



Catherine R. DiCesare

# The Codex Borbonicus Veintena Imagery

Visualizing History,  
Time, and Ritual in  
Aztec Solar-Year  
Festivals

Amsterdam  
University  
Press



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# The Codex Borbonicus Veintena Imagery

*Visualizing History, Time, and  
Ritual in Aztec Solar-Year Festivals*

*Catherine R. DiCesare*

Amsterdam University Press

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Cover illustration: New Fire ceremony and veintena festival of Panquetzaliztli, with 2 Reed year date, Codex Borbonicus, p. 34. Source: Bibliothèque de l'Assemblée nationale (France).

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For Rich and Adam



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# Introduction

The painted calendar manuscript known as the Codex Borbonicus is among the most impressive and important documents to survive from early colonial Mexico.<sup>1</sup> It has resided for some two centuries in the library of the former Bourbon Palace in Paris, now the home of the French National Assembly, from which it takes its name. Although its earliest history remains obscure, the Codex Borbonicus was probably created in or near the city of Tenochtitlan (modern-day Mexico City), imperial capital of the Mexica, or so-called “Aztec,” around the time of the Spanish incursion in the early sixteenth century.<sup>2</sup> The Codex Borbonicus is mostly pictorial, depicting calendars and rituals tied to the three major Mesoamerican calendrical systems of 260 days, 365 days, and fifty-two years. Some Spanish glosses were added at an unknown time. The fidelity of its imagery to central Mexican manuscript conventions indicates the primary authorship of indigenous scribe-artists, or *tlacuiloque*, who were knowledgeable about native pictorial manuscript traditions as well as timekeeping systems and their attendant ceremonies.<sup>3</sup>

1 For facsimiles of the Codex Borbonicus manuscript, see Karl Anton Nowotny and Jacqueline de Durand-Forest, eds., *Codex Borbonicus: Bibliothèque de l'Assemblée Nationale, Paris (Y120)* (Graz, Austria: Akademische Druck- u. Verlagsanstalt, 1974); and Ferdinand Anders, Maarten Jansen, and Luis Reyes García, *Códice Borbónico* (Graz, Austria: Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, 1991).

2 On the provenience of the manuscript, see N. C. Christopher Couch, *The Festival Cycle of the Aztec Codex Borbonicus*, BAR International Series (Oxford: BAR, 1985), pp. 8–10; H. B. Nicholson, “The Provenience of the Codex Borbonicus: An Hypothesis,” in *Smoke and Mist: Mesoamerican Studies in Memory of Thelma D. Sullivan*, ed. J. Kathryn Josserand and Karen Dakin, BAR International Series (Oxford: BAR, 1988), pp. 77–97; and Ferdinand Anders, Maarten Jansen, and Luis Reyes García, *El libro del Ciuacoatl: Homenaje para el año del Fuego Nuevo, libro explicativo del llamado Códice Borbónico* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1991), pp. 51–58. Scholars have long debated the date and provenience of the Borbonicus. Detectable scoring lines in the first section of the manuscript first led the art historian Donald Robertson to suggest that the artists had left space for Spanish glosses, indicating an early colonial date for the manuscript. See *Mexican Manuscript Painting of the Early Colonial Period: The Metropolitan Schools* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994), pp. 87–93. A colonial date for the entire manuscript has tended to prevail in modern scholarship, although, as Elizabeth Hill Boone suggests, the first part of the manuscript may well have been begun in the prehispanic period and the rest finished after the conquest; see Boone, *Descendants of Aztec Pictography: The Cultural Encyclopedias of Sixteenth-Century Mexico* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2020), p. 68.

3 On the native authorship of the Codex Borbonicus, see, e.g., Juan José Batalla Rosado, “Los tlacuiloque del Códice Borbónico: una aproximación a su número y estilo,” *Journal de la Société des américanistes* 80, no. 1 (1994), pp. 47–72; and Boone, *Descendants of Aztec Pictography*, pp. 67–69.

The third chapter of the Codex Borbonicus (pp. 23–37), the subject of this study, visualizes the pageantry of eighteen solar-year feasts, which are generally known by the Spanish term *veintenas* for their twenty-day length.<sup>4</sup> The 365-day Mexica solar-year calendar comprised these eighteen veintena periods of twenty days, along with five ambivalent days known as the *nemontemi*. The annual cycle of eighteen veintenas served any number of purposes in prehispanic Mexico. Ceremonies involved elaborate processions, dances, drinking rites, and feasting, as well as offerings of blood and human lives. Venerations to gods of rain and maize dominated more than half of the rituals, as the people petitioned the gods for rain, protection for the crops, and a bountiful harvest. Ceremonies incorporated ancient and primordial events, celebrating the birth of gods as well as migration stories and community foundations. Some veintena periods also commemorated various social classes and their patron deities. The nobility was an important focus of some feasts, for example, while others honored the powerful military class, and still others celebrated merchants such as the wine sellers and salt makers.

By virtue of its indigenous authorship, early colonial date, and wealth of pictorial detail, the Codex Borbonicus veintena chapter has long occupied a privileged place in the canon of Mexican calendar manuscripts. Few sources match the detail with which it depicts the veintena ceremonies and the panoply of accoutrements donned by priests and celebrants who danced, sang, and processed through the ceremonial landscape of central Mexico. But the manuscript has also posed significant problems of interpretation, for much of its imagery differs substantially from other early colonial documents that contain accounts and depictions of the solar-year ceremonies.<sup>5</sup> For example, figures that some chronicles describe as central to the veintena feasts do not appear at all in the Codex Borbonicus; in other cases, the extant colonial accounts do not readily explain the presence of many ritual participants and activities that take center stage in the Borbonicus ceremonies.

Crucially, the Codex Borbonicus is unusual in the colonial corpus in providing historical specificity for its veintenas by dating the festivals with a set of indigenous year-date glyphs for the years “1 Rabbit” (fig. 1.4), “2 Reed” (fig. 5.1), and “3 Flint” (fig. 1.5). These dates are the first three years in a calendar of fifty-two solar years

4 Important studies of the Codex Borbonicus veintena chapter include Francisco del Paso y Troncoso, *Descripción, historia y exposición del Códice Borbónico* (Mexico: Siglo Veintiuno, 1979); Betty Ann Brown, “European Influences in Early Colonial Descriptions and Illustrations of the Mexica Monthly Calendar” (Ph.D. dissertation, New Mexico, The University of New Mexico, 1977), pp. 221–253; Couch, *Festival Cycle*; Anders, Jansen, and Reyes García, *El libro del Ciuacoatl*, pp. 191–238; and Boone, *Descendants of Aztec Pictography*, pp. 56–69.

