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Three Nahuatl Hymns on the Mother Archetype: An Interpretive Commentary

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Sobre la base de la traducción de tres himnos rituales, de los veinte que Sahagún registró en los Códices de Madrid, el autor propone que 1) los cultos mexicas del siglo 15 de Teteo Innan y Coatlicue son instrumentos de una filosofía sincrética, la que motivaba y justificaba la ambición imperial, y 2) la crítica arquetípica revela el lenguaje simbólico inconsciente en el cual esta ideología se manifiesta.

On February 23, 1978, in a large dig just off the central Zocalo (plaza) of Mexico city, within 300 yards of the great Cathedral, one of the most significant archeological finds of the decade came to light. It is a circular slab of pink stone, measuring three meters in diameter and estimated to weigh over eight tons, upon which is carved a mutilated female figure with arms, legs, and head severed from the torso (Figure 1). The slab was found set into a plaza floor directly beneath the stairs of the pyramid to Huitzilopochtli, “Southern Hummingbird,” the patron god and war numen par excellence of the Mexica-Aztecs whose Venice-like city of canals, chinampa gardens, and vast palaces now forms the rubble upon which Mexico City is built. Set in place during the expansion of the Great Pyramid identified as Epoch IVb, the stone was probably carved sometime around 1469 to mark the ascension of tlatoani “speaker” Axayacatl (Matos 1984, 86). Archeologists quickly identified the carved figure as Coyolxauhqui, elder sister of Huitzilopochtli, and saw her as a depiction taken directly from the myth of the latter’s birth. When Huitzilopochtli’s mother Coatlicue “Skirt of Serpents” became pregnant with him—parthenogenically, by
catching a ball of feathers in her lap—his brothers, the unruly, impulsive "400 Southerners," became outraged at the apparent disgrace of their mother and determined to destroy her (FC III, 1–51). Led by their sister Coyolxauhqui, they begin a march up Coatepec "Snake Mountain" against her, but just as they arrived at the summit where their mother Coatlicue waited, Huitzilopochtli was born in a violent explosion, fully armed and bearing his terrible xiuhcoatl.

1. All references to the Florentine Codex are taken from the Anderson and Dibble edition, and will be cited in the text as FC Book, page numbers.
"serpent of fire." He fell first upon his sister, severing her limb from limb and tumbling her piecemeal down the mountain, then upon the "400 Southerners," whom "he pursued, he terrified, he destroyed, he annihilated, he exterminated." This birth is the subject of Hymn 5.

The discovery of the Coyolxauhqui Stone made clear, in a way no ethnohistorical or archeological evidence to that time had done, how explicitly ritualized this mythic narrative was in the Mexica rites of temple sacrifice. The broken figure of Coyolxauhqui lying at the foot of Huitzilopochtli's pyramid declares that pyramid a type of "Snake Mountain" (though Sahagún's informants had long suggested this symbolism) and every sacrificial victim, tumbled heartless and bloody down its stone stairs, another figure of herself. But it is the image of Coatlicue, the mother, who stands as the motionless nexus of this myth and defines the sacrificial energy of which Coyolxauhqui is the archetypal victim. The great bicephalic sculpture of Coatlicue which now stands in the Museo de Antropología e Historia in Mexico City, monolithic, chthonic, defiant, is well known (Figure 2). She is one of mankind's definitive expressions of the "Terrible Mother" described in Neumann's Jungian studies of comparative religion, the earth-numen who both feeds and devours her children. Paul Westheim compares this stone incarnation of her to Goya's terrifying mural "Saturn Devouring His Children" and says of the statue: "The history of world art knows only one similar case, only one visionary creation where monstrosity has been shaped with identical vigor: Dante's Inferno" (225). Not so well known are the literary remains of this Nahua-Chichimec divine figure or numen, fragments of poetry and mythohistory which still expose beyond and around Coatlicue, her avatars and ancestors, the emotional complexes of her mythological energy which encompass both the mandates for sacrificial war undertaken in her name and the less visible but deeper nurturing qualities of other, more ancient mother figures which precede her in Toltec-Chichimec history and flower again later in the cult of the Virgin of Guadalupe.

The Aztec Empire, founded about 1430 A.D. as an increasingly unequal alliance among the cities of Tenochtitlan, Tetzcoco, and Tlacopan around the shores of Lake Tetzcoco, was not a tightly administered state system with all custom, law, currency, and trade emanating from a single cohesive center. Rather, it was a contiguous territory of widely diverse ethnic groups, languages, cultural levels, social classes, and religious cults, all divided into some 40–50 regional kingdom-states, each with its own tributary towns and villages. This "empire," dominated in 1521 by the Mexica city of...
Figure 2 Coatlicue
Printed with permission of the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia.
Tenochtitlan, was largely a business of tribute collection and redistribution, enforced by occupying garrisons, which fed a splendid and ostentatious theocratic class in the central cities. That the Mexica-Aztecs by 1521 had engineered and inflicted upon their more settled and even ancient neighbors a highly efficient if loosely bound police state smothered in religion is now generally agreed. Its motives, modalities of growth, and internal dynamics, however, remain the subject of intense and interesting debate among ethnohistorians and anthropologists.

It was an old pattern in the Valley of Mexico, but no previous conquering nation had so efficiently executed the range of its ambition and mission, or, apparently, had shown such a keen appetite for the ancient rites of sacrifice once in power. Their own ethnohistorical sources, generally confirmed by those of their eventual vassals, describe their arrival and wanderings about the Valley for some two centuries as ethnic outcasts, accumulating a local history of wounds, offenses and outrages before finally settling in the useless reed swamps of the western shore of Lake Tetzcoco. Harassed out of one kingdom-state after another, they finally took root there probably sometime between 1325 and 1350. By 1500 they controlled the largest tribute empire ever seen in North America. Whatever the historical validity of their accounts recorded in Tezozómoc, Durán, the Codice Ramírez and other migration chronicles, the clear fact is that the Mexica believed themselves to have been formerly a people much maligned, harassed and mistreated by exactly those cities they held most directly in subjection. They are the warriors whose suicidal, blind, and unbreakable will to defend their city (described by Cortés in his Third Letter) against a few foreign instigators and vast hordes of their own rebellious tributaries constituted the most formidable obstacle ever encountered to European designs upon the New World. They were the worshippers of Huitzilopochtli and his dismembered sister, who have left us the sculpture and iconography of their great mother, Coatlicue.

The recent study by Conrad and Demarest (1984; Demarest 1984) of the political and cultural dynamics by which the Mexica-Aztecs rose so quickly to consolidated power represents a trend among some ethnohistorians to pay increased attention to ideology, especially as manifested in religious cults, as a significant and even causal force in late precolonial Mesoamerican history. Arguing against the limits of what they call "static functionalism" and "the dogma of technoeconomic determinism" to account adequately and accurately for the facts of cultural evolution in pre-Columbian America, Conrad and Demarest point out that the former often
illegitimately shifts from functionalist to historical explanations, and the latter “precludes any meaningful objective study of the role of ideology in cultural evolution, since its role is predetermined as epiphenomenal” (Demarest 240). Far from being simply a post facto legitimation of already established political hegemony, they assert, “it is clear that sacrifice and the state religions that incorporated it [in Mesoamerica] were critical causal forces not only in the legitimation of power, but (for at least the Postclassic period) in the actual generation of that power.” The implausible and indefensible lengths to which the cultural materialists will go to defend their system and deny any causal role to religion or ideology is exemplified by the “protein need” hypothesis of Harner and Harris. “Suffice it to say that the underlying logic of the theory has been shown to be self-contradictory by the evolutionary theorists . . . , while the specific historical details involved have been rejected as totally inaccurate by ethnohistorians and archaeologists specializing in the region” (Demarest 241).

Focusing on the well-known reforms instituted by the Mexica under Itzcoatl during and after the Tepanec wars (ca. 1427–30), Conrad and Demarest outline the “ideological adaptation” which they argue constituted the unique contribution of the Mexica to the traditional political, economic and military institutions which they inherited from their immediate Tepanec predecessors. “What was the critical difference, the competitive edge responsible for the Mexicas’ phenomenal success [in building a rapidly expanding tribute empire]? The answer to this question lies in an ideological transformation that assured Mexica victories and fired the continued expansion of their state. The original contribution of the Mexico to the evolution of Mesoamerican civilization was an ideology that successfully integrated religious, economic, and social systems into an imperi- alistic war machine” (Conrad and Demarest 37; Demarest 235). A few powerful leaders, at the center of whom stands the legendary Tlacaelel, apparently initiated historiographic and mythographic “reforms” which rewrote Mexica history and religion to give the ruling dynasty quasi-Toltec associations, to elevate their village patron Huitzilopochtli into a major sun deity, and to generally “solarize” the state religion into a “unique solar/warfare/sacrifice complex that formed the central cult of the Mexica state” (Demarest 235). The elevation of Huitzilopochtli to one of the four powerful Tezcatlipocas, sons of the original divine pair Tonacatecutli and Tonacacihuatl, his displacement of Quetzalcoatl and his identity with Tonatiuh the present “Fifth” sun, all worked to concretize and focus the energies of this cult complex.
In several earlier studies, Johanna Broda has demonstrated that all the primary mythohistorical events in the Mexica-Aztec chronicles, all the peak periods of temple construction, the occasions of cult initiation, and the great increases in ritual sacrifice during the second half of the fifteenth century correspond to specific events in the steadily increasing military, political and/or economic hegemony of Mexica ruling class after 1430, specifically the descendents of tlatoani Acamapichtli who declare themselves the pipiltin “noble sons” (Broda 1978: 97–111). “The cult of Templo Mayor [to Huitzilopochtli],” Broda argues, “was used by the warrior elite as an ideological foundation of their political power,” both within their own city, Tenochtitlan, and as the motive for imperial expansion; “religion served in this context to mystify the true content of the situation”—which was the steadily increasing domination of Mexica institutions by this warrior elite (“Ideology” 33). This analysis as well as that of Conrad and Demarest depends heavily on the Ramirez-Durán-Tezozómoc version of Mexica origins, their migration from Aztlan-Chicomoztoc and the search for the eagle on the nopal cactus sprung from the heart of Copil. That version is generally thought to represent the officially sanctioned text of events elaborated as part of the ideological revisionism of the Mexica pipiltin. In Tezozómoc’s Cronica mexicayotl Huitzilopochtli promises his chosen people, through the mouth of his priest, that

. . . I will make you lords and nobles of all there is in Anahuac . . . You will have innumerable, infinite, endless numbers of vassals who will pay you tribute, who will bring you innumerable precious jade stones, gold, quetzal plumes and work, emerald, coral, amethyst [and] all kinds of precious feathers (23–24).

Clearly such a promise, delivered sometime during the 200–year migrations before founding Tenochtitlan, would be a powerful motivator if generally believed to have divine sanction—and it seems doubtful that such a frankly economic covenant needed much Marxist mystification to make it work. Much more subtle and divisive was the post-Tepanec War strategem of Tlacaelel to appropriate all the newly-won Tepanec lands for his pipiltin brothers and cousins; according to this version of events, the timid Mexica macehualtin “common people” formally wagered their own perpetual vassalage against the lives of the pipiltin during the preparation of

2. See also “Ideology of the Aztec State and Human Sacrifice,” manuscript. This is an especially valuable synthesis and survey of the historical context of the Aztec rise to power and of the continual interplay between political power, religious ideology, ritual, and legitimation, especially after 1440.
the rebellion. The common people, afraid of their angry Tepanec overlords, wanted to turn the image of Huitzilopochtli over to them and sue for peace. When Tlacaelel’s revolt grew into the eventually successful overthrow of Azcapotzalco, the Tepanec capital, this reluctance was recalled as justification for new class and status distinctions within Mexica society itself.

These analyses point with new attention toward the internal dynamics of Mexica society and history. Broda speaks repeatedly of a violence in Aztec ideology “which seems to originate from within society as a necessity postulated by their patron god” (“Ideology” 27); “The cult of warfare was not only the product of imperial expansion, but violence had originated before, within Aztec society” (32; emphasis by Broda); “This violence has to do with the origin of class society, and in the concrete Aztec case with the establishment of the government of the warrior elite” (33); “It must be taken into account that violence originated from within the internal contradictions of Aztec society which were the cause, and not the effect of later imperial history” (8). Broda finds the source of these internal contradictions in the intensified class conflicts among the Mexica-Aztecs themselves as their empire grew; but, we might ask, why did that violence take the particular forms of ritualized sacrificial war and the solar-blood myth that it took in the Aztec state religion? Admittedly, all the icons, and ritual procedures (arrow sacrifice, gladiatorial combat, beheading, fire sacrifice, flaying and skin-wearing) incorporated by the Mexica into their cultus were already practiced by earlier or neighboring groups, but the blood-sun-mother complex woven around Huitzilopochtli, Tonatiuh and Coatlicue-Toci seems to have been the source or focus of the energy which Conrad and Demarest argue impelled the empire to its unique status, and the expression of the internal violence which Broda describes. And within the rhetorical terms of this analysis we can see a further range of suggestion which points us to questions of a specific psychology.

