

Moctezoma's Menagerie:

Managing the Beast in Pre-Cortesian Tenochtitlan

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for a Masters Degree
in the Department of History
University of Saskatchewan
Saskatoon

By
Bradley D. Skopyk

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the idea of the 'ecological Indian' in regard to the Tenochca cultural group (Aztec) who inhabited the city of Tenochtitlan (modern Mexico City) prior to the coming of Cortés and his Spanish envoy. What relationship did the Tenochca have to their natural habitat? How did they conceive of the earth and the cosmos, and what consequences resulted from that conceptualization? The thesis explores the unprecedented historical developments of the Tenochca in terms of socio-economics and politics and interprets them in regard to the underlying Tenochca cosmivision. The crux of the thesis deals with the anxieties that resulted from the unavoidable contradiction of empire in a cosmivision that sees the world as inherently unstable and inhospitable to human culture. The basic argument is that the Tenochca responded to such anxieties with the tools of military and religious violence and with a scientific management strategy that sought to control and order the inimical forces of the natural world. In making this argument, both material and intellectual culture are considered, including animal domestication, economic development and resource exploitation, migration myths and stories, hunting rituals, scientific conceptualizations of time, space, and materiality, and perhaps most telling of all, Moctezoma's menagerie, which was a clear attempt to implement scientific advancements by way of ordering the natural world. The methodology of the thesis is partially analytic and interpretive, and uses a wide variety of sources spanning from Indigenous picture manuscripts to archaeological evidence. The main sources used are the ethnographic materials left to us by Spanish friars such as Bernardino Sahagún, Diego Durán, Andres Olmos, and Toribio Motolinía.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank first and foremost my supervisor and long time teacher of history, Professor Jim Handy, whose work at the University of Saskatchewan in Guatemalan history has been instrumental in guiding my interests and curiosity throughout my undergraduate and graduate degrees. Leaving the nest will be a difficult task, but I'll be taking with me a thirst for understanding that can only be imparted by a great teacher and scholar such as Jim. Thanks to you always. Many thanks go out to the faculty and staff at the History Department at the University of Saskatchewan who have helped make my academic time thus far so rewarding. This thesis is indebted financially to those in the Department of History and those at the College of Graduate Studies who awarded me two years of funding with the University Graduate Scholarship. Many thanks go to the members of my advisory committee, Professor Jim Miller and Laurence Kitzen, and to Professor Ernie Walker, whose comments on the thesis were thought provoking and greatly appreciated. It is customary to finish by thanking my loved ones, friends, family, and most of all, my partner Paula who has put up with more of my idiosyncrasies than any of the rest, not the least of which was my need to escape from people and places into the solitude of the prairie to get anything done. Such a custom seems more than appropriate, because last but not least, you are the ones who underscore all of my efforts, from dusk to dawn, and getting me back at it in the morning. Thank you so much for helping me out when I needed it most. Cheers to you all!

Dedication

To Mom and Dad. Your support and love make nearly anything possible. Thank you.

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Tenochtitlan was a bustling city of between 150 000 and 200 000 inhabitants.³ Founded in 1345 on a bed of reeds, the city's regional domination expanded quickly over the next two centuries until the summer of 1521 when it was finally and utterly ruined by Cortés.⁴ By 1440, Moctezoma the Elder had ascended to the jaguar mat (the equivalent of the royal throne) and the inhabitants of Tenochtitlan had emerged as the dominant group within the Basin of Mexico.⁵ Under the rule of Moctezoma the Elder, the city's inhabitants along with thousands of men from subjugated nations laboured to construct Tenochtitlan's ceremonial precinct, palaces, administrative buildings, and other engineering feats such as the great dyke that separated the saline waters of Lake Texcoco from the fresh water in Lake Xochimilco that surrounded Tenochtitlan.⁶ In regard to Tenochtitlan's rapid ascent to supremacy, we can say quite literally that it emerged from the dregs of the earth and formed itself into a terrifying spectre of domination. Such an ascendancy to power is even more remarkable when we note that the lakeshores and surrounding hillsides of the Basin were blanketed with settlements ranging from hamlets to cities that had been established long before the arrival of the people of Tenochtitlan. The southern, western and eastern shores of the lake were crowded with other cities such as Quahitlan, Ecatepec, Azcapotzalco, Tlacopan (Tacuba), Coyoacan, Xochimilco, Culhuacan, Chalco, Amecameca, Coatlinchan, Huexotla, Texcoco, and many more. It is estimated that 400 000 people resided in the 'Greater' Tenochtitlan area, or the immediate lakefront and the surrounding hills.

Beyond the Basin of Mexico, other cities like Tlaxcala, Cholula, Huejotzinco, and Toluca developed in ecumenes⁷ further to the south and help to illustrate the fact that the entire highland region of Central Mexico was one in which humans gathered in densely populated nucleated centres surrounded by their subsidiary hinterlands. The mountainous terrain demanded such a demographic distribution. Outside the highlands, the Pacific coastal region experiences frequent droughts while the region's ephemeral rivers are either too dry or too rapid to be dammed for irrigation. On the other side of the highlands, the Gulf of Mexico is a region

³ Population statistics according to William T. Sanders, Jeffrey R. Parsons, and Robert S. Santley, *The Basin of Mexico: Ecological Processes in the Evolution of a Civilization* (New York: Academic Press, 1979), 154.

⁴ Modern day Mexico City was built directly overtop of Tenochtitlan. See Image 1 in Appendix III for an aerial photograph showing the integration of the ruins of the Great Pyramid in the heart of Mexico City.

⁵ For the demarcation of this region and of Mesoamerica in general, see Map 1, Appendix II.

⁶ The hydrography of the region can be a little confusing, but see Map 2, Appendix II, for details.

Beginning from the north of the Basin and preceding to the south-east, the various lakes are: Zumpango, Xaltocan, Texcoco, Xochimilco, and Chalco. In other places, I have seen reference to the 'Lake of Mexico' (the waters surrounding Tenochtitlan), but this is so rare that its inclusion as a designated lake seems unnecessary. For the latter reference, see A.P. Maudslay's notes to Diaz, *Conquest of Mexico*, 199.

⁷ 'Ecumene' is used here in the geographical sense, as an area of human occupation, most often coinciding with agricultural activity.

where heavy rainfall and poor tropical soils inhibit the use of this area to support large permanent cities. A picture of Mesoamerica emerges wherein civilization developed primarily in the highlands, in a number of scattered ecumenes that stood in contrast to the overwhelming mass of uninhabitable mountains.

We can view this civilization from two very different perspectives. From one angle, Tenochtitlan appears as the end of a long undulating history of Mesoamerican civilization, rising and falling according to climatic variations, locating and relocating in places as disparate as the tropical forests in the Yucatan peninsula and the highland lakeshore of Lake Texcoco. From this perspective, 'progress' appears to have been a concept with little resonance in Mesoamerica. Writing and mathematical skills flourished in the Classical Mayan period (200 - 700 AD), and then receded, only to emerge in the Basin of Mexico again (in a diminished form), in the fourteenth century. The archaeological site of Teotihuacan, located north-east of Mexico City, was nearly equal in population to Tenochtitlan and evinces the qualities of a well developed bureaucratic and militaristic centre, but it too collapsed. Thus, from the angle of basic structure (viewed in terms of archaeology, myth, or cosmology) the culture of Tenochtitlan was simply the last of many spasmodic eruptions of a conventional theme first expressed by the Olmec. The Zapotec, Mixtec, Toltec, and Maya cultures can be all traced back quite reliably to such a 'mother' culture. The Olmec cultural thematic is perceptible in the unique relationship between rulers and religion, the repetition of basic fertility symbols, and a common mythological tradition. As it is commonly put, the reiteration of conventional themes confirms these cultures to be "variants of one great ... tradition"⁸ that evinces a basic cultural structure with a 'hard nucleus ... resistant to change.'⁹

This perspective of Tenochca history outlined above, however, is not the perspective from which I want to illuminate Tenochca society. From another angle, the culture and population dynamics of Tenochtitlan are far more peculiar and problematic. Teotihuacan and Tenochtitlan may have been similar in terms of their total population, but when analyzed in more detail, the differences are pronounced. The population density of Tenochtitlan was between twelve to thirteen thousand per square kilometre; in Teotihuacan, a slightly smaller population lived in a surface area almost twice as large, thus producing a mean density of seven thousand per square kilometre, almost half as much as Tenochtitlan. Teotihuacan may have been one of

⁸ Roberta H. Markman and Peter T. Markman, *The Flayed God: The Mesoamerican Mythological Tradition: sacred texts and images from pre-Columbian Mexico and Central America* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1992), 58.

⁹ Alfredo López Austin, *Tamoanchan, Tlalocan: Places of Mist*, trans. B.R. Ortiz de Montellano and T. Ortiz de Montellano (Niwot, Colorado: University Press of Colorado, 1997), 5.

the strongest urban powers to have occupied Mesoamerica, but a majority of its population was still agricultural. In Tenochtitlan, the inhabitants were “almost exclusively nonagriculturalists” who were “tightly packed into domestic units of extended family size.”¹⁰ Tenochtitlan was the most populous and non-agricultural city in the history of Mesoamerica; its appearance marks a new model of urbanization. Moreover, economic markers were unique. Archaeologist William Sanders makes a very interesting observation, pointing out that “while all important Second Intermediate Three centres [1150-1400] continued to be significant political centres during the Later Horizon [1400-1519], it is also the case that all three of the Triple Alliance capitals were established at localities which had been unoccupied or insignificant during the earlier Second Intermediate Three period.”¹¹ Such a historical discontinuity is not entirely surprising as it echoes drastic changes made in the economic basis of Central Mexican society:

Such spatial dislocations of power and authority over time may reflect organizational changes of considerable magnitude in which new priorities greatly override old considerations. In the case of Tenochtitlan, one of these priorities almost certainly involved maximizing the specialized production and water-borne redistribution of goods from within the entire Basin on a much larger scale than ever before. ... [T]he demographic ‘success’ of the Late Horizon clearly reflects the implementation of such a priority.¹²

Thus, in a number of important ways, Tenochtitlan broke the chain of historical continuity in Mesoamerica and inaugurated a period of not only unprecedented urban growth, but unprecedented urbanism. Such urbanism brought into focus and made more severe the starkly contrasted juxtaposition of ecumene and mountain. The new urban culture, and its sense of progress and superiority, then, made the landscapes of Tenochtitlan and its periphery mythical and metaphorical battlegrounds for the epic struggle between civilization and savagery, city and wilderness.

Tenochtitlan arose prominently from Lake Texcoco whose waters collected within the Basin of Mexico, an inland drainage basin located at 2200 meters above sea level and surrounded by the snow capped peaks of the Sierra Nevada and the volcanoes of Popocatepetl (5452 m.) and Ixtaccihuatl (5286 m.) to the east, the Sierra de las Cruces to the west, and then to the north, the Sierra de Ajusco. Such mountains are described as “massive walls of high volcanic ridges.”¹³ Directly north of Tenochtitlan, and only ten kilometres away, water gives way to a lateral extension of these mountains, called the Guadalupe Range, at the summit of which was located a small ceremonial precinct. Such ‘natural’ locations were of pre-eminent importance in pre-Cortesian Tenochtitlan. Every fifty-two years, in the New Fire Ceremony, at

¹⁰ Sanders, *Basin of Mexico*, 154.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 155.

¹² *Ibid.*, 155.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 81.

the summit of the Cerro de la Estrella, again, ten kilometres from the city to the south-east, a fire was lit in the chest of a sacrificial victim and the previously extinguished fires of every hearth in Tenochtitlan were then relit, systematically. In another location, in the month of Atcahualo ("Abandoned Water") children with two cowlicks in their hair were taken to seven different mountain tops and sacrificed. In regard to the death of these children, an Indian informant noted that "there was much compassion. They made me weep." The tears shed for them ensured the coming of the summer rains, or so it was thought. Near the town of Aticpac, friar Motolinia describes a place of great beauty where crystal clear water emerged from a spring and emptied into a transparent lake, from which began a river with many (excellent eating) fish. Towering over the lake was a great rock wall "that could not be any more beautiful" even if "painted or carved from wax, ... and there on the mountain as well as at the spring, in ancient times were great sacrifices."¹⁴

We see in these sacrifices a number of contradictory messages, not least of which is their symbolic representation of both nature-worship and nature-conquest. The first is easily recognizable because it is the image that we are accustomed to see. The second image emerges only when we bring to light, as I intend to do in this study, the interplay between the polarities of civilization and wilderness and attempt to discover the proper resonance of such terms in pre-Columbian Tenochtitlan. In less than two hundred years the architectural wonders of Tenochtitlan, one of the world's most astounding cities in the 15th and 16th centuries, were erected from a marshland only marginally inhabitable for the human species. In less than two hundred years, civilization was wrought from wilderness. We must dwell on the commonness of such a development, for like human cultures everywhere that make themselves conspicuous in nature, the people of Tenochtitlan developed a culture that problematized their relationship to the world around them and that sought the resolution to such a problem in the integration, often cruelly and violently, of their own civilization with the wilderness around them.

Before proceeding with this history, however, we must clarify the web of bungled nomenclature that enshrouds the people of Tenochtitlan. Although most readers are most comfortable calling the inhabitants of Tenochtitlan Aztec, these people are most accurately known as Mexica-Tenochca.¹⁵ Azteca (the noun, but often confused with Aztec, the adjective) refers generally to any and all of the cultural groups that migrated southward in the direction of the Basin of Mexico from their common place of origin, Aztlan. The Mexica are a sub-group of

¹⁴ My translation of Fr. Toribio Motolinia, *Memoriales e Historia de los Indios de la Nueva España* (Madrid: Ediciones Atlas, 1970), 305.

¹⁵ Appendix I contains a pronunciation key for words in Nahuatl, the language spoken by almost all of the inhabitants of the Basin of Mexico.

those original tribes, the last group of seven to travel southward in search of new land and liberation from the onerous imperial demands of the dominant group of Aztlan, whoever they might have been. For better or worse, the Mexica split into two groups on account of a settlement dispute, one calling themselves the Mexica-Tenochca, the other, the Mexica-Tlalteloca. The former settled in Tenochtitlan, the other in Tlatelolco, a city attached to Tenochtitlan but with a distinct ceremonial precinct and urban layout. My history follows the Mexica-Tenochca and the empire centred in Tenochtitlan.

But old habits die hard and like most terminology, scholars are resistant to leave Aztec behind for fear of losing and confusing their readership.¹⁶ After all, most people, regardless of their academic background, know of the Aztecs and have a basic image of their infamous cultural traits of human sacrifice and ritual cannibalism. By better defining Azteca and reallocating its most colloquial meaning to Tenochca, we clear away obstacles from the reader's mind and permit the transfer of a new, more accurate image of empire unimpeded by erroneous predispositions. There is a price to pay for historical accuracy, however. The unfortunate fact is that those shared images—as erroneous, biased, and ignorant as they might be—draw us toward the Tenochca and the Basin of Mexico and thus by insisting on the accuracy of our terminology we take the chance that nobody else but the producers of that scholarship will read it. We might take Inga Clendinnen's solution: use Aztec in the title but redefine it as soon as possible. In the end, an erroneous picture of the past does not help anybody and to remove ambiguity and to set the record straight I will make my terminology clear. My position is simple: let each name represent what it should and there will be in time far fewer problems. Thus:

1. *Azteca* refers to any one of the seven groups which came from Aztlan: Xochimilca, Chalca, Tepaneca, Colhua, Tlalhuica, Tlaxcala. Based upon linguistic similarities, however, nearly every major cultural group in and around the Basin of Mexico belongs to the *Azteca*. In contrast to the *Azteca* are the *Otomi*, the other major cultural group which inhabited the Basin prior to the Aztec migration.
2. *Mexica* refers to both the inhabitants of Tenochtitlan and Tlatelolco.
3. *Tenochca*, or *Mexica-Tenochca*, refers to the people of Tenochtitlan.
4. *Tlatelolca*, or *Mexica-Tlalteloca*, refers to the people of Tlatelolco.
5. *Nahua*, the most general term available (next to Mesoamerican and Indian), used mainly by linguistically leaning ethnohistorians to designate any speaker of *Nahuatl*, a variant of the language group Uto-Aztecan.

The Tenochca warred with and then defeated nearly every city-state in the Basin of

¹⁶ One of the best recent works on Mexico-Tenochtitlan is Inga Clendinnen's *Aztecs: An Interpretation*, Canto Edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). Clendinnen admits abashedly that her title is designed to retain readership rather than to follow scholarly trends. Doris Heyden, too, in her translation of Friar Diego Durán's famous history, decided to retain *Aztec* despite recognizing the word's deficiencies in order "to establish consistency" between her translations and past usage. See: *The History of the Indies of New Spain*, trans. Doris Heyden (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994).

Mexico. Most of these conquered peoples were Aztec. It is vital to note that the so called Aztec empire was in fact a Tenochca empire. Although the Texcoca to the east and the Tacuba to the west, together with the Mexica, formed the so-called Triple Alliance, it would be foolish to downplay the dominant role played by the Tenochca. Their closest neighbours and fellow Mexica, the Tlatelolca, were outright conquered during the rule of Axayacatl (1469-'81), their temples destroyed and the people required to live amongst their own filth until the Tenochca permitted them to clean their own city and reconstruct their main temple precinct. The Tlatelolco were clearly a subjugated people despite the fact that they were seen by non-Mexica as the Tenochca's own brethren. Of the three 'partners' in the alliance, Tacuba was undeniably the most junior partner and "little more than a formality."¹⁷ Texcoco was the second most powerful state in the region, with a large number of soldiers prepared for war, its own tribute domain, a highly decorative ceremonial precinct and elaborate state palaces and administrative complexes replete with the most superior decorative gardens in all of the empire. It is often said that Texcoco was the Florence of the empire, as it was renowned for not only architecture and gardens but also its poetry, philosophical inquiry, and the melding of these aspects with the political elite. Nevertheless, with only 30 000 inhabitants, Texcoco could not compete with the Tenochca's might and sheer symbolic wealth in terms of its gold, jade, turquoise, precious feathers and pelts. Moreover, economic and demographic factors weighed decidedly in favour of the Tenochca. Tenochtitlan's burgeoning population and the insurmountable army that it could produce, its economic wealth, and the importance of its great market that attracted every day sixty thousand buyers and sellers made the power of Tenochtitlan terrific. As we will see, the celebrations of conquest (despite the fact that such conquests were made with more non-Tenochca soldiers than Tenochca soldiers) occurred in Tenochtitlan first. The spoils of conquest were brought to Tenochtitlan before their eventual distribution to allied cities. The great majority of war captives were slain in the empire's capital, their flesh served to beasts, the scraps left for the dogs. Thus, in order to understand pre-Cortesian Mexico, it is essential that we identify with utmost precision the perpetrators of empire. We must apportion with care the guilt, responsibility, and acclaim for the conquest and subjugation of such a large number of societies in and around the Basin of Mexico. The Tenochca must receive their just desert.

Tenochtitlan's sudden ascendancy to regional domination must have caught pre-Cortesian Mexico by surprise. But more importantly, it startled the Tenochca. The Tenochca were preoccupied with the task of understanding and demonstrating their worthiness and their unique congruity with the supernatural. The sources continuously evidence their attempt to

¹⁷ Sanders, *Basin of Mexico*, 154.

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merge their own peculiar migratory history with the general Mesoamerican cosmological precepts that set the foundation for their religious beliefs. The merger, however, was wrought with difficulties. The cosmological precepts inherited by the Tenochca inclined them to believe that the material world in which they lived and of which they as humans were made was in its entirety caught in a cycle of regeneration, in which birth and death were simply two points in the perpetual renewal of life on earth. In this cosmovision, humanity enjoyed no privileged role or teleological mission; all matter was equal; all distinctions between species were obliterated.

The Tenochca's cultural inheritance, however, was under immense pressure from the sheer mass of vanities that accumulated as the Tenochca empire expanded further and further into the periphery of Mesoamerica. Their success brought unprecedented rewards. Tribute poured in from every corner of the empire, and to list only a small selection of this tribute: gold, turquoise, and jade; rich feathers and ritual garments; skins of jaguars, eagles, and deer; huge quantities of foods such as cacao, maize, and turkeys; slaves shackled in lines waiting for their moment on the sacrificial stone; and human labour to construct aqueducts, make renovations to pyramids, and work on many other projects. Vanity weighed heavy in a world without distinctions, and the Tenochca were afraid of the beast they had created. The pre-eminent beast was the periphery, the 'savage' human and the non-human alike that waited for the Tenochca in darkness, in forests, and in the northern plains. Frantic efforts were made to tame and subjugate the peripheral world by capturing and transporting it to Tenochtitlan, the centre and axis mundi, and then by ordering it within the spaces constructed for this purpose: jaguars and every conceivable animal were locked in cages, eagles and other birds in the 'bird house,' slaves waited in a nearby cell, albinos, midgets, and hunchbacks all incarcerated in their own enclosures, and captured enemies standing in queues, awaiting their sacrificial moment on the altar.

As we will see in Chapters Two and Three, the metaphor of 'nature as the devouring beast' held a central position within the multitude of Tenochca fears. Soldiers were calmed before war by the council of elders who reminded the warriors that their enemies were not wild beasts, but only humans; a Tenochca story describes the terror of the soldiers as their enemies turned into alligators; the cruellest of all deaths was to be consumed by wild beasts in the wilderness. If the subjugation of enemy groups who resided on the outskirts of empire was representative of the Tenochca's conquest of the periphery, then it is only logical to see the enclosure of wild animals in Moctezoma's urban zoo as the ultimate test of Tenochca strength and the subduing of their worst fear: that the stability of the centre would be overcome by peripheral disorder. The pre-Cortesian Tenochca were intent on protecting their place within the cosmos and they were not afraid to use any means necessary to accomplish the task.

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It has been nearly forty years since León Portilla, the famed nahuatlato scholar, argued forcefully in *Aztec Thought and Culture*, that in the years prior to conquest, philosophical inquiry was developing quickly in the burgeoning city.¹⁸ What I hope to add with this study is that the Tenochca's most eminent philosophical discovery was their own humanity. It has been stated elsewhere that the genius of the Tenochca was to explore the limits of the human self to the logical point in which life merged into a unstructured mass, where that mass became a meaningless materiality, and where the cycle of life (rather than the material manifestations of it) became omnipotent.¹⁹ But that cosmological outlook belonged more generally to the Mesoamerican tradition, not to the Tenochca's own genius. Theirs was the rather simple but violent discovery that although human-kind was logically integrated within the cycle of life, its reason and innate vanities ensnared it within its own linear historical and human trajectory, thus establishing a cleft between humanity and nature. The above hypothesis will be explored through an examination of the Tenochca's unique sense of 'self' as it is illuminated by the relationships established between themselves and their past, their 'savage' human enemies, and the animals which inhabited their daily lives, be they alive, dead, represented in art, or fantastic imaginings.

¹⁸ Miguel León-Portilla, *Aztec Thought and Culture: A Study of the Ancient Nahuatl Mind*, trans. by J.E. Davis (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963).

¹⁹ Take for example the work of Inga Clendinnen, *Aztecs*, Chap. 10, 236-63. Clendinnen's work is a real *tour de force* inasmuch as it does make an attempt to integrate the humanistic position of Portilla with the very anti-humanistic position of those like Markman and Markman. Yet, her 'humanist' component is poorly developed and thematically narrow as it is defined only in terms of the efforts of the political elite to meld cosmological and mundane symbolism, or in her words, thus demonstrating for us 'the complex rhetoric of cosmically sanctioned human power.' (262)

Chapter One: The Cosmological Perspective

1. Introduction

Most historical works on pre-Columbian Tenochtitlan, or which treat the entire Basin of Mexico in general, focus upon the precepts of the Tenochca cosmovision, worldview, or *mentalité*.¹ I take all three terms to mean approximately the same thing, even though 'mentalité' is used more often for the historical analysis of Western culture, while cosmovision and worldview derive from anthropological historiography and are used most often in research on non-Western cultures. As an aspect of cultural history, historical cosmology has a number of defining characteristics that not only enable us to consider it as a separate entity, but which also raise a few objections and that ultimately lead us to question the truthfulness and objectivity of its practitioners. The purpose of this chapter is to explore the emergence of such scholarship and then to determine its consequences on our understanding of pre-Columbian America and of the Tenochca in particular. In a larger context, this chapter is an attempt to locate this study's argument within its historiographical context and to bring forth problems relating to methodology and the limitations imposed by historical sources. This task compels me to bring current pre-Columbian scholarship face to face with recent discourse on environmental sustainability and to define and explain the 'cosmological imperative' (the propensity to examine Tenochca culture in terms of its worldview rather than by chronological sequences, universal models of human nature, important events or personal lives).

Let me begin by saying that the cosmological method can be both interpretive and

¹ As a matter of preliminary reference, I will simply list the names of a few of the most renowned scholars whose works are clear examples of this type of historical method and style: Johanna Broda, Louise M. Burkhart, David Carrasco, Inga Clendinnen, Miguel León-Portilla (most of his works exhibit the *humanist* method and style, but see *Toltecayotl* for a work with chapters exhibiting the *cosmological* perspective), Alfredo López Austin (the dominant cosmologist in the field), Roberta H. and Peter T. Markman, Eduardo Matos Moctezuma, Jill Leslie McKeever Furst, H.B. Nicholson, Esther Pasztory, and Richard F. Townsend.

analytic, but it is always impersonal, synchronic, and culturally relativistic. As a matter of introducing our topic, a brief look at each one of these characteristics is necessary, as well as an attempt to pair off each with its antithetical historical method. Let us begin with the first, the impersonal nature of its history. Generally speaking, there are no people, no places, very few dates, and no events in this type of history. When people and places appear, they do so as tangents to the main line of analysis, and not as a part of a larger narrative. If *humanistic history* can be defined as an attempt to constitute the sovereign thought of the individual and thereby praise, condemn, or account for such thoughts and the actions they produce, then cosmological history can be considered *anti-humanistic*.

The second characteristic is that of synchrony. This second point is somewhat an outcome of the first in that if events are ignored then diachronic processes are difficult to reconstitute. Instead of a diachronic explanation of change, such histories give us a static picture of the internal relations and mechanisms of a culture. At best, we should hope for an analysis of internal conflict between elements within a system, in the Hegelian spirit of dialectics, but not, as Hegel would insist, the synthesis or product of such a conflict. Thus, if we see culture as an independent organism, the task of the cosmologist is to investigate its mechanics or internal architecture, and not to track its evolution over time.

Finally, and most importantly, we must acknowledge the extreme ontological position taken by the practitioners of this type of history. If on the one hand we consider the pursuit of absolute (non-culturally specific) knowledge to be the pursuit of *universal history*—either in the form of meta-narratives (final causes, Christian teleology, or cultural evolutionism) or as analyses of human culture as a natural object (i.e. the study of human nature and the fundamental principles of human social organization)—then we must call the cosmologist a *cultural relativist* for he or she affirms that any culture can be known only on its own terms, and not by the yardstick (in the form of conceptual categories) of any other culture. To stave off confusion, a distinction must be made between universal history and scientific pretensions. Although the two are inherently tied, this is not to say that scientific pretensions are unique to universal history. In fact, we shall see that such pretensions have motivated the adoption of the relativist position as it did the universal position. Cultural relativism does not represent a reassignment to extreme subjectivity, for on the contrary it itself is a critique of the subjectivity of its predecessors and is an effort to obtain more objective results. Thus, in this respect, both cultural relativism and universal history fall within the realm of *history as science* rather than *history as art*. Although linguistic analysis plays a dominant role in this type of approach to history, it is a mistake to underestimate the role played by interpretation. The interpretation of art and human

behaviour in the cosmological model must strive to recover the foreignness of its object. It must struggle against the familiar. Historian Inga Clendinnen, a cosmologist herself, in her book *Aztecs: An Interpretation*, betrays herself by admitting that such scholarship begins from our own sense of self and our imaginative boundaries:

Historians of remote places and peoples are the romantics of the human sciences, Ahabs pursuing our great white whale, dimly aware that the whole business is, if coolly considered, rather less than reasonable. We will never catch him, and don't much want to: it is our own limitations of thought, of understandings, of imagination we test as we quarter those strange waters.²

Such an approach produces ironic results; in the quest for difference, our imagination yearns for the exotic, but produces a disguised rendition of the familiar, our antithesis. Much of this chapter will be an attempt to demonstrate the close relationship between the West's own sense of self and its portrait of the Indian as anti-West or even anti-human.

As we will see, it is no surprise that such relativism came directly after a surge of faith in the progress of the human sciences in the post-World War II era. Models deriving from the human sciences, such as Marxism, cultural evolutionism, Heartland/Hinterland geographic theory, psychological Structuralist theory that demonstrated the commonness of human experience, or any other variety of universal theorizing were deemed inappropriate because they were culturally relative models employing conceptual categories derived from the Western mind. Cultural relativism grew in the wake of such scientific pretensions. Having rebuked the pretensions of universal history and whole-heartedly embraced a cultural relativist model, scholars were left to explore the limits of their imagination in a field known for its scarcity of sources. The historical imagination, although limited by our knowledge of past societies always begins its wanderings from an intellect firmly rooted in the present and absorbed by its anxieties. The thesis that I want to follow is that cosmological investigation of the 1980s and '90s derived from the merging of historiographic trends (the development of cultural relativism as a rebuttal to universal history) and current, popular environmental anxieties. The end result of this merger is a new but equally fabulous rendition of an old image: a complex rendering of the Noble Savage, the Indian as the antithesis to the West and as a product of and remedy to the guilt-ridden conscience of the West and the persuasive pull of Western misanthropy. We shall see that in the process the Indian emerged as largely inhuman and ultimately stripped of consanguinity with our own Western heritage.

² Inga Clendinnen, *Aztecs: An Interpretation*, Canto Edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 275.

2. Cosmovision

There are numerous ways to understand the concept of cosmovision. Two different but not necessarily mutually exclusive models seem to dominate in one variety or another this type of historical literature. A brief survey of these two models will help us set a definition of cosmovision. On the one hand, ethnohistorian López Austin espouses his notion of cosmovision as “a *structured complex of social processes*, beliefs, practices, values, and representations.” Continuing, he asserts that the cosmovision must be seen as an *historical fact* that “...had a hard nucleus with components that were very resistant to historical change. They were almost unchangeable.”³ The centre of the ancient Aztec’s cosmovision can be reconstructed, according to López-Austin, by discovering the culture’s “basic logical principles.”⁴ Thus, his model has two essential features: first, a set of core precepts or basic logical principles of a culture; and second, a ‘structure’ that has a clearly defined centre, “a hard nucleus with components that were very resistant to historical change.”⁵ Finally, he makes an interesting but somewhat confusing analogy between culture and language:

In many ways, cosmovision may be compared to grammar, the work of everyone and of no one, a product of reason but not of consciousness, coherent and possessing a unifying nucleus that increases its radius to the degree that it is restricted to social sectors that are more homogenous. All of this is true because a cosmovision is not the result of speculation but of practical daily relationships, and because a cosmovision is built, beginning with a perception of the world conditioned by a tradition that guides action in society and in nature.⁶

López-Austin’s analogy is helpful in making the concept of cosmovision much more approachable and understandable. Grammatical rules, then, are like the ‘basic logical principles’ of a culture. The rules exist and change without any one person or group claiming credit for their invention. But indeed the rules exist, even if they are sometimes broken; they are not fanciful inventions of linguists; they derive from good usage and the desire for clarity in communication. If it is the job of the linguist to define the hidden rules of grammar, then we should look to the ethnohistorian, that curious blend of historian and anthropologist, for guidance in our understanding of past cultures. And if we today look to books of grammar, teachers and other who have made a conscious study of grammar for the task of disseminating such knowledge, then so might we expect that the Tenochca priests included such a task as a component of their own duties. Thus, in many ways his analogy is apt.

³ Alfredo López Austin, *Tamoanchan, Tlalocan: Places of Mist*, trans. B.R. Ortiz de Montellano and T. Ortiz de Montellano (Niwot, Colorado: University Press of Colorado, 1997), 5. Italics are mine.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

Nevertheless, it evinces a contradiction inherent to a model that seeks to combine both the concepts of structure and centre. We can envision the structure of culture as, in David Cohen's words, an "interior architecture" of the beliefs and behaviour of a society. But how should we envision the centre of such an architectural structure? A building is supported by the angular relationships between horizontal and vertical beams. The best structure, that is, the one that withstands the test of time, is clearly one in which its own weight is borne equally amongst its supports. I would expect that the same could be said about the structure of culture and its load bearing potential. It is impossible to imagine a grammatical or cultural structure that is supported by any one principle. Successful communication requires the careful application of hundreds of rules, none of which is more important than another. In the words of semiologist John Sturrock: "It can make no sense to speak of the 'centre' of a language or any other such system."⁷ The elements of a structure or system (the two terms are vastly different but are equally applicable in this respect) are not important as individual entities but as components of an integrated totality. Sturrock makes the point very clear: "Everything that is not by its nature indivisible can be shown to have a structure, to be a complex whole capable of analysis into its constituent elements, these elements themselves being related to each other according to rules also to be discovered."⁸

In light of such a discussion of the inherent contradiction between centre and structure, we are more successful in understanding López Austin's cosmological model if we interpret his "*structured complex of social processes*" as a system, rather than structure. But here, too, we will find both clarity and confusion. Admitting an analogy between a cultural system and an ecosystem, we see that elements such as individual plants and species (comparable to a host of sociological analytical tools which help to divide an amorphous society into numerous groups and subgroups with individual people being rationally consigned to such groups) support and help one another, but also compete with each other for resources and power (this is obviously pushing the boundaries of the analogy, but power in the plant ecology realm might be seen as equivalent to the ability to propagate freely in the best soils without outside intervention). The interactions amongst elements in a system can be theorized to explain change and stability. As López Austin makes clear in his desire to explore the hard nucleus of the system (and this is, again, where the conceptual confusion arises), he is more interested in the stability of the system and its resistance to change.

In any case, if we take the systemic model on the one hand, it is clear that the other basic

⁷ John Sturrock, *Structuralism* (London: Paladin Books, 1986), 150.

⁸ *Ibid.*, vii.

model available to us is the structuralist model⁹ that we have already explored to some extent, and which appears less apt to be reduced into one or even a few basic principles.¹⁰ For obvious reasons, the linguistic analogy is much more appropriate to structural models of culture for we can see that it is the language itself that produces distinct patterns, and although we might discover rules to explain such patterning, such rules must be taken in their totality and cannot be ordered according to their importance in the system.

It is helpful to note the common characteristics of these two models. Scholars using either one see their task as *reconstructing relationships* between elements in a unified totality. Those relationships take the form of a series of (sometimes more and sometimes less) unconscious logical principles that scholars discover beneath the *surface appearances* produced by any complex social group. By surface appearances I mean to indicate anything that we have collected from the past from which we glean a partial image of a past culture: texts, photographs, architecture, sculpture, mundane artifacts, poetry, clothing, painting, music, etc.; we should also include more unconventional 'objects' such as pollution trapped in glacial ice caps, buffalo rubbing stones and the tiered embankments of fluvial systems that tell their fair share of stories if we learn how to listen. In any case, it is the scholar's task to dig beneath these surface appearances and to reconstitute the complex network of thought (or culture) that sustained and produced them.

Most important, however, is that both structural and systemic models of culture, which explain stability over change, because they explore deeper (less superficial) principles, tend to downplay the importance of intra-cultural variation and a society's internal ideological competition. Peasants and elite, priests and warriors, merchants and tradesmen, men and women: they are all treated as a homogenous group without ideological distinctions. If the effects of cosmological models are not sufficiently alarming when viewed across society's many strata, we need only view the model's effects across time.

As most historians know, the story has not been unravelled until we have explained the cause of events. Take for instance the position of E.H. Carr in his noted book *What is History*: "the study of history is a study of causes."¹¹ Even if the historical theorist Richard J. Evans, in *In Defence of History*, points out that this is a rather conservative outlook because "[h]istorical

⁹ My use of structuralism must not be mistaken for Structuralism, the French movement of the 1950s and '60s. See Sturrock *Structuralism*, or Francois Dosse, *The History of Structuralism: Vol. 1, The Rising Sign, 1945-1966* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

¹⁰ Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 158.

¹¹ E.H. Carr, cited in Richard J. Evans, *In Defence of History* (London: Granta Books, 1997), 129.

explanation commonly proceeds by relating an event or a process or a structure to a broader historical context”¹² and that the “recent turn to cultural history and *mentalités* has seriously undermined the notion of historical causation as understood by E. H. Carr,” he himself has a difficult time accepting new scholarship like the history of *mentalités* which appears to him like “cultural determinism.”¹³

If we, once again, look at the two models as separate entities, we see that the theoretical potential for the explanation of change is different in both cases. In the structural model, we note that it is difficult to imagine an architecture with plastic qualities. At best, we can envision structural renovation or new additions to the existing structures. At worst, we are asked to accept the sudden appearance of completely new and independent interior architectures, a new paradigm that in a bursting forth of discontinuity, invokes a new cultural era. Thus, I tend to agree with Jürgen Habermas who contends that “[u]nder the Stoic gaze of the archaeologist, history hardens into an iceberg covered with the crystalline forms of arbitrary formations...”¹⁴

On the other hand, the systemic model permits change on a theoretical level because the system is itself a dynamic relationship between elements that are in competition. Yet, such relationships are very difficult to explain when it is an elusive and immaterial entity such as culture that is seen as the initiating factor. Political, economic, technological, or even meteorological solutions are all tenable and even believable when argued effectively. In each of these cases, we, as readers of history, can understand the continuing and changing effects of non-personal agents such as political parties and institutions, the control and distribution of the means of production, the advent of a wide range of technologies from domesticated animals to the use and development of systems of writing, or even the effects of global warming and cooling or long term patterns in precipitation. In all of these cases there is a definite physical or ideological intervention whose effects can be traced through time. In the systemic cultural model, on the other hand, we have only the eternally elusive idea that the underlying structure of thought, something deeper than economics, politics, technology or climate, controls the production of artifacts. There is a process at work, for the patterns left by artifacts attest to it. Yet, their invisibility makes them exceedingly difficult to explain.

In light of these conceptual problems, we should not be surprised to find time and again

¹² Evans, *In Defence of History*, 158.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 159.

