CHAPTER ONE

Itz'aat and *Tlamatini*

The "Wise Man" as Keeper of Maya and Nahua Collective Memory

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In pre-Hispanic Mesoamerica there was a class of distinguished men, and even women, who were referred to as wise men and women. Each was called an *itz'aat*, "wise one," in Classic Maya inscriptions from the sixth to the tenth century, and as a *tlamatini,* "wise one," in Nahuatl documents from early colonial central Mexico. Although the term *itz'aat* from the Classic Maya inscriptions has received relatively little attention until recently,[1] ethnographic data from the peninsula of Yucatan and the Maya Mexican and Guatemalan highlands emphasize the importance of elder men, diviners, curers, and healers in Maya communities.[2] In contrast, the term *tlamatini* as it is recorded in early colonial documents from central Mexico has been studied more closely. It has been shown that the *tlamatini* served to guard the holy books, to prophesy the future, to cure, and to advise kings and people through divination. In general, people in this position are considered the keepers of the collective memory.[3] However, the continuity of their importance was challenged as a result of the Spanish invasion and three hundred years of colonial domination.[4]

This chapter has two objectives. First, it explores the pre-Hispanic concept of the wise one among the Mayas and the Nahuas and argues that in both areas these individuals served as keepers of the collective memory in royal courts as well as within small-scale political units and communities. Second, it draws from Maya and to a lesser extent from central Mexican ethnographic data to argue that Spanish colonialism did not extinguish the concept of the wise one in either culture zone. In both regions, however, the function was transformed and the use of hieroglyphic or painted books as a source of moral authority suffered some decline.

The *Itz'aat* among the Classic Maya

In the Classic period, the Mayas in the lowlands were organized in more than eighty city-state-like kingdoms, each one ruled by an *ajaw,* literally perhaps, "he who shouts."[5] To distinguish these supreme rulers from other noblemen in the inscriptions using the same title, the Mayas constructed a complex epithet that today is usually referred to as the emblem glyph. Maya rulers, thus, were named as *k'uhul ajaw.* They were extremely self-centered; during their lifetimes they erected huge public monuments, especially in the form of stelae and altars, to recognize the performance and fulfillment of their ritual duties but also to commemorate wars and other political affairs during their reigns. In many cases, however, instead of contemporaneous

monuments the commemorations of one ruler's deeds depended more on the will and ability of his or her successor than on his or her own desire to provide such recognition.

Within such a kingdom, the ruler counted not only on his extended family—in a presumably patrilineal kinship system with support from his multiple wives, coming sometimes from other kingdoms—but also on a larger contingent of adjutants in political, military, and religious affairs, as well as on servants. Especially in the late Classic, from the seventh century forward, Maya inscriptions on stone monuments, on ceramics, and even on minor objects referred to several specialized persons who likely belonged to the ruler's court. It is supposed that Classic Maya royal courts, besides having architectural features in the shape of palace-like buildings, hosted a larger group of people, some of them linked to the ruler by kinship ties, others obliged to serve. Some of them, such as servants, dwarves, and his own woman, assisted and attended the ruler in close physical proximity; others may have had slightly removed, distinctive duties, such as political administration, adjudication, diplomacy, and ritual and ceremonial activities.[6] Among those serving rulers, we find several high-ranking persons.

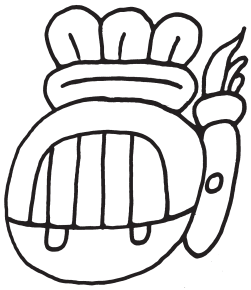
One category of higher-ranking persons uses the title of painter or scribe (*aj tz'ib*) and of sculptor (*aj[?]-lu*). Such titles appear on stone monuments dating from the late Classic in the form of a sculptor's signature, naming the artist who carved the stela, the lintel, or even the altar. But mono- or polychrome ceramics with hieroglyphic texts and images also refer to a painter or scribe by naming him personally.

Other titles worn by persons shown on ceramics from the late Classic are those of a religious interpreter, called *chilam,* and of another officeholder's title—*aj k'uhuun*—the precise meaning of which is still debated. Previously it was thought to mean "he of the holy books."[7] It was believed that this high-ranking title referred not only to skilled scribes who painted books but also to higher political or religious duties. Often the headdresses of the persons wearing the title, such as we see on Maya ceramics, are decorated with a brush pen.

On one ceramic piece we find that the *aj k'uhuun,* with a brush pen thrust into the headdress, is seated next to the aforementioned interpreter (*chilam*), who himself wears a very similar brush pen in his headdress. Both are seated next to an enthroned ruler and, as Michael Coe and Justin Kerr argue, they are presumably advising him while he is receiving tribute from foreign ambassadors or tribute payers. More recently it was suggested that *aj k'uhuun,* instead of "he of the holy books," means "one who keeps, guards" or "one who worships, venerates"—"as a term for junior elites who were overseers of some type or were loyal 'venerators' of high-ranking kings."[8]

Besides these counselors, another important person noted in late Classic Maya inscriptions is the one who held the position of *sajal.* The precise meaning of this title is also still a matter of debate, although it might mean "one who fears."[9] Persons seated in that rank were subordinate lords to the supreme ruler. On some occasions they had to govern smaller sites within the realm of the larger city-state; in other cases, they seem to have formed part of the royal court. Unfortunately, the *sajal* office is not attested everywhere in the Maya lowlands. The western lowlands (e.g., Palenque, Toniná, Yaxchilan) and northwest Yucatan (e.g., Oxkintok, Uxmal, Xcalumkin) are two of the regions where this title shows up as a rank below that of a supreme ruler.

Thus, as the inscriptions and the iconography suggest, the Classic Maya ruler relied on the duties of several intellectual and religious specialists. Among them we must also situate the *itz'aat,* or "wise one."[10] In the hieroglyphic inscriptions this term is written mostly syllabically, hence *i-tz'a-ti*, giving the standard orthography *itz'aat* (fig. 1.1). On rare occasions the head of a monkey appears, always postfixed by the syllable *ti* (fig. 1.2). Here, the monkey head appears to be a full substitution form, yet in the highly standardized hieroglyphic rim from several painted Maya ceramics this logogram and the phonetic complement *ti* can occasionally be found instead of the syllabic form. It is, however, still debated whether a second logogram also corresponds to the term *itz'aat*. It resembles the head of a birdlike creature who shows up with a knotted headband. In contrast to the monkey's head, this logogram is postfixed not only by the syllable *ti* but also by *ta*. This inconsistency, and the fact that the bird logogram never substitutes the syllabic form in the highly standardized ceramic rim, calls its phonetic value into question.[11] Nevertheless, it is precisely this "banded bird," as David Stuart calls it, that provides ample documentation that the term refers to an office. Yet in Tortuguero (Tabasco) one inscription mentions that someone is seated for this office much as a ruler is seated, for example, enthroned as *ajaw*, into his rulership. Thus, if the "banded bird" represents another logogram for *itz'aat,* we are discussing a highly important office comparable to that of an *ajaw* or *sajal*. If, on the other hand, the "banded bird" represents another logogram and therefore has another meaning, then *itz'aat*—either in its syllabic form or represented by the monkey's head—must not necessarily refer to an office. It could instead simply represent an honorific title or even only an attribute. In the following, I discuss the appearance of the term *itz'aat* in the second sense and do not accept the "banded bird" as logogram for *itz'aat*.



