

Mythical Past and Historied Present: Another Interpretation of a Polychrome Vessel from Nochixtlan, Oaxaca

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ABSTRACT

This study presents an alternative interpretation of one of the most aesthetically charged objects known from southwestern Mesoamerica, a tripod vessel seemingly manufactured in the fifteenth century CE. The analysis links the content of the visual narrative painted on the vessel with the use of the object, a function glyphically described around its neck. I argue that the binary structure of the depicted imagery and of the myth of origin encoded in the narrative was dialectically projected into the historical social field that motivated the commissioning of the artifact: a marital alliance to unite two powerful noble houses in order to forge a new dynasty. The deployment of the vessel to drink cacao during a marriage ceremony helps explain how its inscribed surface was meant to be read, and the depicted archetypical toponyms are hypothetically identified with lived places in the valleys of Nochixtlan and Coixtlahuaca.

Because of its aesthetic quality, the painted vessel that motivates this essay has elicited more than a dozen commentaries since the beginning of the twentieth century. The diverse interpretations fall under two main paradigmatic frameworks: one adheres to the premise that the imagery painted on the vessel makes exclusive reference to a mythical event; the other envisions in the vessel's inscription a dialectical relationship between myth and history. In the present alternative view I will build upon key binary dimensions (opposed and complementary) of an undeniable story of creation, as well as on the no-

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Signs and Society, vol. 2, no. 1 (Spring 2014). © 2014 Semiosis Research Center at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies. All rights reserved. 2326-4489/2014/0201-0005\$10.00

tion of a layering of both allegorical and chronicled time. Thus, I will assume that the commissioning of the vessel had an ulterior political motive in which the remote and the recent pasts were woven into the visual narrative, that the place names mentioned allude to archetypes of a primordial account while referencing at the same time a lived geography, and that the represented personages stand for embodiments of ancestral beings so remote in the collective memory so as to constitute cultural models with a deified ontology.

But attempting an exegesis of the vessel requires more than the reading of the inscribed imagery. It is necessary to articulate multiple levels of signification related to it. A comprehensive analysis cannot proceed in a selective fashion or remain at the internal contextual level. One has to address the question of the intended practical purpose of the object to then focus on the linkage between its use and the thematic content of the inscription, as well as to elucidate ways in which the object mediated social relations in the past. In this latter sense, I adopt current views in the study of material culture that conceptualize things in general, and artifacts in particular, not as fetishes or residues of social practices but as co-constitutive in the promotion, maintenance, and transformations of social interactions. Such a framework attends as well at the semiotic process whereby interpretants attribute a capacity for action to material culture, diluting the Cartesian division of object-subject, animate-inanimate, natural-supernatural. It would have been ideal to encompass broader levels of context in this inquiry, such as where and how was the vessel deposited? If indeed part of a funerary facility, in relationship to what else did the object lie? What would have been feasible to infer through a forensic analysis of associated skeletal remains of the person or persons to whom the vessel was dedicated? If the crypt was associated to a palace, where in the community was such a structure built, and if so, how could the settlement be placed in its regional context? The lack of precise contextual information on the vessel precludes us from addressing these questions. However, there are brief and general references to when and where the object was found, which enable us to sketch its most recent biography.

The Finding

The Oaxacan historian Manuel Martínez Gracida (1910, vol. 1, plate 121) relates that in 1890 Luis de Avendaño—political leader of Nochixtlan—commissioned two young brothers, Atilio and Ramón Reyes, to excavate in nearby Pueblo Viejo. The enterprise led to the discovery of numerous objects, including the extraordinary vessel under consideration (fig. 1A). Another scholar, Francisco



(A) Globular tripod vessel, MNA 7-2337-78257 (height 18 cm)



(B) Tripod conical bowl, MNA 7-2317-78264 (height 10 cm)



(C) Serving jar with handle, MNA 7-2320-78268 (height 14.9 cm)



(D) Globular tripod vessel, MNA 7-2422-2796 (height 15.3 cm)

Figure 1. Objects that may have been part of the same funerary offering found in Pueblo Viejo Nochixtlan at the end of the nineteenth century. The metal ear ornament presumably from the same offering is not included. Photo of vessel *A* after Fundación Monterrey (2007, 159). Photos of vessels *B* and *D* courtesy of Michael D. Lind. Photo of vessel *C* after Raghianti and Raghianti (1970, 152).

León (1910, 90), dates the finding in 1893 and, without identifying the actors, simply mentions that some inhabitants of Nochixtlan excavated the sepulcher of a noted personage that yielded jade ornaments and decorated ceramics. Eventually, Avendaño gave part of the findings to the Oaxacan doctor and collector Fernando Sologuren. The vessel has been in the Museo Nacional de Antropología in Mexico City since 1907, when Sologuren sold to the museum a

large portion of his collection (Sellen 2005, 7). It is possible, based on the inventory list that Sologuren generated in order to sell his collection, that together with the vessel, Avendaño may have given Sologuren four other objects from the same archaeological deposit, including three other polychrome vessels and one of a pair of gold ear spoons (fig. 1B–D).¹

Although there is no information about the circumstances and context of the finding, scholars have assumed, based on the crafting quality of the funerary assemblage, that the objects came from a tomb (Caso 1938, 45) that was most likely in the context of a palace (Pohl 2007, 9). Lind (personal communication) clarifies that, if found in a funerary context, it would have been in what are locally known as *sótanos* (shaft tombs excavated into limestone and without masonry features; Guzmán 1934, 27–32; Bernal 1949, 22–28), mortuary facilities seemingly associated to household units but seldom placed beneath the houses proper.

Previous Interpretations

In addition to being prominently featured in many art books and magazines, the vessel has prompted several commentaries, including those of Eduard Seler ([1908] 1993), Francisco León (1910), Manuel Martínez Gracida (1910, vol. 1, plates 122–23), Alfonso Caso (1938), Karl Nowotny ([1961] 2005), Ferdinand Anders et al. (1994, 48), Bruce Byland and John Pohl (1994a), John Paddock (1994), Eloise Quiñones Keber (1994), Michael Lind (1996, 2003), Alfredo López Austin (1998, 2001), Maarten Jansen and Aurora Pérez Jiménez (2000, 210–11), Gilda Hernández Sánchez (2005, 183–84), and John Pohl (2007). Several of these commentaries have been brief if not tangential (Nowotny [1961] 2005; Anders et al. 1994; Quiñones Keber 1994; and Hernández Sánchez 2005, 183–84). Of the studies by Martínez Gracida and León one can emphasize their speculative tone, in part because the authors could not at that time make use of a broad comparative method.

The remarks by Seler, however, are based on his extensive knowledge of surviving pre-Hispanic manuscripts. Thus, his commentary is very detailed, so much so that subsequent scholars have relied in one way or another on his

1. Sologuren's inventory has 84 entries describing some 156 objects (including collars with several beads each) that are said to come from Nochixtlan. Yet the only entries that specifically give Pueblo Viejo as the place of origin refer to the tripod conical bowl with serpent supports (fig. 1B), the pitcher with handles (fig. 1C), the tripod globular vessel under study (fig. 1A; sequential numbers 1394–1395–1396), a polychrome vase (1419; fig. 1D), and a gold ear spoon (1722). Only the first two entries specify "sepulcher" as the context of discovery. Without providing evidentiary proof, Ramsey (1975, 477) attributes the tripod conical bowl in figure 1B to Teojomulco, Oaxaca.

work. And yet, as Alfonso Caso (1938, 49) once aptly said, it gives the impression that one can spell out the writing on the vessel, but what the inscription says remains unknown. Caso himself ventured to posit that the painting on the vessel narrates an astral myth, a view that was influenced by the astralist exegesis of Seler. Paddock (1994), who criticized Seler for imposing a perspective from the Central Highland (that is, adopting Nahuatl as the descriptive language and omitting a historical dimension to the narrative on the vessel), merely attempted to distinguish between a story of origins set in a remote past and enacted by divine entities and the historicity of a more recent past protagonized by mortals. In the end, Paddock succumbed to ambiguity. In his opinion, the narrative on the vessel probably alludes to mythical rather than real places, but the represented personages would be more human than divine. Lind (1996, 2003) pursued the idea of a mythical content, positing that the imagery on the vessel commemorates the origin of pulque among Mixtec people. According to him, the protagonists are those featured in the primordial accounts rendered in several manuscripts, including 9 Wind—who holds an effigy that may personify pulque—and an elder, possibly 2 Dog, who carried out the first pulque ritual at Apoala.

López Austin (1998, 2001) adopted as well an interpretative frame that privileges myth, paying particular attention to the structural characteristics of a primordial account. Taking as a point of departure an observation by Seler regarding several binary oppositions between the two scenes in the visual narrative on the vessel, López Austin argued cogently that the imagery is a projection of two structural principles common in the Mesoamerican religious tradition: the fission of divine ontologies followed by the fusion of complementary opposites as a prelude to an act of creation. Thus, after interpreting the scenes as oblations in mythical places, he identifies in one of them the god 9 Wind–Feathered Serpent at the Hill of the Serpent (*Coatepec* [place of apotheosis]), and in the other the god 2 Dog in the Place of the Cosmic Tree over the Bent Hill where a cave opens and the wealth of the world emanates (*Colhuacan-Michatlauhco* [place of the ancestors and of sustenance]). These identifications lead him to postulate one of the typical splitting processes in mythical accounts: the fraternal or twin doubling of a divine entity, which results in a “pair of brothers who are entrusted with putting the world in motion” (López Austin 1998, 11). López Austin links his identification of the rendered personages to a specific episode in the story of creation recorded at the beginning of the seventeenth century by the Dominican Friar Gregorio García in Cuilapan, Oaxaca:

In the year and day of shadows and obscurity, before the days and years were reckoned, being the world in total darkness, when everything was chaos and confusion, the earth was covered by water: only mud and mold were over the face of the earth. . . . Present only were these gods, the father and mother of all the gods, called 1 Deer–Puma Serpent and 1 Deer–Jaguar Serpent, in their palaces and courts, they procreated two beautiful male gods, modest and wise in all the arts. The first one was named Wind of 9 Serpents [9 Wind Serpent], a name taken from the day he was born. The second son was named Wind of 9 Caves [9 Wind Cave], an appellative also taken from the day he was born. . . . Being these brothers in the house of their parents, enjoying much tranquility, they agreed to make an offering and sacrifice to the gods of their parents, so they took burning ceramic censer and poured on them ground tobacco instead of incense. And this is, as the Indians say, the first offering that was made in the world. (García [1627] 2005, 327–29, translated by the author)²

López Austin (1998, 15) concludes that the narrative painted on the vessel concerns the differential doubling of 9 Wind, one as a Serpent and the other as a Cave, that will lead to the creation of the sky and the earth: “The former conspicuously has the attributes of *Quetzalcóatl*, the lord who extracts the light from the underworld and ascends into the sky to enlighten the world. The latter (*Tepehua* [owner of the hills]) seeks refuge in the interior of the sacred hill and becomes the keeper of the wealth that resides in the underworld.”³

Apparently unaware of López Austin’s study, Pohl (2007, 8–15; see also Byland and Pohl 1994a, 77–80) sought to interpret the inscription painted on the vessel as an account that, in addition to its mythic overtones, incorporates a historical dimension.⁴ His prime goal is to identify the geographic reality of the two toponyms in the imagery and to relate the content of the vessel’s narrative to that on the pre-Hispanic manuscript *Tonindeye* (Nuttall).⁵ His specific interpretations will be commented on in more detail below.

