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Indigenous Tribute in Pre-Columbian and Christian Religious Mesoamerican Context

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Abstract

Several cases exist in which indigenous communities combine traditional ritual objects – especially codices – with Christian liturgical elements such as choir books, papal bulls, and sculptural images. This relationship demonstrates a dynamic and flexible indigenous ideology, in which Indigenous people aim to integrate and incorporate, rather than merge or blend, culturally foreign elements into their own. Here, we focus on one exceptional and almost unknown case. The convent of Tlaquiltenango (Morelos) was built in the second half of the Sixteenth century by Indigenous people working for Franciscan friars, and was later occupied by Dominican friars. In the cloister walls of this beautiful convent, more than one hundred fragments of Indigenous traditional pictography were hidden, discovered at the beginning of the Twentieth century. The fragments had been concealed by Indigenous people since the Sixteenth century using lime. The main subject of these fragments is tribute payment, similar to several other cases we have identified. In this paper, we aim to explore some ideas about why tribute payment frequently emerges as the primary theme in Indigenous objects hidden inside Christian objects. Our hypothesis is that tribute payment, prior to the conquest, carried important connotations that linked Indigenous commoners with their traditional lords and authorities, as well as with their gods. These connotations have not been sufficiently emphasized and their study may help us understand why some Indigenous people concealed tribute codices inside Christian objects during the Sixteenth century and possibly thereafter. Here we present an example of the concealment of Indigenous objects as a form of homage to their traditional rulers.

Keywords: Indigenous colonial Tribute System, Colonial Indigenous Christian symbols, Colonial Codices, Ethnohistory.

Il tributo indigeno nel contesto religioso mesoamericano, dal periodo precolombiano a quello cristiano

Diversi casi dimostrano come le comunità indigene combinino oggetti rituali tradizionali – in particolare codici – con elementi liturgici cristiani, come libri corali, bolle papali e immagini scultoree. Questa relazione evidenzia un'ideologia indigena dinamica e flessibile, in cui i popoli indigeni mirano a integrare e incorporare, piuttosto che fondere o mescolare, elementi culturalmente estranei al proprio contesto. In questo caso, ci concentriamo su un esempio eccezionale e quasi sconosciuto. Il convento di Tlaquiltenango (Morelos) fu costruito nella seconda metà del XVI secolo dagli indigeni sotto la supervisione dei frati francescani, per essere successivamente occupato dai frati domenicani. Nelle pareti del chiostro di questo bellissimo convento furono nascosti oltre cento frammenti di pittografia tradizionale indigena, scoperti all'inizio del XX secolo. I frammenti erano stati nascosti dagli indigeni fin dal XVI secolo utilizzando la calce. Il tema principale di questi frammenti è il pagamento del tributo, come in numerosi altri casi da noi identificati. In questo articolo intendiamo esplorare alcune idee sul perché il pagamento del tributo emerga così frequentemente come tema dominante negli oggetti indigeni nascosti all'interno di contesti cristiani. La nostra ipotesi è che il pagamento del tributo, prima della conquista, avesse importanti connotazioni che collegavano i comuni indigeni ai loro signori tradizionali e alle autorità, oltre che ai loro dèi. Queste connotazioni non sono state sufficientemente evidenziate e il loro studio potrebbe aiutarci a comprendere perché alcuni indigeni abbiano nascosto codici di questo argomento all'interno di oggetti cristiani durante il XVI secolo e forse anche oltre. Qui presentiamo dunque un esempio di come la pratica di nascondere oggetti indigeni rappresentasse un omaggio ai loro leader tradizionali.

Parole chiave: Sistema dei tributi coloniali indigeni, simboli cristiani indigeni coloniali, codici coloniali, etnostoria.

Introduction

It is possible that the majority of studies concerning Mexico's indigenous *pueblos*' relationship with colonial institutions have been viewed from a Western perspective, with a strong emphasis on its economic impact on indigenous communities. This might be the case with the important tribute system during that time. However, there seems to be a gap in our understanding, particularly concerning the intricacies and nuances of the indigenous tribute institution. We offer these preliminary hypotheses, recognizing that they are just the beginning of a much deeper and more comprehensive research journey.

