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Aztec goddesses : a historical perspective

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San Jose State University, 1993

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AZTEC GODDESSES: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

A Thesis

Presented to

The Graduate Studies Office

San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

in the Interdisciplinary Major:

Anthropological History

By

Jo Ann Roman Brisko

December, 1993

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ABSTRACT

AZTEC GODDESSES: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

by Jo Ann Roman Brisko

This thesis addresses the perception of Aztec goddesses from Post-Conquest chronicles to modern historical reconstructions. While briefly exploring the bias and cultural assumptions of these interpretations, this thesis examines Aztec goddesses in both popular and obscure myths and legends, as well as goddess iconography as it relates to Aztec society and contemporary Mesoamerican cultures.

The existing early chronicles were compiled after the Conquest and the bulk of the information was drawn from Aztec Lords serving as informants. Research reveals that there is usually a breakdown in the communication of abstract ideas when the informant is of an alien culture and is submissive to the chronicler. However, the flow of information is especially tenuous when both the chronicler and the informant are male and are exploring the female's realm which in pre-industrial cultures is often quite different from that of the male.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

With few exceptions, modern accounts of Aztec history follow a familiar, almost cliched, format¹. The Aztec are first introduced as a group of miserable migrants, the last of the "barbarian horde" that moved into Mexico from the North after AD 900. These early groups are credited with destroying the civilized city of Tula and of ushering militarism, human sacrifice, and war, into the Valley of Mexico.

Following this description of their origins is a presentation of the great Aztec gods: the peaceful culture hero, Quetzalcoatl, and his evil arch-rival Tezcatlipoca, ancestor gods of Tula; the legendary Mixcoatl and Xolotl, warrior gods of the Chichimeca barbarians; the ancient goggle-eyed god of rain, Tlaloc; Xipe Totec, in whose honor priests wore the skin of flayed victims; and the terrible Huitzilopochtli, a tribal god of the Aztec who, like a Mexican Moses, led them from their wanderings in the desert into the promised land and taught them human sacrifice.

At this point two goddesses, Coyolxauhqui and Coatlicue, are introduced. Although Coatlicue's massive and

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famous statue makes it difficult to ignore her, she and Coyolxauhqui actually seem to merit mention, not in their own right, but because of their proximity to the myth of Huitzilopochtli. Coatlicue is the mother of Huitzilopochtli and Coyolxauhqui is described as his malevolent sister, the moon.

These two goddesses are usually sandwiched between the description of the twin pyramids of Huitzilopochtli and Tlaloc along with accounts of wholesale human sacrifice, "flower wars," captives, and the Knights of the Eagles and Jaguars. If any attempt is made to examine Aztec cosmology, the historian will usually choose from numerous Aztec creation myths one that best illustrates his point of view. A favorite deity, Omoteotl, called the great bisexual creator deity, is introduced and thereafter referred to as male.² Often, reference is made to a self created, male god, Tloque Nahuaque, who, like the biblical Yahweh, is unknowable, sees what's in men's hearts, and shows compassion for them, heretofore an unknown trait in Mesoamerican deities.³ A statement touting the theory that Aztec cosmology was moving toward monotheism usually follows this. The examination of Aztec cosmology ordinarily ends with the historian conflating the remaining goddesses with the less popular gods and dismissing the Aztec pantheon as a pyramidal and dualistic system that is equally primitive and

barbarous. In all fairness, some authors include statements like that of Coe, "Aztec mythology and religious organization are so incredibly complex that little justice can be given them in the space [the author has]."⁴

By the early 16th century, the aggregation of goddesses worshiped in the Valley of Mexico were a result of centuries of syncretism that is both complicated and confusing and need not be discussed at great length here. Briefly, female figurines from Valdivia, Ecuador, dated between 4000-2000 years ago are the earliest human forms found in the New World.⁵ However in Mesoamerica, the first female figurines suggesting ritual were found at Tlatilco and date to ca. 1500 BC.⁶ Called "fertility figures" or "pretty ladies" by early archaeologists, they are now acknowledged as objects of goddess worship, possibly remnants of an Old World Mother Goddess cult⁷ brought to America by the first peoples who crossed the Bering Land Bridge 15,000 to 28,000 years ago.⁸

Due to syncretism, cultural evolution, and a constant redefining of the goddesses' roles, the iconography, myth, and legends of the goddesses formed a grand apex which, on the eve of the Conquest, came to life in the rituals of the Aztec. These rituals are well documented, albeit in a negative manner, in the 16th century

Post-Conquest works of Spanish priests Sahagun and Duran. However in later historical accounts, Aztec goddesses and their functions in Aztec life are omitted or glossed over. Perhaps later historians judged the goddess as unimportant or perhaps they were influenced by their European culture which worshipped a monotheistic male god.

Although not directly addressing the historical perception of Aztec goddesses, Benjamin Keen, in *The Aztec Image in Western Thought*, explores the phenomenon of diversity of interpretation seen in scores of accounts on the Aztec, beginning with the letters of the conqueror, Cortez, and continuing to the present.

Where one [account] has a vision of a tribal democracy in which "the Indians worked together for their common good, and no sacrifice was too great for their corporate well-being," another sees little more than "a band of pirates, sallying from their great city to loot and plunder." One discovers "a totalitarian state whose philosophy included an utter contempt for the individual"; another finds in Aztec political organization "a supreme achievement of humanity, full of happy inspirations that the present might well take into account."⁹

It is extremely difficult to separate objectivity from the cultural bias of any historian, both early and modern, who draws information from Post-Conquest accounts of the Aztec. What are the etic assumptions of these writers, to whom were their loyalties, and were they at odds with their culture or seeking to idealize it? The fact that they, with few exceptions, were all male may have possibly

prejudiced or influenced their interpretation.

What were the motivations of the Post-Conquest chroniclers, notably Fray Bernardino de Sahagun and Fray Diego Duran? These men were first and foremost Catholic priests who adhered to a religion of a strict male god and religious mores that dismissed women as being inferior with a potential for evil if not controlled. The primary mission of these men was to stamp out this "pagan" religion and they were always under the close scrutiny of the Spanish Inquisition to quickly accomplish this goal. Their native informants varied from those who were sincere to those who curried favors by telling the chroniclers what they wanted to hear; from those who lied out of pride of their culture to those who lied from their fear of the Inquisition. Very often there is a breakdown in the communication of abstract ideas when the informant is of an alien culture and submissive to the chronicler.¹⁰ Writing in 1581, Duran narrates a story about the Toltec High Priest Topiltzin.

He [Topiltzin] set out for the sea, and there merely by speaking to it he opened a great hill [in the waters] and disappeared within...When I asked another aged Indian what he knew about the departure of Topiltzin, he narrated to me Chapter Fourteen of Exodus...When I realized...I ceased interrogating him.¹¹

It is apparent from Duran's remarks, that in the fifty odd years since the Conquest (1521) Catholic elements

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had already made their way into Aztec myth. Almost without exception, informants were usually male and any opinion the chroniclers formed about female cosmology was from a male's point of view, theirs or that of their informant. Usually in pre-industrial cultures,¹² the cosmology and world view of the female is not that of the male.¹³ Yet despite these handicaps, both Sahagun and Duran had the insight to devote time and space to Aztec goddesses and our most valuable information on goddess worship comes from them. This is perhaps roundabout proof of the powerful image the goddess projected.

Most of the priest/chroniclers were diffusionists who believed Christianity was brought to the New World by long dead disciples of Christ and that in turn their teachings were corrupted by the devil.¹⁴ Today, some members of the Mormons see Mesoamerica "as the locus for a separate resurrection of Christ."¹⁵ A recognizable theme in most early accounts of Mesoamerican cosmology is the individual author's struggle to explain seemingly Christian elements in Aztec myths.

Whatever his bias, Sahagun faced the myths without flinching and chronicled them with the fervor of a graduate student preparing his doctoral dissertation. Duran, writing fifty years after Sahagun, had another agenda. By discussing Aztec rituals, he hoped to call attention to

"pagan Aztec elements" which had crept into Catholic ritual as it was practiced in the 1580's. However, he was also tormented with the parallels between the Christian Bible and Aztec religion. He wavered and vacillated, believing these parallels were the result of Hebrew prophets or Christian apostles, or both.¹⁶

Torquemada, commissioned by the Crown and Church to write a history of the "Indies," set forth to show that the Aztec had a spiritual and incorporeal god produced by natural reason which had produced similar religious beliefs in widely separated parts of the world. He attempted to explain the "Christian elements" in their religion as a search for the Catholic God and that this search was led astray by Satan.¹⁷ This belief allowed the Inquisition to effectively pursue any lapses in the newly baptized Aztec.

Modern historians also struggle with their interpretations. Leon-Portilla insists that Tloque Nahuaque was the supreme **dual** god and all other gods were masks or aspects of him, "an ubiquitous supreme dual god who created him-self and all that exists."¹⁸ The word dual, which means having two different natures, usually male and female, is here used exclusively as one nature, male. Coe acknowledges a bisexual creator and suggests that a Zoroastrian concept of ontological good and evil is inherent in Aztec belief.

The bewildering multiplicity of Mexican gods were to these thinkers [the mystic intellectuals of the Aztec] but embodiments of one cosmic principle of duality; the unity of opposites, as personified in the great bisexual creator deity, Omoteotl or 'Dual Divinity'. In Aztec philosophy, this was the only reality, all else being illusion. Omoteotl presided over [and lived]...in the uppermost heaven, while various celestial phenomena such as the sun, moon, stars, comets, and winds existed in lower heavens. Beneath the surface of the earth... [was] Mictlan Opochoalocan, 'The Region of the Dead',...the infernal [hell-fire] counterpart of Omoteotl.¹⁹

While there is a polarity, the attracting of opposites, in all but a few Native American myths,²⁰ this polarity does not incorporate the Zoroastrian (and later Christian) concept of ontological evil where good and evil are opposite abstractions. In most native beliefs, the opposite of the positive side does not incarnate the idea of 'evil' but only the negative contributing to the polarity. This polarity must remain balanced. Without balance between the positive and negative, harmony is disrupted and sickness, death, famine, and world destruction could result. As Burr Cartwright Brundage so eloquently states:

The Aztec had no concept of an Armageddon, a day when the gods of the army of the day and the gods of the army of the night should ultimately clash...There were no good gods, no evil gods. They were simply figures who, however much they mingled in the priestly ceremonies, were members of no self-conscious society.²¹

These were deities who lusted after blood and human hearts, yet feeding them was no guarantee the deities would

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extend benevolence to humans. Consequently, feeding them was not perceived as atonement or supplication but simply an attempt to thwart the chaos resulting from the deities' destruction and ultimately that of the Aztec as well.

While Brundage steadfastly denies seeing a good and evil dualism in Aztec religious thought,²² he is seduced by the one god theory and another type of dualism; that of a male and female pair, often called husband and wife by those who interpret Aztec cosmology. Brundage's one god is Tloque Nahuague, a high god in Aztec mythology who is considered unique. This god is often divided into two transfigurations, a female and a male counterpart.²³ These are Tonacateuctli and Tonacacihuatl, Lord and Lady of Sustenance; Citlallatonac, Lord of Starshine, and Citlalinicue, Lady Star Skirt; Tlalhteuctli, called both a feminine Earth Lady and a masculine Earth Lord; and Mictlanteuctli and Mictecacihuatl, Lord and Lady Death. The above scheme fits the Christian Aristotelian sense of order; a Prime Mover at the head, then Substance, and finally sky (heaven), earth, and the underworld (hell).

In all likelihood, Aztec religious cosmology evolved from the hallucinogenic dreams of the shaman as their gatherer/hunter ancestors roamed the semi-arid northern plateau in the dim past.²⁴ When later groups of these ancestors came into contact with other cultures, new ideas

were absorbed which caused them to redefine their beliefs. As the Aztec evolved toward empire, they incorporated syncretism as a deliberate imperial strategy.

The Aztec did not organize their deities in a pyramidal hierarchical order despite the early attempts of the Spanish chroniclers to pair them with those of Classical Europe.²⁵ Instead Aztec deities were an unorganized group united by their thirst for blood and war. Rarely are they seen without implements of sacrifice or accoutrements of war in either their hands or as part of their costume.

While early historians attempted to equate Aztec gods with the Greek pantheon, i.e, Huitzilopochtli with Zeus, later writers attempted to infuse Aztec culture with an intellectual philosophy that seems to have been lifted en masse from the Aegean. Huitzilopochtli is not Zeus, not even a weak Zeus, and Coatlicue has not been buried under layers of pettiness as were the once great goddesses of Greece. When Coatlicue rears her terrifying reptilian head and demands attention, the theory of an omnipotent male Yahweh or Zeus quickly retreats.

Despite the fact that in Aztec cosmology, male and female deities are distinct and represented as different aspects of life,²⁶ a bisexual male deity who transforms part of himself into a female for the purpose of creation is

present in the early interpretations. Many early authors,¹¹ and later ones as well, have appended ineffectual consorts to some goddesses, married others off and literally split the Earth Mother, Tlalteuctli, into a male and female.

Unfortunately, as most historians since Sahagun and Duran have struggled with these myths, they failed to realize that they were influenced by a European Christian view that myth is historical, lineal, and revealed by the true male God. They attempted to force Aztec myth into their concept of a lineal history. Most historians never allowed themselves the freedom of experiencing first one myth, then another, enjoying them as a butterfly would savor the nectar of exotic flowers. Instead, concerned with hierarchical order and their own cultural bias, most historians restricted the myths to a scent trail put down by a line of marching ants.

In conclusion, the history of Aztec Goddesses has suffered from the exclusiveness of androcentric and ethnocentric interpretation. The fault does not lie with Bernardino de Sahagun, the first chronicler of the Aztec. Although he was a man of his time, locked in traditional Spanish Catholic culture and values, he was very candid about all things Aztec and filled copious volumes with information on Aztec life, religion, and culture, as well as flora and fauna. True, he made moral judgements but one cannot be

sure which are genuine and which were inserted into his thesis to placate the Grand Inquisitor. The fault lies with later writers, of which two come to mind, Torquemada and Duran. Both believed that the Aztec were previously "Catholic" or "Israelite" and were led astray by Satan. These writers tried to fit Aztec cosmology into the Judeo-Christian mold of a supreme male deity and the Christian belief of a "fall from grace" and the concept of ontological evil. This encouraged later writers to highlight any similarity with Judeo-Christian thought, or in some cases Greco-Roman myth, and ignore all else.

This study, therefore, is not about another newly discovered "truth." It is a reinterpretation of Aztec Goddess mythology and its influence on Aztec religion and culture.

ENDNOTES

1. Michael D. Coe, *Mexico* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1984); Eduardo Matos Moctezuma, *The Aztec* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1989); and Ignacio Bernal, *Mexico Before Cortez* trans. Willis Barnstone (New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1975), to name three.
2. Coe, *Mexico*, 158.
3. Burr Cartwright Brundage, *The Fifth Sun* (Austin Tx: University of Texas Press, 1979), 91.
4. Coe, *Mexico*, 158.
5. Roman Pina Chan, *The Olmec, Mother Culture of Mesoamerica* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1989), 4.
6. Coe, *Mexico*, 8 and 48.
7. Marija Gimbutas, *The Civilization of The Goddess* (San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 1991), p. 222; David Hurst Thomas, *Archaeology* (Fort Worth, Tx: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1989), 513-518.
8. Robert Claiborne, *The First Americans, The Emergence of Man* (New York: Time-Life Books, 1973), 16-21; Coe, *Mexico*, 21-24.
9. Benjamin Keen, *The Aztec Image in Western Thought* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1971), 3.
10. Linda Schele and Mary Ellen Miller, *The Blood of Kings* (Fort Worth: Kimbell Art Museum, 1986), 31.
11. Fray Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods and Rites and the Ancient Calendar* trans. and ed. Fernando Horcasitas and Doris Heyden, (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma, 1971), 62. Perhaps Duran was not as observant in other cases. He knew the legend of Saint Raymond of Penafort, a thirteenth-century Catalanian, who had sailed from Majorca

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to Barcelona using his cloak as a vessel. Yet when he heard a similar story concerning Topiltzin, he was certain that someone, at sometime, had come to the New World and preached the Bible to the natives, page 17.

12. The term "pre-industrial" refers to an economic system whose interests are predominately agriculture and trade. It is a system that has not based its economics on industrial labor where the emphasis is placed on technical skills as in the use of modern tools and machinery.

13. Annette Weiner, *Women of Value, Men of Renown* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1978), 118-228.

14. Fray Diego Duran, *Book of the Gods and Rites and the Ancient Calendar*, 23-26.

15. Mary Miller and Karl Taube, *The Gods and Symbols of Ancient Mexico and the Maya* (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1993), 198.

16. Duran, *Book of the Gods and Rites and the Ancient Calendar*, 23-40.

17. Keen, *The Aztec Image in Western Thought*, 182.

18. Ibid., 34-35.

19. Coe, *Mexico*, 158.

20. Mircea Eliade, ed. *The Encyclopedia of Religion* Vol. 5 (New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1987), "Twins," by Ugo Bianchi, 99-106.

21. Brundage, *The Fifth Sun*, 61.

22. Ibid., 61.

23. Ibid., 32. I do not disagree with the concept of a female/male pair in some myths. All Mesoamericans were aware that a female and male were necessary to create human life. However this concept is often used as a convenience in order to force Aztec deities into neat categories rather than deal with the reality that in more than a few myths a female force was the prime mover.

24. Peter Furst, Lecture at the Ninth Annual Maya Weekend, University Museum, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, 1991.

25. Brundage, *The Fifth Sun*, 58.
26. *Ibid.*, 175.

CHAPTER 2

THE CHICHIMECA PAST

On November 8, 1519, scarcely ninety years since Tenochtitlan became the greatest city in Mexico, Spanish soldiers entered its gates and the Aztec faced strange and deadly newcomers who would soon destroy them. Roughly 150 years before they became this great power, the Aztec, themselves, were the newcomers in the Valley of Mexico. Called "the people whose face nobody knows," they were despised as intruders and squatters. Their myths speak of a time of wandering outside the Valley of Mexico. This myth would later be romanticized by Spanish chroniclers as similar to the wanderings of the biblical Israelites.

Who were the Aztec and where did they come from? Brundage calls them descendants of the Chichimeca.¹ Davies states that "Chichimeca" is a generic term designating the nomads of the north and that the Aztec called themselves Chichimeca because they equated the term with rugged manliness and fierce warriors.² Coe calls the Chichimeca Nahuatl speakers and hints that the Aztec were the last of these northern barbarians.³ Bernal also believes the name Chichimeca is generic referring to these northern barbarians

and suggests that the Aztec were one of these groups.⁴

Resembling a misshapen funnel lying on its side, many maps of Post-Classic Mexico have a large blank area near the mouth of this funnel mysteriously labeled Chichimeca. This is literally a gray area where the historian must tread lightly when asking, "Who are the Chichimeca?" It has become a habit among authors exploring Post-Classic Mesoamerican history to dismiss them as "barbaric nomads from the north."⁵

From an ethnological point of view, the name refers to gatherer-hunters,⁶ classified as semi-nomadic Desert Culture tribes, who lived in caves and pit houses. Limited to small family groups, these people roamed the semi-arid area from the Valley of Mexico to the Southwestern United States gathering seeds, nuts, and digging for tubers.⁷ Possibly a number of groups gathered together annually for the purpose of finding mates for their mature children, redefining clan ties, and forming communal drives to catch wild rabbits or antelopes.

