



## Elaboration and Abbreviation in Mexican Pictorial Manuscripts

Their Use in Literary Themes

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The literature of every country and of every time is understood as it ought to be only by the author and his contemporaries. Between him and them there exists a common stock of experience which enables the author to mention an object or to express an idea with the certainty that his audience will imagine the same object and will grasp the subtleties of his idea. . . . The task, therefore, of one who lives in another age and wants to appreciate that work correctly consists precisely in recovering the varied information and the complexes of ideas which the author assumed to be the natural property of his audience.

—Milman Parry,  
*The Making of Homeric Verse:  
The Collected Papers of Milman Parry*

**T**HIS EXTRAORDINARY PASSAGE SUMMARIZES perfectly the possibilities and problems we face as historians working with Mesoamerican

indigenous sources. As outsiders, both in space and time, we struggle to understand a document and its message that was totally obvious to the contemporaneous reader and his public. This message is not hidden in some mysterious code but rather shrouded by the passage of time and the consequent cultural changes undergone by the society that produced the document. Milman Parry understood and expressed the need to obtain a profound knowledge of the people who brought forth the message contained in a manuscript. It is not the scribe  is at fault for our difficulties in reading a text but rather our lack of understanding caused by the limited number of sources and the artialness of information that have survived our lack of knowledge of the indigenous languages, or our insufficient theoretical and methodological models that deny us access to the message. Any text that forms part of a tradition will be understood by the members of the group that produced it, as it will follow certain known schemes organized in ways recognized by that group.

As such, Mesoamerican pictorial registers, particularly historical sources, contain accounts that are organized around certain themes that were well known among a wide audience. Whereas the particular details of each account may vary, the underlying structures are more or less the same. Such themes include, for example, the foundation, the *toma de posesión*, or taking hold of the bundle. Since these themes were well known, they could be depicted pictographically in elaborate scenes or abbreviated to one simple pictorial element that represented the whole theme. Therefore, when studying Mesoamerican pictography one first has to identify the themes and then proceed to analyze the pictorial elements within their particular context. However, as a scene may be either be an elaborate or abbreviated representation, one must seek out analogies among related scenes to reach an understanding of each by examining thematic units or groups of symbols with significant relationships.

## Methodology

As much of the argument set forth here is based on things that are not seen but are assumed to be present, I would like to explain in some detail the methodological steps that provide the basis for my final assumptions. The method applied here is that of ethnoiconology, which has its origin in the methodological scheme of Erwin Panofsky (1939:3–33), but has undergone certain adaptations in order to be used for the analysis of Mesoamerican pictographic documents. It was originally developed by Maarten Jansen and Peter van der Loo (Jansen 1982, 1988; Loo 1982, 1987) but has since been used and adapted to a wide range of documents by others (Asselbergs 2004; Doesburg 2001; Lejarazu 2003; Oudijk 2000, 2008a; Roskamp 1998).<sup>1</sup> The successful use of the method is based on the rigid and exhaustive application of each of its steps and, at the same time, on the flexibility of the scholar adapting the method to fit each context or kind of document. This method cannot be applied slavishly to any document or group of documents, but

in every study the scholar has to determine which steps have to be taken and why.

The first level of ethnoiconology is that in which the minimal pictographic elements are identified. Within the Mesoamerican pictographic tradition such elements are never depicted in isolation but rather appear as part of a certain set that is constituted by elements that have a significant relationship to each other. Consequently, the scholar who studies these documents must identify elements within the context of the set of which they are a part. An example from the Codex Selden (folio 5-I) will clarify the procedure (Figure 7.1).

The identification of the minimal elements can be reached through a comparison with other pictographic documents, colonial alphabetical documents, and present-day indigenous traditions. In the figure, the relationship between the plaited hair, a *quechquemiltl*, and a skirt in the depiction of a person is significant as it indicates that the person is a woman. Normally, in historical pictorials the personages are accompanied by their calendar name, which in this case can be identified as 5 Flower. The woman's personal name is drawn as a complex set of glyphs behind her and contains elements representing jewels, a mouth, a hand, and a stick. In Mixtec documents, jewels are most common in feminine names and express the idea of preciousness. The woman is seated on a bench or cushion covered with jaguar skin, which indicates that she is a lady and a ruler of a town.

The first interpretative level is linked to a second through a sublevel that consists of a determination of the genre of a document in order to be able to interpret, within their proper context, the different elements that constitute a pictographic scene. That is, the representation of a temple in a religious manuscript may have a different meaning than it does in a historical text. Many of the Mesoamerican pictographic documents have a historical-geographic nature. However, this does not mean that the documents themselves are not or have never been objects of veneration, as is the case for the Lienzo de Petlacala from the state of Guerrero, which is used in rituals today (Oettinger and Horcasitas 1982). Nor does it mean that the

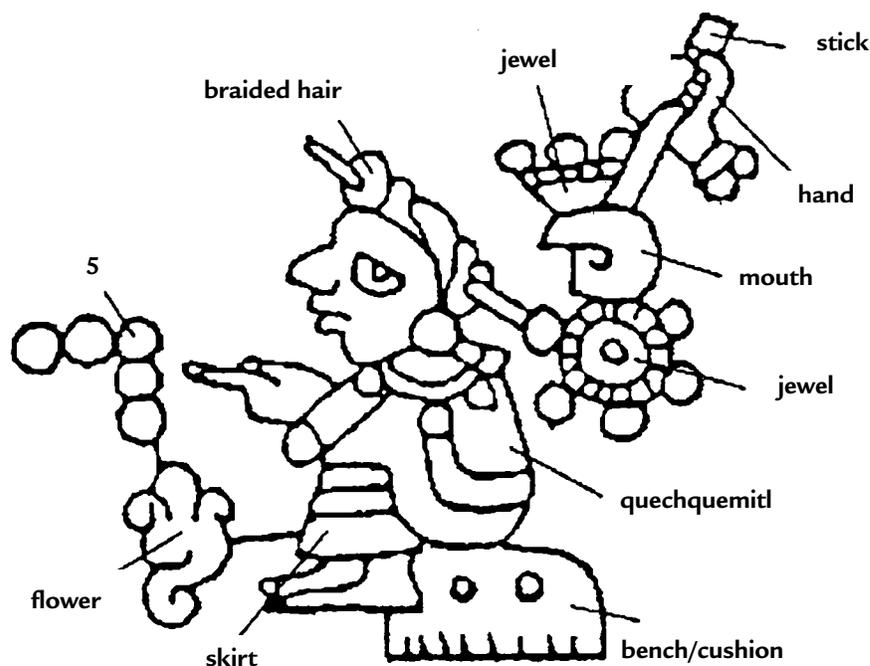


figure 7.1  
 Lady 5 Flower,  
 Codex Selden,  
 page 5-I.  
 (Drawing by  
 the author.)

represented pictographic elements or their constitutive scenes have a religious meaning. Obviously, if the foundation of a town or its lineage is depicted in a historical document, this had and often still has a strong religious connotation for the particular represented group. In fact, the rulers and their ancestors were actually deified persons because they were descendants of an epic founder who was born from a tree, a rock, or a river. As such, we have to consider the genealogy to be an indigenous history of a sacred nature.

The second interpretative level consists of a thematic focus in which the sets of elements are interpreted through significant associations. One of the principal components of ethnoiconology is the use of the “direct historical approach,” which is based on the cultural continuity of indigenous societies in Mesoamerica but with particular attention to the phenomenon of disjunction between the signifier and the signified. According to Panofsky, the use of a certain symbol, or, in this case, a certain pictographic element, can endure through time but not always with the same meaning. This means that the relationship between the signifier

and the signified can change due to a process called disjunction. George Kubler (1961, 1981) argued that disjunction made the use of analogies impossible as a tool for the interpretation of the Mesoamerican past. However, H. B. Nicholson (1976) and Peter van der Loo (1987) have demonstrated that analogies can be applied, but only within a careful and rigorous analysis based on the use of thematic units (for further discussion, see Chance 1996; Gándara 1990; Wylly 1985).

A thematic unit is a pictographic set or scene determined by the significant relationships between the constituting elements. Analogies are drawn between the thematic unit of a known context to understand another similar thematic unit in a lesser known context. Normally, the known context exists in present-day indigenous communities while the lesser known context exists in the past. However, one can imagine an analogy between a recent historical context and a historical context with more time depth. Here I would like to emphasize the importance of the similarity between the two compared contexts. We can consider the rule that the more distant in time

or space are two contexts, the less convincing the analogy will be. So, if a thematic unit from a present-day Mixtec religious context is compared to a thematic unit in an equivalent context from the beginning of the twentieth century, the analogy will be more convincing than an analogy between the present-day Mixtec thematic unit and one from a sixteenth-century Huichol religious context. On the other hand, an analogy will be stronger if two thematic units with many elements are compared. An analogy between one element in two units is never valid since there will be no context, nor any kind of significant relationship. An analogy works if the same significant relationships can be demonstrated between various elements of two distinct thematic units. An example from the prehispanic Codex Bodley (folios 9–10-II) can clarify the issue (Figure 7.2).

The reading goes from right to left. First we see a man called 8 Deer who has a stick in his hand, indicating that he comes from afar. In the other hand, he holds a shield with chevrons, indicating that he is a warrior, and a rope tied to another man who is almost naked, has a black band over his eyes, and holds a flag. All these elements suggest that the latter is a captive who will be sacrificed. Both men walk toward a place where a bearded man named 4 Jaguar, who is seated on a throne with a Ñuu face, receives the captive, who is presented by another seated man. These seated men have black paint around their eyes. This paint is a Mixtec word pun that refers to *sahmi nuu*, “Nahuatl speakers,” who are depicted with “burned eyes” or *sami nuu*. The scene means that Lord 4 Jaguar was ruler of a Nahuatl city-state that is identified as Tollan by a *tule* or cattail reed. After having handed over the captive, Lord 8 Deer leans backward over a stone covered with a jaguar skin. A man who is painted black all over his body, meaning that he is a priest, perforates 8 Deer’s nose and inserts a nose plug.

