

INDIGENOUS INTELLIGENCE IN SPAIN'S AMERICAN COLONY

FOR HALF A MILLENNIUM, the story of America has been told principally by the heirs of Columbus. After all, who else was around to undertake the task? As the noted literary authority Roberto González Echevarría reminds us, America had no letters, no literature before the three caravels touched the western shore of the Atlantic. And as the equally authoritative Leopoldo Zea confirms, still less was there any philosophy.¹ Hence, it fell to the invaders to produce the foundation narratives, the ideological charters, and to furnish truly valid source documents.

Dispossessed as no other continent has been in planetary history, America was in this way comprehensively silenced and subsumed by the European colonial order; and little changed with the independence movements that produced today's nation states, all of whose official languages effectively remain European.

For this reason, it is of some consequence to tease out the exceptions to this rule, that is, the subversives who put the local case. Their growing prominence over the last few decades marks a sea-change with respect to the received western epistemology. In particular – and this is my subject – a gathering flow of indigenous intelligence has been rendering obsolescent, if not objectionable, much of what had stood for good sense in the study of the Spanish and other European colonies in America. Registering and channelling that intelligence has led to several innovations which foreground voices from the past that were previously either silenced or translated into innocuity, precisely because of their reliance on indigenous world-views and non-western perspectives. Texts written alphabetically in the major literary languages of America are now being given more due as artifacts in their own right. Rather than being treated as, at best, sources of data by western scholars, such texts now stand more chance of being credited with having their own logic and argument. As a direct result, many scholars are now wishing to go further historiographically and open up the question of continuity from pre-Cortesian modes of literacy and systems of representation which antedate the importing of alphabet. This issue is of especial interest, precisely because western definitions of history have tended to rely so strongly on what are called “written sources”.

In Mesoamerica, the invasion or “conquest” was generally so violent that it is often thought to have caused a complete rupture and intellectual discontinuity. True, destruction happened on a grand scale. Inscribed stone was shattered, or buried, like the magnificent Sunstone of Tenochtitlan (Mexico City), unearthed again in 1792, which tells the story of the world-ages or “Suns”: Books written in Maya hieroglyphs and in the related

script known as *tlacuilolli* were burned in huge bonfires like those lit by Cortés in the libraries of Texcoco (1520), by bishop Zumárraga in the main square of Tenochtitlan (1539), and by bishop Landa in the Maya town of Ti-Ho (Merida, Yucatan; 1562).

Yet overall the old tradition was by no means eradicated immediately. Some Mixtec annals continue for decades past Cortés' arrival in 1519, without even noting it; scribes were still at work in the late 17th century, when priests encountered *tlacuilolli* books in Huehuetlan and Maya hieroglyphic books in Tayasal. In Oaxaca, screenfold annals on deerskin were still being produced as evidence in court cases two centuries later again.²

Moreover, from the first, concerted efforts were made to respond and adapt to the new circumstances, to translate them in the fullest sense. Annals and ritual books, now most often on European paper, recast old arguments in new terms. New kinds of texts emerged, like the native-paper Landbooks ("Techialoyan") which still today defend local community rights. Even the Christians continued the old line to some degree; their "Testerian"-style catechisms, for example, borrowed telling images from the pagan ritual books, like the "couple under blanket" that denoted fornication. Many of the four hundred or more surviving post-Cortésian texts owe their existence to the fact that the Real Audiencia or royal court of New Spain accepted evidence in native script.

With the invasion came the Roman alphabet, which was used to record texts in a good number of Mesoamerican languages, many of which were printed in standardised orthography. The corpus of such texts in Nahuatl and Maya is particularly large and bears an intricate relationship with native script antecedents. Out of all this, there emerged a number of alphabetic works in native languages which well deserve the epithet "classic", insofar as they bring forward the older tradition on a grand scale.