1.1. Syllabic writing of *itz'aat* (drawing by Daniel Graña-Behrens).

The term *itz'aat,* either written syllabically or in the form of the head of a monkey, appears in association with secondary persons who sometimes also bear other titles. These additional titles are the aforementioned *aj k'uhuun* ("one who keeps, guards" or "one who worships, venerates"), and *aj tz'ib* ("he, the writer and sculptor"). Only one monument, from Tonina (Chiapas), refers to an *itz'aat* who is a Maya ruler. Here *itz'aat* precedes the term for ruler (*ajaw*), suggesting that the male king is qualified by this term, comparable to *k'uhul ajaw* ("divine ruler"). The ruler himself is also termed a 3 *k'atun* person, that is, somewhere in age between fourteen and sixteen. The whole phrase reads *ox k'atun itz'aat ajaw* (blocks B5, C1–D1). Another vessel, from the Naranjo (Guatemala) area, clearly states that the son of the ruler of the aforementioned site was an *itz'aat,* thus providing evidence that royals and their heirs or descendents could also have this designation.[12]

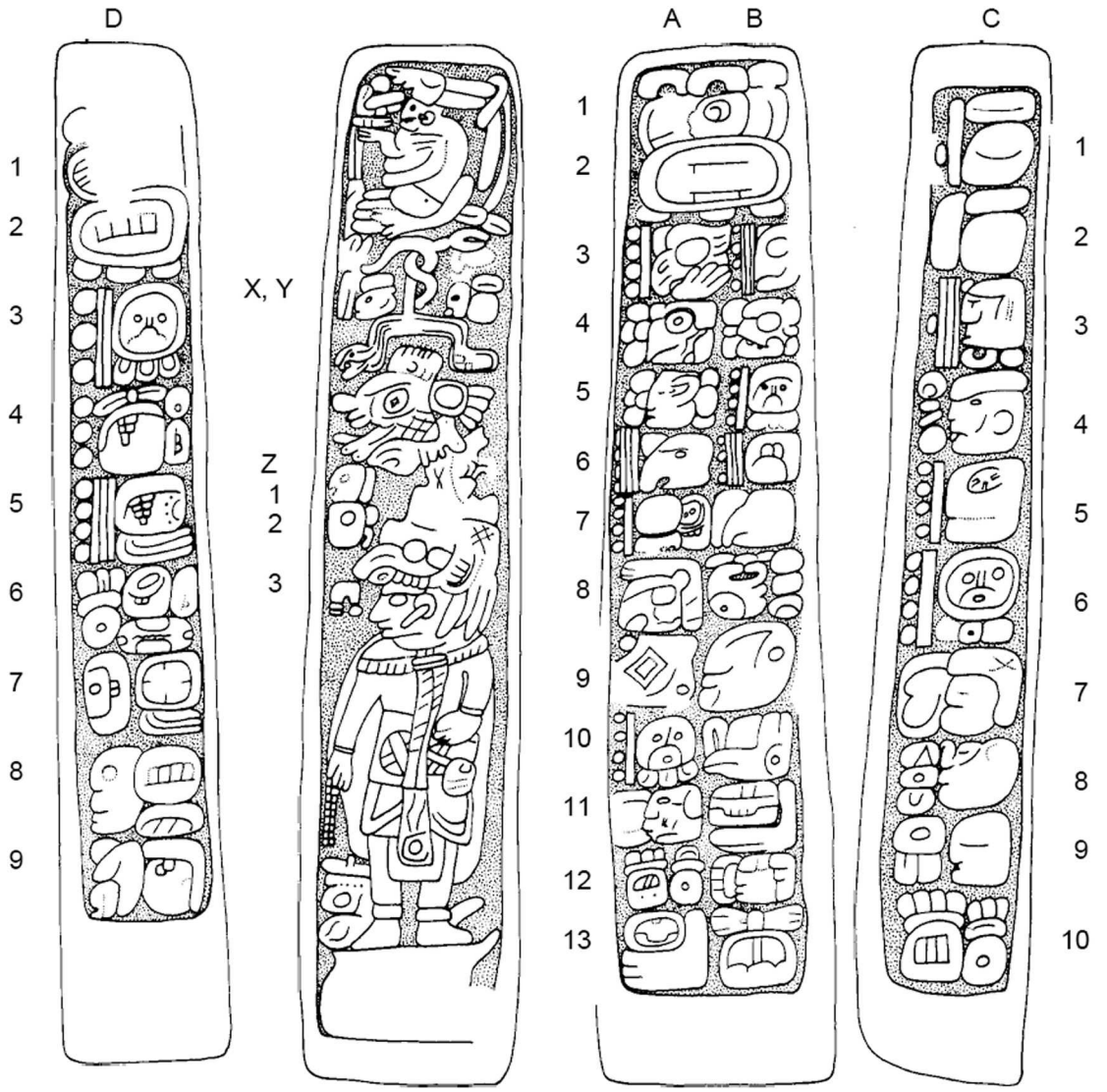
No colonial Mayan dictionaries other than those from the Yucatan Peninsula gloss the term *itz'aat*. In the earliest one, the so-called Calepino Maya de Motul, we find the dictionary entry *idzat,* which is equated with being "astuto, cauteloso, mañoso, abil, artista, industrioso, ingenioso para bien y para mal y sabio assi" (fol. 222r).[13] It calls attention to a person's mental quality, being wise and smart, and to artistic skills that could be used for good or evil. Hence, according to this source, the term semantically refers to an intellectual or manual capacity rather than to an office. Yet it may describe and underscore the successful performance of an office due to the individual's mental and manual abilities. This is also attested in the Calepino Maya de Motul, where on the same folio it is said *idzat ti dzib, ti kay*, which is translated

1.2. Artist described as on *itz'aat* on vase of unknown provenance, Kerr number 8017 (drawing by author).

as "proficient painter and chanter." Hence, I suggest that the term *itz'aat* as it appears in the Classic Maya inscriptions and based on the much later colonial dictionaries refers to a highly talented person with mental faculties and manual skills necessary for certain offices such as the "keeper" or "venerator," the "scribe" or "painter," and the "sculptor."