It is hardly coincidental that this new vision of the universe required the expansionism that was the preferred policy of the militaristic faction. It was this faction that took control of the state in 1427—burning the codices that recorded earlier versions of Mexica history and mythology. Nor is it merely fortuitous that the ceaseless militarism demanded by the hungry warrior-sun also provided a key pillar of Mexica economics—tribute. Indeed, as Berdan’s studies . . . of Mexica economics have shown, even the distinct trade and market sectors of their economy were interdependent with the tribute system and the warfare that generated it. Thus, their
apocalyptic vision of the universe drove the Mexica armies ever outward, taking and sacrificing captives to save the world from perpetual darkness, while at the same time feeding the economic needs of the expanding empire and the boundless ambitions of its leaders (Demarest 236).

Implicit within the last sentence of this quotation is a double analogy which underlies and justifies the following reading of Mexica imperial dynamics: the elite’s “boundless ambition” is read as the source of a need projected onto “the hungry warrior-sun” which is in turn read as an “apocalyptic vision” capable of motivating a general male populace to a military harvest “ever outward” which could “feed” the economic needs of the expanding empire. That is, the informants’ descriptions of the sun’s insatiable thirst for blood is first interpreted by the analyst as the figure of a controlling elite’s personal, psychological dynamics and then reversed so that this dynamic is absorbed (could we say “eaten up”?) by the Mexica generally and becomes a transcendent motivating factor of remarkable efficiency. This focus on the psychology of a small group at a crucial moment of Mexica history is emphasized by Demarest: “Of particular significance is the now overwhelming evidence that the reworking of traditional Postclassical concepts into the Mexica central cult and the propagation of this new dogma in sculpture, poetry, and liturgy were conscious changes deliberately instituted by the militant cadre of leaders who took control of the Mexica state during the Tepanec war” (236). The curious circularity of the double figure in the paragraph above, however, suggests a halting or drawing back of its explanatory power at the lip of an abyss: the minds of a few specific individuals in 1427–30.

It is easy to overlook how few Mexica pipiltin there actually were in 1427. The mestizo historian Chimalpahin is especially informative; according to his Historia mexicana, Acamapichtli, the first Mexica tlatoani “speaker” who was inaugurated in 1367, had only 8 sons and one daughter—though the Mexica chiefs had supplied him with 9 wives. The first and eldest of these children was Itzcoatl, who, though born of an Azcapotzalco slave woman to whom Acamapichtli took a fancy, would become the first “emperor” (Chimalpahin’s term) of a Mexica state. Under his rule, from 1427 to 1440, occurred the revolt and Tepanec war which founded and confirmed Mexica ambitions, and under his administration the ideological revisions described above were performed and promulgated. León-Portilla has pointed out the codex burning and rewriting which Sahagún’s informants attribute to him (1980, 66). But it was the legitimate son, Huitzilihuitl, himself the second tlatoani,
whose line became the dynasty of fifteenth century Mexica rulers: two sons, Chimalpopoca and Moteuczoma Ilhuicamina, became tlatoani themselves, and another, Tlacaelel, became the motivating genius, counselor, confidant and chief administrator to three generations of Mexica tlatoani. In other words, the second generation Mexica pipiltin, children of the eight sons and one daughter of Acamapichtli, could scarcely have amounted to one hundred persons in 1427.

Demarest stops short of any evil-genius theory; in *Religion and Empire* he and Conrad recommend an eclectic neo-Marxist mode of analysis which allows a sufficient space for the dynamic influence of ideology and religion as motivational features of Aztec history. But clearly there was something more involved in the Mexica reforms of 1427–30 than “conscious” manipulation of a group’s religious rituals. Blind faith of the kind demonstrated repeatedly by Aztec youths in battle, bureaucrats in the temple routine, and merchants in hazardous, distant missions is not likely generated by a few clever individuals plotting over their chocolate—unless they are convincingly able to demonstrate that their innovations, their revisions, come from the deeper “truths” of religion, its ideology and its icons. How that was done in the case of crucial mother goddesses among the Aztecs is what I wish to consider.

We know from the extensive studies of comparative religions now available that mythologies have lives of their own, whatever functional adaptations or roles they fulfill at given historical juncures within a society. The depth psychology of Jung and his epigones is now generally regarded with disfavor and antagonism as a speculative exercise by ethnohistorians, art historians, and cultural anthropologists who consider themselves engaged in “scientific” investigation. Nevertheless, even they sometimes take for granted an archetypal terminology developed in the study of comparative religions, as when Nicholson refers to the goddess *Teteo Innan*, of whom Coatlicue is a late avatar, as “the late pre-Hispanic central Mexican version of the widespread earth-mother concept” (423). The discovery of the Coyolxauhqui stone, calling as it does our attention to the attendant myth of Huitzilopochtli’s birth, places this mother figure in special prominence within the solarized state religion which we have seen is the centerpiece of Mexica ideological revisionism. What do such identifications mean, and how are they to be reconciled with this “conscious” revisionism described by Demarest? How can myth interpretation not be taken into account in Aztec ethnohistory when the primary documents upon which so much study depends (the Ramirez-Durán-Tezozómoc
chronicles; the *Historia de los mexicanos por sus pinturas*; the *Anales de Cuauhtitlan* and *Leyenda de los soles*; the Codexes Aubin and Boturini; the chronicle parts of Sahagún, Motolinía, and Mendieta to name only the most obvious) are replete with events, characters, icons that are patently mythical? Neumann, whose *The Great Mother* is the classic survey of the mother archetype through world religion (dedicating an entire section to "The Matriarchal World of America"), warns against "arbitrary and fantastic theories of influences, migrations, and so forth" or the reduction of archetypal interpretation to "superficial 'historical' relations . . . [or] corresponding sociological phenomena"(93). Nevertheless, interpretive observations can be made, and Kaplan has shown in a study of living Zunis that "a convincing case can be made for the belief that mythologies may have a contemporary psychological significance," (256) and this significance "is to be found not in the content of the myth but in an understanding of the nature of their functions and of the fact that these functions are generally hidden and latent"(261). These functions must not, however, be regarded as simply reflecting personality characteristics of persons in the group.

While some mythic texts—such as the migration chronicle of the *Cronica mexicayotl*, the stories of Huitzilopochtli and Quetzalcoatl in Book III of the *Florentine Codex* and the prayers to Tezcatlipoca in Book VI—are obvious products of the Mexica reforms, other less obviously syncretic texts may have been equally important in shifting the focus of belief toward an intensified sacrificial solar cult, toward a mission to maintain the sun. Hymns 4—"Teteo Innan Icuic"—and 13—"Cihuacoatl Icuic"—of the twenty preserved in the manuscripts of Sahagún, along with number 5—"Chimalpanecatl Icuic yoan Tlatelcaoaananotl," are such texts. The first two offer insight to the special syncretism of mother goddesses which probably occurred as part of the Mexica reforms, and the last adds some understanding of the mythic psychology by which the "Horrific Prodigy," Huitzilopochtli, is engendered from his mother, Coatlicue, in the Mexica-Aztec religious imagination. These complex images, the older images from which they appear to have been syncretized, and the patterns of the collective mind which syncretized them can be deciphered somewhat through explication of these fragmentary and hieratic Hymns which appear first in the *Primeros memoriales* section of the *Codice Matritense del Real Palacio* and again in Book II of the *Florentine Codex*. Complete translations have been prepared by Seler (1904), Garibay (1958), and Anderson and Dibble (1981). While the texts were redacted probably between 1558 and 1561 (perhaps as early as 1547), there has been little question
that Seler was right when he said, "In these songs Father Sahagún correctly scented nothing but ancient heathenness." While no linguist has yet completely studied the variations of their language, nearly all translators and commentators have pointed out the obscure and apparently archaic language in which they are cast. Sahagún never translated the Hymns, but the Real Palacio manuscript has series of glosses to many lines. The fact that these glosses have themselves been disputed by later translators suggests that even sixteenth century transcribers did not understand the meaning of certain passages, and perhaps the informants themselves were unable (or unwilling) to clarify them. In spite of this linguistic archaism—which could have been artificially maintained as the poetic stock devices of sacred composers and singers—it is unlikely that the three Hymns in question, as well as Hymn One, "Huitzilopochtli, His Song," could in their received form date any earlier than the period of the Mexica reforms. This is not to deny that they are composed from verbal icons dating perhaps much earlier, as we shall see. Nor does the fact that they were redacted in the town of Tepetulco, a dependency of the Acolhua regency at Tetzcoco and not directly affiliated with the solar cult at Tenochtitlan, rule out their association with those ideological reforms; while its center was unquestionably the temple of Huitzilopochtli in Tenochtitlan, that cult had been thoroughly propogated within the Acolhua provinces as well by 1519 when Cortés arrived. The Hymns, then, give us a double perspective into the Aztec theocratic cult system: as synthetic texts deriving in some part from pre-Aztec sources they show specific religious ideas conjoined with their divine icons "in the purest and oldest form known to us" (Seler); and as syncretic Aztec texts they give us a glimpse into the mind of the Mexica warrior elite as it worked its will through the agency of its cults. While we cannot purport to expose the "inner life" of any specific individuals—the historical data appear too sketchy and contradictory to support psychobiography of individuals in Aztec society—we can suggest some outlines of the collective personal dynamics (to what degree conscious or unconscious we can never know) of that warrior elite and its attendant priesthood which came rapidly into power after 1427. Neither psychoanalytic (Freudian) nor archetypal (Jungian) categories have yet been applied in any extended or systematic manner to the Nahuatl mythic texts (with the exception of some Quetzalcoatl stories and the Neumann analysis discussed below), though their contributions to myth and psychohistorical studies in other cultures have long since been demonstrated and in many cases superceded.
Teteo Innan, Her Song

The first and most essential of these Hymns is number four in Sahagún's Florentine Codex version, entitled "Mother of the Gods, Her Song." There can be little doubt that Teteo Innan, as her name suggests, enjoyed one of the most ancient cults in Mesoamerica, perhaps reaching back even to the wonderful "pretty lady" figurines of the seventh century B.C. But it is also clear that the Hymn as recorded by Sahagún is a product of Chichimec syncretism.

Teteo Innan appears in the sixteenth century Sahaguntine texts as the female component of Huehueteotl, Xiuhtecutli "The Ancient God, Fire Lord," a venerable hearth deity whose hunchbacked, wizened image is found widely among the artifacts of Teotihuacan (100-750 A.D.). Three times, with variations, the following formulaic passage occurs among the rhetorical discourses of the Florentine Codex's Book VI: . . . in mochiubcauh in teteu inna[n], in teteu inta, in vejeteutl in tlexicco, in xiuhtetzaqualco maquitoc in xiuhtecutli "your progenitor, the Mother of the Gods, the Father of the Gods, the Ancient God, [who is set in] the center of the hearth fire, enclosed in turquoise, the Fire Lord" (FC VI, 41; compare pp. 19 and 88). This passage clearly sets Teteo Innan up as complement to a parallel male deity, Teteo Inta, and subsumes them both in the androgynous "Ancient God in the hearth" and the "Fire Lord in turquoise (of the fire's flame)"—therefore identifying the latter as one and the same. Thelma Sullivan's essential article, "Tlazolteotl-Ixcuina: The Great Spinner and Weaver," outlines cult relationships among more than a dozen major goddesses and associates Teteo Innan particularly with Toci "Our Grandmother," Tlalli iyollo "Heart of the Earth," and Temazcalteci "Grandmother of the Bathhouse" (19). Her acquisition of attributes from Tlazolteotl-Ixcuina "Goddess of Filth-Lady Cotton," a complex numen of Gulf Coast origin connected with sexual excess, illicit love, spinning and weaving, confession, and parturition, is demonstrated in their shared iconography of unspun cotton adornments, a spindle whorl headdress, and crescent motifs on clothing as well as shared patronage of pregnancy, parturition, and spinning/weaving (Figure 3). As the Great Weaver who spins the thread of man's fate, Sullivan points out, Teteo Innan-Toci was also the patroness of diviners and day-sign readers (20). Nicholson (1971: Table 3), in his extensive outline of Nahua-Chichimec cult themes and deity complexes, names one entire complex of twenty-one female numens after Teteo Innan, including therein Tlazolteotl, Atlat(n)tonan, Cibuacoatl, Coaltlicue, Itzpapalotl, Xochiquetzal, Ixnextli, Tezacoac, and the Cibuateteo...
as primary subcults. "All the goddesses seem to have embodied to some degree, the pervasive notion of maternal fertility, particularly as projected on the earth" (420). He emphasizes her patronage of curers and midwives, a theme which Sullivan analyzes in detail. Anderson's discussion (1985, 35) of Hymn 13 to Cihuacoatl (see below) considers Teteo Innan in especially intimate relation to the cult of that goddess:

Here is one of two goddesses, Cihuacoatl and Teteo Innan, who, to the more philosophically-minded Aztecs, must have represented somewhat different aspects of a single deity, as earth-mother in her dual role as creator and destroyer. . . . The names for more than a couple of dozen deities whom the sophisticated would probably have recognized as aspects of the mother-goddess can be recalled fairly easily. Of these Atlan Tonan, Ayopectli, Cihuacoatl, Itzpapalotl, Ixnextli, Teci, Ticitl, Tlalli Iyollo, Tlaltecutli, Toci, Tonan, and Yoalticitl appear more often to have ranged from association with to equivalence to Teteo Innan (35).

