

Forbes Interview - Part 2

DECEMBER 11, 2000

Q: From where do we derive our knowledge of the trek from Aztlan to Mexico City?

A: Well there are a number of different codices. All of the major codices in the Valley of Mexico have some reference to it. The one that I was just looking at was the Codice of Chimalpopoca. He outlines the different places where the migration from Aztlán took place. One of the codices specifically mentions Aztlán was in Nuevo Mexico. But there are several of them that do that.

The Spaniards learned about Aztlán from talking with surviving Mexicanos, and other people of the Valley of Mexico, after the conquest. They undoubtedly inquired about where these people had come from, what their history was, that kind of thing. The codices that we have, most of them were not written down until later. So I suspect that it's the oral information that is prior, but we also have the written codices that mention the migration of the Mexican, as they're called, the Mexican or Aztecas, from the North. But with the Coronado expedition already heading towards the North in 1540, I suspect that it was oral information that primarily motivated them.

Q: If we had to look for Aztlán in the American Southwest, where might we look?

A: Given the descriptions of Aztlán that we have, there are a number of different locations where you could look. For one thing, we have to remember that the Mexican or Aztecas may have settled several different places as they migrated southward. And so the descriptions may relate not to the original place, but to a place where they stayed for awhile, on their way. There are a number of places along the Gulf of California, for instance, which would meet that requirement. In fact, one of the rivers, perhaps the Rio Yaqui, was known by the Spaniards as the Rio Aztlán, and that could mean, of course, that it was the route that was followed on the way to Aztlán, or it could mean something else. But it is possible that they did settle for a while along the coast.

I think that there are a number of possibilities. I don't think that we always have to be looking for each different item in the place where we might think that Aztlán would be. Because as we know about Yuman history, things are elaborated as time goes by, and different things from different places get merged together. As a thousand years goes by, or five hundred years. So I think that there are a number of places.

One thing that's interesting to me, is that in the Valley of Mexico, in modern times, we have a language group from the North, still present in the

Sierra, between the Valley of Mexico and Vera Cruz. These people are known as Tepejuanes. The Tepejuanes, or as they call themselves, O'odham, also live in the Sierra down as far as Nayarit, just north of the Huicholo and Cora, and extend up, primarily into Durango, and then they are the same people as the Pima and Papago. Going all the way up to the Gila River. So it's interesting that you find here in northern Uto-Aztecan dialect, or Nahuatl related dialect, that of the O'odham, still being spoken in the area of the Valley of Mexico.

Now how did these Tepejuanes get down there? Well it's possible that they were one of the Mexican groups that didn't lose their language. In other words, instead of joining the others at the lake, and eventually taking up Nahuatl, they actually retained their northern dialect. I think that's a very interesting clue. The O'odham extended as far north as the Rio Gila, in more recent times, just about to the mouth of the Gila and the Colorado River. And in fact when the date expedition came down the Colorado River in 1605, they said the people at the junction spoke the same language as Tepejuan. Now, that could mean that they were simply visiting there with the Cuachan, or the Yuma people, who speak a different language altogether. As they frequently did in later years. Or it could mean at that time they were living as far as the junction of the Gila in Colorado. The O'odham people have a very complex history, as you know, being associated with the ruin of Casa Grande near Sacat'ón, now in the state of Arizona, and also associated with the number of important groupings such as the Pimas of El Soba. The Pimas of El Soba were Pimas living along the Rio Alta, which is just down in Sonora, just below the Arizona-Sonora boundary. And also the Soba Ipuri were inhabiting the San Pedro River valley. Now the name Soba probably comes from an O'odham tradition about a ruler that ruled Casa Grande. I think it's called something like Sivani. And from Siva, I believe, comes the Spanish corruption, Sova. And he was a ruler who was eventually driven away, and his people. Because he was cruel, or something like that. So they moved somewhere else. And there is another O'odham tradition, also, that the people that formerly lived at the Casa Grande went first to the Colorado River and lived for a while. After that, they went around to the east, somewhere. And it is interesting that, on the Rio Grande, that the junction with the Rio Conchos, in northern Chihuahua, the Hulin people, who lived in pueblos, terraced adobe pueblos, [at] the time of Spanish contact. The Hulin are said by the author of a book on the Tepejuan language, to speak a language closely related to Tepejuan. So we have the O'odham kind of speaking people, again, Uto-Aztecan speaking people, spread all the way from [the] southern half of Arizona and the Colorado River, all the way to the Rio Grande, around La Junta del los Rios, where the Conchos River comes in, and then all the way down to the Valley of Mexico, practically. So this is a very interesting group, and I'm not sure that it provides us with a final answer, but it does give us an example that there were definite language contacts between the Valley of Mexico and the Arizona region.

