

Nezahualcōyotl, hero and vassal in the *Suma relación de todas las cosas que han sucedido en esta Nueva España*.

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Summary:

In the work of Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxóchitl, the figure of Nezahualcōyotl has been studied by different scholars, who have pointed out the author's interest in exalting the image of his ancestor for his own personal and political benefit. In this sense, the present work aims to indicate the possible models used by Alva Ixtlilxóchitl to construct the figure of the king of Texcoco. It is proposed that one of the models is the epic hero, in the figure of the vassal represented by the Cid in his song, as well as the hero of the books of chivalry, where the prototypical example is found in the character of Amadis. Thus, when analyzing the models, it will be observed how the Nezahualcōyotl of Alva Ixtlilxóchitl is based on both traditions to create the figure of one of the first Hispanic American heroes.

Keywords: Vassal. Hero. Nezahualcōyotl. Alva Ixtlilxóchitl.

Resumen:

En la obra de Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxóchitl, la figura de Nezahualcōyotl ha sido estudiada por distintos académicos, quienes han señalado el interés del autor por exaltar la imagen de su antepasado para su propio beneficio personal y político. En este sentido, el presente trabajo tiene por objetivo indicar los posibles modelos utilizados por Alva Ixtlilxóchitl para construir la figura del rey de Texcoco. Se propone que uno de los modelos es el héroe épico, en la figura de vasallo que representa el Cid en su cantar, así como el héroe de los libros de caballerías, donde el ejemplo prototípico lo encontramos en el personaje de Amadís. Así pues, al analizar los modelos, se observará como el Nezahualcōyotl de Alva Ixtlilxóchitl se sustenta en ambas tradiciones para crear la figura de uno de los primeros héroes hispanoamericanos.

Palabras clave: Vasallo. Héroe. Nezahualcōyotl. Alva Ixtlilxóchitl.

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One of the most studied themes in the work of Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxóchitl is the figure of Nezahualcóyotl. Critics have observed in this a political and ethical model¹, which extolled the indigenous nobility and their descendants, as well as recovered the Texcocan perspective of the Conquest. On this, Héctor Costilla Martínez writes that, through the image of the king of Texcoco, "[de Alva Ixtlilxóchitl] projected the greatness of his ancestors as a valid resource to sustain the possession of the cacicazgo inherited to his family" (2016, p.435). It is known that, within the viceregal world, at first, the indigenous nobles enjoyed a series of privileges and power under the auspices of the Crown, as the former authorities were granted political positions and territories. It is clear that at the end of the manuscript of the *Sumaria relación de todas las cosas* pursues such privileges, our chronicler pleads in favor of the heirs of Nezahualcóyotl and Nezahualpilli, who now face hard labor (de Alva, de 2021, p.246). This attitude encouraged questions about the veracity of his texts, as Don Carlos Sigüenza y Góngora pointed out that "by magnifying his progenitor, Don Fernando Cortés Ixtlilxóchitl, lord of Tezcoco, he lacks in many things to the truth" (Vásquez, 2021, p.30) or, in the 19th century, Alfredo Chavero judged that "he incurred in exaggerations that adulterate the historical facts" (Vásquez, 2021, p.30).

However, as Sergio Vásquez Galicia reasons, by limiting his historiographic production to the purely economic interests of the acolhua, the analysis is limited, since it cannot satisfactorily account for his motivations. For the historian, there is also "a genuine interest in investigating a past that he believed to be on a par with classical cultures, but without forgetting the pretensions of social prestige and economic benefit" (2021, p.31). This impulse provoked, in turn, a search for the recognition of Texcocan culture, as well as an effort to incorporate it into universal Christian history and give it its deserved fame. It is, then, in this process, where the image of Nezahualcóyotl occupies a fundamental place, since, as Diana Pérez Gerardo explains, the prince of Texcoco is the ideal figure, since he fulfills the western virtues of the rulers, although he professes the wrong faith (2009, p.224). In his *Ensayo historiográfico sobre Don Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxóchitl*, Eugenio del Hoyo mentioned that this virtuousness was far from the real Nezahualcóyotl, for which he proposed to distinguish between the historical and the legendary. The latter is, according to

¹ The works of Georges Baudot (1995) and Patrick Lesbre (2003) have shown the attempt by colonial authors, specifically in Alva Ixtlilxóchitl, to reconstruct in the image of the Texcocan king a model of a providential pre-Christian prince, for example, a poet and wise man like King David.

