Chapter 5

Storming the Viceregal Palace

As Mexican ‘insurgents’ celebrated their Catholic faith and their loyalty to the King of Spain in 1624, Philip IV was undeniably present in the central square through one of his several simulacra. Recently used to signal Philip’s accession to the throne and on the occasion of his father’s funeral in 1622,¹ the royal banner meant that his Majesty was fully present before his Mexican subjects via his coat of arms. A powerful tool of royal authority, the royal banner was involved in ceremonies performed all over the empire, and access to it was strictly regulated by written and customary law. As we have seen in the short account of the Tumult at the beginning of this book, shortly after the first attacks against the viceregal palace, Gelves turned to the banner to calm down the insurgents as a symbol of the king’s image and authority. As a way to abate the fury of the mob at the door of the palace, a flag displaying the king’s coat of arms was hung from the windows of the Audiencia quarters at 9.00 am.²

The viceroy and his defenders inside the palace were right in that the Tumult could not continue when involving open disregard for one of the king’s simulacra. However, instead of leaving the square and returning to their daily cohorts, the insurgents resolved to take it down.³ No harm was intended to the banner. In a ceremonial parade, thereby indicating their loyalty to the Crown, the Mexican insurgents accompanied it to the temporary cathedral, on the

¹ Rah, Salazar y Castro, u-18, Dedicatoria y elogio (1623), by A. de Villalobos, Book 9/1391, fols. 93⁴–98⁵.
² BNE, American Manuscripts, Ms. 18,634/59, Relación de lo sucedido en México lunes 15 de enero de 1624 años, gobernando el Conde de Prie go don Diego Pimentel (February 1624), fol. 3⁴.
³ See Jan Luyken (engraver) and Pieter van der Aa (publisher), Bestorming van het Paleis van de Onderkoning van Mexico, 1623, in J. Ludwig Gottfried, Historische Chronicle (1698), vol. 1, p. 1085, dimensions 110 × 157 mm. The image is part of a posthumous edition of the Historische Chronicle by the German erudite Johann Ludwig Gottfried (?–1637), also known through his Latinised name, Johann Philipp Abelin. Conserved at both the Rijksmuseum and the Amsterdam Museum, the image has been briefly discussed by Bautista y Lugo in a blog entry from 2015; G. Bautista y Lugo, ‘El tumulto de 1624 de la ciudad de México en Holanda’, in Blog Letras Libres (18 August 2015), available online at www.letraslibres.com (accessed May 2016).
same square, and hung it from the tower. In other words, the insurgents were forcibly representing the restoration of harmony between temporal and spiritual authority, which had been subverted by the viceroy’s recent decision to exile the archbishop.

Although the unauthorised manipulation of the banner by the crowd could be perceived as an act of revolt itself, the insurgents’ recourse to a ceremony to honour it was to be highly significant in future investigations concerning the Tumult. As a public representation of Mexicans’ loyalty to the banner and, thus, to the king, this moment was to be crucial in establishing whether the disturbances were a protest against the viceroy alone or a broad challenge to Spanish authority. Indeed, the removal of the banner appears central in the only visual representation of the Tumult, albeit it is one from the late seventeenth century (see the Dutch engraving from the 1690s, on the book cover and also Figure 8).

Later on that same day, his Majesty’s simulacrum was again put to use. With the viceroy in the palace and the Audiencia in the Cabildo headquarters, when the latter took over the viceroyalty’s government as an extreme measure in order to quell the Tumult the king was present too. The proclamation of the regency was immediately followed by his Majesty’s ‘appearance’ in the square through the royal banner hanging from the municipal headquarters. The simple use of the banner had the immediate effect of demonstrating where royal authority resided. Moreover, when the oidor Vergara Gaviria appeared in the square as the newly appointed Capitán general (a title usually given to the viceroy by the king), he was preceded by the royal banner. In the span of one day the right to manipulate the banner had shifted from the viceroy to one of the oidores and, thanks to the insurgents, from the palace to the headquarters of the Cabildo, where the Audiencia was then gathered.

5 Ayala Collection, Ms. II-2863, Relación de las cosas más notables que hizo el Marqués de Gelves desde que empezó a servir el virreinato de la nueva España y que fueron causa de que los más de los magistrados y gente popular concibiesen contra su persona y gobierno sumo odio y enemistad, y del alboroto y convocatoria que sucedió en México el día 15 de enero del año 1624 (1628), fol. 213r.