Q: Could the Colorado delta have been this possible Aztlán site?

A: Well, the Colorado delta is a region that was unstable in many ways. There were a number of different periods in which the Colorado River filled the delta up. Up to that time, the Gulf of California extended all the way to Indio, and in fact, almost to Palm Springs. One can still see the remains of it in the Palms Springs area, and all along the rocks there you can see the shores of the old Gulf of California. But the Colorado River kept dumping its silt into what's known as the delta region, around Mexicali, and so the Mexicali area is tilted upward and there's a river that goes through there called the Rio Hardy, H-a-r-d-y, and that river still sometimes at high tide, can move to the north as well as to the south. It would only take a few feet difference for the Gulf of California to actually be able to move back into the Salton Basin, even today. But at several different times, there were earthquakes or other seismic activity in the area, and the delta was depressed, and the Gulf of California re-entered the Basin. And then there were periods in which the delta was raised by the activity of the Colorado River, or even seismic activity, and the Basin was cut off again. Now, you have to remember that the Gulf of California, when it became cut off, the northern part remained saline, so it was not a fresh water lake. Because of the high salinity in the area, even though the recent Salt and Sea gets fresh water from the Colorado River and from irrigation runoff, which maintains it today, it's still saline. Because of the thousands of years in which it was the Gulf of California. So I think the main feature is the Gulf of California going to the north. Any freshwater lakes in the area would be transient and fairly short-lived, such as the present Salt and Sea, which has only been there since around 1902, as I recall, when the irrigation dykes broke. So I think that the delta is not a good place to envision a major cultural development.

However, in my research for my book *Warriors of the Colorado*, I did find a reference to pueblo-type ruins in the delta area. Now they have never been found by any archeologists. I only had the documentary reference to these pueblo-type ruins. They were in the area occupied by the Hyaguama people, who were a people living between Yuma and the Cocopa area, which is a little bit farther down the delta. And in that region, which is basically a desert wash-type environment, but with many channels of the Colorado River providing rich growth, so there's plenty of water underground. But it's still kind of a desert type environment. In that area, apparently, at one time, there was a pueblo. But as I say, the ruins, apparently, have never been discovered by modern archeologists. There is also an account of an old structure up near the Blythe area. But how old that was, I can't say from the documentary evidence. However, that may refer, you see, to the Soba, or Sivani people going first to the Colorado River before they turned and went to the east. [It] probably does not indicate a very large pueblo-type population because otherwise, the ruins would have almost certainly been discovered a number of times. A lot of cowboys in the area, you know, Indian cowboys and so on

moving cattle all through the delta and so on. So, I think it probably would have been found again, if it were large.

So the delta seems to have emerged barrier around 900 to 1400 A.D. and at that particular time, the Colorado River was deflected to the north. And was flowing into what is now the Salton Basin. Some people call it Lake Cahuilla, during that period of time, although we don't know that the Cahuilla people, who were necessarily living around at least the southern part of it, but probably up around the northern part. In any event, gradually, as the delta emerged higher, the Colorado River deflected itself, again, towards the Gulf of California, and Lake Cahuilla dried up. Of course it dried somewhat slowly, but if people had moved to the shores to live off of the fish and so on that might have been trapped in there, it is possible that the drying up of the lake would have been a catastrophe that could have caused people to move. On the other hand, the archeology of the region doesn't, as far as I know, indicate any connections with a Meso-American type people. Of course, we don't know what the culture of the Aztecas would have been [like] at that particular time.

