



Advanced studies on the archaeology and history of hunting
edited by the ZBSA

Karl-Heinz Gersmann · Oliver Grimm (eds.)

Raptor and human – falconry and bird symbolism throughout the millennia on a global scale

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**Raptor and human –
falconry and bird symbolism throughout the
millennia on a global scale**

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Raptor and human – falconry and bird symbolism throughout the millennia on a global scale

1/4

Edited by
Karl-Heinz Gersmann and Oliver Grimm

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Cover picture: Skilled eagle master. Western Mongolia, August 2011 (photo used with the permission of Dr. Takuya Soma).

*Top to the left: Seal of the Danish king Knud IV (late 11th century). Redrawing. Taken from M. Andersen/G. Tegnér, *Middelalderlige segl-stamper i Norden* (Roskilde 2002) 129.*

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The global perspective of the book. Orange: Eurasian steppe (presumed area of origin of falconry); green: the areas considered in the book (map Jürgen Schüller, ZBSA).

Falconry definition

Falconry is defined as the taking of quarry in its natural state and habitat by means of trained birds of prey (according to the International Association for Falconry and Conservation of Birds of Prey [IAF] = www.iaf.org).



Frederick II of Hohenstaufen with a bird of prey. Miniature in his falconry book (folio 1v, Codex Pal. lat. 1071, Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg/Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana). Redrawing. After: Hunting in Northern Europe (Neumünster 2013) 344 fig. 1.

Frederick II of Hohenstaufen was an early global actor in the 13th century, bringing together falconers and falconry traditions from far and wide.



UNESCO recognition of falconry as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (cf. HEWICKER in this book, Fig. 6).

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Falconry in America – A pre-Hispanic sport?

By José Manuel Fradejas Rueda

Keywords: Pre-Hispanic, pre-Columbian, America, Mesoamerica, Mexicans, Aztecs, falconry, discovery chronicles, semantic change, Spanish language, Mixtec codex

*Abstract: It has long been believed that falconry was known to pre-Columbian people, especially the Aztecs. This, however, is the result of a misinterpretation of the Hispanic Discovery Chronicles and of an image from a Mixtec codex. A review of the Spanish chronicles will prove that the misunderstanding is attributable to a semantic change taking place during the 16th century: *volería*, which originally referred to any group of birds, becomes a synonym of *cetrería* ‘falconry’. It will also be shown that the human figure holding a bird of prey in the Codex Zouche-Nuttall is not a representation of falconry, and can be explained as a symbolic offering to a new Mixtec ruler. The conclusion is that falconry was introduced in America by the Spanish conquistadores and that the first falconer was enrolled in Columbus’ Second Voyage (1493–1496), while the first falconers to set foot on the American continent were members of Hernán Cortés’ army.*

In the mid-19th century, Dutch professors H. SCHLEGEL and A. H. Verster van WULVERHORST (1844, 68) maintained that falconry originated in Asia and from there spread to America, becoming a common practice among the indigenous central American tribes.¹ In 1978, the British author P. Glasier wrote that:

at the beginning of the sixteenth century, Cortés, the Spanish *conquistador*, arrived in Mexico, where he found that the Aztec king, Montezuma, maintained an establishment of trained birds of prey used for hunting (GLASIER 1978, 14).

José REYZÁBAL (1987) based his paper on the history of falconry on this assertion –

Falconry is known to be a common practice in America. When Hernán Cortés conquers Mexico and defeats the Aztec ruler Moctezuma, he discovers that Moctezuma has birds of prey trained for hunting, which is undeniable proof that falconry was not unknown on the American continent (REYZÁBAL 1987, 28) –

and even presented a distribution map of falconry (Fig. 1).

1 This paper is a re-written and updated version of a previous one published in Spanish under the title of ‘La cetrería en América: ¿prehispánica o colombina?’, *Actas del Congreso Internacional V Centenario de la Muerte del Almirante: Valladolid 15 a 19 de mayo de 2006* (Valladolid 2006) 277–288, and it is part of the research project *Archivo Iberoamericano de Cetrería* <www.aic.uva.es> (HUM2006-0932/FILO and FFI2010-15128) funded by Government of the Kingdom of Spain.