del Hoyo, a fantasy close to utopia (1957, p.340), which was based on the humanistic education received at the Colegio de la Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco². The Neolonian pointed out the influence of the western tradition in the construction of de Alva Ixtlilxóchitl's discourse, as well as showing parallels with the *Alphonsian Chronicle* and the *Bible*. For example, he points out chapter XX, of the *Historia Chichimeca*, where the slaughter of children ordered by the tyrant Tezozómoc takes place, turning him into the Tepanecan Herod. Almost at the end of his study, in a brief example, he outlines an extremely interesting link between the romancero, and specifically, with the image of the Cid, only that this is not related to the Texcocan *tlatoani*, but to his son, the infant Axoquentzin and the prophecy of avenging his father, which he relates to the *Romance de Don Rodrigo de Lara*, where a bastard avenges his father, or some others, where an infant Cid avenges the offenses done to his progenitors (del Hoyo, 1957, p. 359). 359). The findings raise the possibility of locating more traces of the Cid in other relations of Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxóchitl. Thus, the objectives of the present text are, first, to identify some traits of the Cidian vassal hero in the configuration of Nezahualcoyotl's character, as well as to locate other heroic traits coming from a popular genre at that time, which influenced other chronicles of the Indies, such as the books of chivalry.

At first, it is necessary to remember the initial situation of Ruy Díaz: he is exiled by order of Alfonso VI; in the same condition is Nezahualcáyotl, who after witnessing the death of his father, Ixtlilxóchitl I by order of Tezozómoc, decides to escape to the mountains. Likewise, the reception of the Campeador in Burgos is similar to the one the prince will have when he arrives at his refuge, of the former it is told that: "Burgeses e burgesas por las finiestras son,/ plorando de los ojos, tanto avién el dolor,/ de las sus bocas todos dizían una razón:/ -¡Dios, qué buen vassallo, si oviesse buen señor!" (Anonymous, 2014, p.7). About the reception of the Texcocan it is narrated that:

He found almost all the citizens who had escaped, especially the noble people, ambushed among those deserts, who, recognizing their lord, all came out to receive him, consoling him and apologizing for how they had not been in his hand, since they alone, without the help of any lord, had sustained the war for so many days (de Alva, 2021, p.156).

² Although it has not been possible to identify where the acolhua received his training, as Battcock and Vásquez Galicia mention, his training is notorious and it is possible that, at least, Alva Ixtlilxóchitl studied the *trivium* (2022, p.163).

Thus, the circumstances are similar: both are in exile, waiting to recover what they have lost; the Cid, his honor; Nezahualcoyotl, his kingdom. In this long journey, both will show a series of qualities that will outline their heroic character. On this subject, Ramón Menéndez Pidal delimited the characteristics of the hero in the *Cantar del Mío Cid*, which for the purposes of this work will serve as support when highlighting those that are also found in the personality of the *tlatoani*.

In the first place, the Spanish philologist highlights his loyalty, but, above all, emphasizes that it is not "to the person of the lord under whom he fights; it is loyalty to the persecuting king" (Menéndez, 1929, pp.633-634). Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar continues to act in the name of Alfonso VI, despite his exile, even when he takes Valencia, he does so in his name. In the relation of Ixtlilxóchitl, we observe the Texcocan prince respecting the hierarchy of Tezozómoc, the murderer of his father, in spite of his persecution, since he asks his subjects to "leave for Tezcuco and look after their houses and estates, and wait for what the tyrant commands" (Alva de Ixtlilxóchitl, 2021, p.157). Later, he will be granted to return to his kingdom, thanks to the intervention of his aunts. When Tezozómoc dies, she appears at his funeral to offer condolences to his relatives: "she presented the tyrant's sons with certain adornments and gold jewelry" (Alva de Ixtlilxóchitl, 2021, p.174). Even when Maxtla, Tezozómoc's successor, orders Chimalpopoca, his uncle, to be imprisoned for having conspired against him, he decides to go to him and mediate for his freedom: "seeing that his uncle was imprisoned and that some days had passed after the honors, for playing the faithful thief, he agreed that night to go to Azcaputzalco and take some present to the tyrant, and ask him to do him the mercy of releasing his uncle" (de Alva Ixtlilxóchitl, 2021, p.183). Although he knows that the Tepanecas have killed his father and have put a price on his head, Nezahualcoyotl's loyalty lies in respect for the hierarchy, as well as the uses and customs among the *tlatoanis*.