There are theories on the part of anthropologists, that what's known as the Numic, or Shoshonean branch of the Uto-Aztecan family, had its hearth, or its origin, development area in southern California, and that the Shoshone and the Paiute and other divisions migrated to the north and northeast from that hearth in southern California. That, of course, would relate to the Hopi, since the Hopi speak a Numic language. Now whether that's really true or not, I'm not sure, because in the late historic period, we find that the Shoshone, for instance, are--and the Comanche, who are also the same as Shoshone, really--are living as far north as Wyoming, and even across the Canadian border in what is now known as Saskatchewan. And, of course, then down through the whole of Utah and the western Colorado area, as well. So to have gotten all those people migrating all the way up to Saskatchewan from southern California, I find a little bit hard to accept, and I think that mistakes can be made, sometimes, when one theorizes where one particular language family originates.

In any case, it's likely that there have been a number of movements in the area. And we're not just yet sure, which directions they traveled.

Q: In what way is Chicomoztoc archetypal of Native American origin stories, the concept of coming from the Earth?

A: There are many origin stories that are found in Meso-America. Among them Maya, for example, and other groups in the Yucatan area, as well as among many people of Central Mexico. They tend to have certain features in common. One of the origin features that's very important is the concept of seven caves.

Seven caves is often associated with a place known as Nonohualco, which is probably located, originally, in southern Vera Cruz, or in Tabasco province on the Gulf of Mexico. Zoiva is another place that's very frequently

mentioned, especially by the Maya, and Chicomoztoc also appears, very frequently. And it appears that a great many of the peoples who eventually became important in the Valley of Mexico, particularly, wanted to graft onto their genealogies, references to these different places. So that we have to be a little careful. While seven caves, obviously, is something very important, I'm not sure we know where the seven caves would be. Because the concept would be borrowed by many different peoples to assert their ancestry.

An example of this are the Pudapache people of Michoacan, who apparently in one of their chronicles, as recorded by Europeans, referred to being of Chichimec ancestry, or the Chichimecos. And many groups also bring in the Chichimecos. The Telascaltecos bring in the Chichimecos, and so on. But the Pudapache language seems to be closest, if any, to any languages of the Andes. And so it's very likely that they came by sea along the west coast of Mexico, and entered the Rio del Balsas and up into Michoacan, that way. And so, it's not too likely that they really are of Chichimec ancestry.

But, nonetheless, some of the people in Michoacan may have been of Chichimec background. Or they chose to borrow this general tradition in the Valley of Mexico and graft it on to their tradition, which otherwise might have become a little bit obscure, having come so far, such a great, great distance in their migrations. So I think Chicomoztoc and seven caves are very important. But we have to be careful about making them essential ingredients of following a specific path. I think they are archetypal references to points that are of importance for all the people of the Valley of Mexico. they're part of a common kind of racial history.

Q: Could egrets have been in the Sun Valley, in the Phoenix area?

A: Before it got drained, the Gila and the Salt River could well have had basins where there was plant life and so on growing that would have attracted egrets. We have egrets around Davis here, you know. And I think, what we've discovered in the last few years is that when you have water being revived in an area, even though it hasn't been there for awhile, the egrets will come. So, I think that one would have to go into the biological literature on the distribution of egrets and other complicated things that we don't have the resources to do right now, at least I don't.

I suspect that the Gila probably had a lot more ponds and lagoons and so on along it, in those days, because the agriculture that the white people have carried on, the mining upstream and everything else, has undoubtedly silted the channel and changed it considerably. it's undoubtedly full of gravel and debris. That didn't formally exist I would guess. So, I wouldn't rule it out, the possibility that it would have egrets, too.

Q: Going back to that pueblo that has been alluded to in documentary evidence but has never been found--

A: OK. OK. Let me see if I can find that, specifically. There's no doubt that the river Yumans shared a number of traits with Hohokoms. The Omodham also shared traits with the Hohokoms. And some people believe that the Omodham culture is a derivative of Hohokom. But Di Peso, an archeologist that worked in the area for many many years, suggests the Omodham were the indigenous people of southern Arizona, that the Hohokoms were intruders from Mexico. According to Di Peso, the early Hohokom culture, up to about a thousand A.D., [who were] a group of immigrants from Mexico, known archeologically as the Hohokom, entered the Pimeria Alta with a recognizably different material culture complex, and took over a number of river valleys, such as the middle Gila and the Salt. They extended their dominion throughout Pimeria Alta. The Hohokom also had colonies up as far as Flagstaff, about the year 1070, and, as I mentioned, their pottery has been found along the Colorado River, and even in the San Fernando Valley, California, where I found some, at Tonga. It was traded that far, so the Hohokom might be worth mentioning, since they did have the ball courts and the extensive irrigation systems and they illustrate the close contact with Mexico.

