

# Introduction

The *Codex Mendoza* is a vivid pictorial and textual account of early-sixteenth-century Aztec life. This unique manuscript combines a history of imperial conquests, a tally of provincial tribute, and an ethnographic chronicle of daily life that collectively constitute the most comprehensive of the known Mesoamerican codices.

Although the subjects of this extraordinary document are commonly referred to as Aztecs, these people called themselves Mexica. They were but one of several Nahuatl-speaking ethnic groups inhabiting the Valley of Mexico during the Late Postclassic period (ca. A.D. 1250–1519). Collectively, all of these peoples are generally termed Aztecs.

The Mexica were the last of numerous nomadic groups to arrive in the Valley of Mexico from the northern desert regions. They established their island community of Tenochtitlan in 1325; by 1519 that settlement had become a metropolis of between 150,000 and 200,000 people. In 1430 the Mexica joined with their neighbors the Acolhua of Texcoco and the Tepaneca of Tlacopan to form the Aztec Triple Alliance. This powerful military confederation spread Aztec military might throughout much of central and southern Mexico, drawing sustained tribute from conquered city-states and battling perpetual enemies at their borders.

The Mexica that appear on the *Mendoza* folios are not only vigorous conquerors and warriors but also disobedient children, inveterate ballplayers, exuberant musicians, pious priests, and despised adulterers. We see their military power as they vanquish city after city to extend their dominion farther and farther afield. Subsequently, we view the vast tributes they demanded from those they conquered: shimmering feathers and sparkling greenstones, bowls of gold dust and axes of copper, reams of paper and loads of firewood, bins of maize and baskets of chiles, loads of textiles and piles of feathered warrior attire. We also monitor their progression from cradle to grave, following the avenues taken by “good” and “bad” Mexica as they pass through life’s prescribed stages. Children are reared, marriages are sealed, priestly novices are disciplined, wars are declared, and judgments are handed down. Clearly, there were many dimensions to Mexica life, and *Codex Mendoza* touches on most of them.

## THE CONTENT AND CONSTRUCTION OF *CODEX MENDOZA*

The *Codex Mendoza* contains seventy-two annotated pictorial leaves and sixty-three pages of related Spanish commentary. These folios

are divided into three distinct sections. Part 1 (nineteen pictorial pages) documents the founding of Tenochtitlan and the history of Mexica imperial conquests, presented chronologically by individual ruler. This section of the codex shows us a generalized view of the settlement of the island city and an idealized victory chronicle of imperial expansion. It does not document all of the Mexica’s wars; nowhere are their disastrous defeats recorded. On the other hand, some enemy city-states appear more than once, under the laurels of successive rulers; this duplication most likely indicates wars but not conquests, or conquests and subsequent subdued rebellions. Some especially notable confrontations are featured: the heated dispute with Chalco under the Mexica ruler Chimalpopoca (folio 4v), the conquest of the powerful city-state of Coaytlahuacan under Emperor Motecuhzoma Ilhuicamina (folio 7v), and the ignominious defeat of the Tlatelolco ruler Moquihuix under Emperor Axayacatl (folio 10r).

The most important consequence of conquest was the imposition of tribute by the victors. Part 2 of *Codex Mendoza* (thirty-nine pictorial pages) served as a detailed account book of the rich and voluminous goods delivered by subdued city-states to their imperial overlords. The 371 city-states that bore these regular tribute obligations were grouped into thirty-eight geographically distinct provinces. *Codex Mendoza* sequentially presents these provinces roughly from north, to west, to south, and on to the east and northeast. It might be expected that the 202 vanquished city-states drawn in *Codex Mendoza*’s conquest history would all reappear among the 371 tribute-paying centers, but this is not quite the case. Some communities listed as conquests in part 1 (such as Yztepec) do not seem to have been incorporated into the empire on a regular tribute-paying basis. Instead they, like many other subjects, emerged more as clients paying “gifts” and offering strategic services such as borderland warfare or route security for the imperial powers. But many city-states with periodic tribute obligations (see *Codex Mendoza*, part 2) do not appear at all in the conquest history of part 1. These communities include the important provincial head towns of Malinalco, Cihuatlan, Tochtepec, and Oxitipan, all known to have been conquered and incorporated into the imperial structure.

Parts 1 and 2 are therefore complementary but not necessarily complete accounts of military conquest and economic control. Placed between the history and tribute sections are two enigmatic folios. They depict eleven lakeside communities and eleven imperial outposts, the latter all distant from the Valley of Mexico. These

transition folios relate partly to the history of conquests, and partly to the tributary obligations of subservience.