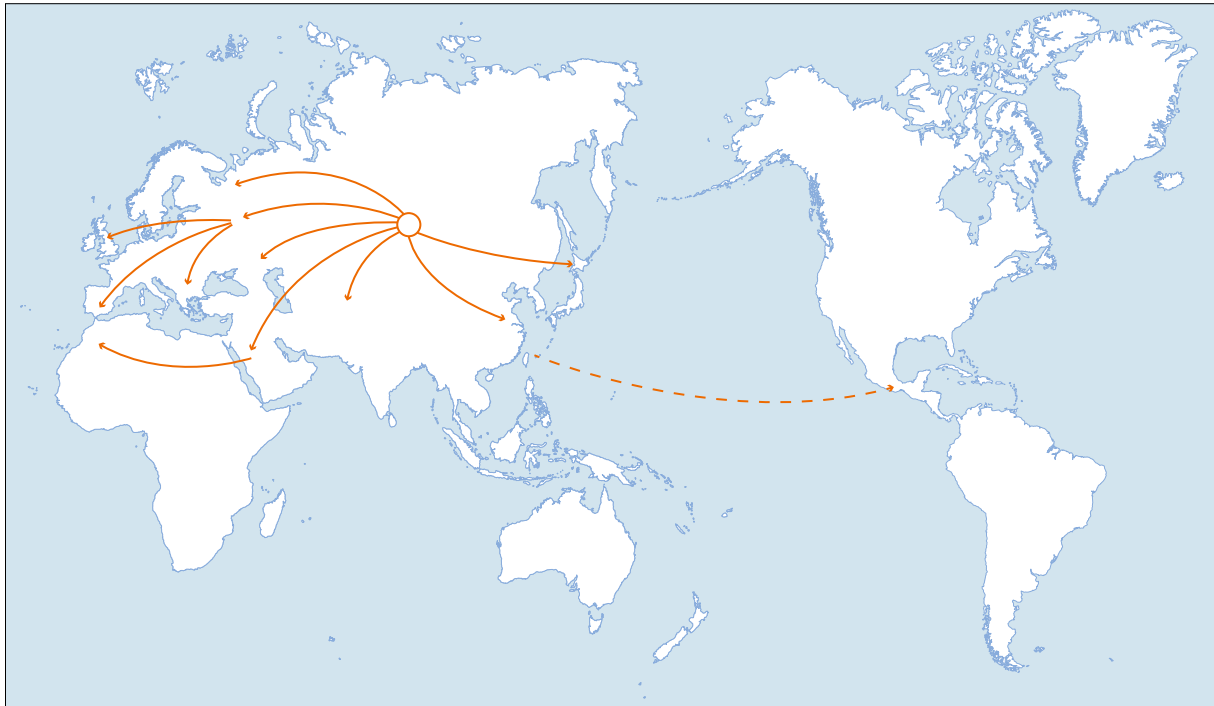


Fig. 1. The spread of falconry from the Eurasian Steppe to America (map J. Schüller, ZBSA, after REYZÁBAL 1987, 27).

I basically agree with the map in the sense that falconry, as we know it today, most probably originated in the Eurasian Steppe area and spread to the east and west throughout Eurasia (cf. GRIMM/GERSMANN in this book, Summary). I do not accept Schlegel-Velster van Wulverhorst's theory, mapped by Reyzábal, that falconry arrived in America via the Pacific Ocean. Nor do I believe it justifiable to state that the Aztecs and other pre-Columbian peoples practised falconry.²

The belief that the Aztecs or any other indigenous people practised falconry is based on a self-serving interpretation of several chroniclers and on the erroneous interpretation of the true meaning of various words used in the chronicles.

Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo (1478–1557), a historian and writer who participated in the colonization of the Caribbean (1514–1524), wrote a lengthy chronicle titled *Historia general y natural de las Indias* ('General and Natural History of the Indies') in which he tells of finding a sort of mews and of questioning those of his comrades who were better versed in falconry than he. In his chronicle, he states: "In all the years that I spent in the Indies, never again did I hear that the Indians hunted with birds" (FERNÁNDEZ DE OVIEDO 1992, p. III.81). Had Fernández de Oviedo's words been taken into account, there should have been no attempts to assert or try to prove that pre-Columbian peoples practised falconry passionately or even knew anything about the sport.