Although the Chichimeca have been blamed for the destruction of Tula in 1200 AD,⁸ this seems to be a later embellishment. Traditionally, gatherer/hunters were small independent family groups with loose clan ties. The necessity of maintaining their food supply daily and the fact that their mode of transportation was limited to

walking hardly make them an invading army. Unfortunately, nothing remotely resembling a historical account from that time exists, since gatherer/hunters myths and histories are usually oral. The few Chichimeca mythological narratives that survived were later incorporated, possibly with added embellishments, into Aztec myth and ritual.

The first myth to be examined involves the Chichimeca Earth Mother. It seems to be the forerunner or perhaps the inspiration for a later popular Aztec myth; that of the mother/son, Coatlicue and Huitzilopochtli.⁹

The Earth Mother gave birth to Four Hundred Mimixcoa¹⁰ in a mythological place of origin called Chicomoztoc, or Seven Caves. Mimixcoa are translated as Cloud Serpents and most authors believe they are either warriors or stellar multitudes. It is possible that they were conceived of as lightning serpents, possibly male, resulting from rain clouds.¹¹ These Mimixcoa were vaguely interpreted as nocturnal, perhaps the darkness associated with storms, and hostile. Lightning is still considered an awesome force even in modern technological societies.

The father of the Mimixcoa, who is not identified as a god, taught them to hunt in order to provide nourishment for their divine parents. However, the Mimixcoa refused and an angry Earth Mother gave birth to five additional

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children, four sons and one daughter, all apparently fully grown and heavily armed. These five, led by one of the sons, the heroic Mixcoatl, slew the Four Hundred Mimixcoa. While the blood of the Mimixcoa served as drink for the divine parents, their hearts, torn out in sacrifice, were the parents' choice food.¹²

As these semi-nomadic Chichimeca moved across northern Mexico, certain members called *teomamah*, or "god bearers," carried fetishes of their gods, wrapped in ceremonial bundles, on their backs. Mixcoatl's fetish was a sacred arrow or dart. His mother's fetish was an obsidian knife. This is the old Earth Mother of the Seven Caves who later became the Aztec Goddess Itzpapalotl, Obsidian Knife Butterfly.¹³ In one version of the myth, she eats the Four Hundred Mimixcoa and is shot by an arrow and burned by Mixcoatl. In another version she is burned and from her body spring different colored flint knives used for human sacrifice.¹⁴ Summing it up thusly, the dreadful Earth Mother destroys and consumes her children. In order to control her, her heroic son Mixcoatl consigns her to death by fire. However, her wrath and hunger could not be quenched by death, so she survives as a sacrificial knife. In the Codex Borbonicus (Fig.1, page 116), Itzpapalotl is pictured wearing a skirt, decorated with knives. She has a de-fleshed face, wings, and talons for hands and feet.

While historians differ in their opinions of the Chichimeca, it is safe to assume the Aztec themselves were a special group of Nahuatl speaking Chichimeca who were the last to move into the Valley of Mexico. To accent their uniqueness, the people who built the great civilization of Tenochtitlan called themselves the Mexica. The following myth defines them as the "Chosen People."

A number of Aztec groups left their mythical homeland of Aztlan. Shortly thereafter, their deity spoke to them from a tree under which they camped and commanded them to split off from the other groups. After the deity finished speaking, the tree split in two and toppled over. The deity insisted they bear its name, Mecitli or Mexica.¹⁵ Later Spanish chroniclers and Indian informants called this deity the god Huitzilopochtli, but Brundage identifies Mecitli as Maguey Grandmother. Mecitli had a *teomamah* who translated her oracles and advised the Mexica. This may have been an early forerunner of a powerful advisor used by the Aztec rulers who was called Snake Woman.¹⁶ Thus the Mexica began their wanderings with two deities, a female Mecitli and her son, Mixcoatl, both of whom were slowly metamorphosing into Coatlicue and Huitzilopochtli. This reinforces the strong mother/son relationship seen in the myth of Coatlicue and Huitzilopochtli. Brundage further

points out that the name Mexico-Tenochtitlan means "Mecitli's Place Near the Nopal Cactus" and not, "In the Middle of the Lake of the Moon."¹⁷ An illustration in the Codex Borgia (Fig.2, page 117) shows a nopal cactus with an eagle perched on it, growing from the body of a taloned Earth Mother. She has a skull in place of a head and wears a sacrificial obsidian knife as a headdress.

This mythical beginning is at odds with the popular view of the Aztec as a male dominated warrior society led by the blood thirsty god, Huitzilopochtli. There is no doubt that Aztec society was obsessed with warfare, but it was not territorial acquisition we've seen in European wars of conquest. As illustrated in the Chichimeca myth, the primary reason for war was to acquire the blood and fresh hearts of sacrificial victims as food for their deities. However, these wars, while acquiring sacrificial victims, also procured trade routes to guarantee a flow of material goods to the Aztec elite.

It is usually written that Huitzilopochtli, the terrible Sun God, needed the hearts and blood of sacrificial victims for nourishment. But upon examining the myths further, it seems Huitzilopochtli was not a Sun God but a War God¹⁸ and it was his mother, the Goddess Cihuacoatl (Coatlicue), or Snake Woman, who required nourishment from human hearts. Every eight days the priests of Cihuacoatl

would go to the ruler complaining she was famished. They would be given a war captive to sacrifice for her. After his heart and blood were fed to the Goddess, the priests would rip off the victim's thigh and cast it outside the temple, crying out, "Take this; the Goddess has gnawed on it."¹⁹ Brundage states, "Sacrificial death, symbolized by the knife, was her issue--not the issue of some god of war, as we might logically have expected."²⁰ Cihuacoatl is described as horrifying (Fig.3, page 118).

The lower part of her face is shown as a crude bare jawbone, and her grisly mouth is stretched wide to indicate her hunger for victims. Her hair is long and stringy, and two knives form a kind of diadem on her forehead.²¹

She is also called a War Goddess. As an alter ego of Coatlicue, both are considered the mother of the War God Huitzilopochtli. Cihuacoatl's demands for food incited the wars her son, Huitzilopochtli, commanded his people to fight. Sahagun states she was a savage beast and an evil omen. He mentions the species of snake she represented and says she walked by night weeping and wailing (for human hearts?). He also states she was a War Goddess.²²

Unfortunately, this strong female element was excluded from 20th century accounts of Aztec history, despite the information given in the two Post-Conquest sources, Duran and Sahagun. The powerful sculptured images

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of Coatlicue, Coyolxauhqui, and others have been ignored and shunted aside as unimportant by modern authors. Elevated to prominence were male gods, representing precise aspects of reality: Tonatiuh, the Sun God; Huitzilopochtli, the War God, and Tezcatlipoca, the Smoking Mirror--a shape shifting Shaman.

In world mythology, the Goddess is recognized as having many attributes, she is Mother, she is Devourer, she is Nurturer and Healer. As Earth Mother, she conveys both terror and awe. From her womb all creation, both negative and positive is born, and at death all creation, both negative and positive, returns. There is no opposition of good and evil because as Earth Mother she is both and she is seen as one. Brundage describes the Aztec Earth Goddess as "the epitome of both terror and bounty [and that] her worshipers experienced her as a whole being, one basically beyond definition." He further states that "her impact upon the Aztec was a religious seizure and a terror which had nothing intellectual about it."²³

The Aztec called this goddess Tlalteuctli, "Earth Owner." She was depicted in a squatting position, peculiar to a female giving birth. She can have a human, caiman, or serpent face (Figs. 7-10, pages 122-125) and snapping jaws at every joint. In her mouth she holds a *tecpatl* or her teeth are made from many *tecpatl*. If the warrior god was

primary in Aztec religious thought, one would expect an even more powerful male image to balance this female one. However, colossal statues of Huitzilopochtli rivaling Coatlicue do not exist. There have been attempts by numerous authors to view Tlaltecuctli as dual; female in the standing form of Coatlicue, and male, Lord Earth, when seen in the toad-like squatting position on the bottoms of Aztec sculpture. These images are often called the Earth Monster and designated as male in the public press. This will be discussed at great length later, but for the moment, it seems more logical to assume that the toad-like being, whose beginnings can be traced back to the Gulf Coast,²⁴ is the Earth Mother Goddess.

No one would better exemplify the culture of death espoused by the Aztec than this mythically central power of Creator and Destroyer--Tlaltecuctli. As Coatlicue, she, not her son Huitzilopochtli, seemed to define the mission of the heroic Aztec warrior, collecting captives who would provide hearts and blood as food for her and her son. The plus side of this religious mission was that it filled Tenochtitlan with all manner of trade goods and booty making that city one of the most powerful, prestigious, and materialistic in Mesoamerica--not to mention the most feared.

To summarize, it is generally not disputed that the

Aztec are the descendants of the Chichimec. It is also interesting that when the early Chichimec myths are examined what emerges is not a mighty warrior sun god who smites all with his sword and demands human hearts for food.

Surprisingly, the most prominent theme is a mother/son relationship with a strong War Goddess as the mother and a rather submissive son. It is the mother who becomes the sacrificial knife and demands the hearts of human captives for food. It is the son who must procure these human captives. To the Aztec this was a logical reason for war and imperialism.

ENDNOTES

1. Brundage, *The Fifth Sun*, 7.
2. Nigel Davies, *The Aztec, A History* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1974), 9.
3. Coe, *Mexico*, 122.
4. *Ibid.*, 123; Bernal, *Mexico Before Cortez*, 79.
5. Coe, *Mexico*, 122
6. I have reversed the traditional hunter/gatherer term which suggests "the mighty and manly hunter" to the more factual term, gatherer/hunter. In the following paragraph, Coe calls the Chichimeca's mainly collectors of mesquite seeds. On page 28, in *Mexico*, Coe cautions us to not be deluded into thinking of early Native Americans as "big-game hunters." In "Archaeology and the study of gender" in *Archaeological Method and Theory*, vol. 7, Michael B. Schiffer, ed. (Orlando, Fla.: Academic Press, 1984): 1-38, Conkey and Spector address the Man-the-Hunter Myth.
7. Coe, *Mexico*, 122-123.
8. *Ibid.*, 133.
9. Brundage, *The Fifth Sun*, 136.
10. *Ibid.*, 171.
11. In *The Aztec, A History*, Davies uses the phrase, Huitzilopochtli ignited his Serpent of Fire. In *Southwest Indian Ceremonials* (Las Vegas: KC Publications, 1970), 8, there is a photograph of a singer's medicine bundle with four zig-zag snakes, representing the cardinal direction, which are said to be related to lightning.
12. Brundage, *The Fifth Sun*, 131.
13. *Ibid.*, 130 & 210.

14. Ibid., 171-173.
15. Matos Moctezuma, *The Aztec*, 31, fig. 25.
16. Brundage, *The Fifth Sun*, 170; Coe, *Mexico*, 156.
17. Brundage, 136 & 240, footnotes 12 & 14; Pina Chan, *A Guide to Mexican Archaeology*, 89.
18. Brundage, *The Fifth Sun*, 152.
19. Ibid., p. 170; Duran, *Book of the Gods and Rites and The Ancient Calendar*, 130.
20. Brundage, *The Fifth Sun*, 175.
21. Ibid., 168.
22. Ibid., 244, footnote 36; Bernardino de Sahagun, *General History of the Things of New Spain* (Florentine Codex), Part I, trans. Arthur Anderson and Charles Dibble (Santa Fe, NM: Santa Fe School of American Research, 1970), 11.
23. Brundage, *The Fifth Sun*, 153-154.
24. Alison Bailey Kennedy, "Ecce Bufo: The Toad in nature and in Olmec Iconography," *Current Anthropology* Vol 23, No.3 (June 1982): 273-290.

CHAPTER 3

CREATOR MOTHER OR CREATOR FATHER

The Aztec conceived of their beginnings with various creation myths which they did not view as lineal history nor as contradictions of each other. Because they preserved these diverse myths without any attempt to bury them under an "official" version, it seems safe to assume they were all considered valid--worthwhile explanations of the unexplainable cosmic events that shaped Aztec reality. This is difficult for a western mind to perceive because the Judeo/Christian culture has officially sanctioned one creation myth--that of a biblical Genesis. The bias towards a lineal religious history and a vague male creator god is deeply ingrained in our Judeo/Christian culture. This problem never existed for the Aztec because they did not view their creation myths as lineal history.

There are numerous creation myths associated with the Aztec and many variations therein. (See Appendix 1.) For this study five myths will be considered and four will be examined in this chapter. The first myth is the favorite of most authors of Aztec historical accounts, but is highly suspect as a creation myth and seems to contain elements of

Catholicism.

Tonacateuctli, Lord of Sustenance, sometimes called the Self-Created, fashioned the waters of the sky and created the earth simply by breathing on it. Brundage¹ identifies his origins as that of an obscure agricultural deity of Teotihuacan. He is depicted with a beard and is possibly the Old Fire God called Xiuhteuctli by the Aztec. Tonacateuctli, is sometimes considered bisexual or has a consort called Tonacacihuatl, Lady Sustenance. At other times Tonacateuctli is interchangeable with Tloque Nahuaque who according to Torquemada "was [the] Soul of the World...[and] men were never far from him at any instant."² One of Tloque Nahuaque's titles was Yohualli-Ehecatl, literally meaning invisible as night (or darkness) and wind.³ Yet, these same divine epithets belong to Tezcatlipoca. It seems in Tezcoco he was removed from the earthly habitat otherwise so congenial to him and placed in the top-most heaven, where he lived as Tloque Nahuaque, an "only" god. Brundage,⁴ in fact, believes this claim of the god's exclusiveness is a product of the city of Tezcoco. Brundage is impressed by what he believes is an Aztec conception of the Immanent One. However, he laments the fact that the concept was not established in a form of worship and an appropriate cult. He calls it a lonely intellectual achievement that bore no fruit.⁵ Taking the

metaphor further, one wonders if perhaps the idea of a self-created invisible male god was a branch grafted onto the tree of Aztec religion by overzealous Spanish chroniclers and perpetrated by later historians.

Hermann Beyer⁶ called the polytheism found in ancient Mexico, "crass" and believed it was due to a natural phenomenon. He believed "learned priest thinkers" had developed a more elevated philosophy and religious ideal, apart from the masses, which led to a belief in One. In fact, Tonacateuctli's elevation to a Self-Created high god is reminiscent of the ideas of First Cause and a Prime Mover present in early Catholic theology. Torquemada⁷ was convinced that the Aztec had a wholly spiritual and incorporeal god as he struggled to explain what he saw as "Catholic" elements in their religion.

These abstract ideas seem terribly out of place with Aztec cosmology, which is basically similar to that of most pre-industrial societies. Creation is delegated to a primeval earth force and is symbolized by the female, with caves representing her vulva and hillocks her breasts and pregnant stomach. She symbolizes creation and nourishment for humans, but as part of this co-existence, death supplies her with nourishment, thus enabling her to re-create. These mythologies view the earth as a self-sustained entity and

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death as the generation of life.⁸ The Earth Goddess has been sacrificed to produce life and that life now exacts an unceasing sacrifice of humans to maintain it--life feeds on life.

Nevertheless, Eduardo Matos Moctezuma⁹ accepts the concept of Tonacateuctli, the Self-Created, who created the earth by breathing on it. He gives us another variation of the above myth. In this version Tonacateuctli delegates creation to his four sons. Matos Moctezuma also states that they decided it was time to bring about law and order. However, the idea of creation bringing order from chaos is a Greco-Roman idea inherent in western European culture and perhaps unconsciously attributed to the Aztec. To accomplish creation, the four sons changed into Quetzalcoatl and Tezcatlipoca (Brundage) and Quetzalcoatl and Huitzilopochtli (Matos Moctezuma).

The god brothers, four who became two, proceeded to create Fire, a weak sun, a woman called Oxomoco and a man called Cipactonal.¹⁰ They instructed the man to cultivate the earth, and the woman was to spin and weave. Together Cipactonal and Oxomoco were to be fruitful and multiply. These two gods then invented the calendar, created the husband and wife gods of the Underworld, created the sun, moon, earth, thirteen skies, and finally created water, in which they put the crocodile-like creature Cipactli.

Brundage¹¹ sees this myth as being modeled after the tlatoani where a ruler shares his power with four individuals and creation is not sexual union but a theistic decision of that same ruler.¹² Plus he calls the steps of this myth haphazard and claims it lacks a focus of the "high" god's motives. Davies¹³ calls Oxomoco and Cipactonal sorcerers or magicians and compares them to Xmucane and Xpiyacoc of the Quiche Maya legend.

The second myth, which relates to the creation of the Fifth Sun, is often conflated with the previous myth of the Self-Created Tonacateuctli in an attempt to present a logical creation sequence. This myth is possibly an outgrowth of the New Fire ceremony in which a fire was kindled in the chest cavity of a sacrificial victim to strengthen and placate the sun and induce it to begin another fifty-two year cycle. In this later version however, the principals suffered an identity problem, which probably resulted in syncretic layering over the years, as this simple agricultural rite evolved into an elaborate initiation rite for the eagle and jaguar warriors.

It was to the advantage of this elite class - the eagle and jaguar warriors - to claim supremacy for their god over all others; in this they would simply be reinforcing their own claims to dominion in the temporal sphere.¹⁴

The myth is as follows: The four previous suns were

destroyed and the gods (the masculine is stressed here, although, one of the previous suns is described as the Water Goddess) gathered in Teotihuacan to call the Fifth Sun into being.¹⁵ They built a huge bonfire and called for volunteers to sacrifice themselves by jumping into the fire. Two gods volunteered; one who was rich and another who was poor and sickly. When the rich god hesitated on the forth attempt, the poor god jumped into the flames in his place and became Tonatiuh, the present Aztec sun. The rich god, now shamed by his cowardice, jumped into the flames on the fifth attempt and became the moon.¹⁶

A variant of this myth has an eagle and jaguar jumping into the fire. The eagle jumped first and became the sun, the jaguar followed him and became the moon. Therefore, the jaguar's spots symbolize his incompleteness.

Brundage¹⁷ strongly suspects that this rite belonged to the military orders of the Knights of the Eagles and Jaguars and its celebration was forbidden to commoners. At this point in the myth, the male moon is discarded and the scene shifts to the new sun, Tonatiuh, and his refusal to appear until the other gods give him their hearts and blood as food and drink. However, the Morning Star (not identified by name) challenges Tonatiuh and they duel until the Morning Star is defeated (the actual rising of the sun). The entire roster of 1,600 gods are sacrificed by Xolotl,

who in turn sacrifices himself as the Evening Star.¹⁸

A parallel myth seen in the Popol Vuh of the Quiche Maya, also exhibits variation in the Hero Twins' identity. They immolate themselves and have their bones ground by a "spirit familiar." Their bones are thrown into Xibalba's Blood River and after five days they first appear as channel catfish, then as vagabonds. In the Popol Vuh,¹⁹ they are said to have taken their place in the heavens as the sun and moon. However, Tedlock²⁰ identifies their mother, Xk'ik', or Blood Woman, as the Moon Goddess; the first twin, Hunahpo, as Venus; and the second twin, Xbalanque, as the full moon. Carlson identifies Xbalanque as the Jaguar (night) Sun in Xibalba.²¹ Others agree that Xbalanque is the night sun in Xibalba but believe that he is recognized as the planet Jupiter in the night sky.²²

The Creation of the Fifth Sun myth was localized in the Teotihuacan area where the ruins of the deserted city may have symbolized the end of previous suns to the Aztec. The presence of the blazing bonfire may be connected to the Old Fire God who was very popular in Teotihuacan. If this is the remnant of an old agricultural rite it may not relate to the sun at winter solstice (as the Yule log does in Germanic tradition) but to the summer solstice instead. Not attuned to the March spring planting and September fall

harvest cycle of Europe's northern latitudes, Native Americans from Chaco Canyon to Peru considered zenith passage, summer/winter solstice, and spring/fall equinox equally significant.²³ It is safe to assume the summer solstice, which signaled the beginning of heavy rains in Teotihuacan, was very important.²⁴ This sacrificial rite may have been held at that time and, indeed, Duran²⁵ describes the feast of Toxcatl as a feast of Dryness celebrated in May to petition for rain.

