# THE SACRED AS EVERYDAY: FOOD AND RITUAL IN AZTEC ART

by

ELIZABETH MORÁN

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Art History
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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Art History in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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ABSTRACT

THE SACRED AS EVERYDAY: FOOD AND RITUAL IN AZTEC ART

by

Elizabeth Morán

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The examination of food and its consumption in a society can lead to a wealth of information about a culture's worldview. In addition to being a source of sustenance, food also reflects a society's system of beliefs and ideals. This dissertation focuses on food, its depiction in Aztec art, and its ritual use in Aztec culture. While admittedly an odd choice for an art historian, the representation of food and its consumption is prevalent in the surviving art works created in various media by the Aztecs of Central Mexico in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The symbolic use of food and consumption is also evident in Aztec ritual, another subject recorded in several sixteenth-century sources of both native and European origin.

Food and its consumption have been explored by archaeologists, anthropologists, and religion specialists, among others. This dissertation, however, is the first integrated study by an art historian. The examination of sculptural and pictorial works of art is central to the ongoing discourse on Aztec culture and ritual. Crucial to that discussion is the way in which everyday staples gave meaning to the rituals performed, and in the process became sacred themselves. The Aztec chose specific foods as symbols and metaphors to be significant in their worldview because these foods in themselves were

important to daily life. The art works created helped to communicate this intertwined relationship between the sacred and the everyday. Through an analysis of images of food and eating, and their role in ritual, this dissertation hopes to facilitate and expand the continuity of dialogue on Aztec art, culture, and worldview.

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# CHAPTER 1

# INTRODUCTION

## The Dissertation Project

This dissertation, “The Sacred as Everyday: Food and Ritual in Aztec Art,” is about food, its depiction in Aztec art, and its ritual use in Aztec culture.[1] Food and eating are part of daily existence. They also play important roles within a society: they commemorate significant events and give meaning to social and religious activities. Integral to a society on many levels, food is often a cultural reflection, mirroring what is significant to a particular group. What then do the surviving images of food and eating reveal about the Aztecs of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Central Mexico? In particular, what do they tell us about Aztec ritual, of which they were an integral part?

The Aztecs depicted eating and foodstuffs in an array of artistic mediums. They painted images of people preparing foods, transporting and storing foods, and the foods themselves. Many of these images come from post-conquest, sixteenth-century

[1] The term “Aztec” has been used to denote historical, linguistic, cultural, and political identities, and while problematic, I use it in this work as a classifier for the peoples who are considered, historically, to have come from Aztlan in the twelfth century, founded the settlements of Tenochtitlan and Tlatelolco in the Central Basin of Mexico about 1325, and became partners with Tetzcoco and Tlacopan in establishing The Triple Alliance in the 1430s. They reached their ascendancy in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries before the Spanish conquest of 1521. For further information see Alfredo López Austin, “Aztecs,” in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Mesoamerican Cultures: The Civilizations of Mexico and Central America*, ed. Davíd Carrasco (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 1, 68-72. The Aztecs were divided into various groups who spoke the same language, Nahuatl, of which the Mexica were one. Scholars often refer to the group that founded the settlements at Tenochtitlan and Tlatelolco as “Mexica,” a name they assumed during the migration. The term “Nahua” is often used to denote Nahuatl-speaking peoples, and scholars often use the term to describe them following the Spanish conquest. For further information see Michael E. Smith, *The Aztecs* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 4. For clarity and continuity I use the term Aztec throughout this manuscript.

manuscripts such as the Spanish friar Bernardino de Sahagún's *General History of the Things of Spain*, also referred to as the *Florentine Codex*.[2] Aztec artists rendered fish, birds and other animals, as well as plants and vegetables, in stone, wood, clay, and paint. They also created stone and clay images of deities that were connected to foods, such as sculptures of maize deities. There are countless images of teeth and mouths devouring, as seen in canonical works like the *Sun Stone* and the monumental sculptures of the earth goddess Coatlicue.

Food was an integral part not only of the Aztecs' daily subsistence, but of the ways in which they viewed their larger world. Among other subjects, comprehensive sixteenth-century works by Sahagún and his Dominican contemporary Diego Durán document ceremonial practices that included the use of foods.[3] It is no surprise that the foods used in those religious rituals were staple items such as maize and beans. The historian Felipe Fernández-Armesto writes, "Staples are almost always sacred, because people depend on them: they possess divine power. The fact that staples in their turn usually depend on man for cultivation does not seem to compromise their sacred status."[4] This is particular true of the Aztecs' main staple, maize, which needs human intervention

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[2] Bernardino de Sahagún, *Florentine Codex: General History of the Things of New Spain*, 12 vols., trans. Arthur J.O. Anderson and Charles E. Dibble, Monographs of the School of American Research, no. 14 (Santa Fe: School of American Research; Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1950-1982). The *Florentine Codex* is an encyclopedic work on Aztec culture and religion organized by the Franciscan friar Bernardino de Sahagún, who used Nahua informants to gather information. The finished product is a bi-lingual work, in Spanish and Nahuatl, the native language of the Aztecs, and accompanied by painted images. Donald Robertson has propoposed that Sahagún's prototype was most probably the thirteenth-century *De Proprietatibus Rerum* by Bartholomaeus Anglicus, since it follows the medieval manuscript in its organization of topics: the Divine, the Human, and the Mundane. See Donald Robertson, "The Manuscripts of Sahagún," in *Mexican Manuscript Painting of the Early Colonial Period: The Metropolitan Schools* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994), 170.

[3] Diego Durán, *Book of the Gods and Rites and The Ancient Calendar*, trans. and ed. Fernando Horcasistas and Doris Heyden (Norman: University of Oaklahoma Press, 1971).

[4] Felipe Fernández-Armesto, *Food: A History* (London: MacMillan, 2001), 34.

for its cultivation. Yet it was also one of the most widely used foods in Aztec ritual. The aim of my dissertation is to analyze how these basic foods were transformed into sacred elements within particular Aztec rituals, and how food in turn gave meaning to the rituals performed.

The question of transformation in ritual is key. Not only were foods transformed in ritual performances through either a physical or symbolic metamorphosis, but the rituals themselves were transformative because of the *use* of food. In Aztec mythology, food takes on a supernatural role by being the catalyst for cosmic change. For example, one myth recounts how each cosmic age began and ended in connection with the eating of specific foods or the conversion of humans into foodstuffs.[5] In some myths deities are transformed into food.[6] And in yet another story, the creation of the world and all its bounty comes about through the transformation of the remains of a dead (or "sacrificed") creature, a symbol of the earth itself.[7]

While these cosmic transformations relegate food to a supernatural realm, changes in food are also part of a natural process. The cycle of a maize seed growing into a plant, which in turn is harvested and prepared in various ways, is a powerful

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[5] *History and Mythology of the Aztecs: Codex Chimalpopoca*, trans. John Bierhorst (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1992), 142-144. I am using the English version of the *Legend of the Sun* as published in *Codex Chimalpopoca*, although there are numerous other translations, including Angel M. Garibay's *Teogonía e Historia de los Mexicanos: Tres Opúsculos del Siglo XVI* (Mexico City: Editorial Porrúa, 1979). For a solid but brief description of the origin of the text see John Bierhorst, "Introduction," in *History and Mythology of the Aztecs: Codex Chimalpopoca*, 1-16. For references to other editions and translations see Roberto Moreno de los Arcos, "Los Cinco Soles Cosmogónicos," *Estudios de Cultural Nahuatl* 7 (1967), 183-210. This particular myth is discussed further in Chapter 2.

[6] In Sahagún, Book 7 (The Sun, Moon and Stars, and the Binding of the Years), the god Xolotl tries to escape Death by transforming himself into three different foods: maize, maguey, and a salamander. This particular myth is discussed further in Chapter 2.

[7] In the *Histoyre du Mechique,* the gods Quetzalcoatl and Tezcatlipoca tear apart the body of a large crocodilian creature, called Tlaltecuhtli (Earth Monster). From her body came the heavens, the earth, and all its bounty. See Angel M. Garibay, *Teogonía e Historia de los Mexicanos* (Mexico City: Editorial Porrua, 1979), 108. This myth is discussed further in Chapter 5.

example of a food's transformation from one state to another. Rituals performed in agricultural ceremonies often paralleled the natural metamorphosis of food. For example, in the agricultural ceremony called *Hueytecuihuitl* (Great Feast Day of the Lords), in honor of the young maize goddess Xilonen, tortillas of green maize and cooked amaranth greens were eaten.[8] This communal meal was fitting for a celebration of the young fertility goddess, whose domain included the young and tender stages of maize and other plants.

To explore the role of food in Aztec life I rely on primary sources that encompass indigenous and Spanish sixteenth-century accounts as well as the wealth of remaining Aztec artworks. Whereas eating and rituals have been scrutinized independently, the former primarily by anthropologists and the latter by religious specialists, my dissertation on food and ritual in Aztec art is the first integrated study by an art historian. Recent studies have treated the ritual dimensions of Aztec social life,[9] but none has dealt specifically with eating and ritual. As so much extant information on the Aztecs depends on visual culture, particularly painted manuscript images and an enormous corpus of sculptural works, it is my conviction that it is crucial to incorporate them into the ongoing dialogue on Aztec ritual practices. Most importantly, my study explores the everyday and ritual as intertwined aspects of life, a point of view that is more in keeping with

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[8] Sahagún, Book 2 (The Ceremonies). This ceremony is discussed further in Chapter 6.

[9] See, for example, Michael E. Smith, "Domestic Ritual at Aztec Provincial Sites in Morelos," in *Domestic Ritual in Ancient Mesoamerica*, ed. Patricia Plunket (Los Angeles: Cotsen Institute of Archaeology, Los Angeles, University of California, 2002), 93-114; Elizabeth Hill Boone "Migration Histories as Ritual Performance," in *To Change Place: Aztec Ceremonial Landscapes,* ed. Davíd Carrasco (University Press of Colorado, 1991), 121-151.

Aztec philosophy.[10] The acts of eating and the various rituals performed by the Aztec were not relegated to separate realms; rather these sacred acts were allied with everyday life.

## Methodology and Sources

My dissertation employs an interdisciplinary approach, utilizing research on food, religion, and ritual from such fields as anthropology, archaeology, and religious studies, in addition to art history. An interdisciplinary approach is necessary because only this kind of cross-cultural investigation will allow a multi-layered understanding of both eating and religious ritual in Aztec thought and culture. In gathering sources, my project uses what Davíd Carrasco calls an "ensemble approach," integrating a variety of sources and types of evidence such as pictorial manuscripts, colonial texts, sculpture, ceramics and other forms of art.[11]

## Visual Sources

The Aztec were prolific artists who created food imagery in many mediums. My discussion of ceramics is based on study of objects at the National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., and the Museo Nacional de Antropología, Mexico City. Those pieces include everyday serving ware as well as vessels used on special occasions. I also make use of figural works, deity statues and monumental sculptural art, such as the *Sun Stone*, many of which were found in the Aztec

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[10] Miguel León-Portilla, "Metaphysical and Theological Ideas of the Nahuas," in *Aztec Thought and Culture: A Study of the Ancient Nahuatl Mind*, trans. Jack Emory Davis (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963), 62-103.

[11] Davíd Carrasco, *Religions of Mesoamerica: Cosmovision and Ceremonial Centers* (Long Grove: Waveland Press, 1998), 12.

capital of Tenochtitlan, as well as smaller pieces that are displayed at The Museo Nacional de Antropología and the Templo Mayor Museum, both in Mexico City, and other museums in Mexico and the U.S. The smaller works include clay figurines of numerous fertility deities, such as those of maize and maguey, whose imagery and cults significantly incorporated the themes of food in ritual.

Also fundamental to my project are copies of sixteenth-century pictorial manuscripts that describe and illustrate Aztec deities, religion, and ritual. Foremost among these manuscripts is the *Codex Borbonicus*,[12] which contains detailed images of the eighteen ceremonies (veintenas) the Aztec staged yearly that involved agricultural ceremonies and feasting. Other painted manuscripts that are essential to the study of deities and rituals are the *Codex Magliabechiano* [13] and the images contained in the lavishly illustrated works of Fray Diego Durán and Fray Bernardino de Sahagún. While based on pre-conquest sources, the images in these volumes were created in the post-conquest period by indigenous artists who blended visual components from both old and new worlds.

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[12] Ferdinand Anders, Maarten Jansen, and Luis Reyes García, *El Libro del Ciuacoatl: Homenaje para el Año del Fuego Nuevo, Códice Borbónico* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1991). The Codex Borbonicus is an early post-conquest pictorial manuscript which is made up of four different sections. The first section is a divinatory almanac. The second section deals with the Lords of the Night, depicted in association with the 52-year cycle. The third section, and the one most used in this study, treats the veintenas, especially the agricultural ceremonies. The fourth and final section is a 52-year cycle and the New Fire Ceremony. See Christopher Couch, "History, Description and Dating of the Manuscript," in *The Festival Cycle of the Codex Borbonicus* (Oxford: BAR International Series, 1985), 1-6.

[13] Ferdinand Anders, Maarten Jansen, Luis Reyes García, *Libro de la Vida: Texto Explicativo del Llamado Códice Magliabechiano* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1996). The pictorial manuscript was done post-contact for a European audience, since space is set aside for Spanish glosses to explain the scenes depicted. The entire manuscript deals with the ritual calendar and annual ceremonies.

## Primary Written Sources

Written texts for this dissertation encompass primary accounts from both indigenous, mestizo, and European writers, written mainly in the sixteenth-century. They include works gathered by Spanish missionaries such as the already mentioned friars Sahagún and Durán, as well as accounts by Sahagún's fellow Franciscan, Fray Toribio de Benavente (Motolinia),[14] the mestizo historian Hernando Alvarado Tezozomoc, who produced the *Crónica Mexicana*[15] in the sixteenth century, and others. Tezozomoc was the great grandson of the Mexica ruler Axayacatl (ruled 1469-1481) and grandson of Moctezuhma Xocoyotzin (ruled 1502-1520).[16] In 1598 he wrote his history of the Aztecs and their kings, from the thirteenth century to the arrival of the Spaniards.

Sahagún arrived in New Spain in 1529, eight years after the conquest, learned Nahuatl, and with the assistance of Nahua elders, assistants, and artists, compiled what is literally an encyclopedia of Aztec culture and religion.[17] The Franciscan's writings, as well as his collection of painted images, continue to allow scholars the opportunity to re-interpret Aztec culture and keep an on-going dialogue about Aztec religion and art.[18]

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[14] Toribio de Motolinia, *Historia de los Indios de la Nueva España*, ed. Georges Baudot (Madrid: Clásicos Castalia, 1985).

[15] Hernando Alvarado Tezozomoc, *Crónica Mexicana, Escrita Hacia el Año de 1598,* Notes by Manuel Orozco y Berra. (Mexico City: Editorial Leyenda, 1944).

[16] D. W. Mcpheeters, "An Unknown Early Sixteenth-Century Codex of the Cronica Mexicana of Hernando Alvarado Tezozomoc," *The Hispanic Review* 34, no. 41 (Nov.1954), 506-507.

[17] H. B. Nicholson "Fray Bernardino de Sahagún: A Spanish Missionary in New Spain, 1529-1590," in *Representing Aztec Ritual: Performance, Text, and Image in the Work of Sahagún*, ed. Eloise Quiñones Keber (University Press of Colorado, 2002), 21-39. In addition to the Florentine Codex, Sahagún and his team of indigenous collaborators produced the *Primeros Memoriales*, trans. from Nahuatl by Thelma Sullivan (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997).

[18] The following is just a small sample of the literature on Sahagún's works: Ellen T. Baird, *The Drawings of Sahagún's Primeros Memoriales: Structure and Style* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993); Miguel León-Portilla, *Bernardino de Sahagún: First Anthropologist*, trans. Mauricio J. Mixco

Diego Durán was brought to Mexico as a small child and lived in Tetzcoco[19] after moving to New Spain.[20] He joined a Dominican monastery by the age of nineteen and, like Sahagún, took great interest in recording the history and customs of the indigenous population, although he often seems to be less sympathetic in his descriptions and writings.[21] Arriving in Mexico in 1524 as one of the original "twelve" Franciscan missionaries, Toribio de Benavente (Motolinía) spent several years writing a history of New Spain, which he completed in February 1541.[22] His writings on the rituals and customs of the Aztecs contain valuable information and they add other rich layer of understanding to the works of Sahagún, Durán, and Alvarado Tezozomoc.

Although later in date than these works, the writings of the priest Hernando Ruiz de Alarcón, completed in 1629, are helpful in examining the survival of food rituals after the conquest.[23] Ruiz de Alarcón was born in Taxco, Guerrero, and served as a parish

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(Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002); *The Work of Bernardino de Sahagún, Pioneer Ethnographer of Sixteenth-Century Aztec Mexico*, ed. J. Jorge Klor de Alva, H. B. Nicholson and Eloise Quiñones Keber (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1988); *Representing Aztec Ritual:Performance, Text, and Image in the Work of Sahagún*, ed. Eloise Quiñones Keber (Boulder: University of Colorado Press, 2002).

[19] The city of Tetzcoco, home of the Acolhua people, formed the Triple Alliance about 1430, with Tenochtitlan and Tlacopan. After the conquest it continued to be an important center.

[20] Fernando Horcasitas and Doris Heyden, "Fray Diego Durán: His Life and Works," in *Book of the Gods and Rites and the Ancient Calendar,* trans. and ed. Fernando Horcasitas and Doris Heyden (Norman: University of Oaklahoma Press, 1971), 4-5. The exact date of his coming to Mexico is unknown.

[21] Ibid., 12- 47.

[22] For a solid discussion on the friar see Georges Baudot, "Friar Toribio de Benavente Motolinía," in *Utopia and History in Mexico: The First Chroniclers of Mexican Civilization (1520-1569)*, trans. Bernard R. Ortiz de Montellano and Thelma Ortiz de Montellano (Niwot: University Press of Colorado, 1995), 246-334.

[23] Michael D. Coe and Gordon Whittaker, trans., *Aztec Sorcerers in Seventeenth Century Mexico: The Treatise on Superstitions by Hernando Ruiz de Alarcón*, Institute for Mesoamerican Studies, Publication No. 7 (Albany: State University of New York, 1982).

priest in the town of Atenango.[24] He began compiling his *Treatise on Superstitions* as early as 1617. Although his work is not from the Basin of Mexico, it is a valuable source that is useful as a supplement and contrast to the earlier writings of Sahagún, Durán, and Motolinía. All of these post-contact works certainly reflect a European mindset and recount events using a European lens, which one must recognize, but they are essential in that they provide an eyewitness look into the indigenous and early colonial[25] Aztec worlds.

## Secondary Sources: Ritual

Sahagún, Durán, and Motolinía were some of the first Europeans to observe, describe, and examine Aztec ritual, and their writings have provided a solid foundation for later scholars. Earlier scholars of the Aztecs focused their work on the identification and classification of deities and rituals, with the emphasis on exploring the Aztec calendar and its relation to ritual. The Mexican archeologist and scholar Alfonso Caso's *El Pueblo del Sol* and *El Calendario Mexicano,* for example, are still significant in their scope and breath.[26] Shorter but just as significant to the foundation of ritual studies is ethnohistorian Henry B. Nicholson's "Religion in Pre-Hispanic Central Mexico," a seminal work on the many aspects of Aztec religion and ritual, to which current scholars

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[24] Ibid., 1.

[25] The term colonial is used throughout this manuscript, but it should be noted that Mexico was never a true colony of Spain, rather it was a viceroyalty. See Mark A. Burkholder with Suzanne Hiles, "An Empire Beyond Compare," in *The Oxford History of Mexico*, ed. Michael C. Meyer and Willian H. Beezley (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 115-119.

[26] Alfonso Caso, *El Pueblo del Sol* (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1953) and *El Calendario Mexicano* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1953).

continue to refer.[27] Also important are the investigations of scholars working in Mexico such as Alfredo López Austin, Miguel León-Portilla, Johanna Broda, and Doris Heyden, who have written at length on Mesoamerican rituals, cosmovision (worldview) and ideology.[28]

More recently, study of Aztec ritual has moved from classification to conceptualization and more theoretical treatment. In *Aztec Ceremonial Landscapes*, for example, scholars from various disciplines explore the different dynamics that reinforced the Aztec ritual world, such as the actions of the marketplace, of warfare, and of ritual as performance. Aztec ritual as performance is also the central theme of *Representing Aztec Ritual: Performance, Text, and Image in the Work of Sahagún*, a collection of essays by an interdisciplinary group of authors who focus on ritual images in the *Primeros Memoriales* and *Florentine Codex.*[29] Aztec ritual has also been explored in connection with the creation of identity in indigenous populations in *Cosmovisión, Ritual*

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[27] Henry B. Nicholson, "Religion in Pre-Hispanic Central Mexico," in *Archaeology of Northern Mesoamerica*, vol.10, ed. Gordon F. Ekholm and Ignacio Bernal, *Handbook of Middle American Indians,* 16 vols., ed. Robert Wauchope (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971), 395-446.

[28] Alfredo López Austin, *Cuerpo Humano e Ideología: Las Concepciones de los Antiguos Nahuas*, 2 vols. (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Instituto de Investigaciones Antropológicas, 1980); Miguel León-Portilla, *Aztec Thought and Culture*. Translated by Jack Emory Davis. The Civilization of the Ancient Nahuatl Mind Series, 67 (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990); Johanna Broda, "Astronomy, Cosmovision, and Ideology in pre-Hispanic Mesoamerica," in *Ethnoastronomy and Archeoastronomy in the Andean Tropics,* ed. Anthony Aveni and Gary Uton (New York: New York Academy of Sciences, 1989), 81-123; Doris Heyden, "Dryness Before the Rains: Toxcatl and Tezcatlipoca," in *To Change Place: Aztec Ceremonial Landscapes,* ed. Davíd Carrasco (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 1991), 188-202.

[29] *Representing Aztec Ritual: Performance, Text, and Image in the Work of Sahagún*, ed. Eloise Quiñones Keber (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2002).

*e Identidad de los Pueblos Indígenas de México*, another collection of essays by Mexican scholars.[30]

While a major component of Aztec ritual, food has been only minimally explored and is usually secondary to other notions such as landscape. Such, for example, is the central theme of historian of religions scholar Philip P. Arnold's *Eating Landscape: Aztec and European Occupation of Tlalocan*.[31] Although most scholars of ritual have recognized the significance of feasting and food in Aztec rituals, no major work has focused on this area. My dissertation intends to remedy this omission.

## Secondary Sources: Feasting

For the most part, food and feasting as a topic of Aztec scholarship has been largely ignored by scholars. Perhaps the idea of exploring a subject that evokes pleasure and the senses on various levels is not regarded as worthy of serious research. Anthropologist Brian Hayden has noted that while there are many descriptive accounts of feasts in earlier ethnographies, few anthropologists have addressed the theoretical importance of feasting.[32] Within recent years, however, several studies have shown how important feasting is for understanding cultural processes.[33] Among these works are food

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[30] *Cosmovisión, Ritual e Identidad de los Pueblos Indígenas de México*, ed. Johanna Broda and Félix Báez-Jorge (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2001).

[31] Philip P. Arnold, *Eating Landscape: Aztec and European Occupation of Tlalocan* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 1999).

[32] Brian Hayden, "Fabulous Feasts: A Prolegomenon to the Importance of Feasting," in *Feasts: Archaeological and Ethnographic Perspectives on Food, Politics, and Power*, ed. Michael Dietler and Brian Hayden (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001), 23-24. Heyden notes that Northwest Coast feasting is an exception.

[33] *Feasts: Archaeological and Ethnographic Perspectives on Food, Politics, and Power*, ed. Michael Dietler and Brian Hayden (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001).

studies such as Gary Paul Nahban's *Coming Home to Eat: The Pleasures and Politics of Local Foods* and Jeffrey M. Pilcher's *¡Qué Vivan los Tamales! Food and the Making of Mexican Identity*.[34] Particularly important to my project are works that specifically deal with food in Mesoamerica, before and after the Spanish conquest. One of the earliest and most influential food studies is historian Alfred Crosby's *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences after 1492*.[35] Crosby's work was one of the first serious studies of the conquest in terms of food exchange, and later scholars often refer to his work. Anthropologist Sophie Coe's *America's First Cuisines* is an important study that examines food and its significance for indigenous cultures. In *The True History of Chocolate,* she and anthropologist Michael Coe focus on chocolate and its significance before and after European contact.[36] More recent works include historian John C. Super's *Food, Conquest, and Colonization in Sixteenth-Century Spanish America* and an interdisciplinary Mexican collection titled *Conquista y Comida: Consecuencias del Encuentro de Dos Mundos*, edited by Janet Long-Solís.[37] Long-Solís has continued to work on several other food studies specific to Mexico, most recently *Food Culture in Mexico*.[38]

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[34] Gary Paul Nabhan, *Coming Home to Eat: The Pleasures and Politics of Local Foods* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2002) and Jeffrey M. Pilcher, *!Qué Vivan losTtamales! Food and the Making of Mexican Identity* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998).

[35] Alfred W. Crosby, Jr. *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1973).

[36] Sophie D. Coe, *America's First Cuisines* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994); Sophie D. Coe and Michael D. Coe, *The True History of Chocolate* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1996).

[37] John C. Super, *Food, Conquest, and Colonization in Sixteenth-Century Spanish America* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985); Janet Long, ed., *Conquista y Comida: Consecuencias del Encuentro de Dos Mundos* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1996).

[38] Janet Long-Solís and Luis Alberto Vargas, *Food Culture in Mexico* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2005).

Innovative studies on feasting as ritual and on domesticity as part of the sacred realm are also relevant. Both historian of religion Kay Almere Read and anthropologist Michael Smith address the role of the everyday in the creation of the sacred.[39] Anthropologist Elizabeth Brumfiel and ethnographer Yolotl González Torres are pioneers who have begun to examine feasting as ritual in Mesoamerica.[40]

While my work makes use of these various studies, it is decidedly different in nature from them because it focuses on the role that food played within ritual and, specifically, the role of basic staples in highly sacred religious activities. Historically, and through surviving art works, it examines the ritual use of food from the beginning of Aztec mythic history through contact with Europeans. It thus allows for an examination of specific foods and rituals that survived the conquest, the ways in which they were recorded after contact, and the reasons why.

## Organization of the Dissertation

Chapter 2, "The Importance of Food in Aztec Society," introduces the role food played in Aztec (Mexica) culture in the Basin of Mexico. It focuses on the importance of food throughout Aztec history, from their nomadic beginnings in the late twelfth century

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[39] Kay Almere Read, *Time and Sacrifice in the Aztec Cosmos* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998); Michael Smith, "Domestic Ritual at Aztec Provincial Sites in Morelos," in *Domestic Ritual in Ancient Mesoamerica*, ed. Patricia Plunket (Los Angeles: Cotsen Institute of Archaeology, University of California, Los Angeles, 2002), 93-114.

[40] Elizabeth Brumfiel, "Meaning by Design: Ceramics, Feasting and the Figured Worlds in Postclassic Mexico," in *Mesoamerican Archaeology: Theory and Practice,* ed. Julia A. Hendon and Rosemary A. Joyce (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 239-264; Yolotl González Torres, "El Banquete Como Forma Ritual," in *Arqueología Mexicana, Historia y Esencia: Reconocimiento al Dr. Román Piña Chán,* ed. Jesús Nava Rivero (Mexico City: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 2002), 119-123.

to their rise in power in the fifteenth century in the Basin of Mexico (Figure 1.1).[41] It begins with a discussion of the first foods as recorded in various pictorial migration accounts and anonymous textual manuscripts such as the *Leyenda de los Soles,* the *Histoyre du Mechique*, and the *Historia de los Mexicanos por sus pinturas*, which reveal the importance of food in Aztec myth and early history.[42] Painted historical manuscripts, such as the *Codex Azcatitlan* and *Codex Boturini,* illuminate the relationship between food and Aztec history and society, beginning with the migration period.[43] These works relate that food was vital in Aztec migration stories, creation myths, and their overall worldview. Like all Mesoamerican peoples, the Aztec desired to keep a balance between themselves and the universe. Part of maintaining that relationship was developing a reciprocal relationship with the earth, which resulted in the economic importance of food. The last part of chapter 2 examines the relationship between trade, tribute, and food production, especially the role of the marketplace and food distribution in Aztec society during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Chapter 3, "Eating as Everyday," explores the everyday use of food among the Aztecs. It examines the types of food the Aztec had available to them in their environment and through cultivation, the numerous ways in which these foods were used and prepared, and the many rules and regulations regarding food consumption. The

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[41] For a discussion of the history of the Aztecs in the Basin of Mexico see Michael E. Smith, "The Rise of Aztec Civilization," in *The Aztecs* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 31-58.

[42] *History and Mythology of the Aztecs: Codex Chimalpopoca*, trans. John Beirhorst (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1992); Angel M. Garibay, *Teogonía e Historia de los Mexicanos: Tres Opúsculos del Siglo XVI* (Mexico: Editorial Porrúa, 1979).

[43] *Codex Azcatitlan*, intro. Michel Graulich, commentary Robert H. Barlow, trans. to Spanish Leonardo López Luján, trans. to French Dominique Michelet, 2 vols. (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, Societété des Américanistes, 1995); Alfredo Pérez Bolde, *Interpretación del Codice Boturini* (Mexico: Centro de Investigaciones Humanísticas, 1980).

foods discussed are those of greatest importance to the Aztec people. Some of these, like maize and beans, were eaten everyday as well as on a ritualized religious level. Others such as cacao (which produces chocolate) and maguey (used in making *pulque*, a mildly intoxicating beverage) were used mainly on special occasions. Investigating the various ways in which food was used in Aztec culture is preliminary to discussing its ritualized uses. Along with both the written and pictorial evidence from sixteenth-century sources, the chapter makes use of ceramics, sculpture, and other art objects related to food.

"Eating as Ritual," chapter 4, examines verbal and visual descriptions of ritualized eating, particularly in ceremonies recorded in Sahagún's *Florentine Codex*, Durán's *Historia* and *Book of the Gods and Rites and the Ancient Calendar*,[44] as well as painted sixteenth-century manuscripts like *Codex Mendoza*.[45] This chapter examines the role of feasting in Aztec culture in both domestic contexts, such as those having to do with "life cycle" events (births, marriages, funerals), as well as state-level ceremonies practiced by the military, merchant, and noble classes.

Chapter 5, "Food and the Gods," provides an overview of representations of food, agricultural deities, and their cults in both painted manuscripts and sculpture. It also examines foods used in religious rituals that are not associated with deity images.

Chapter 6, "Food in Ritual," analyzes specific *veintena* ceremonies as represented in both textual descriptions and related images of ritual activities. This series of eighteen public ceremonies was performed annually in accordance with the 365-day solar

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[44] Diego Durán, *History of the Indies of New Spain*, trans. Doris Heyden (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993) and *Book of the Gods and Rites and The Ancient Calendar,* trans. and ed. Fernando Horcasistas and Doris Heyden (Norman: University of Oaklahoma Press, 1971).

[45] *Codex Mendoza,* 4 vols., ed. Frances F. Berdan and Patricia Rieff Anawalt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

calendar. Of greatest relevance are ceremonies in which everyday grains such as maize and amaranth become sacralized. It is in the veintena depictions that one can best understand how food served as both an everyday and cosmic sustenance.

Chapter 7, "Food and Ritual after the Conquest," examines what happened to food rituals and representations after the Spanish conquest of 1521. It discusses food in the early colonial period (ca. 1521-1600), changes in pre-Hispanic eating patterns, the introduction of new foods, and the food-related rituals that survived. Of specific interest are questions of whether first foods such as maize remained important and whether myths relating to food continued to be significant after the conquest. The chapter also examines the new ways in which foods were used in hybrid rituals that reflected a merging of indigenous and European cultures. It makes use of post-conquest images as found in colonial pictorial manuscripts as well as murals like those in the cloister of the sixteenth-century Augustinian monastery of Malinalco in Mexico.

The concluding Chapter 8 presents final thoughts about food, art, and ritual. It summarizes the findings of the previous chapters about the role of food in Aztec thought as seen in origin and migration accounts, Aztec art, and ritual performance, especially the way basic staples became sacred substances in ritual use. It emphasizes the role of food as a symbol of transformation and a metaphor for cosmic continuity. After noting the changes brought about by contact with Europeans, it briefly considers continuities in the use of pre-Hispanic foods in the daily life and ritual practices of modern-day Mexico.

# CHAPTER 2

# THE IMPORTANCE OF EVERYDAY FOOD IN AZTEC SOCIETY

## First Foods

The sixteenth-century mestizo writer, Hernando Alvarado Tezozomoc, in his *Crónica Mexicana*, recorded the story of the Nahua people from their first entry into the Basin of Mexico in the thirteenth century, their settlement of Tenochtitlan on islands in Lake Tezcoco about 1325, and their systematic rise to power and control in Central Mexico in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (Figure 1.1).[46] Crucial to the beginnings of the Aztecs in their new homeland were the seeds or foods they brought with them: maize, beans, chia, and amaranth.[47] These foods continued to play an important role in Aztec culture, and they were the very same items the Aztec state would later require in tribute from conquered provinces.[48]

Food appears frequently in migration accounts, being present as well at the foundation of Aztec history. In the pictorial manuscripts that illustrate food, such as *Codex Azcatitlan*[49] and *Codex Boturini*,[50] food, food preparation, and food consumption

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[46] Hernando Alvarado Tezozomoc, *Crónica Mexicana, Escrita hacia el año de 1598*. Notes by Manuel Orozco y Berra. (Mexico City: Editorial Leyenda, 1944).

[47] Ibid., 8.

[48] Sophie Coe, *Americas First Cuisines* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), 89.

[49] *Codex Azcatitlan*, intro. Michel Graulich, commentary by Robert H. Barlow, trans. to Spanish Leonardo López Luján, trans. to French Dominique Michelet, 2 vols. (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, Societété des Américanistes, 1995). The anonymous colonial manuscript is divided into three discernable sections: the migration of the Nahuas until the establishment of the city of Tenochtitlan; Aztec history until the arrival of the Spanish; the Conquest and early colonial history. See *Codex Azcatitlan*, 16-22.

[50] Alfredo Pérez Bolde, *Interpretación del Codice Boturini* (Mexico City: Centro de Investigaciones Humanisticas, 1980). The Boturini is one of many Aztec migration accounts, yet it does

are not only symbols for survival and success but metaphors for continuity of culture and religion. As the Mexica moved from one location to the next, they were able to acquire and prepare the necessary foods that allowed them to survive and forge their cultural identity, which included specific everyday foods and their uses in ritual. Migration accounts that illustrate food help establish the Aztecs as the chosen group in Central Mexico to thrive above other cultural groups. Food, or a lack of it, helps in reading this success.

The *Codex Azcatitlan* refers to food very early in the migration account (Figure 2.1). According to folio 4, during the years 1169 and 1170 the Aztec stopped at a desert-like location, whose flora included succulents and cacti such as the nopal.[51] The inclusion of the nopal plant in the image is essential. In Book 11 (Earthly Things) of the *Florentine Codex*, Sahagún's informants list the different types of tunas (cactus fruits), their particular tastes, and some of the ways in which they were cooked.[52] In addition to being an important food item, the nopal fruit became an emblem of Tenochitlan, which literally translates to "place of the fruit of the cactus,"[53] and an icon of Aztec identity. According to Aztec myth, the Mexica would find their home when they came across the

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not culminate in the founding of Tenochtitlan. The manuscript thus seems to be unfinished, as it ends abruptly and prematurely.

[51] *Codex Azcatitlan*, vol. 1, 52.

[52] Bernardino de Sahagún, *Florentine Codex: General History of the Things of New Spain*, 12 vols., trans. and ed. Arthur J. Anderson and Charles E. Dibble (Santa Fe: School of American Research; Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1950-82), Book 11, 126-124.

[53] Esther Pasztory, *Aztec Art* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), 50.

sign of an eagle perched on a cactus.[54] The inclusion of the nopal fruit in the Azcatitlan image foreshadows the success of the Aztecs in their new home.

The rest spot depicted proved to be a good place for a temporary home, as indicated by several houses and temples drawn in the center of the page. In the midst of these buildings a kneeling woman grinds maize on a rectangular *metate* (stone grinder). This type of grinder was used for maize, a critical food in both everyday and ritual use.[55] Its appearance among the temples and homes indicates stability in the everyday, cultural, and religious life of the Aztecs. As they moved around the Basin of Mexico in search of a permanent homeland, they were able to bring with them this basic staple, which was not only important in daily meals, but also became a significant part of ritual activities.

The *Azcatitlan* illustrates another metate at a moment of great tension in the Aztec migration account (Figure 2.2). Folio 11 depicts a point in the migration story where the Aztecs (Mexica) were in the service of the Colhua of Colhuacan, an already settled group in the Basin of Mexico at this time.[56] On behalf of this group they waged war against the people of Xochimilco in the southern Basin of Mexico. The scene on the lower right-hand side shows the two groups battling as the Aztecs try to cross a river to safety. A woman holding a child crosses the river, while on the other bank another woman and child, the sacred bundle of the Aztec patron deity Huitzilopochtli,[57] and several vessels

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[54] Federico Navarrete Linares, *La Migración de los Mexicas* (Mexico City: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y los Artes, 1998), 52-53.

[55] The uses of maize in everyday meals and religious rituals are discussed in Chapters 3, 4, 5, and 6.

[56] *Codex Azcatitlan*, vol. 1, 86-90.

[57] Huitzilopochtli was the patron deity of the Aztecs; his role in the migration history is significant since it is he who orders the Mexica to leave their city of Aztlan and begin their journey. Throughout their migration Huitzilopochtli guides them until they reach their final destination; the location of their new city, Tenochtitlan. Henry B. Nicholson, "Religion in Pre-Hispanic Central Mexico," in *Archaeology of*

appear. Above and to the right of a soldier holding a spear and shield is a metate illustrated in profile (Figure 2.3). The image makes clear what is important to the survival of the Aztecs as a people: their women and children, their god, and their ability to sustain themselves, especially by maize. More than just necessary for basic survival, they were crucial for cultural and religious continuity.

Another pictorial migration account, the *Codex Boturini,* also known as *La Tira de Peregrinación*, uses food to signify those chosen by Huitzilipochtli to migrate southward and those who were not. At this critical point in the story, two distinct groups are depicted to the right of the broken tree: the first enjoys a meal with food-laden vessels around them, while the second weeps as it listens to Huitzilopochtli (Figure 2.4). Above these groups, and beneath symbols of the migrating bands, two men engage in conversation and the artist draws scrolls at their mouths to indicate speech. One of the men looks towards the ground while tears stream down his face, as behind him two footprints move outside the page. Huitzilopochtli has clearly made a selection. The artist depicts the god atop a temple as he looks at the chosen group who celebrate their selection with food. His bundle, however, is no longer in the temple when he speaks to the crying group that has not been chosen. The lack of a deity bundle, tears, and celebratory food, reflects this group's exclusion.[58]

The acquisition as well as the production of food is important in the stories told in *Codex Azcatitlan* and *Codex Boturini*. *Codex Boturini* illustrates the production of

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*Northern Mesoamerica*, vol.10, ed. Gordon F. Ekholm and Ignacio Bernal, *Handbook of Middle American Indians,* 16 vols., ed. Robert Wauchope (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971), 425-426, remarks that Huitzilopochtli was identified with an earthly leader during migration and after the rise of the Triple Alliance between the cities of Tenochtitlan, Tetzcoco, and Tlacopan, about 1430. His cult was widespread throughout the Basin of Mexico. The deity was associated with war, sacrifice, and the sun.

[58] Interpretations of this scene vary in regard to which group continue the migration. See Bolde, 9.

*pulque*, a fermented drink made from the maguey plant (Figure 2.5).[59] At the top left, a figure draws liquid from a maguey plant, using a stick to pierce the center, or "heart," of the plant; he proceeds to suck through the hollow stick the juice stored in the plant. This juice was then fermented to make *pulque*, an intoxicating beverage. Directly above this figure is another man with a bowl in his hand and a larger vessel at his feet; he is enjoying the tasty drink. The scene depicts the Aztecs learning how to make pulque from the people of Chalco, another group in the southern Basin of Mexico.[60] Like the previous scene with Huitzilopochtli, the depiction of food reflects security and the progress being made by the Aztecs, well on their way to becoming a coherent and settled group. The drinking of pulque in Aztec society eventually became highly regulated, and intoxication was severely punished.[61] Like maize, pulque was associated with many deities and was used in a ritual context.[62]

*Codex Azcatitlan* also depicts the acquisition of new sources of food (Figure 2.6). In this image the Aztecs capture an array of birds and fish from a lake using canoes, nets, and poles. This scene indicates the acquisition of new skills as they moved through Central Mexico, as well as the development of possible religious practices. During the

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[59] The term "pulque," *octli* in Nahuatl, is of uncertain origin, yet early written colonial sources were already using the word. See Henry B. Nicholson, "The Octli Cult in Late Pre-Hispanic Central Mexico" in *To Change Place: Aztec Ceremonial Landscapes*, ed. Davíd Carrasco (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 1991), 158.

