

CARTOGRAPHIC WRITING AND THE NATIVE BODY IN GASPAR PÉREZ DE VILLAGRÁ'S *HISTORIA DE LA NUEVA MEXICO*

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Gáspar Pérez de Villagrá was born in Puebla de los Angeles in New Spain in 1555. Educated at the University of Salamanca, he became legal officer and ecclesiastical council on Don Juan de Oñate's 1598 expedition *tierra adentro*, to the northern borderlands of the Mexican Empire now known as New Mexico. The enterprise, a combination of mapping, "pacification" and social and political organization of these new territories, was the subject of Villagrá's 34 canto epic poem *Historia de la Nueva Mexico* (1610).

Villagrá composed his verse *relación* ten years after the events described, as he and other commanding officers stood accused of excesses, cruelties and tyrannies committed in New Mexico, in particular with respect to their punitive attack on the pueblo of Ácoma in January 1599. On the four hundredth anniversary of the expedition, this study focuses upon Villagrá's cartographic writing of the landscape and peoples of the northern borderlands. The epic poem, which culminates in the sack of Ácoma, was Villagrá's literary justification for the exemplary violence that he and the Spanish forces inflicted upon the native town and the native body.

The principals in the New Mexican expedition had all previously experienced warfare with a native population on the borders of the empire. Oñate and his two nephews the Zaldívars had fought the Chichimeca around the silver mines of Zacatecas for 20 years¹. From imposing order on the periphery of empire in Nueva Galicia and Nueva Vizcaya, they moved even further north, beyond the desert known as the chichimec sea, to a region which historians describe as the "periphery of the periphery" (Weber 282; Hall 56-57). The region was graphically incised as *terra incognita* on the northern horizon of the colonial map; it was a void to be named, described, subdued and christianized. Oñate and Villagrá mapped and subdivided the northern lands into several superimposed jurisdictions: those of the Franciscan friars, royal governors, native leaders and expectant encomenderos.

Villagrá's journey with Juan de Oñate took place three decades after the issuance by the Consejo Real de Indias of the questionnaires for the

Relaciones geográficas. Between 1569 and 1586, the *cuestionarios* solicited from New World officials data for mapping the new discoveries. The most wide reaching survey, that of 1577, had requested that colonists compile data through a combination of celestial observation, determination of distances between settlements, and the sketching of cities and their environs (Edwards 18). While few celestial observations were collected, distance and sketch data were made available for much of New Spain. Oñate's expedition began ten years after the last of these data were solicited; he was not specifically asked for these observations, however Oñate, Villagr a and several friars took pains to record geographic position by all of these means. The nature of the inquiry was reflected in much of the writing about the region, which I characterize as cartographic.

Cartographic writing, like the map itself, is not so much a representation of space as it is a space of representation. As Sylvia Tomasch posits in her 1998 book on geographical imagination in the European middle ages, "Like the mappamundi, such texts reveal the politics of empire, the construction of signifiers of mapping, the relationship between center and peripheries and the problematics of alterity" (5). Cartographic writing, then, performs a significant spatializing operation. In early modern European writing, it is a record of expanding empire, a product of developing political ideologies and a projection of colonial desire. In the particular case of Gaspar P rez de Villagr a, cartographic narrative is also a crucial project in his own self-defense: he ties geography to the legal obligations of the soldiers sent to discover and "pacify" the northern margins of the Spanish empire. This study focuses on four moments in the *Historia de la Nueva M xico* in which Villagr a closely relates cartographic imagery to the body of the native.

