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THE IMPACT OF A COLONIAL ROAD ON THE ROCK ART OF NORTHERN MEXICO

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Abstract. This article explores Colonial period rock art related to the Camino Real de Tierra Adentro. Through these unique expressions of indigenous culture native visions of the Camino and its development through time will be explored. The impact of the European encounter on the native peoples who traversed this road will also be considered, as recorded in their own artistic expressions, reviewing the process through which their culture was hybridised.

The Camino Real de Tierra Adentro (linking what are now Mexico City and the city of Santa Fe, New Mexico, U.S.A.) (Fig. 1), with its main thoroughfares and various branches, was established during the conquest and colonisation of northern Mexico (1521–1810 CE). Initially the main purpose of its construction was the transport of mining products like silver. This major roadway played a unique role in the history of the northern regions and in the formation of New Spain and New Mexico. It was, without a doubt, the major artery of communication along which a variety of animals, people, transport vehicles, objects and goods circulated. At the same time it was the route connecting to the north the novelties, ideas, images, cultures and a wealth of experiences and symbols in a constant interplay (Cramaussel 2006).

Figure 1. *Map of the Camino Real de Tierra Adentro, with the location of the rock art sites mentioned in the text. Reworked from Cramaussel (2006: 327).*

The study of the Camino Real has developed, however, almost exclusively from the point of view of the conquerors, making them the sole protagonists of history; and the agents of its design, construction and defence. In this history the indigenous peoples appear as secondary characters (Powell 1984; Reyes 1991; Cramaussel 2006).

How the indigenous peoples of northern Mexico experienced and reacted to the shocking events which intruded on their lives during the Spanish conquest has been poorly studied, particularly those of non-Mesoamerican traditions. As recorded in a variety of colonial documents, we know that many indigenous communities continued practising and developing their own traditions to various degrees and in different ways (Deeds 2003: 60).

The idea proposed by this work is that Camino Real de Tierra Adentro represents a historic phenomenon that severely affected the life of the northern peoples of Mexico. It led to the rise of armed conflicts; it modified ways of living; and it provided a new material world in the form of weapons, tools and clothing. It also brought new religions and knowledge conveyed in books, works of art and images, as well through the different nature

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of those who passed by, such as indigenous people from central Mexico, soldiers, miners, missionaries and others. The impacts of this phenomenon on the minds of the inhabitants of these lands were reflected in one of their most important artistic traditions, rock art, which was recreated during the contact period.

Figure 2. *Cueva de Ávalos site. Colonial Guachichil rock art, main panel, 'horsemen roping equids', or harnessing the same animals with a rope, all around two central anthropomorphous figures. Above, quadrangle motif with a small circle in each corner, similar to the plan view of a* presidio. *Size of motifs 15–20 cm, author's photograph.*

Relevance of rock art

In the analysis of autochthonous cultural developments, rock art offers a privileged approach. Compared to other domains of colonial indigenous traditions, such as painting, feather work, the carving of altarpieces and images, all of which were created in cultural ambiances ruled by Europeans, rock art was made solely by the will and intention of indigenous groups in places of their choice, using media and techniques they determined and where they chose to convey what they wanted to express freely.

To date, about a dozen rock art sites associated with the Camino Real have been registered (Mendiola 2002). This paper is the first comparative study of these sites. Some studies of individual sites exist, such as those developed for la Cueva de las Monas, but they do not make the link with the Camino Real de Tierra Adentro (Guevara 1989; Mendiola 2002; Chacón in press).

From the rock painting sites known so far, I have chosen three that exemplify this type of art. The reasons why these three sites were selected are: (a) they are the more complex sites and have a greater quantity of motifs; (b) they present a great richness and a variety of artistic resources; (c) they are located in three different areas of the long route of the Camino Real; and (d) they belong to three diverse times in the Colonial period.

The selected sites include the Cueva de Ávalos, Zacatecas (Aparicio in press); the Cueva de las Mulas, Durango (Berrojalbiz in press); and the Cueva de las Monas, Chihuahua (Guevara 1989; Schaafsma 1997; Mendiola 2002; Chacón in press).

Three rock art works on the Camino Real

The Cueva de Ávalos is located approximately 30 km southeast of the city of Zacatecas. The cave is situated on a hill in the upper part of the Tlacotes mountains and serves as a natural lookout, offering an excellent panoramic view of the Valley of Cuisilique where the Camino Real passed by. The paintings are found in a natural niche, forming a protected space on the natural terrace from which it rises. Displayed on one of the walls are varieties of painting with different motifs (Fig. 2). Dominating the motifs are anthropomorphous figures mounted on equids or harnessing the same animals with a rope. Also noteworthy are the representations of carts being pulled by equids with mounted riders (Fig. 3). In addition, there are geometric designs, abstract designs and crosses present, and a few paintings that seem to represent letters or numbers. Based on technical, stylistic and iconographic features that this article will demonstrate, all the illustrations seem to correspond to the same period.