Prior to the arrival of the Spaniards, the tribute paid by Indian commoners to their lords, and similarly the tribute paid to the rulers of Tenoch-

titlan, Texcoco and Tlacopan (the so-called Triple Alliance which ruled over all of Mexico until the Conquest), was a vital element not only in their material affairs but in their religious life as well. This system has been studied for colonial time by many important scholars, yet there are still some questions about the indigenous meaning of this system that we can continue to explore. In this spirit, we will explore a selection of examples from diverse regions of Mesoamerica, spanning different periods; we will also delineate a particular case of a colonial convent in the Morelos region.

Instances and cases

Ruiz Medrano suggests that an association may have existed between the image of power attributed to the native nobility and the historical legitimacy claimed by the Indian *pueblos* in the colonial period regarding their lands. It would otherwise be impossible to explain why, in so many maps, codices, and pictorial representations, as well as in various written documents, the Indians were at such pains to present their territory, local history and town symbols linked to the power of their native lords, since the native nobility had long since lost its high social and political status in many regions (Ruiz 2010). Alongside this effort, there was also a parallel effort to assert the legitimacy of noble lineages. The fact that the native nobility, the legitimate traditional indigenous authorities, continued to possess great symbolic force throughout the colonial period was due in part to the strong role played by the oral tradition within Indian pueblos. The symbols of power surrounding the ancient members of the native nobility were tied to and transmitted by this tradition. Similarly, a long-held tradition underlies the symbolic power of the indigenous "native lords," or local governors, and their forebears; on occasion, these figures merge into a single entity and are imaginatively represented as the mediators of divine forces (Ruiz 2007).

According to Maarten Jansen, there appears to be a significant connection between the characteristics associated with the traditional indigenous lords and the legitimation of the tribute system on a symbolic level. He suggests that this link has a long history, stretching back to the time of the Olmec civilization and extending all the way up to that of the Mexica (Jansen 1997).

During the colonial period, these concepts were documented in the Annals of Juan Bautista, a prominent Nahuatl source. For example, it is

recorded in the Annals that in 1564 the Nahua authorities of Mexico disposed that the indigenous painters, or *tlacuiloque*, working on a Catholic religious painting, should produce a work of the highest quality. The reason given was that these lords, principals, or nobles of Mexico had sacrificed themselves for their people (Reyes 2001).

In some *pueblos* in the regions of Puebla and Oaxaca, Indian noble families were still accorded exceptional recognition as figures of power (Ruiz 2010). For example, the *Mapa de Cuauhtinchan No. 2*, made in the town of the same name in Puebla in the Sixteenth century, represents powerful images of ritual sacrifice and sacred statuary. Moreover, the descendants of the pre-Hispanic ruling lineages have maintained power and lands into current times (Ruiz 2007).

There appears to be a clear association between the primordial titles, pictorial documents, maps, and the traditional native nobility on the one hand and what seem to be other symbols of more traditional power on the other. It appears that Indian nobles from the town of Cuautinchan, at some point in the Sixteenth century, may have chosen to display significant elements of Mesoamerican cosmogony within the town's monastery, which could have been intended to support the legitimacy of their *teteuctin,* or traditional lords. In addition, they painted a divinatory calendar at the entrance to the monastery. This phenomenon is not an isolated case, as demonstrated by Eleanor Wake. There are several churches and Christian crosses across Mexico that bear traditional indigenous calendar symbols (Wake 2010).

The colonial titles of the town of Atzompa, in the State of Puebla, contain not only a pictorial map but also musical scores, and all this was wrapped in deer skin[1]. Additionally, a Testerian codex, produced in 1719 by the descendants of the Tenochtitlan Emperor Moctezuma, contains a Bull of the Holy Crusade dated from 1700 and a set of cadastral or traditional tribute documents bound in with Christian sermons, offering a compelling example of the intertwining of Christian and traditional elements[2]. There is a recently published study about this interesting document (Boone *et al.* 2017).