While most of the poet's information is corroborated by multiple independent sources—letters and journals written by participants in the campaign—, Villagr a's first detailed account of the natives of the R o Grande is purely literary. Before the Oñate expedition ventures far into the north, the *indio* Mompil, of great strength and noble bearing, appears and is asked by Oñate to describe the source of the waters of the R o Grande. He stands, clears a space in the sand, and:

Desembolviendo el brazo poderoso
Tom  la punta de una larga flecha
Y assi, como si bien cursado fuera
En nuestra mathem tica m s cierta,
Casi que quiso a todos, figurarnos
La l nea y el Zod aco y los signos,
En largo cada qual de treinta grados,
Los dos remotos Polos milagrosos,
El Artico y Ant rtico cumplidos,

Los poderosos círculos y el exe.
 Y assí, como cosmógrafo excelente,
 Respecto al Cielo quiso dibujarnos
 Algunas partes de la baja tierra.
 Puso del Sur y Norte los dos mares,
 Con Islas, fuentes, montes y lagunas
 Y otros assientos, puestos y estalages.
 Pintónos la circunvezina tierra
 Y el assiento del caudeloso Río
 Por quien tantos trabajos se sufrieron,
 Y todos los aguages y jornadas
 Que era fuerza tener en el camino
 Por aber de beber sus turbias aguas.
 Pintónos una boca muy estrecha
 Por la qual era fuerza se passase,
 Y fuera della no nos dio vereda
 Que por ella pudiesse ser possible
 Que saliessé el ejército marchando,
 Por ser aquella tierra en sí fragosa
 Y muy pobre de aguage en todas partes.
 Allí pintó también las poblaciones
 De nuestra nueva México y sus tierras,
 Poniendo y dándose a entender en todo
 Como si muy sagaz piloto fuera.
 No se movió pestaña, porque juntos,
 Todos oyendo al bárbaro gallardo,
 De gran contento y gozo no cabían. (13.114)

In his literary reformulation of Oñate's desperate wandering through the southern desert, Villagrà devised a potent symbol which would recur throughout his poem: the native as both pilot and cartographer to the Spaniards. Here, Mompil willingly offers his obedience and his land to Philip II. In justifying the expedition, Villagrà symbolically renders the ceremony of submission of the native. The native, without written culture, provides the invaders with an oral explanation of his mapped land. The Spaniards need only put it to paper and fill in the toponyms for themselves. In fact, the Spaniards immediately begin devising names for the sites plotted on the map in the sand; such effacing of the native name is characterized by Stephen Greenblatt as "the erasure of the alien, perhaps demonic, identity . . . it is at once an exorcism, an appropriation, and a gift" (83). In fact, it is the erasure of the native pilot/painter himself. The map, once appropriated and renamed, is no longer his to draw. This gratification of geographical desire is compounded in the poem by the arrival upon the scene of a female native of grace, strength and scant clothing who pleads for the release of the Indian. Too late, she is made a captive alongside him.

The next canto of the poem traces Mompil's sand map, as the Spaniards march northward along the river, confirming each predicted landmark. At each spot along the way Oñate takes possession of the land and the peoples encountered, again renaming as he travels. In fact, many of the pueblos encountered by Oñate's men had already been renamed by the Spanish of previous expeditions: Chamuscado's 1581-2 expedition renamed many of the native pueblos for geographical locations in Spain. Towns in the environs of Cáceres, Avila and Badajoz were particularly popular (Hammond 1966, 62). This repeated act of rendering the foreign familiar through toponymic replacement is central to Villagr a's cartographic discourse, as it was central in the *relaciones* of Columbus, Hern n Cort es and many others in this "new world".