Even more telling is Bernardino de Sahagún's (1500?–1590) total absence of information regarding the sport. In his *Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España* ('General History of the Affairs of New Spain'), this Spanish missionary, who arrived in New Spain³ in 1529, speaks at length of falcons,

2 Since the arrival of the Spaniards in Mesoamerica, *Mexican* (*mexicano, mexicana*) was used as a demonym and glossonym to designate the people of the Mexico Valley and their language, and the first testimonies are dated to the period 1525–1550. Later, after the independence of Mexico (1810–1821), Mexican (*mexicano*) refers to an inhabitant of the country while Aztec is the term for the indigenous people that founded the city of Mexico-Tenochtitlan (LEÓN-PORTILLO 2000).

3 The Viceroyalty of New Spain, 1531–1821, covered the areas of what is now Mexico, Belize, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and the states of Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California.

hawks and sparrowhawks, and even declares that there are no gyrfalcons (SAHAGÚN 1990, 814–815) yet says nothing about the Indians' being familiar with falconry.

Despite Fernández de Oviedo's statements and Sahagún's total silence, it is still believed that the indigenous peoples of America, especially those of Mesoamerica,⁴ were familiar with falconry before the arrival of the *conquistadores* ('conquerors').

Let us review what other witnesses to the discovery and conquest of New Spain have to say regarding the subject. In his *Cartas de relación* ('Letters and Dispatches of Cortés')⁵, Hernán Cortés (1485–1547) informs us that

There is a street where they sell game and birds of every species found in this land: chickens, partridges and quails, wild ducks, flycatchers, widgeons, turtledoves, pigeons, cane birds, parrots, eagles and eagle owls, falcons, sparrowhawks and kestrels, and they sell the skins of some of these birds of prey with their feathers, heads, and claws (CORTÉS 1986, 103),

and he describes Montezuma's aviary in great detail:

He also had another house, only a little less magnificent than this, where there was a very beautiful garden with balconies over it; and the facings and flagstones were of jasper and very well made. In this house there were rooms enough for two great princes with all their household. There were also ten pools in which were kept all the many and varied kinds of water birds found in these parts, all of them domesticated. For the sea birds there were pools of salt water, and for river fowl, of fresh water, which was emptied from time to time for cleaning and filling again from the aqueducts. Each species of bird was fed with the food which it eats when wild, so that those which eat fish were given fish, and those which eat worms, worms, and those which eat maize or smaller grain were likewise given those things. And I assure Your Highness that the birds which eat only fish were given 250 pounds each day which were taken from the salt lake. There were three hundred men in charge of these birds who knew no other trade, as there were others who were skilled only in healing sick birds. Above these pools were corridors and balconies, all very finely made, where Mutezuma came to amuse himself by watching them (CORTÉS 1986, 109–110).

Another section was especially devoted to the birds of prey:

He had another very beautiful house, with a large patio, laid with pretty tiles in the manner of a chessboard. There were rooms nine feet high and as large as six paces square. The roof of each of these houses is half covered with tiles while the other half is covered by well-made latticework. In each of these rooms there was kept a bird of prey of every sort that is found in Spain, from the kestrel to the eagle, and many others which have never been seen there. There were large numbers of each of these birds, and in the covered part of each of the rooms was a stick like a perch, and another outside beneath the latticework, and they were on one during the night or when it rained and on the other during the day when the sun was out. All these birds were given chickens to eat and no other food (CORTÉS 1986, 110).

4 Mesoamerica encompasses the southern area of the former New Spain.

5 The *Cartas de relación* are five letters addressed to Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor, also known as Charles I, king of Spain (1500–1558), in which Cortés tells his story from the moment he arrived on the Mexican mainland in 1519 to the expedition to *Las Hibueras* (Honduras) in 1525.