¹⁴ Habermas' reference to the 'archaeologist' in this citation refers to Michel Foucault's self-designation as an 'archaeologist of ideas', and must not be confused with the more commonly use of archaeologist that is in use across universities through out the world. Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse on Modernity: Twelve Lectures* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987), 253.

that historical explanation is absent, while description predominates and the search for 'meaning' takes the place of the explanation of change and internal dynamics. Let us take scholars Roberta and Peter Markman as a case in point who in *Flayed God* seek to elucidate "the basic mythological structures [that] came into being very early in the development of the urban tradition in Mesoamerican civilization."¹⁵ The affinity between structural and systemic methods is demonstrated by the following statement where they muddle the important distinction between structure and system by saying "that the structure, the hidden system itself, is the 'meaning' of the myth, the final locus of the sacred" and then proceed to muddle distinctive lines of cultural development in over three millennia of Olmec, Zapotec, Maya, or Toltec history. "Despite their quite significant differences," say Markman and Markman, "the four great culture areas that developed as a result of the catalytic Olmec influences are to be seen as quadripartite variants of one great mythological and social tradition."¹⁶

In support of the cosmologists, we might take the position of the famous historian/philosopher R.G. Collingwood who argued in 1935 that the discipline of history is at the most basic level concerned not with facts or events, but with the thought of men and women:

Unlike the natural scientist, the historian is not concerned with events as such at all. He is only concerned with those events which are the outward expression of thoughts. At bottom, he is concerned with thoughts alone; with their outward expression in events he is concerned only by the way, in so far as these reveal to him the thoughts of which he is in search.¹⁷

Collingwood's position, although much debated, clearly stressed the importance of immaterial historical processes that cannot be easily measured nor positively known with any certainty. If this is the true historical object, however, then deep epistemological problems arise when we realize that traditional humanistic approaches to history have overlooked the complex problem of explaining how thought, even at the individual level, is produced, passed on, and corrupted. Indeed, when critically assessed, common notions of tradition, influence, spirit, and the *oeuvre* are problematic, are maintained without "rigorous conceptual structure,"¹⁸ and are protected by the security afforded them by a notion of common sense. As Michel Foucault stated:

We must question those ready-made syntheses, those groupings that we normally accept before any examination, those links whose validity is recognized from the outset; we must oust those forms and obscure forces by which we usually link the discourse of one

¹⁵ Roberta H. Markman and Peter T. Markman, *The Flayed God: The Mesoamerican Mythological Tradition: sacred texts and images from pre-Columbian Mexico and Central America* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1992), 58.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 58.

¹⁷ R.G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, rev. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 217.

¹⁸ Foucault, *Archaeology*, 21.

man with that of another; they must be driven out from the darkness in which they reign.¹⁹

Nevertheless, even if we problematize humanistic history, we have not yet arrived at an answer to our question; the problem of explanation and the propensity to describe remain serious impediments to our historical understanding. Moreover, we must admit that the task of explaining individual thought is relatively stable and coherent in comparison to the mammoth project of cosmological reconstruction. Scholars of this sort must weed through the contradictions and anomalies in societal behaviour in order to elucidate distinct *patterns* considered general and representative of the culture at large. If pattern formation brings to mind scientific rigour, we need to free ourselves of such a delusion. In the best of circumstances cosmological reconstruction is a wobbly enterprise, but the problem is compounded in pre-Columbian studies; the historical evidence is far too weak to allow ourselves even a moment of decisive certitude. The unfortunate reality is that despite the inherent problems of this type of research, we shall see that the inherent weakness of the historical record, combined with the steady waning of universalistic theory has left us with few if any other alternatives.

3. Historiographical Incentives

We need to explain why the cosmological model of explanation predominates over humanistic varieties of historical explanation in the field of pre-Columbian history. One of the primary motivations to undertake such scholarship comes in the form of a negative incentive in which the inherent difficulty in executing personalized, narrative based history forces scholars to describe stable, anonymous structures rather than explain their historical occurrence. This negative incentive is clearly a function of the quality and quantity of historical documentation. It seems evident to me that humanistic historical research, that is, research that sets as its goal the investigation of human agency and its impact on the development of culture and society and that thus sees history as a story of the advancement (and retreat) of the rational, conscious thought of humanity, requires three principal criteria: the description of events (defined in the humanist perspective as conscious acts attributable to individuals), dates (to reconstruct narratives and chronology), and authorship (to look for bias and anachronism). All three of these factors are largely missing from the historical sources that scholars must work with when examining matters in pre-Columbian Mexico (and in any place in the Americas before the arrival of

¹⁹ Ibid., 22.

Columbus, for that matter). Instead, the evidence that we have is mainly in the form of art: “painted books,” sculpture, song-poetry, costume, innumerable artifacts, architecture, etc., and then post-conquest descriptions of pre-conquest “ritual art” —ceremonies that dramatize religious beliefs. Types of information missing from the (figurative) archive are personal communication, detailed historical accounts, or even sufficient information on any single individual to enable historians to reconstruct any one person’s biographical record. The best but still very scarce evidence of this last type typically documents Tenochca rulership and their famous and infamous acts. Yet, our scant biographical knowledge of rulers is insufficient to produce anything out of the ordinary. Once again, we discover such people as named figures in a crowd of anonymity, are given a story that is fundamentally anti-humanistic.

The irony of the facts outlined above is that however harsh our criticism of the Tenochca’s historical record may be, scholars in the field may still take pride in the fact that in no other pre-Columbian field is the corpus of materials better. In particular, there still exists a small but significant collection of pre-Cortesian documents that we now label codices, “painted books” which according to Díaz del Castillo were so plentiful that they filled Tenochca libraries.²⁰ All but a few of these books were ordered burned by the first bishop of Mexico, Don Juan de Zumárraga, sometime in the immediate post-conquest years.²¹ As abhorrent as that conflagration might seem to us today, before the arrival of Cortés, the Tenochca, under the rule of Itzcoatl, Obsidian Serpent, 1427-40, carried out the identical and equally abominable act in

²⁰ Díaz del Castillo, *The Discovery and Conquest of Mexico, 1517-1521*, trans. A.P. Maudslay (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Cudahy, 1956), 211. NB: Díaz spoke of only tribute books, but we can envision another ‘cultural’ library where the majority of the extant codices were stored. In fact, in Bernal Díaz del Castillo, *Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España* (Mexico City: Editorial Porrúa, 1966), Capítulo. XLIV, he makes a clear reference to such store house of cultural books. Such books, or screenfolds, were painted on paper made from the pulp of bark taken from the *amate* (wild fig tree) with the use of mineral colours mixed with organic matter. In earlier versions, deer skin was used in place of bark. [Sandstrom and Sandstrom, *Traditional Papermaking and Paper Cult Figures of Mexico* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1986).] Very few of these books remain. Of unadulterated pre-Hispanic origin, there are no more than sixteen: “five ritual-calendrical codices of the Borgia group from Puebla-Tlaxcala-Western Oaxaca region (Borgia, Cospi, Fejérváry-Mayer, Laud, Vaticanus B); Mixtec manuscripts from Waxaca; the Nuttall group (Becker I, Bodley, Colobino, Nuttall, Vienna), which are mainly historical-genealogical; and three ritual-calendrical screenfolds from the Maya area (Dresden, Paris, and Madrid).” Other codices, with minor adulteration, are post-Hispanic copies of pre-Hispanic originals. [Doris Heyden, in Diego Durán, *History*, 4, n.2.].

²¹ See Luis Nicolau D’Olwer, *Fray Bernardino de Sahagún (1499-1590)*, trans. M. J. Mixco (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1987), 7-10. We should note two things. First, only ‘idolatrous’ material was intended to be burned, but ignorance and fear led to the destruction of nearly everything. And second, the clergy’s opinion was divided over this burning. Nearly all of the *humanistic*-leaning religious were opposed, knowing that such information was the key to exposing idolatry.

order to cover up the Tenochca's meagre past.²² The motivation in both cases, it seems, was to help the Tenochca forget. In any case, with the exception of certain place names, these painted books are not phonetic representations of spoken words, like our script. They are complex images generally depicting human-like figures dressed in ritual attire and with a number of smaller, symbolic images surrounding the central anthropomorphic figure.²³ We can 'read' these documents as diagrams, interpreting them by way of exploring the inter-relationships amongst the various symbolic images on the page. The books depict themes relating to religion, astrology, history, and financial accounting (i.e. tribute). The major restriction and challenge given to scholars who examine these books is that symbols are not self-explanatory (in a way we expect prose to be), but are highly dependent upon the external knowledge and memory of the 'reader' for their proper interpretation. Unlike phonetic or ideogrammatic text, symbols do not attempt to represent linear thought. Tenochca society maintained formal schools where students came to acquire the necessary knowledge to interpret these painted books. Today, despite advances in our ability to decipher the symbolism of such manuscripts, we lack much of that earlier symbolic knowledge, leaving these 'painted books' obscure and our interpretations quite speculative.

Other forms of pre-Cortesian art bequeathed to modern scholars are an appreciable collection of sculptured stone objects, a large number of examples from the lapidary arts, and a multitude of very small pendants made from copper and gold. Similar to the painted books, the more abstract varieties of such arts offer a complex encoding of pre-Cortesian Tenochca thought. On February 21, 1978, workers of the *Compañía de Luz y Fuerza del Centro*, laying cable near the centre square of Mexico City, discovered the stone of Coyolxauhqui,²⁴ one of the most important pre-Columbian stones known to us. Work was halted, and the largest archaeological excavation in Mexico City's history was initiated, as for five years Tenochtitlan's Main Temple

²² See the account in Fray Bernardino Sahagún, *Florentine Codex: General History of the Things of New Spain, in thirteen parts*, trans. A.J.O. Anderson and C.E. Dibble (Santa Fe, New Mexico: The School of American Research and the University of Utah, 1950-'82), 191. Here, we find that "No longer can ... [the old history] be remembered, no longer can it be investigated how long they were left in Tamoanchan.... The history of it was saved, but it was burned when Itzcoatl ruled in Mexico. A council of rulers of Mexico took place. They said: 'It is not necessary for all the common people to know of the writings; government will be defamed, and this will only spread sorcery in the land; for it containeth many falsehoods'." Although there are post-conquest overtones in the explanation, the act is located clearly in the pre-Conquest phase.

²³ See Appendix III for examples of such images, in particular those of the *Codex Fejérváry-Mayer 6* and the *Codex Borbonicus 14*.

²⁴ See Image 2 in Appendix III for the picture of the Coyolxauhqui stone.

precinct was resurrected.²⁵ Undoubtedly, discoveries such as these help to define the contours of Tenochca thought. Moreover, our interpretations of objects such as the Coyolxauhqui stone are less abashed as there is no evidence suggesting that their original meanings, although carved in stone!, were as precisely and systematically defined as were the painted books. Because these objects were made for public display, it seems likely that their symbolic value was open to contemplation (even though, like all symbolic art, the use and repetition of particular symbols—to say nothing of the artist's desire to communicate—indicates that there must have been some agreement between the intended and received messages). Yet, original ambiguity does not equal modern clarity, and thus modern scholarly interpretations can never hope to sidestep the original symbolic ambiguity of such artifacts. It is for this reason that the 'painted books', whose formality at the very least demonstrates an inclination to clarity, should demand a higher estimation than sculptured objects, at least in terms of their use as expressions of rational thought. On the other hand, these are the sources that we have, and although new artifacts will surely appear, they will all fall into the basic pre-Conquest 'archival' categories outlined above.

In search of more information and less interpretation, scholars must look in the post-Conquest phase, wherein they must exchange the benefit of unadulterated sources (the Indian perspective) for the clarity and analytic potential inherent in the phonetic encoding of thought. The accounts left to us by Spanish conquistadores give us an image of the city before and after it was destroyed by the authors themselves, a few hundred more Spaniards, and about ten thousand of their Indian allies. The conquistadores did not have an eye for subtleties. They were not trained commentators nor were they well educated. Take, for instance, Bernal Díaz del Castillo's description of the entrance to a smaller pyramid: there was "a terrifying mouth that is said to be in hell, with its mouth open and long fangs to swallow souls; there were also a few figures of devils and serpents together at the door."²⁶ Unfortunately, Díaz has told us little except that there were serpents and mouths with fangs; the rest of his analysis is so overtly Christian that we learn more about the Christian fear of punishment in Hell than of the sculptures in Tenochtitlan, and much less of Tenochca concepts of the afterlife. Yet, their descriptions, although couched in confused and erring interpretation, are an invaluable source because of their proximity to the pre-Cortesian culture and their fortune to have seen the city before they destroyed it. The best sources in this category are those written by Hernando Cortés and the

²⁵ Eduardo Matos Moctezuma, *Treasures of the Great Temple*, trans. Richard Lindley (La Jolla, California: Alti Publishing, 1990), 29-31.

²⁶ Díaz, *Conquest of Mexico*, 223.

above mentioned Bernal Díaz del Castillo.²⁷

Although separated from the pre-Columbian era by up to sixty years, the next best thing to pre-Cortesian artifacts are the colonial manuscripts bequeathed primarily by friars trained by the Dominican, Franciscan, and Augustinian orders of the Holy Roman Catholic Church. These manuscripts are invaluable to scholars not only because of their familiar format, their known authorship, and their known method of production, but because of their nearly encyclopaedic descriptions of the culture in Tenochtitlan and its vicinity. In this category of documents the most outstanding and original works were produced by Fray Andrés Olmos, Fray Bernardino Sahagún, Fray Diego Durán, and Fray Toribio Motolinía.²⁸ The corpus of texts left to us by friars exhibits a considerable degree of variation in objectivity and originality (plagiarism was not a crime in sixteenth century Spain). All such works need to be read with their intent in mind: to discover and make known the 'demonic' secrets of Indian culture to use to their advantage in the conquest for Indian souls. But as the semiologist Tzvetan Todorov put it in his thought provoking essay, "Knowledge": "Sahagún started from the notion of utilizing the Indians' knowledge in order to contribute to the propagation of the Europeans' culture; he has ended by putting his own knowledge in the service of the preservation of the native culture."²⁹

One of these sources, however, far surpasses the rest as an historical source and almost single-handedly elevates the study of Central Mexico above any other pre-Columbian culture; this is *The Florentine Codex*, compiled and organized by the above mentioned Fray Bernardino Sahagún. It is this work alone which raises the level of analysis of Tenochca culture to a level far above that for any other cultural group in the Americas. Sahagún's work is remarkable for

²⁷ Hernán Cortés, (1522), *Cartas y Documentos* (México: Editorial Porrúa, 1963).

²⁸ In terms of Olmos' contribution, he compiled and wrote his books in the first twenty years after conquest, which is earlier than the others, and for this reason, it seems, we are not certain of his authorship of certain works. However, certain works of fundamental importance are being rescued from anonymity and attributed to his name. The most important of these are: *Codex Tudela*, *Codex Magliabecchiano*, and *Historia de los Mexicanos Por Sus Pinturas* (for a great analysis of this, see S. Jeffrey K. Wilkerson, "The Ethnographic Works of Andrés de Olmos, Precursor and Contemporary of Sahagún," in *Sixteenth Century Mexico: The work of Sahagún*, ed. M.S. Edmonson (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1974), 27-77. Some manuscripts can be ascribed to him with absolute certainty, most prominently: *Arte de Lengua Mexicana* (with annexed "Speeches of the Elders", or *Huehuetlatolli*, and "Hechicerías y Sortilegios") and *Grammaire de la langue náhuatl ou mexicaine*.

As for Sahagún, Durán, and Motolinía, the authorship of their works is much more straight forward. Their most important works are: Fr. Bernardino Sahagún, *Primeros Memoriales* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), *Historia General de las cosas de Nueva España* (México: Editorial Porrúa, 1999), and *Florentine Codex*. Fr. Diego Durán, *Historia de las Indias de Nueva España e Islas de la Tierra Firme, tomos 1 & 2, segunda edición* (México: Editorial Porrúa, S.A., 1984). Fr. Toribio Motolinía, *Memoriales e Historia de los Indios de la Nueva España* (Madrid: Ediciones Atlas, 1970).

²⁹ Tzvetan Todorov, *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other*, trans. R. Howard (New York: HarperPerennial, 1992), 237.

three basic reasons: its scope, its depth, and its method of inquiry. I will begin with the latter of these. Sahagún wrote his *Historia* from the information that was given to him by his informants who responded to various questions given to them by Sahagún himself. At times the questions were more direct (as in *Book 11: Earthly Things*) and at times more open ended (as in *Book 2: The Ceremonies*), but in all cases answers were given and received in Nahuatl, the native language which Sahagún had mastered. Furthermore, the noblemen's comments were recorded in Nahuatl by Mexica scribes trained in the use of the alphabet. Although Sahagún later translated this work into Spanish, we are fortunate enough to have today this same Nahuatl text that was diligently and carefully translated over a thirty year period by two of the most prestigious linguists working in the field, Charles E. Dibble and Arthur J. O. Anderson. *The Florentine Codex*, as its English translation is titled, is a testimony to the long history of humanism, from the Renaissance to the modern period.

In terms of the scope and depth of the book's contents, it is a veritable encyclopaedia of Mexica culture, comprising 13 volumes and thousands of pages of text and images. As an organizing principle, Sahagún followed the European's Great Chain of Being, thus beginning with the most elevated matter, spirit, and finished in Book 11 with inanimate objects such as rocks. The work's vast scope is summed up by Sahagún himself—in language that demonstrates his linguistic and ethnographic penchant—stating that “for this work was thrown a very large net in order to bring to light all of the vocabulary of this language with its distinct and metaphorical significations, and all of the manners of speaking, and every last one of their traditions, good and bad alike.”³⁰

The Florentine Codex is renowned for its descriptions and ethnography, and not for its analysis. In fact, it is precisely its lack of analysis and interpretation (usually ethnocentric and mistaken in other sources such as Motolinía and even Durán) that makes this source particularly valuable. Thus, it contains important descriptions of clothing, ceremonies, and other religious paraphernalia; it is particularly rich in information about ritual symbolism and behaviour; it contains a description of the religious and solar calendar and the interpretation of day signs and the major gods associated with portions of the solar year; it has very important rhetorical speeches and even some poetry as learned by rote by noblemen; it describes noblemen and tradesmen, and all of the goods brought into the city of Tenochtitlan. All of these topics could be used by friars to make the Aztec culture more legible. Of little use, however, were historical personages (other than rulers) or their chief acts; absent from the books is information on artists

³⁰ Sahagún, *Historia General*, p. 18.

and their works or the construction of important buildings in and around Tenochtitlan; in short, we have no information on individual lives.

If the information was only scarce (instead of absent), I might be tempted to agree with Clendinnen who argues that such a lack should be attributed to the poorly developed sense of self in Aztec society.³¹ But this is not a scarcity; it is a non-appearance. For questions never asked, there were never given any answers. Friars wanted ethnographic information, not biographies, not personal stories, not individual idiosyncrasies or even personal narratives. There is a possibility that the absence of this type of humanistic knowledge should be attributed to the functioning of oral history which tends to remember in terms of structure rather than detail.³² It makes little difference to whom we attribute such forgetting. The basic fact is the same: the peculiar and scarce historical record leads us to believe that the Tenochca world was one where general cosmological principles took precedence over history, and where the analysis of structure and system obliterated distinctions as much amongst groups of humans as varieties of species. It is for this reason that we must amplify the human voices that whisper through the sources, telling us of their particularly human hopes, fears, and vanities.

4. The Historical Imagination

Even a brief sketch of Historiography since the late-nineteenth century demonstrates the diverse use to which a relatively small corpus of primary sources can be put. An exploration of historiography before the late-nineteenth century adds very little to our understanding of modern historiography; before that time, many primary sources, the best of which are in Nahuatl, were unknown, not read, or read with such poor linguistic understanding that keeping them in the dark

³¹ Clendinnen's position in *Aztecs* can be ascertained by implication, rather than by any direct criticism on her part of the limitations of sources as compared to her conclusions, such as the definition of the 'self' as a weak, 'highly vulnerable social construct' (143), or her analysis of the "continuing struggles for the scarce resource of individual fame," (128) or "the randomness of fate." (152) The best chapters on this topic are Chap. 4 ("Warriors, Priests and Merchants"), Chap. 5 ("The Masculine Self Discovered"), and Chap. 10 ("Ritual: The World Transformed, the World Revealed"). The closest she comes to making a criticism of herself is in "A Question of Sources", particularly on pp. 278-9, wherein, having admitted her almost singular dependency on the work of Sahagún (8), goes on to explore the peculiar motivation for his work (of which I have already examined in the text above). Moreover, she fully agrees with Paul Veyne that the truth involves an accounting of what is absent from a source (and how that reflects the method and motivating questions of its producer), as much as an examination of the truthfulness of what is present (281).

³² E.g., Claude Levi-Strauss *The Naked Man: Introduction to a Science of Mythology: 4* (New York: Harper and Row, 1981), 38. Also, Markman and Markman, *Flayed God*, 3-5, 25-8, 58-62, 65, 270-72.

might have been preferable to interpreting them by what amounted to the light of a firefly. Let us take the example of William H. Prescott, author of the highly influential book *The Conquest of Mexico*, written in 1843.³³ His work, although the best and most comprehensive examination of the available sources,³⁴ glorified the Aztec empire and culture. Prescott's work evinces a style typical of the Romantic era, or Counter-Enlightenment, wherein a well written story combined with an exotic theme could attract to history a wide public readership. As Keen notes, "in the space of a month Prescott received one hundred thirty favorable newspaper reviews."³⁵ If "the central problem of historical writing is to create a set of structural and stylistic devices which mediates successfully between the difficult requirements of history-as-science and history-as-art,"³⁶ then we might be tempted to side with Keen in saying that "Prescott's *Conquest of Mexico* shows the thin dividing line between history and belles-lettres in the romantic era."³⁷

In our effort to discover the roots of modern scholarship, we must distinguish between work carried out before and after the critical examination of Nahuatl sources and codices. Let us take the example of two American anthropologists whose work was very influential in the United States, Lewis H. Morgan and Adolf F. Bandelier. Writing in the 1870s and 1880s, these scholars exhibited a belief in progress common to an age of "burgeoning science and industry." At this time, scientific inquiry, like that of Charles Darwin and Auguste Comte, was preoccupied with questions of evolution, biological, physical and social alike. The human sciences were no exception to this rule, and it was in such a setting that "anthropology emerged as an independent discipline" that held as its primary task the "search for patterns and sequences in the early history of mankind."³⁸

The implications of such a scientific endeavour can be clearly gleaned in late nineteenth century American scholarship. Morgan and Bandelier, for example, plotted Aztec society within a universal evolutionary model that charted human progress across three 'ethnic periods', from savagery to barbarism to civilization.³⁹ Predictably, European culture was located by such authors at the apex of such a developmental trajectory at the stage of civilization while Native Americans, it was hypothesized, remained in a state of, at best, barbarism. As Keen puts it, in

³³ William H. Prescott, *Conquest of Mexico* (New York: The Book League of America, 1934).

³⁴ Benjamin Keen, *The Aztec Image in Western Thought* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1971), 355.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 361.

³⁶ David Hackett Fisher "The Braided Narrative: Substance and Form in Social History," in *The Literature of Fact: Selected papers from the English Institute* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), 109.

³⁷ Benjamin Keen, *The Aztec Image in Western Thought* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1971), 363.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 380.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 390.

such a schematic “Moctezuma was reduced to a tribal chief, his palace to a communal dwelling, and the city of Tenochtitlan to a humble pueblo.”⁴⁰ Importantly, we must recognize that such science had a very shaky foundation. Bandelier, in his own words, wrote Morgan on August Fourth, 1876, assuring him that he “need not fear the influence of the Spanish authorities, I rather hope to prove to you that these [sources] can be wielded and used to advantage.”⁴¹ And undoubtedly, sources were routinely manipulated to integrate the Indian into a coarse evolutionary model. On this point, Keen’s criticism is harsh: “Bandelier did not merely reserve the right to determine what it was that Spanish chroniclers really saw. He ignored contradictory evidence, lifted phrases from their contexts, twisted the plain meaning of certain phrases, and asserted on his own authority facts that needed to be proved.”⁴²

The historiographical approach of Morgan and Bandelier, and of the whole late-nineteenth-century tradition of history as the evolution of societies, for that matter, was eclipsed at the turn of the century by a predominantly German empiricist tradition led by Eduard Seler who nearly single-handedly began to “drive the spirit of fantasy from the Mexican field.”⁴³ Universal evolutionary models did not disappear from American anthropology, however. We will soon explore their strong resurgence in the post-W.W.II era, despite the fact that modern scholarship, of the type that I have defined as ‘cultural relativist,’ looks back to them with a critical and hostile posture.

As for Seler, he, too, adamantly opposed works such as those of Morgan and Bandelier, and applied himself instead to the slow, tiresome task of “revealing the world of meaning and imagination hidden behind the esoteric language of codices, myths, prayers, and sculptures.”⁴⁴ His methodology was comparative, critical, and empirical, preferring inductive logic over deductive. Surprisingly, there is not a single great work to which Seler’s name can be attached. His failure to produce a classic work is a direct result of his methodology, which resisted generalizations and the attempt to systematize individual findings into a synthesis of Aztec culture. Walter Lehman, Seler’s student, confirmed that “the body of well-ascertained facts is absolutely insufficient to give anything like a connected view of the former state of things in Mexico.”⁴⁵ Franz Boas, another of Seler’s students who came to the U.S. in 1888 was equally hesitant to overstep the border of empirical certainty. He distrusted theory and in Keen’s words,

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 381.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 389.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 395.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 411.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 411.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 451.

insisted that a particularist approach—the study of specific cultures in their particular historical context—was the most fruitful method of anthropological inquiry. *A culture was a self-sufficient and homogenous unit* whose institutions and customs could not be understood except in their interrelations and in terms of the functions they performed.⁴⁶

The above comment establishes a great divide between empiricism and theoretical modeling and equally between scientific rigour and scientific pretensions, but it also exhibits clues as to how this divide would be breached. In an ironic twist of events, whereby the empiricist lays the ground work for intense speculation and whereby induction yields to the receding tide of deductive meditation, we begin to recognize the seeds of current scholarship in the work of Eduard Seler. The treatment of Aztec culture as an independent field of investigation closes off points of entry normally used by historical methods that compare one culture with another. Seler's empiricism and intra-cultural comparative method relies upon the assumption that cultural entities exist, their boundaries can be demarcated, and ultimately, their coherence can be reconstructed. Lehman might contend that it is too soon "to give anything like a connected view of the former state of things in Mexico", but the implicit assumption is that such a connected view is the ultimate objective. Seler himself paid homage to his own teacher, Adolf Bastian, when he summarized Bastian's idea of psychic unity in the following way:

Where the customs and habits are similar, we shall ... be obliged to consider this the result of a similar trend of the human mind, to ascribe it to *a mode of thinking*, which in the most different places and amid the most different conditions, travels the same paths, which sometimes seem very peculiar to ourselves.⁴⁷

And so the seed of cultural relativism began its long period of germination within the field of Mexican studies. If we were to trace the genealogy of this relativism, it is doubtful that we would agree with Keen who tracks its roots to an incipient waning of "faith in science, technology, and progress" at the end of the nineteenth century.⁴⁸ Suggestively, quite the opposite might be accurate: that faith in science was reinvigorated by a new method of investigation that resisted a simple taxonomy of cultures as indicated by their superficial markings, and which stressed instead that an organism must be known internally, on its own terms, by first completing a diagnosis of its constituent components, and next by understanding the inter-relational functioning amongst such components. Thus, cultural evolutionism made way for biological mechanics and the conviction that the historical dynamics of any organism

⁴⁶ Ibid., 405. Italics are mine.

⁴⁷ Seler, in Ibid., 449. Italics are mine.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 404.

will necessarily remain obscure until we understand the internal 'biological' mechanisms that keep it alive and cause it to regenerate.

If we understand Seler's work in this manner, the arrival of our first cosmologist, Mexican scholar Alfonso Caso, no longer seems unprecedented. His "brilliant work of synthesis", *The Aztecs: People of the Sun*, published first in Spanish in 1953,⁴⁹ elevated religion to the status of "the prime motive for all individual acts and ... the basic reason for the existence of state itself,"⁵⁰ and made use of and expanded upon Seler's empirical studies in order to reconstruct the synchronic relations amongst artifacts (as expressions of the internal system). That Caso chose religion as the driving force is hardly coincidental. Caso's definition of religion is expansive, claiming territories of thought and behaviour usually outside the scope of modern conceptualizations. In Caso's study, secular thought is impossible; the Aztec religion is totally consumptive, devouring every moment of quotidian life. "Religion ... took the place of technical innovation."⁵¹ Even the Aztec political system was a "religious theocracy."⁵² The pervasive and domineering Aztec religion kept Aztec society in an eternal state of servility and technological simplicity. Religion was Aztec society's "fatal limitation,"⁵³ and the source of its failure to recognize a "constantly progressive ideal that would have led the people to conceive of life as something more than an invariable, meticulous repetition of ceremonies in honor of the gods."⁵⁴

Even in the new fervour of cultural synthesis, diachronic processes were never completely absent. Caso himself, although sidelining historical processes, clearly placed the Aztecs in the polytheistic stage of religious evolution.⁵⁵ In 1959, Bernal Ignacio, "a disciple of Caso", recognized the independent thrust of empire (as opposed to religion) in his work *Mexico Before Cortés*.⁵⁶ Jacques Soustelle, in his complex and highly acclaimed work, *The Daily Life of the Aztecs on the Eve of the Spanish Conquest*,⁵⁷ published first in French in 1955, explored the internal tensions of Aztec culture in a fundamentally class-based analysis. In his interpretation, the "wonderfully powerful cement" of Aztec culture was beginning to crumble as new tensions

⁴⁹ Alfonso Caso, *The Aztecs: People of the Sun*, trans. L. Dunham (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1958).

⁵⁰ Caso, *Aztecs*, 90.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 96.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 90.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 95.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 475.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 5-7.

⁵⁶ Ignacio Bernal, *Mexico Before Cortés*, trans. W. Barnstone (New York, 1963).

⁵⁷ Jacques Soustelle, *The Daily Life of the Aztecs on the Eve of the Spanish Conquest*, trans. P. O'Brien (London: Pelican Books, 1964).

developed “in which the nature of ownership was changing and in which the ideas of public service and of private wealth were coming into hidden conflict.”⁵⁸

Thus, in the post-W.W.II era, scholarship exhibited an uneasy marriage between the analysis of cultures as independent totalities and their analysis as divided entities succumbing to the forces of often universal causative factors such as class and political organization. In fact, as a means of demonstrating the consistent tidal movement in this ‘post-Seler’ era between empiricism and synthesis, between synchronic and diachronic analysis, and between relativism and universalism, we might take the example of Eric R. Wolf’s fascinating book, *Sons of the Shaking Earth*, published in 1959.⁵⁹ In the preface to *Sons*, Wolf makes his position very clear: a) he is “a scientist” and “anthropologist”, b) he has produced a “synthesis ... of what anthropologists have learned about one area of the world,” and c) such a synthesis is fundamentally diachronic as it is “an attempt to trace the lifeline of a culture.”⁶⁰ Wolf’s analysis is primarily geographic, applying the heartland/hinterland theory to pre-Columbian Mesoamerica. This theory, which examines the relationship between economic/political centres and their periphery, or their hinterlands, is used by Wolf to demonstrate the fact that the fragmented pockets of culture in pre-Columbian Mesoamerica derived from the roughness of the terrain and its stark impossibility to develop large-scale irrigation projects. In Wolf’s analysis, geography is the limiting factor of Mexican history, restraining the development of closely knit empires and generating instead weak links between core regions and their peripheries. The end result is that:

The rule of the Mexica thus had its inherent limitations. Possessed of a powerful apparatus for conquest, they did not overcome the essentially insular character of Middle American society. They merely terrorized the constituent islands into temporary submission. As they sowed the dragon’s teeth of terror, they reaped the whirlwind. As a society and as a culture, they were doomed to disappear in a holocaust of their own creation.⁶¹

For Wolf, the central conflict in Mesoamerican culture was one determined by nature; the centrifugal demands of nature on culture were in strict competition with the centripetal desires of humanity.

Let us make special note of the fact that Wolf’s analysis is fundamentally universalizing: its story is one where nature is pitted against human nature. Although the people and their artifacts are unique to the Indians of Mesoamerica, the underlying structure of their story is not culturally specific. Environmental determinants led to the spattering of culture in pockets,

⁵⁸ Ibid., 93.

⁵⁹ Eric R. Wolf, *Sons of the Shaking Earth* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1959).

⁶⁰ Ibid., vii.

⁶¹ Ibid., 151.

leaving only a small number of areas naturally equipped to produce large surpluses. These surpluses free up labour from the 'food quest' and result in the production of value added goods in the heartland. Such a process is self-perpetuating: specialization in the heartland attracts the staple goods of the periphery, thus increasing the independence of the centre from the production of food products and causing a further intensification of the production of value-added goods. Such a causative chain is, as we can see, a causative circle. Like all such chains, the process spirals not only upward, but if the chain of events is reversed, then also downward. An empire is born, but its death is imminent. In the end, we are forced to conclude that Wolf's story is not a history of the Mexica, but a historical lesson in the determinant effects of gravity:

Through widening conquest and widening trade, the solar system of the favoured area becomes a galaxy, absorbing the constellations of villages and towns beyond its limits, building a super-regional ecology under the aegis of the growing state. But the process is also reversible. The cohesion of such a galaxy depends ultimately on the pull of its center; if the key area weakens in its power of attraction, the satellite systems slip again from their orbits around it and resume their independent courses.⁶²

In light of Wolf's use of the heartland/hinterland model, we should see him in much the same light as Morgan and Bandelier: as a scientist intent on assigning facts to universal theories of cultural evolution. Until the 1980s, universalistic theories such as Wolf's and relativist scholarship inspired by Seler co-existed and at times intertwined. We must recognize that to trace the organism over time and to describe its internal mechanics are two closely related tasks. We have already seen that Soustelle used a class-conflict model to interrupt the unity of Caso's ordered description of Mexica religion. Thirty years later, we see the same odd historiographical tendency in the work of ethnohistorian Alfredo López-Austin.

In *The Human Body and Ideology: Concepts of the Ancient Nahuas*,⁶³ López Austin's work is so exemplary that we might see it as the crowning achievement of such a paradoxical marriage. We might say for all intents and purposes that in 1980 (the date of its first Spanish publication), with *The Human Body*, López Austin delivered to us the last substantial work of the tradition of universal history in the context of Central America. His two volume book explores the complex views of the human body in the Basin of Mexico. Volume two is a tribute to scholarship: hundreds of pages of tabulated taxonomies, classifying nearly every aspect of the treatment and understanding of the body in ancient times. These pages exemplify the countless hours and years of analysis of pre- and post-Cortesian documents. The first edition of *The Human Body* may have been published in 1980, but López Austin's work in the field of ancient

⁶² Ibid., 20.

⁶³ Alfredo López Austin, *The Human Body and Ideology: Concepts of the Ancient Nahuas*, vols. 1 and 2, trans. B.R. Ortiz de Montellano and T. Ortiz de Montellano (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1988).

medicine dates back to 1965. The book is a veritable tribute to empiricism and the quiet, but tiresome, work of those seeking erudition.

If López Austin's book is most clearly identified with the empiricist tradition, it has another aspect which makes clear why such an analysis was undertaken. The author states that "the central purpose of this book is to explain an ideological system and its place in the societies that gave it birth."⁶⁴ López Austin traces the conceptualization of the human body to an internal class conflict in Mexican society. Coercion "was an inefficient and dangerous weapon for those who blandished [sic] it." Instead, ideological control was a more useful tool: "In this system and in the rest of the ideological complex, the form of domination of the government apparatus over the land-holding community was projected onto [the human body]."⁶⁵ There is a jarring twist to *The Human Body*. We begin with an empirical study of medicine, physiology, and anatomy; the work has a definitive air of scientific authority, doubtless a product of his thematic focus (medicine), his linguistic methodology, and his classificatory tables. Yet, even with our critical defences disengaged, we are from time to time forcibly roused from our intellectual stupor by the familiar lexicon of the class-conflict model. We check the date of publication! *The Human Body* is the best and last example of empiricism applied to a universal explanatory model. It would be fruitless to look for a causative relationship between López Austin and subsequent writers in the field of pre-Columbian culture. I am invoking *The Human Body* because it emerged at a point in which traditions and objectives were shifting; it marks an historical threshold, if you will, after which time the pre-Colombian Indian is given few, if any, analogues and the terms of culture become relative, insular, knowable only on their own terms. As the relativity of the human sciences was brought into sharp focus,⁶⁶ comparisons between pre-Columbian cultures and those of the West were deemed inappropriate, academic taboos.

Thus, the 1980s mark the conspicuous disappearance of two scholarly activities. First, with the exception of a few passing speculations, Aztec culture was no longer traced across time, causing the cultural entity to lose its historical perspective. Second, universal modeling disappeared while the reconstruction of homogenous systems and modes of thought ran rampant. In the absence of analogy, which is the common sense method of testing the truthfulness of a proposition, pre-Columbian cultures became the pre-eminent testing ground for the imaginative limits of academia.

⁶⁴ Ibid., v.1, 4.

⁶⁵ Ibid., v.1, 87.

⁶⁶ In France, and in other radical academic circles, such a critique came about much earlier, in part because of Michel Foucault's popular book, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Vintage Books, 1994). It was first published into English in 1971.

5. Misanthropy

I want now to explore the possibility that the desire to protect pre-Columbian culture from the corrupting influence of Western categories of thought is closely related to the West's search for a culture that opens up the possibility of seeing the world in a non-human-centric way.

Ironically, in upholding the independence of their historical object and in defining it as completely alien to the West, cosmologists have rediscovered the Indian. But they have neglected to realize the great irony of their discovery: that the image of the Indian as inhumanly natural is only their own misanthropic image mirrored back at them in the form of guilt (for destroying 'paradise') and regret (for missed opportunities, for taking the irrevocable Rousseaudian step, for choosing themselves over nature).

Let us take as an example of recent scholarship the incredible interpretation of Tenochca culture, *Aztecs: An Interpretation*, given to us in 1991 by Inga Clendinnen. Clendinnen has both a way with words and a keenness of observation that stamps her book with the mark of excellence of which most scholars only dream. Note the book's timely date of publication: one year before the 'celebration' of the Quincentennial of Columbus' arrival in the New World. In the shadow of the 'celebration' some scholars and activists worked to call attention to the crimes of conquest and colonization. Other scholars, like Clendinnen, did their part to bring to life the 'What ifs' of pre-Columbian culture. What if this fundamentally different culture had survived? What could we have learned about them —from them, and in the process, about ourselves, and our own cultural exigencies and limitations? In the foreboding shadow of 1992, *Aztecs* is an attempt to reconstruct the marvels of pre-Columbian Mexica culture.

Despite her attempt to have us believe otherwise, the only methodological difference between Clendinnen's book and other examples of scholarship that explore Aztec cosmivision is that she interprets ritual action while "[m]ost reconstructions of Nahuatl thought rest on the semantic and etymological analysis of sixteenth-century texts in Latin and Nahuatl."⁶⁷ Although she slights the history of mentalités, calling these academics "natural theologians", insults López Austin's work as based on "a simple Marxist analysis," and even states that her object is not "as self-conscious as 'ideology' nor as passive as 'world view',"⁶⁸ her book cannot be understood in any other way but as an unambiguous contribution to cosmological reconstruction, albeit based on distinctions of action rather than linguistic categories. Her work is undeniably synchronic in that she herself states that "I want to retrieve the 'interior architecture'" of Mexica society, and

⁶⁷ Clendinnen, *Aztecs*, 4.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 2 and 4.

also laments that “the account will unhappily, but by necessity, lack historical depth.”⁶⁹ Thus, we see that *Aztecs* contains all of the attributes of cosmological history: it lacks chronology, is synchronic, searches for basic principles hidden away within the structure of culture, and attempts to explain and integrate contradictory elements into a cultural totality by exposing their shared cultural logic.

