

“Silent and Alone”: How the Ruins of Palenque Were Taught to Speak the Language of Archaeology

Irina Podgorny

The silence of Spanish antiquarians and topographical writers upon a subject of such absorbing interest caused the report to be doubted. Recent researches have, however, removed all uncertainty upon the subject.¹

In late colonial and post-independent times – in a context of commercial rivalry among French, American and British interests – maps, manuscripts and drawings from Spanish American administrative archives were turned into valued objects of commerce. Their ownership and publication were disputed by several individuals, learned societies and patrons from Europe and the Americas. Along with this interest, the old-time problem of how to prove the “authenticity” of information originated in the New World (Pimentel 2003; Schäffner 2002) reappeared in the first half of the nineteenth century.

In that same time period, the local elites discovered that trading the documents of the Spanish colonial administration offered additional income. In that specific sense, I argue that the beginnings of modern scientific study of American antiquity are connected with the nineteenth century routes of commerce and include trading of manuscripts.² I describe the case of manuscripts related to the ruins found close to Palenque, Chiapas, and their interpretation in the first decades of the nineteenth century. My goal is to show how the knowledge on these ruins was shaped by the international circulation of data, journals and books, transforming a “nameless city” into a source of real interest to understand ancient history of Mesoamerica.

Taking as main object of our study the London itineraries of the manuscript “*Descripción del terreno y población antigua nuevamente descubierta en las inmediaciones del pueblo de Palenque, jurisdicción de la Provincia de Ciudad Real de*

¹“American Antiquities”. *The Knickerbocker* (1833: 371).

²Some recent contributions have provided new insight to the subject of scientific explorations, by focusing on the intrinsically bound between knowledge and commerce, roads, transportation and communication with Europe (Achim 2007; Cook 2007; Podgorny 2008; Vetter 2004).

I. Podgorny (✉)

CONICET-Museo de La Plata/Universidad de La Plata, Argentina,
e-mail: podgorny@retina.ar

Chiapa, una de las del Reino de Guatemala de la América Septentrional” (originally dated 1787), I will tackle the debates and circulation of information about the ruins of Palenque. This manuscript was the report presented to his superiors by a military engineer Antonio del Río, who was in charge of the exploration of the ruins in 1786. The first part of this chapter will focus on the manuscript’s publication and translation into English in 1822 and the path it followed in the literary circles of London and Europe, including the German language translations of 1823 and 1832. The second part is devoted to the intellectual debates caused by these translations. The feedback from these debates generated a commercial competence to find more documents “lost” in the archives, and to gain reliable data about the ruins. I argue that this commercial competitive and collective character of exchange of information was constitutive of the research practices linked to the study of Latin American past.

In order to understand this crucial period in shaping an image of Mesoamerican past, attention should be paid to the pretended Spanish lack of interest in the ruins, a popular trope among the members of the local elites and foreign agents of post-independent times that in certain contexts still survives as a powerful account.³ To paraphrase the chroniclers from the late sixteenth century, “Much has been imagined about these various peoples and their origin” (Father Francisco Ximénez in Recinos et al. 1950: 6). Whereas they referred to the cities, peoples and documents destroyed by the Spanish conquest, this comment could also be used to describe the situation created during Spanish America revolutionary wars and the scattering of information: local history emerged following the logic of revolutionary goals and events, ignoring what had happened earlier (cf. Alcina Franch 1988, 1995; Cañizares-Esguerra 2001; Pimentel 2000). Hidden in the networks of traffic of information, facts and data could be “discovered” over and over again, lost both in the new account about the past that started to be promoted and the commercial interests of those who could make a profit of the access to the colonial archives.⁴

³Cf. Miguel A. Díaz Perera, “El reino de los incapaces. Antigüedad del indio americano en el testimonio de Frédéric Waldeck y François Corroy”, <http://www.posgrado.unam.mx/filosofiadela-ciencia/assets/pdf/WaldeckResumen.pdf>.

⁴Scherzer had already underlined the relationship between revolutionary war, the destruction and scattering of the archives, and the difficulties to write and understand ancient American history. He wrote as early as 1857: “Al mismo tiempo se encuentra en las pocas bibliotecas que ya existen en las cinco repúblicas una gran falta de manuscritos que tratan esta materia. En ningún lugar de los Estados de Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras y San Salvador se halla un solo documento relativo a la historia antigua de este país. Esta falta completa de escritos no puede explicarse de otra manera, sino por el estrago de las diversas revoluciones que las repúblicas de Centro-América han experimentado desde su separación de la metrópoli en 1823, en las cuales un gran número de documentos importantes fueron perdidos o sacados del país. Se sabe que, cuando en el año 1829, después de la supresión de todos los conventos por el general Morazán, muchas de esas casas venerables se transformaron en cuarteles y presidios, montones de libros y manuscritos fueron sacados de sus depósitos para fabricar cartuchos. Otros tesoros antiguos se extraían por La Habana, Madrid, Toledo y Sevilla adonde los monjes expulsados y los partidarios fugitivos de la Corona de Castilla los quisieron poner en seguridad” (Scherzer 1857: IV–V). In the same sense, Cañizares-Esguerra (2001: 322) expressed: “This widely scattered distribution has not only contributed to keeping the wealth of eighteenth-century Spanish American intellectual debates hidden but also exemplifies the fate of the great collections of indigenous sources put together by most eighteenth-century Spanish American antiquarians”.

The Nameless City

Around 1800 Domingo Juarros y Montúfar (1753–1821), a secular ecclesiastic and synod Examiner of the Archbishopric of his native city of Guatemala, finished the writings of his “Compendio de la historia de la Ciudad de Guatemala”, which received approval for publication in 1808, after being submitted to the administrative instances of censorship. About 20 years later, an English version appeared in London, as “A Statistical and Commercial History of the Kingdom of Guatemala”, translated by Lieutenant John Baily, an agent of Barclays’ house (Naylor 1988). In the early 1820s, the independence of Guatemala, which was originally part of New Spain, meant also the uncertainty about its future political status. In fact, by 1824 it was still unclear whether it would become either an independent state or a province of the Columbian or of the North American confederations. When Juarros’ history was published in London in 1823, in its preface Baily underlined the relevance of this kind of undertakings for the future expansion of British capital and industry that opened due to independence processes in the former Spanish America. Juarros’ book would furnish reliable information based on (1) access to records in the departments of Government, as well as to those of the different convents, (2) observations upon various parts of the country, and of the more remote districts and (3) accurate information from the heads of the different curacies, obtained through Juarros’ connection with the clergy. In such a context, what was at stake was how to obtain access to reliable sources and how to classify the new data obtained in the archives and publications of Spanish America.

In the book translated by Baily, Juarros had contributed a succinct description of the Province of Chiapas, listing its administrative divisions, villages and population. He described Santo Domingo de Palenque, in the province of Tzendales, on the borders of the intendancies of Ciudad Real and Yucatan (Juarros 1823: 18–19):

It is the head of a curacy; in a wild and salubrious climate, but very thinly inhabited, and now celebrated from having within its jurisdiction the vestiges of a very opulent city, which has been named Ciudad del Palenque; doubtless, formerly the capital of an empire whose history no longer exists. This metropolis, – like another Herculaneum, not indeed overwhelmed by the torrent of another Vesuvius, but concealed for ages in the midst of a vast desert, – remained unknown until the middle of the eighteenth century, when some Spaniards having penetrated the dreary solitude, found themselves, to their great astonishment, within sight of the remains of what once had been a superb city, of six leagues in circumference; the solidity of its edifices, the stateliness of its palaces, and the magnificence of its public works, were not surpassed in importance by its vast extent; temples, altars, deities, sculptures, and monumental stones, bear testimony to its great antiquity. The hieroglyphics, symbols, and emblems, which have been discovered in the temples, bear so strong a resemblance to those of the Egyptians, as to encourage the supposition that a colony of that nation may have founded the city of Palenque, or Culhuacan. The same opinion may be formed respecting that of Tulha, the ruins of which are still to be seen near the village of Ocosingo in the same district.