5 Brown, “European Influences,” pp. 221–251; Couch, *Festival Cycle*.

that was used widely across Mesoamerica to keep track of historical episodes and information. Scholars have convincingly correlated its year dates with the Christian calendar.<sup>6</sup> Of special note is the presence of the year date “2 Reed” on page 34. That date glyph accompanies two solar ceremonies that were celebrated in tandem, the annual festival known as Panquetzaliztli, “Raising of the Banners,” and a periodic rite known as the “New Fire ceremony,” which commemorated the changeover from one major fifty-two-year count to the next such cycle. As other scholars have shown, the presence of these year-date glyphs alongside the New Fire imagery in the veintena chapter appears to situate this cycle of ceremonies within a single historical 2 Reed year, probably the year 1507.<sup>7</sup>

Given that the presence of solar-year date glyphs anchors the Codex Borbonicus feasts within the march of historical time, in an earlier study I considered whether that manuscript’s lavish depiction of the autumn ritual known as Ochpaniztli, “Sweeping the Way” (pp. 29–30), depicted a version of the ceremony as it manifested in real time, during the year 2 Reed 1507.<sup>8</sup> Many elements of the Borbonicus Ochpaniztli scene are unusual, diverging in important ways from other extant documents. Because Mexica year-date glyphs could refer to historical circumstances while simultaneously evoking ancient or primordial events, I proposed that the Codex Borbonicus Ochpaniztli imagery reflected the 2 Reed 1507 festival as it responded at once to contemporary sixteenth-century circumstances and to the broader primordial associations of the Mexica year date 2 Reed.

The current investigation takes that earlier inquiry as its point of departure. It broadens that historical framework to understand and interpret the unusual contents of several additional Codex Borbonicus scenes. Here, I attend to the historical dimensions of six veintena ceremonies whose imagery differs substantially from the foci, descriptions, and depictions in other colonial sources. These include the pair of springtime festivals known as Tozoztontli and Huey Tozoztli (figs. 2.1 and 2.2) in chapter 2, in which I expand an earlier study of Huey Tozoztli.<sup>9</sup> I also investigate the summertime ceremonies of Tecuilhuitontli and Huey Tecuilhuitl (fig. 3.1) (chapter 3), the autumn festival known as Quecholli (fig. 4.1) (chapter 4),

6 On the correlation of the Mexican and European calendars, see Alfonso Caso, *Los calendarios prehispánicos* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1967), pp. 41–70.

7 Anders, Jansen, and Reyes García, *El libro del Ciuacoatl*, pp. 33, 59; Edward E. Calnek, “Kirchhoff’s Correlations and the Third Part of the Codex Borbonicus,” in *Skywatching in the Ancient World: New Perspectives in Cultural Astronomy – Studies in Honor of Anthony F. Aveni*, ed. Clive Ruggles and Gary Urton (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2007), p. 91.

8 Catherine R. DiCesare, *Sweeping the Way: Divine Transformation in the Aztec Festival of Ochpaniztli*, Mesoamerican Worlds (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2009), pp. 123–153.

9 Catherine R. DiCesare, “Tlaloc Rites and the Huey Tozoztli Festival in the Mexican Codex Borbonicus,” *Ethnohistory* 62, no. 4 (2015), pp. 683–706.

and, in the final chapter, the wintertime Panquetzalitzli ceremony, which in 1507 appears to have taken place in concert with the New Fire ceremony (fig. 5.1). These scenes are all extraordinary, containing important ritual elements and ceremonial participants that cannot be understood solely in comparison with the extant corpus of veintena sources. Rather than eliding or ignoring discrepancies among the sources to create a synthetic, atemporal narrative, I consider instead what disjunctions between the Codex Borbonicus and other documents might reveal about one singular year's rites. In each case, I approach the festival imagery as the record of events that had occurred in real time, in 2 Reed 1507, during the reign of the emperor Moteuczoma II (r. 1502–1520). Regarding the Codex Borbonicus veintena imagery as a kind of historical document and anchoring its rites within real time and space may provide for a more nuanced understanding of the solar-year ceremonies depicted on its pages.

### **The Codex Borbonicus and the Colonial Veintena Corpus**

In framing the unusual Codex Borbonicus solar-year ceremonies as the record of a single year's festivals, I seek to expand beyond the more usual comparanda, a remarkable corpus of colonial veintena documents created in the sixteenth century. Most of the extant veintena sources date to the early colonial period, produced at the behest of Spanish Christian missionaries to Mexico over several decades following the Spanish incursion. These texts were part of an extensive network of ethnohistoric sources, sources that Elizabeth Hill Boone refers to as "cultural encyclopedias," pictorial manuscripts designed to outline the scope and nature of the territories inhabited by the Nahuatl-speaking peoples of central Mexico.<sup>10</sup> Recognizing that autochthonous ritual was bound up with the count of time, the Christian friar-chroniclers compiled descriptions and depictions of Mexican calendars, attendant ceremonies, and associated deities. These were collaborative projects, created under the auspices of Christian missionaries who worked jointly with local populations, polyglot scholars, and artists, some of whom had been educated in colonial mission schools. Native and mestizo partners thus provided information about local traditions and communal memories about a host of ritual practices and beliefs, as well as oral interpretations and adaptations of native pictorial manuscripts for the colonial ethnohistoric sources. Significantly, local tlacuiloque also provided imagery for many of the friars' compendia, including images of gods along with relevant ritual paraphernalia, accoutrements, and ceremonial settings.

<sup>10</sup> Boone, *Descendants of Aztec Pictography*.

Numerous such sources survive from the sixteenth century.<sup>11</sup> Among the most notable are the chronicles of the Franciscan friar Bernardino de Sahagún and the Dominican friar Diego Durán, which date to the second half of the sixteenth century. Both men spent much of their lives in Mexico, learned Nahuatl, the *lingua franca* of central Mexico, and compiled their chronicles with the active participation of indigenous scholars, elders, and artists. Both also drew on now-lost indigenous manuscript sources. From the 1550s to the 1570s, Sahagún undertook major chronicling projects. These include the *Primeros Memoriales* of 1559–1561 and the voluminous illustrated compendium of the late 1570s known as the *General History of the Things of New Spain*, dubbed Florentine Codex after its current location in the Laurentian Library at the church of San Lorenzo in Florence, Italy.<sup>12</sup> Book Two of the Florentine Codex contains the lengthiest extant descriptions of the Mexica veintena rituals. The volume includes an introductory section of shorter passages describing each veintena period, followed by a second, more detailed series of accounts. Book Two is complemented by Book One, a kind of deity catalog classifying what the friars took to be a “pantheon” of the major Mexican gods. Sahagún’s chronicles are unparalleled in the corpus of colonial documents, providing extensive imagery, information, and texts in both Nahuatl and Spanish. Because of its length and the active contributions of native scholars and artists to its creation, the Florentine Codex is generally the first—and sometimes the only—source to which scholars turn to investigate the solar calendar rituals.

Writing around the same time in the late 1570s, Diego Durán produced his *History of the Indies of New Spain*, an extensively illustrated volume that comprises a historical chronicle as well as two related sections describing the indigenous gods and their associated calendrical rites.<sup>13</sup> Of those two sections, the *Ancient Calendar* explains the eighteen months of the solar-year veintena cycle, laid out month by month, dedicating a separate chapter to each veintena period’s celebrations. That functions in tandem with the *Book of the Gods and Rites*, also an illustrated deity catalog identifying the paramount sacred entities, along with the myths and rituals associated with them.

Other major colonial veintena sources include the chronicles compiled by the Franciscan friar Toribio de Benavente, known as Motolinía, whose texts are among

11 See DiCesare, *Sweeping the Way*, pp. 25–29, 38–54, for more detailed discussion of the major colonial sources that describe the veintena ceremonies. Also see Boone, *Descendants of Aztec Pictography*, for an expansive discussion of the early colonial cultural encyclopedias.

12 Bernardino de Sahagún, *Primeros Memoriales*, ed. H. B. Nicholson, trans. Thelma D. Sullivan (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997); Sahagún, *Florentine Codex: General History of the Things of New Spain*, trans. Arthur J. O. Anderson and Charles E. Dibble, 13 vols. (Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research and University of Utah, 1950).