The term *itz'aat* in its syllabic form or as the head of a monkey appears about twenty times in all known Maya inscription records, half of them in inscriptions from northwest Yucatan. It appears no earlier than the late Classic period, around 672 C.E. (9.12.0.0.0). Although the term seems to be scarcely documented by the Mayas themselves, one must be aware that Maya inscriptions only sporadically and beginning in the late Classic refer to secondary persons, that is, to individuals below the rank of a supreme ruler. Such persons surely first had to gain the right and royal permission to portray themselves in the inscriptions.

The late and increasing use of the term may suggest the dawning of a social process of understanding. We have on the one hand persons with different skills, including "keepers" or "venerators," "scribes" or "painters," and "sculptors," appearing in the inscriptions, and on the other the use of the attribute *itz'aat* to give them an even more prominent status, manifesting a society's growing consciousness about the holders of collective knowledge and memory. It is in this sense that an unprovenanced stela (one that may originate in the Usumacinta region of southwestern Mexico) shows not only the local female ruler but also two sculptors' signatures, one of them referring to an *itz'aat aj k'uhuun* (block E9–F9). Here, then, one of the sculptors of the monument is not simply recorded but remembered as an ordinary "keeper" or "venerator" in the aforementioned sense, but a very recognized and able one, bearing the *itz'aat* attribute. It is unlikely that the sculptor could grant this label to his own work; this distinction probably had to be authorized by the ruler. This would suggest that he was especially venerated by the local ruler or by the community itself.



1.3. Artists characterized on miniature stela of unknown provenance (drawing by author).

A vessel of unknown provenance but surely coming from northwest Yucatan also mentions the artist, who carved rather than painted the ceramic, as being *itz'aat* (block R5) (fig. 2). The same can be said for another sculptor mentioned on a miniature stela, again of unknown provenance but probably from the Campeche area. Here, one of the four carved sides refers to the carver, simply with the attribute *itz'aat* (block C10), and another side shows above the local ruler a monkey sitting in a human-like position who in one of his hands holds a human being performing the art of writing or painting (fig. 1.3). This is probably the sculptor himself. I suggest that the monkey signifies his ability as an *itz'aat*. This, then, would explain why Maya ceramics often depict monkeys holding a brush pen and a codex, interpreted as the Maya patron god of scribes or painters.[14] Beyond this, there is not only an intimate relationship between writing/painting and monkeys but also a complex

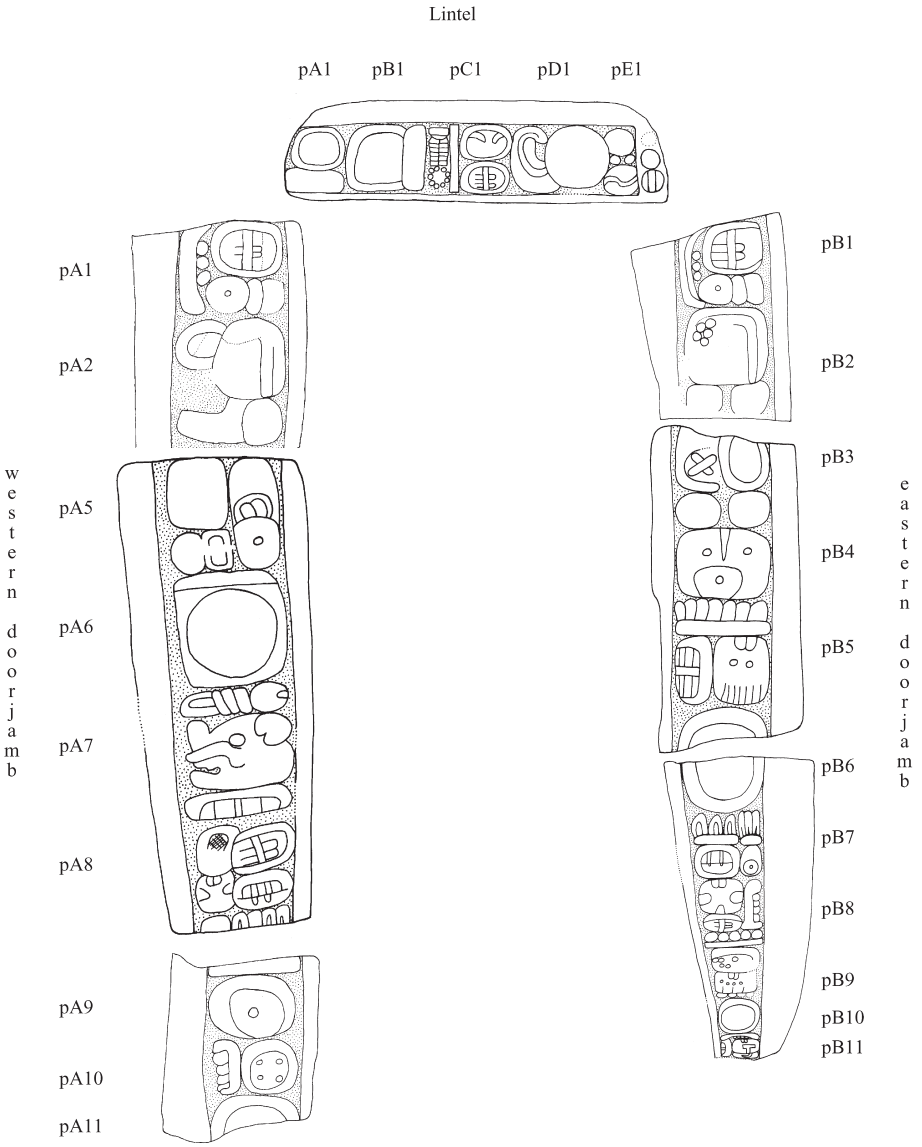
world of understanding painting and writing as an outstanding activity, one that could be achieved only by a few people—who would then be remembered for being *itz'aat*. These artists probably gained even more esteem when they became older physically, although they certainly were already considered old metaphorically.