The descriptions of sacrificial victims jumping (but more likely being tossed) into a fire may be connected to a later Aztec ritual celebrated on the Earth Goddess Cihuacoatl's annual feast in July (which was well into the rainy season in a normal year). Immediately in front of the dark, sooty temple of Cihuacoatl, in Tenochtitlan, stood a replica of the Fire God's hearth. Before the hearts and blood of victims were sacrificed to her, they were cast into this ever burning fire.²⁶

A lengthy digression into this myth was deemed necessary because of its connection to the later rite in honor of Cihuacoatl and because of the ambiguity that exists concerning the identification of the moon as male. Thompson regards this deity as being unimportant and questions his masculinity.

He was said to chant in a females voice in the

story from the Annals of Cuauhtitlan where he is called 4 Tecpatl. This day is the fourth of the 1 Quauhtli 'week' ruled by Xochiquetzal [the Goddess of Female Sexuality].²⁷

Perhaps this deity was a transvestite, a trait often valued in shamans.²⁸

The third myth, the creation of the world from the Goddess Tlalteuctli, is perhaps better known than the forth which involves Citlalinicue. Tlalteuctli is described as monstrous and toad-like with round eyes and snapping bloody jaws at every joint who resided in the primordial waters. In some variations she lives on the back of a monstrous caiman called Cipactli, who is *neither* male nor female. In others, she is formed from an asexual Cipactli in the waters that represented the primeval ocean.²⁹

As the myth continues, two serpents wrap themselves around Tlalteuctli, separating her into two halves.³⁰ They fashion one half as the sky and the other half as the earth. From her hair they make trees, flowers, and grass; from her eyes, springs; from her mouth, rivers and caves; from her nose, valleys; and from her shoulders, mountains. But the goddess has a craving for human hearts and weeps until they are brought to her. She will not allow fruit to grow from her body until she is drenched in human blood.³¹ The Aztec did not find it a contradiction that Tlalteuctli was "drenched in human blood" before humans were created.

Citlalinicue or Star Skirt is central to the fourth and perhaps least known of Aztec creation myths.³² As the myth was recorded by the chroniclers, Citlalinicue is given a male consort, who is never heard from again. The real power lies within the female, Citlalinicue. This myth perhaps best illustrates the Aztec's disinterest in recounting their creation myths as lineal history. Citlalinicue is the Great Mother of the stars who dwells in the Milky Way. She is the source of Wisdom and communicates with others through her messenger, a hawk.

Citlalinicue bears all the stars, but the first born of her children is the *tecpatl*, the flint knife of human sacrifice, which itself is a goddess. At its birth, the *tecpatl* falls to earth in the legendary *Chicomoztoc*, the Seven Caves, and 1,600 deities spring forth from it (400x4 is 1,600, a magic calendric number in Mesoamerica). If this sounds familiar remember the 400 *Mimixcoa* that first appear in the *Chichimec* myth in Chapter Two. These deities send a hawk messenger to Citlalinicue demanding food--human hearts and blood. Citlalinicue orders *Xolotl* (in some versions it is *Quetzalcoatl*, his twin)³³ to retrieve and revive bones which are the skeletons of a former, perfect race of humans. An assortment of accidents takes place which destroys the perfection of the bones/skeletons; thereby, causing humans to become imperfect. *Xolotl* takes the bones to the Earth

Mother (Tlalteuctli?), who grinds them on a metate like corn meal. She places them in her womb which is symbolized by an earthen jar. Xolotl pierces his penis allowing precious blood to flow onto the bone dust. From this paste humans were created (Figs. 4 & 5, pages 119 & 120).

These last two myths are separate tales of creation. While Tlalteuctli's myth is concerned with the general creation of earth and its vegetation, Citlalinicue's is a specific tale of the creation of the sacrificial knife and the humans that will feed the deities with their hearts and blood. It is possible Citlalinicue is the sky half of the Earth Deity, Tlalteuctli.

Tlalteuctli is often translated as Earth Lord and for this reason many historians traditionally consider it a male or at best bisexual. But the Nahuatl word the Spanish translated as "lord" is not gender specific as it is in English. It can mean ruler, master, or possessor, which can apply to a female as well. Aztec art and iconography seem to consistently suggest Tlalteuctli is a female; therefore, for this study Tlalteuctli will be considered the Earth Goddess.

The Aztec had a custom of placing sculptured images of Tlalteuctli on the underside or earth-side of many monuments which ranged in size from the monumental to hand

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held. By their very placement these images are not visible to human eyes--only those of Tlalteuctli. When these sculptures are exposed to human eyes, it is unknown how they should be viewed, let alone interpreted.

Images of her are rare on the sides of monuments. However, there is one solid block (Fig. 9, page 124) which shows her on all four sides, squatting, with her back toward the viewer and her head thrown back. On the top of this monument is a carving featuring the past four Suns and the present Fifth Sun. Perhaps her image surrounding this important cosmological event in Aztec mythology symbolizes the fact that Tlalteuctli gave birth to the Fifth Sun and the preceding Four Suns.

In Figures 6 to 10, pages 121 to 125, one could imagine Tlalteuctli toad-like, crouching in the traditional Mesoamerican birthing position. However, assuming that her position on the bottom of the majority of sculptures places her back next to the earth when set in place, it seems clear she is lying front side up with the monument growing from her body (Fig. 2, page 117).

Previously, Tlalteuctli was described as a toad-like monster with round eyes, snapping bloody jaws at each joint, hair formed from malinalli grass, bell (or shell) decorations on her legs, and one or more personalized tecpatl in her mouth (Figs. 6-10 & 14b, pages 121-125 &

129). In all but Figure 14b, she wears a skull backrack with a serpent belt. Except for the fact that they are not in the squatting position, Coatlicue and Coyolxauhqui share most of these icons with Tlalteuctli (Figs. 11, 12 & 13, pages 126, 127, & 128). In place of the *tecpatl*, Coatlicue has the teeth of a rattlesnake (Fig. 11). Unseen on the back of her sculpture are the skull backrack and snapping jaws at her shoulders and elbows. Coyolxauhqui wears the nose ornament called a *yacaxihuitl* ³⁴ which is also replicated in her earplugs (Fig. 13). In Figure 12 Coyolxauhqui wears earplugs in the style of the *yacaxihuitl*. She also has snapping jaws at each joint and a skull backrack with a serpent belt.

Whenever Lady Earth's skirt is visible, it is usually decorated with skulls, crossbones (Figs. 6, 7, 9 & 10, pages 121, 122, 124 & 126), and sometimes a personalized *tecpatl* (Fig. 14b, page 129). In the myth of Citlalinicue, she is involved with bones/skeletons as well as giving birth to the *tecpatl*. The presence of the snapping bloody jaws, as well as the presence of a skull backrack, the skirt decorated with bones, and the personalized *tecpatl*, seems to point to a merging of Tlalteuctli and Citlalinicue.

Whether Tlalteuctli is the earth half and Citlalinicue the sky half of the same goddess or whether

this is a dramatic syncretic conflation of two powerful primeval forces, it nevertheless resulted in a cosmology of blood that held the Aztec captive. This cosmology is based on the birth of the deities from a *tecpatl*, a bloody sacrificial knife, the creation of the deities food--the blood and hearts of human captives, and the ensuing bloody wars and deaths resulting from feeding these hungry deities and ultimately the dead's return to the great maw of Tlalteuctli. At about this point in Aztec mythology, Itzpapalotl, Obsidian Knife Butterfly, becomes the *tecpatl*. This goddess will be discussed later, especially the "butterfly" element in her name.

In the Codex Borgia, a picture is identified as Itztli (Fig. 14 top, page 129), god of the *tecpatl* with Tezcatlipoca emerging from his anus. Compared with Figure 14 bottom, one sees it is Tlalteuctli with her snapping jaws, crouching toad-like and Tezcatlipoca is emerging from her anus or more likely her vagina which is symbolized by the icon for precious. In Figure 14 top, we see a side view of this same icon. This may, however, hark back to the old Chichimeca myth of Mecitli who gave birth to the five Mimixcoa - four sons and a daughter. Note the four persons emerging from the elbows and knees are male, while those emerging from the anus, as well as the body are female (or sexless). Perhaps the being emerging from the anus is the

female Mimixcoa and the being from coming forth from the Earth Goddess' body is Tezcatlipoca.

Those who were to provide food for the deities, the Aztec themselves, were created from the blood drawn from the penis of a god combined with the ground bone (symbolic of previously devoured sacrificial victims) in the womb of Tlalteuctli which is symbolized by a great earthen jar.

In some versions, the other gods added their blood, but in the Codex Borgia, as in the Citlalinicue myth, Quetzalcoatl and Xolotl pierce their penises. As their blood flows into Tlalteuctli's body, a tree and corn ears grow from it simultaneously. (Fig. 4, page 119). Corn meal and bone meal are synonymous in the many Mesoamerican versions of this creation myth. See Figure 15, page 130 for the similarity between corn ears and the tecpatl.

In Mesoamerican art generally, skulls, skeletal jaws, and skeletonization appear as symbols not simply of death, but of generation [not resurrection] and fertility out of death...The apparent contradiction between fertility, generation, and rebirth on the one hand and bones on the other is in fact perfectly comprehensible in the context of Native Mesoamerican ideology, in which the skeletal remains were...regarded as the seat of the essential life force and the metaphorical seed from which the individual, whether human, animal, or plant is reborn.³⁵

Why then were the sculptures of a squatting Tlalteuctli normally placed at the bottom of Aztec monuments out of human view? The crouching toad, long a metaphor for

birth in the Gulf Coast and Yucatan, mimicks human parturition. In Figure 16, page 131, a crouching toad bearing a row of three holes bored on each shoulder, indicating the venom-secreting pores of the paritoid glands,³⁶ carries on its underside the same symbol that appears on Tlalteuctli from which the god Tezcatlipoca emerges (Fig. 14b, 129). It is not important that this symbol is regarded as her anus, vagina, navel, or heart, if the monument is growing from her body, any part of her body, this reinforces her power as the ultimate birth giver. Perhaps she is the birth giver of the monuments and all Aztec religious symbolism as well.

To conclude, it seems certain that the "official" creation myth of a Yahweh-like supreme being is at best culturally tainted and that a warrior initiation myth cannot be credible as a creation myth. The Earth Mother permeates all aspects of Aztec creation iconography. Her sacredness is emphasized by placing her image at the bottom of their monumental sculpture, thus seriously questioning the claim of a male or dual male/female Lord Earth or Earth Monster.

ENDNOTES

1. Brundage, *The Fifth Sun*, 32.
2. Keen, *The Aztec Image in Western Thought*, 182.
3. Brundage, *The Fifth Sun*, 231, footnote 25.
4. Ibid., 67.
5. Ibid., 68.
6. Keen, *The Aztec Image in Western Thought*, 34
7. Ibid., 182.
8. These mythologies can be found in a number of books: Marija Gimbutas, *The Language of the Goddess* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1989); Elinor W. Gadon, *The Once & Future Goddess* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1989); and Merlin Stone, *When God Was A Woman* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers, 1976) to name a few.
9. Matos Moctezuma, *The Aztec*, 95.
10. Brundage, *The Fifth Sun*, 19-20. Contrary to the myth, Brundage tells us Oxomoco, a very wise and aged goddess, choose the name Cipactli, a caiman, as the first day of the tonalpohualli (an Aztec almanac for divination). Her supposed "husband" is really a symbol of the tonalpohualli and its divine properties. The name Cipactonal when translated means "the cipactli day-sign."
11. Ibid., 43.
12. Linda Schele and David Freidel, *A Forest of Kings* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1990), 346-376. Schele and Freidel discuss a new Post-Classic principle of governance among the Maya, that of mul tepal, "joint rule."
13. Nigel Davies, *The Toltecs Until the Fall of Tula* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1977), 94.

14. Brundage, *The Fifth Sun*, 43.

15. I do not question the Aztec myth of the creation of the Fifth Sun. Most Native Americans believe in multiple creations. However, I do not regard this myth in its present form as the first line of Genesis, so to speak, as others do. I believe this myth was appropriated by the Eagle and Jaguar Knights, conflated with the ancient solstice rain ritual and given importance for their end.

16. Brundage, *The Fifth Sun*, 41-41.

17. Ibid., 43.

18. Ibid., 42.

19. If the Popol Vuh myth was a shamanic initiation rite, as some believe, the Masters of Initiation may have been both male and female (or a female impersonator). The phrase that the twins "became as the sun and moon," may have indicated that they had slightly different powers. The one representing the sun could function in the underworld at night and the one representing the moon could function in the day and night as the moon does.

20. Dennis Tedlock, *Popol Vuh*, a translation. (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1986), 39 & 328.

21. John B. Carlson, "America's Ancient Skywatchers," *National Geographic* Vol.177, No. 3 (March 1990): 95.

22. Elizabeth P. Benson and Gillett G. Griffin, eds., *Maya Iconography*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1988).

23. Carlson, "America's Ancient Skywatchers," 76-107. Joseph Campbell, *Historical Atlas of World Mythology*, Vol II: *The Way of the Seeded Earth*, Part 3: *Mythologies of the Primitive Planters: The Middle and Southern Americas* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1989), 276-279.

24. Edward B. Espenshade, Jr, editor, *Goode's World Atlas* 17th Edition (New York: Rand McNally & Company, 1986), 8-9, 12-13.

25. Duran, *Book of The Gods And Rites and The Ancient Calendar*, 102.

26. Ibid., 211-214.

27. J. Eric Thompson, "The Moon Goddess in Middle America," *Contributions to American Anthropology and History*, Volume V, Nos. 24-29, (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1934; reprint, New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1970), 128 (page reference is to repeat edition.)

28. Joseph Campbell, *Historical Atlas of World Mythology*, Vol II: *The Way of the Seeded Earth*, Part 1: *The Sacrifice* (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1989), 37 and Brundage, *The Fifth Sun*, 31. One possibility is that the Knights of the Eagles and the Jaguars sought to control the erratic, unpredictable, and perhaps dangerous, feminine moon in their secret rites. The other possibility is that the Master of Initiation of the Jaguar Knights was indeed a woman representing the moon or perhaps a man masquerading as a woman - the transvestite.

29. Brundage, *The Fifth Sun*, 154.

30. In the Tlalhteuctli myth (Jonge and Olmos), Quetzalcoatl and Tezcatlipoca are named as the two serpents. In the myth of Citlalinicue (Jonge, Torquemada, Mendieta and Clavigiro) she is credited with giving birth to Quetzalcoatl and Tezcatlipoca. Because this work concentrates on female deities and the identification of the serpents is not relevant to that end, the decision was made to eliminate the names.

31. There is also the possibility that the phrase "drenched in blood" refers to the fertility of the female at the onset of menstruation.

32. Brundage, *The Fifth Sun*, 35-37.

33. Coatl means "snake" but it can also mean "twin" (pl. cocoa).

34. A distinctive nose ornament, probably a version that is worn by lords and certain deities associated with earth and fire. Schele calls these the Tlaloc war symbols.

35. Jill Leslie Furst, *Codex Vinobonensis Mexicanus I: A Commentary*, (Albany N.Y.: State University of New York at Albany, 1978), 318.

36. Kennedy, "Ecce Bufo: The Toad in nature and in Olmec Iconography," 277.

CHAPTER 4

THE GODDESS AND HER HERO SON

The last in our series of five creation myths is possibly the most popular. Although it is often called a creation myth, in reality, it deals with a Hero birth--that of the War God, Huitzilopochtli¹ (See Appendix 2). Set within a strong mother/son relationship, it is reminiscent of the Chichimeca myth of Mixcoatl and his mother, Mecitli, Goddess of the *tecpatl*, as well as the mythic birth of Quetzalcoatl from his mother, the War Goddess Chimalma, or Shield Hand.

According to Aztec myth, Coatlicue, the Earth Goddess, is the mother of a Sorceress Goddess called Coyolxauhqui and of the Centzon Huitznahua (400 Southerners). The myth begins as Coatlicue is sweeping her house. She finds a ball of blue green feathers and conceals it between her breasts, or under her skirt, and miraculously conceives.² Later her daughter, Coyolxauhqui, and the Centzon Huitznahua realize she is pregnant and they are outraged. Some sources (see endnote 2) blame this outrage on their mother's sinful or wanton actions. However, the underlying reason may have been political and the child/god

in Coatlicue's womb was perhaps a threat to Coyolxauhqui's sovereignty.

Whatever the reason, Coatlicue's pregnancy was a call to arms. The Centzon Huitznahua advance on Coatlicue, led by a fully armed Coyolxauhqui, who is ready to kill her and the child as soon as it is born on the legendary mountain of Coatepec. Coyolxauhqui manages to behead Coatlicue and two great serpents emerge from her neck, symbolizing blood. But to everyone's surprise, a fully mature son, armed with an atlatl and a serpent of fire³ emerges from her womb. The Centzon Huitznahua flee before Huitzilopochtli and he pursues his half-sister, beheading her and throwing her body down the hill where it shatters into numerous pieces. This new Warrior God is the terrible Huitzilopochtli, the hummingbird on the left hand of the sun (south).

Huitzilopochtli's identity is often blurred with that of the sun, despite the existence of an Aztec sun god called Tonatiuh and the fact that Huitzilopochtli means the left hand of the sun. Perhaps his identification as the sun resulted from Seler's insistence that this was an astral myth.⁴ However, there is a possibility that as the Aztec moved toward empire, Huitzilopochtli's cult gained in strength and stature and that this merging with the sun took place before the Conquest.

Interpreting the story as astral seems to explain the waxing and waning moon and the disappearance of the stars at sunrise. The beheading and dismemberment theme is the waning moon as she disappears in the sun's fireball in the east. At her rebirth in the west, two days later, she is the waxing moon, pursuing the sun, growing, until at full moon she and the sun face each other at opposite sides of the sky. The moon was perhaps considered dangerous because it changes shape and moves freely about the day and night sky dying once a month. The sun, on the other hand, is trapped in a dawn to dusk existence. In the western sky, the Earth Goddess takes the dying sun (the ball of hummingbird feathers) to her breast, and as the pregnant Earth Goddess, gives birth to a new sun in the east. On an astral level then, Huitzilopochtli would be the sun.

Nicholson credits Eduard Seler with this solar-lunar interpretation, but disagrees with it.

This hypothesis is seductive and logical, which probably explains its wide acceptance. With regard to Coyolxauhqui, however, there seems to be little or nothing in her iconography that is specifically lunar.⁵

Those who accept the western idea of order from chaos, as does Brundage, view this myth as the bringing of order to the chaotic cosmos symbolized by Tlalhteuctli's creation from Cipactli. They also believe this order was

obtained at a great cost--war and human sacrificial victims for the gods.

