FIGHTING WITH FEMININITY: GENDER AND WAR IN AZTEC MEXICO

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According to a historical manuscript written around 1580 by the Dominican friar Diego Durán, a fifteenth century ruler of Tlatelolco had employed a memorable strategy after being vigorously attacked by Tenochtitlan, the Aztec capital now buried beneath Mexico City (Durán 1967, 2:263).[1] The Tlatelolcan king responded to his desperate circumstances by ordering some women and small boys to strip naked and attack the invaders. While the little boys threw burning sticks, the women approached with their private parts "shamefully" exposed, some slapping their bellies and genitals, others squeezing their breasts and scattering milk on their enemies. Another version of the same event adds that the naked women had their heads gaudily feathered and their lips painted red, the color of harlots (Tezozómoc 1975: 392).[2] According to this author, the aggressive women carried shields and obsidian bladed clubs while loudly accusing the Aztecs of being cowards. As the obscene contingent advanced other women —still dressed— turned around, flung up their skirts, and showed their buttocks to the enemy, while others flung from the top of a pyramid brooms, cane staves, weavings, warping frames, spindles and battens.

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[2] These two versions —by Diego Durán and D. Hernando Alvarado Tezozómoc— are cognates, generally thought to derive from a now lost prototype dubbed *Çronica X*. Recently Christopher Couch (1989) has argued that Durán's manuscript was the original and that Tezozómoc's was taken from Durán's.

* Fotografías de Guil'liem Arroyo.

In the accompanying illustration of this incident, these belligerant women appear at the right and top-center, as supporting actors in the final, hand-to-hand struggle between the rulers of the two rival cities (Figure 1). The illustration is believed to have been painted by a descendant of native survivors of the 1521 Spanish conquest of Mexico, a male member of the by then largely enfeebled and coopted Aztec aristocracy, whose sons were receiving schooling in European subjects such as Latin, and —as is evident in this painting— European artistic techniques and conventions. These native artists were often commissioned by mendicants such as Durán to illustrate written accounts of native history and customs as related by native informants. Since both the artists and the original informants of Durán's manuscript were descended from the aristocracy of Tenochtitlan and its closest allies, the manuscript presents the story from Tenochtitlan's point of view. For purposes of ease and clarity, I will hereafter refer to the residents of Tenochtitlan as "the Aztecs", although the name is normally applied to all of the Valley of Mexico polities —including Tlatelolco— that eventually came under Aztec domination.[3]

The illustration of this famous battle, then, clearly reinforces the author's contention that the Tlatelolcan women largely fought with the signs of their gender —not just the biological symbols of their sex, their reproductive body parts and excretions, and their male offspring— but also the domestic utensils that defined their womanly role. For virtually all of these women's missiles must be understood as supremely feminine symbols, sweeping, spinning, and weaving having been exclusively female tasks in prehispanic Central Mexico. (Sahagún 1953-82, 6:96). Important ones, too, since a recorded speech to a newly married Aztec couple, which states that the bride's duty is to clean the patio, provide food, and spin and weave, advises her that it will be satisfactory fulfillment of these tasks "for [which] you will be loved, you will be honored" (Karttunen and Lockhart 1987:111, 172). In marked contrast, Aztec boys were prevented from even touching a spindle or batten, lest in doing so they compromise their future manhood (Sahagún 1953-82, 3:51, 61; 9:14). A midsixteenth century manuscript painting

[3] The battle between Tenochtitlan and Tlatelolco took place in 1473. It resulted in bringing Tlatelolco under the direct control of Tenochtitlan, ending a period of relative prosperity and autonomy for the former. For this reason, and because it had been founded by members of the same migrant group who founded Tenochtitlan, Tlatelolco is normally included with Tenochtitlan and its closest neighbors and allies under the broader rubric of "Aztec." The inhabitants of the Aztec capital are then referred to as the Mexica, or as the Tenochca.

of an Aztec midwife bathing a newborn thus includes a spindle and broom among the proper insignia of a girlchild, but not among the appropriate instruments for a boy (Figure 2).

The Role of Women in Aztec Warfare

How are we, then, to understand this curious episode in Aztec military mythohistory, an episode in which femininity takes the rhetorical form of a weapon? How did gender, in particular here female gender, function in Aztec verbal and visual discourse on warfare and conquest —and how did militarism function in the discourse on gender?