Q: Is there any likelihood that Casa Grande and the Hohokom in the Salt River area could have been Aztlan?

A: There [are] so many interesting things about the Gila River region because of the Hohokom people, who apparently were moving into the basin with southern Mexican cultural characteristics, including the ball court. The ball court is a kind of a diagnostic feature in many ways of Meso-American culture. They brought that along, and they also, of course, are the people who built these tremendous irrigation ditches all over the Gila and Salt basin. Which again is a characteristic that seems to have originated in that area with them. So they are a Mexican based people, using the term "Mexican" in the sense of modern Mexico, and they spoke language that was probably Uto-Aztecan, although it is true that among the modern cultures of the region, the river Yuman people the Cuachan and the Mojave people, often show Hohokom-like characteristics, even though they speak totally different languages. So obviously there was a great deal of intermarriage and [a]cultural mixture. The Hohokom appear to have dominated not only the Gila and Salt, but also some people think that they had a colony as far north as Flagstaff, around the year 1070.

So, what we're demonstrating by this is that there's a lot of Mexican-like contact and influence, even into northern Arizona in the period of time around 1000. There are a lot of other activities that are going on during that period of time, of course. The Athapaskan people, the Navajo people, their myths and tales, begin taking flesh around 1000 A.D. roughly, in that northern region.

Q: Is it conceivable that some Hohokom, having built Casa Grande, having developed these agricultural techniques, could have migrated south to the Valley of Mexico?

A: The Hohokom people may have migrated south to Mexico, going back, as it

were, to where they came from. that's a possibility. Others believe that some of them moved to the Colorado River and intermarried with the Yumans and became absorbed there. Others, undoubtedly, became absorbed among the Pimas and Papagos, with whom they were associated and living. There are some that even think that the Pimas and Papagos are Hohokom descendants.

As far as Casa Grande, itself, is concerned, some scholars believe that Casa Grande was part of a Puebloan tradition that is not necessarily Hohokom. That the Hohokom didn't necessarily build the large pueblos. You know, there is another very very large pueblo in Chihuahua called Casas Grandes, which is even bigger, a very spectacular place. And that was probably not built by the Hohokom. There were lots of pueblos in Northern Sonora, as at Sahuarita, there was a pueblo like Taos, with many stories, you know. So there are a lot of things going on in northern Sonora and Chihuahua and in the Southwest that we don't yet really know very much about.

Q: Can we shift for a moment and go to Chaco Canyon?

A: I'm not really expert on Chaco Canyon, but I've seen a couple of films about it lately.

Q: It appears that at a certain point in history, the Anasazi leave Chaco Canyon, and there's been a lot of debate about where they went. Because they disappeared in around 1200, which is coincident with the possible departure from Aztlan, the logical question is were they the forerunners of the Mexican?

A: Before I answer that, I want to read you some things about the ruins in the Colorado River area, so you can see if you want to cover that.

Q: OK.

A: Between the 1770's and early 1900's, at least four pueblo type ruins were seen along the latter stream of the Colorado. Three in the delta, and one near Blythe. The latter was described by Major Samuel P. Heintzelmann in 1853 as a Spanish ruin located on the detached sandy plateau above the rise of the river, near a place called Hotamine. Hotamine was a Cuachan settlement, located at the southern end of the Palo Verde Valley.

So you know where the Palo Verde is there, in the Blythe area.

The ruin there could not have been of Spanish origin because the Spaniards had no settlements along the river.

So, there was a ruin up there. No one's ever investigated it.

In 1775, Juan Bautista de Anza recorded that he had examined an ancient Indian structure, three leagues from Santa Olaya.

The latter place was about ten leagues, or twenty-five miles southwest of Pilot Knob, which is, roughly, Yuma, down in the delta. De Anza suggested that the ruins represented an attempt to establish a Mexican Aztec empire in the region. So it must have been somewhat similar to other ruins, such as Casa Grande in Arizona, credited to the Aztecs by the Spaniards.