13 The different sections of Durán’s manuscript have been published and translated into English in two discrete volumes, Diego Durán, *The History of the Indies of New Spain*, trans. Doris Heyden (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994); and Durán, *Book of the Gods and Rites and the Ancient Calendar*, trans. Doris Heyden (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971).

the earliest extant accounts of Mexican calendars and rituals. Motolinía's descriptions of the veintena festivals include passages in his *History of the Indians of New Spain* and descriptive lists in the *Memoriales* of the 1540s, along with a brief list of veintena accounts inserted into the *Memoriales*, now known as the Motolinía Insert I.<sup>14</sup> The important Codex Telleriano-Remensis was probably created around the 1550s–1560s; it contains images of Mexican calendars, rites, and deities that were provided by native artists, along with Spanish texts and glosses.<sup>15</sup> Its illustrated account of veintena ceremonies and related deities is closely related to the contents of the Italian-language Codex Vaticanus A.3738, generally referred to as the Codex Ríos after its presumed author, the Dominican Pedro de los Ríos.<sup>16</sup> The Codex Magliabechiano and its close cognate Codex Tudela are also major resources for understanding the veintena ceremonies.<sup>17</sup> Both were probably produced around the 1550s and 1560s. Although there are some important differences between their texts, with the Codex Tudela typically providing much more detailed accounts than the Magliabechiano, the veintena imagery provided by native artists for these sources is closely related, likely drawn from a common prototype.<sup>18</sup>

The Codex Borbonicus is thus an unusual document within a remarkable archive of colonial records, a major indigenous contribution to the corpus of primary sources documenting the cycle of eighteen prehispanic Mexican veintena ceremonies. It is complemented by a small handful of colonial records of the veintenas authored by native artists, including the early colonial calendar known as the Boban Calendar Wheel (fig. 2.6), likely from the community of Texcoco, and the Codex Mexicanus, which was produced in Mexico City in the late sixteenth century.<sup>19</sup>

14 Motolinía (Toribio de Benavente), *Motolinía's History of the Indians of New Spain*, trans. Francis Borgias Steck (Washington, DC: Academy of American Franciscan History, 1951); Motolinía, *Memoriales; o, Libro de las cosas de la Nueva España y de los naturales de ella*, ed. Edmundo O'Gorman (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1971). On the authorship of the Motolinía Insert, which they ascribe to the Franciscan friar Andrés de Olmos, see George Kubler and Charles Gibson, *The Tovar Calendar: An Illustrated Mexican Manuscript ca. 1585: Reproduced with a Commentary and Handlist of Sources on the Mexican 365-Day Year* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1951), p. 70.

15 Eloise Quiñones Keber, *Codex Telleriano-Remensis: Ritual, Divination, and History in a Pictorial Aztec Manuscript* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995).

16 Ferdinand Anders, Maarten Jansen, and Luis Reyes García, *Códice Vaticano A. 3738 (Ríos)* (Graz: Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, 1996).

17 Elizabeth Hill Boone, *The Codex Magliabechiano and the Lost Prototype of the Magliabechiano Group* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983); José Tudela de la Orden, *Códice Tudela* (Madrid: Ediciones Cultura Hispánica, 1980).

18 On the prototype for the Magliabechiano, Tudela, and related manuscripts, see Boone, *Codex Magliabechiano*.

19 On the Boban Wheel, see Charles E. Dibble, "The Boban Calendar Wheel," *Estudios de Cultura Náhuatl* 20 (1990), pp. 173–182; on the Codex Mexicanus, see the recent study by Lori Boornazian Diel, *The Codex Mexicanus: A Guide to Life in Late Sixteenth-Century New Spain* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2018).

Taken together, the Codex Borbonicus and other colonial veintena sources offer an incomparable resource for understanding how the Nahua remembered and represented the prehispanic veintenas in the century following colonization. The indigenous contribution to the colonial veintena sources is crucial, the bedrock of the documents. Moreover, the colonial corpus is especially significant because no prehispanic Mexica books appear to have survived the ravages of Spanish invasion. It is unclear and a matter of longstanding controversy whether prehispanic books had recorded the veintena ceremonies at all, an issue I have discussed elsewhere.<sup>20</sup> Given the dearth of preconquest veintena sources, then, modern scholars rely heavily on the sixteenth-century documents to investigate the Mexica calendar ceremonies.

It is also vital to acknowledge at the outset the asymmetrical power relations of the colonial milieu and the mediated nature of the Christian missionaries' project to document native ceremonial practices: most of the extant sources describing the solar-year ceremonies in central Mexico were initiated at the behest of Christian missionaries who were intent on eradicating indigenous religion. Alarmed by the specter of idolatry and human sacrifice, and plagued by fears of apostasy, some of the Christian missionaries asserted that it was vital to recognize any native Mexican rituals or beliefs that might persist. Sahagún forcibly defended his chronicling project, for example, contending that it was naive to believe that the "fictions and falsehoods these natives held regarding their gods" had truly been forgotten.<sup>21</sup> Sahagún's Florentine Codex investigates virtually every aspect of Nahua culture in central Mexico, but especially the nature of the gods and the calendars governing native ritual practice.

Durán expressed similar apprehensions, explaining to the reader that he compiled his work in order to inform and illuminate the clergy "so that their task may not be in vain." Although it seemed that the practices of bloodletting, human sacrifice, and cannibalism had ended, he warned, "I strongly suspect that a scent of superstition has remained."<sup>22</sup> Durán worried that not only did the celebration of indigenous feasts and ceremonies continue, but, worse, that it was happening in the guise of Christian pageantry. Given this, he cautioned his reader to be on the lookout for any potential conflation of Christian and indigenous feasts. He warned that the natives, while pretending to celebrate "the festivities of our God and of the Saints," were liable to "insert, mix, and celebrate those of their gods when they fall on the same day. And they introduce their ancient rites in our ceremonies." It was therefore crucial to recognize any hints that what the friars deemed to be pagan idolatry was continuing unabated. Among the primary goals of the Christian friar-chroniclers,

20 See DiCesare, *Sweeping the Way*, pp. 29–34.

21 Sahagún, *Florentine Codex: Introduction and Indices*, p. 59.

22 Durán, *Book of the Gods and Rites*, p. 386.



then, was to recognize the presence of indigenous garb, adornments, and events in their midst that might reveal the “evil and idolatrous” celebration of native gods persisting “today as it did before.”<sup>23</sup>