The ordering of the cosmos, the moon's waning, the leaping forth of the sun from the womb of the earth, the cowering of the stars before the heroism of the dawn - all these were seen as the outcome of a great battle. War had decided an issue of creation...To all intents and purposes a true reordering had taken place, sufficiently sweeping to be called, if not creation, at least a re-creation.⁶

However, Nicholson's statement does raise doubts about Coyolxauhqui's identity. As we have seen earlier, Coyolxauhqui shares the iconography of Lady Earth (Fig, 12, page 127). However seductive and logical the solar/lunar, order/chaos hypothesis seems, this myth carries an even deeper message. Huitzilopochtli, prior to his miraculous rebirth, was the tribal deity of a group of newcomers, strangers to the Valley of Mexico, who were known as "the people whose face nobody knows." They said they came from a place called "Aztlan" in the west--hence their name, Aztec.

The orthodox accounts depict him [Huitzilopochtli] as the presiding deity of the whole tribe from the very start...Like Jehovah [Yahweh], Huitzilopochtli guides his people, through the medium of his priests, leading them on to the promised land...In studying ancient Mexican history one often discovers that a situation prevailing at a much later date is projected backwards in time.⁷

The original deity was Mixcoatl, a central figure in Chichimec cosmology, a hunter and ancestral warrior who's fetish, carried on the back of his teomamah, was a sacred arrow or dart stuck into a ball of wadded grass. His

mother, Mecitli, also had a fetish carried by a teomamah, it was the flint knife of sacrifice.⁸ Later through a syncretic addition Mixcoatl became known as the Omen.⁹

The evolution of Huitzilopochtli was finally completed when the *huitzilin*, or hummingbird, became an important religious icon to the Aztec, and the god *Opochtli*, the Left-Handed One, was syncretically conflated with the myth of Mixcoatl and the Omen.¹⁰ However, Huitzilopochtli's status as a War God did not give him power in this new land; he was still an outsider. He could conquer the goddess *Coyolxauhqui* and her people but this was not enough to guarantee him taking her place as the ruling deity. To accomplish this, he had to be born from the proper female lineage; that of the indigenous Earth Mother, the same lineage as *Coyolxauhqui*. He, in fact, had to become *Coyolxauhqui*'s sister. The importance of female lineage was a pattern repeated again and again in Mesoamerica.¹¹ The ruler's claim to rulership was valid only when it passed through the correct female lineage and it seems a god's legitimate claim to a geographical area was subject to that same rule.

In an incident that may be related, the Aztec, before they were a force to be feared, asked the king of Culhuacan for a royal bride in order to establish a female

ruling lineage. When the ruler obliged and sent his daughter, she was promptly killed and flayed, on the orders of Huitzilopochtli, in honor of his mother. It is said this was done to make her a War Goddess.¹²

When Coatlicue gave birth to the War God Huitzilopochtli and he vanquished the older deities, the syncretic addition was successful. The Aztec now had legitimate claim to the Valley of Mexico.

Who are Coatlicue and Coyolxauhqui? Coyolxauhqui was surely a local goddess, perhaps the War Goddess of those who lived in the area prior to the coming of the Aztec. Since it was important for Huitzilopochtli to be born of the proper lineage, Coatlicue was surely the indigenous Earth Mother. It is perhaps at this point Mecitli ceased to be the mother of this metamorphosed deity and became the flint knife itself - Itzpapalotl.

Sahagun does not list Coatlicue as a major Goddess. Instead he calls Cihuacoatl the highest Goddess worshipped by the Aztec. He does name Coatlicue as the mother of Huitzilopochtli and mentions her as a Goddess of those who are in charge of the flowers during the third month called Tocoztontli.¹³ It is difficult to reconcile Sahagun's brief description of Coatlicue with the powerful sculpture representing her. Duran generally ignores Coatlicue, calling Cihuacoatl the major goddess. Since both their

names are so similar, Serpent Skirt and Serpent Woman, one wonders if they are not the same deity.

In the Museo Nacional de Antropologia, in Mexico City, a colossal statue of the Earth Goddess, Coatlicue, stands 11.5 feet high and dominates the space around her (Fig. 11, page 126). She wears a collection of icons that we have seen earlier. The only identifiable female attributes on the statue are flaccid breasts, which may represent the Earth Mother as being emaciated from providing nourishment for mankind and now, she herself, requires nourishment.¹⁴ She will get that nourishment from human sacrifice. The name Coatlicue, "Serpent Skirt," comes from her skirt of writhing serpents held in place by a serpent belt. The goddess' head has been severed and blood in the form of two serpent heads rises from her neck to form a single frontal serpent's face. She wears a necklace of human hearts and hands with a skull for a pendant. On her hands, feet, shoulders, and elbows, Coatlicue has the serpent heads with round eyes and clashing jaws and she carries a skull on her belt in the form of a backrack with feathers or plaited cords cascading down her back. These are icons she shares with Tlalteuctli. However, another icon is present which we do not see on Tlalteuctli: a serpent between her legs, descending from her vulva. A male

author,¹⁵ uncomfortable with this powerful female image,⁵⁴
attempts to place Coatlicue into the category of dual male/
female deities by viewing the serpent between her legs as a
penis. The idea of a serpent as a phallus can be traced to
the patriarchal Genesis myth of Adam and Eve. Recent
studies in early European Goddess religions¹⁶ regard the
serpent as a familiar of the Earth Goddess much as the black
cat was a familiar of medieval witches. The serpent is not
regarded as a phallus in Mesoamerica, but a symbol of birth,
menses, and lineage (Figs. 17 & 18, pages 132 & 133).¹⁷

When one views this sculpture for the first time, it
is overwhelming and threatening. Towering overhead,
Coatlicue leans forward, seemingly ready to pounce on the
viewer, her lidless reptilian eyes hypnotizing. Although
stark and brutal to a non-Aztec, the sculpture is an honest
statement about the cycle of life; death always follows
birth--something we in western cultures tend to sanitize
and deny.

In the written accounts of the Spanish, one of
Cortez's soldiers described a huge and terrifying sculpture
encrusted with gold, jewels, and human blood.¹⁸ It was
secretly buried by the first Spanish Catholic priests. This
may have been the statue of Coatlicue. In 1790, Coatlicue's
statue was accidentally discovered by workmen and was moved to
the Dominican-controlled university. The Spanish Crown and

Catholic Church feared Coatlicue's influence on young Mexicans as the winds of revolution stirred. When offerings were discovered before it, the statue was promptly buried.¹⁹

In 1794, this fear generated a sermon delivered by a Catholic priest in the Basilica of Guadalupe, stating that the Christian Apostle Thomas was, in reality, Quetzalcoatl (a Mexican cultural hero and sometimes god) and that Saint Thomas had brought the cape bearing the vision of the Catholic Goddess Mary to Coatepec long before Cortez. Coatlicue was exhumed in 1803 for a brief examination by Humboldt. The sculpture was then re-buried until 1821.²⁰

Duran tells us the shrine of Cihuacoatl was dark and sooty with a low entrance symbolic of a cave.²¹ This low entrance required anyone entering or leaving her temple to crawl on all fours, perhaps to symbolize death and rebirth from the Earth Goddess's womb. Her statue, considered so holy that even her priests could not touch it, was never brought out to the light but remained hidden in the interior of her shrine which was called Tlillan, the Place of Blackness. It is entirely possible that the feared statue of Cihuacoatl, the statue that remained hidden, was the same statue that we now know as Coatlicue. What distinguishes Coatlicue/Cihuacoatl from Tlalteuctli? Coatlicue/Cihuacoatl like Tlalteuctli was the black earth; female, abundant,

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fertile, and capable of creating life. As an altar ego of this Creating Force, she could become the Devourer, eating the hearts of her children and dancing on their blood soaked bodies. However, one icon separates her from Tlalteuctli; the serpent descending from her vulva. While Tlalteuctli is a primeval creating force, Coatlicue/Cihuacoatl is more specific, she is a creator of lineages.

This, of course, brings us to the identity of Coyolxauhqui, the Goddess Huitzilopochtli had to defeat. A colossal stone relief of Coyolxauhqui, 3.4 meters in diameter (Fig. 12, page 127), was discovered in 1978 by a group of laborers from the utility company of Mexico City, at the base of what was the Great Temple of Tenochtitlan. Carved in the 15th century, this sculpture shows her legendary dismemberment by Huitzilopochtli. It is a subtle sculpture and at first glance it seems to show Coyolxauhqui as a woman, flying or swimming within a circle. Upon closer examination, one can see she is dismembered, as the sculpture depicts her flesh and muscles in a scalloped pattern that seems symbolic. Only after very close examination can one see the ends of Coyolxauhqui's humerus and femur exposed. The Goddess is nude and her vulva is prominent. However, as noted above, Coyolxauhqui shares many icons with Tlalteuctli: serpents' heads with round eyes and clashing teeth at her knees, elbows, and heels, a

a serpent belt with a skull backrack, and malinalli grass for hair. Coyolxauhqui wears *yacaxihuitl* as earplugs but it is the bells she wears on her cheeks that give her her name--Coyolxauhqui, the goddess "painted with bells."²²

Is Coyolxauhqui a War Goddess or a Moon Goddess; or is she a malevolent sorceress? Perhaps she is all three. We know she was considered important enough to the followers of Huitzilopochtli to have her mythical dismemberment memorialized in stone, and to have the stone placed permanently at the foot of Huitzilopochtli's temple.

Davies²³ tells us Huitzilopochtli had a sister called, Malinalxochitl, who was a malevolent sorceress. She had control over animals and particularly such dangerous pests as snakes, scorpions, centipedes, and deadly spiders. Interesting enough these "dangerous pests" are usually associated with the earth goddess (Fig. 6, page 121). As the story continues, Malinalxochitl and her adherents were abandoned "in the night" by Huitzilopochtli as the Aztec continued their journey to the promised land. Later, Copil, a mature son of Malinalxochitl plotted to kill the generation of Aztec, including Huitzilopochtli, who had wronged his mother.²⁴ He succeeded in driving the Aztec from Chapultepec Hill but in the process was killed and beheaded by Huitzilopochtli.

It is unknown whether this myth of Huitzilopochtli and his sister is one of backward projection commented on above. There is an earlier legend of Mixcoatl having a sister, Quilaztli, who was a malevolent sorceress. The myth of Quilaztli goes back to the Chichimec past.²⁵ She was known as a witch and a shape shifter, but she was also a renowned warrior equal to that of Mixcoatl himself. Legend says that the bones of Mixcoatl were interred in her temple. Perhaps Huitzilopochtli preferred not to end up as did Mixcoatl and decided to keep the bones of Coyolxauhqui in his temple. If she was identified with the moon he had reason to fear her.

In almost all Mesoamerican cultures the moon is considered female. Some cultures see her as a shape changing shaman because she mimicks the stages of the female: maiden, mother, and crone. She is visible both day and night. In Mesoamerica, the moon may have been considered particularly dangerous because she is born in the west, the place of death and she dies in the east, the traditional place of birth. She has reversed death and life and perhaps was seen as controlling it.

Coyolxauhqui is not armed with weapons in this sculpture, but in the Codex Borgia, a picture of a goddess armed with shield, atlatl, and darts seems to be interacting with a rabbit who sets in the moon symbol (Fig. 19, page

134).²⁶ The rabbit is a known companion of the Moon Goddess throughout the Southwestern United States and Mesoamerica. The theme of the rabbit and the Moon Goddess is especially prominent in Late Classic Maya art from Jaina, about 500 years prior to the cosmology we are now discussing.²⁷

In summary, the great mother/son myth of Coatlicue and Huitzilopochtli is but a continuation of a much older Chichimeca, and perhaps, pan Mesoamerican myth. However, while the original myth establishes the ritual for human sacrifice, the Coatlicue and Huitzilopochtli myth established this great mother/son of human sacrifice in a "place," the promised land. While in the original Chichimeca myth, sacrificial victims were captured for ritual cannibalistic feasts, the revised and later version of the Aztec myth, established Huitzilopochtli as the primary deity in this promised land. This was done legally by a syncretic layering of myth that had Huitzilopochtli literally born from the same lineage as that of Coyolxauhqui. And that, in fact, she was his malevolent sister who had sent her son Copil to kill him. Not only was Huitzilopochtli born from the correct lineage but he was groomed as the War God who's task was to capture sacrificial victims as food for his mother.

ENDNOTES

1. Lord Raglan, "The Hero of Tradition," in *The Study of Folklore*, ed. Alan Dundes (Englewood Cliffs NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1965), 142-157.
2. Brundage, *The Fifth Sun*, 138; Coe, *Mexico*, 152-153; Davies, *The Aztec A History*, 14-15.
3. Davies, *The Aztec A History*, 15.
4. Henry B. Nicholson, *Art of Aztec Mexico - Treasures of Tenochtitlan* (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1983), 49.
5. Ibid., 49.
6. Brundage, *The Fifth Sun*, 34-35.
7. Davies, *The Aztec A History*, 17.
8. Brundage, *The Fifth Sun*, 130
9. Ibid., 137 & 142.
10. Ibid., 142.
11. James A. Fox and John S. Justenson, "Classic Maya Dynastic Alliance and Succession" *Ethnohistory, Supplement to the Handbook of Middle American Indians*, vol. 4: 7-34.
12. Ignacio Bernal, *Mexico Before Cortez: Art. History, and Legend*, translated by Willes Barnstone. (New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1975), 95.
13. Fray Bernardino de Sahagun, *History of Ancient Mexico*, translated by Fanny R. Bandelier. (Nashville, TN: Baird-Ward Printing Company, 1932), 53 & 173-175.
14. Peter and Jill Furst, *Pre-Columbian Art of Mexico* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1980), 118.
15. Armand J. Labbe, *Man and Cosmos in Prehispanic*

Mesoamerica (Santa Ana, California, Bowers Museum Foundation, 1982), 9.

16. Gimbutas, *The Language of the Goddess*, 121-137 & 319.

17. The "plaited" serpents on Coatlicue's skirt may be synonymous with the crossed long bones on the skirts of Tlaltecuctli reinforcing the idea that a serpent represents birth or re-birth from a female lineage.

18. Mary Ellen Miller, *The Art of Mesoamerica from Olmec to Aztec*, (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1986), 207.

19. Matos Moctezuma, *The Aztec*, 175.

20. Ibid., 175

21. Duran, *Book of The Gods And Rites and The Ancient Calendar*, 211.

22. Nicholson, *Art of Aztec - Treasures of Tenochtitlan*, 49. Nicholson is citing Eduard Seler's *Gesammelte Abhandlungen*, Vol. III, page 329. However, in the original German it is not "bells" but "shells."

23. Davies, *The Aztec A History*, 13.

24. Ibid., 28.

25. Brundage, 170-171.

26. Thompson, "The Moon Goddess in Middle America," 131, identifies this goddess as Tlazolteotl-Toci, a goddess to be discussed later.

27. Schele, *The Blood of Kings*, 143 & 153.

CHAPTER 5

THE GULF COAST CONNECTION

Brundage¹ calls Coatlicue, Cihuacoatl, and Itzpapalotl the Medusa group, comparing them to the three terrifying Gorgon sisters from Greek mythology, of which Medusa is the most famous.² Itzpapalotl, or Obsidian Knife Butterfly as she was called by the Aztec,³ was perhaps the most terrifying to both European conqueror and Aztec. In the various accounts scattered throughout Brundage, she had her beginnings as a Chichimec goddess of the plains associated with the Earth Mother. As Mecitli, she gave birth to the Four Hundred Mimixcoa, devoured them, and was burned by her son Mixcoatl. The goddess fragmented into many colored sacrificial flint knives of which the white one was the sharpest. In the Citlalinicue, or Star Skirt myth (see Chapter 3), we are told Citlalinicue gave birth to the tecpatl, the flint knife of sacrifice, itself a goddess.

According to Brundage,⁴ "Itzpapalotl [Mecitli] is a wholly Chichimec goddess and her only office is war." She was the mother of Mixcoatl and the Mexica (Aztec), one of whose teomamah (god bearers) carried her fetish, the sacrificial flint knife. As the Chichimec myths were

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adopted, or rewritten, by the Aztec, the sacrificial knife became Itzpapalotl herself.

Mecitli,⁵ which means Maguey Grandmother, was the many-breasted Earth Mother who suckled the Five Mimixcoa, of whom one was Mixcoatl. As her identity changed, she became the many-breasted Aztec deity, Mayahuel, the personification of maguey, which produced the intoxicating octli "pulque." Figure 20, page 135, may symbolize this transition. The association is not unusual when one notes that the leaves of the maguey were likened to a female breast and the darker spines, to nipples (Fig. 21, page 136). There is a myth in which Mayahuel is kidnapped and falls to earth.⁶ Her kidnapper changes her into a tree but the demons tear it apart. Maguey grew from the ruined branches of that tree. The falling to earth of the tree echoes the falling to earth of the tecpatl, the sacrificial knife. The destruction of the tree is reminiscent of the tree which broke in two and toppled over after a divine voice commanded the Aztec to split off from the main group and take a new name. These are all common parts of the Mecitli myth.

Mayahuel is surrounded by a remarkable cluster of octli gods called the Four Hundred Rabbits, patrons of drunkenness and ritual orgies. Although they were all male gods, they are secondary to Mayahuel in importance. One temple to these gods has survived in the escarpment at

Morelos. It has a mysterious and awesome approach and from a cleft in the mountain a gigantic phallic rock protrudes.⁷

The name Itzpapalotl, Obsidian Knife Butterfly, is intriguing. The heavy flint sacrificial knife was used for heart extraction. Itzpapalotl became associated with the sharper, more brittle obsidian knife,⁸ probably used for flaying a victim's skin, which was worn during certain rituals. These flaying rituals were connected with the following: 1) the god Xipe, whose origins and name will be discussed later; 2) a feast called Tlacaxipehualiztli "the Skinning of Men"; and 3) with the Goddesses Xochiquetzal "Flower Feather," Chicomecoatl "Seven Snake," and Toci "Our Grandmother."

Both Sahagun and Duran⁹ equate Toci with a ritual flaying and nude male attendants masquerading as Huastecs. Duran¹⁰ reports the Huastec men "do not wear loincloths to cover their privy parts, though these people have many articles of apparel." There is a goddess of Huastec origin called Tlazolteotl¹¹ who is usually conflated with Toci. She was considered a Great Mother and was also called Totzin "Our Foundation, Our Base, or Our Anus" or Tzintzotl "Goddess of the Anus" (zintzl is anus). She was worshipped by the Totonacs and perhaps by the Putun Maya as their Earth Goddess, Ixchel.

Her name was Tlazolteotl, which literally means filth goddess but should be understood as sex goddess...Fertility and sex were perhaps the most obvious emphases in her cult. She was generally depicted with bared breasts and was frequently connected with the coral snake, which symbolized lust. Phallic rites were performed in her religion. Prostitutes and nymphomaniacs [I doubt this term was part of the Aztec language] could be known as "women of the sex goddess." ¹²

Duran¹³ makes no mention of Tlazolteotl, concentrates on Toci's rituals, which deal with flaying, and places the so-called confession, usually connected with Tlazolteotl, under his chapter on Xochiquetzal. Sahagun¹⁴ places both Toci and Tlazolteotl in his list of major Aztec goddesses as separate deities. He goes into great detail concerning the confession ritual, devoting twice as much space to it as he does to all the goddesses combined. Sahagun¹⁵ also calls Tlazolteotl the mistress of lust and states that Tlaczolquane, her other name means, "comedora, de cosas suzias," eater of dirty things. Seler¹⁶ is quoted as calling her the Goddess of Dirt and explains dirty as a euphemism for sensual love and sins of lust, however sin in Spanish is pecado. Therefore, if her name is translated as eater of sins, it is missing the point. Although Duran¹⁷ does not dwell on the text of the Aztec confession as does Sahagun, he points out that the penitent performed blood sacrifices of the tongue.