As a script system, *tlacuilolli* was easily flexible enough to make new and utterly foreign phenomena intelligible in its own terms. After 1519, horse-shoes imprint roads previously marked only by the human foot. On being introduced into the economy in 1536, copper coinage is quoted according to the existing exchange rates of cloth and the cacao bean. The steel of invading weapons is rendered in a hard metallic blue previously reserved for the raingod's meteorite axe. Mastiffs trained to maim and devour resemble the native dogs as canines, yet are immediately distinguishable on account of their appetite, and indeed are portrayed as species-equivalents of those who hold them on leads, the European newcomers who, hairy and pale-eyed, visually announce bestiality. When baptising his converts, the Christian priest is depicted pouring water in a fashion that recalls the ceremonies of his pagan predecessors; yet his hunger for souls and flesh drives him right inside people's houses, violating traditional thresholds. Even the strange phonetics of proper names are caught as needed: the surname Gallegos becomes house (*calli*) and bean (*e-tl*), and Cortés quite

aptly is snake (*coatl*). In the Tlatelolco Annals, “Peru” is ingeniously translated by a hybrid glyph consisting of a Spanish dog (*perro*) and a Nahuatl rubber ball (*ollin*).

When transferred from screenfold to European books, narratives in the annals genre were severely modified in terms of layout and format. Yet the count of native year-names as such survived, began with the same traditional base dates and respected the same perspective. In this way, the Aztec history told in the screenfold Aztlán Annals (Boturini Codex) was adapted and continued on bound European paper in the Aubin Codex, which carries on through the invasion to the end of the 16th century. Moreover, still respecting the visual language of place glyphs, the Aubin text contrived to show how in setting off for western Mexico in 1528, Tenochtitlan’s ruler Motelchiuh was effectively returning to the curved mountain Colhuacan, the toponym which had marked the start of the twelfth-century Aztec migration. The way Aubin represents the proper name of Antonio de Valeriano, governor of Tenochtitlan 1570–1603, is yet more ingenious: as the “water-bird” (*a-tl, toto-tl*) his name glyph evokes both the Spanish phonetics of Antonio and the Nahuatl name-glyph of Tenochtitlan’s fourteenth-century founding father, Atototl. For their part, the authors of the Mendoza Codex, whose title page features Atototl’s name glyph, recalled the paradigms established in the old ritual books in attempting to persuade the emperor Charles V that the old monarchic system could still be viable, in terms of the commodity tribute collected yearly from the four quarters of the former Aztec empire, and of the training and organisation of Tenochtitlan’s workforce.

Even where the initiative was Christian rather than native, it is worth noting that the scribes in question could display varying degrees of loyalty to the old system. The elders of Tepepulco, who worked with Sahagún between 1558 and 1560, adhered to the old theme chapters when making their beautiful copies on European paper, inscribing into them numeracy and logic that Christian missionaries could be guaranteed not to understand.³ At the same time, they explicitly affirmed the old faith, in Nahuatl glosses, noting that for them the one who made rain was none other than their own Tlaloc (*quiahuittl: tiquitoa quichiua tlaloque*).

The most readily demonstrable continuity occurs in the annals genre and resulted in such Nahuatl classics as the Cuauhtitlan Annals, a survey and reworking of a range of highland sources which covers eight centuries, and the Legend of the Suns, which casts much further back, as well as works by such historians as Chimalpahin, Tezozomoc and Cristóbal de Castillo. Other native historians elected to transcribe annals directly into Spanish, notably Ixtlilxochitl, a descendant of the royal house of Texcoco and gatherer of scattered manuscripts, whose Chichimec chronicles patiently trace and verbalise the labyrinthine reading paths that pattern the ten Xolotl Maps. Heeded in Hugh Thomas’ major updating (1993) of

W. H. Prescott's *The Conquest of Mexico* (1843), these sources help correct the pervasive lie that Cortés came to avenge Texcoco and other victims of Aztec imperialism.

The *xihuhtlapoualli* or annals corroborate many aspects of the Spanish invasion that are ignored or traduced in western accounts, notably the role of Malintzin ("La Malinche"). Far from being the humiliated slave of Cortés focused on in Octavio Paz's *Laberinto de la soledad* (1950), Malintzin in general led and dominated Cortés, received more material tribute than he, gave orders in battle, lived a long and fruitful life and with her son Martín held on to great wealth: for precisely these reasons she is wittily satirised by the Aztecs in the *Cantares mexicanos* manuscript, as John Bierhorst's translation makes plain.⁴

