

# *The universal flood and America: Relations between indigenous and Christian worldviews at the Telleriano-Remensis Codex*

Gláucia Cristiani Montoro[1]

## **Abstract**

This paper analyzes the *Telleriano-Remensis Codex* texts written by Dominican missionaries in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, in New Spain. Within these comments, many references can be found connecting aspects of Christianity to myths and practices from the indigenous population. References are made to a flood, pointing out the friars' concern to find a place for the American native people into the European Christian worldview.

**Keywords:** New Spain; *Telleriano-Remensis Codex*; missionaries.

## *O dilúvio universal e a América: relações entre as cosmovisões indígena e cristã no Códice Telleriano Remensis*

### **Resumo**

Este artigo analisa os textos do Códice Telleriano Remensis, escritos por missionários dominicanos na Nova Espanha do século XVI, nos quais aparecem associações entre aspectos do cristianismo e mitos e práticas indígenas, como a referência a um dilúvio, demonstrando a preocupação dos frades em encontrar um lugar para os povos nativos da América na cosmovisão europeia cristã.

**Palavras-chave:** Nova Espanha; Códice Telleriano Remensis; missionários.

## *El diluvio universal y América: relaciones entre las cosmovisiones indígena y cristiana en el Códice Telleriano Remensis*

### **Resumen**

Este artículo analiza los textos del *Códice Telleriano Remensis*, escritos por misioneros dominicanos en la Nueva España del siglo XVI. En ellos pueden encontrarse asociaciones entre aspectos del cristianismo y mitos y prácticas indígenas, como las referencias a un diluvio, lo que demuestra la preocupación de los frailes por encontrar lugar a los pueblos indígenas de América en la cosmovisión europea cristiana.

**Palabras clave:** Nueva España; Códice Telleriano Remensis; misioneros.

## *Le déluge universel et l'Amérique: des rapports entre le paradigme indigène et celui chrétien dans le Codex Telleriano Remensis*

### **Résumé**

Cet article analyse les textes du *Codex Telleriano Remensis*, écrits par des missionnaires dominicains au XVI<sup>ème</sup> siècle en Nouvelle Espagne, dans lesquels il y a des associations entre certains aspects du christianisme et les mythes et pratiques indigènes, y incluse la mention d'un déluge, montrant le soin des frères vers l'insertion des peuples natifs de l'Amérique dans le paradigme Euro-Chrétien.

**Mots-clés:** Nouvelle Espagne; *Codex Telleriano Remensis*; missionnaires.

Article received on August 10, 2012, and approved for publication on December 12, 2012.

[1] Department of History at Universidade Federal Rural do Rio de Janeiro (UFRRJ) - Rio de Janeiro (RJ) - Brazil. *E-mail:* glauciamontoro@uol.com.br

The pictographic codexes<sup>1</sup> produced by several indigenous groups in the Meso-American region were among the main targets of the destructions carried out by the Christian missionaries in the early colonial period of the New World. Therefore, only a few pre-Hispanic members survived. Paradoxically, most codexes that exist until these days have been created during the colonial period, and many of those were sponsored by missionary orders, especially the ones with religious contents.

The *Codex Telleriano Remensis* dates back to the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, when the early language-related difficulties had been overcome, and the interest towards several aspects of the indigenous culture had increased amongst the friars.<sup>2</sup> But how is it possible to explain the effort of these friars to compile pictographs, to search for and register information about matters that the missionaries in the early years of colonization worked so hard to destroy?

Since the 1520s, but mainly after the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the missionaries working in New Spain were especially curious about some aspects of the indigenous cultures, especially in relation to calendars, gods and festivities. Despite the indiscriminate destruction of manuscripts, religious men noticed how important it was to understand the indigenous traditions, so that they could conduct an efficient evangelization in order to fight idolatry. Major efforts have been made to correlate the indigenous and the Christian calendars, since it would enable to identify, in the European calendar, the most significant dates in the indigenous religious life during the pre-Hispanic period. Many of the missionaries compiled pictographs of this period or wrote books with indigenous religious information, which had aspects of idolatry. They justified their acts based on the premise that the lack of knowledge about native traditions was negative for the control of the Church. Some of them stated that the Amerindians practiced idolatry acts in front of the missionaries, and they did not even know it. Sahagún, for instance, who belonged to the Franciscan order, explained:

The doctor cannot properly apply medicines to the patient without first knowing which type, or which specialty he is a doctor of in relation to the knowledge of medicine and diseases in order to properly apply, to each disease, the medicine for it, and because the doctor preaches and priests work for the souls, to heal the spiritual illnesses they should be experienced in spiritual medicines and illnesses [...] it is important that they know whatever is necessary to work on their talents; it is not convenient that the ministers are careless about this conversion, for example, saying that among these people there are no more sins than drunkenness, robbery and carnality, because there are many other sins among them, much more serious which require medicine: the sins of idolatry and idolatry rites, and idolatry superstitions and omen, and idolatry ceremonies, they have not yet completely disappeared. To preach against these things, and also to know

<sup>1</sup>The word *codex* comes from Latin, and was originally used to name small waxed boards used by the Romans to write. The word was added as a label or prefix to name a series of manuscripts in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was also included in texts of Meso-American origin.

<sup>2</sup>In the early colonial period, the Spanish Crown preferred that the religious men in charge of evangelizing the natives in New Spain belonged to mendicant order, that is why friars of several orders worked in the region. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the ones that stood out in the collection of information about native cultures were the Franciscan and the Dominican orders, especially the former.

if they exist, it is important to know how they used such idolatry, because since we do not know it, in front of us, they practice idolatry and we do not understand it [...]<sup>3</sup>

At the late 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, the search for traces of idolatry became almost an obsession amongst religious men (both regular and secular ones), despite the careful circulation of manuscripts due to censorship regarding the texts containing information about the indigenous costumes and practices written by Filipe II, especially after the 1570s.<sup>4</sup> Jacinto de la Serna, for instance, a churchman from the 17<sup>th</sup> century, warned the evangelizers in the “Manual of Indigenous Ministers”:

Because after so much light, so much preaching and work, instead of being filled with light, they are involved with the darkness, and instead of shining with the work of real Christians, we see in them work of real idolizers [...]; because the darkness of idolatry is born inside them, who had been hiding it, however, they never abandoned it, and ever since the faith has been preached to them, they have idolatry, and they work so wisely that they may even idolize in front of the Spanish, and even at the presence of the priests, and they do not know this idolatry [...]<sup>5</sup>

Therefore, it is possible that the *Codex Telleriano Remensis* was developed as a source of information about native cultures. It is a manuscript originated in the central region of Mexico, composed of pictographs (a system of pictographic notation that was characteristic of Central Mexico) and texts with Latin characters (mostly in Castilian, but there are also some words in *náhuatl*),<sup>6</sup> produced with European paper and in *codex format*.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, it is a hybrid source which blends conventions of different writing systems and book formats, as well as very distinct visual conceptions. It is divided into three parts or sections: the first two, which bring calendar-religious topics, and the last one, which is historical. The first one shows the *Xiuhpohualli*, or an annual calendar cycle of 365 days (divided into 18 festivities, or 18 “months” of 20 days each, and one extra page representing the five additional days, called *nemontemi*); the second one is the *Tonalpohualli*, or ritual calendar (with 260 days, divided into groups of 13, known as *Trecenas*);<sup>8</sup> and the third one emphasizes historical contents (since the typical immigrations of the *nahua*<sup>9</sup> people, going through its dynastic history until colonial times), which we prefer to subdivide in two parts: *Migration* and *Historical Annals*.

<sup>3</sup>Bernardino de Sahagún, *Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España*, 10. ed., México, Editorial Porrúa, 1999, p. 17.

<sup>4</sup>A very famous document about such censorship is a royal note of Phillip II, From April 22, 1577, in which the king ordered that the manuscripts produced by the Franciscan Bernardino de Sahagún be collected (*apud* Luiz Estevam de Oliveira Fernandes, *Histórias de um silêncio: as leituras de história eclesialística indiana de Frei Jerônimo de Mendieta*, Dissertação de Mestrado em História, Universidade Estadual de Campinas, Campinas, 2004, p. 61-62).

<sup>5</sup>Jacinto de la Serna, “Manual de Ministros de Índios”, *In: El alma encantada. Anales del Museo Nacional de México*, México, Instituto Nacional Indigenista/Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1987, p. 279.

<sup>6</sup>The *náhuatl* was the language spoken by the elites and by most of the population in the central area of the current territory of Mexico before the European invasion. It was the language of the mexicas (known as Aztecs). During the colonial period translated in Latin characters with the use of Castilian orthography and phonetics.

<sup>7</sup>*Codex format* is a specific book format composed of folios (of paper, parchment or papyrus), brought together by its internal margin.

<sup>8</sup>We chose to use the name given by the Spanish to these divisions, *Trecenas*.

<sup>9</sup>Refers to those who spoke *náhuatl*.

Pictographs were the objects of research of our PhD,<sup>10</sup> in which we conducted a codicological study and a formal and stylistic analysis of scribes/painters or *tlacuilos*.<sup>11</sup> In the mentioned study, it was possible to rebuild the action of producing the manuscript and observing that the *tlacuilos*, besides adopting a series of conventions belonging to the Western tradition, demonstrate characteristics of different regional natives (from the Valleys of Mexico and Puebla), since the codex shows different types of styles, according to the painter who made each of its parts. We also noticed that each of the seven identified *tlacuilos* made specific adaptations of the traditional contents — of their groups or neighboring groups. In order to meet the demands of the Western patrons on the one hand, and of the European support, on the other, they were made out of the paper manufactured in Genoa and organized in the *codex format*, which was still unknown in the pre-Colombian world.

The fact that the pictographs of *Telleriano Remensis* were accompanied by texts in Spanish, that the document was made with paper manufactured in Europe in the *codex format* (European book), that the reading direction was the same as the one used in Western texts, among other reasons, reveal that the manuscript was sponsored and compiled by these colonizers. The content of the texts in Latin characters still suggests that it was specifically developed by missionaries. There are notes in every section of the code, which were possibly inserted to explain the content of images, even though there are comments that are not directly related to them, especially at the end of the manuscript. All of the texts are a result of the efforts of several annotators, and were inserted slowly in different periods of the history of producing the document.

According to the analyses of these annotators performed in our post-doctoral internship,<sup>12</sup> ten individuals participated in this process,<sup>13</sup> which we organized in numbers, from one to ten, according to the importance of their texts and the order of appearance in the manuscript. Therefore, the first five ones were the main annotators, that is, those who wrote the most important and longest texts, while the last five ones only included small sentences or wrote some words in *nahuatl*. *Annotator 1* was identified as the Dominican friar, Pedro de los Ríos, who worked in all of the sections of the code, normally as a secondary writer,<sup>14</sup> except for the first part of the historical section (*Migration*), in which

<sup>10</sup>Gláucia Cristiani Montoro, *Memórias fragmentadas: novos aportes à história de confecção e formação do Códice Telleriano Remensis. Estudo codicológico*, Tese de Doutorado em História Cultural, Universidade Estadual de Campinas, Campinas, 2008.

<sup>11</sup>"*Tlacuilo o tlacuiloani: escritor, pintor*" (Siméon Rémi, *Diccionario de la lengua Náhuatl o mexicana*, Madrid, Siglo Veintiuno, 1992, p. 581). In *náhuatl*, the plural form of *tlacuilo* is *tlacuiloque*, but we chose to add the "s".

<sup>12</sup>Conducted at Universidade Federal Fluminense, supervised by Professor Dr. Ronaldo Vainfas and scholarship of Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico (CNPq).

<sup>13</sup>The previous detailed analysis of the texts in *Telleriano Remensis* was carried out by Quiñones Keber, and she found six authors (Eloise Quiñones Keber, *Codex Telleriano-Remensis: ritual, divination and history in a pictorial Aztec manuscript*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1995, p. 125-127).

