

Mesoamerican Codices

*Calendrical knowledge and ceremonial
practice in Indigenous religion and history*

ALESSIA FRASSANI

BAR INTERNATIONAL SERIES 3085

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COVER IMAGE *The day after the ceremony. House of Alejandra Martínez, Agua Colorada, San José Tenango. Photo by Javier García.*

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Ai miei nonni

Contents

List of Illustrations	xi
List of Audio Files Available Online	xvi
Abstract	xvii
Introduction	1
1. Diviners and Divination	7
1.1. Two examples of Mazatec divination.....	7
1.2. Priests and diviners in ancient and colonial images.....	11
1.3. Divination and ceremony.....	17
2. Night Ceremonies and Chants	25
2.1. Colonial views on night ceremonies.....	25
2.2. Mazatec night ceremonies.....	27
2.2.1. Marina Mendoza.....	27
2.2.2. Baldomero Pineda and the chant of the grandparents.....	30
2.2.3. Leonardo Morales.....	32
2.3. Colonial chanting.....	34
3. The Mesoamerican Calendar	37
3.1. The tonalpohualli.....	37
3.2. The xihuitl.....	40
3.3. The calendar and the festival cycle.....	44
3.4. The festival cycle in the southeastern Nahua region.....	46
4. The Ceremonial Cycle in Colonial Sources and the Ancient Books	51
4.1. Teotleco.....	51
4.2. Emblematic and narrative representations of the veintenas.....	57
4.3. The veintenas in the Codex Borgia.....	62
4.3.1. The quest.....	70
4.3.2. Conclusions.....	74
5. Ritual and Historical Time	75
5.1. Historical time and the Codex Borbonicus.....	75
5.2. The Christian and Mesoamerican calendars.....	81
6. Prophecy, Patronage, and Purpose in the Ancient Religious Manuscripts	87
6.1. The patronage of the Codex Borbonicus.....	87
6.2. The prophetic value of pictography.....	92
6.3. Provenience and dating of the Codex Borgia.....	94
6.4. New Fire and new codices.....	99
7. The Evolution of Early Colonial Pictography	105
7.1. The Codices Telleriano-Remensis and Vaticanus A.....	105
7.1.1. Quetzalcoatl as culture hero.....	106
7.1.2. Cosmology and the tonalpohualli.....	110
7.2. The Codices Tudela and Magliabechiano.....	113
7.2.1. Ritual cloaks.....	114
7.2.2. The tonalpohualli and the veintenas.....	117
7.2.3. Xochilhuitl and the pulque gods.....	119
7.2.4. The ceremonial use of plants.....	120
7.2.5. Gods and ceremonies in folios 89r–92r of the Codex Magliabechiano.....	125
8. Manuscript Painting and the Conventos	131
8.1. The work of Sahagún.....	132

8.1.1. The gods and the chants	133
8.1.2. The huehuetlatolli and the book	136
8.1.3. History and its moral	139
8.2. The Codex Yanhuitlan	143
8.3. Discussion	148
Conclusion	149
Manuscripts and Visual Sources.....	151
Appendix.....	155
Bibliography	157

List of Illustrations

Note: Source details for Kingsborough, Loubat, and Paso y Troncoso may be found in Manuscripts and Visual Sources.

Map 1. Places and regions mentioned in the book. Drawing by David Latorre Rendón based on García Cubas 1885.....	xviii
Map 2. Tenochtitlan and the basin of Mexico. Abbott 1899.....	88
Figure 0.1. Illustrations and text related to the trecena 1 Rain, <i>Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España</i> . Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Ms. Med. Palat. 218, vol. 1, bk. 4, f. 28v–29r. Courtesy of MiC. Any further reproduction is prohibited	2
Figure 0.2. View of Huautla. Photo by Javier García	5
Figure 0.3. Santiago Cortés Martínez and the author working at the transcription and translation of Mazatec texts. Casa de la Cultura María Sabina, Huautla de Jiménez, Oaxaca. Photo by Javier García.....	6
Figure 1.1. Don Isauro Guerrero reading maize. Cerro Palmera, San José Tenango. Photo by Santiago Cortés Martínez	8
Figure 1.2. Don Isauro Guerrero preparing the offering. Cerro Palmera, San José Tenango. Photo by Santiago Cortés Martínez	8
Figure 1.3. Oxomoco and Cipactonal (left), Quetzalcoatl and Tezcatlipoca (right), surrounded by fifty-two year signs. Codex Borbonicus, pp. 21–22. Bibliothèque de l'Assemblée nationale, Paris	11
Figure 1.4. Lord and Lady 1 Deer making an offering of incense and tobacco, generating an offspring. Codex Vienna, p. 51. Kingsborough 1831	12
Figure 1.5. Lord 9 Wind Quetzalcoatl is born from a flint knife after the offering of tobacco and incense by the ancestors above. Codex Vienna, p. 49. Kingsborough 1831.....	12
Figure 1.6. Lord and Lady 1 Deer in heaven with Quetzalcoatl. Selden Roll. Kingsborough 1831	13
Figure 1.7. Lord 1 Jaguar as fire serpent flying from Chicomoztoc. Selden Roll. Kingsborough 1831.....	13
Figure 1.8. A priest is born from the skeletal body of Cihuacoatl. Codex Borgia, p. 32. Kingsborough 1831	14
Figure 1.9. Carvings of Cipactonal and Ome Tochtli. Piedra de los Reyes, Yau-tepec, Morelos. Robelo 1910	15
Figure 1.10. An old priestess and Xochipilli; counted offerings below. Codex Fejérváry-Mayer, p. 7. Loubat 1901	16
Figure 1.11. Yoaltecuhtli ordering a counted offering. Codex Fejérváry-Mayer, p. 14. Loubat 1901.....	17
Figure 1.12. Priestess reading maize in front of Quetzalcoatl and a patient. Codex Tudela, f. 49r. Museo de América, Madrid.....	18
Figure 1.13. The incense burner. Codex Borgia, p. 29. Danzel 1923	20
Figure 1.14. Xantil, Mixteca-Puebla. The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore	21
Figure 1.15. The ingestion of sacred mushrooms (lower right). Codex Magliabechiano, f. 90r. Florence, Biblioteca nazionale centrale, Banco Rari, 232.....	22
Figure 1.16. Mushroom ceremony. Codex Vienna, p. 24. Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna	23

Figure 2.1. María Sabina. Fototeca del Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, Mexico	25
Figure 2.2. Illustrations related to the trecena 1 Death. <i>Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España</i> , vol. 1, bk. 4, f. 25r. Paso y Troncoso 1926.....	26
Figure 2.3. House of Marina Mendoza, Boca del Río, San Mateo Eloxochitlan. Photo by Alessia Frassani	28
Figure 2.4. Baldomero Pineda, Santa Cruz de Juárez. Photo by Javier García	31
Figure 3.1. The tonalpohualli (count of days) according to Bernardino de Sahagún. <i>Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España</i> , vol. 1, bk. 4, f. 79v. Paso y Troncoso 1926	38
Figure 3.2. The twenty day signs according to the Codex Borgia, reading from bottom right to top left. Humboldt 1816–1824	39
Figure 3.3. The sun and night temples officiated by four god-priests. Codex Cospi, pp. 12–13. Loubat 1898	40
Figure 3.4. The five manifestations of Tlaloc. Codex Vaticanus B, p. 69. Loubat 1896	42
Figure 3.5. Days attached to the body of a reptilian creature. Drawing by Agostino Aglio after Codex Borgia, pp. 39–40. The Trustees of the British Museum, London.....	43
Figure 3.6. Atemoztli and Izcalli (bottom), <i>Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España</i> . Patrimonio Nacional. Madrid, Real Biblioteca, II/3280, ff. 252v–253r	45
Figure 3.7. New Fire altar, Tehuacán Viejo, Puebla. Photo by Alessia Frassani	47
Figure 3.8. Three head priests performing their duties. Codex Mendoza, f. 63r. Bodleian Library, Oxford	48
Figure 3.9. The attacks of Venus. Codex Cospi, p. 10. Ms. 4093, Biblioteca Universitaria di Bologna.....	49
Figure 4.1. Mazatec huipil with stencil. Museo Nacional de Antropología, Mexico City. Photo by Javier García	51
Figure 4.2. Teotleco. Codex Borbonicus, p. 31. Bibliothèque de l'Assemblée nationale, Paris	52
Figure 4.3. Teotleco. Codex Tudela, f. 22r. Museo de América, Madrid.....	54
Figure 4.4. Teotleco. Codex Ixtlilxochitl, f. 99v. Durán 1880	55
Figure 4.5. The four glyphs related to the tribute recollection in the Triple Alliance. From top to bottom: Panquetzaliztli, Ochpaniztli, Etzalcualiztli, Tlacaxipehualiztli. Humboldt Fragment. Kingsborough 1831.....	57
Figure 4.6. Ochpaniztli. Codex Tudela, f. 21r. Museo de América, Madrid.....	58
Figure 4.7. Ochpaniztli. Codex Borbonicus, p. 30. Bibliothèque de l'Assemblée nationale, Paris	59
Figure 4.8. New Fire ceremony during Panquetzaliztli. Codex Borbonicus, p. 34. Bibliothèque de la Assemblée Nationale, Paris	60
Figure 4.9. The closing of the veintena ceremonies during Izcalli. Codex Borbonicus, p. 37. Bibliothèque de l'Assemblée nationale, Paris	61
Figure 4.10. a. Micailhuitontli, f. 251r. b. Huey Micailhuitl, f. 251v. <i>Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España</i> . Paso y Troncoso 1926	62
Figure 4.11. a. Lord 9 Wind Quetzalcoatl descends from heaven with two helpers carrying the cults of the sun (Panquetzaliztli) and Xipe (Tlacaxipehualiztli) on their back. Codex Vienna, p. 48. b. Cuahuitlehua and Micailhuitl followed by two wind gods. Codex Vienna, p. 27. Kingsborough 1831	63
Figure 4.12. The beginning of Ochpaniztli. Codex Borbonicus, p. 29. Bibliothèque de l'Assemblée nationale, Paris.....	65

Figure 4.13. The sacrifice of Xolotl in the maize temple. Codex Borgia, p. 43. Kingsborough 1831	66
Figure 4.14. The sacrifice of Itzlacolihqui. Codex Borgia, p. 42. Kingsborough 1831	67
Figure 4.15. Mixcoatl atop the tzompantli. Codex Borgia, p. 45. Kingsborough 1831.....	68
Figure 4.16. New Fire ceremony. Codex Borgia, p. 42. Kingsborough 1831	69
Figure 4.17. Vision quest of the tlatoque. <i>Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca</i> , f. 20r. Mexicain 46–58. Source: gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France.....	71
Figure 4.18. Nose-piercing ceremony. <i>Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca</i> , f. 21r. Mexicain 46–58. Source: gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France.....	72
Figure 4.19. Nose-piercing ceremony inside a temple. Codex Borgia, p. 44. Kingsborough 1831	73
Figure 5.1. The trecena 1 Rain. Codex Borbonicus, p. 7. Bibliothèque de l'Assemblée nationale, Paris.....	76
Figure 5.2. The trecena 1 Dog. Codex Borbonicus, p. 14. Bibliothèque de l'Assemblée nationale, Paris.....	77
Figure 5.3. Xiuhcoatl fire serpent. © Dumbarton Oaks, Pre-Columbian Collection, Washington, DC	78
Figure 5.4. Dedication Stone. Ramírez 1844–1846.....	79
Figure 5.5. Xiuhmolpilli bearing the year sign 2 Reed. Dates 1 Death and 1 Flint are carved at the sides. Ramírez 1844–1846	80
Figure 5.6. Xiuhmolpilli with the year sign 1 Death. Seler 1902	80
Figure 5.7. Front glyph of a xiuhmolpilli bundle depicting the year sign 1 Reed. Drawing by Ximena Vargas based on Moedano Koer 1951	80
Figure 5.8. The conquest of Mexico-Tenochtitlan, years 1 Reed and 2 Flint. Codex Vaticanus A, f. 89r. Kingsborough 1831.....	82
Figure 5.9. The conquest of Mexico-Tenochtitlan, years 3 House and 4 Rabbit. Codex Vaticanus A, f. 89v. Kingsborough 1831.....	83
Figure 6.1. The Mexica military high command: Tlaccatecatl, Tlacohtlacatl, Huitznahuatl, Ticocyahuatl. Codex Mendoza, f. 67r. Bodleian Library, Oxford.	89
Figure 6.2. Coat of arms of the Tapia family. Madrid, Archivo de la Fundación Casa de Alba, carpeta 238, legajo 2, documento 73	90
Figure 6.3 Events of the years 8 Rabbit (1529) and 9 Reed (1530). Codex Mexicanus, p. 78. Mexicain 23–24. Source: gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France.....	91
Figure 6.4. The cihuacoatl. <i>Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España</i> , vol. 2, bk. 8, f. 3r. Paso y Troncoso 1926.	93
Figure 6.5. The sun god and the thirteen birds of the trecenas. Codex Borgia, p. 91. Kingsborough 1831	95
Figure 6.6. Teocalli of the Sacred Warfare. Spinden 1928	96
Figure 6.7. The trecena 1 Death. Codex Borgia, p. 66. Kingsborough 1831.....	97
Figure 6.8. Reconstruction of the two main gods of the trecena 1 Death, Tonatiuh Nahui Ollin and Meztli. Codex Telleriano-Remensis, ff. 12v and 19r. Kingsborough 1831.	97
Figure 6.9. Solar eclipse and ritual performed by Mictlantecuhltli. Codex Laud, p. 24. Kingsborough 1831.....	100

Figure 6.10. Ritual officiated by Mictlantecuhtli. Codex Laud, p. 25. Kingsborough 1831	101
Figure 6.11. Two ritual offerings. Codex Laud, pp. 45–46. Kingsborough 1831	102
Figure 6.12. The trecenas 1 Deer and 1 Flower (bottom); 1 Wind and 1 Water (top). Codex Borgia, pp. 63–64. Kingsborough 1831.....	102
Figure 7.1. Lord 1 Reed as Tlahuizcalpantecuhtli, trecena 1 Serpent. Codex Telleriano-Remensis, f. 14v. Source: gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France.....	108
Figure 7.2. Quetzalcoatl god or priest in the temple, trecena 1 Wind. a. Codex Borgia, p. 63. Kingsborough 1831. b. Codex Borbonicus, p. 18. Loubat 1899. c. Codex Telleriano-Remensis, f. 22r. Loubat 1901	109
Figure 7.3. Feathered serpent, trecena 1 Dog. Codex Telleriano-Remensis, f. 18r. Loubat 1901	110
Figure 7.4. End of the first Sun. Codex Vaticanus A, f. 4v. Loubat 1900	111
Figure 7.5. End of the second Sun. Codex Vaticanus A, f. 5v. Loubat 1900	112
Figure 7.6. Ritual cloaks. Codex Tudela, f. 87v. Museo de América, Madrid.....	115
Figure 7.7. Large ritual cloak. Codex Magliabechiano, f. 7r. Florence, Biblioteca nazionale centrale, Banco Rari, 232	116
Figure 7.8. Ritual cloaks. Codex Magliabechiano, f. 7v. Florence, Biblioteca nazionale centrale, Banco Rari, 232	117
Figure 7.9. The first four days of the tonalpohualli. Codex Magliabechiano, f. 11r. Florence, Biblioteca nazionale centrale, Banco Rari, 232.....	118
Figure 7.10. Xochipilli celebrated during 7 Flower. Codex Tudela, f. 19r. Museo de América, Madrid	119
Figure 7.11. Patecatl as Quetzalcoatl. Codex Magliabechiano, f. 53r. Florence, Biblioteca nazionale centrale, Banco Rari, 232	120
Figure 7.12. Coatlxoxouhqui plant. Codex Tudela, f. 68r. Museo de América, Madrid.....	121
Figure 7.13. Two priests eating and drinking in front of a coatlxoxouhqui plant. Codex Tudela, f. 69r. Museo de América, Madrid	122
Figure 7.14. Ritual consumption of pulque. Codex Tudela, f. 70r. Museo de América, Madrid.....	122
Figure 7.15. Ceremony in front of an altar. Codex Tudela, f. 63r. Museo de América, Madrid.....	123
Figure 7.16. Petition to the god. Codex Tudela, f. 73v. Museo de América, Madrid	124
Figure 7.17. The sacred precinct of Tenochtitlan with the gods Macuilcuetzpalli (5 Lizard) and Macuilcalli (5 House) presiding over the twin temple. <i>Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España</i> , f. 269r. Paso y Troncoso 1905	125
Figure 7.18. Macuilcoatl (5 Serpent). Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.....	126
Figure 7.19. Four gods. Codex Magliabechiano, f. 89r. Florence, Biblioteca nazionale centrale, Banco Rari, 232.....	126
Figure 7.20. Two gods and five paper offerings. Codex Magliabechiano, f. 92r. Florence, Biblioteca nazionale centrale, Banco Rari, 232.....	127
Figure 7.21. Panquetzalitzli and the New Fire ceremony. Codex Laud, p. 17. Kingsborough 1831.....	128
Figure 7.22. Procession to a cave. Codex Laud, pp. 21–22. Kingsborough 1831	128

Figure 8.1. The making of colors. a. Red cochineal, f. 217v. b. Black ink, f. 281v. <i>Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España</i> , vol. 3, bk. 11, ch. 11. Paso y Troncoso 1926.	132
Figure 8.2. Huitzilopochtli preceded by Paynal, <i>Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España</i> . Patrimonio Nacional. Madrid, Real Biblioteca, II/3280, f. 261r	133
Figure 8.3. The gods Opuchtlí, Yacatecutli, Xipe, and Nappa Tecutli, <i>Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España</i> . Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Ms. Med. Palat. 218, vol. 1, bk. 1, f. 12r. Courtesy of MiC. Any further reproduction is prohibited	134
Figure 8.4. The chants of Xipe Totec and Chicomecoatl, <i>Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España</i> . Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Ms. Med. Palat. 218, vol. 1, bk. 2, f. 143r. Courtesy of MiC. Any further reproduction is prohibited.	135
Figure 8.5. “How the ruler felt compassion for the people,” <i>Historia general de las cosas de la Nueva España</i> . Madrid, Real Academia de la Historia, 9/5524, f. 65v	136
Figure 8.6. Albrecht Dürer, <i>The Man of Sorrows</i> , The Small Passion, ca. 1511	137
Figure 8.7. Nun praying in front of the Man of Sorrows, sixteenth century. Upper cloister, Convento de San Salvador, Malinalco, state of Mexico. Photo by Alessia Frassani	137
Figure 8.8. Prayer to Tezcatlipoca, <i>Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España</i> . Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Ms. Med. Palat. 219, vol. 2, bk. 6, f. 8r. Courtesy of MiC. Any further reproduction is prohibited.	138
Figure 8.9. Tlatelolca insurgent warrior, <i>Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España</i> . Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Ms. Med. Palat. 220, vol. 3, bk. 12, f. 34r. Courtesy of MiC. Any further reproduction is prohibited	140
Figure 8.10. The death of Motecuhzoma and Itzquauhtzin and the burial of Motecuhzoma, <i>Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España</i> . Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Ms. Med. Palat. 220, vol. 3, bk. 12, f. 40v. Courtesy of MiC. Any further reproduction is prohibited.	141
Figure 8.11. The burial of Christ, sixteenth century. Cloister, Convento de Santo Domingo, Tepetlaoxtoc, state of Mexico. Photo by Javier García	142
Figure 8.12. Diego Huanitzin, <i>Mass of Saint Gregory</i> , detail. Musée des Jacobins, Auch. Photo by Steven Zucker	142
Figure 8.13. Man holding a rosary and talking to Indigenous peoples. Codex Yanhuitlan, f. 8v. Biblioteca José María Lafragua, Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, Puebla	143
Figure 8.14. Spiritual Works of Mercy. Illustration from Pedro de Gante, <i>Doctrina cristiana en lengua mexicana</i> (Mexico City: Juan Pablos, 1553), f. 60v. Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin	144
Figure 8.15. Frontispiece of <i>Liber Sacerdotalis</i> (Venice: Pietro Ravani, 1548). Biblioteca dell’Archiginnasio, Bologna	145
Figure 8.16. Codex Yanhuitlan, f. 5r, detail. Biblioteca José María Lafragua, Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, Puebla	145
Figure 8.17. Reading right to left, a cave and four gods. Codex Yanhuitlan, ff. 504–507. Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City	146
Figure 8.18. Portrait of Christ. Illustration from Juan de Córdoba, <i>Vocabulario en lengua zapoteca</i> (Mexico City: Pedro de Ocharte, 1573). John Carter Brown Library, Providence	146
Figure 8.19. Parade during Holy Friday, sixteenth century. Convento of San Juan Teitipac, Oaxaca. Photo by Javier García	147

List of Audio Files Available Online

Don Isauro's mantic reading, Cerro Palmera - https://doi.org/10.30861/9781407359670.audio1	9
Don Isauro's mantic reading, Cerro Palmera - https://doi.org/10.30861/9781407359670.audio2	9
Luisa's candles ceremony, Huautla de Jimenez - https://doi.org/10.30861/9781407359670.audio3	10
Marina's night chant, San Mateo Eloxochitlan - https://doi.org/10.30861/9781407359670.audio4	30
Don Baldomero's chant, Santa Cruz de Juárez - https://doi.org/10.30861/9781407359670.audio5	32
Night ceremony with Don Leonardo, Barrio Mixteco, Huatla - https://doi.org/10.30861/9781407359670.audio6	33
Transcription of excerpts from the night ceremony with Don Leonardo - https://doi.org/10.30861/9781407359670.text	33
Don Leonardo's chant, Barrio Mixteco, Huatla - https://doi.org/10.30861/9781407359670.audio7	33

Abstract

Religious manuscripts from ancient and early colonial Mexico offer a direct pathway into Indigenous worldviews through the uniquely Mesoamerican medium of pictography. The complex calendrical system developed in the region during the thousands of years preceding the Spanish invasion forms the basic organizing principle of this pictorial language, which was wisely interpreted by priests to guide their clients in the resolution of life problems. This book offers new interpretations and insights on both calendrics and the related iconography of Mesoamerican religious manuscripts based on the author's field work in the Sierra Mazateca in northern Oaxaca to question accepted notions of divination, chronology, and the dichotomy between ritual and historical time.



Map 1. Places and regions mentioned in the book. Drawing by David Latorre Rendón based on García Cubas 1885.

Introduction

This book presents a study of Mesoamerican religious experience based on an analysis of ancient religious manuscripts, the calendar that informs their structure, and the author's field work in the town of Huautla de Jiménez in the Sierra Mazateca of the state of Oaxaca. Collectively known as the Borgia Group, the Codices Borgia, Vaticanus B, Cospi, Laud, and Fejérváry-Mayer, and part of the Codex Tututepetongo concern virtually every aspect of Indigenous life. The 260-day calendar, known as *tonalpohualli* in Nahuatl, and its related iconography are the basic organizing principle of the pictorials, which have survived to the present day as the most important record of Mesoamerican religion from the pre-Hispanic period. The research was predicated on the idea that modern practices and ceremonies can shed light on the function and scope of ancient religious pictography in a way that other sources, such as those compiled during the colonial period, cannot, despite being chronologically closer to the ancient texts.

Iconographic and methodological advances in the study of Mesoamerican religious pictography have provided modern scholars with a fairly coherent picture of its contents and use. Written sources about the “customs” of the ancient Nahuas or other Mesoamerican peoples that were produced soon after the conquest can be usefully applied to the study of ancient pictographic documents that date to the centuries—or perhaps even the few decades—before the arrival of the Spanish (Nicholson 1973). Furthermore, the production of religious pictography did not cease with the establishment of the colony and the forceful introduction of Christianity into Indigenous communities; rather, it was transformed to inform Europeans about the religion and beliefs of the people of the New World, giving rise to a corpus of hybrid pictographic and alphabetic texts (e.g., the Codices Telleriano-Remensis, Vaticanus A, Tudela, Magliabechiano, Ixtlilxochitl, and Primeros Memoriales, as well as the Florentine Codex), which are frequently used in the interpretation of ancient manuscripts. While Seler (e.g., 1902, 1904) can be considered the founder of the iconographic method, Nowotny (1961) established the current interpretative paradigm that considers religious manuscripts as books for divination. Scholars such as Anders and Jansen (e.g., 1993), Boone (2007), and Mikulska (2008) have considered *teoamoxtli*—a Nahuatl word meaning “sacred books”—as a sort of tarot whose combinatory properties were exploited by the diviner to answer questions posed by the client. The divinatory paradigm beautifully and wisely explains important questions about the sacred books, such as what function they served and how they were read. Thus, the genre and purpose of *teoamoxtli* can be established. Divinatory pictography functions as a language whose coherent structure constitutes the grammar or syntax and whose meaning is derived from iconographic inquiry based on external, mostly colonial sources.

In this approach, the logic and semantic contents of the sacred books constitute a self-contained and closed language. Representations found therein—both individual iconographic elements and their relationships—are taken to articulate meaning according to an external reference, most commonly a written colonial source. For the sake of scientific research, this methodology enables the use of pictography as a tool for reconstructing Mesoamerican religion and customs. The pursuit of interpretation, however, can also take a different path. Rather than a means of logically and coherently expressing an external meaning, language can be understood as a way of inquiring about knowledge and meaning themselves. Rather than reflecting external content, often an all-purpose myth for the historians or iconographer, pictography can be viewed as consciously and purposefully generating its own significance. My line of thinking follows the reflections of Wittgenstein, whose philosophical inquiries were largely devoted to language, its limits, and its potentialities. The Austrian philosopher first considered that philosophy was essentially a process of elucidation and resolution of misunderstandings. With his famous statement, “What can be said at all can be said clearly; and whereof one cannot speak thereof one must be silent” (*Was sich überhaupt sagen lässt, lässt sich klar sagen; und wovon man nicht reden kann, darüber muss man schweigen*; Preface, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 1922), Wittgenstein set the limits for what can be queried through the logic of language. With the further statement, “What can be shown, cannot be said” (*Was gezeigt werden kann, kann nicht gesagt werden*; *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, § 4.1212), he indicated that metaphysical, aesthetic, and even ethical questions are ill-suited to logical inquiry, at least in the way that it has been established in Western philosophical thinking.

A case discussed by Quiñones Keber (2002) demonstrates the applicability of this theoretical stance to Mesoamerican pictography. Book 4 of the Florentine Codex is devoted to the art of divination and provides substantial information for the interpretation of religious manuscripts. It discusses the days of the *tonalpohualli* and their influence on people born on these days. However, according to Quiñones Keber, a crucial aspect of divination was overlooked: the process by which the diviner deduced their mantic interpretation, which occurred in a formal and ritualized manner. Consequently, the images that accompany Sahagún's explanatory text bear little resemblance to the pictorials in ancient sacred books, on which the mantic reading was presumably based. For example, let us analyze the images that correspond to the trecena (a thirteen-day period) 1 Rain in the Florentine Codex (Fig. 0.1), a colonial manuscript, and the Codex Borbonicus (Fig. 5.1), an early colonial document with virtually no Spanish influence. In Figure 0.1, the glyph for 1 Rain is represented



Figure 0.1. Illustrations and text related to the trecena 1 Rain, *Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España*. Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Ms. Med. Palat. 218, vol. 1, bk. 4, f. 28v–29r. Courtesy of MiC. Any further reproduction is prohibited.

rather naturalistically, with thick drops of water falling from a cloud that contains one circle for the numeral 1. In the vignette underneath, a goddess known as *cihuateotl* falls from the sky, bringing disease and death to Earth, as stated in the accompanying Nahuatl and Spanish texts (Sahagún 1950–1982, bk. 4, ch. 11). On the next page, a person signals to a crowd of naked men inside a house. The illustration refers to the act of casting judgment on people in jail, which is again explained in the accompanying text. Finally, two more scenes depict people caring for and bathing a newborn, an illustration often repeated in this part of the manuscript, in which human fate and character are discussed in relation to birth dates (Quiñones Keber 2002, 263–264).

The trecena 1 Rain in the Codex Borbonicus is rather different. It depicts the rain god Tlaloc on a mountain, from which springs a blue stream of water. Another, smaller Tlaloc god or priest stands in front of him, and the two actively engage with each other, talking, praying, or singing, as evidenced by volutes near their mouths. Several offering containers and another priestly figure, who is identified as Chicomecoatl, surround the two Tlaloc figures. The same trecenas in the Codices Borgia (bottom of p. 67) and Vaticanus B (p. 55) essentially depict the same iconography, which sharply diverges from

illustrations for the same trecena in the Florentine Codex (i.e., female supernatural beings bringing destruction to the world or the judgment of imprisoned people). The interpretative logic of Sahagún’s Book 4 on divination reduces images to a corollary of a specific mantic reading and barely contains any references to the original on which the interpretation was based. Once it is brought within the limits of explanatory language, pictography becomes unrecognizable; most importantly, it cannot be reverted. What can be shown cannot be said, in the words of Wittgenstein. I do not argue that iconographic interpretations of religious matters are wrong, but they have limits, and these must be queried.

In his later work *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein (1953) changed (or better, evolved) his stance on intellectual inquiry. After exhausting the possibilities of language as a way to elucidate meaning, he pursued language as a form of therapy. Thus, meaning, both as significance and purpose, does not lie in the definition or “grasp” of an external reference or object but rather in the process of inquiry itself. As Wittgenstein stated, “A philosophical problem has the form: ‘I do not know my way out’” (*Ein philosophisches Problem hat die Form: “Ich kenne mich nicht aus”*; *Philosophical Investigations*, § 123). With this later position, Wittgenstein intended to

move beyond the limits imposed by analytical thinking by using language as a means of exploration rather than explanation—hence the therapeutic value of language in opening up new spaces of possibility, even beyond rational explanation.

Lehrich (2014) argued that the limitations of philosophical inquiry, which were so profoundly interrogated by Wittgenstein, have ancient roots in Western European intellectual tradition, dating to the founding of the philosophical discipline itself. The Greek philosopher Plato opined that poetry and painting were deceitful endeavors whose mimetic forms fooled the audience into thinking that they were in the presence of the real “thing,” not its mere representation. Art and human creativity can only generate partial reflections of an abstract concept; more dangerously, art and poetry can induce strong emotions in the audience, who would feel overcome at the expense of reason. Wittgenstein’s later suggestion of philosophical inquiry as therapy was meant to resolve the seemingly irreconcilable opposition between argument and prophesy, reason and emotion, prose and poetry.

Wittgenstein’s later stance echoes the reasons why Mesoamerican people consulted a diviner in the first place: to voice their own concerns and seek answers. The same holds true for diviners with regard to why they answered their own and others’ calling: to extend a helping hand. To quote Wittgenstein again, “The philosopher treats a question like an illness” (*Der Philosoph behandelt eine Frage; wie eine Krankheit; Philosophical Investigations*, § 225). In other words, symptoms are like clues that the doctor must interpret to reach a diagnosis. When examining still obscure passages in religious manuscripts, I approach them as expressions whose semiosis purposefully escapes unequivocal verbal rationalizations, which calls into question our deeply rooted logocentrism. When it comes to understanding pictorial language, tautologies, and contradictions, meaningless and pointless expressions in the context of explanatory logic, become significant elements, such as composition, repetition, and assonance.

In this view, pictography is by no coincidence close to music and chanting. Tomlinson (2007, 9–26), a musicologist, articulated the most thorough critique of the prevalent approach to the study of *Cantares mexicanos*, a collection of colonial Nahua songs. The author argued that the current form of the songs, which was drafted in the middle of the sixteenth century, betrays a close knowledge and the influence of contemporaneous European modes of poetry, which reduced ancient Nahua songs to the form of written poetry. Adherence to Western literary canon came at the expense of melody, rhythm, and other performative aspects that are intrinsic to music. Tomlinson further argued that scholars such as Ángel María Garibay (1958) and Miguel León Portilla (1961) failed to recognize the Europeanized form of *Cantares mexicanos* and derived from them a somewhat distorted image of Indigenous thought and philosophy. Finally, he believed that singing in the New World was demonized

and eventually domesticated as poetry precisely because performativity, in which meaning is acquired by enacting a text, escapes *logos*. As previously discussed, Tomlinson’s critique follows that of Lehrich, who argued that music and religion’s epistemological validity has largely been questioned in Western philosophy based on the primacy of analytic and verbal logic since ancient Greek times. In the present study, I rely on the experience of Mazatec ceremonies, particularly chants, to question the ways in which Western researchers have categorized and understood knowledge in Mesoamerica. Mazatec chants offer a great intellectual challenge and a unique entry into Mesoamerican thinking and conceptions.

Following Irwin (1994) and Ingold (2006), I argue that in Indigenous America, the world is not unchangeably constructed and cannot objectively be understood and reduced to a fixed verbal meaning; rather, it is in a constant process of unfolding. When conducting research on this world, the use of language as therapy rather than explanation almost becomes necessary. In Indigenous America, altered states, such as dreams, are an essential and constitutive part of consciousness and culture; in Western thought, dreams are, by definition, not real. This is precisely what Wittgenstein recognized as the limits of logocentrism. As argued in his late stance on language inquiry, Wittgenstein shifted from knowledge to self-knowledge and from the pursuit of a clear explanation of “facts” to the questioning of one’s positions and presuppositions (Wright 1998, Maurer 2010).

In the case of Indigenous America, “demonic,” “diabolical,” “drunken,” and “orgiastic” have been among the most common connotations assigned to Indigenous American religious knowledge derived from altered states since the time of conquest, when the majority of alphabetical sources that modern historians use to reconstruct ancient Mesoamerican religion were drafted. Human sacrifice, as I argue more extensively in Chapter 4, has also often served as an explanatory but generic label for rituals that purposefully set out to transcend the boundaries of death and the unknown. Following Wagner (1981, 2018), I also argue that culture is too frequently described as a set of established and somewhat fixed conventions, without considering that creativity is equally part of culture. People routinely reflect on their own culture by creating images of it and then changing these images. In other words, what we think of a certain cultural construct affects the way that we act on it. This is also what Wagner called the “object-subject reversal” or the “reciprocity of perspectives”—that is, the ever-present ability and even intellectual necessity of reflecting on one’s culture. Subjectivity and self-reflection are as important as convention and objectivity.

Ceremoniality accounts for the idiosyncrasies of mantic readings and the relational, contingent, and subjective experience of the ritual encounter. Instead of considering exceptions or inconsistencies as rumors that must be tuned out to detect the rules of pictorial language, I consider that pictography was based on inventiveness

and unpredictability as much as conventions and shared meaning. Often, historians resort to mythology to explain ritual (e.g., Graulich 1999), thus fixing in unchangeable form what is actually a process. On the other hand, Seeman (2004) argued for the interpretation of ritual beyond meaning. Based on his studies of Jewish religious experience, the author argued that the “therapeutic” gesture, such as in curing rituals, is primarily guided by a willingness to help rather than the search for an explanation. In opposition to Geertz, Seeman proposed that configuring an illness within a coherent system of knowledge is not why people in “traditional societies” attend to healers (*curanderos* in the case of Latin America). Rather than rationalizing pain, confronting the “radical alterity of pain” (Seeman 2004, 61) opens up a space of intersubjectivity and transcendence beyond the limits of explanatory logic. In other words, a therapist, doctor, or other healer is primarily moved by the pain of others and by their inability and ethical refusal to reduce suffering to a rational explanation. Concerns and worries that cannot be explained away are the primary reasons why rituals are performed: to confront the unknown or that which defies rational explanation. This is, by definition, a process, not a given. I argue that this is what is lacking in both the objective and methodology of current research in Mesoamerican studies, especially when addressing religious topics and their sources in images and texts.

The fact that no researchers who have investigated Mesoamerican pictography, the current author included, belong to the culture that we purport to explain is no small matter. Overcoming our ignorance tautologically becomes the objective of research itself, as if pictography existed to explain Mesoamerican culture to ignorant but eager researchers. Thus, pictography is taken as the imperfect reflection of a “pure” (but indeed chimeric, pre-contact, and unadulterated) Indigenous culture. While I do not dismiss either iconographic or divinatory inquiry, I aim to discuss the process of meaning and the creation of doubts and rational slippages, over explanation and exegesis.

Recently, Díaz Álvarez (2009, 2013) critiqued the ways in which colonial sources and modern interpreters of these sources have systematized Mesoamerican religion and time as well as their depictions. She also questioned Nowotny’s divinatory paradigm, which posits a firm distinction between the time of religion—embodied in the *teomoxtli* (the sacred books) as a sort of medieval astrology—and the time of history and natural phenomena found in historical and genealogical sources. This topic is the focus of Chapters 3 to 5. In her research, Díaz Álvarez (2016, 2019) relied on a critical reading of colonial sources while also including a reflection on ethnographic material. The 260-day calendar, known as *tonalpohualli* among the Nahuas and *tzolkin* among the Mayas, is no longer in use in the Mazateca. Contemporary studies on the use of the Mesoamerican calendar in southern Mexico and Guatemala (Lipp 1991, Tedlock 1992, Rojas 2013, Rojas 2014, Akker 2018) have revealed a wide variety of functions and symbolism attached to it. Despite the

tonalpohualli’s strict arithmetic (or perhaps in light of it), modern Mesoamerican priests use the combinatory nature of divinatory logic in a highly subjective and situational manner that can respond to the needs and questions of their clients.

Therefore, our current understanding and interpretation of the *tonalpohualli* as static, immutable, and largely incapable of keeping track of “real” time derives from specific historical circumstances, namely the colonialist endeavors of missionary friars in the post-conquest period. Explanatory models that presume the objectification of cultural “facts” should not be the ultimate goal of interpretation. Time and the means by which it is measured also fall under the category of subjectively constructed schemata that are constantly renegotiated and reinterpreted. Finally, beyond any historiographic consideration, recognizing how Platonic, Tomistic, or even more recent philosophical trends have influenced our current interpretation, systematization, and understanding of Mesoamerican cosmology calls for a different and alternative approach. I follow anthropologist Neurath (2010, 2016, 2019), who tried to bring the discussions on Amerindian ontologies and ritual practices (Viveiros de Castro 1998, Viveiros de Castro 2004, Severi 2002, Severi 2004) to bear on the interpretation of the iconography and archaeology of ancient Mesoamerica. All these authors have suggested ways to move beyond the dichotomy of logocentrism and performativity, myth and ritual, and object and subject by stressing the intimate, relational nature of Indigenous American “being in the world.” Perspectivism, which Viveiros de Castro defined as the embodiment of another being’s points of view, can be theoretically posited as a tenet of Amerindian cosmovision. In a much humbler way, I believe that field research and local collaboration can greatly help any researcher to understand the inherent limitations of scientific inquiry and the need to question their own motives and purpose in academic endeavors (Wagner 2016, ch. 2).

Huautla de Jiménez, in the northern part of the state of Oaxaca (Fig. 0.2), is known in the anthropological literature and popular culture for the ceremonial use of sacred mushrooms and the chants of María Sabina, a powerful wise woman who has captured foreigners’ imagination since the 1950s (Estrada 1981). Her chants were partially transcribed and translated with the help of local bilingual Mazatecs and North American linguists, who extensively traveled and lived in Mexico’s rural areas with the aim of converting local Indigenous peoples to Protestantism (e.g., Pike and Cowan 1959, Wasson et al. 1974). I conducted field work in Huautla with Santiago Cortés Martínez, an intellectual and cultural broker who was the coordinator of the Casa de la Cultura María Sabina (Fig. 0.3) at the time of my research. He introduced me to the world of the *chjota chjine*, wise people, whose authority and knowledge are still widely sought and respected in the region. I consider that, among the many aspects of Mesoamerican culture that have been marginalized, persecuted, and silenced for centuries since the Spanish invasion, ceremonies involving



Figure 0.2. View of Huautla. Photo by Javier García.

the ingestion of mushrooms or other substances and techniques that alter one's state of consciousness occupy a special place. Freud defined the unconscious as something irrational and uncontrollable. In the medieval and early modern periods, magic was demonized by the Church and portrayed as quackery by Enlightenment philosophers. Non-rational experiences were relegated to the diabolical by the Church or the insane by the State (Foucault 2006). Mazatec (and, in general, Indigenous American) religious experience forces us to question this long-standing paradigm in Western epistemology by considering what is acquired during dreams or visions as an acceptable form of knowledge.

According to Santiago, the term "vision quest" is not completely appropriate for describing the type of knowledge gained during a night ceremony despite being an accepted notion in Indigenous North American studies (see Irwin 1994). While "quest" (*búsqueda* in Spanish) correctly describes the striving and longing that characterize the ceremony ("I do not know my way out," in the words of Wittgenstein), "encounter" (*encuentro*) should replace the term "vision." While "vision" somehow conveys the notion of a possibly false projection, "encounter" describes a vivid experience of exchange at the interpersonal level. Santiago and I participated in several night ceremonies together and recorded many hours of chanting and prayers. The transcription and translation of the recordings was a difficult task, given that

Mazatec primarily remains an oral language. However, the objective was to collect a corpus of texts that concretely expressed the experience of the ceremony and could be analyzed alongside pictography. While the contents of the chants illuminated the iconography of the sacred books at times, the research moved along the lines of analogy rather than metaphor. Chants do not explain pictography; rather, they share many of the same constitutive characteristics. As argued by Lehigh (2014, 144), it is precisely the elements that are meaningless in the logic of language that become fundamental in religious experience and music (and, I would argue, visual art and pictorial language): redundancy, repetition, rhythm, alliteration, pleonasm, and onomatopoeia. While the logic of language progresses through consonances of meaning, sounds and shapes take precedence in music and art, whose discourse is formed by metonymy and contiguity rather than semantic superimposition (Tomlinson 2007, 28–49).

The book begins with a description of Mazatec divinatory and ceremonial practices, which are presented within the wider context of past and present Mesoamerica. I focus on elements of Mesoamerican pictography that betray a clear and conscious awareness on the part of the creator to consistently invent and re-invent their tradition. Next, Mazatec chants are analyzed as a point of departure for inquiry on the visionary nature of the religious manuscripts. The Mesoamerican calendar is analyzed in depth, and new approaches to its use in ancient times are offered.



Figure 0.3. Santiago Cortés Martínez and the author working at the transcription and translation of Mazatec texts. Casa de la Cultura María Sabina, Huautla de Jiménez, Oaxaca. Photo by Javier García.

The narrative progresses from the present, through a re-reading of colonial sources, to passages in pre-Hispanic manuscripts that do not seem to have counterparts in colonial sources. How does pictography generate a different type of knowledge, one that counters the logic of objectivity and relies instead on self-referentiality, intersubjectivity, and ritual process?

This book argues that a major aspect of Mesoamerican ceremonial life, which has mainly been depicted in colonial sources, is deeply misunderstood. The so-called cycle of the *veintenas* is perhaps the most ubiquitous depiction of ceremonies in post-conquest sources that address Mesoamerican religion, but they are not recorded for the pre-contact period. I follow up and expand on Jansen and Pérez Jiménez's (2017, 431–530) recent identification of the *veintenas* in the central pages of the Codex Borgia to propose a reconsideration of the entire ceremonial cycle as a visionary experience—indeed, a quest—on the part of the priest or diviner to foresee and secure the well-being of an entire community.

As was also argued by Abse (2007), I suggest that priests in ancient times played a larger and more public and political role than they do in Mazatec communities today. How did their knowledge and the way that it was encoded and transmitted change throughout history? How did significant events impact the process of knowledge

production? Given the violent and enduring consequences of colonialism on the American continent and its peoples, resources, and landscape, it can be expected that not only the contents but also the structure and functioning of pictographic texts were deeply affected by historical events. Notions of history undoubtedly intersected with the explicit self-awareness that was inherent in Mesoamerican singing, pictography, and ceremoniality. Chapter 6 examines the impact of historical circumstances on the production of religious manuscripts. Finally, pictography of religious content that was produced after the conquest and under the sponsorship of friars provides evidence of late experimentation within a cultural context that was—and alas, often continues to be—violently against, profoundly discriminatory towards, and ultimately incapable and unwilling to consider Mesoamerican wisdom.

Diviners and Divination

Mazatec divinatory practices are part of the larger Mesoamerican mantic tradition (Nowotny 1961, Durand-Forest 1968, Loo 1987, Boege 1988, 158–227, Anders and Jansen 1993, 31–162, Incháustegui 1994, Rojas 2016, Olivier and Lambert 2019). They can be described as an array of ritual activities that take place between a patient or client and the curandero or healer to address physical illness or problems of a personal nature. The Mazatec term for a curandero is *chjota chjine* (wise person), a generic definition that reflects the diversity of their social and economic status, age, and gender. The wisdom possessed by *chjota chjine* cannot be learned, but is given without being requested. The pervasiveness and importance of wise people and their knowledge in Mazatec society is not an open topic of discussion, even though it remains quite common to seek their help. Children often participate in household rituals and are exposed to their language, instruments, and praxis from a very young age. Although no formal training is necessary to become a curandero, as far as I was able to determine, the ability and calling to cure people sometimes run in families. However, every curandero adamantly stresses that the gift was personally given to them by God or the gods; thus, it was not acquired or inherited.

As has been documented in other regions of Indigenous Mexico (Estrada 1981, Fagetti 2015), initiation into the knowledge and practices of the *chjota chjine* often occurs in a dream or during a night ceremony, when the candidate receives the power with the stated obligation of applying it for the sake of people’s well-being. The gift cannot be refused. A period of deep personal turmoil often precedes the calling, which can be described as the result of the healer’s personal quest to find their own “cure” or “way out” of an existential or physical impasse.

Similar to what occurs in Mesoamerican or “folk” and traditional societies, Mazatec ceremonies exist within a particularly fluid and informal situation and are not bound or reduced to specific institutionalized occasions. Every attempt to classify them is a reductive endeavor, which makes *chjota chjine*’s inventiveness and ability to speak to a common and shared tradition all the more remarkable. Like other Mesoamerican peoples, Mazatec curanderos routinely use maize kernels, candles, *copal* (incense), *piciete* (green tobacco), eggs, and plants (leaves and flowers) during their ceremonies. Catholic images of Jesus, the Virgin, God, the Holy Spirit, the Trinity, or other saints are widely utilized and almost invariably invoked. I believe that the striking similarities between contemporary ritual practices throughout Mesoamerica are more of a testament to the important and successful role that

traditional healers have been able to maintain throughout the generations than any formal training. Early and pervasive exposure to objects, language, and ceremonies generates an enduring, versatile, and adaptable symbolic system. Although recent studies have mostly highlighted changes that have taken place in Mazatec rituals since the rise of so-called “mushroom tourism” (Feinberg 2003, Jacorzynski and Rodríguez 2015), the larger and deeper Mesoamerican framework of Mazatec divination becomes clear once contemporary practice is studied alongside pre- and post-conquest sources.

1.1. Two examples of Mazatec divination

When we visited don Isauro Guerrero in Cerro Palmera, a small hamlet close to the main town of San José Tenango and an hour’s drive east of Huautla, he first prepared the leaves to do a cleanse (*limpia*). Known as *hojas de Pascua* in Spanish, in Mazatec they are called *xka xo’ma toxkoa*, meaning “leaves of the wise people.” Don Isauro threw maize kernels on an altar covered with a white tablecloth and decorated with images of saints (Fig. 1.1). He was able to identify some problems I was facing while conducting research in a foreign country and recommended that I place offerings that he prepared, consisting of eggs, bundles of wild tobacco, and cacao beans, under my bed (Fig. 1.2). While similar rituals have been documented in the Mazateca since the beginning of the twentieth century (Bauer 1908, Bassett Johnson 1939), Seler (1902, 78–86) was the first to discuss the continuity of Mesoamerican divinatory practices since ancient times.

In preparing the offerings, known as *paquetes de pago* in Spanish, don Isauro invoked the grandparents who established the cult by using the Mazatec term *kjoatexoma*, which can be translated as “norm” or “law.”

Jokisin, jokisin chjota chinga nii
The same way the grandparents did it, the same way

Nga chjota chinga nda nai jchaa xokji
He is a good old man, this old father

Jotonda ni ndichjota chingana’ña nga koakisin nga’sa,
It is good that our beloved old people established the ceremonies,

nga tsakienda, nga tsekiekjao, tsakajté, tsakakjao jechao
xanda’be, jechao najño’be
when they put together, when they wrapped the bundles of
chicken eggs, turkey eggs



Figure 1.1. Don Isauro Guerrero reading maize. Cerro Palmera, San José Tenango. Photo by Santiago Cortés Martínez.



Figure 1.2. Don Isauro Guerrero preparing the offering. Cerro Palmera, San José Tenango. Photo by Santiago Cortés Martínez.

After wrapping a number of small packages of paper containing wild green tobacco, don Isauro advised me on where to place the offerings in my room and then proceeded to list all the mountains and hills that surround the region:

Ña cuarto ñatinani ngi nachan ñja'bana chjon
In the room where she lives, below the bed where the woman rests

Koe nangi, koe nangi nachan
There she will place the offering, she will leave [it] below her bed

Jende tsoimi, koe najin ndininde
In the sand, she will deposit it in the earth.

Ngo bote inakji ndikicha koe naya, koi nyaya
She will deposit it in a metal container, she will put [it] inside it

K'oasin koendani
That's how she will prepare it

Jilani chikón Nindo Ya'chinra
You, guardian of Cerro Liquidambar

Koa jilani ñabakaoli ndichikón Naxinganai, naina Naxinganai
And you, who owns the guardian of Peña Caballero, father Peña Caballero

Koa jilani ñabakaoliji Nindo Setanai
And you, you who owns the Hill Where the Sun Shines

Kao Chinkjao
Cempoaltepetl

Ngayije, yije ... nga tse nindo tsojmi xokjoa
All the things, everything belongs to the mountains

Koi basin batji'ta ni'ndaa
That's why we do an offering

Koa tejan cera xitsee nina xibasen kao titjon naina tina
And we offer thirteen candles that belong to God, but Our Father is the first

Koa ya fa'asen tsee nangi xokji, koabe tsatsaán
That is how you deposit in the earth, that is how it is prepared.

Santiago was not able to identify all the mountains don Isauro mentioned, because Mazatec names often differ from Spanish ones. Don Isauro also mentioned another notable feature of Mazatec highlands: caves.

Ya, ya, ya Ndá nainda, Ndá nachoonda, centro principale Tenangondá,
There, there, there ... in Agua Caballero, Agua Calabaza, main town of Tenango

koa Sonroonda, koa Sonngoonda, koa ngo tjondainda and Plan de Laguna, and Llano de Templo, and in every place

Josin ngatsa'jmej Jesús je
Same as Jesus did

Ñanga nitjan, ñanga nindo tsa'jmej ni naina je
Through the caves, the mountains our father walked

Ngo koajin nga koasin tsakin yanaa xana án
And that is how they taught me my work

Koaki tsoje, án koxa nitjan, tsoni
That's what he said: I open the caves, says

Án ... je tibitjo'jta je nitjan
I ... the cave is breathing now

Alito xkachonjin nitjan, koatso kointa kjina
Caves are not like other places, that's what the established count says

<https://doi.org/10.30861/9781407359670.audio1>
<https://doi.org/10.30861/9781407359670.audio2>

The Mazatec highlands feature one of the most extensive cave systems in the world, known as Sistema Huautla. Thus, it is unsurprising that don Isauro mentioned them. According to Santiago, summoning the mountains and caves during a ceremony is an ancient practice that today has been commonly replaced by lists of Catholic saints. The opening of a cave refers to the creation of a tunnel or underground passage that connects faraway places in the region in ways that are not apparent above ground. Caves are also related to water springs and karst rivers. Finally, don Isauro used two words for count—*kointa*, from the Spanish *cuenta*, and the Mazatec term *chóa*—to invoke the norm or the law as synonyms for *kjoatexoma*. Proper counting and correct placement are fundamental to the efficacy of the offering, but the count and the norm may also refer to keeping track of time and days, even if don Isauro and other curanderos in the Mazateca no longer use the Mesoamerican calendar.

Doña Luisa Guerrero performed the thirteen-candle ceremony (*ceremonia de las trece velas*), known in Mazatec as *cera nima* (candles of the souls, dead), for me on August 6, 2014. As with Don Isauro, the number thirteen still carries important symbolic associations even for curanderos who do not have direct knowledge of the Mesoamerican calendar, the tonalpohualli, whose 260 days are generated by a combination of thirteen numerals and twenty day signs. In the Mazateca the number thirteen is associated with the end of a cycle (called *trecena*, from “thirteen” in Spanish, since colonial times), which begins and ends at the ancestors' place. The ceremony is meant to invoke the client's family members who have passed away in order to seek their protection. While lighting the

candles one by one, Luisa Guerrero implored the ancestors to protect me:

Nik'oasin sijeeno jngo kjoanda
So I am asking you for a blessing

Nii tsohai ndinojon
Here is your precious daughter

Nikoa titso ngaje
She is imploring you

K'ianga jexoni, jexo nandaa je xi koasin siki nroenino
It is her, just her, who is asking to be heard

Xi k'oasin jnyanon tjin xko yonngoonoo ngajon
You, who are on your knees with your claws and nails out

K'ianga koetsoason, koetsoataon
You can intercede for her

K'ianga ngasin, nganda
With patience, with calm

Koachikoson, koachikotain ña'nile xitso bakasai
May she receive your blessing and grace that she is looking for

Nga tseni kjoaxkon, nga tseni kjoangoa
Sorrow is big, big is the evil that surrounds us

Nga tseni soo, nga tseni kji'ne
There is a lot of heat, a lot of suffering

Nga tse ixroa, nga tse inda
A lot is broken, there is a lot that is fragile
...

Ni k'oasin sijeno nga tsío
So, I ask all of you

Jotjin mañoó xi koasin kafeson, kafetao
All who are gone, all who have perished

Koa ni koa xotisin 'tasain xkoli, 'tasain xkoyongoli
You have to place your knees, go on your knees and take your
nails out

Xitsa kinli María Sabina
You, who bore the name of María Sabina

Josin k'ianga nga tibitjoi, nga'ji
You are still famous, you

Koaxosin te tsoasoin, koaxosin te tsoata'in
Please, pray and intercede for her

Koaxosin, koaxosin te tsoasoin, te tsoata'in
Please, pray and intercede for her

Ngasin nganda, katamachikonson, katamachikonta'in
Slowly, with patience, give her your blessing, your grace

K'oasin ngasin nganda, ndai'bi, jo'tjim'añon xi chjota 'chja
kam'aon
Slowly, now, all of you who are old people

Xi k'oasin chjota chjine kam'aon
As they were wise people

Josin k'ianga ... josin kinixao ngajon
As you have worked

Xi tsa kinli, ji, si'nii Juan Feliciano, María Miranda, Macario
Miranda
You, whose name was uncle Juan Feliciano, María Miranda,
Macario Miranda

Xi tsa kin Emiliano Díaz, Gustavo Díaz
You, whose name was Emiliano Díaz, Gustavo Díaz,

Xi tsa kinli Merced Dorantes, Apolonio Terán
You, whose name was Merced Dorantes, Apolonio Terán

Ndaibi ngatsio jotjinma'ni xi k'oasin kafeson, kafetaon
Now how many are there who have gone already, those who
have perished already

Xi k'oasin ngasin nganda kanixao
Those who worked well

Koa xosin ti'nya ntjaoo
Please intercede for her

Xkotin, xko'tso'ko
Go on your knees and take your claws out

K'ianga te'tsoa'son, kianga te'tsoa'taon jon
In order to intercede and pray for her

Ali biyofejñjion, ali biyotsitinjñjion
Don't fall asleep, don't bow down

<https://doi.org/10.30861/9781407359670.audio3>

Luisa explicitly named María Sabina, the great *chjon chjine* (wise woman) whose ceremonies and chants were recorded in the 1950s. She then said the names of relatives and other famous wise people from Huautla, the Mazatec capital where she lived, who had already passed. Luisa called on her own curanderos and ancestors, whose strength was indicated through the expression “get on your knees, take your claws and nails out” (*koa nikoá xotisin 'tasain xkoli, 'tasain xkoyongoli*). The ancestor was described as a nahual, such as a jaguar or an eagle, whose strong grasp could protect living descendants. She also said that they should not fall asleep (i.e., lose focus or attention on their task of protecting living descendants). This could also have been a reference to what happens to a curandero in a moment of weakness during a vigil or a night ceremony.

1.2. Priests and diviners in ancient and colonial images

In the excerpts above, don Isauro and doña Luisa referred to the ancestors as the founders and guardians of divinatory knowledge. In the codices and alphabetic colonial sources, ancestral diviners usually appear as a couple: a grandmother and a grandfather known among the Nahuas as Oxomoco and Cipactonal. Perhaps the most emblematic illustration of this couple can be found on page 21 of the early colonial Codex Borbonicus (on the left in Fig. 1.3), where they are seated facing each other inside a square temple enclosure. Oxomoco is on the left casting maize, while Cipactonal, whose name in Nahuatl means “Day Crocodile” (the first day of the tonalpohualli), faces her on the right. He holds a sacrificial bone knife and an incense burner. Both have gourds, used to carry piciete, tied to their backs with a red rope. The couple on page 21 form a couplet with Quetzalcoatl and Tezcatlipoca, who are found on the following page (on the right of Fig. 1.3). The two pages are framed by fifty-two year signs, which comprise a cycle that begins with the year 1 Rabbit on the bottom left part of page 21. While the image of the old diviner couple is often cited to illustrate the art of divination, the full picture of the two couples is usually omitted (e.g., Boone 2007, 26, Jansen and Pérez Jiménez 2017, 20). However, it is clear that Oxomoco and Cipactonal are not the only ones to engage in acts of divination, and both couples and their mutual relationship must be addressed to gain a fuller picture of the meaning and characteristics of Mesoamerican divination.

Quetzalcoatl as an archetypal diviner has been extensively studied in the literature, given his presence in early colonial Indigenous sources. Most notably, López Austin (1989)

and Gruzinski (1989) extensively discussed so-called “man-gods,” both before and after the conquest. As culture heroes, these men were responsible for the foundation of lineages and cities. They gifted their people civilization itself, knowledge, and craft, including the art of painting, day counting, metallurgy, stone, and feather work. After the imposition of the Spanish regime, they continued to act as the community’s intermediaries, and their powers often took on religious overtones. Both López Austin and Gruzinski highlighted the conflation of history and religion in oral and written accounts about the man-gods, an aspect that was also discussed by Nicholson (2001) in his classic essay on Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl. Historical feats often have a paradigmatic quality that defines the ethnic identity of a group, a lineage, or an entire people. As noted by Gruzinski, man-gods acted as progressively acculturated messiahs during the colonial period, especially during times of social crisis.

The important role history played in the religious manuscripts, especially after the conquest, is addressed in Chapters 6, 7, and 8 of this book. However, it is important to emphasize the transcendental importance of the man-gods as intermediaries, who are simultaneously capable of embodying different social, political, and religious roles in not only a rather purposeful but also an idiosyncratic manner. In the Mazatec cases discussed above, don Isauro called on the ancestors, characters akin to the old diviners Oxomoco and Cipactonal, but did not refer to any priests that could be identified as Quetzalcoatl. In fact, I believe that don Isauro himself played the role of the diviner priest during the ceremony. Moreover, doña Luisa directly placed herself within a long lineage of great local diviners to revive their powers during the ritual. Several depictions

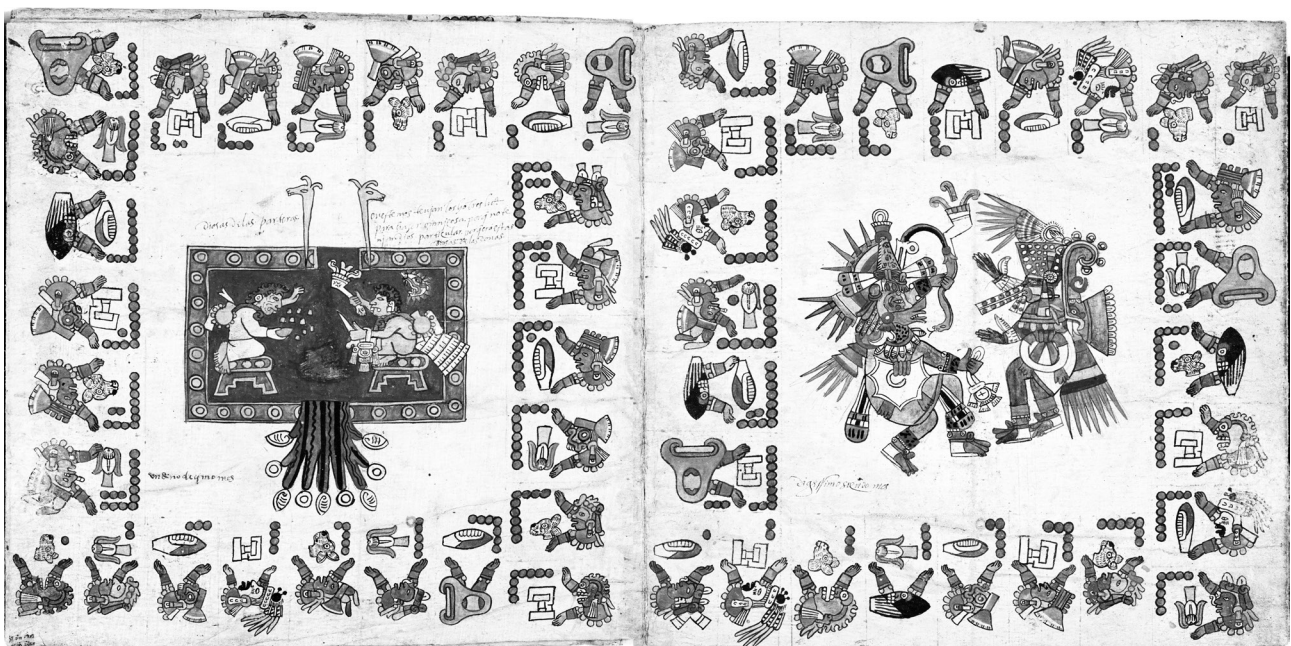


Figure 1.3. Oxomoco and Cipactonal (left), Quetzalcoatl and Tezcatlipoca (right), surrounded by fifty-two year signs. Codex Borbonicus, pp. 21–22. Bibliothèque de l’Assemblée nationale, Paris.

of ancestral couples recur throughout the Codex Vienna, an account of the origin of the Mixtec people, which further exemplifies the coexistence of several types of priests and diviners and their close relationship. At the beginning of the manuscript on page 51, a pair of ancestors named Lord and Lady 1 Deer (Fig. 1.4) sit facing each other, casting tobacco and burning incense; these are typical activities of diviners, as seen in the Codex Borbonicus (Fig. 1.3). A long list of offspring follows on the next two pages. Colonial sources from the Mixteca refer to a primordial couple who existed before the dawn of time (García 1981, ch. IV, Jansen 1982, 89–90). Their skeletal jaws indicate that they are deceased ancestors, but the red-beaked headdress and black-and-red feather headdress indicate the imagery of the wind god Ehecatl, a manifestation of Quetzalcoatl. On a later page (Fig. 1.5), Lord 9 Wind Quetzalcoatl is indeed born from a giant sacrificial knife. Just before this event, on the register above, a pair of ancestors with skeletal jaws and clawed hands and feet are scattering green tobacco

and burning copal, which indicates that Quetzalcoatl is born from their offering, sacrifice, and knowledge. At the same time, as seen on page 51, the primordial diviners also bear the attributes of one of the offspring, Quetzalcoatl.

The Selden Roll, an early colonial manuscript from the Coixtlahuaca Valley in the northern part of Oaxaca, depicts a regional narrative of creation and dynastic foundation in a similar manner to the Codex Vienna, albeit shorter. Figures 1.6 and 1.7 show two scenes from the story. First, Lord and Lady 1 Deer are in the sky facing each other. Red and white horizontal bands punctuated with star-eyes indicate the different layers of heaven. At the center, between the couple, sits Ehecatl-Quetzalcoatl, who is recognizable from his characteristic attributes, such as the conical hat, peaked mask, and curved staff. The event takes place in the year 13 Rabbit and day 2 Deer. Jansen and Pérez Jiménez (2017, 305) suggested that the day sign 2 Deer results from the sum of the two elderly characters’



Figure 1.4. Lord and Lady 1 Deer making an offering of incense and tobacco, generating an offspring. Codex Vienna, p. 51. Kingsborough 1831.

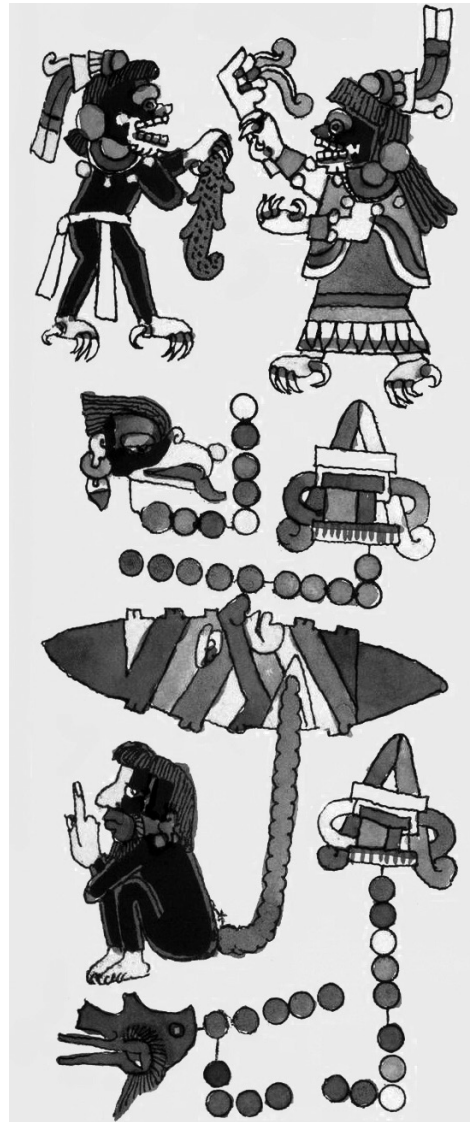


Figure 1.5. Lord 9 Wind Quetzalcoatl is born from a flint knife after the offering of tobacco and incense by the ancestors above. Codex Vienna, p. 49. Kingsborough 1831.

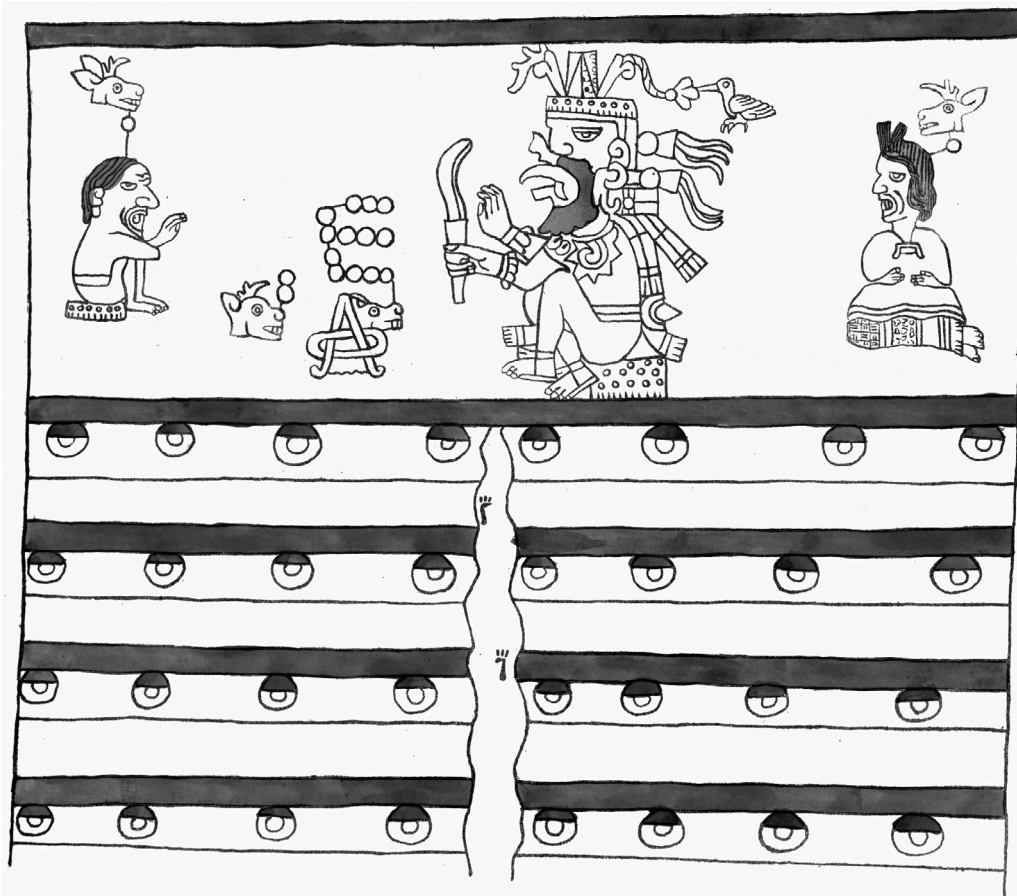


Figure 1.6. Lord and Lady 1 Deer in heaven with Quetzalcoatl. Selden Roll. Kingsborough 1831.

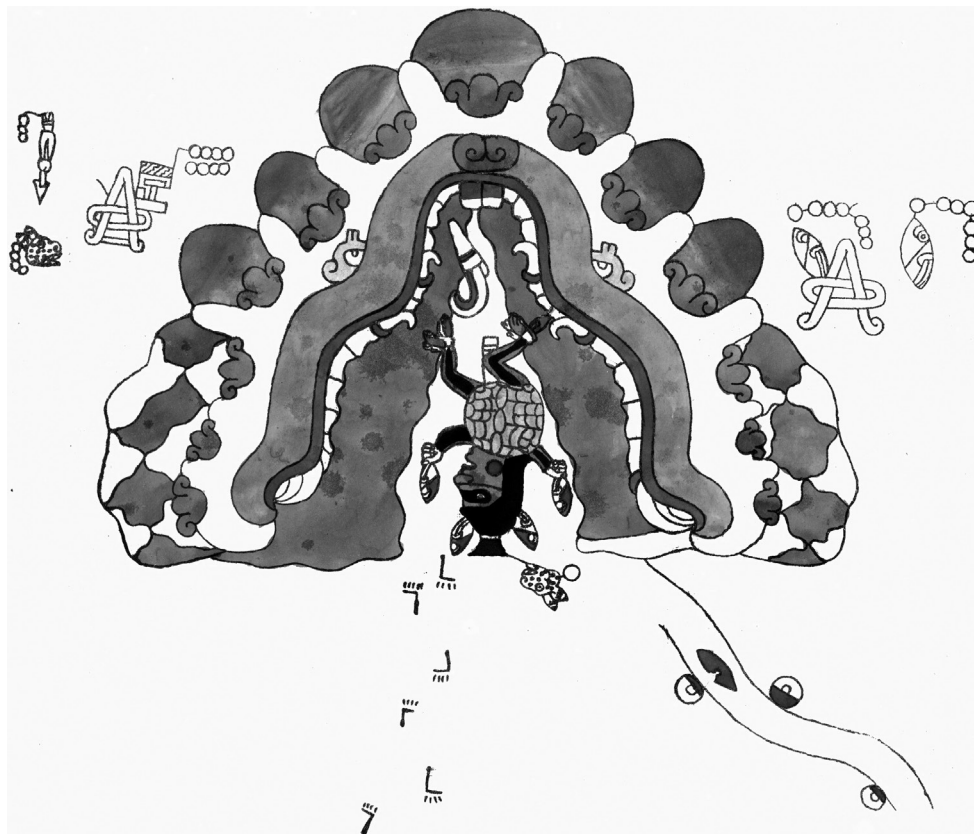


Figure 1.7. Lord 1 Jaguar as fire serpent flying from Chicomoztoc. Selden Roll. Kingsborough 1831.

names. The other date, 13 Rabbit, is the year before 1 Reed, a date associated with the beginning and creation, especially in Mixtec manuscripts. Thus, the episode takes place in heaven before the establishment of worldly things. In a subsequent scene, a priest in the guise of a flying fire serpent, a powerful supernatural creature with a tortoise carapace known as *yaha yahui* in Mixtec and *xiuhcoatl* among the Nahuas, descends from a cave, a sacred place of origins (Hermann Lejarazu 2009). His black body paint and calendrical name, 1 Jaguar, are elements that indicate that he is a priest who is conducting a ritual in the cave. His activity follows a path of flint knives and star-eyes that begins at the cave, eventually reaching a place where the priest performs a ritual known as the New Fire, which is related to the foundation of dynasties. The star-eyes and flint knives of the path denote both the heavenly and the sacrificial quality of the priest's travel, which contrasts with the terrestrial and historical narrative developed on the other path, which departs from the cave along a series of footprints. A similar image of a downward flying priest surrounded by star-eyes and sacrificial knives can be found on page 32 of the Codex Borgia (Fig. 1.8), on which a naked priest passes through the elongated body of the goddess Cihuacoatl, whose skirt displays nightly and sacrificial attributes. The skeletal quality of the Cihuacoatl's body suggests that she is an ancestor who not only generates but also protects the priest's flight and travel into the terrestrial realm.

Burland (1955), Boone (2000, 152–160), and Jansen and Pérez Jiménez (2017, 299–357) have exhaustively commented on the Selden Roll and its place in the creation and historical narratives of Oaxaca and the Coixtlahuaca Valley in particular. Here, what I would like to remark on is, once again, the existence of “another” type of diviner and priest other than the elderly couple (e.g., Oxomoco and Cipactonal, Lord and Lady 1 Deer, etc.). The character can be identified as either Quetzalcoatl, indeed himself a primordial priest, or a priestly reincarnation of him. He appears to be created by the elderly couple and, as in the Codex Borbonicus, to complement their function. In the Selden Roll, he descends from heaven to establish local lineages and connects the ancestral time and place of the ancestors with the historical and terrestrial time of humankind. He is a man-god, according to López Austin's

(1989) definition. Both the Selden Roll and the Codex Vienna belong to a specific genre of ancient Mesoamerican pictography that combines history and religion. The characters found therein are neither historical, such as those in Mixtec genealogical manuscripts, nor gods or god impersonators, as in the teomoxitli (the religious manuscripts). In the latter, which are the focus of this book, the presence of these intermediary figures may sometimes be difficult to ascertain despite their primordial importance.

Another example, not from pictography but from rock carving, offers an opportunity to address the issue in a different context. A few boulders in Piedra de los Reyes (Stone of Kings) in Coatlan (Place of the Serpent), which is located between the towns of Yautepec and Cuernavaca in Morelos, depict a well-known carving of Oxomoco and Cipactonal (Robelo 1910). The two old diviners are shown in profile and face each other, as in the previously discussed images, while the center of the carving is occupied by a frontal depiction of a reptilian creature's open mouth; the day sign 2 Rabbit can be seen inside it (Fig. 1.9). Caves are usually depicted as the open jaws of a reptile, indicating the entrance into the underworld through the mouth of the living earth. Due to the specific physical placement of the three boulders and their respective images, when a person stands between the two boulders with the ancestors, they look as though they are coming in or out of the open mouth of the earth while feeling the embrace of the ancestors. A full understanding of the iconography of the Piedra de los Reyes requires consideration of the ritual action and actors that would enact or activate the place. The subjective position and experience of the priest-diviner who stands between the three stones must be considered in the analysis of the carved images. While the ancestors can be iconographically identified in the carvings, the priest's lived experience must be imagined. Nonetheless, the priest's or performer's role is pivotal in the development of the scene and ritual.

