

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.

Codex Porfirio Díaz o Tututepetongo. Colonial leather screenfold (15.5 × 20 cm). 35-50, Biblioteca del