One vessel from the late Classic documents this attitude toward the *itz'aat* especially well. The ceramic, again of unknown provenance, shows a complex scene of several deities and old men in two lines. Whereas in the lower line several old men appear behind younger women, in the upper line they resemble gods, the so-called Pawahtun, or God N, who is seated and gesticulates with Itzamnaaj (House of the Lizard), God D. The standardized hieroglyphic text along the rim refers to the use of the vessel for fresh cacao, and the vessel's owner is a young nobleman, whose representation is followed by the statement *u tz'ibnal itz'aat,* "the painting of the *itz'aat.*" Although the scene of old men might not necessarily be related to the painter's attributes, the hieroglyphs behind the aforementioned deity in the second line, who is seated on a pillow covered by a jaguar pelt, again mention the term *itz'aat* in an obscure phrase. The concept of being a painter or scribe is therefore linked somehow to the concept of being older and linked to the god Itzamnaaj. This fits in well with what is known about Itzamnaaj, yet it is said that he is not only connected with divinatory practices but also, as one early colonial report from Yucatan sustains, with being the inventor of writing.[15] Hence, writing and divinatory practices seem to have been among the most outstanding faculties and abilities of the *itz'aat* and more closely related to his person than previously thought.

Since inscriptions from the southern and central lowlands do not throw more light on the term *itz'aat,* especially not on the deeper understanding of the exceptional artists' social role, I now turn to northwest Yucatan. Here the term *itz'aat* appears several times in building inscriptions related to persons who may have held the highest authority, although in no case is a supreme ruler mentioned directly. In Xcalumkin (Campeche), building inscriptions offer accounts of several persons, designated in part as *sajal.* Some of the individuals mentioned are owners or inhabitants of these buildings. The verbal statements and additional titles carried by the persons allow us to infer that they possess artistic and intellectual skills. Some among them are designated as *maatz itz'aat winik* ("well-speaking wise man") or as *sajal itz'aat* ("wise *sajal*").[16] There is also a case in which a person appearing without a *sajal* title is identified as *aj k'in* ("priest") and *aj tz'ib* ("scribe"); however, he is the son of a woman who is (as are the other three) married to the most prominent local *sajal* from Xcalumkin, called *kit paj*. From this we can conclude that the owners or inhabitants of these buildings of Xcalumkin had military and artistic or theological-administrative functions and that they held an outstanding position within the Classic Maya society. Like rulers or kings, they had the right—perhaps even the exclusive right—to decorate or construct buildings with stone inscriptions.

Another example that throws more light on the *itz'aat* comes from the recently discovered inscriptions at H-Wasil. The inscriptions of Building 6—carved on two door jambs and a lintel—refer to someone who probably had the title *ajaw* but about which there is no other information except that he is the father of one or even two sons. One of them might be the "owner" of that carving. He carries the title *winik* ("man"), preceded by what is probably the syllabic spelling for *itz'aat* followed by the statement *nib* (western door jamb pA8–pA10) (fig. 1.4).[17] The final term is

especially revealing of the concept of the "wise man." Under the expression *(ah) mek'tan kah* for "regidor, cacique, gobernador" ("town councilman, boss, governor"), the *Diccionario de San Francisco* also lists the equivalent expression *ah nib*.[18] Furthermore, the late seventeenth-century *Arte y vocabulario de la lengua cholti* by friar Francisco Morán reports that in the language spoken in the southern lowlands during the Classic period *cahnib* meant "oficio."[19] According to the early eighteenth-century Spanish *Diccionario de autoridades,* this Spanish word was used for several related meanings, including "occupation, in general," "the specialized occupation of an artist," and the "scribe's office."[20] As both dictionaries show, the term *nib* also meant something like "occupation" or "office."



1.4. Artists characterized in doorway inscription, H-Wasil, Building 6 (drawing by author).

Additional support for this interpretation comes from Xcalumkin, where on column 2 (block B2) appear the signs T89.116.17:585, which can be transcribed as *tu-ni-yi-bi*. Although T89 /tu/ possibly functions here as a preposition, the meaning of the remaining glyphs, which would then form a single noun if read in that exact order, is not clear. Either *niyib* or *yinib* may be intended. The first possibility is not very productive; in the latter case, we would find *-nib* postfixed to something called *yi*.[21]

The colonial Yucatec *Diccionario de San Francisco* gives for *yih* the meaning "sabio" ("wise one") or "prudente" ("prudent, bright"), and *yih uinicil* means "viejo" ("old man").[22] The late sixteenth-century Tzeltal dictionary from Domingo de Ara lists *yighil uinic* for "anciano" ("elder" or "older person").[23] The sixteenth- or seventeenth-century colonial dictionary of Tzeltal, edited by Robert Laughlin, mentions *yihil winik* as "old or strong person," with *yijil* being an adjective meaning "strong, hard, brave, old."[24] It is possible that on the column of Xcalumkin *-nib* is attached to the term *yi(h)* ("old [man]"), because such a status has almost the quality of an "office" and is similar to the status of a wise man. Thus, in the Xcalumkin case, assuming an attached preposition, the compound should be understood as "for the old man [an 'office']."

This expression forms part of a larger dedicatory phrase that begins with the initial series glyphic compound also found on ceramic rims and recently deciphered by Barbara McLeod and Yuriiy Polyukhovich as *alay* ("here"), followed by the verbal statement *utiij* ("it happened") and the object *u wohol* ("his glyph[s]") (block A1–B2). After the *tu yinib* statement, we see a nominal phrase consisting of a name and the title *sajal* (block A3–A4). All together the phrase could mean "here, it happened, his glyphs for the old man [an "office"], the so-and-so *sajal*." Thus, the suffix *-nib* in the inscriptions from H-Wasil, as well as on other inscriptions from the central and southern lowlands to which I cannot refer in detail, may not suffix a toponym but rather an "occupation" or "office."

After the reference "the father of" on the eastern doorjamb in H-Wasil, we have the son possibly named Tun, which was in later times a common patronymic on the Yucatan Peninsula. In Xcalumkin several individuals carry the name Tun. Two of them are of local origin. A third is a ruler from Jaina (Campeche), identifiable by his emblem glyph, mentioned on one of the Xcalumkin doorjambs.[25] His emblem glyph follows the expression *itz'aat tun*. Additional titles on the eastern doorjamb recall the information from Xcalumkin. The person is designated as *aj tz'ib* ("scribe") and as *itz'aat winik* ("wise men"). Thus, it may be that the inscription from Building 6 in H-Wasil refers to a family Tun by naming the father and one or two of his sons. The better-known son is mentioned on the eastern doorjamb as a "scribe" and as a "wise man." This suggests that the father occupied a similar office and passed it down to his son. The title carried by his fellow (scribe) indicates that he occupied a social position similar to one of the individuals from Xcalumkin who carried no *sajal* title. Thus, it can be presumed that the son referred to on the eastern doorjamb was a person of a higher rank, but in any case occupied a status equivalent to that of a *sajal*. The person mentioned on the western doorjamb, either the same or another son of the high-ranking nobleman, was also a "man," but the attribute "wise" appears in an unusual compound—perhaps *itz'aatnib* (wise one [an office]). This might represent a specific title as well as *yinib* (old "man" [an office]) in Xcalumkin.

