

SILVER MINING AND  
SOCIETY IN  
COLONIAL MEXICO  
  
ZACATECAS  
1546-1700

BY

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## CHAPTER I

### DISCOVERY AND SETTLEMENT

On 8 September 1546 Juan de Tolosa, leading a small force of Spaniards and Indian auxiliaries, made camp under a hill crowned by a peculiar semi-circular crest of bare rock. The place lay 150 miles north-north-east of Guadalajara. From the summit of the Cerro de la Bufa, as the Spaniards later called the hill, a group of Zacatecos Indians watched the strangers' activities.<sup>1</sup> Tolosa in due course made friendly approaches to them, and the Indians, in appreciation of his good intentions, showed him stones which, on subsequent examination, were found to be rich in silver. And in this way, according to the traditional account, was the wealth of Zacatecas uncovered to the civilised world.<sup>2</sup> How did Tolosa come to be there?

His arrival on the future site of Zacatecas proved to be the culmination of a movement of exploration and expansion in search of wealth that had started immediately after the conquest of Tenochtitlan. The search for a route to the East, and then the quest for the fabled Seven Cities of Cíbola, had led Spaniards westward and northward from central Mexico in the very early years of the settlement of New Spain. By 1528, Cortés' lieutenants and followers had explored large areas of land to the south of the Lerma-Santiago river system, in what is today the state of Michoacán. And in 1529 began the conquests to the north of the Santiago of Beltrán Nuño de Guzmán, traditionally the blackest of figures among Spanish conquerors of Mexico. Over six years he ranged through regions of northern Michoacán, southern Zacatecas, Jalisco and Culaicán, laying the foundations of the province of New Galicia, which is the geographical setting of this book. He and his lieutenants founded towns, of which the most important at this early date was Compostela, in the west of the region. But far more central to this study, and of far greater subsequent fame, was Guadalajara, first established in 1531 by one of Guzmán's subordinates, Cristóbal de Oñate, and after various hesitations finally

<sup>1</sup> 'Bufa' was the name often given to the rounded crests of hilltops in northern Mexico. Perhaps this was an analogy with the meaning of the word (from Italian 'buffa') in armoury – the grand guard, or curved piece of accessory armour for the left shoulder used in jousting.

<sup>2</sup> Elías Amador, *Bosquejo histórico de Zacatecas*, vol. 1, Zacatecas 1892, p. 186-7.

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sited in 1542 in its present position to the south of the Santiago river (see plan 3).<sup>1</sup>

Guzmán did not, of course, achieve settlement of New Galicia without meeting Indian resistance, and while this was temporarily overcome without great difficulty on early exploratory marches, it nevertheless remained a threat to permanent Spanish occupation of the land, and indeed grew as Spaniards sought to make use of Indian labour in the *encomiendas* granted to them by Guzmán. Resistance stiffened too as Spanish occupation advanced northward beyond the Santiago and Lerma rivers, leaving behind the sedentary Indian cultures of the centre of Mexico and encountering progressively more nomadic peoples. After various lesser revolts, a decisive confrontation came in 1540 with the outbreak of the Mixton war, in which the northernmost of the sedentary, agricultural peoples, the Caxcanes, attempted to halt and reverse the Spanish advance. This people occupied land to the north of the Santiago, extending into the canyon zone of present-day Zacatecas, and shared borders with the Zacatecos nation to the north. It appears to have formed something of a frontier between civilisation and barbarity in this region of Mexico, for beyond it lay the lands of the true nomads. Of these, the Zacatecos occupied much of the north of the modern state named after them and the north-east portion of Durango. Their lands bordered westwards with those of the Tepehuanes, and eastwards with those of the Guachichiles (see plan 4). These three tribes shared a primitive hunting-collecting culture, based on the gathering of mezquite on the fringes of Durango and *tunas* (the fruit of the nopal) in the region of nopal vegetation in eastern Zacatecas and western San Luis Potosí. They were in continuous conflict, and evidently communicated their aggressiveness to their Caxcan neighbours to the south. For despite the Caxcanes' more advanced sedentary way of life, they had waged constant war on the peoples beyond the Santiago, and now turned their efforts against the Spaniards.<sup>2</sup>