The *toma de posesi n* first appears in Villagr a's narrative as inserted prose text (14.131-8) which makes up all of canto 14. Prose documents were inserted in three sections of the poem, each time to express the legality of Spanish actions in the territory. In canto 7, two prose documents laid out the legal authority by which Oñate and his men entered New Mexico: a 1598 letter from Philip II and a letter from the viceroy don Gaspar de Z niga specified Oñate's powers and obligations in uncharted territory. In canto 25, to which we will return shortly, Villagr a inserted in prose the legal justification for the punitive attack on the pueblo of  coma. The *toma de posesi n*, a verbatim record of the authoritative document produced by notary Juan P rez de On s, legally incorporated each discovered population and territory into the Spanish empire. As there were no natives present at the ceremony, it cannot be considered a *requerimiento*, the political protocol for taking possession of land and people which in the *recopilaci n* of 1573 was euphemistically renamed the "Instrument of Obedience and Vassalage".² Greenblatt characterizes this *toma de posesi n* ceremony as a "legal ritual" which was a "characteristic rhetorical feature of what we may call Christian imperialism" (55, 70). The speech act of taking possession, then, was directed more at establishing claim to the land in the face of other European rivals than it was a message to the natives. There are no natives present at this moment in Villagr a's poem, however the symbolic gestures of the *posesi n* did not require their presence. Oñate, according to Villagr a, nailed the Holy Cross to a tree at the river's edge, fixed the royal standard beside it and, to the sound of a trumpet and musket fire, he affixed his wax seal to the document of *posesi n*—the very document inserted into this text—recorded in that place by his notary. This surfeit of symbolic gestures legally establishes his claim to both the known and as yet unknown points on the map of the region:

tomo y aprendo, una dos y tres veces . . . la tenencia y posesión Real y actual, cibil y criminal, en este dicho Río del Norte, sin excetar cosa alguna y sin ninguna limitación, con las vegas, cañadas y sus pastos y abrevaderos . . . y las demás tierras, pueblos, ciudades, villas, castillos y casas fuertes y llanas que aora están fundadas . . . y adelante por tiempo se fundaren en ellos . . . y todos sus indios naturales que en ellas se incluíeran y comprehendieran . . . desde la hoja del Monte hasta la piedra del Río y arenas dél. (14.137)

The *toma de posesión* in Villagrá is, as Greenblatt has observed in other recorded versions of the ritual, "a word pregnant with what is imagined, desired and promised" (73). It is both a geographic and temporal claim to authority; Oñate takes in the name of Philip II all that at the moment of declaration is on the map and all that will subsequently be discovered, revealed or founded.

Villagrá, then, directly associates Oñate's legal gesture with the figure of Mompil and his map. Oñate, in reaching the Río Grande, has physically covered the entire geography mapped by the Indian. At the headwaters of the river, he takes possession of the contents of Mompil's map, crosses this natural boundary and then founds his first settlement just beyond the reaches of the Indian's knowledge. Villagrá portrays Oñate as a Spanish Hercules passing beyond the gates of the known world—a New Mexican *plus ultra*.

In keeping with this association of Oñate with Hercules, the most common metaphorical construct throughout the poem is nautical: the New Mexican landscape—a vast desert interrupted by mountain ranges—is metaphorically an ocean with massive waves. Oñate is, beginning with canto 4, "qual práctico piloto recatado/que las tendidas velas asegura" (6.56.) His carts and horses are "gruessas naves" throwing out sea foam in the desert (10.90); his men find and pass through narrow mountain passes "como Magallanes por su estrecho" (14.125). San Juan de los Caballeros, the first town founded by the Spanish, becomes in Villagrá's portolan universe "seguro y dulce puerto," which more than once protects Oñate from the tempests of rebellion and desertion by his own men (16.48). Villagrá's portrayal of the entry into the north as nautical is not simply a literary trope, well-known in Golden Age Spain, but rather is politically important to his personal argument. The poet/soldier, who was by 1610 accused of the execution without trial of two such deserters, would justify his actions on the basis of maritime law; it was the duty of captains to swiftly punish mutineers³.

The remainder of the map is filled in as the Spaniards explore the environs of their new town, San Juan de los Caballeros. Villagrá records in verse the details of:

Muy buenas poblaciones assentadas
 Por sus quartos y plazas bien quadradas
 Sin género de calles, cuias casas
 Tres, cinco, seys y siete altos suben,
 Con mucho ventanaje y corredores . . . (15.146)

The Spaniards erect a church, with streets radiating outward from it, patterned on Ferdinand and Isabella's settlement of Santa Fe during the 1492 siege of Granada. The day following the first Sunday mass—held on September 8th, 1598—with the known map laid out before them, the Franciscan friars are assigned their portions by Oñate.