The word Sahagun translates as "confession" is

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neyolmelahualiztl. When it is analyzed from a philological standpoint by Leon-Portilla,¹⁸ it means much more than the Western Christian concept of confession. Yolotl when used in association with ixtli means: the face, the heart, the person. "In other text yolotl can mean the dynamic nucleus, the intrinsic motility of human beings."¹⁹

The ritual Sahagun discusses in the Florentine Codex is ambiguous and laced with words important to Catholicism's idea of ontological evil. It is doubtful that what he calls confession, in its original form, was for the same purpose as a Catholic confession where one recites one's sins, at least yearly, to obtain absolution and escape Hell. The cosmology of the Mesoamerican was not that of the Spanish Catholic.

So far, no one has taken "*comedora, de cosas suzias*," quite literally, that is, that it may have been referring to a ritual involving oral sex or even the offering of a severed penis to the goddess, which she ate. There is a myth among 19th century Maya concerning penis eating.²⁰ The Gulf Coast people were often accused of erotic practices when informants spoke to Spanish chroniclers. Perhaps the informants were purposely vague on this subject. An interesting footnote in Duran tells us,

According to a contemporary [16th century] account, the Huastecs "worship the penis and have images of it in their temples and squares, together

with carved figures showing different forms of pleasure between a man and a woman, plus figures of human beings with their legs lifted in diverse ways...the men are great sodomites, cowards, and - bored with drinking wine [?] with their mouths - lie down and, extending their legs, have the wine [?] poured into their anus through a tube until the body is full" (*El Conquistador Anonimo*, 37).²¹

The Classic Maya are well known for their hallucinogenic enemas²² and that may be what is described above. Phallic dances were common to Earth Goddesses and the modern Huichol perform a dance where representatives of the Earth Goddess are accompanied by phallus bearers.²³

Most authors²⁴ agree Tlazolteotl is of Huastec origin and that flaying was an important Gulf Coast ritual. Many sculptures from that area show individuals wearing the flayed skin of a human victim. Duran,²⁵ placing these rituals under those of Toci, tells us a female victim was given a bundle of maguey fiber, which she spun into thread. While many entertained her, hoping to make her forget her fate, she wove a skirt and blouse (over an unspecified time). At dawn on the day of the feast the woman was sacrificed and flayed. A male impersonator donned the skin and the clothing the female victim wove. After some mock warfare, four additional men were sacrificed by being thrown from a high (Duran says 180 feet) platform and beheaded. The male impersonator, wearing the sacrificed female's skin and the woven clothing and carrying a broom as a scepter,

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descended to the sacrificed victims and begin wetting his fingers in the victim's blood and licking his fingers, moaning eerily. At this moment all present said the earth moved and quaked.

Sahagun,²⁶ writing at least 40 years earlier also places the flaying rituals under those of Toci and calls her Tlalliyyollo, heart of the earth, because of the simulated earthquakes. He states the intended female victim was lavishly entertained so she would not be sorrowful. He makes no mention of the weaving although he says the Huastec attendants wore paper crowns with spindles and cotton flowers. Sahagun says the female victim was flayed and a male impersonator wore her skin but he does not mention the ritual leading to the perceived earthquake.

In the Codex Borbonicus, Tlazolteotl is seen clad in a flayed skin representing the act of parturition (Fig. 22, page 137). She is covered with inverted crescent symbols identical to half closed eyes found on female sculptures from Veracruz and on the face of the later Aztec sculpture of Coyolxauhqui (Fig. 13, page 128). Furst²⁷ identifies Tlazolteotl as the Great Mother Goddess and proposes that the adult half emerged from her uterus is the Goddess Xochiquetzal. Xochiquetzal is identified as a young Moon Goddess by both Peterson and Thompson.²⁸ An old Earth Mother and a young Moon Goddess were important deities in

the Gulf Coast from the Preclassic to Postclassic era.

The Gulf Coast is tropical, with ample rainfall, no dry period, and is not subject to the four seasons.²⁹ Perhaps the act of flaying sacrificial victims was done, not to represent the renewal brought by Summer Solstice rains, as it did on the high plateau, but to renew the old dead moon. It is possible the old Earth Mother's female impersonator wore the flayed skin of a male sacrificial victim to symbolize the rebirth of the young Moon Goddess from the earth. Perhaps the Earth Mother's female impersonator ingested his penis to fertilize herself thereby, gaining the title *Tlazolteotl, comedora, de cosas suzias*.

Another Aztec deity whose name is synonymous with flaying is Xipe Totec. His name has been translated to mean, "Our Lord the Flayed One." However, Brundage³⁰ disputes this and suggests his name may mean "He with the Phallus," citing a word **xipitl* or **xipilli* as meaning "penis." He states that the word *xipintli* means "foreskin." Both Peterson and Krickeberg³¹ suggest that Xipe originated on the Pacific Coast and that he was originally connected with the new moon as well as the pulque gods, the Four Hundred Rabbits. Seler³² suggests that these gods were symbols of dying and rebirth. Since most Mesoamericans see

a rabbit in the full moon, perhaps this symbolized the death and rebirth of the moon.

Another sacrifice to Xipe was the arrow sacrifice.³³ This was widely practiced by the Maya and by other Gulf Coast cultures until the Late Classic (900 AD). A victim was tied to a ladder-like structure and as priests danced around him they pierced his heart and other areas with darts, spears, or later with arrows (Fig. 23, page 138). His blood was allowed to drip on the earth in a symbolic fertilization in what Sahagun refers to as "coupling with the earth."³⁴ Duran³⁵ alludes to this sacrifice under the rituals for Chicomecoatl, while Seler tells us.

she [Tlazolteotl]...was the deity who, according to this legend introduced the peculiar kind of sacrifice which was offered to the earth - the shooting to death with arrows.³⁶

The above seems to lend credence to the idea that "comedora, de cosas suzias" was a phallic ritual, involving Tlazolteotl rather than the simple interpretation of her "eating" people's sins, as put forth by the chroniclers.

We have traced Itzpapalotl's name from the ancient Chichimec Goddess Mecitli, to a fuzzy merging with Gulf Coast flaying rituals and the Goddess Tlazolteotl, and finally a split when Mecitli becomes two goddesses, Mayahuel, the Pulque Goddess and Itzpapalotl, Obsidian Butterfly, the personification of the obsidian knife used

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for flaying. However, the "butterfly" element in her name needs further investigation. Perhaps it was connected to a certain toad that lives in the Gulf Coast, *Bufo marinus*.

B. marinus is a toad whose toxin is deadly if ingested by humans. However, it can produce hallucinogenic reactions when taken in very minute diluted forms. According to Kennedy,³⁷ the toad sheds its skin once a week when immature and six times a year when mature. The skin splits down the toad's back and up its belly, staying intact on its face. *Bufo* gradually sucks its loosened old skin into its mouth, ingesting it. Kennedy suggests,

The shape of the shed toad skin...is a perfect geometric butterfly shape and may relate to concepts of transformation...[G]oing as it [the toad] does from a larval vegetarian aquatic form to an adult carnivorous terrestrial form...And in shedding its skin it periodically reenacts the cosmic drama of transformation and renewal...The flayed toad skin may even...be the fons et origo of the whole Xipe-Totec tradition. The "warty" mottled or maculated texture of some Xipe-Totec skins would appear to support this suggestion. It is tempting to speculate that this flayed toad skin may have been worn as an alveolar mask suspended from the nasal septum...The psychoactive skin and paratoid secretions would then be absorbed through the capillary bed of this "death mask" area of the mid-face directly to the brain.³⁸

Perhaps the butterfly element in Itzpapalotl's name relates to this entire religious idea of flaying humans, a phallic ritual, and the use of a flayed toad skin, in the shape of a butterfly (Fig. 24, 139), for a hallucinogenic experience which was somehow connected with the

transformation and rebirth of the new moon. It is possible this entire religious cosmology was imported to the old city of Teotihuacan, which shows a strong Gulf Coast influence, and on this high, dry plateau it became syncretized to their already existing rain rituals. Many paintings, sculptures, and ceramics show individuals, especially Xipe, wearing stylized butterfly masks suspended from their nasal septum (Fig. 25, page 140). Figure 26, page 141, identified as Itzpapalotl, wears the icons of Tlaltecuctli with the exception of butterfly wings or a cape symbolizing wings.

One particular sculpture from Teotihuacan, a 3 m. figure of a female also appears to wear a face mask of flayed skin. Her mouth has the characteristic oval shape of the Xipe face masks (Fig. 27, page 142). Coe³⁹ identifies this giant statue as Chalchiuhtlicue and Miller⁴⁰ calls this same statue a prototype of the Aztec Chalchiuhtlicue. She further states that "this great basalt water goddess seemingly wrings moisture from her very garment."⁴¹ Upon closer examination it seems that this goddess' clenched fists extend beyond the hem of her huipil and have holes in them as if to hold an object during ritual. Unfortunately, since the culture of Teotihuacan disappeared 500 years before the Aztec appeared in the valley, we will never know the name of this goddess or if she represented water.

Chalchiuhtlicue can be translated as Jade Skirt, jade being symbolic of water. The Aztec used water, like all agriculturists, for their cornfields and crops. However, it was also an important symbol of life and was used for ritual purification. They washed newborn children in water, purified themselves with water throughout their life, and ritually washed their dead before disposing of the body.⁴²

Adding to the confusion surrounding the Water Goddess, Chalchiuhtlicue, is an Aztec God of Rain and Lightning, called Tlaloc, who was as important to the Aztec as was Chalchiuhtlicue. Some digression is necessary to understand this apparent contradiction.

The Mexican artist Covarrubias was convinced Tlaloc's roots came from the snarling, male, Olmec were-jaguar and proceeded to trace these roots in a 1946 publication.⁴³ Soustelle,⁴⁴ however, called Covarrubias' comparisons a "tour de force, [and] a dazzling magic trick" pointing out that Tlaloc is ophidian, not a jaguar, and reminding us that the Olmec of Veracruz had no need for a deity to bring rain in an area where it rains almost every day of the year. In fact he remarks that they possibly implored their deities not to send them so much rain! However, the snarling, male, were-jaguar theme is a favorite of anthropologists even though it may be incorrect.

Coe,⁴⁵ supporting Covarrubias' hypothesis, bases his acceptance of it on a hypothetical union of a male jaguar and a human female which resulted in a race of infantile beings with snarling mouths, toothless gums, or long curved fangs. This is supported by those who cite two very badly damaged Olmec sculptures, found by Sterling, who professed to see in these disfigured pieces the sexual coupling of a jaguar and a woman.⁴⁶ Another bas-relief is cited which shows two fanged jaguars, with claws bared, leaping on two prone humans (Fig. 28, page 143). However, there are no exposed genitalia and a sexual identification of the two humans is next to impossible.⁴⁷ This may actually symbolize a shaman being transformed into a jaguar.

Kennedy⁴⁸ has proposed a very important hypothesis as to the identification of the "snarling were-jaguar" and again calls attention to the toxic toad of the Gulf Coast, *Bufo marines*. In a quote above, Kennedy explains the sloughing procedure of *B. marines*. After sucking in its skin and while ingesting it, the ends of the toads extremities (its fore and hind legs) would hang out of the sides of the toad's mouth. In fact the "Kuntz Axe" type of sculpture, which supposedly shows bifid fangs, upon closer examination looks like the legs of a toad (Fig. 29, page 144). The so-called "toothless crying baby" sculpture may

refer to the "egg tooth" motif seen as far away as Guerrero. However, Covarrubias⁴⁹ did recognize the toad motif in the Veracruz yokes, associated with the ritual ballgame, and remarked on their resemblance to the Aztec *oztotl*, the symbol for the mouth of a cave (Fig. 30, page 145).

If, as has been proposed, *B. marines* is the symbol of the Earth Goddess and was associated with caves, the place of birth and rebirth, it is fair to assume this concept was imported to Teotihuacan. As it was syncretized to the religion of the high plateau, perhaps the ophidian masks, seen on the so-called Temple of Quetzalcoatl, came to symbolize the life-giving properties of rain because of their association with the "wetness" and lush vegetation of the Gulf Coast. Another motif involving a cave entrance, bridging 1200 years, appears on a relief at Chalcatzingo, and in a mural painting at Teotihuacan. The one at Chalcatzingo shows a person, believed to be a female, in the mouth of a cave represented by a goggle-eyed monster (circa. 600 BC). In a mural painting at Teotihuacan (circa. 600 AD), a goddess in a goggle-eyed mask emerges from the mouth (of a cave?) of a goggle-eyed monster (Fig. 31, page 146).

There are some striking comparisons in this religious iconography: 1) Duran,⁵⁰ writing in the 16th century, tells us the name Tlaloc means, "Path under the Earth or Long Cave," a reference to birth from the Earth

Mother perhaps? 2) In 1971, a lava-tube cave with four long side lobes was discovered under the structure called the Pyramid of the Sun at Teotihuacan.⁵¹ 3) The 3m. basalt goddess of Teotihuacan was found in front of the structure called the Pyramid of the Moon. The structure is framed by a dormant volcano, the source of the city's water.⁵² 4) The Aztec viewed Chalchiuhtlicue as Iztaccihuatl, White Woman, a 17,343 foot high dormant volcano, when it was a source of flowing water.⁵³

Some writers, Brundage in particular,⁵⁴ insist that Aztec gods change appearance, become transformations of other gods, and even change sex. However, that argument, tenuous as it may be in other cases, is definitely not the case here. Chalchiuhtlicue is female and although she may wear the goggle-eyed mask, she never becomes the male Tlaloc.⁵⁵ Perhaps the reason for this lies in the fact that they are not competitors at all. It is quite possible that the deity called Tlaloc, the God of Rain and Lightning, was an indigenous storm god of the high plateau. Since he is usually shown carrying a lightning serpent, he could have been viewed as a god of thunderstorms. When witnessed at the high, 5,000 foot, altitude of Teotihuacan, thunderstorms can be awesome and frightening. Lightning is also considered male fertilizing energy.⁵⁶

Chalchiuhtlicue, on the other hand, became the Goddess of Water and was perhaps associated with the rush of amniotic fluid preceding birth.⁵⁷ She was implored in the ritual washings which followed birth in the Aztec culture. Perhaps the goggle-eyed mask, interchangeable between Tlaloc, Chalchiuhtlicue, and sometimes Tlalhteuctli, was simply symbolic of water or "wetness".

Seler's references to these birth rituals seem to be isolated ideas strung together. Here I have separated them.

...the water [from the Goddess]...is a symbol of purification and cleansing; it removes filth, which is sin.⁵⁸

Seler assumes filth to mean sin. However, could filth refer to the general condition of a newborn baby that is covered with the mother's feces, urine, and blood?

Thus speaks the midwife when four days after its birth [this was the fourth washing] she subjects the child to a ceremonious washing: "My son [child], come to thy Mother, the Goddess of Water, Chalchiuhtlicue. May she cleanse the dirt which thou hast of thy father and thy mother."⁵⁹

Again this refers to ritual washings within the scope of an indigenous purification rite. However, what follows below seems to be influenced by the Catholic Baptismal Rite.

..."My son [child], come unto thy Mother, thy Father, the Lady Chalchiuhtlicue, the Lord Chalchuihtlatonac [?] ...may it take from thee the evil which thou hast from the beginning of the world, which clings to thee from thy father, from thy mother."⁶⁰

A "husband" is now appended to Chalchiuhtlicue where none existed before and the quote speaks, not of the dirt of birth, but of the evil which comes from the beginning of the world and clings to the child from its parents. This surely is influenced by the Catholic dogma of Original Sin and is not surprising since the chroniclers were convinced there were Christian elements in Aztec religion.

Also associated with birth in Aztec culture are a group of goddesses conceived of as five distinct individuals. These are the Cihuateteo, woman warriors, or the Cihuapipiltin, princesses. They are seen as five goddesses each representing different directions (the fifth direction is zenith).⁶¹ These five apparitions, are connected to birth rituals because it was believed they were mortals who had died in childbirth.

Sullivan⁶² explains that at childbirth, the pregnant woman is regarded as a warrior going into battle. She is supported by the poetic words of the midwife to conduct a good and honorable fight and to take a captive (the newborn). When the woman successfully delivers, the midwife shouts a war cry which signifies that the woman, a valiant warrior, had fought her battle and has taken a captive, she has captured a child. When a woman died in childbirth, she was called *mocihuaquetzqui*, "one who has stood up like a

woman [warrior]."⁶³ Those women were deified and were 79
considered female counterparts of the male warriors slain in
battle.

The Cihuateteo resided in the western part of the sky and escorted the sun from zenith to the western horizon. The male warriors lived in the east and escorted the sun from the eastern horizon to zenith.⁶⁴ At certain times these Cihuateteo descend to the earth to dwell in crossroad shrines set up to propitiate them. However, their images, seen in Figure 32, page 147, were not maternal. The Cihuateteo have de-fleshed faces with a skeletal mouth and claws for hands and feet. They were feared because they were thought to be vengeful toward children.⁶⁵

Most Cihuateteo images display a date at the top of their heads skillfully carved into their hair. This date is initially the thirteen day period that in the Aztec calendar is assigned to the west.⁶⁶

To summarize, it seems clear that syncretism as a whole can confuse those who examine myths. It is also clear that Duran's and Sahagun's accounts, separated by forty years, are not identical. The chroniclers may have rearranged the myths to fit their needs, but it is more likely their informants, by now old with fading memories or young and influenced by Catholicism, gave differing accounts. As the Aztec gained power in the Valley of Mexico

and became conquerors of their neighbors, they absorbed new goddesses with similar traits. As a result, whole identities shifted and merged. Certain erotic practices from the Gulf Coast became syncretized to the more "conservative" religions of the nomadic Aztec. This seemed to overwhelm and overload the Aztec psyche. The concept of a Goddess, living in damp places associated with birth, i.e., caves or underground lava tubes seems to have come from an extremely wet place. When a religious concept developed in a wet environment is imported to a semi-arid one, symbols are shifted, realigned, and their original meaning is often obscured. The Aztec Water Goddess and Rain God are very different and dwell in separate domains. This is surely because they fulfilled different needs, because their individual beginnings were dissimilar, and because they were not of the same sex. The Rain God's accoutrements identify him as a storm god of the high plateau while Chalchiuhtlicue is the Goddess of flowing water, amniotic fluids, and lakes. However one thing is clear: whatever the syncretic effect on the original and terrible Mother of the Chichimeca, the Goddess of the Tecpatl survived as Itzpapalotl and merging with the flaying ritual of the Gulf Coast became Obsidian Knife Butterfly.

ENDNOTES

1. Brundage, *The Fifth Sun*, 166.
2. Joseph Campbell, *The Masks of God: Occidental Mythology* (New York: Penguin Books, 1976), 25.
3. Miller and Taube, *The Gods and Symbols of Ancient Mexico and the Maya*, 100, point out that Itzpapalotl may mean clawed butterfly and her wing blades are the original tecpatl or flint knife. Also the concept of a clawed butterfly may refer to a bat.
4. Brundage, *The Fifth Sun*, 173.
5. Ibid., 158.
6. Ibid., 158.
7. Ibid., 159.
8. Ibid., 210.
9. Sahagun, *Florentine Codex: General History of the Things of New Spain*, 16. Duran, *Book of The Gods And Rites And The Ancient Calendar*, 296.
10. Duran, *Book of The Gods And Rites And The Ancient Calendar*, 296, footnote 5.
11. Brundage, *The Fifth Sun*, 163.
12. Ibid., 162-163. Brundage, who has been notably fair in his treatment of goddesses, takes a decidedly androcentric stand when describing Tlazolteotl.
13. Duran, *Book of The Gods And Rites And The Ancient Calendar*, 229-234.
14. Sahagun, *Florentine Codex: General History of the Things of New Spain*, 23-27.
15. Ibid., 23 and footnote 69. Duran, *Book of The*

Gods And Rites And The Ancient Calendar, 64 footnote 8 states, It is said that to take an oath, an Indian would bend down, touch the earth with his fingers, lick his fingers and say, "in the name of the Earth Goddess, I swear such and such a thing, and in proof, I eat this earth." This was called eating earth in respect for the Goddess. This oath may have been confused with a confession.