This long scene can be identified as a thematic unit and its meaning understood through an analogy with another thematic unit from the colonial period, included in the *Relación geográfica* of Cholula in the state of Puebla: “These kings and caciques, in inheriting the kingdom or *señorío*,

came to this city to recognize obedience to the idol of it, Quetzalcoatl, to whom they offered rich feathers, cloths, gold and precious stones, and other things of value. And, having offered, they were put into a chapel that was dedicated to this purpose, in which the two high priests marked them piercing their ears, or their nose or the lower lip, according to the *señorío* they had. After which they were confirmed in their *señoríos*, and they returned to their lands” (Acuña 1985:130–131; my translation).<sup>2</sup>

The same *Relación* of Cholula explains that the city was also called Tollan Cholollan (Acuña 1985:128), which was one of the most important Nahuatl city-states in Postclassic Mesoamerica. Lord 8 Deer was ruler of Tilantongo in the Mixteca Alta from where he walked to Cholula. Although the text of the *Relación* refers to certain objects that were presented before the bundle of the god Quetzalcoatl, the Codex Bodley shows the presentation of one or two captives before a Lord-Priest 4 Jaguar. We should note that in the Codex Zouche-Nuttall this same Lord 4 Jaguar is depicted with a beard, a wart on his nose, and facial paint of black semicircles—all elements associated with Quetzalcoatl (Jansen 1996). It seems, therefore, that 4 Jaguar was a priest of the very same god and, as such, a personification of Quetzalcoatl. After the presentation of the captive by 8 Deer, priests perforated his nose and placed a nose plug as a symbol of a Toltec ruler.

The two thematic units are mutually explicative as some of the elements of the piercing ritual are not mentioned in the *Relación geográfica* of Cholula but are represented in the Codex Bodley and vice versa. The identification of Tollan as Cholula, as well as that of other elements of the pictographic thematic unit, is possible due to an analysis of other pictographic documents such as the Codex Zouche-Nuttall, the Codex Colombino, and the *Historia tolteca-chichimeca*. From these manuscripts, we understand that the significant relationships between the different elements of the thematic units are the same: the presentation of objects before the god Quetzalcoatl, or his priest, in Tollan Cholula in order to receive the nose

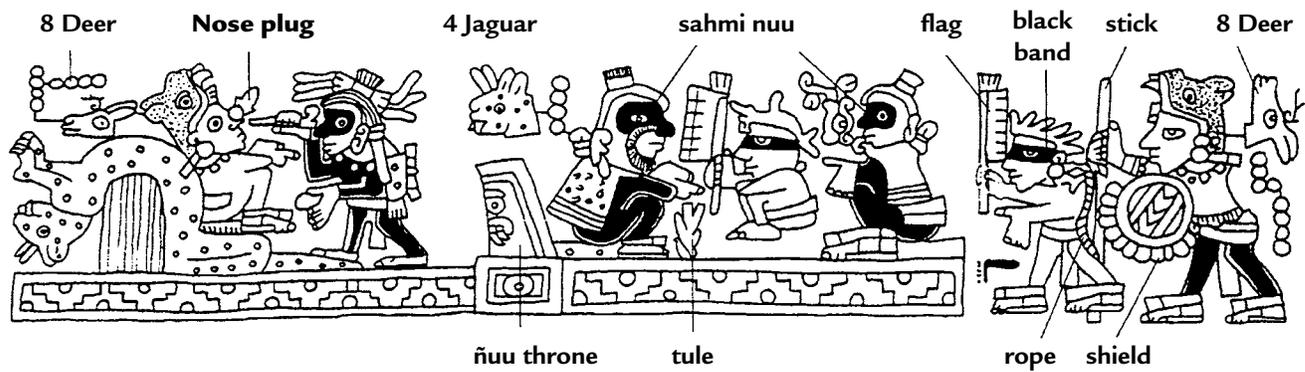


figure 7.2

The piercing of Lord 8 Deer's nose in Cholula, Codex Bodley, pages 9–10-II. (Drawing by author.)

piercing and a nose plug that confirms the status of the ruler. The analogy between the two units is very strong, and for this reason certain elements can be supposed and transposed from one unit to the other. For example, although no temple is represented in the Codex Bodley, we know the stone covered by a jaguar skin on which 8 Deer received his nose plug was situated in a temple as this is explicitly mentioned in the *Relación geográfica*.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, we know that the purpose of nose perforation was to insert a nose plug (or that perforation of the lip was for inserting a *bezote* or lip plug) because the  is depicted in the Codex Bodley, although the it is not mentioned in the *Relación geográfica*.

This very same method can be applied to multiple historical-geographic pictographic documents that register the boundaries that define the territory of a community. In the pictorials, places can only be identified as boundary stones if they appear in the same order in the geographic reality and if the same sequence exists of more than two boundary stones in the two thematic units. In the sixteenth-century Lienzo de Guevea, for example, the toponyms Isoguatenco, Ticuatepequeg, and Cosmaltepequez can be identified as three boundary stones of the town of Guevea precisely because these appear in the very same order on a map of the nineteenth century and in the present-day landscape (Figure 7.3). For this same reason,

we cannot identify Ticuatepequeg as the town of Tehuantepec because the towns of Isoguatenco and Cosmaltepequez simply do not exist, nor have they ever existed in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec.

On the subject of the application of analogies between the ethnographic present and the historical past, we should attend to the examples of Karl Anton Nowotny (1961) and Peter van der Loo (1987). In an extraordinary publication, Nowotny argued that the “calendrical” and “religious” codices that make up the Borgia Group actually are mantic documents that indicate the prognostic associations of certain periods of time and their patrons. Based on the work by the ethnographer Leonhard Schultze-Jena (1938), who studied the ritual use of counted bundles among the Tlapanecs, Nowotny (1961:272–275) demonstrated that the pages of the prehispanic divinatory codices that contain bars and dots concern the use of counted offerings in ritual petitions (Figure 7.4). In 1987, Loo, based on his fieldwork in Tlapanec, Mixe, and Nahua communities, continued Nowotny's work demonstrating the strong relationship that existed through time between the divinatory codices and the present-day rituals. In his book, Loo gives methodological arguments in favor of the application of analogies in iconographic studies and constructs a methodological foundation for ethnoiconology that was then developed and applied to many other kinds of documents.