2. Hernández Sánchez (2005, 183) makes the keen observation of the dark-red background to the imagery on the vessel, which according to her, implies that the account takes place “at night and in darkness.”

3. López Austin (1998, 3 n. 9) justifies the use of the Nahuatl language to name the rendered deities and places given the lack of data on their equivalences in the Mixtec language.

4. Anders et al. (1994, 48), in their brief discussion of the painted vessel, also characterize its visual narrative as mythological and historical.

5. The naming of the pre-Hispanic manuscripts in this study follows the nomenclature proposed by Jansen and Pérez Jiménez (2004). Their equivalent old name is provided in parentheses only when the manuscript is mentioned for the first time.

The Inscription on the Vessel

The globular body of the vessel renders two scenes (fig. 2), each one with a personage in the act of presenting an offering. One is dedicated in front of a temple and the other in front of a tree. In turn, the temple and the tree are each associated with a place name. Ignoring a priori if the scenes constitute events whose temporality is sequential or coeval, and without knowing beforehand if there is a specific point of departure in the account, I will begin by arbitrarily describing the representation of Lord 9 Wind–Serpent of Rain (*Iya Qh Chi Coo Dzavui*; *Iya* [lord], *Oh* [9], *Chi* [Wind], *Coo Dzavui* [Serpent of Rain]; fig. 3).⁶

All previous commentators agree on the identification of this personage, although they attribute to him different qualities. Seler, Caso, and López Austin characterize him as a deity and—using his epithet in Nahuatl—call him *Quetzalcóatl*. Furst (1978, 102–13) considers him a deified culture hero, a divine priest-shaman and a shaman-healer. Jansen and Pérez Jiménez (2000, 210) take him to be a healer-diviner who personifies *Quetzalcóatl*. His attributes are unmistakable: bearded, with a long square-ended nose and a pointed bucal mask with a prominently curved canine. The profile of the face has a curved, vertical stripe of facial paint behind the eye, and he wears a jaguar helmet. This later attribute of 9 Wind is pervasive in the pre-Hispanic manuscript *Yuta Tnoho* (Vindobonensis), although it appears in a synecdochical form, that is, as the jaguar pelt covering a royal headband (fig. 4).

In the vessel's image, a bundle of feathers protrudes behind the helmet. On the back of the neck, the personage carries a circular mirror for divination, marked by two projecting conical knots similar to those that, in other contexts, fasten bundled sacrificial offerings. His ear ornaments, whose actual versions were fashioned out of nacre,⁷ include a disc-shaped element with a hook-like pendant. The chest has an ornament covered with a jaguar pelt and dangling shells of *Oliva porphyria* around the edge. Three embellishments hang from below the chest ornament, including—from back to front—a fringed linen, two band-like elements with three dangling circular tassels, and a cut-shell pectoral suspended from the neck with a thick cord. Other ornaments include fringed and or tasseled bracelets and wristlets, as well as a bangle placed just below the knees. The latter two types of bodily adornments have small circular elements, undoubtedly signaling the jingling bells that were manufactured with metal

6. That most of the commentators, including myself, begin the description of the narrative with this scene is in large part because the identification of the personage is uncontroversial.

7. The iridescent inner shell layer of molluscs.



Figure 2. Rollout drawing of the two scenes in the visual narrative painted on the vessel. Drawing by Elbis Domínguez Covarrubias.

alloys. The anterior sash of his loincloth protrudes from the knees, and the sandals tied at the level of the ankles are clearly evident.

The personage, shown with an arm resting on his bent legs, appears seated in a stepped throne of woven mat.⁸ The throne has a frame around its edge and has a series of scroll-like ornaments on the back. According to Seler ([1908] 1993, 286), these scrolls may index the quality of “Radiance,” “Brightness,” or “Glow.”⁹ The throne is painted over the sign ‘hill-serpent’. The scalloped orange band at the base of this glyph makes it clear that it is the name of a hill

8. Paddock (1994, 105) pointed out how the stylistic rendering of the human body adheres to the assembly of standardized parts. Thus, instead of a right and left arm the personage’s representation repeats a right arm twice.

9. A note about glyphic transcriptions is in order. Descriptive labels of signs appear in lowercase letters between single quotes (‘hill-insect’); translations of presumed or ascertained logograms are capitalized and placed between double quotations marks (“Exuberant”); presumed logographic readings in Mixtec or Nahuatl are hispanicized, capitalized, and italicized (*Iya Qh Chi Coo Dzavui*).



Figure 3. The representation of 9 Wind glossed. Drawing by Elbis Domínguez Covarrubias

(fig. 5). The identification of what Lord 9 Wind holds in the extended hand has elicited various interpretations. Martínez Gracida (1910, vol. 1, plate 122–23) insinuated that it was a decapitated head. López Austin does not discuss this item, but his conclusion implies that the object is a censer where the tobacco of the primeval offering is burned. Pohl (2007, 9) suggests that it represents an effigy vessel, while Jansen and Pérez Jiménez (2000, 211) propose a logophonic reading of “Face-Heart,” a couplet in the Mixtec language that means “all of his persona.” Two observations compel me to follow the interpretations of López Austin and Pohl, which could actually be complementary (a censer in the shape of an effigy vessel). One is the fact that the presumed rendering of a heart can equally be that of a flower (fig. 6). The other is that the phonetic reading



Figure 4. Jaguar attributes in representations of Lord 9 Wind. Modified from Anders et al. (1992b) facsimile.



Figure 5. The graphic convention of a scalloped basal band in the representation of hills. Drawing by Elbis Domínguez Covarrubias. Photos modified from Anders et al. (1992a), Caso (1964), and Anders et al. (1992b) facsimiles.

implies that the representation is not that of an object, but rather a linguistic reference that qualifies the participation and “total immersion” in the visionary trance that, according to Jansen and Pérez Jiménez, typifies in this scene the role of 9 Wind.

The face of the effigy shows a horizontal stripe of red paint over the eyes. It has a circular ear ornament and over the head a headdress that ends in a three-petal flower, three feathers, and a jingling bell. Thus, it is possible that 9

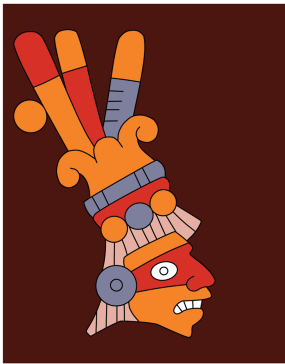


Effigy vessel,
Zaachila tomb 1



Effigy vessel
attributed to Cholula

A



"Hearts", *Yuta*
Tnoho-15b



Day-name glyph "Flower"
Yuta Tnoho-32c

B

Figure 6. A, Effigy vessel and ceramic polychrome head. B, Comparison of the "Heart" sign and the day name glyph "Flower." Drawing by Elbis Domínguez Covarrubias. Photos in A after Solís (2004a, 296 and 200). Photos in B modified after Anders et al. (1992b) facsimile.

Wind is shown in the act of offering tobacco with an effigy censer that exhibits facial paint—similar to that on the two effigies illustrated in figure 6—beautified with symbols of the nobility (flower, feathers, and a gold rattle).

Several scholars (Jansen and Pérez Jiménez 2000, 210; Pohl 2007, 9) have argued that the temple in front of 9 Wind appears over a cave represented by means of a serpent with its jaws open. Yet, as I have already demonstrated based on the scalloped basal band, this other feature appears to be another instance of the glyph 'hill-serpent'. The temple includes a basal platform with a staircase, a broad balustrade decorated with a quadripartite motif (a rectangle

in the center and double lines on each of the four sides), and an entablature painted with the representation of two shells (fig. 7). The flat roof of the superstructure is decorated with stepped merlons.¹⁰ While the temple is shown in profile, the frontal view of two grass roofs is evident at the top of the building. One of the roofs is conical and the other is trapezoidal. The former is topped by a cut-shell pectoral from which a stream of sacrificial blood flows.¹¹ The latter roof has, at the top, an entablature decorated with two blue-painted concentric circles and crowned by stepped merlons. Such a graphic composition suggests that the temple has two sanctuaries, one circular—dedicated to the Wind God—and one rectangular—dedicated to the Rain God, taking the blue concentric circles on the roof's entablature as iconic renditions of jadeite beads and hence as symbolic of rain drops.¹²

The architectural configuration of double temples has not been attested in the Mixteca Alta, but temples with twin sanctuaries are characteristic of the Nahuatl tradition in the Central Highlands. Since the valleys of Coixtlahuaca and Nochixtlan became part of the hegemonic domain of the Empire of the Triple Alliance during the fifteenth century, particularly after the conquests of Motecuzoma Ilhuicamina, one may assume that in these valleys, as well as in neighboring regions, this architectural form may have been imposed or emulated. As a matter of fact, in the manuscript *Tonindeye* there is the sequential representation of four temples with the sacred bundle of 9 Wind whose configuration is almost identical to the one on the vessel, except that these other temples alternate in different pages of the manuscript (two with the conical roof and two with the trapezoidal roof; fig. 8).¹³

Another important feature of the temple painted on the vessel is the serpent with the head of a dog and a solar ray in the tail. This serpent winds up from behind the conical roof and rises up straight in front of 9 Wind. Seler identified this glyph as a representation of *Xolotl*.¹⁴ In the manuscript *Yuta Tnoho*-24a there is a passage involving 9 Wind at the "Place of the Lord Dog" (fig. 9), but here the glyph 'dog' (*Xolotl*) does not have a reptilian body or a solar ray. In

10. These ornaments do not imply that the structure was a battlement or a fortress.

11. The scene on the manuscript *Yuta Tnoho*-48c where two ancestral elders who reside in the sky invest 9 Wind with his titles, attributes, and functions, shows a temple above him with a conical roof topped by a shell.