It took two years, the participation in the field of the viceroy himself, Antonio de Mendoza, and the efforts of 30,000 Aztec and Tlaxcalan auxiliaries, to subdue the Caxcanes in the Mixton revolt.<sup>3</sup> But subjugation, once achieved, was an important advance towards stability and permanence

<sup>1</sup> For the history of exploration by Cortés' agents and Guzmán, see J. H. Parry, *The Audiencia of New Galicia in the Sixteenth Century. A Study in Spanish Colonial Government*, 1948, pp. 19-25; H. H. Bancroft, *History of the Pacific States of North America*, vol. 5 (*Mexico*, vol. 2, 1521-1660), San Francisco 1883, pp. 344-71; J. Lloyd Mecham, *Francisco de Ibarra and Nueva Vizcaya*, Durham, North Carolina 1927, pp. 22-5.

<sup>2</sup> For a fuller account of the culture of the peoples mentioned here, see M. Othón de Mendizábal, 'Carácter de la conquista y colonización de Zacatecas', in *Obras completas*, vol. 5, México 1946, pp. 75-82.

<sup>3</sup> Parry, *The Audiencia*, p. 28.

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of the Spanish occupation of New Galicia. Its most useful result, as far as the story of Zacatecas goes, was to open the way for exploration to the north-east further than any had gone before, by establishing at long last solid Spanish domination over the lands of the Caxcanes.<sup>1</sup>

It was nevertheless some years before explorations in that direction were to bear fruit. In the meanwhile Spanish settlers in New Galicia still faced considerable difficulties. The value of encomiendas fell as the Indian population was reduced by pestilence, and agriculture afforded a poor livelihood to colonists. Some relief came in 1543 with the first mining strikes in the region. Gold was found at Xaltepec and silver at Espíritu Santo, both near Compostela on the western margin of New Galicia. Further east, in the same year, came silver strikes at Guachinango, Xocotlán and Etzatlán. The prosperity of these mines was short-lived; their rich ores were quickly exhausted. But the strikes encouraged permanent settlement in New Galicia, not only through the possibility of wealth they offered, but also through the demand they created for food, and a consequent development of agriculture.<sup>2</sup> The mining discoveries were a result of the efforts of Cristóbal de Oñate, now lieutenant-governor of New Galicia, to find economic resources rich enough to support and stabilise the population of the province. Oñate did not fail to extract personal benefit from these mines, and some five years later used the wealth he had derived from them in the establishment of a settlement at Zacatecas.

The years after the Mixton war were in general, then, ones of consolidation of settlement. Typical devices of Spanish colonisation in the New World come into play at this time. A vanguard of priests moved slowly northwards, attempting to root the nomads in townships; while Mendoza himself appears to have supervised the founding of a number of Indian settlements in the north of the Caxcan region, as a bulwark against the nomads of the plateau.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, administration of the province

<sup>1</sup> One of Guzmán's lieutenants, Peralmíndez Chirinos, is said to have reached the site of Zacatecas, without realising its mineral potential, in 1530. The itinerary of Chirinos' journey is not clear. See José López Portillo y Weber, *La conquista de la Nueva Galicia*, México 1933, pp. 224-8; Fray Antonio Tello, *Crónica miscelánea y conquista espiritual y temporal de la Santa Provincia de Jalisco en el Nuevo Reino de la Galicia y Nueva Vizcaya y descubrimiento del Nuevo México*, 1635; in ed. of Guadalajara 1891, pp. 107-10.

<sup>2</sup> Matías de la Mota Padilla, *Historia de la conquista de la Provincia de la Nueva Galicia, escrita por . . . en 1742*, Guadalajara 1920, p. 270; Parry, *The Audiencia*, p. 28.

<sup>3</sup> There is no record of these foundations in the chronicles of New Galicia or in modern secondary sources, but that they took place is indicated by a document belonging to the pueblo of Susticacán, about 35 miles south-west of Zacatecas, showing that Mendoza established the town in 1542. I am grateful to Don Federico Sescosse for a copy of this document. It is a royal order of 1602 addressed to Viceroy Velasco the younger, referring to complaints by the Indians of Susticacán about a land dispute with the neighbouring town of Tepetongo.