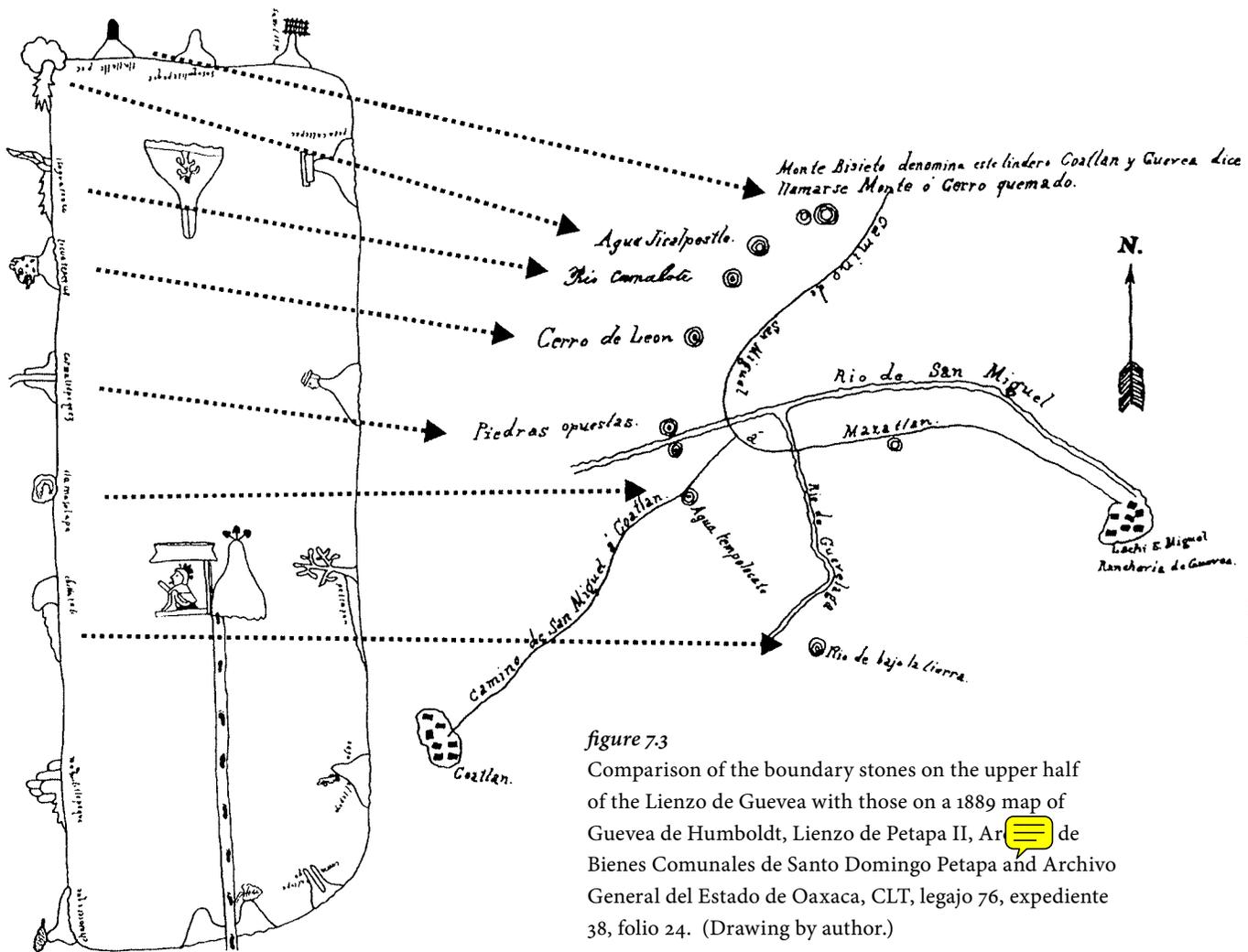


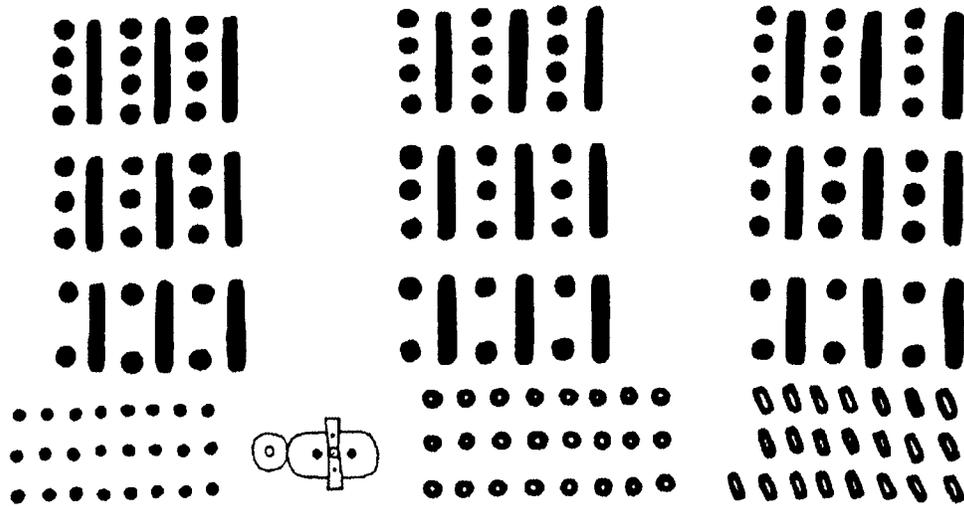
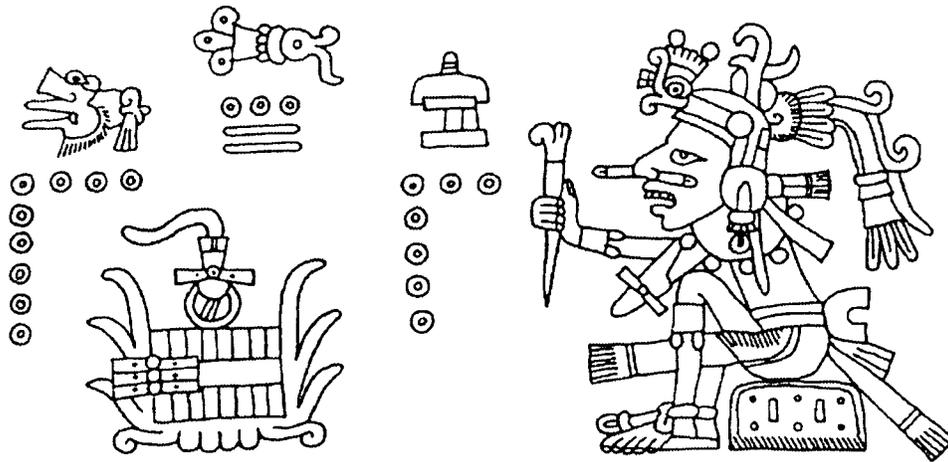
figure 7.3  
 Comparison of the boundary stones on the upper half of the Lienzo de Guevea with those on a 1889 map of Guevea de Humboldt, Lienzo de Petapa II, Archivo de Bienes Comunes de Santo Domingo Petapa and Archivo General del Estado de Oaxaca, CLT, legajo 76, expediente 38, folio 24. (Drawing by author.)

<<Author: Is the highlighted text the full description of the 1889 map?>>

I should emphasize that in order to apply the direct historical approach and to reach conclusions about the prehispanic and colonial documents, it is necessary to have a profound knowledge of present-day and historical indigenous communities because this approach is based on the cultural continuity of indigenous societies in Mesoamerica. Obviously, such cultural continuity does not mean that indigenous societies are or were static through time. On the contrary, a living culture by definition is never static but always in the process of changing and developing based on historical roots. If in our investigations we take into consideration and analyze the processes of change the indigenous societies have

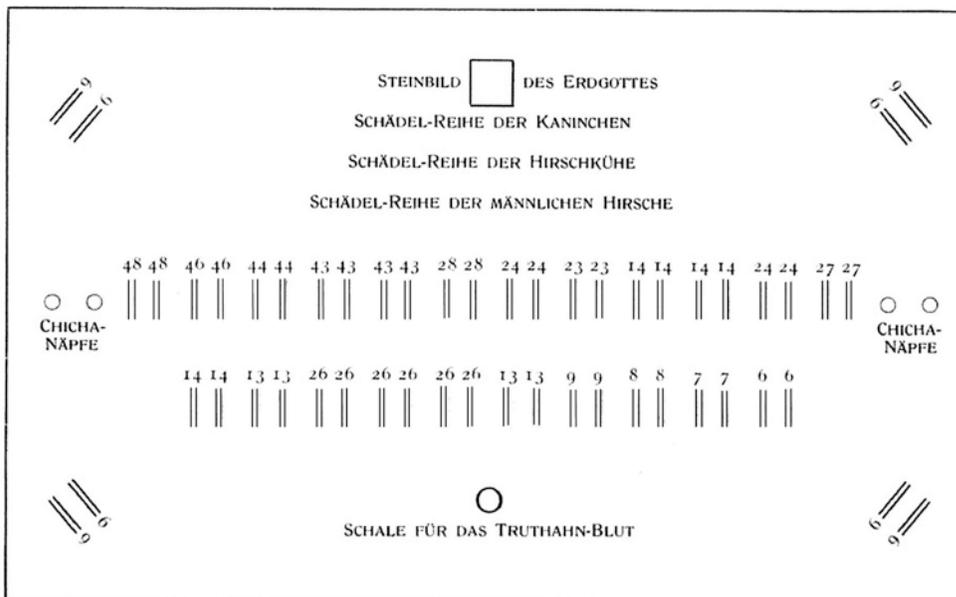
undergone or are undergoing in their history, we can reach conclusions based on information from present-day communities (by, of course, applying the thematic units).

Finally, in the third interpretative level, we generate conclusions based on the observations made in the previous analysis. This is obviously done within the broad historical, social, and ideological context of the pertinent era. Only at this point can reasons be suggested as to why a document was made, by whom, and when. This is also the moment at which the meaning of a document, or that of the group of documents to which it belongs, can be evaluated within a context of more extensive political and historical processes.



a

figure 7.4  
Ritual petitions with  
counted offerings:  
a) in the Codex  
Fejérváry-Mayer,  
page 9; and b) in a  
Tlapanec community  
(after Schultze-Jena  
1938:147). (Drawings  
by author.)



b

## Mesoamerican Historical Sources

In applying the methodological scheme to Mesoamerican pictorials, one has to look for thematic units that can be used to create the analogies. An obvious field for such analogies would be oral literary traditions, as many scholars have pointed out the strong relationship between Mesoamerican pictographic documents and such traditions (Byland and Pohl 1994:8–9; Jansen and Pérez Jiménez 2007:33–63). Storytellers use archetype structures to tell their different histories (see Vansina 1985 on oral tradition). In this way, they capture and hold the attention of an audience who knows what happens next but will always be curious about the particular aspects of a history. These archetype structures can also be recognized in the Mesoamerican pictorial corpus that seems to have been used during public ceremonies in which rulers legitimated their social position and secured the support of their vassals. Archetype structures consist of a series of certain well-known themes, or “thematic units” in pictographic analytical terms, that in many pictorial documents are depicted as various related complex elements or scenes. These were so well known that it was only necessary to represent one or two of these elements to indicate the whole theme. A storyteller would read one pictorial scene but tell the whole sequence, while his

audience would know at the beginning how this particular sequence would end and could, therefore, focus on the way the story was told and on particular details.

As the themes are fundamental for understanding the message of an account, I need to establish which themes existed in pictographic documents from the Postclassic period. The division of the historical documents into themes was already pointed out by Elizabeth Hill Boone (2000:239–241), who established three main themes: Origins, Foundation, and Duration of the Family, Line of Rule, or Polity. In her discussion of these themes, Boone distinguished a marked difference between Mixtec and Nahuatl accounts: the former emphasize local origins, while the latter focus on a migration history. While this is undeniably true, I will try to show that historical accounts from the Oaxaca region also include migrations, or journeys perhaps better described as pilgrimages, that parallel the theme of migrations in the structure of the Nahuatl historical accounts. The pictographic documents, therefore, include four main themes:

Before treating these themes, I would like to note that not every document contains this full structure.<sup>4</sup> This lack may be due to the particular objectives of the painter of a document, which would cause him to represent only part or parts of the whole, but it could also be due to the

**TABLE 7.1**  
Themes found in the historical accounts from the Oaxaca region

<b>ORIGIN</b> Chicomoztoc Aztlán	<b>MIGRATION</b> Coatepec Ilhuicatepec Yaxitzadao	<b>FOUNDATION</b> Toma de Posesión Sacred Bundle	<b>HISTORY</b> Genealogy Rulers List
<b>SACRED BIRTH</b> Apoala/Achiutla River of Lineage Lagoon of Primordial Blood	River of Black Hill		

requirements of the time when a document was produced, for during the colonial era the depiction of certain themes was no longer desired and new themes were introduced. For example, the Mapa de Teozacualco depicts the long lineage of the Mixtec town of Tilantongo. This same lineage is displayed in the Codex Bodley, where the sacred births of the founders from a tree and a river are extensively discussed. However, the Mapa de Teozacualco does not make any reference to this origin, but rather begins five generations later and three generations after the initiation of the Tilantongo lineage. Although we do not know why this origin was not included, it may not have been considered fitting in a colonial context, or perhaps the painter's objective was to illuminate the lineage of Teozacualco rather than that of Tilantongo.

### The Origin and Sacred Birth Theme

The origins of peoples in Mesoamerican pictographic documents can either be traced back to a particular place in a faraway, often mythical landscape, or they can be related directly to a place in the present and known landscape. This difference seems to have a historical explanation, as those who claim a faraway origin actually seem to have had one, while other groups actually have strong historical ties to their present habitat, often going back to Preclassic and Classic times. Typically, groups with this latter, more local place of origin were born from trees, rivers, hills, or stones. This points to an important distinction between local and foreign groups as foreign peoples are not themselves born at their place of origin but only come from there. However, within the structure of the historical accounts there is no significant difference between a faraway and local place of origin except for a subsequent migration that I will discuss.

All complete historical accounts begin in a place of origin. The nonlocal places of origin are often conceptual rather than actual physical places and are often shrouded in a primordial, mythohistorical mist. Although various scholars have tried to identify these places of origin (Kirchhoff 1961;

Seler 1960b), most modern-day investigators have accepted that such an undertaking is hardly possible. However, some indigenous groups may have believed that these places actually existed and may even have so designated certain locations.

Most of the nonlocal places of origin are situated in the arid northern or northwestern parts of Mesoamerica or even outside of the Mesoamerican borders as proposed by Paul Kirchhoff (1966). These places have been associated with Nahuatl-speaking groups who actually have their origins in present-day northern Mexico and the southwestern United States, but recently pictographic and alphabetic evidence has emerged for quite a few Otomanguean groups as well, although this may be due to Nahua influences (Monaghan 1995; Oudijk 2000, 2008b). While there is evidence that some of these places of origin were already in use during the Classic period, it seems increasingly clear that they had a particularly widespread distribution during the Postclassic period.

