

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

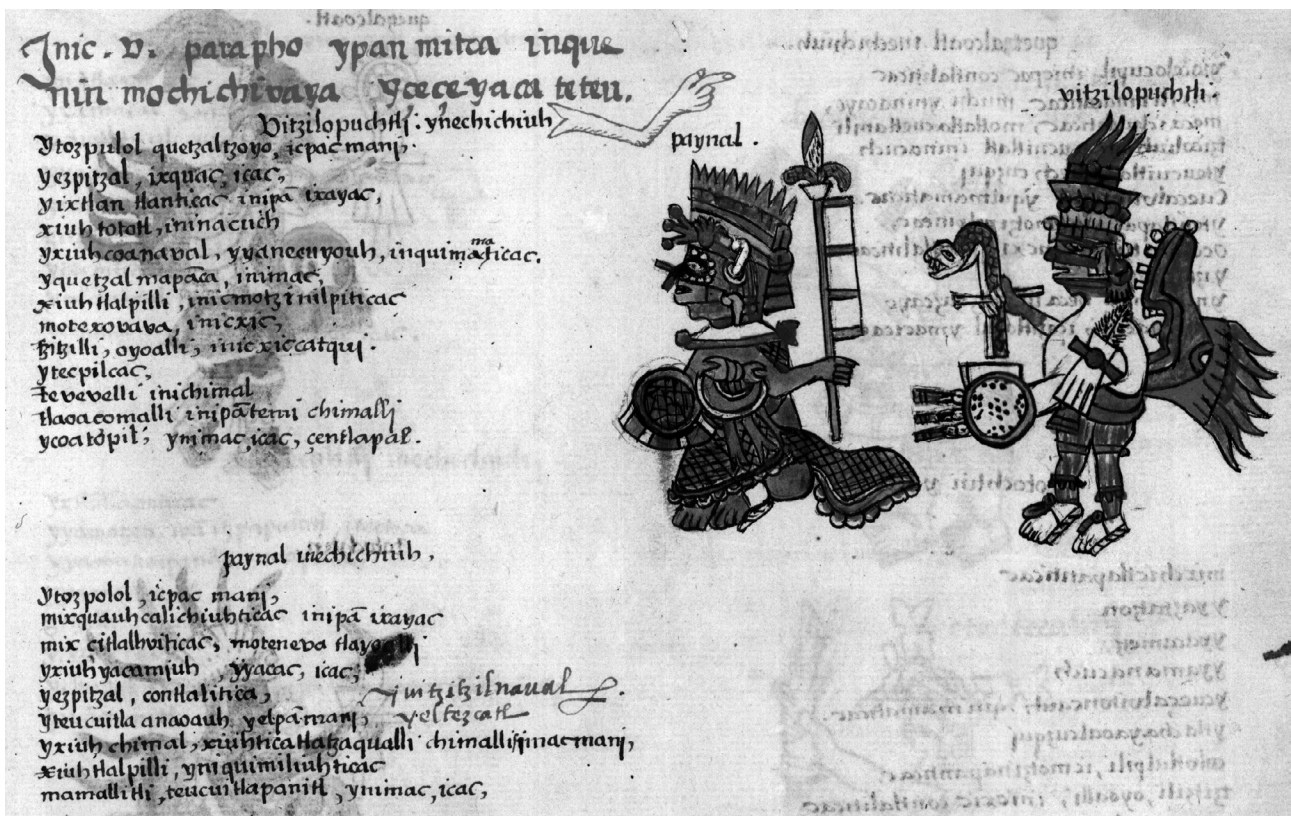


Figure 8.2. Huitzilopochtli preceded by Paynal, *Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España*. Patrimonio Nacional. Madrid, Real Biblioteca, II/3280, f. 261r.