16. Sahagun, *Florentine Codex: General History of the Things of New Spain*, 23 footnote 68.

17. Duran, *Book of The Gods And Rites And The Ancient Calendar*, 246.

18. Miguel Leon-Portilla, "The Problematics of Sahagun: Certain Topics Needing Investigation," in *Sixteenth-Century Mexico The Work of Sahagun*, ed. Munro S. Edmonson (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1974), 251-252.

19. *Ibid.*, 252.

20. John Eric Thompson, *Religion of the Ancient Maya* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1970), 355-356. The Maya Hero Twins resent that their grandmother, Xmucane, the Earth Goddess, gives all the meat they bring home to her lover, either a monster or tapir, who visits her every night. The Hero Twins decide to slay their grandmother's lover. (There is no connotation of "sin" here only a resentment that they had to provide meat for another able-bodied male.) "They made a deadfall trap, setting sharp stakes in the bottom...[Their grandmother's] lover fell in and was killed. The boys cut off and roasted [the lover's] penis and taking it home gave it to [the grandmother] to eat. She said it was tasty. The boys laughed and some birds called out, 'Look at her; she has eaten her lover's penis.'...She [the grandmother] sent the boys to sleep and went down to the river to sharpen her claws...the big crested lizard...warned the boys that [the grandmother] planned to kill them. Each put...a calabash...in his hammock with a blanket...so it looked as though all were asleep. Then they hid in the rafters of the hut...[Their grandmother] crept in and dug her freshly sharpened claws into each calabash in turn, believing each was a boy's head."

21. Duran, *Book of The Gods And Rites And The Ancient Calendar*, 296 footnote 5.

22. Schele and Miller, *The Blood of Kings*, 145 & 146 footnote 28.
23. Walter Krickeberg, *Pre-Columbian American Religions* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1968), 57.
24. John Eric Thompson, "The Moon Goddess in Middle America," 129 (page reference is to reprint edition). Alfonso Caso, *The Aztecs*, trans. Lowell Dunham (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1970), 54. Brundage, *The Fifth Sun*, 162.
25. Duran, *Book of The Gods And Rites And The Ancient Calendar*, 229-237.
26. Sahagun, *Florentine Codex: General History of the Things of New Spain*, 15-16.
27. Jill and Peter Furst, *Pre-Columbian Art of Mexico*, 50 & 116.
28. Frederick A. Peterson, *Ancient Mexico*, (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1959). 136. Thompson, "The Moon Goddess in Middle America," 130.
29. Espenshade, *Goode's World Atlas*, 8-9. The Gulf Coast is classified as tropical rain forest-constantly moist with rainfall all through the year.
30. Brundage, *The Fifth Sun*, 232 footnote 38.
31. Peterson, *Ancient Mexico*, 128. Krickeberg, *Pre-Columbian American Religions*, 46.
32. Brundage, *The Fifth Sun*, 242 footnote 15.
33. Peterson, *Ancient Mexico*, 147.
34. Krickeberg, *Pre-Columbian American Religions*, 51.
35. Duran, *Book of The Gods And Rites And The Ancient Calendar*, 227.
36. Sahagun, *Florentine Codex: General History of the Things of New Spain*, 23 footnote 68.
37. Allison Bailey Kennedy, "Ecce Bufo: The Toad in Nature and in Olmec Iconography," *Current Anthropology*,

- Vol. 23, No.3 (June 1982): 281.
38. Ibid., 181.
 39. Coe, *Mexico*, 97.
 40. Miller, *The Art of Mesoamerica*, 72.
 41. Ibid., 92.
 42. Duran, *Book of The Gods And Rites And The Ancient Calendar*, 264-267.
 43. Jacques Soustelle, *The Olmecs The Oldest Civilization in Mexico*, trans. Helen R. Lane (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1984). 185-186.
 44. Ibid., 186.
 45. Coe, *Mexico*, 64.
 46. Soustelle, *The Olmecs The Oldest Civilization in Mexico*, 52-53.
 47. Ibid., 89.
 48. Kennedy, "Ecce Bufo: The Toad in Nature and in Olmec Iconography, 274 footnote 2 & 279.
 49. Ibid., 278.
 50. Duran, *Book of The Gods And Rites And The Ancient Calendar*, 154.
 51. John B. Carlson, "America's Ancient Skywatchers" *National Geographic*, Vol. 177, No. 3, (March 1990): 93.
 52. Miller, *The Art of Mesoamerica*, 45.
 53. Brundage, *The Fifth Sun*, 242 footnote 11.
 54. Ibid., 53-56.
 55. Ibid., 242 footnote 11.
 56. Miller, *The Gods and Symbols of Ancient Mexico and the Maya*, 106.

57. Ibid., 60.
58. Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, 23 footnote 71.
59. Ibid., 23 footnote 71.
60. Ibid., 23 footnote 71.
61. Brundage, *The Fifth Sun*, 173-174.
62. Thelma D. Sullivan, "Pregnancy, Childhood and Deification of the Women Who Died in Childbirth," *Estudios De Cultura Nahuatl* 6 (1968): 63-96.
63. Brundage, *The Fifth Sun*, 174.
64. Nicholson, *Art of Aztec - Treasurers of Tenochtitlan*, 67.
65. Brundage, *The Fifth Sun*, 174.
66. Nicholson, *Art of Aztec - Treasurers of Tenochtitlan*, 67-68.

CHAPTER 6

THE WHORE-VIRGIN COMPLEX

Those who attempt to untangle the myths of Aztec Goddesses encounter a problem of polarized and conflicting themes. The "historical" accounts of the three most influential Spanish priest chroniclers, while containing similar information, are often quite diverse. One reason is the fifty years separating Sahagun's account from Duran's and the thirty years separating Duran's from Torquemada's. Consequently Torquemada wrote his version eighty years after Sahagun. In eighty years, a changing political and religious climate can color an author's perception. Also it is fair to assume the Aztec nobles who were Sahagun's informants were no longer alive. Added to this is the unusual fact that Duran's and Sahagun's version lay unpublished, for 300 years, in their respective monasteries. However, because Torquemada's work was ordered written by the Crown/Church, it was published shortly after it was written. His work became the "quasi" official version.

As scholars we must not be seduced by the word "history," accepting these works without questioning their purity. The agendas' of the chroniclers were often, and

perhaps always, at odds with those of their informants. Both chroniclers and informants lived under the real terror of the Inquisition. As was stated in the Introduction and is restated in the Conclusion, each party participating in this cultural encounter had their own hopes, fears, loyalties, and ethnic cultural bias. Often the first casualty was accuracy.

Legitimate questions must be asked. Was Torquemada given guidelines, was his first draft accepted or was he ordered to rewrite it to conform to a certain prerequisite? Both Duran's and Sahagun's works languished in their respective monasteries' dusty archives for 300 years before publication. An examination of Sahagun's Spanish manuscript seems to dispel any evidence of editing before publication.

[However] the production of the smooth Spanish translation [of the Florentine Codex] is a very different matter: it was a response to a crisis...It seems clear the crown, nervous over the Indian rebellion in Peru, became alarmed at an enterprise that encouraged the autonomy of Aztec tradition. A Spanish version of the work [originally written in Nahuatl] was suddenly necessary in order to defend not only Sahagun but the whole thrust of the Franciscan missionary effort from the Inquisition. The Spanish version was produced in relative haste in 1575-1577 and was sent to Spain.¹

How much were these men influenced by the political, religious, and cultural climate of their era? There is no way to find answers to these questions; nevertheless, the questions are legitimate and must be asked and will be asked

in this chapter.

The natural sexuality of Aztec goddesses is often belittled and terms synonymous with evil and sin are hung around their necks like a dead albatross. A case in point is Tlazolteotl, a Gulf Coast deity associated with fertility and the moon, who became a Goddess of Lust, adultery, and sexual passion in the Spanish chronicles. The following explanation of Tlazolteotl's role seems odd.

Because of her patronage of adultery and sexual passion, Tlazolteotl became a mighty force in the personal lives of some members of Aztec society. *She had the power not only to stir up passion but also to pardon sexual transgressions; [my italics]* for this latter purpose her cult provided the services of a special priest, who heard confessions and cleansed the person involved of the impurity caused by whatever sexual offense had been committed.²

To accept the above, one has to accept the concept of ontological evil among the Aztec. Even in the Christian religion where ontological evil is accepted, the deity who forgives evil transgressions is not usually responsible for enticing the said evil transgressions. This role usually falls to the altar ego of the deity, in the case of Christianity, the Devil.

Coatlicue, herself was the victim of suspicion. If one believes the chronicler's point of view, Coatlicue's children, true to the chronicler's concept of Aztec morality, are outraged at the sin and wantonness they

suspect resulted in her pregnancy. Yet her bastard son, Huitzilopochtli, prevails over his moral brothers and sister and becomes a powerful Aztec god, proving that despite all the chronicler's talk of chastity--sin does pay.

The Aztec concept of sin, if such a concept existed, is certainly elusive. Although he may have been stating the ideal and not reality, Sahagun³ imbued the Aztec with a morality which seems odd considering the sexual appetite of their deities. This description seems to consciously, or unconsciously, conceal a darker side of their culture. Perhaps this is a result of the Aztec's exposure to the ideas of "others" whose religious manifestations came from an environment totally unlike the arid plains. The rituals of a settled agricultural community are concerned with the reproduction of the food system as opposed to those of nomadic gatherer/hunter who must constantly seek out their food. Possibly the Aztec's transition from a nomadic group to that of an agricultural community came too quickly for these ideas to have merged into a cosmology that was not in conflict.

Nomadic gatherer/hunter groups, who must limit their ritual practices, do not have the luxury of indulging in complex rituals as do settled agricultural communities. The settled communities build temples, base their rituals on

the cyclic year, and make use of religious professionals, either female and/or male, to mediate between them and their deities. While the male mediators are often called priests, the female half of these professional mediators have been called "temple prostitutes" by archaeologists and historians who come from a patrilineal culture. Words like prostitute, Goddess of lust, adultery, and sexual passion, conjured up word images that were anathema to the priest chroniclers. However, we must ask the pointed question, did the Nahuatl words from which these words were translated carry the same semantic load?

A case in point is the word "prostitute" which actually means "to set before." In Latin, *pro*, "before" and *statuere*, "set." The word is used to define a woman who gives sexual intercourse for gain. This is exactly the meaning the male chroniclers wished to confer in their accounts; however, is this what the Aztec were implying?

What chroniclers and historians call "prostitute" the Aztec called *ahuilnenqui*, she who goes about giving pleasure and fragrance. Another definition is less complimentary. One source calls them *motzennamacani*, she who sells her lower half.⁴ But, perhaps it was the chronicler, not the informant, who placed a moral value on the definition.

Women were welcomed at the schools for warriors on

certain occasions to give pleasure and fragrance.

...warriors, known as *tequihuaque*...since they were fearless men and highly esteemed...were permitted to keep mistresses [a western concept], play with women [?] and woo publicly...holding her hand while they danced, giving her color for her lips and cheeks, feathers for her head, and jewels for her neck.⁵

In honor of Xochiquetzal, the Tlalhuicas, a Aztec tribe in Cuernavaca, introduced young girls and boys to drink intoxicants and have sex in an accepted ceremonial ritual.⁶ This was undoubtedly a rite of transition; however, it caused a shocked European commentator to state,

in that feast the boys danced with the girls, and they gave each other drinks until they were intoxicated and they committed on one another their wickedness and fornications.⁷

Duran chose not to mention *ahuilnenqui* and when Sahagun⁸ commented on these women, his denunciation has the ring of a shocked 16th century priest (or perhaps in fairness to Sahagun, a shocked 20th century priest as well). Why was it so important for Sahagun to denounce, so vehemently, the "prostitute" and extol the "moral" woman? Perhaps it was because the Aztec themselves did not denounce and extol these women.

Although this strange whore/virgin complex is present in most Aztec goddesses, it seems to be epitomized in the goddess Xochiquetzal. Duran⁹ first describes her as a "harlot...who lived a whorish life" and sullied the

reputation of the chaste and pure Topiltzin/Quetzalcoatl. Duran, who believed Topiltzin was a Christian apostle, gives a description of Topiltzin that rivals that of an ideal cloistered monk.¹⁰ Nevertheless, this "harlot... who lived a whorish life" is also listed as the Goddess of Love, flowers, fertility, pregnancy, manual and domestic skills, of prostitutes, wives, weavers, painters, and sculptors;¹¹ as well as an patron of embroiders and silversmiths.¹² She is also listed as Goddess of "Springtime," Bride of the Sky, mother of corn, and paradoxically, the Virgin.¹³

Xochiquetzal has many "husbands" appended to her. She is the spouse of Piltzinteuclli (an obscure sun god), the maize god (?), Tlaloc, the rain god, or the Lord of Sustenance (a Yahweh-like god).¹⁴ In another source she is the spouse of Macuilxochitl "Five Flowers" or Xochipilli "Flower Prince" and the mother of the maize god(?) or the mother of Quetzalcoatl and Xolotl.¹⁵ True to the patrilineal frame of mind, Xochiquetzal's importance is only justified by associating her with a male deity, either as a mother or a wife.

An Aztec myth, to which Brundage¹⁶ makes a puzzling comparison to the Hellenic Judgement of Paris, has Xochiquetzal and two other goddesses, Citlalinicue and Chalchiuhtlicue attempting to seduce a young man called

Yappan. This man, eager to preserve his chastity, hid under a rock (the answer to the baffling question of why the man went to such lengths to preserve his chastity is never given). The other goddesses failed but Xochiquetzal succeeds and the young man literally loses his head; it was lopped off by an angry god. As in many mythological "just so" stories, the young man is turned into a scorpion (which do not have obvious heads).

Xochiquetzal is also compared to the Hellenic myth of Persephone.¹⁷ In this myth, she is carried off by Xolotl or Tezcatlipoca and taken into the underworld, not to be confused with the Christian Hell, although, the chroniclers may have implied that in this Post-Conquest source. While there she eats the fruit of the underworld which forces her to remain in the underworld for certain lengths of time. Brundage sees no European contamination in this myth believing it refers to the storing of seed corn.¹⁸

In connection with the eating of fruit, another myth compares Xochiquetzal with Eve in Genesis I. Xochiquetzal is called the first woman to lose paradise making her the first woman to "sin" (a Judeo-Christian concept).¹⁹ After she ate the fruit of the tree it shuddered, broke in two and bled. This breaking of a tree goes back to the Mecitli myth and the instructions of that tree deity to the Mexica. Another version has Xochiquetzal living in the never-never

land of Tamoanchan.²⁰ The Yahweh-like Lord of Sustenance ordered those who lived there not to pluck the flowers or destroy the boughs of a certain tree growing in Tamoanchan. In defiance, the boughs were broken and the flowers plucked by those described vaguely as gods. Somehow this was Xochiquetzal's fault and all fell from paradise. Thompson tells us that,

There seems little doubt that [to the Spanish] 'plucking the rose' [rosa was used by the Spanish to describe all tropical flowers, especially the plumeria] is symbolical, like our 'eating the forbidden fruit,' and refers to sexual intercourse.²¹

Who then is Xochiquetzal? One can see her identity and duties caused myriad problems, not only for the Spanish chroniclers and the Aztec informants, but for modern historians as well. Sahagun does not include Xochiquetzal in his list of major Aztec goddesses but Duran²² does. He sets aside Chapter XVI for her rituals and touches briefly on the so-called "confession" usually associated with Tlazolteotl. Since Tlazolteotl is considered of Huastec origin she may have been worshipped there as the Earth Goddess who gave birth to the moon. Furst²³ believes that Tlazolteotl gave birth to Xochiquetzal. However, it is not clear if he believes that Xochiquetzal was recognized as the daughter of Tlazolteotl on the Gulf Coast or if Xochiquetzal was a goddess of the central plateau and, mimicking

Huitzilopochtli, became the daughter of Tlazolteotl by a syncretic birth.

There is an interesting picture in the Codex Laud showing Tlazolteotl with cotton spindles in her hair, weapons (?) in her hand, and her snake behind her, interacting with what appears to be water, perhaps an ocean wave (Fig. 33, page 148). In the water is Ehecatl, the god of wind²⁴ and Tlazolteotl's snake carries the image of Ehecatl in its mouth. Below the water line is the Moon Goddess, in a bowl, perhaps signifying the moon rising from the ocean. This would not be an unusual scene on the Gulf Coast. The goddess wears a lunar nose ornament but she is not dressed or otherwise decorated which may suggest she is the new moon. The waxing moon is often considered a bowl and the moon sign for both the Aztec and the Maya is bowl shaped (Fig. 34, page 149).

Thompson²⁵ believes Xochiquetzal is a deity of the central plateau and Coe²⁶ proposes to see representations of her in Tula. While her identification as a moon goddess is tentative, her very name tells us she is a Xochi-quetzal, a flower-feather.²⁷ Duran²⁸ tells us that on her feast "no other finery--gold, silver, [precious] stone, feathers--was worn on this day--only flowers." He gives us an interesting description of the Aztec love of flowers.

[They are filled with] happiness and delight...

on smelling any kind of flower, whether it have an agreeable or a *displeasing* [my italics] scent, as long as it is a flower. They become the happiest people in the world smelling them, for these natives in general are most sensuous and pleasure-loving. They find gladness and joy in spending the entire day smelling a little flower or a bouquet made of different kinds of flowers...they relieve the tediousness of journeys with flowers. To sum up, they find the smelling of flowers so comforting that they even stave off and manage to survive hunger by smelling them.²⁹

The above description hints that these flowers may have had hallucinogenic properties. No one has yet proposed that Xochiquetzal's "precious" flowers may have included the hallucinogens, but perhaps it is time to explore the possibilities. In Chapter 4, a Chichimec goddess called Quilaztli is introduced as the malevolent sister of Mixcoatl. In addition to being a shaman, she is an ancient Chichimec goddess who presides over all edible things that grew on the plains.³⁰

Narcotic seeds were known and were articles of traffic among the Chichimeca in the northern steppe going back to early levels of shamanic practices. Hallucinogens had early been adjuncts of shamanism, and it was from these lowly religious levels that the four vegetable gods [of hallucinogens] were ultimately produced.³¹

Perhaps the duties of overseeing these hallucinogens was absorbed by Xochiquetzal when Quilaztli faded into the Chichimec past. Hallucinogens were not limited to the plains. In the murals of Teotihuacan, a goddess is shown with the twining tendrils of what may be morning-glory

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plants sprouting from her body and dripping seeds.³² Highly hallucinogenic, morning glory seeds, called *Ololiuhqui*, were seen by the Aztec as being part of the body of the Goddess Green Snake. Perhaps this Teotihuacan goddess was an early manifestation of Green Snake. The most common hallucinogen was *yetl*, tobacco, and it was the very body of *Cihuacoatl* "Snake Woman." The others were *teonanacatl*, the narcotic mushroom, the "flesh of the gods" and *peyotl*, peyote, a small black being.³³ These are but four hallucinogens from a vast list available to the shamans of Mesoamerica. At specific rituals, these deities would be crushed and drunk in water or *octli*. The Aztec believed that by drinking them a person would see visions of their own destiny.