### Places of Origin

Although it is possibly the most famous place of origin among the general public, Aztlan is actually a very particular place, as it is known only to be related to the Aztec people, of which the most important groups have come to be known as the Mexica-Tenochca and the Mexica-Tlatelolca. As such, Aztlan is only known from Mexica documents.<sup>5</sup> They place it in the north and represent it as an island in the middle of a lake, for which reason some scholars have suggested that it mirrors Mexico-Tenochtitlan (Boone 1991:144–145; Castañeda de la Paz 2006:60; Duverger 1987:123–128; Seler 1960a:22). Pictographically, four or six houses are depicted, which supposedly represent the distinct groups that made up the Mexica and that eventually settled in their respective barrios or *parcialidades* in Tenochtitlan. Both pictorials and alphabetic texts claim that Huitzilopochtli, the patron god, told the Aztecs to leave Aztlan, which is the reason they crossed the lake and began their migration.

Without any exception, all Mexica sources that consider Aztlan situate (Teo)Colhuacan, or Curved Hill, on the shores of the lake that surrounds the island.<sup>6</sup> These two places are so much related that, for example, the *Anales de Tlatelolco* and *Anales de Chimalpahin* mention them in one breath as if they were one place. Curiously, the *Memorial breve acerca de la fundación de la ciudad de Culhuacan* mentions Aztlan, and in the place of (Teo)Colhuacan it positions Chicomoztoc, or Seven Caves, on the other side of the lake (Chimalpahin Cuauhtlehuanitzin 1991:21). The identification of (Teo)Colhuacan and Chicomoztoc as one and the same place is particularly strong in the *Historia tolteca-chichimeca* (folio 2r) where the history begins in “Colhuacatepec,” a direct reading of the glyph for Colhuacan (Kirchhoff et al. 1989:132, par. 12). The pictographic representation of Colhuacatepec (folio 5r) leaves no doubt as to its close relationship with Chicomoztoc as it actually tops the cave. The various kinds of cactus growing on top of the cave indicate that this place is somewhere in an arid region. The next representation of Colhuacatepec-Chicomoztoc occurs when the Tolteca-Chichimeca lords Ixcicouatl and Quetzalteuycac ask the Chichimecs of Chicomoztoc to help them in their struggles against the Olmeca-Xicalanca of Cholula (Figure 7.5). The Nahuatl text that accompanies the famous painting of Chicomoztoc (folio 16r) actually names it as “Colhuacatepec Chicomoztoc,” and it is shown with different pictographic elements related to “beginning,” such as a New Fire ritual, a bow, and a person in a river.<sup>7</sup>

From these accounts, we can see that Aztlan, (Teo)Colhuacan/Colhuacatepec, and Chicomoztoc are so closely related that they should be regarded as one and the same place whose name can be interchanged according to the needs of a *tlacuilo*, or scribe. The idea is that when one of these places was mentioned, the reader (and his audience) would automatically understand the reference to the whole complex of places and symbols related to “origin.” Thus a *tlacuilo*, in painting a pictographic document, either could decide to depict an elaborate scene including all or many of these symbols or, on

the contrary, could decide to portray only one such symbol. As we saw in the Mapa de Teozacualco, the inclusion or exclusion of symbols would be determined by a variety of reasons from spatial considerations to the objective of the account to the person(s) to whom the document was directed.<sup>8</sup>

Similarly, the Zapotec pictorials and alphabetical texts contain references to places of origin that can be related to the set of places just mentioned. For example, the founder of the ruling house of Macuilxochitl, in the valley of Oaxaca, is Lord 8 or 11 Rabbit who came from a place called Quelatinizoo, or Lagoon of Primordial Blood. This exact same place is the place of origin of the founders of Quiaviní, another valley town. However, in this case the lagoon is associated with two more places: Billeгаа and Billehegache, or Cave Nine and Cave Seven, respectively.<sup>9</sup> The latter is, of course, the very same Chicomoztoc so well known from the Nahua sources. This is not the only reference to Cave Seven in Oaxaca. The Codex Zouche-Nuttall (folio 14) describes the primordial couple Lord 5 Flower and Lady 3 Flint being born from a Chicomoztoc, here apparently related with Apoala, one of the most important Mixtec places of origin. Similarly, the Lienzo de Tlapiltepec shows that the early ancestors of Atonaltzin, the founders of the Coixtlahuaca lineage, came from Chicomoztoc. Moreover, this same *lienzo* relates Cave Seven, depicted with various elements of arid regions, to the Rivers of Jade and Quetzal Feathers, a wordplay on *descendants* (*cuzcatl quetzalli*) (Doesburg and Buren 1997:111n12). These rivers are also depicted in the Lienzo de Tequixtepec I and the Codex Gómez de Orozco as a place from which Lord 7 Reed and Lady 4 Movement, the primordial founders of Coixtlahuaca, were born.

The Lagoon of Primordial Blood is also associated with other places of origin. An early seventeenth-century title from the Zapotec community of San Juan Comaltepec states that its founder came from “guiag lachui niza, guelarenee, zaguita” (Hill in the Middle of the Water, Lagoon of Blood, and Place of Reed) (Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City [hereafter AGN], Tierras 812, exp. 2, ff. 96r–97v). The first is not known in this context

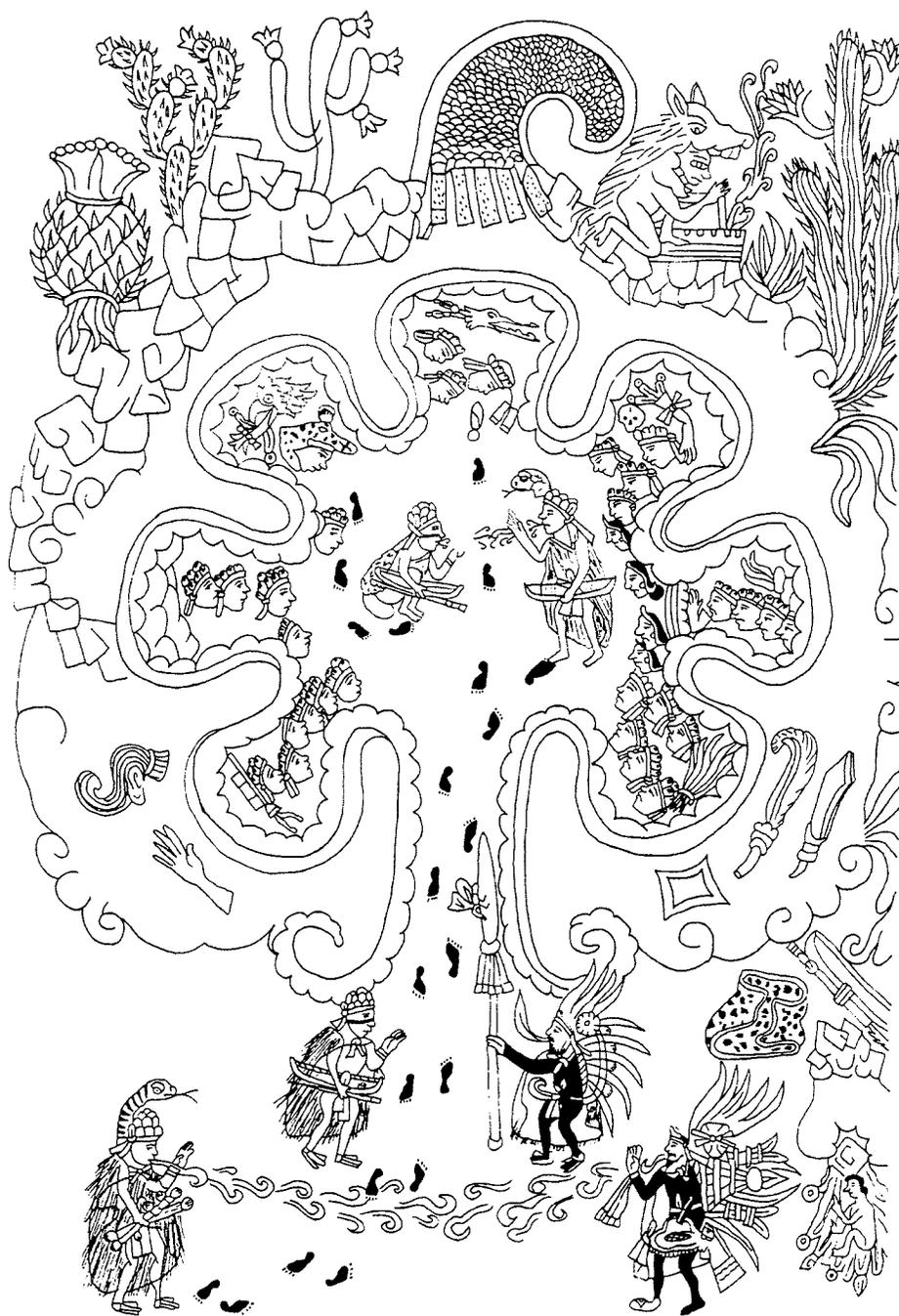


figure 7.5  
*Historia tolteca-chichimeca*, folio 16r, representing Colhuacatepec-Chicomoztoc. (Drawing by author.)

from other documents, although in the *Codex Vindobonensis* (folio 48), 9 Wind descends from the skies and arrives at such a place. Place of Reed, however, is very famous, but rather as it was known in Nahuatl, Tollan. Here the situation becomes more complicated since Tollan is not a place of

origin but signifies a civilized place, with a great concentration of people who have knowledge of the arts. Still, in another Zapotec document from Santa Catarina Yetzalag, Tollan is also associated with Lagoon of Primordial Blood, so there seems little doubt that they are conceptually related

(Archivo Histórico Judicial de Oaxaca, Oaxaca [hereafter AHJO], AVA, Civil, legajo 15, exp. 6, ff. 4r–5r). In the Nahuatl region, this relationship is confirmed in the *Relación geográfica* of Cholula, which shows—at the foot of the Tlachihualtepec, or Great Pyramid—an extraordinary representation of cattail reeds growing out of water with drops of blood, that is, Tollan with Lagoon of Primordial Blood (Acuña 1985:125–126). Not surprisingly, the *Historia tolteca-chichimeca*, a document with alphabetic and pictographic texts that often add information to each other, depicts all the places of origin just mentioned in one large sacred landscape. As mentioned, folio 16r (Figure 7.6) shows Colhuacatepec and Chicomoztoc, but the accompanying alphabetic text makes clear that this page

should be read together with folio 16v as one large scene: “And here is where the curved hill is, where the blue water extends, where the white tules are, where the white reeds are, where the white willow raises, where the white water-sand extends, where the red cotton extends, where the *atlacuezona*<sup>10</sup> extends, where the ballcourt of the *nahuales* is, where the *zaquanmiztli*<sup>11</sup> is. And here is where the curved hill is.”<sup>12</sup>