This is the third essential cartographic moment in the poem. Oñate, in Villagrà's words, "sembró sus religiosos, como Christo sembró el Apostolado, por provincias" (163). To Fray Zamora, the Picuríes and the inhabitants of Taos; to Fray San Miguel, the Indians of Pecos; the Queres of San Felipe, Santo Domingo, and Cochití to Fray Rojas. The Jémez went to Fray Lugo. The Zía, along with Ácoma, Zuñi and the Hopi pueblos went to Fray Corchado. Fray Claros was given the Tiguas of the Puaray (modern day Bernalillo) and the Tewas in the vicinity of the capital were entrusted to Fray Cristóbal de Salazar, and the father commissary⁴. Oñate's detailed recitation of the names of the pueblos of the Río Grande ritualistically includes the settlements within the purview of the Spanish empire. The bodies and souls of the inhabitants are divided among the eight assembled Franciscans in regions; the inhabited land is marked accordingly on the map and assigned to the caballeros of the Oñate expedition. Finally, the legal vassalage ceremony is enacted by the native leaders of the pueblos. It is no coincidence that Oñate's next act in Villagrà's poem (three lines later) is to initiate a complete inspection of each settlement mentioned, and in particular to see with his own eyes the already famous stronghold of Ácoma.

Villagrà provides detailed descriptions of the pueblos among which Oñate's expedition settled near Santo Domingo. His poem tells of kivas, kachinas, sacred clowns, food preparation, shelter and customs, and of social interaction (cantos 15-17). While much of this information was no doubt colored by his own expectations of native behavior, Villagrà indicates in several instances keen observation of pueblo life. Such intimate familiarity, however, precludes many of the plot elements of epic narrative. Villagrà simply knew too much about the pueblos around San Juan de los Caballeros. In his poem he provides detailed ethnographic description of the portion of the map which had been written upon, identified and renamed. But there was still an ideal epic location on the edges of this known world. Ácoma was a separate and inaccessible space, appropriate for epic plots just as the margins of sixteenth century maps contained blank space to be filled in according to the imagination of the car-

tographer⁵.

Ácoma was famous among the Spanish long before Villagrá had his first sight of it. On Coronado's 1540 expedition, Alvarado had written of the peak on which the Ácomans isolated themselves (Junquera 18). Castañeda on the same journey noted the difficulty of access for the Spaniards and, yet, the ease with which even the women and children of Ácoma negotiated the dangerous cliffs (Hammond 1940, 223). He also noted the "warlike mood" of the Ácomans and the strategic position they held, as they could "without exposing themselves . . . hurl so many [stones] down that no army, however powerful, could reach the top" (Ibid., 218). Espejo's chronicler Luxán wrote in 1582 that the town was built for war, heavily fortified and impenetrable (Junquera 19). It was a fortress in which "the doors of the houses are like trap doors. They keep watch day and night" (Hammond 1966, 182). The Gallegos *relación* of the 1581-82 expedition of Father Agustín Rodríguez and Francisco Sánchez Chamuscado described the pueblo as "the best stronghold in existence even among Christians" (Gallegos 51), a fortress which the Spaniards dared not explore further. Also on the Chamuscado expedition, the notary Martín de Pedrosa annotated in his list of encountered pueblos that Ácoma was "situated on a stronghold, the greatest in Christendom" (Hammond 1966, 120). In sum, the inherited descriptions of the pueblo were mysterious, and certainly evocative of the type of adventure to be found in the romances of chivalry.