<sup>14</sup>Among the annotators, there was a distinction between *primary* and *secondary* ones in each of the sections. The *primary* texts were the first ones to be added to each of the sections, and are usually placed in planned or standard locations, below the pictographs. The other texts or words, be they the addition of new data, corrections or complementation, were considered as *secondary*.

he was the only one to make comments. *Annotator 2* also worked on more than one section. He wrote the primary texts of *Xiuhpohualli* and some secondary texts of *Tonalpohualli*. The one we call *Annotator 3* may be considered as the primary commentator of *Tonalpohualli*, because his texts were the only one planned to be in this section, with the same location in each of the *Trecenas*. He was also the primary annotator of the first *Historical Annals*, from pages 29r to 39r of the *fac-similar*.<sup>15</sup> *Annotator 4* is the second<sup>16</sup> primary annotator of *Historical Annals*: from pages 39v to 47v. *Annotator 5* introduced comments on pages 4lv, 48r and at the end of the manuscript, pages 49v and 50r, in which he wrote long notes in two pages without pictographs, only his texts and those of Pedro de los Riós (on page 50r). We believe that he also added some words in gothic letters to *Tonalpohualli*.

---

*The most important texts of Codex Telleriano Remensis reveal the knowledge related to the indigenous culture gathered by a group of friars who worked in New Spain*

---

*Annotator 6* was the first to be identified amongst those who had made only a few contributions. We believe that he was the author of the names of festivities in gothic letters of *Xiuhpohualli* and of one of the texts, also in gothic, in the first page of *Tonalpohualli*. As to *Annotators 7, 8* and *9*, they included words or small texts in *Tonalpohualli*: *Annotator 7* was in charge of the names of the calendar signs, of the Lords of the Night<sup>17</sup> and he was also the author of the second group of texts on page 8r; *Annotator 8* inserted a sentence on page 12v; and *Annotator 9* made small comments on pages 16v, 17r and 23v. Finally, *Annotator 10* wrote the gothic letters with the names of the sovereigns of *Mexico Tenochtitlan* in the *Historical Annals*.

This large number of authors and the progressive inclusion of texts made the notes of *Telleriano Remensis* extremely heterogeneous. The four parts of the codex (considering the historical session divided in two parts — Migration and Historical Annals) reveal different annotation patterns, even if we consider just the primary annotations, because the comments had to be adjusted to the pictographic content, which presents a different pattern or is organized differently in each of the contents of the manuscript. In this article, we will focus on

---

<sup>15</sup>For the indication of codex pages throughout this paper, we will use the numeration of *fac similar* which is published by the Texas University (Eloise Quiñones Keber, *Codex Telleriano-Remensis: ritual, divination and history in a pictorial Aztec manuscript*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1995).

<sup>16</sup>There are two primary authors in the Annals. The first one (*Annotator 3*) commented on pages 29r and 39r, and the second one (*Annotator 4*), 39v to 47v.

<sup>17</sup>The "Lords of the Night" are nine gods who are in charge of each of the days in *Tonalpohualli*.

these texts with Latin characters in the *Codex Telleriano Remensis*, especially on those from the first topics of the manuscript, of the content of religious-calendar, *Xiuhpohualli* and *Tonalpohualli*.

### The annotators of the religious-calendar contents

The *Codex Telleriano Remensis* is currently incomplete, since there are folios of three sections missing. In all cases, the pictographic content can be rebuilt with the *Codex Vaticanus A*, because the three sections of the first one are identical to the ones in the second, which still has some additional topics. The *Codex Vaticanus A* is also a manuscript dating from the mid-colonial Mexican period, comprised of pictographs and texts in Latin characters, but in Italian, unlike the *Telleriano Remensis*, whose longer annotations are found in Castilian. Humboldt<sup>18</sup> was the first author to notice the similarities between the two manuscripts, in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, when he found the evidence of a relationship with the Dominican friar Pedro de los Ríos in both texts. The connection of *Codex Vaticanus A* with this friar has been determined since the 17<sup>th</sup> century, but in the 19<sup>th</sup> century it was also possible to connect the *Codex Telleriano Remensis* to him. The relation is mainly based on the analysis of two passages, which were present in the text of one of the manuscripts: in third person, in the text of *Vaticanus A*,<sup>19</sup> and in first person in the *Telleriano Remensis*.<sup>20</sup> This evidence, associated with the similarity between the two manuscripts and with the reference to the name of Ríos as the compiler of *Codex Vaticanus A*, besides more information found in the texts of *Telleriano Remensis* that are attributed to him,<sup>21</sup> show that *Telleriano* might have been compiled or, at least, changed, by this friar, so he was probably one of its annotators (named in this paper as *Annotator 1*).

Due to the existence of similar documents produced under the auspices of missionary orders in New Spain, and considering the cost that would be aggregated to the production of this type of document and the large number of people involved in the annotations, among which we can identify other religious men apart from Ríos (whose names are unknown), we believe that this manuscript had belonged to the Dominican Order. Pedro de los Ríos was one of its main annotators, and possibly, the compiler of the contents. Therefore, the most important texts of *Codex Telleriano Remensis* reveal the knowledge

<sup>18</sup>Alexander Von Humboldt, *Vues des cordillères et monumens des peuples indigènes de L'Amérique*, Paris, F. Schoell, 1810, p. 279.

<sup>19</sup>Page 23r of fac-similar: *Codex Vaticanus 3738. Facsímil del Codex Vatic. Lat. 3738 de la Biblioteca Apostólica Vaticana*, Graz (Austria), Akademische Druck- u. Verlagsanst (ADEVA), 1996.

<sup>20</sup>Page 15r of fac-similar: Eloise Quiñones Keber, *Codex Telleriano-Remensis: ritual, divination and history in a pictorial Aztec manuscript*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1995.

<sup>21</sup>Such facts coincide with some data collected about his life in *Actas Capitulares de los Dominicos (Archivo Histórico - INAH, Cidade do México/Bancroft Collection, Berkeley)*, in which it is exposed that he was aware of the region of Oaxaca, and in one document of *Archivo General de Indias (Justicia 160 No 2. "Los indios y principales de la Nueva España con(tra) los preladados de ella sobre el pagar de los diezmos los dichos indios"*, 1559), which confirms he passed by several regions of New Spain, besides showing he spoke at least one native language, possibly *náhuatl*.

related to the indigenous culture gathered by a group of friars who worked in New Spain in the early colonial period. Such texts reveal the personal experience of these friars during a period in which they were in touch with different indigenous groups, especially in places where there were units of the order to which they possibly belonged, that is, the Dominican Order.