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began to be regularised, though until 1545 the only constant thread in government was Cristóbal de Oñate, for many years lieutenant-governor of New Galicia, and in practice the chief executive official in the frequent absences of the governors themselves.<sup>1</sup> Oñate appears always to have acted with great credit to himself, but there was a need for more permanently institutionalised administration, and when Lorenzo de Tejada, oidor of the Audiencia of Mexico, arrived in Guadalajara in 1544 to enact the New Laws, he recommended the establishment of an Audiencia for New Galicia. Tejada drew the province more closely under the control of Mexico City by annulling all grants of *encomienda* made by Guzmán and Coronado, and placing the Indians so released under Crown administration. The Consejo de Indias subsequently issued orders for the creation of the Audiencia of New Galicia at Compostela in January 1548. In the interim, government was in the hands of an *alcalde mayor*, Baltasar de Gallegos, appointed from Mexico City.<sup>2</sup>

In the stable and slowly expanding New Galicia of 1545, the most respected and possibly the richest man in the province, Cristóbal de Oñate, who was now relieved of his lieutenant-governorship, continued to encourage the search for wealth. The expedition led by Juan de Tolosa that by chance located the silver ore deposits of Zacatecas seems to have been part of Oñate's exploratory enterprise, though it is not clear to what extent he participated in financing it. According to Amador's account, Oñate had heard of silver deposits in the direction of Zacatecas and commissioned Tolosa to locate them. The party of Indians and Spaniards left Guadalajara in August 1546 and arrived on the site of Zacatecas on 8 September.<sup>3</sup> Mota Padilla elaborates this, saying that part of Tolosa's force of Indians came from the recently subjugated town of Tlajomulco in Michoacán, and part from Juchipila, where Tolosa stopped to augment his force on his march northwards.<sup>4</sup> The surviving documentary evidence, however, does not support the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century statements of Mota Padilla and Amador. According to an account

<sup>1</sup> After Guzmán's departure from New Galicia in 1536, the Crown having finally removed him for his excesses against the Indians and for insubordination, the governorship was held by Diego Pérez de la Torre. But he was killed in 1538 in an Indian uprising. His successor, Francisco Vázquez Coronado, spent most of his term of office at the head of his celebrated expedition to Cíbola and Quivira, far from New Galicia; though he was actively in office from 1542 to 1545, in which year he resigned, under censure for negligence and corruption injustice. Mendoza administered New Galicia directly during part of the Mixton campaign, and apparently for a short time afterwards. Parry, *The Audiencia*, pp. 26–30.

<sup>2</sup> Parry, *The Audiencia*, pp. 30–1.

<sup>3</sup> Amador, *Bosquejo histórico*, p. 186.

<sup>4</sup> Mota Padilla, *Historia*, ed. México 1870, p. 194; as quoted in P. W. Powell, *Soldiers, Indians and Silver. The Northward Advance of New Spain, 1550–1600*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles 1952, p. 229, note 25.

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(*información*) of Juan de Tolosa's services, dating from 1550 (less than four years after the event), he made several expeditions in search of mines from the town of Nochistlán.<sup>1</sup> On one occasion, being in Tlaltenango with a group of Spaniards, he was shown a piece of ore of some promise, and asked the local Indians where it came from. On being told, he led out an expedition consisting of Indian slaves, and Spaniards of his own force and that of one Miguel de Ibarra, on a search which resulted in the Zacatecas strike. At first the discovery was disappointing, for the earliest deposit to be found was 'the poor mine of Miguel de Ibarra'. The date of the find is not given. Witnesses merely say that it was more than three years before – that is, some time before the middle of 1547.<sup>2</sup> Tolosa then took three or four mule-loads (*cargas*) of ore to Nochistlán, where he found Miguel de Ibarra with his nephew Diego. The ores were assayed, with a result promising enough to cause the Ibarras to agree to co-operate with Tolosa in further exploration and development of the mines.<sup>3</sup> So about three days later, Tolosa and Diego de Ibarra returned northwards to the site of Zacatecas and within a short time brought in more settlers.

