

The Birth of the Day Count in the Codex Borgia

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Throughout the Aztec world, the 260-day divinatory calendar, the *tonalpohualli*, ordered and controlled all human and natural events. It bound supernaturals to every possibility and every actuality, and daily it shaped the fate of every living person. At its core was the count of twenty days, the basic count, which always carried much more divinatory weight than the companion cycle of thirteen. The Nahuatl word for twenty is simply *cempohualli* or "one count".¹ The count of twenty forms the basis of the Mesoamerican vigesimal system of counting, and it itself is founded on the human body, representing the number of digits on our hands and feet. In some Maya dialects the word for twenty is *uinal*, which shares its root with *uinic*, the word for human.² When the *Chilam Balam of Chumayel* recorded the appearance of the twenty-day count at the world's dawning, it was in the guise of human footprints that appeared on a road making the passing of a man.³

The creation of this day count is recorded in only a very few sources. A Maya version is recounted in the *Chilam Balam of Chumayel*; a Mixtec version is pictured on the opening page of the *Codex Vienna*. Of the many ethnohistorical sources for the Mexica Aztecs, only Sahagún, the *Anales de Cuauhtitlan*, and the *Historia de los Mexicanos por sus Pinturas* mention it, and then only in passing. In this paper, I argue that another version, a Puebla-Tlaxcalan version, exists in the *Codex Borgia*. It comes early in the cosmogony that occupies the eighteen-page ritual/narrative section of the *Borgia*.

In the *Chilam Balam of Chumayel*, the section titled "The Birth of the Uinal" tells how the count of twenty days came to be created in the half-light before the world's dawning. Long before the creation of humans, before even the creation of the heavens, earth, and sea, human footprints appeared on the road; they were measured and counted; thus was created the 20-day count, the *uinal*.⁴

From Mixtec-speaking Oaxaca, the painted cosmogony of the *Codex Vienna* locates the creation of the twenty-day period second in the series of visual couplets that open the world (fig. 1). Still in the heavens at the dawn of creation, the first couplet represents ritual voice and offering: In the bottom right corner of the first page⁵ two unnamed human figures represent these actions: one sings

¹ Seler, 1900-1901, p. 16; Sullivan, 1988, p. 151.

² Seler, 1900-1901, pp. 5-6; Thompson, 1971, pp. 52, 143-144.

³ Edmonson, 1986, pp. 120-126.

⁴ *Idem*.

⁵ *Codex Vienna*, p. 52.

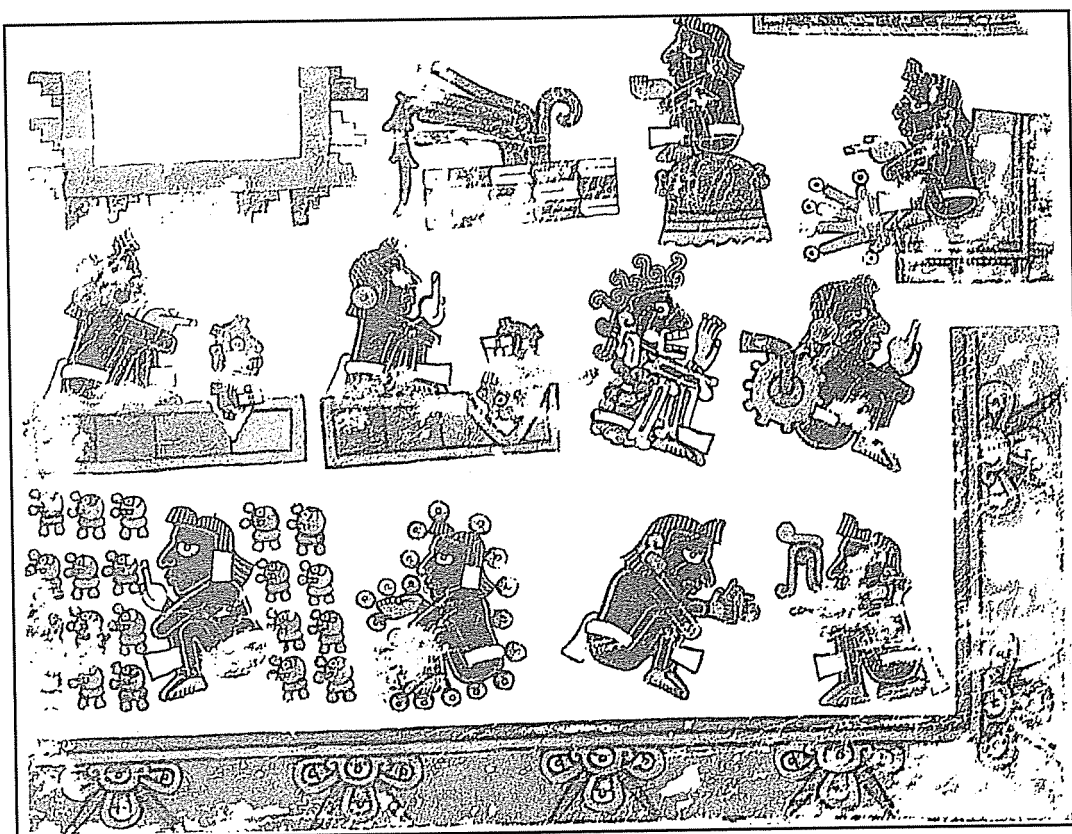


Figure 1. The beginning of creation on the first page of the *Codex Vienna* (p. 52).

or prays while the other leans toward him and offers powdered tobacco. This is the first ritual act—song/prayer and offering—which initiates creation. Immediately there follow another two unnamed humans, one outlined with twenty stars to signal twenty nights, and the other flanked by twenty symbols representing days. Here is born the count of twenty nights and twenty days.⁶ Next come earth spirits, death, priests, and the combination of water and hill (the metaphor for polity). A great sky band framing the bottom and right sides of the page figuratively locates all these actions in the heavens. All of this comes before the primordial couples and subsequent gods, and before the land is laid down and water brought forth, long before the sun's first rising.