The hallucinatory gods, different than the gods of drink, entered into each individual person and their inner-sight was multiplied many times over. The hallucinogens allowed them to attain a sharper, more colorful, and precise, personal vision of a part of their life that was completely unknown. Perhaps the popular myths of *Xochiquetzal* eating the fruit of paradise and falling from its heights are symbolic of a hallucinatory induced high and its ultimate low.

The Moon Goddess in the Gulf Coast and Yucatan was a female with many lovers³⁴ which some attribute to the speedy and erratic movement of the moon across the sky. If this

Moon Goddess was syncretically appended to Xochiquetzal, this belief may account for the myths of her many husbands." Brundage (above) sees the storage of seed corn as explaining the descent of Xochiquetzal into the underworld in the Persephone-like myths. However, a more plausible explanation of her descent is not the action of some sex-crazed god, but the three day disappearance of the moon after it falls into the morning sun in the east until it's first visibility after sunset in the west.³⁵

One remaining myth concerning Xochiquetzal is interesting because it highlights a theme that is not often discussed in Mesoamerican myths. This world wide theme is that of the detachable or flying vulva (or vagina, depending on the writer's vocabulary). This Aztec myth has a counterpart in the Yucatan among the Maya,³⁶ but it is also well known in Eastern Europe³⁷ and Hawaii.³⁸ In the Aztec version³⁹ a god (in this case Quetzalcoatl) masturbates on a rock from which a bat emerges. Some other deities were preparing to invent flowers to spring out of the surface of the earth. They summoned the bat and ordered it to bring back a piece of Xochiquetzal's vulva. While she was sleeping the bat did just that and presented the vulva to the deities. After washing it, beautiful flowers began to grow but they had no odor. The bat then took her vulva to

the underworld and washed it there and wondrously fragrant flowers began to grow (Perhaps the description of *ahuilnenqui* as giving fragrance, along with pleasure, comes from this myth). One wonders what interesting themes may have been lost as the Spanish priests retold the myth of *Xochiquetzal*'s detachable vulva.

It seems the need for a Maize Goddess developed late in Aztec cosmology. This seems somewhat strange because one would expect her to be a primary deity in a culture where maize is said to be the "staff of life." At the time of the Conquest, maize is presented as the mainstream food, however, little is said of amaranth, a family of plants, rich in both protein and starch. There is a possibility that amaranth was more important than maize to the Aztec. Perhaps amaranth was a staple and maize a luxury. A variety of rituals recorded by the Spanish chroniclers highlighted the importance of eating amaranth dough idols in Aztec ritual. Noting its similarity to Catholic communion (the eating of the Body and Blood of Christ), perhaps the Church successfully destroyed the cultivation of amaranth for this reason,⁴⁰ a fate maize did not suffer.

On Sahagun's list of major goddesses. *Chicomecoatl*, "Seven Snake" is simply called "the representative of maize and men's sustenance of whatever sort; what is drunk, what is eaten."⁴¹ Under the rituals of *Chicomecoatl*,⁴² Duran

alludes to the arrow sacrifice, which fertilizes the earth. Clearly she is an indigenous agricultural goddess invoked by the farmers of the high plateau. The nomadic Chichimec gatherer/hunters had no need for an agricultural goddess.

Chicomecoatl, the Goddess of breads and cornfields,⁴³ of harvested grains, especially maize, as well as fruits and vegetables, was the first deity to cook.⁴⁴ She is one of a group of four. A Goddess called Xilonen, Fresh Maize Ear Girl, is associated with her.

She was conceived as a maiden dancing joyously with outspread arms and a double ear of maize in each hand. She is one of the few completely joyous and innocent figures in Aztec [cosmology].⁴⁵

Two other Goddesses, Ilancueye, Old-Lady Skirt (referring to the withered husk around the dried ear of corn) and Cozcamiahuatl, Cornflower Necklace complete the set of four.⁴⁶ While Chicomecoatl could be viewed as the Agricultural Mother, Xilonen would represent the fresh new corn. The withered and dried Ilancueye is the stored corn for eating and perhaps Cozcamiahuatl is the dry seed corn. This grouping of four seems to parallel the four phases of female life: Cozcamiahuatl as the dried seed corn representing both death and rebirth, Xilonen is the maiden, Chicomecoatl is the mother, and Ilancueye is the crone. In most agricultural societies, the phases of the moon, the

growth cycle of the food grain, and the phases of female development are interchangeable.

To summarize, the syncretic absorption of Tlazolteotl and Xochiquetzal by the "conservative" nomadic Aztec as they entered the Valley of Mexico caused a culture shock. Most gatherer/hunting groups were egalitarian and often the female was also a shaman due to her knowledge of food plants and hallucinogens. Sexuality was controlled by the female because she could carry only one child and a burden basket. Any other children must be able to care for themselves. As with other nomadic groups, the first concern of the Aztec's ancestors was survival. When the hunting was poor they may have practiced cannibalism. Perhaps they rationalized this act by inventing deities that demanded human captives and with whom they could share the ritual meal.⁴⁷ While female sexuality was controlled by the logistics of the burden basket, the usual demand for male warriors was offset by the demand for female shaman and food gatherers. No doubt the nomads sacrificed children to their deities when an abundance of one sex tipped this delicate balance. Hallucinogens were important to sustain them on long treks when food and captives were in short supply or to allow their deities to speak to them through their shaman. The culture shock erupted when the Aztec encountered

agrarian groups who lived in a less harsh environment and who were concerned with the fertility of the grain they grew. These settled groups, who had time to build temples, could plan rituals concerning the coming rains, the amount of moisture, and the growing season. They enjoyed less restrictive sexuality, and used hallucinogens in a ritualistic atmosphere, tied to the agricultural cycle, the cyclic moon, and the four stages of female development.

ENDNOTES

1. Munro S. Edmonson, "Introduction," in *Sixteenth-Century Mexico The Work of Sahagun*, ed. Munro S. Edmonson (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1974), 8-9.
2. Brundage, *The Fifth Sun*, 163.
3. Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, 107-113.
4. Duran, *Book of The Gods And Rites And The Ancient Calendar*, 298 footnote 7.
5. Ibid., 298.
6. Brundage, *The Fifth Sun*, 160.
7. Thompson, "The Moon Goddess in Middle America," 136.
8. Duran, *Book of The Gods And Rites And The Ancient Calendar*, 298-299 footnote 7.
9. Ibid., 68.
10. Ibid., 58. Duran tells us Topiltzin, "spent all his time praying in his cell; where he lived doing penance. He built altars and oratories in all wards of the city, and he set up images on the walls and altars. He knelt down before these images, worshipped them, and kissed the earth, at times with his mouth, at times with his hands. His entire life was occupied in constant prayer. This priest always slept upon the floor where stood the altars he built. There his disciples came, and there he taught them to pray and preach." See Duran 247 and 59 footnote 4 for his belief that Topiltzin was a Christian Apostle.
11. Peterson, *Ancient Mexico*, 136.
12. Duran, *Book of The Gods And Rites And The Ancient Calendar*, 239.
13. Brundage, *The Fifth Sun*, 160.

14. Ibid., 160.
15. Peterson, *Ancient Mexico*, 136.
16. Brundage, *The Fifth Sun*, 162.
17. Ibid., 161-162.
18. Ibid., 162.
135. 19. Thompson, "The Moon Goddess in Middle America,"
20. Brundage, *The Fifth Sun*, 161.
135. 21. Thompson, "The Moon Goddess in Middle America,"
22. Duran, *Book of The Gods And Rites And The Ancient Calendar*, 238-247.
23. Furst, *Pre-Columbian Art of Mexico*, 50 & 116.
24. Tedlock, *Popol Vuh*, 343. A Maya and Caribbean God of Storms is called Hurakan, the origin of our word for hurricane. Due to her Gulf Coast origin, Tlazolteotl, viewed as the Earth Goddess there, may be interacting with a wind storm manifested by the Aztec God of Wind - Ehecatl.
130. 25. Thompson, "The Moon Goddess in Middle America,"
26. Coe, *Mexico*, 13
27. In Nahuatl, Xochi means "flower." Quetzal means "feather" or "plume of the Quetzal bird." Often, because these green tail feathers were so prized, quetzal, by extension, could mean "precious."
28. Duran, *Book of The Gods And Rites And The Ancient Calendar*, 239.
29. Ibid., 238.
30. Brundage, *The Fifth Sun*, 170.
31. Ibid., 185.

32. Ibid., 185.
33. Ibid., 184.
34. Schele and Miller, *Blood of Kings*, 153. Thompson, "The Moon Goddess in Middle America," 135.
35. Modern astronomy has shown us that the moon disappears for only one day and that the last crescent before disappearance and the appearance of the first crescent can be seen in some part of the world or with special astronomical aids. However, the naked-eye observation of pre-industrial societies does not perceive this subtle difference. Nor, do they perceive the ever-so-slightly edge of the moon that is shaved off one day before full moon or one day after full moon. For all intents and purposes, these societies see the moon as full for three days and disappearing for three days.
36. Brundage, *The Fifth Sun*, 242 footnote 19.
37. Gimbutas, *The Language of the Goddess*, 251.
38. Martha Beckwith, *Hawaiian Mythology*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1970), 186-187.
39. Brundage, *The Fifth Sun*, 160-161.
40. Miller and Taube, *The Gods and Symbols of Ancient Mexico and the Maya*, 40.
41. Sahagun, *Florentine Codex*, 13.
42. Duran, *Book of The Gods And Rites And The Ancient Calendar*, 227.
43. Brundage, *The Fifth Sun*, 157.
44. Ibid., 242 footnote 9.
45. Ibid., 157.
46. Ibid., 242 footnote 7.
47. Miller and Taube, *The Gods and Symbols of Ancient Mexico and the Maya*, 54-55.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

Most societies leave only an oral record of their religion and culture which is usually distorted when their religion and culture is interpreted by those alien to that society.

Actually those who leave written records scarcely fare better; their words are often misread or misunderstood by later generations. The redeeming factor here, however, is that the words are written and can be redefined or reinterpreted.

Always at the forefront of any cultural interpretation is the etic baggage carried by those who chronicle new cultures. However, societies with oral accounts are more vulnerable and usually their traditions are forever etched in time by the assumptions of the person making first contact. This first contact was rarely a meeting of equals and was usually the result of a conquest. In most instances, the conqueror was a white European male and the vanquished an indigenous non-white male. Females, regarded as necessary domestic substitutes for the conqueror's country women, were rarely utilized by the

chroniclers for cultural information. Adding to this disadvantage was the mindset of most conquerors who subjugated and made contact with non-white societies during the Age of Discovery. The Age of Discovery was actually the Age of Conquest which began in 1492 and continued as an accepted practice until World War II .

In this time span, most chroniclers, anthropologists, ethnographers, and historians were: 1) Christian, often priests, who believed in a white, male, Creator God; 2) male, believing a woman occupied a secondary role in society; and 3) ethnocentric, believing that white European culture was the ideal and the only culture which could save non-white indigenous societies from their barbarous selves.

The Moors were driven from Spain in 1492. This final Catholic victory, and the unification of Spain, was looked upon as a sign from God. The Jews, who enjoyed autonomy under the Moors, were forced to leave Spain or convert to Catholicism. The Inquisition was given more power by the Spanish Crown to make sure the Jewish converts did not lapse back into Judaism. This was the Spanish mindset when, a scarce thirty years after the Moorish expulsion, the Aztec were conquered.

Flushed with victory against the Moors and armed with a mandate from their God to spread Christianity and

Spanish culture, the conquistadors sailed toward Mexico. However lofty these intentions, the men were encouraged by their King to acquire treasure and territory for the Crown. This attracted volunteers whose agenda was not religion and culture, but gold and power.

One wishes the first chroniclers of Aztec religion were avowed atheists who had lived in a cultural vacuum all their life--but this was not to be. However, if the first chronicler was to be a Catholic priest, it is fortunate that priest was the learned and observant Bernardino de Sahagun.¹ When he arrived in Mexico eight years after the conquest, he somehow realized this was a unique opportunity to record an unknown culture. Sahagun used a variety of informants " who for the most part were selected from the native elite...the data they provided reflect an upper-class view point."²

[He sought] out older people for traditional lore, females for herbal and medical information, *calpixqui* and diviners for esoteric data. It was noteworthy that his access to the priestly class was limited and it was principally the *pochteca* (merchant) class that his contacts were extensive and sustained.³

Although his account is often sprinkled with condemnations, he was very precise in exactly what he was condemning. One wonders whether the negativism was not to keep the Inquisition at bay. If Sahagun had an agenda it was to shape the traditions of the Franciscan Order into a

utopian Church in the New World with specific policies and practices.⁴ As it were, his works were seized and sent back to Spain. Considered too radical for its time, Sahagun's manuscript was not published until 300 years later.

Duran⁵ and Torquemada⁶ had their own agenda and their own cultural and religious bias. Duran was an avowed diffusionist and believed that somehow Judeo-Christian religion was introduced to the Aztec by a lost tribe of Israel or a Christian apostle. Both tried to find a powerful, invisible, Yahweh-like, Aztec Creator that arose above the many deities and wholesale human sacrifices. They believed this omnipotent good god was somehow shackled by an evil Satan. This belief resulted in many chroniclers and historians appending the doctrine of ontological evil to all Mesoamerican religions. However, the belief in ontological evil is very rare in the New World.

Writing some forty years after Sahagun, Duran meticulously chronicled the Aztec deities and their prescribed rituals. His rationale was that if churchmen knew the pagan rituals, they could exorcise those that had infiltrated Christian practice. Again he is very explicit in his descriptions raising suspicion that he, too, may have walked the Inquisition tightrope. His works also disappeared until they surfaced and were published in 1867.

About eighty eight years after the Conquest,

Torquemada was ordered by the Crown to write an account of the indigenous peoples. Finished in 1613, it became the quasi-official version and was published many years before Sahagun's works. Torquemada's endeavors set the stage and cast the die for future interpretations of Aztec religion and culture.

Taking their cue from these early chroniclers, later historians interpreted and reinterpreted this information. They sometimes elevated the perceived philosophical ideals of the Aztec to untenable heights. All historians up to the present time (myself included) are influenced by their own agenda and cultural bias. In earlier days those who came down on the side of the non-white oppressed Aztec tended to imbue them with an idealized philosophical and spiritual thought. Those who sided with the conquerors emphasized the brutal and barbaric nature of Aztec religion as the rationale to destroy a culture. The majority, however, vacillated between these extremes.

In the rush to define, either the negative or positive, religious and philosophical thought of the Aztec, the Goddess was trampled underfoot. Again, despite the sex of the informants and their status as "conquered," Sahagun's account is the best we have. Comparing his works with Duran's, the discrepancies between Goddesses' names, their

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purpose, and their ritual, in accounts separated by forty to fifty years, points to the fact that their informants often differed in their narratives. This is perhaps because Duran's informants were second generation and from a different class structure.

The truthfulness of informants must always be questioned in these early sources, because they were submissive to the Christian God and King. They had their own agenda while divulging their holy secrets to the Spanish priests. Were the informants hoping to gain favor, telling the priests what they thought the priests wanted to hear? Were they fearful of the Inquisition, carefully choosing their words in order not to have the words twisted against them with an accusation of participating in a pagan ritual? Did they lie out of pride for the ancient religion and/or to protect those practicing the old religion underground? One must always bear in mind that in addition to playing a dominant and active role in this exchange, the chronicler was the final editor and presented what he thought was worth presenting.

Unfortunately, these early chroniclers and historians have etched an account, whether it be true, untrue, exaggerated, prejudiced, or influenced by the writer's culture that will stand forever as the "true history" of the Aztec. The term is mutually exclusive as it

is neither true nor history. Nevertheless, this account exists and finds its way into every work attempting to study the Aztec, from the extensive historical study to the obligatory "historical" introduction in every book of Aztec art.

Acquiring information about the Goddess under these conditions was next to impossible. Often she is simply ignored or dismissed as inconsequential. For example, exclusive of the early chroniclers, almost all works carry separate chapters for what historians consider the four or five most important male deities: Huitzilopochtli, Tlaloc, Tezcatlipoca, Quetzalcoatl, and Xipe. However, goddesses are usually combined under one chapter.⁷ Indexes of serious historical accounts, while listing the word god, simply ignore the word goddess or some limit their list to Coatlicue and Coyolxauhqui and then only in relation to Huitzilopochtli. In works where goddesses are discussed and where their names are listed in the index, the goddesses are never approached directly. They are often appended to a god as a "wife" or presented as an extension of a god, i.e., Huitzilopochtli's mother, or Tlaloc's sister. Glossary's aiding in the pronunciation of Nahuatl rarely include a list of the goddesses' names and if any are included, they are very limited.

However, there is information if one is willing to search for it. This involves reading and comparing numerous accounts that are confused, garbled, and sometimes pretentious. One must read between the lines, as well as read copious footnotes. It is impossible to do a comprehensive study of Aztec deities without understanding the symbol system and closely examining the iconography of the deities. All indigenous peoples realized that communication between themselves and their deities was done with symbols, as well as with song and dance. Using sexual genitalia as a criteria for identification is not always possible. However, all deities carry an identifiable regimen of icons; for example the icons of The Earth Goddess are very distinct.

Another important avenue is an investigation of the environment--which always defines cultural norms and influences religion.

Environment provides materials for religious actions and religious conceptions. It is a well-known fact that primitive religions to a great extent reflect the prevailing natural conditions.⁵

If the original religious concept was born in an environment with too much rain, examining how it changed when imported to one where rain is limited can help to clarify concepts. Realizing the dramatic changes a nomadic religious concept, born on the arid plains, endured when it

was forced to change to that of a fertile, settled agricultural community is very illuminating.

The historical devaluation of female deities and the suppression of their cultural contribution robs any culture of its depth and richness. Forcing Aztec Goddesses into the mold of a patriarchal Christian European cosmology distorts their role in Aztec culture and by extension all cultures in Mesoamerican. Confusing and conflicting statements regarding ritual and its interpretation usually result. If the Aztec female's importance is accepted in the context of European culture, that of a dutiful wife and mother, then the Goddess, which has no role model in European culture, will become a whore, a demon, or a monstrous being.

Ignoring the Goddess creates a large and glaring vacuum in the study of Aztec cosmology by distorting it and weighting it on the side of male deities. It is into this abyss this work is plunged in the hope that it will balance the biased accounts of a super male warrior society answering only to Huitzilopochtli and his demands for human hearts and blood.

Now it is time to recognize Aztec Goddesses in their own right and give these powerful, sometimes beautiful, sometimes fearsome and sometimes horrifying female deities their due. Now it is time to realize that it was Cihuacoatl who demanded this bloody ambrosia.

