However, according to the accompanying text on folio 253r, it was only during the latter veintena of Izcalli that Pillahuana was periodically observed. During Atemoztli, the cult was dedicated to the rain gods that resided in the mountains. The consumption of pulque is only mentioned in relation to the festival of Atemoztli in the Florentine Codex (Sahagún 1950–1982, bk. 1, ch. 21, bk. 2, ch. 35) but not as a primary aspect of the cult. In this regard, it may be noted that the Codex Magliabechiano (ff. 40v–41r) assigns the periodical celebration of Pillahuana to the veintena of Tepeihuitl, the monthly celebration of the mountain rain gods of the central Mexican basin. Finally, four drops of water are visible in the upper right corner of the image related to Atemoztli. While they may have represented the name of the festival (which means “water falls”), the four blue drops could also signal a celebration that occurred every four years, as in the case of Pillahuana.

The similarities between the two scenes in Primeros Memoriales do not seem to be coincidental. In the original pagination, the illustrations of Atemoztli and Izcalli face each other at the bottom of two opposing pages. It is generally understood that the images were drafted before the text was added. Did the tlacuilo intend to draw attention to the similarities and correspondences between the rituals of the two veintenas that were not otherwise noted? Or was the painter creating similarities at the moment they drew the picture? It would appear that these early colonial images of the veintenas attempted to creatively systematize what was possibly a much more flexible and diverse ceremonial life than what friars were accustomed to in Europe and eventually imposed on Indigenous peoples in New Spain.

In the Florentine Codex, Sahagún dedicated a separate chapter to so-called movable feasts, at the end of the description of the eighteen veintenas. The last sentence in the chapter (Sahagún 1950–1982, bk. 2, ch. 19, 41) reads, “These movable feasts, in some years, displace the feasts of the calendar, as also happens in our own.” Sahagún’s statement suggests that there is perhaps a closer connection between the veintenas and the festivals dictated by the tonalpohualli than is usually acknowledged. It may also be that Sahagún, drawing on his long experience as a missionary in Tepepulco, reached a certain conclusion on the redaction of the veintenas, which he himself acknowledged created “spurious festivities” that could not be completely assimilated into the cycle.

The pictographic manuscripts known as the Codices Tudela (ff. 29r–30r; Fig. 7.10) and Magliabechiano (ff. 46r–48v) conclude the section on the eighteen veintenas with a representation of Xochihuitl (Feast of the Flowers), which is identified in a gloss as “moving feast” (fiesta extravagante). Although the feast moves over the course of the solar year, the dates of Chicome Xochitl (7 Flower) and Ce Xochitl (1 Flower) assigned to the celebration of Xochihuitl in the source occur twenty days apart; thus, they are a veintena and rightly placed after the presentation of the eighteen feasts of the solar calendar. This appears to have been another occurrence of a veintena-type festival that was omitted from the monthly calendar invented by the friars and their Indigenous pupils.

Several scholars remarked on the patterning of the veintena festivities. Graulich (1986, 1999, 85–87) noted the parallelism of rituals performed during the veintena celebrations in the first half (from Tlacaxipehuaiztli to Xocotl Huetzi/Huey Micailhuitl) and second half of the solar year (between Oehpanitzitl and Atleahuato). Kirchhoff (1968) correlated historical and modern calendars throughout Mesoamerica and grouped the eighteen feasts into six simple celebrations and six double celebrations. The double celebrations are Pachtontli and Huey Pachtli, Micailhuitontli and Huey Micailhuitl, and Tozoztli and Huey Tozozontli. They extended over a two-month period, according to different sources. More recently, Torres Cisneros (2011) remarked on the same pattern in the 260-day calendar in use among the Mixe of southern Oaxaca. These examples seem to indicate that different communities throughout Mesoamerica followed similar but somewhat adjustable patterns in their ceremonial lives rather than a fixed calendar of celebrations. Ultimately, this should be unsurprising considering the many ecological systems and lack of a unified religious or political authority in Mesoamerica.