This same priority obtains generally in the Mexica realm. There, the *Historia de los Mexicanos por sus Pinturas* places the creation of the day count after the birth of the four primordial gods, children of the creator lord Tonacatecuhtli, but before the appearance of the lords of the underworld Mictlantecuhtli and Mictlancihuatl, and before the creation of the heavens, the great water, and the Cipactli crocodile from which the earth was fashioned. When the 20-day count came into being, the world was still in half light before the sun was born.⁷ Sahagún⁸ and the *Anales de Cuauhtitlan*⁹ indicate that the day count and the larger divinatory calendar became the responsibility of the aged ancestral couple Cipactonal and Oxomoco, who were the prototypal diviners and daykeepers.

⁶ Jansen, 1982, 1, pp. 125-127; Boone, 2000b, pp. 90-91.

⁷ Garibay, 1979, pp. 25-27.

⁸ Sahagún, 1953-1982, 4, p. 4.

⁹ Bierhorst, 1992, p. 25.

In the pictorial cosmogony in the *Codex Borgia*, the day count first appears immediately after the expression of spiritual power or energy, before the creator god Quetzalcoatl appears, before the sun and moon, when the cosmos was all in darkness (fig. 7). It is activated by earth spirits. But before we focus on this image, let me step back and explain why this page represents an episode in a Puebla-Tlaxcalan creation story.

Of all the divinatory codices, the *Borgia* is unique in having an eighteen-page narrative section, which occupies ten pages on the front side and then spans the turning of the codex from front to back to continue with eight pages on the back. This section contains twelve distinct units or scenes which are framed or separated from each other by elongated and abstracted gods and goddesses related to darkness, stars, and death. However, these framing elements have openings in them, through which human and wind figures shoot to pass from one unit to the next; the openings and the figures moving through them create a strong sense of sequence. Thus the section has distinct units, with continuity between them.

Eduard Seler, that early master of the Mexican codices, stressed the sequential, narrative quality of the section and saw it as a continuous whole. Coming from an intellectual environment that sought astral analogues for the identities and actions of ancient divinities¹⁰ he interpreted this section as the passage of Venus through the heavens and underworld during its 584-day cycle. He saw the *Borgia* imagery as representing a supernatural journey through cosmic space occupied by gods and spirits. Today, this Venus interpretation is generally, and rightfully, discounted because there is almost no specific Venus imagery or calendrics in the section. Seler himself offered very little concrete evidence to support his idea; he asserted it but did not prove it. Karl Anton Nowotny, the next major thinker about the *Codex Borgia*, summarily dismissed Seler's Venus reading as a gross over-interpretation. Nowotny¹¹ instead stressed the individuality of the units (as opposed to their continuities) and read the section as a series, but not necessarily a sequence, of what he called "Temple Cult Rituals." He described these rituals as independent festivals of the kind that would have occurred in a particular ceremonial center, and he suggested that the architectural features in the section could potentially be identified with a real location. Subsequently Bruce Byland¹² and the team of Ferdinand Anders, Maarten Jansen, and Luis Reyes García,¹³ among others, have generally followed and expanded on Nowotny's approach and interpreted the scenes as a group of rituals that take place over time in a single location. There is not agreement on where this location might be, but Anders, Jansen, and Reyes García see the rituals as being supervised by the earth/mother goddess Cihuacoatl, who they identify with the elongated goddesses who frame the scenes.¹⁴

My own approach has been first to analyze the overall graphic structure of the section to identify its organizational features, and to look for commonalities in the imagery. This leads me to agree with Seler that the section should be read as a narrative, for the continuities are much stronger than the differences between the individual scenes. Commonalities in the imagery then point not to a series of established rituals but to a narrative of creation. I read the section as a painted cosmogony.

The framing and dividing elements are key to the section's structure. They separate the action into episodes and also provide the continuity a narrative requires. On the opening pages, all the action is framed by quadrilateral gods and goddesses, skeletal creatures with skull heads, clawed

¹⁰ Anders, Jansen y Pérez Jiménez, 1994, pp. 63-66.

¹¹ Nowotny, 1961, pp. 245-256; *ibid.*, 1976.

¹² Byland, 1993, pp. xxiii-xxvi.

¹³ Reyes García, 1993, pp. 191-245.

