



Vol. 6, No. 3, Spring 2009, 229-241

[www.ncsu.edu/project/acontracorriente](http://www.ncsu.edu/project/acontracorriente)

### Review/Reseña

David Carrasco and Scott Sessions, eds. *Cave, City, and Eagle's Nest: An Interpretive Journey through the Mapa de Cuauhtinchan No. 2*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2007.

### ***A Collaborative Journey through the Mapa de Cuauhtinchan No. 2***

**Robert Haskett and Stephanie Wood**

University of Oregon

Sometime in the storied past of human beginnings the goddess Itzpapalotl flew out of the sacred origin cave of Chicomoztoc wielding a human leg like a scepter. Behind her came seven male Chichimec leaders. They embarked on a migratory journey along sinuous roads that led them to the holy city of Cholula. From there, one group passed from seemingly mythic to historical time, to travel the borders of the territory that they would settle, founding the *altepetl* (city-province) of Cuauhtinchan at its

heart, nestled beneath mountains, surrounded by a landscape studded with artificial and natural markers of its consecrated past, present, and future as an autonomous, cultured polity.

This and much more is found on the stunning pictorial codex known as the *Mapa de Cuauhtinchan No. 2 (MC2)*, part “sacred history about pilgrimage” and origins, and part “sacred history about settlement,” a unique manuscript with features that are also characteristically Mesoamerican in both intent and content for those familiar with the *mapas* genre (including codices, *lienzos*, and other indigenous-authored pictorial histories). Editors David Carrasco and Scott Sessions have assembled a monumental collection of scholarly studies of the *MC2* provided by a multidisciplinary mix of noted specialists in a variety of pertinent fields of inquiry. Together, they have created a *tour de force* examination of this important ethnohistorical manuscript that should interest not only specialists, but any reader seeking a better understanding of the ways human beings come to terms with and remember their past and how they employ these historical memories. The volume stands out for its daring, multi-year, multipurpose methodological explorations that reach beyond the normal iconographic approach and outside the usual limits of Mesoamerican studies, with remarkable results.

The *Mapa* forms part of a set of pre-contact-style cartographic histories and related manuscripts that were once kept in Cuauhtinchan’s *cabildo* archive. The *MC2* is related to three other, similar codices, known as the *Mapas de Cuauhtinchan* 1, 3, and 4. Enrique Orozco revealed these documents to the outside world in 1891. The *MC2* had a checkered history following its nineteenth-century “discovery.” Though known and studied by twentieth-century scholars, by the 1990s it was in the hands of Adela Obregón Formosa, whose family had held the manuscript for many years. It was in this context that the *MC2* was “rediscovered” and acquired by Ángeles Espinosa Yglesias (who, along with John Coatsworth, contributes a forward to the present volume), founder of Puebla’s Amparo Museum. The *MC2* itself is now housed in its own climate-controlled setting in that museum. It was Espinosa Yglesias who invited David Carrasco to study the manuscript, and he invited a multi-disciplinary team of notable scholars to

work with him under the auspicious David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies at Harvard. The Amparo Museum was instrumental in providing a number of technical specialists, headed by conservator Marina Straulino, who produced stunning digital images of the manuscript, enhancing what had become frayed and faded over the centuries. Straulino contributes her own fascinating chapter to the volume, wherein she describes the challenges and techniques employed in the digital reconstruction, and enlightens us about traditional papermaking techniques of central Mexicans.

The resulting enhancement has allowed Carrasco's team to recover many images that were nearly or completely illegible on the worn *amatl* (fig bark paper) surface. The fruits of this work are stunningly displayed throughout the fifteen chapters of the book as reproductions of some of the *MC2*'s more than 700 individual images and symbols, as well as in the form of a removable facsimile in full color—although not in full size—tucked inside the back cover. Sandwiched between the end of the editors' introduction and the beginning of the first section of chapters is also a very useful, full-color guide to the manuscript divided into sixteen segments, paired with line drawings of those same segments based on earlier classificatory work carried out by Keiko Yoneda.