3.4. The festival cycle in the southeastern Nahua region

Huautla de Jiménez and other towns in northeastern Oaxaca, home to the Mazatec, Popoloca, and Chinantec peoples, are the only communities in modern Mexico where an agricultural calendar akin to the veintenas is still known (Weitlaner 1936, Weitlaner and Weitlaner 1946, Carrera González and Doesburg 1996; see Appendix). Historically, the festival cycle has been documented in the region since the early colonial period. According to Fray Toribio de Benavente, also known as Motolinía (1971, ch. 25), who worked at the Franciscan mission in Tehuacán, a Nahua town in southern Puebla, the three neighboring towns of Tehuacán, Coxcatlán, and Teotitlán observed similar religious practices despite their different local tutelary gods. The friar (Motolinía 1971, ch. 16) also specifically mentioned the yearly celebrations of the veintenas, whose Nahuatl names differed slightly from the more commonly known ones in central Mexico. A few decades later, in the 1580s, the Relación de Teutitlán del Camino (Paso y Troncoso 1905, vol. 4, 213–231) stated that veintena ceremonies were performed in modern-day Teotitlán de Flores Magón and the surrounding area, including Huautla, which is mentioned in the same source as a dependency of Teotitlán. Both sources referred to the veintenas in Nahuatl, one of the languages spoken in the area, and listed the same names, as noted by Paso y Troncoso (1905, vol. 4, 217n1). This is particularly noteworthy because Motolinía’s account and the Relación were independently redacted roughly forty years apart. First, the friar learned first-hand narratives of historical deeds and pre-Hispanic religious customs during his time at the evangelical mission in the 1540s. Later, Spanish emissaries and local Indigenous officials compiled a
geographical census at the behest of the Crown in the latter part of the sixteenth century (Cline 1964).

Both sources noted the political importance of local priests in the kingdoms of the southern Nahua region, which may be partly due to a common ancestry that set them apart from the surrounding Mixtec, Mazatec, Popoloca, and Cuicatec peoples. According to several sources, Tehuacán, Teotitlán, and Coxcatlán were putatively founded by Nonoalca people from Tula in the modern state of Hidalgo. For example, the Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca, a manuscript from Cuauhtinchan in Puebla, relates the migration of Toltec groups to southern Mexico after the fall of Tula (Kirchhoff et al. 1989, 133–135, ff. 6–8). One of the leaders of the migrating group was Xelhua o Xelhuan, who eventually settled in the area of Tehuacán, Teotitlán, and Coxcatlán, encroaching on an ethnically diverse territory. Xelhua is also mentioned as the town’s founder in the Relación de Cuzcatlán (Paso y Troncoso 1905, vol. 5, 47).

According to the Relación de Teutitlán del Camino (Paso y Troncoso 1905, vol. 4, 220), three main priests ruled over the towns’ religious and civic duties: Teuctlamacaz (lord-priest, from teuctli or lord and tlamacaz or priest in Nahuatl), Ecatlamacaz (wind-priest, from ecatl or wind and tlamacaz), and Tetzatlamacaz (omen-priest, from tezahuitl or omen and tlamacaz). While Teuctlamacaz seems to imply some type of political authority given the term teuctli (lord), Ecatlamacaz and Tetzatlamacaz presumably involved more strictly religious duties, such as seasonal or weather-related ceremonies in the case of the Ecatlamacaz and oracular practices in the case of the Tetzatlamacaz. Furthermore, the wind-priest and the omen-priest may have been the temple priests for the two main gods worshiped in town, Teyztapali and Coatl, which are also mentioned in the Relación (Paso y Troncoso 1905, vol. 4, 217). As indicated by its name, Teyztapali was likely a god and image of a slab stone akin to the god Iztapal Totec (Paso y Troncoso 1905, vol. 4, 217n2, Codex Telleriano-Remensis, f. 22v), while Coatl may refer to Quetzalcoatl as a manifestation of the wind god.

The two temples and their respective cults—one dedicated to divination and administered by the Tetzatlamacaz and the other to the seasonal rituals of the Ecatlamacaz—created a complementary and dynamic opposition, similar to the one between Tezcatlipoca and Quetzalcoatl found in the Codex Borbonicus (p. 22) and discussed in Section 1.2. The Relación also explains that these priests were celibate and regularly fasted, self-sacrificed, and lived in seclusion at their temples. Motolinía (1971, ch. 25) complements the information provided by the later source as follows:

Figure 3.7. New Fire altar, Tehuacán Viejo, Puebla. Photo by Alessia Frassani.
In these three provinces I am telling you about [Tehuacán, Teotitlán, and Cozcatlán], the ministers of the temples and everybody in their houses fasted eighty days every year. They also observed fast and lent before the celebration of their devil, especially those priests, by eating only maize bread, water, and salt. One lent lasted ten days, while others were of twenty or forty days, and others were of eighty days, such as the one for Panquetzaliztli in Mexico … These priests were also called “fire bearers,” because they threw incense and coal on the fire three times during the day and three times during the night … The fast was not observed everywhere; rather, each province did it for their own gods according to their own devotion and customs. In some towns in these provinces, the devil had its own dedicated priests who were always keeping a vigil and prayed, fasted, and sacrificed themselves, and this full-time occupation lasted four years, and the priests were indeed young men who fasted for four years … [In their temples,] they did not eat fruit, honey, or any other sweet; only every twenty days they were allowed to eat that, because that was like Sunday for us. They stayed awake, taking turns in pairs while the other two slept; they spent the night singing to the devil many songs and regularly drawing blood from different parts of their bodies … every twenty days, they did that. If I am not mistaken, they counted eighteen times eighty, because they did not count five days of the year, but only eighteen months of twenty days each. (Translation by author)