*Codex Mendoza's* conquest history and tribute tallies both appear to have been copied from extant prehispanic documents; in content and style they are reasonably faithful reflections of the Mexica's own view of their imperial strength and vitality. Part 3, however, "The Daily Life Year to Year," was a novel, postconquest creation with no known prehispanic prototype. Containing fifteen pictorial pages, this section provides an ethnographic account of Mexica daily existence. It begins with colorful images depicting infancy and childhood as Mexica children are named, disciplined, and educated. The life paths of these young people are then traced. Males attend formal schools, gain priestly training, capture enemies on the battlefield, engage in public works, marry, become entangled in litigation, learn crafts, and achieve high social rank. Some, however, go awry and are punished for adultery or other crimes. The members of a more disciplined group gain esteem and ultimately become elderly models of community morality and reap the attendant rewards, including the right to imbibe unlimited quantities of intoxicating *pulque*.

Females marry young, literally "tying the knot" around age fifteen. A few careless, less conventional women are subsequently shown in liaisons with errant young men, in legal disputes, or as partners in crime. Righteous aged matrons, however, conclude their disciplined lives exercising the coveted privilege of unrestricted access to *pulque*.

We see little of the pervasive Aztec religion in *Mendoza*, although the ethnographic section of the pictorial would seem the logical backdrop for the topic. We do glimpse priests performing a few of their duties, including the training of a young novice shown in one colorful vignette. Beyond that, only the rare deity peers at us from a place-name glyph, or an occasional temple looms in the background, or certain obscure elements of religious symbolism are coded into textiles and warrior attire. But these are only subtle references to religion; the flamboyant ceremonies that so forcefully punctuated Aztec daily existence are conspicuously absent.

Although the paper on which *Codex Mendoza* was compiled was of European origin, displaying watermarks characteristic of Spanish papermakers, the composers of the pictorial were themselves experienced native scribes. And whether they copied from extant pictorial codices (as in parts 1 and 2) or devised a new format (as in part 3), they tended to follow indigenous artistic canons and styles; the one major exception is the rather awkward attempt at perspective on folio 69r. Throughout the document, the hand of a single master painter is evident; other skilled natives worked with him, preparing the pigments and applying the colors in flat washes. They and knowledgeable elderly Aztecs interpreted the glyphs and paintings, apparently discussing particular meanings among themselves in Nahuatl. They did not always reach easy agreement (see folio 71v). Finally, this indigenous information was translated into Spanish by a bilingual friar who then wrote the accompanying explanatory Spanish commentaries—which for the most part face each pictorial page—as well as the Spanish glosses that appear directly alongside the pictorial images.

#### A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE *CODEX MENDOZA*

The *Codex Mendoza's* adventurous early history is as colorful as its prehispanic content. It was drafted some twenty years after the turbulent and traumatic Spanish conquest of the Mexica of Tenochtitlan. By 1541 the Mexica's imperial capital had been transformed

into Mexico City, viceregal seat of Spain's wealthy dominion of New Spain. It was there that the *Codex Mendoza* was compiled at the behest of the Spanish crown (Charles V) and under the supervision of Spanish friars. Native scribes and interpreters were solicited from a generation that could still claim firsthand knowledge of preconquest Aztec life.

The *Codex Mendoza* appropriately came to carry the name of the then-viceroy of New Spain, Antonio de Mendoza, who may well have commissioned the manuscript. The document was produced in a bit of a flurry, by the Spanish commentator's own admission (see folio 71v). He was rushing to meet the departure of the annual flota, the Spanish treasure fleet. The manuscript was hastily finished, packed, and then dispatched by mule train to bounce along rough serpentine roads that descended over 7,000 feet to the Gulf of Mexico port of Veracruz. The document's destined voyage to Spain, however, was abruptly interrupted when French privateers attacked the Spanish flotilla and carried its rich booty to the coffers of Henri II of France. Fortunately, *Codex Mendoza* survived that transfer unharmed. At the French court, the king's cosmographer, André Thevet, himself fascinated with exotic lands and peoples, gained control of the manuscript; indeed, his name appears in five places, twice with the date 1553 (on folios 1r and 71v).

The document continued to change hands after Thevet's death. The next owner was Richard Hakluyt, chaplain to the English ambassador to France, who was also an aficionado of geographical and cultural exotica. He acquired the document for 20 French crowns and carried it to England. From Hakluyt it passed to Samuel Purchas sometime after 1616, then to Purchas's son, and subsequently to John Selden, an avid collector of Western Hemisphere manuscripts. In 1659, five years after Selden's death, the *Mendoza* finally came to rest in Oxford University's Bodleian Library, where it remains to this day. In the intervening years, the document fell into eclipse as it was quite forgotten for 172 years, not emerging for scholarly perusal until Viscount Kingsborough brought it to light in 1831.

