

Interviews on Aztlán and Ancient Chicano/Mexicano History

IN SEARCH OF AZTLÁN

Dr. Jack Forbes Interview

October 9, 1999

Q: Dr. Forbes, please tell us about the migrations of Native American peoples throughout the Americas.

A: From about forty thousand years ago until about eleven or twelve or thirteen thousand years ago, depending on the exact region, a good part of North America was covered with glaciers. The glaciers extended all the way from the Atlantic to the Pacific, across the northern United States and across what is now Canada.

During that period of time, linguistic evidence seems to indicate that most of our native language groups, the ancestors of those language groups, were living south of the ice, because it looks like it took twenty to forty thousand years for the special characteristics of American languages to evolve in relation to Asian and other languages. So during that period of time, the ancestors of all of our native people except probably for the people known as Eskimos and Aleut, were living south of this ice belt. And most of them were probably living in South America or at least down in Central America, because much of the United States was tundra or taiga--pretty hard to live in. And [their population was] probably pretty sparse.

But as the ice began to melt and the weather began to warm up, the migrations seem to have been from south to north. Most people don't seem to understand that this is where most of our American ancestors came from. They came from the south moving north rather than coming down from Alaska, where the population was, undoubtedly, very scanty during that period of time.

Eventually, of course, these groups meet. But one of the things that is interesting about some of the new DNA studies and so on, is that it looks like our ancient American peoples--whom I'll just call Americans for short--these Americans had only a very small number of female ancestors. So most of us, whether we're living in the extreme southern part of South America or living in Mexico or in the U.S. or Canada today, are descended from a very small group of female ancestors, and probably an almost equally small group of original male ancestors, as well. So we are all related. All the native people of the Americas are distinctly related with each other.

So as time goes by, of course, migrations continue to take place because warming continues, and a lot of other processes occur, which lead people to move. We find very large language families developing, such as the family known as the Uto-Aztecan or Uto-Nahuan language family, from whom many modern Mexican people are descended. And these people, apparently, when the Europeans begin to move across the U.S. and Canada, it appears that these peoples are spread out all the way from southern Saskatchewan, maybe Alberta, in the form of people known as Shoshones. [They] are spread all the way out from there clear down into Central America, down into Nicaragua, and possibly even, in a few instances, farther south than Nicaragua.

So this is a great language family, which spans a little bit of Canada and most of the western United States, and then all the way down into Mexico and Central America. Today of course, we have many different tribes who are descended from this language family. Groups such as the Utes, the Comanches, the Shoshones, many California Indian groups, the Paiutes and others in Nevada. And, of course, many different groups in Mexico.

Q: We heard theories that the historical Aztlan may well have been in Nayarit, the immediate precursor to the trip to Mexico City, and yet we found these maps that alluded to possible original sites that predate this in the U.S. Southwest. Could you explain how this might be possible, in terms of what we've known as the succession of migrations?

A: Well, of course, at the time of the Spanish conquest, the field of history was very very well developed among the ancient people of what is now central Mexico. They kept track of their own past, year by year. Of course, as time went by, some of it got mixed up a little bit and there were political things that got written in once in a while, but generally speaking it was a pretty profound historical record.

After the conquest, many individuals began writing this history down in Nahuatl as well as in Spanish, and we have texts, such as that of the Codex Chimalpain, which, specifically, states that the Aztec origin, the place of origin, was in what had come to be known as New Mexico, Nuevo Mexico, which at that particular time, would be, basically, the southwestern United States, considered broadly rather than the present state of New Mexico.

When the first Spanish expeditions began to move north, out of the Valley of Mexico, one of the things that they were very interested in was finding new riches, *otro Mexicos* in the north, and so they want very much to know where the Aztecs came from. They want to know about fabled cities that might still exist in the North where they can find a lot of gold and so on. Every expedition that heads towards the north

has large numbers of people who speak Mexicano, or Nahuatl. There are people from other language groups, as well, but the main emphasis is on the Mexican-speaking people because they are used as interpreters with different tribes in the north, and it is assumed, by the Spaniards, that an interpreter in the Mexican language will be of extreme value no matter where they go. As they travel north, for example, the Coronado expedition in 1539, 1540, takes many many hundreds if not a thousand or more Mexican-speaking people with them into what comes to be known as Nuevo Mexico. And it is this movement, I believe, which leads to the identification of a number of ruins and other places in the Southwest, as being *Casas De Moctezuma* houses of *Moctezuma*, or origin places of the Aztecs or Aztlan. One finds the Spaniards talking about this very frequently in their writings. And not only in the writings of people like *Chimalpain*, but also in writings of Spanish historians, as well.