He mentions this aviary again – “Mutezuma had kept in [some of these houses] every species of bird found in these parts” (CORTÉS 1986, 223) – when he discovers there has been an attempt to set it on fire.

Nothing in Cortés’ writings can possibly lead us to believe that Montezuma or any other Aztec nobleman had the faintest idea what falconry was. Yet it must be assumed that Cortés was familiar with this sport because, during the expedition to *Las Hibueras*, Bernal Díaz del Castillo⁶ (1492–1581) notes that Cortés was accompanied by “two falconers, named Perales and Garci Caro” (DÍAZ DEL CASTILLO 2011, 840).

From Díaz del Castillo’s descriptions and accounts it is also very difficult to conclude that the Aztecs were familiar with falconry. According to his reports, Moctezuma even expressed disbelief when he first heard of these techniques until he saw that the Spaniards could actually train a sparrowhawk to hunt:

One day, as many of us officers and soldiers were with Moctezuma, a hawk pounced upon a quail, which, with others, and numbers of pigeons, was kept by his Indian steward, whose business it was to see that our quarters were always clean and tidy. This hawk succeeded in seizing its prey, and flew off with it. As we were all looking on, one of our men, Francisco de Azevedo, cried out, ‘O! what a fine bird! How beautifully it flies away with its prey!’ We were all of the same opinion, and remarked, that this country altogether abounded with birds that might be trained for hawking (*aves de caza de volatería*).

Moctezuma, observing how lively we were discoursing together, was curious to know what it was, and inquired the reason of his page Orteguilla, who told him we were admiring the hawk which had pounced upon the quail, and added, that if we had such a bird in our power, we could teach it to fly from the hand, and attack a bird of any size and kill it.

Then, returned Moctezuma, I will have this same hawk caught, and we shall see whether they can teach it all they say. Upon which, we all took our caps off and thanked him for his kindness. Moctezuma then sent for his birdcatchers (*cazadores de volatería*), and commanded them to bring him the hawk above mentioned. These immediately set to work, and before noon, they actually caught the bird, and presented it to Azevedo, who immediately recognized, by the plumage, that it was the identical one we had seen. We saw many similar instances, and even stronger proofs of the punctuality with which this monarch’s orders were fulfilled. Even now, in his confinement, his subjects not only continued to bring him tribute from the most distant parts of New Spain, but they likewise obeyed his commands implicitly, and stood in such great awe of him, that even the birds which flew in the skies above were brought down for him if he expressed a wish that way (DÍAZ DEL CASTILLO 2011, 366–367).

Francisco López de Gómara (1511–1566?) relates the same anecdote, though in somewhat abridged form, in his *Historia General de las Indias* (‘General History of the Indies’). Although this chronicler, who spent part of his life in Seville, never himself set foot in America, he had direct access to Hernán Cortés (as his chaplain) and to other *conquistadores*.

A difficult enterprise it is to catch a lion because it is dangerous prey and those who attempt it have few weapons and protection, although skill is worth more than strength; but it is much harder to catch birds which fly in the air, as Montezuma’s hunters do; they possess such art and

6 Bernal Díez del Castillo, a foot soldier in Cortés’ expeditions, was later named governor of Guatemala. His memoir is titled *Verdadera historia de la conquista de Nueva España* (‘The True History of the Conquest of New Spain’).

skill that they can catch any bird no matter how wild and flight-ready it may be, when he so orders. It happened one day that the Spaniards who guarded Montezuma saw a sparrowhawk in a hallway and one of them said: “Oh! What a good sparrow hawk! Who would have it!” Then Montezuma called some servants, who were said to be great hunters, and he dispatched them to catch the sparrowhawk and bring it to him. They went off and willingly and skilfully brought it back and Montezuma gave it to the Spaniards. Although this may be hard to believe, it has been widely reported by word of mouth and in writing.