Robelo (1910, 342, 349) was the first to identify the couple as the primordial diviners, further noting that colonial sources identified Cuauhnahuac (modern-day Cuernavaca), where the petroglyphs are located, as the Mesoamerican calendar's place of origin. However, the

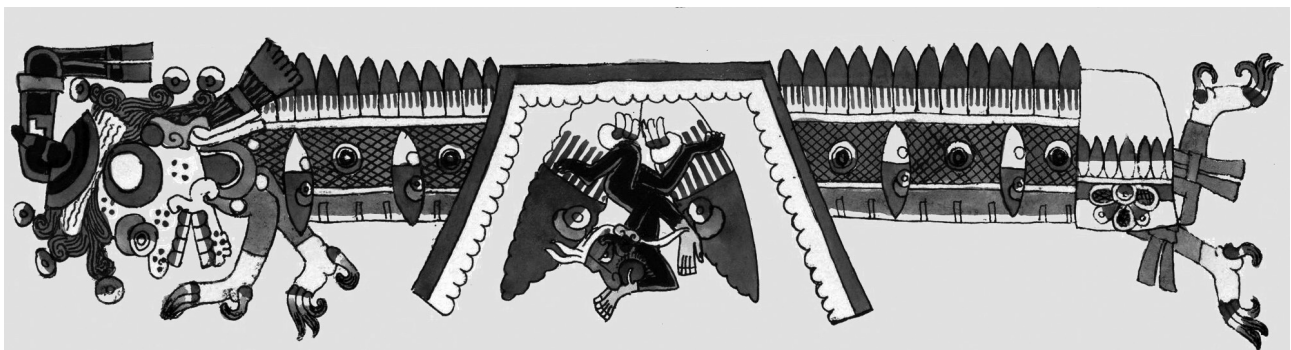


Figure 1.8. A priest is born from the skeletal body of Cihuacoatl. Codex Borgia, p. 32. Kingsborough 1831.

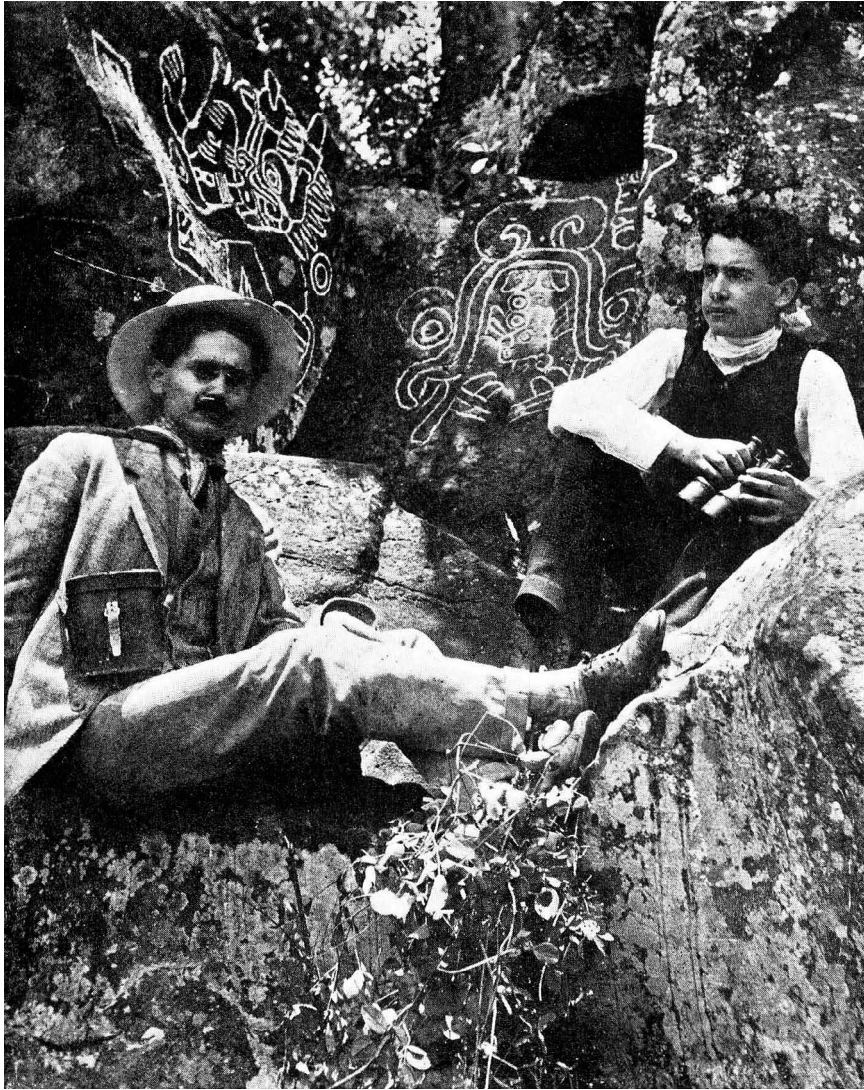


Figure 1.9. Carvings of Cipactonal and Ome Tochtli. Piedra de los Reyes, Yautepec, Morelos. Robelo 1910.

same author (Robelo 1910, 350) was unable to clarify the meaning of the date and name 2 Rabbit found on the central boulder inside the crocodile's mouth. In Nahuatl lore, Ome Tochtli (2 Rabbit) is the calendrical name assigned to the gods of *pulque*, a beverage obtained from fermented agave, which is still popular in central and southern Mexico today. According to the Codex Magliabechiano (ff. 49r–49v), both Tepoztlan and Yautepec, two towns in the Cuernavaca area near Piedra de los Reyes, had pulque gods as their patron deities. Thus, it is possible that Ome Tochtli represented at the site is a specific reference to the local founding god and its birth as it emerges from the earth with the embrace, support, and sacrifice of the elderly couple. A priest standing between the boulders depicting Oxomoco and Cipactonal could personify Ome Tochtli and derive their powers from the elderly couple and the earth.

The interchangeable roles of old diviners and powerful priest-gods can be found on a series of pages in the Borgia Group that represents protocols of rituals (Nowotny 1961,

272–275, Anders, Jansen, and Loo 1994, 267–300, Boone 2007, 157–169). Each page depicts a *mesa* (sacred table) for the correct number and placement of candles and other offerings, as seen in both don Isauro and doña Luisa's ceremonies (see also Sharon and Brady 2003, Dehouve 2007). In Fejérváry-Mayer, a long sequence of eighteen pages (pp. 5–22) depicts several *mesas*. The top portion of each page or *mesa* shows a god engaged in a ritual activity in front of an offering, whose number and placement are specified on the lower part of the page. Of the eighteen scenes, the priestess is present in only one instance on page 7. She is seated in front of a god, most likely Xochipilli, with whom she is interacting, as indicated by their gestures (Fig. 1.10). Both priestess and god are seated on a *petate* (straw mat), while an offering of white feathers and a burning ball of *hule* (rubber) is placed between them. The elderly diviner on the left has seemingly invoked and summoned the young god. The offerings of white feathers and flowers are depicted in the bottom register, along with numeral dots and bars. The remaining pages of this section in the manuscript only depict one character on

each page, seated on the right, the place of the god on page 7. Although the identity of each character cannot always be determined, their divine status is indicated by their rich and varied iconographic attributes. On page 14 (Fig. 1.11), for example, the god takes an active ceremonial role; he holds two sacrificial tools, a *maguey* (agave) spine and a bone, in his right hand while pointing his left index finger to a bundle of burning *ocote* (pinewood) sticks in front of him. As on all other pages in this section, the god on this page seems to be performing an officiating role usually played by a priest or priestess. The god is seemingly about to perform a ritual bloodletting that should be performed for him rather than by him. Although this may seem odd, this example of a god performing a ritual that ought to be performed for them is not a rare instance in the religious manuscripts (see, for example, Fig. 3.3 and 6.9).

Patton (2009) discussed a similar situation in a series of Greek vases that depict gods conducting libation rituals that should be performed for them. This paradoxical situation turns the otherwise pragmatic relationship of giving an offering to obtain a favor (*do ut des*) into a purposeless, self-referential act. The gods become the generator of their own cult, with no other outcome than the

ritual itself. Patton (2009, 13) calls this type of depiction “divine reflexivity” and explains that, in such instances, the painted image does not prescribe a ritual but rather depicts an idealized moment of the ritual realization. The image of the god becomes a form of self-expression; the divine realm is at once the objective and the source of all ceremonial actions, including human ones (Patton 2009, 174). In the Introduction, I referred to the work of Jewish scholar Seeman (2004) who, in analyzing the relationship between the existential philosophy of Levinas and Rabbinic thought, stressed the selfless nature of the so-called “medical gesture,” defined as an act primarily driven by altruism. The “medical gesture” is an imperative to act rather than an explanation or rational justification of a fact or situation. I believe that the pages of the codices that depict mesas constitute another instance of the generosity of ritual (i.e., a ritual that goes beyond the limitations imposed by strict pragmatism). This is not to say that no objectives are pursued in a ceremony. On the contrary, seeking a cure for an illness is almost always the reason that people consult Mazatec healers. Finally, the curandero’s vocation goes well beyond any pragmatic objectives and may be better described as a lifelong pursuit of knowledge for its own sake.

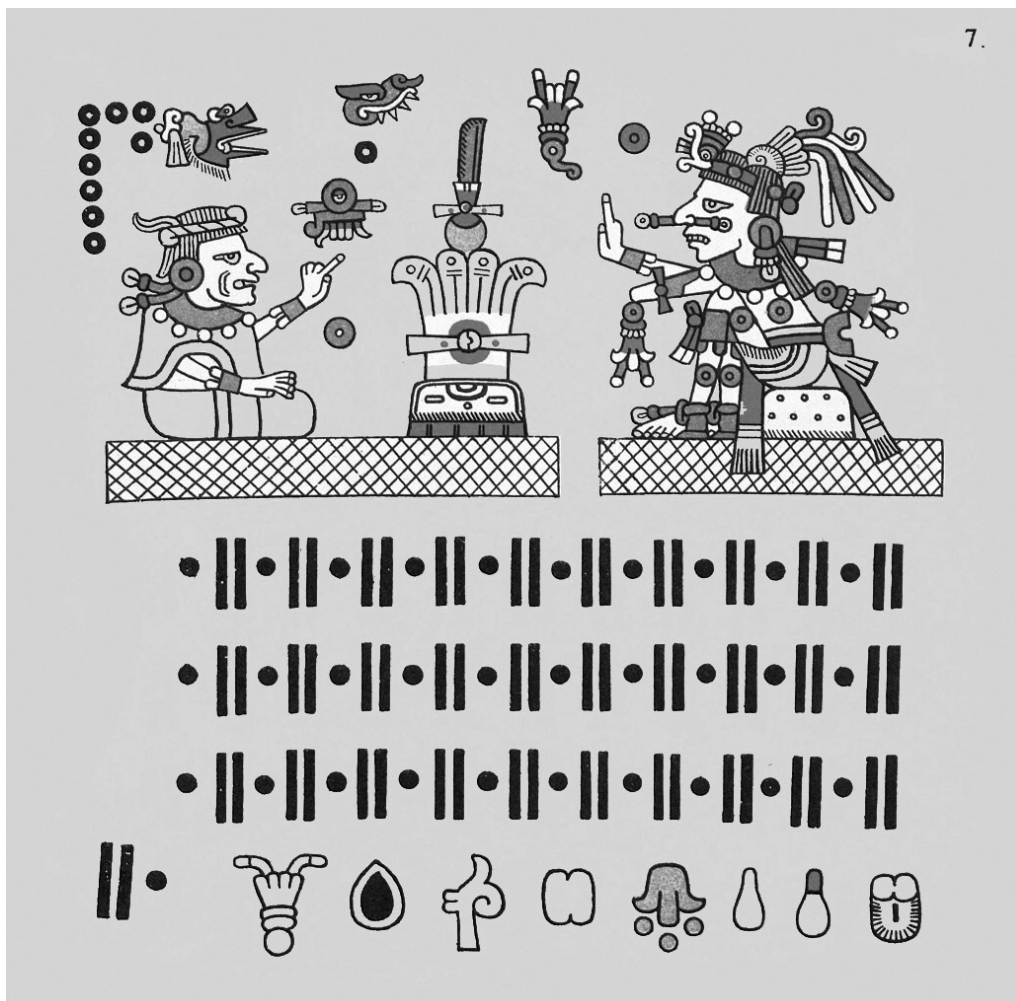


Figure 1.10. An old priestess and Xochipilli; counted offerings below. Codex Fejérváry-Mayer, p. 7. Loubat 1901.

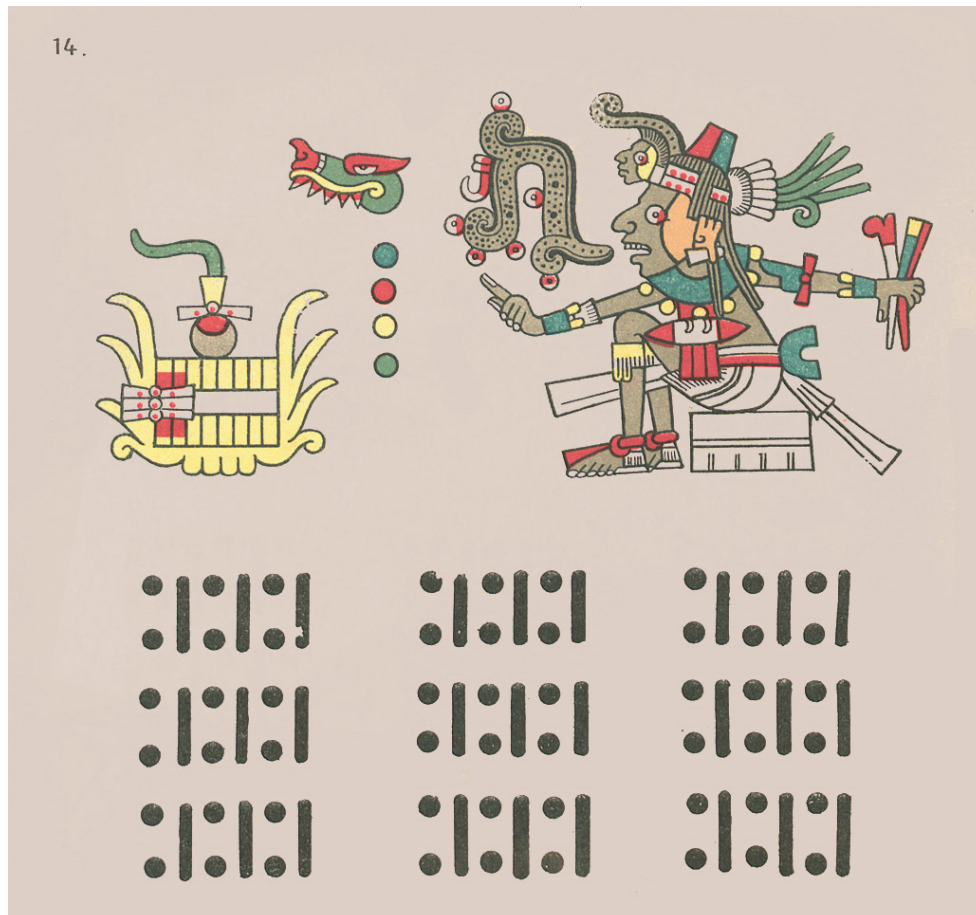


Figure 1.11. Yoaltecuhtli ordering a counted offering. Codex Fejérváry-Mayer, p. 14. Loubat 1901.

The god of Figure 1.11 illustrates another specific iconographic feature that indicates a high degree of reflexivity in the image-making process. His yellow and gray facial paint is replicated in the small head mounted on his forehead. Both heads also produce a gray and smoky volute accompanied by star-eye symbols. An image that contains a smaller version or copy of itself is a rhetorical and stylistic device known as *mise en abyme*, French for “into the abyss” (Dällenbach 1989). The visual and literary rhetorical trope of repeating the entire image or narrative in a detail of itself has the rather destabilizing effect of creating an infinitely regressive situation in which the reader or viewer is being read and viewed at the same time in an endless spiral. The image or story appears to generate itself. Subject and object interchange so that the viewer’s and reader’s placement in the story is confused and their identity and existential status are questioned. The interchangeability of object and subject also has the effect of nullifying the boundaries between external reality and internal or enclosed fiction or projection. The image ceases to draw its meaning from an external point of reference and becomes its own source of referential meaning, which is evinced by the iteration of certain features. In our case, the iconography of the god is syncretic or ambiguous, mixing as it does the attributes of Patecatl and Yoaltecuhtli (Anders, Jansen, and Pérez Jiménez 1994, 218–219), but this is not a mistake, because the exact replication does not

leave any doubts about the *tlacuilo*’s (painter’s) original intention. Iterability rather than prototype constitutes authority (Derrida 1988). Self-referentiality is typical of the reflexive nature of divinity, according to Patton (2009, 176). The priest can read himself in the book while reading it, as suggested by the superimposition of roles in the images from the previously discussed codices. There is no need for an external myth to explain why the gods perform the ceremony the way that they do or sport certain attributes; they simply do. As modern scholars, we often make this mistake and look for external and reliable sources while forgetting the process by which a source does indeed function as such. In the field, a lack of explanation for certain ceremonial activities or beliefs is often taken as a sign of loss of meaning, without considering that willful repetition of a certain behavior is in itself tradition.

1.3. Divination and ceremony

Scenes that clearly depict the mantic reading of maize or other comparable divinatory practices can only be found in two cognate illustrations in the Codices Tudela (f. 49r; Fig. 1.12) and Magliabechiano (f. 78r). Figure 1.12 depicts presumably three stages of a visit to the diviner, proceeding from top to bottom. First, two men consult with a woman, who is not only talking to them, as indicated by the gray volutes, but also weeping. Then,

the central and main scene depicts a female diviner seated on a mat to the left. She is throwing maize kernels and black beans from a conch shell onto a white cloth. In front of her is an image of Ehecatl-Quetzalcoatl, which also rests on a straw mat. Finally, a person who is talking and crying, presumably the client, is depicted below. While the act of crying is clearly an expression of the concerns that afflict the patient, it could also be interpreted as the tears that often accompany the vision and clarity attained during the ceremony (Jansen 1982, 196–197). In this case,

knowledge of one's condition passes from the priestess in the first scene to the person directly afflicted below through the reading of the maize in the middle. While the curandera in the first scene could immediately understand the situation, the clarity that comes from divination helps to communicate knowledge to the person below.

Comparing this image with the ones from pre-Hispanic codices, it is noticeable that the kernels and table are not present or naturalistically depicted in the latter



Figure 1.12. Priestess reading maize in front of Quetzalcoatl and a patient. Codex Tudela, f. 49r. Museo de América, Madrid.

(Fig. 1.10–1.11); rather, the manuscript itself becomes a mesa whose stuccoed surface mimics the white cloth, while the dot-and-line numerals signify both the number and position of the kernels, bundles, and candles. In the Codex Tudela, kernels and beans are placed at the center of the image, floating in the air, which mimics the position that they may take once they are on the cloth. Moreover, in the ancient books, one always finds the god associated with the offering but never the client and very rarely the diviner herself. The image in the ancient books needs an external reader to function and be properly activated (Díaz Álvarez 2016), as it is not a mere depiction of a narrative scene with an explanatory intent.

Among the Mazatecs of Oaxaca, the altar on which the kernels are thrown is covered with a white cloth and adorned with sacred images, branches, flowers, and candles; it is referred to as *yamixa tse* (white or pure table). It is always oriented towards the east, the place from which light, clarity, and knowledge originate. Don Isauro Guerrero explained the following:

Tso xi ndichjota chingana: Ndosen
The revered grandparents say, clear and pure circle of knowledge

Ndonai ndona, kitsole chjota chingana ñaa
Wise father and wise mother, that it is how our ancestors called it

Ndosen, naskana, kitsole je chjota chingana ñaa
Circle of knowledge, they gave it a really beautiful name, our ancestors

Koa ya kjiroani ña bitjoni tsui, kjoama kjoatjao
That is where the sun rises; from there the ceremonies and the rites (knowledge) came.

The expression *ndonai ndona*, which we translated as “wise father and wise mother,” refers to a place of supreme clarity, where knowledge is acquired (Carrera González and Doesburg 1996, 189–190). *Ndosen*, mentioned in the second line, has a similar meaning as a place found in the east, which in Western cultural terms could perhaps be indicated as “heaven” (Boege 1988, 174–183). *Sen* or *isen* evokes the idea that one’s nature or identity rests in a double, an image or representation of sorts.

According to Mesoamerican lore, the great culture hero Quetzalcoatl disappeared into the east at the end of his life. In the Codex Vaticanus A (f. 9v), the place is called Tlapallan, the Colored Place, a name related to the concept of *in tllilli in tlapalli* (black and colored), a metaphor for knowledge and the ancient books, whose figures comprise a black outline and colored areas. In the Codex Tudela (Fig. 1.12), Quetzalcoatl, the tutelary god of priests, sits in front of a wise woman, where today we see images of saints (Fig. 1.1). Behind the priestess is a gray circle decorated with star-eyes. Quetzalcoatl, the supreme deity of priestly knowledge, is seated in the east

and opposed to the west, which is associated with night and obscurity. Through a consultation with the diviner, one leaves behind uncertainty and turns towards clarity. Previously, Anders and Jansen (1996a, 214) interpreted the night symbol as an indication that the ritual of divination took place at night. María Sabina once related to Álvaro Estrada (1981, 63) that Toribio García, a *chjota chjine* of Huautla, used thirteen kernels of corn for divination. She said that he used to cast kernels during night vigils and again at dawn. In my experience, however, the reading of maize is not part of night ceremonies and is more often performed during the day, although it may be conducted in conjunction with night ceremonies, as explained in Chapter 2.

In pre-Hispanic manuscripts, star-eyes on a gray background not only indicate the night as a temporal marker but are also frequently an attribute of gods and ceremonial tools. On page 12 (Fig. 3.3) of the Codex Cospi, for example, two officiating priest-gods extend their censers towards a temple. While the character in the top scene can be identified as Tonatiuh and his related sun cult, the god below, Itzlacolihqui (Curved Obsidian Blade), wears a headdress with star-eye symbols and dark, smoky hair, which highlights his relationship with night and obscurity. A large smoke volute emerges from Itzlacolihqui’s incense burner and the temple itself, presided by over an owl, which contrasts with the colorful bird and bejeweled offerings of the temple above. The calendrical arrangement on the left associates the top image with the east, while the image below corresponds to the north (Jansen 2002, 288–302). In the Codex Tudela (Fig. 1.12), the priestess is an intermediary figure between opposing forces: the realms of clarity and knowledge versus the “other” realm—the place of the unknown, obscurity, and the ancestors.

Olivier discussed the intermingling of rather than the opposition between obscure and possibly negative forces on the one hand and clarity and knowledge on the other in his research on the identity of Tezcatlipoca (Smoking Mirror; Olivier 2003, 2015b). In both texts and images, Tezcatlipoca is almost inextricably related to Quetzalcoatl, the primordial priest of the east. By contrast, Tezcatlipoca, as his enemy brother, embodies night and darkness. The dynamic relationship between the two is clearly expressed on page 22 of the Codex Borbonicus, as previously discussed. Olivier (2003, 22) also highlighted that sacrifice, especially self-sacrifice or immolation, is closely related to music and prayer. Self-sacrifice is often represented in pictographic form as a flint knife, as previously explained in the birth of Lord 9 Wind Quetzalcoatl and the ecstatic flight of priest 1 Jaguar in the Selden Roll. The impalpable but pervasive quality of music and prayer is a primary manifestation not only of wind, Quetzalcoatl-Ehecatl himself, but also the “night wind” (*in yohualli in ehecatl* in Nahuatl), which is more commonly an attribute of Tezcatlipoca (e.g., Sahagún 1950–1982, bk. 6, ch. 1). Visually, smoke, soot, and charcoal produced by burning flames were often used for the black body paint of priests (Olivier 2003, 185–189).

Following this interpretation, the night is not only a temporal accident but also a constitutive element of ceremonial action. On page 29 (Fig. 1.13), the scene that opens the long central sequence of the Codex Borgia is dominated by a large anthropomorphic incense burner with eyes and a fleshless mouth. Smoky volutes emanate from it, and their ends feature the head of a wind god, Ehecatl, a clear indication of a nightly smoke or wind. In this instance, the juxtaposition between night and Quetzalcoatl-Ehecatl becomes a blending, which indicates that the opposition is dynamic and not fixed. In the lower part of the image, the square enclosure opens to the next scene on the following page of the manuscript, where two intertwined smoke serpents generate two priestly figures from their mouths; their beaked masks and claws indicate

that they are nahuales. The image suggests that it is the smoke that generates the priests. Ceremonial actions, such as the burning of copal and other substances on a brazier, are not so much performed by the priest as they bestow the status of priesthood on a person.

Marina Mendoza of Boca del Río, a small village in the vicinity of Huautla, expressed the power and importance of incense burners in ceremonies with the following words:

Ni'kijain'la tiskangini nroa'i nañaa
Our incense burner will never fall

Ni'kijain koi'tsaoya'ni nroa'i naa
My incense burner will never cease burning

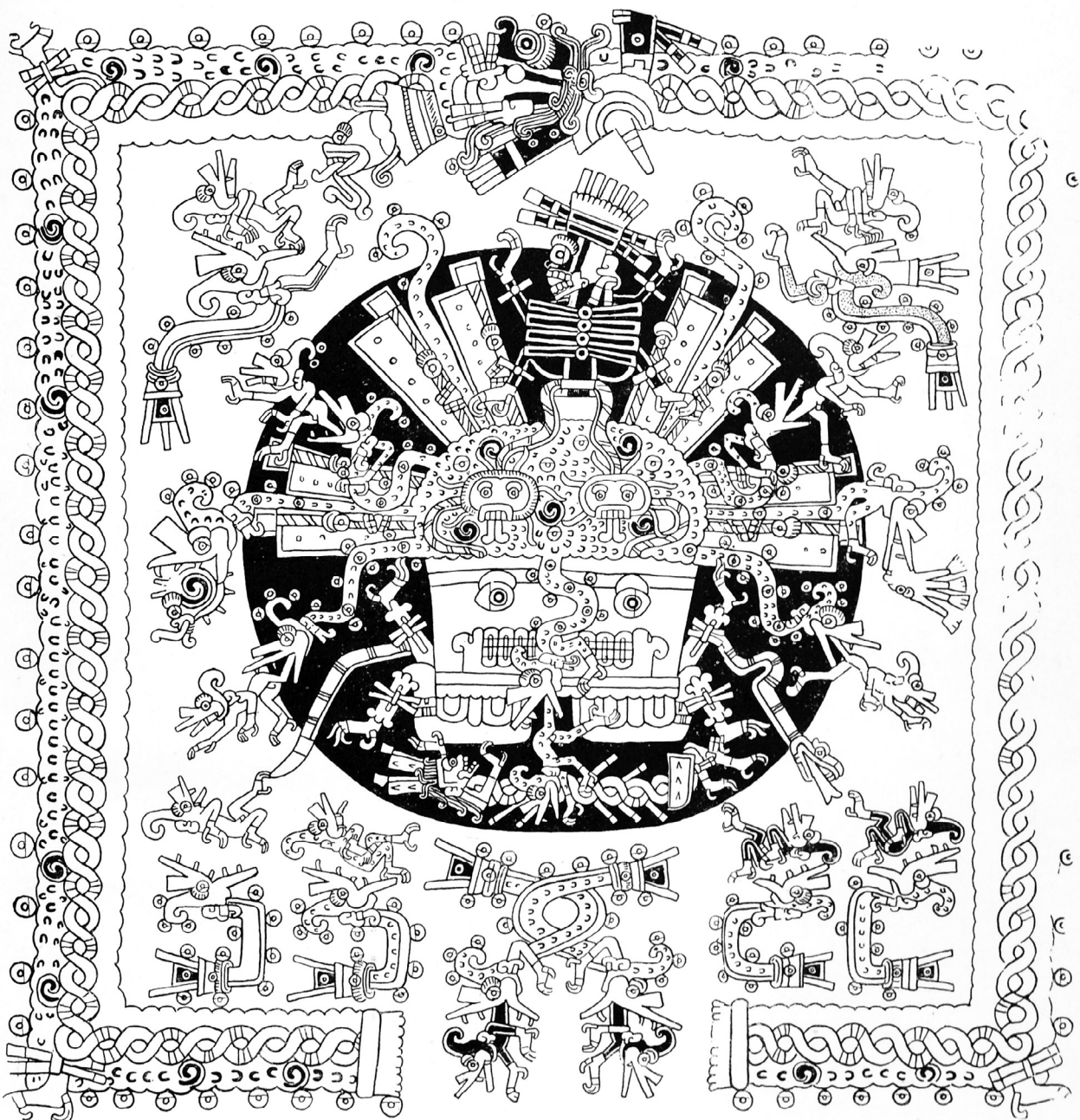


Figure 1.13. The incense burner. Codex Borgia, p. 29. Danzel 1923.

Finally, incense burners from the region of Tehuacán and Teotitlán, which are commonly referred to as *xantiles*, offer an example culturally and geographically close to both Huautla de Jiménez and the codices (Fig. 1.14). The term “xantil,” used today in the region to refer to any archaeological object, probably derives from the Spanish word *gentil* (meaning “pagan”) in reference to the religion practiced before colonization. Seler (1895, 35) was the first to identify the most-represented god in the *xantiles* as the central Mexican Macuilxochitl (Five Flower), a god of game, dance, and music who is similar to Xochipilli (Lord of Flowers). Despite its clear central Mexican iconography, the *xantil* is a typical artifact from the southern Nahuatl region, including the Mazateca and other areas of the northern state of Oaxaca. Although southern

Nahuatl iconography’s bearing on the interpretation of the codices and Mazatec night ceremonies are discussed at greater length in Section 3.4, it is worth mentioning the work of John Pohl (2007) on a *xantil* now housed at the Princeton University Art Museum. He identified the character on the *xantil* as Macuiltonal (Five Soul), a patron god of sorcerers, diviners, and healers, thus emphasizing the intrinsically ceremonial nature of feasting, music, and dancing as activities that are more commonly associated with the Macuilxochitl-Xochipilli deity complex. A comparison of the Tehuacán *xantil* with the incense burner on page 29 of the Codex Borgia (Fig. 1.13) and the god on page 14 of the Codex Fejérváry-Mayer (Fig. 1.11) reveals the complexity of this type of object, which conflates the smoke, the representation of the god, and



Figure 1.14. Xantil, Mixteca-Puebla. The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore.

the priest who impersonates the god. Once the censer is activated by placing burning wood and other substances in it, smoke emerges from the holes in the nostrils, mouth, and chest. This fuming body, as seen in Figure 1.11, is not only a metaphor for knowledge but also an actual ritual and devotional object. Pictographic symbolism closely adheres to a lived experience and vivid perceptions of the senses (sight, touch, smell, etc.). Both Jansen (2002) and Pohl (2007) related the use and symbolism of the censers of southeastern Mexico to the consumption of substances such as *piciete* (wild tobacco) or sacred mushrooms, which induce altered states of consciousness as a means of attaining knowledge.

The ritual consumption of mushrooms, which takes place exclusively at night, is perhaps the aspect of Mazatec culture and ceremonies that is best known to outsiders. Sacred mushrooms are called *ndi'xitjo* (little ones that spring forth) in Mazatec, a reference to the fact that they spontaneously grow during the rainy season and cannot be cultivated. Since Gordon Wasson's numerous visits to the region, a Mazatec woman called María Sabina (Fig. 2.1), who was from Río Santiago—a small village located around half an hour's drive from Huautla—and lived in

the main Mazatec town until her death in 1985, became a world-renowned *chjon chjine* (wise woman; Estrada 1981). While written references to the use of sacred plants can be found in colonial sources from the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries (e.g., the Florentine Codex, bk. 11, ch. 7 and Alarcón and Serna in Andrews and Hassig 1984, bk. 1), I discuss two clear pictographic representations in this section. First, the colonial Codex Magliabechiano (f. 90r; Fig. 1.15) explicitly and succinctly illustrates the consumption of sacred mushrooms. On a small page that depicts different and perhaps unrelated scenes (see also Section 7.2.5 for further discussion), a man seated on a straw mat appears to be in the act of ingesting a round object with a white stem while holding a similar object in his other hand. The man is probably ingesting mushrooms, which are sprouting from a patch of land right in front of him. A large skeletal figure looms behind him and touches him with his right claw. The composition suggests an opposition: on the one hand, the man performing the ritual is leaving darkness and death behind him thanks to the power of the sacred plants in front of him, which in this case would indicate clarity. On the other hand, the skeletal character can be understood as an ancestor who guides and touches or protects the man who undertakes the ritual. The



Figure 1.15. The ingestion of sacred mushrooms (lower right). Codex Magliabechiano, f. 90r. Florence, Biblioteca nazionale centrale, Banco Rari, 232.

colonial image of the skeletal figure creates a terrifying depiction of the power of the plant, perhaps suggesting diabolical overtones, but it can also allude to the fact that mushroom ceremonies can have terrible outcomes when they are not properly performed by knowledgeable people.

The only pre-Hispanic depiction of a ceremony involving the consumption of mushrooms can be found on page 24 of the Codex Vienna (Fig. 1.16). First identified by Caso (1963), this scene is part of a long sequence of rituals that precedes the rise of the first sun on page 23 (the manuscript's page count proceeds backwards). The ceremony takes place in Apoala, a town in the Mixteca Alta that is considered a place of origin for the Mixtec people, as indicated by the toponym on the bottom right corner of the page, where the reading of the scene begins. Next to the toponym, two spirits are engaged in a conversation on the day 4 Lizard, year 8 Reed. The narrative then proceeds upwards, alternating from right to left and from left to right. The ceremony is performed by Lord 9 Wind Quetzalcoatl, who first meets with an old priest, Lord 4 Lizard, seated on a temple platform before bringing forth the mushrooms in

the form of two goddesses, Ladies 4 Lizard and 11 Lizard, whom he carries on his back. Both women have white mushrooms sprouting from their heads. Jansen (1982, 196) noted that characters or gods with these calendrical names only appear in this scene and are not mentioned anywhere else in extant Mixtec codices. Next, the scene depicts a mortuary bundle placed on the ground and emanating smoke volutes, followed by a representation of the rain god Tlaloc and a maize plant; the same images can be found in a preceding scene on page 27 that relates to the invention of agriculture. This cluster of images is associated with an unspecified year 1 indicated by one dot and a year sign (interlaced A-O sign) in front of the mummy. It is unclear whether these chronological markers are a reference to specific times during the year when the ceremony must be performed or the establishment of the ceremony itself. The ceremony begins with Quetzalcoatl playing and singing with a human bone and skull to invoke the presence and help of the ancestors. In front of him sits a character who is visibly crying and holding two white mushrooms (to this day, mushrooms are consumed in pairs). In the Codex Tudela (f. 49r), I interpreted the act of



Figure 1.16. Mushroom ceremony. Codex Vienna, p. 24. Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna.

crying as a reference to diviners' ability to see what afflicts a patient. The weeping character bears the calendrical name of 7 Flower—Xochipilli among the Nahuas, the god of music and feasting, who is similar to the xantil discussed above.

Jansen (1982, 197) transcribed an excerpt from a chant by María Sabina in relation to his interpretation of the ceremony in the Codex Vienna. It is worth reading the text again:

Chjon nga kjindia nia, tso
Woman who cries I am, says

Chjon nga bixia nia, tso
Woman who whistles I am, says

Chjon nga sitsin nia, tso
Woman like thunder I am, says

Chjon nga sikane nia, tso
Woman who rumbles I am, says

Chjon spiritu nia, tso
Woman spirit I am, says

Chjon nga kjindia nia, tso
Crying woman I am, says

(Wasson and Wasson 1957a, side 1, band 1)

(<https://youtu.be/EqExyGM7FOA>)

Transcription and translation by Santiago Cortés Martínez and Alessia Frassani

In this excerpt, María Sabina associates the act of crying with meteorological manifestations, such as storms, wind, and rain. Her tears are like raindrops, and her cries reverberate like thunder. At the same time, the subject—María Sabina insistently referred to herself in the third person, as a woman—becomes an immaterial spirit who can inhabit the falling drops and resounding thunder. María Sabina describes an atmospheric phenomenon as a self-ascribed attribute in a manner similar to the night and star-eyes seen in the several aforementioned depictions from pre-Hispanic codices. Rain and thunder are not external and circumstantial meteorological accidents; they are constitutive of a subjective experience that occurs during the ceremony. It is clear that the words and chants of modern chjota chjine are analogous to images in the ancient codices and objects, such as the censer. Colonial sources, in contrast, despite being chronologically closer to the ancient manuscripts, did not utilize the full potential of images as generators of meaning but rather relied on pictography as illustrations, which turned the subjective experience of knowledge acquisition into an external and ostensibly objective point of view. However, this point of view was usually openly hostile to Mesoamerican religious experience. The comparison of the two images of mushroom consumption in the Codices Magliabechiano and Vienna once again highlights the

division in the depiction of sacred images and beings from the pre-Hispanic period and the colonial period. While ceremony participants in the Mixtec manuscript were gods themselves and performed a ritual of self-reflexivity, the solitary man's ingestion of the sacred plant in the later colonial depiction was divorced from the ancestor that he was encountering. The latter image is descriptive or etic, an anthropological expression that indicates the observer's external and analytical point of view. The narrative in the Codex Vienna, on the contrary, conflates human and communal experiences of the ceremony with the encounter with the gods to the point that the two fuse into a single complex image.

As previously mentioned, the mushroom ceremony in the Codex Vienna precedes and is actually the culminating event in a series of rituals that lead to the rise of the first sun on page 23. Participants in the ceremony (i.e., Lords 2 Dog, 1 Death, and 4 Movement and Ladies 9 Reed, 1 Eagle, 9 Grass, and 5 Flint) are well-known characters who prominently appear not only in the preceding chapters of the Mixtec creation narrative but also on the remaining pages (22–1), which relate the founding of regional dynasties. Therefore, the rise of the first sun is a liminal moment that marks the beginning of a new era in the world, out of the darkness of the ancestors' primordial time. Compared to depictions in colonial manuscripts, it becomes apparent that death, darkness, and night have connotations in Mesoamerican thought that are quite different from the European tradition. Passage through night and darkness and the ability to establish a relationship and communication with the ancestors are instrumental to the rise of the sun, light, life, and social organization. Darkness is not a static position of ignorance or a lack of understanding but rather a dynamic quest towards knowledge and the establishment of new order.

This chapter discussed the ways in which Mazatec chjota chjine and Mesoamerican wise people or priests more generally can subjectively generate their own personae, powers, and scope of action. Divination, especially when it directly addresses the ancestors who reside in another world, entails active engagement with them in an often dark and unknown realm. Unlike any functionalist view of rituals that posits adherence to an established protocol to achieve the desired effect, Mesoamerican divination and its ceremonies are extremely inventive and open-ended processes; they are geared towards reunion with the ancestors, who are the only ones who can grant supernatural powers to the living. Wagner's ideas on the "invention of culture" are especially relevant in this context (Wagner 1981, Zamora 2016).

Night Ceremonies and Chants

Recordings of María Sabina's chants (Wasson and Wasson 1957a, Wasson et al. 1974) by American mycologist Gordon Wasson turned a humble but powerful woman into one of the most famous figures in modern Mexico, both within and outside of the country (Fig. 2.1; Estrada 1981). Nonetheless, despite the publication of the recordings along with full transcriptions, annotations, and translations of the recited texts in both Spanish and English (Wasson et al. 1974), the remarkable knowledge of María Sabina and many other *chjota chjine* from the region has not been given the attention that it deserves.

This chapter is an attempt to critically present and discuss original Mazatec chants that were recorded, transcribed, and translated by the author and Santiago Cortés Martínez, a *huauteco* with a long-lasting interest in the preservation and promotion of his native language, ceremonies, and traditional medicine. The chants provide a unique entry point into Mesoamerican healers' images of themselves and their knowledge and powers. Colonial poems and chants are also critically presented alongside contemporary examples to understand the historical depth and trajectory of Indigenous way of constructing personhood and agency in a ritual context.

2.1. Colonial views on night ceremonies

Along with other deeply misguided and negative terms, such as “idol” (*idolo*), that have been used to describe sacred Mesoamerican images in colonial and modern scholarship, “drunkenness” (*borrachera*) has been taken at face value when describing ceremonies, especially those performed at night, which are seemingly implied to be orgiastic, alcohol-fueled rituals. Such a misinterpretation is a direct result of the fact that every piece of information on the use of mind-altering, psychoactive substances in colonial sources was intended to demonize and extirpate their use. Treatises such as those by Ruiz de Alarcón and other friars compiled in the seventeenth century were veritable manuals for the identification of illicit Indigenous practices that involved substances such as *ololiuhqui* (*datura* seed), *piciete* (wild tobacco), and sacred mushrooms (*teonanacatl*; Andrews and Hassig 1984, Ponce et al. 1987).

The implications of such a prejudicial stance are seldom considered when relying on these sources for interpretation, perhaps due to common and long-lasting misconceptions of altered states in Western society and culture. Notably, Ginzburg (1983, 1991) unveiled how the witch-hunt craze



Figure 2.1. María Sabina. Fototeca del Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, Mexico.

of the early modern period persecuted deeply rooted agrarian cults in Europe. A person's ability to transform into another being (human, animal, or supernatural) was deemed diabolical by the Church and led to the killing of hundreds of thousands of people, mostly women. Witches were accused of being willfully malevolent beings who vengefully caused sickness and death to others. It is not a coincidence that Inquisitorial practices in the Old World spread to the New World during the same period in the wake of the political subjugation of Indigenous peoples. After the so-called decline of magic and the rise of the modern state, which became the institution charged with controlling societal behavior, the condemnation of altered states passed from the realm of the diabolical to that of the insane (Foucault 2006). Even Freud's theorization of the subconscious, which has been accepted by the medical and scientific establishment since the early twentieth century, elicits the idea of something subversive and threatening. To this day, substances that alter states of mind are mostly illegal and only used for recreational purposes.

In the case of Latin America, perhaps no scholar has more cogently expressed the deep and entrenched relationship between Western constructs and Indigenous American history than Michael Taussig (1986). In his work, the colonialist enterprise of the Peruvian Amazon Rubber Company in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries manifested the limits of European logos pushed to extreme and inhumane rationality in the name of capitalist extractivism, a situation that he described as "epistemic murk" (Taussig 1986, 121). The unspeakable torture and violence perpetrated against local Indigenous workers who were forced into the extraction of rubber was "a space of death" (Taussig 1986, 4, 127), from which the healing of these victims paradoxically began. Rituals with the *yage*, a sacred and powerful Amazonian plant, represent travel to the world of death and back, and they counter and heal the rationality of Western violence, which conceives of death as final and abhorrent—indeed, the physical and cultural destiny inflicted on Indigenous people in the Amazon rainforest. Where colonialist logic finds its most gruesome outcomes, a new type of understanding emerges.

In Mesoamerica, 1 Death is a date and a calendrical name associated with the sun, as seen in depictions of the trecena beginning with this day on page 66 of the Codex Borgia and the Codex Telleriano-Remensis (f. 12v), among others. Moreover, 1 Death is the day sign of Tezcatlipoca (Sahagún 1950–1982, bk. 4, ch. 9), the visionary god associated with night and darkness. The Nahuatl text and images that correspond to the day sign 1 Death (Fig. 2.2) in the Florentine Codex indicate sacrifice and cannibalism: "He will die sacrificed as a war captive. They will cook him in an *olla* and eat him" (Sahagún 1950–1982, bk. 4, ch. 9, 35). The upper image of the illustrations depicts a naked man seated on a rock, weeping with his head bowed. Then, the next image shows two people extracting the heart of a male victim stretched out on a sacrificial stone. Finally, the third image presents two people cooking and

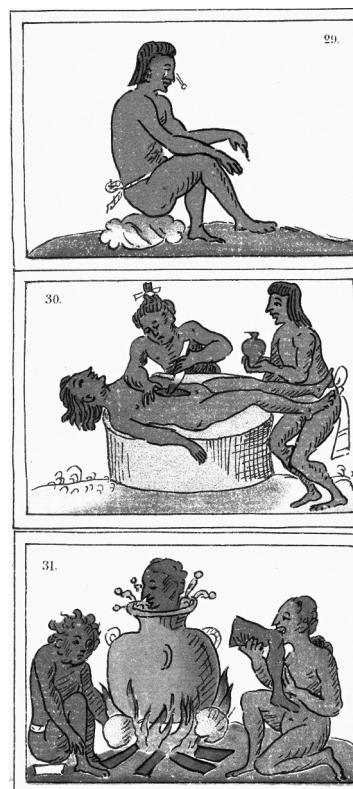


Figure 2.2. Illustrations related to the trecena 1 Death. *Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España*, vol. 1, bk. 4, f. 25r. Paso y Troncoso 1926.

eating dismembered body parts. Cannibalism has been deconstructed and rejected as a largely early colonialist fabrication that began with the European encounter of the once infamous Caribs of the Antilles (Arens 1979, Reid 2009, 88–99; see also Barker et al. 1998, Isaac 2005, Wilkosz 2015, Declercq 2018, and Restall 2018). What is left of this image and the information provided by the Nahuatl author of the written text, once they are stripped of the barbaric distortion imposed by those who were in reality inflicting insufferable pain onto Indigenous people? Is death itself a journey from light to darkness *and* back?

A gloss in the Codex Telleriano-Remensis (f. 12v), penned next to the day sign 1 Death, reads,

Those who were born here would be magicians for they tried hard to transform themselves into the shapes of various animals as well as other shapes, as well as making it appear as if a man were separating into pieces, as if each leg and arm were detached. (Quiñones Keber 1995, 261)

According to Fagetti (2015, 153–155), modern shamans known as *xicovame* (fire serpents, sing. *xicovatl*) in the Nahuatl town of Tlacotepec, Puebla, experience the abandonment of their own body as literal dismemberment: flesh and bones are left visible on a table or a plate, while the person inhabits another physical state.

The man seated on a stone in the first image of Figure 2.2 is not pondering his somber destiny. Weeping is associated with vision, as discussed in Chapter 1. The naked man, devoted to Tezcatlipoca, is beginning his journey to reach the world of the ancestors and know his fate, which may mean death in battle or as a war captive, as also suggested in the above-quoted Nahuatl text from the Florentine Codex. As further discussed in Chapter 8, the intellectual missionary experiment that led to the creation of the Florentine Codex demonstrates the limits of the cultural encounter when it is framed by evangelical ideology. It was the missionaries' intention to represent, with the authority of the victor, Mesoamerican culture at the moment of its declared death. As modern heirs of Sahagún's ethnographic and encyclopedic method, Western scholars fall victim to the same mistake all too often.

Anthropologists have long turned their attention to shamanism and ecstatic techniques, building on the classic study by Romanian historian Mircea Eliade (1964). Furst (1972), Harner (1973), and Wasson (1980) are the most important contributions for the present study, which seeks to uncover the shamanic aspects of Mesoamerican being in the world, as expressed through visual and other artistic means (see also Harrison-Buck and Freidel 2021). Mazatec ceremonies and their language provide a key to the identification of elements in the pictographic and textual descriptions of Indigenous ceremonies, which speak to an enduring Mesoamerican paradigm of vision quests (or, as Santiago suggested, quests for an encounter) and spiritual transformations.

2.2. Mazatec night ceremonies

Night ceremonies have been referred to as *veladas* (vigils) since the work of Wasson (Wasson et al. 1974, IX), who also provided detailed descriptions of the general outlook and development of the performance he attended (Wasson and Wasson 1957b, 215–329, reprinted partially in Wasson and Wasson 2003). *Velada* is a translation of the Mazatec terms *tsaka tio' nko* or *kjoabijnachon*, both of which refer to the act of being awake at night. All ceremonies take place after dark, most often in the curandero's house. Usually, people other than the curandero and the patient are in attendance, such as members of either family or close acquaintances. The entire ritual, which lasts between two and five hours, entails different kinds of activities. Every time that I attended a *velada*, the curandero or curandera made a divinatory reading both before and after the ceremony using corn kernels, eggs, or candles, as explained in the previous chapter, which helped to clarify the prospect and outcome of my visit. At the same time, it seemed to me that these divinatory rituals, held in daylight, also served as a kind of introduction and closing for the nocturnal experience by connecting the dark time with the light of day. Praying with Catholic litanies, such as *Avemaría* and *Padre nuestro*, in either Spanish or Mazatec, accompanied the entirety of the night ceremony. Long periods of silence and casual chatting were also part of the communication

established between participants. Plants, such as *hoja de Pascua*, as seen in the preceding chapter, and *aguardiente* (a distilled spirit) were frequently employed; they were mostly rubbed on the head, temples, and forearms of the patient, a procedure that was intended to “raise” (*levantar* in Spanish) them—that is, to infuse strength or calm. Copal smoke served the same function, and it was often blown on the participant's face and body. While these aspects are almost universal, every curandero has their own style of conducting the ceremony and sings in remarkably different ways. In my experience, the most important factor that determined the outlook of a ceremony was the severity of the issue to be addressed, which could be physical, psychological, or social (e.g., interpersonal conflict). If the curandero themselves had unresolved problems, these would also greatly interfere with and affect the quality or, more accurately, the intensity of the ceremony.

Although I attended five ceremonies, I was only able to record on three occasions because curanderos often do not want mechanical devices to disrupt the ceremony or their words to be recorded. During chanting, language could become rather obscure, but this was usually because recordings cannot reproduce the complexity of the lived experience and interactions shared by participants during the ceremony. Wasson's 1974 publication is the only one that includes a complete tape recording, transcription, and translation (in both English and Spanish) of a ceremony conducted by María Sabina in 1958. By contrast, earlier published recordings (Wasson and Wasson 1957a) only contained excerpts from chants. For this reason, I believe that the latter publication only included partial transcriptions and translations, which could not be completed due to a lack of necessary context. In her later years in the 1970s, María Sabina was asked to perform a ceremony several times purely for the sake of being recorded, which she resented. She complained that the little mushrooms had lost their powers because of this. Even in earlier recordings from the 1950s, she agreed to the intrusion in the ceremony out of courtesy; however, in her own opinion, it came at a great cost (Estrada 1981, 90–92). The ceremony recorded in 1958 (Wasson et al. 1974) involved a young man called Perfeto José García who had fallen severely ill. It is important to mention Perfeto's illness because, as seen in some of the following chants or excerpts, the quest, struggle, and longing for knowledge (to identify the origin and cause of the illness to cure it) is a central aspect of and indeed the driving force for the ceremony. Without it, it is unclear what the purpose of the ceremony would be.

2.2.1. Marina Mendoza

As can be gathered from the full transcription in Wasson et al. (1974), ceremonies are punctuated by long and strenuous requests to God and saints to elucidate why the patient is suffering and to plead for clarity on the causes and outcome of the illness. For example, the following excerpt represents an invocation performed by Marina Mendoza on my behalf in Boca del Río, a dependency



Figure 2.3. House of Marina Mendoza, Boca del Río, San Mateo Eloxochitlan. Photo by Alessia Frassani.

of San Mateo Eloxochitlan located near Huautla on the federal highway, during a ceremony held on August 24, 2014 at her house (Fig. 2.3):

Na'inaa xi tsi so'nde, sije'ña kjoanda tjatse ndili'ji
My Father of the World, I ask for a blessing for your little one

¿Cómo se llama? — Alessia
What's her name? — Alessia

Nga'i'sin'nga jtino ko'na nda'i, na'i xi tsi so'nde
She is here with me now, Father of the World

Kata én, katana kjoale koi'nixin, koi'nitjen je'ndai
May [God] consider your words, may he consider you, on this day, on this night, right now

Nga'ndai ka'ni ka'bijin nio'xtila'li ya'ni'ya oracion'li
Now you gave your bread in your house of worship

Ka'bi'ni kjoanda'li xi'koi'nixin je'ndai, na'i xi tsi so'nde
You gave your blessing on this day, now, Father of the World

Ji kajen'li sondeli ji, aliya'jin'sa, nai tao'ngo xi tsi so'nde
You won in your world and nobody else [but you did], only Father of the World

K'oasin si'isenli ji ndi'li
So you will enlighten your little one

Tisiko, chomi'tje, chomi'yajin me'ni chiin xi tjin'le
Help her, raise her, lift her from the disease she carries

Ñani, ñani nda, sate'ta ndi'li
Where, wherever she is blocked, your little one

Tojñani nga ñai chón, ji xi nkoali k'oana i'sain, na'i xi tsi so'nde
Wherever there are difficulties, you will shed light on the path, Father of the World

Na'inaa Scribano, na'inaa San Isidro, ndi na'naa Natividad, ndi'chjon Pastora, ndi'chjon nda 'be
Father Notary (grandfather of the underworld), Father San Isidro, Mother Nativity, Lady Pastora, lady of the running water

Sijena án kjoanda xikoi nixin, je tsee San Pedro, San Pablo
I ask for a blessing on this day, of San Pedro, San Pablo

Na'inaa San Miguel Arcangel, kata én, kata kjoali ji
Father San Miguel Archangel, consider her words, may he consider you

San Ramon, sijena án kjoanda
San Ramon, I ask for a blessing

Ndi'nanaa Guadalupe, José y María
Precious Lady Guadalupe, Joseph and Mary

Xi tjen, xi xo'má katabitjo
May what drips like mucus go away

K'oasin si i'sen í, k'oasin k'oe je kjoandali
So enlighten here, so give your blessing

Tjana i'sen niji tsa meni xichon, meni xitjin, na'i xi tsi sonde
Enlighten, you, where the problems are, where there are
issues, Father of the World

Kata én, kata kjoani
May her words be considered, may she be considered

Nga'i skotsen ndiasai, ndiajtsoko, ndili ji
(God) will look after the path of the calf, of the foot (her
destiny) of your daughter

Transcription and translation by Alessia Frassani and Santiago
Cortés Martínez

Although Marina refers to God as a Christian entity, as evidenced in her mention of the bread given in the house of worship, for example, several other supernatural beings are more clearly Mesoamerican. Na'inaa Scribano is an elderly and authoritative figure, akin to Cipactonal introduced in Chapter 1. Although rendered with a Spanish word meaning “notary,” Na'inaa Scribano's powers consist in his ability to read and draft written documents, such as the ancient painted books. Ndi'chjon nda 'be, the Lady of the running water, a well-known supernatural among the Mazatec, is the local equivalent of the central Mexican Chalchiuhtlicue (Fig. 7.4). Some of the same expressions are found again in the following chant, although the tone and intensity attained during chanting is quite different. On the same night, Marina performed only one chant during a three-hour ceremony.

Án'jña nga'nirole so'nde, ti'tso
I am the strength of the world, is saying

Án'jña nga'nirole kjoa'nichikon'ta'in, ti'tso
I am the strength of the blessing, is saying

Án'jña nga'nirole so'nde, ti'tso
I am the strength of the world, is saying

Án'jña nga'nirole kjoa'kjin tokon, ti'tso
I am the strength of wisdom, is saying

Án'jña xi ma'naa ni'ndayaa chjota, ti'tso
I am the one who knows how to cure people, is saying

Án'jña xi ma'naa fe'e, ti'tso
I am the one who knows how to come forth, is saying

Án'jña xi ma'naa fitje'en, ti'tso
I am the one who knows how to fly, is saying

Án'jña xi ma'naa fe'e, ti'tso
I am the one who knows how to come forth, is saying

Án'jña nga'nirole so'nde, ti'tso
I am the strength of the world, is saying

Án'jña nga'nirole nangi, ti'tso
I am the strength of the earth, is saying

Án'jña nga'nirole kjoa'kjin tokon, ti'tso
I am the strength of wisdom, is saying

Án'jña nga'nirole son'de, ti'tso
I am the strength of the world, is saying

Án'jña nga'nirole na'chja ninda'jba, ti'tso
I am the strength of the grandmother of the broken bones, is
saying

Án'jña nga'nirole na'chja Lisabe nginde, ti'tso
I am the strength of Grandmother Lisabe of the underworld,
is saying

Án'jña xi ma'naa fi'tjeen, ti'tso
I am the one who knows how to come forth, is saying

Án'jña xi ma'naa fe'e, ti'tso
I am the one who knows how to come forth, is saying

Án'jña xi ma'naa ni'ndaa chjota, ti'tso
I am the one who knows how to cure people, is saying

Án'jña na'chja Lisibe, ti'tso
I am Grandmother Lisabe, is saying

Án'jña nga'nirole cho'o nro'jbi, ti'tso
I am the strength of the opossum, is saying

Án'jña nga'nirole xa i'ndo sincee, ti'tso
I am the strength of the spotted jaguar, is saying

Án'jña nga'nirole na'chja ninda'jba, ti'tso
I am the strength of the grandmother of the broken bones, is
saying

Án'jña nga'nirole kjoa'bi'jnachon, ti'tso
I am the strength of life, is saying

Án tisije kjoanda nai'taongo xi tsi so'nde
I am the one asking for a blessing, oh Father, guardian of the
world

Tai'nai kjoanda, tai'nai nga'nio kjoan'kji tokon'li
Give me blessing, give me the strength of your wisdom

Ji'ni nai taongo xi tijnli nga'nio, na'in
You are, my father, the one who gives strength, Father

Ji'ni xi mali ni'ndaya'ai chjota
You are the one who knows how to heal people

Ji'ni nai'naa San Isidro
You are my father, San Isidro

Ji'ni nai'naa Escribano
You are my father, Escribano

Ji'chjon Pastora
You mother, Shepherdess

Si'jee án kjoanda
I ask for your blessing

Tai'ñe kjoanda'li, tai nga'nioli ji
Give your blessing, your strength

Ni'kia'jinla ti'ska'ngini x'oa'inaña
My incense burner will never fall and break

Ni'kia'jin koi'tsaoya'jin x'ao'inaa
My incense burner will never stop burning

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Transcription and translation by Santiago Cortés Martínez
and Alessia Frassani

The chant is the only instance during the entire ceremony where Marina openly states that she identifies with natural and supernatural beings, such as animal and saints. While she invoked God, saints, and other divine beings throughout the ceremony, as seen in the first prayer, it was only during this chant that she claimed otherworldly powers for herself. In other words, while she addressed supernatural beings during prayers and invocations, she only claimed to be or become them in a few minutes of chanting. In this respect, Marina's chant is similar to María Sabina's (Wasson et al. 1974, Wasson and Wasson 1957a).

Marina closed the sentences with the verb *tso* (says) or *ti'tso* (is saying), with the subject of the verb left implicit. Munn (1973, 89) remarked on this characteristic of Mazatec chanting, in which the speaker appears to quote someone else: "I am the strength of the world, I am the strength of the opossum, etc." It appears that God or another religious authority is telling the women (i.e., bestowing upon them) the strength and powers of various animals. At the same time, the use of direct quotation makes the "I" in the embedded sentence a co-reference to the subject of the main clause "says/is saying," whose subject is implicit. Not only is the "I" an indexical pronoun, but it also moves in a continuum from the relational stance of the present speaker to the fixed proposition expressed in the sentence: "The curandera is a spotted jaguar." Thus, the speaker fluctuates between simply being themselves to being the narrator of the event and seeing themselves from the outside looking in, finally returning to the initial quoted proposition: "I am the spotted jaguar." This initial and final statement is not declarative but rather expresses

an embodied experience: knowing is not believing but experiencing.

2.2.2. Baldomero Pineda and the chant of the grandparents

Chanting is a particularly lively aspect of Mazatec culture and not restricted to night ceremonies (Quintanar Miranda 2007, Faudree 2013). Baldomero Pineda (Fig. 2.4) from Santa Cruz de Juárez, a small dependency of Huautla, composes and performs his own songs for the yearly celebration of the Day of the Dead (Cortés Martínez and Frassani 2017). During one such occasion, when Santiago Cortés and I visited him in his shop in Santa Cruz, on November 2, 2014, he sang the following chant:

Jonga inda jonga nangi, tso el oro
Slowly, calmly, says the gold

Án k'jinten, k'jitje tojme tikina, tso
I jump, I overcome any obstacle, says

Jñan kjoa'nii, jtji ma, jti'tsa kja'ngi, tso el oro
Wherever it is hidden, concealed, says the gold

Án k'jinten, k'jitje tojme tikina, tso
I jump, I overcome any obstacle, says

Jñan kjoa'nii, jtji ma, jti'tsa kja'ngi, tso el oro
Wherever it is hidden, concealed, says the gold

Án fa'xoe án fa'nia, tso
I implore humbly and reverentially

Tojñan kjichoi'ñen
As far as you reach

Atsin ma'sinlee, atsin ma'sinlee
Don't you feel bad for me? Don't you feel bad for me?

Nga k'oasin ti'jnan nion'noo án
That you are keeping me closed in?

Tonga nda'i tokjoa' mana
Now I feel nothing, I have no fear

Tjen k'aoñan chjota titjona
I now come with my big people

An'nan xi koan'na si'tsín si'faneña
I am the one who knows how to thunder and rumble

Tsatsín k'oakonai ñan' tinamali
If you do not tell me where you keep it hidden

K'oa me kjoa'ni ximeli, Jo kjoa'tjin taón jme'li jí
What do you want? How much do you want?

Kjoe'e kiechi'tjaiña án, chjota'na án
I am coming to pay for my people



Figure 2.4. Baldomero Pineda, Santa Cruz de Juárez. Photo by Javier García.

Tsatsín k'oakoi jñan kjoa'ni tjima titsa'kjangi, tso
If you do not show where it is hidden, where it is covered, says

Tsatsín k'aokoi jí chjota nda xi tjen'koa jñan
If you do not show it, I come with my capable people

Ngo tjo si'xkoa si'ndenai jñani ngatinai jí
You will destroy me swiftly, wherever you are

Jonga faxoc, jonga fania jña, nga'i kjoe'eñan
I bow with reverence and humility, now that we have come here

Ji kjoa koakonai án, nga'ya jtina manai
You will show me where you keep me hidden

jñanin koa sai'li, tsoa kjoa'sai kjoanio'nain
Where you found it, there I will also find the strength

Jmeni jé xi ya án, nga koasin tijnamani'nain
What sin have I committed for which you are hiding from me?

Jmeni jé xichon nga koasin tjima titsakjangili
What is the sin for which you keep it hidden and covered?

Tonga ndai án kotsen són, kotsenta'ñan
But now I am the one who is looking carefully, the one who
is searching

Niyaa ti'jnan ñan
There I am

Atsin ma'sinlee án nga k'oasin ya tinanio'nina
Don't you feel for me, since you are keeping me hidden there?

Tonga tjen kaonan chjota titjona
I am coming with my important people

Ngo tjo kjoas'koena, skoeya skoetañan
Swiftly he will rescue me, he will receive me

Tsimasianñan, likoi tibeñan
Poor me, I am not aware

Nga k'oasin tijma, tjitsakjangili kjoa'ai tsen senixina án
Because you keep it hidden, you keep it covered, my spirit

Tsi'masinle, atsi'masiañan
Don't you have any compassion, don't you feel for me?

Ni'ya tsoatinianiole jña tinai jí
You have sequestered me, you have hidden me there where
you are

Jetsabe jña'nga jtinanioli
I have seen now where you have it hidden

K'oa jotjin ma taón jmeli 'an k'oechitje, án
How little money do you want, I will pay, I

Tjen kaona chojta nda'ñan
I am coming with capable people

Tjen kaona án xi kjoa'axin
I am coming with the person who will unveil (clear) it

Jñanga tjina ta'nio'oa án
Where I am chained

Aní k'oasin jnó tjita nai'ñan
Why do you keep me in chains?

Tonga nda'i jñan
But now I ...

Koena kjoa'xoe, kjoania jña, ti kao kjoachan kjoa'ti, tso
You will show reverence and humility to me, let the anger go

Kao kjoanda, tso
With goodwill, says

Kjoaxoe fannia, tso
With reverence and submission, says

án kotsen són, kotsen'tañan so'nde xokji
I look carefully at this world

Tso xi tsaka tio'konni chjota chingana
So it says, when our ancestors kept the vigil

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Transcription and translation by Alessia Frassani and Santiago
Cortés Martínez

Baldomero's song is unique in that it is not a night chant but rather a recollection of what his grandparents used to sing during the ceremonies. Baldomero himself has never taken mushrooms, which is not uncommon in the Mazateca despite their widespread consumption. Some people, including Baldomero, have never partaken in veladas, explaining that they have not received a calling to do so. Thus, the chant should be analyzed alongside the songs that Baldomero composes for the Day of the Dead as a tribute to the ancestors. At the same time, it clearly belongs and relates to the tradition of night chants, as several features indicate. In a manner akin to what was discussed before, the grandparents, who are the guardians of the world of the dead, and the singer, Baldomero himself, sometimes exchange roles. It is often unclear who is speaking, although it is explicitly stated at the beginning that "gold" (*el oro*) is speaking. Baldomero explained that gold is the same as cacao beans, one of the most common offerings used to communicate with the dead and the gods. Thus, in the chant, the gold-cacao is an animate intermediary that can speak and carry a message, but it is the chant itself

that brings the ancestors' message from the world of the dead to that of the living. As noted in the case of Marina, the often impersonal "says" (tso in Mazatec) conveys the idea of a message that stands on its own and depersonalized from whoever created or sent it in the first place.

However, Baldomero's night chant differs from previously presented ones in that there is no claim of supernatural embodiment. While the speaker claims at some point to be able to thunder and rumble—thus equating himself to a storm, as is often the case with María Sabina—Baldomero does not mention any animal, natural phenomenon, or god. The singer becomes angry and at times confrontational, but the chant is clearly a quest—a persistent search for someone or something that is hidden. What is out of reach and invisible, purposefully covered, sequestered, or tied in chains, is unclear, but it is explicitly stated at some point that this is indeed the *senixin*, a word composed of the term *sen* that can mean "image," such as one's double, and *nixin* (day). Alan Suárez Ortiz suggested to me in a personal communication (2022) that *senixin* corresponds to the Nahuatl word *tonalli*, which refers to both the day (hence tonalpohualli, the calendar, as the "count of days") and the character of a person (the "spirit" closely related to the day of birth; Martínez González 2006). In this light, it becomes clearer that in the chant it sometimes appears as if the speaker is the one sequestered and hidden and other times it seems that something is hidden, sequestered, and looked for. I'sen also refers to a place of clarity and knowledge, as in the expression ndosen seen in Section 1.1, and wisdom is thus equated with self-knowledge. A longing for clarity and the relentless pursuit of enlightenment and knowledge on one's destiny becomes the central issue in the following chant.

2.2.3. Leonardo Morales

Santiago Cortés Martínez and I participated in a ceremony with Leonardo Morales on July 29, 2014 in the locality of Barrio Mixteco in Huautla. The ceremony lasted around five hours and Leonardo not only prayed and sang several times but also whistled and spoke a non-existent language (glossolalia). Whistle speech is a well-known characteristic of Mazatec language, even in everyday use (Cowan 1948), and glossolalia has been recorded in María Sabina's chants (Wasson et al. 1974, XI–XII). In the case of Leonardo's, I had the impression that he was speaking Italian, given that the ceremony was directed at me and Italian is my native language.

Ngo'la'ni, koin ... koin'chaa
First, I will talk

K'ianga'ma nga'tjin'naa canto
It can be done, when we have some canto

K'ianga li'saa joxo'sin nga'tso'ba án
It is when ... this is how I am going about

Ali'me xi'tjinaa nga'tso'ba
I have no problem while I am going

To jngo sa'tse canto, nga'ma'na, nga'ba'jme
It is only a chant, because I can go

To'sa to jngo
It is only one

Un perdón de Dios, un perdón de Dios
God's blessing, God's blessing

Perdón del Cielo y perdón de aquí
Heaven's blessing and earthly blessing

Como así se comunica que ...
As it is communicated ...

Está dando de todo nuestro Señor
Our Lord is giving us everything

Da gracias a Dios Padre Todopoderoso
Thanks to our Lord, almighty

No más tengo un canto
I only have a song

Jí ni'jñe, nga jí ni'jñe, nga jngo kjoanda xi'tsi
You, you are you, your blessing

Nga jí, jí, jíi, nga jí, jí, jíi, nga'i nga'jo'nga'sin tsó'ba nda'i
Because you are you, the reason why I am going around now

Nga jí bix'kiee, nga jí *santa*, nga, nga jí, nga jí, ngo kao jíni,
kao jí nga nda'i
Because you read, you are saintly, you are unique, with you
in this moment

Jí bix'kiee, nga jí *santa*, j'e ... chakaonai'ña, nga i'tso'ba, nga
i'kjoe'e
You read, you are saintly, but talk to me, because I am
wandering around here, I arrived here

Nga ngo kjoanda, ngo kjoanda, ngo kjoanda sije'lee nda'i
A blessing, a blessing, a blessing is what I am asking for at
this moment

Ti'se'kao'na'iña, ti'se'kao'na'i jí
Help me, help me

Nga jí mamá, nga jí nga nda'i
Because you are the mother, because you are you in this moment

To jngo nga jí, to jngo nga jí, to jngo ni'nda'i
You are the only one, the only one, the only one in this moment

To jngo nga'jaoo, nga i'tso'ba, nga i'jo'nga, ngo kjoanda xi'tsi
It is only a hole, because I am wandering around here, because
here is your blessing

Ngo kjoanda, nga kao nga jí nga kao josin tso'ba
A blessing, I am truly going around

I'so'nde xo'chón, i'so'nde xo'chón
On this world, on this world

Jíni nda'i, ngojí ni nda'i, nga jngo kjoanda
You are, you are now a blessing

Jíni, jí, ngojí ni jí, jí nga'nda'i
You are you, because you, you are at this moment

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Transcription and translation by Santiago Cortés Martínez
and Alessia Frassani

This chant is rather different from Marina's and María Sabina's and seems more akin to Baldomero's. While both women claimed to have greater powers and become animals and supernatural beings, neither Baldomero nor Leonardo made such claims. The insistent and even threatening requests for clarity and knowledge in Baldomero's chant are absent in Leonardo's. He repeatedly and rather plainly states that he has a chant and is singing it. A term that Leonardo often employs is *kjoanda*, which can be translated as "blessing," although the word has other meanings: offering, ceremony, grace, bounty, or something good in general. The same meaning applies to the word *perdón* (forgiveness) that Leonardo uses in the Spanish portion of the text. If so, the entire chant is about asking a supreme spiritual authority (the Virgin or the Father) for a blessing. Leonardo's chant revolves around singing for its own sake without any explicit message or contents. The impersonality of the utterance, which was suggested in previous chants through the use of direct quotation with an implicit subject, becomes the central theme developed by Leonardo. Consequently, the text is full of deixis (i.e., terms that can only be understood in a relational context), such as "you," "here," and "at this moment," which refer to a context without explicitly describing it. The place where Leonardo finds himself is only suggested but cannot be clearly identified. Although he directly addresses the Father and the Virgin, he may not be in their presence but rather longs for them. Leonardo never describes a situation that he sees or something that he hears.

Leonardo relied on the rhetorical and ontological trope of the *mise en abyme* to sing about himself singing. Caught in a labyrinth of his own construction, he disappeared into it. In a separate discussion, he compared chanting to the voice of a radio, which, unattached to its speaker, can rapidly move around and allow everyone to hear and enjoy it until the radio is turned off and the chant returns to where it originated (which I believe is God). In this light, we can also understand Leonardo's glossolalia: words in a chant do not refer to anything but rather express the process of creating language itself (Munn 1973).

The narrator's shifting and often ambiguous position in all the chants discussed underscores a specific feature

of the language employed. As in daytime divination (e.g., the reading of maize), the wise person seeks signs and clues for a client, but only during night ceremonies do they embody the signs, the gods, to themselves become divine agents. Their ability to speak to the gods and invoke them is taken a step further, and the performer becomes the god and claims their powers. Such a transformation occurs when the curandero simultaneously describes a situation that they participate in and see themselves from the outside as if a spectator to the story. The ability to enter, inhabit, and then leave the attributes of a certain god or supernatural being increases their power. Although I was able to participate in a limited number of ceremonies and, in even fewer cases, to record and eventually study the texts, two aspects stood out in the chants. On the one hand, the chant is a search characterized by feelings of longing, solitude, hopelessness, desperation, and anger at times; on the other hand, there are moments of communion and even transformation into gods, whose powers and knowledge are claimed by the performer.

2.3. Colonial chanting

Some of the features highlighted in modern Mazatec chants can also be found in the few examples of colonial texts that reproduce chants and songs either in their entirety or in short excerpts. The performer's consistent use of the first person and the conflation of several identities are frequently found in the so-called incantations collected in the early seventeenth century by Ruiz de Alarcón, as are exhortations from the singer, who sometimes angrily pled with the gods (Andrews and Hassig 1984). Ruiz de Alarcón gathered his material from several Nahuatl communities in the modern states of Morelos and Guerrero with the intention of creating a manual to extirpate enduring Mesoamerican ceremonial practices. The texts that he transcribed constitute an important historical source for the present study because the original context of their production and execution seems to be very similar to those of modern Mazatec divinatory and curing chants or prayers despite being considerably shorter, perhaps because they were collected as samples. In the incantation for fortune telling (Andrews and Hassig 1984, bk. 5, ch. 2), the text reads as follows:

Ca niman aman. Nohmatca nehhuatl.
It will indeed be I, immediately at this moment.

Nohxomoco. Nicipactonal. Nicmati huehue, nicmati ilamah
It is I in person. I am Ohxomoco. I am Cipactonal. I know Old
Man, Old Woman.

Nimictlanmati, nitopamati
I am knowledgeable about Mictlan, I am knowledgeable
about Topan.

Nohmatca nehhuatl. Nitlamacazqui. Ninahateuctli
It is I in person. I am the priest. I am the nahualli-lord.

(Andrews and Hassig 1984, 151)

The priest claims to be both Oxomoco and Cipactonal, the old diviner couple, and immediately follows by saying that they know them, seemingly because they have visited Mictlan and Topan, the otherworldly realms that surround the terrestrial plane. Thus, the “I” in the sentence shifts position and apparently indicates different identities and enunciators. As a result, the attributes of both the ancestral couple and the man-god (*nahualli-lord*) diviner are conflated, creating a complex image previously seen in the discussion of the primordial couple of the Codex Vienna in Section 1.2.

Around eighty years before Ruiz de Alarcón, Franciscan friar Bernardino de Sahagún collected another important corpus of sacred texts (Sahagún et al. 1997, 128–129). They are referred to as *cuicame* (sing. *cuicatl*, song) and are formally different from Alarcón's incantations. Despite the early date of Sahagún's “sacred hymns,” as they have been called since Garibay (1958), their current form and context of production may have been influenced by early modern European poetry, as Tomlinson (2007, 9–27) suggested for another corpus of poetic texts, the *Cantares mexicanos*. In other words, it would appear that Sahagún's *cuicame* were an early attempt to normalize Nahuatl ceremonial chants according to the canons of European poetry, as discussed in the Introduction. I do not think that it is coincidental that the songs were attached as an appendix to the second book of the Florentine Codex, which is dedicated to the *veintena* ceremonies, the most important ritual cycle of Nahuatl communities. In the same appendix, Sahagún discusses the temples, their rituals, and their gods. Thus, the songs are an aspect of the cult that is more directly related to activities within the temple, a divine manifestation akin to the image of the god itself. They are only indirectly related to the public aspects of the cult, which are presented in the main part of the second book, and are more accurately described as part of secluded activities within the temples, where the image of the god usually resides.