This has significant implications for the forms and contents of the colonial records. The resultant veintena documents compiled under the auspices of the friar-chroniclers tend to be ahistorical and synthetic catalogs of the solar-year ceremonies, underwritten by the premise that the veintenas were celebrated uniformly in each year. Durán candidly admitted that he culled the data he received from his native informants and discarded whatever information precluded a coherent narrative. Because he sought “the truth”—and feeling certain that he was “not confused by different versions ... obtained from several sources”—Durán felt free to distill the information in his chronicles and to include only those things “on which I found my informants agreed.”<sup>24</sup> The colonial veintena sources focus particularly on outlining the main ritual activities and sacrifices that took place in each period, frequently including the western calendrical dates when ceremonies might be expected to take place. They also seek to establish patron deities and the various items of ritual paraphernalia and accoutrements that the friars took to be a set of diagnostic insignia. For example, the *Codex Magliabechiano* begins its description of the eleventh month with the statement, “This figure and feast the Indians called Ochpaniztli, which means sweeping, because during it they put a broom in the hand of the demon whom they called Toci, which means our grandmother.”<sup>25</sup> The annotator goes on to describe dancing and extensive bouts of drinking, along with the sacrifice and flaying of women. The *Magliabechiano* imagery (fol. 39r) depicts an image of the “demon” Toci, who bears the cotton headdress and spindles, blackened mouth, and broom that the friars believed were her attributes. The *Codex Telleriano-Remensis* describes the same feast, identifying the date on which it would begin, September 12; naming its patron goddess, Toci, whom they also identify as Tlazolteotl; and providing an outline of the month’s main activities, which included fasting and widespread communal sweeping and cleaning.<sup>26</sup> The accompanying illustration in the *Telleriano-Remensis* (fig. 0.1) provides an image of Toci-Tlazolteotl that is similar to the goddess featured in the *Codex Magliabechiano*. Durán assigns Ochpaniztli, “Day of Sweeping,” “performed in honor of the goddess Toci,” to a slightly different date, September 17.<sup>27</sup> He describes the deity’s image as a wooden statue with a white face, blackened from the nose down, bearing a headdress of cotton locks, spindle whorls with bunches of spun

23 Durán, pp. 71–72.

24 Durán, pp. 70–71.

25 Boone, *Codex Magliabechiano*, p. 196.

26 Quiñones Keber, *Codex Telleriano-Remensis*, p. 254.

27 Durán, *Book of the Gods and Rites*, p. 447.

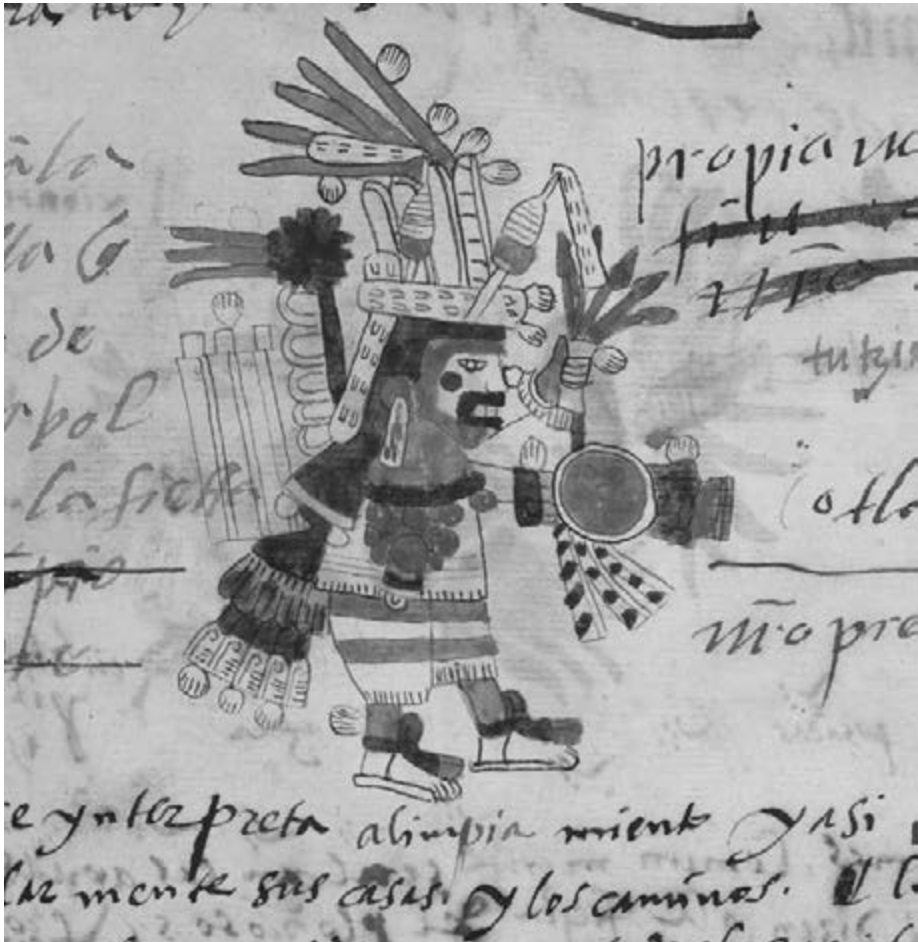


Figure 0.1. Detail, Veintena festival of Ochpaniztli, Codex Telleriano-Remensis, folio 3r. Bibliothèque nationale de France. Source: gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France.

cotton, and a broom.<sup>28</sup> This descriptive formula for the veintena ceremonies holds for much of the corpus. Although the extant documents compiled by the Christian missionary-chroniclers often vary widely in the precise details they record, their essentializing accounts consistently present the veintena periods as invariable from year to year, including fixed actors and ritual activities.

Moreover, the friars treated the veintena cycle as if it were a system independent of other native calendars, as Emily Umberger has noted.<sup>29</sup> This, too, may be

<sup>28</sup> Durán, p. 231. I discuss the colonial corpus of veintena scenes, particularly Ochpaniztli, at length in DiCesare, *Sweeping the Way*.

<sup>29</sup> Emily Umberger, "Notions of Aztec History: The Case of the Great Temple Dedication," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 42, no. 1 (2002), p. 89.

rooted in the Christian missionaries' extirpation discourse. Betty Ann Brown observes that the friars tended to stress the significance of the 365-day count while downplaying the 260-day cycle known as the *tonalpohualli*, or "count of days."<sup>30</sup> The basis of the 365-day calendar in the vague solar year meant that the friars more readily apprehended it, as it approximated their own idea of what a calendar should be. Durán writes that the solar-year cycle was the true calendar, since "everyone knows that the year is made of three hundred sixty-five days."<sup>31</sup> At the same time, the missionaries disdained the 260-day *tonalpohualli* cycle. In actuality, the *tonalpohualli* appears to have been the more important calendar, governing virtually every aspect of indigenous life, from quotidian agricultural activities to marriage and childrearing, warfare, and ritual feasting. However, the days of the *tonalpohualli* cycle had mantic properties, and the genre of book that recorded it, called the *tonalamatl* or "book of days," functioned as a vital tool in a complex system of divination—whose use tied it ineluctably with astrology and sorcery. Ever concerned about the threat of apostasy, Durán was especially suspicious of the *tonalpohualli* and its use. "Perhaps," he writes, "it would be better to call it witchcraft."<sup>32</sup> The divining priest, known as the *tonalpouhque*, who engaged the sacred forces governing the *tonalpohualli* was no less than the mouthpiece of the devil himself, a "sorcerer-fortune-teller."<sup>33</sup> Sahagún was equally scathing in condemning the *tonalpohualli*, "this art of soothsaying," as an "artifice made by the devil himself ... a thing of fraud and deceit" rather than rational, intended "to dazzle and derange people of low capacity and little understanding."<sup>34</sup> While it may be understandable that the Christian friars working in the colonial period misunderstood or mischaracterized these calendars as wholly discrete entities, this has had the effect of obscuring the essentially intertwined nature of the major Mesoamerican calendars. That issue is at the heart of the present inquiry.