In the years since Kingsborough's "discovery" of *Codex Mendoza* among the Bodleian's holdings, the document has so impressed scholars and publishers that it has appeared in several editions. Kingsborough's *Antigüedades de Mexico* (1831–1848) and James Cooper Clark's *Codex Mendoza* (1938, 3 vols.) are the most notable precursors to the University of California's deluxe and paperback editions.

#### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF *CODEX MENDOZA*

The *Codex Mendoza* combines Aztec pictorial and glyphic images with written text in Nahuatl and Spanish to provide a kind of Rosetta stone for Mesoamerican studies. The level of detail available in the document is greatly enhanced by its presentation in these different formats, allowing it to serve as a reference point for the interpretation of other Mesoamerican codices and cultures.

Given its breadth of content, *Codex Mendoza* has long been acknowledged as a major source for studies of Aztec history, geography, economy, social and political organization, glyphic writing, costumes, textiles, military attire, and indigenous art styles. This inclusive manuscript not only documents expected patterns of imperial organization, artistic symbolism, and the daily round but reveals unexpected variations as well: city-states were incorporated into the empire in creatively diverse ways, scribes made use of alternative glyphic and artistic devices, and individuals followed markedly diverse paths as they made their way through life's maze.

*Codex Mendoza* also offers suggestive insights into other cultures separated from the Aztecs in both time and space. Thanks to the inclusiveness of this manuscript, we are afforded a glimpse into the Mesoamerican past as well as geographic regions far removed from

the imperial Valley of Mexico. And inasmuch as an enhanced understanding of any one civilization helps us to unravel common developmental and structural patterns in others, this extraordinary pictorial manuscript enriches all those who study it.

# FOLIO 2r:

## THE FOUNDING OF TENOCHTITLAN

Folio 2r, a pictorial representation of the Mexica's founding of Tenochtitlan, the Aztec empire's capital, is one of the most complex and informative pages of *Codex Mendoza*. This single folio succinctly incorporates information on the city's earliest history—both fact and myth—its first officials and structure, the recording of two important conquests, and the calendric notation of an early leader's long reign. To understand the symbols depicted on this page, it is helpful to review the early history and legends surrounding the Mexica's prior wanderings.

### THE MEXICA'S EARLY HISTORY AND MIGRATION MYTHS

Although the *Codex Mendoza* commentary barely alludes to it, the force that drove the Mexica to establish their city in an unprepossessing marsh began over two hundred years before, in the distant northern deserts. The Aztecs' origin myth speaks of that region as Chicomoztoc, locale of the legendary seven caves from which emerged the related, nomadic Chichimec groups.<sup>1</sup> These were the emigrants who, following the demise of the Toltec empire in 1150, sequentially moved down and settled in the fertile and civilized Valley of Mexico.<sup>2</sup> The crucial factor that would influence the Mexica's destiny was timing; they were the final group of these migrants to arrive.

The Mexica's peregrination had been a particularly long and difficult one. Their reputation for savage ferocity did little to endear them to those whom they encountered. As a result, the Mexica seldom stayed long in one place; Alvarado Tezozomoc, in his *Crónica Mexicana*, likens them to the luckless tribes of Israel under the goad of the Egyptians.<sup>3</sup>

According to legend, even the gods treated the Mexica capriciously. Although their special deity Huitzilopochtli never forsook them, they inadvertently made an enemy of Copil, son of their patron's malevolent sister, Malinalxochitl. She related all accumulated grievances to her son, who avenged his mother by adding to the trials of the hapless Mexica, Huitzilopochtli's chosen people. Although Copil succeeded in causing considerable trouble, in the end he himself was killed. The evil Copil's heart was cast into Lake Texcoco at the order of Huitzilopochtli.

In the long course of the Mexica's wanderings, the mythical Huitzilopochtli finally led them into the Valley of Mexico in search

of their promised land. Since they could find neither a place to settle nor resources on which to survive, they were forced to serve the already established groups as lowly vassals. But the Mexica consistently made their overlords uneasy; they had not yet shed their "unsavory, barbaric" ways. After a series of unfortunate encounters with their increasingly nervous neighbors, the wanderers eventually made their way to Colhuacan, whose ruling lineages were direct Toltec descendants. History relates that this well-established city represented the oldest and most civilized center in the Valley of Mexico. The Mexica, who came as despised suppliants, were soon serving Colhuacan as very effective mercenaries; their military prowess filled their adversaries with dread. As for their Colhuaque masters, the Mexica's acts of savagery against them yet again alienated the far more powerful group.