Q: Could you tell us about Chimalpain?

A: Chimalpain was a Nahuatl-speaking native person who lived in the area of the city of Mexico in the latter part of the fifteen hundreds and early sixteen hundreds. He was one of the main sources of information for other writers who came along later, so it's a very valuable text that he has for us, identifying with Aztlan, with a city in a lake, in the north in an area known today--or at that time--as Nuevo Mexico.

But in addition to that kind of information, you have the testimony of the Spaniards as they visit the Southwest, and they mark on their maps, as you're well aware, all of these houses of Montezuma and *ruinas*, ruins of the Aztecs. And when we find places like Casas Grande Chihuahua, and Casa Grande in southern Arizona, this terminology of "Casa Grande" is one that is closely associated with this belief that the Aztecs came from that region.

Now the exact places where Uto-Azteca speaking people migrated from, are not completely known. Because, of course, as I indicated, during the period of glaciation, the language groups were probably much farther south. There was probably a long northward migration, but there could have been many migrations back and forth, in the mean time. We're talking about ten thousand years of movements, and many many different things may have happened. But nonetheless we see, if you look at a map of the Uto-Aztecan family, you will see that they have a very very large territory in the arid sections of the western United States, precisely around the area that is identified on some of the maps as being the homeland of the Aztecas.

Q: Where would you place the other groups that we've come to know as the Anasazi, the Sinaguas and other people, whose

ruins we've seen? Did they come after what may have been the precursors to Aztlan, or were they contiguous with them?

A: Well, we do have some information on migrations of many of these groups. The migrations of the people that come to be known as the Anasazi are relatively recent. In other words, we're talking about [these movements being], say, a thousand years ago, maybe fifteen hundred years ago. There's plenty of room, within the Southwest, for other peoples to have been moving around during the same period of time. For example, we also have the migration records of the Athapaskan-speaking Navajo people and Apache people, taking place in the same areas at the same time. And also adopting people who were probably speakers of other language families into, let us say, the Navajo group, for instance. But you have to remember that when we're talking about Anasazi or pueblo people, one of the reasons I decided to apply the term Aztlán in 1960 or '61, to the entire Southwest and northern Mexico, was not just because of my knowledge of the tradition about Aztlán, but also because the native people of a good part of Sonora and part of Chihuahua are also pueblo Indians. And in places like Sahuaripa, for example, in Sonora, you had terraced pueblo dwellings, very similar to Taos, New Mexico. So when you talk about "Pueblo Indians," you're talking about people who also extended down into Sonora. And these people were speaking Uto-Aztecan languages. They were speaking branches of the Pima family or the Opata-Tewi family, and so there were still Uto-Aztecs who were Pueblo Indians, even in the historic period of European contact.

Q: Given that we know Aztlán was somewhere in the Southwest, is the migration to Tenochtitlan something that would have happened over a short period or a long period of time?

A: Many of the chronicles tend to date the departure of the Aztecs or the Mexitin, as they're called often, from Aztlán at about 1064, [by] our present calendar. One says 1090, I believe. As I recall, it takes about two hundred and eighteen years or two hundred and eighty years--something like that--before they manage to reach the Valley of Mexico. Then, of course, another couple hundred years before they found the great city of Tenochtitlan. So it is a migration according to the records that we have that took a considerable period of time. It could, of course, have actually begun earlier, and those dates may have been set to it later. We don't know, exactly, how accurate those dates are, but I have no reason to challenge them myself, at this point.

Q: It is said that Aztlán is a lake, has seven caves, is a place of whiteness, a place of herons and egrets. Given that, where might Aztlán be located in the Southwest?

A: Well, I think there are several places where one could start out. There was a great city along the coast of Sinaloa,

known as Aztatlán, and this was a very very large city, which, of course, was depopulated by the Spanish conquest. But it was a large city, not as large as Tenochtitlan, of course, but a city of considerable size, and also the Spaniards marked a river along the coast on some of their maps called the Rio de Aztatlán. I place it at about [what we know as] the Rio Yaqui.