¹⁴ See also Byland and Pohl, 1994, p. 158, who suggest parallels with the story of Lord 8 Deer in the Mixtec codices; Pohl, 1998, pp. 186-189, who associates imagery on p. 32 with a moveable feast at Ocotelolco in Tlaxcala; and Taube, 1986, pp. 62-65, who relates some of the architectural features with those at Cempoalla. Milbrath, 1989, and Brotherston, 1999, in press, relate the scenes to the eighteen monthly feasts.

hands and feet, and the facial paint and headdress of death gods (see figs. 6, 7). Later, subsequent units of content are separated from each other by what Nowotny¹⁵ termed “strip goddesses” (*streifenförmige Göttin*) (fig. 2). These are goddesses, all female, whose torsos are elongated into strips that span the width of the page to form a border from one scene to the other. Like the quadrilateral figures, they always have a skeletal head, clawed hands and feet, and the headdress of the death lords, but their long torsos may contain flint knives, skulls, Venus or star symbols, or netting. These strip goddesses have been variously identified as sky bands,¹⁶ death goddesses,¹⁷ and earth goddesses in the form of Tlazolteotl¹⁸ or Cihuacoatl.¹⁹ I believe, however that they function less as specific goddesses than as structural elements, which at the same time allude to darkness, sacrifice, and creation. They appear at the bottom or top of a page to signal a change in the action or location from the previous or subsequent pages. The strip goddess at the base of p. 32, for example, effectively separates the action on this page from that which begins on p. 33.

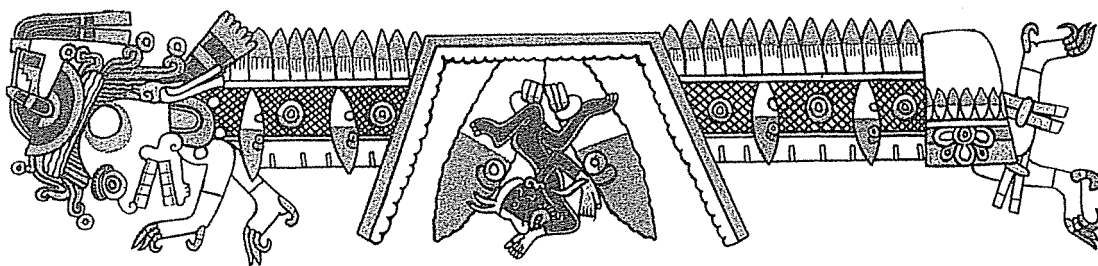


Figure 2. Strip goddess, which separates the episodes in the *Borgia* narrative section (p. 32). Quetzalcoatl shoots through the opening in her torso to continue into the next episode.

These strip goddesses also provide continuity from one unit to another. The very center of their torso is cut open, the opening bordered by the red and wavy yellow bands that signal cuts into human flesh. In this opening appears a male figure in an active moving position (arms outstretched and legs bent in an exaggerated pinwheel) who visually leaves one scene and enters another. Although these moving males vary slightly in their coloring and costume, most are different guises of the creator god Quetzalcoatl.²⁰ Most wear Quetzalcoatl's distinctive headdress, shell pectoral, and curved shell ear ornaments, and some have his beard and face paint as well; the first moving male and the very last one have the face and body paint that is diagnostic of Quetzalcoatl. These emerging figures not only act as visual bridges from one unit to another, they initiate or activate the actions that follow, and they often participate in those actions. They are principal actors in the larger drama that unfolds down the pages.

The rest of the visual imagery of the narrative section is more consistent with a creation story than a cycle of festivals. Although there is no exact correlation with known cosmogonies recorded in words and letters, a number of scenes do recall specific places or actions that figure in creation stories recorded in the sixteenth century for the Aztecs, Mixtecs, and Maya.

¹⁵ Nowotny, 1961, p. 247.

¹⁶ Seler, 1963, 2, p. 41.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 18, 48.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 48; Byland, 1993, pp. xxiv-vi.

¹⁹ Anders, Jansen, and Reyes García, 1993, pp. 202, 222-241.

²⁰ Although Seler, 1963, 2, pp. 9-61 and Nowotny, 1961, pp. 245-256 identified them as Quetzalcoatl, Byland 1993, pp. xxiv-xxvi, and Anders, Jansen and Reyes García, 1993, pp. 191-245 have interpreted them as several different individuals and propose that they are priests who initiate the rituals that follow.

On page 32, for example, the rectangular precinct rimmed with flints and occupied by a personified flint (fig. 3) recalls the House of Knives that in the Quiche Maya *Popol Vuh* was the second peril faced by the Hero Twins during their descent into the Underworld.²¹ In this place the Underworld lords expected the twins to be cut to pieces. An Aztec version of the House of Knives or flint-knife enclosure may have existed in one of the Underworld layers, such as the second, third, or fourth, that are characterized by flint or obsidian according to the *Codex Vaticanus A/Ríos* (fig. 4). The painter represented these three underworld layers as twin hills each topped by a flint, a single hill studded with flints, and a configuration of curls (wind) punctuated with flints.²² The *Borgia* presents its flint-lined enclosure as a place of both death and birth. Warriors in human, eagle, and flint guise hold up bloody trophy heads as if in a war dance on the sides of the flinted enclosure, while in the middle a large parturient figure studded with flints gives birth. From flints at the figure's joints and neck emerge five Tezcatlipocas, differently colored to reflect the cardinal directions and center. The birth of differently colored manifestations of Tezcatlipoca is, of course, part of the Aztec's own creation story. The *Historia de los mexicanos por sus pinturas*²³ records how the creator goddess gave birth to four Tezcatlipocas: the red Tezcatlipoca, the black Tezcatlipoca, Quetzalcoatl, and Huitzilopochtli (blue Tezcatlipoca).