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[1] Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico, (AGN) Títulos de tierras, Caja 21, file. 1. We thank the late Professor Eleanor Wake for sharing with us this information.

[2] Bibliothèque National de France, (BNF) Fond Mexicain, no. 77, year 1719. We thank very much Bérénice Gaillemin for generously sharing with us not only a copy of this

We can also find indigenous traditional ritual objects alongside Christian symbols in many Otomi family burial chapels from the Querétaro region; there we may observe that in the Nineteenth century, people buried deer horns with their ancestors (Chemín Bässler 1993; personal visit to these Otomi family chapels, summer 2016).

It is also noteworthy that New Spain's indigenous population incorporated papal bulls into the rituals devoted to the ancient gods. John Chuchiak has observed that the papal bulls held significant importance for the colonial-era Maya as sacred objects, and he has demonstrated how they were incorporated into their traditional beliefs. Chuchiak's observations were driven, in part, by a curiosity surrounding the presence of a papal bull attached to a prominent pre-Hispanic Maya codex, the Madrid Codex. The bull, a Bull of the Holy Crusade, was made from paper that dated to the late Sixteenth or early Seventeenth century and was probably attached to the codex by a Maya sacristan during that time span (Chuchiak 2004).

It is worth noting that the Bulls of the Holy Crusade were often attached to Indigenous land titles, as evidenced by land records from the Seventeenth century prepared by the Nahua *pueblo* of Magdalena Mixuhca, situated on the outskirts of Mexico City[3]. The local indigenous nobility and their lands are also depicted on an Eighteenth-century codex (though bearing the date 1672) produced in the pueblo of San Luis Huexotlan (present-day State of Mexico). It is said that this codex has a copy, apparently granted in 1700, of the Bull of the Holy Crusade attached to its reverse side. The manuscript, which appears to be a map showing various plots of land, is divided into different-sized rectangles on which appear drawings – done in a very late style – of buildings and persons and texts written in Nahuatl[4].

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manuscript but also her ample knowledge about the so called *Testerian Codice*s and their cognitive function.

[3] Biblioteca del Museo Nacional de Antropología, Codex Vault (BMNA), A II 8-2, *Documento de la Magdalena Mixuhca.* It seems that these records were submitted to the BMNA only fairly recently by residents of the pueblo. The donation also included a map of the community and its environs. That the map fails to correspond to what is described in the written part of the record is probably attributable to its superficiality as well as to a significant time gap between its production and the preparation of the original record.

[4] BMNA 35-36, Códice de los señores de San Luis Huexotlan y San Lorenzo Axotlan. San Luis Obispo Huexotla, Estado de México, circa 1672. Strip of European paper to

In a 1764 legal proceeding, the Indians of Amecameca (present State of Mexico) produced an extensive record of titles containing documents pertaining to their jurisdictional rights and boundaries, pictorial maps, pictures of their early rulers, and a papal bull (*Títulos Primordiales*[5], primordial land titles). Their extensive list of *tlatoque*, caciques, and native lords includes the names of the *pueblo*'s rulers from the Fifteenth to the Eighteenth century. In a similar manner, the Nahua inhabitants of the Tepezintla, located in the northern mountain range of present state of Puebla, have maintained a bark strip of paper from the Eighteenth century on which the caciques of the *pueblo* are represented. This document, accompanied by a Nahuatl gloss, is bound with the Bull of the Holy Crusade dating to 1596 (Becerra 2002).

This last case shares notable similarities with that of the Nahua town of San Simón Oztuma in the present-day state of Guerrero. In this town, there are several colonial documents in Nahuatl, most of them from the Seventeenth century, that talk about the local people, church obligations, and also some documents that seem to come from the local colonial indigenous *Cabildo*, among which is a papal bull[6].

In both cases, there is a clear connection between primordial titles, pictorial documents, maps and the traditional native élite on one side, and the use of papal bulls and other symbols of conventional power on the other. Furthermore, we have a remarkable example in the colonial Peru's study by Thomas Cummins, where an Inca lord was mummified with a papal bull attached to his chest (Cummins 2011).