12. Byland and Pohl (1994, 77) comment that "this may be an attempt to show a building with two roofs or two buildings that are so similar functionally and so close to one another physically that they may be drawn as one."

13. In the manuscript *Yoalli Ehecatl* (Borgia)-33 and 34 there is also the sequential yet separate representation of a temple with a conical roof and a temple with a trapezoidal roof.

14. This Nahuatl name literally means "the one with the crooked foot" and was applied to any entity with a double nature (López Austin and Quintana 2000, 3:1348). According to Anders et al. (1992b, 244 n. 143), representations of *Xolotl* refer to "the monstrous deity of wealth."



Figure 7. The representation of the temple glossed. Drawing by Elbis Domínguez Covarrubias.

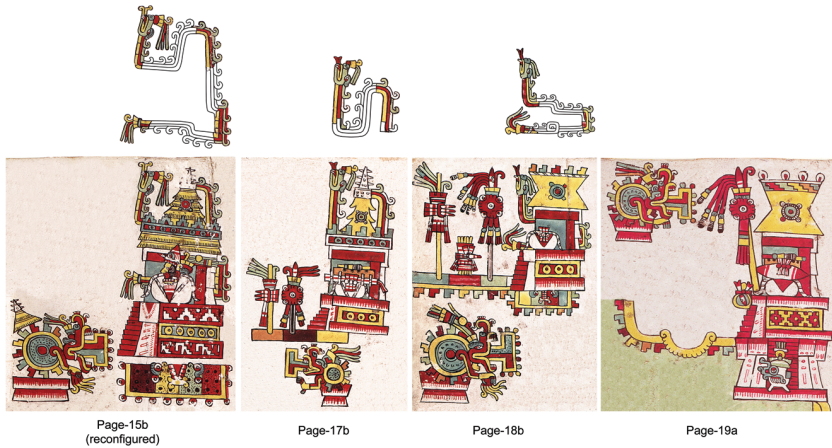


Figure 8. Temples with the sacred bundle of 9 Wind in the manuscript *Tonindeye* (twice with a conical roof and twice with a trapezoidal roof). The temples are associated to a ‘fire-serpent’ circular gladiatorial platform. An undulating feathered serpent appears in the background plane on the first three temples. Photos modified from Anders et al. (1992a) facsimile. Drawings by Javier Urcid.

one of the twin and jeweled personifications of *Xolotl* in the manuscript *Yuta Tnoho* (49b), the turquoise ‘man-dog’ wears a royal headband, a bone awl, and the shell ornaments characteristic of 9 Wind. It is possible that the ‘serpent-man-dog-ray’ glyphic compound in the vessel may have a phonetic or semantic value related to the place name. If one considers the connotations mentioned in note 14, the glyphic compound could emphasize the dual and prized nature of the temple. Although Byland and Pohl (1994a, 77) describe the glyphic compound as a skeletonized serpent, it is unclear what attributes support such a statement. On the other hand, Jansen and Pérez Jiménez (2000, 210) take the ‘serpent-man-dog-ray’ glyphic compound as a constitutive part of the narrative, interpreting it as an index of the presumed visionary trance enacted by 9 Wind.¹⁵

The Other Scene on the Vessel

The personage in the other scene painted on the vessel is an elderly man, bearded, and seated on a cushion covered with a jaguar pelt (which includes

15. This argument, which resembles the interpretative model of the “vision serpent” in the semantic component of Maya writing (Schele and Freidel 1990; Schele and Miller 1992), is the result of a literal reading of the imagery, without taking into account the conceptual nature of the sign. Nothing prevents us from assuming that the representational trope of humans shown as if emerging from the open jaws of serpents is a visual metaphor to denote the act of “making ancestral spirits present,” rather than the reference to a state of trance of the represented personage as mediated by the scribe.



Paired personifications of 'men-dog', *Yuta Tnoho-49b* (left) and 18b (right)

9 Wind at the "Place of Lord Dog", *Yuta Tnoho-24a*

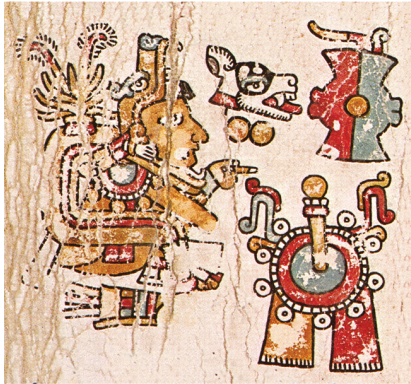
Figure 9. Lord 9 Wind and the imagery of 'men-dog'. Drawing by Elbis Domínguez Covarrubias. Photos modified from Anders et al. (1992b) facsimile.

the tail) who offers—seemingly on a stone receptacle—burning tobacco (fig. 10).¹⁶ In addition to the privilege of seating on a cushion with a feline pelt, a headdress in the shape of a jaguar head denotes his high rank. Hanging from behind the headdress is a bundle of feathers, and sticking out of the bundle's wrapping is a flint knife. The elder carries on the back of his neck a smoking mirror which, as in the case of 9 Wind, alludes to his role as diviner. He wears a chest ornament marked by concentric elements decorated around the edge by jingling bells, and over it, hanging on his back, is a gourd with tobacco. The latter includes a tubular

16. According to Jansen and Pérez Jiménez (2000, 211) the personage holds a "stone with a darkened center from which smoke emanates; perhaps making reference to the *naualtezcatl*, the magical mirror usually consulted by diviners."



10 Rain, Tonindeye-19b



2 Dog "Serpent-Grass",
Yuta Tnoho-30b



2 Dog with a pouch covered
with the pelt of a jaguar paw,
Yuta Tnoho-21

Figure 10. Identity of the personage painted in the other scene on the vessel. Drawing by Elbis Domínguez Covarrubias. Photos modified from Anders et al. (1992a, 1992b) facsimiles.

bead capped with a jingling rattle, a semantic complement that qualifies the gourd and its content as something “Precious.”¹⁷ Four fringed stripes, probably made out of skin, paper, or cloth, hang from the gourd; and these may have formed part of the harness that enabled suspending the gourd to the body.

In addition to the ear ornament that mimics a flower, the personage wears fringed and/or tasseled bracelets and wristlets, as well as a bangle placed just

17. Seler ([1908] 1993, 286) interprets the jewel as the strap to suspend the gourd.

below the knees. Except for the former, these ornaments have dangling spherical rattles. The seated personage is shown with an arm resting on the bent legs. A short skirt is discernible over the loincloth, and the fringed anterior sash of the latter visibly protrudes in front of the knee and bent elbow. The elder wears sandals tied at the level of the ankles.

This personage has elicited diverse interpretations. Selser ([1908] 1993, 286) construes him as the deity-priest *Tonacatecuhtli*,¹⁸ the god of ancestral times, the night, and the darkness prior to the birth of the sun. Selser also draws the similarity of his attributes not only with another closely related god identified in the manuscript *Yuta Tnoho* by the calendrical name 2 Dog, but also with the venerable elderly priests figured in the manuscript *Tonindeye*. His distinctive attributes include the face of an old man—bearded and almost toothless—and the tobacco gourd. In contrast, Caso (1938, 49) focuses on the smoking mirror on the back of the neck to identify the personage as the god *Tezcatlipoca*.¹⁹ Quiñones Keber (1994, 151) attempts to confine his identity even further by proposing that, given the jaguar headdress and his relation to the cave toponym in front of him, it had to be a representation of a presumed Mixtec equivalent to *Tepeyolotl* (the heart of the hill).²⁰ Jansen and Pérez Jiménez (2000, 210) equate him with *Cipactonal*,²¹ a name that in some sources from the Central Highlands makes reference to the primordial woman. As mentioned before, López Austin (1998, 2001) and Lind (1996, 2003)—following one of the leads proposed by Selser—interpret the personage as 2 Dog, the prominent companion of 9 Wind in the manuscript *Yuta Tnoho*. On the other hand, Byland and Pohl (1994a, 77; see also Pohl 2007, 13–15) follow another of the alternatives put forward by Selser and interpret him as one of the venerable elders who in the manuscript *Tonindeye* is identified as Lord 10 Rain. The key argument in Pohl's identification (personal communication) is a passage in the manuscript *Yuta Tnoho*-30/27 where 9 Wind, identified by the personal name “Serpent-Coyote,” faces 44 personages, among them 2 Dog. In this context, 2 Dog has the personal name of “Serpent-Grass” and the epithets “Earthquake and Fire, Gourd of Precious Tabaco, and the Famous One (the one of many songs).”²² Since in this

18. Literally, “the lord of our sustenance” (López Austin and Quintana 2000, 3:1336).

19. Literally, “the smoke of the mirror” (López Austin and Quintana 2000, 3:1322).

20. This argument by Quiñones Keber anticipates one of the conclusions of López Austin (2 Dog as the owner or heart of the hill).

21. Literally, “the sign of his fate is Alligator” (López Austin and Quintana 2000, 3:1256).

22. The reading of these epithets is taken from Anders et al. (1992b, 132–33). In the graphic representation of one of them there is a glyphic conflation whereby the sign ‘jewel’ substitutes for the iconic rendition of the tobacco gourd.

scene 2 Dog wears a serpent helmet and in the manuscript *Tonindeye* 10 Rain wears a jaguar headdress, then—according to Pohl—the personage painted on the vessel (with a jaguar helmet) has to be 10 Rain. However, it is evident that in the vessel neither of the personages is identified by the epithets with which they are identified in the manuscript *Yuta Tnoho*-30. Furthermore, 2 Dog appears on another scene in the manuscript *Yuta Tnoho*-21a with a pouch made with the skin of a jaguar paw (fig. 10), making it evident that the presence/absence of feline attributes is not a criterion to identify the personage.

In contrast, Jansen and Pérez Jiménez (2000, 210) as well as López Austin (1998, 2001) explicitly identify the personage as Lord 2 Dog, although previously Anders et al. (1992b, 126 n. 6) seemingly established an analogy between Lord 2 Dog and Lord 10 Rain when commenting that the same priestly rank (of the former) appears frequently in the manuscript *Tonindeye* (e.g., on page 14, where the elders with the tobacco gourd 10 Rain and 10 Grass appear). Can one assume that 2 Dog and 10 Rain are equivalent personages, or regional variants of the same archetype? Systematic comparisons of the contexts in which these two personages appear in the manuscripts *Yuta Tnoho* and *Tonindeye*, as well as of their attributes, suggest that such an analogy is not an identity. The data shown in table 1 suggest the following (see also fig. 11):

- (1) In the manuscript *Yuta Tnoho* 9 Wind and 2 Dog appear together in several foundational events that take place in primordial times. In the manuscript *Tonindeye*, they are the wise elders 10 Rain and 10 Grass who, together, carry out several actions in primordial times. In this later manuscript, 9 Wind and 10 Rain never appear together.
- (2) In the manuscript *Yuta Tnoho* the elders 10 Rain and 10 Grass are not figured, either alone or together. In contrast, the manuscript *Tonindeye* does allude, although most often separately, to Lord 9 Wind and Lord 2 Dog. The manuscript *Tonindeye*-18a includes only once the paired representation of 9 Wind (with weapons and self-sacrificial awls) and 2 Dog (with the tobacco gourd and a sacrificial pouch).
- (3) The attributes of old age, the beard, and the tobacco gourd are not exclusive to lords 2 Dog and 10 Rain. In the manuscript *Tonindeye*, 10 Grass—companion of 10 Rain—also have them. They appear as well in the manuscript *Yuta Tnoho*-18a on another personage named 5 Alligator, who is shown with a serpent headdress.