This account of the discovery is borne out by witnesses to the Tolosa *información*. Juan Michel, one of the earliest miners to arrive in Zacatecas, relates that when news of the strike spread he hurried to the site and there found Tolosa and Diego de Ibarra with slaves and horses.<sup>4</sup> Michel claims he was the second person to arrive after the initial group gathered by Tolosa and Ibarra. So it seems quite clear that Tolosa must be given credit for the discovery of ores itself. He was obviously engaged with the Ibarras in the search for mineral wealth, since his expedition included some of Miguel de Ibarra's men; and their convenient presence at Nochistlán only confirms that they were exploring the resources of the north. The name of Cristóbal de Oñate is not to be found in the Tolosa *información*, and while it is possible that Tolosa and the Ibarras were

<sup>1</sup> AGI Patronato 80, R. 1, No. 5, 'Información de los méritos de Juanes de Tolosa, fundador de la ciudad de Zacatecas; y otras informaciones de los descendientes del dicho Juanes de Tolosa y del Marqués Hernando Cortés y del emperador Moctezuma para la pretensión de . . . Don Juan de Zaldívar Cortés Moctezuma.' This document has two distinct parts. The first is dated Nochistlán, June 1550, and is the *información de méritos* drawn up by Tolosa himself before Hernán Martínez de la Marcha, oidor of Guadalajara. The second part (beginning at f. 21v.) is dated Guadalajara, May 1594, and was drawn up by Tolosa's son, D. Juan Cortés Tolosa Moctezuma. The first account and petition of 1550 had brought Tolosa no reward from the Crown.

<sup>2</sup> AGI Patronato 80, R. 1, No. 5, 'Información . . . de Juanes de Tolosa', ff. 8v.–11.

<sup>3</sup> AGI Patronato 80, R. 1, No. 5, 'Información . . . de Juanes de Tolosa', f. 3v.

<sup>4</sup> AGI Patronato 80, R. 1, No. 5, 'Información . . . de Juanes de Tolosa', ff. 11–13, testimony of Juan Michel.

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acting under the general directive of Oñate, it seems that he had no direct part to play in the discovery. His contribution to the history of Zacatecas, in the form of capital for the establishment of a permanent settlement in a situation made hostile both by the barrenness of its surroundings and the ferocity of its Indian inhabitants, came soon afterwards. With justification he may occupy his position, with Tolosa and Diego de Ibarra, as one of the traditionally honoured founders of Zacatecas. The founders, as today commemorated in a decorative fountain in the city, are generally accounted as four. The last, not yet mentioned here, is Baltasar de Temiño de Bañuelos, who, like Oñate, goes unclaimed in the Tolosa *información* of 1550. In the later account of 1594 he appears as a witness, stating merely that he was 'one of the first settlers to come to the said mines after the said Juanes de Tolosa had discovered them'.<sup>1</sup>

In the origins and careers of the four founders of Zacatecas there are interesting similarities, and their biographies are illustrative of certain common themes in the history of Zacatecas as a mining settlement. It is clear that the most distinguished of them at the time was Cristóbal de Oñate, who had many years of experience as a senior administrator and mining entrepreneur in New Galicia. Born in Vitoria, in the Basque province of Alava, in 1504 or 1505, the son of *hijosdalgo*, he crossed the Atlantic to New Spain in 1524 as the assistant (*ayudante*) of Rodrigo de Albornoz, accountant (*contador*) of the Treasury office of New Spain. He was one of Guzmán's lieutenants in the conquest of New Galicia from the beginning of that enterprise in 1529, and seems always to have been a moderating influence in that ruthless group. In the course of his career he was awarded two *encomiendas*, one at Culucán, close by Mexico City, and the other at Tacámbaro in Michoacán. He also gained useful connections by his marriage to Doña Catalina de Salazar y de la Cadena, daughter of the Treasury officer Gonzalo de Salazar, an accomplice of Guzmán's. His wealth of later years derived from mining enterprises in various parts of New Galicia after the Mixton war and was reinvested in further mining activities at Zacatecas. But although he encouraged prospective miners to go to Zacatecas and supported them while they were there, he seems to have been resident very little himself. In the period immediately after the discovery of the mines, Oñate was in Mexico City, as is evident from his testimony in the *información* of Diego de Ibarra, dated at Zacatecas, 22 March 1550. Oñate there states that his agents (*criados*) in Zacatecas had written to him in Mexico City saying that they wished to

<sup>1</sup> AGI Patronato 80, R. 1, No. 5, 'Información . . . de Juanes de Tolosa', f. 54 v., testimony of Baltasar de Temiño de Bañuelos, Zacatecas 14 May 1594.