The friar mentions the veintena calendar in use among the southern Puebla priesthood and the ceremony of Panquetzaliztli in relation to day counting, especially the twenty-day count (leading to regular intervals of twenty, forty, or eighty days), night ceremonies, and vision quest (fasts, wakes, and self-sacrifices). All these aspects are seemingly inseparable. The friar concludes that priests from the southern region of Tehuacán, Teotitlán, and Cozcatlán were highly sought after for their divining powers, even by the Mexica ruler Motecuhzoma in Tenochtitlan. In the recently excavated site of Tehuacán Viejo (Fig. 3.7), an altar features a stepped decoration that is strikingly similar to the New Fire altar depicted in the Codex Borbonicus (p. 34; Fig. 4.8). The temple and altar in the manuscript were likely those located in Iztpalapa on the hill known as Huixachtecatl, Cerro de la Estrella, where the “fire bearers” lit the New Fire during Panquetzaliztli. The presence of a New Fire altar in Tehuacán is another proof of the widespread adoption of the same ceremony by different groups throughout Mesomerica, as indicated by Motolinia.

A three-part illustration from the Codex Mendoza aptly demonstrates how intertwined self-sacrifice, night ceremonies, and skywatching were in ancient Mexico. Folio 63r of the Codex Mendoza (Fig. 3.8) depicts the “nighttime activities of the head priests,” as explained on the previous page facing the drawing. The night setting of the three activities is indicated by the round gray patch on the top central part of the page. The dark night sky is brightened by the stars, which are depicted as eyes with a red eyelid. In the first scene on the left, a priest walks forward holding a smoking censer in one hand and a bag containing copal (incense) in the other. He is also carrying a gourd on his back that, according to the gloss, contains “poison” that he will use to self-sacrifice. The potion was likely concocted with a mind-altering substance used in night ceremonies. Behind the priest walks a novice carrying branches that will be used to create an altar in the woods, where the ceremony will take place. The next scene shows a priest seated on a straw mat and playing a teponaztle, a horizontal drum that, according to the gloss, was played by the priest at night. Finally, on the right, another priest is engaged in skywatching, as indicated by the star-eye symbol moving from his eyes towards the sky. The gloss specifies that the priest did so to keep track of the time. Illustrations in the Codex Mendoza are rather
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descriptive and do not display the rich iconography of religious manuscripts.

During the second half of the sixteenth century, Augustinian historian Jerónimo Román y Zamora (1897) compiled a history of world civilizations, including the Indigenous peoples of the Americas, by collating information from several primary sources. Describing the many acts of penitence and self-sacrifice performed by the priests of Tehuanecán, Teotitlan, and Coxcatlán following Motolinía’s account, he also wrote about the importance of the cult of Venus in the region, second only in importance to that of the sun (Román y Zamora 1897, bk. 1, ch. XV). According to Román y Zamora, it was believed that Quetzalcoatl transformed into Venus when he died; therefore, great attention was paid to counting the days on which the planet appeared and disappeared in the sky. Appropriate rituals were celebrated, especially at the moment of Venus’s reappearance. Although Román y Zamora did not mention it, it is likely that the cult of Quetzalcoatl as Venus, known as Tlahuizcalpantecuhtli, revolved around the observation of the planet’s appearance at the summit of the volcano Citealpetl (known in Spanish as Pico de Orizaba), which is the highest peak in Mexico. According to both colonial and modern lore, Quetzalcoatl turned into ashes and disappeared from the top of this mountain (Arroniz 1867, 66–67, Medellín Zenil 1962, Levine 2014, 179–180). The Nahua name of the peak means “star mountain,” a reference to the Venus star.

The Codex Cospi (p. 10; Fig. 3.9) depicts two scenes that are part of the so-called “attacks of Venus,” a calendrical table that established omens related to the periodic appearance of the planet in the night sky (Nowotny 1961, § 18, Boone 2007, 151–155). In the top image, Quetzalcoatl as Tlahuizcalpantecuhtli pierces a mountain with his spear. The mountain appears to be bleeding, water springs from its foot, and a tree sprouts from the top. The peak of the mountain is white, which indicates that it is snow-capped. Although there are a few other peaks with

Figure 3.9. The attacks of Venus. Codex Cospi, p. 10. Ms. 4093, Biblioteca Universitaria di Bologna.
perennial glaciers in central Mexico (e.g., the Popocatepetl in Puebla and the Matlalcueye or La Malinche in Tlaxcala), the Citlaltepetl seems to be the most likely identification for the mountain in the Codex Cospi, given that the Venus cult is the subject of the pages. If this is indeed the case, the Codex Cospi would hail from a community in the southeastern Nahua region where the Citlaltepetl is not only visible but also venerated.