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

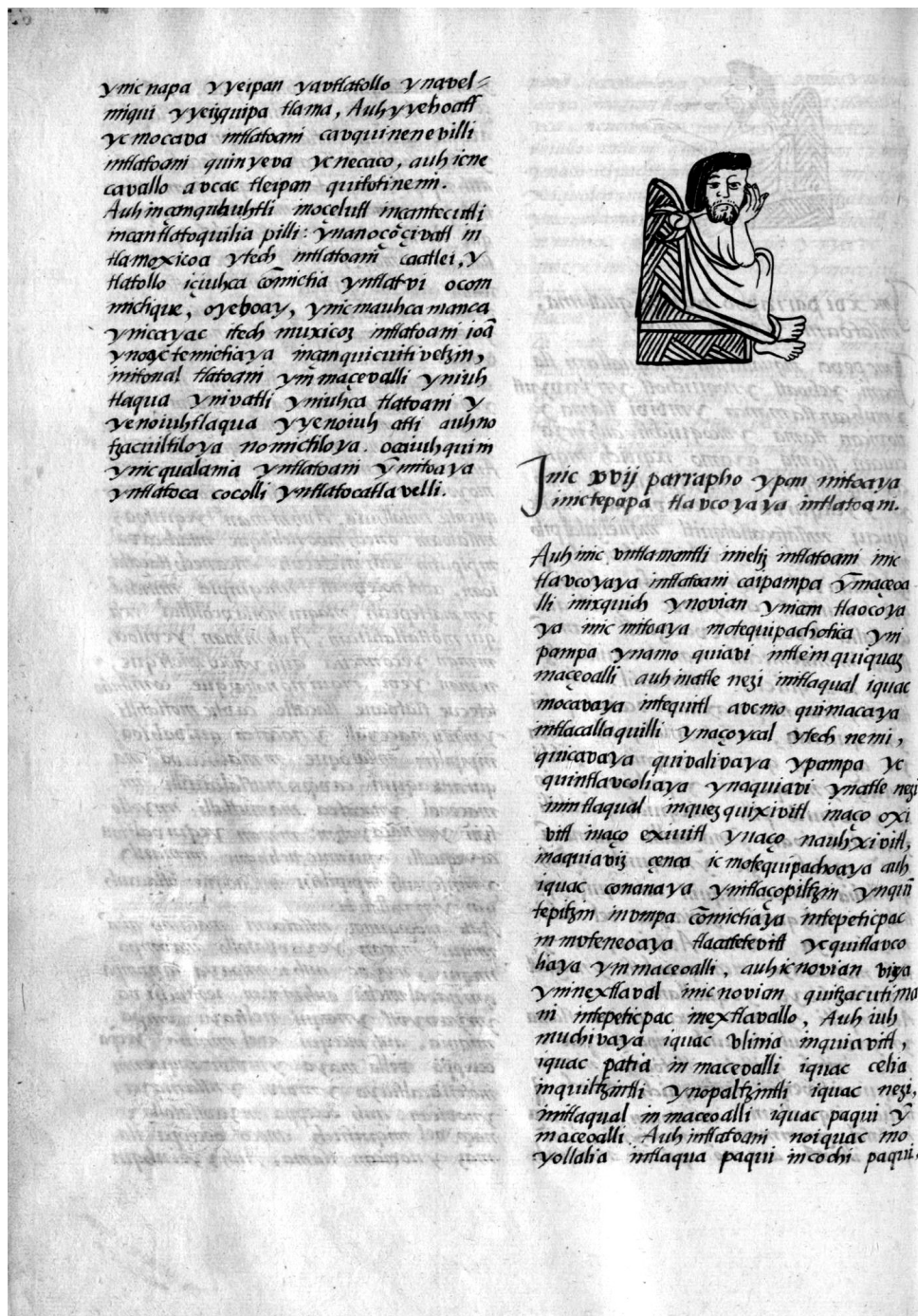


Figure 8.5. “How the ruler felt compassion for the people,” *Historia general de las cosas de la Nueva España*. Madrid, Real Academia de la Historia, 9/5524, f. 65v.