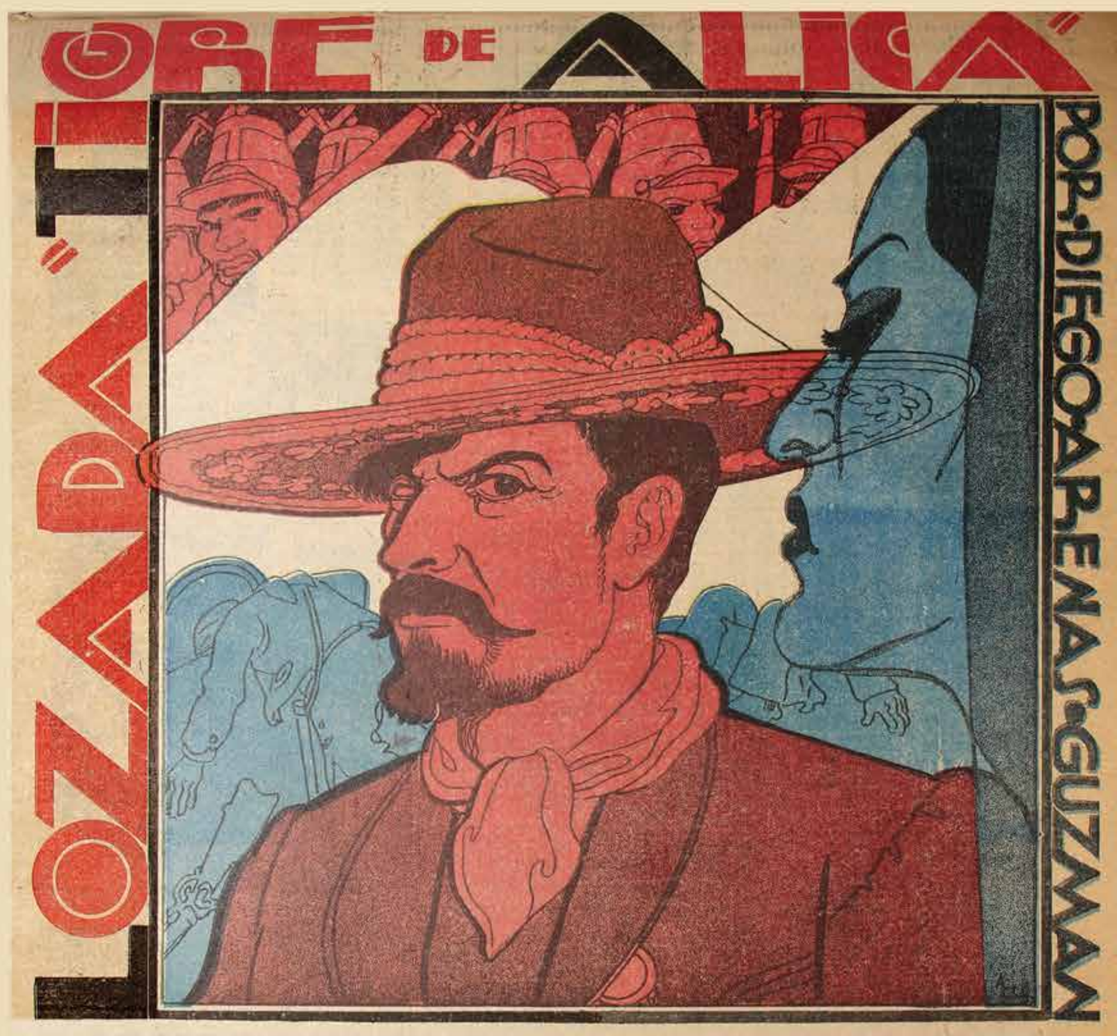
POPULAR POLITICS AND REBELLION IN MEXICO

