

The Aztec civilization was built, in no small degree, by people who spoke Nahuatl known as the Nahuas. Today, we can learn about their culture from two kinds of written sources. One of them are those that survived the sixteenth-century Spanish invasion: mostly painted books (codices) written in a sophisticated and still very much incomprehensible Graphic Communication System (GCS); the other are those created or inspired by the Spanish friars who adapted the Latin alphabet to Nahuatl at the same time producing extensive writings in their own language. These historic pieces paint an image of people whose perception of the world differed from ours in fascinating ways. They believed that their souls consisted of the heat of the Sun, in the night they wandered the forests embodied in wild animals, and they always had to ensure the thriving of the cosmos by sacrificing blood drawn from their tongues and ears.

This project arises from a desire to understand and appreciate a different way of thinking. However, to achieve this goal, we need to delve very deep into the sources. What both friars and their native disciples converted to Christianity wrote about Nahua culture cannot be taken for granted, because they tended to condemn the Nahuas as heathens. For this reason, scholars look for methods that will allow them to read between the lines and use pre-Hispanic sources, such as codices, to cross-check the information from alphabetic texts. The practice that we chose focuses on conceptual metaphors. „Conceptual” means that we do not treat metaphors as mere figures of speech but rather as ways of thinking grounded in the particular worldview. Consider the Christian metaphor „man is dust”: how much it reveals about Christian beliefs on the condition of humans, as well as on their origin and afterlife! However, to interpret it correctly, we need to first read the Genesis and other Christian texts, as well as look at the symbolic Christian paintings. In this project, we intend to do precisely this kind of interpretation but concerning Nahua conceptual metaphors. They are abundant both in the language, recorded in the alphabetic texts and graphic representations in the codices. To identify them, we will primarily look for the so-called metonymic series, which are characteristic of the Nahua cultural production. When the Nahuas wanted to express a concept metaphorically, they often approached it through a listing of its constituent elements or attributes (in brief, metonymy is part for the whole). For example, a woman could be „a skirt, a blouse, a spindle, a batten”: the first two refer to typical womanly clothing, while the other two to her responsibility for producing textiles. The entire series gives us an idea of what was the model of womanhood in the Nahua society.

Since Nahua worldview is complex, it is not possible to attempt its comprehensive reconstruction within a single project. We have decided to limit our study to three thematic areas that we consider central to the Nahua thought and beliefs: 1) sacrifice and self-sacrifice (the latter was, e.g., bloodletting), 2) places of origin and otherworlds, and 3) anti-structure (i.e., the chaotic, non-civilized, and dangerous aspect of existence) and non-humans. The objective of the project is to write at least six papers, each of them on one metaphorical complex belonging to these areas. The material for analysis will come from the three alphabetic sources which provide the most abundant selection of metaphors (the *Florentine Codex*, the *Cantares mexicanos*, and Hernando Ruiz de Alarcón’s *Tratado de las supersticiones*), as well as from divinatory codices that the Nahuas used to predict future and choose dates for important events. By the end of the project, we will attempt to use our case-studies for a reconstruction of a portion of the Nahua worldview.