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# Alterra Roma

Art and Empire from Mérida to Mexico



*Le MERCURE des MEXICAINS adoré à CHOLULA sous le nom de QUETZALCOUATL.*

Edited by  
**John M.D. Pohl and Claire L. Lyons**

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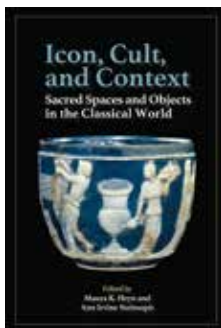
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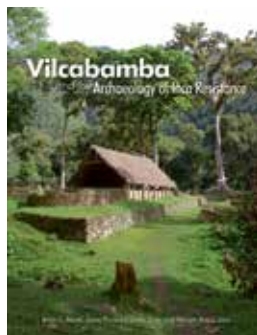
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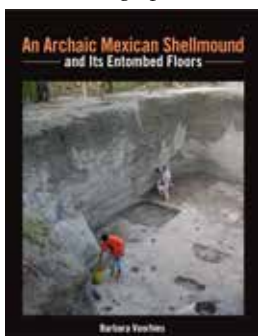
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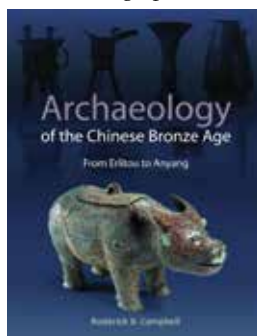
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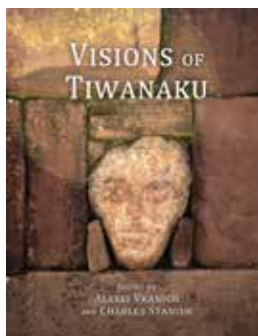
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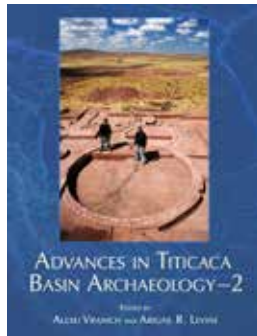
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# **Altera Roma**

**Art and Empire from Mérida to Mexico**

**Edited by**

**John M. D. Pohl and Claire L. Lyons**

**UCLA** COTSEN INSTITUTE OF ARCHAEOLOGY PRESS



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America Consoled by Minerva and Mercury for the Evils of the Conquest. Barthélemy-Joseph-Fuloran Roger after François Gérard. Frontispiece to *Le voyage aux régions équinoxiales du Nouveau Continent, fait en 1799–1804*, par Alexandre de Humboldt et Aimé Bonpland (Paris 1814–1834, Vol. 18).

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This volume assembles the papers from a symposium cosponsored by the J. Paul Getty Museum and the Cotsen Institute of Archaeology at UCLA, which was held in conjunction with the Getty Villa's landmark 2010 exhibition *The Aztec Pantheon and the Art of Empire*. Bringing masterpieces of Aztec art to Los Angeles for first time, this unprecedented exhibition explored analogies and differences between the Roman and Aztec empires, especially as they were perceived by the first Europeans who came into contact with the advanced civilization that built Tenochtitlan. An outline of our approach was published in a companion volume of the same title. There we acknowledged our debt of gratitude to museum colleagues in Mexico City, Toluca, Apaxco, and Philadelphia, as well as to the Biblioteca Medicea

Laurenziana in Florence and the Getty Research Institute, for exceptionally generous loans that inspired our endeavors.

A dialogue between the arts created under the Aztec and Roman empires grew out of conversations about “parallel pantheons” between Thomas Cummins of Harvard University's Department of History of Art and Architecture and Michael Brand, former director of the J. Paul Getty Museum, regarding the prospect of introducing non-Western art traditions into the museum's program. Brand and Alfonso de Maria y Campos, director general of the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, then laid the groundwork for displaying masterworks from Mexican museums to audiences in southern California. Precious encouragement came from directors Felipe Solís Olguín and David Bomford, who

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## Introduction

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The symposium “*Altera Roma: Art and Empire from the Aztecs to New Spain*” was cosponsored by the J. Paul Getty Museum and the Cotsen Institute of Archaeology at UCLA. Held at the Getty Villa in conjunction with the 2010 exhibition *The Aztec Pantheon and the Art of Empire*, the symposium was designed to examine the imperial sculptural traditions of the Aztec and Roman Empires as seen through the eyes of sixteenth-century Europeans, who were then rediscovering their own past at the same time they were confronting the living “past” of an entirely new civilization. The exhibition situated Aztec monumental sculpture on a par with Classical works of art for the first time, prompting vigorous debate among symposium attendees about the exhibition’s underlying theme—the comparative analysis of the

cultural imperatives that motivated the production of monumental art in “theater states,” civilizations that deployed art and architecture on a spectacular scale for strategic ideological and propagandistic purposes.

Central to our discussions was the definition of *empire*, a concept that has been broadly used to describe different social, political, and economic entities from the remote past to the present day (Alcock et al. 2001). Originating in the Latin *imperium* (“authority to command”), the term has impelled historians to equate empire with Rome, due largely to the impact that Roman precedents had on subsequent European polities beginning in the 1500s and continuing for four centuries of global colonial expansionism (Lyons and Papadopoulos 2002:2).

A core issue is the level of control that

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an empire exerts over its subjects. At its height, Rome epitomized a territorial empire by exercising direct control over conquered states and maintaining a standing military to enforce compliance with the demands of the “metropole,” or urban capital. Archaeologists who work more with non-Western traditions that had much in common with Rome but exerted dominance more or less indirectly—the Aztecs being a primary example—tend to focus on the degree of hegemony (from the Greek *hegemonia*—“dominant rule”) that the state exercises over its tributaries in determining broader definitions for empire (Smith 2001:129–133).

All imperial systems, in fact, exert both direct and indirect control at any given time in response to fluctuating social, political, and economic factors. Cross-disciplinary studies of empires therefore emphasize the domestic politics of both the metropole and its periphery, together with consideration of a preexisting regional “world system,” with no single motivating factor being any more essential to imperial success than any other (Doyle 1986:46–47). Walter Scheidel sees these three conditions—metrocentric, pericentric, and systemic—as being interconnected through the dynamics of the city-state systems within which many empires have their origins. For Scheidel, a city-state consists of a highly centralized micro-state composed of a stratified urban population dependent on the support of the surrounding hinterland that it dominates. Populations may be ethnically affiliated with neighboring city-states, but social identity is centered more on

the state itself, with exclusive membership in the society expressed through various forms of ritualized identity.

City-states thrive within larger international systems that promote shared traits among those who see the advantages of forming exclusive long-distance relationships. These relationships lead to standardization of commercial forms and are supported by a symbolic visual vocabulary that defines a field of common values, especially through the promotion of internationalism in art and architecture. The spread of the Hellenistic style into Italy and the diffusion of Mixteca-Puebla style throughout southern Mexico exemplify this process. Allied city-states can nevertheless be factional, bellicose, and competitive economically and militarily, and alliances are useful only so long as they are beneficial to all participants.

Scheidel therefore views the Roman and Aztec Empires as emerging hegemonic city-states and notes several informative analogies. Each empire began by extending military influence over neighboring polities but carefully retained local paramounts in positions of authority to foster the illusion of confederacy. The transformation of the city-state into an imperial state occurred when the politically stable centers of Rome and Tenochtitlan became increasingly powerful, while the surrounding states of the periphery remained weak or disunited, and outright subjugation became possible. As they expanded beyond their native territories, the Roman and Aztec Empires found themselves dealing with the broader world systems on which



city-states were economically, politically, and socially dependent. Under such circumstances, they were forced to accommodate divergent agendas both from within and externally. Hegemony was effectively achieved by co-opting the international identity of the world system in order to legitimize the power of taxation, maintain a military presence, and enforce laws among subjects in distant lands.

It is the promotion of internationalism and ethnic plurality by empires that most concerns contributors Eulogio Guzmán, Jonathan Edmondson, and Emily Umberger, who examine the roles that monumental sculpture and architecture played in the political and religious life of the center and the subsequent export of imperial ritualism to conquered regions. Monarchs ruled both the Rome and the Aztec Empire. The Aztecs addressed this personage as the *huey tlatoani*, or “great speaker,” while the Romans used *imperator* or *emperor*, meaning “commander.” These terms reveal the city-state roots from which positions of authority originated. Rome, for example, constituted a republic in which political power was ideally distributed between the patrician and plebeian social classes, whose interests were supposed to be equally represented by elected consuls, magistrates, and senators. Predicated on a Greek model, this system sustained the Roman people in their struggle against the tyranny of the *rex*, the hereditary authority of the Etruscan kings, against whom they rebelled and whom they eventually conquered.

The Aztec city-state, or *alteptl*, was composed of *calpulli* occupied by a

commoner class of *macehuales*, who attributed the founding of residential wards to the Chichimeca, tribal ancestors who migrated into the Valley of Mexico under the leadership of councils of chiefs and elders (Aguilar Moreno 2007:74–75, 92–94). While some city-states were compared to republics by the Spaniards and may have had their antecedents in earlier forms of Chichimec “tribal” organization, we have little evidence that a republic per se ever played a significant role in the foundation of the Aztec Empire. Soon after the Mexica founded the *alteptl* of Tenochtitlan, they gained power by hiring themselves out as mercenaries to warring factions of local Toltec rulers. Subsequent intermarriage with ruling families led to the establishment of a powerful princely class (*pipiltin*), who distinguished themselves from the *macehuales* by emphasizing their Toltec heritage, residing in palaces (*tecpan*), and directing the *alteptl* administration through their control of high offices, including that of the *huey tlatoani*. The *macehuales* were represented in city-state decision-making through *calpuleque* (councils of ward heads). Since a *calpulli* might also include a *tecpan*, a *calpul* could, in theory at least, hold authority over a *pilli*, particularly with regard to commonly held land. Potential conflict between social classes was managed by *tetecuh-tin*, administrators and judges who were appointed by the *huey tlatoani* to advise and arbitrate. Additionally, a certain degree of upward mobility into the *pilli* class could be achieved by *macehuales* through success in military or mercantile

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endeavors. These avenues of social mobility therefore contributed to the emergence of a complex pluralistic society comparable in many respects to that of Rome.

Both the Roman and Aztec Empires experienced the institutionalization of autocracies rooted in the city-state's processes of expansionism. Early on, military conquests enriched republican Roman commanders, who then directed their considerable resources toward gaining political control over the metropole by winning as many positions of high office as they could legitimately hold. Pompey and Julius Caesar achieved their ends by sponsoring feasts, festivals, and games. They constructed temples, theaters, and other public works, many ornamented with monumental sculpture in the Hellenistic style, the international visual vocabulary of the greater Mediterranean world system that they sought to dominate (Pohl and Lyons 2010:61–62). These endeavors enabled them to redistribute conquest wealth to their supporters and in so doing to supersede the checks and balances in authority that had been intentionally created by the republic to impede individual control over the state. This laid the foundation for the autocratic authority instituted by Augustus as the first Roman emperor.

Although we lack comparable detail in the historical sources to identify more precisely how the position of *huey tlatoani* was transformed into that of an emperor, Guzmán cites considerable archaeological evidence that similar processes were at work in Aztec society.

His study examines the remains of the monumental architecture and art of the Templo Mayor, the principal ceremonial structure of Tenochtitlan. The first large-scale enlargement of the temple, Phase II, was constructed under Acamapichtli (1375–1395), the noble son of a Tolteca–Chichimeca marriage and founder of the Mexica Dynasty, from which all subsequent *huey tlatoque* were elected (Aguilar Moreno 2007:79–83, 232–236). The platform was surmounted by twin temples, the foundation for what would ultimately become the cults of Tlaloc, the ancient Toltec storm god, and Huitzilopochtli, the Chichimec culture hero, a clear demonstration that accommodating cultural pluralism was at the heart of Mexica strategy from the outset.

Over the course of the next century, the Templo Mayor was expanded under six successive *huey tlatoque*, who sponsored military expeditions outside the Valley of Mexico. Historical accounts inform us that these emperors required conquered city-states to supply labor and matériel for each new construction. This fact is confirmed by the geologic sourcing of the actual building materials as well as an examination of various foreign symbols and designs present in spolia reuse and in objects cached as offerings incorporated into the fill of the temple's foundations. Carved stones with dedication dates fitted into the Templo Mayor's superstructure were also associated with the rules of specific *huey tlatoque*. Statuary portrayed not only narratives of the deeds of creation heroes but also the *huey tlatoque* themselves by combining a tradition of

monumentality derived from the more ancient Teotihuacan and Tula traditions within their own territorial sphere with the international style of the Eastern Nahuas, Mixtecs, and Zapotecs, along with traditions of more than a dozen other cultures throughout southern Mexico that dominated the wider world system (Nicholson and Quiñones Keber 1983:24–27; Pohl et al. 2012: 26, 31–35; Umberger 1981, Umberger and Klein 1993:334–336; Vaillant 1975:171). For Guzmán, the Templo Mayor therefore embodies a visual diagram of the power of the imperial state and the emperor, clearly intended to awe and to convince the constituents of Mexica dominance over many peoples through one government.

In the Roman and Aztec Empires, monumental architecture and art were sponsored by both the state and its emperors to promote a collective social memory through cultural pluralism that facilitated policy making. Once these primary goals had been achieved within the metropole, the effectiveness of the strategy could then be directed toward the external world system from which it was influenced to facilitate expansionism into ever more distant regions. It is during this process that the primary differences between the Roman territorial empire and the Aztec hegemonic empire reveal themselves.

Following his triumph over Antony and Cleopatra at the Battle of Actium in 31 B.C., the Roman Senate voted new titles for Augustus, officially proclaiming him *Imperator Caesar Divi Filius*—emperor and son of the divine Caesar. Institutionalizing the military title was

specifically intended to appeal to the army through a cult of personality originally fostered by Julius Caesar (Pollini 2012:134, 165–169). Augustus, as the son of the divinity, thereby laid the foundations for institutionalized overlordship, and by the end of the first century B.C. he had begun to extend his political influence into tributary provinces, particularly Iberia.

With his examination of the founding of Emerita Augusta (Mérida in present-day Extremadura), Jonathan Edmondson proposes that it was not just loyalty among the troops that Augustus was promoting as *imperator* but the enlistment of the skills of the military engineers who would have served as the principal architects for the new city. Initially, bridges and aqueducts were built to sustain the urban populace, many of whom were veterans of Augustus's Cantabrian campaign. Construction of imposing public buildings followed. These included an amphitheater, a theater, temples, and a forum modeled on that of Rome itself. Inscriptions bore testament to the sponsorship of these projects by Augustus and his son-in-law Agrippa, as well as his successors, the emperors Tiberius and Claudius. Monumental statuary portrayed the legends of culture heroes like the Trojan prince Aeneas, not only the progenitor of all the Roman people but specifically of the Julio-Claudian line, through which Julius Caesar and Augustus would ultimately claim descent from Aeneas's mother, the goddess Venus. As a result, ceremonial city centers like that at Emerita served as theatrical stages on which the power relations

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between Roman rulers and Iberian subjects were played out through local intermediaries.

Umberger is equally fascinated by the development of imperial art styles and the means by which images were deployed under the sponsorship of emperors within the metropole and the city-states of conquered provinces. Like Augustus and his successors, Aztec emperors sponsored the construction of monumental temple and plaza complexes at the centers of their cities. These served as settings for carefully orchestrated public rituals that reified social bonds between classes by dramatically symbolizing their shared investment in the state. Tenochtitlan's Templo Mayor represented Coatepec (Serpent Mountain), where a cosmic war was continually reenacted by captive enemies, who played the role of Huitzilopochtli's legendary rivals, Coyolxauhqui and her brothers, slain when the culture hero was miraculously born fully armed from the womb of his mother, Coatlicue (Pohl and Lyons 2010:66–69). The colossal statue of Coatlicue embodies a unique sculptural mode of expression by simultaneously juxtaposing the abstract in overall form with the representational in specific details that characterized the imperial style. Carved portrait reliefs attested to the emperor's patronage of aqueducts and dams. Thrones, gladiatorial stones, and basins for sacrificial offerings depict the emperors dressed in the guise of Huitzilopochtli, clearly alluding to their divine role as earthly representatives of the patron god.

By contrast, Umberger sees a very different process taking place in the sponsorship of the imperial style in the provinces. In choosing to maintain a hegemonic empire and to leave existing rulers in place to represent their interests, the Aztecs did not build administrative centers; nor did they erect the political monuments of conquest so apparent in the imperial capital. For the most part, images carved in imperial sculptural style outside the Basin of Mexico are modest in scale and suggest local emulation of metropolitan works by local craftspeople. Exceptions include a metropolitan-style temple constructed above a cliff at Tepoztlan, where a glyph block commemorates the *huey tlatoani* Ahuitzotl, but the cult to which it is dedicated was that of the local *pulque* god Tepoztecatl. In comparable fashion, a round temple at Calixtlahuaca in Morelos was dedicated to the wind god Ehecatl-Quetzalcoatl. Umberger concludes, therefore, that taking possession of a territory entailed extending into it imperial manifestations of a divine force that emphasized an accommodation with local nature gods and fertility cults. Control of a foreign territory therefore appears to have required negotiations with its sacred forces just as much as with the living inhabitants.

Focusing more on the role of the ruler as the representative of the divine, John Pohl addresses one of the most controversial events in the history of the Spanish conquest, the veneration of Hernán Cortés as an Aztec god. He introduces several central issues regarding the construction of a new pluralistic

identity within Spain's New World empire, a theme also discussed by Thomas Cummins, Andrew Laird, Guilhem Olivier, and Cecelia Klein. According to a history first composed by the Aztecs themselves but confirmed by Spaniards as well, Motecuhzoma II's ambassadors greeted Cortés and presented him with lavish gifts, including the ritual dress of the god Quetzalcoatl, the Toltec culture hero who was prophesied to return from the east and reclaim his kingdom. The story was widely used by later chroniclers to blame Motecuhzoma's ineffective leadership on primitive superstitions, and it persisted well into the late twentieth century, at which time it was utterly discounted by the revisionary thinking of postcolonial theorists, who advocated that the story was the invention of sixteenth-century apologists and spin doctors (See Restall 2003a:112–113 for discussion; see also Moore 2008:327–343 for a directly comparable debate in regard to other non-Western traditions).

While Motecuhzoma's actions may appear ambiguous to us, we know that the Aztecs also presented the lords they intended to execute with ritual dress. Quetzalcoatl was the patron deity of a confederacy of city-states throughout southern Mexico, whose support Cortés would need to confront the Aztec Empire, a fact Motecuhzoma would have had to seriously consider when he first learned of the conquistador's arrival (Pohl et al. 2012:35–43). In approaching the problem as a political anthropologist, Pohl proposes that while much of the controversy could be attributed to the questionable

agendas of colonial chroniclers, the appropriation of divinity as a stratagem among charismatic leaders had been an essential part of both Spanish and Aztec agendas since the mid-fifteenth century, a fact to be reconsidered in light of Scheidel's emphasis on the roots of empire in city-state formation.

Among ancient Mediterranean and Mesoamerican societies, the cults of man-gods were regarded as an essential aspect of city-state social identity (Nilsson 1972:65, 88; Pohl 2003:61–62). Just as much a product of social ritualism in the community as they were a source, heroic sagas represented a synthesis of factual accounts and mythic traditions that bound together both the human and divine inhabitants of a place. Because they were sanctified by religious ritual, sagas were deployed to stir patriotic sentiments by ambitious leaders who sought to connect their political agendas to the city-state cult.

When Cortés recounted the Aztec myth in a letter to Charles V, he shrewdly described how Motecuhzoma proclaimed that the Holy Roman Emperor should be acknowledged as the returning man-god. Fable or not, Cortés was well aware that Charles was recasting himself as a new Aeneas to forge a multicultural image for his emergent empire. As Thomas Cummins observes, the Spanish emperor had adopted the Pillars of Hercules to extol the wealth and prosperity awaiting his subjects and soldiers across the Atlantic in the New World, emblazoning the heraldic symbol with the motto "Plus Ultra"—"More Beyond."

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During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Italy was again divided into city-states. Their roots lay in the Late Antique Germanic tradition of local dukes (from the Latin term *dux*, or “military leader”), who established themselves within strongholds from which armed men could range the surrounding countryside. As the dukes acquired institutional support from constituent populations, they became autonomous rulers, attracting merchants to the protection of ducal castles for periodic trade. Permanent settlements eventually emerged around the castles, necessitating the construction of perimeter walls that formed fortified urban centers (Pohl 2015).

Machiavelli described Italian city-states as either principalities or republics controlled by titled nobles and wealthy merchants. Few if any of these individuals, however, ruled through broad institutional structures, and fealty was perceived as just another commodity to be bought and sold. Expansion of trade throughout the Mediterranean enriched individuals who sought to gain control over their city-states but could do so only through coalition building among rival families and alliances with other city-states.

Among the first to enlist artists in their efforts to promote their political agendas was Cosimo de’ Medici of Florence and Alfonso of Aragon and Naples. Sometime between 1440 and 1460, Cosimo (or his brother Piero) commissioned Donatello to create a statue of the biblical David’s triumph over Goliath. Undertakings of this kind represented close collaborations between benefactors and the artists they employed. We know, for example, that Cosimo was

passionate about collecting and preserving classical writings (McHam 2013:8–9, 93–101, 118–120). His thirteenth-century edition of Pliny the Elder’s *Natural History* remains the earliest known copy of the Roman scholar’s work. Donatello could therefore draw on ancient antecedents by comparing ekphrases, or descriptions of Classical sculpture in the writings of Ovid, Pliny the Elder, and others, to surviving fragments of sculpture preserved in the collection at the Lateran Palace, among other significant ancient sites around the city of Rome (Barkan 1999:4–5, 52–53, 66–67). The influence of classicism is evident in the extraordinarily naturalistic execution of the youth’s nude body, with its *contrapposto* pose, which invokes latent iconographic allusions to ancient figures such as the god Mercury, the slayer of Argus; the hero Perseus, the slayer of Medusa; and the Tyrannicides, the defenders of Athenian democracy. The first free-standing life-sized bronze sculpture created since antiquity, Donatello’s masterpiece was intended to be displayed in the courtyard of the Medici Palace, where it allegorically symbolized the banking family’s patronage of Florence and its defense of the republic’s independence in the face of the military expansionism of the rival city-state of Milan (Baron 1966; McHam 2001:37–38; Terry 2009).

In comparable fashion, Alfonso V, as king of Naples, commissioned a monumental public sculpture of Parthenope, the mythical Siren and Greek patron goddess, to appeal to the population and to cast himself as the repentant Ulysses returning to bring peace and prosperity to the city-state

after years of successional conflict that ended in 1442 (Beyer 2000:15; Pohl 2015). By the same token, as the Spanish monarch of the Crown of Aragon, Alfonso aimed to appeal to the viceroys, princes, and citizen councils of his multicultural subject states across the western Mediterranean, and he commissioned the sculptor Francesco Laurana (1420–1502) to erect a Roman-style arch at the main gate to the king's official residence at Castel Nuovo. Regarded as the wonder of the age, it featured a frieze depicting Alfonso's triumphal entry into Naples as a conquering Roman general. Lest there be any doubt about his imperial ambitions, Alfonso sponsored Pisanello to design bronze portrait medals of himself to distribute among his vassals; on them his likeness appears as "Divus," the title attributed to deified Roman emperors.

These sculptural and architectural works are recognized today as the first large-scale visual manifestations of humanism. The study of Greek and Roman writings embraced by scholars, writers, artists, and princes as a revolution in interdisciplinary studies was a reaction to the medieval education of the monasteries in that it emphasized a rigid curriculum of practical, professional, and scientific studies (Mann 1996). It was natural that politicians would not only consult Classical works for inspiration but would also envision how the philosophies they espoused could further their ambitions through the invention of a new allegorical vocabulary. Works like the Medici *David* or Alfonso's arch did not represent a resurrection of the past, therefore, but rather reflected a unique fifteenth-century dialogic synthesis between literature and art,

the primary sources for which were only then being reunited for the first time in a millennium (Seznec 1972:213).

This synthetic process engages Cummins's examination of how the legacies of the Aztec and Roman civilizations influenced one another in the minds of Early Modern empire builders. In 1506 a life-sized marble sculpture that depicts the Trojan priest Laocoön and his sons struggling for their lives against two giant serpents sent by Minerva to kill them was discovered in Rome. Significantly, the myth does not appear in Homer but rather was familiar to the Romans from Virgil's *Aeneid*, which motivated the prominent placement of the sculpture in the imperial Palace of Titus. Under the patronage of Julius II, the Laocoön was moved to the papal residence at the Vatican, from where its portrayal of profound human anguish not only continued to inspire artists from Michelangelo to Bernini in the creation of their own heroic masterpieces, but also anticipated synthetic thinking in the New World.

A map based on an original design by Hernán Cortés and published in Nuremberg in 1524 depicts the central ceremonial center of Tenochtitlan. In front of the Templo Mayor stands a monumental human figure grasping two serpents. For Cummins, the pose evokes that of Laocoön, which is consistent with the printer's use of other familiar European devices in the map's composition. The fact that the figure is decapitated thematically links the image to the monument known as Coatlicue, Serpent Skirt, the mother of Huitzilopochtli and the primordial goddess

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of the Aztec people. Cummins proposes that the syncretic image is symbolic of two related processes through which the Aztec and Roman pasts were consciously inter-fused by secular politicians and mendicant priests to promote their respective missions in imperial New Spain.

Sixteenth-century chroniclers write of the fragments of Aztec monuments that were ubiquitous in viceregal buildings around Mexico City. These included a *temalacatl*, or gladiatorial stone, incorporated into a wall of the city's cathedral. As Edmondson shows, the reuse of spolia was similarly widespread throughout Spain, a dramatic example being construction of a basilica within the central arena of the amphitheater at Tarragona, a provincial capital closely associated with Augustus. Iberian Christians and Muslims had long seized one another's religious structures, reworking them to suit their own purposes. Guzmán discusses the use of spolia in the construction of the Templo Mayor and proposes that it signified subordination of the conquered city-states within the Basin of Mexico, who contributed materials and labor as part of their tributary obligations to Tenochtitlan. Incorporating spolia also ritually symbolized the buy-in of the periphery into the metropole of the emerging Aztec Empire. Could similar motivations underlie the incorporation of spolia into the public constructions of Mexico City?

The promotion of a synthetic ideology of conquest is well documented in early colonial accounts of Mexican feasts and festivals (Curcio-Nagy 2004; Harris:2000). A typical feature of these events was the erection of triumphal arches and other edifices

on which artwork portrayed scenes comparing the feats of the conquistadors with those of Classical heroes. Portraits of Aztec gods and emperors appeared alongside those of Roman gods, Charles V, and Cortés. Drawing on established traditions of Iberian and Mesoamerican ritualism, dances—especially the *Danza de la Conquista*, which dramatically reenacted the fall of Tenochtitlan—were performed over the course of several weeks. Adapted from the Spanish *Danza de los Moros y Christianos*, the *Danza de la Conquista* continues to be performed throughout Mexico today (Harris 2000:126–131, 136–143; Pohl and Lyons, 2010:70–71). The promotion of empire in Mexico City was visualized in ways directly comparable to the Augustinian revolution in Iberia 15 centuries earlier, as power relations between rulers and subjects were dramatically played out through local intermediaries and the promotion of ethnic pluralism in the new imperial society.

Spolia also reflect the major shift in attitude toward Classical art taking place within Rome itself. In 1527 the disaffected imperial army of Charles V sacked Rome and imprisoned Pope Clement VII. This startling event was the catalyst for the Counter Reformation, as the church realized that it had lost much of its respect among Europe's nobility, as well as its popular appeal. By 1545 a conservative atmosphere prevailed among ecclesiastical leaders, which led to the condemnation of many aspects of Renaissance humanism, especially admiration for the Classical world. Clement had been an enthusiastic collector of Roman and Aztec antiquities, even



commissioning a copy of the Laocöon as a gift for France's King Francis I (Barkan 1999:277–279; Domenici and Minelli 2014). The Franciscan pope Sixtus V, by contrast, oversaw both the restoration and demolition of Rome's ruins. He repurposed the columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius as plinths for statues of the Christian saints Peter and Paul to celebrate the triumph of the true religion over paganism, a theme that had its roots in the Observant reform movement of his order in the fifteenth century.

The Great Western Schism, which produced rival papacies in Europe, fostered disaffection among mendicant religious orders, who called for observance, a return to the conservative ideals, rules, and requirements as decreed by their founders. The Franciscans in particular experienced a great revival of missionary zeal, as many renewed their vows of poverty, chastity, and humility, as well as the call to ministry for the tens of thousands of non-Christians subjugated by Spain after the fall of Granada and the discovery of the New World. Under Cardinal Cisneros, great value was placed on Classical education, but for the friars it served as the foundation for studying the strategies of conversion established by church fathers in their efforts to promote Christianity as the religion of a new empire.

Andrew Laird first encountered the Florentine Codex, Franciscan friar Bernardino de Sahagún's 12-volume encyclopedia of Aztec civilization, while attending a classicist conference in Mexico. He became fascinated with the heroic sagas of Quetzalcoatl and Huitzilopochtli recounted

in Book 3. The prose in which these stories was written suggested to him that they had been influenced by the narrative of Virgil's *Aeneid*, the epic saga of the progenitor of the Roman people composed by Virgil under the patronage of Augustus in his effort to promote the Julian line, which claimed descent from the hero. But what would account for the unexpected echoes between these two texts? Under what circumstances did Virgil's epic poem influence the chronicle of Aztec history written by a Franciscan and why?

Educated in Spain, Sahagún arrived in Mexico only eight years after the conquest, when vestiges of the grandeur of Aztec civilization could still be seen among the ruins of the pre-Columbian city. He instinctively understood the value of the culture but also recognized the formidable task of replacing Aztec spiritual beliefs in the deities for whom these massive edifices had been erected (Nicolau D'Olwer and Cline 1973:186–187). Sahagún concluded that true spiritual conversion could be achieved only through an understanding of the indigenous mind, and he embarked on a lifelong study of Aztec language and customs. In 1536 he joined the Colegio de Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco to teach Latin to the sons of Aztec nobles. Here Sahagún honed his ability to impart to his students the same passion for studying the ancient Roman world that he himself possessed for the Aztecs. Through his teachings, the Franciscan fostered a cross-fertilization of perspectives that formed the foundation for the collaborative interpretation of Aztec history and theology embodied in the Florentine Codex.

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Enlisting the aid of four of his former students, Antonio Valeriano, Alonso Vegerano, Martin Iacobita, and Andrés Leonardo, Sahagún was intent on providing his readers with informed insights into the nature of Aztec religion by drawing analogies from Roman counterparts, likening Huitzilopochtli to the war god Mars, Quetzalcoatl to the hero Hercules, and Chicomecoatl to the goddess of grain, Ceres. Other passages make direct comparisons between mythical accounts of Tula and Troy or Cholula and Rome. Although it seems that Sahagún and his associates were promoting a favorable appreciation of Aztec civilization, scholars have been perplexed by the fact that they also dismissed the same gods as devils.

Narratives inspired by the Virgilian text would be a logical frame of reference. Despite his pagan beliefs, the Augustan poet had been held in high regard since late antiquity. Sixteenth-century friars accorded him much the same status as the Old Testament saints and credited him with foretelling the coming of Christ in his fourth eclogue (Metford 1983:256). Did this imply that the Classical training of Sahagún's four associates encouraged them to recast the legends of their native gods and to equate them with the ancient traditions of the Spaniards?

Reversing conventional views of European dominance, recent colonial studies have highlighted indigenous agency in the founding of New Spain, particularly as a consequence of the new philology (Restall 2003b). Credit for the conquest is accorded to the tens of thousands of indigenous troops who participated in

the campaigns as much as to the strategic command of their leaders. Indigenous nobility called *cacicques* succeeded in establishing themselves as political leaders throughout central and southern Mexico, particularly in collaboration with the Franciscan and Dominican orders. Many held statuses equivalent to their Spanish counterparts. Material evidence of these collaborations is seen in innovations in art that consciously blended aesthetics, themes, and symbolism drawn from both indigenous and European traditions (Aguilar Moreno 2005:107–122).

Guilhem Olivier also investigates the comparisons made by Sahagún and his associates but observes that, unlike Renaissance princes, who elevated themselves by invoking direct, albeit fictive, connections to the legacy of imperial Rome, Sahagún drew on Virgil to expose the gods' false nature. He first examines their attributes and then questions their sanctity by characterizing them as simply human beings who were promoted to divinity, and he finally condemns them as demons to be cast out just as the church fathers had done. Olivier warns that we should be cautious about interpreting the very concept of an Aztec "pantheon," showing that much of what the Franciscans understood of the Graeco-Roman pantheon was in large measure derived from early church writings and not the literature of Classical antiquity.

Olivier's points are well taken. As conversion proceeded, church ritual became the basis on which indigenous leaders and Spanish authorities negotiated their roles within a shared hegemony over

New Spain. Saints became fundamental community symbols who enabled the indigenous people to continue to advocate their claims to legitimacy and thereby to preserve much of their culture to the present day. Communities adopted saints as patrons in various ways. Mendicant friars advocated for certain saints, including the founders of their orders, as spiritual benefactors. In other cases, a significant event took place in the community on the feast day of the saint. Miracles could also serve as the foundation for a saint's cult, and much has been written of the miraculous appearance of saints to indigenous people, such as the legend of Juan Diego and the Virgin of Guadalupe (LaFaye 1976).

Occasionally saints assumed the attributes of a pre-Columbian or Roman antecedent. Numerous churches were built on or adjacent to the ruins of the patron god's temple in former city-states. The city of Cholula, described by Sahagún as the Rome of the Aztecs, was one of several examples (Pohl et al. 2012:25–26). Following the conquest, a Franciscan monastery was erected in 1529 on the site of the Temple of Quetzalcoatl, together with two churches, one dedicated to San Gabriel, the community patron, and the other to San Miguel, the patron of the barrio. Curiously, a print by French engraver Bernard Picart (1673–1733) portrays Quetzalcoatl at Cholula as the Mercury of the Mexicans, no doubt because both gods were the patrons of merchants (Gutiérrez 2009; Pohl and Lyons 2010:53).

Mercury, however, was also connected with the archangels Gabriel and Michael

as the winged messenger of the gods, who bore the herald's staff and trumpet; the weigher of souls symbolized by the scales of judgment; and the guide to the afterlife. Early Christian artifacts conflate the attributes of Saint Michael and Mercury, and shrines dedicated to Saint Michael came to occupy the sites of the temples of Mercury (Hall 1979:208; Napoléon Didron 1886:180–182). In Cholula, the Church of San Gabriel was actually constructed from the original masonry of the Temple of Quetzalcoatl (Lind 2012:93). This suggests that the selection of Gabriel and Michael was possibly rooted in a dialogue between the Franciscans and the indigenous nobles of Cholula, through which Quetzalcoatl was first assimilated, with his equivalent in the Roman pantheon, who in turn was identified with a logical counterpart from the Christian tradition. This was classicism as translation writ large through an interpretive process not unlike what we see on the opening folio of the Florentine Codex, showing the chart of Aztec deities designated with Roman names.

By the close of the seventeenth century, much of the Aztec world had disappeared, a largely forgotten legacy buried under the viceregal capital of Mexico City. Highly imaginative, often sensational visual popularizations debasing Aztec culture replaced the earliest colonial—or “primary”—historical sources. Nowhere was this process more apparent than in the artistic interpretations of Aztec religious practices, particularly ritual human sacrifice, which both fascinated and

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appalled Europeans. Cecelia Klein provides a chronological analysis of scenes of human sacrifice from surviving late pre-Columbian pictorial manuscripts through early postconquest Mexican prose manuscript illustrations of the act. She then looks critically at the largely fanciful renditions of Aztec sacrifice created by and for Europeans from the seventeenth to the eighteenth century. In the pre-Columbian codices, human sacrifices appear as highly religious acts performed by static figures depicted in profile before schematic renderings of temples and altars. Shortly after the conquest, however, manuscripts like Codex Magliabechiano portrayed Aztec human sacrifice in new compositions filled with sanguine details. The original meanings were increasingly deemphasized, and sacrifices were reconceived to appear more like contemporary European prints depicting the passion of Christ or the bloody and agonizing suffering of Christian martyrs.

By the seventeenth century, renderings of Aztec human sacrifice were being published in Europe as even more highly sensational and fanciful illustrations for books about the New World. They feature brutal and gory images of heart extraction, decapitation, flaying, cannibalism, child sacrifice, and immolation. Klein shows that many of them had their roots in both Classical and biblical accounts. For example, the Aztec patron god Huitzilopochtli was depicted presiding over a human sacrifice standing on a pillar within a domed chapel, his arms raised like those of a Roman statue. Concurrent are images that portray

Huitzilopochtli with the fanged teeth, pointed ears, wings, horns, and cloven hooves of the biblical Satan or his agents, the cannibalistic witches who reputedly sacrificed small children to the devil and then ate them. Klein shows that the behavior of witches was further conflated with the imagined sins of Jews, associated by Europeans with the ancient Phoenicians, who were believed to have thrown children into burning cauldrons as offerings to their god Molech. A surprising number of European images of Aztec human sacrifice allude to the age-old European fear that Jews wished to mutilate the genitalia of gentile children, thereby repudiating the holiness of Christian circumcision.

Much of the animalistic imagery of Satan is thought to have been inspired by the appearance of satyrs, particularly Pan, the Greek woodland god (Morgan and Morgan 1996:48). The god Dis Pater and his Etruscan antecedent Charun may have been even more significant contributors to the iconography of demons. These Italic gods of the underworld appear in tomb paintings with many of the features later equated with Satan. According to the early Christian author Tertullianus, an impersonator of Dis Pater even performed as the tormentor of those condemned to public execution in Roman amphitheaters, particularly Christians. Dis Pater, later subsumed under Pluto, is identified as the lord of the underworld in the *Aeneid*. In drawing from the *Aeneid*, Dante in turn referred to Dis Pater's domain as Dis, a city composing the sixth through the ninth circles

of hell, where heretics, murderers, and traitors—sinners who most offended God—were condemned to eternal punishment by the Furies. Throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Dante's vision inspired the work of many artists who sought to portray the Christian place of eternal proscription, most notably Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* for the Sistine Chapel. Taken as a whole, Klein's analysis proposes that visual images of Aztec human sacrifice made after the conquest ultimately tell us much more about the fears, hopes, needs, beliefs, and historical and social circumstances of the colonial artists who made them than they tell us about the ancient Aztecs themselves.

To counter corruptions of the Aztec world that were widely disseminated through visual media, a growing revitalization movement flowered among criollo intellectuals. Some began to assemble collections of historical documents, antiquities, and maps in their efforts to galvanize an emergent sense of Mexican identity, which was rooted as much in the Aztec world as in the Spanish. A leading exponent was the Mexican patriot and intellectual Don Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora (1645–1700). Sigüenza y Góngora had already achieved considerable attention internationally for his research on subjects ranging from astronomy to philosophy when he was commissioned to design a 90-foot-tall triumphal arch to celebrate the 1680 arrival of Viceroy Tomás de la Cerda y Aragón (1638–1692). Titled *Theater of Political Virtues That Constitute a Ruler, Observed in the Ancient Monarchs*

*of the Mexican Empire, Whose Effigies Adorn the Arch Erected by the Very Noble Imperial City of Mexico*, it was ornamented with images of the Aztec emperors and the deity Huitzilopochtli to allegorize the virtues of rulership. Sigüenza y Góngora later published a description of the arch in which he expressed his views on the importance of the Aztec legacy to the future cultural identity of Mexico (Sigüenza y Góngora 1986).

Leonardo López Luján's contribution concludes this volume by showing how a new Spanish dynasty's passion for antiquities and the past would eventually fulfill much of what Sigüenza y Góngora and his contemporaries had envisioned. In 1735 Charles, the fifth son of Phillip V of Spain, was crowned king of Naples after a brief military campaign of liberation from Austria. Educated in Italy, Charles took a keen interest in history. In the wake of the extraordinary discovery of Herculaneum in 1738, became the nascent field of archaeology's first patron. The discoveries were astounding, and awareness of the importance of how artifacts and antiquities could be used to reconstruct past lifeways was conveyed between scholars in Italy and Mexico not only through publications but through drawings and casts as well.

As the Age of Enlightenment fueled a fascination with the study of ancient civilizations and indigenous cultures of the Americas on both sides of the Atlantic, a momentous discovery was made in the central plaza in Mexico City. In 1789 Juan Vicente de Güemes, second count of Revillagigedo (1740–1799),

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was appointed viceroy of New Spain. Dismayed by the general condition of the streets in Mexico City, he instituted a number of public works projects, which led to excavation of the Aztec Calendar Stone, a 24-ton basalt relief depicting an image of the sun god within a complex cosmological diagram of the sacred calendar. Historian Antonio de León y Gama (1735–1832) recognized the significance of the stone, together with a colossal statue of Coatlicue unearthed nearby later that same year. He published the first modern scientific study of Aztec monumental sculpture (León y Gama 1792). From that moment, we can observe how the rediscovery of the ancient Aztec world steadily contributed to the construction of an emblematic Mexican identity at the same time the nation's founders were fighting for independence in 1810. By the outbreak of the revolution in 1910, the Aztec world had been embraced as a national heritage, and fascination with the recovery of Aztec archaeological treasures became a national pastime that endures to the present day.

Mexico's 2010 bicentennial celebration offered us an opportune moment to display the nation's extraordinary

sculptures in a fresh light and to pose new questions of them against the Classical backdrop of the Getty Villa. Our aim was to lend momentum to what we hoped would be a "conversation" between works of art that, though separated in time and place, have much to tell us about the dynamics of empires. Consequently, the range of perspectives presented at the "*Altera Roma*" symposium was intentionally broad. Our goal was not to craft a unified viewpoint or to advocate a single methodology. Mediterranean antiquity supplied the critical conceptual foundation. Memories of Roman Hispania were used to guide and critique the Spanish imperial mission in the New World. By the same token, encountering Aztec civilization had the equally significant effect of stimulating antiquarian and ethnographic research among European humanists. The legacy of these early intellectual endeavors continues, but the emphasis today is on cross-cultural approaches to the study of ancient civilizations. Analogies can show how a redistribution of epistemic power to the study of non-Western traditions, an imperative in contemporary scholarship, might be conceived.

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## 1

**Rome, Tenochtitlan, and Beyond:  
Comparing Empires across  
Space and Time****Walter Scheidel****Comparative History and the  
Study of Empire**

What are empires and what do we stand to gain from drawing comparisons among them? To begin with the second question, historical comparison serves two main purposes. From a global and (very) long-term perspective, human history has witnessed a large amount of parallel or even convergent development. In this context, comparison is the only viable means to distinguish common features from culturally specific or unique characteristics and developments. Moreover, and even more importantly, comparisons help us identify variables that were critical to particular historical outcomes. In short, it is rather difficult and sometimes impossible to find out what “mattered” in the history of one place or period unless we also know what happened in other places and periods.

Comparative history takes many forms. Social scientists—in disciplines such as political science, sociology, and economics—may use comparisons of historical cases to test a particular theory. Multiple comparanda are required for this exercise—the more the better. This approach favors a focus on variables, which in turn encourages the use of statistical techniques such as multivariate regression analysis. Although this is by no means always unfeasible or impracticable in the study of premodern history, it is fair to say that comparative *historians* by and large have different goals and apply different techniques. Historians tend to focus on “analytical comparisons” between equivalent units (say, the Roman and Aztec Empires) to identify factors that help explain common or contrasting patterns or occurrences. This approach can

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show how the unique features of particular cases affect the unfolding of common social processes—such as, in our case, empire-building. Emphasis is put on entire cases rather than on discrete variables, and the ultimate objective is to improve the process of causal explanation (e.g., Bonnell 1980; Haupt and Kocka 1996; Skocpol and Somers 1980; Tilly 1984).

For the comparative historian, the main questions are, therefore: Which factors were crucial rather than incidental to observed developments, and how could different contexts produce similar outcomes, or vice versa? In other words, comparative history uses case-based comparisons to investigate historical variation and to devise causal explanations of particular outcomes.

Empires are only one of many historical phenomena that are susceptible to comparison. But what are empires? In the most general terms, they are a particular kind of state. This answer, of course, may seem merely to beg the question. Defining the term *state* is a notoriously challenging (if popular) undertaking. This is not the place even for the most rudimentary discussion of this issue. Suffice it to say that, in a nutshell, states are the product of governmental institutions claiming authority over people and territory, primarily in the spheres of rule-making and certain forms of coercion. (For the debate, see Scheidel 2013:27.) A number of prominent scholars have distinguished between different categories of states: the separation of “city-state” from “territorial state” is perhaps the most com-

mon distinction, and one that is highly relevant to the study of entities such as ancient Rome and the Aztec Triple Alliance (Finer 1997:6–7; Gellner 1983:13; Giddens 1987:35; Trigger 2003:266–267). We will return to this issue below.

One might think that “empires” are territorial states that simply happen to be big. Yet size as such is not normally considered to be a key criterion. Once again, numerous academic definitions compete for attention. Scholars tend to stress the importance of center–periphery relationships: an “empire” requires a ruling center or core that dominates a subordinate periphery. Others add the dimension of internal diversity, which is usually a side effect of conquest. A useful metaphor is provided by Alexander Motyl’s image of the empire as a rimless wheel: a “hierarchically organized system with a hub-like structure—a rimless wheel—within which a core elite and state dominate peripheral elites and societies by serving as intermediaries for their significant interactions and by channeling resource flows from the periphery to the core and back to the periphery” (Motyl 2001:4). This analogy combines the elements of diversity, foreignness, and subordination of the periphery to the center. Imperial constructs may either fall apart or fuse into more coherent and cohesive systems. The former outcome is much more common, with China or the European nation-states serving as rare examples of the latter.

Very broadly speaking, empires are studied in the context of five major and largely separate historiographical tradi-

tions, focusing on the ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean empires, Islamic empires of the Middle East and India, empires in China and the Eurasian steppe, pre-Columbian formations in the Americas, and European commercial and colonial empires. Any project that touches on Rome, the Aztecs, and Spain all at once, such as the present volume, cuts across entrenched traditions and opens up new paths for comparative history.

This is particularly important in view of widespread misapprehensions about the significance of both time and space. Thus one might encounter the view that historical cases need to be more or less simultaneous, to belong to the same “period,” to be suited to direct comparison. This is not true for the simple reason that relative development matters much more than absolute chronology. It is well-known that due to fundamental environmental constraints, social complexity developed similarly but more slowly in the New World than in the temperate zones of Afroeurasia (e.g., Diamond 1999 or any good world history textbook, such as Fernández-Armesto 2010). This means that even though the flourishing of Maya, Aztec, and Inka civilization postdates the end of the Classical “ancient world” of western Eurasia, in terms of overall properties, there is no good reason not to classify these civilizations as “ancient.” Unfortunately, this is by no means generally accepted. To name just one recent example, the newly established Institute for the Study of the Ancient World at New York University excludes all American civilizations from

its remit. As far as I can tell, this is not merely a function of adherence to (Eurocentric) absolute chronology but also owes a lot to what we might call the “tyranny of space”—the notion that physical connections between civilizations are somehow more significant or interesting than their structural properties. The disproportionate popularity of Silk Road studies relative to analytical comparisons between ancient Rome and China is a telling example of this academic bias. Against this background, it is perhaps not surprising that concurrent or successive entities or the connections between them are often considered more suitable for cross-cultural study than those that happened to be separated by oceans or millennia, or both. But this tendency is intellectually indefensible. On the contrary, one could argue that complex New World civilizations are exceptionally important precisely because they developed in complete isolation from Afroeurasia, thus presenting historians with the unique gift of a natural experiment in parallel macrosocial evolution. This fact alone ought to make historians of empire *more* eager to include the Americas rather than less.

In practice, however, this has rarely happened. Shmuel Eisenstadt’s *Political Systems of Empires* and John Finer’s *History of Government* manage to ignore the New World altogether, while Michael Mann’s *Sources of Social Power* spares only a few pages (Eisenstadt 1993; Finer 1997; Mann 1986:121–124). Apart from various more eclectic collections of essays, John Kautsky’s monograph *The*

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*Politics of Aristocratic Empires* seems to be the main exception in paying proper attention to conditions in the Western Hemisphere (Kautsky 1982). In the cognate field of anthropology, by contrast, Bruce Trigger's work stands as a monument to the crucial importance of the New World to our understanding of macrosocial evolution (Trigger 2003).

As mentioned earlier, without comparison, we can never have a good sense of what mattered. This elevates comparison beyond the humble status of an auxiliary instrument or a mere option in the historian's tool kit. At the very least, a comparative perspective is an invaluable antidote to what one might call "visibility bias." Specialist historians usually aim to reconstruct and understand history by studying remains that are specific to their cases. Remains—certain kinds of objects or textual information—that are more common or prominent than others tend to be seen as significant or at least attract a lot of attention for the simple reason that it is possible to say a lot about them. Historians' instinct is to privilege existing remains and worry less about what is not there. This is perfectly understandable but also problematic in as much as this tendency colors causal interpretations and explanations. To illustrate this point briefly from personal experience, in a collaborative volume on fiscal regimes and the political economy of early states around the world, the leading expert asked to cover the Aztec case notes the relative scarcity of interest in this issue, especially in the question of how Aztec war efforts

were funded and who collected taxes. From a comparative vantage point, this observation is intriguing because these topics are central and often almost obsessive concerns among historians of state formation in medieval and modern Europe. While this contrast may largely be a function of the availability of evidence, it cannot legitimately be taken to suggest that fiscal mechanisms did not matter as much in Mexico as they did in Europe or that they do not deserve an equivalent amount of attention (Smith 2015; cf., e.g., Bonney 1995, 1999).

This is not to say that comparison should be used to fill gaps in the evidence. Instead, it makes us aware of imbalances that arise from engagement with what is available within a given historical context, or with what a particular favored brand of scholarship is inclined to find interesting. The more different cases historians know about—above all, cases studied by scholars embedded in different academic traditions associated with different parts of the world and different periods—the better they will be able to spot such imbalances and formulate the questions they need to ask in order to understand a particular historical case.

### **From City-State to Empire**

Since all this may seem rather abstract, let us move on to a few more specific points drawn from Mediterranean and Mesoamerican history. Both Rome and the Aztec Triple Alliance started out as city-states. Rome belonged to the Latin city-state culture (with about 20 mem-

bers by 500 B.C.E.) and bordered on the Etruscan network of another dozen or so larger city-states. The Mexica of Tenochtitlan initially controlled one of about 50 city-states in the Valley of Mexico. And farther south, the Mixtec city-state of Tututepec grew into an empire during the four centuries leading up to the Spanish conquest.

Is *city-state* a meaningful or legitimate concept? The answer is simple: Just as with *state* or *empire*, it depends on how narrow or broad our definitions are. Most recent scholars acknowledge the existence of the “city-state” as a distinct type of state and differentiate it from territorial polities: the city-state as a more or less autonomous city joined to its hinterland; the territorial state (or country-state or macro-state or toponymic state) with multiple administrative centers dominated by residents linked to a central government (Scheidel 2013:15, 30–32).

As always, one encounters extreme positions, such as the idea that we should discard the very notion of city-state in favor of indigenous concepts (Feinmann and Marcus 1998:8–9). But the same could be demanded for any human institution we study—the state, the family, and so on. Local variation in terminology and meaning surely does not preclude cross-cultural conceptualization and comparative study. At the same time, we must resist the temptation to elevate a particular form of city-state to a normative ideal type. Thus few city-states in history resembled the ancient Greek polis or its medieval Italian and

German relatives, endowed as they were with a package of features, including a strong concept of citizenship, political participation, rights and liberties, and republicanism.

We owe to the Danish ancient historian Mogens Hansen a two-volume cross-cultural survey of some three dozen city-state cultures from the Sumerians to the nineteenth century, which duly include both Latins and Aztecs as well as the Maya (Hansen 2000b, 2002). His basic condensation of an “ideal type” based on all these cases is probably fairly unobjectionable:

a highly institutionalised and highly centralised micro-state consisting of one town (often walled) with its immediate hinterland and settled with a stratified population, of whom some are citizens, some foreigners, and, sometimes, slaves. Its territory is mostly so small that the urban center can be reached in a day’s walk or less, and the politically privileged part of its population is so small that it does in fact constitute a face-to-face society. The population is ethnically affiliated with the population of neighboring city-states, but political identity is focused on the city-state itself and based on differentiation from other city-states. A significantly large fraction of the population is settled in the town. . . . The urban economy implies specialization of function and division of labor to such an extent that the population has to satisfy a significant

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part of their daily needs by purchase in the city's market. The city-state is a self-governing but not necessarily an independent political unit [Hansen 2000a:19].

But how did the Roman city-state compare to those of the Aztecs? One thing they both have in common is that they went on to create large empires. This was a relatively rare development but not without parallel: other examples include ancient Athens and Carthage and medieval and Early Modern Venice. In such cases, one city-state commonly attained hegemony over others in the same cluster before progressing to direct rule and expanding beyond the original city-state culture. This was a remarkable accomplishment, as individual city-states within a given cluster endeavored to constrain and contain their peers and therefore tended to obstruct one-city rule. In some cases, such as Carthage and to some extent even Rome, we cannot tell for sure how one city-state came to dominate the others. External pressure is the most plausible candidate for a mechanism that favored hierarchical cooperation over balancing. It provided a powerful incentive for alliance-building and hegemony that created a basis for later rule; Classical Athens and probably also Rome are notable examples. Similarly, the Triple Alliance between Tenochtitlan and its partners Texcoco and Tlacopan was said to be the result of war against the powerful Tepanecs of Azcapotzalco.

The more or less republican city-state empires of the Mediterranean—Athens,

Carthage, Rome, Venice—shared strong differentiation of their citizen cores from their allies and subjects. Historical functional analogues are provided by numerically small conquest groups that lacked a strong center or “metropole” and that physically moved into ecologically different environments, such as the Xiongnu, Mongols, and Manchu in China; the Arabs in the Middle East; and the Mughals in India. City-state empires differ from these latter cases in that their cores or metropolises were well organized and settled and maintained a central position. The more privileges “insiders” enjoyed, the more different the subordinated periphery was conceived to be. The special status and dominance of the citizenries of Classical Athens, ancient Carthage, the Roman Republic, and Venice are all well documented. In other words, city-state empires are particularly good illustrations of the principle of the “rimless wheel.” Core-periphery differentiation made it more challenging to establish a single overall—“Gellnerian”—ruling class for the entire imperial state: either horizontal ties between citizen and noncitizen elites remained weak, as in the Athenian case, or the original city-state core was transformed over time, its exclusivity eroding as imperial rule became more diffused, as in the mature Roman Empire (Scheidel 2006; cf. Gellner 1983:9).

By contrast, “polis-like” features are missing from the Mexica case: we find not only an increasingly powerful monarchy but also a strong hereditary nobility that was rigidly defined by law and



benefited disproportionately from imperial expansion. Nobles also at least formally, if not de facto, controlled access to land for commoners and otherwise ruled them directly. This is quite different from the situation in Athens or republican Rome at the time of their expansion. Among the Aztecs there is no sign of a meaningful concept of citizenship and attendant prerogatives: if privileges accrued to commoners, it was to individuals who had shown exceptional military prowess but never collectively as a function of belonging to the “in-group” of a particular city-state (e.g., Smith 2000). Hence the Aztecs and the neighboring Tututepec Mixtec, together with the Assyrians, form a group of empires originating from city-states that lack the features of what we might call “citizen-city-state empires” (Scheidel 2006; cf.; Lind 2000; Liverani 2011; Smith 2000).

### **Similarity, Difference, Causation**

Comparisons are primarily concerned with three things: similarities, differences, and explanation. In the present case, a number of similarities can be observed. We have already noted the relatively exceptional city-state origin of the Roman and Aztec imperial formations. Both the Triple Alliance and Rome extended and exerted control in a loose, hegemonic fashion. Local autonomy was maintained, and central interference, at least initially, was kept to a minimum. In their central regions, both powers gradually came to dominate several hundred city-states and equivalent

micro-polities. Local governments—mostly oligarchies in Italy and local dynasts in Mexico—retained their positions. Both Romans and Aztecs pursued strategies of encirclement when outright conquest was not feasible: the Romans in the case of the federation of the Samnites, and the Aztecs with the Tlaxcala states and perhaps more inchoately with the Tarascan Empire to the west.

Further similarities are apparent in the relative paucity of a distinct archaeology of empire, a result of a combination of factors such as indirect rule, the lack of direct infrastructural investment outside the center, and the relatively short time frame involved. Although growth in exchange and some standardization occurred, they commonly preceded conquest and did not emanate from the center itself. Examples include the so-called Hellenization of Italy and, in Mesoamerica, the spread of the so-called Mixteca-Puebla style, or international style, which developed well outside the Valley of Mexico, started to spread before the Aztec Empire was launched, and far exceeded its eventual sway. One might even take these developments to have laid some of the groundwork for empire rather than the other way round. In both cases, conspicuous change was largely limited to the respective political centers.

The Roman Empire I am depicting here is not a familiar one. Did Rome not leave a tremendous footprint, erecting a long-lived state whose cultural impact is felt to the present day and that filled the Mediterranean and its

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hinterlands with a distinctive material culture that is instantly recognizable to modern tourists? This is all true, but it raises an important point about historical comparison. If we compare imperial entities at very different stages of their development—the proverbial apples and oranges, as it were—we may end up pondering differences that are more apparent than real.

This is highly relevant to the issue at hand. Earlier scholarship sometimes stressed the loose or hegemonic character of the Aztec Empire, doubting even its claim to being a “real” empire. Such qualifications have been countered by work that focuses on Aztec imperial strategies and features that match those of other imperial formations (e.g., Berdan et al. 1996). From a comparative perspective, what matters most is that the Aztec Empire was very *young*. Observed differences between the Aztecs of 1519 and the mature Roman Empire of the first few centuries C.E. may therefore simply reflect very different stages of imperial state development. By the same token, one could argue that the Romans had not built a “real” empire until after several centuries of massive expansion and provincial rule.

The Spanish appeared on the scene only 91 years after the Triple Alliance had been formed in 1428. Aztec expansion proceeded in waves, from about 1430 to 1450, from 1458 to 1468, and from 1486 to 1502. Thus, by 1519, different subject territories had been under Aztec control anywhere from 20 to 90 years, and many of them for not more than about

two generations. The Aztecs claimed approximately 500,000 km<sup>2</sup> overall and ruled several million people in central Mexico alone (Smith 2003:47–59). This is quite similar to the Roman Republic in the second century B.C.E., with a comparable number of people in the core (peninsular Italy) and growing peripheral possessions. However, if we date Roman imperial expansion from the early fourth century B.C.E. onward, it took much longer—two or even three centuries—for it to match the Aztec Empire in spatial and demographic heft.

In any case, this is the “Roman Empire” that we need to consider in comparisons with the Aztecs. Notable differences concern the practices of resource extraction. Where republican Rome drafted soldiers from among its citizens and allies but levied very little tax or tribute within its extended Italian core, the Aztecs, in addition to raising troops, primarily sought tribute in kind. Republican Rome invested more in colonies and roads than the Aztecs. As already noted, social and political structures were more hierarchical in Mexico than in Roman Italy. The two polities also differed in terms of stability. Disturbances of the Roman alliance system were limited to episodes of foreign invasion, generally limited in scope, and quite readily contained. By contrast, the Aztec Empire witnessed more frequent rebellion and reconquest. Even allowing for the uneven impact of “guns, germs, and steel,” it is instructive to contrast the very different outcomes of the attacks of Pyrrhus and Hannibal in Roman Italy and of the Spanish in Mexico.

During much of the republican period, Rome's governmental infrastructure was, if anything, even more modest than that of the Aztecs. Yet the Roman alliance network proved more stable and resilient. (If we were to [mis]take the task of comparative history to be the search for similarities, the Assyrian and Western Zhou Empires would arguably provide the closest analogues to the Aztec polity and its defining characteristics.) What accounted for this difference? Plausible options include the minimization of overt tribute-taking as opposed to joint military service; greater investment in colonies and roads; and the slower pace of expansion, which allowed for more consolidation.

At the same time, it is easy to exaggerate the differences between Romans and Aztecs even at putatively similar stages of state formation. If we jump centuries forward in time, to the dislocations of the fifth and seventh centuries C.E., when the Roman Empire was dismembered by relatively small groups of challengers—first Germans in the West and later Arabs in the East—we must wonder whether intervening developments had mattered all that much after all. Centuries of state-building and culture change (conventionally known as Romanization) failed to prevent the defection of local elites to external challengers and the erosion, collapse, or takeover of existing governmental institutions and practices. This raises much-needed doubts about causal significance: Were “guns, germs, and steel” really as essential in the swift Spanish success

as is often assumed? After all, not just Rome but many traditional empires fell in a similar fashion—the Achaemenids to a single Macedonian army; successive Chinese dynasties to Xiongnu, Mongols, and Manchu; Indian states to invaders from the northwestern frontier; Arabs to Turks; and so on. In none of these cases did the challengers enjoy the benefits of superior firepower or metallurgy, or serendipitously deploy their own lethal diseases. Seemingly powerful empires commonly showed little resilience in the face of such challenges. So is there anything special about the Aztec collapse?

My goal here is not to develop an argument about Roman or Aztec power but simply to illustrate a point I made at the beginning. We are dealing with questions that cannot be (well) answered by looking at any one empire, by judging variable A or variable B to have been “important” just because it happens to be conspicuous in the record or has received a lot of attention by experts in the applicable area of academic specialization. We can tell only if or how much a given variable—modes of surplus extraction, colonization, infrastructure, smallpox—mattered if we relate the configuration of variables specific to one case to configurations in other cases that are sufficiently similar to warrant systematic comparison. As always in comparative history, the challenge is to identify significant factors and the ways in which they are related to observed outcomes. A willingness to draw on historical data from both sides of the Atlantic Ocean will be essential in meeting this challenge.

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## 2

**The Visualization of Imperial Dominance:  
Hobbes's *Leviathan*, the Mexica Templo  
Mayor, and the Materialization of Authority<sup>1</sup>****Eulogio Guzmán**

**T**he Mexica, like many other cultures, have been understood through the prism of a comparative historical lens. As the essays in this volume make clear, for the Mexica and their incorporated polities (often referred to collectively as the Aztec), this trend began on first contact with the Spanish, who viewed them in relation to the pagan cultures of the Graeco-Roman era. This comparison inspired a number of studies, which have accommodated numerous agendas.<sup>2</sup>

Many recent studies have explored the competitive and dynamic social milieu of the Mexica; this scholarship, combined with reassessments of complex societies and hegemonic systems of government (many from cross-cultural perspectives) and archaeological discoveries (not only of the Mexica capital but also in peripheral Aztec sites), has provided a more nuanced

understanding of Mexica society.<sup>3</sup> Such works have demonstrated behavioral similarities among competitive regimes in history that thrived in internecine political environments. Such studies have amplified our knowledge of the ways in which one-party governments in general exerted control among a diversified constituency. In this essay I analyze how the architecture and accompanying visual culture at the Mexica's Templo Mayor, their civic-religious edifice par excellence (Figure 2.1), was used to express the ideals of their politically emergent ambitious government. To conceptually explore Mexica visualization of politics, I examine this edifice and its three-dimensional composition in comparison to one of the most profound two-dimensional illustrations of corporate authority ever produced, the frontispiece to Thomas

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**Figure 2.1.** Unearthed remains of Templo Mayor, Mexico City. (Photo by author, 2008)

Hobbes's *Leviathan*, published in Paris in 1651. I have chosen the comparison of a two-dimensional composition to a three-dimensional construction because both entities visually illustrate the political tenet that a government legitimizes its authority by imaging the integrated corporate membership of its polity.

This paper begins with a select visual analysis of the *Leviathan*'s frontispiece that relates its imagery to the central premise of Hobbes's treatise on the power of the sovereign. After this brief presentation, I discuss the concept of sovereignty as defined in the discipline of political philosophy and relate it to late Preclassic central Mexico (A.D. 1200–1519). I then analyze what I identify as visual manifestations of sovereign power for the Mexica, arguably the greatest hegemonic power in the central Mexican

region from A.D. 1427 to 1519. I lay out my exploration of Mexica materiality of authority by concentrating on the Templo Mayor to argue that its repetitive and continuous construction—lasting over 100 years—demonstrates that this culture obsessed over the presentation of every detail of this edifice, because its image was *the* preeminent manifestation of corporate authority on earth.

Although the architecture and the decorative program associated with the Templo Mayor and the imagery visible on the *Leviathan* frontispiece are from different periods and are historically unrelated, my analysis points to an ideological overlap in the conception and visual presentation of authority. In examining the architectural composition of the Templo Mayor, its accompanying embellishment, and its associated deposits,



I show that the multiethnic Mexica used their imagery as political weapons to represent, assert, showcase, and attentively materialize their hegemonic claims. These claims were materialized, I argue, to convince their constituents of the Mexica belief in many peoples, one government.

### The Image in and of *Leviathan*

In *Leviathan*, Hobbes (1991:89) observes that humans without governance would live in a state of nature and that life would be “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.”<sup>4</sup> In their natural state, humans would have no rules and would fight and kill one another in a “war of all against all,” with no recourse to outside authorities. Hobbes proclaimed that for people to peacefully coexist, they needed to give up their natural rights to all things, even the bodies of others, via a mutual transferring of right. This covenant/contract vested the consent of the many within a single entity and legitimized the total authority of that sovereign over his subjects. The coming together for the mutual protection of all was, for Hobbes, the basis of society and the foundation of a governed entity.

Hobbes’s treatise, regarded by many as one of the most influential examples of social contract theory, was illustrated by a single print, *Leviathan* (Figure 2.2), which appeared as the work’s frontispiece.<sup>5</sup> This image is commonly invoked among political theorists as the visual manifestation of Hobbes’s social imaginary, and it is one of the most enduring and fundamental representations of political power. Examination of this canonical

image outlines the fundamental principle of Hobbes’s political deliberation: to maintain effective control, the absolute sovereign must, in his manifestation of authority, refer to his constituent membership.

*Leviathan*’s frontispiece, printed in 1651, was attributed by some to Abraham Bosse. According to Keith Brown (1978:24), this image was based on an earlier original drawing, credited to Wenceslas Hollar, that appeared in the Egerton Manuscript, a handwritten manuscript given to Charles I (Figure 2.3).<sup>6</sup> The frontispiece image is divided into two sections: a rising giant dominates the top segment of the page, while the bottom area comprises two vertical panels, subdivided into four horizontal registers, that flank a central section with the treatise’s title.<sup>7</sup>

The scene in the top register presents a giant rising like an emergent sun over a rolling landscape, which includes hamlets and a well-planned, fortified city. This figure takes a mountain-like pyramidal form; wears a crown, a beard, and a mustache; and wields a sword in one hand and a crosier in the other. All of these symbols assert Hobbes’s thought that the sovereign must rule supreme over both temporal (martial) and spiritual (religious) power. This image likewise illustrates the Hobbesian axiom: There can be no greater power on earth than the sovereign, as echoed in the Latin biblical inscription appearing above the Leviathan’s head.<sup>8</sup> Hobbes scholars (Bredenkamp 2007; Brown 1978) argue that the most innovative and important

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**Figure 2.2.** Frontispiece, Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 1651. Ink on paper. (© Trustees of the British Museum)

component of both Hobbes's written work and this composition is the composite makeup of the torso and arms of the rising colossus, which in the 1651 image are symbolically made of a miniature populace facing the emergent giant.<sup>9</sup> The earlier Egerton Manuscript version shows nearly all the same details but for one major exception. In the previous drawing, the body comprises stacked

individual heads.<sup>10</sup> Both the Egerton and the published 1651 drawing aptly illustrate the principle that absolute authority needs to fully embody its constituency. However, the details comprising the body on each colossus promote alternate applications of this imperative.

To Horst Bredekamp (2007:48–49), the facial expressions in the Egerton drawing seem anxious, active, and frightened.



**Figure 2.3.** Frontispiece to the Egerton Manuscript, presented to Charles I, 1651. Ink on paper. (© British Library Board, Egerton 1910, f.1)

He added that they “openly play with the ambiguity of their position,” on the one hand protected and on the other imprisoned within the body of the Leviathan. These outwardly facing heads, I would also add, suggest that each member of the corporation is responsible for his own well-being and must not follow blindly. The adjustment of the torso in the latter, printed image, with the smaller figures of

a populace focusing on the giant, not only makes the subjects anonymous (we see only the backs of their heads), it also underscores the subjects’ total submission to the overwhelming power of the sovereign who captivates them (Bredekamp 2007:40–42).<sup>11</sup> This latter version is more sympathetic to Hobbes’s treatise and conveys Hobbes’s premise with greater optic clarity, suggesting that the change to the

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image reflects someone's intimacy with the contents of the treatise. Curiously, as I show in this essay, the Mexica's visual culture symbolically fused representation of their constituents within the most important symbols of their central government to generate a strikingly similar imagined trope of political dominion. A comparison of the visual analogies that refer to the corporate entity on the *Leviathan's* frontispiece outlined here to representations of plurality incorporated onto the imaging of the Mexica Templo Mayor likewise shows an ideological concurrence that enables a more complete assessment of the political materialization of Mexica imperial dominance.

### **Sovereignty and the Mexica Political Milieu**

The term *sovereignty* has had numerous associated meanings that have changed through time, but it has maintained its core definition of supreme authority within a territory.<sup>12</sup> A sovereign possesses authority and, according to Dan Philpott (2003), territoriality. The principle of territoriality defines members of a community, specifies that their membership derives from residence within defined borders that may not necessarily correspond with a single identity, and *is* the quality that binds citizens to authority. Philpott argues that both of these concepts, sovereignty and territoriality, rose together in Hobbes's philosophy and that these ideals are materialized in both versions of the imagined Leviathan.

In his 1992 study of the social and cultural history of indigenous Nahua Mexico in the sixteenth through

eighteenth centuries, the late James Lockhart (1992:14) asserted that the *altepetl*, or ethnic state/social unit, was at the heart of the social organization of the Nahua world.<sup>13</sup> In metaphorical form, *in atl in tepelt*—literally “the water(s), the mountain”—refers to territory, and Lockhart adds (1992:14) that it was specifically an organization that held control over a given territory. *Altepetl* took a variety of forms and sizes. The Spanish gave the name *pueblo* (meaning “people”) to the *altepetl*. It was an appropriate term, as each *altepetl* imagined itself consisting of a different people.<sup>14</sup> The social composition of the *altepetl* varied, but it commonly comprised relatively equal, separate, and self-contained constituent parts. By definition, its minimum requirements were a territory, a collective of social groups broken into constituent parts, and a dynastic ruler.