In 1782, the area of the Cojuanes, another people related to the Haliaguamis. they're almost identical people, there in the delta. Their land was referred to as the land of the Cojuenes, that is Cojuanes, in place of

the Casa Grande. This was apparently eighteen leagues southwest of Fort Yuma Hill, near a lagoon. Anza's Casa Grande would have been in the same area. So, that's probably worth taking note of.

In 1826 Lieutenant R. W. Hardy sailed up the Rio Arvi, from the Gulf, and on July 23rd wrote, Near our present situation, one-half league up the Hardy above its junction with the Colorado, is one of those old ruins, which are supposed to mark out the progressive march of the Aztecs from the north to Mexico. It is called by the natives Casas Grandes but the Indians have no tradition respecting its former occupiers. None at least that I could learn.

On July 29th, he was asked by the Indians of the area to pass, quote, over to the Indian encampment at Casas Grandes, but he didn't do that. About the year 1903, a cowboy, familiar with the delta region, discovered adobe ruins a few miles southeast of the junction of the Colorado and the Hardy. There he saw walls eight feet thick and ten feet high. In 1930, Fred B. Niffin attempted to locate this site, but could not do so, as the cowboy was not available to guide him to the exact location.

Q: Could you sum that up for us?

A: We have, surprisingly, quite a bit of information from early sources about pueblo type ruins in the lower Colorado delta. Some of them from very credible people, like Juan Bautista de Anza, who led a major expedition to California. In 1775, he examined what he called an ancient structure about twenty-five miles to the southwest of now Yuma, Arizona, in the delta. He thought that they represented a ruin of the Aztecs, Casas Grande, or Casa Grande of the Mexican or Aztec empire, in the region. Similar sites were found later on, a few years later, for example, the territory of the Cojuana people is roughly the same area [and] was referred to as the territory of the Cojuanas and the Casa Grande.

So, I think there's pretty good documentation that there was a Casa Grande in the delta. Similar structures were seen by Lieutenant Hardy, who explored what is now known as the Rio Arvi, in the 1820's, and also learned about a Casas Grandes, which was supposedly an Aztec ruin, in the delta area. But he didn't, himself, go over to see it.

Q: Why is it likely that we won't find those ruins today?

A: Well, there's been a lot of shifting in the delta, and they were made of adobe. Apparently, with rains and weathering, they gradually go down to form mounds. And unless you were a trained archeologist, really doing a very careful survey, all you would probably find, today, would be a few mounds. The roofing would have probably deteriorated completely, or have been dragged off by people to use for some other purpose, and so the mounds would be exposed, and would gradually disappear into just adobe hills.

Q: The only other thing I'd like to ask about is Chaco Canyon.

A: The people who are known as Anasazi, which is an Athapaskan word from the Navajo language. The only group that currently survives, who speaks a Uto-Aztecan [language] are the Hopi. And the Hopi speak a Shoshonean or a

Numic branch language, which is from the tribes to the north--Shoshones, Paiutes, Utes. it's related to those, and to the Indian people of southern California, the Los Angeles basin people.

Q: Is it coincidental that the site at Chaco Canyon was abandoned at about the same time as the purported departure from Aztlan?

A: The history of movements from Chaco Canyon, and from the Four Corners region, and other areas, is still shrouded in mystery. it's shrouded in mystery partly because many of the Pueblo peoples will not reveal their detailed oral histories. They do not want anthropologists or others to know those detailed oral histories, and as a result, we do not know for sure where each pueblo originated, that is of today's pueblos. it's very likely that they do have detailed accounts of how they migrated to where they are today. The general belief is that most of them probably came from the Chaco region or from the Four Corners region.