In *Primeros Memoriales* (Sahagún et al. 1997, paragraph 14, ff. 279r–280r), the chant performed during *Atamalqualiztli* (the Feast of the Water Tamales), a ritual that involved fasting with water and unseasoned tamales, begins with an invocation to the mother goddess *Tlazolteotl* before switching to a description of *Tamoanchan*, the paradise of abundance, where the corn god *Centeotl* is said to have been born. Then, the setting seemingly changes to a marketplace on the earthly realm (*tlalpan*), and the verse reads as follows:

Oyatlatonazqui tlavizcallevaya
The sun has come forth, the morning has dawned

inan tlachichinaya nepapā quechol
And sundry red spoonbills sip nectar from flowers

xochitlacaca yyātala, yantata, ayyao, ayyave, tililiyao, ayyave
oayyave

Where flowers stand erect *yyātala, yantata, ayyao, ayyave,*
tililiyao, ayyave oayyave

Tlalpā timoquetzca
 On earth you are standing

tianquiznavaquj a
 By the marketing place, ah

Nitlacatla niquetzalcoatla yyantala yātanta, yyao, ayyave,
tliliyao, ayyave, oayyave
 I am the lord Quetzalcoatl *yyantala yātanta, yyao, ayyave,*
tliliyao, ayyave, oayyave

(Sahagún et al. 1997, 145–146)

The last verse marks an abrupt intermission on the part of the narrator to boldly state that he is the supreme priest whose cult is also related to the aforementioned marketplace. The song then shifts to the underworld, where Xolotl plays in a ball court, and back to a marketplace in Cholula, where the main temple of Quetzalcoatl was located. The last verse reads,

Cochina cochina cocochi
 The sleeper, the sleeper is dozing

Ye nicmaololo nicanj ye ciuatl
 I turn the woman here over

Nicochina yyeo ovayeo, yho, yya, yya
 The sleeper I am *yyeo ovayeo, yho, yya, yya*

(Sahagún et al. 1997, 146)

These concluding lines seem to refer to the next chant, which is dedicated to Xipe Yovallavana (the Night Drinker; i.e., the one who falls into a state of trance, like the night sleep) and may not belong to this chant. It is in this state of trance that the performer first sees someone sleeping; then, they turn the person over and realize that the person is actually the sleeper whom they just saw. Another important aspect that both Nahua texts share is the mention of different realms, such as Mictlan, Topan, and Tamoanchan, as places visited during the chant, which indicates that singing is in itself a journey to and from another world where knowledge and power reside. Both Mictlan and Tamoanchan are places of the dead; thus, traveling back and forth between them is akin to entering and exiting the land of the dead and defeating death itself.

As I just said, the verses at the end of the *cuicatl* for *Atamalqualiztli* seem to introduce the song to Xipe as follows:

Xippe icujc, totec iovallavana.
 The song of Xipe, our Lord the visionary

Ioalli tlavana, iztleican, timone
 You, you are in trance, why do hide yourself?

nequja xjiaquj mjtlatia teucuj tlaquemitl, xjcmoquenti quetlovjia.
 You are hiding your golden cape. Put it on!

Noteuhoa chalchimmama tlacoa
 My Lord is holding a precious shield

pana itemoia, oiquetzallavuevuetl,
 comes down in the middle of the water, precious drum

ayquetzalxiujcoatl nechaiqujno
 precious turquoise serpent

cauhquetl ovjia
 Poverty has left us

Manajivajia, njia njia poliviz
 I shall be happy, it shall not perish

nियोatzin, achalchiuhtla noiollo
 I am the purple corn, my heart is a place of precious water

ateucujtlatl nocoiattaz noiolce
 I shall see golden water

vizqujtlatl achtoquetl tlaqua
 My heart shall be content

vaia otlacatquj iautlatoa quetl ovjia
 The warrior who leads into battle is born *ovjia*

Noteuhoa centlaco xaiaivilivizco
 You will grow the height of maize plant

noa yioatzin motepeiocpa mjtz
 You are the purple maize on your mountain

valitta meteuhoa, vizqujntla
 Your followers will see you

catl achtoquetl tlaquavaia etla
 I shall be content. The Lord ripens, the one who comes first

catqui iautlatoaquetl ovjia
 The warrior who leads into battle is born *ovjia*

Transcription and translation by Osiris González, Raúl Macuil Martínez, and Alessia Frassani

The two variants of this chant found in *Primeros Memoriales* and the *Florentine Codex* have been translated several times (Seler 1902, 1071–1078, Garibay 1958, 175–185, Sahagún 1950–1982, bk. 2, 213, Sahagún et al. 1997, 146–147). The epithet attributed to Xipe, *yovallavana*, found in the title head of the chant, is usually translated as “night drinker” (the corresponding illustration in the *Florentine Codex* indeed shows Xipe Totec in the second image drinking from a cup; see Fig. 8.4). However, I believe that, although drinking may refer to an intoxicating beverage such as the fermented agave drink pulque, the term *yovalla* should be better understood as the effect of the drink:

inducing a state of trance. Andrews and Hassig (1984, 79–80, 262) proposed a similar translation for the same term in the incantations collected by Ruiz de Alarcón.

The paleography and translation of the manuscript version from the Florentine Codex by Osiris González, who studied “classical” Nahuatl at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México in seminars led by León Portilla, and Raúl Macuil, a Nahua speaker from Tlaxcala, highlight the text’s close relationship to the corresponding image (Fig. 8.4). For example, we translated *chalchimmama* as “he who holds a precious shield” (from *chimalli*, shield) rather than “precious water,” as was the case in all preceding translations. *Quetzallavuevetl* became “precious drum” (from *huehuetl*, drum; see also Rojas Rabiela 2000, 248–249); previously, *ahuehuetl* had been translated as “cypress tree.” In both cases, we opted for a closer adherence to what is found in the illustration, and I believe that the tlacuilo chose to adhere to elements found in the chant, such as the shield in the upper image and the upright drum in the one below. Finally, we translated *yoatzin* as “purple maize,” the meaning of the term in modern Nahuatl, rather than “green stalk of maize” (Sahagún et al. 1997, 147). Previous translations relied on an annotation found in *Primeros Memoriales* (f. 280r), which referred to *yoatzin* as “the green maize stalk, my ear is like a jade” (Sahagún et al. 1997, 147). However, in the early twentieth century, German archaeologist and ethnographer Konrad Preuss (1905, 371) proposed translating *yoatzin* as “deplorable night” (*bejammernswerte Nacht* in German, *deplorable noche* in the Spanish translation from German given by Neurath in Preuss 2008, 97)—from the word for night (*yohual*) and the reverential *-tzin*. This interpretation was strongly opposed by Seler (1905, 463), who by that time had already produced his own translation, which has remained the standard reference for all subsequent studies (Seler 1902, 1071–1078). Finally, the interpretation proposed in this book, “purple maize,” reconciles both versions, as the darkness of the night indicates the purple color of the maize.

This colonial chant presents interesting similarities to modern Mazatec equivalents. In Baldomero’s chant, the god is hidden at first. The chant is itself a quest and a request to encounter the god. The singer challenges the god to manifest himself because the well-being of the performer and their community depends on it. While Mazatec chants tend to be repetitive and have little progression, Prof. Eloise Quiñones Keber rightly indicated to me in a personal communication (2016) that the god progressively manifests himself in the song to Xipe, growing and blossoming like a plant. This stylistic difference may be due to a refashioning of the cuicatl to conform to the canons of written poetry, losing much of its performative, repetitive, and pleonastic value in favor of a progressive narrative (Tomlinson 2007, 28–40). Singing, on the one hand, is in itself a quest for clarity and knowledge, a constantly unfolding process. Written poetry, on the other hand, tends to favor a self-contained structure. This explains Sahagún’s complaints about the

obscurity and demonic nature of the cuicame found in the introduction to the appendix.

Chanting is a performance that intensifies the process of knowledge acquisition. It is through experience rather than doctrinal teaching that real wisdom is attained. These reflections align with the general understanding of Indigenous American chants elaborated by Carlo Severi (2002, 2004), who highlighted the pragmatism of Kuna (Panamanian) healers’ knowledge and language, the construction of the chant as a path, and the complexity of the chanter’s identity as it unfolds in a purposeful and self-reflective way during the ceremony. Process, not structure; pragmatism, not doctrine; and self-reflexivity, not objectivity, are central concepts in Indigenous knowledge.

While Mazatec *chjota chjine* are not directly aware of the existence of their sacred books in European collections, they frequently mention them in ceremonies. Marina calls the guardian of the underworld by his first name, Escribano (notary), the one who produces official documents. Leonardo refers to God as “the one who reads.” María Sabina mentions books several times in her chants, along with notarial acts and pencils (Munn 2003). The acts of writing and reading are an inseparable process of pursuing knowledge. Books, as sacred sources of wisdom, are constantly reinvented every time they are invoked. The next chapters are dedicated to the ancient sacred books and the calendar that informs their structure.

The Mesoamerican Calendar

The codices of the so-called Borgia Group, which are named after the codex that is considered its finest example (see listing in the Appendix), offer an unadulterated window into ritual, divinatory, and calendrical knowledge as it was practiced in Mesoamerica before the arrival of the Europeans. Today, all pre-Hispanic religious manuscripts are housed in European collections, where they arrived in the first decades after the conquest as gifts and objects of curiosity for ecclesiastical and political dignitaries throughout the continent. It is unknown how many more manuscripts of this kind circulated in Mesoamerica. The extent of the deliberate physical destruction of Indigenous knowledge on the part of the friars cannot ultimately be quantified. Many other specimens may have been forgotten and destroyed over time once they were hidden to spare them from Spanish and missionary fury. Lack of provenance notwithstanding, it is quite remarkable that the few surviving manuscripts of the Borgia Group form a very consistent corpus in terms of both calendrics and iconography. Nowotny (1961) was the first to conduct a comprehensive study of the manuscripts as a whole based on calendrical concordances, upon which iconographic similarities are largely based. Colonial manuscripts that feature religious content, such as the Codices Borbonicus, Telleriano-Remensis, and Tudela, also focus on the Mesoamerican calendar and related iconography, although in a much simpler manner, which likely reflects the limited knowledge of ancient religion and calendrics on the part of the lay Indigenous informants who contributed to their creation. This chapter focuses on the Mesoamerican calendar, especially its different configurations, in the pre-Hispanic religious manuscripts. An in-depth analysis of the calendar's functioning and use is essential to gain an accurate understanding of the pictorials.

3.1. The tonalpohualli

The 260-day calendar is one of the diagnostic characteristics of Mesoamerican civilizations, as was first recognized by Kirchhoff (1943). The earliest archaeological record of it dates to the Formative Period in the sixth century BCE, and its use extends to the present, albeit restricted to Indigenous communities in southern Mexico and Guatemala. Mazatec diviners, as noted in previous chapters, no longer rely on the 260-day count, although German ethnologist Wilhelm Bauer (1908) documented the use of a twenty day-sign calendar in the region in the early twentieth century. Thus, in my field work, I could not account for the use of the 260-day count in divination. Instead, I largely relied on a study by Paul van den Akker (2018), a colleague from the Faculty of Archaeology at Leiden University, who conducted extensive field work in the Maya K'iche'

community of Momostenango. Paul's knowledge of the intricacies, functioning, and logic of the calendar, known as *chol q'ij* in K'iche', was gained through his training and collaboration with don Rigoberto Itzep Chanchavac, a K'iche' *ajq'ij* (diviner) from Momostenango.

Spanish friars extensively discussed the use and characteristics of the ancient Mexican calendar in their writings. Most notably, Bernardino de Sahagún (1950–1982, bk. 4) devoted an entire book of his great opus to “judicial astrology or art of divination.” Figure 3.1 is an illustration from the appendix at the end of the book, where Sahagún explains to the reader the table that the diviner, whom he refers to with the Nahuatl word *tonalpohuque*, used to count days and make prognostications. Tonalpohuque literally means “those who count the days,” from the words *tonal* (day) and *pohualli* (to count). Tonalpohualli is the word for calendar, as the “count of days.” The table combines twenty day signs (Fig. 3.2) and thirteen numerals, which are consecutively counted to yield a unique and fixed sequence of 260 days. Beginning on 1 Crocodile (Cipactli in Nahuatl), the count reaches 13 Reed (Acatl), at which point the numeral starts again from one with 1 Jaguar (Ocelotl), reaching 7 Flower (Xochitl), then 8 Crocodile. After 260 days, both the thirteen-day period and the twenty day signs return to the initial position of 1 Crocodile. It should be noted that, in contemporary communities such as Momostenango, where the tzolkin (as the tonalpohualli is known among Mayanists) remains in use, no fixed day functions as the first in the calendar; rather, the count seamlessly and endlessly continues. By contrast, in the ancient manuscripts, the count almost always appears to begin with day 1 Crocodile, although the diviner could easily start counting from any point in their chart.

In Sahagún's table, numerals are indicated with Arabic numbers, while Indigenous documents, such as the codices of the Borgia Group, utilize a dot for a unit to reach a maximum of thirteen dots. Although a complete and unequivocal date can only be given with a combination of a day sign and a number, numbers in the ancient manuscripts are often omitted and implicit in the progressive count of day signs. Dots are often used to indicate a period or lapse of time between signaled day signs. As also remarked by Mayanists (Aveni 2011), such a use of numbers in Mesoamerican calendrics indicates that intervals and lengths of time between events were at least as important as the time when the events occurred. Replacing dots with Arabic numerals, as Sahagún did in his table, erases this important aspect of Mesoamerican time reckoning and philosophy.

1	Acaatl	Cipactli	1	8	2	9	3	10	4	11	5	12	6	13	7
2	Acaatl	Cipactli													
3	Calli	Coatl													
4	Tzotzil	Coatl	2	9	3	10	4	11	5	12	6	13	7	1	8
5	Acaatl	Coatl													
6	Tzotzil	Coatl	3	10	4	11	5	12	6	13	7	1	8	2	9
7	Calli	Coatl													
8	Tzotzil	Coatl	4	11	5	12	6	13	7	1	8	2	9	3	10
9	Acaatl	Coatl													
10	Tzotzil	Coatl	5	12	6	13	7	1	8	2	9	3	10	4	11
11	Calli	Coatl													
12	Tzotzil	Coatl	6	13	7	1	8	2	9	3	10	4	11	5	12
13	Acaatl	Coatl													
1	Tzotzil	Coatl	7	1	8	2	9	3	10	4	11	5	12	6	13
2	Calli	Coatl													
3	Tzotzil	Coatl	8	2	9	3	10	4	11	5	12	6	13	7	1
4	Acaatl	Coatl													
5	Tzotzil	Coatl	9	3	10	4	11	5	12	6	13	7	1	8	2
6	Calli	Coatl													
7	Tzotzil	Coatl	10	4	11	5	12	6	13	7	1	8	2	9	3
8	Acaatl	Coatl													
9	Tzotzil	Coatl	11	5	12	6	13	7	1	8	2	9	3	10	4
10	Calli	Coatl													
11	Tzotzil	Coatl	12	6	13	7	1	8	2	9	3	10	4	11	5
12	Acaatl	Coatl													
13	Tzotzil	Coatl	13	7	1	8	2	9	3	10	4	11	5	12	6
1	Calli	Coatl													
2	Tzotzil	Coatl	1	8	2	9	3	10	4	11	5	12	6	13	7
3	Acaatl	Coatl													
4	Tzotzil	Coatl	2	9	3	10	4	11	5	12	6	13	7	1	8
5	Calli	Coatl													
6	Acaatl	Coatl	3	10	4	11	5	12	6	13	7	1	8	2	9
7	Tzotzil	Coatl													
8	Acaatl	Coatl	4	11	5	12	6	13	7	1	8	2	9	3	10
9	Calli	Coatl													
10	Tzotzil	Coatl	5	12	6	13	7	1	8	2	9	3	10	4	11
11	Acaatl	Coatl													
12	Tzotzil	Coatl	6	13	7	1	8	2	9	3	10	4	11	5	12
13	Calli	Coatl													
1	Tzotzil	Coatl	7	1	8	2	9	3	10	4	11	5	12	6	13

Figure 3.1. The tonalpohualli (count of days) according to Bernardino de Sahagún. *Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España*, vol. 1, bk. 4, f. 79v. Paso y Troncoso 1926.

Among contemporary Maya K'iche' diviners, it is generally understood that day signs, which are assigned a name, indicate the quality and character of the day, also referred to as *ajaw* (Lord), while numerals indicate the quantity or intensity of the day sign (Akker 2018, 32–38). To appreciate the relationship between day signs and numerals, one can read the rows of numbers in Figure 3.1, which are each assigned to one of the twenty day signs. While a sign recurs every twenty days, the numeral assigned to it waxes and wanes in intensity over the course of 260 days. If the day is 1 Crocodile, it will be 8 Crocodile after twenty days, 2 Crocodile after twenty more days, 9 Crocodile after sixty days, and so on. Periods dictate not only the quality of a day but also its intensity in a way that is not incremental but rather pendular.

Sahagún explained that intervals of thirteen days formed a block; this is usually referred to in Spanish as a *trecena*, which derives from the word for thirteen in Spanish (*trece*). The first day of the *trecena*, which is assigned the

numeral 1, functions as the ruler (usually referred to as “regent” in the literature) of the entire period. The first *trecena*, 1 Crocodile, is followed by 1 Jaguar, 1 Deer, 1 Flower, and so on until the twentieth *trecena*, 1 Rabbit, which completes the 260-day count with the day 13 Flower. The twenty *trecenas* of the tonalpohualli ($13 \times 20 = 260$) constitute only one of the calendar’s possible partitions, but they are indeed an important one and usually referred to as *tonalamatl* (book of days; see Fig. 5.1, 5.2, and 6.7). This term is somewhat a misnomer because it specifically indicates the actual pictographic manuscript employed by the diviner, as *amatl* means “paper.” The depiction of the twenty *trecenas* is the only presentation of the tonalpohualli found in the ancient books (the Codices Borgia, pp. 61–70, and Vaticanus B, pp. 49–68) that shows striking iconographic similarities to its counterpart in colonial religious manuscripts (e.g., the Codices Borbonicus, pp. 3–20; Telleriano-Remensis, ff. 8r–24r; and Tudela, ff. 98v–124r). Continuity in iconography related to the *trecenas* from ancient to colonial times indicates the

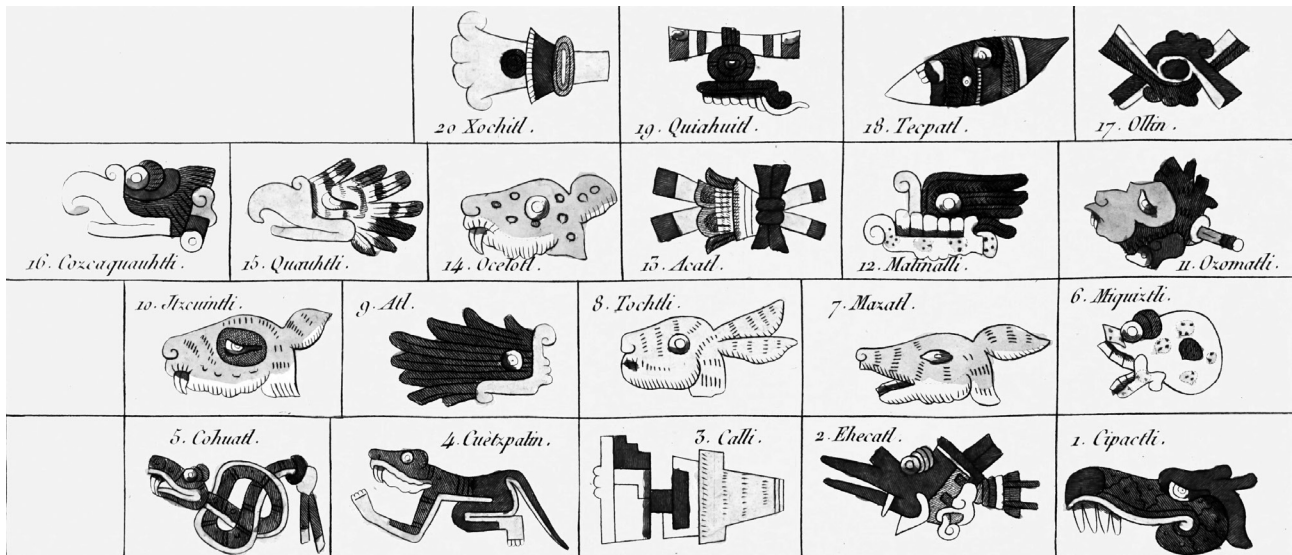


Figure 3.2. The twenty day signs according to the Codex Borgia, reading from bottom right to top left. Humboldt 1816–1824.

widespread use of this particular chronological division of the tonalpohualli in Mesoamerica for the prognostication of fate and destiny, which is indeed the topic of Sahagún’s fourth book of the Florentine Codex.

Beginning with Nowotny (1961), modern studies have focused on other possible divisions of the tonalpohualli that are uniquely found in pre-Hispanic manuscripts. This has given rise to important considerations on comparable iconography and content in the Borgia Group codices (e.g., Anders and Jansen 1993, Anders, Jansen, and Loo 1994, Boone 2007). The arithmetic of the 260-day calendar generates patterns in which numbers and periods of four and five are favored ($13 \times 4 \times 5 = 260$), aside from the basic twenty-trecena division ($13 \times 20 = 260$). Furthermore, the numbers four and five were symbolically attached to cardinal directions. In the case of a partition into four periods ($65 \times 4 = 260$), each period of sixty-five days was assigned to a cardinal direction, usually in the following order: east, north, west, and south. In the case of the fifty-two-day partition ($52 \times 5 = 260$), a fifth direction was added: the center. A complete count must be reached by the end of the specific periodization employed, as also seen in Sahagún’s table, to include every possible calendrical occurrence. Usually, a single theme, such as agricultural fertility, marriage, birth, travel, or pilgrimage, was treated in each periodization of the manuscript. A section that includes a single theme and periodization is sometimes referred to as an “almanac” (Boone 2007). After consulting with a diviner, the client would know how to take proper action according to the day of the planned activity or when a specific event occurred. Babies were assigned birth dates as names, and body parts were attached to specific day signs, which shows other possible uses of the tonalpohualli as depicted in the books consulted by diviners.

To exemplify the complex but coherent arrangements of the calendar and its images in the Borgia Group

manuscripts, I analyze pages 12–13 of the Codex Cospi (Fig. 3.3) in the following paragraphs. As explained by Nowotny (1961, § 16) and Anders, Jansen, and Loo (1994, 257–265), the two pages present four comparable scenes in which a character brings an offering to a temple. On each page, there are two gods, temples, and related offerings in contrasting colors; one is bright and yellow, while the other is dark and black. Inside each bright and yellow temple, there is a colorful bird singing a “flowery chant,” as indicated by the green and yellow volute emerging from its mouth. By contrast, in each dark temple sits an owl, a nocturnal predatory animal that emits a dark smoke. On the one hand, the two bright and yellow characters can be identified as gods or priests with the attributes of Tonatiuh, the sun god, and Cinteotl, the god of the harvest, on pages 12 and 13, respectively. The two dark characters, on the other hand, exhibit the iconography of Itzlacolihqui and Mictlantecuhtli, the god of the underworld, and are engaged in an act of self-sacrifice by perforating their ears. The offerings brought by the god-priests in their censers are also of an opposing nature: while the smoke emanating from the censers of the bright Tonatiuh and Cinteotl has attributes of flowers and jewels, Itzlacolihqui’s and Mictlantecuhtli’s offerings consist of stones and bones that emanate a heavy black smoke.

The calendar count of this quadripartite sequence assigns specific portions of the tonalpohualli to each god, temple, and offering by dividing the 260-day calendar into five blocks of thirteen days each. The thirteen-day period is not painted; rather, the diviner had to implicitly count it, evincing the correct partition upon reading the sequence of days on the left-hand side of the images. The first five days in the top left image, for example, are Crocodile, Reed, Serpent, Movement, and Water. A knowledgeable diviner would have known that the sequence is based on a consistent lapse of fifty-two days between each consecutive day depicted. Given that fifty-two is a multiple of thirteen, every day in that sequence has the same numeral, which

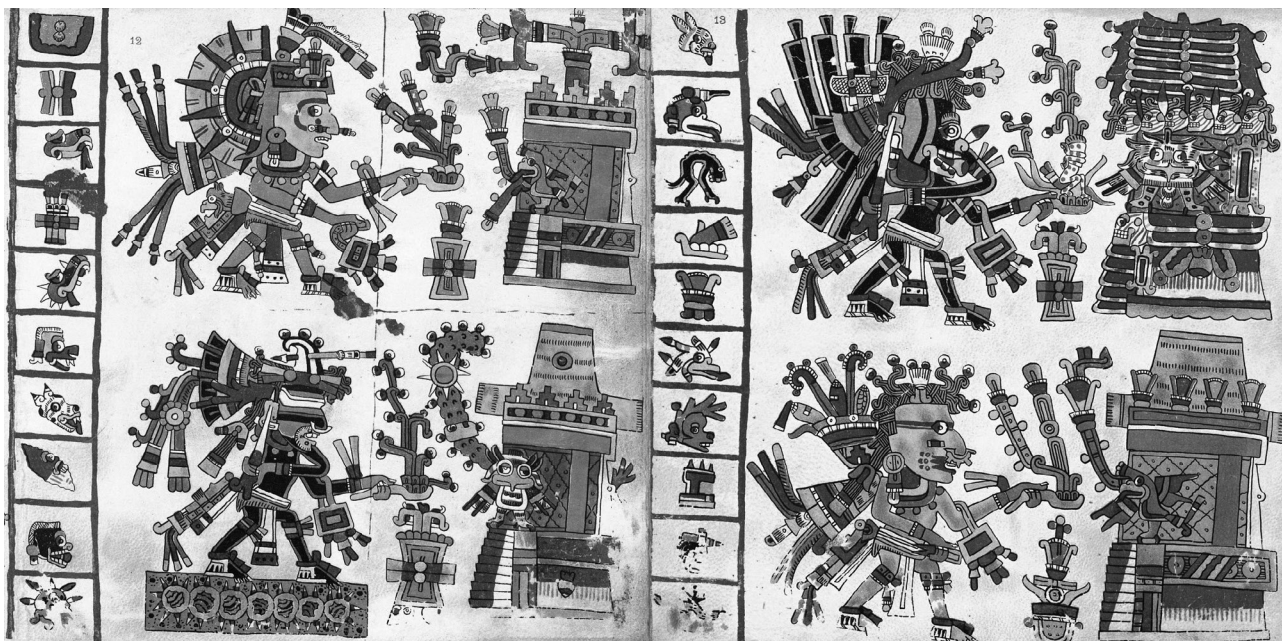


Figure 3.3. The sun and night temples officiated by four god-priests. Codex Cospi, pp. 12–13. Loubat 1898.

is the reason it was not explicitly written. The table underneath depicts the days Jaguar, Death, Flint, Dog, and Wind, each of which occurs thirteen days after the day sign in the same position above (i.e., 3 Jaguar occurs thirteen days after 3 Crocodile, and so on). The next table is on the bottom of page 13 and shows the day signs Deer, Rain, Monkey, House, and Eagle. The last block of trecenas is at the top of page 13 and depicts the day signs Flower, Grass, Lizard, Vulture, and Rabbit. When presented in this manner, the calendar can be read in different ways. For example, if the diviner reads one trecena in the first scene, such as 1 Crocodile, they could proceed to the next consecutive trecena that begins in the same position in the following scene (i.e., 1 Jaguar) or jump ahead fifty-two days in the following trecena of the same block (see also Boone 2007, 75–78, for an explanation of a similar partition of the tonalpohualli in the Codex Fejérváry-Mayer, pp. 33–34).

When iconography and calendrics are analyzed together, it becomes clear that the opposition between light and darkness and between life and death is dynamic. God-priests, their offerings, temples, and presiding birds are interchangeable, as the movement between them is circular rather than one-directional. Seasonality and the corresponding movement of the sun or other planets and stars were readily superimposed on the progressive count of days, and the dimensions of time and space could not be separated. The back-and-forth movement across time and space could also be performed in a different manner without necessarily following a specific spatial-temporal path. These complex presentations of the tonalpohualli are commonly found in pre-Hispanic manuscripts but rarely found in colonial religious documents, which only focus on the twenty trecenas, as previously mentioned.

3.2. The xihuitl

The simplified rendition of the tonalpohualli found in colonial sources has led scholars to believe that two calendars were in use in Postclassic central Mexico: the tonalpohualli, which consisted of twenty trecenas of thirteen days, and the *xihuitl* (“year” in Nahuatl), the solar or civic year that roughly corresponded to a cycle of 365 days. The latter is composed of so-called veintenas, eighteen periods of twenty days, which culminated in a festival from which the name of the veintena was derived (see Appendix). At the end of the eighteenth twenty-day period, five more days were counted; they were referred to as *nemontemi* (wasted days) because no ritual activities were performed. Thus, the total count reached 365 ($18 \times 20 + 5 = 365$), approximating the solar year. The veintena calendar is sometimes referred to as *cempoallapohualli* (count of twenty), although colonial sources rarely used this term (Bustamante García and Díaz Rubio 1983, Doesburg 1996, 106, Johansson 2005). The term “cempoallapohualli” hints at the mathematics of the Mesoamerican count, which employed a base-twenty numeral system.

Mexican scholar Díaz Álvarez (2009, 2013, 2018) recently challenged the assumption that two separate time reckoning systems were in use in late pre-Hispanic central Mexico, basing her critique on an examination of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century sources. She argued that the separation and indeed dichotomy between divinatory and historical time, tonalpohualli and xihuitl, largely corresponded to a Western understanding of time that not only operated at the time of conquest but still holds true today. The systematization of the Mexican solar calendar into veintenas, in Díaz’s view, was based on the

European monthly calendar, which forcefully applied the names of specific festivals (Atlcahualo, Tlacaxipehualiztli, Tozoztontli, etc.) to a sequence of twenty-day periods. Among others, Sahagún (1950–1982, bk. 4, appendix), in the chapter dedicated to the art of divination, emphatically asserted that the Nahuas employed two distinct calendrical systems. For the friar, the xihuitl was the only reliable and objective means of recording historical events and natural phenomena over the course of the solar year. By contrast, the tonalpohualli functioned only as a zodiac and was full of idolatrous misbeliefs created by the devil to deceive credulous people. In modern times, this once-Catholic view has become generally accepted, although stripped of its condemnatory overtones. The time of religion is considered the product of a historical and cultural construction, while the solar calendar is taken as factual and unconstrained by relativistic human projections. The increasingly sophisticated technology used to measure even the slightest movement of the sun or other celestial bodies further strengthens our trust in the mechanics of modern timekeeping, finally erasing any other alternatives to compute and conceive of the passing of time.

Although seldom recognized in the study of Late Postclassic central Mexican calendrical systems, there is a known partition of the 260-day calendar that greatly facilitates the counting of the veintenas and solar year within the tonalpohualli: the partition of the 260 days into four groups of five trecenas ($5 \times 13 = 65$; $65 \times 4 = 260$). The 65×4 table establishes the sequence of the so-called yearbearers, the days that gave the name of the solar year. Sahagún's table of the tonalpohualli (Fig. 3.1) provides an alphabetically written list of yearbearers used in Late Postclassic central Mexico (Reed, Flint, House, and Rabbit) in a column on the left, from 1 Reed (given as 1 Acatl) to 13 Rabbit (13 Tochtli). The Codex Borbonicus also provides a full list of fifty-two yearbearers on pages 21–22, beginning with 1 Rabbit on the lower left corner of page 21 (Fig. 1.3). Given the arithmetic of the tonalpohualli, while the day sign of the yearbearer always repeated in the same sequence of four days, the corresponding numeral increased one unit each year (year 1 Reed is followed by 2 Flint, 3 House, 4 Rabbit, 5 Reed, and so on). The days assigned to the position of yearbearers were ultimately arbitrary, but they were necessarily positioned five days apart in the tonalpohualli.

Furthermore (and perhaps more interestingly), the 65×4 table provided the sequence of the days of the veintenas over a four-year period. Each of the eighteen veintenas of a given solar year began with the same day and therefore followed the same sequence. For example, if the first day of the veintena was a day Crocodile, this meant that every veintena of that solar year would begin with Crocodile (albeit with a different numeral), which can be easily calculated by referring to the table provided by Sahagún and analyzed above (Fig. 3.1). As previously mentioned, every row gives the occurrence of the same day sign every twenty days; this indicates that the day would be 8 Crocodile twenty days after 1 Crocodile and 2 Crocodile after twenty more days. Given that there are only thirteen

numerals, certain veintenas, and their respective sequence of days, would repeat during a solar year. Over four years, if a veintena began with 1 Crocodile the first year, the veintena in the same position would begin with 2 Death the following year; 3 Monkey the next year; and finally, 4 Vulture the fourth year, before reverting to Crocodile, this time with the numeral 5. In matters pertaining to the solar year, a veintena in the same position meant that similar agricultural and seasonal phenomena and astronomical occurrences could be expected.

Ajq'ij (diviner) don Rigoberto Itzep Chanchavac from Momostenango still relies on the 65×4 table to establish the correct day of the Mam, as the yearbearer is known in Maya communities (Akker 2018, 60–61). He further noted that the steady numeral increase of the yearbearer through the years indicated an intensification of the quality of the regent day sign. The 65×4 calendar partition, although relatively infrequent in the Borgia Group manuscripts, is fairly common in the few surviving ancient Maya codices. Long (1923), Pharo (2014, 153–168), and Barrera Atuesta (2019) already remarked on this and considered the 65×4 table of the tzolkin as an arithmetic means of correlating astronomical and seasonal phenomena with the passing of the 260-day calendar. In Maya codices, the same calendar division is also employed in the calculation of the Venus cycle, as in the Codex Dresden (pp. 24, 46–50), with parallels in the Codices Borgia (pp. 53–54), Vaticanus B (pp. 80–84), and Cospi (pp. 9–11; Nowotny 1961, § 18, Anders, Jansen, and Loo 1994, 237–256, Boone 2007, 151–156). The tonalpohualli and the solar calendar of 365 days align every fifty-two years, beginning a new cycle. This means that every fifty-two years, the days of the tonalpohualli occupy the same position in the veintenas throughout the solar year. In turn, the Venus and solar cycles align roughly every eight years. Finally, the solar calendar, the Venus cycle, and the tonalpohualli return to the same position every 104 years (i.e., every other solar cycle of fifty-two years).

I believe that this partition was used by ancient diviners to establish the correct unfolding and sequence of the veintenas and corresponding ceremonies therein over a four-year period, according to the specific relationship established with day signs and numerals of the tonalpohualli. The 65×4 division explains the importance given in the sources to periods of four and eight years. In *Primeros Memoriales* (ff. 253v–254r), for example, the feast of Atamalqualiztli is discussed immediately after the eighteen veintenas and took place every eight years. This information, given in the alphabetic text, is presented as a series of eight turquoise circles in the upper part of the corresponding illustration. Following this same line of argument, the four blue dots placed in front of Chicomecoatl at the beginning of the celebration of Ochpaniztli on page 29 of the Codex Borbonicus (Fig. 4.12) can be interpreted as a festival that was conducted (or conducted in a particular manner) only every four years. Although it is only a detail, I believe that this clue is important because it indicates an understanding of the veintenas as not being fixed to the monthly calendar of later colonial sources but dependent on an internal

counting system that recognized the cyclical occurrence of certain dates every four years.

The 65×4 calendrical partition was typically found in pre-Hispanic religious manuscripts related to the prognostication of rain. This is the case for the Codex Borgia (pp. 27–28), with parallel sections in the Codex Vaticanus B (p. 69; Fig. 3.4), which depicts the four and five manifestations of Tlaloc, the rain god, and Fejérváry-Mayer (pp. 33–34, top; see the discussion in Boone 2007, 145–147). In the image from the Codex Vaticanus B, the god Tlaloc appears five times: once at the center and four times at the corners. Starting in the top right quadrant, which corresponds to the east, the dates given are 1 Reed (yearbearer) and 1 Crocodile, the first day of the calendar. Proceeding counterclockwise, the top left quadrant, which is associated with the north, provides the date of year 1 Flint and day 1 Death. Then, in the quadrant of the west, the date of year 1 House and day 1 Monkey are given. Finally, year 1 Rabbit and day 1 Vulture are given in the last quadrant, which corresponds to the south. The fact that day or year signs appear in conjunction with agricultural prognostications is unsurprising considering that seasons are tied to the passing of the solar year.

Among the Zapotecs of Oaxaca, four rain gods presided over the periods of the calendar and their prognostications

of rain. According to information found in the Codex Vaticanus A (f. 55v) and Juan de Córdova's *Arte en lengua zapoteca* on the Zapotec calendar, the year lasted 260 days. No clear day was set as the first; rather, days were continuously counted. The 260-day calendar was divided into four periods of sixty-five days, each governed by a "planet" (*planeta*) or rain god, known as *cocijo* in Zapotec (Córdova 1578, ff. 115v–116r), as seen in the example of the Codex Vaticanus B above.

A compelling pictorial representation of the dynamic between the solar calendar and the tonalpohualli (65×4 division and the twenty day signs) can be found in the Codex Borgia, pp. 39–40 (Fig. 3.5). It depicts a scene belonging to a larger ritual sequence in the manuscript's central section. The count begins with the horizontal and outstretched body of a crocodilian creature, from which two parallel series of day signs unroll on the left and right sides of the page until they close at the bottom, creating a square. The day signs are drawn only in black outline, a rare occurrence in pre-Hispanic manuscripts. Although badly eroded, they can be reconstructed (Nowotny 1961, § 21b, Anders et al. 1993, 224, Boone 2007, 198–199). On the right, the twenty day signs unfold according to their position in the tonalpohualli, from Crocodile to Flower. They are possibly counted twice for a total of forty days. On the left, the day signs are presented according to the

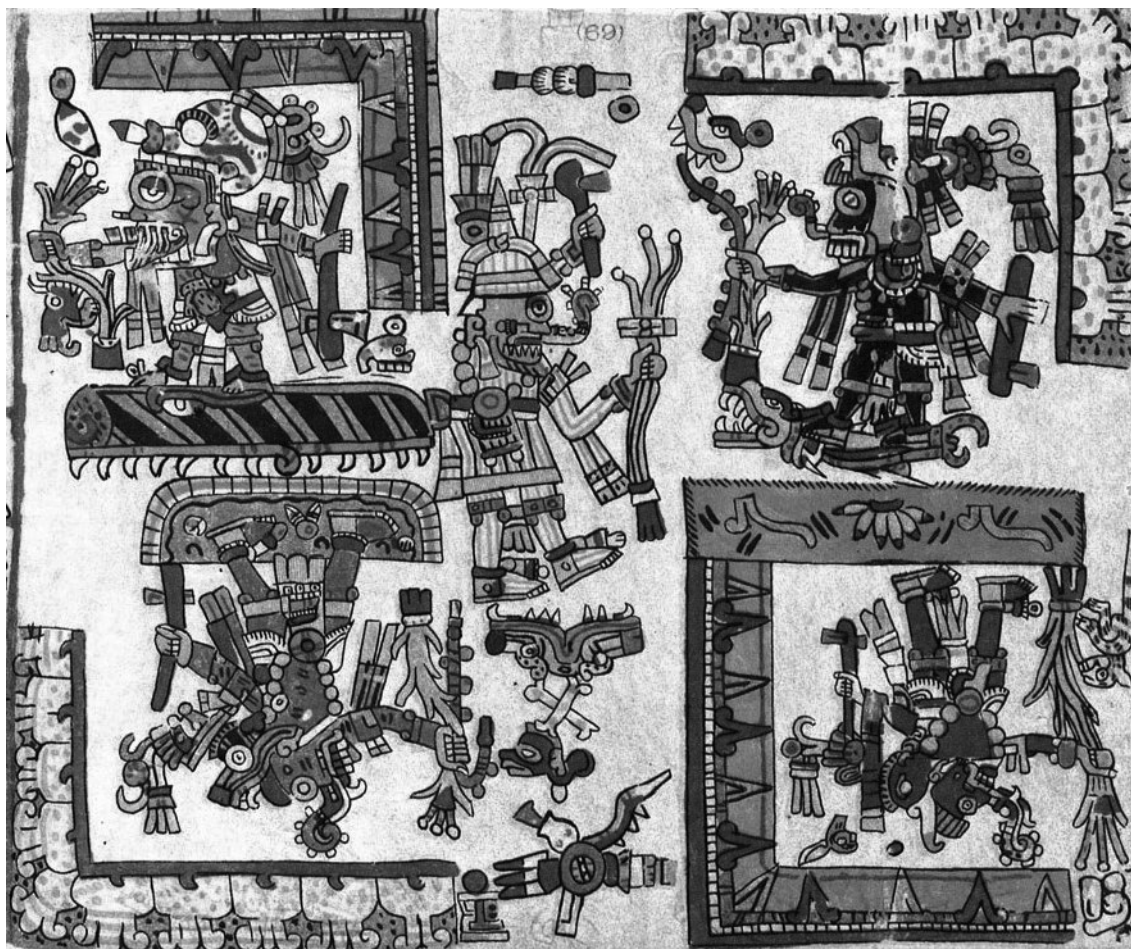


Figure 3.4. The five manifestations of Tlaloc. Codex Vaticanus B, p. 69. Loubat 1896.



Figure 3.5. Days attached to the body of a reptilian creature. Drawing by Agostino Aglio after Codex Borgia, pp. 39–40. The Trustees of the British Museum, London.

65 × 4 partition of the tonalpohualli. The sequence begins with Crocodile, Death, Monkey, and Vulture; it is then repeated, followed by Grass, Movement, Wind, and Deer, which are also repeated. The last readable days are Reed, Flint, House, and Rabbit. The sequence at the bottom of the scene is too badly eroded. However, the day sign Jaguar can be reconstructed; it belongs to what would be the missing sequence of Rain, Lizard, Water, and Jaguar.

According to Jansen and Pérez Jiménez (2017, 503), the two lines represent syntagmatic time on the right and paradigmatic time on the left. In this view (also expressed in Jansen 1988a and Jansen 1988b), syntagmatic relations, which correspond to the consecutive days of the tonalpohualli, are those of historical characters and their actions. By contrast, paradigmatic relations, expressed by the 65 × 4 recurrence of day signs, are those of religion and divination. This dichotomy parallels not only the distinction but also the profound interrelation between astronomical and natural phenomena, ceremonial action, and divination. In other words, the different uses of the calendar, which Jansen (1988a, 1988b) attributed to the genre of historico-

genealogical and divinatory pictography—the former syntagmatic, the latter paradigmatic—can be found here in a single religious text. The inextricable relationship between two separate counting systems also means that history is not simply a checklist of things past but rather a reckoning with the deeds of the ancestors to make sense of the present and find guidance for the future. As discussed in Chapter 1, connecting with the ancestors to gain knowledge and clarity on one's destiny is a central aspect of Mesoamerican ceremonial behavior and Mesoamerican religion more generally. The simultaneous presence of the tonalpohualli (count of days) and the cempoallapohualli (count of twenty) in a single image of the religious manuscripts also calls into question the accepted dichotomy between history and religion, facts and symbols that, as skillfully analyzed by Díaz Álvarez, still taints our view of Mesoamerican cultures.

The unique combination and progression of thirteen numerals and twenty day signs constituted the only means of counting the passing of individual days. The same system was indistinctly used in all pre-Hispanic

manuscripts, both the Borgia Group of religious content and the historico-genealogical Mixtec codices. For a Westerner who is accustomed to keeping track of days according to a fixed sequence of months in the solar calendar, the idea of counting a cycle of 365 days (the solar year) within a different cycle of 260 days may seem rather counterintuitive and exceedingly difficult to master. It should be noted, however, that no system for counting astronomical days and years is perfect, given that the Earth's rotation is not constant and that approximately six hours every year exceed the 365 days. Thus, periodic adjustments will always be required regardless of the counting system used.

3.3. The calendar and the festival cycle

The veintena calendar described in colonial sources compiled by the friars was primarily liturgical despite its agricultural and even astronomical underpinnings (Broda 1983, Broda 2004, Graulich 1999). Its ceremonies constitute one of the most important aspects of Nahua and Mesoamerican religion in both written and pictorial sources. The earliest document on the veintena cycle is possibly the Codex Borbonicus (pp. 23–37), followed by Primeros Memoriales (paragraphs 2A and 2B, ff. 250r–253v), the Codices Telleriano-Remensis (ff. 1r–7r) and Vaticanus A (ff. 42v–51r), and the manuscripts of the so-called Magliabechiano Group (Tudela, ff. 11–28; Magliabechiano, ff. 29–46; and Ixtlilxochitl, ff. 94–102). Among other friars, Sahagún (1950–1982, bk. 2) and Durán (1971) devoted a large part of their documentary efforts to the compilation of ceremonies during the eighteen veintenas. Despite the relative wealth of information on the veintenas in the sources, their timing and exact position within the solar year remain a matter of debate, as they are not unequivocally explained in the documentary record.

In early colonial sources such as the Codices Telleriano-Remensis and Tudela, for example, the attempt to correlate veintenas, solar months, and the Julian calendar led annotators to correct dates several times. The Codex Telleriano-Remensis (f. 7r) depicts the nemontemi, the remaining days at the end of the solar cycle, and contains a gloss that reads, “On February 29 the five dead days on which there was no sacrifice.” Although Quiñones Keber (1996, 151) believed that “29” was a mistake and that the correct day was the 19th, the painter and annotator may have made a conscious effort to come to terms with the final counting of the days of the year and related adjustments. The information may indicate the day added every four years to the end of February, as is customary in the Julian and Gregorian calendars. In the central part of the page, another annotator changed the number of nemontemi days from five to four, while another day was also pictorially added (Quiñones Keber 1995, 151). Is this inconsistency in the source purely attributable to a note-taking error, or does it indicate a deeper indeterminacy in the calendrical system itself?

The inexorable precision of the tonalpohualli finds an unsurmountable obstacle in the incommensurability of

the astronomical year. Despite Caso's (1967) efforts to fix the veintenas in the solar calendar, veintenas would significantly shift positions in only a matter of years without a periodic adjustment, which Caso (1967, 33, 48) himself believed was not possible in the tonalpohualli. It is well known that, among the Mayas, no adjustment was made to the tzolkin, the 260-day calendar (Thompson 1960, 121). The *uinal*, as the twenty-day period is called in Mayan, was used in both the Long Count and the *haab*, the solar year (Thompson 1960, 96–97, 143–144). In the former case, on the one hand, the uinal indicated the second position right after *kin* (day) in the progressive count since a fixed “day one.” In this instance, the position and use of the uinal conformed to the vigesimal Mesoamerican counting system (the second position in the decimal system is taken by the tens). In the solar calendar, on the other hand, the uinal indicates one of eighteen fixed twenty-day periods, which are each assigned a distinct name. In this case, the uinal functions in a manner similar to the months in the Gregorian calendar. In fact, in dates found on Maya monuments from the Classic period, the uinal is always accompanied by a numeral that indicates the day within the period. The inexorable accumulation of a delay in the position of the uinal within the *haab* is somewhat countered by the Long Count, which registered every elapsed day.

Understanding the counting of the solar year and the veintena calendar as part of the same calendrical system of the tonalpohualli may help resolve some lingering problems in the existing scholarship. While the counting proceeds steadfastly, actual celebrations (i.e., the festival cycle) may have adjusted to the concurrent passing of the individual days of the tonalpohualli or tzolkin. Akker (2018, 118–119) proposed that, among the Mayas, agricultural ceremonies and activities were indeed movable and not bound to the uinal of the *haab*, which are by necessity fixed. Contemporary K'iche' communities only celebrate certain seasonal and yearly feasts in a grand manner; most are only modestly observed. As a result, the burden of the cost and logistics of the entire ceremonial cycle in the region is shared among communities in the highlands through a rotational system. Astronomical phenomena are almost exclusively observed according to the Gregorian calendar, which is synced with the solar year thanks to the bissextile correction. The relationship between the calendar count, as a fixed system, and ceremonial events is flexible and fluctuates. In this respect (and to close the discussion of the Maya calendar system as it pertains to my work), it should be noted that the most accepted correlation between the Maya and Gregorian calendars, known as the Goodman–Martínez–Thompson (GMT) correlation, is indeed only a statistical median within a range of days (Klokočník et al. 2008, Gaspani 2013). While mathematical precision indicates a specific moment, the correlation is more accurately defined as a span of days that neighbor a specific point in time.

I argue that celebrations related to veintena periods, which were established through the vigesimal count and the

65 × 4 partition of the tonalpohualli, would slowly begin, peak, and eventually fade out in a manner that was fluid and allowed for concurrent celebrations and variations according to cultural and geographical differences. Variations could also occur within a single community, depending on the cults and priests involved. Festivals related to the veintenas could therefore overlap and stretch, peak and fade according to heightened moments dictated by the tonalpohualli. La Farge (1934, 115) noticed that among the highland Mayas of Guatemala, while the day was perceived as beginning at dusk, the day as a whole was understood as starting the following morning and including activities conducted in daylight. By contrast, periods such as the uinal or the haab were counted as beginning exactly at dusk, thus seemingly during the previous tzolkin day. This indicates that there were differences in the counting of days and periods. Tedlock (1983), for example, noted that in Momostenango, days and periods are perceived as slowly beginning and fading out rather than having a clear-cut beginning and ending (see also Akker 2018, ch. 2). Caso (1967, 53) suggested that the Mexica changed the day at noon rather than at midnight, a difference that could account for occasional mistakes in concordances. The information is provided, among others, by a gloss in the Codex Telleriano-Remensis (f. 48v).

These examples indicate that there was no necessary agreement between different groups and communities on when a day or period started despite using the same calendar, the tonalpohualli. The sun, Venus, the moon, and all constellations move seamlessly through the sky, slowly rising and descending in the horizon. They do not appear and disappear in a moment. Their periodic movements are at odds with the day count, which require periodical adjustments in calculation. There are several clues in early colonial pictographic and alphabetic sources about the assimilation of a fluid festival cycle into a fixed system akin to the European monthly and liturgical calendar, which is tied to the solar year. In *Primeros Memoriales*, the veintenas of Atemoztli and Izcalli can be found in folios 252v and 253r, respectively. In both instances (Fig. 3.6), the upper part of the image is dominated by the main temple in the center. It is flanked on the left by a priest carrying a gourd and a tobacco pouch and wearing a turquoise diadem, and on the right by a woman drinking a foaming beverage from a cup. In the lower part of the image, four or five young boys and girls are also drinking from a cup while standing on *petates* (straw mats). The two images seem to represent the same ceremony, Pillahuana, which was celebrated every four years and involved children in the consumption of pulque (Doesburg 1996, 113–114).



Figure 3.6. Atemoztli and Izcalli (bottom), *Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España*. Patrimonio Nacional. Madrid, Real Biblioteca, II/3280, ff. 252v–253r.

However, according to the accompanying text on folio 253r, it was only during the latter veintena of Izcalli that Pillahuana was periodically observed. During Atemoztli, the cult was dedicated to the rain gods that resided in the mountains. The consumption of pulque is only mentioned in relation to the feast of Atemoztli in the Florentine Codex (Sahagún 1950–1982, bk. 1, ch. 21, bk. 2, ch. 35) but not as a primary aspect of the cult. In this regard, it may be noted that the Codex Magliabechiano (ff. 40v–41r) assigns the periodical celebration of Pillahuana to the veintena of Tepeilhuitl, the monthly celebration of the mountain rain gods of the central Mexican basin. Finally, four drops of water are visible in the upper right corner of the image related to Atemoztli. While they may have represented the name of the festival (which means “water falls”), the four blue drops could also signal a celebration that occurred every four years, as in the case of Pillahuana.

The similarities between the two scenes in *Primeros Memoriales* do not seem to be coincidental. In the original pagination, the illustrations of Atemoztli and Izcalli face each other at the bottom of two opposing pages. It is generally understood that the images were drafted before the text was added. Did the tlacuilo intend to draw attention to the similarities and correspondences between the rituals of the two veintenas that were not otherwise noted? Or was the painter creating similarities at the moment they drew the picture? It would appear that these early colonial images of the veintenas attempted to creatively systematize what was possibly a much more flexible and diverse ceremonial life than what friars were accustomed to in Europe and eventually imposed on Indigenous peoples in New Spain.

In the Florentine Codex, Sahagún dedicated a separate chapter to so-called movable feasts, at the end of the description of the eighteen veintenas. The last sentence in the chapter (Sahagún 1950–1982, bk. 2, ch. 19, 41) reads, “These movable feasts, in some years, displace the feasts of the calendar, as also happens in our calendar.” Sahagún’s statement suggests that there is perhaps a closer connection between the veintenas and the feasts dictated by the tonalpohualli than is usually acknowledged. It may also be that Sahagún, drawing on his long experience as a missionary in Tepepulco, reached a certain conclusion on the redaction of the veintenas, which he himself acknowledged created “spurious festivities” that could not be completely assimilated into the cycle.

The pictographic manuscripts known as the Codices Tudela (ff. 29r–30r; Fig. 7.10) and Magliabechiano (ff. 46r–48v) conclude the section on the eighteen veintenas with a representation of Xochilhuitl (Feast of the Flowers), which is identified in a gloss as “moving feast” (*fiesta extravagante*). Although the feast moves over the course of the solar year, the dates of Chicome Xochitl (7 Flower) and Ce Xochitl (1 Flower) assigned to the celebration of Xochilhuitl in the source occur twenty days apart; thus, they are a veintena and rightly placed after the presentation of the eighteen feasts of the solar calendar. This appears to have been another occurrence of a veintena-type festival

that was omitted from the monthly calendar invented by the friars and their Indigenous pupils.

Several scholars remarked on the patterning of the veintena festivities. Graulich (1986, 1999, 85–87) noted the parallelism of rituals performed during the veintena celebrations in the first half (from Tlacaxipehualiztli to Xocotl Huetzi/Huey Micailhuitl) and second half of the solar year (between Ochpaniztli and Atlcahualo). Kirchoff (1968) correlated historical and modern calendars throughout Mesoamerica and grouped the eighteen feasts into six simple celebrations and six double celebrations. The double celebrations are Pachtontli and Huey Pachtli, Micailhuitontli and Huey Micailhuitl, and Tozoztli and Huey Tozoztontli. They extended over a two-month period, according to different sources. More recently, Torres Cisneros (2011) remarked on the same pattern in the 260-day calendar in use among the Mixe of southern Oaxaca. These examples seem to indicate that different communities throughout Mesoamerica followed similar but somewhat adjustable patterns in their ceremonial lives rather than a fixed calendar of celebrations. Ultimately, this should be unsurprising considering the many ecological systems and lack of a unified religious or political authority in Mesoamerica.

3.4. The festival cycle in the southeastern Nahuatl region

Huautla de Jiménez and other towns in northeastern Oaxaca, home to the Mazatec, Popoloca, and Chinantec peoples, are the only communities in modern Mexico where an agricultural calendar akin to the veintenas is still known (Weitlaner 1936, Weitlaner and Weitlaner 1946, Carrera González and Doesburg 1996; see Appendix). Historically, the festival cycle has been documented in the region since the early colonial period. According to Fray Toribio de Benavente, also known as Motolinía (1971, ch. 25), who worked at the Franciscan mission in Tehuacán, a Nahuatl town in southern Puebla, the three neighboring towns of Tehuacán, Coxcatlán, and Teotitlán observed similar religious practices despite their different local tutelary gods. The friar (Motolinía 1971, ch. 16) also specifically mentioned the yearly celebrations of the veintenas, whose Nahuatl names differed slightly from the more commonly known ones in central Mexico. A few decades later, in the 1580s, the *Relación de Teotitlán del Camino* (Paso y Troncoso 1905, vol. 4, 213–231) stated that veintena ceremonies were performed in modern-day Teotitlán de Flores Magón and the surrounding area, including Huautla, which is mentioned in the same source as a dependency of Teotitlán. Both sources referred to the veintenas in Nahuatl, one of the languages spoken in the area, and listed the same names, as noted by Paso y Troncoso (1905, vol. 4, 217n1). This is particularly noteworthy because Motolinía’s account and the *Relación* were independently redacted roughly forty years apart. First, the friar learned first-hand narratives of historical deeds and pre-Hispanic religious customs during his time at the evangelical mission in the 1540s. Later, Spanish emissaries and local Indigenous officials compiled a

geographical census at the behest of the Crown in the latter part of the sixteenth century (Cline 1964).

Both sources noted the political importance of local priests in the kingdoms of the southern Nahuatl region, which may be partly due to a common ancestry that set them apart from the surrounding Mixtec, Mazatec, Popoloca, and Cuicatec peoples. According to several sources, Tehuacán, Teotitlán, and Coxcatlán were putatively founded by Nonoalca people from Tula in the modern state of Hidalgo. For example, the *Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca*, a manuscript from Cuauhtinchan in Puebla, relates the migration of Toltec groups to southern Mexico after the fall of Tula (Kirchhoff et al. 1989, 133–135, ff. 6–8). One of the leaders of the migrating group was Xelhua o Xelhuan, who eventually settled in the area of Tehuacán, Teotitlán, and Coxcatlán, encroaching on an ethnically diverse territory. Xelhua is also mentioned as the town's founder in the *Relación de Cuzcatlán* (Paso y Troncoso 1905, vol. 5, 47).

According to the *Relación de Teutitlán del Camino* (Paso y Troncoso 1905, vol. 4, 220), three main priests ruled over the towns' religious and civic duties: Teuctlamacaz (lord-priest, from *teuctli* or lord and *tlamacaz* or priest in Nahuatl), Ecatlamacaz (wind-priest, from *ecatl* or wind and *tlamacaz*), and Tetzatlamacaz (omen-priest, from

tetzahuitl or omen and *tlamacaz*). While Teuctlamacaz seems to imply some type of political authority given the term *teuctli* (lord), Ecatlamacaz and Tetzatlamacaz presumably involved more strictly religious duties, such as seasonal or weather-related ceremonies in the case of the Ecatlamacaz and oracular practices in the case of the Tetzatlamacaz. Furthermore, the wind-priest and the omen-priest may have been the temple priests for the two main gods worshiped in town, Teyztapali and Coatl, which are also mentioned in the *Relación* (Paso y Troncoso 1905, vol. 4, 217). As indicated by its name, Teyztapali was likely a god and image of a slab stone akin to the god Iztapal Totec (Paso y Troncoso 1905, vol. 4, 217n2, Codex Telleriano-Remensis, f. 22v), while Coatl may refer to Quetzalcoatl as a manifestation of the wind god.

The two temples and their respective cults—one dedicated to divination and administered by the Tetzatlamacaz and the other to the seasonal rituals of the Ecatlamacaz—created a complementary and dynamic opposition, similar to the one between Tezcatlipoca and Quetzalcoatl found in the Codex Borbonicus (p. 22) and discussed in Section 1.2. The *Relación* also explains that these priests were celibate and regularly fasted, self-sacrificed, and lived in seclusion at their temples. Motolinía (1971, ch. 25) complements the information provided by the later source as follows:



Figure 3.7. New Fire altar, Tehuacán Viejo, Puebla. Photo by Alessia Frassani.

In these three provinces I am telling you about [Tehuacán, Teotitlán, and Cozcatlán], the ministers of the temples and everybody in their houses fasted eighty days every year. They also observed fast and lent before the celebration of their devil, especially those priests, by eating only maize bread, water, and salt. One lent lasted ten days, while others were of twenty or forty days, and others were of eighty days, such as the one for Panquetzaliztli in Mexico ... These priests were also called “fire bearers,” because they threw incense and coal on the fire three times during the day and three times during the night ... The fast was not observed everywhere; rather, each province did it for their own gods according to their own devotion and customs. In some towns in these provinces, the devil had its own dedicated priests who were always keeping a vigil and prayed, fasted, and sacrificed themselves, and this full-time occupation lasted four years, and the priests were indeed young men who fasted for four years ... [In their temples,] they did not eat fruit, honey, or any other sweet; only every twenty days they were allowed to eat that, because that was like Sunday for us. They stayed awake, taking turns in pairs while the other two slept; they spent the night singing to the devil many songs and regularly drawing blood from different parts of their bodies ... every twenty days, they did that. If I am not mistaken, they counted eighteen times eighty, because they did not count five days of the year, but only eighteen months of twenty days each. (Translation by author)

The friar mentions the veintena calendar in use among the southern Puebla priesthood and the ceremony of Panquetzaliztli in relation to day counting, especially the twenty-day count (leading to regular intervals of twenty, forty, or eighty days), night ceremonies, and vision quest (fasts, wakes, and self-sacrifices). All these aspects are seemingly inseparable. The friar concludes that priests from the southern region of Tehuacán, Teotitlán, and

Coxcatlán were highly sought after for their divining powers, even by the Mexica ruler Motecuhzoma in Tenochtitlan. In the recently excavated site of Tehuacán Viejo (Fig. 3.7), an altar features a stepped decoration that is strikingly similar to the New Fire altar depicted in the Codex Borbonicus (p. 34; Fig. 4.8). The temple and altar in the manuscript were likely those located in Iztapalapa on the hill known as Huixachtecatl, Cerro de la Estrella, where the “fire bearers” lit the New Fire during Panquetzaliztli. The presence of a New Fire altar in Tehuacán is another proof of the widespread adoption of the same ceremony by different groups throughout Mesomerica, as indicated by Motolinía.

A three-part illustration from the Codex Mendoza aptly demonstrates how intertwined self-sacrifice, night ceremonies, and skywatching were in ancient Mexico. Folio 63r of the Codex Mendoza (Fig. 3.8) depicts the “nighttime activities of the head priests,” as explained on the previous page facing the drawing. The night setting of the three activities is indicated by the round gray patch on the top central part of the page. The dark night sky is brightened by the stars, which are depicted as eyes with a red eyelid. In the first scene on the left, a priest walks forward holding a smoking censer in one hand and a bag containing copal (incense) in the other. He is also carrying a gourd on his back that, according to the gloss, contains “poison” that he will use to self-sacrifice. The potion was likely concocted with a mind-altering substance used in night ceremonies. Behind the priest walks a novice carrying branches that will be used to create an altar in the woods, where the ceremony will take place. The next scene shows a priest seated on a straw mat and playing a *teponaztli*, a horizontal drum that, according to the gloss, was played by the priest at night. Finally, on the right, another priest is engaged in skywatching, as indicated by the star-eye symbol moving from his eyes towards the sky. The gloss specifies that the priest did so to keep track of the time. Illustrations in the Codex Mendoza are rather



Figure 3.8. Three head priests performing their duties. Codex Mendoza, f. 63r. Bodleian Library, Oxford.

descriptive and do not display the rich iconography of religious manuscripts.

During the second half of the sixteenth century, Augustinian historian Jerónimo Román y Zamora (1897) compiled a history of world civilizations, including the Indigenous peoples of the Americas, by collating information from several primary sources. Describing the many acts of penitence and self-sacrifice performed by the priests of Tehuacán, Teotitlán, and Coxcatlán following Motolinía's account, he also wrote about the importance of the cult of Venus in the region, second only in importance to that of the sun (Román y Zamora 1897, bk. 1, ch. XV). According to Román y Zamora, it was believed that Quetzalcoatl transformed into Venus when he died; therefore, great attention was paid to counting the days on which the planet appeared and disappeared in the sky. Appropriate rituals were celebrated, especially at the moment of Venus's reappearance. Although Román y Zamora did not mention it, it is likely that the cult of Quetzalcoatl as Venus, known

as Tlahuizcalpantecuhtli, revolved around the observation of the planet's appearance at the summit of the volcano Citlaltepētēl (known in Spanish as Pico de Orizaba), which is the highest peak in Mexico. According to both colonial and modern lore, Quetzalcoatl turned into ashes and disappeared from the top of this mountain (Arroniz 1867, 66–67, Medellín Zenil 1962, Levine 2014, 179–180). The Nahuatl name of the peak means "star mountain," a reference to the Venus star.

The Codex Cospi (p. 10; Fig. 3.9) depicts two scenes that are part of the so-called "attacks of Venus," a calendrical table that established omens related to the periodic appearance of the planet in the night sky (Nowotny 1961, § 18, Boone 2007, 151–155). In the top image, Quetzalcoatl as Tlahuizcalpantecuhtli pierces a mountain with his spear. The mountain appears to be bleeding, water springs from its foot, and a tree sprouts from the top. The peak of the mountain is white, which indicates that it is snow-capped. Although there are a few other peaks with



Figure 3.9. The attacks of Venus. Codex Cospi, p. 10. Ms. 4093, Biblioteca Universitaria di Bologna.

perennial glaciers in central Mexico (e.g., the Popocatepetl in Puebla and the Matlalcueye or La Malinche in Tlaxcala), the Citlaltepētēl seems to be the most likely identification for the mountain in the Codex Cospi, given that the Venus cult is the subject of the pages. If this is indeed the case, the Codex Cospi would hail from a community in the southeastern Nahuatl region where the Citlaltepētēl is not only visible but also venerated.

The colonial accounts attested that celestial phenomena, such as the solar and Venerian cycles, were tied to specific cults under the auspices of specialized local priests, who were known even outside the region. In turn, the observation of astronomical phenomena was fundamentally tied to considerations regarding meteorological and agricultural events throughout the solar year and over the course of several years. Therefore, it is unsurprising that *veintenas* (i.e., solar celebrations) were also observed in a region known for its precise astronomical knowledge.

Finally, both the calendar and shamanic practices were recorded in the Mazateca in the early twentieth century. Wilhelm Bauer (1908, 858) referred to the importance of what he called an “animal cult” in the Mazateca, which seemingly involved not only the belief that men and women could transform into animals but also devotion to specific animals in church or town hall altars. Local *caciques* were responsible for the maintenance of the cult, upon which the well-being of the community depended. Bauer (1908, 865) also referred to the existence of the Mesoamerican calendar in the region, although his information was unclear. In fact, the anthropologist mentioned the twenty day signs, which he believed were all related to animals. However, he stated that there were thirteen “months,” which indicates that he may have conflated and confused the thirteen numerals of the *tonalpohualli* with the eighteen twenty-day months of the solar year, a calendar still known in many towns of the Mazateca, including Huautla.

The specific information regarding ritual and religious customs in the southeastern Nahuatl region from the pre-Hispanic period to the present confirms the existence of broad cultural continuity within the so-called Mixteca-Puebla horizon (Nicholson 1966, Nicholson 1982) and Eastern Nahuatl region of Puebla and Tlaxcala (Pohl 2003, Pohl 2007). Archaeological data indicates that the Tehuacán Valley is one of the areas where some religious manuscripts may have originated (Chadwick and McNeish 1967, Sisson and Lilly 1994, Álvarez Icaza 2018). Indeed, the only religious manuscript whose provenience is known, the Codex Porfirio Díaz or Tututepetongo (pp. 43–33), hails from the town of the same name in the Cuicatec region of Oaxaca, neighboring the Mazateca (Anders and Jansen 1994, 267–296, Doesburg 2001).

Modern Mazatec practices are part of this broad archaeological and historical context and highlight the importance of the visionary aspect of the *veintenas*'

ceremonies, including skywatching and day counting. The following chapters consider iconography and calendrics, images, and time keeping as intertwined phenomena in the ancient religious manuscripts, as Mesoamerican priests would not separate knowledge about time (the past, present, and future) from their religious experiences.

The Ceremonial Cycle in Colonial Sources and the Ancient Books

The preceding chapters established the importance of calendrical knowledge and night ceremonies among the activities that the Mesoamerican priesthood was supposed to master. In Chapter 3, on the *tonalpohualli*, it was argued that the so-called *veintenas* constituted a liturgical calendar based on a specific partition of the *tonalpohualli* (65×4), which, while approximating the solar year, was eventually drastically refashioned during the colonial period according to Spanish missionaries' ideas. Earlier in Chapter 2, modern and historical Nahuatl and Mazatec chants clarified the primordial roles that ritual and lived experience played in the process of knowledge acquisition in Mesoamerica. This chapter explains that both calendrics and rituals played an essential role in the reinterpretation of the yearly ceremonial cycle in the ancient and colonial painted books.

4.1. Teotleco

Chjon na'ná nda'nitsian, jñe
Our mother woman, water of the center (or marketplace), you are

Chjon na'ná, josin fana ntjao'na
Our mother woman, like our blowing wind

Chjon na'ná, josin nginde, jñe
Our mother woman, like underground, you are

Chjon xaa kamaí, jñe
Woman who turns into a jaguar, you are

Chjon ná xa kamaí, jñe
Our mother woman, who turns into a jaguar, you are

Chjon xon ndijin, jñe
Woman charcoal-stained paper, you are

Chjóon ná xon ndijin, jñe, tso
Our woman charcoal-stained paper, you are, says

María Sabina (Wasson and Wasson 1957a, side 2, band 1)
(https://youtu.be/_KQwV3JixyI)
Transcription and translation by Santiago Cortés Martínez and Alessia Frassani

This short excerpt from a chant by María Sabina offers an insightful starting point for understanding some scenes from the *veintena* ceremonies. The *chjon chjine* claims to be like water, wind, and earth—three major natural forces. She quickly moves through different realms, much like the speaker in the chants collected by Alarcón and Sahagún (discussed in Section 2.3). The last two verses refer to perforated stencils and charcoal stamps that women use to embroider textiles, chiefly *huipiles* (female garments; Fig. 4.1). Women use stencils to leave small charcoal dots



Figure 4.1. Mazatec huipil with stencil. Museo Nacional de Antropología, Mexico City. Photo by Javier García.

on the huipil, which outline the figure to be embroidered. In the words and experience of María Sabina, this almost exclusively female activity becomes analogous to transforming into a jaguar. The realization comes when she sees black spots appearing on the huipil. María Sabina knows how to become a jaguar because she knows how to interpret signs. The huipil is a common garment, and women know how to embroider them, but she is the only one who can recognize these charcoal shapes as the jaguar's spots. It is also noteworthy that she describes the embroidering—the process of creating a garment rather than the final product. She brings attention not to the outcome of the activity but to surfacing the signs that a

transformation is taking place. Figure 4.6 depicts an image from the Codex Tudela (f. 21r), in which the earth goddess Toci, also known as Tlazolteotl, patroness of the *veintena* of Ochpaniztli, is accompanied by a priest. Her skirt has black stains, usually understood to be liquid rubber, which resemble jaguar spots. This image of a female goddess seems to represent quite literally what María Sabina refers to in the chant transcribed above. The same skirt, identified as a *manta* (cloak), is depicted in the Codex Tudela (f. 87v; Fig. 7.6).

Figure 4.2 depicts the ceremony of Teotleco from page 31 of the Codex Borbonicus (Nowotny 1974, 19–22,

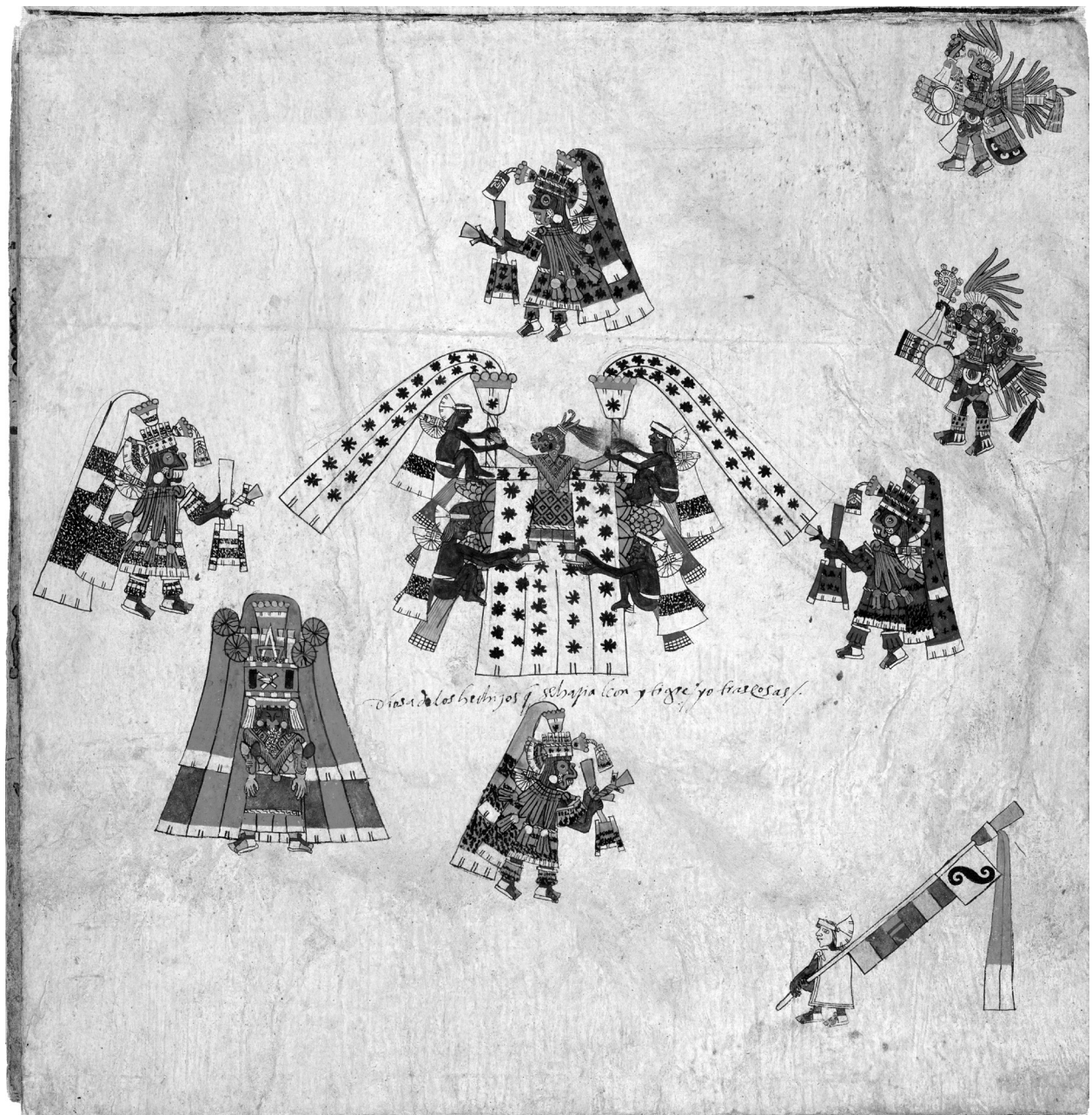


Figure 4.2. Teotleco. Codex Borbonicus, p. 31. Bibliothèque de l'Assemblée nationale, Paris.

Couch 1985, 74–75, Anders et al. 1991, 214–215). At the center is the *ixiptla* (impersonator) of the goddess Chicomecoatl-Xilonen, who is associated with ripped corn. She is stretched on a bed of maize cobs covered with black-stained paper strips. A Spanish gloss underneath the figure reads, “Goddess of magic who turned herself into a lion or a tiger and other things” (*Diosa de los hechizos que se hacía león y tigre y otras cosas*). This sentence clearly indicates the ascription of powers to a priest, akin to those of Mazatec curanderos and María Sabina in the excerpt above. While the gloss initially seems to be unrelated to the image, since no sign of transformation is evident, Anders et al. (1991, 215) noted that it probably refers to the act of seeing the *nahual* (image or double) of a god on a bowl filled with either maize dough or *yauhtli* (marigold leaves), which was left in the temple during the celebration of Teotleco. For example, according to the alphabetic text of the Codex Tudela (f. 22), an old priest would regularly check whether the footprint of “roosters and lions and many other animals” (*gallos y leones y muchos otros animales*) appeared on the bowl during this *veintena*. The revelation could occur at midnight, dawn, or midday. Footprints were taken as a sign that the gods had come—thus the festivity’s name, Teotleco, which means “God arrives.”

The gloss in the Codex Borbonicus does not explain the image that it accompanies but rather complements it. The writer of the gloss evidently did not refer to the image but another source; at the same time, they implied that the woman stretched out on the stained paper was a priest or priestess, identifiable by her attributes as the goddess Chicomecoatl. When combined, the text and the images suggest that the ability to read signs equates to transformation and, ultimately, divine presence, albeit from different perspectives. The annotator of the Codex Borbonicus was able to read something that was not readily visible into the image. The same could be said of the priest or priestess themselves: only the one who can read the signs is able to transform. In many contemporary Indigenous communities of Mexico, the ability to read and interpret signs is still considered the prerogative of curanderos and healers (Monaghan and Hamann 1998). Munn (1983, 475), paraphrasing María Sabina, stated that curanderos are the ones who examine the tracks of the feet and of the hands, as a hunter tracks his animals.