It would be madness for a king like Montezuma to issue this order and foolishness for the others to obey if they did not have the ability or knowledge to carry it out; he did to show off his greatness and arrogance. The hunters brought another wild sparrowhawk and swore it was the same one. If that is true, as is confirmed, then I praise the person who accomplished the task rather than the one who issued it.⁷

And Toribio de Benavente (also known as fray Toribio de Motolinía, 1490?–1569), one of the first twelve Franciscan missionaries to arrive in New Spain in 1524, lived in Mexico City for some time and tells us of his experiences in *Historia de los Indios de Nueva España* (‘History of the Indians of New Spain’):

In this town, Montezuma had all kinds of animals, beasts and reptiles, birds of all species, waterfowl that lived on fish, and even birds that fed on flies, and for all of them he had people who looked after them and attended to their keeping, because Montezuma felt such curiosity for them that he had birds caught and brought to him when he saw them flying in the air and took pleasure in them. A Spaniard who is a trustworthy witness, being one day in the presence of Montezuma, saw that he had taken a fancy to a sparrowhawk that flew by – or perhaps it was to show off his power before the Spaniards – he ordered his men to catch it and the diligence of those who went after the sparrowhawk was so great that they brought that wild sparrowhawk in their hands (BENAVENTE 1970, 298).

It cannot be deduced from these texts that the Aztecs were familiar with falconry simply because they were skilful hunters who could catch live birds.

The basis for the assertion that the Aztecs were accomplished falconers is to be found in Francisco LÓPEZ DE GÓMARA’s *Historia general de las Indias* (‘General History of the Indies’):

When [Montezuma] went hunting, carried on a stretcher on men’s shoulders, he took with him eight or ten Spaniards who guarded him, and 3,000 Mexicans, among them lords, knights, servants, and hunters, who he had with him in great numbers, some for deer stalking [*montear*], other were beaters [*ojeos*], and others for *altanería* [erroneously interpreted as ‘falconry’].⁸

The presence of the word *altanería* in this brief passage leads Javier CEBALLOS ARANDA (2002, 76) in his book about falconry to interpret the word as a cognitive or full synonym of *cetrería* ‘falconry’. In consequence, he draws the conclusion that “the ruler [i.e. Montezuma] (after being captured by Cortés) moved immense teams to practise falconry alongside other forms of hunting”. And he backs up this supposition by comparing it to another quotation from the same text in which the word *altanería* appears again:

7 The quotation is taken from *Corpus diacrónico del español*, an online database of the Real Academia Española <<http://www.rae.es>>.

8 Same as footnote no. 7.

The main pastime of these outings was *caza de altanería* [once again erroneously interpreted as ‘falconry’], with herons, kites, ravens, magpies, and other birds, strong and weak, great and small, with eagles and vultures and other birds of prey which flew up to the clouds, and some of these killed hares, wolves and, as some people say, even deer (fol. 50v).

In light of these two interpretations of *altanería* in López de Gómara’s chronicle, Montezuma did indeed seem to be a passionate follower of the *caza de altanería*. The term *altanería* (if it does indeed mean ‘falconry’ here) used by the chronicler seemingly leaves no room for doubt. And while it is true that, according to the *Diccionario de la lengua castellana por la Real Academia Española* (DRAE)⁹, *altanería*, defined as ‘hunting with falcons and other high-flying birds of prey’, is the fourth and therefore the least frequent meaning of the word.

This very same conclusion can be drawn from Francisco Cervantes de Salazar’s (1514–1575) *Crónica de la Nueva España* (‘Chronicle of New Spain’).¹⁰ Dated in 1560, it would not only seem to tell us that the Aztecs kept birds of prey for hunting –

There was another house near this one, likewise equipped and with very beautiful rooms. This was also called an aviary, not because there were more birds in this one than in the other, but because they were bigger, nobler and of a different species, because they were birds of prey [*de rapiña*] with which one could go hunting. Skilled men looked after them with such minute care that was impossible to exceed (CERVANTES DE SALAZAR 1978, p. I:318). –

but also that Emperor Montezuma

went more frequently to this house [...] than to the others because it was more akin to royalty to own these birds. He would stop by there, asking the wardens and those who were responsible for the birds many questions, many secrets that he wanted to know about the *arte de la cetrería* [art of falconry] and he certainly had the right to, because today the greatest number of birds and best ones anywhere in the world are to be found here (CERVANTES DE SALAZAR 1978, p. I:318).