[60] Pasztory, 200. Eduard Seler, "The Pulque Vessel of the Bilimec Collection," in *Collected Works in Mesoamerican Linguistics and Archaeology*, 8 vols., ed. Eric S. Thompson and Francis B. Richardson (Culver City: Labyrinthos, 1992), 3: 206, observes that one of the traditional places given for the invention of pulque is the region of the Huaxtecs on the east coast of Mexico.

[61] The *Codex Mendoza* (folio 71r) illustrates the death of two young men who were caught drunk. See Frances F. Berdan and Patricia Reiff Anawalt, *The Essential Codex Mendoza* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 147.

[62] Ritual uses of pulque are discussed in Chapters 5 and 6.

year, the Aztecs celebrated a series of agricultural ceremonies that Spanish chroniclers referred to as *veintenas* (see Chapter 6). An important aspect of many veintenas was the capturing or acquisition of food. For example, *Quecholli*, the veintena celebrating the god of the hunt Mixcoatl, included a great hunt in honor of the deity.[63]

## Food and Myth

The importance of food is demonstrated by its presence in Aztec mythology, where it appears in stories dealing with cosmic beginnings. The simple act of discovering maize takes on cosmic significance in a myth told in the *Codex Chimalpopoca*.[64] After creating humanity and the earth, the gods wondered what they would eat. The task of finding food fell on the god Quetzalcoatl (Quetzal Feather Serpent), who observed an ant retrieving a kernel of maize from a mountain called "Food Mountain." Quetzalcoatl reached this mythic site after transforming himself into a black ant, followed an ant inside the mountain, and succeeded in acquiring maize. The text tells us that he and the ant "carry it out together."[65] But acquiring this basic staple was not enough. While the gods were pleased with the maize kernels and distributed them to the people, Quetzalcoatl determined to take the entire mountain of food. When his plan proved unsuccessful, he sought help from the other deities. The god Nanahuatl, who in another myth becomes the sun, helped Quetzcalcoatl by striking the Food Mountain with

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[63] Sahagún, Book 2, 36.

[64] I am using the English version of the *Legend of the Suns* as published in *History and Mythology of the Aztecs: Codex Chimalpopoca*, trans. John Bierhorst (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1992). All information relating to the myth is from *Codex Chimalpopoca*, 146-147, unless otherwise noted.

[65] Ibid., 147.

lightning.[66] To assist him the gods also summoned the rain gods (Tlalocs) who represented the four cardinal directions and were associated with the directional colors – blue, white, yellow, and red.[67] The successful acquisition of the Food Mountain brought with it a host of other foods: maize of all colors, in addition to beans, amaranth, and chia.

The foods named in this cosmic event were basic staples the Aztecs consumed on an everyday level as well as during special ritual activities. The *Codex Chimalpopoca* thus demonstrates the merging of the ordinary with the sacred. It takes a cosmic event to acquire basic staples; the god's participation is necessary. This merging of the everyday with the extraordinary is also echoed in the use of color in the story. The Tlalocs, summoned from literally "the four corners of the universe," are blue, white, yellow and red, colors that the Aztec audience would have associated with the cardinal directions.[68] Historian of religions scholar Kay Read also notes that in this myth corn may be associated with the cardinal directions, since the colors listed for the corn repeat almost exactly the colors of the four Tlalocs.[69] While this is possible, I believe that the use of color when describing maize is also meant to indicate the abundance of food received from the gods.

[66] Ibid., 147, n. 24.

[67] Ibid., 147.

[68] Although Mary Miller and Karl Taube note that colors in Central Mexico rarely correspond to specific directions, I would argue that in this case it may not be about a specific direction but rather the idea of numerous directions that are indicated. See Mary Miller and Karl Taube, *An Illustrated Dictionary of The Gods and Symbols of Ancient Mexico and the Maya* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1997), 65-66.

[69] Kay Almere Read, *Time and Sacrifice in the Aztec Cosmos* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 255, n. 105.

**Food and Cosmovision**

Historian of religions scholar Davíd Carrasco defines cosmovision as the "ways in which cultures combine their cosmological notions relating to time and space into a structural and systematic whole."[70] The Aztecs' conception of their place in the universe reflects not only their unique world view but also incorporates the views of both older and contemporary cultural groups in Mesoamerica. The Mesoamerican universe consisted of three areas: 1) the celestial, 2) the earthly, and 3) the underworld.[71] Food played a vital role in these three distinct regions. Particularly significant is the way food and eating were connected to the Aztec vision of the construction and/or destruction of these realms, the four previous eras or "suns" and the Aztec era of the Fifth Sun.

Book 7 (The Sun, Moon and Stars, and the Binding of the Years) of the *Florentine Codex* records the birth of the Fifth Sun, or the fifth cosmic age, in which the Aztecs believed they existed. References to food and its usage in this story are both hidden and overt. The two deities responsible for the rituals that started off the cosmic events begin by performing "penances for four days."[72] Read believes that a more accurate translation of the word "penance" in this passage would be "merit," since Aztec rituals were not ones of atonement, as "penance" would lead one to conclude.[73] She points out the Nahuatl word *mahceua* (often translated as "penance") may be one of the most difficult words to translate because of its many nuances. In her view, "Rather, the

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[70] Davíd Carrasco, *Religions of Mesoamerica: Cosmovisions and Ceremonial Centers* (Long Grove: Waveland Press, 1998), 51.

[71] Ibid.

[72] Sahagún, Book 7, 44.

[73] Read, 246-247, n. 19. Penance as atonement is a more modern interpretation.

gods are beginning a kind of complex ritual dance in which, through a number of acts (including sacrifice), the sun will be put in motion and the cosmos put into an appropriate order."[74] In addition to sacrifice, she suggests that the word also refers to the first meal of the day, and reflects the beginning of a new day and the sun's rising.[75]

While it is possible that these rituals began with the primary daily meal, I propose that the reference is to an *absence* of food. In another chapter in Book 7 of the *Florentine Codex,* the myth is recorded differently: "Then they began now to do penance. They fasted four days – both Tecuciztecatl [and Nanauatzin]."[76] Fasting is significant in Aztec ritual because it points to a pause in time, a separation that distinguishes regular time from sacred time. In Aztec rituals, as is demonstrated throughout the recording of both private and public celebrations, fasting is a prelude to commemorating a significant rite.[77] In this myth abstaining from food becomes a ritual in itself. The Aztec people thus mimic this divine action when performing both domestic and state rituals. Involuntary food abstinence is also important to the Aztec myths of the destruction of the Fifth Sun, as will be examined below.

In Book 7, the myth continues with the gods Tecuiciztecatl (God of the Moon) and Nanahuatzin (Nanahuatl) creating a fire in the hearth.[78] In other translations of

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[74] Ibid., 246-247, n. 19.

[75] Ibid., 247, n. 19.

[76] Sahagún, Book 7, 4.

[77] Sahagún, Book 2, 7 and 36.

[78] Sahagún, Book 7, 44.

Sahagún's work this fire pit is called the "God Oven."[79] Bierhorst translates it in the *Codex Chimalpopoca* as a "spirit oven."[80] This oven was a simple *tlecuilitl*, a cooking fire with three stones, which is often illustrated in Aztec pictorial manuscripts as the basic means of cooking in the hearth of Aztec homes (Figure 2.7).[81] The gods Nanahuatzin and Tecuiciztecatl then jump into the fire and become the sun and moon, respectively. The myth records that when Nanahuatzin cast himself into the flames he began to "crackle and pop in the fire like one who is roasted."[82] This allusion to the sounds of maize being cooked is also evident in other translations. In Read's translation, "Like so he burns, he blossoms, his flesh sizzles."[83] "Burning" and "sizzling" are certainly words that bring to mind the cooking of food. Read points out that in Nahuatl "to blossom" would capture "the onomatopoeic character of corn popping."[84] The Aztecs in fact used popped corn in agricultural rituals to adorn architecture, sculpture, and people. Maize and popped corn continue to be used today by groups in Mexico in religious contexts.[85] In addition to being used as ceremonial adornment, maize was used in both domestic and state rituals, especially in those that were of a highly sacred nature. Less explicit references to food in the myth of the Fifth Sun include the moment of waiting after the gods threw themselves in the fire: "For a long time they stretched out there, they sat

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[79] Read, 52. Whereas I use Anderson and Dibble's English translation from Sahagún's *Florentine Codex*, Read translates directly from the Nahuatl. See Read, 245, n. 8.

[80] *Codex Chimalpopoca*, 148.

[81] Read, 246, n. 20. Sahagún's informants use the word *teotexcalli.* Sahagún, Book 7, 5.

[82] Sahagún, Book 7, 48.

[83] Read, 53.

[84] Read, 248, n. 36.

[85] Ibid., 248, n. 36.

waiting. The gods stretched out there."[86] While the modern reader might be unable to pick up on the cultural reference, the Aztec audience would have known that "stretching out" refers to the patting of the tortilla, turning a mound of dough into a flat disk. Read points out that another word used in the context of cosmic production is "mana" which means to "pat something out as a tortilla is patted out."[87] I cannot help but wonder if the Aztec cook would think of the creation of the cosmos and her place in it as she used her hands to stretch out the maize dough and make the flat shape of a tortilla.

Later in the myth, Death pursues the god Xolotl (Monster or Dog), who transforms himself first into maize, then maguey, and finally an *axolotl* (a salamander). Two of the transformations, maize and maguey, are food items with a high level of ritual significance. While maize was an everyday staple, it was also a part of sacred celebrations and often used in rituals that involved sacrifice.[88] The juice of the maguey, used to make the specialty drink pulque, was also consumed in ritual and associated with various deities.[89] Unlike maize, pulque was not an everyday food item, but was often used in special domestic and religious rituals. Book 11 (Earthly Things) describes the *axolotl* or salamander as "boneless…good, fine, edible, savory: what one deserves."[90] Both Sahagún and his informants seem to have appreciated this tasty food item. While not much else is known about the cooking of the salamander or its use in ritual functions,

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[86] Ibid., 54.

[87] Ibid., 249, n. 40.

[88] Diego Durán, *Book of the Gods and Rites and The Ancient Calendar*, trans. and ed. Fernando Horcasitas and Doris Heyden (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971), 222.

[89] Maguey was associated with the goddess Mayahuel and the 400 "rabbits," or pulque gods. Miller and Taube, 138. Chapter 4 provides more information on the deities associated with this plant.

[90] Sahagún, Book 11, 64.

because it appears with two other sacred food items it must have had some importance to the Aztec audience. What would have also been highly significant to them was Xolotl's transformation into three different foods. Transformation would have been understood as a process of both the supernatural and natural realms, and often, as is the case of Xolotl, a wonderful blending of the two.

Transformation also plays a significant role in the stages of food. Food substances are always changing; from raw material to prepared meals, they constantly move through different stages. The cycle of a grain growing from a seed in the ground into a plant, which in turn is harvested and prepared in various ways is a powerful example of a food's ability to transform and be transformed from one state to another. The Aztecs would have been well aware of their catalytic involvement in food's transformation from raw material into cooked or prepared foodstuffs, especially for their basic staples. Maize, for example, needed constant human intervention, from cultivation to consumption.[91]

Like the creation myth told in Book 7 of the *Florentine Codex,* the anonymous authors of the *Codex Chimalpopoca*[92] also use transformation and food in their stories. In the *Annals of Cuauhtitlan* transformation is important to the creation of the Fifth Sun and the four previous ages or suns. Each cosmic age involved some form of transformation and destruction that included eating and food, or the conversion of humans into foodstuffs. During the First Sun, for example, the people living in this

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[91] Sissel Johannessen and Christine A. Hastorf, "Becoming Corn Eaters," in *Corn and Culture in the Pre-Hispanic New World,* ed. Sissel Johannessen and Christine A. Hastorf (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), 443.

[92] The *Codex Chimalpopoca* contains two anonymous works; the *Annals of Cuauhtitlan of 1570* and the *Legends of the Suns*, dated 1558. See John Bierhorst, "Introduction," in *History and Mythology of the Aztecs: The Codex Chimalpopoca*, trans. John Bierhorst (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1992), 3.

cosmic era ate "7 Straw" (a calendrical name used for ancient food) and jaguars eventually ate them.[93] In the age of the Third Sun people were transformed into turkeys and ate "7 Flint"; in the Fourth Sun they were turned into fish and ate "4 Flower."[94] Although scholars vary in their interpretation of the *Annals of Cuauhtitlan*, it is crucial that in each era food or some kind of consumption took place and some form of cosmic transformation occurred.[95] Indeed, food is the catalyst in the transformation. Without these items of consumption the various suns or universes could not have existed. Read in fact believes that the myths of the different suns are about cosmic transformations. She notes:

> This myth about the first four suns is a story about cosmic beginnings resulting from cosmic endings. It is a story about multiple transformations. Each sun's life span is carefully counted out. Then each sun has its own unique inhabitants who live in unique houses and eat their own particular food.[96]

I agree with Read that the myths are about cosmic transformations, but I would also stress that food is a key element in the creation myth of the *Codex Chimalpopoca* because of its very own *transformative* nature. Food is transformed through its natural growing cycle as well as when it is prepared and consumed by humans.[97] In the myths transformation

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[93] *Codex Chimalpopoca*, 142.

[94] Ibid., 143.

[95] John Bierhorst, who translated the version above, believes that these foods, while unidentified in the text, refer to early staples such as wild seeds or primitive grains. See *Codex Chimalpopoca*, 142, n. 3. Read believes there are several ways to interpret this "food" – as actual food, as the name of a god that carried special significance, or as a specific time period that was passing (or being "metaphorically eaten"). See Read, 253, n. 77.

[96] Read, 69.

[97] Food consumption and transformation has been examined by various scholars, but I would like to note several works that are specifically relevant to this study. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked*, trans. John and Doreen Weightman (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), notes the importance of

occurs through food consumption. Eating, while part of the every day, becomes the action leading to the creation and destruction of the cosmos.

In contrast to other depictions, the *Codex Magliabechiano* emblematically illustrates the harvest ritual *Hueytozoztli* (Great Vigil) that honored the maize deities (Figure 2.8). In the upper center a paper dress and headdress belonging to the maize goddess Chicomecoatl appear; below are three baskets with offerings of food. While the accompanying text does not identify the food items, I believe that each one illustrates maize in a different state. The first basket represents maize seeds in their raw state, that is, ground up maize kernels. The round objects that fill the middle basket appear to be uncooked maize dough balls, which played a role in rituals celebrating the maize deities.[98] The third food item, illustrated from above, shows three flat tortillas. While the artist painted the scene only minimally, the representation of the various states of maize within the ritual is clear. Descriptions of the *Hueytozoztli* celebration are highly detailed in Sahagún's Book 2 (The Ceremonies), yet the *Codex Magliabecchiano* artist selects just a few crucial elements to illustrate it.[99] To an Aztec reader of the painted manuscript, the

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cooking as a symbol of the social and cultural. Cooked food becomes a multi-dimensional metaphor, including a society's level of sophistication. See Lévis-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked*, 81-143. Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), examines food consumption as a ritual that creates boundaries (specifically important is Chapter 3). A more recent work that echoes and further examines food consumption in this light is Brian Hayden, "Fabulous Feasts: A Prolegomenon to the Importance of Feasting," in *Feasts: Archaeological and Ethnographic Perspectives on Food, Politics, and Power,* ed. Michael Dietler and Brian Hayden (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001), 23-64. Hayden notes the ways in which consumption not only establishes necessary boundaries within a society but also creates a balance within it.

[98] Sahagún records that maize dough balls were used in rituals dedicated to the maize deities. See Book 2, 80. Read notes that balls, usually woven from grass, were used to catch blood flowing from bloodletting ceremonies. See Read, 247, n. 24.

[99] Sahagún, Book 2, 7-8, 61-65.

transformation of maize from raw material to cooked meal would echo the creation of the cosmos through the consumption of food and its ability to transform.

The *Annals of Cuauhtitlan* also tells of the destruction of the Fifth Sun:

> They say the sun that exists today was born in 13 Reed [751], and it was then that light came, and it dawned. Movement Sun, which exists today, has the day sign 4 Movement, and this sun is the fifth that there is. In its time there will be earthquakes, famine.[100]

Earthquakes and famine mark the destruction of the Fifth Sun, also called 4 Ollin (Movement). Both earthquakes and famine are dynamic examples of catastrophic ends. While the role food plays has been examined in the creation of the cosmos, it now needs to be considered in its connection with the destruction of the cosmos. Here the *absence* of food marks the destruction of the Fifth Sun. Famine disrupts the fabric of society: activities that constitute part of daily events become increasingly difficult to maintain; activities that make up ritual life cease to exist.[101] The physicality of both earthquakes and famine drastically alter the human body. In discussing the extreme effects of famine on the body, Peter Farb and George Armelago detail its debilitating stages:

> It produces diarrhea and other disturbances of the digestive tract; hypertension and eventual collapse of the circulatory system; a sharp decrease in the intake of oxygen by the respiratory system; a decrease in strength and control over limb movements governed by the neuromuscular system; and increasing vulnerability to changes in temperature as the thermoregulatory system fails.[102]

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[100] *Codex Chimalpopoca*, 26.

[101] Peter Farb and George Armelago, *Consuming Passions: The Anthropology of Eating* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1980), 212-213.

[102] Ibid., 211.

The Aztec man and woman would thus have felt the cosmic end of the Fifth Sun in a very direct and corporeal way. Through the absence of food, the end of the cosmic realm became more than an abstract concept; it became something palpable and personal. The destructive changes in the body would echo the destruction taking place in the larger universe.

Most sixteenth-century historical texts on the Aztecs mention famine, and they are also depicted in pictorial histories. Durán's *History* shows the great Aztec ruler Moctezuhma Ilhuicamina (ruled 1440-1468) overseeing his officials distributing goods and foods during a famine (Figure 2.9). He sits on a throne in the center of the painting, while to his right and left two dignitaries dispense clothes and food. In front of Moctezuhma are more mantles, baskets, and vessels with foodstuffs. The huddled bodies of the poor frame the ruler and his aides. The poor either reach out to take the goods or sit quietly waiting to receive them. The accompanying text states that before the ruler intervened:

> People became faint and walked about shriveled and skinny due to the famine they suffered. Others became ill, having eaten things bad for the health. Others in their despair abandoned their city, homes, wives, and children, and departed toward more fertile lands to seek salvation.[103]

Had it not been for the foodstuffs in the royal storehouses the people would have perished.

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[103] Diego Durán, *The History of the Indies of New Spain*, trans. Doris Heyden (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994), 238.

**Representing Food, Eating, and Cosmovision**

As evident in the myths in the *Codex Chimalpopoca*, food (or a lack of it) plays a role in the creation and destruction of the cosmos. In addition to being expressed in surviving accounts, this connection is also evident in surviving artwork. The *Bilimek Vessel* in the Museum für Völkerkunde, Vienna, depicts various faces emerging from a series of complex designs (Figure 2.10). The skeletal face on the front of the vessel is static and expressionless; stones or shells at one time filled two empty eye sockets. The turn-of-the-nineteenth-century German Mesoamericanist Eduard Seler was the first to identify this face as that of a pulque god.[104] Above the face of the deity is a solar disk with a set of three figures on either side, whom anthropologist Karl Taube identifies as *Tzitzimime,* stars of darkness.[105] He postulates that they are menacing the sun with staffs and stones. The battle between the forces of night and the sun was a constant point of tension in the Aztec worldview, and more so during solar eclipses, when it appeared to the naked eye that a cosmic battle was underway. The ending of a 52-year cycle would have been the most significant cosmic battle fought between the sun and the night. This conflict between light and dark is echoed in the iconography of the pulque vessel, since the sun disc is partially covered by a spotted device at the lower rim.[106] If the sun did not prevail, then the 52-year cycle would not be renewed and life on earth would end.[107] The

[104] Seler, 204 -205.

[105] Karl A. Taube, "The Bilimek Pulque Vessel: Starlore, Calendrics, and Cosmology of Late Postclassic Central Mexico," *Ancient Mesoamerica* 4 (1993), 1.

[106] Ibid., 1-2.

[107] Ibid., 8-13. Taube makes a connection between the iconography on the vessel and the conclusion of the 52-year cycle. In addition to identifying the Tzitzimime, he also identifies a pair of year bundles on the vessel.

vessel's cosmic iconography was first studied by Seler, but he identified the figures on either side of the sun and night sign as the six days preceding the eight day of the eleventh *trecena* also called "eight flint knife,"[108] or rather the six deities that presided over these days.[109] This symbolism would have been recognized by the Aztec audience, who understood that the pulque gods were supposed to be influential during this time.[110] Other scholars have accepted the pulque god identification and have pointed out other pulque deity iconography, such as the ornaments that were part of the typical attire of the deities.[111]

On the back of the vessel is a female figure that has been variously identified as Tlaltecuhtli (Earth Lord); Coatlicue (Serpent Skirt), Huitzilopochtli's mother; and Cihuacoatl (Woman Serpent), an earth-mother goddess associated with the night (Figure 2.11).[112] The skirt of the goddess is adorned with serpents that stick their tongues out and show their fangs. Her hands and feet are spotted jaguar paws with sharp claws. Her static face resembles a skeletal mask with a fleshless jaw and teeth bared. Pulque flows from her breasts into a vessel between her legs.[113] While it is not known what the Vienna

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[108] Seler, 204. The Aztec ritual calendar consisted of 260 days made up of 20 days which repeated 13 times to create 260 unique combinations; this meshing of 20 days with 13 numbers would equal a 260-day ritual period called the *tonalpohualli*. The term *trecena* was used by Spanish chroniclers for a 13-day period.

[109] Seler identifies them as two pulque gods, the fire god, the morning star (Venus), a dance god, and a local deity with jaguar associations. See Seler, 218.

[110] Ibid, 204.

[111] H. B. Nicholson, and Eloise Quiñones Keber, *Art of Aztec Mexico: Treasure of Tenochtitlan* (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1983), 62.

[112] Gerard van Bussel, "*Pulque* Vessel," in *Aztecs,* ed. Eduardo Matos Moctezuma and Felipe Solís Olguín (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2002), cat. no. 142. While he does not quote his source, van Bussel uses the work of Eduard Seler, who was the first to interpret the iconography on and function of this vessel. Seler identified this figure as Coatlicue. See, Seler, 220.

[113] Nicholson and Quiñones Keber, 62. The authors note that "pulque is the 'wine of the earth'."

vessel was specifically used for, its imagery suggests it might have served to drink pulque in night rituals that were held to assure the continuation of the sun's rise into the heavens and thus the continuation of the known era or universe.[114] The priest or leader who handled such a vessel would undoubtedly have recalled the myth of the creation of the Fifth Sun and the episode of Xolotl turning himself into maguey. Each time he poured pulque into his mouth or into another vessel, the myth would have come alive along with the expectation that the sun would rise again and be renewed.

The Vienna vessel allows food, in this case the maguey beverage, to be a part of the consumption necessary to continue cosmic time. Read has used the term "cosmic eating" to describe the continuous travel or "eating away" of time in Aztec religion;[115] I use the term quite literally: cosmic creation (and destruction) through consumption. This ideology is reflected in the myths present in the *Codex Chimapopoca*, Sahagún's writings, the *Bilimek Vessel*, and a host of other artworks made by the Aztecs. Aztec art is riddled with images of teeth, open mouths, protruding tongues signifying a constant devouring in much religious sculpture.

A prime example of these motifs is seen in the monumental *Sun Stone* in the Museo Nacional de Antropología in Mexico City (Figure 2.12). While many scholars have written extensively on this piece,[116] I would like to utilize the interpretation of

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[114] Van Bussel, cat. no. 142. Van Bussel uses Seler as his source. See Seler 218-221.

[115] Read, Chapter 6.

[116] For example, Cecilia F. Klein, "The Identity of the Central Deity in the Aztec Calendar Stone," *The Art Bulletin* 58, no. 1 (March 1976), 1-12; Davíd Carrasco "Cosmic Jaws: We Eat the Gods and the Gods Eat Us," in *City of Sacrifice: The Aztec Empire and the Role of Violence in Civilization* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999), 164-187; H. B. Nicholson, "The Problem of the Identification of the Central Image of the 'Aztec Calendar Stone'," in *Current Topics in Aztec Studies: Essays in Honor of Dr. H.B. Nicholson*,

Carlos Navarrete and Doris Heyden, who identify the central image as Tlaltecuhtli (Earth Lord) instead of its traditional interpretation as the sun god Tonatiuh.[117] The image of the Earth Monster Tlaltecuhtli appears in an array of art, from monumental public sculpture in the ceremonial center of Tenochtitlan to smaller pieces from domestic temple and altars within and outside the capital.[118] According to Navarrete and Heyden's interpretation, on the *Sun Stone* Tlaltecuhtli's face emerges from a complex design that includes the *Ollin* (Movement) symbol of the Fifth Sun, a border of the 20 day signs, and two *xiuhcoatls*, or "fire serpents," whose mouths open wide at the bottom center of the calendrical band. Tlaltecuhtli's mouth is open and the tongue protudes, but this is no ordinary tongue (Figure 2.13). The tongue is a sacrificial knife, called *ixcuauac*, which Read translates as "he who has an eating face."[119] These sacrificial knives were also associated with the northern part of the universe or the "place of the dead."[120] Notice that the two *xiuhcoatls* (fire serpents) also hold sacrificial knives in their mouths at the base of the disc (Figure 2.14). In other contexts the knives look animated due to the addition of shells for eyes and teeth (Figure 2.15). The large and visible shell teeth underscore the use of the knives to literally eat the flesh through sacrifice.

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ed. Alana Cordy-Collilns and Douglas Sharon, San Diego Museum Papers (San Diego: Museum of Man, 1993), 3-15.

[117] Carlos Navarrete and Doris Heyden, "La Cara Central de La Piedra del Sol, Una Hipótesis," *Estudios de Cultura Náhuatl* 11 (1974), 355-376.

[118] Richard F. Townsend, *State and Cosmos in the Art of Tenochtitlan*, *Studies in Precolumbian Art and Archaeology* 21 (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1979), 69, observes that Tlaltecuhtli's face on this monument can be interpreted as representing both the sacred earth and the territory of the Mexica nation.

[119] Read, 126.

[120] Eduardo Matos Moctezuma, "Knife Blades with an Image of a Face," in *Aztecs*, ed. Eduardo Matos Moctezuma and Felipe Solís Olguín (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2002), cat. no. 277.

The Museo Nacional has several other Tlaltecuhtli sculptures, including one in which the sacrificial knife also stands in for a tongue (Figure 2.16). This Tlatecuhtli is surrounded by other rows of teeth that protrude from fleshless mouths of the skulls at the joints of the monster. Another Tlaltecuhtli appears beneath the Vienna pulque vessel discussed earlier (Figure 2.17), where it is depicted more abstractly, with the open mouth displaying sharp teeth that become design elements. Tlaltecuhtli also merges with another deity on the underside of the colossal sculpture of Coatlicue, also in the Museo Nacional. There a carved relief depicts Tlaltecuhtli with Tlaloc attributes, goggled eyes and a fanged mouth (Figure 2.18).

The close connection between Tlaltecuhtli and eating is not only evident in Aztec sculpture but in Aztec mythology. The *Histoyre du Mechique* tells of the creation of the Aztec world by the deities Tezcatlipoca and Quetzalcoatl who split a crocodilian creature in two.[121] One half becomes the sky and the other, called Tlaltecuhtli, becomes the earth. The other gods, seeing her dismembered state, are saddened and try to console her. They do so by creating from her different parts all the foods necessary for the survival of humanity. To the Aztec mind, Tlaltecuhtli is thus the earth that is intimately connected to humanity through the sustenance she brings via her very body. She can therefore appear in the guise of Tlaloc, the deity responsible for the rains necessary to make all things grow. In all representations, she is a constant reminder of the need for sacrifice, since the Aztecs believed that blood sustains the earth, which in turn sustains humanity. Cosmic eating thus not only refers to the passing or eating of time but to the hope that continued time will be bountiful.

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[121] The following account is from the *Histoyre du Mechique (Historia de México*) as it appears in Garibay's *Teogonía*, 108.

## Food and Politics

The Aztec island capital of Tenochtitlan faced what many urban cities of today face, problems of overcrowding and limited resources. Tenochtitlan's population was believed to be about 200,000 at the time of the Spanish conquest, with an overall Basin-wide population between 1 million and 2.65 million people.[122] The production of food in this area would not have been sufficient to deal with these masses. Food was produced in the city and its immediate surrounding areas through various production methods, most noticeably *chinampas* or artificially constructed gardens, yet they would not have been enough to sustain the needs of such a large population.[123]

Food was constantly brought into the city through various means, including by foot and canoe. *Tlamenes,* or foot carriers, were heavily used in Tenochtitlan and throughout the Aztec empire. While these foot carriers were essential in transporting goods, the use of canoes, or *acalli*, was also crucial. Ross Hassig notes that canoe traffic "economically linked the entire lake system of the Valley [Basin] of Mexico."[124] This statement highlights the interdependence between the city and surrounding areas. While the flow of goods was predominantly into the city and consisted primarily of foodstuffs,

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[122] Ross Hassig, "The Collision of Two Worlds," in *The Oxford History of Mexico*, ed. Michael C. Meyer and William H. Beezley (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 94.

[123] Chinampa agriculture is discussed further in Chapter 3. For further information on chinampa agriculture see Ross Hassig, *Trade, Tribute and Transportation* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985), 47-53; Edward E. Calneck, "Settlement Pattern and Chinampa Agriculture at Tenochtitlan," *American Antiquity* 37, no.1 (1972).

[124] Hassig, 60.

the city also served as a market to surrounding areas. Canoe trade thus flowed in both directions.[125]

The marketplace, or *tianquiztli*, was vital for the distribution of foodstuffs. Many European chroniclers comment on the Aztec market, including conquistador Bernal Díaz del Castillo, who upon seeing the great marketplace at Tlatelolco writes, "we were astounded at the number of people and the quantity of merchandise that it contained, and at the good order and control that was maintained, for we had never seen such a thing before."[126] He goes on to describe the incredible range of goods that were sold at the market and the vast numbers of people who came to both sell and buy.[127] The impression the market made on the Europeans is also evident in the many depictions of marketplaces and vendors in works by Sahagún and other early sixteenth-century authors. Indigenous artists depicted the market because it was a major meeting place for the native population. Durán also notes the importance of the market to the Aztec empire, mentioning that attendance at the market was required of all Aztecs.[128] This regulation to attend by the Aztec state would have created the necessary numbers for market sales. In addition, and perhaps more significantly, the marketplace would have been a place for all Aztecs to merge daily activities with the purchasing of food and items for ritual ceremonies.

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[125] Ibid.

[126] Bernal Díaz del Castillo, *The Discovery and Conquest of Mexico,* trans. A.P. Maudslay (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Cudahy, 1956), 215.

[127] Ibid., 215-217.

[128] Durán, *Book of the Gods,* 274.

The location of the market was linked to city planning and growth. Díaz del Castillo remarks that the market contained administrative buildings associated with market activities, which probably included places to perform quality and price control.[129] Durán mentions the role of market administrators as well as the market architecture, noting that it included a court where disputes could be heard and settled.[130] Hassig comments that important markets were often adjacent to the residence of rulers, indicating a conjunction of the economic and the political.[131] As the Aztec empire grew, the tribute system which the state had set in place was inadequate in guaranteeing enough foods; the city depended extensively on the market system.[132]

Religious ideology also played a role in the Aztec economy. Hassig observes that at the market of Tenochtitlan the day would begin and end with the sounding of the drum from the temple of Quetzalcoatl.[133] Markets were organized by the Mesoamerican calendar, taking place either daily, or every five, nine, thirteen, or twenty days.[134] He connects these market cycles to religious concepts involving the calendar, associating thirteen to the Lords of the Day cycle and nine to the Lords of the Night cycle.[135] This

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[129] Díaz del Castillo, 216.

[130] As noted in Hassig, *Trade and Tribute*, 67.

[131] Ibid.

[132] Richard E. Blanton, "The Basin of Mexico Market System and the Growth of Empire," in *Aztec Imperial Strategies,* Frances Berdan et al. (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1996), 78. Frances F. Berdan, "The Tributary Provinces," in *Aztec Imperial Strategies*, ed. Frances Berdan et. al. (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1996), 115, has observed that tributary provinces provided the state with a regular and predictable flow of goods and secured broad areas for relatively safe long-distance trade. Berdan counts 38 different provinces in the *Codex Mendoza*.

[133] Hassig, *Trade and Tribute*, 67. He does not provide a sixteenth-century source for this.

[134] Ibid., 75. The numbers 5, 9, 13 and 20 are units in the Aztec calendar.

[135] Ibid., 75-84.

cyclical recurrence of the market days appears in images painted by indigenous artists. A native view of a market in Durán's *Book of the Gods* illustrates it in a circular shape (Figure 2.19). Among the goods being sold are clothing, foodstuffs, and slaves. Directly in the center of the marketplace is a smaller circular form, identified by Durán as a *momoztli* or "roadside shrine or a pillory block."[136] On these shrines the friar records that food was offered; "thus in that small shrine where the idol of the market stood were offered ears of corn, chili, tomatoes, fruit, and other vegetables, seeds, and breads – in sum, everything sold in the *tianguiz*."[137]

The religious, political, and economic thus merge in Aztec thought and culture, and food played a dynamic role in this interaction. The inclusion of food in migration and origin accounts helped transform the ordinary act of eating into an extraordinary activity, one that played a role in the construction and destruction of the cosmos. Food as a source was necessary both for the everyday and the special occasion. Basic daily staples such as maize, beans, and other elite goods such as chocolate were part of the trade and market system. The Aztecs specifically targeted areas to control that would allow them access to the foods they desired.[138] The ability of leaders to acquire the necessary foodstuffs for basic functions and ritual activities was also necessary for the economic and political success of the empire. Nothing is more telling about this requirement than a tale told in the *Codex Chimalpopoca* regarding the fall of the

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[136] Durán, *Book of the Gods,* 273.

[137] Ibid, 276. While Durán uses the word "bread," he is actually referring to maize.

[138] Both Hassig, *Trade and Tribute*, 87, and Frances Berdan (in her 1975 dissertation "Trade, Tribute, and Market in the Aztec Empire," and later publications such as *Aztec Imperial Strategies*) note the importance of trade to Aztec expansion. My point here is to stress that goods desired included everyday staples as well as goods used for special occasions.

legendary city of Tollan.[139] It relates that the Toltecs and their leader Huemac played a game against the rain gods. The game took on cosmic significance when the Tlalocs lost and in retaliation decided to give the Toltec leader "the shuck in which the green ear grows" instead of the promised quetzal feathers and jade.[140] Annoyed, Huemac refused the gift. The dispute came to a head when the Tlalocs became angry and announced that they would hide their "jades" and make the Toltecs suffer for four years.[141] The text then reads,

> So then it snowed, the snow fell knee deep, and the crops were destroyed. It was in Tecuilhuitl [June or July] that it snowed. Except that in Tollan, where there was intense heat, all the trees, the prickly pears, and the magueys dried up, and all the stones broke apart and were shattered by the heat….And when the four years of hunger had passed, the tlalocs appeared in Chapoltepec, where the water is. And milk corn – food – is rising to the surface.[142]

The story continues with the gods requesting human sacrifices. Unfortunately, the Toltecs could not deliver these and the city fell. Another group, the Aztecs, rose to the occasion and delivered the necessary sacrifices. Johanna Broda has pointed out the connection between sacrifice, the mythical fall of the Toltec, and the rise of the Aztecs.[143] The role that food plays in the story should not be overlooked. Huemac's scorn of the

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[139] All information on the myth is from *Codex Chimalpopoca*, 156-158, unless otherwise noted. Tollan was considered by the Aztecs as the capital of the Toltecs, a Central Mexican group which were believed to have invented the arts, writing, and the calendar. The Aztecs and many other cultural groups claimed to be descended from the Toltecs. Scholars have linked the mythical Tollan to Tula, a city in Hidalgo, Mexico. Tula was the first large city after the fall of Teotihuacan (after 750) and flourished between 950-1150. See Michael Smith, *The Aztecs* (London: Blackwell, 1997).

[140] *Codex Chimalpopoca*, 156.

[141] Ibid.

[142] Ibid., 156-157.

[143] Johanna Broda, "Consideraciones Sobre Historiografía e Ideología Mexica: Las Cronícas Indígenas y el Estudio de los Ritos y Sacrificios," *Estudios de Cultura Náhuatl* 13 (1978), 99.

gods' (meager) offering led to four years of famine, which in turn led to the collapse of the Toltec empire. While the Toltecs cemented their fall with the inability to make appropriate human sacrifices, the Aztecs sacrificed a woman. But they also *fasted* for the sacrificial victim for four days, and here the absence of food parallels the four years of famine suffered by the Toltecs. Because it was a voluntary act, it became a powerful offering that helped the Aztecs become the dominant group in the Basin of Mexico.

## Conclusion

Migration accounts illustrate the key role food played in establishing the Aztec as *the* dominant group in the Basin of Mexico. The anonymous artists of the *Codex Boturini* and *Codex Azcatitlan* use food, its preparation, as well as its acquisition, as symbols of success. In the *Azcatitlan* a stone metate used for the daily grinding of maize is transformed into a mark of victory as the Aztec fight against the people of Xochimilco in the southern Basin. Food acquisition is also transformed into an icon of victory. In the *Boturini* the Aztec are shown learning how to make pulque, the highly valued fermented drink used in ritual. With this knowledge in hand, they are no longer a group that is merely wandering the lands, they are a group that has achieved both cultural and religious continuity.

Food and its acquisition are also relevant to Aztec origin myths. In the *Codex Chimalpopoca* the god Quetzalcoatl acquires food by transforming himself into an ant and following another ant into the mountain called "Food Mountain." His foray brings to the Aztec people maize, beans, amaranth and chia, foods that are both significant to daily meals as well as sacred celebrations.

In mythic creation stories, food is intimately tied to the creation as well as the destruction of the Aztec universe. In the *Codex Chimalpopoca* the creation of the cosmos is synonymous with food preparation: the gods Nanahuatzin and Tecuiciztecatl jump into an oven, or *tlecuilitl*, a cooking fire with three stones, and become the sun and the moon. A lack of food in the *Codex Chimalpopoca* marks the ending of the Aztec universe.

In many native accounts food plays a key role in a transformation; it is often through its consumption that cosmic creation can take place. I believe food appears in this context because it both undergoes transformation and causes transformation. Food can change from seed to plant and from raw material to prepared meal; additionally, it alters the body and mind when consumed.

Consumption is a theme depicted in much of Aztec art. On the *Sun Stone* monolith, interpreting the central image as the Earth Monster Tlaltecuhtli correlates with the Aztec myth that relates the death and destruction of her body in order to create the earth and all its bounty. Tlatecuhtli is often depicted with an *ixcuauac*, or protruding sacrificial knife, as a reminder to the Aztec viewer of the tenuous relationship they had with the earth. A constant balance through offerings and sacrifices had to be achieved. The *Codex Chimapopoca* also addresses the balance needed between humanity and the universe. In the account of the fall of Tollan and the rise of the Aztec, again food becomes a metaphor for triumph. In addition to human sacrifice, it is the *absence* of food, or *fasting*, that predicates success.

# CHAPTER 3

# EATING AS EVERYDAY

This chapter explores the everyday use of food among the Aztecs. It examines the types of food the Aztecs had available to them in their environment, the numerous ways in which they used and prepared these foods, and the many rules and regulations they devised for consuming them. The foods discussed are those of greatest importance to them. Some of these, like maize and beans, were eaten every day as well as on ritual occasions; while others, such as cacao and maguey (also known as the century plant), were reserved mainly for special events. Investigating the various ways in which foods were used in everyday Aztec life is preliminary to discussing their ritualized uses (Chapters 4, 5, and 6). Sources include written and pictorial evidence from sixteenth-century documents, as well as ceramic and sculptural art works.

## Aztec Plants

**Maize.** The Aztecs had a variety of plants that they used for meals as well as medicinal purposes. Foremost for their sustenance was the maize plant.[144] Its importance is indicated by its inclusion in historical as well as origin myths (see Chapter 2); it was associated with both the everyday and the sacred. Maize, native to Mesoamerica and cultivated throughout the Americas, was valued by Mesoamerican cultures long before the Aztecs established Tenochtitlan in the fourteenth century. Maize pollen dating to

[144] In her comprehensive study of Mesoamerican foods and cuisines, Sophie Coe points out that corn is a generic term used for a staple grain that has been used for different plants in different countries at different times. Sophie Coe, *America's First Cuisines* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), 10. Maize or "maíz," in Spanish, comes from the Taino word "mahis," which means "source of life." When the Spanish first reached the northern Antilles they were introduced to the staple and its Taino name.

