

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 Panquetzalitzli 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 Panquetzalitzli 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 Panquetzalitzli 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

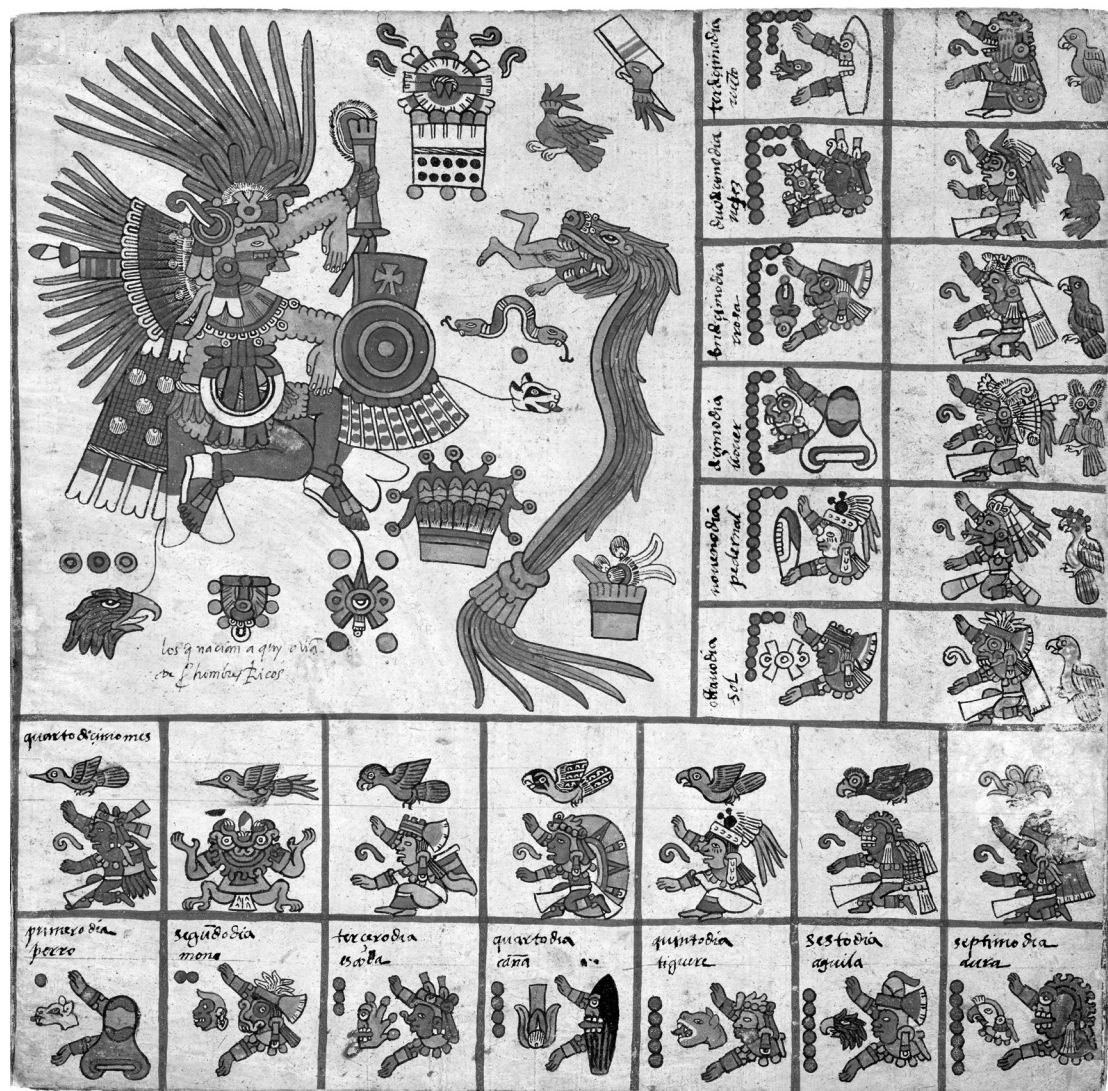


Figure 5.2. The trecena 1 Dog. Codex Borbonicus, p. 14. Bibliothèque de l'Assemblée nationale, Paris.