As these citations and analyses make clear, there can be little doubt that by Aztec times Teteo Innan represented a mother and earth nu-
men of considerable antiquity and authority in the Valley of Mexico. Toci “Our Grandmother” is the name of her specifically Mexica hierophany, as we shall see, whose cult genesis as a flayed princess of Culhuacan is recounted in the Cronica mexicayotl, and the Teteo Innan-Itzpapalotl figure called forth in the Hymn at hand is a syncretized Nahua-Chichimec numen of late Postclassic formation, reflecting Aztec sacrificial concerns and imperial preoccupations.

The informants of Sahagún and Durán indicate clearly that the Mother of the Gods was the focus of an earth-mother cult among the Aztecs as line 18 of the Hymn suggests: Tonan tlatelcutli which means literally “Our Mother, Lord of the Earth.” (This gender ambiguity, which Neumann points out is nearly always a feature of Terrible Mother figures, will reappear frequently in our texts.) Sahagún’s informants call her Toci and identify her directly with the earth: “[She is] the goddess called The Mother of Gods, who is also named, Tlalli yiollo “Heart of the Earth,” and Toci “Our Grandmother” (FC I, 4). The identifying iconography of her costume included painting the lips and cheeks with liquid rubber, a headband of raw cotton usually with spindle whorls inserted, a skirt covered with shells and white eagle feathers and called the “Star Skirt” (distinguished her from her later avatar Coatlicue “Serpent Skirt”), a shield with a golden crescent, a medicinal herb, and a broom. Durán describes her idol, in the image of an aged woman, which sat in a shrine just outside the west gates of Tenochtitlan called Cibuatocalli “Temple of Woman”:

Above the nose the face was white and from the nose down it was black. Her hair was dressed in the fashion of a native woman, and locks of cotton were attached in the form of a crown. On both sides of the hair were stuck spindle whorls with their bunches of spun cotton. From the end of these spindle whorls hung bundles of corded cotton. In one hand she held a shield; in the other, a broom. On the nape of her neck she wore plummage of yellow feathers. Her short blouse was adorned with a fringe of unspun cotton, and below it she wore a skirt. All her attire was white (1971, 87). (See Figure 3)

While her position in the west is symbolic—cibuatlampa “region of woman” means “west”—the shrine’s location outside the city wall suggests a certain respectful distance from this goddess who in her ancient essence was well above the Aztec appropriations of her for their imperial cults. Nevertheless, another image of her sat in the pitch-black Tlillan “Place of Blackness,” a 60 by 30 foot chamber atop a pyramid where the Mexica kept and “fed” stone images of all their native and captive gods. From this lightproof hall, entered only by a low door “through which one could
barely crawl," the images were taken out on occasions of feast days, processions, or to entreat their special favor, and to it they were returned when festivities or entreaties were completed.

The exact performance context of this Hymn is uncertain, but presumably it was part of the annual twenty-day festival of Ochpanitztli in which Teteo Innan played a dominant role (Figures 4 and 5). The name, Durán reports, "means sweeping of the roads." One of the most important festivals of the Aztec religious year, it fell in late September to mid-October and had a dual theme of earthly fertility (a harvest celebration) and patriotic warfare (Brown 1984); Durán gives a thorough description in volume II, Chapter XV of his Historia and Sahagún does the same, in lesser detail, in Chapter 30 of the Florentine Codex, Book II. Forty days before the festival, a middle-aged woman who would become the ixiptla or "mask" of the goddess was purified and named Toci, Teteo Innan, Tlalli yiolli—and carefully locked away each night. Twenty days later she was garbed in the costume of the goddess and brought out daily to dance and sing before the public who adored and worshipped her as the goddess herself, doubtlessly singing the Hymn here discussed. Seven days before the festival she became the special charge of seven midwives or sorcerers, who took great pains to keep her in good spirits. "... If those who represented the gods and goddesses alive became downcast, remembering that they were to die, it was an ill omen." She then made a skirt and blouse for herself from raw maguey fiber. When finished she was led with great ceremony to the market where she symbolically offered the skirt and blouse for sale. Here she was met by the priests of Chicomecoatl, "Seven Serpent," a numen of ripe corn, who treated her as their own goddess. In these activities, beside the seven midwife attendants, she was accompanied by four men "disguised as Huaxtecs." The latter were a people of Mayan affiliation, occupying the tropical Gulf Coast "Hot Lands" to the east of the Nahua provinces; the Aztecs always looked down on them as loose and decadent people, especially for the "immodesty" of the men who "did not provide themselves with breechclouts." Durán says they dressed in white, red, yellow, and green, the colors we find in the symbolism discussed below. These attendants also suggest the close affiliation of the cult of Teteo Innan to that of the Huaxtec mother goddess, Ixcuina. Then, before dawn on the day of the festival proper, the "goddess" was sacrificed: one priest took her by the arms, back to back, and by leaning forward lifted and arched her over his back; the sacrificer then "took her by the hair and beheaded her so that the man holding her was drenched with blood from head to foot."
Figure 4 Festival of *Ochpaniztli*
Primeros memoriales manuscript
Printed with permission of the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia.
Figure 5 Festival of Ochpaniztli—Central ixiptla of Teteo Innan/Toci; note dangling hands of flayed victim below. Hands of the masked priest, and note the large penis sheathes on the blackfaced attendants. Codex Borbonicus
Printed with permission of the New York Public Library.
Her skin, skirt and blouse, and cotton headdress were donned by another priest, called Tec[u]cizquacuilli, an attendant priest of the male moon numen, Tecuciztecatl, belonging to a class of priest, the quacuilli, whose function was the care of a victim’s body after sacrifice. He then appeared before the people and led a mock skirmish called “fighting with grass” in the temple courtyard, involving most of the warriors of the city who ran waving bloody straw brooms and grass. Following this skirmish, everyone danced behind the skin-wearing priest singing songs, probably including the present Hymn, in honor of the goddess, to the temple of Huitzilopochtli where the Teteo Innan-Toci skin-bearer stood before the image of Huitzilopochtli and four times “raised his arms and made himself into a cross” in a receiving or display position clearly symbolic of sacred coitus. A piece of skin was also flayed from the goddess-victim’s thigh, according to Sahagún’s account, and taken to an impersonator of the god Cinteotl, a numen of the ripe maize ear (cintli), who is referred to as the “son” of Teteo Innan. He dons the thigh-skin as a mask and also a tall, curved hat which identifies the god Itztlacoliuhqui “Curved Obsidian Knife,” a god of frost, making this son of Teteo Innan a double impersonation of both corn and its natural enemy. The Teteo Innan-Toci and masked Cinteotl-Itztlacoliuhqui impersonators then paraded together (Sullivan 1974; Brown 1984).

In the sacrifice which followed, the victims were slain in a form unique to this goddess (described only in Durán): they were pushed from a platform erected on poles “about a hundred and eighty feet high” to smash into the temple courtyard below. The crushed victims were beheaded, their blood collected in bowls and set before the goddess-impersonator. The swords of all attendants were then replaced with brooms which were held aloft as the skin-bearer descended the pyramid. He wet his finger in the bowl of blood, bent to lick it “in the most frightful way. He then moaned eerily, and

3. This is an extensive discussion not only of the thigh-skin mask and other iconography of Itztlacoliuhqui but of the entire Ochpaniztli festival. It was, Sullivan indicates, “the festival of the midwives, healers, and diviners and in great part was a celebration of birth, both of man and of the corn. Actually, the rites in this complex festival revolve around three principal concepts: sweeping, birth, and war, all inextricably linked with each other” (255). Teteo Innan/Toci/Yaochiahuatl, she says, was considered engaged in the eternal battle of childbirth, and therefore “was the prototype for all Aztec women.” The sweeping and broom motif refers to clearing the roads for arrival of tribute, clearing the day for arrival of the sun, and perhaps for the arrival of the “son” of Toci, Cinteotl/Itztlacoliuhqui, who Sullivan demonstrates is a complex image involving corn, obsidian, and frost. The broom is both a phallus and a weapon of war.
everyone shuddered and was filled with fear at his moans. It is said
that the earth moved and quaked at this moment." Durán adds, "I
tried to investigate this and attempted to laugh off and mock this
absurd belief. But I was assured that this part, this area of the tem-
ple, trembled and shook at that moment." All the people then per-
formed the rite of *niltalcua*, literally "I eat earth," touching a finger
to the earth and eating the dirt which stuck to it as a sign of fealty,
sincerity, reverence, and humility.

Following this sacrifice, the tlatoani took his "throne" and re-
viewed the full strength of his army, from veteran captains to new
recruits. To each he distributed arms, cloaks, or adornments accord-
ing to rank, presumably from the tribute levies gathered through-
out the year. After a great arm-waving dance accompanied only by
drums, the newly equipped army engaged in a mad, running combat
out of the city to the shrine of Teteo Innan-Toci at the Cihuateoc-
calli where the skin-bearing priest left all his ritual attire on a straw
figure of the goddess. The blood drawn in this final wild melee "was
like a sacrifice of themselves, in place of bleeding the tongue or ears
as they did in other festivals."

Such was the ritual context of this Hymn's divine image in Te-
nochtitlan at the time of the conquest, clearly blending themes of
earthly fertility and patriotic warfare. Several observations suggest
the goddess's roots in the semilegendary Toltec cults identified his-
torically with the Postclassic cities of Xochicalco, Tula Xicotitlan,
and Cholula. The strong cotton motif in her costume and her Star
Skirt identify the Mother of the Gods as the four-part feminine half
of the ancient divinity worshipped by the prince of Toltecs, *Ce Acatl
Quetzalcoatl*, from whose iconography and memory in Nahua ideol-
yogy authority and legitimacy flowed (López Austin 1973; Carrasco
1982). In the *Anales de Cuaubtitlan* it is recorded that the Toltec
man-god revered as his highest gods a quaternity of divine pairs:

It is told that he turned heavenward his prayer, in addressing his gods, whom
he invoked by these names: *Citlalliycue-Citlalatontec*, *Tonacichuatl-
Tonacatecutli*, *Tecolihuanquey-Yetzlaquenqui*, *Tlamanac-Tlallichcatl*. He
directed his voice, as it is known, to Ommeyocan, Place of Duality beyond
the Nine Heavens. And, as is known, he invoked and made supplication
to those whose house is there, living in humility and retirement (Lehmann,
76–7).