In establishing principles of intellectual continuity, these Nahuatl and Aztec texts likewise reveal the roots of resistance to Christianity, famously exemplified in the rejection of the Franciscan mission to Tenochtitlan/Mexico City in 1524. By and large, the Nahua historians chose to ignore the Biblical story, strongly affirming their own genesis account of world ages. The problem of origins was however faced by Chimalpahin (1579–1660), in the histories he transcribed into Nahuatl from ancestral codices in Chalco Amecameca. Referring to the scattering of the Jews which culminated in Vespasian's razing of Jerusalem around 70 AD – he has the year 11 House or 73 AD – Chimalpahin refutes in calendrical detail biblically-based Christian arguments that the Mexicans must have been one of the Lost Tribes. In support of his claim that they had been "established on this side" for far longer, he translated into Nahuatl Enrico Martínez's *Reportorio de los tiempos y historia natural desta Nueva España* (1606), which defines America as the fourth world, equivalent and comparable as such with the other three, Asia, Europe, and Africa.⁵

The Maya of Yucatan claimed to have learned about the alphabet and Christianity long before either was imposed on them after the fall of Ti-Ho in 1539. The presence among them, over many years, of captives taken when repelling Spanish attacks launched from Cuba speaks for this claim, as does what is otherwise known about the literary curiosity of the Maya. One of the first uses to which they put the alphabet was to transcribe the hieroglyphic books, chapter by chapter. Written in alphabetic Maya, such major texts as the Chilam Balam books and the *Ritual of the Bacabs* are explicit in pointing to the hieroglyph (*uoh*) as a privileged source of knowledge. The ideological consequences of respecting this order of continuity were glimpsed by the US epigrapher Linda Schele, who in proclaiming "This is American history" supplied a long-needed corrective to compatriot archaeologists and anthropologists who continue to refer to all pre-Columbian America as "pre-historic". (In point of fact, the Mesoamerican calendar was far more accurate and comprehensive than anything Europe had to offer at the same period.)

With the transcription of the Maya hieroglyphic books into the alphabet, the cycle of the calendrical period known as the *katun* emerges as a key organising principle of the Chilam Balam books, which are named after the towns in Yucatan which authored them (Chumayel, Tizimin, Kaua, Mani, Oxcutzcab etc.). In these texts, the cycle is structured, as it is in the hieroglyphic texts, in paragraphs that correspond to the place and ruler of the *katun*, its general qualities and its specific events. The same order of continuity is found in other chapters in the Chilam Balam books which conceptually cluster around the *katun* cycle: chronicles, forecasts, cosmogonies, and sets of riddles designed to unmask imposters among candidates for office under the *katun* system. Besides following the format of hieroglyphic originals, the alphabetic Chilam Balam texts invoke other characteristics of that script, such as syllabic word-play and mathematical logic.

Consciously rehearsing this tradition in the Chilam Balam book of Chumayel (pp. 19–21), the Maya reflect on the Christian invasion as the latest in a longer series that included Nahuatl-speaking “foreigners” from Mexico. In each case they select and translate concepts from the invading languages and weigh them against their own, appealing to the hieroglyphic precedent. Critical to Maya identity through the Colony, the Chilam Balam tradition sustained the nineteenth-century War of the Castes and has carried through to our day. The strength of Maya precedent in the Chilam Balam books is highlighted through comparison with texts produced by individuals who collaborated with the Spaniards, Nakuk Pech, Gaspar Chi and others, where there is no longer a trace of the *katun* calendar and time-system. In its stead there is a reliance on a much reduced Christian imagination of time and government, and on Maya versions of Spanish institutional rhetoric.⁶

The resistance offered by the Itza to the south in Petén had similar underpinning, especially through the person of Canek, who named himself after a noted Maya ruler.⁷ In turn, this order of political memory has had a key role in the prolonged resistance displayed over the centuries, and today, by the Maya of Chiapas.

In the larger sphere of chronology, problems were caused from the outset by the version of genesis and world history imported by the Europeans, especially in so far as it posited a single creation only a few thousand years old, and single geographical origin – the Holy Land – for the peoples of the planet. Most acutely, it raised the question: with the arrival of the Europeans, who entered whose history?