The Cueva de las Mulas site is located in the Cañón de Molino of the Guatimapé Valley in the north-central zone of Durango state, where the oldest route of the Camino Real was found (Fig. 1). The cave is located at the foot of the walls that form the canyon. It is not a very deep cave, but its width is substantial. All of the artwork is painted and most of the more than 250 recorded motifs were painted with black pigment in reduced size. The iconography represented is varied. (Since the emic meaning of the motifs mentioned in this paper is generally unknown, subjective interpretations are placed in quotation marks throughout.) There are 'livestock scenes' in which 'horsemen' armed with

Figure 3. *Cueva de Avalos site. Colonial Guachichil rock art. Covered and wheeled cart is drawn by a pair of horses or mules, one in front of the other, an anthropomorph sits astride each draft animal. Author's photograph, drawing by Belen Carolina Medina Marcial.*

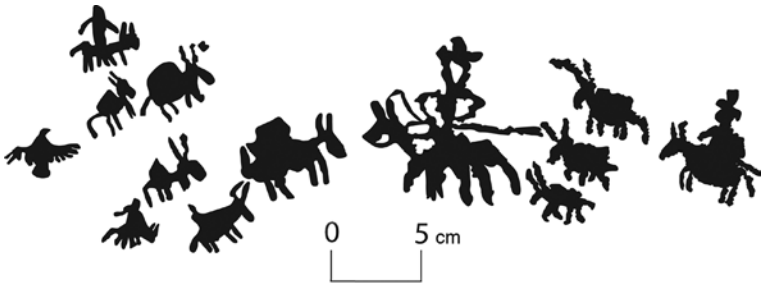

Figure 4. *Cueva de las Mulas site. Colonial Tepehuan rock art. A 'mule train' carrying cargo led by a few 'horsemen' dressed as Spaniards armed with 'lances'. Motifs are painted in a flat black. Drawing by Daniel Herrera Maldonado.*

Figure 5. *Cueva de las Mulas site. Colonial Tepehuan rock art. Two 'men' in the centre appear to be fighting. Their garments and arms are of European tradition. To the right there is a 'horseman' and below an 'archer shooting an equid'. Size of motifs 5–20 cm, photograph by Balaam Galvéz.*

Figure 6. *Cueva de las Monas site. Colonial Tarahumara rock art over archaic expressions. To the left is a possible scene of the 'Raspa del Jícuri' ritual (the scraping of peyote). To the right is a large figure in a running position, next to the 'ritual', surrounded by a kind of halo. In the bottom right there is a small equid. Outline and infill style, size of motifs 30–75 cm, author's photograph.*

'pikes' are watching over herds of horses; scenes related to trade and expeditions in which 'cargo mule trains' led by 'riders dressed as Spaniards' can be observed (Fig. 4); 'scenes of war' and 'political' or 'ritual activities' involving figures with 'European garments and arms', and others with 'indigenous clothing or garments' not easily identifiable (Fig. 5); and finally the representation of isolated 'emblematic animals'. As in the case of the Cueva de Ávalos, the technical, stylistic and iconographic characteristics of all the paintings that we will discuss in the text indicates that they were made in the same period.

The rock art site of the Cueva de la Monas is located 50 km northwest of the city of Chihuahua, at the foot of the summits of Majalca, not far from the route of the Camino Real (Fig. 1). The site consists of a rockshelter, located in the upper part of a hill that has an elongated shape.

There is a great number and variety of motifs, all of which are painted. It has been observed that these expressions were made during several different eras (Mendiola 2002: 51, 52). The oldest expressions, comprised by geometric polychrome patterns, correspond to the Archaic period of the pre-Hispanic past (9000 BCE–500 CE). The other diverse styles seem to correspond to different times of the Colonial era (1521–1820 CE) and according to some authors, to the 19th century as well (Mendiola 2002: 51–52; Chacon in press). They also present a variety of colours, including polychrome ones. Anthropomorphous motifs dominate; however, zoomorphs and the highlighted presence of 'musical instruments' can also be observed. The motifs are large, some measuring 90 cm in height (Fig. 6).

These three sites share a remote location, far from the hub of Spanish colonial life. Moreover, all were important places in the cultural landscapes of diverse indigenous cultures that crossed the Camino and were repositories for a rich body of symbolism. These cultures continued developing their traditions in the Colonial era, reproducing their sacred places and their symbolic landscapes, and integrating into their traditions their experience of the dramatic events that took place in the conquest and the colonisation of their lands.

Forms of expression

In these three rock art sites one can see a wealth of forms of expression that the communities of non-Mesoamerican tradition inhabiting the north of Mexico

were capable of creating. Painting was the common technique, but each site is distinct, offering one or several pictorial techniques combined in a unique way. The study of the expressive forms presented here is the result of my analysis regarding these three rock art works.

The pigment in the Cueva de Ávalos was applied in a consistency between pasty and liquid; it covers the surface well without leaving gaps, despite the great irregularity and roughness of the wall (Fig. 3). It seems to have been composed of clay, earth excavated from the same wall, then mixed with water and lime. Colour varies from whitish, cream to beige, and red appears in a few motifs.

The majority of the motifs represent zoomorphs, anthropomorphs, anthropomorphs mounted on equids, 'wagons' and crosses (Fig. 2). The dimensions of the motifs range from 10 to 30 cm, and sometimes motifs that appear to be related to one another are disproportionate in size. The type of representation is schematic; the figures are created by using a line with little detail, without two-dimensional volume, similar to stick-figures (except for some geometric and zoomorphic designs with the outline delineated and two-dimensional in volume), the vast majority of which are drawn in profile. Despite this aspect, the paintings convey a sense of movement.