In *Aztecs*, Clendinnen takes on the most paradoxical aspect of Tenochca society (a high civilization that practices human sacrifice on a scale previously undreamed of) by making a ‘close reading’ of ritual, and more specifically, rituals of human sacrifice, in Mexica society. The Spaniards were equally sickened by such extreme and frequent acts of deliberate human violence, but they were equally bewildered by the incongruity between human sacrifice and the indescribable marvels of Tenochtitlan, The Sum of All Wonders, the city that awed the Spaniards and set their greed voraciously desiring. Inga Clendinnen set as her problem the integration of these two cultural tendencies, between which exists in the Western mind an insurmountable abyss, the exemplary opposition between civilization and savagery. In the following quotation, she re-enacts human sacrifice so very well that her description is worth quoting at length. Nevertheless, important for our purposes is our reaction to the work as Clendinnen compels us to confront our own affections:

The victims who died on the killing stone, like those who fought in the gladiatorial combat, had been stripped of their distinctive warrior regalia, and wore the red and white body-paint of the warrior captive destined for death. If the most courageous did indeed leap up the pyramid steps, shouting the praises of their city, their voices would not have carried far in the thin air. Others, faltering or swooning, were dragged by the hair by one of the swarm of attendant priests. The watchers must have seen an unfluent movement of men, climbing or stumbling or dragged up the steps; then seized, flung back, a priest’s arm rising, falling, rising again; the flaccid bodies rolling and bouncing down the pyramid’s flanks. What they would see most clearly would be those bodies, and the blood, drenching the stone, the priests, then beginning its slow tide down the stairs. A disturbing sight, for men who dreamed and women who had sung and painted their faces for the signs of warriorhood. Honours so hardly won were denied, ignored, made meaningless as men, jealous of the least indicators of rank and ordered in accordance with that rank, watched undifferentiated bipeds being done to bloody death. They watched again as each broken, emptied cadaver was taken up to be carried to the captor’s home temple for dismemberment and distribution: flesh scraped from skulls and thighbones; fragments of flesh cooked and eaten; human skins, dripping with grease and blood, stretched over living flesh; clots of blood scooped up to smear the temple walls.⁷⁰

There is really no need for comment on the manner in which our sensibilities are assaulted by such a description. We shall soon see that by playing on our abhorrence of violence and our sympathies for nature, Clendinnen enables us to change hatred into love and even nostalgia.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 261.

Clendinnen's resolution to the Aztec paradox is simple yet unthinkable to the western mind, unthinkable because it counters our vanity, our individual passions, and most importantly, our humanity. The basic analogy between the woman's womb and the earth itself as womb, was, for Clendinnen, the "foundation of Mexica thought." If the womb was the earth, "human flesh [was] equated with maize, vegetable food, and the earth itself; human blood with rain and flowing water; the human heart with the sun and its heat." The Mexica rituals of human sacrifice were an expression of that essential human/earth analogy, says Clendinnen. All earthly objects—humans, animals, hills, forests, corn—were all created equal by the Giver of Life. Quoting Clendinnen: "What the rituals finally and most powerfully represented was a vision subversive of human distinctions, with all the elegancies and elaborations of the social order collapsed into the carnal indifference of death." The individual in this context, that is, the 'self', was a weak and "highly vulnerable social construct, made or unmade through a series of public acts, and to a particular notion of 'fate'."⁷¹ Clendinnen's long sought solution to the problem of human sacrifice is fundamentally *anti-humanist*; she has discovered a human culture that does not recognize a divide between itself and the external world, does not conceive of a difference between self and other, and is ignorant of progress, the value of the individual, and of its own humanity. What could death mean to a society in which humans do not value their own existence? Her suggestion is the following:

Men could master the terrible randomness of fate only momentarily, and only by yielding to it. Human autonomy flared to light the voluntary act of acquiescence, as the war club or flint knife came smashing down. With the moment of self-extinction came the moment of self-possession.⁷²

The following point must be made absolutely clear: the above assault on our sensibilities is not an unfortunate outcome of scholarship, it is the clever strategy of Clendinnen's argument. As historians, and writers in search of truth, we are made rudely aware of our own disposition to a particular subject, but so much less important do we judge the baggage of the reader.

Clendinnen's genius hinges on her heightened awareness of the emotional posture of her expected readership, and on the recognition that the reader's emotional response to a work indicates his or her own internalization of the subject, or otherwise said, the reader's constant moral trafficking between the juxtaposed terms of Self and Other.

Thus, readers must confront their own responses to Clendinnen's portrayal of Tenochca culture in order that her argument have its full effect. Clendinnen's answer to the long asked question is unbearable, unbearable because we are brought to believe that our abhorrence derives

⁷¹ Ibid., 143.

⁷² Ibid., 152.

from our own 'unnatural' distinction between humanity and nature. It is unbearable because we realize that Clendinnen's analysis of Aztec culture is a criticism of our own Western sensibilities. Our abhorrence brings us face to face with our 'vanities and affections' and we begin to question the necessity of our most fundamental cultural values. Where we believe in the sanctity of life, Clendinnen shows us a culture where life enjoyed no privileged position within the scope of the earth's regenerative cycle. Where we believe that violence should only be used as a means to protect against violence, Clendinnen gives us an image of a culture in which the public butchering of human beings was a part of daily life. And most importantly, where we see humanity as the most sacred and prized possession, our opposite is projected back to us: a culture in which humanity was seen as an obstacle to the understanding of reality, so much so that "[w]ith the moment of self-extinction came the moment of self-possession."

Clendinnen's strategic use of Western affections would fail miserably if she were not able to rest her argument upon the back of two sets of current popular beliefs. The first of these belongs to the long history of Western misanthropy in which the more general belief in the corruption of humanity is made more particular, historical, and cultural, so that we can see clearly a tradition in Western thought that is convinced of its own perversity, that Western culture has at some point in our past taken a step in the wrong direction (i.e. the Rousseaudian step) that irrevocably disjunctured ourselves from nature. The second set of popular beliefs, which although different from the first, is closely related to it (in fact, the latter results from the former): the Ecological Indian. The term was coined by ethnohistorian Shepard Krech III, and he defines it as a "noble image speaking to ecological wisdom and prudent care for the land and its resources...; [it is] the Native North American as ecologist and conservationist."⁷³ It should be made clear that Krech's objective in the *Ecological Indian* was to refute the idea of the Ecological Indian, and not to strengthen it. Such a vision of the Indian as a paragon of environmental morality is, according to Krech, a manifestation of a much older, complex, and often contradictory image of the Indian as Noble Savage.⁷⁴

Yet, Krech explored the idea of the Ecological Indian in regard to Native Americans who lived as hunters and gatherers (save his assessment of the Hohokom agriculturists, which looks solely at technology and conservation). He did *not* look at the image of the Ecological Indian as an agriculturist who by Clendinnen's account was supposedly in *tune with nature* and living beneath the oppressive weight of the idea of the regenerative cycle. Yet, the image of the

⁷³ Shepard Krech III, *The Ecological Indian: Myth and History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), 16.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 17.

'Indian as conservationist' or the 'Indian as a caring custodian of the land' must be viewed as sharing a common origin and discourse as those images of the Indian as a complex, civilized, philosophical being who has come to accept the limits of self and the servility of humanity. We must come to realize that in such a discourse the common denominator is the strategic deployment of the Ecological Indian as a model of connectedness with nature, and it is meant to contrast, confront, and then remedy the belief in our own (Western) disconnectedness. In such a way, we must be prepared to recognize the role played the Ecological Indian in our own misanthropic history of the world, as conquered, dominated and plundered by Western civilization. Such a history is constantly retold, sometimes emphasizing our greed and lust for wealth and pleasure, and then remedied by the need for an ethic of conservation and preservation; at times it speaks against 'progress,' the negative impact of science and technology, and our misplaced faith in humanity; its remedy, on the other hand, is the idea of ecology and the elimination of 'humanity,' not the species, the idea.

On the eve of the Quincentennial, Clendinnen played skillfully into such a well established discourse (that was, of course, supported by widespread public sympathies). Hers was not the first or last to represent the Indian or even the Tenochca as our antithesis. She was simply one of the more recent and best stated versions of the theme that has grown exponentially since the growth of the environmental movement of the 1970s. We have seen that the image of the Ecological Indian is buried in Western misanthropy, but the origin and structure of such misanthropic beliefs have not yet been clarified. I will now attempt such a clarification, with the final purpose to show how the Ecological Indian was the light by which we discover our own (supposedly unique) perversity.

At the heart of the problem is Western bi-polarity, wherein the debate rages between an exaggerated sense of self-love and an equally overdeveloped sense of self-hatred. It is the latter of these two extremities that concerns us here, for in it we find that such a lack of self-esteem derives from the perception that we are forever bound by an insidious and ancient dissection of the world into two opposing entities, civilization and wilderness. Such a belief has two important characteristics: first, like most self-esteem problems, it results in a highly developed sense of self-pity and in the conviction that we alone suffer from such an illness, and second, it searches deep into our own cultural childhood and eventually lays blame on the teachings and practices of our 'parents', the Roman practice of domination and the Christian justification to do so. In the following few paragraphs we shall look at the justification supplied by Christianity, not to lay blame, but to demonstrate the manner in which two Christian topoi interact so that the stability of a dichotomy (the topos of civilization/wilderness) is subjected to the judgement of

Christian morality. Such an encounter produced an ever oscillating judgement wherein at times civilization represented God's divine image, and at others, the image of evil.

In Christian teaching, man was given dominion over all animals. In the Edenic paradise in which he and his helpers lived, all animals lived together in harmony. However, the fall of Eden led to a dispersal of animals, resulting in a situation in which those that stayed by man's side were considered natural, while those that lay outside of his now diminished domain were unnatural, wild beasts. The wilderness, as untamed nature, was not the place of beauty, tranquillity and purity with which we now associated it; it was disorder, a place of evil, and the abode of the anti-Christian. Historian Matt Cartmill notes that

Christian tradition condemns the wildness of wild animals as a satanically incited rebellion against man's divinely constituted authority over nature. ... This traditional Christian image of the wilderness as a sort of terrestrial Hell, a demoniacally perverted caricature of Eden, is diametrically opposite to the familiar modern conception of wilderness as a domain of beauty, purity, and order that must be protected from defiling human incursion. Wild nature began to acquire this aura of holiness in the Middle Ages.⁷⁵

The implications of the reversal of morality within the civilization/wilderness dichotomy are certainly worth exploring for they point toward an incipient form of misanthropy. Historian William Cronon explored this misanthropic theme in his introduction to *On Common Ground*. He states, in an unmistakably satirical tone, that "Wilderness is the natural, unfallen antithesis of an unnatural civilization that has lost its soul. It is a place of freedom in which we can recover the true selves we have lost to the corrupting influences of our artificial lives."⁷⁶ Wherein we note that Cartmill tracked the moral reversal to the Middle Ages, Cronon attributes it to the Enlightenment. Cronon examines the idea of Nature in this context as a surrogate for God, a monolithic entity, capitalized, it is "One Thing with One Name."⁷⁷ Civilization (as human culture separated from Nature) was torn asunder from the inherent logic of nature. The Enlightenment Philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau, in his *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, attempted to retrieve the moment in human history where the species faltered, separating irrevocably from natural law. For Rousseau the point of departure is decisive:

from the moment one man began to stand in need of the help of another; from the moment it appeared advantageous to any one man to have enough provisions for two, equality disappeared, property was introduced, work became indispensable, and vast

⁷⁵ Matt Cartmill, *A View to a Death in the Morning: Hunting and Nature through History* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1993), 51.

⁷⁶ William Cronon, "Introduction," in *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature*, ed. William Cronon (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995), 80.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 35.

forests became smiling fields, which man had to water with the sweat of his brow, and where slavery and misery were soon seen to germinate and grow up with the crops.⁷⁸

If on the one hand the West has a long misanthropic tradition with strong Enlightenment overtones, we should be fully aware of another tradition, humanism, which since the Renaissance has continually countered the moral reversal. Philosopher David Ehrenfeld, writing in 1978 at the time of incipient environmental awareness, in his book *The Arrogance of Humanism*, clearly reflects such misanthropic sentiments by arguing that “some of humanism’s religious assumptions are among the most destructive ideas in common currency.”⁷⁹ He goes on to claim that its main principle, “supreme faith in human reason,” is a product of Christianity that gave humans dominion over animals and created humans in God’s image.⁸⁰ The pride of being chosen by God as a privileged species, according to Ehrenfeld, has resulted in a conquest attitude toward nature with horrendous environmental impacts. Other scholars, such as historian Michel Foucault makes an early (1966) criticism of human-centred culture in the *Order of Things*. At the end of his highly controversial book which explores the appearance of the human sciences and their peculiar focus on ‘man as a privileged object of study,’ he declares that “one can be sure that man is a recent invention...[of the nineteenth century that will] ... be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea.”⁸¹

And so we see that in the 1960s and ‘70s (as epitomized by Foucault and Ehrenfeld), humanity emerged in scholarship as an invented and avoidable concept that artificially divided our species from nature. In the ‘90s, scholars such as Cartmill and Cronon have shown that such discourse plays into the long history of Western misanthropy and ultimately reinforces a much older and dangerous distinction between ourselves and nature. Such a critique of Western scholarship is vital to the effort of obtaining an accurate picture of pre-Columbian Mexico. And thus, we as readers must be vigilant to the invocation of our own sympathies in works such as Clendinnen’s *Aztecs*. By understanding our own attachment and moral position to such subjects, we will clarify the image of the Indian as he lived before the catastrophic collision of his world with that of his ancient brethren.

Guided by Western misanthropy and the environmental movement, radical scholars quickly rejected technological based solutions to environmental problems as Band-Aid solutions. Larger, deeper changes had to be made in the underlying assumptions beneath Western thought.

⁷⁸ Jean Jacques Rousseau, “A Discourse on the Origin of Inequality,” in *The Social Contract and Discourses*, trans. G.D.H. Cole (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1973), 92.

⁷⁹ David Ehrenfeld, *The Arrogance of Humanism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 3.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁸¹ Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 386-7.

A society marked by the notions of progress, rationality, and domination cannot live in harmony with nature, it was (and is) said. Scholars began to look for alternative worldviews that could be used as models to reconfigure the Westerner's relationship with the non-human world. In their search they found the unadulterated Indian, standing within his culture, and in anthropologist Clifford Geertz' opinion, "suspended in webs of significance that he himself has spun."⁸² Indeed, if they had looked hard enough they would have found an entire discourse to which they could have attached their works. For those of us living in the Americas, and I suspect for many people living in Europe, the cultures of the New World have served as distorted images of our own identity. The Ecological Indian, as an aspect of the Noble Savage, is our antithesis. If we believe in progress, he stands as barbarian or savage. In the light cast by the burgeoning misanthropy of the 1970s and '80s, he is the contrasting image to our scientific, religious, and technological perversity.

The implications of worldview solutions to the current environmental crisis are great for they involve structural changes to our socio-economic organization and/or paradigm shifts in our own mode of thought. Such changes are hard to imagine. In fact, because they attempt to escape the Western mind, they are required, almost by definition, to border the imaginable; they must verge on the unthinkable. Such a discourse spins out of control within the vicious circle it has created. It cannot be otherwise; the more readily the solution is understood, the closer it is to our own mode of thought, and thus the less we have changed.

Thus, we have identified the roots of historical works such as Inga Clendinnen's *Aztecs*. The merging of three separate factors, a meagre historical record that lacks the human perspective, the historiographical trend of culminating in cultural relativism, and popular beliefs in Western misanthropy has brought us to the current position where fantasy seems to dominate pre-Columbian scholarship. Each new study seems to take us further away from the realm of the normal and into a time and place where the rules of human logic and affections are suspended; we have entered a cultural black hole. Cultural relativists demand that an attempt be made to explore foreign cultures in their own (foreign) terms. Of course, aside from the stark impossibility of accomplishing such a fanciful desire, the assertion can and should be made that we should at least try to pay attention to the distinctions between words amongst different languages, especially those languages as foreign as the Aztec, Nahuatl. It is assumed that if a word's foreignness cannot be maintained through careful sidestepping of immediate correlations with obvious Western categories of thought (which represent innumerable stumbling blocks), it

⁸² Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture," in *Knowledge and Postmodernism in Historical Perspective*, ed. Joyce Applyby (New York: Routledge, 1996), 311.

is necessary to leave behind shadows in the translations, places where the correlations between another language and our own becomes far less than symmetrical. Put simply, if the term is understood completely, the translator has failed. It is not only necessary but desired that a degree of doubt remain. Knowledge of the Other, in this sense, is equivalent to its assimilation.

With the imagination running off madly in all directions, it is no wonder that the portrait of the Indian that we most often see resembles The Crying Indian, a man lamenting the loss of the past and fearing his and his family's future in a continent threatened by Western culture.⁸³ He represents a culture in tune with nature, or better said, his tears represent the discovery of nature, for in times past humanity and nature were so closely intertwined that the Indian remained ignorant of their own existence. Our portrait of the Indian bespeaks an entire litany of discourse on the Indian's relationship to the physical world.

For example, let us browse the ideas of some of the most noted scholars in the field. Historian Louise Burkhart argues that the "Nahuas did not set humanity off from the rest of nature like Christianity does. Human beings are a part of the world; the world was not something to be rejected or striven against."⁸⁴ Richard Townsend critiques Western urbanism and praises the Tenochca for having "a concept of urbanism that is very different from that of the West, where religious and civic institutions sharply distinguish man's identity from that of untamed nature."⁸⁵ Ángel Garibay, in his introduction to *Book 11* of Sahagún's *Historia*, admonishes those with a low opinion of pre-Columbian Mexico to pay close attention to *Book 11*, stating: "Este Libro es el que deben estudiar, más que ninguno otro, aquellos que tienen el prejuicio de la rudeza, de la barbarie, de la tosquedad de nuestros indios. El amor a la naturaleza en sus grados todos es signo de distinción intelectual y de delicadeza de emociones."⁸⁶ The desire to fault the Westerner's mode of thought does not originate and terminate in the field of Aztec studies. Jim Miller, one of the most noted historians of native-white relations in Canada, was absolutely clear on his position: "At the root of the environmental problem is Western society's worldview; and the solution could lie in adoption of the aboriginal peoples' distinctly different outlook on the cosmos and humans' place therein. ... Indigenous peoples

⁸³ See Image 3 in Appendix III.

⁸⁴ Louise M. Burkhart, *The Slippery Earth: Nahuatl-Christian Moral Dialogue in Sixteenth-Century Mexico* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1989), 48.

⁸⁵ Richard F. Townsend, "Coronation at Tenochtitlan," in *The Imagination of Matter: Religion and Ecology in Mesoamerican Traditions*, ed. D. Carrasco (Great Britain: B.A.R., 1989), 160.

⁸⁶ I translate this as "This is the Book that should be studied, more than any other, by those who hold the prejudiced belief of the simplicity, barbarity, and savagery of our Indians. The love of nature in all its forms is a sign of intellectual distinction and refinement of emotions." Ángel María Garibay K. in his Introduction to Book 11 of Sahagún, *Historia General*, 615.

...are cooperative and compatible with the environment, [while the European is] competitive and destructive.”⁸⁷

My purpose in including the above comments from different historians is to demonstrate that there are very good reasons to suspect that such images of the Indian tell us more about ourselves than about their true identity. Debates on current issues often spill into historical discourse. My criticism of the worldview camp is designed to show the insoluble relationship between our own Western yearning for environmental sustainability and academic research on the relationship between Indigenous peoples and their natural environment. My point is that our yearning for another way of living in the world has resulted in the ‘discovery’ of the Indian as our idealized Other, and of a society which might relieve us of our self-diagnosed perversity. If the following chapters of this study succeed in any respect, I hope to cast a shadow of doubt upon the image of the Indian as that idealized Other, and to demonstrate that the pre-Columbian Tenochca were fully aware of their own humanity and the clear distinction between themselves and the world around them.

6. A Humanist Perspective

In an extremely insightful book, *The Conquest of America: the question of the Other*, Tzvetan Todorov examines the Conquest in terms of each side’s (both Indian and Spaniard’s) ability to judge each other’s military strategy. Cortés was a pragmatist; he was able to see the situation as it was, make alliances, arrange troops, make political and diplomatic manoeuvres. Cortés, unlike his predecessor, Christopher Columbus, Todorov argues, succeeded in conquest because he recognized the singularity of the event and the basic humanness of the Indians he was set to defeat. Columbus, on the other hand, “does not succeed in his human communications because he is not interested in them. ... In Columbus’ hermeneutics human beings have no particular place. ... Columbus speaks about the men he sees only because they, too, after all, constitute a part of the landscape.”⁸⁸ For Todorov, Moctezoma and Columbus communicated within the same set of principles; Moctezoma could not admit the Spaniard into the realm of the human; when Cortés spoke, Moctezoma did not listen: “Even when the information reaches Montezuma, his interpretation of it, though necessary, is made in the context of a

⁸⁷ Jim Miller, “Conclusion,” in *Sweet Promises: A Reader on Indian-White Relations in Canada*, ed. Jim Miller (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1991), 466.

⁸⁸ Todorov, *Conquest*, 34.

communication with the world, not of that with men; it is his god from whom he seeks advice....”⁸⁹ Todorov, then, concludes that the Aztecs fell to the Spaniards because of, among other reasons, their “incapacity to perceive the other’s human identity —i.e. to recognize him both as equal and different.”⁹⁰

There is no small irony in the fact that on the eve of the Quincentennial, scholars find themselves in the same difficult position as Christopher Columbus: they have failed to recognize the essential humanness of the Indian —his similarities and differences included. The following exploration of the Tenochca’s view of his relationship with the world around him is an attempt to do this, to discover the Indian’s humanity, his paralyzing fear of our shared Other (nature) and his attempted conquest of it. In such an investigation, I make every effort to insure that an attempt to recover the Tenochca’s lost humanity does not become a whitewashing of Tenochca differences and a noxious process of unequivocal assimilation. To evade the Other, we do not invoke another reversal of the dichotomy, give it a quick make-over, and finish by producing another image of Self. Instead, Todorov has taught us the secret of Cortés’ success: he was able to recognize the basic humanity behind the mysterious world of Tenochca cultural appearances, and to skillfully distinguish between sameness and difference. I hope to do the same, but with less violence and more patience, and as a part of an ancient, although ever widening and intensifying, discourse of Man in the Universe.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 72.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 76.

Chapter Two:

Encountering Nature in the City: The Tenochca's New Perspective

1. Introduction

As the city grew, the inhabitants of Tenochtitlan looked back on their own history with pride and even conceit. When Moctezoma the Younger assumed control of the state in 1502, the city was not yet one hundred sixty years old. Yet it had achieved a position of supreme authority throughout a vast region that stretched from the Pacific to Atlantic coasts and whose length (from north-west to south-east) was more than 750 kilometres.¹ Tenochtitlan was more populous, its political structure more complex and hierarchical, and its streets more orderly than any city previously seen, heard of, or remembered by its inhabitants.

In the current chapter, we will explore two related aspects of the emerging Tenochca society, each retracing in its own way the scope of encounters between the inhabitants of the insular urban core and non-human environments and animals. My first objective, then, is to bring to the fore the details of Tenochca material culture—defined here for our purposes as economic goods and implements, and the activities associated with the procurement distribution and consumption of those goods. This task will allow us to glean from the sources the scope of everyday relations between humans and animals in the city. But more importantly, our look into material culture helps us understand the Tenochca environmental outlook and the departure of such an outlook from the more generalized culture of Mesoamerica. Thus, by outlining the nature of historical disjuncture in Tenochca material culture, we come one step closer to understanding the multitude of strange and aberrant cultural traits that marked the Tenochca environmental outlook. Following this initial task, and keeping the details of this material culture in mind, we will focus our attention on Tenochca cultural perceptions and will attempt to sketch out the details of Tenochca thought in regard to the non-human environments located on the periphery of the city, as expressed by historical narratives and the drama of ceremony.

¹ See Map 1 in Appendix II.

In accomplishing these two tasks, a picture emerges in which Tenochca culture (both material and immaterial) appears to be in a state of rapid flux and in which we see a deep historical incongruity with past civilizations, as well as with the Tenochca's own national history. First and foremost, as the Tenochca economy increased in complexity and was constituted less and less by primary resource sector activities, hunting and to a lesser extent agriculture were seen as abstractions—more ideas than reality, more concepts to be played with, overturned, and reconfigured, than actual daily chores. In fact, as the empire expanded, Tenochtitlan's economy was consumed by the activities of civil service and manufacturing. In the process, the scope of interaction with living creatures narrowed considerably to the extent that living animals were most often encountered as pets, objects of speculation and fear, or animated flesh to be sacrificed.

Perhaps the most fascinating discovery of this investigation is the way in which this cultural transformation was conceptualized by the Tenochca in terms of a movement from one landscape to another (rather than from one time period to another), from the desert plains to the forested mountains. Historical disjuncture, then, was best remembered and understood by symbolically representing it in geographical terms. From an analysis of both of these landscapes, we learn that the plains were closely related with both mythical time and the Tenochca historical past. The plains were their mother. The forest, on the other hand, had no such connotation. It was a place of unknown dangers, a place to be conquered; the forest was a threat to human civilization and it needed to be conquered and tamed.

One of the most salient examples of the tendency to see history through the eyes of landscape is the Quecholli Festival. As we will see, the Quecholli Festival was an expression of the inherent conflict between empire and wilderness, centre and periphery. More to the point, it dramatized the difficulty of being human in a predominantly inhospitable world, and it, perhaps better than anything else, shows that instead of bowing to the fatalistic teachings of the Mesoamerican tradition, through the Festival, the Tenochca brutally declared their intention to survive.

2. The New Economy

We must begin by focussing our attention on the economic and cultural changes that quickly transformed the city's inhabitants from wandering migrants (Chichimeca from the north) into the most successful artisan and merchant culture known in the history of Mesoamerican

cultures. In doing so, we will investigate the role of the Tenochca in the primary resource sector, the breadth of their relationships with animals, and will also bring to light the expanding state and its enormous entourage of political elite, professional bureaucrats, and service men and women.

The market at Tlatelolco is the best expression of the new Tenochca economy. On the so-called '*calle de caza*' (Cortes' designation of the portion of the market replete with a great assortment of animals and animal parts), birds of prey were sold alive or dead, and in whole or in pieces (skins, feathers, heads, beaks, and claws all collected, displayed, and sold by certain vendors). It is well known that the Tenochca made extraordinary use of the feathers of a huge variety of birds including, but not exclusively: the resplendent trogon (quetzal), mexican trogon, roseate spoonbill, troupial, cotinga, emerald toucanet, hummingbird, many varieties of parrot and macaw, as well as birds of prey such as eagle, hawk, and owl, waterfowl such as heron, goose, mallard, and pelican, and finally, on the domestic side, turkey, quail, and duck. In Book 11 of *The Florentine Codex*, careful distinctions are made between feathers of the same species depending upon the bird's age and the location on the bird's body from which the feather was taken.² In fact, more than thirty-five pages are devoted to the listing of bird species, colouring, habitat, and unique characteristics. It is interesting to note that only on rare occasions do Sahagún's informants describe the behaviour or nature of these birds. The great majority of entries go into great detail about the bird's unique colouring on every different part of its body. This information, along with the occasional listing of nesting habits and calls, suggests that their knowledge of these birds did not exceed their utilitarian interests in them for purposes of commerce and manufacturing.³

Of course, the market contained many more animal varieties than just birds. One could find there wild animals such as rabbits, hares, opossum, moles, armadillo, tapir, deer, buffalo, cougars, jaguars and ocelots, as well as a great variety of fish, turtles, frogs, salamanders, lizards, and even crocodiles. Smaller animals were particularly prized, such as axocuilin (a yellow hispid worm from the plum tree up to two inches long from which an oil was made for industrial rather than dietary purposes), and then for human consumption, grubs, two varieties of maguey worms (purple and white), the young of black ants (which were actually white and then fried in a pan), the 'honey ant', and a chilli red locust.⁴ And then there were domesticated animals used for food, such as turkeys, quail, ducks, and dogs.

² Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, Book 11, 55-6.

³ *Ibid.*, 19-55, 56 describes how they are torn apart.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 90-98.

The animals found in the market had a diversity of uses. On the one hand, some, like dogs, cougars, ocelots, crocodiles, eagles, and quail were sacrificed for religious purposes. Of all these, quail were most frequently sacrificed, their heads being torn off, and their bodies thrown against a wall, allowing them to run, headless. At the Main Temple precinct, the merchants took quail to Huitzilopochtli.

When he had arrived where the ground drum stood, he then set down the incense ladle. First he beheaded the quail. He cast it on the ground; there it moved, fluttering. He observed closely where it would proceed to go. If it went [north] toward what they called the land of the dead, the right hand of the earth, [the host] was much frightened thereby.⁵

If the bird would flutter to any other direction, it could be taken as a sign of good fortune. Incense was then offered to the four directions and the merchants proceeded to a banquet in which hallucinogenic mushrooms were consumed in order to tempt fate once again. (The sacrificed birds of this festival were eaten.) Other animals, such as the jaguar and crocodile, were again beheaded and then offered for religious purposes, most likely to the temple of Tlaloc as they were symbolic of the underworld, fertility, and the earth as an all consuming beast.⁶

Death by decapitation is a means of butchery rarely imposed on humans. Sacrificial human victims were sacrificed by opening the chest cavity with an obsidian knife or, on special occasions, with the blade of a swordfish. Only thieves and other criminals sentenced to death were executed by way of decapitation. This fact demonstrates a degree of similarity amongst animals and corrupted humans, and demonstrates the exclusion of both groups from the proper (civilized) human realm. The animal/criminal analogy might be challenged in the reader's mind on the grounds that it overlooks the basic religious value of animal sacrifice and the penal function of the other. There is, in my mind, a degree of truthfulness in such a position. Religious ceremonies, and all of their physical paraphernalia, were located (ideologically) at the centre of Tenochca thought and were revered highly for the protection they afforded the city and its inhabitants. Yet, in Tenochca culture, our clearly demarcated divisions of politics, justice, religion, and even 'entertainment' (as we shall see in the follow chapter), are so confused and intertwined that they begin to lose meaning and definition. Because of this, it seems best to me to avoid such Western demarcations of thought and culture. More fruitful is the approach that I

⁵ Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, Book 9, 37.

⁶ For an example of animal sacrifice, see Image 4 in Appendix III which shows the skull of a puma with a precious stone forced between its jaws. For an image of the Earth Monster (Tlaltecuhli), see Image 5 in Appendix III. For the myths of the creation of the world, see "Historia de los Mexicanos Por Sus Pinturas," in *Nueva colección de documentos para la historia de México, Tomo III*, ed. J. G. de Icazbalceta (México: Editorial Porrúa, 1981), and "Legend of the Suns," in *History and Mythology of the Aztecs: Codex Chimalpopoca*, trans. J. Bierhorst (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1992).

have tried to take here: to expose the symbolic value of individual acts through metaphor, historical narrative, and comparative analysis of intra-cultural phenomena. Nevertheless, it is imperative to keep in mind that in terms of sheer numbers, animal sacrifices pale in comparison to the quantity of animals slaughtered for more utilitarian purposes; most animals were simply cut up into their significant parts (jaws, paws, beaks, tails, pelts and hides) and used for utilitarian household purposes: clothing, cooking utensils, decorative items, musical instruments, medicine, etc..

The most fascinating aspect of the *calle de caza* is that the Tenochca had a very small part in the capturing, hunting, and raising of these animals. Most of these animals came from the periphery of the empire: the Pacific and Atlantic coasts, peripheral forests, the northern plains, or the isthmus of Tehuantepec. The roles played by the Tenochca in this economy of wild animals were those of merchants, porters, vendors, and artisans. Exceptions to this rule were a small degree of animal domestication and the primary exploitation of lake resources.

In terms of animal domestication, Mesoamerica had very little experience. Unlike Peru, Mesoamerica did not have any ruminants (llama, alpaca, or vicuña) for the transport of goods, or for wool and food. In Mesoamerica, the domesticated species were turkey, duck, quail, dog, possibly the weasel, and bees (the Mexicans were renowned for their honey). Many different types of birds were tamed, as were monkeys. But, strictly speaking, very few of the Tenochca made a living from keeping domesticated animals. For example, certain individuals, like the 'Feather Seller' and the 'Egg Seller', actually raised turkeys, ducks, and quail for feathers, eggs, and meat.⁷ This production was most likely accomplished on the mainland, very close to the island city. With a population of nearly two hundred thousand people, there was little room in the city for domesticated livestock. Only the state could afford this extravagance. There is evidence to suggest that birds used for ceremonial purposes were kept in a state run building that according to Hernando Cortés contained 1500 'gallinas' (either turkeys or quail).⁸ In any case, these animals were the property of the state, were used for formal ceremonies and state banquets, and would never have been sold in the markets.

Biologist Jared Diamond, in a public lecture delivered at UCLA, argued that environmental conditions made domestication a very difficult task in Mesoamerica.⁹ He states that:

... domestication requires that a wild animal fulfill many prerequisites: the animal has to have a diet that humans can supply; a rapid growth rate; a willingness to breed in

⁷ Florentine Codex, Book 10, 92.

⁸ Cortés, 65.

⁹ Jared Diamond's lecture, www.uclanews.ucla.edu/lectures/Diamond/003.html.

captivity; a tractable disposition; a social structure involving submissive behaviour towards dominant animals and humans; and lack of a tendency to panic when fenced in."¹⁰

There is no doubt that these qualities are beneficial for domestication. However, it is mistaken to reason that because wild animals do not have these characteristics, they are not domesticable; surely it is obvious that such 'naturally' domesticable animals would not survive long in the wild, searching their whole lives for human foods. Domesticated species are made, not found. Inappropriate characteristics are removed through generations of selective breeding and natural selection. The wild boar, auroch, and jungle fowl selectively evolved into the pig, cow, and chicken. Likewise, the turkey and wild turkey have many differences.

Domestic turkeys are larger and more docile than their wild ancestors. Breeding has selected for birds with a rapid growth rate, an efficient conversion of feed to meat, and a high proportion of breast meat. ... Selection for white feathers was to improve the appearance of birds after killing and the removal of feathers. Selection for large breast muscles to increase the proportion of white meat has changed their physical characteristics. Increased body weight has much reduced their ability to fly.¹¹

In short, we recognize the fact that significant behavioural and physical differences exist between the wild and domesticated species of turkey and that these differences were caused by human will over a period of thousands of years. Over such a time period, an unbridgeable gap developed between the domesticate and its wild ancestor; no more is the wild animal suited for life on the farm, than the domesticate is for life in the wilderness.

I do not want to take this argument too far; as Diamond argued, some animals clearly have more potential for domestication. Obviously, we will not make a deer into a horse, and the lack of any suitable beast of burden in Mesoamerica is one factor that would never have been overcome without the interruption of a non-Mesoamerican culture. However, we should not measure domesticability solely in terms of the animal's natural and geographic disposition. The real line which divides domesticable and undomesticable species is fundamentally cultural.

Note the cultural emphasis in the following definition of the domesticate:

Animals are domesticated when they are *kept for clear purposes*, their *breeding is controlled*, *survival depends on humans*, and they have *acquired traits* not found in the wild.¹²

Thus, the shortage of domesticated animals in Mesoamerica may very well be the result of a lack of will, rather than the product of a scarcity of potential domesticates.

Leaving aside any consideration of the astounding fact that Mesoamerica and Peru had

¹⁰ Diamond, *lecture*.

¹¹ College of Agriculture, University of Saskatchewan, www.ag.usask.ca/exhibits/walkway/what/animdom.html.

¹² College of Agriculture, U of S, *animdom*. Italics are mine.

virtually no contact before the arrival of the Spaniards (thus, leaving aside the possibility of domesticating the llama, alpaca, and vicuña), it is interesting to note that certain wild animals such as the tapir and peccary (both pig-like animals whose meats were prized in the days of Tenochtitlan), the rabbit, or the iguana (also a popular and equally savoury meat), had a great deal of potential for domestication, yet they were not. This fact might be explained by assessing the geography of *human* settlement. The dense population of Central Mexico and their extremely efficient use of agricultural lands left little room and little reason to expand the practice of domestication, which is by far the most inefficient use of land. When human labour is plentiful and land is scarce, it is unlikely that domestication will flourish. Moreover, when the benefits of securing livestock are outweighed by the burden of private possession, domestication will not develop. Thus, in Peru, the vicuña (another ruminant) was once domesticated and then abandoned to the wild because its wool was of better quality and the animal is so extraordinarily easy to capture and shear when it was left to itself.¹³ We should note that the Canadian caribou and the Eurasian reindeer are of the same species, but only the latter was domesticated. The rabbit, an animal that fits all of Diamond's criteria, has been successfully bred as a pet and would have enormous potential for farm domestication if only its meat were more avidly desired. The point here is that domestication requires both a will, and a way. And without the former, the latter is irrelevant.

If a small amount of animal husbandry is one exception to the Tenochca's basic absence from primary resource exploitation, then we might consider the role of hunting. Certain authors in the past have tried to explain human sacrifice as a means of demographic and dietary control.¹⁴ However outlandish such an idea may be, it highlights the difficulty experienced by some American scholars to understand the ability of complex urban societies in Mesoamerica to satisfy protein requirements with so few Western food items in the daily diet. If at one time ritualistic cannibalism was given such an explanatory role, then it should not surprise us to learn that wild game, in some cases, is given the same explanatory role.¹⁵ If given any consideration at all, however, the irrationality of this latter idea is quickly revealed. Of all the game available for consumption, deer meat is the only type worthy of consideration. And even in this case, with the population of the Valley of Mexico estimated at over one million people, and the deer population estimated very generously at a maximum of 98,000-130,000 (assuming a 100%

¹³ Padre José de Acosta. "Historia Natural Y Moral de Las Indias". In *Biblioteca de Autores Españoles: Tomo LXXIII: Obras del Padre José de Acosta* (Madrid: Ediciones Atlas, 1954) 135.

¹⁴ E.G. This is the position taken by historian R.C. Padden, amongst others, cited in Keen, 497.