This is the most complex and complete description of the conceptual place of origin, which incorporates all the different elements mentioned before and adds others that are unique to this document. An analysis of all the different documents that include such places of origin shows perfectly how Mesoamerican pictography and oral tradition

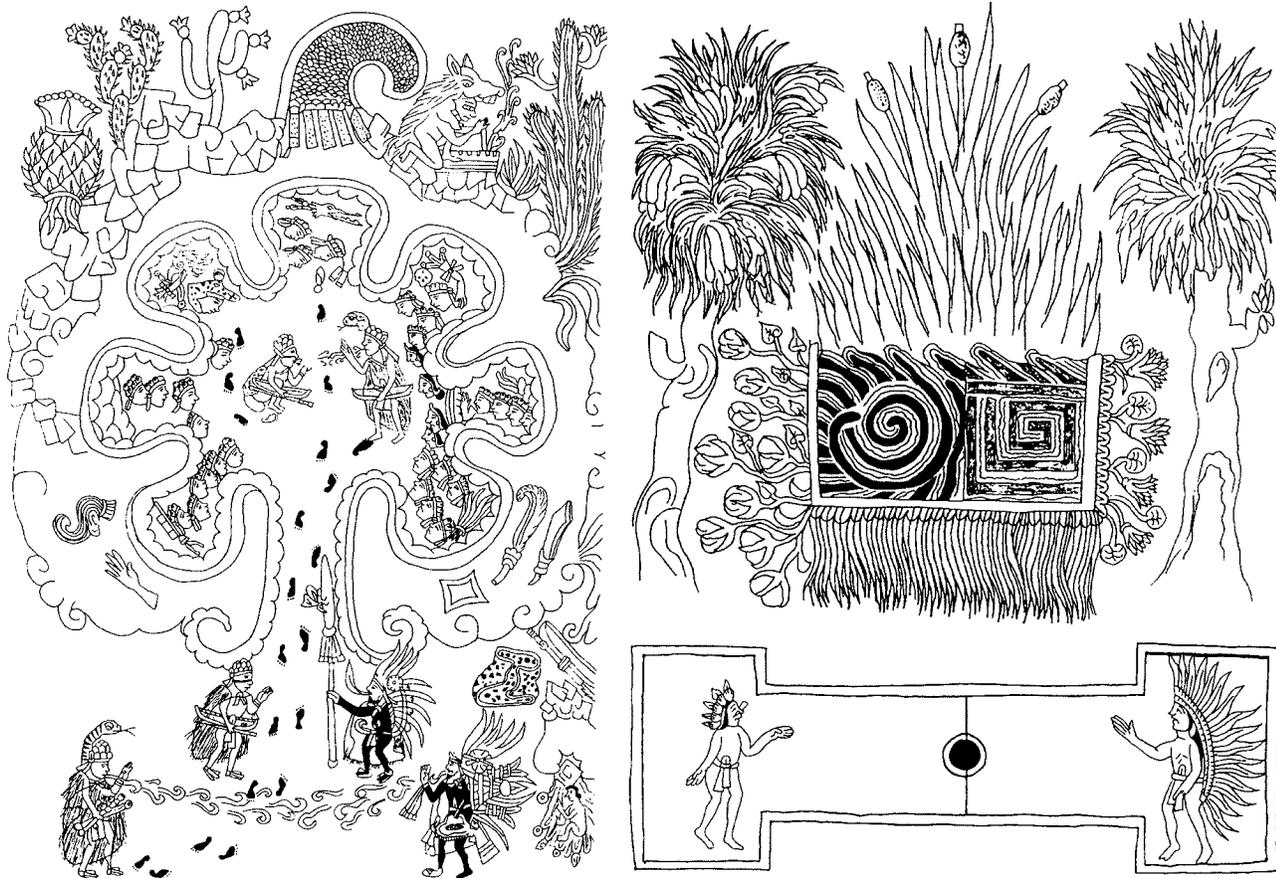


figure 7.6  
*Historia tolteca-chichimeca*, folios 16r and 16v, representing the place of origin. (Drawing by author.)

could abbreviate and elaborate scenes that make up a theme. In Nahua, Zapotec, and Mixtec sources, these places of origin could be referenced together as if they made up some sort of a sacred landscape from which each group would pick its own conceptual place.

Whereas the places of origin that have been discussed are conceptual places in the sense that they did not exist physically in a real landscape, they are referenced by multiple ethnic groups. And some groups actually created this sacred landscape in their ritual centers, including some of these conceptual places. The *Historia tolteca-chichimeca* includes four maps of Cholula (folios 7v, 9v–10r, 14r, and 26v–27r) in which the temple platform of Tlachihualtepec, that is, the Great Pyramid of Cholula, occupies a central position. Iztacuexotl, or White Willow, one of the places of origin on folio 16v (Figure 7.6), has a prominent place in all four maps; Tollan and the Lagoon of Primordial Blood are depicted on three of these maps. As these maps are representations of the real landscape, a Lagoon of Primordial Blood, a

Tollan, and a White Willow were probably created at the foot of the Great Pyramid. Such a creation of a sacred landscape is very similar to what the Mexica-Tenochca did in their ritual precinct when they built the Templo Mayor in order to represent Coatepec, the place where their patron god, Huitzilopochtli, was born.

Although this sacred landscape seems to be related with places of origin, there is reason to believe that much more was meant. Fray Benito Hernández, in the prologue of the *Doctrina Xpiana en lengua misteca* (1584), describes the four steps on the road to God.<sup>13</sup> The first is that of the earth, which he describes as follows:

The first *difrasismo* to describe the world strongly resonates with the Lagoon of Primordial Blood, while the second refers to roundness of the world, which is probably due to European influences as there is no indication that in Mesoamerica the world was considered to be round.<sup>14</sup> What follows after these difrasismos shows a strong relationship with folio 16v of the *Historia tolteca-chichimeca*, suggesting an analogy between the pictographic

TABLE 7.2

Four steps on the road to God, as described by Fray Benito Hernández, in the prologue of the *Doctrina Xpiana en lengua misteca* (1584)

[n]diyo yehe dzina, yca cuhui	The first step is [what]
[n]dacu nduta,	becomes water
[n]dacu niñe,	becomes blood [i.e., “whole world”]
ninacañu	has surrounded
ninadzucu	has wrapped up [i.e., “roundness”]
ñuu ñayehui,	world [whence]
yocana	emerge,
yosita	come out,
yosanu:	grow
[n]dehenuu	all kinds
[n]dehe[n]du	all things
si nichitu,	perfected
nindehe	finished
nituhu:	consummated
[n]dehenuu yutnu	all kinds of trees
[n]dehenuu yta,	all kinds of flowers
[n]dehenuu yucu:	all kinds of plants
[n]dehe nuu cuhu,	all kinds of grasses
Sayoniyndo	that you receive

scene and Hernández's alphabetic description. The reference to all kinds of trees, flowers, plants, and grasses growing out of the earth is closely related to what the Nahuatl reader of the *Historia tolteca-chichimeca* read from this page. So more than just places of origin, the Lagoon of Primordial Blood and therewith Chicomoztoc, (Teo)Colhuacan, River of Jade and Quetzal Feathers, and others are references to the earth as life giver, as a fertile entity from which everything is born, including the primordial ancestors.

### The Migration Theme

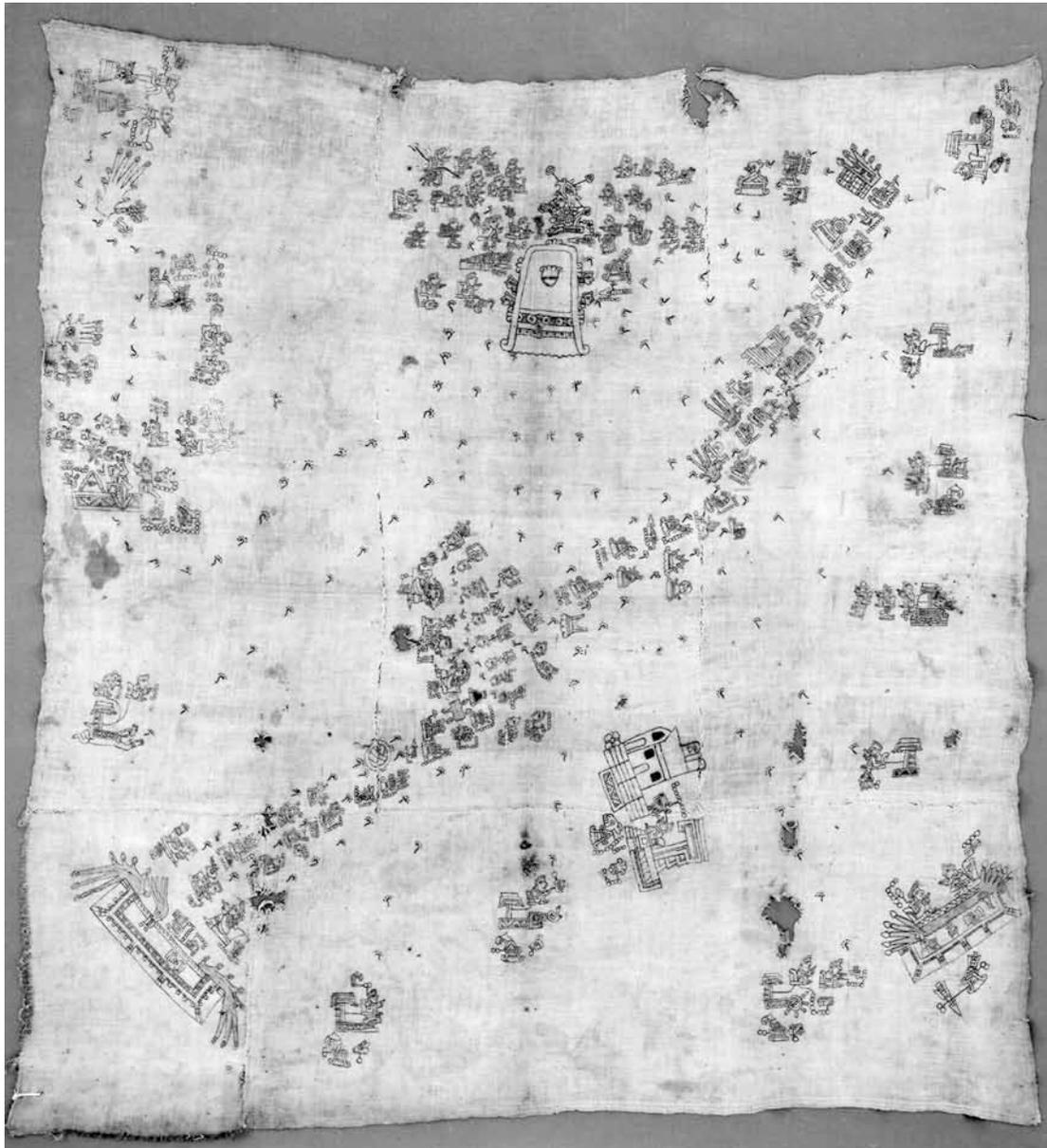
The migration theme has been particularly associated with Nahua history. Most famous, of course, are the Mexicas, who came from Aztlan and for years wandered around the northern Mesoamerican landscape before settling in central Mexico. Even Nahua groups, or those who presume a Nahua identity, that live outside of the central Mexican region refer to their migrations before having settled down. The people of Jicalan claim to be of Nahua-Toltec descent, and thus in their pictographic origin story depicted in the Lienzo de Jicalan (also known as the Lienzo de Jucutacato), they leave a cave situated somewhere in Veracruz and migrate, crossing central Mexico, before founding their community in present-day Michoacan (Roskamp 1998:81–198). Similarly, Nahua groups in Guerrero refer extensively to their migration from the Valley of Mexico to their new settlements (e.g., the Lienzos de Chiepetlan, Tira de Xalatzala, and Lienzo de Petlacala; for further discussion, see Dehouve 1995; Jiménez and Villela 1998). The main issue, of course, is that these groups came from another region and thus actually migrated toward their present location. So the historical sources simply register, either in mytho-historical or historical fashion, something that seems to have happened.