Manuel Lozada and La Reforma, 1855–1876

Zachary Brittsan



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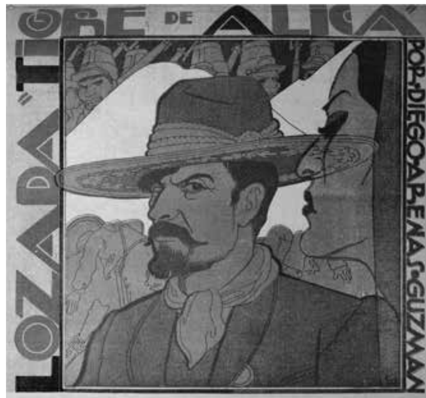

Zachary Brittsan

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For Peggy and Ted

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Preface

Ireneo Paz, a Guadalajara native, an ardent liberal, and a contemporary of Manuel Lozada, penned a fictionalized account of the dead man's life in 1885. The story begins with the fateful first meeting between the bandit Lozada and a representative of the prominent Barrón y Forbes Company, presumably taking place in the late 1840s. By highlighting the nascent alliance between conservative regional elites and the rural masses, Paz revealed his preoccupation with how a small-time bandit could have managed to sustain a conservative rebellion against liberal rule for fifteen years. Although Paz's focus on the marriage of elite ideology, money, and weapons with unscrupulous peasant foot soldiers disregards peasant agency and political culture, his opening pages reveal a wealth of contextual clues about the physical environment and patterns of human engagement in Jalisco's seventh canton that inspired a sustained defense of local interests.[1]

The encounter between Lozada and the unnamed representative occurred at an undisclosed site along the banks of the Santiago River in the foothills of the Sierra de Álica, a jagged expanse of mountains in Mexico's Sierra Madre Occidental that runs north and south across the region. Located outside the urban center of Tepic (the capital of Jalisco's seventh canton), the meeting place constituted an environmental crossroads. Although the river was a valuable source of water and served as a thread that ostensibly connected some foothill villages and haciendas with urban centers downstream, it was not navigable for large stretches and therefore limited as an engine of commerce. The semitropical climate of Tepic and the surrounding foothills nevertheless supported a wide variety of seasonal commercial agriculture and pasturelands. To the east, the foothills gave way to the more temperate climes, scrub oak, pine forests, and limited agricultural space of the Sierra de Álica. To the west, tropical lowlands descended to a mix of rugged coastline and marshy swamplands.

This particular environmental setting certainly affected the human geography in significant ways, ensuring the demographic and commercial vibrancy of the city of Tepic and surrounding plateau. San Blas, the only major port communicating with Guadalajara, Mexico's second-largest city, was of paramount importance to the regional economy in the early to mid-nineteenth century. Yet the muggy climate that supported tropical diseases and biting gnats in the port town made Tepic much more desirable as a place of residence for merchants.[2] While San Blas maintained relevance as a point of commerce, most of the pesos generated from trade were reinvested in

Tepic and surrounding environs. The growing commercial networks and agricultural sites of production also made the plateau region desirable as a labor site. Many indigenous and *mestizo* peasants from the area and surrounding highlands of the Sierra de Álica constituted the primary workforce. Even Manuel Lozada and his gang members, who had found sustenance by preying on growing streams of commerce, spent their early years working on the region's haciendas. So, more than a geographic crossroads, the large central swath of Jalisco's seventh canton constituted a point of congregation, interaction, and investment for a diverse cross-section of local society.

But just because foreign merchants, mestizos, and Indians intermingled regularly in and around Tepic, the seventh canton did not constitute a proverbial melting pot. Paz's words make this clear. The unarmed representative of the Barrón y Forbes Company was "respectably dressed" and traveled on a bridled horse. In addition to such markers of class, civility, and urbanity, his manner of speech suggested that he had enjoyed a formal education. Even if the representative had been born locally, he was linked to a small but growing community of mostly European foreigners who entered the region after the fall of the Spanish monopoly to find their fortune. In contrast, Lozada and his gang were largely illiterate, humbly dressed, traveled by foot, and had never ventured too far from home. Although Paz dismissively and incorrectly refers to Lozada as a "little Indian" of limited mental agility, his language reveals an air of perceived ethnic distinction that had long divided the European and mestizo lowlanders—with whom Paz clearly identified—from the mestizo and indigenous residents of the foothills and highlands.[3] Even if three hundred years of racial mixing and nearly thirty years of independence had rendered useless most legal measures of difference, a mélange of cultural markers constituted an enduring vocabulary upon which one could call to discern oneself from an inferior "other."