In La Cueva de las Mulas the artwork is black. Although chemical analysis of the pigment is yet to be conducted, it appears to consist of charcoal mixed with water and a binder, which at this time is also unknown. The evidence suggests that the pigment was in a fairly liquid state and applied using a small brush (Fig. 5). The motifs are filled in and of flat colour. Initially the line is awkward in appearance but care can be seen in the details of many of the figures. Nevertheless, the expressions of this site stand out due to the highlighting of the minute images which vary between 5 cm and 15 cm. Most motifs are shown in profile, although a considerable portion has a foreshortened perspective or a perspective rendered in three-quarters view. Some are represented frontally. In addition, we note the possible intention of capturing movement, giving life to the actions narrated, and imparting a dynamic quality to the scenes portrayed (Fig. 4).

The forms of expression at this site seem to bear a strong relationship to the European world; the small size of the motifs and brush technique suggest an influence derived from the universe formed by the missions, which made great use of books with engravings in their evangelisation efforts (Donahue -Wallace 2009: 301; Bargellini 2009: 79), or from other 'educated' circles in nearby towns.

In the Cueva de las Monas the forms of expression differ from those used in the two previous sites. A wide variety of techniques and styles is present. It should be noted that this rockshelter had been used at different periods since pre-Hispanic times. Although we are not going to deal with the manifestations of the earlier

Figure 7. *Cueva de las Monas site. Colonial Tarahumara rock art. Paintings of two 'musical instruments', a 'viola da gamba' and a 'harp', and a 'bird in flight' resembling a dove or a swallow. Outline and infill style, size of motifs 15–30 cm, author's photograph, drawing by Alfredo Maldonado.*

period, it is relevant to point out that they influenced some aspects of the rock art created during the Colonial period. Pre-Hispanic designs occupy the entire extent of the walls of the shelter, and constitute the background on which the more recent motifs were painted. Some of the latter mimic ancient motifs. Similarly, it is evident that certain expressions had been repainted a thousand years later.

With respect to the colonial manifestations, emphasis is placed on a variety of colours: black, white, red, orange and light brown. The black may be charcoal, but determining the composition of the pigments was not attempted. The quality of the paints used to cover a surface without preparation and their preservation over time (Fig. 6) is notable. The iconography is distinct in comparison with the other two sites. Most of the images are anthropomorphs of varied forms and styles, but there are also geometric motifs, dots, a few animals, animal tracks and the only known colonial representation of 'musical instruments' in the rock art of Mexico (Fig. 7).

Colonial styles in the Cueva de las Monas

One noteworthy aspect of this body of rock art is the variety of styles used in the Colonial period representations. Before continuing, I want to clarify that when using the word 'style' I intend to only offer an initial approach to the styles of the sites, not to make a rigorous definition of them. I am aware that

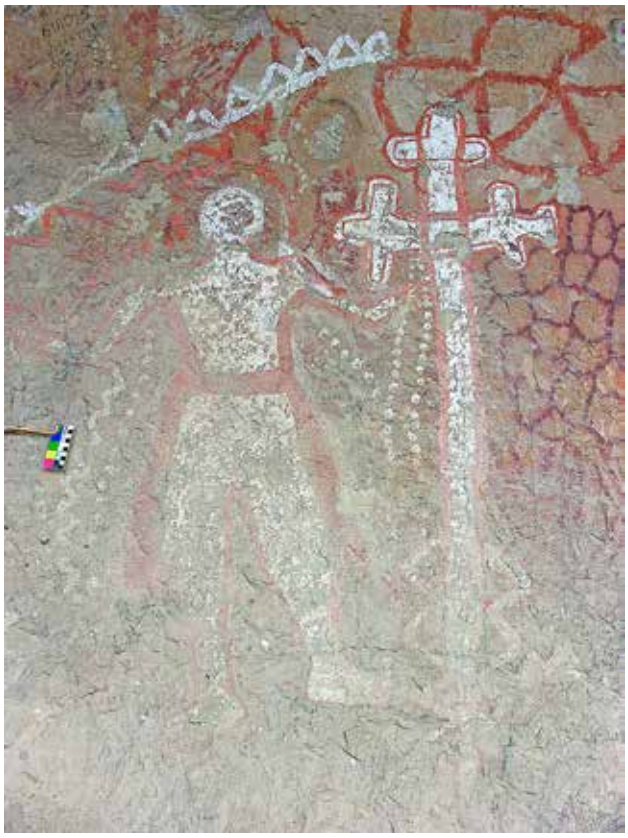

Figure 8. *Cueva de las Monas site. Colonial Tarahumara rock art. Painting of a 'man' wearing a 'cape, a wide belt, short baggy pants and sandals'. He seems to carry a large processional cross. Outline and infill style, size of motif c. 1 m, author's photograph.*

it is necessary to analyse a greater number of sites before attempting a broader explanation of the styles. This initial analysis will hopefully lead to a more comprehensive definition of styles at the three rock art sites.