4. The still persistent folk tales of La Llorona, "the Weeping Woman" who
wanders through the night wailing both in grief for her conquered children and in
thirst for blood, reflect and perpetuate some fading cultural memory of this awe-
inspiring and numenous moment in pre-Columbian ritual.
The feminine half of the first name-pair, "Of Stars Her Skirt," reappears literally in the "Star Skirt" of shells ascribed to Teteo Innan by the informants of Sahagún—which means that in addition to her role as earth mother she had also been a sky goddess. The second name-pair, "Lady of Sustenance-Lord of Sustenance," is applied to the original divine couple in the creation accounts of the very early (1530's) *Historia de los mexicanos por sus pinturas* manuscript. The third name-pair, "He Wrapped in Coal-She Wrapped in Blood," associates by its colors anciently symbolic of knowledge, with the "Red and Black Land" of which Ce Acatl went in search. The last name, "He Who Firms the Earth-She Who Covers the Earth with Cotton," refers to the cotton and spindle whorl iconography in the headdress of Teteo Innan's costume, and confirms her association as well with the goddess Tlazolteotl-Ixcuina "Goddess of Filth-Lady Cotton," suggesting a Toltec connection for the latter figure as well. The close relation between Teteo Innan and Ixcuina is confirmed by the accompanying "Huaxtecs" in the former's ritual festival. Sullivan points out that the Florentine Codex also describes a four-fold identity for Ixcuina under the names "First Born, Younger Sister, Middle Sister, and Youngest Sister," each of which was also named Tlazolteotl (12). The iconography of cotton and spinning, Sullivan demonstrates, identifies this figure as the "Great Spinner and Weaver" who forms the fabric of human life, the great conceiver and parturient: "The spindle set in the spindle whorl is symbolic of coitus, and the thread, as it winds around the spindle, symbolizes the growing foetus. . . . Spinning and weaving represent life, death, and rebirth in a continuing cycle that characterizes the essential nature of the Mother Goddess" (14). The quadruple aspect of the four Tlazolteotl sisters and of the four aspects of the female numen worshipped by Ce Acatl in Tula are metaphors of the generative and regenerative cycle of life, "the growth and decline of all living things which, like the spindle, pass through four stages: youth, fecundity, middle age, old age and death" (30). In other words, her cotton motif and her "Huaxtecs" identify Teteo Innan with the "ancient" four-fold Toltec goddess and with the four-fold Huaxtec Great Spinner, Ixcuina, all figures of fertility, natural regeneration, sustenance, and life energies.

The color symbolism of the Hymn also confirms this Toltec association. The Hymn breaks structurally into two sections between lines 12 and 13, the first section evidently incomplete. As Garibay has indicated (1958, 70), the first twelve lines probably represent only half of an original text which would have included identical
stanzas for two other colors, thus completing the traditional and sacred 4-color, directional quincunx symbolism. Two such passages, nearly but not quite identical, can be found in the text of the myth-history narrative known as the *Anales de Cuauhtitlan*; but occur in relation to the goddess Itzpapalotl "Obsidian Butterfly" who figures so prominently in the second half of Teteo Innan's Hymn. The first of these passages opens the text of the *Anales* and is itself fragmentary, due to manuscript damage, and gives only two colors, yellow and red. The second, however, is complete. In it the Obsidian Butterfly is advising her people, the Cuauhtitla Chichimecs whose history is the central thread of the *Anales*, whom to choose as their first tlatoani or ruler. Then she adds,

> And then you will go to the east
> where you will shoot arrows,
likewise to the Divine Land in the north
you will shoot arrows,
likewise in the Region of Thorns [west],
you will shoot arrows,
likewise in the irrigated Flowerland [south]
you will shoot arrows.

> And when you have gone to shoot,
have caught up to the gods—
the green, the yellow, the white, the red;
eagle, jaguar, serpent, rabbit, etc.,
then you will place those who will be guardians of Xiuhtecutli [Fire Lord],
Tozpan and Ihuiltl and Xiuhnel
[names of the hearth stones];
There you will burn your captives (Lehmann, 65–66).

In both *Anales* passages and in the Hymn—though two are fragmentary and one abbreviated as well as poorly transmitted—the basic poetic structure is a refrain repeated four times with variation each time for one of the cardinal regions and its associated color, and a concluding stanza. The particular color correspondences and sequences in the two *Anales* passages are Chichimec: yellow-?, red-south in the first, fragmentary version, and green-east, yellow-north, white-west, red-south in the second passage, just quoted. The Hymn, which gives yellow and white with no explicit directional association, appears to reproduce the middle segment of that latter sequence. However, since directional sequences in texts such as these often end with south, and the Hymn likely is missing its first two colors, it probably enacts a system in which white, its final color,
corresponds to south. Such a scheme is found in the more venerable, supposedly ancient (in Nahua thought) and "civilized" Toltec sequence which is given by Sahagún's informants in several passages from the Florentine Codex describing the cult center of Ce Acatl as west-green, north-red, east-yellow and white-south (FC III, 13). Clearly the Hymn to Teteo Innan appears to correspond to this Toltec pattern, circling the compass clockwise from west, thus identifying the goddess as belonging to an order of ancient legitimacy and authority.

The identification of Tamoanchan as the goddess's place of origin in lines 3, 6, 9, and 12—if the verb "emerge" can be understood to imply origins—affirms that god and man have a common place of origin, since it was to Tamoanchan that Quetzalcoatl brought the "precious bones" from which the first men were made by Quetzalcoatl and the goddess Quilaztlī. Tamoanchan, which is mentioned in two of the Quetzalcoatl myths, is a kind of earthly paradise. Garibay identifies it with Tlalocan, the paradise of Tlaloc (numen of water, rain, lightning and mountains), and says it was a place from which came the souls of the newborn. Seler notes that in addition to being the birthplace of life, it was often considered the particular place of origin of the Nahua people. In Book X of the Florentine Codex, Sahagún reports it was a name, meaning "We Seek Our Home," used by the earliest Nahua tribes to designate the "earthly paradise" they came in search of. León-Portilla translates it as "House from Which We Descend" and suggests it may sometimes refer to the transcendent Omeyocan, highest heaven of duality. Nicholson calls it "probably a Mayance word meaning 'place of the bird serpent'" (408). Its most common use in the texts and the sense with which it is used in this Hymn is to refer to an earthly place from which men originate, also the geographical matrix of the earthmother, an earth womb. The definitive description is supplied by the annotator of the Codex Telleriano-Remensis who provides the following explanation under the fifteenth trecena (13-day "week" of the 260-day tonalpoalli count) named 13 Eagle and governed by Itzpapalotl, the "Obsidian Butterfly" who is understood to originate there:

This place known as tamoancha[n] xuchitlycacan is the place where these gods which they had were created and is almost like saying "a terrestrial

5. These correspondences are somewhat problematical and based largely on suggestions of Lehmann. See also Nicholson, p. 405. If this green, red, yellow, white sequence is correct for the Hymn to Teteo Innan, then the text is missing two initial stanzas, probably identical to lines 1–12, with the colors green and red inserted.
paradise,” and they say that when these gods were in that place they per-
sisted in cutting the roses and tree boughs so that [the high god] 
*Tonacatecutli* and the woman [his consort] *Tonacacibuatl* became greatly 
angered and expelled them from that place, and so some came to the earth 
and others to hell (infierno), these latter being those who fill them with 
fear (folios 27v, 28r; translation by the author).

“You emerge from Tamoanchan” in the Hymn, then, means exactly 
that: the goddess appeared first among men from that chthonic 
womb. But the mention of Tamoanchan also serves to identify this 
ancient mother with the goddess Quilaztli who appears as a promi-
nent avatar of the Aztec Terrible Mother Cihuacoatl, discussed be-
low; it is to Quilaztli that Quetzalcoatl brings the bones which she 
grinds up in her “precious jade bowl” to create man in Tamoan-
chan. Thus the Aztec goddesses are linked back to the venerable, 
legitimate mother numen.

The “mask” mentioned repeatedly is of course the mask of hu-
man thigh-skin donned in the ritual by Teteo Innan’s “son,” Cint-
teotl, a god of corn who seems to have represented the ripe ear. 
The Hymn would appear to suggest it is worn by Teteo Innan her-
self but the sense of the word *teomechaue* is more that she is the 
owner or possessor of the mask, not its wearer. At a more general 
level the “masks” of Aztec god-images are the ixiptla, the human 
goddess- impersonators (first victim, then priest wearing the victim’s 
skin) themselves, personae, not merely costumes, the victim adopts, 
becoming visible to men only by masking herself in human form. 
This is the underlying theology of all the various flaying and skin-
donning rituals of the Aztec year, and it asserts a ritual identity be-
tween the god- impersonating victim and the wearer of his or her 
skin.6

The first section of this Hymn also is characterized by the flower 
symbolism so pervasive in Nahuatl lyrical poetry. The yellow and 
white flowers which “had opened the blossom” evoke the creative, 
fecundive powers of the mother earth-spirit throughout the world— 
the four directions. Garibay, referring in part to Seler, has delineated 
the three complexes of reference contained here in the four flowers 
(1971, 118). They are first the literal flowers of spring which festo-
toon the earth to announce the rebirth of life. They are also the 
“flowers of our flesh,” *xochitl tonacayotl*, and sacred, therefore,

6. An identical, if less bloody, ritual theology can still be found today in the 
kachina cults of the Hopi, Zuni, and other traditional Pueblo groups. In all such mask-
ing rituals, the human within does more than simply put on the attire and face of 
the spirit figure; he must also adopt the personality and behavior of that figure.
to Chicomecoatl, “Seven Serpent,” goddess of the vegetables on which our flesh depends—maize most specifically. The flower is jux- taposed to human life again and again in lyric poems to evoke qualities of both brevity and luster, often expressing a uniquely Nahua sense of aesthetic revel hovering just above a landscape of profound tragedy.

Untrue, untrue—that we come to live on the earth;
grass of springtime is on the making of us.
The heart comes freshening and quick, comes blossoming,
the body blooms in several flowers—
they wilt.
So it was said by Tochihuitzin (Cantares mexicanos f. 14v).

Few poetic corpora have cultivated the imagery and vocabulary of natural process so intensively—as opposed to extensively—or celebrated the delight of its contemplation as rapturously as does the Nahuatl, especially in xopancuicatl, the “green songs” or “songs of spring.” The flower became a pure symbol of this rapture above anguish, which eventually becomes synonymous with song (oral lyric poetry) itself: in xochitl in cuicatl “flower and song” in the metonymic image pairs characteristic of the formulaic, formal tec- pillatolli oral style. But the flower was also the “divine flower of the sacrificed,” the flowers the mother consumes, particularly in war, in tribute for the multitude she spawns; this is itzimiquiz- xochitl, “the flowering obsidian death” (FC VI, 14; see Duverger 1983). Rapture could occur on the field of battle as well as by the flowering drum in the courtyard, according to late Aztec aesthetics.

It is this latter aspect of the archetype, the “Terrible Mother” with her hunger for the flower of man’s flesh, which is developed in the second major section of the Hymn to Teteo Innan. Here she is identified as Itzpapalotl, “Butterfly of Obsidian.” This goddess is always described as a specifically Chichimec deity, though iconograph- ically it might appear reasonable for her to have originated somewhere in the religious complexes of Teotihuacan. The butterfly as a stylistic motif in Central Mexican art derives largely from that culture, and Bernal has described the importance of manufacture and trade in obsidian in the growth and influence of that city (“Teo- tihuacan”). In the extant Nahuatl texts, however, Itzpapalotl appears only in association with Chichimec peoples, and the particular hi- erophany referred to here is usually recorded somewhere near the beginning of migration myths. We have already seen one such pas- sage from the Anales de Cuauhtitlan in the above discussion of color orientations. Description of the appearance of a “demon” of some
sort sitting on a teocmitl or barrel cactus (lit. ‘divine pot’), sometimes identified as Itzpapalotl, is found in at least four Nahuatl texts: *The Codex Aubin*, the *Leyenda de los soles*, and the *Cronica mexicayotl*, in addition to the *Anales*. All the mythic references in this section of the Hymn are clarified by the corresponding passages from these texts.

The theme of this event in every case is the initiation of sacrifice among Chichimecs, and the syncretism of Itzpapalotl into the numen of Teteo Innan is a primary contribution of the Aztec ideological revisionism. In the first fragmentary *Anales* text the demon (*tlacatecolotl* ‘human owl’ or a shape-shifting sorcerer) is identified as Itzpapalotl who delivers an order to gather prisoners from the four directions. The instructions to deliver them into the hands of Xiuhtecultli and the three hearth stones is a mandate for fire sacrifice, made explicit in the *Anales* passage quoted above. The *Anales* go on to tell that when the Chichimecs originally came on the Central Mexican scene they were guided by four hundred ‘cloud serpents,’ the *Mimixcoa*, until they arrived on the Nine Plains where Itzpapalotl fell on them and consumed them. The line from the Hymn referring to this event suggests these Cloud Serpents were deer, an implication clarified somewhat in the *Leyenda de los soles* manuscript. According to this account, one *Mixcoaxocoyotl*, or Mixcoatl the Younger, escapes the massacre by hiding in a barrel cactus into which Itzpapalotl pursues him. But he comes out shooting his bow and calling the other *mixcoa* who come to life again, and together they shoot the goddess to death. They then cremate her and anoint themselves with her ashes. All of this, curiously, is said to take place before the Chichimec emergence from *Chicomoztoc*, ‘Seven Caves,’ their mythic place of origin, and even before the counting of years began.