Each of the ten annotators of the codex, especially the five main ones, had their own ways of gathering information in the manuscript. In the two sections that will be approached in this article, the second and the first, there were notes from eight out of the ten described annotators. The first one, *Xiuhpohualli*, was annotated by three individuals: *Annotator 2*,<sup>22</sup> who was the primary commentator, while *Annotator 1* and *Annotator 6* may be considered as secondary ones. The two main ones are *Annotator 1* and *Annotator 2*, because they wrote the most important and extensive notes. In the second section, *Tonalpohualli*, there were eight people: *Annotator 3*, was the primary commentator, while *Annotators 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 8* and *9* made several types of inclusions. The longest texts belonged to *Annotators 1, 2* and *3*, while *Annotators 5, 6, 7, 8* and *9* made only a few contributions or added some names in *náhuatl*. As observed, the only texts that could be connected to a specific individual were the ones by *Annotator 1*, attributed to the Dominican friar, Pedro de los Ríos.

The interests of each of these commentators of *Telleriano* varied according to the section in which they worked. However, their notes are shaped by the type of information that was available at the time. Sometimes their notes demonstrate that they did not know about the topic which they were writing about. This might have occurred because the attempt to understand was always carried out using their own terms, or according to the reports of indigenous people who had no knowledge on the matters they were trying to learn. That is why, in comparison to what had been provided on the same topic in the books by Sahagún<sup>23</sup> — who made an extremely detailed work of compilation, with the assistance of instructed members of the indigenous elite — it seems that the annotators of *Telleriano Remensis* could not gather much information. In general, the friars who annotated *Telleriano* had lack of data since their notes contain other elements related to the happenings in the colonial period or their own experiences. These had only a minor relationship with the subject or with the data or period about which they were writing. Quiñones Keber<sup>24</sup> states that there was a *tendency* of these annotators of replacing the description of the rituals with notes about incidents of historical and ethnographic interest.

<sup>22</sup>This individual was called *Annotator 2* because of the order of appearance in the texts. Even if he was the primary autor in the *Xiuhpohualli* section, the texts by *Annotator 1*, Pedro de los Ríos, appear first in the codex, and on the upper left corner of the first page. The choice ton ame Ríos as *Annotator 1* was also due to his importance, because besides being the only one who included notes in all of the sections, he may also have been the compiler of the manuscript.

<sup>23</sup>Bernardino de Sahagún, *Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España*, 10. ed., México, Editorial Porrúa, 1999, p. 17.

<sup>24</sup>Eloise Quiñones Keber, *Codex Telleriano-Remensis: ritual, divination and history in a pictorial Aztec manuscript*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1995, p. 138.

*Annotator 2*, for instance, who wrote long texts in *Xiuhpohualli* and *Tonalpohualli* and proved to be a religious man — possibly Dominican, due to his knowledge about the places where there were units of this order — explained that the festivity of the “month” *vey tecuilvitl*<sup>25</sup> was the one the indigenous people were preparing at the time of the killing, which triggered the episode *Noche Triste* (Sad Night), in *Mexico Tenochtitlan*. In the following “month”, *mic caylhuatl*, after talking about the party of the dead, when they put food and drinks on the graves, he ended up describing the costumes related to the way of burying the dead of the *mixtecas* and *zapotecas*. In other parts, he connects the “month” with the period in which Cortés was done subjugating *Mexico Tenochtitlan*, or with his first entry in the Valley of Mexico. Finally, he related the events that took place during the colonial period to the “months” or to the festivities of the *Xiuhpohualli*, without adding any significant data about the festivities *per se*. This does not only happen with *Annotator 2*. Pedro de los Ríos, *Annotator 1*, who seems to have worked together with *Annotator 2* in the sections of *Xiuhpohualli* and *Tonalpohualli*, also described many elements of his personal experiences or facts related to the Spanish people in different areas of New Spain. For instance, he completed the description provided by *Annotator 2*, while describing about the way *mixtecas* and *zapotecas* buried their dead, adding the *mexicas*, which, according to him, was inherited from the *otomis*. On the “month” of *ochpaniztli*, he mentioned that in this period, Cortés set foot on land for the first time (that is, stepped on the territory that would become New Spain). He also reported, in *Tonalpohualli*, page 15r, that he had seen the crowns represented in the pictographs of *Tonacateotl* and *Mictlantecuhitli* gods on the war captains of *Coatlan*.

In our opinion, this “tendency”, using the term employed by Quiñones Keber, of the annotators of the *Tellerian* to tell historical or ethnographic incidents can be explained by the lack of deeper knowledge of the friars on the subjects represented in the pictographs, and/or due to limited information, in case they were using indigenous informers.

On the other hand, *Annotators 1* and *2* did not demonstrate total lack of knowledge about gods and festivities. Sometimes, they brought up the gods and their attributions, ceremonies of *Xiuhpohualli* and events related to the days or periods of *Tonalpohualli*. On these matters, Quiñones Keber<sup>26</sup> believes that they were more interested in gods than in rituals. The author states that, especially Ríos, cared much about the honored gods, their visual appearance and the roles they played in indigenous religion and rituals in mythological stories.

The knowledge of Pedro de los Ríos seems to be limited, but he writes about the practices carried out by the people during some festivities, such as the so-called

<sup>25</sup>For the words in *náhuatl* used in the texts, we will use the spelling in the codex.

<sup>26</sup>Eloise Quiñones Keber, *Codex Telleriano-Remensis: ritual, divination and history in a pictorial Aztec manuscript*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1995, p. 147-148.

party of the dead, in *vey mic cayhuítl*, when they climbed up to the terrace of their houses to “pray” for the dead of the family. He also knew about indigenous myths concerning gods, when he refers to *Tezcatlipoca* as the one who tricked *Quetzalcoatl*, a reference to a part of the story of *Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl* of *Tula*. Besides, he knew some aspects of the gods, such as the missing foot of *Tezcatlipoca*. He also says that, on the 6<sup>th</sup> *cana* day,<sup>27</sup> the natives would throw a great party to *Quetzalcoatl* in *Cholula* and that *Huehucoyotl* was the god of *otomis*.