80,000 years ago was found in a core taken from under the Bellas Artes concert hall in downtown Mexico City.[145] Domestication of maize occurred as early as 5,000 BCE, as demonstrated by evidence found in the dry caves of the Tehuacan Valley of Southern Puebla and Northern Oaxaca in Mexico.[146] As the dominant food staple, maize was highly important to the cultures of Mesoamerica. Besides being woven with origin myths and used in rituals, it took the form of a deity.[147]

Part of maize's success as a staple was the manner in which it was prepared. Mesoamerican cooks would grind the maize into powder and mix it with either lime or wood ashes.[148] This simple process, known as *nixtamalization*, changed the nutritional component of the seed and dramatically enhanced its value to create a powerful source of protein.[149] Christine Hastorf and Sissel Johannessen, who explore the reasons why maize became so crucial in the pre-Hispanic world, give two possible explanations: 1) maize cannot survive without human intervention and 2) maize, and its growth, resembles humans and their growth.[150] Thus maize appears to belong conceptually to the world of people as well as of plants; in creation myths it was often used in reference to humans.[151] For example, the Maya murals at the Late Classic (700-900) site of Cacaxtla, in the

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[145] Ibid., 10-11.

[146] Ibid.

[147] Chapter 2 discusses various myths in which the role of maize was significant to the Aztecs.

[148] Sahagún uses "she" when referring to cooks, but Coe notes that other sources such as the *Codex Tuleda* show cooks that were both female and male. See Coe, 111.

[149] For more on the process of nixtamilization, see Coe, 14.

[150] Sissel Johannessen and Christine A. Hastorf, "Becoming Corn Eaters," in *Corn and Culture in the Pre-Hispanic New World,* ed. Sissel Johannessen and Christine A. Hastorf (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), 442.

[151] Ibid.

present-day Mexican state of Tlaxcala, depict maize plants whose cobs have been transformed into human faces (Figure 3.1). In Maya thought the first humans were made from maize ground with blood.[152] Its cultivation was deeply connected to the survival and growth of Mesoamerican individuals. Maize had an extraordinary significance for the Aztecs: it was present at almost every meal; it was used in many curing rituals; and it played an important role in both state and domestic rituals.

The importance of maize is evident in the number of gods associated with it. Cristina Barros and Marco Buenrostro specify that the Aztecs associated maize with Tlaloc, an ancient god of rain; Chalchiuhtlicue, goddess of terrestrial waters; Chicomecoatl, goddess of sustenance; Centeotl and Centeocihuatl, male and female counterparts of the corn deity; Xilonen, goddess of tender maize; Ilamatecuhtli, goddess of dry corn; and Tezcatlipoca, the omnipotent patron god of rulers, sorcerers, and warriors, to whom the Aztecs dedicated a harvest festival during *Toxcatl* (Dry Thing), one of eighteen agricultural ceremonies (veintenas) performed annually by the Aztecs.[153] To this list I would also add Quetzalcoatl (Quetzal Feather Serpent), another ancient god, who according to one myth was responsible for bringing maize to the Aztec people.[154]

The importance of maize is also apparent in the many regulations regarding its consumption and treatment. Aztec mothers followed strict rules when feeding their

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[152] *Popol Vuh: The Mayan Book of the Dawn of Life*, trans. Dennis Tedlock (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), 69-71.

[153] Cristina Barros and Marco Buenrostro, “El Maíz, Nuestro Sustento,” *Arqueología Mexicana: El Maíz* 5, no. 25 (May – June 1997): 13-14.

[154] This myth is discussed in detail in Chapter 2.

children maize tortillas, as seen in folios 58r to 60r of the *Codex Mendoza*.[155] As the child grew, so did the required intake of tortillas (Figure 3.2). At age three, children received one half a tortilla; from ages four to five they received a full tortilla; from ages six to twelve they received one and a half; their entry into teenage years was marked by two whole tortillas. In preparing meals with maize, Aztec cooks also followed specific prodecures. Sahagún's informants note that Aztec cooks would often breathe on maize kernels before putting them into the fire in order to prepare the grains for the flame.[156] In the marketplace, maize selection was an important business. Sahagún's informants told him that "The best seed is selected. The perfect, the glossy maize is carefully chosen. The spoiled, the rotten, the shrunken falls away; the very best is chosen."[157] The vendor of maize was judged to be a good or bad person based on the selection of kernels that he sold. The seller was supposed to have kernels that were "clean, smooth, round, full, good, flawless, perfect;" if not, then this "bad seller of maize grains [is] verily uncooperative, a deceiver."[158] Maize thus became a reflection of the seller's personal and moral character.

It is noteworthy that the Aztecs had several names for maize. In Book 11 (Earthly Things) of Sahagún's *Florentine Codex*, his informants list the various different types of

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[155] Frances F. Berdan and Patricia Rieff Anawalt, *The Essential Codex Mendoza* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

[156] Bernardino de Sahagún, *Florentine Codex: General History of the Things of New Spain*, 12 vols., trans. and ed. Arthur J. Anderson and Charles E. Dibble (Santa Fe: School of American Research; Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1950-82), Books 4-5, 184.

[157] Sahagún, Book 11, 282.

[158] Sahagún, Book 10, 66.

maize and their color, ranging from yellow (*coztic centli*) to tawny (*quappachcintli*).[159] They describe a maize fungus (*cinnanacatl*) and maize ears that appear in pairs (*tzatzapalli*).[160] The informants even warn against "false maize," which was a weed (*cinteococopi*) similar in appearance to maize.[161] In addition to describing the maize plant in detail, Sahagún's informants also illustrate the many varieties of maize available, including the double ears of maize and the malformed maize with fungus, or *huitlacoche*, which continues to be considered a Mexican delicacy (Figures 3.3 and 3.4).

The significance of maize is also apparent in the many ways in which Aztec cooks prepared and served it. The Aztec cook spent an enormous amount of time grinding maize to make the dough, which was then used to make an assortment of dishes.[162] Balls of dough could be patted down into thin round sheets and cooked on a *comal* or griddle to make *tortillas*, the staple of the Aztec diet that was present in all daily meals. Tortillas could be eaten in many different ways, flavored with items such as maguey syrup or folded over and filled with meats and vegetables. Maize dough could also be used to make *tamales*, a sort of dumpling that could be filled with meats and vegetables. The tamale was then wrapped in a maize husk and cooked in large vessels referred to as *ollas* in sixteenth-century written sources.[163] Elizabeth Brumfiel notes that due to the time and

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[159] Sahagún, Book 11, 280.

[160] Ibid., 281.

[161] Ibid., 282.

[162] Elizabeth Brumfiel notes that before the introduction of mechanized maize mills, a woman could spend six to eight hours a day grinding maize into dough for a family's needs. For more information see Elizabeth Brumfiel, "Weaving and Cooking: Women's Production in Aztec Mexico," in *Engendering Archaeology: Women and Prehistory*, ed. Joan M. Gero and Margaret W. Conkey (Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 238.

[163] The Spanish text of the *Codex Mendoza* identifies this vessel as an "*olla*." See Berdan and Anawalt, fol. 60r.

energy it took to make them, tamales were considered a special food by the Aztecs, being eaten by nobles or used in ceremonial contexts by commoners.[164] Indeed, Sahagún's informants refer to the time-consuming process of tamale making; "Then tamales were prepared. All night they were occupied; perhaps three days or two days the women made tamales. So they passed the night."[165]

A gruel called *atolli* was prepared from the liquid of boiled maize dough. Sahagún describes the endless variations in flavoring and additives used for this gruel:

> …maize gruel with honey, with chili and honey, with yellow chili; white, thick gruel; sour, red maize gruel with fruit and chili; small, green tomatoes with a maize gruel made with anonas; maize gruel made with amaranth and toasted maize; maize gruel with fish-amaranth seeds and honey; cold maize gruel; maize gruel with wrinkled chía, covered with green chilis or small, hot chilis, white maize gruel with chía, covered with squash seeds and with chili; maize gruel made with tortilla crumbs…[166]

This list reflects what was available for the lords of Tenochtitlan; the common Aztec man or woman probably had his or her atolli sprinkled with beans or seeds like amaranth and chia, if anything at all. The gruel was often taken as a breakfast food at the start of each day, perhaps because it was considered to have medicinal properties.[167] Because atolli was transportable, it was used by travelers and warriors as a provision.

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[164] Brumfiel, 239.

[165] Sahagún, Book 6, 129. His informants are here discussing a feast in connection to a wedding banquet. It is possible that in order to speed up the process, tamales were made in an assembly line fashion, with one or two people responsible for certain tasks.

[166] Sahagún, Book 8, 39.

[167] Sahagún, Book 10, 157.

Another highly transportable form of maize was *pinolli*, which was ground and toasted. If one added water to pinolli it became an instant meal to which the Aztecs added chocolate and chili for flavor.[168] These maize foods are just a sampling of the ways the grain could be cooked and consumed; there were probably countless other ways this basic staple was prepared that Sahagún's informants did not record.

The sixteenth-century Jesuit, José de Acosta[169] also writes about maize and marvels at the many ways in which the indigenous population prepared it: boiled, roasted, ground and used as dough for various "breads," ground and used as an alcoholic beverage.[170] Indeed, he says, "there is no lack of ingenuity in New World cookery."[171] Maize use, as noted by the various sixteenth-century sources, continued into the colonial era and still exists as part of modern Mexican cuisine.[172]

**Beans.** Along with maize, other staples like beans, chia, and amaranth came into Tenochtitlan in great quantities from the provinces. Although these foods were grown in the Basin of Mexico, a greater supply was requisitioned from other areas to fulfill the needs of the city (see Chapter 2). Sahagún's informants discuss these foods in Book 11. Beans are second to the discussion of maize. His informants list and illustrate the various

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[168] Coe, 118.

[169] Acosta traveled extensively through the New World but his information on Mexico derives from the so-called "Tovar Manuscript," complied by another scholar, Juan de Tovar. See Walter D. Mignolo, "Introduction to José de Acosta's *Historia Natural y Moral de las Indias*," in *Natural and Moral History of the Indies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), xx.

[170] José de Acosta, *Natural and Moral History of the Indies*, trans. Frances M. López-Morillas (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 198-199.

[171] Ibid., 198.

[172] Colonial uses of maize will be further detailed in Chapters 7 and 8.

beans available to the Aztecs: large black beans, brown, red, white, purple, sand beans, quail beans, mottled beans, and mouse beans, among others.[173] The earliest evidence for cultivation of the common bean comes from a cave in the Peruvian Andes, where seeds of a fully domesticated species were found in debris with radiocarbon dates of 8,000 BCE.[174] The earliest evidence of domesticated beans in Mesoamerica was found in the Tehuacan Valley, Puebla, Mexico, with radiocarbon dates going back to 7,000 or 6,000 years ago.[175] Other species of beans have murkier histories. Some species, like lima and sieva beans, share a distant ancestor but were domesticated independently by Andean and Mesoamerican native farmers.[176] I should point out that what is being discussed here is the New World bean – lima, kidney, navy, wax, and pinto – among others, since different types of beans were known in Europe.[177] Beans were certainly a major part of the Aztec diet, as is evident in the *Codex Mendoza*, which lists nineteen provinces that provided

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[173] Sahagún, Book 11, 284-285.

[174] Lawrence Kaplan and Lucille N. Kaplan, "Beans of the Americas," in *Chilies to Chocolate: Food the America's Gave the World*, ed. Nelson Foster and Linda S. Cordell (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1992), 62-63.

[175] Ibid., 63.

[176] Ibid.

[177] The fava bean, for example, was a staple of Rome. For more information, see Kaplan and Kaplan, 61.

barrels of beans to Tenochtitlan.[178] The study of beans is nevertheless very poor for the Aztecs.[179]

In addition to being a basic staple in the Aztec diet, beans were used for games by Aztec lords (Figure 3.5):

> *Patolli* was played with large beans – four large beans with holes bored into the surfaces. The game was won when from their hands they scattered the four beans on a mat painted in widely spaced black [lines], with which the *patolli* mat was designed…[180]

The game was a dangerous gamble, since the loser had to give up his costly goods, which could be jewelry, clothes, houses, slaves, or property.[181]

**Chia.** Sahagún describes chia as "a seed which is like flaxseed, from which comes an oil like linseed oil."[182] He goes on to describe its flavor as "tasty, savory."[183] Chia, a plant resembling sage, was used by the Aztecs to make flour, which was then made into various types of foodstuffs. In the tribute section of *Codex Mendoza* chia and amaranth are depicted in the same fashion, as clusters of small dark dots that represent diminutive

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[178] Berdan and Anawalt, 34-75, 79-82, 95-101, 106-109. The provinces are Petlacalco, Acolhuacan, Quahnahuac (Morelos), Huaxtepec (Morelos), Quahtitlan, Axocopan, Atotonilco, Hueypuchtla, Atotonilco (Hidalgo), Xilotepec, Quahuacan, Tuluca, Ocuilan, Malinalco, Xocotitlan, Tepequacuilco (Guerrero), Chalco, Tepeacac and Coyolapan. All provinces are in the Basin of Mexico unless otherwise stated.

[179] Robert Bye, "Beans," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Mesoamerican Cultures*, 3 vols., ed. Davíd Carrasco (Oxford University Press, 2001), 1: 83, notes that study is poor for Mesoamerica in comparison with South America.

[180] Sahagún, Book 8, 29.

[181] Ibid., 30.

[182] Sahagún, Book 11, 285.

[183] Ibid.

seeds. Only when the accompanying text of the manuscript specifies whether the seed is chia or amaranth can the reader be certain which is being referred to (Figure 3.6). The artists of the *Florentine Codex* also illustrate chia, but rather than showing it already harvested, they depict it as a full plant with its roots exposed (Figure 3.7). Chia, like amaranth, came in from some of the warmer provinces of the Aztec empire such as Coyolapan and Tepequacuilco.[184] In addition to being used for flour, chia was also added as a flavoring to drinks and other foods.

**Amaranth.** The earliest evidence of a domesticated species of amaranth comes from excavations in Tehuacan, Puebla, where 5,500 year-old domesticated amaranth was uncovered.[185] Sahagún's informants describe amaranth, or *huautli*, as it was called in Nahuatl, as being similar to Spanish goosefoot, and notes that this was one of many varieties.[186] They illustrate amaranth several times in Book 11, paying particular attention not only to the details of the plant, but also the removal of the edible seeds (Figure 3.8). When amaranth plants flowered, some plants were red, others were black. Like maize, amaranth dough was prepared as tamales and tortillas; the seed was added to flavor sweets.[187]

A valued food, amaranth was one of the four foods Alvarado Tezozomoc recorded as those the Aztecs migrated with into the Basin of Mexico, and like them, was

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[184] Berdan and Anawalt, 106-109.

[185] Daniel K. Early, "The Renaissance of Amaranth," in *Chilies to Chocolate: Food the America's Gave the World*, ed. Nelson Foster and Linda S. Cordell (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1992), 17.

[186] Sahagún, Book 11, 286.

[187] Ibid., 288.

often used in religious rituals.[188] It was the year's first crop for the Aztecs, usually ripening before the maize harvest.[189] Its connection with the maize plant could have been one of the reasons that amaranth was so important in ritual. Many of the annual *veintena* ceremonies included deity images made from amaranth dough.[190] Domestic rituals also included the use of amaranth. For example, Sahagún's informants note when a baby boy was born, a shield and bow and arrows of amaranth dough were made for him.[191] Anthropologist Daniel Early notes that amaranth was considered a gourmet food. Members of the nobility, for example, ate special tamales made from amaranth, called *huauquiltamalli*.[192] But amaranth was also a part of the cuisine of the commoner, being sold in large quantities in the Aztec markets. The *Codex Mendoza* lists amaranth as tribute coming annually from seventeen provinces.[193]

**Squash.** The Aztecs had various types of edible squashes, some of which were eaten raw while others were cooked. From the various squashes available the Aztec cook could make tamales as well as many other dishes. Pumpkin flowers were used for flavoring as

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[188] Hernando Alvarado Tezozomoc, *Crónica Mexicana, Escrita hacia el año de 1598*. Notes by Manuel Orozco y Berra. (Mexico City: Editorial Leyenda, 1944), 8.

[189] Coe, 90-91.

[190] These are discussed in Chapter 6.

[191] Sahagún, Book 6, 201.

[192] Early, 20-21. It should be noted that he is here using the *Codex Mendoza* as his source.

[193] Berdan and Anawalt, 34-75, 79-82, 95-97. The provinces are Petlacalco, Acolhuacan, Quauhnahuac (Morelos), Huaxtepec (Morelos), Quahtitlan, Axocopan, Atotonilco, Hueypuchtla, Atotonilco (Hidalgo), Xilotepec, Quahuacan, Tuluca, Ocuilan, Malinalco, Xocotitlan, Tepequacuilco (Guerrero), and Chalco. All provinces are in the Basin of Mexico unless otherwise indicated.

well as eaten on their own.[194] Pumpkin seeds were considered a delicacy and valued for their delicious flavor; Sahagún's artists illustrate the squash and the seed (Figure 3.9). Durán recorded that tributes of pumpkin seeds were received in great quantities by the Aztecs.[195] Winter squashes are low in calories and high in vitamin A and potassium; their juices are highly alkaline and were found useful as an anti-inflammatory.[196] When noting the various treatments that the indigenous people used, Sahagún's informants list squash seeds as a curative ingredient for stomach pains.[197]

The Aztecs created large realistic stone replicas of squashes (Figure 3.10). While not much is said in the surviving sources about their use in ritual, it is my belief that they played a role in the many agricultural ceremonies the Aztecs performed. Nicholson and Quiñones Keber suggest that pieces such as this one were installed permanently as display items in temples.[198] Some of the large stone squashes have holes of various sizes drilled into them, indicating that they may have been made during termination rituals that were a part of celebrations such as the New Fire Ceremony, held every 52 years to commemorate the ending of a calendar round (or 52-year cycle) and beginning of another.[199]

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[194] Sahagún, Book 11, 288.

[195] Diego Durán, *Book of the Gods and Rites and The Ancient Calendar*, trans. and ed. Fernando Horcasitas and Doris Heyden (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971), 205.

[196] Elisabeth Luard, *The Latin American Kitchen* (San Diego: Laurel Glen, 2002), 31.

[197] Sahagún, Book 10, 155.

[198] H. B. Nicholson, and Eloise Quiñones Keber, *Art of Aztec Mexico: Treasure of Tenochtitlan* (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1983), 113. The authors also note that these sculptures were originally thought to be temple offerings.

[199] Sahagún, Book 7, 25-32. Miller and Taube, 50.

**Chilies.** The sixteenth-century Spanish Dominican, Bartolomé de las Casas, observed that "without chili, Mexcans don't believe they are eating."[200] Chilies were added as a condiment to almost every meal. They were used in tamales, tortillas, stews, gruels, and even chocolate. Cooks combined chili and fine chocolate to make a drink called *chicahuatl*.[201] Acosta remarks that chili was so prized by the Indians that they carried it with them as important merchandise to trade.[202]

Folio 55r of the *Codex Mendoza* lists 400 loads of dried chilies received as a tribute item from the province of Oxitipan in Central Mexico (Figure 3.11). Chilies of different variety were sold in the market, as is evident by the extensive list provided by Sahagún's informants: "…mild red chilis (sic), broad chilis, hot green chilis, yellow chilis…water chilis…smoked chilis, small chilis, tree chilis, thin chilis, small chilis."[203] The accompanying image illustrates the chili vendor sitting on a blanket with her many different chilies spread out in plain view and several baskets (which can be assumed to contain more chilies) behind her (Figure 3.12). A buyer walks toward her and extends his hand in greeting; she reaches out behind her, perhaps to show him some other chilies that he might prefer.

Besides being an important ingredient in cooking, chilies also played a major role in medicine. They were used to cure everything from digestive and respiratory problems

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[200] Janet Long Solís, *El Placer del Chile* (Mexico: Clío, 1998), 11. "Sin el chile los mexicanos no creen que están comiendo." Translation mine.

[201] Ibid., 11.

[202] Acosta, 206.

[203] Sahagún, Book 10, 67.

to labor pains and toothaches, among many other ailments.[204] In describing a treatment for a tooth infection, Sahagún's informants record: "As its cure, pine resin mixed with ground *conyayaoal* worms is placed as a poultice over the surface. And one presses a heated chili upon the tooth, and one presses salt upon the tooth."[205] An illustration in the *Florentine Codex* shows an Aztec man cleaning his teeth with a cloth, but notice that among the several items in front of him is a large chili pepper (Figure 3.13). Perhaps the Aztecs used chilies in overall dental hygiene.

**Tomatoes**. Individuals could find different types of tomatoes in the market: large, small, on the vine, thin, sweet, yellow, red, rosy, among many others.[206] With these tomatoes the Aztec cook would make all kinds of sauces or add the tomato to shredded meat, gourd seeds, and chilies.[207] Tomatoes were also used for medicinal cures; for example, to cure coughs, salted tomato was rubbed on the mouth and the cough would "pass through" the body.[208] While tomatoes were widely used in Aztec cuisine and would later become a major part of Old World cuisines, the works of Sahagún and Durán offer limited information about them.

Francisco Hernández, a doctor sent by Phillip II of Spain in 1570 to make a survey of the natural life of New Spain, spent a great deal of time recording his finding

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[204] Ibid., 146-147.

[205] Ibid., 146.

[206] Ibid., 68.

[207] Ibid., 70.

[208] Ibid., 150.

on the tomato.[209] Of particular interest to the doctor were the many medicinal uses of the plant: to cure blocked tear ducts, alleviate headaches, stomach aches and heartburn; reduce mumps; heal spreading sores; reduce throat inflammation and sinus infection; and control excessive menstrual flow.[210] But he is also keen to note that tomatoes were varied in color, shapes and size, and were beautiful, and "one can use them in ground form or mixed with chili to make a very agreeable sauce that improves the flavor of many dishes."[211]

**Miscellaneous Plants.** Writing on the nutritional value of the Aztecs diet, anthropologist Bernard Ortiz de Montellano notes,

> Of particular relevance to a consideration of Aztec foods is the nutritional value of the staple diet of Mesoamerica – corn, beans, and squash, supplemented by chilies and tomatoes. This triad has been the basis of the Aztec diet since antiquity, and the addition of chili and tomato as condiments covered most culinary situations.[212]

Along with these staples, a variety of foods was available. The Aztecs ate jícama (the Mexican turnip), sweet potatoes (as well as other tubers), chayote (a type of squash), honey, fungi, mesquite, cacti, and an assortment of other plants and shrubs. They used much of what was available to them in their natural habitat, as well as the diverse foods that came into the city as tribute from many distant provinces.

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[209] *The Mexican Treasury: The Writings of Dr. Francisco Hernández*, ed. Simon Varey, trans. Rafael Chabrán, Cynthia L. Chaberlin, and Simon Varey (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 115-116.

[210] Ibid., 116.

[211] Ibid., 115-116.

[212] Bernard R. Ortiz de Montellano, *Aztec Medicine, Health and Nutrition* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 100.

> Among the many fruits to be found in these mountains and in all of New Spain there is one called *ahuacatl*. On the trees this fruit looks and hangs like a big early fig but in flavor it is like the piñon nut. There are four or five different kinds of these ahuacatl. …There are others as big as very large pears, and they are so good that I believe them to be the very best fruit in New Spain, both in flavor and in virtue.[213]

It is not difficult to see why Motolinía was so excited about the avocado. Before reaching New Spain he had never seen nor tasted this fruit that he found so flavorful. Along with being a major food item, avocados were also used to make oil for both cooking and burning.[214] Sahagún's informants indicate that the Aztecs used the pits of avocados to treat ear infections and scabies.[215]

Many other ingredients used for cooking were also used for medicinal purposes. The maguey plant, in particular, had an infinite number of uses for the Aztecs.[216] Tomato and tomato juice were used to treat illnesses of the eyes and nose, and a diet of turkey and tortillas were used to combat coughing.[217] Chili, squash seeds, and herbs were mixed to make a drink to treat chest ailments, and maize cobs were charred and powdered and

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[213] Fray Toribio de Motolínia, *Historia de los Indios de la Nueva España,* ed. Georges Baudot (Madrid: Editorial Castalia, 1985), 334-335. Entre muchas frutas que hay en estos montes, y en toda la Nueva España, es una que llaman *ahuacatl*; en el árbol parece, y así está colgando como grandes brevas, aunque en el sabor tiran a piñones. De estos ahuacates hay cuatro o cinco diferencias…y sale muy bueno, así para comer como para arder. Translation from Toribio Motolínia, *History of the Indians of New Spain*, trans. and ed. Elizabeth Andros Foster (Wesport: Greenwood Press, 1973), 222-223.

[214] Ibid., 335.

[215] Sahagún, Book 10, 140-141.

[216] Many of the treatments listed in Sahagún, Book 10 mention the numerous medicinal uses of the maguey plant.

[217] Sahagún, Book 10, 140-141, 144-145, and 150. Avocados and tomatoes were used with other ingredients to apply to infected areas. For more information on native plants and their appearance in the *Florentine Codex* see Robert Bye and Edelmira Linares, "Mexico's Maddening Plants of the Sixteenth Century According to the Florentine Codex," in *Chalchihuitl in Quetzalli: Precious Greenstone, Precious Quetzal Feather,* ed. Eloise Quiñones Keber (Lancaster: Labyrinthos, 2000), 15-29.

applied to swellings from sprains.[218] Food consumption and its restrictions constituted a large part of the curing strategies of the Aztecs; what a person did or did not eat could aid in healing an assortment of ailments.

## Other Everyday Foods

**Land Animals.** The Aztecs had an abundance of animals available for food. In the description of the tortilla and food seller in Book 10 (The People) of the *Florentine Codex*, Sahagún's informants mention tamales made from an assortment of ingredients, including turkeys, fish, frogs, tadpoles, rabbits, gophers, and *axolotl* (an edible larval salamander).[219] Book 11 (Earthly Things) lists various other animals that the Aztecs ate: opossums, hares, deer, iguanas, and dogs.[220] The chapter also mentions animals that may or may not have been eaten: the coyote, badger, grey fox, raccoon, squirrel, chipmunk, weasel, skunk, otter, kangaroo rat, and armadillo, among others. Many species of animals were hunted. Coe mentions a great hunt held by Viceroy Mendoza in 1540 in which thousands of animals of all sorts were captured to be eaten.[221]

Many of these animals were sold in the markets or were part of the tribute paid to Tenochtitlan. Durán mentions deer, rabbits, and quails coming in as tribute, along with gophers, weasels, and large rodents, and he notes "some [were] uncooked and others in barbecue."[222] Some animals, like the snake, could be caged and fed for a later meal.[223]

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[218] Sahagún, Book 10, 151, 153.

[219] Ibid., 69.

[220] Sahagún, Book 11, 11-13, 15-16.

[221] Coe, 99. Coe does not mention her source, and I have been unsuccessful in locating it.

[222] Durán, 205.

Francisco Hernández, the sixteenth-century physician and naturalist, writes about several birds that were caged and fed for the sole purpose of fattening them for a kill.[224] This is evident in one of Sahagún's illustrations that depicts two turkeys being fed for a later kill (Figure 3.14). While some animals were hunted, captured, or put into cages, others, like the dog, were domesticated.[225] These dogs were not the Chihuahua variety that usually comes to mind, but a different hairless type.[226] This dogs were called *xoloizcuintle* by the Aztecs.[227] Dogs were eaten during special occasions, as noted by Motolinía, who lists dog meat as one of the foods served at an important banquet.[228]

**Birds and Fowl.** The Aztecs also had a variety of birds available for food. Book 11 includes duck, goose, mallard, brown cane, and the pelican, along with many other bird species.[229] Some were captured or hunted, as seen in an illustration that depicts two men in a canoe capturing an *atotolin*, a white pelican **(**Figure 3.15**)**. The large bird has been speared and one man holds the bird down while the other removes the weapon. In the following image several men are gathered in a house enjoying the cooked pelican. Another image shows the rather ingenious way in which the Aztecs captured birds

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[223] Coe, 99. Again, no source is mentioned.

[224] Cited in ibid., 99.

[225] Ibid., 95. The five domesticated animals were the dog, the Muscovy duck, the turkey, the bee, and the cochineal insect, which was used as a source of dye rather than food.

[226] Ibid., 96.

[227] Alicia Gónzalez, written communication, December 2006.

[228] Motolinía, 187. While Baudot translates this animal as "paloma" (dove), several other editions, including Fray Toribio Motolinía, *El Libro Perdido,* ed. Edmundo O'Gorman (Mexico City: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 1989), 69, translates it as "perrillos" (puppies).

[229] Sahagún, Book 11, 26-30.

(Figure 3.16). Poles were buried in the lake and a net (probably made from maguey fibers) was strung on the rods. Birds were caught on the net as they attempted to fly over the lake. Other species like the turkey and the Muscovy duck were domesticated. When describing the Basin of Mexico landscape, Motolinía observes of Lake Texcoco, "There were so many [birds], that in many parts, it looked like a solid lake made up of birds. This happens in winter and the Indians harvest many of these birds."[230]

While the sources do not say much about the duck, there is ample information on the turkey.[231] Sahagún's informants warn against getting them from the bad turkey seller, whose birds were "poorly cooked turkeys, like rubber, tough, hard; sick turkeys; snuffling turkeys, with colds; dying turkeys; spoiled [ones]."[232] A good seller should provide turkeys that were "fat, fleshy, corpulent, of [good] breast and thigh, tender."[233] Turkeys were sold in great quantities in the market; Motolinía records that the market at Tepeyacac sold eight thousands birds every five days.[234] Hernando Cortés records that turkeys were used to feed Moctecuhzoma's zoo animals.[235]

Turkeys were widely used in ritual as well. The sixteenth-century humanist Cervantes de Salazar records that a festival was dedicated to turkeys.[236] In Sahagún's and Durán's descriptions of the annual *veintena* ceremonies, turkeys were often used as

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[230] Ortiz de Montellano, 100. While he quotes Motolínia, Ortiz de Montellano does not provide a complete citation.

[231] Coe, 95.

[232] Sahagún, Book 10, 85.

[233] Ibid.

[234] Coe, 96.

[235] Ibid. Cortés mistakenly identifies them as chickens.

[236] Ibid. The primary sources I have examined do not record this festival.

sacrifices to the gods. Durán also notes that turkeys were part of tribute received by the Aztecs, along with other fowl, eagles, and many other animals, both "wild and domesticated."[237] The National Museum of the American Indian, in Washington D.C., has several small clay representations of turkeys in its collection (Figure 3.17). It is possible that these figurines were used in domestic rituals regarding the consumption of turkeys.[238]

**Water Animals and Insects.** An abundance of marine foods were also available to the Aztecs. From Lake Texcoco they were able to get lake shrimp, frogs and tadpoles, small fish, salamanders and edible algae.[239] While the Western eater might not find some of these items appetizing, the Aztecs ate smartly, eating species that were in many cases easily available and highly nutritious. Worms and insects were cooked in many different ways and in some cases considered delicacies. Hernández observes that the "Indians ate tadpole with pleasure" and they "consider[ed] exquisite many things."[240] In discussing the worm referred to as *meocuilin*, Sahagún's informants assured him that it was "edible, savory, good-tasting."[241]

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[237] Durán, 207.

[238] I believe these were intended for domestic purposes since they are small, clay figurines, very similar in type to the ceramic figurines of deities that are used in domestic rituals during Aztec times. See Elizabeth M. Brumfiel, "Figurines and the Aztec State: Testing the Effectiveness of Ideological Domination," in *Gender and Archaeology*, ed. Rita P. Wright (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylavania Press, 1996), 143-166.

[239] Coe, 100. Coe does not name her source.

[240] Ortiz de Montellano, 114, quoting Francisco Hernández in *Obras Completas*, 4 vols. (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1959).

[241] Sahagún, Book 11, 98.

Of great interest is the algae called *tecuitlatl* by the Aztecs.[242] This green substance was collected from the lake and sold in the market. It was often eaten with maize or a sauce made of chili peppers and tomatoes.[243] This algae made quite an impression on some sixteenth-century European writers, who describe the collecting of the algae and its preparation. Motolinía observes:

> There breeds upon the water of the Lake of Mexico a sort of very fine slime, and at a certain time of the year when it is the thickest, the Indians gather them with very fine nets until their *acales* or boats are full. On shore they make a very smooth plot two or three brazas long and a little less wide on the earth or on very fine sand. They throw it down to dry until it makes a loaf two dedos thick. A few days later, it dries to the thickness of a used ducat. The Indians cut this loaf into wide bricks and eat a lot of it and think it is good. This merchandise is carried by all the merchants of the land as cheese is among us. Those of us who share the tastes of the Indians, find it very tasty.[244]

Ortiz de Montellano notes that *tecuitlatl* is an extraordinarily nutritious food, being seventy percent protein and rich in vitamins and minerals.[245] A major advantage of this algae was that it grew in salty water and did not compete with or displace other potential food sources. It was drought-proof and stable for up to a year after drying, making it easy to store for long periods.[246]

The abundance of the lake was thoroughly exploited by the Aztecs. There are numerous images in the *Florentine Codex* of people fishing, spearing water animals, or

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[242] This algae is known as *spirulina geitlerii*.

[243] Ortiz de Montellano, 102-103.

[244] Ibid., 104. Ortiz de Montellano quotes Motolinía but does not provide a complete citation.

[245] Ibid., 105.

[246] Ibid., 106.

collecting algae. The *Codex Mendoza* illustrates a boy of fourteen years being educated in the art of fishing (Figure 3.18). He stands in a canoe, which is in the middle of a "lake," typified by the blue organic shape of water around it, spears a fish, and pushes it into his net. His father sits outside the lake instructing him on how to use the fishing net; blue speech scrolls stemming from his mouth indicate his words of advice.

While Lake Texcoco provided an abundance of food for the inhabitants of the lakeshore area, a large quantity of seafood was received in tribute from other provinces. Durán notes, "From the coast came everything that could be found in the sea: scallop shells, large and small sea snails, curious fish bones, shells of giant turtles, other turtles of different sizes, stones from the sea, pearls baroque and smooth, ambers."[247] Coe questions the freshness of such tribute items, noting that there are no reliable accounts of an Aztec post system and the use of runners, although it is possible that these food items were salted and preserved.[248] While the range of seafood available, and to whom, is not fully known, it is probable that if fresh seafood came into Tenochtitlan it would have been first provided to the rulers and the nobility.

### Special Foods

Two plants that were special to the Aztecs were the cacao tree, whose pods produced the seeds from which chocolate was made, and the maguey plant, which, among many other products, yielded an alcoholic beverage called *pulque*.[249]

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[247] Durán, 204. He is not specific about where these items came from.

[248] Coe, 99.

[249] Coe, 95. Coe points out that the Aztecs made alcoholic drinks from an assortment of ingredients including maize, honey, and cactus fruits.

**Chocolatl.** *Chocolatl* or *cacao*[250] was definitely a specialty item. It was highly esteemed not only for the tasty beverage that could be made from it but for the value of the seed itself, since cacao seeds were used as currency throughout Mesoamerica.[251] Drinking chocolate was the privilege of a select few – lords, noblemen, warriors and the class of merchants known as *pochteca* – in short, individuals of some wealth.[252] Sahagún's informants are very specific about this, noting that "The common folk, the needy did not drink it."[253] Coe speculates that it even might have been limited to a specific gender, since some of the banquet descriptions given by Sahagún's informants mention that while men were served a chocolate drink, women were served a gruel of chia with a dressing of chili on top.[254]

Cacao was another of the foods that quickly impressed the Spaniards. Sixteenth-century sources are full of descriptions of the cacao tree and the many different ways to prepare chocolate. Motolinía, for example, describes the plant and its seed, and lists some of the uses of cacao:

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[250] The Aztecs referred to chocolate as *chocolatl*, whereas the Maya used the term *cacao*. For clarity, I will use the more recognized term cacao.

[251] See Motolinía's quote below. This unit of currency was so efficient that it continued in use once the Spaniards took over Aztec trade routes. Numerous post-contact sources record the complaints of Spaniards on the incredible ability of the indigenous people to create convincing counterfeit cacao beans, a practice that was already in place at the time of the Aztecs. This was no small task when one considers the unique size and shapes of individual pods.

[252] Sophie D. Coe and Michael D. Coe, *The True History of Chocolate* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2000), 93.

[253] Sahagún, Book 6, 256.

[254] Coe, 109. While it is possible that chocolate was only available to men, not enough information remains to make this claim with certainty.

> Cocoa is the fruit of a medium-sized tree beside which, as soon as they plant the seed, they set another tree that grows tall and shades the cocoa tree and serves as a sort of mother to it. The seeds are like the almonds of Castille, except that when well grown they are bigger. The fruit is borne in the pods with sections marked in them, like little melons, and each of these pods usually has about thirty seeds or "almonds" of cocoa. It is eaten green, as soon as the "almonds" begin to harden, and is very good. They also eat it dried, but only a few grains and not often. Its most general used is as money, and it is current all through this country…This cocoa is a very generally used drink; ground up and mixed with corn and other grains, also ground, it is drunk all over the country, and it is for this that it is used. In some places they make it very well. It is good and is considered a very nourishing drink.[255]

Chocolate was not an Aztec phenomenon. The Maya of the Classic Period (ca. 250-900) also valued cacao immensely and reproduced the pods and the chocolate drink in numerous art works. Especially well known is the *Princeton Vase*, which Coe and Coe believe was the first image to show the making of chocolate.[256] The finely painted black-on-cream vase in the Princeton University Art Museum's collection depicts a scene from the underworld. The Maya God L is attended by five young women, one of whom pours chocolate from one vessel into another to create the desired froth or "head" on the beverage. Sahagún's artists also depict this same method of chocolate production in the *Florentine Codex* (Figure 3.19). A ceramic vessel lid in the Museo del Sitio de Toniná in

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[255] Fray Toribio de Motolínia, *Historia de los Indios de la Nueva España,* ed. Georges Baudot, 329-330. El cacao es una fruta de un árbol mediano, el cual luego le plantan de su fruto, que son unas almendras casi como las de Castilla, sino que lo bien granado es más grueso, en sembrándolo ponen par de él otro árbol que crece en alto, y le va haciendo sombra, y es como madre del cacao...Cómese verde desde que comienzan a cuajar las almendras, y es sabroso, y también lo comen seco, y esto pocos granos y pocas veces. Mas lo que más generalmente de él se usa es para moneda y corre por toda esta tierra…Es este cacao una bebida muy general, que molido y mezclado con maíz y otras semillas también molidas, se bebe en toda la tierra y en esto se gasta; en algunas partes lo hacen bien hecho, es bueno y tiénese por muy sustancial bebida. Translation from Toribio Motolínia, *History of the Indians of New Spain*, trans. and ed. Elizabeth Andros Foster, 217-218.

[256] Coe and Coe, 50.

Chiapas, Mexico, shows a spider monkey wearing a necklace of cacao pods (Figure 3.20). Spider monkeys were notorious for eating cacao pods and posed a serious threat to them, especially since the tree, which needed moist and shaded land, was difficult to grow. While the Maya grew the cacao tree in *cenotes* or sinkholes,[257] the dry land and cool climate of Central Mexico was not conducive to its cultivation. The Aztecs acquired cacao either through trade or tribute.

Durán notes that the Aztecs received cacao seeds in "vast amounts" and lists Xoconochco, on the Southern Pacific coast, as one of the conquered provinces that provided them.[258] The *Codex Mendoza* also illustrates other provinces from which chocolate was obtained, such as Tochtepec and Cuetlaxtlan (also on the Southern Pacific coast), which had a warmer climate suitable to the growth of the cacao tree.[259] Sophie Coe notes that the Aztec empire received a yearly tribute of 980 loads of cacao with every load containing about 24,000 beans that weighed about fifty pounds.[260] Chocolate was a much desired drink for the Aztecs. They relished preparing it in many ways, often adding exquisite ingredients and flavorings. Sahagun's informants mention that honey, aromatic flowers, vanilla and chili, among other condiments, were added to chocolate

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[257] Mary Miller and Simon Martin, *Courtly Art of the Ancient Maya* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2004), 63.

[258] Durán, 203 and 202.

[259] Berdan and Anawalt, 112-115, 122-124.