¹⁵ E.G. This is the position taken by archaeologist David Starbuck, cited in Sanders, 488.

increase above optimal deer densities on cultivated land), we discover the maximum contribution to the diet of the inhabitants of the Valley of Mexico to be <0.1-0.1%, an absolutely miniscule amount.¹⁶ It is conceivable that Tenochca noblemen had far more than their fair share of venison and other luxuries (which would have only further reduced the amount available to commoners), but such a tiny fraction of the population is hardly important when considering the total dietary needs of the population. From archaeological evidence we can surmise that as early as 600-300 B.C. the supply of deer meat fell below protein demands, and that by 100 B.C. was an important source of protein while turkey and dog were domesticated.¹⁷ To summarize, as Sanders notes, "...the role of hunting in Prehispanic Central Mexico has been greatly exaggerated."¹⁸

It is interesting to pursue this thread a little further, as our effort to understand the Tenochca fulfilment of protein requirements brings to light the small and dwindling role of animal husbandry in the Tenochca economy, and as such, it brings to the fore once again the very small role the Tenochca played in the primary resource sector. We might turn to other meat sources such as the domesticates of dog and turkey to increase our explanatory power, but as we shall see, such efforts, too, stop far short of a full explanation of protein requirements. Three species of dog were found in Mesoamerica: the *itzcuintli* (the common dog with a full coat of hair; it is currently known as the 'Creole Dog' and is considered to be the common Mexican 'mutt'), the *xoloitzcuintli* (the hairless dog, the puppies of which we might identify as the *teuih*, those dogs fattened for the market; today, the breed is rare but still available), and the *t[tl]alchichi* (the short-legged dog with fur; perhaps the precursor to the modern Mexican Chihuahua). The *itzcuintli* and *tlalchichi* were the common breeds for house pets and they are also the species most similar to those found at ceremonial archaeological sites from the Formative Period (6000 B.C. – 300 A.D.). As pets and human companions, dogs of these species were sacrificed at the funeral of their masters, as they were to accompany him to *Micilan* (the Land of the Dead) as the master's guide, aiding him in the transit across Mictlan's nine rivers. The *xoloitzcuintli*, on the other hand, had greater religious and medicinal value in the Late-Horizon period (Aztec) as it was commonly sacrificed for religious purposes and was used for curative measures.

In terms of the consumption of dog meat as a regular source of protein, however, the picture is far from clear. Undeniably, two breeds of dog were eaten: *xoloitzcuintli* and

¹⁶ Sanders, 73-90, also Sanders, Appendix D.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 489.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 489-90.

tlalchichi. However, documentary evidence suggests that the consumption of dog in Tenochca society was decreasing despite a rapid upward population flux. Although archaeological evidence suggests a steady rise in the consumption of dog from 1500 B.C. to the Late-Horizon period,¹⁹ we can see that its meat was increasingly disparaged in Tenochtitlan. An informant for Sahagún's Florentine Codex stated that the "meat seller ... sells turkeys, turkey meat, venison, rabbit meat, hare, duck, crane, goose, mallard; bird meat, roast birds, quail meat, eagle meat; meat of wild beasts, of opossum..." The informant had reason to omit dog from his list as he continues by asserting that a bad meat vendor "claims dog meat to be edible."²⁰ In another instance, it is stated that in the merchants' festival (*Panquetzaliztli*) dog meat was disguised in the following way: "Then he bought dogs to provide the people as food, perhaps twenty or forty. When they died, they put them with the turkeys which they served; at the bottom of the sauce dish they placed the dog meat, on top they placed the turkey as required."²¹ In another place in the *Codex*, the dog is described as a filthy creature: "It eats all: the flesh of the dead, the spoiled; it eats the revolting, the stinking, the rotting."²² Human sacrifice was a messy affair—on a busy day, hundreds, even thousands of victims tumbled violently to the bottom of the pyramid stairs, already with their chest cavity gaping and their innards exposed, and then the bodies were dismembered, the heads were carried to the infamous skull rack while legs and arms were carried away, paraded through the city and eventually cut up and cooked for ritual consumption. Human remains would surely have been strewn about, innards would lie wasting near the temple, flesh would be dropping from the skull rack, and leg and arm bones, combined with sinew, skin, and other portions, would lie about near hearths scattered throughout the city. As the above quotation makes clear, the dog (along with the animals in Moctezoma's menagerie) helped to clean the city of the victim's flesh.

Because the *Florentine Codex* is a post-Conquest document, there is a strong possibility that the low opinion of dog meat is flavoured with the politics of colonial culture. Undoubtedly, the adoption of Spanish cultural norms would ameliorate the Indian's position within the rigid structure of colonial society. Yet, the position of these informants is even more significant when we consider the fact that the authority to which they are speaking, Fray Bernardino Sahagún, stated himself in the *Historia* that "There are other dogs that they call *tlalchichi*, hairless and plump, that are very good to eat."²³

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 285.

²⁰ Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, Book 10, p. 80.

²¹ Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, Book 9, 48.

²² Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, Book 11, 16.

²³ Sahagún, *Historia*, 628.

This is not to say that all Spaniards agreed with Sahagún. Fray Diego Durán took a trip to the great dog market at Acolman, on a 'quiet' day, only to discover "more than four hundred dogs, small and large, tied up, some still for sale, some already bought." The Spaniard who accompanied him told Durán that the dogs were "to celebrate their festivals, weddings, and baptisms." In response, a despondent Durán lamented that he had "seen that in every village there had been meat vendors where dog meat was sold at a higher price than beef."²⁴ From the evidence outlined above, we see that dog meat was undoubtedly sold and consumed by the residents of Tenochtitlan. Contrary to Durán's statement, the bulk of evidence and all of the best sources either avoid any mention of the consumption of dog or they label the meet as unfit for human consumption. In light of these facts, it seems fair to conclude that the dog's dietary role was secondary to its primary role as pet and as a religious sacrificial victim, and moreover, its dietary role had been substantially reduced by the eve of the Conquest.

In contradiction to most preconceived opinions, the most important primary resource sector of the Tenochca was the lacustrine economy. In fact, in terms of protein resources, we need only heed the words of Doctor Hernández to realize that Western notions of the edible will not suffice. We will not find on his list items such as venison and turkey.

It is a rare animal that their palates spare. ... [They eat] poisonous snakes ... dogs, moles, dormice, worms, lice, mice, lake moss, and although I would rather not have to say this, lake mud, as well as other things of the animal and plant orders that are horrible and disgusting.²⁵

Hernandez' comments are clearly exaggerated—I have never seen reference to the consumption of lice and mice, and his reference to dormice (an Old World species) is undoubtedly mistaken, as are his references to lake moss and mud. Yet, his comments contain more than a thread of truth.

The foot soldier Bernal Díaz del Castillo attested to a popular product named *tecuilatl*: "Also, [there were] fishermen and others who sold cakes made of a substance like mud that they collect from this great lake and that thickens to make loaves that have a flavour something like cheese."²⁶ *Tecuilatl* was not, obviously, 'lake mud', but rather a blue-green algae (*spirulina geitleri*) that thrives in salt water lakes, collected in nets by canoe, laid out in sheets on the shore, and left to dry in the sun. The algae are extremely high in protein (70% per weight), have all of

²⁴ Fr. Diego Durán, *Historia de las Indias de Nueva España e Islas de la Tierra Firme, tomos I & II, segunda edición* (México: Editorial Porrúa, S.A., 1984), II, 185.

²⁵ Francisco Hernández. *The Mexican treasury: The writings of Dr Francisco Hernández* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 76.

²⁶ Bernal Díaz del Castillo, *Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España* (Mexico City: Editorial Porrúa, 1966), 159. My translation.

the essential amino acids, a slow perishability rate, are abundant and have a fast rate of growth.²⁷ In short, *tecuilatl* is, nutritionally speaking, the perfect source of protein. A modern critic, archaeologist William T. Sanders, goes so far as to say that “[c]onsidering the very dense Late Horizon population it probably would not be stretching the point to argue that this resource may have been critical to its maintenance.”²⁸

Tecuilatl was only one of a large variety of lacustrine economic activities in which the Tenochca participated. The list of lacustrine products includes: “five types of fish, frogs, polliwogs, freshwater crustaceans and molluscs, turtles, ... various aquatic insects and their larvae [a type of caviar known as *a[h]uahтли*],”²⁹ reeds, wild rice, red aquatic worms made into a loaf (*ezcahuiltl*),³⁰ ... salt, and a large number of water fowl such as geese, at least 13 species of duck, grebe, heron, crane, coot, water turkey, wood ibis, pelican (for ceremonial purposes as it was considered to be the ‘lord of the lake’), and at two unidentified species (*pipitztl* and *acuicuiyalotl*).³¹

Lacustrine products formed the basis of Tenochtitlan’s protein requirements and they were renowned, and in some cases notorious, for the consumption of such goods. When Tenochtitlan was still paying tribute to the Azcapotzalco, they paid with lake products.³² As an island city, products of the land were always the most difficult to obtain. But even when the empire was well established, we find that visiting rulers were treated to sumptuous meals of “fish and frogs and every variety of bugs from the lake that they eat, and equally ducks” and many other varieties of waterfowl.³³ But even more importantly, more than any other sector of the primary resource economy (hunting, agriculture, forestry, feather collection, or domestication), the Tenochca were engaged in the gathering and selling of lacustrine resources.

This is not to say that agriculture was unimportant to the burgeoning city. Undoubtedly chinampas agriculture (the floating gardens that encompassed the island city) boosted the economy and permitted the Tenochca to support themselves in the early years of their city’s growth. Beans, corn, amaranth, and chia were the mainstay of the Mexican diet; this fact cannot be ignored. But these products alone cannot tell us the entire story; by themselves they lack the

²⁷ William T. Sanders, Jeffrey R. Parsons, and Robert S. Santley, *The Basin of Mexico: Ecological Processes in the Evolution of a Civilization* (New York: Academic Press, 1979), 290.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 290.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 85.

³⁰ Durán, *Historia II*, 59.

³¹ Sahagún, *Florentine Codex, Book 11*, 26-39.

³² Diego Durán, *The History of the Indies of New Spain*, trans. Doris Heyden (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994), 56.

³³ Durán, *Historia II*, 339.

necessary proteins for human development. Moreover, we must remember that the bulk of the Chinampa 'fields' were located in the Xochimilco region, south and east of Tenochtitlan, along the banks of Lakes Xochimilco and Chalco. Moreover, a great deal of agricultural produce was carried to Tenochtitlan as tribute and redistributed to employees of the state as well as to those students and priests involved in religious organizations. Tenochtitlan consumed far more than it ever produced.

Of course, I stress that I am referring only to that part of the economy known as the primary resource sector that, when regarded in the economy as a whole, would only have engaged a small percentage of the city's population. Tenochtitlan had a complex economy that was primarily occupied with the handling of merchandise, its distribution, and most importantly, the provisioning of the state. Most people would find themselves employed in commerce, as merchants, vendors, and porters, as artisans, or for the state as veterinarians and keepers of game, horticulturalists, bureaucrats, administrators, policemen, and administrators, or, generally speaking, service-men and -women employed by the state in the upkeep of royal palaces, storehouses, temples, and in public works. This fact cannot be overemphasized.

For 2000 years, the population density of Basin of Mexico fell within a range of 30-50 people per square kilometre. In the 14th and 15th centuries, this pattern changed dramatically, exploding to a density of 200. This new carrying capacity demonstrates a dramatic shift in the economic structure of the region. As Sanders explains:

... full-time non-food producers were proportionately very much more highly concentrated at Tenochtitlan than we originally thought. ... Certainly the demands of Tenochtitlan ... would have placed a great strain upon the agricultural capacity of the entire region. ... A nucleated core (Tenochtitlan-Tlatelolco) ... was surrounded by a suburban core of intensive agriculturalists and some full-time artisans (e.g. salt makers). Further away, within a radius of 20 kilometres (perhaps slightly more within the chinampa district) full-time agriculturalists provided the great majority of the center's subsistence requirements. The remaining subsistence needs derived from tribute and rent (from dependent tenants) from more far-flung areas.³⁴

The new economy, then, made Tenochtitlan the primary focus of economic production for the entire Basin of Mexico, and even beyond. As non-food producers, its population required massive amounts of natural resources supplied to the city by way of the market and government warehouses (as tribute). Such an assessment of the Tenochtitlan economy and the occupations of its inhabitants is particularly important to keep in mind when examining ceremonies that involve human and animal sacrifice, or when we visit the ordered chambers of Moctezoma's menagerie in the next chapter. If we fail to do so, we may find ourselves in the erroneous position held by so many scholars: arguing that the cultural perversities of Tenochtitlan

³⁴ Sanders, 180.

demonstrate a society 'in-tune with nature', an 'agriculturalist' society deeply implicated in the cycle of regeneration, or a 'hunting' society expressing their reliance on wild game.

If López-Austin is correct in saying that the "cosmovision that developed over thousands of years [in Mesoamerica] was based on agricultural production" in which the basic reference point for understanding the world was "the archetype of the plant cycle",³⁵ then the Tenochca pose a very serious problem. They do so for two reasons. First, the Tenochca were newcomers to Mesoamerica and although they undoubtedly sought acculturation, they would nevertheless have looked upon such a tradition as foreign and conceptually challenging. Second, as outlined above, the Tenochca economy was very different from that of traditional Mesoamerican societies. In a society such as Tenochtitlan's, where direct contact with living creatures or the working of land was a scarce resource in itself, and where the characteristics of their human civilization were unprecedented in terms of their sheer demographic volume and disjuncture from the primary resource sector, 'nature' became an abstraction metaphorically conceived as the anti-human, the place in which the Tenochca were forced to prove their strength and worthiness. At the boundary of civilization and nature, was the 'Hunt', a cultural moment in which humans forcibly encounter the natural world, weigh it up, and consider the relationship between the human and non-human realms. Most importantly, if the 'hunt', as a metaphorical abstraction, can be considered a means of philosophical inquiry, the results of that inquiry will tell us a great deal about the Tenochca's own conceptualization of their relationship with the natural world. The remainder of this chapter explores precisely these issues.

3. The 'Hunt'

In his very interesting book *A View to a Death in the Morning* Matt Cartmill explored the idea of hunting in the history of Western culture. Although he investigated the role of the 'hunt' in Western culture, his results illuminate startling parallels between Western and Tenochca conceptualizations, and that fact alone warrants a brief exploration of his subject and main ideas.

Cartmill's first step is to make a clear definition of hunting. "Hunting has to involve violence," he avers. "We define hunting ... as the deliberate, direct, violent, killing of unrestrained wild animals; and we define wild animals in this context as those that shun or attack

³⁵ Alfredo López Austin, *Tamoanchan, Tlalocan: Places of Mist*, trans. B.R. Ortiz de Montellano and T. Ortiz de Montellano (Niwot, Colorado: University Press of Colorado, 1997), 10-11. It is worth restating that this position is echoed repeatedly by numerous scholars.

human beings.” Continuing, he states that the ‘hunt’ “is intelligible only as symbolic behaviour, like a game or a religious ceremony, and the emotions that the hunt arouses can be understood only in symbolic terms.”³⁶

Taking Cartmill’s approach as a guide, my analysis of the hunt will necessarily begin, then, with a firm understanding of its dramatic ‘staging’: the metaphoric load that the *location* of the hunt bears. If the hunt is conducted in the forest, the plains, or even in the city (of, let’s say, a stray cat or a serial killer), then we must discover the symbolic value of those places in the mind of the hunter. The hunted, too, bear a great metaphoric load to which Cartmill alludes when he qualifies the animal as either shunning or predatory. I will take this aspect much further in the following pages when uncovering the character of the Tenochca ‘beast’, as well as the deer or rabbit. Cartmill’s crowning achievement, in my opinion, is to sketch out the hunt in its purely symbolic casting: “The hunt is thus by definition an armed confrontation between humanness and wilderness, between culture and nature. ... [I]t represents something like a war waged by humanity against the wilderness.”³⁷

* * *

A listing of the ruler’s pleasures in the Florentine Codex is fascinating for its innocence and, by our standards, political incorrectness. It is well known that Moctezoma enjoyed the entertainment of jesters, log rollers, and “dwarfs, cripples, hunchbacks, and servants.” We should probably add to this list the albinos that Cortés identified as being kept in a room adjacent to the Royal Aviary, but who were kept one room removed from “another house where they kept many monstrous men and women, in which there were dwarfs, hunchbacks, and others with deformities” who were attended to by their own private staff. As a subject of entertainment and wonder, these individuals were classified in the same manner as the eagles, ocelots, bears, mountain cats, and various birds that Moctezoma and other elite observed with delight. Other ‘pleasures’ of the ruler were listed as singing and dancing, the ball game, patolli (the latter two were both a form of gambling), botanical gardens, and last but not least, hunting:

[The rulers] shot with bow and arrow—with a bow, with a shaft, with bird arrows, with darts. With this belonged a bracelet on which were large, round, green stones or fine turquoises. The ruler places it around his wrist. ... They shot small birds with [a blowgun]. ... They hunted with a bird net; with it they captured various birds.³⁸

Moctezoma the Younger had a private royal retreat, sometimes called a ‘recreation centre’, on a small island near Culhuacan named Tepepulco. It seems that the island was designed partially as

³⁶ Matt Cartmill, *A View to a Death in the Morning: Hunting and Nature through History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 29.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 30.

³⁸ Sahagún, *Florentine Codex, Book 8*, 29-30.

a theme park, a constructed wilderness. It contained 'pleasure gardens' in which many medicinal and rare coastal plants were grown and tended to by state employed horticulturalists, a beautiful home built on a hill that "took advantage of the concavities in the rocks,"³⁹ and the island itself was regularly stocked with wild animals for Moctezoma's hunting pleasure. The location must have been one of Moctezoma's most beloved locations as he retreated to it immediately after the victories of his coronation war in the provinces of Napallan and Icpatepec. 5100 slaves were being brought back for sacrifice and he needed time to recover before the great but tiring events that were to follow.⁴⁰

From [Tlapitzahuahan] Motecuhzoma was taken in a canopied canoe to the hill, where he enjoyed himself for a few days with those lords and rested from the arduous task of conquest. He also offered thanks and sacrifices in the shrine there.⁴¹

We have other reasons to believe that Tepepulco was one of Moctezoma's favourite location and that his preference for it owed in no small amount to it being his private hunting retreat. One of Hernando Cortés' first accomplishments in Tenochtitlan was the taking into captivity of Moctezoma. Having been cooped-up all day for weeks, the Tlatoani was suffering from a case of boredom. To relieve his melancholy he asked Cortés' permission to hunt at Tepepulco, a place that Bernal Díaz del Castillo described as "a rocky hill that was nearby, and in which the Mexicans did not dare hunt, regardless of their social position, as they would be punished by death."⁴² Having been granted his wish,

Moctezoma set out with many lords and noblemen, while another Spanish sloop was filled with other rulers as well as a son of his, and he ordered the preparation of his guides who travelled there by canoe. ... And having arrived at the island, which was not far, and having killed all of the game that he wanted, deer and hare and rabbit, he returned very satisfied and happy to the city.⁴³

The hunting excursion would have been perfectly understandable to Cortés and others in his retinue who were familiar with the sport of hunting and the designation of certain forests as royal hunting reserves. We know that in Europe the privatization of forests and the professionalization of hunting (as a sport) increased steadily in the second millennium A.D.⁴⁴ Our knowledge of the historical and geographical extent of sport hunting in Mesoamerica, however, is much vaguer. The Mestizo Diego Muñoz Camargo, a Tlaxcalan nobleman, asserted

³⁹ Durán, *History*, 415.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 415.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 400.

⁴² Díaz, *Historia*, 177.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 177-8.

⁴⁴ Cartmill, 60.

the practice to be common amongst noblemen in Tlaxcala.⁴⁵ From this reference it seems possible that sport hunting may have been a pleasure for noblemen from many districts outside of Tenochtitlan. In terms of the historical continuity of sport hunting, which is far more important for our purposes, our knowledge is absolutely barren as written, pictographic, and archaeological sources are silent on the issue. While we know surprisingly little about the geographic and historical context of these hunts, we know, on the other hand, a great deal about the characterization of the hunted and of the setting of this dramatic event.

The hunt was either conducted on the forested mountain or on the desert plain. The two landscapes are marked by a degree of metaphoric similarity, but as we shall see, their mythico-historical differences bequeath to them fundamentally disparate identities. Significantly, in the captivating descriptions of both the plains and the forest in the *Florentine Codex*, the places are portrayed as very dangerous and not conducive to human subsistence. To begin with, a short entry on the plains, transcribed here in its entirety, reads:

It is a plain where the grass lies as a covering. Nowhere are there gardens, nowhere are there houses. It lies worthless, wasting. There are rabbits, serpents, wild beasts, wild animals.⁴⁶

Following the initial description of the plains as being covered by grass, there is an assessment of the plain's value to humans: it is not suitable for agriculture or settlement. "It lies worthless, wasting." Additionally, the three types of animals listed are not a haphazard selection; they represent three basic themes. Rabbits, as well as deer, are given the character as wandering cowards, given to the caprice of their passions.⁴⁷ They are likened to the harlot who "promenades; she goes about pushing. ... [S]he goes about constantly merry, ever on the move, wandering here and there, never coming to repose, ... she follows the wide road, goes the way of the rabbit, the deer."⁴⁸ The rabbit is additionally tied to the *octli* (maguey wine) cult and thus the fertility cult (this fact was perhaps evident in the references to the harlot). Serpents, on the other hand, are directly representative of the female fertility cult and the act of birth [e.g. the *Teteoinnan* Complex (This God Our Mother): including, *Coatlicue* (Serpents-her-Skirts), and *Cihuacoatl* (Women-Serpent)].⁴⁹

Tied to the themes of fertility and birth, by nature of their opposition to them, is the

⁴⁵ He did this in his *Historia de Tlaxcala*. The reference was made in Benjamin Keen, *The Aztec Image in Western Thought* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1971), 129.

⁴⁶ Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, Book 11, 263.

⁴⁷ Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, Book 4, 37.

⁴⁸ Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, Book 10, 56.

⁴⁹ Nicholson's classification in "Religion in Pre-Hispanic Central Mexico," in *Handbook of Middle American Indians*, vol. 10, ed. Gordon F. Ekholm and Ignacio Bernal (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1971), unnumbered pages between 408 and 409.

theme of death, as represented by the various transfigurations of the *tecuaní* (the wild beast, man-eating beast, or savage beast). In one aspect of the *tecuaní*, serpents and beasts are brought together in the goddess of *Chicomecoatl* (Seven-Headed-Serpent) who devoured crops with frost and thereby induced hunger.⁵⁰ As Durán stated in his description and analysis of the rites and ceremonies of the Indians of New Spain: "Whatever it be that stings or bites, be it poisonous or not, they [the Indians] call *tecuaní*, and as such they call this goddess *Chicomecoatl* to signify the harm she does when she freezes the fields and crops."⁵¹ More apparent, however, is the *tecuaní* transfigured on earth as the eagle, vulture, jaguar, ocelot, coyote, or crocodile. It is also interesting to note that in a metaphorical sense the bravest of soldiers was called a *tecuaní* on account of his fearlessness and ability to kill.⁵² In fantastic earthly forms, the *tecuaní* is endlessly transfigured as any number of carnivorous beasts with qualities of multiple species that haunted and terrified humans. In mythico-religious forms, the *tecuaní* is *cipactli* (the earth in the form of crocodile; in other Amerindian traditions this earth-animal is envisioned in quite a different way as a turtle or another aquatic animal), or it is alternatively called *Tlaltecuhltli* (Earth Lord, or Earth Monster). These gods were represented with monstrous, fanged imagery (similar to *Tlaloc*). On the door of a smaller pyramid in Tenochtitlan, there was "a terrifying mouth of which those who paint say are in hell with an open mouth and great fangs to devour souls."⁵³ In all three cases (natural, fantastic, and mythico-religious transfigurations), the common theme is death and the consumption of flesh, and this is tied to birth and fertility by way of opposition. It is thus suggested that the plains are primarily construed as a regenerative landscape, a place where life and death equal polarities of the single theme of regeneration.

Of utmost importance to our understanding of the plains are the mythico-historical events that unfolded on this landscape. The deer plays an important mythic role in the Tenochca's own peregrination to the south, from Aztlán. In this situation, two Chichimec demigods, *Xiuhnel* and *Mimich*, chase across the plains two two-headed deer that descended from the sky with a great crash. In one account of the event, the two Chichimec are told by *Camasale* (otherwise known as *Mixcoatl*, the hunting deity) that they must capture the two deer and worship them.⁵⁴ It later proved that the deer would lead the Chichimec to victory in a war against neighbouring peoples. However, in a very different rendition of the same basic story,⁵⁵

⁵⁰ Durán *Historia I*, 135.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 135.

⁵² See *tequani*, in Alonso de Molina, *Vocabulario* (México: Ediciones Colofón, 1996), 494.

⁵³ Díaz, *Historia*, 163. My translation.

⁵⁴ "Historia de los Mexicanos por sus Pinturas," 237.

⁵⁵ "Legend of the Suns," 151-2.

the two two-headed deer are hunted in desert lands. One of the two deer, which are in fact both goddesses, transforms herself into a woman and lures Xiuhnel with her body and also a drink of a love potion constituted of blood. He is given the drink and then lies with the goddess. Having trapped him, she rips open his chest with her teeth and consumes him. The other deer, now too a woman, runs after Mimich but at noon the next day a pot cactus descends from the sky and the goddess falls on top of it, becoming stuck. Mimich shot her repeatedly and then returned to his brother, crying. In a Sacred Hymn recorded early on by Sahagún,⁵⁶ The Song of Teteoinnan (Earth Goddess), the mythic event is given a slightly different twist, suggesting a mixed explanation of the event. Teteoinnan blooms forth like a flower on earth, but she does so, it seems, in the guise of Itzpapalotl (another earth goddess, Obsidian Butterfly), who was implanted upon the cactus on the plains:

Oh, the goddess is atop the barrel cactus
She's our mother Itzpapalotl ...
From it she came forth.
Oh, you've seen her on the ninefold plains.

In this respect, this rendition agrees with the version in which the hunters and the hunted (who, by the way, reverse their roles twice) are at war and who each destroy the other. But then the Hymn finishes by suggesting that "Xiuhnel and Mimich caught the deer on the plain; they had mercy on it." Their mercy upon the deer fits better with the non-conflictual rendition of the account given in the first version, *Historia de los Mexicanos por sus Pinturas*.

Most importantly, all renditions of the story of Mimich, Xiuhnel, and the two-headed deer, despite their disagreement, attest to a common theme: the importance of the plains in the history of the Tenochca and all other immigrants of the Basin of Mexico. In their migration, the Tenochca descended from the harsh northern plains into the southern heartland. For the Tenochca, the plains, and the animals that lived upon it, were imbued with the symbolic power of history and subsistence, even if that age was long past. The deer, like the rabbit, was a symbol both of the cult of fertility (blood, licentiousness, the blossoming of flowers, sustenance, etc.) and also of savagery (migration, wandering, licentiousness (again), and life without agriculture).

The forest, however, was a very different place and had a fundamentally discrete symbolic value that contrasts with that of the plains. If on the one hand our commonly held perceptions of Amerindian culture prepare us to accept the notion that the Tenochca would be knowledgeable and at ease in the forest setting, then it is not surprising that we are totally

⁵⁶ Fr. Bernardino Sahagún, *Primeros Memoriales* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), 135-6.

unprepared to discover that Tenochca accounts (as described repeatedly and unequivocally in the sources) tell a very different story. We must not overlook the fact that in the epic struggle at the beginning of time, which set the stage for the descent of the Aztecs from Aztlan, the Earth Goddess gave life to humans upon the plains—from her death upon the cactus and the struggle with Mimich the flowers of regeneration bloomed, even if the price paid for such rebirth required the death of Xiuhnel, ‘an eye for an eye’, we might say. On the other hand, the Tenochca had no such historical contact with the forest. We do not find a plethora of mythic stories that tell of human life in the forests. In the great historical account of Mesoamerican history given by Sahagún’s informants in the *Florentine Codex*, the origin of the Mexica is repeatedly located in “the land of the Chichimeca, from the desert lands.”⁵⁷ Moreover, the plains and deserts, while clearly related to the Mexica and all other Aztec, Toltec, and Nahua nations, are set off against the mountains and forests which are designated to the Otomí, a distinct language and cultural group that never dwelled in cities or learned to write. The following passage recounts the mythic-historical division between ‘civilized’ and ‘savage’ nations:

And the leader of the Otomí left [the others] at Coatepec. He introduced his people into the forest. It is said that since they lived there, they always made their offerings on the mountain tops. And they sought out only the mountain slopes to build houses....

And then these different people went [on]: the Tolteca, the Mexica, the Nahua. All the people, as they sought land, encountered the plains, the deserts. ... They went to settle at a place in the desert, in a valley among the crags, a very dangerous place. ...

And at this place there were, or as one said, there are, seven caves. These different people made them serve as their temples; they went to make their offering there for a long time. No longer is it remembered how long they resided there.

After emerging from the Seven Caves, the first story about life in the forests in the Mexican phylogeny is not in mythic time, but is given a firm date of 1245 when after more than fifty years of near constant quarrelling with the settled nations in the Basin of Mexico, the Mexica were permitted to settle on the backside of the Curved Mountain near Culhuacan, south of the Island of Tepepulco. Their newly acquired place of residence was named Tizaapan and was given to them with a great deal of maliciousness and malevolence on the part of the advisors of the King of Culhuacan. As the Tenochca were hated by every nation in the area, the king had decided to play. The historical account emphasizes the point that Tizaapan was uninhabitable as it had been previously abandoned: “[t]he place was deserted as it was covered with many snakes and poisonous vipers that descended from the hilltop.” The king, gloating in the shrewdness of his ruse, gave orders to a messenger, telling him to “go and see the condition of the Mexicans, and give my salutations to those that remain and ask them how they are making out in the site

⁵⁷ Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, Book 10, p. 189-197. Specifically, 189 and 195.

that has been given to them.”⁵⁸

The King of Culhuacan and his people had not realized that in the time since the Mexicans had settled the hillside, they had done very well for themselves. They had built houses and a shrine to Huitzilopochtli, and had cultivated their fields. At first, they had been horrified by the quantity of snakes and beasts that inhabited their settlement and had made the place a living hell, but gradually, the Mexica adapted and made these ferocious animals their sustenance. “[T]hey did not eat any other meat but these snakes, vipers, and lizards that come from on top of the hill, and by this method they became fond of them and savoured their taste, so much so that they consumed them and finished them off until it was difficult to find even one of them to eat.”⁵⁹ In fact, contrary to the King’s expectations, the Mexica seemed to be prospering. The messenger had “found all of the Mexicans very happy and content, with their fields cultivated and well ordered, a temple erected for their god, and the people in their houses, their pots and spits full of snakes, some roasted and some broiled.”⁶⁰ The King’s resignation was categorical: “They will have what they want,” he stated, “I tell you that this people is favoured by god, and they are cruel people with nasty habits; leave them, don’t anger them, so that if we do not do them wrong, they will be appeased.”⁶¹ The Mexica were allowed to intermarry with the Culhua people. As Davies states, “... intermarriage followed, probably more on the part of the nobility than of the common people, and thereafter the Mexica laid claim to descend from the Culhua and hence from the Tolteca.”⁶²

Going one step further, it is evident that in addition to intermarriage, or as a preliminary step to it, the conquest of the forest landscape was a trial in which the Mexica proved their adaptability to the new environment, and because of their success in that regard, they were accepted as members of the new culture. The meaning of the story of the Mexica in Tizaapan is quite clear. The Mexica encountered the forest as an unprecedented competitor, outside of the realm of their history, as the quintessential symbol of the trials and tribulations that confronted them in an unfamiliar and inhospitable world. The Mexica were ready to test the strength of their nation when they arrived at Tizaapan, and the world around them watched as they came out victorious, proving themselves to be unnaturally powerful, a human tecuani able to mimic the beast and then conquer it.

⁵⁸ Duran, *Historia II*, 40. My translation.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 40-1.

⁶² Nigel Davies “Aztec Origins,” in *Smoke and Mist: Mesoamerican Studies in Memory of Thelma D. Sullivan*, ed. J.K. Josserand and K. Dakin (Great Britain: B.A.R., 1989), 663.

There is no doubt that this story is less reality than a statement made by the Mexica about themselves. It is an idealized version of how they wanted to be remembered. This element of fictitiousness should not be considered a problem for those who hope to gain insight from the story of Tizaapan. Quite the opposite, if we hope to enter into the mindset of the Tenochca, it is their self-imagining that is helpful. Specifically, from the example of Tizaapan, we have learned that they conceived themselves to be engaged in a bitter fight for survival in an inhospitable world, and that their renown was founded upon them being victorious in the most deadly of all places, the forest.

Markman and Markman, in the *Flayed God*, also explored the implications of the story of Tizaapan. In their analysis, they focused on the reoccurring symbolism of the snake and instead of drawing any parallels between snakes and the themes of war, conquest, wilderness, or forests (which as the context for the encounter are, in my opinion, the essence of the story), they argue that the snake symbolizes the idea of sacrifice and the "cyclical renewal in the migration myths, and in still another way links the birth myth to the migration myth."⁶³ Thus, these authors have, in my opinion, accomplished the impossible: they have transformed a story about human conquest into an analogy for the regenerative cycle and the supremacy of that concept in Mesoamerican thought.

At this time, it is worthwhile to review the basic tenets of Mesoamerican cosmology. At the most basic level, the world was conceived as divided into quadrants. Each of the four directions was given special attributes necessary for the survival of life on earth. But such attributes could be potentially ruinous if they were not balanced by countervailing attributes from other directions. When permitted to dominate alone, as each direction had done in the previous Four Suns in the Aztec cosmogonical conceptualization, the world was disharmonious and eventually collapsed. In the Fifth Sun, the one in which the Tenochca lived (believed to have begun in the year 741 A.D.), the four directions worked in tandem to bring the spatial and temporal dimensions in unison, each reigning for thirteen years, thus constituting the fifty-two year cycle, or bundle.⁶⁴ Moreover, the centre was the point of equilibrium in which on a day to day basis the attributes of the directions coalesced and formed a central axis (or *axis mundi*⁶⁵).

⁶³ Roberta H. Markman and Peter T. Markman, *The Flayed God: The Mesoamerican Mythological Tradition: sacred texts and images from pre-Columbian Mexico and Central America* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1992), 298-9.

⁶⁴ For a great graphic demonstration of this idea, see Image 6 in Appendix III, which is a page from *Codex Fejérváry-Mayer*.

⁶⁵ This term is Paul Wheatley's, "The Suspended Pelt: Reflections on a Discarded Model of Spatial Structure," in Donald R. Daskins Jr., *Geographical Humanism, Analysis and Social Action* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan, 1977).

The *axis mundi* was, for the Tenochca, Tenochtitlan. Only in that place could the world be perfectly ordered on the social, spatial, and temporal dimensions. Thus, the place itself—the ordering of its streets, the quadripartite division of the city, and most of all, the definition of the city as the point of equilibrium in which human culture could thrive and would be protected from the destabilizing potential of any one of the four directions—all of these cosmological considerations were as important to the maintenance of order as were social considerations.

Thus, adding to my own analysis of Tizaapan laid out above, there is a great deal of evidence to erode further the position of Markman and Markman. In the Tenochca historical account,⁶⁶ the incident at Tizaapan was, more or less, the prototype of countless renditions in Tenochca history of the same basic theme: the forest and its beastly inhabitants as the Tenochca's arch-enemy. One of the defining moments in Tenochca history is the Great Famine of One Rabbit (1454). The Famine resulted in a massive demographic movement, a scattering of people from the centre to the periphery, and the selling of children of the elite and commoners into slavery.⁶⁷ Significantly, the famine was remembered as a collapse of the cosmological, and the disharmonizing of the human, temporal, and spatial dimensions. We see this process in the words of an anonymous elder who in about 1570 interpreted an ancient pictographic manuscript that recorded the events of One Rabbit:

1 Rabbit [1454]. At this time the people were one-rabbitted And for three years there was hunger. The corn had stopped growing. . . .

2 Rabbit [1455]. [A] year-bundle feast was celebrated. And in this second year of hunger, the famine became much worse. . . .

3 Flint [1456]. At this time it happened that amaranth was just all that was being eaten. People were dying. This was the third year of the famine. Painted [in the picture writing] are [what look] like people being eaten by vultures and coyotes.⁶⁸

We can imagine the picture that our interpreter had before him; it would have been similar to the folio from the *Codex Aubin* in which the Mexican peregrination is depicted and numerous

⁶⁶ Durán claims that his account was simply copied from an earlier Nahuatl version. Proof of this fact is that two other histories by different authors closely parallel the story and details of Durán's *Historia*. These two books are 1) Tezozomoc's *Crónica Mexicana*, and 2) the *Códice Ramirez*, probably written by Juan de Tovar. It seems that Tovar's book might have been copied from Durán, which precludes it from being included as evidence in support of an earlier Nahuatl version. However, Tovar had written an earlier version of the history that is now lost, but which was taken directly from a series of documents probably collected from Native informants by Fray Andrés Olmos, known as the so-called 'Crónica X' that is also lost. Tezozomoc's work was also taken from the original Nahuatl version, even if the 'translation' was far from literal.

⁶⁷ Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, Book 9, Florentine Codex, 23-4.

⁶⁸ "Annals of Cuautitlan," in *History and Mythology of the Aztecs: Codex Chimalpopoca*, trans. J. Bierhorst (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1992), 107.

ferocious wild animals attack and consume the Mexica.⁶⁹

Indeed, in all of the following citations, we see a recurring theme: the ferociousness of wilderness in contrast and in opposition to the ordered, civilized spaces of the city. Kings were admonished to take care of “widows and orphans and ... those who go about day and night in the wilderness.”⁷⁰ Fornicators and adulterers were punished by being roped around the neck, and then, symbolically, dragged throughout the city and thrown into the wilderness “so that they could become food for beasts.”⁷¹ To boost morality amongst the rank and file, soldiers were told to consider that “you will not be fighting jaguars or pumas or demons, nor do they have mouths so large that they will swallow you. They are men of flesh and bones, as we are.”⁷² In a battle alongside a river in the Teuctepec province, the Tenochca broke ranks and ran for their lives as their greatest fear became reality: “some of the conquered soldiers who fell into the water turned into alligators All of this amazed the Aztec army and filled them with terror.”⁷³ And yet again, in the context of war and death the Tenochca express their opinion repeatedly of the most horrendous of all deaths and the ultimate crime committed against a civilized nation: to be fed to and eaten by wild beasts. In one instance a group of merchants found a large number of Tenochca emissaries that had been reported missing in enemy lands: “They found what has been described: the roads closed or blocked and, as they looked in different directions, the Aztecs saw vultures attacking the dead bodies. They then followed the path of these birds and discovered the disintegrating bodies of the envoys, eaten by beasts.”⁷⁴

And so the Tenochca met the forest as the quintessential enemy to human survival that resided in the disordered periphery of the civilized centre. They encountered it first at Tizaapan—the place where agriculture and civilization were, before the Tenochca, proven to have failed, where humans were not meant to live—and then in famine, war, and finally, in death. With this metaphorical load, it thus comes as no surprise to find a very lengthy description of the forest in Book 11 of Sahagún’s *Florentine Codex*, of which I will only quote a small portion:

It is a place of verdure, of fresh green; of wind—windy places...; a place of cold.... It is a place whence misery comes, where it exists; a place where there is affliction—a place of affliction, of lamentation, a place of affliction, of weeping; a place where there is sadness, a place of compassion, of sighing; a place which arouses sorrow, which spreads misery. ...