Having angered their Colhuacan overlords, the wretched Mexica had to seek protection in the great lagoon of Lake Texcoco, taking shelter among the reeds and rushes. According to the legend, it was there, in a seemingly unpromising marsh, that Huitzilopochtli finally proclaimed the promised land was near. The tattered band was told to look for the place where Copil's heart had been cast into the lake. It had fallen on a rock, whence had sprouted a great prickly pear cactus; perched at its top would be found a magnificent eagle. The prophesied apparition was soon located on a small, uninhabited islet. At last the Mexica had reached their ultimate destination; their centuries of wandering were finally at an end.

This brief account constitutes the known facts and legends concerning the founding of Tenochtitlan. All chroniclers of the event recount essentially the same story, differing only in the details they choose to emphasize.<sup>4</sup>

### THE ISLAND SECTION OF FOLIO 2r

#### *The Eagle on the Cactus*

The most dominant image of folio 2r is the eagle perched atop a prickly pear cactus that grows from the Aztec glyph for rock. This same symbol appears in several other Colonial accounts,<sup>5</sup> and still serves today—with the addition of a snake in the eagle's beak—as the national emblem of modern Mexico.

The eagle that depicts the foundation legend is an Aztec symbol for the sun, which is associated with Huitzilopochtli, the Mexica's

patron deity. The cactus fruit the eagle is about to consume may represent the human hearts offered the sun to sustain it during the daily journey across the firmament.<sup>6</sup>

### *The Shield and Arrows*

Just as the eagle on the cactus symbolizes the founding of Tenochtitlan, the shield and arrows immediately below represent the city itself. A shield backed by arrows is an Aztec glyph for war.<sup>7</sup> When the shield in question carries this particular design—the *ibuiteteyo* (down ball)<sup>8</sup>—it represents the power of Tenochtitlan.<sup>9</sup> The *ibuiteteyo* shield occurs repeatedly in *Codex Mendoza*. It appears before each of the nine sequential Aztec rulers in the conquest history, part 1 of *Codex Mendoza*. This shield is also carried by the two victorious warriors of folio 2r, one of the priest-warriors of folio 65r, and the mighty Aztec general, Tlacohtcalcatl, on folio 67r.

### *Island Divided by Crossing Streams of Water*

A goodly portion of folio 2r depicts a square divided “in the form of Saint Andrew’s cross.”<sup>10</sup> This stylized plan represents the original small island in Lake Texcoco on which Tenochtitlan was founded, an islet divided in quarters by two waterways. It has been suggested that the orientation of this island depiction differs from that of a modern map: north may not be at the top.<sup>11</sup>

Although the Mexica’s promised land proved to be small and marshy, happily it was very fertile. The *Crónica Mexicayotl* provides a detailed description of the arrival of the Mexica at the site of the future city of Tenochtitlan:

And then they saw, that the weeping willows and the willows that stood there were white, and also the reeds and the tules were white and the frogs were white, the fish were white, the snakes were white, which lived there on the shores. And they saw, that rocks and caves stood face to face. The first rock and cave were seen where the sun rises and is called: Fire Water, Where the Water Is Burning. And the second rock and cave were seen in the direction of the realm of the dead [the north]—therefore they cross each other—it is called Blue Water and its name is Yellow Water. And when they had seen that, the old people cried, and said: “So this will be the place, for we have seen what has been told and explained to us by the priest Huitzilopochtli, when he said: ‘As you will see, there are in the tule-grounds in the reed-beds many different things.’ And now here we have all beheld and admired it, for it has truly happened and the word has proved to be true, that he spoke to us.”<sup>12</sup>

Obviously, the site contained a profusion of flora and fauna,<sup>13</sup> as well as abundant fresh water. Several sources contain the legendary account of streams running from two springs, one of which ran blood red, the other deep blue.<sup>14</sup> It is the intersecting of these two mythical waterways that creates the St. Andrew’s cross of folio 2r. It appears that from an early date the Mexica were building a system of connecting canals and footpaths to serve their new center in the lagoon. Certainly these smooth-functioning lanes of transportation and commerce were in active service when the Spaniards arrived.