For these and similar reasons, the Chilam Balam books of the lowland Maya take very much their own view of Christianity, thanks to the critical attention they pay to the Biblical Genesis and to commentaries on Creation by such major Christian exegetes as St John of Damascus and Alphonso X. Duly reshaped, these are integrated into Maya cosmogony to produce highly ingenious accounts of the “beginning of time”. The same is true of

the imagined ends of time; the longer Maya faith in universal intelligence informs versions of the Last Judgment (Matthew 25) and the Apocalypse (Revelation 15). Munro Edmonson remarks how in the process “these new elements were numerologically assimilated into the pre-existing system”.⁸

The highland Maya similarly based their political history on cosmogony; and in so doing they likewise resisted the biblical story, while alluding to it and domesticating it. The sea-crossing during the migration from Tula told in the *Popol vuh* comes, in the *Cakchiquel Annals*, to resemble the opening of the waves on the flight from Egypt; in the Quiché *Título de Totonicapán* (of which only a Spanish translation survives), the Biblical echo is even stronger in so far as Balam-Quitze opens the water with his staff. In this interplay of motifs, it is hard to know what is original, what is translation, and what is calculated counterargument. In the *Popol vuh* account of the Blood Woman’s being impregnated by the forbidden fruit of the tree and her flight from the underworld Xibalba, the story of Eve in Eden is undermined point for point, for, in line with American cosmogony generally, she is honoured for the “disobedience” that made her the mother of the epic heroes of the nation.⁹

This is the context out of which the Codex Mexicanus emerged, a remarkable text made of native paper and written in native script, yet bound in European fashion and inclusive of alphabetic glosses in Nahuatl.¹⁰ Most of its 102 pages are taken up with a history of the Aztecs, from the 12th century and their beginnings in Aztlan, up to the end of the 16th century and the elaborate Spanish programme of colonisation. Framing the annals are initial and terminal parts on chronology as such (pp. 1–15, 89–102), in which a thorough and principled comparison is made between local and imported thought, with respect to the measurement and internal divisions of the solar and the civil year, the zodiac, the sidereal moon, the “elements” of nature and the mechanisms of larger calendar cycles and epochs. Particular interest was excited by the attempts of Pope Gregory to reform the Julian calendar in the year 1582, when leap days added incorrectly in the past had to be “lost” along with the time they represented.

Pages of the initial part of the Mexicanus Codex deserve especial attention as examples of how knowledge and doctrines whose roots go back to Greece and Rome were critically viewed and redefined in the New World. They focus on the solar year (p. 9), and the zodiac (pp. 10–11).

A dual wheel design on page 9 (see Figure 1) juxtaposes Christian with Mesoamerican years, and sums up an opening section on the year as such. The left-hand wheel shows 28 Christian years, a solar cycle identified by the 4 × 7 Sunday or Dominical letters (a-g) used in the timing of Easter. The right-hand wheel shows 52 Mesoamerican years, the “year-binding” period (*xiuhmolpilli*) produced by combining the two series used to name years in the native calendar: the Thirteen Numbers, and the four “year bearer” Signs, here House, Rabbit, Reed and Flint.¹¹ In the position shown,

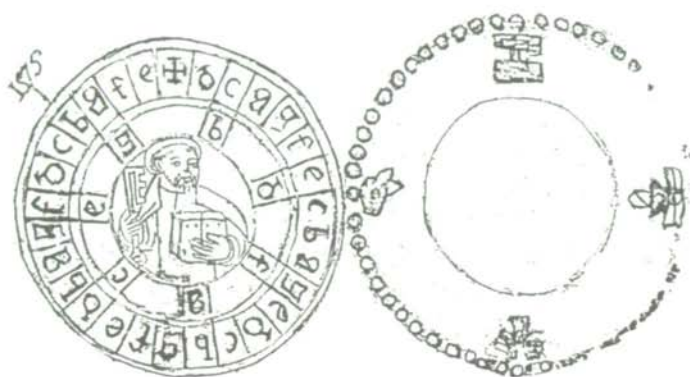


Fig. 1 The calendar wheels (Mexicanus, p. 9)

the “b” year of the Christian Wheel, seventeen years before the “b” year 1575 (glossed as such in Arabic numerals), is just touching the first of the Rabbit years on the Mesoamerican wheel, under the rabbit’s nose. In the Tenochtitlan correlation, 1558 was in fact the year 1 Rabbit, the last of the Aztec year-bindings completed before Mexicanus was written. Hence, the wheels are not only juxtaposed but also mesh and may carry us forward or backward in time in correct calendrical sequence.

In the centre of the Christian wheel, St Peter holds a triple-pronged key in his right hand and a book in his left. The open pages of the book each show a four-square pattern of dots, three of which are covered by St Peter’s hand. Above his head a cross occupies an extra division of the solar cycle wheel, raising from 28 to 29 the total of the divisions that mesh with the 52 Mesoamerican years, should the wheels be turned forwards or backwards in time.