In the *Leyenda* account it is not Itzpapalotl who appears on the barrel cactus but five of the mixcoa. In this version the Four Hundred Mixcoa are born of *Iztacchalechbiubtiicue*, ‘White Jade Skirt,’ in the year 1 Flint. Later five more are born in a cave and are nursed by *Mexitli* who is called ‘Lord of the Earth.’ The Sun himself then calls the Four Hundred, gives them bows and ‘precious arrows’ feathered with quetzal, heron, trupial, white and red spoonbill and blue cotinga plumes and orders them to provide him food and drink. The mixcoa, however, waste all their time shooting birds, sleeping with women, and getting drunk (as the 400 Rabbits this same crowd become revered as gods of drunkenness). In disgust the Sun calls the five later-born mixcoa, giving them the same materials and orders them to destroy the Four Hundred who ‘say nothing to Our Mother,
Our Father.” The Five then appear together on a barrel cactus before the Four Hundred who wonder who they are, so like themselves. The Five hide separately in a tree, in the earth, in a mountain, in the water, and in the ball court. As the Four Hundred pass, the Five fall on them, destroying all but a few, and make sacrifice to the Sun. The few who survive offer their home, the cave Chicomoztoc, as ransom for their lives: “We will only sit by the door.” Obviously, therefore, the Four Hundred mixcoa are associated with the Chichimecs in this account as in the Anales story. The Historia de los mexicanos por sus pinturas manuscript says that the Four Hundred were in fact called “Chichimecs” and were created by Camaxtle (Tezcatlipoca) specifically to provide nutriment for the sun. The same text describes how five persons (one a woman) previously created then descend and settle in a “tree” (the ubiquitous barrel cactus) where they are fed by eagles. Meanwhile Camaxtle invents the maguey wine to which the Four Hundred take with relish. The Five then fall upon the Four Hundred and slay all but three: Xiuhnel, Mimich and Camaxtle himself.

The appearance of Xiuhnel and Mimich gives our first clue to the identity of these names which appear in the final line of the Hymn—they are Chichimec mixcoa or “Cloud Serpent” survivors of the battle with which ritual sacrifice begins. The Hymn seems to presume some mythical complex which involves (a) Chichimec origins as deer (if Itzpapalotl feeds on “hearts of deer” and the offered victims are Chichimecs, then Chichimecs are deer), (b) the names Xiuhnel and Mimich, and (c) the initiation of war for the express purpose of gathering sacrificial victims—the xochiyaoyotl or “flower war.” Immediately following the destruction of the Four Hundred in the Historia por sus pinturas manuscript, there is reference to a two-headed deer which falls from the sky and is taken up by Camaxtle as a sacred emblem. Under its power he wages various battles until the Chichimecs manage to steal it from him. Not until we return to the Leyenda de los soles manuscript, however, is this complex made explicit. The manuscript goes on to tell how, following the sacrifice of the Four-Hundred,

. . . there came down two deer, each with two heads, and also these two mixcoa [“cloud-serpents”] named Xiuhnel and Mimich, who hunt in Godland [the desert areas of the North from which the Chichimecs were thought to have migrated].

Xiuhnel and Mimich pursued the two deer, trying to shoot them.

A night and a day they pursued them and by sunset they were tired.
They consulted each other and said, "You build a hut there, and I'll build one here."

The malicious ones had not yet arrived. Then they came, they who were deer but had become women. They came calling, "Xiubnel, Mimich, where are you? Come, come to drink; come to eat."

And when they heard them they said to one another, "Hey, aren't you going to answer?"

Then Xiubnel called to them and said, "You come here, Sister."

She came and said to him, "Drink, Xiubnel."

Xiubnel drank the blood and then immediately lay down with her.

Suddenly she threw him down and came face down upon him, then devoured him, tore open his breast.

Then Mimich said, "She has actually eaten my elder brother!"

The other woman was still standing and calling, "Lover, come and eat."

But Mimich did not call her. Instead he took the firesticks and lit a fire, and when it was lit, ran and threw himself into it.

The woman, pursuing him, also entered the fire. She followed him there the entire night, until noon of the following day.

And then he descended into a thorny barrel cactus, fell into it, and the woman fell down after him.

And when he saw the star-demon had fallen, he shot her repeatedly.

Only then could he turn back. Then he returned, parting and tying his hair, painting his face and weeping for his elder brother who had been eaten.

Then the fire gods heard it and they went to bring the woman, Itzpapalotl, "Obsidian Butterfly."

Mimich went in the lead. And when they took her, they burned her, and she burst into bloom.

First, she blossomed with the blue flint; The second time she blossomed with the white flint, and they took the white and wrapped it in a bundle.

The third time she blossomed with the yellow flint, but no one took it, they only looked.
The fourth time she blossomed with the red flint which no one took.

And the fifth time she blossomed with the black flint which no one took.

*Mixcoatl* took the white flint for a god and wrapped it and carried it in a bundle, and then went off to make war in a place called Comallan.


This Mixcoatl then goes on to become the father of Ce Acatl Quetzalcoatl, which culminated a mythic sequence from creation of the Mixcoa-Chichimecs to the birth of Ce Acatl. Here Itzpapalotl does not appear on the barrel cactus but falls into it; nor does she order victims for the fire sacrifice but is herself so sacrificed, in a Chichimec analogue to the Fifth Sun myth in which all the gods are sacrificed.

The mythic references of the Hymn’s second section, therefore, might be roughly delineated like this: “The goddess is on the barrel cactus, Our Mother *Itzpapalotl*, where she appeared to us with the mandate for pursuing prisoners in the four directions and for their sacrifice by fire. On the Nine Plains she glutted herself on the hearts of the four hundred cloud-serpent deer, our ancestors. She is Our Mother, the Queen, the spirit of the earth—and equivalent therefore to the ancient Toltec Mother of the Gods, Skirt-of-Stars. With new chalk and new plumage she is annointed as in our first sacrifice of her on the desert, when she exploded into the five fragments of colored flint. She is costumed for war in all of the directions. She herself becomes the deer, the two-headed or paired were-deer who seduced *Xiuhnel* and consumed him, and who pursued *Mimich*...
through the fire until she fell into the barrel cactus and become our sacrifice."

This myth of Xiuhnel, Mimich and Itzpapalotl as the were-deer offers an insight on the Chichimec mythic imagination. It is the only Nahuatl text in which erotic fantasy is specifically related to acts of sacrifice, and it affords an explicitly sexual perspective on the impulse to human sacrifice among the Aztec peoples who transmitted this myth as sacred history (the Leyenda manuscript was apparently recorded in Tenochtitlan since the phrase nican Tenochtitlan "here in Tenochtitlan" occurs on folio 5v). The myth appears to provide a rationale, a charter, for acts of sacrifice as appeasement of a universalized "toothed vagina" fantasy projected onto the earth mother herself.

The vagina dentata fantasy is found explicitly mentioned or enacted in mythologies from the Marquesas to the Amazon, but Neumann notes "the vagina dentata is most distinct in the mythology of the North American Indians" (168). Thompson records at least twenty incidents of this motif in North American texts alone (1966, 309), and more recent reports give it an important role in the myths of the Yanomamò and the Makiritare of the northern Amazon region (Chagnon 1983; de Civeraux, 1980). The myth of Xiuhnel and Mimich clearly enacts such a fantasy in the seduction of the savage attack upon Xiuhnel by the "sister"8 of Itzpapalotl with, it seems unavoidable to suggest, the heart being substituted for the male genital, and the literal mouth of the goddess replacing the metaphoric mouth of the vagina dentata. Mimich escaped, but since this tale became a tribal myth, it must have been understood that in some sense the goddess, transformed to the multicolored flint into which her body exploded, continued to pursue all Chichimecs. If this fantasy was adopted as representative of some encompassing anxiety in the Chichimec identity (otherwise we would not have the myth) then some answer, some response to, or appeasement of the pursuing Obsidian Butterfly was needed. That fire provided Mimich his escape suggests it might be a useful medium of ritual protection, and we have seen above in the Anales passages that fire did become an essential part of sacrifice to this goddess. If she wanted hearts, then certainly the way to protect one's own was to offer her someone else's. The war which Mixcoatl goes off to create, carrying the swaddled white flint fragment of Itzpapalotl, is a direct consequence of the encounter between Xiuhnel, Mimich, and the were-deer. It

8. This "sister" disappears thereafter and so must be a nabual, a magical double, of Itzpapalotl.
is the mythic prototype of the first *xochiyaoyotl* or "sacrificial flower war" intended to gather "hearts and flowers" in propitiation of the goddess's ambivalent appetite. Seen this way, the "flower wars," a very important institution of fifteenth century Nahua society, becomes an elaborate displacement of masculine anxiety from the female sexuality before which it is generated to the battlefield where it is enacted and then to the temple ritual where it is appeased in fire and blood. It would appear to be a male dominated development from start to finish.

Recalling the clear identification by Sahagún's informants of Teteo Innan-Toci as an earth-mother figure, we can see now in the syncretism of Itzpapalotl-Teteo Innan a specific case of the vagina dentata projection which Eliade claims is found throughout world mythology:

... A number of South American iconographic motifs represent the mouth of Mother Earth as a vagina dentata. ... It is important to note that the ambivalence of the chthonian Great Mother is sometimes expressed, mythically and iconographically, by identifying her mouth with the vagina dentata (63). 9

In this case the projection is specifically employed as a divine charter for the initiation of a systematic pursuit and sacrifice of human offerings. Obviously, this is not to suggest that human sacrifice among the Nahua peoples has its genesis in a single perverse, male erotic fantasy. I believe, however, that this little narrative is as significant for the Chichimec tradition as the Five Ages myth is for the "high" Toltec traditions. This is an explicitly Chichimec myth and the psychoemotional complex it imagizes can only relate to those tribes who describe themselves as having come out of the mythic "Seven caves" to the north and share the cult of Itzpapalotl. These anxieties have nothing to do with the penitential theology of the Five Ages myth and its attendant sacrifice, apparently the more ancient and universal complex throughout Mesoamerica. As these Chichimecs infiltrated and assumed the more classic traditions of Central Mexico, however, it seems this masculine anxiety was one of their lasting contributions. In the Hymn to Teteo Innan it has been cathected on to the figure of the ancient Mother of the Gods, and in Hymn 13 to Cihuacoatl it will reach the full flower of Aztec conception.

9. This projection becomes even more firmly identified when we notice the obsession of Durán's and Sahagún's informants with the mouth and teeth of Cihuacoatl/Coatlicue.
It is "the destructive side of the Feminine, the destructive and deathly womb," says Neumann, "[that] appears most frequently in the archetypal form of a mouth bristling with teeth" (168), and he points to an image of Cihuacoatl-Ilamatecutli "Old Woman Lord" in the *Codex Magliabecchiano*, arrayed with a skull mask and various flint knives, as a fine figure of this symbol. (Figures 6 & 7) According to traditional psychoanalytic theory, one of the rationales in the psychogenesis of male homosexuality is a castration anxiety generated by the fantasy that the female genital is in some way an

![Figure 6 Cihuacoatl
Codex Magliabecchiano](image-url)
oral castrating instrument (Friedman 594–5). Psychiatric definitions of homosexuality have considerably deviated from the classical Freudian terms, of course, and the mythic use of an erotic fantasy is usually well removed from the individual or personal use of it. It is interesting to note, however, that although ritual and social homosexuality seem to have been widespread throughout the Americas, in the Aztec cities it was brutally punished. The Code of Nezahualcoyotl (1402–1472) of Tetzcoco provides the following for convicted homo-erotics:

Figure 7 Cihuacoatl
From the "Atlas" of Durán
The active agent [of the couple] was tied to a pole and all the young men of the city covered him with ashes in such a way that he was buried, and the passive one had his entrails pulled out through the anus before being likewise buried in ashes (Ixtlilxochitl, vol III: 187–8).

In Ixtlilxochitl’s account this is first in the list of Nezahualcoyotl’s “eighty ordinances,” and the author notes that “the nefarious sin was punished with the greatest rigor.” Even discounting some exaggeration on Ixtlilxochitl’s part, desirous to impress a Spanish audience with the virtue of his ancestors, the brutal sadism of this penalty argues a certain repressive quality behind its invention.