The anthology's chapters are divided into three thematic parts, worthy of individual attention for the rich, methodologically diverse, and detailed analyses they provide. Part One, "Orientations in Time and Territory" (Chapters 1 through 6) includes the already-noted discussion by Straulino of the restoration work she and her team pursued in "A New View: The Conservation and Digital Restoration of the *Mapa de Cuauhtinchan No. 2*" (Chapter 2). But Part One actually opens with an excellent overview study of the *MC2*, "The House of the Eagle," provided by the eminent art historian and scholar of historical codices, Elizabeth Hill Boone. Boone writes the perfect introductory study of the *Mapa*, since she summarizes the story being told in the manuscript. This is a complex tale, and the author is not content to regale her audience with a simple story, noting that we should consider the significance not just of the "story," or in other words "the content being communicated," but also the "discourse,"

which is “the form and structure in which the story is told” (28). She does this herself not only by laying out the essentials of the narrative presented in the *Mapa*, but also by classifying it in comparison with other pictorial documents and in terms of interpretive thought and models derived from her own previous work and the studies of other scholars in the field. The chapter is richly illustrated with relevant images from the *MC2* as well as from comparator texts (such as the *Tira de Tepechpan*, the *Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca*, and the *Mapa de Sigüenza*).

Subsequent chapters in Part One bring the *Mapa de Cuauhtinchan No. 2* into clearer and more tangible relief. Many of the authors whose work is presented in this section explore the original purpose or purposes of the document and consider the identities of its creators. In the relatively brief Chapter 3, “Representations of Territorial Organization in the *Mapa de Cuauhtinchan No. 2*,” Ann Clair Seiferle-Valencia exams how territory is depicted in the *Mapa*, demonstrating the ways in which it serves as an *altepetl*-centered document, showing the polity’s borders and its relationships with other places, such as Cholula (a very prominent pictorial element). With this purpose in mind, it seems a bit odd that this chapter is the only one in the book lacking illustrations.

In Chapter 4, “The Lords of the Land: The Historical Context of the *Mapa de Cuauhtinchan 2*,” Mexican scholar Ethelia Ruiz Medrano examines both the pre-Hispanic and colonial historical context of the *MC2*. Among other things, she argues that the *MC2* provides evidence for the significant role played by surviving indigenous nobility in the area. She examines, too, the sometimes conflicted history of the community across time (even into the present century). She believes that Pinome elites, culturally related to the Mixtecs and, along with the Nahuas, one of two dominant ethnicities in Cuauhtinchan, were responsible for creating the codex. Ruiz bases this argument on a comparison of the *MC2* with what is known about *lienzos* and other pictorials from the Puebla region, concluding that the mapa was probably created mainly for internal use, particularly as it supported the Pinome ruling lineages in their continued exercise of authority in Cuauhtinchan.

In the fascinating Chapter 5, “A Claim to Rulership: Presentation Strategies in the *Mapa de Cuautinchan No. 2*,” Florine G.L. Asselbergs suggests an alternative interpretation to this latter point. After a very detailed reconstruction of the narrative in the document, with careful attention being paid to the dynastic lineages depicted in the *Mapa*, Asselbergs concludes that it was probably created by Nahuas (or perhaps by both Nahuas and Pinome, though the author cites documentary evidence for continued conflict between ruling lineages of both ethnicities during the sixteenth century) and based on a historical tradition that came into being in the fifteenth century after the region was taken over by the Mexicas. In this case, local lords in Cuauhtinchan were trying to assert very old claims of legitimacy to their *altepetl* and its holdings based on their history of migration from Chicomoztoc by way of Cholula. Along the way, Asselbergs compares the narrative of the *MC2* with that of the *Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca*, and also carries out some stylistic comparisons with the *Lienzo de Quauhquechollan*, which “shows how Jorge de Alvarado led the Quauhquecholteca to Guatemala, how the Quauhquecholteca participated in the Spanish conquest of Guatemala, and how they eventually settled and continued their lives there” (139).