In the position given, to alter or break the Christian cycle in this way seems to point to the major calendrical event that occurred just four years (the leap-day span) after the last letter was recorded, “e” or 1578, i.e. the Gregorian Reform of 1582, otherwise alluded to in Mexicanus, which did effectively cause a break in the 28-year Dominical letter sequence. At the same time, within the Mesoamerican system, this alteration ingeniously points to the reasons behind the Reform in question, that is, the imperfect Julian measurement of the seasonal year and hence of the need for leap-year days, in so far as this last had long been calculated in Mesoamerica according to a superior formula involving the number 29 (rather than 28). This formula is also found in the hieroglyphic texts of the Maya and it specifies that over 29 year-bindings or 1508 years, the difference between the metric year of 365 days (i.e. without leap-days) and the slightly longer seasonal year (365.242 days) itself amounts to a year. This is exactly the total of years produced by the operation of the two wheels in question, since 1508 is the lowest common multiple of 29 and 52.¹²

The following two pages of *Mexicanus* (pp. 10–11) carry forward the statements made about the year, by dealing with the zodiac. The Dominical letters reappear on page 10, this time in a table that deals with the zodiac stations of the year, as well as the Metonic cycle which reconciles solar and lunar frequencies, and hence the Paschal or Easter dates. It begins appropriately with the “equinoctial” sign Aries and reads vertically downwards. By contrast, the zodiac as such becomes the focus of the table on page 11 (see Figure 2), where it is set out in upper and lower registers that begin with Aquarius and Leo; at the same time, this second zodiac is more adapted to local thought. The Aquarius/Leo division of the zodiac is normally associated with the 28 stations of the sidereal moon, which are duly noted below, two or three per zodiac sign. A third register makes a further correlation, this time with Aristotle’s “four elements” – *aer*, *aqua*, *ignis*, *terra* – in three successive sets, according to a logic still invoked by astrologers and French wine-growers today (Aquarius, Gemini and Libra belong with Air; Pisces, Cancer and Scorpio belong with Water, and so on).

In presenting this sidereal zodiac, the Aztec authors of the *Mexicanus* adduce their own corresponding ideas and knowledge not so much through direct comparison, of the kind found in the meshing calendar wheels, as by allusion, subtle modification and occasional substitution of the received design. This translation affects the detail of both the zodiac signs and the four elements, and, point for point, builds up into an argument that is altogether comparable with that stated in the calendar wheels, and yet more forcefully political. Following the correlative principle which so mechanically informs the Old World table, the Aztec scribes take it further in order to turn it on itself and make their own case.

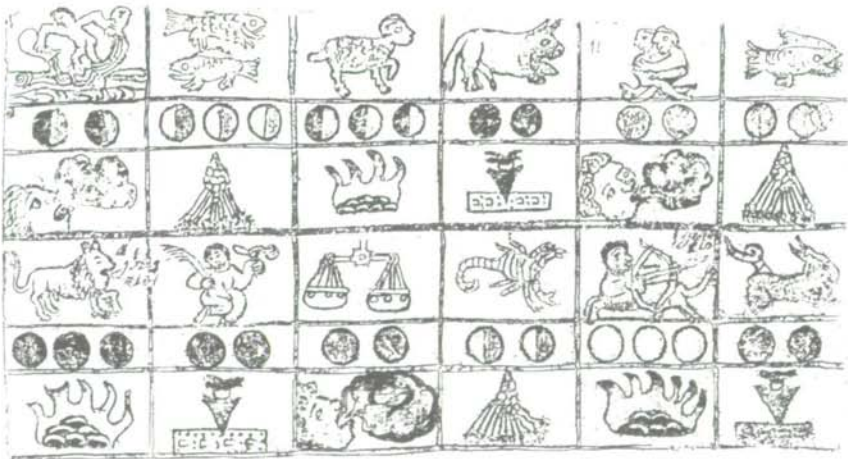


Fig. 2. The zodiac (*Mexicanus* p. 11)