[260] Coe, 102.

drinks.[261] Maize was often added to chocolate as well, and perhaps was a more common drink.[262]

Michael Coe has identified the god K'awiil as a cacao god for the Classic Maya.[263] While no such identification has been made for the Aztec deities, the ritual importance of cacao cannot be overlooked. While I discuss chocolate and its ritual use more fully in Chapter 4, here it is enough to mention that it was drunk during many ceremonies. The tree and drink also had a symbolic meaning for the people, for Book 6 (Rhetoric and Moral Philosophy) records, "This saying was said of cacao, because it was precious…The heart, the blood are to be feared."[264] While the exact meaning of this statement remains obscure for the modern reader, Sahagún's informants make clear cacao's connection to blood (and hence life) in Aztec thought, and thus its incredible importance.

**Maguey.** Motolinía, in his *History*, dedicates the nineteenth chapter of his third book to the maguey plant.[265] Maguey is probably best known for its use in making the fermented alcoholic drink *pulque*, but the plant had an enormous array of uses.[266] Maguey, or as the Aztecs called it, *metl*, was used to make syrup, honey (which was often used for

[261] Sahagún, Book 10, 93.

[262] Berdan and Anawalt, 32. A version of this chocolate and maize drink, called *champurrado*, is still drunk today.

[263] Miller and Martin, 63.

[264] Sahagún, Book 6, 256.

[265] The maguey, whose scientific name is the Agave Americana, comes from the Agavaceae family, and is also known as agave and the century plant.

[266] The following discussion is based on Motolinía's account in *Historia de los Indios de la Nueva España,* ed. Georges Baudot, 393-397.

cooking), vinegar, and small unsweetened cakes. Spines from the plant were used for awls, nails or tacks, and needles. From the leaf fibers the Aztecs made cord, rope, thread for sewing, blankets, and an assortment of clothing that included footwear and capes. Maguey leaves provided the Aztecs with building materials and fuel for burning. As Motolinía notes, "… this is the poor man's firewood."[267] The Aztecs also used the leaves to make paper. Motolinía records that everyone from cooks to artisans, craftsmen, and builders used these leaves to carry materials:

> They cut them – for they are very long – and on one piece the Indian women place the corn that they grind, for as they grind it with water and the corn itself has to be well moistened, it needs something clean to fall on…After they have made the corn into dough they put it on another piece of maguey leaf. These pieces of maguey leaves are much used by the craftsmen, called *amantecatl,* who work in gold and feathers. On these leaves they make a paper of cotton mixed with paste, as thin as a very veil, and on the paper – on top of the maguey leaf – they work all their designs. It is one of the principal things that they use in their craft. Painters and other craftsmen make excellent use of these leaves. Even those who build houses use a piece of one of these leaves for carrying the mortar.[268]

Durán also tells us that maguey fibers were used to make clothing for servant girls to wear in the home.[269] The plant was also medicinal, often used to counteract snake bites,

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[267] Ibid., 395. "…es ésta la leña de los pobres." Translation mine.

[268] Ibid., 394-395. Las pencas también por sí aprovechan para muchas cosas. Cortan estas pencas, porque son largas, y en un pedazo ponen las Indias el maíz que muelen, y cae allí; que como lo muelen con agua y el mismo maíz ha estado en mojo, ha menester cosa limpia en que caiga; y en otro pedazo de la penca lo echan después de hecho masa. De estas pencas hechas pedazos se sivern muchos los maestros que llaman *amanteca*, que labran de pluma y oro; y encima de estas pencas hacen un papel de algodón engrudado tan delgado como una muy delgada toca, y sobre aquel papel y encima de la penca labran todos sus dibujos; y es de los principales instrumentos de su oficio. Los pintores y otros oficiales se aprovechaban mucho de estas hojas, hasta los que hacen casas toman un pedazo y en él llevan el barro." Translation from Toribio Motolínia, *History of the Indians of New Spain*, trans. and ed. Elizabeth Andros Foster, 273.

[269] Durán, 204.

cuts, and burns. Since it is a succulent, it holds liquid, which knowledgeable travelers used to quench their thirst. If this were not enough to convey that maguey was a super plant, Motolinía notes that an edible worm was found in the maguey plant and comments "…when toasted and salted, these are good to eat."[270] Even the parasites living off the plant were useful!

The maguey plant grows naturally in arid areas in Mexico, making it easily available to the Aztecs. By no means solely employed by them, it was also used by other Mesoamerican peoples and is still cultivated today. Its role in Aztec culture was immense. Maguey was so important that it was associated with the goddess Mayahuel, and pulque was connected with a group of gods referred to as the Centzon Totochtin or "400 rabbits," in reference to the drunkenness it could cause.[271] These gods, also known under individual names, were responsible for numerous aspects of Aztec life including agriculture.[272] Ortiz de Montellano states that they were also patron gods of villages.[273] The ritual uses of the maguey plant are discussed in Chapter 5.

Sahagún's informants also record the many uses of the plant and illustrate the harvesting of maguey (Figure 3.21). Two men work the maguey field, the one at the lower right cutting the plant into sections. The viewer can see that the basket on his back is already filled with plant cuttings. A second man at the upper left seems to be removing

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[270] Motolinía, *Historia de los Indios de la Nueva España,* ed. Georges Baudot, 396. "…los cuales tostados y con sal son muy bueno de comer." Translation mine.

[271] Ortiz de Montellano, 110.

[272] Henry B. Nicholson, "Religion in Pre-Hispanic Central Mexico," in *Archaeology of Northern Mesoamerica*, vol.10, ed. Gordon F. Ekholm and Ignacio Bernal, *Handbook of Middle American Indians,* 16 vols., ed. Robert Wauchope (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971), 419-420.

[273] Ortiz de Montellano, 110.

the entire maguey plant, or he is possibly in the process of removing the useful liquid from the plant. Maguey farming became very widespread during the Aztec period with fiber and sap production becoming the two largest domains of maguey processing.[274]

## Food for the Elite

Aztec society was highly stratified, and because of this not all foods were available to everyone. Staple items such as maize, beans, chia, amaranth, and chili were available to all, from the nobility to the common class, but other items, notably cacao, were only available to those of wealth and power. The Jesuit Francisco Javier Clavigero, writing in 1780, stated that, "At all times the markets are full of a thousand species of vermin, raw, cooked, fried, or toasted, sold especially for the sustainment of the poor."[275] These items, which might indeed have been tasty, were certainly not what the lords of Tenochtitlan ate. Book 8 (Kings and Lords) of the *Florentine Codex* lists the various foods available to the lords, and some of the descriptions make the mouth water. Among the dishes prepared were "Tamales made of maize flowers with ground amaranth seed and cherries added; tortillas of green maize or of tender maize; tamales stuffed with amaranth greens; tortillas made with honey, or with tuna cactus fruit."[276] While many of these were staple items available to commoners, the more delicate ways that maize and

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[274] Susan T. Evans, "Aztec Household Organization and Village Adminstration," in *Prehispanic Domestic Units in Western Mesoamerica: Studies of the Household, Compound, and Residence*, ed. Robert S. Santley and Kenneth G. Hirth (Boca Raton: CRC Press, 1993), 176-177.

[275] Coe, 99.

[276] Sahagún, Book 8, 38. While the English translation of Sahagún's work uses the word "cherries," this fruit was not indigenous to the Americas, originally coming from Europe and Asia. See Andrew Mariani, "Cherries," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Food and Drink in America,* 2 vols., ed. Andrew. F. Smith (Oxford University Press, 2004), 1: 219.

amaranth were prepared set them apart from everday usage. Other dishes that were probably not available to commoners included "lobster with red chili, tomatoes, and ground squash seeds."[277]

Ground squash seeds seem to have been added to many meals and, as noted above, these seeds came in great quantity to Tenochtitlan as tribute items and were highly sought after as a flavorful additive to tamales and tortillas. Another condiment added to many of the dishes were chili peppers. Sahagún's informants list different types of chilies in a range of sizes and color; in fact, they seem to revel in the many range of color chili peppers came in. They often describe the color of ingredients and list the various colors that one item could come in, as in the case of the tuna or cactus fruit, which they point out can come in "many hues – white, yellow, bright red, green, orange."[278]

His informants report that when the ruler of Tenochtitlan had finished his supper he was served his choice of chocolate:

> …the ruler was served his chocolate, with which he finished [his repast] – green, made of tender cacao; honeyed chocolate made with ground-up dried flowers – with green vanilla pods; bright red chocolate; orange-colored chocolate; rose-colored chocolate; black chocolate; white chocolate.[279]

Chocolate was served in many ways during pre-Hispanic times. Aztec lords drank *tlaquetzalli*, a beverage made from fine chocolate.[280] The above description probably reflects the different types of chocolate prepared for the ruler rather than a survey of what

[277] Sahagún, Book 8, 38.

[278] Ibid.

[279] Ibid., 39.

[280] Coe and Coe, 87.

was drunk at one time. Notice again the mention of the colors that chocolate came in. It is obvious that the Aztecs were not only very fond of exquisite tastes but of beautiful presentation as well. The Coes note that Aztec cooks added many different ingredients to make special chocolate drinks: black pepper, vanilla, allspice, *achiote* (a seed used for its flavor and red color), and many different flowers.[281]

Although Aztec vessels do not provide the rich figural iconography and glyphic texts that Maya ceramics do, special vessels were used for chocolate consumption.[282] A detail from folio 47r of the *Codex Mendoza* illustrates the preferred vessel shape for drinking chocolate, although it is quite possible that other vessel shapes were also used (Figure 3.22). An Aztec vessel in the Museo Nacional de Antropologia in Mexico City combines stamped decoration with fine geometric painting around the rim (Figure 3.23).[283] Eloise Quiñones Keber has noted that the embossed design element is in a pod or heart shape.[284] These two items, the cacao pod and heart, were linked symbolically as containers for special liquids – cacao and blood – and had significant ritual meaning.[285] The image of an upside down warrior is repeated four times around the vessel; he wears a coyote helmet, feathers and a mask in the shape of a bird's beak.[286] The choice of a

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[281] Ibid., 90-92, citing various sources including Francisco Hernández and Sahagún.

[282] See Dorie Reents-Budet, *Painting the Maya Universe: Royal Ceramics of the Classic Period* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994); Michael D. Coe, *The Art of the Maya Scribe* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1997).

[283] Eduardo Matos Moctezuma and Felipe Solís Olguín, *Aztecs* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2002), 452.

[284] Written communication, June 2006.

[285] The ritual symbolism and use of cacao is further discussed in Chapter 5.

[286] Eloise Quiñones Keber (written communication, June 2006) has observed that the upside down image would face the warrior as he was drinking from the vessel. This is very similar to the image of Tlaltecuhtli on the back of the Bilimek pulque vessel discussed in Chapter 1; Tlaltecuhtli would literally be

warrior figure suggests that vessels such as this one may have been used for chocolate drinking in warrior ceremonies or royal feasts.[287]

While there is no question that chocolate was a food source for the upper class, the question of gender usage is vague.[288] Women were certainly involved in the preparation of chocolate as seen in the *Codex Tuleda* **(**Figure 3.24) and the *Florentine Codex*. Both images show the women in the process of making the chocolate "foamy." The foam, created by pouring the chocolate from one jar to another, was especially prized by the Aztecs.

## Food Production

Agricultural work was neither the primary type of occupation nor the major basis for household subsistence in the city of Tenochtitlan.[289] The Aztecs employed various agricultural methods on the lakeshore and beyond to provide some form of sustenance for the general population. Among these were chinampa agriculture, terracing, and multicropping. Chinampas are artificial planting areas built up from mud scooped from the bottom of a lake or freshwater swamp, held in place by posts and roots, and separated

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pouring pulque from her very own body into the priest's mouth. The coyote helmet, feathers, and bird's mask are features that associate the figure with the gods Tezcatlipoca and Huitzilopochtli. See Felipe Solís and Roberto Velasco Alonso, "Cup with Images of a Warror," in *Aztecs*, cat. no. 210.

[287] Solís and Velasco Alonso, cat. no. 452. The authors identify this vessel as a *jicara*, a ritual drinking vessel. Alicia Gónzalez, however, has noted that the jicara was an everyday vessel and easily accessible by many, still widely used by indigenous people and the poor (written communication, December 2006). If this vessel was used in ritual, it would most likely have been to serve chocolate or pulque.

[288] Sophie Coe believes that women might not have been allowed to consume chocolate on certain occasions. See Coe, 106.

[289] Edward Calneck, "Settlement Patterns and Chinampa Agriculture at Tenochtitlan," *American Antiquity* 37 (1972): 104.

by canals.[290] The narrow size of the plots allowed for an intense porosity of the soil. Chinampas received enough moisture to provide a continuous, stable, and intensive agriculture. Through these methods the yield of chinampas in Aztec times was high.[291] Edward Calnek's work from the 1970s demonstrated that chinampas existed in Tenochtitlan in various sizes but were not always included in city planning.[292] Household gardens were created spontaneously by individuals and were not part of the larger state agricultural organization. These small chinampa plots were used as a source of garden vegetables. Others shared larger plots allowing several families to be sustained from their yield, while some parts of Tenochtitlan were completely chinampa free.[293] While chinampa agriculture was fundamental for the Aztecs, it certainly did not provide for all the food needs of the city. The Aztecs did, however, develop chinampa technology to its fullest potential, expanding the existing chinampa system to cover more than seventy-five square miles to support as many as 100,000 people.[294]

Sahagún's artists illustrate yet another agricultural technique employed by the Aztecs. Farmers would often intercrop plants, that is, mix various crops on one patch of land. Maize was often intercropped with beans and squash, as illustrated in the *Florentine Codex* (Figure 3.25). Experiments have shown that multicropping decreases

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[290] Ortiz de Montellano, 78.

[291] Teresa Rojas Rabiela, "Chinampa Agriculture," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Mesoamerican Cultures*, 3 vols., ed. Davíd Carrasco (Oxford University Press, 2001), 1: 200.

[292] Calnek, 114. Other authors share a different view. Hassig believes that the grid pattern of the chinampas indicates centralized planning. See Ross Hassig, *Trade, Tribute, and Transportation: The Sixteenth-Century Political Economy of the Valley of Mexico* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985), 29.

[293] Calnek, 112 and 114.

[294] Early, 19.

the risk of weeds and parasites and therefore increases crop yields.[295] The Aztecs used their natural resources to their best abilities. Extremely productive labor-intensive chinampa agriculture was used throughout the city, lakeshores were also irrigated, and banks were terraced.[296] This broad range of techniques allowed for a maximum utilization of available land.

Although the southern district of the Basin of Mexico was heavily used for *chinampa* or artificial planting areas, most of the foodstuffs consumed came into the city through trade and tribute. Coe notes that the *Codex Mendoza* gives the average amount of tribute from each province as 28 *troxes* of maize, 21 each of beans and chia, and 18 of amaranth.[297] Raw foods included squash, honey, cacao, chilies, among many other things. In addition, the Aztecs received many other types of foods already prepared.[298] Prepared foods included many meat dishes.[299]

The Aztec tribute system was not only a useful method of supplementing the food needs of Tenochtitlan, but its labor needs as well. A tribute work force could be redistributed to better serve the needs of the urban population and ruling elite. Men and women supplied the labor for cooking and other food preparation, as well as labor in the marketplace.[300] Labor redistribution was intricately organized by the Aztec state.[301]

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[295] Ortiz de Montellano, 95.

[296] Hassig, 53.

[297] Coe, 89. Coe notes that a *troxe* is what the Spanish called the wickerwork containers that held between 8,000 and 10,000 bushels.

[298] Durán, 205.

[299] Ibid., 205.

[300] Susan Kellogg, "The Social Organization of Households Among the Tenochca Mexica Before and After the Conquest," in *Prehispanic Domestic Units in Western Mesoamerica: Studies of the*

## Food Preparation, Presentation and Storage

**Aztec Cooks.** While Sahagán describes all cooks as being female, Coe notes that the *Codex Tuleda* describes cooks as being both male and female.[302] She speculates that the males were in charge of the outdoor cooking, while females might have been in charge of indoor cooking. While this is certainly possible, I am hesitant about gender-specific breakdown of tasks. What is certain is that the good cook was highly regarded. Sahagún's Book 10 (The People) of the *Florentine Codex* describes some of the virtues of the good cook, and among them is one that is very basic: she "has good drink, good food."[303] According to his informants, part of being a good cook was the ability to make maize dishes.[304] The accompanying images depict two female cooks. They kneel in front of a *metate* (a three-legged grinding stone) and busily grind what may be maize kernels to make one of the many maize dishes (Figure 3.26). Beside the cooks are a basketful of seeds, a flat surface on which to place food, and a tripod vessel.

The *Codex Mendoza* illustrates a mother instructing her thirteen-year old daughter in the art of cooking, indicating that females were the chief domestic food preparers (Figure 3.27). The child kneels in front of a metate, while her mother stands behind her, speech scrolls emanating from her mouth to indicate her words of direction. Surrounding

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*Household, Compound, and Residence*, ed. Robert S. Santley and Kenneth G. Hirth (Boca Raton: CRC Press, 1993), 212.

[301] Ibid.

[302] Coe, 111.

[303] Sahagún, Book 10, 53.

[304] Ibid.

the young girl are other cooking utensils, a handled *olla* or jar, a *comal* or griddle, with three round stones supporting it over the fire, and a small tripod bowl with a grinder in it.[305] This bowl, called a *molcajete* in contemporary Spanish, (or as the Aztecs referred to it, *molcaxitl*), had deep incisions on the inside for grinding substances. As illustrated**,** the bowl was accompanied by a stone pestle. Coe notes that this molcajete was specifically used to make the many sauces of the Aztecs.[306] The molcajete, among many other Aztec cooking utensils, is still in use today.

**Aztec Kitchens.** Not much information is available on Aztec kitchens. Historian Susan Kellogg notes that indigenous women's wills from the sixteenth century suggest that within a house compound Mexica women had a designated section where they cooked, called a *cihuacalli,* a "woman's house or room" or "house/room of women."[307] In early colonial wills this room, treated as a separate entity from other parts of the house, was often left by women in their wills to their daughters.[308] The images mentioned above in the *Florentine Codex* and the *Codex Mendoza* show cooking in what seems to be a specific area in which the necessary cooking paraphernalia was housed. Some Aztec houses did not have a separate room for food production and meals, or *tlacualoyan*; but at the very least they had a hearth or *tlecuilitl*. The nobility of Tenochtitlan certainly had a

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[305] Quiñones Keber has suggested that the girl depicted in the *Codex Mendoza* (along with the two cooks in the *Florentine Codex*) might be rolling out the balls into flat tortillas; notice the three dough balls in the metate. Written communication, June 2006.

[306] Coe, 109.

[307] Kellogg, 210, n. 5.

[308] Ibid. Kellogg notes that while daughters and granddaughters were the preferred inheritors, women occasionally left the room to a son.

separate room or set of rooms that were set aside and used exclusively for cooking. Servants probably labored there as a form of tribute.

**Aztec Cooking Utensils.** In Book 8 (Kings and Lords) Sahagún illustrates some of the numerous cooking items that were sold in the marketplace (Figure 3.28). His artists depict several large tripod vessels and baskets. Illustrated repeatedly in sixteenth-century sources, baskets were used to hold dry goods, everything from raw seeds to cooked tamales. Sahagún describes the basket seller in Book 10 (The People) and notes that many different baskets were made that had various uses: "…baskets made of spiny plants, baskets with serrated edges, large baskets, cylindrical baskets, tortilla baskets, baskets for hot things, food baskets; reed baskets, shallow baskets…"[309]

Along with these items, other wares were also used for cooking. The clay olla, sometimes referred to as a pot but really shaped like an urn with two handles, was a staple kitchen item.[310] Coe notes:

> Cooking in an *olla* is a constant refrain repeated throughout all the food descriptions. This might mean steaming, as when a little water was put in the bottom of the *olla*, then a light framework of sticks to keep the tamales from coming in contact with the water, then the tamales in their wrappers, and the whole tightly covered and set over the fire. Stewing and boiling were also practicable in an *olla*.[311]

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[309] Sahagún, Book 10, 83.

[310] Berdan and Anawalt, 125.

[311] Coe, 109.

A *mano,* similar to the metate except that it was held in the hand, was also used in Aztec cooking for grinding herbs. These cooking and serving utensils were homemade, locally made, available at the markets, or came into Tenochtitlan as part of the tributes received. Durán notes,

> Other provinces sent gourds as tribute. Some of these were deep, others shallow, some plain, others carved; some were gilded and painted with rich and intricate designs. Some of these have lasted until today and are exquisitely worked. Another type of gourd was wide and flat, and these were used in the same way that we use silver trays or large plates to carry the food to the table or to offer water for the hands. They also had curious gourds with handles, similar to chocolate pots.[312]

The friar's observations make it difficult to ascertain whether he is referring to ware made from actual gourds or clay. While scholars have pointed out that various sixteenth-century sources state that Moctecuhzoma ate only from fine polychrome ware made in Cholula in the neighboring Puebla Valley, in a recent lecture on ceramics archaeologist Michael Smith discovered that even in the middens of commoners in Calixtlahuaca, in the Toluca Valley, there was evidence of Cholula pottery being used.[313] He equated this with our notion of having "good china" that is only used for special occasions. Commoners used their basic clay wares for everyday, while Cholula pottery was probably reserved for special occasions such as children's naming ceremonies, marriage celebrations, and other special events. The Coes also notice discrepancies in various sixteenth-century sources that discuss food ware. While Bernal Díaz del Castillo

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[312] Durán, 204.

[313] Michael Smith, lecture presented at *The Arts in the Aztec Empire* Symposium, Guggenheim Museum, New York, October 16, 2004.

records that the lords of Tenochtitlan drank chocolate from gold cups, Bartolóme de las Casas says that they were made from gourds.[314]

## Conclusion

It should be noted that many of the foods discussed above were not eaten on a daily basis or by all segments of society, but were a component of the average diet of the elite and ruling classes. Meats and certain fish, for example, could only have been obtained by persons of some wealth. Sixteenth-century chroniclers such as Sahagún and Durán focused their attention on the remaining elite class with very little attention to the common class. Modern archaeology and anthropology have also focused attention on the elite class, although more recent scholarship is being dedicated to commoners and their activities.[315]

The Aztec did have a wide range of food available to them, either produced within the Basin of Mexico, its surrounding areas, or available at markets from long-distance trade. Certain foods, such as maize, were part of the everyday and eaten at practically every meal and accessible to all classes. Other foods, like cacao, were relegated to a certain class, and possibly even a specific gender. Not surprisingly, foods that are significant in daily meals became significant in ritual; maize for example, was not only consumed in ritual celebrations but it was often given as an offering and used to decorate effigies and temples during religious ceremonies.

Food was also used as medicine. Tomatoes, chili and turkeys, are just a sampling of foodstuff which provided medicinal cures for the Aztec. The maguey plant supplied

[314] Coe and Coe, 94-96.

[315] See especially the work of Michael Smith and Elizabeth Brumfiel, among others.

the material for garments, ropes, fuel, and needles, to name just a few items. But most significantly, food was an art in Aztec culture; sixteenth-century sources attest to the attention paid to its preparation and presentation. Whether as part of an elite feast or a ritual ceremony, Aztec cuisine was impressive.

# CHAPTER 4

# EATING AS RITUAL

The various everyday foods available to the Aztecs of Central Mexico also formed an important component of ceremonial and ritual activities. These occasions ranged from domestic activities such as births and marriages to state-sponsored religious, political, or agricultural events often associated with fertility deities. Everyday staples such as maize and beans were eaten, as were special foods such as amaranth and chocolate. This chapter examines feasting in Aztec culture, focusing on domestic rituals that include life-cycle events as well as elite feasts involving the merchant, military, and ruling classes. Again, crucial to this examination are the written and illustrated accounts compiled by friars Bernardino de Sahagún and Diego Durán in the sixteenth century.

## Feasting in Aztec Culture

Cultural anthropologists define a feast in various ways. Michael Dietler, who has examined food and feasting practices in *Feasts: Archaeological and Ethnographic Perspectives on Food, Politics and Power,* takes a very direct approach to the definition, describing it as "an analytical rubric used to describe forms of ritual activity that involve the communal consumption of food and drink."[316] Brian Hayden, Dietler's frequent co-author, provides an uncomplicated definition as well: a feast is a sharing between two or

[316] Michael Dietler, "Theorizing the Feast: Rituals of Consumption, Commensal Politics and Power in African Contexts," in *Feasts: Archaeological and Ethnographic Perspectives on Food, Politics, and Power*, ed. Michael Dietler and Brian Hayden (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001), 65.

more people of special foods.[317] He adds that these special foods are not generally served at daily meals.[318] Hayden's simple and useful definition cannot be applied to the Aztecs, who used one of their basic staples, maize, in both daily and sacred meals. My own definition of "feasting" is more in tune with ethnographer Polly Weissner, who defines feasting as involving 1) the aggregation of people; 2) food sharing and food distribution; 3) a specific occasion (for example, to appease ancestors, initiate youth, marry, bury the dead); 4) some form of display; and 5) abundance.[319]

Feasting for the Aztecs was a multifaceted event and involved an array of elements other than food. An Aztec feast could include music, singing, story-telling, dancing, incense and the burning of copal, flowers, tobacco smoking, offerings, and gift-giving, among other activities.[320] A critical requirement was that these items should be provided *in abundance.* Sixteenth-century chroniclers emphasize this throughout their descriptions of Aztec feasts. Sahagún's informants record that a good feast was one in which guests were given plenty, in food and offerings.[321] Durán also notes that "everything was to be created in abundance."[322]

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[317] Brian Hayden, "Fabulous Feasts: A Prolegomenon to the Importance of Feasting," in *Feasts: Archaeological and Ethnographic Perspectives on Food, Politics, and Power*, ed. Michael Dietler and Brian Hayden (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001), 28.

[318] Ibid., 28.

[319] Polly Weissner, "Of Feasting and Value: Enga Feasts in a Historical Perspective (Papua New Guinea)," in *Feasts: Archaeological and Ethnographic Perspectives on Food, Politics, and Power*, ed. Michael Dietler and Brian Hayden (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001), 116-117.

[320] Bernardino de Sahagún, *Florentine Codex: General History of the Things of New Spain*, 12 vols., trans. and ed. Arthur J. Anderson and Charles E. Dibble (Santa Fe: School of American Research; Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1950-1982), Books 4-5, 122.

[321] Ibid., Books 4-5, 122.

[322] Durán, *History of the Indies of New Spain,* trans. Doris Heyden (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994), 319.

Aztec feasts were also about display, of material wealth and culture, as well as of social and political relations. A feast allowed a host to make his wealth and power visually evident. In addition to the abundance of food served and offerings made, some feasts required that the host provide gifts and lodging to his guests. Durán lists goods that were given to the guests; these included luxury items such as mantles and jewelry.[323] Royal feasts often included the inviting of both friends and enemies from afar. These special guests needed to be provided with lodging for several days, if not weeks. The wealth of goods displayed at a feast could often belong to a group or several individuals, allowing for group or class distinction and association.[324]

Dietler believes that all feasts are inherently political.[325] While some Aztec feasts were overtly political in nature, such as those having to do with state-level religious and ruler ceremonies, others, such as domestic feasts and merchant banquets, were less so. The inherent nature of a feast does indeed allow for the construction of politics.[326] A feast brings people together, promoting the creation and maintenance of relationships, political or social or both. Dietler notes that a feast is often a device for legitimizing status differences, with the manipulation of food consumption emphasizing these differences.[327]

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[323] Ibid., 322.

[324] Inga Clendinnen, *Aztecs: An Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 38.

[325] Dietler, 77.

[326] Ibid., 68. Dietler focuses on what a feast does, that is, the purpose of a feast.

[327] Ibid., 84, 88.

While the political uses of a feast are significant, it is important to remember that feasts are inherently social events. The sharing of food and drink creates a communal setting. Sahagún's informants describe such a scene:

> There was the giving of pleasure, of much contentment. There was the encouragement of one another, and tearful greetings. And some only hummed, singing secretly, or did nothing. And some did nothing else but sit content and rejoicing, laughing, and making witty remarks, making others burst into laughter as if their sides were sore.[328]

An Aztec feast was never single-minded in its purpose. Due to the complexity of feasting behavior, few feasts had a pure function, and in some cases the pretext for a feast, such as a funeral, may have had very different components in different types of households, such as a poor versus a rich household.[329]

Another important aspect of Aztec feasts, and indeed of feasting in general, is the sequencing of events. Sequence in a feast can be so structured that it can itself become a ritual.[330] Sahagún's informants note that eating at a feast corresponded to rank.[331] They go on to say: "And thereupon went the server, following him those who changed the courses and carried [the food] in their arms. They served the people, placed them in order, went placing the people in line, putting them all in line."[332] This passage emphasizes social order and structure in Aztec feasting. Sequence was also important in

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[328] Sahagún, Books 4-5, 119.

[329] Hayden, 36.

[330] Dietler, 70.

[331] Sahagún, Books 4-5, 121.

[332] Ibid., 117.

the selection of the day for the feast; all feasts were held on specific days chosen in consultation with a calendar specialist, or diviner.

## Domestic Rituals and Feasting

Many domestic rituals applied to all of the various classes of Aztec society on different occasions, especially life cycle events such as the birth of a child, marriage, or death. However, the information recorded in the sixteenth-century derives mainly from the ruling or noble class; most sixteenth-century sources say very little about the Aztec commoner. The kind of feasting attached to these rites of passage would have varied from household to household and region to region.

## Child-Naming Ceremonies

What Sahagún and other sixteenth-century writers refer to as “baptism” was the native ceremony of bathing and naming a newborn child.[333] This event occurred several days after birth, always on a favorable day determined by the calendar specialist.[334] If the day on which the child had been born was not a good one, then the diviner advised the parents to postpone the event to a more auspicious day.[335] The event had several components, the first of which was a ritual bathing of the child (Figure 4.1). Sahagún’s artist depicts the child standing in a small tub filled with water, while the midwife pours water from another vessel. While the image is certainly influenced by more realistic European art

[333] The term “baptism” was applied because the celebration involved the bathing of the child in a basin in a manner similar to the Christian baptism of a child. Whatever the case, the word “baptism” as used by Sahagún’s informants does not reflect the Western/Christian notion of the term.

[334] Sahagún, Book 9, 33.

[335] Sahagún, Books 4-5, 113.

conventions, the indigenous artist has used the pre-Hispanic way of depicting water; small round circles are attached to the streams of water as they fall onto the child's body. In describing the bathing ceremony for a female child, Sahagún's informants write:

> When the baby girl was bath (sic), the midwife placed the water in a new basin. Then she uncovered the baby. Then she raised it as an offering in the four directions; then she lifted it up, she raised it as an offering to the heavens. Then she took the water. First she made it taste the water; then she placed water on its chest; then she poured water on the crown of its head.[336]

The second component of the event involved naming the child. This activity included other children shouting the chosen name through the streets, the offering of maize and beans and, of course, a feast in honor of the gods.[337] Sahagún's informants note that there was an abundance of food and drink at these feasts.[338]

The *Codex Mendoza* conflates aspects of the ritual bathing and naming ceremony (Figure 4.2). At the top left, the mother sits on the ground with the infant in a cradle. Above the infant are four rosettes that refer to the four days after the baby's birth on which the naming ceremony occurred, the day 4 Xochitl or flower. Interestingly, the four rosettes are part of the headdress decoration of the goddess of maize, Chicomecoatl. The indigenous artist uses the Aztec convention of dots and footprints to connect images that are conceptually linked; these dots take the viewer from the baby to the four rosettes to the scene to the right.[339] Here the midwife holds the baby in her hands and both child and

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[336] Sahagún, Book 6, 205.

[337] Sahagún, Books 4-5, 113.

[338] Ibid., 114.

[339] Frances F. Berdan and Patricia Rieff Anawalt, *The Essential Codex Mendoza* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 147.

woman lean over a basin filled with water. Across from them are three boys who are eating from a vessel full of food. Berdan and Anawalt identify the food in the vessel as *izquitl* or parched maize kernels, a food item that Sahagún includes in the list of foods served at the naming ceremony.[340] The three boys would "call out" the new name of the child, and the artist paints speech scrolls emanating from their mouths.

The banquet then held in honor of the child provided not just food and entertainment for guests but also numerous offerings that included tobacco, flowers, and clothing. The preparations described by Sahagún's informants also illustrate the attention to the cuisine that was a part of these feasting ceremonies:

> And some plucked and removed the feathers from birds, and dressed them; or slew, singed, and dressed dogs; or prepared and cooked meat, and braised it in pots…They made tamales and wrapped them in husks. They made tamales using dried grains of maize; they made white ones with beans forming a seashell on top, and meat cooked with maize. They made tamales of meat. Some cooked the tamales in an olla. Some washed the maize grains which had been cooked in lime. Some carried and drew water, or poured it. Some broke up, ground, and pulverized cacao beans. Some mixed cooked maize with chocolate. Some cooked stews, or roasted chilis (sic) – different kinds of chilis.[341]

This description emphasizes the attention the Aztecs paid to ceremonial cuisine. A good feast required not only a great diversity of foods, but foods that were prepared and presented exquisitely. While child-naming ceremonies occurred across class divisions, Sahagún's description clearly refers to an event that was held by individuals of some wealth. Commoners did not have access to chocolate, nor could they serve an abundance

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[340] Ibid., 148; Sahagún, Book 6, 201, 205.

[341] Sahagún, Books 4-5, 123.

of food to many people. Sahagún's informants mention the need for vigilance by those in charge of the crowds at these well attended events; disorganization was not a part of the feast.[342] The successful feast was one in which there was order, structure, and an abundance of food, drink, and offerings. It was necessary for the host to provide his guests with as much as possible "in order to meet the obligations of banqueting, lest it be said [of the host] that the guests were slighted and found discontent there."[343] In Aztec banquets there was a reciprocal relationship between host and invited guests, Sahagún's informants note that "No one wished to be deflated or to lose stature; all persons wished to be given recognition, fame and distinction."[344] These comments show the delicately balanced dynamics between the host and his guests and the social complexities of such feasting rituals. The purpose of such a feast indeed went beyond that of naming a child and introducing him or her to society. All Aztec feasting ceremonies allowed for guests and host to carry on social interactions crucial to the workings of a larger society. Sahagún's informants note that when wine was served, the server began with those of highest rank.[345] If guests were not happy or satisfied, it was the host's obligation to make them feel better.[346]

In several vignettes the *Florentine Codex* illustrates the feasting that occurred in connection with the child-naming ceremony (Figure 4.3 – 4.6). The image on the top left depicts offerings being given to the guests. Three guests, all male, sit before two huge

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[342] Ibid., 121.

[343] Ibid., 122.

[344] Ibid.

[345] Ibid., 118.

[346] Ibid.

baskets laden with foodstuffs, perhaps tamales filled with meat. The artist renders them in an animated fashion with speech scrolls enlivening the interaction among them. Two other men approach them with offerings of a bouquet of flowers and copal.[347] At the top right, all talking has ceased since the two men are too busy eating from the heaping food baskets in front of them; their offering of flowers and copal lie next to the food baskets.

The lower registers depict women in much the same sequence of events as the male-dominated scenes. At the lower left a woman approaches two seated women with offerings; there is communication among the three, indicated by the speech scrolls. Notice that the goods being offered are the same as those offered to the men, bouquets of flowers and copal. At the lower right the two women sit talking and eating with two vessels and a basket set in front of them, while a third woman approaches them with yet another basket filled to the brim with food.

These scenes are interesting because in addition to illustrating the abundant food and material wealth given at these feasts, they also show gender interactions. In none of the four scenes is there a mixed-gender eating group; women and men dined separately. In her discussion of cacao and feasting, Sophie Coe has proposed that chocolate could have been limited to a specific gender, since some of the banquet descriptions by Sahagún's informants mention that while men were served a chocolate drink, women were served a gruel of chia with a dressing of chili on top.[348] While it is very likely that special foods such as cacao and pulque were limited to specific class, gender, and age

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[347] Berdan and Anawalt identify a similar image in the *Codex Mendoza* as a flower bouquet. See Berdan and Anawalt, 228.

[348] Sophie Coe, *America's First Cuisine* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), 109. Coe quotes Sahagún, Books 4-5, 118. While it is possible that chocolate was only available to men, not enough information remains to make a claim with certainty.

groups, from the four scenes just examined in Sahagún's manuscript, it seems that both men and women, at least in a naming ceremony, ate the same foods.[349]

## Wedding Ceremonies

Another banquet event that would have been celebrated across class divisions is that of the wedding. According to the manuscript, when a desire for marriage had been expressed (whether by the parents or by the Aztec youth is not indicated), a young boy's parents notified his *calmecac*, or school, leaders and asked for their permission.[350] A part of this process involved a feast in which school leaders were invited and offered gifts. Sahagún notes that "Then tamales were prepared, chocolate was ground, sauces were prepared."[351] After the permission of the leaders had been given, the family of the boy discussed which young girl would be requested in marriage. The *Codex Mendoza* depicts a noble wedding scene (Figure 4.7). In the lower register the bride is carried from her home by a woman accompanied by a procession of female attendants holding pine torches aloft. The bride next appears in an indoor scene where she is literally "tying the knot" in Aztec fashion: her mantle is tied to that of her husband. Husband and wife are seated on a straw mat; she sits directly on the ground, he on a woven seat. Between them is the hearth of the house, in front of which lies an incense offering. On either side of the couple is an older couple, Aztec match-makers involved in the execution of the marriage.

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[349] Yólotl González Torres, "El Banquete Como Forma Ritual," in *Arqueología Mexicana, Historia y Esencia: En Reconocimiento al Dr. Román Piña Chán,* ed. Jesús Nava Rivero (Mexico City: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 2002), 119. The author uses Sahagún as her source, noting that not all members of the Aztec family ate together.

[350] Sahagún, Book 6, 127.

[351] Ibid.

They are identified by Spanish glosses as "viejo" and "vieja" ("old man" and "old woman") and they are speaking to the younger couple, as is evident in the speech scrolls coming from their mouths. The old woman also gestures with her right hand, probably addressing the younger woman. The match-makers reappear below this scene, this time seated across from each other. Between them are several food items, including an olla full of pulque, (often shown in manuscripts foaming on top), a small pulque drinking cup, a basket full of tamales, and a tripod vessel with turkey meat.[352] The old couple is again speaking. As is typical of the scenes in the *Codex Mendoza*, this wedding scene conflates several different moments of the marriage ceremony and feast. It addresses activities that pertained to the wife, the actual wedding ceremony, and the feast that accompanied the event.

Although wedding celebrations were a part of the lives of both the noble and commoner classes, the scene described in Book 6 (Rhetoric and Moral Philosophy) could only refer to a noble wedding arrangement and banquet. On the state-level marriage could be quite political, with families negotiating ties and affiliations through marriage.[353] The guests invited to the wedding in Book 6 included individuals who "were illustrious, the lords, the captains, the seasoned warriors," men of authority and

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[352] While the Spanish gloss identifies the tamales and turkey simply as *comida* ("food"), these two items are represented in similar fashion in other Aztec pictorial manuscripts. See Berdan and Anawalt, 168-169. The pulque jar and drinking vessel can be identified by a U-shaped symbol, which represents the nose ornament (*yacameztli*) of the pulque gods. For a thorough discussion on this symbol and its iconography see Patricia Rieff Anawalt, "Rabbits, Pulque, and Drunkenness: A Study of Ambivalence in Aztec Society," in *Current Topics in Aztec Studies: Essays in Honor of Dr. H. B. Nicholson*, ed. Alana Cordy-Collins and Douglas Sharon, San Diego Museum (San Diego: Museum of Man, 1993), 22-25.

[353] Susan Kellogg, "The Social Organization of Households Among the Tenochca Mexica Before and After the Conquest," in *Prehispanic Domestic Units in Western Mesoamerica: Studies of the Household, Compound, and Residence*, ed. Robert S. Santley and Kenneth G. Hirth (Boca Raton: CRC Press, 1993), 216-217.

power in Aztec society.[354] The class association is also apparent in the kinds of items served at the wedding feasts (pulque) and the gifts given (flowers, tobacco).[355]

The drinking of pulque at a wedding was limited to the elderly.[356] Sources note that pulque was regularly drunk by the Aztec elderly. The *Codex Mendoza* shows an elderly woman drinking pulque (Figure 4.8).[357] She sits on the ground with a pulque cup in her left hand and a jar full of pulque in front of her. At her side a younger man and woman speak to her and the younger woman assists her by holding her right arm. A third woman (slightly older than the first) approaches the group and speaks. The older woman is active in the conversation as well, since speech scrolls emanate from her mouth. Directly above this scene is a similar one with an older man. Unlike the woman, however, he is not drinking pulque but sitting with a bouquet of flowers in his hand. Like the older woman he is attended by a younger man and woman, and the younger man supports his arm. All three have speech scrolls coming forth from their mouths; the older man's are larger and more ornate, perhaps indicating that he is singing or reciting poetry.