London of the 1820s, where this translation was published, was one of the nodes of this new commerce of information, becoming not only a centre of collection and printing but also a central destination for those exiled from the Spanish America, who entered, as well, in the undertakings of publishing and publicizing the new

ideas and the emerging new political entities (Gallo 2002; Roldán Vera 2003). London had also constituted the destiny of many Spanish émigrés, who took refuge in Britain after the Napoleonic invasion of Spain, taking with them collections that had been under their responsibility in Madrid. In this context, the industry of translations, transcriptions, facsimiles, the copying and moving of documents, library and archive research, plundering, shipping, molding, printing as well as the publishing of journals, magazines and reviews flourished. In that frame, statistical, historical and geographical knowledge was linked to the expansion of trade, welfare and the emergence of a new political order in the New World (cf. Roldán Vera 2003).

The London translation of Juarros' book was almost contemporary to the appearance of two other manuscripts from Guatemala, in which one of the authors proposed that those ruined temples were the vestiges of another mythical city. In fact, soon after independence, Doctor Mac Quy, an Englishman who by those years lived in Guatemala, brought to London a manuscript called "Teatro Crítico Americano" and a memoir written by a certain Spanish officer (Baudez and Picasso 1987). They were accompanied by several drawings that had also been stored for many years in the archives of the colonial administration.⁵ These 21 pages and 15 lithographs were bought in London by the editor Henry Berthoud, who would later publish their translation as *Description of the Ruins of an ancient City, discovered near Palenque, in Guatemala, in Spanish America*. In such a way, Berthoud was publishing for the first time the memoir written by Captain Antonio del Río, dispatched by Captain General of Guatemala in 1786 to examine the ruins of very great extent of a city and antiquity near Palenque, province of Chiapas. Del Río, a Spanish military engineer, had departed to the city of the unknown name with a large party of men to remove the trees and shrubs with which the ruins were overgrown. Having cleared the ground, they found magnificent edifices, temples, towers, aqueducts, statues, hieroglyphics, unknown characters and bas-reliefs upon the walls, which Juarros would later mention in his work (Juarros 1823). The 1787 report of Captain del Río to his superiors was accompanied by many drawings and representations of the curious figures and writings discovered in the interior of these stone buildings. Following the paths of Spanish bureaucracy, copies were made for the local archives while others were dispatched to the metropolis, including one for cosmographer-general of the Indies Juan Bautista Muñoz, who was compiling materials for the completion of a new history of the Americas.⁶ Upon Muñoz' request, some fragments of the ruins were also sent to be studied and compared in the Royal Cabinet of Madrid.

⁵The reception and different editions of del Río's memoir had been addressed by Brasseur de Bourbourg n/d; Cabello Caro 1984; García Sáiz 1994; Baudez and Picasso 1987 and Riese (in del Río 1993).

⁶Cf. *Catálogo de la colección de Juan Bautista Muñoz, documentos interesantes para la historia de América*, 2, Madrid, 1955: 457 (on Muñoz cf. Cañizares-Esguerra 2001; Ballesteros Beretta 1941, 1942).

Berthoud published the manuscript and the drawings accompanied by *Teatro Crítico Americano* authored by Guatemalan scholar Pablo Félix Cabrera (1794). By doing so and by changing the name of the manuscript, which by then focused on the ancient city, Berthoud consolidated the installation of the ruins in the realm of antiquarianism and disquisitions about the history of the American continent. Whereas del Río’s report, following the protocols of the surveys of military engineer corps and the instructions given from Spain by Muñoz (cf. Castañeda Paganini 1946; Podgorny 2007a), emphasized the description of the terrain, accesses, roads and the materials of the buildings and the city, Berthoud’s compilation shifted definitively the focus to the problem of the origins of the American population, a debate that, in fact, had already been initiated in Guatemala and Madrid learned circles (cf. Ballesteros Gaibrois 1960; Cañizares-Esguerra 2001; Recinos et al. 1950). As the Juarros’ comments displayed, the reports on the ruins close to Palenque were already known in Guatemala learned “tertulias” (Ballesteros Gaibrois 1960); moreover they were the result of a growing local interest in the exploration of the “city” connected with the search of visibility of that province in the Court of Madrid and the claim about the rights of Campeche to be allowed to act as a port for the commerce of the natural products of Chiapas (cf. Letter of Father Roca to Miguel de San Juan, 2 Jan 1793, in Ballesteros Gaibrois 1960: 25). In those discussions, the “city” was already referred as such, using terms such as “Ciudad del Palenque” or “Ciudad Palencana”.

However, Berthoud presented the discovery of the manuscript in the archives as a chapter of the political revolution brought about in Mexico and the Central American Provinces, the effects of which:

[...] having expanded the public mind, its prevailing influence has been extended to the functionaries of the government, so that state secrets and the long treasured documents in the public archives have been explored.

Moreover, he explained the limited access to the administrative archives by means of the jealousy temperament of the Spanish government:

[...] with regard to their possessions in Mexico, and the consequent desire they entertained of burying in total oblivion, any circumstances that might conduce to awaken the curiosity, or excite the cupidity of more scientific and enterprising nations (Berthoud in del Río 1822: VIII).

The Spanish colonial archives, in such a way, were presented as mere deposits of unused and muted documents, as if they were organized without purpose or with the only goal of gathering facts and data to conceal them from other nations and the local Creole population. Cabrera and Juarros’s writings, on the other hand, were described as full of abhorring statements and prejudices that resulted from his Roman Catholic beliefs; both Berthoud and Baily alerted the English readership about the prominent role of religion in the works they had in their hands. Even when we agree with Cañizares-Esguerra (2001) that there is – and there was – a historical vacuum regarding the world of ideas and administrative practices of the Spanish Atlantic world of the late eighteenth century, it is important to underline that this vacuum was connected with the emerging discourse of local elites that

condemned the colonial past as a period of darkness and backwardness (cf. Roldán Vera 2003). The same kind of arguments expressed by Berthoud can be found in the new measures taken by the independent governments regarding the creation of museums, public libraries and new repositories of information (Podgorny 2007b; Podgorny and Lopes 2008). In such a way, British, French and Creole writers of the 1820s would scarcely differ in the manner of referring to a period and to the agents that, far from having emerged anew with the revolution, were reshaping their discourses and themselves in terms of the new political order to be created.

Connected with the unawareness and rejection of the context in which the documents were produced, Berthoud faced another problem: how to prove the authenticity of a manuscript that described a place that no one in Europe had seen. In his prefatory lines, Berthoud addressed the main problem contained in the pages that he was going to make public:

As attempts have so frequently been made to deceive the world, by announcing and publishing the details of discoveries which never effected, and the description of places, having no existence but in the writer's brain; the editor conceives himself imperiously called upon to offer some prefatory words, explanatory of the manner in which the literary documents, comprised in this volume, together with its pictorial embellishments, came into his possession (in del Río 1822: VII).

As it was discussed (Daston and Park 1998), the accounts from Spanish America on nature and ancient civilizations were received with scepticism, lowering the scientific threshold of credibility. Since the love of wonder fed many historical and anthropological frauds in the late nineteenth century, travellers, correspondents and publishers developed various strategies to prove their reliability (Podgorny 2007a); the key problem was why and whom to believe. Baily, in the mere title of his translation, underlined that Juarros' data were obtained from original records in the archives, actual observation and other authentic sources. Berthoud was trying to persuade his potential readers of the authenticity of both the manuscript in his possession and in the ruins, a thing hidden in some remote place in Guatemala that neither he nor Dr. Mr. Mac Quay had ever seen. In such a way, the ruins discovered near Santo Domingo de Palenque reemerged not by means of further exploration of the jungle of Chiapas, but in a zone defined by the traffic of documents stored in the colonial archives, the uncertainty of a source produced in an unknown context, and the popular trope among European antiquarians and savants of the essential Spanish backwardness in the realm of science.