From these patterns one can establish, as López Austin (1998, 2001) had done based on other arguments, that the personages illustrated on the vessel

are personifications of the venerable elders 9 Wind and 2 Dog. In the manuscript *Yuta Tnoho*-21, 2 Dog is clearly associated with the region of the north (Anders et al. 1992b, 150–54), and on page 10 in the same manuscript—in company of 9 Wind—they establish and legitimize several kingdoms in the northern sector of the Mixteca Alta (Anders et al. 1992b, 174–77).

The place where 2 Dog makes an offering in the visual narrative on the vessel is an extraordinary composition of a landscape that includes a tree on top of two hills with bent summits. A cave is referenced by means of a visual metaphor in the center of the composition, below the hills (fig. 12).²³ The tree has a swollen trunk, and each of its two branches ends in ears of corn with their leaves. The trunk, the branches, and the fruits are dually differentiated in terms of color and textural marks. Two knots with their lateral ribbons appear in frontal view in the center of the trunk—a graphic trope that usually indexes sacrificial offerings. In certain contexts, bulging, female-gendered personification of tree trunks is a visual metaphor to denote the beginnings of a lineage (fig. 13). Considering the representation of ears of corn in the tree on the vessel, it seems that, in a generic sense, the ‘pregnant tree’ alludes in this particular context to the origin of humans from maize.²⁴

Each hill is marked on their interior and along their borders by distinct qualifying signs (fig. 14A). In addition to the scalloped orange basal band, the hill on the left side has, from bottom to top, three horizontal bands (two blue and one red), a section with a continuous motif that mimics the scaled skin of an alligator (“Earth”), and what appears to be the textile design of a female garment. Superimposed on these zones are the signs ‘red-black-white rectangle’²⁵ and “Flower.” Over the bent summit of the hill sign there is a cluster of signs that include two red circles (‘balls of incense’), feathers (“Exuberant” or “Iridescent”), and a tubular bead from an ear or lip ornament (“Precious”). The opposite hill has the scalloped orange basal band, and at a higher level than the other hill, three horizontal bands (two blue and one red), followed by what

23. In the scene on the manuscript *Yuta Tnoho*-48c where two ancestral elders who reside in the sky invest 9 Wind with his titles, attributes, and functions, there appears behind him a double hill with a bulging tree on top of one of the summits.

24. Byland and Pohl (1994, 79) point out that in the divinatory section of the manuscript *Yoalli Ehecatl* 49–53, the only sacred tree with ears of corn is the one corresponding to the center. Hermann (personal communication) notes how the ‘tree-maize’ in the vessel differentiates the two halves, just as in the primordial ‘tree-woman’ in the story of creation recounted in the manuscript *Yuta Tnoho* 37b.

25. This sign appears in the manuscript *Yuta Tnoho* (35b, 30a, 22b, 17b), but Anders et al. (1992b) do not interpret it. Hernández Sánchez (2005, 72) describes its associations in the divinatory manuscripts, including representations of deities such as *Xochipilli*, *Macuilxochitl*, *Tonacatecuhtli*, *Cinteotl* (god of maize), at times with monkeys and, in Codex Magliabechi where a similar version of the sign occurs on the representation of cotton cloths glossed in alphabetic script as “cloth of five roses,” an expression that refers to *Macuilxochitl* (5 Flower).

Table 1. Occurrences of the Venerable Elders 9 Wind–2 Dog and 10 Rain–10 Grass in the Manuscripts *Yuta Tnoho* and *Tonindeye*

Manuscript	Page	Elder	Elder	Attributes	Context
<i>Yuta Tnoho</i>	49	9 Wind		Shown as a bearded elder, without a tobacco gourd	Origin of 9 Wind from a flint knife
<i>Yuta Tnoho</i>	48	9 Wind		Shown as a bearded elder, without a tobacco gourd	Investiture of 9 Wind. He appears three times, once as a warrior
<i>Yuta Tnoho</i>	47	9 Wind		Shown as a bearded elder, without a tobacco gourd	9 Wind as creator, appears twice
<i>Yuta Tnoho</i>	38	9 Wind		Shown as a bearded elder, without a tobacco gourd	9 Wind confers with other beings prior to the emergence of the first humans; his calendrical name is implied
<i>Yuta Tnoho</i>	35	9 Wind		Shown as a bearded elder but without the Wind mask. Has no tobacco gourd	9 Wind confers with an elder named 1 Flower
<i>Yuta Tnoho</i>	34–33	9 Wind	2 Dog	9 Wind is shown as a bearded elder, without a tobacco gourd; 2 Dog is shown as a bearded elder carrying a tobacco gourd	9 Wind makes an offering at Apoala to the primordial couple Lord 1 Grass and Lady 1 Eagle. 2 Dog and 25 other personages confer with lords 4 Serpent and 7 Serpent
<i>Yuta Tnoho</i>	32	9 Wind		Shown bearded and without most of his common attributes, including the Wind mask. He has no tobacco gourd	9 Wind institutes the first ritual to renew fire
<i>Yuta Tnoho</i>	30	9 Wind	2 Dog	2 Dog carries the tobacco gourd; 9 Wind is shown bearded but without the Wind mask. He has no tobacco gourd	They appear in the context of gatherings and rituals at Apoala. 2 Dog appears three times, and 9 Wind appears four times. They mutually perforate their earlobes; 9 Wind is shown once identified by the personal name 'Serpent-Coyote'
<i>Yuta Tnoho</i>	25	9 Wind	2 Dog	2 Dog is shown as a bearded elder and does not carry a tobacco gourd. In one instance he is shown with the eyes painted. 9 Wind is not shown as an elder, and is mostly devoid of his common attributes	Appear in the context of the first pulque ritual at Apoala; 2 Dog appears twice
<i>Yuta Tnoho</i>	24	9 Wind	2 Dog	2 Dog is shown as a bearded elder and does not carry a tobacco gourd. 9 Wind is shown as a bearded elder without a tobacco gourd.	Appear in the context of a ritual involving hallucinogenic mushrooms. 9 Wind appears three times and 2 Dog twice
<i>Yuta Tnoho</i>	23	9 Wind	2 Dog	Shown as a bearded elder and without the tobacco gourd	Appears in the context of the first sunrise. 2 Dog confers with other personages
<i>Yuta Tnoho</i>	22	9 Wind	2 Dog	Shown as a bearded elder and carrying a tobacco gourd	Appears in the context of the founding of dynasties and kingdoms in the northern region of the Mixteca Alta. He is shown twice, once offering pulque

<i>Yuta Tnoho</i>	21	2 Dog		Shown as a bearded elder and without a tobacco gourd but with a pouch shaped as a jaguar paw	Appears in the context of the founding of dynasties and kingdoms in the northern region of the Mixteca Alta
<i>Yuta Tnoho</i>	18	5 Alligator		Shown as a bearded elder with a serpent headdress and carrying a tobacco gourd	Appears in the context of the founding of dynasties and kingdoms in the eastern region. 5 Alligator offers the blood of a sacrificed quail
<i>Yuta Tnoho</i>	10	2 Dog	9 Wind	Both are shown as bearded elders; 2 Dog carries a tobacco gourd	Both establish kingdoms and dynasties in the region of the "Mountains of Rain" (The Mixteca Alta)
<i>Tonindeye</i>	4	2 Dog		Not shown as an elder, but carries a tobacco gourd	Appears in a section devoted to the story of a great ruler named 8 Wind. Confers with a personification of the Rain god
<i>Tonindeye</i>	14	10 Rain	10 Grass	Both are shown as bearded elders, have their eyes painted, wear a jaguar headdress, and carry a tobacco gourd	Both appear in the section devoted to the dynasty of Lady 3 Flint and Lord 12 Wind, in the context of six primordial places
<i>Tonindeye</i>	15	10 Rain	10 Grass	Both are shown as bearded elders, have their eyes painted and carry a tobacco gourd	Both appear in the section devoted to the dynasty of Lady 3 Flint and Lord 12 Wind, in the context of a peregrination to a sacred place ('sun-river' or 'temple of plumed serpent-bundle of 9 Wind')
<i>Tonindeye</i>	16		10 Grass	Shown as a bearded elder, has the eyes painted and carries a tobacco gourd	Appears in the section devoted to the dynasty of Lady 3 Flint and Lord 12 Wind, apparently presenting the transformation of Lady 3 Flint's mother into her alter ego; shown accompanied by a young lord named 10 Reed
<i>Tonindeye</i>	17	10 Grass	10 Rain	Both are shown as bearded elders, have their eyes painted, and carry a tobacco gourd	Both appear in the section devoted to the dynasty of Lady 3 Flint and Lord 12 Wind. 10 Rain appears twice, first conferring with Lady 3 Flint and then making an offering at 'city-mountains'
<i>Tonindeye</i>	18	2 Dog	9 Wind	2 Dog is shown as a bearded elder and carries a tobacco gourd; 9 Wind is not shown as an elder and is devoid of most of his common attributes	Both appear paired in the section devoted to the dynasty of Lady 3 Flint and Lord 12 Wind, legitimating the enthronement of Lady 3 Flint
<i>Tonindeye</i>	19a	10 Grass	10 Rain	Both are shown as bearded elders, have their eyes painted and carry a tobacco gourd; 10 Grass wears a jaguar headdress	Both appear in the section devoted to the dynasty of Lady 3 Flint and Lord 12 Wind, at 'hill-cicada'; 10 Grass is shown presenting a quail
<i>Tonindeye</i>	19b	10 Rain		Shown as a bearded elder, has the eyes painted, and carries a tobacco gourd. He also wears a jaguar headdress	Appears in the section devoted to the dynasty of Lady 3 Flint and Lord 12 Wind, in the context of their marital alliance. 10 Rain is seated on a throne and about to sacrifice a quail