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leave the mines because of shortage of food and the poor quality of ores.<sup>1</sup> And one of the informaciones relating to Oñate himself definitely describes him as a householder (*vecino*) of Mexico City.<sup>2</sup>

If Oñate was not normally resident in Zacatecas up to the time of his death, about 1570, his children became active members of the mining community and proceeded to greater fame. The most illustrious of them was Don Juan de Oñate y Salazar, conqueror, *adelantado* and governor of New Mexico. His brother, Don Alonso de Oñate y Salazar, was first a miner in Zacatecas and later solicitor general (*procurador general*) for the collectivity of miners of New Spain, New Galicia and New Biscay. The eldest son, Don Fernando Pérez de Narriahondo y Oñate, succeeded to the family encomienda at Tacámbaro and later became *alcalde mayor* of Puebla. Like the other founders of Zacatecas, Cristóbal himself is said to have died in poverty. In another información relating to him, presented by his grandson Cristóbal de Oñate Rivadeneira in México on 23 January 1584, there is a statement that he had extracted more than a million and a half pesos from the mines in which he held interests; but this enormous sum had been completely consumed in financing campaigns against Indians and in pacification. So great had been his services to the Crown that his children were left indigent: the constant aggrieved complaint of a conquistador's descendants.<sup>3</sup>

About the early activities of Juan de Tolosa, information is slighter and less certain. Neither the place nor the date of his birth is known, though it has been suggested that he was from Guipúzcoa – a plausible idea in view of the existence of the town of Tolosa.<sup>4</sup> Mecham states that he took part in the Mixton campaign, but neither in the información of 1550 nor in that of 1594 is such service claimed by him or by his descendants, and it would not have been a point to be passed over lightly. His first definite appearance on the scene is in 1546, with his arrival at Zacatecas at the head

<sup>1</sup> AGI Guadalajara 28, 'Información de oficio recibida en esta real audiencia de México de la Nueva España, sobre la que dió Diego de Ibarra, caballero de la orden de Santiago, vecino de México', México 9 August 1582. Most of the actual *probanza* is dated Zacatecas 22 March–20 April 1550.

<sup>2</sup> AGI Patronato 75, R. 5, No. 1, 'Información de los servicios de Cristóbal de Oñate en la conquista del Nuevo Reino de Galicia'; presented by Fernando de Oñate, his son, in Mexico City, 31 October 1577. N.f.; reference is to Q. 6 of the *interrogatorio*.

<sup>3</sup> AGI Patronato 78, R. 1, No. 1, 'Probanza de los méritos y servicios de Cristóbal de Oñate, conquistador de la Nueva Galicia . . .', México 23 January 1584; here, *interrogatorio*, Q. 10. Other information on Oñate from: J. I. P. Dávila Garibi, *La sociedad de Zacatecas en los albores del régimen colonial, actuación de los principales fundadores y primeros funcionarios públicos de la ciudad*, México 1939, 13; López Portillo y Weber, *La conquista*, p. 137; AGI Mexico 1064, No. 1, f. 224.

<sup>4</sup> Dávila Garibi, *La sociedad*, 29; AGI Patronato 80, R. 1, No. 5, 'Información . . . de Juanes de Tolosa', f. 4v.

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of his troop. Then, some time in the early 1550s he married the daughter of Hernán Cortés and Doña Isabel Moctezuma, Doña Leonor Cortés Moctezuma, who in due course gave birth to three children: Don Juan Cortés Tolosa Moctezuma, a miner and active cabildo member until his death in 1624; Doña Isabel Cortés Moctezuma, later to marry Don Juan de Oñate, the adelantado of New Mexico; and Doña Leonor Cortés Moctezuma, wife of Cristóbal de Zaldívar Mendoza, a distinguished participant in the campaigns against the Chichimec Indians in the 1570s and 1580s, and a Basque in descent.<sup>1</sup> The date of Juan de Tolosa's death is unknown, though he was certainly no longer alive in 1594 when his children presented their información. In it they claimed, like Oñate's descendants, that he had died in poverty, leaving only a few abandoned ore-processing mills (*haciendas de minas*). His early mining fortune from Zacatecas had been wholly dissipated in further explorations he undertook during the 1550s in search of other mines.