In that sense "remote witnessing", as Pimentel (2003) calls the practices that allow testimonies about the truth and existence of things that occur in distant spaces, could not work without further mediation; in a context where the Spanish undertakings were discredited, the name of an official such as Antonio del Río could not be accepted as reliable witness. "Dr. Mac Quay", on the other hand, was as unknown in London as the ancient city close to Palenque. The reliable witness was Alexander von Humboldt, who in his trips to America "[...] not only mentions its existence, but has inserted an engraving from one of the pictorial illustrations of the present volume" (Berthoud in del Río 1822: IX). But Humboldt had stayed at quite a distance from Chiapas, having worked in 1803–1804 in the archives of

Mexico City, a crucial node of Spanish administration. Humboldt testified the existence of those manuscripts in the archives; however, since he had published a plate that differed from those in Berthoud’s possession, this evidence was permeated by vagueness.⁷ In order to deal with this contested authenticity, the “original” manuscript was open for public inspection at the publisher’s house. In the end, the genuineness was assured by appealing to the protection of Lord Holland, to whom Berthoud dedicated his efforts. In such a way, the Philological Society of London stated:

This work is dedicated, with permission, to Lord Holland, a nobleman so distinguished in literature in general, and particularly in the literature of Spain, that the prefixure of his name is *a sufficient guarantee for the authenticity of the original Spanish documents* [emphasis I. P.], of which this work professes to be a translation; and the critic is, therefore, left only to the task of examining into the nature of these ruins, and into the sagacity of the speculations that have been formed upon their discovery.⁸

Henry Richard Fox, third Baron Holland (1773–1840), having lived for several years in Spain, was, indeed, a promoter of the Spanish literature in London. Lord Holland and his wife were in the centre of Whig politics and belonged to circles of letters, having strong links to French diplomats. Their library was extensive and well-used by a wide set of people including essayists, statesmen, playwrights, foreign scholars, distinguished visitors, poets, antiquaries, medievalists and historians. The Holland House and its circle were very well known for patronizing savants, the uses of history for political purposes and a strong interest in continental politics (Wright 2006). It was not particularly supportive of Spanish American new political entities. In that sense, Berthoud’s preface and its reviewers also expressed the tensions of the debates existing in London about the abilities of the local South American elites to lead the destinies of the continent.

Berthoud’s dedication to Lord Holland could be a decisive factor that assured the translation of del Rio’s report to gain wide recognition by being reviewed in some London journals, such as the “*European Magazine, London Review*”, the “*New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal*” (1822) and “*The Eclectic Review*” (1823).⁹ The “Description of the Ancient City” – sold for 1 pound and 8 schillings,

⁷Later on, Alexander von Humboldt would make use of Berthoud’s publication in an article he published in 1826 on the new State of Central America, feeding the reliability of the source as a piece that was worth quoting (Humboldt 1826).

⁸“Description of the Ruins of an Ancient City, discovered near Palenque, in Guatemala, in Spanish America. Translated from the Spanish. 4to. pp. 128. London, 1823”. *European Magazine, London Review: Illustrative of the Literature, History, Biography, Politics, Arts, Manners, and amusements of the age. Embellished with Portraits*. 83: 454.

⁹“Art. IV. Description of the Ruins of an Ancient City, discovered near Palenque, in Guatemala, in Spanish America. Translated from the Original Manuscript Report of Captain Antonio del Rio, followed by a Critical Investigation and Research into the history of the Americans, by Doctor Paul Felix Cabrera, of the city of New Guatemala, 4to. Pp. XIV, 128. (17 plates). Price 1l. 8s. London, 1822”. *The Eclectic Review*. 18 (1823: 523–532).

about the same price of a good grammar book or history and travel books¹⁰ – was listed among “new publications” at the following magazines, some of them associated to Whig circles: *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* (February 1823), *The Edinburgh Magazine and Literary Miscellany* (1823), *The Edinburgh Review* (1823), *The Quarterly review* (1823), *The London Magazine* (1823), *The British Review*, and *London Critical Journal* (1822), *The Monthly Repository of Theology and General Literature* (1822) and *The Edinburgh Annual Register* (1824). It was also reviewed in the German language journals *Allgemeines Repertorium der neuesten in- und ausländischen Literatur für 1824* (Leipzig 1824) and the *Göttingische gelehrte Anzeiger* (1824). Some of the reviews mocked Cabrera’s ideas but also underlined the matter the publication had actually established:

The report and graphic illustrations of these antiquities by Captain Antonio del Rio are well worthy of the attention of the curious, but his discoveries do not appear to us to throw the smallest light upon the problem of how America first became inhabited by the human species; they merely establish that cities and populous districts existed formerly on the borders of Campeche, and that their inhabitants were not identically the same people as those whom the Spaniards, on their arrival, found in such power in other parts of Mexico.¹¹

In such a way, the discovery was presented as the result of action by the late colonial administration. They criticized Catholicism of the members of the local elites and the concealing nature of colonial archives. At the same time, the reviewers tackling Cabrera’s method attacked the common practice of most antiquarians, who have the:

[...] habit of selecting two distant nations, and tracing some resemblance in their ancient customs, manners, religions, and civil architecture, they draw the inference that one must have been descended from the other, forgetting that such resemblances merely prove the general analogy of our animal nature; and that man, under similar stages in the scale of civilization, will have analogous institutions, and analogous objects both of ornament and of convenience, although these may be all modified differently by various contingent circumstances[...].¹²

Far from being a patrimony of Cabrera and Guatemalan scholars, comparison of “distant nations” represented common practice of the early nineteenth century antiquarian circles, where the resemblances among peoples from distant continents was highlighted by comparing images, sources from antiquity and manuscripts discovered in the libraries (cf. Burke 2003; Momigliano 1950; Schnapp 2002). It was in that vein that Alexander von Humboldt (1810: 83) noted:

¹⁰In 1846, 25 years after its publication, it could still be acquired at a moderate price of 15 schillings, as listed with the number 846 on John Russell Smith’s catalogue from Soho Square. cf. *A catalogue of choice, useful, and curious books in most classes of literature, English and foreign, now on sale at very moderate prices* by John Russell Smith. London. 1846. However, in the late 1830s some reviews mentioned that Del Rio’s work had been “scarcely published in this country;” cf. “Antiquités mexicaines, Voyage pittoresque... and Colección de antigüedades mexicanas que existen en el Museo Nacional”. *The foreign quarterly review*. 18 (1836–1837: 33) London Edition.

¹¹“Description of the Ruins of an Ancient City...” *European Magazine*. 83: 456.

¹²Ibid.

[...] il seroit à désirer que quelque gouvernement voulût faire publier à ses frais ces restes de l'ancienne civilisation américaine: c'est par la comparaison de plusieurs monumens qu'on parviendroit à deviner le sens de ces allégories, en partie astronomiques, en partie mystiques.

The elements used in such comparisons included architectural details (like windows and arches), components of the attire and ornaments of the human figures depicted in the manuscripts (especially headdresses and shoes), medals, coins, inscriptions and hieroglyphs (Mora 1999; Pomian 1987). Comparison of things from distant nations was also the main procedure to establish chronology, based on these resemblances that could be arranged in relation to the dates obtained from classical sources, texts and/or inscriptions in the medals (Rudwick 2005). Hieroglyphs represented a potential clue to the meanings of the accounts left by ancient peoples. Finding resemblances with some of the known or deciphered systems of writing involved the first step towards a common grammar of civilized men. This practice – shared by Guatemalan and European antiquaries – of understanding the ruins of ancient peoples by comparing them with classical sources took for granted the universal history of humankind. Historiography of Latin American and classical archaeology has often forgotten this common framework that permeated the debates over the history of peoples that today are the subject of disciplines that scarcely have something in common. As we will explore in the next section, the controversies over Palenque in the 1820s and early 1830s allow us to analyse a period in the history of antiquarianism when the Latin America's past was linked with the Old World's Antiquity.

Huehuetlapallan or American Babylon?