In the first set of three signs, Aquarius, Gemini and Libra, those identified with Air, play is made with the idea of being double, which as such is plain enough in the case of the Gemini twins and the two weighing pans of Libra's scale. Here, however, Aquarius too becomes double, through the fact that the water-bearer holds not one but two jars. Moreover, the streams of water pouring from them are shown to swirl one above the other, in an aqueous pattern altogether reminiscent of pre-Hispanic water glyphs (*a-tl*). At one level, all this recalls the strange coincidence, explicitly noted in Tovar and other companion codices of the 16th century, whereby the January water jar of the Old World Aquarius finds a counterpart in that of the Aztec "water falling" feast (Atemoztli) which fell at a similar time of year. In turn, this detail alerts us to the further fact that the Twins of Gemini also "intermingle", indeed that they are not normal twins at all but a fornicating couple, sitting face to face in a sexual posture likewise found in the pre-Hispanic books, the legs of the female overlaying those of the male. Finally, this causes us to notice that the doubleness of the third Air sign, Libra, carries through the same idea of superimposition, at the expense of balance, one pan being higher than the other. Hence, as a sequence, the three modified Air signs reinforce each other visually in proposing a complex but altogether coherent response to colonisation, as evinced in the new calendar, the sexual propensities of the invaders, and the dubious equity of their legal system.

The next set of signs, Pisces, Cancer and Scorpio, assigned to Water, appear here as fish (the norm), another fish (instead of a crab), and a crab-like scorpion. The first fish (Pisces) are a pair, and unlike the single fish of Cancer have incipient legs. The implicit argument takes the idea of decline down deeper in time and, in the context of Mesoamerican cosmogony, suggests regression down the evolutionary scale from higher to lower vertebrate, to crustacean, concepts elaborated in the *Popol vuh* which it would take western philosophy another three centuries to develop.

The third and fourth sets of signs, which belong to Fire and Earth, concentrate on the true animals of the zoo-diac, as well as anthropomorphic Virgo. Play is made with the link that all these creatures ultimately have with the idea of being domestically protected (Virgo), domesticated (the herd animals Aries the ram, Taurus the bull, Sagittarius the half horse, and Capricorn the goat), or tameable (Leo the lion). In native America, herd animals along with the economy and ideology of pastoralism were unknown outside the Andes and their introduction into Mexico was profoundly resented at a practical and a philosophical level. Here, attention is drawn to their "tails", and thereby to the process of sexual selection basic to pastoralism. The bull's pizzle (Taurus) is enormous and contrasts in exemplary manner with the tiny or absent members of the Fire creatures Aries, Leo, and Sagittarius. All nonetheless have long proper tails (even Virgo holds up a tail-like frond), except for Aries. Indeed, with his tiny

docked tail, Aries proves to be not a ram at all, but a shorn yearling, and recalling the Paschal lamb of Easter, looks as ineffectual as Christ's agents most often proved to be as defenders of their newly-acquired Indian flock. The other side of the same coin, the bull continues to symbolise the worst of European aggression in native-paper codex-style books still produced in Mexico today.¹³

Overall, the twelve zodiac signs in the second Mexicanus zodiac (p. 11) remain quite recognisable as the Old World configuration they are. Yet they are persistently modified, a fact easily confirmed by comparison with the unmodified Paschal zodiac on the previous page (p. 10). Thanks to this, and to the appeal to the kind of visual logic found in the classic codices, the adapted zodiac comes to undermine the culture from which it stemmed. This process is yet more obvious in the case of the four elements with which the signs are correlated, where, moreover, a positive counter-statement is also made. Each of the four elements is deliberately traduced, not just satirically, but in the name of quite another philosophy; and this process is incremental, with each successive representation of the same element, and between successive elements.

Air, the opposite of clear or transparent, is puffed out as black breath on to the white page, from a mouth set in a face with European features and framed by curly (as opposed to straight Indian) hair. As time goes by, the head moves from side to side, the mouth opens wider, and the black pall of bad breath cumulatively spreads. The act of exhaling darkness in this way, shamanic in origin, is clearly registered in the classic codices, where, for example, the Lord of the Underworld attempts to eclipse the sun Tonatiuh by just this means (Laud Codex p. 46). Hence, within the image that is wholly European in style, there is again a native message, one which sums up the negative commentary on Spanish colonisation made so far.

This carries through to the element Water, which is no more sweet or welcome than European breath and issues from ice crystals far above, arriving as hard hail and cold rain. The image as such, however, is now not European but native and corresponds, quite exactly, to that seen in the account of the altiplano winter given in the Tepepulco Manuscript (Sahagún's *Primeros memoriales* f.283), where Itztlacolihqui the Ice Lord threatens newly-planted crops with his hail. In other words, the idea of destructiveness is transposed from the European face to be incorporated into an existing meteorological cycle. At the same time, there is an appeal to the idea of how physical state may be determined by altitude and changes in temperature (solid ice forms as water rises and then melts as it falls); and to numeracy (the falling streams of liquid always number eleven).