Table 1 (*Continued*)

Manuscript	Page	Elder	Elder	Attributes	Context
<i>Tomindeye</i>	20	9 Wind	9 Wind	Shown dressed as a young warrior and taking a captive	Appears in the section devoted to the dynasty of Lady 3 Flint and Lord 12 Wind. 9 Wind leads the battle against the 'stone-men'.
<i>Tomindeye</i>	20	10 Rain	10 Grass	Both are shown as bearded elders. 10 Rain, with his eyes painted, wears a jaguar headdress; 10 Grass' body is painted black. He carries a tobacco gourd	Both appear in the section devoted to the dynasty of Lady 3 Flint and Lord 12 Wind, in the context of paying homage to the brother lords (and their parents) slain by the 'stone-men'.
<i>Tomindeye</i>	21	10 Rain	10 Rain	Shown as a bearded elder, has the eyes painted, carries a tobacco gourd and a decapitated head	Appears in the section devoted to the dynasty of Lady 3 Flint and Lord 12 Wind, in the context of presencing a battle against the 'striped-men'. 10 Rain is accompanied by the young lord 10 Reed
<i>Tomindeye</i>	21	9 Wind	9 Wind	Shown dressed as a young warrior	Appears in the section devoted to the dynasty of Lady 3 Flint and Lord 12 Wind. 9 Wind stands in a ballcourt after vanquishing the 'striped-men'.
<i>Tomindeye</i>	22	10 Rain	10 Rain	Shown as a bearded elder carrying a tobacco gourd	Appears in the section devoted to the dynasty of Lady 3 Flint and Lord 12 Wind, at 'hill-black'. He presents a quail to 12 Wind and his companions, who bring to 'hill-black' the sacred bundle of 9 Wind
<i>Tomindeye</i>	22	9 Wind	9 Wind	Shown dressed as a young warrior; his calendrical name is implied	Appears in the section devoted to the dynasty of Lady 3 Flint and Lord 12 Wind. In this context 9 Wind embodies his own sacred bundle

Note.—The entry for *Tomindeye* 18 is highlighted to indicate the paired occurrence of 9 Wind and 2 Dog in the manuscript.



Figure 11. The paired lords 9 Wind–2 Dog and 10 Rain–10 Grass. Photos modified from Anders et al. (1992a, 1992b) facsimiles, and Burland (1955) facsimile.



Figure 12. Toponym in the other scene painted on the vessel. Drawing by Elbis Domínguez Covarrubias.



Figure 13. Personified pregnant trees as visual metaphor that in certain contexts signals the “beginning of a lineage.” Drawing by Elbis Domínguez Covarrubias. Photos modified from Anders et al. (1992b) facsimile.

appears to be the design of a male ceremonial vest that includes an interwoven design (“Mat”) and a horizontal band with inverted S-shaped motifs (“Clouds?”). Inset in the upper section of the hill sign are X-like motifs. The signs ‘flint knife’ (“Sacrifice?”) and ‘jingling bell’ appear superimposed over the zoned interior. The border of the hill sign has, from bottom to top: (1) a bead (“Precious”), (2) a bundle of feathers (“Exuberant” or “Iridescent”), (3) rectilinear volutes (“Smoke”), and (4) curvilinear volutes (“Aroma?”). Painted at the base of the hills is the split image of the head of an alligator, facing down and with jaws open. Inside the maw appear curved (above) and horizontal (below) bands

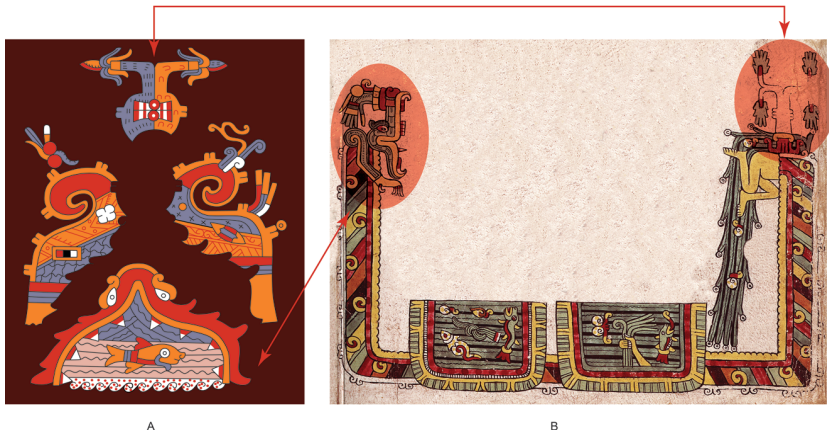


Figure 14. A, Glossing of the tree, the hills, and the cave of the toponym on the vessel. B, Comparison with the landscape painted on the manuscript *Tonindeye-36*. Drawing by Elbis Domínguez Covarrubias. Photo modified from Anders et al. (1992a) facsimile.

with an undulating line in the middle (“Dripping and flowing water”), an overlapped representation of a fish, and at the bottom, white “Foamy” scrolls that signal “Waves.”

Anders et al. (1994, 48), as well as Lind (personal communication) have proposed that this toponym represents two landscape features in the Valley of Apoala, namely, the *Peña Cerrada* and the cave *Yahui Coo Maa*, both located west of the community of Apoala. Inside the cave there is a spring that, according to Lind, has fish. Jansen (1982; see also Anders et al. 1992a, 165 n. 1; Jansen and Pérez Jiménez 2007, 100–105; 2011, 288–91) has also argued that part of the geography of the Valley of Apoala is rendered as well in the manuscript *Tonindeye-36*, with the cave *Yahui Coo Maa* represented on the left side by the open jaws of an alligator and, on the right side, the waterfall that is located east of the community. If so, the toponym depicted on the vessel would be a partially differential synecdoche of the elaborate toponym in the manuscript *Tonindeye*. While the former would include the *Peña Cerrada* (the two hill signs), the cave with the spring, and the primeval tree (excluding, however, the “Valley surrounded by mountains” [the entire body of the alligator with ‘stony’ marks], the “River that pulls out” [a hand holding the caudal feathers of a plumed serpent], the “River of a knotted reed” [a twisted reed], and the waterfall), the latter renders the cave, the valley, the two rivers, the waterfall, and the primeval tree (but excludes the *Peña Cerrada*; fig. 14B).

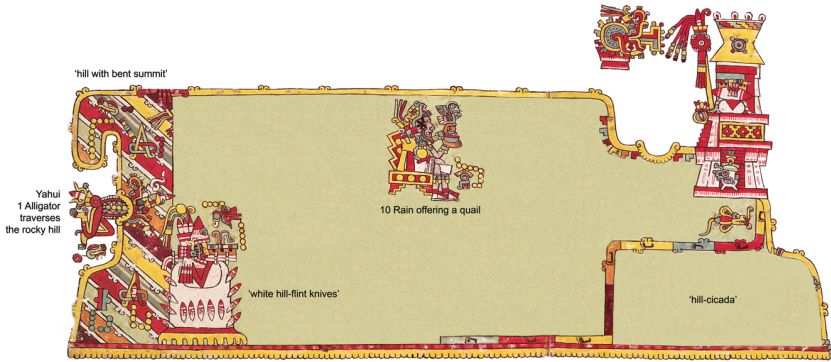


Figure 15. The toponyms on the manuscript *Tonindeye-19*. Photo modified from Anders et al. (1992a) facsimile.

Nowotny ([1961] 2005, 50) is also of the opinion that the tree in the toponym painted on the vessel is a representation of the tree of human genesis in Apoala, just as it is depicted in the manuscript *Yuta Tnoho-37b* (fig. 13). However, neither the tree on the landscape view in the manuscript *Tonindeye-36* nor the one in *Yuta Tnoho-37b* include ears of corn. In addition, other references to Apoala as “River that Pulls–River of the knotted Reed,” for instance in the manuscript *Yuta Tnoho-24*, resort to a simple rather than a partially differential synecdoche.

In contrast to these interpretations, Byland and Pohl (1994a, 77; Pohl 2007, 14) argue that the place name on the vessel shares several attributes with a group of toponyms that in the manuscript *Tonindeye* have a close spatial relation, places that they identify geographically in the southern sector of the Valley of Nochixtlan. Their spatial relationship, according to these scholars, seems especially evident on page 19 (fig. 15). There, seated on a stepped throne (similar to the one on the vessel where lord 9 Wind sits) appears the elder 10 Rain carrying the tobacco gourd while holding a bowl to collect the blood of a quail to be sacrificed. The setting is a tall hill with a bent summit and an aperture on one side that is associated with ‘white hill–flint knives’ and the ‘hill–insect’. Thus, according to Byland and Pohl, the place name signaled by the toponym ‘tree–bent hills–cave’ on the vessel corresponds to a place they locate between ‘white hill–flint knives’ and ‘hill–insect’, southwest of the community of San Miguel Magdalena Jaltepec.²⁶

26. There are several opinions regarding the interpretation and geographical correspondence of the toponym ‘hill–insect’. Byland and Pohl (1994a, 1994b) actually paraphrase it as “Hill of the Wasp” and link it to an

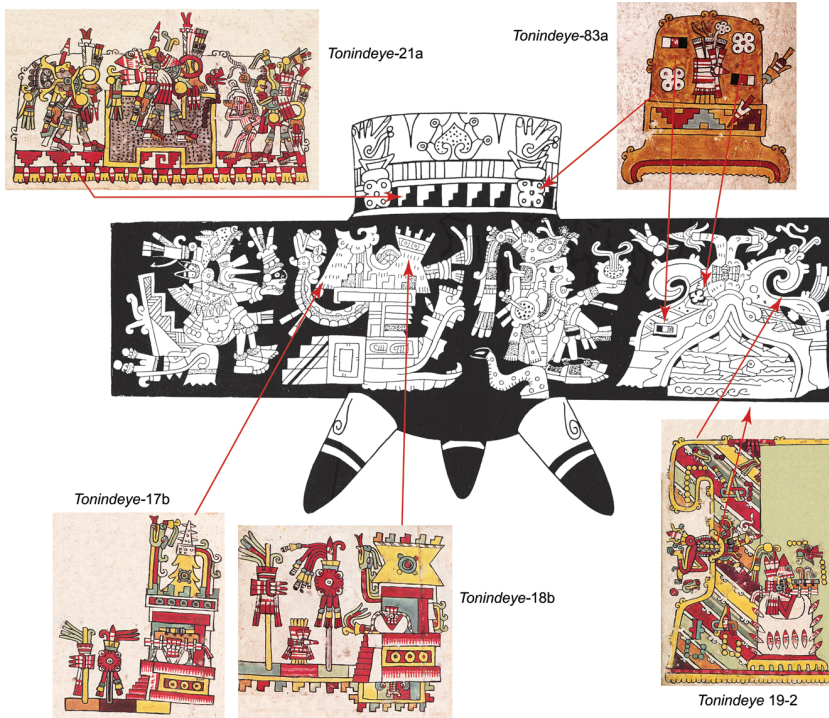


Figure 16. Glyphic similarities between the imagery painted on the vessel and several places depicted on the manuscript *Tonindeye*, according to Byland and Pohl (1994a, 78). From *In the Realm of 8 Deer*, by Bruce E. Byland and John M. D. Pohl. Copyright 1994 by the University of Oklahoma Press. All rights reserved. Reprinted by permission. Drawing after Byland and Pohl (1994a). Photos modified from Anders et al. (1992a) facsimile.