What we find in the Hymn to Teteo Innan, then, are fragments of Chichimec desert mythology grafted onto the more “ancient” and venerable “Toltec” images of a mother earth spirit. The identity of this earth spirit as Toci “Our Grandmother” seems to be a specifically Mexica development. This name does not appear in the text of the Hymn to Teteo Innan but both Durán and Sahagún give it as one of the three names by which the earth mother was identified in the rituals of Ochpaniztli: Mother of the Gods, Heart of the Earth, Our Grandmother. Durán gives it as the principal name when reporting that ritual, described above. It is also Durán, in the first volume of his Historia, who specifies the connection between this image and Mexica mythic history.

Toci was considered to be the mother of the gods. She was the daughter of the King of Colhuacan whom the Aztecs, shortly before their arrival in this land, had desired to marry to Huitzilopochtli. She had been killed, skinned, and then her image adorned as a goddess. From this had come enmity and war between the Aztecs and Colhuacan (245).

In other words, we are referred to that self-defining event late in the Mexica migration myth, when while living as near slaves among the Colhua, the Mexica priests, directed by Huitzilopochtli, request the daughter of King Achicometl that they “might do her honor as a goddess.” The honor they did was to flay her, dress a priest in her skin, then invite her father to worship. What he saw when the incense flared up in the dark temple drove him mad for revenge, a revenge which propelled the Mexica into their final swampy resort in the marshes of Lake Tetzcoco. This event is reported in the migration account of Tezozómoc’s Cronica Mexicayotl. In that account Toci is called Yaocihuatl, “Enemy Women.” Her “coming” is foretold by Huitzilopochtli who says he will take her for a wife. The installation of this cult to Toci-Teteo Innan is an act of cultural appropriation on the part of the Mexica in which they take on Toltec
legitimacy by theft of the cult from the Colhua who were considered legitimate scions of the true Toltecs.10

The huehuetlatolli texts ("discourses of the elders") of the Florentine Codex, particularly those relative to childbirth, reveal a final aspect of the image of Teteo Innan which must have been among the most ancient elements of her character. In Chapter 27 of Book VI we find recorded the elaborate interchanges between midwife and family of a girl about to give birth, regarding responsibility and assistance in the birth. In the first response of the midwife to the family we find this paragraph:

And now truly you cry out, you call out, you summon Ticitl, Teteo Innan, Tonan, Yoalticitl—"The Midwife, Mother of the Gods, Our Mother, Midwife of Darkness"—who governs, in whose hand and protection is the Flower House, known on earth as the "sweatbath." There Teci[Toci?], Yoalticitl, provides for one, adorns one, fortifies one. In her hand, in her lap, and upon her back you have placed your necklace, your quetzal feather [the pregnant girl], along with whatever she may be arrayed in, whatever the Omnipresent Lord may have arrayed her in, whatever he has placed within her (FC VI, 153).

As patroness of midwives, the Mother of the Gods is herself midwife to all human existence. The name "Midwife of Darkness" identifies her as a maieutic force by whose agency being is formed out of nothing: yoal—"darkness" is the generic Nahuatl root whose function corresponds roughly to the notions of preformal chaos in Homer and Hesiod, with the very significant difference that the Nahuas give no evidence of needing any preformal matter from which to make their something. Ex nihilo nihil appears not to have been a Nahua conviction.11 The special sweat house which served as a delivery room was known as the xochicalli "flower house," a name invoking all the levels of the flower-human metaphor described above, with the added, Aztec doctrinal innovation that made giving birth, the "siezing of a man," the ideological equivalent of capturing a prisoner of the field of battle (Sullivan 1966).

10. "Parece lógico suponer que los mexicas hayan adaptado ceremonias de los culhuas durante su dependencia política de ellos, y que estos ritos hayan sobrevivido en la fiesta de Ochpaniztli" (Broda, "Consideraciones," 106).

11. The use of the phrase in iooayan (translated variously as "in the beginning," "in the darkness," "before the day begins") to indicate both the condition of the universe previous to creation of the Fifth Sun and the condition of a human identity previous to birth is evidence of the Nahua belief that ontology recapitulates not phylogeny but cosmogony. This term plays some part in the Nahua conception of man's natural moral condition.
In a final, culminating evocation of the mother numen, after the anointing ceremony, addresses the cradle itself as *Yoalticitl*:

You who are Mother of us all, You who are
*Yoalticitl*, you with the cradling arms, you
with the lap: the baby has arrived.

It is at this moment of deepest tenderness and intimacy that the plea for benevolence at the hands of an ambivalent deity is most poignant; as she laid the baby in it, the midwife said to the cradle, "Honored Mother, receive it. Beloved Old Woman, do not do anything to the baby; be gentle with it."

**Cihuacoatl, Her Song**

There is a second Hymn in the same Sahagún texts which describes another avatar of this image of the celestial-telluric Mother of the Gods/Skirt of Stars/Obsidian Butterfly. Hymn 13 is entitled *Cihuacoatl Icuic* "Woman-Snake, Her Song" and appears to celebrate a goddess whose cult was especially strong in the region to the south of Lake Tetzcoco which incorporated the neo-Toltec city of Colhuacan, the Chichimec dynasties of Chalco-Amaquemecan, and the chinampa city of Xochimilco. As in the Hymn to Teteo Innan, the image here bears traces of syncretism, again possibly at the hand of Mexica-Aztec cult revisionists. I have already quoted above Anderson's opinion that Teteo Innan and Cihuacoatl were "somewhat different aspects of a single deity," but the image of the latter is of special importance since it seems to provide the Mexica-Aztecs the direct antecedent for their own image of Huitzilopochtli's mother, Coatlicue, culminating avatar of the devouring mother.

Garibay calls this "certainly the best of the agricultural poems from the pre-Hispanic past with which [I] am acquainted," and the vehement exuberance with which all sorts of war, sacrifice, agriculture and fertility imagery get heaped together in this Hymn probably merits such a judgment. The telluric aspects of Teteo Innan and the predatory hungers of Itzpapalotl both hover in the background of the Hymn to Cihuacoatl like the lines of a palimpsest. The "sweeping" of line 5 invokes the symbolic brooms of the ritual of the Mother of Gods, while the references to Mixcoatl and the deer of Colhuacan recall the ominous shape-shifting Butterfly of Obsidian. Already prefigured in several of the appearances of Itzpapalotl on the barrel cactus, the eagle identity with its war-ritual accoutrements is the determining feature of Cihuacoatl. In fact, according to a passage in Torquemada, she may be a product of a tribal or clan variant
of that Chichimec account. According to this story in the *Monarquía indiana*, sometime during the course of the Aztec migrations a “sorceress” named Quilaztli transforms herself to an eagle and appears to two Aztec hunters. They are about to shoot her when she reveals herself. They are disgusted and unimpressed. Later she tries again to frighten them, and dressed as a warrior, tells them: “I am forceful and manly, and in my names you will be made to see who I am and my great strength. For though you know me as Quilaztli, I have four other names by which I am known: one is *Cohuacihuatl*, which means ‘Snake Woman’; another is *Cuauhxicihuatl*, which means ‘Eagle Woman’; another is *Yoaçihuatl*, which means ‘Warrior Woman’; and the fourth is *Tzitzimicihuatl*, which means ‘Infernal Woman’” (80–81). We have seen the name Yaocihuatl above as a sobriquet applied by the Mexica to Toci, their personal avatar of the Mother of the Gods acquired in the person of the princess of Colhuacan. The usage of this Hymn to Cihuacoatl likely antedates the Mexica appropriation, however, and suggests that their Toci was taken from this particular regional variant of the Mother who came later to acquire an important cult of her own.

That Cihuacoatl was fully differentiated from Teteo Innan at the time of the conquest is made clear by the descriptions of ritual and idol adornment in Sahagún and Durán. For the informants of both priestly ethnographers, the Snake Woman was foremost in immediate potentiality among goddesses, clearly more ominous than Teteo Innan. She is listed first among the descriptions of feminine divinities. Sahagún’s informants say of her:

The savage Cihuacoatl: She was horrific, terrifying, and brought men misery. For it was said she gave men the hoe, the tumpline; thus she forced men [to work]. And in this way she showed herself to men, she appeared to men: like a lady of court she was wrapped in white, garbed in white, in the purest white. Her hairdo was tightly wound and rose in two horns above her head. At night she went weeping, went about as a dreaded sorceress, which was also an omen of war (FC I, 3).

The informant adds that her face was painted half red, half black, that she wore also golden earplugs, a cape, and eagle feather headdress (the “eagle-plumes” of the Hymn) and carried a turquoise weaving stick. Her aspect as a numen of agricultural labor, very significant for the Hymn, identifies her with the earth and Teteo Innan, as does her whiteness. Durán mentions the second name, Quilaztli, and calls her “the main goddess . . . [who] though she was the special goddess of Xochimilco [at the south end of Lake Tetzcoco], was revered and greatly exalted in Mexico, Tezcoco, and all the land.”
(1971, 210) The informant especially remembered the open mouth and ferocious teeth of the idol and the drawings which accompany Durán’s text emphasize that feature (See Figure 7). Her feast fell in the eight Nahua month, *Huey Tecuilhuitl*, on a day Durán correlates as July 18.

Fire sacrifice was the feature of her ritual. An hour before dawn on the day of festival, four prisoners were tossed, one at a time, onto the coals of a huge brazier which had blazed for four days, like the mythic hearth in which *Nanahuatzin* threw himself to become the sun in the Five Ages Myth. Before the victim could die they dragged him out and extracted the heart in the usual manner. This was done, not on the open pyramid, but within a room before the dark chamber Tlillan, in which the idols were kept, with the female surrogate-victim of Quilaztl-Cihuacoatl seated in the place of honor. When the four fire victims had been slain, she was thrown across their bodies, her throat slit, her heart extracted, and her blood collected to anoint all the idols in the neighboring chamber and to scatter finally over the brazier. After the sacrifice, the priests of Cihuacoatl performed their one penitential act of the year. These priests were unique in Nahua ritual in that they performed no blood letting or penance of any kind until this feast day. On this day they came from all wards of the city, set the idol of their ward before the brazier, then sat before it holding a burning incense torch aloft in each hand, letting the hot resin run down their arms and over their naked bodies. When the torches were extinguished, each tore the caked resin from his skin and threw it into the brazier with other bundles of incense, dancing around the smoking fire “intoning chants about fire and sacrifice,” of which the Hymn to Cihuacoatl was undoubtedly one. If so, the “thorns” of lines 11 and 12 cannot be the customary, literal blood-coated thorns of penitential self-sacrifice, as Seler believed and in which Garibay concurred, since these priests never used such thorns. By metaphoric extension, however, they might serve as images of the burning torches and boiling resin which, for the priest of Cihuacoatl, equated a year's worth of the bloodied thorns and straws of other penitents. In this sense the singer's burning hands truly were “full” of thorns. This interpretation does not necessarily exclude the suggestion of the original annotator, followed by Garibay, that both thorns and grass broom are images of the *buitlli* or planting stick (known in Spanish as the *coa*) which is in turn figured in the ritual timbrelled staff of lines 10, 14 and 17. The broom, of course, recalls the ritual sweeping of Teteo Innan.

The imagery of agricultural process is invoked in this Hymn in
terms of human sexuality. The phallic associations of the planting stick are too obvious and universal to require documentation, and the identification of the timbrelled staff as a phallic symbol in Central Mexico can be supported by various representations in the pictographic codices: Codex Borgia, plate 9, shows a human couple lying together under a blanket and between them the sign chicabuaztli, the timbrelled staff. In the Hymn to Tlaloc this instrument is mentioned in magical association with the fecund powers of the god, embodied in the thunder and lightning. Garibay’s comments are succinct: “Not without reason the Nahuatl text of the informants of Sahagún called the trimbelled staff nabualcuahuitl, which is ‘magic staff,’ since out of its movement springs life—in field work with the planting stick, in human union with the phallus” (1958, 145). It is the Quilaztli name in line 1, taken from quilitl “edible green plants,” that invokes the agricultural powers implicit in the image of Cihuacoatl.