A clue to the answer appears in the same codex depiction of the newborn, for here the salient device for a boychild is a combination of darts and a shield (Figure 2). This fits with our understanding that war was a *male* domain in ancient Central Mexico. Sources state explicitly that the army was drawn exclusively from the male population and eyewitness accounts of the 1521 Spanish conquest indicate that women were ordered to take up arms only at the end, as a means of obscuring the fact that the native forces were being defeated (Durán 1967, 2:568; Berlin and Barlow 1948:70; Sahagún 1953-82, 12:116). Virtually all Aztec men, except the aged and infirm, and a few officials, were expected to leave their fields, jobs, and families to risk their lives for the state whenever called on. Such calls to military service must have been frequent given the political economy's increasing dependence on imperial expansion and forced tribute, which after 1428 resulted in almost on-going warfare. The considerable hardships these demands wrought on the average household were offset in part by a state-sponsored system of rewards of goods and status for faithful and effective military service, a system that allowed men an opportunity to move upward in an otherwise closed class hierarchy. One of these rewards consisted of the right to certain insignia, including a particular shield decoration.

While physical aggression and expropriation were appropriate for men, then, Aztec women ideally remained comparatively passive and at home. In contrast to the baby boy's umbilical cord, which was buried on the battlefield, the baby girl's cord was buried next to the hearth to signify, in the words of one Spanish chronicler, that she "wilt go nowhere" (Sahagún 1953-82, 6:172-73; 5:186).[4] Here she cooked and

[4] Durán (1967, 2:265) says that "like women" the defeated Tlatelolcans "were to stay in their houses" at the order of the Aztecs of Tenochtitlan as punishments for refusing to pay them tribute.

cleaned, spun and wove, and bore and raised the (male) warriors who would form the state's armies of the future. Indeed, although some prostitutes apparently followed Aztec warriors into battle, there is no record of wives having accompanied their husbands to serve and carry for them, as did Inka women in ancient Peru (Torquemada 1975, 2:299; Hemming 1970:204).[5] In the final pages of *Codex Azcatitlan* (XXVI), which illustrate the Spanish conquest of Tenochtitlan, they are instead shown being ferried to a stone building well away from the site of the struggle where, watching from the roof, they presumably would be safer.

Femininity and Cowardice

The Tlatelolco warrior women are therefore anomolous from an Aztec perspective, significant, surely, because they invert both the ideal and the norm. This inversion is all the more poignant given frequent Aztec rhetorical use of femininity as a metaphor for military cowardice. For as the *Codex Azcatitlan* image implies, ordinary women were not just, in theory at least, passive and uninvolved in militaristic activities, they were further represented as weak and timid, inclined to retreat from physical conflict. Thus does an Aztec description of the undesirable male paint him as one who by avoiding battle "acts like a woman" and who, "afraid, fearful, cowardly", retreats from it (Sahagún 1953-82, 10:24).

Both cowardly as well as unsuccessful warriors were accordingly labelled "effeminate", even "homosexual", insults that —in Aztec my-

[5] According to Adolph Bandelier (1880: 131, plus 144n), Aztec women prepared the food to be taken to the battlefield, but it was carried there by *tamemes* (male carriers), and by the warriors themselves. That women certainly helped their men to prepare for war is supported by Sahagún (1953-82,8: 69), who mentions that women as well as men served as directors of the market place, being thus charged with responsibility for assigning war provisions. He says nothing however, to indicate that these women ever left the city to accompany the army. The only women ever mentioned to have accompanied warriors into battle may well have been assigned the task by the state. They were apparently *auianime*, a type of Aztec prostitute reportedly freely available to warriors during certain state rituals in the capital (e.g., Sahagún 1953-82,2:102). Torquemada (1975-2:299) calls them *maqui*, a word that he claims meant "the meddlers." Elizabeth Salas (1990:7) seems to assume that he meant *mociuaquetzque* or "valiant women." According to Torquemada, these women often died in battle, having thrown themselves into the fray. Some of them were sacrificed during Quecholli in honor of the goddess of sexual pleasure, Xochiquetzal.

thohistory at least— often provoked valor.[6] One written version of the battle between Tenochtitlan and Tlatelolco leaves out the story of the warrior women, but relates instead how the beleagured Tlatelolco ruler tried to rally his demoralized men by calling them "effeminates" and "sodomites" (Torquemada 1975, 1:179). The most picturesque example of such martial use of femininity to provoke warfare involves the ruler of yet another neighbor of Aztec Tenochtitlan, Coyoacan, who invited several Aztec dignitaries to a local feast. Once arrived, these men were ordered to put on the blouse and skirt of a woman "because", they were told, "these are the proper garments for men whom we have been trying to provoke and incite to war" (Durán 1967, 2:92). The officials were then sent home in this "shameful" costume to their own ruler, who not only responded militarily, but, upon winning, refused to pardon his enemies. The seriousness of the insult is made clear by Aztec law, which made transvestism, like homosexuality in any form, a capital offense punishable by death.[7]