Every one has heard of the ancient cities of Herculaneum and Pompeii, and many Americans have crossed the Atlantic, have submitted to the vexations of French and Italian police and customhouse officers, to the miserable accommodations of Italian inns, and to the extortions of the vetturini, for the purpose of visiting these ruins; ignorant that in America may be found two cities of far greater extent than either of these mentioned above, and covered not by the cinders or lava of a volcano, but by the rapid vegetation of past ages.¹³

While Berthoud's publication was present in the main catalogues of the nineteenth century libraries, its distribution and marketing still deserve a detailed study, which would enlighten the shaping of another account that circulated in the European circles regarding the fate of the text published in London (cf. Riese in del Río 1993). In fact, in another shift of the European itineraries of del Río's report, the destiny of Berthoud's publication was described by Johann Heinrich, Freiherr

¹³ “The Family Magazine”. 1837: 143.

Menu von Minutoli (1772–1846) – the second translator into German of the English translation – as suffering oblivion in London. Minutoli presented himself as having saved the “Description of the Ancient Ruins” from being lost due to the failure of Berthoud’s publishing house; something that had occurred immediately after the printing was finished. However, this alleged rescue of the manuscript differs from the extensive presence of Berthoud’s translation at public and private libraries. Moreover, it ignores the first German translation that took place immediately after the London version of 1822, which – as Minutoli’s – was based on Berthoud’s translation. In fact, in 1823 the “Description” suffered another transformation. The first German translation appeared in Meiningen as “Huehuetlapallan, Amerika’s grosse Urstadt in dem Königreiche Guatimala: Neu entdeckt von Antonio del Rio u. als eine phöniciſch-canaanäiſche u. carthagische Pflanzſtadt erwieſen von Paul Felix Cabrera” (“Huehuetlapallan, American great original city in the Kingdom of Guatemala, recently discovered by Antonio del Río and presented by Paul Felix Cabrera as a Phoenician-Canaanite and Carthaginian colony”). Here, the city was named after a place quoted in the chronicles, the mythical original residence of the wandering nation of the Toltecs. The translation was printed by Philip Hartmann in old German font characters (gothic font). It lacked new foreword and included translation of Berthoud’s explanatory preface and the dedication to Lord Holland. Neither the authorship of the translation was mentioned nor did the publisher explain modifications of the title (Rio, Antonio del 1823). This German version, although not extensively present in the library catalogues, was also reviewed by contemporary literary journals, listed at the “*Journal général de la Littérature étrangère*” (Paris 1825), and extensively reviewed at the *Taschenbuch zur Verbreitung geographischer Kenntnisse* (“Notebook for the diffusion of geographical knowledge”), a journal published in Prague by Johann Gottfried Sommer, under the title “Überreste der altamerikanischen Stadt Huehuetlapallan” (“Vestiges of the ancient American city of Huehuetlapallan”).¹⁴ The latter also included the engraving of the “Tower of Huehuetlapallan” (“Thurm zu Huehuetlapallan”) (Fig. 1), one of the plates that accompanied del Rio’s memoirs published in London (Fig. 2). By naming the ruins as “Huehuetlapallan”, the first German translation honoured Cabrera’s interpretation of the Casas de Piedra and his “Solution to the grand historical problem of the population of America” (Cabrera 1822). On the other hand, it also answered the old question about the origins of the Mexican peoples, as posed and popularized by Alexander von Humboldt in his “Essai politique sur la Nouvelle Espagne” (Humboldt 1814: 133–134):

The Toultecs introduced the cultivation of maize and cotton; they built cities, made roads, and constructed those great pyramids which are yet admired, and of which the faces are very accurately laid out. They knew the use of hieroglyphical paintings; they could found

¹⁴“Überreste der altamerikanischen Stadt Huehuetlapallan”. *Taschenbuch zur Verbreitung geographischer Kenntnisse*. 1825: 225–237.



Fig. 1 “Tower of Huehuetlapallan” (taken from “Überreste der altamerikanischen Stadt Huehuetlapallan”. *Taschenbuch zur Verbreitung geographischer Kenntniss*. 1825: 225–237. Particular collection)

metals, and cut the hardest stones; and they had a solar year more perfect than that of the Greeks and Romans. The form of their government indicated that they were the descendants of a people who had experienced great vicissitudes in their social state. But where is the source of that cultivation? Where is the country from which the Toultecs and Mexicans issued? Tradition and historical hieroglyphics name Huehuetlapallan, Tollan, and Aztlan, as the first residence of these wandering nations. There are no remains at this day of any ancient civilization of the human species to the north of the Rio Gila, or in the northern regions travelled through by Hearne, Fidler, and Mackenzie.

Contrary to Humboldt’s opinion, Cabrera – and the first German translation undoubtedly agreed with his interpretation – located the source of culture and cultivation of Mexicans in the South, inverting the traditional direction that explained culture flowing from wandering peoples who arrived from the North (cf. Buschmann 1866). Displaying profuse antiquarian erudition, Cabrera (1822: 94) had concluded that Huehuetlapallan, far from being a mythical place, was as real as the capital of the province of Chiapas:

The kingdom of Tlapalla was not an imaginary one as Clavigero supposed, and the route taken by Quetzalcoatl from Cholula to Coatzacoalco, in the absence of all other proofs, is sufficient to show that it was not situated to the northward of Mexico, but to the south east.

In order to ascertain the origin of those Americans who inhabited the countries bordering on the Gulf of Mexico and the adjacent islands, Cabrera was trying to prove that Huehuetlapallan, a compound name of two words – Huehue (old) and