The most explicit sexual imagery of the Hymn appears to come in lines 21–22 when the goddess says “Let him fill me/he my prince Mixcoatl,” apparently a personification of the earth invoking the “fecund action of the sun” in the figure Mixcoatl. “The earth asks for seed, the woman asks for life,” Garibay interprets. But it must be noted that, while there can be little question of the sexual imagery in the Hymn, the question of consciousness of this imagery in the minds of Nahua singer and listener is significant for consideration of those psychic and poetic complexes which form the relationships between sexuality and human sacrifice (relationships put before us implicitly in this Hymn rather than explicitly as in the mythic narrative of Xiuhnel and Mimich). With the exception of this final reference to “filling,” all of the phallic associations in the Hymn depend on some extra-textual allusion. The original commentator never goes beyond pointing out the multiple metaphor of the thorn-planting stick-timbrelled staff. In fact, it is far more likely that in the conscious mind of the singer the timbrelled staff which supports the maize ear in the divine field was nothing more—or less—than the stalk itself whose “timbrels” were the brown leaves rustling against one another. Even the “filling” might be interpreted without any conscious recourse to sexual activity. The appetite of this terrible mother was notoriously insatiable, as Sahagún’s informant notes and Durán recounts in detail. Year round, the latter reports, priests maintained the brazier in honor of her and

... went once a week to visit the sovereigns and warn them that the goddess was famished. Then the rulers provided the repasts: a captive taken in war, to be eaten by the goddess. He was led to the temple and delivered
to the priests, who took the prisoner and thrust him into the chamber of Cihuacoatl. He was slain in the usual way: his heart was extracted and offered up.

In other words, the “filling” of this goddess was almost certainly associated first with her mouth in the mind of the Aztec devotee, and most probably understood as an appetite for sacrificial victims. We have already seen ample evidence of Mixcoatl as prototype of the Chichimec warrior ranging to the four corners of the compass collecting victims for his goddess; his literal war arrow is probably all that is meant by the composer here. No explicit phallic reference need be intended, though it is obviously implicit.

In fact, both the description of the cult and the text of Hymn 13 suggest Cihuacoatl is a direct descendent of the figure with whom Chichimec sacrifice mythically begins: Itzpapalotl, in whom we have seen Chichimec imagination transforming libido into appetite for sacrifice and war by way of a toothed vagina fantasy. The fire sacrifice (a direct command of Itzpapalotl in the Anales de Cuauhtitlan), the deer identity (lines 25 and 31), the eagle identity (lines 1, 4, 18, and 34), and the devotion of Mixcoatl (lines 20–22) all directly reflect the accounts of Itzpapalotl’s hierophanies. The name 13-Eagle in line 18 is the calendrical name of the 13-day trecena ruled by Itzpapalotl in the 260-day tonalpoalli round (Codex Telleriano-Remensis, f. 18). (Figure 8) Furthermore, the fantasy of sexual consumption is inflated to an impression of insatiable hunger in the cult of Cihuacoatl. As I have suggested, numerous aspects of Itzpapalotl’s image suggest the transfer of masculine sexual anxiety into a fantasy of literal feminine aggression. The statement of Quilaztli as eagle to the Aztec hunters—“I am forceful and manly”—underlines that impression. The emphasis on the mouth and teeth of Cihuacoatl in the memories of all informants and the torn thigh of the sacrificial victim further confirm a toothed vagina fantasy displaced to the mouth and glorified into ritual. If Durán is correct in suggesting that the victims of Cihuacoatl constituted the majority of all sacrifices12 and her cult was a motive force in the creation of the ritual “Flower Wars,” then these emotional complexes might be causal factors of some significance in late Aztec ideology. The “Flower Wars” could then be seen as elaborate occasions for the defense of a threatened masculinity and relief of an exaggerated castration anxiety; the captured victim becomes propitiation offered on the warrior’s behalf to the goddess’s appetite. Of course complexes such as this cannot

12. There is no particular evidence to support, or refute, this suggestion. See González Torres.
be evoked to explain the origins or conscious justifications of human sacrifice in Central Mexico generally, but they do suggest a source of the specific urgency, even desperation, with which the Aztec reformers infused the ancient penetential and sacrifice theologies.

For all of these reasons it is doubtful that the singers of the Hymn were conscious of the sexual imagery which annotators have found so readily accessible. What Hymn 13 ostensibly proclaims is the supposedly intimate relation between earthly fertility and human acts of war and sacrifice: the earth-fertility numen, Quilaztli, towering protectress of the Chalmeca who maintains the precious maize erect in its mythic holy field, Tonacaacxolman, is one and the same as the sacrificial eagle, the consuming and warring sun, the were-deer of Colhuacan, consumed and consuming— in short, Our Mother Yaocihuatl, "Enemy Woman." But from the perspective of four centuries we can see that the apparent vehicle of sexual imagery is in
fact the unconscious tenor of the agricultural fertility-human sexuality metaphor, and the real subject of the Hymn to Cihuacoatl is the relationship between the impulse to war and the veiled, unconscious fantasies of castration at the mouth of the Terrible Mother. “Let men be dragged forth; all will be destroyed!” she cries, and the over-awed warrior priest, believing he addresses the sun, replies “Ahuiya! She of the eagle plumes, unmasked, Ahuiya!/The rising one, unmasked.”

**Chimalpanecatl, His Song**

There is another brief Hymn which describes the emotional transfer or cathexis of psychic energy from the mother to the son, Huitzilopochtli, in a quick but potent flourish of symbols. This Hymn is called *Chimalpanecatl Icuic Yoan Tlatecahua Nanoti*, He Upon the Shield, His Song, and Master of Maternity’s Field of Labor,” and is found fifth in the series of the Sahagún collections, following the Hymn to Teteo Innan.

The investiture of masculinity in “The Grand Captain of War” described by this brief Hymn is absolute, and the original annotator makes the symbolism of line 7 almost explicit when he points out that the full verb should be *omoquichquetz*, “he stood up like a man.” The entire second stanza refers directly to the terrifying attack of Huitzilopochtli upon his brothers, the “400 Southerners,” moments after his birth. It was in the guise of the mother of Huitzilopochtli that the figure of the Terrible Mother achieved her last, furious flowering in Mesoamerica, supplying motive and inspiration for that touchstone of Aztec plastic arts with which we began, the statue of Coatlicue now preserved in the National Museum of Anthropology at Mexico City with its badly damaged twin *Yolloiucue*, “Skirt of Hearts.” Monolithic and awesome, its ability to draw all symbols into itself has attracted the best efforts of various pre-Columbian art critics. Justino Fernández pretends to have discovered in the visual form of Coatlicue a representation not only of the entire Nahua cosmology but of its principal deities as well. His reading, which often treats very general formal qualities as specific symbols, does derive from the Mexica aesthetic a realization vital to any reading of the poetry, a conception almost too literal and too simple for us to grasp, but one which opens the late Aztec self-conception like no other single recognition.

The being of the beauty of Coatlicue is the being of Warrior . . . . It was the Warrior beauty that illuminated a spiritual world anguished in life, more
assured by the heroic death of the Warrior and the pregnant mother who were both reborn in new forms. Because of this, the peculiar state of the beauty of Coatlicue is between life and death, and for that we are moved by its dramatic, tragic, solemn, dynamic, and inflexible force as the ultimate meaning of life, of death—moribundity, which was, and is, as much of men as of stars and gods (578).

For the Mexica-Aztec who believed in the horrific birth of Huitzilopochtli out of the awesome bowels of Coatlicue, the actions of birth and death were one and the same. Throughout the huehuetlatolli (discourse of the elders) texts, giving birth is described as “seizing a man (a prisoner),” and the women who died in childbirth, the cihuateteo or “goddesses,” were declared, in Aztec doctrine, to ascend to the Heaven of the Sun where each noon they took charge of the sun from the dead warriors who had met it at sunrise, and accompanied it to Cihuatlampa, “Place of the Women,” where it set each day in the west. The pernicious influence of these women is the source of the fourth name Quilaztli gave herself in the account of Torquemada, Tzitzimicihuatl or “Demon Woman;” these spirits were thought to descend on certain nights of the year with skulls for heads and equipped with claws and talons, threatening all passersby, especially at crossroads.

This sense of identity between birth and death may be another consequence of late Aztec ideological revision, this time of the classical faith in transcendence and apotheosis described in the Hymn of Teotihuacan.13 There had once been, the fifteenth century Nahua apparently believed, a way to balance harmoniously all the warring forces which composed his being and his society, a way to recover the mythic, timeless stasis of which his histories spoke, the illo tempore of those marvelous people, the Toltecs. But it was a way he had for the most part lost, and within the confines of the revised symbolism of Coatlicue, his nostalgic dynamism could find a new ritual channel: war as worship:

13. “They called [the city] Teotihuacan, ‘Where We Become Gods,’ because there they interred their lords. Accordingly they taught: ‘When we die, we do not lose our life but remain alive and awaken to a new joy.’ They addressed the corpse, invoking it as a divinity, with the name ‘pheasant’ if male or ‘owl’ if female:

‘Wake up: The sky reddens, dawn shows itself there, already the pheasants of flame, the swallows have returned.’ ” (FC X, 192)

This text appears twice in the manuscripts of Sahagún. If the attribution of the informants has any validity, it would be the oldest recorded poetic fragment in the Americas.
Movement of generation as struggle, contrariety as war; this is being, existence. The being of the Gods' existence is being warrior. And man couldn't help but be similar to the gods; for this reason his fundamental activity is war, which brings the sacrifice of life as means both of personal apotheosis and maintenance of the gods. Thus, the being of the existence of man is also being warrior (Fernández 576).

Westheim, whose comments on the statue of Coatlicue are quoted at the opening of this discussion, interprets the imagery of the name, "Skirt of Snakes," as reference to the totality of living creatures which crawl over her body, the earth. This provides a clear distinction from the ancient, more removed Teteo Innan whose principal characteristic is her "Skirt of Stars." In accord with the "mythic realism" which Westheim believes characterizes the attitude of all pre-Columbian art—apparent, of course, only by contrast with European traditions—he notes the proliferation of careful naturalistic detail (snake heads, claws, severed hands, human hearts) lavished on a "surrealistic," visionary shape in which there is only the vaguest insinuation of the human form. "The sculptor wished to express something greater, something that would transcend all human concepts. To relate it to the human would be to belittle it, to take away its strength." It is exactly in this light we must read the "human" imagery of birth in Hymn 5. This is not a painful, humble, human birth like that of the "Son of Jesse" upon which Western history grounds its linear sense of self, its 0 A.D., but the totally painless and superhuman springing forth of the "Horrific Prodigy" to beat history back into some continual and hopefully eternal mythic pattern of cyclic repetitions. The end pursued by such an aesthetic, Westheim notes, "is not limitation of the fantasy by bringing the work closer to reality, but excitation of the fantasy." In contrast to the Greek goal of "purification of passion," this art strives to inspire an "unchaining [of] psychic religious force, a detachment from self," and extinction of self in the spiritual experience, a mystical ecstasy. This same aesthetics of ecstasy thoroughly permeates the cuauhtzcuiatl or "eagle songs" of the Cantares mexicanos manuscript and aptly describes the tone of this brief Hymn on the birth of Huitzilopochtli. Nurturing a cult of ecstatic awe around the figures of a solar sacrificial ideology would clearly have been functional and necessary if we hypothesize a small cadre of Aztec revisionists anxious to impress and inspire a general Mexica populace with the need for sustained war.

I have outlined from three poetic texts an immensely multivalent Central Mexican numen corresponding generally to Jung's mother archetype—and there are further avatars of her hardly mentioned...
here, which, while significant in other contexts, do not play important roles in the mythic texts at hand. The general work of the Mexica-Aztec revisionists in these texts appears to be this: Over an ancient “Toltec” great mother goddess—Citlalicue/Tonacacihuatl/Tecolliquenqui/Tlallichcatl for those Toltecs, Teteo Innan in later times, and Toci for the Mexica—who is a celestial progenitress and protectress, spinner of destiny and the life cycle, spirit and source of earthly fertility (and as Lady of Mictlan, an underworld, voracious consumer of the dead), was laid the Chichimec mother and deer goddess Itzpapalotl whose most enduring feature was her implicit threat to masculine sexuality, a threat which could be propitiated by the offering of human prisoners taken in war. The syncretism of these images seems to have produced the awesome Cihuacoatl from whom the Mexica appropriated the nature, characteristics, and attributes of Coatlicue, the mother of their patron, Huitzilopochtli. Nahuat mythography reaches a kind of culmination in the Mexica figure of Coatlicue. Only through examination of the texts of the Toltec dispensation, with its man-god hero Ce Acatl Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl, and the Tenochca-Mexica migration myth, the specific charter myth of the Huitzilopochtli cult and the solar state religion, does the full outline of this revisionist ideology become clear. By channeling the nutritive powers of Cihuacoatl to himself (as sun) and compensating with his exaggerated aggressiveness for the sexual anxiety aroused by her, Huitzilopochtli needed only to appropriate the salvationist features of the penetential cult to Quetzalcoatl/Tlahuizcalpantecutli “Plumed Serpent/Lord of the House of Dawn,” a Venus cult, to become the vortex of all spiritual powers known to the Mexica. How the revisionists accomplished this latter usurpation is seen most clearly in the myth of Copil recorded in the Cronica mexicayotl.