Enemy Woman

The significance of the Tlatelolcan women in Aztec literature and painting must therefore be read in the context of not only the historical fact that Aztec women did not participate in warfare, but also the common Aztec representation of women as incapable and undesiring

[6] That women were perceived as unthreatening is indicated by the claim that the Tlatelolcan ruler's advisors told him that his enemy's powerful chief advisor was old and so no more to be feared "than a little old woman who spends her time sitting" (Durán 1967,2:255). See Sahagún 1953-82,10:24 and *Historia de los mexicanos*... 1891:247 for additional references to cowardice as womanly behavior, and Garibay 1964, III-55-60 for an instance in which failure to win a battle led to innuendos of homosexuality (see also Quezada 1975:67). Herrera (1947,6:444) states several times that to call a man a consenting sodomite was tantamount to asking for an immediate fight (see algo Stenzel 1976:183; Guerra 1971:154).

[7] The prohibition seems to have been pan-Mesoamerican, the method of execution varying from place to place and source to source as strangling or hanging, stoning, or burning. See Las Casas 1909:56; Mendieta 1971:137-38; Motolinía 1971:357; *Histoyre du Mechique* 1905:18; *Historia de los mexicanos*... 1891:258, 260, 262, 311-12. The Aztecs, to judge by colonial sources, were decidedly homophobic. One text describes the lesbian as having a "crushed vulva", and the sodomite as "a defilement, a corruption... a taster of filth, revolting, perverse..." (Sahagún FC 10:37). The hermaphrodite was assumed to be "a detestable woman... who has a penis [and] takes female companions...", that is, a lesbian (*Ibid*:56). Male homosexuality, to judge by the etymology of two of the terms for it, was considered to be inhuman (López Austin 1982:167).

of doing so. What, then, did their aggressivity connote? The question is complicated by Robert Barlow's (1987, 1:116) note that a Tlatelolcan account of the same battle portrays the women as true soldiers who wore war dress and took prisoners, while downplaying the fact that Tlatelolco lost the war (see also Berlin and Barlow 1948-5-6, 70)! Since the Tlatelolcan rendition simply altered rather than eliminated the incident, it follows that the War Woman motif had some value for both sides of the conflict. The broader question to be tackled, then, is: how do we explain this ambivalence of the theme of female aggression, and what was its function in Aztec discourse on war and gender?

I will argue here that the rhetorical potency of the Tlatelolcan warrioresses derived from their simultaneous reference to two fundamentally opposed concepts of the aggressive woman which, through a partial overlap of signs, helped the Aztecs to mediate the contradictions in men's attitudes toward women. The first of these concepts, which I will call "Enemy Woman", was embedded in a mythohistorical tradition of combative hostile women who, like the Tlatelolcan warrioresses, in the end did not win their battle. The same manuscript that depicts the Tlatelolco debacle, for example, illustrates two women, armed with shields and obsidian bladed clubs, helping their men to confront Aztec advances (Figure 3). The accompanying text implies that they represented the enemy Tepanec forces whose critical defeat in 1428 marked the beginning of Aztec hegemony (Durán 1967, 2:85, Pl. 11).[8] One of the only two Aztec tales known to me of fighting women who were not enemies of the Aztecs concerns Toltec women who fought valiantly beside their husbands, even taking prisoners, before —along with their men and children and like the Tepanecs— being killed (Ixtlilxochitl 1975, 1:281). The only story that does not present warring women as members of a losing party features, significantly, Aztec women themselves. The incident took place prior to the foundation of the capital when the beleaguered Aztecs were forced to defend their camp at Iztacalco against a Tepanec attack (Berlin and Barlow 1948:43). The

[8] I say implies because the text makes no specific mention of women warriors. It merely presents the story of the defeat of the Tepanecs as told by the ruler of Coyoacan and his councilor to their people as a warning of what might happen to them should they fail to form alliances against the Aztecs. So vicious was the Aztec assault on the Tepanecs that "no one [including the women, we must assume] was spared." Other scholars (e.g., Couch 1989:369-70) have erroneously tended to assume that the illustration depicts an Aztec war with Coyoacan, which would imply that the fighting women were Coyoacanos. The illustrator of the *Tovar Manuscript,* who copied this illustration, made the same mistake and so labelled the Aztecs' adversaries as Coyoacanos in his picture (LaFaye 1972: Pl. x).