## The Codex Borbonicus Veintenas in Modern Scholarship

While modern studies of the Codex Borbonicus veintena imagery have taken a wide array of approaches to grappling with its unusual contents, much of the scholarship—even that acknowledging its exceptional nature—regards the Borbonicus cycle as an ahistorical model of the monthly ceremonies, a pictorial analog of the friars' synthetic accounts. Indeed, researchers often turn first to the cultural

30 Brown, "European Influences," p. 9.

31 Durán, *Book of the Gods and Rites*, p. 395.

32 Durán, p. 395.

33 Durán, p. 398.

34 Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, vol. 4, p. 145.

encyclopedias compiled by the Spanish Christian missionaries to interpret its contents. As Christopher Couch notes, scholars often gloss over the unique elements of the Borbonicus veintena scenes, treating them instead “as though they were illustrations of the later textual accounts. Some of the drawings do match the later descriptions of the ceremonies quite closely, and have been published time and again as illustrations of them. Others vary greatly from the descriptions, but these differences have usually been ignored.”<sup>35</sup> Even Borbonicus scenes that diverge substantially from other images and descriptions are sometimes depicted as the authoritative pictorial model for understanding certain annual ceremonies. This is particularly the case for the Codex Borbonicus Ochpaniztli scene, as I have considered elsewhere.<sup>36</sup> Although that extraordinary scene differs in important ways from other colonial veintena sources, nevertheless it is frequently presented as the standard illustration of the ceremony, as it might have taken place in *any* year.

Other studies maintain that the Codex Borbonicus and other veintena sources should be understood in terms of an indigenous tradition of creating veintena “handbooks” for priests overseeing their annual celebration, though no prehispanic examples of such a handbook have survived. Eloise Quiñones Keber suggests that veintena handbooks would have served as guides for priests to assemble the “requisite components for the ceremonies from year to year, such as the costumes to be worn by participants, the ritual exercises to be performed, the items to be used, and the offerings to be made.”<sup>37</sup> In this line of inquiry, colonial veintena documents, particularly the Borbonicus as well as the cognate Magliabechiano and Tudela manuscripts, the Codices Ríos and Telleriano-Remensis, and Sahagún’s *Primeros Memoriales* serve as evidence for the existence of such prehispanic manuals. For H. B. Nicholson, the Codex Borbonicus veintena chapter exemplifies an ahistorical, prescriptive guide for use by Mexica priests to organize the annual ceremonies.<sup>38</sup> Nicholson argues that ritual celebrants would have used such handbooks to direct the festivals as they were carried out on the public stage.

Here and elsewhere, Nicholson also suggests that the variability of the contents of sources like the Borbonicus may be reflective of local or regional specificity, agreeing with Christopher Couch’s conclusions that the unusual nature of the Borbonicus probably situates it in a single community. For Couch, the apparent

35 Couch, *Festival Cycle*, p. xii.

36 DiCesare, *Sweeping the Way*, pp. 123–153.

37 Eloise Quiñones Keber, “An Introduction to the Images, Artists, and Physical Features of the *Primeros Memoriales*,” in *Primeros Memoriales*, by Bernardino de Sahagún, ed. H. B. Nicholson, trans. Thelma D. Sullivan (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), p. 28.

38 H. B. Nicholson, “Representing the Veintena Ceremonies in the *Primeros Memoriales*,” in *Representing Aztec Ritual: Performance, Text, and Image in the Work of Sahagún*, ed. Eloise Quiñones Keber (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2002), pp. 65–66.

emphasis on commoners and agricultural rituals in the Borbonicus may situate the manuscript in the agricultural *chinampas* district south of the city of Tenochtitlan. Nicholson considers iconographic evidence in the Borbonicus veintenas, wherein a figure identifiable as Cihuacoatl, “Woman Snake,” plays a prominent role and appears in multiple scenes. On this basis, Nicholson proposes that the manuscript hails from either Itztapallapan or Culhuacan, communities south of Tenochtitlan where that goddess had been a major focus of local venerations.<sup>39</sup> These studies are particularly important for privileging the pictorial elements of the Borbonicus imagery above the friars’ texts to support their conclusions.

In contrast, other scholars have contended that the Codex Borbonicus should be placed within a newly formulated colonial tradition of veintena imagery. Following a suggestion by George Kubler and Charles Gibson that early colonial methods for pictorializing the veintenas were at least partly a colonial invention, for example, Betty Ann Brown argues that the heterogeneity of the colonial documents indicates that there probably were no prehispanic conventions for depicting the months of the 365-day calendar. She also asserts that the veintena cycle was of relatively little importance to the Mexica. Brown suggests instead that the Spanish chroniclers strongly influenced the formalization and codification of the veintena information in the colonial corpus. This was “the inevitable result of their soliciting and recording data in terms of European preconceptions,” informed particularly by European administrative needs and expectations.<sup>40</sup> Noting the substantial discrepancies between the Codex Borbonicus veintenas and other colonial sources, Brown concludes that the Borbonicus does not represent a full set of annual ceremonies.<sup>41</sup> Susan Spitler likewise situates the Codex Borbonicus within a post-conquest project of creating new veintena sources to document the prehispanic past. Spitler also asserts the likelihood that there did exist a prehispanic veintena system in some structured form, an assertion with which I agree. Reflecting more recent scholarly concerns, Spitler argues for the active agency of the native authors of the Borbonicus in formulating new colonial pictorial strategies for depicting the prehispanic rituals.<sup>42</sup>

Particularly relevant for the current study are those analyses of the Codex Borbonicus veintena chapter that focus on the presence of the historical year dates bracketing the festival cycle. This has been considered in relation to a constellation of calendrical questions. One issue of longstanding debate concerns the overall order in which the Mexica celebrated the eighteen periods of the veintena cycle. In his important late nineteenth-century analysis, Francisco del Paso y Troncoso suggests

39 Nicholson, “Provenience of the Codex Borbonicus,” vol. 1, pp. 77–97; Couch, *Festival Cycle*, pp. 8–10.

40 Kubler and Gibson, *Tovar Calendar*, p. 52; Brown, “European Influences,” p. 11.

41 Brown, “European Influences,” pp. 221–253.

42 Susan Spitler, “Nahua Intellectual Responses to the Spanish: The Incorporation of European Ideas into the Central Mexican Calendar” (Ph.D. dissertation, Tulane University, 2005), p. 145.

that the Codex Borbonicus veintena cycle establishes an authoritative order for the Mexica celebration of the veintena months, beginning rather than ending with the monthly festival known as Izcalli.<sup>43</sup> However, this is an interpretation at odds with the information in most of the extant colonial documents.<sup>44</sup> Among the earliest scholars to closely study the Borbonicus, Paso y Troncoso attends carefully to the details of the imagery, providing important identifications of specific characters and ritual activities based on then-available colonial documents, particularly Sahagún. So does the eminent anthropologist Alfonso Caso, whose many studies have contributed major insights to our understanding of Mexican calendrics in general and the Codex Borbonicus in particular.<sup>45</sup> Caso agrees with Paso y Troncoso that the Borbonicus may establish a variant order for the Mexica veintena ceremonies that positions Izcalli as the first period.<sup>46</sup> The presence of the 2 Reed date glyph in the veintena chapter plays an important role here, indicating that the Codex Borbonicus presents a general sequence of veintena festivals as they would have taken place in 2 Reed/New Fire years.<sup>47</sup> Although Caso's conclusions about the order of the months and the Izcalli initial period have not been universally accepted, nevertheless he bases his arguments on careful reasoning about the logic of the Mexica calendar systems, as well as the ways in which the veintena calendar of 365 days and the tonalpohualli of 260 days may have intermeshed during the larger cycle of fifty-two solar years. Caso's important hypotheses about the correlation of these two calendars, along with revised correlations offered by Rafael Tena, undergird the present study.<sup>48</sup>

Other scholars have taken a different tack to the question of the historical year-date glyphs. They deem the presence of those year dates alongside the New Fire ceremony to be evidence of the historical specificity of that group of festivals, thereby situating the Borbonicus veintena chapter in real time. For example, Ross Hassig explores the significance of the year dates in relation to a major calendrical

43 Paso y Troncoso, *Códice Borbónico*, pp. 103, 294–296.

44 See Kubler and Gibson, *Tovar Calendar*, pp. 46–52, for a discussion of the order of the months as listed in the extant veintena sources.