However, this respect shows another quality: moderation. As evidenced above, the attitude of the acolhua is measured, he decides to be guided by what the customs dictate. But not only does he do this, in addition, in the multiple situations of danger in which he finds himself, he prefers to flee and only uses violence when necessary. In this sense, it is narrated that on the way to Chalco:

He saw a woman Çiltlamiyauh... who was taking mead and as the prince was thirsty... he asked this woman to give him some mead to drink, but out of sheer miserliness and lack of charity, she refused to give it to him, but began to shout and call for Neçahualcoyotzin to be arrested.... she

begged him to be quiet, that if he did not want to give her what she was asking for, she would just say that he was not finished... She refused and seeing this Neçahualcoyotzin took out his club and cut off his head, because it was not convenient for him to do otherwise, since he was among so many of his enemies. (de Alva, 2021, p.164).

The Texcocano had no other measure to avoid being discovered, but to murder the woman, so the use of violence is not something that disturbs his temper. The same happens when he takes up arms against Maxtla, since the event occurs after a failed assassination attempt, from which he again manages to escape. He evades ambushes so many times that de Alva mentions that the tyrant's son "considered him invisible or enchanted" (2021, p.187), to the extent that some old naturals considered him immortal. Similarly, invincibility is an attribute present in the Cid (Menéndez Pidal, 1929, p.641), which, in his case, is exalted from his epithet, since the word Campeador is equivalent to *victorious*.

Finally, I would like to highlight two final characteristics of the heroic model of the vassal. The first is his loyalty, on the one hand, in Nezahualcóyotl, to his father Ixtlilxóchitl. In his last battle against the Tepanec Empire, the king orders him to hide in the top of a tree and not to intervene with the intention that the lineage is preserved, so "to please his father he climbed a tree that is called *capulin*, very full... and from there he was watching everything that happened to his unfortunate father, and he would like to die for his father" (de Alva, 2021, p.153). Once again, the prince's temperance comes to the fore, since it is mentioned that "he did not get down from the tree because what happened to his father would not happen to him, since he well knew the harm that would be done to his country and his relatives" (Alva de Ixtlilxóchitl, 2021, p. 154). On the other hand, there is the relationship that Nezahualcoyotl has with his vassals, whom he rewards for their actions during the war against Maxtla. Thus, to a knight who helped him hide from Maxtla's men during the siege of his palace, "he later gave him many mercies, giving him a number of towns for himself and all his descendants without other many preeminences, and among others, he married him to a very important lady, a descendant of the royal house of Tezcucó" (Alva Ixtlilxóchitl, 2021, p.99). Likewise, it is mentioned that, to the generals who helped him in his war against the Tepanecas: "he thanked them and promised them many mercies and that their lords would do the same, and they left with all the spoils and slaves they could carry" (de Alva, 2021, p.208).

The last quality is his trust in God, Alberto Montaner, based on the *Cantar del Mío Cid*, explains that the vassal "always keeps his trust in God and in his future" (2014, p.649). In the same way, the *tlatoani* keeps his trust in the Tloque Nahuaque, when he asks his vassals to obey the orders of Tezozómoc, it is said that "he hoped that the Tloque Nahuaque would liberate them when the time of the tyrant's power came, since it was not convenient otherwise" (de Alva, 2021, pp.156-157). It must be remembered that, in the specific case of the Acolhua chronicler, this unique and creative divinity is identified with the Christian divinity, in his *Compendio histórico de reyes de Tetzcoco*, he writes "el Tloque Nahuaque que llaman los castellanos Jesucristo" (de Alva, 2021, p.149). We can observe that, like the Campeador, Nezahualcoyotl keeps confidence in the recovery of his kingdom, since the divine will accompanies him. Thus, in a first analysis, we can affirmatively answer that the Texcocan king follows a Cidian model of hero. Similarly, Pablo García Loaeza has proposed a similar relationship between the figure of the Cid and Fernando de Ixtlilxóchitl, the most direct ancestor, in the writings of the acolhua, the scholar asserts that our author "may have had in mind the adventures of the Cid Ruy Díaz when imagining the exploits of the infant Ixtlilxóchitl in similar circumstances" (2021, p.212), with the intention of creating "the first purely Spanish-American hero" (García, 2021, p.212). In turn, this statement is relevant in the case of Nezahualcóyotl, so we would not be talking about a single hero, but about a complete lineage, represented in the Texcocan lords, converted into legendary beings through an accumulation of chivalric values, coming from a literary tradition, in the romances and songs.