Neumann (147–148) suggests a less historically focused understanding of these mother images, however. The “‘Terrible Female,’” he says, “is always a symbol for the unconscious” and does not spring from anxiety complexes of men only but expresses an archetypal experience of the whole species, male and female alike. Furthermore, the image of the Terrible Mother originates as inner experience of the individual and cannot be derived from the actual or evident attributes of any woman, nor does the dominance of an archetypally feminine worldview in any society necessarily imply female economic or political domination in that society. Rather, in a vaguely historical and sequential process that varies greatly in time span among actual historical cultures, the Great Mother, of which the Terrible Female is a specific variant, emerges as a phase in the
evolution of human self consciousness out of the unconscious. In parallel ontogenic and phylogenetic processes, the development of consciousness occurs in four “phases”: embryonic containment in the mother (consciousness indistinguishable from the unconscious); childlike dependence on the mother; relation of the beloved son to the Great Mother; and the heroic struggle of the male hero against the Great Mother (148). “The dialectical relation of consciousness to the unconscious takes the symbolic mythological form of a struggle between the Maternal-Feminine and the male child” with the emerging strength of the male corresponding to the increasing power of self consciousness in cultural history. This is true of women as well as men, since consciousness is universally experienced as ‘male’ and the unconscious as ‘female.’ These phases Neumann roughly labels the uroboric, the Great Mother (encompassing the middle two), and the dragon fight.

The Terrible Mother, then, is that aspect of the unconscious which manifests itself as a powerful psychic gravity seeking always to absorb the emerging self-consciousness back into itself, a desire which the emerging self experiences as a hunger for its physical death: “Thus the womb of the earth becomes the deadly devouring maw of the underworld . . . for this woman who generates life and all living things on earth is the same who takes them back into herself, who pursues her victims and captures them with snare and net. Disease, hunger, hardship, war above all are her helpers, and among all peoples, the goddesses of war and the hunt express man’s experience of life as a female exacting blood. This Terrible Mother is the hungry earth . . . ” (149), and her avatar “always includes the uroboric snake woman, the woman with the phallus” (170). In several pages of highly provocative analysis (185–208), Neumann seeks to apply this to what he knew of Aztec mythology.

While Aztec society as described in the sixteenth century sources is clearly “patriarchal,” Neumann believes, it just as clearly shows signs of “an originally Matriarchal constellation . . . overlaid by patriarchal institutions” (185). The Aztec religious political arrangement, in fact, “is highly instructive for the history of human development,” Neumann asserts, representing an archaic stage in which “the men as warriors stood in the service of the female godhead, to whom they offered blood sacrifices; and thus it remained in Aztec culture, although the political-social-extraverted dominance had already been taken over by the male group”—though, again, these gender labels refer to psychic principles and not to any male or female dominance in social or political orders (186). Of course, Mexica religion and its social linkages are far too complex to be captured by a description of this sort, and Neumann’s commentary
suffers the disadvantage of distance from the primary sources; never-
theless, his comments on the complexes of blood sacrifice, dismem-
berment, agricultural fertility, corn, and obsidian—all conspicuous
elements in the Hymns of Teteo Innan, Cihuacoatl, and Chimal-
panecatl and their—attendant myths—offer an interpretive under-
standing of fifteenth century Mexica revisionism which will help
us avoid the illusions of a too facile faith in the sheer conscious plot-
ting of a few brilliant ideologues.

In his own review of the Ochpaniztli rituals of Toci described
above, Neumann concentrates on the fertility theme: in the back-
ground of the festival is the sacred marriage of mother and son, and
“it is the birth of corn that is represented in these strange rites”
(194). But the links between plant fertility, heart sacrifice, and ca-
stration anxiety that Neumann points out in this iconography spe-
cifically reinforce the analysis I have given above, particularly in
the Itzpapalotl theme and in the Cihuacoatl Hymn. “In incest with
his mother the hero begets himself” (198): the goddess Teteo Innan-
Toci spreads herself before the image of Huitzilopochtli; Cihuacoatl
calls to Mixcoatl, “Let him fill me.” But the wages of such power
is death, and the familiar Old World principle of the dying male who
succumbs to the great Mother finds a new twist in America: not only
is the young, phallic “Adonis-son” slain by the Terrible Mother, but
also his mature form, the warrior. And the fertility imagery outlines
a symbolism in which “cutting out of the heart is identical with the
husking of the corn” (corn is a phallic fertility image [196]), and,
that invokes the act of giving birth. Since giving birth was the
mythic equivalent of taking a prisoner in revisionist Aztec ideology,
“we must ask whether [this] strange mode of expressing feminine
life was taken over from the male ritual of sacrifice or whether the
male ritual of sacrifice imitates the fundamental situation of female
life” (202). Indeed, the mythic equation between birth and capture
also reverses to define the captor as the captive’s “mother and
father.” In the brief Hymn 5 we see the birth of a warrior-son, half
identical with his mother, and representing the masculine heroic
principle and its renewal, but, Neumann suggests, in late Aztec for-
mulation, “the subordination of all heroes of light [of sun] to the
regenerative power of the great and Terrible Mother constellates
[a] conflict between the Terrible Mother lurking in the background
and the patriarchal consciousness of the Aztecs” (200). The con-
fusion between these two modes of consciousness generates the unique
ideological landscape of late Aztec religion: “and fertility forms a
unit with sacrifice of the phallus, castration, and blood” (200).

Husking the corn, extracting the heart, is in this ideological al-
gebra castration, mutilation, and sacrifice of the essential male part.
At the same time it is birth and a life-giving deed for the benefit of the world of mankind (203). So we can see that the rituals of Toci blending fertility, growth, harvest, parturition, and patriotic warfare all grow (mytho)logically from the elements found initially together in the little charter narrative of Xiuhnel, Mimich and the goddess Itzpapalotl. Commenting specifically on the Hymn to Teteo Innan, Neumann points out that in it we see a transformation of the Great Goddess from an obsidian goddess of the hunt, of blood and night, to an earth goddess (191), though as I have shown, this transformation is effected by a specific syncretism between Teteo Innan and Itzpapalotl, probably an invention of the Mexica-Aztecs.

The son of her fertility [Cinteotl in the rituals of Ochpaniztli] now became the corn, which was identical with the obsidian knife [he wears the black, knife-shaped hat]—and she herself became the fertility goddess of the corn. But her old terrible nature persisted, for fertility, death, and sacrifice belong together, and the husking of the corn is identical with the tearing out of the heart from the victim with the help of the obsidian knife (191).

The extraordinary vitality of the archetype of the Terrible Mother among the Aztecs, Neumann suggests, reveals “a terror of death resembling that of the Egyptians” (189), and in their rituals we find a survival of the earliest cult relationships between the Great Mother and her sacrificial son who is both beloved fecundator and victim. None of this should be understood to contradict the more historically focused analysis of early fifteenth century Mexica ideological revisionism exemplified by Conrad and Demarest which I have applied to the Hymns of Teteo Innan, Cihuacoatl, and Chimalpahucatl. While it is clear that the specifically Aztec constellations of Teteo Innan/Toci/Cihuacoatl/Coatlicue/Itzpapalotl cannot be preserved vestiges of ancient cult relationships (Neumann is simply inadequately informed on this point), the dynamic syncretisms perpetuated by the extended family of Mexica pipiltin under Itzcoatl would seem, on the basis of Neumann’s comparative analysis, to include something quite beyond self-conscious scheming to motivate and later justify imperial ambitions. In Neumann’s particular evolutionary terms, we see the Mexica-Aztecs (or at least that extended family of pipiltin which I have hypothesized may be responsible for the religious icons so crucial to the late solarized state religion), through their acutely imagined and ritually staged struggles with the ubiquitous Great Mother, caught in a cultural struggle against the domination of the unconscious, symbolized as death itself and cathetced onto the insatiable, obsidian lined mouth of this Terrible Mother. They were, in Neumann’s four-phase history of
consciousness, frozen in or regressed to the phase of the “Dragon-fight,” the heroic son fighting to free himself of the overwhelming attractions of his maternal origins. Beyond (or “beneath” or “above”) the calculated ideological revisionism which these Hymns, and other texts like them, reveal, we see an atavistic, unconscious project of psychological revisionism as well, which blends mythic, oneiric, sexual, familial, and agricultural image systems into a total political and religious constellation which can only be described as a work of genius if seen from the internal Mexica point of view, or diabolical if seen from the majority perspective of its many tributary subjects and defeated vassals.

**Teteo Innan, Her Song (Hymn 4)**

Ahuia! Yellow flowers open the blossom;  
She, Our Mother with the sacred thigh-mask;  
You emerge from Tamoanchan.

Ahuia! Yellow flower is your flower;  
She, Our Mother with the sacred thigh-mask;  
You emerge from Tamoanchan.

Ahuia! White flowers open the blossom;  
She, Our Mother with the sacred thigh-mask;  
You emerge from Tamoanchan.

Ahuia! White flower is your flower;  
She, Our Mother with the sacred thigh-mask;  
You emerge from Tamoanchan.

Ahuia! Goddess upon the barrel cactus,  
Our Mother, Aya, Itzpapalotl.

Ao, We had seen her;  
on the Nine Plains

*These translations are my own, based on the Florentine Codex paleograph published in the second 1981 edition by Anderson and Dibble. In preparing these versions I have compared Seler (1904), Garibay (1958), Anderson and Dibble (1981) and Anderson’s important discussion of eight of the twenty Aztec Hymns (1982), including “Cihuacoatl, Her Song.” I have seldom deviated from translations already found in these German, Spanish, and English versions; notable exceptions are my translations of the word tlaltecaoanotl, which I have rendered as “Master of Maternity’s Field of Labor” in the title of Hymn 5, and use of the word “macho” in line 7 of the same Hymn. The first of these identifies Huitzilopochtli’s ideological patronage of parturition as symbolic victim-capture, and the second (for which my precedent is Ezra Pound) calls attention to the psychohistorical aspects of my discussion. The phraseology of my translations is often determined by judgements of poetic quality and rhythm in English.
with hearts of deer she will nurture herself, 
Our Mother, Aya, Lord of the Earth.
Ao, ye, With new chalk, new plumes, 
She is anointed; 
in the four directions arrows are broken.
Ao, To the deer transformed, 
across the Divine Land to behold You 
come Xiuhnel and Mimich.

Cihuacoatl, Her Song (Hymn 13)*

The Eagle, the Eagle, Quilaztli, 
of snake-blood circled face, 
emplumed, 
in eagle plumes, she comes.
She comes sweeping the roads, 
Protectress of Chalma and spreading tree 
over the Colhua, Huiya!
In the place of Sun’s acxoyatl tree, 
in the Divine Fields the maize ear 
is supported on the timbrelled staff 
Thorns, thorns fill my hands; 
Thorns fill my hands. 
In the Divine Field the maize-ear 
is supported on the timbrelled staff.
The grass broom fills my hands; 
In the Divine Field the maize-ear 
is supported by the timbrelled staff.
13-Eagle, Our Mother, Aya, 
Ruler of the Chalmeca. 
"His cactus shaft, his glory; 
Let him fill me, He 
my Prince, Mixcoatl, Aya." 
Our Mother, Enemy Woman, Aya; 
Our Mother, Enemy Woman, Aya; 
The Deer of Colhuacan 
in her costume of feathers, Aya. 
Ahuiya!
Already had Sun declared his war:
Gingerich: Three Nahuatl Hymns

“Aya! Let men be dragged forth,
All shall be destroyed!”

The Deer of Colhuacan
in her costume of feathers.
Ahuiya!
She of the eagle plumes, unmasked;
Ahuiya!
The rising one, unmasked.

Chimalpanecatl, His Song
and Master of Maternity’s Field of Labor (Hymn 5)*

Upon his shield, from the full belly,
the Grand Captain of War is born.
Upon his shield, from the full belly,
the Grand Captain of War is born.

On Mount Coatepec, Chief
among mountains put on his shield-mask.
Truly none stands macho as he;
the earth gave shivers then
when he put on the shield-mask.

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