These could represent places where the Aztecas stopped and lived for periods of time, left part of their people behind, as they migrated south. I think one of the things that possibly could be done would be a textual analysis of later Aztec Nahuatl to see if there are any words left over from any northern Uto-Aztecan dialects. One might find that there are some relics in the Aztec speech of the late period that will tell a little bit about their history of what their language was formerly like. We know that they abandoned, or at least some of the texts indicate, that they abandoned their former language and adopted the official Nahuatl of the Valley of Mexico, at some time. So they probably were speaking a little bit different dialect before that time. Probably not too different, but maybe some relics could be found. So there are lines of research that could be followed.

In any case, it is quite clear that they are part of a larger community of what we could call Mexicanic or Uto-Nahuan peoples, who are in turn a part of a larger group of people we call Native Americans during the 1492 period. We can just call them all Americans and just leave it at that. These are the original Americans.

Q: How did the Spanish explorers of that era construct their maps?

A: Every map maker was a little bit different. There was a lot of copying, of course. They tended to copy other maps. But the thing that tended to drive the map making were reports from the field in diaries, journals. They would look at journals, or sometimes, perhaps, they had access to maps prepared by people who had been out traveling. So a scholar of maps can often tell when the information from a particular expedition finds its way to the map makers, because all of a sudden there are new place names that show up, new rivers, new coast lines, new geographical information. So when you find on a map something about Teguayo and the Aztecs coming from an island and a lake in that area, and so on, that, undoubtedly, comes from a very specific source. The source itself may never be found. It may have been destroyed or lost or may have been oral. But we know that some map makers saw a source. Subsequently, of course, it could have been copied, then, by other map makers. But again, you may find new information coming in, as some of the maps will show much more detailed information than the earlier maps. Then you

know that somebody else has had some additional information that they've fed in to the map makers.

Q: Could you tell us why, in your book, you see the Chicanos as the northern-most Aztecs.

A: The word Mexicano, from which, I believe, Chicano is derived, from the Nahuatl Meshicano, is a term that all during [the] Colonial Period referred to people who spoke Nahuatl. It is a term that refers to an indigenous American people. So that when the republic was established, between 1810 and 1821, they were going to adopt the term Anahuac, which again is a native term, referring to the land between the rings of oceans, but when they finally decided to adopt the term Mexicano, Mexico, they consciously adopted an indigenous name. They consciously identified with themselves, as an indigenous American people. Of course, that was very logical, because, overwhelmingly, the ancestry of the Mexican republic's people is from the original American people. It is estimated about 80% of the genes are derived from original American people.

I grew up in southern California. El Monte. And a lot of my friends, my classmates, the field workers who were in the field next door to my house who came in and drank water from our faucet, I interacted with them all the time, and first started learning Spanish at that time and all these people were brown indigenous people. And so I grew up with an awareness from my earliest age that people known as Mexicanos and so on, were Indian. Native people. I mean, I never had any doubt about that. And so it always took me as a surprise, later on, when some people began to say well these were whites with Spanish surnames or something like that. I never could quite understand that.

So when we look at the people from from Mexico, and the Chicanos--and I should say something about Chicanos. Chicanos have their roots in the Southwest for another reason, too. And that is because many many pueblo Indians, many California Indians, and others, through intermarriage, and otherwise, became ancestors of the present Chicano population. The Chicano population doesn't only come from what is now the republic of Mexico. It also stems from what used to be Mexico, north of the border, the present border. And so, in any case, these people are very definitely related to all the other indigenous people and they constitute the largest group. Whereas the Navajo may only number two hundred, three hundred thousand people, you know, the Chicanos number into the millions. And so, obviously, this is the largest group of indigenous people in the United States, today.

Q: Given what you just told us, how would you suggest that the Mexican-Chicano population answer the census?

A: Well, it's very interesting that after a lot of prodding, the federal government and the central organ of the federal government that has control over ethnic definitions, the O.M.B., Office of Management and Budget, has decreed that all persons who have their origin in the people who were here before Columbus, can indicate their identification as American Indian or Alaska Native. In other words, if you have ancestry, and if you have community connections or relations, or if it's important to you that you are descended from pre-Columbian Americans, then you can check the American Indian/Alaska Native box on the 2000 census.

