

### **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, 7<sup>th</sup> *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