Up to this point, I have reviewed the characteristics of the Spanish epic hero present in the *Sumaria relación* of Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxóchitl -fidelity, loyalty, moderation, invincibility and trust in God-; however, as indicated in the introduction, there is another genre from which influences can be traced: the books of chivalry. First of all, it is clear that some of the features of the chivalric hero are present in the model of the vassal of the Cid, as Menéndez Pidal commented, this is found on the threshold of two eras, that of the epic and that of chivalry (1929, p. 638). Likewise, the influence of this genre in the Novo-Hispanic chronicles is already a classic theme, think of Irving Leonard's *Los libros de conquistador* and Bernal Díaz del Castillo's references to *Amadís de Gaula*. In this sense, I consider it pertinent to propose some characteristics and relationships between the heroic model of the books of chivalry and Alva Ixtlilxóchitl's Nezahualcóyotl. First of all, it is worth clarifying that I will take *Amadís de Gaula* as an

example, as a paradigmatic work of the genre, as well as the study *Amadís: héroe mítico cortesano* by Juan Manuel Cacho Blecua, and I will focus on those heroic characteristics that are not found in the Cid's cantar de gesta.

Now, one of the first parallels I would like to point out is the extraordinary birth, although the *Sumaria* does not give an account of the origin of the prince; in the *Historia de la nación Chichimeca*, it is reported that "his birth was very well known by the astrologers and soothsayers of that time, and it was in the morning at sunrise, with great pleasure of his father" (de Alva, 2024, p.106). As Cacho Blecua mentions, before coming into the world, a series of prodigies determine the greatness of the hero's exploits to come (1979, p.16). Among the things that are present in the *Sumaria*, is the trait of abandonment, Amadis is abandoned in the waters by his mother Elisena and, as Cacho Blecua emphasizes, in general, the orphan characters are constituted as exemplary models of heroism, since they have to consolidate themselves (1979, p.135). This same model operates in the orphanage of Nezahualcóyotl, after the death of Ixtlilxóchitl, he must set himself up as the legitimate heir and recover the kingdom lost at the hands of Tezozómoc. For this same reason, the acolhua is shown walking throughout the territory forming alliances: "he went to different parts of the earth, leaving no kingdoms, provinces, towns or places that he did not enter to know the designs and wills of the lords of these parts" (de Alva, 2021, p. 163). That is to say, starting from the loss, the prince must begin to build his identity as a lord.

Another characteristic linked to the Texcocan is the prediction of the hero's future; usually, a prophetic event takes place to reveal his future. Thus, verbigracia, in the *Amadis de Gaula*, Urganda the unknown one predicts the destiny of the Doncel del Mar to Gandales: "-Dígoote que aquel que hallaste en la mar que será flor de los caballeros de su tiempo...este fará tales cosas tales cosas que ninguno cuidaría que pudiesen ser comenzadas ni acabadas por cuerpo de hombre" (Rodríguez de Montalvo, 2021, pp.255-256). In the text of the acolhua, it is related that "there were many prodigies and signs in that time [Maxtla's reign]" (de Alva, 2021, p.209), among these is the appearance of an anthropomorphic monster that appears before two knights in the fields of Texcoco, said creature with loud voices proclaims: "Look, Tlaxcala, Huexutzinco, Tula and other parts come upon you; the tyrant Maxtla will be finished and will recover the one who comes to him by right" (de Alva, 2021, pp. 210-211). If from his birth great deeds were already augured for the prince, the creature's prophecy does nothing more than reaffirm his good

company in his struggle for the stolen lordship, highlighting the coming feats for the hero. However, the prophetic event that seems to dictate the future of the poet-king is a dream that Tezozómoc has prior to his death, where it is shown: "twice Neçahualcoyotzin... [once] made a golden eagle, who gave him great scratches on his head, and it seemed that he pulled out his entrails and heart and ate it...[the] second time, made a tiger and tore his feet to pieces" (de Alva, 2021, p.169). This fact prepares the victory of the legitimate heir and his return to power, recovering the usurped throne, also anticipates one of the final scenes of the war against the Tepanecas, the death of Maxtla at the hands of Nezahualcoyotl, who rips out his heart. This narrative mechanism, likewise, is found in the *Amadis*, when King Perion has a nightmare:

He entered that chamber through a false door, and he did not know who was coming to him, and he put his hands in his sides, and pulled out his heart and threw him into a river. And he said: Why did you do such a cruel thing? It is nothing of the sort, he said, that there remains another heart that I will take from you, although it will not be by my will (Rodríguez de Montalvo, 2021, p.238).