These tensions rarely surfaced, however, and they certainly did not limit commercial interaction across class lines. In fact many residents of Tepic exuded optimism about the economic and social potential for the region so long as certain obstacles to trade could be overcome. According to Paz, the representative of the Barrón y Forbes Company quickly revealed to Lozada that the primary impetus for his visit was to persuade Lozada to put his muscle and local knowledge to work for the merchants. Specifically, he wanted Lozada's gang to facilitate the illicit exchange of goods, describing them as "cargos of merchandise that sometimes enter via permitted ports in agreement with port employees, and other times via any coastal point, which have to be defended from the port attendants or any public force that tries to capture them."[4] Despite the public prominence of the Barrón y Forbes Company, they and other commercial entities like them would go to great lengths to protect themselves from the onerous tariffs assessed on imported goods as well as the *alcabalas* (sales taxes) assessed on the overland transit of these goods. When port officials could not be paid to look the other way, the area under their watchful eyes could be circumvented. Such practices were part of doing business in the seventh canton of Jalisco and speak to local economic interests that spanned social

categories to the degree that white elites and mestizo toughs found common cause. By manipulating or defying the tax collectors, merchants padded their profits and ensured their local economic dominance. For his part, Lozada entered into contact with the very revenue streams that later would underwrite his authority as an arbiter of local politics.

If a specific set of environmental factors and financial incentives brought a diverse array of actors together, an amorphous honor code cultivated a sense of trust among them. In Paz's imagination, after agreeing to the terms under which Lozada would provide protection for illicit trade, the Barrón y Forbes representative learned that Lozada's illiteracy prevented him from faithfully executing a written contract. Without hesitation, the representative responded, "It does not matter. Do you, sir, give your word of honor?" Lozada ratified the contract simply by responding in the affirmative and offering the visitor "a measure of cane liquor and cold rolls filled with chopped meat."[5] The inviolability of such niceties should not be overestimated, but they speak to the prominence of shared cultural understandings based in a sense of masculine honor that easily substituted for universalizing legal codes and contracts. One's good character, affirmed through an observable respect for the sanctity of interpersonal relations, formed the basis for mutual trust and did not require the presence of a lawyer. In this manner, parties of distinct social and racial backgrounds entered into agreements without the pretense of resolving or eradicating such markers of distinction.[6]

The involvement of the Catholic Church as a transmitter of moral authority in Jalisco also speaks to the ongoing relevance of supposedly *passé* forms of engagement. Contrary to the assumption that it was a monolithic body taking a reactive stance against liberal initiatives from the moment of independence in 1821, the hierarchy in Guadalajara recognized its privileged position and sought to shape the secularizing tide of the Age of Revolutions as committed citizens of the Republic, at least until midcentury.[7] Rural priests, a much less privileged subset of the church with a stark awareness of local needs, were more varied in their relationship with temporal authorities.[8] One of the ways in which religious authorities in Guadalajara attempted to steady themselves against the pull of anticorporate liberalism was to expand their presence in Tepic in the early 1850s, traveling through the Sierra de Álica and inquiring about local religious needs. If anything, they hoped to maintain and even expand the moral authority of the church by engaging with an increasingly restless flock.

In the case of Tepic proper, the Sierra de Álica, and many villages along the foothills of the seventh canton of Jalisco, secularization was less visible than in the capital. Here the colonial church had established strong ties of affinity, and even as those ties were weakened after independence, the laicization of faith kept religious sentiments strong in the region. Missionaries may have encouraged Guadalupan devotions among indigenous communities with some success, but such devotions took on a life of their own. The popularity of a Marian shrine in the town of Talpa grew immensely after independence and drew devotees from all over the western

mountains of Jalisco. This "Queen of the Lowly," as she was known, became one of the most important shrines in western Mexico by midcentury.[9] Far from constituting a brake on material well-being or a rigid imposition from the Catholic hierarchy, local residents engaged the church and rural priests as sympathetic if not always malleable spiritual interlocutors.