Now this is the first time that has really been open to native people from South America, Meso America, Central America, and it specifically says, people from South America and Central America in the new definition. And so it's interesting what will happen is that of course under the 2000 census, Chicanos can check all of their racial ancestry. If they want to check American Indian because they have indigenous Mexican ancestry, they can check that. If they want to check Caucasian, because they have some Spanish ancestry or something, they can check that. If they have African ancestry, they can check that. So they can check more than one. But it definitely gives Chicanos the opportunity to fully embrace their indigenous ancestry if they choose to do so. And, of course, that's quite separate from the Hispanic/Spanish origin question, which is a different question that will be on the census.

Q: And this is for hereafter, not just simply the 2000 census?

A: Presumably, it will be for the hereafter. Though one never knows how long it will last. But for now, it looks permanent.

Q: In 1961, you wrote an article that pinpointed Aztlán not simply as a site but rather a whole region. Can you explain why you put forth that theory?

A: Well, I was aware of the tradition that the Aztecas had migrated from Aztlán. And I was also aware of some of the other things that we've talked about today, namely that the maps and other things showed the homeland as being north of the present Mexican border. I was, at that time, very interested in the fact that northwestern Mexico and the southwestern United States really constitutes a single region in terms of geography. It's mostly a desert area, very similar native cultural traditions, overlapping language boundaries, the common history, of course, of all of the modern peoples living there. And as a result, I decided to try to come up with a name that could be used to refer to that region, because Southwest, obviously, is an ethnocentric term, northwest, also, is not accurate if you include the

U.S. area. So it came to me to call this region Aztlán, and so I thought it was a large enough region that it would certainly embrace the original Aztlán. So that's why I did it. That was about 1961, '62, when we had the Native American movement in southern California, which attempted to bring together indigenous people from north of the boundary and south of the boundary in one movement.

Q: In 1965 you wrote a book called Aztecas del Norte and it wasn't published for several years thereafter. Is there a reason that it was not published immediately?

A: Well, I queried many publishers, Eastern publishers, Chicago, New York, and so on. And at that time, it appeared that no one was interested in publishing a book about Mexican Americans. Perhaps my book was a little too radical, in any case. They didn't think there was a market for it. Which I thought was incredible, but it had to wait till 1973 before I could find a publisher. So I think that's the main reason: they just didn't think there was a market; they were very Eastern oriented. And, I think, this trend continues today, in the New York publishing industry, where there's very little interest in the Southwest and Chicanos and so on; it seems to me.

Q: Eight years after you wrote this notion of Aztlán as being the Southwest, the Denver Youth Conference, in 1969, adopted the idea as the rallying cry of the Chicano people. How did you feel about that?

A: I thought it was fantastic, but at that time, I was extremely active in many native movements, and I was of course following what was happening in the Chicano community very closely, and so it just seemed to me one of many logical things that were happening at that particular period of time. But I thought, of course, that it was so great that the MECHA, and other elements in the Chicano community were developing this concept of a homeland in the north.

Q: Can you explain why the maps you have made are so unconventional?

A: Well, of course, the north-south maps that we have are Euro-centric maps. They're designed because, of course, Western Europe dominated the Colonial Period, and they drew the maps always with Western Europe in the center, or at the north, and as you know they also made Europe bigger than it should be in relation to other continents, and so on. So around 1970 or '71, I started making some maps that were turned around, where South America is at the top of the map. Patagonia, Tierra del Fuego, and so on, is up at the top of the map, and it goes down with Canada at the bottom of the map. I was very interested in seeing that the Mar Caribe, the Caribbean, becomes like the Mediterranean of America.

Then I also experimented, recently, with maps, having them face towards the sunrise, towards the dawn. Why not have them face towards the sunrise direction. And when you turn a map to face the sunrise direction, you really can get the feel for how Yucatan moves very very easily along with the currents, all the way to the mouth of the Mississippi and Louisiana. And of course this helps to explain why you have, within the United States, great Mexican type cities, such as Cahokia, Moundville, and many others, with pyramids, and so on, that resemble, very closely, the pyramids that you find developing in Central Mexico, and also, of course, in coastal Peru. What we really have is a unity, in many ways, in the continent, and in the continent's history. We know, for example, that there was regular trade between coastal Peru and the coast of Nayarit, using rafts with sails, probably balsa type rafts, but there was a regular trade over a very, very long period of time.