Similar to the Codex Borbonicus, the text in the Codex Tudela (f. 22r) explicitly relates to signs on dried dough or leaves, but the corresponding illustration does not bear any visual elements of this (Fig. 4.3). Yet, the two representations of the same feast are quite distinct despite being seemingly characterized by similar events. In later colonial manuscripts, a naked body, which is only partially visible from a temple on the left, cannot be identified with any god or goddess due

to the lack of any iconographic features. It lies on top of a series of round and yellow shapes, which may be identified as corn, although this is unclear. The hidden body’s nakedness and loose posture hint at death by sacrifice, which is akin to the central figure in the Codex Borbonicus, whose hands and feet are tied by four priests, possibly indicating that a sacrifice is imminent (Anders et al. 1991, 216). Batalla Rosado (1993, 127–130) further suggested that the central character in the Codex Borbonicus is not supine but rather in an elevated and diagonal position because the head does not rest on the bed of corn cobs. The black-stained paper and the two short poles that culminate in long strips on top of the structure should be understood as being much longer and in a vertical position in reality. The fact that the priest-goddess should be understood as standing is corroborated by several sources that attest to the use of a litter to parade a god impersonator of Chicomecoatl during Ochpaniztli, a festival that largely overlaps with Teotleco in this manuscript, as extensively discussed below (Batalla Rosado 1993, 129).

In the Codex Tudela the priest in the center of the illustration assumes the same outstretched position of the Codex Borbonicus’ central image, while his black body paint recalls the four officiating characters around the goddess in the Codex Borbonicus. The two white feathers on the priest’s head are usually attributes assigned to sacrificial victims, which would identify him as the sacrificed rather than the sacrificer. Finally, in the representation of Teotleco in the Codex Tudela, the last image on the right depicts a god, identifiable as Xipe Totec, ascending a temple stairway. This is an explicit reference to the name and celebration of the *veintena* of Teotleco (which means “God arrives”). The frontal depiction of Chicomecoatl in the bottom left corner of the Codex Borbonicus can be considered the equivalent of Xipe Totec in the Codex Tudela.

Compositionally, in the Codex Tudela, the priest is the central and connecting figure between the lifeless body on the left (perhaps his former self) and the fully manifested god on the right. He is also naked and painted black; he is no longer who he used to be or yet what he will become (Olivier 2003, 188). By contrast, the Codex Borbonicus, an earlier and stylistically pre-Hispanic manuscript, conflates and blurs the attributes and appearances of three images and bodies: the god or goddess, the priest, and the sacrificed. The ambiguity of the central image’s position in both manuscripts underscores its shifting ontological status: from sacrificer to sacrificed and from god or goddess impersonator to god or goddess revealed.

As remarked by Batalla Rosado (2002, 210–211), later scenes that are cognate to those of the Codex Tudela in the Codices Magliabechiano and Ixtlilxochitl



Figure 4.3. Teotleco. Codex Tudela, f. 22r. Museo de América, Madrid.

(Fig. 4.4) add gruesome details, such as blood spurts and flames around and inside the temple, that are not found in the Codex Tudela. The earlier document follows the Codex Borbonicus more closely in its consistent lack of explicit depictions of violence and human sacrifice.

Batalla Rosado considered the addition of horrific details in the Codices Magliabechiano and Ixtlilxochitl to be a result of the progressive demonization of Mesoamerican religion within the intellectual circle of friars, who fabricated information and images from



Figure 4.4. Teotleco. Codex Ixtlilxochitl, f. 99v. Durán 1880.

earlier manuscripts rather than direct knowledge of the rituals depicted. While I concur that these changes were incremental, specific consideration should be given to their nature and purpose. By adding gruesome details, tlacuilos responded to the desire for a “reality effect” (Barthes 1989) in the narrative and assumed the point of view of a fictitious eyewitness. However, the account’s brutal realism is a mere rhetorical device; it is factually and historically inaccurate, as even the Codex Tudela was written approximately two generations after the conquest. In general, realistic and gruesome details served the purpose of legitimizing the account based on an “evidential paradigm” (Ginzburg 1989) that began to take hold in Europe in the early modern period. Equally propelled by the Holy Office of the Inquisition’s systematic ecclesiastical persecution of religious minorities in the Old World (Pereda Espeso 2017, 209–235) and the wondrous discoveries that accompanied the conquest of the New World (Adorno 1992), new and more convincing proofs of veracity began to appear in historical accounts. Cortés’ letters, written as a kind of journal to justify the conquistador’s actions to the King of Spain, constitute an early and clear example of this new historiographic and epistemological stance. Cortés’ written first-person testimony was in fact substantiated with objects and gifts sent to Europe, thus producing compelling evidence of the truthfulness and reliability of his account. Once in Spain, Cortés relied on the traditional historical writing of López de Gómara (1552) to provide authority to his story based on customary references to biblical and Classical texts.

A comparison of the later Codex Ixtlilxochitl (f. 99v) and corresponding images of the festival of Teotleco in the Codices Borbonicus and Tudela indicates that the manifested god is not depicted in the former. A few footprints can be seen descending from an empty temple in the background, but only drips of blood are visible on

the stairway. Divine epiphany, which is seemingly the objective of the ritual itself, is completely bypassed here and replaced by blood, as an evidentiary clue of human sacrifice. A naked person, who is partially visible from the temple on the left, has black spots on their body—the result of burning at the stake, the form of human sacrifice to which the victim was subjected.

The casting of victims into the fire is an aspect of the ceremony of Teotleco described in numerous written sources, beginning with the Codex Tudela itself (f. 22v). The lengthiest narrative, however, is found in the Florentine Codex (Sahagún 1950–1982, bk. 2, ch. 31), according to which victims were cast into the fire while a priest danced around them and moved like a squirrel. He wore an animal crest and whistled as he approached the fire, making chirping sounds that mimicked the animal. Another priest was dressed like a bat; these are both descriptions of *nahuales* (i.e., humans who can transform into animals and other natural phenomena). After the sacrifice, a row of priests descended the temple stairs while firmly holding one another. This caused some to fall on their face and others on their side. In the Codex Magliabechiano (f. 39v), by contrast, it is stated that some of the sacrificed fled when they were led in procession to the temple top. The priests’ and the sacrificed’s ascending and descending movements were interchangeable and complementary in a manner that resembles the interchangeability of their positions, as noted before. The Codex Ixtlilxochitl (f. 99v) refers to the name Teotleco as “rise to the god” (*subida a dios*), while the corresponding image shows downward-pointing footprints.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that in the appendix of Book 2 of the Florentine Codex, two temples are listed in relation to the ceremony of Teotleco: Quauhxiccalco, where the priests danced arrayed as animals, and Teccacalco, where the victims were cast into the fire.

However, the Sahaguntine description of the same ceremony, as previously mentioned, seems to indicate that the two events occurred in the same place and were concomitant. The somewhat confusing back and forth between sacrificer and sacrificed in both the images and texts, in addition to what appears to be interchangeable and concurrent places and actions, simultaneously encompasses the unilateral and terminal experience of death and human sacrifice. To explain these discrepancies, it is important to bear in mind that, as is frequently repeated in the sources, ceremonies involving human sacrifice took place in the temple at midnight, i.e., a time and place that were at once hidden from public view and quite propitious for rituals involving altered states. Therefore, information regarding large braziers in which the victims were presumably burnt becomes particularly interesting. Durán (1971, *Gods and Rites*, ch. 5) related that such a brazier was found in the temple of Tezcatlipoca. It was used to create a black ointment consisting of poisonous animals (e.g., spiders, centipedes, and scorpions) with which priests painted their bodies black. The concoction, which also included substances such as piciete (wild green tobacco) and ololiuhqui (datura seed), was also ingested to induce visions in the priests. Thus, large braziers may have been used not to burn people but to create a vision-inducing soot that was also employed to stain the priests' bodies.

Archival sources corroborate this hypothesis. In 1544, during the Inquisition trials against the cacique and governors of Yanhuitlan (a Mixtec town in the modern state of Oaxaca), testimonies declared that the local Indigenous priest employed a black body paint made of charcoal soot to cover his own body (AGN, Ramo Inquisición, vol. 37, exp. 7, f. 40r, Sepúlveda y Herrera 1999, 210). Then, he proceeded to declare that he was no longer Christian and would duly follow the customs and mandates of the ancestors. Another example comes from a Nahuatl myth collected by Sahagún (1950–1982, bk. 7, 50) in the *Memoriales con escolios* about the gods Nanahuatzin and Tecuzitcatl's voluntary self-immolation, which occurred during the last creation in Teotihuacan. Initially hesitant, the gods ultimately jumped into the fire to become stars; they were soon followed by the eagle and jaguar, which were left with burns and bruises as a result of the experience—the characteristic spots that they still carry to this day.

In light of this information, I suggest that the black spots on the naked body seen lurking within the temple in the Codex Ixtlilxochitl (f. 99v) may be understood not as (or, at least, not only as) a sign of death by burning but as the stains produced by the black charcoal soot that appear on the body as one transforms into a jaguar nahual. Both the friars and, tragically, the Nahuatl pupils who were educated by them produced often exaggerated and dehumanizing portrayals of Mesoamerican ancestral religion that persist to this day. The priests cast themselves into the fire—that is, they ingested the concoction and transformed themselves into animals. Colonial sources' insistence

on human sacrifice, which is still viewed as the nucleus of Aztec (and Nahuatl) religion by many scholars (e.g., Carrasco 1999, Graulich 2005), had a specific and clear objective: silencing the visionary experience. Therefore, what I propose here is not to discard colonial sources but to read them anew by using modern Mazatec experience as a wedge in the Spaniards' and their Indigenous converts' colonialist narratives.

I do not suggest that human sacrifice was not practiced by either the Mexica or other Mesoamerican peoples. Following López Austin and López Luján (2008) and, more recently, Restall (2018, 75–144), I propose confronting the abundant literature on human sacrifice with actual archaeological records. On the one hand, if sources are to be taken literally, thousands of victims were sacrificed every year in the Templo Mayor, the most important ritual site in central Mexico. On the other hand, while excavations are ongoing, only the remains of a few hundred people have been retrieved. Skulls, which are by far the most common skeletal remains, cannot provide any indication about the cause of death because decapitation was conducted post-mortem (López Austin and López Luján 2008, 139–141, Chávez Balderas 2010, 317–343). Skulls with perforated temples, frequently including those of female and even child, found in so-called *tzompanli*, altars with racks of skulls (Pijoán Aguadé and Mansilla Lory 2010, 307–310, Matos Moctezuma et al. 2017), suggest that these are secondary burials. The reuse of skeletal remains, especially skulls, in ceremonial contexts such as caches or sacred bundles is firmly established in both colonial sources and contemporary practice (Castillo 2001, 121, Tezozomoc 1997, ch. 94, Blom 1954, Jansen 2011, Maza García de Alba 2019). Indeed, it is a widespread phenomenon on the entire continent. In this context, many human remains in the sacred precinct of Tenochtitlan may be interpreted as ancestors' relics.

The astounding difference between the extant archaeological evidence from the main locus of practice of human sacrifice and colonial sources not only disproves the latter but begs the question of which practices were actually performed that the friars fatally misunderstood and misinterpreted. Rather than viewing human sacrifice as the nucleus of Nahuatl and Mesoamerican religion, I believe that sacrifice should be understood as part of a larger ceremonial complex that in no way led to the death of the sacrificed. Schele and Miller's (1986) now classic study famously demonstrated the importance of ritual bloodletting as a form of self-sacrifice among the Classic Maya. I believe that ceremonies involving altered states of consciousness, which implied a journey to the world of the dead (and back), were often misunderstood and ultimately mistaken by the friars as an ultimate sacrifice—the definitive termination of life. There may have been overlap between night ceremonies and human sacrifice. For example, Clendinnen (1995, 92–93) suggested that the sacrificed were drugged or sedated before execution with substances that may have been used to induce visions in other doses, combinations, and ceremonies, a practice

that has been both historically and archaeologically corroborated in the Inca Empire (McEwan and Guchte 1992). Another case of overlap and possibly confusion between death and altered states is accession rituals, which were often described as being akin to funerals (see below for further discussion). As seen earlier, travel to and from the world of the ancestors is a key aspect of knowledge acquisition in Mazatec ceremonies. Nightly rituals are deeply transformative experiences, and although they are perhaps existentially similar to death, they are not to be mistaken for physical death, let alone human sacrifice.

As studied by López Luján (2005), perhaps the most ubiquitous aspect of the archaeology of the Templo Mayor are the offerings—large caches of carefully placed objects that should be understood as a type of gift and which often included human remains (sacrificed or not). Offerings and sacrifices have often been said to have a similar underlying logic: giving to receive. In this context, the surrender of precious items or even life is intended to restore balance by giving what is due (Köhler 2001). In line with this book’s main arguments, I propose that offering and sacrifice can also be understood as an open gesture or a quest—a process in which participants partake and are fully aware of the outcome’s indeterminacy (Neurath 2010, 93). Indeed, sacrifice as offering allows for the possibility that an offer can be refused and a plea to the gods can remain unanswered. This view aims to question cosmological interpretations that rationalize human behavior and seeks to understand ceremony as an open-ended process that can generate meaning, not simply reflect a preconceived notion of reality or truth.

4.2. Emblematic and narrative representations of the veintenas

The festivals of the yearly calendar can be grouped according to their style and iconography (Kubler and Gibson 1951, 37–41). For example, the Codex Borbonicus depicts full-fledged ritual scenes, including priests, gods, and temple structures. Other manuscripts, such as the Codex Telleriano-Remensis (see Section 7.1), only represent the tutelary god or patron of the veintena, who, as remarked by Quiñones Keber (1995, 136), should be more accurately understood as a godly impersonator. The Codex Tudela alternates ceremonial scenes and godly depictions in its representation of the veintenas. Another type of veintena representation consists of rather emblematic and glyph-like images that appear within larger scenes as a sort of temporal markers. In colonial manuscripts, this type of representation can be found in tributary accounts, such as the Codex Mendoza, Matrícula de Tributos, and the Humboldt Fragment (Fig. 4.5), that depict the four tribute periods of the Aztec Empire: Tlacaxipehualiztli, Ochpaniztli, Panquetzaliztli, and Etzalcualiztli (Long 1942, Barlow 1943). Tlacaxipehualiztli is represented by the conical hat of Xipe Totec, the tutelary god of the ceremony; Ochpaniztli is depicted as the broom of Tlazolteotl, the main goddess of this celebration; Panquetzaliztli, which means “the raising of banners,” is identified by an upright

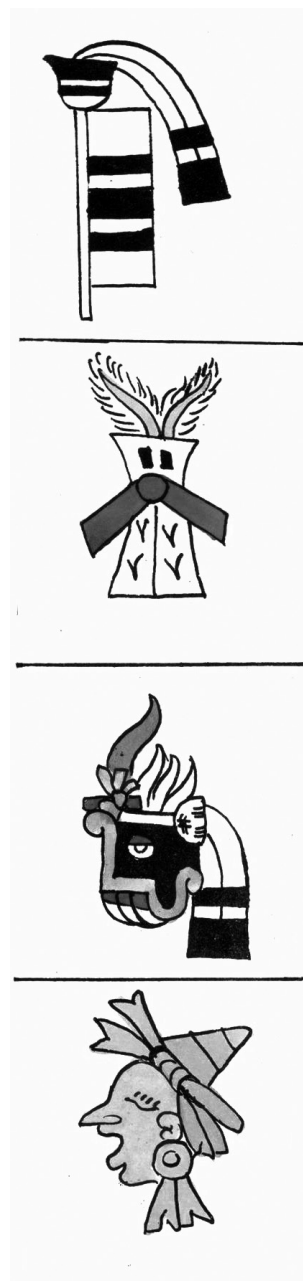


Figure 4.5. The four glyphs related to the tribute recollection in the Triple Alliance. From top to bottom: Panquetzaliztli, Ochpaniztli, Etzalcualiztli, Tlacaxipehualiztli. Humboldt Fragment. Kingsborough 1831.

banner; and Etzlacualiztli, a festival dedicated to Tlaloc, is depicted as the head of the rain god.

The Codex Borbonicus employs emblematic markers within the larger narrative of the veintenas. As extensively recognized in the literature (Paso y Troncoso 1898, 165–179, Couch 1985, 70–82, Anders et al. 1991, 214–215, Graulich 2008), the twelfth festival of the year, Ochpaniztli, is given a larger and more elaborate treatment than any other celebration in the cycle. It extends over several pages and overlaps with the subsequent veintenas. On pages 29–32, the priest of Chicomecoatl plays a central role, differently from most later sources, which assign the festival of Ochpaniztli to Toci or Tlazolteotl. For example,

in the Codex Tudela (f. 21r; Fig. 4.6), the goddess is dressed in white cotton and accompanied by a richly adorned attendant carrying weapons. The corresponding scene in the Codex Borbonicus centers around a frontal depiction of a brightly colored Chicomecoatl, who stands atop a temple and is surrounded by numerous attendants

(Fig. 4.7). However, in the lower portion of the page, the mother goddess Tlazolteotl, who is dressed in white and holding a broom, appears in a rather diminutive position and does not seem to be participating in ceremonial activities. Anders et al. (1991, 208) described the presence of the tutelary goddess as a temporal marker.



Figure 4.6. Ochpaniztli. Codex Tudela, f. 21r. Museo de América, Madrid.



Figure 4.7. Ochpaniztli. Codex Borbonicus, p. 30. Bibliothèque de l'Assemblée nationale, Paris.

The same situation recurs on page 34 (Fig. 4.8), which depicts the celebration of Panquetzaliztli. In this case, the main ritual is the New Fire, which is not conducted yearly but rather every four years or, in the case of the year 2 Reed (1507), every fifty-two years. A symbolic representation of the veintena of Panquetzaliztli, an upright white-and-blue banner, is shown at the upper part of the page on a temple with Huitzilopochtli, to which Panquetzaliztli is normally dedicated, at its foot. The tlacuilo resorted to the same strategy of placing a glyph to mark a specific ceremony on pages 23 and 37 (Fig. 4.9), on which Izcalli is indicated by an offering of white paper cutouts. Xilomaniztli (the Offering of Tender Maize) is succinctly symbolized by a blue basket filled with colorful corn cobs on page 23, while

Etzalcualiztli, the feast of the bean porridge, is represented by a pot full of beans on page 26. Finally, the feast of Tititl is identified by its characteristic white bundle on page 36. The different manners of the veintena depictions in the Codex Borbonicus closely reflect an understanding of annual ceremonies that could be adapted to fluctuating calendrical, astronomical, or agricultural events rather than being tied to fixed chronological constrictions.

While several scholars have noted the Codex Borbonicus' narrative depiction of the veintenas as an outlier among surviving manuscripts (Couch 1985, XII, DiCesare 2009, 11–13, 123–125, Díaz Álvarez 2018, 159–162) because of its uneven distribution of celebrations throughout its pages,

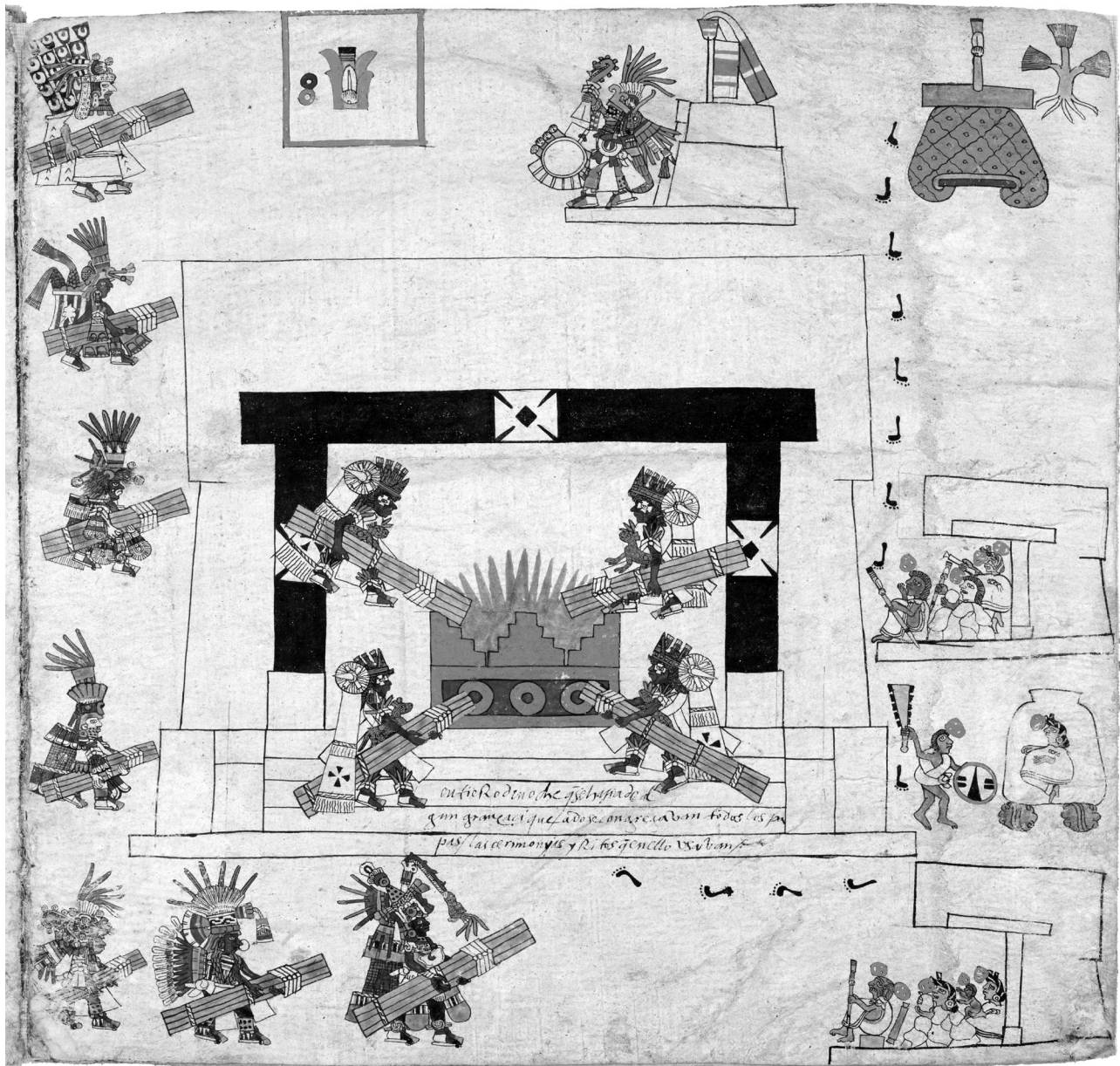


Figure 4.8. New Fire ceremony during Panquetzaliztli. Codex Borbonicus, p. 34. Bibliothèque de la Assemblée Nationale, Paris.

it is important to bear in mind that the Codex Borbonicus is virtually a pre-contact manuscript in style, format, and painting materials. Therefore, it is a more reliable and authoritative source on pre-Hispanic ceremonies and their representations than any other later document. Manuscripts such as those in the previously discussed Magliabechiano Group (Tudela, Magliabechiano, and Ixtlilxochitl) were drafted as late as fifty years after the last presumed public celebrations of any veintena. Moreover, they were not even independently produced and heavily relied on one other (see Chapter 7). The Codex Borbonicus is unique in its traditional and virtually unadulterated Indigenous outlook, format, and style. Later standardization, which derived from a concerted production developed within the friars' schools, should not be taken as a rule but rather as a colonial depiction of Indigenous culture and calendar and a product of their time.

Primeros Memoriales (paragraph 2A, ff. 251r–251v) offers another example comparable to the Codex Borbonicus. Its veintena illustrations were compiled in the Nahuatl town of Tepeapulco in the modern state of Hidalgo between 1558 and 1561 (Sahagún et al. 1997, 4). In the document, the mother goddess Tlazolteotl or Ixcuina is featured in the ceremonies of Micaillhuitontli and Huey Micaillhuitl (Small and Great Feast of the Dead; Fig. 4.10) that precede Ochpaniztli. Similarly to the Codex Borbonicus (p. 30), she can be seen wearing a white dress and holding a small broom.

As remarked by Jiménez Moreno (1974, 44), her presence in both scenes is not easily explained. In light of the Codex Borbonicus' depiction of Ochpaniztli, which extended over several pages and veintenas, it can be hypothesized that, in Primeros Memoriales, a period of observances in

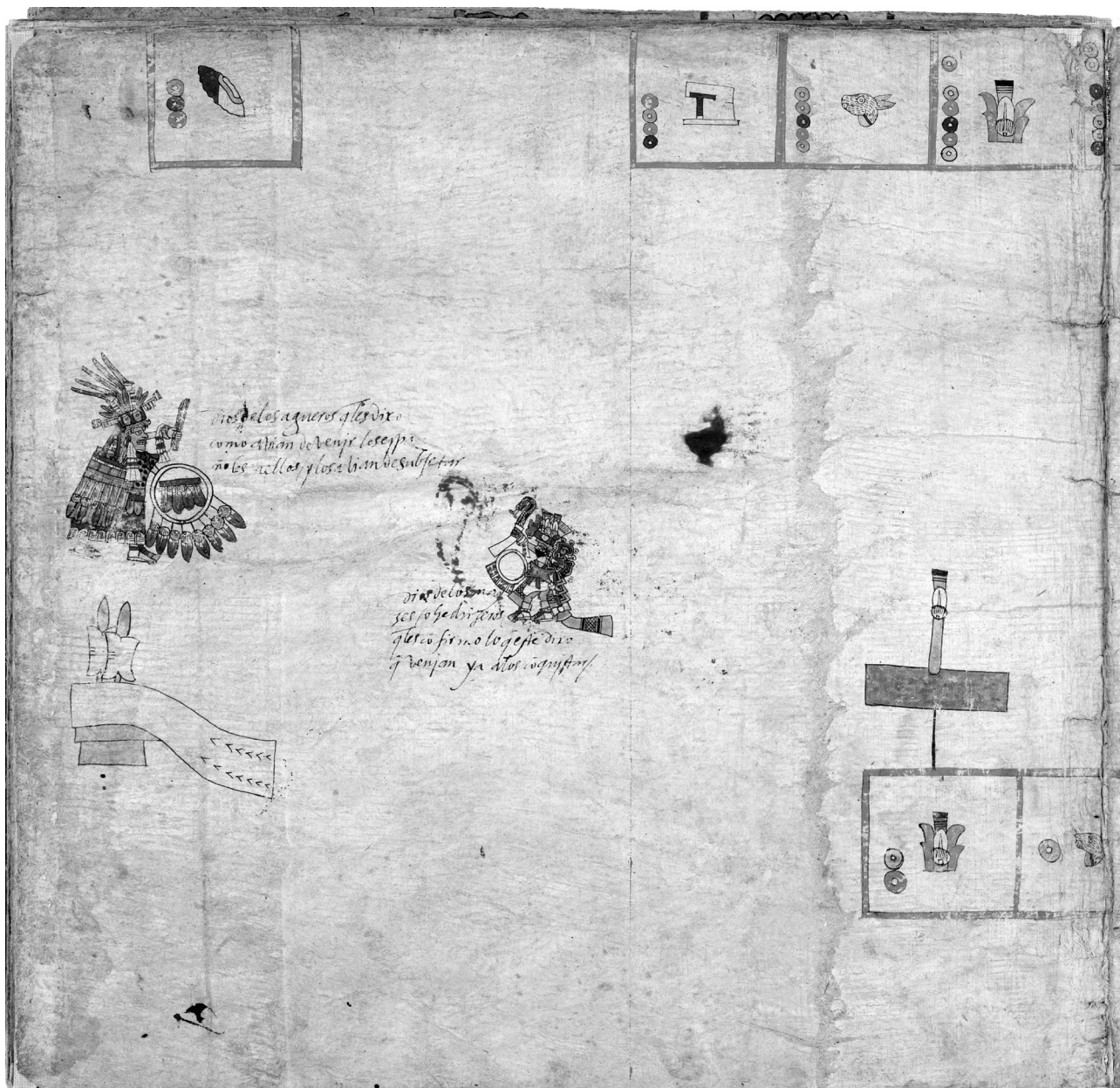


Figure 4.9. The closing of the veintena ceremonies during Izcalli. Codex Borbonicus, p. 37. Bibliothèque de l'Assemblée nationale, Paris.

honor of Tlazolteotl was marked and extended beyond the specific veintena of Ochpaniztli, which was dedicated to the goddess, to include seemingly unrelated ceremonies.

The synthetic depiction of the veintenas is the only one documented in pre-Hispanic and post-contact Aztec sculpture (Fig. 5.7; Nicholson 2002, 65–72, Díaz Álvarez 2018, 156–159). Therefore, early colonial images and sculptures attest that the representation of gods, goddesses, or some of their characteristic attributes as a kind of period marker was common and was not an exception in the representation of the veintenas. During seminar discussions at Leiden University, Prof. Maarten Jansen raised the possibility that several abbreviated representations of the twenty-day celebrations also appear in the pre-Hispanic Mixtec Codex Vienna (see also Jansen

and Pérez Jiménez 2018, 357–360). On page 48 (Fig. 4.11a), a well-known image represents the descent of Lord 9 Wind Quetzalcoatl from heaven. First, he sits in the sky and takes orders from older and larger priests, surrounded by several small objects. Eventually, he descends from the sky on a cotton rope, accompanied by two male figures whose dress identifies them as eagle and *yahui* (fire serpent) *nahuales*. Their role seems to be that of bringing to earth two temples, previously seen in heaven, by carrying them on their back. On the left, the jaguar character carries a temple that contains a mask of Xipe Totec, which possibly indicates Tlacaxipehualiztli. On the right, the temple carried by the fire serpent contains a sun disk, which could correspond to Panquetzaliztli. Eventually, both temples are placed on the ground (perhaps an indication that the cult has been established), along with another structure

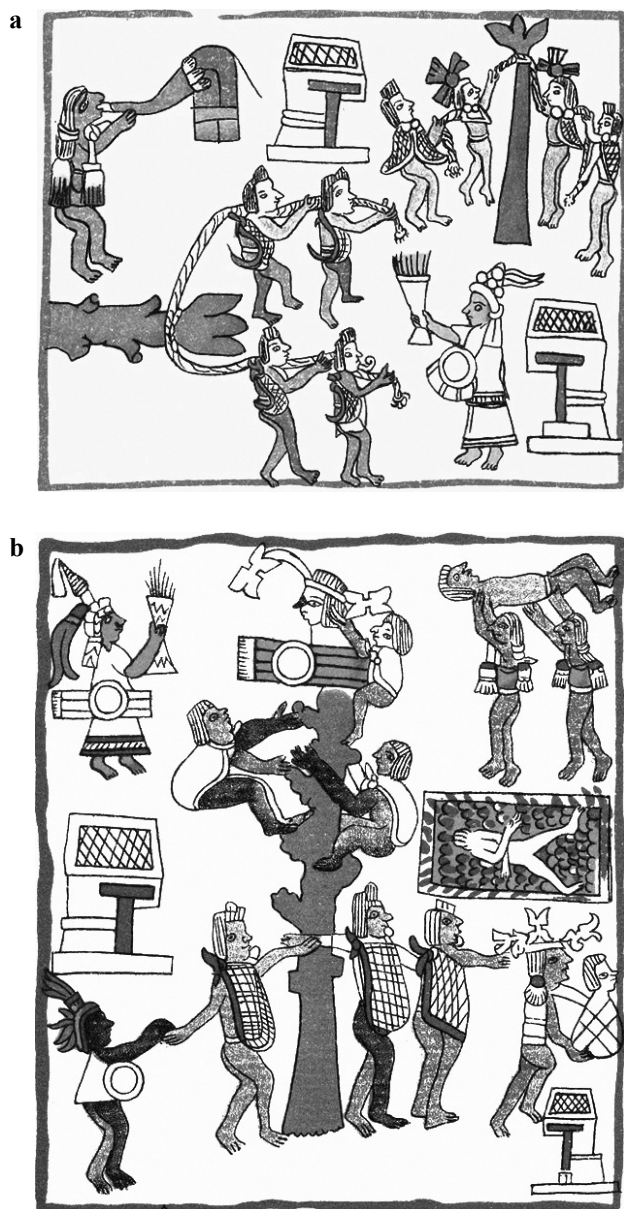


Figure 4.10. a. Micailhuitontli, f. 251r. b. Huey Micailhuitl, f. 251v. *Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España*. Paso y Troncoso 1926.

depicted within a black square; this may indicate Tlillan (the Place of Darkness), which is a temple usually presided over by Cihuacoatl. Later, on page 27 (Fig. 4.11b), the narrative includes two symbols on top of a volute within a larger scene that represents the creation of agriculture (Furst 1978a, 198, Monaghan 1990). In Mixtec codices, volutes indicate both a celebration and an offering, concepts expressed by the Mixtec word *huico* (Jansen and Pérez Jiménez 2018, 357). On top of the volutes stand a tree and a mummy bundle, which could correspond to Cuahuitlehua, and Micailhuitontli or Huey Micailhuitl among the Nahuas. The name of the former celebration means “raising of poles or trees” in Nahuatl, while that of the latter refers to celebrations of the dead. After these two symbols, more signs refer to the seasons and years. First,

there is half an A-O year sign with a single dot, then two depictions of the wind god. This strengthens the hypothesis that yearly celebrations and seasons are indicated. The line ends with a broken corn plant, followed by a rising sun and a small representation of a manuscript, complete with dots and a day sign. The narrative is evidently very abbreviated but seems to suggest that initial, unsuccessful attempts at agriculture could only be corrected through the use of the calendar to track the movement of the sun and the seasons. Several other possible veintena markers appear throughout the Codex Vienna (see, for example, pages 22 and 15), suggesting that seasonal celebrations and related ritual activities played a role in the mythical accounts of creation of the Mixteca.

The varied length and emphasis given to the veintenas and their pictorial expressions indicate that the ceremonies unfolded rather fluidly and were punctuated by single periodic markers. What follows in this chapter is a different and renewed approach to the possible representation of the festival cycle in the ancient sacred books based on the considerations expressed so far.

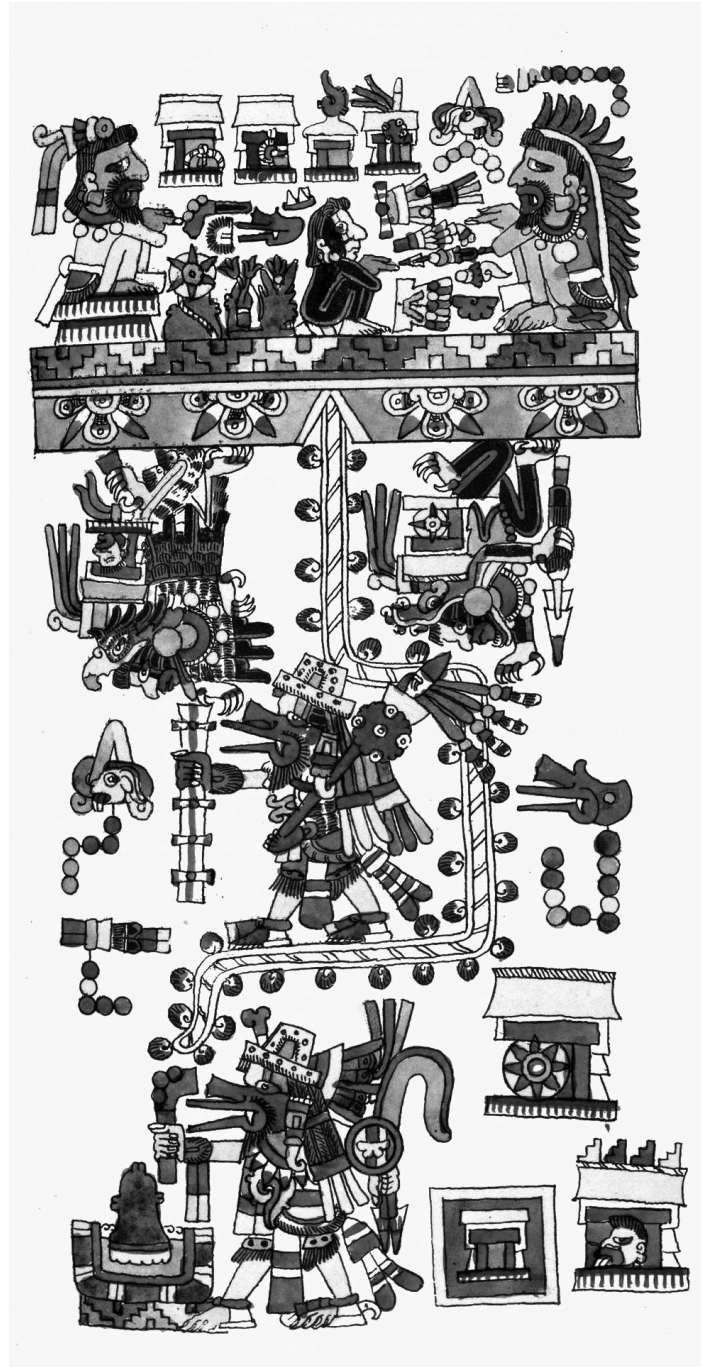
4.3. The veintenas in the Codex Borgia

The central pages of the Codex Borgia (pp. 29–46) have attracted the attention of scholars since Seler’s (1904) seminal study. According to the German scholar (Seler 1904, vol. 2, 1–75), this section of the manuscript depicts a journey into the underworld of the Venus star, incarnated as a Quetzalcoatl priest who flies through and performs several ceremonies in a long sequence of scenes. According to Seler’s astral interpretation, the protagonist’s travel mimics the planet’s movement and its periodical disappearance and reemergence in the sky. While Seler’s interpretation has been rejected, the central role played by the Quetzalcoatl priest as the main, recurring character in the unfolding narrative generally remains accepted (see Boone 2007, 176–178).

Nowotny (1961, § 21b) was the first to provide a systematic critique of Seler’s interpretation. He proposed that the sequence on pages 29–46 of the Codex Borgia constituted a series of temple structures and related rituals that belonged to a specific ceremonial center. Although he did not offer any possible identifications of the center, he suggested a connection with Tenochtitlan’s sacred precinct, whose temples provided the stage for the eighteen yearly feasts of the veintenas. Nowotny further noted that the date clusters that irregularly appear in the sequence are indeed yearly occurrences over the span of a four-year period; in other words, they correspond to the veintenas of the solar year, a point developed in Section 3.2 of this book. Nowotny’s suggestion that the central pages were a sequential presentation of rituals and their settings is an important point of departure for the present analysis.

Anders et al. (1993, 49–69, 175–190) offered another important contribution to this study by establishing the

a



b

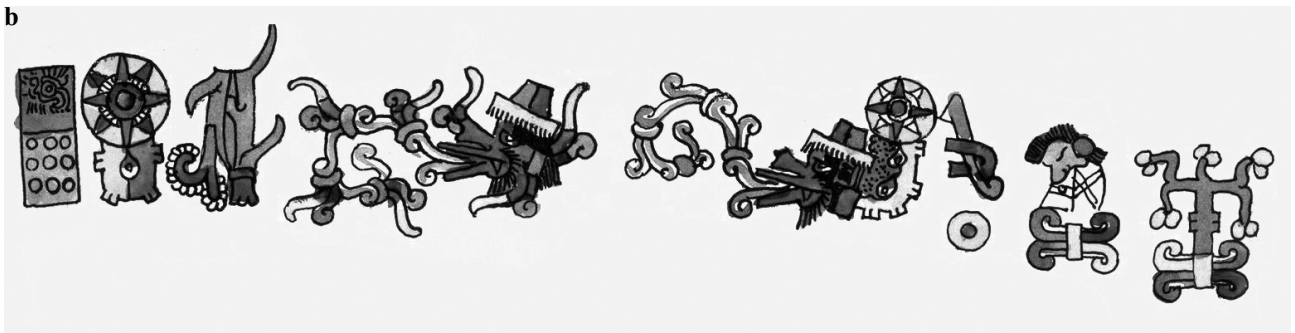


Figure 4.11. a. Lord 9 Wind Quetzalcoatl descends from heaven with two helpers carrying the cults of the sun (Panquetzaliztli) and Xipe (Tlacaxipehualiztli) on their back. Codex Vienna, p. 48. b. Cuahuitlehua and Micailhuittl followed by two wind gods. Codex Vienna, p. 27. Kingsborough 1831.

visionary aspect of the Codex Borgia's ritual sequence within the wider context of Mesoamerican religion. In their view, the Quetzalcoatl priest must be understood as a nahual who can transform and embody different natural forces for the sake of the community's well-being. More recently, Jansen and Pérez Jiménez (2017, 431–530) further developed this idea and offered a detailed analysis of the rituals and places of the Codex Borgia's central pages in relation to the veintenas known through colonial Nahua sources. The relationship between the vision quest and the veintena ceremony is of particular importance. Jansen and Pérez Jiménez (2017, 450–451) also stressed the interdependent relationship between the officiating Quetzalcoatl priest and Cihuacoatl, the mother goddess figure who protects and guides the priest in his ritual endeavors throughout the Codex Borgia's central scenes. In Chapter 1, I discussed the importance of priestly figures as intermediaries between the world of the living and the dead, from whom they derive their knowledge and authority. Night ceremonies can indeed be described as a journey to the world of the dead to meet the ancestors.

Jansen and Pérez Jiménez's identification of the veintenas in the Codex Borgia partially coincides with a previous study by Milbrath (2013, ch. 2), who nevertheless believed that the ritual sequence took place during a specific period between 1496 and 1506. In contrast to the methodology espoused by Jansen and Pérez Jiménez, Milbrath opted for a systematic chronological correlation largely based on a study by Aveni (1999). While I find the suggestion to anchor the Codex Borgia in historical time interesting (as further discussed in Section 6.3 of this book), the main problem with Aveni and Milbrath's identification of chronological and astronomical events is that it is based on selected dates that appear in the pages of the Codex Borgia while ignoring at least as many other dates found in the same pages but that do not corroborate their chronology. More generally, the important issue of the genre of the manuscript, its mantic and ceremonial content, is never considered when framing astronomical and chronological interpretations of the document. In other words, was Codex Borgia painted before, after, or during the period between 1496 and 1506 that was presumably depicted in the manuscript? What was the purpose of recording past agricultural or astronomical events? How past events shape the outlook of religious pictorial manuscripts is an important question that is addressed in Chapters 5, 6, and 7. Here, I am mostly concerned with iconographic identifications and their significance within the corpus of religious manuscripts.

My analysis largely follows clues in the Codex Borbonicus' veintena section to find parallels in the Codex Borgia's central pages. There is a general similarity between the composition and placement of the ritual section in these two manuscripts. In both instances, the reader must either move around the document or turn it ninety degrees to follow the narrative. The Codex Borbonicus is a particularly large document. Each page measures roughly 40 × 40 cm. Although the Codex Borgia is the largest of the surviving pre-Hispanic codices, it is

considerably smaller than the Codex Borbonicus and measures approximately 27 cm on each side. However, the section in the Codex Borgia spans both sides of the document. Thus, the sequence cannot be appreciated at a glance; rather, the reader is forced to follow the sequential unfolding on each page.

As previously mentioned, the black Quetzalcoatl priest in the Codex Borgia is accompanied throughout his journey by the mother goddess Cihuacoatl, who is represented outstretched, functioning as a framing device or temple enclosure, and found mainly in the opening and closing scenes of the ceremonial cycle. By comparison, the Codex Borbonicus' veintena section opens and closes with the Cihuacoatl and an accompanying Xiuhcoatl (fire serpent) priest. In the first instance on page 23, the former is glossed as "main priest" (*papa mayor*), which is consistent with the major priestly role of the Cihuacoatl in the Mexica Empire. The Xiuhcoatl priest, by contrast, is identified as the tlatoani Motecuhzoma. At the end of the cycle on page 37, they reappear, this time identified by their divinatory powers: Cihuacoatl as "god of the omens" (*dios de los agüeros*) and Xiuhcoatl as "god of the maize kernels [used in divination] and magicians" (*dios de los maizes y hechiceros*). Thus, the two characters are comparable to modern Mesoamerican and Mazatec priests, whose powers and knowledge were discussed in previous chapters.

In both manuscripts (page 34 of the Codex Borbonicus and page 46 of the Codex Borgia), the New Fire ceremony is depicted towards the end of the sequence and constitutes a pivotal event in the cycle, either over a year or a period of years. In my analysis, I focus on the ceremonial trajectory that begins with Ochpaniztli, whose long and elaborate depiction in the Codex Borbonicus indicates its importance in the sequence, and ends with the New Fire on Panquetzaliztli.

On page 29 of the Codex Borbonicus (Fig. 4.12), the representation of Ochpaniztli begins on the left, with the priest of Chicomecoatl dancing in front of her assistants, who are playing different musical instruments such as conch shells and trumpets. The scene then proceeds towards a temple decorated with colorful corn cobs, which is longitudinally placed to indicate that the priest is entering it. Eventually, a character exits the temple, wearing a human skin and carrying corn cobs in their hands and a quail in their mouth. These attributes identify the character as Centeotl, the god of corn, who continues to walk towards a smaller temple, presumably the one depicted on the next page (p. 30; Fig. 4.7). A comparable scene can be found on page 43 of the Codex Borgia (Fig. 4.13), which is entirely occupied by a yellow quadrangular enclosure decorated with corn cobs. A priest descends from above, through the body of Cihuacoatl and inside the temple, where a large frontal and squatting Xolotl is being sacrificed. Xolotl's upward head may also indicate a state of trance. The skin that the god wears on their hands and feet is spotted like that of a jaguar, while their chest and trunk are shaped like a round jeweled altar (*cuauhxicalli* in Nahuatl) that contains

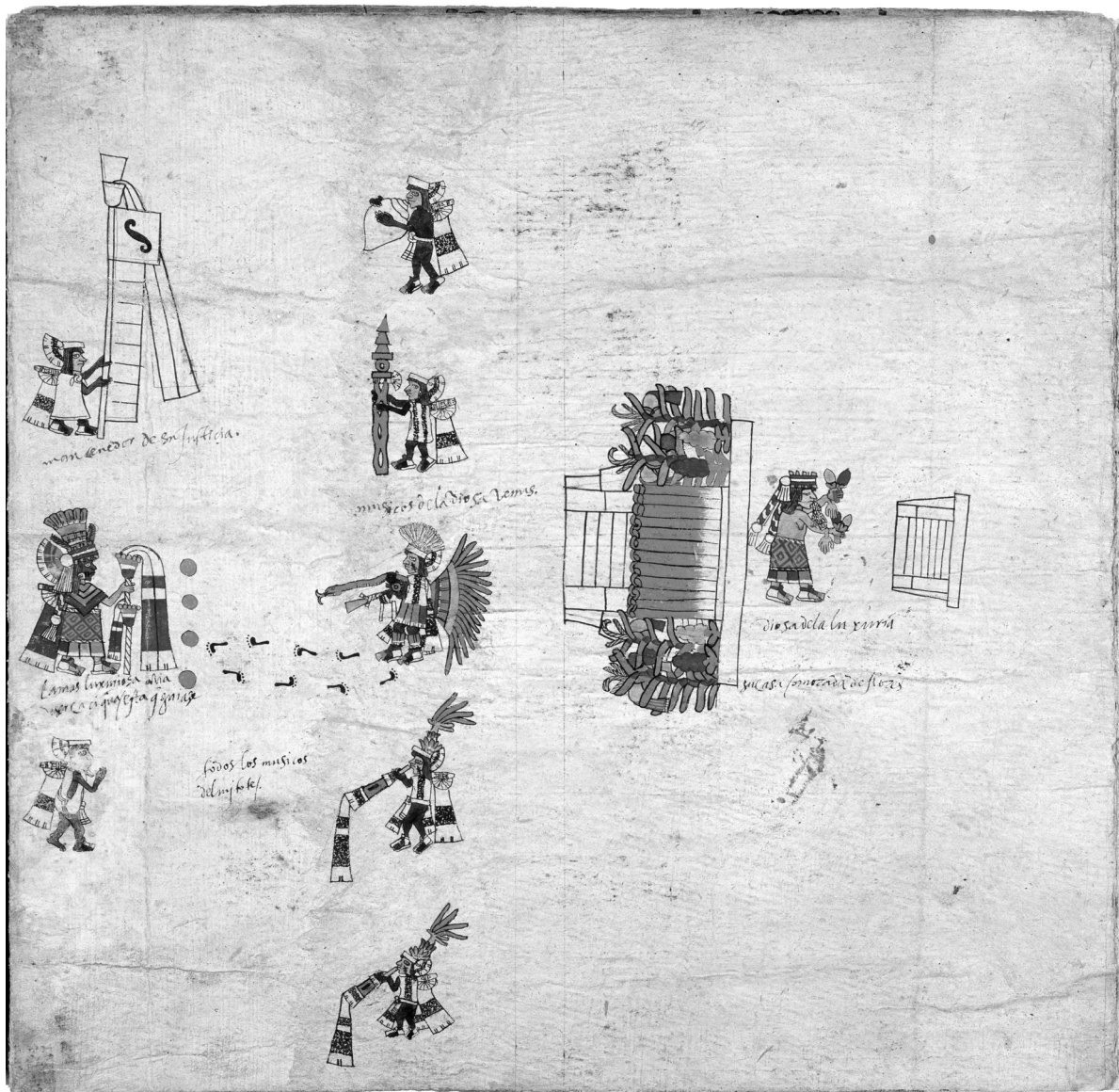


Figure 4.12. The beginning of Ochpaniztli. Codex Borbonicus, p. 29. Bibliothèque de l'Assemblée nationale, Paris.

their heart. Several characters surround the Xolotl altar. In the upper corners of the image, two male figures are seated on jaguar and eagle thrones (a reference to political power), while two women below carry children on their backs while grinding corn, typically female and domestic activities. In the middle section, four gods with distinctive colors (most likely in reference to the cardinal directions) kneel and pour offerings into two containers. Beneath Xolotl lies the body of a Cihuacoatl decorated with both nocturnal symbols (the gray and starred body) and corn cobs. The scene ends with the priest's successful exit from an opening in the temple enclosure at the bottom of the scene. He is carrying corn cobs on his back, which means that he has become Centeotl. The scene in the Codex Borgia is much more complex than the one in the Codex Borbonicus, and many iconographic details cannot be fully explained. Yet, both scenes depict a ritual that takes place within a similar temple and in which the protagonist is a priest who becomes Centeotl by virtue of successfully passing through the temple.

According to the written information provided in the Florentine Codex (Sahagún 1950–1982, bk. 2, ch. 30, 120–121), during Ochpaniztli, Chicomecoatl was a priest who celebrated a ritual involving the human sacrifice of a woman, who represented Toci. The sacrifice would take place at midnight in the temple, where the victim was flayed. Her skin was eventually worn by another person named Teccizquacuilli. Another part of the victim's skin, taken from the thigh, was worn by an impersonator of Centeotl. On page 29 of the Codex Borbonicus, the ritual begins with Chicomecoatl on the left and ends (or, better yet, proceeds) with a person wearing a skin exiting a temple on the right. The Codex Borgia, by contrast, makes clear that the same person who enters the temple exits it and that the sacrifice is of a god's vicar, Xolotl, whose body animates the sacred offering altar. The latter pre-Hispanic manuscript provides an internal perspective that focuses on what happens within the temple's enclosure, which is exactly what colonial sources omit, including the Codex Borbonicus.



Figure 4.13. The sacrifice of Xolotl in the maize temple. Codex Borgia, p. 43. Kingsborough 1831.

Nowotny (1961, § 21b, 247) and Jansen (2002) aptly noted that the Codex Borgia offers a mystical and spiritual view of the ritual rather than the external and public aspects of the cult. In colonial sources, human sacrifice often became a placeholder for any ritual activity that was conducted away from the public eye, especially in light of the secrecy that surrounded private ceremonies conducted inside temples at night. These rituals involved a deep and personal transformation on the part of the people involved, who eventually emerged as different gods or characters due to having acquired new knowledge and power. While colonial sources speak of human sacrifice, the Codex Borgia depicts the anthropomorphizing of the temple's altar. Xolotl, who wears a jaguar skin (much like the human skin of Centeotl in colonial sources), is a god related to the underworld and the otherworldly travels of Quetzalcoatl. Here, he functions as a surrogate for the priest, and his sacrifice is not death but rather a process of transformation.

The scene that precedes the ceremony in the maize temple on page 42 of the Codex Borgia includes other elements that refer to Ochpaniztli and its protagonists (Fig. 4.14). The main action revolves around Itzlacoliuhqui (Curved Obsidian Blade). His body is skeletonized, and he wears a conical hat and a black-and-white face covering (Anders et al. 1993, 227–231). As noted by Jansen and Pérez Jiménez (2017, 504), Itzlacoliuhqui's body in the Codex Borgia may consist of some type of dough due to its white color and red dots. Ixiptla (god impersonators) were often made of corn or other edible staples. In Sahagún's text (1950–1982, bk. 2, ch. 31), Itzlacoliuhqui partook in the ceremony of Ochpaniztli as an aspect of Centeotl, the maize god, who is born from the sacrifice of Toci. In the Codex Borgia, Itzlacoliuhqui undergoes sacrifice by heart extraction on a stone slab, as seen in the top scene. Before this, he is in a ball court, where he is stoned and beaten by four characters. After his sacrifice on a stone, he travels to another underworld



Figure 4.14. The sacrifice of Itzlacoliuhqui. Codex Borgia, p. 42. Kingsborough 1831.

realm—a flooded sunken courtyard—and drowns. He is finally immolated on a crossroad at the bottom of the page. In this last sacrifice, which immediately precedes the ritual in the temple of maize on the following page, an offering of sticks wrapped in a white cloth is placed on top of a colored strip, which may represent the earth. I follow Jansen and Pérez Jiménez (2017, 509) in interpreting the offering as a glyphic reference to the festival of Ochpaniztli, as previously discussed (see Humboldt Fragment). In a similar manner to the Codex Borbonicus and Primeros Memoriales, the glyphic marker indicates a time of the year, even if the ceremonies depicted may not necessarily follow a predictable outlook or duration, rather displacing themselves or overlapping in a rather fluid manner. Once again, the image in the Codex Borgia is particularly complex, and many details cannot be fully accounted for. However, it is worth noting that the corresponding text

by Sahagún related to the *veintena* ceremonies, including Ochpaniztli, are far from clear, a fact described at length above in the case of the varied descriptions of Teotleco. Characters often overlap and exchange roles so that the straightforward trajectory of the action is often difficult to follow, defying any simple progression or narrative.

In Primeros Memoriales, it was noted that the goddess Toci appeared before her putative festival of Ochpaniztli during the *veintenas* of Micaillhuitontli and Huey Micaillhuitl (ff. 251r–251v). In the Codex Borgia, it seems that a ritual preparation that involves the sacrifice of Itzlacoliuhqui as a manifestation of Centeotl is similarly noted in the period leading up to the celebration of Ochpaniztli. Indeed, Jansen and Pérez Jiménez (2017, 509) identified elements of the *veintenas* of Micaillhuitontli and Huey Micaillhuitl in the Codex Borgia (p. 42), such as the importance of dough

ixiptla in those veintenas, according to colonial sources. In the corresponding image in *Primeros Memoriales*, a decapitated dough figure can be seen lying on a bed of corn in the second illustration related to Huey Micailhuiltl, which can be compared to Itzlacolihqui in the *Codex Borgia* (p. 42). Unlike most colonial sources, the scenes in the *Codex Borgia* are characterized by the central role played by the priest, at once sacrificer and sacrificed, as the prism and catalyst through which ritual action is enacted. Every ritual and successive place comes into being because it is visited and activated by the sacrificed priest.

The New Fire ceremony concludes the ceremonial cycle on page 46 of the *Codex Borgia*. The corresponding veintena of Panquetzaliztli is introduced by the abbreviated symbol of a blue upright banner on page 45 (Fig. 4.15), where it appears on the upper portion of the

page. The banner pierces through the temple enclosure and is wrapped around a night vision serpent. The central image on this page is the tzompantli, the skull altar, on top of which stands a character with a fleshless head and a white body with red stripes, akin to Camaxtli, the god of hunting. Behind him (or stemming from him) is a tree with different colored banners. Anders et al. (1993, 239) noted the custom of placing banners atop trees during Panquetzaliztli (Durán 1971, *Calendar, Fifteenth Month, Codex Telleriano-Remensis*, f. 5r). Below the tzompantli, the officiating priest is seated on an altar structure in a particularly dynamic position. He appears to be bleeding (perhaps dematerializing) and turning into a sacred bundle, as indicated by the cloth that covers him. According to Tezozomoc (1997, ch. 94), the tzompantli was not an altar but rather the sacred bundle containing the body of the deceased. In particular, the source relates the solemn

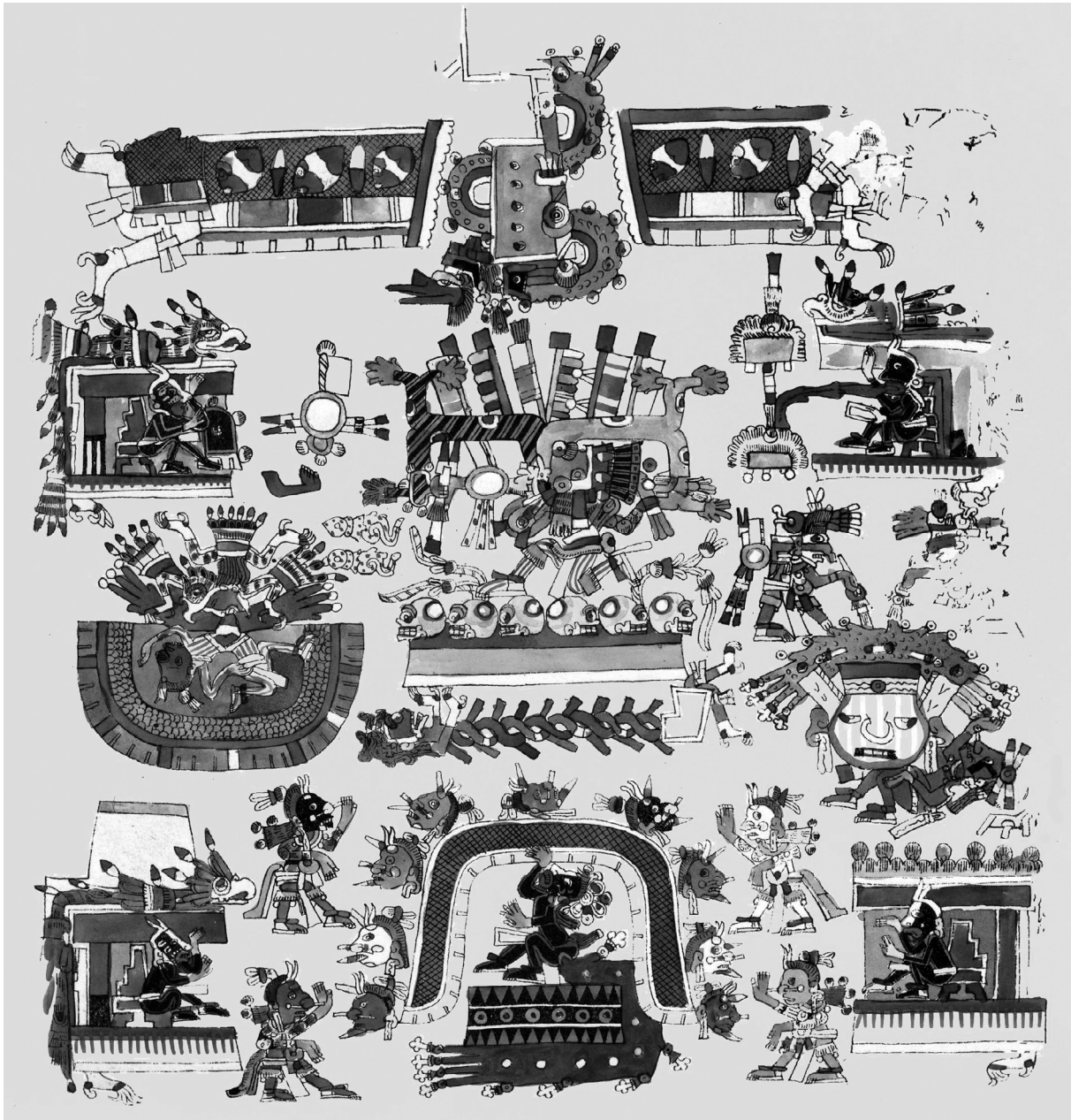


Figure 4.15. Mixcoatl atop the tzompantli. *Codex Borgia*, p. 45. Kingsborough 1831.

burial of warriors, including a brother of Motecuhzoma, that took place after a particularly deadly and fierce battle against the Huexotzinca army, from the town in the modern state of Puebla. Once the bundles were burnt, the remains were scattered in a place called *tzompantitlan* near the temple of Huitzilopochtli in the Templo Mayor, where the archaeological remains of the Huey Tzompantli were recently located. A somewhat similar but complementary piece of information can be found in Sahagún (1950–1982, bk. 7, ch. 12), who claimed that a noble taken captive from Huexotzinco was sacrificed in Tenochtitlan during the celebration of the New Fire at the end of the fifty-two-year cycle. Finally, a gloss on page 34 of the Codex Borbonicus, which depicts the ceremony of Panquetzaliztli, can be seen on the stairway of the temple. It reads, “Night burial of an important cacique, during which all the most important priests would gather to perform the ceremonies and rituals they were accustomed to do” (*Entierro de noche que se*

hacia de algún gran cacique, a donde se congregaban todos los papas, con las ceremonias y ritos que en ello usaban). All these relatively disparate references indicate a connection between certain ceremonies related to the creation of sacred bundles from the remains of deified warriors and ancestors, the New Fire, and the *veintena* of Panquetzaliztli. Historical events, such as the battle between the Mexica and the Huexotzinca, and periodic ritual occasions are blurred and confused, perhaps because the distinction between ceremonies for the gods and human deeds was not as clear-cut as we may want it to be. Was there a common source for both Nahua and Spanish historians, who framed the same information in distinct terms that responded to distinct conceptions of time and human action?

In the Codex Borgia, the ritual of the New Fire is depicted on page 46 (Fig. 4.16) in a scene dominated by an animated



Figure 4.16. New Fire ceremony. Codex Borgia, p. 42. Kingsborough 1831.

pot, from which the officiating priest emerges. Four colorful serpents enclose the burning pot. The Florentine Codex contains the following:

Thereupon likewise descended the fire serpent. It was just like a blazing pine firebrand. Its tongue was made of flaming red feathers. It went [as if] burning [like] a torch. And its tail was of paper, perhaps two fathoms or three fathoms long. As it came down, it was like a real serpent; it showed its tongue; it was as if it bent back and forth.

And when [the priest] had brought it to the base [of the pyramid], he proceeded carefully there to the eagle vessel. Then he went up [to the eagle vessel]: he also raised [the fire serpent] in dedication of the four directions. When he had [so] raised it in dedication, then he cast it upon the sacrificial papers; then they burnt.

And when he had come to leave it, when he went ascending to the top, then shell trumpets were blown. (Sahagún 1950–1982, bk. 2, ch. 34, 147)

The Codex Telleriano-Remensis (f. 5r) confirms that the feast of Xiuhtecuhtli was also celebrated during Panquetzaliztli. Four priests, each carrying a large pinewood bundle, performed the ceremony by orienting themselves towards the four directions, as seen in the Codex Borgia, where the four serpents around the burner form a square. On page 34 of the Codex Borbonicus, several god impersonators carry large pinewood bundles, but only four priests dedicated to Yoaltecuhtli (the lord of the night invoked during the New Fire ceremony, according to Sahagún; Anders et al. 1991, 223) direct their torches to the turquoise hearth in the temple. The New Fire ceremony was conducted not only to mark the conclusion of a fifty-two-year count (*xiuhmolpilli*) but also, on a smaller scale, to celebrate the closing of a four-year cycle (Sahagún 1950–1982, bk. 2, ch. 37–38). In the Codex Borbonicus, it is clear that the New Fire ceremony was conducted during Panquetzaliztli, as also corroborated by Sahagún (1950–1982, bk. 2, ch. 34). However, the same source (Sahagún 1950–1982, bk. 2, ch. 37) relates the drilling of a new fire during Izcalli. Similarly, in the Codex Telleriano-Remensis (f. 5r), the fire god Xiuhtecuhtli's ceremonies are described as part of Panquetzaliztli, while the god himself is depicted as the patron of Izcalli on folio 6v, where he can be seen sporting attributes of the “fire bearers.” These seemingly confusing elements indicate that the two celebrations (Panquetzaliztli and Izcalli) share overlapping features, despite occurring sixty days apart. In this light, the ceremony of the New Fire in the Codex Borgia (p. 42) can also be related to Izcalli (Jansen and Pérez Jiménez 2017, 521–523).

The proposed analysis is based on a close reading of a ceremonial trajectory that begins in Ochpaniztli and culminates in Panquetzaliztli with the New Fire ceremony in both the Codices Borgia and Borbonicus. However, there are two more important rituals that take place during

this long ritual sequence in the Codex Borgia that find a parallel not in a religious manuscript but rather in a historical account.

4.3.1. The quest

In folios 20r and 21r (Fig. 4.17 and 4.18) of the Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca, an early colonial document from Cuauhtinchan (a town in the vicinity of Puebla), two scenes depict consecutive rituals of political accession. First, four characters with the attributes of the god of hunting, Mixcoatl (e.g., red-and-white body paint and the instruments of his trade), lie atop a tree. According to the accompanying text (Kirchhoff et al. 1989, 171), the four men are *tlatoque* (rulers), who fasted for four days while alone in the woods. Two eagles and two jaguars, symbols of royalty, pour nourishing liquid into their mouths. As discussed by Olivier (2015a, 466–473), the objective of the ritual was to attain the status of nobility, which was finally accomplished with the perforation of the septum, the ritual represented in the following image. Nowotny (1961, § 15b, 251–252) first indicated that both scenes have a parallel on page 44 of the Codex Borgia. Figure 4.19 depicts a quadrangular temple enclosure, within which stands a colorful tree that sprouts from a round solar disk on the chest of Cihuacoatl, who also displays the attributes of the rain god. On top of the tree, a character dressed as an eagle receives precious liquid from a descending bat-like figure. The eagle-person is being nourished in the same manner as the *tlatoque* in the Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca. At the same time, on the lateral openings of the temple, the beaks and teeth of an eagle, a jaguar, and a bird perforate the noses of three men who appear as fire serpent *nahuales*. Thus, the image fuses the two successive scenes of the Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca, the nourishment of the *tlatoque* on the trees, and the perforation of the septum.

The nose-piercing ceremony on page 44 of the Codex Borgia is placed exactly between the sacrifices of Itzcolihuiqui on page 42 and Xolotl on page 43, which are tentatively tied to the *veintena* of Ochpaniztli in the present analysis, and pages 45–46, which end the ritual cycle with the New Fire during Panquetzaliztli. *Primeros Memoriales* states that, “at this time [of Panquetzaliztli], abstinence was practiced for eighty days, although there was not abstaining from eating. There was eating, but no one washed himself with soap or took a steam bath; no one slept with a woman” (Sahagún et al. 1997, 64). Information from the Florentine Codex (Sahagún 1950–1982, bk. 2, ch. 34) confirms that Panquetzaliztli was the culmination of eighty days of fasting that began during Ochpaniztli. Finally, a previously discussed passage in Motolinía (1971, ch. 25) states that priests known as “fire bearers” (*cargadores del fuego*) from Tehuacán, Teotitlán, and Coxcatlán began their preparation for Panquetzaliztli eighty days prior to the feast.

Elements of a quest are especially evident in the fasting of the aspiring *tlatoque*, as indicated in the image and text of the Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca. Olivier (2008,

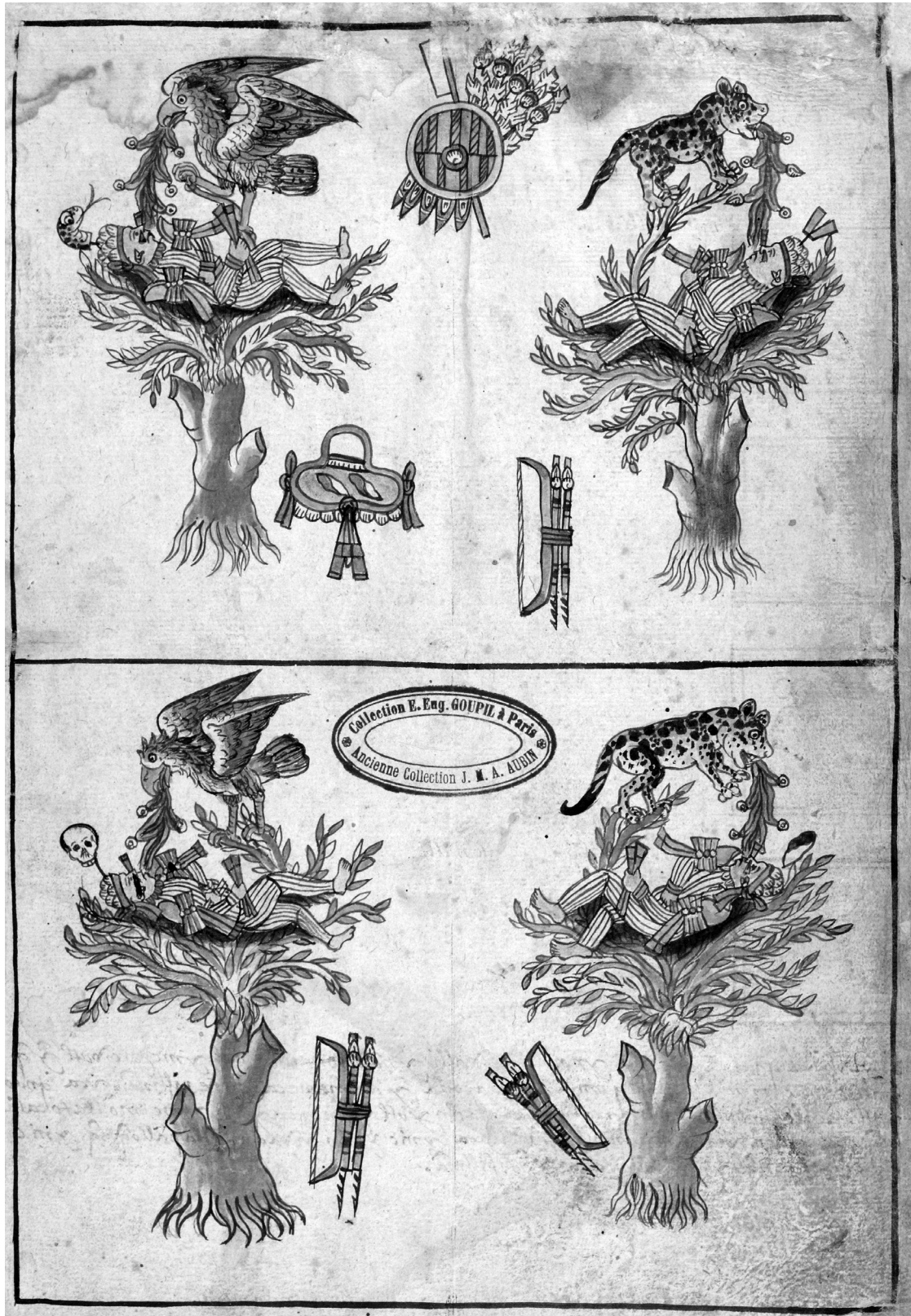


Figure 4.17. Vision quest of the tlatoque. *Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca*, f. 20r. Mexicain 46–58. Source: gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France.

271–274) noted a relationship between the naked red-and-white striped body, conical hat, pierced nose, and other features of the so-called Huastecs (León Portilla 1965) and the ceremonies for the royal succession, when the

aspiring king symbolically died and was reborn with a new identity. I propose that these specific elements do not indicate a ritual death but are rather signs of a vision quest, a journey to the world of deified ancestors from which

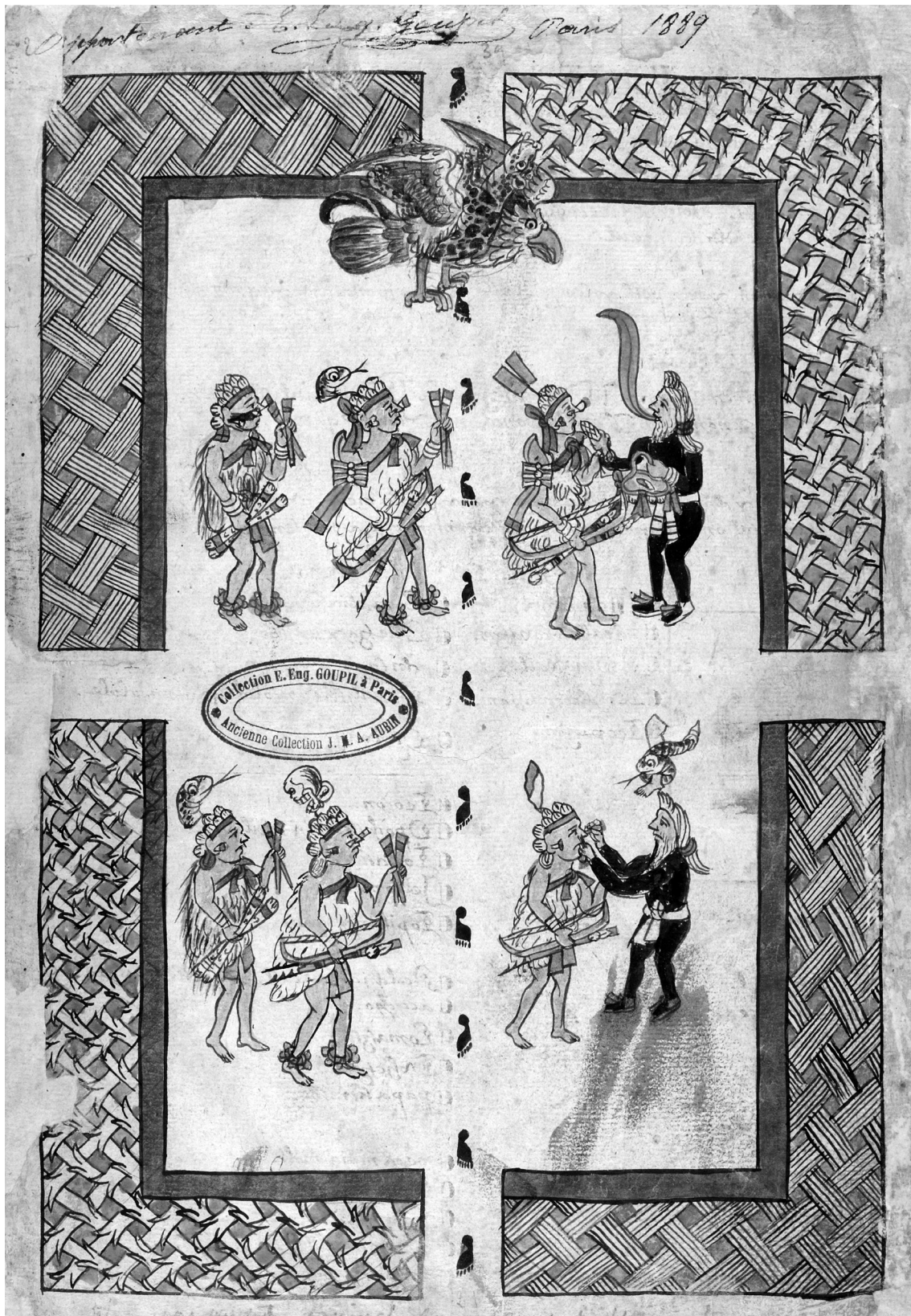


Figure 4.18. Nose-piercing ceremony. *Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca*, f. 21r. Mexicain 46–58. Source: gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France.

aspiring rulers return with the knowledge and experience necessary for their leadership role. In the Codex Borgia, the sacrificed priest on page 43 is Itzlacolihqui, who begins his journey during Ochpaniztli and self-immolates

during Panquetzalitzli as Tlahuizcalpantecuhtli on page 45. Although political overtones may be present in the nose-piercing ceremony on page 44 of the Codex Borgia, the protagonist is the bird nahual priest in the middle of



Figure 4.19. Nose-piercing ceremony inside a temple. Codex Borgia, p. 44. Kingsborough 1831.

the scene who receives the precious nourishment while on top of a tree (possibly fasting), not the three characters on the sides.