Even liberals like Ireneo Paz, who rejected the legitimacy of religion as a component of contemporary political culture, could not ignore the vibrancy of local religiosity in Jalisco. For him, Lozada's religion stood as a substitute for political agency. During a second meeting in late 1857, Paz's fictionalized representative requested that Lozada take sides in the country's brewing political dispute. At first Lozada was reluctant, suggesting that national political debates "will happen over there, in Mexico City." After convincing Lozada that the upcoming conflict was already having local repercussions, the representative explained the nature of the contending political platforms. Paz depicted Lozada in this moment as having great difficulty comprehending the ideological framework for armed rebellion. Nevertheless, Paz's Lozada enthusiastically pledged to defend Catholicism, saying to the representative, "It will not cost me anything—I will do it right now if you want—all the more so because I have a very strong devotion for the Virgin of Guadalupe."[10] In this reading, provincial religiosity, alongside financial reward, served as the primary motivator for Lozada and his fellow rebels. Political awareness was as distant and foreign to them as the nation's capital.

Although the dialogue between Lozada and the representative of the Barrón y Forbes Company is apocryphal, the important alliance that emerged from the meeting can be verified in historical documents from just a few years later. Furthermore, Ireneo Paz's temporal and geographic proximity to events as they unfolded offers an intriguing lens through which to appreciate the economic, social, and cultural environment of Jalisco's seventh canton in the mid-nineteenth century. Tepic and its environs may have been geographically distant from Mexico City, but contrary to Paz's view, it resided firmly within the bounds of national political discourse. Over the course of Mexico's violent Reforma (1855–1876), Manuel Lozada and his supporters willingly took up arms against liberal initiatives. Their local conservative currents may not have been strong enough to stand in perpetual opposition to the growing national tide of liberalism, but they continue to inform the story of Mexico today.

Popular Politics and Rebellion in Mexico

Introduction

Fragments of a Buried Mirror

When the late literary giant and cultural observer Carlos Fuentes authored *The Buried Mirror* (1922), he chose a simple but compelling metaphor to frame his study of five hundred years of the history of the Americas. The titular mirror represented the Spanish, indigenous, and African cultural traits that had imprinted themselves to a great degree upon Latin American societies. So strong were these characteristics, the metaphor suggests, that Latin American individuals holding the mirror could in fact recognize a part of themselves by looking upon any one of these sites in the Atlantic World. This idea is particularly jarring in the sense that many Latin Americans and most of Latin America's leaders since 1810 have taken pains to distance their countries and communities politically, economically, and culturally from their Spanish ancestors. Although these same leaders have embraced some aspects of Mexico's indigenous heritage—especially in the twentieth century—they have done so with unease. Fuentes took issue with these tendencies, arguing that half-hearted measures denied or "buried" the very essence of what it meant to be Latin American. He proposed a different tack, recognizing the enduring importance of Spanish, indigenous, and African heritage in contemporary society. For all the historical tragedies inherent in the colonial experience, he insisted, an understanding of the cultural continuities between Latin America and Spain could potentially "transcend the economic and political disunity and fragmentation of the Hispanic world."[1] Although the publication of the book coincided with the quincentennial of Columbus's seminal crossing of the Atlantic, it was not so much an exaltation of Europeanness as it was an appeal for readers to make peace with this past, gain a better understanding of their present, and be less fettered by historical baggage in their confrontation with contemporary problems.