⁶⁹ See Image 7 in Appendix III.

⁷⁰ Durán, *History*, 387.

⁷¹ Durán, *Historia*, 36.

⁷² Durán, *History*, 163.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 433.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 419.

It is a disturbing place, fearful, frightful; home of the savage beast, dwelling-place of the serpent, the rabbit, the deer; a place whence nothing departs, nothing leaves, nothing emerges. ...

There is no one; there are no people. It is desolate; it lies desolate. There is nothing edible. Misery abounds, misery emerges, misery spreads. There is no joy, no pleasure. ... All die of thirst. ... It is the home of hunger; there is death from hunger. All die of cold; there is freezing; there is trembling; there is the chattering, the chattering of teeth. There are cramps, the stiffening of the body, the constant stiffening, the stretching out prone. ...⁷⁵

As we have seen, the war against forest could only be resolved by the total victory of one side or another. In the Tenochca mind, the forest, unlike the plains, did not have the quality of moderation or trade-off; it was life *or* death, not both.

4. Quecholli Festival

By the reckoning of Sahagún, the fourteenth month of the Tenochca calendar, known as the month of Quecholli, coincided with a twenty day period of the Julian calendar that began on October 20th and ended on November 8th. In this month, a great festival was enacted wherein the city's men prepared for battle on the hill known then as *Ixillan Tonan* (Our Mother's Belly⁷⁶) or alternatively, *Zacatepetl*. This hill is located in the Southwest corner of the Basin, near the ruins of *Cuicuilco*, in what is know today as the *Pedregal de San Ángel*.⁷⁷ The Quecholli Festival is a wonderful summation of the basic analogy between hunting and war in Tenochca culture. The festival was a time in which legendary battles on mountain tops and the historic transition from a hunting to a agricultural society were brought into sharp focus.

In the first five days of the festival, very little was done. In the next five, rigorous preparation began for the hunt. The month of Quecholli was a month for the male citizens of all ages to gather and work together without differentiation. A great demonstration of this is the work carried out by males in preparing the arrows used in the hunt. Reeds were gathered for this purpose and then carried upon the shoulder by each seasoned warrior to be offered to *Huitzilopochtli*. The reeds were then straightened and hardened over the fire, and then finally brought home by all of the city's male folk. "Indeed all moved together—seasoned warriors,

⁷⁵ Sahagún, *Florentine Codex, Book 11*, 105-6.

⁷⁶ For this translation, see reference for 'ixillantli' in Karttunen, *An Analytical Dictionary of Nahuatl* (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1983), 325.

⁷⁷ See Map 2, Appendix 2.

youths, young men of marriageable age.”⁷⁸ The men made offerings of blood from their ears; they fasted, abstained from alcohol and copulation with their wives (or prostitutes). “It was said: ‘They anoint themselves with blood because of the deer.’ They fasted for the deer, so that [the deer] would be hunted.”⁷⁹ Thus anointed with blood, the men of Tenochtitlan positioned themselves opposite those of Tlatelolco, and both sides prepared their spears, cutting the reeds and embedding the points and then finally applying pine pitch to the ends. The spears were bundled in groups of twenty and stacked in front of the main temple. On the ninth day of the month, the men and boys demonstrated their marksmanship in a wide variety of contests, and on the tenth day deceased warriors were honoured in an elaborate ceremony.

All of these preparations served to fuel the excitement of the men who awaited the events of the eleventh and twelve days of the month of Quecholli. No one would be more eager than the young boys who would for two days escape the confines of the city and the restrictions imposed by urban life. On the eleventh day, “There is issuing on the grass.” Grass was offered by the city’s women to the Temple of Mixcoatl, and “thereupon there was the departure to hunt.”⁸⁰ All of the city’s men left for Zacatepetl. “[N]o longer did anyone go to be left here in Mexico. And no longer did anyone follow the road. Verily, many men went there to Zacatepec.”⁸¹ Upon their arrival, the men built grass shelters and fires to keep them warm throughout the long night as they camped on the grassy flats between Zacatepetl and the Western shore of Lake Xochimilco. For the men of Tenochtitlan who waited anxiously for the next day’s hunt, the preparation of spears and arrows, the encampment, the open hearth, the absence of women to do the cooking, and then climactically, the hunt, all these activities and the associated symbolic imagery of the Quecholli festival inculcated the men with a sense of the role of hunting in their nation’s past. It served to highlight the great historical disjuncture between times past and times present. Yet, because the Tenochca soldiers took the lead in the preparations, the men who gathered on the grassy flats must have realized the close relationship between the hunting of deer and the killing of men: both in their own time were the most vital roles of men and both served to preserve and extend the eminence of their nation.

On awaking the next morning, the men prepared their bodies with regalia typical of the hunter: they smudged circles around their eyes and mouths, put eagle feathers in a headdress, and chalked their legs.⁸² Armed with bows, arrows, altatls and spears, the men and boys set out

⁷⁸ Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, Book 2, 134.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 134.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 136.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 181.

⁸² Durán, *Historia I*, 281.

from their grass shelters in an orderly fashion: "there was departing; there was arranging in order, there was disposing in rows. Like a rope they stretched; nowhere was it cut." The ordering of men and boys highlights the unconventionality of this hunt. The Quecholli hunt did not involve a few men in the wilderness in search of prey, seeking, waiting, and pursuing their sustenance. It was a well-ordered attack performed by thousands of men working in unison.

We might draw comparisons with the buffalo hunts conducted by the nations of the Great Plains. In both cases, the hunt was a large scale and highly organized enterprise, and both induced a sense of national unification (not to mention male comradery). Yet, the two cases are fundamentally different. The buffalo and nations of the Great Plains shared a common landscape, and moreover, the Indians were utterly dependent upon the buffalo for their sustenance; the buffalo hunt was the first step in the process in which buffalo became man. Going further, I cannot overstate the importance of the setting. Buffalo and man encountered each other on their shared plain of existence. From home to hunt, the men did not step into a new realm of reality in which the everyday rules of conduct were suspended and reconceptualized. In the case of the Tenochca, the structure of the encounter between predator and prey is completely different. On the hill, in the forest, the Tenochca left their current world behind, and prepared themselves for battle in a vastly different reality. The change was conceptualized as both historical (their past revisited) and geographical (the periphery confronted). In both cases, however, self met other (familiar met foreign) in a contest of elimination. It is undoubtedly this structure of two opposites vying for life on the slippery slope of survival that Cartmill spoke of when he maintained that "[t]he hunt is thus by definition an armed confrontation between humanness and wilderness, between culture and nature. ... [I]t represents something like a war waged by humanity against the wilderness."⁸³

This assessment of the hunt is particularly apt in approaching the Quecholli hunt, which ended in a brutal slaughter of animals whose corpses were left to rot upon Zacatepetl:

Everyone in this manner encircled all the deer, coyotes, rabbits, jack rabbits. Cautiously they closed in upon them. And when they were able to come upon them, then there was the seizing [of the game]; it was fallen upon on the part of each one. All that escaped their hands did not yet die. And when this was done, thereupon they dispersed. There was returning. But the captors were still left there; they yet slew [more game]. To those who yet caught a deer or a coyote, Moctezuma gave gifts of capes whose edges were striped with feathers. ... And Moctezuma gave the captors food, and they drank. And when the slaughtering had been done up on Zacatepec, thereupon there was a quick departure. They took with them only the heads of [the game]; they carried them each

⁸³ Cartmill, 30.

with them in their hands; they went dripping blood. When they reached their homes, they hung each [of the heads] high.⁸⁴

In the days following the hunt upon Zacatepetl, as if to draw attention to the incongruity of what they had just done with the realities of their modern urban landscape, humans were sacrificed upon the altars of the Temples of Tlamatzinco and Mixcoateopan. At Tlamatzinco, the hands and feet of the victims were tied before being dragged up the temple steps:

Then they took them up; four [priests] carried each one of them; they went pulling them by their arms [and] their legs; [the captives] went bobbing their heads up and down; their heads went hanging toward the ground. ... And as they took them up, it was said: 'Thus they slay them as deer; they served as the deer who thus die.'⁸⁵

One method of interpreting these human sacrifices is to draw attention to the dramatization of the basic analogy between humans and deer, and thus to conclude that both the animal and human sacrifices affirm the equality amongst the species and the basic similarity between the Tenochca's cultural past, when hunting was the means of providing sustenance, and the culture of late-pre-Hispanic Tenochtitlan, with its focus on imperial expansion, civil service, value-added manufacturing, the exploitation of lake products, and to a far lesser extent, agriculture. This interpretation might not be altogether erroneous, especially if the specific details of Tenochca culture and economy are ignored and the Tenochca are viewed instead as a continuation of the more general Mesoamerican tradition.

Yet, it is possible that a complex ceremony such as that which occurred in the month of Quecholli could have posited multiple and even contradictory messages for those who watched or participated. Another interpretation, and the one that agrees most with the details of the ceremony and the symbolism used in the Quecholli festival, underscores the *discontinuity* of Tenochca culture with the Mesoamerican tradition. The Tenochca economy had changed the details of life in Tenochtitlan so that it contrasted drastically with previous cultural groups. Tenochtitlan was a larger, more densely populated, and more economically specialized than any of its predecessors. The Tenochca gloated over their successes. Their historical account highlights their victories over humans and nature. They descended from the plains into the valley, and at Tizaapan they conquered the forest and proved themselves worthy of civilized life. The Quecholli festival, and the hunt in particular, memorialized their national conquests. Motolinía offers only a terse account of the festival, but his description is clear: "This festival was when they ordered themselves for war."⁸⁶ The analogy, then, is far less that between past

⁸⁴ Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, Book 2, 137.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 139.

⁸⁶ Fr. Toribio Motolinía, *Memoriales e Historia de los Indios de la Nueva España* (Madrid: Ediciones Atlas, 1970), 25.

Atlas, 1970), 25.

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Atlas, 1970), 25.

and present or between animal and human. Rather, the Quecholli festival equates war and hunting, violence against humans and violence against nature. In the eyes of a culture intent upon expansion and imperial control, both were enemies. The theme, here, is disjuncture, and for their historical, cultural, economic, and geographic disjuncture, the Tenochca would pay by being perpetually driven by a paranoia of the periphery and by a paralyzing fear of social collapse. The methods of managing the periphery and its threats are the subject of our next chapter.

Chapter Three:

Protecting the City and Domesticating the Empire: Capture, Enclosure, and Scientific Inquiry.

In Tenochca culture, and to some degree in the more generalized culture of the Valley of Mexico, the living earth was not conceptualized as a paradise in which nature and humans lived together in harmony. The only images of what we might consider to be depictions of paradise are at the long abandoned city of Teotihuacan, where, in a series of murals dedicated to Tlalocan, men play like children along with birds in a land of bounty, with rivers and other water themes symbolized repeatedly.¹ Other stories, such as the Aztec return to Aztlan in Diego Duran's *Book on the Rites and Ceremonies*, as well as rare references to Tamoanchan (another mythic/historical concept regarding an original place of unification), also suggest a degree of familiarity with the notion of paradise.

Yet, a clear distinction can and should be made between Western and Tenochca notions of paradise. The Tenochca paradise was on the one hand a mythical place of origin that could never be regained in the future, or alternatively, it was life in Tlalocan, a place reached only by chance—death by lightning, gout, drowning, or by certain skin afflictions. Individuals were chosen by Tlaloc to go to Tlalocan; humans could not earn their way by good behaviour. In the Christian/Western perspective, paradise is one of three things: a) the Garden of Eden, b) Heaven, and most commonly in contemporary culture, c) any place of natural beauty in which peace, tranquility, and harmony amongst species predominates. In Western culture, paradise is not only an ideal place, but an ideal culture to which humans must strive to develop, for they must learn to live peacefully and cooperatively. When we compare this notion to the Tenochca perspective, we encounter a basic division between the two: Tenochca conceptualizations of paradise are strictly limited to those non-earth bound paradisiacal places that are unobtainable, or at least, not obtainable by the free will of human beings. Paradise, in the Tenochca perspective, was at best an idea associated with the gods and/or times past; in the human domain, it was outside of the realm of possibilities. In contrast, in all three versions of Christian paradise, it is a place of

¹ See Image 8, Appendix III.

morality, reached through one's good behaviour. We should also note that in the Christian conceptualization of paradise, paradise is the natural state of nature, in its purest, most unadulterated state. The exile from the Garden of Eden represents a deviation from the original state of nature and the only way back to this original harmony is to replicate on earth the paradise of the Kingdom of God in Heaven. In the Tenochca perspective, the opposite is true. The original state of nature is chaotic and disharmonious. Nature can be harmonized, but only by human initiative: the ordering, representation, and management of disordered entities at the centre, which in the Tenochca perspective was considered to be Tenochtitlan.

In this chapter, I want to continue with the line of argument first developed in Chapter One, in which the search for paradise has often been fulfilled in the Americas as scholars have mused over the positive attributes of a generalized Indigenous environmental ethos. The objective of the first chapter was to demonstrate the logic behind a yearning for an Ecological Other and its playing out in historiography. In this chapter, I want to offer a more *positive* line of argument, by exhibiting the Tenochca's own image of the world in which they lived. In doing so, it will become apparent that the idea of earth as naturally harmonious and ordered has been forcibly applied in recent Western examinations of Indigenous cultures. As students of history, we must realize that the ideological yearning for 'natural man' (for a people who have made paradise a reality, who have lived 'within nature', who have not 'striven against nature') is a Western fiction that does not necessarily correspond to the reality of pre-Hispanic Tenochtitlan. In fact, in the case of the Tenochca, the application of such ideas could not be more inappropriate.

When we bring to light the details of the Tenochca environmental outlook, paradise seekers will be very disappointed with the results, for on the surface, at least, the Tenochca prove themselves to be far too similar to the Western self-image: a culture whose will to survive pitted the ordered spaces of civilization against the disordered and inimical spaces of wilderness. In the following pages it is argued that the natural world was coercively ordered and managed by the Tenochca in order to expand and protect the human realm. The tools for this initiative were primarily the city (as an ordering mechanism) and science (as a concerted effort to unlock the mysteries of the earth, and to use such knowledge for the purposes of human advancement). Even though this conflictual approach to wilderness is shared by both Tenochca and Western perspectives, it is imperative to understand that such superficial similarities are the products of fundamentally disparate processes. As we shall see, the logic of Tenochca fear emanated from a need to *integrate* inimical natural forces, not to vanquish them. The Tenochca perspective required a careful reorganization of the earth's unalterable constituent elements into stable,

balanced, and benevolent spaces (such as cityscapes). From their perspective, 'evil' (inimical forces seen as beasts) could not be defeated; it was a natural component of the earth's regenerative cycle. Instead, the beast needed only to be tamed, brought under control, its powers harnessed for human advantage. The beast was not the object of concern; rather, it was wilderness, envisioned as unmitigated nature, a state of natural disorder, and a peripheral place beyond the grasp of human dominion.

1. Paranoia: The Spectre of Wilderness vs. The Threat of Neighbours

In *City of Sacrifice*, David Carrasco made a very interesting argument, demonstrating in a sustained argument spanning several chapters that the Aztecs suffered from a paranoia of the periphery and that the religious violence for which they are notorious can be interpreted as an attempt to deal with the threats to the stability of the centre. An interesting fact that partially supports his assertions is that archaeological digs in the ceremonial precinct area of Tenochtitlan reveal that eighty percent of offerings originated from outside of the Valley of Mexico.² What force or power induced such fear? Was the threat political (i.e. neighbours) or natural (the godly forces of wilderness)?

There is no doubt that political motivations were partly responsible for a great deal of the violence and initiatives of the Tenochca state, and it is altogether possible that in many cases political and religious spheres overlapped, especially when we consider that religious ceremonial objects collected from the periphery (fish, mammals, crustaceans, reptiles, etc.) do not represent the natural domain so much as they stand as symbols of a peripheral domain inhabited most significantly by enemy nations. There is no better example of the melding of political and religious concerns than the politicization of human sacrifice. It was regular procedure to invite foreign heads of state and other ambassadors to Tenochtitlan to observe the spectacle of humans being slaughtered on top of the Great Pyramid. In Duran's *Historia* we find the following passage:

The noble guests who had come to the feast and sacrifice were horrified, beside themselves, on seeing so many men killed, sacrificed in the gruesome way. They were so frightened that they dared not speak. They were in a bower handsomely decorated with flowers and branches, the borders covered with designs cleverly made of flowers of different colours. Large fans of rich feather work protected them from the sun and all were sitting upon the seats covered with jaguar skins, which were well tanned on the

² David Carrasco, *City of Sacrifice: The Aztec Empire and the Role of Violence in Civilization* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999), 54-55.

inside and whose fur looked splendid on the outside. ... They marvelled at what they had seen but at the same time were horrified by the sacrifices.³

It is obvious that the reaction of the foreign elite, assembled for the spectacle and treated with every luxury known to the Tenochca, was indeed the intended reaction. By such a demonstration, the Tenochca made known their power over men.

In a very different and much more benign spectacle involving a hawk, a quail, three Spaniards, and Moctezoma, the same theme as outlined above is repeated. As the three Spaniards and Moctezoma are conversing, a hawk swoops down, snatches a single quail, and returns to the air. Because the Spaniards were amazed by the agility of the hawk, Moctezoma commanded his bird hunters to catch the bird so that the Spaniards might employ it for their own purposes.⁴ It is interesting to note that although Díaz del Castillo would have known of the story within days, if not hours, of the event, he did not record it until the 1550s in Spain. On the other hand, one of the earliest commentators, save Cortés, was Motolinía, who recorded the same story in 1541.⁵ In his version, which differs only slightly from Díaz del Castillo's, Motolinía maintained that Moctezoma's orders were designed to "show his greatness before the Spaniards." It is worth noting the location of this story within Motolinía's book: it follows a description of Moctezoma's menagerie and it precedes a description of Moctezoma's servants and the servility and humiliation which they and all other citizens showed their ruler.

The political interpretation can be taken much further so that it intrudes upon and even denies some of the arguments made in the preceding chapter. Take, for instance, the example of the conquests at Tizaapan in which I had argued that the primary message was that the arrival of the Tenochca in a foreign landscape presented them with great challenges, not least of which was the test of their courage and fortitude in the task of establishing a home for themselves amongst the hazards imposed by nature (beasts, forests, and finally swampy lake islands). The conquests of Tizaapan, if interpreted politically, might be seen as less a conquest of nature, than a demonstration to the rulers of Culhuacan of their power to succeed in the worst of circumstances. Indeed, the ruler of the Culhua, having seen the Tenochca's success at Tizaapan, conceded defeat and allowed the Tenochca to intermarry with his people. Such an interpretation, which undoubtedly has a degree of accuracy, would see symbols such as pots filled with snakes as representative of the Tenochca's potential power over men, and not of their strength in

³ Diego Durán, *The History of the Indies of New Spain*, trans. Doris Heyden (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994), 276.

⁴ This story is told by Bernal Díaz del Castillo, *Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España* (Mexico City: Editorial Porrúa, 1966), 178.

⁵ Fr. Toribio Motolinía, *Memoriales e Historia de los Indios de la Nueva España* (Madrid: Ediciones Atlas, 1970), 298.

vanquishing wilderness and its disordered, non-human spaces.

Yet, in story after story there are images of beasts preying on humans in times of social and cultural upheaval. In dreams induced by psychedelic mushroom banquets, men envisioned themselves consumed by beasts.⁶ We have examined the Quecholli festival and the travelling into the wilderness to confront the beast. There are even examples from earlier periods, from the time of Teotihuacan, where it can be seen from murals located on the outskirts of Teotihuacan that the crisis of a civilization was seen as the penetration of the beast into the protected confines of the city. As Eric Wolf attests in *Sons of the Shaking Earth*: “When a painter depicted jaguars and coyotes on the walls of a building complex called Atetelco, on the south-western outskirts of Teotihuacán ... a feeling of impending crisis and doom must already have been in the air.”⁷ There are examples of the great market in Tlatelolco that the Tenochca remembered with great pride. There are the examples and stories of merchants, the quintessential transgressor between civilized and wilderness landscapes, bringing back to Tenochtitlan the prizes of the periphery. Their occupation, more than any other, was the civilizing mission. Soon, we will examine Moctezoma’s menagerie of wild animals that Díaz del Castillo thought of as a living hell, but for which we must discover the function and symbolic meaning within Tenochca society. The fact of the matter is that there are far too many references to beasts and insidious environments to ignore. They might be discounted, one by one, as symbols of political crises and conquests, but in my opinion, this approach is too tedious and far fetched to explain them convincingly.

Thus, what exactly was pronounced by the stories and spectacles outlined above? How should we interpret the incidents in which the Tenochca confront man and beast? In the case of the spectacle of human sacrifice, the message is unequivocal: beware of the Tenochca, the death of your men and those of other nations on top of our pyramid is an indication of our favouring by the gods and of our total control over the lives of men everywhere. Other stories and spectacles, like the story of Tizaapan and the hawk are more troublesome, for they involve the subjugation of the non-human world. To me, it seems likely that the message in these circumstances was independent of political concerns (although it had implications there too) and spoke to a relationship between the Tenochca and the world around them. In a rather simplistic way, we might interpret these scenarios as representative of human/nature dialogue, stating: “the world is innately inimical to human occupation, but we have proven ourselves to be able to

⁶ Bernardino Sahagún, *Florentine Codex: General History of the Things of New Spain, in thirteen parts*, trans. A.J.O. Anderson and C.E. Dibble (Santa Fe, New Mexico: The School of American Research and the University of Utah, 1950-’82), *Book 9*, 39.

⁷ Eric R. Wolf, *Sons of the Shaking Earth* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1959), 102. For this mural, see Image 9 in Appendix III.

overcome its varied manifestations and to manage its powers for our own uses.” Here, the message may have been sent to humans, but its content was totally concerned with human conquests in the non-human world. The Tenochca knew that one day they would be defeated, but because they remembered that Teotihuacan and Tula were defeated not by men, but by beasts, the Tenochca kept a watchful eye on their surroundings, always on the lookout for inimical spirits, in the form of ferocious animals, that threatened the stability of their city.

In the following pages I seek to show that the paranoia of the periphery was driven more by the spectre of disordered (dehumanized) nature, that is, wilderness, than it was by peripheral human groups. In the following pages, we will continue our examination of the centre/periphery complex with a look at the Tenochca characterization of the earth.

2. Earth: The Unnatural Abode

In every definitive stage of life (birth, puberty, marriage, and death), the Tenochca citizen was made to know the difficulty of life on earth for humans. Take, for instance, these words addressed to newborns to prepare them for a life of hardship:

O my beloved grandson, thou has endured suffering and fatigue. For thou has come here to earth: thou has appeared on earth. Thou shalt behold, come to know, and feel pain, affliction, and suffering. It is a place of torment and affliction; of constant torment ...; a time of torment and a time of affliction to which thou has come; a place of bitterness, a place of much work....⁸

It is worth repeating that the Tenochca rose to power in the mythical era of the Fifth Sun. In this age, the four part division of the cosmos was precariously stabilized so that in each 52 years, each cardinal direction (and its associated powers) ruled for 13 years, in a consecutive rotation. The natural world was competitive and disorderly, each quadrant ruled separately, not in tandem as a unified force or entity. Nature is often conceptualized in the Western tradition as a fully integrated and logical entity, but such a notion is theoretically impossible in the Tenochca perspective. The world was too competitive to be considered a totality; its defining characteristic was its unlawfulness; it was profoundly illogical.

In the legends which describe the cosmogony of the earth, there are numerous references to the earth as a single entity, *Cipactli*. In order to avoid any possibility of confusion with Western ideas such as the Gaia Hypothesis, which also conceives of the earth as a single living entity, I want to take a moment to explore the concept of *Cipactli*, otherwise known as

⁸ Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, Book 4, 114.

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Tlaltecuhlti, or the 'Earth Monster'. It was said that the earth was created when Quetzalcoatl and Tezcatlipoca carried Tlaltecuhlti to a place in the water:

She was filled up at all joints by eyes and mouths with which she bit like a wild beast. ... [Quetzalcoatl and Tezcatlipoca] changed themselves into two large snakes of which one seized the goddess from the right hand to the left foot, the other from the left hand to the right foot, and they pulled so much that they broke her in half, and from the half towards the shoulders they made the earth and carried off the other half to heaven.⁹

It is interesting to note that in this description of the creation of the earth, the earth is constituted as a single being, albeit a 'wild beast' who devoured all that passed by her innumerable mouths. In fact, the story continues by giving this being human emotions, stating that "this goddess sometimes wept at night." From her body, the world was constituted:

from her would come all of the fruit necessary for the life of men; ... [the gods] made from her hair trees and flowers and grasses, from her skin the very fine grass and small flowers, from her eyes wells and fountains and small caves, from her mouth rivers and great caverns, from her nose mountain valleys, and from her shoulders mountains.¹⁰

It is important to realize that the version of the creation of the earth that is given above, and which is the usual end point for the accounts given by most scholars,¹¹ is not the end of the creation story. As Lopez Austin states, the creation story and the Legend of the Suns is an explanation of the way things are now; the creatures and objects of the Fifth Sun still show remnants of the past four Suns.¹² For example, monkeys and apes owe their origin to the Second Sun, turkeys were constituted in the Third, dogs in the Fourth, and all types of fish in the Fifth. It is significant, then, that in the Fourth Sun, "it rained so hard and so abundantly that the heavens fell":

Seeing that the sky had fallen, the four gods ordained that they should make four roads through the center of the earth, in order to enter it and raise the sky. They created four men to help them. ... Tezcatlipoca and Quetzalcoatl turned themselves into enormous trees Then the men, trees, and gods raised the sky with the stars as they are today.

⁹ Story is taken from "Histoyre du Mechique," trans. from French by F.M. Swensen, found in Roberta H. Markman and Peter T. Markman, *The Flayed God: The Mesoamerican Mythological Tradition: sacred texts and images from pre-Columbian Mexico and Central America* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1992), 213. The "Histoyre du Mechique" has a complex history itself of which I need only say that the work is an early colonial translation of a now lost early colonial manuscript in Nahuatl. The original Nahuatl manuscript was probably a myth collected by Andres Olmos.

¹⁰ Ibid., 213.

¹¹ Eg. Doris Heyden in the imagination of matter and also the store given in Markman and Markman, in "Histoyre du Mexique." It is worth noting that the account in the "Histoyre du Mexique" ends suddenly at this point. To resume the story, one must take up the *Leyenda de los Soles* (a very early colonial account written in Nahuatl and probably collected by Andrés Olmos that is an educated interpretation of pre-conquest pictorial documents, or the "Historia de los mexicanos pos sus pinturas," which is preserved in Nahuatl, but which is probably based on the same pictorial documents as the "Leyendas...").

¹² Alfredo López Austin, *The Human Body and Ideology: Concepts of the Ancient Nahuas*, vols. 1 and 2, trans. B.R. Ortiz de Montellano and T. Ortiz de Montellano (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1988), 245.

After the sky was raised, the gods gave life to the earth, which had died when the sky fell.¹³

The collapse and reconstitution of the two realms (heaven and earth) can be seen as a process of two discrete entities suddenly integrated and then once again segregated. These events have important consequences for the Tenochca conceptualization of the world in which they lived. To them, all of the elements of the earth were constituted from a single being, yet the death and disintegration of the earth and heavens, and then their reconstitution as two separate entities attached by four trees, resulted in a world which was constructed from cosmological collapse and which thus shows signs of that earlier period of disorder. As a result of the collapse and more particularly, the establishment of columnar pathways (trees) that join heaven, earth, and the underworld, the heavenly gods regularly travelled to and from earth and occupied the flesh of earthly material. Such an occupation of earthly matter by animistic entities ('souls') may have invigorated life on earth, but it also resulted in a disorderly constitution of living objects by the spirit of gods who were naturally and eternally competitive amongst themselves. As Lopez-Austin states:

The gods travelled inside the hollow posts, coming from the sky and from the depths of the earth. Their encounter was sinful. The two parts of Cipactli's body were not to be united again. The gods from above and below were fragments of the goddess' divided body, and their marriage was a violation of the original separation.¹⁴

Following the creation and movement throughout the sky of the Fifth Sun, the earth warmed, causing the restricted transit of essences within the hardening matter that they occupied. The earth had thus been constituted in a highly irregular and ad hoc manner, and then made permanent by the sun's energy. The consequence of this was the natural instability of the earthly realm. All objects were animated by a nearly infinite number of divine essences that mixed and matched to create the enormous diversity of species found on earth. However, this vision of the earth was further complicated by a belief in the volatility of individual beings. The transit of essences was only restricted by the hardening of earthly material, not blocked. As we shall see, time and space were variables that impacted the spiritual balance of beings. At certain times and in certain places, the natural balance of essences within individual beings could be upset by the invasion or abandonment of the being by any essence. The earth was the nodal point in which the forces of the underworld, the heavens, and the four directions collided in often destructive ways; the consequence of this for the Tenochca was that the individual, and in fact the entire

¹³ "Historia de los Mexicanos por sus Pinturas," translated by Scott Mahler, in Markman and Markman *Flayed God*, 129.

¹⁴ Alfredo López Austin, *Tamoanchan, Tlalocan: Places of Mist*, trans. B.R. Ortiz de Montellano and T. Ortiz de Montellano (Niwot, Colorado: University Press of Colorado, 1997), 13.

earth, was an extremely volatile, disorderly, and perilous realm.

The inherent instability of the cosmos and the precarious position of humans within it were well understood by the Tenochca. This knowledge was often phrased in the following way:

On earth all live, all go along a mountain peak. Over there is an abyss; over here is an abyss. Nowhere is it possible, to the left, to the right is the abyss. ... It is as if somewhere there were a ford. ... And it is slick, slippery on earth. No one is escaping. The snare, the pit, the cords, the straw, the sharp straws lie placed one above another, joined to another.¹⁵

The texts attest to the narrow (spatial) realm of human life on earth. We should not overlook the emphasis of the texts on the geographical conceptualization of order and the human spaces within it: the four quadrants, the mountain peak, the *place* of suffering.

The hardships of life on earth might lead us to believe that life after death would be more rewarding. In Book Three of the Florentine Codex, we might see our speculations confirmed by the following address to the dead:

O my son, thou hast found thy breath; thou hast suffered; our lord hath been merciful to thee. Truly our common abode is not here on earth. It is only for a little time, only for a moment that we have been warm. Only through the grace of our lord have we come to know ourselves.¹⁶

Despite the suggestion in the above passage that the plight of humans would be relieved after death, there is little other evidence to support such a notion. Ironically, life after death was no less difficult; most humans went to the underworld, to a place called Mictlan, 'our common place of perishing.'

The trip to Mictlan was a perilous voyage. The dead needed to make their way through the place 'where the mountains come [crashing] together,' 'the road which the serpent watcheth,' the place of the 'eight deserts', the 'eight hills', the 'obsidian-bladed winds', and finally, 'the place of nine rivers'.¹⁷ And if the hardships of the voyage were not enough, it is related that upon arrival the spectacle was abhorrent: the lords of Mictlan (Mictlantecuhtli and Mictecacihuatl) "eat feet, hands, and a fetid beetle stew. Their gruel is pus; they drink it from skulls." Not only is it the lords who eat such things. "He who on earth ate a stew of black beans, eats hearts in Mictlan. And all the poisonous herbs are eaten there ... Everything that is not eaten here on earth is eaten there in Mictlan, and it is said that nothing else is eaten, that there is great want in Mictlan. ... It is very cold. ... And there is much work."¹⁸

¹⁵ Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, Book 6, 53.

¹⁶ Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, Book 3, 41.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 43.

¹⁸ Fr. Bernardino Sahagún, *Primeros Memoriales* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), 177-8.

If we search in Tenochca literature for positive imagery of Mictlan, we are hard-pressed to find it. The only benefit of life in Mictlan was the disclosure (unfleshing) of reality and the release from the hardships of self-knowledge that took place on earth. It was said: "There, there is an enlarging of the earth [where] forever it hath ended. Thou hast brought thyself to the place of mystery, the place of the unfleshed."¹⁹ Yet, such meagre knowledge did not make humans desire death. Those who sought knowledge on earth—the philosophers, poets, and priests—they were not tempted by the 'enlarging of the earth.' Quite the opposite was true. The elite informants of the Florentine Codex averred that "the intelligent, the clear thinkers were terrified [of death]. But the perverse, those badly brought up, those who could not think, the effeminate, the rebellious only laughed at it Not thus were they terrified of death."²⁰

Just as we have seen that the Tenochca notion of life on earth was not in any way connected to concepts of paradise, it is absolutely clear that Mictlan and Hell bear no resemblance to each other. In fact, it should come as no surprise that the entire paradise/hell dualism that plays a fundamental role in Christian teaching is not at all represented in pre-Conquest Tenochca culture. Louise Burkhart calls the Tenochca conceptualization of religion as a 'dialectical dualism' in which elements "cannot be reduced to an opposition between positive and negative. They contain elements of each other; thus, there is no need for mediation between them."²¹ Just as simple opposition and the notion of good and bad were not frameworks in which Tenochca culture was organized, the notion of superior and inferior species was not present either. Again, quoting Burkhart, "There was no permanent structure, no ontological hierarchy or Great Chain of Being, but rather a process or a movement."²² If we understand Tenochca conceptualizations of life on earth in this way, it is not surprising that Tenochca elite scoffed at the desiring of death by ignorant peasants; death was not a release from life, it was only a continuation of it, another stage in the ongoing process of the burden of life. In the choice between life on earth or life in Mictlan, neither was considered to fit human wants; both contained unique advantages (freewill and self-knowledge vs. divine revelation), but both contained fierce devouring beasts.

Yet, on earth humanity could consciously alter their condition. Earth may not have been a *natural* human abode, but with constant attention to its modification, it could become more accommodating. The infusion of the gods within matter was the reason that forests were

¹⁹ Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, Book 3, 41.

²⁰ Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, Book 2, 106-107.

²¹ Louise M. Burkhart, *The Slippery Earth: Nahuatl-Christian Moral Dialogue in Sixteenth-Century Mexico* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1989), 37.

²² *Ibid.*, 37.

associated with Mictlan and also with Tezcatlipoca, that jaguars were related to both the underworld and the sun, that eagles were animated by the spirit of the sun, that hummingbirds and other birds were infused with the spirit of Huitzilopochtli and Quetzalcoatl, etc.. But if the world was at first glance utterly chaotic, then the Tenochca citizen could be relieved that the variability of the earth could be at least partially known. All objects possessed clues as to the make up of their inner (imperceptible) spirits, both by the inscriptions made upon their exterior surfaces, as well as by their behaviour. As we shall see, such an inquiry into the divine composition of earthly objects could allow the Tenochca to know the world and then to tame its chaotic manifestations, permitting them to manage and order the world for their own advantage. One of the simplest means of obtaining such knowledge about the world, and thus of ordering and managing the diversity of species and objects, was by knowing their geographic location and habitat, and by doing so, establishing their relationship to the centre.

3. The City as Ordering Mechanism

In the Tenochca's own historical accounts, as rendered in the *Primeros Memoriales*,²³ a contract was made between rulers and ruled in the historical period of the Chichimeca in which for the cost of all of the world's possessions, the rulers and nobility supplied their people with protection from destructive forces. It was said:

They said that the inhabitants of the whole world were the common property of the Mexica, Acolhua, the Tepaneca. ... Thus they established the custom that the [Triple Alliance] ... penetrated everywhere. ... They went, they conquered them, and their tribute therefore increased. ... And it was said that all precious things, wherever they were produced in the places along the coast, were the rightful due of the rulers.²⁴ ...

Thus were the customs; thus they guarded the world. It was said that when the world began, when it originated, the Chichimeca guarded their homes, their lands, and thus they guarded their commoners everywhere. Thus things were guarded; the Mexica, the Acolhua, the Tepaneca thus guarded things.²⁵

Thus, to justify their rule and privilege—and the poverty of the general population—the Tenochca elite required a means of reassuring commoners that steps were being taken to protect them. In a society in which the vast majority of the population was impoverished while a few lived in outrageous luxury, the general populace needed far more than simple verbal reassurance

²³ In Sahagún's *Primeros Memoriales*, the following is said about original sources on pages 227-8: "Thus was it said: 'The way of life is [according to] the black, the red [writings].'"

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 223-4. Following this passage is 4 pages which list the objects that were considered to be their 'rightful due'. The list is meant to be comprehensive, it seems.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 227-8.

to be satisfied that the elite were maintaining their half of the deal. Of course, war, religion, and a shared sense of history are excellent tools for a state to build a sense of nationalism and a degree of complacency amongst the general populace. Yet, the contract outlined above gives us reason to believe that more was needed to maintain group coherence and class inequality than mere opposition to external threats. Elite were required to show clear physical proof of their efforts to protect the population. The City of Tenochtitlan was, by and large, the most expressive and easily recognizable symbol of the efforts of the elite. Tenochtitlan was a fragile ordering mechanism designed to cope with and ultimately manage the predominantly inimical world that was characterized by disorderly, beastly forces—be they human (in the best scenario), or *natural* (in the most menacing).

Such an ordering mechanism was based upon the Tenochca principle that the city was a precipice surrounded on all sides by the great abyss. In anthropological terms, we can understand Tenochtitlan as the centre of the universe, and the centre was the *axis mundi*, the place through which the earth was connected to the upper and lower worlds. As Lopez Austin says, “man was conceived to be the center of the cosmos, born at a time when the five points of the terrestrial plane met in equilibrium, a being in whom it was believed the qualities of all the components of the universe converged.”²⁶ In Markman and Markman’s words, “Humanity ... was thus perceived ... as a balanced synthesis of the universe.”²⁷ The danger in this situation, of course, is that humanity, as a synthesis of nature, precludes the need for non-human spaces at all. And indeed, in the Tenochca perspective, the City became the symbol of the totality of nature. In fact, the Tenochca initiative was to take the periphery to the centre and domesticate it by incorporating it into the synthetic fabric of urban life. In the ordered spaces of Tenochtitlan, all was imported and given its place, and the ideal of domestication was taken to its logical conclusion.

One of the most puzzling features of Tenochtitlan was Moctezoma the Younger’s menagerie, sometimes called a zoo or bestiary. Moctezoma’s strange collection of animals was also one of the most awesome sights for the first Spaniards to visit Tenochtitlan. Hernando Cortés marvelled at the fine masonry “all in the style of a chess board.”²⁸ The menagerie contained many types of raptors (eagles, hawks, vultures, and falcons) and many species of land birds (such as Quetzals, Macaws, or Cotingas), in which each bird was given its own large cage and perch, and wherein there were many varieties of birds and a great quantity of each species.

