

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 Huaniztin, 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 Huaniztin, *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