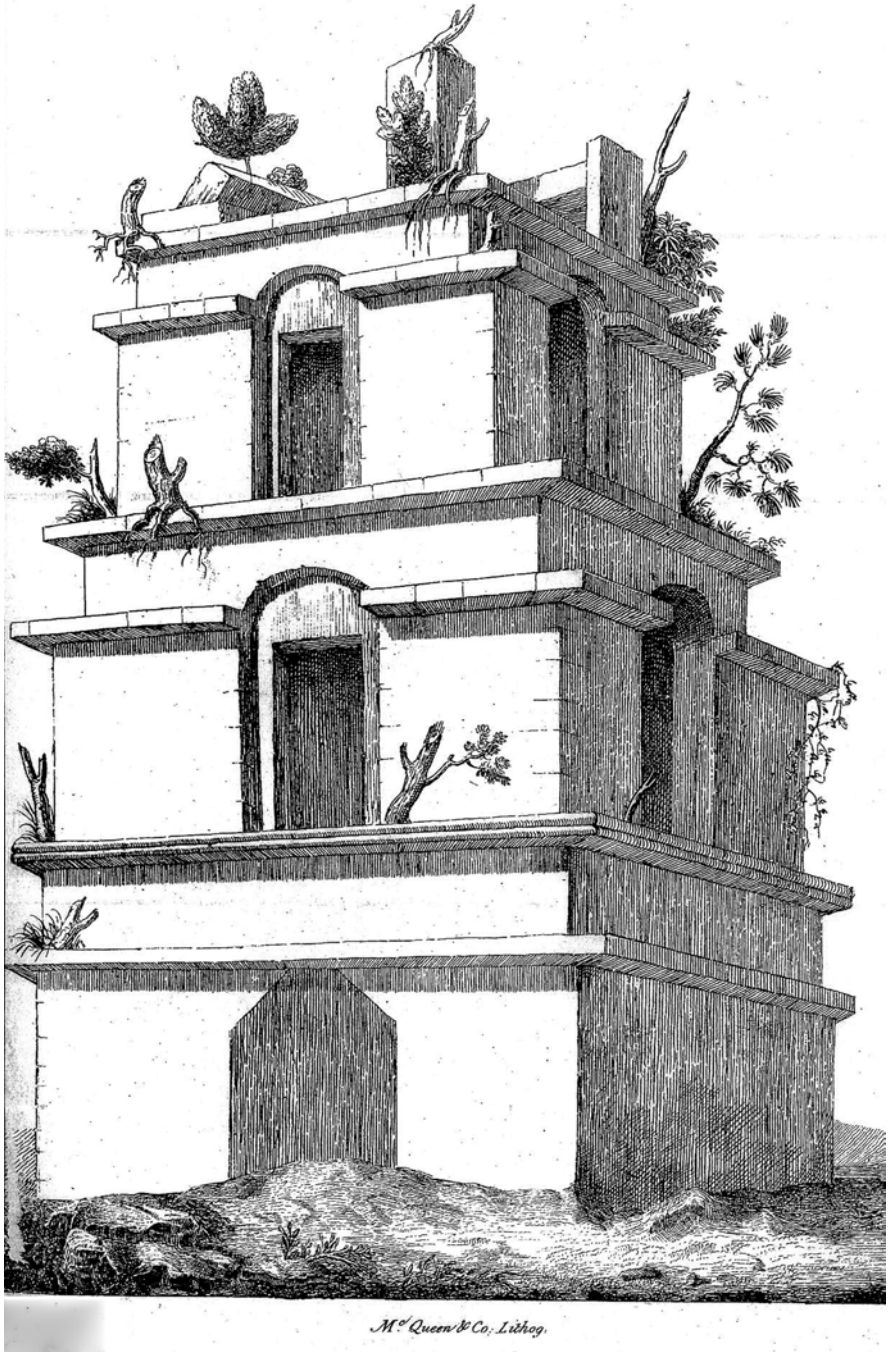


Fig. 2 "Tower of Palenque" (taken from Antonio del Río 1822. *Description of the Ruins of an Ancient City discovered near Palenque, in the Kingdom of Guatemala, in Spanish America.* Translated from the original manuscript report of Captain Antonio del Río: followed by Teatro Crítico Americano; or a critical investigation and research into The History of the Americans, by Doctor Paul Felix Cabrera of the city of New Guatemala. London: Henry Berthoud) Courtesy of Biblioteca Fl. Ameghino, Museo de La Plata

Tlapallan – was the name which anciently distinguished the Palencian city. In 1794, instead of Asian connections, Cabrera had proposed a direct relationship with the peoples of the Mediterranean, mainly with the Phoenicians. By entitling the publication as “Huehuetlapallan”, the German translation of 1823 assumed as a fact that the ruins were those of the mythical city, the centre of origin of Mesoamerican civilizations. Sommer’s *Taschenbuch*, despite promising to follow the transcription of Cabrera’s essay, only published del Río’s memoir, which did not mention Huehuetlapallan. Several German journals reviewed this publication,¹⁵ some of them asking to contrast this translation with other recent publications such as Juarros’,¹⁶ who said, as we have already mentioned, that the ruins could be attached to the city of Colhuacán, while the ruins found in Ocosingo belonged to Tula. This debate, in fact, located the origin of the Aztecs in Guatemala and Chiapas, contradicting the ideas of the Humboldt’s brothers and those proposed by chroniclers and historians such as Torquemada, Boturini and Clavijero. According to Cabrera, in the temples of the unknown or Palencian city, there was a very conclusive proof of the ancient origin of the Americans, excelling those of the Greeks, the Romans and equivalent to that of the Hebrews. However, the review published at *Leipziger Literatur Zeitung* (1824: 2430) underlined that Cabrera’s attempts for both proving that the city had been founded by Phoenicians traders, and adapting the ruins to the mosaic chronology, would not be accepted even by the most orthodox theologians, who would rather stick to the desiderata of the universe that was already known.¹⁷

The southern origin of the Aztecs interested historians when in June 1832 Minutoli’s new German translation was published (Río, Antonio del 1832). By then, the role of the German edition of 1823 seemed to have been forgotten. According to (Río, Antonio del 1832, translation by Minutoli), the sheets of the almost finished English version had been turned into garbage, ready to be sold as old paper, when the French vice consul César Moreau rescued them in London, allowing the composition of a complete volume. Moreau – as Minutoli – was an expert archive seeker, who by those years was trying to create a statistical corpus for the understanding of the commerce between France and Great Britain and a comparative tableau of the French state. Moreau, thanks to his statistical pursuits, was connected to the network of manuscript traders from different parts of the

¹⁵Such as “Allgemeines Repertorium der neuesten in- und ausländischen Literatur für 1824” (Leipzig).

¹⁶“Neue Allgemeine Geographische und Statistische Ephemeriden”. Weimar 1824: 437.

¹⁷“Nach der Art, wie die spanische Regierung nach Möglichkeit um alle ihre transatlantischen Besitzungen eine chinesische Mauer zog, darf dies gerade nicht wundern. Die Beschreibung dieser Ruinen und der in ihnen gefundenen zahlreichen hieroglyphischen Bilder u. s. w. gibt allerdings Raum zu vielen Vermuthungen, die, hätten die Spanier, gleich echten Vandalen, nicht Mexiko’s Adel und (Bilder) Schriften vernichtet, wohl längst aufgeklärt seyn würden. Die zweyte Abtheilung, welche die längste ist, sucht, treu der mosaïschen Zeitrechnung, zu beweisen, dass Mexiko von Phöniciern und Karthago aus bevölkert sey. Solche theologische Beweise mögen kaum dem orthodoxesten Theologen zusagen, geschweige dem, der in solchen Dingen lieber seine Unwissenheit bekennen, als solche Ansichten durchgefochten wissen will”.

world. Although his main interest focused on the East Company and East Indies, his expertise in dealing with archives and manuscripts made him aware of the intense trade of documents in London of the 1820s (Sarrut and Saint-Edme 1835: 179). Minutoli himself was connected with the study of Egyptian antiquities, having travelled with his wife to Egypt in the 1820s and having extensively published his studies in different journals and compilations.¹⁸ Minutoli (1831) devoted several pages to the step pyramid of Saqqara, whose age, in the realm of antiquarianism, was a matter of controversy. This building, which had been regarded as one of the oldest extant buildings of the world, allowed Minutoli to propose a suggestion that pyramids were used as temples, tombs and astronomical observatories. As element of evidence and comparison, he discussed the analogies with the Mesoamerican pyramids. A third building was introduced into the series of analogies to reinforce the astronomical use of Egyptian pyramids: the Tower, residence of king Belus, the ancient sovereign who founded Babylon and built the ziggurat, which many scholars had considered to be the Scriptural tower of Babel.¹⁹ In such way, the ancient Mexican, Egyptian and Babylonian cults were brought together in the antiquarian debates to enlighten the functions of the recently rediscovered buildings. In such context, the so-called “tower” of the “palace of Palenque”, one of the most recurrent plates published to illustrate the different versions of del Río’s memoir, intervened as another element to discuss the analogies among buildings, functions and the peoples that inhabited the ancient world. The reviewer of Minutoli’s essay noted:

By the way, an accurate investigation of the recently discovered Mexican monuments and their comparison with the Old Egyptians is still lacking. If we are not wrong, they were the object of a prize called some years ago, but that still remains deserted. Such a work would be extremely appreciated by the learned world.²⁰

Based on analogies, the study of antiquity, far from being limited to the Mediterranean and the Near East, expanded its geography and scope to the civilizations of the New World.

The study of American antiquities presented some inconveniences, however, that did not help to achieve these goals. As Minutoli’s reviewer underlined, there was a call for a prize that could not be fulfilled, i.e., the prize offered by the Société de Géographie de Paris, a Golden Medal, valued 2,400 francs, to obtain a more complete and exact description than the existing ones of the ruins of the ancient city of Palenque, in the country of Chiapas, ancient kingdom of Guatemala and designated

¹⁸*Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie*: 771–772. [http://mdz.bib-bvb.de/digbib/lexika/adb/images/adb021/@ebt-link?target=idmatch\(entityref,adb0210773\)](http://mdz.bib-bvb.de/digbib/lexika/adb/images/adb021/@ebt-link?target=idmatch(entityref,adb0210773)).

¹⁹As the reviews mentioned, some writers found resemblances between the temples of Belus and the pyramid of Cholula, eight graduated square towers that terminated in a topmost sanctuary.