Aztecs, we are told, were seized with great courage and "each woman took prisoners".

It is often the belligerant women themselves, moreover, who, directly or indirectly, provoke the hostilities by attempting to deprive man of something to which he feels entitled. The best known example is the story of one Coyolxauhqui, or "Bells-on-Cheek", who according to one chronicler led her 400 brothers in a brazen attempt to kill their mother, Coatlicue or "Snake Skirt", because she had become pregnant upon tucking a ball of feathers into her waistband while sweeping (Sahagún 1953-82, 3:1-5). The son in Coatlicue's womb, who was the Aztec national patron and war god, Huitzilopochtli or "Hummingbird-Left", learned of the uprising and (shades of Athena) sprang forth fully armed to defend her. As the accompanying manuscript illustration shows. Huitzilopochtli cut off his evil sister's head and rolled her body down a mountain, where it broke into pieces. The 400 brothers were either dispatched or exiled, and Huitzilopochtli's people, under his leadership, moved on to establish their capital and empire in the region.

That the sister's animosity was directed here toward the son, not the mother, is indicated by a different version of the same basic event, in which, under another name, she is said to have terrorized her people with black magic in hopes of attaining divine status like her brother. As a sorceress, she turned at time into an animal, while at others she unleashed noxious snakes, scorpions, centipedes, and spiders, in the aftermath devouring her victims' hearts (Codex Ramírez 1975:23; Tezozómoc 1975a:225). Her ambition put her in direct competition with Huitzilopochtli, who here addressed his sister's jealousy by simply abandoning her (Durán 1967, 2:31).[9] She eventually married a sorcerer and produced an evil son who grew up to himself challenge his uncle's authority. For this insolence, Huitzilopochtli killed and decapitated him (Durán 1967, 2:37-45).

It would be a mistake, however, to conclude from these stories that the underlying hostility was specifically and simply between Huitzilopochtli and his sister. Since all subsequent Aztec rulers, like Huitzilopochtli, were male, it follows that the real threat was not just to Huitzilopochtli, but to the power and legitimacy of the state itself. Moreover, another account of the Aztec migrations has Huitzilopochtli beheading, not his sister, but his mother. That the defeated woman's exact relationship to the god was not the issue is confirmed by the fact that his

[9] See also *Códice Ramírez* 1975:23. Tezozomoc's (1975a:225; 1975b:29) accounts of the incident do not mention her desire to be a goddess.

mother's name in this account is Coyolxauhcihuatl, "Bell-Face-Woman" —an obvious variant of "Bells-Her-Cheeks", or Coyolxauhqui (Tezozómoc 1975b:34-35). The threat to Huitzilopochtli which was posed by his female relative therefore symbolized all pretensions —past and future— to Aztec supremacy.[10] The conflict was expressed as gender opposition.[11]

The importance to Aztec ideology of the archetypal pretender's deserved defeat is clearly evidenced by a relief on the upper surface of a giant (11' in diameter) stone disk accidentally discovered in 1978 (Figure 4). The disk was found at the foot of that half of the Aztec's main twintemple pyramid which had been dedicated to Huitzilopochtli; its context dates it to the years between 1469 and 1481. In it, the upstart Coyolxauhqui appears, identifiable by the gold bells on her cheeks, as bound, decapitated, broken, dismembered, and bleeding, her former evil powers expressed by the skull at the small of her back, and by the monstrous profile masks on her knees, elbows and heels. Her tongue protrudes as a further sign that she is dead. The disk, as is often pointed out, was placed at exactly that spot where would have landed the lifeless bodies of ritually sacrificed war prisoners representing Coyolxauhqui and her brothers after being rolled down the stairs of the war god's temple pyramid from the platform above. There it served to warn potential enemies of their certain fate should they try to obstruct the state's military ambitions.[12] To reinforce the point, a

[10] Susan Gillespie (1989-50-52) has noted that mothers, wives, daughters, and sisters are often merged and interchangeable in Aztec mythohistory, strongly suggesting that their exact relationship to the male principal is not the issue. Rudolf van Zantwijk (1963:192) had already warned that we cannot take the term "sister" literally in stories such as that of Coyolxauhqui, since kinship terms functioned as titles of Aztec dignitaries. He assumes that the principals represent two of the groups who travelled together on the migration from Aztlan. Yólotl González-Torres (1975) argues against the popular belief first put forward by Eduard Seler (1960-61, 3:328) that the analogy is astronomical, with Huitzilopochtli representing the sun and Coyolxauhqui the moon.