As in Mazatec chants, the polyhedral figure of the priest can consecutively embody many and different characters, to the point of a confusing accumulation of identities. He is the absolute protagonist of the pages under discussion in the Codex Borgia. For example, on page 45, the Quetzalcoatl priest can be seen in the middle left of the image transforming into an eagle nahuatl and extracting the heart of a sacrificial victim plunged into a river. The same character, identified as Tlahuizcalpantecuhtli (Seler 1904, vol. 2, 71) due to his white body with red stripes, is on top of the tzompantli structure in the middle of the scene. The dynamic posture indicates that he is alive. The same attributes, in addition to the small net that he holds in his right hand (used to carry food during hunting), connects him to Mixcoatl, the god protagonist of the

veintena of Quecholli, which is celebrated right before Panquetzaliztli (Milbrath 2013, 30, Jansen and Pérez Jiménez 2017, 517–519). Mixcoatl, the god of hunting, also shares attributes with the tlatoque of the fasting and nose-piercing ceremony in the Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca (ff. 20r, 21r). Next, the priest himself appears bleeding on an altar. His body is in a dynamic posture and covered in a large white cotton cloth, which indicates that he is transforming into a sacred bundle known as *tlaquimilolli* in Nahuatl (Anders et al. 1993, 239). This means that the priest first made the sacrifice, then became the fruit of his own sacrifice. I propose that the priest, as the protagonist of the story, has the ability to subjectively take on the role of people, sacrificed, sacrificers, and even powerful objects in a rapid and dynamic manner, as was initially proposed for the scenes of Teotleco in the Codices Tudela (f. 22r) and Ixtlilxochitl (f. 99v), which are admittedly much simpler in their iconography and compositions.

4.3.2. Conclusions

In this chapter, I proposed approaching ritual representations in colonial and ancient manuscripts in a novel manner. First, iconographic complexity and idiosyncrasies were framed within the idea of transformation—that is, the human ability to change and take different shapes, such as animals, gods, and natural elements. This ability, which is sometimes defined as “instability” in the anthropological literature on South American shamanism (Viveiros de Castro 1994, Alberti 2007, Lagrou 2009), creates a constant interplay between different characters and corresponding ceremonial roles.

While mythological explanations pursue clear meaning, imply causality, and create a reassuring but somewhat fictitious linearity for the narrative, the focus on ritual action brings process itself to the fore. Second, I propose primarily interpreting this process as a quest, again relying on anthropological literature on Indigenous American cultures (Irwin 1994) as much as my own field work in the Mazateca. The quest implies that ritual action is not only a process but also an open one with a desired—but not a guaranteed—outcome. While a shared and common belief system may provide a road map to the destination, individuality and subjectivity play a major role in the ceremonial context. In the literature on ancient Mesoamerican religion, ritual is mostly understood as a public event whose purpose was to create and foment social cohesion. By contrast, in this book, I propose that in the case of religious manuscripts, pictography was not merely a reflection of religious beliefs but rather a means through which religious knowledge was constructed and materialized. Although the purported mysticism of the Codex Borgia’s ritual pages, as remarked by Nowotny, may ultimately seem to preclude any possible definitive interpretation, we should not refrain from asking even unanswerable questions in our own quest for meaning. The following chapter argues for a reassessment of the backbone of religious books, namely the Mesoamerican calendar, vis-à-vis its representation in colonial times.

Ritual and Historical Time

The preceding chapter proposed the identification of a ceremonial sequence in the Codex Borgia with the *veintenas*, relying on a critical analysis of written and pictorial sources from the early colonial period. Specifically, I argued that the erasure of the visionary aspect of *veintena* ceremonies had a major impact on the way in which they were represented after the conquest. Following Díaz Álvarez (2013, 2018, 2019), I argued that the normalization of the ceremonial cycle was geared towards the creation of a solar calendar akin to the one in use in Europe, conceived as separate from the *tonalpohualli*, whose only function became that of a zodiac, a divinatory device seemingly divorced from timekeeping. In the present chapter, I attempt to reconstruct an internal chronology of the *veintena* ceremonies in the Codex Borbonicus, the earliest surviving post-conquest manuscript that presents crucial ritual and historical information on the Mexica without relying on later sources. This leads to a questioning of the accepted correlation between the Christian and Mesoamerican calendars.

5.1. Historical time and the Codex Borbonicus

The Codex Borbonicus is the closest example of a pre-colonial manuscript from central Mexico that has survived. It stands out among the Mesoamerican sacred books because its provenience and dating are known, although not in detail. As first suggested by Nicholson (1988), several remarks about the swamps (*chinampas*) in the glosses indicate a probable southern locale in the basin of Mexico. Nicholson also remarked on the importance given to Cihuacoatl as the main priest of the ceremonies in the section dedicated to *veintenas*, which points to the towns of Colhuacan or Xochimilco, where the goddess was venerated as a patron deity. The manuscript also contains several dates associated with the solar year (*xihuitl*), specifically the consecutive years 1 Rabbit, 2 Reed, and 3 Tecpatl. According to the most accepted correlation, these dates correspond to the consecutive years of 1506, 1507, and 1508. *Veintena* celebrations unfolded over the course of 2 Reed (1507).

The approach to the Mesoamerican ceremonial festival cycle that I propose is flexible and requires an understanding of these celebrations in conjunction with the *tonalpohualli*, to such an extent that dates in the 260-day calendar could determine which rituals to undertake at any given point in the year. Therefore, it is important to look for clues in the same manuscript that connects the *tonalpohualli* with the solar year. In the case of the Codex Borbonicus, several authors (Quiñones Keber 1987, Graulich 1997, Anders et al. 1991, 40n6) noticed the

presence of a main priest, who is identified by a gloss as *papa mayor* in the image of the *trecena* 1 Rain on page 7 (Fig. 5.1). This priest, who wears a human skin and carries corn cobs in his hands, eventually plays a major role in the ceremony of Ochpaniztli on page 29 of the *veintena* section, as previously discussed. As its seventh day 7 Serpent, the *trecena* 1 Rain includes Chicomecoatl, which is indeed the Nahuatl name of the god impersonated by the priest during Ochpaniztli in the manuscript. While no other pre-Hispanic *tonalamatl* (Borgia, p. 67 and Vaticanus B, p. 55) depicts Chicomecoatl during its tutelary *trecena*, the colonial *Tonalamatl Aubin* (p. 7), which closely follows the Codex Borbonicus, prominently presents him as a co-regent along with the rain god Tlaloc. According to extant sources, Chicomecoatl is not the principal officiating priest or goddess of Ochpaniztli, and its prominent role in the Codex Borbonicus constitutes an exception compared to later depictions of this *veintena*, which is more commonly presided over by Toci or Tlazolteotl, as in the Codices Tudela (f. 21r), Telleriano-Remensis (f. 3r), and others.

DiCesare (2009, 133–134) interpreted the anomaly of Chicomecoatl's role during Ochpaniztli in the Codex Borbonicus by referring to information reported by Durán. The Dominican friar (Durán 1971, *Gods and Rites*, ch. 14–15) dedicated two consecutive chapters to Chicomecoatl and Toci because, in his words, their celebrations fell one after the other. Chicomecoatl was first celebrated on September 15, while Toci supposedly fell on September 16 during the Ochpaniztli festival. Chicomecoatl (i.e., 7 Serpent) is a movable feast within the solar calendar whose specific occurrence during the harvest in September—and the related Ochpaniztli festival—would not take place every year. Durán's information indirectly suggested that Chicomecoatl may have been chosen instead of Toci as the principal goddess because of a specific occurrence of the *tonalpohualli* during the year 2 Reed portrayed in the *veintena* section of the Codex Borbonicus.

If the *trecena* 1 Rain, whose seventh day is 7 Serpent, fell during the harvest festival of Ochpaniztli in September, this also means that Panquetzaliztli, which occurs eighty days after Ochpaniztli, would roughly fall during the *trecena* 1 Dog. Chimalpahin (1998, 7th *Relación*, ff. 186r–186v) stated that the New Fire ceremony for the year 2 Reed, the same one celebrated on page 34 of the Codex Borbonicus, took place on the day 4 Reed, the fourth day of the *trecena* 1 Dog (see also Anders et al. 1991, 39). This means that 7 Serpent (Chicomecoatl) would fall during Ochpaniztli exactly in the year of the New Fire depicted in both the *trecena* and *veintena* sections of the Codex Borbonicus. In the preceding chapter, the ritual trajectory



Figure 5.1. The trecena 1 Rain. Codex Borbonicus, p. 7. Bibliothèque de l'Assemblée nationale, Paris.

from Ochpaniztli to Panquetzaliztli was discussed in relation to the identification of the festival cycle in the central pages of the Codex Borgia. The proper celebration of Panquetzaliztli entailed a preparation of eighty days on the part of the officiating priests, which began at the end of Ochpaniztli. Anders et al. (1991, 40n6) also noted the importance of day 4 Reed in conjunction with year 2 Reed, because the day of the yearbearer (2 Reed) falls exactly eighty days before 4 Reed and during Ochpaniztli, a ceremony highlighted in the Codex Borbonicus.

Panquetzaliztli ceremonies are related to the lightning of the New Fire. In both the Florentine Codex (Sahagún 1950–1982, bk. 4, appendix) and Primeros Memoriales (Sahagún et al. 1997, paragraph 3, f. 286r, 159), it is said that the celebration of the New Fire coincided with the zenith passage of the Pleiades, an astronomical event tied

to the sun's nadir that occurs in central Mexico around mid-November, and that the Mexica observed from the top of the hill at Huixachtecatl in Iztapalapa (Broda 1982). The same sources (Sahagún et al. 1997, paragraph 2A, f. 252r, 64, Sahagún 1950–1982, bk. 2, ch. 15) further stated that Panquetzaliztli, when the New Fire ceremony was traditionally celebrated, began in mid-November. In the Codex Tudela (f. 25r) the relationship between this celebration and the nadir passage of the sun is similarly established. Finally, in an Inquisitorial trial leveled against don Juan, cacique de Matatlán, a Totonac community in the modern state of Hidalgo (*Procesos de indios idólatras hechiceros* 1912, 205–215), the cacique himself stated that the main celebration of Panquetzaliztli was held in 1539 on November 16 (*Procesos de indios idólatras y hechiceros* 1912, 214). The ceremony was dedicated to the ancestors, an indication of the relationship between this

celebration and the modern Day of the Dead, which falls at the beginning of November. Other sources, such as the Codex Telleriano-Remensis (f. 5r), placed Panquetzaliztli in the third week of December. This latter identification is the more commonly accepted one for the celebration of this veintena, which relates the ceremonies for Panquetzaliztli with the winter solstice (Caso 1967, 58, Carrasco 1979). It is plausible that different communities in Mesoamerica tracked the winter course of the sun from its nadir in mid-November to the solstice in the third week of December and established a different date within this range to celebrate the sun in its “nightly passage.” This hypothesis undermines the existence of synchronology among Mesoamerican communities despite the use of the same calendrical system.

Another important aspect that should be taken into account is that although the days of the tonalpohualli determined when a celebration within the solar and agricultural calendar would take place, the carving of a monument or ritual object to commemorate an event could bear a date that was not factual but rather expressed the historical or ceremonial importance of the occurrence. The Codex

Borbonicus is an early colonial manuscript whose glosses indicate that it was intended for a European audience. It is worth noting that, unlike in later historical, calendrical, or divinatory pictographic documents, neither the tlacuilo nor the annotator of the Codex Borbonicus made any attempt to correlate the Indigenous and European calendars. In the present analysis, internal evidence is taken as a point of departure. The correlation proposed by Caso (1967), which is still generally accepted in the scholarship, does not allow for a Panquetzaliztli ceremony on the day 4 Reed in the year 2 Reed, if this is understood to be 1507. Day 4 Reed fell on November 8, close to the nadir of the sun, in 1506. In 1508, the same day fell on December 27, close to the winter solstice. Accordingly, days 7 Serpent and 2 Reed fell roughly eighty days earlier, in August in 1506 and late September or early October in 1508. Although both periods fell during the harvest and were thus an appropriate time to celebrate Ochpaniztli, 1508 seems to be a better choice.

Gilone (1977, 38) noted that, on pages 14 and 15 of the Codex Borbonicus, which correspond to trecenas 1 Dog and 1 House, the turkey—a bird associated

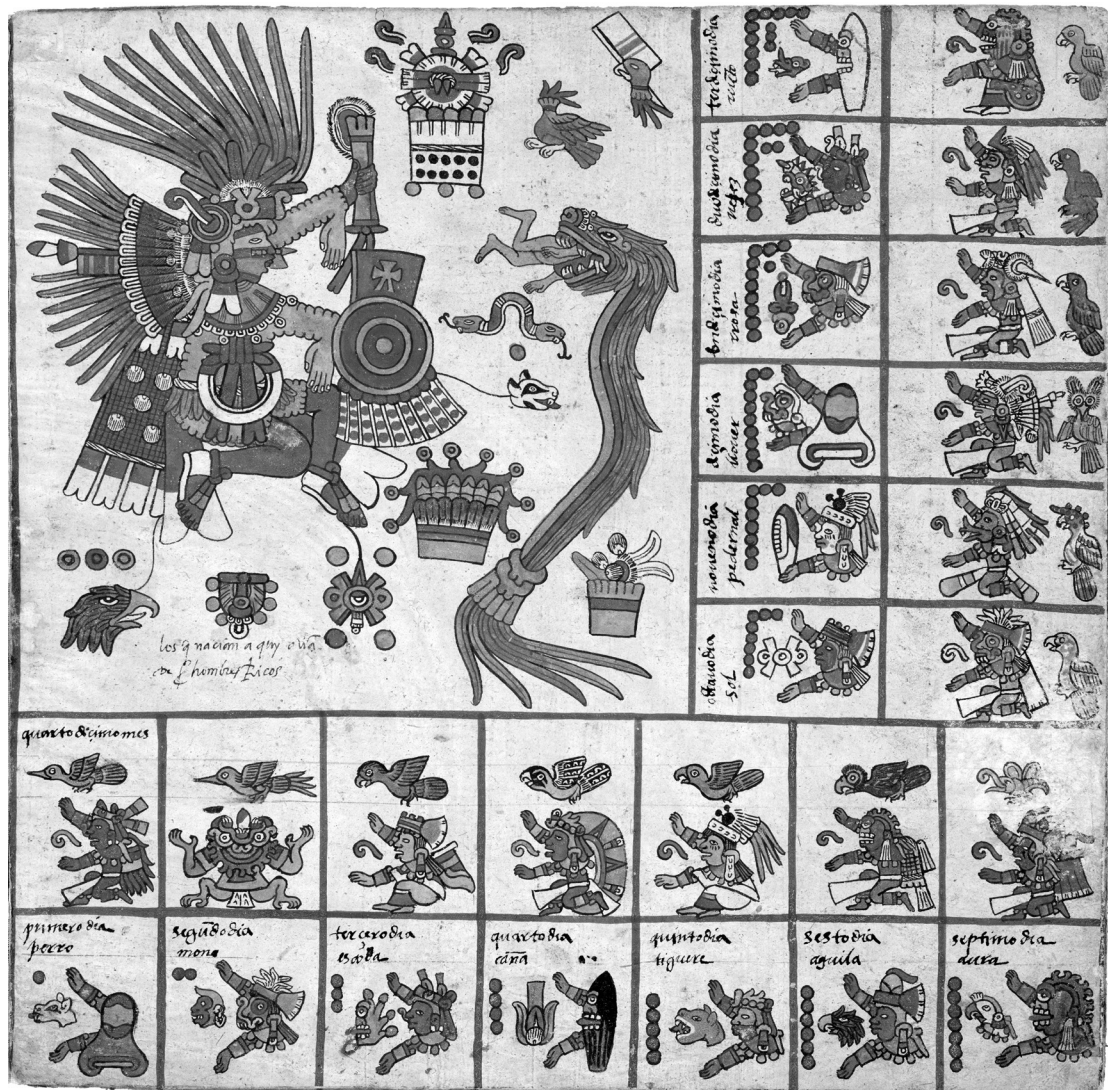


Figure 5.2. The trecena 1 Dog. Codex Borbonicus, p. 14. Bibliothèque de l'Assemblée nationale, Paris.

with the ninth day—presents unique features that do not appear in the other pages of the tonalamatl. While the animal normally sports a blue caruncle, red dots are visible on the animal’s crest only on these two trecenas, which encompass a twenty-six-day period. According to Gilonne, this feature indicates the period of the year when the young male turkey reaches sexual maturity, during the months of July and August. Trecenas 1 Dog and 1 House fall during July and August in 1508, thus corroborating the proposed date change (1508) for the celebrations of the year 2 Reed. On the one hand, while I ultimately believe that the correlation (if indeed there was one) remains undetermined, the internal seasonal logic of the Codex Borbonicus contradicts the accepted correlation. On the other hand, it is clear that the tonalamatl in the Codex Borbonicus moved in sync with the vague solar year. Without any need to frame the veintenas and their seasonal recurrence within “another” calendar (the xihuitl, the solar year), a Nahuatl diviner was capable of reading, understanding, and anchoring the passing of the seasons and solar year within the tonalpohualli.

A coiled fire serpent (Fig. 5.3), now located in Washington, DC, has the year of 2 Reed carved at its base (Alcina Franch et al. 1992, 198–199, Hajovsky 2015, 87–93). The year sign is traversed by a knotted rope, which refers to the “binding” that occurred that year, while the name glyph of Motecuhzoma II, a turquoise diadem and a nose ring with speech volutes, is depicted on top of the year sign. Given that Motecuhzoma II appears as a Xiuhoatl priest in the Codex Borbonicus, it seems likely that the monument was carved to commemorate the great ceremony depicted in the veintena section of the Codex Borbonicus. The sculpture offers clear iconographic and archaeological evidence that the xiuhmolpilli was in fact celebrated in the year 2 Reed.

According to the Codex Telleriano-Remensis (f. 41v), Motecuhzoma II decided to move the celebration of the xiuhmolpilli from the year 1 Rabbit to 2 Reed. As known through numerous sources (e.g., the Codex Telleriano-Remensis, f. 92r), there was a terrible famine during the year 1 Rabbit under the reign of Motecuhzoma I that lasted until the following year, 2 Reed. In the same chapter dedicated to Chicomecoatl, Durán related,

According to my information from the natives, these people suffered terrible famines, barren years, and plagues sent by God in olden times. Thus they were afraid of certain years and their numbers, prophesying wars, plagues, or famines just as we do. There are people who can foretell in which there will be war, hunger, and so on ... (Durán 1971, Gods and Rites, ch. 14, 225)

In a personal communication (2017) with me, Paul van den Akker related that several local *aj qijaab'* (calendar specialists) in Momostenango told him that a specific day of the 260-day calendar can be celebrated on a date with the same calendar name but a different numeral. For example, the important feast of 8 Q'anil (8 Seed) is dedicated to the blessing of the seeds. However, whenever 8 Q'anil falls outside the planting season, another day bearing the name of Q'anil but another numeral is chosen to celebrate the seeds at the appropriate time. Eventually, the feast will still be remembered and recalled as the celebration of 8 Q'anil.

No clear archaeological evidence has been recovered in relation to the celebration of the xiuhmolpilli in 1455, fifty-two years before 1507, during the reign of Motecuhzoma I. A plaque with the year 1 Rabbit was found in Phase IV of the Templo Mayor, which corresponded to Motecuhzoma I's



Figure 5.3. Xiuhoatl fire serpent. © Dumbarton Oaks, Pre-Columbian Collection, Washington, DC.

reign. A portrait of the ruler, known only through colonial descriptions, also featured this date (Umberger 1987, 443). Although Motecuhzoma II changed the year of the celebration of the New Year, the year 1 Rabbit continued to play a very important calendrical function. In the case of the Codex Borbonicus, pages 21 and 22 depict the entire fifty-two-year cycle, which begins with the year 1 Rabbit rather than 2 Reed. Could it be that the ceremony was conducted a year before 2 Reed (i.e., 1 Rabbit) but eventually commemorated as if it had happened in the year 2 Reed? Could Motecuhzoma have changed the name of the year? The fact that mantic dates for the harvest ceremony during Ochpaniztli, 7 Serpent and 2 Reed, and the New Fire during the sun's nadir and winter solstice in Panquetzaliztli were more propitious in a different year than 1 Rabbit may have prompted a change in the timing or commemoration of the celebration, especially given the precedent set during the previous fifty-two-year cycle under Motecuhzoma I, when a terrible famine ravaged central Mexico during 1 Rabbit.

At any rate, divination and history intersect in an inextricable way. Year 1 Rabbit is in fact designated as a particularly adverse year for crops in religious manuscripts, such as in the lower right quadrant on page 69 of the Codex Vaticanus B (see Fig. 3.4). Was the divinatory system capable of predicting climatic fluctuations (e.g., droughts and floods) over the course of several decades, as asserted by Durán, or were the religious manuscripts periodically redacted to reflect changing cycles of the solar year, contradicting the idea that divinatory calendrics is immutable? Long-term observations on the solar and Venus cycles and their relationship with periodical and seasonal phenomena may have spurred the creation of specific pictorials that reflected such knowledge.

Although changing the synchronology of the Mesoamerican and Christian calendars would indeed require shifting the entirety of the historical record in Nahuatl dates by roughly one year, it bears remembering that the correspondence between the two calendars occurred late, around two generations after the fact. Many inconsistencies can be attributed to the use of perpetual calendars, with which local historians reconstructed and collated their data. Even historical witnesses to the events would not necessarily remember the day, or even the year, if they were indeed alive. Chroniclers, by contrast, would normally repeat a learned history whose dates had taken on symbolic significance because the events turned out to be momentous.

These two possibilities—the commemoration of the New Fire on a date other than its actual occurrence or the shifting of the entire calendar—are not mutually exclusive. The relative arbitrariness and flexibility with which the year, its beginning and end, and the veintena celebrations included therein were established enabled a retrospective reordering of events according to meaningful or mnemonically significant patterns. A case

in point is the dedication of the Templo Mayor under Ahuizotl. In the Codex Telleriano-Remensis (f. 39r), this is said to have occurred in the year 8 Reed (identified as 1487 in a gloss), when the New Fire was also celebrated, although the year did not coincide with the conclusion of a fifty-two-year cycle. Chimalpahin (1998, 7th *Relación*, ff. 180v–181r) chronicled the event on the day 4 Reed, year 8 Reed. However, 4 Reed fell outside of the winter period and the range for Panquetzaliztli ceremonies in 1487, according to Caso's chronology. It seems likely that Chimalpahin fixed the event on day 4 Reed because this was the most appropriate date for a New Fire ceremony.

The monument known as the Dedication Stone (Fig. 5.4) is believed to depict the event of the consecration of the Templo Mayor under Ahuizotl. It bears a large inscription of the year 8 Reed, accompanied by another smaller date or day name, 7 Reed, above the main scene. While 8 Reed most likely refers to the year of the dedication of the Templo Mayor, 7 Reed could also be the day of the inauguration, as it would have fallen on December 18, close to the winter solstice in 1487. In this case, the dates carved on the pre-Hispanic monument beautifully coincide with the commonly accepted chronology, while the colonial source, such as the information provided by Chimalpahin, is incorrect. Did the Nahuatl historian record



Figure 5.4. Dedication Stone. Ramírez 1844–1846.

a symbolic date many years after the event, or was the date already adjusted when the monument commemorating the Templo Mayor's expansion was carved under Ahuizotl? As previously noted (Nicholson and Quiñones Keber 1983, 52–55, Jansen and Pérez Jiménez 2017, 362–363), the monument depicts the reigning ruler Ahuizotl and his deceased predecessor and uncle, Tizoc, performing a bloodletting ritual, thanks to which they assume the attributes and powers of Quetzalcoatl, whose calendrical name is 7 Reed. A comparison between documents and sources related to different events in both the pre- and post-conquest periods indicates that dates were consistently treated as commemorative of past events and historical or mythical figures and, therefore, assumed symbolic overtones.

The interplay between time computations and mantic values is evident in the so-called *xiuhmolpilli* stones, tubular monuments that represent bundled sticks and commemorate the Binding of the Years (Nicholson and Quiñones Keber 1983, 43–45). The most famous and widely reproduced of these (Fig. 5.5) depicts the closing of the year 2 Reed, a date carved on the front of the sculpture within a quadrangular cartouche. On the sides, the days or day names 1 Death and 1 Flint are represented within two circles. However, the National Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City holds three similar sculptures, two of which have the year 1 Death carved in the front within a quadrangular cartouche (Fig. 5.6). Although 1 Death was an important date related to the sun god and Tezcatlipoca, it was not a yearbearer in the Mexica calendar. Perhaps the squared enclosure in this instance does not refer to a year but rather to one of the other possible symbolic associations of 1 Death. However, it could also mean that whoever commissioned the monument followed another calendar in which the day sign Death functioned as a yearbearer. It is remarkable that these sculptures were recovered within



Figure 5.5. *Xiuhmolpilli* bearing the year sign 2 Reed. Dates 1 Death and 1 Flint are carved at the sides. Ramírez 1844–1846.



Figure 5.6. *Xiuhmolpilli* with the year sign 1 Death. Seler 1902.

or near the sacred precinct and were presumably produced in Tenochtitlan, given their clearly local style.

In another such sculpture, an upright banner is placed right next to the cartouche of the year, which contains the date 1 Reed (Fig. 5.7). This iconographic detail clearly points to Panquetzaliztli in a rare pre-Hispanic depiction of the *veintena* (Moedano Koer 1951, Nicholson 2002, Díaz Álvarez 2018, 148–150). A skeletonized head hovers above the year sign and produces smoke volutes from its mouth. On top, a spider with flowered antennas appears to be falling from the sky, which is represented as a square patch with dots for stars. All these elements are related to the prediction of world destruction that may fall exactly

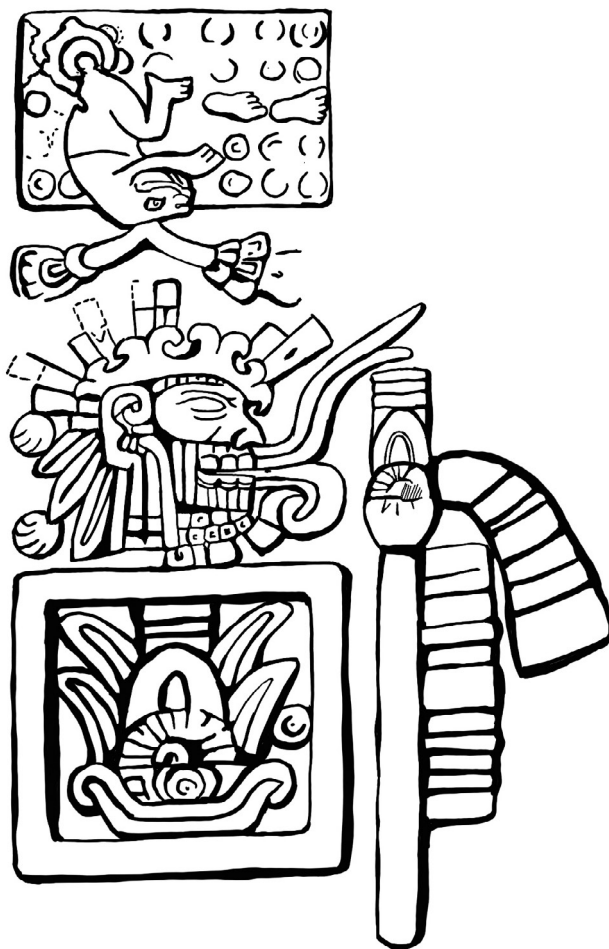


Figure 5.7. Front glyph of a *xiuhmolpilli* bundle depicting the year sign 1 Reed. Drawing by Ximena Vargas based on Moedano Koer 1951.

at the conclusion of the fifty-two-year cycle. Thus, along with the glyph for the celebration of Panquetzaliztli, it is clear that the sculpture represents the *xiuhmolpilli* (Binding of the Years). However, while Reed functioned as a yearbearer in the Mexica calendar, 1 Reed did not correspond to the conclusion of the fifty-two-year period. Moedano Koer (1951), who first published research on the monument, proposed that the date was commemorated according to the Mixtec calendar, in which 1 Reed is particularly important, as often seen in the Codex Vienna (Furst 1978b). Given these examples, it seems plausible that different calendars were in use even within the same great capital of the Aztecs.

The crossover of symbolic and historical dates may seem rather confusing, but perhaps this is precisely the lesson to be learned from Mexica chronology: timekeeping is a cultural construct. The understanding and ordering of astronomical phenomena are necessarily constrained by the intellectual and mathematical means employed. The predictive and suggestive symbolism of the *tonalpohualli* implies that measuring time may and should lead to new interpretations of the events and people involved. In other words, if it is true that different calendars were in use throughout Mesoamerica, the fact that the surviving monuments that commemorate the *xiuhmolpilli* were purposefully carved in the same style and placed within the same sacred precinct in Tenochtitlan suggests that the possible misinterpretation of year dates, day signs, and day names was actively pursued in the carving of the sculptures to allow future generations to further decipher and engage with them.

5.2. The Christian and Mesoamerican calendars

Alfonso Caso (1967, 41–50) established the synchronology between the Christian (Julian) and Mesoamerican (more specifically, Mexica) calendars used today. While also relying on previous studies, the Mexican scholar calculated the correlation largely based on the fall of Tenochtitlan, which is recorded in both Spanish and Nahuatl sources according to their respective calendars. The Christian date is August 13, 1521, while historical accounts of the same event in Nahuatl sources give the date as day 1 Serpent, year 3 House. Once a fixed date is established, the counting is projected backwards and forwards.

The fall of Tenochtitlan is not the only event that was consistently documented according to both calendars. Prem (2008, 209–232) provided a detailed summary of the main events and respective dates as they appear in the sources. For example, Cortés' arrival in the Mexica capital on November 8, 1519 is frequently mentioned in Spanish accounts. However, two dates are given for the event in Nahuatl sources: either day 8 or 1 Wind, year 1 Reed (Prem 2008, 213–218). Furthermore, as Prem (2008, 227) noted, neither one matches the correlation based on the dates of the fall of Tenochtitlan. The author (2008, 228) recapitulates the arguments made by Seler, Caso, and, more recently, Tena to explain

such discrepancies. While Seler and Caso believed that there was a mistake in the sources and corrected them accordingly, Tena maintained that the existence of a leap year in the Mesoamerican calendar accounted for the error. As explained in Chapter 3, the existence of a periodic readjustment in the *tonalpohualli* is unfeasible because the counting of the 260 days is based on an uninterrupted correlation between thirteen numerals and twenty day names that repeat according to predictable patterns. As Caso (1967, 33, 48) himself explained, adding one day to the *tonalpohualli* would be like adding a day to a week during a random month. Moreover, the astronomical observation of a day change (or slip) needs not to be reflected in the 260-day cycle, which in any case is unrelated to the solar year.

The other option espoused by both Seler and Caso—that of a simple clerical error in the sources—also raises several questions. Among them, how can we account for the fact that all sources consistently mention the same day for the fall of the city and either 1 or 8 Wind for Cortés' arrival in the city two years prior? The fact that Spanish and Nahuatl sources were not independently redacted but rather relied on information provided by the same primary source should not be underestimated. Both Seler and Caso fixed the inconsistencies by choosing 8 Wind as the day of the meeting between Cortés and Motecuhzoma on November 8, 1519 because this allowed for a smaller mistake of only one day when counting backwards from the later date of the fall of Tenochtitlan on August 13, 1521 (Caso 1967, 52). It should be noted that the other day for the event, 1 Wind, falls twenty days before 8 Wind, which seems to indicate that the Nahuatl historian counted twenty by twenty, as one would expect from someone accustomed to the Mesoamerican calendar. At any rate, the dates are inconsistent.

Prem (2008, 228) explained the discrepancy in a more convincing manner. He attributed it to the use of a European perpetual calendar (*reportorio* in Spanish) to establish a correlation between the two calendars. The two days in question, Cortés' arrival in Tenochtitlan and the final fall of the city, happened in 1519 and 1521, respectively. The year 1520, which fell between the two, was a leap year in the Julian calendar; therefore, one more day was counted in the *tonalpohualli* when reconstructing the events with the use of a *reportorio*. I find this to be the simplest and most logical explanation. The reliance on a European perpetual calendar also implies that Nahuatl sources were reconstructed a posteriori based on an already established correlation between the two systems, which considered the Julian leap year. It is quite probable that the dates given in early colonial chronicles were already the product of an established synchronology, not independently gathered factual historical data.

The dates of both Cortés' arrival and the fall of Tenochtitlan were given in the Christian calendar by Cortés (1986) himself in his second and third letter, which were dated 1520 and 1522, respectively. The earliest

corresponding dates in Nahuatl sources are possibly from the *Anales de Tlatelolco*, a manuscript whose exact dating is problematic. Although it claims to be from 1528, internal linguistic evidence suggests a later date, possibly in the 1550s (Lockhart 1993, 40). Cortés' letters, which were a sort of journal of the events of the invasion and conquest of Mexico, were likely the primary source for all subsequent historical accounts, both Spanish and Indigenous.

The only pictographic document that depicts the Spaniards' arrival in Tenochtitlan and subsequent events with specific dates is the Codex Vaticanus A (ff. 89r–89v; Fig. 5.8 and 5.9), a copy of the Codex Telleriano-Remensis that, however, lacks the folios in question. Assuming that the Codex Vaticanus A is a faithful copy of the Codex Telleriano-Remensis, it remains the earliest source with both pictographic and alphabetic information regarding the conquest of Mexico. In the two folios that depict the three pivotal events of the enterprise of conquest (i.e., Cortés' arrival in Tenochtitlan, the Toxcatl massacre, and the surrendering of the Mexica), days and veintenas are also indicated in a way that is unique to these pages. The encounter between Cortés and Motecuhzoma is given as day 1 Wind, year 1 Reed, a date consistent with other Nahuatl sources, as discussed above. What follows in the year 2 Flint is the infamous carnage perpetrated by the Spaniards in the Templo Mayor during a time of celebration for the Nahuatl. Lastly, folio 89r depicts the

death of Motecuhzoma (Anders and Jansen 1996b, 354–357). A series of veintena glyphs run directly underneath these events. The sequence begins with Quecholli, the veintena that, according to most historical sources, was celebrated during the arrival of Cortés (Prem 2008, 214–245). The ninth glyph corresponds to Toxcatl, in the following solar year; this glyph is placed underneath the massacre that apparently occurred in the sacred precinct during the celebration of this veintena. Finally, the death of the tlatoani during the month of Huey Tecuilhuitl is marked by its characteristic glyph, a colorful rosette (see also folio 46r in the same manuscript). On the reverse page (f. 89v), the year 3 House depicts Cortés again, this time carrying a weapon and riding a horse against a Mexica soldier in full armor. The serpent in a green square seen on the back of the Spanish conquistador is usually understood to be a reference to the day Serpent but without a numeral; it corresponds to 1 Serpent, the day of the fall of Tenochtitlan. The five veintena glyphs at the bottom are identifiable as Toxcatl, Etzalcualiztli, Tecuilhuitontli, Huey Tecuilhuitl, and Micailhuitontli; they probably correspond to the last five months of confrontation and siege before the final capitulation of Tenochtitlan, which occurred on day 1 Serpent, year 3 House during the veintena of Micailhuitontli, according to other sources, as seen above.

The unusual display of the veintenas' emblem glyphs and the fact that the day of the capitulation was not given in full but only as Serpent, without the numeral necessary for the

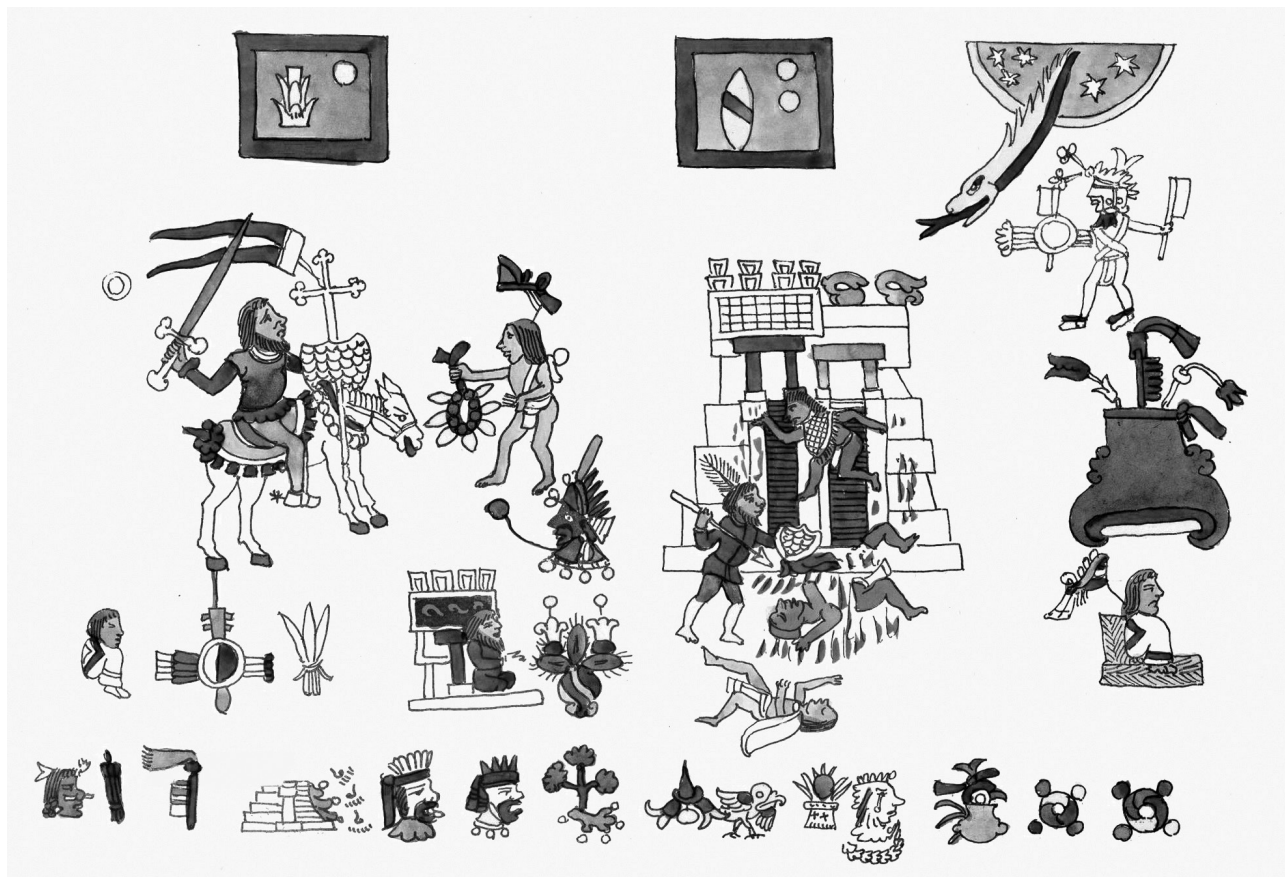


Figure 5.8. The conquest of Mexico-Tenochtitlan, years 1 Reed and 2 Flint. Codex Vaticanus A, f. 89r. Kingsborough 1831.

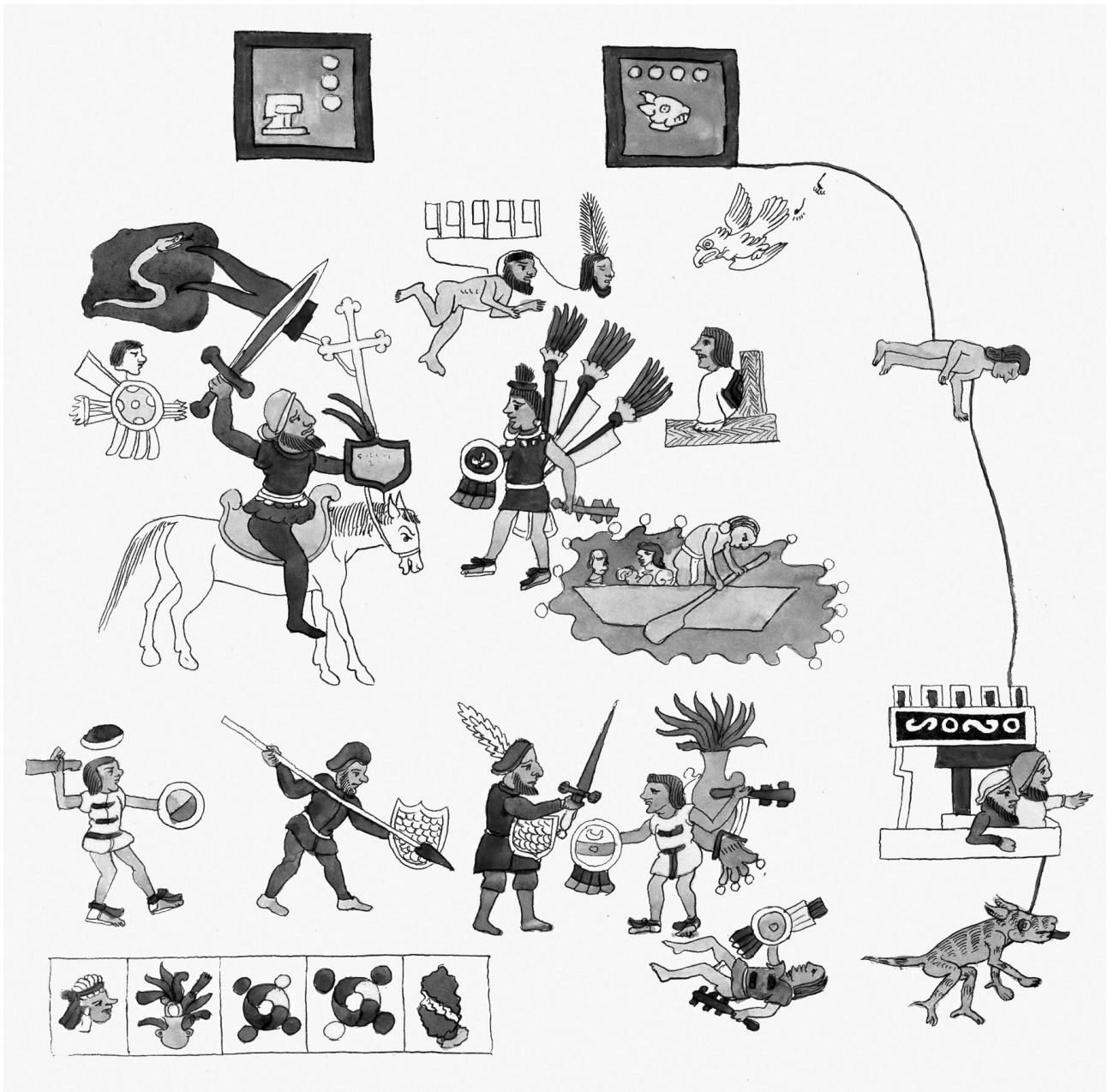


Figure 5.9. The conquest of Mexico-Tenochtitlan, years 3 House and 4 Rabbit. Codex Vaticanus A, f. 89v. Kingsborough 1831.

correct identification of the day in the tonalpohualli, may indicate a failed attempt at reckoning with discrepancies in the sources. Indeed, the count does not add up. Previously, I noted the correction of the veintena dates in the Codex Telleriano-Remensis, from which Vaticanus A was copied. The painter-historian of the Codex Vaticanus A—or more likely, the author of the original Codex Telleriano-Remensis—proceeded chronologically from the date of the initial contact and relied on the veintenas count to keep track of the days, only to realize that the count was erroneous and consequently decide not to write a fixed numeral for the day Serpent. Modern scholars since Selser and Caso have opted to count backwards from the fall of Tenochtitlan.

Although seldom considered, the fact that the year did not begin at the same time throughout Mesoamerica may

have been a great source of confusion when attempting to establish a basic year-to-year correlation between the two systems. For example, it is a well-established fact that the Mixtec calendar year was one numeral off compared to the central Mexican count; that is, the Aztec year 1 Reed corresponded to 13 Reed in the Mixtec count (Jiménez Moreno and Mateos Higuera 1940, 69–74). Kirchhoff (1954–1955) proposed that a different calendar was in use in Tlatelolco, the twin city of Tenochtitlan on Lake Texcoco, largely based on the discrepancies that appear in Nahuatl documents related to the events of the conquest from the two cities. A correlation study by Caso (1967, 39, 71) posited that the yearbearer (i.e., the day that would give the name of the year) was the last day of the year, which, according to his calculations, coincided with the last day of the veintena of Tititl. This assumption is still generally

accepted, despite its being arithmetically untenable and the beginning of the ceremonial and veintena cycle differing in the sources (Kubler and Gibson 1951, 51, Nicholson 1971). Considering that the tonalpohualli does not adjust to the solar year, the day of the yearbearer was tied to its corresponding year only in a conventional manner despite early assertions by Selser and, eventually, Caso and Tena that its position was fixed (Prem 2008, 88–89). The same holds true for the celebration of the veintenas, which Caso believed occurred on the last day of each period, although there is a lack of consistent information on the matter in the sources.

An interesting excerpt from the Florentine Codex (Sahagún 1950–1982, bk. 12, ch. 3) states,

Then the year changed to the one following, 13 Rabbit, and when it was nearly over, at the end of the year 13 Rabbit, [the Spaniards] made an appearance and were seen once again ... He thought and believed that it was Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl who had landed. (Lockhart 1993, 62)

The text indicates that the arrival of the Spaniards on the shores of Veracruz equaled the return of Quetzalcoatl, a prophecy that some scholars claimed (Gillespie 1989, 173–207, Townsend 2003) was concocted in colonial times. This correlation is quite telling. If the return of Quetzalcoatl is a post-conquest myth, could the day mentioned in the source also be a matter of retroactively casting a specific episode into a larger historical and prophetic framework? Cortés, the earliest historical source, does not provide the date of the fateful encounter in San Juan. It was Díaz del Castillo (2010, ch. 38), a much later eyewitness source, who established the precise day. The author, who was part of Cortés' expedition, placed the event during Holy Week, which fell in the third week of April in 1519, according to the Julian calendar still in use in the early sixteenth century. By contrast, Cortés (1986) himself not only failed to mention the specific day but also did not even refer to this important religious occurrence in the Christian calendar when writing about the event in his first letter. It was already dark when the Spaniards heard people approaching, but they waited until the next day to disembark and meet the visitors. This detail coincides with the account by Díaz del Castillo, who mentioned that the ships arrived onshore on the night of Maundy Thursday but that their occupants only disembarked on Holy Friday. For his part, Cortés did not even mention that emissaries had been sent by the Mexica emperor, Motecuhzoma. One can only imagine that a later readjustment on the part of both the Nahua and the Spanish cast what had been a rather uneventful encounter into a historical moment with religious overtones.

Conversely, if it was factually accurate that Cortés and his men arrived in San Juan de Ulúa around the third or fourth week of April 1519, as in Díaz del Castillo's account, then this event occurred right before day 1 Reed, year 1 Reed in Caso's chronology. The Nahua text of the Florentine

Codex presented above states that the year 1 Reed was just beginning. This suggests that the year began when the yearbearer entered. I think that this could again be a case of a later adjustment and purposeful agreement on the part of Nahua and Spanish historians to fix the Mesoamerican and Christian Julian calendars to one another based on eventful occurrences. In other words, the Mesoamerican counting of the years was retroactively established based on the correlation with the foundational event of the encounter. The agreement on a correlation, which implies locking the Mesoamerican and Christian calendars, in turn generated all the aforementioned inconsistencies and contradictions, including the existence of a leap year (Prem 2008, 303–305). There was perhaps no agreement in pre-contact Mesoamerica as to when the year or even days or periods began and ended. Not only was the yearbearer possibly different in each community, but the year may have been perceived as slowly entering until the day of the yearbearer was reached and slowly dying or exiting after the second passing of the yearbearer.

Although correlation efforts since the pioneering work of Caso (1967) have consistently posited that every community or political and social group in Mesoamerica was on the same day of the tonalpohualli, it is more reasonable to assume that this was not the case. Unlike in Europe, where the Catholic Church was officially in charge of timekeeping across several nations and states, there was no religious, political, or otherwise all-encompassing authority in Mesoamerica that enforced such standards. Even in Europe, when Pope Gregory XIII introduced the correction of the Julian calendar in 1582, states whose governments had officially embraced Protestantism did not immediately adjust to the change and did so independently over the course of a few centuries. In contrast, the fixed periodicity of the tonalpohualli did not require every community to be on the same day. Calculations in the tonalpohualli are a relatively simple matter for those accustomed to a vigesimal system. The ways in which the tonalpohualli can be divided are constant, therefore creating predictable patterns that can be easily applied regardless of the specific day involved. Put differently, work schedules are programmed in modern society according to a weekly calendar because the seven-day period is fixed and unchangeable. The same is not true for the yearly calendar, which given the irregularity of the months' duration, cannot produce usable or manageable patterns. For the most part, weekly schedules are used to plan future activities, while fixed dates in the month and year are relevant for retroactively reckoning with historical events. While planning a vacation, we may need to remember the day of the week to avoid missing a plane, but the month and period of the year subsequently become the virtual repository of our vacation memories. Historical sources compiled generations after the narrated events offer a particularly complex picture. As historians, we privilege a specific order and placement of events and are perhaps unaware at times of the larger historical significance that we bestow on them after the fact.

Historians are mostly interested in causality. On the one hand, the unequivocal correlation between the Christian and Mesoamerican calendars enabled Western historians to easily keep track of reconstructed events. I believe that this is the reason why Caso's chronology, for all its inconsistencies, has not been reevaluated. On the other hand, by adjusting Mesoamerican chronology for the sake of clarity, we may correctly establish facts but miss out on the complexity of the Mesoamerican calendar and its many variants, adaptations, and implications. The fact that dates may be assigned a different value for every occasion is an indication that the work of the diviner was not a matter of straightforward interpretation but rather a quest to envision different outcomes and solutions to the problems posed by the client.

The aforementioned reflections arise from the need to rethink not the narrated events, but the Mesoamerican conception of time. As a preliminary conclusion, I propose reconsidering some aspects of the Mesoamerican calendar. First, it seems reasonable to assume that not every community or group was on the same day and year. This is in light of—and not despite—the fact that there is only one calendar, the *tonalpohualli*, which functions according to arithmetically predictable patterns. Backward and forward counting was always inscribed in the *tonalpohualli*'s inexorable arithmetic, which sometimes created confusing inconsistencies when faced with the variable durability of astronomical time, such as the apparent movement of the sun and Venus. Such inconsistencies were openly exploited in both pictorials and carved monuments to signify that calendrical knowledge, for all its predictability, could always lead to different and new interpretations. Pictography and the calendar are as much a self-contained and coherent language that can explain the world as they are an open and self-generating expression that creates the world.

Prophecy, Patronage, and Purpose in the Ancient Religious Manuscripts

The Codex Borbonicus was used as a reference in the preceding chapters to understand divinatory practices, ceremonies, and calendrics in the ancient manuscripts. The importance of the document lies in the historical information that it provides on the xiuhmolpilli celebrations in the year 2 Reed in Tenochtitlan. Although it is likely that the manuscript was created to commemorate such an occasion, the Codex Borbonicus dates to the colonial period. Therefore, it is either an early post-conquest copy of a now-lost sixteenth-century pre-colonial manuscript or an original colonial document that was intended to commemorate an important event that had taken place before the conquest (Nowotny 1974, 11).

Robertson (1959, 89–90) first noted that the red outline of the cells in the tonalamatl section on pages 3–20 of the manuscript left room for explanatory glosses to be placed next to the days and corresponding deity representations. This is a clear indication not only that the Codex Borbonicus was drafted after the conquest but also that a Spanish audience that required specific explanations was intended and expected. Later, colonial religious manuscripts such as the Codices Telleriano-Remensis and Tudela were created to illustrate Indigenous religion to a faraway European audience who would never travel and know the New World firsthand, and contained lengthy written explanations. Pre-Hispanic manuscripts, such as the religious Codices Borgia, Vaticanus B, Cospi, and Laud, were also taken to Europe soon after the conquest as gifts to popes and other dignitaries throughout the continent (Domenici 2017).

The Codex Borbonicus may also have been created to bridge the geographical and cultural distance between the two sides of the Atlantic. However, it is unique and distinct, as it is neither an object intended for a cabinet of curiosities, like the pre-Hispanic codices, nor a document that claims to illustrate a vanquished and vanished Nahua religion, like colonial religious manuscripts produced under missionary guidance. The Codex Borbonicus was produced after the fall of Tenochtitlan (1521) but before the establishment of the Colegio de la Santa Cruz in Tlatelolco and other conventual schools that would become the intellectual sites of manuscript production in New Spain by the mid-1530s (Robertson 1959), a topic that is thoroughly discussed in the following chapters.

Unlike all colonial religious manuscripts, the Codex Borbonicus maintains the physical features of a *teomoxtili* (an ancient sacred book), such as the *amate* paper support and the accordion folding of its pages. However, in contrast

to them and the pre-Hispanic codices of the Borgia Group, human sacrifice and other rituals that involve bloodletting are conspicuously absent, which likely indicates that traits of Indigenous religion that were more easily misunderstood and condemnable by a non-Indigenous audience were purposefully obliterated. In other words, the Codex Borbonicus betrays a post-conquest production and a Spanish-intended audience, but it was conceived within an Indigenous intellectual circle that was not condemnatory but instead had a profound understanding of Mesoamerican religion.

6.1. The patronage of the Codex Borbonicus

Jansen (2002, 300) noted that the Codex Borbonicus was inventoried among the books in the possession of King Philip II of Spain at El Escorial in 1600. It was described as a “book in large folio format of the caciques of Mexico and the days that they sacrificed in the week, handmade and painted with retouched figures; cardboard binding covered with red velvet and colored banners” (*libro en folio mayor, de los caciques de México y de los días que sacrificaban en la semana, de mano, pintado en colores con figuras retocadas; encuadernado en papelón cubierto de terciopelo carmesí con cintas coloradas*; Zarco Cuevas 1924–1929, vol. 3, 553). The “caciques of Mexico” were likely the patrons of the Codex Borbonicus, which may have been commissioned as a gift to the King of Spain (Jansen and Pérez Jiménez 2017, 398). I suggest that the document itself contains several clues about its patrons’ identity.

As extensively remarked in the scholarship (Couch 1985, ch. 2, Nicholson 1988, Anders et al. 1991, 51–58), the Codex Borbonicus likely hails from the southern shores of Lake Texcoco and the towns of Iztapalapa, Colhuacan, or Xochimilco (Map 2). Glosses throughout the *veintena* section repeatedly mention the chinampas, raised fields on the fertile fresh waters of the southern lake. The goddess Cihuacoatl, who plays a leading role in the yearly ceremonies in the second part of the manuscript, was worshiped as a town patron in Colhuacan and Xochimilco. The New Fire ceremony during Panquetzaliztli is said to have taken place in the Cerro de la Estrella near Iztapalapa.

The priest impersonator of Cihuacoatl appears on pages 23 and 37, along with another priest dedicated to Xiuhucoatl and identified by a gloss as the tlatoani Motecuhzoma II. This strongly suggests that the Cihuacoatl priest was the historical *cihuacoatl*, the main priest and chief administrator of the Mexica state. According to Chimalpahin (Schroeder 2016, 131–132) the office of *cihuacoatl* at the time of



Map 2. Tenochtitlan and the basin of Mexico. Abbott 1899.

Motecuhzoma II was held by Tlacaelel II, grandson of the first Tlacaelel and nephew of the *cihuacoatl* that immediately preceded him, Tlilpotonqui. Therefore, Motecuhzoma II and Tlacaelel II may have been the patrons of the original manuscript related to the last New Fire ceremony held in pre-conquest times, from which the Codex Borbonicus was painted (Jansen 2002, 301–302). The patrons of the colonial manuscript should be sought instead among the Indigenous inheritors and successors of the *tlaotoni* and *cihuacoatl* in the city of Mexico-Tenochtitlan in the early years after the conquest.

In the chaotic years immediately after the war, siege, and fall of Tenochtitlan, the Mexica royal family (i.e., Motecuhzoma and his oldest direct male descendants) nearly all died as a result of battle, disease, or executions that were meant to behead the lineage that ruled over the Triple Alliance. Cortés explained in his fourth letter to the king that he decided to appoint a *cihuacoatl* from the high ranks of the Mexica Empire as governor of Mexico-Tenochtitlan after the assassination of Cuauhtemoc:

I charged a captain general whom I had known in the time of Mutezuma with the task of repopulating [the city]. And so that he should have more authority I gave back to him the title he held when his lord was in power, which was that of Ciguacoatl, which means lieutenant of the king. I likewise appointed chieftains whom I had known previously to the offices in the government of this city which they had once held. And to this Ciguacoatl and the others I gave such lands and people as were necessary for their sustenance, although not as much as they had owned before, nor enough to make them dangerous at any time. (Cortés 1986, 321)

While Cortés' decision may be seen as a strategy to keep any putative ruling noble from seizing power, it also

reflects the importance of the office of the *cihuacoatl* in the traditional structure and hierarchy of the Mexica Empire before the conquest. The *cihuacoatl* that Cortés appointed in 1524 was Tlacotzin, who died shortly thereafter. He was replaced by Motelchiutzin, baptized as Andrés de Tapia, who ruled between 1525 and 1530. In 1532, Pablo Xochiquentzin assumed the role before Diego de Alvarado Huanitzin, the grandson of the *tlaotoni* Axayacatl and nephew of Motecuhzoma II, restored the traditional line of descent in 1539.

In the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, leading Indigenous historians such as Chimalpahin and Tezozomoc, who were both nobles of Mexica descent, disparaged what they considered to be the interim rule of the *cihuacoatl* (also referred to as *cuauhtlatoani*), as it deviated from their lineage (Castañeda de la Paz 2011). This institutionalized version of Indigenous colonial history has been challenged by scholars who delved into the complexity of Indigenous–Spanish interactions in the nascent colony (Kellogg 2005, Ruiz Medrano 2006). Elsewhere, I argued that two types of religious and political authority coexisted in the early post-conquest period in the Mixtec town of Santo Domingo Yanhuitlan (Frassani 2017, 80–94, Frassani and Snijders 2020, 85–92). As evinced from the transcripts of an Inquisition trial dated to the 1540s, the local ruling noble was Domingo de Guzmán, who is referred to as “cacique” in the documents. However, an equally important figure was Francisco de las Casas, who is consistently identified in the same source as *gobernador* and seemingly did not have any family relationship with the cacique's lineage. While both of these figures (and a third figure known only as Juan) were persecuted for following the religion of their ancestors, Francisco de las Casas stands out due to his position as a religious leader. After his death, the Guzmán ruling lineage unilaterally imposed their authority on the town despite opposition from the former governor's heirs, who sued the caciques in court but without success. However, based on a pre-Hispanic custom, it seems that, like the Mexica, hereditary rulers in Yanhuitlan and the Mixteca shared their duties and responsibilities with a larger group of councilors (Pohl 1994, 19–57).

Recently, Rovira Morgado (2013) reevaluated the figure of the second Indigenous governor of Mexico-Tenochtitlan after the conquest: Motelchiutzin, also known as Andrés de Tapia. A man of humble Tlatelolca origins, he rose through the ranks of the Mexica state and administrative apparatus thanks to his demonstrated abilities. His career began under the reign of Motecuhzoma II or even his predecessor, Ahuizotl, when he had distinguished himself as a brave and successful warrior. Bernal Díaz del Castillo said the following about him:

I remember that at that time [Motecuhzoma's] steward was a great cacique to whom we gave the name of Tapia, and he kept the account of all the revenue that was brought to Montezuma, in his books which were made of paper which they call *amal*, and he had a great house full of these books. (Díaz del Castillo 2010, ch. 91, 64)

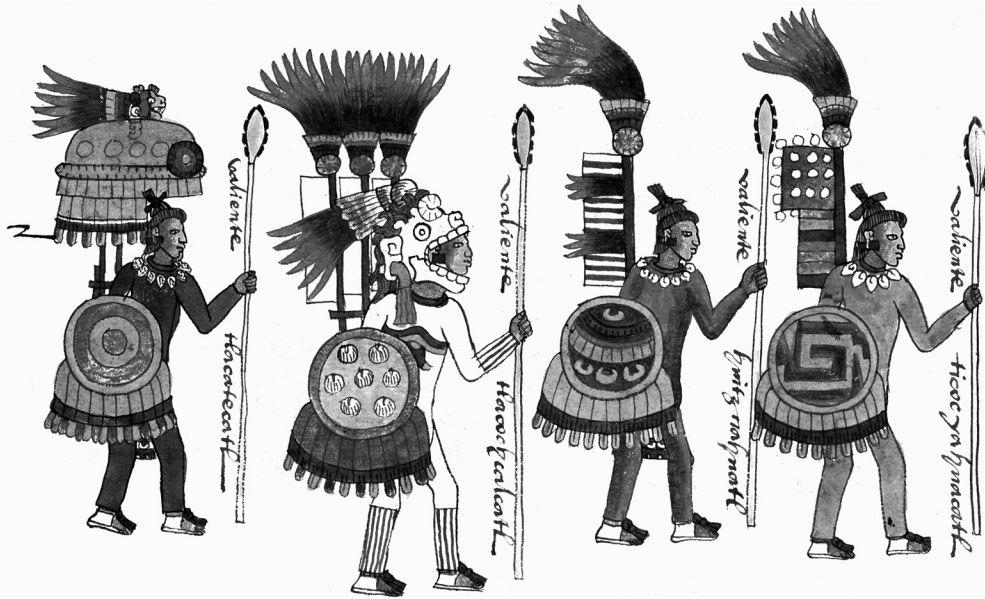


Figure 6.1. The Mexica military high command: Tlacatecatl, Tlacohtlacoatl, Huitznahuatl, Ticocyahuatl. Codex Mendoza, f. 67r. Bodleian Library, Oxford.

Motelchiutzin was part of a council that included only a handful of people whom the tlaotoni entrusted with tribute collection and record keeping, among other duties. The official titles of these royal administrators are variously mentioned in the sources as *tlacohtlacoatl*, *tlacatecatl*, *cioacoatl*, and *tlillanalcqui*, as seen in the Codex Mendoza (ff. 65r, 67r) and the Florentine Codex (Sahagún 1950–1982, bk. 8, ch. 14). Motelchiutzin also held the title of *huitznahuatl* (Fig. 6.1), the head of Huitznahuac, which was the southeastern quadrant of Mexico-Tenochtitlan and one of the four “great houses” or *calpulli* in the city (Rovira Morgado 2013, 176–180). Huitznahuac was connected through a causeway (modern-day Calzada Iztapalapa) to the southern shores of Lake Texcoco, the likely site of production of the Codex Borbonicus, as previously mentioned. More specifically, the Tlillan temple on page 34 of the Codex Borbonicus was probably located near Huixachtecatl, Cerro de la Estrella in Iztapalapa, where sources attest that the New Fire ceremony was conducted.

The coat of arms granted to the Tapia family, the descendants of Motelchiutzin, by Charles V in 1535 clearly symbolized both the titles and possessions of the lineage founder (Fig. 6.2). On it, an eagle-jaguar hybrid sports a few colorful feathers and sits on top of water. The animal is a reference to the Mexica warrior caste (known as eagle-jaguar), whose elaborate costumes included feathers, as seen among the huitznahuatl and others in the Codex Mendoza (f. 67r). The water may be a reference to the precious resource of Lake Texcoco. The coat of arms was granted to the family thanks to the efforts of Motelchiutzin’s son, Hernando de Tapia, who traveled twice to Spain. The first trip was between 1528 and 1529, when his father was governor of Mexico-Tenochtitlan, and the second was in 1532 after his father’s death, after which he resided in Spain for five years (Martínez Garnica 2009, 96–102, Rovira Morgado 2019, 20–25).

The Codex Mexicanus, a manuscript compiled between 1570 and 1590, possibly depicts the two pivotal events of Motelchiutzin’s investiture as governor of Mexico-Tenochtitlan and Hernando de Tapia’s travel to Spain. On page 78 (Fig. 6.3), a strip of turquoise squares identifies consecutive years in the Nahuatl calendar, which are also glossed with the corresponding Christian date. On top of the cartouche for the year 8 Rabbit (1529) are two mummy bundles, which are identifiable by their glyphic names as the tlaotoni Cuauhtemoc and the first cihuacoatl Tlacotzin, both of whom died within a short period of time from each other. The last Mexica emperor was executed by Cortés, while Tlacotzin died on his way back to Mexico-Tenochtitlan from Honduras, where he had been taken captive with Cuauhtemoc and other members of the Mexica army, including Motelchiutzin. A third person depicted below the two mummies was made ruler in Cuauhtemoc and Tlacotzin’s place, as indicated by his royal headdress. He can be identified as Motelchiutzin by his name glyph, a stone, which also appears to be associated with him in the Codex Aubin (f. 45v), the Humboldt Fragment II, and Primeros Memoriales (f. 51v). The following year, 9 Reed (1530), four male figures are associated with footprints leading to a semi-circular black spot. As argued by Diel Boornazian (2018, 143), this is probably the journey of a group of people, including Cortés and Indigenous dignitaries, to Spain. However, archival sources state that the conquistador left for Spain twice (first in 1528 and again in 1532), not only once in 1530, as indicated in the manuscript. The two people on the left can clearly be identified as Indigenous, given their haircuts and lack of a beard. An owl is attached to the figure at the top to indicate Nezahualtecolotzin (Venerable Fasting Owl), a son of Motecuhzoma, while the figure below is possibly Matlacoatzin, who was also in the Mexica entourage. The person leading the retinue in the top right corner is Cortés himself, while the male



Figure 6.2. Coat of arms of the Tapia family. Madrid, Archivo de la Fundación Casa de Alba, carpeta 238, legajo 2, documento 73.

head below sports a Spanish hat but no beard. The character's name glyph, a stone with water drops, should probably be read as Tapia (Diel Boornazian 2018, 143). This identifies the figure as Hernando de Tapia, son of Motelchiuhtzin. Thanks to his dual Spanish and Nahuatl upbringing, Hernando de Tapia became a *nahuatlato*,

an official Nahuatl interpreter for the Crown, after his return to New Spain (Rovira Morgado 2019). The Hispanicized headdress and speech volute attached to Tapia in the manuscript indicate the cultural and linguistic intermediary role that he successfully played until his death circa 1555 (Codex Mexicanus, p. 83).



Figure 6.3 Events of the years 8 Rabbit (1529) and 9 Reed (1530). Codex Mexicanus, p. 78. Mexicain 23–24. Source: gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France.

In 1532, during his stay in Spain, Hernando de Tapia cosigned a petition to Charles V with other Indigenous nobles to restore the patrimonial rights of their families. In the letter, he declared himself to be the son of Andrés de Tapia, “old *tecuhltli*, governor of Mexico” (*antiguo tucotecle, gobernador de México*) under Cortés (Archivo General de Indias, México, 95, exp. 24, ff. 209r–210r, López de Meneses 1960, 193, Pérez-Rocha and Tena 2000, 97–98). Hernando de Tapia referred to his father’s title and position using both Mexica and Spanish terminology. The governor of Mexico-Tenochtitlan at the time, Pablo Xochiquentzin, was also among the signatories and identified himself as *tucultecle y gobernador de México*. The first signatory was Martín Nezahualtecolotzin, son of the tlatoani Motecuhzoma.

When Hernando de Tapia finally succeeded in obtaining the coat of arms for his family in 1535, the king wrote,

In that you, Fernando de Tapia, of New Spain, son of Andrés de Tapia, told us that your father was of service to us in the conquest of New Spain in announcing to

our [*sic*] captains and governors that they had come to conquer it in our name and in doing all that he could as a loyal vassal, you asked that given these services rendered and in order of those not to be forgotten, we would grant you a coat of arms ... (*Por quanto vos Fernando de Tapia, natural de la Nueva España, hijo de Andrés de Tapia, nos habéis hecho relación que el dicho vuestro padre nos sirvió en la toma de la dicha Nueva España en dar aviso á nuestros [*sic*] capitanes é Gobernadores que en nuestro nombra la fueron a conquistar é en todo lo demás que él pudo, como bueno é fiel servidor nuestro nos suplicaste é pediste por merced que acatando los dichos servicios, é porque de ellos quedase memoria, vos mandásemos dar por armas un escudo fecho de dos partes, en esta manera ...*; Archivo de la Fundación Casa de Alba, carpeta 238, legajo 2, documento 73, f. 1r, Paz y Meliá 1892, 250, translation by author)

The paleography of the document is exceedingly difficult, but it is illogical that Andrés de Tapia Motelchiuhtzin would warn or announce (*dar aviso*) to the Spaniards that the

Spaniards had come to conquer New Spain. Moreover, the text refers to those who were told the news of the conquest as *capitanes e gobernadores*. The Spaniards usually reserved the latter term for Indigenous rulers and officials, not Spanish soldiers. It is more likely that *nuestros* (our) should have read *vuestros* (your), which would mean that Andrés de Tapia warned his own captains and governors that the Spaniards were coming to conquer them. Thus, according to the passage, Motelchiuhtzin's contribution to the Crown was that he warned the Mexica that the Spaniards would conquer their land in the name of the Spanish king. However, what does this announcement refer to?

It is possible that Motelchiuhtzin had a premonition (*tetzahuil* in Nahuatl), which sources concurred played a major role in the events leading up to the Spanish conquest (e.g., Sahagún 1950–1982, bk. 12, ch. 1, Tezozomoc 1997, ch. 104–111). In the *Cantares mexicanos*, a collection of Nahuatl poems from the mid-1500s, Motelchiuhtzin is mentioned a few times as one of the heroes of the last battle in the siege of Mexico-Tenochtitlan, which took place in his native Tlatelolco in 1521. One of the songs is given as follows:

In this picture place of yours,
Amid your paintings
The Only Spirit has caused you to see things
Oh Tapia, oh Motelchiuh
And he causes weeping, he causes sadness here.
The Mexican nation is passing away.

Yn ye mamox ipan
motlacuilol ye inepantla
mitzontlachialti Ycelteotl
yn Tapia ye Motelchiuh
techocti tetlaocolti
y nica ye yauh yn mexicayotl
(Bierhorst 1985, song 60, 281)

The song was written as a Renaissance *stanza* but based on a traditional Indigenous *cuicatl*. It states that God showed to Motelchiuhtzin through the painted books that the ancient Mexica culture and customs were coming to an end. This is very similar to what is stated on page 34 of the Codex Borbonicus during Izcalli at the very end of the *veintena* cycle, when the Cihuacoatl priest and Motecuhzoma close the ceremonies for the year 2 Reed. In a gloss, Cihuacoatl is described as “god of the omens who told them that the Spaniards would come and conquer them” (*dios de los agüeros que les dijo cómo habían de venir los españoles a ellos, y los habían de sujetar*). Motecuhzoma could only confirm this dire prediction. The gloss next to him reads, “god of corn kernels (used for divination) and magicians who confirmed to them what he said: that they would soon come and conquer them” (*dios de los maizes o hechiceros, que les confirmó lo que este dijo: que venían ya a los conquistar*).

It is plausible that Motelchiuhtzin's son, Hernando de Tapia, brought a manuscript commissioned by his father

during one of his trips to Spain, either in 1528, while Motelchiuhtzin was still the *tecuhtli-gobernador* of Mexico-Tenochtitlan, or in 1532, after his father's death, to prove the family's ancestry and obtain a noble title from the Crown. The Codex Borbonicus may have been used as the painting that proved the veracity of Motelchiuhtzin's vision and prophetic pronouncement, as stated in the official document transcribed above. One of the Codex Borbonicus' most striking characteristics is its style and execution. It is a seemingly perfect copy of a pre-conquest pictographic manuscript, as if to demonstrate visually that the fate of the Mexica had already been revealed before Cortés' arrival.

Motelchiuhtzin's fateful premonition is consistent with the powers of a priest and, more generally, the office of a person who was not of noble descent and had to prove his own abilities—military, administrative, or otherwise. As seen in Chapter 1 of this book, Indigenous healers or *curanderos* are granted their powers regardless of status. They are chosen; they do not choose. However, the social obligation associated with their calling is binding. Motelchiuhtzin proved his value among the Mexica and the Spaniards alike and was able to serve both overlords in the tumultuous years of the invasion and conquest. It seems that Motecuhzoma and, eventually, Cortés and Charles V recognized Motelchiuhtzin's visionary ability and the way that he used it to serve them.

6.2. The prophetic value of pictography

The identification of Motelchiuhtzin as the patron of the Codex Borbonicus rests on a few specific historical data points, namely his role and status in pre-conquest Mexico-Tenochtitlan during the enterprise of conquest and later in the city reconstruction that transformed the great Mexica metropolis into the capital of New Spain.

Motelchiuhtzin's various titles (e.g., *cuauhpilli*, *huitznahuatl*, *cuauhtlatoani*, and others) are not always easy to define in the sources. The council of trusted officials appointed by the *tlatoani* performed both administrative and religious duties, which involved responsibilities as well as privileges, especially in the form of tribute (Acosta Saignes 1946, Dehouve 2013). The somewhat nebulous information regarding these offices is also reflected in the reconstruction of the historical figure of the *cihuacoatl* *Tlacaoel*, as noted in the literature (Colston 1974, Peperstraete 2008). While Durán, Tezozomoc, and others who possibly relied on the same lost source, the so-called *Crónica X*, paint a larger-than-life picture of a man who was said to have lived over a hundred years, others, including Sahagún, do not even mention him. In the Codex Borbonicus, the *Cihuacoatl* priest on pages 23 and 37 is unidentified, unlike the accompanying *Xiuhcoatl* priest, who is said to be the *tlatoani* Motecuhzoma. The charged ritual and religious role played by the *cihuacoatl* may have deeply affected the way that he was portrayed in historical sources. In the Florentine Codex, for example, the *cihuacoatl* is often mentioned but never unequivocally



Figure 6.4. The *cihuacoatl*. *Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España*, vol. 2, bk. 8, f. 3r. Paso y Troncoso 1926.

identified. In the chapter devoted to the kings, it is said that, during the reign of Motecuhzoma II, the *cihuacoatl* “went about weeping, at night. Everyone heard it wailing and saying: ‘My beloved sons, now I am about to leave you’” (Sahagún 1950–1982, bk. 8, ch. 1, 3). The corresponding illustration (Fig. 6.4) depicts a serpent with the head of a woman (which reflects the literal meaning of *cihuacoatl*, woman-serpent) speaking to a group of people weeping, perhaps as a response to her oracular predictions; in the background, a house is on fire. The omen of the *cihuacoatl* is the same one given by the *Cihuacoatl* priest in the *Codex Borbonicus*, by Motelchiutzin in the family title’s concession, and in the song of the *Cantares mexicanos*.

Two related accounts of the premonitions of conquest demonstrate the intertwined importance of vision and pictography in Mesoamerica. Durán (1964, ch. 70) and Tezozomoc (1997, ch. 110–111) related the first sighting of the Spaniards by Mexica envoys on the Gulf coast and what they relayed to Motecuhzoma in Tenochtitlan. According to both sources, Motecuhzoma sent a *tlillancalqui*, a member of the emperor’s inner circle, to the coast to watch the boats and men approaching. The *tlillancalqui* interacted with Cortés and his interpreter, doña Marina, and then returned to Tenochtitlan. Once back in the city, he recounted everything that he saw to Motecuhzoma, who became gravely concerned. The *tlatoani* then ordered an old *tlacuilo* named Tocual in Tezozomoc’s account (1997, ch. 110, 457) to paint what the *tlillancalqui* had observed. The ships of the Spaniards were like floating mountains, and their weapons produced a terrifying smoke. As no one had seen

these things before, Motecuhzoma asked the *tlillancalqui* to seek old and knowledgeable people in the towns and villages surrounding Tenochtitlan who could interpret the painting. After several failed attempts, the *tlillancalqui* suggested asking an esteemed man from Xochimilco known as Quilaztli. This man may have been none other than the *Cihuacoatl* priest from Xochimilco, as Quilaztli is indeed another name for *Cihuacoatl*. Quilaztli told the *tlatoani* that the arrival of the Spaniards was painted in an old *amoxtili* (book) that had been left behind by the *teomamaque* (the god bearers), the leaders of the Nahuatl-Mexica migration into central Mexico (Durán 1964, ch. LXX, Tezozomoc 1997, ch. 111, 459). This account corroborates what was expressed in the *Codex Borbonicus*. It was a *Cihuacoatl* priest from a southern town in the basin who prophesied the arrival of the Spaniards and the demise of the Mexica. Could this be another clue that the *Codex Borbonicus*, a fine and unique example of Mexica pictography, was produced by the *cihuacoatl*’s descendants? It does not seem coincidental that pictography and its use by Mexica high officials in the fateful events of the encounter are discussed in two strictly related sources that uniquely describe the *cihuacoatl* Tlacaclael and his successors in great detail (see Peperstraete 2007).