45 See esp. Caso, *Los calendarios prehispánicos*, pp. 41–73; and Caso, "Calendrical Systems of Central Mexico," in *Handbook of Middle American Indians: Archaeology of Northern Mesoamerica*, ed. Gordon F. Ekholm and Ignacio Bernal, 10 (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971), vol. 10, pp. 333–348.

46 Caso, *Los calendarios prehispánicos*, p. 45.

47 Caso, p. 134.

48 See Caso, pp. 57–59; and Caso, "Calendrical Systems of Central Mexico," pp. 339–446. Rafael Tena, *El calendario mexica y la cronografía* (Mexico City: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1992), pp. 85–86, suggests a slightly different correlation from the calendars than the one proposed by Caso. I discuss these issues at length in chapter 1. While the differences between the two calendrical correlations are important, they are beyond the scope of the current study, as their correlations agree for every relevant veintena.

reform, another issue of longstanding debate. Examining the ways in which the Mexica wielded the solar-year calendar as an instrument of political and economic control, Hassig contends that the Borbonicus veintena chapter evidences a shift in the year in which the New Fire ceremony was celebrated, moving the ritual from the year 1 Rabbit to the year 2 Reed.<sup>49</sup> Importantly for the current study, Hassig asserts that the Borbonicus feasts “are not generic festivals, but historically specific ones,” which he asserts are tied to the 2 Reed year 1455.<sup>50</sup> Edward Calnek proposes that the Borbonicus veintena chapter documents a different kind of calendrical reform, one that had taken place in the city of Tenochtitlan in 1507. Responding to a study by Paul Kirchhoff, Calnek draws on the earlier hypotheses of Paso y Troncoso and Caso, cited above, regarding the overall order of the Mexica veintena cycle. Calnek concludes that a cycle beginning with Izcalli reflected a Tenochca-specific reform in the early sixteenth century. While Paso y Troncoso and Caso frame the Borbonicus veintena cycle as a somewhat generic set of ceremonies for New Fire years, Calnek argues that the Codex Borbonicus version of the New Fire ceremony must have been the ritual that took place in 1507.<sup>51</sup>

Ferdinand Anders, Maarten Jansen, and Luis Reyes García have also considered the significance of including the year-date glyphs alongside the New Fire imagery. They assert that the Codex Borbonicus documents the events of one singularly important historical year 2 Reed, which, like Calnek, they identify as 1507.<sup>52</sup> Like Nicholson before them, Anders, Jansen, and Reyes García explore the importance of the figure identifiable as Cihuacoatl. They emphasize that the term “Cihuacoatl” not only identified an important deity but was also a political title for an administrative office held by the Mexica emperors’ second-in-command. Anders, Jansen, and Reyes García thus conclude that the Borbonicus most likely represents a colonial copy of a prehispanic manuscript made specifically for the historical figure of the Cihuacoatl, though his specific identity remains an open question.<sup>53</sup> In their analysis, the Codex Borbonicus veintena chapter commemorates the ceremonies

49 Ross Hassig, *Time, History, and Belief in Aztec and Colonial Mexico* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), pp. 90–97. On the debate over the shift in year date from 1 Rabbit to 2 Reed, also see Emily Umberger, “Appendix: The Years 1 Rabbit and 2 Reed and the Beginning of the 52-Year Cycle,” in *The Aztec Templo Mayor*, ed. Elizabeth Hill Boone (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1987), pp. 442–444; Tena, *El calendario mexica*, pp. 92–93; Michel Graulich, “Las fiestas del año solar en el *Códice borbónico*,” *Itinerarios* 8 (2008), pp. 185–194; and John Frederick Schwaller, *The Fifteenth Month: Aztec History in the Rituals of Panquetzaliztli* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2019), pp. 176–193.

50 Hassig, *Time, History, and Belief*, p. 93.

51 Calnek, “Kirchhoff’s Correlations,” p. 91; Paul Kirchhoff, “Calendarios Tenochca, Tlatelolca y Otros,” *Revista Mexicana de Estudios Antropológicos* 14, no. 2 (1955), pp. 257–267.

52 Anders, Jansen, and Reyes García, *El libro del Cihuacoatl*, pp. 33, 59.

53 Anders, Jansen, and Reyes García, *El libro del Cihuacoatl*, pp. 41–49.

of that special New Fire year 2 Reed 1507, the time of the last prehispanic New Fire ceremony before the Spanish incursion.

Although these scholars have drawn different conclusions about the nature of the Codex Borbonicus veintena chapter, the studies by Calnek, Hassig, and Anders, Jansen, and Reyes García all challenge the premise underpinning other studies that the Codex Borbonicus veintena ceremonies record, in the words of Anders, Jansen, and Reyes García, an “eternal cycle” of feasts, or that the chapter represents a type of prescriptive ritual handbook.<sup>54</sup> Rather, the historical specificity and uniqueness of the Codex Borbonicus drive their interpretations. For reasons that I discuss at length in chapter 1, I believe that Calnek as well as Anders, Jansen, and Reyes García are correct in anchoring the Codex Borbonicus veintenas to the 2 Reed year 1507.

These scholars’ studies are also important for privileging the authority of the native Mexican authors of the Codex Borbonicus, and they begin their analyses with the contents of the ceremonial scenes rather than turning first to the Christian missionaries’ textual accounts of individual feasts. The native artists of the Codex Borbonicus accord the Mexican veintena system a measure of historical specificity that should be taken very seriously in interpreting its contents. These studies thus provide a crucial point of departure for how we might situate the Borbonicus veintena ceremonies within their historical moment.

Because they are largely concerned with questions of dating, the order of the monthly cycle in Tenochtitlan, and the broader function of the solar-year ceremonies, however, the foregoing scholars’ analyses have not considered what the historical specificity of the Codex Borbonicus ceremonial chapter might mean for understanding individual festivals as they took place in the year 2 Reed 1507. This is the task of the current study.

## Methodology and Chapter Summary

In attending to the historical nature of the Codex Borbonicus veintena rituals, I seek to address more broadly the problematic nature of assigning western, Christian concepts of time, history, and the sacred to autochthonous Mexican rituals and texts, along with the concomitant flattening of time into binary categories deemed *either* “linear”—and therefore secular and historical—*or* “cyclical,” that is, ritual and ahistorical. I suggest instead that the Codex Borbonicus bridges ritual–calendrical genres with historical chronicling, inviting a consideration of how the Mexica yoked ritual and myth to early sixteenth-century historical and calendrical concerns. In the prehispanic solar-year calendar ceremonies, history, myth, and ritual all

54 Anders, Jansen, and Reyes García, p. 33.



operated in concert. This book thus considers some of the ways in which linear and cyclical time intersected in late Postclassic ritual performance, and seeks to blur the boundaries between sacred and secular manuscript genres.