Of the third of the recognised founders of Zacatecas, Diego de Ibarra, a good deal is known. Born in the town of Eibar in Guipúzcoa about 1510, he arrived in New Spain in 1540, in time to take part in the Mixton campaign. He appears to have fought that war in the company of his uncle, Miguel de Ibarra, and after the defeat of the Indians they began explorations together into the north of New Galicia, combining efforts with Juan de Tolosa, as has already been noted. Diego de Ibarra drew his share of Zacatecas' prosperity in the early 1550s, and, a wealthy man, married in 1556 Doña Ana de Velasco y Castilla, daughter of the second viceroy of New Spain, Luis de Velasco. He became important later as the principal source of credit for the expeditions of his nephew, Francisco de Ibarra, who, in a short period before his early death in 1575, explored vast areas to the north-west of Zacatecas, creating the province of New Biscay and becoming its first governor. After Francisco's death, Diego de Ibarra assumed the governorship in his place in 1576. He lived thereafter to an advanced age. In 1600 he was still claiming recompense for his great expenditure in the conquest of New Biscay, which had amounted, so he claimed, to over 200,000 pesos. Thus had his personal fortune drained away. But in fact he was not quite so destitute, for he failed to mention that in the last quarter of the century he had assembled an enormous estate to the west of Zacatecas, centred on the hacienda of Trujillo. This estate, together with other lands in New Biscay and extensive mining interests in Zacatecas and other mining towns of the north, was incorporated into a *mayorazgo* in 1578, which was inherited by his daughter, Doña Mariana de Velasco. His only son, Luis, had died in 1576. This

<sup>1</sup> Dávila Garibi, *La sociedad*, genealogical table No. 11.

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mayorazgo was one of a very few ever created in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries by miners and citizens of Zacatecas.<sup>1</sup>

Baltasar de Temiño de Bañuelos is usually taken to be the fourth founder of Zacatecas, but is worthy of the title only in the limited sense that he may have been present at the formal foundation of the settlement in 1548. For that was the year in which he appears to have arrived, and there were indisputably many others on the site before him. He was doubtless the youngest of the four, having been born about 1530, a son of the Temiño family from Burebe in Old Castile. In later life he was a leading miner and citizen of Zacatecas, and was appointed lieutenant captain-general of New Galicia in 1572 by Viceroy Enríquez in the war against the Chichimec Indians. He later protested that the cost of equipping forces for this struggle was his ruin, and in his last years, like his companions, claimed to be poor. He died in 1600, after playing a part in the local administration of Zacatecas for many years. The family name persists in the town throughout the seventeenth century, but his descendants never attained his position in the society of the city, nor riches approaching his.<sup>2</sup>

These were the four men whom Zacatecas recognises today as its founders. Their careers are characteristic of those of many of their fellow citizens in later years – a rapid rise from obscurity to an esteemed social position through the accumulation of wealth; high marriages; ascent to important military and civil office; descent from silver-lined middle years to indigent old age. The fact that three of them were Basques, and one from the northern limits of Old Castile, is also of interest. The history of the exploration and settlement of northern New Spain is dominated by Basque names in this period, and indeed into the seventeenth century: Francisco de Ibarra and Francisco de Urdiñola in New Biscay, Juan de Oñate in New Mexico, Martín de Zavala in New León. There was a tendency among emigrant Basques, above all other Spaniards in America, to congregate with others of the same tongue and regional origin.<sup>3</sup> But Zacatecas was not a city numerically dominated by Basques at any time, as can be seen from many name lists of miners and inhabitants in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Basque families were influential but

<sup>1</sup> On Ibarra, see: Dávila Garibi, *La sociedad*, pp. 37–41, and genealogical table No. 15; Mecham, *Francisco de Ibarra*, pp. 42, 223, 239; AGI Mexico 1064, No. 1, f. 221; AGI Guadalajara 28, 'Información de oficio recibida . . . sobre la que dió Diego de Ibarra', México 9 August 1582.

<sup>2</sup> Mecham, *Francisco de Ibarra*, pp. 42, 48.

