

## 1-TOCHTLI, 2-ACATL SURVIVALS OF THE NEW FIRE CEREMONY 1558/1559; 1610/1611

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### RESUMEN

En el México prehispánico, grandes ceremonias se celebraban cada 52 años al momento de la congruencia de los dos ciclos básicos de 365 y 260 días. Los fieles apagaban todos los fuegos durante cinco días, después de los cuales un Fuego Nuevo estaba encendido sobre una víctima sacrificial. La evangelización de México se acompañó de sincretismos importantes de las tradiciones locales, con sus fechas y lugares de culto. Encontramos en los archivos de los siglos XVI y XVII la huellas de estas Ceremonias del Fuego Nuevo.

### ABSTRACT

In pre-Hispanic Mexico great ceremonies were celebrated every 52 years at the congruency of the two basic calendar cycles, of 365 and of 260 days. All ritual and domestic fires, were extinguished for five days. Then a new fire was lit on the chest of a victim. The evangelization of Mexico was accompanied by syncretism of the local faith, its feasts and places of cult. We find in the archives of the XVI and XVII centuries traces of the survivals of the New Fire Ceremony.

*Key Words:* archaeoastronomy

“In the year of thousand five hundred and fifty nine, ended another bunch of years which they call Toxihmolpilia. In that one they did not make any public ceremony because the Spaniards and priests were in this land.”

(B. de Sahagun, Codice florentino, Libro V.)

#### 1. 1558/1559 SAHAGUN

In his paper “*Bernardino de Sahagún, pionero de la antropología*”, Miguel León Portilla mentions that:

“*Bernardino reports that in 1558 he received of his superior the order to start what interested him so much. He should investigate what he called natural, human and divine things of the ancient Mexicans*” (M. Leon Portilla, 1999).

The date was probably not random, and it is possible that one of the reasons was the fear of the renovation of old beliefs and reactions against the imposed new faith which could lead to some excesses. In 1558-1559 the Great New Fire Ceremony should have been celebrated, and the natives certainly remembered all that had disappeared. 37 years after the conquest of Tenochtitlan, the wars and illnesses had dramatically reduced the population and the situation was apocalyptic. Nevertheless many

witnesses of the past had survived. Many still remembered the great New Fire Ceremony of 1507, It was the last chance to save the world from utter extinction by sacrificing to the gods in a last attempt to restore an epoch already idealized. Some understood that the only way to save something was to act discretely, but we find many testimonies of the sentiments which animated the souls of native Americans.

#### 2. THE BOURBON CODEX

The last page of the Borbonicus counts 52 years after the last New Fire celebrated in 1507, and leads to the year 1558/9, which clearly indicates a continuity of the old indigenous way of counting time by groups of 52 years. This year 2-*Acatl* is accompanied by the glyph of a *mamalhuaztli*, the instrument used to light the sacred fire by rotation.

#### 3. THE ANNALS OF TLATELOLCO

In the Annals of Tlatelolco, the image of Saint Sebastian is twice repeated for year 1-*Tochtli* (1558), and year 2-*Acatl* (1559). Heinrich Berlin mentions that:

“*We owe to Dr. Alfonso Caso the suggestion that this refers to the indigenous binding of the years associated to the representation of Saint Sebastian which coincide with the day of the commemoration of the pagan celebration*”. (H.Berlin, 1948:116),

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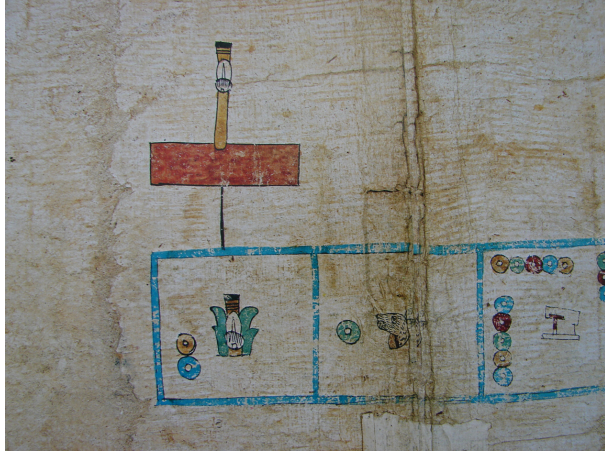


Fig. 1. The last page of the Borbonicus.

and we find thus another peculiar treatment of the years 1-*Tochtli*/2-*Acatl*, a testimony of the reminiscence of the native binding of the years. But why is Saint Sebastian represented twice to mark the year 1558?