The migratory accounts often include a place that is liminal in nature. That is to say, it occupies a place on the border of primordial time and “real” time, although there is also some evidence that at

times it marks the border between a region that is considered “known” and one that is “unknown” (or “ours” versus “theirs”). The most famous of these liminal places is Coatepec, which in Nahua and Chochon documents so often marks the foundation of a lineage and therewith the beginning of historical time. (For an excellent discussion of Coatepec as a liminal place, see Castañeda de la Paz and Doesburg 2008.) Another liminal place is Ilhuicatepec, which in the *Pintura de la Peregrinación de los Culhuaque-Mexitin* (Mapa Sigüenza) seems to substitute for Coatepec (Castañeda de la Paz 2006:74–81). In the Lienzo de Cuauhquechollan, a glyph that shows strong similarities with that of Ilhuicatepec marks the border between the non-Mayan- and Mayan-speaking regions. (For an excellent study of the Lienzo de Cuauhquechollan, see Asselbergs 2004.) Curiously, a very similar glyph is depicted in the Mapa de Cuauhtlanzinco to indicate the change from indigenous to Catholic religion. These Ilhuicatepec-like toponyms all show a tree or plant that is perforated by an arrow or sword. Although we do not know why this pictorial scene was chosen as a liminal marker, its function is very clear. From the alphabetic and pictographic documents, we can deduce that this liminal place may be situated in the middle or end of the itinerary, making it almost part of the foundation theme.

Migratory itineraries are also known from other groups like the Zapotecs, Mixtecs, Mixes, and Otomis—indigenous groups that have lived in their respective regions since at least the Classic period—which might suggest that a migration would not be part of their historical accounts. Many of these non-Nahua migrations are known from late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century titles and may therefore be regarded as elements of colonial acculturation rather than autochthonous cultural aspects of these groups. Yet a more precise analysis of some Oaxacan documents makes clear that the migration theme was already present in prehispanic times and that it had the same structural function in the historical accounts as in the Nahua sources.

The Lienzo de Amoltepec is an early sixteenth-century pictographic document from the Mixteca



*figure 7.7*  
Lienzo de Amoltepec. (Photograph courtesy of the Division of Anthropology,  
American Museum of Natural History.)

Alta (Figure 7.7).<sup>15</sup> It shows the foundation ritual of the town, which is represented as a large hill with a qualifying glyph in the top center of the sheet. The reading starts in the left bottom corner, where a large river is depicted with a hand holding feathers. This reads as the toponym *yuta tnoho*, or River-to-Pluck, referring to Santiago Apoala, the important Mixtec

place of origin. A sacred date, year 8 Rabbit, day 6 Vulture, precedes a meeting between a couple and a woman. The context suggests that the couple, Lady 2 Grass and Lord 2 Movement (on the left), were born from the river, while the woman on the right is the infamous Lady 9 Grass, the guardian and oracle of the funerary cave of Chalcatongo. She is associated

with the primordial times before the sun had first risen, and she rules in the south, the place of death (Codex Vindobonensis, folios 33, 25, 23, and 15–14). After the meeting, the couple and woman leave and pass through five places, each with its own sacred date, before arriving at River of the Black Hill, near the center of the lienzo. Here a large meeting takes place with all the lords of the surrounding towns. After this meeting, the couple leaves Lady 9 Grass behind and continues their route, which takes them upward through another ten places before they arrive at the town (top center), where they are installed as rulers before all the lords of the region.

So between their birth from the river and their installation as rulers, the couple goes on a migration of undetermined length, though this itinerary seems to be more of a pilgrimage than a migration. The distinction is that *migration* would imply going from town to town, as is the case in the Nahua documents, and *pilgrimage* going from place to place, as in the Mixtec, Zapotec, and Chochon documents. As the toponyms in the Lienzo de Amoltepec do not seem to be towns but rather places in the landscape, this journey would be a pilgrimage.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, what is represented seems to be a route with certain stops that takes Lady 2 Grass and Lord 2 Movement to the town where they will become rulers.<sup>17</sup> Thus, the narrative pattern in the Lienzo de Amoltepec shows the same structure as the typical Nahua historical account: origin-migration or pilgrimage-foundation. If the journey is indeed a pilgrimage, the River of the Black Hill likely functions as the liminal place, since Lady 9 Grass does not accompany the couple after this toponym. Lady 9 Grass, being a supernatural, could not trespass the River of the Black Hill, which was a liminal place between primordial and historical time.

The exact same thing happens in the Selden Roll: Quetzalcoatl, as is indicated by the footprints, descends from heaven to the earth and goes all the way to Coatepec, the liminal place, where a meeting is held, after which he goes back. As the Lienzo de Amoltepec is a colonial document, one could suppose that this migration/pilgrimage theme was incorporated into a Mixtec pictorial due to a spreading of Nahua narrative patterns throughout

New Spain based on the close relationship between Spanish colonizers and certain Nahua groups. However, this argument falls apart in the face of a prehispanic example from the Mixteca in the Codex Vindobonensis.

The Codex Vindobonensis is like the *Popol Vuh* for the Mixtec, as it relates the creation of the world and the foundation of the main towns in an extremely elaborate fashion (Anders et al. 1992; Jansen 1983). This highly complex document begins with the first primordial couple and their descendants who are still spirits. Then 9 Wind descends from the skies and organizes the Mixtec landscape. A long list of primordial places follows. Nine Wind then orders the birth from a tree of more primordial spirits and establishes the first ceremonies and rituals. Only after these events does the sun come up for the first time in the sacred year 13 Rabbit, day 2 Deer. Now that the world has been organized, the different regions, nine in all, have to be inaugurated before the actual foundations can take place. Each of these rituals of inauguration is structurally depicted in the exact same way—that is, all ritual materials are gathered before the deity in control of the particular region. The deity cleanses his region after the ritual (Figure 7.8). Five of these regions seem to be conceived as real or conceptual landscapes, represented by hills, and are direct references to the five Mesoamerican cardinal directions (Codex Vindobonensis, folios 21, 18–17, 14, 10–9, and 5).<sup>18</sup> A list of toponyms of varying length follows each cleansing. I would point out that these lists of toponyms are not part of the landscapes but are depicted just before them. Finally, the last four pages of the codex are dedicated to the foundations of sixteen towns in the Mixteca Baja and Alta.

So how does the Codex Vindobonensis fit into the structure of Mesoamerican historical accounts? This codex is particularly dedicated to the origin story, which is drawn out over the first twenty-three pages, followed by the cleansing rituals and their corresponding lists of toponyms, and finally the foundations. Structurally, the rituals and the lists of toponyms occupy the space where we would expect the migration theme: right

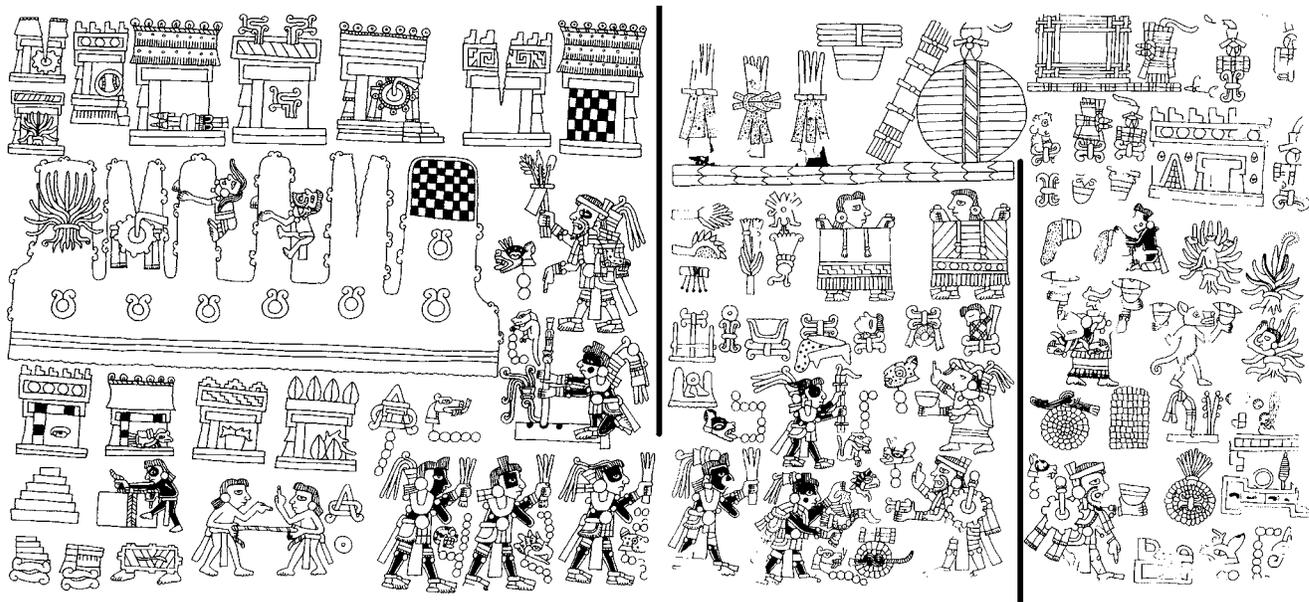


figure 7.8  
Codex Vindobonensis, pages 8–10. (Drawing by author.)