In my opinion, the differences between the toponyms on the vessel and those in the several pages of the manuscript *Tonindeye* highlighted by Byland and Pohl are more significant than the similarities that they point out (fig. 16). The shared attributes are not primary but are, rather, those that function as secondary qualifiers (e.g., ‘white flower’, ‘red-black-white rectangle’, ‘flint knife’). Furthermore, the hill next to ‘white hill–flint knives’ in the manuscript *Tonindeye-19* has one, not two bent summits, and rather than a cave, the aperture on the rock denotes the ability of the *Yahui* 1 Alligator to fly and

archaeological site in the *agencia municipal* of San Isidro (near Tilantongo) known today as *Yucu Yoco* (Hill of the Wasp, or Hill of the Hive). Jansen and Pérez Jiménez (1998, and 2007, 120; see also Jansen 1998) identify it with one of the hills of Monte Albán—in the far distant valley of Oaxaca—based on the glossed toponyms that appear on the Mapa de Xoxocotlan identified as *Yuco Yoo* (Hill of Reeds) and *Sayultepec* (Hill of the Fly). More convincing is the proposal by Hermann (2011, 42–50), who identifies the insect’s representation as that of a cicada and relates it geographically to Monte Negro (Black Hill), adjacent to Tilantongo.

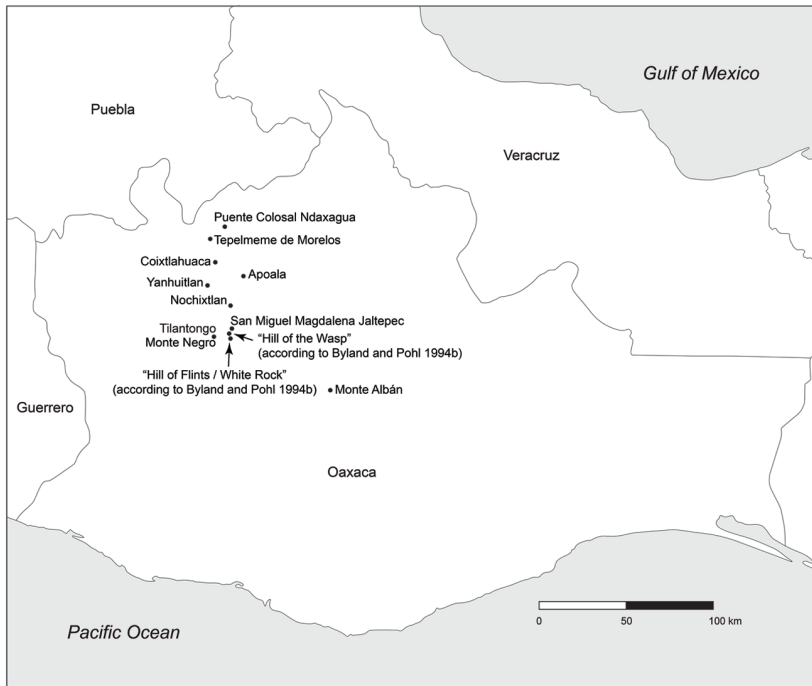


Figure 17. Map showing localities in the valleys of Coixtlahuaca and Nochixtlan, Oaxaca. Drawing by Elbis Domínguez Covarrubias.

traverse through it (Smith 1973b, 60–64). Ultimately, the proposal of Byland and Pohl requires explaining why a vessel found in Pueblo Viejo Nochixtlan makes reference to localities in the environs of San Miguel Magdalena Jaltepec (fig. 17).

The Signs Painted on the Neck of the Vessel and the Function of the Receptacle

Before putting forward another interpretation of the geographical correspondence of the toponyms painted on the vessel, it is necessary to analyze the remaining inscription. The neck of the container has three horizontal bands, each one painted with different signs (fig. 18). The lowermost band, which is delimited by thick orange lines, alternates red and white stepped merlons. Their identification as merlons stems from the representation of such architectural elements in the same temple where Lord 9 Wind makes an offering, as well as their use to designate places of veneration in the manuscript *Yuta*

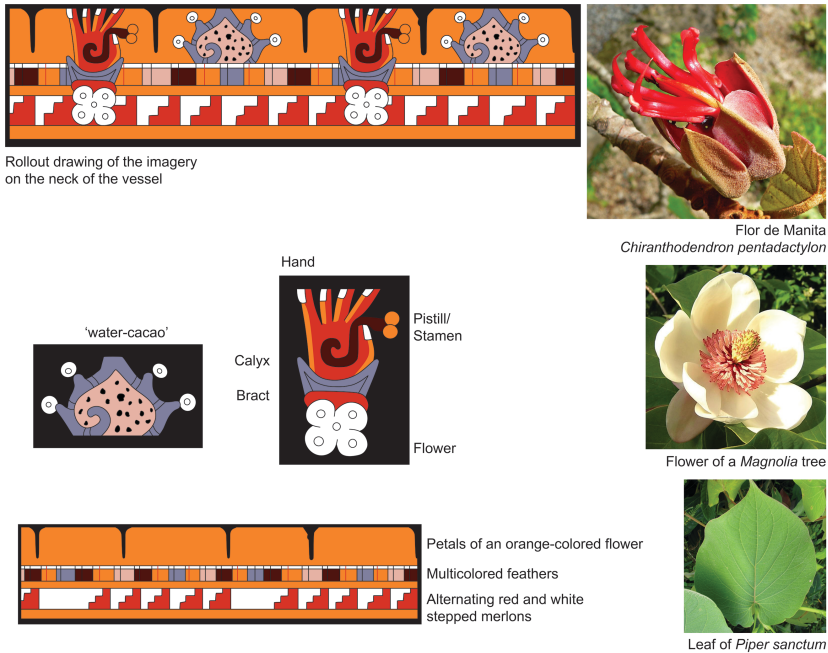


Figure 18. Signs painted on the neck of the vessel. Drawing by Elbis Domínguez Covarrubias. Photo of Flor de Manita © Stan Shebs 2005, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Chiranthodendron_pentadactylon_4.jpg. Photo of a Magnolia flower, http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Magnolia_Watsoni.JPG. Photo of leaf of *Piper sanctum* © Brian's Botanical 2013. Used by permission.

Tnoho (see the 'adoratory of the woman-tree of origin' in fig. 13 or the 'adoratory where cacao is offered' in fig. 19). The intermediate band consists of a series of short, trimmed, multicolored feathers in vertical position. The upper band, just below the lip of the vessel, seemingly represents in the background plane the petals of an orange-colored flower, and superimposed on each one of them is an alternating sequence of two glyphs, one comprising a white four-petal flower topped by a bract, a calyx, a pistil/stamen, and a red-colored hand. The other sign consists of two streams of water that simulate the silhouette of a leaf and delimit an interior area painted in pink and stippled. Seler—in another stroke of genius—proposed that the first glyphic compound iconically represents a red flower known in southwestern Mesoamerica as Flor de Manita (Mexican hand tree). Much later, and independently of Seler's identification, Coe and Coe (1996, 90) commented that the flowers of Flor de Manita (*Chiranthodendron pentadactylon*) were used to season the elite beverage based

on cacao.²⁷ These two lines of evidence strongly suggest that the other sign along the border of the vessel's neck makes iconic reference to the water-stirred cacao.²⁸ As a matter of fact, the overall configuration of the glyph 'water-cacao' is similar to the shape of the petals of the *yolloxochitl* flower (*Magnolia mexicana*) and to the form of the leaves in the *mecaxochitl* plant (*Piper sanctum*), two other condiments that, according to Hernández (1615, vol. 1, chap. 20, and vol. 2, chap. 13), were used as well to flavor the cacao beverage.²⁹ It is thus possible that the representation of the presumed orange-colored petals that serve as background for the alternated signs index another of the known spices for the cacao drink, namely, the flowers of *Cymbopetalum penduliflorum*, belonging to the *Annonaceae* family of trees. In other words, three of the glyphs painted on the neck of the vessel make reference to what the container was meant to hold.

Another detail that may support the inference about the specific function of the vessel is the red lines that end in a spiral painted on the three supports (fig. 19). These motifs appear to be iconic and synecdochical representations of monkey tails. There is evidence of a relationship between cacao and monkeys, as evinced in a scene on the manuscript *Yuta Tnoho* where a cacao vessel with the effigy of a monkey head is depicted, or in scenes on incised ceramics from the Classic Period in the Pacific littoral of Oaxaca (Talum incised ware) where monkeys appear suspended from their tails amid cacao plants, or the imagery of monkeys and cacao in Maya censers and vessels. Miller and Martin (2004, 86) comment that, as a competitor, the spider monkey poses a hazard for the cultivation of cacao. From a different perspective, Young (1994, 10 and 97) argues that monkeys play an important role in the reproductive success of the cacao trees since, in order to reach the sweet pulp of the seeds, monkeys gnaw the hard shell of the mature pods. The fruits that they abandon and that eventually spoil provide the ideal conditions for the reproduction of worms that pollinate the cacao flowers. Nájera Coronado (2012) has proposed the recon-

27. The name of the *Chiranthodendron* tree in contemporary Mixtec is *ita ndaa, tundakua* (Argueta [1994] 2009), literally meaning "flower-tree, open-closed hand."

28. Pohl (2007, 9) interprets the pistil/stamen protruding from the hands as graphic references to hallucinogenic mushrooms, despite the fact that in pre- and post-Hispanic manuscripts mushrooms are represented in a different way (Caso 1963). It is evident that in the vessel, the glyphic compound 'bract-calyx-pistil/stamen-hand' denotes Flor de Manita and that the white flower at the base is the semantic determinative "Flower."