Now, the Navajo also have a tradition that one of their clans was originally known as the Turkey Clan, but came to be known as the Quiya Ani Clan, which means tall house people, because they originated at Tall House in the Chaco area. They came from Tall House, and migrated out. And as they migrated, they said well, we're from Tall House. And so instead of being the Turkey People, they became known as the Quiya Ani. The western Apache also have the same clan. According to Carl Gorman, my old friend, who was a member of the Quiya Ani Clan, they also had a tradition that they migrated all the way to the Pacific coast, and then returned to the Arizona area. So that you have very elaborate migrations going on in the area. And you have people probably changing languages as they perhaps become under different religious influences, as they intermarry with other people. The Navajo, for example, who have very detailed origin stories about the region, sometimes meet cliff dwellers who speak the same language that they do. Other times they meet people who speak different languages that they don't understand. They have people that come and join the Navajo from the Colorado River, for instance, so that it's a complicated thing. And we really can't, I think, put together the detailed history of the region, as long as the Pueblo people want to keep their traditions to themselves.

We have to remember, also, that there are many pueblos to the south that were inhabited by people whose languages we don't know today, throughout the Mogollon Mountain area of Arizona. You have pueblos that are commonly ascribed to a people as Salado People, partly because of the Salt River. There is some indication that some of those people might have spoken Oâodham, for example, Pima. Tepejuan language. It is very possible that some of the Salado Puebloans spoke in Oâodham language. Which is again, a group of people that, some of them, at least, end up in the Valley of Mexico. it's possible that some of them spoke an Athapaskan language, and they certainly were part of the same cultural tradition as Casas Grandes, Chihuahua, and Casa Grande in southern Arizona.

Q: Would you rule out that some group of Anasazi, or people from the Four Corners area, might have been the Mexicans?

A: I would not rule out that Pueblo people, who are called Anasazi, might have been among those who migrated to Mexico. The people who eventually ended up in the Valley of Mexico, of course, are made up of a number of different tribes or tribelets. We don't know that they all spoke the same language, even, for example. Although we assume that they probably did. And after migrating that distance, they certainly would've all been able to be multi-lingual. Probably they spoke many languages, as typical of Indian people of that area. I think that it is quite possible that they were among the Pueblo peoples at that period of time.

Q: One last thing. The Fremont people. Are you familiar with, with them?

A: Slightly. You mean the prehistoric people that lived up in the Utah-

Q: In the Utah area. And I presume that they're named Fremont after John C.

A: that's the Fremont, I think the plateau, or something like that, the basin is named after him, I think.

I think that it's very important to know that all these people, every time they find one of these ruins, they ascribe it to the Aztecs? That was a part of common Mexican folklore. Like when Anza was traveling, of course, his soldiers, and almost all the people that were with him, were Mexicanos. Even though he was a Spaniard, as I recall. But all the rest were Mexicanos. Mostly Indians. And so that's what they thought. That was the general belief, that the Aztecs had come from this region, had been up in that region. it's just such a powerful, obviously epic, belief.

I'm trying to see here if there [are] any references in here to the Mexican language. The people who lived in the Great Salt Lake area, in the Late Historic Period, say, the 1770's, when the Escalante expedition gets up into that area, are basically, Shoshone people in the northern end of the area, and Utes, Utes Barbones or Bearded Utes, living to the south of Salt Lake City. The Utes Barbones probably are people that we would call Paiutes today. But for the Spaniards, Ute and Paiute were, essentially, the same people. Their way of life may have, at one time, had some Puebloan characteristics, because we know that the Pueblo cultures extended up into the Mauopa Valley of southern Nevada, and even up into southern-most Utah and parts of Colorado. But by the time that the Spaniards get into the area, they've acquired horses, and they're primarily hunting and fishing peoples. they're not growing much in the way of crops, although agriculture does extend somewhat up into that area.

Q: Would these people have been privy to the kind of farming technology that others, like the Anasazi and other people, would have had?

A: Not necessarily would these people have the kind of agricultural knowledge that the people in the Valley of Mexico later [have]. Or the Anasazi, for that matter. The Chichimec people, who, again, play a very very important role in all of the myths of the Valley of Mexico, appear to have been a people with only a marginal interest in agriculture. They lived in desert areas, where they probably did some farming along the washes, and so on, but primarily they were probably hunting and gathering peoples. Zacatecos, for example, and Pames, Juamares. So there wouldn't necessarily have been a strong agricultural tradition. What you find throughout desert areas is that all people will do a little bit of farming when they can. They'll do a little bit of farming in desert washes and canyons, letting old people stay and take care of things and watch them, but the main life support comes from hunting and gathering of wild foods. They know about agriculture, and they can make the transition very rapidly if they're in a better environment.