The problem is that Cervantes de Salazar bases his chronicle on López de Gómara’s work. Since López de Gómara, Hernán Cortés’ chaplain, never set foot in the New World, his main source of information was undoubtedly Cortés’ own *Cartas de relación*. For this reason, the three texts should be considered as one.

How then do we explain Cortés’ and Díaz del Castillo’s absolute silence regarding falconry as opposed to the assertions made by López de Gómara and Cervantes de Salazar? I believe the explanation lies in the different meanings of the word *volatería* in Díaz de Castillo’s *Historia verdadera*. All the editions of the *DRAE*, from the first¹¹ up to the latest (DLE 2014), concur in the first and

9 El *Diccionario de la lengua castellana por la Real Academia Española* (DRAE), now *Diccionario de la Lengua Española* (DLE; <http://dle.rae.es>) is the authoritative dictionary for the Spanish Language. The first edition was published in 1780, and nowadays it is the collaborative work of the Spanish Royal Academy (RAE) and the 21 academies of the Spanish language from Latin America, Phillipines and the United States.

10 Francisco Cervantes de Salazar (1514–1575) is a Spanish Humanist who by 1550 had sailed to New Spain, where he lived until his death. He had a successful academic career as professor and chancellor of the Royal University of Mexico, the first university founded in North America (1551).

11 The first edition of the “official” *Diccionario de la lengua castellana* (see note 6) was published by the Real Academia Española between 1726 and 1739 and is commonly known as *Diccionario de AUTORIDADES* because it exemplifies every meaning with a quote from the most authoritative writers (for the falconry terminology in this dictionary see FRADEJAS RUEDA 1992a).

second meanings: 1. hunting with birds trained for this purpose [i.e. hunting], and 2. a group of different types of birds.

According to the *Corpus diacrónico del español* (CORDE ‘Diachronic Corpus of the Spanish Language’), the first documentation of *volatería* is found at the end of the 15th century in an agreement of the Council of Madrid (27 June 1498), which states that:

said gentlemen resolved with Sancho de Villanueva, who is in charge of salt and game this year, that, in order to provide for the inhabitants of the city and that all vendors be able sell their goods freely, for the rest of this year all those who bring to market *bolatería* (fowl) or any other type of game shall be free of tax duties.¹²

Here the meaning of *bolatería* corresponds to the DLE’s second definition: ‘a group of different types of birds’. This was the usual meaning of the word during the 16th century, as 73.84 % of the cases collected in CORDE prove.

In the *Libro del ejercicio corporal y de sus provechos* (‘Book on body exercise and its benefits’), a text dating from 1553, however, *bolatería* may be interpreted as a full synonym for ‘falconry’:

The truth is that those who invented hunting, so as to catch rabbits, hare, deer, wild boar, and other similar things like *bolatería*, because they were able to combine work with great pleasure and joy, were very learned and worthy of much praise, as they put our human nature to such good use (MÉNDEZ 1553, fol. 44v).

In texts collected in CORDE, and dated to 1560, 1573, 1575, 1589, 1590 and 1596, *volatería* can be substituted for *cetrería* (‘falconry’) or other equivalent terms such as *altanería* or *halconería*.¹³ The conclusion to be drawn from this data is that *volatería* as a synonym of ‘falconry’ does not appear until the second half of the 16th century and, even then, is not the most widespread meaning.¹⁴

Were we to substitute the word *volatería* in the phrase *caza de volatería* from DÍAZ DEL CASTILLO’S (2011) narration for *cetrería*, *halconería* or *altanería*, there would be no contradiction whatsoever in what the Spaniards said in the presence of Montezuma:

y que habia en estas tierras muchas buenas *aves de caza de volatería*
[this country altogether abounded with *birds that might be trained for hawking*].