It is my view that the 365-day solar calendar provided a stable structure for celebrating the monthly ceremonies of the annual veintena cycle, but with the potential for substantial variation in its ritual activities, participants, and locales from year to year. I suspect that the Mesoamerican calendars interacted in ways that routinely affected individual manifestations of the annual veintena ceremonies, sometimes in dramatic ways. Modern scholarship on the solar-year veintenas has tended to perpetuate the colonial friar-chroniclers' approach to the ceremonies as a system comprising discrete, fixed units, whose actors, events, and locations would have stayed largely consistent, but it seems to me very unlikely that the celebration of the veintena ceremonies remained wholly unchanged each year. I suggest that the cycle of annually repeating veintena feasts in Tenochtitlan was a mutable system that could accommodate varying ceremonial expressions in response to historical vicissitudes, the deeper connotations of Mexica year dates, and the conjunction of different calendrical cycles.

The case studies in this book explore two intertwined calendrical concerns. First, I expand my earlier inquiries into the historical nature of the Codex Borbonicus, cited above, by examining further the implications of the 2 Reed year-date glyph prominently depicted on Borbonicus page 34. For the Mexica, important year dates like 2 Reed were markers of events that had taken place in historical time. Because one of the primary functions of year-date glyphs in indigenous pictorial imagery was to anchor events within the march of linear, reckoned time, I maintain that the Codex Borbonicus veintena chapter documents the ceremonial cycle of 2 Reed 1507, during the early sixteenth-century reign of Moteuczoma II. I lay out the evidence for this conclusion in chapter 1. At the same time, Mexica year dates were laden with deeper mythic, historical, and metaphorical meanings; in the central Mexican calendar system, the cycle of fifty-two historical years operated along a continuum that bound together ancient myths, local origin stories, and communal foundation events with recent historical episodes and figures. When year dates repeated in later cycles, those deeper meanings could inform how events in the present were understood. Given this, I argue that the broader associations borne by 2 Reed years—both ancient and modern—indelibly inflected the tenor, ritual activities, and relative significance of the veintenas documented in the Borbonicus. Certain feasts may also have been elevated in special years like 2 Reed to become splendid public events and even citywide spectacles.

To do this, I look beyond the standard corpus of colonial veintena sources to extant historical chronicles and annals to better understand the historical, primordial, and metaphorical associations of the year date 2 Reed, and how those associations

might have affected the veintenas. Extant Nahuatl historical sources were largely created in early colonial Mexico by native, mestizo, and Spanish historians, often drawing on a trove of earlier manuscripts as well as native oral traditions. Some chronicles recount stories recorded from autochthonous oral traditions, sometimes in a process of interpreting the now-lost pictorial manuscripts by knowledgeable native readers/singers/performers/interpreters. The research of several scholars into the metaphorical and mythical associations of Mexica year dates, in central Mexican historical chronicles as well as late Postclassic imperial sculpture, has been especially helpful for understanding the potent primordial associations of the year 2 Reed with new beginnings of all kinds.<sup>55</sup> Annals histories and chronicles are crucial for revealing how 2 Reed years, historical and primordial alike, were conceptualized and remembered in later periods, and may do much to clarify how the larger associations of that year shaped the ritual performance of a singular historical year's ceremonies.

An important corollary to these questions about the historical nature of the Codex Borbonicus veintenas concerns the conjunction of time and space in the practice of Mexica ritual performance. Among the most interesting aspects of the eighteen solar-year ceremonies are the ways in which some of them manifested ephemeral recreations of sacred landscapes. I consider whether key ceremonial locations depicted in the Borbonicus would have been specially activated in the year 2 Reed. A good deal of scholarship has identified specific places in the landscape surrounding Tenochtitlan where the veintena rituals took place. Central Mexican historical chronicles describe many sacred locations, both real and mythical, where major ancient and primordial events had taken place in 2 Reed years. I suggest that some of the historical scenes in the Borbonicus reflected the integration of primordial and historical episodes, events, and figures in ceremonial landscape settings, places resonant with communal memories of legendary episodes involving gods and ancient kings.

The second major calendrical concern addressed in this book has to do with the convergence of the 365-day solar calendar that governed the veintenas with the major 260-day calendrical count, the tonalpohualli. Although there were multiple

55 See, e.g., Richard F. Townsend, *State and Cosmos in the Art of Tenochtitlan* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, Trustees for Harvard University, 1979), pp. 23–36; Emily Umberger, "Aztec Sculptures, Hieroglyphs, and History" (Ph.D. dissertation, New York, Columbia University, 1981); Cecelia F. Klein, "The Ideology of Autosacrifice at the Templo Mayor," in *The Aztec Templo Mayor*, ed. Elizabeth Hill Boone (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1987), pp. 293–370; Susan D. Gillespie, *The Aztec Kings: The Construction of Rulership in Mexica History* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1989), esp. pp. 68–82; William Landon Barnes, "Icons of Empire: The Art and History of Aztec Royal Presentation" (Ph.D. dissertation, New Orleans, LA, Tulane University, 2009); and Patrick Thomas Hajojsky, *On the Lips of Others: Moteuczoma's Fame in Aztec Monuments and Rituals* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015).

timekeeping systems in use across Mesoamerica and they formed a complex web, Umberger contends that scholars since the early colonial period in Mexico have largely treated the calendars “as separate systems in all but numerical respects.”<sup>56</sup> Yet the fifty-two-year count was formed from the constant permutation of the 365-day calendar with the 260-day tonalpohualli, and the latter cycle, in turn, had its own set of patron deities as well as associated ritual feast days. This study therefore investigates what impact the tonalpohualli, with its discrete feasts and auguries, might have had on specific veintena ceremonies as the 260-day calendar cycled through the solar year 2 Reed 1507.

To explore this question, I draw on the correlations of the calendrical counts of 260 and 365 days proposed by Alfonso Caso, which were later revised by Rafael Tena (tables 1.1 and 1.2).<sup>57</sup> There are numerous extant prehispanic and colonial tonalamatls, the divinatory almanacs that depict and describe the 260-day tonalpohualli, including an impressive example in the Codex Borbonicus itself. Although myriad questions remain about the nature and function of the tonalpohualli, extensive information was collected in the colonial period that has helped modern scholars to better understand its workings. I look to these documents to investigate which important tonalpohualli feast days might have converged with the veintena ceremonies under consideration here. I conclude that these kinds of calendrical conjunctions may have significantly expanded the scope of individual veintena rites, interacting in ways that were sometimes propitious and sometimes alarming, and requiring that the Mexica integrate additional gods, rites, and accoutrements into the annual veintena ceremonies. Returning to the discussion of space and place, such confluences may have also dictated that a given period’s rites expand to encompass key ceremonial locations in the sacred landscape bearing mythic and historical significance.