I distinguish three styles based on criteria of colour, technique and iconography: (1) dark garnet style, (2) orange flat style, and (3) outline and infill style. The first style cannot at present be anchored in time, although some of its aspects point to the Colonial era. It consists of mainly geometric figures, and to a lesser extent, animal tracks, all in garnet colour. Anthropomorphs are absent. The motifs have been made with only flat colour or outlines.

The second style is characterised by figures painted in flat orange, executed in a rough manner, with little detail. Although uncommon, a few items of clothing, such as a headdress of Apache style and a type of short baggy pants can be identified, which aid in the dating of this style in the Colonial period.

The third style is the most complex. I have subdivided it into five preliminary sub-styles in order to understand it better, although not a single sub-style offers many motifs. To summarise, all are similar in the following aspects: the predominance of anthropomorphs, items of clothing (i.e. the short baggy pants), the consistent presence of the outline, the strength of the draughtsmanship, and the colour treatment employing closed areas or blocks (Fig. 6). The latter aspects give the images a sense of well-marked two-dimensionality. All of these sub-style images (except one) have two colours or more: red, white, black, orange.

The sum of these features indicates the contemporaneity of these expressions, although a difference is noted in the details: some are more elaborate, manifesting greater care in the rendering of proportions, details and drawings; while others are cruder, almost without details, less proportionate, more schematic, with a much simpler design. One should note that paintings of this style were made by different hands. They were made by indigenes who received the same training, resulting in the similarities of style, but with different skill and personal manner in the utilisation of colour. These different persons painted at roughly the same time.

In general this style of *outline and infill* exhibits European influence in painting, through the use of figures drawn to Western human proportions, as in the case of the anthropomorph wearing a 'cape holding a cross' (Fig. 8), or the one in short 'baggy pants' and 'earspools' with arms resting on hips. Another European influence is the use of colour to give the impression of volume, as utilised in the last figure described above. One of the most interesting aspects is the representation of the outline or silhouette of the image. The contour outline sometimes limits the figure, while at other times it defines the image itself, and still in other figures, it completes parts of the image (Figs 7 and 8). The style bears a strong resemblance to early sketches as part of the process of painting in the Western tradition.

It appears that there was no local tradition of oil on canvas painting in northern Mexico during the Colonial period, specifically in the Tarahumara, in contrast to other domains of art, such as the wooden and stone carvings of altarpieces and images (Bargellini 2008: 548). But during the Colonial period in New Mexico, paintings on animal hides were done in areas under colonial rule, especially with religious themes, and were painted mostly by natives (Donahue-Wallace 1996: 43–69). It should be noted that during pre-Hispanic times in the southwest of the U.S.A. and the northwest of Mexico, there was a tradition of painting on hides (Bargellini 2009: 89). The execution of these colonial paintings began with a charcoal sketch, done with a piece of wood charcoal used like a pencil. The sketch consists of a delineated figure without interior modelling, only the silhouette of the image. Subsequently, the interior of the figure was painted in a flat colour. Many of these paintings are characterised by a dense outline, a flat colour coat, and a two-dimensional treatment of forms (Donahue-Wallace 2009: 302). To a great extent these images remind me of the expressions found in the Cueva de las Monas. It is known that in certain periods of the Colonial epoch, paintings on animal hides from New Mexico were exported in large quantities through

the Camino Real (Donahue-Wallace 2009: 298). In this regard it must be mentioned that the Camino Real was practically the only route connecting New Mexico with the rest of New Spain, and the same itinerary was followed always from the city of Chihuahua to Santa Fe (Cramaussel 2006: 299).

We can deduce from the overlap observed in colonial styles, that the *orange flat* style and the *outline and infill* style, with its sub-styles, are painted over paintings executed in the *dark garnet* style. The latter style is therefore the oldest with the other two implemented later. The temporal relationship between the last two has yet to be determined.

Composition

The analysis of the composition can be used to examine the messages of these works. The Cueva de Ávalos and the Cueva de Mulas offer similarities in the layout of the motifs and purported scenes. In a major part of the motifs in both places the images seem related to other figures apparently representing an action. Some of the 'scenes' seem to have a narrative character, while others are more descriptive, wherein there appear many simple actions that seem to correspond to the same field of activity, but without an apparent temporal ordering (Fig. 9). Among those with a linear narrative character, the 'cart scenes' painted in profile in the Cueva de Ávalos stand out (Fig. 10). Here, pairs of horses or mules, one in front of other, pull covered and wheeled carts while an anthropomorphous figure sits astride each draft animal. In one case the cart is depicted passing near Calvary. In the Cueva de las Mulas one of the most complex scenes is that of a 'mule train' carrying cargo led by a few horsemen dressed as Spaniards armed with lances (Fig. 4).

However, the forms of displaying the narratives are very different from the mentality and art of that time in Europe when historical sequence is represented by easily distinguishable units or elements and the view of the past is demoted to the background or to the margins, where it is described on a smaller scale with less precision (Bargellini 2008: 554). In both the Cueva de Ávalos and the Cueva de las Mulas, the supposedly narrative parts consist of a juxtaposition of scenes of approximately the same size and painted in the same way, but not always in a linear sequence.