Symbolically, both territory and rulership came to be defined in Mesoamerican societies by the presence of the indigenous temple, while each constituent part had an ethnic unity embodied in a special god and cult of its own. Each established *altepetl* in the Valley of Mexico had a main temple associated with a local cult, a sovereign tied to this religious political structure, and some sort of central market (Lockhart 1992:16). In his exhaustive analysis of the human body, Alfredo López Austin presents numerous examples of the intimate associations in Nahua society between the individual and the collective social conscience personified in one's personal body and in the office of the local ruler, the *tlatoani*. In his work, López Austin's

elucidates the many, multiple relations between government and the physical body of each constituent.<sup>15</sup> Tangibly, no visual form materialized the idea of the *altepetl* better than the indigenous temple, and arguably there was no greater temple in Postclassic Central Mexico than the Mexica Templo Mayor.

### The Foundation of Authority in the Codex Mendoza

The Mexica were the last major social group to enter the central Valley of Mexico after a continuous migration by northern Nahuatl peoples during the thirteenth century. The prolonged arrival of Nahuatl in the valley created a competitive social environment among polities in the region. Mexica late arrival into the overcrowded Basin of Mexico put them at a disadvantage in settling among already established peoples. After failed attempts at settling around the shores of Lake Texcoco, the Mexica finally established their capital on the marshy island of Mexico-Tenochtitlan in A.D. 1325. This auspicious event was handsomely illustrated by what was most likely an indigenous artist (Nicholson 1992:1:10) on one of the first pages of the postconquest Codex Mendoza, dated to the early 1540s (Figure 2.4).<sup>16</sup> The bottom of this page illustrates one way the Mexica legitimized the establishment of their capital, through the subjugation of the polities of Tenayuca and Culhuacan, as identified by accompanying Aztec locatives and a Spanish gloss. This event is commemorated by the illustration of two burning temples at the hand of oversized

Mexica combatants. These large warriors are shown taking prisoners in an area that symbolically lies just outside Tenochtitlan (Carrasco 2000:26–27). This indigenous capital is rendered here as a large rectangle bisected by diagonal boundaries, which are outlined in black and filled with flat areas of color.<sup>17</sup>

Curiously, this image celebrating the foundation of power materializes Mexica authority not only by rendering military victories but also by illustrating the sensible political premise, articulated 100 years later in Hobbes's treaty, that a ruler's claim to sovereignty is legitimized when it embodies constituent membership. In the Codex Mendoza, composite membership is visible in the presence of 10 leaders gathered around the centrally rendered eagle perched on a cactus—a motif intimately associated with Mexica political emergence.<sup>18</sup> These men wear capes, a symbol of nobility, gender, status, and political authority that had similar connotations to the togas worn by Roman senators who represented Rome. According to Frances Berdan and Patricia Anawalt (1992:2:4–6), these lords reference the ancestral founding members of the confederation that united to establish what would become the seat of Mexica government. Much like the Egerton Manuscript drawing, which presents constituents facing outward from within the body of the Leviathan, the representatives on the Mendoza page have highly stylized faces. However, unlike the Egerton image, the identity of these figures is specified by the accompanying glyph naming each representative and the ethnic faction he embodies.



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**Figure 2.4** Foundation of Tenochtitlan in Codex Mendoza, ca. 1540s. Ink and wash on paper. (Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, Ms. Arch Selden A.1, folio 2r)

The perfectly symmetrical quadrangle anchors the main composition to the center of this page; it frames an eagle set on top of a cactus that grows from a rock outcrop. This Aztec place sign identifies the capital by its name, Tenochtitlan (the land of the stone cactus).<sup>19</sup> Azure boundaries symbolically refer to the waters of Lake Texcoco, as well as to Tenochtitlan's numerous canals, and delineate the orthogonal perimeter bisected into quarters by two additional aqua-colored lines that meet at the center of this rectangle.<sup>20</sup> These blue lines define a formée cross design—a form synonymous with a Mesoamerican cosmogram as evident in the Codex Féjervary-Mayer, a preconquest Mixteca-Puebla manuscript.<sup>21</sup> Such cosmograms commonly referred to a precisely planned, sacred center and in this case recall Mexico-Tenochtitlan's alignment with the cardinal points. Carrasco accounts for many symbolic associations present on this image to affirm that the Mexica capital was the ideal manifestation of sacred order. However, the presentation of 10 indigenous lords supporting the founding of a well-organized capital not only makes this image solemn but also commemorates the Mexica as a legitimate preconquest political authority, which by the time this image was created had been replaced by the very Spanish viceroy who commissioned this manuscript.

Carrasco (2000:24–25) associates the oversized eagle placed in this privileged central position with the war god Huitzilopochtli. This image announces the arrival of the Aztec political

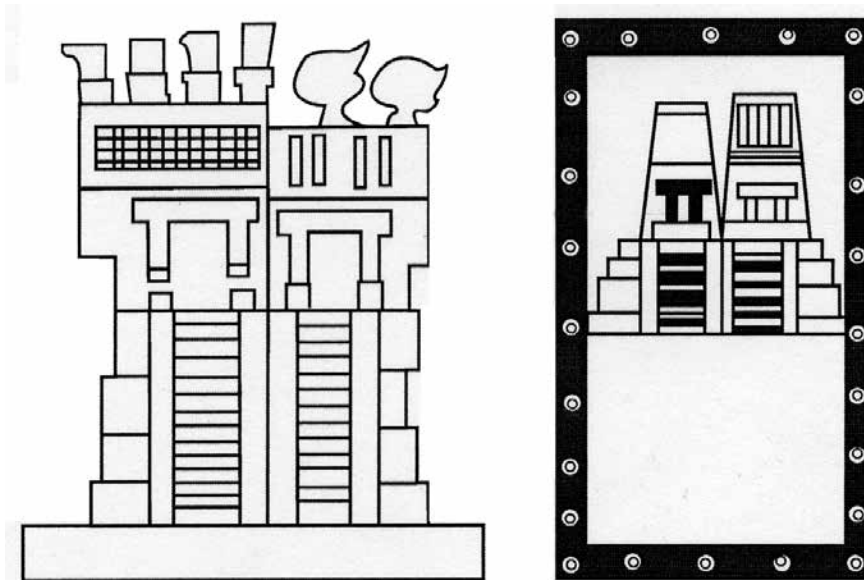
collective in the region, transforming this location into a seat of conquest and a confluence of authority. One figure, slightly larger and placed closest to the center, is identified by an Aztec name sign and a Spanish gloss as the chieftain Tenoch, the founder of the Mexica capital.<sup>22</sup> Tenoch's status as political leader is confirmed by his sitting on a ripened reed mat—a prototypical symbol of sovereignty (the other figures sit on mats made of green, unseasoned reeds)—by the speech scroll that emanates from his mouth, identifying him as an orator, *tlatoani*, the Nahuatl term for sovereign; and by the dark painted skin defining his status as head priest (Boone 2000:232). In political terms, this image concisely conveys that the effective foundation and prosperity of the imperial government (its economic windfall is thoroughly documented in the subsequent pages of the Codex Mendoza) came as a result of the unified composite membership under the chieftain Tenoch.<sup>23</sup> Likewise, the vital placement of this majestic avian beast indexes the important place of the Mexica at the center of the island and the nexus of all politics.

Interestingly, few architectural references were made on the Mendoza page, but two elements can be seen within the rectangular representation of the capital.<sup>24</sup> In contrast to the structures outside this central tableau that have been conquered, the design of the two architectural features in the central square signals that they were made of nonpermanent materials. The deliberate rendering of these structures in

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nondurable materials corroborates ethnohistorical claims (Durán 1984:69) stating that stone structures were built on the island for the first time during the reign of the second Mexica emperor, Chimalpopoca, and further explains the absence of the most important civic structure, the Templo Mayor.<sup>25</sup> This notable structure must have been constructed in a later phase in history. The lack of durable architecture in the central area of this image expresses the metonymic relation between sovereignty and permanent architecture that existed within indigenous society: the underdeveloped nonpermanent structures reflected the developing political organization and progress of the Mexica. Inversely, as will be shown, durable construction during later times was the

necessary visual benchmark of Mexica political progress. The capture of the only permanent architecture present in this page by oversized Mexica warriors commemorates the beginning of the consolidation of Mexica power as they subdued established polities, symbolized by the burning structures (in this case temples), and embarked on the vassalage of their unfortunate neighbors. Similar to Hobbes's Leviathan image, the bodies of the representatives on the Mendoza page were contained within the tableau representation of the Mexica government—in this case the capital, a place where the eagle (and later the Templo Mayor), like Hobbes's Leviathan, symbolically rose, commanding the awe of emergent groups in the landscape.



**Figure 2.5.** Drawings of the Templo Mayor in Codex Telleriano-Remensis and Codex Aubin. (Drawings by Lisa Boomer)



### **Mexica Consolidation of Power and the Templo Mayor**

The Templo Mayor physically occupied the central position in the capital. Its regal remains, along with the rest of the Mexica capital, lay entombed after conquest under subsequent colonial buildings until archaeologist Eduardo Matos Moctezuma exhumed the bulk of this structure, along with other accompanying constructions, in 1978, through his supervision of the Proyecto Templo Mayor (PTM).<sup>26</sup> The PTM's discoveries corroborated information found in postconquest narratives, describing the temple as a solid mass that supported two shrines on its summit (Figure 2.5); one shrine was dedicated to the supreme Mexica patron Huitzilopochtli, and the other incorporated the most fundamental god in the land, the rain god Tlaloc.<sup>27</sup> Two separate stairways located on the eastern facade of the Templo Mayor gave access to each shrine on the summit. Emily Umberger and Cecelia Klein's (1993:307–312) investigation of this temple revealed several prototypes, including one at the semiautonomous center of Tenayuca (see Marquina 1951:plates 49, 50, 51), the same polity the Mexica celebrated conquering on the bottom of the Mendoza page discussed above. Traditionally, Mesoamerican temple pyramids supported just one temple on the summit, a shrine normally dedicated to the deity of the ruling group, but as Umberger and Klein (1993:307) make clear, twin temples were found in several sites that predate Tenochtitlan's version, and according to John Fox (in Umberger and Klein 1993:309), in some cases twin

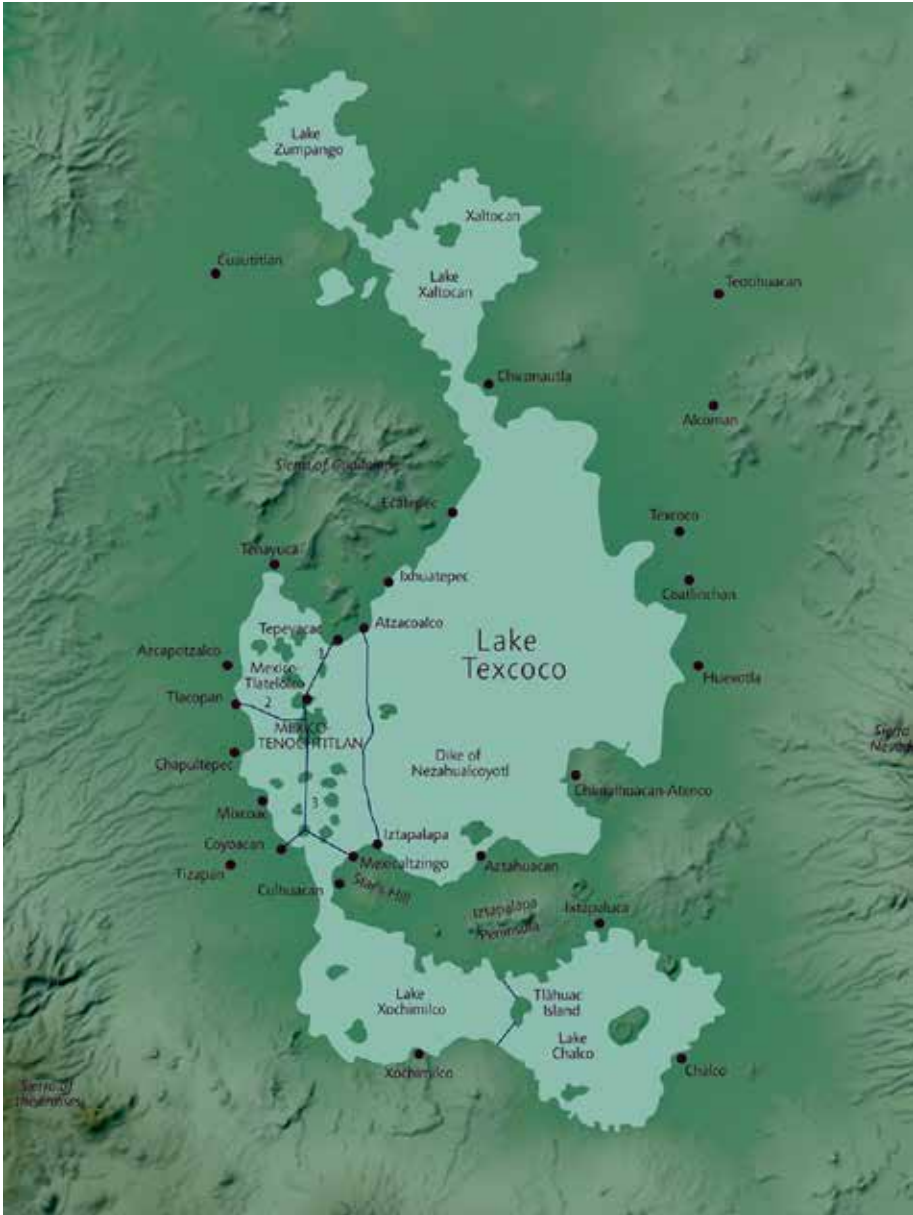
temples were an innovation responding to local political expansion. The adoption of an architectural design that included two separate shrines at the summit signaled Mexica interest in incorporation. The Mexica conquest of Tenayuca, it seems, not only provided the military legitimacy needed to establish autonomy as rendered in the Mendoza image, it also gave the Mexica, in the twin temple pyramid design, a visual emblem that symbolically heralded the incorporated membership of their emergent political institution.

### **Labor and Construction on the Templo Mayor**

According to Matos (1981:50), Acamapichtli, the founder of the Mexica Dynasty, completed the first major revision of the Templo Mayor, known as Construction Phase II.<sup>28</sup> Matos's archaeological explorations showed that after this phase, the Mexica rebuilt this edifice five more times in its entirety and in several partial remodels, making it likely that each of the subsequent emperors leading up to the Spanish conquest sponsored an architectural renovation.<sup>29</sup>

Ethnohistorical sources report that the building of the Templo Mayor involved a diversified labor force of corporate constituents. For instance, in the *Historia de las indias*, Dominican friar Diego Durán (1984:133–135; see also Tezozomoc 1944:79–82) writes that the rebuilding of the Templo Mayor coincided with the commemoration of the emperor Motecuhzoma I's ascendancy to power in A.D. 1440. Motecuhzoma I, Durán mentions, requested assistance

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**Figure 2.6.** Map of the Basin of Mexico showing major settlements, ca. 1500.  
(Drawing by Jennifer Munson)

from his subjects to rebuild the Templo Mayor, and the subordinate lords of Texcoco, Colhuacan, Xochimilco, Cuitlahuac, Mizquic, Culhuacan, Tacuba, and Azcapotzalco responded with the labor needed to complete the expansion. Leonardo López Luján, Jaime Torres, and Aurora Montufar (2003:70–75) conducted a petrographic analysis of the primary materials used to construct the Templo Mayor, identifying some possible quarries used to mine the stones that went into this structure. Their works point out that in addition to involving the two other principal members of the Triple Alliance, Texcoco, and Tacuba, the Mexica also invited assistance only from polities within the nucleus of the lakeshore. Mapping the placement of these towns in relation to Tenochtitlan (Figure 2.6) makes it clear that four of the polities named by Durán approximate a quadripartite layout (Texcoco, northeast; Tlacopan, northwest; Xochimilco, southeast; Cuitlahuac, southwest) centered on Tenochtitlan, which in Mesoamerican spatial terms was a metaphor for the entire political, economic, and religious realm of the indigenous universe (Guzmán 2016). In other words, the material and spatial composition of the Templo Mayor resonated the conceptual vision of both the Nahuatl religious order and the political universe. Ideologically, the physical composition of the Templo Mayor comprised raw materials of those politically incorporated entities, while their symbolic reference of the actual landscape noted that the enticing realms beyond were within their reach.<sup>30</sup>

An examination of the unearthed Templo Mayor platform, corresponding to Construction Phase IVa and attributed by Matos (1981:50) to Motecuhzoma I, shows the incorporation of a random mosaic of stones and patterns (Figures 2.1 and 2.7). This bricolage corroborates the historical narrative that a number of well-supervised hands worked on this construction project.<sup>31</sup> However, the deliberate incorporation of a variety of visual forms of expression on the Templo Mayor can be seen in Phase III as well. This construction phase was associated with the emperor Itzcoatl, the first Mexica sovereign to embark on an imperial quest. Several sculptures associated with the Templo Mayor made multiple iconographic, stylistic, and material references to a variety of social groups during this period. These include a set of large sculptures leaning on the steps of this platform and a series of more than 140 tenoned stones made of different materials and set onto this building's platform. (See discussions in Guzmán 2017; López Austin and López Luján 2009: Table 9, figures 127-129 and plate 54). A look at later construction phases confirms that this was a recurrent event: sculpture decorating the Templo Mayor constituted a material representation of the diverse Mexica constituency, making it clear that these socially complicated acts of construction were produced for everyone's visual consumption. The Templo Mayor then not only optically comprised the surrounding lands; its material compositions, construction methods, accompanying sculpture, and

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**Figure 2.7.** Exposed Templo Mayor platform showing the random mosaic pattern.  
(Photo by by author, 2008)

composite labor made it the actual embodiment and corporate representation of fruitful Mexica supervision.

Construction employing a composite of stone materials is visible at other Mesoamerican sites, including the great centers of Teotihuacan and Tollan. However, a look at the exposed Templo Mayor construction stages reveals a denser concentration and a greater variety of stone patterns and stone types, on the structure's body and especially on its paved flooring (Figure 2.7). The continual construction of the Templo Mayor, confirmed through the archaeological record, shows that anyone who visited the Mexica capital would have witnessed its composite underskin. The Templo

Mayor's architecture mirrored the intricate, composite makeup of Mexica society and functioned as a metonym for the conceptual ideals of sovereign authority. It is striking to note that Hobbes would similarly reconfigure these concepts (in a different part of the world) for his *Leviathan*. In its final, completed phase, a single coat of white plaster covered the Templo Mayor, unifying this composite makeup. This final coat permanently bonded the efforts of the labor force with those of the ruling elite and not only provided an artistic impression of Mexica political unity but likewise gave their authority a tangible architectural reality—that is, until the whole process was started anew, which, excavations show, it





**Figure 2.8a** The Templo Mayor before its final coat of plaster, in Codex Durán, 1579–1581. (Biblioteca Nacional, Madrid, Vitr/ 26/11)



**Figure 2.8b** The Templo Mayor in its completed state, in Codex Durán, 1579–1581. (Biblioteca Nacional, Madrid, Vitr/26/11)

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repeatedly was (López Austin and López Luján 2009).

The constructed reality proved so effective and resounding that it even endured the demise of the structure itself at the hands of the Spanish and insurgent indigenous forces, as visible in many postconquest illustrations of this structure. Christopher Couch (1987:295–308) argues that five artists illustrated Durán’s compendium. In particular, “Artist B” illustrated two compelling images of the Templo Mayor that relate to the construction and inauguration of this structure under another emperor, this time the penultimate sovereign, Ahuitzotl (A.D. 1486–1502). Two illustrations rendered by Artist B accompany the two separate chapters (43 and 44) authored by Dúran (1984:333–349). The first image (Figure 2.8a) accompanies a narrative describing the architectural completion of the Templo Mayor and reveals the ambivalence held by many who reported on the Mexica following the destruction of the indigenous capital during the colonial period. This first image inaccurately renders the Templo Mayor as two separate entities but correctly illustrates its body as comprising coursed stones, which resonates with reports of well-coordinated construction efforts by the Mexica. The second image illustrates an all too familiar account of sacrifice and includes a sensationalist account of immolated victims (see Klein 1987 and this volume; López Austin and López Luján 2009) (Figure 2.8b). Curiously, the second image of the Templo Mayor corrects the misrepresentation on the previous page

by the same artist. In this image, the temple is presented as one massive platform bound together by a coat of plaster and the flow of blood. This acculturated artist misrepresented some of the details of this structure but did not confuse the idea that public ritual acts brought together the efforts of those who contributed to the construction of this supreme structure, as evident in the rendition of the single unified platform on this page and in the many movable feasts celebrated by the Mexica and discussed throughout Dúran’s book (Guzmán 2017). However, the Templo Mayor was not only consecrated in public rituals.

**The Templo Mayor Offerings**

Ethnohistorical accounts report that the Templo Mayor was the hub of public and semiprivate ritual activity. Accordingly, Mexican archaeologists have unearthed a panoply of objects precisely arranged amid the construction layers of the Templo Mayor. These meticulously placed objects comprising “offerings” were set into masonry-lined coffers, small stone boxes, or cavities created within the fill, or beneath the floors of this structure (Figure 2.9a).<sup>32</sup> To date, archaeologists have recorded 169 individual offerings, collectively containing well over 20,000 ritual items (López Luján 2014:76). Of the grand variety of faunal, marine, and human remains contained within the deposits, as well as ceramic and stone objects, including many sculptures and jewelry items (Figures 2.9b–c), no two offerings are identical. Still, Matos (1979) recognized patterns



**Figure 2.9.** Objects recovered from Templo Mayor offerings, on view at the Museo Templo Mayor, Mexico City. (Photo by author)

in the deposits. Subsequently, López Luján's (1993) exhaustive analysis of an initial 118 offerings revealed that the diligent placement of objects followed specific patterns that held precise symbolic significance, including references to a three-tiered universe. The small size of the deposits and their frequency in the archaeological record show that these ritualized transactions were private commemorative acts that only a few people could have participated in or witnessed. The offerings were a material record of repeated intimate sociocultural, sacred transactions between the vested parties making and receiving the deposits,

which, I postulate, also symbolized solemn political covenants (Guzmán 2004, 2016, 2017).

López Luján's (1993, 1999) detailed analysis showed that the offerings comprised material from many of the distinct polities that made up the Mexica state; some deposits contained culturally specific materials, such as greenstone sculptures from the Oaxaca and Mezcala cultures or masks from other cultural regions outside the Mexica capital.<sup>33</sup> Interestingly, for some time Emiliano Melguar (personal communication 2008, 2010) has conducted analyses of the types of microscopic manufacturing marks found

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**Figure 2.10.** Offering 98, Templo Mayor Phase IVb. (Photo by author)

on many Templo Mayor objects to try to identify the possible artistic workshops that produced the items found in the offerings.<sup>34</sup> His results suggest that many objects that reference cultures other than the Mexica seem to bear local fabrication markings, possibly by Tenochca sculptors. This local production of foreign sculptural forms shows that the Mexica invested heavily in fabricating visual representations of all polities within their politically ambitious scope, whether legitimately incorporated members of their confederacy or not.

Most if not all of the offerings contained at least one cultural Mexica item, such as portable sculptures. In particular, a special offering in a deposit designated

Chamber II (Figure 2.10) held more than 50 masks and 80 figures of different artistic styles that faced west and out toward those interring the contents (López Luján 1993:318–319).<sup>35</sup> This layout strikingly recalls—in three-dimensional form—the faces peering outward from the two-dimensional body of the Leviathan rendered in the Egerton Manuscript (Figure 2.2); in this offering, the faces looked out from the depths of the Templo Mayor. In this offering, the Mexica not only made cosmogonic associations to the framework of the universe, they also created a material reference to the composite makeup of their government by depositing masks made of diverse stone materials and styles. These discovered deposits





**Figure 2.11.** Two-tufted figures unearthed in various Templo Mayor offerings in Phase IVb, A.D. 1469–1480. Museo del Templo Mayor. (Photo by author)

may outline a number of complicated agendas that, it can be argued, were an explicit manifestation of the Mexica penchant for cultural ingestion.

López Luján (1999, 2006) asserts that every new construction phase of the Templo Mayor celebrated the exuberant progress of the expanding empire, making it logical for me to propose that the offerings also functioned as political references to the many incorporated polities in each subsequent phase of construction. These offerings, it would seem, symbolized political covenants made at the capital that seem to have been renewed in every new construction phase. This is yet another reason, complementary to the religious association, why the deposits obsessively referenced every region in the Mexica political universe: every polity coveted and attained had to be

represented or fabricated in each building phase of the Templo Mayor at whatever cost.

Among the many portable sculptures found in the deposits, one type stands out: sculptures depicting a compact, seated male wearing a loincloth and a distinctive headdress with “two tufts” (Figure 2.11).<sup>36</sup> An analysis of the iconographic attributes, contextual meaning, and symbolic associations of the two-tufted figure led López Luján and others (López Luján 1993; Matos 1993; Solís [in Alcina-Franch 1993 and in Matos and Solís 2003]) to link its identity with Xiuhtecuhtli, a preeminent deity in the Mexica pantheon. López Luján further articulated the religious symbolism of this being and its central importance in relation to the many Templo Mayor deposits in his fundamental work on the

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**Figure 2.12.** Painted designs on the faces of two-tufted figures. (Drawing by author)

offerings.<sup>37</sup> My work (2004, 2005, 2016, 2017) has carefully documented the intentional graduated differences among the corpus of sculptures to explore their political overtones. The examination of these sculptures has identified the multireferential nature of this being, visible in many distinct styles, diverse iconographic references evident in the modified complexity of details of personal dress, and 12 painted face designs (Figure 2.12), as well as in different types of materials used to sculpt them. These artistic expressions of multiplicity outline a series of visual strategies that announce Mexica political interest (much like that of the Roman Empire) to

ingest, dominate, and control a diversified, eclectic, large group of peoples. In essence the two-tufted figure, like the image of the Leviathan, conceptually referenced the coming together of multiple groups under a single regime.

Two-tufted figures range in size from 12.8 to 36.9 cm, with sculpted traits that manifest both a naturalistic and a more abstract geometric style, with at least 41 documented (Guzmán 2004) substyles. My close examination of their iconography showed that each sculpture held a graduated complexity in the distinct articulation of its dress, a possible marker of the social status of the person it represented. These dress elements included seven

headband designs, 14 earring variations, and 17 types of back straps; raw materials referenced numerous stone quarries (Guzmán 2004). In totality, my results demonstrate that the details on two-tufted figures distinguished one from another in myriad ways and support my claim that sculptures visually affirmed the cultural multiplicity of the Mexica Empire.

My collective findings (2004, 2005, 2016, 2017) further show that the two-tufted figures' iconography references not only multiple deities but also concepts related to governance. In codices, ruling elites wear the same regalia as two-tufted figures, including diadems with *chalchihuitl* designs, rectangular earrings with pendant ornaments, and back straps. Curiously, many of the motifs worn by the two-tufted figures likewise embellished the ultimate symbol of sovereign autonomy, the Mesoamerican temple. I have argued elsewhere (2004, 2016, 2017) that the two tufts on this figure referred to the temple shrines that crowned the Templo Mayor. Visual characteristics suggest that this compact figure was a surrogate for the other essential representation of government, the indigenous temple. It is not inconsequential to find that the iconography on the headdresses of these figures deliberately resonated both motifs decorating the crown of the supreme edifice associated with political order, the Templo Mayor. This edifice was not only where two-tufted figures were repeatedly deposited; it was also the core where all religious and political covenants were continually renewed in different forms.

### Conclusion

Mexica culture reigned supreme in Mesoamerica more than a century before Hobbes wrote *Leviathan*. Yet in Tenochtitlan and in post-Civil War England, in order to argue more successfully for a strong, authoritarian state presence, those in power had to show that they had the backing of a confederate body and a command of the world that they governed effectively. In this paper I argue that the image of the Templo Mayor memorialized the consolidation of Mexica power. Centering on Hobbes's imaged Leviathan as a framing device for my discussion on the materialization of power leads me to suggest that although the Mexica and post-Civil War English society had little in common, their artistic conception of political authority was visually congruent. Hobbes's writings specifically focused on an analysis of political behavior within a competitive social environment, which resonates with the internecine political milieu existing in central Mexico during the time of Mexica reign. Hobbes articulates the power of the single-party government, and his study provides a useful frame to help explain the concept of authority and total control exemplified years earlier by the Mexica government. This is not to say that Hobbes's treatise can be used to explain all the political intricacies of the Mexica's sociocultural exchanges with their constituents, but his analysis of human nature does provide opportunities that can generate fruitful discussions of political behavior among all competitive polities, and Hobbes consistently provided Roman examples to ground his own analysis.

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The process of construction, the composite makeup of the material body, and the visual presentation of the Templo Mayor as a unified whole show that this structure represented the expanding political influence of the Mexica conglomeration in its multifaceted composite makeup. My discussion of visual forms integrated into Templo Mayor architecture, as well as the symbolic contents found within associated offerings, shows that the Mexica used visual culture to represent their government as an incorporated ethnic polity. A look at the exhaustive efforts related to the continuous rebuilding of this edifice

show that Mexica emperors, much like political leaders elsewhere throughout time (Trigger 2007), created in the design and construction of the Templo Mayor a material manifestation of their power. As demonstrated here, the Mexica went to great lengths to ensure that the Templo Mayor's material, visual, and symbolic composition incorporated the multiple styles and techniques of cultures they both dominated and coveted politically. The many artistic agendas of the Templo Mayor exemplify a visual diplomacy that was consistently employed to assert claims of a diversified political universe.



**Figure 2.13.**  
Dumbarton Oaks  
Unku, Inka culture.  
(Dumbarton Oaks,  
Washington, D.C.)



**Figure 2.14.** Coatlicue sculpture, Mexica culture. Museo Nacional de Antropología, Mexico City (Photo by author)

In *Leviathan*, Hobbes (1991:89) referred to the civilizations of the Americas as being in a state of nature, without any government. Little did he know that complex polities did exist in the Americas and that many conceptualized and visualized sovereignty in strikingly similar ways to his own conception of effective governance. What would he have thought had he seen the Inka Dumbarton Oaks Unku (Figure 2.13) and understood that this tunic comprises a miniature network of smaller *unkus* with varied *tocapu* designs that Tom Cummins (2007:281–282) identifies as indexical to political and social groups

incorporated into the Inka Empire? What if he had stood before the Coatlicue (Figure 2.14) and felt its awesome visual presence bearing down on him; would he have recognized that its multifaceted, sumptuous intricate surfaces optically resonated Mexica themes of political incorporation?<sup>38</sup> Would he have recognized the visual overlaps of the imagery borne on these objects, with their multi-indexicality to politics, economics, religion, and corporate membership, as congruent with his own brilliant conjuring of the Leviathan? If so, how would this have led him to expand his own political analysis of authoritarian rule?

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## **Notes**

- 1 This paper owes much to many generous individuals. I am thankful to John Pohl and Claire Lyons for their invitation to contribute to the conference and for their editorial work to my essay in this. Discussions with Cecelia Klein helped define the initial project; this essay reflects many spirited discussions with her on this topic. Emily Umberger caught a couple of factual oversights in an earlier draft and has been a considerate colleague; I am very grateful to her. At Tufts University I am especially indebted to Vickie Sullivan, Jennifer London, Ioannis Evrigenis, Kevin Dunn, Hilary Binda, and Jonathan Wilson, director of the Center for the Humanities, for their many comments and suggestions. Eduardo Matos and Leonardo López Luján gave me access to much of the primary archaeological data that informs my project. Their unending support has been not only kind but also princely. Emiliano Melguar generously shared much of his own research. Jennifer Munson and Jacquie Dow provided invaluable comments and unending moral backing to this project; I am indebted to them for years to come and especially to Munson for her unwavering love and support. The comments of Anonymous Reviewer 1 helped sharpen the focus of this essay; I am much obliged to that reviewer. All errors and omissions are my own.
- 2 Regrettably, some of the comparisons exploring the Mexica past spawned misconceptions about Mexica society and culture. For example, in 1880 the anthropologist Adolph Bandelier adopted Henry Louis Morgan's comparison of the Iroquois Confederation to the Mexica, because they were both corporate indigenous governments. Bandelier's study relied on outdated and inadequate sources on the Mexica, which misguided his comparison of two distinctly different social organizations. Bandelier also did not carefully assess the veracity of many of the sensationalized historical accounts he consulted. Not surprisingly, his studies promoted a distorted view of the Aztec as an egalitarian society, tribal in nature.  

Morgan's work provided an important initial understanding of Mexica social organization, in spite of his largely misreading the competitive social environment of Lake Texcoco, where the Mexica thrived. Bandelier's popular study focusing on Mexica political structure extended many of the assumptions found in Morgan's work. Useful but brief discussions of the problems encountered in Bandelier's and Morgan's publications relating to Postclassic central Mexico are found in Gibson (1971:376) and in Berdan and Smith (1996:4–8). A brief bibliographical note is in Glass (1975:552).
- 3 Some notable early ethnohistorical studies that provide a valuable assessment of the sociopolitical environment of Postclassic central Mexico include Moreno 1931; Barlow 1945, 1949; and Gibson 1971. More recently, comparative studies of empires and complex societies from a number of disciplines have elucidated different strategies used to dominate others in the past. Significant contributions to this topic can be found in Alcock et al. 2001, Doyle 1986, Feinman and Marcus 1998, Mann 1986, Trigger 2007, and Yoffee 2005.

- 4 The full quote in chapter 13, “Of the Natural Condition of Mankind,” in Thomas Hobbes’s *Leviathan* (1991:89) reads, “Whatsoever therefore is consequent to a time of warre, where every man is enemy to every man; the same is consequent to the time, wherein men live without other security, than what their own strength, and their own invention shall furnish them withall. In such condition, there is no place for Industry; because the fruit thereof is uncertain: and consequently no Culture of the Earth; no Navigation, nor use of the commodities that may be imported by Sea; no commodious Building; no Instruments of moving, and removing such things as require much force; no Knowledge of the face of the Earth; no account of Time; no Arts; no Letters; no Society; and which is worst of all, continual fear and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short.”
- 5 Keith Brown (1978:24) notes there are those who suggest that this figure should be blamed, in part, “for certain persistent misunderstandings or oversimplifications of key elements in [Hobbes’s] theory.” Many scholars widely regard Hobbes’s *Leviathan* as the quintessential foundation to the study of modern politics. See Richard Tuck (in Hobbes’s *Leviathan* 1991) and Duncan Stewart (in “Thomas Hobbes,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2013 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2013/entries/hobbes/>>.) for a comprehensive bibliography on the subject.
- 6 In 1898 F. A. Borovsky (see discussion in Brown 1978) was the first to credit this image of the Leviathan to Wenceslas Hollar. According to Brown (1978:24), this image has since been cataloged in the British Museum under Bosse’s name. Horst Bredekamp (2007:31) also names Abraham Bosse as the author of the published Leviathan image.
- 7 See Keith Brown (1978) and Horst Bredekamp (2007) for a complete discussion of images that refer to both the temporal power of military force and religious structure and order, as rendered in the lower registers of the *Leviathan* frontispiece.
- 8 The inscription reads in the original Latin, “Non est potestas Super Terram qua comparatur Job 41:24.” It can be translated as, “There is no greater power on earth that can compare.”
- 9 In his analysis “The Title Page of the *Leviathan*,” Noel Malcolm (2002) suggests that Hobbes came to the idea of representing the giant on the frontispiece after his introduction to an optics apparatus invented during his lifetime that fascinated him. Bredekamp (1999, 2007) has addressed the visual strategies in images illustrated in Hobbes’s many works.
- 10 G. A. J. Rogers and Karl Schuhman (Hobbes 2005:48–70) present a concise history of the Egerton Manuscript in *Thomas Hobbes: Leviathan*. In his discussion of the artists who created the Leviathan, Brown (1978:26–29) argues that the drawing in the Egerton Manuscript is closest to Hobbes’s original ideas. Brown also notes that the differences in the treatment of the body signal a clear change in the visual representation of this fiend. Brown attributes the significant change in the presentation of the Leviathan’s body not to Hobbes but rather to the artist in Paris who etched this famous image. (See also the discussion in Bredekamp 2007.)

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- 11 The change from a faceless public to a facing mob making up the body of the giant constitutes a double indexicality in power relations. Both images make references to the way the body politic and authority were imaged in Europe during this time, yet they index two distinct social relations. Discussions of the representation of the metaphor of the body politic and authority during the Renaissance are present in Kevin Dunn (1994:124–145), Annabel Patterson (1991:111–138), and Christopher Pye (1988:279–302). Two excellent examples of studies that explore the artistic impression of power on the American continent are presented in Cummins 2007 and Schreffler 2005 and 2007. Schreffler does not discuss Hobbes’s writings or his ideas related to the frontispiece of *Leviathan*, yet he includes the work as an illustration of the emergent centrality of power in the landscape in his earlier work (Schreffler 2005:162). His latter (2007) eloquent examination of authority in colonial Mexico drops the visual reference to *Leviathan* entirely.
- 12 The history of sovereignty is long and complicated, but Dan Philpott (2003) provides an insightful overview of this complex concept. In his discussion of the different forms of sovereignty, Philpott points out that supreme authority was a quality that Early Modern states possessed but that popes, emperors, kings, bishops, and most nobles and vassals during the Middle Ages lacked. Ernst H. Kantorowics (1997) presents one of the most complete examinations of medieval political theology in his work focusing on medieval kings, and Michael Schreffler updates some of these contributions in his 2007 publication, which focuses on representations of the monarch in colonial New Spain.
- 13 James Lockhart’s discussion on the *altepetl* provides a fundamental source for understanding the social organization of this indigenous social unit. Additional excellent discussions on the *altepetl* are presented in Carrasco (1976, 1996). Comprehensive discussions of Nahua social structure based on historical documents are likewise found in Charles Gibson’s work *The Aztecs under Spanish Rule* (1967) and also in his 1971 work.
- 14 Lockhart (1992:15) writes that among the Nahuas, nucleation was a significant factor, but it was not central to modes of sociopolitical organization.
- 15 In his study of the human body (1980), Alfredo López Austin identifies the intimate associations that existed between order, stratification, cosmology, and the human body. (See especially discussions presented on pages 7–25 and 442–466.)
- 16 This manuscript is named after New Spain’s first viceroy, Antonio de Mendoza, who commissioned its creation. Henry Nicholson (1992:1–11) addressed some of the salient chronological issues surrounding the attribution of authorship to this document and provided a succinct overview of the scholarship devoted to dating this manuscript. Nicholson’s article focused on the history of the manuscript and mentioned that an indigenous artist was more than likely involved in the process; he referenced Silvio Zavala’s 1938 work on the subject, which identified indigenous artist Francisco Gualpuyogualcal as someone who had worked on a similar manuscript for Viceroy Mendoza. The essays



by Kathleen Stewart Howe (1992:1:25–34) and Elizabeth Boone (1992:1:35–54) in the same volume provide valuable discussions on the relationship between indigenous and European styles and on the pictorial history contained in the pages of the Mendoza. Interestingly, Nicholson reported (1992:1:7) that several plates of this manuscript were illustrated with woodcuts that accompanied Volume 3 of *Hakluyt's Post-humus: Or Purchas His Pilgrimages* (1625) by Samuel Purchas (the owner of the Codex Mendoza at the time), before the manuscript was deposited in the Bodleian Library, where it now resides. Hakluyt's publication included a faithful woodcut rendition of the Mendoza frontispiece, which he published in England 26 years before Hobbes's *Leviathan*.

- 17 Donald Robertson was the first to make this identification, in his landmark publication on codices in 1959.
- 18 Except for the left quadrant, where four men are shown, two men appear in each of the three remaining quadrants of Mendoza's folio 2r.
- 19 This image captures what Carrasco (2000:19) called "the last move in the tour of migration and the first tableau of the tour of empire."
- 20 In her book *Stories in Red and Black*, Elizabeth Boone (2000:36, 53) provides the best discussion of Aztec glyphs and their conceptual associations.
- 21 Although this image does not belong to the Aztec culture per se, it represents what could best be described as a pan-Mesoamerican spatial conception. This manuscript belongs to the Mixteca-Puebla tradition, which greatly influenced Mexica art and is often referred to as an international style of sorts. Discussions on the Mixteca-Puebla style are covered in the works of Boone (2000), Fields 2012, Nicholson (1983), Pohl (1994b), Pohl and Byland (2004), and Robertson (1970). Elizabeth Boone provides the best discussion of the formée cross design (2000 and 2007) in her works on pictorial manuscripts.
- 22 The phonetic components identifying Tenoch's logograph are the same that appear at a much larger scale at the center of the composition. These include a stone and a cactus (*teitl* and *nochtli*, respectively, in Nahuatl) to create the compound name Tenoch, or "stone cactus."
- 23 A long Spanish text (Berdan and Anawalt 1992:7) accompanies this image. It describes the pictorial scene and adds that the men unified under Tenoch because he was an admirable leader. The Spanish text in folio 1r reads, "El exercito mexicano truxo por caudillos diez personas nonbradas / . . . que ansi mysmo en lo figurado hazen demonstracion /. Los quales Aviendo /hecho su asiento Eligieron por cabeça y señor A tenuch /. para que los governase como perçona especial para ello y en quien concurrian partes y abilidad para exercer señorio /. y los demas caudillos que fuesen como fueron sus hazedores y capitanes de la demas jente popular /."
- 24 The two architectural references on these pages include a *tzompantli* (skull rack) and a front-facing structure built on a solid platform but with walls and roofing made of thatch. According to Carrasco (2000:45), the *tzompantli* referenced Mexica sacrifice and capture of war captives.

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- 25 In her analysis of ethnohistorical documents, Aguilera (1978) found that the earliest reference to permanent architecture is attributed to the emperor Chimalpopoca. Further articulation of the representation of authority in relation to the political landscape in the Mendoza and the material composition of the Templo Mayor's architecture can be found in Guzmán 2016 and 2017.
- 26 The uncovering of the Mexica capital began in 1978 after the fortunate discovery of a colossal monolith, in the historical center of modern-day Mexico City, bearing the representation of the goddess Coyolxauhqui. Matos designed the Proyecto Templo Mayor as an entity that would excavate, consolidate, and comprehensively investigate the vestigial remains not only of this supreme edifice but also of exposed associated surrounding structures. For a history of the unearthing of the Templo Mayor, see Boone 1987; Matos 1979; López Austin and López Luján 2009; and López Luján 1993, 2006.
- 27 Alfredo López Austin and Leonardo López Luján provide the most insightful discussion of the Templo Mayor's associated symbolism to date in their 2009 tome devoted to this edifice. In this impressive volume, the authors explore the deep religious associations Tlaloc and Huitzilopochtli had with the Templo Mayor and the larger mythical realm of both Nahua and Mesoamerican culture.
- 28 Bray (1977) argues that political consolidation began when Mexico-Tenochtitlan petitioned its old lords, the Culhua, for the right to have a king, or *tlatoani*, of its own. In 1375 the Mexica were given Acamapichtli, a noble offspring of a Mexica-Culhua marriage, to install in their capital as the founder of their dynasty. Acamapichtli provided the Mexica with a strategic connection to the Culhua lineage and gave them a legitimate claim to direct descent from the legendary, most prestigious Toltec civilization. Bray (1977) argues that this event took place in A.D. 1372, but in the ethnohistorical sources, the date more commonly associated with this event is 1375, the year Acamapichtli took the throne (Townsend 1992).
- The affirmation of political bonds through strategic marriages was a common practice among Mesoamerican peoples. Examples of this phenomenon can be found in works by Carrasco (1996), Pohl (1994a, 1994b), and Terraciano (2001) on intermarriages among Mixtec kingdoms and their elites.
- 29 Several of the construction platforms at the Templo Mayor had glyphs associated with dates, suggesting that each phase of construction had a mythical and specific temporal association, largely corresponding to each of the nine Mexica emperors who reigned prior to the advent of Spanish rule. Since the unearthing of the Templo Mayor, there has been a running and much contested debate about the assignation of an emperor's governance to the temporal construction sequence at the Templo Mayor. For a discussion of the attributed assignation of construction phases to specific emperors, see Graulich 1992; López Austin and López Luján 2009; López Luján 1993, 1999, 2006; Matos 1979; Umberger 1987.
- 30 I present a comprehensive analysis of political associations found in Mexica spatial arrangements in Guzmán 2016.

- 31 According to López Luján (1993, 2006), Phase IVb represents the most completely excavated Templo Mayor construction phase.
- 32 The sizes of the receptacles containing the offerings vary, but they are generally small. In a few cases they were large enough to warrant being named chambers. To date, only three chambers (I–III) have been found in the foundations of the Templo Mayor. For a discussion of the locations of the various offerings, see López Luján (1993).
- 33 An example of some of the wide range of materials is the consistent presence in all deposits of raw marine material from either the Pacific or the Atlantic coast in the form of fine sand and marine creatures.
- 34 Emiliano Melgar has collaborated with others and conducted analysis on various materials recovered from the Templo Mayor, including obsidian, turquoise, and shell. See Melgar and Solís (2009) and Velázquez Castro and Melgar (2014).
- 35 In their discussion of the materials from Chamber II, Bertina Olmedo and Carlos Javier González (1986:72) mention having discovered 57 masks and 87 figures, but López Luján (1993:318–319) writes that 56 masks and 98 complete figures were discovered in Chamber II. Most of the sculpted material was of diverse Mezcala styles, but there was one Mixtec *penate*.
- Tlaloc was one of two deities to whom the Aztec dedicated the Templo Mayor, but the storm god was not exclusive to Aztec culture. Tlaloc was among the most common deities in all Mesoamerica. In contrast, the god of war, Huitzilopochtli, was the Mexica patron deity and was shared by only a few other Mesoamerican polities. For a brief discussion of the continuous presence of the storm god in Mesoamerica, see Arnold (2001:56–57).
- 36 According to López Luján (1993:174–179), the two-tufted figure was special due to the fact that he (1) was the most recurrent figural sculpture (after Tlaloc vessels) in the deposits, and (2) typically occupied the distinguished top layer of the offerings he inhabited.
- 37 There is a great debate as to the precise iconographic identity of the two-tufted figure. Although many (López Luján 1993, Matos 1993, and Solís [in Alcina-Franch 1993]) agree on the interpretation of this figure as Xiuhtecuhtli, the Mexica god of fire, alternate views include Nicholson (1983) and Nagao (1985a, 1985b). For a longer discussion of this polemic, see López Luján (1993:174–179) and Guzmán (2004, 2017).
- 38 In her study of imperial styles in the capital, Emily Umberger (2003) has shown that the surfaces in Aztec art became increasingly more ornate with time, to achieve what she calls the mature Aztec imperial style.

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3

**Monuments of Empire in Roman Spain and Beyond: Augusta Emerita (Mérida), the “Spanish Rome”**

**Jonathan Edmondson**

**The Rediscovery of Mérida in an Imperial Age**

In 1491 the important Spanish humanist Elio Antonio de Nebrija (1444–1522) included in a collection of his poems and epigrams (*Carmina et epigrammata*) two short works

in Latin elegiac pentameters on the ruined monuments of two impressive Roman sites in Spanish Extremadura. One of these poems, entitled “De Traiani Caesaris ponte,” treated the monumental bridge erected over the Tagus at Alcántara under Trajan:

*iam Tagus abstulerat geminae comertia terrae  
 quam Lusitanam saecula prisca vocant.  
 ponte sed extracto ripas commisit utrasque  
 Traianus princeps et patefecit iter.  
 nunc licet auriferis Tagus indignetur arenis 5  
 non tamen haec moles flumine pulsa ruet.  
 labere pace tua Tage: non hanc Hasdrubal hostis  
 militiae praesul sed Benedictus habet.*

Once the Tagus had prevented communications between the two parts of that twin land that earlier ages called Lusitania. But the emperor Trajan joined both banks of the river by constructing a bridge and opened up the route. Now let the Tagus with its gold-bearing sands express its indignation, but this mighty structure will not be beaten down by the flow of the river and collapse. Glide on peacefully, Tagus; Hasdrubal,

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our enemy, no longer controls this river, but rather [Saint] Benedict [San Benito], leader of our [Christian] army.

Nebrija had clearly visited the Roman bridge when he was a member of the academy of Don Juan de Zúñiga, grand master of the Order of Alcántara, at Zalamea de la Serena, between 1486 and 1491 (Fontán 1986), since he was the first to record the Latin inscription (*CIL* II 760) that lists the names of various Lusitanian municipalities often thought

(erroneously, it now transpires) to have contributed financially to the construction of the bridge.<sup>1</sup>

In a second, much longer poem, *De Emerita Restituta* (On Emerita Restored), the poet laments the lost glories of the once very impressive Roman city of Augusta Emerita (modern Mérida) (Álvarez y Sáenz de Buruaga 1949):

*quid non longa dies vertit mutatque vetustas?  
 rebus in humanis quid superesse potest?  
 hinc ubi nunc Merida est corrupto nomine, quondam  
 Emerita Augusti Caesaris illa fuit.  
 quam dedit emeritis habitandam cuius et agros 5  
 donativa dedit praemia militibus.  
 hic ubi disiectas moles et calce soluta  
 fundamenta vides orbiculata tamen,  
 amphitheatrales populus pariterque senatus  
 spectabat ludos innumerasque feras. 10  
 hic ubi nunc podium est et in orbis semireductos  
 surgentesque gradus atque anabathra vides,  
 scaena fuit quondam tragedis atque comedis  
 nota theatrales exhibuitque iocos.  
 hic ubi alta porticus est sublimibus columnis 15  
 sed quam multa aetas longaque trivit hyems,  
 curia magna fuit ubi plebs cogente senatu  
 accepit leges iussaque magna tulit.  
 hic ubi nunc circus signina structilis arte est  
 atque duplex stadium naumachiamque vides, 20  
 circenses simul et navales atque curules  
 praebebat ludos civibus ille locus.  
 arduus hic fornix media quem conspicis urbe  
 quemque triumphalem plebs male docta vocat,  
 civis erant magni quondam monumenta: sed anni 25  
 nomina delerunt et genus et patriam.*

What is not transformed by the long passage of time and changed by old age? In human affairs what can survive? Here, where now Mérida stands with its name corrupted, once stood Augustus Caesar's famous city: Emerita. He gave it to his veterans to inhabit, and its territory he gave as gifts and rewards to his soldiers. Here where you see scattered structures and foundations bereft of cement, but still circular in form, the people and equally the senate used to watch amphitheater games, as well as innumerable wild beasts. Here where a podium now stands and where you see the steps and platforms rising in semi-circles, this was once the stage noted for its tragedies and comedies, a place where farces were also put on. Here where a lofty portico now stands with its tall columns, if gnawed away by the passage of time and the long winters, this was once a mighty curia where the plebs at the senate's urging received laws and bore its mighty orders. Here where now the circus stands constructed with its *opus signinum* flooring and where you can see a double stadium and a *naumachia*, that place once offered the citizens circus games, naval combats and chariot-races. Here the lofty arch which you can see in the heart of the city and which the ill-educated plebs calls a triumphal arch was once the monument of a great citizen; but the years have destroyed all trace of his names, his family, and his homeland.

In general terms, here Nebrija seems to be following Petrarch, who in the mid-fourteenth century had reacted with a poignant mixture of admiration and distress as he contemplated the ruins of once-mighty Rome (Lara Garrido 1980:esp. 386).<sup>2</sup> Nebrija begins (lines 3–6) by alluding to the fact that Emerita was founded as a colony by the first *princeps*, Augustus, for the veterans he demobilized in 25 B.C.E., after the first phase of the tough campaigns against the Asturians and Cantabrians, a war that by 19 B.C.E. assured Roman control of all of Hispania, 200 years after Roman armies first arrived in the Iberian peninsula (Dio 53.26.1, with Álvarez y Sáenz de Buruaga 1976; Le Roux 1982:69–72; Saquete Chamizo 1997:24–39). But Nebrija concentrates most on Emerita's major Roman monuments: the amphitheater (lines 7–10), theater (lines 8–14),

supposed *curia* (meeting place for the colony's senate) (lines 15–18), circus (lines 19–22), and an honorific arch commemorating a prominent local citizen (lines 23–26). In so doing, he proudly recalls Emerita's past glories as a once-great Roman city, fully equipped with the public buildings and monuments appropriate to a Roman colony and the capital of the Roman province of Lusitania. His familiarity with the actual site of Mérida is confirmed in another work, a lecture (his *sexta repetición*), "On Measurements" ("De mensuris"), delivered at the University of Salamanca on June 11, 1510. Here he explained how he had patiently walked and measured the length of the Roman circus at Emerita, which allowed him to confirm the "correct and undoubted" length of the Roman foot and the Roman mile (*iustam indubitamque pedis passusque mensuram*).<sup>3</sup>

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Nebrija's discussions of Emerita illustrate how, in the late fifteenth century, Spanish humanists were showing an increasing awareness of, and interest in, the Roman ruins of Spain, and, more particularly, how such *laudes urbium* were becoming an important part of their scholarly enterprise as they sought to imitate and rival their Italian counterparts by demonstrating that Spain too could boast impressive monuments of the Roman past (Gómez Moreno 1994:242–258 [chapter 15], 282–295 [chapter 18]; Tate 1982, 1994). Nebrija himself worked for several years on a detailed *Muestra de Antigüedades de España*, the first part of which was published in 1499, but he never brought the work to completion. This knowledge of the monuments of a once-mighty empire in Spain, the Roman Empire, was emerging just as the Spanish were launching their own missions of imperial expansion in the New World. Nebrija was intimately connected to this imperial project in composing his most famous work, *Gramática de la lengua castellana*, the earliest known grammar of any Romance language, published in 1492. As he commented in the preface to this work, addressed to Queen Isabella of Castile, one of his main reasons for preparing this grammar was because “siempre la lengua fue compañera del imperio” (language was always the companion of empire).<sup>4</sup> Just as the Romans had spread Latin through their empire, so too would the Spanish now bring the Castilian language into use wherever they conquered.

As John Pohl and Claire Lyons emphasize in their companion volume to the exhibition *The Aztec Pantheon and the Art of Empire* (2010:13), this recovery of knowledge about the Roman imperial heritage in Spain by humanists provided a “classical lens through which the conquistadors and missionaries regarded the peoples of the New World.” Hence it is no coincidence that when Francisco de Montejo “El Mozo” (1508–1565) conquered the Yucatán Peninsula after several failed attempts by his father between 1528 and 1535 (Clendinnen 2003 [1987]:20–37) and came in 1542 to found a new Spanish city near a site rich with monumental Maya ruins, he decided to call his new city Mérida. The reason for this, according to a report of the local town council to the Council of the Indies in 1579, was “because the Spaniards found well-constructed buildings of rough stone and mortar with many mouldings similar to those the Romans had made in Mérida in Spain” (quoted in Lupher 2003:236). Montejo's family was from Salamanca, a major center of Renaissance learning in Spain, and for them the monumental remains of “Emerita, Augustus Caesar's city,” to borrow Nebrija's description (quoted above), may also have defined what an imperial city should look like.<sup>5</sup>

During the fifteenth and early sixteenth century, Emerita, with its visible Roman remains as outlined by Nebrija and others still earlier—for instance, an anonymous description composed around 1430 and included in Ms. 4236, Biblioteca Nacional, Madrid (Gómez Moreno

1994:282–284)—was the Roman site best known to the humanists of the period, who viewed it as the greatest city of Roman Hispania (Gimeno Pascual 1999).<sup>6</sup> In this same period, the texts of some of its copious Latin inscriptions were first recorded by scholars connected to the court of Charles V, such as the Italian humanist Michelangelo Accursio (1489–1546) from L’Aquila. He arrived at Charles V’s court in 1525/6 and in October 1527 visited Mérida, where he recorded the texts of 15 Latin inscriptions (Ms. O-125, XXVII, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Milan: *Itinerarium ab Olmedo ad divam Guadalupiam et inde ad Emeritam et pleraque alia loca*; these texts were later incorporated in the standard edition of Roman inscriptions from Hispania as *CIL* II 478a, 478b, 478k, 487–489, 506, 518, 535, 539, 547, 551, 564, 565, 601). Within the next decade, Nicolaus Mameranus (1500–1566/7), a humanist originally from Luxembourg (Didier 1915; Wiegels 2001:81–90), included a still greater number—27—from Emerita in his *Epitaphia et antiquitates Romanorum per Hispaniam* after his visits between 1533 and 1535 to Mérida and to the Dominican monastery at Galisteo, some 150 km to the north. Early that same decade, the Conde de Osorno, a member of the Council of State, had taken 60 cartloads of sculpture and inscriptions from Mérida to adorn the monastery he had established at Galisteo (Edmondson et al. 2001:107–109; the texts he recorded are *CIL* II 470, 473, 476, 485, 487, 488, 490, 495, 501, 506, 507, 513, 514, 517, 528, 530, 531, 536, 538, 554, 558, 562,

563, 565, 573, 599, 603).<sup>7</sup> Florián De Ocampo, official chronicler of Charles V from 1539 onward (Pattison 1993; Samson 2006), worked a number of inscriptions from Emerita into his account of Roman Spain in his *Crónica General de España* (1544–1553).

Monumental city planning was very much one of the concerns of the Spanish in the New World, with increasingly detailed instructions (*ordenanzas*) being sent out by the Spanish Crown about the best locations for, and the ideal internal layout of, a colonial city. The growing awareness of the Roman cities and urban monuments of Spain provided obvious models for the conquistadors in their colonial urban planning, as did Vitruvius’s influential treatise “On Architecture” (Durston 1994; Kinsbruner 2005:chapter 3). Many of the Spanish conquistadors came from Extremadura, the very region of southwestern Spain in which Mérida was located. Hernán Cortés (1485–1547) was born in Medellín, just 30 km east of Mérida, upstream along the Guadiana River. Whether his two years at the University of Salamanca from 1499 to 1501 provided him with much exposure to Classical authors and the finer points of Roman history is a moot point, but he was certainly able, and keen, to compare his exploits in the New World with those of his Roman predecessors. (See Elliott 1967 on Cortés’s “mental world”; more generally Sánchez Barba 1987.) Even though the impressive Roman theater now fully revealed through excavations in his hometown of Medellín (Del Amo y de la

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Hera 1982; Haba Quirós 1998:257–264) was unknown to him, it is likely that he had some awareness of the impressive ruins of Emerita and the importance of monumental urban centers as an element of imperial control.<sup>8</sup>

**Cities and Urban Monumentality as a Strategy of Imperial Control in Roman Hispania: Augusta Emerita**

The very close connection in Roman thought between cities, political stability, and a civilized lifestyle needs little demonstration. For instance, the geographer Strabo, from Amasia in Pontus (northern Turkey), writing under Augustus and Tiberius, commented (3.2.15, C151) with evident approval on the civilized benefits that an urban lifestyle had brought to the region he calls Turdetania, roughly equivalent to the Roman province of Baetica and modern Andalusia:<sup>9</sup>

Along with the fertility of the land, the Turdetanians have come to enjoy both a peaceful existence [τὸ ἡμερὸν] and a lifestyle based in cities [τὸ πολιτικόν]; and the Celtici too because they are neighbours of the Turdetani, but to a lesser degree. The Turdetanians, and especially those who live in the Baetis [Guadalquivir] valley, have been completely transformed to a Roman way of life, not even remembering their own language. Most of them have become Latins and they have received Romans as colonists, with the result that they are almost all Romans.

The creation of a network of cities, with clearly defined territories, across the entire Roman Empire provided a crucial infrastructure for Roman provincial administration, with the local elites of these cities playing a key intermediary role between imperial masters and provincial subjects. As a result, the urban centers of these cities served as the physical settings, the urban stages as it were, on which power relations between ruler and subjects were played out (Edmondson 2006).

The cities designated as judicial assize (*conventus*) centers, where the Roman governor gave justice on his annual tour of his province—and especially those assize centers that became the chief center of Roman administration in each province—were particularly important as symbolic spaces in which the realities of Roman power were made patent to Rome’s provincial subjects. (See Le Roux 2004 for *conventus* centers in Roman Hispania.) Augusta Emerita was indeed one of those assize centers and was the main administrative center of Lusitania from the moment the province was created, when Augustus decided to split the large province of Hispania Ulterior into the two new provinces of Lusitania and Baetica, probably in 16 B.C.E. (Strabo 3.2.15; Étienne 1992; Le Roux 1982:54–56, 74–75; Richardson 1996:135–136). There were 14 *conventus* centers in the three Hispanic provinces combined. Emerita was one of three in Lusitania, the others being Pax Iulia (Beja) and Scallabis (Santarém) (Pliny *NH* 4.22.117); there were four in Baetica—Hispalis, Astigi, Gades, and



## Monuments of Empire in Roman Spain and Beyond



**Figure 3.1.** Map of Augusta Emerita, showing locations of its major Roman monuments. (Plan adopted, with permission, from Ramallo and Röring 2010:164, figure 1)

Corduba (Pliny *NH* 3.1.7)—and seven in Tarraconensis—Bracara Augusta, Lucus Augusti, Asturica Augusta, Clunia, Caesaraugusta, Carthago Nova, and Tarraco (Pliny *NH* 3.3.18). Along with the other two provincial capitals, Corduba and Tarraco, Emerita (Figure 3.1) took on special significance as a major space for the display of Roman imperial power. These three cities were all unusually large in terms of their intramural area: Corduba and Tarraco extended for about 60 ha, while Emerita reached about 80 ha.<sup>10</sup> By comparison, Italica, Barcino, and Emporiae were less than half the size of Emerita, while the other Roman colonies in Lusitania whose wall circuits can be securely established were much smaller still. Metellinum (Medellín), for instance, covered 25 ha and Pax Iulia (Beja) just 24 ha (Le Roux 2005:21 and

note 17).<sup>11</sup> So Emerita made an immediate impact by its sheer size, which was matched by the unusually large extent of its territory, a feature that elicited comments in the Roman literature on land surveying (the *agrimensores*) (Agennius Urbicus *De Contr. Agr.* 44 Thulin = 40 Campbell; Gorges and Rodríguez Martín 2004; Wiegels 1976).

Emerita was visually striking to any traveler approaching from the south, as he or she would have to cross the unusually long Roman bridge across the Guadiana River. At no less than 800 m in span, it served as a symbolic tour de force of Roman architectural and engineering expertise. As Trillmich has emphasized (1990:302–303), the new colony of Emerita could have been founded at a number of other locations along the Guadiana where it would have been

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**Figure 3.2.** Silver denarius of P. Carisius, legate of Augustus in Hispania Ulterior, issued at Emerita, ca. 25 B.C.E., showing (on the reverse) the colony's main gate, with the name EMERITA above. (Photo © Trustees of the British Museum)

much easier to build a bridge; but the Romans deliberately chose a site where they could show off their engineering skills to maximum effect as a means of impressing the local inhabitants. A similar effect was achieved by Emerita's wall circuit, its gates, and the extensive aqueduct systems that assured its water supply (Álvarez Martínez 2008, 2011). The colony's main gate was featured on both a series of silver *denarii* issued at Emerita by P. Carisius, Augustus's legate in Hispania Ulterior at the time of the colony's foundation (Figure 3.2) (*BMCRE* I 53, nos. 288–292, plates 5.9–5.12; Trillmich 1990:301, plate 22.6), and on the local bronze coinage minted at Emerita later in Augustus's reign and under Tiberius (*RPC* I 70–74, Emerita, nos. 10, 12 [Augustan], nos. 20–27, 30–33, 38, 41–44 [Tiberian], plates 1–4; Beltrán 1976). This coin image became an easily legible shorthand for the fact that Emerita

was designed to be an imposing monumental center even in its earliest years. The towering aqueducts in the immediate vicinity of the colony constituted another showcase of Roman engineering skill. Emerita eventually came to be equipped with at least four aqueduct systems leading to two separate Roman reservoirs, the Proserpina and Cornalvo reservoirs, located 5 km northwest and 15 km northeast of the city, respectively (Mateos Cruz et al. 2002; Méndez Grande 2014 [2010]). At least one of the four aqueducts dates to the foundation of the colony under Augustus. This may be the AQVA AVGVSTA, known from a monumental inscription (31 cm high, 121.5 cm wide, and 8 cm deep) with bronze letters measuring 9.4 cm high (*AE* 1984, 493 = *CIIAE* 1).<sup>12</sup> This name may hint that Augustus provided the funding and technological expertise for the construction of this essential amenity. Earlier scholars

had dated at least one other aqueduct system to the Augustan period, but the so-called Los Milagros Aqueduct has now been firmly dated to the mid-first century C.E. (Ayerbe Vélez 2000, contra Canto 1982), which is probably also the date of the aqueduct known as the San Lázaro aqueduct and the recently discovered Las Abadías aqueduct.

Although we lack direct evidence for this, it seems highly plausible that Roman military engineers were responsible for the initial layout of the colony, for building the bridges across the Guadiana and Albarregas Rivers, for laying out the grid plan of the urban center with its underlying sewer system, and for establishing the basic infrastructure of its water supply. We have more definitive proof of the direct intervention of Augustus and his immediate

family in the monumentalization of the colony from inscriptions built into the fabric of two of its main public spectacle buildings: the theater and the amphitheater.

Marcus Agrippa, Augustus's son-in-law from 21 B.C.E. onward, played a central role in construction of the colony's theater (Figure 3.3). His name appears on no fewer than five monumental inscriptions that survive from this building (Figure 3.4).<sup>13</sup> The fact that in all of them he is named in the nominative case suggests that he was the major benefactor of the initial building. His titles—*consul III*, *tribunicia potestate III*—date the inauguration, if not completion, of the building to 16–15 B.C.E. Furthermore, two of the inscribed marble blocks bearing Agrippa's name seem to have been moved during subsequent remodeling



**Figure 3.3.** Roman theater, Emerita. (Photo by author)

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**Figure 3.4.** Dedicatory inscription of M. Agrippa from the Roman theater. (Photo by author)



**Figure 3.5.** Roman amphitheater, Emerita. (Photo by author)

from their original location, perhaps on the *scaenae frons* (it has been suggested), into new positions beneath the tribunals located over each of the lateral entrances to the orchestra (Richmond 1930:116; Trillmich 1990:310). This would suggest that they were seen as precious relics, as it were, preserving the memory of the colony's early benefactor and likely patron; they had to be maintained at all costs, even if their original function in the theater's fabric had become obsolete.

Augustus himself took on the role of major benefactor for the construction of the amphitheater (Figure 3.5), built directly alongside the theater. Here segments of at least three monumental inscriptions, all naming Augustus in the nominative, have been discovered; two of them were designed to run along the front of the tribunals on the west and east sides of the arena, while the third may have been set up across its north entrance.<sup>14</sup> Augustus's titles include reference to his sixteenth year of tribunician power, which would date the inauguration of the building to the period between June 26, 8 B.C.E. and June 25, 7 B.C.E. Every time crowds filled the amphitheater to watch the gladiators, wild beast hunts, or mock naval battles that could be put on there, they were reminded of the benefactions of the first *princeps* by the very visible presence of his name and titles around the arena.

During the reign of Tiberius (14–37 C.E.), a circus for chariot racing was laid out in the northeastern sector of the colony's *suburbium*, though its seating was not constructed in stone until the

reign of Domitian. Its central *spina* was monumentalized and equipped with water fountains later still—under Trajan or thereafter (Gijón Gabriel and Montalvo Frías 2011; Humphrey 1986:362–376; Montalvo Frías et al. 1997; Sánchez-Palencia et al. 2001). *Ludi circenses* were a major part of the main state festivals at Rome, forming the climax, for instance, of the most important festival of all, the *Ludi Romani* (also called the *Ludi Magni*) in September. In a provincial capital like Emerita, they were put on at the major festivals of the Roman state gods, though on a smaller scale, and the games were presided over by the provincial governor in the presence of other members of the Roman administrative staff and with the support of the *domi nobiles* of Emerita and other members of the Lusitanian elite, attracted to the provincial capital for the festival. Monumental circuses are much rarer than theaters and amphitheaters in provincial cities, and this is certainly the case in Hispania. Tarraco and Emerita have two of the best examples from anywhere in the western provinces, once again underlining their special status in the provincial urban hierarchy. (See Ruíz de Arbulo and Mar 2001 on the circus at Tarraco; see Ramallo Asensio 2002 on spectacle buildings in Hispania.)

However, it was arguably in the various public forums of the colony that Roman power and imperial authority were constantly reinforced through the rituals played out there and by the symbolic resonances of the architecture and monumental art on display. As we shall see, the picture was by no means static, but



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the Roman state—most directly through the intervention of the provincial governor of Lusitania—sought to develop the *mise-en-scène* as Rome’s political needs changed. I am not trying to argue that this occurred in all provincial cities; in general, the impetus to monumentalize provincial urban centers came from the local elites. But at judicial assize centers and provincial capitals such as Emerita, the Roman emperor and his representatives took an ongoing interest in reinforcing the symbolic language of Roman power.

The colony’s main forum at the outset was laid out in canonical manner at the intersection of the *decumanus maximus* and *kardo maximus* and had a monumental granite temple (Figure 3.6) (known since the seventeenth century, without any secure

foundation, as the Temple of Diana) as its focal point (Álvarez Martínez and Nogales Basarrate 2003). The use of granite decorated with stucco for the temple points to an early construction date, in the period before ample supplies of marble became available for the colony’s buildings following the opening of the quarries 100 km west of Emerita in the vicinity of Estremoz and Vila Viçosa in modern Portugal later in the Augustan period (Álvarez Martínez and Nogales Basarrate 2003:77–118, 133–139; Trillmich 1990:305–309; on the marble quarries, see Alarcão and Tavares 1989). The temple has some design features very much derived from the Temple of the Deified Julius (Caesar) in the Forum at Rome, especially the rostra-like podium with lateral stairways across its front.



**Figure 3.6.** Granite temple (“Temple of Diana”) from the original forum of the colony. (Photo by author)



**Figure 3.7.** Podium of the temple from the new forum, built during the reign of Tiberius. (Photo by author)

From the sculptural finds connected with this temple, especially two colossal torsos of seated divinized emperors and a diademed portrait head of Agrippina the Younger, fourth wife of Claudius and mother of Nero, it was very likely a temple dedicated to the cult of the emperors (Álvarez Martínez and Nogales Basarrate 2003:269–280; Trillmich 1990:306–307; 2007:423–428).