Rovira Morgado (2013, 176–177) argued that Motelchiutzin himself was the *tlillancalqui* who first witnessed the arrival of the Spaniards and on whose account the first image of the foreigners reached Motecuhzoma’s eyes. While Durán and Tezozomoc’s accounts are very similar, the Nahuatl historian (Tezozomoc 1997, ch. 110, 457) inserted a brief passage in the narrative on the *tlillancalqui*’s travel to the coast that is not found in Durán’s. Both versions state that Motecuhzoma granted the *tlillancalqui* tribute privileges and possessions as a reward for his service and bravery, but only Tezozomoc identified the land and towns, some of which were also mentioned in early colonial archival sources as being disputed by Motelchiutzin/Andés de Tapia’s heirs. Rovira Morgado believes that Tezozomoc was aware of the Tapia family’s ongoing suit and took the opportunity to share his opinion on the matter when writing his chronicle. It should be added that, in this scenario, it was Motelchiutzin’s early expedition to the coast that granted him the title of *huitznahuatl*, the priest-officer in charge of the southeastern ward of Tenochtitlan. It was perhaps in this capacity that Motelchiutzin was able to call on the *Cihuacoatl* priest Quilaztli from Xochimilco to consult on the painting.

The *Codex Borbonicus* seems to reflect the complex religious and historical dynamic at play on the eve of the conquest in interesting ways. The glosses in the *veintena* section corroborate the idea that the New Fire ceremony took place in the same southeastern part of Tenochtitlan and towns on Lake Texcoco where *Cihuacoatl* was especially revered and Motelchiutzin oversaw the cult and tribute administration. However, the *Codex Borbonicus* does not depict Spanish ships and firearms. The manuscript is not the painting made

after Motelchiutzin's eyewitness account, which was eventually corroborated by an older painted manuscript in the possession of Quilaztli in Xochimilco. Yet, the Codex Borbonicus is, or at least purports to be, an early colonial copy of a lost pre-Hispanic original, thus mimicking the same exegetical dynamic narrated in Tezozomoc and Durán's accounts in its production. The *raison d'être* of pictography lies in its future currency and is always contingent on interpretation. Quilaztli's corroboration of Motelchiutzin's account based on ancient texts, in turn, imbues the event of the encounter with a deeper historical dimension and significance.

The Codex Borbonicus is not concerned with historical events but rather their religious underpinnings and ritual processes. As argued in the preceding chapter, the tonalamatl section of the manuscript includes clues that tie the trecenas of the tonalpohualli to the specific historical period presented in the second part of the manuscript, the New Fire ceremony in the year 2 Reed under Motecuhzoma II. Nowotny (1974, 11) also noted traces of feathers in the tonalamatl of the Codex Borbonicus, which may indicate that the manuscript was used at some point. On the one hand, Codex Borbonicus is tied to a specific moment as a testament to a ceremonial occasion that legitimized a prophecy; on the other hand, divination and ritual use were still essential components of the manuscript's life. In other words, we tend to think of written or painted documents as immutable and durable receptacles of information for future memory and generations, while Mesoamerican pictographic manuscripts self-consciously present partial information that must be constantly and retroactively reinterpreted and adjusted.

If my hypothesis that Codex Borbonicus was commissioned by Motelchiutzin and his son Hernando de Tapia to aid their petition for the family's patrimonial and legal rights is correct, then the unadulterated pre-Hispanic style employed by the tlacuilo was meant to reinscribe the Spanish conquest into an imaginable Mexica future unbent by the defeat and humiliation of colonization. In the Codex Borbonicus, the cihuacoatl's prophecy is given at the end of the veintena cycle during the xiuhmolpilli of the year 2 Reed (1507). The prophecy of conquest, while in itself frequently found in colonial alphabetical sources, is never cast within such a clear Mesoamerican religious and eschatological framework.

6.3. Provenience and dating of the Codex Borgia

The pivotal roles, both historical and religious, played by the Cihuacoatl priest and the New Fire ceremony in the commission, production, and final form of the Codex Borbonicus suggest that patronage and provenience can also be reconstructed for the Codex Borgia. This manuscript shares an emphasis on the yearly ceremonies and its protagonists with the Mexica counterpart, as detailed in Chapter 4. What prompted the Codex Borgia's creation? What specific occasions determined its iconography and outlook? What internal clues may be found within

the manuscript that implicitly indicate a certain locale, historical period, or ritual event?

Jansen and Pérez Jiménez (2017, 438–442) articulated a specific argument for the identification of two paired temples that appear in the Codex Borgia's central pages (pp. 29–46) alongside the main religious structures of the sacred precinct of Cholula. Based on information provided by the *Relación geográfica de Cholula* (Acuña 1985, *Relación de Cholula*, § 14), two main priests ruled over the town: the Aquiach (Ruler of Above), who was associated with the sky and whose nahual was an eagle, and the Tlalquiac (Ruler of Below), who was associated with the earthly realm and whose animal companion was a jaguar. On the Codex Borgia's central pages, two temples with complementary earth and sky imagery are frequently juxtaposed. It should be noted that, according to the *Relación*, the two priests resided in the same temple dedicated to Quetzalcoatl, while the Codex Borgia clearly represents two separate structures. In the *Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca* (ff. 26v–27r), the main precinct of Cholula had one main temple that featured two separate conical roofs. It is possible that the Quetzalcoatl temple in Cholula was similar to the Templo Mayor in Tenochtitlan: a single structure topped with two separate temples dedicated to two different gods.

Finally, according to the same source (Acuña 1985, *Relación de Cholula*, § 14), Cholula was where rulers throughout the region would receive the investiture of their royal titles, specifically through the nose-piercing ceremony, as seen on the previously discussed page 44 of the Codex Borgia and the *Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca* (f. 21r). Archaeological data show a remarkable stylistic unity between the Codex Borgia's pictorials and polychrome ceramics in Cholula (Nicholson and Quiñones Keber 1994). Both historical and archaeological data, therefore, seem to indicate that this important Nahuatl city was the place of origin of the Codex Borgia. In turn, the murals in Tizatlán and Ocotelulco, Tlaxcala, may be “inspired” by pictorials such as the Codex Borgia (Peperstraete 2006).

A key element for establishing chronology in the Codex Borbonicus was the identification of specific features in the tonalamatl section of the manuscript, which relates to events in the solar year. In the Codex Borgia, the twenty trecenas found on pages 61–70 are arranged in rows (see Fig. 6.12). The section is followed on page 71 (Fig. 6.5) by a separate plate that depicts the thirteen birds of the trecenas, which are repeated on each trecena panel in the Codex Borbonicus. On page 71 of the Codex Borgia, the central image is dominated by a solar god seated on a throne and receiving the blood of a decapitated quail. The sacrifice is performed at night, as indicated by the dark sky and moon (a rabbit in a crescent) above. Right next to the night sky, there is a Mixtec year sign associated with the date 1 Reed. The year sign, which can be identified as an interlaced A-O symbol, has the sign Reed inserted into it. As suggested by Jansen and Pérez Jiménez (2017, 437), the leaves in the year sign are a linguistic pun, as the words for



Figure 6.5. The sun god and the thirteen birds of the trecenas. Codex Borgia, p. 91. Kingsborough 1831.

“leaf” and “year” are homophonous in Nahuatl. Therefore, the symbol combines Mixtec calendrical conventions with Nahuatl terminology—another indication that the Codex Borgia hails from the southern Puebla region, where the two ethnic and linguistic groups closely interacted.

The animal performing the sacrifice of the quail is difficult to identify. Anders et al. (1993, 347) tentatively considered it a skunk. Previously, Seler (1904, vol. 2, 290) noted that the animal’s muzzle is skeletonized: the lower jaw is fleshless, and the nose is replaced by a sacrificial knife. The German scholar also noted that the animal was green (now faded into light brown), which led him to interpret the spikes on its body as leaves of grass (or perhaps

another plant). The animal could be a coyote, which is associated with Tezcatlipoca along with other feline or canine wild animals (Anders et al. 1993, 347, Olivier 2003, 32–33). As in the glyph for Coyoacan, the coyote has circles (*coyoctic*) on its body, where they may function as a phonetic complement for *coyo-*.

The red deity on the left has clear solar associations. He is seated on a throne or altar and inside a rayed disk that represents the sun. The 4 Movement day sign at the base of the throne or altar indicates the fifth and present era at the time for the Nahuas and Mexica of central Mexico. Two colored streams fall from the sides of the sun, forming the known couplet *atitlachinolli* (water-conflagration), a

metaphor for war and conflict that aligns with the sun god's weapons and attack position. Warfare, solar imagery, and epochal dates are characteristic elements of another well-known throne or altar, the Teocalli of the Sacred Warfare (Fig. 6.6), a Mexica monument that was commissioned by Motecuhzoma II around the celebration of the *xiuhmolpilli* for the year 2 Reed. This date is carved in the front along with the date of the previous year of 1 Rabbit. Thus, the year sign 1 Reed that appears on page 71 of the Codex Borgia could also indicate the completion of a fifty-two-year cycle. As discussed in the previous chapter, Mixtecs and Nahuas counted years in a slightly different manner (Jiménez Moreno and Mateos Higuera 1940, 69–76). While the two systems shared yearbearers, their numerals are one unit off from each other. Year 1 Reed in the Mixtec

calendar corresponds to year 2 Reed in the Nahuatl-Mexica calendar. It is also well known that 1 Reed was a year of cyclical completion among the Mixtecs (Furst 1978b, Anders et al. 1993, 347n1).

Finally, another important feature in the sun god altar on page 71 of the Codex Borgia indicates not only the completion of a calendar cycle but also a more specific ceremonial event. I believe that the colorful banners raised behind the god should be taken as a reference to *Panquetzaliztli*, a ceremony dedicated to the sun. As discussed at length in the preceding chapters, *Panquetzaliztli* was the most appropriate time to perform the ritual of the New Fire, as it fell between the time of the sun's nadir and winter solstice.



Figure 6.6. Teocalli of the Sacred Warfare. Spinden 1928.

Nowotny (1960, § 7a) suggested that page 71 refers not only to the preceding tonalamatl section, given the depiction of the thirteen birds, but also, more specifically, to the sixth trecena, 1 Death, whose regent is the sun god. On page 66 of the Codex Borgia, Tonatiuh (the sun god)

is on the right. He kneels in a dynamic posture towards an enthroned elderly man holding a carved staff (Fig. 6.7). In the Codex Telleriano-Remensis (f. 13v and 19r; Fig. 6.8), the trecena 1 Death depicts the sun god, who is identified in the gloss by his calendrical name, Nahui Ollin

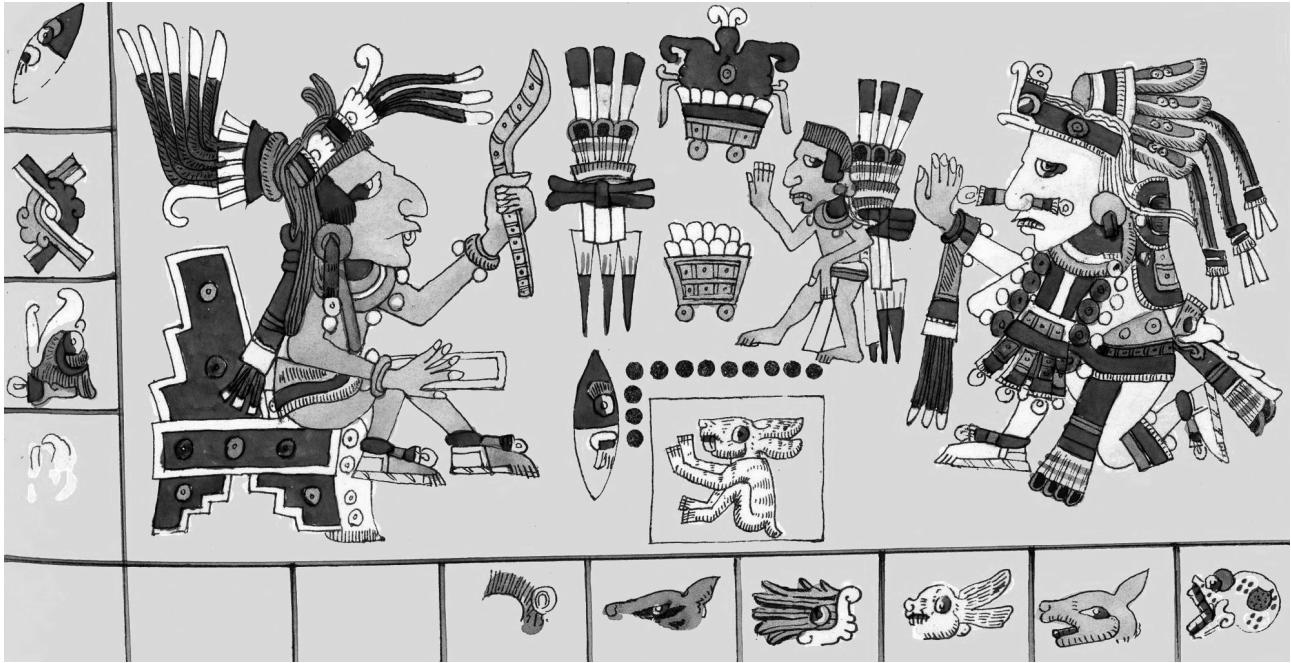


Figure 6.7. The trecena 1 Death. Codex Borgia, p. 66. Kingsborough 1831.

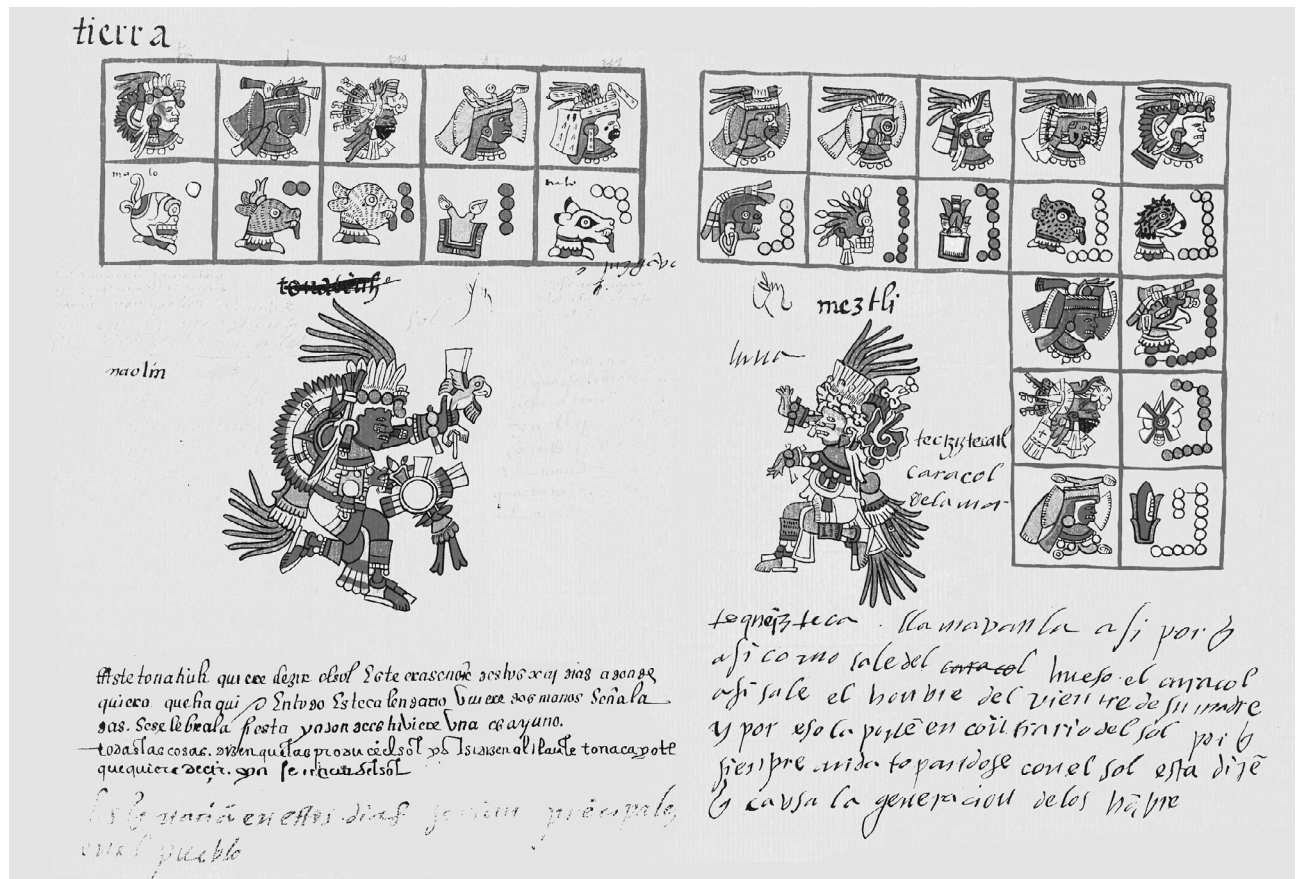


Figure 6.8. Reconstruction of the two main gods of the trecena 1 Death, Tonatiuh Nahui Ollin and Meztli. Codex Telleriano-Remensis, ff. 12v and 19r. Kingsborough 1831.

(4 Movement), opposite Meztli, the moon god. The sun god holds a bird in one hand, along with a white banner that signifies sacrifice. In the Codex Borgia, a quail is sacrificed to the sun god by the coyote-like animal in front of him. In the Mexica teocalli (Fig. 6.6), the sacrifice to the sun is performed by Motecuhzoma II and a god with the attributes of Tezcatlipoca and Huitzilopochtli. Finally, in the Codex Borbonicus (p. 6), the trecena 1 Death depicts the sun god opposite a god-priest of Tezcatlipoca, who embodies darkness and night. The conflation and exchange of iconographic elements and ritual behavior between the sun god and his counterpart, the moon god/Tezcatlipoca/elderly character, bespeak their symbiotic relationship. This interpretation was seemingly also expressed by an annotator of the Codex Telleriano-Remensis (f. 19r), who stated, “And thus they put [Tecciztecatl, the Moon god] opposite of the sun because it is always countering the sun, which they say causes the generation of men” (Quiñones Keber 1995, 261). The victory of the sun over darkness, albeit temporary and cyclical, is a major theme in the Panquetzaliztli ceremony in general and its representation in the Codex Borgia (p. 71).

If Nowotny’s suggestion is correct and the scene on page 71 of the Codex Borgia, which depicts a sacrifice to the sun god during Panquetzaliztli to celebrate the completion of a calendrical cycle on the year 1 Reed, is directly related to the trecena 1 Death, this would also indicate that a specific solar and historical year is highlighted in the tonalamatl of the Codex Borgia, in a manner akin to that of the Codex Borbonicus discussed in the preceding chapter (Ochpaniztli was highlighted during the days 7 Serpent and 2 Reed, beginning in the trecena 1 Rain). According to Caso’s chronology, day 1 Death fell on November 6 in 1505, close to the nadir of the sun, and December 26 in 1507, close to the winter solstice. The latter was year 1 Reed for the Mixtecs, a date highlighted on page 71. Could the Codex Borgia have been produced to commemorate the New Fire celebrated in Cholula for the binding of the fifty-two years during 1 Reed (1507) in the Mixtec calendar?

One last detail in the Codex Borgia’s trecena 1 Death is worth mentioning: a rabbit is enclosed in a square surrounded by twelve dots. Anders et al. (1993, 330) interpreted the sign as 12 Rabbit. However, the square around the animal could also indicate that Rabbit should be understood as a separate day—that is, day sign Rabbit plus twelve more days. In other words, the date could be read as trecena 1 Rabbit. This trecena falls eighty days before 1 Death and recurs 180 days after it.

According to Motolinía (1971, ch. 11), the priests of Cholula, whom he called *tlamacazque*, began a gruesome fast eighty days before the main celebration in their town, which was held every four years. The feast honored the god Camaxtli, who can be seen in the Codex Borgia (p. 45; Fig. 4.15), standing on an altar during a celebration tentatively identified as Panquetzaliztli. The *tlamacazque*’s ritual quest began with a four-day fast, during which they only ate a small tortilla and drunk a little bit of water.

Then, they spent sixty days inside the temple enclosures, constantly tending to the altars and sleeping only a few hours every night. Although they bathed every night, they covered their bodies with black charcoal paint. After sixty days of “insufferable hardship,” they were allowed to sleep and rest a little more for the remaining twenty days before the feast day. Finally, on the day of the celebration the priests could return to their homes, where they were given colorful cloaks to parade in the temple. In Section 4.3.1 the quest of the priests during the days preceding Panquetzaliztli was similarly related to the hunt god Camaxtli-Mixcoatl and the tlatoques dedicated to his cult in the Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca (ff. 20r, 21r) and the Codex Borgia (p. 44).

The quest began on page 42 with the sacrifice of Itzcolihuiqui (Fig. 4.14). At the top of the page Itzcolihuiqui is seen stretched out on an altar, an occasion marked by a day Rabbit encircled by a yellow ring. This day follows from the previous section, where the thirteen preceding days of the trecena 1 Eagle are depicted in full; this indicates that Rabbit does not stand for the day alone on this page but the entire trecena beginning on 1 Rabbit (Boone 2007, 200, Jansen and Pérez Jiménez 2017, 506). This detail seems to corroborate the interpretation that the veintena sequence represented in the Codex Borgia (pp. 29–46) coincides with the year 1 Reed in the Mixtec calendar, when the Panquetzaliztli ceremony was held during 1 Death and Ochpaniztli occurred eighty days prior during 1 Rabbit.

Given the 260-day periodicity of the tonalpohualli, day 1 Rabbit recurs 180 days (roughly six months) after 1 Death. Paul van den Akker suggested to me in a personal communication (2021) that, if 1 Death coincides with the winter solstice, six months later 1 Rabbit would coincide with the summer solstice in the third week of June. Alternatively, if 1 Death corresponded to the nadir of the sun, it would correspond six months later to the first zenith passage of the sun at the beginning of May. In this respect, it is quite intriguing that the deities’ iconography of the trecena 1 Death and its reprise on page 71 in the Codex Borgia suggest the contrast between the opposing forces of darkness and light, the sun and the moon, and their perpetual struggle, which leads them to shift positions at established intervals.

It may be recalled from the previous chapter that both 1 Death and 1 Reed are carved on Mexica xiuholmopilli sculptures and framed by square cartouches (Fig. 5.5 and 5.6). The fact that celebrations of the ending of a cycle were held in both years 1 and 2 Reed (according to the Mixtec and Mexica calendars) indicates not only that there were different time-keeping traditions in Mesoamerica but also that they were not viewed as mutually exclusive. There was no impulse or interest in imposing a single homologous time; instead, different “calendrical schools” coexisted, and their relative merits, meaning, and uses were perhaps even discussed and compared among calendar specialists.

6.4. New Fire and new codices

Previous considerations of the possible historical dating of the Codex Borgia undermine a basic assumption in Nowotny's divinatory paradigm (i.e., the perpetual use of the tonalpohualli and its calendrical tables). According to this view, the ancient books of wisdom were manuals that could be used over and over again regardless of the year.

By contrast, the approach that I propose stresses that the specific geographical and historical circumstances of production are not mere accidents to be placed within a larger a priori cosmological scenario but rather constitutive elements of the way that religious knowledge was conceived and constructed. I posit that the specific reasons for and circumstances of a manuscript's commission largely dictated the final outlook of its pictorials, iconography, and calendrics. Therefore, images and the calendar did not conform to an immutable logic of divination but instead underpinned a dynamic reinvention of tradition, a constant reckoning with the inexorable passing of time, the accidents of history, and human actions.

Mexican scholar Ana Díaz Álvarez (2016, 2019) also espoused this view and suggested examining the codices not as books or inactive repositories of abstract knowledge but as objects to be manipulated. My suggestions follow up on those of Díaz by seeking clues about the localities, time, and circumstances of production. With regard to pre-Hispanic manuscripts that were salvaged from an unknown location at an undetermined time, establishing their patronage, provenience, and exact dating is bound to remain a somewhat speculative endeavor. Nonetheless, I believe that it is necessary to change our perspective and question our conceptions of history, fate, and religion. Even if divinatory books such as the Codices Borgia and Borbonicus were painted to bear traces of the specific historical and geographical circumstances of their production, this did not necessarily preclude future use. However, it meant that any subsequent divinatory reading would need to consider clues derived from the moment and place of creation and incorporate them into the understanding of and guidance on future actions and outcomes.

A passage from the Florentine Codex (Sahagún 1950–1982, bk. 10, ch. 29) offers glimpses of how cosmology, religion, history, and the ancient books were part of a relational web and mutually depended on one another. According to the origin story of the Mexica, the books of knowledge were destroyed twice. First, the wandering Mexitin (as the Mexica were once called) arrived in Tamoanchan; they were led by wise people called *amoxoaque*, which means “those who have the books.” However, the *amoxoaque* soon abandoned their people, heading east and taking the books and all knowledge contained therein on calendrics and crafts, among other things, with them. Only four old wise people remained, who had to invent knowledge anew: Oxomoco, Cipactonal, Tlaltetecuin, and Xuchicahuaca. They created the tonalpohualli (the count or calendar of destiny), the *xiuhamatl* (the historical annals), the *xiuhpohualli* (the

count or calendar of the years), and the *temicamatl* (the book of dreams). These books were preserved until the time of the Mexica tlatoani Itzcoatl (1427–1440), when a group of rulers convened and decided to burn them all.

Itzcoatl's book burning has traditionally been interpreted as a strategic move that was intended to erase dissenting historical accounts during the crucial period of the Mexica's hegemonic rise in the basin of Mexico (Battcock 2012, 97–105). However, as Battcock (2012, 105) indicated, it is also noteworthy that the episode is only mentioned in the Sahaguntine passage and not in any other source. Therefore, Itzcoatl's book burning is part of a mythological account rather than a historical one, which suggests that the tlatoani's decision had religious and ceremonial underpinnings that extended beyond shrewd political calculations. In particular, Battcock suggested that destruction by fire was a highly charged ritual of renewal and rebirth, a rite of passage by which the present realm was transcended to move towards a new era. Navarrete (1998) had previously interpreted the act of replacing old books and rewriting history, a process that implies destruction, as integral to knowledge production among Mesoamerican peoples. In the abovementioned passage by Sahagún, the disappearance of the old books enabled the creation of new books and new knowledge.

In the case of Itzcoatl, it is tempting to imagine that the first *cihuacoatl*, Tlacaelel, was among the tlatoques who decided to undertake the radical destruction and reconstruction of religious and historical knowledge in the early fourteenth century (León Portilla 1956, 244–245, Battcock 2012, 97–98). It was during the reigns of Itzcoatl and Motecuhzoma I, and the tenure of Tlacaelel I as *cihuacoatl*, that the Mexica expanded into the southern fresh waters of Lake Texcoco. As argued by Klein (1988), the incorporation of the cult of *Cihuacoatl* into the Mexica pantheon was the result of this war of conquest in a region where, as we have seen, the goddess was worshiped. The Mexica appropriated local land and resources by symbolically co-opting the local patron *Cihuacoatl*, turning this powerful but defeated goddess into one of the most important offices in the land. When the Codex Borbonicus was painted in the early post-conquest period, Motelchiuhtzin invoked the power of both the goddess *Cihuacoatl* and his *cihuacoatl* predecessors to rewrite and re-envision history once again, this time casting the Mexica defeat at the hands of the Spaniards as a meaningful new beginning for colonial Indigenous governorship.

The Codex Borgia shows clear traces of having survived a fire that burnt the first two pages (pp. 1–2, 74–76), albeit only partially. Although it is not possible to firmly establish when the manuscript was damaged, the earliest information provided by the Jesuit José Lino Fábrega in the eighteenth century alludes to the fact that the fire damage had occurred long before the manuscript arrived in Italy. According to others, including the Baron von Humboldt, the fire occurred later, when the manuscript was already in the possession of Italian collectors. Anders et al. (1993, 36–37) suggested that the Codex Borgia may have survived

one of the many bonfires ordered by the mendicant friars after the conquest; it can also be hypothesized that the manuscript had been partially burnt and destroyed as part of a ritual that took place in ancient times.

Following others (Anders and Jansen 1994, 18–20, Boone 2006), I have argued elsewhere (Frassani 2021) that the Codex Laud, a fine example from the Borgia Group, is a full and complete manuscript that was creatively painted and reinvented based on a faulty and damaged original. The Codex Laud is an iconographic outlier within the corpus of religious pictographic manuscripts because only a small proportion of its pictorials are cognate with others in the Borgia Group. The calendrics of the manuscript is also particularly problematic, with incomplete or faulty calendar counts appearing especially at the ends, where folded manuscripts are more easily damaged. While the

manuscript is not itself a fragment, the calendrical count suggests that traces of damage and loss were preserved when an incomplete original was copied.

On page 24, a sun disk is encircled in blood while its tutelary solar deity presides over its interior (Fig. 6.9). On one side, an eagle feeds on the blood from the sun; on the other side, Mictlantecuhtli performs human sacrifice while partially covering the sun and touching the god inside the disk with a dark fog that emanates from his mouth. This scene represents a solar eclipse and the seemingly opposite forces that characterize this celestial phenomenon (an eagle from the sky and death from the underworld). The page is framed on two opposite sides by an earth band in which the eyes and teeth of a crocodilian creature are visible throughout. Four gods (eight in total) are arranged along these two sides and face one another in pairs. Nowotny (1961, § 21a,



Figure 6.9. Solar eclipse and ritual performed by Mictlantecuhtli. Codex Laud, p. 24. Kingsborough 1831.

244–245) first noted that, calendrically, this is an instance of an incomplete 65×4 partition of the tonalpohualli. The day signs Crocodile, Death, Monkey, and Vulture are each followed by twenty-five dots, thus signaling four periods of twenty-six days each, for a total of 104 days. As Burland (1966, 22–27) noted, it would appear that this is a fragment of a sequence that should have included four more scenes on four different pages, for a total of two rounds of 260 days.

The initial section on the other side of the manuscript (pp. 25–32; Fig. 6.10) also represents an incomplete cycle. The count begins at the bottom right of page 25 with the day Crocodile, followed by Death, Monkey, Vulture, and Crocodile again, a count that repeats the calendrical partition from the last section on the other side of the manuscript. Overall, the count reaches a total of 180 days rather than 260. If, as Burland (1947) proposed, the last repeated day (such as Crocodile on the first page) indicates that the entire cycle must be repeated, this would add up to 360 days (i.e., one cycle of eighteen veintenas). Burland noted that this is the only depiction of the vague solar year

in pre-Hispanic religious manuscripts. It seems that the painter of the Codex Laud copied a faulty original that was missing several pages, plausibly creating a link with the previous section on the other side of the manuscript; however, the count is only hinted at and never actually completed (Burland 1966, Anders and Jansen 1994, 155–159). Iconographically, the section is dominated by the cult of Mictlantecuhtli and related activities.

The other end of the manuscript on pages 45 and 46 (Fig. 6.11) depicts rituals performed by two women—one young and one elderly. The elderly woman’s blood offering is channeled into the round, open jaws of a reptilian creature, which represents the earth; a coyote or dog and a turkey are shown alongside it. The two animals may be understood as either nahuales presiding over the ceremony or offerings. In the following scene, a young female officiant may be identified by the day name 1 Water (the dot is beside her, while the sign for water is in the water stream that she pours onto the burning offering) and the water goddess Chalchiuhtlicue (Boone 2007, 167).

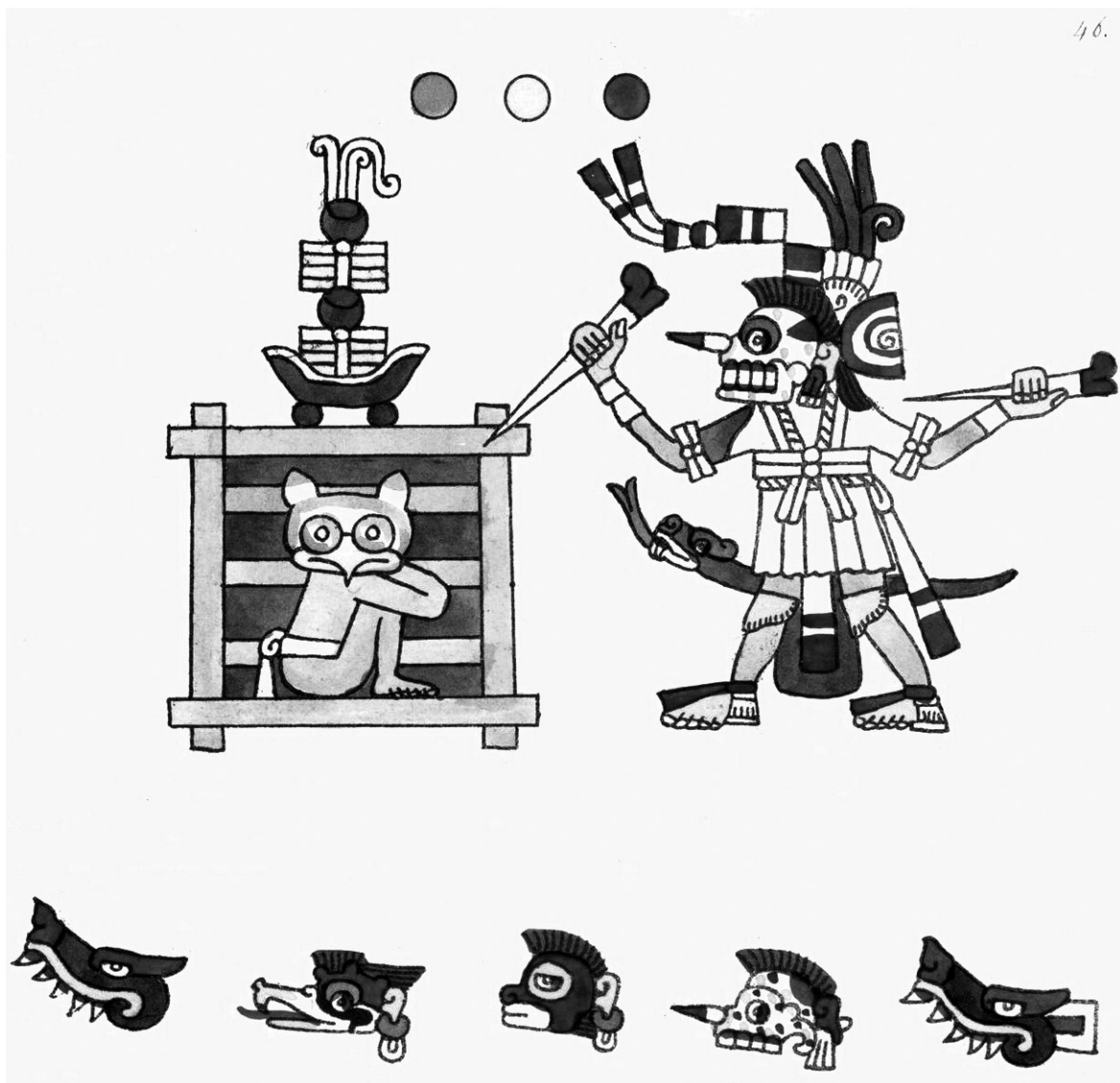


Figure 6.10. Ritual officiated by Mictlantecuhtli. Codex Laud, p. 25. Kingsborough 1831.

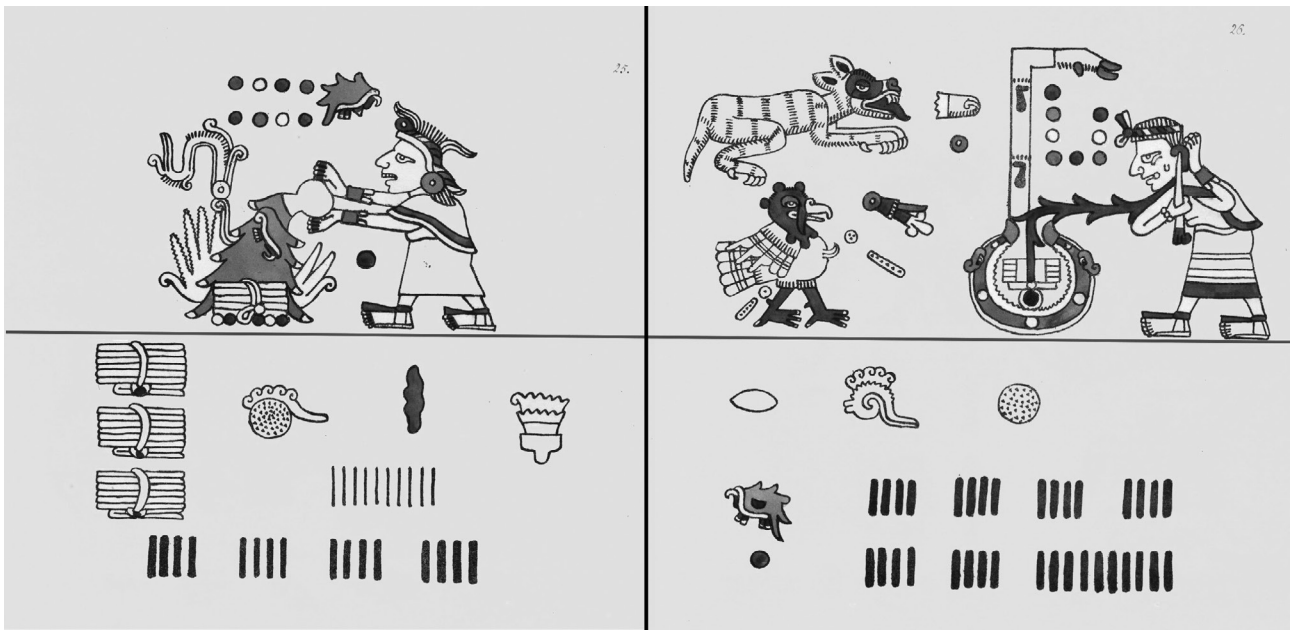


Figure 6.11. Two ritual offerings. Codex Laud, pp. 45–46. Kingsborough 1831.

The water offering dissolves into the sky as vapor in an upward motion, which contrasts with the blood offering being swallowed by the earth in the preceding ritual. Several unclear days are signaled on the two pages that indicate periods of twenty and eighty days. The day 1 Water can be found in the lower register of page 45, while day 8 Deer is connected to a path of footprints to the earth monster in the register above. Day 1 Flower may also be depicted next to the turkey; above it, a circle is placed near what seems to be a feather. On the next page, day 8 Water is signaled above, while day 1 Water reappears as the sign within the stream of water and the single dot next to the

young woman pouring the liquid. The continuous red line that divides both pages horizontally makes it difficult to understand whether they should be read as a whole (Boone 2007, 167) or, as Nowotny (1961, § 22) and Anders and Jansen (1994, 215–216) suggested, beginning at the bottom of page 45 and proceeding right to left, then left to right in the top register, where the two ritual scenes take place.

I propose that these two pages of the Codex Laud were copied and reinvented from a damaged part of a tonalamatl similar to that on pages 63–64 of the Codex Borgia (Fig. 6.12). Two consecutive trecenas, 1 Deer and 1 Flower

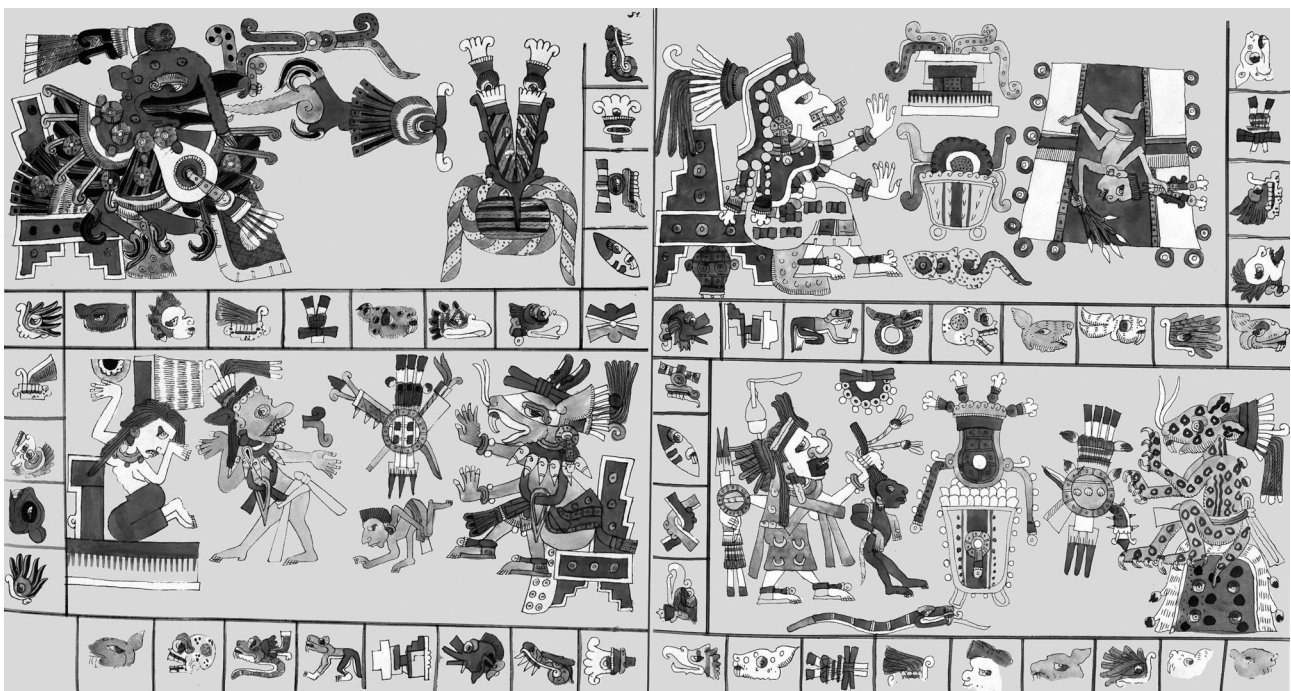


Figure 6.12. The trecenas 1 Deer and 1 Flower (bottom); 1 Wind and 1 Water (top). Codex Borgia, pp. 63–64. Kingsborough 1831.

in the bottom register (read from right to left) are paired with consecutive trecenas 1 Wind and 1 Water in the top register, which must be read from left to right. The four trecenas are part of a tonalamatl arranged into two rows of ten trecenas that proceed in opposite directions in the two registers. These four trecenas contain, among others, days 1 Flower, 8 Deer, 1 Water, and 8 Water, which are found in the pages of the Codex Laud. Iconographically, the turkey and the coyote on page 45 of the Codex Laud are also found on page 63 of the Codex Borgia. Chantico, patron of the trecena 1 Wind, is seated in the upper right corner of the Codex Borgia; underneath her seat, there is an upturned jar. The pouring of water on a fire results in smoke and “conflagration” (atltlachinolli in Nahuatl), which is an attribute of Chantico; it can be seen in her trecena as the smoke that emerges from the offering and temple in front of her. Indeed, the female officiant on page 46 of the Codex Laud performs the same ritual activity of pouring water to extinguish a fire. Finally, several small elements drawn in a white outline and the red serpentine shape near the numeral bars in the pages of the Codex Laud recall the shell trumpet in the trecena 1 Wind of the Codex Borgia.

This comparison of two pages from a tonalamatl and two ritual scenes from the Codex Laud reinforces the idea that the latter was copied from a faulty original, whose reinvention resulted in new and perhaps even unprecedented images. It is therefore unsurprising that the Codex Laud’s original pictorials often accompanied faulty and inconclusive calendrics. The complex but incomplete calendrics of the Codex Laud, paired with its unique iconography, suggests not only that the manuscript was creatively reconstructed from one or more damaged originals but also that the reinvented contents were explicitly and purposefully kept fragmented when painted anew, perhaps to indicate a previous destruction (and rebirth or survival) by fire or other means. What purpose did the manuscript serve? Battcock (2012, 108–109) noted an interesting detail in the description of funerary rituals in the Florentine Codex. After the dead were tightly wrapped in their bundles, paper vestments were placed in front of them:

And here is wherewith thou wilt pass where mountains come together; and here is wherewith thou wilt pass by the road which the serpent watcheth; and here is wherewith thou wilt pass by the blue lizard, the *xochitonal*; and here is wherewith thou wilt travel the eight deserts; and here is wherewith thou wilt cross the eight hills; here is wherewith thou wilt pass the place of the obsidian-bladed winds. (Sahagún 1950–1982, bk. 3, appendix, ch. 1, 43)

Strips of paper that depicted the places where the dead would travel before reaching their final destination were given to the dead as a guide to the underworld. Although Battcock suggested that these painted papers were burnt on a pyre, as the passage in Sahagún seems to suggest, several descriptions of funerary rituals state otherwise,

including those in the Codices Tudela (ff. 57–60) and Magliabechiano (ff. 65–69). Papers were given to the deceased, along with food and offerings that the dead would eventually give to Mictlantecuhtli at the entrance of the underworld. Following this evidence, it could be hypothesized that the Codex Laud may have been prepared as a guide for a deceased person on their path to the land of the dead. Mictlantecuhtli plays a predominant role on pages 25–31 of the manuscript, in a section where the calendrics follows a solar year pattern. In the same passage on the painted papers given to the deceased, Sahagún (1950–1982, bk. 3, appendix, ch. 1) stated that funerary rituals were celebrated eighty days (four veintenas) after a person’s death and again at the end of each year until the fourth year, after which it was understood that the deceased had reached their destination.

These are only a few reflections on the possible use of religious pictographic manuscripts beyond the dichotomy between history and divination. The three teomoxitli analyzed here—the Codices Borbonicus, Borgia, and Laud—are hardly representative of a corpus whose characteristics will always remain unknown because too many of them have not survived. The analysis took Mazatec ceremonies as an emic point of departure to go beyond our current understanding of pictographic images as a text whose meaning will finally become clear once its grammar and syntax have been understood. The approach that I advocate considers that astronomical and historical time, as well as other unpredictable contingencies, have shaped the patronage, purpose, design, and afterlife of pictographic manuscripts.

The remaining chapters are dedicated to the analysis of manuscripts produced in the colonial period to document Indigenous religion and customs. Their images rarely show the deep symbolism of the ancient books because they were conceived to reflect or illustrate a distorted idea of Mesoamerican religion that was alien and refractory to the complexity of the pictorial language. Still, ritual practice and history are invariably intertwined with divination as a testament to the impact of the invasion and conquest on Mesoamerican peoples and their books.

The Evolution of Early Colonial Pictography

This and the following concluding chapter analyze religious manuscripts produced after the conquest under the sponsorship and guidance of Spanish friars. The Codices Telleriano-Remensis, Tudela, and Magliabechiano and the Florentine Codex have been cited numerous times throughout this book in the interpretation of images and calendrics pertaining to the ancient religious manuscripts. In this chapter, the focus is on their creation in the mid- and late sixteenth century. Although the socio-cultural context of their production can be at least partially reconstructed, unlike the Codices Laud, Borgia, and even Borbonicus, the analysis of the manuscripts' contents, organization, and specific iconography offers the most important clues and insights into the motivations and concerns of the artists and patrons involved.

A comparative analysis of selected post-conquest sources reveals the ways in which Spaniards (primarily friars) and Nahuas participated and interacted in the representation of Mesoamerican religion after the establishment of the colonial order in New Spain. As discussed in the preceding chapters, the Codex Borbonicus is also a post-conquest document, but it was produced before the forceful Christianization of the Indigenous population. Once manuscript painting was co-opted and confined to the *conventos* and their schools, the documents began to serve a different purpose: illustrating Indigenous religion to a foreign and mostly hostile audience. In this respect, the most striking feature of the manuscripts discussed in this chapter is perhaps the novel juxtaposition and relationship between the alphabetic text and pictorial representations—the two poles of European and Mesoamerican understanding of local religion, respectively. I do not mean to argue that alphabetic and pictographic texts were separately produced or that they constitute parallel narratives, a view that has been expressed by authors such as Batalla Rosado (2002) and Magaloni Kerpel (2003a, 2003b) with respect to the Codex Tudela and the Florentine Codex, respectively. However, I attempt to highlight how the inherently different semiosis engendered by Mesoamerican pictography and European alphabetic writing—a topic discussed in the introduction of this book—came to interact and mutually influence each other once they were made to coexist within the same intellectual project. I have already remarked on a peculiar quality of the glosses in, for example, the Codex Borbonicus: they often provide information that is not given or apparent in the images but nonetheless corroborated by other colonial sources.

Two pairs of manuscripts are discussed in this chapter: the Codices Telleriano-Remensis and Vaticanus A, and

the Codices Tudela and Magliabechiano. The dating of these documents is not precisely known, but they were all compiled roughly between 1550 and 1580 and underwent different stages of production. All manuscripts primarily concern Nahua (Aztec) religion and comprise divinatory and ritual sections. The latter aspect is extensively represented by the *veintena* ceremonies. How did history—namely, the fateful events of the conquest and its aftermath—and a certain conception of history affect the way that both divination and ceremonies were represented during the colonial period? Post-conquest pictorial and alphabetic descriptions of Mesoamerican religion, such as those analyzed here, were produced under the supervision of the Spanish friars. Their agenda and purpose were wholly different from those of the creators of pre-Hispanic manuscripts. To understand how different ideas and conceptions operated within these texts, I compare the works as a whole and try to define the overall intellectual project before moving on to a comparison of specific details to account for their differences and possibly competing points of view.

7.1. The Codices Telleriano-Remensis and Vaticanus A

The Codex Telleriano-Remensis, a manuscript that details several aspects of Nahua religion and history, may have been drafted in the 1550s and 1560s (Quiñones Keber 1995, 129). The Codex Vaticanus A is largely a “clean” copy of the Codex Telleriano-Remensis, whose sections were partially rearranged, and the glosses were translated into Italian (Quiñones Keber 1995, 130). Painted and written on European paper, both works are also bound like Western books. Although the Codex Vaticanus A's pictorials are decidedly of inferior quality, the codex contains more sections. Its faithful reproduction of the Codex Telleriano-Remensis makes it particularly useful for reconstructing lost pages from the original. Jansen (1984) established that Dominican friar Pedro de los Ríos was responsible for the realization of both documents, which reflect a wide interest in Nahua culture. The manuscripts include sections on mythology, the calendar, divination, ceremonies, and history. With respect to general presentation and layout, Quiñones Keber (1995, 242–243) noted the tripartite arrangement of the Codex Telleriano-Remensis. The *tonalamatl*, which addresses the calendar and divination, can be found between the ceremonial cycle (the *veintenas*) and history (the *annals*). Thus, the gods are the focus of the first part of the manuscript, followed by human and individual destiny (the reading of the *tonalamatl*), and, lastly, the historical and transcendental projection of human and divine action through time. The same author (Quiñones Keber 1995, 242–243)

suggested that this may be an intrinsic pattern in Nahua or Mesoamerican cosmovision rather than an external and imposed European conception. However, no known or extant pre-Hispanic pictographic document includes historical accounts alongside ritual and divination.

The Codex Vaticanus A, which is seemingly a complete version of the Codex Telleriano-Remensis, has a slightly different structure. The manuscript begins with a cosmological and mythological narrative, then presents the tonalamatl, which is primarily concerned with personal fate. The festival cycle of the veintena follows, introduced by a written text on the fifty-two-year cycle in Italian. The manuscript proceeds with a presentation of religious and social customs before closing with the historical section of the annals. Table 1 summarizes and compares the two manuscripts' general layout.

Both documents posit a paradigmatic dichotomy between ceremonial life and divination. The poles of the dichotomy comprise religion and the gods on one side and fate, history, and people's ethnic identity on the other. In the preceding chapters, I argued that ritual and divination are inseparable aspects in the ancient books, which blend clues about ceremonies related to the solar year in the tonalamatl and the 260-day count. The Codex Vaticanus A further complements sections on Indigenous religion and history, which are presumably based at least partially on preexisting pictographic genres, with mythological and ethnographic texts and illustrations. This creates a framework for the understanding of Mesoamerican religion that seemingly contradicts the Indigenous pictographic semiosis, which relies on performance (i.e., ritual action and context) to function properly.

How did locality and timing inform the Codices Telleriano-Remensis and Vaticanus A's descriptions of Mesoamerican (mostly Nahua) life, religion, and history? Following Cline (1973, 11) and upon consideration of the multiple possible sources of the Codex Telleriano-Remensis, Quiñones Keber (1995, 127–128, 130–131) opted for two major places of production: Mexico City-Tenochtitlan and the area of Puebla and Cholula. On the one hand, the pictorials of the Codex Telleriano-Remensis were possibly drafted in the newly founded capital of New Spain or even Tlatelolco (Quiñones Keber 1995, 128) and created before the addition of the glosses,

which are particularly diverse. The different handwritten annotations in the Codex Telleriano-Remensis belong to the Dominican friar Pedro de los Ríos and other Nahua or *mestizo* authors and may have been added in Cholula or Puebla. The Codex Vaticanus A, on the other hand, was possibly created in Puebla in the early 1560s. The Italian glosses indicate that the manuscript was created with the intention of reaching an overseas audience, most likely the Vatican in Rome (Anders and Jansen 1996b, 30–31). The Italian texts in the Codex Vaticanus A have a finished and polished quality that is missing from the annotations in the Codex Telleriano-Remensis, whose glosses sometimes appear to be hastily written. Therefore, the two documents can be analyzed as part of a process of knowledge production regarding Nahua culture. The Codex Vaticanus A contains a much longer and more elaborate cosmological section, which may have reflected the interests of the friars and a foreign audience in general. It is possible that the Codex Telleriano-Remensis has always only comprised the three sections that, albeit fragmented, still exist today. Mythology became a device with which foreign actors repackaged and repurposed Mesoamerican pictographic manuscripts for an Italian audience.

7.1.1. *Quetzalcoatl as culture hero*

As a mythological culture hero, Quetzalcoatl is remarkably present in the two manuscripts' images and texts. The ways in which this important character is addressed, presented, and discussed shed light on differing conceptions of history, mythology, and religion within the codices. In Section 1.2 of the book, I discussed the importance of Quetzalcoatl as a diviner and visionary priest. I argued that his presence is often implicit in the pre-Hispanic codices because the diviner who read the manuscript and interpreted and activated its images took on the active role of Quetzalcoatl. Furthermore, I argued that the divine priest is represented in a conscious and self-referential manner in the ritual narrative in only a handful of instances. This is the case with the Quetzalcoatl priest in the central section of the Codex Borgia and Moteczuzoma II and with the Cihuacoatl priest in the veintena section of the Codex Borbonicus.

The books discussed in this chapter offer a third perspective on the role of the diviner—more specifically, his mythological character. This is perhaps the best-known aspect of Quetzalcoatl (López Austin 1989, Nicholson 2001), precisely because of its preponderance in written colonial sources. However, as argued in the following discussion, this may be a largely post-conquest distortion that was developed within the friars' intellectual circles and responded to their interests. I do not suggest that the concept of Quetzalcoatl as a cultural hero did not exist in pre-Hispanic Mesoamerica. Rather, I propose that, while Quetzalcoatl's powers once inhabited the present and were summoned during the very act of opening and interpreting pictographic images in the sacred books,

Table 1. Contents of the Codices Telleriano-Remensis and Vaticanus A

The Codex Telleriano-Remensis	The Codex Vaticanus A
1. Veintenas	1. Cosmology and mythology
2. Tonalpohualli/Tonalamatl	2. Tonalpohualli/Tonalamatl
3. Annals	3. Fifty-two-year cycle (text only)
	4. Veintenas
	5. Religious customs
	6. Annals

the creation of a mythological discourse about him was geared towards relegating those very visionary qualities to “another” time, the mythic past or the messianic future. In the colonial context, visionary powers were relegated to the demonic and diabolical and therefore could not be salvaged. The personification of the divine ceased to be narrated as an acceptable lived experience and became a tale of the past.

In the first section of the Codex Telleriano-Remensis, which is dedicated to the *veintena* ceremonies, Quetzalcoatl is mentioned only twice in the glosses: in relation to *Pachtontli*—a festival dedicated to Tezcatlipoca, his nemesis—in folio 3v and in relation to the festivities of Quecholli in folio 4v. As Quiñones Keber (1995, 255) noted, both annotations are attributed to Pedro de los Ríos (Hand 3) and refer to Quetzalcoatl, first his defeat at the hands of Tezcatlipoca and in the second instance as the Venus star. Both annotations are part of a larger and well-known narrative about the sinful demise of the great priest, and the tale of the culture hero, who was cast as a sort of Adam, betrays Christian overtones. It should also be noted that, in both cases, Pedro de los Ríos’ remarks do not provide more information about the depicted ceremonies—*Pachtontli* and *Quecholli*—but rather diverge from the topic.

Both the Codices Telleriano-Remensis and Vaticanus A reference Quetzalcoatl as the main priest of Cholula in pictorials and glosses in the *tonalamatl* section. As previously mentioned (Quiñones Keber 1995, 166, 168), while the pictorials display an iconography found in other pre-Hispanic manuscripts and monuments, the glosses extensively relate the myth of Quetzalcoatl in a rather Christianized manner, including references to Jesus and the Creation of Man. The annotation in folio 10r, which was made by Pedro de los Ríos, explains that the main celebration of 7 Reed during the *trecena* 1 Deer was held in Cholula every fifty-two years. The “Binding of the Years,” which occurs at the end of a fifty-two-year cycle, is the moment the *tonalpohualli* (cyclical time) and historical time meet, as the 260-day calendar reverts to its initial position within the solar year. Celebrating it every fifty-two years ensures that the day 7 Reed falls during the same time in the solar year (i.e., in relation to the season and movement of the sun) when the historical event (birth or death) took place.

For the *trecena* 1 Reed in folio 11v, the same annotator again states that “the other great feast” for Quetzalcoatl was held in Cholula, which is undoubtedly a reference to the first day of the *trecena*, also a calendrical name associated with the god and culture hero. At the same time, 7 Reed and 1 Reed are twenty days apart, which signals a period of celebration akin to a *veintena*. Accordingly, one annotator (Hand 1) refers to a fast that precedes the last four days of the *trecena* 1 Flower, before 1 Reed begins. This remark highlights the intrinsic ceremonial nature of the *tonalpohualli*, gods, and days, in contrast to Pedro de

los Ríos, who refers to the myth of Quetzalcoatl and a related celebration in Cholula.

Interestingly, the two authors (Hand 1 and Hand 3) consistently demonstrate considerably divergent points of view on the same dates and periods throughout the *tonalamatl*. Relying on a personal comment by Louise Burkhart, a scholar of Nahuatl language and documents (Quiñones Keber 1995, 326–327n24), Quiñones Keber (1995, 126) tentatively identified Hand 1 as an Indigenous intellectual due to certain recurring orthographic mistakes that indicated that Nahuatl may have been his first language (both written and spoken). It is interesting to see how annotations written by Hand 1 significantly differ from those of Pedro de los Ríos (Hand 3), among others. For Hand 1, important days are not identified in isolation; rather, they require preparation and anticipation, as if they exist on a continuum of perpetually counted time and cannot easily be extrapolated from it. Rather than encapsulating a mythical event, a tendency clearly exhibited by Pedro de los Ríos, this annotator suggests that time and memory are embedded in ritual and divinatory practice. Thus, dates indicate periods in which ritual activity intensifies rather than a fixed commemoration.

In folio 14v of the Codex Telleriano-Remensis (Fig. 7.1), which corresponds to the *trecena* 1 Serpent, Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl is referenced in the pictorials through his calendrical name 1 Reed, attached to the main character *Tlahuizcalpantecuhtli*, the Venus or morning star. Pedro de los Ríos (Hand 3) adds in writing that “when he went away or disappeared, he took this name” (Quiñones Keber 1995, 262). Once again, this annotation indicates that special attention is paid to mythology and lore. By contrast, Hand 1 follows his own interests by referring to the fasting days associated with the *trecena*, without any mention of Quetzalcoatl. The importance that Pedro de los Ríos attributed to the mythical tale of Topiltzin pervades the two works that he compiled. One wonders if this interest may have affected the production of the pictorials, including folio 14v. For example, cognate images in the same *trecenas* at the bottom of page 69 in the Codex Borgia and page 57 of the Codex Vaticanus B do not associate a name with the Venus star god, although the deity is recognizable by his white body and long yellow hair.

In folio 22r, which is associated with the *trecena* 1 Wind and the hearth goddess *Chantico*, Hand 1 simply states that *Chantico* was the patron of the thirteen days and does not comment on the accompanying image. Annotations by this author are often pleonastic and recursive and do not complement or explain the image. Pedro de los Ríos, however, discusses *Chantico* with the usual Christian and demonic overtones, an element that is more vigorously developed in the corresponding text in the Codex Vaticanus A (f. 31r). In it, the “first” priest Quetzalcoatl (as he is described in the gloss) faces *Chantico*, the patron of the *trecena*; once again, he is identified by one of his

	i	m	b	i	b

malo

este día del mundo en tiempo
malo que entró en el mundo
nueva de y como se llama en palo
lo piedra de detras que vendría
aparece la ytema mo marizallo

~~patecate~~ **tlauizcalpantecutli**
vuc cau

ola estrella venus

la primera claridad es
fue criado en el primer
años del diluvio
dizen que esta lumbre
o estrella fue criada
antes que sal

este tlauizcalpa tectitli
estrella venus es el que cal
vati ~~gubato~~ y ~~dispar~~
fue ympo en el mar tiempo
al qual de nula mas yero
dize que esta estrella
llamamos luzero o el alma
y aby lo pintan con una
una trasudja
cuando se fue
de saparecio
tomo su nombre



Aste Tlahuizcalpantecutli quiere decir señor de la mañana quando
amanece y lomes mo es señor de aquella claridad. quando quiere anoche
cer se te es señor de los tres dias ayunaban los quatro profetas
propiamēte la primera claridad
y aparecio en el mundo. / a qui era
~~el aguiño de los santos que era el cielo~~
lo de mas / propia uete de la libra sobre
las cascas o haz de la tierra

Figure 7.1. Lord 1 Reed as Tlahuizcalpantecutli, trecena 1 Serpent. Codex Telleriano-Remensis, f. 14v. Source: gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France.

calendrical names, 1 Reed (Fig. 7.2a). He is enclosed within a quadrangular temple structure glossed as “golden house” (*casa de oro*). The *Anales de Cuauhtitlan* (*Códice Chimalpopoca* 1945, par. 35, f. 5) and the Florentine Codex (Sahagún 1950–1982, bk. 3, ch. 3) describe the palaces or temples of Quetzalcoatl in Tula. Gold, green stones, corals, shells, turquoise, and feathers adorned these houses, indicating their sacredness and preciousness. The corresponding trecena on page 18 of the Codex Borbonicus (Fig. 7.2b) also represents a temple enclosure; in it, a standing priest holds an incense bag in one hand and an instrument of sacrifice in the other, in the same guise as Lord 1 Reed in the Codex Telleriano-Remensis. However, in this case, day 1 Crocodile (the first day of the calendar) is depicted near the priest and the sacred house, although it is not directly associated with them. The sign can also be read as the calendrical name of Cipactonal (Day Crocodile), an ancestral diviner credited with the invention of the calendar, as discussed in Chapter 1 (Anders et al. 1991, 172). Finally, the corresponding image at the top of page 63 in the Codex Borgia (Fig. 7.2c) consists of a naked priest falling down a yellow or golden opening while holding sacrificial instruments. In mantic terms, the image could refer to the priest’s visionary travel (as seen in the central pages of the same codex, Fig. 1.8, 4.13, 4.15, 4.16, 4.19) or failure to keep up with penitential duties (Anders et al. 1993, 343). The related evidence from these pictorials suggests that, in the later manuscript (i.e., the Codex Telleriano-Remensis), the written story of Quetzalcoatl was Christianized, perhaps through the influence of Pedro de los Ríos, but upon a preexisting set of ideas related to the office of priesthood. In the colonial manuscript, the date that refers to the invention of the calendar (1 Crocodile) transforms into Quetzalcoatl’s name (1 Reed). The challenges and difficulties inherent in priestly functions are described as a result of sin, a fate assigned to Chantico in the gloss in folio 21v. As discussed in Section 5.2, although 1 Reed is a day that has been associated with Quetzalcoatl since ancient times, it may have taken on new symbolic overtones after the conquest, when it became associated with Cortés’ arrival.

Finally, in the trecena 1 Dog, Quetzalcoatl is mentioned in relation to the accompanying image in both the Codices Telleriano-Remensis (f. 18r) and Vaticanus A (ff. 26–27). The first page of the trecena, which is missing in the Codex Telleriano-Remensis, depicts the patron Xipe Totec (Our Lord the Flayed One). The corresponding Italian gloss in the Codex Vaticanus A (f. 26v) refers to Xipe Totec as a priestly companion to Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl, a myth that is only found in the first section of this manuscript. The text also refers to the fact that 4 Reed, the fourth day of the trecena, was the day on which the rulers were enthroned, following three days of fasting beginning on day 1 Dog. Indeed, 4 Reed is indicated as the day of accession rituals in the Florentine Codex (Sahagún 1950–1982, bk. 4, ch. 25), as discussed in Section 5.1. On the opposite page, an emerald-green feathered serpent in the act of devouring a man faces Xipe Totec (Fig. 7.3), an image repeated in all other trecena depictions (the Codices Borgia, Vaticanus B, Borbonicus). Despite the many sculptural representations of Quetzalcoatl as a mythical feathered serpent, only this trecena portrays it in the act of devouring a human being. In the Codex Telleriano-Remensis, Pedro de los Ríos glosses the image with a terrifying explanation: “To express that it is the feast of fear, they depict this dragon devouring a man” (Quiñones Keber 1995, 265). The friar may be referring to the celebration of Xipe Totec, which is presumably mentioned in the first half of the trecena. However, he may also be referring to coronation rituals and related fasting. As suggested by Quiñones Keber (1995, 181), the act of disappearing into the serpent may be a variation on the theme of emerging from it, which is common in imagery of the plumed serpent. The association of days or years Reed with different numerals (most commonly 1, 4, or 7) is frequently found in pre-Hispanic depictions of Quetzalcoatl in Aztec sculpture in relation to penitential rituals performed by royal dignitaries to invoke and even embody Quetzalcoatl’s identity and powers (e.g., Hackmack Box or the carved relief in the Cerro de la Malinche in Tula, Hidalgo). In another section of the Codex Vaticanus A (f. 7v), a temple called Cauacalco (House of the Serpent) is glossed as “house of fear” (*casa del temor*).



Figure 7.2. Quetzalcoatl god or priest in the temple, trecena 1 Wind. a. Codex Borgia, p. 63. Kingsborough 1831. b. Codex Borbonicus, p. 18. Loubat 1899. c. Codex Telleriano-Remensis, f. 22r. Loubat 1901.

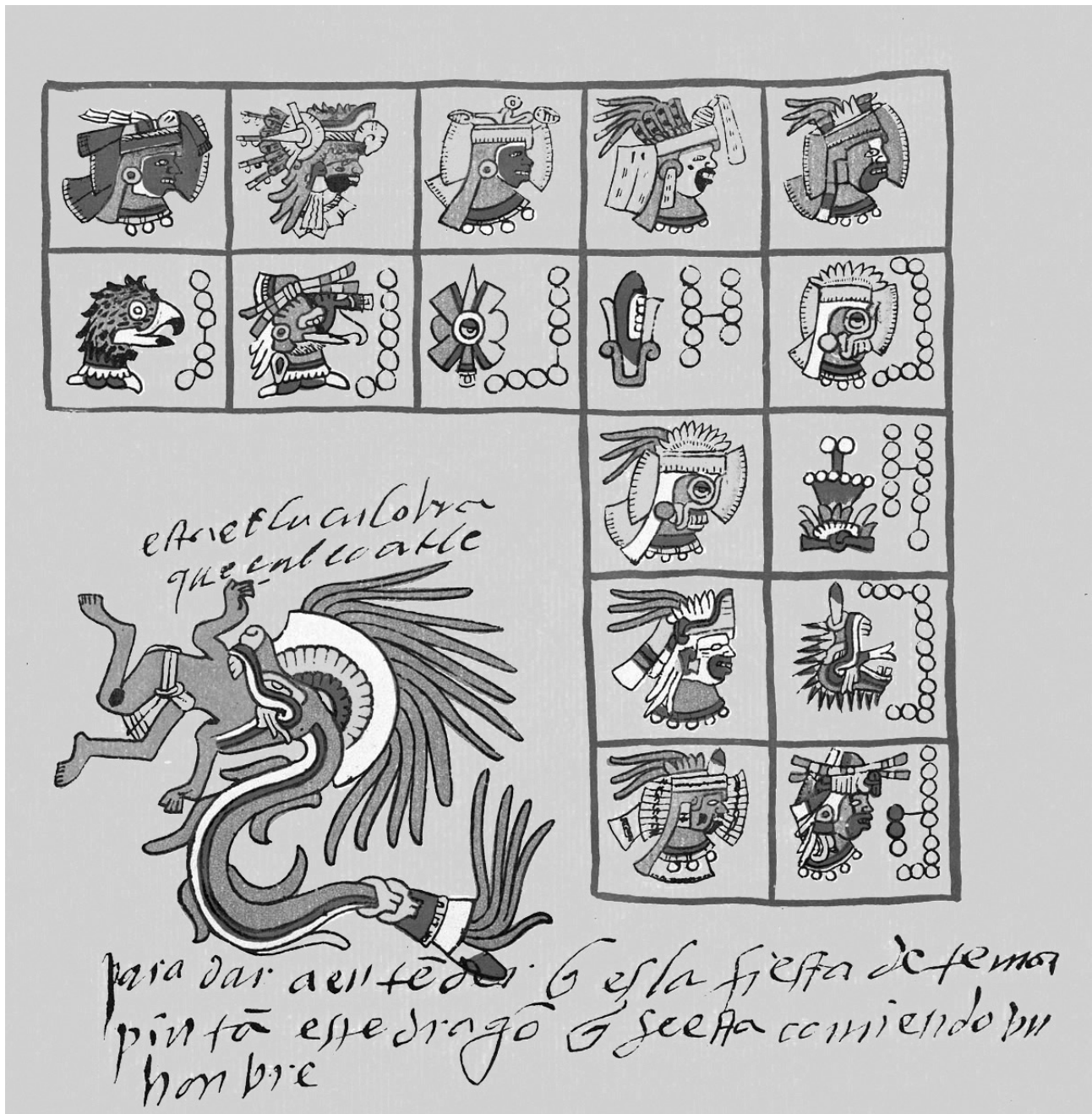


Figure 7.3. Feathered serpent, trecena 1 Dog. Codex Telleriano-Remensis, f. 18r. Loubat 1901.

According to the accompanying text, in one of the temples Quetzalcoatl and his followers performed penance in Tula (also identified sometimes as Chollan). The name “house of fear” derived from the attitude required when entering the temple. People kept their gaze on the ground and never looked up while inside. In the image, the temple’s roof is decorated with green feathers, and a feathered serpent can be seen disappearing into the house, which somewhat mimics the disappearance of the naked man into the maws of the serpent in folio 18r.

7.1.2. Cosmology and the tonalpohualli

The first section of Vaticanus A (ff. 1–10) is not found in the Codex Telleriano-Remensis and was perhaps never

part of it. It addresses Indigenous cosmogony, creation, and the life and deeds of the legendary Quetzalcoatl. As Quiñones Keber (1996) previously remarked, there seems to be a strong Nahua (but perhaps not Mexica) influence in this section, which suggests that the pictorials were produced in the region of Cholula and southern Puebla, where Pedro de los Ríos worked in the 1550s and 1560s. The depiction of Nahua cosmology in folios 4v–7r is worth close calendrical and iconographic scrutiny. It relates the four eras (Four Suns), with corresponding deities and events that led to their destruction. Although narratives related to different eras of creation and destruction are common in Mesoamerican mythology, the version found in this manuscript is unique. The first era ended with flooding, and it is aptly associated with

Chalchiuhtlicue, the Nuhua goddess of water. While Mexica monuments refer to this era as 4 Water (e.g., the famous Calendar Stone), the day sign associated with this era in the Codex Vaticanus A (f. 4v) is 10 Water (Fig. 7.4). This day, which belongs to the fourth trecena of the tonalpohualli (1 Flower), is recorded as the first day of a four-day fasting period in both the Codex Vaticanus A (f. 16v) and the Codex Telleriano-Remensis (f. 10v). The observance is related to the celebration of 1 Reed, the first day of the following trecena, which is presided over by Chalchiuhtlicue, the water goddess responsible for a deluge that destroyed the world (Codex Telleriano-Remensis, f. 11v). According to the *Leyenda de los Soles* (*Códice Chimalpopoca* 1945, f. 1–2), the era of 4 Water was destroyed in the year 1 Reed. In the case of the Codex Telleriano-Remensis, all the glosses mentioned are from Hand 1, possibly a Nuhua annotator, whose comments favored the description of ceremonial aspects over divinatory or even mythological ones. In this respect, while day 10 Water should be interpreted as a mythological date in the cosmological section of the Codex Vaticanus A, it has a ceremonial value in the tonalamatl in both the Codices Vaticanus A and

Telleriano-Remensis. It is possible that the painter of the Codex Vaticanus A placed importance on the day Water that immediately precedes day 1 Reed, which was associated with destruction by flooding. Thus, calendrical considerations inherent in timekeeping and the tonalpohualli may have played a role in the presentation of cosmological information.

The second era (f. 5v; Fig. 7.5), is presided over by the god of wind, Ehecatl, who is depicted falling downwards in the guise of a green feathered serpent. The head of the serpent is replaced by a solar disk from which the wind god himself emerges. Rather than the most commonly depicted day 4 Wind, the day 1 Dog is signaled, which is the first day of the fourteenth trecena, as previously discussed; its mantic image includes a green feathered serpent devouring a man. The fourth day of the trecena, 4 Reed, was reserved for the enthronement of rulers. The two images—a naked man entering a feathered serpent and a sun god emerging from it—may be viewed as the stages of a succession ceremony in which the prospective ruler must undergo a rite of passage (vision quest) to acquire his title.