between the origin story and the foundation. What is interesting is that all these rituals terminate with a series of toponyms, none of which have been identified by ethnohistorical research. In the case of the first eight lists, they seem to be related to the general idea of the cardinal directions<sup>19</sup> and may therefore be more conceptual than real.<sup>20</sup> However, the last cleansing is clearly that of the Mixteca, and it is associated with a long list of ninety-six toponyms.<sup>21</sup> After the extensive investigations on toponyms of the Mixteca, one would expect that at least some of these toponyms would have been identified had they been towns, but this is not the case. Thus, it seems likely that this long list does not refer to towns but rather to places in the Mixtec landscape. If these toponyms are indeed places they might represent a pilgrimage. The cleansing rituals at these places would then be very similar to the function of the stops made by Lady 2 Grass and Lord 2 Movement during their pilgrimage from Apoala to their town. These stops would have been made in order to perform rituals or make offerings and as such would constitute a perfectly normal Mesoamerican pattern.

The Coixtlahuaca Valley also produced an example of the pilgrimage narrative. The Lienzo de Tlapiltepec begins with the birth of primordial ancestors from Chicomoztoc and others from the River of Jade and Quetzal Feathers (see Caso 1961; Johnson 1994). After three generations in an undetermined town, the lineage moves to Cerro Verde, where Atonaltzin founds the dynasty that will become the ruling lineage of Coixtlahuaca. Before arriving at Cerro Verde, Atonaltzin passes by an enormous representation of Coatepec, which is situated precisely on the border of primordial and historical time since immediately after the lineage is founded. Thirteen place glyphs are depicted just underneath Coatepec. None of these have been identified, nor do they look like typical toponymic glyphs of towns, particularly since eleven of the glyphs are temple platforms. Given the position of these toponyms in the narrative, it seems reasonable to interpret them as representing a pilgrimage.<sup>22</sup>

Evidence of migratory itineraries from the Zapotec region is more problematic, as they are principally related to late seventeenth- and early

eighteenth-century primordial titles. Although these documents are important sources for local indigenous history, they are not without their problems; they are complex accumulations of information from other documents and oral traditions and were often made with certain specific objectives in mind (see, for example, Gruzinski 1993:98–145; Haskett 2005; Lockhart 1991:39–65; Oudijk and Romero Frizzi 2003; Wood 2003). Still, in the titles there are many narrative patterns that are known from prehispanic and early colonial documents. Typically many of the Sierra Zapotec titles contain migrations, although in a variety of contexts.<sup>23</sup> Some are related to the foundation of the town in prehispanic times, which took place only two generations before the conquest (Oudijk 2000). Other migrations are associated with the “new” foundation of a Christian town right after the conquest. Although the context is different, the function is the same in the narrative structure: a migration right before a foundation. The title of San Juan Tabaá was written as the will of its first colonial cacique, don Juan de Mendoza y Velasco, supposedly on February 21, 1551.<sup>24</sup> After the general introduction and the oath in the name of God, don Juan briefly explains how his father, Biladeladao, arrived as a conqueror in the Sierra and founded the town. Immediately after, Hernán Cortés is introduced, and he baptizes don Juan and his lords and establishes the town council. After a warning to the people of Tabaá that they should guard their lands, the story shifts to prehispanic times and relates anew, but this time with more detail, the migration of Biladeladao and the foundation of the town. Another example is the seventeenth-century *Probanza de Yetzelalag* (AHJO, Villa Alta, Civil, legajo 15, exp. 6, ff. 4r–5r). This account starts with the arrival of Cortés and the conquest of Mexico-Tenochtitlan. From there, Cortés “migrates” to Oaxaca, then turns northward into the Sierra Zapoteca, where he arrives at a mountain called Yaxitzadao. Here the story shifts to prehispanic times, gives the names of all the founders of the towns in the Sierra region, and relates the migration from Yaxitzadao to Yetzelalag, implying the foundation of the town. The story is picked

up again at the time of the conquest and recounts the baptism of the indigenous lords, the arrival of Spanish authorities, and the establishment of the town council.

In both examples, as in the other titles from the region, the migration is directly related to the foundation of the respective town. Even in the *Probanza de Yetzelalag* (*Probanza de Yetzelalag o Santa María Yabichi*), where the migration starts in Mexico-Tenochtitlan and the protagonists are the Spaniards, once the protagonists arrive in the Sierra Zapoteca they are replaced by the prehispanic founders of the town who then continue the migration. What is particularly interesting is that this change takes place in Yaxitzadao since this place seems to function as a kind of Coatepec, or liminal place, in the Zapotec narratives. Five titles contain this place. In the *Posesión de Comaltepec* (*Posesión y información de San Juan Comaltepec*; AGN, Tierras 812, exp. 2, ff. 96r–97v [translation on ff. 98r–99v]), it seems to be the place of origin, as the two founders, Bilala and Yadela, start their migration here. In the title of San Bartolomé Lachixova (AGN, Tierras 812, exp. 2, ff. 28r–30r [translation on ff. 31r–32v]), the migration begins in Lagoon of Primordial Blood and passes through Yaxitzadao. In the *Memoria de Juquila* (*Memoria probanza de Yetzegoa* [Juquila]; AGN, Tierras 335, exp. 5, ff. 9r–12v [translation on ff. 16r–19v]) and the *Memoria de Yacuini* (*Memoria probanza de Yacuini* [Totolinga]; AGN, Tierras 335, exp. 5, ff. 8r–v, 5r–7v [translation on ff. 1r–4v]), the ancestors leave Oaxaca and arrive in Yaxitzadao where they are baptized. After the ceremony, they start the migration to their respective towns. However, this migration seems to take place in prehispanic times.

Although there are quite a few Oaxacan documents with examples of migrations and pilgrimages, others only include references to the sacred birth of a primordial ancestor and the subsequent foundation of a lineage or town, with no evidence of such itineraries. In order to understand the differences between these historical accounts we must consider the use of abbreviations and elaborations of scenes in Mesoamerican pictographic documents. As we have seen, abbreviations can be

used in pictographic and alphabetic documents if a theme is known to the reader and his public.

In addition to the ones already discussed, a few more of the Mixtec pictorials show the sacred birth of primordial ancestors from trees, rivers, or stones. The most important of such documents are the Codices Bodley, Selden, and Zouche-Nuttall. Typically, the primordial ancestors are born in a place that is distinct from where the lineage is founded. Thus the Codex Selden (folio 1) depicts Lord 11 Water being born from Place of the Precious Hill of Sand,<sup>25</sup> where an arrow thrown by the god Venus has landed, after which he rules in Valley of the Face. His daughter married Lord 2 Grass, who was born from a tree in Achiutla, and together they ruled in Smoking Temple of the Cobweb. Similarly, Lady 1 Death (Codex Bodley, folio 1-V) was born from a tree that may be the same as 2 Grass's, but she ruled together with Lord 4 Alligator in an unidentified place. According to the Codex Zouche-Nuttall (folio 21), they are associated with Hill of the Sun, which is a far cry from Tilantongo, the most important Mixtec city-state, of which they founded the lineage. The reverse of the Codex Bodley relates the dynastic history of Tlaxiaco but starts with the birth of the primordial couple Lord 1 Flower and Lady 13 Flower from the river of Apoala. All these examples show primordial ancestors being born in one place and ruling in another.

There is some evidence of primordial ancestors being born in the place in which they would become rulers. Codex Bodley (folio 38-II) shows Lord 7 Movement and Lady 7 Grass being born and ruling in Hill of the Feather Ornament, but, since the location of this place has not been identified and it is strongly associated with visionary beings, it may be a conceptual rather than a real place, as in "those who were born from the earth in immemorial time." For the painter, it was more important to indicate that these ancestors were born from the earth than to indicate the specific place this may have happened. Similarly, on the same page, Lord 2 Rain was born from Hill of the Brazier near Place of the Jaguar where he ruled (Codex Bodley, folio 38-III). His birth was provoked by an arrow thrown

by Venus, a direct parallel with the birth of Lord 11 Water in the Codex Selden (folio 1), as already mentioned. This parallel may be another indication of a conceptual place of origin rather than a concrete place. These scenes would therefore be read as "Lord 2 Rain (or 11 Water or 7 Movement) who was born from the earth and became founder of (his respective town)." An apparent exception to this rule is Lord 8 Wind (Codex Zouche-Nuttall, folio 1), who was first born from the earth at Place of the Ball Court, after which he is depicted as if he were born from a hill in Place of the Monkey–Place of the Ball Court, and finally he emerges from the River of Apoala. Lord 8 Wind ruled in Hill of the Monkey or Suchixtlan. However, the presence of the River of Apoala next to Suchixtlan suggests, again, that the message is not that 8 Wind's birth was fixed to one place but rather that he was born from the earth.<sup>26</sup>This was the main legitimating aspect for 8 Wind and particularly for his descendants.

From all these examples, we see that, indeed, founders were born from the earth, which may either be represented as a conceptual place in a geographically unidentified landscape or as a geographically situated place, whether a ceremonial center created to represent a sacred landscape or a real landscape in which the conceptual place is supposed to exist. This conceptual place may be represented pictographically in an elaborate scene with all the attributes of origin, or it may consist of a scant drawing with few indications of its importance. After being born, the founders would displace themselves to where their houses would be founded, and, again, this can be depicted in elaborate scenes showing long migrations or pilgrimages or can simply include the conceptual place of origin and the place of foundation, implicating the move from one place to the other.