The conquistadors initially viewed Tenochtitlan from a mountain pass; their first dazzled impressions were of a dream-world city. By 1519, the Mexica’s modest island home had grown into a metropolis with a population of between 150,000 and 200,000.<sup>15</sup> The city—now resplendent with towering temples, closely grouped palaces, neat homes, and well-cultivated gardens—rose white and glistening above the clear waters of Lake Texcoco. In addition to

an internal system of canals bordered by adjacent roadways, this busy urban center was connected to the mainland by four broad causeways.<sup>16</sup> Activity was everywhere; foot and canoe traffic was in bustling profusion. The response of the Europeans to this beautiful sight was awe and amazement. Little wonder that they later remembered Tenochtitlan as the Venice of the West.

### *The Division into Quadrants*

The Spanish commentary for folio 2r makes no mention of the significance of the four divisions formed by the crossing waters. There is, however, an explanation in another sixteenth-century source. According to the legend reported by both Alvarado Tezozomoc<sup>17</sup> and Durán,<sup>18</sup> Huitzilopochtli told the Mexica to divide their new city into four main wards, which they referred to as Moyotla, Teopantlaza, Atzacualco, and Cuepopan.

Huitzilopochtli commanded the people to distribute among themselves the gods they had so laboriously carried throughout their long and difficult wanderings. Each of the four neighborhoods was then divided into as many subsections as it possessed idols; these deities were called *calpultēotl*, or district gods. Durán likens the resulting units, or *calpulli*, to parishes that bear the names of Christian saints. Modern scholars associate these barrios with the social and territorial groups that exploited each section of land.<sup>19</sup>

On folio 2r, two of the four divisions contain what could be construed as place-name glyphs. However, the Spanish commentary makes no mention of them, and to date no one has definitively determined what these images mean. The building in the upper quadrant has been variously identified as a *tecpan* (noble’s house or government building),<sup>20</sup> a *cabildo* or townhouse,<sup>21</sup> and a temple of Huitzilopochtli.<sup>22</sup> The latter speculation is the most probable. The humble shrine that appears on folio 2r may well represent the first stage of what evolved into the magnificent sixteenth-century Templo Mayor. This was the towering one-hundred-foot-high edifice that so impressed Cortés and his men.

The recent excavation of the Templo Mayor revealed that the temple had undergone seven construction phases.<sup>23</sup> From humble beginnings, Huitzilopochtli’s temple—shared by the rain god Tlaloc—just kept growing. Unfortunately, subsurface groundwater precluded finding the earliest, fourteenth-century shrine.

The skull rack—*tzompantli*—in the right-hand quadrant of the Tenochtitlan plan is easily recognizable as to function. However, beyond the recognition that it contained the heads of the Mexica’s sacrificial victims, the rack’s appearance on folio 2r has not been further interpreted.<sup>24</sup> It is of interest that this *tzompantli* is one of the very few images in the *Codex Mendoza* that openly acknowledges the Aztecs’ disquieting practice of large-scale human sacrifice.

### *The City’s Founders*

The four sections of the city all contain identically arrayed males. Each sits in the standard Aztec male posture, white *tilmatli* tightly wrapped about drawn-up legs. Nine of these figures, each seated on a bundle of green reeds, wear no body paint and have their hair arranged in the distinguished warrior hairstyle, the *temillotl* (pillar of stone).<sup>25</sup> The tenth and largest of these dignitaries is seated on a yellow woven mat in the left quadrant. His black body paint, smear of blood at the temple, and loosely tied-back hair signify that he is a priest. Only this male, whose glyph and Spanish gloss indicate that he was named Tenuch, has a speech glyph. As the Spanish commentary confirms, he is the leader of the group.

Tenuch ("Stone Cactus Fruit")<sup>26</sup> first appears in the Mexica's history as the foremost of the four priest-rulers who led the group after their arrival in the Valley of Mexico.<sup>27</sup> His role became increasingly important during and following the Mexica's service to Colhuacan. Although Tenuch is not regarded as a founder of the Mexica ruling dynasty, his speech glyph confirms that he did indeed serve his people as their *Tlatoani* (Speaker).<sup>28</sup> The Spanish commentary further supports this, alluding to Tenuch being "especially gifted with leadership abilities."

The nine dignitaries who surround Tenuch also are identified by both name glyph and Spanish gloss. The three figures seated behind Tenuch have glosses reading Xocoyol ("Foot Bell"), Teçineuh ("He Who Expels Someone"), and Oçelopan ("Jaguar Banner"). The latter's gloss is misplaced, as his name glyph indicates. This male is really Acaçitli ("Reed Hare"); Oçelopan, complete with his ocelot-banner name glyph, is the left-hand figure in the upper quadrant. Facing him is Quapan ("Eagle Banner"). In the right-hand quadrant sits Aguexotl ("Water Willow") and Xomimitl ("Foot Arrow"). The lower quadrant contains Atototl ("Water Bird") and Xiuhcaqui ("Person Shod with Turquoise-Colored Sandals"). Along with Tenuch, these nine dignitaries apparently were the founders of Tenochtitlan.<sup>29</sup>

The sixteenth-century sources differ as to both the role of these officials and even how many there were.<sup>30</sup> What is certain, however, is that folio 2r is acknowledging ten outstanding leaders instrumental in establishing the Mexica's capital.