Fuentes's laudable if over-optimistic endeavor, which gazed across the Atlantic Ocean and multiple centuries, has a modern and more local echo. A fragment of his metaphorical mirror, certainly one of many, lies buried in the nineteenth-century earth of rural Jalisco. As liberal statesmen and military men expelled French imperialists from Mexico in the 1860s, they simultaneously sought to inter the remains of a domestic, conservative opposition that had tolerated and in some cases fought for the imperial cause. Mid-nineteenth-century Mexico, not unlike early twenty-first-century Mexico, was plagued by violence in the countryside. Entire portions of the country pursued agendas that undermined national stability. Broadly national conflicts like the War of Reform (1858–1860) and the

French Intervention (1862–1867) obscured local conflicts even as they fueled them. Such regionalized rebellions are crucial to understanding deeper, more personal characteristics of the ideological disagreements that shaped the period. One popular movement in particular, led by a nominally conservative mestizo, Manuel Lozada, spanned the War of Reform and the French Intervention before peaking in the early 1870s. The rebellion ranged widely across the western state of Jalisco (at that time also encompassing present-day Nayarit) and counted approximately seven thousand people among its ranks. Rebel leaders drew the ire of leading figures like Benito Juárez and Sebastian Lerdo de Tejada while pretenders to the throne in Mexico City like Maximilian von Hapsburg and Porfirio Díaz sought alliances with Manuel Lozada to enhance their military status. Despite such high-profile dalliances, Lozada's rebellion has remained little more than a historical footnote.

How did such a prominent rural *caudillo* (leader) slip so quickly from the historical registry? In July 1873, just five months removed from his largest military campaign, Lozada sat in the Tepic jail awaiting execution. Federal troops aided by Lozada's former ally, Andrés Rosales, had captured Lozada near his hometown of San Luis de Lozada in the company of his wife and twenty-five loyal followers. They brought him into Tepic and put him on trial before a hastily assembled military tribunal. Two days later, officers sentenced Lozada to death and photographed him for the first time in his life (see fig. 1). Early on the morning of 19 July 1873, liberal troops escorted Lozada to a hill outside of town and put him before a firing squad. They placed his body in an unmarked grave, attempting to bury him in the anonymity from which he had emerged nearly two decades earlier. From their perspective, they had stamped out a relic of Mexico's barbaric past, further clearing the way for the liberal vision of national consolidation and progress.[2]

Lozada's death corresponded with the decline of political conservatism at the national level, rendered unviable well before the dawn of Porfirian rule in 1876. Conservative Catholics' ill-fated alliance with the French invaders and subsequent military defeat by liberals in the 1860s had relegated them to public obscurity. The emerging liberal state did everything in its power to dictate the terms of public memory, and their remembrances to Lozada clearly revealed their plans for Mexico's future. By essentially hiding the physical location of his body, federal troops greatly reduced the possibility that any heroic memory of Lozada would enjoy a posthumous celebration.[3] Unlike the heroic cult that authorities quickly embraced in the wake of Emiliano Zapata's assassination during Mexico's 1910 Revolution, liberals in Jalisco in 1873 took pains to avoid the attachment of sacred meaning to Lozada's corpse.[4] Instead authorities erected a fluted column with a Corinthian and Ionic cap in the middle of Tepic's central plaza as a memorial to Lozada's military defeat. The monument, which still stands today, clearly symbolized the victory of the Republic over the forces of disorder that Lozada represented. Tepic's citizenry, the monument conveyed, would be better served reflecting on the Greek heritage of their ideas than on the bandit scourge that had spent the better part of fifteen years inciting ethnic, religious, and political violence.