Under Tiberius a whole new forum was constructed in the northwestern half of the colony's urban center, which had as its focal point a temple (Figure 3.7) modeled on the Temple of Concord from the Roman Forum. This second forum was clearly not projected in the original city plan, since four housing blocks on either side of the *kardo maximus* had to

be eliminated to clear space for its construction (Mateos Cruz 2006).<sup>15</sup> A number of inscribed pedestals (or fragments thereof) are known to have come to light in the vicinity of this forum: for example, those dedicated to Tiberius (*EE* VIII 22), to Concordia Augusti (*CIL* II 465), to Domitian (*CIL* II 477), and to a late-third- or early-fourth-century governor (*praeses*) of the province of Lusitania of equestrian rank (*CIL* II 481).<sup>16</sup> Fragments of further inscriptions that have emerged from recent excavations attest to further official acts here: (a) the dedication of an object of 50 pounds (16.373 kg) of silver, in which a provincial governor of Lusitania, a *legatus Augusti propraetore*, is mentioned (*AE* 2006, 585 = *HEp* 15, 51 = Stylow 2006:308–311, no. 3, figure

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292 [photo]: - - - - - / [- - -] +one • leg / [- - - ex? arge]nti p(ondo) L—perhaps L. Fulcinus Trio, governor from about 21 to 31 C.E.; M. Porcius Cato, whose governorship Alföldy places under Claudius around 46; or M. Salvius Otho, governor from 58 to 68 (Alföldy 1969:135–139); and (b) a monument dedicated to either Domitian or Trajan (*AE* 2006, 586 = *HEp* 15, 52 = Stylow 2006:311–312, no. 4, figure 293 [photo]: [- - -] ARI • DIVI / [- - -] AVG • GER / - - - - -, which may be expanded either as [*Imp(eratori) Caes]ari Divi / [Vespasiani f(ilio) Domitiano] / Aug(usto) Ger(manico) / - - - - -* or as [*Imp(eratori) Caes]ari Divi / [Nervae f(ilio) Nervae Traiano] Aug(usto) Ger(manico) / - - - - -*). All this would suggest that the new forum was designed to be, or soon came to be, another major center for celebrating the Roman emperor, the imperial family, and representatives of the Roman state or for the latter to make public dedications to important Roman deities.

It would appear that the provincial governor L. Fulcinus Trio played a large part in this monumental project. He spent about 10 years in Emerita as governor (*legatus Aug[ust]i*) of Lusitania between around 21 and 31 C.E., before returning to Rome to hold the suffect consulship. An intriguing inscription, recently published, attests to the fact that two or three of the *conventus* (juridical districts) of Lusitania or possibly just one *conventus*—depending on how one restores the text—honored a Lusitanian of equestrian rank, L. Cornelius L.f. Bocchus, who had served as Fulcinus Trio’s *praefectus fabrum*—literally his “prefect of engineers” but in

effect his chief administrative assistant (*AE* 2010, 662 = *HEp* 19, 19 = Stylow and Ventura Villanueva 2010:486–489, no. 11, figures 37–38 [photos]: [*L(ucio) Cornelio L(uci) f(ilio) Bo]ccho / [pr(aefecto) fabrum] V L(uci) Fulcini Tr]ionis • co(n)s(uli) / [curatori templi Divi?] Augusti / [flamini provinc(iae)] Lusitan(iae) / [universi provinc(iae)? co]nventus*).<sup>17</sup> Bocchus is already known from honors paid to him at two port cities on the west coast of Lusitania (González Herrero 2006:38–45, with earlier bibliography): his hometown of Salacia (Alcácer do Sal) (*CIL* II 2479 + 5617 = *EE* VIII, 4 = *IRCP* 189: [*L. Cornelius L. f. Boc]chus pr(aefectus) Caesarum bis*; the title *pr(aefectus) Caesarum* suggests that he served both Augustus and Tiberius) and Olisipo (Lisbon) (*FE* 275 = *HEp* 12, 654 = *AE* 1999, 857: *L. Cornelio L.f. Gal. Boccho Salaciensi, flamine provi[n]ciae Lusitania[e], praef(ecto) fabrum V, trib(uno) milit(um) leg(ionis) VII Aug(ustae) d(ecreto) d(ecurionum)*). These other texts help restore the new inscription from Emerita with greater security. In particular, it is from the Olisipo text that we learn that Bocchus was *praefectus fabrum* five times. The new text from Emerita, as restored by Stylow and Ventura, shows that he had served as Fulcinus Trio’s main assistant for 5 of the latter’s 10 years as governor of Lusitania. Since Trio is recorded as consul in line 2, he had clearly left Emerita and returned to Rome by the time Bocchus was honored. Furthermore, according to Stylow and Ventura’s proposed restorations, he was not only chief priest of the imperial cult for the province (*flamen provinciae Lusitaniae*; a point

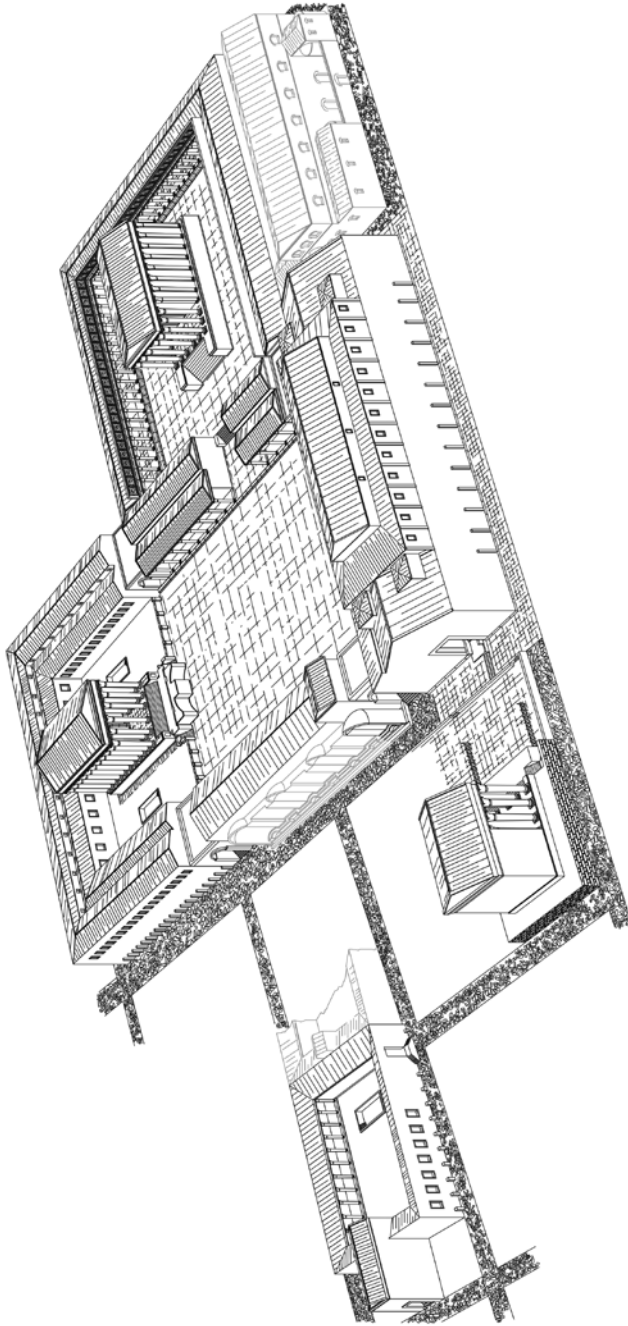


already known from his honorific statue at Olisipo) but perhaps also [*curator templi Divi*] *Augusti*, superintendent of the Temple of the Deified Augustus—responsible for oversight of one of the main temples in Emerita itself: either the granite temple in the original forum of the colony or the marble temple in the new forum, constructed under his supervision when he was Fulcinius Trio's assistant. However, serious doubts have now been raised about the plausibility of the restoration [*curator templi Divi*] *Augusti* (Fishwick 2011; Saquete Chamizo 2011), and it would be unwise to place too much faith in it.

Yet another porticoed square was added adjacent to the original forum of the colony (Figure 3.8), probably under Claudius and Nero (Nogales Basarrate and Álvarez Martínez 2006; Trillmich 1995, 2007:434–441, all revising the late-Augustan dating of Álvarez Martínez and Nogales Basarrate 1990 and Trillmich 1990:310–315) or perhaps as late as the Flavians (Ayerbe Vélez et al. 2010:807–828; 2011; cf. Trillmich 2011). This too required two housing blocks (*insulae*) to the east of the original colonial forum to be demolished. Recent excavations in Calle Baños have now revealed structures identified as the podium of the temple that stood in the middle of this new forum (Ayerbe Vélez et al. 2010:396, 745–779, esp. 764–766).<sup>18</sup> Its surrounding portico (Figure 3.9) was adorned with shield roundels (*clipei*) with heads of Jupiter Ammon and Medusa separated by semi-engaged pilasters with caryatids (Figure 3.10), a decorative scheme very similar in conception to that of the Forum of Augustus

at Rome (De la Barrera 2000; Trillmich 1990:310–313, plates 25a–f [*clipei*], 26a–d [*caryatids*]; for more recently discovered fragments, see Peña Jurado 2010:592–594, nos. 11–16, figures 27–33). A series of rectangular niches was cut into the back wall of the portico for the display of sculptures (estimated as numbering 60 in total). These included togate figures (possibly *summi viri*), mythological figures from early Roman history, and a statue group showing Aeneas leading his son Ascanius and carrying his father, Anchises, on his shoulder as they fled the flames of Troy (Trillmich 1995). Trillmich's identification of this sculptural group was dramatically confirmed by the 1986 discovery in excavations of a fragment of an inscribed *elogium* of Aeneas (De la Barrera and Trillmich 1996 = *AE* 1996, 864a–b = *HEp* 7, 109a–b = *CIIAE* 76a–b), clearly copied from the prototype that stood in the Forum Augustum in Rome and of which parts of a copy erected in the forum at Pompeii have been known since the mid-nineteenth century (*CIL* X 808 = *Inscr. It.* XIII.3, no. 85). Recently, another sculptural fragment, excavated here in 1980, has been identified as belonging to an over-life-sized statue of Romulus carrying the *spolia opima* (Nogales Basarrate 2007:493–495, figure 11d [photo]; 2008). And even more recently, a fragmentary inscription has been reinterpreted as part of an inscribed *elogium* of M. Valerius Volusi f. Maximus, dictator at Rome in 494 B.C.E. (Ramírez Sádaba in Álvarez Martínez and Nogales Basarrate 2003:388, no. 60 = *HEp* 13, 159; reinterpreted by Stylow and Ventura Villanueva 2010:483–485, figures 34–36)—one of the

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**Figure 3.8.** Reconstruction of the colony's original forum, plus the new forum annex, Flavian period, based on excavations of 2009 by Teresa Barrientos Vera and J. Suárez.



**Figure 3.9.** Portico of the marble forum annex with niches for togate statues. (Photo by author)



**Figure 3.10.** *Clipei* with heads of Jupiter Ammon (left) and Medusa (right) and pilaster with caryatid in mid-relief (center). (Museo Nacional de Arte Romano, Mérida; photo by author)

figures of Roman republican history selected by Augustus for his gallery of *summi viri* in the Forum Augustum at Rome.<sup>19</sup>

These various elements confirm that it was an architectural complex closely modeled on the Forum Augustum in Rome.<sup>20</sup> The Forum Augustum was very much associated with celebrating Rome's

military victories, with the Temple of Mars Ultor as its focal point, a statue of Augustus in a triumphal chariot (*quadriga*) in the center of the piazza, and enemy weaponry captured by Augustus's armies during their various campaigns proudly displayed at its entrance (Ovid *Fasti* 5.561–562, 579–580; Spannagel

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1999:224–255; Zanker 1968). It was also where Roman praetors presided over civil lawsuits in the shade of its flanking porticoes, as vividly attested in the *Tabulae Sulpiciorum* from Pompeii (e.g., *TPSulp.* 13–15, 19, 27, on which see Camodeca’s 1999 edition with commentary ad loc). It is tempting to imagine that this new forum at Emerita came to be the setting for similar celebrations of Roman military victories, and it may well have been where the Roman provincial governor held his judicial assizes. If so, it is hard to underplay the visual

impact of the surrounding architecture, its decorative scheme, and its sculptural display. Litigants would be arguing their cases in an ambience consciously modeled on the Forum Augustum in Rome. The great mythical heroes who had helped found Rome and the noble military and political leaders of the Roman Republic were there in a sense to add their authority to that of the Roman governor when he sat in judgment on cases brought by Rome’s provincial subjects from all over the judicial assize (*conventus*) district.



**Figure 3.11.** Relief of M. Agrippa sacrificing at a round altar. (Museo Nacional de Arte Romano, Mérida; photo by author)

Two further assemblages of monumental art help emphasize the way in which key events linked to Emerita's foundation also had an important impact on the visual landscape of the colony, in particular by reminding local inhabitants and visitors alike of the connections Emerita had with Augustus's family and some of the military achievements of his reign. First, various surviving fragments of a relief depict Augustus's son-in-law M. Agrippa, head covered (*capite velato*), in a solemn act of sacrifice at a round altar, accompanied by sacrificial attendants (*camilli*), a piper, and a lictor (Figure 3.11). The whole scene was adorned, above, with elaborate swag garlands, *bucrania*, and sacrificial dishes and jugs (Figure 3.12). These fragments were discovered in, or can be traced back to,

the area of the new marble forum modeled on the Forum Augustum discussed above. This relief very likely alludes to the rites connected to the foundation of Emerita, with Agrippa prominent as an early patron of the colony (Trillmich 1986). The stylistic similarity of the garlands on this relief, as well as on another relief from this same complex in Emerita, featuring a spreading laurel tree (Nogales Basarrate 2007:495, figure 12e), to those on the Ara Pacis in Rome (Zanker 1988:114–118, figure 96), inaugurated on July 4, 13 B.C.E. and dedicated on January 30, 9 B.C.E., suggests that this key Augustan monument in Rome may have provided the iconographic model for a series of reliefs from Emerita. Indeed, some scholars have even argued that the relief may come



**Figure 3.12.** Relief block with swag-garland, bucrania, and sacrificial jug. (Museo Nacional de Arte Romano, Mérida; photo by author)



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from an altar erected in the center of Emerita, the Ara Providentiae, shown on some of the coin issues produced in the colony's mint under Tiberius (Nogales Basarrate 2007:490–497, esp. figures 12a–b, 12e, and 12g, with earlier bibliography). Even if this latter point cannot be established with any certainty, it is clear that Agrippa's role in the initial layout of the colony was commemorated on a major monument in the very heart of the urban center. And the stylistic connections to the reliefs from the Ara Pacis

once again reinforced the symbolic ties between the provincial colony and the imperial center.

A second important historical event intimately connected with the colony's foundation may have been commemorated on another monument in the urban center of Emerita, if Trillmich's identification of two monumental heads as depictions of Cantabrians is correct (Trillmich in La Rocca et al. 1997:376, nos. 146–147). A third fragmentary male head of a “barbarian” has now been



**Figure 3.13.** Monumental male head with *torques* identified as a Cantabrian. (Museo Nacional de Arte Romano, Mérida; photo by L. Plana Torres, MNAR)



**Figure 3.14.** Monumental female head identified as a Cantabrian. (Museo Nacional de Arte Romano, Mérida; photo by author)

associated with them (Nogales Basarrate 1999; Velázquez Jiménez 2014). One of the portraits (Figure 3.13) (53 cm high; hence we must assume that it once formed part of a colossal monument), discovered during excavations preparatory to the construction of the Museo Nacional de Arte Romano in Calle José Ramón Mérida, shows a long-haired male wearing a *torques*, a neck collar associated with Celts and Germans and, more generally, with Rome’s barbarian foes from the western empire (MNAR inv. no. 24,422; Trillmich in La Rocca et al. 1997:376, no. 146; Trillmich 2015; for the symbolism of the *torques*, see Hautenuave 2005). A second (Figure 3.14), previously interpreted

as a priestess of Isis, is better viewed as a “barbarian” Cantabrian woman (MNAR inv. no. 8,274; García y Bellido 1949:116, no. 20, plate 12; cf. Trillmich in La Rocca et al. 1997:376, no. 147). Emerita, as noted above, was founded in 25 B.C.E. for veterans demobilized after the initial campaigns of Augustus’s Cantabrian Wars. M. Agrippa was responsible for finally ending the Cantabrian resistance in 19 B.C.E. (Dio 54.11.2–6). What more fitting monument to erect in this colony of veterans than one that commemorated Rome’s victory over the Cantabrians, a victory in which the initial settlers at Emerita and their civic patron, M. Agrippa, had played a direct part?

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A key point to remember is that these public buildings at Emerita and their sculptural display did not remain frozen, as it were, in the form they took at the moment of their inauguration. They were quite frequently remodeled to take account of changed political circumstances at Rome. Recent work has suggested that the amphitheater, for example, was considerably redesigned and monumentalized in the Flavian period (Durán Cabello 2004:131–221, esp. 212–216, 242–247, summarized by the same author in Dupré Raventós 2004b:58–61, updating Golvin 1988:109–110, no. 77). The theater also experienced a series of reforms, most notably in the area of its *scaenae frons*, which was richly monumentalized in marble in the late-Claudian and/or Neronian period and underwent further major refurbishment in the Trajanic period (Durán Cabello 2004:31–129, esp. 118–127, 239–242, summarized in Dupré Raventós 2004b:55–58; Trillmich 2004). Imperial statues graced the stage building, as was normal in theaters, but the composition of the statuary group shifted to mirror political changes within the *domus Augusta*. For instance, a statue of Agrippina the Younger stood here—presumably only for the decade between her marriage to Claudius in 49 C.E. and her death and disgrace in 59 C.E. The seating area (*cavea*) was not immune to modification either—for example, under Trajan, a small *sacrarium* for the cult of the *Lares et imagines* was built into the *ima cavea*, in which a series of pedestals for statues honoring the reigning emperor was set up (Trillmich 1989–1990).<sup>21</sup>

### Conclusion

The urban layout and monumental art of the colony of Emerita functioned in a variety of different but overlapping ways to create a distinctly metropolitan Roman ambience in the most westerly province of the Roman Empire. Not only was Emerita one of the largest cities in Rome's Hispanic provinces, but its many monuments, some funded by benefactions of the emperor and imperial family, made it stand out as a center of *Romanitas* in what had been, prior to 25 B.C.E., a thinly populated region of Hispania Ulterior and one in which there had not been much urban development in the pre-Augustan period (Edmondson 1990 and 2011a; see Jiménez Ávila 2004 for the immediate environs of Mérida). It was thus with some justification that the German archaeologist Adolf Schulten (1870–1960) described Mérida as “the Spanish Rome” in his account of the city published in the *Deutsche Zeitung für Spanien* in 1922. Emerita very quickly became a key center for the diffusion of the image of Roman power. Its identity was fixed from the start as very much a community of Roman status, with strong links to the metropolis encouraged by the residence here of much of the personnel tied to the Roman provincial administration of Lusitania (Haensch 1997:176–178, 490–492) and by the ongoing interest of the Roman authorities, in dialogue with the local colonial elite, in developing the monumental architecture of a town that was in many ways designed to resemble a miniature Rome. In the past, the



Augustan period has been privileged—arguably overprivileged (see the comments of Trillmich 2009:464–467)—in much of the scholarly discussion about Emerita, but it is now clear that the very Roman identity of the colony was enhanced over a much longer period through a series of building projects that took place under Tiberius (the construction of a circus and the so-called provincial forum), Claudius and Nero (the marble embellishment of the forum focused on the “Temple of Diana” and the adjacent “marble forum”), the Flavians (the amphitheater and modifications to the wall circuit), and Trajan (important modifications to the theater and embellishments to the circus).

What I want most of all to suggest is that these monumental buildings and their symbolically charged imagery took on greater significance because Emerita was a crucial stage on which a series of rituals underlining Roman power was played out in front of an audience made up not just of the Roman citizens and other residents of Emerita but also of Roman subjects from other parts of the province who were attracted to the Lusitanian capital at certain key points of the year; and here I mean not just the Lusitanian elite but sometimes lower-ranking Lusitanians from across the province as well. It was at Emerita on January 3 each year that the Roman provincial governor, probably standing alongside the provincial *flamen*, took vows for the security of the *princeps*, his family, and the Roman state. (For the formula, see Pliny *Ep.* 10.35, 100.) On

this occasion, he would also accept the oath of allegiance from the soldiers who formed part of his entourage and from the provincial subjects of Lusitania. (See Pliny *Ep.* 10.52.) Similar rituals were held to mark the anniversary of the accession of the ruling emperor, to mark his *dies imperii* (see Pliny *Ep.* 10.52, 102 on Trajan’s *dies imperii* on January 28), and to celebrate his birthday (see Pliny *Ep.* 10.17: Trajan’s birthday on September 18). It was at Emerita that the governor held the most important judicial assizes in the province for the inhabitants of the *conventus Emeritensis*, the largest of the three *conventus* districts that made up the Roman province. It was at Emerita that the provincial council (*concilium*), made up of delegates from every urban community of the province, met each year to select the chief priest (*flamen*) and chief priestess (*flaminica*) of the provincial imperial cult and to approve various honorific decrees (Deininger 1965:130–131; Étienne 1958:119–175, esp. 165, 169, 171–172), such as when the provincial council of Lusitania voted to honor a Roman senator who was then serving as quaestor of the emperor Hadrian (*EE* VIII 302 = *ILS* 8972). And, finally, it was at Emerita that the most important cultic acts to mark the province’s devotion to the deified emperors and empresses of Rome were carried out under the supervision of the provincial *flamen* and *flaminica* (Fishwick 2002:139–154; 2004:41–69, 189–194).

These political, judicial, and religious ceremonies all took place in front of

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the very temples in the public squares or inside the spectacle buildings that we have been exploring. They were often, we must imagine, accompanied by lively processions through the streets (Fishwick 2007) and rounded off with festal celebrations in the theater, amphitheater, and/or circus (Gros 1990). In short, they were conducted in settings that helped to communicate something of the history and mythology of the *res publica populi Romani* to provincial subjects in a colonial context. Most of all, the role and authority of the Roman emperor were placed in highest relief. Statues of him, his family, and his ancestors (a number of whom had been deified) were everywhere to be seen: in forum porticoes, on the podia of temples, on the stages of theaters, and even in the private houses and suburban villas of the more prosperous local citizens (Ando 2000:232–245; for the explicit testimony that statues of the emperor Antoninus Pius formed a backdrop at the trial of Apuleius in Sabratha in Tripolitania, see Apuleius *Apologia* 85). The rich evidence from Emerita reveals just how important cities and their built environments were for the transmission of Roman imperial imagery, especially those cities—such as Emerita—that functioned as Roman judicial centers and, still more, as Roman provincial capitals. Whether Spanish conquistadors such as Hernán Cortés were fully aware of how potent monumental architecture

and art had been in the consolidation of Roman authority in the Hispanic provinces must remain an open question. But our increasing understanding of the urban landscapes of Roman provincial cities such as Emerita, Corduba, and Tarraco and of the rituals that took place there serves to underline the value of cities and their urban monuments as a key strategy of Roman imperial rule.

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### Abbreviations

<i>AE</i>	<i>L'Année Épigraphique</i>
<i>BMCRE</i>	<i>Coins of the Roman Empire in the British Museum</i> , edited by H. Mattingly and R. A. G. Carson, 1923–1962, British Museum, London.
<i>CIIAE</i>	<i>Catálogo de las inscripciones imperiales de Augusta Emerita</i> , edited by José Luis Ramírez Sádaba, 2003, Cuadernos emeritenses 21, Museo Nacional de Arte Romano, Mérida.
<i>CIL</i>	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum</i>
<i>EE</i>	<i>Ephemeris Epigraphica</i>
<i>FE</i>	<i>Ficheiro Epigráfico</i>
<i>HEp</i>	<i>Hispania Epigraphica</i>
<i>ILS</i>	<i>Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae</i> , edited by Hermann Dessau, 1892–1916. Weidmann, Berlin.
<i>Inscr. It.</i>	<i>Inscriptiones Italiae</i>
<i>IRCP</i>	<i>Inscrições romanas do Conventus Pacensis</i> , edited by José d'Encarnação, 1984, Instituto de Arqueologia, Faculdade de Letras, Universidade de Coimbra, Coimbra.
<i>MNAR</i>	Museo Nacional de Arte Romano, Mérida
<i>RPC</i>	<i>Roman Provincial Coinage</i> , edited by Andrew Burnett, Michel Amandry, and Pere Pau Ripollès, 1992, British Museum, London and Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.
<i>TPSulp.</i>	<i>Tabulae Pompeianae Sulpiciorum: TPSulp.: edizione critica dell'archivio puteolano dei Sulpicii</i> , edited by Giuseppe Camodeca, 1999. Quasar, Rome.

### Notes

- 1 For the demonstration that it was Nebrija in his *Dictionarium latinum-hispanum* (first published in 1512) who himself added the lines *municipia provinciae Lusitaniae quae stipe collata opus pontis fecerunt*, mistakenly taken over in all subsequent editions of *CIL* II 760, see Carbonell et al. 2007:249.
- 2 *Epistula ad Clementem Sextum Romanum pontificem* (1342): *quot sunt mihi templa, quot arces, / vulnera sunt totidem. Crebris confusa ruinis/ moenia, reliquias immensae protinus Urbis / ostentant, lacrimasque movent spectantibus.*
- 3 For the full text, see the edition of Costas Rodríguez 1981: *et apud Emeritam urbem Lusitaniae quondam clarissimam inter cetera magnitudinis eius vestigia stadium in circo ubi ludi circenses celebrabatur quod saepe meis pedibus gressibus passibus quae dimensus sum: unde facile collegi iustam indubitatumque pedis passusque mensuram.*
- 4 For Nebrija's dictionary (Nebrija 1992 [1492]), see the critical edition of A. Quilis; for its various editions, see Torre 1945:esp. 186–187. On Nebrija, see Esparza Torres 1995; Mourelle de Lema 2006;

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- 5 For the impact of Diego de Landa's drawings (ca. 1566) of the ruins of Mérida and other Yucatec sites in European antiquarianism, see Schnapp 2012.
- 6 Note also Fernando Marias's comment (Kagan 1989:339) about Anton van den Wyngaerde's inclusion of drawings of Roman Mérida among his views of Spanish cities prepared for Philip II in the 1560s: "It was almost as though only Mérida of Roman times, before the Muslim conquest and the Reconquest in 1228 by Alfonso IX of León, was important enough to be placed alongside the great Spanish cities of the sixteenth century."
- 7 On the interest in the antiquities of Mérida at the court of Charles V, see Marcks 2001.
- 8 We await full publication of the spectacular discoveries of the excavation campaigns of 2008–2010. For a preliminary account, see Mateos Cruz and Picado 2011. For some of the sculptures from the theater's *scaenae frons*, see Griño Frontera and Novillo 2009:51–64, nos. 21–27; see also [http://www.medellin.es/+medellin/reflejos\\_roma.htm](http://www.medellin.es/+medellin/reflejos_roma.htm).
- 9 On Strabo and the close connection in his thought between civilization and an urban lifestyle, see Lasserre 1982; Thollard 1987.
- 10 For convenient summaries of the archaeological remains of each city, see Dupre Raventós 2004a, 2004b, 2004c.
- 11 On Pax Iulia, see Lopes 2003; for Scallabis, see Arruda and Guerra 2002; Arruda and Viegas 1999; on Pax Iulia and Scallabis, see Alarcão 1990:44–49; for Norba, see Callejo Serrano 1968; Salas Martín and Esteban Ortega 1994. For a comparison between Emerita and Metellinum, see Edmondson 2011b.
- 12 An "Aqua Augusta" could date to a period later than the Augustan age, as with the "Aqua Augusta" of Flavian or Trajanic date at Capera (Cáparra, Cáceres province), set up [*pro sa*]-*lute municipi Flavi Ca[perens(is)]*: *AE* 1941, 307, rev. Stylow 1986:303–307, no. 3 = *AE* 1986, 307. For other examples from Hispania and elsewhere, see Stylow 1986:288–289 and note 8.
- 13 Two lintel blocks: *CIL* II 474 = *ILS* 130 = *CIIAE* 2–3: *M(arcus) • Agrippa • L(uci) • f(ilius) • co(n)s(ul) • III trib(unicia) pot(estate) • III*. Three separate granite blocks with dowel holes for bronze letters (a) in situ over the east entrance to the theater: Richmond 1930:115–116, figure 4, plate 6b = *CIIAE* 4 = Trillmich 1990:304, note 46, plate 23e: *M(arcus) • Agrippa • L(uci) • f(ilius) • co(n)s(ul) • tert(ium) / trib(unicia) • potest(ate) t[ert(ium)]*; (b) and (c) original location unclear, but perhaps on the *scaenae frons*: *CIIAE* 5: *M(arcus) Agrippa [•] L(uci) • f(ilius) • co(n)s(ul) • III • [tri]b(unicia) • pot(estate) • III*; *CIIAE* 6: *M(arcus) Agr [ - - - - ]*. For recent work in the theater and amphitheater, see Mateos Cruz and Pizzo 2011.
- 14 See Menéndez Pidal y Álvarez 1957; Ramírez Sádaba 1995; *CIIAE* 9–11 (height of letters: *CIIAE* 9 = 18.5–20 cm; *CIIAE* 10 = 12–15 cm; *CIIAE* 11 = 15 cm). However, more work on the physical location of these inscriptions within the amphitheater is needed.
- 15 For a new larger forum built under Tiberius in Caesaraugusta, see J. A. Hernández Vera and J. Núñez in Beltrán Lloris 2007:50–56; for the late-Augustan/Tiberian "forum adiectum" in Corduba, see Ventura Villanueva 2007.

- 16 See further Saquete Chamizo 2005a, 2005b; Stylow 2006:299–304, nos. A–E, figures 285–288. By an interesting coincidence, a dedication to Concordia of 5 pounds of gold and 10 pounds of silver survives from Rome, set up in 30–31 by L. Fulcinius Trio, governor of Lusitania when this forum was being laid out: *CIL VI 93 = AE 1953, 89: [L(ucius) Fulcinius Trio / leg(atus) Aug(usti) prov(inciae) L]usitaniae / [co(n)s(ul)] design(atus) / [pro] salute Ti(beri) Caesaris / Augusti optimi ac iustissimi principis / Concordiae / auri p(ondo) V / argenti p(ondo) X.*
- 17 This reading would mean that all three *conventus* joined together in honoring Bocchus. If the final line originally read [*decreto co]nventus*, it would attest just one *conventus*, presumably the *conventus Emeritensis*, the assize district centered at Emerita. For further discussion (and doubts on the reading of the original editors), see Fishwick 2011 and Saquete Chamizo 2011.
- 18 Further traces of structures belonging to this podium came to light in July 2010 and were reported in the local newspaper *Hoy* for July 15, 2010. See <http://www.hoy.es/v/20100715/Mérida/obras-calle-banos-descubren-20100715.html>.
- 19 We do not have direct evidence for his presence in the Forum Augustum display, but his statue with *elogium* was part of the group in the Basilica Aemilia in the Forum Romanum (*CIL VI 40920*). His *elogium* also features at Arretium (*CIL XI 1826 = ILS 50*) as one of a group of *elogia* copied from the Forum Augustum; so it appears highly plausible that he also featured in the Forum Augustum. See further Spannagel 1999.
- 20 For its identification as an Augusteum, see Nogales Basarrate 2007:490–497; 2008 (with previous literature).
- 21 An inscription dates the reform to the 130th year of the colony—that is, 105 C.E.: *AE 1990, 515 = HEp 4, 167 = CIIAE 26: [anno] coloniae CXXX / [- - - C]aes(ari) Aug(usto) Ger(manico) Dacic(o) [- - - / - - - provi]nciae Lusit[aniae - - - sacr]ari ? Larum et imaginum / [- - -]D dat[- - - / - - -]A D[- - -].* A full epigraphic study is still needed to discuss various possible restorations of this important inscription. For the six surviving pedestals with the inscription *Aug(usto) sacr(um)*, see *CIL II 471 = CIIAE 27; CIIAE 28–32 = AE 2003, 868–872.*

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## 4

## Aztec Art in Provincial Places: Water Concerns, Monumental Sculptures, and Imperial Expansion

Emily Umberger

**T**he Roman and Aztec Empires both began as hegemonic polities, but whereas the Roman Empire continued to exist and went through various stages in the following centuries, the Aztec Empire ended less than 100 years after it began in 1428 (see Hassig 1984). Beyond this broad observation about their early similarities, there are many differences and contingencies that still need to be considered before close comparisons can be attempted (see Walter Scheidel 2006 and this volume). In particular, basic facts concerning the formation of the lesser-known Aztec polity and its political expansion need to be reconstructed in more detail. The following is an attempt to reconstruct some of the missing details using the material remains of art and archaeology.

The Aztec Empire began as an uprising of three allied city-states—Mexico (which

included two cities, Tenochtitlan and Tlatelolco), Texcoco, and Tlacopan—against the Tepanecs, who controlled the Basin of Mexico, where they all lived. After the overthrow of the Tepanecs in 1431, the alliance conquered all other city-states in the basin and expanded its political control outside the basin. At the same time, the Tenochca rose to dominance over their allies and reconceived their city as the imperial capital. This was accomplished by the mid-1470s in the reigns of Motecuhzoma I (1440–1469) and his successor, Axayacatl (1469–1481).

A number of traditional mechanisms characteristic of hegemonic empires in central Mexico tied the provinces to the center: intermarriages among royal families, large feasts and ceremonies involving the attendance of rulers and nobles

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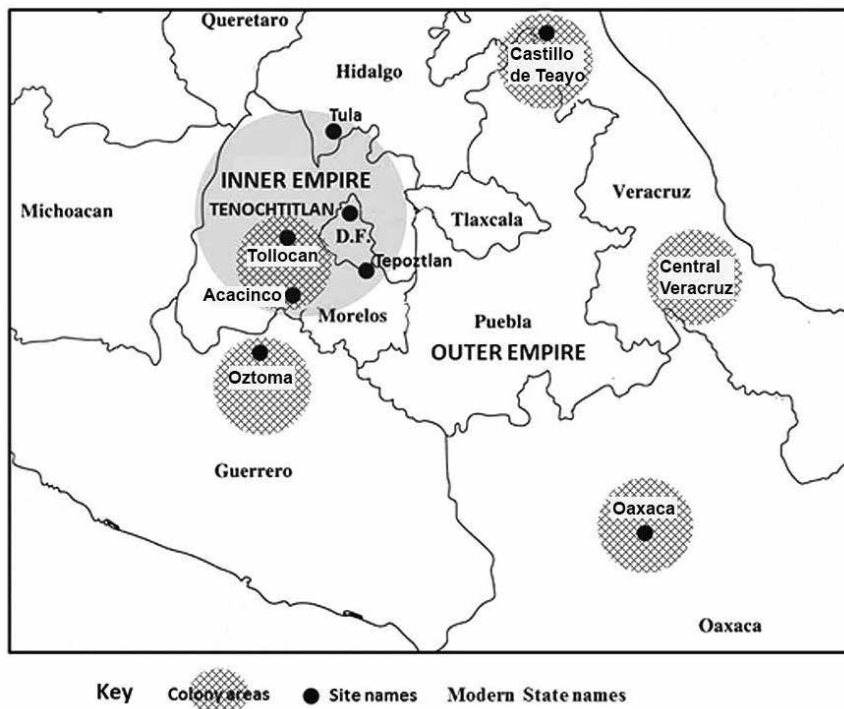
from outside areas, and the removal of captured local patron deities to the conquering polity (Berdan et al. 1996; Carrasco 1999; Diel 2007; Pohl 1998; Smith 1986; descriptions in Durán 1994 [1579–1581]). Efforts creating greater consolidation in the provinces of the basin included the separation of political and economic networks (Hodge 1984, 1996), the forced residence of royal sons in the capital city, partial conversion of the people of radically different cultures living in the basin (Umberger 1996:151, note 1),<sup>1</sup> the uniting and coordinated development of basin hydraulic systems (Palerm 1973), and the realignment of networks of shrines in the sacred environment to focus on Tenochtitlan (e.g., Aveni 1991; Broda 1982, 1991; Broda et al. 2009; Carrasco 1991). Alfredo López Austin (1977:259) describes the process of appropriation of these places: “When a town was established, the patron gods occupied hills or changed themselves into hills. . . . Taking possession of a territory implied extending the different manifestations of divine force to it” (see also Broda 2009:296). The Aztec Empire, in turn, replaced local gods at these places with its own nature deities. As is well-known, the hills were the containers of water, shrines were also located at springs and other water features, and the control of weather and agriculture was crucial to Aztec culture, as will be seen.

As an art historian, I focus on the remains of Aztec architecture and sculptures. These are sparse in the expanse of the documented empire and are

concentrated in places that the Aztecs used or where they had enclaves and colonies (Umberger 1996:152–159). Even in these places, however, they did not build administrative centers or palaces. Rather they moved into and expanded preexisting structures and left local rulers and administrative forms in place where possible. Although there are Aztec-style temples in the empire, no temples or images of the Aztec political patron god, Huitzilopochtli, have been found outside the Basin of Mexico.<sup>2</sup> The foci here are the actual remains found in parts of the empire just outside the basin, which I am calling the Inner Empire, in particular remains of three imperial shrines in the landscape (Figure 4.1). These are all in situ; two are petroglyphs on rocks, and the third was incorporated into the exterior wall of a temple.

The areas to the south and east of the basin were occupied in the majority by other Nahua polities, related to the Aztecs in their Nahuatl language, culture, and heritage. The north was occupied by a mix of Nahuas and Otomis. One place within this area was of long-term importance to the people of the basin, ancient Toltec Tollan (now called Tula), the city-state considered the source of Nahua culture. The city itself was deserted and in ruins in Aztec times, but its environs were still densely populated and the former center was the object of long-distance pilgrimages and ceremonies.

In contrast to these Nahua-dominated areas, the Tollocan Valley to the west was controlled by the Matlatzinca and



**Figure 4.1** Map of the Aztec Empire with colony areas and the Inner Empire highlighted. (Drawing by author)

occupied by them and other non-Nahua cultures, which were considered foreign despite their proximity. The Nahua areas had fallen under Aztec control beginning in the early decades after the empire was formed. The area around Tula being especially important, it seems that the Otomi there were partially Nahuatized, as were the Otomi in the basin (Umberger 1996:151, note 1), and Tenochca rulers were installed, beginning with sons of Itzcoatl, who ruled from 1428 to 1440 (Umberger 1996:154). The Valley of Toluca (Tollocan) was not conquered until the mid-1470s, after Tenochtitlan had become the center of power and was expanding in population far beyond the

capacity of the basin to support it. The conquest and colonization of the Tollocan area seems to have been a matter of agricultural necessity, as will be seen. It is the only part of the Inner Empire to have been colonized with large numbers of people from the basin, and it seems to have been subjected to some of the processes of greater consolidation seen in the basin. Its form of government was Nahuatized (evidence in García Castro 1999:chapter 1; García Payón 1974 [1936]; and Zorita 1971 [1963]:263–270), and although there was probably no mass conversion of the indigenous there, those who dealt with the empire had to have been partially converted.

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### **The Basin of Mexico and the Imperial Capital, Tenochtitlan**

The Aztec Basin of Mexico was divided into the following provinces when Europeans arrived in 1519: Mexico, with Tlatelolco and Tenochtitlan being on linked islands in the lake that filled much of the center of the basin; Acolhuacan on the east shore, with its capital at Texcoco; the Tepanec area (perhaps called Tepanecan) on the west shore; Chalco to the southwest; Xochimilco to the southeast; and the smaller city-state territories of Culhuacan, Tlahuac, and Mixquic, also in the southern lake district (Gibson 1964). All the people of these provinces practiced a version of Nahuatl culture, referred to generally as Aztec, culture by modern scholars, there being no accurate native term for the conglomerate of basin polities involved. The people living in this area identified themselves by place of residence. For instance, the people living in the province of Mexico were called Mexica, and among these, those living in Tenochtitlan were called Tenochca. These “ethnic” names did not have roots in the deep past, and cultural distinctions among these Nahuatl groups were relatively minor (Umberger 2008).

Like other central Mexican Nahuatl, the Mexica Aztecs of Tenochtitlan claimed two heritages, that of the urbanized Toltecs of Tollan, whose society had collapsed by about A.D. 1200, and that of migrant groups, generically called Chichimecs, who entered central Mexico from the north soon after

the collapse of Tollan. In the basin, this dual heritage was formed through intermarriage between the leaders of the new migrants and Toltec descendants already settled in cities like Colhuacan, as illustrated in the *Codex Xolotl* (Dibble 1980:facsimile plate I). Little is known of the original cultures and languages of the Chichimec ancestors, as their descendants had replaced them with the Nahuatl language and Toltec culture of the earlier basin inhabitants generations before the Spanish conquest (Bray 1978; Calnek 1978; Offner 1983) and had also manipulated greatly their stories about both pasts (see, for instance, Boone 1991 on the migration period; Davies 1977 and 1980 on the Toltecs). Thus, although central Mexican societies in general consciously styled themselves as Neo-Toltecs, with Toltec culture representing the necessary tools and behaviors of agricultural and urban life, they claimed some distinctive values from their landless, nomadic ancestors. These were ideas about the warrior fierceness and courage necessary to upset the status quo and expand political control.

Because the basin was enclosed by ranges of high mountains, it lacked natural outlets, and its inhabitants were dependent on springs, rain, and runoff from the mountains, which settled in low areas as a series of lakes. Water levels in the basin could vary greatly, with too much leading to destructive flooding and too little leading to famines. In both cases, agricultural production suffered. So, despite Aztec excellence in hydraulic engineering, the maintenance

of urban society was subject to the vicissitudes of the weather—wind, sunshine, rain, and temperature. The Aztecs conceived of these forces as controlled by supernatural beings, which they depicted in anthropomorphic images, located at shrines in both the landscape and the cities, which were architectural replicas of the landscape.<sup>3</sup> The outlines of the complex ceremonies devoted to these beings were determined by historical events and calendar cycles as well as environmental factors.

In the mid-fifteenth century, Aztec society had been nearly destroyed by a period of flooding followed by a severe famine. Although fertility had returned by the end of the year 1 Rabbit (1454), the traditional beginning year of a new 52-year cycle, fears of a similar disaster persisted and increased as the next 1 Rabbit year (1506) approached. Problems with agricultural productivity meant that the new cycle would have an inauspicious start. The monuments to be discussed here were commissioned by the rulers Ahuitzotl (1486–1502) and Motecuhzoma II (1502–1520) in the late 1400s and early 1500s. Some have been excavated from the remains of the capital itself, where they decorated ceremonial areas, while others are still in situ in sacred places outside the basin. The two groups of artworks are linked by hieroglyphs and imagery referring to the same water-related events. Those in the landscape itself are particularly interesting in that they map ties between the basin and surrounding areas at particular dates.

### Deity Images

The imagery of Aztec art, including that of deities, derived from a variety of Nahua and other sources. Some deities, general to broad areas and across political divisions, were inherited from the deep past, the oldest being the rain god the Aztecs called Tlaloc, easily identified by his “diagnostic” goggles. He is recognizable in Toltec as well as pre-Toltec remains and predates the florescence of Nahua culture (as seen in Teotihuacan examples). Chronologically later images are of Ehecatl, the wind god with buccal mouth mask; the goddess of agriculture, who wears a paper-house (*amacalli*) headdress to represent emergence from the underworld; and Chalchiuhtlicue (Jade Skirt), a water goddess dressed as a noblewoman with a “pillbox and tassel” headdress. The temporal development and territorial expanses covered by these deity categories and various styles within them are unknown, but their associations with distinctive natural realms (wind, rain, water, and so on). These seem to have been relatively constant across broad areas and over long periods of time before the Spanish conquest.

In contrast to these nature gods are the supernatural beings that served as political patrons—for example, Huitzilopochtli (Hummingbird Left) and Tezcatlipoca (Mirror’s Smoke) in Aztec times. Their areas of power were the polities they represented and varied accordingly. H. B. Nicholson (1971:409–410) called them tutelary deities and noted that they pertained

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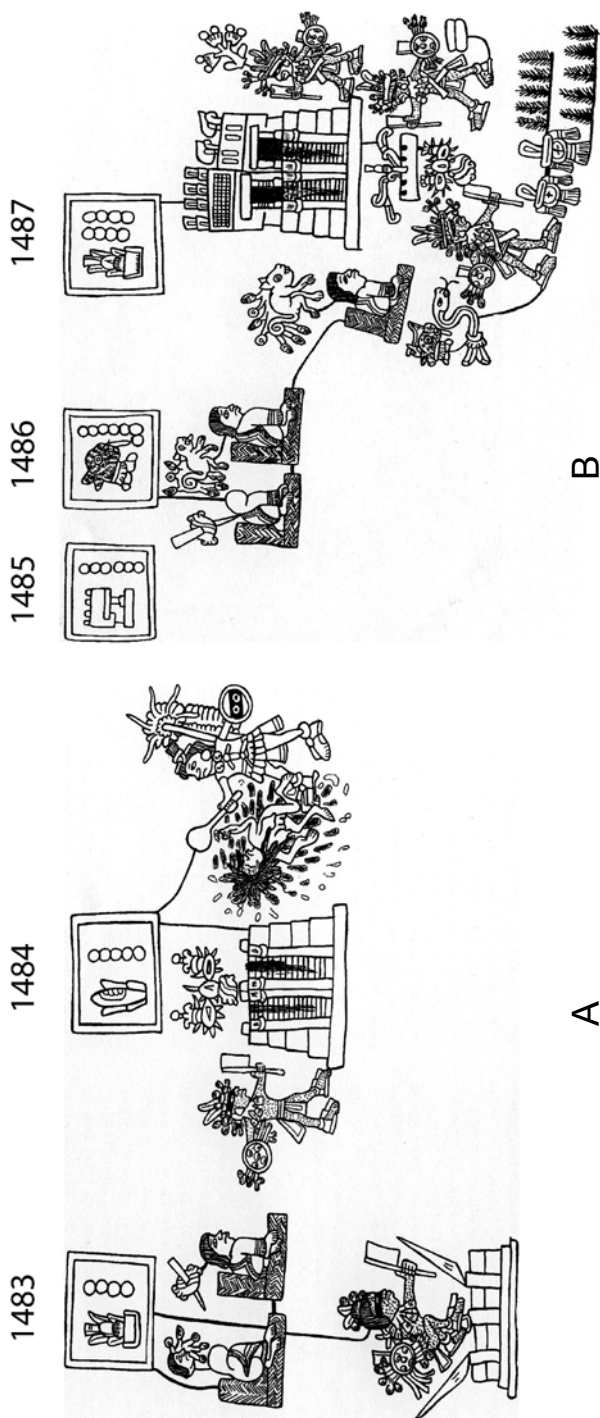
to polities of all sizes—broad territories, provinces, city-states, and sections of the latter—and that they were localized versions of spatially more generalized deities, like Tezcatlipoca (see also López Austin 1977:253–261; Townsend 1979:34–36). Their identities were merged with those of the territorial leaders, and their images varied from place to place. The powers and natural realms controlled by such gods could also change radically, according to seasons, dates in multiple calendar cycles, and especially political rise and fall. Typically, like the ruler himself, the patron god of an independent area was compared to the day sun in relation to the gods of subordinate territories, who were like the celestial bodies of the night sky, even if they had represented the sun in their own domains before conquest. The patron gods took on the roles and appurtenances of the nature gods, when the powers of the latter peaked in seasonal and calendar cycles. Thus the appearances of the patron gods could vary greatly in their own polities, as well as change when put in a context with the deities of other polities. In sum, most aspects of their identities were not permanent.<sup>4</sup> Interestingly, although Huitzilopochtli, the patron god of the Tenochca Aztecs and symbol of their aggressions, is represented visually and often mentioned in written sources from the capital, his image has not been found in Aztec remains in the empire, as mentioned above. Rather, the Aztec nature gods seem to have been installed to represent the forces controlling the empire.

### **Monuments in the Imperial Capital**

Motecuhzoma I (1440–1469), the Tenochca ruler who initiated production of the imperial-style sculptures now familiar to us, was the great innovator of many other aspects of Aztec society that persisted until the Spanish conquest. These cultural beginnings and his ambitions for control of the whole Aztec world were realized by four successors: three grandsons—the brothers Axayacatl (1469–1481), Tizoc (1481–1486), and Ahuitzotl (1486–1502)—and a great-grandson, Axayacatl's son Motecuhzoma II (1502–1520).

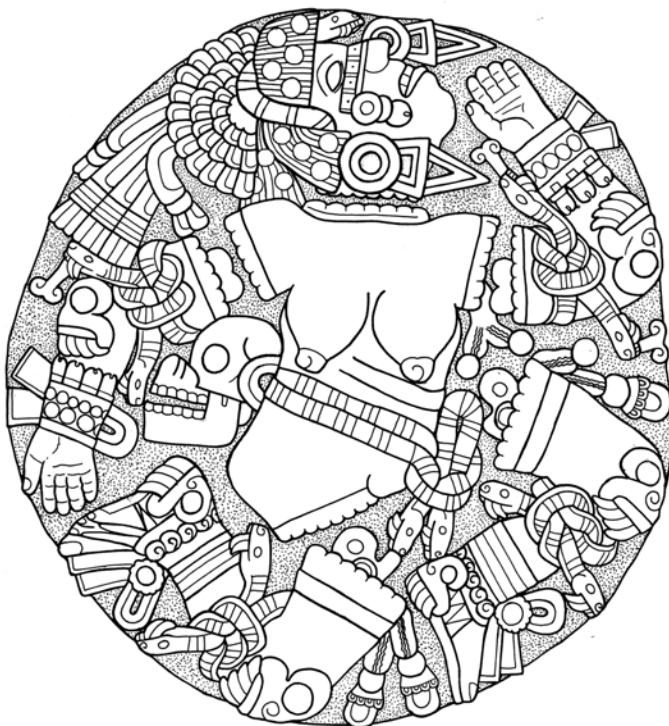
The most important monuments created by each ruler decorated his own enlargement of the Templo Mayor, or Great Temple (Figure 4.2). The Great Temple was a double temple, with two stairways up the front and two shrines on the platform of the pyramid base. Like other pyramids, it was conceived as an urban counterpart to a mountain, where the human and natural worlds met. In Tenochtitlan the mountain was Coatepetl (Serpent Mountain), the mythical place where Huitzilopochtli had achieved dominance, like the sun rising from the earth to the zenith, and where he defeated an army of enemy siblings, who transformed into stars, and their general, Coyolxauhqui, the moon. The double shrines on the “high place” of rulership, the platform of the Templo Mayor, were dedicated to the ancient rain and agricultural god Tlaloc and the new patron god Huitzilopochtli, who served as Tlaloc's most exalted vassel (*macehualli*). Tlaloc was the





**Figure 4.2.** Unknown colonial native artist, stages and ceremonies during the Templo Mayor expansion of Tizoc and Ahuizotl, dedicated in 1487 (Codex Telleriano-Remensis, ca. 1562–1563, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris): (a) Folio 38v, dedication ceremony and sacrifice of captives in 5 Flint (1484) during the reign of Tizoc; (b) Folio 39r, sacrifice of victims from Ahuizotl's conquests to celebrate completion of the whole temple in 8 Reed (1487). The captives represent the defeated siblings in the story of Huitzilopochtli's birth at Coatepec (the Templo Mayor); the males are the enemy brothers turned into stars, and the female represents Coyolxauhqui, the enemy leader. (Drawings by author after images in Quiñones Keber 1995:80–81)

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**Figure 4.3.** Preconquest Aztec artists, Great Coyolxauhqui Stone, ca. 1469, found in its original position in front of the Templo Mayor. Andesite, formerly painted, diameter ca. 325 cm. (Museo del Templo Mayor, Mexico City; drawing by author)

nature deity most responsible for the fertility necessary to Aztec society. Upon enlargement, the temple was decorated with new sets of sculptures representing the characters of the charter myth, like the defeated Coyolxauhqui (Figure 4.3), and with large sacrificial stones, called stones of the sun for the image of the sun on the upper surface (Figure 4.4).<sup>5</sup> The image of Huitzilopochtli was in the shrine on the right side of the platform.

As depicted in the manuscript illustration in Figure 4.2, the ruler Ahuitzotl ascended the Tenochca throne in 1486. After finishing the Templo Mayor enlargement of his

predecessor, Tizoc, he spent much of the next decade waging war abroad, where he extended Aztec hegemony to the far south. Having established himself as a military hero, Ahuitzotl returned to Tenochtitlan in the mid-1490s to attend to the needs of the city itself. One concern was practical and essential to the material health of his realm, and the other was ceremonial.

The ceremonial concern was the celebration of two upcoming anniversary years requiring rituals and new constructions. These were the years 7 Reed (1499) and 1 Rabbit (1506). Seven Reed was one of two years dedicated to Topiltzin



**Figure 4.4.** Preconquest Aztec artists, Stone of Tizoc, created about 1483–1484. Andesite, unpainted, height 88 cm, diameter 260 cm. The stone bears the hieroglyphic name of the ruler Tizoc (in the vignette on the left) and was made for his enlargement of the Templo Mayor, illustrated in Figure 4.2. (Museo Nacional de Antropología, Mexico City). Photograph courtesy of the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, Mexico City

Quetzalcoatl, Our Lord Feathered Serpent, the deified Toltec ruler considered by the Aztecs as the prototype for ruler behavior. Seven years later was 1 Rabbit, the first year of a new 52-year cycle. It was an especially fearful time because the world order was considered fragile and in danger of collapse between cycles and because of the famine in the last 1 Rabbit year. One of the worst catastrophes known in Aztec history, it caused starvation in the Basin of Mexico and migration to other zones. Many basin Aztecs sold themselves into slavery and/or moved to more productive areas on the tropical Gulf Coast (Durán 1994 [1579–1581]:238–241).

Even after agricultural production was restored, the Aztec administration feared a return of this type of catastrophe and

concomitant societal collapse, and there were good reasons to be concerned. Agriculture was always difficult in the Basin of Mexico, as noted above, because of the unpredictability of rain and the complexities of water control. In the 1490s, when the growing population of the city of Tenochtitlan required more water than ever, the lake was low, and the main source of drinking water, the aqueduct built from Chapultepec by Nezahualcoyotl decades earlier, was inadequate (Bribiesca 1958).

Thus, for his great civic construction, Ahuitzotl chose to build a new aqueduct from springs on the south lakeshore and a series of structures along its route to the heart of the city. This would simultaneously meet immediate needs and assure prosperity for the upcoming cycle change;

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thus the ceremonies of both 7 Reed (1499) and 1 Rabbit (1506) were planned to focus on the project and its benefits. For many reasons, the aqueduct itself must have been considered an appropriate offering to Quetzalcoatl, as he and the Toltecs were the Aztecs' models of urbanization and agricultural prosperity (Sahagún 1950–1982 [1575–1578]:book 10, 165–170). The ceremonies of each year's 20-day solar months featured other deities and attended to other societal needs, but no doubt the emphasis was skewed somewhat according to the dominant theme of a special year.<sup>6</sup> The climactic set of ceremonies of 1499 involved the initiation of the aqueduct itself.

According to Durán's history (1994 [1579–1581]:chapters 48–49), Ahuizotl had sent messengers to Coyoacan to demand the use of the spring of Acuecuexatl near that city. Tzotzoma, the king of that area, replied that the Aztecs could use the water, but he warned that the springs were uncontrollable and could cause great damage. Ahuizotl was enraged by this less-than-humble response to his haughty demand and sent assassins to kill Tzotzoma. He then proceeded to build the aqueduct. Meanwhile, the kings of other cities around the lake reportedly talked among themselves about the unjust murder, but no one dared to speak of it to Ahuizotl.

The day of the aqueduct initiation arrived. At the beginning of its journey, the stream of water was greeted by one of the lords of the court dressed as the water goddess Chalchiuhtlicue and addressing the water as the goddess herself: "Precious lady, welcome to your road . . .

this day you will arrive at your own city, Mexico-Tenochtitlan." In the city, when the water arrived at each of four branch canals, a child was sacrificed and other offerings were made.

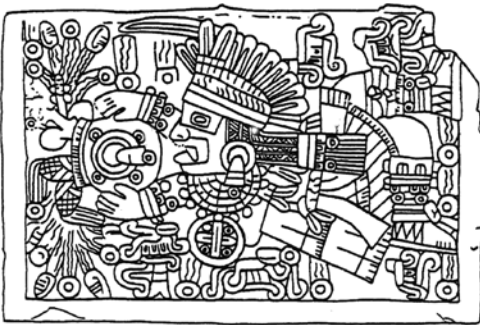
The buildings created for the 1499 celebrations have not yet been discovered archaeologically, except for (possibly) the newly uncovered Calmecac, which may have been built or refurbished in that year.<sup>7</sup> Despite the dearth of such remains in the city, significant parts of the structures at the springs—water storage tanks and sections of the aqueduct—did survive and were discovered and documented by César Lizardi Ramos in the mid-twentieth century (1954).<sup>8</sup> In addition, a number of sculptures created for the ceremonies have survived. Some bear the date 7 Reed combined with imagery related to water and Quetzalcoatl, notably the sculptures illustrated here, Ahuizotl's Box and the Acuecuexatl Stone (Figures 4.5 and 4.6). Others sculptures bear the date but seemingly unrelated imagery. Still others do not bear hieroglyphs, but their imagery is appropriate. This is the case of deity images in the round, which are rarely inscribed, like the water gods Tlaloc and Chalchiuhtlicue. Sculptures in all three categories were found along the aqueduct route, this new "road" extending from the springs in Coyoacan to the ceremonial center of the city.

The sculptures in Figures 4.5 and 4.6 bear the obvious imagery of the event in some combination of date, ruler name, water, feathered serpent imagery, and water gods. When unbroken, Ahuizotl's Box (Figure 4.5) bore on the exterior

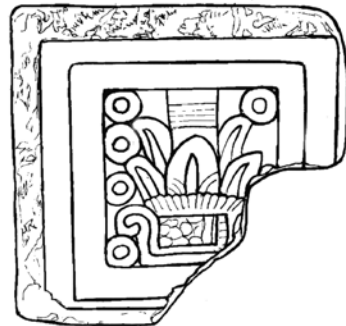
**Figure 4.5.** Preconquest Aztec artist(s), fragments of stone box, 1499, find-spot unknown. Formerly painted. The fragment of the side of the box, 23 x 33 cm, is in the British Museum, London, while the lid, 13 x 33 x 30 cm, is in the Museum für Völkerkunde, Berlin. (a) The sides of the box (presumably) had multiple images of Tlaloc or a helper around the exterior and multiple representations of an *ahuitzotl*, an imaginary animal representing Ahuitzotl's name, on the interior surfaces. (b) A sculpted *ahuitzotl* crouches on top of the box lid, and the date Reed (probably 7 Reed before damage) is on the inside of the lid (c). (Drawings by author; b and c after Selser 1990–1998a:199, figures 200a–b)



B



A

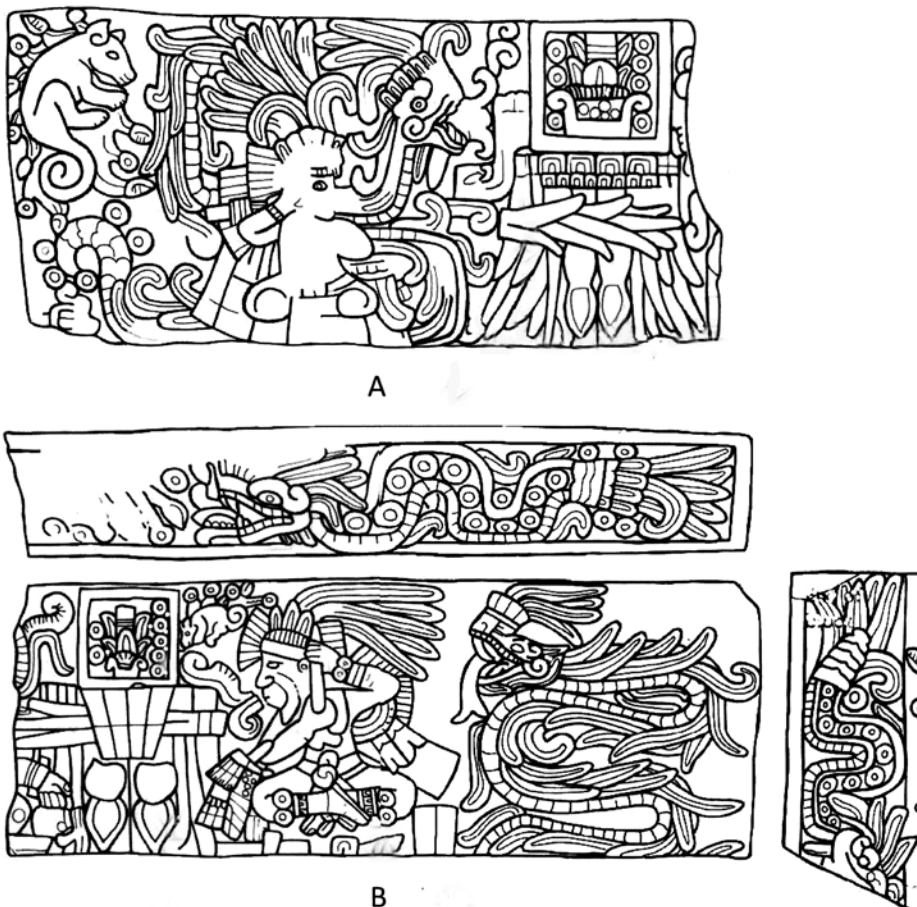


C

repeated depictions of the rain god or his helper pouring water, corn, and amaranth from a vessel. On the inside were repeated images of the king's hieroglyphic name, the imaginary water animal called *ahuitzotl*. The box lid is topped by an image in the round of the same animal, with the date (now partial) of the event on the interior. The Acuecuxatl Stone (Figure 4.6) was linked to the aqueduct project and to Durán's passages soon after its discovery in 1924 (Alcocer 1935:96–99), and it bears more information about the associations of the date. The sculpture was found reused as a lintel in a building on the Plaza San Lucas south of the central precinct—a place of ceremonial

offerings along the described aqueduct route. The relief was originally probably twice as long, with four depictions of the ruler Ahuitzotl on it (Wicke 1984). In the illustration seen here, the remaining half depicts Ahuitzotl on both sides performing an act of ruler devotion to the gods; he draws blood from his ear in imitation of Quetzalcoatl (Figure 4.7) (see Nicholson 1955:4). Quetzalcoatl is alluded to also in the feathered serpent behind the king, and a hand pours water from a vase to the lower left on Side B. (Unfortunately, the rest of that figure is missing.) What is most significant about this monument is that it shows the connection between the event and Quetzalcoatl (Umberger

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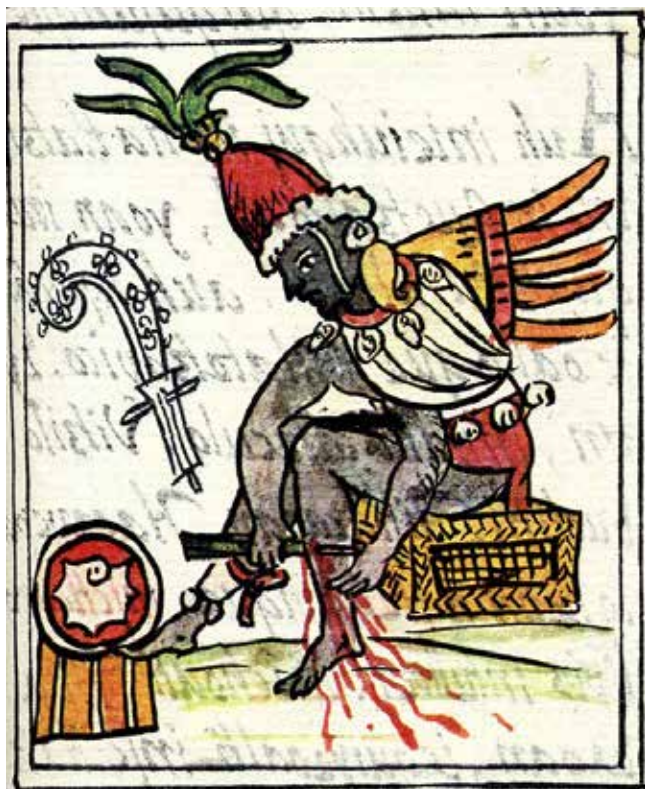


**Figure 4.6.** Preconquest Aztec artist(s), Acuecuexatl Stone, 1499, Mexico City. Stone, formerly painted, 78 x 167 (present length) x 36 cm. This sculpture was found reused as a lintel in a Mexico City slaughterhouse in 1924. On both sides, Ahuitzotl is accompanied by his name glyph, a rampant feathered serpent, and the date 7 Reed. Before reuse, the stone was probably associated with an aqueduct that is described as having passed through this area. (Museo Nacional de Antropología, Mexico City; drawings by author)

1981:13). This visual link, of course, is what allows for the reconstruction presented above—a more complex interrelationship of related events and ideas than reported in any colonial account.<sup>9</sup>

Unfortunately for Ahuitzotl, who intended the aqueduct to increase the capital's

dwindling water supply, the rainy season that followed produced large amounts of water (Durán 1994 [1579–1581]:370–372), which rushed along swollen rivers from the hills framing the southwest part of the basin to the lake (Bribiesca 1958). The result was a flood so bad that it lapped



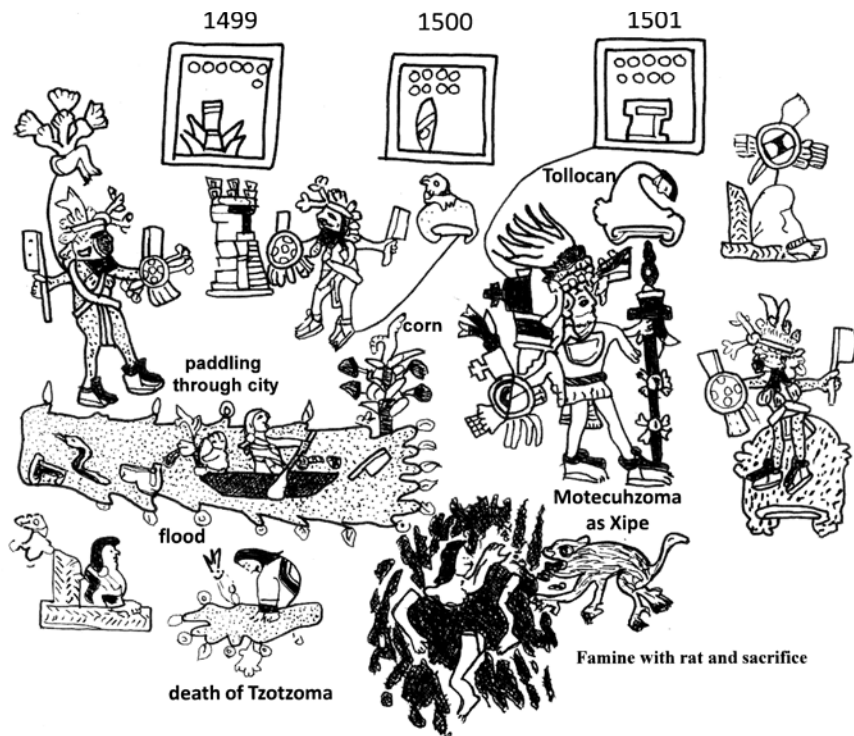
**Figure 4.7.** Unknown colonial native artist, Quetzalcoatl drawing blood. In Sahagún 1979 [1575–1578]:1, book 3, chapter 13. (Courtesy Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City)

at the lower part of the Templo Mayor. Crops in the basin were ruined, and people had to travel in boats instead of on foot through the city itself, as pictured in the Codex Vaticanus A (Figure 4.8).

At first, Ahuitzotl tried to stop the flood by building a dam. This being to no avail, he consulted with Nezahualpilli of Texcoco, the son of Nezahualcoyotl and a great seer, who linked the catastrophe to the murder of Tzotzoma—a punishment from the gods for the killing of one of their earthly representatives. According to Durán, Nezahualpilli said, “O powerful lord, you must realize that you have offended, you have

transgressed against the gods. That lord was the image of the gods and they had entrusted him with the government of his nation” (Durán 1994 [1579–1581]:371). Following Nezahualpilli’s recommendation, Ahuitzotl, accompanied by a group of lords and priests, went to the springs and dismantled the dams and aqueduct. Offerings were thrown into the springs. Among them were large stone idols, “including a great statue of the goddess” (Durán 1994 [1579–1581]:372), presumably like Figure 4.9, and sacrificed children. Ahuitzotl then begged forgiveness and named the son of the murdered king to the throne of Coyoacan.

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**Figure 4.8.** Unknown artist, Codex Vaticanus A (1566–1589), folio 85v. This page depicts events between 1499 and 1501: the death of Tzotzoma; the flood of Tenochtitlan with people in a boat, a symbol of the ruined corn crop, and a floating royal crown; a rat and sacrificial victim representing the subsequent famine; and Motecuhzoma dressed as Xipe, carrying a rattle staff. (Drawing by author after Anders et al. 1996a)

Stories about Ahuitzotl’s last two years vary in their treatment of his relationship to the flood. In Durán’s chronicle, Ahuitzotl went on to another war but then fell mysteriously ill, possibly poisoned, and suffered a decline in health that led to his death two years after the flood. In other sources (e.g., Alva Ixtlilxochitl 1975–1977 [1600–1640]:2:167), he hit his head during the flood and his decline and death were due to this injury. His incapacity during his last years, whatever the cause, seems to be indicated in the

Codex Vaticanus A (Figure 4.8), where Motecuhzoma II is represented in the ruler’s military costume, the guise of Xipe Totec (Our Lord, Flayed), leading an army in the Tollocan area in 1501. The fact that Ahuitzotl was still alive at the time makes this image unique in Aztec pictorial codices; only upon accession to the throne is a named personage represented.

At any rate, the sources agree on the date of Ahuitzotl’s death, 10 Rabbit (1502).<sup>10</sup> After his funeral, the new ruler, Motecuhzoma, finished rebuilding





**Figure 4.9.** Preconquest Aztec artist(s), Chalchiuhtlicue, goddess of lake and surface water, late fifteenth–early sixteenth century, Mexico City, exact provenience unknown. Stone, unpainted, 77 x 26 cm. (Museo Nacional de Antropología, Mexico City; photograph courtesy of the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, Mexico City)

the damaged city, something initiated in Ahuitzotl's reign, and prepared for the upcoming cycle beginning. The agricultural prospects of the basin had worsened, as several years of dryness, infertility, and famine had followed the flood. Motecuhzoma had several monuments

created in the city during this time, no doubt to appeal for rain. These included a pair of archaizing sculptures of the rain god Tlaloc (Umberger 1987a:77, 89, figures 12–15, 30, 31), one in the pose of an ancient Teotihuacan god and the other in the pose of a Toltec sculpture type—the Chacmool (Figure 4.10). The Teotihuacanoid sculpture bears the date 11 Reed on its back, and this may date both sculptures to the year 1503. In addition to their archaic poses, both wear huge jade necklaces with antique picture-plaque pendants. This type of plaque, first created by the Maya to represent a ruler (McVicker and Palka 2001), seemingly linked rulership to fertility, and the jade material itself was significant because of its association with water. The form was subsequently copied by later people all over Mexico up to Aztec times (Umberger 1987a:92–95). Knowing the antiquity of the forms they were quoting, it is obvious that the Aztecs were appealing to the past for support.