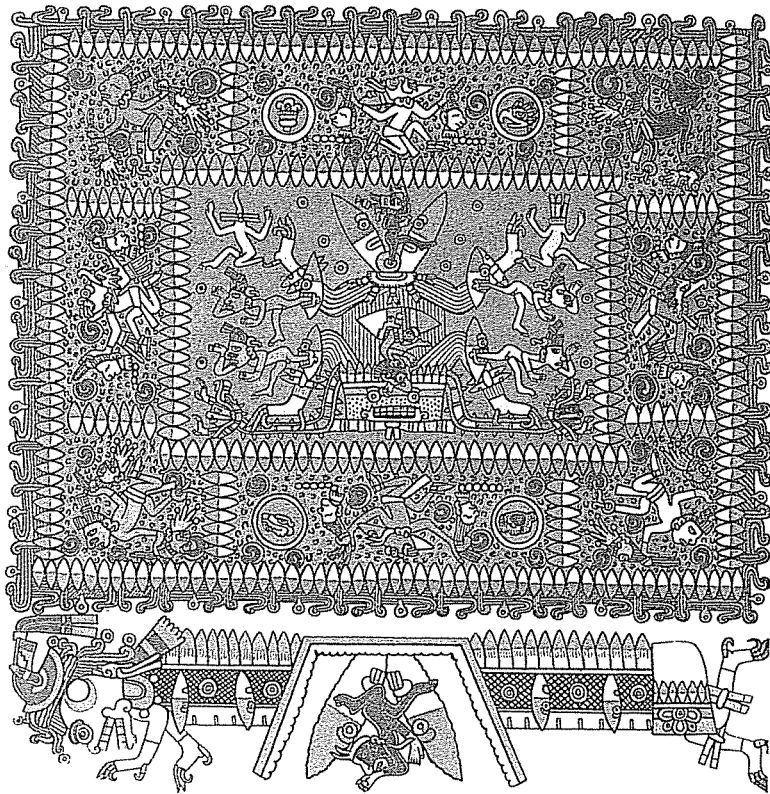


Figure 3. The Flint Enclosure, wherein are born the five Tezcatlipocas and Quetzalcoatl.
Codex Borgia, p. 32.

²¹ Tedlock, 1985, p. 43.

²² The Nahuatl and Italian glosses name them "tepetli monanamyeia" or "mountains that are joined", "Iztepetl" or "Obsidian Mountain", and "Yee hecaya" Itzteecayan translated by Corona Núñez, 1964-1967, 3, p. 10 as "where blows the wind of razors [or knives]".

²³ Garibay, 1979, pp. 23-24.

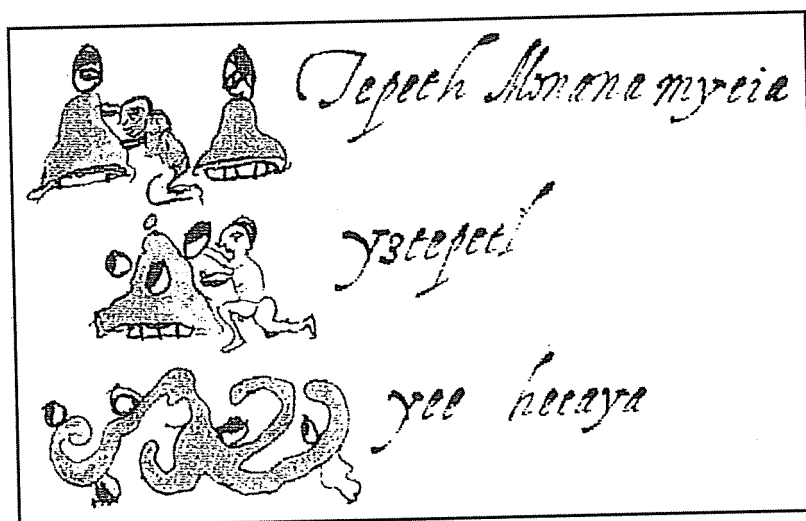


Figure 4. Three levels of the Underworld that are associated with flints. *Codex Vaticanus A/Ríos*, p. 2r.

It is also on this page of the *Borgia* that Quetzalcoatl makes his first appearance, born along with the Tezcatlipocas from the great parturient flint (see fig. 3). Later, flanked by two facing flints, he passes through the first strip goddess. Quetzalcoatl's birth from a flint in the *Borgia* parallels the birth of the Mixtec culture hero Lord 9 Wind, the Mixtec Quetzalcoatl, who is pictured born from a great flint in the opening pages of the *Codex Vienna* (fig. 5). In the *Vienna* cosmogony, Lord 9 Wind is the principal agent of creation. He separates the heavens and waters from the earth, brings the earth's physical features into being, assigns titles to the other gods, and introduces the concept of polity and the accoutrements of rule to the Mixteca.²⁴ In the *Borgia* narrative, Quetzalcoatl, in his several manifestations, plays a similar role, often accompanied by Tezcatlipoca. In Aztec creation stories, Quetzalcoatl is a major creative force. He is the one who, with Tezcatlipoca, separates the heavens, earth, and water, who acquires the ancestral bones from which humans are made, and who brings out maize from inside the Mountain of Sustenance. In the *Borgia* narrative, Quetzalcoatl and Tezcatlipoca are the actors that appear most frequently.²⁵

Throughout the *Borgia* passage we also see an emphasis on the quadripartite nature of the universe.