Finally, noted archaeoastronomer Anthony F. Aveni presents an engaging exploration of the ways in which time and space interact in the codex in Chapter 6, “Calendar, Chronology, and Cosmology in the *Mapa de Cuauhtinchan No. 2*.” He is particularly interested in teasing out the force of mythic time in the manuscript, and the significance of events related to certain date glyphs and time sequences. This allows Aveni to establish that the left side of the manuscript, which narrates the journey from Chicomoztoc to Cholula, was “quite different” from the right side, which celebrates the foundation of Cuauhtinchan and its territory—a difference discernable not only in stylistic ways, but in the form in which time and space are employed to tell the *MC2*’s story.

Part Two, “Narratives and Rituals of Roads and Roadsides,” begins with a contribution by Keiko Yoneda, whose extensive work on the maps of Cuauhtinchan has established the basis of our understanding of these key resources. In “Glyphs and Messages in the *Mapa de Cuauhtinchan No.*

2: Chicomoztoc, Itzpapalotl, and 13 Flint” (Chapter 7), the author brings her considerable expertise to bear on the manuscript, setting her analysis within a somewhat broader context of the *Mapas de Cuauhtinchan 1, 3, and 4*, as well as a related manuscript known today as the *Mapa pintado en papel europeo y aforrado en el indiano*. Though not a clear departure from the character of the contributions found in Part One of the volume, this chapter begins a deeper analysis of what might be called the historical content of the codex, among other things with a view to establishing its purpose more clearly. The author approaches all of these documents as historical in nature, dating the initial events depicted in the *MC2* at 1173 C.E. (in terms of our current calendar), with the action extending to 1458 C.E. As the chapter unfolds, the author provides systematic commentary and analysis of the elements in the manuscript, discussing Chichimec culture and the role of this ethnic group in origin stories, the significance of the goddess Itzpapalotl as the apparent initiator of the migration out of Chicomoztoc, and the many toponyms, as well as boundaries, depicted across the pictorial. Like Asselbergs, Yoneda believes that both Nahuas and Pinomes were involved in its creation, and that its possible appearance in the 1540s seems tied to its utility as evidence in a lawsuit against Tepeaca in 1544 (she suggests that the well-known *Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca* may have played a similar role at the time). But she maintains that the *MC2* and its relations were designed with much more than this relatively mundane purpose in mind: to establish and legitimize the corporate identity of Cuauhtinchan. Of course, this meant that the document conveniently proved “that the people of Cuauhtinchan came and settled in the area before the people of Tepeaca (Tepeyacac) and therefore had rights over the lands that were in litigation” (190). Thus the creation of the *MC2* could well have intersected with both “internal” and “external” concerns of the community.

This latter interpretation is advocated by Eleanor Wake in Chapter 8, “The Serpent Road: Iconic Encoding and the Historical Narrative of the *Mapa de Cuauhtinchan No. 2*.” Covering some of the same ground as Yoneda, but in a different manner, Wake presents a detailed analysis of the historical representations found in the *MC2*. Like some of the other authors

in the anthology, she detects both Nahua and Pinome influence, though believes that it was from the latter group that the painter(s) ultimately came, with the intent to assert the importance of that ethnicity in Cuauhtinchan's history and identity. The very compelling treatment of the pictorial elements of the manuscript, tied together with highly significant serpentine roads, is interwoven with a wealth of relevant comparative discussion based on the *MC2*, other manuscripts in its "set," and other indigenous-authored records of the sixteenth century from both Nahua and Mixtec traditions, all of which she manages with great skill. What Wake finds about colonial historical narrative could also dialogue well with studies of more textual manuscripts, such as her suggestion that these records "could be directed simultaneously toward distinct audiences, offering both parallel and distinct arguments that, more often than not, were littered with underlying messages proclaiming the ethnic or political superiority of the author's own group or hometown" (208).