On the other hand it should be noted that in both cases there is a general conception of the overall work that directs its creation; the component parts comply with the general discourse and thereby confer a sense of unity to the work as a whole. Elements or scenes are not treated as unrelated, as if executed at different times by different people, much as in the manner of graffiti.

The situation is different in the Cueva de las Monas. In the first place, even in colonial times, there were various events when expressions were painted in the shelter so that it is occasionally difficult to separate and identify the motifs and 'scenes' from different periods. But it appears that the composition for each

Figure 9. *Cueva de las Mulas site. Colonial Tepehuan rock art. Two anthropomorphs holding an elongated object between them. The 'scene' has a central position with respect to a series that surrounds it, forming a circle, and linked by the one in the middle. Drawing by Alfredo Maldonado.*

Figure 10. *Cueva de Avalos site. Colonial Guachichil rock art. In the centre of the image and to the left: 'covered and wheeled carts' are drawn by a pair of 'horses or mules', one in front of the other; an anthropomorph sits astride each 'draft animal'. 'Calvary' is on the far right, size of motifs 15–30 cm, author's photograph.*

style is different. The most noticeable difference is in the outline and infill style. Here the composition consists of separate units along the shelter, which appear to have no narrative continuity; the majority are representations of a person or simple 'scenes', and do not seem to include complex narrative episodes. Although physically separated, they share some relationship regarding themes; various seem to allude to religious matters, such as the possible representation of the *'raspa del jícuri'* ritual (the scraping of peyote) (Mendiola 2002: 52) (Fig. 6), or of a person carrying a large Christian cross (Fig. 8). Furthermore, as explained above, these units are also related by their expressive

resources, possibly painted by several hands over a short period of time.

The concept of a figurative ensemble in constant evolution, painted during different periods over the course of time, does not correspond with colonial art that followed the European tradition. In this final perception, in general, the oldest expressions were replaced when they became physically deteriorated and have lost the value they once had (Bargellini 2008: 553).

What is expressed in these examples of rock art?

The Cueva de Ávalos and the Cueva de las Mulas have more similarities, a certain closeness in the messages expressed. Equids have a significant presence in three of the main themes: 'hunting scenes', 'livestock scenes' and apparent scenes related to commercial expeditions and commerce.

At both sites the trade caravans focus on the transport of people, animals and goods; it is the movement seen along the Camino Real that is the most relevant theme, and which apparently most impressed the natives. In the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the trade caravans consisted of long trains of mules and horses, or oxen-drawn wagons containing great quantities of goods (Reyes 1991: 78). Wagons are not depicted in Cueva de las Mulas, only trains of mules. I think this is mainly because wagons could not travel on this part of the road due to the mountainous ground. Instead, they were able to move in the section between Mexico City and Zacatecas (Cramaussel 2006: 305, 306), as it is portrayed in Cueva de Ávalos (Fig. 3).

The caravans were accompanied by herds of cows and sheep used to sustain the travellers along the Camino Real, which could take several months to complete (Cramaussel 2006: 312). It is not surprising that these two sites were situated along the route of the Camino Real.

The activities related to the equids (horses, mules or donkeys) hold a special role in the expressions. One of the most represented motifs is livestock, as seen in the roping of horses or herds of equids being driven by horsemen armed with pikes or spears. From the first expeditions these animals attracted strong attention. In the Cueva de las Mulas there are scenes of a man with a bow shooting at an equid (Fig. 5). But the benefits of the horse were quickly understood and the potential to their way of life recognised. This surely played a vital role in the Camino Real de Tierra Adentro. Subsequently, horse thefts began to be reported. Among the reports there stands out the account of an episode in the Guatimapé Valley near the Cueva de las Mulas where the Tepehuanes raided the first exploration of Francisco de Ibarra (Lazalde et al. 1983: 15; Berrojalbiz in press).

For the indigenous peoples of the Mexican north, characterised by a way of life with great mobility and dispersion, the horse represented an element of irresistible attraction. Thus, for example, before the end of the 16th century, Tepehuan leaders had their warriors riding horseback, and during the Tepehuana rebellion, initiated in 1616, sources mention attacks by groups of Tepehuanes on horseback (Berrojalbiz in press). The conquest and colonisation by the Spanish profoundly altered the habitat and the lifestyles of indigenous societies, creating new adaptations, like thefts and raids, in which the horse was of vital importance (Deeds 2003: 54); the influence of the Spanish also changed the way wars were conducted between native groups. And quickly following, trade in stolen horses and livestock was established as an important activity (Deeds 2003: 222).

We find a few representations of equids in the Cueva de las Monas, but they are not the most relevant motifs, and to date have not been considered as part of an action or a scene. However, it is interesting to note that of the few animal representations from the Colonial era found at this site, the majority are of equids (Fig. 6).

The *presidio* or fort is one of the colonial establishments associated with the Camino Real, since in many cases it was installed for the defence of this road, against Indian attacks and any other threats. There are two *presidios* very close to the Cueva de Ávalos (Aparicio in press). It is not surprising that one of the interpretations of a peculiar motif of this rock art site is a plan of a *presidio*. The motif consists of a quadrangle, which has a small circle in each corner. Its form is very similar to the plan view of a *presidio* (Fig. 2) (Arnal Simon 1995: 197, 217). Another aspect that supports this interpretation is the position this representation holds in the artwork, surrounded by scenes of horsemen roping equids. Normally the *presidios* maintained herds of horses since each soldier was required to have six to eight replacements (Hadley 2004: 3). In addition, the herds of equids were often kept in the courtyard of the *presidio*, which could have made the *presidio* seem like a type of large corral.