29. For a discussion of how the cacao drink spiced with these flowers was readily accepted by creoles and colonizing Spaniards and then imported as a package to Europe, see Norton (2006, 671–75). All the mentioned condiments have also attributed medicinal properties. For the ethnopharmacology of *Chiranthodendron pentadactylon*, see Martínez (1959, 421–22), Jiu (1966), Logan (1981), Argueta ([1994] 2009), and Velázquez et al. (2009). For that of *Magnolia mexicana*, see Martínez (1959, 343–46) and Pennington and Sarukhán (1998). For that of *Piper sanctum*, see Martínez (1959, 184–86), Argueta ([1994] 2009), and Márquez and Lara (1999, 99).



Cacao vessel with a monkey effigy, *Yuta Tnoho-44a*



Cover of a censer with a monkey effigy wearing a collar with cacao pods, Tonina, Chiapas



Ceramic fragment with the representation on a monkey suspended from a cacao plant. Former Museo Frissell, Mitla, cat. no. MFR-28792 (photo by the author)

Figure 19. The curvilinear sign on the supports of the vessel as possible synecdoche of “Monkey.” Drawings by Elbis Domínguez Covarrubias. Photo of detail in the manuscript *Yuta Tnoho* modified from Anders et al. (1992b) facsimile. Photo of censer’s lid after Miller and Martin (2004, 86).

struction of a myth concerning the origin of cacao in which the monkey plays an important role, but such a reconstruction is based on a series of problematic assumptions. For now, even though a link between cacao and the monkey can be established, the symbolic underpinnings of that link remain to be elucidated.³⁰

John Pohl (2003) has demonstrated how the polychrome ware exemplified by the vessel from Pueblo Viejo Nochixtlan was commissioned by people with much economic and political clout, heads of corporate groups who owned estates and controlled labor to work the fields, managed the production of certain crafts—like cotton textiles—or oversaw guilds like those of long distant

30. In the cosmogram on the manuscript *Tezcatlipoca-1* (Fejérváry-Mayer), the quadrant corresponding to the south has a half-white, half-blue cacao tree, with a parrot posed on top of it and flanked by the Young Maize god and the Death god. The tree sprouts, or descends, from or to the earth (depicted as the open maw of an alligator). However, the south quadrant in the cosmogram is not associated with the day Monkey, either as initial day of one of the 20 *trecenas*, as initial day of one of the four 65-day cycles, or as the first day of the eleventh *trecena*. In all these cycles, the day Monkey is associated with the West.

traders. Members of the highest-ranking corporate groups lived in palaces to which workshops of artists and craftsmen were attached. These producers specialized in the manufacture of a wide variety of sumptuary goods of great aesthetic value, including those based on lapidary, metallurgical, or ceramic technologies. The objects so produced were displayed as symbols of wealth and authority and were prestations given to instigate economic and political favors with members of other equally powerful or subordinate yet competing corporate groups.

Regarding the knowledge, skill, and technology needed to make ceramic pieces like the vessel under discussion (Pilitas Polychrome [Lind 1987, 14–22]), their manufacture involved multiple steps that, once the raw materials had been procured and prepared, began with the hand molding of the containers. Once the desired shape was completed, the surfaces were smoothed and the supports, if applicable, were attached. After the clay dried, the formed pieces were dipped into a substance composed primarily of lime and an adhesive compound whose dried thin layer allowed for the subsequent application of an orange-color base (with light to darker tones) and then polychrome paints that rendered visual narratives or token signs. The skill to realize the compositional arrangement of images and texts, especially in the case of convex surfaces like the one on the vessel from Pueblo Viejo Nochixtlan, is indeed remarkable. Afterward, the painted surfaces were burnished in order to bring out their shining finish. Finally, the vessels were fired to harden them and to permanently fix the painted inscriptions.

Based on scenes rendered on the pre-Hispanic manuscripts and on the decipherment of the glyphs painted on the neck of the vessel from Pueblo Viejo Nochixtlan, this particular tripod container must have been used to prepare, present, offer, and drink cacao, a beverage of great esteem that was consumed during important feasting events when relationships between corporate groups were established or consolidated, particularly if marriage alliances between them were involved (fig. 20). As shown in figure 20, marriage scenes in the manuscripts depict the spouses seated on a mat, facing each other, and sharing a tripod vessel with foam protruding from the vessel's mouth. At times, the foam is marked with the iconic rendition of flowers, or the vessel's content is signaled by the representation of cacao pods. Most often it was through these commensalisms that corporate groups augmented their influence and power. Thus, as the newlyweds shared the foamy cacao flavored and garnished with flowers and other spices, the couple could read one scene at a time; and maybe it was during this moment in the celebration that the vessel was rotated in



Figure 20. Differences in the representation of drinking vessels for cacao and pulque. Photo of vessel after Solís (2004b, 220). Other photos modified from Anders et al. (1992b) facsimile, and Jansen and Pérez Jiménez (2005) facsimile.

their hands so that, aided by poetic speech, the coparticipants completed the reading of the visual narrative.

The Possible Geographic Referents Signaled in the Vessel

Although I agree with the argument of López Austin (1998, 2010) regarding the identification of the toponyms painted on the vessel as intimations of mythical places—a position equally shared by other scholars (Hermann, personal communication)—I will proceed with the assumption of a dialectical relationship between mythical realities and historical metaphors (Sahlins 1981), that is, with the premise that myth regiments historical processes and historical experiences shape myth. The case of the island of Aztlan as a place of origin that mirrors Mexico-Tenochtitlan, the island center of a hegemonic empire is pertinent. In fact, there are several examples in Mesoamerica of toponyms that reference the ‘hill-cave’, or the ‘cave-tree’, some of which appear to have a geographical dimension (fig. 21).

Given the interpretation concerning the function of the vessel, I surmise that the toponyms must identify the political loci of the noble houses that were allied through a marital arrangement. Portable objects, like cacao drinking vessels, may or may not move spatially and/or temporally (as heirlooms). Assuming

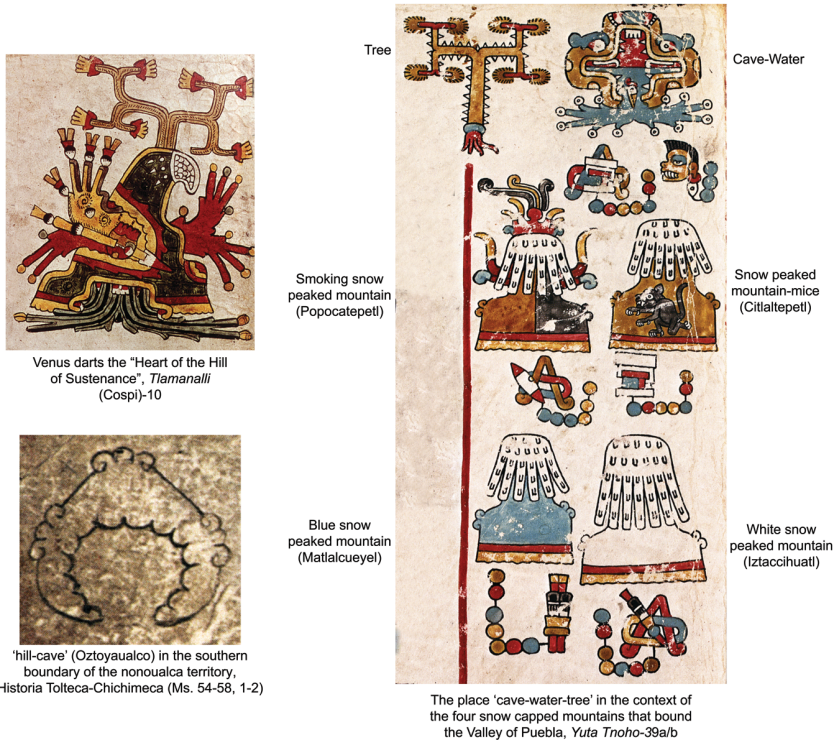


Figure 21. ‘Hill-cave-tree’ as an archetype and in actual toponyms. Photos modified from Anders et al. (1994) facsimile, Anders et al. (1992b) facsimile, and Kirchhoff et al. (1976).

that one of the married individuals was buried with the vessel in the hub of one of the allied royal houses, then one of the toponyms would name the Pueblo Viejo of Nochixtlan. In the narrative passage on the manuscript *Yuta Tnoho*-8d where 9 Wind and 2 Dog establish several centers in the northern sector of the Mixteca Alta appears a ‘hill-serpent-temple-offering of burning tobacco’, very similar to the two instances of ‘hill-serpent’ in the 9 Wind vignette on the vessel. This resemblance opens the possibility that this is the glyphic name of Pueblo Viejo of Nochixtlan (fig. 22). Such a proposal leads to a more detailed consideration of the glyphic names of Nochixtlan that appear in several sources, including (1) the codex of Yanhuitlan—a nopal plant that emanates from a dentate mouth painted over a plain entablature next to a seated personage (a glyphic compound that is glossed with alphabetic writing as *Atoco*; Smith 1973a, 176, 232, fig. 24a); (2) the *Matrícula de Tributos*—a bowl with prickly pears, a nopal plant, and blood streams (a glyphic com-



Possible reference to Pueblo Viejo Nochixtlan in the manuscript *Yuta Tnoho-8d*

Figure 22. Examples of ‘hill-serpent’. Drawing by Elbis Domínguez Covarrubias. Photo modified from Anders et al. (1992b) facsimile.

pound that is not glossed with alphabetic writing; Berdan and de Durand-Forest 1980, 12r); (3) the codex Mendoza—a bowl with prickly pears, a nopal/biznaga plant, blood streams, and teeth (a glyphic compound that is glossed with alphabetic writing as *Nochiztlan* and read as “Where there is much cochineal”; Berdan 1992, 1:195); and (4) the toponym in the manuscript *Yuta Tnoho-21a* that Jansen and Pérez Jiménez (2007, 323, n. 16) suggest could phonetically identify the “Valley or Place of the Cochineal.”