<sup>3</sup> This effect is noted by P. Boyd-Bowman in 'La emigración peninsular a América: 1520–1530', *Historia Mexicana*, vol. 13, No. 2, October–December 1963, pp. 165–92; here p. 168.

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few. Above all, Basques were great explorers; and Zacatecas the source of finance for their expeditions and the base from which they set out. How did that base develop from the small beginnings made by Juan de Tolosa and Diego de Ibarra in the autumn of 1546?

The beginnings were not indeed very auspicious. The news of the discovery at Zacatecas spread quickly, but it did not seem that the deposits were more remarkable than those already found further south in New Galicia. The Treasury officials of the province, in December of 1547, were less enthusiastic about Zacatecas than about Culiacán, where silver strikes had just been made.<sup>1</sup> At Zacatecas there was difficulty in attracting and holding settlers. At one point Diego de Ibarra and his servants constituted the whole population.<sup>2</sup> While mines were few and poor, and attack by Indians an ever-present threat, there was little to recommend Zacatecas. One of the witnesses to the Tolosa *información* of 1550 relates that Tolosa, after making the initial discoveries of ore, quickly extended his explorations (in characteristically energetic fashion) to Tepezala. Returning thence to Nochistlán, he heard that the pioneers of Zacatecas were leaving for fear of the Indians; and at Mecatabasco, eighteen leagues south from Zacatecas, he found a group of fugitives from the mines, including Diego de Ibarra himself. In an attempt to preserve the settlement he and one Tomás de Arrayaiza returned to Zacatecas, and with Ibarra began to build solid houses, strong enough to withstand Indian attack. These were flat-roofed dwellings (*casas de terrado*), probably of *adobe* construction.<sup>3</sup> All this appears to have taken place early in 1547, and it was the only occasion on which there was a serious possibility of Zacatecas being abandoned. The Indian danger, which still remained a mere threat, was to become far more urgent in later years; but by then the town had grown to such a size that there was little chance of dislodging it. Now, in 1547, Diego de Ibarra, providing a nucleus of his own men, gave shelter, food and protection to newcomers, and indeed positively sought to encourage settlement by writing to those who he thought would be interested in the venture. At times he was maintaining seventy or eighty Spaniards in his house (variously referred to as a *casafuerte* or *posada*), although such large numbers were probably not reached until 1548, when the rich silver discoveries made in that year finally removed all danger of abandonment of the camp and attracted

<sup>1</sup> AGI Guadalajara 31, Treasury officials of New Galicia to Charles V, Compostela 15 December 1547. Of the Zacatecas mines they merely said 'they are held to be rich'.

<sup>2</sup> AGI Guadalajara 28, 'Información de oficio recibida . . . sobre la que dió Diego de Ibarra', 1582, f. 11v.; testimony of Bartolomé de Mendoza.

<sup>3</sup> AGI Patronato 80, R. 1, No. 5, 'Información . . . de Juanes de Tolosa', 23 May 1550, ff. 4, 7v.-8, testimony of Juan de Amuseo.

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a flood of fortune seekers.<sup>1</sup> It is hardly an original observation to point out that Ibarra's mode of procedure in establishing Zacatecas is typical of the contemporary Spanish method of conquest and settlement, which delegated exploration to private enterprise and capital in return for promised future reward in the form of cash, concessions or honours of one sort or another. The founders of Zacatecas were later to be disappointed in their petitions for rewards for their efforts.<sup>2</sup>

The date of the founding of the town of Zacatecas is usually given as 20 January 1548. It was the day, according to various chronicles, on which the four founders met on the site for the first time. There is no documentary evidence for this, but the date of foundation is of no more than local patriotic interest in any case. The year 1548, though, was possibly the most important in the history of Zacatecas, for it was then that the major ore discoveries were made. The three principal groups of silver-bearing veins (*vetas*) in the Serranía were located in the months from spring to autumn: the vein christened La Albarrada (or in particular the mine of San Benito on it), forming part of the all-important Veta Grande, was found on 1 March; the veta of San Bernabé, two and a half miles north-east of Zacatecas, was located on 4 June; and the first of the veins of the Pánuco group, some eight miles north of Zacatecas, were discovered on 1 November.<sup>3</sup> These veins, with others occurring in association with them, yielded a large part of the wealth of Zacatecas until the beginning of the twentieth century. And although other deposits were later found in the immediate vicinity of the town, and other mining centres grew and flourished in what became the Zacatecas silver district, it was principally the veins in the hills of the Serranía, as far north as Pánuco, that yielded the mass of silver. The most important of the veins discovered in 1548 was the Veta Grande, in which were sunk many of the mines responsible for the great and later boom of 1615 to 1635. Today, around the centre of the Veta Grande, there is a small, decayed village, which seems to be of eighteenth-century origin. But in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries there was no permanent settlement there, since the road to Zacatecas was short – no more than four miles – and access easy. There were, however, huts and shelters at the mine-heads for temporary