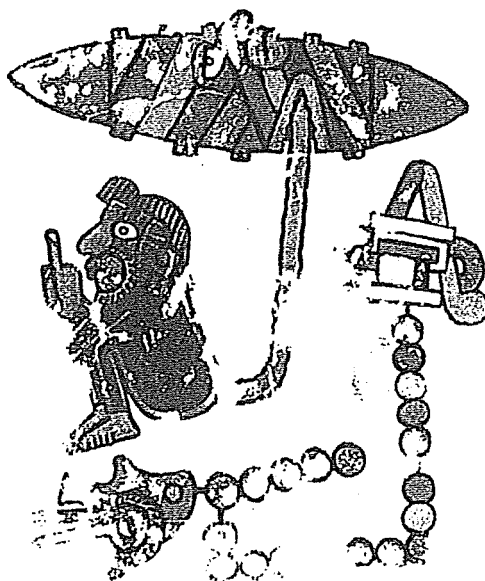


Figure 5. The birth of the creator god Quetzalcoatl (Lord 9 Wind) from a great flint in the *Codex Vienna*, p. 49.

²⁴ Boone, 2000b, pp. 91-95.

²⁵ Quetzalcoatl appears in three manifestations: the standard Quetzalcoatl with diagnostic face paint; a black Quetzalcoatl who has smoke coming from his eyes; and a variant that Anders, Jansen, and Reyes García, 1993, p. 214 identify as Xolotl, and Byland, 1993, p. xxiv, and Byland and Pohl, 1994, pp. 157-159 call Stripe Eye because he has who has a black vertical stripe through his eye; the latter is usually costumed as Quetzalcoatl and otherwise replaces him in the narrative.

Figures constantly appear in multiples of four, to reflect the four directions (or occasionally five, the fifth being the center): five wind serpents (p. 29; fig. 6), four plants (p. 30, fig. 7), five Tezcatlipocas (p. 32; fig. 3), four eagle/flint warriors and four Tezcatlipoca warriors (p. 32; fig. 3), four essences of rubber (p. 33), four essences of fire (p. 33), four lords of darkness (p. 35), four essences of lightening (p. 37), four captive victims (p. 38), four serpents around the old creator couple (p. 38), four Cihuateteo (p. 41), four black-ball players (p. 42), four deformed Tonallehque (p. 42), four Venus or star figures (p. 45), four hearth goddesses (p. 46), and four essences of fire from the fire drilling (p. 46). When day signs appear, as they do on seven of the pages, they also are usually in sets of four (*e.g.*, figs. 3, 7). In most instances these figures are arranged in a rectangular configuration, as if to define the four directions. Usually, also, they are differentially colored according to directional colors (usually red, blue, yellow, and white). Some architectural forms are also quadripartite: such is the four-colored dark ball court (p. 35), the flint enclosures (pp. 31, 44), the four "Eagle Houses" in which Quetzalcoatl figures sit on thrones (p. 45), and the four-colored and four-sided hearth at the passage's end (p. 46).

What is perhaps most telling, however, is that throughout the narrative section we see an emphasis on emergence and birth. From the initial page (p. 29) to the last (p. 46), figures, either singly or in fours or fives, are depicted emerging from central forms. They flow from the mouths of dark wind serpents that themselves writhe out of seething cauldrons and bundles (*e.g.* pp. 29, 36); they burst from the joints of parturient figures (*e.g.* pp. 32, 42; fig. 3); or they spring from precious disks or hearts that stand as metaphoric wombs (*e.g.* pp. 31, 32, 33, 38, 42). Twelve of the eighteen pages have scenes like this of birth or emergence. All these features—the emphasis on Quetzalcoatl and Tezcatlipoca, the affinities with known creation stories, the prevalence of quadripartite essences, and the emphasis on birth and emergence—signal acts that shaped the world and created human culture as it was then known. The *Borgia* narrative opens with the first surge of energy and ends with the drilling of a new fire, and we know from many other contexts that drilling a new fire is quintessentially an act of foundation.²⁶

The opening pages (pp. 29–32) of the narrative function as a prologue or genesis; they present the first acts that set the stage for all that follows. Emphasis is on the creation or emergence of fundamental essences, tools, and concepts. Here the action is framed by quadrilateral gods and goddesses.

The creation story opens not on day-lit earth but in the night heavens or in the relative darkness that came before the sun (fig. 6). A great quadrilateral god frames all the action. He has the skull head, dark coloring, wild "night hair" (punctuated with stars), headdress, and clawed extremities of a death god. His abstractly attenuated body is composed of an interior band of blood and an exterior band of starry darkness, which are fused together by a twisted cord.²⁷ His clawed hands and feet extend at the corners. I identify him as male because he lacks a skirt and has no band of unspun cotton in his headdress, which all the goddesses have. His torso remains open at the base to allow dynamic essences and spirits to flow onto the next scene. Since he and all the other anthropomorphic figures who appear in these first scenes have clawed hands and feet and are painted black or other symbolic colors, I interpret them all as essences, personifications, and anonymous agents of action, rather than as specific supernaturals or persons.