As to *Annotator 2*, he also demonstrated to know a little about the rites and religious costumes, when he explained the reason why natives left offerings to the dead in *mic cayhuítl* (according to him, so that they could stand the difficult journey to the place where the souls rest, in the last level of *Mictlan*),<sup>28</sup> or when he mentioned that they swept their houses and paths in *ochpaniztli*, or even when they made gladiator sacrifices of warriors in *panquetzaliztli*, among others. In the case of the texts of the same author in *Tonalpohualli*, due to the guessing feature of this section, they are more related to the omen to which an individual born in the *Trecena* was submitted to, or on a specific day inside the mentioned *Trecena*. Therefore, the focus is on the prognosis of the days of *Tonalpohualli*.

About these data concerning the rituals and prognoses, it is interesting to mention that we think they were open to the public, because both *Annotator 2* and the other commentators refer to, in the case of *Tonalpohualli*, simple aspects of the predictions, which common people should know about, as they usually consulted with fortune tellers or *tonalpouhque*, especially when children were born — so that their fortunes could be read. Besides, some other events related to *Tonalpohualli* or those described in *Xiuhpohualli* by the annotators should be open to all, or at least to a significant part of the population, as when they mention the day when the “adulterers” and thieves were judged, or the day of bad omen to the merchants, when they could risk their merchandise in case they began commercial enterprises, or even those days when everybody should stay at home since they were too dangerous, or when women died during labor, and about the *Cihuateteo*, who looked monstrous. Certainly, these types of event, connected with the fear of the populations or with the important restrictions, should be made public to the population. We do not believe that the annotators had access to detailed information, such as the ones that could have been provided by a *tonalpouhque*, who should know the prognoses related to the days of the calendar, since this was his job. The fact that *Annotator 2* only mentioned the prognoses of a few days only shows that he had access to limited data, possibly the ones that were registered in the memory of populations.

This did not only happen in relation to the prognoses of *Tonalpohualli*, but also in the descriptions of *Xiuhpohualli* festivities. Generally, the information

<sup>27</sup>One of the days in the Meso-American calendar.

<sup>28</sup>In *náhuatl*, *Mictlán* refers to the infra-world of Meso-American indigenous cultures, to where most human beings would go to after dying.

offered by the main annotators of this section (*Annotators 1* and *2*) show the most popular aspects of the festivities. About this matter, Quiñones Keber<sup>29</sup> mentions that the authors *prefer* to explain how the festivities were seen by the populations, in general. However, for us, this case should not be related to the “preference” of the annotators, but to a consequence for the type of information they had access to. Possibly, their informers were not experts in the topics about which the friars were writing, so they had the same impressions and knowledge as an ordinary person.

---

*In the ochpaniztli “month,” the natives celebrated the feast “of the one I sin to eat the fruit of the tree,” which has a direct association with the Christian “original sin”*

---

Other types of description that are present in the first two sections of the codex refer to the interpretation of specific elements represented in pictographs — such as the attributes of the gods — or to the translation of the meaning of names of the represented gods. Concerning the second aspect, *Annotators 1* and *2* often reveal the meaning of the names of the “months” in *Xiupohualli*. As to *Tonalpohualli*, the translation was attributed mainly to *Annotator 1*, Pedro de los Ríos, and *Annotator 3*, the primary glossator of the second section of the codex.

Also for Quiñones Keber,<sup>30</sup> the person who had made the primary annotations of *Tonalpohualli*, that is, *Annotator 3*, seems to have been a native. However, this conclusion is due to the fact that the author believes that the commentator of the primary *Tonalpohualli* texts was also the one who made the words and texts in gothic letter of the codex, mostly in *náhuatl*. The author assumes that only a native could have written the words in *náhuatl*. We do not agree with Keber’s interpretation. These words could have been written by a missionary who knew the language well, or who had been working on a transliteration of the sound of these words, spoken by an indigenous person or a mestizo, since most of them referred to names of gods, festivities and calendar days used before the conquest. Out of the five individuals who wrote words in *náhuatl* in the codex, we can state that at least two of them were religious men, due to the fact that the content of the other three, are longer and offer many different data for analysis.

---

<sup>29</sup>Eloise Quiñones Keber, *Codex Telleriano-Remensis: ritual, divination and history in a pictorial Aztec manuscript*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1995, p. 138.

<sup>30</sup>*Idem*, *Ibidem*, p. 161.

Therefore, considering only the texts attributed to *Annotator 3*, the primaries of the second section and the primaries of the beginning of the *Historical Annals*, we see that it is hard to sustain the hypothesis that it is an indigenous person who was the author of the words in *náhuatl*. Besides, there are several indications in the text that lead us to believe it is a friar, possibly from the same order of Pedro de los Ríos. Perhaps he was not well experienced as *Annotators 1* and *2*, who demonstrate their experience in several locations of New Spain, where there were units of the Dominican Order, but this again does not mean that he could not have been a friar. His comments put him closer to the missionaries, because besides some details, he refers to the indigenous costumes in the third person plural, while he identifies himself with the Spanish people in the first person.

In most of the second section of the codex, *Annotator 3* provides some data concerning the accomplishments and attributes of the gods, but, in the last *Trecenas*, he is limited to the identification of the patron god only. It seems more likely that he obtained these data from one or more indigenous informers. But, besides the comments about the patron gods in *Tonalpohualli*, he repeatedly mentions the fasts, that is, in which periods of each *Trecena* the indigenous people fasted. In another passage, he explains that *Chalchiuhtlicue* was the goddess that “remained from the flood”. These last mentioned aspects of the indigenous religion, which are curiously parallel to the Christian rites and histories, demonstrate the compatible features that interest missionaries.

However, the parts of the texts written by *Annotator 3* which we can connect to aspects of Christianity are not as many as those found in the comments of his partners, *Annotators 1* and *2*, who frequently went back to these references. For instance, in *Xiuhpohualli*, Ríos relates the “feast of all gods”, in *vey pachtli*, similar to the Catholic “feast of all saints”, and *Annotator 2* writes about the *panquetzaliztli* feast, which describes a ceremony that is associated with communion.