<sup>1</sup> AGI Guadalajara 28, 'Información de oficio recibida . . . sobre la que dió Diego de Ibarra', 1582, *passim*.

<sup>2</sup> There is a traditional story, often repeated in local histories of Zacatecas and its region, demonstrating that Cristóbal de Oñate followed Ibarra's example in supporting settlement in Zacatecas. It is said that a bell was rung at mid-day in his house, inviting passers-by to a free lunch. See J. Arlegui, *Crónica de la Provincia de N.S.P. S. Francisco de Zacatecas*, México 1737, ed. used México 1851, p. 123.

<sup>3</sup> Amador, *Bosquejo histórico*, pp. 188–90; Mota Padilla, *Historia*, ed. Guadalajara 1920, p. 270. The precision of dates in these sources must be regarded with suspicion.

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housing of workers and storage of ores and equipment. Pánuco was further off; and partly for that reason, partly because it yielded very rich ores right at the beginning, a separate camp grew up there. The discovery of Pánuco was claimed for Diego de Ibarra by his descendants.<sup>1</sup>

The strikes of 1548 led to a rush to Zacatecas, beginning in that year, and continuing for some years to come. The massive influx of population led to problems of public order and control, and there arose a need for regular civil government. In late December 1548 the citizens of Zacatecas applied to the Audiencia of New Galicia for the appointment of an *alcalde mayor*. The first recorded holder of the office was one Pedro Mejía, in 1549. There was evidently serious conflict among prospectors for claims, leading to violence and deaths. Abuses in the employment of Indians were also common. Indians were flooding into Zacatecas, while others were being seized for use as carriers (*tamemes*) and having their crops illegally confiscated as the demand for food at the mines soared.<sup>2</sup> In October 1549 it was reported that there were in Zacatecas 300 Spaniards skilled in mine work.<sup>3</sup> Many of these had come from Mexico City and had begun to remit silver there directly from Zacatecas, thus robbing New Galicia of taxes, which disturbed the Treasury officials of the province. But possibly a more important effect of the early silver remittances was the establishing of regular communication between the northern part of the plateau and the central region of Mexico.<sup>4</sup>

In the autumn of 1549 the *Licenciado* Hernán Martínez de la Marcha, one of the first four *oidores* of the Audiencia of New Galicia, arrived at Compostela, the seat of the Audiencia, to take up his post.<sup>5</sup> In the following year he undertook a *visita general* of the whole of the province, in the course of which he spent some time in Zacatecas. By now the Audiencia had appointed an *alcalde mayor*, but his effect in the preservation of order seems to have been small. For la Marcha found, in March 1550, a turbulent mining camp, full of prospectors from all parts of New Spain, who abandoned mines as quickly as they opened them up, jumped claims and neglected to register their workings. They likewise failed to pay any tax on the silver they produced. La Marcha made an inspection of the claims then being worked, and forwarded a report drawn up by the *alguacil mayor* of the town. Fifty mine owners were currently working stamp-mills and ore-refining plants. Cristóbal de Oñate, and others in company

<sup>1</sup> AGI Guadalajara 7, 16 September 1614, Doña Ana de Ibarra Velasco to king.

<sup>2</sup> CDHG, vol. 1, p. 102, Guadalajara 29 December 1548, 'Petición para que la Audiencia no se asiente en Compostela sino en Guadalajara'.

<sup>3</sup> AGI Guadalajara 31, 22 October 1549, Juan de Ojeda to Charles V.

<sup>4</sup> AGI Guadalajara 31, Compostela, 20 December 1548, Treasury officials to Charles V.

<sup>5</sup> Parry, *The Audiencia*, p. 44.