One of the most interesting aspects of the expressions in the three sites corresponds to the clothing; standing out among them are the short pants and the hats. This peculiar form of pants, with wide legs cut below the knee, appear on several of the characters (Figs 5, 6, 8 and 9). But the hats were the most interesting garments, especially in the Cueva de las Mulas. Among the cases when caps can be identified, one appears to be a cap with feathers stuck to the sides.

A considerable number of the anthropomorphs wear hats, but more interestingly, these are all of the same type, top hats with wide brims (Figs 4 and 5). This type of hat can be placed at the end of the 16th century and the first half of the 17th century (Russo 2006: 59–79).

One aspect that strongly captivates our attention in two of these rock art corpora is the minimal presence of motifs related to the Catholic religion, despite being a dominant force in colonial society, and despite the efforts of the evangelical enterprise. There are only three motifs found at the Cueva de las Mulas,

monograms reworked with the name of Saint Joseph, but they are small in size and occupy a marginal place in the work. There are several representations of the Christian cross at the Cueva de Ávalos. Although not central to the discourse, they hold more relevance due to the number, the size and the position they occupy. Furthermore, they are the only motifs that contain red colour. Highlighted are a group of three crosses, with the centre cross larger than those on the sides located behind a cart pulled by 'mules', which likely allude to Calvary (Fig. 10). In this context it is difficult to know what they represent; perhaps they symbolise a Christian space, such as a church or a mission, or indicate a place, as in a geographical reference, where three crosses are located near the Camino Real.

Conversely, it should be noted that there are some motifs that may correspond to the symbolic systems of the cultures of the painters of these two sites. In the case of the Cueva de las Mulas, there are, in addition to the narrative scenes, a variety of animals ('eagles and vultures, coyotes or wolves, deer' and other, fantastic beings) that appear to be of a symbolic character, for they are not a direct part of the actions of certain scenes, and seem to be related to indigenous mythology and symbolism.

But where religious elements are more prominent is in the Cueva de las Monas. The iconography is different, and the human representation has a protagonist role, but on many occasions it seems linked with religious aspects of both the indigenous and Christian religions. Thus, in one of the scenes, the *'raspa del jícuri'* (scraping of peyote) ceremony can possibly be identified, which has been practised among the Tarahumara communities of Chihuahua since at least in the 19th century and possibly long before (Chacón in press) (Fig. 6). The scene includes a large figure in a running position, who appears next to the 'ritual', surrounded by a kind of halo, which very likely represents *'juego de palillo'* (a type of ritual game) and is connected to the ceremony (Chacón in press). Some assert that the halo is the peyote that enfolds the person (Mendiola 2002: 51), while on the other hand it may resemble the halos of rays that surround many depictions of Catholic virgins.

Other figures appear with apparent elements of the Christian religion. Some are represented with a cross on their heads or in their arms, perhaps representing priests. But there is one in particular that appears to bear unique clothing: a cape, a wide belt, short baggy pants and sandals. He carries a 'large processional cross' and his head is surrounded by a small halo of points (Fig. 8).

In addition, two musical instruments may be represented in another panel: one resembles a *viola da gamba* or a *vihuela*, the other a harp, together with a 'bird' with its wings extended (Fig. 7). These extraordinary images, unique in the rock art of northern Mexico, remind us of the cultural environment the missions created. Music was an integral part of performing the mass and other Christian celebrations, and it was taught to the natives (Bargellini 2009: 56, 79). Thus, the probable scene may be a representation of instruments played in the nearby missions or churches. Jesuit missions for the Tarahumara people, and a Franciscan mission for the Conchos natives existed in relatively close proximity to this rock art site during the 17th century and part of the 18th century (Bargellini 2009: 74).

However, it is possible that the depictions do not relate to actual instruments, but allude to certain metaphors regarding the representation of the Christian heaven, or rather the divine notion of heavenly harmony. In regards to the religious ideas of New Spain current at the end of the 17th and early 18th centuries, music, following the neo-platonic tradition, symbolised the perfection of the universe (Davies 2009: 45). Additionally, in the Renaissance tradition the *viola da gamba* and the harp were classified as 'low' or soft instruments, and were those which had mystical power over the souls of men and the power to convert them (Davies 2009: 47, 54).

In the canvases of late 17th century and early 18th century, these instruments were painted to convey these beliefs. Perhaps some of these paintings or engravings arrived in the Chihuahua missions near the Cueva de las Monas, but it is also possible that these ideas were taught in the mission schools. In addition, together with the instruments, a bird resembling a dove is painted, which in Christian theology represents the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, the idea of singing is also evident, as was indicated to San Gregorio by the Holy Spirit for the liturgy. We note, then, that these three motifs transmit messages that are consistent with one another .