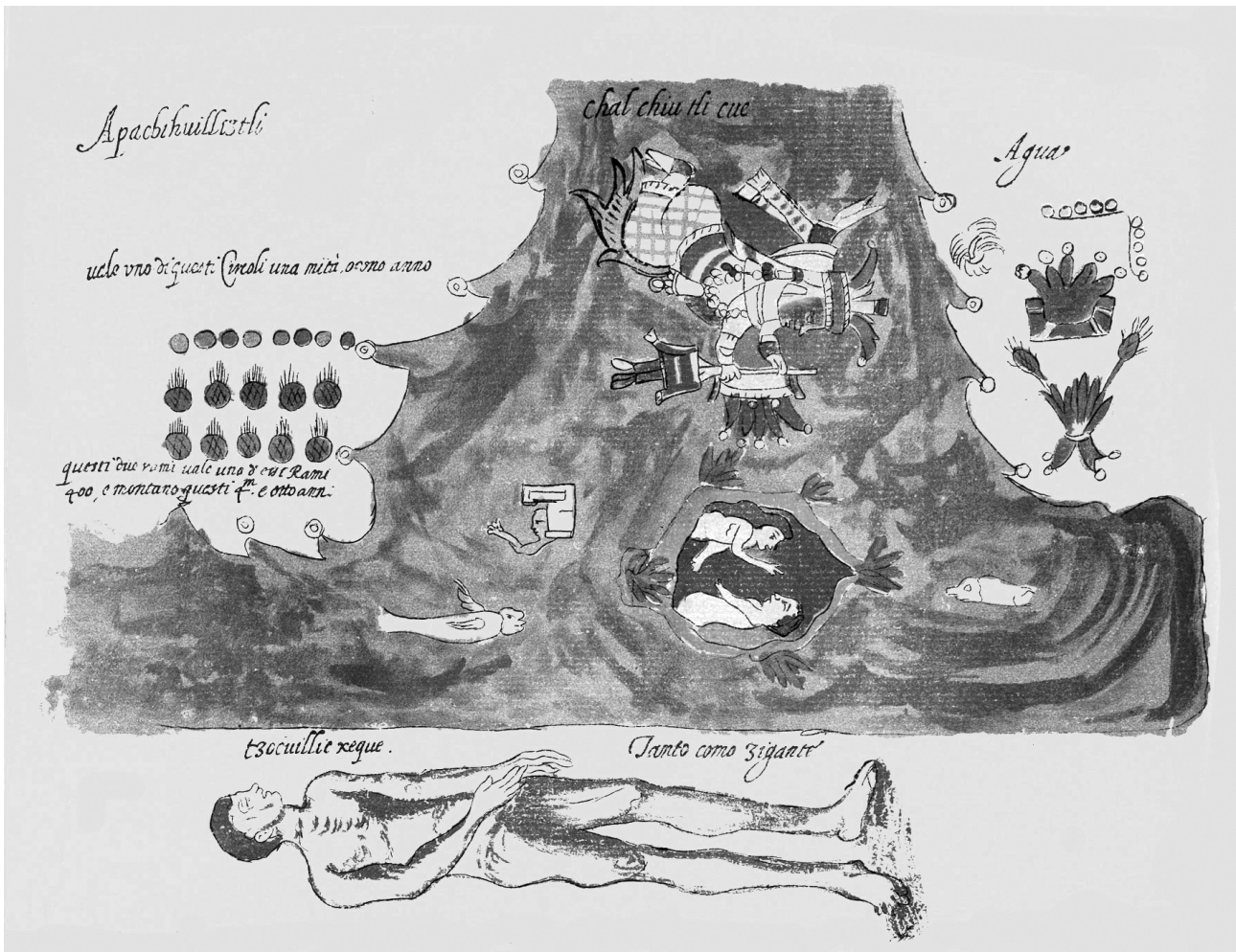


Figure 7.4. End of the first Sun. Codex Vaticanus A, f. 4v. Loubat 1900.

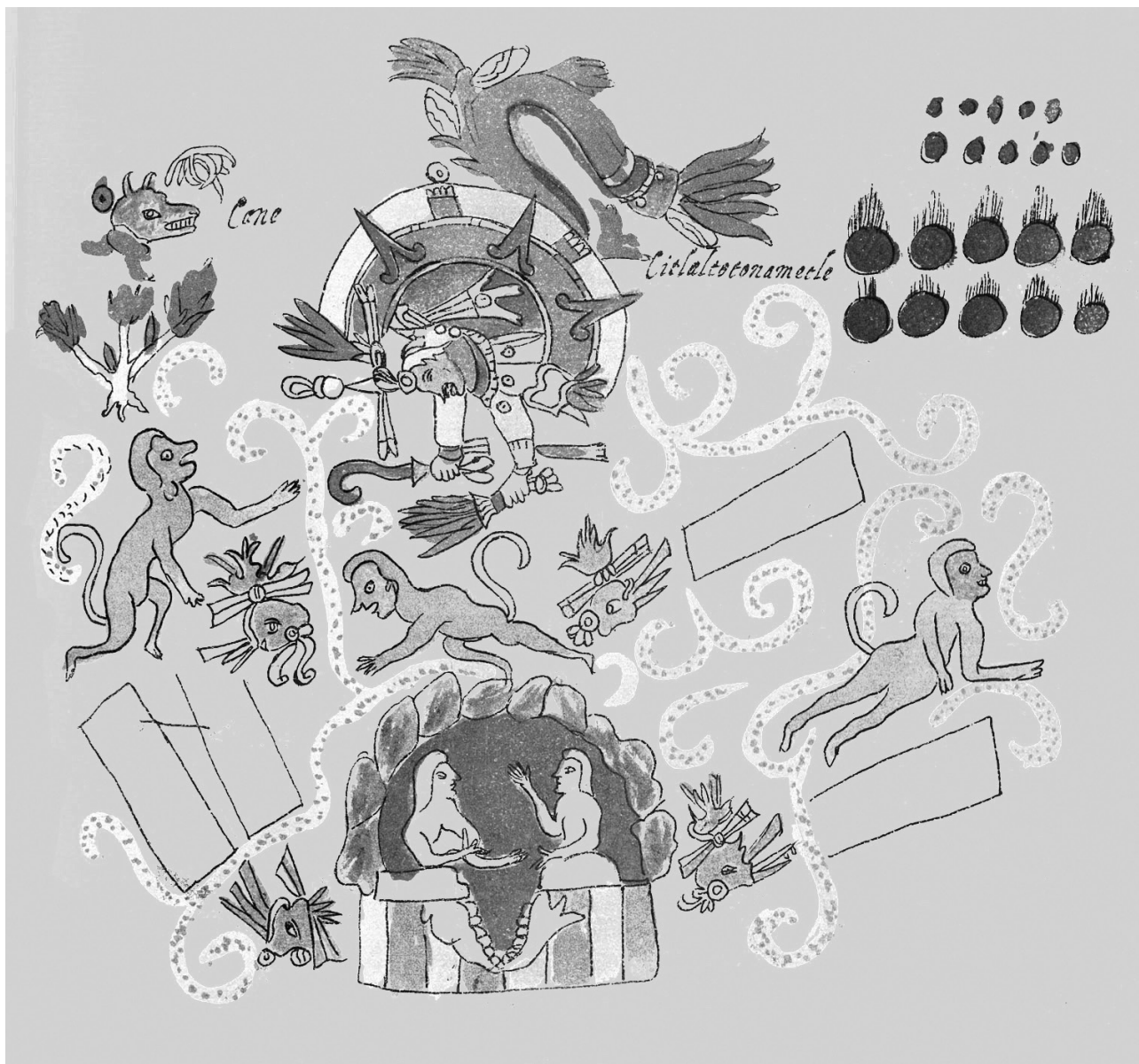


Figure 7.5. End of the second Sun. Codex Vaticanus A, f. 5v. Loubat 1900.

The relationship between the second era and the trecena 1 Dog is explained in the Italian text as follows:

The deluge came on the day that they call 1 Dog, which is in their calendar, because they relied on these events to make those pictures that they use for every day of the month and year, as we shall see ... (*venne questo diluvio in quel giorno ch'essi dicono, uno cane, che se ritrova nel suo calendario, perché de simili accidenti pigliorno occasione di fare quelle figure, che servissero à tutti li giorni del mese et dell'anno, come dopo si vedrà ...*). (Translation by author)

The annotator then makes a clear connection between cosmology and the calendar. Although the latter derived from the former in his mind, cosmological significance in this case (and many others) may have been based on calendrical patterns and established ceremonial behavior.

The third era, presided over by the fire god Xiuhtecuhtli, is associated with the day 9 Movement and was destroyed by fire, according to the text in folio 6r. This day, which belongs to the trecena 1 Water, falls five days before 1 Wind, which is tied to the destruction of the world by fire in the *Leyenda de los Soles* (*Código Chimalpopoca* 1945, f. 1–2). The annotators of both the Codices Telleriano-Remensis (f. 21v) and Vaticanus A (f. 30v) note this aspect in relation to the patron of the trecena, Chantico, the hearth goddess and female equivalent of Xiuhtecuhtli, who is responsible for the destruction depicted in the Codex Vaticanus A (f. 6r; Anders and Jansen 1996b, 180). It is possible that, even in this instance, the day signaled is a day of preparation and anticipation for the upcoming destruction. Finally, no date is mentioned for the fourth and final era associated with the flower goddess Xochiquetzal in folio 7r. This absence can be attributed to the fact that, according to the Codex Vaticanus A, this was the current era, which began

when Quetzalcoatl was born of Xochiquetzal in Cholula. Unlike central Mexican sources, such as the *Leyenda de los Soles* (*Códice Chimalpopoca* 1945, f. 3), only four eras (or Suns) are narrated in the Codex Vaticanus A, as discussed by Quiñones Keber (1996).

The proposed interpretation of cosmological dates based on their importance as markers of ceremonial activities in the tonalpohualli undermines many assumptions regarding fixed mythological narratives. Ceremonial behavior, historical or circumstantial occasions, and even specific localities are important in determining the iconography and outlook of pictographic images. In this respect, some specific information in a section that relates the life and deeds of Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl in the Codex Vaticanus A ties the manuscript to the southern Puebla region, near Huautla and the Mazateca. In folios 5r and 10v, it is said that Quetzalcoatl's followers included Xelhua, who is credited with the construction of the Great Pyramid of Cholula, the Tlachihualtepetl. In Section 3.4, Xelhua was mentioned as the leader of the Nonoalca, a Nahuatl group that settled in modern-day southern Puebla and founded the towns of Tehuacán, Teotitlán, and Coxcatlán. Archaeological data indicates that this region is one of the possible places of origin for some of the ancient religious manuscripts. Furthermore, in folio 9v, the departure of Quetzalcoatl is specifically tied to Venus and its periodic disappearance into the sun, another observation that ties the Codex Vaticanus A to southern Puebla, a region renowned for its skywatchers. Both details seem to confirm that the Codex Vaticanus A was produced based on specific and regional information that was eventually turned into a more general mythological tale. In another section of the Codex Vaticanus A (ff. 60v–61r), the annotators explicitly state that some information on traditional clothing was gathered in the southern regions of the Mixteca and Zapoteca in Oaxaca.

Calendrics, divination, and ceremony merge in a very interesting last aspect of the trecena 1 Flower in the Codex Telleriano-Remensis. In folio 10v, Pedro de los Ríos (Hand 3) writes, “they said [there was] an omen in the year of one rabbit [1 Rabbit], on the day one rose [1 Flower], that a rose blossomed in the earth and then withered” (Quiñones Keber 1995, 259). This information is reiterated on the following page, where the friar specifies that, every eight years, there was an eight-day fast before the day 1 Flower that was observed by eating only “bread [presumably tortillas] and water” (Codex Telleriano-Remensis, f. 11r). The friar further stated that “in this year of 1562 on July 23 the feast was celebrated” (f. 11r). Later, on one of the last and hastily compiled pages in the annals in folio 49r, he again writes that the the feast was held in the year 5 Rabbit and on the day 1 Flower (July 23, 1562). In this instance, Pedro de los Ríos attaches to the commemoration of 1 Flower (Ce Xochitl) an omen of a blossoming flower from the Huasteca, a Nahuatl-speaking region towards the Gulf Coast, in the modern state of Veracruz. While this information is internally coherent, it does not align with Caso's chronology, according to which 1562 was the

year 5 Rabbit but July 23 was 5 Rain. Furthermore, in the veintena section of the same manuscript (f. 1v), the feast of Atamalqualiztli, as the fasting of bread and water was known among the Nahuas, is said to have occurred in Tenochtitlan during the year 2 Flint (1520), concurrent with the veintena of Hueytecuilhuitl. In Caso's chronology, July 23 was 5 Rain in the year 2 Flint, during the veintena of Hueytecuilhuitl. If Atamalqualiztli was celebrated every eight years, an observation also found in the Sahaguntine sources, then it would always fall in the same yearbearer: either Rabbit or Flint, but not both. Finally, day 1 Flower may refer more to the floral symbolism of the day sign in relation to the blossoming of a flower on that day than any calendrical calculation. One also wonders if Pedro de los Ríos relied on a calendar in use in the Huasteca that was different from the more widely accepted one in central Mexico.

7.2. The Codices Tudela and Magliabechiano

The case of the two manuscripts titled after their European owners, the Spanish Tudela and the Italian Magliabecchi, is similar to that of the Codices Telleriano-Remensis and Vaticanus A in that the Codex Magliabechiano is a copy of the Codex Tudela, as Batalla Rosado (2002, ch. 6) demonstrated. The former features a clean look and juxtapositions between written texts and painted images. By contrast, frequent annotations and redactions are found around images in the latter. The Codex Magliabechiano was predominantly glossed by a single hand; a second scribe added only a few annotations (Boone 1983, 28). Thus, this is another instance in which a comparison of two manuscripts clarifies the process of knowledge production about “ancient” (mostly Nahuatl) religion and customs in a colonial context. Rather than searching for an original or a presumably unadulterated Mesoamerican god, myth, ritual, or ceremony, the present discussion is mainly concerned with a critical combined reading of the colonial sources themselves. The intellectual demands and ideological aims of the friars must be addressed to understand their impact on the Indigenous (again, mostly Nahuatl) presentation of Mesoamerican religion primarily shown in the pictorials.

The two manuscripts differ from the Codices Telleriano-Remensis and Vaticanus A in that greater attention is given to the written explanation of rituals and ceremonies. Texts and glosses were drafted by a single author in the Codex Tudela, according to Batalla Rosado (2002, 79–88). He was also responsible for the long text found at the end of the manuscript (ff. 90–125), which focuses on explaining the tonalpohualli. Batalla believes that the annotator of the manuscript, who remains anonymous, was not a priest or a friar given his generally descriptive and neutral stance with respect to the rituals that he described. Furthermore, compared to the two previously discussed colonial manuscripts, mythology appears to have been of no interest to the annotator, who maintained a close adherence to the images rather than complementing them with narrative tales. Remarkably, as seen below, divination

was also not a main concern. Overall, the authors of the Codices Tudela and Magliabechiano demonstrated a very different approach from those of the Codices Telleriano-Remensis and Vaticanus A, in which the representation and description of religious or ceremonial customs is either limited or entirely absent. It is possible that the lay nature of the Codex Tudela’s commission dictated not only the topics treated but also their portrayal in the manuscript. The descriptive approach rarely attempts to interpret the meaning “behind the image”—that is, its divinatory or mythological significance.

The two manuscripts contain the same sections but in a different order. Although some parts of the Codex Tudela were reordered at a later date, according to Batalla (2002, 16–22, 48–50), their original placement differed from what was eventually adopted in the Codex Magliabechiano. In both cases, the tonalpohualli is located right before the description of the veintena cycle and after the initial section on ritual cloaks. After the veintena section, there is a list and description of different gods, including, most notably, the gods of pulque (the fermented beverage obtained from agave) and different rituals. Finally, the Codex Tudela closes with a depiction of the years of the solar calendar (xiuhmolpilli).

Table 2 provides a brief comparison of the changes that occurred between the Codices Tudela and Magliabechiano. In the Codex Tudela the section on the counting of the years (xiuhmolpilli) is found at the end of the book, while in the Codex Magliabechiano it was moved right after the one on the tonalpohualli. In the process, the Codex Magliabechiano’s author opted to separate the calendars and the ceremonies, which are kept more closely related in the Codex Tudela.

7.2.1. Ritual cloaks

According to the reconstruction proposed by Batalla, the depiction of ritual cloaks (*mantas rituales* in Spanish) comprised the first chapter in the original arrangement of the Codex Tudela; they are also the topic of the first section of the Codex Magliabechiano. There are only a few differences in the images of this section in the two manuscripts. Each page depicts either six (the Codex Tudela) or four cloaks (the Codex Magliabechiano), which are painted as horizontal rectangles of the same size. Cloaks, which are known in Nahuatl as *tilmatli*

(sing.), are found in colonial manuscripts as prized tribute items (Codex Mendoza, ff. 17v–56v) and summarily described as the attire of lords in Primeros Memoriales (ff. 55v–56r) and the Florentine Codex (Sahagún 1950–1982, bk. 8, ch. 8–9). As remarked by Seler (1902, 509–619), there are many iconographic commonalities between representations of the cloaks in the two codices under discussion and the Nahuatl terminology of the Sahaguntine sources. Anders and Jansen (1996a, 141–142, 156) suggested a systematic comparison of the cloaks’ outstanding iconographic features with mantic symbols in the trecenas of the Codex Borbonicus. In the Codices Tudela and Magliabechiano, the cloaks are placed before the tonalpohualli. As we shall briefly see, the depiction of the tonalpohualli in these manuscripts differs from all other extant representations of the 260-day calendar. Its close proximity to the ritual mantles may indicate a different aspect of the divinatory calendar that is unique to these two sources. Brief texts introduce the series of cloaks and provide clues about their significance and even placement in the manuscripts:

These are the makes of the mantles dedicated to the demons and each lord and nobleman used to wear them for the festivals and keep them in remembrance of the demons to which they were dedicated. (*estas son hechuras de mantas dedicadas a los demonios y cada uno de los señores y principales se las vestian en las fiestas y las tenyan en memoria de los demonios a quien eran dedicadas*; Codex Tudela, f. 85v; Batalla Rosado 2002, 426, translation by author)

These figures and the following through the eighth folio are the mantles or garments that the Indians used in the festivals, which will be named later with all the solemn days of these festivals, just as our festivals have *octavarios*. (Codex Magliabechiano, f. 2v; Boone 1983, 171)

The texts clarify that the mantles were used in the ceremonies of the veintenas discussed later in the books. The text from the Codex Tudela further states that the cloaks were specifically worn for these occasions and then kept to commemorate the celebrations. The Codex Magliabechiano adds that each festival was celebrated in specific periods. In Catholic liturgy, *octavas* are the eight days of observance for a festivity—most commonly Corpus Christi, but also Holy Week. The annotations suggest both performative and commemorative uses for the mantles. I believe that this is how their presence at the beginning of the books should be understood. The act of wearing a cloak and other paraphernalia means impersonating and becoming a god. Their representation is more than an iconographic clue that was intended to aid the identification of the gods in the following section. Rather, it is a statement on the transformative and creative quality of performance and the role that cloaks and other objects play in it. The mantles with the jaguar spots and other black stains, probably hule (liquid rubber), in folios 86r, 86v, and 87v of the Codex Tudela (Fig. 7.6) and folios

Table 2. Contents of Codices Tudela and Magliabechiano

The Codex Tudela*	The Codex Magliabechiano
1. Ritual cloaks	1. Ritual cloaks
2. Tonalpohualli	2. Tonalpohualli
3. Veintenas	3. Xiuhmolpilli
4. Gods and rituals	4. Veintenas
5. Xiuhmolpilli	5. Gods and rituals

*Original arrangement according to Batalla Rosado (2002).

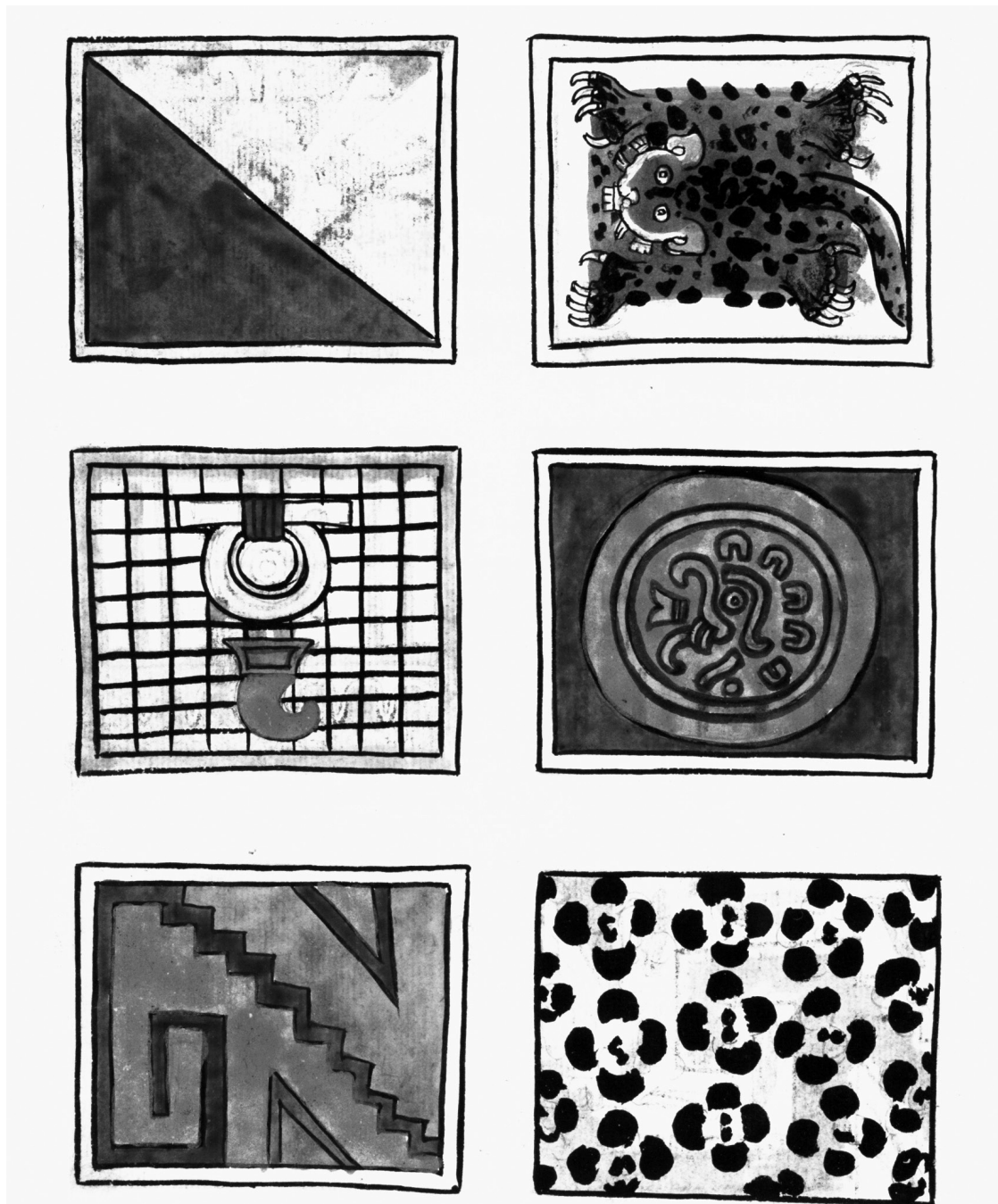


Figure 7.6. Ritual cloaks. Codex Tudela, f. 87v. Museo de América, Madrid.

4r, 5r, and 6r of the Codex Magliabechiano recall María Sabina’s vivid description of her ability to transform into a jaguar by recognizing the spots left by the charcoal on her huipil (discussed in Section 4.1). Furthermore, the Codex Magliabechiano’s glosses in this section repeatedly mention Macuilxochitl, 5 Flower, the Mesoamerican god of feasting, and Ometochtli, 2 Rabbit, the god of pulque and altered states—a topic that I elaborate on below. They also mention Quetzalcoatl and Tezcatlipoca, the two major gods related to visionary powers.

Finally, one mantle occupies an entire page in folio 83v of the Codex Tudela and folio 7r of the Codex Magliabechiano (Fig. 7.7). The image, which was left uncolored in the

Codex Tudela, represents a turkey impaled on a stick and diagonally positioned on the page/mantle. Fire bursts from the lower portion of the page, while scattered or flying obsidian flints occupy the top part of the image. The gloss in the Codex Tudela explains that this was how turkeys were roasted, while the one in the Codex Magliabechiano states that this is the cloak of the devil’s fire (*manta del fuego del diablo*). The turkey is tied to the reed with white ropes decorated with cotton balls and feathers, an iconographic element usually associated with sacrificial victims. The turkey is a manifestation of Tezcatlipoca, which may also be referenced by the obsidian flints. This is the last mantle depicted in the Codex Tudela, but it remains unclear why the section closes with this imposing

manta del fuego del diablo.



7

Figure 7.7. Large ritual cloak. Codex Magliabechiano, f. 7r. Florence, Biblioteca nazionale centrale, Banco Rari, 232.

but unfinished depiction. By contrast, the tlacuilo of the Codex Magliabechiano continues with more illustrations of cloaks and a different arrangement (Fig. 7.8). On the reverse side of the turkey mantle (f. 7v), there are four mantles decorated with a different representation or symbol: fire, rabbit, wind, and water. The first three are also found in the Codex Tudela, but they are placed alongside another cloak with a solar disk. All these symbols (fire, rabbit, wind, water, and the sun) relate to the Suns (i.e., successive creations) known through distinct colonial sources, such as the Codex Vaticanus A, previously discussed. In this context, the large mantle with the turkey burnt by fire can be understood as a reference to the third Sun (4 Rain), which, according to most sources, ended in a rain of fire and whose inhabitants were turned into turkeys (Moreno de los Arcos 1967, 191). If these scattered references are correct, the cloaks would have, in addition to the previously mentioned performative function, a very different meaning or purpose, indicating a rather implicit cosmological narrative.

The depiction of mantles as ritual objects and cosmological symbols suggests a tension between the performative and transformative aspects of clothing and the intention

to convey a mythical narrative. As previously argued, these two divergent approaches to the representation of Mesoamerican religion may derive from different agendas in the production of the manuscripts. On the one hand, the friars were more interested in explanatory statements, such as myths and mantic readings; on the other hand, Indigenous artists and the pictographic medium itself were more concerned with the pragmatics of ritual and the correspondences suggested by the inner workings of the tonalpohualli. In other words, explicit statements on mythology and cosmology reflected the needs of a readership that was unfamiliar with Mesoamerican religion and thus required a clear diagrammatic explanation of it. Conversely, as a quintessential Mesoamerican form of expression, pictography was not intended to be illustrative but rather useful in a ceremonial context. Their serviceability ultimately made them pliable to reworking and interpretation.

Although it is ultimately impossible to know how the people involved in the production of the manuscripts interacted with and mutually influenced one another, it is important to bear in mind that the Indigenous intellectuals and artists who contributed to them were born after the

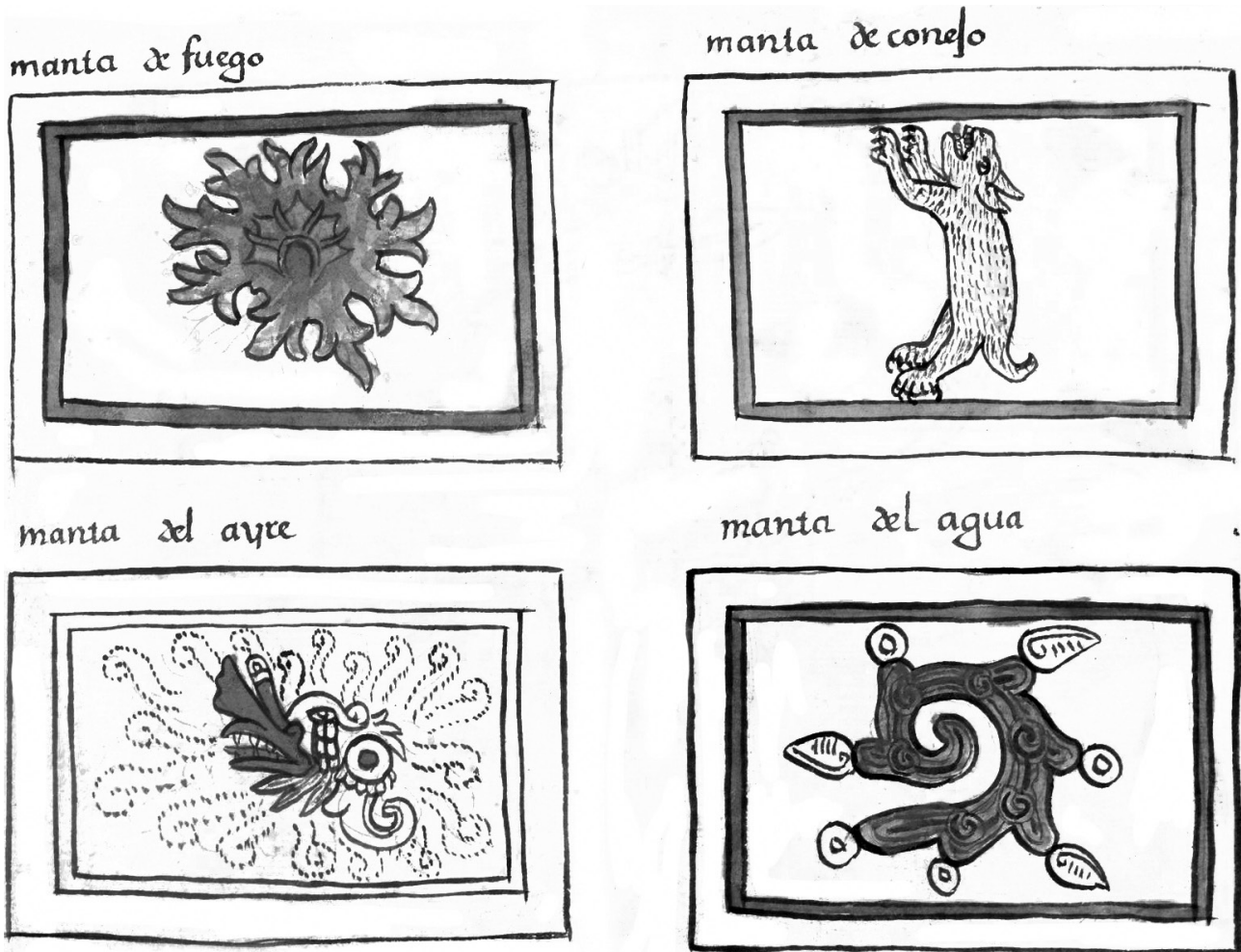


Figure 7.8. Ritual cloaks. Codex Magliabechiano, f. 7v. Florence, Biblioteca nazionale centrale, Banco Rari, 232.

conquest and most likely had been educated by the same friars with whom they eventually collaborated. This aspect of Indigenous manuscript production is investigated at greater length in the next chapter dedicated to the work of Sahagún. The encyclopedic Sahaguntine project contains many images that were produced by Indigenous painters and that nevertheless played a much more ancillary and illustrative role than those in the Codices Telleriano-Remensis, Vaticanus A, Tudela, and Magliabechiano.

7.2.2. The tonalpohualli and the veintenas

The Codex Tudela (ff. 90r–124r) treats the 260-day calendar through elaborate pictorials and lengthy written explanations based on a four-part division of the tonalpohualli and associations with trees and pairs of patron gods (Jansen 1986, Batalla Rosado 2002, 374–385). In the text, divination and ritual activity are accorded the same importance. Day signs are noted not only in terms of the fate of whoever was born on that day but also in terms of the type of sacrifice that the person was required to make. This indicates that mantic images had equally predictive and prescriptive functions.

The corresponding section in the Codex Magliabechiano (ff. 11r–14r) beautifully but rather simply renders the twenty day signs of the tonalpohualli, each accompanied by a numeral from one to thirteen. The count begins with the day 1 Flint (Fig. 7.9) rather than the expected 1 Crocodile. While Batalla Rosado (2002, 379) considered this detail a simplification of the original section in the Codex Tudela, whose calendrics was seemingly too complex for the copyist of the Codex Magliabechiano to master, Anders and Jansen (1996a, 157) proposed instead that the manuscript was drafted on a year that began on a day Flint, which also establishes the veintena count for that year. I find this suggestion to be interesting and worthy of consideration. While the canonical reading of the calendar seems to imply that there is a first day in the calendar, the 260-day calendar does not have any fixed correlation with the solar and vague year, and day 1 Crocodile may fall at any point of the year. Among contemporary Maya K'iche' communities, no day is universally considered to be the first of the chol q'ij, although there is general agreement that 8 B'atz' (8 Monkey) may be counted as the first (Akker 2018, 33–34). The annotation in folio 13v related to this section seems to confirm Anders and Jansen's hypothesis:



Figure 7.9. The first four days of the tonalpohualli. Codex Magliabechiano, f. 11r. Florence, Biblioteca nazionale centrale, Banco Rari, 232.

These figures of this part, which are those just mentioned, which are twenty, are the twenty days of each festival, which are painted later. They had them in order to name one who was born in these days ... (Boone 1983, 177).

The annotator is clearly referring to the veintena festivals that had a close relationship with the solar year and would in fact fall on a specific set of twenty day signs in any given year, as discussed at length in this book. In the Codex Magliabechiano, the specific time of the manuscript's production had a bearing on the drafting of the calendar, while the Codex Tudela adheres to a standard depiction, beginning with day Crocodile on folio 98v. The following pages in the Codex Magliabechiano depict the xiuhmolpilli, the cycle of fifty-two years. This placement seemingly departs from the original arrangement in the Codex Tudela, in which the counting of the years is positioned at the end of the book. As for its depiction, both codices represent the entire fifty-two-year cycle from year 1 Reed to 13 Rabbit. An explanatory text in folio 14v of the Codex Magliabechiano introduces the counting of the years with another reference to the veintena ceremonies that were celebrated over the course of the solar year.

I believe that this provides sufficient proof that the painters and annotators of this manuscript had a specific narrative and content structure that they wanted to develop and that its focus was the ceremonial aspect of the Mesoamerican calendar (i.e., how days and time periods were celebrated and counted). In this respect, there is a clear shift from a divinatory function assigned to the pictograms and their arrangement to a ceremonial and descriptive one. While the illustrative purpose of these manuscripts should not be underestimated, I have argued throughout this book that the current divinatory paradigm applied in the study of the codices has perhaps wrongly underestimated other less pragmatic but more self-reflexive aspects of Mesoamerican religious pictography and the calendar—namely, a ceremonial, commemorative, or even prophetic function.

The counting of the years (xiuhmolpilli) in both manuscripts begins with the year 1 Reed, an unusual date for Nahuatl manuscripts, which more commonly used either 1 Rabbit or 2 Reed. The reason seems to be of a historical and transcendental nature because glosses in both codices (Tudela, f. 77v, and Magliabechiano, f. 14v) explicitly refer to the arrival of Cortés in Mesoamerica in the year 1 Reed or 1519 (*entró el Marqués del Valle a esta tierra*). Given the complete lack of historical contents in

the Codices Tudela and Magliabechiano, in contrast to the Codices Telleriano-Remensis and Vaticanus A, the religious overtones of the date year 1 Reed as a marker of a new beginning should not be underestimated. In the Codices Telleriano-Remensis and Vaticanus A, the year 1 Reed is associated with Quetzalcoatl and the tale of his return after his disappearance in the eastern sea. While all these documents offer the earliest pictographic depictions and accounts of the events surrounding the conquest, they were produced at least one generation after the fact and drafted by artists and friars who had not witnessed them firsthand. Thus, they are indicative of the perception of momentous historical events in a later period.

7.2.3. Xochihuitl and the pulque gods

One of the most interesting aspects of the Codices Tudela and Magliabechiano are the godly and ceremonial scenes that follow the veintenas section. At the closing of the yearly ceremonies (depicted in folios 29r–30r in the Codex Tudela and 46v–48r in the Codex Magliabechiano), Xochipilli, the god of flowers and feasting, is celebrated (Fig. 7.10). He holds a *yollotopilli* (a heart stick), one of his known attributes. A flowered plant is depicted in front of him, along with his day sign, 7 Flower, and a few eggshells that, according to the annotator of the Codex Magliabechiano, were scattered on the street to celebrate the gods who provided an abundance of eggs. The same manuscript further explains that this occasion was a movable feast (*fiesta extravagante*), a celebration tied to the tonalpohualli that occurred at different points of the solar year. However, in the following folio in both codices, another day, 1 Flower, is added to the celebration

of Xochipilli. 7 Flower and 1 Flower occur twenty days apart, which suggests that this celebration was akin to a veintena.

The day 1 Flower, which corresponds to the fourth trecena of the tonalpohualli, is a day dedicated to artists and musicians. In the case of the Codex Borbonicus, for example, Quiñones Keber (1987, 191–192) proposed that the explicitly ritual and festive character of the trecena 1 Flower presided over by Huehuecoyotl may indeed be the representation of the festival of flowers (Sahagún 1950–1982, bk. 2, 36, bk. 5, 25–27) in the tonalamatl section of the manuscript. In the Codices Tudela and Magliabechiano, there appears to be a close relationship between this particular movable feast and the previous section devoted to the veintenas. In this light, Xochihuitl (the Feast of Flowers) paradigmatically becomes a feast dedicated to feasting. Moreover, as noted in Section 3.3, the presentation of the feast of 1 Flower as a movable feast right after the “fixed” solar celebrations of the veintenas also seems to suggest that the relationship between solar or seasonal phenomena and the tonalpohualli was noteworthy. The xihuitl and the tonalpohualli were one calendar, rather than two working in sync. In a few sources, namely Cristóbal del Castillo’s Nahuatl chronicle (Castillo 2001, ch. 71, 167–168) and the Códice de Huichapan (Caso 1967, 222), which hails from the Otomí town of the same name in the modern state of Hidalgo, Xochihuitl is mentioned as a veintena that falls in December, replacing Izcalli or Tititl. In the Codices Tudela and Magliabechiano, Xochihuitl is placed right after Tititl.

Several representations of the pulque gods, which are disparagingly described as “gods of drunkenness”

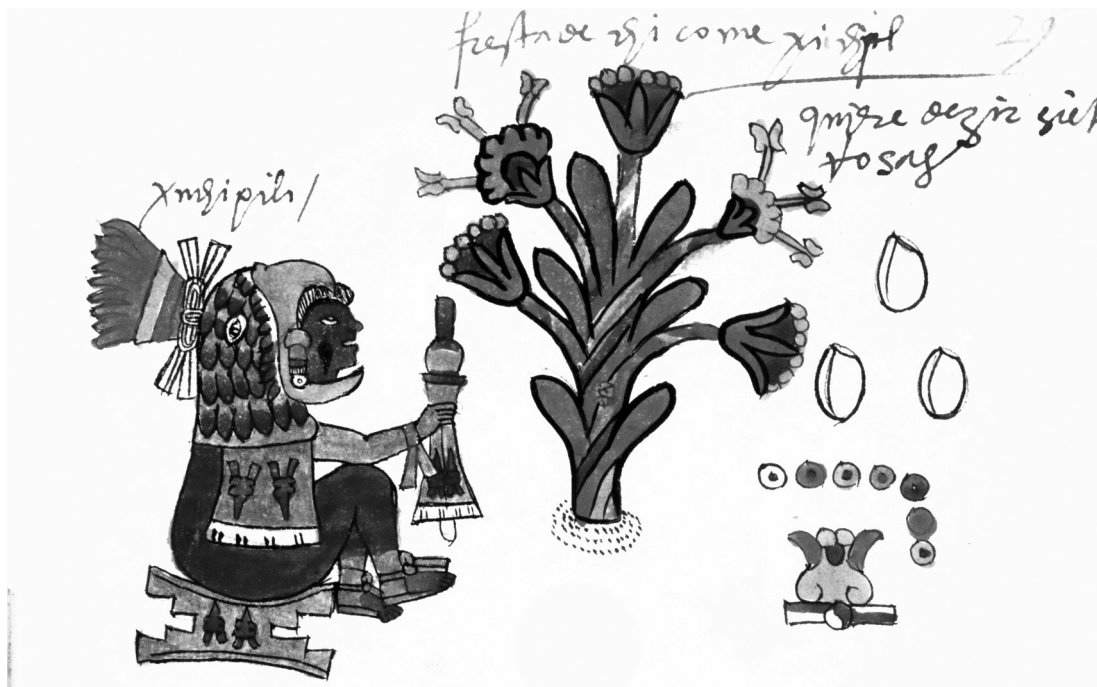


Figure 7.10. Xochipilli celebrated during 7 Flower. Codex Tudela, f. 19r. Museo de América, Madrid.

(*dioses de la borrachera*), follow the feast of flowers. “Drunkenness” is a misguided term that betrays a deep misunderstanding of the role and importance of pulque and its gods in a ritual context. Instead, I propose interpreting the pulque gods as representatives of a cult that was closely related to the visionary powers of the drink (Wasson 1980, 93–103, Ashwell 2006, 93–103). The eleventh trecena of the tonalpohualli (1 Monkey) is presided over by Patecatl, the god of pulque, in the Codex Telleriano-Remensis (f. 15v). An annotation on this page explains that he “is the lord of these thirteen days and of certain roots that they put in the wine, for without these roots they could not become drunk no matter how much they would drink” (Quiñones Keber 1995, 263). These roots are depicted in a ritual found in both codices under discussion (Fig. 7.14), as elaborated below. They are substances added to the drink to make it powerful and able to induce visions.

Pulque gods in the Codices Tudela and Magliabechiano are explicitly related to several localities in the modern state of Morelos, such as Tepoztlan and Yautepec, where Ome Tochtli and his many manifestations were venerated

as local patrons (Codex Tudela, f. 32r, Anders and Jansen 1996a, 185). According to Mendieta (1973, bk. 2, ch. 14), the calendar originated in this region, as discussed in Section 1.2. Therefore, the gods of pulque are strictly related not only to the drink and its visionary powers but also to timekeeping and its devices. Patecatl, depicted among the pulque gods in folio 35r of the Codex Tudela and folio 53r of the Codex Magliabechiano (Fig. 7.11), is shown with many of Quetzalcoatl’s attributes, including a feather headdress, a curved stick, and a shell symbol on his shield.

7.2.4. The ceremonial use of plants

The display of powerful and sacred plants as well as pulque is noteworthy in the two manuscripts’ descriptions of ceremonies. Flowery plants are also prominent at all such occasions, beginning with Xochipilli on the page dedicated to 7 Flower (Codex Tudela, f. 29r, Codex Magliabechiano, f. 47r). As first discussed by Wasson (1973, 305), several words found in colonial sources indicate the “flowery” connotations of plants and ceremonies. First, in the sixteenth-century Nahuatl dictionary by the friar Alonso



Figure 7.11. Patecatl as Quetzalcoatl. Codex Magliabechiano, f. 53r. Florence, Biblioteca nazionale centrale, Banco Rari, 232.

de Molina, *xochinanacatl* (literally, “flowery mushroom”) is translated as “mushroom that causes drunkenness” (*hongo que emborracha*). In the Florentine Codex (Sahagún 1950–1982, bk. 11, ch. 7), the corresponding word is *teonanacatl* (“sacred mushroom”), which identifies mushrooms with psychoactive components. The adjective “flowery,” which is given in Nahuatl by the prefix *xoch-*, is used interchangeably with both “sacred” (*teo-*) and “visionary” (or “drunk” in colonial sources). Thus, the festive nature of the calendar is more accurately reinterpreted as sacred and ceremonial. Rituals include both communal gatherings and night ceremonies, with the latter being of a more private nature. With respect to private ceremonies, Wasson (1973, 324) mentioned the term *temicxoch* (literally “flower of dream”) found in Ruiz de Alarcón’s treatise (Andrews and Hassig 1984, bk. 2, ch. 2, 79). Although the incantation was intended to “induce sleep,” according to the Spanish text, it is more likely related to a state of trance. It is perhaps not a coincidence that the Xochipilli statue studied by Wasson for its detailed depiction of flowers, petals, and pistils came from Tlalmanalco, a town near the region of origin of many of the pulque gods in the two codices under discussion.

Folios 68r, 69r, and 70r in the Codex Tudela and the corresponding folios in the Codex Magliabechiano (i.e.,

folios 83r, 84r, 85r) prominently display flowering plants, although the information provided by the annotators is scarce or nonexistent. First, in folio 68r in the Codex Tudela (Fig. 7.12), two flowered vine plants grow on a patch of land with outstretched serpents. Guerra (1967, 173) and Anders and Jansen (1996a, 218–219) identified the plant as *ololiuhqui coatlxihuitl* or *coatlxoxouhqui* (green serpent plant; Sahagún 1950–1982, bk. 11, ch. 7), whose seeds have psychoactive properties. The same plant or a piciete (wild tobacco) appears in the next image in folio 69r of the Codex Tudela (Fig. 7.13). It stands between two male priests; one is eating a green substance, while the other is drinking. Finally, in folio 70r (Fig. 7.14), five people (two men and three women) are performing a pulque libation ritual seated around a jar with a foaming white beverage. In the corresponding image in the Codex Magliabechiano (f. 85r), the god of pulque himself is also present. The only gloss and information provided pertain to the bundled roots, which are used to make the *ocpatli* (literally “pulque medicine” or “what makes pulque work”). These images attest that the consumption of pulque was conducted in a ceremonial context by priests on certain occasions, perhaps related to communal festivities. The numerous gray or smoky volutes scattered in front of the two male drinkers on page 69r of the Codex Tudela indicate the words and chants associated with these private events.

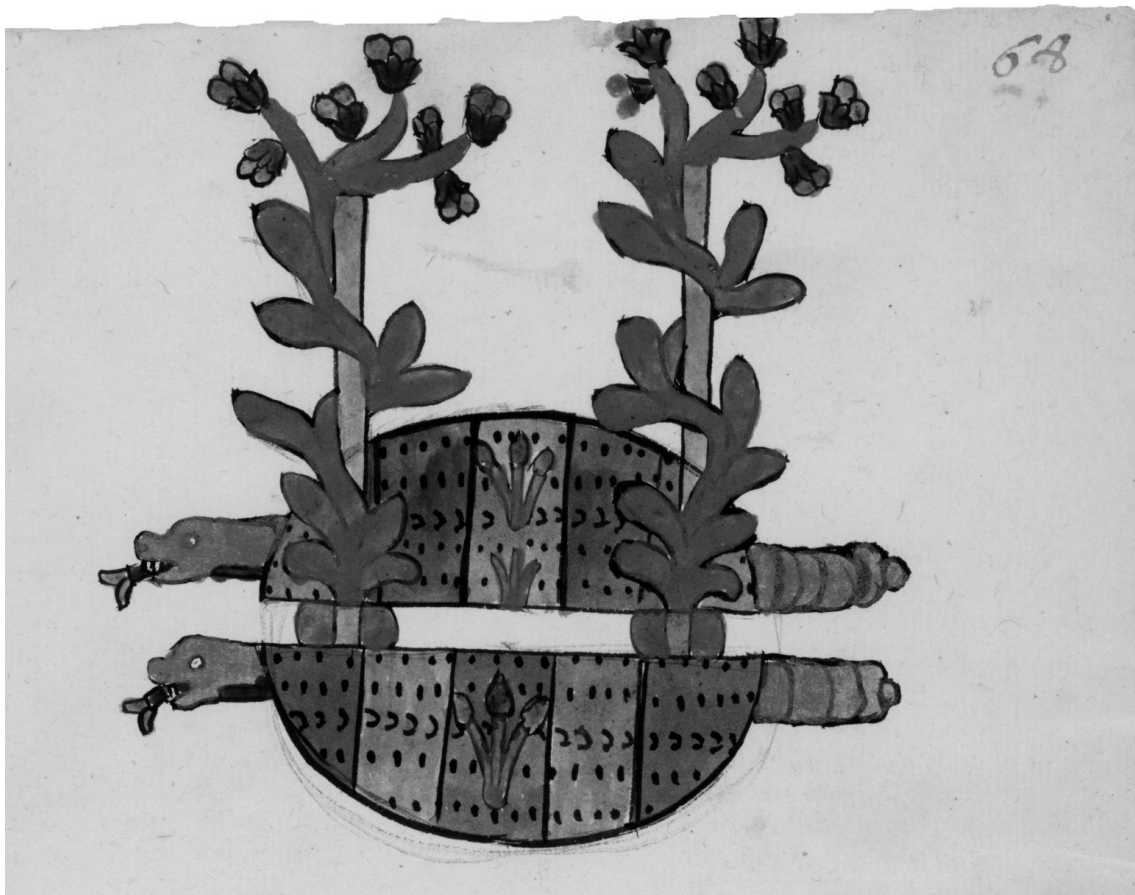


Figure 7.12. Coatlxoxouhqui plant. Codex Tudela, f. 68r. Museo de América, Madrid.



Figure 7.13. Two priests eating and drinking in front of a coatloxouhqui plant. Codex Tudela, f. 69r. Museo de América, Madrid.



Figure 7.14. Ritual consumption of pulque. Codex Tudela, f. 70r. Museo de América, Madrid.

The ingestion of sacred plants in relation to priestly knowledge, communal activities, and a festive setting is a common theme on two other pages. In folio 63r of the Codex Tudela (Fig. 7.15), a vessel that contains burning copal (incense) is set on an altar framed by two flowering plants, which appear to have been cut from their roots. A man and a woman are sitting in front of the altar making offerings. The corresponding text in the Codex Magliabechiano (f. 73v) explains,

This is a small place of sacrifice where the Indians offered incense or paper with blood to their gods. It is known that every five times [*sic*] they had in common a cue or place of sacrifice in which to hold a sacrifice. And for every twenty days they had another larger one that was dedicated to an idol of their gods to whom they were devoted. And each barrio had another large temple where they had another idol, whom they say was guardian of the barrio ... (Boone 1983, 213)

As noted by Boone (1983, 213) and Batalla (2002, 312), it is possible that the term *veces* or *vezes* (times in Spanish) should have read *vecino* (neighbor), which is shortened as *vez*. There is indeed a certain confusion and ambiguity in the timing and place of participation in the ritual in question, but perhaps both aspects of

the cult were at issue. On the one hand, the cult must be observed every five or twenty days. On the other hand, certain families or neighborhoods were involved. Festivities that took place every five days (*macuililhuitl*) or twenty days (*cempoalilhuitl*; Sahagún 1950–1982, bk. 2, Bustamante García and Díaz Rubio 1983) were celebrated differently in each community and various social groups within each community, such as associations of people who practiced the same craft. On the page in question, the tools depicted directly below the altar may represent plastering and scraping tools made of stone and obsidian that were used by masons or papermakers.

Finally, folio 73r in the Codex Tudela (Fig. 7.16; Codex Magliabechiano f. 87r) depicts five penitents engaged in different ceremonial acts with thorns, incense burners, and food and other offerings. The person at the top is casting paper strips soaked in blood into a fire. The five men are expressing their devotion to a god with a large feather headdress seated atop a temple. At the foot of the temple, a blue lizard walks over a white cloth with five dots next to it. The text accompanying the image explains that this ceremony was intended to petition the gods. To understand whether the request would be granted, priests put a straw mat next to the stairway of the temple. If a lizard walked on it, it was taken as a sign that the request



Figure 7.15. Ceremony in front of an altar. Codex Tudela, f. 63r. Museo de América, Madrid.



Figure 7.16. Petition to the god. Codex Tudela, f. 73v. Museo de América, Madrid.

would be granted. The addition of the five dots seems to suggest the day 5 Lizard in the tonalpohualli. However, as observed by Anders and Jansen (1996a, 221–222n7), there is an inherent ambiguity to the representation. The animal is depicted in a transitional status between the iconic value as a day sign and a representational status as the animal carrying the oracular response. The

numeral 5 can also be read in two different ways: as the five-day period (macuilxiuhuitl) dedicated to the oracle and ceremonial quest or as the number of the day. As illustrated in *Primeros Memoriales* (f. 269; Fig. 7.17), 5 Lizard is one of the names of Macuilxochitl (Sahagún et al. 1997, 120n9, Anders and Jansen 1996a, 221–222n7), whose temples and cults were found around the main

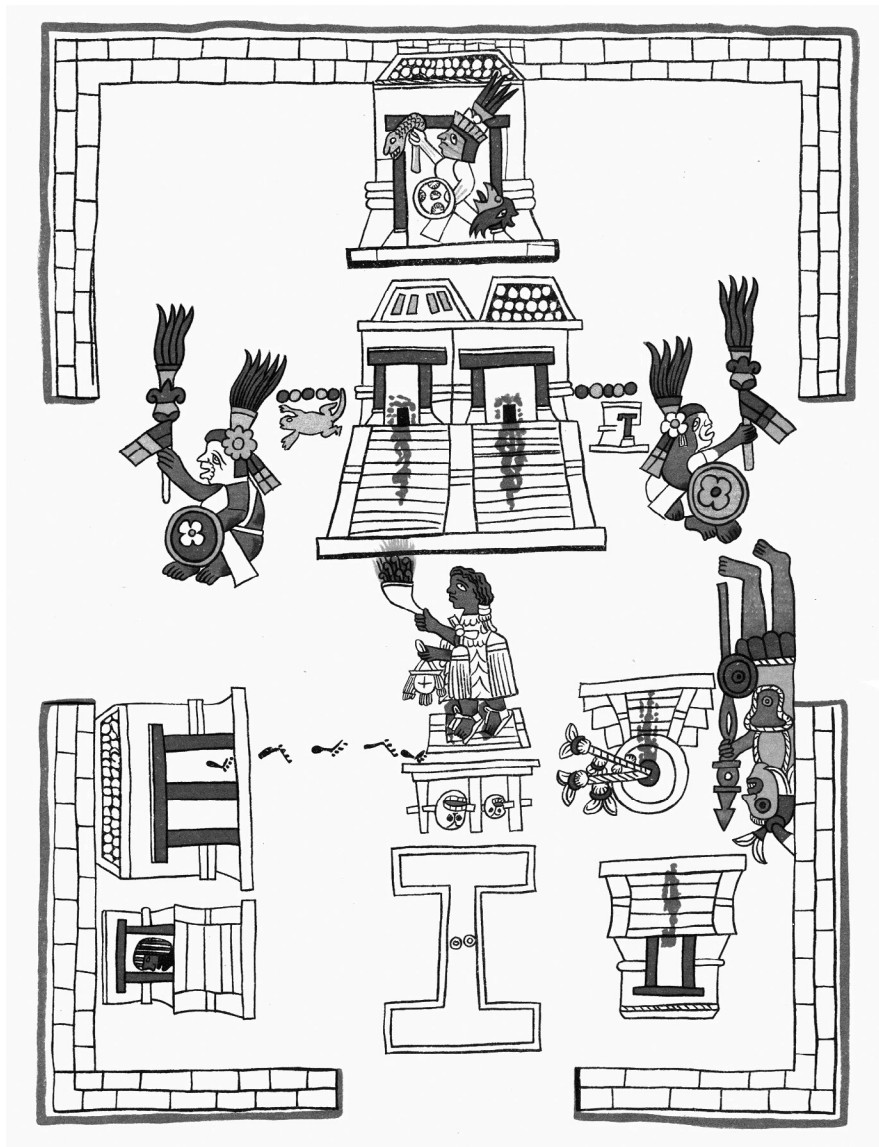


Figure 7.17. The sacred precinct of Tenochtitlan with the gods Macuilcuetzpalli (5 Lizard) and Macuilcalli (5 House) presiding over the twin temple. *Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España*, f. 269r. Paso y Troncoso 1905.

twin pyramids in the sacred precinct. The god illustrated in the Codex Tudela was probably an image such as the one found today at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City (Fig. 7.18), which has the name 5 Serpent carved in the back of its head. Their presence in the pictorials attests to the importance of the cult to the Macuiltonaleque, godly diviners who commanded rituals upon consultation of the sacred books (Pohl 2007). I believe that the tlacuilo deliberately pursued ambiguity by showing that the relationship between the days of the tonalpohualli, divinatory function, or festival days is not fixed but rather constitutes a web of meaning that is always dependent on the act of reading and interpretation.

7.2.5. Gods and ceremonies in folios 89r–92r of the Codex Magliabechiano

After the long section on festivals and ceremonies, a few illustrations of gods and ceremonies that appear in the

Codex Magliabechiano are not found in the Codex Tudela, either. Folios 89r–92r (Fig. 7.19 and 7.20) depict several gods in groups of three or four. Boone (1983, 27) argued that the artist responsible for this portion of the manuscripts was the same one who added the cloaks in folios 8 and 9, which are not found in the Codex Tudela. As for the iconography of the gods in this unique section, Anders and Jansen (1996a, 223–224) noted that Tlaloc, Quetzalcoatl, Xiuhtecuhtli, Xipe, Centeotl, and Tezcatlipoca were patron deities of several veintenas, which may indicate that this part of the manuscript was copied from an original fragment that depicted the yearly ceremonial cycle. In folio 89r (Fig. 7.19), a priestly impersonator in the bottom left corner of the page stands out from the others due to the insignia of Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl (Aguilera 1983, 166, Anders and Jansen 1996a, 223). He is encircled by eighteen footprints, which, as Paul van den Akker brought to my attention in a personal communication (2017), may be a reference to the number of veintenas in a year. Thus, the footprints may be

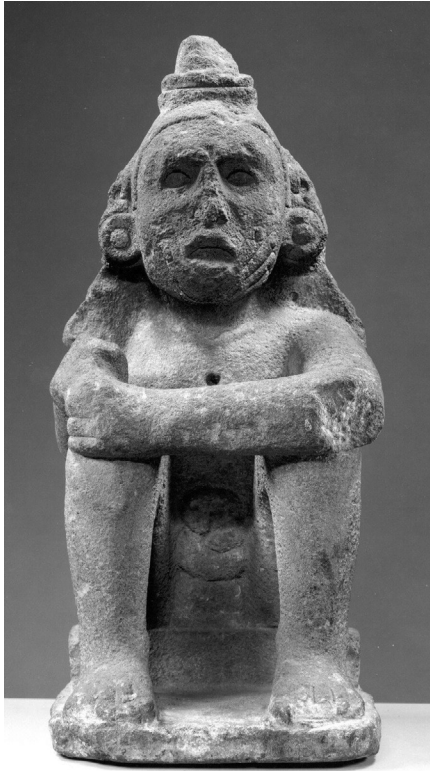


Figure 7.18. Macuilcoatl (5 Serpent). Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

interpreted as the eighteen ceremonies that comprise the yearly cycle and must be completed around Quetzalcoatl, according to his instructions.

Tena (2000, 428–430) followed up on the suggestion that the gods in these last pages of the Codex Magliabechiano relate to the veintena patrons and further developed an idea proposed by Caso (1967, 36, fig. 14), who posited that the five paper offerings that close the section and the book in folio 92r (Fig. 7.20) represent the five nemontemi days. Tena (2000, 429) referred to these representations as “paper offerings” (*amatetehuítl* in Nahuatl). The last one is larger than the others and decorated with a maize outcrop. It should be noted, however, that nemontemi are seldom pictorially represented and therefore not easy to identify despite being consistently cited in written sources.

At the bottom of folio 90r (Fig. 1.15), there is an unusual scene that breaks with the general contents of the section. A man is seated on a straw mat, ingesting mushrooms, as explained in Section 1.3. More red and green mushrooms sprout from a patch of land in front of him, while Mictlantecuhtli, the god of the land of the dead, looms from the back and slightly touches the seated figure. I suggest that this scene, which was seemingly added to a loose representation



Figure 7.19. Four gods. Codex Magliabechiano, f. 89r. Florence, Biblioteca nazionale centrale, Banco Rari, 232.

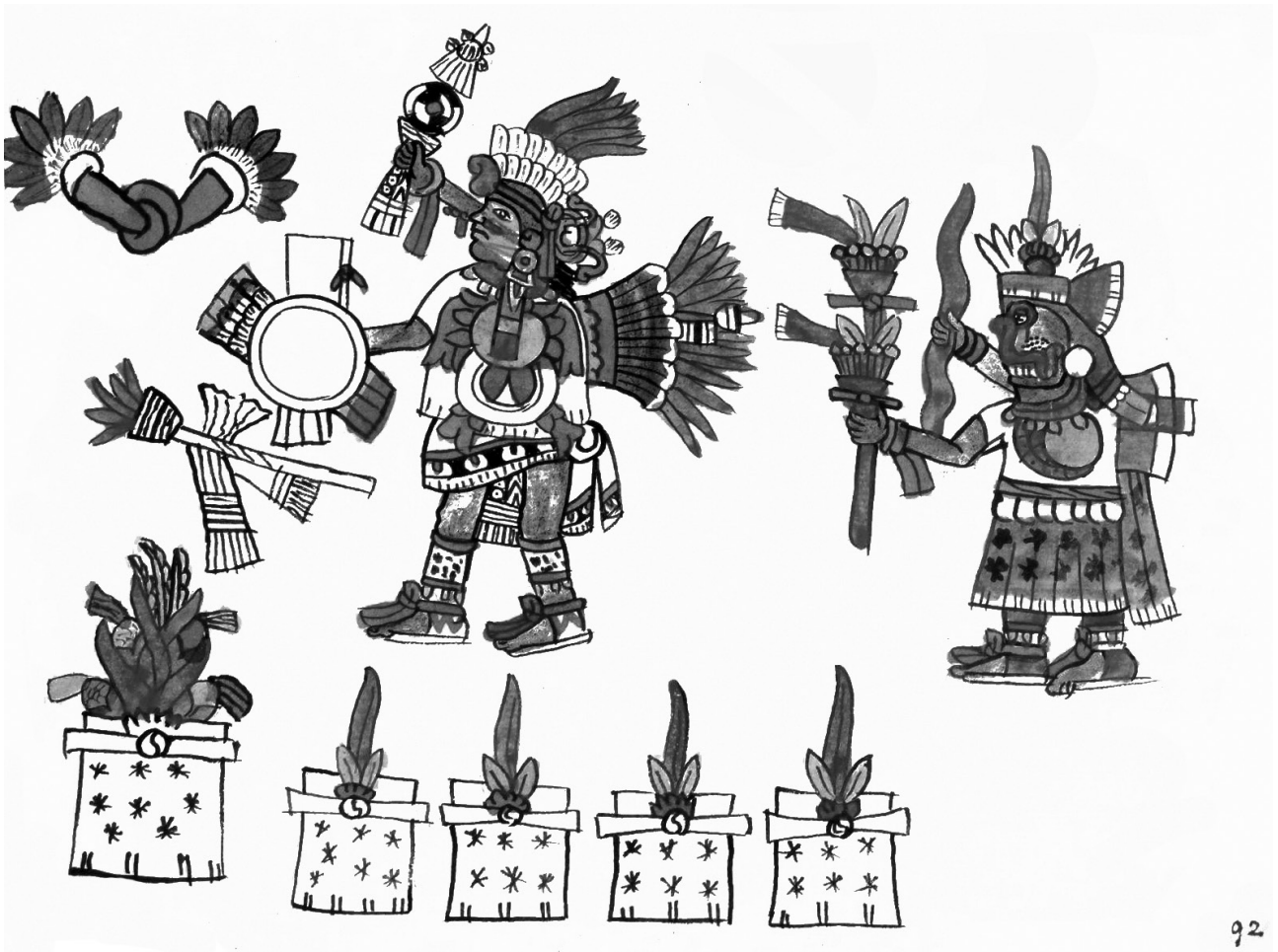


Figure 7.20. Two gods and five paper offerings. Codex Magliabechiano, f. 92r. Florence, Biblioteca nazionale centrale, Banco Rari, 232.

of the *veintena* patron gods, is another instance of the close relationship between visionary experience and the *veintena* ceremonies. Their planning and correct performance required knowledge derived from the experience of a revelation, as discussed in the previous chapters. The presence of Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl can also be interpreted in this light, as he is the archetypal priest in charge of leading ceremonies.

Boone (1983, 27) previously commented on this unique section of the Codex Magliabechiano and considered that the iconographic complexity of the gods makes it unlikely that they were independent inventions; rather they were copied from a source other than the supposed prototype of the Codex Magliabechiano (presumably the Codex Tudela). Indeed, there is a very interesting comparison to be made with pages 17–22 in the Codex Laud (Fig. 7.21–7.22). A sequence of twenty-two characters is arranged in two rows but without guiding red lines; with one exception, they all face the same direction. The section includes at least one clear reference to the *veintena* ceremonies on page 17 (Fig. 7.21), presumably at the beginning of the sequence to the right, where Xiuhtecuhtli, the fire god, opens the celebration in the top right corner

of the page, followed by another priest drilling a stick in a fire serpent at the bottom. In front of the officiating priest, another character carries a white flag. Both men carry a turquoise diadem, and their body paint identifies them as Paynal and Huitzilopochtli, the main gods of the celebration of Panquetzaliztli, according to the sources. On the following pages, where the retinue appears to reach its final destination in a cave (Fig. 7.22), three characters bear distinctive iconographic attributes. The last one, who holds a burning ball of hule (rubber), can be identified as Tezcatlipoca; behind him follows a man who can be identified as a priest to Xiuhtecuhtli (Anders and Jansen 1994, 253). The rain god Tlaloc, holding a serpent and an ax, is next. Once the offering is placed, the scene (and presumably the ceremonial pilgrimage) ends with four day signs and counted bundled stick offerings, which were left uncolored. In folio 92 of the Codex Magliabechiano, Tezcatlipoca and Tlaloc, possibly related to the celebrations of Teotleco and Tepeilhuitl (Anders and Jansen 1996a, 224n10) or Toxcatl and Etzalcualiztli (Tena 2000, 429) appear right before the five paper offerings, which Tena identified as *nemontemi*. Thus, both codices contain a loose representation of the tutelary gods of the *veintenas*.

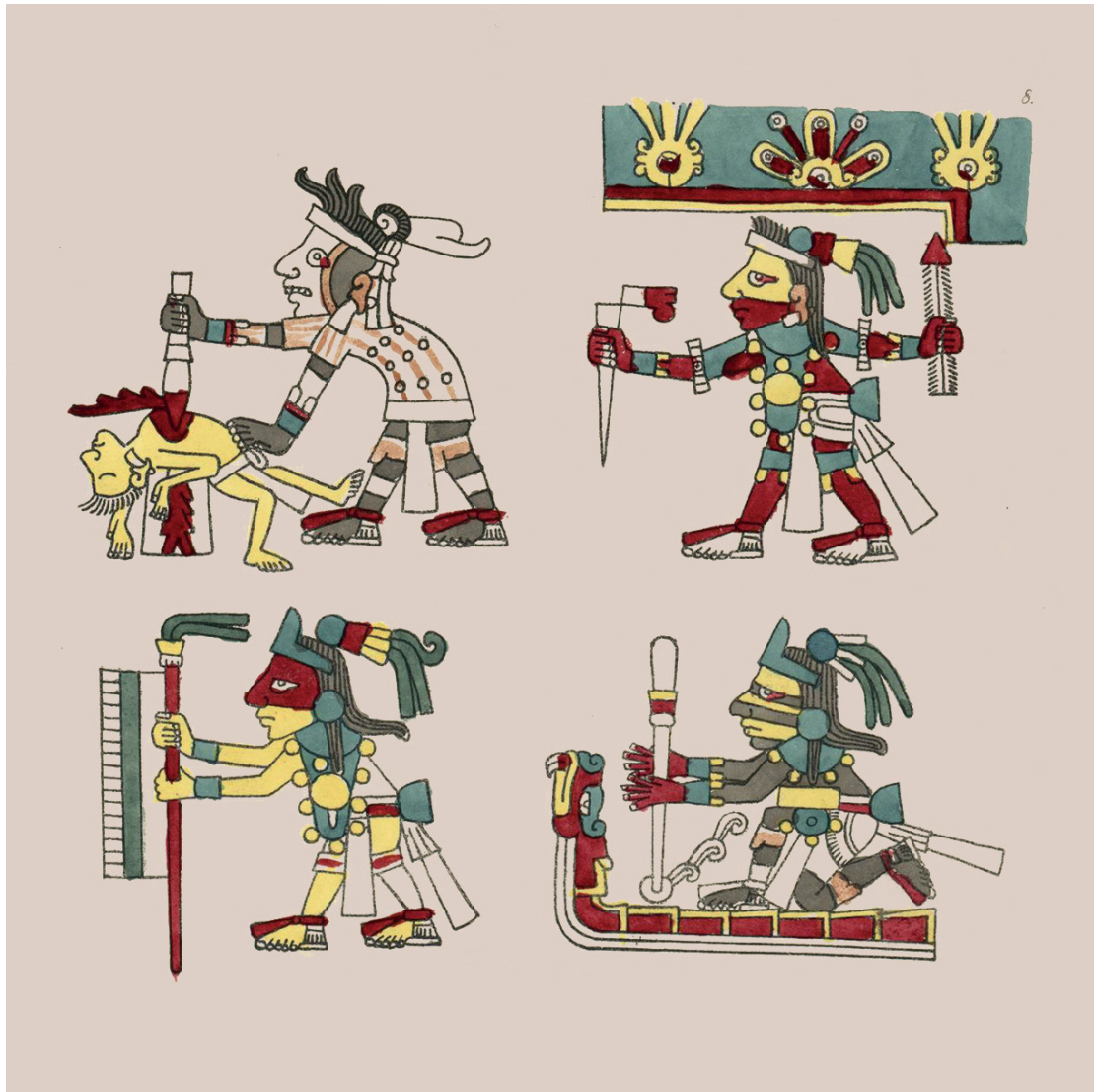


Figure 7.21. Panquetzaliztli and the New Fire ceremony. Codex Laud, p. 17. Kingsborough 1831.



Figure 7.22. Procession to a cave. Codex Laud, pp. 21–22. Kingsborough 1831.

Both the Codices Magliabechiano and Laud may be an original creation of different divinatory or ceremonial images. In the case of the Codex Laud, these images were taken from a lost original, which had presumably already been damaged when the new manuscript was painted. By contrast, the Codex Magliabechiano was copied from the Codex Tudela but lost much of its credibility, according to Batalla Rosado (2010). In both instances, however, the quality and level of detail in the images contradict their presumed fragmentary and lacking contents. Why would an artist invest skills and time to reproduce an incomplete and therefore unusable document? Perhaps we should consider that the result is neither faulty nor inconsistent; indeed, we have yet to understand much of the logic that underlies pictographic image-making in both pre-Hispanic and colonial contexts. Could it be that the seemingly complete image of the eighteen veintenas that we have come to expect from the sources, including the Codex Magliabechiano itself, is not more appropriate for describing the Mesoamerican ceremonial cycles than the fragmentary images found on the pages of the Codices Magliabechiano, Laud, and Borgia?

The main aim of this book is to understand pictography as a cultural expression whose complex inner mechanisms are not a mere reflection or illustration of some external reality but rather able to engender their own meaning. The four documents examined in this chapter belong to a corpus of Mesoamerican religious texts produced during the colonial period that largely adhered to their ancient counterparts. In other words, the images were meant to convey meaning on their own terms and were not ancillary to verbal explanations. The final fate of pictography is the focus of the next and final chapter.

Manuscript Painting and the Conventos

This last chapter is dedicated to the development of pictography once it was fully incorporated into the intellectual project of the friars and their art schools. The four manuscripts discussed in the preceding chapter also form part of the corpus of pictographic and written works produced under mendicant sponsorship. They largely relied, however, on established pre-Hispanic canons, such as those found in the Borgia Group manuscripts. The written text, provided in the form of glosses, is largely subordinate to the images. Written explanations were intended to complement or clarify the meaning of the pictorials, whose overall presentation and composition still conformed to known pre-Hispanic pictographic genres.

By contrast, the work of Bernardino de Sahagún discussed in this chapter was wholly novel, blending European literary antecedents and local pictographic traditions. In particular, the Florentine Codex is widely considered the most important source on Nahuatl culture, religion, and history at the time of contact and is therefore cited at length in this book. However, the bulk of information in the document is found in the written texts. The Nahuatl version of the texts, whose complete translation was attempted only once, by North American scholars Arthur Anderson and Charles Dibble (Sahagún 1950–1982), reflects the interests and knowledge of an Indigenous intellectual elite that had been fully educated at mendicant schools. The monumental work of Bernardino de Sahagún is contrasted with the Codex Yanhuitlan, a document produced in the Mixtec town of the same name. The manuscript is fully pictographic and hails from a region in Mesoamerica where picture writing was particularly developed. The Mixtec codices, in fact, constitute the only pre-Hispanic corpus of historical documents that focus on local and regional genealogies. The Codex Yanhuitlan is heir to this tradition, but it also represents a novel genre that fully incorporated a format, a style, and contents derived from European and colonial examples.

Both works have received extensive scholarly attention. Therefore, I focus on specific aspects that demonstrate the scope, impact, and limitations of the mendicant evangelical and educational enterprise in New Spain. On the one hand, the encyclopedic and scholastic endeavor of the Franciscans, which is exemplified by the work of Sahagún, intended to salvage Mesoamerican religion by portraying it as dead and sealed in the past, not as a living phenomenon. Consequently, books were seen as repositories of fixed knowledge on mythology and rituals, as also observed in the Codices Telleriano-Remensis, Vaticanus A, Tudela, and Magliabechiano. On the other hand, the Codex Yanhuitlan was produced in an Indigenous town and demonstrates how local Mixtec leaders and artists

were able to re-appropriate the pictographic medium from the friars to address the complex socio-political situation in early colonial Yanhuitlan.

One striking aspect of these manuscripts is the innovative and widespread use of monochrome, an artistic development unique to sixteenth-century New Spain that has yet to receive its scholarly due. In Europe, monochrome painting (usually referred to with the term *grisaille*, from French for “gray-like”) was first adopted in manuscript illumination. An outstanding example is the famous Book of Hours produced by Jean Pucelle for Jeanne d’Evreux, the queen of France in the first half the fourteenth century. Eventually, early Netherlandish painters mastered the technique in oil painting, most notably in the decoration of altar wings. Throughout the Renaissance, the *grisaille* technique was commonly employed to paint architectural decorations and details and to create *trompe l’oeil* or other similar visual effects. Among the few scholars who have addressed the use of monochrome in the visual arts of New Spain, Manrique (1982) and Peterson (1993, 62–63) considered that the lack of color was a direct consequence of the pedestrian and unoriginal copies of European models that arrived in the New World in the form of prints. Although I believe that the introduction of print illustrations from Europe triggered the production of monochrome images among Indigenous *tlacuilos*, the selective adoption of *grisaille* in specific contexts reveals a conscious positioning on the part of local artists vis-à-vis a foreign and imposed tradition.

European art historical scholarship on *grisaille* has examined it as a representational strategy that engages and asks questions of the viewer (Schoell-Glass 1999). Philippot (1966) noted that the lack of color in early Netherlandish altar wings, which usually depicted fictive sculptures in niches, had the effect of collapsing different levels of reality into a single surface. Fehrenbach (2011) considered that monochrome in early modern marble sculpture constituted a regression of the naturalist Renaissance impulse to a potential state of animation, a moment in which dead and raw materials seemed to come alive and make present what the picture claimed to be. Finally, Powell (2012, 107–111) remarked on the uncanny vivacity of paintings of monochrome sculpture, highlighting a possible paradox; the painted image purports to be a sculpture, but sculpture shows a degree of realism in its expression that one would only expect from the “real” subject. In all these cases, *grisaille* is employed to implicitly reveal the mechanism by which the image and its life-like and mimetic qualities are created. This is often framed within the debate on the *paragone* (comparison) between the relative merits of architecture, sculpture, and painting. Monochrome manifests a transition or process that the viewer must

engage with to decode the image beyond its mere iconic value. In other words, both the mimetic and emblematic values of an image are presented at the same time.

In the present study, monochrome is similarly interpreted as a conscious decision on the part of Indigenous artists, which led to the creation of an artistic trend that dominated the visual arts of colonial New Spain throughout the latter part of the sixteenth century. It is worth noting that the use of grisaille developed in the arts of New Spain in media that had existed since the pre-Hispanic period: murals and manuscript painting. However, there is no indication that monochrome was ever employed in Postclassic central Mexican art. Therefore, grisaille was juxtaposed with but did not replace preexisting traditions, and its study offers an opportunity to analyze how new themes and techniques were incorporated alongside established canons of Indigenous arts. The transmission and exchange of knowledge (both local and imported) within a new context of artistic production—namely the art of the conventos—resulted in the reformulation of principles by which images were created and functioned. The introduction of monochrome techniques was a response to new creative circumstances and an opportunity for artists to ponder the fundamental changes that were happening in Mesoamerica at the time in purely visual terms.

8.1. The work of Sahagún

The intellectual enterprise of Bernardino de Sahagún culminated in two major works that are commonly referred to as *Primeros Memoriales* and the *Florentine Codex*. In this section, they are analyzed by focusing on the distribution and function of the illustrations in the manuscripts, as well as their relationship to the corresponding written text. In the process, the deliberate role played by grisaille becomes apparent.