There may be additional examples of traditional indigenous representations embedded within culturally foreign contexts (along with the reverse dynamic). However, this phenomenon might not have received much attention from specialists due to its apparent contradiction. The image of these assemblages of unlikely objects may evoke the perception that they are incoherent and of fleeting significance at best. Typically, when a codex is found, for example, inside a choral book, it is generally

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which is affixed, in the lower margin, a strip of indigenous paper. Folded in the form of a six-sheeted screen fold, 29 x 111.5 centimeters.

5 Archivo General de la Nación, México (AGN) *Títulos Primordiales*, caja 20, exp. 5.

6 San Simón Oztuma, Guerrero, local archive, file 17, papers in colonial Nahuatl, Sevententh century. We thank Professor Ruth Arboleyda for sharing with us photographs of these documents.

assumed that its placement is simply a matter of happenstance and that there is no deeper explanation at work. The presence of a codex adorned with a papal bull has, on occasion, been met with a certain degree of ambivalence by scholars. For instance, Ramón Mena, a Mexican historian from the early Twentieth century, found the presence of a bull attached to the Codex of San Luis Huexotlan disconcerting. He expressed concern over the state of the codex, noting its poor condition and the quality of the drawings and writing, which he found to be substandard. He described it as a fragmentary codex, noting its dirty state and the presence of old printed matter with blurred Gothic script affixed to it. The well-known Eighteenth-century collector Lorenzo Boturini has referred to them as «old Bulls» (Mena 1923).

However, it is important to note that Christian symbols are not the only elements associated with indigenous traditional power. Written and pictorial records of tribute payment to native lords are also present in Christian objects. It is evident that colonial indigenous people demonstrated a desire to incorporate their native pictographic tradition into Christian symbols. One notable example is that of the *Cristos de caña*, hollow papier-mâché figures reminiscent of the crucified Christ, crafted by indigenous artisans from cornstalks or other plants. These artifacts, as we understand it, contain codices within them, as is the case of the Christ of Mexicaltzingo in the State of Mexico[7]. The image of Christ was made from maize by indigenous craftsmen and contained traditional codices (Carrillo 1949; Taylor 1996)[8].

The Mexicaltzingo Christ figure was discovered by a conservator in the trash can of the *pueblo*'s church. It is believed that sometime in the middle of the Twentieth century, the community's priest decided it was time to clean out the church. In his efforts to restore order, he disposed of a Sixteenth-century *Cristo de caña* crafted by Indian artisans. Fortunately, the conservator was present at the time and was able to retrieve and subsequently restore this religious artifact. During the restoration process, the conservator discovered several fragments of Sixteenth-century indigenous codices concealed within the inner frame.

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7 Biblioteca del Museo Nacional de Antropología, Codex Vault, *Códice de Mexicalcingo* 35-127.

8 Professor William B. Taylor is the only person who has taken note of this outstanding case (Taylor 1996: 61-62).

These items, which were handed over in 1964 to Mexico's National Anthropology Museum, consist of a group of seven fragments of indigenous paper of varying size on which are depicted scenes concerning Indian tribute payments. It appears that this collection belonged to three different pictorial manuscripts. There is another group of fourteen fragments with text written in Nahuatl, as well as a final group of additional fragments that includes three religious paintings from the Sixteenth century (Glass & Robertson 1975).

The *Cristos de caña* appear to have traveled beyond Mexico's borders to the Iberian Peninsula, which suggests the potential for other religious artifacts, including *Cristos*, to contain elements of indigenous tribute codices. For example, fragments of an indigenous codex from the first half of the Sixteenth century were recently discovered (during Holy Week of 2009) inside the ribbon on a cloth covering the genitals of a *Cristo de caña*. The Christ figure is believed to be housed in the parish of Bornos, located in Spain's province of Cádiz, and it is thought to have been brought from «the Indies». The fragments appear to depict a register of tribute obligations, seemingly listing the names of the Indian tributaries in alphabetical order. There are other examples of this, such as the Tilde Christ, and some other found in Badajoz. It has been suggested that the combination of *Cristos de caña* and *amate* paper inside them with tribute codices might due to the order of the Third Council of Mexico that in 1585 tried to forbid the fabrication of Christ's images made of cane.