Because the famine continued into 1 Rabbit, Motecuhzoma postponed the new cycle ceremonies until the following year, 2 Reed (Quiñones Keber 1995:folio 41v; Umberger 1987b:appendix), when, fortunately, fertility returned and the new cycle could begin under propitious circumstances. A clear example of a monument commemorating this new cycle ceremony is a fire serpent (*xihcoatl*) at Dumbarton Oaks. On the base (Figure 4.11) of this imaginary serpent, the carrier of the sun through the sky, is carved the date 2 Reed, bound by a knotted rope signifying the tying of years. It

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A

**Figure 4.10.** Preconquest Aztec artist(s), archaizing Tlaloc sculpture in the form of a Chacmool, ca. 1503. Stone, formerly painted, 74 x 108 x 45 cm (Museo Nacional de Antropología, Mexico City). (b) Drawing of the archaizing plaque depicted on Tlaloc's necklace. (c) Maya picture-plaque of ruler, Classic period (ca. 300–900), jade. (d) Mexican copy of Maya picture-plaque, Classic or Postclassic period, probably from Oaxaca; jade, 9.8 x 9.1 cm. (Photograph by author, courtesy Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, Mexico City; drawings by author)



B



C



D

is accompanied by the hieroglyphic symbol of Motecuhzoma's name.<sup>11</sup>

Motecuhzoma commissioned many more monuments for the new cycle ceremonies, most dated by the 2 Reed date with knotted rope. Some represent seemingly unrelated deities and motifs, but this was to be expected in an anniversary year. An example is the image of Xipe Totec, the flayed god, in the National Museum of the American Indian, bearing the 2 Reed date on its back (where the rope ties of the costume do double duty). It was made most likely for the Tlacaxipehualiztli (Flaying of Men) ceremony of 1507. How the Tlacaxipehualiztli ceremony was connected to the specific fertility concerns of the time is unclear, but the

conceptual link between the flayed god and fertility, as well as warfare, is seen in Motecuhzoma's image in Vaticanus A (Figure 4.8), where he wears the flayed-skin warrior costume and carries Xipe's rattle-staff, a symbol of fertility. The importance of this role to Motecuhzoma is underlined by his representation in the same warrior costume and carrying the same staff in his final portrait at Chapultepec (see Nicholson 1959).

Other sculptures from this time bear more obvious references to the primary ceremonial focus of the year, the cycle change. One of the best-known examples pulls together a multitude of the associations of this event into a type of narrative. It is a 4-foot-tall stone pyramid model (Figure

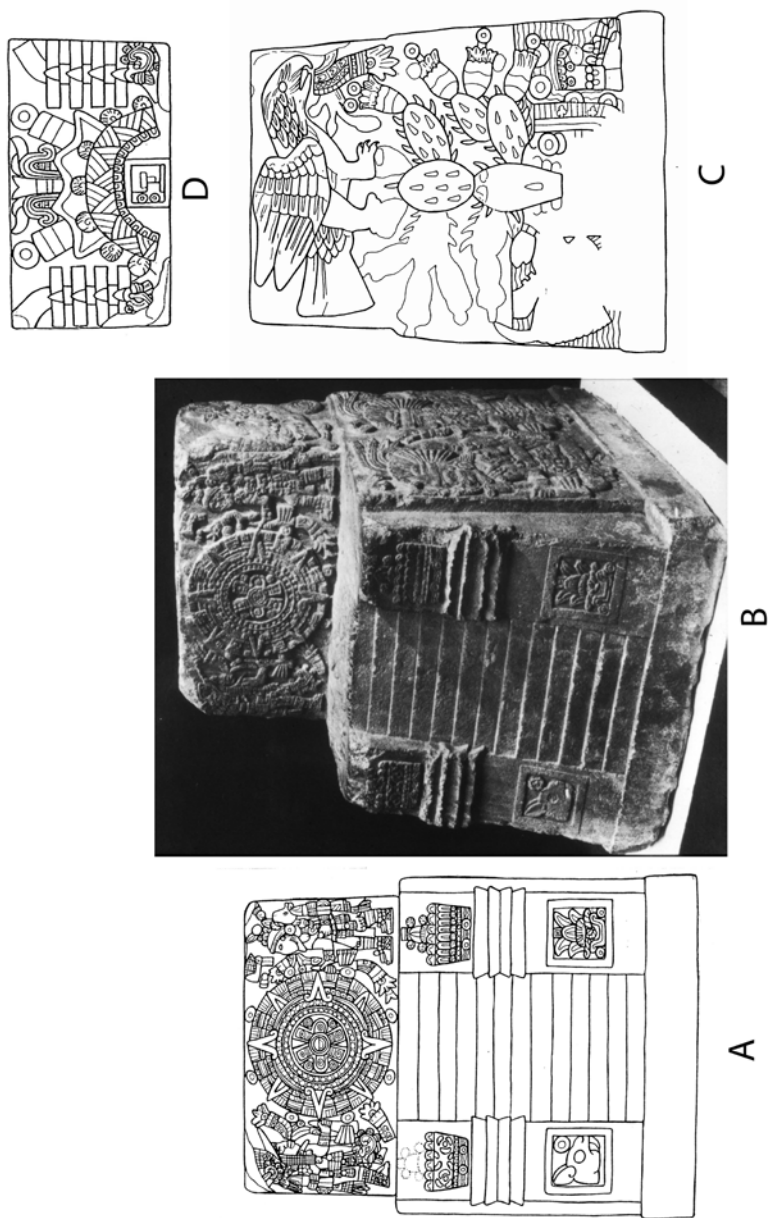


**Figure 4.11.** Preconquest Aztec artist(s), representation of the hieroglyphic name of Motecuhzoma II and the date of the New Fire Ceremony, 2 Reed (1507), on the underside of a fire serpent (*xiuhcoatl*). Polished green-colored stone, 45.5 x 45.5 cm. (Dumbarton Oaks, Washington, D.C.; drawing by author)

4.12b) representing the earth mountain as the ruler's throne, with a sun disk on the shrine that serves as the throne back. (See also Barnes 2016; Caso 1927; Townsend 1979:49–63; Umberger 1984 [2010].)<sup>12</sup> The years 1 Rabbit and 2 Reed (the latter with tied rope) are on the front of the stairway (a), and the back of the sculpture is occupied by a scene referring emblematically to Tenochtitlan through the eagle on the cactus (*tenochtili*), the city's hieroglyphic symbol (c). The eagle symbolizes the sun nourished by the human heart-fruits of the prickly pear cactus. The fruit-bearing cactus indicates that the city is fertile again,

and it is not an accident that the cactus grows from a reclining, subdued image of the water goddess. As Durán reported, the great Nezahualpilli had said at the time of the flood, when he suggested the necessity of appealing to the water goddess with sacrifices, “Perhaps with all of this you will calm her and she will control her streams and they will not flow as they do now.” Another image on the monument reveals that the rebuilt city was conceived as a new start, a refoundation. The motif is the date of the original foundation, 2 House (1325), on the roof of the temple-throne (d). The eagle on the

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**Figure 4.12** Preconquest Aztec artist(s), Teocalli de la Guerra Sagrada. Stone, formerly painted, 123 x 92 x 100 cm (Museo Nacional de Antropología, Mexico City). (a) This miniature pyramid was a monument representing the Aztec throne of power, made for Motecuhzoma II at the time of the New Fire Ceremony of 2 Reed, 1507. (b) Front with the dates 1 Rabbit and 2 Reed (1506 and 1507) flanking the staircase. (c) Back of monument with scene of the foundation of the city of Tenochtitlan, the eagle on the cactus. (d) Top of monument with the date 2 House (1325), the year of the city's founding. (Drawings by author; photograph courtesy of the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia)

cactus is always pictured in manuscript scenes of the foundation, and the occurrence of the two motifs on the ruler's monumental throne seems to indicate a sort of refoundation after the flood.

### **Imperial Monuments in the Inner Empire**

As indicated above, the Aztec Empire consisted of cultures of different heritages—Nahua cultures, outside the basin that varied from Aztec culture but not radically; and non-Nahua cultures, which could differ in substantial ways. For this reason, the supernatural beings the Aztecs encountered during their imperial expansion could be very similar to or could differ significantly in appearance and properties from their Aztec counterparts, depending on the area conquered. This was the case even for nature gods, like the possible wind god images of the Matlatzinca in the Tollocan area, which are very different from Aztec beings (Umberger and Hernández 2016). Whether the deity forms differed or not in a new area, Aztec sculptures stood out because of their distinctive styles, in both preimperial and imperial forms. Most cannot be mistaken for parallel creations, even in Nahua areas, or as anything other than intrusive signs of conquest.

There seem to have been five colony areas (Figure 4.1) located at intervals along well-traveled routes in fertile parts of the empire, and these are the areas where Aztec remains are concentrated (Umberger 1996, 2007a; Umberger and Klein 1993). By colony areas, I mean places with substantial numbers of Aztec emigrants from the basin and beyond in

permanently established communities. The first colonies were not officially sponsored, an example being those in northern Veracruz around Castillo de Teayo, which were populated by basin residents seeking fertile areas during the great famine of the 1450s. Other colonies resulted from imperial strategy: the Oaxaca (Huaxacac) colony was established by Motecuhzoma I later, probably in the 1450s (Durán 1994 [1579–1581]:236–237); multiple colonies in the Tollocan Valley were formed after its conquest in the 1470s, during the reigns of Axayacatl and Tizoc; and the Oztoma colony was established in Guerrero by Ahuitzotl in the 1480s. An important function for all colony areas was to provide a stopping place for Aztec travelers and to support Aztec military efforts with manpower and food. The Tollocan colony had additional functions as a result of its proximity to the basin. Added to the expected strategic purposes vis-à-vis the Tarrascan Empire further west, it provided an outlet for the basin's growing population. Because the majority of immigrants from the basin seem to have been agriculturalists (as indicated by the numerous fertility deities in local Toluca Valley museums), they could provide a reliable source of food to the basin. This colony area is probably the only one in the empire showing signs of greater consolidation with the center: a large population influx, the possession of estates in the area by members of the Tenochca royal family, the installation of an Aztec-style government, and the imposed use of the Nahuatl language on residents in the

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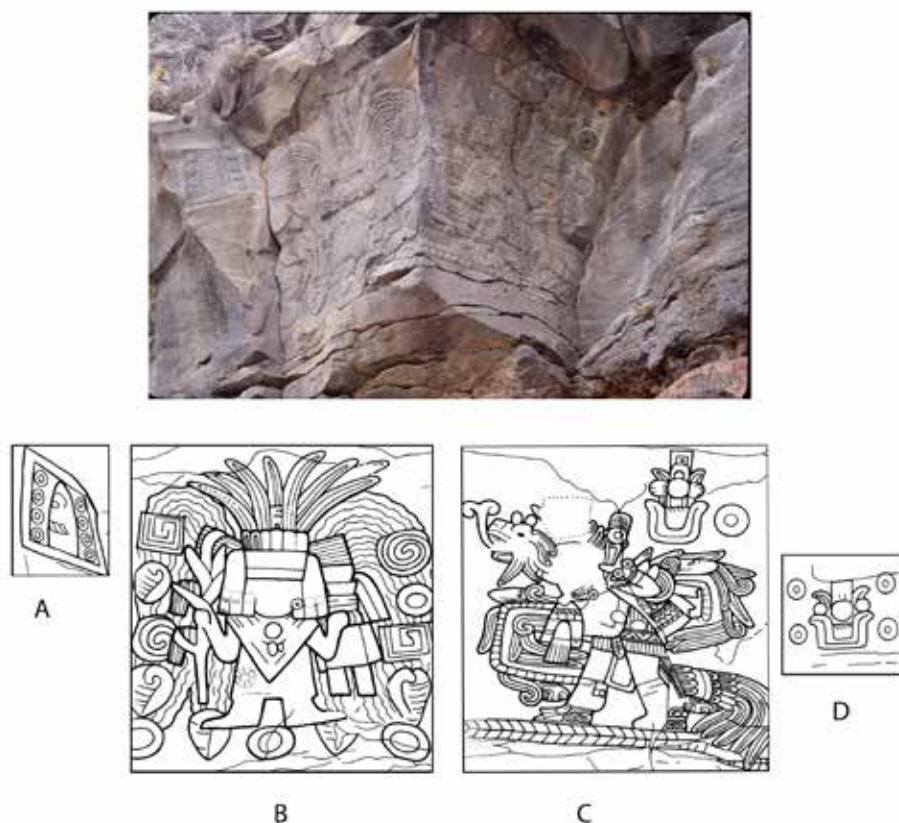
areas immediately around the centers of power. Most of the images in museums are relatively small and not in the imperial style. Many must have pertained to commoner colonists, and in this they resemble images found in other areas with agriculturalists (notably at Castillo de Teayo). Few have specific find-spots listed, but one was located on a low hill. There were probably many more of these modest shrines, as well as images, in community settings in all places with Aztec agriculturalists.

At none of these colonies, even those in the Tollocan area, did imperial presence take the form of new administrative buildings or palaces, as stated at the outset. Nor have Aztec images of rulers, patron gods, conquest monuments, or even the characters of the Aztec myth of triumph been found. Rather, the imperially sponsored shrines, like those made by commoner colonists, emphasize nature gods and fertility. And whereas the commoner fertility gods have been found at historical distances, the events that reveal close connections with the center are found in the Inner Empire. They range from individual carved rocks (for examples, see Krickeberg 1969) to ensembles of reliefs, sculptures in the round, and temple architecture.

The first monument discussed here (Figure 4.13) was clearly created in reaction to the 1499 flood that nearly destroyed basin society. On a cliff overlooking ancient Toltec Tollan but across the Rio Tula from the ruins, it consists of a series of reliefs on four adjacent rock surfaces. The hill is called Cerro Malinche,

and the reliefs are recognizably Aztec (Nicholson 1955:17–19). Durán's history, quoted above, tells of Ahuitzotl's visit to the spring of Acuecuexatl near Coyoacan to appeal to the water goddess, Chalchiuhtlicue. Deity images were reportedly offered, but no actual remains that might be interpreted historically have survived at the site. The imagery of the Malinche reliefs reveals them to be from the year that followed the flood's initiation. They clearly depict the action of contrition, mark Tollan as another place that was visited to stop the flood, and reinforce the involvement of Quetzalcoatl revealed by the Acuecuexatl Stone.

The main figure is a frontal image of Chalchiuhtlicue surrounded by water and holding a corn plant. To the right, a male figure in profile faces her and draws blood from his ear. He is clearly petitioning the goddess. The rampant feathered serpent (*quetzalcoatl*) behind him identifies him as a ruler, and the 1 Reed date next to his head identifies him as a deity. (Gods are labeled by calendar names not personal names.) In contrast to the figures on the Acuecuexatl Stone who are labeled Ahuitzotl, this figure is the deified ruler of Tollan himself, Quetzalcoatl, Our Lord 1 Reed (Topiltzin, Ce Acatl), who petitions the water goddess on behalf of the Aztecs. Also informative is the contrast in the poses of the two deities, one being the petitioner of the other. The framed date 8 Flint to the left of the goddess refers to the year 1500, a year when basin fertility continued to be plagued by water problems, flooding, and possibly the beginning of the famine (see Figure 4.8).<sup>13</sup>



**Figure 4.13.** Preconquest Aztec artist(s), reliefs on Cerro Malinche, 1500, in situ on cliff across the river from and facing the ancient site of Tollan (now Tula); pictograph. (a) The scene on the left features a frontal image of the water goddess Chalchiutlicue, next to the year date 8 Flint (1500). (b) On the right, Quetzalcoatl, the ancient deified ruler of Tollan, draws blood from his ear in petition to the water goddess. The date 4 Reed next to him may refer to the reinstatement of the Coyoacan Dynasty. (Photograph and drawings by author)

On the surface to Quetzalcoatl's right, the unframed date 4 Reed, the customary day of Aztec ruler installation, probably refers to the installation of the new king of Coyoacan and/or the restoration of that city's *tlatocayotl*, royal line. Ahuizotl's offense was conceived as an offense against the gods. It violated the rights over the southern shore lands given to the local ruler by the

gods, as clearly stated by Nezahualpilli when Ahuizotl consulted him (Durán 1994 [1579–1581]:371). Conflicting information indicates that Ahuizotl may not actually have had Tzotzoma killed, but he did disrupt the lineage of this subject town. This was an aggressive practice that the Aztecs avoided, if possible, and apparently there were sacred reasons behind this avoidance (not just

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the inconvenience of setting up a new administration). At any rate, the Aztecs were indicating a renewed respect for their “contract” with the gods in this image.

Although Durán did not mention Tollan as a place of petition at the time of the flood, he did record ceremonial visits to the site both before and after this period, indicating that it was a customary Aztec practice. At the time of the Spanish arrival, Motecuhzoma sent a procession of priests to Tollan to bury a Spanish biscuit in the temple of Quetzalcoatl (Durán 1994 [1579–1581]:501). Another expedition had gone to the same area decades before the flood. In the 1440s probably, Motecuhzoma I had sent a large envoy of “sorcerers” to a “hill called Coatepec in the province of Tula,” where they traced “magic symbols upon the ground.” Transformed into animals, they traveled from there to the home of their ancestors (Durán 1994 [1579–1581]:214–215).

Also interesting is evidence of a possible physical connection between Tenochtitlan and Tollan, a “watery road,” conceived as a drain for the excess water of the basin (Umberger 2013). Hypothetically, it began as a river emanating from a spring north of the mountains that enclosed the basin, was diverted through a canal crossing a broad area of irrigated fields, and joined the Tula River at the spot where the reliefs are located. As is well-known, the Tula River flows north to join the Panuco River, which ultimately empties into the great sea of the Gulf of Mexico. The proposed waterway no longer exists, and the investigation

of the premodern appearance of the area is made difficult by destructive actions associated with various *desagüe* projects and urban expansion. However, the possibility of its former presence is suggested by early colonial records of Aztec ideas about subterranean water sources, combined with later colonial records and maps of the topography between the basin and Tula.<sup>14</sup>

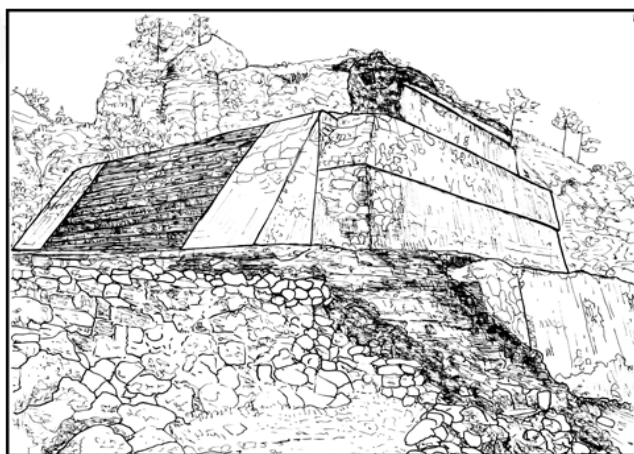
Outside the basin to the south, another royal commission, presumably from Motecuhzoma’s time, memorializes Ahuizotl’s death and brings up questions about Aztec attitudes toward this ruler at the end of his reign. In other words, was his final reputation as a ruler tainted by his role in the flood? I think the evidence here indicates that it was (see note 9). The commission is in the form of two reliefs once set into Tepozteco Temple above the modern town of Tepoztlan in Morelos (Figure 4.14). The temple was devoted to Tepoztecatl, the chief god of the intoxicant *pulque*. It was a famous shrine that (reportedly) attracted pilgrims from as far away as Chiapas and Guatemala (Besso and González 1980:15, no source cited), implying it had pan-Mesoamerican significance as the principal place of this deity. Ceramic shards around the shrine and in the broader area, and the temple’s multiple building phases, indicate that the structure was already standing by Ahuizotl’s time. It was most likely a preimperial structure (Michael Smith, personal communication 1986). The area where it stands apparently fell under Tenochca control early in imperial history, during the reign of Motecuhzoma I.



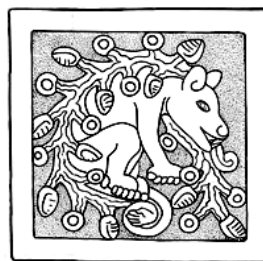
The presence of Ahuizotl's name glyph indicates that he was made the referent of a preexisting ensemble; the reported presence of his death date reinforces its funerary connotation.

The relief plaques are beautifully carved in the imperial style and were found in the rubble on the east side of the pyramid. The one representing the ruler's name, the imaginary animal called an *ahuizotl*, was found undamaged (Figure 4.14b). There remain only broken fragments of the other; they were on view in the Museo Arqueológico de Tepoztlan in 1976 (Umberger 1981:figure 106). According to Marshall Saville (1896:226), they once represented the date 10 Rabbit. Why did the Aztecs choose this temple to commemorate Ahuizotl's death? *Pulque* was an

alcoholic beverage associated with drunkenness, loss of control, stumbling, falling, and night. Although the link with darkness, death, and the underworld is sufficient to have made it an appropriate place to memorialize a ruler's descent to the underworld after death, perhaps more important in the case of Ahuizotl is the metaphorical link between drunkenness and failed rulership. Three colonial illustrations make the connection clear. In one, a drunkard is depicted as falling from a cliff, a high place like the ruler's place of power (Figure 4.15a). In another, the earlier ruler Moquihui of Tlatelolco, whose name (probably not coincidentally) means "drunken one," is depicted falling from the artificial mountain of his own great temple after his defeat by the Tenochca (Figure 4.15b).



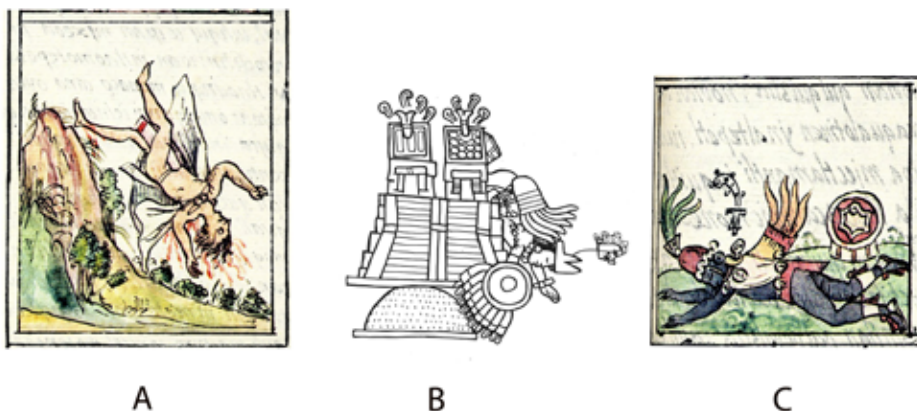
**A**



**B**

**Figure 4.14.** (a) Preconquest architect(s), Tepozteco Pyramid (possibly modified by Aztecs), Postclassic period, on a cliff above the town of Tepoztlan, Morelos. (b) Preconquest artist(s), Aztec relief plaque of Ahuizotl's name, once set into a side of the pyramid, 1502. Stone, once painted, 73.5 x 72 x 24 cm. (Museo Nacional de Antropología, Mexico City; drawings by author)

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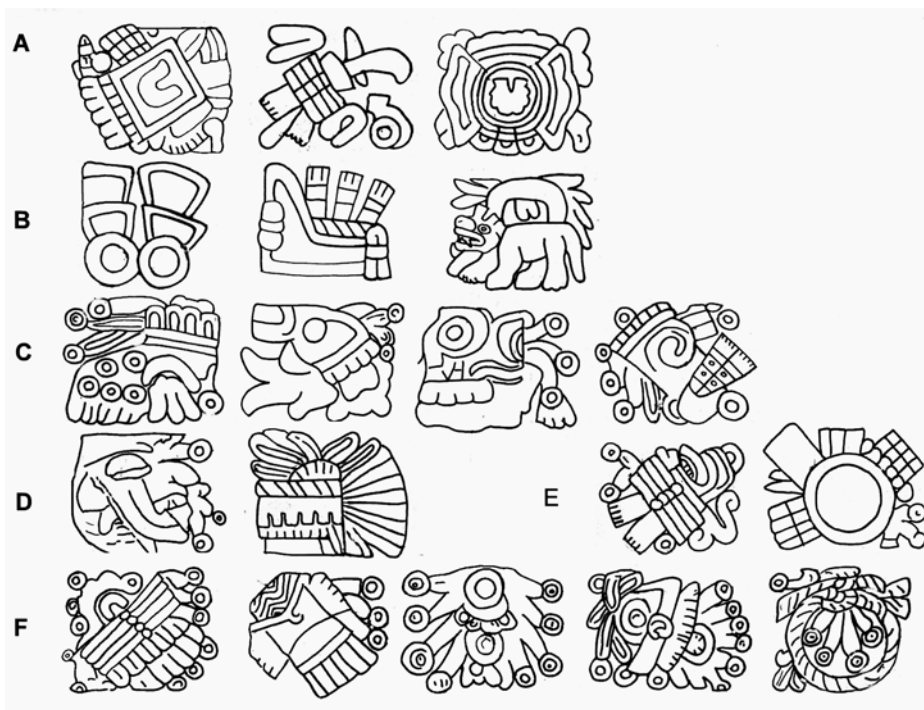


**Figure 4.15.** Unknown colonial native artists, representations of the “fall from a high place.” (a) Drunken man falls from cliff (Sahagún 1979 [1575–1578]:1:book 4, folio 13v). (b) Tlatelolco ruler Moquihuix (Drunken One) falls from his own Templo Mayor in defeat (Codex Mendoza [1541–1542], Bodleian Library, Oxford, England). (c) Drunken Quetzalcoatl lying on the ground (Sahagún 1979 [1575–1578]:1:book 3, chapter 13). (Drawing by author after Berdan and Anawalt 1992:volume 4; scenes from the Florentine Codex courtesy Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City and the Bodleian Library)

Finally, the ancient ruler Quetzalcoatl is depicted lying on the ground in a drunken stupor (Figure 4.15c). This last event, according to legend, marked the end of Quetzalcoatl’s reign, when he drank to excess, had sex with his sister, lost political control, and left Tollan in shame. In other words, a ruler’s loss of control was like that of a drunkard and subsequently led to his fall from the high place of rulership.<sup>15</sup> Just as Quetzalcoatl was the prototype of the behaviors and cultural accomplishments of the ideal ruler, he was also the prototype for ruler failure. Perhaps Ahuitzotl was conceived as metaphorically drunk with power and fame, and his actions against Tzotzoma were seen as an unjustified use of aggressive tactics against an allied ruler. Sahagún writes about different types of drunkards. Of one type, he says, “He blustered,

vaunted, and sang praises of himself. . . . He belittled what others said” (Sahagún 1950–1982 [1575–1578]:4:15–16).

The reliefs on the benches inside the shrine show Nahua imagery, but like the temple, they are of unknown date and could also predate the area’s appropriation by the Aztecs (Figure 4.16).<sup>16</sup> Most motifs are emblems of death (the funerary dog worn as a pendant, paper ornaments, a lord’s crown, and a nose ornament), of *pulque* (crescent moons, *pulque* vessels, and liquid), and of warfare and sacrifice (shields, weapons, and bundles). A few at first glance might be mistaken for the names of other Tenochca rulers. Two emblems, the crown and nose decoration of a lord (Figure 4.16b, first two images), recall the hieroglyph for Motecuhzoma. Another, a disembodied foot with the wounds of bloodletting, looks like the



**Figure 4.16.** Preconquest artist(s) (Nahuas; possibly Aztecs), bench reliefs, Postclassic period, in situ in the Tepozteco Temple, Morelos. Stone, once painted. The motifs here are organized by theme: (a) *pulque* motifs (shield, copper ax bundle, and vessel); (b) lord's paraphernalia (crown, turquoise nose "buttons," and dog funerary pendant); (c) dismembered body parts (foot, finger, skull, and ear); (d) Xipe face and fertility deity headdress with folded paper "fan" on back; (e) other warrior paraphernalia (knife bundle worn on shoulder and shield and darts); (f) other bundles. Because they lack color, the types of liquids attached to all motifs cannot be identified. (They could be water, *pulque*, or blood.) (Drawings by author after Seler 1990–1998b: figures 14–21)

name glyph of Tizoc (Figure 4.16c, first image). A third, a profile head with water pouring down its front, resembles Axayacatl's glyph (Figure 4.16d, first image). In all cases, however, other interpretations are indicated. The lines on the face with water point to those of the god Xipe Totec; the disembodied foot is found elsewhere in relief sculptures, strewn with other body parts across a surface, sometimes water; and the lord's crown and nose

decoration are depicted on a lord's funerary bundle (Figure 4.17). When used to form the king's name glyph, the latter emblems are arranged as if on a face (Figure 4.11); here they are not. At the Tepozteco, they recall the royal crown floating on the floodwaters of the city in Figure 4.8. So although the temple had a general association with ruler deaths and the plunge into darkness, Ahuitzotl's death is the only one memorialized on it.

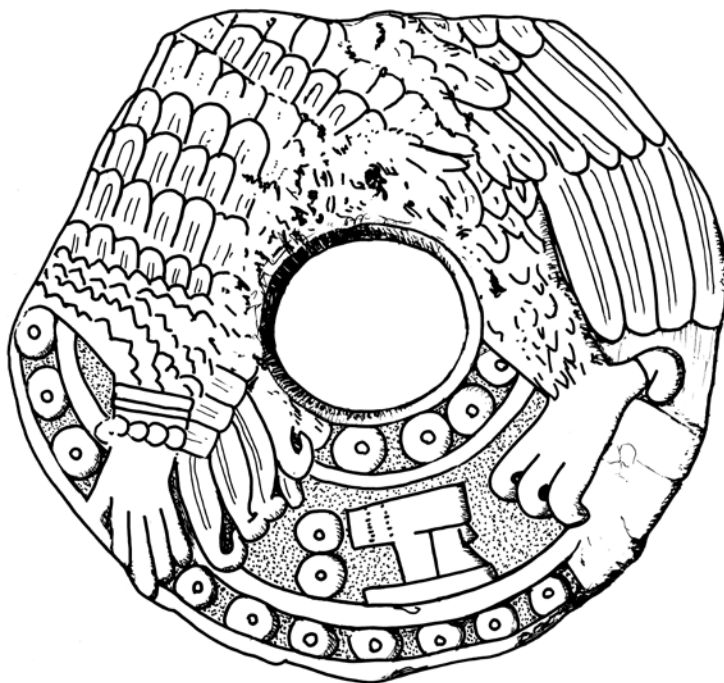
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**Figure 4.17.** Unknown colonial native artist, depiction of a lord’s funerary bundle (Codex Magliabechiano [ca. 1561], folio 72). The bundled corpse is wearing a lord’s crown, a turquoise nose “button,” paper costume parts, and the image of a dog around its neck. It is facing a vessel probably containing *pulque*, a dismembered arm, knotted paper or cloth bundles, and two musicians. (Drawing by author after Anders et al. 1996b)

The year 2 Reed, when fertility returned to the basin, was also memorialized in Tepoztlan, as evidenced by three sculptures. A pierced 2 Reed sculpture was seen in 1976 set into a wall outside the Museo Arqueológico de Tepoztlan (Umberger 1981:figure 108); and a plaque inside the museum may have originally represented 2 Reed. (Only one dot is present.) Two Reed was not a common inscription before 1507, so these examples probably date from that year. Both lack the rope motif and the accompanying 1 Rabbit date that would make the connection to 1507 certain, but the motifs on yet another sculpture

said to be from Tepoztlan support the probability. This sculpture is a ball court ring (Figure 4.18), on which are represented the solar eagle and the date 2 House. These motifs also occur together on Motecuhzoma’s pyramidal throne of 2 Reed (1507), where they refer to a refoundation of the rebuilt Tenochtitlan and the return of fertility. Extending the idea further, it should be noted that both the pyramid throne in Figure 4.12 and the temple on the cliff refer to the high place of rulership, but whereas Ahuizotl fell from the high place, Motecuhzoma’s throne celebrates the restoration of the Tenochca Dynasty, with the sun on



**Figure 4.18.** Preconquest Aztec artist(s), ball court ring said to be from Tepoztlan, representing a person in an eagle costume and the date 2 House, both motifs associated with the foundation of Tenochtitlan and the new cycle monument in Figure 4.12. Material, dimensions, and present location unknown. (Drawing by author after Seler 1990–1998b)

the seat back represented as at the zenith above the mountain/pyramid. (See Umberger 1987b on solar metaphors.)

The final example of a provincial monument commemorative of events in Tenochtitlan is a petroglyph at Acacincó (modern Acatzingo de la Piedra) (Figure 4.19) in the southern Toluca Valley, in the state of Mexico, east of the Tepozteco (Barlow 1946). Its reference to the 1507 cycle beginning is clear, as is the connection of this event to the flow of water. The relief is located on a high hill amid a group of ruins recently studied by Mexican archaeologists (Zúñiga 2010).<sup>17</sup> Next to the figure portrayed, the dates 1

Rabbit and 2 Reed together can only refer to the cycle change of 1507 (even though, as with the dates at Tepoztlan, the knotted rope is absent). The main image, a frontal figure seated with crossed legs, is not a god seen before in Aztec art but a new invention. It is an enlarged version of the ancient being on the jade necklaces worn by the archaizing Tlaloc sculptures commissioned by Motecuhzoma during the dry years before the cycle change. The relationship of these pendants to the Acacincó figure is reinforced by the presence of a pendant between the carved figure's hands and the hole immediately below it, the type of hole where the Aztecs

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**Figure 4.19.** Preconquest Aztec artist(s), monumental carving on rock of a seated figure, 1507, in situ, Cerro Malinche, state of Mexico. The carving is an enlarged image of the figure on an antique picture-jade of the type worn on beaded necklaces by the rain god Chacmool (Figure 4.10) and other sculptures in Tenochtitlan. Next to the figure are the dates 1 Rabbit and 2 Reed (1506 and 1507), the years marking the end of one year cycle and the beginning of the next, during which fertility returned to the Basin of Mexico. (Drawing by author after a photograph by Enrique Juan Palacios, 1925, in an archived scrapbook at the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, Mexico City; photographed by author in 1976)

characteristically put a piece of jade to represent the heart. (The hole here no longer holds a jade and the carvings on the pendant are not visible.) How was this new supernatural being conceived by the Aztecs? I cannot say with present knowledge, but the connection with water and fertility is made clear by the monument's location next to a spring.

Tollan and Tepoztlan were ancient Nahuatl sites that had sacred, ancestral links to Aztec culture. The placement of imperial imagery in these locations is thus understandable. But why was the monument to renewed fertility and water created at Acacincó in the southern Valley of Toluca? What was the significance of this location? Was there once

a tradition connecting it with the Basin of Mexico? Did the Aztecs conceive of a subterranean river between the two areas as proposed in the case of the Tula reliefs? Given its location, one cannot help but suspect that there was also a connection with the most noteworthy geological feature in this area, the nearby Nevado de Toluca (Xinantecatl), a huge extinct volcano with two lakes in its crater. According to ethnographic evidence collected by Alejandro Roblés García (2009), the present native inhabitants of the area consider this mountain to be connected to the ocean and the locus for water control across the broad area of highland central Mexico. Do these ideas date back to pre-Hispanic times? They must, given the sixteenth-century records of Aztec ideas about subterranean waters and their ultimate connection to the greater bodies of the ocean seas. As the source of water control in central Mexico, the Nevado de Toluca would have been especially important after the flood of 1499.

Given this mountain's importance, one might expect an Aztec temple complex at the top, but there are no traces of such a structure. This is actually not surprising, given the lack of Aztec structures on the other high mountain peaks in central Mexico, even Popocatepetl, Ixtaccihuatl, and Tlaloc, which formed the eastern border of the Aztecs' basin. Mount Tlaloc, which was dedicated to the principal rain god, does have a temple on its summit, but it is a pre-Aztec temple that the Aztecs attributed to the Toltecs. Perhaps more significant is

the fact that the top of Mount Tlaloc was controlled by no single contemporary polity. Although it was the objective of pilgrimages by the basin rulers, they shared it with enemy Nahua polities from the Puebla Valley to the east. Perhaps these high mountain zones were conceived as pertaining to the gods (and the Toltecs, as original owners of the land), while the shrines of contemporary human polities (for example, those at Malinalco and Calixtlahuaca in the Toluca Valley and those at Tetzcotzinco and Chapultepec in the basin) were on lower peaks. Rulers were intermediaries between human populations and the gods, but they were also *macehuales* (subjects, tributaries) of the gods (see Hicks 1982:232). Roblés García (2009) described such a hierarchy among the central Mexican peaks, with the highest mountains dominating and controlling broad areas and with lower peaks in secondary and tertiary positions and having local connections. In other words, whereas the powers of the high mountains crossed political boundaries, the powers of the lower peaks did not.

### Final Thoughts

From the evidence explored in this paper, it seems that the Aztecs considered their environmental problems as tied to factors of weather and terrain in areas covering the broader expanse of central Mexico, and their efforts to control these areas beyond the basin involved the installation of their own weather gods in the landscape. Control of an area required negotiations with its sacred forces

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as well as the living inhabitants. The extent to which these and other ideational factors were behind Aztec expansion into more distant areas is unknown. Nor is it known how their ideas and actions might have changed over time. As it is, at the time of the Spanish conquest, the installation of deities in the landscape of the more distant parts seems to have been limited to the small shrines of colonists to keep local agricultural conditions favorable, while the empire's involvement with the landscape was still centered on

the capital and the Inner Empire surrounding it.

## **Acknowledgments**

I am grateful to John Pohl and Claire Lyons for inviting me to participate in this project, to Walter Scheidel for sharing his ideas on the developmental stages of imperial polities, to Mike Smith for involving me in the Calixtlahuaca Project, to Stacie Widdfield for promoting the study of water and art in Mexico, and to Barbara Mundy for extended discussions of Aztec water control.

## **Notes**

- 1 Conversion was principally for reasons of administration, not religion, and was restricted to mostly Otomi in the basin and the Inner Empire.
- 2 At least not yet. However, see Sergheraert (2009) for archaeological remains of possible Huitzilopochtli shrines, identified by the presence of Aztec-style architectural *clavos* (tenons), usually displayed on the upper facades of temple shrines.
- 3 There were originally many more of these, some the commissions of different local commoners and nobles and others imperial commissions, notably at Chapultepec and Tetzcotzinco. After the Spanish conquest, the basin sites especially suffered the iconoclastic attacks of the Catholic Church. Images on rocks are thus the only remains, and some of these have been damaged also. Portable sculptures were removed or destroyed more easily.
- 4 See Umberger (2008:96–98), for examples representing changes in the appearance of both patron deities and historical men.
- 5 See also Barnes 2016; Townsend 1979; Umberger 2008; and Wicke 1976.
- 6 See DiCesare (2009) on the historical specificity of the Ochpaniztli ceremony in 2 Reed (1507). See Umberger (2002) on the sequence of historical and ceremonial events in Tenochtitlan between 1483 and 1487.
- 7 The date 7 Reed is found on one sculpture (Berrera and López 2008:page 24, top).
- 8 The remains he found may also incorporate colonial phases (Barbara Mundy, personal communication 2013). I am not aware of them having been studied by later archaeologists, and I do not know whether they still exist.
- 9 On the Acuecuexatl Stone, see also Barnes (2016).
- 10 There are sculptures that may relate to Ahuitzotl's burial in Tenochtitlan, but the imagery of sculptures and references in written sources of this period are ambiguous and contradictory. See López Lújan's study of these (2010).



- 11 The shape of the speech scroll in front of the implied “face” of the glyph forms a reference to the feathered serpent.
- 12 See Maxwell and Hanson (1992:176–177, 182–183) for the usage of the phrase *high place* in relation to rulership. It is often used to signify a pyramid, a hill, or a throne (Umberger 2007b, 2010 [1984]) but not specifying one over another. However, the visualization of the concept of the pyramid-mountain as a throne is seen in this sculpture and in small clay versions.
- 13 No doubt the area around Tollan was plagued by the same problems at the time (Terry Stocker, personal communication 2013).
- 14 Mastache 1976; Mastache et al. 2002; Rojas Rabiela et al. 2009; Sahagún 1950–1982 [1575–1578]11:247–248; 1979 [1575–1578]:3:book 11, folio 233. On Aztec ideas about water, see also Arnold 1999 and López Austin 1977.
- 15 On the political significance of noble drinking in Nahua Puebla, see Pohl (1998); on Moquihuix’s fall, see Umberger (2007b).
- 16 Unfortunately, the reliefs cannot be dated by style. Bench reliefs, even those in Tenochtitlan, tend to be rather roughly carved, even during the reign of Axayacatl after the perfection of the imperial styles (López Luján 2006:1:104). The Tepoztlan benches were originally plastered and painted, and the paint was visible when they were excavated in 1895 (Rodríguez 1895). The colors, which have long since disappeared, may have provided additional information.
- 17 The archaeologists did not recognize the sculpture as dating from the new cycle year or any other possible links to water and Tenochtitlan. One large rock cut out like a room of some sort was popularly called Cama de Moctezuma, according to a label below a 1925 photograph by Enrique Palacios in an album in the office of the director of INAH. It would be interesting to know if other oral information in relation to it still exists in the area. I am grateful to Eduardo Matos for allowing me access to this volume in 1976.

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## 5

**Dramatic Performance and the Theater  
of the State:  
The Cults of the Divus Triumphator,  
Parthenope, and Quetzalcoatl**

**John M. D. Pohl**

**T**raditionally, the conquest of the Aztec Empire came to be celebrated in popular art and literature as resulting from the use of superior technologies together with the sheer bravado of a few hundred men under the command of Hernán Cortés. However, more sophisticated, scholarly studies have shown that the military and political strategies were far more complex and were rooted in the campaigns of the Reconquista of the Iberian Peninsula and the Aragonese claim to the kingdom of Naples, together with the subsequent entrance of Spain into the Italian Renaissance wars between 1494 and 1559 (Pohl 2001a:10–20; 2015; Pohl and Robinson 2005:34–38). Historians now focus on tactics of divide and conquer, for example, by which Ferdinand and Isabella first succeeded in playing Islamic factions in southern

Spain against each other until, so weakened by internal dissent, the last remaining kingdom of Granada was subjugated in 1492 (Edwards 2004; Prescott 1851; Thomas 2003:3–26).

Profits from the Granada campaign were then reinvested into an extraordinary adventure, the four expeditions of Columbus to the Caribbean between 1492 and 1504, together with those of other entrepreneurs, such as Pinzón, which not only reaped returns in gold and slaves but also opened up entire continents to Spanish colonization (Sauer 1966: 70–160; Thomas 2003:137, 424). As king of Aragon, Ferdinand II was immediately aware of the implications of this windfall, and he capitalized on his financial successes by directing his attention to the kingdom of Naples, a domain that extended across more than

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one-third of the Italian Peninsula and to which his father's brother Alfonso V had first established a claim as an adopted heir (Edwards 2004:48–67; Prescott 1851:291–305; Ryder 1990:92–94; Thomas 2003:150–152).

In 1495 Ferdinand dispatched an army to Italy under the command of Gonzalo Fernández de Córdoba (Edwards 2004:107–114; Prescott 1851:3:300–340; Purcell 1962:104–119). After suffering a devastating defeat at the hands of Swiss mercenary pike men, Córdoba reorganized the Spanish army into battle units of offensive gunners, swordsmen, and pike men called *colunelas*, who could blast holes in the ranks of the opposition, allowing the swordsmen to repeatedly charge into the ensuing melee, break down the enemy phalanx, and withdraw under the protection of the pikes (Pohl 2015). In this way, Córdoba transformed the Spanish army into the formidable fighting machine that emerged triumphant with the ultimate defeat of the French at the Battle of Garigliano in 1504 (Burke 1877:128–150; Edwards 2004:113; Livesey 1987:46–51). Appointed the first viceroy of Naples, he displayed an elegant personal style, exerting a rare sense of diplomacy to encourage his opponents to come to honorable terms rather than having their cities sacked and burned as the rules of war dictated. As ruthless as the conquistadors would later become, they thereby learned the art of war, as well as diplomacy and coalition building, from the man they would always remember by his honorific title, *El gran capitán*, meaning “The Great Captain.” (Purcell 1962).

Cortés had considered joining Córdoba but perceived greater financial rewards in the Caribbean campaigns (López de Gómara 1966:8). Nevertheless, many of his troops were experienced veterans of the Italian wars, and the tactics they had developed to fight the French and their Swiss mercenaries were ideally suited to the massed assaults of Aztec light infantry formations that could number in the tens of thousands (Pohl 2001b:24–29).<sup>1</sup> But tactics were only part of the strategy. Both disease and the exploitation of political factionalism played an equal role. Smallpox not only killed thousands of citizens, it also devastated the political structures of ruling families to such an extent that by 1521, Cortés had become a kind of kingmaker, appointing his own successors to the thrones of disaffected allies as the incumbents still loyal to the empire expired. What had begun as a Spanish military adventure had been transformed into an indigenous civil war (Hassig 1994:152–153; Matthew and Oudijk 2007; Pohl 2002; Restall 2004; Thomas 1993:444–445, 592–593).

A significant but generally underestimated aspect of Cortés's political strategy was the exploitation of indigenous religious ideology, particularly legends surrounding the prophecy of a returning triumphant hero or god who would reclaim his kingdom in Mexico. Cortés alluded to the legend in his second letter to Charles V; his secretary Francisco López de Gómara identified the god more specifically as Quetzalcoatl in his biography of Cortés (López de Gómara 1966:58; Pagden 1986:85–86). The most detailed

account of the Aztec veneration of Cortés comes from the Aztec people themselves and is recorded in Book 12 of the Florentine Codex (Anderson and Dibble 1978:12–16). When Cortés arrived off the coast of Veracruz, he received the ambassadors of Motecuhzoma shipboard. After “kissing the earth” in recognition of his position as the Spanish leader, they announced the purpose of their mission and stepped forward to dress Cortés in the array of the god Quetzalcoatl, including a turquoise mosaic snake mask, a head fan of quetzal feathers, gold and jade jewelry, a tunic, and a cape. Further, they displayed the ritual clothing of the gods Tlaloc, Tezcatlipoca, and Ehecatl on the ship’s deck before him. The affectation of the qualities of a deity by ritual impersonators had profound significance for the Aztecs. For example, in the city of Cholula, a slave was dressed as the god Quetzalcoatl each year (Durán 1971:131–133). This deity impersonator was venerated as the incarnation of the god for 40 days, at the end of which time he was sacrificed during the great feast dedicated to the god and sponsored by the city’s leading merchants. Likewise, a slave was dressed as Tezcatlipoca in Tenochtitlan each year and venerated as the living incarnation of the god on earth until the time of the Feast of Toxcatl, at which time he was ritually slain (Sahagún 1952–1981:2:66–67). To indigenous observers, the dressing of Cortés could be interpreted as the veneration of a deity impersonator dedicated to sacrifice. On the other hand, the impersonation of a deity reinforced the authority of political

office. Tenochtitlan’s high priest was addressed as the Cihuacoatl, or Snake Woman, and the individual who held the position was known to dress as the goddess for which he was named during public ceremonies (Durán 1994:424). Perhaps the most significant, however, was the affectation of the ritual dress of the Aztec patron god himself by the *huey tlatoani*, or emperor. A famous sacrificial stone graphically portrays the emperor Tizoc wearing the guise of the patron god Huitzilopochtli while capturing the deities of foreign city-states (Pasztory 1983:150; Wicke 1976) (Figure 5.1). The monument places the emperor in the pivotal role as the supreme military leader, responsible for “bringing home the war” and its ritual reenactment and the source from which all the blessings of the imperial conquest strategy flowed (Pohl 2002:10–11).

By the time Cortés had reached Tlaxcala, he was being compared to Quetzalcoatl by a confederacy of city-states extending from Tlaxcala through Puebla to the Pacific coast of Oaxaca. Calling themselves the Children of the Plumed Serpent, they maintained a principal cult shrine at the pilgrimage and merchant center of Cholula (Pohl 2003a; Pohl et al. 2012). After an initial series of hostilities—for Cortés had mistakenly sent the Tlaxcalteca lords a “gift” of a crossbow, which had been interpreted as a declaration of war—the Tlaxcalteca allied themselves with Cortés and marched on Cholula, slaughtering the inhabitants loyal to the Aztec faction there and appointing Cortés the lord of the city

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**Figure 5.1.** The Aztec emperor Tizoc is represented in the guise of Huitzilopochtli capturing the patron god (or lord) of an opposing kingdom on the Stone of Tizoc, preserved in the Museo Nacional de Antropología, Mexico City. (Photo by author)

(Thomas 1993:235, 261–264). To what extent Cortés initially understood the complexities of Aztec heroic legends any better than the protocol for royal gift giving is unknown, but he could not have failed to grasp the basic significance of the role into which he was being cast. The fact that the Lienzo de Tlaxcalteca

depicts Cortés dressed in a quetzal-feather headdress receiving the surrender of the last Aztec emperor, Cuauhtemoc, indicates that the conquistador understood perfectly well the function of ritual dress in the public presentation of a divine persona by the conclusion of his campaign (Figure 5.2). Nevertheless, the idea that



**Figure 5.2.** Cortés appears in the guise of the god Quetzalcoatl, wearing a quetzal-feather crown in the Lienzo de Tlaxcala. (Drawing by author)

indigenous peoples would seriously regard Cortés as a god has caused many historians, in particular, to dismiss the accounts of the use of myth and divinity as a political strategy by the Spaniards out of hand. (See Lockhart 1992:603–604 for discussion.) The debate could benefit less from attributing such beliefs to colonial

assumptions about “primitivism” and more from considering direct comparisons to the strategies of deity impersonation deployed by the politicians of comparable theater states, not only from the time of antiquity but during the time of the Spanish conquest itself.

The earlier Spanish claim to southern Italy was in fact rooted not in any hereditary Christian right to the kingdom of Naples but rather in more ancient and equally pagan Graeco-Roman traditions, including the *Odyssey*, invoked by Alfonso V of Aragon. Born in 1396, Alfonso V succeeded to the throne of Aragon at age 20 and claimed Sardinia and Sicily by hereditary right, as well as contended the Genoese claim to Corsica. An ambitious politician, he persuaded the childless Queen Joanna II of the kingdom of Naples to adopt him in 1421 as her heir to counter the claims of the pretender Louis III of Anjou, advocated by Pope Martin V (Pohl 2015; Ryder 1990:93). When Joanna and Alfonso fell into dispute two years later, the queen rejected him and named Louis her heir. Alfonso was forced to withdraw to Aragon until 1435, after both Joanna and Louis had died, leaving Naples to René of Anjou, Louis’s brother (Ryder 1990:198). The stakes were high, for Alfonso was in a position to add Naples to his existing claims and thereby to dominate the western Mediterranean. He then returned, and war ensued between the two rivals for seven years, until 1441, when Alfonso finally laid siege to Naples, sacked the city, and staged a Classical Roman-style triumphal entry into Naples to publicly

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display the legitimacy of his claims to its citizens (Ryder 1990:248–251). It was a remarkable act of statecraft, not only for its spectacle but because it invoked pagan myth rather than Christian law in supporting Alfonso's legitimacy to the population of his new kingdom as *divus*, a title of divinity attributed to Roman emperors following the apotheosis of Julius Caesar and the establishment of a temple cult dedicated to his memory by proclamation of the Senate.

From the very outset of the Renaissance, Alfonso was an early patron of art, history, and literature who sought to affirm Naples's predominance over rival Italian states by transforming the city into a lively cultural center. As count of Barcelona, he would have had firsthand knowledge of the size and scale of early imperial Roman architecture displayed in the ruins of the second-century amphitheater of Tarragona. As king of Naples, he regularly organized excursions to visit ruins, such as the House of Ovid at Sulmona, for distinguished noble visitors, including the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick III (Ryder 1990:314, 355). This passion for antiquities extended to such extremes that in the midst of the siege of Gaeta, he stopped his men from producing projectiles from the stones of what he believed to be the remains Cicero's house (Ryder 1990:314). An enthusiastic collector of ancient coins, Alfonso commissioned no less a master than Pisanello to create a commemorative portrait medal portraying him as a military conqueror. Surviving correspondence indicates that he had Donatello create a bronze

equestrian statue of him, part of which may still exist as the great bronze horse's head preserved in the Museo Nazionale in Naples (Hersey 1973:53–54). All of the thoughts, plans, and technical expertise were in place to establish Alfonso as the pioneer in the art of theatrical statecraft that would later come to distinguish the emerging Renaissance not only in Italy but in Spain as well (Figure 5.3).<sup>2</sup>

Alfonso possessed a personal library of works by Livy, Plutarch, Ovid, Virgil, Cicero, Seneca, and others who described the use of architectural wonders by Pompey, Caesar, and Augustus in their roles as the impresarios of Roman political stagecraft. In 1443 he conceived an ingenious program of legitimacy for himself by sponsoring the largest civic construction project of the age: a triumphal arch at the Castel Nuovo, the city's principal fortification (Figure 5.4). Designed by Francesco Laurana, the structure was inspired by a first-century triumphal arch standing in the city of Pula in Laurana's homeland of Croatia (Hersey 1973:34–37). The panel surmounting the arch features a relief depicting the Spanish monarch entering Naples in the manner of a Classical hero commemorating his triumphal entry into the city after besieging it. Alfonso appears riding in a wheeled car pulled by a team of four horses (Beyer 2000:30–35; Hersey 1973:46–48) (Figure 5.5). The scene is directly comparable in design to the procession of Constantine appearing on the triumphal arch of the first Christian emperor at the ruins of the Forum in Rome. Both Alfonso and Constantine wear a



**Figure 5.3.** Drawing for medal commemorating Alfonso V designed by Pisanello, ca. 1445. Codex Vallardi, Louvre Museum (Wikimedia Commons)

sleeved, ankle-length garment. Each is seated in a high-backed chair mounted directly to the platform of a carriage that travels through a crowd of followers surrounding on foot (Figure 5.6).

A second work commissioned for the castle's Hall of the Barons commemorated the same event, but Alfonso was careful to show the procession passing before Naples re-created as a Classical Roman city featuring the first-century Roman temple of the hero twins Castor and Pollux. The facade of the temple in fact stood in the city until 1666, at which time it fell during an earthquake. Contemporary architectural studies and later copies detail the structure's six principal columns, some of which were subsequently incorporated into the Church

of San Paolo Maggiore (Beyer 2000:35–40). Curiously, the sculptor added another building to the ancient Roman skyline. The stacked levels of columns and the curvature of the profile suggest that it was intended to represent a theater. A theater once stood in Neapolis, the original name for the city, but it is very unlikely that any vestige of the structure was visible in Alfonso's time. Therefore it's at least conceivable that the designer of the panel was also drawing comparison to the two most important standing works of architecture in ancient Rome itself, the Pantheon and the Colosseum.

Perhaps the most remarkable work of art that would be commissioned, however, was either never completed or has been lost. Although Alfonso's library was

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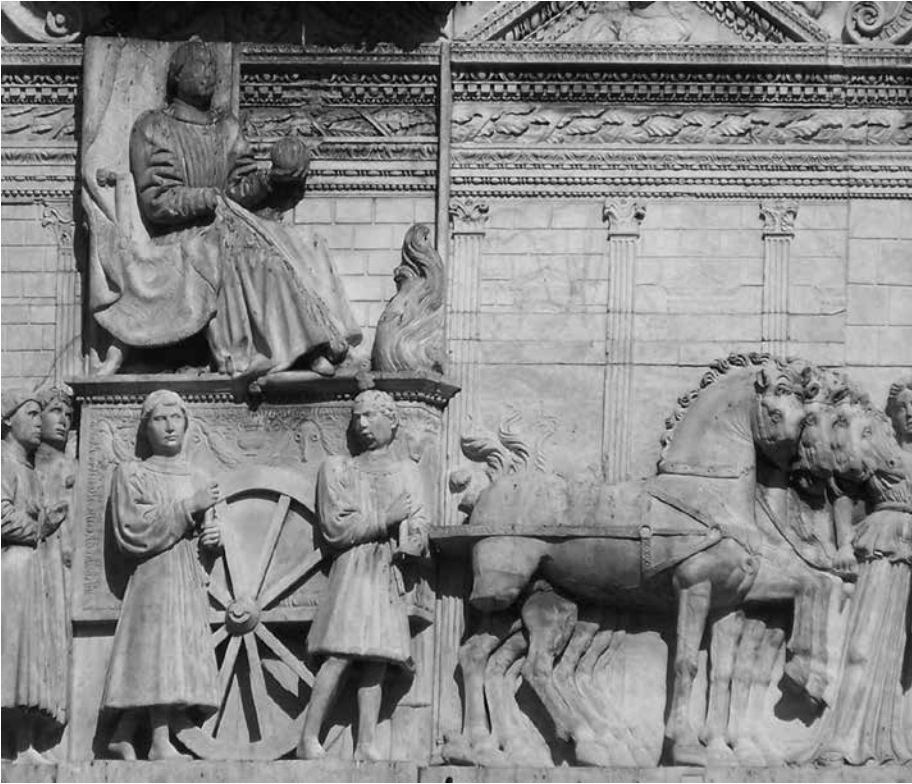


**Figure 5.4.** The Arch of Alfonso at the Castel Nuovo, Naples, Italy. This portion was completed ca. A.D. 1455. (Photo by author)

destroyed in the Allied bombing of Naples during World War II, surviving copies of his papers and notes describe a large reclining statue of Parthenope, one of the Sirens of the Greek epic the *Odyssey* (Beyer 1994, 2000:13–19). According to various accounts of the legend, including a remarkable fifth-century B.C. representation on an Attic vessel recovered in Italy, Ulysses and his men had angered the sea god Neptune when they blinded his son, the Cyclops Polyphemus, at the outset of their journey home to Ithaca after the fall of Troy. Neptune, among other gods,

then caused Ulysses to wander aimlessly around the Mediterranean for 10 long years. Among the travails the hero and his men endured was an encounter with the Sirens, anthropomorphic birds that sang to sailors from the cliffs of their seaside home near Capua, Italy, driving them mad and causing them to wreck their ships on the rocks below. Desiring to hear the song of the Sirens but also wishing to avoid the fate of those who had gone before, Ulysses ordered his men to tie him to the mast of his ship while they stopped up their ears with beeswax so that they would not be





**Figure 5.5.** Detail of the Arch of Alfonso showing the triumphal entry of Alfonso into Naples. (Photographer unknown, nineteenth century; author's collection)

seduced themselves. Hearing the songs of the bird-women, Ulysses begged his men to untie him, but they resisted and rowed their ship out of danger (Lattimore 2007) (Figure 5.7).

The Siren Parthenope was so devastated by Ulysses's ability to resist her spell that she cast herself into the sea.<sup>3</sup> After three days, her body washed ashore in the Bay of Naples. The local inhabitants erected a tomb and named the Greek city that they founded there Parthenope in her honor. The city suffered a decline in later centuries but was reestablished as Neapolis or Naples, even though the

people continued to refer to themselves Parthenopeans. Third-century B.C. coins bearing a portrait of Parthenope testify to the continuing importance of the goddess as a fundamental symbol of the community into the Roman period, but most importantly, in conceiving the statue, Alfonso would have been inspired by the remnants of monuments and spolia found throughout the city that, by tradition, continue to be identified as images of Parthenope even today (Beyer 2000:39, 122). According to a letter that Alfonso wrote to the cardinal of Aquileia, the statue was to bear an inscription that read,

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**Figure 5.6.** Detail of the Arch of Constantine showing the triumphal entry of Constantine into Rome, dedicated in A.D. 315. (Photographer unknown, nineteenth century; author's collection)

“I, Parthenope, afflicted by so many years of war now rest in peace by the labors of Alfonso.”

Therefore, like the triumphal arch at the Castel Nuovo, the monumental statue of Parthenope was intended to play a significant part in Alfonso's public campaign to support his claims to the kingdom of Naples. Royal titles in medieval Europe were traditionally passed from generation to generation through preferred systems of primogeniture. Most favored male lines, but female lines were also acceptable and might be rooted in earlier, pre-Christian traditions. Females could also inherit if male siblings died without heirs. Consequently, Joanna II succeeded to the throne of Naples when her brother Ladislas was either poisoned or succumbed to disease in 1414. When she herself also failed to produce an

heir, she was pressured by Pope Martin V to accept the head of a related but junior line of descent through the House of Anjou (Ryder 1990:78–80).

By 1443 Alfonso had no real hereditary right to Naples and was placed in the position of having to appeal to its citizens, the true Parthenopeans, who had played a critical role in supporting the claims of both Joanna and her brother in earlier disputes with the House of Anjou. By staging a triumphal entry into Naples and then sponsoring an arch to commemorate the event, Alfonso was invoking the right of a returning Roman general or even emperor, traditionally awarded a triumph by the Senate and the people for extraordinary feats of conquest in the interests of the state, ultimately even taking the title of *divus*, or deified emperor. By commissioning



**Figure 5.7.** Detail of an Attic red-figure *stamnos* by the Siren Painter, portraying Odysseus (Ulysses) tied to the mast of his ship as a spurned siren, possibly Parthenope, casts herself into the sea, 480–470 B.C., from Vulci. (Courtesy the British Museum, inv. no. 1843,1103.31)

a monumental sculpture of Parthenope with his inscription, he would have directly connected the theme of the returning hero, possibly even alluding to Ulysses himself as the repentant spurner, back to rescue the patron goddess of the kingdom (Figure 5.8).

Alfonso V's artistic and architectural program therefore directly countered any hereditary and Christian claim by the House of Anjou. He also anticipated by nearly half a century the artistic and architectural achievements of so many Renaissance princes who followed, from

the Medici to Alfonso's own great-grand-nephew the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, in invoking Classical allegory to support their claims to titles and domains they had usurped or conquered. Charles in particular was specifically interested in the rights of a Roman emperor to advocate waging war against the pagan lands beyond the Pillars of Hercules, which he had adopted as his personal emblem by *de juri belli*, the ancient Roman law of justifiable conquest (Pohl and Lyons 2010:13–15). He would

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**Figure 5.8.** Marble medallion preserved in the Victoria and Albert Museum depicting Alfonso of Aragon as a Roman emperor. The accompanying text addresses him as *divus*, or “divine,” a remarkable claim for a mid-fifteenth-century Christian monarch. Alfonso was the first Renaissance patron to promote such self-aggrandizing allusions to antiquity, thereby setting the precedent not only for so many princes who followed but also for conquistadors, who would be proclaimed as gods by indigenous peoples of the Western Hemisphere in their efforts to rationalize new alliances with outsiders. (Photograph by Sailko, Wikimedia Commons)

emphasize his claim to the world as a descendant of another Trojan War hero, Aeneas, and he commissioned works that portrayed him as the hero’s impersonator.

Simply put, Spain’s claim on southern Italy, which drew the emerging Iberian nation into the Italian Renaissance wars, was ultimately rooted in rituals associated with the pagan traditions of Classical

Rome and the Greek myth of a goddess from the *Odyssey*. From this perspective, one could argue that it would be surprising if Cortés, a true son of this new political and ideological environment, would not invoke the legend of a returning hero bent on conquest if it would further his goals. Controversy has surrounded the account ever since

the publication of Cortés's letters. For centuries afterward, scholarly interpretations proclaimed that the prophecy had caused Emperor Motecuhzoma, otherwise known for his extraordinary capabilities as a political and military leader, to accede his role as servant to the returning god and merely temporary caretaker of his domain.

This was never a very satisfactory scenario, and subsequent historians and anthropologists have emphasized that the cult of Quetzalcoatl was hardly a significant component of cult worship at Tenochtitlan, that Cortés himself never wrote of being venerated as Quetzalcoatl specifically, and that the accounts of the return of the god with regard to the fall of the Aztec Empire were colonial in date. This led some scholars to conclude that the myth of Quetzalcoatl was a colonial invention to explain the drastically reduced circumstances that the Aztecs found themselves in after nearly a century of being the masters of the known world (Gillespie 1989:173–207; Restall 2004:1112–1113). Others have emphasized that although so many accounts of Quetzalcoatl, at least from central Mexico, might be colonial in date, they were so widespread and consistent in the basic characteristics of narrative that they could not have been invented in so short a time without being rooted in a more ancient pre-Columbian tradition (Nicholson 2001:xxix–lxi).

We have seen how the identity of the Mexica patron god Huitzilopochtli was affected by the Aztec *huey tlatoani*, or emperor, himself. Elsewhere I have

proposed that Mesoamerican creation stories and heroic legends associated with Huitzilopochtli, Tezcatlipoca, and Quetzalcoatl described the origins of the universe and in so doing accounted for the movements of peoples and their claims to land and property, as well as prescribed rituals and established codes for cooperative behavior (Pohl 2003a). Being just as much a product of ritual as they were a source, heroic histories blended factual accounts with mythic traditions. They were recounted in multiple, even conflicting variations but were always filled with enough detail as to suggest that they could be based on historical events. If there was no established tradition, a hero could even be invented and patterned to reflect newly adopted ideals. This was how religion bound together both the human and divine inhabitants of a place.

Since the stories were sanctified by religious ritual, they could be used to incite patriotic sentiments. The spiritual connection to gods, heroes, and ancestors maintained through their cults transcended differences in language and culture among diverse peoples and could be comparable to claims of nationality that contemporary societies use to define a state. From this perspective, the legend of Quetzalcoatl can be directly compared to the use of ancient myths in the creation of leagues of Classical Greek city-states, for example, not to mention the ability to inspire the sentiments of the citizenry of a Renaissance kingdom like Naples, who continued to honor the pagan ancestral traditions on

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which their local identity was originally founded, together with their dedication to a greater Christian faith.

While the cult of Quetzalcoatl may not have played a significant role in the ritualism of Tenochtitlan, Motecuhzoma would have had much to be concerned about with regard to the manner in which the god was regarded throughout so many of the domains that the Aztecs had conquered. The odyssey of Quetzalcoatl following his banishment from Tollan was revered by more than a dozen different ethnic groups throughout southern Mexico, who claimed that the penitent hero had traveled through their kingdoms to establish his presence as a devotional figure, particularly at the city of Cholula. This new Tollan was venerated throughout Mesoamerica as a major market, pilgrimage center, and source of religious and political cohesion. The appeal of the cult of Quetzalcoatl was that it transcended all local religious customs and bound ethnically diverse peoples together into homogenous social and political units. This in turn facilitated the expansion of marriage alliances dominated by the Eastern Nahuas, Mixtecs, and Zapotecs and the expansion of economic corridors of exchange throughout southern and eastern Mexico as far as lower Central America. Given the manner by which myth and history were blended in Mesoamerican thought, the existence of Quetzalcoatl as a historical individual might remain a source of debate. Nevertheless, archaeologists have shown that the innovations in political organization, wealth,

and technology attributed to the culture hero were certainly real enough. During a period of political decentralization after A.D. 1200, the southern Mexican highlands witnessed the rise of scores of independent royal estates, along with an extraordinary emphasis on finely crafted works of portable art in precious metals, gems, polychrome ceramics, textiles, and feather work, which moved along strategic alliance corridors through bride wealth, dowries, and other forms of gift exchange (Pohl 2003b).

The Children of the Plumed Serpent would have had a substantial investment in invoking Quetzalcoatl's cult both during and following the Spanish conquest of the Aztec Empire. The Tlaxcalteca, the Eastern Nahuatl league that had been cut off from its alliance partners in Puebla and Oaxaca by the double envelopment of the Aztec Empire, quickly perceived the advantages in backing Cortés. Following the Cholula massacre, they heralded Cortés as a conquering hero when he appointed a new king favorable to their interests and marched on Tenochtitlan to ultimately besiege the Aztecs in the longest continuous battle in military history (Hassig 1994:80–81).

Subsequently, many kingdoms engaged the new colonial order peacefully under the leadership of caciques. The evangelization of the Children of Quetzalcoatl was given largely to the Franciscan and later to the Dominican order, which sent missionaries to all the ranking noble houses from Tlaxcala to Oaxaca. Acting as mediators between

the Crown and the indigenous caciques who actually controlled the land, the Dominicans in particular eventually succeeded in forming the most productive partnerships (Spores 1967, 1984; Terraciano 2001). Southern Mexico became the land of opportunity. The caciques capitalized on the new Habsburg world system by engaging in lucrative long-distance trading ventures, gaining monopolies over the transportation of international goods moving from Manila to Spain via overland routes through Mexico.

Obviously, Cortés himself would never write about being treated as a deity to Charles V. He left this to his biographer and indigenous writers, who later composed their own accounts of the events. More importantly, for Cortés to admit to participating in such ritualism would be tantamount to declaring himself an autonomous king in rebellion against the Holy Roman Emperor, an accusation that was already being made by some of his own men, as well as by Governor Velasquez of Cuba. However, the subsequent successes experienced by the Eastern Nahuas, Mixtecs, and Zapotecs when they enthusiastically participated in the conquest of Michoacán, Jalisco, Nayarit Chiapas, and Guatemala are well documented (Matthew and Oudijk 2007). At the same time Cortés was named Marques del Valle de Oaxaca, indigenous caciques expanded their domains, built lavish palaces, and dedicated churches. They dressed as Spaniards, rode horses, and acquired new titles to suit their elevated positions, such

as Lord Seven Monkey of Yanhuitlan, who became Domingo de Guzmán, the name of the saint and founder of the Dominican order. The cacique of Tilantongo became Felipe de Austria, a title of the king of Spain, while the Zapotec cacique of Tehuantepec became Don Juan de Cortés, adopting the surname of the conquistador-commander himself.

It took nothing less than sheer ingenuity and political skill to co-opt the strategies of the European nobility and yet simultaneously preserve indigenous traditions. For the most part, this was accomplished peacefully, but in 1550 a rebellion broke out among the *cacicazgos* of Oaxaca. Significantly, it was inspired by the proclamation of a second coming of the god Quetzalcoatl (Gay 1986:202–203). Today, like Naples and its cult of Parthenope, the legacy of Quetzalcoatl at Cholula can be seen everywhere throughout the city. The Church of San Gabriel towering above the city's main plaza is constructed from masonry blocks originally used to construct the Temple of Quetzalcoatl.<sup>4</sup> The responsibility of sponsoring the principal cult festival of the city once dedicated to Quetzalcoatl continues to be shared among majordomos from the ranking merchant families of the city, and the festival is held in conjunction with the largest indigenous market in North America, where 200,000 merchants gather annually in the plaza of the deity who was proclaimed to be the Mexican Mercury, the Roman god of commerce (Pohl 2003b) (Figure 5.9).