Chapters 9 and 10, which close out Part Two, take the reader to even more specialized terrain. "Botanical Symmetry and Asymmetry in the *Mapa de Cuauhtinchan No. 2*," by Robert A. Bye and Edelmira Linares, is based on the premise that the representations of plants in the codex served as carriers of the people's history. This brilliant piece takes us much beyond the expected iconography of the historical and sacred content of the manuscript, to demonstrate the rich cultural information hidden within food crops, ritual plants, and other flora on the landscape (e.g. *nopal* and other cacti, agave, maize, chiles, beans, ritual plants, and trees, including sacred trees), embodying ethnically significant referents and feeding group identity and memory. Bye and Linares also illuminate human agency not only in domesticating plants, but also in transporting them to new zones as they migrated, bringing key elements, for instance, from the arid Chichimeca North and examples of the richer flora of central Mesoamerica into the culture of Cuauhtinchan.

Chapter 10, Guilhem Olivier's "Sacred Bundles, Arrows, and New Fire: Foundation and Power in the *Mapa de Cuauhtinchan No. 2*," contains, as the title suggests, an investigation of the fascinating fourteen sacred bundles (*tlaquimilolli*) laden with meaning that appear across the

manuscript in various contexts. Because all of these bundles have associated arrows or arrow shafts, linking them perhaps to conquest, Olivier gives some attention to these details, along with other sacred symbols of creation, origins, identity, and foundation. He concludes that the bundles “contained the bones or relics of a people’s tutelary deity” and, together with key, associated rituals, constituted a system of remembrance that provided elements of “collective identity” (301), a major and recurring theme across these essays.

Part Three, “Comparisons and Approximations,” begins with three comparative contributions (Chapters 11, 12, and 13): Vincent James Stanzione’s “Walking is Knowing: Pilgrimage through the Pictorial History of the Cuauhtinchantlaca,” “Indigenous Migrations, Pilgrimage Trails, and Sacred Geography: Foregrounds and Backgrounds to the *Mapa de Cuauhtinchan No. 2*,” and by Jace Weaver and Laura Adams Weaver, and “The *Mapa de Cuautinchan No. 2* and the Cosmic Tree in Mesoamerica, the Caribbean, and the Amazon-Orinoco Basin,” by Osvaldo García-Goyco. Stanzione bases his observations on his own, ethnographic experiences with traditional Maya culture in Santiago Atitlan, particularly as they are connected with pilgrimage and initiation rites for young men. He argues that, just as in Atitlan, the depiction of pilgrimage and rites on the *MC2* was intended to “teach young men [of its time, and perhaps later] about their people’s sacred geography and the sacred events that took place in those sacred spaces” (317). Weaver and Weaver study migration and pilgrimage “in the context of North American indigenes” (335) by looking at three examples, the Quechan, or Yuman, peoples, the Tohono O’odham and their salt pilgrimage, and the peripatetic Huichol peyote hunt. With these comparators in mind, the authors conclude that while the left part of the *MC2* can probably not be viewed as the record of a pilgrimage, it is possible to see elements of such a narrative on its right side, the one focused on the foundation of Cuauhtinchan.

Obviously the Stanzione and Weaver and Weaver chapters end with divergent conclusions about pilgrimage as it is represented in the *MC2*, providing, in the process, interesting food for thought. But we are not entirely convinced of the comparative value of the examples pursued in