The apparition of Venus as the morning star is strictly attached to the celebrations of the New Fire Ceremony, and was accompanied by the killing of a prisoner with arrows:

*“...during four days he armed himself with arrows; so that after eight days the great Star they call Quetzalcoatl appeared ...”* (Anales de Cuauhtitlan, 51).

If the two figures of Saint Sebastian of 1558 and 1559 mark the beginning of the *Xihuitl*, or Mexican year, it should mean that this Christian date fell at the proximity of the beginnings of the Mexican years. The days 1-*Nemontemi* and 1-*Izcalli* corresponded in 1558 to the Julian calendar 10th and the 15th of January and Saint Sebastian is on January 20th. Another possibility would be that the manuscript was written after the Gregorian reform in 1582. Then, the feast of Saint Sebastian, on Gregorian January 20th, a Julian day number 2290127, would fall exactly on the 1-*Nemontemi*, first day of the years 1-*Tochtli* and 2-*Acatl*, delimiting exactly the year 1-*Tochtli*. Were the Annals of Tlatelolco elaborated after the calendar reform of 1582? Or was it copied after that date? Or was it corrected with the addition of the two figures of Saint Sebastian? Or did the scribe of this document adopt the Gregorian calendar convention years before the reform took place? As strange as it might seem, this is not impossible. The Gregorian reform was planned and discussed many years before its application. The na-

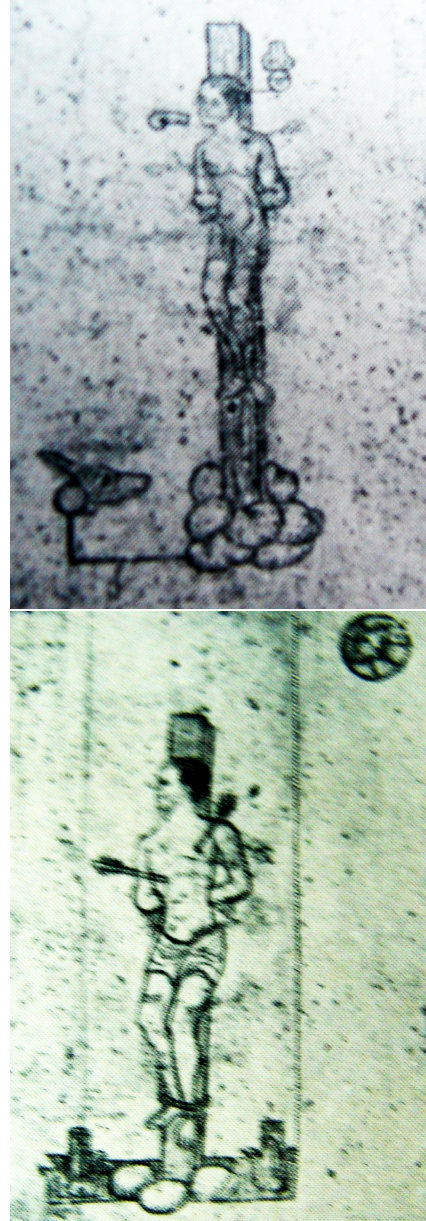


Fig. 2. The figure of Saint Sebastian in 1558 and in 1559.

tive scribe would only have to adopt an Easter root date of the 21st of March corresponding to the astronomical equinox. This possibility cannot be excluded as some other documents of the same period seem to have adopted such a convention as well.

Two other documents of the Tlatelolco collection mention again the New Fire Ceremony of the years 1558/1559: “1559, 1-*Tochtli*, - when the Mexicans bound their years” (Unos anales coloniales de Tlatelolco, 1519-1533, in Barlow, 1989:238). And in the codex Aubin: “Here our years were bound for the eighth time” (Barlow 1989:277).





Fig. 3. Codex Mexicanus page 9.

#### 4. CODEX MEXICANUS

Another document that deals with Mexican chronology is the Codex Mexicanus. It shows on its page 9 the Julian cycle of dominical letters incremented with the wheel of the Mexican year bearers. They match on the year 1-*Tochtli*: “Of the two wheels, the Mesoamerican one (right) shows a Series III Round while the Christian one (left) shows a solar circle; they mesh at 1 Rabbit 1558 AD” (Gordon Brotherston, 1983: 204).