When we combine the evidence from H-Wasil with the information from Xcalumkin, a more detailed picture arises about social stratification in late Classic Yucatan. It shows that certain individuals below the rank of king were highly important for the community where they lived and perhaps for the kings themselves, serving as mediators with the community. Such persons possessed the status of "noblemen." They had the right not only to erect buildings and decorate them with carved inscriptions but to accumulate titles such as "wise man," "scribe," or, in the case of Xcalumkin, "priest" and "elder," suggesting that their intellectual capacity was of vital importance for both local people and kings. These rights and prestige may have come as a result of their position and their function in the community, meaning that they could have been recognized as "keepers" of the Classic Maya local heritage and cultural memory.

Thus, in conclusion, we are perhaps dealing with an institutionalized, pre-Hispanic occupation in some form equivalent to the colonial and modern *hmèen* ("shaman," literally "doer"; pl. *hmèenob*) in the Yucatan or the "ancianos" (elders) in Tzotzil-speaking communities, such as San Lorenzo Zinacantan in the highlands of Chiapas, as reported by Evon Vogt.[26] In Yucatan the *hmèenob* are still important professionals in villages, fulfill the functions of priest and shaman, and are engaged in the village ceremonies, especially those devoted to indigenous gods, exorcism rites, and healing rituals. Although most of them are dedicated to leading health-restoring and other ceremonies only on a part-time basis and to making *milpa* just as any other man in the village, there are some who devote themselves to this profession. There is also a tendency to pass the vocation from father to son.[27] Today most curing and divinatory practices of the *hmèen* take place in his domestic house.[28]

Hence, I suggest that Classic inscriptions such as those from Xcalumkin as well as from H-Wasil refer to ritual specialists who were responsible for the communities' feasts and rituals comparable, to a point, with the colonial and modern community "elders" in Chiapas or the Guatemalan highlands or with the "shamans" in Yucatan. Perhaps similar, but less obvious or prominent, the *itz'aat* in the inscriptions of the central and southern lowlands were also considered the holders of collective knowledge.

The Tlamatini among the Nahuas

As Boone pinpoints, the *tlamatini* is related to four different religious and artistic activities.[29] One is the priestly function. This explains how he might receive the title of Quetzalcoatl, alluding to the legendary Toltec ruler Ce Acatl Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl and to the mythical understanding of the Toltecs as "necromancers, sorcerers, witches, astrologers, poet, philosophers, and tellers of fate," according to the late sixteenth-century *mestizo* historian Alva Ixtlilxochitl.[30] This was the most complex function, and it overlapped all others. The role as calendar priest included not only supervising the 260-day count (*tonalpouhqui*) but also performing prophesies based on that calendar and on other knowledge, such as astronomy, and serving as a teacher.[31] Also within this role was that of physician (*ticitl*) or healer who cured the people.

A second job performed by the *tlamatini* was that of soothsayer (*tlapouhqui*), one who heard confessions and was a mediator between the people and the deities. Sahagún says that "the soothsayer is a wise man, an owner of books [and] of

writings," and he clearly distinguishes between the "good soothsayer," "one who reads the day signs for one; who examines, who remembers [their meaning]," and the bad one, who is a "deceiver, a mocker, a false speaker, a hypocrite—a diabolical, a scandalous speaker."[32]

A third function of the *tlamatini* was that of sorcerer (*nahualli*), no less complex than the second.[33] Again Sahagún clearly distinguishes the "wise one" who is good, who is a "counsellor, a person of trust—serious, respected, revered, dignified, unreviled, not subject to insults," from the "bad one," who is a "doer [of evil], an enchanter," one who "bewitches women," who "deludes people" and "casts spells over them."[34] Thus, a sorcerer is considered a "caretaker, a man of discretion, a guardian." However, the sorcerer was not only a "counsellor" but also, and more precisely, a "guardian" who kept an eye on the community as a whole. Perhaps in this role he was also responsible for rain and the weather in general.[35]

The last role of the *tlamatini* was that of owner of sacred books, one who counted the days and watched over the prophecies. As Johansson points out, being considered "owners" or "keepers" of the "sacred books" did not mean that the *tlamatini* was the one who painted or wrote them.[36] As Sahagún remarks on this role, the *tlamatini* seems to be more of a "leader of man, a rower, a companion, a bearer of responsibility, a guide."[37] For the task of painting and writing the books, he probably counted on the specially trained *tlacuilo;* and only those born on the day sign "monkey" (*ozomatli*) were considered fortunate enough to become an artist, singer, or scribe.[38]

Two crucial Nahua documents refer to the *tlamatini* (pl. *tlamatinime*), the "wise one":[39] a passage in the Coloquios y Doctrina Cristiana (fol. 34v), and the Florentine Codex (Book 10, chap. 8), both compiled in the mid-sixteenth century by friar Bernardino de Sahagún.[40] In his great essay on the faith of ancient Mexico, Miguel León-Portilla opens his short passage about the *tlamatini* with a passage from the Coloquios, but he does not elaborate on the cited text.[41] To understand this passage, it is indispensable to know that the text is Sahagún's written version of how the Nahua noblemen and priests responded to "Los Doce," the twelve Franciscans who in 1524 first tried to persuade them to accept the Christian faith. Their response was carefully formulated and, at the same time, diversified. The passage (see below) is the response given by the priests or noblemen, whose task is to supervise the religious affairs of the Nahuas (see appendix 1.1 for Nahuatl original and Spanish translation). A longer passage would include the response of the noblemen and elite warriors who were responsible for maintaining the political sphere intact.