either case, in that the aptness of the selected cultures—which in their specifics are quite different, often in time as well as in space—from that of the central Mesoamericans, is not always clear. Why are these comparators particularly useful and telling, and not others? How does one deal with the great gulf in time (to say nothing of cultural evolution) that separates the young Mayan men of contemporary Santiago Atitlan from their imagined fellows in sixteenth-century Cuauhtinchan? It seems plausible that the codex could have served as a “map” for later tracings of the *altepetl*’s borders by town leaders and other citizens, but the much more ambitious supposition made by Stanzione may go too far, based on evidence (or the lack thereof) from sixteenth-century Cuauhtinchan itself. Are pilgrimage traditions among the Quechan, Tohono O’odham, and Huichol really valid comparators to those that might have been inscribed in the *MC2*? Are the traditions and beliefs of these very different kinds of cultures, in comparison to early colonial central Mesoamericans, actually cognates? García-Goyco’s work is not without some stimulating ideas about the ways in which cross-cultural analysis can be carried out, although his study tends to gloss over specific cultural and historical differences, and seems to be predisposed to find cosmic trees in all kinds of representations across several American cultures, a predisposition that sometimes appears to be more convenient than empirical. Yet there is value here, since among other things the author provides us with some interesting analysis of graphic elements in the *MC2*, as well as in some other central-Mesoamerican codices (Mixtec and Nahuatl). All three chapters in this section challenge us to place the Cuauhtinchantlaca in a broader “indigenous” context, taking in the great body of peoples who have been in contact with, and impacted by, invaders and colonizers. One can even attain a sense about the ways in which the people of the *MC2* fit in with, and help us to grasp, possibly shared thought patterns of a broader humanity.

Part Three is rounded out by two other chapters, Dana Leibsohn’s “Seeing in Situ: *The Mapa de Cuauhtinchan* No. 2” (14), and “Middle Place, Labyrinth, and Circumambulation: Cholula’s Peripatetic Role in the *Mapa de Cuauhtinchan* No. 2” (15), by David Carrasco and Scott Sessions. A scholar well versed in the interpretation of pictorial codices, and

particularly of cartographic historical manuscripts, Leibsohn presents a complex argument about the presence of what she calls “ancestral vision” in the *MC2*, a vision that provided “images to contemplate and thus know history, [but imagery that] also offered an example of proper behavior to those living in the present” (400). This ancestral vision was particularly important when things hung in the balance, when the whole enterprise of history could go wrong. Here the importance of active ancestral engagement was most crucial if the history of the Cuauhtinchantlaca was to move forward or persist despite the challenges and dangers inherent in the colonial world of the sixteenth century and beyond. Leibsohn provides intelligent ruminations on how observers saw the past and how the document is a place, a site “where the invisibility of the past was given shape,” showed “ancestral deeds,” and “animated memory” in some way, verbalizing truths that extend beyond simply this manuscript.

Carrasco and Sessions contribution is equally stimulating. They believe that on the *MC2* Cholula is a place that “marks *multiple transformations*” (427; authors’ emphasis) in a sacred social memory in which this important *altepetl* functioned as a “*Middle Place* par excellence necessary for the successful transformation of their people from the culture of Chicomoztoc to the culture of Cuauhtinchan” (427). The authors argue that the “tour and tableau” model often applied to cartographic-style pictorials (an approach followed by many contributors to the present volume) is wanting because it does not accommodate locales that, in their words, serve as an “‘urban changing place,’ a place where status, identity, clothes, and access to the land, social status, and authority were transformed” (428). They write of the roads on the *MC2*, particularly on its left side, as “labyrinths” connoting danger and difficulty, of the significance of the “circumambulation” embodied in the roads of the right side of the codex, which in its marking off of borders “reveals...the sacrality of collective property” (445). This well written chapter serves at once as a thoughtful interpretive study in its own right, and a kind of concluding summary of at least some of the work and conclusions of the volumes many contributors, as well.