As Brotherston and Prem mention, the date written in the upper left side of the wheel of dominical letters, in front of the letter B, is 1575 (Gordon Brotherston, 1983:204; Prem, 1978: 275).

The year 1558 starts as well with a Saturday and bears the same dominical letter B. The junction of the two calendar wheels on the year bearer 1-*Tochtli* points evidently to the base of the calculation, starting with the Mexican cycle on a year 1-*Tochtli* 1558.

#### 5. LEYENDA DE LOS SOLES

The author of the “*Leyenda de los Soles*” starts his manuscript precisising, a very rare occurrence, the exact date of its writing: the 22nd of May 1558 “*hoy día 22 de mayo de 1558*”. The author, very well informed, left a cryptic message for posterity. He gave the very day of the forbidden ceremony.

The Julian day 22 of May 1558 (JDN 2290259) corresponds to the morning ascension of Venus, 9 days after inferior conjunction (Venus +9).

The relative positions of Venus and the node of Moon orbit on that date of the 22nd of May 1558 are identical to the situation found in the Dresden Codex for the year 1038, 520 years earlier.

- 1-*Ahau* 18 *Kayab*: 1038 X 24: Node 41, Venus +9
- 3-*Cozacauhtli*: 1558 V 22: Node 41, Venus +9

The day 3-*Cozacauhtli*, is the eve of the fatidic 4-*Ollin* year 1-*Tochtli*, the most apocalyptic day and year possible.

The *Leyenda* offers us another enigma, it mentions the names of two Suns totally unknown from other sources, it says: “6-*Wind*, 6-*Flower*; both together are names of the Sun.” (Leyenda III). If we apply the pattern of Venus inferior conjunctions when the Node of Moon orbit is at 32 days off the Sun, we obtain for unique solution in the years 1-*Tochtli*:

6-*Xochitl* Year. 1-*Tochtli*, 582283, 18 II 3119 AC, Node 35 et Venus 2.

6-*Ehecatl* Year. 1-*Tochtli*, 1151605, 19 XI 1561 AC, Node 34 et Venus 1.

The year 3119 is the same as that of the start of the Venus table in the Dresden Codex and other Mesoamerican cosmologies. Between this two dates we count 569322 days. This represents exactly 975 true cycles of Venus of 584,92 days each, or 15 great ceremonies of the New Fire at 104 years distance. So that the first Sun named here 6-*Flower* lasts for 1558,752 tropical years.

Let us see then what happens if starting from the first 6-*Xochitl* (J.J. 582283) we report systematically this distance of 569322 days.

We obtain the following dates.

6-*Xochitl*, 582283, 18 II 3119 A.C.

6-*Ehecatl*, 1151605, 19 XI 1561 A.C.

6-*Quetzpalin*, 1720927, 21 VIII 2 A.C.

6-*Miquiztli*, 2290249, 22 V 1558 A.D.

This system is effective as it recreates almost perfectly<sup>2</sup>, at 569322 days of distance the same celestial conditions which presided to the first one. And strikingly, when we apply this length of 569322 days from the first day 6-*Wind*, (JDN 582283), 18 II 3119 AC, the third step falls precisely on the 22nd of May 1558, the very date written so enigmatically at the beginning of the manuscript together with a provocative formulation: “*Aquí están las consejuelas de la plática sabia*”. But very strangely this date is again here expressed in the Gregorian calendar, 24 years before the application of the calendar reform. If this is right, the scribe of the *Leyenda* wanted to leave a cryptic message for the far future.

#### 6. FRESCOS AT THE CUERNAVACA CATHEDRAL

The main work of the Cuernavaca Cathedral was completed in the early fifties of the XVI century, a few years then before the fatidic date of 1558. It seems the church hurried to prepare an imposing

<sup>2</sup>For details of exact calculation, see Lebeuf 2003 : 382.



Fig. 4. Detail of the frescos in Cuernavaca.

monument for Easter 1558, in order to lead to its own profit the mass of such ardent believers they found in America. Was it an attempt to christianize the New Fire Ceremony? The celebration of Easter Sunday starts on Saturday evening after sunset, with the lighting of a sacred fire. This fire ceremony initiates the liturgy of light, waiting for day break, for a new start of the liturgical year cycle. This ceremony is strictly attached to the renewal of time and of the world and to the reappearance of Venus as the morning star<sup>3</sup>. Nothing here that could offend a christian, nor a Mexican indian.