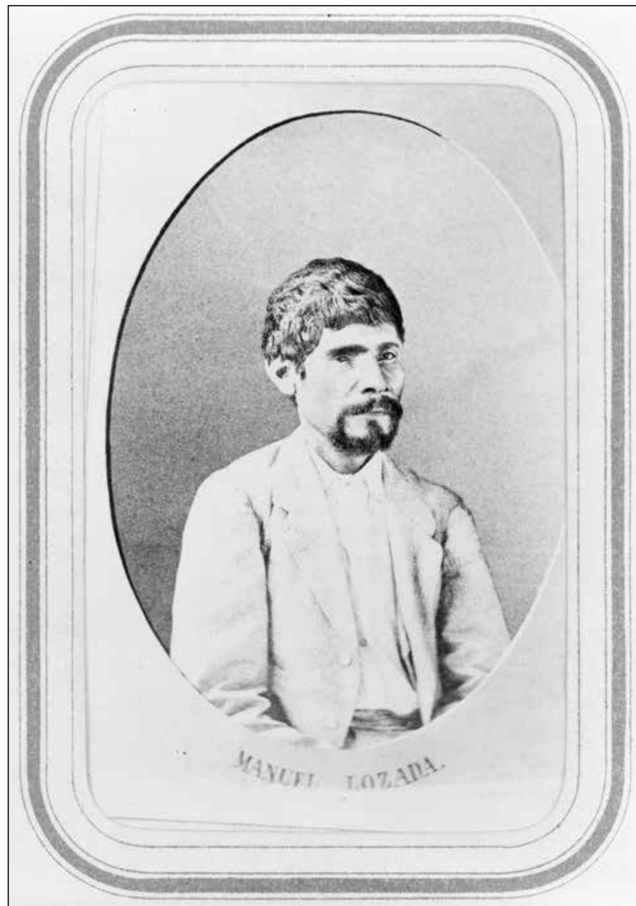

FIGURE 1: This image is one of two photographs taken of Manuel Lozada in Tepic after he had been sentenced to death by firing squad in July 1873. In keeping with the somber moment, the portrait is devoid of objects or accessories that might have indicated his prominence as a regional leader. An unintentional dynamite explosion the previous year had scarred the right side of his body, visibly damaging his right eye. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

For decades, this narrative controlled the public sphere both at the national and local levels. Although this figurative act of forgetting was underwritten by real violence, the largely successful suppression of conservative narratives and memory has had lasting cultural and political ramifications. The liberal campaign to exude modernity and exclude a political identity that traced its roots to the indigenous precolonial and Spanish colonial eras was based on the false assumption that Mexico in the mid-nineteenth century constituted a *tabula rasa*. Instead of peering into the mirror and embracing the maddeningly disparate yet vibrant regional polities that constituted Mexico, public authorities buried their mirror and sought to move on. As the contentious and regionalized nature of contemporary politics suggests, however, moving on has proved to be much easier in theory than in practice. Digging up the story of Manuel Lozada will not alone heal ongoing political fragmentation in Mexico or elsewhere in Latin America, but it can provide a much-needed understanding of cultural difference.

This telling of the story may not rewrite the history of liberal victory at the national level between 1855 and 1876, but it does raise serious questions about the consolidation of liberal nationalism among Mexico's rural citizenry.[5] By openly

embracing and expressing conservative sympathies after 1855, Manuel Lozada engaged with a local cultural-value system and generated a groundswell of support from everyday people, which challenged an elite worldview. Analysis of government correspondence, military documents, parish records, newspapers, and Manuel Lozada's proclamations and personal letters makes clear that he had tapped into an ideological undercurrent that I term "popular conservatism."[6] Defense of the Catholic Church, the integrity of communal landholdings, and local political autonomy constituted the mainstays of this belief system that was rarely articulated but consistently enforced by Manuel Lozada and his followers. Lozada's brand of rough justice and conservative military alliances made him unpalatable to most outside observers, yet they allowed an individual of modest origin to maintain a viable rebellion until his capture and execution by federal forces in 1873. Although Lozada's supporters contested national reforms and shaped state formation within the confines of the nineteenth century, knowing their story is essential to a fully realized understanding of political culture in Mexico today.

A Corner of the Mirror Revealed

A glimpse of this alternative narrative emerges in an unusual obituary recorded by the priest of Tepic in 1873. The entry about Manuel Lozada is unlike any of the hundreds of otherwise formulaic obituaries that year. Four identical illustrations of skull and crossbones adorn each corner of the entry. Above each skull hovers a small cross (see fig. 2). Like those before and after it, the entry was made by the priest

FIGURE 2: Father Ignacio Ayala recorded Manuel Lozada's violent demise in July 1873. Although Lozada's obituary in Tepic's *libro de defunciones* (death register) is formulaic in many respects, the highly visible skulls and crossbones adorning each corner of his entry stray significantly from the script. Courtesy of the Archdiocese of Tepic.