Carrasco and Sessions' Chapter 15 is in fact a fitting coda for the volume as a whole. As with any anthology containing so many individual contributions there is some unevenness in the mix. But in the end this unevenness is slight, the speculation in some of Part Three's chapters interesting and informative, and the whole fabric of the anthology strong and impressive. The authors' ideas and analyses are sure to offer interpretive food for thought to specialists in many fields of inquiry. We found many stimulating ideas that help us better understand later-colonial indigenous-language prose histories, the so-called *títulos primordiales*, which contain strong cartographic elements themselves, albeit in a different form, and which preserve a similar discourse affirming ethnic, social, and political identities and territorial associations. Carrasco, Sessions, and the entire group who worked on this exemplary volume are to be congratulated. They have set new standards for the study and publication of essential indigenous-authored manuscripts such as the *MC2*.

Carrasco and Sessions have also demonstrated how an anthology can have greater academic import than a single monograph on the subject would have produced. Collaboration such as is demonstrated in their volume can be extremely productive and beneficial to the authors and the readers. The institutional support that allowed for this close, interdisciplinary study with color photographs in large format, apparently few page restrictions, and impressive technological enhancements must also be commended without qualification. The fact that the group had a shared reading list and met and discussed their research in progress also resulted in a remarkable degree of cross-fertilization and dialogue within the anthology. In the future, it would be interesting to see what one or more collaborating members of the indigenous communities in question might be able to add to such diverse pathways into the *Mapa* as we see in the Carrasco and Sessions edition.

In closing, it seems appropriate in the context of an electronic journal for us to invite the colleagues involved in this magnificent project to consider adding their work to the online, searchable *Mapas Project* based here at the University of Oregon (<http://mapas.uoregon.edu>), or a similar Internet based resource collection, which could take user access to the

manuscript's detailed analyses a major leap forward. We have found that the kinds of enhanced comprehension facilitated by the sectioning and numbering of the details of the *MC2* (beginning on page 22) can be much more effective with the aid of electronic tools and hyperlinks. Even more, the digital attachment, storage, and retrieval of commentary related to such details simply cannot be approximated on paper. Imagine being able to click on the figure of Itzpapalotl and instantly find everything said about this goddess by all who addressed her presence on the manuscript and her significance as a leader of the emergence from the legendary Seven Caves. As things stand currently, we have to go to the index, we have to know her name, look up "Itzpapalotl," and then flip back and forth through the volume to hunt for the 43 references, one by one.

Digital searches also offer the advantage of allowing the user many additional approaches for finding this same material, by searching specific words or strings of letters, such as "Itzpapalotl" or "goddess" and being given both textual and image matches. As more manuscripts are included in the databases, these kinds of search results become richer; they could show Itzpapalotl as she appears in other manuscripts, highlight other goddesses, such as Chimalman, leading comparable migrations, or draw attention to other renditions of figures emerging from Chicomoxtoc. Digital retrievals that come with "gender" or "wom\*n" searches, for example, will also help us compile materials to paint the larger picture of ideologies that allowed female figures to lead crucial, identity-shaping migrations, that placed young women under the sacrificial knife, or that paired fair-skinned ladies with dark-skinned lords in momentous cross-ethnic alliances. These are all shown here on the *MC2* and worthy of comparing with other manuscripts, pictorial and textual.

Just as the neglected, underdeveloped history of indigenous women and of gender ideologies in early Mesoamerica could take an important step forward with the digitization and integration of details with scholarly analysis, achievements in iconography and the decipherment or interpretation of pictographic writing would also be advanced immeasurably with this same process. Imagine even just the image-text associations that Keiko Yoneda makes in identifying glyphs (Chapter 7)

being entered into an online database, where her work could benefit those struggling to analyze similar details on other manuscripts. The impressive ethnobotanical work of Robert A. Bye and Edelmira Linares, pairing manuscript details with photographs of these same plants today, and uniting both with species names that include indigenous language terms, cries out for electronic storage and retrieval. All of this could easily be accomplished with the cooperation of the scholars (who are credited), the repositories (who provide permissions), and those who are making and serving free digital humanities tools. The result would only amplify and significantly extend the reach of what we have found to be a superior, collaborative, close study of this one, albeit impressive manuscript, linking it and integrating it with other similar projects for the advantage of all.