My own research has shown that the native people in the Gulf of Mexico, and the Caribbean, were using sails, making very, very large vessels, holding up to as many as ninety men in them, sometimes with the decks covered with wood, so that a cabin could be built on top of the deck, and of course carrying freight. Columbus, himself, ran into a Maya boat of the type on one of his trips around Yucatan. So [a] great deal of movement took place by water. We know that. A great deal took place by water. We had lots of seagoing American people during that period of time.

Q: Could you tell us about some significant Native, North American sites that echo architecture as a result of communication between what we now know as Central American Aztecs/Mayans?

A: There's a great deal of continuity between the development, archeologically, of pyramids and planned cities, ball courts and things like that, between Meso-America and the Andean, Peruvian, region in the south, and also, the Mississippi Valley and other areas, in what is now the United States. We have many great cities in North America that [are] of Meso-American type, such as Cahokia, which is a huge city, probably had forty or fifty thousand people at least, from about 1200 to 1500, on our present calendar. [It was] surrounded also by forty or so smaller cities, and another very large city in southern Indiana called Angel, of a similar type. And this particular city of Cahokia has a marker that has what looks like the Maya symbol for time, or the sun, that was found, buried in the ground near what was probably the little observatory. And of course it has the pyramids that are of Meso-American type. But these pyramids actually may have begun in southern Louisiana. The oldest pyramids in the Americas, the oldest mounds, I should say, are found in Louisiana about 5000 years ago. And from there

they spread to the coast of Peru, and the coast of the Gulf of Mexico, of Mexico, in what comes to be known as the Olmeca region, or what I call Tolan, because this is the ancient name for that region. Tolan is an area of complex culture in the Mediterranean of America. And of course, eventually, when we get away from this ethnocentric Anglo-centric kind of history that's taught in the United States, eventually, North American history will begin with the Caribbean and the Gulf of Mexico, and this region of high culture as it develops all around these waters; and develops as a continuity, and is the heritage, of course, of all of us in North America today.

Q: You've stressed the importance of maps throughout your work. Given the power of maps, what do you think is the importance of the maps we're discovering today?

A: Well, I think that the maps that you've found and that others have found are going to be extremely important. Because they tend to bear out several things. One is, of course, the unity of the indigenous people. The fact that the present political boundaries have not been boundaries for very long. And that these boundaries should not interfere with our relationship to each other, and I'm talking about not only indigenous nations, but also of course of other peoples who live in America today. America, of course, is not the United States. America is the entire continent. And I think that's another thing that we must make very very clear, is that there never was any America except the entire continent, until very, very recent times. America may also be an indigenous term, incidentally. Perhaps not derived from Amerigo Vaspucci, but I won't go any farther with that today. But, in any event, I think that the maps help us to understand that the peoples known as Mexican-Americans, Chicanos, and so on, have their roots in what is now the United States. And whether that's back thousands of years, or whether it's only back to 1064, they help to reinforce that knowledge of basic origin and relatedness.

Q: Go ahead and tell us about the origin of the word "America."

A: Well, there is a very early map, I forget the exact date. But I think it's about 1507, something like that, which shows an island, just off the coast of Venezuela, probably, supposed to be Nicaragua, but they thought it was an island at that point, because they haven't yet been along Central America to see that it's part of the mainland. And it's called Tamaraque. Some people would say it's Tamaraque, but probably the "t" stands for Tierra (as is very common in Spanish) and thus Tierra Amaraque, or Tierra Maracay. I have a theory that the term America comes from Maraca. We have lots of place names all around the Caribbean, such as Maracayu, Maracaibo, Amaraca, which come from the word Maraca, basically, which is the gourd. And the gourd is very

important because a lot of people in the Caribbean believed that that was one of the origins of human beings, that human beings came out of a gourd. And, of course, it's central to the ceremonies of the area, and also North America and South America are both shaped like gourds. Isn't that interesting? Of course, there also was a mountain range in Nicaragua, known as the Sierra Ameriquin. And some people believe that the name America comes from that name of the mountain range. Of course, others still believe that it comes from Amerigo Vaspucci, but the problem with that is that most documents have him known as Alberico Vaspucci, not Amerigo, so the question still isn't settled of where the name America comes from. But in any case, it was first applied to the region of present day Venezuela and Colombia and Nicaragua, later to the entire continent, and the only people who were known as Americans for hundreds and hundreds of years were the native people.