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*Le MERCURE des MEXICAINS adoré à CHOLULA sous le nom de QUETZALCOUATL.*

**Figure 5.9.** Quetzalcoatl is described as the Mercury of the New World at Cholula, in recognition of his role as patron god of commerce. (Eighteenth-century print by Picart; author's collection)

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## Notes

- 1 The experience of the Spaniards in Granada and Italy had a profound effect on the Aztec campaign strategy in general, particularly the development of the *columela* formation under Gonzalo Fernández de Córdoba, a combined unit of gunners, pike men, and swordsmen that later proved so devastating to Aztec military formations (Pohl 2015; Pohl and Robinson 2005:35–38). There were also a number of notable participants in the Italian wars who were later associated with Cortés. For example, Cortés's own father fought with Fernández de Córdoba in Spain and Italy, as had a cousin, Gonzalo Pizarro Rodriguez de Aguilar, father of Francisco Pizarro, the conquistador of Peru (Wood 2002:24). Amador de



Lares served as Fernández de Córdoba's personal steward in Italy before joining Cortés, as had the conquistador Sotelo, who had learned to construct catapults in Italy, and Torbillas, who had served as a pike man in Italy and had learned to construct the lances and pikes the Spaniards used during the Aztec campaign (Prescott 1854:3; Thomas 1993:79, 520). Bernal Díaz del Castillo lists a number of participants in the Aztec campaign in chapter 205 of his account. Many would have been the sons of military professionals who had learned the art of war in the Granada and Italian campaigns, but he specifically notes that conquistador Camillas had served as a drummer in Italy before joining Cortés. Among notable conquistadors operating in the Caribbean at the same time as Cortés was Ávar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, who fought with distinction at the Battle of Ravenna in 1512 before participating in the Narváez expedition to Florida and ultimately surviving captivity in Texas. All of these men would have been quartered at one time or another in the Castel Nuovo in Naples, the political and military headquarters for the Italian kingdom.

- 2 In many ways, Alfonso V of Aragon was both directly and indirectly responsible for laying much of the foundation for the Italian Renaissance world. As Alfonso I of Naples, he was the only king ruling on the peninsula, and he possessed almost limitless resources for the planning of ambitious art and architectural programs inspired by his fascination with the Classical world. His passion led him to introduce Italian arts, fashion, and culture to the royal courts of Spain. In turn, he actively promoted Spaniards into key political and social positions throughout Italy. His Valencian subject Bishop Alfonso de Borja became Pope Callixtus III, while his subject Roderic Llançol i Borja became Pope Alexander VI, patriarch of the Borgia family, which was to dominate the political landscape of Italy throughout the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century.
- 3 Homer referred to the creatures only as Sirens. The name Parthenope appears in the writings of Eustathius and Strabo.
- 4 San Gabriel (together with San Miguel) was frequently compared to Mercury by medieval and Renaissance writers; they were recognized equally as divine messengers (Faivre 2000:22; Rolfe 1962:369).

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## 6

**Aztec and Roman Gods in  
Sixteenth-Century Mexico:  
Strategic Uses of Classical Learning in  
Sahagún's *Historia General***

**Andrew Laird**

In Book 2 of his *Monarchia indiana*, a compendious history of Mexico from its mythical origins to his time of writing in the 1590s, Fray Juan de Torquemada recounted how the *aztecas* left Aztlan, the mythical place from which they originated, and came to be called Mexicans (Barlow 1945), settling in various places before they reached their promised land by a lake. In the course of their long migration, when they reached Apanco, a strange event occurred. A witch named Quilaztli appeared before two of their commanders in the form of a great and beautiful eagle perched on a nopal cactus. The men aimed their arrows at her, but she made fun of them, telling them not to shoot, as she was their sister, of their people, and that they would pay the price if they killed her. On a second occasion, Quilaztli sought to terrify the same two

men, in the guise of a warrior. She spoke to them, revealing her various names:

If you know me as Quilaztli . . . I have four other names by which I know myself. One is “Cohuacihuatl,” which means Serpent Woman; another “Quauhcihuatl,” which means Eagle Woman; another “Yaocihuatl,” which means Warrior Woman; the fourth “Tzitzimicihuatl” means Devil Woman. And by the qualities contained in these four names you will see who I am, the power I have, and the harm I can do you [Torquemada 1975–1983 (1615):1:117; translation by author].

Quilaztli is an unpleasant avatar of the Aztec goddess Cihuacoatl, the Serpent Woman. Sculptures of Cihuacoatl in the

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National Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City include a stone statue from Cuernavaca (ca. A.D. 1325–1521) representing the goddess as emerging from the mouth of a serpent, with an ear of maize in one hand and a snake in the other (Figure 6.1). As Torquemada describes her, Cihuacoatl has a lot in common with a female divinity described in Virgil's *Aeneid*:

Grief-bearing Allecto from the seat of grim goddesses and the infernal darkness, whose heart is set on gloomy war, rage, trickery and baneful crimes . . . so many forms she assumes, so fierce their appearances, so many her black sprouting snakes [Virgil *Aeneid* 7.324–6, 327–8; translation by author].

Allecto, an infernal agent of Discord, is another snake-wielding goddess with many names who can take any form she likes, including that of people known to those she aims to terrorize. She also makes her entrance at the very point that Aeneas and the Trojans are reaching their own promised land of Italy. There is another glancing convergence: Allecto induces Aeneas's son to kill with his arrow a pet stag cherished by the Latin maiden Silvia, directly causing the war between her people and the Trojans.

But the words spoken by Quilaztli strikingly recall those of another Classical figure, who appears in the *Metamorphoses* or *The Golden Ass*, a Latin novel dating from the mid-second century A.D. by the pagan author Apuleius, which



**Figure 6.1.** Cihuacoatl with an ear of maize in one hand and a serpent in the other, from Cuernavaca, ca. 1325–1521. Museo Nacional de Antropología, Mexico City, inv. no. 11-3298. (Wikimedia Commons)

was well-known in a Castilian translation, *Lucio Apuleyo del Asno de oro*, published in 1513 by Diego López de Cortegana (Gaisser 2008:270–276). The translation proved immensely popular in the colony of New Spain before it was proscribed in Gaspar de Quiroga's inquisitorial Index of 1583 (Leonard

1992:248). The *Metamorphoses* ends with a vision of a goddess who wears a crown adorned with coiled serpents, a mirror, and ears of wheat (Figure 6.2). She too explains her multiple identities: Minerva, Venus, Diana, and so on; but the Ethiopians and Egyptians call her by her true name, “Queen Isis.” Then she says to the beleaguered protagonist Lucius: “I am here to take pity on your misfortune, to favour and help

you” (Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 11.5). Torquemada’s Quilaztli, who pledges hindrance and harm rather than providing help, is a pointed inversion of Apuleius’s Isis. Romances or Renaissance demonology could have possibly inspired Torquemada, but Allecto and Isis have the most conspicuous bearing on this construction of a Mexican divinity.

What are we to make of the stealthy intrusion of these Classical models into



Figure 6.2. Apuleius’s description of Isis; in Kircher 1652:189. (Wikimedia Commons)

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an account of the Aztec myth, and of an origin myth to boot? Analogies with Greek and Roman antiquity had long served to explain many aspects of nature and culture in the New World (Gerbi 1985:60–63), so the integration of these new realities into the context of what was familiar in Europe meant that America “shed the very features that defined it as alien and different” (MacCormack 1995:79). Torquemada’s presentation of Cihuacoatl-Quilaztli has complexities that will be revisited at the end of this paper, but in general it could be seen as a more positive attempt to accommodate the unfamiliar, simply because the Aztec goddess cannot be completely identified with either of the Classical figures she recalls. Unlike Allecto, a deputy who does the dirty work for other gods, Quilaztli acts of her own volition; and unlike Isis, the syncretic figure of Quilaztli is far from benign and nurturing. The blending of elements from a familiar, canonical repertoire to convey something new has long been regarded as characteristic of ethnography (Clifford and Marcus 1986).

The following discussion is devoted to some uses of Classical learning in Bernardino de Sahagún’s encyclopedic *Historia general de las cosas de la Nueva España*, or *General History of Things in New Spain*, a principal resource for the history, culture, and beliefs of pre-Hispanic Mexico, which was compiled at least two decades before Torquemada wrote. Sahagún also interviewed native informants for this work, which was redacted with the help of indigenous students who knew Latin as well as Nahuatl and

Spanish. The parallel text in the latter two languages was supplemented by more than 1,800 hand-painted illustrations, which are often crucial to interpretation of the written content. Each book of the *Historia general* was preceded by a prologue to the reader (in Spanish only), to introduce and contextualize the data to follow. As the excerpts from the quotes below will illustrate, the Spanish prologues tend to be a vehicle for the personal views and opinions of Sahagún himself.

Scholars have long been aware of occasional echoes of Classical authors in the *Historia general*, but the aim here is to show that the connections between the Aztec and Roman gods sometimes made by Sahagún were directly related to his missionary endeavor. So too were some less obvious appropriations of Classical and early Christian sources in his history; an examination of these will draw attention to collisions between the Aztec and Graeco-Roman pantheons that reveal something of Sahagún’s methods and hidden agenda.

The ideological climate in which these collisions occurred is important. The imperatives of evangelism, which accompanied the Spanish subjugation of native peoples, were paramount (Boruchoff 2003). The fact that the missionary friars called the Mexican deities “demons,” “devils,” or “false gods” is indicative of a stark polarity that was presupposed between Christianity and all other forms of belief, which was to have a complex reception among the native peoples of New Spain (Cervantes 1991, 1994). But long before it affected indigenous



Mexicans, that polarity had already had consequences for Muslims and Jews, and it had been endorsed by the opposition in medieval jurisprudence between the *populus Romanus* (those who belonged to the Holy Mother Church) and the *populi extranei*, originally the Greeks, Tartars, Saracens, and Jews, who did not (Laird 2009). Theology is often political theory in disguise, but the thinking behind this polarity rested on a very significant and very deliberate step taken in antiquity by the church fathers: they cleverly identified the Greek and Roman gods with the demons driven out by Christ in the Gospels.

Such an identification may look unsurprising, but characterizing the recognized Olympian gods as demons would not have been an obvious move in Rome during the second century A.D. Hitherto, new cults had spread by being absorbed into the civic religion (as was the case with Serapis), by supplementing it (as with Mithras), or through syncretism (as the Greek Dionysus had merged with Liber, the Roman god of wine). Yet the early Christians wanted no truck with the so-called gods of the gentiles. They were persuaded by one of the very first Christian writers, now known as Justin Martyr, who wrote a letter in Greek, entitled the *First Apology*, to the pagan emperor Antonius Pius in the 150s. It proved foundational:

Of old, evil demons, effecting apparitions of themselves, both defiled women and corrupted boys, and showed such fearful sights to men, that those

who did not use their reason in judging of the actions that were done, were struck with terror; and being carried away by fear, and not knowing that these were demons, they called them gods, and gave to each the name which each of the demons chose for himself. . . . For not only among the Greeks were these things condemned by Reason through Socrates, but also among the barbarians by Reason Himself, who took shape and became man, and was called Jesus Christ; and in obedience to Him, we not only deny that they who did such things as these are gods, but assert that they are wicked and impious demons, whose actions will not bear comparison with those even of men desirous of virtue [Minns and Parvis 2009:88–91; translation by author].

In short, Justin maintained that the Greek and Roman gods were really evil demons who, having appeared long ago, had been *mistaken* for gods and even named as gods (such as Jupiter, Apollo, Venus, and others) but that those demons had long ago been exposed by Socrates's arguments and were later condemned, even among the barbarous Jews, by Reason, incarnate in Jesus Christ. Tertullian, Augustine, Jerome, and other Christian fathers inherited this view. A surge of interest in the early church, a defining feature of the European Renaissance (Kristeller 1974:77; Marrou 1976), meant that Justin's original position was widely held in the 1500s. That position resolves an apparent contradiction in the

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thinking of the missionary friars: they maintained that Aztec gods were invented and not real, and yet at the same time they conceived them as potent, pernicious demons. The missionaries' point was that the beings venerated by the Mexicans, just like the pagan deities of Europe, were not gods and were not celestial. They were simply regarded as demons who passed themselves off as gods.

That perspective, though, was concurrent with a fascination for Roman polytheism shared by many Renaissance humanists. The wide dissemination in Spain of Cicero's pagan theological works excited an interest to which educated churchmen would not have been immune (Escobar Chico 1997). In particular, Cicero's dialogue *De natura deorum*, or *On the Nature of the Gods*, which interrogated polytheism from the interlocutors' different philosophical perspectives, provides a fascinating parallel to a dialogical work by Bernardino de Sahagún on a rather comparable theme: The *Coloquios* (*Colloquies*) were an elegant record in Spanish and Nahuatl of exchanges between "the Twelve," the first Franciscan missionaries in Mexico, and some Aztec priests that supposedly took place in 1524 (Klor de Alva 1980; León-Portilla 1986). Like Cicero's dialogue, the *Coloquios* were written up some decades after the conversations they purport to record took place, and stylized rhetoric is a prominent feature of these exchanges. But while in Cicero's Rome divine lore was clearly subordinated to the power of argument, oratory was presented as a *vehicle* for the divine lore

of the Mexica, much as it was for the theology of the Christian friars.

The influence of pagan Roman tradition is evident in the very structure of the first book of Sahagún's *Historia general*, on the Mexican gods. Each of the 22 chapters treats an individual divinity, but Sahagún introduces his chapter 13 as beginning the treatment of "gods that are lesser in rank (*menores en dignidad*) than those spoken of above" (cf. Anderson and Dibble 1970:29). This entails that the six male and six female deities surveyed in the preceding chapters were therefore the *greater* Aztec gods. Sahagún's modern readers have not been alert to the significance of this; the Romans had 12 great gods of their own—also six male and six female.<sup>1</sup> The Romans' groupings of the chief *di consentes*, often in male-female pairings, are especially pertinent (Schilling 1992:73–75). The early Roman poet Ennius, in his *Annales* (fragment 62, discussed in Skutsch 1968:103–118), enumerated 12 great gods, six female and six male, in two Latin hexameter verses:

Juno Vesta Minerva Diana Ceres  
 Venus Mars  
 Mercurius Jovis Neptunus Vulcanus  
 Apollo

The same gods were listed in Livy's history *Ab urbe condita* (From the Foundation of Rome) (22.10.9) as being honored in the *lectisternium*, a propitiatory ritual conducted in 217 B.C. (Nouilhan 1989). Virgil (*Georgics* 1.5–25) lists another group of 12 agricultural gods. Augustine, in *City of God* (7.2), had drawn a list of

20 *di selecti* (“select gods”) from Varro, a Roman scholar of the first century B.C., which might also have inspired Sahagún’s hierarchical distinction between greater and lesser Mexican deities, if not the number of 12.

In Book 1 of the *Historia general*, Sahagún also followed earlier chroniclers, such as Fernández de Oviedo and Bartolomé de las Casas (Olivier this volume), by drawing some equivalences between individual Roman and Mexican gods: “Huitzilopochtli is another Hercules,” “Tezcatlipoca is another Jupiter” and so on. The pairings, which were confined to the opening sentences of only some Spanish chapters without being given in the Nahuatl version, were reviewed or abandoned in successive redraftings, as indicated by Table 6.1. (adapted from Nicolau d’Olwer 1987:112):

Scrutiny of the characterization of the Mexican goddess of water, Chalchiuhtlicue, as “another Juno” illuminates the way in which these equivalences were designed to function. Chalchiuhtlicue’s principal attribute was to have “power over the water of the sea and rivers, to drown those who go on the waters, and to make storms and whirlwinds, and to sink ships and boats” (*Historia general* 1.11). Yet control over water was not at all a customary attribute of Juno in Roman or Renaissance traditions. One would rather expect Chalchiuhtlicue, as an aquatic deity who could whip up storms, to be compared to *Neptune*—and that was exactly the comparison Sahagún *had* made in the *Memoriales*, the original five-book

version of the history produced in 1563–1565. Sahagún’s substitution of Juno for Neptune in the first revision (and his retention of that substitution in the final version) makes sense only in terms of Juno’s unique role in Virgil’s *Aeneid*. There she instructs Aeolus to stir up a storm at sea with the aim of preventing the Trojans from safely reaching the coast of Italy: “Whip up the might of your winds, flood their ships and sink them, or drive them in all directions and scatter their bodies over the sea” (*Aeneid* 1.69–70; translated by author). In fact, Neptune’s role in the epic was to pacify the tempest that Juno had caused (*Aeneid* 1.124–127). Thus Sahagún’s connection of Chalchiuhtlicue to a well-known but markedly *poetic* portrayal of Juno shows that the names of Roman deities are serving only as very elementary illustrations—in the end, such equivalences might reveal a good deal less about the essential nature of the Aztec deities than they do about how a Franciscan missionary sought to present them.

That association of Chalchiuhtlicue with the poetic portrayal of Juno in Virgil could indicate why the Roman gods are mentioned in the Spanish text of the *Historia general* in the first place. Sahagún identifies Hercules, Jupiter, Juno, and the others *as fictional creations* to emphasize the equally fictitious nature of the Mexican deities. It is made very clear—for instance, in Sahagún’s Spanish prologue to Book 3—that the Aztec gods are inventions, with no more credibility than those of the ancient Romans:

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The divine Augustine did not consider it superfluous or vain to deal with the fictitious mythology of the pagans [“theologia fabulosa de los gentiles”], in the sixth Book of the *City of God*, because, as he says, the empty fables and fictions the [ancient] pagans had of their feigned gods could easily make them understand that they were not gods, nor could they bring anything of advantage to a rational creature. For this reason, the fables and fictions that these natives held regarding their gods are placed in this third Book because once there

is understanding of the vanities they held for faith concerning their lying gods, they may come more easily by Gospel doctrine to know the true God, and those the natives held as gods were not gods, but lying devils and deceivers [“aquellos que ellos tenjan por dioses non erã dioses sino diablos mentirosos y enganadores”] [Anderson and Dibble 1982:59; translation modified by the author].

This line of thought tends to elude readers today: in the sixteenth century the Graeco-Roman pantheon was regarded

**Table 6.1:** Evolution of equivalences between Mexican and Roman gods in successive draftings of chapters of Book 1 of Sahagún, *Historia general*

	1563*	1565**	1577***	
<b>Huitzilopochtli</b>	Mars	Hercules	Hercules	ch. 1
<b>Paynal</b>	Mercury	–	–	ch. 2
<b>Tezcatlipoca</b>	Jupiter	Jupiter	Jupiter	ch. 3
<b>Tlaloc</b>	–	–	–	ch. 4
<b>Quetzalcoatl</b>	Hercules	Hercules	–	ch. 5
<b>Cihuacoatl</b>	Venus	–	–	ch. 6
<b>Chicomecoatl</b>	Ceres	Ceres	Ceres	ch. 7
<b>Temazcalteci</b>	–	–	–	ch. 8
<b>Tzaputlatena</b>	–	–	–	ch. 9
<b>Ciuapipilti</b> (goddesses of disease)	–	–	–	ch. 10
<b>Chalchiutlicue</b>	Neptune	Juno	Juno	ch. 11
<b>Tlazolteotl</b>	–	Venus	Venus	ch. 12
<b>Xiuhtecutli</b>	Vulcan	Vulcan	Venus	ch. 13
<b>Tezcatzoncatl</b>	Bacchus	god of wine	god of wine	ch. 22
<b>Teteosinnan</b>	Artemis	–	–	Appendix

\*1563–5: *Memoriales* in three columns, or ‘Tlatelolco manuscripts’ in 5 books: Baird 1993

\*\*1565–8: *Memoriales* in Spanish

\*\*\*1577: Definitive text of the *Historia general*.

with far less detachment than it is now. Even Renaissance scholars sympathetic to the classics emphasized, first and foremost, the *falsity* of the ancient gods, who were still regarded by the church as a source of potential confusion or danger (Seznec 1972:263–264). Thus, in a popular moralistic work, *Relox de príncipes* (Dial for Princes), published in 1529, Antonio de Guevara, a Franciscan contemporary of Sahagún, felt impelled to describe the deities of antiquity as

ancient gods that were mere human inventions, just as the ground of their condemned toadstools was unstable sand, shifting earth, perilous bogs, and wrong turns. Some pitiful ones of this pitiable number, like a ship that goes off course, ran aground and were flooded; others, like rotten buildings with collapsing foundations, fell dead; finally those gods that only had the name of gods, ended up forgotten in perpetual oblivion forever [Blanco 1994:82; translation by author].

The tenor of Sahagún's unheaded confutation of idolatry (which follows chapter 16 of the appendix to *Historia general* Book 1) is very similar. It elaborates on a biblical verse quoted in Latin from the Book of Wisdom 12:13: "For there is no other God but thou, who hast care of all." For his part, Sahagún writes: "This is thus revealed: Huitzilopochtli is no god; Tezcatlipoca is no god; Tlaloc, or Tlalocatecutli is no god; Quetzalcoatl is no god, neither is Ciuacoatl!" (Anderson and Dibble 1970:63). After the negation

of some 20 Aztec deities in this manner, there is another scriptural quotation from Psalms 5:5: "All the gods of the gentiles are demons." The intercultural alignment Sahagún cares about is the one that has been stressed already: the church's long-standing identification of all pagan gods with the demons cast out by Christ. This is the real respect in which the Aztec gods resemble the Roman ones. And this crucial alignment explains something that preoccupied Tzvetan Todorov (1984:233): Sahagún can associate the omnipresent, invisible prime mover Tezcatlipoca with Jupiter yet at the same time see no affinity between Tezcatlipoca and the Christian God.

In the main body of the *Historia general* there are no explicit parallels with Greece and Rome, like those drawn by Fernández de Oviedo and Bartolomé de las Casas to further their respective agenda (Lupher 2003:237–255). The few Classical references in Sahagún's short Spanish prefaces do not provide any deep insight on the ensuing subject matter—only a crude orientation. For example, in the prologue to Book 8, we read that the ancient Mexicans who fled the destruction of Tula founded Cholula, which the Spaniards—struck by its nobility, buildings, and grandeur—called Rome. Sahagún then comments drily: "It seems that the affairs of these two cities went the way of Troy and Rome" (Anderson and Dibble 1982:70). This is just as superficial and anecdotal as his next comparison, of Mexico City to Venice, already a commonplace, and the

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likening of Quetzalcoatl—the deified king of Tula—to “King Arthur among the English” a few paragraphs before.

However, the more covert ways in which Classical learning is deployed in the *Historia general* also have a bearing on how the Mexican gods are conceived and presented in the work. In the prologue to Book 1, Sahagún explains the rationale for the entire project: missionaries need knowledge of heathen practices in order to recognize signs of idolatry in their converts in the way a physician needs to know the symptoms of a disease in order to cure it:

The physician cannot advisedly administer medicine to the patient [*enfermo*] without first knowing of which humor or from which source the ailment derives. Wherefore it is desirable that the good physician be expert in the knowledge of medicines and ailments, in order to administer adequately the cure for each ailment. The preachers and confessors are physicians of the souls for the curing of spiritual ailments. . . . The sins of idolatry, idolatrous rituals, idolatrous superstitions, auguries, abuses, and idolatrous ceremonies are not yet completely lost [Anderson and Dibble 1982:45].

Such an analogy ultimately goes back to Plato, but Sahagún is specifically echoing the beginning of Augustine’s *City of God* Book 2, which attacked the old Roman religion for its lack of moral teaching and the obscenity of its rites:

If only the infirm understanding of human custom did not presume to resist the reason of clear truth, but yielded its weakness to healthy doctrine as if to medicine, until it were healed with divine assistance procured by devout faith. . . . But now since the disease of the souls of those foolish people is greater and more virulent . . . [Augustine, *City of God* 2.1; translated by author].

Later on, in the prologue to Book 3, part of which was quoted above, Sahagún more openly signals his debt to Augustine’s rebuttal of the Romans’ worship of demons.

By purloining Augustine’s medical conceit at the outset, Sahagún follows the agenda of *City of God* in aiming to demonize—quite literally—the gods of the Mexica. But he may also have been appropriating a powerful argument from as an impeccable authority as Augustine to justify his researches. Augustine provided the Franciscan with a framework that enabled him to set up a dialectic between the pious disclaimers of his Spanish-only prefaces and the ethnographic material to be presented in both Spanish and Nahuatl in the books they herald. To avoid repercussions from the church, Renaissance humanists in Italy, including Da Fiano, Salutati, and Mantovano, had often employed similar tactics in their source books on Graeco-Roman myth or in their imitations of pagan poetry (Baron 1966:291–313; Bull 2005:7–36; Marrone 2000: 28–37). For example, the renowned fourteenth-century poet and

scholar Giovanni Boccaccio opened each of the 15 Latin books of his *Genealogia deorum gentilium* (Genealogy of the Pagan Gods) with a prayer to Christ, and he ended the entire work with a profession of faith. Versions of Boccaccio's Classical mythography in Latin were well-known in Spain (Álvarez Morán and Iglesias Montiel 2001). Moreover, the *Genealogia* was cited extensively in Guevara's *Relox de principes*, which was in the library of the College of Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco—where much of the *Historia general* was probably compiled (Mathes 1985:56).

Although Sahagún gives no indication of his models, the omens recounted in books 8 and 12 of the *Historia general*—by which the Aztecs supposedly foretold the destruction of their empire—are based on portents from Classical and Christian literature (Fernández-Armesto 1992). The sword-shaped light in the sky that Sahagún's sources list as the first omen has an antecedent in Josephus's first-century history of the Jewish War. Comets, lightning flashes, and other freaks of nature recall the portents that marked Caesar's death in Virgil's *Georgics* 1.466–88 and that foretold the Roman civil war in Lucan's *Pharsalia* 1.524–695, and there are comparable things in the Roman historians Livy and Tacitus. Several sets of connections could be explored, but the sixth omen listed in the *Historia general* deserves special attention because it has a bearing on the gods and is related on three separate occasions.

The first is in Book 8, chapter 1: “In the days of this same [ruler, Montezuma] it happened that Ciuacoatl went about

weeping, at night. Everyone heard it wailing and saying: ‘my beloved sons, now I am about to leave you’” (Anderson and Dibble 1954:3; Anderson and Dibble's interpolation). In the two subsequent tellings, in Book 8, chapter 6, and Book 12, chapter 1, the goddess Cihuacoatl, or Snake Woman, is not named, although a small ink painting of a snake with a woman's head accompanies the text in Book 8 of the *Historia general* (Figure 6.3). In the written text, the nocturnal lamenting is attributed in the Nahuatl to “a woman” or, in the Spanish versions, to “cries in the air, as of a woman” (“bozez en el aire como de una muger”): “A sixth omen: often a woman, was heard as she went weeping and crying out, loudly did she call out at night. She walked about saying: ‘O my beloved sons, now we are about to go!’ Other times she said: ‘O my beloved sons, whither shall I take you?’” (Anderson and Dibble 1955:2–3).

As long ago as 1949, Sahagún's biographer, Luís Nicolau d'Olwer, noted the similarity of this vignette to an episode from a late-first-century A.D. dialogue by Plutarch, *On the Deficiency of Oracles*, in which Thamus, the Egyptian pilot of a Greek ship, heard a voice coming from an island announcing, “The Great Pan is dead.” The utterance was accompanied by “loud lamentation, not of one, but of many, mingled with amazement” (*Deficiency of Oracles* 419c–e). Nicolau d'Olwer (1987:111) considered it curious that Sahagún had not spotted the resemblance himself, since Plutarch's works were available in Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco, where the

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agua en alto el agua: y hiz  
 tempestad en la laguna  
 y las batieron en las casas  
 en cerca, y derrocaron n  
 fellas: trujeronlo por mjt  
 porque nningun viento ca



sto aguero fue que enaq  
 is, oyeron bozes en el ay

Figure 6.3. Ink drawing of Snake Woman; detail in Sahagún 1575–1577: book 8, folio 12r. (World Digital Library)

friar and his indigenous collaborators were at work. An Isingrin edition of all of Plutarch's *Moralia*, printed in Basel in 1552, certainly was in the library of Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco (Mathes 1982:64), but of course Nicolau d'Olwer did not realize that this Aztec omen in the *Historia general* was based on the account given by Plutarch in the first place.

Plutarch's story of the oracle about Pan's death had gained currency because it was transmitted by a later Greek Christian author, Eusebius of Caesarea, who wrote in the early A.D. 300s. Part of his *Praeparatio Evangelica* (Preparation for the Gospel) sought to explain why the Greeks had come to abandon their ancestral polytheistic

religion. After quoting Plutarch's account in its entirety, Eusebius continued:

So far Plutarch. But it is important to observe the time at which [Plutarch] said the death of the demon [Pan] took place. For it was the time of [the emperor] Tiberius, in which our Savior, making His sojourn among men, is recorded to have been ridding human life from demons of every kind: so that there were some of them now kneeling before Him and beseeching Him not to deliver them over to the Tartarus that awaited them [Eusebius, *Praeparatio* 5.17; translation by author].



This interpretation was what made Plutarch's anecdote of the oracle so significant for Christian readers: Pan's death was seen as a consequence of Christ's triumph—but what Eusebius said in the next sentence would come to have a special resonance, more than a millennium later, for missionaries in New Spain:

You have therefore the date of the overthrow of the demons, of which there was no record at any other time; just as you had the abolition of human sacrifice among the gentiles as not having occurred until after the preaching of the Gospel had reached all mankind.

Human sacrifice had been far more common in Mexico than it had ever been in the pagan Mediterranean. That further comment from Eusebius reveals why the elements of the Aztec omen may have been fashioned to recall this particular Greek one, which had acquired so much significance in the Christian world.

There is independent evidence that the connection between the death of Pan in Plutarch and the valediction of Cihuacoatl in Sahagún is no coincidence. In his *Historia natural y moral de las Indias*, which was published in 1590, the Jesuit missionary and historian José de Acosta included a chapter on “The omens and strange prodigies that occurred in Mexico before the passing of Montezuma's empire.” In prefacing his account, Acosta wrote:

You should read Eusebius, who treats this matter at length in his *Praeparatio*

*Evangelica*. . . I have mentioned all this on purpose, so that no one may look down on what the histories and annals of the Indians recount about the strange prodigies and prognostications that had marked the end of [Montezuma's] reign and that of the devil [Acosta 2002 (1590):403].

The “histories and annals of the Indians” can only be the accounts in Sahagún; there are no other creditable Nahuatl sources for these omens, as James Lockhart and others have pointed out (Lockhart 1993:5, 18, cited in Townsend 2003:666–667). Acosta's recommendation of Eusebius alerts his readers to the European and biblical sources for the Aztec omens—which he admits at the end of his chapter “may not have happened exactly as described” (Acosta 2002 [1590]:406).

If Sahagún was deliberately forging a connection between Pan and Cihuacoatl, we still need to explain why these *particular* divinities were selected from their respective traditions and paralleled in this way. At first sight, neither of them seems to be an obvious choice. However, the figure of “Great Pan” has less to do with the quaint god of Arcadian shepherds who dances around with satyrs and nymphs in Classical poetry and Renaissance art, but everything to do with the Pan as god of “All” (Wernicke 1903). This wordplay in Greek led to a conception of Pan as the supreme divinity of Nature, whom the Stoics identified with Zeus-Cosmos, so that for Christians, Pan came to represent *all* the

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pagan divine powers (Borgeaud 1983, 1988; Lane Fox 1986:130–132; Sirinelli 1961:200).<sup>2</sup> The renowned French humanist and satirist François Rabelais, once a Franciscan himself and a precise contemporary of Sahagún, was well aware of this legacy and of Eusebius’s interpretation of the oracle of Pan’s death (Krailsheimer 1948). Rabelais playfully identified Pan with Christ himself in a work entitled *Pantagruel* (4.28), first published in 1532:

For he may lawfully be said in the Greek tongue to be Pan, since he is our all. . . . He is the good Pan, the great shepherd . . . at his death, complaints, sighs, fears, and lamentations were spread through the whole fabric of the universe, whether heavens, land, sea, or hell. The time also concurs with this interpretation of mine; for this most good, most mighty Pan, our only Savior, died near Jerusalem during the reign in Rome of Tiberius Caesar [French text cited in Flacelière 1974:93; translation by author].

The choice of Great Pan’s demise to represent the collapse of the ancient European pagan order then makes sense. But why, out of all the Aztecs deities, did Sahagún choose Cihuacoatl to correspond to Pan by announcing her departure? The reason emerges if we go back to Sahagún’s chapter about her in Book 1. Unusually, the Nahuatl and Spanish versions are substantially different. The Nahuatl text describes her attributes and appearance, along with her inauspicious nocturnal lamenting:

Cihuacoatl (Snake-Woman)] [was called] a savage beast and an evil omen. She was an evil omen to men; she brought men misery. For it was said: she gave men the digging-stick, the tump-line; she visited men therewith. And as she appeared before men, she was covered with chalk, like a court lady. She wore ear-plugs, obsidian ear-plugs. She appeared in white, garbed in white, standing white, pure white. Her womanly hair-dress rose up. By night she walked weeping, wailing, also was she an omen of war. And in this wise was her image arrayed: her face was painted one-half red, one-half black. She had a head-dress of [eagle] feathers; she had golden ear-plugs. She wore a triangular shoulder-shawl. She carried a turquoise [mosaic] weaving stick [Anderson and Dibble 1970:11].

Sahagún’s Spanish chapter on Cihuacoatl in Book 1, however, pays less attention to her white garments and Morticia Addams-style makeup. Instead it adds a crucial detail: that she is also called Tonantzin: “Our Mother.” This prompts another interpretation of the goddess that we do not find in the Nahuatl text: these two names, *Snake Woman* and *Mother*, must mean that “this goddess is our mother Eve, who was tricked by a serpent.” Sahagún was drawing from a tradition of Eve herself as a Serpent Woman, which went back to the A.D. 190s, when Clement of Alexandria claimed in his *Protrepticus* (2.12) that the aspirated Hebrew name

of Eve, Hevva, translates into Greek as “female serpent.” Clement also linked this etymology to the use of serpents and the ritual invocation of Eve with the traditional cry of “Euhoe” in Greek Bacchic orgies, and Eusebius took the same view in the *Praeparatio evangelica* 15. Iconography of Eve as the reflection of a serpent with a woman’s head was widespread by the Middle Ages, exemplified by the *Portail de la Vierge* on the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris and later by Masolino’s fresco in the Brancacci Chapel in Florence and Michelangelo’s Sistine Ceiling in Rome (compare Klein, Figure 9.5, in this volume). The English historian and mythographer Gervase of Tilbury, who wrote in Latin during the early 1200s, had attributed an explanation of odd images like this to the Venerable Bede: “The Devil chose a particular kind of serpent with a woman’s face, because like approves of like, and then gave its tongue the power of speech” (Banks and Binns 2002:87). Gervase’s ensuing mention of a popular tradition that women who are turned into serpents “can be recognized by a white band or fillet which they have on the head” might bring to mind the attire of the Snake Woman described three centuries later in the *Historia general*, but the miniature illustration of a snake with a woman’s head in Book 8 of the *Historia general* (Figure 7.7) was obviously influenced by such European imagery and had no connection to indigenous representations of Cihuacoatl.

Sahagún’s alignment of Cihuacoatl with Eve may explain why he abandoned

the equivalence with Venus that he had proposed in the *Memoriales* in 1563, but it is disingenuous. For even though Sahagún may have wanted to believe that the Mexican Snake Woman and Eve were one and the same, he was afraid of the far more threatening identification prompted by Cihuacoatl’s alternative name, Tonantzin. The anxiety is made very clear in his appendix, written only in Spanish, to Book 11, which reveals that “in Tepeyac there was once a temple dedicated to Tonantzin, which means ‘Our Mother,’ but that the church of Our Lady of Guadalupe has been built there, the Indians also call her *Tonantzin*.” This use of the name Tonantzin is “something that should be remedied,” says Sahagún, “for the correct [native] name of the Mother of God, Holy Mary, is not Tonantzin but rather Dios inantzin” (Anderson and Dibble 1982:90).

The word *remedy* (*remediar*), as the solution for idolatry at this crucial juncture, recalls the *medical* analogy inherited from Augustine, which opened the whole *Historia general*. The perilous association of Cihuacoatl-Tonantzin with the Virgin Mary shows that Sahagún found this goddess especially troublesome—he expressed the same concern again in the note he appended to the manuscript of the *Kalendario Mexicano, Latino y Castellano*: “When the [Mexicans] say they are going to *Tonantzin* or that they are arranging a fiesta for *Tonantzin*, they understand the old [Aztec/pagan] one, not the modern [Christian/Marian] one” (García Icazbalceta 1954:381; translation by author). That identification would

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have been reason enough for him to stage the goddess's departure, discreetly but decisively, in the *Historia general*. Fortuitously or not, the repetition of the catalog of omens in the work enables Cihuacoatl to give voice to her own valediction on three separate occasions.

Fray Juan de Torquemada, Sahagún's successor at the College of Tlatelolco, also devoted a chapter, in Book 6 of *Monarchia indiana*, to Cihuacoatl. He attributed the connection of her name with Eve to Sahagún: "According to the etymology of this name given by Fray Bernardino de Sahagún, this woman or goddess that they called Cihuacoatl was the first woman in the world, mother of all the human race, the one indeed that was tricked by the snake" (Torquemada 1975–1983 [1615]:3:98). That attribution could well suggest that Torquemada did not subscribe to Sahagún's etymology himself. After all, as was shown at the outset, Torquemada's own method of discrediting the Snake Woman goddess of the Aztecs had covertly involved figures associated with serpents who were not biblical but Classical: the nightmarish Allecto and the mother goddess Isis. But the association of a Mexican goddess who had many names with the multifaceted Isis could serve to convey the hidden dangers of syncretism—although, ironically enough, Isis herself would end up becoming a latent prototype for the snake-crushing Virgin of Guadalupe in the 1600s.

As well as indications from iconography (Escalante Gonzalbo 2000; Gruzinski 1994, 2002:91–106), there are

eloquent Latin letters written in the mid-1500s by some acculturated Mexicans from the indigenous nobility who were well aware of the gods of Europe's pagan antiquity: the indigenous Latinist Pablo Nazareo flattered Philip II by likening him to Apollo (Osorio Romero 1990:13), and Antonio Valeriano, another native humanist, sought support from the same monarch for the establishment of a *musarum domus*, "a house of the Muses," in Azcapotzalco (Laird 2014:159). But it should be emphasized in conclusion that comparisons of the Aztec deities to those of ancient Greece and Rome were never very sustained, never very developed, and never very explicit in the 1500s. That was because the need to convert the Indians was far more pressing than the pursuit of comparative anthropology. As Sahagún himself insisted, extirpation of the idolatry of the Mexicans required understanding of its nature and origins. Analogies with Graeco-Roman idolatry would hardly contribute to such understanding, and that is why they were not explored. To have done so would be like trying to cure one disease by studying the symptoms of another.

The parallels that are really striking and that will reward much more study are those between the missionary ethnographers themselves and the Christian historians of late antiquity, or even some pagan authors who offered intellectual responses to polytheistic religion. The challenges the missionaries confronted were similar enough for them sometimes to use identical arguments

and narrative strategies. José de Acosta virtually acknowledged this: Eusebius, Clement, Pliny, and Plutarch served him as models, over and above his immediate sources for Mexican history and belief. In the 1600s, creole authors would express pride in their American heritage by making extravagant comparisons

between the Aztec and Roman pantheons, even positing historical connections between them (Andrews 2007; Lorente Medina 1994). The more cautious alignments in Franciscan writers like Sahagún and Torquemada, on the other hand, were there to serve the serious purpose of evangelism.

### Notes

- 1 The Greek tradition of 12 *Olympian* gods transmitted from Herodotus and Pindar, to which the 12 months and the 12 signs of the zodiac were connected by Plato, would not have been known to Sahagún. Manilius's *Astronomica*, rediscovered in the 1460s, aligned each of the Roman gods listed by Ennius with a sign of the zodiac (Bull 2005:28–29).
- 2 References to the god Pan as “All” in antiquity include Plato, *Cratylus* 408B, and Cornutus, *Compendium of Greek Theology* 27 (opposed by Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 124). See further Wernicke (1903).

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## 7

## The Mexica Pantheon in Light of Graeco-Roman Polytheism: Uses, Abuses, and Proposals

**Guilhem Olivier**

As they passed through those enormous provinces, the Spaniards found extremely great idolatries and they were the ones that were found written on the rites of the ancient gentiles; such as sacrificing men, having temples and statues of idols, worshipping animals and honoring them with processions and blood sacrifices, being superstitious in looking at omens and having almost all [the practices] that were written about on the ancients.<sup>1</sup>

At the end of the sixteenth century, this is how chronicler Juan Suárez de Peralta (1949:9) described the “extremely great idolatries” of the native people of New Spain, whom he identified without hesitation with the customs of the “ancient gentiles” of the Old World. With significant variants, a number of chroniclers who

described the religion of the Mexicas resorted to the Graeco-Roman past to make various types of comparisons.<sup>2</sup> On the one hand, an effort was made to offer the learned European public known models that could be imposed onto an alien reality difficult for them to understand. The idolatry of the indigenous people was also condemned by comparison to that of the ancient gentiles, just as the Fathers of the Church had decried pagan religions.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, the act of comparing the native people to the prestigious Greeks and Romans clearly led to granting the original inhabitants of New Spain an outstanding place among peoples regarded by the Spaniards as “civilized.”<sup>4</sup> In this framework, Bartolomé de las Casas, when he systematically compared pre-Hispanic societies to Old World civilizations, reached the conclusion that the moral and

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even religious spheres of the indigenous people were superior to those of the ancient Greeks and Romans (Bernand and Gruzinski 1988; Hanke 1974; Luper 2006; Pagden 1988). Regarded by some scholars as a stage in the development of an anthropological perspective on the native peoples,<sup>5</sup> the comparison to the peoples of Classical antiquity has been criticized by other scholars, who regard this as a methodological obstacle that prevents an accurate approach to the specificity of Mesoamerican civilizations (Bernand and Gruzinski 1988).

In this paper, I examine the way Fray Bernardino de Sahagún dealt with information regarding Classical antiquity, above all information concerning the gods.<sup>6</sup> The vast majority of materials on this matter come from prologues and appendices written by the Franciscan. Comparisons with the Roman gods also appear in annotations that Sahagún added to the margins of the texts in Nahuatl and in the Spanish part of the *Códice Matritense del Real Palacio*. Finally, it is worth mentioning the captions of illustrations in Book 1 of the *Códice Florentino* and other references in the Spanish text in the same book. As for Sahagún's indigenous informants, although there is no doubt that they were familiar with the pantheon of Classical antiquity as a result of their command of Latin,<sup>7</sup> they do not seem to have participated in the comparative processes that we are going to examine. In fact, as Alfredo López Austin (1974:124–125) has pointed out, the proposals suggesting that these same informants would have compared their

ancient gods with those of the Romans—which would indicate their high degree of acculturation—must be rejected:

It was not the informants, however, who compared the Nahuatl gods to those of Mediterranean antiquity: in the Madrid Codex the comparison is found in the margin in Sahagún's handwriting. Such comparisons continue into the General History, but they are not written in Nahuatl, not even in the Florentine Codex.<sup>8</sup>

Thus the purpose is to delve into the reasons that led the Franciscan to compare Mexica deities with certain Roman gods, as well as significant variants, in the processes of identification that we find throughout his work, an element that, as far as I know, has not been taken into account by the vast majority of experts. It is true that Luís Nicolau d'Olwer (1990 [1952]:140, note 14), an outstanding biographer of Sahagún, mentions these variants in a brief footnote in his book. However, this author regards comparisons of Mexica deities with Roman gods in the Franciscan's work as nothing more than "simple formulas, which do not continue nor may they be explained." Later d'Olwer (140–141) states that the references to Classical antiquity in Sahagún's writings are "simple literary reminiscences, suggested by anecdotal or insignificant similarities." I would like to demonstrate the contrary, that the comparisons established by Sahagún, although brief and specific, make it possible to detect the Classical models that

the friar drew from and to evaluate more closely the diverse “comparative strategies” that he adopted—strategies that I am going to compare with those used by other chroniclers.

As a result of his training at the University of Salamanca, it is not surprising that Sahagún (1950–1981:1:50; 2000:65) evokes the Roman world when he presents his work:

Through my efforts twelve Books have been written in an idiom characteristic and typical of this Mexican language, where are found all the manners of speech and all the words this language uses, as well verified and certain as that which Virgil, Cicero, and other authors wrote in the Latin language.<sup>9</sup>

In the same way, the Franciscan constantly relates the ancient history of the autochthonous peoples to that of Classical antiquity:

This renowned and great city of Tula, very wealthy and with very wise and brave people, had the misfortune of Troy. The Cholulans, who are those who escaped from Tula, have had the legacy of the Romans, and like the Romans they built their Capitol as their fortress. . . . The Tlaxcallans seem to have followed the fate of the Carthaginians [Sahagún 1950–1981:1:48; 2000:63].<sup>10</sup>

However, it is above all the way he handles classical antiquity with respect

to the gods that I would like to analyze here. Although Sahagún (2000:689) characterized Mexica myths as “ridiculous fables,” nonetheless he compiled an important number of accounts, such as the origin of the sun and moon and the myth of Huitzilopochtli’s birth. How can the simultaneous dismissal of native myths be reconciled with the tremendous effort invested in collecting them? Sahagún (2000:299) turned to the work of Saint Augustine for support when he explained,

The divine Augustine did not consider it superfluous or vain to deal with the fictitious theology of the gentiles in the sixth Book of the City of God, because, as he says, the empty fictions and falsehoods which the gentiles held regarding their false gods being known, [true believers] could easily make them understand that those were not gods nor could they provide anything that would be beneficial to a rational being.<sup>11</sup>

We know that Saint Augustine’s work—which could be found in the library of the Colegio de Santiago Tlatelolco (Mathes 1982:33)—had a major impact on the vision of the gods adopted by several chroniclers, including Las Casas, Acosta, Torquemada, and others. Despite this negative assessment, Sahagún forgave the Nahuas for their apparently senseless accounts:

How foolish our forefathers, the gentiles, both Greek and Latin, had been

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in the understanding of created things is very clear from their own writings. From them it is evident to us what ridiculous fables they invented of the sun, the moon, some of the stars, water, land, fire, air, and of the other created things. . . . So if this happened, as we know, among people of so much discretion and presumption, there is no reason for one to marvel that similar things are found among these people, so innocent and so easy to be deceived [Sahagún 2000:689].<sup>12</sup>

As for the multiplicity of Nahua deities, Sahagún identified several of them with Roman gods. We can see the genesis of these comparative processes in detail within the framework of the Franciscan's extensive body of work (d'Olwer 1990:40; Laird this volume). Absent in the *Primeros Memoriales*, the comparisons appear for the first time in the Nahuatl part of the *Códice Matritense del Real Palacio* (Sahagún 1906), which Francisco del Paso y Troncoso called "Memoriales en tres columnas con el texto mexicano" (Memoirs in three Columns with the Mexican [Nahuatl] Text, 1564) (Bustamente García 1990:420–421). Huitzilopochtli was described as "another Mars, god of wars" (otro Marte, dios de las guerras) (folio 33r); Paynal appeared as "another Mercury" (otro Mercurio) (folio 33r); Tezcatlipoca as "another Jupiter" (otro Júpiter) (folio 33v); Quetzalcoatl as "another Hercules great sorcerer" (otro Ercules [sic] gran nigromántico) (folio 34r); Tezcatzoncatl as "another Bacchus"

(otro Baco) (folio 35r); and Xiuhtecuhtli as "another Vulcan" (otro Vulcán) (folio 37v). As for goddesses, Chicomecoatl was compared to Ceres; Cihuacoatl to Venus; and Chalchiuhtlicue to "another Neptune, goddess of the sea and of rivers" (otra Netuno [sic], diosa de la mar y de los ríos) (folios 34r, 35r, 37r, 45r).

In the Spanish part of the same manuscript (Sahagún 1906), called "Memoriales complementarios" (Complementary Memoirs) (1565) (León-Portilla 1999a:86–87), by Paso y Troncoso, the same comparisons appear in the cases of Tezcatlipoca, Chicomecoatl, and Xiuhtecuhtli, but Sahagún changed his ideas about Huitzilopochtli, now called "another Hercules" (otro Hércules) (folio 1r); Cihuacoatl became "our mother Eve" (nuestra madre Eva) (folio 2v); and Chalchiuhtlicue appeared as "another Juno" (otra Juno) (folio 4v). Tlazolteotl, who was not compared to any deity in the Nahuatl part, now was described as "another Venus" (otra Venus) (folio 5r).

In the *Códice Florentino* (1575–1577), the first references to names of Roman gods appear beside the illustrations that begin the first book, some of which are repeated later in the Spanish text. Of the 26 deities depicted, 8 are identified with Roman gods: Huitzilopochtli with Hercules (Figure 7.1), Tezcatlipoca with Jupiter (Figure 7.2), Chicomecoatl with Ceres, Chalchiuhtlicue with Juno (Figure 7.3), the Cihuapiltin with nymphs (Figure 7.4), Tlazolteotl with Venus, Xiuhtecuhtli with Vulcan, and Tezcatzoncatl with Bacchus (Sahagún 1979:1:book 1, 10–12). Of these eight deities identified



**Figure 7.1.** After comparing him with Mars, Sahagún equated Huitzilopochtli with Hercules (Sahagún 1979:1:book 1, 10). (Drawing by Elbis Domínguez)

with Roman deities, five—Tezcatlipoca, Chicomecoatl, Chalchiuhtlicue, Tlazolteotl, and Xiuhtecuhtli—are mentioned again in the same way in the titles of the chapters referring to them, while Huitzilopochtli is described as “another Hercules” at the beginning of the paragraph that describes him (Sahagún 1979:1:book 1, folios 1, 3r, 5r, 6v, 10r). In contrast, the identification of the Cihuapipiltin with nymphs and the equivalence of Tezcatzoncatl and Bacchus are not mentioned again.

Sahagún was not the first chronicler to resort to these sorts of comparisons. They can also be found at an early date in the work of Fernández de Oviedo (1945:X, 54): “[Motecuhzoma] had one as god of war, as the gentiles [had] Mars; and another was honored and received sacrifices as the god of waters, Neptune according to the ancients; another was worshipped as god of wind, according to the gentiles Aeolus.”<sup>13</sup> In addition, Bartolomé de las Casas (1967), in his *Apologética*

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**Figure 7.2.** Tezcatlipoca appears as “another Jupiter” but also as “the evil of Lucifer” (Sahagún 1979:1:book I, 10). (Drawing by Elbis Domínguez)

*Historia*, systematically compared the deities of the Old World with indigenous gods, a method that was also adopted by Fray Juan de Torquemada and Agustín de Vetancourt.

Returning to Sahagún’s work, the majority of comparisons that he made seem obvious, and in fact it seems strange that for deities such as Tlaloc and Quetzalcoatl, the Franciscan did not follow Fernández de Oviedo’s example of

comparing them to Neptune and Aeolus, respectively.<sup>14</sup> We saw that in the Nahuatl part of the *Códice Matritense*, the name Neptune was oddly given to the goddess Chalchiuhtlicue, probably for her control over the sea. This is an identification that Sahagún omitted in the Spanish text, where he changed the name to Juno (Figure 7.3). This latter comparison might seem a bit arbitrary, but Isidore of Sevilla (1982:730–731) states that Roman poets





**Figure 7.3.** Chalchiuhtlicue, “another Neptune,” later becomes “another Juno” (Sahagún 1979:1:book 1, 11). (Drawing by Elbis Domínguez)

“see Jupiter as fire and air, and Juno, as water and earth.”<sup>15</sup> Similarly, John Pohl and Claire Lyons (2010:18; and see Laird this volume) cited a passage from the *Aeneid*, “when Juno provokes Aeolus to stir up a tempest against the Trojan fleet,” to explain the equivalence of the Roman goddess with Chalchiuhtlicue. In fact, this latter deity was able to sink canoes in the lake around Tenochtitlan (Sahagún 2000:122).

The attentive reader will have noticed that Oviedo’s comparison of Huitzilopochtli to Mars is also found in the Nahuatl part of the *Códice Matritense* (Sahagún 1906:folio 33r).<sup>16</sup> So why did Sahagún abandon this equivalence, which seems logical—and which was also adopted by Diego Durán (1995:2:23–24)<sup>17</sup>—and choose to liken the Mexica patron deity to Hercules in the Spanish texts in the *Códice Matritense* and in the *Códice Florentino*

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(Sahagún 1906:folio 1r; 1979:10, folio 1r) (Figure 7.1)? Sahagún's new choice may perhaps be explained by the condition of deified man that both traditions assign to these individuals. Sahagún's informants claimed that Huitzilopochtli "was only a common man, just a man" (*çan maceoalli, çan tlatcatl*) (Sahagún 1950–1981:1:1). And Sahagún (2000:69) in his Spanish version added: "When he was alive this man was highly regarded by the Mexicans for his strength and skill in war, [and] after he died they honored him as [they honor] God."<sup>18</sup>

Here the Franciscan resorts to the theory of euhemerism, from the name of the Greek writer Euhemerus, born around 316 B.C.<sup>19</sup> In his novel entitled *Sacred History*—one of the first books translated into Latin—Euhemerus described a journey of initiation toward the island of Panachea. There was found a golden column bearing an inscription describing the feats of several individuals with names of deities. Therefore Zeus had been a wise king, Aphrodite a courtesan of the king of Cyprus, Athena a warrior queen, Saturn a king of Latium, and so forth. All of them were outstanding historical figures who later were deified. Euhemerus's work met with great success in antiquity, but above all at the beginning of the Christian era. In fact, apologists and later fathers of the church—Clement of Alexandria, Lactantius, Tertullian, Saint Augustine, and others—used it against the pagans to demonstrate the falsity of their gods (Alphandéry 1934; Augustin 1994:1:83, 88, 94, 270, 305, 333, 365–367; Seznec 1993:22). In the same way, Sahagún (2000:70) emphasized the mortal origin of the Mexica deities, so in the case

of Paynal, "who, being a man, was worshipped as God" (*el cual, siendo hombre, era adorado por Dios*), of Opochtli, included among the gods known as Tlaloques, "although they knew that he was completely a man" (*aunque sabían que era puro hombre*) (97), or Quetzalcoatl, who "although he was a man, they held him as [a] god" (*aunque fue hombre, teníanle por dios*) (Sahagún 2000:73).

As for this latter deity, we can read with some confusion in the Nahuatl part of the *Códice Matritense* (Sahagún 1906:34r) and in the *Códice Florentino* (Sahagún 2000:308): "Of the account of who Quetzalcoatl was, another Hercules, a great sorcerer" (*De la relación de quién era Quetzalcóatl, otro Hércules, gran nigromántico*). So we can see that Huitzilopochtli had been designated by Sahagún himself as "another Hercules" (*otro Hércules*) for being "very bellicose, [a] great destroyer of towns and a killer of people" (*muy belicoso, gran destructor de pueblos y matador de gentes*), characteristics that seem to correspond more with the aggressive Mexica patron deity than with the peace-loving image of Quetzalcoatl recorded in the Franciscan's work. I specify the work of the Franciscan because we know from other sources that Quetzalcoatl was associated with conquests and human sacrifices, so his personality was not as distinctive as that of Huitzilopochtli (Sahagún 1906:folio 34r; 2000:308) (Figure 7.5).<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, in my opinion, Sahagún likened both Huitzilopochtli and Quetzalcoatl to Hercules because Hercules was a mortal who was granted divine status after death,

comparable to the Mexica gods in euhemerist theory put forward by the Franciscan friar.<sup>21</sup> What draws our attention, even though it is not related to the comparisons established by Sahagún, is the fact that after his death, King Charles V himself was compared to Hercules for his conquest of the New World, in fact beyond the Pillars of Hercules (Bataillon 1975:2:24).

Following euhemerist theory, Sahagún (2000:79) notes the extreme case, at least in his eyes, of the “goddesses called *cihuapipiltin* [who] were all women who died from [their] first childbirth, who were canonized

as goddesses.”<sup>22</sup> The Franciscan went on to exclaim, with a touch of misogyny: “This adoration of women is something so mockable and laughable that there is no reason to speak of confutation on the part of authorities of the Holy Scripture” (2000:122).<sup>23</sup> In the *Códice Florentino*, Sahagún had compared the *Cihuapipiltin* to nymphs, while Isidore of Seville (1982:734–735) stated that nymphs were “the water goddesses, and their name came from ‘clouds,’ for water came from clouds and that is why they bear this name”<sup>24</sup> (Figure 7.4). Perhaps this may be explained by an image from the



**Figure 7.4.** Sahagún equated the *Cihuapipiltin* with nymphs (Sahagún 1979:1:book 1, 11). (Drawing by Elbis Domínguez)

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**Figure 7.5.** Quetzalcoatl performs a human sacrifice in the Codex Borgia (Seler 1963:plate 42). (Drawing by Rodolfo Ávila)

*Códice Florentino* (Sahagún 1979:book 4, folio 28v) in which the Cihuapiltin were represented as traveling on clouds (Figure 7.6).

The case of Tezcatlipoca is particularly interesting, because he is one of the few gods that Sahagún does not identify as a mortal. He always likens him to Jupiter and points out “that he was regarded as [a] true god, and invisible . . . creator of the sky and of the land and he was almighty”<sup>25</sup> (Figure 7.2) (Sahagún 2000:71, 306). These attributes of a supreme deity obviously made Tezcatlipoca a perfect equivalence for the supreme god of the Romans.<sup>26</sup> In addition to the exceptional power attributed to both deities, I propose that the comparison of Tezcatlipoca to Jupiter was based on other fundamental

shared characteristics. In fact, Saint Augustine (1994:1:86, 191–192, 296, 314) and Isidore of Seville (1982:724–725) emphasized Jupiter’s amorous conquests and multiple affairs—with mortal women and even with adolescents such as Ganymede—to denigrate both his morality and his divine status. In the same way, Muñoz Camargo (1998:165) narrated how Tezcatlipoca seduced the wife of Tlaloc, Xochiquetzal, whom he described as “goddess of those in love, such as the gentiles in antiquity held the goddess Venus” (*diosa de los enamorados, como antiguamente tenían los gentiles la diosa Venus*). In Sahagún’s work, Tezcatlipoca is described as a Huastec, with his exposed phallus conquering the daughter of Huemac, king of Tollan, and in another passage, the



**Figure 7.6.** The Cihuapiltin travel among the clouds (Sahagún 1979:1:book 4, folio 28v). (Drawing by Elbis Domínguez)

“Lord of the Smoking Mirror” is insulted in an inelegant manner by being described as *cuiloni*—in other words, a passive homosexual (Sahagún 1950–1981:1:19–22; Sahagún 1950–1981:4:35). As a result, it is important to take into account these negative aspects attributed to Jupiter to fully understand the equivalence posited between Tezcatlipoca and the supreme god of the Romans.

Continuing with Tezcatlipoca, and as a corollary to the identification with Jupiter, Sahagún exclaimed: “This [Tezcatlipoca] is the evil of Lucifer, father of all evil and lies, extremely ambitious and haughty, who deceived your ancestors” (Sahagún 2000:120).<sup>27</sup>

In fact, together with the comparison made with deities of Classical antiquity and the use of euhemerist theory, Sahagún identified the Mexica gods with devils, particularly in “the appendix of the first book in which idolatry is refuted” (Sahagún 2000:112). In this part, the Franciscan again enumerated a long list of deities, adding after the name of each one, “is not a goddess” or “is not a god,” and he concluded with a reference from Psalms (96, 5), “Omnis dii gentium demonia” (All the gods of the gentiles are devils) (Sahagún 2000:117).<sup>28</sup> Later Sahagún continued with his enumeration of Mexica deities, introducing them with the phrase “another demon your

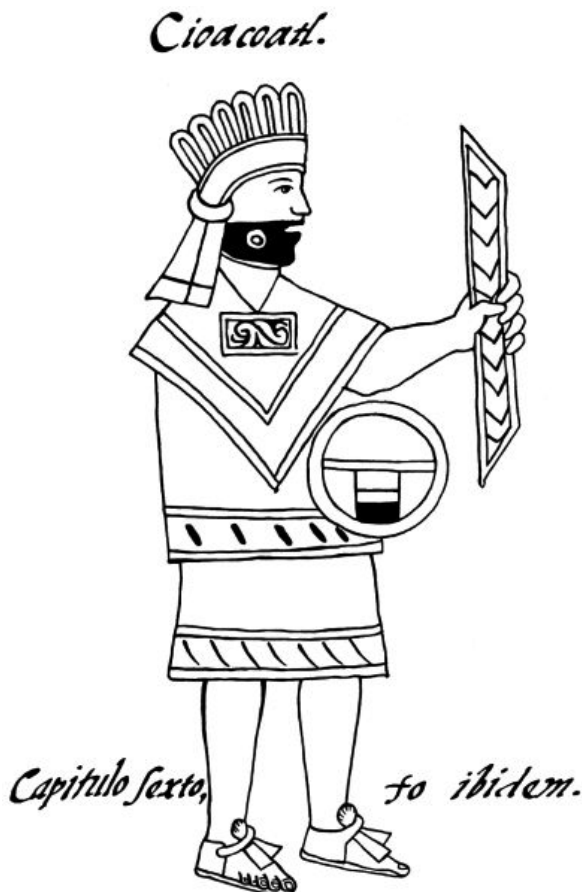
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ancestors worshipped” (otro demonio adoraron vuestros antepasados) or “another devil your ancestors worshipped” (otro diablo adoraron vuestros antepasados), followed by the name of this god (Sahagún 2000:123–124). In this aspect, Sahagún was doing nothing more than adopting an opinion shared by the majority of chroniclers, who believed that the demon, expelled from the Old World by the spread of the Gospels, had taken refuge in the New World, where he had tricked the Indians into worshipping him (Ragon 1988). As Elizabeth Boone (1989:70) has pointed out, this transformation of the gods into devils was expressed in the illustrations in the *Códice Florentino* (Sahagún 1979:3:book 11, folio 240v), for example when the Great Temple (Templo Mayor) of Tenochtitlan appeared to be occupied by devils with European features. In fact, on several occasions, Sahagún’s indigenous informants adopted the friar’s demoniacal discourse, describing Mexica gods as *diablo* or *diablome*—in other words devils—in the Nahuatl text of the *Códice Florentino* (Sahagún 1950–1981:1:19, 58, 63, 67, 68, 70, 72).

The case of the goddess Cihuacoatl strikes me as highly illustrative of the doubts and range of comparisons that Sahagún applied to Mexica deities (Figure 7.7). In fact, in his first attempt to compare them in his annotations to the Nahuatl part of the *Códice Matritense* (1906:folio 35r), he designated Cihuacoatl as “the goddess Venus.” However, in the Spanish part of the same manuscript (folio 5r) and later in the *Códice Florentino* (Sahagún 2000:82), Venus became the equivalent to

Tlazolteotl. As for the goddess Cihuacoatl, whose name Sahagún (1906:2v; 2000:74) said “means ‘snake woman’” (que quiere decir “mujer de la culebra”), he added, “They also call her Tonantzin, which means ‘our mother.’ In these two cases, it seems that this goddess is our mother Eve, who was deceived by the snake, and they were aware of the matter that happened between our mother Eve and the snake.”<sup>29</sup>

As for the preaching of the gospel in the New World prior to the arrival of the Spaniards, Sahagún (2000:1150) confessed that there “had been many doubts” (habido mucha duda) and that “I always have been of the opinion that the gospel was never preached to them, because I have never found anything that alludes to the Catholic faith.”<sup>30</sup> However, later in the same chapter, the Franciscan reconsidered his position: “It seems to me that it very well could have been that they were preached to for some time; but that the preachers who came to preach to them had been dead for some time, [so] they lost all faith that had been preached to them and they returned to their idolatries” (1151).<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, with profound pessimism, Sahagún predicted that when the Indians were left alone, in less than 50 years, “there would be no trace of the preaching that has been given to them” (no habría rastro de la predicación que se les ha hecho) (1152). By assimilating the goddess Cihuacoatl with Eve, Sahagún shared, although in a highly specific way, the interpretational strategy of the Dominican Fray Pedro de los Ríos, who recognized in different deities depicted in the Codex Telleriano-Remensis Christian



**Figure 7.7.** Ciuacoatl: Venus? Eve? or “A devil that they were painting as a woman”? (Sahagún 1979:1:book 1, 10v). (Drawing by Elbis Domínguez)

figures such as Adam and Eve, as well as avatars of the devil (Ragon 1993). Finally, in his refutation of the idolatry included in the *Códice Florentino*, Sahagún (2000:121) claimed that Ciuacoatl was none other than “a devil whom they painted as a woman” (un diablo que pintaban como mujer), a comparison that has been perceptively analyzed by Cecelia Klein (1995) in light of the confluence of pre-Hispanic elements and the European image of the wild woman.

As for the number of deities venerated by the ancient Mexicans, Sahagún (2000:107) spoke of “many imaginary gods” (muchos dioses imaginarios) when he described the Tlaloques, and in refuting their cult, he exclaimed, “This seems more like senseless child’s play than [that of] men of reason. Your ancestors invented other countless mad ideas and other innumerable gods that neither paper nor time would suffice to write about them” (125).<sup>32</sup> From there arises the question of

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the order that the Franciscan followed in presenting the native gods.

The subject is important, because it translates on the part of Sahagún an interest in the native pantheon that was not always expressed by other chroniclers. For example, Sergio Botta (2008:14) points to the significant absence in Motolinía's work "of a taxonomic or cognitive desire" with regard to Mexica gods, so that "the inventory of idolatrous events is deprived of the organizing principle and concerning the most diverse reality in the interior of an omni comprehensive category. This shows how, in the missionary's eyes, it is completely useless to seek order in the indigenous worldview." In the case of the *Primeros Memoriales*, where 37 deities were represented, scholars have proposed a wide variety of hypotheses that reflect the doubts that survived when it came to the organization of the native pantheon. It has been said that a list of gods was copied from an illustration in a pre-Hispanic codex (Baird 1979:179), from an "indigenous map" in which the gods were associated with the directions (Zantwijk 1982), or from representatives of the divinities celebrated during rituals—for example, those that appear in the section of the *veintenas* of the Codex Borbonicus (Nicholson 1988). Finally, as Eloise Quiñones Keber (1988:256) stated, "Neither manuscript [*Primeros Memoriales* or *Códice Florentino*], therefore, offers a complete catalogue of major Aztec deities, and Sahagún's principle of selection in either case is unclear."

However, let us take a look at the order that Sahagún employed in the *Códice Florentino*. Chapter 1 of Book 1 begins,

"That it speaks of the main god that they worshipped and to whom the Mexicans made sacrifices, called Huitzilopochtli" (Que habla del principal dios que adoraban y a quien sacrificaban los mexicanos, llamado Huitzilopochtli) (Sahagún 2000:69). What is interesting is that in the Nahuatl column, the indigenous informants say: "It speaks of the most important and principal gods whom they worshipped and made offerings to in the past" (Yntechpa tlatoa, yn oc cenca tlapanauja teteuh: yn qujnmoteuti-aia, yoan yn qujntlamanjliaia, yn ie vecauh) (Valiñas Coalla 2007:8). In other words, it speaks of gods (*teteuh*) in the plural.<sup>33</sup> Later, Sahagún (1906:35r; 2000:74) announced, "It is about the principal goddesses that they worshipped in this New Spain" (Se trata de las diosas principales que adoraban en esta Nueva España), which corresponded this time to the parallel Nahuatl text (Sahagún 1950–1981:1:11). Finally, starting in chapter 13 of the *Códice Florentino*, Sahagún (2000:87) wrote, "It is about the gods that are lesser in dignity than those mentioned earlier" (Trata de los dioses que son menores en dignidad que los arriba dichos), which also corresponded to the Nahuatl text (Sahagún 1950–1981:1:29). It is possible to specify that the Nahuatl text uses the word *tepitoton*—literally "little, small things" (*chicas, pequeñas cosas*)—to refer to these "minor" gods, while the word *veueintin*—literally "big things" (*cosas grandes*)—is employed to describe the principal deities (Molina 1970 [1571]:folios 103, 157).

This division of the pantheon into greater gods, greater goddesses, and lesser gods seems to correspond more to a Western



scheme than to an indigenous classification. (See also Laird this volume.) As Emily Umberger (2015:92) correctly noted, “It appears that Sahagún’s images were meant for a new purpose—to create simple images for a European audience as explanatory and mnemonic devices. In the process he simplified them, created a new, non-Aztec type of context, and organized them in a linear hierarchy comprehensible to a European audience.” Furthermore, what is surprising is the placement of certain gods as well as some absences: the presence of Paynal can perhaps be understood beside Huitzilopochtli among the greater gods, but why did the Tlaloques figure among the minor gods and not beside Tlaloc in the first group? How can it be explained that major numens such as Xiuhtecuhtli and Xipe Totec are relegated to the status of minor gods while the rather obscure Tzapotlatena appears among the “greater goddesses”? Finally, how can we explain the absence of deities as prominent as the sun god Tonatiuh, the earth deity Tlaltecuctli, the Lord of the Dead Mictlantecuhtli, and the god of the ancestors and hunting Mixcoatl? Be that as it may, what draws our attention is the fact that we can find a tripartite division applied to the deities of the Roman pantheon in the writings of Las Casas (1967:1:554–556)<sup>34</sup> and Torquemada, with both authors explicitly referring to Saint Augustine’s *City of God*<sup>35</sup> as a source for this model. Furthermore, according to Torquemada (1975–1983:3:59):

This well-known error used by the ancient idolaters was also closely followed by these [people] of this New

Spain, holding some select and chosen gods that the gentiles held as foremost and supreme. There were others of lesser degree and lower esteem; and other lesser ones, whom everyone regarded as divinities, although they might have been purely human.<sup>36</sup>

Although this scheme does not correspond exactly with the list presented in Sahagún’s work, which Torquemada drew from for his *Monarquía Indiana*, the tripartite structure that these two Franciscans use to present the gods in their writings—a structure that follows a model inspired by Saint Augustine’s *City of God*—reveals its Western origin.<sup>37</sup>

In light of the preceding, it is worth reconsidering some attempts to classify the Mexica pantheon by modern scholars. Let us take the case of a book by Lewis Spence, *The Gods of Mexico*, published in London in 1923. The author begins his work with the great cosmogonic myths, and then he analyzes the “great gods” (Huitzilopochtli, Tezcatlipoca, and Quetzalcoatl). He continues with the creator deity Ometeotl; the divinities of the earth, rain, fire, *pulque*, stars, and death; and finally the “minor” gods. In the well-known 1971 *Handbook of Middle American Indians*, an article by Henry B. Nicholson, “Religion in Pre-Hispanic Central Mexico,” continues to be a classic. The American ethnohistorian proposes categorizing the gods into three major groups: (1) celestial creator deities; (2) agricultural deities of rain and fertility; (3) deities of war and sacrifice, with each group composed of different “complexes”

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dominated by important gods (Ometeotl, Tezcatlipoca, Xiuhtecuhtli, Tlaloc, and so on). Finally, I mention the voluminous 1992–1994 work of Salvador Mateos Higuera, *Enciclopedia gráfica del México antiguo*, where the gods are described throughout four thick volumes as “supreme gods,” “creator gods,” and “minor gods.” Numerous other examples of this type of study may be found.

Without denying the didactic value of these schemas, experts have assembled and classified Mesoamerican deities in groups or complexes based on Western categories without asking how the native people might have organized their own pantheon.<sup>38</sup> As Marcel Detienne (2000:84–85) stated when he analyzed the contributions of Georges Dumezil in the study of Indo-European polytheism, it is necessary to consider structures of the pantheons reflected in myths, in the deities venerated on altars and at temples during certain celebrations, and so forth, as long as the lists and order of the deities come from original sources.<sup>39</sup> Nevertheless, Dumezil has been criticized, for example by Arnaldo Momigliano (1984), for rigidly applying his famous model of the three functions on sources to ancient Rome.