²⁶ López-Austin, cited in Markman and Markman, 77.

²⁷ Markman and Markman, 77.

²⁸ Hernán Cortés, *Cartas y Documentos* (México: Editorial Porrúa, 1963), 78.

The cages were tall, and the bottom half was made of brick, while the top was constructed with a large number of slender criss-crossed poles that formed a cage. The menagerie also included a huge variety of mammals and reptiles, and even though Cortés and Díaz only give us a small selection of them, and even though their identification of the species is often erroneous (they cited tigers, lions, etc), we can with near certainty establish the presence of jaguars, ocelots, pumas, and other wild cats; foxes, coyotes, and wolves; and many types of snakes kept in large clay pots. If Antonio de Solís can be trusted, in his *Historia de la conquista de México*—published in 1684—he claimed that Moctezoma’s collection even contained bison.²⁹ If one has witnessed the size and strength of a bison, one will appreciate the Tenochca feat of capturing and transporting these animals from the Northern plains into Tenochtitlan. It is reported that the birds and animals were given live prey to devour (quail and turkeys), as well as the flesh of common sources of meat (dogs, deer, and “the bodies of the Indians who have been sacrificed.”³⁰). The menagerie was so large that it was said that three hundred men were charged with the care of its animals.

For Díaz del Castillo, the spectacle of viewing these animals was surpassed by “the infernal noise when the lions and tigers roared and jackals and foxes howled and the serpents hissed, it was horrible to listen to and it seemed like a hell.”³¹ It is perhaps worth noting that Díaz’s memories of the menagerie were coloured by the horrific events of *La Noche Triste* in which in the process of fleeing the city, the Spaniards suffered a great loss of life. In Díaz’s mind, the Tenochca were devil worshipers, and the menagerie was living proof of their satanic leanings. “And we took it as certain that when they threw us out of Mexico, and killed more than eight hundred and fifty of our soldiers, that the dead would sustain the wild beasts and snakes for many days.”³² Díaz’s horror of Moctezoma’s collection of animals is interesting not only for its role in emphasizing the terrific spectacle of the menagerie, but most importantly, because it brings to the fore the issue of the function of the menagerie in Tenochca culture, politics, and religion.

At first sight, we can easily imagine a few possible functions for the menagerie. There is, of course, the possibility that its main function was as a form of entertainment and pleasure for the city’s elite and for foreign embassies. Alternatively, and politically, it is conceivable that

²⁹ Andrés de Solís in Roldán Peniche B., *Bestiario Mexicano* (México, DF.: Panorama Editorial, 1987), 28-9.

³⁰ Díaz del Castillo, *The Discovery and Conquest of Mexico, 1517-1521*, trans. A.P. Maudslay (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Cudahy, 1956), 213.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 213.

³² *Ibid.*, 157.

the Tenochca elite used the menagerie as a form of terror in which foreigners such as the Spaniards were treated to a full sensual demonstration of Tenochca power and bestiality, that is, their potential to harness and mimic the ferocity of wild animals. Finally, there is a multifaceted explanation that should be considered. In any case, let us begin by exploring the possibility that the principal function of the menagerie was the pursuit of leisure and entertainment.

When the Spanish conquistadores were led into Moctezoma's menagerie, they encountered a world they had never seen before. Although the idea of the 'zoo' in Western culture dates back to Egyptian times and was then elaborated in the Classic Greek period to become a place not only of leisure, but of science, the concept began to erode in the Roman period. By the fifteenth century, the zoo, as a vast collection of wild animals made available for public observation, had disappeared. Undoubtedly there were certain periods in certain places, such as the Charlemagne era in France, or, closer to the period in question, the rule of Emanuel I in Portugal (1495-1521), that are exceptions to the rule but generally speaking, collections of wild animals were small, private, and used strictly for entertainment. In fact, it was only following the discovery of the New World and the Conquest of Mexico that royal zoos began to flourish in Europe.³³ It is very likely that the impetus for this development derived from a surge in the idea of 'novelty' that was supplied by the sudden expansion of the known world, in both geographical and cultural terms. In any case, poorly educated soldiers such as Cortés and Díaz were awed by Moctezoma's menagerie and struggled to understand it. Both observers used a variety of terms to describe what they saw (*casa de ídoles* [...of idols], *casa de aves* [...of birds], etc.), but neither found a word semantically appropriate, one that would be repeated and permanently applied. The problem was that the necessary archetype was missing. Searching for appropriate metaphors, both Cortés and Díaz aligned the menagerie with more familiar analogies such as public gardens, and as we have seen, Hell.

It was the former of the two analogies, however, that served most often the attempts of conquistadores to understand and interpret the environments of Tenochtitlan. Public ornamental gardens were a regular part of civic and royal landscapes throughout Western history. Nevertheless, it is imperative to recognize the limited scope of these gardens. It was not until the Sixteenth century that the first botanical gardens (more or less scientific in scope) began to dot the Italian and European landscapes. The medieval and early-renaissance gardens were strictly ornamental. It should come as no surprise, then, that Cortés' description of both gardens and menageries rarely escapes the boundaries of ornamentalism:

³³ My source here is David Hancocks, Chapter One of *A Different Nature: The Paradoxical World of Zoos and Their Uncertain Future* (University of California Press, 2001).

There were gardens very lush and with many aromatic trees and roses. Within the garden is a great pool of fresh water, very well built with sides of handsome masonry, around which runs an open walk with well-laid tile pavements, so broad that four persons can walk abreast on it ...³⁴

Cortés' description of ornamental gardens is basically repeated by Díaz, and then by religious commentators who lacked first hand knowledge of the city before it was destroyed.³⁵ Although the ornamental descriptions of the gardens is partly right, the emphasis on ornamentalism is perhaps misplaced. We know that Moctezoma's 'retreat' at Tepepulco was more than a place of leisure; there were altars and medicinal gardens in which a wide variety of plants were gathered. Even Díaz, in one instance, identifies the presence of "medicinal herbs" in the gardens near the residence of Moctezoma.³⁶ Most importantly, however, a passage in *Book 10* of the *Florentine Codex* gives us fascinating and unexpected information regarding horticulturalists in Tenochca society:

The horticulturalist [is] a planter of seeds, a broadcaster of seeds; a tree-planter; a planter; an uprooter of plants.... The good horticulturalist [is] a careful worker, a calm worker—diligent, solicitous, careful of things, dedicated, able; *a knower of books, a reader of the day signs, of the months, of the years.*³⁷

The reference to the horticulturalist's training in reading is unexpected. In pre-conquest Tenochtitlan, only a very small number of people would have learned to read the books and would have had access to them. The horticulturalist, then, belonged to a select group of professional elite in Tenochtitlan. As very few pre-Columbian books survived the Conquest, one can only wonder if it was not possible that botanical cataloguing had not begun in Tenochtitlan and other cities. In any case, it is important to realize that our description of pre-Columbian gardens is filtered through the impoverished culture of Medieval and early-Renaissance Spain, and that this Spanish culture overlooked nearly every aspect of these gardens that suggested scientific investigation. As a archetype of interpretation, the ornamental garden and its pleasure seeking function set the stage for Spanish interpretations of Moctezoma's menagerie and bequeathed to history a very limited interpretation of these urban landscapes. It is for this reason that a complete reassessment must be made of 'natural' spaces inside Tenochtitlan.

Our effort to understand the function of the menagerie and its significance within late-Tenochca culture is dependent upon our ability to define its *contents and geographic location* in regard to other buildings such as the aviary and tribute store houses, arms depots, holding places

³⁴ Cortés, 56-7.

³⁵ Motolinía, *Indios*, 295-7. Durán, *History*, 205.

³⁶ Díaz, *Historia*, 158.

³⁷ Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, *Book 10*, 42. Italics are mine.

for slaves, captured enemy soldiers, and criminals, rooms containing albinos, hunchbacks, and deformed human beings, as well as to the state gardens and other pleasurable places. The spatial organization of these objects is far from clear, but by gathering all of the relevant data, the situation can be somewhat clarified. The segregation and compilation of objects in these rooms and houses gives us insight into the Tenochca system of classification, and thus, of their valuing, characterization, and purpose for collecting them. By using this methodology, we have a far better chance of avoiding the tendency to transplant Western constructs such as the 'zoo', 'gardens', 'jails', or 'sanatoriums'. This is not to say that there is no possibility for overlap between the cultural constructs of Western and Tenochca cultures, but to begin with such suppositions would preclude the possibility of difference and would ensure that our investigation ends at the same place from which it began.

In our tour of 'natural' urban spaces, we will revisit the building seen in Chapter Two in which were put approximately five hundred ducks and fifteen hundred turkeys. The location of this room is difficult to place, but according to Cortés it is near the market, close to a place in which visitors lodged. Because this 'very nice building' was located near the market in Tlatelolco, and owing to its contents (which were very specialized and which constituted a vast quantity of only two species), we can deduce that the building was a type of poultry house used for economic purposes alone. Indeed, Cortés notes that the birds were plucked each year for their esteemed feathers. Such a building was without any direct political, leisurely, or cosmological objectives.

A far more interesting place was a type of aquatic aviary that housed a wide variety of fresh water and salt water birds. Ten pools of water, some with fresh and some with salt water, made homes for many species such as flamencos, herons, ibis, and others.. Again, there were three hundred attendants for these birds, and this was in addition to a smaller group who were like veterinarians and whose primary occupation was to cure the sick birds. The pools were surrounded by a large garden area with beautiful walk-ways and a number of lookouts which perched over the pools.³⁸ Additionally, the building that housed the aviary and surrounding gardens was a place in which two foreign diplomats could be lodged and treated to every possible luxury.

Bernal Díaz's description of the aviary is absolutely confused and can only be followed if looked at carefully and assessed in terms of Cortés' descriptions. His mistakes are worth assessing, however, as they seem to be perpetuated in the works of many modern commentators.

³⁸ Cortés, 77.

Díaz's first mistake, remembering 50 years after the conquest, was to include various types of land-based birds (such as eagles, quetzals, parrots, and macaws) in his description of the 'casa de aves'. As we have seen, these birds were housed in the menagerie. His second great error, it seems, was his association of these water-borne birds with the those birds that were contained in the building that I labelled the 'poultry house'. For instance, he claims that these birds were bred in this building, which would be an impossible undertaking if the variety of species was as great as both he and Cortés claim. The final error worth mentioning is that directly following his description of the 'casa de aves' is a description of the menagerie, which leads the reader to believe that the activities of the poultry house were located near those of the menagerie and the aquatic aviary. It is necessary that we recognize the clear spatial segregation made in Tenochca society between the economic and political/religious realms. On the other hand, once we have identified Díaz's chief point of confusion (the poultry house with the aquatic aviary), we are able to see that both he and Cortés agree that the aviary was located near, perhaps adjacent to, the menagerie, and that both were located near the centre of the city.

In Cortés' description of the aviary, he notes that in the corner of the aviary, in a separate room altogether, were contained a number of albinos: "there was in this house a room in which men and women and children white from the moment of their birth, in their face and body and hair and eyebrows and eyelashes."³⁹ The inclusion of albinos in this building is very peculiar, as it complicates the possible singular function of this building as a place of leisure for foreign diplomats. Moreover, the location of albinos in the aviary is even more significant when we take into account the strange contents of yet another building that Cortés describes in the following way:

There was another house where there were many monstrous men and women, in which there were midgets, hunchbacks, ... and others with other deformities, and each type of monstrosity was given its own room; and also for these people there were people dedicated to caring for them ...⁴⁰

This building, too, which we might call the house of deformation, was located near the menagerie and aviary, in the city centre. The specific segregation of these people and animals into their own rooms and cages, is interesting because it suggests a differentiated system of valuing and characterization. Albinos were physically normal, but their white colouring was reminiscent of Aztlan (the place of whiteness) and the peregrination myth, of the white frogs and aquatic species that indicated the place in which Tenochtitlan would be founded. We also know that deformed humans and midgets were associated with Tlaloc and the fertility/regeneration

³⁹ Ibid., 78.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 78.

complex. Of course, Cortés' description is too short to hypothesize as to the meaning and rationale behind the particular ordering of these humans. Nevertheless, we will see that the fact that they were ordered has meaning in itself.

Left out of the previous description of Moctezoma's menagerie is a rather peculiar feature, and it should be said, one of the most salient features of the menagerie for Bernal Díaz, one that helped to invoke his horror and the analogy of Hell. He began his description in the following manner:

Let us leave this [aviary] and go on to another great house, where they keep many Idols, and they say that they are their fierce gods, and with them many kinds of carnivorous beast of prey⁴¹

The idols placed in the menagerie were those collected in the Tenochca army's excursions into enemy lands, often far into the periphery. The integration of foreign religious symbols, ceremonies, and beliefs was one of the Tenochca's most defining traits and their best effort to solidify an otherwise miscellany of cultures into one empire. It has been noted in many places that the Tenochca did not require its conquered territories to accept the culture of Tenochtitlan, nor did they attempt to destroy foreign gods and religious beliefs. As we know, the all-or-nothing mindset of conquest and the goal of outright acculturation to the norms set by the conquerors was the mode of conquest of the Spaniards. In the Tenochca culture of conquest, the only demands made by the Tenochca of the vanquished was their tribute, in goods and services provided in Tenochtitlan. Of course, such onerous demands often resulted in hardship and the increased poverty of conquered groups. Yet, in terms of cultural integration, the onerous came to rest squarely upon the shoulders of the victors. Each victory complicated the task of integration, the ordering and representation of dissonant elements at the centre.

Let us make another observation in regard to management of 'evil-doers' and war captives. Criminals were jailed in the petlacalco, storehouses guarded by a group of majordomos known as the calpixque. Slaves and captives, however, were guarded in either a place called the malcalli or the totocalli (menagerie). Again, it is fitting that the two groups, both awaiting their death, were separated and given discrete status. Such a division suggests two things. First, we can note that the treatment of war captives was anything but utilitarian; they were aligned most of all with living animal captives brought from periphery. We should also remember that the bones of many of these animals (jaguars, crocodiles, turtles, etc.) were found lying amongst those of the human sacrificial victims, a fact which emphasizes their foreignness and peripherality rather than their political use. The same might be said of the placement of

⁴¹ Díaz, *Conquest of Mexico*, 213.

criminals, which can only be understood if we stay clear of preconceived notions deriving from Western justice, which is a system separated from religious activities. The amalgamation of criminals and tribute only makes sense if their common aspect is emphasized: they are both aberrations of Tenochca culture: the one because of its geographic origin and the other because of its aspect as transgressors of Tenochca law.

Finally, it is important to recognize that all of these objects were contained in the city centre. We can discern this fact from their common link to the calpixque, who handled the arrival, storage, and distribution animals and objects sent to the petlascalco, the menagerie, and most likely the aquatic aviary. Because the calpixque were housed in one location (known alternatively as either the calpixcalli or texcancalli), and waited there for orders from dignitaries to gather and deliver all precious things kept in the city (food, skins, shields, capes, jewels, etc.), it seems likely that their residence would have been located amidst their places of work: the petlascalco, totocalli, and the aquatic aviary.

When we view the spatial organization of Tenochtitlan in this light—by way of the integration of the periphery into the centre—many strange inconsistencies can be explained. For instance, the strange combination of idols and the menagerie, exotic aquatic birds, albinos and foreign diplomats, as well as the strange collection of deformed human beings—all were cultural and geographic aberrations that were imported and then segregated into their various identities. The logic here seems to be an equation of representation and integration, that the centre was stabilized by means of domesticating the foreign into the ordered spaces of the city. We might even go so far as to see the Quecholli festival in this same way, that the fundamental strategy was to conquer and then ‘domesticate’ the slain beasts by importing their severed heads into the heart of the city.

In the analysis carried out above, I have sought to elucidate the strange mixture of objects that were amalgamated into a core region of the city, whose purpose can be considered administrative, political, and religious. Because the function of some of these objects might be considered recreational in Western culture (in particular, the gardens and menagerie), and because the recreational interpretation is the one most repeated, I have attempted to investigate the possibility that the main purpose of these rooms is better considered political and religious than recreational. To summarize the argument thus far, the location of such a diversity of objects in one general location in the centre of the city in, perhaps, a large complex of buildings surrounding the residence of the majordomos (from menageries, to lodgings, to jails, to slave holdings, to tribute warehouses, to deformed human beings), when considered in their totality, cannot be considered as a sort of recreation complex. It seems to me that if there was any such

leisure complex at all, it would have been located outside the city in a place such as Tepepulco or Itzapalapa. Moreover, the location of such utilitarian buildings as the 'poultry house', leads me to conclude that primary function of the complex of buildings discussed above is not recreational, but like all things in the core of the city, religious, and by extension of the sphere of religious imperative into the sphere of everyday life, political. Specifically, Tenochtitlan was the place at the crossroads of the vertical and horizontal axes, and the movement of objects from the periphery to the centre and then their ordering and representation according to cosmological principles, represents an effort on the part of the Tenochca to stabilize the centre against the threat of bestial forces of the periphery.

4. Representation

Of course, the real-life incarceration of the beast was one of the most effective means of demonstrating the strength of the Tenochca in harnessing and managing bestial forces. Yet, it was certainly not the only means, nor should we believe that its utility far outweighed the others. If the beast or its remains (heads, skins, feathers, etc.) could not be physically brought to the city, it was not a problem; animals and beastly images of them were often *represented* in a variety of forms: wrought from stone, cast from gold, narrated in myth and other stories of fantastic beings, or, most intriguingly, mimicked. The crafting and representation of objects from a variety of sources was an undertaking that fascinated Cortés and his men. As Cortés said:

... what greater eminence could there be to a savage nobleman like [Moctezoma] to have counterfeited from gold and silver and stones and feathers, every object under the sun that exists in his kingdom, so close to the original, that there is not a silversmith in the world that could do it better, nor could a stoneworker fathom the instruments to make it so perfect, nor from a man of the pen or wax could it be made so marvellously.⁴²

Indeed, as the Picture Gallery in Appendix III exhibits, great attention was given to the detail of these images, so much so that even the typical behavioural qualities of the species were represented.⁴³ As Doctor Hernández commented at the turn of the seventeenth century, likely with examples of the crafted works before his eyes, they made "fish with alternating gold and silver scales; parrots with moving tongues, heads, and wings; monkeys with prehensile hands and feet that make a bobbing turn as if they were spinning, and others holding an apple or some

⁴² Cortés, 76-7. My translation.

⁴³ For the representation of animals in Tenochca art, see Images 10-12 in Appendix III.

other fruit that they seem to be eating.”⁴⁴ One of the most famous examples is the colossal sculpture of the jaguar with an indented vessel on its back. The jaguar is posed in the crouched position, perhaps waiting for its moment to attack. Art historian Esther Pasztory has commented that the animal might have been sculpted from its cage in the menagerie, for “[h]ere the massive power of the feline is conveyed, not its swiftness and grace.”⁴⁵

In a very interesting article entitled “Geography, Climate and the Observation of nature in Pre-Hispanic Mesoamerica,” Johanna Broda brings to light the representation of mountains and oceans in the Templo Mayor. To begin with, she states that “the majority of the more than 7,000 objects found buried in the offering caches within the temple structure, are related to the cult of water.”⁴⁶ Significantly, almost all of them were imported from the oceans. Full skeletal remains of sword-fish, blow fish, sea urchins, shark teeth, tortoise shells, crocodiles, corals, a special variety called brain coral, and innumerable small shells and snails.⁴⁷ Some were even laid upon sand brought from the coasts, and oriented in a east-west fashion. Moreover, in the month of Tepeilhuitl, “the mountain festival,” more or less in our month of October, small replicas of the encompassing mountains were crafted from amaranth seed dough.⁴⁸ The mountains, seen as the origin of clouds and the producer of rain, were representative of Tlaloc and the fertility cult. As Broda said, these mountains and the “piling up this marine fauna in the temple structure ... conjure up the presence of the sea in the heart of the Aztec empire...”⁴⁹

There was more than one way of representing the beast in Tenochtitlan; it was also woven into the fabric of Tenochca culture by means of the mimicking of natural beastliness in war, commerce, and ritual. In Chapter Two, we saw that the fears of Tenochca warriors were quelled by the general’s speech that reminded the young soldiers that “you will not be fighting jaguars or pumas or demons, nor do they have mouths so large that they will swallow you. They are men of flesh and bones, as we are.”⁵⁰ If we extend the logic of the above statement, we are able to understand the Tenochca ideal of the warrior: an eagle, an ocelot, an Otomí. As Inga

⁴⁴ Francisco Hernández. *The Mexican treasury: The writings of Dr Francisco Hernández* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 76.

⁴⁵ Esther Pasztory, *Aztec Art* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, 1983), 171-2.

⁴⁶ Broda, Johanna. “Geography, Climate and the Observation of Nature in Pre-Hispanic Mesoamerica,” in *The Imagination of Matter: Religion and Ecology in Mesoamerican Traditions*, ed. D. Carrasco (Great Britain: B.A.R., 1989), 140.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 140.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 141.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 141.

⁵⁰ Durán, *History*, 163.

Clendinnen notes, “[t]he great warriors were solitary hunters.”⁵¹ As eagle and ocelot warriors, two of the most prestigious ranks in the military, a ritual idealization of warrior conduct depicts them as predators seeking out their prey: “They each went on the ground; they each went stretched flat; they went looking from side to side; they each went leaping upwards; they each went fighting.”⁵² The great warriors, those fearless of death, would burst upon their foe, causing fear and, hopefully, flight.⁵³ It was the ensuing pursuit that transformed the battle from a duel between men into a hunt. The most valiant soldiers of all, however, were those labelled Otomí: [t]he wicked but brave warrior, those furious in battle, those who only came paying the tribute of death.”⁵⁴ We have already seen that the Otomí were known for their dwellings in the forested mountains. Significantly, the Otomí people were reviled by the Tenochca for their uncivilized behaviour. A common insult was to be called an Otomí. They were considered stupid, covetous, vain, strong but lazy, consumers of uncivilized foods such as skunk meat, and given excessively to hunting. Yet, ironically, such uncivilized traits were considered ideal for the warrior. Such depictions of the ideal warrior suggest that war, like the hunt, was an undertaking that took place on the boundaries of human identity, and that to be a truly fierce warrior, the individual had to leave his humanity behind.

The warrior did not alone possess such beastly qualities, nor was it only he who boasted of his conquests. The Tenochca merchant considered himself to be as brave as those who fought for their lives in war. Their excursions into foreign territories were given the same basic structure: they “encounter the waste lands, to descend into the gorges—everywhere there are places of danger and drawing into fields of battle.”⁵⁵ Very few people were remembered by name in Tenochca history. We have the names of great leaders, a few great military leaders, only a small number of poets whose works had a profound influence in Tenochca culture, and then, strangely enough, a number of merchants. These merchants were memorialized for their successful acquisition of new goods that glorified the city and enriched the citizens and rulers.⁵⁶ These mercantile conquests should not be reduced to the status of imports/exports that is imposed by the logic of modern capitalism. Their collection in the city had enormous political and religious importance; they were symbols of stability, growth, privilege, and imperial might. Indeed, we might even go so far as to see the merchants as national heroes who risked their lives

⁵¹ Inga Clendinnen, *Aztecs: An Interpretation*, Canto Edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 115.

⁵² Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, Book 2, 51.

⁵³ Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, Book 4, 38-9.

⁵⁴ Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, Book 6, 110.

⁵⁵ Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, Book 4, 47.

⁵⁶ Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, Book 9, 1-2.

to become predators who traveled into inimical territory to seize and conquer foreign goods. Such goods were brought back to Tenochtitlan, like captured warriors, and were incarcerated (as were wild beasts) in the warehouses located in the City's centre. The self-proclaimed analogy between warrior and merchant, and the nearly identical placement of the captured goods in Tenochtitlan, seems to justify at least the contemplation of such a proposition.

Although we have seen that both the merchant and warrior envisioned their quest in virtually the same basic structure, it would be wrong to assume that such human/beast transformations only took place on the periphery, where humanity was forced to adopt a position of savagery to compete with the powerful forces of untamed nature. In fact, it seems that that such bestial comportment could be adopted in the centre of the city, by one of the most revered groups in Tenochca culture, the priests. The Tenochca priest did not resemble in any way priests and ministers of Christian churches; Christian preachers idealize propriety while the dress and hygiene of Tenochca priests emphasized abasement. Their hair was grown long and was clotted with blood; they bathed rarely (contradicting the social norm of bathing each day); and they performed excruciatingly painful acts of penitence that involved blood letting from ears, legs, tongues, and other bodily parts. While in training for their duties, the young men were regularly deprived of sleep for weeks, and the smallest slip-ups in conduct (stumbling, dropping objects, being the last to return, etc.) were punished with brutal violence. As Inga Clendinnen describes:

The punishment of the delinquents was public and brutal. A noisy procession of priests harried and bullied them down to the lake edge, the youngest offenders dragged by the hand or carried on the shoulders, the older hauled along by their loincloths. ... [T]he victims were mercilessly ducked and rolled in the water until half-drowned—punished by 'Tlaloc' himself—and then left, shaking and choking, to be rescued and tended by their kin....⁵⁷

In addition to such brutality for trivial blunders, the priests and their students were required to trek into the forests at night.⁵⁸ Such a trek was considered to be extremely dangerous, as the priests and students were tempting an encounter with the most vicious spirits and beasts, in the most feared time and place. Preparations were made with an unguent called the 'comida divina' (divine sustenance), "made from poisonous bugs ...: spiders, scorpions, centipedes, lizards, vipers, etc."⁵⁹ Of course, we have said nothing of their duties of human sacrifice: the brutal execution of thousands of victims that designated the priest as executioner and spiritual leader. All of these priestly activities prepared the men to encounter other worlds and to contact not only the life giving forces of the sky, but also the macabre forces of the underworld. The priest,

⁵⁷ Clendinnen, 131.

⁵⁸ Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, Book 3, 65-6.

⁵⁹ Durán, *Historia I*, 51-2.

principally occupied with death and the savage spirits that terrified human civilization and threatened its progress, like merchants and warriors, ventured into the spiritual wilderness in a civilizing mission that aspired to protect the city from harm.

This portrait of the priest helps us explain the existence of certain fantastic creatures that mirrored the occupation of priests. One such creature was the Mazamiztli, an ‘animal’ that ran amongst the deer, unnoticed because of its guise: it had the fur, body, head, face, tail, ears, and feet like a deer. However, “[n]owhere else do they resemble, nowhere else are they like a deer.” The Mazamiztli had teeth like a jaguarondi: “it has the front teeth, the fangs, the molars. In short, it is a wild beast [a man-eater: *tequani*].” It goes about with the other deer, disguised as one of them; then, when it is hungry, “it pounces upon one; it suddenly rips open its belly [from its belly to its neck], it strews its entrail on the ground with its claws [which are like metal hooks].” The surgical cut from belly to throat mimics the activities of the priest who opened the sacrificial victim’s chest with an obsidian blade, and both the priest and Mazamiztli were like predators amongst their own kind. The Mazamiztli, like the priest, could be detected by one sign: its “sickly odour.”⁶⁰

Even more telling than the parallel between the priest and Mazamiztli, however, is near perfect match between the fantastic creature known as the Quauhtlotli (a falcon, of sorts) and the priest. The Quauhtlotli attacks its prey as do all falcons and eagles, by swooping down upon it, seizing it with the talons, and taking it away. However, again, the Quauhtlotli’s prey is always another bird, its own kind. The Quauhtlotli hovers over its prey, causing the bird to experience paralysis, and having chosen its prey, the falcon is transformed into an avian rendition of the Tenochca priest: it pierces the victim’s throat with a quick, surgical incision: “It drinks the blood, consumes it all. It does not spill a drop of the blood. And when it can eat it, first it plucks out the birds feathers [like a flayed human being].” It eats three times a day, according to the sun, before sunrise, at midday, and after sunset. And then, if we had not already been sufficiently prodded to recognize the mirroring of the priest’s responsibilities to the god Huitzilopochtli, then we are told: “And this falcon gives life to [Hu]itzilopochtli because, they said, these falcons, when they eat three times a day, as it were [giving] drink to the sun; because when they drink blood, they consume it all.”⁶¹

Contradicting this model of bestiality for warriors, merchants, and priests, were judges,

⁶⁰ Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, Book 11, 5-6.

⁶¹ It is fascinating to note that these fantastic beasts were considered to be real. These descriptions are interspersed amongst actual species (bears, hawks, etc.) and in the case of the Quauhtlotli, there is even a description of how the animal is hunted by humans. Notably, the hunting method is equally fantastic: a snare is place in the breast of a duck that is set out as a trap. Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, Book 11, 43-4.

rulers, dignitaries, and military generals; those who led and protected others required compassion and humility:

Those who came to occupy the rulership, those who came to oversee the vassals, those who came to direct the eagle warriors, the ocelot warriors, were the weepers, the sighers, those who humbled themselves, those who inclined themselves, the bowers, those who became meek, those called the secure, the peaceful, the calm, the gentle.⁶²

We might add to this that the “bad ruler” was a “wild beast, a demon of the air, a demon, an ocelot, a wolf”,⁶³ and while the gods “hath provided thee thy fangs, thy claws...,” he was admonished to “retract thy teeth, thy claws.... Cause no one to weep, cause no one sadness, cause no one to cry out. Injure no one. Do not manifest thy fury, thy anger....”⁶⁴

Although the bi-polarity of ideal human behaviour, as both brutal and gentle, is puzzling, it can be understood to be a result of the Tenochca belief that there is a time and a place for everything: civilization was propagated in the city’s centre, but so too were the more horrific, but unalterable, characteristics of nature. To ensure the city’s stability, it needed to be all things, as David Carrasco puts it, the Sum of All Wonders.⁶⁵ The incorporation of the beast (as living creature, material goods, and characterized behaviour) into the life of the city represented both an attempt at its domestication (through spatial ordering), and also an attempt to harness (through mimesis) the natural forces that normally destroy humanity rather than enlarge it. As we have seen previously on the hill of Tizaapan, the Tenochca’s valour, in the minds of foreign nations, was a direct result of their willingness to take on the most horrific aspects of the natural world. The great fear felt by these same foreign nations was, consequently, a direct result of the Tenochca’s success in that initiative.

5. Science

The processes of ordering and representation, along with a whole arsenal of artifices that enabled the Tenochca to thrive in the world, were supported and given life by an investigative mindset that sought to bring to light the complex mechanics of the cosmos. The common academic approach is to contain such knowledge-seeking efforts under the canopy of religious thought. Their primary justification for doing this, it appears, is that modern scientific advances have proven many Indigenous beliefs to be completely incorrect, with their final

⁶² Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, Book 6, 110.

⁶³ Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, Book 10, 15.

⁶⁴ Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, Book 6, 52-3.

⁶⁵ Carrasco, 221-2.

causes always linked back to religious explanations. For instance, it was once believed that worms entered an animal's body by means of shooting stars.⁶⁶ Shooting stars were a product of cosmological processes controlled by the gods, and thus the final cause of these worms was then related back to the realm of the gods and to the religious sphere. To revisit the ideas of Alfonso Caso, Tenochca religion was "the prime motive for all individual acts and ... the basic reason for the existence of state itself,"⁶⁷ it "took the place of technical innovation,"⁶⁸ and he went so far as to say that the Aztec political system was a "religious theocracy."⁶⁹ Religion was Aztec society's "fatal limitation,"⁷⁰ and the source of its failure to recognize a "constantly progressive ideal that would have led the people to conceive of life as something more than an invariable, meticulous repetition of ceremonies in honor of the gods."⁷¹ Caso's comments highlight the difficulty of importing Western categories of thought such as 'science' and 'religion' into a fundamentally different society. What Caso failed to realize is that the Tenochca sought vigorously to understand the mechanics of nature's machinery. Indeed, as the great motivating force of progress, scientific inquiry was one of the Tenochca state's most time consuming activities. The Tenochca took their discoveries no less seriously than modern scientists, and even though the results of their inquiries seem ludicrous from the perspective of the twenty-first century, we should not ignore their quest for truth, or pass it off as another fiction dreamed up by unrestrained mysticism and deceptive religious thought.

Underlying the logic of spatial organization, as seen in Moctezoma's menagerie, the tribute warehouses, the aquatic aviary, the house of deformity, etc., as well as the representative works of art and the exploration and domestication of the idea of the 'beast' within these ordered spaces, if we remove our biases and conceptual frameworks, we see a serious truth-seeking inquiry into the nature of reality. As Johanna Broda argues, we must concentrate our efforts not on 'science', per se, and its opposition to 'religion' or 'politics', nor on the Truthfulness (upper-case 'T') of their findings, but on the 'observation of nature' and its socially constructed truths (lower-case 't'), defined as: "the repetitive observation of the phenomena of the natural environment which permits us to make predictions and orient social behaviour based on these observations."⁷² If we insist to frame this truth-seeking enterprise in context of 'science', then

⁶⁶ Sahagún, *Primeros Memoriales*, 155.

⁶⁷ Alfonso Caso, *The Aztecs: People of the Sun*, trans. L. Dunham (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1958), 90.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 96.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 90.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 95.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁷² Broda, 140.

we must heed the words of Albert Einstein:

Science as something existing and complete is the most objective thing known to man, but science in the making, science as an end to be pursued, is as subjective and psychologically conditioned as any other brand of human endeavour—so much so, that the question ‘What is the purpose and meaning of science?’ receives quite different answers at different times and from different sorts of people.⁷³

The Tenochca observation of nature (its ‘scientific’ endeavour to reveal the secrets of nature) hinged on the exploration of the dynamics of time, space, essences (animated spirits of the gods), and the interaction between all three factors.

First, in the Tenochca culture, and indeed, in Mesoamerican culture, time was the principal means of bringing order to a seemingly chaotic world. Time was devised into three separate, but intertwining systems, night/day, and the solar and ritual calendars. The most basic attributes of time could be gleaned from knowledge of what spirits ruled at night, which at dawn, which at noon, and which at dusk. Based upon this classification, certain events could be expected at night, but never during the day, and vice versa. At a more cosmic level, however, the Tenochca had an accurate solar calendar of 365 days, eighteen groups of twenty days each, with an extra five malevolent ‘nameless’ days tagged onto the end of the year. Some commentators go so far as to include an extra day to these five days every four years, constituting, of course, a leap year. In any case, this calendar was paired off against a 260 day calendar (twenty groups of thirteen days) that was very significant to the Tenochca conceptualization of diachronic order. Numerous renditions of the 260 day calendar survived the colonial conflagrations and exist today as evidence of numerology: the characterization of days as either good or bad, or simply propitious for a certain type of event. Tenochtitlan was bombarded by evil spirits that brought havoc and death to its citizens. It was the job of the numerologists and those who created and interpreted the 260 day calendars to understand the patterns of their regularity. In this rigorous exploration of cylindrical cycles and patterns, the future was predicted on the basis of momentary alignments amongst various cycles ranging from 5 days to 18, 980 days. There was a long history of such calendrical calculations in Mesoamerica, and the Classical Maya had even analyzed cycles as long as millions of years in length. The practical considerations that resulted from numerological predictions varied from the definition of one’s fate (whether one would be happy, rich, comic, a conjurer, a dog breeder, or would possess any other characteristic, be it ill fated or beneficial), or, at the societal level, if disaster would strike the king, or if the world would be forever terminated.

Calendrical and astrological study and observation aided in the prediction of

⁷³ Albert Einstein cited in Broda, 146.

cosmological events that threatened the stability of the city. The two calendars (solar and ritual) synchronized every fifty-two years, that is, the first day of each calendar occurred on the same day every fifty-two years. This occurrence was the subject of a great deal of attention in Tenochtitlan, the last of which occurred in mid-November, 1507. In the new Fire Ceremony, as the events during this period were called, *all* fires were extinguished, and the people of Tenochtitlan waited in anticipation of the signal from the gods, informing them as to the fate of the universe. It was feared that in this time the sun would perish and the cosmos would be overtaken by the original condition of stasis: “nevermore would the sun come forth. Night would prevail forever, and the demons of darkness would descend, to eat men.”⁷⁴ In such times, when the world was imbalanced, disorderly forces could enter into the most vulnerable bodies and disrupt their internal balances and make-ups. Women were detained in granaries for it was feared that “if the new fire was not drawn, they would eat men; [for] they would be changed into fierce beasts.” Small children were not allowed to sleep, “or close, shut, or [even] half-close their eyes. ... They kept waking them, punching and nudging them, calling out to them. ... Because if they were to sleep—it was thought—they would turn into mice” During an eclipse of the moon, a similar degree of panic struck the city, as again, women and children were vulnerable to transformations.⁷⁵ During an eclipse of the sun, the entire city was vulnerable to attack as “demons of darkness will come down.... [T]here was an uproar. There were war cries.”⁷⁶

The innate balance of individuals, as determined by their birth date within the 260 day calendar, was consistently threatened by not only time induced transformations, but also spatial/temporal coincidences. Places such as the crossroads were considered extremely volatile places, as essences from different directions interacted, resulting in unpredictable occurrences. Great care was taken when passing through such places. Of course, the problems encountered at crossroads bring to mind the challenges of the city centre, a place located at the *axis mundi*, the centre of the universe, where the upper and lower worlds met by way of a great column, the tree of life. Other spatial/temporal coincidences, and the most renowned category of all, were the auguries catalogued by Tenochca elite in the *Primeros Memoriales*. Such auguries, phrased in the structure ‘if you see or hear [such in such], then [such in such] will happen,’ exhibit a large degree of correlation between the animated spirits of various species (such as those that constitute mice, owls, or coyotes) and their transit through unusual spaces (usually envisioned as

⁷⁴ Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, Book 7, 27-8.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 8

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

wild forces moving through urban spaces). For example: "The fourth augury: When a horned owl cried at the edge of the roof it was said that either one would die in battle or his child would die. ... Then there is this: When wild beasts cried out, it was also an augury for the city."⁷⁷

Although our knowledge of the precise symbolism of these auguries is too scarce to make a full analysis, as a general class of 'observations', the auguries can be understood not as consequences of moral transgressions, but as the unfortunate event resulting from the chance encounter between humans and wild spirits travelling through landscapes.