The first scene is a burst of creative energy and power. Within a black circle, dark swirling energy explodes from a great turquoise bowl. Seven dark, star-studded wind serpents (wearing the buccal wind mask of Ehecatl) issue from the dark mass. Born from the mouths of five of these wind

²⁶ Boone, 2000a.

²⁷ Seler, 1963, 2, p. 10 interpreted the twisted cord as *malinalli*.

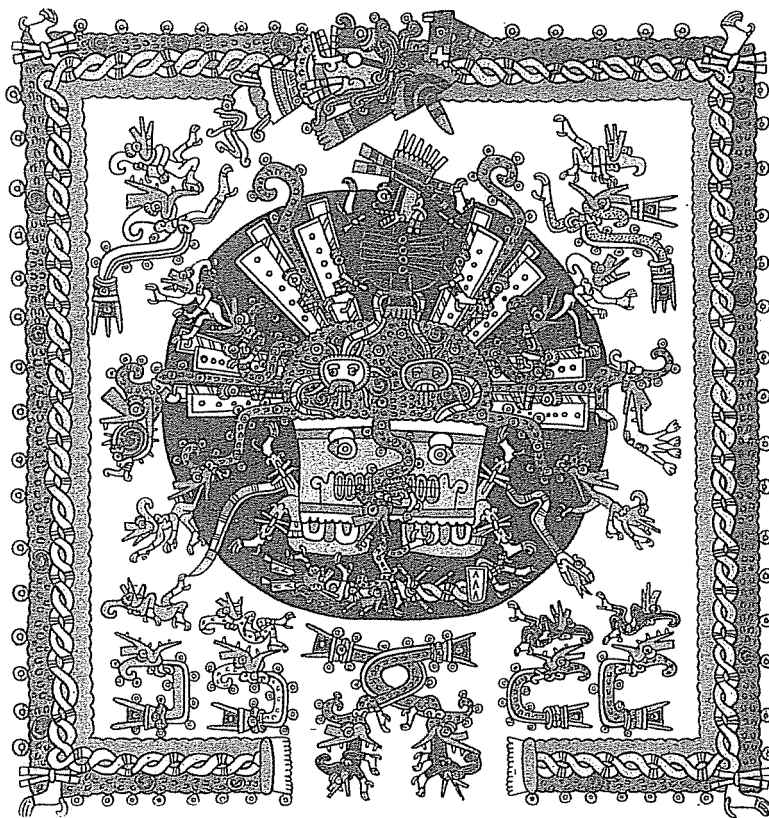


Figure 6. The opening of the creation story in the *Codex Borgia* (p. 29) with a burst of creative energy carried to the four quarters.

serpents are five anthropomorphic wind essences, colored red, yellow, blue, white, and “dark”. They flow outward toward the four quarters, while other wind serpents and essences energetically fill the corners of the composition. On either side, two other wind serpents emerge from the central mass bearing a round ball of obsidian (left) and a plant or tree with yellow flowers (right). The obsidian ball and the plant are an unlikely pairing, and their appearance here is not entirely understood. The pairing with obsidian makes sense, however, if the plant is a copal tree,²⁸ for then we would be witnessing the creation of two of the principal elements humans would later use in making blood and incense offerings to the gods. If this is correct, this page would parallel the opening scene of the cosmogony in the Mixtec *Codex Vienna*, where the first elements of creation are prayer and the act of offering powered tobacco—ritual actions that initiate the creative acts that follow.

On this first page we are faced with the emergence of spirits and power, which fill the cosmos in its four directions. This creative act has perhaps been engineered by the black skull-headed supernatural in birth-giving pose who hovers above the dark mass. Two spiders—perhaps celestial demons or Tzitzimime—²⁹ descend from the supernatural on the white sacrificial cords that are their silks. On both sides, the large white banners of sacrifice that jut out of the mass speak of primordial sacrifice. Sacrifice is emphasized also by the “ground line,” which takes the form of a

²⁸ The copal tree *Copalquahuil* is *Bursera jorullensis*, Gates, 1939, p. 131. Anders, Jansen, and Reyes García, 1993, p. 192 read the *Borgia* tree as a palm, and Seler, 1963, v. 2, p. 10 simply as a tree in flower.

²⁹ Seler, 1963, 2, p. 22.

twisted goddess who has sacrificial banners in her hair and forming her skirt. The themes of this first event of creation seem therefore to be the explosion and spreading of energy, and sacrifice, including perhaps sacrifice potentially enacted by using obsidian and the plant. At the end, two dark wind serpents bearing black wind essences fly out of the opening in the quadrilateral goddess' body to carry the narrative to the next event.

The second event in the cosmogony is the creation of the day count and thus of time itself (fig. 7). The action here is centered not on a circle of black but around a disk of red. It is ringed with the twisted cord from the quadrilateral god who frames the previous scene and embellished like a great jewel. Its outer border is a ring of star-studded black panels interrupted by red strips, which recalls the black and red headdress of Quetzalcoatl and may again symbolize a time of darkness.³⁰ Inside the red disk are the two wind serpents and wind essences from the preceding event; the wind essences hold out copal bags, as if they have brought copal as a sacrificial element from the preceding scene.