The cloister of Tlaquiltenango´s convent and the tribute

In addition, as we have found, other Christian objects to which the Indians added tribute codices and culturally significant items reflecting their traditions, were stored in the cloister of the Sixteenth century convent of Tlaquiltenango, in Morelos[9]. In 1906 the low cloister walls were found to be covered with more than 100 fragments of tribute codices. They were all the work of Indians and are all painted on bark paper or *amate*[10]. Many

[9] There is a second edition of a chronicle about the town made by the local priest Pbro. Gabriel Calderón, (2004); recently a brief description of the monastery and the rivalry among Franciscans and Dominicans friars in Sixteenth century Tlaquiltenango has been published by Laura Elena Hinojosa (Hinojosa 2009).

[10] These fragments belonged to what became known as the *Códice de Mauricio de la Arena*. Six of them are housed at present in Mexico's National Museum of Anthropology

of these artifacts are very little known to specialists. The use of bark paper in colonial convents is well documented, as evidenced by the beautiful paintings made in *amate* by the Indian Juan Gerson in the Franciscan Convent of Tecamachalco, Puebla (Reyes 2000). Recently, the historian Melchor Soto Canchola (n.d.) discovered an impressive painted mural on the back of the principal altar of the Convent of San Bernardino, in Xochimilco (Mexico City) made by local Xochimilca artists in *amate*. The mural, which measures approximately 10.82 x 11.15 feet, features several Franciscan friars[11].

The Tlaquiltenango convent and its maize-stalk Christ figures are notable examples of the use of codices from the Sixteenth century, which offer insights into the tribute and taxation exacted from Indian *pueblos* during that period. It is noteworthy that these cases are not incidental; as we have seen, others have come to light, and we believe that they express the Indians' conscious use of both Christian and indigenous symbols of power. The resulting synthesis demonstrates more than an overarching cultural dynamism; it also reveals how central the tribute codices were to the Indians' affirmation of their *pueblo*-based, communal identity.

It appears that it was the priest of Tlaquiltenango, Father José Agapito Minos Mateos, who first detected the codices in 1894. These codices had been painted hundreds of years earlier on the walls of the cloister inside the convent and then covered over at some later date by a thick layer of chalk. It appears that Father Minos may not have fully considered the significance of the discovery to the local community of Tlaquiltenango. Instead, he promptly informed a local landowner, Juan Reyna, of his find. Reyna, who had studied in Ithaca, New York, in 1896, had connections in the United States, as he was acquainted with Herbert Spinder, a well-known mayanist archeologist and director of the Museum of New York at the time. With the assistance of Father Minos, Reyna was able to sell more than ninety fragments of the codex to the Museum of Natural History of New York for the sum of two thousand dollars (Minos 2007).

(MNA 35-21) The others, nearly a hundred, are in the American Museum of National History in New York City: *Códice Tlaquiltenango*, American Museum of Natural History, rare folio 16-d, Vols. 1 and 2.

11 We thank historian Melchor Soto Canchola for a guided visit to the Convent and for a copy of his article: *Los santos de papel (pintura mural sobre papel amate) ex convento de San Bernardino de Siena Xochimilco* unpublished manuscript.

According to the contemporary town's historian, Agur Arredondo Torres, the codices affixed to the walls of the convent had likely been covered over prior to 1700. He bases this on the fact that the fragments mention communities, such as Atzompa, which ceased to exist long ago and whose one-time location has passed out of all memory (*Ibidem*). The construction of the monastery of Tlaquiltenango, carried out under the auspices of the Franciscan friars (Figs. 1 and 2), began in 1540 and concluded sometime after 1550, making it one of the oldest such colonial structures in the region of Morelos. For a brief period, it became the object of ecclesiastical rivalry. In 1570, it came under the care of the Dominican order; however, in 1584, the local population of Tlaquiltenango expressed strong desire for the return of the Franciscans, and the Dominicans temporarily left the site. The dispute matter was eventually resolved through the intervention of Archbishop Alonso de Montúfar. The Franciscan friars were reinstalled and they remained in control of the monastery until the late Eighteenth century, when it was placed in the hands of the secular clergy (Calderón 2004) [12].