12 Quoted from the *Libro de ACUERDOS del Concejo Madrileño* and taken from the *Corpus diacrónico del español* (CORDE).

13 For a study of these terms in Spanish falconry treatises see FRADEJAS RUEDA 1992b.

14 During the course of the 17th c. the term *volatería* will replace that of *halconería*, i.e. hunting carried out with falcons. This is evident when the falconers of the royal household describe themselves as “servants in the royal house for the hunting of *volatería*” and in a 1636 document state that they were “previously called *falconeros*” (Toledo, Archivo Histórico Nacional, Nobleza, Frías,C,593,D.2). In 1644, Alonso MARTÍNEZ DE ESPINAR, hunter of king Felipe IV (1605–1665) in his *Arte de ballestería y montería* (*Art of archery and hunting*), defines the term *volatería* in the following way: “*Volatería* is an act in which a human being, through great care and clever training, makes of birds that once roamed freely with the wind trained birds which he can govern (p. 3)” and uses the word *cetrería* as a full synonym at the end of the work: “I have made these observations in compliance with the definition of *cetrería* which I gave at the start of this work; and, because I am not of this profession, I will list the authors who write on the subject, especially for those who would like to learn more” (p. 367).

If, on the other hand, one was to make the same substitution in the second case –

y luego mandó sus *cazadores de volatería*, y les dijo que le trajesen el mismo gavián
[Moctezuma then sent for his *birdcatchers*, and commanded them to bring him the hawk above
mentioned] –

the new phrase ‘hunters of *cetrería*’ or ‘falconry hunters’ [*cazadores de cetrería*] (‘birdcatchers’ in the English translation), would make complete sense, but it would not be what Díaz de Castillo really said.

Had these hunters indeed been falconers, Moctezuma would have known what the Spaniards were talking about and he would not have had to dispatch his hunters of *volatería* to catch the sparrowhawk so that he could see whether the Spaniards were capable of taming it and hunting with it. In reality, the Aztec ruler’s hunters of *volatería* devoted themselves to catching birds by any means whatsoever. This is the meaning of the *Diccionario de AUTORIDADES*’ Latin translation: *Ars aucupatoria*, ‘the art of catching birds’. It also agrees with what Hernando RUIZ ALARCÓN (1999) in his treatise documenting the superstitions and non-Christian customs and practices of the indigenous people of Mexico reports in 1629:

On incantations and sorcery used in hunting, especially *volatería*.

It is the custom of [the indigenous people of Mexico] to hunt *volatería* with nets, which they fasten to the banks of the stream or springs where the birds come to drink. To ensure success, guided by their superstitions, they conjure the nets and, for even better results, they assign themselves divine power.

Thus, the supposition that the pre-Columbian peoples knew and practised falconry is based on the erroneous use of the new meaning of *volatería* ‘hunting with birds trained for this purpose [i.e. hunting]’, which developed during the course of the 16th century.

CEBALLOS ARANDA (2002, 76) further sustains that there is graphic proof of the practice of falconry by the Mixtecs.¹⁵ His assertion is based on the interpretation of an image from the *Codex Zouche-Nuttall*, an illuminated accordion-folded Mixtec manuscript written on deer skin, currently at the British Museum.¹⁶ This codex, written between 1350 and 1450, contains two independent narrations. The recto side of the document (p. 1–41) is concerned with the royal lineage of Tilantongo, a Mixtec citystate. The verso side (p. 42–84), records the genealogy, marriages and political and military feats of the Mixtec ruler *Iya Nacuaa Teyusi Ñaña* (Lord Eight Deer Jaguar-Claw, 1063–1115 CE). The ruler is portrayed next to his name, represented by eight circles and a stag’s head (p. 43; upper right)¹⁷.

On p. 47 (fol. 52; cf. Fig. 2) we are told that the rulers of several cities came to Lord Eight Deer Jaguar-Claw to accept him as their king. They are depicted by six human figures holding a gift (a cocoa bean, a feather fan, a jaguar, a gold necklace, and an anthropomorphic figure) and we are offered their calendar names (Five Wind, Five Eagle, Nine Movement, Nine Rabbit, Six Flower and Seven Lizard) and the cities where they came from (only for four of them: Head City; Maguey City,

15 The Mixtecs were one of the largest indigenous populations at the time of the Aztec Empire; they inhabited the present-day Mexican state of Oaxaca and were to some extent subjugated by the Aztecs.