The numerology of calendrical calculations (as an inquiry into the patterns of essences through time) and the careful attention to spatiality (as the tracking of essences through space) were both cornerstones in the Tenochca investigation of nature, and both testify to the degree to which the Tenochca sought to tame (through knowledge) the seemingly endless and chaotic transit of the gods through time and space. With such knowledge in hand, the city's elite, privileged with the burden of trading protection for wealth, could assure their citizens that their defense of civilization and empire was not merely reactionary; they could take pre-emptive measures, too. A virtual cataloguing of the essential makeup of earthly objects was conducted for uses in rulership, so that such things as the king's speech could be improved by the powerful essences that emanated from the skins of animals such as the jaguar,⁷⁸ in medicine, so that cooked snakes could be used as a cure for leprosy,⁷⁹ in religion, so that the 'comida divina' could be used to protect priests as they travelled into the wilderness,⁸⁰ in sexual relations, so that the 'horned snake' was used to remedy impotence, and because knowledge could never be restricted to the elites, in thievery, as the left arm of the woman who had died in childbirth was used to "cast their intended victims into a helpless paralysis, and do with them and their possessions as they chose."⁸¹ Indeed, it is only after reviewing the depth of the investigation into the transit of essences through time and space that we can begin to understand the meaning of the great variety of animals, humans, and earthly objects that were collected in the centre of the city; they were assembled in the ordered spaces of Tenochtitlan as an extension of the logic of the auguries: if the auguries exhibit the danger of chance encounters between humans and the gods, then the chambers of Moctezoma were an attempt to bring order and regularity to such encounters. The menagerie, then, was the quintessential effort to integrate the gods into human

⁷⁷ Sahagún, *Primeros Memoriales*, 174-6.

⁷⁸ Sahagún, *Historia*, 460.

⁷⁹ Padre Bernabé Cobo, "Historia del Nuevo Mundo". In *Biblioteca de Autores Españoles: Tomos LXXXI y XCII: Obras del P. Bernabé Cobo*, 2 Vols. (Madrid: Ediciones Atlas, 1964), 356.

⁸⁰ Duran, *Historia I*, 51-2.

⁸¹ Clendinnen, 178.

spaces, and it was not so much a symbol of political might, as it has been so frequently said, but as a symbol of the Tenochca's desire to make the natural world a little more predictable.

6. Conclusion

For the Tenochca, the natural state of the world was far from being paradise; it was chaos. The earth was not formed in an ordered manner as in the Christian account. Rather, it was formed by accident, as a result of the ripping into two of *Cipactli's* body and the consequential disorganized liberation of spirits. Then, in another transgression of orderliness, the heavens collapsed into the underworld, again, sinfully mixing two separate worlds. The earth was defined by its location at the nexus of these two worlds, trapped at a dangerous intersection where godly spirits transited, invaded bodies, and upset the original constitution of earthly beings. The great human paradox, then, was that humans were blessed with life, but they were forced to live this life in an unstable, inimical world.

Yet, it must be said that the Tenochca did not hold a predominantly fatalistic view of their position in the world; a culture does not ascend to a position of regional supremacy as passive observers of the world. The Tenochca accepted the identity of the world as constituted of forces innately varied and contradictory, but they tried either to limit the destructiveness of such forces through ordering and representation or to make use of them through the controlled release of essences. The lesson was not that humanity was powerless against the caprices of nature; rather, it was that if humans wanted to survive they must re-arrange the world (often violently) to benefit human civilization.

Between the conclusion of Chapter Two and Three, a contradiction is apparent: the 'beast' was at once conquered and accommodated, vilified and normalized, annihilated and ratified. We saw in Chapter Two a life or death struggle in the forest, one in which no truce could be established. In Chapter Three, the opposite is argued: the beast was not eliminated, but was accepted and validated within the city; its powers were utilized, and in such a way, preserved. Although it is possible that Tenochca culture itself possessed an internal contradiction between mythico-religious and mythico-militaristic worldviews, the solution to such a problem can be found by focussing our attention on the Tenochca sense of place and the characterization of landscapes. By bringing the beast into Tenochtitlan, alive and well, but bound and quickly incarcerated, the Tenochca demonstrated not only their political might (in regard to other humans), but they made manifest their objective to domesticate the empire, give

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it representation in the city, and to tame wilderness while keeping the beast for its own purposes. While there is no evidence to point toward the systematic eradication of wilderness, I believe that there is plenty of evidence to support my position: that the Tenochca had a clear distinction between civilization and wilderness, that it was believed that the latter hindered the development of the former, and that the Tenochca took a stance of active resistance toward wilderness. The goal was not the eradication of disorderly forces; it was their domestication, be it within the city, or beyond its borders.

Conclusion:

Fear, Defeat, and the Ascendancy of the Natural Order

Long before the Spaniards arrived in Mexico, there was a sense of impending crisis, and I am not referring here to the renowned Conquest Omens that are reported in *Book 12* of the *Florentine Codex*, although as a product of the debut of the Conquest, those signals of distress are important too. Rather, I am referring to a wonderful story copied by Fray Diego Durán in his *Historia de las Indias* wherein a mythical voyage to the Aztec place of origin, Chicomoztoc, “The Seven Caves”, near Aztlan, is recounted.¹

It is said that Moctezoma the Elder (1440-1469), desiring to show his servitude (and renown) to the gods, wished to present the mother of Huitzilopochtli, Coatlicue, with lavish gifts. In preparing for the voyage, Moctezoma and his Prime Minister, Tlacaelel, debated strategies. Moctezoma suggested the usual preparations should be taken: “I have decided to call together some of my valiant warriors and send them, very well armed....”² Upon hearing this, Tlacaelel scoffed at Moctezoma’s suggestion; it seemed clear to him that the King had not fully understood the nature of the mission. The trek to Aztlan was not the usual matter of life or death, conquest or defeat; the mission was part reconnaissance and part communicative. There was a desire to learn about their historical roots and also a need to communicate a message to Coatlicue, and show her the wealth of her people, the Tenochca, who were guided by her son, Huitzilopochtli. Tlacaelel assured Moctezoma that “what you have determined to do is not for strong or valiant men, nor does it depend upon skill in the use of arms in warfare.... Your envoys will not go as conquerors but as explorers. ... No, you must look for wizards, sorcerers, magicians, who with their enchantments and spells can discover [the Seven Caves at Aztlan]”³ In the earliest stages of the journey, its failure seemed imminent, as the king himself did not seem to understand the rigours of affairs not requiring military solutions.

¹ Fr. Diego Durán, *Historia de las Indias de Nueva España e Islas de la Tierra Firme, tomos I & II, segunda edición* (México: Editorial Porrúa, S.A., 1984), II, Chapter XXVII. Also, see the English translation in Roberta H. Markman and Peter T. Markman, *The Flayed God: The Mesoamerican Mythological Tradition: sacred texts and images from pre-Columbian Mexico and Central America* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1992), 414-425. See Image 13 in Appendix III for an image, produced by the Tenochca, of their place of origin.

² Durán, cited and translated in Markman and Markman, 416

³ *Ibid.*, 415-6.

In any case, having summoned all of the sorcerers and magicians from all of the provinces in his domain, a group of sixty of such gifted men was gathered before Moctezoma. The men set out for Chicomoztoc, with instructions to learn about the fate of Huitzilopochtli's mother and the other inhabitants of the region, and to give her "a large number of mantles of all types, with women's clothing, precious stones, gold, fine jewels, quantities of cacao and *teonacaztli*, cotton, black vanilla flowers in large numbers, and beautiful feathers, the finest that could be found."⁴ In short, all of the king's riches were to be offered to the goddess, and by such gifts, she would recognize the greatness of the king and the extent of his empire.

Upon arrival, however, the magicians and sorcerers were shocked to learn that the people there had no knowledge of Moctezoma nor the greatness of his empire. An old man questioned the embassy, asking "Who are Motecuhzoma and Tlacaelel? ... They were not among those who departed from here." The embassy confessed that only the names of the original settlers are known; "The men you mentioned are gone from this earth, all of them are dead. We have heard them mentioned; that is all." All of the original settlers still lived in Aztlan; death was impossible. The old man, distressed by the conversation, decided that the embassy should see Coatlicue and instructed the group to pick up their belongings and follow him to the summit of a sandy hill where Coatlicue lived. The old man climbed with ease and without fatigue, but the Tenochca embassy trailed behind, "their feet sinking into the soft sand, climbing with great difficulty and heaviness." Looking back, the old man realized that his guests had sunken to their waists in the sand. "'What is wrong with you, O Aztecs?' he asked. 'What has made you so heavy? What do you eat in your land?'" Having described their foods, the old man gave judgment:

Such food and drink, my children, have made you heavy and they make it difficult for you to reach the place of your ancestors. Those foods will bring you death. The wealth you have we know nothing about; we live poorly and simply.⁵

The old man, dismayed by the physical condition of his guests, carried them and their baggage to the summit to meet Coatlicue.

Coatlicue was a 'hideous and abominable' woman, and was layered in dirt and grime. "Her face was so black, so covered with filth, that she looked like something out of Hell." Since the day her son had left her, she had not washed or changed her clothing. She mourned for his return. "Look at me," said Coatlicue, "life had become fasting and penance because of him. Let him remember what he said to me when he departed":

⁴ Ibid., 417.

⁵ Ibid., 420.

O my mother, I will not tarry, I will soon return
 After I have led these seven barrios to find a dwelling place,
 Where they can settle and populate the land that has been promised them.
 Once I have led them there, once they are settled and I have given them happiness,
 I will return. But this will not be until the years of my pilgrimage have been completed.
 During this time I will wage war against provinces and cities,
 Towns and villages. All of these will become my subjects.
 But in the same way that I conquered them they will be torn from me,
 Strangers will take them from me.
 And I will be expelled from that land. ...
 It will be then, O mother, when my time has come,
 That I will return for you to shelter me.
 Until then do not grieve.⁶

Coatlicue understood the work of her son, Huitzilopochtli, but she believed that he had forgotten his filial duties. "Therefore I command you to tell him that his time is up, that he must return now."⁷ Finally, her last words to the Tenochca envoy were harsh. Like her son, the Tenochca have strayed from the good way. They have been gluttons for pleasure. Their rich food and drink has caused them death, debilitated them, "they have upset your natural system. You have been spoiled by those mantles, feathers and riches that you wear and that you have brought here. All of that has ruined you."⁸

And so the Tenochca embassy set out for their return voyage. Rather than a conquest of their own history and gods, as Moctezoma had originally desired, they returned defeated, reproached, and admonished for their self-indulgence, and truly, as the function and pride of the empire had always been the seizure and collection of such goods in the city, they were ashamed for their empire. They told everything to Moctezoma and Tlacaehel, who only wept.

We must remember that the story of the voyage to Aztlan was written by the Tenochca, about themselves. As self-conscious criticism, the trip to Aztlan allows us to look into the psyche of the Tenochca, or at least, into the musings of elite citizens. Such a perspective reveals a good amount of anxiety, and a brooding sense of disaster. I would even go so far as to say that the journey to Aztlan speaks to us about Tenochca misanthropy, a belief in their own disjuncture from the 'natural' life, the life of simplicity. The trip to Aztlan is a strong condemnation of the conceit and vanity of empire, beginning with the Moctezoma's absurd proposition of sending the military to meet the gods until the final gibe in which all of the king's goods and pleasures are deemed contaminants, material trinkets that obscure the way to the purified life. Torn asunder from their cosmological (spiritual/essential) value, Moctezoma's goods were exposed for what they were: items of conspicuous wealth that demonstrate vanity and that serve to

⁶ Ibid., 421-2.

⁷ Ibid., 422.

⁸ Ibid., 423.

alienate humans from the workings of the gods.

The irony in this strong self-criticism is that the story purportedly took place in the era of Moctezoma the Elder, in the middle years of the Tenochca empire. Even though the story may have been a product of late pre-colonial times, or even early-colonial society, it suggests that from the end of Moctezoma's reign in 1469, the Tenochca lived in a state of self-proclaimed 'sin'. Moctezoma the Younger's menagerie, the aviary, the tribute warehouses, the extravagances of the feather and gold workers, and all of the hoarding of wealth in Tenochtitlan were the masquerading of vanity as the higher ideal of cosmological stability, the privileges of empire as payments to the gods. As I have sought to make clear in this study, driving this cultural aberration were an impassioned paranoia of the periphery and the consequential classification of landscapes as inimical, favourable, or somewhere between, depending upon its humanness and its amenability to human life, from the civilized spaces of the city to the deadly spaces of wilderness.

There were many precedents for this overwhelming fear of social collapse and its relationship to indulgence in worldly pleasures. The most important of these, however, is the fall of Tula, the Toltec empire of Quetzalcoatl. In Book 3 of the Florentine Codex, individual chapters are devoted to the overindulgence of certain pleasures and acts of self-gratification: alcohol, sex, political and spiritual conceit, dance, valour, theatre, and food. Chapter after chapter, the Toltecs are ensnared in a trap that sets as its bait one of the pleasures or conceits listed above, and each time that they gather to indulge, they are slaughtered. But the Toltecs take no heed of these lessons. They do not acknowledge their own decadence. "It was if they paid no heed to all that had befallen them. No longer did they consider it an evil omen; they were as if besotted."⁹ It was not until mountains burned and stones rained from the sky that they began to take notice of the imminent disaster,¹⁰ but by this time it was too late. Finally, the Toltecs are given the coup de grace; they are lured by the smell of roasting corn. "And when they smelled the toasting maize, the Tolteca found [the smell] good; they found it agreeable.... And when they smelled it, quickly, swiftly they came here; in a very few moments they came here." When they are gathered all together, the little old woman roasting the corn "slew them all, she destroyed them completely."¹¹

The arts and crafts that the Tenochca practiced and cherished were thought to have

⁹ Bernardino Sahagún, *Florentine Codex: General History of the Things of New Spain, in thirteen parts*, trans. A.J.O. Anderson and C.E. Dibble (Santa Fe, New Mexico: The School of American Research and the University of Utah, 1950-'82), *Book 3*, 28.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 31.

originated in Tula, and the Tenochca never concealed their debt to that culture. Yet, it is ironic that they too were like the Toltecs, not curbing their own over-indulgence in worldly pleasures. They knew of the reasons for the fall of Tula; they themselves invented the story of the return to Aztlan, and it was they who best phrased the ethos of moderation that they seemed to ignore:

Let us not admire ourselves; let us not falsely claim our deserts; let us not falsely claim our merits. ... No one at all became proud; no one at all became vain.¹²

And elsewhere:

And this betokened our life on earth. For he who rejoiced, who possessed riches, who sought, who esteemed our lord's sweetness, his fragrance—richness, prosperity—thus ended in great misery. Indeed it was said: 'No one on earth went exhausting happiness, riches, wealth.'¹³

The Tenochca knew better than anyone else that the collapse of their empire would surely come, and its appearance would owe to their sumptuousness, yet they could not curb their desires nor the inertia of imperial expansion.

It will be useful to step back from our subject for a moment and ask ourselves if the cultural traits of paranoia of the periphery and the idea of wilderness were the product of an elitist vision in Tenochca society and as such only marginally representative of the society at large. After all, the logic of this vision is most likely to be inherent to those who had the most to lose, and moreover, as protectors of the city and its inhabitants, the City's elite were required to consider at all times the possible threats to societal stability. Concerns such as those expressed directly above are supported by the examination of the historical record provided in Chapter One. We can be certain that the Florentine Codex and all other post-conquest documents are products of the elite mind. Even the so-called picture manuscripts of the pre- and post-Conquest period, however, were produced, kept, and read by the elite strata of society. But then again, we know that the religious ceremonies were avidly followed and participated in by hordes of commoners and elites alike. We know that the military was one of the main vehicles for social advancement in Tenochca society, and we know that the merchants stood outside of this entire elite/commoner complex as a component of a rapidly expanding economy, and that this trade, too, was an opening for those in search of social advancement. In fact, in Tenochtitlan, more than in any other Mesoamerican society, the great economic transformation from primary resource extraction to manufacturing and service industries made social advancement a distinct possibility for the majority of its citizens, and in those sectors of society where social advancement seemed less tangible, national identities and social integration were still required

¹² Ibid., 62, and 66.

¹³ Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, Book 2, 71.

and propagated by the state (the lauding of the merchant class, public education, state-run services, and most of all, military perks and honours). Because of such economic and social transformations, the basic Mesoamerican model, one of cultural homogeneity and economic stagnation over several millenia, does not fit the outline of the historical record for Tenochca society. Rather, the Tenochca must be seen as an aberration of this model, a culture straddling two worlds (the world before and the world after their migration) and a culture awed by their own success and taken by the idea of novelty. This is the aspect that I have tried to develop in this study and that best fits the historical record, and if this is a predominantly elitist vision—an inevitable outcome of the process of producing our primary sources—then I am comforted by the fact that such a vision, although only directly representative of a small strata of society, held great sway by not only the processes of coercion and hegemony, but by the very real prospect of social advancement that seized the imaginations of the masses.

But all of that—the economic and political expansion, the display of wealth by the City's elite, the collection of goods and beings in the City for economic and cosmological purpose, in fact, all those dreams of social advancement—all was brought to its knees by the coming of the Spaniards.

The signs of the impending collapse came first within the city, as the domesticated realm began to slip away from their control. Quail, frying in a pan, began to talk back, as did turkeys, masks, and dogs. Such things were striven against with extreme violence, but such resistance was fruitless;¹⁴ the domain of civilization was beginning to crumble. There was a “tongue of fire, like a flame, like the light of dawn, ... it looked as if ... it stood piercing the heavens.” Sacred temples burned, lightning struck in the heart of the city, comets fell, lake water foamed up, destroying houses, voices were heard at night of weeping women, saying “My beloved sons, now we are about to go!”, and then finally, there was notification that strangers would arrive: a bird was brought to Moctezoma with a mirror on its head, and in the mirror “there appeared the heavens, the stars—the Fire Drill [constellation].” This was an evil omen. When Moctezoma looked again, “he saw, a little beyond, what was like people coming massed, coming as conquerors, coming girt in war array.”¹⁵

If we read the Tenochca interpretation of the conquest, the political conquest of Mexico is silent: they were not overly concerned with Spanish colonialism and the control of one people over another. Instead, they continually lamented the loss of civilization, the dispersal of people

¹⁴ From *Códice Cozcatzin*, cited in Ángel María Garibay K., *Historia de la Literatura Náhuatl* (México: Editorial Porrúa, S.A., 1992), 391.

¹⁵ Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, Book 12, 1-3.

into the mountains and caves, and the vulnerability of their people to the vagaries of nature, bestial forces that took the form of jaguars and alligators that preyed on helpless Indians. The Conquest of Mexico is only indirectly credited to the Spaniards. The Spaniards fit into this interpretation of the Conquest by way of being labelled beasts themselves, hungering inhumanly for gold, riding on the backs of great beasts, and with unusually large and ferocious dogs leading the way.

When the Spaniards were first heard of and then encountered on the coast, Cortés was immediately identified as being a god, in particular, Quetzalcoatl, the Plumed Serpent, the Mesoamerican god of the arts and civilization. The story of Quetzalcoatl is fascinating, as he is purported to have left from the East and to have stated his intention to return from that direction, to rule once again. It is clear, however, that he did not leave of his own free will; he was ousted from the known world for reasons of his own vanity and sensuality, by his own self-knowledge.¹⁶ He was tempted to do such things by Tezcatlipoca, a god who does not adhere to any moral code: he punishes and redeems at his own capricious will. Tezcatlipoca was most often 'seen' in the form of a wild beast: a jaguar, coyote, or even in the form of a deadly spider. On Tezcatlipoca's left foot was a deer hoof, symbolizing his capriciousness, his wandering spirit, a spirit that knew no boundaries and did not follow the straight and narrow road. Tezcatlipoca and Quetzalcoatl were immortal enemies. Pre-Conquest Aztec codices, or painted picture manuscripts of indigenous origin, depict the two in their anthropomorphic guise, staring face to face, locked in combat.¹⁷

Quetzalcoatl's and Tezcatlipoca's heavenly battle was mirrored on earth by the human struggle to create ordered cities and empires out of a naturally disordered world. The expansionist mentality of the Tenochca, building themselves an empire larger than any previously known in the Americas, put the city of Tenochtitlan at the centre of this earthly struggle.

Given such an historical backdrop, it is not surprising that the Tenochca observed and noted every bestial image of the Spaniards. As signs of their bestial character became increasingly evident, the idea that Cortés was Quetzalcoatl, here to help the Tenochca in their civilizing mission, became increasingly suspicious. This is not to say that they were now being thought of as simply men, but only that the newcomers started to show signs of a bestial

¹⁶ Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, Book 3, Chapters 3-14.

¹⁷ Códice Borbónico: manuscrito mexicano de la biblioteca del palais bourbon, libro adivinatorio y ritual ilustrado, publicado en facsimil, ed. Francisco del Paso y Troncoso, intro. Jules Théodore Ernest Hamy (México: Siglo Veintiuno, 1979), ff. 22. See Image 14 in Appendix III.

character, more akin to the ways of Tezcatlipoca. It was said that the cannon was 'like thunder', 'their deer were as tall as roof terraces', and most fearsome of all, were their dogs, which were seen as abnormally large, nervous, and hungry. For the Tenochca, the spots of Spanish dogs showed them to be related to one of the most feared animals, the ocelot, which regularly fed on human flesh.¹⁸

The Spaniards' first demonstration of unusually extreme cruelty was in the city of Cholula, where thousands of unarmed citizens and lords were massacred. Following this, the Spaniards sped forward to Tenochtitlan, with their bestial dogs leading the way, "panting; their foam dripping [from their mouths]."¹⁹ The social order, too, seemed to be overturning. It was said that "everyone among the commoners went about overwrought; often they rose in revolt. It was just ... as if the earth rebelled."²⁰ When the Spaniards had finally settled into the city, the Mexicans would not approach their quarters for fear of death. It was said that "... the Mexicans dared not at all to go there. They were in great terror; they could not control themselves for fear; ... No one dared do anything. It was as if a fierce beast were there; it was as the deep of night."²¹ When the Indians approached the Spanish quarters with their provisions, they simply dropped the food and ran back to safety. Such terror was not abated by the actions of Spaniards as they entered the famed Bird House where the royal treasures were collected and snatched up everything made of gold, silver and precious stones. Here, too, they are compared to monkeys. In yet another place, their insatiable appetites for gold earned them the designation of pigs.²²

We must be clear on one issue, however: in Tenochtitlan, the beast was not the equivalent of dumb muscle, in the way that we often make a sharp division between brawn and brains. The beast was not feared because of its animalistic qualities. Quite the opposite, its ferociousness was a symbol of its overabundance of godliness and its close relationship to the spiritual realm of the underworld and death.

The beast was the quintessential representation of an innately disordered world, a world in which our common notions of 'nature' do not hold up. In our cultural understanding of the world, it has been said that capital-N-Nature is conceived as One Thing with One Name. Like a

¹⁸ Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, Book 12, 20.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 30.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 30.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 49-50.

²² *Ibid.*, 31. The reference to pigs is somewhat troublesome. Pigs were not native to the Americas, but arrived with the Spaniards. There are two explanations for this reference. First, 'pigs' might be more properly understood as either tapir or peccary, which were two pig-like animals popular in Mexico but not domesticated prior to the Conquest. The other explanation, and the one that seems most likely to me, is that by the time of the original inscription of this ethnographic material (1555), the Indians were well acquainted with the voracious appetite of the Spaniard's livestock.

singular god, it abides by a regulatory system that we struggle to understand. In our vision of nature, everything is inter-related in a single complex system. The Tenochca world, however, was fundamentally different; it was naturally chaotic, not ordered. Hundreds of gods filled the Tenochca pantheon and competition amongst these gods made life unpredictable. In the Tenochca perspective, the idea of Nature is anachronistic.

The ultimate lesson for the Tenochca was cruel indeed: nature tended toward chaos, and despite their best efforts to overcome that propensity, despite their attempts to build civilization, to order the world according to its diversity of beings, despite all of the riches collected in the city, they too would succumb to this unstoppable force. For in the end, the riches and wealth, disguised as 'offerings' to the gods, were a transgression of the natural *disorder* of both the spiritual and material worlds. This conclusion, in some ways, does not differ significantly from the cosmological outlooks critiqued in the first chapter; in both instances, the world is posited as inhospitable to human civilization and as such both emphasize the disastrous fate of humankind and its confinement within a cycle of regeneration inclined toward the effacement of distinction between species. As Inga Clendinnen has so aptly put it, "the human body, cherished as it might be, was no more than one stage in a vegetable cycle of transformations, and human society a human arrangement to help sustain that essential cycle."²³ This was the lesson inherited, or adopted (since their own lineage was not Mesoamerican) by the Tenochca from the wider 'Mesoamerican Tradition', as it is often called. Yet, like all peoples, the Tenochca had their own traditions and their own developments that set them off from the general trend, and it is precisely these oft forgotten internal developments and their incongruity with the Mesoamerican Tradition that my own study has attempted to draw out, emphasize, and elaborate upon.

My own conclusions do not fully invalidate that other position, but they do cast into doubt the notion that the Tenochca had accepted their fate as set out by the cycle of regeneration. In fact, a great deal of evidence can be brandished to demonstrate that although the Tenochca envisioned their human position as ultimately trapped within the cycle of regeneration, a great deal of energy was exerted in the effort to liberate themselves from the most extreme vagaries of the earth's natural order by renouncing the role of passive victim and thereby implementing a counter-incarceration of the natural world—ordering, managing, manipulating, and harnessing its physical and metaphysical forms for human advantage. The natural world was not rejected, but its original manifestation (wilderness) was clearly striven against and forcibly transformed to make nature more propitious (in the form and layout of civilized spaces). It is precisely this

²³ Inga Clendinnen, *Aztecs: An Interpretation*, Canto Edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 262.

image of the Tenochca, as active participants in their own destiny, that this study has attempted to revitalize.

The Tenochca took their human stance in such a world in Tenochtitlan, where they studied the make up of the world, classified beings into their constituent spiritual essences, and then carefully ordered such objects at the heart of the city. Such a procedure was, above all else, a civilizing mission in which a chaotic world was made liveable through domestication. Great storehouses were kept at the heart of the city in which live and dead animals, gold, feathers, jade—even albinos and deformed human beings—in fact, all of the things of the world, all of which was permeated by the spirits of a pantheon of gods that were innately competitive, all was collected and ordered in Tenochtitlan.

In the decades following the Conquest of Mexico, a common complaint was brought to the attention of the parish priests: on their journeys from one place to another, even when Spaniards and Indians walked together, Indians were preyed upon by the beasts that inhabited the forests and rivers. As we know, the Conquest did not give rise to this great fear of the forests and rivers. These landscapes were always deadly places. Nevertheless, taking careful note of these incidents, the friars used this fear to their own advantage, inventing stories in which it was said that only baptized individuals could be protected from these wild beasts, as “God would guard them miraculously.”²⁴ However, following the Conquest, not only was the periphery feared, but so too was home. The Conquest of Tenochtitlan was in fact a great dispersal, a process in which people scattered into the wilderness in fear. In their flight from Spanish beasts, Indians found little peace. In their homes, once places of refuge, they commonly slept with their animals in elevated lofts to avoid succumbing to the predators of night. “And if one forgot to take precautions,” a friar said, “[the Indians] were certain that the tigers and lions would take all that was left below.”²⁵

From the heights of their ego, the Tenochca could only be defeated by the gods, in the form of beasts with gaping jaws and razor sharp fangs. Seen through the eyes of the Tenochca, Tenochtitlan was not destroyed by men; nor was the Conquest a political victory. The Conquest of Mexico, according to the Tenochca perspective, was the ascendancy of the chaotic forces of nature over humanity, another victory for chaos in a long drawn out battle between humans and a mostly inhospitable world, one that began long before the Spaniards ever came to the New World.

²⁴ Fr. Toribio Motolinía, *Memoriales e Historia de los Indios de la Nueva España* (Madrid: Ediciones Atlas, 1970), 307.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 307-8.

As an epilogue, I should say that some might feel that my judgment of the Tenochca environmental outlook is unjustifiably harsh. My response is the following: since Columbus realized that the peoples he discovered were not Asian, the basic 'humanness' of Amerindians has been in question. Friars wondered if Indians possessed souls; politicians and academics questioned where Indians fit in the hierarchy of races and thus to what degree Indians were inferior to themselves. Next was the idea of the Noble-Savage and the romanticizing of the simple life. Most recently, cultural relativists have placed Indians in a world of their own, separated from us by modes of thought that can never be understood. My effort has been to help re-humanize one of these Amerindian groups. Only by accepting their faults, as well as their strengths, their greed and self-interest, as well as their compassion, can we hope to see the Tenochca as human, as complex beings who are driven by all of the same competing passions that define our own modern, human, selves. Our shared humanity must be our point of departure, otherwise our attempts to know each other will be forever meaningless, failed attempts to look the other in the eye.

Yet, hopefully by this point, I have succeeded in making clear to the reader the great cultural divide between Western and Tenochca environmental perspectives. If on the one hand we admit a shared fear of the periphery and the human initiative to domesticate untamed nature, then we must be careful to note the basic disparity of cultural logic that brought each side to the same perspective. We might say that both had the same fears, but for very different reasons. In Tenochca culture, there was no Great Chain of Being, no essential hierarchy that put humans above animals, animals above rocks, etc.. The beast was feared because it was imbued with a spiritual constitution that gave it great ferocity. It was feared because of its godliness, not its materiality. In the Tenochca perspective, the earth was worshipped not for love, but for fear. And here the Christian God and the Tenochca beast are paralleled once again, as the beast was indeed a profitable means of eliciting consent in Tenochca society. Yet, the odd feature of Tenochca culture, and a quality that distinguishes their outlook from most others in the West and East is the fact that redemption played nearly no role. There was no common paradise, no heaven, no place of refuge from the hardships of life. Life was hell, and so too was life *after* death. If heaven could not be found on earth or in the afterlife, the Tenochca's next best option was to play the role of the beast themselves. If the beast could not be conquered, it needed to be mimicked. If it could not be effaced, it needed to be captured and controlled.

The Tenochca, like all humans, were guided by the general human imperative of survival and by their need to take a human stance within it. Yet, Tenochca fear originated from their particular and peculiar outlook of the world as innately cruel and disordered; their brutal

treatment and interaction with the world around them was a logical outcome of such an outlook. But the Tenochca, like the Europeans, were not satisfied with mere survival. Both possessed an expansionist mindset. Given their proclivity for progress—their economy, their urbanization, their love of the arts—the Tenochca required stability, even if such stability needed to be forcefully and brutally wrought from the world around them.

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Appendices

Appendix I: Pronunciation Guide

For Readers Already Familiar with Spanish Orthography and Pronunciation

Nahautl orthography was first devised by Spaniards, and for that reason, it is still based on Spanish orthographic conventions. Such a methodology of representing the Nahuatl language in the Roman alphabet is crude at best, but simplifies the orthography and allows readers to make their way through the text with a minimal degree of difficulty. Therefore, for those familiar with Spanish pronunciation, read the Nahuatl words as though they were Spanish, with the following exceptions:

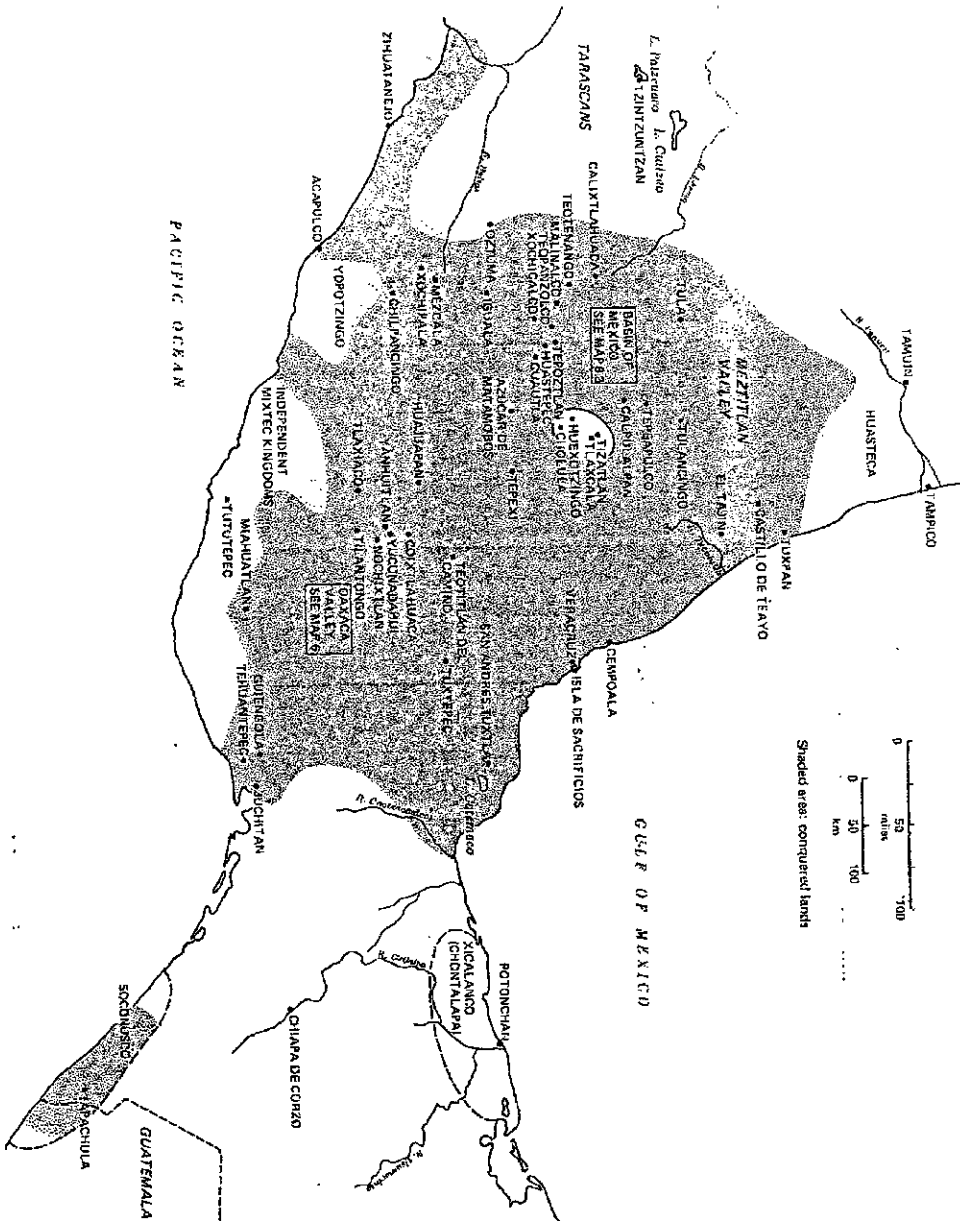
- Accents are always located at the second last syllable, unless otherwise accented. The only exception to this rule is with place names that end in 'an', which always stress the last syllable.
- NB: The letters 'h', 'll', 'tl', 'tz', 'x', and 'z' have distinct phonetic values that must be noted in the phonetic table below.

For Readers NOT Familiar with Spanish Orthography and Pronunciation

- Words are stressed on the second-to-the-last vowel
- CU is pronounced KW.
- HU is pronounced W.
- H without an adjacent U represents a glottal stop (as in go_ over).
- LL is pronounced like a long L.
- TL and TZ count as single consonants, never as full syllables.
- X is pronounced like English SH.
- Z is pronounced like English S.

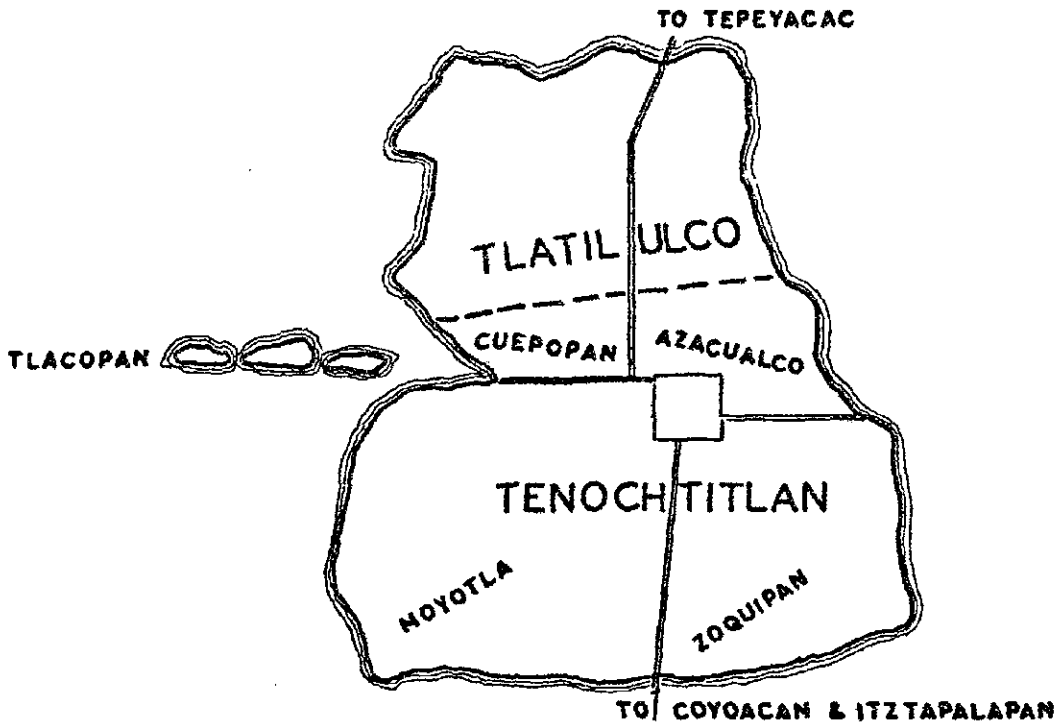
Appendix II: Maps

Map 1



Extent of the Aztec State on the Eve of Conquest.
(from Weaver, 1993)

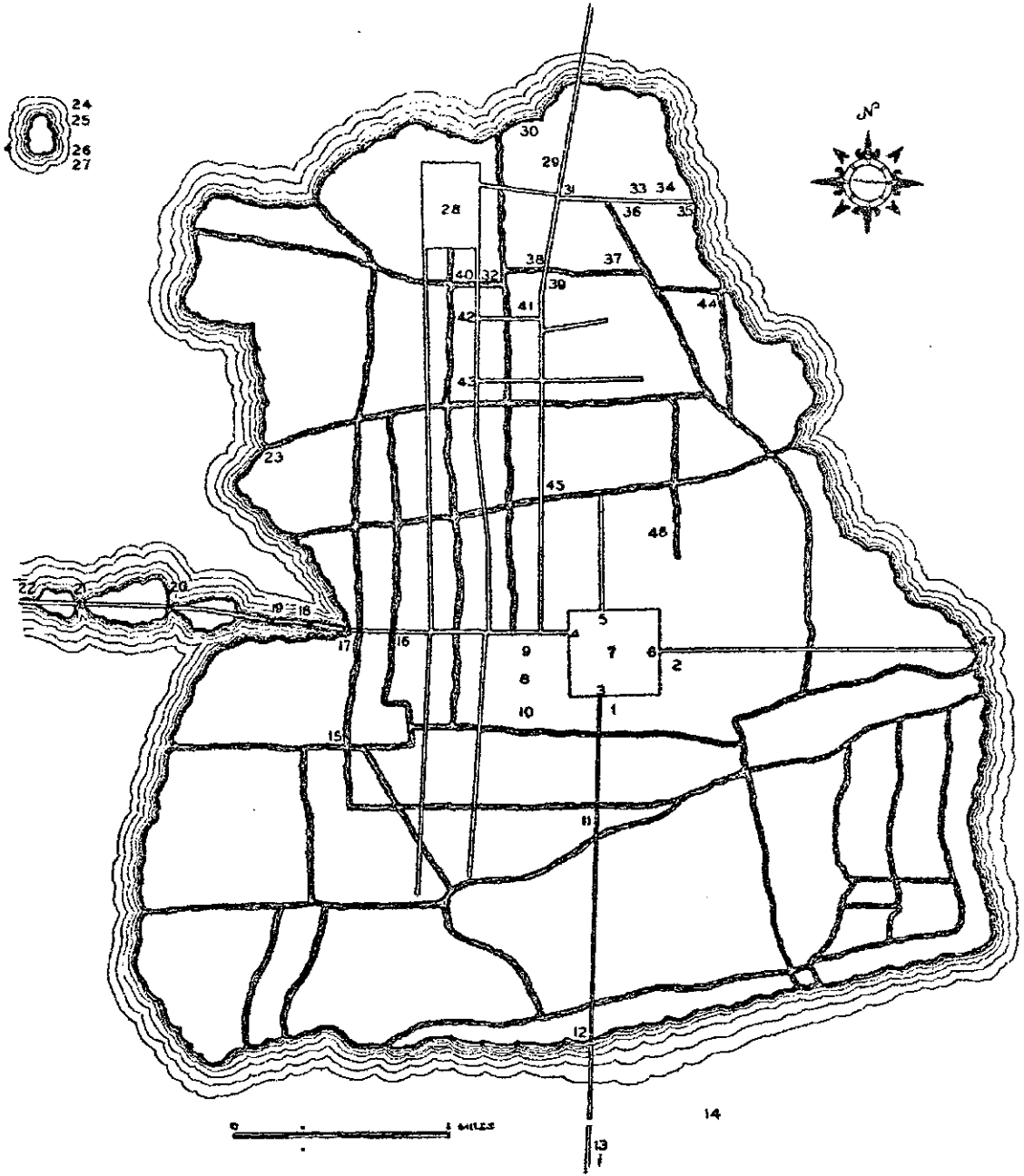
Map 3



The Quadripartite division of Tenochtitlan and the binary division of Tenochtitlan-Tlatilulco.