Concerning the organization of Mesoamerican gods, scholars have at their disposal original materials in the same pre-Hispanic sources, which have not been used to their fullest. For the Classic Maya world, epigraphers have barely begun to analyze the lists of gods recorded on monuments and stelae.<sup>40</sup> For central Mexico, among other documents concerning the organization of Mesoamerican gods, what

stand out are religious codices of the so-called Borgia group, in which deities are depicted distributed in different sections and almanacs. Foremost experts such as Eduard Seler (1963 [1904]), Francisco del Paso y Troncoso (1898), and Konrad Theodor Preuss (1903) have managed to identify these gods, as well as explain the significance and function of the sections where they appear. Karl Nowotny (2005 [1961]) and more recently Elizabeth Boone (2007) managed to clarify the meaning and functions of the other sections, taking into account their divinatory, ritual, and even mythical dimensions.

As far as I know, there has not been any study of the organization of the gods in the different sections. Why do certain gods and not others appear as patrons of the 20 days, of the 20 *trecenas*, and of the 18 *veintenas*? What is the logic underlying the placement of these or other gods in the list of merchant gods or among those who were patrons of marriage forecasts? Why were Xiuhtecuhtli, Itztli, Piltzintecuhtli, Chalchiuhtlicue, Mictlantecuhtli, Cinteotl, Tlazolteotl, Tepeyollotl, and Tlaloc chosen as Lords of the Night? What are the shared characteristics that led the *tlacuiloque* (scribes or painters) to put them together in a single group? These groups probably reflected divine functions determined by a certain type of calendrical, ritual, and even mythical order that still eludes us today.

I would like to conclude with a reconsideration of criticism that has been leveled against the use of the Graeco-Roman pantheon by sixteenth-century Spanish

chroniclers. In fact, these criticisms do not take into account knowledge of Graeco-Roman antiquity on the part of the chroniclers of that period—knowledge, it is worth remembering, that came to a large extent from Christian authors writing against pagan religion.<sup>41</sup> Obviously, the vision of the pagan pantheon in these writings was simplified, if not caricatured. Therefore, other scholars speak of simplified schemas from Western antiquity that could not capture the complexity of pre-Hispanic religious systems. In contrast, I believe that despite their limitations and scope, comparative processes carried out by sixteenth-century chroniclers laid the foundations for an anthropological approach to foreign cultural realities. It will be necessary to continue to evaluate these works in light of the political and religious context in which they arose (Hodgen 1971). The case of Fray Bernardino de Sahagún is a fascinating field for this type of appraisal. In fact, together with the collective character of his work, which transmitted in an exceptional way the voice of his indigenous informants, we know of the Christianizing and linguistic desires that guided his great enterprise (León-Portilla 1999b). In this essay we have examined Sahagún's attitude toward Mexica deities, a subject that has received little attention to date on the part of specialists. Through different indications, we have seen that Sahagún's position on the subject of native deities is not monolithic: it shifts back and forth between recognition of parallels with the Graeco-Roman pantheon, euhemerist theory, the presence of the devil, and

a trace of a possible evangelization prior to the arrival of the Spaniards. The way that Sahagún chose to organize the native pantheon leads us to reflect on the Western origin of his classification, a model that prevails in a number of twentieth-century works on Mexica gods. Actually, scholars today offer us a much more nuanced vision of the Graeco-Roman gods—one that draws on the contributions of anthropology. Consequently and without falling into mechanical, anachronistic comparisons, I am convinced that studies of pantheons from Classical antiquity can serve as valuable sources of inspiration for our studies of Mesoamerican material.<sup>42</sup> On this matter, the proposals of Jesuit Joseph-François Lafitau, in his novel work *Mœurs des sauvages américains comparées aux mœurs des premiers temps* (1724:1:3–4), still strike me as highly suggestive:

I was not satisfied with only knowing about the character of the savages and finding out about their customs and practices, I have sought in these practices and customs the vestiges of most ancient antiquity; I have read with care the oldest writers who dealt with customs, laws and uses of cultures that they knew; I have undertaken a comparison of these customs and I confess that although the ancient authors gave me enlightenment to support some happy conjectures concerning the savages, the customs of the savages gave me enlightenment to more easily understand and to explain several things that are in the [writings of the] ancient authors.<sup>43</sup>

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## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank Debra Nagao for the translation of this article into English.

## **Notes**

- 1 “Hallaron los españoles al tiempo que pasaron a aquellas provincias grandísimas idolatrías, y eran de las que se hallan escritas de los ritos de los antiguos gentiles; como son sacrificar hombres, tener templos y estatuas de ídolos, adorar los animales y honrarlos con procesiones y sacrificios de sangre, ser supersticiosos en mirar en agujeros y tenerlos casi todos los que de los antiguos se escriben.”
- 2 See the excellent study by David A. Lupher (2006).
- 3 Pierre Ragon (1988:175–176) comments on an interesting precedent in Spain, when a conversion campaign was undertaken in the Basque country: “A certain intellectual elite assimilated the cultural particularities of the [Basque] population to the reminiscences of a pre-Christian idolatry very similar to Graeco-Roman paganism.” We should recall that Fray Juan de Zumárraga and Fray Andrés de Olmos participated in these campaigns and that the latter had an influence on the conception of Sahagún’s work (Baudot 1983:129–165).
- 4 Keen (1984:101, 113, 160, 172). In this regard, Patrick Lesbre’s reading of the representation of the god Tlaloc by indigenous painters in the *Códice Ixtlilxóchitl* is relevant: “The identification of Tlaloc with Classical antiquity makes it possible to escape the absolute condemnation imposed by demonization; it recovers and dignifies the figure. Therefore, the survival of the god’s image is achieved, with the status of a ‘historical memory’ and not as an example of idolatry. With this procedure, the culture of the ancient Mexicas was situated within the context of the great cultures of antiquity” (Lesbre 2008:97).
- 5 See the novel study by Sergio Botta (2008).
- 6 For the vision of the Mexica pantheon in Sahagún’s work, see Olivier (2002).
- 7 See Osorio Romero (1990) and Lupher (2006:229–234).
- 8 Actually, we have found only one exception in the Nahuatl part of the *Códice Florentino* (Sahagún 1979:book 6, folio 28r), where Sahagún’s informants made the comparison between Chicomecoatl and the Roman goddess Ceres (“itoca chicomecoatl yn juhquj ma ceres catca”).
- 9 “Por mi industria se han escrito doce libros de lenguaje propio y natural desta lengua mexicana, donde allende de ser muy gustosa y provechosa escritura, hallarse también en ella todas las maneras de hablar, y todos vocablos que esta lengua usa, tambien autorizados y ciertos como lo que escribió Vergilio y Cicerón y los demás autores de la lengua Latina.”
- 10 “Esta célebre y gran ciudad de Tulla, muy rica y de gente muy sabia y muy esforzada, tuvo la adversa fortuna de Troya. Los chololtecas, que son los que della se escaparon, han tenido la sucesión de los romanos, y como los romanos edificaron el Capitolio para su fortaleza, así los chololanos edificaron a mano aquel promontorio que está junto a Cholula. . . . Los tlaxcaltecas parecen hacer sucedido en la fortuna de los cartaginenses.”

- 11 “No tuvo por cosa superflua ni vana el divino Agustino tratar de la teología fabulosa de los gentiles en el sexto libro de La ciudad de Dios, porque como él dice, conocidas las fábulas y ficciones vanas que los gentiles tenían cerca de sus dioses fingidos, pudiesen fácilmente darles a entender que aquéllos no eran dioses ni podían dar cosa ninguna que fuese provechosa a la criatura racional.”
- 12 “Cuán desatinados habían sido en el conocimiento de las criaturas los gentiles, nuestros antecesores, así griegos como latinos, está muy claro por sus mismas escrituras, de las cuales nos consta cuán ridiculas fábulas inventaron del Sol y de la Luna, y de algunas de las estrellas, y del agua, tierra, fuego y aire, y de las otras criaturas. Y lo peor es, les atribuyeron divinidad y adoraron, ofrecieron, sacrificaron y acataron como a dioses. . . . Pues si esto pasó, como sabemos, entre gente de tanta discreción y presunción, no hay por qué nadie se maraville porque se hallen semejantes cosas entre esta gente tan párvula y tan fácil para ser engañada.” Fernández de Oviedo adopted a similar, somewhat condescending attitude when describing the gods and rites of the Indians of Nicaragua, whose strangeness and irrationality should come as no surprise when one considers that “such intelligent” people as the Greeks and Romans had similar customs (Lupher 2006:242–243).
- 13 “A uno tenía [Motecuhzoma] por dios de la guerra, como los gentiles a Marte; e a otro honraba e sacrificaba como a dios de las aguas, según de los antiguos a Neptuno; otro adoraba por dios del viento, según de los gentiles a Eolo.” He also compares the gods of the Indians of Nicaragua to Roman gods (Fernández de Oviedo 1945:XI,180).
- 14 As for the avatars of this association of Tlaloc with Neptune in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, see the suggestive study by Pablo Escalante (2000).
- 15 “Ven a Júpiter como fuego y aire, y a Juno, como agua y tierra.”
- 16 In the *Retórica cristiana* by Diego Valadés (1989:406), the Mexica patron deity appears “as a statue of a Roman god,” according to Elizabeth H. Boone (1989:59), or as “an image of Zeus,” according to Pablo Escalante (2000:323).
- 17 “La figura del ydolo [Huitzilopochtli] presente es la que los mexicanos adoraban por el mayor Dios de todos y á quien tenían mayor confianza: decían incitar los coraçones de los hombres y enbravecellos para la guerra, debaxo la qual opinion adoraban los gentiles al Dios Marte.” Concerning the perception of the gods and the “comparativism” of Diego Durán, see Bernand and Gruzinski (1988:89–120).
- 18 “Este dios llamado Huitzilopochtli fue otro Hércules, el cual fue robustísimo, de grandes fuerzas y muy belicoso, gran destruidor de pueblos y matador de gentes. . . . A este hombre que por su fortaleza y destreza en la guerra le tuvieron en mucho los mexicanos cuando vivía, después que murió le honraron como a Dios y le ofrecían esclavos.”
- 19 Alfredo López Austin (2002:87–88) also detected this influence of Euhemerus in Sahagún’s work.
- 20 See, for example, Thévét (1905:34–36) and *Leyenda de los Soles* (Bierhorst 1992:153–155). A representation of Quetzalcoatl performing human sacrifice is found in the Codex Borgia (1963:plate 42).

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- 21 Furthermore, in another part of his work, Sahagún (2000:719) compares King Quetzalcoatl of Tula with “King Arthur among the English” (el rey Artús entre los ingleses).
- 22 “Diosas llamadas cihuapiltin [que] eran todas las mujeres que morían del primer parto, a las cuales canonizaban por diosas.”
- 23 “Es esta adoracion de mujeres cosa tan de burlar y de reir, que no hay para qué hablar de la confutar por autoridades de la Sagrada Escritura.”
- 24 “Las diosas del agua, y derivan su nombre de ‘nubes,’ pues de las nubes provienen las aguas y por ello se las denomina así.”
- 25 “Era tenido por verdadero dios, y invisible . . . criador del cielo y de la tierra y era todopoderoso.”
- 26 It is worth mentioning that Pablo Escalante (2008:14), based on a comparison between the book of emblems of Andrea Alciato and the *Códice Florentino*, proposed the existence of parallels between Tezcatlipoca and the god Pan.
- 27 “Éste [Tezcatlipoca] es el malvado de Lucifer, padre de toda maldad y mentira, ambiciosísimo y superbísimo, que engañó a vuestros antepasados.”
- 28 It should be said that Saint Augustine (1994:1:29) appropriately used this same biblical citation to refute the pagan gods of the Romans.
- 29 “También la llaman Tonantzin, que quiere decir ‘nuestra madre.’ En estas dos cosas parece que esta diosa es nuestra madre Eva, la cual fue engañada de la culebra, y que ellos tenían noticia del negocio que pasó entre nuestra madre Eva y la culebra.” About this association, see also Laird this volume.
- 30 “Yo siempre he tenido opinión que nunca les fue predicado el evangelio, porque nunca jamás he hallado cosa que aluda a la fe católica.”
- 31 “Paréceme que pudo ser muy bien que fueron predicados por algún tiempo; pero que muertos los predicadores que vinieron a predicarlos, perdieron del todo la fe que les fue predicada, y se volvieron a sus idolatrias.”
- 32 “Esto más parece cosa de niños y sin seso que de hombres de razón. Otras locuras sin cuento y otros dioses sin número inventaron vuestros antepasados, que ni papel ni tiempo bastarían para escribirlas.”
- 33 We follow the translation published in Leopoldo M. Valiñas Coalla (2007:8). In fact, in Sahagún (1950–1981:1:1), Charles E. Dibble and Arthur J. O. Anderson follow Sahagún and translate: “Which telleth of the highest of the gods,” which is incorrect.
- 34 For the classification of the gods in the works of Las Casas, Torquemada, and Acosta, see the following suggestive reflections of Bernand and Gruzinski (1988:79–87).
- 35 This may be pointed out despite certain variants in the classification of Roman gods in the work of Saint Augustine (1994:255, 262, 267, 277, 286–290, 304, 333). In fact, today scholars of Roman religion point out that “the divisions [of the gods] proposed by the ancients are fluctuating and contradictory” (Bayet 1969:113; see also Schneid 2001:128–137; Sez nec 1993:282–283).
- 36 “Este error tan conocido y usado de los antiguos idólatras fue también muy seguido de éstos de esta Nueva España, teniendo unos dioses selectos y escogidos que los gentiles

tuvieron por primeros y supremos. Otros hubo de inferior grado y estimación más baja; y otros menores, a los cuales todos daban divinidad, aunque hubiesen sido puros hombres.”

- 37 The tripartite model was used in the sixteenth century in a treatise called *Teología mitológica* (1532) by German scholar Georg Pictor, who divided the Graeco-Roman gods into “Magni Dei,” “Selecti Dei,” and “Indigetes Dei,” whom he also compares with Asian and Egyptian deities (Seznec 1993:266–267).
- 38 During some lectures, which were published, Paul Kirchhoff said in a somewhat colloquial but correct way, “We have classified the gods of Mexico however we’ve pleased” (Hemos clasificado a los dioses de México como nos daba la gana) (Kirchhoff 1983:42).
- 39 See also chapter 4, “Comment lire Dumézil,” in the book by Schneid (2001:95–117).
- 40 Stephen Houston, personal communication September 2009.
- 41 An exception to this is the noteworthy scholarship of Las Casas, who had a profound knowledge of ancient sources (Lupher 2006:271–272).
- 42 See the brilliant and provocative essay by Marcel Detienne (2000).
- 43 “Je ne me suis pas contenté de connaître le caractère des Sauvages, et de m’informer de leur coùtumes et de leurs pratiques, j’ai cherché dans ces pratiques et dans ces coutumes des vestiges de l’Antiquité la plus reculée; j’ai lu avec soin ceux des auteurs les plus anciens qui ont traité des mœurs, des lois et des usages des peuples dont ils avaient quelque connaissance; j’ai fait la comparaison de ces mœurs les unes avec les autres, et j’avoue que si les auteurs anciens m’ont donné des lumières pour appuyer quelques conjectures heureuses touchant les Sauvages, les coutumes des Sauvages m’ont donné des lumières pour entendre plus facilement et pour expliquer plusieurs choses qui sont dans les auteurs anciens.”

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## 8

## Toward a New World's Laocoön: Thoughts on Seeing Aztec Sculpture through Spanish Eyes

Thomas B. F. Cummins

The title of this essay makes triple reference to the Laocoön. The first reference is, of course, to the Trojan priest and his two sons in Virgil's *Aeneid* and the eventual foundation of Rome by Aeneas after his leaving Troy and his wanderings throughout the Mediterranean. This Roman foundational myth is not altogether unlike the Mexica's account of their own origin, which begins with their departure from Aztlan/Chicomoztoc, followed by wanderings and prodigious deeds until they founded Tenochtitlan.<sup>1</sup> The second reference to the Laocoön is to a sculpture of the priest and his sons as they are attacked by the serpent sent by Athena to prevent them from warning the Trojans of the Greek ruse of the wooden horse. The sculpture is either a copy or the original (ca. 200 B.C.) created by three Rhodian sculptors, Agesander, Athenodoros, and Polydorus,

as recorded by Pliny (Figure 8.1). It was unearthed in 1506 and quickly entered into the visual world of the sixteenth century as a major antique reference.<sup>2</sup> For example, Marco Dente da Ravenna created an engraving of the sculpture in 1506, and a marble copy, which is now in the Uffizi, was made by Baccio Bandinelli ca. 1520–1525. And of course, one of the most famous examples in Spain is el Greco's painting from around 1610.

I shall return to this Early Modern history of the sculpture and its images, but I want first to recognize the third and rather more oblique yet direct reference, to Clement Greenberg's 1940 essay published in the *Partisan Review* and entitled "Toward a Newer Laocoön," which in turn takes from Lessing's eighteenth-century essay (1957 [1766]) on the characteristics of poetry and the plastic arts, arguing that

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**Figure 8.1.** *Laocoön and His Sons*, by Agesander, Athenodoros, and Polydorus, as recorded by Pliny the Elder, 40–20 B.C.E. Unearthed in 1506 on the Esquiline Hill in Rome. Parian marble, height 208 cm, width 163 cm, depth 112 cm. (Museo Pio-Clementino, Vatican City)

each has its own character. (The former is extended in time; the latter is extended in space.) These two essays are about aesthetics and the nature of art, a modern possibility that arose when images came to be regarded in multiple ways: sometimes being an expression of art, sometimes being an expression of the sacred, and sometimes both—a division that, according to Belting (1994:438), begins in the Renaissance. These new alternatives allowed the pagan relics of antiquity to be admired for “the delicacy of their artistry and the antiquity of their marble” (Meléndez 1681:2:61–63).

I will not refer to the specifics of Lessing’s and Greenberg’s arguments, as they are too narrow and restrictive in terms of the historical conditions and the sculptural works that are the focus of this study. They instead are invoked in terms

of how one might think of comparisons of representations. Here I refer to the historical conditions in which comparison between many of the sculptures of Classical antiquity and Aztec sculpture are at once rooted in the narrative moments of their respective mythologies while at the same time coming under the scrutiny of sixteenth-century Catholic Europeans. This relationship between classical antiquity and pre-Columbian America is not quite the same thing as is analyzed in recent historical work by Anthony Grafton (1992), Sabine McCormack (1991, 2006, 2009), and David A. Lupher (2006), which is focused on a more philological approach to sixteenth- and seventeenth-century texts. Their work establishes the historical dimensions in which the New World was, at times, framed through the lens of Classical antiquity.

This essay is based instead upon the question and response that arose in 2007 at the Getty Villa when Michael Brand, then director of the Getty Museum, asked me about a possible collaboration with Mexico and my ideas on what such a collaboration might be. I immediately said that night that the only natural exhibition at the Villa could be one that was historically based, one that drew upon the visual connections that Spaniards made between Aztec religious images and practices and their own Classical inheritance. For example, the Yucatán colonial city Mérida was so named because when the Spaniards first came to the site, they found so many buildings of stone and mortar that they were reminded of the Roman buildings of Mérida in Spain.<sup>3</sup> And while both Inka and Aztec buildings conjured up sixteenth-century comparisons to Roman ruins in Spain, it would seem that if any pre-Columbian sculptural tradition could be compared with Greek and Roman sculpture, it would be Aztec stone sculpture.

This is not a modern-day conceit, as Serge Gruzinski has amply documented (1992, 1994). So simply by having marble sculptures of Hercules on permanent exhibition at the Getty Villa, it might be possible to imagine, through their juxtaposition with certain Aztec sculptures, the basis of the powerful suggestion made by the depiction of Huitzilopochtli, the titular deity of the Aztec in Bernardino de Sahagún's Florentine Codex, who is at the same time called "another Hercules" (Figure 8.2). The historical question becomes why such an image and others in

this late-sixteenth-century manuscript would be seen as iterations (*otro*, "another") of the deities of Classical Rome? Could one reconstruct the historical roots of a visual imagination that might underlie such sixteenth-century assertions? The answer is yes, in a way, but only by innuendo, suggestion, and imagination in relation to seeing Classical objects themselves—the very opposite of the "science" of philology (see Thomas 1990).<sup>4</sup>

Before studying, suggesting, or imagining any visual comparisons, analogies, connections, and coincidences between Classical and Aztec representations, it is important to point out that the image and description of Huitzilopochtli as another Hercules is, at first glance, perplexing, if we take into account the Habsburg relation to Hercules as a model of their own heroic and imperial might. It is here that one can begin to trace the ideology of visual imagination through the broader arena of images in the sixteenth century. Both Maximilian and his grandson Charles V surrounded themselves with images of Hercules (Sauerlander 2006:60). For example, a bard (a horse's armored breast plate) that probably belonged to Maximilian I, made in Augsburg around 1517–1519 and attributed to Kolman Helmsshmid, depicts on one side the Old Testament hero Samson and on the other side Hercules slaying the serpents sent by Hera when he was an infant. The imagery goes on to depict the Twelve Labors of Hercules (Soler del Campo 2009:64–65). The figure of Hercules is an allegorical reference to Maximilian himself, who had already been depicted in a woodcut of

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**Figure 8.2.** *Vitzilobuchtli (Huitzilopochtli), otro Hercules.* Watercolor, height 31 cm, width 32 cm. In Sahagún 1575–1579:1:detail folio 9r. (Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Florence, Med. Palat. 218)

around 1500 as Hercules Germanicus and deemed restorer of order and promoter of virtue (Silver 2008:23, 127–129). The point is that the body of the emperor was literally framed by the image of Hercules.

It is no surprise then that Maximilian’s grandson Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor and king of Spain, chose the mythical Pillars of Hercules, which stood at the mouth of the Mediterranean, as a part of his personal device, along with the Latin phrase “plus ultra” (Rosenthal 1971, 1973). He too surrounded himself with this allusion to Hercules in a variety of forms and media (See Soler del Campo 2009:112–113). For example,

an allegorical design for a dress shield of Charles V, now called the Apotheosis of Charles V and attributed to Giulio Romano, conflates the great victory in Tunis against the Turks with the successful campaigns of Cortés and Pizarro in the Americas (Silver 2008: 217–219). In the composition (Figure 8.3), we see Charles V on the deck of a Roman warship with a standard with an imperial eagle attended by Fame and Victory. Fame holds a shield with the device “plus ultra,” which refers to the Pillars of Hercules, which we see behind on land, held by Hercules himself, and on the other side is Neptune. They together refer to the expansion of the empire to the Americas and perhaps the campaigns being conducted by Pizarro in Peru. This image of Charles V is very similar in iconography, pose, and form to the life-sized allegorical bronze-cast portrait of Charles V restraining Fury created by Leone Leoni between 1551 and 1556, described below. And finally, this invocation of Hercules and the Americas was one of the last things anyone setting out for the Americas would see in Seville, known as New Rome (Lleó Cañal 1979), as it was placed on the walls of the Ayuntamiento (town hall) with other Classical images. Thus the Pillars of Hercules became ubiquitous in Spain and the Americas, and they allegorically referred to the might of the Holy Roman Emperor, the direct descendant of Aeneas, and his taking of the Americas. For example, Martín de Murúa, a Mercedarian friar who produced in 1590 the first extensively Andean illustrated manuscript in Cuzco, created an allegorical image of the immensely rich





**Figure 8.3.** Design for the *Parade Shield with the Apotheosis of Charles V*, attributed to Giulio Romano, 1535–1540, Italy. Pen on paper, diameter ca. 41.1 cm. (Teylers Museum, Haarlem, inv. no. K16)

mining city of Potosí in which the enormous figure of the Inka emerges from behind the mountain of Potosí (Figure 8.4). He grasps two pseudo-Corinthian columns that are crowned and above which is written “Plus Ultra.” The Inka speaks in Latin: “Ego fulcio columnas eius” (I sustain these columns). That is, the Andes may have been reached by breaching the columns of Hercules, but in Martín de Murúa’s manuscript, originally one of the very first images<sup>5</sup> claims that it now is the wealth of Peru that sustains Spain and its ancient heritage. The allegorical image is a combination of Classical and local visual references that make its message immediately understandable.

Returning to Sahagún’s Florentine Codex, we can understand, perhaps, what underlies the significance of why the manuscript opens its illustrations with the image of Huitzilopochtli, the titular deity of the Aztec, and his identification as another Hercules (Figure 8.2). At the very least, the nobility and grandeur of Hercules were preeminent in the imagination of sixteenth-century Spaniards as it pertained to the persona of imperial authority and the conquest of the Americas.<sup>6</sup> In 1559, for example, the images of Huitzilopochtli and Hercules appeared together in Mexico City. They formed part of the eulogy to Charles V represented in paintings

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**Figure 8.4.** Emblematic depiction of the mines of Potosí, by Martín de Múrua. In Múrua 1590–1613:folio 141v. (Collection Sean Galvin, Dublin)

on the ephemeral royal sepulcher built by Claudio de Arciniega in the patio of the convent of San Francisco de los Naturales. This placement ensured a massive and continuous native audience for as long as it stood. A woodcut of the two-story structure appears in Francisco Cervantes de Salazar’s *Túmulo imperial de la gran ciudad de México* (1963 [1560]). And it reveals the architectural classicism of Serlio and his influence on Machuca and Siloe. The woodcut image

of the architecture is embellished by Cervantes de Salazar’s careful description of the pictorial program dedicated to the glory of Charles V. The program is a mixture of historical paintings concerning the conquest of the Americas and allegorical images of Charles’s virtues and his defense of the church, often represented through Classical figures. On the first story was hung a painting depicting “Cortes, armed standing atop the temple of the principle demon that they called

Uchilobos [Huitzilopochtli]” (Cervantes de Salazar 1963 [1560]:192–193). Cortés throws the figure of Huitzilopochtli from its place of honor, an accomplishment that was meant to demonstrate the divine favor for Cortés. On the second floor, Hercules was depicted fighting the multiheaded serpent Hydra. This figure metaphorically represented Charles V as the defender of the faith against the Lutheran heretics (198). Other historical actors (Motecuhzoma and Atahualpa) and ancient mythical figures (Jupiter, Apollo, and the phoenix) were used to unite the historical accomplishments of Cortés in Mexico on behalf of Charles V and the greatness of the Holy Roman Emperor on behalf of the church.

Only 16 years later, Sahagún wrote about Huitzilopochtli: “This God, called Huitzilopochtli, was another Hercules who was extremely noble with great strength and very bellicose, destroyer of cities and killed many people in war. He was like living fire and greatly feared etc.” Sahagún gives great nobility and stature to this deity rather than demeaning and demonizing him as on the funerary monument for Charles V, and as will come later in Sahagún’s own manuscript. Sahagún goes on in this early section to describe Huitzilopochtli’s attributes and costume, the first element of which, he says, was the head of a fire-breathing dragon. Here the critical point is that he depicts and describes this deity and the rest of the Aztec gods as individuals with particular attributes and qualities; they are gods who take the form of men. If one thinks of the *Aeneid*, then Roman

gods walked and interacted with man for good and bad in much the way they did in Mexico.<sup>7</sup> However, Sahagún’s images are more than that, as they capture in European illustrative form the fact that Mexica cosmological expression was based on a very anthropocentric religious tradition, unlike almost anything else the Spaniards encountered in the Americas. Aztec deities were imagined as men and women differentiated by attributes, and men and women could for a time be manifestations of the deities by donning those attributes. The recognition and the transformation were accomplished through the attributes of each deity, as can be seen in Sahagún’s depictions of Xiuhtecuhtli (“otro Vulcan”) and Tezcatlipoca (“otro jupiter”) (Figure 8.5). The figure of Xiuhtecuhtli is shown in profile, striding forward. He holds a shield in one hand and a symbol of fire and lightening in the other. He wears sandals and a loincloth, and his face is painted in black and yellow bands. The rest of his body is painted white. The dynamic pose of Sahagún’s image conjures up the pre-Hispanic belief that Mexica gods became manifest and walked the streets of Tenochtitlan when priests, captives, and slaves donned the transformative regalia and became what they represented (Clendinnen 1991:87–140; 236–263; Hvidtfelt 1958; Townsend 1979:23–37). The magically transformative power of this dress can be imagined through a drawing in the *Descripción de Tlaxcala*, a manuscript prepared in the early 1580s to be presented in Spain to Philip II. The pen-and-ink drawing depicts the act of the extirpation of idolatry

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**Figure 8.5.** *Tezcatlipoca, otro Jupiter*, watercolor. Height 31 cm, width 32 cm. In Sahagún 1575–1577:1:detail folio 9r. (Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Florence, Med. Palat. 218)

by the Franciscan friars. Idols are not cast down. Rather, the friars stand with torches to either side of a great circular conflagration in which masks, ritual dress, and other paraphernalia are consumed by a ball of flames (Muñoz Camargo 1981 [1585]:folio 239v). In contrast to the flames, which are schematically rendered, the objects being burned are depicted in sharp focus. They are quite detailed and therefore easy to identify. Each mask is frozen in place, and we can recognize, for example, the masks of Ehecatl, the wind god, and Tlaloc, the water god.

The transformative power of ritual costume is one of the mechanisms for a kind of Aztec transubstantiation, which is termed *ixiptla*. Not only did men become gods by donning their attributes, but sculptures were both dressed and carved to appear dressed with the attributes of gods, and thereby they became the presence of that deity. What is not of interest here are the metaphysical differences and similarities between Christian transubstantiation and Nahuatl *ixiptla*. Rather, it is important that in these religions it was believed that god became man and man was made in god's image and that gods sacrificed themselves on behalf of mankind, be it for Romans, Aztecs, or Christians. In terms of Spanish Catholicism, these were critically related concepts that authorized the cult of images and their proliferation in Spain at the end of the fifteenth and beginning of the sixteenth century (Pereda 2007:27–144). If we look at Juan Martínez Montañés's 1606 image of the Christ child (Figure 8.6), fully sculpted, painted, and then dressed, holding the chalice and host, the signs of the transubstantiation, we are intended to witness the mystical relationship between the image of Christ as man and the image of Christ as Eucharist. This sculpture is an example of the late explosion of religious imagery in Spain, which was accompanied by the sporadic collecting of Classical sculpture. More importantly, perhaps, not only does the lifelike appearance of the Spanish golden-age sculpture make the sacred present by its simulacrum,<sup>8</sup> but the term used for the final stage of painting that creates the



**Figure 8.6.** *Christ Child*, Juan Martinez Montañes, 1606, Seville Cathedral; painted wood.

lustrous sense of flesh is *encarnación* (Pacheco 1956 [1638]:2:92–112). The modern definition has multiple entries and translates as “personification,” “natural flesh color,” “the act of assuming a human body,” and “the incarnation” (God’s assumption of the human presence through Christ). The first vernacular Spanish dictionary, by Sebastián de Covarrubias Orozco, already has the double entry “verbo divino tomando nuestra carne” (the divine word taking on our flesh) and “cerca de los pintores, vale dar color de carne en las pinturas” (the painter’s skill of painting proper flesh tones) (1998 [1611]:512). Of course,

the act of painting a religious sculpture to appear human, the personification of deities in ancient sculpture, and the incarnation of the divine word are radically different concepts within Early Modern Catholic culture. Nonetheless, the painting of flesh color by an artist and the holy word made flesh were expressed precisely by the same term in sixteenth-century Spanish. Moreover, the very existence of Christian images was permissible in the sixteenth century because of an artistic act in Classical antiquity: when the apostle Saint Luke painted Christ’s portrait.

It is important to note again that Classical antiquity and Christianity were

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visually constituted by images of gods in the image of man, and so when Spaniards came upon Mexico and marched into Tenochtitlan, they encountered a religion and sculptural tradition that was fully anthropocentric, unlike almost anything else the Spaniards had or were to encounter in the Americas in terms of being commensurate visually. They came upon life-sized stone figural sculptures, carved fully in the round, sometimes rendered with primary sexual characteristics, ready to be dressed (Figure 8.7). Their limbs were sometimes carved free from the block and at times moved in gesticulations (Figure 8.8). There was often an idealized naturalism seen in the rendering of the human face (Figure 8.9). Many principal deities, such as Coatlicue, were carved with the primary identifying iconographic features of their divinity, and they appeared most gruesome. It was the telltale hearts around her neck and the gorgon-like intertwined serpents that marked Coatlicue as a fearful goddess in the extreme, another Medusa. It was through the gods' attributes that the narratives of their individual deeds, traits, and divine powers were recounted. Moreover, the Templo Mayor compound, the heart of Tenochtitlan, was a thaumaturgic theater, a kind of *mise-en-scène* in which the sculptures were placed in relation to each other and determined by the temple-cum-mountain to instantiate in perpetuity the foundational myth (Carrasco 2000). The mythic narrative had physical locus and sculptural presence that made palpable and spatial the temporality of oral narration and

singing, just as had occurred in ancient Rome. Not only were Classical sculptures displayed so as to instantiate myths as well as historical deeds, but Catholic life-sized sculptures were also set in relation to each other and in architectural spaces so as to re-create events such as the dormition of the Virgin, the crucifixion of Christ, and the Stations of the Cross. (See, for example, Bray 2010:48, illustration 32.)

Nowhere else in the Americas but in Mexico did the Spaniards encounter a sculptural tradition similar to both their Classical heritage and their own Catholic tradition. Hence there was commensurability in terms of both form, based upon human anatomy, and the rhetorical senses of the image. However, any similarities that the Spaniards acknowledged in pre-Hispanic practices were recognized as being a perverse deception worked by the devil. The visual affinity between Aztec and European forms was nonetheless most unusual in the Americas, and it surely played upon the visual imagination of those who entered Tenochtitlan and other Mexican cities. Moreover, it allowed for a synthesis of new sculptural forms unlike any other in the colonial world. One need think only of the atria crosses carved of stone produced by native sculptors for the many newly built missions in sixteenth-century Mexico to understand how easily one sculptural tradition could slip into the other. Here, the image of the living cross became infused with body parts of the divine word as they emerged in an uncanny eruption from the stone.





**Figure 8.7.** Female figure, ca. 1450–1521, found in Texcoco. Basalt, height 154, width 51, depth 32 cm. (Museo de Nacional de Antropología, inv. no. 10–81543)

With the other great pre-Hispanic culture conquered by the Spaniards, the Inka, there is no such equivalence in sculptural traditions, nor any kind of blending as occurred with the Mexican atria crosses and baptismal fonts. Nor do we find a parallel Peruvian pantheon as imagined in Mexico, although the Inka were self-identified as semidivine. Moreover, we hear much more about

places than about images and gods in Peruvian chronicles. There are multiple oracles and pilgrimages, most often centered on a nondescript or natural form, something very different than what we find described for Mexico. For example, the only rendering of one of the great Andean deities, Pariacaca, a main protagonist of the Huarochiri manuscript, which appears in a map of the central

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**Figure 8.8.** Standing male, ca. 1400–1521, possibly found near Puebla. Gray basalt, 107 x 17 x 25 cm. (Peabody Museum of Natural History, Yale University, ant. 008525)

Andes done around 1577 (Figures 8.10a and 8.10b), is identified as “idolo” at the top of the stairs leading up the mountain and off the road from Lima to Cuzco. But the idol itself is represented only by an oddly U-shaped rock, something similar to what one sees at Machu Picchu and elsewhere in the Andes. And if we compare an image by Sahagún (1577–1579) of the ritual sacrifice to a deity, carved from wood and dressed (Sahagún 1996:folio 26r), with Guaman Poma’s image of sacrifice to an Andean deity (Murúa 1590–1613:folio 105v), we can see how precise the rendering of the form and iconography of the Mexican figure are in comparison to the amorphous depiction of the Andean *huaca* (see Trever 2011) (Figures 8.11a and 8.11b). By paying careful heed to such differences, we might find that the experiences and therefore the reactions and attempts by Spaniards to draw parallels between the Classical world and American cultures were based on actual Aztec and Inka practices and what were seen as equivalences. Too often, scholars sketch a critique of the European experience and its formulations in text and image as being based on simple and universal tropes, so that the so-called sixteenth-century construction of the American Other is undifferentiated and blind. To be sure, Aztec sculptures and deity impersonations were not like Catholic sculptures and mystery plays. They were their opposite. If this were not the case, would Sahagún have suggested that the Aztec gods constituted another pantheon? It was to Classical antiquity that the parallels were drawn.





**Figure 8.9.** Idealized head meant to be attached to a body, ca. 1500, found in the area of Templo Mayor, Mexico City. Stone, red shell, and obsidian, 19.1 x 15.5 cm. (Museo de Nacional de Antropología, Mexico City, inv. no. 10–92)

It was something that could be seen and recognized as parallel to what was already experienced in Europe. This comparison with Aztec (Mexico) gods was already prepared by the idea, put forth in the early evangelization of the Americas, that the New World was in the same state of pagan idolatry as was the ancient world of Europe before the Gospels were preached (Cummins 2002, 2006). The Jesuit José de Acosta tries to put an end to this kind of thinking at the end of the sixteenth century in his *De Procuranda Indorum Salute* (1984 [1588]).

However, for those of the first generation of Franciscans in Mexico, such as Sahagún and Diego Valadés,<sup>9</sup> the parallel was real: the Aztecs stood at a cusp, just

as the ancients had, with both in a pagan state of idolatry before Christ's salvation and the apostolic mission of preaching the word (Acosta 1984 [1588]). The Franciscans, in fact, understood themselves as parallel to the apostles in their mission, arriving as 12 bringing the Gospel as depicted allegorically in the 1578 engraving created by Diego Valadés (1579:107). These early Franciscans described the idolatry of Aztecs and others, but they saw sculptures, such as Ehecatl-Quetzalcoatl, that appeared as men dressed in the paraphernalia of gods (Figure 8.12). In fact, it is only the buccal mask that shifts the sculpture from the image of a man to the image of a god. Can we not also think, perhaps, that at

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**Figure 8.10.** Map of Huarochiri, viceroyalty of Peru (a), and detail of the mountain shrine of the Andean deity Pariacaca (b), Diego Davila Briceño, 1586. Paper, ink, and watercolor. (Real Academia de la Historia, Madrid)

some level of recognition, there was visual confirmation of the assertion that the state of pagan idolatrous worship by the Aztec was equal to the pagan antiquity of Europe?

At some level, these visual similarities were most fully registered by Sahagún (Figure 8.2). Nonetheless, a number of images in all media and on both continents represent pre-Columbian culture and people and make reference to Classical antiquity. Some images, such as are found in Valadés’s *Rhetorica Christiana*, are about the Christian transformation of Mexico’s pagan past. Other images

suggest the parallel states of pagan antiquity and pagan Mexico, and still others are allegorical expressions of imperial power. Let us look at one of the very first images of Mexico: Cortés’s 1524 map of Tenochtitlan in his published second letter. What is of interest here is the sacred center of the city (Figure 8.13). The Latin glosses identify the main buildings of the walled compound, including the principal temple, where sacrifices were offered (“templum ubi sacrificant”), and the *tzompantli*, or skull rack (“capita sacrificatorum”). In the center is depicted a freestanding, headless, seemingly nude,



Figure 8.11a. Toçoztli Festival for the Goddess Cinteutl. Watercolor, height 31 cm, width 32 cm. In Sahagún 1575–1577:1:detail folio 29v. (Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Florence, Med. Palat. 218.) Ceremony and Sacrifice of Native of the Andes; watercolor. In Múrua (1590–1613:folio 105r). (Collection Sean Galvin, Dublin)

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**Figure 8.11b.** Details of images in Figure 8.11a.

colossal sculpted figure. It is dynamically posed, with both arms extended. Two serpents seem to be held in the outstretched hands. It does not matter to what sculpture this figure refers—perhaps one particular sculpture of Coatlicue.<sup>10</sup> What is essential is that it is identified as a stone idol—“idol lapideum”—and that the artist, either whoever drew the map itself or whoever cut the woodblock for the print, gives the figure of the idol a decidedly colossal and Classical form.

Benedetto Bordone makes the Classical allusion complete four years later in his image of the great city of Tenochtitlan (Figure 8.14). The idol’s head has been restored, like a repaired Classical sculpture, and it stands upon a pedestal, nude and in a clear *contrapposto* pose. Are we looking at a New World Laocoön or at least a classicized Aztec deity that in some form makes allusion to that most recently discovered and more recently restored sculpture by Baccio Bandinelli?





**Figure 8.12.** *Ehecatl-Quetzalcoatl*, found in Calixtlahuaca. Basalt and pigment, height 176 cm, width 56 cm, depth 50 cm. (Museo de Antropología e Historia del Estado de México, Toluca, inv. no. 10–109262)

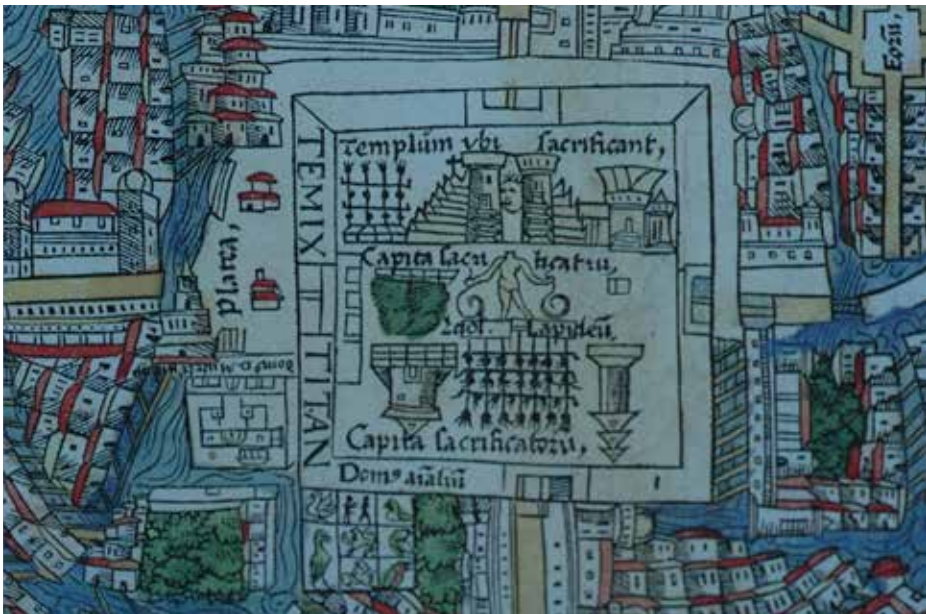
Certainly the image was already well-known by the engraving of 1506 by Marco Dente da Ravenna. However, the earliest image of the Laocoön comes from the *Vatican Virgil*, an illuminated manuscript containing fragments of Virgil's *Aeneid* from about 400 (Figure 8.15). It is one of the oldest surviving sources for the text of the *Aeneid*, and here we see a slightly different configuration of Laocoön and his sons, one in which the arms are outstretched as an enormous Laocoön kneels upon an altar. The image was not only copied in a drawing for a new illustrated *Aeneid* at the beginning of the sixteenth century, but Marco Dente da Ravenna created a print based on the *Vatican Virgil* composition (Figure 8.16). The outstretched hands of the acephalous stone idol of the Aztecs are perhaps closer to this representation of the Laocoön than to the sculpture unearthed in Rome. Whatever similarity there might be, the point is that both versions of the Laocoön were circulating at the same time that Cortés's second letter to Charles V was published in Latin. So when Cortés's map was first printed and then reprinted by Bordone, a visual nod, however subconscious, to the Laocoön would not be too far of a stretch of the visual imagination.

Cortés's letter is addressed to Charles V, and so I am not all together unsure that he and his son Philip II might not have recognized an affinity between this central figure in the map and the Laocoön, as well as to Old Testament illustrations of the golden idol (Camille 1989). Certainly the Latin-reading public of

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A



B

Figure 8.13. Map of Tenochtitlan and Caribbean (a) and detail of the sacred precinct (b). Hand-colored woodcut, in Cortés 1524. (Newberry Library: Ayer 655.51 .C8 1524d)

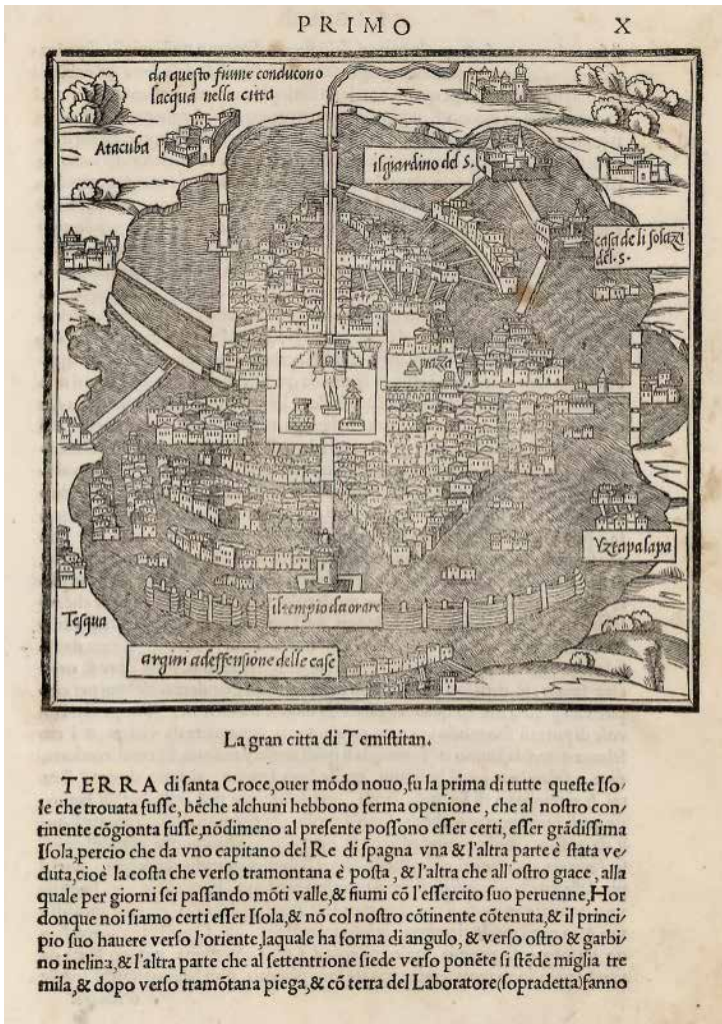


Figure 8.14. *La Gran Ciudad di Temistitan (Tenochtitlan)*. Woodcut on paper. In Bordone 1528:10.

Cortés's second letter was aware of the Laocoön and its importance as a major Classical sculpture. Moreover, there is a direct reference in relation to Charles V's own sculpted image of might and power as Holy Roman Emperor and the descendant of Aeneas. This is seen most vividly in Leone Leoni's bronze

sculpture of Charles V, finished in 1564, six years after Carlos died (Figure 8.17a). Leoni synthesizes Classical Greek and Roman heroic traditions in a remarkable way, a prescient combination of Polykleitos's *Doryphorus* and the Prima Porta Augustus. Charles stands in *contrapposto*, holding a spear and dressed in



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**Figure 8.15.** *Death of Laocoön* from the *Vatican Virgil*. Color on parchment. (Biblioteca Apostolica, Cod. Vat. lat. 3225, folio 18v)

a combination of Roman and modern armor. The references are direct and obvious in terms of iconography, form, and style. At his feet is a male nude figure bound with chains, posed as if just fallen, cringing before the righteous might of Charles V. This figure is called *Furor* or *Fury*, and it was understood at the time to express allegorically the emperor's military strength and his subjugation of the impious.<sup>11</sup> The tortured and anguished figure turns on a completely different axis from the standing Charles,

and from the back we see his muscles strained in defeat. But walking around the figure, it becomes apparent that the composition of this figure is based on the anguished Laocoön. Only the gestures of the arms are reversed, but the dynamic twisting of the body is clear to be seen as Leoni's source, which would be obvious to anyone familiar with this Classical figure.<sup>12</sup>

Leoni signed the statue on the pedestal "LEO.P.POMP.F.ARET.F. CAESARIS VIRTUTE DOMITUS," a paraphrase





**Figure 8.16.** *Death of Laocoön* after *Vatican Virgil*, Marco Dente da Ravenna, 1515–1520. Engraving on paper, 26 x 39.2 cm.

of a well-known passage from Virgil in which the Roman poet hails his patron, Emperor Augustus, as a statesman who has brought peace and law to a disordered world. “The gates of War,” the poet goes on to say, “are now closed, and impious Ire, bound fast with chains, fumes horribly in helpless rage,” here cast in the form of the suffering Trojan priest, so recently discovered. However, it is not only in the Laocoön that we can see this imperial Roman connection. This near life-sized militant figure of the Holy Roman Emperor approaches similarity to images of the pagan divinity of the Caesars. Moreover, Leoni combines the imperial portrait and the heroic, athletic portrait in a most complicated

technical way. He cast the armor and the emperor’s body separately. That is, the figure is dressed in armor that can be removed, and when it is, the body of the Holy Roman Emperor in the guise of an ever-youthful man, resplendent in the virility of his Classical nudity, is seen (Figure 8.17b). This transformation is as close to an image of apotheosis of the Holy Roman Emperor as one could create without it being idolatrous.<sup>13</sup> From the historical distance of almost five hundred years, Leoni’s sculptural concept of body and dress seems uncannily parallel to the naked Aztec sculptures that were dressed so as to become supernatural beings. Of course, the paraphernalia in which Aztec statues and men

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**Figure 8.17a.** *Charles V and Fury*, Leone Leoni and Pompeo Leoni, 1551–1564. Bronze, 251 x 143 x 130 cm. (Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid, inv. no. E00273)



**Figure 8.17b.** *Charles V and Fury* (detail).

were dressed so as to become the gods whose attributes they assumed, were, in the eyes of all Europeans (Protestants, Muslims, and Catholics alike), idolatrous—whereas antiquity and its remnants seemed, at least for the Catholic Mediterranean, safely exorcised of such content.<sup>14</sup>

That is at least what Juan Meléndez (1681) a Dominican from Peru, believed when he wrote about the idols of antiquity and those encountered in the New World, affirming that:

In many parts of Christendom especially in Rome there is so little risk of idolatry that they preserve the ancient statutes of their idols, celebrating in them only the delicacy of their artistry and the antiquity of their marble, because as the Christian faith, by the grace of God, is so deeply rooted in the hearts of the faithful there that now does not run the risk anyone believes that there is divinity in the stones and so the palaces, gardens and galleries are filled with them.

But in the Indies, as the original natives of those countries are still recently converted to the Faith, and it has only recently taken possession of the hearts of those descendants of the ancient pagan religion, that while there are many good Christians among them, there are still many weak ones, and all of them being generally of such easy nature that they can be moved by evil or weakness, as is more often the case, to return to their ancient idols, rituals and ceremonies and so it is that it is not permitted that their idols be either kept or preserved as they perpetuate their memory and demonstrate their antiquity.<sup>15</sup>

One wonders what any descendants of the Aztecs would have made of Leoni's sculpture of Charles V, in armor and then without. One wonders also what they might have thought when, upon reaching Spain and Italy, they came upon the Apollo Belvedere, the Laocoön, or any other Classical sculpture.<sup>16</sup> This we will perhaps never know. However, we can imagine, at least, the register of surprise through the dim recognition of something familiar. This imaginative reconstruction is possible if we look at the Laocoön in comparison with the small painted stone Aztec sculpture of the monkey form of Ehecatl, god of wind (Figure 8.18). Sculpted fully in the round, the Ehecatl figure stands erect, composed on a spiral axis in a *contrapposto* pose.<sup>17</sup> He holds aloft in one arm his undulating tail and a serpentine form in the other, as

a rattlesnake coils at his feet. The pose and iconography are uncannily similar to the priest Laocoön as he restrains and struggles with the great serpent. And although these two sculptures could never have been brought into proximity with each other in the sixteenth century, their resemblance remains very suggestive, at the level of the uncanny. Moreover, the



**Figure 8.18.** Ehecatl-Quetzalcoatl, purposely broken as a dedicatory sacrifice, ca. 1500; discovered during excavations at the Pino Suárez metro station, Mexico City, 1967. Stone, 60 x 37 x 33 cm (Museo de Antropología, Mexico City, inv. no. 10-11784)

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Aztec monkey sculpture of Ehecatl becomes ever more prescient as it seems to anticipate yet another iteration of the Laocoön: Niccolò Boldrini's woodcut of Titian's caricature of the Laocoön, ca. 1550 (Figure 8.19). What precisely the nature of the caricature is remains unclear; however, one suggestion links it to the Versalian–Galenist dispute about the study of human anatomy (Janson 1946).<sup>18</sup> Titian's caricature, it is argued, sides with Andreas Vesalius's method, based on human dissection, against those who preferred the Classical study of anatomy based on the dissection of apes by Galen of Pergamon (A.D. 129–199).<sup>19</sup> If this image is at all related to Vesalius and his dispute with the Galenists, then it should be remembered that Vesalius not only dedicated his *On the Fabric of the Human Body* (1542) to Charles V, but he also became physician to Charles V and Philip II. Regardless of the historical connection between these men,

the resemblance of the Aztec sculpture and the Boldrini woodcut allows us to imagine how seeing the one piece in the Americas might have been recalled upon seeing the other in Europe.<sup>20</sup>

Let us think about how this difference plays out in practice in America. One does not have to look far to see how such Classical references and practices were presented in Mexico. For example, just as pagan Rome had been transformed gradually to become a Christian city, in which remnants of the past (*spolia*) were reminders of its glorious but pagan past, so too the pagan past of Mexico was exhibited in the new walls of a Christian Mexico City. This material juxtaposition between past and present, infidel and faithful, was already practiced in Spain, where both its Classical heritage and its triumph over the heretical Muslims were on display, both by the conversions of mosques and the reuse of Classical sculpture and architectural elements.



**Figure 8.19.** Caricature of the Laocoön, attributed to Niccolò Boldrini, ca. 1520. Engraving, 36.2 x 49.2 cm image; 27.3 x 40 cm sheet. (Private Collection)

There are multiple instances of Aztec stonework recut to serve for architectural features, such as a socle for a new form of column. But Aztec sculpture was also embedded into the walls as pure spolia. For example, in 1596 the Florentine trader Francesco Carletti visited Mexico City, and in 1606 he described its new cathedral, which

had not been completed in my time. [But] there one still sees a tablet formed from a huge, thick stone worked in a round shape on which are carved various figures in half relief, and with a small gutter in the middle through which ran the blood of the men who were sacrificed in the times of the Mexican nobles, in honor of their idols, of which ones sees the remains still throughout the city, walled up in the exterior walls of buildings erected by the Spaniards, placed there to express the triumph of their foundation [Carletti 1965 (1606):59].

This sculpture is clearly described in terms of an Aztec *temalacatl-cuauhxicalli*, or sacrificial or gladiatorial stone, to which was tethered a captive warrior, who was forced to defend himself against Aztec knights armed with razor-sharp obsidian weapons. At least two *temalacatl-cuauhxicallis* (one created during the reign of the Aztec leader Motecuhzoma I [1440–1469] and the other created during the reign of Tizoc [1481–1486]) are remarkably close to Carletti's description of the "thick stone worked in a round shape on which were

carved various figures in low-relief." Perhaps just as remarkable, the object could still be read in terms of its function as a gladiatorial monument. Such Aztec monuments assert a kind of history of Aztec conquests, or *res gestae*,<sup>21</sup> in which the schematic image of the Aztec leader (*tlatoani*) grabs the forelock of his opponent, which is the pictorial convention for the conquest of a city and its peoples. In a parallel reuse of monuments and images of imperial conquests, Pope Sixtus V had the bas-relief sculptures on the columns of Trajan, commemorating his victory over the Dacians, and Marcus Aurelius, commemorating his victory over the Germans and Sarmatians, restored in 1588 and then surmounted with bronze sculptures of Saint Peter and Saint Paul to commemorate the triumph of the church and "to eliminate the memory of Idols" (Fontana 1590, cited in Cole 2009:58). The Roman Domenico Fontana and the Florentine Francesco Carletti shared a complex and common set of ideas about the pagan monuments, such that we find near identical texts concerning Roman imperial and Aztec imperial sculptures as they were displayed in Rome and Mexico City at the end of the sixteenth century.

The new walls of viceregal Mexico were more than repositories for remains of the conquered pagans. New images conflated pagan Mexico and Classical antiquity in the universal battle of Christendom against the demonic. The murals of the Augustinian convent of Ixmiquilpan are staggering in their originality, unlike anything ever seen, but drawing upon references that all could

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understand. Here one sees a tremendously complex combination of Classical and Nahua themes combined in a single, extraordinary composition within an Augustinian convent northeast of Mexico City. Here Aztec and Chichimec (uncultured peoples of the north) warriors face off against one another. The Aztec warriors are depicted wearing the armor and insignia of two orders of Aztec knighthood, while the Chichimec carry bows and arrows and are partially nude. The figures are interspersed with extremely vibrant vines and acanthus leaves, based upon the newly discovered murals of Rome in the Domus Aurea. Such images often appear in borders of murals in Mexico, and a frieze when so painted was called a *romano* or a *grotesco*, composed by vegetal motifs, *angeluchos*, and mythological monsters of antiquity.<sup>22</sup> The *romano* therefore carries with it a sense of pagan art of antiquity. However, its presence in the murals of Ixmiquilpan adds more, as the figures are intertwined in this vegetal morass, in a composition that does not juxtapose but intermixes these two worlds. That is, these are not just framing devices. Thus the flowery speech of the Aztec warriors is not represented through an Aztec glyph; rather, the speech glyph becomes at times the acanthus leaves of antiquity. It is as if the speech glyphs are no longer recounting their own ancient exploits but are narrating the great deeds of Hercules, Aeneas, and other ancient Classical heroes. Or at least that is what one can imagine upon seeing them.

There is, however, a deeper connection to be made; it deals with the cultural

and natural differences between peoples. Some are more bestial and have less reason than others. Some of the Chichimec warriors are centaurs: half man, half horse (Figure 8.20). Here the cultural differences and struggles of ancient Mexico are framed not only with Classical figures but with a Classical trope about civilized versus barbarian, culture versus nature. This is best seen on the Parthenon's southern metopes, which depict battles between men and centaurs. One group depicts the centaurs' battle against the Lapiths, which occurred at the wedding of Pirithous and Hippodamia. The centaurs, being creatures of less reason, became drunk, and because of their bestial nature, they became belligerent, fighting with the Lapiths. There are other, not securely identified battles between men and centaurs on the Parthenon metopes, but in all cases, the battle is not only mythical but metaphoric, standing in place of the Persian War, so recently won by the Athenians. The centauromachy represents the eternal conflict, now historical, between the barbaric (Persians, who had savagely violated Athenian traditions and customs, as well as Athens itself) and the cultured (Athenians and their triumph over the barbarians). In ancient Greece, this dichotomy was expressed by two terms: *sophrosyne*, implying the capacity for moderation and self-restraint (an Athenian trait), and *hybris*, from which comes the modern word *hybrid* through Latin, which signifies the opposite of *sophrosyne*, or the lack of moderation, and impiety (and therefore a principal characteristic of the Persians).<sup>23</sup> And nothing



**Figure 8.20.** Centaur/Chichimec warrior, detail of battle scene, after 1550. Mural, west door, Augustinian Monastery of San Miguel Archangel, Ixmiquilpan, Hidalgo, Mexico.

perhaps is more hybrid than the centaur—half man, half beast.

In Ixmiquilpan, 2,000 years distant from the clash of Athenians and Persians, and 7,000 miles distant from the Acropolis, the pictorial term for expressing the eternal struggle between civilization and barbarity, culture and nature, was a new “hybrid” form in which the long historical struggles between the inhabitants of northern Mexico (the Chichimec) and the Valley of Mexico were expressed through both Aztec and Classical Greece and Roman iconography. Whoever conceived of the program—native, Spaniard, or both—is unclear, but the artists who

executed the design were surely *tlacuilos*, native painters, newly trained in European techniques, forms, and concepts. They gave vivid expression to the almost universal theme of the civilized versus the barbarian (Debroise 1994; Gruzinski 1994:53–89).

One more example, albeit from South America, brings us a bit closer to the Laocoön. It begins with the architectural treatise of Sebastiano Serlio, first published in Italian in Venice but quickly translated into many languages, including Spanish, when it was published in Toledo in 1552. What is of interest are Serlio’s woodcut prints from his third



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book, which treats the antiquities of Rome. One of the most famous structures is Bramante's proposed Belvedere theater for the Vatican, which Serlio reconfigures and shows in plan and elevation.<sup>24</sup> The apse-like structure with niches would be a Neoclassical setting for displaying Classical sculptures in the papal collection. The text names several of them specifically: the Laocoön, the Apollo Belvedere, and "il bellissimo torso di Hercole," among other ancient sculptures. Such images, as Meléndez noted, could be appreciated for their beauty and material. To approach them, one was to ascend a semicircular staircase, which was first convex and then concave, with the transition created in the middle by a complete circle. The theater for the display of some of antiquity's greatest works (Figure 8.21)—the Apollo Belvedere, the Laocoön, and Hercules—as never built in Rome. But it was built in the Americas at the end of the sixteenth century, as we see in Figure 8.22. However, it was not to be used as a theater for the display of sculptures of ancient deities. Rather, the monumental stairs rise from the Plaza of San Francisco in Quito, leading to the central portal of the church. Built over an Inka site, the church stands triumphant, and the staircase leads the devout from the secular space of the plaza to the spiritual embrace of the Gospels. When the doors of the church are opened for the salvation of all, one does not then see an image of antiquity, be it European or American, but rather a painting that takes its theme from the New Testament. Here, Renaissance architecture is deployed

differently, understanding the differences as laid out by Meléndez. There could be no New World Laocoön proudly displayed in this theater of Serlio, because, unlike in Rome, "where they preserve the ancient statues of their idols, celebrating in them only the delicacy of their artistry and the antiquity of their marble, because as the Christian faith, by the grace of God, is so deeply rooted," in the New World, "while there are many good Christians among them, there are still many weak ones, and all of them being generally of such easy nature that they can be moved by evil or weakness, as is more often the case, to return to their ancient idols, rituals and ceremonies and so it is that it is not permitted that their idols be either kept or preserved as they perpetuate their memory and demonstrate their antiquity."

The dichotomy between weak and strong faith, artistry and idolatry, celebration and idolatry as drawn by Meléndez, however, is not so simple. First of all, there are to my knowledge no direct comparisons made between Aztec sculpture and Roman sculpture as art. Rather, the comparison is always made as between forms of idolatry and the subject of pagan worship. Aztec sculptures were subject to the same fervent iconoclasm that all other native images received: they were, for the most part, destroyed or buried, because they were classified as demonic idols. Yet their destruction and vilification occurred precisely at the historical moment when Classical idols were being reclassified as art and when Catholic images were themselves



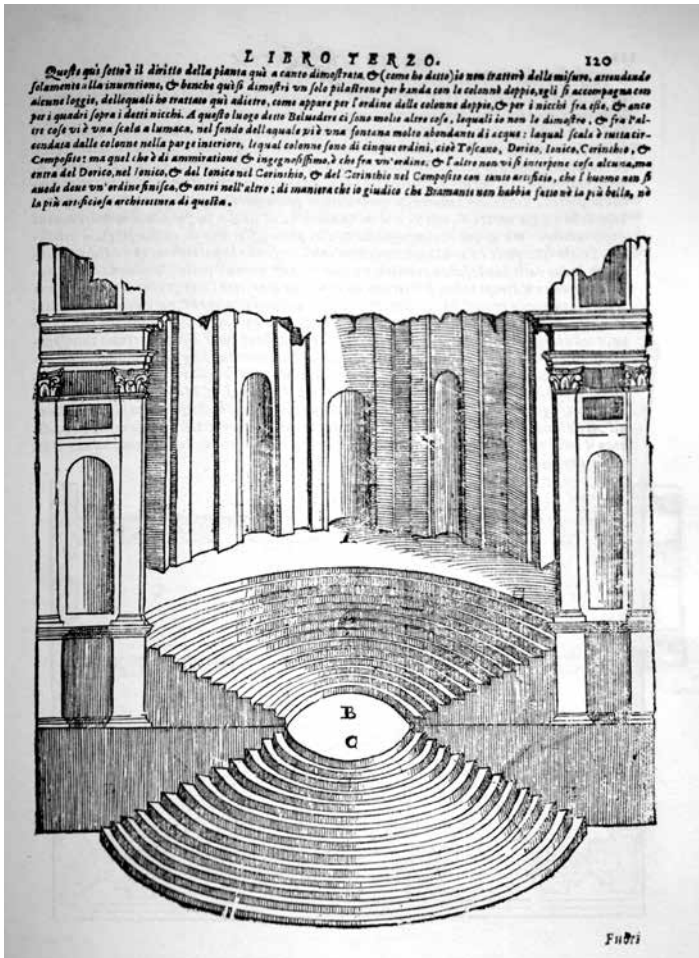


Figure 8.21. Bramante's Stairway to the Nicchione of the Vatican Belvedere, Sebastiano Serlio; woodcut. In Serlio 1544:folio 120r.

subjected to iconoclastic fanaticism by northern Protestants. However, at times the residual pagan veneration, for which the Apollo Belvedere, the Laocoön, Hercules, and other rediscovered masterpieces of antiquity were originally created, haunted their reappearance in Rome. As Cole (2009:58) has reminded us, Pope Sixtus VI (1585–1590) was

“infamous for demolishing monuments of the pagan past,” and as already mentioned, he placed the bronze statues of Peter and Paul on ancient Roman columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius in 1588. Two years before, Pope Sixtus VI presided over the raising of the Vatican obelisk in the center of Saint Peter’s Square. A cross was placed atop the

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**Figure 8.22.** Staircase leading from plaza to entrance of San Francisco, after Sebastiano Serlio's engraving of Bramante's stairway, ca. 1627, Quito, Ecuador.

obelisk, and the pope himself performed an exorcism. A text was inscribed on the socle, and the last phrase, "VICIT LEO DE TRIBU JUDA" (Behold the Lion of Judea), refers to Apocalypse 5.5. It was traditionally used in exorcism rituals (Cole 2009:65). The first phrase, "ECCE CRUX DOMINE," refers to the cross itself, and it is followed by "FUGITE PARTES ADVERSAE"—that is, "All evil flees before this victorious cross." Just as Sixtus exorcized the demons of the Egyptian obelisk, it may be that the

reuse of Aztec stone sculpture, with the figure of Tlaltecutli serving as the socle of a column, was also programmatic within the campaign to extirpate Aztec religion. A cross therefore may have been placed at the top of the column in the New World, just as had been done in Rome for the obelisk.<sup>25</sup>

Pope Sixtus V also commissioned Tommaso Laureti in 1585 to paint *The Triumph of Christianity* in the Sala di Constantino in the Vatican. Depicted within an immense room of marble and

jasper is a column with a smashed idol, the god Mercury, at its base. In the place of this fallen idol of antiquity is a golden crucifixion raised in Christian victory (Cole 2009). My point is that similar extirpation efforts were being made in the Americas, and especially in Mexico City, as the church displayed its triumph over its new encounter with pagan idolatry. Bits and pieces of the defeated were imbedded in walls or became new columns in commemoration of the church triumphant. Crosses were erected over ancient sites, and exorcisms were performed in the guise of extirpation. At the very least, this idea is expressed in the pen-and-ink drawing in the *Descripción de la ciudad y provincia de Tlaxcala* (Muñoz Camargo 1981 [1585]:folio 239r), which depicts the first 12 Franciscans kneeling before the first cross erected in New Spain. Demonic figures buzz around it as the power of the cross drives them from the temple mound on which it is erected. It is almost as if the text at the base of the Egyptian obelisk in Rome (“ECCE CRUX DOMINE / FUGITE PARTES ADVERSAE”) were reimagined in the New World as the Aztec demons flee from the power of the living

cross. Exorcism, for those who exorcise, is an ever ongoing task.

So while the sculpture of Classical antiquity and ancient Mexico have nothing historically in common, they did, in the sixteenth century, circulate in parallel worlds that often intersected in the imagination of history and religion and eventually, much later, aesthetics. In part, this world was a pagan universe that existed prior to the preaching of the Gospels, and images created in each location were equally classified as idols. However, only in Mexico did the idols of pagan America have a passing resemblance to the pagan idols of Classical antiquity. And even as these latter works began to be recovered in Renaissance Europe, and were in many cases exhibited as art rather than as religious idols, the Aztec sculptures were not yet reevaluated in terms of their artistic qualities. Like the obelisk of ancient Egypt and the columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius, they were still infused with the demonic of a collective pagan past, such that they came to resemble each other in the minds of Sahagún and all those who could and can still imagine across time and space.

### Notes

- 1 One might, for example, profitably compare the *Tira de Peregrinación*, Codex Azcatitlan, or other Mexican pictorial foundational manuscripts, especially those with colonial texts such as the *Historia Tolteca Chichimeca*, with the long history of illustrated versions of the *Aeneid* (Wlosok 1998) in terms of how text and image in origin myths are imagined. For the teaching of Classical texts, including the *Aeneid*, to Mexica youth in Mexico City, see Gruzinkzi (1992) and Luper (2006). Finally, one might add the narratives of the wanderings of Cortés and his men as they traveled from the coast into the valley, where they were confronted with a vision of something unbelievable. See Bernal Diaz del Castillo (1632:64r).

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- 2 Barkan (1999:3) notes, “The Laocoön . . . is not only the most famous of all antiquities in the sixteenth century, but it comes . . . to be the very symbol of art as subject.” More recently it has been argued that the sculpture was made by Michelangelo as a forgery or counterfeit (Catterson 2005). Whether there is any truth to this argument, it is irrelevant to the argument presented here, except that Michelangelo was one of the very first people to see the sculpture before it was even transported from where it was found. Thus it was already a reference for sixteenth-century artists from its reemergence from Classical antiquity into Renaissance Italy.
- 3 This comparison was presented in 1579 to the Council of the Indies, and it is just one example of similar comparisons as cited in Lupher (2006:236). See also Ryu (2014) for the relationship in architecture between Roman antiquity and colonial Mexico.
- 4 Interestingly, some European classicists and historians can be offended by such an approach, understood as being either stupid or imperialist. Anthony Pagden, in his remarks at the symposium, asserted that the only valid comparison for the Aztec would be with the aborigines of Australia, as they did not really live in cities or have an advanced culture comparable to Rome. Francesca Martelli, an Oxford-based Mellon Career Development Fellow in Classics, proposes a politically correct and *reductio ad absurdum* exposé, full of sound and fury and puffery, of the nefarious North American/Anglo imperialist hand of the curators of the North American Getty Museum, who “fabricate a cultural myth of origin for its patrons at the expense of the cultural heritage of those displaced” (Martelli 2011). As a counterpoint in the history of modern art, Aztec art (and pre-Columbian art in general) was excluded from being a primitive source for modern art, as Rubin characterized it as “archaic” and “courtly” (Rubin 1984:3, 74, note 14). That is, Aztec art really exists exclusively within its own category, most often understood as a delirious, ferocious, sacrifice society of blood and horror (Paz 1972:87). Bataille (1986 [1928]:3–4), however, articulates the sacrifice of the Aztecs with the politics of early-twentieth-century modernity.
- 5 The folio was later removed from the front of the manuscript and inserted in the section at the end of the manuscript that deals with the cities. This transposition is evident for two reasons: It is a single page that has been tipped into the choir, where it now appears, and it is the only image in the city section created by Murúa; his assistant and informant, Guaman Poma de Ayala, created all the others. See Cummins (2014).
- 6 Not only were Maximilian and Charles V imagined through and surrounded by images of Hercules and his labors, but, as Cañizares-Esguerra (2006:7) has pointed out, the title and imprint pages of the 1530 edition of Pietro Martire d’Anghiera’s *De orbe nouo* are bordered with an illustrative woodcut depicting the Labors of Hercules. The publisher makes the analogy between the conquest-hero of the New World and its offer of riches in exchange for the extirpation of idolatry and the heroic deeds of Hercules.