The founding of Tenochtitlan is the first of three concepts illustrated on folio 2r. The other two—a calendric band commemorating the fifty-one years of Tenuch's reign and a pictorial recording of two cities conquered during his rule—establish the format followed throughout the historical section of *Codex Mendoza*. However, folio 2r's initial depiction of the Mexica's conquests is far more elaborate than those that follow; the remaining folios record only the localities overcome—no victorious warriors ever again appear in the conquest record.

### THE CONQUEST SECTION OF FOLIO 2r

Situated directly below the scene of the founding of Tenochtitlan are two almost identical conquest scenes. They differ only in the conquered cities' place glyphs, the victorious warriors' war clubs, and the shields of the vanquished. Each of the vignettes employs standard glyphs for conquest: an image of two closely juxtaposed fighting men (captor forcing captive into a subservient position) and a toppled and burning pyramid temple.

All four warriors wear *icbcahuipilli*, the standard Mesoamerican armor of thick, quilted cotton. In keeping with the greater glorification of Tenochtitlan, only the armor of the Mexica warriors is detailed, showing marks of the quilting. Both of these conquerors wear their hair in the "pillar of stone" style and carry the *ihuiteteyo* shield, symbolizing their city. One carries the *maquabuitl*,<sup>31</sup> the obsidian-inset warrior club; the other wields a wooden battle stick, the *huitzoçtli*.<sup>32</sup> The first of the conquered warriors bears a red and white shield, unique to folio 2r; the other prisoner carries the undecorated, generic shield that occurs frequently in part 3 of *Codex Mendoza*.<sup>33</sup>

Apropos the conquest section of folio 2r, the Spanish commentary speaks of the growing power of the daring and warlike Mexica, who "gave vent to their spirit by overcoming their neighbors . . . Colhuacan and Tenayucan."<sup>34</sup> This statement is an excellent example of revisionist history. Although the founding of Tenochti-

tlan marked the end of the Mexica's wanderings, their existence remained precariously marginal for a long time. In order to survive and obtain any raw materials other than food, the Mexica had to continue working as vassals for their more powerful neighbors. It was only in that menial capacity that they were involved with the conquest of Colhuacan and Tenayucan. Such an event did take place, but only some fifty years after the 1376 death of Tenuch. At that time the Mexica were serving as mercenaries for the expanding kingdom of the Tepanecs.<sup>35</sup>

The Mexica learned a great deal about conquest from Tezozomoc, the effective Tepanec tyrant. Indeed, it was the Mexica's later audacious takeover of the expanding Tepanec domain in 1428<sup>36</sup> that really started them on their ascent to power. Perhaps the focus of folio 2r on Colhuacan and Tenayucan, actually conquered much later when the Mexica were serving under the Tepanecs, reflects Tenochtitlan's later dominance over their former master. It may also have something to do with the Aztecs' view of history as repeating, a reflection of their view of time. This cyclical concept is discussed below.

### THE CALENDRIC COUNT OF TENUCH'S RULE

Serving as a margin to folio 2r is a contiguous calendric count of fifty-one years, the length assigned to Tenuch's rule of the fledgling city of Tenochtitlan. As the Spanish commentary notes, "each little compartment . . . figured in blue . . . means one year."<sup>37</sup> This method of bordering each page of the history section with the years that correspond to the length of the relevant emperor's reign continues throughout part 1.