The *Historia de la Nueva México* repeats these previous impressions and exaggerates the pueblo's mysterious strategic position on a mesa above steep cliffs. Villagrá's description of the first view of the pueblo presents Oñate as an astute architect who assesses the strength of the enemy:

. . . admirado de ver la brava fuerza,
 Grandeza y fortaleza que mostraban
 Los poderosos muros lebantados,
 Torreones, castillos espantosos,
 Baluartes y braveza nunca vista,
 Pasmado se quedó por un buen rato
 Mirando desde afuera las subidas
 Y bajadas grimosas, no pensadas. (18.169)

Ácoma is the most impregnable fortress, the most well-constructed bulwark in the northern territories. Here is a dangerous and worthy enemy. His poem associates with Ácoma further imagery from the Old World. The pueblo, like the labyrinth of Crete, is difficult to navigate and filled with the monstrous, the destructive forces of the idolater (31. 273). Ácoma is also, like Jerusalem, a city on a hill, occupied by the infidel, awaiting its

delivery to the Catholic Church. Ácoma is Numancia, the celtiberian town famous for its fierce resistance and mass suicide in the face of Roman invasion (34.296). Finally, and most appropriately, Ácoma is Troy, the doomed city in flames at the conclusion of the first epic poem, the *Iliad* (31.273; 33.293). In Villagr , the  comans can take on each of these mythical/historical identities because they inhabit the unknown margins of the mapped world.  coma and its residents become in Villagr  a literary construct, based upon thousands of years of western European tradition; they had little to do with the other pueblos of Villagr 's narrative.

However, the  comans had everything to do with Villagr 's personal situation in 1610, when he published his poem in Alcal  de Henares. Villagr  was at Court, unsuccessfully attempting to gain audience with Philip III, and already aware that his actions in New Mexico were under investigation in Mexico City. By 1614 he, along with O ate and seven others, would be convicted of excesses committed in New Mexico. All of the principals and their families, financially and politically ruined, would be appealing the sentences well into the reign of Philip IV (Hammond 1953, 1141-59).

The fourth critical cartographic moment in Villagr 's epic poem takes place in canto 25. It is the legal argument for the declaration of just war on  coma. Having, in November of 1598, declared their obedience in body and spirit to king Philip II, the Indians of  coma subsequently attacked and killed O ate's nephew and 12 other soldiers (Knaut 35). O ate's decision that a punitive attack on  coma constituted a just war was recorded verbatim in the middle of Villagr 's verse poem: O ate must punish guilty subjects under the king's laws and—as an unchecked uprising might encourage other pueblos to consider a general revolt—exemplary punishment is necessary for securing and preserving the peace. In Villagr , O ate cites his previous experience with the Chichimeca as further proof of the need to act swiftly and brutally. The resulting war—two days of fighting “a fuego y sangre”—ended in the burning of  coma. Many of its nearly three thousand inhabitants, barricaded inside the kivas, died in the flames. Villagr 's claim that the inhabitants committed suicide like the numantinos was not backed up by the testimony at the later trial (reprinted in Hammond 1953, 428-79).

In the *Historia de la Nueva M xico*, the Spanish entry into the pueblo divides  coma into four quadrants for fighting, and renders the pueblo “un matadero horrendo” (30.263). Having already subdivided the town, the Spaniards set about subdividing its inhabitants as well, reducing them to severed limbs, “pechos, ojos, cabezas, piernas y gargantas” (Ibid). The battle, once ended, results in:

... gran suma de difuntos
 tullidos, mancos, cojos, destroncados.
 Abiertos por los pechos, mal heridos,
 rasgadas las cabezas y los brazos,
 abiertos por mil partes y las carnes
 vertiendo viva sangre ... (31.269)

The Ácomans, unwilling to surrender, hasten their dead souls to Dante's second dwelling place, reserved for suicides (33.287).⁶

About three hundred survivors were brought back to Santo Domingo for trial. On February 12, 1599 Oñate pronounced a sentence which provoked much protest among even the Spanish colonists, although Villagrá's poem tactfully never mentions dissent. All males over twenty five years of age were to lose a foot and be remanded to the Spanish for twenty years of servitude. Males age 12 through 25 and all women over 12 years of age were likewise to perform 20 years of service to the Spanish. The children were handed over into the care of Spanish families while the elderly were to be distributed among the northern tribes.⁷

Villagrá's poem subjects both the land and the people of the new territory of New Mexico to the authority of the cartographic grid. Just as its geographic points are named, conquered, and subdivided, so the native body is defeated and dismembered. Ácoma, the one site which resisted inclusion in the imperial project, was destroyed. Its surviving inhabitants were separated, some suffering literal dismemberment and mutilation. Villagrá's poetic reformulation of the events at Ácoma emplots the punitive expedition as exemplary punishment of the rebellious native without whom the body of empire would wither.