- 7 Sahagún was not the only Franciscan chronicler to make such a comparison with the Roman pantheon. Fray Juan de Torquemada, writing only slightly later, states in his *Monarchía Indiana* that Aztec deities were exactly the same as Graeco-Roman deities, with the same characteristics, “although their names sounded different, since all men did not have the same languages” (cited in Keen 1971:182). See Keen (in passim) for other comparisons between the Aztecs and Rome made in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries.
- 8 *Simulacrum* is the Latin term used for religious images in the Council of Trent. (Christium adormus, et sanctos quarum illae, similitudinem gerunt, veneremur) (Rodríguez and Adeva 1989 [1566]:484).
- 9 Valadés, who in 1579 published his *Rhetorica Christiana* in Perugia, created the book’s prints in Italy. Many of them depict the Aztecs, and he dresses them in a synthesis of the Roman toga and the Aztec *tilma*.
- 10 Mundy (1998:21) suggests that the sculpture is either Coatlicue, who was beheaded by her children, or the dismembered figure of her daughter Coyolxauhqui, and that the curvilinear forms held in the outstretched hands are banners or perhaps steams of blood. In fact, the forms curl in on themselves, suggesting an animated being. Only magnification reveals that no distinguishing characteristic identifies them specifically. Hence it seems that the engraver, at least, allowed the sinuous, curvilinear forms to stand for snakes.
- 11 Fury is developed in the sixteenth century as a key component for Spanish political allegorical expression. See Falomir 2014:19–74.
- 12 In 1540, prior to the years in which he worked on Charles and the Fury, Leone Leoni was in Rome as engraver of the papal mint. But that seems to have been a short stint; he ran into trouble and was condemned to the galleys. But of course he would have seen the Laocoön. See Plon (1887:11–13). In a letter dated August 1549 (Plon 1887:48–49), Leone Leoni writes to Ferrante Gonzaga from Cambrai, recounting that he recently made a short trip to Paris, after having persuaded Mary of Hungary to give him permission (with the aid of Granvelle, “msr d’Arras”), “for I considered that certain molds of all the beautiful statues in Rome were on the verge of going down the drain, because of the death of the good King François I, and I was eager to reproduce them with much facility. To have executed them in Rome, as in the first time [this probably refers to Leoni’s sojourn in Rome in 1540], apart from the time that prevents me from even dreaming of that, would cost a great deal.” The account takes up the entire letter. Plon (1887:49) explains that these molds were made by Primaticcio in Italy, at the order of François I, and that they were of 10 statues, including the Laocoön. These 10 statues were then cast at Fontainebleau. Of these, five were melted down during the revolution and five survive in the Louvre. Maybe the Laocoön is one of them. If so, that is the Laocoön that Leoni used. Leoni notes in his letter that he intends to cast them in metal, because that is what Mary of Hungary wants him to do. This he wants to undertake in Milan (hence his letter to Gonzaga, who will benefit from this, because it means Leoni will bring his casts to Milan). Leoni’s source, Primaticcio’s cast of the Laocoön, is still in Fontainebleau. This is the image that Leoni copied for Mary of Hungary in 1549.

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(Primaticcio made his cast from the original in Rome around 1540.) In a letter from 1551, written at Augsburg (Plon 1887:74), Leoni refers to the Laocoön in an expression that is difficult to understand. He writes: “And if sometimes one cannot attain all that appetite desires, this comes from the fact that the occupations are thus that they break the head of Laocoön.” This probably refers to the Laocoön’s anguished expression, which Leoni incorporates into the expression of Fury.

- 13 In fact, the sculpture was never placed during Philip’s lifetime. Moreover, Leone and Pompeo Leoni’s Habsburg tomb effigies, adorning the high altar at El Escorial, were called idolatrous. In 1566 Pompeo was accused of heresy and condemned to a life sentence in a monastery in Valladolid. It was only through Charles’s intercession that he was released (Plon 1887:366–388). In 1592 José de Sigüenza criticized the sculptures for their *idolatria*, accused both Philip II and the Leonis of involvement in the occult, and charged that the altar was “fundamentally astrological” rather than architectural (Kubler 1982:127–130). I want to thank Dan Zolli (2007), who brought these references and their importance to my attention. Kubler also suggests that the sculptures may have been gilded with gold from the Americas, based on his investigation into the Leonis’ workshop.

- 14 For example, Andreas Vesalius’s preface to his book *De Humanis Corporis Fabrica, Libri Septem* (On the Fabric of the Human Body) (1542:4r) addresses his patron, Charles V, as if he were divine, with godlike powers: “At the same time it does not escape me how little authority this effort of mine will have on account of my age, as I have not yet passed beyond my twenty-eighth year . . . unless it come to light auspiciously, duly approved by the great patronage of some godlike power. Because it can never be more safely protected or more splendidly honored by any immortal name greater than that of the divine Charles, the most invincible, greatest Emperor.” Of course, this is flattery and literary excess, yet Vesalius sees in Charles the same qualities that Leone Leoni portrays.

- 15 En muchas partes de la christianidad, por el poco, ó ningun peligro, que ay de la Ydolatria se conservan, especialmente en Roma, la estatuas antiguas de los Ydolos, celebrando en ellas solo el primor de sus artifices, y la antigüedad de sus marmoles, porque como la fé, por gracias de dios, estan tan arraygada en las coracones de los fieles, ya no corre aquel peligro, de persumir, que ay diuinidad en piedras: y assi con ellas las palacios, y los jardines, y Galerias.

Pero en las Yndias, como los Yndios originarios de aquellas paises, todavia son recien convertidos a la Fé, y esta tiene tan pocos años de possession, en los corazones de los descendientes de su Antigua gentilidad, aunque ay muy Buenos Chrisitanos entre ellos, todavia ay muchos flacos, y porque siendo todos generalmente de naturales facilamos de mudarse, ó ya fea de malicia, ó de falqueza suele suceder, que se buelven a los idolos, y á sus ritos, cerimomias antiques, no se permitan guardar, ni conferbar su idolos, ni sus huacas, ni por raçon de memoria, y demonstracion de la antigüedad.

Assi se tiene mandado, que no solo en las yglesias, sino que en ninguna parte, ni publica, ni secreto de los pueblos de los Yndios, se pinte el Sol, La Luna, ni las estrellas; y en

muchas partes, ni animals terrestres, volatiles, ni marinos, especialmente algunas especies de ellos,, por quitarlos la ocasion de bolver . . . á sus antiguos delirios, y deparates (Meléndez 1681:2:61–63).

- 16 Native nobility from the Americas, such as members of the Tlaxcalan embassy to Spain, did not need to voyage to Italy to see collections of antiquities. There were collections in Seville, especially that of the Duke of Alcalá in the Casa de Pilatos (Trunk 2002). In addition, in 1561, Leone Leoni's son and partner, Pompeo Leoni (1533–1608), established a residence in Madrid, where he displayed an important collection, primarily of the most important painters and sculptors of the sixteenth and early seventeenth century. Aside from paintings with Classical subjects, such as a copy of Titian's *Actaeon and Diana*, he had casts of numerous Classical sculptures, such as the *Venus Felix*, a small lead Hercules, and the heads from the Laocoön (Helmstutler Di Dio 2006:140). He had at least three feather paintings from Mexico as well. One represented a "lion with a plume [*penacho*]," and it may in fact have been an Aztec feather shield, much like the one in Vienna, or an emblematic representation of Pompeo Leoni's name. The other two had Christian themes. One was a triptych with the Passion, and the other depicted the Descent from the Cross with the royal coat of arms (Helmstutler Di Dio 2006:156). So, whether or not any Mexican or Andean ever crossed the threshold of Pompeo Leoni's door (which is unlikely), at the very least he brought bits and pieces of the Laocoön under the same roof with Mexican colonial art in the sixteenth century. According to Diego de Villalta in his treatise *De las estatuas antiguas* (1590), Diego de Hurtado de Mendoza (1503–1575) was perhaps the greatest Spanish collector of antiquities, including coins, manuscripts, and sculptures (Sánchez Cantón 1923:29).
- 17 The sculpture was excavated by Jordi Gussinyer in 1969 in Mexico City. It had been placed in front of the temple dedicated to the wind god (Boone 1987:53; Gussinyer 1969).
- 18 See Janson (1946) for differing interpretations of what Titian intended by this caricature.
- 19 Janson summarizes his argument, writing that the caricature's "message might be formulated as follows: 'This is what heroic bodies of classical antiquity would have to look like in order to conform to the anatomical specifications of Galen!'" (Janson 1946:51).
- 20 There is no evidence that Boldini's print circulated in the Americas, and it seems unlikely that it would have, so any such comparisons between the two would have been made by the traveler rather than by the Aztec and Venetian images being brought physically into proximity in Mexico.
- 21 Boone (2000:194–199) has discussed the Mixtec and Aztec pictorial histories in terms of *res gestae* and annals.
- 22 M. Toussaint (1948:2) defines *romano* as "llamaban de Romano a la pintura decorativa de frisos y fajas constituídas por adornos vegetales, angeluchos, y monstruos mitológicos," as cited in D. Robertson (1994:42).
- 23 For my understanding of *hybris*, see Cains (1996), and for my understanding of *sophrosyne*, see Rademaker (2005).
- 24 Serlio's *Tercero y quatro libro de arquitectura* was first translated into Spanish in 1552

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and was republished several times. Moreover, it was used as a source for numerous buildings in the New World. For example, his woodcuts of the plan of the Pantheon, which begin the third book, were used for several structures in Mexico. See Ryu (2014).

- 25 In 1560 Aztec painting was already being discussed in relation to Egyptian art, in terms of their similar forms and expressions, in Felipe de Guevara's (1788 [1560]:231–236) chapter “De las pinturas Egipcias.”

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## 9

## Death in the Hands of Strangers: Aztec Human Sacrifice in the Western Imagination

**Cecelia F. Klein**

Sometime between 1559 and 1571, the Dominican Francisco de Aguilar, in recounting his experience as a soldier under Hernán Cortés during the 1521 Spanish conquest of central Mexico, expressed his fascination with the customs of the indigenous people we know today as the Aztecs. Aguilar (1977 [ca. 1570]:102–103) translated from Fuentes 1963:163–164 was particularly interested in Aztec human sacrifice, explaining, “As a child and youth I began reading many histories and antiquities of the Persians, Greeks, and Romans. I have also read about the rites performed in Portuguese India, and I can truthfully say that in none of these have I heard of such abominable forms of worship as they offered to the Devil in this land.”<sup>1</sup> In this passage, Aguilar compared Aztec culture to what he knew of both

the ancient Mediterranean world and Europe’s other “Others” of his day. The same passage, however, emphasizes what Aguilar perceived as an important disparity, describing the Aztecs as far worse than any of the peoples to whom he had compared them. The reason for his prejudice becomes very clear in his succeeding paragraphs, which describe in shocked tones how Aztec priests used stone knives to excise the hearts of human victims thrown on their backs over low stones and how they would thereafter be cruelly dismembered and cannibalized.

Although Aguilar did not illustrate his report, artists in both postconquest central Mexico and Europe did create visual images of Aztec human sacrifice. Unlike Aguilar, however, most—if not all—of them could not claim to have been

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eyewitnesses to the act. They therefore had to make sense of what they read and heard about Aztec sacrifice in terms of the categories and concerns of their own time and place. For that reason, it should not come as a surprise that their illustrations include a number of sensationalized and imaginary details, many—if not most—of which have no basis in contact-period writings. These postconquest visual images of Aztec sacrifice, regardless of whether they were created by native artists or by Europeans, instead often drew from European compositions, themes, and visual tropes, some with deep roots extending all the way back to the ancient Mediterranean world mentioned by Aguilar. As a result, I will proceed to argue, the images must be largely understood not as records of historical truths about the Aztecs but as expressions of age-old and contemporary fears of real and imagined forces lurking much closer to home.

The first signs of Old World influence in images of Aztec sacrifice surface in a comparison between ways the subject was rendered in preconquest imagery and depictions in early postconquest—that is, early colonial—art (Robertson 1959).<sup>2</sup> With the exception of the preconquest Mixtec historical manuscripts, which narrate stories about the Mixtec past, and some artworks by the Maya living to the southwest, preconquest Mesoamerican images merely allude to human sacrifice rather than depicting the actual moment when the victim loses his life.<sup>3</sup> The victim often appears alone, in some cases standing upright and seemingly having

sacrificed himself (e.g., Codex Borgia 4, Codex Féjervary-Mayer 2, Codex Laud 4, 19). Otherwise the victim is accompanied only by his sacrificer—except in two pages of Codex Borgia (33, 34), where the sacrificer has a single assistant. Bystanders and witnesses are invariably absent. In preconquest Mexican art as well, the participants are always depicted in profile and against an empty background; there is no landscape or architectural setting.<sup>4</sup> Finally, the amount of bloodshed in these scenes is usually minimal, the blood streams are highly stylized, and the faces of the perpetrators and victims betray no pain or sadness (Klein 2009) (Figure 9.1).<sup>5</sup>

Our earliest surviving postconquest images of human sacrifice from central Mexico retain a number of these indigenous features, no doubt because they appear to have been painted by native descendants from the Aztec aristocracy. The continuation of preconquest modes of depicting sacrifice is particularly evident in the screenfold manuscripts known today as the Codex Borbonicus and the Tonalamatl Aubin, both of which, Donald Robertson (1959:86–93) believed, were painted prior to 1541.<sup>6</sup> In these pictorials, as in the past, human sacrifice is merely implied by decapitated bodies, containers of human hearts and/or blood, isolated body parts, a person or a deity wearing a flayed human skin, and, in Codex Borbonicus 13, a *tzompantli*, or skull rack—albeit one that displays a single skull. The only exception appears in page 25 of Codex Borbonicus, where a priest carrying a small figure on his back





**Figure 9.1.** Preconquest human sacrifice, Codex Laud 17, detail, 1250–1521, Mexico. (After Anders et al. 1994)

heads toward Mount Tlaloc, where, we are told elsewhere, the Aztecs sacrificed children in the hope that their tears would persuade the water god Tlaloc to release rain (Sahagún 1950–1982:2:8). Here the artist chose to hint at a sacrifice to come rather than allude to one that had already taken place.

It is not until we turn to the painted manuscript known today as Codex Tudela and to its closest cognate, Codex Magliabechiano, that we begin to see a significant move away from preconquest ways of representing human sacrifice.<sup>7</sup> Unlike the traditional screenfolds, these manuscripts take the form of bound

sheets of European paper, and the illustrations are accompanied by commentaries written in Spanish. The commentaries strongly imply that the manuscripts were commissioned by and for the colonizers, who, we know, were recording Aztec customs and beliefs in order to more effectively exterminate them. The native artists who made the illustrations had, in all likelihood, been converted to the newly introduced Roman Catholic religion and may have studied at one of the monastic schools in Mexico City, which had been built over the former Aztec capital, Tenochtitlan.<sup>8</sup> In those schools, painting and drawing in the European manner

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were among the subjects taught, often by having the students copy imported European book illustrations and prints.

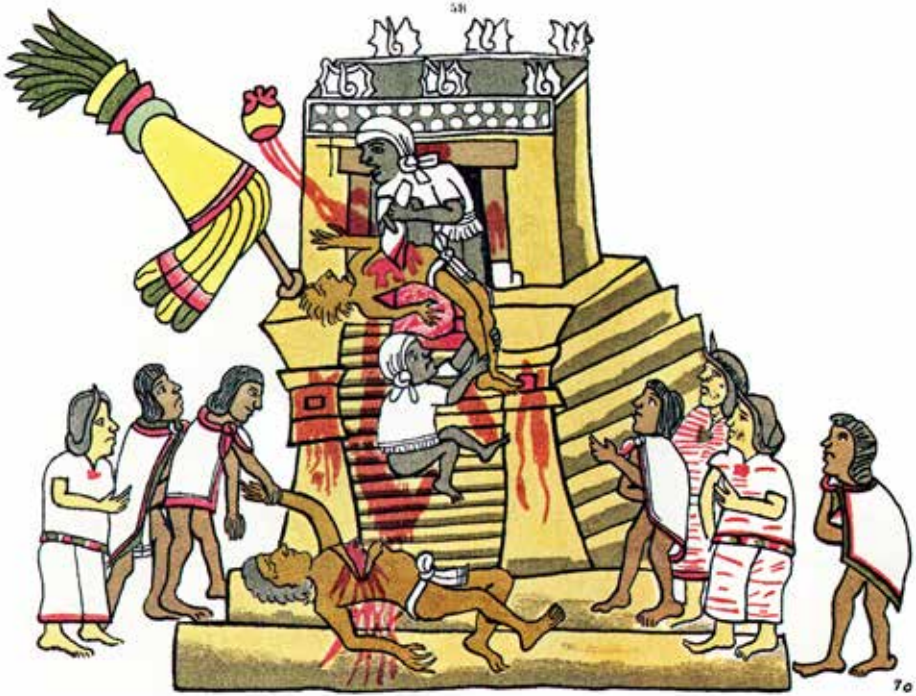
Although scholars disagree on the exact genealogical relationship of codices Tudela and Magliabechiano, they agree that Codex Tudela is the earlier of the two (Batalla Rosado 2002:159–165; Boone 1983:5).<sup>9</sup> It is therefore not surprising that evidence of European artistic influence and sensibilities is greater in Codex Magliabechiano. The Codex Magliabechiano artists, for example, omitted the tears and “speech scrolls” that issue from ordinary people’s eyes and mouths in scenes of sacrifice and cannibalism in Codex Tudela (53r, 64r; cf. Magliabechiano 70r, 73r). They also left out completely a scene in Codex Tudela 52r that depicts weeping petitioners calling out to a large skeletal deity. The Tudela commentator identified that god as Humitecuhli, “Bone Lord,” whom he described as an “advocate for the sick” (Tudela de la Orden 1980:280; my translation). Because the people’s tears and utterances in these images represent pleas for supernatural assistance, their absence, and the absence of Humitecuhli, from Codex Magliabechiano leaves its viewers with the impression that human sacrifice was pointless, that it bore no relationship to people’s hopes for relief from illness and other problems. Indeed, the Magliabechiano commentator largely ignored the lengthy commentaries in Codex Tudela 49r, 49v, and 50r that describe the Aztec belief that human sacrifice encouraged supernatural benevolence.<sup>10</sup>

Further visual evidence of an increase in European sensibilities over time emerges from a comparison of Codex Tudela 53r to its cognate folio in Codex Magliabechiano (Figures 9.2, 9.3).<sup>11</sup> As in the earlier Tudela version and some preconquest images of sacrifice, Codex Magliabechiano 70r depicts a priest leaning over a bleeding victim stretched backward over a sacrificial stone.<sup>12</sup> In both of the colonial pictorials, however, and for the very first time, a second priest has been added—this one to hold the right leg of the victim—while, in accord with eyewitness accounts of Aztec heart excision ceremonies, a second victim, already deceased, has been rolled down the pyramid stairs. In the Codex Tudela version of the scene there are also, for the first time, three additional figures at the bottom, a number that the Codex Magliabechiano 70r artist increased to seven. The upraised arms and speech scrolls of the Codex Tudela petitioners have been left out of the Magliabechiano version, where the bystanders now read as active participants. One of them grasps the deceased’s left arm as though to drag away his lifeless body, presumably to dismember it.<sup>13</sup> In the later version of this scene as well, greater emphasis is placed on the moment when the victim dies. Unlike the sacrificer in Codex Tudela 53r, who is depicted in profile view like sacrificers in preconquest images, this priest’s upper torso has been turned to the front. His mouth and that of his victim have fallen open, the latter working together with the man’s raised arm to indicate that he is experiencing pain. Like



**Figure 9.2.** Preconquest human sacrifice, Codex Tudela 53r, detail, ca. 1555, central Mexico. (Courtesy Museo de América, Madrid)

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**Figure 9.3.** Human sacrifice, Codex Magliabechiano 70r, detail, ca.1560, central Mexico. (After Nuttall 1983 [1903])

the blood that spills copiously down the pyramid stairs, none of these features appears in preconquest manuscript images of human sacrifice.

Of importance here as well is the fact that both images show the sacrifice as taking place at a large temple pyramid. The building depicted in conventional profile form in the earlier Tudela cognate has been turned at an angle in Codex Magliabechiano 70r so that it can be viewed largely from the front. The tiered pyramidal base, the post-and-lintel door, the flat roof with merlons, and the balustrades decorated near the top with binder moldings in both folios are true to what we know about Aztec religious structures,

but those in Codex Magliabechiano have been more carefully drawn. What we see here is clear evidence of a mounting colonial desire to locate the human sacrifices of the pagan past in a specific architectural setting.

What was that setting? Although the largest, most important Aztec temple pyramid, the Templo Mayor (Main Temple), located at the heart of Tenochtitlan, had two shrines on top, the single-shrine buildings in our pictures, as we will see, almost certainly refer to it. If that is the case, the invisible deity for whom the offerings were intended was surely the Aztec state's patron deity and god of war, Huitzilopochtli (Hummingbird Left).



Spanish eyewitnesses agreed that a statue of Huitzilopochtli had been housed in one of the two shrines sitting side by side atop the Templo Mayor and that human sacrifices had been performed in front of it.<sup>14</sup> Whereas the rain god Tlaloc in the adjacent shrine was never perceived as a threat to Spanish interests in the New World, the conquerors quickly identified Huitzilopochtli as the divinity most dangerous to their mission.

That the temple pyramids in codices Tudela and Magliabechiano represent the Templo Mayor, and that the excised victim's heart was intended for Huitzilopochtli, gains support from a slightly later image of an Aztec heart excision sacrifice. The picture illustrates a manuscript compiled between 1559 and 1561 by the Spanish Franciscan Bernardino de Sahagún (1993) while he was working in Tepepulco (now Tepeapulco) northeast of Mexico City (Robertson 1959:169–170, note 9).<sup>15</sup> Known today as the *Primeros Memoriales*, the manuscript contains a lengthy Nahuatl text recorded by Sahagún on European paper in alphabetic script. Sahagún based his text on interviews with elderly Aztec informants living in the area. For the section of the *Primeros Memoriales* describing the eighteenth month festival of the Aztec year, Panquetzalitzli (Raising of Banners), his native illustrators provided an image of a heart excision sacrifice in progress at a pyramid with a single shrine, which is now represented in full frontal view (Figure 9.4).

The influence of European pictorial strategies is clear in this scene, which

combines the sacrifice with a number of other ritual events that we know took place at different times over the course of the month depicted. As in the other *Primeros Memoriales* illustrations of month festivals, the background is devoid of elements that would place the events within a particular space. George Kubler and Charles Gibson (1951:39) described this type of composition, in which events that take place at different times are collapsed together within a single picture plane, as “simultaneous illustration.” Until now scholars

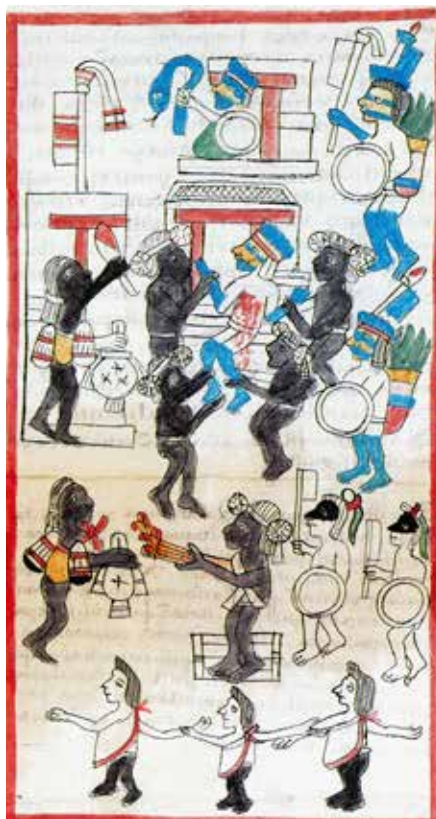


Figure 9.4. Panquetzalitzli, after Sahagún 1993:folio 252v, detail.

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have agreed that the simultaneity of the sequential events within these frames derived from preconquest artistic practices. Robertson (1959:61, 172) argued that it replicated the indigenous scattering of isolated forms over a flat, empty ground, whereas Ellen Baird (1993:108, 112, 115–116, 124) seconded Betty Ann Brown's (1978:218–219) suggestion that it followed the continuous meander pattern seen in preconquest historical manuscripts.<sup>16</sup>

I am in disagreement with my predecessors on this point. The proposal that the scenes were to be read in continuous meander fashion is contradicted by the fact that the events depicted within a single frame are not always laid out in the same order in which, according to Sahagún, they occurred. Better models, in my opinion, are European prints of the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance of the kind imported into Mexico at an early date. A 1484 Dutch woodcut, for example, combines within a single landscape the Fall of the Angels and Man, Adam and Eve, Noah's Ark, the Destruction of Pharaoh's Host, and the Baptism of Christ, together with unidentifiable figures in contemporary medieval dress (Figure 9.5). There is no coherent narrative implied by the placement of these vignettes relative to the others, and they are not arranged in chronological order.

The influence of European pictorial models can also be seen in the way the *Primeros Memoriales* sacrificial groups have been composed. In both images the victim's body is no longer depicted in profile; instead it has been turned

to the front with its limbs outstretched. The victim's diagonal alignment and outspread arms and legs recall European scenes of the moments leading up to Christ's crucifixion and fit with the widespread native understanding of Christ's death on the cross as a sacrifice. Diana Magaloni Kerpel (2003:210–213) has similarly proposed that the depiction of the deposition of Motecuhzoma II's body in Sahagún's *Códice Florentino*, or Florentine Codex, which was completed by 1577, was based on European images of the deposition of Christ's body (Sahagún 1979:3:book 12, 40v).

Then too, the roughly cruciform arrangement of the participating priests around the *Primeros Memoriales* victim parallels that of the men attending to the extended arms and legs of Christ and certain Christian martyrs depicted in medieval and Renaissance European art. When the nailing of Jesus to the cross is depicted, one or more persons may work at each of Christ's feet, while others attend to his hands (Figure 9.6). In scenes where a martyr is being drawn and quartered, as in the 1468 martyrdom of Saint Hippolytus by Dieric Bouts and Hugo van der Goes, the victim is again usually oriented diagonally, his outstretched limbs pulled by a horse and rider. In addition to the increased number of participants in these paintings, the artists have included at least several onlookers (Mills 2005:figure 88).

Even more telling of the Tepepulco artists' dependence on European models is the presence in the *Primeros Memoriales* image of a second temple, seen in side



**Figure 9.5.** *The Early History of Man and the Baptism of Christ*, woodcut, in Jacobus di Theramo, *Der Stondern Troest*, Haarlem, 1484. (After Hind 1935:2:figure 329; courtesy Constable and Robinson, London)

view, which appears directly above the temple at which the sacrifice is being performed. This upper temple houses a figure in profile whose head and arm emerge from a bundle, identifying the figure as a relic or statue of a deity.<sup>17</sup> That the deity is Huitzilopochtli is clear from his diagnostic headdress of blue feathers, blue-and-yellow horizontal face stripes, and upraised staff in the form of a blue

serpent.<sup>18</sup> Sahagún’s corresponding text explains that Panquetzalitli was when “[the figure of] Huitzilopochtli was fashioned” (Baird 1993:64).<sup>19</sup>

But why did the artist place Huitzilopochtli above, rather than inside, the temple where the sacrifice takes place? Baird (1993:124–125) proposed that in the *Primeros Memoriales* month festival illustrations, a building at the top of a scene was

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**Figure 9.6.** Gerard David. *Christ Nailed to the Cross*, ca. 1481. Oil on oak, 48.4 x 93.9 cm. (Layard Bequest, 1916. National Gallery, London; © National Gallery, London/Art Resource, NY)

meant to be understood as being farther away than the others. This differed from Eduard Seler's (1992 [1901]:119) earlier interpretation of the spatial relationships among structures depicted in folio 268v, which provides an aerial view of a ceremonial precinct.<sup>20</sup> Seler correlated each of the structures in that image with a name in the accompanying list of the buildings depicted, concluding that the single shrine at the top of the picture frame, which sports another bust of Huitzilopochtli, is the Colhuacan Teucalli (Colhuacan Temple), Huitzilopochtli's original temple, over which the Templo Mayor had been erected. In other words, although the older temple no longer existed, the artist, wishing to include it, placed it above the Templo Mayor. H. B. Nicholson (2003:261) later rejected Seler's interpretation, however, concluding that the temple at the top of the scene should be understood as being behind the building below it.

Here again, a very different factor may have been at work. Like the sacrificial groups in codices Tudela 53r and Magliabechiano 70r, the sacrifice in Sahagún's image of Panquetzalitzli blocks our view of the temple doorway and the shrine's interior. This made it impossible for the artist to show that the god's statue or relic bundle was inside his temple. Because of this, the artist may have felt a need to depict him nearby. The decision to place the deity directly above his real home recalls late medieval and Renaissance European religious images that often show God the Father—in some images the Virgin Mary—in the form of a bust hovering in midair over the protagonists below. Examples appear in the Cologne bible of 1478 or 1480 and in a French bible of 1517 (Strachen 1957:figure 106; 1959:figure 48). The iconographic influence of biblical illustrations on Sahagún's Florentine Codex has been previously argued by Pablo



Escalante Gonzalbo (2003:187–190), who suggested that a European image of Christ Pantocrator served as the model for a figure of a seated man with outspread arms who the corresponding text says is destined to be sacrificed (Sahagún 1979:1:book 2, 103r). In like vein, I suggest that the artist of *Primeros Memoriales* 268v was sufficiently frustrated by the fact that the sacrificial group was obscuring the god housed in the shrine behind it that he chose to show the god separately, presiding from above, exactly where God often appears in European prints.<sup>21</sup>

That this was the case is supported by another early colonial depiction of human sacrifice, one that bears a remarkable resemblance to the *Primeros Memoriales* depiction of Panquetzaliztli (Figure 9.7). This image appears in folio 239r of mestizo author Diego Muñoz Camargo's (1981 [1581–1584]) "Descripción de la Ciudad y Provincia de Tlaxcala," which he prepared for Spain's King Philip II between 1581 and 1584.<sup>22</sup> The drawings in the "Descripción" were made to accompany Muñoz Camargo's *Relación de Tlaxcala*, one of a number of sixteenth-century regional reports, or *relaciones geográficas*, commissioned by the Spanish Crown for use in strengthening Spain's hold on Mexico. Whether the presumably native artist of this image was aware of the images of Aztec heart excision sacrifice in Sahagún's *Primeros Memoriales* or whether he and Sahagún's artists drew from the same pictorial source, I cannot say, but the formal similarities of the two images are unmistakable.

Although, unlike Sahagún, he has included two Spaniards at lower left, Camargo's artist, like Sahagún, has depicted the front of a pyramid with a single shrine, with a heart excision ceremony being conducted in front of the doorway. The victim's body is again aligned diagonally, each of his outstretched limbs grasped by a priest, one of whom has shoved a knife into his bleeding chest. A second bloody victim, presumably already dead, lies crumpled at the foot of the stairs. In this image, however, in contrast to Sahagún's depiction of Panquetzaliztli, the sacrificial group has been placed low enough on the stairs to allow a bust of the principal Tlaxcalan deity, Camaxtli-Mixcoatl, to float directly overhead (Muñoz Camargo 1981 [1581–1584]:163, 264).<sup>23</sup>

The motif of an exotic deity installed in his niche or temple was by no means either new or exclusive to central Mexico. By 1554 a winged and goat-legged devil on an altar supported by two harpies had been combined with a human sacrifice in an illustration to Spaniard Pedro Cieza de León's *Crónica del Peru* (MacCormack 1991:figure 9; Moffitt and Sebastián 1996:222). The motif also appears in many sixteenth- and seventeenth-century European books recounting the marvels of foreign places as far away as China and India (e.g., Wyss-Giacosa 2006:figures 106, 109, 110). In Europe it can be traced back at least as far as ca. 1400, when it appeared in a Flemish illustration to Marco Polo's report of Asian kings honoring a golden idol in *Li Livres du Graunt Caam*.<sup>24</sup> In that miniature, the

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**Figure 9.7.** Human sacrifice from *Historia de Tlaxcala* by Diego Muñoz Camargo, Mexican School, sixteenth century. Pen and ink on paper. (© Glasgow University Library, Scotland/ Bridgeman Art Library)

“idol” stands on a pedestal in a niche, conspicuously bearing the horns of the Christian devil. A forest and a lion occupying the foreground signify the idol’s primal nature, to judge by the lions that appear with Adam and Eve in an engraving by the publishing company established by the Fleming Theodor de Bry (Gaudio 2008:17).<sup>25</sup> The lion, as we will see, would reappear in a European image of Aztec sacrifice.

In Europe, beginning in the sixteenth century, the god-in-the-temple motif was used again and again to represent the evils of preconquest Mexican paganism, and, as Elizabeth Boone (1989) has ably shown, the ensconced deity was almost invariably Huitzilopochtli. Perhaps because we have no preconquest manuscript images of that deity, European engravers were free to imagine and embellish the god’s appearance, drawing

freely from their stock of images of other foreign gods. They also relied heavily on images of the Christian devil. In their scenes of Mexican sacrifice, which circulated widely as illustrations to written accounts of the Spanish conquest and the New World, Huitzilopochtli, like Satan, often has wings, horns, goat legs, and a large, ferocious face on his torso (Boone 1989:figures 24, 34, 36, 37).

Concurrent with images of Huitzilopochtli as a Mexican devil, however, were those depicting him as a Grecian or Roman god. As Boone (1989:56–57) has observed, these portrayals correlate with the writings of Europeans like Bartolomé de las Casas, Peter Martyr, and even Hernán Cortés himself, all of whom, unlike Aguilar, for the most part favorably compared the Aztecs to the pagan inhabitants of the ancient world. Huitzilopochtli was even likened by some European writers to the Roman war god Mars. (See Laird and Olivier in this volume.)

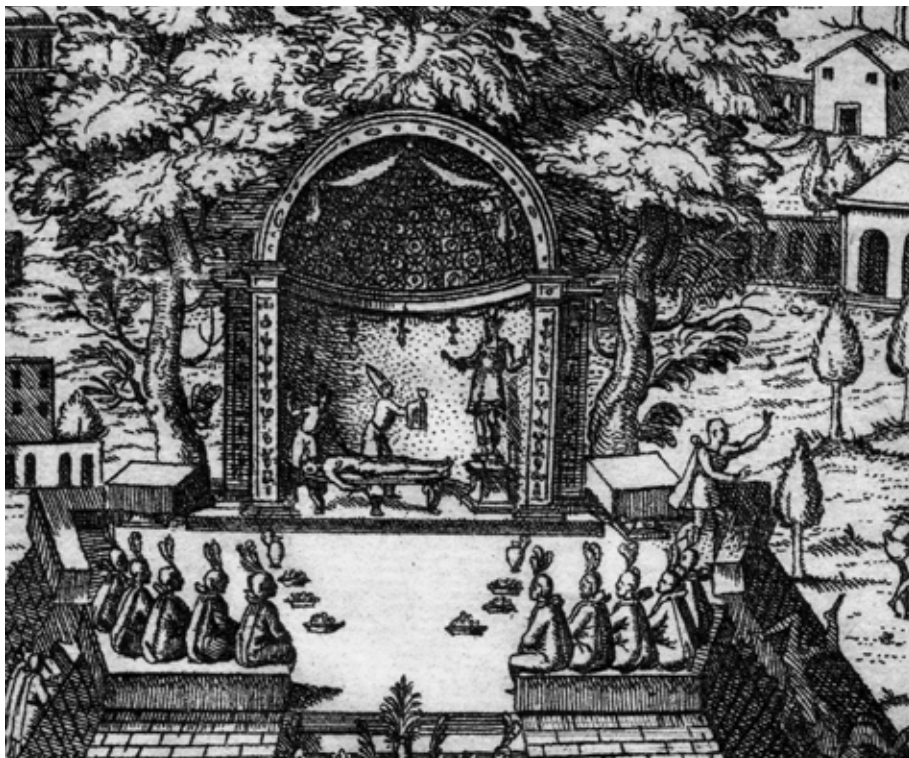
Perhaps because human sacrifices had long been attributed to the ancients, it was this classicized variant of Huitzilopochtli that was most often depicted presiding over a human sacrifice. The combination first appeared in Mexico in Franciscan Diego Valadés's (1989 [1579]) illustrated *Rhetórica christiana*, initially published in Italy in 1579. In Valadés's engraving of the Templo Mayor, here set within a vast natural and urban landscape, Huitzilopochtli stands upright on a pedestal, his arms raised like those of a Roman statue, within a single domed chapel with vaguely Classical elements (Boone 1989:59) (Figure 9.8). Before the

statue, the tiny profile body of a sacrificial victim lies on a low table or bench, while a priest, wearing what looks suspiciously like a bishop's miter, hands the man's heart to the deity. This is one of the earliest images of Aztec human sacrifice that draws upon the art and architecture of the ancient Mediterranean world, a strategy that would be increasingly employed in the centuries to come (Boone 1989:59).

Although Valadés's temple sacrifice is but a small detail of a much larger scene, it was borrowed and greatly enlarged for the background of a 1625 image of Franciscan Ioannis (Juan) de Ribas teaching a group of natives in the temple atrium.<sup>26</sup> It may also have been the inspiration for an engraving made for a 1691 French translation of Antonio de Solís's *Histoire de la conquête de Mexique, ou de la Nouvelle Espagne*, which was first published, without illustrations, in Madrid in 1684 (Boone 1989:63) (Figure 9.9). Here, however, the sacrificial group has been moved to the foreground, where the grimace of the victim and the faces of the five priests who tend to him are better seen. The chief priest, his head crowned with a feather headdress of the kind documented over a century earlier for Brazilian natives, with one hand plunges a knife into the victim's chest. Looking on from the distance is an elegant Huitzilopochtli, who is now seated on a large orb within another domed chapel, this one strung with garlands, with crossed ankles and outspread arms.

Although Solís's engraver seems to

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**Figure 9.8.** Human sacrifice, detail of scene of Tenochtitlan. In Valadés 1579:opp. 165.

have been more interested in the sacrificial group than in the deity responsible, he may have had another reason to close in on the operation. In Solís's image, the sacrificer's other hand is conspicuously placed on the victim's groin, his index finger pointing to the victim's genitals. No written account of Aztec human sacrifice explains this odd gesture; nor are there any preconquest Mexican images that depict it. Nonetheless, attention to a sacrificed man's groin is also seen in an engraving illustrating the Fleming Theodor de Bry's multivolume *Americae*, part of his famous Grand Voyages series, which was launched in 1590 and completed in 1624 by de Bry's

widow and descendants. De Bry's print drew from early colonial Mexico reports of several events that had taken place in Tenochtitlan during the Aztec month Tlacaxipehualiztli (Flaying of Men). These included gladiatorial sacrifices of distinguished enemy warriors, the subsequent flaying of their corpses, and the consumption of parts of their flesh by the captor's family. In his print, de Bry's engraver obligingly includes a gladiatorial pair at left and a cannibal feast to the right, but the main focus of his image is the slain victim in the center foreground, whose reclining body is laid out dramatically along a diagonal, head closest to the viewer and lolling backward over the



**Figure 9.9.** Huitzilipochtli presiding over a human sacrifice. In Solís 1691:opp. 25. (Photo courtesy Elizabeth H. Boone)

sacrificial block. A feather-crowned priest in the process of flaying the spread-eagled corpse places his knife exactly over the victim's groin (Figure 9.10).<sup>27</sup>

There are clear European precedents for this artistic trope. For example, in Nicolas Le Rouge's (1925 [1496]) woodcut of hell's punishments for the sin of anger, devils poke the genitals of naked sufferers with a long pole.<sup>28</sup> Then too, de Bry may have been aware of the Fleming Dirk Vellert's 1542 stained-glass image of the Judgment of Cambyses, which shows Cambyses, like

an Aztec gladiator, being flayed—albeit while still alive.<sup>29</sup> The diagonal alignment of Cambyses's body, with his head closest to the viewer, is strikingly similar to that of de Bry's slain gladiator. In Vellert's image, as in de Bry's print, a man kneels between Cambyses's legs, his knife pointed at Cambyses's groin. In depicting an Aztec priest's knife pointed at the genitals of a sacrificed Aztec enemy, de Bry was clearly drawing from an already well-established European pictorial motif.<sup>30</sup>

That the hand-at-the-groin motif was

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**Figure 9.10.** Flaying of a slain gladiator during Tlacaxipehualiztli, from Theodore de Bry and family, *Americae, Nona et postrema pars*, 1602, IX. (Photo courtesy Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA)

imposed upon the Aztecs by European artists is confirmed by an engraving made by the French exile Bernard Picart to illustrate his monumental *Cérémonies et coutumes religieuses de tous les peuples du monde* (The Religious Ceremonies and Customs of All the Peoples of the World), which was published, edited, and coauthored by Jean Frederic Bernard. Although Picart, who clearly patterned his own version of Tlacaxipehualiztli after de Bry's, neatly moved the flayer's knife up onto the victim's chest, he included the hand-on-groin motif in his *Idoles of Tabasco* (Gutiérrez 2010:figure 7) (Figure 9.11). Tabasco is located well

to the southeast of the former Aztec headquarters, but the Aztec presence is nonetheless palpable in this image, where a goat-legged figure in the distance seems to channel Huitzilopochtli. In this scene, the sharp dagger held by the kneeling man on the far right is aimed at, and even touches, the private parts of his sprawling naked victim. In Picart's *Idoles* as well, another hapless victim is falling headfirst from the back of a lion, which recalls the lion in Marco Polo's miniature of Asian kings. He is falling into a large basin filled with some kind of liquid, a motif that, although it never appears in preconquest images of human sacrifice,





**Figure 9.11.** *Idoles de Tabasco*. From Picart 1723–1743. (Photo courtesy Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA)

reappears in a surprising number of other European images of violence.

An example is a French engraving of a human sacrifice before Huitzilopochtli in his temple made for Abbé Antoine Francois Prévost's (1746–1789:12:opp. 546) *Histoire générale des voyages*. Largely based on Solis's earlier engraving and titled *Vitzilipuztli Principale Idole des Mexiquains* (Huitzilopochtli Principal Idol of the Mexicans), it shows the chief sacrificing priest, his head crowned with a feather headdress of the kind documented over a century earlier for Brazilian natives, inserting his hand directly into the gash in the victim's chest,

presumably to pull out his heart (Figure 9.12). At the hands of Prévost's engraver, the classicized deity with his plumed crown has been elevated high above the sacrificial group on an enormous pedestal. Resting on the low platform directly beneath him, in front of the sacrificial block, is a large basin presumably filled with some liquid, probably boiling water or blood.

Notable as well in Prévost's image is the crowd of onlookers, which has now grown to a considerable size. Similar throngs appear in variants of the same composition, such as Johann Georg Purmann's (1970 [1777]:2:opp. 232)

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**Figure 9.12.** *Vitzilipuztli, principale idole des mexiquains.* In Prévost 1746–1789:12:opp. 546. (Photo courtesy Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, 85-B20810 v 12)



*Sitten und Meinungen der Wilden in America*, first published in 1778. In these engravings, the large group of observers testifies to the growing European desire not only to further dramatize the actual moment of the victim's death but to portray it as having been condoned by the masses as well.<sup>31</sup> Their presence parallels the intended role of large crowds at the public executions of the day, which, as Michel Foucault (1979:58–59) pointed out, were summoned precisely to serve as “the witnesses, the guarantors, of the punishment.”<sup>32</sup> Mitchell Merback (1999:20, 142–150) has emphasized the ideal participation of the entire community, or *communitas*, in what he has called the “spectacle of punishment”

surrounding European executions as far back as the Middle Ages.

However, during the eighteenth century, some European artists began to omit not only the crowds of witnesses but also Huitzilopochtli from their scenes of Aztec sacrifice. The effect was to close in even further on the participants, whose gestures and facial expressions now forced the viewer to share in the cruelty of the moment. We see this in Francesco Severio Clavigero's 1780–1781 *Il Sacrificio ordinario*, which was first published in Italy (Figure 9.13).<sup>33</sup> Here the inspiration for the composition again seems to have come from European Christian imagery. Nicolas Poussin's *Martyrdom of Saint Erasmus*,



Figure 9.13. *Il Sacrificio ordinario*. After Clavigero 1780–1781:plate in atlas.

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for example, had, over a century and a half earlier, presented a similarly dramatic close-up of a religious killing, albeit one in which the doomed man's agonized face was fully exposed (Figure 9.14). The strategy would be adopted again roughly a hundred years later by the artist illustrating French traveler-explorer Desiré Charnay's 1885 (plate 47, opp. 48) *The Ancient Cities of the New World* (Figure 9.15). In Charnay's image, as in Poussin's, the man whose dripping heart is raised in triumph by his aggressor has been turned at an angle to give us a better view of his gaping, gory chest wound.<sup>34</sup>

The original model for these more intimate sacrificial groups appears once again to have been a de Bry engraving (Figure 9.16). In de Bry's image of the Templo Mayor, seen in an unusual aerial and three-quarter view, there are now six priests collaborating in the operation. A seventh priest pushes the body of a previous victim down the stairs with a pole. Several armed men guard the next group of victims, who are seated near the bottom of the stairs, while four men on the upper platform bear witness to the rite. The chief sacrificer and two other figures wear the proverbial Brazilian feathered headdress, but most of the officials are dressed in European priestly robes.

The drama signaled by the oblique viewing angle in this image is intensified by the priests' varied postures and gestures and by the huge gash in the victim's torso, which runs from his chest to his groin. What I call "the slash" has a long history in European art. In the New World we see it first in a rather crude

woodcut illustrating Hans Staden's 1557 account of his stay among the reportedly cannibalistic Tupinamba of Brazil (Whitehead and Harbsmeier 2008:figure 52). The trope was given an even more graphic form in an illustration to de Bry's *Americae*, where it accompanied Bartolomé de las Casas's *Narratio Regionum Indicarum por Hispanos Quosdam devastatatum verissima*. Ironically, although Las Casas's text was a sharp criticism of Spanish cruelties in the New World, it is a native rather than a Spaniard who seems to be responsible for the slash in this image (Duchet 1987:plate 5). The source of the motif, however, was certainly European, as it shows up in a 1508 woodcut depicting German modes of execution and punishment that was made well before Staden had landed in Brazil (Hampe 1929:opp. 68). Its use in images of unlicensed violence continued at least into the early seventeenth century in European visual culture. An English (or German) print detailing the execution and dismemberment of the English subversive Guy Fawkes, for example, shows an executioner reaching into the huge gash in Fawkes's beheaded torso—interestingly, to remove his heart (Kunzle 1973:1:figure 5-2)!<sup>35</sup>

In de Bry's engraving of the Templo Mayor, we see both of the temples that we know crowned its platform, although each assumes a peculiar, tri-domed shape with an arched doorway. Inside each temple is an "idol," with the one on the right, which presumably represents Huitzilopochtli, taking the form of the devil. In this regard, the image relates, as



**Figure 9.14.** Nicolas Poussin, *The Martyrdom of St. Erasmus*, 1628–1629. (Pinacoteca, Vatican Museums, Rome; photo courtesy Scala/Art Resource, NY)

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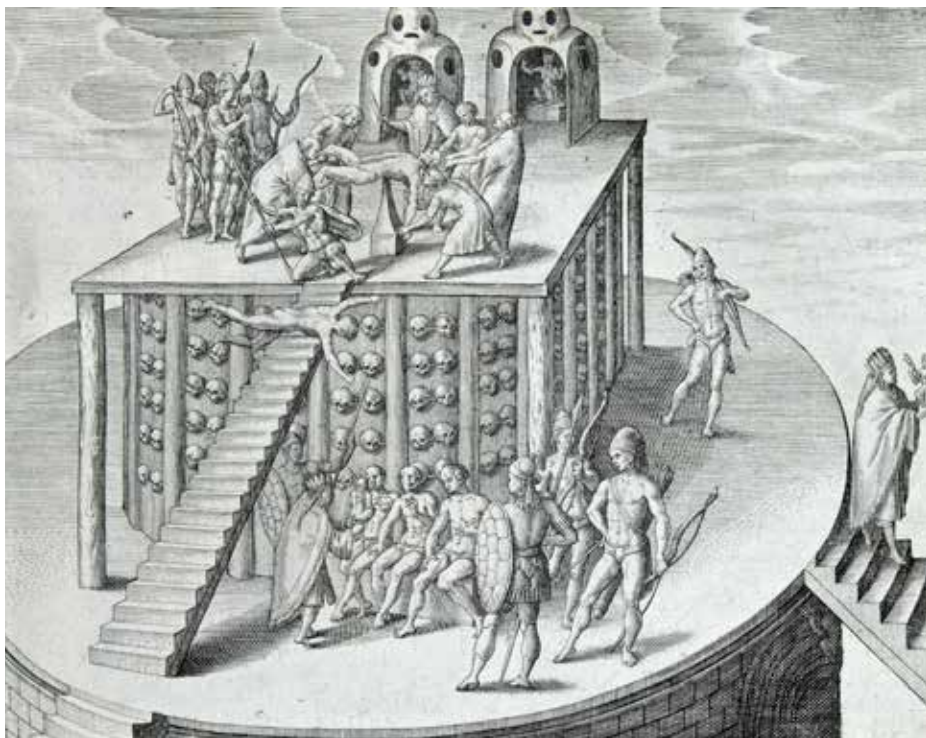
**Figure 9.15.** Human sacrifice. In Charnay 1885:plate 7, opp. 48.

Boone (1989:70) pointed out, to earlier, sixteenth-century depictions of the Templo Mayor in Sahagún's (1979:1:book 3, 391v) Florentine Codex and in Dominican Diego Durán's (1967:2:plate 30) *Historia de la Indias de Nueva España e islas de la Tierra Firme*, completed in 1581. In both of those images, a native artist has inserted a ferocious, hairy creature into

Huitzilopochtli's shrine on the right. In folio 345 of Durán's *Historia*, the demonized Huitzilopochtli presides over an extremely bloody heart excision sacrifice.

The pyramid platform supporting the two temples in de Bry's image, however, bears little resemblance to the Templo Mayor as it is known through earlier writings, pictures, and modern excavations.





**Figure 9.16.** Human sacrifice at the Templo Mayor, from Theodore de Bry and family, *Americae, Nona et postrema pars*, 1602. (Photo courtesy Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA)

De Bry's Templo Mayor is represented as a square structure supported by a fantastic cylindrical pyramid, which has no resemblance to the Aztec structure's tiered and tapered, rectangular-plan pyramidal base. The sides of de Bry's upper platform, moreover, are covered with numerous vertical rows of human skulls. These were doubtless based on reports like that of Hernando Alvarado Tezozomoc (1944:119), who claimed that Spaniards saw 72,000 human skulls of "los sacrificados y vencidos de guerras" (those sacrificed and conquered in war) pegged into the walls of Huitzilopochtli's shrine

at the Templo Mayor. Ceramic models of Aztec temple pyramids occasionally do show skulls decorating the battered roofs, and some carved stone skulls with tenons have been found by archaeologists, but Alvarado Tezozomoc seems to have confused these roof decorations with the infamous Aztec skull racks. At the hands of other European writers and engravers, as here, Aztec skull racks sometimes assume a curiously architectural form, and the skulls they display can number in the many thousands. The conqueror Andrés de Tapia (1950:70–71), for example, claimed that the principal Aztec skull

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rack in the main ceremonial precinct of Tenochtitlan, which he said supported 136,000 skulls, was flanked by two “towers” encased with even more skulls.

These highly exaggerated reports are a far cry from preconquest and early colonial visual references to skull racks, which, as we have seen in Codex Borbonicus 13, are greatly abbreviated in form. The rack in Codex Boturini (10), which Robertson (1959:83–86) assigned to the same period, likewise supports a single skull. Unsurprisingly, over time in Mexico, the number of skulls per rack increased exponentially. In folio 57r of the Codex Vaticanus 3738, painted later on in the early 1560s, the number of skulls increases to three, while folio 68r of the even later Book 12 of Sahagún’s Florentine Codex, which deals with the Spanish conquest of central Mexico, shows the severed heads of eight Spaniards and four of their horses strung on a skull rack.<sup>36</sup>

Images of Aztec building interiors and exteriors covered with human skulls became quite popular in Europe. An example is the skull-studded backdrop to a variant of Prévost’s *Vitziliputzli* that appeared in a 1726 edition of Antonio de Herrera’s 1601 *Descripción de las Indias Occidentales*, where the large basin seen in Prévost’s engraving is replaced by a flaming cauldron (Brading 2009:figure 80). Picart (1723–1743:3:after 146) likewise used skulls to decorate the interior of a shrine, in this case adorning curtains flanking a ferocious figure of the decidedly nonferocious Aztec god Tezcatlipoca (Mirror Smoking) (Gutiérrez 2010:figure 5). The most extravagant use of Aztec

skulls, however, appears in a 1754 edition of Prévost’s (1746–1789:12:587) *Histoire générale des voyages*, which includes an engraving of an Aztec cemetery with a long wall, staircases, and towers studded with thousands of human skulls (Figure 9.17). Titled *Cimetierre des Sacrifices* (Cemetery of Sacrifices), this image also includes the enigmatic basin, which is here presumably filled with water, as two women appear to be using it to wash yet more skulls in preparation for displaying them.<sup>37</sup> Prévost had no need to include the actual sacrificial rite in this print. The skulls alone conveyed the message.

In the de Bry illustration of the Templo Mayor, an additional priest descends the staircase on the far right, holding up a little figure, seemingly nude. Although the text identifies the figure as the deity for whom the sacrificial offerings are intended, it looks somewhat like a small child. The ambiguity may have been intentional, as the victim in a number of European images of Aztec sacrifice is a child or infant. This is noteworthy because, although archaeology has confirmed colonial reports that the Aztecs sacrificed children on certain occasions, there is only one set of preconquest Mexican images of children who may have been sacrificed.<sup>38</sup> These images appear in cognate sections of the divinatory almanacs in codices Borgia 15, Vaticanus 3773(B) 38–40, and Féjervary-Mayer 27. In all three sets, deities remove a long, wrinkled, ocher-colored band from the abdomen of a much smaller and entirely naked



**Figure 9.17.** *Cimetierre des sacrifices*. In Prévost 1746–1789:12:opp. 544. (Photo courtesy Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, 85-B20810 v. 12)

figure. Although most scholars identify the ocher bands as umbilical cords, I (Klein 1990–1991, 1993) have previously argued that the bands represent the victim’s intestines or their unpleasant contents, which were believed to embody one’s moral offenses. In Codex Vaticanus B, one of the figures has been thrown over a sacrificial stone, blood spurting from his chest wound; in Codex Borgia 15, one leans against a sacrificial stone. If these children are being sacrificed, they are the only child sacrifices in the art of preconquest Mexico.

Europeans, in contrast, were very taken with the notion of Aztec child sacrifice,

which they invoked as justification for conquest and conversion. For example, Peter of Ghent (1954), who was known in the New World as Pedro de Gante, in 1529 wrote to his colleagues in Flanders that the Aztecs sacrificed and mutilated their children and that their priests survived solely on the flesh and blood of infants. It is not surprising, therefore, that visual images alluding to child sacrifice had appeared by the second half of the sixteenth century in colonial Mexican manuscripts painted for Spanish patrons. In both Codex Borbonicus 25, as discussed above, and folio 250r of Sahagún’s *Primeros Memoriales*, we see

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an Aztec priest carrying a child destined for sacrifice toward Mount Tlaloc. In the upper right corner of Sahagún's scene, there is a second child, bleeding and apparently already dead, at the shrine atop Tlaloc's mountain.

These few early colonial Mexican visual images of Aztec child sacrifice are faithful to written accounts of sacrifices to Tlaloc. This is not the case, however, for European depictions of Aztec child sacrifice. Moreover, at least one of these European depictions of infant sacrifice in the New World predates Mexican images of the subject. In an interesting twist to the Huitzilopochtli-in-the-temple images discussed above, an anonymous, ca. 1522 German woodcut shows devil worship in Yucatán focused on the killing of infants (Figure 9.18). In this "announcement," the familiar staircase leads up to a European-style vaulted chapel, where a standing male figure, presumably an "idol," holds a banner while presiding over the death and dismemberment of two small children. The priest on the right, who wields a knife, has just severed the foot of one of these babies, while a third man tosses the lifeless bodies of several other infants down the stairs. At the bottom, a grieving mother stoops to pick up what remains of her slaughtered offspring. On the right we see a European ship carrying a mendicant sailing into the harbor, presumably to save the day, but in the meantime, Satan, at the upper right, looks on with satisfaction. Note the crowd.

The theme of child sacrifice already had a long history in European art, where it had been employed as early as the

fifteenth century in accounts of pagan practices in the Far East (e.g., Mitter 1992 [1977]:figure 9). It would also have a long future in Europe, where it was used to signify the brutality and inhumanity of both Native Americans and the Europeans who conquered them. An engraving almost certainly by de Bry shows a native Timucua woman of northern Florida bringing an infant to a second woman, presumably its mother, who crouches, with bowed head and hands covering her face, before the altar where the child will be sacrificed to the king. The king seems to be curiously indifferent to the proceedings, turning his head away from the action to converse with a European (Wyss-Giacosa 2006:figure 32).<sup>39</sup>

Picart, whose project was a critique of European, especially Roman Catholic, biases and atrocities elsewhere in the world, created his own version of de Bry's image, one reflecting greater sensitivity to the subject (Wyss-Giacosa 2006:figure 31). As scholars have observed, and as we saw with his depiction of Tlacaxipehualiztli, Picart often deliberately minimized the Amerindian cruelty and violence featured in de Bry's engravings (Gutiérrez 2010:264–265, 267; Hunt et al. 2010a:8). In his version of the Timucua sacrifice of a firstborn infant, in addition to reversing the composition horizontally, Picart closed in on the proceedings, leaving out the figures in the left foreground of de Bry's image and moving the king to the middle ground, where he sits attentively before the altar, facing the weeping mother. With these changes, Picart brought the principals



**Neue zeitung. von dem laude. das die  
Sponier funden haben ym 1521. iare genant Jucatan.**

Neuezeitung vō Prusla/vō Kay: Ma: hofe 18 Martze. 1522.

Neue zeyt von des Turcken halben von Offen geschrieben.



**Figure 9.18.** Title page of a 1522 German newsletter depicting infant sacrifice. (After Glaser 1989:132)

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closer to the viewer, where the mother's anguish is more palpable.<sup>40</sup> The theme of mother and child in the face of a possibly demanding divinity also appears in Picart's version of a 1712 print by Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, which depicts an East Indian woman worshipping a giant, disembodied head inside a shrine (Wyss-Giacosa 2006:figure 9). Unlike Tavernier, Picart placed a small child in the mother's arms, suggesting that it was to be an offering (Hunt et al. 2010a:figure 9.7).

The visual trope of the murdered or sacrificed infant would live on into the nineteenth century, when German-born artist Emanuel Leutze painted his famous *The Storming of the Teocalli by Cortés and His Troops*. Amid the violence and carnage in that giant canvas is an Aztec man—presumably a priest—with a stone knife clenched in his teeth. He holds a limp, apparently lifeless baby over a large, steaming container while a woman, presumably the child's mother, looks up despairingly (Figure 9.19). The child, we must assume, has been sacrificed by its own people in hopes of turning the tide of battle. By this time the motif of the doomed infant, regardless of the identity of its killers, could serve as a visual sign of European savagery toward Native Americans as well. In the upper left of Leutze's composition, an armored Spaniard dangles a hapless baby by one leg. The pair recalls a much earlier print, possibly made by de Bry, of a Spaniard hurling a naked baby by its leg into what appears to be an oven while a colleague lights an open fire under the feet of a

large group of naked natives hanging by the neck (Glaser 1989:220).

Even more common in European prints of the New World are images of Native Americans cooking and eating little children. The 1528 image in Bartolomé de las Casas's *Narratio Regionum Indicarum verissima*, mentioned above, shows natives roasting a small child on a rack (Duchet 1987:plate 5). An even more shocking version of the theme appears on the title page of a 1662 Dutch book on the New World, written and illustrated with copper engravings by Gottfried Schultze (Godefread Scholtens). There we see New World priests, dressed and bearded like biblical figures, roasting a baby atop a large stone block (Figure 9.20). Embedded in the smoke that rises from the fire is the devil. A native woman (who looks curiously African) kneels in front of the pyre, holding a child who is apparently to be the next victim, while on the left, yet another kneeling mother and her baby await the child's fate as well.<sup>41</sup>

The concept of a child being roasted over a fire doubtless relates to age-old European reports of "barbarians," living beyond the periphery of the "civilized" world, who flouted the mores of the civilized world by cooking and eating people, including children. Images of allegedly cannibalistic Mongols, or "Tartars," roasting a Christian man on a spit date back to a time well before the discovery of the Americas, as exemplified by scenes in Matthew Paris's *Chronica Majora* of ca. 1236–1259 and Sebastian Munster's *Cosmographia universalis* of 1544 (Lestringant 1997 [1994]:figure 2,



**Figure 9.19.** Emmanuel Gottlieb Leutze, *The Storming of the Teocalli by Cortez and His Troops*, 1848. Oil on canvas, 84  $\frac{3}{4}$  x 98  $\frac{3}{4}$  in. (Ella Gallup Sumner and Mary Catlin Sumner Collection Fund, 1985.7; Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut; photo Courtesy Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art/Art Resource, NY)

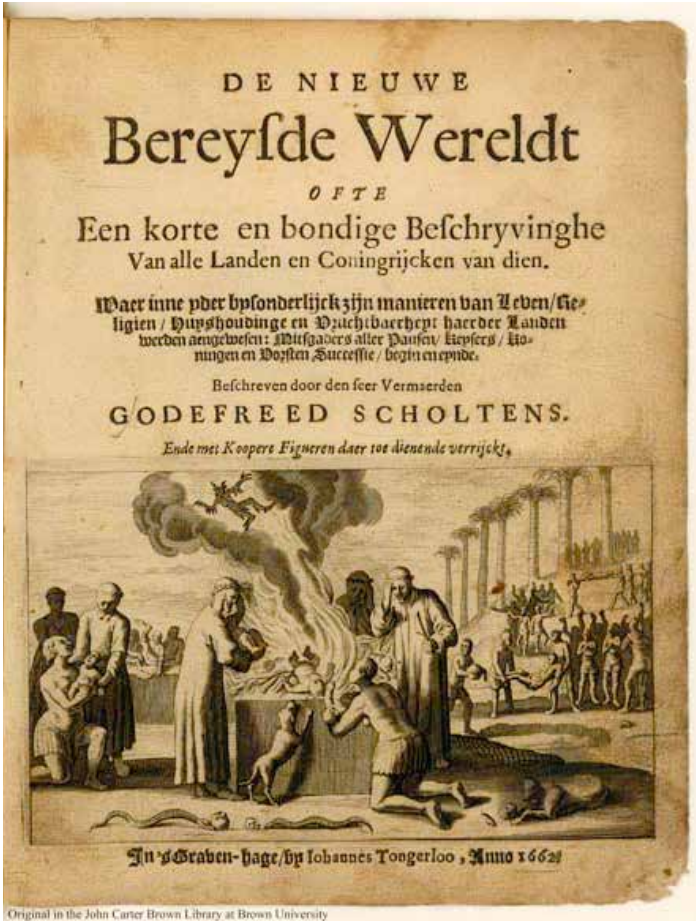
bottom; Lewis 1987:figure 180).<sup>42</sup> Jan van der Straet simply inserted a well-worn European motif into the background of his ca. 1600 engraved personification of America greeting Christopher Columbus (Doggett 1992:37, figure 1).

This fascination with the notion of roasting someone over a fire never appears in preconquest pictorial sources, where cannibalism is seldom referenced and is only implied, usually by a person sitting in a large pot (e.g., Codex Borgia 7, 10).<sup>43</sup> The earliest New World

depictions of true cannibal feasts appear in the early colonial period, in codices Tudela 64r and Magliabechiano 73r. Later on, one of Sahagún's (1979:1:book 4, 2r) native artists would illustrate the Florentine Codex with a picture of a man immersed in a pot full of a boiling liquid while another man stokes the flames beneath the pot and a third chews a dismembered leg. These depictions of cannibalism, however, cannot hold a candle to the detailed European renderings of New World anthropophagy.



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**Figure 9.20.** Infant sacrifice. Title page to Schultze 1662. (Photo courtesy John Carter Brown Library at Brown University)

Why was Aztec child sacrifice such a popular subject among European artists? Ethelia Ruiz Medrano (2007:106) has found records of children sacrificed in colonial Mexico as late as the seventeenth century, yet the subject was essentially ignored by colonial artists working in Mexico after Sahagún's death. In contrast, the theme of murdered children had long intrigued Europeans, whose artists often depicted a child or infant being devoured by one or another monstrous being. In some places, for example, the

mythic wild man or werewolf was said to consume babies, a penchant immortalized in an early-sixteenth-century engraving by Lucas Cranach the Elder (Bernheimer 1952:23; Colin 1987:8; Klein 1995:figure 12.2).<sup>44</sup> In 1520 Hans Weiditz carved a woodcut of the popular "child-scarer" of German folklore, whom Charles Zika (2003:425, figure 71) linked to myths of the Roman god Saturn and his Greek predecessor Kronos, both of whom had devoured their own children. The theme carried over into

Christian iconography in the form of the devil devouring miniature souls, which was then projected onto the phallic god Deumo of Calicut, India, by Jörg Breu the Elder (Leitch 2010:132–133; Mitter 1992 [1977]:17, figure 11).<sup>45</sup> Deumo's extended phallus contrasts with late medieval literary claims that Kronos/Saturn had not only castrated his father but was himself castrated by his son Zeus/Jupiter (Zika 2003:420–423). Zika (2003:figures 63, 68) illustrates a 1531 French woodcut depicting the castration of Saturn as he prepares to devour a baby, as well as a 1523 German woodcut in which the tip of Saturn's sickle touches the penis of a naked child. Regardless of whether the demon is depicted as oversexed or emasculated, his penchant for devouring children, as we will see, seems to have had sexual connotations.

Europe's interest in the ritual death and cannibalism of Aztec children was doubtless related to its demographic concerns of the time. According to the *Encyclopedia of Children and Childhood in History and Society* (Fass 2004:1:290), war, disease, and sporadic famines had "catastrophic effects on mortality rates in early modern Europe." Infant mortality was extremely high, with a quarter of all newborns dying in their first year. Another quarter did not live to adulthood. Populations declined throughout Europe, and Spain was particularly hard hit. William Christian (1981:23–28) cites plagues, epidemics, and droughts in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Spain that nearly wiped out entire towns, taking an especially heavy toll on babies. The

plague of 1496, for example, followed a famine on the outskirts of Madrid, as did another plague in 1506–1507, which afflicted the entire region.<sup>46</sup> This alone would explain the concern for the mortality of infants and children. More telling, however, are the many reports of those terrible times that describe how parents, in desperation, resorted to eating their children (Lucas 1930:355–356, 364, 376; Ó Gráda 2009).<sup>47</sup> As Zika (2003:468–470) noted, some woodcuts from those periods depict the subject.

Europe's fears of the murder of innocents are nowhere more overtly expressed than in the literature and imagery surrounding European witchcraft, which in turn impacted the way European artists visualized Aztec human sacrifice. Witches, who were said to have sexual relations with both each other and the devil, were widely blamed for the pestilence and famines that ravaged Europe. They were also traditionally described as cannibals who preferred to sacrifice small children to the devil, as well as to cook and dine on them (Murray 1918). Numerous European prints depict them doing just that. We see a clear reference to this in a detail of a witches' banquet in a 1613 print by Jan Ziarnko, where the body of a tiny infant lies on a plate at the center of the table (Figure 9.21).<sup>48</sup>

By the time Europeans had arrived in the Americas, "witches" were being tracked down and persecuted in many countries (Caro Baroja 1964:151). The fear of witches was quickly transferred to Mexico by clergy and mendicants who had helped investigate these matters back

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**Figure 9.21.** Witches' banquet by Jan Ziarnko. Detail of *Description et Figure du Sabbat des Sorciers*; in Lancre 1613.

in Spain. One was Mexico's first bishop, Juan de Zumárraga, who took office in 1528. Zumárraga had helped investigate the problem of witchcraft in the Basque country, and his chief assistant, Fray André de Olmos, once arrived in Mexico, wrote a treatise on what he perceived as witchcraft among the Aztecs, much of it taken directly from a 1529 treatise by the Spaniard Martín de Castañega.<sup>49</sup> That treatise may have piqued the interest of early colonial artists (Cervantes 1994:19; Klein 1995:254–255). In a previous article, I argued that the European notion of the witch who feeds on children shaped Sahagún's report that the Aztec goddess Cihuacoatl (Woman Snake) was said to have recently eaten an infant in his cradle (Klein 1995:247).

Many European images of witches show a child being dropped into, or already floating in, a large basin of boiling water, reminiscent of the steaming vat in Leutze's painting. In a 1575 French engraving of a witch representing Hunger or Envy, a young child attempts to climb out of the large cook pot next to the old hag, whose penchant for killing is evidenced by the skeletal figure before her (Lestringant 1997 [1994]:figure 7). The close connection between the witch and a large basin is evident in a 1590 woodcut depicting the execution of a naked witch in a cauldron. The cauldron recalls the one in Prévost's *Vitzilipuztli* (Zika 2007:187–188, figure 7.6). One man stokes the flames under the pot while another pours a liquid of some kind—probably boiling

water or oil—over the witch’s head. The association had longevity, for as late as 1710, Abbé Laurent Bordelon was illustrating a cannibalistic feast at a witches’ Sabbath in which dismembered babies were being cooked in a pot and served up at a table (Tannehill 1975:figure 15). A small child is being lowered headfirst into a boiling vessel in the title page of Peter Binsfeld’s 1591 *Tractat Von Bekantnuß der Zauberer und Hexen* (The Diabolical Deeds of Witchcraft) and in a woodcut in the 1626 Italian edition of the *Compendium Maleficarum*, a handbook for those seeking to ferret out and exterminate witches (Zika 2007:figure 7.8) (Figure 9.22). The latter includes two additional women roasting a baby on a spit.