This approach was inspired by the research of several scholars, including early studies by Nicholson as well as more recent work by the art historians Emily Umberger, William Barnes, and Patrick Hajovsky, all of whom explore what the calendrical correlations might reveal about the contents and contexts of late Postclassic artworks bearing dates, particularly sculpture.<sup>58</sup> I first considered the question of the calendrical correlations of the veintena and tonalpohualli cycles in an earlier investigation of the Codex Borbonicus Huey Tozotli ceremony, expanded here

56 Umberger, “Notions of Aztec History,” p. 89.

57 Caso, *Los calendarios prehispánicos*; Tena, *El calendario mexicana*.

58 See, e.g., H. B. Nicholson, “An Aztec Monument Dedicated to Tezcatlipoca,” in *Miscellanea Paul Rivet: Octogenario Dicata* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1958), pp. 593–607; Nicholson, “The Chapultepec Cliff Sculpture of Motecuhzoma Xocoyotzin,” *El México Antiguo* 9 (1961), pp. 379–442; Umberger, “Aztec Sculptures, Hieroglyphs, and History”; Umberger, “Notions of Aztec History”; Barnes, “Icons of Empire”; and Hajovsky, *On the Lips of Others*.

in chapter 2.<sup>59</sup> I engage that calendrical question in all the chapters of this book. Exploring how specific veintenas may have intersected with the tonalpohualli days in real time, in the year 2 Reed 1507, may do much to clarify the unusual characters and activities depicted in the Codex Borbonicus imagery. A model of calendrical conjunctions that allows for multiple manifestations of the Mexica veintenas in different years might also help to explain some of the apparent contradictions among the friars' veintena texts.

Throughout this book, then, I aim to take a decolonial perspective to the study of prehispanic Mexica veintena ceremonies by interrogating the category of genre in colonial Mexican pictorial manuscripts, by re-examining the operation of the veintenas in relation to other aboriginal calendrical systems, and by expanding the comparanda we use to investigate prehispanic calendar rituals. Given the antiquity of pictorial manuscript traditions in Mexico and the indigenous authorship of the Codex Borbonicus, the Spanish Christian missionaries' colonial veintena accounts should illuminate a reading that *begins* with the Borbonicus manuscript's pictorial contents, renderings by native artists of their own prehispanic rituals. I seek to privilege the imagery provided by indigenous scribe-artists above the missionary-chroniclers' alphabetic texts, rather than relying mainly (or only) on the Christian missionary-chroniclers' textual characterizations of the calendars.

This is not to deny the significance of the corpus of colonial veintena sources for investigating prehispanic traditions. However mediated and problematic the friar-chroniclers' sources may be, no one would deny that our modern understanding of Mesoamerican calendars and ritual systems has been immeasurably enhanced by the information collected by the Christian missionaries in the sixteenth century. Nevertheless, there is a great deal more information to be gleaned by attending to additional sources beyond the textual accounts compiled by Sahagún, Durán, and other Christian missionaries. Much of the colonial archive resulted from the friars' active collaboration with indigenous partners, who provided not only ample information and communal memories but also extensive pictorial imagery for their encyclopedias of calendar rituals, deities, and accoutrements. As I and others have addressed elsewhere, the native artists' images in the colonial manuscripts often amplify, complement, and clarify the information contained in the friars' alphabetic texts.<sup>60</sup> What is more, art historians have long recognized that native pictorial manuscript sources, no longer extant, sometimes served as the very basis for the information recorded in the colonial cultural encyclopedias. The pictorial imagery in the colonial manuscripts must continue to be treated as a primary and invaluable source of information.

59 DiCesare, "Tlaloc Rites and Huey Tozoztli."

60 See DiCesare, *Sweeping the Way*, pp. 29–34.

Chapter 1 provides the foundation for the four case studies that follow. It examines the geographic and temporal specificity of the New Fire ceremony depicted on page 34, which, in turn, anchors the cyclically recurring Borbonicus festivals in historical time. The chapter lays out the major Mesoamerican calendars depicted in the Codex Borbonicus, describes their different forms and functions, and considers how the calendar cycles intertwined. It also seeks more broadly to blur the binary categories of “sacred” and “secular” genres in the consideration of colonial veintena sources.

The next four chapters comprise a series of case studies of specific veintena festivals. Investigating how different calendrical cycles overlap in a single year may provide a more nuanced understanding not only of the third chapter of the Codex Borbonicus but of the functioning of the Mexica veintena system more broadly. The six festivals at issue appear to have taken on unusual prominence in that year 2 Reed 1507. Chapter 2 investigates the pair of springtime ceremonies known as the “Small and Great Vigils” (Tozoztontli and Huey Tozoztli), expanding my earlier study of Huey Tozoztli, cited above. I propose that its agricultural veneration of the gods of rain and maize had routinely taken place in the farmers’ fields, but that its 2 Reed 1507 manifestation should be understood in light of recent environmental cataclysms, when the people were recovering from the effects of a terrible drought and famine. I argue that these feasts were transformed to become state-sponsored spectacles involving royal pilgrimages to the mountaintop temple of the rain god Tlaloc, and that the rain god’s shrine would have been specially activated not only by the calendar year date 2 Reed but also by several major tonalpohualli feasts that converged with that veintena period. In this way the ceremonies evoked primordial myths of cataclysm as well as a return to abundance.

Chapter 3 considers the unusual backdrop of a Mexican ballcourt for the summertime “Small and Great Feasts of the Lords” (Tecuilhuitontli and Huey Tecuilhuitl), a celebration of the nobility and its obligation to provide food for a hungry populace. I suggest that the ballcourt setting recreated primordial landscapes wherein dramatic political ruptures had played out. Such episodes affirmed that the Mexica ascent to power and the inauguration of a new epoch in a year 2 Reed had been sanctified by the gods themselves, drawing on intertwined concerns with agriculture and political authority. Ultimately, the ancient investiture of power by the gods served to legitimize the current reign of the Mexica, associations amplified by the overlapping veintena and tonalpohualli counts.

In chapter 4, I consider why the alcoholic beverage known as *pulque* is specially highlighted during the feast known as Quecholli (“Precious Feather”). That ceremony was dedicated to a ritual deer hunt and celebration of the warrior class, under the aegis of the god Mixcoatl (“Cloud Serpent”). I suggest that the drinking rites were integrated into the period as a separate ritual feast, tied to the 260-day tonalpohualli calendar cycling through Quecholli in 1507. That calendar feast was notoriously a

time of uninhibited drunkenness and debauchery. Because the Mexica associated Mixcoatl more broadly with wildness as well as the primordial invention of pulque, I conclude that it was appropriate to integrate those tonalpohualli ceremonies into the Quecholli rites on a grand scale.

Chapter 5 concludes the book where it begins, exploring the expansive New Fire imagery on page 34. This scene is one of the most famous and complex scenes in the manuscript, depicting a ceremony that commemorated the origins of the sun in tandem with Panquetzalitli, “Raising of the Banners,” which celebrated the origins of the sun god. Scholarly analyses have tended to emphasize the cyclical temporalities and mythical underpinnings of these solar ceremonies, but the conjunction of the two appears to have been unusual and historically specific, resulting in a powerful conjunction of calendar dates. This final chapter therefore considers the political and ideological dimensions of pairing the two ceremonies in the early sixteenth century. Ultimately, in historicizing the Codex Borbonicus veintena cycle and reconsidering the genres of “sacred” and “secular” routinely used to categorize native Mexican manuscripts, I aim to dislodge it from its authoritative perch among Mexican ritual manuscripts and situate it instead alongside dated artworks and manuscripts from late prehispanic and early colonial Mexico.