### The Christian worldview in Telleriano Remensis

In general, when we observe the texts of the main annotators in the first section of the codex, it is possible to see that the approach of ceremonies conducted during festivities is often made through analogies with Christian practices. Ríos states that, in the *ochpaniztli* “month”, on page 3r, the natives celebrated the feast “of the one I sin to eat the fruit of the tree”, which has a direct association with the Christian “original sin”. On this same page, the author refers to *Xochiquetzal* as the first goddess to have sinned. He also writes about guardian angels and says that, in *atemoztli*, they celebrated the festivity of the lowering flood waters. In the second section of the *Xiuhpohualli*, the author associates the female figure on page 11r (who is named *Ysnextli* and later, *Suchiqueçal*) to Eve, saying that she is always represented crying and looking at her husband, Adam, identified as *Huehucoyotl*. He also brings up that the god represented

on page 16v was among the ones who sinned in Paradise; and in relation to a picture on page 23r, he states that it is the devil tricking Eve before she sinned. Besides, he refers to the gods, many times, as *devils*, and states that the destruction of the world happened because they dared to sacrifice.

*Annotator 2*, however, also writes about fasting, sin and the end of the world. On page 13r (*Tonalpouallii*), which has the representation of a broken tree, he makes a very remarkable comment:

[...] tamoancha and xuchitlyvcacan is the place where the gods were created, which was considered almost as the Paradise on Earth, and so they say that when these gods were in that place, they were out of control and cut roses and branches off the trees, and so the Tonaceteuctli and the woman Tonacaciuatl were angry because of what had been done to that place, and so some came down to Earth and others to hell, and these are the ones who frighten them.<sup>31</sup>

Therefore, there are frequent references by these authors on myths, and indigenous ceremonies and costumes that were similar to the aspects of the Christian Western culture. The annotators seem to emphasize the elements which were familiar to them, looking for themselves in others. In order to translate the culture of the others, they used comparisons with elements of their own culture.<sup>32</sup> Being Christian friars, they ended up explaining the indigenous religion by using reference elements that were part of Biblical passages and practices of the Catholic Church. For Cristina Pompa, “[...] what the missionaries, chroniclers, and agents of the colonial government presented in their sources is their own image deformed in a mirror, due to the translation process [...]”<sup>33</sup>

Quiñones Keber<sup>34</sup> also pointed out to the relationship between Christian and indigenous practices and stories in the texts of *Telleriano Remensis*, defending that these analogies exist so that the indigenous characters and events could be made more accessible to the Spanish audience. However, among so many stories, why would the friars choose exactly these similar ones to report? Could it be due to the fear of elements they could not understand? In our opinion, it is not just a coincidence or the use of analogies was only to make the text more understandable; it actually seems like a more plausible and prudent choice adopted by them, considering some concerns.

The mention of the flood is the most frequent one among annotators, especially in the case of Pedro de los Ríos. He even emphasizes, in all of the *Tonalpoualli* section, which gods survived the flood. Ríos is almost obsessed with the relation of the flood with the gods and the other stories of the indigenous mythological-religious universe. For him, this event seems to be remarkable.

<sup>31</sup>Eloise Quiñones Keber, *Codex Telleriano-Remensis: ritual, divination and history in a pictorial Aztec manuscript*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1995, p. 29.

<sup>32</sup>François Hartog, *O espelho de Heródoto. Ensaio sobre a representação do outro*, Belo Horizonte, Editora da Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, 1999, p. 224-245.

<sup>33</sup>Cristina Pompa, *Religião como tradução: missionários, Tupi e Tapuia no Brasil colonial*, Bauru, Editora da Universidade do Sagrado Coração, 2003, p. 27.

<sup>34</sup>Eloise Quiñones Keber, *op cit.*, p. 146.

For instance, according to him, sacrifices and self-sacrifices began after the flood, and the Venus star was created before it.

About the flood, Quiñones Keber states that

while one might be tempted to see these as Christian allusions, they may actually refer to the floods that destroyed the last of the four previous worlds (or ‘suns’), presided over by the water goddess Chalchiuhtlicue [...] <sup>35</sup>

Therefore, the author mentions that the annotations of Pedro de los Ríos about the flood are not related to the Christian Biblical flood, but to the end of one of the cosmogonic eras found in one of the Aztec myths, known as the “Legend of the Suns”.<sup>36</sup> This myth analyzes the existence of four previous eras that ended up in natural disasters, and the most famous representation of them is found in the so-called *Pedra do Sol* (Sun Stone), since the calendar symbols related to the days of such apocalyptic disasters in the four previous eras are engraved there:

*4 jaguar*: when the world was inhabited by giants, who were eaten by jaguars;

*4 wind*: when the world was destroyed by winds and hurricanes;

*4 rain*: when the world was destroyed by fire rains; and

*4 water*: when the world was destroyed by a flood, caused by waters sent by the goddess *Chalchiuhtlicue*.<sup>37</sup>

Comprehending these four representations, the Sun Stone also brings up the one of the then current era, at a greater dimension, which is the ‘4th’ movement. In this case, the world will be destroyed by earthquakes. The apocalyptic mysticism was common amongst religious men, especially Franciscans, and its role was to call the attention to indigenous myths related to apocalyptic ends, as in the case of the “Legend of the Suns”. According to Boxer,<sup>38</sup> this apocalyptic disaster was very much exposed and understandable for the people in New Spain. Therefore, it is not a coincidence that, among the four different ends for the “Legend of the Suns”, specifically the one concerning the flood called more attention of the Dominican friars, annotators of the *Codex Telleriano Remensis*. The coincidence between the flood described in the Holy Scriptures and in indigenous legends about the apocalyptic end caused by water, called the attention of several religious men, who worked or wrote about America. In “*Historia General*”, by Fernández de Oviedo, for instance, the “information about the mercedary provincial, Francisco de Bobadilla, about beliefs, rites and ceremonies of the natives in Nicaragua to the governor Pedrarias Dávila” was

<sup>35</sup>Eloise Quiñones Keber, *Codex Telleriano-Remensis: ritual, divination and history in a pictorial Aztec manuscript*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1995, p. 149.

<sup>36</sup>Primo Feliciano Velázquez (Ed.), “Leyenda de los Soles”, *Códice Chimalpopoca: Anales de Cuauhtitlán y Leyenda de los Soles*, México, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1945, p. 119-123.

<sup>37</sup>Ether Pasztory, *Aztec Art*, New York, Abrams, 1983, p. 170.