To understand the principle underlying the four recurring calendric symbols—House, Rabbit, Reed, and Flint Knife—it is necessary to consider briefly how the people in the Mesoamerican world viewed time. To them, time—and the burden it carried, history—was cyclical. Appropriately, the Aztecs had a recurring calendar system with no apparent method of distinguishing one cycle from the next. According to Sahagún, the longest time count reckoned was 104 years. He refers to this period as a century; half of it, fifty-two years, he calls a "bundle of years."<sup>38</sup>

This fifty-two-year period, or "calendar round," consisted of years designated by combining four names, Rabbit, Reed, Flint Knife, and House, with the numbers 1–13. This results in  $4 \times 13$ , or fifty-two, distinct name-number combinations, in a sequence such as One Rabbit, Two Reed, Three Flint Knife, Four House, Five Rabbit, Six Reed, and so on. It is this cyclical concept that explains the four recurring images combined with varying numbers of circles in the compartments of the calendar count.<sup>39</sup>

Just as the Aztecs viewed time and history as cyclical, so too they believed the universe had already gone through four major transformations. In each epoch, the world had again been born, destroyed, and created anew. Because such a catastrophic event could occur only at the conclusion of a fifty-two-year cycle, special precautions always had to be taken at that time. The culmination of a period was marked by a sense of frightening vulnerability. Would the cycle begin again? There was always the pending threat of the destruction of the fifth and present sun, and hence the end of all life.

#### *The New Fire Ceremony*

This occasion, the "Binding of the Years," better known as the "New Fire Ceremony," was one of the most profound of the Aztec ritual round. Throughout the Valley of Mexico, household goods

were destroyed and all fires were extinguished; the populace sat in darkness awaiting the inexorable machinations of fate that only the heavens could reveal.

At or near midnight on this important night, the high priests climbed to a pyramid built high atop the mountain Uixachtecatl (today known as the Cerro de Estrella, "Hill of the Star"). There they watched the passage of the Pleiades, waiting tensely until this cluster of stars had reached its zenith to see whether it would continue on in its journey across the heavens. Only after its uninterrupted movement was confirmed did the priests know that Huitzilopochtli's people were safe for another fifty-two years.

Once the continuity of the universe was determined, a particularly prestigious war captive was quickly sacrificed and his heart extracted. A fire drill—note the depiction in the lower right of folio 2r—was immediately set whirling in a tiny bed of dry moss set within the victim's yawning chest cavity. It was the spark from this "New Fire" which the priests used to ignite the great bonfire that notified the people waiting below that the world was safe; life would indeed continue.<sup>40</sup>

### *The Founding Date of Tenochtitlan*

According to Sahagún, the last New Fire Ceremony occurred in 1507.<sup>41</sup> If one counts back three fifty-two-year cycles—156 years—the New Fire Ceremony indicated on folio 2r would have taken place in 1351.<sup>42</sup> Counting left—backwards in time—from this Two Reed compartment gives 1325 as the corresponding year for Two House, the founding date of Tenochtitlan pictured on folio 2r. Although the Spanish commentary on folio 1r reads 1324, the former date is accepted by most modern scholars.<sup>43</sup> That is not to say, however, that all the Colonial sources agree on 1325 as the correct date.<sup>44</sup>

The pictorial presentation of the founding of the Mexica's capital on folio 2r represents a blending of myth and history. That the Mexica first established their city in the fourteenth century on a small, marshy island in Lake Texcoco is documentable history. That this incipient metropolis in the lagoon should initially have been divided by canals for greater mobility is logical, as is the desire of the Indian artists of folio 2r to immortalize their intrepid founders. But there reality seems to stop.

That the newly settled Mexica were strong enough by themselves to conquer Colhuacan and Tenayucan within their first fifty years is highly improbable. What this boastful assertion reflects is the Aztecs' view of history: events were periodically revised so as to edify rather than inform. Not every event the Mexica report is a datable reality.<sup>45</sup>

No matter that folio 2r represents, in part, an invented past. This impressive page illustrates, with understandable pride, the humble beginnings of what was to become one of the greatest pre-Columbian cities ever to flourish in the Western Hemisphere, the Mexica's mighty Tenochtitlan.

#### NOTES

1. These tribes are usually enumerated as the Tepaneca, Acolhuaque, Chalca, Tlalhuica, Couixca, Uexotzinca, Tlaxcalteca, and others (Sahagún 1950–1982 10:197).

For illustrations of the mythical seven caves see *Manuscrit Tovar* 1972: pl. 1; Durán 1967 1: *láminas* 1, 2; 2: *lámina* 2.

2. See Anawalt essay (chapter 8 in volume 1) for a discussion of the nomadic Chichimecs' settling in the Valley of Mexico and attaining a Toltec-heritage legitimacy.

3. Alvarado Tezozomoc 1944:16.

4. Other accounts of the founding of Tenochtitlan can be found in *Codex Mexicanus* (Mengin 1952), *Mapa Sigüenza* (Kingsborough 1831–1848, vol. 4), *Crónica mexicana* (Alvarado Tezozomoc 1944, 1975a), *Crónica mexicanoytl* (Alvarado Tezozomoc 1975b), *Relaciones de Chimalpahin* (Chimalpahin 1965), *Codex Ramírez* (1975), and *Manuscrit Tovar* (1972), as well as the chronicles of Sahagún and Durán.