> There are those who guide us . . . who instruct us how our gods must be worshipped, who make offerings, who burn incense, those who receive the title of Quetzalcoatl. . . . They busy themselves day and night with the placing of the incense, with their offerings, with the thorns to draw their blood. Those who see, who dedicate themselves to observing the courses of the stars, and the movement of the heavens, and how the night is divided. Those who read their books, who recite what they read, who noisily turn the pages of the books of paintings, they who are in possession of the black and the red inks—of wisdom—and that which is depicted. They lead us, they guide us, they tell us the way. Those who arrange how a year falls, the reckoning of the destinies, the days, and the twenty-day months. . . . to them falls to speak of the gods.[42]

The passage makes clear that in central Mexico shortly after the Spanish seizure of power those keepers of the collective memory were still esteemed as important leaders thanks to several important functions. They were considered "wise men of the words" (*tlatolmatinime*), those "who make offerings" (*tlamacazqui*) or "burn incense" (*copaltemaliztli*), and, finally, those "who count" (*quipouhticate*) and "are responsible for the books" (*in tlacuilolli quitquiticate*). Thus, as Patrick Johansson concludes, they were, more generally speaking, wise priests ("sabios sacerdotes") responsible not only for the books but also for the community.[43]

The idea that these men guided the community is especially notable in another passage from the Florentine Codex (see appendix 1.2 for Nahuatl original and Spanish translation).[44] This text makes particularly clear that these functions could be used for good as well for evil, but that only the "wise one" was considered to be a good person and helpful for the community:

> The wise man [is] exemplary. He possesses writings; he owns books. [He is] the tradition, the road; a leader of man, a rower, a companion, a bearer of responsibility, a guide. The good wise man [is] a physician, a person of trust, a counsellor; an instructor worthy of confidence, deserving of credibility, deserving of faith; a teacher. [He is] an adviser, a counsellor, a good example; a teacher of prudence, of discretion; a light, a guide who lays out one's path, who goes accompanying one. [He is] reflective, a confessor, deserving to be considered as a physician, to be taken as an example. He bears responsibility, shows the way, makes arrangements, establishes order. He lights the world for one; he knows of the land of the dead; he is dignified unrivalled. He is relied upon, acclaimed by his descendants, confided in, trusted—very congenial. He reassures, calms, helps. He serves as a physician, he makes one whole.
>
> The bad wise man [is] a stupid physician, silly, decrepit [pretending to be] a person of trust, a counsellor, advised. [He is] vainglorious, vainglory is his; [he is] a pretender to wisdom . . . vain—discredited. [He is] a sorcerer, a soothsayer, a medicine man, a remover of intrusive objects from people. A soothsayer, a deluder, he deceives, confounds, causes ills, leads into evil; he kills, he destroys people, devastates lands, destroys by sorcery.[45]

In contrast to the interpretations of Boone and Johansson, León-Portilla sees the "wise man" as neither a religious specialist nor a craftsman but a philosopher.[46] He translates *tlamatini* as "wise one, philosopher," drawing from Sahagún's gloss *sabio o philosophos* from the Códice Matritense held by the Real Academía de la Historia.[47] He also makes clear that the word *mati* ("to know"), made into a noun by *–ni,* results in the formation of several composite words, such as *tlateumatini* ("the wise one of the godly things"), *ilhuicacmatini* ("the wise one of the heaven"), and even *mictlanmatini* ("the wise one of the otherworld [*mictlan*]").[48] For León-Portilla, the *tlamatini* is responsible for the humanistic and philosophical worldview.[49] He reminds us of the Aztec state ideology of human sacrifice and the concept of the "flower war," a previously announced war with the primary purpose of capturing the enemy alive in order to sacrifice him later, which epitomized the mythical-militaristic understanding of the world. For León-Portilla, the *tlamatini* was someone who tried to understand the transitory nature of life on earth, the universal questions about life and death, and ultimately rejected the official Aztec state ideology, especially the concept of human blood sacrifice as a necessary condition for keeping the world alive.

Then, as philosopher, the *tlamatini* was a good person.[50] Finally, León-Portilla identifies Nezahualcoyotl, one of the most prominent rulers from Texcoco (also spelled Tetzcoco in this volume), as a wise man; in several songs this native leader questioned earthly things and the official Aztec ideology of the afterlife.[51]

It is worth noting that Richard Haly questions León-Portilla's understanding of the *tlamatini* as philosopher; Haly is worried that this interpretation might harmfully replace native religious concepts with something European, namely, "philosophy."[52] Haly also wonders if León-Portilla's equation of *tlamatini* with philosopher leads him to assume that the late pre-Columbian period was a Mexican "classical age."

The tremendous importance enjoyed by these wise men or women in late pre-Hispanic Aztec society is documented by the assertion that the Aztec ruler Motecuzoma Xocoyotzin, who later met Hernando Cortés, could not make any decisions about the significance of several omens that appeared in the sky and on earth shortly before the Spanish invasion because his astrologers and wise men failed to understand them or even took no notice of them.[53] Motecuzoma, completely nervous and disturbed, felt left alone. Angry with them, he decided that they should be killed and replaced by others.[54]

León-Portilla identifies two seated males in the Codex Mendoza as *tlamatini*. However, on one folio the Spanish gloss says *tlamacazqui* and *alfaqui mayor*, and on the other only *alfaqui mayor*.[55] *Tlamacazqui* is a Nahuatl word meaning "one who served in a [preconquest] religious establishment."[56] *Alfaqui mayor,* a Spanish term originally from Arabic, is not listed in the *Diccionario de la lengua castellana* or *Diccionario de autoridades* from 1726, but it appears in the modern *Diccionario de la lengua española* as "doctor o sabio de la ley."[57] In the Codex Mendoza, the person glossed as *tlamacazqui* and *alfaqui mayor* is sitting inside or next to a school for youth (*calmecac*).[58] Thus, it can be supposed that he had some priestly function and was a teacher, explaining the perception of him as "doctor" or "wise one." The second scene in the same codex (fol. 63r), however, points to someone who is watching the night sky as the "doctor" or "wise one." This would suggest that the information given by Sahagún—that the priest, teacher, and astrologer all had a prestige consistent with the attributes accorded the *tlamatini*—is trustworthy.

Again in the Codex Mendoza we find a third scene alluding to several "wise men" (fol. 69r). It shows the palace (*tecpan*) of Motecuzoma Xocoyotzin. Aztec palaces followed more or less a similar plan, and they are thought to have been administrative-residential buildings. As Susan Toby Evans points out, "The town plaza was a critical adjunct to the palace," important to the people whose lives occupied the palaces. In her view, one entered the Aztec palace from that plaza and "look[ed] across the sunken entry courtyard to the lord's dais room, which faced the plaza and was raised above the level of the courtyard."[59] Around this dais room and the courtyard were grouped several residential rooms in roughly honeycomb organization. In the case of the palace of Motecuzoma as shown in the Codex Mendoza, we find four men sitting on mats in the first room coming from the town plaza. At the approximate altitude of the roof a larger gloss or phrase says, "estos cuatro son como los hombres de consejo de Motecuzoma / hombres sabios," and over the lintel we see the gloss, "sala de consejo de Motecuzoma." The author who comments on the scene may have been aware that some advisors of the king, whom he calls the "wise ones," resided in the palace of the king. It is likely that these

"advisors" or "counsellors" lived in a residential room that had a door or opening onto the town plaza. This might be important, for it seems that these men, although the king's advisors, were also in constant communication with the community via the town plaza.