²⁰“Uebrigens fehlt uns noch immer eine genaue Untersuchung der verschiedentlich bekannt gewordenen mexikanischen Denkmale und eine Zusammenstellung und Vergleichung mit den alt-ägyptischen, wie solches, wenn wir nicht sehr irren, bereits vor einem Jahre zum Gegenstand einer Preisaufgabe, die aber leider unbeantwortet geblieben, gemacht worden ist. Eine solche Arbeit würde aber gewiss höchst belehrend werden, Bähr 1832: 202–203”.

by the name of Casas de Piedras in the Memoirs of Captain Antonio del Rio. The prize requested the traveller to give pictorial views of the monuments, with blueprints, sections, main details of the sculptures and to notice particularly the bas-reliefs representing the adoration of the cross, as seen engraved in the work of del Rio. Likewise, it was important to observe the analogy between these different edifices, considered as productions of the same art and of the same people. With respect to the geography, the Society demanded: first, specific maps of the districts in which these ruins were situated, accompanied with topographical plans constructed according to the most correct principles; second, the real height of the principal points above the sea; third, remarks on the natural appearance and the productions of the country. The Society also required that research had to be made into the traditions relative to the ancient people to whom the erection of these monuments was attributed, with other observations on the habits and customs of the natives of the country, and a vocabulary of the ancient languages. It was necessary to particularly inquire the traditions of the country regarding the age of these edifices, and to endeavour to discover, if it was well established, that the figures designed with a certain degree of correctness were previous to the conquest. The memoirs, maps and drawings were supposed to be left at the office of the Central Commission, before the 31st of December, 1829. But the reviewer was correct and by 1832 the prize remained vacant (cf. Prévost Urkidi 2007).

In 1830, however, London had provided “new” documentation on the ruins of the ancient city. Under the patronage of the Irish Catholic antiquarian and member of the Parliament Edward King (1795–1837), better known as Lord Kingsborough, seven imperial folios were published, comprising the facsimiles of: “ancient Mexican paintings and hieroglyphics preserved in the Royal Libraries of Paris, Berlin and Dresden, in the Imperial Library of Vienna, in the Vatican Library, in the Borgian Museum at Rome, in the library of the Institute at Bologna and in the Bodleian library at Oxford, together with the publication of ‘The monuments of New Spain’ by M. Dupaix”.²¹ The facsimile was in charge of the Italian painter and lithographer Augustine Aglio,²² who during 5 years had transcribed those various manuscripts and drawings to enable the publication of sources scattered throughout Europe as the “Antiquities of Mexico” (Kingsborough 1830–1848). Pretending to be a complete work of all the existing manuscripts and hieroglyphical paintings, illustrative of Mexican antiquities that Europe could furnish, the seven volumes, as

²¹In his preface Minutoli explained that he did not have neither opportunity nor the time to contrast the information in his possession with the new materials presented at the costly London facsimiles, of which he was aware thanks to the reviews published in different journals. The story of Berthoud’s failure, as told by Minutoli, seems to have foreseen the history of Edward King, whose debt with the printers landed him in debtors’ prison.

²²Augustine Maria (Agostino Maria) Aglio (1777–1857) was already well known to the public and among the Catholics of London as the artist, who had executed the altar piece (a panorama of the crucifixion) and ceiling of the Catholic chapel of Moorfields. cf. “Mr. A. Aglio’s Mexican Antiquities”. *The Olio; or, Museum of entertainment*. 5: 376. and <http://www.stmarymoorfields.net/documents/SMMbooklet.pdf>.

it was critically remarked by reviewers, did not contain any documents from the Spanish archives. The *Foreign Quarterly Review* observed that they actually comprised fewer manuscripts than might have existed in the Escorial in Madrid, and in the archives of other Spanish towns, especially of Simancas, near Valladolid.²³

The volumes were priced at £175 (£120 with the plates in plain outline, and £175 coloured), equal to about £850 (Lincoln 1835: 12) or 18,000 francs (Denis 1831), 5 times the prize promised by the *Société de Géographie*. Lord Kingsborough, whose patrimony was valued at 50,000 pounds, intended not to sell but to present them to the main libraries of Europe. Edward King promoted also the publication and gathering of Chinese manuscripts and was praised in his obituaries as “[...] munificent patron of the arts, and generous contributor to all literary and scientific institutions”. While the sixth volume was mostly devoted to his notes on the Jewish origins of the Mexican civilization,²⁴ the reviews would underline the resemblance which the New World bore to the monuments of ancient Egypt:

The eye of the antiquary falls with familiar recognition on the same graduated pyramids; on marks of the same Ophite worship; on picture writing like the early Anaglyphs of Egypt; and on a hieroglyphical language of a similarly symbolical and phonetic description; on vestiges of the worship of a similar Triune and solar deity; on planispheres and temples; sculptures and statues, which though characterized by some distinctions peculiarly American, exhibit a great analogy in posture and gesture to the sculpture of Egypt.²⁵

The reviews of Lord Kingsborough’s volumes consolidated this analogy but also discussed the ideas of Scottish historian, William Robertson (1721–1793), who in his “*History of America*” (1777) had depreciated the age and the value of the buildings of New Spain.²⁶ Kingsborough’s volumes appeared as the conclusive evidence that the people of New Spain at the time of the conquest were at a very advanced level of civilization. The “ancient city” of Chiapas was named Palenque or the “Pompeii of South America”, possessing hieroglyphs as elegant as the Egyptians and as scientifically contrived as the Chinese. It was assumed that it was a city of the Tultecan people, six centuries more ancient than the Mexicans, and, according to the diagnostic elements of the antiquaries, that seemed to derive from Egypt or China. However, most reviewers concluded that the most important thing resided not in these disquisitions or those authored by the pen of Lord Kingsborough but in the images of the objects and monuments that Aglio had made available, copying the Mexican paintings by means of transparent paper. By insisting on the “graphic power” of a work “whose achievements alone constitute all that this work must be

²³“Art. IV. Antiquities of Mexico”. *The Foreign Quarterly Review*. 9 (1832): 92.

²⁴Edward King proposed that America was peopled by the ten lost Jewish tribes carried away by the king of Assyria and that the people who authored the monuments of his work were Jewish.

²⁵“Mexican Antiquities”. *The Gentleman’s magazine*. August (1831): 99.

²⁶The “*History of America*” was a great editorial success, even more marked on the continent, where it was considered as Robertson’s masterpiece going through nine editions between 1777 and 1780. It was translated into Spanish in 1827 by Bernardino de Amati.

admitted to possess of value and importance in the eyes of the present or future generations”,²⁷ the reviews recalled that the “eye” (not exactly a reader’s one) was the most important instrument of the antiquarian. Many magazines referred to the “Antiquities of Mexico” just as the work of Aglio,²⁸ reaffirming that the copy and transcription of unavailable sources provided more knowledge than any philosophical disquisition. Moreover, they underlined:

A folio of metaphysics is an awful companion in the nineteenth century; and we own, that for once that we have peeped at his lordship’s lucubrations, we have turned 50 times to the variegated pages of Mr. Aglio’s department.²⁹

While discussing Darwin’s letter to a friend, J. Secord (1986: 21) had remarked that in the community of geologists few read each other’s work and that the discipline was quite oral. He meant that ideas were verbally discussed among peers in the context of periodical meetings. In that context, the emergence of modern geology – as discussed by Rudwick (1976) – was tight to the presentation of visual evidence namely maps, specimens and illustrations. Such an approach was already a common practice among antiquarians (Rudwick 2005). Burke (2003) has recalled that like the humanist movement out of which it developed, antiquarianism was originally text-centred but, in the course of time, the antiquaries became more and more interested in the material culture of the past. For antiquarians, as for natural philosophers, books had rather “to be seen”: Aglio’s facsimiles and the prize of the Société de Géographie requesting memoirs, maps and drawings responded to this imperative for the constitution of corpuses of images, which attempted to constitute a collection of raw facts obtained in places that no one had seen with his or her own eyes. The praise of both, the quality of Aglio’s lithography and the munificence of Lord Kingsborough for affording such excellence, stressed also the intimate connection between the development of “imitative art” and the progress of knowledge. In that sense, Aglio’s work could be proposed as a “key” to unlock the stores of the Mexican antiquities, expressing by this expression that an image could do more for proving the value of the Mexican monuments than all the disquisitions on the origins of ancient peoples. This method of historical and antiquarian research had been indeed celebrated as revolutionary:

Since the end of the last century, a fortunate revolution has taken place in the manner of examining the civilization of nations, and the causes which impede or favour its progress. We have become acquainted with countries, the customs, institutions, and arts of which differ almost as widely from those of the Greeks and Romans, as the primitive forms of extinct races of animals differ from those of the species which are the objects of descriptive natural history (...) To the labours of (Humboldt) the world is chiefly indebted for the increased light thrown on the ancient state of the Mexican and Peruvian nations, by his

²⁷“Antiquities of Mexico”. *The Monthly review*. 1831: 274.