Now fully integrated into native teaching, the third element Fire develops this line of thought. For Fire is not some mysterious essence like phlogiston but a fire (*tle-til*), like the one purposefully lit by the metalworkers in the

Florentine Codex (Book 9). The image again relates temperature change to verticality and to physical state, showing how flames of gas rise from solid coal. And it again invokes numeracy, this time more complexly. For the coals and flames always present the same overall unit-total of 11, which repeats that of the Water example; yet as the fire grows hotter they visibly shift their inner proportion, as 7:4, 6:5 and 5:6.

Of the four “elements”, the last, Earth, is the one most defiantly reclaimed from Old World philosophy. On the Mexicanus page, Earth signifies not as god-given but because it is worked and tended. It is the field (*tlalli*), imaged as such, as in countless 16th-century legal documents, by its regular edge and exactly patterned “plantation” infixes (pairs of dots; laterally-inverted and square-sided Cs); and it is tended by a definitely native hoe. In the codices, the sophistication of the elements which make up this earth glyph is such that they could mathematically specify field area and form, and type of soil (here they are unfortunately too effaced to be fully decoded). By comparison, European ideas on the subject were rudimentary,¹⁴ sufficiently so further to damage native society.

Just as the modified zodiac signs imply a critique, so the correlative set of four elements goes on to propose another thesis, which points to ideas of production, to the importance not of immutable “elements” but of human effort and intelligence, all within a larger idea of natural origin. If the thought registered in the second Mexicanus zodiac is to be termed “astrology” like that of its scholastic prompt, then it is one based on a very different world view and a more accurate calendrics.

In sum, the Mexicanus Codex offers a discreet and ingenious commentary on major chronological questions of its day. Showing deep familiarity with paradigms of Old World thought, it states difference in precisely gaugeable terms, modifying its originals and alluding repeatedly to Mesoamerican ideas of time and nature. Its pages give a small yet precious insight into another philosophy and tradition of knowledge, which came to be massively smothered, disrespected and even persecuted in that last spasm of medieval scholasticism known as the Inquisition.

Of the voices “within” the Spanish colony, those of America’s indigenous populations are now being better heard and read as the innermost. In this perspective, they are the opposite of what is often called “marginal”, “minority” or “alternative”, terms borrowed perhaps too hastily from the social sciences. Minority they certainly were not in the Colony, and still are not statistically speaking in such countries as Guatemala, Ecuador and Bolivia. Nor do they deserve to continue to be regarded just as some sort of other, in Todorov’s sense. Indigenous traditions are the factor whose absence will be increasingly noticed in accounts of America under Spanish rule which deconstruct the discourse of the colonisers while failing to heed attentively enough that of the colonised – a point made by several reviewers with respect to such works as Tzvetan Todorov’s *La Conquête de l’Amérique*.

La question de l'autre (1982), Stephen Greenblatt's *Marvellous Possessions* (1991) and Walter Mignolo's *The Darker Side of the Renaissance* (1997).¹⁵ Carried forward today by many distinguished scholars whose first languages are indigenous (among them, Luis Reyes, Ramón Arzápalo, Abdón Yaranga, Juan de Dios Yapita, Salvador Palomino, Elicura Chihuailaf), this tradition provides the framework in which to broach and where necessary rethink such key historiographical questions as the time depth of cultural and intellectual experience in America, the coherence of the "world-age" philosophy, textual continuity from pre- to post-Hispanic times, the unhelpful binary opposition between "myth" and "history", and received western notions of script.

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NOTES

The author apologises for the quality of the Figures, which is due to the deteriorated state of the originals.

¹ "American philosophy began with its history under the sign of dependence, on 12th October 1492." So said L. Zea in his opening address to the XII Interamerican Congress of Philosophy, Buenos Aires, August 1989 (according to *Excelsior* of Mexico City, 13 August 1989). In *The Pilgrim at Home*; *Alejo Carpentier* (Austin, 1990), R. González Echevarría reported: "It was therefore in the Caribbean that Latin American literature 'began', for it is in Columbus's diary that we first encounter what will become the most persistent theme of Latin American literature: how to write in a European language about realities never seen in Europe before" (pp. 25–6).