Fig.1. Tlaquiltenando monastery, wall paitings (photo: E. Ruiz Medrano).

[12] It is not clear the year of edition of this book.

Fig.2. Tlaquiltenando monastery, wall paitings, detail (photo: E. Ruiz Medrano).

The artists responsible for the codices on the cloister walls have not been fully identified. It is generally agreed that the paintings on the cloister walls were created by native artists, who also created religious scenes and imagery on the entryway of the convent. The latter paintings, which are believed to have been created in the second half of the Sixteenth century, are still visible today. One scene, for example, depicts the confession of an Indian nobleman by a friar, with spiders and toads – an allegorical representation of his sins – descending from the Indian's mouth, while an angel hovers above his shoulder[13].

We have had the privilege of examining the fragments of the codex housed in the National Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City and The Natural History Museum in New York. Based on our research and a period of study in Tlaquiltenango, we believe we have gained a deeper understanding of the context surrounding the elaboration of the convent's codex. In all these cases, there is a common theme: the codices treat the subject of indigenous tribute payment. Those who have studied this practice have focused on and emphasized its vital economic aspect (Miranda 1980). However, it is also important to consider that for the Indians of New Spain, the tribute they paid to their native lords might have carried other meanings as well.

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13 There are other examples of this in colonial Mexican churches.

The lords of ancient Mesoamerica collected tribute during religious festivals, a practice depicted in some surviving Sixteenth-century codices, such as the Azoyú Codex or the aforementioned Tlaquiltenango Codex (Fig. 3), with its symbols of the *veintenas* representing the festivals of *Tlacaxipehualiztli, Etzalcualiztli, Ochpaniztli* and *Atemoztli,* and indicating the periodicity of tribute payments, as Henry B. Nicholson has stated (Nicholson 2002).

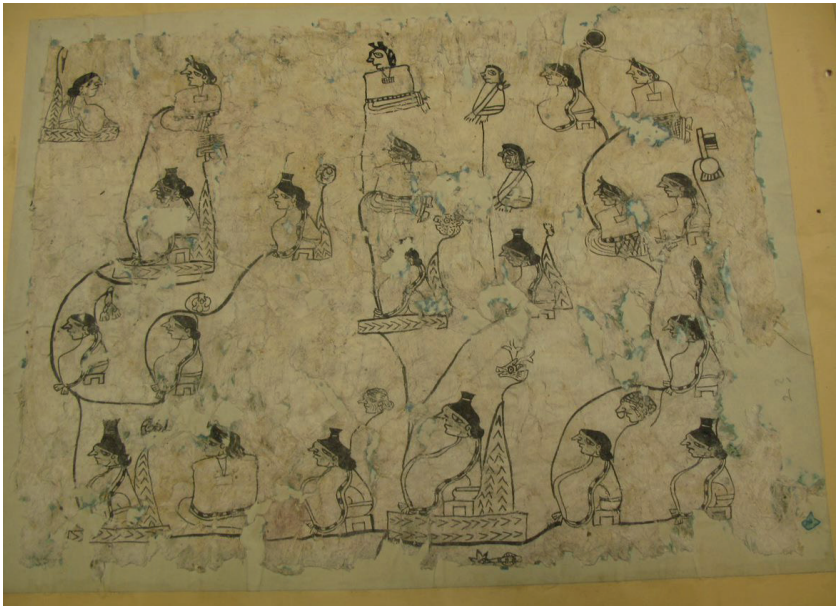

Fig. 3. Tlaquiltenango Codex, the lords of Tlaquiltenango and their lineages (photo: E. Ruiz Medrano).