ENDNOTES

1. Alfonso Caso, *The Aztecs, People of the Sun*. (Norman OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1958), 58-59 footnote 1. "Bernardino de Sahagun...(1499?-1590) was a Franciscan friar born in Sahagun, Spain. He came to Mexico in 1529, only eight years after the conquest of Mexico City. He studied the Indian languages and collected the myths, legends, and traditions of the Indians from his Indian pupils and elders of the tribe. He became the New World's first anthropologist, linguist, and educator. His monumental work was not published until 1829 in Mexico."
2. Edward E. Calnek, "The Sahagun Texts as a Source of Sociological Information," in *Sixteenth-Century Mexico The Work of Sahagun*, ed, Munro S. Edmonson (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1974), 189.
3. Edmonson, "Introduction." 5.
4. Ibid., 8.
5. Caso, *The Aztecs, People of the Sun*, 72 footnote 1. "Diego Duran (1537-88), a Dominican friar, born in Seville, Spain, lived in Texcoco [Mexico] from childhood. He finished his *Historia de las Indias de la Nueva Espana e Islas de Tierra Firme* in 1581. It was published in Mexico in 1867 and 1880."
6. Ibid., 88 footnote 1. "Juan de Torquemada (?-1625), a Franciscan friar of Spanish origin, who came to Mexico as a child. He took the habit of St. Francis and later served as a provincial of his order. In 1609, he was ordered by the Commissioner General of the Indies to write his *Monarquia Indiana*. The work was finished in 1613. In three parts, it deals with the antiquities of New Spain, Cortes' expedition, religion and customs of the Indians, and the evangelization of the natives."
7. A happy exception is Miller and Taube's *The Gods and Symbols of Ancient Mexico and the Maya*.
8. Ake Hultkrantz, "An Ecological Approach to Religion." *Ethos* 31 (1966): 143.

ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1. The Goddess Itzpapalotl wears a skirt, decorated with sacrificial knives. She has wings and a de-fleshed face, as well as talons in place of hands and feet. (Drawing by the author from the Codex Borbonicus.)

Figure 2. A cactus with an eagle perched on it is growing from the body of the taloned Earth Goddess Tlaltecuctli. She has a skull face and wears the sacrificial obsidian knife as a headdress. The mandible of the obsidian knife acts as her chin strap. Blood seems to be flowing from the right claw of the eagle into the genital area of Tlaltecuctli and water seems to be flowing from behind the cactus. (Drawing by the author from the Codex Borgia.)

Figure 3. Often identified as a *tzitzimitl* or star demon, this deity seems to fit the description of *Cihuacoatl*, "The lower part of her face is shown as a crude bare jawbone, and her grisly mouth is stretched wide to indicate her hunger for victims."

(Drawing by author from the Codex Magliabechiano.)

Figure 4. The Earth Goddess Tlalteuctli is shown lying on the spiny body of Cipactli. Two gods, Quetzalcoatl and Xolotl, can clearly be seen piercing their penis with a black bloodletting tool. Their blood flows into Tlalteuctli's body fertilizing it. A corn stalk with a quetzal bird perched at its top grows from her body. A multi-layered sun symbol, which I have eliminated for clarity, was in the circle made by the dotted line. (Drawing by the author from the Codex Borgia.)

Figure 5. A carved shell from Postclassic Veracruz graphically illustrates the theme of Figure 4. A bowl of ground bone, or corn, is fertilized by the blood of a male deity as he draws a rope through his penis. The female deity is identified as Tlazolteotl who is considered an Earth Goddess on the Gulf Coast. Both are setting on entwined serpents. (Drawing by the author.)

Figure 6. An image of the Earth Goddess Tlaltecuctli on the bottom of a cuauhxicalli, a stone container for hearts. Typical of the Tlaltecuctli images, she has snapping jaws at her joints, a skull backrack with a serpent belt, bells or shells on her legs, a skirt with skulls and crossbones, and hair of malinalli grass. This carving of Tlaltecuctli has a tecpatl in her mouth and serpents centipedes, scorpions, and spiders in her hair. (Drawing by the author after Sanchez.)

Figure 7. Tlaltecuctli shown on the bottom of a small, carved stone box, roughly 6"x13"x8". While Tlaltecuctli wears her standard icons, seen in Figure 6, the human face of that image has been replaced with a face made from two side views of a caiman and the caiman's teeth are tecpatl. (Drawing by the author.)

Figure 8. This image of Tlalhteuctli, on the bottom of a cuauhxicalli, has also substituted a caiman or serpent face for the human face seen in Figure 6. (Drawing by the author after Joyce.)

Figure 9. This image of Tlaltecuctli shows snapping jaws at her joints, skull backrack, bell (or shell) leg decorations, malinalli hair, a skirt with skulls and crossbones, and a face made from two side views of a caiman with tecpatl as teeth. However here she is carved on the four sides of a small stone block, roughly 9"x26"x22", rather than on the bottom. (Drawing by the author.)

Figure 10. This image of Tlaltecuctli was part of a large Aztec monument which was trimmed for use in colonial times. It is similar to the image in Figure 6 which shows a defleshed human head with cheek decorations instead of a head made from two side views of caiman. This image also shows the standard icons associated with Tlaltecuctli. (Drawing by the author.)

Figure 11. Coatlicue wears the icons associated with Tlaltecuctli. Her face is made up from two side views of a rattlesnake with its fangs substituting for the tecpatl. Clearly seen from a back view (not shown) are the snapping jaws at her joints, a skull backrack, and bell (or shell) leg decorations. The plaited snake skirt may be a substitution for the skull and crossbones skirt of Tlaltecuctli. (Museo Nacional de Anthropologia, Mexico)

Figure 12. In this 11 foot stone relief of Coyolxauhqui, discovered at the base of the Great Temple of Tenochtitlan, she wears all the icons of Tlaltecuctli except for the skirt of skulls and crossbones and the tecpatl in her mouth. Her ear plugs are patterned after the *yacaxihuitl*, a nose ornament worn as an insignia by lords and deities which is, perhaps, a substitute for the tecpatl. Coyolxauhqui has bell (or shell) decorations on her cheeks. Perhaps the circular decorations on Tlaltecuctli's cheeks, in Figures 6 and 10, are also shells or bells. The original has a crack through the stone which I have eliminated for clarity. (Drawing by the author after Kiphuth.)

Figure 13. The decapitated head of Coyolxauhqui wearing the yacaxihuitl nose ornament over her mouth. Her eyes are half closed in death. (Drawing by the author.)

Figure 14. The figure of Tlaltecuctli (top) is incorrectly identified as Itztli, the male god of the obsidian knife, who is supposedly giving birth to Tezcatlipoca. If one compares this figure with Nicholson's reconstruction of Tlaltecuctli giving birth to Tezcatlipoca (bottom), it seems clear both are images of the Earth Goddess. (Top drawn by the author from the Codex Borgia, bottom drawn by the author after Nicholson.)

Figure 15. In Aztec iconography, the ear of corn and the tecpatl are rendered alike. This is perhaps due to the similarity between corn meal and bone meal in the myths and the fact that corn is the food of humans and human hearts and blood are the food of the deities.
(Drawing by the author.)

Figure 16. Toad with three holes on its side, symbolizing the venom secreting pores of *B. marinus*, and with the symbol for precious on its underside. (Drawing by the author.)

Figure 17. Tlazolteotl (top) is shown with her snake, a constant companion. The Woman, Wak Tun (bottom) is materializing the uay of the lineage god, K'awil. (Top drawn by the author from the Codex Fejervary-Mayer, bottom is a drawing of Yaxchilan Lintel 15 by Ian Graham.)

Figure 18. A lineage serpent named Na Chan, who is called the uay of the Woman Chak Kimi, has just been called forth (bottom). The serpent is shown shedding its skin as it passes through the uterine area of the Woman Chak Kimi. A serpent shedding its skin is a symbol of rebirth. In the top figure, the serpent has been isolated and it is clear its skin is wrinkled, cracking, and falling off. (Bottom is a drawing of Yaxchilan Lintel 14 by Ian Graham, top is drawn by the author after Ian Graham.)

Figure 19. A heavily armed female goddess is interacting with the moon which contains a picture of a rabbit. The Mesoamericans saw an image of a rabbit in the full moon. This goddess is identified as Tlazolteotl with her snake. (Drawing by the author from the Codex Borgia.)

Figure 20. Pulque is seen pouring from the breasts of a Goddess. I have identified her as Tlaltecuctli because she has a de-fleshed face and hair from malinalli grass. She wears a serpent skirt and one can see the snapping jaws just under the jaguar claws on her hands.
(Drawing by the author after Seler.)

Figure 21. Mayahuel, the Goddess of Pulque and by extension the Maguey Goddess, from the Codex Fejervary-Mayer. The leaves and spines of the maguey plant were compared to female breasts and the many breasted Chichimec Goddess, Mecitli. (Drawing by the author after Taube.)

Figure 22. The Goddess Tlazolteotl, clad in a flayed skin, is shown in an act of parturition. (Drawing by the author from the Codex Borbonicus.)

Figure 23. A sacrificial victim spread-eagled and tied to a wooden frame or ladder. He is then shot with arrows and his blood is allowed to drip to the ground as a means of fertilizing the earth - symbolized by the circular icon. (Drawing by the author from the Codex Nuttall.)

Figure 24. The skin of *B. marinus* spread out to resemble a stylized butterfly. (Drawing by the author after Dickerson.)

Figure 25. Two masks from Teotihuacan which show a highly stylized *yacapapalotl*, or "nose butterfly". The bottom figure has three skulls on the *yacapapalotl*. (Drawing by the author.)

Figure 26. An image of Itzpapalotl wearing the icons of Tlalteuctli along with wings, or a cape simulating wings, with tecpatl is visible in the folds of the wings or cape. (Drawing by the author after Seler.)

Figure 27. A basalt sculpture of a goddess found at Teotihuacan in front of the so-called Pyramid of the Moon. This sculpture is often identified as Chalchiuhtlicue - the Goddess of Water. However, it is unknown what her name or function was in this ancient city. (Drawing by the author.)

Figure 28. Jaguars with bared fangs and long claws interact with two prone humans, perhaps as part of a shamanic transformation. Relief no. 4 from Chalcatzingo. (Drawing by the author after Gay and Pratt.)

Figure 29. A jade effigy sculpture known as the "Kunz" axe. On close inspection, its bifid fangs seem to resemble the feet of a toad. (Drawing by the author.)

Figure 30. The stone yoke (top) - a stone representation of a ballplayer's belt - is carved in the likeness of a toad. An Aztec symbol for a cave or entrance to the underworld (bottom) resembles an open mouth. (Top drawn by the author, bottom drawn by the author after Covarrubias.)

Figure 31. Two motifs, bridging 1200 years show a similar theme. The top figure is from Chalcatzingo, Morelos and the bottom is from Teotihuacan. (Top drawn by the author after Coe, bottom drawn by the author after Sejourne.)

Figure 32. One of the five Cihuateteo or Women Goddesses, also known as Warrior Women, who died in childbirth. They were not maternal but demonic, with de-fleshed faces and claws for hands and feet. (Drawing by the author.)

Figure 33. Tlazolteotl is seen interacting with an ocean wave containing the representation of Ehecatl, the God of Wind. On the horizon a naked female, which may be the new moon, sits in a bowl.

(Drawing by the author from the Codex Laud.)

Figure 34. Most Mesoamericans saw a rabbit in the moon. The Maya Moon Goddess holds her rabbit while setting in a bowl shaped moon sign (top). In the Codex Borgia, a rabbit sits in a bowl-shaped moon sign in a starry sky symbolized by the half closed eyes (bottom). The bowl is filled with water. (Drawing by author.)

GLOSSARY

In Nahuatl, the stress falls on the penultimate syllable. The final l in many Nahuatl words is very soft and often vanishes when words are borrowed by European languages. An h after vowels, and not preceded or followed by u, represents a glottal stop (the sound between the oh's of English oh-oh!). Vowels are pronounced as they are in Spanish. U before a vowel has the sound of a w, otherwise it has an oo sound. An x has the sound of sh. With the exception of ci, which has a see sound and ch, which has a cha sound, all c's are hard.

AZTEC GODDESSES

Chalchiuhtlicue (Chahl-chee-wtleee-kweh) - Jade Skirt, the goddess of flowing water and fertility.

Chicomecoatl (Chee-koh-meh-koh-ahtl) - Seven Snake, the goddess of agriculture.

Chimalma (Chee-mahl-mah) - Shield Hand, a War Goddess.

Cihuateteo (See-wah-teh-teh-o) - Women Goddesses who died in childbirth, Woman Warriors.

Cihuacoatl (See-wah-koh-ahtl) Woman Snake

Cipactli (See-pahc-tle) - The asexual caiman that lived in the primeval ocean.

Citlalinicue (See-tla-lee-nee-kweh) - Star Skirt

Coatlicue (Koh-ah-tleee-kweh) - Snake Skirt, earth, fertility, and lineage goddess.

Coyolxauhqui (Koh-yohl-shahw-kee) - She who is painted with bells/shells on her cheeks.

Itzpapalotl (Eets-pah-pah-lohtl) - Obsidian Knife Butterfly

Malinalxochitl (Mah-lee-nahl-shoh-cheetl) - An evil sorceress.

Mayahuel (Mah-yah-wehl) - The Goddess of Maguey, the woman of four hundred breasts.

Mecitli (Meh-see-tlee) - Maguey Grandmother

Quilaztli (Kee-lahs-tlee) - A witch and shape shifter, but also a warrior of renown equal to Mixcoatl himself.

Tlalteuctli (Tlahl-tehw-tlee) - Earth Lord, Earth Owner, and Earth Goddess. The Nahuatl word that the Spanish translated as "lord" is not gender specific.

Tlazolteotl (Tlah-sohl-teh-ohtl) - A Major Earth Goddess from the Gulf Coast syncretically absorbed into Aztec ritual.

Toci (toh-see) - Our Grandmother

Xochiquetzal (Shoh-chee-keh-tsahl) - Flower Feather, the goddess of flowers, music, dancing, and female sexuality.

AZTEC GODS

Ehecatl (Eh-eh-kahtl) - The Wind God (a good example of the glottal stop).

Huitzilopochtli (Wee-tsee-loh-pohch-tlee) - Left handed hummingbird, the militaristic tribal god of the Aztec, son of Coatlicue and brother of Coyolxauhqui.

Mixcoatl (Meesh-koh-ahtl) - Cloud Warrior, the hunting god of the Chichimec ancestors of the Aztec. The son of Mecitli.

Quetzalcoatl (Keh-tsahl-koh-ahtl) - Feathered serpent, sometimes a god and at other times a cultural hero. The son of Chimalma.

Tezcatlipoca (Tehs-kah-tlee-poh-kah) - Smoking Mirror, a shaman and shape shifter. Possibly an ancient and more important god than Huitzilopochtli.

Tlaloc (Tlah-lohk) - The Rain God

Xipe Totec (Shee-peh Toh-tek) - The Flayed God, possibly connected to the Gulf Coast cultures.

Xolotl (Shoh-lohtl) Quetzalcoatl's twin - Evening Star

COMMONLY USED WORDS

- Chichimeca (Chee-chee-meh-kah) - An anglicized version of Chichimecatl (Chee-chee-meh-katl), Aztec ancestors.
- Chicomoztoc (Chee-koh-mos-tohk) - Legendary Seven Caves a sacred place from which all mankind emerged.
- Cuahxicalli (Kwahw-shee-cahl-lee) - Called an Eagle Vessel, a place for depositing sacrificed human hearts.
- Huasteca (Wahsh-teh-kah) - A Gulf Coast people.
- Malinalli (Mah-lee-nahl-lee) - Wild grass, twisted to form a binding cord. Often seen as the hair of Tlalteuctli.
- Mexica (Meh-shee-kah) - The name the Aztec called themselves.
- Mimixcoa (Mee-meesh-koh-ah) - Cloud Serpents
- Nahuatl (Nah-wahtl) - The language of the Aztec.
- Ololiuhqui (Oh-loh-leew-kee) - Morning glory seeds, morning glory vine was considered the body of the Goddess Green Snake.
- Pulque (Pool-keh) - An alcoholic drink of the Aztec and other Mesoamerican cultures.
- Tecpatl (Tehk-pahtl) - The sacrificial Knife of the Aztec. When personified it became Mecitli or Itzpapalotl.
- Tenochtitlan (Teh-nohch-tee-tlahn) - The Mexica capital constructed on an island in Lake Texcoco. It is now Mexico City.
- Teotihuacan (Teh-oh-tee-wah-kahn) - Place of the Gods. Given this name by the late comers, the Aztec, this ancient city of Central Mexico flourished between 200 BC and 650 AD.
- Yacapapalotl (Yah-cah-pah-pah-lohtl) - Nose ornament in the form of a stylized butterfly.
- Yacaxihuitl (Yah-cah-shee-weetl) - Turquoise nose ornament, the insignia of lords (lord in Nahuatl is not gender specific).

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APPENDIX 1

VARIOUS COSMOLOGIES ATTRIBUTED TO THE AZTEC

Despite the Chichimec Myth on the previous page, which highlights various births from a powerful Earth Goddess, the Spanish priests were more at ease with the idea of a self-created male deity. Therefore, they constructed a cosmology which had Tloque Nahuaque dividing himself into male and female pairs.

A SPECIFIC VIEW OF AZTEC COSMOLOGY-COE 1984

A SPECIFIC VIEW OF AZTEC COSMOLOGY MATOS MOCTEZUMA 1989

APPENDIX 2

LORD RAGLAN'S PATTERN OF TWENTY-TWO ELEMENTS
IN THE LIFE STORIES OF FOLK HEROES

I realize these twenty-two elements were compiled with Greek, European, and Biblical heroes in mind, however, it is interesting that they can be successfully applied to heroes of Native America as well.

THE HERO OF TRADITION

1. His mother is a virgin.
2. His father is a king (and)
3. Often a near relative of his mother (but)
4. The circumstances of his conception are unusual (and)
5. He is also reputed to be the son of a god (or goddess).
6. At birth an attempt is made to kill him.
7. He is spirited away (and)
8. Reared by foster parents in a far country.
9. We are told nothing of his childhood.
10. On reaching manhood he returns or goes to his future kingdom (or founds a city).
11. After a victory over the king, giant, dragon, etc,
12. He marries a princess often the daughter of his predecessor (and)
13. Becomes king (or god).
14. For a time he reigns uneventfully (and)
15. Prescribes laws (but)
16. Later he loses favor with the gods and/or his subjects

17. And is driven from the throne and city.
18. He meets with a mysterious death.
19. Often at the top of a hill.
20. His children, if any, do not succeed him.
21. His body is not buried (but)
22. He has one or more holy sepulchers (or temples).

HUITZILOPOCHTLI

His mother is (5) Coatlicue, a goddess, and he has no father. He is (4) magically conceived by a ball of hummingbird feathers on (19) a hill called Coatepec, "Snake Mountain." His sister Coyolxauhqui and the Centzon Huitznahua (6) plan to kill him at birth. He is born fully armed and (11) slays his sister Coyolxauhqui and pursues and defeats the Huitznahua. He becomes a god (13), (9), and (10) founds Tenochtitlan. He demands sacrifices and (15) promotes wars. He has a holy temple (22). He is displaced by the god of the Conquistadors (16) and disappears (17).

He scores twelve points out of twenty-two.

Classical and Biblical heroes scored by Raglan are:
 Oedipus, 22; Thesus, 20; Romulus, 18; Heracles, 17;
 Persus, 18; Jason, 15; Pelops, 14; Joseph, 12;
 Moses, 20; Elijah, 9; Siegfried, 11; and Arthur, 19.

Other heroes scored by Raglan are: Watu Gunung, a Javanese hero, 18; Lew Llawgyffes, a Celtic hero, 17; Nyikang, a hero of the White Nile, 14; and Robin Hood, 13.

Other than the story of Huitzilopochtli, all information was obtained from *The Study of Folklore*, by Alan Dundes, University of California at Berkley, pages 142-157.