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

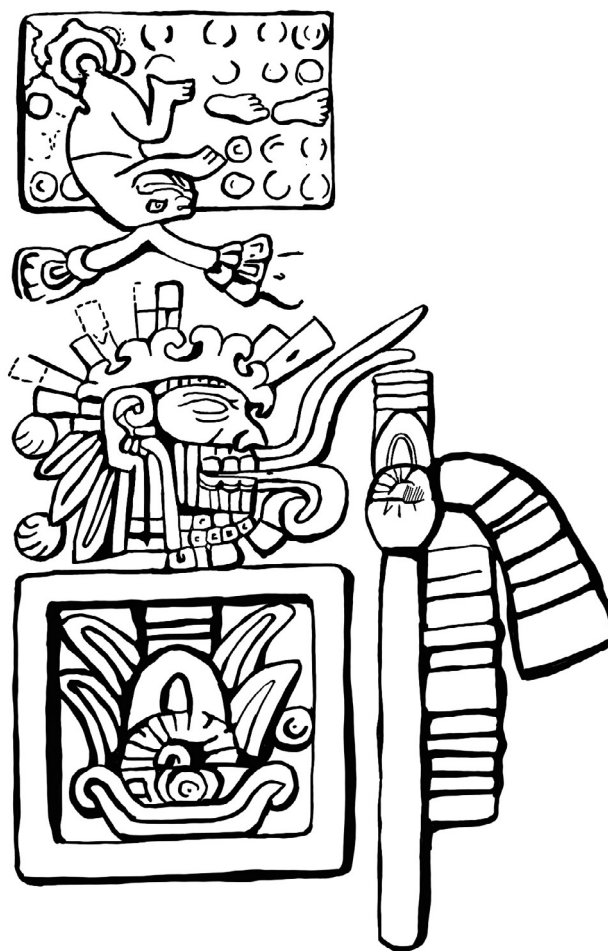


Figure 5.7. Front glyph of a *xiuhmolpilli* bundle depicting the year sign 1 Reed. Drawing by Ximena Vargas based on Moedano Koer 1951.

at the conclusion of the fifty-two-year cycle. Thus, along with the glyph for the celebration of Panquetzalitli, 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

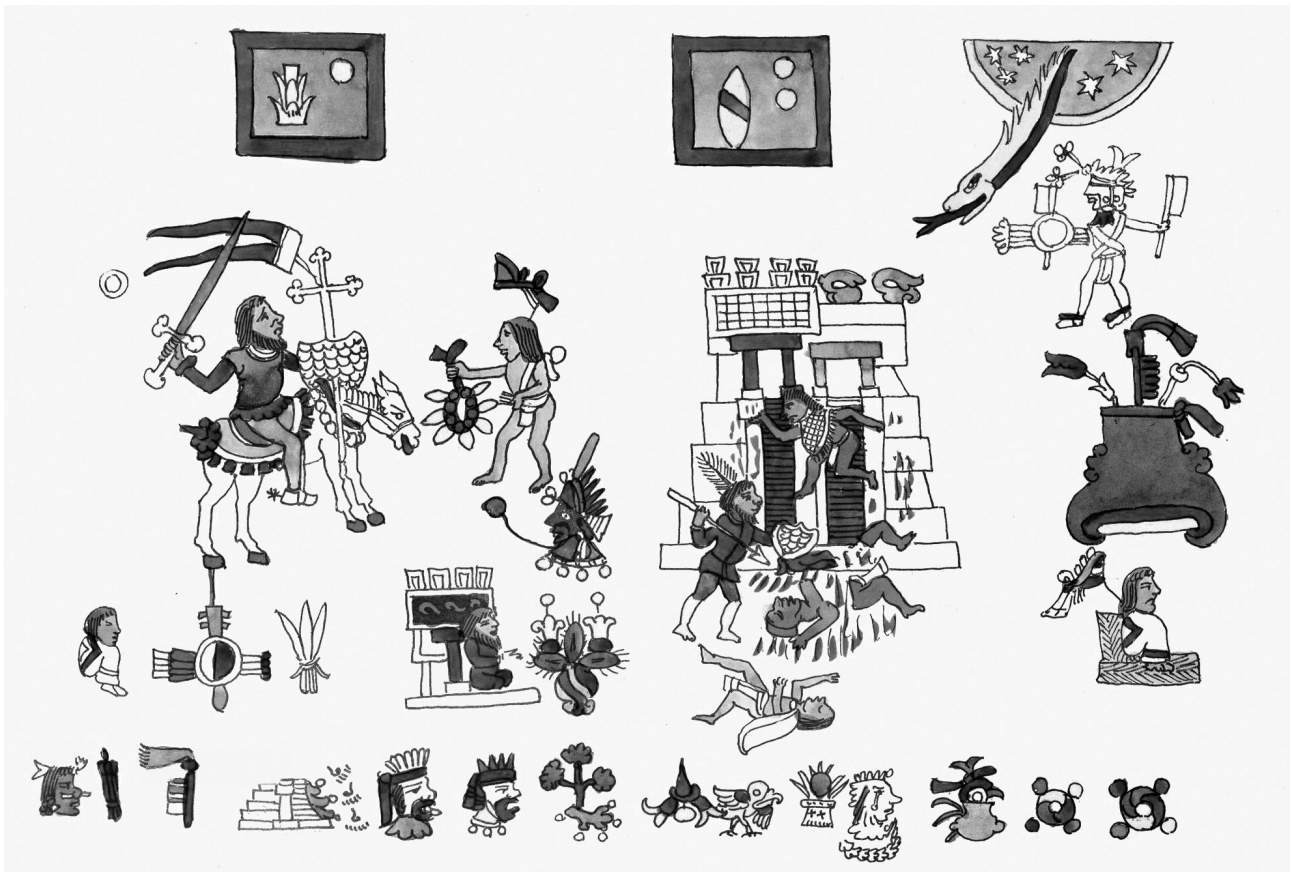


Figure 5.8. The conquest of Mexico-Tenochtitlan, years 1 Reed and 2 Flint. Codex Vaticanus A, f. 89r. Kingsborough 1831.