Around the disk are the twenty day signs, beginning with Crocodile in the lower right, which encircle the disk in a counter-clockwise direction. The first and each fifth day sign is ringed by a circular cartouche to mark the four-fold division of the count (Crocodile, Death, Monkey, and Vulture). At these four corners are four directional trees personified by black figures who have

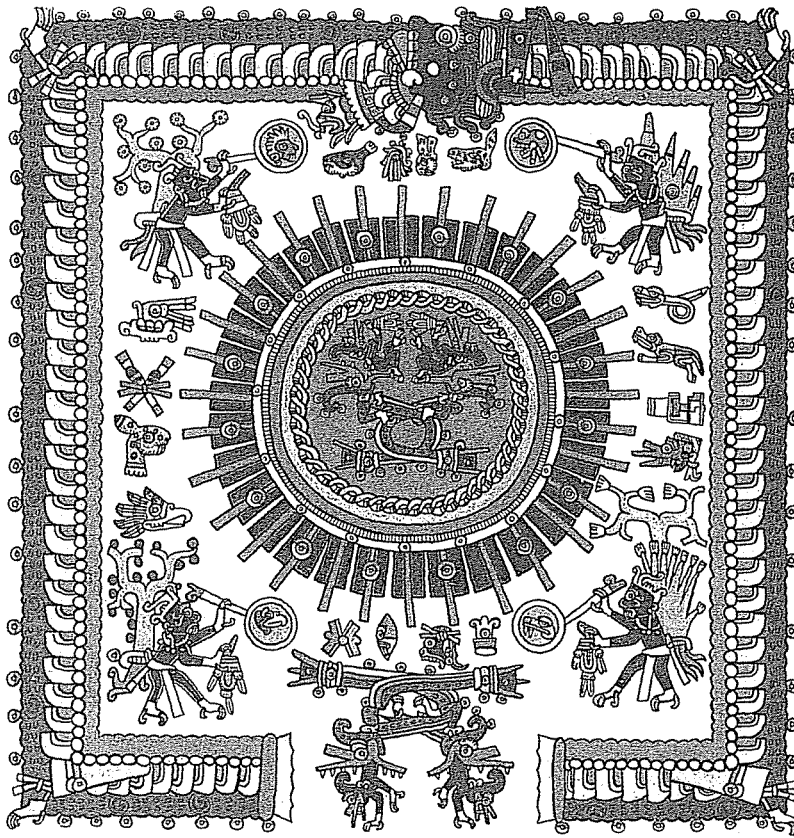


Figure 7. The birth of the day count in the *Codex Borgia* (p. 30) where the day signs are activated by plant spirits.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 14; Anders, Jansen, and Reyes García, 1993, p. 196.

fanged mouths, smoke scrolls coming out of their round “supernatural” eyes, and yellow curls and bumps issuing from the top of their head. These figures recall Mixtec *ñuhu*, or earth spirits, who have circular eyes, fangs, and heads characterized by “earth” bumps.³¹ Here in the *Borgia* they personify an unidentified tree, a maguey, a ceiba, and probably some kind of fruit tree, which symbolize east, north, west, and south, respectively.³² They hold out copal bags and pierce the four ringed day signs with bone awls.

This action has usually been read somewhat vaguely as a scene of priestly auto-sacrifice pertaining to plants,³³ but that cannot be correct. The figures’ claws, round eyes, black body paint, and supernatural hair identify them as essences or spirits. Moreover, they are clearly and intentionally piercing the days signs and not themselves. This piercing action is surely a statement of birth more than a record of self sacrifice. In all of the Mexican divinatory codices, the only other time supernaturals pierce another being with a bone awl is in the birth almanacs, where the gods pierce the eyes of newborns to symbolize their birth and first seeing (fig. 8).

The birth almanacs appear in the *Codices Borgia* (pp. 15-16), *Fejérváry-Mayer* (pp. 23-24), and *Vaticanus B* (pp. 33-35), where their imagery and meaning is very similar from manuscript to manuscript. This kind of birth almanac does not foretell the life fate of a newborn, which is accomplished by other almanacs, but focuses on the birth act and the first days of life.³⁴

The almanac has four sequential parts, each covering twenty days and devoted to one aspect of birth. These are the four major events of childbirth: the birth itself, the presentation of the child, the manipulation (cutting?) of the umbilical cord, and nursing. Each part has five scenes or mantic cells involving an infant and deity, four days to a scene.³⁵ The parallel scenes in the first section pertain to the act of birth, when the child comes into the world as a living, breathing human. The *códices* represent this by picturing a deity piercing the eye socket (occasionally another part) of an infant, who is either represented by a diminutive figure or only a head. Although this enigmatic imagery might seem unrelated or even antithetical to birth, it should be read metaphorically. The piercing in the Mexican almanacs may well refer to the Aztec understanding that

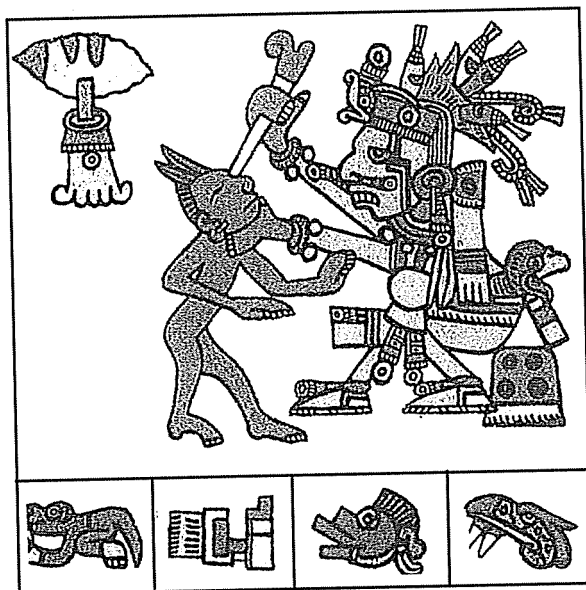


Figure 8. A scene from the birth almanac in the *Codex Borgia* (p. 15) in which the maize god pierces the eye and thereby activates an infant.