DECEMBER 11, 2000

Q: From where do we derive our knowledge of the trek from Aztlán 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 that 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 probably 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 Mexitín, as they're called, the Mexitín 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 Mexitín 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 Aztatlán, 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 Huichol 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 a 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 Mexitín 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 Oñate 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 Quechan, 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 and Colorado. The O'odham people have a very complex history, as you know, being associated with the ruin of Casa Grande near Sacaton, 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 Altar, 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 Julime (Hulim) people, who lived in pueblos, adobe pueblos, [at] the time of Spanish contact. The Hulim 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 Halyikwamai 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 as a 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 the 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, 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 Purapecha 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 Tlascaltecos bring in the Chichimecos, and so on. But the Purapecha language seems to be closest, if any, to 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 de las 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: There's no doubt that the Colorado river Yumans shared a number of traits with Hohokoms. The O'odham also shared traits with the Hohokoms. And some people believe that the O'odham culture is a derivative of Hohokom. But Di Peso, an archeologist that worked in the area for many, many years, suggests the O'odham 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 Hohokam, 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 Hohokam 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 Tujunga. It was traded that far, so the Hohokam 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 Hohokam in the Salt River area could have been Aztlán?

A: There [are] so many interesting things about the Gila River region because of the Hohokam 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 Quechan and the Mojave people, often show Hohokam-like characteristics, even though they speak totally different languages. So obviously there was a great deal of intermarriage and [a]cultural mixture. The Hohokam 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 Hohokam, having built Casa Grande, having developed these agricultural techniques, could have migrated south to the Valley of Mexico?

A: The Hohokam 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 Hohokam 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 Hohokam. That the Hohokam 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 Hohokam. There were lots of pueblos in Northern Sonora, as at Sahuaripa, where 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 Aztlán, the logical question is were they the forerunners of the Mexitín?

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 it. This is from my book WARRIORS OF THE COLORADO.

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 Quechan 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 ruin was said to be in "the area of the Cojuanes," another people related to the Halikwamais. They're almost identical people, there in the delta. Their land was referred to as "the land of the Cojuenes," that is Kohuanas, 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 Hardy, 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. Kniffin 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 expeditions 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 Aztecas, 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

Hardy, 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 were there 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 Aztlán?

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 Kiya 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 Kiya Ani. The western Apache also have the same clan. According to Carl Gorman, my old friend, who was a member of the Kiya 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 known as Salado People, partly because of the Salt River. There is some indication that some of those people might have spoken O'odham, for example, Pima-Tepejuan language. It is very possible that some of the Salado Puebloans spoke an O'odham language. Which is again, a group of people that, some of them, at least, (Tepejuanes) end up in the Valley of Mexico. And in any case they certainly were part of the same cultural tradition as Casas Grandes, Chihuahua, and Casa Grande in southern Arizona, and perhaps also at La Junta de los rios on the Rio Grande (the Julime).

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

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 clans. 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 region?

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 early travelers, after 1500, every time they find one of these ruins, they ascribe it to the Aztecs. That was a part of common Mexican and then Hispano-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], in my book, Apache, Navajo and Spaniard, any references 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, Yutas 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 earliest 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 Moapa Valley of southern Nevada, and even up into southernmost 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, Guamares. 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.

[Interview with Chuy Trevino]

[See Jack D. Forbes, AZTECAS DEL NORTE: THE CHICANOS OF AZTLAN (1973), WARRIORS OF THE COLORADO (1965), APACHE, NAVAHO AND SPANIARD (1960, REVISED 1994), and the Special Collections Department of the Shields Library, Univ. of California, Davis, for the Jack Forbes Collection. The latter contains much information on the above topics, especially in F-23 to F-25 (Chicanos) and in other sections. See Forbes' web site for a guide to the manuscript and microfilm collections]