## Conclusion

The continuous use of elaboration and abbreviation in the pictorial and alphabetic texts was possible due to the obvious message contained in these manuscripts. The message was known

because it formed part of a literary context that organized its accounts into themes.<sup>27</sup> Through analogies with the same themes in other accounts that had been told before, the audience would have recognized these themes in a certain account that was being told to them.<sup>28</sup> Using these analogies, they would identify and fill in holes left by a reader for a particular reason or simply because he was not a good reader. Similarly, as historians, we can identify themes through the study of a corpus of related texts and generate readings using the significant relationships between the minimal elements that make up the thematic units. So although a document may not depict a migratory itinerary between a certain place of origin and a particular town, the “hole” can be filled in by

applying an analogy of a similar scene in a different document.

Mesoamerican scribes, when displaying their messages in pictographic or alphabetic documents, would follow certain narrative structures that can be divided into four main themes: origin, migration, foundation, and history. These themes were represented by one or more scenes made up of minimal elements with certain significant relationships. As these themes were known to the readers of the codices and their public, the painter could freely abbreviate or elaborate the pictographic scenes. The reader would thus draw upon his knowledge of Mesoamerican narratives to tell a (hi)story and, depending on his skills and experience, elaborate the abbreviated scenes.

#### NOTES

- 1 Peter van der Loo and Maarten Jansen, in turn, were inspired by several other scholars, including Alfonso Caso, Karl Anton Brumfiel, and Mary Elizabeth Smith. While these great investigators methodically paved the way for present-day pictographic studies, they never explicitly set forth the method they applied.
- 2 “Los tales reyes y caciques, en heredando el reino o señorío, venían a esta ciudad a reconocer obediencia al idolo de ella, Quetzalcoatl, al cual ofrecían plumas ricas, mantas, oro y piedras preciosas, y otras cosas de valor. Y, habiendo ofrecido, los metían en una capilla que para este efecto estaba dedicada, en la cual los dos sumos sacerdotes los señalaban horadándoles las orejas, o las narices o el labio inferior, según el señorío que tenían. Con lo cual quedaban confirmados en sus señoríos, y se volvían a sus tierras.”
- 3 Codex Colombino (folio XIII) shows an impressive parallel scene of 8 Deer’s nose piercing in which the ceremony takes place in a temple of pearls in Tollan (Cholula). This same temple of Cholula is depicted in the Codex Bodley (folio 12-I) and probably is the same as that drawn in the *Historia tolteca-chichimeca* (folios 26v–27r). See also the nose piercing of 8 Deer’s successor, Lord 4 Wind, in Tollan Cholula (Codex Bodley, folio 34-IV/V).
- 4 I will only discuss the first two themes due to the limited space. For discussions of the sacred bundle as foundational element, see Olivier 2007 and Oudijk 2000:161–168; for the “toma de posesión,” see Oudijk 2002; and for the historical theme, see Boone 2000.
- 5 Pictographic documents that represent Aztlan are the Tira de la Peregrinación, Codex Aubin, Codex Azcatitlan, the Pintura de la Peregrinación de los Culhuaque-Mexitin (Mapa Sigüenza), and possibly the Codex Mexicanus, which seems to represent Aztlan as a Tollan. The most important alphabetic records of Aztlan are Codex Aubin, Bernardino Sahagún’s Florentine Codex, *Códice Mexicayotl*, *Anales de Tlatelolco*, and the works of Chimalpahin and José de Acosta.
- 6 Pictographic documents that represent (Teo) Colhuacan are the Tira de la Peregrinación, Codex Azcatitlan, the Pintura de la Peregrinación de los Culhuaque-Mexitin (Mapa Sigüenza), the Codex

- Mexicanus, and the *Historia tolteca-chichimeca*. Alphabetic documents that refer to this place are Sahagún's Florentine Codex, *Anales de Tlatelolco*, and the works of Chimalpahin (2a and 7a) and José de Acosta.
- 7 See the parallel scene in the Codex Azcatitlan (lámina 4) where these very same elements are associated with Chicomoztoc. This observation is the result of various discussions on this topic with Maria Castañeda de la Paz.
  - 8 Such abbreviation and elaboration is actually most common in Mesoamerican pictography. See, for example, the elaborate depiction of the prenuptial rituals of Lady 6 Monkey in the Codex Selden (folios 7–8) and the scant marital scene in the Codex Bodley (folio 34-II). These prenuptial rituals were probably the rule in the case of royal marriages, but only in the case of Lady 6 Monkey are they represented. A less elaborate marital scene is that of the Codex Zouche-Nuttall (folio 19) showing Lady 3 Flint and Lord 12 Wind.
  - 9 The toponyms cannot be translated as “Nine Caves” and “Seven Caves,” which in Zapotec would be Gache Billehe and Gaa Bille, respectively. Thus these caves seem to be related to seven and nine, both important and sacred numerals in the Mesoamerican cosmovision. Monaghan (1995:210) has made the same point for the Mixtec Cave Seven, Soko Usha.
  - 10 This is a water lily described by Sahagún as an attribute of Chalchiuhtlicue, the Water Goddess. One of the drawings that accompanies the description shows the goddess carrying a shield with a representation of the flower (Florentine Codex, bk. 1, ch. 11), which is identical to that depicted in the *Historia tolteca-chichimeca* (folio 16v). I would like to thank Alfredo López Austin for identifying this plant.
  - 11 I have not been able to identify this animal. From the description, it seems to be a yellow puma (*zaquan* = feather of the *çaquantototl* = “bird with yellow and rich feathers” [Molina 2001 (1571):151]; *miztli* = “lion” [Molina 2001 (1571):57v]).
  - 12 “Izcatqui y colihquitepetl ycatcan yn atl xoxouhqui ymancan yn iztac tolin ymancan yn iztac acatl ymancan yn iztac uexotl yhicacan yn iztac axali ymancan yn tlapalichcatl yyonocan yn tlapalatlacuezonan yyonocan y nauallachtli yyonocan yn zaquanmiztli ymancan Izcatqui y colihquitepetl.” I would like to thank Karen Dakin for her translation of the Nahuatl text.
  - 13 I want to thank Michael Swanton for showing me this Chocholtec text and allowing me to use his unpublished translation.
  - 14 A difrasismo is a grammatical construction that pairs together two separate words to describe one abstract unit, for example, water-hill (town), water-burned field (war).
  - 15 Antonio Peñafiel (1890) claimed the lienzo came from San Cristóbal Amoltepec, which was refuted by Alfonso Caso (1958), who identified it as coming from San Juan Yolotepec. Maarten Jansen (1994:82–83) has recently shown that Caso's identification is erroneous.
  - 16 Although it is difficult to distinguish between toponyms that are towns and toponyms that are places, certain indications can be discerned in Oaxacan pictographic documents, particularly when one has a series of toponymic glyphs. For example, in the particular case of the Lienzo de Amoltepec, the toponyms include quite a few patios and temples, which normally do not represent towns. There are four toponyms that seem to be of the type “River of . . .,” while in the Mixtec pictorials few towns have this kind of place-name. Similarly, there are three toponyms that seem to be related to aspects of a landscape (rock, plateau, and Hill of Wind/Ehecatl). Individually, each of these toponyms could be naming a town since there is no difference between a toponym representing a town or one representing a place in a landscape. However, if there are many of these toponyms, they likely refer to places rather than towns. Furthermore, only one toponym seems to include a frieze, which is the most typical aspect of a place glyph representing a town in Mixtec pictorials.
  - 17 In present-day Sierra Zapotec communities, such stops are also made when going to an important ritual place. For example, in San Cristóbal Lachirioag on the day of a child's first birthday, the family will go to La Cruz Verde, a large tree at three hours' walking distance from the town. On the way several stops will be made at specific places, often marked by crosses, for a ritual specialist to make offerings in order to “please” the local spirits.
  - 18 Jansen (1982:245–268) suggested identifications for some these hills in the real landscape, but in his later publications (Anders et al. 1992; Jansen and

- Pérez Jiménez 2007), he did not follow through with these identifications.
- 19 Some of these are clearly related to the cardinal directions. Folios 22–21 relate to the north as Checkerboard represents that direction; folios 17–15 represent the west because of the River of Ashes; folios 15–14 may be the east because of the rising sun; folios 15–14 represent the south because of Lady 9 Grass and her Temple of Death; folios 13–12 must be the east because of the sky; and folios 12–11 represent the center because of the earth monster. For a discussion of these identifications, see Jansen 1998.
  - 20 I would like to note that of the ninety-one toponyms related to the cleansing of the cardinal directions, fifty-five are temples, fourteen are *temazcales* (sweat houses), nine are ball courts, and seven are patios. Of the remaining six, three are marketplaces and three are rivers, probably referring to two places that are difrasismos. All these are unusual as toponymic elements for towns, particularly in such numbers.
  - 21 Some of these toponyms seem to be given as difrasismos, and consequently these do not necessarily constitute ninety-six different places.
  - 22 Other documents from the Mixteca region that show (possible) migration/pilgrimage themes are the Codex Dehesa, Codex Tulane (plates 1 and 9), Codex Egerton (folios 3–4), and Codex Baranda. The latter is a document that is based on an earlier original, and its painter did not necessarily understand the message of the original. This aspect becomes clear when one looks at the calendar names, which are at least strange, but also in the organization of the first scene, which seems to be a landscape set in primordial times with a possible Tollan and a Coatepec. Maybe some of the toponyms were actually part of a pilgrimage.
  - 23 Eighteen titles have been identified from the Sierra Norte of Oaxaca. Seventeen of these are from Zapotec towns, and one is from the Mixe town of Santa María Tiltepec. Few have been published or analyzed, but María de los Ángeles Romero Frizzi and I are preparing a full transcription, translation, and analysis.
  - 24 The title is kept in the Municipal Archive of San Juan Tabaá. For a transcription of the Zapotec text and its translation, see Oudijk 2000:295–310.
  - 25 Jansen and Pérez Jiménez (2000:102) read this Place of Sand as Añute or Jaltepec, no doubt spurred by the idea that the codex effectively deals with the lineage of that place. However, Añute is consistently depicted as a mouth that spits sand and is called Belching Mountain in the literature (Smith 1983:252–255). Even if we accept the identification of Place of Sand as Jaltepec, Lord 11 Water still moves from this place to the Valley of the Face.
  - 26 The monkey and ball court, as qualifying elements in 8 Wind's place of birth, would then be an indication of the place where he would become founder. This pattern would give a similar reading for the feather ornament, the jaguar, and the sand in other sacred births (Codex Bodley, folios 38-II and 38-III; Selden, folio I).
  - 27 I consider the Mesoamerican oral tradition to be part of a literary tradition in that it produces texts to which one can apply philological analysis.
  - 28 This process is no different from any modern-day reader noting thematic analogies between, for example, James Joyce's *Ulysses* and Homer's *Odyssey*.