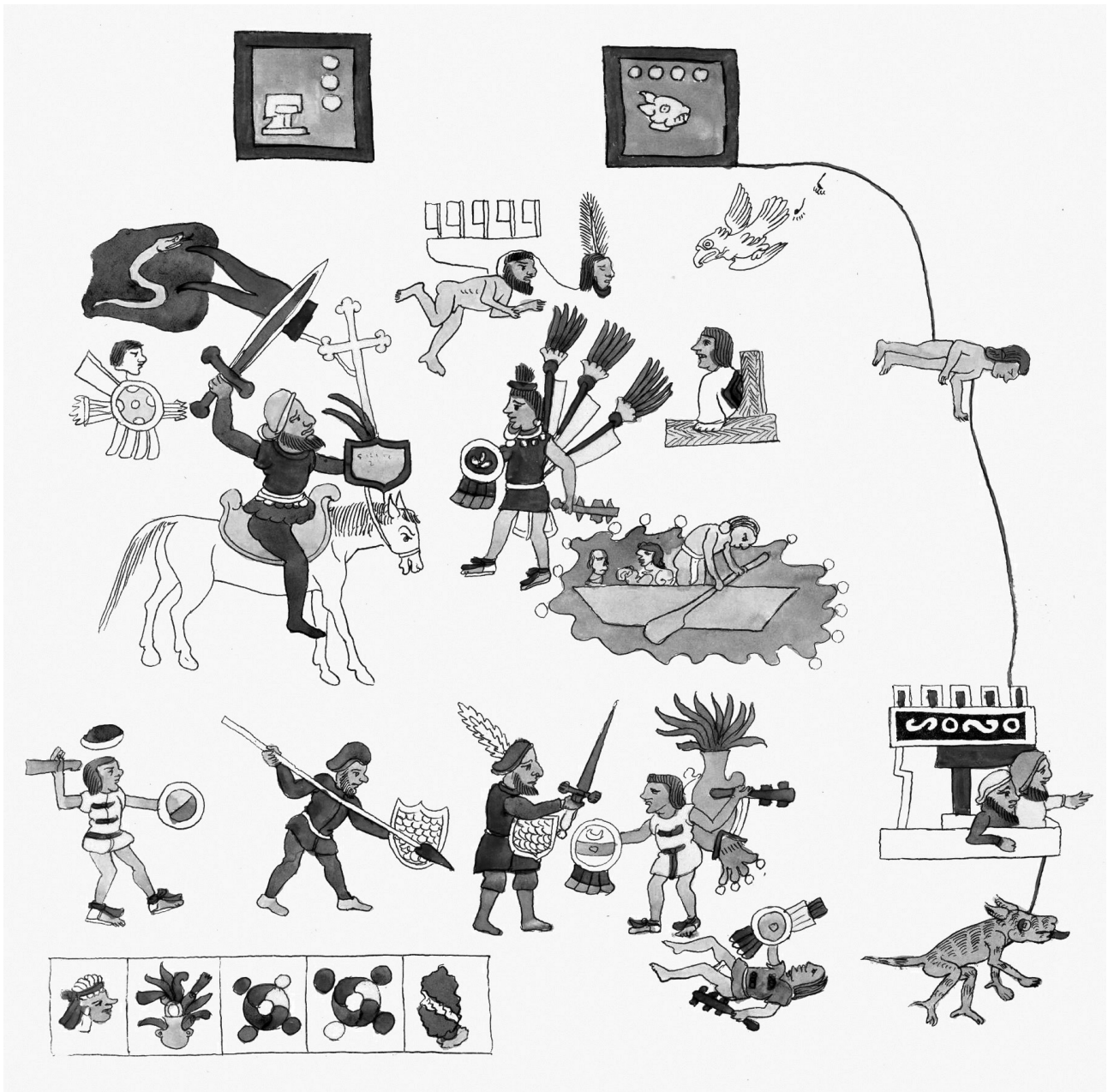


Figure 5.9. The conquest of Mexico-Tenochtitlan, years 3 House and 4 Rabbit. Codex Vaticanus A, f. 89v. Kingsborough 1831.

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). Kirchoff (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 Nahuatl 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 Nahuatl 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 Nahuatl 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