Both the older man and woman are drawn on a larger scale than the other figures to show their importance in the scene and perhaps to show their age in comparison to the younger figures depicted. The woman who approaches the lower group is drawn with the characteristic "age lines" on her face; she is also larger than the other figures, yet smaller than the two main ones. The Spanish commentary provides the following explanation of the scene:

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[354] Sahagún, Book 6, 129.

[355] Ibid.

[356] Ibid., 130.

[357] For other sixteenth-century references, see Anawalt, 17.

> It is shown how, according to the laws and customs of the lords of Mexico, they forbade drunkenness except to those of seventy years of age, man or woman, if such old persons had children or grandchildren. These had license and freedom to use it, as the figures show.[358]

Clearly the individual who interpreted the scene did not know how to read all the visual cues; the older man is not drinking pulque, nor is his bouquet of flowers mentioned. While flowers were part of feasting rituals and were given to all invited guests, the offering of pulque at non-religious feasts was limited to the elderly.[359]

## Funerary Ceremonies

Several sixteenth-century sources remark on the presence of food at funerary ceremonies. Like other feasting ceremonies already discussed, most of these sources comment on rituals carried out by the wealthier classes. It is difficult to fully interpret what commoners did at the time of someone's death, but some basic similarities were probably similar to extant descriptions.

Aztec burial rituals corresponded to how a person died.[360] A common thread, however, was the presence of food, drink, gifts, and offerings. Sahagún notes that the deceased was often dressed in mantles and adorned with paper offerings.[361] Paper

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[358] English translation from Berdan and Anawalt, 146.

[359] Anawalt, 34, notes several veintena ceremonies in which pulque was given to others besides the elderly. I discuss religious ritual uses of pulque in Chapter 5.

[360] For example, if someone drowned or was struck by lightning, that person was thought to have been chosen by the rain god Tlaloc to die in a water-related death; instead of being cremated that person was buried. For an overview of some of these funerary practices, see Miguel León-Portilla, *Aztec Thought and Culture*, trans. Jack Emory Davis (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990), 124-133.

[361] Fray Bernardino de Sahagún, *Historia General de las Cosas de Nueva España*, vol. 1 (Mexico City: Consejo Nacional Para la Cultura y las Artes, 2000), 328.

offerings were also a component of agricultural rituals, especially those connected to the rain deity Tlaloc.[362] History of Religion scholar Phillip Arnold observes that paper was also closely connected to food preparation:

> Just as human beings rely on the daily gifts of Tlaloc's body through their consumption of maize and other foodstuffs, paper seems to serve an analogous yet distinct symbolic relationship to food as another processed cultural object important for the sustenance of human and Tlaloc related life.[363]

As an element connected to Tlaloc and the sustenance of life, it makes sense that paper also makes an appearance at the time of death, a point where life was believed to take on a different form.

Sahagún's informants relate that the dead were often given a dog to travel with.[364] The dog was a guide and companion to the land of the dead. It is unclear if a dog was sacrificed, as often were servants,[365] or if the text refers to a substitute image of a dog like the funerary urn discovered at the Templo Mayor[366] in the shape of a dog (Figure 4.9).

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[362] For more on paper offerings and pre-Hispanic uses, see Phillip Arnold, "Paper Rituals and the Mexican Landscape," in *Representing Aztec Ritual: Performance, Text, and Image in the Work of Sahagún*, ed. Eloise Quiñones Keber (Boulder: University of Colorado Press, 2002), 227-250.

[363] Arnold, 232.

[364] Sahagún, *Historia de las Cosas de Nueva España*, 329.

[365] Ibid, 330.

[366] The Templo Mayor in Tenochtitlan was considered the *axis mundi* of the Aztec empire. It was perceived as the meeting point of heaven, earth, and the underworld; the main center in the political, economic, and religious sense; the location where Aztec rulers emphasized their power and legitimacy to kingship; the place where tribute was deposited and monuments were erected; and the backdrop for the activities of the state including the cycle of veintena ceremonies. See Johanna Broda, Davíd Carrasco, and Eduardo Matos Moctezuma, *The Great Temple of Tenochtitlan: Center and Periphery in the Aztec World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 5.

Durán comments on the sacrifice of servants in his *Book of the Gods and Rites*,[367] where he lists the priest or chaplain, chief steward, cupbearer, humpback, and dwarf, who accompanied the deceased to the underworld to serve him there.[368] Cooks were also slain at the time of a lord's death. Durán states that "They killed the grinders of corn so that these women might grind and prepare tortillas in the other world."[369] The elite dead were also cremated with many material goods that they would use in the afterlife: jewelry of gold, silver, and precious stones; earplugs and bracelets; and fine mantles.[370] While neither Durán nor Sahagún comments on whether or not food was provided for the deceased, one can assume that these types of offerings were made since many Aztec deposits, like those in Templo Mayor, included numerous ceramic vessels that may have been used for foods such as special tamales and sauces.

Food and offerings were also important aspects of the banquets held in honor of the dead. "At these funerals [people] ate and drank; and if [the deceased] had been a person of quality, lengths of cloth were presented to those who had attended the funeral."[371] Durán comments on the great amount of food that was consumed; "everyone…eats the host out of house and home."[372] He tells his reader that *octli* or "wine" was served,[373] as well as chocolate, fowl, fruit, seeds, and other foodstuffs.[374]

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[367] Diego Durán, *Book of the Gods and Rites and The Ancient Calendar*, trans. and ed. Fernando Horcasitas and Doris Heyden (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971), 122.

[368] Ibid.

[369] Ibid.

[370] Ibid.

[371] Ibid.

[372] Ibid., 151.

[373] Ibid., 310.

These foods are similar to those in other banquets such as merchant and wedding celebrations. Like feasting at those events, a funerary banquet would have involved more than just food distribution and eating. Food order, presentation, and gift giving would have also been important aspects of funerary ceremonies.

## Household Ceremonies

It would be simplistic to think of rituals having to do with the home as private and those having to do with the state as public, since this does not correlate with how the Aztecs saw the world and their place it in. Anthropologist Louise Burkhart observes that the Aztec house served as a model of the cosmos: the domestic space was the one in which the Aztec child developed a sense of orientation and time, learned the pattern of the day's activities and the calendrical cycles, and realized that order is fragile and temporary.[375] Indeed, when a child was first named, the children participating in the ritual shouted the new name to the four corners of the universe, indicating that from very early on the child and his identity were tied to the Aztec cosmos.[376] The importance of daily life lived in relationship with the cosmos is also evident in the *Codex Mendoza,* which devotes its third section to the mundane events in an Aztec youngster's life that defined his or her place in the Aztec world.

State rituals often mirror those that were practiced on a domestic level. Sweeping, which was practiced by all Mexica women in a household, was also done by

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[374] Ibid., 442.

[375] Louise M. Burkhart, "Mexica Women on the Home Front: Housework and Religion in Aztec Mexico," in *Indian Women of Early Mexico*, ed. Susan Schroeder, Stephanie Wood, and Robert Haskett (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), 31-32.

[376] Sahagún, Books 4-5, 113; Berdan and Anawalt, 118.

priests and priestesses in temples, as well as by gods in myths. The goddess Coatlicue, for example, conceived her son Huitzilopochtli while she swept a temple.[377] The agricultural veintena ceremony called *Ochpanitzli* (Sweeping of the Roads) involved the sweeping of roads, houses, baths, and courtyards.[378] Burkhart, in fact, refers to the mimicking of domestic ritual in temple ritual as "cosmic housekeeping."[379] Michael Smith also notes that some state religious practices resembled domestic religious ones in their objects and themes, demonstrating a continuity between domestic and state religious practices. For example, people burned incense in their homes using long-handled censers (see Figure 4.10), which were identical to those used by professional priests in public ceremonies in Tenochtitlan.[380]

Smith also points out that state rituals took a different form from household rituals in the use of ceramic figurines.[381] Figurines have been found in domestic archaeological contexts (Figure 4.11) but not in the excavations at the Templo Mayor in Tenochtitlan.[382] Figurines are quite interesting for various reasons. While they are found in household contexts, they were evidently used there in some form of religious ritual, since many of the figurines bear deity costumes and attributes. Their exact function remains somewhat

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[377] Burkhart, 34.

[378] Ibid., 35.

[379] Ibid., 32.

[380] Michael E. Smith, "Domestic Ritual at Aztec Provincial Sites in Morelos," in *Domestic Ritual in Ancient Mesoamerica*, ed. Patricia Plunket, The Cotsen Institute of Archaeology, Monograph 46 (Los Angeles: University of California, 2002), 93.

[381] Ibid., 93.

[382] Elizabeth M. Brumfiel, "Figurines and the Aztec State: Testing the Effectiveness of Ideological Domination," in *Gender and Archaeology*, ed. Rita P. Wright (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 146-147.

unclear but they were probably used in rituals having to do with fertility, curing, and divination on a domestic level.[383] Ceramics that represent women also illustrate Mexica females in a very different light from how they are depicted on a state level. Elizabeth Brumfiel believes this suggests that the areas outside of Tenochtitlan did not accept elite ideology, especially when it came to women in Aztec society.[384] There are, however, clay figurines of major gods such as one from Tlatelolco,[385] a miniature Xipe Totec impersonator wearing the torso skin of a flayed victim, with the incision on his legs delineating the wearer from the skin of the sacrificed victim (Figure 4.12). It is certainly possible that such deity figurines were used in household shrines and rituals.

Domestic rituals also involved food and cooking. In the Appendix to Sahagún's Book 5 (The Omens), the friar lists different native beliefs, many of them involving household rituals and food. He notes that an Aztec woman would breathe on dried grains of maize before cooking them, believing that this would cause the maize not to fear the fire. Women would often pick up maize grains that were found on the floor with reverence, claiming "Our sustenance suffereth: it lieth weeping. If we should not gather it up, it would accuse us before our lord. It would say: "O our lord, this vassal picked me not up when I lay scattered upon the ground. Punish him!" Or perhaps we should starve."[386] In both cases maize was regarded as very much alive, and the consequences

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[383] See Smith, 93; Brumfiel, 146-147.

[384] Brumfiel, 155.

[385] Felipe Solís, *El Imperio Azteca* (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2004), cat. entry 228.

[386] Sahagún, Books 4-5, 184.

of not giving it due attention were quite severe. Worse than being punished by the gods was being starved by them.

Foods created with maize also functioned as omens. If a woman was making tortillas and her tortilla doubled over, it would indicate that she would have a guest. If her husband was out of town, it would mean her husband would be coming home soon.[387] Household cooking was also connected to warfare and enemy captives. A man was admonished not to dip into the cooking pot because he would not capture any captives.[388] If tamales stuck to a pot they should not be eaten, or again, he would not capture any enemies. Here food is equated to success in warfare. If a woman ate them, she would not bear children.[389] The connection between warfare and the house is also evident in the admonition to not kick the hearth stone, since this would make one slow and unable to move in war.[390]

Cooking utensils were also believed to have some form of cosmic power. If someone was grinding and his grinding stone broke, this would be seen as a bad omen indicating that death would befall someone in that household.[391] The fire drilled in a house was also seen as a divinatory tool. If the new fire did not take long to start, it was

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[387] Ibid., 187-188.

[388] Ibid., 185.

[389] Ibid.; see also Burkhart, 41-45.

[390] Sahagún, Books 4-5, 187.

[391] Ibid., 194.

believed that the household would be a happy one; but if the new fire did not take, then the household would be unhappy.[392]

## State-Level Rituals and Feasting

State-level feasting included ceremonies related to rulers, merchants, and the military, as well as the eighteen ceremonies (veintenas) performed during the year. While the latter ceremonies include many of the same characteristics of ruler and military feasting ceremonies, they are discussed in Chapter 4. This chapter focuses on state-level rituals that correspond to merchant banquets and ruler accession ceremonies, as well as a feast held at the time a young man left the *telpochcalli*, or "house of youth," for marriage.

## Merchant Banquets

Sahagún's Book 9 (The Merchants), focuses on the merchant class and elite products such as gold, precious stone, and feather objects and artists.[393] Like other class groups in Aztec society, the long-distance merchants or *pochteca* lived separately in their own *calpulli* or ward, had their own associations, and worshipped their own deities. The pochtecas were also an integral part of the Aztec state: they policed small traders in local markets; collected the necessary taxes for the ruler; traded on the ruler's behalf; and obtained information on the distant lands in which they sold and traded.[394]

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[392] Ibid.

[393] There is much information in Book 9 on the merchant class and their feasts, as well as in other books of the *Florentine Codex*. Fray Toribio de Motolínia, *Historia de los Indios de la Nueva España,* ed. Georges Baudot (Madrid: Editorial Castalia, 1985) also dedicates two chapters to the merchant banquets. The focus of much of these writings tends to be on numerous offerings to the gods, including bloodletting and the sacrifice of slaves.

[394] Clendinnen, 133.

Book 9 describes several merchant banquets, including a feast held during the veintena of *Panquetzaliztli* (Raising of Banners),[395] which merchants collectively hosted as a way for them to disperse accumulated wealth.[396] This was not an altruistic act; in return, the merchants expected to receive recognition and good will from those invited.[397] The feast can be seen as an investment in their social standing. In fact, the feast was often an opportunity to illustrate just how well connected and respected (or feared, as in the case of rulers) an individual was. As Sahagún's informants state: "by each group separately there was bringing of goods according to custom; guests were procured, wealth was procured."[398] The Aztec feast allowed for a complex layering of relationships between host and guests, where each depended on the other to carry out the tangible or underlying aspects of the feast.[399]

Sahagún's informants identify the banquet host as having a great fortune.[400] His wealth was on display in the variety of goods available at the feast: "First he set down for this purpose the cacao beans, the "divine ear" spice, the tubes of tobacco, the turkeys, the sauce dishes, the carrying baskets, the earthen cups, the wood or the combustible cane to burn, on which the tamales would cook."[401] This display of wealth contrasted with their

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[395] Arthur J. O. Anderson, "The Institution of Slave-Bathing," *Indiana* 7 (1982), 89. Also see Sahagún, Book 9, 59-61, 67.

[396] Clendinnen, 138.

[397] Ibid. Clendinnen writes on the tension that existed between the merchant class and others in Aztec society, 135-140.

[398] Sahagún, Books 4-5, 121.

[399] See Sahagún, Books 4-5, 122, for more on the dynamics between guests and host.

[400] Sahagún, Book 9, 33.

[401] Ibid.

everyday behavior. Inga Clendinnen points out that merchants generally practiced self-effacement, habitually wearing the maguey fiber cloaks of the commoner and cultivating a conscientious humility.[402] This self-effacement belied the incredible wealth and access to goods that the merchant really had. Some of the wares the pochtecas traded in – fine quetzal feathers, necklaces of gold and precious stones, jaguar pelts, exquisitely woven mantles and blankets – would have only been available to those of wealth in Aztec society. Sahagún's artists illustrate two merchants selling their wares in the market (Figure 4.13). While they are simply dressed and wear no jewelry, their status in society is indicated by the woven mats they sit on and the wealth of goods that lie between them: necklaces made from gold and precious stones, golden earplugs and bracelets, and an entire jaguar pelt.

Sahagún's informants note that before the banquet the reader of the day signs was consulted; that is, the day was not chosen at random but was selected at a time that the Aztecs considered favorable.[403] In fact, the feast required a great deal of advance planning and a high degree of structure. Everything from who was serving to what was being served, and in what order, was orchestrated in great detail. This sequencing of activities and events, as noted earlier in this chapter, added another layer of ritual to the feast.

A merchant banquet involved more than just serving food. It required offerings, both to the guests and to those honored, whether these were lords or gods. Offerings took various forms: flowers, tobacco, food, animal sacrifices, and even human sacrifice.

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[402] Clendinnen, 133.

[403] Sahagún, Book 9, 33.

Singing and dancing were also required elements. Incense and copal were lit, and sometimes hallucinogenic plants, such as mushrooms, served. Sahagún's informants emphasize the various offerings. They note: "And the aged merchants received the people with flowers, with tubes of tobacco, [and] paper garlands, with turquoise mosaics, and fine maguey fiber plumage glistening with flecks of mica."[404] A quail had already been sacrificed and incense burned.[405] Offerings to the god Huitzilopochtli had also taken place in the form of flowers and tobacco which were set at the bottoms of the steps of the temple in "an eagle vessel."[406] After these offerings and the serving of food, the host served mushrooms with honey. These mushrooms were hallucinogenic, allowing for the spiritual experiences and visions that were also part of many feasting rites. Sahagún's informants then record that "they only drank chocolate during the night."[407]

Sahagún's informants also illustrate some of the events that took place during a merchant's banquet. One image depicts a merchant seated in front of two dogs and a turkey, selecting the best animals for his feast (Figure 4.14). The dogs, who look particularly plump, were probably fed on avocados and corn. The meat of these domesticated animals was served in various ways, in special dishes garnished with ingredients like chilis and pumpkin seeds, or prepared in tamales. Tamale makers were hired from throughout the city, and it is likely that all kinds of food specialists were hired for large banquets such as these.[408] Also depicted are images of guests receiving food

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[404] Ibid., 38.

[405] Ibid., 37-38.

[406] Ibid., 37.

[407] Ibid., 39.

[408] Ibid., 59.

offering in various types of vessels, including tripod bowls, drinking cups, and baskets of various sizes. Another image illustrates a male and female couple being offered gifts that include flowers and tobacco (Figure 4.15). The offerings are depicted on a large scale, looming in space before the guests. While one could argue that their size indicates the native artist's lack of ability to depict forms in perspective, I believe it more likely reflects his desire to show the grandness of the offerings given.

During the veintena of *Panquetzaliztli* (Raising of Banners), a major part of the merchant feast included the offering of slaves. Book 9 includes several chapters dedicated to the description of a ritual called "slave bathing," in which the slaves were ritually cleaned and prepared by the wearing of fine clothes, adornment with flowers, the smoking of tobacco, the eating of finely cooked meals, and the drinking of chocolate. In short, the slaves would experience a noble life, one that included many offerings routinely made to the gods. But this life was brief, and in the end the slaves would be killed and offered to the gods.[409] Rituals involved in the slave bathing included food and eating. Not only did the slaves receive food and drink, but all invited were well served. Sahagún's informants note: "And when the sun came forth, thereupon food was served to each and every one. They served food to all the people. They passed no one by."[410]

Writing on slave sacrifice and *Panquetzaliztli* celebrations, Arthur Anderson notes that these lavish feasts were a way in which the merchants increased their prestige and status.[411] While the sacrificed slaves were "offered" to whatever god was being honored,

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[409] See Sahagún, Book 9, Chapters 8-14, for further information on slave sacrifice rituals and *Panquetzaliztli*. See also Anderson, 83-85.

[410] Sahagún, Book 9, 41.

[411] Anderson, 91.

the entire event – the sacrifice, dancing, food, gifts – represented a public display of wealth and a way to interact with the nobility and others being honored. The merchants, like the military class in Aztec society, were able to increase their wealth through their profession and connections. Lavish feasting was a means to strengthen relationships and negotiate their status in society.[412] While the term "status" and "prestige" are readily understood today, there is certainly a difference between what we today think and the ancient cultures might have thought about them. As Hayden observes,

> …while the Western terms status and prestige carry connotations of psychological gratification stemming from the approval of others, equivalent terms in transegalitarian societies generally carry a different set of connotations relating more to economic success, political success and power, reliability in honoring debts, and the ability to organize people for a variety of purposes.[413]

We must keep in mind that power and prestige for the Aztecs would have had a very different meaning from our own.

## Warrior Ceremonies

Military-related ceremonies included many different types of feasting, one of which occurred when a young man left the youth house, where he had been educated, to marry. The *Codex Mendoza* illustrates this occasion (Figure 4.16). Here the married youth sits facing five other young men identified as *telpuchtli* or youth leaders.[414] Words are being exchanged, since all six men have speech scrolls emanating from their mouths.

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[412] Sahagún, Book 9, 51, notes that merchants invited other merchants to their banquets, so relationships were negotiated not only among distinctive classes (merchants, soldiers, nobility) but within them.

[413] Hayden, 32.

[414] Berdan and Anawalt, 141.

Between the married man and his military companions gifts and food are being presented as part of the feast: a large basket filled to the brim with tamales, a turkey in a tripod vessel, and a cacao gourd filled to the top with chocolate. Gifts include a copper axe, perfumes, and two mantles. Behind the married man is his wife, who is spinning; presumably she has cooked the food and is now weaving more mantles for the gift giving. She works silently as she weaves, since no speech scrolls emerge from her mouth, yet she is drawn on a larger scale than any of the figures, including her husband. The accompanying Spanish text of the *Mendoza* gives us a reason behind the feast: "And in order to please them and so they will accept his request, he provides them with a banquet offering them good food and drink, and gives them gifts."[415] The feast was not merely an occasion for the youth leaders to say goodbye, but rather a demonstration of the complex personal and professional dynamics that occured in Aztec society. Feasting helped to create a balance in social and political relationships.

## Ruler Ceremonies

In his *History of the Indies of New Spain*, Durán describes the coronation ceremonies of the ruler Ahuizotl (ruled 1486-1502) and his successor Moctezuhma Xocoyotzin II (ruled 1502-1520). The ceremonies reveal many similarities. In both, invited guests included local lords and nobility, men of stature in Aztec society, as well as the rulers and lords of enemy cities. Festivities included lavish gift-giving, dancing, eating, and the lodging of guests. The entire feast lasted for four days, at the end of which ritual human sacrifices were carried out. Durán is very candid about why the

[415] English translation from Berdan and Anawalt, 140.

Aztecs invited their enemy guests. The generous gifts and festivities were all part of the military and political propaganda the Aztecs created to make themselves the ultimate power in Mesoamerica and to legitimize the authority of the ruler. He notes:

> It was designed to amaze them, also to fill them with fear, and to make them see the grandeur and abundance of jewels and gifts that were exchanged on such occasions. This was proof of Tenochtitlan's valor and excellence, and of its wealth. All of this was based upon ostentation and vainglory, in order to instill fear in the enemy and to show that the Aztecs were the masters of all the riches of the earth and controlled all the finest lands. This is why they celebrated their feasts so splendidly.[416]

The invited guests were given luxurious mantles, golden jewelry that included diadems, bracelets, leg ornaments, ear, nose, and lip plugs, and an assortment of jewels. They were also offered feathered goods, flowers, and tobacco. Durán repeats throughout that everything was given in abundance.[417] He adds that the enemy guests were sometimes treated better than the local lords and rulers.[418]

Lavish gift-giving was also an intricate part of the trade and tribute system the Aztecs created. Durán remarks that it seemed as if the sole purpose of the tribute a city received from its various provinces was for it to be distributed in festivities having to do with the rulers' coronation.[419] Indeed the *Codex Mendoza* illustrates an enormous quantity of goods, such as exquisite mantles coming from various provinces in the Gulf Coast area such as Tochtepec (folio 46r) and Tochpan (folio 52r).

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[416] Durán, 319.

[417] Ibid.

[418] Ibid., 321.

[419] Ibid., 323.

While the ruler's feast was a great celebration, the occasion was also riddled with tension and fear. Some invited enemies feared that they would be attacked and did not attend; others pretended to come but never showed up.[420] It was also a stressful scenario for the "great men invited," other lords and nobles. They had the enormous responsibility of bringing provisions for the feast: "Especially notified were the governors, treasurers, and other high officials of all the cities, who were warned that if they failed in any way they would be deprived of their positions and exiled from their homeland together with their families and relatives."[421] Durán notes that artists were also threatened if they did not meet their obligations, and would often work without rest.[422] The ruler feast was then an opportunity for him to display his control over the various classes, nobility, artists, and commoners, as well as an occasion on which political ties could be made, strengthened, or destroyed.

Durán itemizes some of the foods presented at these inaugural feasts: plenty of meat (deer, rabbits, hare, quail, and turkey), all kinds of land and water animals, loads of chilies and other seeds that were used in special dishes, and a wide variety of fruits brought in from coastal areas.[423] Food was also important in the inauguration of new buildings. Although Durán does not mention specific foods when Ahuizotl dedicated the expansion of the Great Temple in Tenochtitlan in 1487, he does comment that "he planned a great and sumptuous feast for its dedication."[424]

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[420] Ibid., 320-321.

[421] Ibid., 319.

[422] Ibid.

[423] Ibid., 406.

[424] Ibid., 328.

Sahagún's informants also comment on ruler feasts. After a ruler had been chosen, rituals were performed before the image of Huitzilopochtli, the patron god of the Aztecs. These included offerings of blood sacrifice and of incense and other fragrances.[425] The corresponding images depict the bundle of Huitzilopochtli within a temple (Figure 4.17). Six priests hold incense-burners and sharp implements, most likely made from maguey thorns, for blood-letting rituals. The two figures closes to the temple have already put the thorns through their ears. After these ceremonies concluded, a great feast was held and all, "friendly and unfriendly," were invited.[426] His informants do not mention specific foods served at these feasts, yet both food and drink were offered freely, along with capes, shields, and other unspecified gifts.[427] The lavish presents to both friend and foe are another example of the strategy of the ruler that undoubtedly added to both the prestige and tension of such feasts.

## Conclusion

By no means do the activities described above constitute all examples of Aztec domestic and state-level feasting as noted in sixteenth-century sources. Rather, it is an overview of some of the more prominent ceremonies in which feasting occurred. In both domestic and state-level feasting, similar characteristics are found. Everyday staples, such as maize and beans, as well as special foods like pulque and chocolate, were a component of ritual feasting. In addition, other non-food offerings were given; in the

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[425] Sahagún, Book 8, 62-64.

[426] Ibid, 65.

[427] Ibid.

case of a wealthy individual or individuals, this could take the form of jewelry, mantles, and housing. The less wealthy could offer gifts of flowers, dance, or song.

Aztec feasts were an opportunity for the host to display his material wealth as well as his authority or power within the larger society. A host could also make demands of his guests, asking for food and other items. At the same time, it was his role to make sure that there was an abundance of food, entertainment, and offerings. Feasting required a delicate balance between host and guests. The role food played in these events was therefore crucial in keeping a balance in Aztec society.

Throughout an individual's life, food was a marker of significant events and important changes. In child-naming ceremonies, a special maize dish was served to four small boys who would "call out" the name of the child, introducing him or her not only to the larger society, but in essence, to the four corners of the universe. As an old person, the Aztec individual would have the right to drink the fermented drink pulque, without any concern about excess. Even in the afterlife food was present, since sacrifices for nobles sometimes included cooks.

Food items were also thought to be endowed with special powers. In Book 5 (The Omens) of the *Florentine Codex* Sahagún's informants record the many beliefs about the ability of food to cause punishment by the gods or serve as signs and omens. In addition, the tools used in preparing food also had cosmic capabilities. A broken grinding stone was read as an omen of death. Success in drilling of a fire in a home foretold a successful household. Food in Aztec culture thus enveloped the mundane and everyday, as well as the extraordinary and cosmic.

# CHAPTER 5

# FOOD AND THE GODS

The cosmic connection between food and deities is evident in the many Aztec gods that correspond to specific foods, for example, the maize goddess Chicomecoatl, the maguey goddess Mayahuel, and the salt goddess Huixtocihuatl. Some deities, while not directly representing food, were associated with it, such as the fire god Xiuhtecuhtli, who was honored in the home by offerings made to the hearth, and the rain god Tlaloc, whose benefits were necessary for the growth of maize and other plant foods.

Deities of food and agriculture were honored both privately, in the home setting, and publicly, in state-wide ceremonies coordinated by Aztec priests and held in the Templo Mayor of Tenochtitlan and other locations. These state-wide public ceremonies were connected to the agricultural cycle and the 365-day solar calendar. Called *veintenas* by Spanish chroniclers, these rites provided a continuous annual sequence of ritual activities and were a catalyst for the creation and display of much deity sculptures.[428]

## Representations of Food and Agricultural Deities in Manuscripts and Sculpture

Food-related deities were represented in various mediums. Displayed in public areas such as temples and roadsides, as well as in the home on private altars, deities were rendered primarily in stone, wood, and clay. In addition to the many surviving stone sculptures of Aztec gods, sixteenth-century manuscripts, such as those of Bernardino de Sahagún and Diego Durán, illustrate and comment on images made from perishable materials. Some veintena celebrations called for the creation of images out of foods

[428] The activities of the veintenas will be specifically discussed in Chapter 6.

themselves, such as dough figures adorned with seeds and beans.[429] Other perishable materials, such as paper, fiber, and plants, may have also been used to create or decorate deity images.

## Maize Gods

Aztec artists represented maize deities in several forms based on gender and age. Centeotl (Maize Cob Lord) was the youthful male maize deity, although anthropologist H.B. Nicholson notes that the term "centeotl" was frequently used as a generic term for both male and female maize deities.[430] Centeotl was sometimes merged in the Aztec pantheon with other youthful solar-fertility deities such as Xochipilli (Flower Prince), who presided over generative power and sexuality in the abstract, and flowers, feasting, painting, dancing and gaming in the concrete.[431] Centeotl is often depicted in ritual divinatory manuscripts such as the *Codex Borbonicus*, but rarely in sculpture.[432] In the *Borbonicus* he appears twice, conflated with Xochipilli.[433] In the *Etzalcualiztl*i (Eating of Etzalli) ceremony, Centeotl, along with several other deities, plays a ritual ball

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[429] The use of dough images in specific veintenas will be discussed in Chapter 6.

[430] Henry B. Nicholson, "Religion in Pre-Hispanic Central Mexico," in *Archaeology of Northern Mesoamerica*, vol.10, ed. Gordon F. Ekholm and Ignacio Bernal, *Handbook of Middle American Indians,* 16 vols., ed. Robert Wauchope (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971), 417.

[431] Ibid.

[432] I do not know of any sculptural images.

[433] He appears in the sixth (*Etzalcualiztli* or "Eating of Etzalli"), the seventh (*Tecuilhuitontli* or "Small Feast Day of the Lords") which is merged with the eighth (*Hueytecuilhuitl* or "Great Feast Day of the Lords") veintena in the *Codex Borbonicus*. See Anders, Jansen, and Reyes García, *El Libro del Ciuacoatl: Homenaje para el Año del Fuego Nuevo, Libro del Códice Borbónico.* (Madrid: Sociedad Estatal Quinto Centenario; Graz: Akademische Druck-und Verlagsanstalt; Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1991), 202-204. Specific veintenas will be discussed in Chapter 6.

game.[434] After the game, he reappears as part of the ceremonies connected to Xilonen, a female maize deity discussed below.[435] Centeotl's association with regenerative solar powers would have connected him to aspects of the various agricultural ceremonies celebrated by the Aztecs.

Chicomecoatl (Seven Serpent) was another female maize goddess.[436] Sahagún's informants note that she was the goddess of "maize and men's sustenance."[437] Like the maize god Centeotl, she is sometimes conflated with other fertility deities. Nicholson notes that to some extent she was also merged with the female half of Ometeotl, as part of the primordial couple.[438] As such, Chicomecoatl would have had creative and generative powers. Several representations of the maize goddess Chicomecoatl are found in stone. A piece from the Ethnologisches Museum in Berlin, for example, was collected very early in the nineteenth century (Figure 5.1).[439] The tall and elaborate headdress of the figure immediately draws the viewer's eyes. This headdress, often referred to as a "temple headdress," certainly brings to mind architectural forms, yet the headdress would have been made from paper and was called *amacalli* or "house of paper."[440] Typical

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[434] Anders, Jansen, and Reyes García, 202.

[435] Ibid., 202-204.

[436] Although mostly associated with maize, Chicomecoatl is also referred to as a goddess of food in general. See Bernardino de Sahagún, *Florentine Codex: General History of the Things of New Spain*, 12 vols., trans. and ed. Arthur J. Anderson and Charles E. Dibble (Santa Fe: School of American Research; Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1950-82), Book 1, 13.

[437] Ibid.

[438] Nicholson, 417.

[439] María Gaida, "Chicomecoatl," in *Aztecs*, ed. Eduardo Matos Moctezuma and Felipe Solís Olguín (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2002), cat. no. 109.

[440] For a brief discussion of the headdress, see Esther Pasztory, *Aztec Art* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993), 218-219.

stone depictions of Chicomecoatl include this type of headdress yet seem to vary in its design. Aztec artists used the same framework for the headdress yet took liberties with details (Figures 5.2 and 5.3). The figure from Berlin carries a staff in her right hand, and in her left she holds a double ear of maize decorated with paper strips.[441] These items are significant. The staff is in the shape of a *chicahuaztli* or a solar ray and refers to the sun's creative powers.[442] Paper is a material used throughout ritual, making its appearance as decoration, architectural setting, and an offering. Sahagún's informants note that the goddess Chicomecoatl also carried a shield with a sun symbol and his artist illustrates her this way (Figure 5.4).[443] She holds the sun shield in one hand and a double maize cob in the other. They describe her as "the representative of – maize and men's sustenance of whatever sort; what is drunk, what is eaten."[444] The illustration and written description clearly demonstrate the deity's association with the sun (power to create) and with food (power to provide).

The Berlin Chicomecoatl sculpture discussed above is very similar to that illustrated in the *Codex Borbonicus* (Figure 6.6). Nicholson notes that the depiction of the maize goddess Chicomecoatl in this illustration of the *Ochpaniztli* (Road Sweeping) celebration is conflated with the goddess Teteoinnan (Gods Their Mother) or Tlazolteotl (Eater of Filth), two deities that fall within the category of the earth-mother complex.[445] These earth-mother deities were responsible for regeneration and fecundity. These

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[441] Gaida, cat. no. 109.

[442] Ibid.

[443] Sahagún, Book 1, 13.

[444] Ibid.

[445] Nicholson, 417.

themes were also associated with the maize deity Chicomeocoatl, as is evident by the rituals celebrated to her and in the way she is depicted in both sculpture and painted manuscripts.

Xilonen was the young maize goddess, taking her name from *xilotl,* the tender, green maize ear.[446] Xilonen was often depicted in sculpture, as in a figure from the Museo Nacional de Antropología in Mexico City (Figure 5.5). The artist has shaped the stone to depict a naturalistic representation of a young and attractive woman; her face is smooth and youthful, her eyes look forward, her lips slightly part, and her clothing reveal the sensuous forms of her breasts. Sculptures like this one would have been painted and adorned with such items as shells, bones, and gem stones, making the sculpture appear much more animated. Here Xilonen is identified by the maize cobs she holds in her hands, which are decorated with strips of paper. Her headdress, which ends with a bow and tassel, is similar to the headdress appearing on sculptures of Chalchiuhtlicue (Jade Skirt), goddess of streams and lakes (Figure 5.6). Xilonen's association with a water deity serves the purpose of underlining the interdependence of rain and water in the growth and harvesting of maize. While Chicomecoatl images are found in many manuscripts, examples of Xilonen are infrequent.[447]

## Maguey and Pulque Gods

Many deities are associated with pulque, the intoxicating beverage made from the maguey plant. The maguey plant itself, or *metl,* was personified by a female deity called

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[446] Ibid.

[447] The *Codex Borbonicus* veintenas include images of Xilonen.

Mayahuel. The artist of the *tonalamatl* (the 260-day divinatory manual) of the *Codex Borbonicus* depicts Mayahuel in the eighth 13-day period or *trecena* as stemming from the pulque plant; the viewer can only see her head and arms (Figure 5.7). She wears an elaborate headdress and holds two cords in her right arm.[448] Eloise Quiñones Keber notes that no three-dimensional representations of the goddess Mayahuel have survived,[449] in contrast to surviving representations of other pulque deities in both stone sculptures and painted manuscript images. It is quite possible that these and other deity images were made from perishable material, such as wood, feathers, or even food. Durán states many of the rituals performed by the Aztecs called for the making of deity images in dough, often from maize, chia, or amaranth.[450] This could certainly explain the absence of such three-dimensional stone images.

Along with Mayahuel, there were a series of pulque gods who collectively were referred to as the Centzon Totochtin or "400 Rabbits." Individually, they were also known under various names depending on the region.[451] The pulque gods were connected to Mayahuel in Aztec myth. *Codex Vaticanus A* describes Mayahuel as a woman with 400 or "innumerable" breasts from which flowed an incredible amount of

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[448] Eloise Quiñones Keber notes that Eduard Seler first identified these as the root that enhanced the intoxicating effect of the maguey juice, then later identified them as penitential "cords." See Quiñones Keber, "Mayahuel and Maguey: Sustenance and Sacrifice in an Aztec Myth," *Latin American Indian Literatures Journal* 5, no. 2 (Fall 1989): 73.

[449] Ibid., 77.

[450] Diego Durán, *Book of the Gods and Rites and The Ancient Calendar*, trans. and ed. Fernando Horcasitas and Doris Heyden (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971), 203.

[451] Nicholson, 419.

maguey juice.[452] This maguey juice was transformed by the gods into pulque. A finely carved figure at the Museo del Templo Mayor, in Mexico City, illustrates one of the many pulque gods (Figure 5.8). The deity sits on the ground with his arms folded and resting on his knees. He has numerous characteristics that are often associated with pulque gods: his face is painted red along its center, flanked by what might have been green or black paint on the sides, and he wears a crescent-shaped nose-ring called *yacameztli* or *yacahuicolli*.[453] This "nose moon" is believed to be Huastec in origin and is a feature also worn by Tlazolteotl, the goddess of sexual excess.[454] The Huastecs of the eastern Gulf Coast, one of the groups conquered by the Aztecs during the fifteenth century, were believed to have been the source of pulque-making.[455] The "nose-moon" symbol was also placed on pulque vessels, a possible reminder of the caution that is necessary when drinking pulque.[456]

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[452] Henry B. Nicholson, "The Octli Cult in Late Pre-Hispanic Central Mexico," in *To Change Place: Aztec Ceremonial Landscapes*, ed. Davíd Carrasco (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 1991), 159.

[453] Ibid., 172. These characteristics of the pulque god were first identified by Eduard Seler in his seminal manuscript study, *The Tonalamatl of the Aubin Collection: An Old Mexican Picture Manuscript in the Paris National Library* (London: Hazell, Watson, & Viney, 1900-1902).

[454] Eduardo Matos Moctezuma, "Xiuhtecuhtli," in *Aztecs*, ed. Eduardo Matos Moctezuma and Felipe Solís Olguín (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2002), cat. no. 247. He bases the identification on Seler's work.

[455] Eduard Seler, "The Pulque Vessel of the Bilimec Collection," in *Collected Works in Mesoamerican Linguistics and Archaeology*, 8 vols., ed. Eric S. Thompson and Francis B. Richardson (Culver City: Labyrinthos, 1992), 3: 206.

[456] Ibid. Seler has pointed out a connection between the Huastecs, pulque, and the specific iconography on the Bilimek vessel.

## The Salt Goddess

According to Aztec myth, the goddess Huixtocihuatl discovered salt as she was escaping from an attack by her brothers, the Tlaloque, or rain gods.[457] She was important to the Aztecs, since the veintena *Tecuilhuitontli* (Small Feast Day of the Lords) was dedicated to her.[458] The Aztecs used salt not only as a condiment but also as a preservative for fish and meat.[459] High quality salt was hard to acquire, making it a valued commodity and adding to its importance in tribute.[460] The *Codex Mendoza* illustrates salt coming into Tenochtitlan from the province of Ocuilan, south of the Toluca Valley, in the form of loaves. The corresponding Spanish gloss states: "These loaves of salt, for the sole use of the lords of Mexico, were very white and fine."[461]

Sahagún's artists illustrate two scenes that correspond to the Small Feast Day of the Lord celebration in honor of the salt goddess. The first depicts a woman dressed in the guise of the salt goddess and two female attendants (Figure 5.9). The deity impersonator is elaborately dressed: her skirt and blouse are richer in detail than her attendants, she wears jewelry on her ears and around her ankles, and she holds a large staff and painted shield. The two women who attend to her wear simple skirts and blouses. In contrast to the goddess, they wear no jewelry or shoes. Both hold bouquets

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[457] Sahagún, Book 2, 91.

[458] Ibid., 13-14.

[459] Jeffrey R. Parsons, "Salt," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Mesoamerican Cultures*, 3 vols, ed. Davíd Carrasco (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 3: 116.

[460] Ibid.

[461] Frances F. Berdan and Patricia Rieff Anawalt, *The Essential Codex Mendoza* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 73.

of flowers in their hands, and one carries a large pitcher, perhaps to pour libations onto the shrines of the goddess.