³¹ Van der Loo, 1987, fig. 46; e.g., *Vienna*, p. 52.

³² Seler, 1963, 2, p. 14 identified them as a tree in flower, the maguey, perhaps a cotton plant, and a tree with round fruits. Anders, Jansen, and Reyes García, 1993, p. 196 identified them as a palm, a maguey, a *pochote* ceiba, and a fruit tree.

³³ Seler, 1963, v. 2, p. 11; Anders, Jansen, and Reyes García, 1993, p. 196.

³⁴ See Anders and Jansen, 1993, pp. 239-246; Anders and Jansen, 1994, pp. 247-260, and Anders, Jansen, and Reyes García, 1993, pp. 109-115, who were the first since Fabrega, 1899, p. 94 to recognize all four sections as a birth almanac. Seler, 1901-1902, pp. 87-121; *ibid.*, 1902-1903, pp. 190-210; *ibid.*, 1963, v. 1, pp. 179-206 characteristically assigned it an astral/Venusian interpretation.

³⁵ The *Borgia* pictures all the day signs, but the *Fejérváry-Mayer* and *Vaticanus B* depict only the first sign for each scene and replace the others with spacers.

humans were animated by having been breathed and bored by the creator couple.³⁶ According to Sahagún, when the midwife prepared to bathe a child shortly after he was born, her oration included the statements: "Thy mother, thy father, Ome tecuhtli, Ome ciuatl have sent thee. Thou wert [breathed], thou wert bored in thy home, the place of duality".³⁷ It was through this breathing and boring that a child's *tonalli* or soul entered its body while still in the womb.³⁸ Anders, Jansen, and Reyes García³⁹ and Anders and Jansen⁴⁰ interpret this piercing scene in the almanacs as the divine act that opens a child's eyes and teaches him to see, know, reason, and live; and because a bone awl is used, life will involve penitence. The sharp, piercing action may also refer to the pain of the birth act.

The second, third, and fourth sets of scenes are less ambiguous and clearly related to early infancy. The second is the presentation of the child, held aloft by a supernatural, which parallels the midwife's act, after washing, of raising up the child four times to the gods.⁴¹ The third set involves the umbilical cord, which a deity stretches and pulls away from the child; the cord ends with a symbolic element, such as a flower or jewel. In the *Fejérváry-Mayer*, several of the gods also hold knives with which to cut the cord. The fourth set represents the infant, now fully born, nursing at the breast of one of the goddesses.

Returning to the second page of the *Borgia* cosmogony, it is on this page that the twenty day signs first appear, brought forth with the help of the directional trees. The plant spirits pierce and figuratively "open" the day signs; they animate the newly born days just like the major gods will later animate newly born humans. This is not an act of sacrifice but an act of creation, when the twenty day signs—and thus the calendar—come into being.

On the first two pages of the *Borgia* narrative we see the first burst of energy and the organization of this energy into a quadripartite cosmos; the accoutrements of sacrifice—obsidian and perhaps copal—are born then too. Next is the birth of the day count and the beginning of recorded time. This pairing parallels the Mixtec cosmogony recorded in the *Codex Vienna* (p. 52), where the first events of creation are the making of offerings—in the form of song/prayer and powdered tobacco—followed by the appearance of the twenty nights and twenty days. This and what follows take place in the heavens before the sun is born. The Mixtec creation legend recorded by Gregorio García also tells how all was originally in darkness, chaos, and confusion.⁴² In the Maya *Popol Vuh* and in Aztec creation stories, the day count is also created early, when the world is still in darkness and the land, sea, and heavens unformed. Although the individual details of these stories may vary from those in the *Borgia*, because their specific cultures are different, we can still see that the essentials are generally the same.

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³⁶ León-Portilla, 1985, p. 76 points out their visual similarity to depictions in the Maya *Codex Madrid* 96-99 of gods carving idols and masks using axes and bone awls.

³⁷ Sahagún, 1953-1982, 6, p. 202. Anderson and Dibble translated "otipitzalco" as "thou wert cast", but Furst, 1995, p. 64 follows López Austin, 1988, v. 1, pp. 208-209 in reading *pitza* as "to breathe".

³⁸ López Austin, 1988, v. 1, pp. 208-209; Furst, 1995, pp. 64-65.

³⁹ Anders, Jansen, and Reyes García, 1993, p. 110.

⁴⁰ Anders and Jansen, 1994, p. 251.

⁴¹ Sahagún, 1953-1982, 6, pp. 202-203.

⁴² Dahlgren, 1979, p. 294.

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