<sup>38</sup>Charles R. Boxer, *A igreja e a expansão ibérica (1440-1770)*, Lisboa, Edições 70, 1989, p. 138.

published.<sup>39</sup> It is a list of questionings made by the friar Francisco de Bobadilla to some indigenous “chiefs” concerning their beliefs and costumes — allusive to the indigenous cosmogony, rites, gods, among others. Here is part of the interrogation and his answers, in which “F” refers to friar, and “I”, to the indigenous people:

F. Do you know or have heard if, after the world was made, it got lost or not?

I. I heard my parents say that, a long time ago, the world had been lost through water, and that it was in the past.

F. Do you know if all the men were drowned?

I. I don’t know, but the teotes rebuilt the world with more people, birds and all things.

F. How did the teotes escape? From some high place, in a canoe or a boat?

I. All I know is that they are gods, how could they drown?<sup>40</sup>

From these fragments, it is possible to tell that the aforementioned Mercedary searched for specific answers on some topics. In our opinion, the main interest of the missionaries for private matters related to the indigenous culture was due to their search for specific information that could help them fit these American people into their own beliefs, that is, into the content of the Holy Scriptures, especially Genesis. For Simaan and Fontaine, the New World and other discoveries:

[...] established embarrassing problems for the Church, once it was difficult to conciliate them with the Scriptures. Who were those peoples, who did not know about the flood or Redemption? Would they have committed the original sin? Where would they stand in Creation? And what about all of those unknown animals, could they be placed in Noah’s Ark? How much credit should be given to the report of Genesis?<sup>41</sup>

In several colonial chronicles written by religious men, it is possible to find alternative explanations for the existence of native Americans, because the discovery of the New World brought up discussions about the place of the natives in the Holy Scriptures and whether or not they had received the “true faith”.

With the New World, a new humanity is also discovered. We are left with the crucial issue of inserting it in the divine economy, which means to include it in the genealogy of peoples. So, there is no other solution than continuity, other than opening a space in European cosmology for them. Since humanity is only one, the inhabitants of the New World necessarily descend from Adam and Eve, therefore, from one of Noah’s sons, probably the dammed one, Caim, the one who undressed his father [...]<sup>42</sup>

<sup>39</sup>Paulo Suess, *A conquista espiritual da América Espanhola*. 200 documentos - século XVI, Petrópolis, Vozes, 1992, p. 127.

<sup>40</sup>*Idem, Ibidem*.

<sup>41</sup>Arkan Simaan; Joële Fontaine, *A imagem do mundo. Dos babilônios a Newton*, São Paulo, Companhia das Letras, 2003, p. 117.

<sup>42</sup>Manuela Carneiro da Cunha, “Imagens de Índios do Brasil: o século XVI”, *Estudos Avançados*, vol. 4, n. 10, São Paulo, 1990, p. 102.

Therefore, for the Christians at that time, the flood was a universal event, and only Noah and his family survived it. The peoples of Europe, Asia and Africa were descendants of Noah's sons, but what about the men in America? In case they were descendants of one of Noah's sons, how could they get to the American continent, so far away from Europe? In search of explanations for the above, Acosta<sup>43</sup> was the first one to propose a migration theory to the American continent by land, through the North, thus anticipating the theories on the populations of America through the Bering strait.

Considering such problems, it was natural that religious men could search for events or myths from the indigenous cultures to explain the existence of these groups in the context of Biblical passages. The credibility of a text, which, back then, was accepted as a true story, was at stake, and it was the base of the conception of a Christian world. Therefore, we cannot conceive of the references of a flood in the *Codex Telleriano Remensis* being only allusions to indigenous stories, but also were a result of the concern of the annotators. In this aspect, the content of the annotations of the codex is related to a series of other texts produced by religious men during the colonial period. It is because of the fact that while they were explaining the pictographs or writing books, these individuals had common interests and concerns.<sup>44</sup>

Ronaldo Vainfas<sup>45</sup> remembers that “[...] the ‘discovery’ of the New World was actually a double process, because the revelation of the Amerindian existence seems to have led to the (re)construction of the Western Christian identity”. Therefore, due to the problems that were triggered by the existence of the Americans for the Christian ideology, some of its dogmas had to be discussed and reassured.

### **The annotators of *Telleriano Remensis* and the indigenous evangelization**

The domain of native languages and the daily proximity to the communities should have provided the missionaries with access to several data concerning the similarities between the indigenous and Christian religious universe. Thus, it is understandable that the texts of *Telleriano Remensis* present these analogies, and also that they present comparisons between different indigenous cultural traditions, since at least two annotators, one of them being Pedro de los Ríos, are experienced in different regions of New Spain.

<sup>43</sup>Joseph Acosta, *Historia natural y moral de las Indias*, México, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2006, p. 60-63.

<sup>44</sup>Alvim pointed out to the presence of such European worldview in some missionary chronicles of the 16<sup>th</sup> century in: Márcia H. Alvim, *Dos céus e da terra: astrologia judiciária e descrição da superfície terrestre nos relatos missionários da Nova Espanha do Século XVI*, Tese de Doutorado em Ciências, Universidade Estadual de Campinas, Campinas, 2007, p. 99-141.

<sup>45</sup>Ronaldo Vainfas, *A heresia dos índios. Catolicismo e rebeldia no Brasil colonial*, São Paulo, Companhia das Letras, 1995, p. 23.

According to Santos — who analyzed missionary chronicles, such as the ones by Sahagún, Durán and Acosta, besides codexes and native texts — throughout the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the *nahua* reports on the past have undergone a transformation, called the “fabulizing”, due to the intervention of Christian missionaries:

[...] we can see that the main goal of these missionaries, in their *Historias*, was not to collect or transcribe the native explanations about the past in order to preserve them. On the contrary, the objective was to demonstrate the lies in such reports in comparison to the Biblical version of the creation of the world and the first days of the supposed human history.<sup>46</sup>

The complex relationship between natives and missionaries in the early colonial period demonstrates that the manipulation and adaptation of the stories of both groups was a continuous process of cultural interaction. The missionaries disqualified the natives' stories, discrediting them and announcing them as imaginary stories,<sup>47</sup> and at the same time they tried to get to know more about the native religious practices so that they could detect manifestations of idolatry. On the other hand, they looked for elements that could associate indigenous elements with Christian stories in the indigenous traditions, so that they could insert these peoples in the human history that is reported in the Bible — as the case of the flood, since there were also legends about floods in several indigenous cultures. Besides, they could also be trying to create and/or keep connections between the indigenous past and the colonial present, so that the Christian ideas could be more easily accepted and incorporated, and they could make sense within the native cultural universe.