It should also be noted that one of the hypotheses for the interpretation of other styles of motifs belonging to the Colonial era is that the *orange flat* style is a representation from an original myth of an indigenous group. This is the myth of the giant or giants, *Kanoko*, from the Tarahumara people of Chihuahua, who in ancient times lived in caves, killed the elderly and children and raped women. This myth has been identified with the expressions of an anthropomorphous character, a man ten times greater in size than the figures that surround him and with six fingers on one hand, dressed in short simple trousers (Chacón in press).

Temporal and cultural attribution

The three rock art sites that have been studied show how this art was created during the entire Colonial era and how indigenous cultural traditions developed throughout this time, as they belong to different periods of the encounter between two distinct cultural worlds.

The initial information about the era in which the artwork of the Cueva de las Mulas was created, based on the presence of horses, mules and donkeys, scenes of a man with a bow shooting at an equid, headdresses, garments, tools and weapons, and the Christian monograms, point to the end of the 16th century and the first half of the 17th century (Berrojalbiz in press).

Besides, the trail that goes near this cave was more relevant before 1631. Later, the most important routes were changed to the east (Cramaussel 2006: 305).

This corresponds to the period of the exploration and conquest of the Durango territories, and the initial efforts of colonisation and evangelisation. This period also corresponds to the time of the great rebellion of the Tepehuanes in 1616, which put Spanish power in check and gave rise to a movement that questioned the universal order the Spaniards wanted to impose. This conflict caused the emergence of reflections and ideological responses, already bearing strong Spanish influences, of the indigenes of the area, particularly the Tepehuanes (Deeds 2003).

There are several reasons to attribute this work to the Tepehuan Indians: (a) they occupied the territory surrounding the Cueva de las Mulas just before the arrival of the Spaniards; (b) the cave is in an isolated place sacred to these people according to the earliest sources; (c) representations applied to a very rugged rocky surface without any preparation does not seem to be the type of work that a person of Spanish culture would make; (d) the art work conveys a unitary concept of a complex discourse with a non-European composition and logic, and not a haphazard accumulation of motifs unrelated to one another and executed during very different periods, like inscriptions or crosses; (e) it highlights the almost total absence of Christian motifs in the work. When people of a Spanish or non-indigenous background carried out interventions at the rock art sites, they commonly left elements of Christian symbolism among the motifs. Finally, (f) their way of life was characterised by mobility and dispersal, so they adopted horses rapidly. This accounts for the abundant depictions of equids.

There are no clear indications to assign a temporality to the Cueva de Ávalos rock art, but the predominance of an equine theme, the carts, the minimal presence of elements from the Catholic religion, the absence of firearms (except an anthropomorph with a possible shotgun) whose representation was more widespread in later periods of the rock art of the north, all point towards an early period of the colony in that area, at the end of the 16th century or the first half of the 17th century. The similarities shared with the Cueva de las Mulas also point to this period, in terms of expressive forms, composition and iconography, as well as the elements of clothing, such as pants and hats. The reason to attribute the authorship of this work to indigenous tradition is that it is similar to the work found in the Cueva de las Mulas. The indigenous people from the area around the Cueva de Ávalos were the Guachichiles. That being the case, it would be another reason for the early execution of the work in the colony, for this indigenous group disappeared quickly, at least as a cultural tradition.

The Cueva de las Monas was painted at various times during the Colonial period. Of the three preliminary styles from this phase, only one of them contains elements considered good time indicators to distinguish at what point in this period the expressions were created. This is the style called outline and infill. This type of representation, in regards to the paintings made by indigenous hands in studios directed by Europeans in New Mexico, may correspond to the second half of the 17th century or the first half of the 18th century. Added to this is the representation of a *viola da gamba* or *vihuela* in the same style on the walls of the shelter, musical instruments in vogue in the 17th century that could later be found in the missions at the beginning of the 18th century (Lucero Enríquez, pers. comm. February 2010). Moreover, the section of the Camino Real between Santa Barbara, in the south of Chihuahua, and Santa Fe, was not frequently travelled until the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th (Cramaussel 2006: 308, 309).

With regard to cultural attribution, there are several indications from the expressions at the Cueva de las Monas and various opinions. Highlighted among the motifs is what is being seen as depicting a ritual often practised by the Tarahumara for several centuries, the *'raspa del jícuri'* (Fig. 6), although it is also known that other groups in central Chihuahua such as the Conchos used peyote. Beside this 'scene' another depiction represents a running person who seems to be participating in a *'juego del palillo'* (Chacón in press), for which there are references in the sources for the Tarahumara, but not so for other groups. Also, another figure is represented as a native with Western clothing from New Spain, although with 'earspools' and a hairstyle featuring 'bangs' which may correspond to a Tarahumara, but there are more reasons to think the figure is of the Concho ethnic group. Initially then, it could be attributed to Tarahumaras (Mendiola 2002: 52; Chacón in press) of the Colonial period, while also taking into consideration that there could have been other groups who were in the area during that epoch, like the Conchos (Guevara 1989: 46–69), that might have shared some cultural elements with the Tarahumara, but we know virtually nothing about them.