16 London, British Museum, Add. Mss. 39671 (museum no. Am1902,0308.1).

17 The name of this ruler, and of any other Mixtec, is expressed by the date of birth according to the Aztec 260-day cycle built by means of 13 numbers and 20 different signs (mostly animals) used in a fixed order (ANDERS et al. 1992, 65–66).



Fig. 2. Lord Five Eagle, from Maguay City offering an eagle to Lord 8 Deer Jaguar-Claw (Codex Zouche-Nuttall [British Museum], p. 47 [fol. 52]).

Crack City and Grey Bird City). The last figure in the series, on the lower right,¹⁸ is offering a bird of prey. This is Lord Five Eagle (an eagle's head and five circles drawn in front of this figure), and comes from Maguay City (the topographic pictogram for city is below the human figure and on it there is a plant – a maguay, more commonly know as agave –, and the gift he brings is an eagle that denotes military strength and courage in war.¹⁹ The two pictograms on the left are two of the cities conquered by Lord 8 Deer Jaguar-Claw.

Therefore, this simple image, out of context, cannot lead to the conclusion that the Mixtecs practised falconry, if falconry is to be defined as a type of 'hunting wild game carried out with trained birds of prey'. Nevertheless, it must be admitted that today there is a tendency to use the word 'falconry' to describe many activities in which birds of prey are used. But they do not respond to the traditional definition of falconry, only the application of falconry techniques used for the handling of birds of prey. Thus CEBALLOS ARANDA (2002, 76) mitigates his assertion by saying "that there can be no doubt that in Mexico birds were at least captured". Capturing birds is a far cry from falconry.

My conclusion is that falconry, defined as hunting wild game with trained birds of prey, was unknown to pre-Columbian peoples. Neither the pictorial evidence I have just described, that is abso-

18 In fact, it is the second element of the page, as the reading of the codex is boustrephedon, i.e. it starts is in the upper right corner of every page, goes down, and up to the top again.

19 For a full account of this codex and its meaning see ANDERS et al. 1992; WILLIAMS 2009 and 2013.

lutely symbolic in an historical narrative, nor the words of the chroniclers of the West Indies indicate that the indigenous peoples were familiar with the art of falconry. Those who did cite it as an Aztec practice were either not eye witnesses to the events – as is the case of López de Gómara –, or they themselves fell prey to the semantic change of the Spanish word *volatería*, which was in the process of acquiring the new meaning ‘hunting with trained birds of prey’ but which was still used in the old sense of ‘a group of different birds’. And, while it is true that over the course of time *volatería* would indeed become a full synonym for falconry, this is not the case in our documentation.

Consequently, falconry (*cetrería*) was completely unknown to American indigenous people, and first crossed the Atlantic with the Spaniards. The first falconers on the mainland would seem to be those who accompanied Hernán Cortés on the expedition to *Las Hibueras*, Perales and Garci Caro. However, they were not the first falconers to arrive in the Americas. One Pedro Dársena, by profession falconer (*cetrero*), figures on the payroll among the 1,500 men who set sail with Columbus on his Second Journey (1493–1496) (VARELA MARCOS et. al 1998, 56).¹⁹

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19 We might pose the question of why a falconer was enrolled in Columbus’ Second Voyage to America, to which there is no easy answer. According to LEÓN GUERRERO (2006, 84), the presence of a falconer among the men that took part in this second voyage was the result of vague news provided by Columbus of the abundance of birds of prey in the New World. These news immediately roused the interest of King Ferdinand II (1452–1516), who was a great practitioner of the art of falconry and who sent Columbus a letter (dated 16 Aug. 1494; Sevilla, Archivo General de Indias, Fondo de Veragua, Patronato 295, no. 24) ordering him to bring back as many falcons as possible (MARTÍNEZ SALINAS ALONSO 2011), and ordered a falcon catcher to be appointed to trap falcons in America. So interested was the crown that in 1501 it established the post of Royal Falcon Catcher of the Indies (*Redero mayor de las Indias*); the first person to hold it was Álvaro Pérez de Meneses and among his duties was to select from all falcons trapped in America the best specimens for the King’s mews (MARTÍNEZ SALINAS ALONSO 2013).

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