According to the Coloquios y Doctrina Cristiana from 1524 and later recorded by Sahagún, the Nahua noblemen and wise men were running out of arguments to sustain their religion against the evangelism of friars and exclaimed, "If, as you say, our gods are dead, it is better that you allow us to die, too."[60] Contrary to this scene just described, perhaps more mythical than real, Johansson argues that the "wise men" actually did die in the aftermath of the Spanish conquest as a result of illness, persecution, and killing.[61] He claims further that their deaths led, at the same time, to the disappearance of most of the "collective memory," and that the changing social world required their services less. But this assessment seems to be too far-reaching. Although the "wise men" must have suffered with Spanish colonization and a vanishing old world, they surely found ways to survive, if only by modifying their role. Still today, in Veracruz and Guerrero, for example, the Nahuatl-speaking people consider a person who cures to be a *tlamatini*. And among the Huastecs the "wise one" is responsible for the rain, renders homage to the mountain gods, and performs sacrifices to the earth.[62]

Conclusions

Although we are removed by time and space, we can identify several traits common among the Classic Maya and late preconquest Aztecs or Nahuas that tell us who their respective "keepers of collective memory" were. By comparing the *itz'aat* from the Maya area to the *tlamatini* from central Mexico we may now say that only those persons marked with these labels were venerated as holders of the collective knowledge. But contrary to what has been thought previously, neither term refers to a specific office but rather to an intellectual capacity or skill that was exclusively reserved for the most distinguished persons in a community. These persons were engaged with religious tasks, teaching, sorcery, and writing and record keeping.

There are minor differences between the two culture zones. Whereas in the Maya case persons with artistic skills like master painters or sculptors were also considered "wise ones" and keepers of the community knowledge, in central Mexico we do not find this, which may reflect a different societal complexity. Although responsible for the (holy) books, in Aztec society the *tlamatini* was not an active master painter or carver, and no artist was seriously considered as a keeper of the collective knowledge.

In the Yucatan, the label "wise one" may have implied an office, but in the greater Maya area there are clear indications that the "wise one" was also esteemed as an "elder." Elders still enjoy social prominence in community life in the Guatemalan and Mexican highlands. And the same seems to be true for central Mexico. Here again, the concept of "wise man" continued to exist, although modified. It may be that the "wise man" was no longer necessary for advising the king or other noblemen living in the ruler's palace in the capital, but he (or she) may have continued to have a function in places that were more removed from European oversight. Such changes may have echoed the Maya case when significant alterations occurred at the

highest levels of the Classic Maya civilization at the end of the tenth century. Finally, besides those "wise men" living in the kings' palaces in the large residential areas called city-states in both the Maya and Nahua zones, all Mesoamerican communities, to a certain degree, and as we noted in H-Wasil in northwest Yucatan, counted on such "wise men."

Appendix 1.1. Passage from Coloquios y Doctrina Cristiana

Auh inhin, totecuiyoane ca oncate in oc no techiacana, in techitqui in techamama yn ipampa in tlaiecultilo, ca in toteouā yn intlamaceuhcavā cuitlapilli, ahtlapalli in tlamacazque, in tlenamacaque auh in quequetzcova mitoa, in tlatolmatinime, auh in intequiuh in quimocuitlauia in ioalli in cemilhuitl, in copaltemaliztli, in tlenamaquiliztli in vitztli in acxoiatl, in neçoliztli in quitta in quimocuitlauia yn iohtlatoquiliz in inematacacholiz in ilhuicatl, in iuh iovalli xelivi. Auh in quitzticate, in quipouhticate, in quitlatlazticate in amoxtli, in tlilli, in tlapalli in tlacuilolli quitquiticate. Ca iehoantin techitquiticate techiacana, techotlatoltia iehoantin tehoantin quitecpana iniuh vetzi ce xivitl iniuh otlatoca in tonalpoalli, auh in cecempoallapoalli quimocuitlauia, iehoantin ynteniz incocol y mamal in teutlatolli[63]"

Y, he aquí, señores nuestros, están los que aún son nuestros guías, ellos nos llevan a cuestas, nos gobiernan, en relación al servicio de los que son nuestros dioses, de los cuales es el merecimiento, la cola, el ala [la gente del pueblo]: los sacerdotes ofrendadores, los que ofrenda el fuego, y también los que se llaman quequetzalcoa. Sabios de la palabra, su oficio, con el que se afanan, durante la noche y el día, la ofrenda de copal, el ofrecimiento del fuego, espinas, ramas de abeto, la acción de sangrarse, los que miran, los que se afanan con el curso y el proceder ordenando del cielo, cómo se divide la noche. Los que están mirando [leyendo], los que cuentan [o refieren lo que leen] los que despliegan [las hojas de] los libros, la tinta negra, la tinta roja, los que tienen a su cargo las pinturas. Ellos nos llevan, nos guían, dicen el camino. Los que ordenan cómo cae el año, cómo siguen su camino la cuenta de los destinos y los días, y cada una de las veintenas. De esto se ocupan de ellos es el encargo, la encomienda, su carga: la palabra divina.[64]

Appendix 1.2. Passage from the Florentine Codex

in tlamatini tlauilli ocutl, tomaoac ocutl apocio, tezteatl, coiaoac tezcactl, necoc xapo, tlile, tlapale, amuxoa, amoxe, tlilli tlapalli, utli, teiacanqui, tlanelo, teuicani, tlauicani, tlaiacanqui

In qualli tlamatini: ticitl piale machiçe, temachtli temachiloni neltoconi, neltoquiztli, temachtiani, tenonotzani, teixtlamachtiani, teixcuitiani, teixtomani, tenacaztlapoani, tetlauiliani, teiacanani, tehutequiliani, itech pipilcotiuh, tetezcahuiani, teiolcuitiani, neticiuiloni, neixcuitiloni, tlauica, tlahutlatoctia, tlatlalia, tlatecpana, cemanaoac tlauia tepan mictlan onmati, aquequelti, haxixicti, itech nechicaoalo, itech netzatzilio, temachilo, itech netlacanteco, itech tlaquauhtlamacho, tlaiolpachiuitia, tepachiuitia, tlapaleuia ticiti, tepatia