In this sense, the *veintenas* in ancient Mesoamerica were closely associated with the performance of specific rites, which, as Michel Graulich has demonstrated, were regularly undertaken by members of every caste and class, from the humblest peasant to the highest-ranking lords and priests in the faust solemnities. The time between these rites was determined by two calendars: the solar one of 365 days and the ritual one of 260 days. In ancient Mexico, the 18 «months» of the «year» lasted twenty days, and each was marked by festivities. One such example is *Tlacaxipehualiztli,* which means «flaying of men» and was a war festival dedicated to the god Xipe Totec. The festival *Etzalcualiztli* is believed to have been dedicated to

Tlaloc, the god of rain and water. The earth goddess, Toci, was honored in the festivities of *Ochpaniztli,* while the festival of *Atemoztli* also celebrated water (Graulich 1999).

Additionally, in the Tlaquiltenango codex, there is evidence of indigenous pictorial representations also interspersed with early colonial fragments of musical scores. Ethelia Ruiz in 2012 presented these images to members of a seminar on ancient Mexican music at Mexico's National Autonomous University and they believe the music scores date to the late Sixteenth century. They are aware of only one other such example in Mexico: a set of musical notations found in the Cathedral of the city of Puebla[14]. Additionally, within the *amate* tribute codices, there are colonial fragments of Christian sermons written both in Latin and in Nahuatl, attached to the cloister walls.

Regarding the *Cristo de caña* figures and the monastery of Tlaquiltenango, the associated codices are believed to date to the colonial Sixteenth century and are thought to deal with coeval tribute and taxation matters affecting the Indian *pueblos*. It is important to note that such cases are not accidental. Instead, we believe they reflect the Indians' experience with and manipulation of not only their own symbolic universe, but the symbolic universe of Christian power and authority as well.

According to Maarten Jansen, there appears to be a significant link between the characteristics associated with the traditional indigenous lords and the legitimation of the tribute system on a symbolic level. There are numerous examples of this phenomenon that have been identified through research by various specialists. For instance, in the town of Zinacantán (Chiapas), the authority of caciques and civil office holders is said to be guided by two hierarchies: the religious cargo holders and the shamans. On this point, Evon Vogt respectfully suggests that «the structure of the gods and the structure of politics appear to be decisively interconnected in Zinacantan and Chamula» (Vogt 1973: 111).

A further subtlety has recently been illuminated by Bernardo Flores Medina in his analysis of the nahuatl concept of *tequitl*, which since the Sixteenth century has been translated as tribute, or work, or both. However, Medina's analysis suggests that for pre-Colonial indigenous society, the concept of *tequitl* might have been much more profound than simply eco-

[14] Conference presented by Professor Ethelia Ruiz, *Notas musicales indígenas en el convento de Tlaquiltenango*· at the Ancient Music Seminar held at Mexico's National Autonomous University (UNAM) October 20th, 2012.

nomic exchange through tribute or the obligation to provide labor (Flores 2010). From the perspective of the early Spanish conquerors, friars and settler population, what the indigenous people referred to as *tequitl* could be seen as similar to tribute or work. However, while there were similarities, the nuances differed. Tribute, as understood by the Spanish, represented the economic and material contributions to social and political institutions, such as the *encomienda* and the *corregiminento*. However, for the indigenous people, these associations represented only one aspect of the *tequitl*. *Tequitl* was seen as a way to foster contentment and fulfillment and it played a crucial role in maintaining a connection between people and the divine. The *tequio* among the native population today can be seen as a modern interpretation of this ancient concept, aiming to maintain a sense of unity and shared purpose within communities. The *tequio* refers to the labor or work that Indians provide their community without receiving any salary or financial compensation (Cancian 1976; Ruiz 2010; Olivier 2015).