According to Ricard,<sup>48</sup> one of the conversion modalities was based on the similarities between indigenous and Christian elements; for instance, Schwaller explains that there was, among the Aztecs, a form of confession called *neyolmelahualiztli*:

[...] the concept of sin did not exist among the aztecs; that is why the friars had to relate the Christian concept of sin with the Indigenous concept of impurity or dirt. So they could use the Aztec ritual of confession as a starting point.<sup>49</sup>

Therefore, it is possible that the missionaries were also searching for or focusing on elements of the indigenous past that could help them with the evangelization task, whether they were concerned about making their teachings more efficient or just trying to fight idolatry. In this sense, *Telleriano Remensis* must have been an important resource for the evangelizers. By the level of deterioration of the original manuscript, it is possible to observe that it was very much

<sup>46</sup>Eduardo Natalino dos Santos, *Calendário, cosmografia e cosmogonia nos códices e textos nahuas do século XVI*, Tese de Doutorado em História, Universidade de São Paulo, São Paulo, 2005, p. 398.

<sup>47</sup>*Idem*, *Ibidem*, p. 394-399.

<sup>48</sup>Robert Ricard, *La conquista espiritual de México*, México, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1986, p. 409-410.

<sup>49</sup>John F. Schwaller, “La iglesia en la América Colonial española”, *Historia General de América Latina: consolidación del orden colonial*, v. III2, Madrid, Unesco/Editorial Trotta, 2007, p. 544-545.

used throughout the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. Its sections were separately handled, because many of the bifolios were completely loose. This has led to the loss of many folios, of the beginning and the end, even before the document arrived at the National Library of France, in 1700, where it remains until the current days. When it arrived at the library, its condition was not that of a 'concluded' document. The codex was bound only when it was in Europe (possibly in Spain), in the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, after having lost many of its folios.

The *Telleriano Remensis* should be a research source for information about indigenous traditions, since it has been through the hands of many religious men, who not only studied it, but also included new details that complemented or corrected what was already expressed there. This intensive use of the contents of the codex was probably continued for many years, after its last annotations, so that it could have been very much damaged as it was when it arrived in France. Therefore, its physical characteristics suggest that it may have been used as a support in the formation of evangelizers, so that they could be able to identify manifestations of idolatry and control the natives. Therefore, the *Telleriano Remensis* could also have been a useful resource against idolatry.

However, attributing the role of actors in the context of evangelization only to the Europeans would be like looking only at one side of the story. The new ideology had to make sense to the natives, so a kind of interconnection between both worldviews was necessary, or a "translation" of the Christian ideology into indigenous terms, using the term made famous by Cristina Pompa,<sup>50</sup> in which process the natives would also be actors. The Christian stories and practices had to be incorporated into the pre-existing world, so that the indigenous religious conceptions, and to a minor level, the European ones, could go through constant processes of *re-signification*,<sup>51</sup> since the prohibitions of sacrifices and other practices were only a superficial part of change.

It was a multi-focused process of absorption, adaptation and incorporation, but always unbalanced, due to the inequality of the forces of the involved traditions and the ability of the Hispanic culture to limit, destroy, censor and repress, with the instruments of the State and the Church, anything that could go against its cosmography.<sup>52</sup>

So, the analogies were probably not made only by the missionaries, but also by the natives, because, when they heard the Christian stories in Catholic preaching or readings,<sup>53</sup> they should have naturally made connections with their own knowledge of the former's religion. In this scenario, Manuela Carneiro da Cunha explains that there was, on the side of the natives, a "[...] remarkable effort, similar to the one of the missionaries, to comprehend the different,

<sup>50</sup>Cristina Pompa, *Religião como tradução*: missionários, Tupi e Tapuia no Brasil colonial, Bauru, Editora da Universidade do Sagrado Coração, 2003, p. 27.

<sup>51</sup>*Resignificação* no sentido proposto por Marshall Sahlins (*Ilhas de História*, Rio de Janeiro, Jorge Zahar Editores, 2003, p. 7, 15 e 190; e *Historical metaphors and mythical realities*. Structure in the early History of the Sandwich Islands Kingdom, Michigan, University of Michigan Press, 1985, p. 67).

<sup>52</sup>Stuart B. Schwartz, *Cada um na sua lei*. Tolerância religiosa e salvação no mundo atlântico ibérico, São Paulo, Companhia das Letras, Bauru, Editora da Universidade do Sagrado Coração, 2009, p. 261.

<sup>53</sup>The friars even created pictographic catechisms, known as "Testerian Codices"

to incorporate and make foreigners and their beliefs understandable”.<sup>54</sup> The search for information about Amerindian cultures by the missionaries, therefore, probably helped them make the Christian ideologies to be understood by the natives. The latter, most likely, “translated” them from their own conceptions, or the knowledge of indigenous traditions could have been built by the missionaries from a Christian European worldview

Therefore, the knowledge put together by these religious men, including the content of *Telleriano Remensis*, should now be carefully analyzed, because, despite the effort to know the native peoples, these Europeans did not go much further than their own culture.

The understanding that the annotators of *Codex Telleriano Remensis* had from the native world was mediated by their own interests and concerns, such as the extirpation of idolatry, the confirmation of the passages in the Holy Scriptures and the insertion of the natives in the Christian cosmogony. The frequent citation of the flood in *Telleriano Remensis* clearly shows how the knowledge and ideologies of the natives were selected, manipulated and interpreted according to the Western conceptions of the Dominican friars who put them together. Therefore, in the attempt to understand the other, they ended up talking more about themselves.

---

<sup>54</sup>Manuela Carneiro da Cunha, “Imagens de Índios do Brasil: o século XVI”, *Estudos Avançados*, vol. 4, n. 10, São Paulo, 1990, p.103.