The cathedral is covered with frescos representing the martyrdom of Saint Philip. A detail of the fresco, apparently from the old fresco, is its frame which represents a column in flames. It is made of two smaller superposed fluted columns resembling the ancient bunches of reeds lighted for the New Fire Ceremonies in pre-hispanic Mexico.

<sup>3</sup>For the relation between Venus and the Easter Light liturgy, see A. Lebeuf 1995, "Maria Magdalena, the morning star"; A. Lebeuf 1997, "The tale of Crazy Harman".

#### 7. THE BISHOP DE MONTUFAR ORDERS *THE PIEDRA DEL SOL* BE BURIED

Chavero referring to Duran, notes that the famous Aztec calendar stone, or *Piedra del Sol*, was buried shortly before 1558 by the Bishop Alonzo de Montufar in order to subtract it from the rites of the folk (Chavero, 1876: 4/6). The date of this event points again to the precautions taken before the 1558 New Fire Ceremony.

#### 8. THE PROFECY OF JUAN TETON

In the same year 1558, a certain Juan Teton was preaching the return to the old faith:

*"Do you already know what our ancients are saying around? When the Binding of the Years come out there will be complete darkness, the sky monsters Tzitzimime will come down, they will eat us and there will be transformation. Those who took baptism, those who believed in God will transform into something else. He who eats meat of cow, will be transformed into this exactly; he who eats meat of pork will be transformed into the same; he who eats meat of lamb will be transformed into it ... he who eats the meat of chicken will be transformed into it also ... they will die, they will not exist anymore, because their life will have come to the end, their count of years... Look at those of Xalatlauhco, those who first believed, don Alonzo: three capes and three hats became of his sons and the principals. All of them were transformed into something else, all are walking about, eating grass. ... if you do not believe what I tell you, you will be transformed together with them ... I shall mock you, because of the baptism. I shall forgive you, so that you do not die and with it could finish everything. And there will be hunger ... When you will be given screams in Chapultepec, you will run with your belly in the sand; The Old Woman of the hard teeth will see you and frighten you, but she will not eat you, she will leave you. Everything will be as I tell you, as you hear it ... This happened in Coahuatepec, Atlapolco, and here are the names of those who washed their heads of the baptism: the governor of Coahuatepec, don Pedro de Luna; Francisco Zacayoatl, mayor of Huexotla ... Nicolas Fiscal, governor of Atlapolco; don Pedro Xico, attorney; Juan Teco ... And all this happened in the year of a thousand and five hundred and fifty eight." ( M. León Portilla 1974:30-31).*

We find here the prophecy of traditional evils bound to the awful passage between two "centuries".



This prophet was not isolated and other rebels occupied important social positions. The date of this revolt, 1558, is another time 1-*Tochtli* and not 2-*Acatl*.

#### 9. CHIMALPAHIN AND THE ECLIPSE OF 1611

In 1611, it was still well known that the year 2-*Acatl* was the fatal moment when the world would stop turning and come to an end, accompanied by the usual cataclysms among which the eclipse occupied a prominent position. The eclipse as well as earthquakes and the descent of sky monsters, *Tzitzimime*, were all apocalyptic signs. Chimalpahin notes:

*“2-Acatl, here in this year, on Friday 10th of June 1611, the sun was eaten at three o’clock in the afternoon, on the day of Saint Barnabe ... Here in the city of Tepeaca there was a lot of fear when the stars appeared in 1611. When there was the eclipse of the Sun, when Sun and Moon killed each other. Those who saw it were very frightened because they were gods to our ancestors, and for that reason came the great illness in the year of the reeds”* (Garibay, 1945:160-161).

#### 10. 1-*TOCHTLI* OR 2-*ACATL*?

Several indications reported here in relation with the New fire ceremony refer to the native years 1-*Tochtli* or 2-*Acatl*. The recurrent mention of 1-*Tochtli* years leads us to suspect the rejection of the Aztec reform year 2-*Acatl* by numerous native scholars after the conquest. The Aztecs had displaced the venerable date of 1-*Tochtli* for the ceremony, and inaugurated the 2-*Acatl* tradition to impose the cult of Huitzilopochtli, their tribal god. To save the world it was necessary to return to the ancient 1-*Tochtli*. Doing so, meant not only a revolt against Christianity but also expressed hatred of the Aztec order which had led to a ruin.

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