²⁸Moreover, the complete gathering of the materials was attributed to Aglio. However, Edward King had agents in Mexico, Madrid and other European cities: this network of manuscript and document providers still deserves further research.

²⁹“Antiquities of Mexico”. *The Monthly review*. 1831: 256.

collection and elucidation of their monumental remains. But the principal object of this celebrated traveller and excellent man seems to have been to *bring together pictures of the manners, arts, languages, and traditions of the New Continent*, and to point out the analogies subsisting between them and those of the Old World, wherever they can be ascertained, without at the same time venturing to determine the secret causes of these resemblances, while no historical fact carries us back to the period of communication which existed between the inhabitants of different and remote climates. This work we regard as eminently calculated to supply a previous *desideratum* in the historical details of America; and the plan of it is, in so far, superior to the methods generally pursued by investigators of the monuments, languages, and traditions of nations. The author has avoided founding any particular hypothesis on insufficient grounds; he frankly lays before his readers the result of his observations and researches,—like the summing up of an impartial judge,—and leaves them to form their own conjectures as to the origin of a people on which it is vain to offer any decisive opinion, knowing that the human mind, notwithstanding the difference of external circumstances as to time and place, will frequently develop itself in the same manner.³⁰

Even when that “metaphysical” side rather than vanishing continued to exist, the reviews reflected both the search for a non-textual language in the realm of anti-quarianism and the consolidation of a visual logic for the two dimensional displays of things, both in line with Humboldt’s undertakings (cf. Bourguet 2004; Dettelbach 1999; Schäffner 2000).

The golden ore

By the mid 1830s, the discoveries in Spanish America had been accepted as equal in interest and importance to the Egyptian discoveries and the triumphs of Champollion and Rossellini. However, in contrast to the subject of Egyptian antiquities, the New World was still considered virgin soil, “a golden ore that remains in the mine”,³¹ and that could also take on the role of the Mexican “mining shares, which have proved as abortive as the fable of the old woman and her goose with the golden egg”.³² The exploration and study of the ruins were compared with the works that promised fantastic revenues or new and successful system of working in the mines, which had given employment to labourers and capitalists, by the formation of companies, “many of whom have been indulged with golden dreams without releasing golden harvests”.³³ Whereas mines and ruins shared in fact both the attraction of “virginity” and the danger of fraud, the 1830s antiquarians and traders of antiquities seemed to observe the sealed book of Spanish American solid ruins as a reality that could provide a revenue in a far less risky way than the mines.

³⁰“Antiquities of Mexico”. *The foreign quarterly review*. 9 (17) 1832: 110–111.

³¹“Antiquités mexicaines, Voyage pittoresque... and Colección de antigüedades mexicanas que existen en el Museo Nacional”. *The foreign quarterly review*. 18 (1836–1837): 31 (London Edition), 17 (American Edition).

³²“Mr. A. Aglio’s Mexican Antiquities”. *The Olio; or, Museum of entertainment*. 5: 395.

³³Id.. p. 396.

However, it was still pending to popularize the subject, to divert it “of the voluminous and repulsive pedantry by which it has been hitherto overlaid”.³⁴ “Popularization” involved recruiting travelling and local-based agents who could act as commissioners and correspondents in order to establish a constant flux of data and objects from the archives and also from the ruins. The Société de Géographie prize helped much in that kind of popularization, where a monetary award was attached to the prestige of collaborating in the building of knowledge.

This wheel had indeed already started moving: among the documents that Aglio transcribed, the fourth volume included: “Monuments of New Spain” by W. Dupaix, from the original drawings, executed by order of the King of Spain in the first years of the nineteenth century, and specimens of Mexican sculpture, in the possession of Mr. Latour Allard. As Humboldt mentioned in 1826, Latour Allard, who in those years resided in New Orleans, took a collection of plates, objects and drawings acquired in an auction in Mexico to Paris. They were in fact, the plates and objects from Guillermo Dupaix expedition to Palenque in the early nineteenth century,³⁵ which Aglio could copy and then publish in Lord Kingsborough’s volumes (cf. Alcina Franch 1988: 221–253; Fauvet-Berthelot et al. 2007; Warden 1827) (Fig. 3). Other copies arrived in Paris in the early 1830s as part of the mission of M. Baradère in Mexico (Alcina Franch 1988, cf. Dupaix 1834).

The French chargé d’affaires in Mexico,³⁶ Ferdinand Deppe with his shipping to Berlin (Río, Antonio del 1832, translation by Minutoli), and William Bullock with his publications and his Mexican museum in London (Aguirre 2005, Arteta 1991) consolidated their roles as providers of Mesoamerican artifacts to European museums and private collectors. This wheel also propelled the first Mexican regulation, issued in November of 1827 stipulated that exportation of antiquities is forbidden. Article 4 of this law prohibited the exportation of the four most valuable Mexican commodities: gold and silver in “pasta, piedra y polvillo”, “cochineal seeds”, and Mexican monuments and antiquities.³⁷

Moreover, short after the publication of Lord Kingsborough’s work, in 1831 a correspondent of the Literary Gazette announced a “great discovery by a certain Colonel Galindo” in the neighbourhood of Palenque. Juan Galindo, governor of Petén, (cf. Graham 1963) sent his first letter to the editor of the Gazette in April 1831, addressed to the editor:

³⁴“Antiquités mexicaines, Voyage pittoresque...”, p. 32 (London edition).

³⁵“Diese Zeichnungen sind die Früchte der Reise des Hauptmanns Dupe, eines mexikanischen Altertumsforschers, mit dem ich mehre interessante Erkursionen gemacht. Ich besitze selbst eine Zeichnung von der Anbetung eines heiligen Kreuzes aus dem Paleuque, von denen, die in dem engländischen Werke abgebildet sind, ganz verschieden” (Humboldt 1826: 160).

³⁶“Neue Forschungen und Nachrichten über die Ruinen von Palenque”. *Das Ausland*. 1832: 347.

³⁷“Arancel para las aduanas marítimas y de frontera de la República Mexicana” 16th Nov 1827. In: en *Legislación Mexicana*. México, Imp. del Comercio, t. 2, 1876: 26–30. cf. Morales-Moreno 1994. Cochineal was Mexico’s second most valued export after silver. The Mexican Independence involved that the monopoly on cochineal came to an end: large scale production of cochineal emerged in other places, especially in Guatemala.



Fig. 3 “Tower of Palenque” (taken from Dupaix in Edward King, Viscount Kingsborough 1830–1848. *Antiquities of Mexico: comprising facsimiles of ancient Mexican paintings and hieroglyphics, preserved in the royal libraries of Paris, Berlin and Dresden, in the Imperial library of Vienna, in the Vatican library; in the Borgian museum at Rome; in the library of the Institute at Bologna; and in the Bodleian library at Oxford. Together with the Monuments of New Spain, by M. Dupaix: with their respective scales of measurement and accompanying descriptions. The whole illustrated by many valuable inedited manuscripts, by Augustine Aglio. London: A. Aglio, vol. 4. Courtesy Biblioteca do Museu Nacional, Rio de Janeiro)*

I am desirous of communicating to the literary world, through your universally circulated *Gazette*, some idea of these antiquities, which rescue ancient America from a charge of barbarism.³⁸

Galindo, having visited the ruins and knowing the region, remarked that “every thing bears testimony that these surprising people were not physically dissimilar from the present Indians”.³⁹ He also presumed that the Maya language – still spoken by all the Indians and by most of the other inhabitants throughout Yucatan, the district of Petén, and the eastern part of Tabasco – derived from them. However, according to him, the Indians who inhabited the states of Chiapas and Tabasco and the current inhabitants of the region close to the ruins represented an uncivilized and timid tribe, in a low scale of improvement.

