

The aim of this project is to develop and write a book with a new interpretation of Codex Laud. This ancient screenfold manuscript managed to survive the destruction of religious materials in the 16th century when the Spaniards arrived to the territories of today's Mexico and Central America. In precolonial times, these books were used by priests who were specialized on the auguries and rituals associated with the 260-day calendar. They were called in Nahuatl, the language of the Aztecs, as *tonalamatl* or "book of destinies". Nowadays, only five of these precolonial manuscripts remain, all in collections of museums or libraries in Europe. Codex Laud, now in the Bodleian Library in Oxford, United Kingdom, is the less studied and hence comprehended of this group. It is also the codex with most images related to death, such as skulls, skeletons, death deities, human remains, and human sacrifices. It is often believed that these scenes are product of violent rituals with dismemberment of bodies and large sheds of blood. This view has evolved, in great part, by the colonial chronicles that the Spaniards wrote while describing the culture and religion of Mesoamerican peoples. Their view helped to justify their agenda for colonization which endured for 300 years and yet the aftermath of exclusion of indigenous peoples and deprivation in their communities still prevail. This project attempts to bring forth a different perspective to the scenes depicted on this type of heritage materials, in particular to Codex Laud, in fact by nourishing its decipherment with the knowledge that comes from the on-going use of the 260-day calendar and its symbolic associations among indigenous people themselves.

For this, empirical data has already been compiled through years of ethnographical research in a Mixe community in the south of Mexico. There, this fascinating system of reckoning time, with its prognostication and medicinal-ritual recommendations, still persists. This corpus constitute a good basis for a better comprehension of the time sequences, signs and symbolisms on the pages of Codex Laud. Moreover, in this community notions and practices around ancestors, including rituals, festivities like Days of the Dead, divinatory sessions and various forms of communication between the living and the dead, are kept strongly. This data is very valuable due to the abundance of images associated with the world of the dead in the pages of Codex Laud.

Furthermore, this project aims to build a thorough understanding of this screenfold manuscript by the study of its material support and painting (and writing) process, including its manufacture technique, color palette, and biography details. These descriptive features aid to comprehend how this *tonalamatl* was planned, drafted and created in its layout and graphic contents, as well as how it was employed and manipulated by the expert of the calendrical and occult signs on it. In this sense, this investigation uses a bottom-up approach to the study of Codex Laud which is rarely seen in our discipline.

This new book-commentary explores the meanings of the painted-written signs, not only by nourishing from ethnographic data, but also by following innovative theories that explain how graphic systems convey information effectively. These theories look at different strategies -or principles- that work in hand in the transmission of messages, such as the arrangement of signs across the space of pages and different patterns and colors of motifs to transmit messages. The fundamentals on the construction of metaphors and metonyms, which are also a common feature in Mesoamerican languages and whose visual counterparts have also been identified on codices, represent a helpful resource to better understand the meaning of signs. In this sense, instead of immediately addressing scenes of bloodletting or human remains to literal meanings, metaphoric (or disguised) concepts grounded in Mesoamerican worldview may be playing a part in the semantics.

In this sense, this project examines other possible meanings for the materiality and graphic contents of Codex Laud which relate to the world of the dead and their capacities to communicate with the living. Like in contemporary indigenous communities where the knowledges of the the 260-day calendar prevail, ancestors are active members of the community. They warn of possible dangers to come and are addressed too, along with deities and other divine entities, to relieve angst, cure illnesses and achieve goals. Codex Laud may have been a manual to understand the world of the dead and even as a portal to give meaning to dreams, omens or bad fortune. This view distances itself from predisposed discourses of violence and body massacres inherited after 500 years of a colonial mindset.