In the *Florentine Codex* (Sahagún 1950–1982, bk. 11, ch. 11, Dupey García 2015), the use of monochrome is associated with the act of writing in a series of illustrations about colors and their production. Cochineal red is clearly associated with pictorial manuscript production and the drawing of guiding lines on a rectangular strip in folio 217v (Fig. 8.1a). Black, a pigment obtained from a fruit known as *nacazcolotl*, is produced for writing, as exemplified by an illustration of a scribe in folio 281v, where his tools, chair, and book indicate a European activity (Fig. 8.1b). The Nahuatl text related to this image defines the black pigment as “a medium for painting, a medium for writing” (*tlacuiloloni, letrachioaloni*; Sahagún 1950–1982, bk. 11, ch. 11, 241, Dupey García 2015, 235). The distinction between local and imported techniques and technologies is clearly stated. While black as a color has intrinsic symbolic associations in both pre-Hispanic and Indigenous colonial art, as stated in the same chapter on the *Florentine Codex* regarding the color *tilli* (Sahagún 1950–1982, bk. 11, ch. 11, Dupey García 2015, 238), in the current discussion I am primarily concerned with what is clearly a lack of color: the use of black and white in an obvious and conscious opposition to a colored palette. Indeed, painting was considered writing in Mesoamerican tradition. Recent studies on the importance of colors in manuscripts and sculpture revealed that the meaning of images was closely tied to their material components (Magaloni Kerpel 2014, Dupey and Vásquez 2018). Hue, brilliance, texture, origin, production process, and provenience were all factored into the selection of a specific palette for any given occasion.

In the colonial setting, pictographic images not only had to coexist with written texts but also often played an ancillary role. The changing dynamic between these two poles (the written and the painted) is highlighted in manuscripts produced in the intellectual circles of the conventos using monochrome. In both *Primeros Memoriales* and

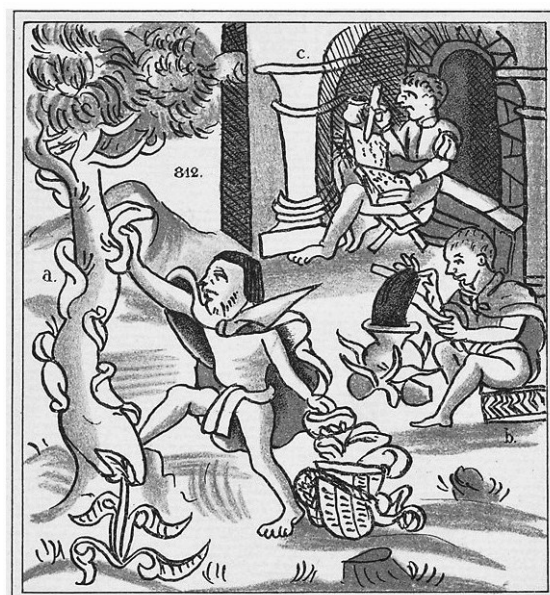


Figure 8.1. The making of colors. a. Red cochineal, f. 217v. b. Black ink, f. 281v. *Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España*, vol. 3, bk. 11, ch. 11. Paso y Troncoso 1926.

the Florentine Codex, images played a fundamentally different role than the nearly contemporaneous manuscripts discussed in the previous chapter despite being drawn by Indigenous artists. However, like the *Codices Telleriano-Remensis*, *Vaticanus A*, *Tudela*, and *Magliabechiano*, *Primeros Memoriales* and the *Florentine Codex* are two distinct works that are closely related to each other, as the latter made ample use of the information and images found in the former, which was produced earlier. While *Primeros Memoriales* was largely drafted in Tepeapulco in the modern state of Hidalgo, the *Florentine Codex* was essentially a product of the College of Santiago Tlatelolco, where Sahagún ended his prolific career as a teacher and a missionary. *Primeros Memoriales*, which is missing some sections, is about a third of the length of the *Florentine Codex*, which comprises three volumes of over 700 folios each. Furthermore, in *Primeros Memoriales*, most illustrations are found in sections dedicated to the religious aspects of Nahuatl culture, such as the *veintena* ceremonies and the array of gods; in the later *Florentine Codex*, sections devoted to natural philosophy are more profusely illustrated. While certain final decisions on the production of both manuscripts may only be speculated about (perhaps Sahagún realized that it was wiser not to indulge in the illustration of “idolatrous” subjects), it is worth engaging in a comparison of the strategies employed in the two works.

8.1.1. The gods and the chants

According to Sahagún himself (1950–1982, *Introductory Volume*, prologue to bk. 2) regarding the way that

information was initially gathered, elderly people in the community of Tepeapulco discussed matters pertaining to various topics (e.g., court, warfare, politics, and religion) “in pictures.” It is possible that Sahagún was referring to pictographic documents that eventually became the sources for the selectively drafted images in *Primeros Memoriales*. Indigenous students and assistants eventually added Nahuatl text to the illustrations (López Austin 1974, 123, Quiñones Keber 1988, 202–203). A passage in *Primeros Memoriales* (paragraph 5A, ff. 261r–267v) depicts Mesoamerican and Nahuatl deities. Each image is accompanied by a short text in a manner that was probably similar to the way that Nahuatl researchers initially took notes in the field. In folio 261r (Fig. 8.2), the first god depicted is Huitzilopochtli, the patron of the Mexica. Although the text on the left refers to him, he is preceded in the illustration by Paynal, a vicar or surrogate of Huitzilopochtli who plays a major role in the festival of *Panquetzalitzli* dedicated by the Mexica to their tutelary god (Sahagún 1950–1982, bk. 2, ch. 34). Paynal is holding a white and blue banner that may indeed signal this celebration, as argued for a similar depiction on page 17 of the *Codex Laud* (Fig. 7.21). Huitzilopochtli carries a turquoise fire serpent disguise, known as *xiuhconahualli* in Nahuatl. In the corresponding image in the *Codex Laud*, the New Fire is lit on a turquoise fire serpent.

I believe that Paynal was depicted as preceding Huitzilopochtli in *Primeros Memoriales*, a decision that was later reversed in the corresponding section of the *Florentine Codex* (vol. 1, bk. 1, f. 10r), because of the

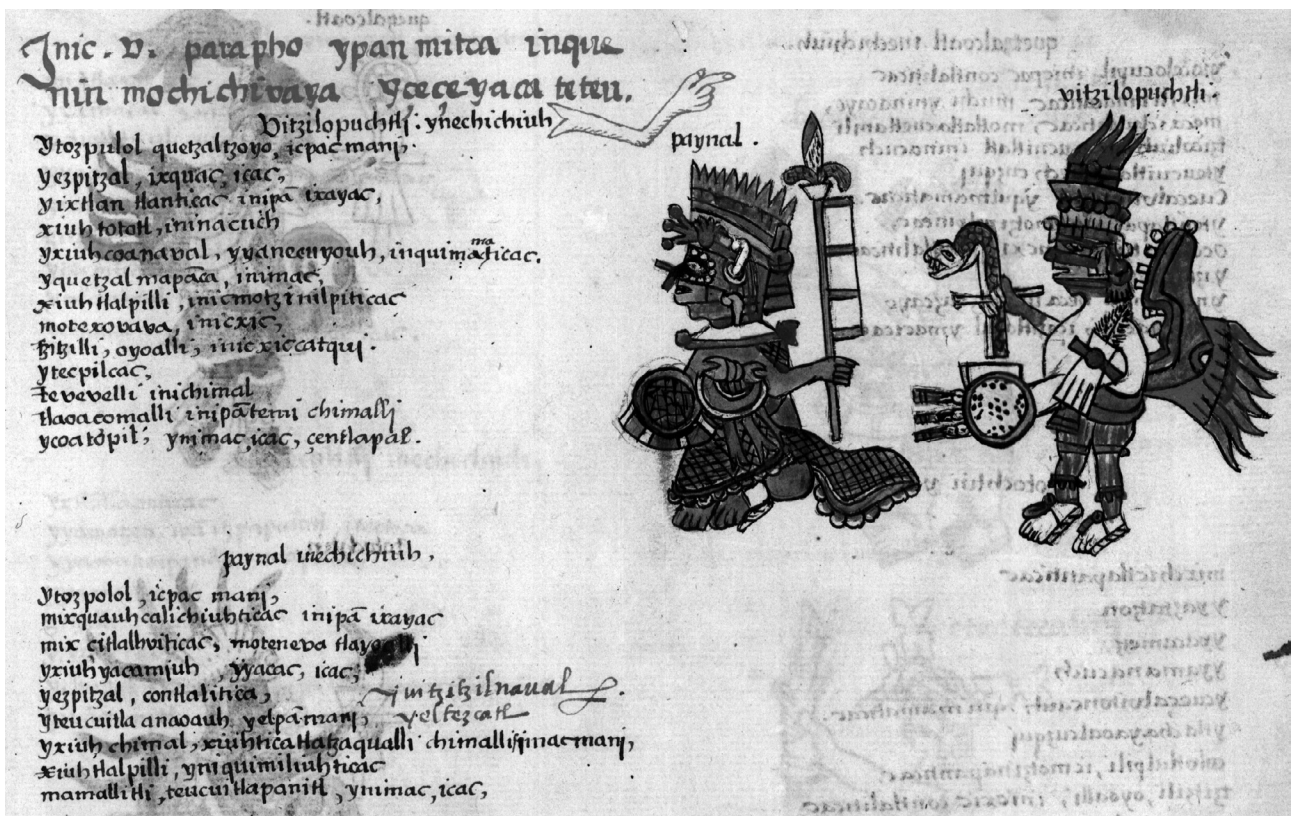


Figure 8.2. Huitzilopochtli preceded by Paynal, *Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España*. Patrimonio Nacional. Madrid, Real Biblioteca, II/3280, f. 261r.

intrinsic ceremonial value assigned to the enunciation of a god. Mentioning a god means summoning their presence, an act that in itself implies ceremoniality and temporality. Gods cannot be fully distinguished from the specific celebration and moment in which they appear because they do not exist as an absolute idea; rather, they are the materialization of prayers, chants, and other ceremonial acts designed to summon them according to given calendrical occurrences (such as the veintena of Panquetzaliztli).

Even if depictions of single deities are a pictographic innovation extracted and reduced from more complex pictographic scenes (Quiñones Keber 1988, Boone 2019, 99–106), they still bear unmistakable traces of the Mesoamerican tradition of image-making, which materializes divinity through the medium of pictures. The succinct text that accompanies the images enumerates the gods' attributes, from headdresses to staffs and other paraphernalia, in a rather descriptive manner—first for Huitzilopochtli, then Paynal. The text suggests that enunciation can create an image, its likeness (or *ixiptla*), in a similar manner to dough, stone, wood, or pigments (Magaloni Kerpel 2014, 9–13). The redundant and

pleonastic listing of the images' features, which may or may not be visible in the illustration, recalls the comments made by one of the annotators in the Codex Telleriano-Remensis, as discussed in the preceding chapter. Reiterating in writing what is depicted in a side picture may seem repetitive according to the proto-scientific interpretive logic applied in “research” by Sahagún’s pupils. From the viewpoint of religion and ritual, however, correct repetition is necessary for the successful completion of a ceremony. If the ceremoniality of the god’s attributes and evocation is suppressed, the listing becomes repetitive and useless. Thus, the Sahaguntine encyclopedic project clashed with the intrinsic value of pictography as an expressive religious medium.

In the later redrafting of the Florentine Codex (vol. 1, bk. 1, ff. 10r–12v), deity depictions were placed at the beginning of the first book. They were not accompanied by descriptive texts but rather were assigned the names of Roman gods and a reference to the text in which their ceremony is mentioned (Fig. 8.3). In only two instances, images of the gods were reused to illustrate the *cuicame* (songs) in the appendix of the second book, which was dedicated to



Figure 8.3. The gods Opuchtlí, Yacatecutli, Xipe, and Nappa Tecutli, *Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España*. Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Ms. Med. Palat. 218, vol. 1, bk. 1, f. 12r. Courtesy of MiC. Any further reproduction is prohibited.



Figure 8.4. The chants of Xipe Totec and Chicomecoatl, *Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España*. Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Ms. Med. Palat. 218, vol. 1, bk. 2, f. 143r. Courtesy of MiC. Any further reproduction is prohibited.

the ceremonies of the veintenas (Fig. 8.4). The images of deities that accompanied the chants were adjusted to make the figures' postures more dynamic than those of their counterparts in the first book. Xipe Totec, whose chant was analyzed in Section 2.3 of this book, is engaged in chanting, as indicated by the speech volutes emerging from his mouth. In the following image, his position has flipped, and he is playing a drum and drinking. These are fitting additions to a text that purportedly reproduces a chant—a performance. Thus, we are left to wonder whether this is a depiction of a deity or a performer. This ambiguity is even more apparent given that the god, priest, or impersonator performs a ritual and sings a song that should be chanted to him rather than by him. No clue is given on where the

chant and dance may be taking place, as no participant or temple is shown. Instead, the image is witness to the effect of the chanting; it comes alive thanks to the power of the accompanying song.

In Sahagún's cuicame, both texts and images are engaged in an act of mutual interpretation. They do not explain each other but rather indicate the constitutive elements of the performance. Collectively, song, music, dance, and the image of the god *are* the god. While the image itself remains only an illustration, it expresses the vitality and efficacy of the ceremony that does not lie in the clear enunciation or communication of content but rather in the correct realization of a performance. While written texts

and images are forcefully separated by the colonial logic of writing, the painting of the singing Xipe Totec is a correlative of the transcribed chant, which also seems to have the power to breathe life into the image.

8.1.2. The huehuetlatolli and the book

Aside from the cuicame, there is another section in both Primeros Memoriales and the Florentine Codex that includes the transcription of recited texts—namely, prayers and admonitions given by the rulers to their people and by parents to their children. Paragraphs 15–17 of Primeros Memoriales and Book 6 of the Florentine Codex

are dedicated to the huehuetlatolli (words of the elders; Sullivan 1974). Unlike the cuicame, these texts are prosaic, although the language employed is still profusely rhetorical and metaphorical. The corresponding illustrations in both manuscripts share a lack of color and evident reliance on European models, especially engravings.

In Primeros Memoriales (paragraphs 15–17, ff. 61v–66r), uncolored images were deliberately employed to illustrate the rulers’ speeches and admonitions in a section of the manuscript on rulership. In folio 65v, the image of a lonely man illustrates “how the ruler felt compassion for the people” (Sahagún et al. 1997, 248; Fig. 8.5). The bearded

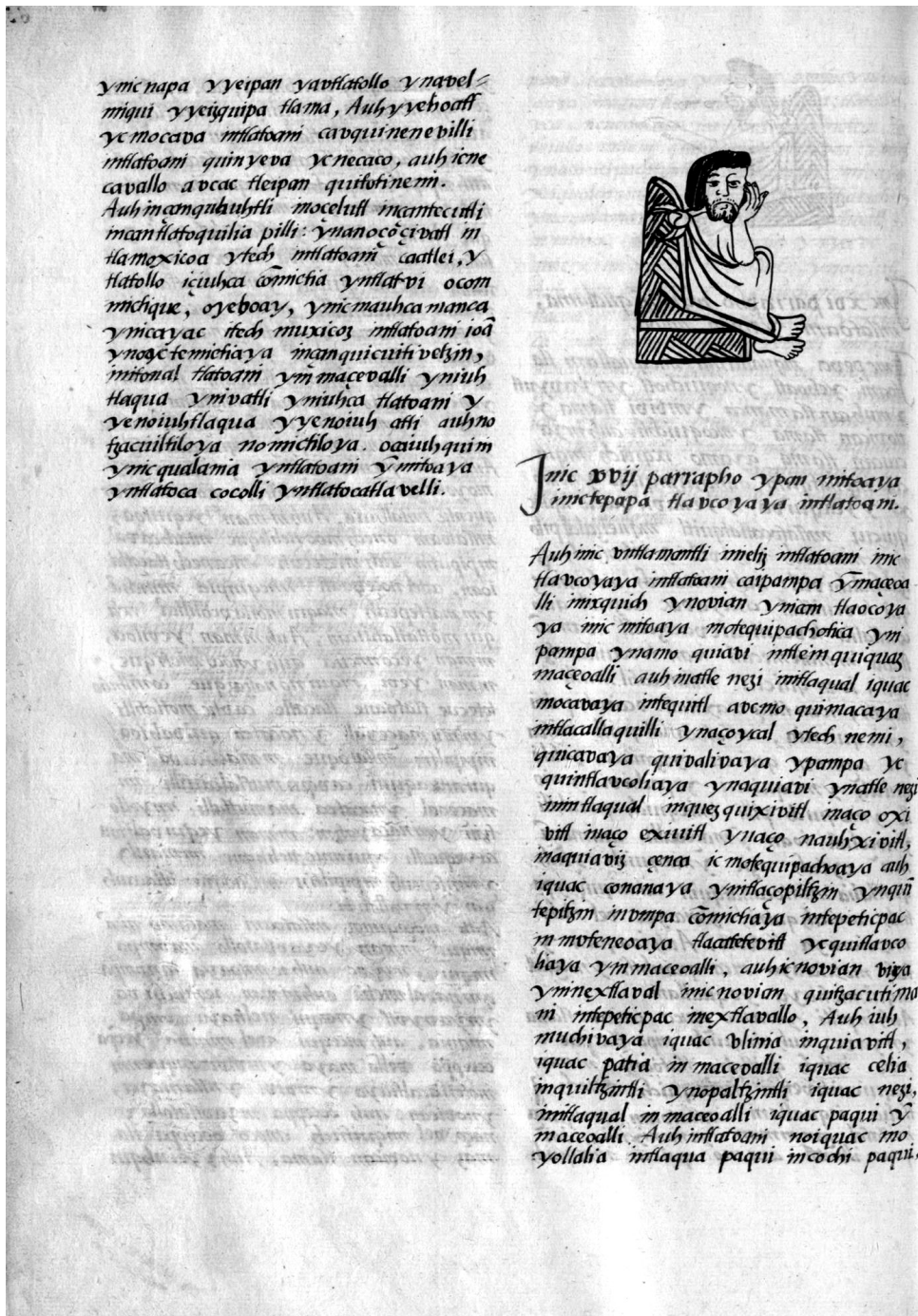


Figure 8.5. “How the ruler felt compassion for the people,” *Historia general de las cosas de la Nueva España*. Madrid, Real Academia de la Historia, 9/5524, f. 65v.



Figure 8.6. Albrecht Dürer, *The Man of Sorrows, The Small Passion*, ca. 1511.

man sits on an *icpalli*, a straw seat with a high back, and rests his head on his left hand in a pensive manner. This posture is typical of an innovative type of *Ecce Homo* or *Man of Sorrows*, which developed around 1500 in northern Europe and was especially popularized through German engravings and the work of Albrecht Dürer (Fig. 8.6). In New Spain, a close geographical and chronological example can be found in the upper cloister of the Augustinian convent in Malinalco in the state of Mexico. A despondent Christ sits on the cross, awaiting crucifixion (Fig. 8.7). A nun kneels and prays in front of Jesus, indicating the devotional and meditational nature of the image.

In the Florentine Codex, Book 6 includes the speeches of leaders but begins with prayers dedicated to the ancient gods, followed by a series of expiatory texts. In the first prayers, Tezcatlipoca is introduced as “principal god” (*principal dios*), betraying the Christianized overtones found throughout the texts. Moreover, all the illustrations are in grisaille, which led Magaloni Kerpel (2011, 73) to suggest an explicit adherence to European book illustrations of a mostly doctrinal and liturgical nature. The question remains, however, as to why the artists decided to employ such a strategy in this particular book.

Figure 8.8 presents a double illustration. A group of kneeling men in the bottom image direct their gaze upwards. The



Figure 8.7. Nun praying in front of the Man of Sorrows, sixteenth century. Upper cloister, Convento de San Salvador, Malinalco, state of Mexico. Photo by Alessia Frassani.

object of their attention is seemingly a monstrous creature floating in the sky in the top vignette. In the latter, a lone man stands with his arms crossed in a sign of respect for the same being. The illustrations seemingly depict Tezcatlipoca, who appears at the beginning of Book 1 in full attire. Here, however, the god is completely transformed, and his bifurcated tongue suggests a diabolical creature. In the image, the presence of both worshipers and a priest, who is cast in an intermediary role, separates the divine from the human in a clear hierarchical arrangement. At the same time, there are no costumes or musical instruments to indicate a specific ceremony or gods; instead, the image is a diagrammatic representation of a religious power structure.

Throughout Book 6 of the Florentine Codex, images and texts make constant (albeit indirect and implicit) references to Christianity by employing an image typology that abruptly deviates from Mesoamerican types and adheres to models derived from Christian doctrinal texts. Printing presses had been active in New Spain since 1539 and were almost exclusively devoted to the production of religious texts in Indigenous languages. It is likely that Indigenous peoples participated in the production of books in their native language, not only as writers and translators but also as illustrators and typographers (Grañén Porrúa 1991, 24–25, Garone Gravier 2011, 161–163). Despite fragmentary historical information, the participation of Indigenous intellectuals seems quite reasonable given that New Spain’s doctrinal books made extensive use of their native language in bilingual texts, a feature shared by *Primeros Memoriales* and the Florentine Codex, and indeed an innovation of New Spain’s presses. Therefore, it is unsurprising that manuscript and book illustrations resembled each other, as they were all simultaneously produced in the same intellectual milieu of the friars’ conventual schools.



Figure 8.8. Prayer to Tezcatlipoca, *Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España*. Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Ms. Med. Palat. 219, vol. 2, bk. 6, f. 8r. Courtesy of MiC. Any further reproduction is prohibited.

The strikingly different visual references used by Nahua artists in illustrations of the cuicame and the discourses of the elders demonstrate that there were two types of religious images at play, each with a distinct cultural ancestry and formal and iconographic features. They conveyed a different religious experience in pictures and words. It is generally assumed that huehuetlatolli was a Mesoamerican genre (León Portilla 1961). In the colonial context of book production, while the cuicame were largely left untranslated, the more prosaic discourses of the elders seem to find a counterpart in the doctrinal genre employed by the friars (Dibble 1974).

As for the illustrations, Tezcatlipoca is distorted and monstrous in Book 6 of the Florentine Codex. In Book 1, he appears with all his diagnostic attributes, along with all the other Mesoamerican gods in an arrangement akin to the Greco-Roman pantheon (Botta 2016, Olivier 2016). Perhaps a Classical topos allowed the tlacuilo a truer image of the ancient gods who were no longer worshiped (not openly, at least) when the book was compiled. However, is this depiction more reliable, or have we come to “believe” colonial images of Mesoamerican gods because they present the readable iconographic pictures that we need as scholars?

The overall structure of the Florentine Codex, which loosely follows that of *Primeros Memoriales*, is encyclopedic and based on medieval and universalistic conceptions of knowledge (Robertson 1959, 167–172, Palmeri Capesciotti 2001, Ríos Castaño 2014, ch. 3). As remarked by Quiñones Keber (1988, 207), the first six books of the manuscript are dedicated to ancient sacred wisdom, including chapters on gods, ceremonies, divination, and prognostication—all aspects also treated in ancient pictographic manuscripts. Books 7 to 12, by contrast, concern natural philosophy—topics and genres that have no counterpart in Indigenous manuscripts. The Mesoamerican roots of the first six books prioritized orality and performance tied to ritual events. Book 6 also belongs to this part, but incorporates Christian sermons and prayers, effectively mediating between a Mesoamerican conception of ceremonies and their depictions and Western rhetoric and images. While the texts are inspired and poetic in Book 6, Tezcatlipoca is depicted as unreachable and monstrous. Through the use of grisaille, the tlacuilos commented on all that is missing when a Christian conception is applied to Mesoamerican religion: the gods are unrecognizable, distant, and silenced. Monochrome illustrations in Sahagún’s works typically accompanied very long texts that claimed to be verbatim reproductions of recited originals. The text is thus frozen and not performed. The gods have left this world, and the new religion posits a god who remains unknowable. The use of monochrome, based on engraved illustrations, communicates the idea that the Christian way of constructing doctrinal truth is incapable of conveying Mesoamerican divinity. Thus, Sahaguntine illustrations express the impossibility of a resolution between Mesoamerican and Christian conceptions of the sacred.

8.1.3. History and its moral

Book 12 of the Florentine Codex relates the conquest of Mexico-Tenochtitlan by Cortés’ invading troops. The book is unique to the Florentine Codex and not present in *Primeros Memoriales*. Lockhart (1993, 1–27) argued that the narrative of the city’s siege and capitulations was likely collected at an early date in Tlatelolco, based on details of the account that specifically refer to this locality of Mexico City. It is well known that illustrations were left uncolored starting from Volume 3, Book 11, folio 178r, which is probably due to technical and logistical problems such as a lack of pigment or time to apply it before the work was shipped to Europe. However, in Book 12, the use of color is resumed in a few vignettes, thus creating a visible contrast with the rest of the images.

Folio 34r (Fig. 8.9) illustrates the rebellion of Tlatelolca warriors after the massacre perpetrated by the Spaniards in the sacred precinct during the celebrations of Toxcatl. A Nahua warrior overcomes his adversaries, who are falling in the background. His spear is horizontally positioned and straight, and the diagonal posture of his legs creates an abstract and solid composition that starkly contrasts with the dismembered bodies of the falling Spaniards. The colorful feathers on the warrior’s helm and the pink hue of

his skin clearly indicate that the figures in the background are purposefully painted in grisaille. The Tlatelolca warrior is static and victorious, while the Spaniards are trampled and defeated.

The illustration neatly conforms to the genre of Book 12, which appears to be based on a long-standing European historiographic paradigm established by Greek historian Herodotus, a fact that has not been recognized before. Herodotus’ narration of the Greek war of resistance against the Achaemenid Empire combines eyewitness accounts of battles and other pivotal events of the conflict with anecdotal and ethnographic details about the jewelry, armor, and weapons of the foreign Persians (Hartog 2009). Sahagún (1950–1982, bk. 12) adheres to this Classical topos by declaring in the introduction to Book 12 that he wanted to compile the history of the conquest to record Indigenous terms for weaponry and other information related to the Nahua art of war. Ludo Snijders indicated to me in a personal communication (2015) that the reference to the Persian war was indeed explicit in the image under discussion, as well as in the following images in folios 36v and 39r because the shield of the Nahua warrior sports a capital lambda (Λ) whose diagonals mimic the firm posture of the Tlatelolca warrior. The letter is equivalent to the Latin “L” and stands for “Lacedaemon,” the Greek name of the city of Sparta. It bears remembering that the Spartans were the army that led the Greek coalition in a heroic last stand at Thermopylae.

In central Mexico, history was not as favorable to the Nahuas as it was to the Greeks. When the Tlatelolca rebellion finally succumbed to the Spaniards, all was lost. The use of monochrome in this context functions within a specific historiographic genre and should not be understood in relation to chants, ceremonies, and performance, as analyzed above, but rather as a parable or moral. In “pagan” times, before the advent and imposition of Christianity, the confrontation between Spaniards and Nahuas would have resulted in a favorable outcome for the besieged Nahuas. The painter of the images in Book 12 took the final defeat and imposition of Christianity as an incontrovertible fact and a starting point. He projected the events of the conquest to an ancient time, when the “others” (or barbarians) would have been the Spaniards. Thus, the cities around the lake in the basin of Mexico were accordingly equated to the coalition of Greek cities against the invading Persian army.

The impact of Christianity’s imposition is evident in another illustration in which color is applied as a juxtaposition to monochrome. The vignette in folio 40v (Fig. 8.10) represents in a vertical arrangement the sequence of events that followed the death of Motecuhzoma II, leader of Tenochtitlan and the Mexica, and Itzquauhtzin, ruler of Tlatelolco, when the Spaniards threw their bodies into the city canals. Eventually, Nahua priests recovered the bodies and gave them a proper burial. In the first illustration at the top, two Spaniards and the rigid but lifeless body of Itzquauhtzin are painted in full color; this contrasts with



Figure 8.9. Tlatelolca insurgent warrior, *Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España*. Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Ms. Med. Palat. 220, vol. 3, bk. 12, f. 34r. Courtesy of MiC. Any further reproduction is prohibited.

the lower half of the image, in which the murky waters of the canal and the body of the Mexica tlatoani are depicted in gray. The use of color progressively ceases and in the second vignette the image is rendered only in black outline. This shift in the use of color is accompanied by changes in composition. While the bodies of the deceased rulers are depicted in a frontal position in the upper part of the image and the point of view is longitudinally placed in the air, Motecuhzoma's body is disarticulated when Nahua priests transport it. The viewer finds themselves on

the same plane as the protagonists of the events. The lifeless movement of the Mexica ruler's body equals that of the fallen Spanish soldiers in the previously discussed illustration on folio 34r to indicate defeat and death. It also signals the tlatoani's transition from the status of a hero to that of a defeated human.

Magaloni Kerpel (2003a, 38–40) interpreted the two compositions as contrasting pre-Hispanic and Spanish views. First, the static and front-facing bodies of



Figure 8.10. The death of Motecuhzoma and Itzquauhtzin and the burial of Motecuhzoma, *Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España*. Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Ms. Med. Palat. 220, vol. 3, bk. 12, f. 40v. Courtesy of MiC. Any further reproduction is prohibited.

the deceased rulers rely on Mesoamerican canons in the representation of sacrificial victims, while the transportation of Motecuhzoma's body is based on the Catholic theme of the burial of Christ in the following scene. I agree with the latter identification, which is amply evidenced by the many representations of the same theme in Mexican conventos (Fig. 8.11). However, I do not think that the colored and frontal depiction of the Indigenous leaders is related to the depiction of human sacrifice in

the Florentine Codex or pre-Hispanic manuscripts, which usually show naked, disarticulated or dismembered, bleeding bodies (see, for example, Fig. 4.14, 6.9). Rather, I believe that both images rely on prototypes of the dead body of Christ, whose depiction underwent profound transformation during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (Ringbom 1965, Belting 1994, Nagel 2000). Increasingly emotional and dramatic images and compositions departed from long-held canons imposed by Byzantine icons,



Figure 8.11. The burial of Christ, sixteenth century. Cloister, Convento de Santo Domingo, Tepetlaoxtoc, state of Mexico. Photo by Javier García.

which were front-facing, hieratic, and flat, as seen in the famous feather mosaic that Diego Huanitzin, the governor of Mexico City, bequeathed to Pope Paul III in 1539 (Fig. 8.12). The sequence of images in the Florentine Codex presents the trajectory from iconicity to naturalism.

According to the text and images, the burial of Motecuhzoma was not conducted according to established pre-Hispanic customs. Instead, his body was covered with wood and then burnt. In the Nahuatl text, it is further stated that the body of Motecuhzoma was disrespected and humiliated in a manner reminiscent of Jesus' suffering during the Passion. Eventually, Motecuhzoma's body burst into flames and produced a foul odor. According to

the narrative in both images and words, it would appear that the Mexica ruler lost his sacred status when his life assumed the same trajectory as that of Christ. However, Jesus died as a man, only to be resurrected as a pure spirit. By contrast, the Mexica ruler had the opposite destiny, moving from a deified presence to physical disappearance (Bröchler 2009, 63–69).

The use of monochrome enabled Indigenous artists to discuss the new status and function of the image in a colonial context in purely visual terms. The humanization of God according to Christian canons denotes a world without gods. The new god imposed by the Spaniards after barbaric campaigns of destruction that razed ancient



Figure 8.12. Diego Huanitzin, *Mass of Saint Gregory*, detail. Musée des Jacobins, Auch. Photo by Steven Zucker.

temples and their images bears the wounds of defeat on his body: humiliation, betrayal, torture, and death. Motecuhzoma-Christ expresses the disappearance of the gods from Indigenous land. The use of grisaille creates an image that is only a trace of its former self, deprived of all the colors and powers that were lost on the way from the Old World.

8.2. The Codex Yanhuitlan

The Codex Yanhuitlan, the last manuscript considered in this book, is quite different from those addressed so far. Its contents are not religious, although there are remarkable images of Mesoamerican gods. It dates to the colonial period but was not produced in the schools of the conventos. However, as I claim in the following pages, it shows a clear relationship with and dependence on the artistic innovations of the friars' workshops. The Codex Yanhuitlan was produced in the Mixtec town of the same name under Indigenous patronage and thus offers an opportunity to close the story of Mesoamerican pictography and religion by returning to an Indigenous point of view, albeit in an inevitably colonial context.

The manuscript hails from the Mixteca in modern Oaxaca, southern Mexico, a region known for its long pictographic tradition in pre-contact times. Possibly drafted around 1550, the manuscript directly addresses historical events and characters related to the tumultuous period following the invasion and the imposition of the colonial regime. For this reason, it has attracted the attention of scholars since the 1940s, which resulted in a progressive clearer image of its contents and the town's history (Jiménez Moreno and Mateos Higuera 1940, Berlin 1947, Sepúlveda y Herrera 1994, Jansen and Pérez Jiménez 2009, Doesburg et al. 2015). Every folio of the manuscript was cut and separated from the original quire or binding, most likely in the eighteenth century. Most of the pages are in the Biblioteca Lafragua in Puebla (hereafter referred to as "Lafragua"), while other parts are found in the Archivo General de la Nación (AGN) in Mexico City and the Centro Cultural Santo Domingo of the Biblioteca Francisco de Burgoa (CCSD) in Oaxaca.

I specifically address the manuscript's style and iconography, which display a unique intermingling of Mixtec, Nahuatl, and Western features. Grisaille is used throughout the manuscript, which represents an innovation of the Codex Yanhuitlan within the Mixtec pictographic tradition. Folio Lafragua 8v (Fig. 8.13) depicts a typical colonial scene. A large Spanish figure looms in the center and is seated on a large wooden armchair. He is engaged in a lively interaction with three visibly smaller Indigenous men while holding an oversized necklace (most likely a rosary), which extends to the other side of the page. The Indigenous figures on the Spaniard's right stand on top of a rectangle, a place name for Yanhuitlan found throughout the manuscript. Another male figure addresses the Spaniard from the left. The lower part of the page is missing, but there is another place name on the right,

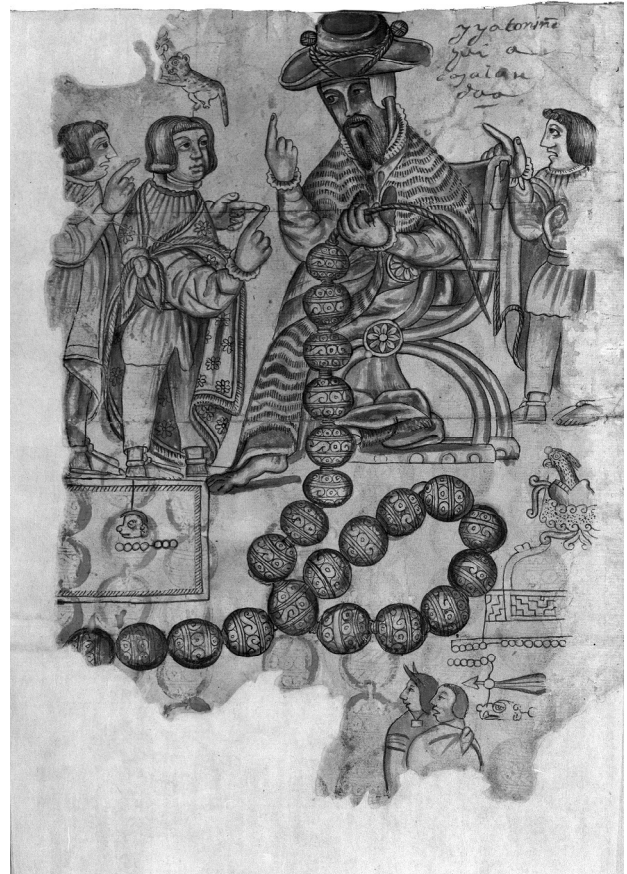


Figure 8.13. Man holding a rosary and talking to Indigenous peoples. Codex Yanhuitlan, f. 8v. Biblioteca José María Lafragua, Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, Puebla.

which is currently unidentified. The identity of the scene's protagonist has been a matter of disagreement among scholars. On the one hand, Jiménez Moreno and Higuera (1940, 64) considered him to be a religious figure such as a vicar or a bishop because of his long robe and large hat, whose brim is tied with a knotted rope. Jansen and Pérez Jiménez (2009, 167), on the other hand, identified him as a lay person—more specifically, Francisco de las Casas, a Spanish conquistador and the first *encomendero* of Yanhuitlan, who was said to have usurped the role of the friars and taught the rosary (doctrine) to Indigenous people under his *encomienda* (Sepúlveda y Herrera 1999, 167–168).

I believe that an illustration produced in Juan Pablos' printing workshop in Mexico City may contribute to the discussion on the identity of this enigmatic character. The print first appeared in Pedro de Gante's 1553 *doctrina* (doctrinal manual), a bilingual Nahuatl and Spanish text. On a page dedicated to the Spiritual Works of Mercy (*Las obras de misericordia espirituales*; Fig. 8.14), a small illustration depicts a man engaged in a lively conversation with a group of smaller people standing in front of him. The image illustrates one of the seven spiritual works of mercy—namely instructing the ignorant, which involved lay people, not friars or priests, in the care of the spiritual

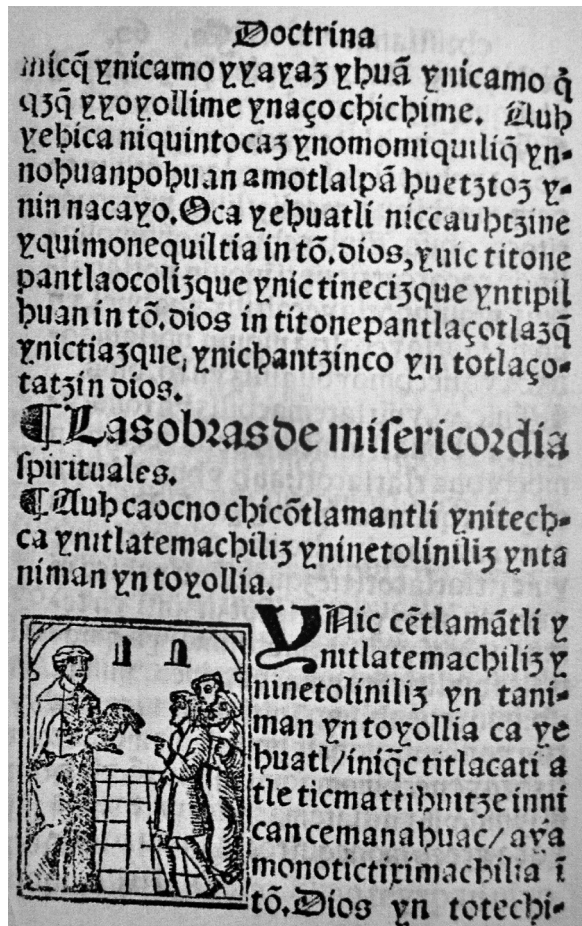


Figure 8.14. Spiritual Works of Mercy. Illustration from Pedro de Gante, *Doctrina cristiana en lengua mexicana* (Mexico City: Juan Pablos, 1553), f. 60v. Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin.

well-being of those in need. People who offered works of mercy were often depicted wearing a long robe that covered their entire body and a large hat, a reference to the first act of mercy attributed to a traveling Samaritan. Therefore, the scene from the Mexican engraving shows a double relationship with the page from the Codex Yanhuitlan in both form and content. Not only can the central character be identified as a lay person, but it can also be argued that he is in fact engaged in a spiritual work of mercy, given the large rosary that fills the page. García Valencia and Hermann Lejarazu (2012) noted that the Codex Yanhuitlan's characters make particularly complex gestures that nonetheless bear little resemblance to the equally elaborate hand movements of the protagonists of the Mixtec codices. The colonial manuscript adheres more closely to the rhetorical gesturality of Renaissance treatises found in many of the early illustrations produced for Juan Pablos' press, which indicates that such representational conventions circulated in New Spain's artistic, intellectual, and Indigenous circles from a very early date and had already been fully absorbed by local artists when the Codex Yanhuitlan was produced.

Juan Pablos (originally Giovanni Paoli from Brescia, Italy) co-founded the first printing shop on the continent

in 1539 with Juan Cromberger, who hailed from Seville. The printing house was located on a plot that was once the property of Juan de Zumárraga, the first bishop and inquisitor of New Spain, who also resided nearby (Grañén Porrúa 2010, 3–6). The Franciscan school San José de los Naturales was built on the old grounds of the destroyed royal workshops of the palace of Motecuhzoma (Escalante Gonzalbo 2010, 137) and located only blocks away from the press. Although the conventual school in Santiago Tlatelolco is widely credited as the main center of production for Indigenous manuscripts in the capital, the city center of Mexico was also important. The intellectual and physical proximity of the Office of the Inquisition, the school of San José de los Naturales and the press of Juan Pablos offers an opportunity to ponder the exchanges that may have occurred between men who worked and lived there at both the local and regional level, once the effects of the conventos' institutionalized education were felt in other parts of New Spain.

In this light, further similarities between images produced in Juan Pablos' workshop and the Codex Yanhuitlan may not be coincidental. The *Manual de adultos*, a catechism for adults, was possibly the first book published in the New World by the press and is known today only through fragments held at the Biblioteca Nacional de España (Grañén Porrúa 2010, 22, 145–148). The book appears to be a Latin-to-Spanish translation of *Liber Sacerdotalis* (first printed by Pietro Ravani in Venice in 1523), a very popular manual for the administration of sacraments and Catholic liturgy that was widely utilized by friars in New Spain, including Bishop Juan de Zumárraga (Zulaica Gárate 1939, 31–36). The frontispiece of the *Liber Sacerdotalis* depicts a small group of priests or novices who are presented from the back and kneeling in front of the pope and other prelates (Fig. 8.15). A similar representational strategy is used to illustrate a crowd of men on one of the Codex Yanhuitlan's pages, which breaks with pre-Hispanic Mixtec conventions (Fig. 8.16; Escalante Gonzalbo 2010, 165–168). Some of their heads have a tonsure, which was typical for ordained men but quite uncharacteristic for Indigenous men.

Despite the Codex Yanhuitlan's evident Mixtec affiliation, the manuscript's exact site of production is not known. The Indigenous ruler of the town, don Domingo de Guzmán, and the governor don Francisco de las Casas spent two years in Zumárraga's prisons in Mexico City while the Inquisition officially investigated accusations of idolatry and apostasy leveled against them (Greenleaf 1969, 74–81). During interrogatories, which occurred between 1544 and 1546, Domingo de Guzmán testified that he knew the Christian doctrine because he learned it from a book circulated by the friars (Grañén Porrúa 2010, 21). It is even more likely that, during their two years in jail, both Mixtec men were given regular instruction with doctrinal manuals. The manuscript was painted not long after the two Mixtec leaders' safe return to their town; thus, it is perhaps unsurprising that the painter of the Codex Yanhuitlan relied on print images.

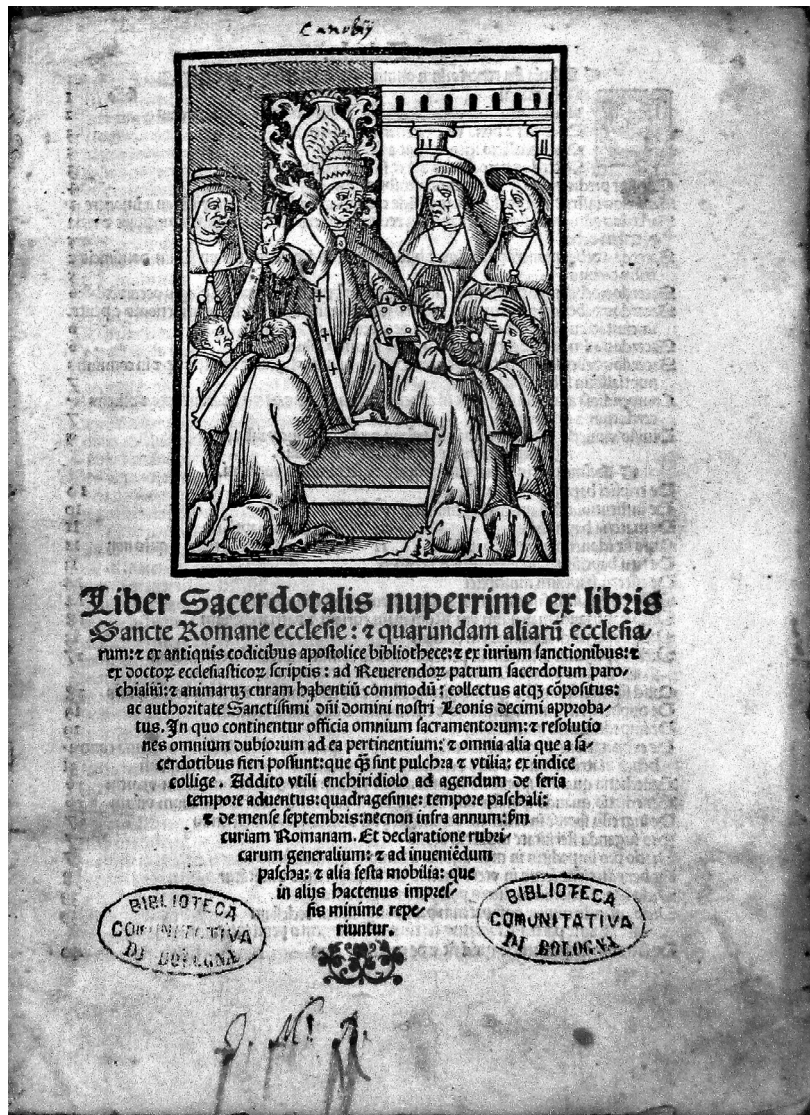


Figure 8.15. Frontispiece of *Liber Sacerdotalis* (Venice: Pietro Ravani, 1548). Biblioteca dell'Archiginnasio, Bologna.

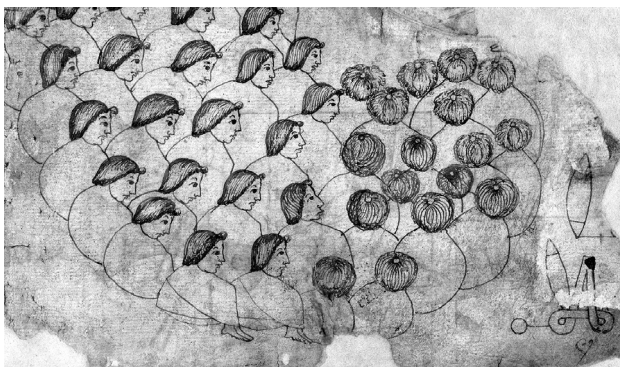


Figure 8.16. Codex Yanhuitlan, f. 5r; detail. Biblioteca José María Lafragua, Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, Puebla.

Another interesting correlation between circulating Christian prints and the imagery of the Codex Yanhuitlan can be seen in the two large medallions that depict a solar god and Xipe Totec in AGN folios 504r–507v (in the left

of Fig. 8.17). The heads are encircled by a series of rays commonly found on Mixtec gold disks. Although they presumably depict pre-Hispanic objects, the rendition of the two gods' profiles is inconsistent with known Mixtec goldwork, which favors front-facing and often three-dimensional depictions. Rather, the medallionic portraits of Christ (Hill 1920), which became increasingly common in fourteenth-century Europe, seem to be a closer iconographic antecedent. A print by Hans Burgkmair was widely copied, and different versions appeared in the books of New Spain. Some were perhaps locally produced, as evinced from their style and execution (Grañén Porrúa 1993–1994, 105–107; Fig. 8.18). In folio 504v, the two medallions of the solar god and Xipe are paired with two anthropomorphic and life-like depictions of the rain god, who is known as Ñuhu Ndzaui among the Mixtecs, and a female goddess. As established by Jansen and Pérez Jiménez (2009, 159), the four gods correspond to the four tribute and veintena periods of the Mexica Empire, to which Yanhuitlan was subject (see Section 4.2). The solar god is related to the celebration of Panquetzaliztli,

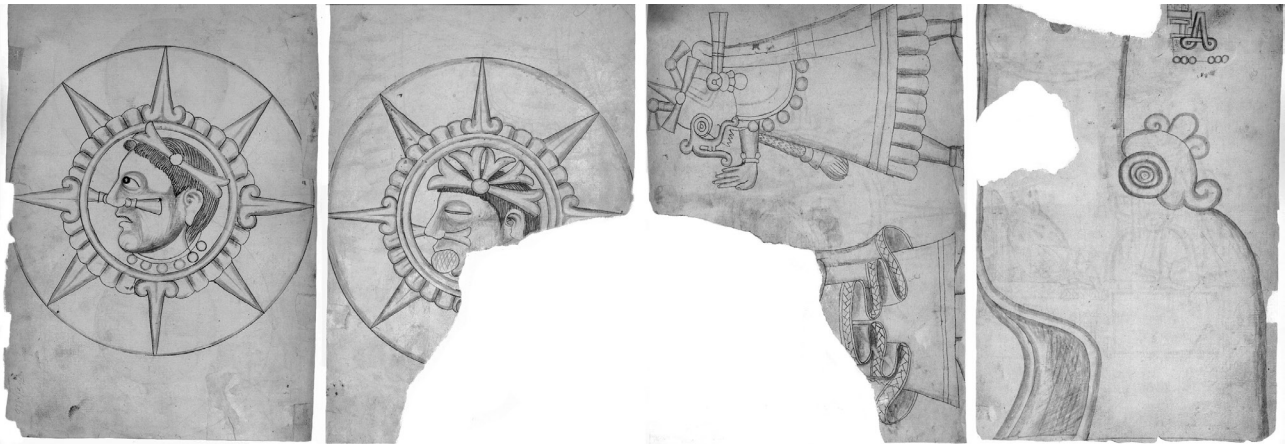


Figure 8.17. Reading right to left, a cave and four gods. Codex Yanhuitlan, ff. 504–507. Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City.

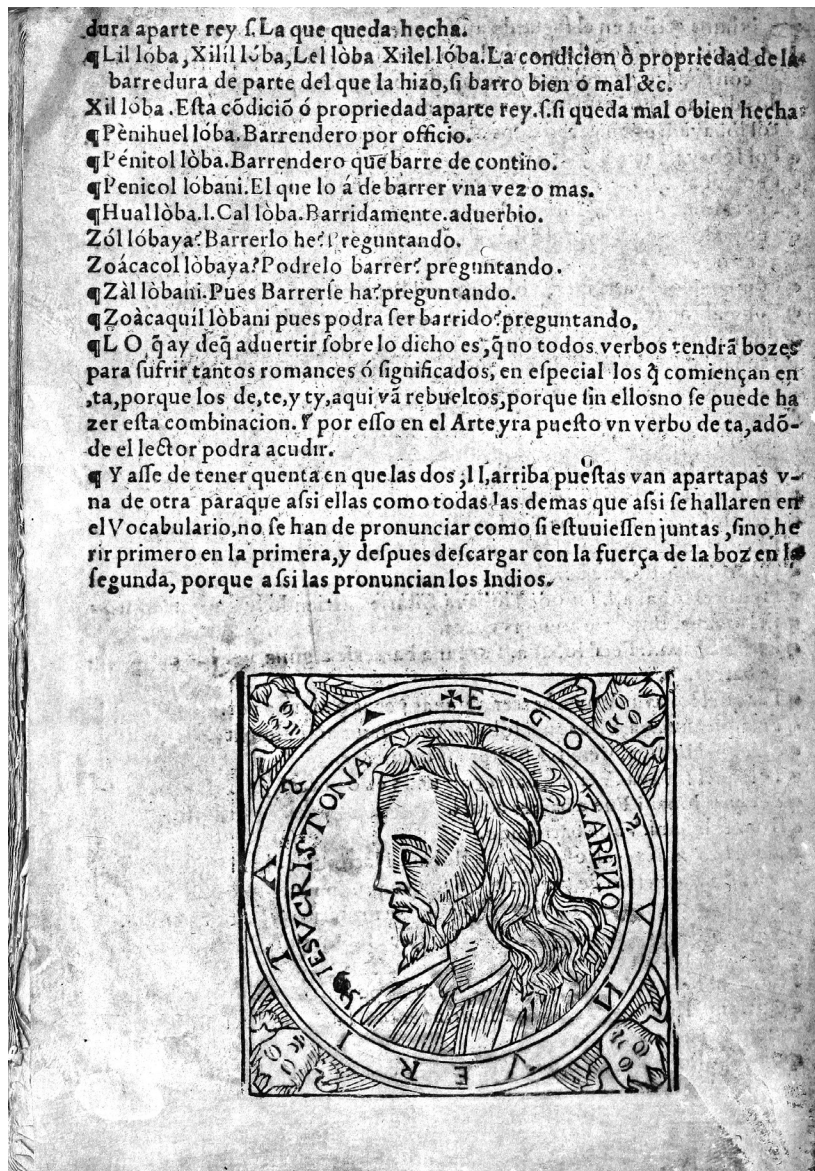


Figure 8.18. Portrait of Christ. Illustration from Juan de Córdoba, *Vocabulario en lengua zapoteca* (Mexico City: Pedro de Ocharte, 1573). John Carter Brown Library, Providence.

Xipe Totec to Tlacaxipehualiztli, and the rain god to Etzalcualiztli. Finally, the goddess can be identified as Tlazolteotl, who corresponds to the *veintena* of Oehpaniztli. According to the most accepted reconstruction of the manuscript (Doesburg et al. 2015, 53–54), the four gods were positioned right before a giant reptilian maw, as reconstructed in Figure 8.17. Jansen and Pérez Jiménez (2009, 159) interpreted the crocodilian creature as the first day of the calendar, day Crocodile, while Doesburg et al. (2015, 54) considered it to be the entrance to a cave and the earth, which is often zoomorphically rendered in pictographic manuscripts. These two options are not mutually exclusive, as previously seen on pages 39–40 of the Codex Borgia (Fig. 3.5) and pages 17–22 of the Codex Laud (Fig. 7.22). In all these representations, the day/cave crocodile eats the days and ceremonies and the gods that lead them. In the Codex Borgia, the extended and horizontal jaws of the crocodilian creature count as the first day, day Crocodile, of the two sets of days that extend over the sides of the manuscript. In the Codex Laud, the gods walk towards a cave, where an offering is eventually placed. As noted by Anders and Jansen (1994, 253), in Codex Laud the day 1 Jaguar is inserted into the cave in the form of a round dot and a feline ear at the back of the crocodilian monster. The pages of the Codex Yanhuitlan, possibly painted in the early 1550s, are not only among the earliest surviving depictions of Mesoamerican gods in the post-conquest period but also indeed contemporaneous to the *veintena* images from colonial manuscripts discussed in the previous chapters. Based on these notable aspects of the Codex Yanhuitlan, it can be concluded that the

manuscript was produced by an artist from a cultural and religious milieu who was well aware of the friars' intellectual pursuits and their preferred portrayal of both "ancient" Mesoamerican religion and Christian doctrine.

A third distinctive iconographic element found throughout the manuscript further corroborates the idea that the *tlacuilo* of the Codex Yanhuitlan had been trained at the schools of the conventos. In two instances (Lafragua 9v, AGN 506v), Indigenous rulers sit on the typical Nahuatl *icpalli*, a royal seat with a high back. In folios Lafragua 8v (Fig. 8.13), Lafragua 1v, and CCSD 1r, women sport the typical two-horned hairstyle of married Nahuatl women, while Indigenous men wear the characteristic central Mexican *tilma*, a large cloth knotted on the shoulder. These features are not found in Mixtec manuscripts. The same "foreign" conventions appear in the sixteenth-century monochrome murals in San Juan Teitipac in the valley of Oaxaca, in which local friars, Spaniards, and Indigenous people participate in the Holy Friday procession (Fig. 8.19). The use of Nahuatl conventions indicates that the artist was either from central Mexico or had been trained at a conventual school in that region. The fact that monochrome was employed in both mural and manuscript painting further suggests that the technique was also tied to a specific central Mexican artistic training and the schools of the conventos.

The heterogeneity of the Codex Yanhuitlan's sources complicates the identification of the document's genre. In addition, its purpose and commission are not documented.



Figure 8.19. Parade during Holy Friday, sixteenth century. Convento of San Juan Teitipac, Oaxaca. Photo by Javier García.

The combination of Christian and Mesoamerican iconography seems even more baffling when one recalls the persecution suffered by the leaders of Yanhuitlan shortly before the manuscript's presumed realization. The manuscript was likely sponsored by the cacique Domingo de Guzmán, following his return to power after two years in prison in Mexico City, where he had been formally charged and persecuted by the Inquisition. Perhaps don Domingo's defeated rulership after years of struggle accounts for the juxtaposition of different ideologies: pre-Hispanic gods and their importance in the Indigenous tribute system and Spanish and Dominican attempts to dominate local resources.

8.3. Discussion

As Quiñones Keber (1988, 203) remarked, Sahagún's project was inherently contradictory. The friars sought information regarding Indigenous religion and customs while simultaneously persecuting, demonizing, and destroying every manifestation of them. Nahua artists bore witness to a world in which the past that they were asked to portray was only visible in the ruins that surrounded the schools that they attended. In the Sahaguntine work, the reference to Classical antiquity and the abrupt passage to Christianity should be understood in this light.

Although it is deeply indebted to the artistic endeavors of the conventual schools, the Codex Yanhuitlan seems to propose a different model of coexistence. Mesoamerican gods, despite being depicted according to European conventions, were not framed within a Classical canon but rather were clearly presented as part of a Mesoamerican understanding of time, the calendar, and tribute. Mesoamerican gods and Christian symbols and institutions are represented in the Codex Yanhuitlan, in stark contrast to the conspicuous absence of European religion in the extensive Sahaguntine works (Terraciano 2010, 67). Despite its purported ethnographic stance, Sahagún's experiment is fraught with the impossibility of reconciliation between the Mesoamerican and Christian worldviews, as seen in the image of Motecuhzoma-Christ. Rather than a mediation between two worlds, as frequently suggested (e.g., Escalante Gonzalbo 2003, 191, Magaloni Kerpel 2003b), the Nahua artists who worked within the confines of the conventual schools belonged to a single world, replete with contradictions that could not be resolved in light of the friars' patronage and exigencies.

The use of monochrome reveals the mechanism by which the painted image was created and conceived and, by extension, reveals gaps in the friars' contradictory project. As previously suggested (Cline 1988, Magaloni Kerpel 2003b, 221), it is possible that Book 12 of the Florentine Codex offers a subversive view of Sahagún's project that was highly critical of Spanish military and political presence in Mexico. However, Indigenous artists were required to frame history through a dramatic and irreconcilable division between the periods before and after the conquest, a legacy that lingers in academia to this day. The Codex

Yanhuitlan, in contrast, manages to portray the Indigenous point of view on the colonial situation. As a result, Mesoamerican and Catholic sacred images and objects are given similar and equal treatment in the Codex Yanhuitlan. By contrast, in the Florentine Codex, Christian imagery is only indirectly found in the diabolical representation of God-Tezcatlipoca in Book 6 and the Motecuhzoma-Christ. The Codex Yanhuitlan indeed belongs to a long Mixtec tradition of picture writing that did not wane with the conquest but adjusted to the colonial context and continued well into the eighteenth century, whereas the Sahaguntine experiment was short-lived because it was incapable of translating and imagining Mesoamerican religious and cultural conditions in the colonial context.

Conclusion

Understanding Mesoamerican religious pictography requires rethinking and questioning our own conceptions of what pictures and calendars “do.” I proposed that pictographic images were not a series of finite symbol sets. While they were part of a larger cultural system, both their symbolic meaning and formal qualities were open to reinterpretation and reinvention depending on the occasion, time, and place of execution. Mesoamerican pictorials are characterized by an enduring but somewhat deceptive iconicity. As demonstrated throughout this book, iconographic studies and interpretations of Indigenous art rely heavily on external sources, which are often fraught with ignorance and prejudice on the part of the writers. In the Western artistic tradition, which has historically favored representation over abstraction, naturalism tends to be understood as a strategy that strips images of magical powers by constraining them to reality. In Indigenous America, where there is no external “text” (either written or recited) for explaining images (Severi 2004), the mimetic and iconic impulse is of a different nature, more akin to magic. Creating a picture by copying and replicating generates a second nature to the original capable also of multiplying its powers (Taussig 1993). By creating a picture of a god with the attributes of an animal or a plant, their unique abilities—flight, vision, strength, dexterity, and curative properties—are transferred to the book, where the image resides, and to the person invoking the god, who verbally replicates the power of the original. In other words, pictographic images do not function according to the Western semiosis that encodes meaning through external referents. Instead, they derive their power from the suggestion of analogies, assonances, and resemblances that generate meaning within the picture.

Understanding pictographic images as generators of meaning by association rather than symbols also has implications for the understanding of time and time-keeping systems as cultural constructions, as it contradicts the notion of time as objectively measurable and controllable by technological means. Mechanical, digital, and astronomical clocks that can capture time in an increasingly precise manner turn our conception of time into something unquestionable and absolute. What if time in Mesoamerica was understood as being inherently dependent on the *tonalpohualli*, the mathematical system employed to measure it, with all its possibilities and constraints? I believe that the numerous inconsistencies found in the correlation of the Christian and Mesoamerican calendars demonstrate that there was no impulse towards synchronicity in Indigenous America. Rather, time-keeping was conceived as a conscious activity for pondering human destiny and one’s place in the world. There were not two (or more) separate calendars in ancient Mesoamerica, one historical and one religious, because reckoning

with the past and envisioning the future always entailed mediation with the constraints of the present. A thorough reconsideration of the *veintena* cycle is a theme that extends over this entire book and encompasses both the potency of images and the calendar. I proposed that the visionary aspects of the *veintenas* were profoundly misunderstood and silenced by the friars and their pupils, who refrained from describing the most private and mystical aspects of the rituals and privileged information on their public execution instead. The fact that even the earliest colonial sources on the ceremonial cycle were compiled more than a generation after the last public performance took place further complicates the matter. The domestication of the *veintena* rituals relied on the creation of a calendar ad hoc and the pursuit of a correlation between Mesoamerican and Christian chronologies. Finally, I proposed seeking fragmented clues on the *veintenas* in pre-Hispanic and early colonial documents (the *Codices Borgia*, *Laud*, *Magliabechiano*, and *Yanhuitlan*) to counter and question the systematic reconstruction conducted by the friars.

Consequently, I believe that the strict distinction between religious and historical documents should also be questioned, as it relies too heavily on European and post-Enlightenment conceptions of history and religion. While there were certainly different genres of pictorial manuscripts (e.g., genealogical, tributary, and divinatory), separating belief from fact is not always an easy feat. Historical events, especially catastrophic ones such as conquest and famine, impact not only religious behavior but also ideas regarding divinity and destiny. Moreover, preconceived notions informed by one’s education and culture dictate the way in which even traumatic events are apprehended and understood. I would like to conclude this book with a note on a specific Nahuatl term employed to describe pictographic manuscripts in Sahagún (1950–1982, bk. 10, ch. 29). In a chapter dedicated to the discussion of the various kinds of people who dwelt in Mexico before the arrival of the Spaniards, the first paragraphs introduce the Toltecs, the putative cultural ancestors of the Aztecs. According to the text, “the Toltecs were very wise” (Sahagún, 1950–1982, bk. 10, ch. 29, 168) because they invented the year count (*cexiuhlapoalli*) and the day count (*tonalpoalli*): “They established the way in which the night, the day, would work; which day sign was good, favorable; and which was evil [...]. All their discoveries formed the book of dreams.” In Nahuatl, the “book of dreams” is called a *temicamatl*, which is given as “book for interpreting dreams” in Anderson and Dibble’s translation. However, from the passage above, it can be inferred that the *temicamatl* was a book that contained all calendrical and mantic knowledge and not a separate book used to interpret dreams. Later in the same chapter, in a passage on the origins of the Mexica, the *temicamatl* is mentioned again as an invention of the wise and

elderly people who remained behind after the migrating Mexica were abandoned by their leaders in Tamoanchan. According to this passage, “they [the *tlamatinime*, the wise people] devised the count of days [tonalpoalli], the book of years [*xioamatl*], the count of years [*xippoalli*], and the book of dreams [temicamatl]” (Sahagún 1950–1982, bk. 10, 191). Once again, it would seem that the book of dreams belonged to the broad category of repositories of calendrical knowledge. According to the text, these books recorded time and historical events until the time of Itzcoatl, when they were all burnt. In Section 6.4, I discussed Itzcoatl’s “book burning” as an act that was possibly instigated by the cihuacoatl Tlacaelel to rewrite history (as well as time and knowledge).

Finally, books of dreams were still in use at the time of the arrival of the Spaniards. In the third book of the Florentine Codex, a chapter related to Nahua priests’ life and teaching in the *calmecac* (priestly school) specifies, “Especially was there teaching of songs which they called the gods’ songs inscribed in books [*teucuicatl*, *amoxxotoca*]. And especially was there teaching of the count of days [tonalpoalli], the book of dreams [temicamatl], and book of years [*xiuhamatl*]” (Sahagún 1950–1982, bk. 3, ch. 8, 67). Singing and the count of days and years were all closely related to the same object, the temicamatl, which I believe best describes what we have come to know as Mesoamerican religious manuscripts. Dreams convey knowledge through direct and subjective experience rather than rote learning. Dreams make time malleable and adjustable. Finally, chanting is an appropriate concrete and sensorial manifestation of dreaming.

Manuscripts and Visual Sources

The following list provides links to repositories worldwide that have made available digital reproductions of the ancient manuscripts. Libraries and museums also hold nineteenth-century copies of Mesoamerican codices, which are especially useful because colors may have faded, hues may have changed, and brilliance may have been lost in some manuscripts in their current state. Thus, Agostino Aglio's drawings, held in the British Museum, and Lord Kingsborough's and the Duc de Loubat's publications can be fruitfully compared with original documents (Dupey García 2016, Snijders 2016, 109–32).

Codex Borbonicus. Pre-Hispanic/colonial amate screenfold (26.5 × 28.8 cm). Y120, Bibliothèque de l'Assemblée nationale, Paris. Facsimiles: *Manuscrit mexicain de la Bibliothèque du Palais Bourbon*. 1899. Edited by Joseph Florimond, duc de Loubat. Paris: Leroux; *Codex Borbonicus*. 1974. Graz: Akademische Druck- u. Verlagsanstalt.

Codex Borgia. Pre-Hispanic leather screenfold (ca. 27 × 26.5 cm). Mss Borg.mess.1, Vatican Library, Rome (https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Borg.mess.1). Facsimiles: *Antiquities of Mexico*. 1831. Edited by Edward King Kingsborough, vol. 3. London: Robert Havell and Colnaghi (<https://library.si.edu/digital-library/book/antiquities-mexico>; <https://bibliotecadigital.rah.es/es/consulta/registro.do?id=5968>), after original drawings by Agostino Aglio, British Museum, London (https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/E_Am2006-Drg-227); *Il manoscritto messicano borgiano*. 1898. Photochromography. Rome: Danesi (<https://library.metmuseum.org/record=b1294555>); *Codex Borgia*. 1976. Graz: Akademische Druck- u. Verlagsanstalt.

Codex Cospi. Pre-Hispanic leather screenfold (ca. 18 × 18 cm). Ms 4093, University Library, Bologna (https://bub.unibo.it/it/bub-digitale/il-codice-cospi/bub_ms4093_cospi). Facsimiles: *Antiquities of Mexico*. 1831. Edited by Edward King Kingsborough, vol. 2. London: Robert Havell and Colnaghi (<https://library.si.edu/digital-library/book/antiquities-mexico>; <https://bibliotecadigital.rah.es/es/consulta/registro.do?id=5968>), after original drawings by Agostino Aglio, British Museum, London (https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/E_Am2006-Drg-225); *Descripción del códice cospiano: manuscrito pictórico de los antiguos Náuas que se conserva en la Biblioteca de la Universidad de Bolonia*. 1898. Edited by Joseph Florimond, duc de Loubat. Rome: Danesi (<https://archive.org/details/librodelmessicod00univ>); *Codex Cospi*. 1968. Graz: Akademische Druck- u. Verlagsanstalt.

Codex Fejérváry-Mayer. Pre-Hispanic leather screenfold (ca. 17.5 × 17.5 cm). M12014, World Museum, Liverpool. Facsimiles: *Antiquities of Mexico*. 1831. Edited by Edward King Kingsborough, vol. 3. London: Robert Havell and

Colnaghi (<https://library.si.edu/digital-library/book/antiquities-mexico>; <https://bibliotecadigital.rah.es/es/consulta/registro.do?id=5968>); British Museum, London (https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/E_Am1902-0111-1); *Codex Fejérváry-Mayer: An Old Mexican Picture Manuscript in the Liverpool Free Public Museums (12014/M)*. 1901. Photochromography. Edited by Joseph Florimond, duc de Loubat. Berlin and London (<https://doi.org/10.5479/sil.818150.39088013500129>); *Codex Fejérváry-Mayer*. 1971. Graz: Akademische Druck- u. Verlagsanstalt.

Codex Ixtlilxochitl. Colonial manuscript on folio paper (ca. 30 × 21 cm). Mexicain 65-71, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris (<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b84701752>). *Codex Ixtlilxochitl*. 1976. Graz: Akademische Druck- u. Verlagsanstalt.

Codex Laud. Pre-Hispanic leather screenfold (ca. 15.7 × 16.5 cm). MS. Laud Misc. 678, Bodleian Library, Oxford (digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/objects/7f3d2646-088e-4686-87a6-2c2cf20f413e [from slides]). Facsimile: *Antiquities of Mexico*. 1831. Edited by Edward King Kingsborough, vol. 2. London: Robert Havell and Colnaghi (<https://library.si.edu/digital-library/book/antiquities-mexico>; <https://bibliotecadigital.rah.es/es/consulta/registro.do?id=5968>); 1966. *Codex Laud*. Graz: Akademische Druck- u. Verlagsanstalt.

Codex Magliabechiano. Colonial manuscript on cuarto paper (16 × 22 cm). Banco Rari, 232, Biblioteca nazionale centrale, Florence (<http://teca.bncf.firenze.sbn.it/ImageViewer/servlet/ImageViewer?idr=BNCF0003871444#page/1/mode/2up>). Facsimiles: Zelia Nuttall. 1903. *The Book of the Life of the Ancient Mexicans*. Berkeley: University of California (<https://archive.org/details/booklifeancient00boongoog>; <https://bvpb.mcu.es/es/consulta/registro.do?id=469712>); *Codex Magliabechiano XIII.3*. 1904. Edited by Joseph Florimond, duc de Loubat. Rome: Danesi.

Codex Mendoza. Colonial manuscript on folio paper (ca. 30 × 21 cm). MS. Arch. Selden. A. 1, Bodleian Library, Oxford (<https://iiif.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/iiif/viewer/2fea788e-2aa2-4f08-b6d9-648c00486220#?c=0&m=0&s=0&cv=0&r=0&xywh=-6816%2C-464%2C20217%2C9265>). Facsimile: *Antiquities of Mexico*. 1831. Edited by Edward King Kingsborough, vol. 1. London: Robert Havell and Colnaghi (<https://library.si.edu/digital-library/book/antiquitiesmexi1king>; <https://bibliotecadigital.rah.es/es/consulta/registro.do?id=5968>); Frances Berdan and Patricia Rieff Anawalt. 1992. *The Codex Mendoza*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

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Appendix

Glossary

S: Spanish; N: Nahuatl; M: Mazatec

amoxtli (N). Book

cempoallapohualli (N). The count of the twenty days, calendar of the veintenas

chjota chjine (M). Wise person

copal (N). Incense

cuicatli (N). Song

curandera/o (S). Healer

ilhuitl (N). Day, feast

ixiptla (N). Ritual impersonator, vicar of a god

kjoanda (M). Offering, ceremony

limpia (S). Cleansing ritual

nahual (N). Spirit companion, animal double

nemontemi (N). Five remaining days of the solar year count

piciete (S/N). Wild, green tobacco

pulque (S/N). Fermented beverage obtained from agave

teoamoxtli (N). Sacred book

tlacuilo (N). Painter of books

tlamacazque (N). Priest, minister of the temple

tonalamatl (N). Book of days, divinatory book

tonalpohualli (N). Count of the days, 260-day calendar

tonalpohuque. (N) Day-keeper, diviner

trecena (S). Thirteen-day period

veintena (S). Twenty-day period

velada (S). Night ceremony

xihuitl (N). Year

xiuhmolpilli (N). Binding of the years, at the end of a fifty-two-year period

xiuhpohualli (N). Count of the years

Day Names

1. Crocodile (N: cipactli)
2. Wind (N: Ehecatl)
3. House (N: calli)
4. Lizard (N: cuetzpactlin)

5. Serpent (N: coatl)

6. Death (N: miquiztli)

7. Deer (N: mazatl)

8. Rabbit (N: tochtli)

9. Water (N: atl)

10. Dog (N: itzcuintli)

11. Monkey (N: ozomatli)

12. Grass (N: malinalli)

13. Reed (N: acatl)

14. Jaguar (N: ocelotl)

15. Eagle (N: cuauhtli)

16. Vulture (N: cozcacuauhtli)

17. Movement (N: ollin)

18. Flint (N: tecpatl)

19. Rain (N: quiahuitl)

20. Flower (N: xochitl)

Trecenas

1. 1 Crocodile
2. 1 Jaguar
3. 1 Deer
4. 1 Flower
5. 1 Reed
6. 1 Death
7. 1 Rain
8. 1 Grass
9. 1 Serpent
10. 1 Flint
11. 1 Monkey
12. 1 Lizard
13. 1 Movement
14. 1 Dog
15. 1 House
16. 1 Vulture
17. 1 Water
18. 1 Wind
19. 1 Eagle
20. 1 Rabbit

Veintena Festivals in Nahuatl

1. Atlcahualo (Water is abandoned), Cuahuitlehua (Rising of Trees), Xilomanaliztli (Offering of Tender Corncobs), Cihuailhuitl (Feast of Women)
2. Tlacaxipehualiztli (Flaying)
3. Tozoztontli (Small Bloodletting or Vigil)
4. Huey Tozoztli (Big Bloodletting or Vigil)
5. Toxcatl (Popcorn or Drought), Tepopochtli (Smoking or Fumigation)
6. Etzalcualiztli (Eating Corn and Beans)
7. Tecuilhuitontli (Small Feast of the Lords)

8. Huey Tecuilhuitl (Big Feast of the Lords)
9. Micailhuitontli (Small Feast of the Dead) or Tlaxochimaco (Offering of Flowers)
10. Huey Micailhuitl (Big Feast of the Dead), Xocotl Huetzi (Falling Fruit), Tenahuatiliztli (Dispensation)
11. Ochpaniztli (Sweeping the Roads), Ecoztli (Yellow Bean)
12. Teotleco (Arrival of the Gods), Pachtli (Moss), Pachtontli (Small Festival of Moss)
13. Tepeilhuitl (Festival of the Mountains), Huey Pachtli (Big Festival of Moss)
14. Quecholli (Dart or Roseate Spoonbill)
15. Panquetzaliztli (Raising the Banners)
16. Atemoztli (Water Descending)
17. Tititl (Shrinking or Stretching)
18. Izcalli (Growing or Revival)

Nemontemi (Five days that do not belong to any veintenas)

Veintenas in the Mazatec Calendar

After Weitlaner and Weitlaner 1946 and Carrera González and Doesburg 1996

1. Chan-mé (month/period of the corn, or wanting)
2. Chan-tjao (month/period of the wind)
3. Chan-xkí (month/period of the counting or decrease)
4. Chan-kji (unknown meaning)
5. Chan-jín (month/period of blood)
6. Chan-jnó (month/period of the owl)
7. Chan-to (month/period of fruit)
8. Chan-maje (month/period of growth, development)
9. Chan-majtí (angry or thundering month/period)
10. Sinda (bad period/month)
11. Siné (yellow month/period)
12. Chan-kjoa (month/period of *quelite*, a leafy vegetable)
13. Chan-nzje (month/period of *guaje*, a type of tree)
14. Chan-jndo (long month/period)
15. Chan-sa (long month/period or growth, increase)
16. Chan-kín (month/period of wood)
17. Chan-kján (broken or stripped month/period)
18. Kinda (month/period of the clouds)

Kinda-aó (period of five days)

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