In 1614, when Oñate was finally convicted on 12 counts of tyranny and excess in New Mexico, Villagrá was condemned for two crimes. He was acquitted in the actions of Ácoma, because he was under Oñate's specific orders (Hammond 1953, 1109-24). Villagrá's execution of two Spanish deserters, also on the orders of Oñate, earned him banishment from New Mexico for a period of six years. Ironically, the heavier price—two years to be spent without commission and exiled from Mexico city—was assessed for his writings on New Mexico. The viceroy condemned him for "praising highly the quality, richness, and fertility of the provinces of New Mexico, when the opposite is true, as it is a sterile and poor land, sparsely populated" (Hammond 1953, 1116). Villagrá's geographical *relación* was misleading, it implied resources and promise that were false. The cartographic writing of the *Historia de la Nueva México* inscribed too much into the blank expanses of the regional map.

In January of 1998, a massive bronze statue of don Juan de Oñate was unveiled northeast of the town of Española and near the site of the original Oñate capital at San Juan pueblo in commemoration of the four-

hundredth anniversary of Oñate's *entrada* into the northern provinces. Within the week, an Indian commando group amputated the statue's right foot with an electric saw and mailed to local newspapers polaroid pictures of their handiwork, along with a statement that the action had been taken "on behalf of our brothers and sisters of Ácoma Pueblo" (Brook A10). The investigation that followed turned up little more evidence than the frequent smiles of interviewees. The exemplary punishment of the Oñate statue resulted in the temporary closing of the roadside monument, while state officials debated whether to bother restoring the missing foot. According to local sources, Oñate only needs to lose some 23 additional feet for justice to be served.

Notes

¹In his *History and Warfare in Renaissance Epic*, Michael Murrin traced the continuities in war strategy between the Chichimec conflict and the punitive attack on the Pueblo of Ácoma. Both sides employed "terrorist tactics," attacking and mutilating their enemies in order to instill fear (Murrin 225-28).

²In her *Ceremonies of Possession in Europe's Conquest of the New World*, Patricia Seed explains this change in the use and nature of the *requerimiento* after 1573, and points to the necessity of the ritual *toma de posesión* for "conquerors desiring official recognition" from the King (89, 95).

³This argument is the basis of his 1612 pamphlet, the *Justificación de las muertes, justicias y castigos...*, written in his own defense and in support of his commanding officers in response to the impending trial in Mexico City. It is a detailed explanation of the legal precedent for Oñate's actions in New Mexico. Among the authorities cited by Villagrà are Roman and Spanish law, Thomas Aquinas, and maritime statutes (Villagrà, *Justificación*, 2r-5v).

⁴Hammond reprinted the journal of a participating friar, who confirmed this summary by Villagrà (1953, 323). The wording is similar enough to suggest that both accounts were derived from the same legal document.

⁵Not coincidentally, Ácoma was one of few pueblos which had not been renamed by the Spaniards during their many previous visits to the region. According to Hammond, the pueblo names fall into four categories: those of Spanish origin, those of the New Mexican Tribes, those derived from Mexican/nahuatl, and those of the saints. Along with the Zuñi pueblos, Ácoma conserved on the Spanish maps its original and decidedly exotic toponym (1940, 62).

⁶In Villagrà, "Para el segundo albergue caminaron / que ocupan, según dize el gran Lombardo, / allá en los calabozos del infierno / los que sin merecer alguna culpa / de su voluntad fueron omicidas / De sus infames almas desdichadas" (33.287).

⁷Oñate's sentence is reprinted in its entirety in Hammond 1953, 476-79.

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