(from Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, Book 12, unnumbered prefatory pages)

Map 4



TENOCHTITLAN-TLATILULCO

(from Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, Book 12, unnumbered prefatory pages)

Place Names for Map 4

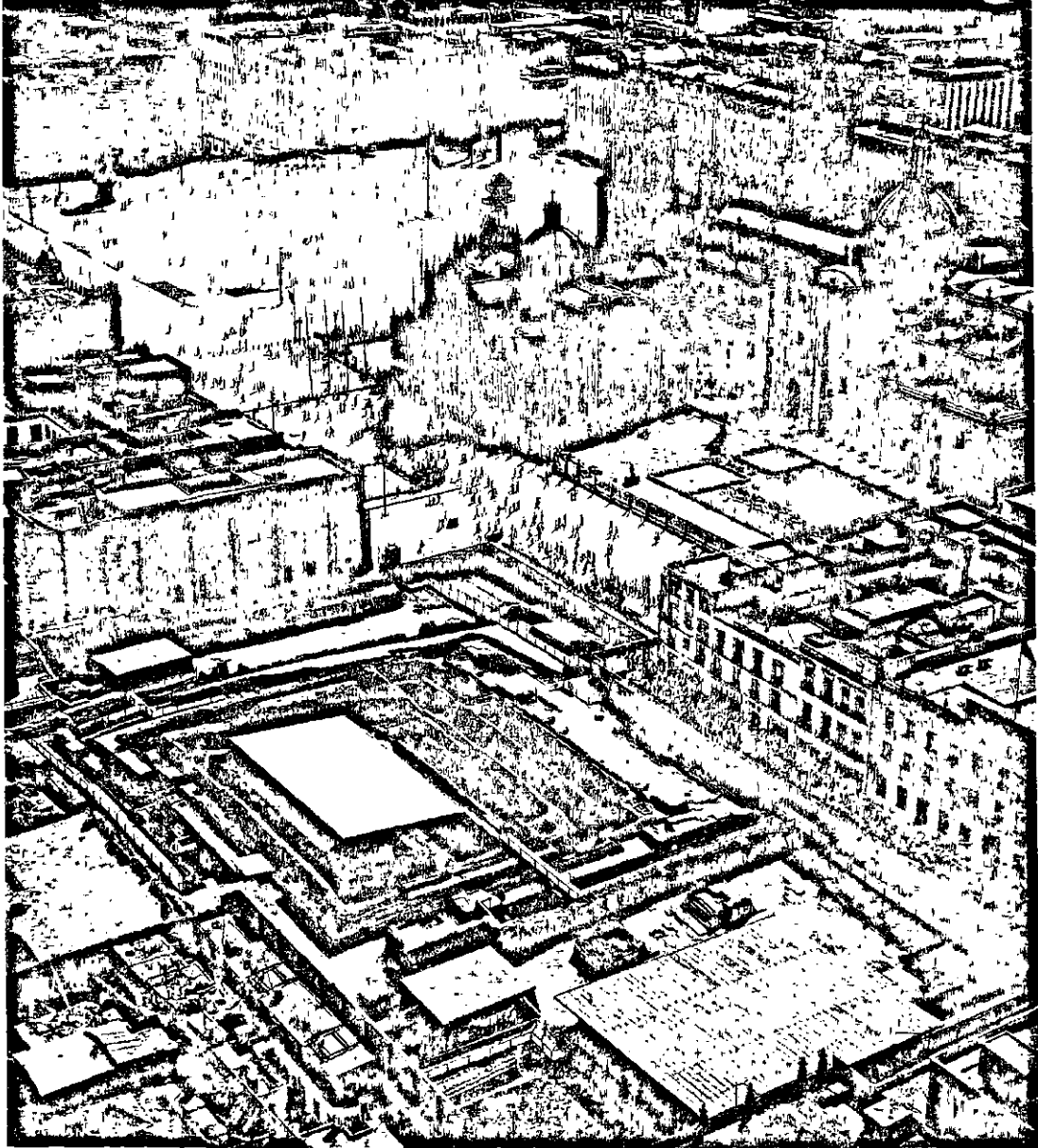
KEY TO MAP OF TENOCHTITLAN-TLATILULCO

- | | |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1. Palace of Moctezuma | 24. Nextlatilco |
| 2. Totocalco | 25. Iliacac |
| 3. Quauhquiauac | 26. Ayauhcaltitlan |
| 4. Tecpantzinco | 27. Yauhtenco |
| 5. Acatl yiacapan | 28. Market of Tlatilulco |
| 6. Tezcacoac | 29. Teteuhtitlan and Tlaixcuipan |
| 7. Temple of Uitzilopochtli | 30. Atecocolecan |
| 8. Palace of Moctezuma the Elder | 31. Coyonacazco and Amaxac |
| 9. Teoayoc | 32. Copalnamacoyan |
| 10. Cuicacalco | 33. Ayacac |
| 11. Uitzillan | 34. Atliceuhyan |
| 12. Xoloco | 35. Totecco |
| 13. Fort Xoloco | 36. Quauecatitlan |
| 14. Acachinanco | 37. Apauazcan |
| 15. Tecpancaltitlan | 38. Tlacochealco |
| 16. Tecpantzinco | 39. Tetenanteputzco and Atactzinco |
| 17. Tzapotlan | 40. Xochicalco and Quauhquechollan |
| 18. Atenchicalco | 41. Yacacolco |
| 19. Mixcoatechialtitlan | 42. Tlilhuacan and Atezcapan |
| 20. Tolteca canal | 43. Colhuacatonco |
| 21. Petlacalco | 44. Xocotitlan or Cihuatecpan |
| 22. Popotlan | 45. Tetzontlalamacoyan |
| 23. Copulco | 46. Atzacualco |
| | 47. Tetamaçolco |

(from Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, Book 12, unnumbered prefatory pages)

Appendix III: Picture Gallery

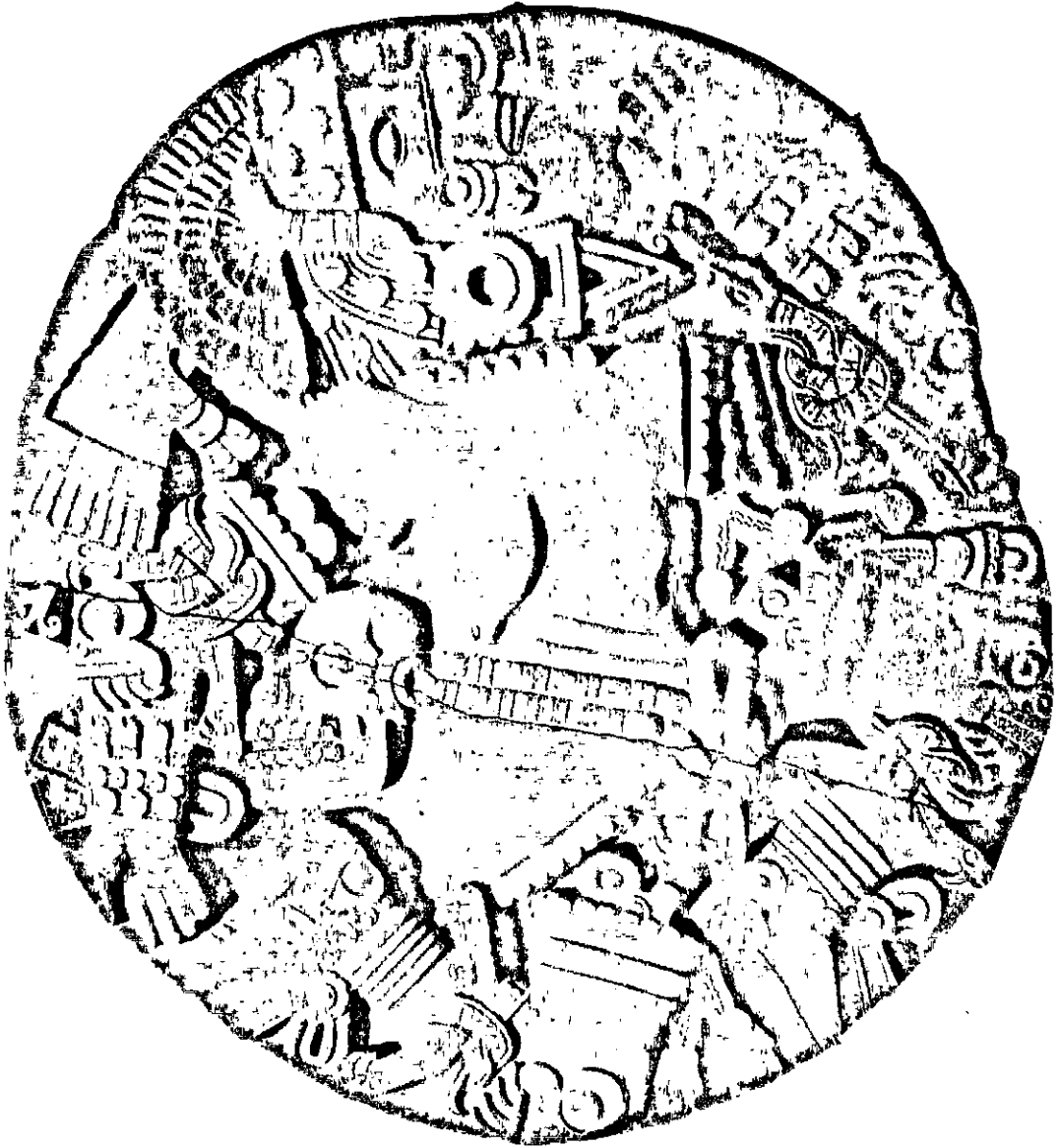
Image 1



An Aerial View of the Ruins of the Great Pyramid (in the foreground) with the Zocolo of Mexico city in the background.

(from Matos Moctezuma, *Treasures of the Great Temple*, 39)

Image 2



Coyolxauhqui Stone.

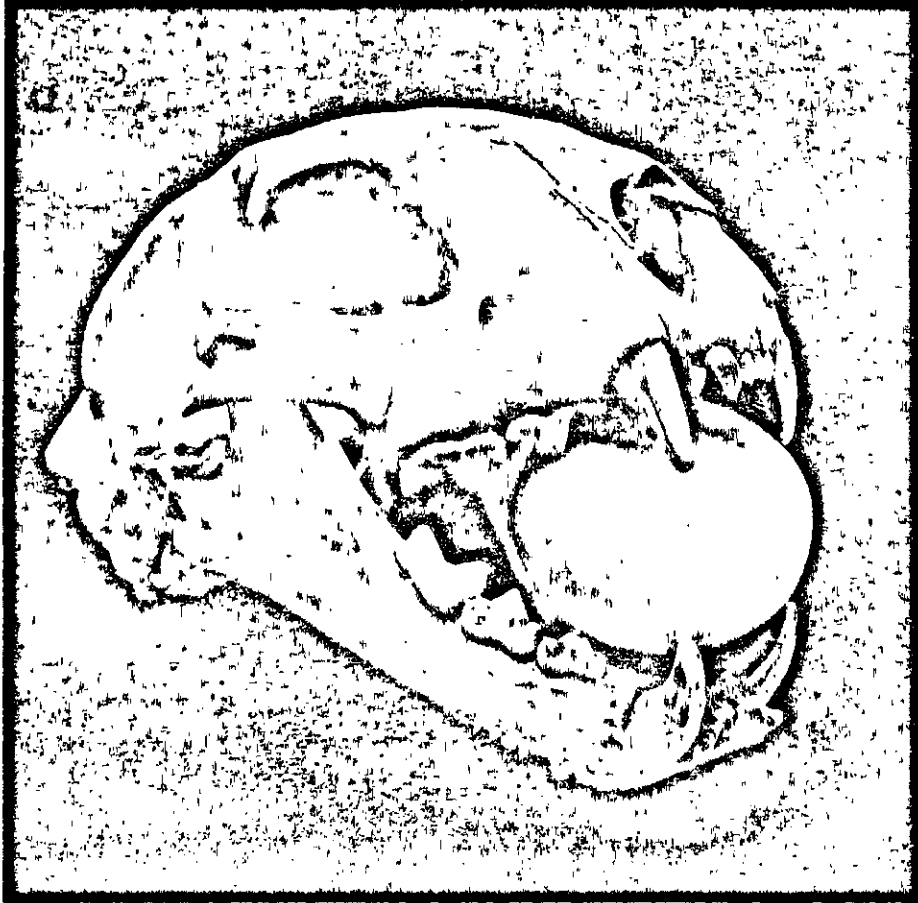
(from Inga Clendinnen, *Aztecs*, unnumbered colour plates)

Image 3



Iron Eyes Cody as the Crying Indian, 1971.
Notice the tears.
(from Krech, *Ecological Indian*, 1)

Image 4



Puma skull with precious green stone lodged in mouth. An offering to Tlaloc, discovered in excavation of 1978-83.

(from Matos Moctezuma, *Treasure of the Great Temple*, 135)

Image 5

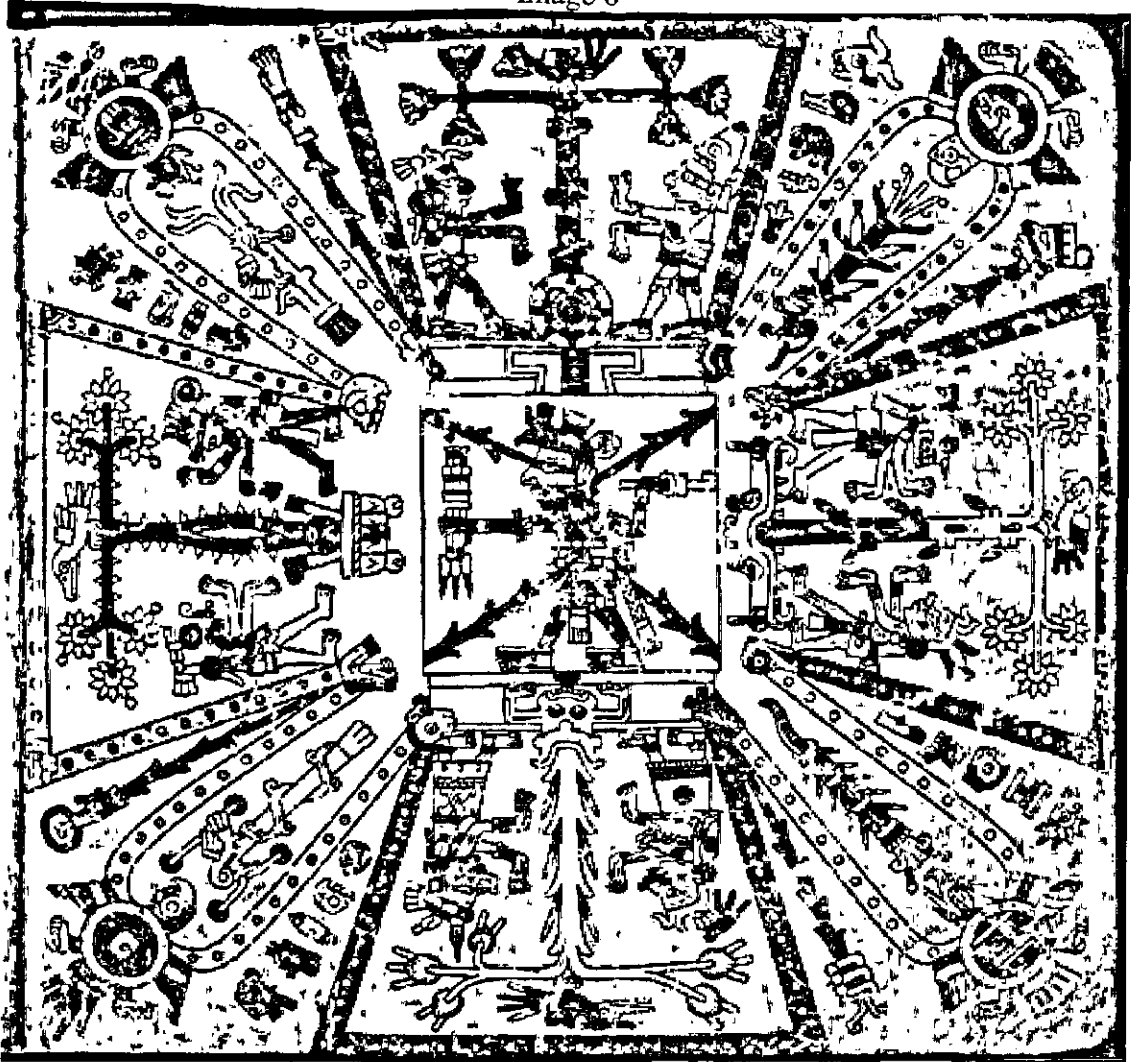


Tlaltecuhli, the Earth Monster.

Tlaltecuhli is depicted here with legs bent, in squatting (birthing) position. In contrast to this fertility symbol, it is depicted with an obsidian (sacrificial blade) as a tongue and with skulls in hand and between its legs.

(from Markman and Markman, *Flayed God*, 226)

Image 6

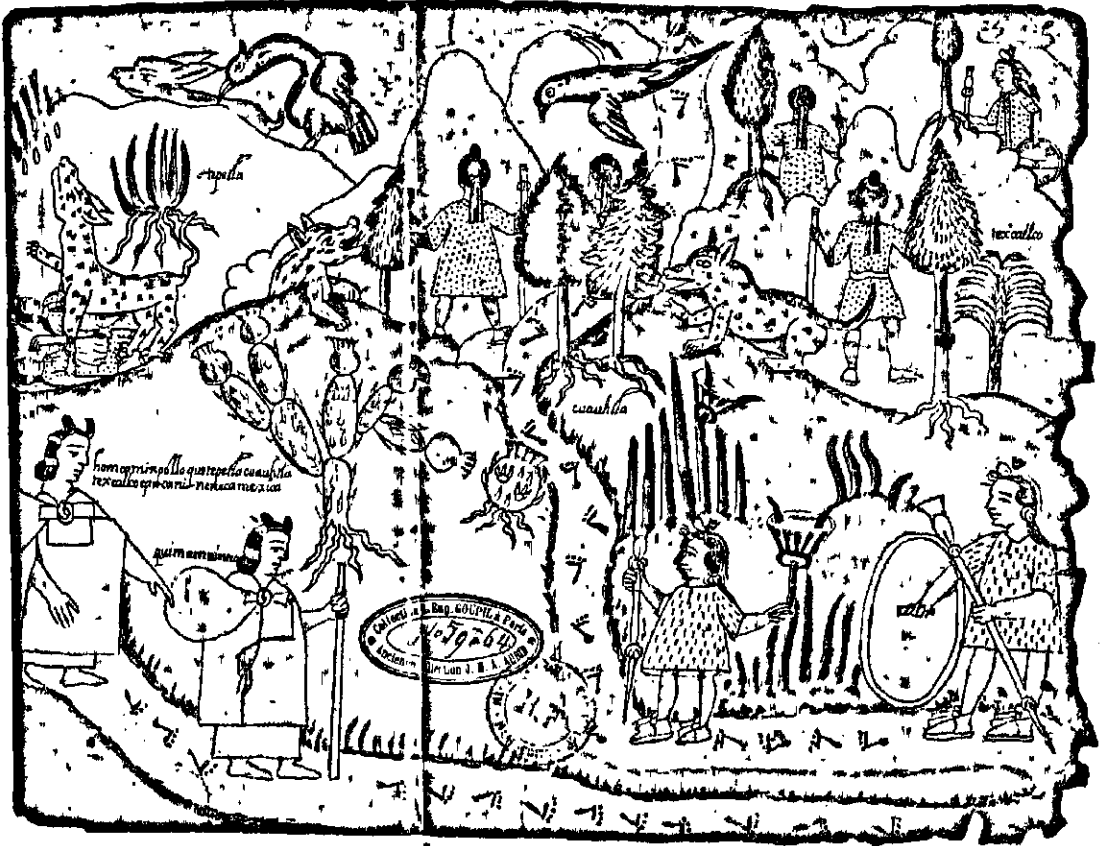


The Aztec Xiuhtecuhtli and the Four Directions.

This Mesoamerican painted manuscript divides the world into five parts. Holy trees symbolize the compass points: east at the top, west on the bottom, north to the left, and South to the right. It was used by long-distance merchants along trade routes between central Mexico and the fringes of the Yucatan Peninsula.

(Codex Fejérváry-Mayer, 1)

Image 7



The Tenochca Peregrination. “The perilous trek of the Aztecs as they made their way from the land of the Chichimecs, their ancestors, to found Tenochtitlan is quaintly portrayed here with footsteps showing the route they followed. The phantasmagoric beasts they face include birds as big as jaguars and rabbits larger still. Although most of the tribe members seem assured of reaching their destination, the two Indians at upper left have apparently succumbed to a jaguar.”

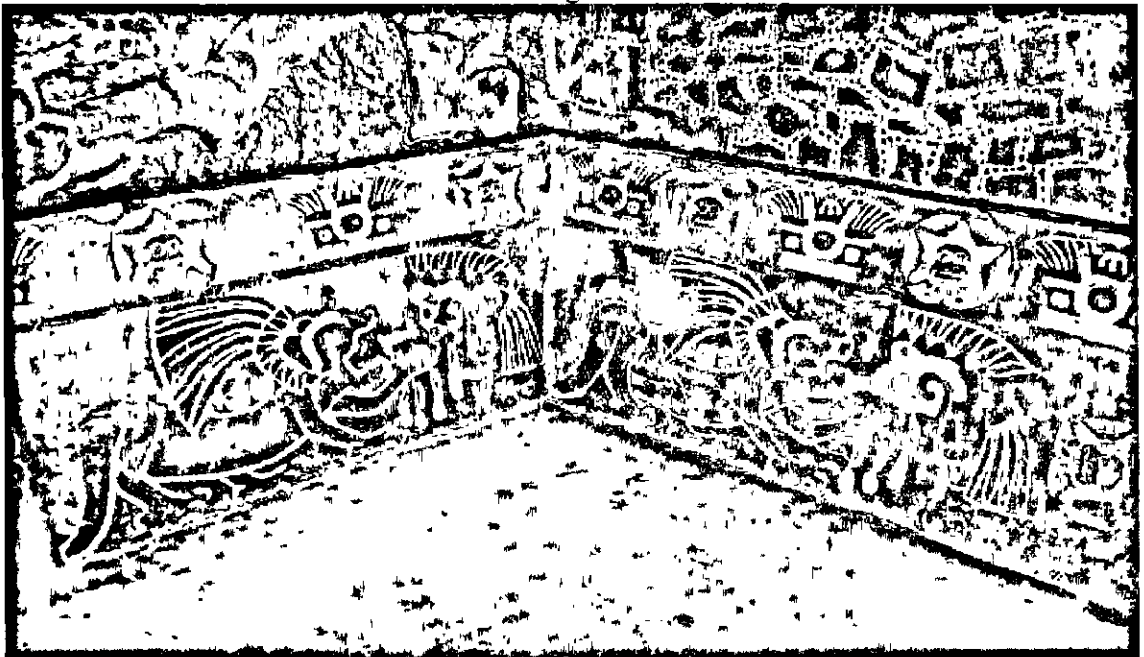
(from *Codex of 1576 (Codex Aubin)*, but reproduced in
Karl E. Meyer, *Teotihuacán*, 84-‘5).

Image 8



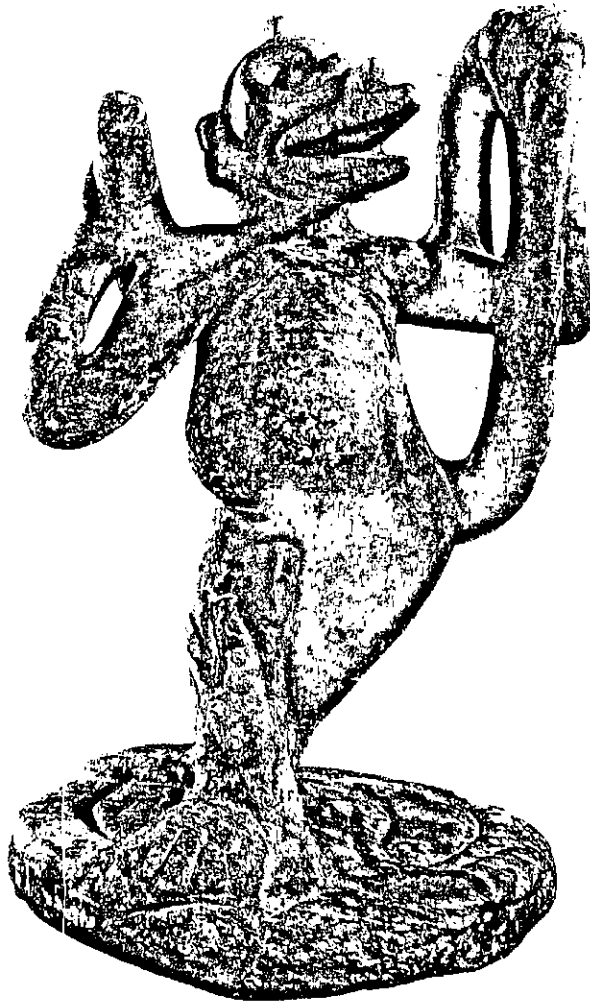
Tlalocan: patio mural from Teotihuacan: a reproduction in the Museo Nacional de Antropología, Mexico City. (California State University. [calstatela ...WebPage-Thumb.00002.html](#))

Image 9



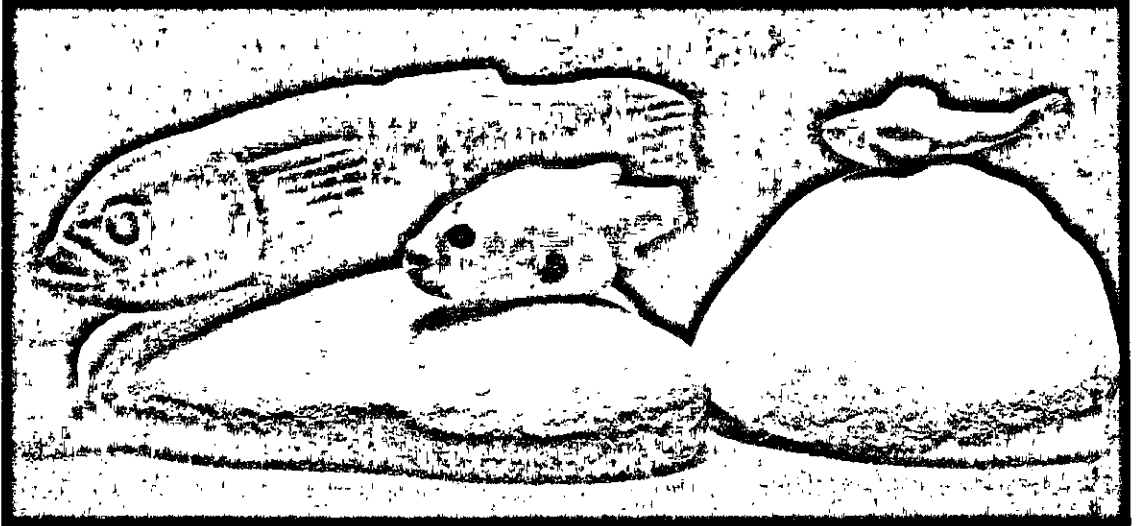
Jaguar Frescos: Teotihuacan. (California State University. [calstatela ...WebPage-Thumb.00002.html](#))

Image 10



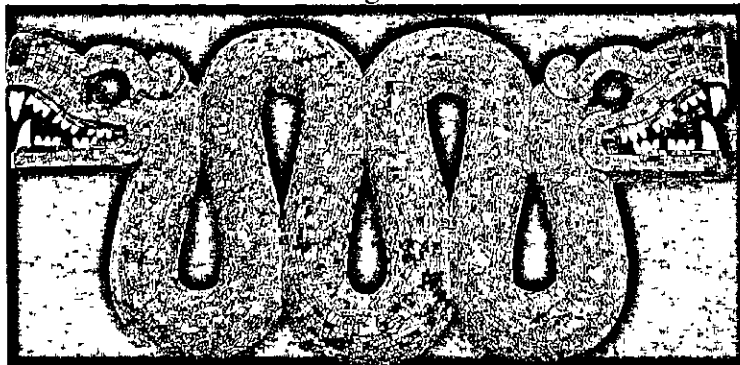
Monkey with Buccal Mask Holding Serpent.
(from Pasztory, *Aztec Art*, 216)

Image 11



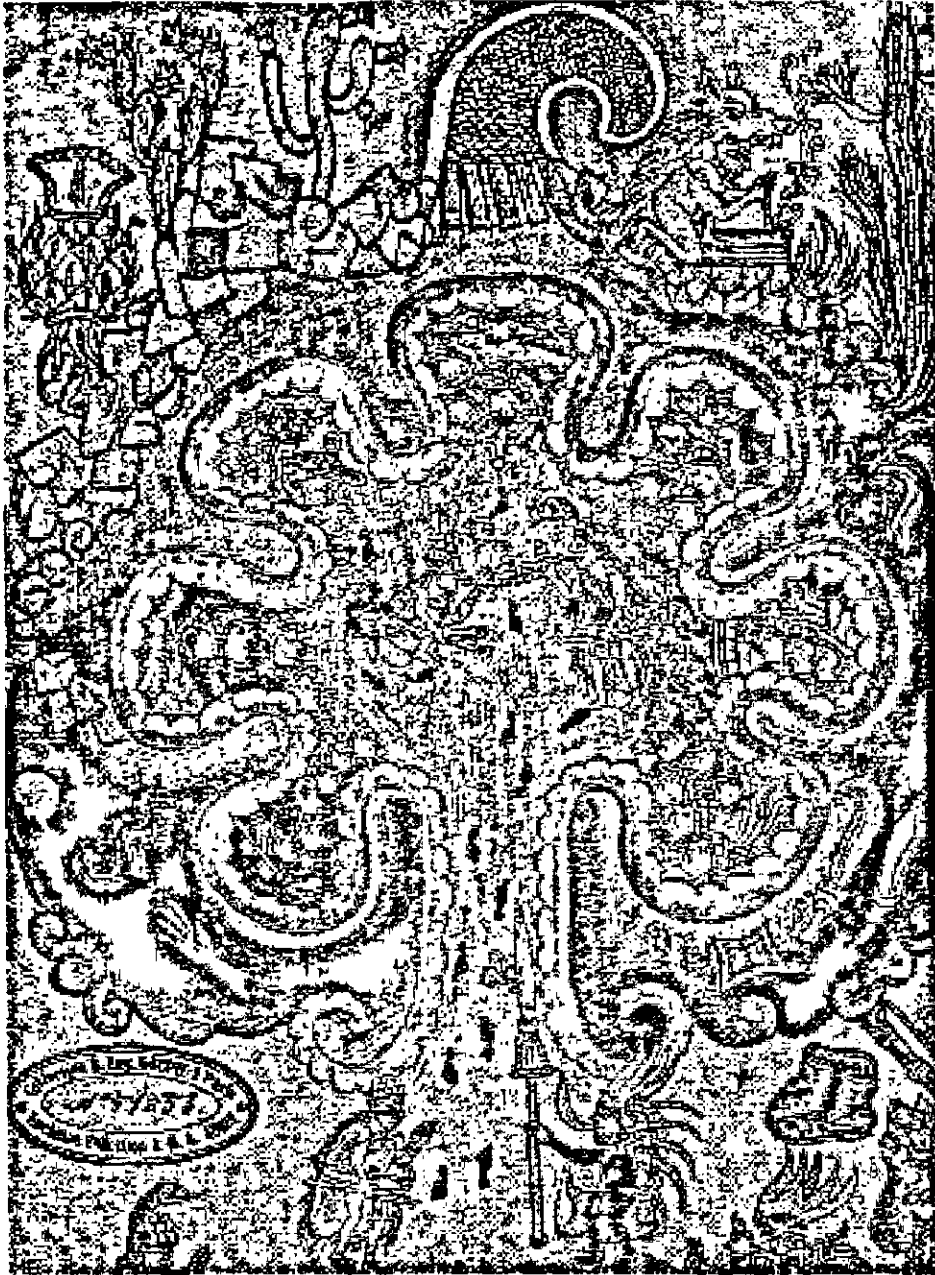
Fish Carved in Green Stone and Mother of Pearl.
(Matos Montezuma, *The Great Temple*, 151)

Image 12



Mosaic Serpent Pectoral. Hollowed wood faced with turquoise mosaic.
(from Pasztory, *Aztec Art*, 265)

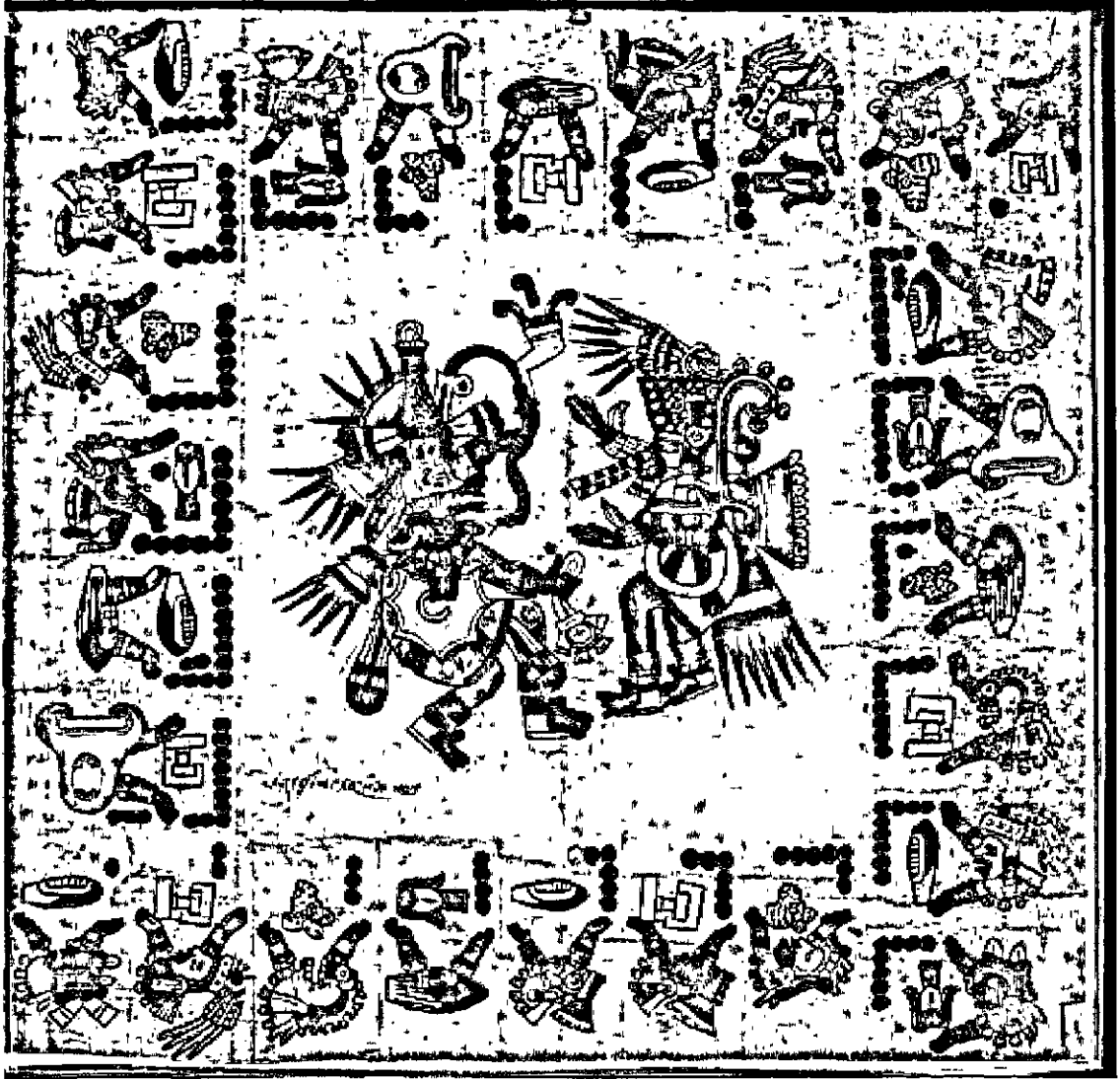
Image 13



Chicomoztoc, the Aztec Seven Caves. NB: desert landscape depicted above the caves.

(from *Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca*, but also found in Markman and Markman, *Flayed God*, colour plate 24)

Image 14



Quetzalcoatl (left) and Tezcatlipoca (right) in Combat (in centre of image)

(from *Codex Borbonicus*, 22)