The second image depicts the sacrifice of the Huixtocihuatl deity impersonator (Figure 5.10). The victim lies on her back, arms stretched above her head, her face expressionless. She is held down by three male priests as a fourth cuts open her chest with a large knife. The corresponding text provides a detailed description of the sacrifice:

> And the slayer stood ready; he arose upright for it. Thereupon he cut open her breast. And when he had opened her breast, the blood gushed up high; it gushed far. It was as if it rose; it was as if it showered; it was as if it boiled up. And when this was done, he took her heart from her; he placed it in the green jar, which was called the green stone jar. And when this was done, loudly were the trumpets blown.[462]

The language used in describing the sacrifice can also be used to describe cooking: “it rose” and “it boiled up” certainly reflect references to food. This is appropriate when we consider that sacrifice was considered by the Aztecs as a debt-payment to the gods, an offered “meal” for the many foods received through their benevolence. The salt deity might have also been associated with sustenance in general, for when describing her attire Sahagún’s informants note her face was painted “the yellow of maize blossoms” and her tassel was in the form of maize.[463] This correlation between maize and the salt goddess again underscores the interdependence between foods and the gods. After the sacrifice Sahagún notes that a great feast was held.[464] During the celebration everyone, not just

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[462] Sahagún, Book 2, 94.

[463] Ibid., 91.

[464] Ibid., 95.

the old, could drink pulque, and Sahagún notes that many ended the celebration very drunk.[465] This is significant, since pulque was one food item that was highly regulated.

### Other Deities Associated with Food

**Tlaloc.** Tlaloc was an ancient Mesoamerican god of rain and water, represented very early in Mesoamerican history.[466] Sahagún describes him as "the provider. To him was attributed the rain; for he created, brought down, showered down the rain and the hail. He caused the trees, the grasses, the maize to blossom, to sprout, to leaf out, to bloom, to grow."[467] He was often depicted with maize and other foods. Indeed, Sahagún's informants note that he was arrayed with food: "his face was [spotted] with [a paste of] amaranth dough."[468] The *Codex Magliabechiano* illustrates a Tlaloc impersonator during the veintena of *Etzalcualiztli* (Eating of Etzalli). The figure stands on a straw mat, a maize stalk in his left hand and a staff in his right (Figure 5.11). In front of him is a vessel filled to the brim with a substance that may be dried maize. Tlaloc's role as the god of rain was not taken lightly by the Aztecs, who from experience were keenly aware of the disastrous effects of drought. Of the eighteen veintenas celebrated throughout the year, four are specifically dedicated to Tlaloc and the rain gods; these include *Atlcaualo* (Ceasing of Water), *Tozoztontli* (Small Vigil), *Etzalcualiztli* (Eating of Etzalli) and

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[465] Ibid.

[466] Miller and Taube note that Tlaloc first appears on ceramic vases from Tlapacoya, Puebla, southeast of Mexico City, that date to the first century BCE. See See Mary Miller and Karl Taube, *An Illustrated Dictionary of the Gods and Symbols of Ancient Mexico and the Maya* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1993), 166.

[467] Sahagún, Book 1, 7.

[468] Ibid.

*Atemoztli* (Descent of Water). Tlaloc's association with water and his role as provider of foodstuffs made him a key deity in the Aztec pantheon.

**Fire God.** The fire god was important on both state and household levels. As noted in Chapter 3, the hearth was a center of domestic rituals. Sahagún notes that food was offered to the hearth before anything was eaten, and pulque was offered before any of it was drunk.[469] Miller and Taube point out that three-dimensional images of Huehueteotl (Old God), the ancient Mesoamerican fire god, usually turn up in residential quarters rather than in temples, though some were found in the Templo Mayor.[470] Xiuhtecuthli, the god of terrestrial fire, was also venerated in household shrines. During celebrations to the deity, blood, food, paper, and incense were offered at temple shrines, and Sahagún's informants note that the poor would make offerings in "their own fires."[471] Kay Read notes that for the Aztec people the ordinary and the extraordinary are woven together as part of their worldview.[472] This is especially apparent in rituals performed in the home that were also paralleled by some aspect of state rituals commemorating cosmic events. In these instances the everyday merged with the extraordinary, becoming even more meaningful for the people performing the rituals. The state-wide celebration of a New Fire ceremony falls within this category.

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[469] Sahagún, Book 2, 195. Durán, 463, also notes food offerings made at domestic shrines.

[470] Sahagún, Book 2, 92.

[471] Ibid., 87.

[472] Kay Almere Read, *Time and Sacrifice in the Aztec Cosmos* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 41-42.

The drilling of a New Fire in the hearth took on cosmic proportions as part of the broader New Fire Ceremony that was celebrated every 52 years on the occasion of the coinciding of the 260-day ritual calendar and the 365-day solar calendar. While this was a state ritual, it also had domestic components. During a New Fire Ceremony all pots and cooking ware were destroyed, all fires were extinguished, and the Aztec people awaited the cues of the priests who read the astrological signs to let them know when to rekindle the fires, signifying a new beginning.[473] Fires were first rekindled at the top of a hill on a site called Huixachtlan, now called Cerro de la Estrella, in the southern Basin of Mexico.[474] From there the priests brought the fire to the temple of Huitzilopochtli in the Templo Mayor precinct, which was in the center of the city.[475] The series of fire rekindling continued as priests and other ceremonial officials went from the main temple lighting fires in other temples, ceremonial precincts, and eventually homes. The hearth was also used to prognosticate the fortune of a household during a New Fire ceremony. If the drilling of a New Fire in a home took too long to catch fire, then the household would be unhappy; but if it started quickly, then that household would be a happy and prosperous one.[476]

The New Fire ceremony thus included all sectors of society and encompassed both the domestic and ceremonial spaces. On a state level the ceremony recalled the creation of the Fifth Sun and the necessary travel of the sun throughout the year (time) for the regeneration of all living things. This notion of regeneration and renewal would have

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[473] Sahagún, Book 7, 25-32.

[474] Anders, Jansen, and García y Reyes, 35.

[475] Sahagún, Book 7, 25-32.

[476] Sahagún, Books 4-5, 194.

been significant for Aztec individuals not only during the New Fire Ceremony, but everyday, as they added leaves and plants to the hearth.

Like Chicomecoatl, the fire god is represented in both sculpture and painting. Sahagún's informants describe his appearance: "black was smeared about the lower part of the face…he wore a paper crown with the feathers of the lovely cotinga and a spray of quetzal feathers…his shield had pieces of turquoise and mirror-stone. He carried the staff with the device for seeing."[477] They also illustrate the deity (Figure 5.12). In the painted image, Xiuhtecuhtli stands in profile, body in motion with one foot slightly off the ground. The native artist has rendered his body in a Europeanized fashion, arms and legs in proportion to the torso and head. What identifies the figure as a deity are the accoutrements he wears. His headpiece is adorned with quetzal and cotinga feathers and his face is painted with black stripes. In one hand he carries a shield and in the other a staff.

Stone sculptures of the fire god vary. A stone sculpture in the Museo del Templo Mayor shows the deity seated with his arm crossed over his knees (Figure 5.13). He wears the characteristic black face paint and his mouth and ears are decorated with red paint. He wears less than the Sahagún image: a simple loin cloth covers him at the waist, ornate earplugs decorate his ears, and a large headdress covers his head. The headdress has two square protuberances representing the sticks rubbed together to produce a fire.[478] The deity's face has age lines, his eyes are almost closed, and he is toothless; some of these characteristics are shared with the ancient god of fire, Huehueteotl. Another figure

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[477] Sahagún, Book 1, 30.

[478] Matos Moctezuma, cat. no. 246.

from the Templo Mayor represents a seated Huehueteotl with Tlaloc attributes (Figure 5.14). His goggle eyes and fang mouth piece would have been understood by the Aztec audience as the contrary, but complementary, elements of water and fire.[479] Fire was also associated with the male and celestial part of the universe, while water was associated with the female and earthly realm.[480] Both water and fire were necessary in the obtaining and preparation of food.

**Tezcatlipoca and Quetzalcoatl.** Mythically, food is intimately connected to two major gods who were part of the Aztec pantheon as well as ancient pan-Mesoamerican deities, Quetzalcoatl (Quetzal Feather Serpent) and Tezcatlipoca (Smoking Mirror). Quetzalcoatl was an important and ancient Mesoamerican deity. Nicholson notes that his realm is hard to define since he displays so many different aspects that cut across multiple themes and deity complexes.[481] As a fertility god, he was associated with water and wind, and in effect with life-giving abilities. A myth in the *Legend of the Sun* section of the sixteenth-century *Codex Chimalpopoca* credits the god Quetzalcoatl with the initial discovery of maize and the bringing of it to the people.[482] In addition to his feat of obtaining maize for humanity, another myth from the sixteenth century in the *Histoyre du Mechique* illustrates his role in the birth of the maguey plant.[483] In this myth Quetzalcoatl and

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[479] Ibid. The goggle eyes and mouthpiece are characteristic of Tlaloc, the god of rain.

[480] Ibid.

[481] Nicholson, "Religion in Pre-Hispanic Central Mexico," 428.

[482] *History and Mythology of the Aztecs: Codex Chimalpopoca,* trans. John Bierhorst (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1992), 146-147. This myth will be discussed further in Chapter 6.

[483] Angel M. Garibay, *Teogonía e Historia de los Mexicanos* (Mexico City: Editorial Porrúa, 1979), 107.

Mayahuel, the goddess of maguey, are hiding from the *tzitzimime*, or the constellations and planets that had transformed themselves into demons of darkness.[484] The two deities change themselves into branches of a tree, but the *tzitzimime* are not fooled and tear Mayahuel to shreds. Quetzalcoatl buries her remains and from her body sprouts the first maguey plant. Mayahuel's sacrifice is thus necessary for the generation of the maguey plant. The story is one of many mythic examples where deity sacrifice is required in order to gain foodstuffs, most notably plant life.[485] In both stories Quetzalcoatl is involved in the attainment of two of the most important foods, maguey and maize. While both of these were certainly used on a daily level, they were foods that were also used in rituals throughout the year.

Quetzalcoatl, along with the god Tezcatlipoca, is identified in another myth in the *Histoyre du Mechique* as being responsible for the creation of the earth and by extension all things on it.[486] The myth recounts how in the very beginning of time there was no earth, just a large crocodilian creature floating in space and water. Transforming themselves into serpents, the gods tear apart the creature, called Tlaltecuhtli (Earth Monster), to create the earth. From half of her body they created the heavens, from the other half, the earth. Like the myth of Mayahuel, it demonstrates that in Aztec belief sacrifice is necessary in the creation of plant life and, more specifically, food.

The myth continues as all the other gods, distressed at the dismemberment of the creature, decide to console her. The text notes,

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[484] For a detailed definition of *tzitzimime,* see Miller and Taube, 176.

[485] Aztec myths involving food and sacrifice are detailed in Chapter 1.

[486] Garibay, 108.

> and they ordered from her body all the necessary fruits needed by men to live. To do that, from her hair they created trees and flowers and grasses; and from her skin, young grass and young flowers; from her eyes, pools and fountains and small caves; from her mouth, rivers and large caves; from her nose, valleys and mountains.[487]

The account is a meaningful version of the origin of the earth, because it illustrates the Aztec concept of the interconnection between all living things and the correlation between the gods, the earth, and food. Everything is cyclical; through the death or the sacrifice of the gods, life, in the form of the earth, and the food produced by her, is attainable. The myths of Quetzalcoatl and Tezcatlipoca bridge the space between the everyday and the sacred as well. They help create the ideology of the everyday as sacred. The merging of sacred acts (such as human sacrifice) with everyday foods reinforced this philosophy in Aztec culture.

**Earth-Mother Goddesses.** There were many earth-mother goddesses in Mesoamerica, and for the most part they shared similar characteristics: they were responsible for human birth and death and the earth's cyclic renewal. As noted earlier, these characteristics also apply to several agricultural deities. Their feature can best be seen in the maize goddess Chicomecoatl's depiction in the *Ochpaniztli* (Road Sweeping) veintena in the *Codex Borbonicus* (Figure 5.6). Here the goddess wears her typical paper headdress, but she is also wearing the skin of a sacrificial victim. Nicholson has already connected this image with two other deities, Teteoinnan (Gods Their Mother; also known as Coatlicue or Serpent Skirt) and Tlazolteotl (Eater of Filth), two female deities that fall within the

[487] Ibid., 108. "…y ordenaro que de ella saliese todo el fruto necessario para la vida del hombre. Y para hacerlo, hicieron de sus cabellos, árboles y flores y yerbas; de su peil la yerba muy menuda y florecillas; de los ojos, pozos y Fuentes y pequeñas cuevas; de la boca, ríos y cavernas grandes; de la nariz, valles y montañas." Translation mine.

category of the earth-mother complex.[488] In the painting the goddess impersonator's hands are full of maize cobs, yet the viewer can also make out the limp hands of the sacrificial victim. This contrast between live flesh and dead flesh would certainly have been read by viewers as a reminder of the cyclic nature of life. Death was always necessary in order for life to begin. The sacrifice and death of a victim was needed in order to receive life-giving sustenance from the earth. Sacrifices like these were orchestrated in various veintenas throughout the year such as in is the *Ochpaniztli* (Road Sweeping) in honor of the earth goddess Toci and *Tlacaxipehualiztl*i (Flaying of Men) in honor of the male fertility god Xipe Totec.[489]

**Xipe Totec.** Xipe Totec (Flayed Our Lord) was a deity who presided over a widespread cult in Mesoamerica, yet his exact nature is somewhat obscure.[490] His importance in agricultural renewal is evident in one of the major ritual performances dedicated to him, *Tlacaxipehualiztli* (Flaying of Men), celebrated in early spring. The skin of a sacrificed victim was worn by a priest until it deteriorated, a possible reference to harvesting and new growth.[491] It is similar to the Chicomecoatl-Teteoinnan/Tlazolteotl ritual described above, in which the skin of a sacrificial victim was worn by a priest as a physical reminder of the cycle of death and renewal.

Xipe Totec representations appear in both manuscripts and three-dimensional forms, with several stone images found in Tenochtitlan. Like the images of the maize

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[488] Nicholson, "Religion in Pre-Hispanic Central Mexico," 417.

[489] These two veintenas will be discussed further in Chapter 6.

[490] Nicholson, "Religion in Pre-Hispanic Central Mexico," 422.

[491] Sahagún, Book 2, 54.

deities, sculptural representations of Xipe Totec follow a certain pattern yet are richly individualistic in details. Such is the case with a sculpture from the Museum der Kulturen in Basel and another from the Museo Regional de Puebla, Mexico (Figures 5.15 and 5.16). Representations of Xipe Totec generally wear the characteristic death "mask" of the sacrificed victim: closed or hollow eyes, slack skin, and an open mouth, as seen in the Basel and Puebla sculptures. Yet the artists render the bodies quite differently. The Basel figure is seated, legs crossed, hands resting on knees. The distinction between "live" flesh and "sacrificed" flesh is made through the use of color and the linear division between the two. The deity impersonator's flesh is painted red, while the skin of the victim, unpainted, remains the dark color of the natural stone. The figure from Puebla, a ceramic piece, stands erect with one hand lifted, perhaps to hold an item made from perishable material. Like the Basel artist, the Puebla sculptor used line and color to differentiate between live and dead flesh, but he also uses texture. The artist was intent on showing the rippling and bubbling of flesh that is removed from the body. It is possible that stone and ceramic representations of Xipe Totec were adorned with the actual flesh of the sacrificial victims during veintena celebrations.[492] Xipe Totec was also considered a solar deity and both he and the sun god Tonatiuh were connected with growth and renewal. Both deities played vital roles in agriculture.

**Tonatiuh.** As the force behind agricultural growth, the solar god Tonatiuh was also merged with Centeotl, the god of maize.[493] Both maize and the sun were integral to

[492] Miller and Taube, 188.

[493] Nicholson, "Religion in Pre-Hispanic Central Mexico," 424.

rituals connected to sacrifice and war, such as in the Flaying of Men ceremonies to Xipe Totec that conflated honoring of the sun and human sacrifice, with maize used throughout the event.[494] In discussing celebrations to Xipe Totec, Sahagún's informants note that mock battles were performed.[495] These activities would have reinforced the ideology of Aztec warfare, especially the capturing of enemies for sacrificial offerings. Veintena participants would have understood these sacrifices as being crucial to the continuation of the sun's travel, the passage of time, and the growth of plants.

## Foods Lacking Deity Images: Chocolate, Amaranth, and Chia

It is surprising that no Aztec deities seem to correspond with such important foods such as chocolate, amaranth, and chia. While they may not have any deities directly representing them, they were intimately connected to many rituals honoring various deities. Appendix 1 lists amaranth, chia, or chocolate for seven different veintenas, and it is my belief that amaranth probably appeared in most, if not all, of the veintenas, but Sahagún's informants simply did not record them.[496] Amaranth was used for the dough that was shaped into deity images in various veintenas: images of Chicomecoatl, Huitzilopochtli, Xiuhtecuhtli, and the Tlaloque (mountain gods) were all made from amaranth dough.[497] Sixteenth-century sources do not state that chia was used for deity images, yet it is certainly possible that this grain was used in preparing the dough as well.

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[494] This particular veintena will be discussed in Chapter 6.

[495] Sahagún, Book 2, 52-53.

[496] The specific veintenas are Ceasing of Water (amaranth), Flaying of Men (amaranth), Great Vigil (amaranth and chia), Dry Thing (amaranth), Great Feast Day of the Lords (amaranth), Raising of Banners (amaranth and chocolate) and Descent of Water (chocolate).

[497] As noted above.

Both amaranth and chia came into the city of Tenochtitlan in great quantities, as is illustrated in the tribute section of the *Codex Mendoza,* which shows that for every two bins of maize or beans, there was one of amaranth or chia. Other seeds, such as squash seeds, were used to decorate the dough images, and perhaps chia was used in this context as well.

Less is known about the use of chocolate in ritual. The title page of the *Codex Fejérváry-Mayer*[498] shows a cacao tree as one of the four trees of life, which are further associated with the four cardinal directions (Figure 5.17). Each tree is framed by a pair of deities. In the center of this cosmic vision is the fire god Xiuhtecuhtli, identified by the black stripes on his face. Davíd Carrasco notes that the *Fejérváry* image reflects the Mesoamerican worldview divided into five sections: the four directions, and in the center of the cosmos, the human body, considered by the Aztecs as a potent receptacle of cosmological forces.[499] Sophie and Michael Coe note that in the *Fejérváry* image, the cacao tree is associated with the south, and the southern direction is further associated with the color red.[500] This association might be a reference to the warmer, southern locations that produced chocolate. The bird on top of the tree is another reference to the south for it is a macaw bird that lived in tropical southern areas. The color red is also associated with blood, and the cacao pod was associated with the human heart torn from

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[498] Ferdinand Anders, Maarten Jansen, and Luis Reyes García with Gabina Aurora Pérez Jimenez, *El Libro de Tezcatlipoca, Señor del Tiempo: Libro Explicativo del Llamado Códice Fejérváry-Mayer* (Graz: Akademische Druck-und Verlagsanstalt; Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1994).

[499] Davíd Carrasco, *Religions of Mesoamerica: Cosmovision and Ceremonial Centers* (Long Grove: Waveland Press, 1998), 67.

[500] Sophie D. and Michael D. Coe, *The True History of Chocolate* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1996), 100.

the body in sacrifice.[501] Sahagún's informants point to the complex relationship between blood and chocolate. When recording the sayings associated with cacao, they note that it was called both heart and blood.[502] The Coes, referring to the work of the Maya scholar Eric Thompson, note that cacao pods and the heart might be connected because they had similar shapes, but also because they were both repositories for precious liquids, chocolate and blood.[503] The *Fejérváry-Mayer* offers a highly complex reading of the Postclassic worldview, and the inclusion of the cacao tree illustrates its importance to that cosmic vision. It is therefore puzzling that the Aztecs did not have a deity for cacao and chocolate.[504]

## Conclusion

While it is evident that specific deities were associated with food, the relationship between gods and foods in Aztec thought is complex and multi-layered. In many instances deities merge with one another and connect with various food items as well as with food acquisition. This merging and blending makes for a rich reading of images and texts.[505] For example, although Centeotl (Maize Cob Lord) was the youthful male maize deity, he appears in the *Codex Borbonicus* merged with the deity Xochipilli (Flower Prince), who presided over generative power, sexuality, feasting, and dancing (among

[501] Ibid., 101.

[502] Sahagún, Book 6, 256.

[503] Coe and Coe, 101.

[504] No such deity has yet been identified.

[505] For further information on specific deity complexes see Nicholson, "Religion in Pre-Hispanic Central Mexico," 395-446.

other things). Chicomecoatl (Seven Serpent), while known as the goddess of maize and all sustenance, also appears in the *Borbonicus* conflated with various earth-mother deities. Other gods, whose associations are harder to define and were part of the larger pan-Mesoamerican belief system, also have significant associations with food. The gods Quetzalcoatl and Tezcatlipoca, for example, play important roles in myths about food acquisition and distribution.

Deities and foods are connected in other ways as well. In deity descriptions, veintenas, and other ceremonies recorded by Sahagún, gods were often either adorned with food items, given food items as offerings, or described using food references. For example, when describing the veintenas in honor of the salt goddess, his informants note that her tassel was in the form of maize and that her face was painted "the yellow of maize blossoms."[506] The language used in describing ceremonies and gods reflects an interdependent relationship with food. Thus, when describing the sacrifice made to the salt goddess, Sahagún's informants use words associated with food: the sacrificial victim's blood "rose" and "boiled up" much like maize in a pot.

Although direct connections can be made between certain foods and specific gods, or group of gods, this is not the case with all food items that were considered valuable in both sacred and secular use. A case in point is cacao. As of yet no Aztec deity has been identified as having an association with cacao, yet it was connected to something exceptionally valuable and sacred in Aztec thought: human blood. This relationship must have been an important one in Mesoamerica, as illustrated by the cacao tree that is one of four directional trees in the *Codex Fejérváry-Mayer.* In the center of

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[506] Sahagún, Book 2, 91.

this cosmic vision is Xiuhtecuhtli. This complex image provides another demonstration that the gods, man, foods, and the cosmos, were intimately connected.

# CHAPTER 6

# FOOD IN RITUAL

The Aztecs performed a series of eighteen public ceremonies that were connected with their agricultural cycle and the 365-day solar calendar. These ceremonies, called *veintenas* by Spanish chroniclers, provided a continuous annual sequence of ritual activities organized by the state and orchestrated by priests. Rituals included feasting, dancing, singing, gift giving, and public sacrifices. Sahagún's informants record that architecture, sculpture, as well as people, were adorned with garlands of flowers, feathers, papers, and other decorative elements.[507]

## The Veintena Ceremonies

The veintena ceremonies are recorded in great detail in Book 2 (The Ceremonies) of the *Florentine Codex*. Other sixteenth-century friars, such as Durán and Motolinía, also record the rituals.[508] In addition to the images by the artists of Sahagún's work, the veintena gods and ceremonies are visually recorded in painted manuscripts such as one part of the *Codex Borbonicus,* the first part of the *Codex Telleriano-Remensis,* and a section of the *Codex Magliabechiano.*[509] When comparing the various sixteenth-century

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[507] Bernardino de Sahagún, *Florentine Codex: General History of the Things of New Spain*, 12 vols., trans. Arthur J.O. Anderson and Charles E. Dibble, Monographs of the School of American Research, no. 14 (Santa Fe: School of American Research; Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1950-82), Book 2, 16.

[508] Diego Durán, *Book of the Gods and Rites and The Ancient Calendar*, trans. and ed. Fernando Horcasitas and Doris Heyden (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971); Toribio de Motolinia, *Historia de los Indios de la Nueva España*, ed. Georges Baudot (Madrid: Clásicos Castalia, 1985).

[509] Anders, Jansen, and Reyes García, *El Libro del Ciuacoatl: Homenaje para el Año del Fuego Nuevo*, *Códice Borbónico* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1991); Eloise Quiñones Keber,

sources, both written and pictorial, it is apparent that the names and order of the veintenas, as well as the activities associated with them, were not uniform throughout Central Mexico.[510] Johanna Broda, for example, notes the differences between Durán's and Sahagún's descriptions of the *Tlacaxipehualiztli* (Flaying of the Men) ceremony.[511] In his analysis of the *Codex Borbonicus*, Christopher Couch points out that the images from the manuscript differ markedly from written accounts.[512] While accounts by Sahagún and other writers stress the role of the state and the city center, Couch contends that images from the *Borbonicus* stress the role of the commoner.[513] I believe that the *Codex Magliabechiano's* veintena images are similar to Sahagún's work in that they emphasize rituals performed by the nobility that took place in a ceremonial center. Regional and local veintena ceremonies also varied from those in Tenochtitlan and other major centers.

Eighteen veintenas were celebrated throughout the year, each corresponding to a particular deity or deities. Individual components varied in length of time, sometimes taking place for various days. Veintena ceremonies were performed throughout the Aztec empire. While the Templo Mayor of Tenochtitlan was the most significant site

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*Codex Telleriano-Remensis: Ritual, Divination, and History in a Pictorial Aztec Manuscript* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995); and Ferdinand Anders, Maarten Jansen, Luis Reyes García, *Libro de la Vida: Texto explicativo del llamado Códice Magliabechiano* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1996).

[510] Eloise Quiñones Keber, *Codex Telleriano-Remensis*, 135. See Also Appendix.

[511] Johanna Broda de Casas, "Tlacaxipeualiztli: A Reconstruction of an Aztec Calendar Festival From 16th Century Sources," *Revista Espagñola de Antropología Americana* 5 (1970): 205-209.

[512] Christopher Couch, *The Festival Cycle of the Aztec Codex Borbonicus* (Oxford: BAR International Series, 1985), 38-40.

[513] Couch has noted that while other accounts of *Tlacaxipehualiztli* stress the gladiatorial sacrifices and the rituals performed by the warrior class, the *Borbonicus* shows commoners dressed in white maguey capes. See Couch, 38.

where celebrations were carried out, rituals took place in small towns, local temples, and private homes. Even allowing for local differences, the veintena celebrations solidified broad social and religious concepts. The ceremonies revolved around the agricultural calendar with rituals performed in association with the natural cycle of plant growth and harvest. They were very public occasions for the Aztec man and woman to visually conceptualize their worldview. The connection between the individual, his surroundings, and the continuation of time and life would have, in fact, been an aim of such public displays.

The way food was incorporated (or not) in veintena ceremonies is significant. The Appendix lists each of the eighteen veintenas, their corresponding deities, and the foods mentioned in each by Sahagún's informants in Book 2 of the *Florentine Codex*.[514] It also indicates when the informants mention fasting and whether dough images were made.

## Food in the Veintenas

During the veintenas food was included in two major ways, as offered goods or as eaten foodstuffs. Food offerings were particularly significant in ceremonies celebrating fertility deities. These gods would have been honored due to their role in providing sustenance to the Aztecs, hence food offerings were significant elements in keeping a cosmic balance. During *Hueytozoztli* (Great Vigil), which honored the maize and rain

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[514] The order of the veintenas reflects the listing of the ceremonies in Book 2. The spelling and translation of the veintena and deity names is taken from Henry B. Nicholson, "Religion in Pre-Hispanic Central Mexico," in *Archaeology of Northern Mesoamerica*, vol.10, ed. Gordon F. Ekholm and Ignacio Bernal, *Handbook of Middle American Indians,* 16 vols., ed. Robert Wauchope (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971), 395-446.

gods, food was gathered and placed in temples.[515] Durán emphasizes the importance of food to Aztec veintena ceremonies, telling his reader before he details the specific ceremonies:

> Petitions were made to the deities, begging for a good, fruitful year full of fortunate events. New foods were eaten, different from everyday fare. This custom of eating different foods on feast days was a ceremonial rite. The people made distinctions among the dishes, and for every feast a new food was prepared – that which was permissible on said festivity.[516]

One example is the feast observed during the month *Izcalli* (Growth) in honor of the fire god Xiuhtecuhtli and the rain god Tlaloc. These celebrations included the making of special tamales, called *huauhquitamalcualiztli*, from amaranth.[517] Sahagún's informants also refer to them as "precious green stone tamales."[518] The name reflects the value placed on the dish, since both "precious" and "green" usually applied to greenstone or jade, considered extremely valuable in Mesoamerica. The tamales were also served spicy and hot, perhaps a reference to both fire and the god Xiuhtecuhtli. The dish may also reflect the harvesting sequence since amaranth was harvested prior to the maize crop. Another example of special food preparations connected to specific veintenas was the *Etzalcualiztli* celebration, literally the "Eating of Etzalli," a gruel or porridge of maize and beans that Sahagún describes as "a delicious food, which they liked well."[519] The

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[515] Sahagún, *Florentine Codex,* Book 2, 7. Some of the foods offered were everyday staples such as beans, chia, and maize.

[516] Durán, 414.

[517] Sahagún, Book 2, 33.

[518] Ibid., 160.

[519] Ibid., 11.

consumption of this dish became a major activity in this ceremony that honored the fertility god Tlaloc. These special dishes were made of staple crops that were often intercropped with one another, amaranth, maize, and beans. They were everyday foods, but they acquired a sacred dimension by being the focus of a veintena ceremony.

There were other ways in which food was used throughout the veintena ceremonies. Gathering food could be a component of a feast, as illustrated by the *Izcalli* celebration to Xiuhtecuhtli and Tlaloc. Before the feast began, the young men went on a hunt to ensure that there were plenty of animals for offerings given during the feast.[520] Hunting itself was the major activity during *Quecholli* (Precious Feather) in honor of Mixcoatl, the god of the hunt. In this veintena the method of obtaining the necessary food items for consumption and offerings reflects the specific deity being honored. In discussing the hunt, Sahagún notes:

> Next day, at dawn, all forthwith broke fast and set out for the country and formed a great wing, wherewith they surrounded many animals – deer, rabbit, and other animals – and little by little they kept coming together until they rounded up all of them. Then they attacked and hunted, each one what he could.[521]

This quote also points to another "use" of food in veintena ceremonies, that of food abstinence. Fasting is mentioned in seven of the eighteen feasts in Book 2: *Tlacaxipehualiztli* (Flaying of Men), *Hueytozoztli* (Great Vigil), *Toxcatl* (Dry Thing), *Etzalcualiztli* (Eating of Etzalli), *Hueytecuilhuitl* (Great Feast Day of the Lords), *Quecholli* (Precious Feather), and *Panquetzaliztli* (Raising of Banners). In many cases abstaining from food was a prelude to feasting and was performed by both priests and

[520] Ibid., 33.

[521] Ibid., 26.

participants. During *Panquetzaliztli* the priests fasted for forty days,[522] but Sahagún's informants note that during *Tlacaxipehualiztli*, everyone, including children, fasted.[523]

Food restriction also took a different form in some veintenas. During *Hueytecuilhuitl* (Great Feast Day of the Lords), food was given to all poor men and women in honor of the maize goddess; but if anyone was caught taking more than his or her share that person would be "mishandled" and be sent away from the feast empty-handed.[524] Sahagún's informants state, "And no one cheated with the tamales. But if they saw anyone try to cheat with the tamales, if it was seen, they struck him; they struck him repeatedly, leaving marks on him with a cord made of reeds."[525] During the celebrations to Huitzilopochtli, only the old men and women were allowed to drink pulque; if anyone else drank, that person would be punished.[526] In keeping with the characteristics of a feast, food restrictions allowed for order and sequence; anyone not following these regulations was seen as disruptive to the feast (and the rituals to the honored deity) and had to be dealt with severely.

In other ceremonies food was used to make deity images. Book 2 describes six veintenas in which dough images were made.[527] Images were not always created to represent the specific deity being honored, but rather to connect the various associations of that particular god or goddess. For example, in the feast honoring the rain gods during

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[522] Ibid., 7.

[523] Bernardino de Sahagún, *Primeros Memoriales*, trans. by Thelma Sullivan (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), 65.

[524] Sahagún, *Florentine Codex,* Book 2, 14.

[525] Ibid., 97.

[526] Ibid., 16.

[527] These include *Hueytozoztli* (Great Vigil), *Toxcatl* (Dry Thing), *Xocotlhuetzi* (Xocotl Falls), *Tepeihuitl* (Hill Feast Day), *Panquetzalitzli* (Raising of the Banners), and *Atemoztli* (Descent of Water).

the month of *Atemoztli* (Descent of Water), Sahagún's informants recount that images of mountains were made from dough and called *tzoalli.* The Aztec audience would have known that the mountain tops were the dwelling places of the rain gods. Book 2 provides descriptive details of the images: "They fashioned for them their teeth of squash seeds, and their eyes of some beans which are named *aiecotl."*[528] These images were divided into parts, their heads and "hearts' were removed, and those present in the feast ate them.[529] The sacrificing and symbolic eating of the flesh of the gods mimicked feasting during *Tlacaxipehualiztli* (Flaying of Men) in honor of Xipe Totec, in which the actual flesh of sacrificed victims was eaten. In other cases, such as in the month of *Hueypachtli* (Great Vigil), also in honor of the rain gods, Sahagún mentions that dough was used to cover images made from wood.[530]

Human sacrifice was another component of many of the veintena ceremonies, and food was connected to these offerings in different ways. The sacrifices performed during veintenas were a form of "debt-payment," a term Sahagún's informants use repeatedly in their descriptions. It represents a way in which the Aztecs tried to keep a cosmic balance by giving to the gods the most precious substance available, human blood, in return for all the things the gods provided to them. In addition to maintaining a reciprocal relationship with the gods, the blood of humans was seen as the source for the continuation of life. This complementary view of life and death was ingrained in Aztec thought and enacted in veintena ceremonies. Many veintenas included sacrifices to

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[528] Sahagún, Book 2, 30.

[529] Ibid, 30.

[530] Ibid., 24.

deities that were responsible for the preservation of life. For example, throughout the year human sacrifices were offered to the deities associated with the sun,[531] so that each day would begin and time would continue. Human sacrifices were intended to strengthen the sun to make its daily journey.

Food played a significant role in veintenas which incorporated human sacrifice. In some veintenas the sacrificial victim was offered food or drink, such as during *Toxcatl* (Dry Thing) in honor of Tezcatlipoca.[532] Often food was used as a prelude or conclusion to sacrifices being offered. This is evident in the feast of *Etzalqualiztl* (Eating of Etzalli), in honor of the rain gods, in which a special gruel was eaten by all, including the victims to be sacrificed.[533] In other cases, such as during *Tlacaxipehualiztli* (Flaying of Men) in honor of Xipe Totec and *Tepeilhuitl* (Hill Feast Day) in honor of the rain gods, the flesh of sacrificed victims was mixed with food, creating a sacred meal of maize and human flesh for those who consumed the dish.[534]

Consumption, whether of dough images, foodstuffs, or human flesh, thus played a central role in veintena ceremonies. As has been elaborated in Chapter 2, the act of eating is a transformative act: it changes foodstuffs into the very energy needed to sustain life. In addition, sacrifices, whether of foods or flesh, allowed the gods to "eat" so they too could have the energy to continue with their tasks. Consumption itself was a ritual that exchanged energy and life-giving abilities. Davíd Carrasco refers to this as

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[531] Some veintenas in which human sacrifices were offered to deities associated with the sun include *Panquetzaliztli* (Raising of the Banners) in honor of Huitzilopochtli, *Toxcatl* (Dry Thing) in honor of Tezcatlipoca, and *Tlacaxipehualiztli* (Flaying of Men) in honor of Xipe Totec.

[532] Sahagún, Book 2, 9.

[533] Ibid., 11-12.

[534] Ibid., 49, 24. *Tlacaxipehualiztli* (Flaying of Men) is discussed further below.

"transferability," an exchange between the vital forces of humans and the realms and personalities of the gods.[535] As veintena participants ate the dough images, foodstuffs, or flesh, they were symbolically taking part in a transformation: an "eating" of the gods that connected them with the cycle of the cosmos. Participants symbolically ate the gods, and in doing so, they were consuming nature and even humanity as well. They were now part of the cosmic cycle of life.

## Ceremonies in Honor of the Maize Deities

Several veintenas directly honored the maize deities, such as *Hueytozoztli* (Great Vigil) and *Hueytecuitl* (Great Feast Day of the Lords); others indirectly celebrated them. During *Hueytozoztli,* which celebrated the maize gods Centeotl and Chicomecoatl as well as the Tlaloque (rain gods), fasting and the gathering of food took place several days before the actual ceremony. Sahagún's informants relate that young stalks of maize were collected and garnished with flowers, then placed before the images of the maize gods in the various temples.[536] In addition to these offerings, the maize gods were also offered foodstuffs, although these are not specified in the text. His informants do note that images made from dough or *tzoalli* were offered to the maize goddess Chicomecoatl, along with all types of maize, beans, and chia.[537]

The corresponding images are noteworthy. The first illustrates the gathering of the stalks and the presentation at the temple (Figure 6.1). At the upper left corner of the

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[535] Davíd Carrasco, "Cosmic Jaws: We Eat the Gods and the Gods Eat Us," in *City of Sacrifice: The Aztec Empire and The Role of Violence in Civilization* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999), 179.

[536] Sahagún, Book 2, 7.

[537] Ibid.

image is a temple. A group of Aztecs is shown to the left of the building and closer to the viewer. The group is made up of three men who stand and hold corn stalks in their hands, and three women who sit in front of the men. Two of the women are partly hidden since the artist has used an overlapping technique to show European perspective. The fully visible woman holds in her hands two bowls and appears to be using one of them to pour food or drink into the other. A large ceramic vessel stands before her. To the right of the group are offerings placed in front of the temple: several maize cobs and bowls, most likely filled with whatever foodstuff is in the ceramic vessel.

In the second image Chicomecoatl dominates the scene, with worshippers shown disproportionately smaller than the deity (Figure 6.2). The goddess is placed in the center, filling up most of the picture plane. She wears a headdress, a long skirt, and a *quechquemitl*, the triangular upper garment often associated with Aztec goddesses.[538] In her hands she carries the symbols of her fertility: a shield decorated with a painted flower and a vessel containing two large maize cobs. From between her legs slither seven serpents, symbols of fertility and a literal reference to her calendric name, Seven Serpent. In front of her kneel three male worshippers with their hands extending towards her, between them are three baskets and one bowl laden with food, and two large maize cobs appear at the deity's right side. Although Sahagún's informants do not mention the specific foods in the text, the images shows that red and green chili peppers, flat tortillas, round maize dough balls, maize kernels, and maize cobs were being offered to the

[538] Patricia Rieff Anawalt, "Analysis of the Aztec Quechquemitl: An Exercise in Inference," in *The Art and Iconography of Late Post-Classic Central Mexico*, ed. Elizabeth Hill Boone (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1982), 41.

goddess. Feeding the gods was a way to give thanks for the sustenance they provided throughout the year.

In the *Codex Magliabechiano* the ceremony is represented minimally and in the form of food offerings (Figure 6.3). A maize stalk adorned with painted paper represents a visual code for the goddess, since in the feast for Xilonen the young maize goddess wears a very similar garment. The garment is a *quemitl*, a bib-like item that was tied around the neck of deity images.[539] In front of the personified stalk are two baskets and one flat dish. The baskets hold maize kernels and maize dough balls, respectively, and the dish contains three tortillas. It is interesting to observe that the scene, while abbreviated, focuses on maize and its transition from raw material into finished product, a process by which it became a food basic in the Mesoamerican diet.

Other accounts of *Hueytecuihuitl* (Great Feast Day of the Lords), in honor of Xilonen, detail an incredible array of food. Durán, in his *Book of the Gods and Rites*, notes:

> Then was brought forth the sumptuous food which had been prepared for each king [to offer the god]: turkeys and their hens and game with a number of different kinds of bread…They offered so much food that those who tell this story (they are men who actually saw these things) affirm that the food was so plentiful – stews, breads, and chocolate in the native style.[540]

In addition to the foods offered, Durán also mentions another use of food in the ceremony. In recording the actions of the woman who was going to be sacrificed to

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[539] Patricia Rieff Anawalt, "Memory Clothing: Costumes Associated with Aztec Human Sacrifice," in *Ritual Human Sacrifice in Mesoamerica*, ed. Elizabeth H. Boone (Washington: D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1984), 166-167. Eduard Seler first identified this association in *The Tonalamatl of the Aubin Collection* (London, 1900-1901), 112. Anawalt notes the bib usually occurs in conjunction with the rain god Tlaloc.

[540] Durán, 158.

Chicomecoatl, he notes that she was placed on a litter that was decorated with ears of corn, chili, and squash.[541] During the veintena celebrations food was thus used as an adornment, decorating architecture, sculpture, and people. In the feast, food was not only symbolically embodied by the female impersonator, it physically enveloped the sacrificial victim. Participants would have been made keenly aware of the powerful connection between food and deity because the scene was so visually striking.