5. For examples of the eagle perched atop a prickly pear cactus, see *Manuscrit Tovar* 1972: pl. 4; Durán 1967 2: *láminas* 6, 63; *Codex Izhuatpec* (see van Zantwijk 1985:64); *Códice Aubin* 1963:48.

6. Davies 1974:37.

For a detailed discussion of the origin of the founding legend symbol, see Heyden 1988.

7. The Nahuatl term for shield and arrows, *mitl chimalli*, is also a metaphor for war. Molina (1977: folio 57r) defines *mitl chimalli* as "guerra, o batalla. Metapho" (war, or battle. Metaphor). This is from folio 57r "Mitl. saeta, o flecha" (dart, or arrow); folio 21r "Chimalli. rodela, adarga paues, o cosa semejante" (shield, round target, or similar thing).

8. See Anawalt essay (chapter 8 in volume 1) for additional information on the *ihuiteteyo* shield.

9. Van Zantwijk (1985:65) identifies this glyph as "the real Aztec 'coat of arms,'" while Clark (1938 1:21) states that it denotes the seat of government.

10. *Codex Mendoza* folio 1r (Frances Berdan translation).

11. Van Zantwijk implies that the stylized map of Tenochtitlan has been rotated ninety degrees. See van Zantwijk 1985:59–66 for his discussion of the probable locations of specific early barrios on the folio 2r plan.

12. Alvarado Tezozomoc 1975b:62–64; English translation from van Zantwijk 1985:60–61. For additional illustrations of the island site see Durán 1967 1: *lámina* 3; 2: *lámina* 4; *Manuscrit Tovar* 1972: pl. 2 (p. 240).

13. Each of the four sections of folio 2r's island contains from three to five glyphs of plant life, indicating the fertility of this marshy land.

Davies (1974:37) points out the possible significance to the Mexica of the great preponderance of tule surrounding their new site. The eleventh-century Toltec called their capital city Tollan (Tula), "Where There Are Many Reeds." This linking of Tenochtitlan with the ancient capital of the Toltec empire would have appealed greatly to the newly arrived Mexica.

It was also the fecundity of this marshy area which the Mexica so successfully later exploited through *chinampa* agriculture. This is the system of horticulture that involves creating plots of arable land by alternating layers of mud and vegetation in the shallow lagoons. These "islands" were secured in place with willows, planted so that the roots could act as anchors. These exceptionally fertile gardens produced very impressive yields.

See Berdan 1982:21–22 for a detailed discussion of *chinampa* agriculture. 14. *Códice Ramírez* 1975:25–26; Durán 1964:31. Alvarado Tezozomoc (1975b:63) gives the names of the two springs as Tleatl ("Fire Water") or Atlatlayan ("Place Where Water Is Burning")—this may refer to the blood-red water—and Matlatlatl ("Blue Water") or Toxpalatl ("Yellow Water"; translations van Zantwijk 1985:60).

Note that the streams on folio 2r are drawn in the European manner rather than in the indigenous canon: water depicted with curvicular lines that form little splashes bordered with circles or shells (M. E. Smith 1973:166–167).

15. See Calnek 1972 for a discussion of the size of Tenochtitlan's population.

16. See folio 64r, "Image Descriptions," for a discussion of the canals, bridges, and roads of Tenochtitlan.

17. Alvarado Tezozomoc 1975b:74–75.

18. Durán 1964:32, 40.

19. The modern Aztec scholar van Zantwijk questions Durán's contention that the original four quarters correspond to the later divisions of Colonial Mexico City. For a detailed discussion of the original sacred waters and later canals, the causeways, and the lining up of these waterways with the cardinal directions, see van Zantwijk 1985:59–74.

20. *Ibid.* 65.

21. Clark 1938:1:21.

22. See Boone essay, volume 1.

This latter hypothesis seems the most likely, as Durán (1964:31) reports that the first thing the Mexica did was to construct a temple to Huitzilopochtli out of mud and grass from the marsh.

23. See Matos Moctezuma 1982 for information on the 1978–1982 excavation of the Templo Mayor.

24. Durán (1971:78–79) links the skull rack to Huitzilopochtli's temple, which could account for its appearance on folio 2r.

Alvarado Tezozomoc (1975b:74) mentions one of the lesser divisions of the city by the name of Tzomolco. The *tzompantli* may be linked to this district.

25. From Molina 1977: folio 97v "Temimilli. columna redonda de piedra" (round column of stone).