

## Summary for the general public

The research proposed in this project aims at reconstructing the meaning, role and rules governing the oral tradition of the pre-Colonial and early-Colonial Central Mexico cultures. The indigenous groups inhabiting this region at that time used to transmit their memory of the past and the knowledge on the presence via various, mutually complementary channels of communication, such as graphic register of the codices or different methods of non-verbal communication. However, the predominant way of transmitting the information was the oral tradition.

As it has been discovered for various oral cultures all over the world, the construction of an oral discourse is quite different from the written one. For instance, the knowledge of the past, which according to the traditional concepts of the modern Western historiography should take form of a well-organized set of names, facts, events and dates, in the oral tradition takes form of a dynamic narration, in which the concern for objective precision of the reported data gets substituted by the necessity of explaining the way in which the past has influenced the contemporary situation. One of the methods of finding common point of reference for past and presence is to inscribe the historical facts into the symbolical structures of the myth, that is a sacred narrative aimed at explaining the rules governing the surrounding world. Another important discursive tool used by the oral tradition to construct the argument of the narrated stories is a cultural topos, understood as a “commonplace” or elements of traditional material, which have symbolical meaning perfectly understood for the members of a given community and can be creatively reconstructed according to the needs of every new narration.

The objective of this project is to identify such *topoi* in the corpus of texts of ancient Aztec songs, collected in two Colonial manuscripts, titled *Cantares mexicanos* and *Romances de los Señores de la Nueva España*. Finding and explaining the meaning of these “commonplaces” of the Aztec oral tradition will contribute to better understanding of the way in which the members of this culture used to perceive the surrounding world. On the other hand, the awareness of discursive characteristics of the Aztec oral tradition will be also crucial for correct interpretation of the colonial chronicles, which for many researchers are one of the most relevant sources of knowledge. These books, produced in the 16th and 17th century, although created in form based on the model of European annals, were in fact written also on the basis of the indigenous books, called codices, and oral tradition reported to the chroniclers by the indigenous informants. Thus, they are in fact a mix of two different narrative patterns: European historiography and indigenous oral tradition. These two tendencies get so merged that it becomes extremely difficult to distinguish one from another. In consequence, it happens sometimes that researchers try to provide a meticulous historical analysis for the events that are in fact of mythical origin or used to function as cultural *topoi*. This project aims at identifying the cultural *topoi* present in the songs, which can be treated as a register of “pure” orality, and then to find them also in the chronicles. In this way not only will it contribute to better understanding of the Aztec ideology, but also, it will shed more light on the oral components present in the texts of the chronicles, improving the methodology of work with these sources.

The principle material effect of this project will be a monographic study on the role of the cultural *topoi* in construction of the Aztec oral tradition. The book will include also complete and well-documented translations of the investigated songs. Moreover, there is also planned a Polish translation of these songs, presented in form of publication for general public.