In other latitudes of the Americas, as in the south, with comparable processes of colonisation, there have been studies on the evolution of the iconography that appear in these expressions of Colonial period rock art: which images appear on the walls as the contact, conquest and colonisation unfolded (Querejazu Lewis 1992; Martinez and Arenas in press). Comparing these works with the three sites of the Camino Real, at the outset, they appear to record similar processes. In the Cueva de Ávalos and in the Cueva de las Mulas, the predominant images are of equids and horsemen, or carts pulled by equids, as well as confrontations of men on horseback clashing with men on foot, and also between men on foot, some with Spanish arms and others with indigenous arms. These themes appear most frequently in the early Colonial sites in South America (Querejazu Lewis 1992: 6). The early sites of the Camino Real also coincide with their contemporaries of

the southern continent in the minimal representations of religious motifs. Over time in South America, with the development of the colony, more motifs of crosses assiduously appeared, becoming a dominant theme, in addition to other expressions depicting evangelising efforts and the presence of the Church: feasts, rituals or elements of rituals and churches. Also, the fusion of European and pre-Hispanic religious elements can be observed (Querejazu Lewis 1992: 7). In the Cueva de las Monas, the outline and infill style corresponds to more recent times, the topics paralleling the development of the iconography in the southern continent. Anthropomorphous representations dominate, but are linked to both Catholic and autochthonous religions, which have painted gestures, details and elements of the ceremonies, including allegorical motifs of Catholic theology, as in the representation of certain musical instruments juxtaposed with a bird.

Turpin documents a parallel evolution in the iconography of sites she studied in northern Coahuila, Mexico, and southern Texas, U.S.A., far from major roads. At first there is interest in horses and livestock in general, as well as in clothing, weapons, buildings and churches. Later, the representations concentrate on Christian elements, combining them with indigenous religious motifs, as seen in the Cuevas de las Monas (Turpin 1989: 287, 288; Turpin 2010: 151, 152). At the end of the 17th century, with the arrival of the Apache and Comanche Indians, the topics were centred on war and hostility against the Europeans.

The most remarkable differences in the iconography between these sites and the ones related to Camino Real lie in the lack of motifs that depict the commercial caravans or military expeditions that travelled this road, for example the scenes with the trains of mules or wagon convoys, discussed above, and other motifs related to the route, such as the portrayal of a *presidio*.

Rock art as a source of knowledge about the Camino Real

Rock art gives us the view of the forgotten perspective of this historical phenomenon; the other side of the coin. As presented, the indigenous people were not passive, but reacted actively; they conducted their own cultural development before these events; they created strategies before the clash of mentalities, and often these were strategies of cultural resistance.

In these new cultural developments of non-Mesoamerican traditions they deployed a wealth and variety of expressive resources. Among these it can be observed how they appropriated techniques and elements of the European world. Of the complex resources they employed, the following stand out: the use of colour to impart a sense of volume, the combination of flat colours with the delineation of an outline, the use of human proportions in painting figures, and the use of a brush to paint motifs, especially the small ones. The composition of the scenes and the motifs are also unusual, as they mix modes of indigenous expression with a Western narrative style.

Expressed in these paintings are a variety of messages and thoughts. What characterises these sites is the prevalence of images related to the Camino Real de Tierra Adentro and transit along this corridor: the commercial caravans and the expeditions with their carts or trains of mules, the livestock activity, the *presidios* and the soldiers, and the new ideas and practices like painting styles.

The horse, along with mules and donkeys, formed one of the most frequently addressed themes, and aroused the most fascination in these communities, which may be related to the connection that they made with their northern traditional way of life characterised by a great mobility. The armed characters, along with scenes of hunting or fighting, depending on how it is interpreted, reflect the conflict and the conquest.

Religion is treated in a peculiar manner. In two of the sites, which have been attributed to an early era, elements of the Catholic religion appear in a discrete manner, reworked, and are not central expressions of great concern or interest. But other motifs, such as images of certain animals, show how elements of indigenous religion are present and of greater relevance. In another site from a later period, the two types of sacred symbolism share the same importance and appear to be part of the central discourse. The advanced knowledge of Catholic allegories that are reflected in this work is remarkable.

In light of the images of Cueva de las Monas it is reasonable to consider whether the Jesuit missions of the Tarahumara or the Franciscan missions of the Conchos (the missions closest to the site) taught the art of painting. Similarly, we should consider the connections to New Mexico, where indigenous artists not only painted in the missions but also in workshops run by high-ranking civilians, similar to governors. The linkages among master painters, indigenous painters, works of art, animal hides, engravings, missionaries and patrons were made possible and forged by the Camino Real.

Thus we see a shift in the central themes over time, from the movement through the Camino Real and armed conflict, the early interest in equids, to the sacred elements from both autochthonous and European traditions, in a context of dialogue, creating a new religious development.

All of these aspects show how the rock art works associated with the Camino Real are unparalleled in obtaining a complete panoramic view of the hybridisation process, in a diversity of northern cultures of non-Mesoamerican tradition, over several centuries; but also from the indigenous expressions, from their own perspective, they represent a unique cultural phenomenon in the world. Without a doubt, within this great process the Camino Real de Tierra Adentro was one of the phenomena that most impressed the native peoples, a great showcase of culture in movement that continued to produce reactions and attraction during

the several centuries that it remained in force.

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