A person elected or appointed to carry out particular civil or religious duties has the obligation to accept, because such activity will benefit the community as a whole (Flores 2010). *Tequio* can also involve participating in collective endeavors. It is part of a complex system that has been studied in greater depth for Mesoamerica and the Andean region. In Peru, for instance, John Murra explained that the revenues of the Lupaqa lords consisted primarily of access to peasant energies, and through them, to land and to herbs (Murra 1968: 128). He further suggests that

> there are hints in the sources that assistance in working any resource was not provided automatically in traditional Andean economies. People had to be formally requested, since work in the fields was conceived as part of an exchange, a system of reciprocity, even if it involved people of unequal rank. This initial step, which serves as the catalyst for reciprocal relations, merits greater attention in Andean studies. Contemporary ethnology can offer valuable insights that could inform our understanding of this subject. In the Andes, "land tenure" for both peasants and lords was meaningless without access to people. The concept of land and labor being intertwined in a reciprocal relationship formed a unified whole, which, while it could be analyzed in isolation, required a holistic approach to truly grasp its essence in Andean contexts (*Ivi*: 134).

The lords provided the initial seed, but at the appropriate time and upon «request», the planting and related work were carried out by «all the Indians», the community as a whole, in an atmosphere characterized by

sociability and accompanied by ritual and music. In Aymara, *haymatha* meant «to go and work in the fields that are planted communally, like those of the lord...or the poor». It also meant «to dance in the ancient way, particularly when they go to the fields of their leaders» (*Ivi*: 133-134), «what was the nature of the "reciprocal" relationship between the community and its lords». In the context of the Andean region and Mesoamerica, during the occasional work done by the community, it could be said that the lord provided hospitality and a festive atmosphere» (*Ivi*: 135; Flores-Marcial 2015).

The festive atmosphere is also integral to the performance of *tequitl* in Mesoamerica. There are numerous sources that document this, as well as many ethnographic accounts that highlight the Indians' festive mood as they begin a collective project (Sandstrom 1991; Monaghan 1990, 1995; Good 2005). In our experience, we have seen several times since 2004 the people from the Mixtec town of Cuquila singing all the time while performing hard tasks for the collectivity, such as building canals to bring water from a small lake situated in a mountainous, distant place (Ruiz 2010).

There are other examples of traditional indigenous representations that can be cited, such as the tribute statement paid by Otomi Indians from the town of Tenango that was attached to an Otomi *doctrina* (doctrine book) in 1785[15].

Another example is the Nahua Bible, which bears an indigenous tribute codex that has been studied by Mark Z. Christensen (2010). A further example involves a private antique collector who discovered, in late 2008, that the interior part of a Sixteenth-century wooden statue of a bishop had been covered with a codex done on bark paper (*amate*). The codex contained glyphs of tribute payments and accounts[16].

Conclusions

It can be hypothesized that the examples described throughout these pages provide valuable insights into the relationship between Indigenous com-

[15] Biblioteca del Museo Nacional de Antropología, Colección. (MBNA, Colección) CA 826 *Lengua otomí y su traducción al castellano compendio de doctrina por fray Antonio de Guadalupe Ramírez* (1785?).

[16] In debt to the Dr. Manuel García for providing us with photographs of this sculpture and its codex.

moners, their traditional lords and authorities and their spiritual beliefs. We suggest that these connotations have not been sufficiently emphasized and their study might help us understand the reasons why some Indigenous peoples hid tribute codices inside Christian objects during the Sixteenth Century and perhaps later. These findings suggest that the inclusion of such elements could reflect the complexity of the indigenous cultural reality, a reality characterized by a great cultural dynamism of Indian pueblos in both colonial and contemporary contexts.

Finally, as Olivier states – with numerous examples from pre-Columbian times to present day – every individual in ancient Mexico had an obligation to give his *tequitl. Tequitl* means office, work or tribute: it can be said that it is the obligation that every individual must contribute something to society (Carrasco 1978; Olivier 2015). The ancient gods also gave their *tequitl*; it is this constant serving (Olivier 2015), paying tribute, working for others that sustained the universe. Perhaps it was such a natural notion, an unspoken pact between the material and the immaterial realms that it did not need to be emphasized. It is conceivable that this idea was so deeply embedded in the cultural fabric that it was not explicitly highlighted, but rather reflected in religious and sacred colonial artifacts (Ruiz 2017).

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