As it is observed, in the two dreams, a fact is referred to happen in an enigmatic way, in this case, the abandonment in the river of his son, Amadis, in the flow of the story, later this fact is fulfilled. The two prophesied events are elements that give unity to the narrative, giving meaning to each of the images presented, and when the prophesied event occurs, the figure of the heroes is further exalted.

Another important element is the investiture of the knight, this, generally, is an initiatory test, which "entails in a more or less transparent way, a ritual death followed by a resurrection or new birth [...] his death means, at the same time, the end of childhood, of ignorance, of the profane condition" (Cacho, 1979, pp.76-77), this rite is observed, in *Amadis*, in his abandonment and subsequent investiture by his father, King Perion, although there is a lack of knowledge on the part of the knight, it is still significant since the qualities of one are transferred to the other (Cacho, 2021, p.142). In the case of the Texcocan prince, the initiatory step is given from the death of his progenitor, since the fact gives meaning to his name, the wolf in fasting, and assigns him the purpose of his journey to avenge him and recover his kingdom, the first great cycle of Nezahualcoyotl is his revenge. Besides that, prior to the death of Ixtlilxóchitl I, they are sworn by all his vassals, one as lord and the other as legitimate heir, in the same way, the qualities are transferred in the ceremony, as well as the power.

Finally, I would like to point out two last traits that, in Nezahualcoyotl, are linked, on the one hand, lineage and, on the other, the reestablishment of royal power. The Spanish critic asserts that "the ancestry [of Amadis] can only be considered as a reaffirmation of his heroic enterprises. In turn, these take on a decisive importance as a consolidation of the lineage" (Cacho, 1979, p.134). Amadís, although at the beginning he does not know his true identity, with his actions he seems to reaffirm it, when he learns his true ancestry, only the reason for his heroic actions becomes clearer. The *tlatoani* is not unaware of his lineage; however, there is a constant emphasis on the fact that he is the last link in it, due to the death of his father, this is remarked by Ixtlilxóchitl in the orders he gives him for the last time: "and [that] he should beware of the tyrant and his vassals, not to take his life, because in ending it would end in him the lineage so ancient in the straight line of the Chichimeca lords" (de Alva, 2021, p. 156). Likewise, his cunning during the confrontation against Maxtla and Tezozómoc, which saved him from several ambushes, are proof of his ancestry. Finally, Cacho Blecua refers that, at the end of the heroic journey, the idyllic court re-emerges to control the kingdom: a "utopian space ruled by the best possible monarch and served by the most loyal and hard-working knights" (1979, p.168). Once the war with the Tepanec Empire is over and the tyrant Maxtla is overthrown, Alva Ixtlilxóchitl draws this utopian court:

It seemed to Neçahualcoyotzin ... that it was good to have lords as vassals and he communicated it to the lord of Mexico, who told him that it was not good, and that it seemed to him that it should not be done. And notwithstanding all this... In all these towns he placed lords as it is said, notwithstanding that all were his vassals and they paid him tribute and recognized him as their lord, and as such they obeyed him (2021, p.228).

Thus, the prince finishes delineating the traits that relate him to the heroic model of the knight, as well as to his epic model, it can be observed how his values and qualities are well represented by the figure constructed by Alva Ixtlilxóchitl. Although it is clear that this does not necessarily mean that the Texcocan author took *Amadís de Gaula* as an example, it is necessary to recognize that this work was part of a series of books and romances that exalted such models, which our author may well have known and had in mind when he sought to exalt his ancestry of lords and warriors, a strategy that other novo-Hispanic chroniclers used to demand rewards; However, few were as successful as Alva Ixtlilxóchitl, who perpetuated the legend of one of his ancestors.

In conclusion, after this detailed examination of the literary links in the characterization that our chronicler makes of Nezahualcoyotl, it is possible to recognize the interest in recovering the chivalric tradition, where the influence of the literature of his time is evident. In this sense, it should be remembered that, among the writings of the acolhua, romances of his own creation have been found that take up themes related to the chivalric world. In addition to this, it is necessary to point out that, as mentioned, the heroic characterization is not only a fact of the poet king, but of all the lineage of the lords of Texcoco, in each of them, we can find elements that come from the chivalric sphere, to exalt their figures, used in function of their recognition, as Pablo Loeza mentions. For this reason, it is essential to review other central figures in the Texcocan descent, such as Ixtlilxóchitl I, Quinatzin, Xólotl, among others. At the same time, it is necessary to find which other works, romances, books share motifs and elements with the texts of Alva Ixtlilxóchitl in the elaboration of his characters.

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