The colonial accounts attested that celestial phenomena, such as the solar and Venerian cycles, were tied to specific cults under the auspices of specialized local priests, who were known even outside the region. In turn, the observation of astronomical phenomena was fundamentally tied to considerations regarding meteorological and agricultural events throughout the solar year and over the course of several years. Therefore, it is unsurprising that veintenas (i.e., solar celebrations) were also observed in a region known for its precise astronomical knowledge.

Finally, both the calendar and shamanic practices were recorded in the Mazateca in the early twentieth century. Wilhelm Bauer (1908, 858) referred to the importance of what he called an “animal cult” in the Mazateca, which seemingly involved not only the belief that men and women could transform into animals but also devotion to specific animals in church or town hall altars. Local caciques were responsible for the maintenance of the cult, upon which the well-being of the community depended. Bauer (1908, 865) also referred to the existence of the Mesoamerican calendar in the region, although his information was unclear. In fact, the anthropologist mentioned the twenty day signs, which he believed were all related to animals. However, he stated that there were thirteen “months,” which indicates that he may have conflated and confused the thirteen numerals of the tonalpohualli with the eighteen twenty-day months of the solar year, a calendar still known in many towns of the Mazateca, including Huautla.

The specific information regarding ritual and religious customs in the southeastern Nahua region from the pre-Hispanic period to the present confirms the existence of broad cultural continuity within the so-called Mixteca-Puebla horizon (Nicholson 1966, Nicholson 1982) and Eastern Nahua region of Puebla and Tlaxcala (Pohl 2003, Pohl 2007). Archaeological data indicates that the Tehuacán Valley is one of the areas where some religious manuscripts may have originated (Chadwick and McNeish 1967, Sisson and Lilly 1994, Álvarez Icaza 2018). Indeed, the only religious manuscript whose provenience is known, the Codex Porfirio Díaz or Tututepetongo (pp. 43–33), hails from the town of the same name in the Cuicatec region of Oaxaca, neighboring the Mazateca (Anders and Jansen 1994, 267–296, Doesburg 2001).

Modern Mazatec practices are part of this broad archaeological and historical context and highlight the importance of the visionary aspect of the veintenas’ ceremonies, including skywatching and day counting. The following chapters consider iconography and calendrics, images, and time keeping as intertwined phenomena in the ancient religious manuscripts, as Mesoamerican priests would not separate knowledge about time (the past, present, and future) from their religious experiences.
The preceding chapters established the importance of calendrical knowledge and night ceremonies among the activities that the Mesoamerican priesthood was supposed to master. In Chapter 3, on the tonalpohualli, it was argued that the so-called veintenas constituted a liturgical calendar based on a specific partition of the tonalpohualli \((65 \times 4)\), which, while approximating the solar year, was eventually drastically refashioned during the colonial period according to Spanish missionaries’ ideas. Earlier in Chapter 2, modern and historical Nahuatl and Mazatec chants clarified the primordial roles that ritual and lived experience played in the process of knowledge acquisition in Mesoamerica. This chapter explains that both calendrics and rituals played an essential role in the reinterpretation of the yearly ceremonial cycle in the ancient and colonial painted books.

### 4.1. Teotleco

Chjon na’ño nda’nitsian, jñe
Our mother woman, water of the center (or marketplace), you are

Chjon na’ño, josin fana ntjao’na
Our mother woman, like our blowing wind

Chjon na’ño, josin nginde, jñe
Our mother woman, like underground, you are

Chjon xaa kamai, jñe
Woman who turns into a jaguar, you are

Chjon ná xa kamai, jñe
Our mother woman, who turns into a jaguar, you are

Chjon xon ndijin, jñe
Woman charcoal-stained paper, you are

Chjón ná xon ndijin, jñe, tso
Our woman charcoal-stained paper, you are, says

Maria Sabina (Wasson and Wasson 1957a, side 2, band 1) (https://youtu.be/_KQwV3Jixyl)
Transcription and translation by Santiago Cortés Martínez and Alessia Frassani

This short excerpt from a chant by María Sabina offers an insightful starting point for understanding some scenes from the veintena ceremonies. The chjon chjine claims to be like water, wind, and earth—three major natural forces. She quickly moves through different realms, much like the speaker in the chants collected by Alarcón and Sahagún (discussed in Section 2.3). The last two verses refer to perforated stencils and charcoal stamps that women use to embroider textiles, chiefly huipiles (female garments; Fig. 4.1). Women use stencils to leave small charcoal dots

Figure 4.1. Mazatec huipil with stencil. Museo Nacional de Antropología, Mexico City. Photo by Javier García.