The theme of sacrificing children in a cauldron had had a long history in the Old World, stretching back to the middle of the first millennium B.C.E. in the western Mediterranean (Day 1989; Halm-Tisserant 1993). According to Hebrew texts, at that time Phoenicians at Carthage were sacrificing their firstborn infants to the bull-headed god Molech by throwing them into a fiery cauldron (Bergmann 1992). That the concept, if not the practice itself, reached Spain as well is suggested by a Phoenician funerary tower at Pozo Moro, today a small village in southeastern Spain just across the sea from Carthage. The monument bears a relief depicting a banquet where a monstrous two-headed deity of the underworld is being served what appear to be the crumpled remains of a small child in a raised bowl (Almagro Gorbea 1978,

1983; Kempinski 1995; Kennedy 1981; Rundin 2004). Europeans seem to have transferred their “memories” of the biblical Molech to their fears of contemporary witches and from there to have attributed them to Native Americans.

But as Zika (2003:475–479; 2007:233–235) and others (e.g., Hsia 1996) have pointed out, the sins of European witches were often conflated or intertwined with the imagined sins of Europe’s other most hated Others, the Jews, who were closely associated with the Phoenicians in the minds of Christians. Many early colonial writers were convinced that American Indians had descended from the Jews, in some minds from the lost tribes of Israel (e.g., Durán 1967:2:13–19; Escalante Gonzalbo 1999:26–28). This is important because, like witches, Jews were accused of murdering children (see Hsia 1988, 1996; Newall 1973). What we today call the blood libel refers to European fears that Jews might kidnap and kill a Christian child in order to obtain its blood, which they would then use to desecrate the host. The disappearance of a child was often laid at the feet of unwary Jews, who were tortured until they confessed to having killed it and were then executed. Just such a fate was believed by many Spaniards to have befallen a missing boy outside Granada in 1428. The case became so notorious that a cult developed around the child, who came to be known as El Santo Niño de la Guardia (The Sainted Child of la Guardia) (Lea 1889; Loeb 1887). The fate this boy was alleged to have suffered, and the evil of his alleged killers, would have been fresh



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Figure 9.22. Witches roasting a child; in Guazzo 2004 [1626].

in the minds of the first Spanish men and women to arrive in New Spain.<sup>50</sup>

Here, among the blood libel legends that traumatized medieval through early-modern Europe, we gain further understanding of the ubiquity and meanings of the large basin that appears in so many scenes of Aztec human sacrifice. The child who was believed to have been killed by Jews for his blood was likened to Christ in the minds of Christians; indeed, he becomes the Christ child in Jaime Serra's ca. 1400 altarpiece for the monastery of Sijena, in Catalonia (Rubin 1999:plate 21). There, a rabbi with a sharp knife desecrates the host while a youthful Christ stands

upright in a large vat of boiling water. In a 1458 drawing, *Jews Taking the Blood from Christian Children for Their Mystic Rites*, it is the slaughtered children's blood that is being poured into a large tank. Symbols of the sun and the moon that overlie the container's dark contents indicate that the blood will be used for occult purposes (Dundes 1991:back cover).<sup>51</sup> Thus the large, liquid-filled containers in European scenes of Aztec human sacrifice must have triggered memories of a number of other images in viewers' minds: the bathing of the decapitated skulls of sacrificial victims, the boiling and eating of innocent children by famine-starved parents



and sexually depraved witches, and the collection of blood taken by Jews from the helpless bodies of Christian children for the purpose of destroying the host.

The blood libel stories, finally, can also help us better understand the recurrent motif of a slayer's hand or finger pointed at his victim's groin. The most famous case of a blood libel was that of an Italian boy, Simon of Trent, whose dead body was discovered on March 26, 1475 (Hsia 1988, 1992; Schultze 1991). In the most commonly reproduced image of little Simon, the child is held upright, arms outspread, by a large group of Jewish men and women, in a pose reminiscent of Christ crucified, while, in an obvious allusion to Jewish

circumcision, a rabbi aims a large knife at his genitals (Schultze 1991:294). The same crime was reported throughout Europe in sometimes crudely carved woodcuts, where the knife blade literally rests on the reclining boy's penis (Figure 9.23). In other pictures there are spots of blood around his genitals (Schultze 1991:295). Might not this kind of image help account for the visual trope in which the tip of an Aztec sacrificer's knife points to the groin of his victim? The common association of Jews with child murders, as well as images of Jews aiming sharp knives at a child's genitals, would have been well-known to most Europeans.<sup>52</sup> Some of the images of Simon of Trent are



**Figure 9.23.** Unidentified Florentine engraver, *The Ritual Murder of Simon of Trent*, ca. 1475–1485. (From *The Illustrated Bartsch*, Vol. 24; photo courtesy Abaris Books, London)

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eerily similar in composition to scenes of Christ's circumcision, suggesting not only that they were modeled after those scenes but that Simon's mutilation was a desecration of that holy act as well (Figure 9.24).

It is thus easy to see how the motif came to connote the savagery and diabolism of the New World descendants of the lost tribes of Israel. It would have worked together with the understanding of the time that because the genitals are



**Figure 9.24.** Master of the Tucher Altarpiece, *Circumcision of Christ*, ca. 1448–1450. (Suemondt-Ludwig-Museum, Aachen; photo by Anne Gold; after Mellinkoff 1993:2:figure II.23)

the prime symbol of a person's strength and creative potential, they are also the part of the human body with the greatest potential for evil. As Zika (2003:423) has pointed out, "Power in the sixteenth century was often construed and communicated in quite overt sexual terms."

Much of what the world thinks it knows about Aztec human sacrifice derives from visual images such as those discussed above. From the foregoing, however, it should by now be clear that these images tell us as much—in most cases much more—about the native converts and Europeans who made them as they tell us about the Aztecs. The almost obsessive focus on a sacred setting, typically a temple or a niche, with an often terrifying deity ensconced within it; the preference for depicting the actual moment when the knife penetrates the skin and blood gushes from the wound; the desire to close in on expressions of pain and grief; the emphasis on the large number of religious dignitaries responsible for the evil that is happening; the legalistic need for eyewitnesses to the priests' heinous actions; and the curious preoccupation with murdered and devoured children—like the large basin and the telling weapon on the victim's groin—all speak to Europe's own enemies and fears of the time, its own moral values, its own history, and its own pictorial strategies for addressing those fears and values. These concerns, like the artistic conventions and tropes used to address

them, often for centuries, in turn helped shape the Old World's understanding of the indigenous people of pre-conquest Mexico. Aztec human sacrifice may have seemed more terrible to Aguilar than anything else he claimed to know of, but at the hands of European artists, it was rendered in ways far more familiar to them than it would ever have been to the Aztec themselves.

### **Acknowledgments**

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## Notes

- 1 On the role of Classical models in shaping the representation of Native Americans, see Moffit and Sebastián (1996:173–247).
- 2 The Spaniards destroyed most of the preconquest pictorial manuscripts they found, including all those from the Aztec capital. Nonetheless, enough pictorials from other places in Mexico survived to permit comparisons. They are believed to have been made between A.D. 900 and 1200, during what is known as the Postclassic period.
- 3 Preconquest Mexican painted manuscripts were made of single sheets of animal hide or beaten bark paper that were then folded accordion-style. Frederico Navarrete (2008:65) similarly found that violence plays a much more salient role in postcontact European images of the conquest than in preconquest Aztec battle scenes.
- 4 The only exceptions to these rules appear on pages 4, 33, and 34 of Codex Borgia. On page 4, a bound victim whose heart has already been removed stands upright on a ball court, although the presence of two deities implies that the setting is mythical. On pages 33 and 34, we see a heart excision rite, which is clearly not the focus of the scene, being performed in a groundless space to the far left of a large temple. None of the participants, including the victim, appears to be human, however; rather they seem to be supernaturals. This would fit Elizabeth Boone's (2007:171–210) interpretation of Codex Borgia 33 and 34 as episodes in the creation of the universe deep in mythic time.
- 5 The only exceptions to this appear in the Mixtec Codex Nuttall, pages 83 and 84, where stylized tears depend from the eyes of two men about to be sacrificed.
- 6 Robertson (1959:86–93) assigned the years 1521–1541 to the “first stage” of what he called the School of Mexico-Tenochtitlan. Glass, in collaboration with Robertson (1975:91), thought the Tonalamatl Aubin might be preconquest, but Robertson (1959:60) had earlier concluded that it was colonial.
- 7 Codices Tudela and Magliabechiano belong to the Magliabechiano group of manuscripts, which includes two other, but considerably later, illustrated manuscripts: the Codex Ixtlilxochitl, made in 1600, and the Codex Veytia of 1755. Both are too late to be relevant here (Batalla Rosado 2002:157; Boone 1983:5).
- 8 The two most important monastic schools in the mid-sixteenth century were San José de los Naturales in Mexico City, run by the Fleming Peter of Ghent (Pedro de Gante), and the Colegio de Santa Cruz in Tlatelolco, where the Spaniard Bernardino de Sahagún taught off and on from 1536 until his death in 1590. Franciscans Toribio de Benevente, better known as Motolinía (1950:238–239; 1971:240), and Gerónimo Mendieta (1971 [1770]:411) both remarked on the impressive accuracy of native copies of European woodcuts, some of which had arrived in Mexico as loose broad- or catchpenny sheets. (See also Escalante Gonzalbo 2003; Johnson 1988; Leonard 1992 [1949]; Robertson 1959:38–45.)
- 9 Robertson (1959:125–133) was the first to make the case for an earlier date for Codex Tudela. Boone posited a common lost prototype, which she dates to sometime between 1528 and 1553, of which Codex Tudela, which she put at ca. 1555, was a direct copy.

Codex Magliabechiano, in her view, was derived, slightly later, from a different copy of the prototype, which is also lost. Juan José Batalla Rosado (2002:159–165), in contrast, contended that Codex Tudela was the original, dating it to 1540, whereas Codex Magliabechiano was loosely based on later copies sometime in the second half of the sixteenth century. Bertold Riese (1986:77) proposed a different genealogy, improbably placing the Codex Magliabechiano in the eighteenth century.

- 10 The reference to Humitecutli (cited as Humitecmtli) is preserved, however, in the *Costumbres, Fiestas, Enterramientos, y Diversas Formas de Proceder de Los Indio de Nueva España*, an eighteenth-century copy of a mid-sixteenth-century copy of the text in Codex Tudela (Gomez de Orozco 1945).
- 11 Robertson (1959:129) was the first to compare this scene to its Codex Tudela predecessor, noting a number of features indicating the artist's greater awareness of European pictorialism.
- 12 This composition, favored by native artists before the conquest, continued to be used in other colonial manuscripts as well—for example, Codex Mexicanus 40 (Mengin 1952:436) and the Mapa de Cuauhtinchan No. 2 (Carrasco 2007:figure 10, section J).
- 13 Codex Tudela 53r was the model for a vignette depicting Aztec sacrifice in the lower right corner of the title page to the second decade of Antonio de Herrera's 1601 *Historia general de los hechos de los Castellanos en las Islas I Tierra Firme del Mar Oceano* (Batalla Rosado 2002:figure 11).
- 14 In the course of excavating the Templo Mayor in the late 1970s and 1980s, archaeologists found a sacrificial stone located directly in front of the Huitzilopochtli shrine on the upper platform of Stage 2.
- 15 For the dating of Sahagún's complete corpus of manuscripts, see Gibson and Glass (1975:361).
- 16 See also Baird (1988) and Boone (2003) on European elements in Sahagún's work.
- 17 Many Mexican deities were represented, not in the form of statues but by bundles of "relics" or other objects believed to contain the deity's essence and powers.
- 18 On the preconquest appearance of Huitzilopochtli, see Boone (1989:10–19).
- 19 Sahagún (1950–1982:2:142, 176) reported that human sacrifices were performed during Panquetzaliztli in memory of Huitzilopochtli's victory over his seditious siblings during the migration from Aztlan.
- 20 Sahagún titled this page "Diverse Houses of the Devils." It is uncertain whether it represents the main ceremonial precinct of Tenochtitlan or that in Tepepulco.
- 21 A sacrifice similar in composition to that in the illustration of Panquetzaliztli appears in the same manuscript (folio 268v) in the illustration of the month of Tlacaxipehualiztli. The divine patron of Tlacaxipehualiztli, Xipe Totec (Our Lord the Flayer), is not depicted there, however, perhaps because the Spaniards did not consider him a threat.
- 22 See also Muñoz Camargo (1984 [1581–1584]). Although never conquered by the Aztecs, Tlaxcala lay adjacent to the Aztec homeland and shared much of its culture.

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- 23 To the left of folio 239r, a group of five native men advances toward the slain man at the foot of the pyramid steps, its leader holding a flaming torch in one hand and a bird, apparently intended as an offering, in the other. Facing them are two well-dressed Spaniards, one of whom holds a decapitated bird. The explanatory text on the page reads: “The manner of their houses and idolatrous temples, and how they sacrifice human bodies to their gods, friars and Spaniards [being] present” (my translation). Presumably, the Spaniards are protesting.
- 24 The image, which appears in Ms. Bodley 264, folio 262v, can be accessed at <http://bodley30.bodley.ox.ac.uk:8180/>. Marco Polo’s report, although in French prose, was added as folios 218r–271v to the English manuscript, which features the Romance of Alexander. The miniatures in *Li Livres du Graunt Caam* were made by Johannes and his school.
- 25 De Bry’s engraving was based on one by Joos van Winghe (see Gaudio 2008:17).
- 26 Ribas’s images can be viewed at <http://www.jcb.lunaimaging.com> 01562004.
- 27 Aztec gladiatorial combats had been imagined by artists ever since the making of codices Tudela (12R) and Magliabechiano (30r) and would continue to be well into the nineteenth century, when French painter Jean-Frédéric Maximilien de Waldeck painted his imaginative *Reconstrucción ideal de una ceremonia prehispánica* (Ideal Reconstruction of a Pre-Hispanic Ceremony) (Museo Soumaya 2006:plate 233). Another ceremony, possibly a heart excision sacrifice, takes place on a temple platform in the background of Waldeck’s painting.
- 28 Le Rouge’s print is one in a series illustrating the downside of each of the Seven Deadly Sins.
- 29 Vellert’s image can be accessed at ARTstor: UCB-SHARE\_504888.
- 30 The long arrow pointed directly at the groin of a downed enemy in de Bry’s *Outines milites ut caesis hostibus utantur* (How the Warriors of Outina Treat Their Murdered Enemies) apparently alludes to the claim, made in the accompanying text, that Outina’s warriors used arrows to pierce the corpses of their enemies through the anus (Duchet 1987:plate 40).
- 31 See, for example, the version by Purmann, which can be accessed at <http://www.lunacommons.org>.
- 32 Foucault was writing about modes of punishment common in eighteenth-century Europe before modern penal codes had been put in place. It cannot be a coincidence that it was during that century that artists began to include large crowds in their scenes of human sacrifice.
- 33 The image appears unnumbered, together with the other illustrations, at the end of the book.
- 34 Half a century later, the American artist H. M. Herget would use similar visual tactics to illustrate a *National Geographic* article on the Aztecs by Frank H. H. Roberts Jr. (1937:111), at that time a staff archaeologist for the Bureau of American Ethnology, Smithsonian Institution (Stephenson 1967:84–94). The article, including its illustrations, was reprinted in Stirling (1955:240–266).

- 35 According to an anonymous reviewer of this article, images in the Netherlands that depicted Spaniards tearing out and eating a person's heart were probably inspired by European images of Aztec heart sacrifices in the New World.
- 36 On the dating of Codex Vaticanus 3738, also known as Codex Vaticanus A and Codex Ríos, see Quiñones Keber (1995:111), who concludes that it was completed by 1563.
- 37 Like other standard images of the Aztec world seen in the works of de Bry and Prévost, a version of the *Cemetery of Sacrifices* illustrates Purmann's (1790 [1777]:2:opp. 240) *Sitten und Meinungen der Wilden*. Purmann's *Vitzilipuztli*, for example, appears in the same volume opposite page 232.
- 38 On archaeological evidence of Aztec sacrifices of children, see, e.g., Chávez (2007), Chávez et al (2005), López Luján et al (2010), and Román Berrelleza (1990, 1991, 1999). In contrast to the Mexicans, the Classic-period (A.D. 250–900) Maya did occasionally depict children about to be, or shortly after being, sacrificed (Taube 1994).
- 39 <sup>31</sup> De Bry is thought to have based this image on a watercolor by French artist and traveler to the New World Jacques Le Moyne. The thesis has been called into question in recent years, however (Milanich 2005). All of Le Moyne's originals have been lost.
- 40 Picart also changed the title of the scene to state that the newborn was an offering to the sun, not the king, a notion that he apparently took from the title of another of de Bry's images, depicting the annual Timucua offering of a deer to the sun.
- 41 My thanks to David Kunzle for translating the title of this manuscript: "The New Traveled World or Short and Succinct Description of All Its Lands and Kingdoms. Wherein are Indicated for Each Land in Particular Its Ways of Living, Religion, Domestic Life and Fertility. Together with the Beginning, End, and Succession of Popes, Emperors, Kings, and Princes. Described by the Very Illustrious Godefread Scholtens and Enriched with Copper Engravings Pertaining Thereto."
- 42 A woodcut of the same subject was published by Sebastian Munster in Basel in 1554 (Lestringant 1997 [1994]:figure 2).
- 43 For preconquest Mexican images of a person in a large cooking vessel, see Codex Borgia 5, 7, 10, 20, 57; Codex Laud 25; and Codex Vindobonensis 25.
- 44 For Cranach's cannibalistic wild man or werewolf crawling off with a baby in his mouth, see <http://www.metmuseum.org>.
- 45 The print illustrates Lodivico Varthema's *Die Ritterlich vnd lobwürdig reiz des gestrengen vn[d] landtfarers . . .* of 1515, which was translated from the 1510 Italian original.
- 46 For more on Spanish concerns about depopulation due to plagues, epidemics, and wars, see Black (2006:55, 79, 145–146, 180, note 66, 214, note 64).
- 47 On cannibalism in medieval Europe, see Gordon-Grube (1988), McGowan (1994), and Tattersall (1988).
- 48 The witches' banquet is in an etching from *Description et Figure du Sabbat des Sorciers*, which appears in Lancre (1613).

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- 49 Castañega's treatise was originally titled *Tratado muy sutil y bien fundado de las supersticiones y hechicerías y unos conjuros y abusiones; y otros cosas al caso tocantes y de la posibilidad e remedio dellas*. It was republished in 1946 by Agustín G. de Amezúa as *Tratado de las supersticiones y hechicerías*. For an English translation of Castañega's treatise, see Durst (1979).
- 50 To my knowledge, no images of El Niño de la Guardia, if ever made, have survived.
- 51 The source of this drawing was the *Book of the Cabala of Abraham the Jew*, which is held in the Library of the Arsenal, Paris (Dundes 1991:note on back cover).
- 52 The pictures of Simon of Trent with a knife at his groin must also have invoked memories of late medieval and Renaissance scenes of the biblical Massacre of the Innocents, which typically show tiny babies impaled on long spikes.

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## 10

***Alia Herculanea:***  
**Pre-Hispanic Sites and Antiquities**  
**in Late Bourbon New Spain**

**Leonardo López Luján**

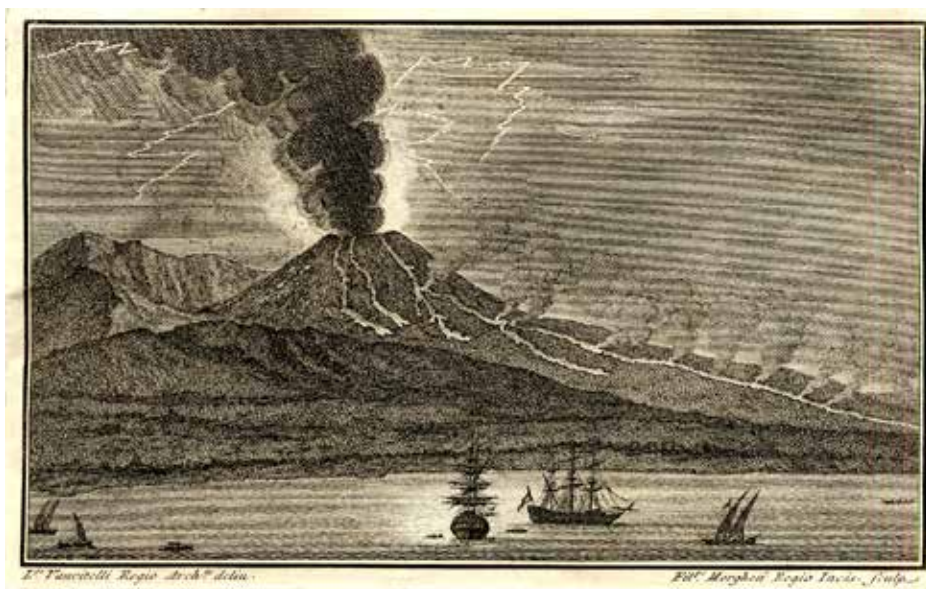
**P**ompeii and Herculaneum are symbols of the archaeologist's bliss, certainty in the discovery of almost the totality of vestiges of ancient life...a veritable dream! These cities are also at the source of the privileged place occupied by archaeology in our civilization. Their spectacular discoveries amazed all civilized men from the last two centuries. There one could see the parade of European arts and letters:

For generations, archaeologists there have refined their methods and modified their objectives. At the start, only small paintings were pulled from the walls and only statues, important objects, gems, and jewels were collected. Today, everything is recovered right down to a dead fly from 1979, and even the roots of bushes

in gardens are excavated to conduct a detailed contextual, computerized record. Pompeii and Herculaneum continue to be the laboratory for archaeological methods, the field of privileged experimentation.

With these words, Tony Hackens (1993:15), vice president of the Archaeology Program of the European Community (PACE), inaugurated academic sessions to celebrate the 250th anniversary of the first explorations at the Roman cities buried in A.D. 79 by the ashes and mud spewed by Mount Vesuvius (Figure 10.1).<sup>1</sup> This meeting took place on October 30, 1988, in the beautiful Italian town of Ravello. That day, in a packed room overlooking the sea, the supreme luminaries of Classical archaeology and art history were gathered together: Luisa

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**Figure 10.1.** The eruption of Mount Vesuvius. (Accademia Ercolanese di Archeologia 1757–1792:volume 1)

Franchi, Christopher Parslow, Elisabeth Chevalier, Giuseppe Guadagno, Richard Brilliant, and many others.

Amid great anticipation, the room went silent as the lights were dimmed for the opening presentation to begin. However, the guest speaker did not say a word about Charles of Bourbon (Carlo di Borbone, later Charles III of Spain)—the memorable sovereign of the Two Sicilies—or that in 1738 he entrusted Spanish engineer Roque Joaquín Alcubierre to unearth the marbles beneath his palace at Portici (Figure 10.2). Far from it; the speaker described in detail the discovery of the sculpture of a moon goddess named Coyolxauhqui and how 10 years earlier, in 1978, work had begun to unearth it at the Templo Mayor of Tenochtitlan.

Clearly, the speaker was Eduardo Matos Moctezuma, who spoke with great knowledge and pride of the past glories of other Moctezumas before him (Hackens 1993:16–17; Matos 2003:15; personal communication 2006). You might ask: Why was he bestowed with this apparently incongruent honor? Why was a Mexican opening celebrations marking the birth of Italian archaeology? The answer might seem obvious: The transcendent significance of archaeological work at the Templo Mayor that revolutionized our knowledge of Mexica civilization certainly merited such a distinction. What is interesting about this event is how it mirrors other connections—much more remote in time—between the archaeology of Italy and that of Mexico.





**Figure 10.2.** Portrait of Charles of Bourbon, king of the Two Sicilies. In the lower right corner, a pick, shovel, and Roman antiquities allude to the Herculaneum excavations. (Accademia Ercolanese di Archeologia 1757–1792:volume 1)

### **Two Old Publications**

Much earlier, in 1748, the widow of José Bernardo de Hogal from Andalusia published a small but unusual pamphlet at her printing press on the street of Las Capuchinas (today known as Venustiano Carranza), in what is now the historic center of Mexico City (Figures 10.3–10.4).<sup>2</sup> It is a work in quarto format with numbered sheets; it originally had four pages (Anonymous 1748b; see Medina 1989:5:98). In the opinion of historian Roberto Moreno de los Arcos (1970:95),

this was the first publication expressly devoted to archaeology that appeared in New Spain. But this work, significantly, did not deal with a moon goddess decapitated by her own brother; nor was it about a pyramid with two temples on top. Instead, it dealt with the productive excavations at Herculaneum, which had begun a decade earlier, in 1738. The baroque title of the pamphlet was *Relación del maravilloso descubrimiento de la ciudad de Heraclea, o Herculanea, hallada en Portici, casa de campo del Rey de*

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Figure 10.3. Cover of the booklet on Herculaneum published by Hogal's widow (Anonymous 1748b).

*las Dos Sicilias, sacada de los Mercurios de septiembre, y noviembre del año pasado de 1747* (Account of the Marvelous Discovery of the City of Heraclea, or Herculaneum, found in Portici, Villa of the King of the Two Sicilies, Taken from the *Mercurio* of September, and November of Last Year 1747).

As the title states, Hogal's widow used the content of two earlier articles from the Madrid newspaper *Mercurio Histórico-Político*.<sup>3</sup> Today we know that these, in turn, were a translation of two quarto sheets in circulation on the streets of Paris under the title *Relation d'une découverte*

*merveilleuse faite dans le Royaume de Naples* (Account of a Marvelous Discovery Made in the Kingdom of Naples), apparently in July 1747 (Grell and Michel 1993:137–138). Closer examination reveals that the publication contained extracts from apocryphal letters, presumably written by a nonexistent gentleman from Malta and by a fictitious abbot from Orval. These letters describe visits to totally furnished residences, in perfect condition, in an underground city. One even mentions a table set with bread, cheese, and wine that, despite their seventeen centuries of antiquity,



Figure 10.4. Frontispiece of the booklet on Herculaneum published by Hogal’s widow (Anonymous 1748b).

continued to be “very fresh”! The abbot took some of these foods with him as a souvenir of his visit, as well as some bits of mural painting. This apocryphal publication made such an impact that the *Mercure de France* republished the letter from the gentleman from Malta, also in July (Anonymous 1747a). However, six months later, a French traveler published in this periodical a missive placing the letter’s veracity in doubt (Anonymous 1748a),<sup>4</sup> and shortly thereafter, philosopher Charles De Brosses wrote a series of commentaries on its questionable authenticity in a letter addressed to the

Académie des Inscriptions (Grell and Michel 1993:138).

Hogal’s widow’s very modest pamphlet, just as all leaflets sold to passersby and clients who frequented the bookshops in Mexico City, fulfilled the brief mission of spreading the latest news. Through the centuries, its ephemeral nature has turned it into an exceptionally rare publication. Fortunately, after months of searching databases and libraries in Mexico and abroad, I was able to locate a copy in the reserve holdings at the Biblioteca Nacional de México, bound in Volume 604 of the vast Lafragua Collection.<sup>5</sup>

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Given its enormous importance for the history of Mexican archaeology, I translate it into English in its entirety, as follows (Anonymous 1748b):

Here are spread two letters (They write from Naples) by two Strangers concerning a marvelous discovery, made in this Kingdom, which shall please the Wise, particularly Antiquarians. The first of these two Letters is written by a Gentleman from Malta, in Portici, Country House of the King of the Two Sicilies, on June 24, and it contains as follows:

I have seen what is unique in History. The City of Heraclea [Herculaneum], of which Pliny speaks in his Letters, and that an eruption of Mount Vesuvius (which is located in Italy, at a distance of five or six leagues from Naples) buried in many feet of Ashes[;] a place that is called Portici, Country House to the King of the Two Sicilies, is gradually being discovered; This City is complete and all of the Houses adorned, and the Furnishings very well preserved. I have seen everything that was being prepared to eat at the time of the eruption, such as very fresh Bread, Wine, Cheese, and so forth: the Utensils, the shape of earthenware vessels, many of them useful, Silk Thread for fishing, not very different from what we use [today]. An entire theater was found there, its Statues of bronze and marble, of the most beautiful Antiquity; frescoed paintings extremely well preserved, with the only

difference that they are not more than of two colors. But this will not seem strange to those who are aware of the origin of Painting, for it is shown that the first Painters naturally used in the creation of their works of only one color, nothing more than a simple Pencil; [and] that later they used two [colors], which they then found the means to blend all together.

The text is truncated here, because the copy in the Lafragua Collection contains only the first sheet (pages 1 and 2). Nevertheless, for the reader's benefit, I fill in the missing portion by including the following English translation of the original French publication, a copy of which may be found today in the Bibliothèque Mazarine in Paris (côte A 1519 6e pièce; see Grell and Michel 1993:143–144):

to make their paintings more attractive and to make them more expressive both in clothing and in flesh tones.

This confirms how valued they are for their antiquity.

The King has several Halls of a new palace that he is decorating paved with these rarities, in Parquets & in Mosaics that have been found complete there.

Extract from the Letter from the Abbot of Orval, written in Rome in the month of June of 1747, upon his return from Naples and from Portici.

*This is what he says.* What we have found to be marvelous from there,

& what is the most incredible in the world is an underground City, ruined in the ashes of Mount Vesuvius, during the reign of Titus, around thirty years after Jesus Christ.

This City, of which the historians of that time tell of the destruction, was called Heraclea; the King of Naples made its discovery two or three years ago, & he had it exhaustively excavated; he took and continues to take from there every day ancient Statues of inestimable value, of the most valuable marble, & riches of all sorts, which he uses to decorate his Palaces, & that are of the supreme beauty.

I, who have visited this City, was content to take wheat and bread from that time, which still survive in the houses, & fragments of a painting from a Room.

As for the domestic utensils, furnishings, ornaments of personal adornment, tools that serve in Sacrifices, all of this ordered within the King's cabinets as they are taken from there; because this quest is only conducted very slowly, given the precautions that are taken there to avoid losing anything, because everything there is extremely valued. No mention has yet been made if any manuscripts have been found there: but there should not for a single instant be any doubt that they would have existed, & I am deeply convinced that among all the treasures that will be found in this City, these will be seen as the ones of the greatest esteem.

I have not mentioned anything of the bays of Pozzuoli, Capri, the entrance

of the Cumaen Sibyl, Lake Averno, of the Elysian Fields, & of all of the places consecrated by Fable & by History, no more than Gaeta, Capua and other enchanting spots throughout the Sea, where Cicero's House was located, where he was trapped by Mark Anthony's Soldiers, & whose respectable ruins still survive.

I have visited all of this, judge by what delights you: but detailing it would take up considerable space. Farewell.

Read & approved on July 26, 1747.

CREBILLON

Approval Seen, permission to print, under the registration of the Guild Chamber, on July 26, 1747,

BERRYER.

Registered under the Registry of the Community of Booksellers-Printers of Paris, No. 3166, in accord with the Regulations, & notably to the Council Degree on July 10, 1745, in Paris, on July 18, 1747. CAVILIER, Official Receiver.

At the GONICHON presses, street of La Huchette, the day of Abraham's sacrifice. M.DCC.XLVII.

Hogal's widow decided to make known the consequences of this pamphlet in 1749 (Anonymous 1749). She then published a leaflet with an amusing article containing an equally lengthy title: *Copia de carta del emperador de la China, escrita a nuestro santissimo padre Benedicto XIV, pidiendo a su santidad una princesa de Europa en matrimonio con la solemne Promessa (entre otras) de establecer una*

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*mutua correspondencia con su Santidad* (Copy of a Letter from the Emperor of China, Written to Our Most Holy Father Benedict XIV, Requesting from His Holiness a Princess from Europe in Marriage with the Solemn Promise [among Others] of Establishing a Mutual Correspondence with His Holiness). On the back side of this sheet, she included an addendum entitled “Parrapho, que se deve añadir a la Relacion que se imprimió el año pasado de la Ciudad de Heracla, sacado del Mercurio del Mes de Marzo” (Paragraph That Should Be Added to the Account Printed Last Year on the City of Heraclaea, Taken from the *Mercurio* of the Month of March) (Figure 10.5).

In the following, I translate into English the complete text from this leaflet. This document is also bound in Volume 604 in the Lafragua Collection (Anonymous 1749):

The discoveries of Antiquities, as curious as they are well preserved, continued in the ruins, or underground at the ancient City of Heraclaea, six miles from this Capital on the part of Mount Vesuvius on the Portici plain, concerning which we have received the following Account. It had been believed naturally that there was nothing more than a Theater at the place that was being dug: that is, in the place that according to the Historians was submerged in an Earthquake, that took place during the Reign of Emperor Titus; but after some time, every day they found fragments of other Buildings, which proved, it was

not merely a simple Theater, but rather an entire City, confused by the fire and the ashes that Vesuvius had vomited on that Country from time to time. This is, without doubt, the ancient Herculenum, or Herculanium (sic), that Anthony in his Itinerary places six miles from our Capital, which corresponds to two leagues in France; and precisely it is this distance that can be seen today. And what is even more convincing are the inscriptions that have been found at the same spot and that read Herculanenses, the name of the inhabitants of the buried City.

It would take a very long time to give a detailed Account of all of the pieces that have been discovered, and so we will be content with speaking of them in general. They consist of large and small fresco Paintings; many Columns and Statues; a set of Kitchen equipment, and wooden Dishes, and an infinite range of other antiquities. Two Colossal Seated Statues are of the greatest perfection. There is a nude Statue of Nero holding the Caduceus in his hand. A large number of liquid measuring tools have been found, that will be of great use in explaining the ancient Writers; a quarto Book or six copper sheets; glass Bottles found full of a thick, black substance believed to be Balsam from Egypt, with which the dead were embalmed. They have even uncovered a Cake in its Oven that was completely reduced to ashes; but despite the ashes one can still see the shape of this Cake. We have in the Architrave of the Theater the name of



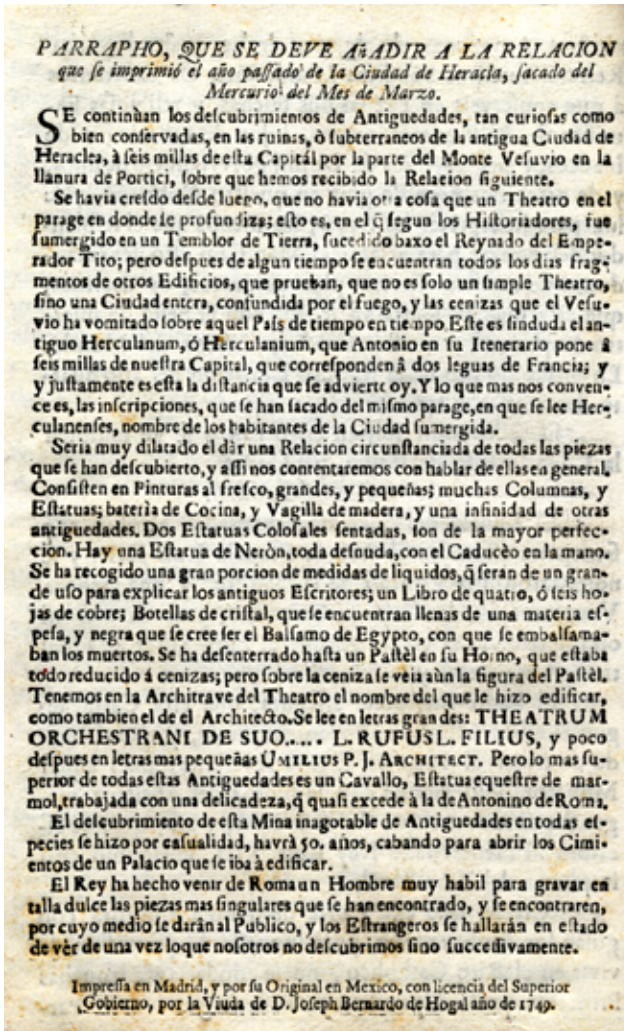


Figure 10.5. Leaflet on Herculaneum published by Hogal's widow (Anonymous 1749).

the man who had it built, as well as that of the Architect. It reads in big letters: THEATRUM ORCHESTRANI DE SUO... L. RUFUS L. FILIUS, and a little after in smaller letters UMILIUS P. J. ARCHITECT. But the greatest of all of these Antiquities is a Horse, a marble Equestrian statue, worked with a delicacy that almost exceeds that of [Marcus Aurelius]

Antoninus of Rome. The discovery of this inexhaustible Mine of Antiquities of all sorts was made by accident, some fifty years earlier, while digging to make the Foundations of a Palace that was going to be built.

The King summoned to Rome a Man highly skilled to make intaglio prints of the most singular pieces that

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have been found, and that may be found, through which they will say to the Public, and to Foreigners who will be in a position to see at once what we discovered gradually.

Printed in Madrid, and through its Original in Mexico, with the permission of the Higher Government, by the Widow of D. Joseph Bernardo de Hogal in the year of 1749.

### **Expanding Awareness of the Herculaneum Excavations**

How is it possible that the first “news” of Herculaneum to reach New Spain was actually apocryphal letters? First we should take into account the fact that the excavation of this site—regarded as the supreme archaeological operation of the eighteenth century—served to bolster the image of Charles of Bourbon as a sovereign as sensitive to the arts as he was powerful. Following a clever strategy of political propaganda, Charles identified his government (1734–1759) with the glorious imperial past of Rome: he promoted the recovery and exhibition of antiquities, erected archaic-style buildings and monuments, published the Latin classics, and had himself portrayed in the style of Roman emperors or of recently found sculptures (Allroggen-Bedel 1993:38–39; Mora 1998:48, 62; 2001:27–40).<sup>6</sup>

In this context, the ruins of Herculaneum were treated as overflowing treasures, ripe to be flaunted before one’s own and foreigners alike (Figure 10.6). In fact, in swift, changing undertakings, galleries in the solidified pyroclastic flows were perforated to exhume the greatest possible

number of frescoes, marbles, and bronzes to adorn Portici Palace. Unfortunately, in the first years of the excavation, field records were limited to inventories of objects and to cursory drawings of the contexts in which they were found (see Fernández Murga 1964, 1989; Parslow 1995).

To be expected, rumors of the spectacular discoveries soon spread, which attracted aristocrats and men of letters from Germany, France, and England. These outsiders were seen with mistrust by the court, because the king wished to monopolize the publication of artworks that were coming to light day by day. Therefore, he deployed a double strategy (Allroggen-Bedel 1993:35–37). On the one hand, teams of local scholars and illustrators were organized to prepare luxurious volumes sponsored by the Crown. On the other, the time allowed for visits to the museum and the humid underground galleries was restricted, and carefully examining objects, taking notes, and doing drawings were prohibited. Visitors skirted these obstacles by setting inscriptions, sculptures, and pictorial compositions to memory and reproducing them graphically and textually as soon as they left the premises.

And so a true black market of archaeological information was produced. In it, real news circulated on par with imprecise or distorted accounts and even outlandish lies (Chevallier 1993:58; Fernández Murga 1989:32; Gordon 2007; Grell and Michel 1993:133–134). The consequence was the publication of unauthorized missives and descriptions, some of them apocryphal, in



the *Nouvelle Litterarie* from Florence, the *Philosophical Transactions* from London, and the *Mercure de France* from Paris, among others.

The luxurious official publications of the Regia Stamperia of Naples appeared many years later. In 1752 five volumes of the *Prodromo delle antichità d'Ercolano* (Prodrome of the Antiquities from Herculaneum), written by Ottavio Antonio Bayardi, were released.<sup>7</sup> In 1755 the *Catalogo degli antichi monumenti dissotterrati dalla discoperta città di Ercolano* (Catalog of the Ancient Monuments Unearthed at the Discovered City of Herculaneum), by the same author, appeared. Finally, from 1757 to 1792, the eight-volume in-folio series *Le Antichità di Ercolano esposte* (The Antiquities Discovered in Herculaneum), prepared by

the Accademia Ercolanese, was published (Figure 10.7). Lavishly illustrated, beginning with the image of the archaeologist-king on the frontispiece (Alonso Rodríguez 2010a:figure 2), this series was given by Charles to members of the European aristocracy, scientific institutions, and a small number of other individuals.

Because they were not available on the market, few copies of these series reached the Americas. One of them was requested from New Spain on August 26, 1785, by engraver Gerónimo Antonio Gil, who wished to have a copy for the library of the Academy of the Three Noble Arts of San Carlos (Angulo Iñiguez 1935:21–22; Báez 1974:107–110; 2003:42–45; Fuentes 2002:54).<sup>8</sup> However, the professors and students of the budding academy had to wait until November 1790,



**Figure 10.6.** The Herculaneum excavations, according to a vignette from Saint-Non (1782).

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**Figure 10.7.** Frontispiece of the first volume of *Le Antichità di Ercolano esposte*, 1757.

when three crates containing books, prints, mathematical kits, drawing instruments, and an archaeological piece reached New Spain, all sent from the port of La Coruña under the orders of Ignacio de Hermosilla (Angulo Iñiguez 1935:27; Báez 2003:46–48).<sup>9</sup> The second of these crates included, among other contents, “5 volumes of Herculaneum” in a large format, bound and with a nominal value of 2,800 pesos, while the third crate had “3

volumes of Herculaneum;” *Les édifices antiques de Rome* by Antoine Desgodetz, valued at 520 pesos; and an “Etruscan” vessel with an estimated value of 450 pesos. Fortunately, these specimens are still preserved and may be consulted in the reserve holdings of the Biblioteca Nacional de México.<sup>10</sup> Another copy of the series, it is worth mentioning, was in Thomas Jefferson’s library at Monticello in Virginia (Winkes 1993:127).

### Herculaneum in the Imaginary of New Spain and Guatemala

The two apocryphal publications of Hogal's widow, together with the books from the royal presses in Naples, had a major impact on enlightened individuals in New Spain, awakening or reviving their interest in local archaeological vestiges and the pre-Hispanic past. This renewed interest is evident in the writings of local scholars and men of the cloth, who praise the antiquarian work of Charles, who by that time had become Charles III of Spain (1759–1788).

For example, the multifaceted Mexican writer José Antonio Alzate y Ramírez (1777–1778:title page) referred to the excavations at Herculaneum at the beginning of his *Descripción de Xochicalco*, dedicated to Viceroy Antonio María de Bucareli y Ursúa. There he states:

The conservation of antiquities is one of the highest of every government in which the sciences flourish; the wealth that was distributed, and the will that was established to extract and preserve the [antiquities] of Herculaneum at the time our Sovereign reigned in Naples confirm this truth and highlight it even more if we heed the public notoriety, which then, the wise Monarch was to serve to Reign in Spain, he generously gave up a small ring embellished with a precious stone found in those ruins so that nothing be separated from the precious cabinet.

Alzate refers here to an event described by all historians in different

versions. (See Allroggen-Bedel 1993:37; Colleta 1975:124–125; Fernández Murga 1989:145–146). When Charles boarded the ship that took him to Spain to ascend the throne of his brother Ferdinand VI in 1759, it was noted that he still wore a ring with a precious cameo found in the excavations that he had worn for seven years. At that instant, he decided to turn it over to his minister Tanucci, so it could be returned to the museum of Portici, demonstrating that archaeological relics were the property of the state and not the king.<sup>11</sup>

Alzate again referred to the cities destroyed by Vesuvius and their rebirth in several articles in his *Gazeta de Literatura* in 1792 and 1793. In them he mentioned the “frescoes, which have resisted time, [and] humidity” (Alzate 1831a [1792]:411), and he expressed surprise over the “fruit, blackened wheat, and two whole loaves of bread” that had managed to be preserved because they had not come into contact with air (Alzate 1831c [1793]:81). He also spoke of the aim of “a certain subject” to excavate at Otoncalpulco, near Mexico City, dismissing it by saying that it did not deserve to be recorded by an individual “but by the magnificence of the Bourbons, sovereigns who have drilled Herculaneum and Pompeii, opulent cities, to show us what men executed two thousand years ago, and that nature has hidden with the aid of arms more powerful than our artillery” (Alzate 1831b [1792]:459).

In 1792 the astronomer and antiquarian Antonio de León y Gama published his *Descripción histórica y cronológica*

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*de las dos piedras* (Historical and Chronological Description of the Two Stones), in which he considers the explorations of Alcubierre as worthy of being imitated in Mexico. León y Gama (1792:1–2) states:

I have always thought that in the main plaza of this city, and in the neighborhood of Santiago Tlatelolco, many precious monuments of Mexican antiquity should be found. . . . If excavations were carried out, as they have done for this purpose in Italy to find statues and fragments that recall the memory of ancient Rome and are currently being carried out in Spain, in the Villa [small town] of Rielves, three leagues from Toledo, where they have discovered several ancient pavements. How many historical monuments would be found from Native antiquity? . . . And how many treasures would be discovered?

Later, León y Gama (1792:4) confessed that he had written his treatise on the Calendar Stone and Coatlicue:

to shed some light on antiquarian literature, which is promoted to such a great extent in other Countries, and that our Catholic Monarch Charles III (may he rest in peace) being King of Naples promoted with the celebrated Museum that he founded at Portici, at the cost of immense amounts of money, of the excavations

he ordered be conducted in the discovery of the ancient cities of Herculaneum and Pompeii, buried for so many centuries beneath the ashes, stone, and lava from the eruptions of Vesuvius.

The fame of the Bourbon excavations went beyond academic circles in New Spain. An interesting case in point is that of canon Gaspar González Cándamo, who raised the subject in a sermon he gave to parishioners in the Cathedral of Guadalajara in 1789, when he finally heard the news of the death of Charles III. Archaeology occupied center stage in the praise he bestowed on the monarch's legacy (González Cándamo 1789:7; see Estrada de Gerlero 1993:62–65):

What new and unforeseen school of thought does not open to the Arts in the Herculaneum Museum? The renowned cities of Heraclea and Pompeii, buried for so many centuries in the abysses of the earth, offer the most outstanding examples of the magnificent simplicity of antiquity. What costs can be skimmed from this glorious enterprise? Or what work can be denied to bring to light those precious monuments that have contributed so much to the advancement of the Arts and that will be preserved in glory to the end of time in the illustrious name of their august discoverer?

Five years later, on December 12, 1794, Fray Servando Teresa de Mier gave his

celebrated sermon in the Colegiata de Guadalupe, in which he declared that Saint Thomas had evangelized the indigenous population prior to the arrival of the Spaniards in the New World. As proof of such a controversial idea, he referred to the meaning of the Sun Stone and the Coatlicue (Teresa de Mier 1997:28–29):

But before beginning to prove my four propositions, to proceed with clarity, we need to establish who were the Mexican Indians, when and where did they come from, if some of the apostles preached the Gospels to them, and which [apostle] it could have been. Do not think, sirs, that I am going to become tangled up in the intricate and interminable disputes printed on this, all [of them] are in vain, since those monuments from the time of public paganism and accredited [and] excavated in the earlier viceroyalty and much more precious than all of those from Herculaneum and Pompeii have given us Ariadne's thread to emerge from the labyrinth. Especially that large rock that is in the patio of the university, and that teaches amply about the ruin of the ancient capital of the Indians in the earthquake of the death of Jesus Christ and the foundation of Mexico four hundred years later, and that other large rock that is at the base of the new tower of the cathedral is even more interesting, and it contains the true *teomoxtli* or book of God that Mr. Gama has recently wished to rake up in his periodicals after having seen

it so many times that he needed to try to explain it.

This assessment is highly significant at a time in which the creoles, in their desire for independence, imbued the indigenous past with new value.

News of Herculaneum and Pompeii also featured prominently among the inhabitants of the captaincy general of Guatemala. Italian architect Antonio Bernasconi clearly had the catastrophe caused by Mount Vesuvius very much in mind when he visited the ruins of Palenque (Cabello Carro 1992:36). In the report he sent to Governor José Estachería on June 13, 1785, he wrote that the Maya city did not succumb to an eruption but rather to other causes (Bernasconi 1992 [1785]:114):

At none of the hills and Hillocks where I traveled in that ancient Place have I observed any sign of volcanic eruption, nor any other indication that suggests violent destruction, and thus it seems more likely that the abandonment of the inhabitants produced its decline, which may very likely be attributed to the Indians based on the shape of the statues, the way of making the mounds, and the lack of order of streets and blocks; nevertheless the construction of the buildings is not completely uncivilized in the art with which they were built.

Similarly, Domingo Juarros (1808:14), in his *Compendio de la historia de la ciudad de Guatemala* (Compendium on the

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History of the City of Guatemala), also noted similarities and differences between Palenque and Herculaneum:

STO. DOMINGO PALENQUE. Town of said Province of *Tzendales*, in the confines of the Intendancy of Ciudad Real, and Yucatan. . . . It has become famous for the vestiges of a very opulent city, that has been given the name of the *City of Palenque* found in the lands of its jurisdiction: undoubtedly the court of an Empire, although of unknown Histories. The mentioned Metropolis was another *Herculaneum*, although not like this buried under the ashes of Vesuvius, but rather hidden in a vast desert: until the mid-eighteenth century [when] some Spaniards entered that aforementioned solitude, they found themselves, with great wonder, before the façade of a magnificent city of six leagues in circumference.

### **The True Impact of the Herculaneum Excavations**

This compilation of references to Herculaneum makes it clear that the enlightened thinkers of New Spain and Guatemala were well aware of what was happening in southern Italy. Their writings show their surprise at the richness and excellent preservation of the archaeological contexts, as well as their great admiration for the king's undertakings in the recovery and safeguarding of Roman antiquities. However, it's worth asking if these excavations, beyond their presence in the collective imagery of the time,

had any other type of repercussion in the rest of the Spanish Empire. According to Gloria Mora (1998:108–115, 122) and Jaime Alvar (2010:315–322), the impact was null in Spain in terms of archaeological methodology and the antiquities salvage projects organized by the Crown or the academies. Paradoxically, Charles III did not undertake any similar initiatives when he ascended the Spanish throne: he never sponsored the archaeological explorations under way at sites such as Mérida, Sagunto, Segóbriga, and Itálica (see Mora 1998:89–106). In reality, the only significant influence that can be perceived is in literary allusions to the discoveries in Italy and in news on the donation of the volumes of *Le Antichità* to academies and important individuals.<sup>12</sup>

In the case of Peru, Joanne Pillsbury and Lisa Trever (2008:205–210) noted suggestive similarities between the innovative archaeological plans of Chan Chan contained in the 1781–1789 work of Baltasar Jaime Martínez Compañón y Bujanda, the bishop of Trujillo, and the precise drawings of Herculaneum done by military engineers Roque Joaquín de Alcubierre, Pierre Bardet de Villeneuve, and especially Karl Weber. The authors recall, however, that the first plans of the Roman site were published in 1797 and that specifically those done by Weber did not come to light until the nineteenth century (Pillsbury and Trever 2008:206; see Parslow 1995:7, 197). Even though they do not dismiss the possibility that an original plan of the Bourbon excavations might have been seen in Spain by Martínez Compañón or by the Spanish

engineers who worked for him at Chan Chan, they are of the opinion that such similarities could well have been the result of the use of generalized cartographic conventions in European military engineering and mining. After a lengthy discussion, Pillsbury and Trever (2008:214) reach the important conclusion that “the Vesuvian excavations ultimately had a limited impact on New World archaeology.”

In the case of New Spain, there do not seem to be any direct connections: drawings and copper engravings that illustrate the descriptions of pre-Hispanic monuments owe little or nothing to the plates from volumes printed in Naples. It seems clear that artists trained in the traditional guild system and in the Academy of San Carlos represented the monuments of Xochicalco, El Tajín, Tenochtitlan, and Teotihuacan following graphic conventions taken from scientific and technical disciplines such as medicine, botany, geography, metallurgy, and industry, through the constant flow of publications from Europe and the United States.

Nor is there any attempt to emulate the objectives, techniques, and archaeological methods employed at Herculanum. In New Spain, for example, one never sees what Alain Schnapp (1993:242–247) has rightly defined as “the tradition of hunting objects, of swiftly unearthing the largest possible number of ancient works.” To a good measure, this is due to the fact that vestiges equivalent to the highly coveted Roman marbles, bronzes, and murals did not exist in pre-Hispanic archaeological contexts. Similarly, at

Mesoamerican sites, mining techniques used to excavate galleries more than 24 m deep were useless. The science of numismatics, which sought coins and medals, dates, places, genealogies, areas of political domination, and historical events, was inapplicable. And it was impossible to undertake epigraphic repertoires of inscriptions recorded on monuments through a complex writing system as was the case for Roman antiquities.

In New Spain there was no clear-cut state policy when it came to antiquities. With the exception of the very late Royal Antiquarian Expedition (1805–1809) led by Captain Guillermo Dupaix from Luxembourg, the viceregal government never planned or oversaw archaeological undertakings (Fauvet-Berthelot et al. 2012).<sup>13</sup> However, we cannot deny a certain interest in monuments from the pre-Hispanic past on the part of the local authorities, such as that resulting from the accidental discovery of the Calendar Stone and the Coatlicue. Through a series of legal documents that we have recently published, we know that Viceroy Revillagigedo ordered an inquiry into the circumstances surrounding the discovery of these monuments in the Plaza de Armas, that he personally promoted the preservation of the monoliths in the university atrium and at the cathedral, and that he had the monuments drawn, measured, and weighed (López Luján 2011b; Matos and López Luján 2012). Unlike the king of Spain, however, Revillagigedo did not finance the study of the sculptures; nor did he sponsor their publication through the Academy of San Carlos.

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Now that we have already mentioned this institution, this is a good time to point out that students there were inculcated with an education that went against the religious aesthetic of the baroque; instead they were instilled with expressions inspired by Graeco-Roman antiquity (Fuentes 2002:17–22; Lombardo 1986:1248–1249). For this purpose, the academy used its spectacular didactic collections of paintings, prints, medals, plaster casts, and books brought from Europe (Angulo Iñguiz 1935:19–21; Uribe 1990:91, 125–126). Besides the volumes on the excavations at Herculaneum mentioned earlier, the library also contained books on the antiquities of Rome and Palmyra, as well as works by Vitruvius, Serlio, Vesalius, Piranesi, and Winckelmann. Among the plaster casts were copies of the Laocoön, the Venus de' Medici, the Castor and Pollux group, and the gladiator, among many others.

Today, the academy's archives house hundreds of drawings done by students from that time (Fuentes 2002). Many of them are exercises in which students copied reproductions of sculptures from Herculaneum. There are also many copies of plates from Palladio's treatise on architecture and Vignola's work on the canon of the five Classical orders of architecture. Within this rich body of images is a rather clumsy ink sketch of a Roman temple in ruins drawn by José María Caballero in 1805 (Fuentes 2002:113, cat. 68).

In this seminal environment, what is highly significant is that members of

the academy had reappraised major material works from the indigenous past that were unearthed in Mexico City at the end of the eighteenth century. I am referring specifically to the so-called *Indio Triste*—the fantastic animal known as the *ahuítzotl*, a serpent, and a toad—sculptures that are today located in the Museo Nacional de Antropología and in the Museo de Escultura Mexicana at Santa Cecilia Acatitlan (López Luján 2012:97–98; 2015:94–121). An album of antiquities produced by Dupaix included ink and gouache drawings of these sculptures, accompanied by glosses indicating that they were exhibited in the academy alongside plaster casts of Graeco-Roman sculptures (López Luján 2011a; 2015).

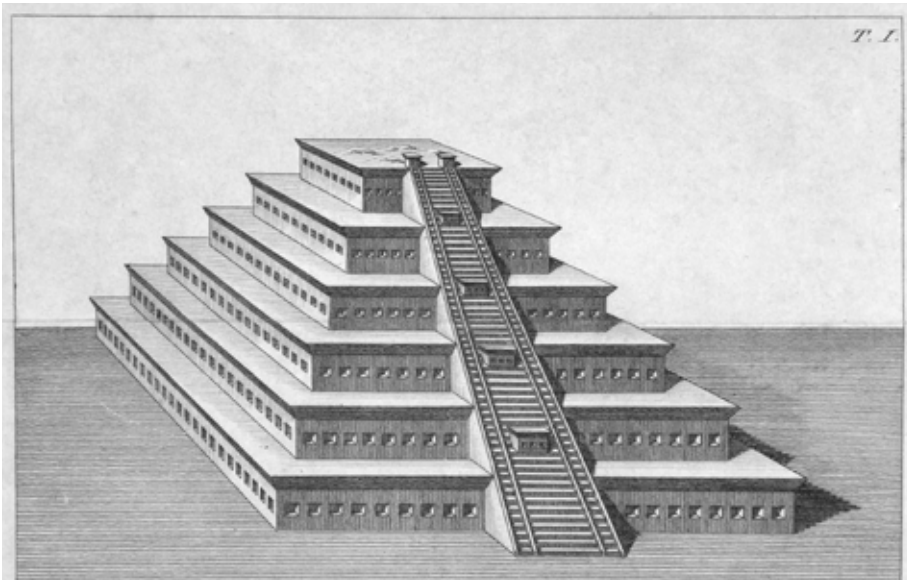
Before concluding, I would like to briefly examine the case of Pedro José Márquez, a Jesuit, who, together with his fellow members of the order, was expelled from New Spain in 1767 (Flores 2014; Gutiérrez Haces 2010). During his exile in Italy, Márquez became a well-known expert in ancient Roman architecture, particularly the work of Vitruvius (Márquez 1972:17–20; Romani 1998:132). His research led to eight treatises, some of which were published.<sup>14</sup> What is interesting for the present discussion is that Márquez, after receiving the descriptions of El Tajín and Xochicalco published in Mexico City, set about the task of composing the essay entitled *Due antichi monumenti di architettura messicana* (López Luján 2008a, 2012; Márquez 1804, 1972; Romani 1998:137–153). There he



explained the function and significance of the Pyramid of the Niches and the Temple of the Feathered Serpents based on analogies drawn with Egyptian, Hebrew, Greek, and fundamentally Roman antiquity. The objective of these comparisons was to disavow the differences between ancient peoples, sustaining that all of them sprang from a common origin and reaching the conclusion that they therefore possessed the same historical dignity. Based on this logic, Márquez often attempted to reduce the pre-Hispanic world to the categories of Graeco-Roman civilization (Gutiérrez Haces 1988:194; Romani 1998:144–149). For example, he identified the balustrades of the Pyramid of the Niches as two narrow stairways that flanked a wide central stairway (Márquez 1804:7). Based on this error in perception, the

Jesuit proposed that the supposed lateral stairways were used to go up and down the pyramid, while the central stairs were interpreted as wide stands for seating, as in Roman theaters, amphitheatres, and temples (Figure 10.8).

Márquez also dealt with the significance of the niches, calculating a total of 380 based on data published in the *Gazeta*. Using this total, he proposed that 365 niches represented the days of the year, that 13 equaled days of leap year corrections that would exist in a 52-year cycle, and that the 2 remaining niches alluded to a pair of 52-year cycles (Márquez 1804:11–12). In this way, he concluded the calendrical function of the pyramid, similar to the one that Italian architect Giovanni Marliano da Nola (1478–1559) attributed to the Arch of Janus in Rome. The four facades of



**Figure 10.8.** Copperplate engraving of the Pyramid of the Niches, El Tajín (Márquez 1804:plate i).

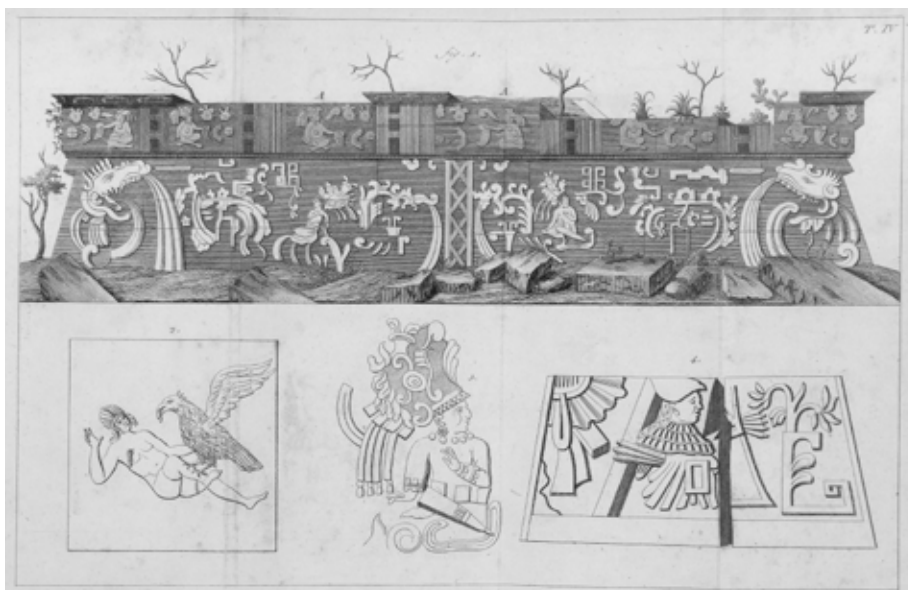
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this triumphal arch inspired Marliano to interpret them as symbols of the seasons, while the 12 niches on each side were seen as the months.

When it came to Xochicalco, Márquez (1804:19–20) believed the Temple of the Feathered Serpents was a setting for human sacrifice (Figure 10.9). However, he clarified his statement by adding that the pre-Hispanic people never reached the exorbitant number of victims recorded in the Spanish chronicles and that the Romans also committed the same acts to honor Jupiter on the Capitoline Hill in Rome. Márquez (1804:22–24) ended by saying that one should not underestimate the grandeur of pre-Hispanic civilizations based on the state of degradation of their modern descendants, for the same phenomenon was recorded in Greece.

## **Final Considerations**

We can conclude that, at the end of the viceregal period, the enlightened creoles of New Spain set about the task of exalting pre-Hispanic civilizations, often comparing them to the Classical world. This reappraisal of the past should be understood as a strategy full of political meaning, for it promoted the creation of a national spirit and instilled the desire for independence. It should be mentioned, however, that Spaniards born in Spain were always there to show Spaniards born in the Americas who the true heirs to ancient Rome were. A well-known event confirming this took place in 1794: Michele La Grua Talamanca, Marqués de Branciforte, who was originally from Sicily, came to Mexico City as the new viceroy (Ciaramitaro



**Figure 10.9.** Copperplate engraving of the Temple of the Feathered Serpents, Xochicalco (Márquez 1804:plate iv).



**Figure 10.10.** Copperplate engraving of the plan of main plaza of Mexico City (Humboldt 1810).

2008:151). Among his new provisions, he set about again modifying the Plaza de Armas (Figure 10.10). For this end, he commissioned architect Antonio González Velázquez to build an enormous ellipse with a railing to emulate the one in the plaza of the Capitoline Hill in Rome (Uribe 1990:62–64).

Then Manuel Tolsá was commissioned to create an equestrian statue of the king of Spain inspired by the portrait of Marcus Aurelius, also on the Capitoline Hill.<sup>15</sup> After years of delays, the monument was cast in August 1802 and finally inaugurated in November 1803. The *Gazeta de México* said that this was a statue worthy of the golden age of Greece and Rome (Escontría

1929:55). Alexander von Humboldt (1986:338–340; see Holl and Fernández Pérez 2002:188), who had struck up a friendship with Tolsá and attended the ceremony, recorded his opinion in his travel diary: “The animation and beauty of the horse is indescribably beautiful—a genuine Andalusian breed, and stepping forward so gallantly, so naturally and nobly. The king commanding, dominating, and at the same time as clement and generous as Marcus Aurelius.” In this sculpture, 16 feet high, the figure of King Charles IV appeared dressed as a Roman emperor, while his spirited horse trampled the quiver and eagle that symbolized the subjugated native population of New Spain.<sup>16</sup>

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**Notes**

- 1 A summary of this research has been published in López Luján (2008b).
- 2 José Bernardo de Hogal founded his printing press in 1721. He soon earned a reputation for himself and was honored by being named *impresor mayor* of the city. After his demise in 1741, his wife ran the establishment until 1755 (Medina 1989:1:clix–clxv, clxx).
- 3 The *Mercurio Histórico Político* appeared without interruption from 1738 to 1830, although it changed its name to *Mercurio de España* in 1784. Founded by Salvador José Mañer, this periodical based its content on translations to Spanish of articles taken directly from the *Mercure de France*.
- 4 This Parisian periodical was founded in 1672 by Donneau de Visé under the name *Mercure galant*. In 1724 it changed its title to *Mercure de France*, and it was published regularly until 1832. It is worth mentioning that in the issue corresponding to October 1747, three additional articles were published on the Herculaneum excavations (Anonymous 1747b, 1747c, 1747d).
- 5 Bound in parchment, this volume brings together different printed matter that for the most part measures 21 cm (8¼ inches) in height.
- 6 For a similar strategy pursued in southern Italy some 400 years earlier by Alfonso V, see John Pohl's essay in this volume.
- 7 Considering the long delay of this publication, Bayardi's descriptions and interpretations are disappointing and insufficient (Fernández Murga 1989:123).
- 8 In 1778 Gil was entrusted with establishing and directing a school of engraving in the Real Casa de Moneda de México (Mint of Mexico). For this purpose, the Castilian engraver left Spain, bringing with him several manuals and works by Spanish and Italian treatise writers; 26 bas-reliefs, heads, and small figures cast in plaster; 80 drawings of heads, hands, and feet; more than 1,000 prints; and thousands of medals and coins, many of them Greek and Roman (Angulo Iníiguez 1935:3–4; Bargellini and Fuentes 1989:25; 1990:19; García Melero 1992:271). This collection, which in 1783 went on to form part of the patrimony of the recently established Academy of San Carlos, increased noticeably in the colonial capital—for example, with publications seized from convents as a result of the expulsion of the Jesuits. Faced with the imminent opening of the Academy in November 1785 and regarding these didactic materials as insufficient for teaching purposes, Gil made an ambitious new request from the Spanish Crown in his capacity as director of the new institution (Angulo Iníiguez 1935:21–22; Báez 2003:42–45; Bargellini and Fuentes 1989:26). As for publications, he asked for “the set of Herculaneum and Pompeii from Naples,” the “Antiquities of Rome by Piranesi and other works that he has published,” *The Ruins of Palmyra* by Robert Woods, and the book of the travels of Antonio Ponz, among others. In addition, among the plaster casts, he requested the shipment of “the *Seated Mercury* that came from Herculaneum,” “the Ganymede from Herculaneum,” and the “castings of the urns and bas-reliefs that exist in the Academy of Herculaneum.” This request has its antecedent in 1782 (Báez 1974:107–110; Bargellini and Fuentes 1989:25–26; Fuentes 2002:54).

- 9 As is widely known, the sculptor from Valencia Manuel Tolsá set sail from Cadiz the following year, in 1791, with a much more important cargo for the Academy of San Carlos in Mexico (Alonso Rodríguez 2010b:241–242; Angulo Iníguez 1935:25–27; Bargellini and Fuentes 1989:26–28, 59, 65–66, 77–78, 81; Escontría 1929:61–66). It consisted of 73 crates containing mainly plaster casts (192 according to the inventory), including copies of at least 11 bas-reliefs and 10 three-dimensional sculptures found in the ruins at Herculaneum. Furthermore, there were prints, art materials, instruments, and to a lesser extent books.
- 10 Marked as from the Academy of San Carlos, the following were preserved: the *Catalogo* by Bayardi (1755); a set with volumes 1–7 of *Le Antichità* of the Accademia Ercolanese di Archeologia (1757–1779); another set with volumes 1–5 and 7; and a book on Rome by Desgodetz (1779 [1682]). Other treasures in the reserve holdings in the Biblioteca Nacional de México include the five volumes of the *Prodromo* by Bayardi (1752) and Volume 8 of *Le Antichità* (1792), although their origin is unknown. On the other hand, the Biblioteca Palafoxiana in Puebla possesses Bayardi's *Catalogo* and volumes 1–7 of *Le Antichità*. However, it is possible that these copies might have entered the library around 1850 as part of the collections of Bishop Francisco Pablo Vázquez. The bishop could have acquired them in Rome in the 1820s, when he was negotiating with the Holy See for recognition of the independence of Mexico (Jesús Joel Peña Espinosa, personal communication 2006). As for the “Etruscan” vessel, its present whereabouts are unknown.
- 11 According to Gloria Mora (1998:113), this anecdote can be refuted by taking into account that in the Museo Arqueológico Nacional in Madrid there are several objects cataloged as from the collection of antiquities from Herculaneum and Pompeii that Charles III had brought from Naples. Among them there are portable mosaics, carbonized fruit, and Greek vases. (See also Alonso Rodríguez 2010b:238–240; Alvar 2010:316, 319.) Documentation also attests to the fact that Camillo Paderni sent antiquities to Charles III in Madrid. It is worth adding that in the Academy of San Fernando in Madrid, there was a great collection of drawings and plaster copies from Herculaneum given by the king (Alonso Rodríguez 2010b:241; Bargellini and Fuentes 1989:26; García Melero 1992:270–271). According to Urrea (1989:116), Charles III donated a similar collection to the Academy of San Carlos in Valencia in 1776.
- 12 Mora (2001:50) emphasized that while the excavations at Herculaneum and Pompeii were widely publicized by Charles De Brosses in France, Sir William Hamilton in England, and Johann Winckelmann in Germany, in Spain the drawings of Abbot Antonio Ponz and those of Fray José Ortiz y Sanz were never made known. Curiously, none of the Spanish travelers who visited the works described the ruins in detail.
- 13 We know now that most of Dupaix's archaeological expeditions in New Spain, his famous *correrías particulares*, took place between 1791 and 1804 and were self-financed. (See López Luján and Gaida 2012; López Luján and Pérez 2013; López Luján and Sánchez 2012.)

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- 14 Márquez's publications on ancient Roman architecture are *Delle case di città degli antichi Romani, secondo la dottrina di Vitruvio* (1795); *Delle ville di Plinio il giovane* (1796); *Dell'ordine dorico ricerche* (1803); *Esercitazioni architettoniche sopra gli spettacoli degli antichi* (1808); and *Illustrazioni della villa di Mecenate in Tivoli* (1812). Márquez also published a treatise on astronomy (*Tavole nelle quale si mostra il punto del mezzo giorno e della mezza notte, del nascere e tramontare del sole, secondo il meridiano di Roma*, 1790) and an Italian translation (1804) of Antonio de León y Gama's *Descripción histórica y cronológica de las dos piedras . . .*
- 15 Although rather unconvincingly, Bérchez (1989:45) has proposed that Tolsá's sculpture was inspired by a small-scale equestrian statue of Charles III carved in wood, today held in the Academy of San Fernando in Madrid and attributed to Manuel Álvarez, Juan Pascual Mena, or Juan Adán. Other authors have proposed, in contrast, that Tolsá's sculpture was modeled after the bronze of Louis XV of France by François Girardon (Uribe 1990:106).
- 16 For this reason, the statue was on the point of being destroyed in 1824—three years after the consummation of Mexico's independence. Everything was resolved when the decision was made to eliminate the eagle by hammering it off, which could not have been done with the quiver because it was positioned at one of the points of support for the horse's leg. The statue was then moved to the patio of the university (Escontría 1929:58).

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