³⁸“Original Correspondence to the Editor. Ruins of Palenque”. *The London Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Lettres, Arts, Sciences*, 1831: 665–666. Galindo was right: the Gazette was sold in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Dublin, Paris and North America.

³⁹“Original correspondence...”, op.cit.; also published in Galindo 1834: 62.

Another local correspondent, Francisco Corroy, French physician from Tabasco, transmitted his news of the ruins to Paris and New York learned circles, from where he was requested to write the history of that region as a privileged eyewitness of things that most of his correspondents could hardly imagine. On his letter to Samuel Akerly in New York, Corroy, a member of several learned societies of the Americas and Europe, described the territories of the ruins were as if “God and man had abandoned to eternal oblivion” (Corroy 1833: 372). In that context, he posed the question of “how can one venture to write the history of ruins, masses and piles of stones, whose antiquity reaches back more than 4,000 years” (Corroy 1833: 372). As Galindo also pointed out, nothing could be expected from memory or from accounts held by living people. At a party in Santo Domingo de Palenque, a few days before writing the letter to London, Galindo had inquired a priest and *alcalde*, as the oracles of Palenque:

[...] who they supposed were the builders of these ancient edifices. The priest shook his head, and hinted at their being antediluvian, while the *alcalde* stoutly affirmed that they must have been built by a colony of Spaniards prior to the conquest!!!⁴⁰

Even worse, when the Indians were asked who built these edifices, they replied: “The devil!”⁴¹ History had to be sought in the silence of ruins hidden in the forest to the east and west of Santo Domingo de Palenque. Local correspondents accepted – as the European antiquarians- that they were searching for

[...] a race now vanished and forgotten, who possessed a degree of civilization greater than that of any aboriginal nation at the time of the Spanish conquest, and perhaps a written language, and the only records of whose existence are the ruins of their vast edifices, their bas-reliefs, their statues, and their inscriptions in an unknown character and dialect.⁴²

Whereas there was some agreement in calling the monuments left by them “Tultecans”, some authors were convinced that they were even older and – almost overlapping with Cabrera’s ideas – were related to the Anakim or Cyclopean family of Syria, connected with the founders of Cartago.⁴³ Moreover, it was underlined that the term “Mexican antiquities” was a misnomer and a distinction had to be introduced in the realm of antiquarianism, the older monuments of New Spain – the most important and those that most strikingly resemble the Egyptians – were not Mexican but the work of a nation of “giants and wandering masons”.⁴⁴ By the end of the 1830s this “indispensable distinction” between “Mexican” for designing the Aztec monuments, and “Tultecan” for the builders of the ancient city near Palenque indicated that the history and the monuments of New Spain before the conquest had to be ordered in, at least, two nations and two eras. The expanding of the study of Mesoamerican past also meant the expansion of the historic span of Mesoamerican civilizations. Who were the

⁴⁰“Original correspondence...”, op.cit.

⁴¹“Original correspondence...”, op.cit.

⁴²“American antiquities”, *The Knickerbocker*. 1833: 371.

⁴³Cf. “Antiquités mexicaines, Voyage pittoresque...”, *The foreign quarterly review*. 18 (1836–1837), pp. 31–63.

⁴⁴Ibid. p. p. 38.

Tulteques, the builders of the monuments and sculptures, people as extraordinary as if they came from another planet,⁴⁵ was the question to be answered in the years to come. Corroy and Galindo provided their testimonies and, with their letters from Tabasco, Chiapas and Yucatan, collaborated in the emergence of the Mayan history.

Concluding Remarks

In another article I discussed the “engineering side” of the creation of the archaeological object (Podgorny 2007a). The novelty of Berthoud’s publication, the translations into German and the publication of Dupaix’s reports in London and Paris resulted in bringing together antiquaries’ disquisitions with reports by military engineers. By doing so, antiquaries started paying attention to how things were recovered in the field, an aspect that in the early nineteenth century was not consider a part of neither antiquarian nor historian practice. The distinction between the facts provided by the drawings and technical memoirs presented a remarkable contrast with the vagueness of the disquisitions over the origins and analogies seen in the monuments. In that sense, debates over Palenque constituted one of the nodes where this relationship was considered to create some kind of consensus about facts in order to escape from the imaginable.

On the other hand, the administrative archives proved to be an incredible source of information for the commercial powers and investors. They were used as profitable depositories by those who could reach the former secret documents and instal them in the market of data and facts from the old Spanish Empire. From Mexico to the La Plata River, consuls, casual travellers and local functionaries established themselves as privileged providers of information and valuable pieces of an “unknown and silent” world. Maps, drawings, fossils and antiquities, surveyed either by the complex body of Spanish military engineers or by members of the clergy and learned societies that emerged in the second half of the eighteenth century, were transformed into highly demanded commodities in the context of a circuit that was avid to incorporate things to trade. The end of the monopoly exerted by the Spanish administration and the “opening” of the colonial archives was equalled to a discovery. In that context, the abundance of items was advertised as “findings” of these agents, who presented themselves as the few ones that could mediate between the savant world and the territories inhabited by silence, secrecies and ignorance. The archives and the ruins were presented as repositories of raw materials, equivalent to deposits of natural resources that required the hand of modern entrepreneurs to give them the value that they deserved; this rhetoric consolidated the already existing connection between inquiry and trade. Objects of inquiry were also objects of monopoly and commerce, following its routes, fees and regulations, with prices defined by the market demands.

The history of circulation of books and manuscripts, as I argue in this paper, deserves further attention in order to escape from a history based on the images and topics created during the independence times. In his seminal book “How to write the

⁴⁵Ibid. p. 41.

History of the New World”, José Cañizares-Esguerra devoted the ending part to the “historical vacuum on the world of ideas and culture” that made possible the “discovery of the ruins of Palenque” (Cañizares-Esguerra 2001: 321–322). As Cañizares-Esguerra pointed out, two issues were at stake: (a) the difficulty involved in understanding unfamiliar mental landscapes and (b) the intricacy of reaching relevant sources, housed all over the main libraries and archives of the Americas and Europe. Once the sources started circulating, the “Casas Viejas” of Santo Domingo de Palenque became an object defined by translations, published or stored in different cities and media. Moreover, the object itself became a piece scattered in the itineraries of the sources that circulated through travellers, merchants and local residents. “Palenque”, no doubts, represents a good case for analysing the complexity of scientific objects. The mere emergence of “the ruins of Palenque” meant two things: the disappearance of the colonial city of Santo Domingo de Palenque, fed by the ruins hidden in the jungle, and the fragmentation of the “Casas Viejas” all along the roads that connected the monuments with the ports and metropolitan centres in Europe and the Americas. Palenque became an object to be composed by comparison of images, written sources, eyewitness’ reports and pieces scattered in the nineteenth century world, shaped by the interaction of human and non-human agents. In that sense, the ruins of Palenque, deeply rooted in the forest of Chiapas, could also be seen as a non-human go-between of the nineteenth century, a mute thing that had to learn how to travel in order to talk the new language of archaeology.⁴⁶

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⁴⁶In that same sense, Juan Pimentel has analyzed the iconic “*Megatherium*” as a non human go-between of the transatlantic world of the late eighteenth century. For him, that unknown beast represents a mobile object that condensed the complexity of the exchange between Spanish America and European savant circles. Juan Pimentel, “Across nations and ages. The Creole collector and the many lives of the *Megatherium*”, en Lisa Roberts, Simon Schaffer, and James Delbourgo (eds.), *Go-Betweens and Imperial Networks of Knowledge, 1770–1830*, Amsterdam: Chicago University Press (forthcoming 2009).

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