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### Teteo Innan, Her Song, from the Florentine Codex

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# THE FLAYED GOD

THE MYTHOLOGY OF MESOAMERICA  
SACRED TEXTS & IMAGES FROM PRE-COLUMBIAN MEXICO & CENTRAL AMERICA



ROBERTA H. MARKMAN & PETER T. MARKMAN

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# CONTENTS

Myths and Mythic Images x  
Acknowledgments xiii  
Guide to Pronunciation xv

- I INTRODUCTION: THE HISTORICAL FRAMEWORK 1**
- II THE FIGURE OF THE GODDESS: THE MYTHOLOGICAL IMAGES OF THE VILLAGE CULTURES 29**  
Introduction 30  
The Mythic Images 46
- III OF TIME, SPACE, AND EARTH: THE MYTHOLOGY OF THE URBAN TRADITION 57**
- IV THE FOURFOLD UNFOLDING: THE MYTHS OF CREATION 63**  
Introduction 64  
Maya Creation Myths 97 ✓  
Aztec Creation Myths 120 ✓  
Mixtec Creation Myths 149 ✓  
An Izapan Creation Myth 154 ✓  
Cosmological Images 156
- V FLAYED GODS, SNAKE WOMEN, AND WERE-JAGUARS: THE MYTHS OF FERTILITY 173**  
Introduction 174  
The Flayed God 204  
The Great Goddess 212  
The Gods of Rain and Storm 228
- VI FEATHERED SERPENTS AND HERO TWINS: THE MYTHIC STRUCTURE OF RULERSHIP 267**  
Introduction 268  
The Mythic Paradigm of the Ruler 302  
The Maya Hero Journey 316  
The Aztec Hero Journey 352  
The Migration Myth in Its Aztec Embodiment 380
- Notes 427  
Bibliography 437  
Illustration Sources and Credits 447  
Index 449

# MYTHS AND MYTHIC IMAGES

- Image 1: The First Figurine: The Goddess of Zohapilco 46  
Image 2: The Goddess as Mother: A D-1 Figurine from Tlatilco 48  
Image 3: The Pregnant Goddess: A Figurine from Copalche, Guatemala 50  
Image 4: The Mask of Life and Death: A Ceramic Mask from Tlatilco 52  
Image 5: Cuicuilco's Old God of Fire 54  
The Birth of the Uinal, from *The Book of Chilam Balam of Chumayel* 97  
The Birth of All of Heaven and Earth, from the *Popol Vuh* 104  
The Creation of the Sun and the Moon, from the *Florentine Codex* 120  
The Creation of the World, from the *Historia de los Mexicanos por sus Pinturas* 126  
Myth of the Suns and the Toltec-Chichimec Origins of the Mexica People: The Entire *Leyenda de los Soles* 131  
The Mixtec Creation Myth, from the *Origen de los Indios del Nuevo Mundo e Islas Occidentales* 149  
Image 6: The Tree of Origin, from the *Codex Vindobonensis* 152  
Image 7: An Izapan Creation Myth: Izapa Stela 5 154  
Image 8: The Vertical Dimension of the Cosmos, from the *Codex Vaticanus A* 156  
Image 9: The Image of Time: An Architectural Detail from Palenque 158  
Image 10: The Image of Time: Yaxchilan Stela 10 158  
Image 11: Time, the Gods, and Man, from the *Codex Borgia* 160  
Image 12: Time, the Gods, and Man, from the *Codex Vaticanus A* 160  
Image 13: Hueheteotl and the Quincunx 162  
Image 14: The Aztec Calendar Stone 164  
Image 15: Xiuhtecuhtli and the Four Directions, from the *Codex Fejérváry-Mayer* 166  
Image 16: Tlaloc as the Four Quadrants of Space and Time, from the *Codex Borgia* 168  
Image 17: Time Turning into Space: The Pyramid of the Niches at El Tajin 170  
Image 18: Time Turning into Space: The Temple of Quetzalcoatl at Teotihuacan 170  
Song of Xipe Totec Iouallauan, from the *Florentine Codex* 204  
Image 19: Xipe Totec: The Flayed God: A Ceramic Image from Veracruz 206  
Image 20: The Ritual Act of Sacrifice: Ballcourt Scene from El Tajin 208  
Image 21: The Ritual Act of Sacrifice: Ballcourt Scene from Chichen Itza 208  
Image 22: Life Born from Death: Izapa Stela 50 210  
The Myths of Tlaltecuhltli and Mayahuel, from the *Histoyre du Mechique* 212