In amo qualli tlamatini xolopiticitl, xolopitli, teupilpul, piale, nonotzale nonotzqui tlanjtz tlanitze, motlamachitocani, pancotl chamatl, atoiatl, tepexitl, xomulli, caltechtli, tlaiooalli, naoalli tlapouhqui, ticitl, tetlacuicuili, tlapouhqui, teixcuepani, teca mocaiaoani, teixpoloa, tlaohuitilia, tlaohuicanaquia, tlamictia, tepoloa, tlalpoloa, tlanaoalpoloa[65]"

De los sabios: El sabio es como lumbre o hacha grande y espejo luciente y pulido de ambas partes, y buen dechado de los otros, entendido y leído. También es como camino y guía para otros. El buen sabio como buen médico remedia bien las cosas; da buenos consejos y buena doctrina con que alumbra e guía a los demás, por ser él de confianza y de crédito, y por ser cabal y fiel en todo y para que se hagan bien las cosas da orden y concierto, con lo cual satisface, en contenta a todos, respondiendo al deseo y esperanza de los que se llegan a él. A todos favorece y ayuda con su saber. El mal sabio es mal médico, tonto y perdido, amigo del nombre de sabio y de vanagloria, y por ser necio es causa de muchos males y de grandes errores, peligroso y despeñador, y engañador o embaucador.[66]

Notes

1. Freidel, Schele, and Parker, *Maya Cosmos;* Coe and Kerr, *Art of the Maya Scribe*, 90.
2. Fought, "Chortí (Mayan) Ceremonial Organization," 472–76; Redfield and Villa Rojas, "Chan Kom," 75; Vogt, "Ceremonial Organisation," 42.
3. Boone, "In Tlamatinime," 21; Johansson and León-Portilla, *La palabra de los aztecas,* 28; León-Portilla, *La filosofía náhuatl,* 320–22.
4. Johansson, *La palabra,* 29.
5. Houston and Stuart, "Peopling the Classic Maya Court," 59.
6. Inomata, "King's People," 27.
7. Coe and Kerr, *Art of the Maya Scribe,* 95.
8. Ibid.; Houston and Stuart, "Peopling the Classic Maya Court," 226.
9. Houston and Stuart, "Peopling the Classic Maya Court," 61.
10. 1Curiously, neither of the two volumes dedicated to the analysis of the royal courts of the ancient Maya refers to the *itz'aat,* not even in relation to the offices related to writing or painting; Inomata, "King's People."
11. Stuart, *Inscriptions from Temple XIX,* 133.
12. Coe and Kerr, *Art of the Maya Scribe,* 97.
13. Ciudad Real, *Calepino Maya de Motul.*
14. Ibid., 106.
15. Taube, *Major Gods of Ancient Yucatan,* 33–36; Coe and Kerr, *Art of the Maya Scribe,* 102.
16. Grube, "Hieroglyphic Sources," 31.
17. For a full hieroglyphic analysis of this inscription, see Graña-Behrens, "Reconstructing the Inscription."
18. Michelon, *Diccionario de San Francisco;* Barrera Vásquez et al., *Diccionario maya,* 519.
19. Morán, *Arte y vocabulario,* 149.
20. *Diccionario de autoridades,* 21–22.
21. For alternative interpretations, see Graña-Behrens, "Reconstructing the Inscription."
22. Michelon, *Diccionario de San Francisco,* 420.
23. Ara, *Vocabulario de lengua tzeldal*, 309.
24. Laughlin and Haviland, *Great Tzotzil Dictionary,* 1:36.
25. Graña-Behrens, "Emblem Glyphs," 110, fig. 4.
26. Vogt, "Ceremonial Organisation."
27. Redfield and Villa Rojas, *Chan Kom,* 76.
28. Hanks, *Referential Practice,* 333.
29. Boone, "In Tlamatinime," 9.
30. Ibid., 11.
31. León-Portilla, *La filosofía náhuatl,* 77, makes clear that at least thirty different classes of priest existed among the Nahuas or Aztecs; one of them was the supreme priest who bore the title of Quetzalcoatl; see also ibid., 69, 86.
32. Sahagún, *Florentine Codex,* Book 10, 31.
33. López Austin, "Cuarenta clases," 87–117, gives a list of forty different *nahualli.*
34. Sahagún, *Florentine Codex,* Book 10, 31.
35. Martínez González, "Sobre la función social," 41, also associates the *nahualli* with a physician (*ticitl*) who cures people.
36. Johansson, *La palabra,* 135.
37. Sahagún, *Florentine Codex,* Book 10, 29.
38. Sahagún, *Florentine Codex,* Books 4/5, 82,
39. Usually a man, but on some occasions women could also be considered "creators and keepers of the traditional knowledge of the Aztecs." Boone, "In Tlamatinime," 21.

40. Sahagún, *Florentine Codex,* Book 10; Sahagún, *Coloquios y doctrina cristiana*.
41. León-Portilla, *Aztec Thought,* 59.
42. English translation from León-Portilla, "El binomio oralidad," 135–54.
43. Johansson, *La palabra,* 135.
44. León-Portilla, *La filosofía náhuatl,* 59.
45. Translation from Sahagún, *Florentine Codex,* Book 10, 29–30.
46. León-Portilla, *La filosofia náhuatl,* 72, 74, 391.
47. Sahagún, *Códice Matritense,* fol. 118r ; León-Portilla, *La filosofía náhuatl,* 63, Fig. IX.
48. León-Portilla, *La filosofía náhuatl,* 66.
49. Ibid., 317–19.
50. Ibid., 84–85.
51. León-Portilla, *Quince poetas,* 91–92; León-Portilla and Davis, *Aztec Thought,* 61.
52. Haly, "Bare Bones," 273.
53. Sahagún, *Florentine Codex,* Book 8, 17–19.
54. Durán, *Historia de las Indias,* 2:470.
55. Berdan and Anawalt, *Codex Mendoza*, fols. 61r, 63r; León-Portilla, *La filosofía náhuatl,* 69, 87.
56. Karttunen, *Analytical Dictionary of Nahuatl,* 278.
57. *Diccionario de la lengua española*, 1:95.
58. Berdan and Anawalt, *Codex Mendoza,* fol. 61r.
59. Evans, "Aztec Noble Courts," 241–42.
60. León-Portilla and Davis, *Aztec Thought,* 182–83.
61. Johansson, *La palabra,* 31.
62. Martínez González, "Sobre la función social," 42.
63. Sahagún, *Coloquios y doctrina cristiana,* 138, 140.
64. Ibid., 139, 141.
65. Sahagún, *Florentine Codex,* Book 10, 29–30.
66. Sahagún, *Historia general*, Book 2, chap. 8.