If one considers the extension of the ancient settlement of Nochixtlan during late pre-Hispanic and early colonial periods documented by Spores (1972), the presence during the Late Natividad phase (AD 1250–1520) of several discontinuous population nuclei becomes evident, including sites N401, N405, and N428 (on the hill ridges) and N409, N609, N610, N605, N606, and N430 (on the low-lying hills, their piedmont, and the alluvial plains). Since the *Matricula de Tributos*, the codex Mendoza, and the codex of Yanhuitlan were written during the span between 1522 and 1550, one can assume that the glyphic references to *Nochiztlan* and *Atoco*—whose glyphs do not include an iconic reference to a hill—refer to the occupation during the Late Natividad and the Early Convento phase (AD 1520 and 1580) that sprawled on the low-lying hills and alluvial plains right underneath modern-day Nochixtlan (fig. 23). Actually, sites N401 (now known as Cerro de Joya [Hill of the Jewel]), N405

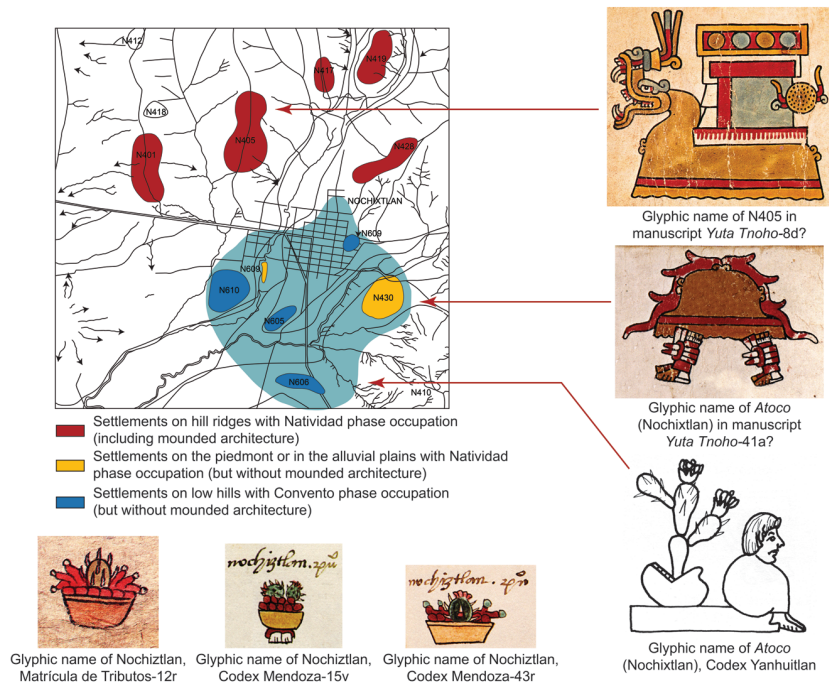


Figure 23. Settlements near and underneath contemporary Nochixtlan that date between AD 1000 and 1660, and their possible glyphic correspondence. Drawings by Elbis Domínguez Covarrubias after Spores (1972, figs. 24–25), and Smith (1973a, 232). Photos modified from Anders et al. (1992b) facsimile, Berdan and de Durand-Forest (1980) facsimile, and Berdan and Anawalt (1992, vol. 3).

(identified by Spores as Pueblo Viejo), N428 (now known as Cerro de la Cruz [Hill of the Cross]), and N417 must have had in pre-Hispanic times their own unique names.³¹ I, therefore, suggest that the hill site N405 may be the one identified in the vessel in the manuscript *Yuta Tnoho-8d* as ‘hill- serpent’.³²

If the other toponym on the vessel is literally taken as two tall hills—a quality that, as established by Jansen and Pérez Jiménez (2000, 209 n. 289), is

31. Regarding the names of these hills, only “Hill of the Jewel” may be of pre-Hispanic origin. Readily available data on Mixtec place names from localities around Nochixtlan (Hamann 2012a)—derived from the one-community perspective of post-Hispanic cartographic practices—do not allow us to ascertain the Mixtec names of these hills and their related features.

32. The proposal by Jansen and Pérez Jiménez regarding the toponym in the manuscript *Yuta Tnoho-41a* (‘hill-legs with pointed knots-red streams’) is based on an argument of homophony between Mixtec *nduvua* (leg) and *nduhua* (valley). Thus, the former name of *Atoco* (now Nochixtlan) would have been in Mixtec *Nduhua Nduq* or *Anduq* (‘Valley or place of the cochineal’). Jansen and Pérez Jiménez implicitly interpret the red streams that flow from the ‘hill’ glyph as ‘cochineal dye.’ If so, the glyphic compound could be read as ‘Valley and hill of the cochineal,’ names that could reference the settlements in the alluvial plains and in some of the surrounding low hills (but not the settlements atop the high ridges).

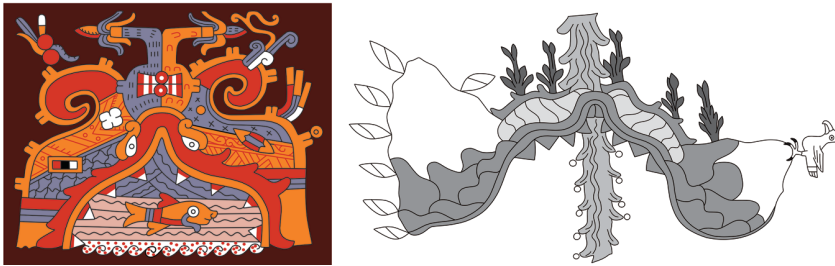


Figure 24. The Puente Colossal and the Ndaxagua through-cave near Tepelmeme de Morelos, Coixtlahuaca, and their possible glyphic representation in the Nochixtlan vessel and the Lienzo de Coixtlahuaca II. Drawings by Elbis Domínguez Covarrubias. Photo by the author.

coded by the bent summits based on the homophony in the Mixtec language between *to bend* and *large* or *big* (*cahnu*)—the fact that each hill is clearly distinguished from one another by their own qualifying signs and that they share between them a cave—then another possible interpretation based on visual analogy is to consider the landscape of the Puente Colossal near Tepelmeme, in the Coixtlahuaca valley (Rincón Mauter 1995, 2005a, 2005b; Urcid 2005; see fig. 24). This is a through-cave that traverses the base of the convergence of two tall limestone hills now known as Cerro Tequelite/Paredón (Hill-Large Wall) and Cerro de la Escalera (Hill of the Staircase). The through-cave was formed by the millenary course of a stream (now piped at the spring of

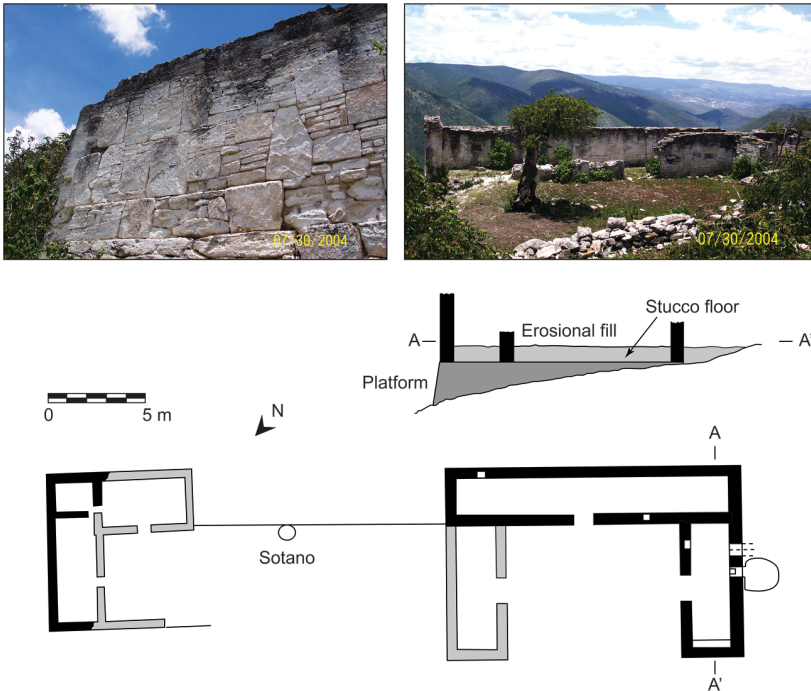


Figure 25. Remnants of a late pre-Hispanic palace on Cerro de la Escalera. Drawing by Elbis Domínguez Covarrubias. Photos by the author.

origin and diverted in the opposite direction to supply water to the modern-day town of Tepelmeme de Morelos). The Puente Colossal borders to the south with the Nochixtlan valley and is some 55 linear kilometers from Pueblo Viejo of Nochixtlan. In addition, the eastern upper slope of the Cerro de la Escalera there are the still standing remnants of a late pre-Hispanic palace that must have been the seat of a corporate group of relative importance (fig. 25).

Conclusion

There are still unanswered questions regarding a number of details in the symbolism of the vessel from Pueblo Viejo de Nochixtlan. Equally as well, several components in the interpretations of other scholars, particularly the exegesis by López Austin, are not necessarily exclusive but complementary to the reading proposed here. Namely, that the two scenes on the cacao drinking vessel depict the venerated ancestral sages 9 Wind and 2 Dog (figured also in the manuscripts *Yuta Tnoho* and *Tonindeye*), who according to the visual nar-

rative on the object consecrated and established since primordial times the centers of two corporate groups. These groups would have established a socio-political alliance around the first half of the fifteenth century, and the cacao drinking vessel would have been commissioned for the wedding ceremony that forged such an alliance. The dual and complementary oppositions intrinsic to the myth coded on the vessel were projected onto the historical social field of the binate marital union and of a pact between two political entities from which a new dynasty was to arise. Future research of toponyms in Mixtec that combines further archival research of cartographic information in post-Hispanic documents, contemporary local knowledge, and on-the-ground reconnaissance (Geurds 2007; Hamann 2012b) may help substantiate or reject the hypothesis—based on a spatial possibility and on visual analogy—that the centers of the allied corporate groups implicated in the narrative on the vessel were situated, one in the Valley of Coixtlahuaca (the Puente Colossal near Tepelmeme) and the other in the northern sector of the Valley of Nochixtlan (Pueblo Viejo, Nochixtlan). Equally as well, if the toponym ‘tree–bent hills–cave’ on the vessel were to represent the ancient community of Apoala, future archaeological work may be able to determine the presence of a palace that would have been the seat of one of the royal houses presumed to have established the said marital alliance.³³

The graphic conventions rendered on the object closely resemble the scribal art evinced in the manuscript *Yuta Tnoho*. However, there are several features in the visual narrative on the vessel that point toward scribal appropriations of some conventions from the Central Highlands. These include the referencing of a double temple, the representation of a woven-mat throne with a back support (Hermann 2005, chap. 5), and of a solar ray on the tail of the ‘serpent-dog’ that usually characterize representations of the ‘fire serpent’ in Central Mexico. It is possible that the scribe who painted the vessel was from somewhere in the Mixteca Alta, perhaps even from Apoala or its environs, but there is no reason to assume that the vessel was manufactured and inscribed in the same place where it was used or where it was found. Undoubtedly there is more to the ancient history of the Mixteca than what appears written in the surviving manuscripts, which demonstrates the contributions that archaeology and studies of material culture can provide to the historiography of the region.

33. Perhaps significant is the fact that the entrance to the Valley of Apoala through the *Peña Cerrada* (which may be rendered by the two bent hills in one of the toponyms on the vessel) is the route followed by people to this day to travel between Apoala and Nochixtlan (Jansen and Pérez Jiménez 2007, 102).

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