- Teteo Innan, Her Song, from the *Florentine Codex* 214
- Cihuacoatl, Her Song, from the *Florentine Codex* 217
- Image 23: Coatlicue 220
- Image 24: Coyolxauhqui 224
- Image 25: Tlaltecuhlti, the Earth Monster 226
- Image 26: Ehecatl 228
- The God and Goddess of Water, from the *Historia de los Mexicanos por sus Pinturas* 230
- A Prayer to Tlaloc, from the *Florentine Codex* 231
- Tlaloc, His Song, from the *Florentine Codex* 239
- Image 27: The Olmec Were-Jaguar: San Lorenzo Monument 52 242
- Image 28: Cocijo: The Zapotec Rain God: Monte Alban I Funerary Urn 244
- Image 29: Cocijo: The Zapotec Rain God: Monte Alban II Funerary Urn 246
- Image 30: Cocijo: The Zapotec Rain God: Monte Alban III Funerary Urn 246
- Image 31: The Teotihuacan Tlaloc: An early Tlaloc Urn 248
- Image 32: The Teotihuacan Tlaloc: An early Tlaloc Urn 248
- Image 33: The Teotihuacan Tlaloc: The "Plancarte" Urn 248
- Image 34: Tlaloc After the Fall of Teotihuacan: Xochicalco Stela 2 250
- Image 35: Tlaloc After the Fall of Teotihuacan: Cacaxtla Mural Figure 250
- Image 36: The Aztec Tlaloc: Castillo de Teayo Relief Sculpture 252
- Image 37: The Aztec Tlaloc: Castillo de Teayo Tlaloc Sculpture 252
- Image 38: The Aztec Tlaloc: Tlaloc Urn, from the Templo Mayor 254
- Image 39: Izapa Stela 1 256
- Image 40: The Chac of the Codices: The Quadripartite Chac, from the *Dresden Codex* 258
- Image 41: The Chac of the Codices: Painted Pottery Funerary Plate 260
- Image 42: The Architectural Chac 262
- Image 43: Tlaloc as Tlaltecuhlti or Tlaltecuhlti as Tlaloc 264
- The Aztec Ruler's Entreaty to Tezcatlipoca, from the *Florentine Codex* 302
- Image 44: "El Rey": Chalcatzingo Monument I 308
- Image 45: The Olmec Throne: La Venta "Altar" 4 310
- Image 46: The Olmec Throne: Oxtotitlan Mural C-1 310
- Image 47: The Ruler and the God: La Venta Monument 19 312
- Image 48: The Ruler as the God: Yaxchilan Stela 11 314
- The Hero Journey of the Hero Twins, from the *Popol Vuh* 316
- Image 49: The Fall into Xibalba: The Palenque Sarcophagus Lid 348
- Image 50: Dancing out of Death: A Limestone Panel from Palenque 350
- Quetzalcoatl's Hero Journey, from the *Florentine Codex* 352
- Quetzalcoatl's Hero Journey, from the *Anales de Cuauhtitlan* 368

- Image 51: Life, Death, and the Ruler: A Huastec Stone Sculpture 378  
The Birth of Huitzilopochtli, from the *Florentine Codex* 380  
The Aztec Migration Myth, from the *Florentine Codex* 386  
The Finding and Founding of Tenochtitlan, from the *Crónica Mexicayotl* 394  
Image 52: The Beginning of the Migration, from the *Codex Boturini* 410  
Image 53: The Seven Caves of Chicomoztoc, from the *Historia Tolteca Chichimeca* 412  
The Return to Chicomoztoc, the Place of Origin, from the *Historia de las Indias de Nueva España e Islas de Tierra Firme* 414

virgin and said to her: "I have come to get you to take you to the world." To which she immediately agreed and so the two of them went down, he bearing her upon his shoulders; and as soon as they arrived on earth, they transformed themselves into a tree with two branches, of which one was called Quetzalhuexotl, which was the one of Ehecatl, and the other Xochicuauhitl, which was the one of the virgin.

Now, when her grandmother, who was sleeping, awoke and did not find her niece, she immediately summoned the other goddesses, who are called Cicime, and they all came down to earth to search for Ehecatl. At this point, the two tree branches separated from each other and the one of the virgin was immediately recognized by the old goddess who took it and broke it and offered a piece of it to each of the other goddesses who ate it; but the branch of Ehecatl they did not break, but left it there; which, as soon as the goddesses had gone back up to heaven, turned back into its first form of Ehecatl, who gathered up the bones of the virgin whom the goddesses had eaten and buried them, and from there a tree arose, which they call *metl*, from which the Indians make the wine that they drink and in which they rejoice; but this is not because of the wine, but for some roots that they call *ucpatli* which they put into it.