Lavish food offerings were especially appropriate in *Hueytecuilhuitl* (Great Feast Day of the Lords). Sahagún's informants records that for eight days before the feast, everyone was fed: "in the morning they gave them to drink a kind of gruel which they call *chienpinolli*. Each one drank as much as he wished. And at noon they placed all in order, seated in rows, and they gave them tamales."[542] Sahagún's artists illustrate two groups of people eating from several baskets and vessels (Figure 6.4). The huddled figures at the left wear scant clothing, whereas the group on the right, sitting in front of a building, are larger in size and wear the robes of the nobility. Thus both commoners and the elite feasted, even if the poor ate separately. Sahagún's informants describe the sumptuous array of tamales that were eaten:

> They were perchance tamales of maize treated with lime, or tamales made with fruit; some were tamales of maize blossoms, some were tamales with twisted ends, some were honey tamales. And of the twisted-end tamales some had grains of maize, some had green beans and grains of maize.[543]

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[541] Ibid., 224.

[542] Sahagún, Book 2, 14.

[543] Ibid., 97.

This quote illustrates the tremendous amount of preparation involved in these ceremonies. Tortillas of green maize and cooked amaranth greens were eaten as well, as would be fitting for a celebration of the young maize goddess, whose domain included the young and tender stages of maize and other plants.[544] In the Aztec agricultural calendar, amaranth was harvested before maize, a connection reinforced in the ceremony.

Maize and maize deities are also important to veintenas in which other fertility deities were honored. One of the most complex ceremonies was *Ochpaniztli* (Road Sweeping) held in honor of the earth goddess Toci (Our Grandmother). The ceremony included the sacrifice of several young women. Davíd Carrasco has noted that ritual performances described by sixteenth-century sources demonstrate that women were sacrificed in one-third of the yearly festivals.[545] As living symbols of fertility they were the favorite offerings to the earth mother deities. One of the first sacrifices that occurred in *Ochpaniztli* was the decapitation of a young woman who was dressed as the goddess Toci.[546] The sacrifice was viewed as a *nextlahualtin* or "debt payment" to the goddess, a giving of a life for the generous receiving of the earth's bounty. Carrasco postulates that by ritually controlling death the Aztecs were participating in the regeneration of plants, humans, and the world itself.[547] The skin of this sacrifice female was then flayed and worn by a priest, with the exception of the leg which was given to another priest who

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[544] Ibid., 105.

[545] Davíd Carrasco, "The Sacrifice of Women: The Hearts of Plants and the Makers of War Games," in *City of Sacrifice: The Aztec Empire and the Role of Violence in Civilization* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999), 7.

[546] The following account of the veintena is from Sahagun, Book 2, 118-126, unless otherwise noted.

[547] Carrasco, "The Sacrifice of Women," 190. The author includes the regeneration of war forces as well.

took on the guise of Centeotl, the god of maize and the son of Toci. The offering of a victim to the ruler also occurs in another veintena.[548] Here, it can be seen as yet another form of regeneration: from the goddess's leg, her son emerges, a visual rebirth through sacrifice.

Other aspects of *Ochpaniztli* were mock battles, dancing, feasting, and food offerings.[549] The priests, some dressed in the garb of the maize goddess Chicomecoatl, conducted rituals in which food was the major component. Sahagún records,

> Then they came forth from their temples. They strewed seeds [of maize] there at [what was called] the banquet table of the devil [Uitzilopochtli (sic), a small pyramid which was] not very high. And when they had climbed up, then they flung forth, they each dispersed here, they each scattered here on the people the seeds – white maize grains, yellow maize grains, black, red; and squash seeds.[550]

Maize takes on a cosmic role as it is first offered to Huitzilopochtli, patron god of the Aztecs, and then dispersed to participants. The "raining down" of food from the temple tops would have certainly been understood as a symbol of the abundance that various sacrifices would have brought about.

In contrast, Sahagún's informants do not illustrate this scene but focus instead on the singing and dancing that occurred at the ceremony. The *Codex Borbonicus* images,

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[548] *Tlacaxipehualiztli* (Flaying of Men) will be discussed further below.

[549] Other authors have focused on the mock battles and sacrifices. See Betty Ann Brown, "Ochpaniztli in Historical Perspective," in *Ritual Human Sacrifice in Mesoamerica*, ed. Elizabeth H. Boone (Washington D.C.,: Dumbarton Oaks, 1984), 195-209; Davíd Carrasco, "Give Me Some Skin: The Charisma of the Aztec Warrior," in *City of Sacrifice: The Aztec Empire and The Role of Violence in Civilization* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999), 140-163.

[550] Sahagun, Book 2, 124.

however, offer enlightening comparisons.[551] One scene shows a priest wearing the flayed skin of a sacrificial victim as he exits a temple (Figure 6.5). This deity impersonator has been identified by Seler as Tlazolteotl (Goddess of Filth), who is often portrayed wearing quail feathers or the entire bird as an ornament.[552] The *Borbonicus* artist depicts the deity with a bird in its mouth, an elaborate headdress, a skirt wrapped around the waist, and the flayed skin of a female sacrificial victim around her shoulders. The flayed skin is evident by the breasts that hang loosely and the victim's hands that dangle from the wrists of the priest who wears the skin. The deity impersonator holds in his hands large maize cobs. In addition, the temple from which he exits is lavishly adorned with large cobs.

Another scene of the *Ochpaniztli* ceremony depicts a priest in the guise of Chicomecoatl-Tlazolteotl wearing the flayed skin of a sacrificial victim (Figure 6.6). This scene represents a very complex segment of the ceremony, yet the importance of food in the ritual is quite evident. In the center, atop a stepped pyramid, is the fertility goddess, who can be identified by the elaborate *amacalli* or "house of paper" on her head. The amacalli is typical of the maize goddess Chicomecoatl, but the quail in her mouth, is a feature of the goddess Tlazolteotl. She wears a long skirt and a *quechquemitl* on her upper torso. Anawalt has connected the *quechquemitl* with ritual use in Aztec culture, and specifically with fertility deities.[553] While other scholars have argued for a Teotihuacan origin of the costume, Anawalt suggests a Gulf Coast location, the fertile

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[551] It should be noted that the account of the ceremony in the *Borbonicus* differs considerably from accounts recorded by Sahagún and Durán, a distinction that might be due to regional differences. See Anders, Jansen, and Reyes García, *Códice Borbónico,* 208 for further information.

[552] Anawalt, "Analysis of the Aztec Quechquemitl: An Exercise in Inference," 53.

[553] Ibid., 37-63.

region of the Huastecs.[554] Anawalt also notes that Central Mexicans associated the Huastecs with the abundance of food, cotton (a highly valued commodity by the Aztecs), and fertility.[555] The image seconds this Huastec connection by incorporating several figures dressed as Huastecs surrounding the temple. The male figures are naked with the exception of a loin cloth; they have painted black stripes on their bodies and wear the conical hat associated with the Huastecs.[556] In their hands are two objects: a broom and an extended phallus. Anawalt has argued for a connection with fertility in the erotic sense; however, I would argue that the imagery is also about the fertility of the earth and the promised abundance of food.[557] According to Aztec myth, it was the Huastecs who taught them how to make pulque.[558] During the five years of famine in Central Mexico during the mid 1400s the Aztecs turned to the Huastecs for supplies of food.[559]

The association with abundant food is certainly emphasized. In the first image, abundance is seen not only in the number of maize cobs decorating the temple, but in their size as well: they are plentiful and large. In the second image, although full of figures and activity, it is the center figure of the maize goddess that captures the viewer's attention. The goddess, a powerful combination of two deities connected with food and the earth, stands frontally, facing the viewer. She is flanked by four other figures,

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[554] Ibid., 47-48.

[555] Ibid., 48-51.

[556] Ibid., 54.

[557] Ibid., 51.

[558] See Chapter 2.

[559] Nigel Davies, *The Aztecs: A History* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1974), 91-94.

identified by Sahagún's informants as the "Chicomecoatl offering priestesses."[560] They hold maize cobs and incense bags in their hands.

The *Ochpaniztli* depictions in the *Borbonicus* continue with an actual scene of human sacrifice, and perhaps the image can be read as a prelude to the first two already discussed. This active scene is the strongest argument for a food and earth connection in addition to sexual fertility. Although Sahagún's informants note that Tlazolteotl "was mistress of lust and debauchery,"[561] she was also responsible for "eating away" the sins of man.[562] Again, consumption allows for the transfer of energy between gods and humans. The balance necessary to create such a restoration is reiterated in the ceremonies through the intimate connection of food and sacrifice; literally a giving to and taking from the earth.

In the scene the goddess impersonator lies on an altar while four priests tie her down. (Figure 6.7) The goddess wears the same wrapped skirt as the deity impersonator in Figure 6.5. This time, however, she also wears a *quechquemitl* over her shoulders. The altar on which the deity impersonator lies is in the shape of a large *quemitl*, the bib-like item that Anawalt identifies as one of four costumes associated with human sacrifice, which here is decorated with rubber and large maize cobs.[563] The decoration of the altar is significant. It appears again in the *Borbonicus,* but this time as a stand-in for the image of the fertility goddess (Figure 6.8). Here the deity *is* the costume: painted paper decorated with rubber and adorned with maize cobs of various colors.

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[560] Sahagún, Book 2, 124.

[561] Sahagún, Book 1, 23.

[562] Davíd Carrasco, "Cosmic Jaws: We Eat the Gods and the Gods Eat Us," 178.

[563] Anawalt, "Memory Clothing," 165

## Ceremonies in Honor of Tlaloc and the Tlaloque

Several ceremonies were held during the year in honor of the rain god Tlaloc and the Tlaloque: *Atlcahualo* (Ceasing of Water), *Tozozotontli* (Small Vigil), *Etzalcualiztli* (Eating of Etzalli), and *Atemoztli* (Descent of Water). These ceremonies were complex and involved food in various ways, as befitted these fertility deities. During *Atlcahualo* the various rain gods were honored through child sacrifices.[564] These children, greatly adorned and costumed, were sacrificed at various points throughout the city.

During this time also, victims were gathered for the gladiatorial sacrifices for the next veintena. Sahagún's informants record that they were brought to Xipe Totec's temple, and there the priests

> ... intimated to them how they were to die; they tore out their hearts; yet they were only putting them to the test. It was with the use of tortillas of ground corn which had not been softened with lime, or "Yopi"-tortillas, that they tore their hearts from them.[565]

In the ceremony tortillas were transformed into sacrificial knives; thus, the sacrificial victims experienced a symbolic killing through the use of food.

Food was also used in an unusual form during *Etzalqualiztli* (Eating of Etzalli).[566] Before the festivities began, the Tlaloc priests fasted for four days. The younger priests offered maize dough balls to the god and these were eventually eaten by the older priests. Sahagún's informants write: "There in his turn he laid down four offering-balls of dough

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[564] Sahagún, Book 2, 42-43.

[565] Ibid., 45.

[566] The following information on this ceremony is from Sahagún, Book 2, 78-90.

made of maize. Very cautiously, very gently, very warily he placed them."[567] These dough balls could not be moved; if they rolled and were spoiled, the younger priests were seized by the older priests. Also offered by the young priests were four large tomatoes or four green chillies. The three foods offered were basic ingredients in everyday meals, yet during *Etzalqualiztli* (Eating of Etzalli) they were transformed into powerful offerings. The number of offerings might also have been associated with the four cardinal directions, and hence with the cosmos. Like the use of tortillas in the *Atlcaualo* (Ceasing of Water) celebration, there was a tension and threat in the use of food in *Etzalqualiztli* (Eating of Etzalli). The feasts continued with bloodletting by participants and the offering of incense by the priests. After this, food was eaten with a sauce and with great care. The ritual performed by the participants mimicked the food ritual performed by the priests, and again food became a threat. Sahagún's informants state,

> And if someone were to exchange his sauce with someone, they detained him because of it, they seized him because of it; he was seized because of it. And when food was eaten, no one let a drop of the sauce fall there on the ground where the sauce had been placed. If anyone split a little sauce, for all this he was detained; there was punishing.[568]

While food restriction was certainly common during veintena celebrations, the use of food in *Atlcaualo* and *Etzalqualiztli* seems particularly ominous, with severe consequences for those who did not follow procedures accordingly.

Of particular importance to the celebrations of *Etzalqualiztli* was the special dish called *etzalli* that was eaten during the feast. Durán, who was raised in Mexico, writes:

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[567] Sahagún, Book 2, 80.

[568] Ibid., 83.

> Since my childhood I ate [*etzalli*] often, I can explain that is a sort of bean stew containing whole kernels of corn. It is considered very tasty, so coveted, so greatly desired that it is a small wonder it had its own special day and feast on which it was honored.[569]

He notes that this dish was considered expensive, and not all could normally eat beans and maize together.[570] Eating the dish was an acknowledgment of the abundance of the harvest.[571]

Durán goes on to describe other aspects of the ceremony, which included a ritual performance using agricultural implements such as hoes, sharp sticks for sowing, and other tools.[572] These were placed on altars in the home and were honored for their role in harvesting. He notes that offerings of food, pulque, and incense were also made, and while he does not specify the nature of the food offering he does say that "pieces of fowl, turkey, and human flesh" was sometimes added to the *etzalli* dish.[573] The friar records that after food was eaten, everyone bathed, and all the agricultural instruments were washed.[574]

### Feast in Honor of Xipe Totec

One of the most dramatic *veintena* celebrations was that of *Tlacaxipeualiztli* (Flaying of Men) in honor of the solar and fertility god Xipe Totec. This celebration

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[569] Durán, 430.

[570] Ibid., 431. This statement seems odd, yet I have not been able to confirm or disprove it via other primary sources.

[571] Ibid.

[572] Ibid.

[573] Ibid., 432.

[574] Ibid.

received much comment from sixteenth-century chroniclers because of the intense level of human sacrifice that was part of the various rituals performed. Sahagún's informants note that "it was the time when all the captives died, all those taken, all those who were made captive, the men, the women, all the children."[575]

The focus on human sacrifice and cannibalism has overshadowed some fascinating aspects of eating and food in connection to the ritual. From the very start of *Tlacaxipeualiztli* food was emphasized. Sahagún's informants state that the day before the sacrifice took place the hair of the captives was cut and placed in the hearth, and the participants fasted.[576] Here the omission of food was an important part of the ritual and perhaps symbolized an actual separation between the everyday and the extraordinary set of days to follow. The connection between the captives and the hearth is also interesting, perhaps reminiscent of the daily offerings that common Aztecs would have performed in the home.

*Tlacaxipeualiztli* began with the sacrifice of enemy warriors who had been captured.[577] They were sacrificed on top of the temple of Huitzilopocthli, the Aztec patron deity associated with the sun, war, and renewal. The hearts were extracted and placed in a vessel called a *cuauhxicalli* ("eagle gourd"). The bodies of the captives were then thrown down the temple steps, where they were removed by other priests who flayed the skins of the victims. These skins were later worn by the captors who engaged in mock battles. Carrasco proposes that the exchange that occurred between captors and

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[575] Sahagún, Book 2, 47.

[576] Ibid.

[577] The following information is from Sahagún, Book 2, 47 – 56.

captives, a literal *transfer* of flesh, was perceived by the Aztec audience as a metamorphosis of power that animated their material world as well as their very own bodies.[578] The exchange was necessary to empower the rituals performed in the ceremony, making them meaningful and sacred offerings to the gods for their continual provisions of sustenance.

When the captives were taken to the homes of the captors to be divided and eaten, the text emphasizes that the captor himself could not eat the flesh of the captive; only his family and relatives could partake of the special meal.[579] The captor became the captive, and hence the offering as well. A stew called *tlacatlaolli,* made from dried maize, was specifically prepared for the event; each family member ate some of the stew and in each serving "went a piece of the flesh of the captive."[580] According to Aztec belief, these sacrifices were necessary to maintain the balance between the gods and man, to keep the giving and receiving in order. In eating the flesh of the sacrificed victim the Aztec man and woman intertwined themselves within that cosmic plan. The stew of maize made sense on many levels. As one of the primary staples for the Aztec, it was eaten on a daily basis and throughout the day. What could the Aztecs be more grateful for than receiving from the gods this basic substance? The growth of the plant, indeed of all the foods they harvested, depended on the sun; it is only fitting that maize would appear in a ceremony that honored the solar and war god Huitzilopochtli, as well as Xipe Totec, another god

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[578] Davíd Carrasco, "Give Me Some Skin," 146. In this essay Carrasco demonstrates the connection between war and renewal in the *Tlacaxipeualiztli* ceremony.

[579] Sahagún, Book 2, 54.

[580] Ibid., 49.

associated with the sun and with fertility. To the Aztec mind, all three had an enormous control over the continuation of life.

The connection between flesh and food became even more apparent when the captor wore the skins of the victims. The Flaying of the Men was a ceremony concerned with renewal; the skinning of victims and the wearing of the skins was a potent visual metaphor for growth and rebirth. After performing the mock battles, the warriors went home to home threatening and scaring the common people. They were appeased, however, by offerings of food and other goods, such as turkey hens or cotton mantles.[581] Carrasco has noted that these rituals transformed the entire city of Tenochtitlan into a battlefield in which the sacrificed bodies nourished the sun as well as those that participated in the sacred meals; all absorbed the spirit or “soul” of the offerings.[582] Renewal was cosmic. Keep in mind, however, that the veintenas were most concerned with agricultural rites, hence renewal would have been seen as a very tangible goal, a bountiful harvest. As people performed the Flaying of the Men rituals, cosmic renewal was intertwined with agricultural renewal.

The flesh of the captives also served another role. Sahagún’s informants note:

> And the captor kept [the captive’s] skin for himself; he went lending it to others. For twenty days there was begging in it; it was passed from one to another; it was worn all day. He who wore it customarily gave the captor all that was given [him], all that was gathered. Afterwards [the captor] divided up, distributed [the gifts] among [all of] them. Thus he made use of his skin.[583]

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[581] Ibid., 50.

[582] Carrasco, “Give Me Some Skin,” 148.

[583] Sahagún, Book 2, 54.

The flesh of the sacrificed victim was not only a symbolic tool for receiving food from the gods, but a very real way to get food from the participants. Human flesh became the necessary exchange item for food. It was no longer an abstract idea; it was a very real activity in which the audience participated.

Aztec warriors also sacrificed enemy captives on the gladiatorial stone. Tied to a sacrificial stone, with a "weapon" of feathers instead of the usual obsidian-bladed club, the captive had to fight off four fully-equipped Aztec warriors. Like the sacrifices on Huitzilopochtli's temple, the defeated captive's heart was removed and offered to the sun god, and he was later skinned as well. Like the earlier sacrifices, food was connected to the gladiatorial sacrifices in various ways. Before the victim was led to the gladiatorial stone, he was made to drink pulque: "they gave him pulque, and the captive raised the pulque four times in dedication, and afterwards drank it with a long hollow cane."[584] It is interesting to note that in the discussions of some rituals connected to the pulque gods, Sahagún's informants illustrate the priests drinking with a long hollow tube from a vessel in the form of a rabbit. Sahagún's informants also refer to the rope that was tied from the center of the stone to the waist of the captive as the "sustenance" rope.[585] The name evokes the umbilical cord and the connection between a mother who gives sustenance and her child. It also mimics the interdependent relationship between the Aztec and their deities. In this instance, the rope acts as a visual connection between the captive and his impending death, destruction, and renewal. This association would not have been lost on the Aztec audience who saw time as cyclical, with one event needing to end in order for

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[584] Ibid., 52.

[585] Ibid.

another to begin again. Many of the other rituals in the Flaying of the Men ceremony also reiterate this relationship: the sacrifices on the temple tops and gladiatorial stone, the captives and their captors (who "provide" the food for the gods as well as the participants), and especially the flesh of the victims that is literally used as an exchange for food.

The images that depict cannibalism are curious, and it is certainly understandable why such an act has been so controversial in the scholarly literature.[586] In *Codex Magliabechiano* the ceremony in honor of the god of death Mictlantecuhtli depicts several participants sitting around three vessels containing a human leg, an arm, and a head as they face the god of death in his temple (Figure 5.9). The participants are all eating. The figure closest to Mictlantecuhtli has two round objects that are outlined in red, and it could be surmised that they are all partaking of the flesh that has been offered. But it should be noted that only the two round objects outlined in red are being offered to the death god; everyone else is holding a round object outlined in black. These objects could very well be maize dough balls, with only Mictlantecuhtli receiving the actual flesh.

**Ceremony in Honor of Tezcatlipoca**

According to Sahagún's informants, one of the most important veintenas was *Toxcatl* (Dry Thing), in honor of the omnipotent god of rulers, Tezcatlipoca.[587]

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[586] Most notable are Michael Harner, "The Ecological Basis for Aztec Sacrifice," *American Ethnologist* 4, no. 1 (February 1977) and Bernard R. Ortiz de Montellano, "Aztec Cannibalism: An Ecological Necessity?" *Science* 200 (May 1978).

[587] Sahagún, Book 2, 9.

Tezcatlipoca has been described as the supreme god of the Aztec pantheon and most significantly "…the virile, ever-youthful, omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient deity."[588] Doris Heyden emphasizes the complex nature of the deity by demonstrating that Sahagún's informants had at least 360 names to address the deity.[589] The celebration of *Toxcatl* was also complicated and multi-layered, but one of its most important aspects was the relationship between the ceremony and Mexican seasonality, that is, periods of dryness in contrast to times of rain.[590] *Toxcatl* was the ceremony that marked the (hopeful) end of the dry season. The religious and economic importance of the ceremony is underscored by the offering of human sacrifices during *Toxcatl*.

The ceremony began with the sacrifice of a Tezcatlipoca impersonator, but the rituals themselves began almost a year before.[591] Sahagún's informants spend a great amount of time detailing how this deity impersonator was selected. He was perfect in every sense of the Aztec ideal: young, strong, attractive. In addition, after his selection the deity impersonator was educated to ensure "that he should be very circumspect in his discourse, that he talk graciously."[592] For one year this young man lived as a lord, with

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[588] Nicholson, 412.

[589] Doris Heyden, "Dryness Before the Rains: Toxcatl and Tezcatlipoca," in *To Change Place: Aztec Ceremonial Landscapes*, ed. Davíd Carrasco (University Press of Colorado, 1991), 189-190. Eloise Quiñones Keber notes that perhaps this was to address the god with a new name each day of the year. Written communication, October 2006.

[590] Heyden, 188. In analyzing the feast of *Toxcatl*, other authors have noted different associations the feast would have had for the Aztec audience. For example, Guilhem Olivier has pointed out the parallels in *Toxcatl* between Tezcatlipoca and the Aztec ruler. See Guilhem Olivier, "The Hidden King and The Broken Flutes: Mythical and Royal Dimensions of the Feast of Tezcatlipoca in Toxcatl," in *Representing Aztec Ritual: Performance, Text, and Image in the Work of Sahagún*, ed. Eloise Quiñones Keber (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2002), 107-142.

[591] The following account of the celebrations during Toxcatl is from Sahagún, Book 2, 66-77.

[592] Ibid., 68.

all the appropriate lifestyle amenities. He was also expected to copulate with four women who represented specific agricultural deities: Xochiquetzal (Flower Quetzal Feather), goddess of plant life and vegetation; Xilonen (Young Maize Ear Doll), goddess of tender maize; Atlatonan (Atlan Our Mother), an earth deity goddess; and Huixtocihuatl (Huixtotlin Lady), goddess of salt.[593] The women would have been seen as the living symbols of the agricultural deities. Their sexual relation with the Tezcatlipoca impersonator was the ultimate merging of forces to ensure fecundity. Heyden refers to this as a "marriage" and an impregnation with the "seed" of Tezcatlipoca.[594] This pollination would signify the end of the deity impersonator as well, since shortly after he was sacrificed to the gods. His death was thus symbolic of the dry season ending.[595]

The deity impersonator's death was similar to other sacrificial victims: his heart was extracted and offered to the sun. But rather than flaying his skin, the priests decapitated him and put his head on the skull rack. With this offering to Tezcatlipoca completed, a figure of Huitzilopochtli was made out of wood and covered with amaranth dough.

> Then they dressed him in a godly cape. It was costly; it was all made, embellished, designed with precious feathers; it was provided with the red-eye border; its edge was quite all of roseate spoonbill [feathers]. And in its center lay a large golden disc.[596]

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[593] Ibid., 70. Heyden identifies Atlatonan as a patroness of lepers and goddess of maize. See Heyden, 199.

[594] Heyden, 199.

[595] Ibid., 200.

[596] Sahagún, Book 2, 72.

Both Tezcatlipoca and Huitzilopochtli were associated with the sun and with war, hence the appearance of the Aztec patron god during the feasts of Tezcatlipoca. In fact, Huitzilopochtli was sometimes identified as an avatar of Tezcatlipoca.[597] In the ceremony the Tezcatlipoca impersonator died a death similar to captives of war; his heart was the prime gift to the sun. After an amaranth figure of Huitzilopochtli had been costumed and adorned, they took it to a temple and the celebrations continued into the evening. Here again tamales were part of the offerings made:

> And the tamales which they ate were fruit tamales, [which] were chili-red, or tamales made of maize softened with lime, or bean and cornmeal cakes, colored tamales, tamales of coarse white flour, and [tamales] rolled up in amaranth seed dough. These cylincrical tamales wrapped up in amaranth seed dough were the tamales they distributed at the temple.[598]

Quails were then offered to Huitzilopochtli. Everyone participating in the festival decapitated a quail in honor of the god, and these were then roasted and eaten. Once these food offerings were given (and received), the women began dancing various dances, one of which consisted of them wearing large garlands of popped corn around their necks and distributing them to the audience, a reminder of the abundance to come which the participants could enjoy. The celebration concluded with more sacrifices in honor of Tezcatlipoca.

The honoring of these two important deities, Tezcatlipoca and Huitzilipocthli, was the responsibility of all, from commoners to the ruler. While the text does not provide further information on the quail offerings, the Aztec audience would have connected this

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[597] Nicholson, 426.

[598] Sahagún, Book 2, 73.

bird with the earth deity Tlazolteotl, who was also associated with the earth's fecundity. Another food ritual that was certainly connected to the goddess was the "earth-eating ceremony" performed before the image of Tezcatlipoca.[599] While no other information is provided in this particular chapter of Book 2, the Appendix of the book sheds some light on this ceremony: "with one finger [they touched the ground and then the mouth]" and this was usually done before the image of a deity or in front of the hearth.[600] The ritual echoed the reciprocal relationship between man and earth, the constant dependence of man on the food produced by the earth, and man's requirement to pay homage to the deities for that food.

Tamales were not consumed every day since their production required a great deal of time and labor.[601] Yet the appearance of these foods, and especially of the great variety of tamales made, reaffirm the importance of both deities and their significant roles in agriculture. Doris Heyden notes that in this veintena Huitzilopochtli became a symbol of abundance.[602] He was honored at the end of *Toxcatl* or Dry Thing, which occurred during the dry season, and before *Etzalcualiztli* celebrated rain and abundance.

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[599] Ibid., 69.

[600] Ibid., 195.

[601] Elizabeth Brumfiel believes that tamales were eaten by the elite and only eaten by commoners in a ritual context. See Elizabeth Brurmfiel, "Weaving and Cooking: Women's Production in Aztec Mexico," in *Engendering Archaeology: Women and Prehistory*, ed. Joan M. Gero and Margaret W. Conkey (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1991), 238.

[602] Heyden, 200.

## Conclusion

In noting the food eaten during the veintena ceremonies, Durán writes, "I believe that the special food eaten on each feast was consumed in order to assure that this type of food [would not] be wanting at any time."[603] This statement shows that he was very much aware of the symbolic connection between the food consumed and the ceremonies performed. Yet the use of food by the Aztecs in these ceremonies is much more varied, multi-layered, and complex than merely assuring a good harvest or an abundance of food. While these basic needs were certainly part of the rituals performed, in the veintena ceremonies food became part of the cosmic realm, not only as a necessity for the continuation of life, but in its transformation from the tangible into the abstract. For example, food was related to the cosmos and the four cardinal directions during *Etzalqualiztli*, which included four maize balls, four chilies, and four tomatoes. In their association with the cardinal directions, and as offerings to the gods, these staples were transformed into cosmic foods.

As is evident in the overview of the celebrations mentioned by Sahagún's informants, food was used in veintena rituals in many ways. Some feasts mandated that special meals be prepared. These special dishes sometimes referenced specific deities in such feasts as *Izcalli*, in which a hot sauce was prepared in honor of the fire god Xiuhtecuhtli. Other special meals referenced a harvesting sequence or technique, such as the *Etzalcualiztli* ceremony in which two basic staples that were routinely intercropped, beans and maize, were combined to make a special dish. In addition to preparing special meals, food served as an adornment, often used to decorate sculpture, architecture, and

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[603] Durán, 466.

participants. In the feast *Hueytecuitl* honoring the maize goddess Chicomecoatl, food was used to decorate temples, deity impersonators, and the litter in which the goddess was carried. Here food enveloped the physical scene to such an extent that the viewer could not overlook its specific role in the veintena.

While these examples certainly illustrate the tangible use of food during some veintena celebrations, others illustrate a symbolic or abstract use of food. During *Huetozoztli* maize was offered as maize kernels, dough balls, and tortillas (Figure 6.3). This transformation from raw to prepared material is significant, for it illustrates a cycle of continuous change. Transformation is a theme prevalent in Aztec thought and is reiterated in the veintenas, especially in ceremonies where human or dough "flesh" was eaten. Such consumption illustrates the transformation of food and the transformative power of food.

Food was also used as a threat in some veintena ceremonies. In the celebration to Tlaloc in *Atlcahualo,* hardened tortillas were used to psychologically torture future sacrifice victims. In this veintena food was transformed into a "weapon" used to sacrifice captives. In rituals honoring Xipe Totec, food was mixed with the actual flesh of sacrificial victims. Both food and flesh took on a powerful role, perhaps becoming embodiments of the cosmic itself. Aztecs participating in or observing these ceremonies would have easily understood the purpose of these transformations. Modern viewers may find it difficult to interpret the original meaning of some of these sanguinary and esoteric rituals, but the images help us see that through the medium of food the Aztecs intended to communicate that something transformative was taking place.

# CHAPTER 7

# FOOD AND RITUAL AFTER CONQUEST

Food was exchanged rather quickly after European contact. By as early as 1493, maize (a Taino word) may have reached Europe with Columbus' return from the Caribbean.[604] By 1525 maize was already being grown in both Portugal and Spain.[605] By 1565 chili peppers were common in Spanish gardens.[606] In examining food after the conquest, historian Alfred Crosby notes:

> The great advantage of the American food plants is that they make different demands of soils, weather, and cultivation than Old World crops, and are different in the growing seasons in which they make these demands. In many cases the American crops do not compete with Old World crops but complement them.[607]

The New World plants enabled the Old World farmers to produce food from soils that prior to contact were considered useless.[608]

## Food at the Time of Conquest

Food played a vital role from the very beginning of the meeting of the Old and New Worlds. In Book 12 (The Conquest) of the *Florentine Codex* Bernardino de Sahagún's informants observe that one of the first encounters between Spaniards and

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[604] Mark A. Burkholder with Suzanne Hiles, "An Empire Beyond Compare," in *The Oxford History of Mexico*, ed. Michael C. Meyer and William H. Beezley (Oxford University Press, 2000), 137.

[605] Ibid., 137.

[606] Ibid., 138.

[607] Alfred W. Crosby, Jr., *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1973), 176.

[608] Ibid.

Aztecs featured an exchange of food.[609] The Aztec ruler Moctezuhma II ordered several of his messengers to investigate the stories of strange men reaching the east coast. Upon seeing the Spaniards and hearing their guns, the messengers were fearful and fainted. Both the text and the corresponding image describe Cortés's men trying to revive the messengers with wine and food (Figure 7.1). When describing the Spanish food to the ruler Moctezuhma, they noted that "their food was like fasting food,"[610] apparently not finding it that appetizing. Later on in the conquest story Moctezuhma ordered that food be given to the Spaniards (Figure 7.2).[611] Although they were horrified that some of the food was soaked in blood, they did eat of what was offered:

> …they ate white tortillas, maize kernels, eggs, turkey hens, and all manner of fruit – custard apple,[612] mamey, yellow sapota, black sapota, sweet potato, manioc, white sweet potato, yellow sweet potato, colored sweet potato, *jícama*, plum, *jobo*, guava, *cuajilote*, avocado, acacia [bean], *tejocote*, American cherry,[613] tuna cactus fruit, mulberry,[614] white cactus fruit, yellow cactus fruit, whitish-red cactus fruit, *pitahaya*, water *pitahaya*.[615]

## Food after the Conquest

When the Spaniards finally conquered the Aztecs in 1521, they kept the tribute system in place, demanding the same foods and goods from the conquered provinces.

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[609] Bernardino de Sahagún, *Florentine Codex: General History of the Things of New Spain*, 12 vols., trans. and ed. Arthur J. Anderson and Charles E. Dibble (Santa Fe: School of American Research; Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1950-82), Book 12, 15-16.

[610] Ibid, 19.

[611] Ibid., 21.

[612] Ibid., n. 5. Anderson and Dibble identify it as *quahtzapotl* (anona).

[613] Ibid., 22, n. 2. Anderson and Dibble identify it as *capuli* (prunus capuli).

[614] Ibid., n. 23. Anderson and Dibble identify it as *amacapuli* (morus celtidifodia).

[615] Ibid.

During the first years of Spanish rule, the Indians paid tribute in food to *encomenderos* (conquistadors who became the trustees of the indigenous population), thus playing a critical role in the food economy of what they named New Spain.[616] Tribute items included corn, fowl, eggs, fruits, vegetables, fish, honey, and chocolate, among other foods. The household of Cortés, for example, was given fifteen loads of maize, eighty baskets containing twenty tortillas each, ten native fowl, two Castillian fowl, two rabbits, ten quail, three doves, fruit, salt, chilies, and firewood on a weekly basis.[617] Eventually, with the increase in the Spanish population and the decrease in the native population, tribute became insufficient as a means of supplying food to the city. By the middle of the sixteenth-century the system had begun to fall apart.[618]

Soon after the Conquest, the Spanish imported all things European into the new settlements established in Mexico. The success of New Spain was due in part to Spanish efforts to transform an unknown New world into a familiar Old one. Beef, cows, sheep, goats, pigs, and chickens, along with all types of fruits and plants, were brought over to establish a staple European food supply.[619] Sahagún's artists illustrate some of the first Old World animals they saw, including horses, pigs, sheep, goats, and cattle (Figure 7.3). By 1600 all the most important food plants of the Old World were being cultivated in the

[616] Janet Long-Solís and Luis Alberto Vargas, *Food Culture in Mexico* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2005), 15. The Viceroyalty of New Spain was established in 1535. See Burkholder with Hiles, 117.

[617] Sophie Coe, *America's First Cuisines* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), 229. Coe does not identify her source but notes that this tribute was in 1533.

[618] Ibid., 229.

[619] Sophie D. Coe and Michael D. Coe, *The True History of Chocolate* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1996), 110.

Americas.[620] Jeffrey M. Pilcher, who specializes in Mexican cultural history, comments: "The introduction of European crops was a natural step in the conquest of America, for Spanish cuisine itself had resulted from a long series of invasions."[621] Of great importance to Europeans were olive oil, wine, and bread.[622] Wine and olive oil were difficult to produce in New Spain, however. Grapes did not grow so readily and the olive tree preferred the warmer climates of places like Chile and Peru.[623] Constant shortages occurred and the government of New Spain had to keep a tight hold over distribution.[624] Wheat was a different matter; the Spanish were able to satisfy their demand for wheat by using the native population for forced labor in order to cultivate this grain.[625] And while the Spanish were eating their familiar fare, the Indians continued to eat their usual foods.

During the early colonial period (ca. 1521-1600) there were many food restrictions on the native population, prohibiting them from gaining control of European foods and animals.[626] Indians were also restricted when it came to producing and selling food.[627] On May 9, 1527, the government of New Spain prohibited Indians from buying and selling Spanish goods, and on June 12, 1553, they were forbidden to trade, slaughter,

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[620] Crosby, 106. Some of these include citrus fruits, apples, pears, cherries, mangos, grapes, strawberries, plums, peaches, bananas, melons, and watermelons, all of which arrived in the sixteenth century. For further information see Long-Solís and Vargas, 52-53.

[621] Jeffrey M. Pilcher, "*!Que Vivan los Tamales! Food and the Making of Mexican Identity* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998), 27. Pilcher refers here to many Spanish "staples" such as wheat, wine, and olive oil, which owed their cultivation and origin to other cultures and places including Egypt, Syria, Phoenicia, and Greece. Ibid., 27-28.

[622] Crosby, 70.

[623] Ibid., 71.

[624] Pilcher, 31.

[625] Ibid., 34.

[626] Coe, 233.

[627] Ibid.

or sell pigs.[628] Indian markets outside Mexico City were only allowed to sell tortillas, corn flour, tamales, and local fruit.[629] Coe notes that as the Spanish and Indian cultures began to mix, food restrictions increased, and oftentimes these restrictions had very little to actually do with food or drink.[630] Rather, it was an attempt to keep the Indian and Spanish worlds separated and ordered, with Indians eating only New World foods, and Spanish eating Old World foods. This separation was actually about class and social structure rather than about taste or the foods themselves.

An example is the case of wheat and maize and the responses to both by Indians and Spaniards. Maize, identified as an indigenous food, was not highly valued by the Spaniards. In 1597, the botanist John Gerard, describing maize, noted that it "is of hard and evil digestion, a more convenient food for swine than for men."[631] Spanish consumption of bread served to underscore the difference between the European and the maize and potato-eating native.[632] Indians, when given a choice between wheat and maize, continued to value their indigenous staple. When the Spaniards tried to integrate wheat into the diet of the indigenous population, the effort was not as successful as they had hoped. In fact, the Mexican population resisted wheat more than their counterparts in South America.[633] While taste certainly played a part in the choice, other factors must be considered as well. Arnold Bauer has noted that from the Indian's point of view, wheat

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[628] Ibid.

[629] Long-Solís and Vargas, 16.

[630] Coe, 229.

[631] As quoted in Burkholder with Hiles, 137.

[632] Arnold J. Bauer, *Goods, Power, History: Latin America's Material Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 87.

[633] Ibid.

seemed inferior to maize, since maize yielded up to ten times more than wheat when measured in proportion to seed.[634] It also took less labor and time to produce roughly the same amount of grains. But perhaps the strongest reason for the Indian's preference of maize was due to its continued importance in their cultural and religious lives.[635]

Another tactic that was used by the government of New Spain in order to keep native and European foods (and people) separate was the restrictions placed on Indian markets. Indian markets outside of Mexico City were only allowed to sell native foods: tortilla, corn flour, tamales, and local fruits.[636] There were also prohibitions on Spaniards and Blacks from buying in Indian markets.[637] By the close of the sixteenth century, Indian markets, and commerce in general, was in the hands of the Spanish authorities.[638]

Images from the *Florentine Codex* help illustrate the separation that occurred during the early colonial period. In Book 10 (The People), Sahagún's informants list the various meats sold by the meat seller. Along with the meat from local animals, they list "the meat of the Castilian [animals] – chickens, cattle, pigs, sheep, goats."[639] The corresponding image depicts two men dressed in European clothing with a scale between them (Figure 7.4). While the text does not identify the meat seller as European, it is obvious to the viewer that both seller and buyer were Spaniards. Another image in the

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[634] Ibid.

[635] Maize continues to be used in rituals in Mexico today. This will be discussed further in Chapter 8.

[636] Long-Solís and Vargas, 16.

[637] Coe, 229.

[638] Long-Solís and Vargas, 16.

[639] Sahagún, Book 10, 80.

*Florentine Codex* depicts the wheat seller (Figure 7.5). Again, two men are depicted with a scale between them. One man carries a bag over his shoulder, as the other walks to the scale that is in the center of the picture. Behind the wheat seller are several other bags presumably full of wheat. Like the meat seller and buyer, both are clearly dressed as Spaniards.

### Changes in Pre-Hispanic Patterns and Introduction of New Foods

The attempt to keep native and Spanish lives separate was not very successful; eventually both people and food began integrating. One simple reason for the merging of foods was the fluctuation in availability and pricing of European goods. Poorer Spaniards, unable to acquire bread on a regular basis, ate maize prepared in gruels and breads.[640] Substitution was made out of an economic necessity.

An important influence in the integration of food and people was the role of the native woman and her presence in the Spanish home. There were few Spanish women among the early immigrants to Mexico. Several hundred arrived in 1535 and 1536 when New Spain reached the status of viceroyalty, but there were never enough to match the numbers of male Spanish settlers.[641] While the most common marriage pattern was between members of the same race, occupational group, and social stratum, poorer Spaniards often married native women and richer ones often took them as concubines.[642] Some Spaniards specifically sought out high-ranking indigenous women as wives to

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[640] Burkholder with Hiles, 137.

[641] Long-Solís and Vargas, 74. Other sources, such as Susan Migden Socolow, *The Women of Colonial Latin America* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 52-59, note that the arrival of Spanish women into the Americas did increase over time, especially by the end of the sixteenth century.