² On the codices generally, and for precise information about the examples quoted below, see K. A. Nowotny, *Tlacuilolli. Die mexikanischen Bilderhandschriften, Stil und Inhalt* (Berlin, 1961); C. Gibson & J. Glass, "A Census of Middle American Prose Manuscripts in the Native Historical Tradition", *Handbook of Middle American Indians* (Austin, 1975), Vol. 15, pp. 322–400; S. Gruzinski, *Painting the Conquest* (Paris, 1992); G. Brotherston, *Painted Books from Mexico* (London, 1995).

³ See J. Rabasa, *Inventing America. Spanish Historiography and the Formation of Eurocentrism* (Norman, 1993).

⁴ J. Bierhorst, *Cantares mexicanos. Songs of the Aztecs* (Stanford, 1985), which brings out the key concept of intellectual continuity in the Nahuatl or Aztec tradition. See also J. Lockhart, *The Nahuas after the Conquest* (Stanford, 1992), M. León-Portilla, *La filosofía náhuatl estudiada en sus fuentes* (Mexico, 1956), and G. Kutscher, G. Vollmer & G. Brotherston, *Aesop in Mexico* (Berlin, 1987).

⁵ J. Durand-Forest, *L'Histoire de la Vallée de Mexico selon Chimalpahin* (Paris, 1987), pp. 127–8; on Chimalpahin and Vespasian, see S. Rendón, *Relaciones originales de Chalco Amaquemecan. Escritas por Don Francisco de San Antón Muñón Chimalpahin Cuauhlehuanztzin* (Mexico, 1965), p. 124.

⁶ W. Hanks, *Word and Image in Maya Culture: Explorations in language, writing and representation* (Salt Lake City, 1989). On the Maya hieroglyphs, see L. Schele & D. Freidel, *A Forest of Kings: The untold story of the ancient Maya* (New York, 1990) and M. Coe, *Breaking the Maya Code* (London, 1992); on their transcription into the alphabet, see M. C. Alvarez, *Textos coloniales del Libro de Chilam Balam de Chumayel y textos glíficos del Códice de Dresde* (Mexico, 1974) and A. Barrera Vásquez & S. Rendón, *El libro de los libros de Chilam Balam* (Mexico, 1948). N. Farriss, *Maya Society under Colonial Rule*

(Princeton, 1984) and I. Clendinnen, *Ambivalent Conquests: Maya and Spaniard in Yucatan, 1517-70* (Cambridge, 1987) deal with the Yucatec Maya situation more generally.

⁷ V. R. Bricker, *The Indian Christ, the Indian King: the historical substrate of Maya myth and ritual* (Austin, 1981).

⁸ M. Edmonson, *Heaven Born Merida and Its Destiny. The Book of Chilam Balam of Chumayel* (Austin, 1986), pp. 36, 249.

⁹ See G. Brotherston, *Book of the Fourth World. Reading the Native Americas through their Literature* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 292-307. The English versions of the *Popol vuh* by M. Edmonson, *The Book of Counsel: the Popol Vuh* (New Orleans, 1971) and D. Tedlock, *The Popol vuh* (New York, 1985) deal with the links between Quiché cosmogony and history, as does R. Carmack, *Quichean Civilization* (Los Angeles, 1973).

¹⁰ To date, the only accessible publication of this fundamental text remains that of Ernst Mengin, "Commentaire du Codex Mexicanus", *Journal de la Société des Américanistes* 41 (1952), 387-498. Hanns Prem provides indispensable information in "Comentario a los partes calendáricas del Codex Mexicanus", *Estudios de Cultura Náhuatl*, 13 (1978), 267-88.

¹¹ On the Mesoamerican year calendar in general, see M. Edmonson, *The Book of the Year* (Salt Lake City, 1988).

¹² Continuing this order of analysis, it is also possible to read in this complex design a reference to the Era base date (3114 BC) invoked in Mesoamerican calendars; cf. Brotherston, *Book of the Fourth World*, pp. 116-18.

¹³ A. Sandstrom & P. Effrein, *Traditional Papermaking and Paper Cult Figures of Mexico* (Norman, 1986).

¹⁴ H. R. Harvey & B. J. Williams, "Decipherment and Some Implications of Aztec Numerical Glyphs", in: *Native American Mathematics*, ed. M. P. Closs (Austin, 1985), pp. 237-60.

¹⁵ See for example Peter Hulme, "Voices from the Margins?", *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies* 8 (1999), 219-34.