### **Teteo Innan, Her Song, from the *Florentine Codex***

This is another in the series of the sacred hymns recorded by Sahagún in both the *Codex Matritensis* and the *Florentine Codex*, a series that includes the "Song of Xipe Totec Iouallaun" presented above. Willard Gingerich, translator of this poem and a distinguished interpreter of Nahuatl poetry, indicates that "by Aztec times Teteo Innan represented a mother and earth numen of considerable antiquity and authority in the Valley of Mexico. Toci, 'Our Grandmother' is the name of her specifically Mexica hierophany," who by the time of the Aztecs can be seen as reflecting their "sacrificial concerns and imperial preoccupations."<sup>64</sup> The ritual context of the hymn, however, described in detail by Sahagún<sup>65</sup> and discussed briefly below in connection with Toci, certainly demonstrates the hymn's concern with earthly fertility as well as



those "imperial preoccupations." It is for that reason that Teteo Innan was addressed as "Our Mother, Lord of the Earth."

Gingerich contends that "the identification of Tamoanchan [an earthly paradise] as the goddess's place of origin . . . affirms that god and man have a common place of origin, since it was to Tamoanchan that Quetzalcoatl brought the 'precious bones' from which the first men were made by Quetzalcoatl and the goddess Quilaztli ['she who makes things grow,' an aspect of Coatlicue]."<sup>66</sup> The line "you emerge from Tamoanchan" suggests, then, that "the goddess appeared first among men from that chthonic womb" and that Teteo Innan links humanity back to the "venerable legitimate mother numen," Quilaztli. Thus "Teteo Innan, Her Song," is concerned with fertility on the deepest of levels.

This fundamental concern is suggested by the first stanzas in at least two ways. First, the mask referred to "is the mask of human thigh-skin donned in the ritual by Teteo Innan's 'son' Cinteotl, a god of corn who seems to have represented the ripe ear." Second, the hymn's opening is marked "by the flower symbolism so pervasive in Nahuatl lyrical poetry. The yellow and white flowers which 'had opened the blossom' evoke the creative, fecundive powers of the mother earth-spirit throughout the world. . . . They are first the literal flowers of spring which festoon the earth to announce the rebirth of life. They are also the 'flowers of our flesh,' and sacred, therefore to Chicomecoatl, 'Seven Serpent,' goddess of the vegetables on which our flesh depends—maize most specifically."

The hymn's second section refers to a complex mythic tale, one neither wholly preserved nor fully understood, in which the goddess Itzpapalotl, "Obsidian Butterfly," as an aspect of Teteo Innan, is involved with the initiation of sacrifice among the desert peoples who were to become the Aztecs. "With new chalk and new plumage she is anointed as in our first sacrifice of her on the desert. . . . She herself becomes the deer, the two-headed or paired were-deer who seduced Xiuhnel and consumed him, and who pursued Mimich through the fire until she fell into the barrel cactus and became our sacrifice." This myth of Xiuhnel and Mimich to which the last line of the hymn refers is presented in the myths of creation above as section VII of the *Leyenda de los Soles*. It involves the transformation of Itzpapalotl into a two-headed were-deer who seduces and consumes Xiuhnel, a cloud serpent, and then, in the process of chasing the other cloud serpent, Mimich, is caught in the barrel cactus and sacrificed.

Interestingly, "the rituals of Toci blending fertility, growth, harvest, parturition, and patriotic warfare all grow (mytho)logically from the elements found initially together in the little charter narrative of Xiuhnel, Mimich and the goddess Itzpapalotl." And that narrative strikes the deepest of the chords relating to fertility in Mesoamerica: the necessity of sacrifice in reciprocation for the bounty of the earth.



## TETEO INNAN, HER SONG

Translated from the Nahuatl by Willard Gingerich. Originally published in "Three Nahuatl Hymns on the Mother Archetype: An Interpretive Commentary" by Willard Gingerich in *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* 4 (1988): 191-244. Reprinted by permission of the translator.

*Ahuiya! Yellow flowers open the blossom;  
She, Our Mother with the sacred thigh-mask:  
You emerge from Tamoanchan.*

*Ahuiya! Yellow flower is your flower:  
She, Our Mother with the sacred thigh-mask  
You emerge from Tamoanchan.*

*Ahuiya! White flowers open the blossom;  
She, Our Mother with the sacred thigh-mask;  
You emerge from Tamoanchan.*

*Ahuiya! White flower is your flower;  
She, Our Mother with the sacred thigh-mask;  
You emerge from Tamoanchan.*

*Ahuiya! Goddess upon the barrel cactus,  
Our Mother, Aya, Itzpapalotl.*

*Ao, We had seen her;  
on the Nine Plains*

*With hearts of deer she will nurture herself.*

*Our Mother, Aya, Lord of the Earth.*

*Ao, ye, With new chalk, new plumes,  
She is anointed;*

*in the four directions arrows are broken.*

*Ao, To the deer transformed.*

*across the Divine Land to behold You  
come Xiuhnel and Mimich.*