[642] Coe and Coe, 111. See, Socolow, 62.

create profitable alliances.[643] Many Spanish homes had a native presence in the kitchen. It is easy to imagine beans, maize, avocados, and potatoes being cooked and eaten along with beef, milk, cheese, oranges, and bananas.

Another important venue for the mixing of cuisines was the New World convent where young girls from good families were educated. The first convent in Mexico City, Nuestra Señora de la Concepción, was established by 1540.[644] Nearly 60 convents were founded in colonial Mexico between 1550 and 1811.[645] In addition to reading, writing, and religious doctrine, many convents also offered classes in sewing, embroidering, painting, and cooking.[646] Convents also served as experimental locations for New World crops and hybrid cuisines; for example, the popular Mexican dish *mole poblano*, with its mixture of Old and New World ingredients, (such as cinnamon and chiles) is believed to have originated in a convent kitchen.[647] There are many different stories about where mole poblano originated,[648] but the first recorded mole recipes come from *Novismo arte de cocina o Escenlente colección de las mejores recetas* by C. Alejandro Valdés in 1831.[649] Valdés credits Sor Juana de la Asunción from the St. Dominic convent in

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[643] Asunción Lavrin, "Women in Colonial Mexico," in *The Oxford History of Mexico*, ed. Michael C. Meyer and William H. Beezley (Oxford University Press, 2000), 250.

[644] Socolow, 91.

[645] Lavrin, 269.

[646] Long-Solís and Vargas, 19.

[647] Ibid., 17 and 19.

[648] For a summary of mole poblano creation stories see Miguel Guzmán Peredo, *Crónicas Gastronómicas* (Mexico City: Fontamara, 1991), 27-29.

[649] Pilcher, 171, n. 1.

Puebla de los Angeles (present-day Puebla) with accidentally coming up with the recipe.[650]

Perhaps the biggest influence in the mixing of Old and New World foods and cuisines came from the new creole[651] and mestizo[652] groups that were used to eating both types of food. While the indigenous population declined dramatically during the sixteenth century, the mixed-ancestry population grew in numbers,[653] allowing for the continued blending of cultures and cuisines. Much of this mixing was simply substitution out of necessity. For example, when wine was difficult to attain and creoles could not afford the steep prices, they may have chosen to adopt the indigenous pulque or drink *aguardiente*, distilled sugarcane liquor.[654] Both were seen as cheap substitutes. In other cases, the mixing of Old and New World foods was about taste. Cooks in the markets began selling European and native fruits side by side along with prepared foods that combined products from both continents, such as quesadillas, which used the Indian's tortillas with the cheese produced from European cattle.[655] Pilcher comments on the ingenuity of colonial cooks:

> Colonial cooks, in attempting to re-create European foods, actually developed a highly innovative culinary repertoire. Forced to use native ingredients such as chiles and low-status European ones like pork fat, they improvised dishes that were both delicious and distinct from those eaten in the

[650] Pilcher, 25. The ingredients used by Sor Andrea included cloves, cinnamon, peppercorns, coriander and sesame seeds (Old World); chiles, tomatoes, turkey broth, and chocolate (New World).

[651] Spaniard born in New Spain.

[652] A person of mixed Indian and European descent.

[653] Larvin, 251.

[654] Pilcher, 31.

[655] Long-Solís and Vargas, 22.

> peninsula. Yet they tried valiantly to maintain ties to the homeland and, in particular, demanded the European staff of life, wheat bread. Native Americans reacted in a similar manner to the gastronomic encounter by incorporating Old World plants and animals to their diet whenever convenient…"[656]

In the ingredient borrowing that went on from one culture to another, chocolate stands out as one of the most quickly appropriated items by Europeans. During pre-Hispanic times chocolate was consumed by the elite and used as currency. After the Spanish conquest, chocolate retained its importance among the native population and became significant for the Spaniards as well. The Spanish conquistador Bernal Díaz del Castillo records the feast that was hosted by the Viceroy Antonio de Mendoza and Hernando Cortés (who was already the Marqués del Valle) in 1538, upon the announcement that Charles V (Spain) and Francis I (France) had signed a peace agreement.[657] Of all the foods that were served at the feasts, two Mesoamerican foods stand out: "chocolate" and "fruit from the land."[658] Unfortunately he does not specify which native fruit was eaten.

The province of Xoconochco, along the Southern Pacific coast, was the dominant producer of cacao trees during pre-Hispanic times. After contact with Europeans the area was severely affected by a drop in its native population, a decline significant enough to hinder chocolate production.[659] The Spaniards then acquired chocolate from other places,

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[656] Pilcher, 33.

[657] Coe, 241. She gives a detailed synopsis of the banquet on 241-246.

[658] Bernal Díaz del Castillo, *Historia Verdadera de la Conquista de la Nueva España*, 2 vols., ed. Joaquín Ramírez Cabañas (Mexico City: Editorial Porrúa, 1977), 2: 312. "Cacao" and "fruta de la tierra." Translation mine.

[659] Charles Gibson, *The Aztec Under Spanish Rule: A History of the Indians of the Valley of Mexico, 1519-1810* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1964), 348.

among them Guatemala and El Salvador.[660] Unlike the native population, Europeans took chocolate hot, regularly sweetened with sugar, and they produced a froth by beating the drink with an instrument called a *molinillo*.[661] In some monasteries, friars drank chocolate twice daily, once in the morning and again in the afternoon.[662] Pilcher believes chocolate might have been a more popular beverage than alcohol. To prove his point he cites a story recorded by Thomas Gage, an English priest who was in Mexico in the seventeenth century:

> Gage…described the women of Chiapas as beings so addicted to chocolate that they drank it during Mass. When threats failed to stop this practice, the bishop excommunicated the offenders; to which the women responded ironically by poisoning his cup of chocolate. Fray Francisco Ortiz went before the Holy Office of the Inquisition, in 1650, on charges of consuming chocolate before Mass.[663]

The irony in chocolate's history is that once it was included in the European diet, it was transformed into a European food. While it was considered inappropriate for Spaniards to eat native foods, chocolate was relegated to another class and became a drink with a European social status.[664]

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[660] Ibid.

[661] Coe and Coe, 115.

[662] Long-Solís and Vargas, 20.

[663] Pilcher, 31.

[664] Coe and Coe, 125-202.

**Food Rituals after the Conquest**

Food continued to be important to the ritual life of the native population of Mexico after the conquest. Although friars such as Motolinía claimed very early on after contact that idolatry had been wiped out, others, such as Sahagún, felt that much work had to be done in order to eliminate native religious belief.[665] The character of Aztec religion, with its emphasis on a pantheon of gods, made it difficult for friars to fully eradicate native beliefs. A Christian God was easily perceived as one of many gods, and Christ's death could certainly have been interpreted as a kind of "debt-payment" to the gods.[666] The private sphere of the native population was also very difficult for the friars to penetrate.[667]

Rites of passage ceremonies, such as funerals and weddings, were occasions in which food still played a vital role in the social and religious life of the native population. Friars such as Diego Durán were often troubled by foods they saw for sale in the Indian markets because they were aware of the ritual significance these foods had. Upon seeing several hundred dogs for sale, for example, the friar inquired about them and the answer he got deeply troubled him: "For fiestas, weddings, and baptisms."[668] He writes:

> I was deeply distressed, for I knew that in olden times the little dogs had been a special sacrifice to the gods and that they were eaten afterward. I was even more distressed on seeing that in each village beef and mutton were being sold

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[665] Gibson, 101.

[666] Gibson, 100-101.

[667] Linda A. Curcio-Nagy, "Faith and Morals in Colonial Mexico," in *The Oxford History of Mexico*, ed. Michael C. Meyer and William H. Beezley (Oxford University Press, 2000), 157.

[668] Diego Durán, *Book of the Gods and Rites and The Ancient Calendar*, trans. and ed. Fernando Horcasitas and Doris Heyden (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971), 278.

> and that for a real one may buy more beef than [the meat of] two dogs, and yet [the latter] are still eaten.[669]

He understood that the choice of meat was not a mere matter of taste or availability, but could also reflect an intended ritual use. Durán was also aware of special dates associated with celebrations, and he routinely checked the Aztec calendar to see if there were any correlations between native dates or names and those chosen to celebrate a Christian saint or feast.[670] When approached by an Indian who requested Saint Luke as a patron saint, he checked the Aztec calendar: “It was then that I saw clearly that he had asked for the Feast of Saint Luke because it fell on the day and sign of House.”[671] Durán made the connection between the man’s calendric name, *Calli* or House, and the day of the feast of Saint Luke. The friar was also troubled by the lavish spending necessary to host a festival.[672] He was aware of the requirements of native religious festival, that after a propitious date was chosen and the proper foods were offered, the host gave freely of food and offerings to his guests.

Motolinía also notes the use of food in Christian rituals, but does not seem to have been as suspicious as Durán.[673] He records that the Feast of the Apostles was celebrated by the Indians, who often brought offerings for their dead. He notes what was offered: “Some offer maize, others mantles, others food, bread, chickens, and in the place of wine,

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[669] Ibid., 278.

[670] Ibid., 410.

[671] Ibid.

[672] Ibid.

[673] Fray Toribio de Motolinía, *Historia de los Indios de la Nueva España,* ed. Georges Baudot (Madrid: Editorial Castilia, 1985), 185.

they offer chocolate."[674] Of particular significance in the list of offerings are maize and cacao, two foods that were offered and prepared in pre-Hispanic religious rituals. Maize, in particular, had a special place in Aztec cuisine, both at daily meals and as sacred offerings. During the celebration of *Ochpaniztli* (Road Sweeping) in honor of the earth mother Toci and the maize goddesses, maize was offered as a gift, a costume adornment for the deity impersonator, and a decorative element in the festival.[675] Cacao, available only to individuals of some social standing (merchants and the nobility), was another food associated with religious celebrations. It played an important role in the Aztec worldview since it was often equated with both the heart and with blood, two offerings considered to be essential for the continuation of the cosmos. [676]

Agricultural ceremonies also continued after the conquest. Although later in date than Durán and Motolinía's works, the writings of the priest Hernando Ruiz de Alarcón (completed in 1629) are helpful in examining the survival of food rituals after the conquest.[677] Of great concern to the priest was the use of *huauhtli* or amaranth. He notes that amaranth was used to make everyday meals such as a cold gruel to drink and buns

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[674] Ibid., 185. "Unos ofrecen maíz, otros mantas, otros comidas, pan, gallinas, y en lugar de vino dan cacao." Translation mine.

[675] Sahagún, Book 2, 118-126. For images see Anders, Jansen, and Reyes García, *El Libro del Ciuacoatl: Homenaje para el Año del Fuego Nuevo*, *Libro del Códice Borbónico* (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1991). Ochpaniztli is further discussed in Chapter 6.

[676] Sahagún, Book 6, 256.

[677] Michael D. Coe and Gordon Whittaker, *Aztec Sorcerers in Seventeenth Century Mexico: The Treatise on Superstitions by Hernando Ruiz de Alarcón* (Albany: State University of New York, 1982). Ruiz de Alarcón was born in Guerrero, where he served as a parish priest in the town of Atenango. Although his work is not from Mexico City, it is a valuable seventeenth-century source.

that were "cooked in the manner of tortillas."[678] But what disturbed him was the harvesting of the seed and the celebration that followed:

> From the first the first that they gather, [when it has been] ground well and made into dough, they fashion some idols in human form, about a quarter of a yard in size. For the day on which they form them, they prepare a great deal of their wine. When the idols have been made and baked, they put them in their chapels as if they were setting up some images. Placing candles and incense for them, they offer to them amid bouquets the wine prepared for the dedication…"[679]

Ruiz de Alarcón goes on to describe the festivities that were held, which featured singing, the playing of music, and much drinking. He notes that "the owners of the little idols keep them carefully for the next day, during which all those in the festival gather together in the said chapel and divide the little idols into pieces like relics, which are eaten among all of them."[680] Amaranth was similarly used during pre-conquest celebrations to make dough images of Chicomecoatl, Huitzilopochtli, the fire god Xiuhtecuhtli, and the mountain gods.[681] These images were often broken into pieces and eaten as symbolic sharing of the "flesh" of the deity. Pilcher has noted that because of its religious significance, friars issued a ban against the cultivation of amaranth.[682] Amaranth use thus declined, since the early friars, keen on ending idolatry, limited the growing and

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[678] Ibid., 75.

[679] Ibid.

[680] Ibid.

[681] See Appendix.

[682] Pilcher, 35. Neither he nor Ortiz de Montellano provide their source for similar statements. See Bernard Ortiz de Montellano, *Aztec Medicine, Health, and Nutrition* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 108.

harvesting of the seeds. Amaranth is still widely used in Mexico, principally in the preparation of a popular sweet called "alegria."[683]

Ruiz de Alarcón also records the many spells and chants associated with the fertility of important foods such as maguey and maize. Of the maguey spell he notes,

> In the spell they ask – in metaphorical terms – that crying, sweating, and streaming take place, meaning that there be a great amount of maguey-sap so that their harvest might be more abundant…[684]

For maize, he comments that spells were said for the planting and the storing of the seed.[685] Other foods such as squashes and sweet potatoes also had spells associated with them.[686] In some cases, the tools used for harvesting received special chants so that they might work more efficiently.[687] During pre-Hispanic celebrations of *Etzalqualiztli* in honor of the rain gods, a ritual performance using agricultural implements such as hoes, sharp sticks for sowing, and other tools had also been carried out.[688] The tools were placed on altars in the home and honored for their role in harvesting. Some of the chants recorded by Ruiz de Alarcón recall deity names and epithets:

> Please bring yourself forth, Priest whose sign is 1 Water, For now the priests have arrived, Now I have come to leave the priest, Precious prince 7 serpent, Let us go, For here is Basket of Our Sustenance.[689]

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[683] Long-Solís and Vargas, 41.

[684] Coe and Whittaker, 173.

[685] Ibid., 175-181.

[686] Ibid., 182-185.

[687] Ibid., 172.

[688] Durán, 431.

[689] Coe and Whittaker, 175.

This chant used for the planting of maize seeds makes reference to "Seven Serpent," the calendric name for Chicomecoatl, the goddess of maize. It also refers to the food as "Our Sustenance," another phrase used by Sahagún's informants, who called the goddess of maize the "representative of …men's sustenance."[690]

The maguey plant posed another concern for the priest, who reported:

> When they are to go to transplant the maguey they prepare themselves with tobacco as if it were a guardian angel or an angel of God, to which they entrust the task. Next they get a sharpened stick, with which they are to dig up the small maguey plants, and they begin casting a spell on the said stick, advising it to carry out its task well.[691]

As related in Chapter 3, the maguey plant was used to make the fermented beverage pulque, consumed in pre-Hispanic times in religious rituals and associated with various deities. The drinking of pulque also became a moral issue for Spanish clerics, who often criticized the Indian's drinking as detrimental to the spirit, a concern as disturbing to the church as its pre-Hispanic ritual associations.[692] Pulque increased as a problem for the poorer Spanish social classes as well; unable to afford wine, they drank pulque and aguardiente instead.[693]

Pulque's roots in New Spain continued to be strong. During the year 1662 Mexico City experienced a food shortage that caused riots.[694] The public attacked and set

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[690] Sahagún, Book 1, 13.

[691] Coe and Whittaker, 171.

[692] Sonia Corcuera, "Pulque y Evangelización. El Caso de Fray Manuel Pérez," in *Conquista y Comida: Consecuencias del Encuentro de Dos Mundos,* ed. Janet Long (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1996), 414.

[693] Ibid., 414-417; Pilcher, 31.

[694] The following account is noted in Long-Solís and Vargas, 24.

fire to the National Palace, the Municipal Council of the Spaniards, and the market stands in the main plaza. While the buildings were burning, the crowds yelled "Death to the Viceroy," "Death to the Magistrate," and "Long live Pulque." When the riots ended, the Viceroy at the time, the Count of Galves, took measures to restore the food supply in the city and forbade the entrance and sale of pulque, on which he laid full blame for the riots.

In addition to the textual descriptions and images in works by Durán and Sahagún, painted images from early colonial monasteries also provide another glimpse into how foods continued to be used in rituals and symbolic images after the conquest. In the sixteenth-century Augustinian monastery in Malinalco, in the Toluca Valley, several of the surviving painted murals depict foods, among other subjects. The site of Malinalco was an important center prior to the arrival of the Spaniards. It was a tributary province of the Triple Alliance and was predominantly responsible for providing clothing, but also foodstuffs.[695] The four food items given to the Aztec capital were one bin each of chia, maize, beans, and amaranth.[696] Two of those, maize and amaranth, were highly significant in ritual use. In addition to providing important goods to the city of Tenochtitlan, Malinalco was also essential to the ritual life of the Aztecs. During 1501 and 1515 a circular temple was cut from the living rock (Temple I, Figure 7.6).[697] The entrance to the interior was accessed through a series of narrow steps and the open "mouth" of a giant serpent. Inside the small temple a circular bench with one jaguar and two eagle sculptures was carved from the stone as seats (Figure 7.7). A third eagle seat

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[695] Frances F. Berdan and Patricia Rieff Anawalt, *The Essential Codex Mendoza* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 72-73.

[696] Ibid., 73.

[697] Michael D. Coe: *From the Olmecs to the Aztecs* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1994), 187.

was positioned in the middle of the room, while in the center of the various seats a deep hole was cut into the ground. Richard Townsend notes that the four seats correspond to various military offices that were replicated on the local level.[698] In addition to being a site concerned with state affairs, Temple I was also a location where warrior religious rituals took place and the hole in the center was most likely an offering place for sacrifices and for blood offerings made to the earth. In Townsend's words, "This was a ritual place for offerings to the 'heart of the earth' or 'the heart of the mountain,' the location of the earth's life force."[699] Indeed, as the select few walked up the narrow stairs and through the open mouth of the serpent, they would have been reminded of their role in continuing the cycle of life on earth.[700]

With the advent of the Spaniards, Malinalco continued to be important in both matters of religion and government. During the early colonial period Malinalco served (and still does) as the *cabecera* or principal town for the area.[701] Recognizing the ritual significance of the site, Spanish authorities quickly set about a church building program. Some of these churches were massive. Monasteries were often built in cabeceras because in addition to being establishments to educate the native population and to keep them under control, they also served as a place for the Spanish population to seek refuge in the

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[698] Richard F. Townsend, *The Aztecs* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2000), 109.

[699] Ibid.

[700] Davíd Carrasco, "Cosmic Jaws: We Eat the Gods and the Gods Eat Us," in *City of Sacrifice: The Aztec Empire and the Role of Violence in Civilization* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999), 168. He points out that the Aztec envisioned the earth as a gaping jaw.

[701] Jeanette Favrot Peterson, *The Paradise Garden Murals of Malinalco: Utopia and Empire in Sixteenth-Century Mexico* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993), 11.

event of a rebellion.[702] The monastery at Malinalco, dating to roughly 1560, was staffed by the mendicant Augustinian order.[703]

The fertile lands of the Toluca Valley continued to be important to the daily life of both the Spanish and native population. Native crops such as maize and sweet potato as well as introduced foods such as sugar cane, apples, and bananas were cultivated.[704] It is then not surprising that foods, plants and animals, are depicted in the painted murals of the convento at Malinalco. While the church was built around 1560, the murals were not painted until after 1571 by numerous artists.[705] The more thoroughly trained painters were given the responsibility of the walls, with apprentices relegated to secondary areas, details in the frescoes, and the vault paintings.[706]

The overall theme of the painted murals was that of a garden, an "earthly paradise," which Peterson notes went beyond the walls of the cloister garden to include the entire monastic complex and even the Christian church.[707] Cloisters of European monasteries consisted of a corridor surrounding a central garden.[708] The living quarters of the friars at the monasteries were usually on the second floor. While the cloister was

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[702] Robert Ricard, *The Spiritual Conquest of Mexico: An Essay on the Apostolate and the Evangelizing Methods of the Mendicant Orders in New Spain: 1523-1572*, trans. Lesley Byrd Simpson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), 163.

[703] Peterson, 22.

[704] Ibid. Peterson describes some of the ample food supply available in the Toluca Valley. I have separated it into Old and New World foods.

[705] Ibid., 43. Other scholars do not agree with this date and believe it is earlier in both construction and painting of the murals. See Samuel Y. Edgerton, *Theaters of Conversion: Religious Architecture and Indian Artisans in Colonial Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2001), 213.

[706] Peterson, 40. Peterson classifies them as Artist A (most skilled), Artist B, assistants C, D, and E.

[707] Ibid., 130.

[708] Edgerton, 207-208.

traditionally reserved for the friars' use in Europe, art historian Samuel Edgerton contends that in colonial New Spain, and certainly at Malinalco, these corridors were used to host processional functions.[709] He observes that the painted murals at Malinalco were a backdrop to the actions taking place in the corridors, rather than being an Indian representation of an earthly paradise.[710] He interprets the mix of Old and New World icons as not only the choice of native artists, but also of the Augustinian friars who were very well aware of their meanings.[711] The images at Malinalco are complex because they were created by a native population and for a native audience, but within a European and Christian framework. The reading or interpretation of the images must have varied from individual to individual.

Various pre-conquest foods are represented in the Malinalco scenes, but it is difficult to ascertain if these foods were associated with their pre-conquest meanings, or indicated a new post-contact association. Whatever the case, they were still very much associated with ritual. One image that is repeated several times is a monkey on a cacao tree (Figure 7.8). During pre-Hispanic times, spider monkeys, notorious for stealing cacao pods, were sometimes depicted on vessels for chocolate (Figure 3.20). Monkeys also had an important role in Aztec thought for they were considered to be precursors of man, and as such were thought to have creative powers.[712] Cacao pods and chocolate were also equated with the heart and blood since both were containers of valuable

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[709] Ibid., 216-217.

[710] Ibid., 235.

[711] Ibid., 224.

[712] Ibid., 104.

liquids.[713] In European thought, however, the monkey usually had negative associations. Peterson points out that from the twelfth century on the ape was the symbol of a sinner.[714] Since monkeys and apes appeared to parody human actions it was believed they represented man in a state of depravity.[715] By the sixteenth century, the ape and his apple diet were directly linked to the fall of man, and Peterson believes that it is in this context that they appear at Malinalco, since the murals also include many images of apple trees. The monkey is depicted twice in the garden frescoes at Malinalco (east cloister wall). Both times it is dangling not from an apple tree, but rather on a Mesoamerican tree, the cacao plant. Clearly, the native association was not forgotten.

Another tree that appears at Malinalco and also had religious pre-Hispanic associations is the *sapote* tree. The name "sapote" comes from the Nahautl word *zapotl*, which means "soft," and the sapote fruit is indeed large and oval with a soft flesh.[716] Like the cacao plant, the sapote tree also played a role in pre-Hispanic ceremonies. In describing the rituals performed during *Tlacaxipehualiztli* (Flaying of the Men) in honor of Xipe Totec. Durán describes the offerings presented to the deity: "They gave bunches of ears of corn…They were offered there and had to be placed upon green leaves from the sapota tree," and his artists depicted it in a garden setting (Figure 7.9).[717] The sapote fruit was also enjoyed at regular meals and Sahagún's informants note that it was "good,

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[713] Sahagún, Book 6, 256.

[714] Peterson, 105.

[715] Ibid. Peterson is referring to the work of H. W. Janson, *Apes and Ape Lore in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (London: Warburg Institute, 1952).

[716] Elisabeth Luard, *The Latin American Kitchen* (San Diego: Laurel Glen, 2002), 232.

[717] Durán, 176.

fine, sweet."[718] In Malinalco it also appears in the east wall of the garden frescoes. Both Peterson and Edgerton agree that its inclusion was intended to represent the biblical Tree of Knowledge.[719] Sapote trees were part of the lush garden at Itztapalapa in the southern Basin of Mexico, which Bernal Díaz del Castillo noted were "like things never dreamed of."[720] The pre-conquest image certainly illustrates the abundance of both flora and fauna. The trees are heavy with fruits, the small pond is full of fish, and numerous birds surround the edges of the pond. The landscape is filled with diverse trees and plants, many eaten on a daily basis, such as maize and tomatoes, as well as used in ritual. The sapote tree is dominant in the picture plane, located in the upper left hand corner of the square pond. Undoubtedly the sapote tree at Malinalco was interpreted by native viewers as having both old and new ritual associations.

## Conclusion

While the exact meaning of the native trees depicted in the garden murals at Malinalco eludes definitive interpretation, food use in indigenous rituals certainly continued after the conquest. Sixteenth-century friars such as Durán noted the continued use of native foods in wedding and baptisms ceremonies, as well as in other types of celebrations.[721] Like many pre-Hispanic rituals, these post-contact ceremonies not only consisted of eating special meals but also sacrificing various animals.

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[718] Sahagún, Book 11, 117.

[719] Peterson, 107. Edgerton, 223.

[720] As quoted in Ana María L. Velasco Lozano, "El Jardín de Itztapalapa," *Arqueología Mexicana* 10, no. 57 (2002): 28. "Como cosa jamás soñada." Translation mine.

[721] Durán, 278 and 410.

Some pre-Hispanic foods never lost their religious significance. Maize, for example, retained its native religious as well as cultural importance. During the seventeenth century, the priest Ruiz de Alarcón recorded various chants or prayers that were said for the planting and harvesting of special plants, including maguey and maize.[722] In fact, maize continues to be used in rituals in many parts of Mexico. Presently, in some rural areas of Mexico, the Eucharist ritual is performed not with wheat wafers but with maize ones.[723] During the early colonial period some pre-Hispanic foods continued to be preferred for specific rituals. While the native population eventually had access to plenty of new meats, such as pork and beef, Durán notes that they preferred to use dog meat for ritual offerings.[724]

The advent of Christianity brought a new set of ceremonies in which food use in rituals continued. Motolinía records a Feast of the Apostle celebration which not only included offerings of maize but also of bread and chickens.[725] It is not surprising that some European foods would be absorbed into ritual ceremonies. The garden murals at Malinalco provided the native audience with depictions of lush and fertile lands in which the sapote and cacao tree could be newly interpreted in a Christian context and used in rituals.

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[722] Coe and Whittaker, 175-184, 171.

[723] Dr. Jane G. Landers, oral communication, April 2006.

[724] Durán, 278.

[725] Motolinía, 185.

# CHAPTER 8

# CONCLUSION

This dissertation has examined a wide range of art to determine the connection between food and Aztec thought and practice. As noted, foodstuffs are depicted in an array of mediums including sculpture and images in painted manuscripts. Consumption is intimately connected with food, and as such is also depicted in art works and pictorial sources. By exploring food and consumption in Aztec art, it has been possible to determine their importance in ritual and culture and, most importantly, how they helped to shape the Aztec worldview.

From the very beginning of their history food was essential to the Aztecs for their survival and the formation of their identity. As the Aztecs moved into and about the Basin of Mexico and converted themselves from a nomadic band to the dominant group in Central Mexico, their migration accounts reflect how food was used as a symbol for this transformation. In *Codex Azcatitlan,*[726] the Aztec stop at a location that is full of succulents and other edible vegetation. One such plant was the nopal cactus, which would become a symbol of their capital city of Tenochtitlan (Place of the Prickly Pear Cactus on a Stone), but here serves as a foreshadowing of their future greatness. In *Codex Boturini*,[727] food appears at a point of tension in the story, when the Aztec patron god Huitzilopochtli chooses between groups in the migrating band, selecting one that

[726] *Codex Azcatitlan*, intro. Michel Graulich, commentary by Robert H. Barlow, trans. to Spanish Leonardo López Luján, trans. to French Dominique Michelet, 2 vols. (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, Societété des Américanistes, 1995).

[727] Alfredo Pérez Bolde, *Interpretación del Codice Boturini* (Mexico City: Centro de Investigaciones Humanisticas, 1980).

would continue the migration under his guidance. One group weeps with sadness, as the chosen group (the Mexica) eats from bowls laden with food. In both manuscripts food is a symbol of success in the transformation of the nomadic group into a people who would preside over a tribute empire in the Basin of Mexico and beyond.

The notion of transformation is further explored in other Aztec origin accounts and art work. In origin myths such as the *Legend of the Suns*[728] and *Histoyre du Mechique*,[729] food plays a role in the alternating destruction and creation of the cosmos. In the *Legend of the Sun*s each cosmic era or "Sun" is marked by the consumption of a particular food, and food becomes a catalyst for cosmic change. Why food? Food is critical on a fundamental human level; simply put, we would not be able to exist without nourishment for our bodies. This basic act takes on a cosmic relevance in Aztec myths of the construction (and destruction) of the universe. The connection between consumption and the continued existence of the human body becomes a metaphor for the continuation of the world. This is also evident in the many rituals the Aztecs performed. Throughout the year they orchestrated private and public rituals to cement their religious and cultural ideologies. Both domestic and life-cycle rituals, as well as public state rituals, involved the use of food and its consumption to create a cosmic connection.

Food transforms, engenders transformation, and can be transformed. For example, the seed that is planted grows into the plant that is harvested. Consumption is also a transformative act. When one eats, the body is replenished with necessary fuel and

[728] *Legend of the Suns,* in *History and Mythology of the Aztecs: Codex Chimalpopoca*, trans. John Bierhorst (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1992).

[729] *Histoyre du Mechique,* in *History and Mythology of the Aztecs: Codex Chimalpopoca*, trans. John Bierhorst (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1992).

continues to grow and live. Food is also transformed by humans. The seed that is planted and later harvested becomes the grain that is ground, made into dough, and prepared in numerous ways. It is not surprising, then, why the Aztecs chose food as a dynamic symbol in their migration and origin accounts as well as in the many rituals they celebrated throughout the year.

In the rituals the Aztecs performed, the transformative power of food is often highlighted. This is apparent in the annual series of *veintena* ceremonies, which were dedicated to specific gods and organized around the agricultural cycle within the 365-day solar calendar. Veintena rituals used food in various ways: to decorate temples, participants, sculpture and living representatives of deities; to feed the gods, participants, and observers; and to mark a special time or moment in the ceremony. In addition to using food in these tangible ways, some veintenas used food in more esoteric ways. For example, during *Huetozoztli* (Great Vigil) in honor of Centeotl (Maize Cob Lord), maize was offered as maize kernels, dough balls, and tortillas (Figure 6.3). These offerings highlight the transformation of food and illustrate a cycle of continuous change. This metaphor would have been a significant one for the Aztec audience that would connect food with the power of cosmic transformation and continuity.

The choice of foods in these ceremonies is important. Staples such as maize, beans, chia, and amaranth appear in some of the most sacred of the veintenas. The Aztecs depended on these foods daily for their physical existence and transformed them

into symbols necessary for continued cosmic existence. In rituals these everyday foods became sacred.[730]

In addition to ritual performance, Aztec art reiterated these food-related ideologies visually. For example, a huge stone block found in Mexico City depicts four large maize cobs in relief on one side (Figure. 8.1). Interpreted as an altar, a monument such as this probably served as a receptacle for various offerings to the gods, thus allowing participants to connect with the spiritual realm. Here the maize cobs would not be associated with the tortillas that were eaten on a daily basis, but rather as a sacred food connected to the gods and the cosmic realm.

Rituals involving food continued after contact with the Spanish. Chapter 7, which investigated the ways food was used in the early colonial period (ca. 1521-1600), reveals that some practices reflect a pre-Hispanic connection, others a European one, yet others a link to both. One is struck by how strong Indian traditions related to food continue to be in Mexico from ancient to modern times.

Although many contemporary uses of food in Mexico reflect a fusion with European culture, food use and consumption are still intimately connected to the pre-Hispanic past. From the very beginning of Aztec myth and history, food was an important aspect of both creation and migration stories. As the Aztec settled in the Basin of Mexico and began their imperialistic expansion in the fifteenth century, foodstuffs became intertwined with their rise to power. With each conquered province came a new demand for specific food items.

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[730] As historian Felipe Fernández-Armesto has noted, "Staples are almost always sacred, because people depend on them: they possess divine power. See Felipe Fernández-Armesto, *Food: A History* (London: MacMillan, 2001), 34.

The use of food in contemporary native ritual has been documented by several scholars. In some native rural communities in Mexico, a maize wafer serves as the host during the Catholic ritual of communion.[731] Anthropologist Alan Sandstrom has noted the continuing importance of maize to the spiritual and ritual life of Nahuas living in Amatlán, a remote village in the tropical region of northern Veracruz.[732] Of particular significance is the continued use of maize kernels in divination (Figure 8.2). The contemporary rituals recorded by Sandstrom resonate with the domestic ones performed by the ancient Aztecs. The Appendix to Book 5 (The Omens) of the Florentine Codex, for example, records the various ways food was used in rituals that took place in the home.[733] Dishes made with maize often functioned as omens. For example, a tortilla doubled over could have various possible interpretations, such as a visit from a surprise guest or the return of a spouse.[734]

Sandstrom also documents how Nahua spiritual specialists use maize, as well as coins or small pre-Hispanic axes and carved pieces of green stone, to restore harmony in the human world.[735] In Amatlán, people still recognize the importance of the sacred

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[731] Dr. Jane G. Landers, oral communication, April 2006.

[732] Alan R. Sandstrom, *Corn is Our Blood: Culture and Ethnic Identity in a Contemporary Aztec Indian Village* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991). Especially important to this discussion is Chapter 6, “Religion and the Nahua Universe,” 229-322.

[733] Bernardino de Sahagún, *Florentine Codex: General History of the Things of New Spain*, 12 vols., trans. and ed. Arthur J. Anderson and Charles E. Dibble (Santa Fe: School of American Research; Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1950-1982), Books 4-5, 184-188.

[734] Ibid., 187-188.

[735] Sandstrom, 235-237.

nature of the earth; they view it as both male and female, akin to the Aztec conception and representation of the Earth deity Tlaltecuhtli.[736]

The reciprocal relationship between the earth and humanity is still a concern of contemporary indigenous groups in Mexico. Anthropologist Tim Knab, who has worked with the Nahua of San Miguel in the Sierra de Puebla, records a contemporary prayer:

> We live here on the earth
> We are all fruits of the earth
> The earth sustains us
> We grow here, on the earth and lower
> And when we die we wither in the earth
> We are all fruits of the earth.
> We eat of the earth
> Then the earth eats us.[737]

This prayer emphasizes the interdependency between the earth, its bounty, and humanity. The earth provides the necessary foodstuffs for human beings to sustain themselves, and thus grow and live; yet when they die, they return, or give back to the earth, so the cycle can begin again. During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries human sacrifice was a major component of many of the veintena ceremonies.[738] Sacrifices were considered a form of "debt-payment," and were performed to keep a cosmic balance. The Aztecs offered to the gods the most precious substance available, human hearts and blood, so that they could continue receiving the bounty of the earth.

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[736] Ibid., 240.

[737] As quoted by Johanna Broda, "Templo Mayor as Ritual Space," in The Great Temple of Tenochtitlan: Center and Periphery in the Aztec World," ed. Johanna Broda, Davíd Carrasco, and Eduardo Matos Moctezuma (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 107. Tim Knab also notes many other prayers to the earth, some of which include references to food preparation as well. For example, one prayer includes "those who eat the earth, who heat the earth." See Timothy J. Knab, "Life in the Holy Earth, The Aztec Underworld in the Natural World of the Sierra de Puebla: A Geography," in *The Dialogue of Earth and Sky: Dreams, Souls, Curing, and the Modern Aztec Underworld* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2004, 110.

[738] Sacrifices performed during specific veintenas are discussed in Chapter 6.

This concept of feeding the gods in return for their feeding humanity was communicated in Aztec art by such monuments as the *Sun Stone*, which shows the central solar deity[739] with a protruding knife-tongue and grasping human hearts. It is also a key message of the Foundation Scene of *Codex Mendoza*, where an eagle, a symbol of the sun, lands atop a nopal tree, as his claws grasp the cactus' flowering fruits that represent human hearts.

Perhaps one of the most visible examples of the continued role of food in contemporary ritual is that of Day of the Dead celebrations in Mexico (Figure 8.3).[740] The holiday climaxes on November 2, the Christian feast of All Souls, which is dedicated to the departed souls of relatives. People welcome their dead relatives back into the earthly realm by setting up altars in their homes and at grave sites. Part of the ceremony consists of adorning shrines and graves with flowers and food. Food appears throughout the celebration, most notably in sugar confections in the shape of skulls, but also in offerings of food to the dead that include specially prepared meals, chocolate beverages, and sweets. While the celebration is not specific to the Nahuas, the various rituals involved certainly parallel pre-conquest Aztec ceremonies for the dead.

The numerous deities connected with food in art, ritual, and myth thus reflect the importance of food in the Aztec worldview. Maize alone was associated with nine different gods. Agricultural rituals demanded an enormous amount of time and energy from Aztecs at all levels of society throughout the year. In short, food – its attainment and consumption on both the everyday and ritual levels – meant life for the Aztecs

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[739] This image has also been identified as the Earth Monster Tlaltecuthli. See Chapter 2.

[740] The literature on Day of the Dead celebration is quite extensive. Stanley Brandes, "Iconography in Mexico's Day of the Dead: Origins and Meanings," *Ethnohistory* 45, no. 2 (Spring 1998): 181-218, is particularly useful in its examination of pre-conquest and European models for the celebration.

APPENDIX
SAHAGÚN'S BOOK TWO (THE CEREMONIES)

| Veintena | Major Deities | Food | Fasting | Dough Images | Painted Images in Book Two |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Atlcahualo (Ceasing of Water) | Tlaloc, Chalchiuhtlicue (Jade Her Skirt), Quetzalcoatl (Quetzal Feather Serpent) | amaranth seeds, tortillas | | | |
| Tlacaxipehualiztli (Flaying of Men) | Xipe Totec (Flayed Our Lord) | *tlacatlaolli* (dried maize stew, pulque, tortillas of uncooked maize, tamales of wild amaranth seeds, turkey hens | yes | | #1-12 |
| Tozoztontli (Small Vigil) | Tlaloc Coatlicue (Serpent Her Skirt) | food served (not specified) | | | |
| Hueytozoztli (Great Vigil) | Centeotl (Maize Cob Lord) | white atole, atole made of maize softened with lime, *aquetzalli* (atole made with fruit), hard baked frog, pinole with beans, toasted maize, maize of various colors, beans, amaranth, chia, quail | yes | | #13-14 |
| Toxcatl (Dry Thing) | Tezcatlipoca (Smoking Mirror), Titlacauan (We His Slaves) | tamales made with fruit, tamales softened with lime, bean and corn-meal cakes, tamales of coarse white flour, tamales rolled up in amaranth seed dough, quail, other (not specified) | yes | Huitzilopochtli | #15-21 |

| Veintena | Major Deities | Food | Fasting | Dough Images | Painted Images in Book Two |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Etzalcualiztli (Eating of Etzalli) | Rain Gods | etzalli (cooked maize and beans), maize balls, green chilies | yes | | #22-23 |
| Tecuilhuitontli (Small Feast Day of the Lords) | Huixtociuatl (Lady of Salt) | pulque | | | #24-25 |
| Hueytecuihuitl (Great Feast Day of the Lords) | Xilonen (Young Maize Ear Doll) | pinole sweetened with honey, atole, tamales made with maize, tamales made with fruit, tamales made with blossoms, tamales with twisted ends, cane of green corn, cooked amaranth greens, pulque; feeding of poor for seven or eight days | yes | | #26-28 |
| Tlaxochimaco (Giving of Flowers) | Huitzilopochtli (Humming Bird Left) | tamales, turkey hens, dogs, pulque | | | |
| Xocotlhuetzi (Xocotl Falls) | Xiuhtecuhtli (Turquoise Lord) | food served (not specified) | | Xiuhtecuhtli | |
| Ochpaniztli (Road Sweeping) | Teteo Innan (Gods Their Mother) | maize and squash seeds | | | |
| Teotleco (Arrival of the Gods) | Huitzilopochtli (Humming Bird Left), Xiuhtecuhtli (Turquoise Lord) | dried grains of maize, ears of maize, toasted maize, maize dough balls, pulque | | | |

| Veintena | Major Deities | Food | Fasting | Dough Images | Painted Images in Book Two |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Tepeihuitl (Hill Feast Day) | Rain Gods | pulque | | mountains | |
| Quecholli (Precious Feather) | Mixcoatl (Cloud Serpent) | great hunt: deer, coyotes, rabbits, other food and drink (not specified) | yes | | |
| Panquetzaliztli (Raising of the Banners) | Huitzilopochtli (Humming Bird Left) | tamales of amaranth seeds, pulque, chocolate, meat, other food (not specified) | yes | Huitzilopochtli | |
| Atemoztli (Descent of Water) | Rain Gods | small tamales, sauces, chocolate, pulque, other food (not specified) | | mountains | |
| Tititl (Contraction) | Illamatecuhtli (Old Mother), Tonan (Our Mother), Cozcamiauh (Necklace of Corn Flowers) | maize balls | | | |

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