of Tepic, Ignacio Ayala. Although the meaning of the skull and crossbones today is often associated with poison or piracy, it held an entirely different meaning for Father Ayala. Dating back to the colonial period, the skull and crossbones often marked the entryway to Catholic burial grounds, distinguishing the holiness of the space.[7] More contemporaneously, the symbol adorned the sarcophagi of individuals who had served the church during their lives (see fig. 3). The sarcophagus pictured below is located in the chapel adjacent the cathedral in Guadalajara, Jalisco's capital and urban core. It contains the remains of José de Jesús Ortíz y Rodríguez, Guadalajara's archbishop between 1901 and 1912.[8] The Latin inscription above the skull and crossbones, "*Ossa et cineres*" (bones and ashes), yields little insight, but the symbol's association with such an important religious figure and its prominent location on the sarcophagus near the chapel's altar suggest that the image was intended in homage to Rodríguez's high standing within the church.

In Lozada's case, in addition to the symbolic meaning conveyed by the skull and crossbones, the text of the obituary entered by Ignacio Ayala is also notable. Obituaries

FIGURE 3: This sarcophagus in the chapel adjoining Guadalajara's cathedral contains the remains of Archbishop José de Jesús Ortíz y Rodríguez. The skull and crossbones in high relief at the image's center mark the final resting place for a distinguished leader of the Catholic Church. Courtesy of the Archdiocese of Guadalajara.

tended to be extremely formal (and formulaic) in their manner of addressing the recently deceased, but Lozada's title was particularly reverent. Most of the names of the dead were preceded by "Sor/Sra" or "Don/Doña," yet Ignacio Ayala identified Lozada as "Sor. General D. Manuel."[9] This combination of honorific and title suggests that Ayala held Lozada in high regard. Acknowledging his standing as a general is especially interesting, since it was a title granted Lozada by the French imperialists in the 1860s and later used only by Lozada and his supporters in the seventh canton of Jalisco. Members of the opposition generally refused to attribute such a high military grade to Lozada. Even granting that some residents may have addressed Lozada as a general out of fear rather than loyalty and respect, that fear must have been greatly diminished after 19 July 1873, when Lozada was executed. Father Ayala chose to draw the skull and crossbones around Lozada's especially formal obituary without any conceivable pressure to do so. His decision stands as a lasting indicator that religious leaders recognized Lozada as an ally of the church. Such an unexpected find suggests there is another side to the story of Manuel Lozada's movement than the one created by government officials in 1873.

Establishing Manuel Lozada's religiosity, however, is a difficult endeavor; the record of his religious practices is scant. Enough information does emerge, nonetheless, to conclude that he did embrace Catholic spiritual moorings at important junctions in his life. Born in San Luis on 28 September 1828, he was taken to the parish seat near Tepic by his parents, Norberto García and Cecilia González, and baptized two days later.[10] Lozada's engagement with the Catholic Church as a parishioner is unknown until much later in his life. At some point in his adulthood, Lozada called upon the priest of Jalisco (a small town near Tepic, not the state by the same name), Father González, to take his confession and marry him to Eligia Montes.[11] It is likely that he cultivated amicable relations with religious personnel beyond that point, attending mass occasionally, baptizing his children, and sending them to primary school under the tutelage of priests in the 1860s and early 1870s. These moments may reveal little about the depth of Lozada's belief system, but they do illustrate that his personal convictions generally adhered to established norms of religious service. Lozada's obituary in 1873 may have marked his final religious transaction, but it was far from being his only interaction with the Catholic Church.

As will be developed in the chapters to follow, the church was much more forgiving of his human peccadilloes than was the state. Understanding Lozada's personal piety in the context of the political struggle described above demonstrates how his enigmatic relationship with the religious establishment developed and why local priests tolerated the violence associated with Lozada's rebellion. At the same time, an analysis of Lozada's faith explodes any notion that he was just a millennial figure seeking to bring otherworldly salvation to the residents of the Sierra de Álica. Lozada was a natural ally of the church when the national conflict pitting religious conservatives against liberal statesmen erupted into civil war in 1857, but the relationship that emerged over the intervening years was much more practical than fanatical. What it did reveal was that religious piety constituted an important component