[11] I would argue, therefore, that Michel Graulich (1984) missed the real point of the allegory of Coyolxauhqui in her aspect of the sorceress who hoped to share or usurp her brother's divinity. Graulich (pp. 150-51) argues that woman here represents feminine passivity which threatened to impede the movement, vitality, and militaristic aggressiveness of man as represented by Huitzilopochtli. As such, she must be overcome. I see her instead as competition in the form of female aggressiveness —that is, as a marked departure from the female norm, and thus as an aberration. At no time do the texts say that these threatening women want to settle down— nor is their behavior passive.

[12] According to Torquemada (1975, 1: 245-46), captives representing the gods Chanticon and Cohuaxolotl were sacrificed during the month festival of Tecuilhuitl, "the last [month] of the year." These "gods" may have actually been the god-

stone carved head of Coyolxauhqui at one point was placed on the platform above, the stylized blood streams carved on its underside a clear sign of her decapitation. Statues of her conquered brothers reportedly stood in the vicinity as well; eight stone figures which surfaced in the recent excavations of the main temple pyramid may represent them (Matos 1987:200). Coyolxauhqui thus appears here, as do other mythic women elsewhere, as the first Aztec enemy to die in war.[13] Her violent death, a symbol of the Aztecs' triumph over treachery, became the foundation, the basis of their future successes.

As the archetypal conquered woman, then, Coyolxauhqui represented all conquered enemies of the state, and served as a prototype for the later Tlatelolco warrioresses. In anticipation of them, her female sexuality served as a metaphor of the inferiority of all those who contested Aztec power, and of their inevitable political defeat. Like the Tlatelolcans, moreover, she was represented in Aztec mythohistory as a woman who had stepped outside the bounds of ideal femininity to enter and to challenge the world of men. In doing so, she compromised her femininity. This is explicit in another written version of the original challenge to male leadership, this time by a woman named Quilaztli. Described as having dressed herself for battle, Quilaztli proudly warned her offended kinsmen that, although they might think her vile, worthless, and of little spirit like "any other woman", she was in fact quite strong and "manly" (Torquemada 1975, 1:80-81).[14] The carver of the giant stone relief of Coyolxauhqui made the same point by presenting her as nearly naked, wearing only her royal jewelry and a knotted serpent loincloth. Her scanty costume relates directly to the Aztec practice of stripping male war prisoners to their loincloth as a sign of their defeat and demeaned social status. Like Quilaztli, then, Coyolxauhqui was identified with martial masculinity as a sign that her challenging behavior was both inappropriate and ineffective.

But nakedness could also be a sign of excessive and illicit female sexuality, as several manuscript paintings of the goddess of lust and

desses Coyolxauhqui and her Xochimilcan counterpart, Chantico; no male deities by the names of Chanticon and Cohuaxolotl are known to me.

[13] Another was the goddess Xochiquetzal ("Precious Flower"); see *Historia de los mexicanos* . . . 1891:235). In some Central Mexican histories, the woman was Itzpapalotl, "Obsidian Butterfly", about whom more above (*Anales de Cuauhtitlan* 1975:3).

[14] Quilaztli was in the end simply ignored rather than assaulted but her opponents were so offended by the masculine behavior of their kinswoman that they tried to keep the matter quiet.

adultery plainly show; proper Aztec women kept their sexual organs fully covered when in public view. Female sexual promiscuity and prostitution, like adultery, were rigorously proscribed, and adultery even at the highest levels was punishable by death.[15] The reasons were the usual; the adultress, like all wanton women, was seen as "a bearer of bastards, an aborter" (Sahagún 1953-82, 10:56).[16] Among the ruling elite legitimacy of birth was a major issue, since lineage to a great extent determined who held power and privilege and who did not. The importance of women in this process was augmented by the fact that, although lineage could be traced through either the male or female line, or both, the ideal lineage founder was a woman.[17] Moreover, although political offices were almost invariably held by men, men's right to them depended on the rank and status of their wife and mother; the Aztec supreme ruler's mother was particularly influential (Carrasco 1984:43-44; Motolinía 1971:337-38).[18] Susan Gillespie (1989:19-20)

[15] Nezahualpilli, ruler of Texcoco, had his principal wife, a daughter of the ruler of Tenochtlitlan, put to death for adultery, although it may be relevant that she was also barren (Carrasco 1984:5, 52). In Tlaxcala, as in Texcoco, the offending male, as well as the female, was executed (Zorita 1963:130-31, 134). Sahagún (1953-82, 4:82; 4:42, 45; 6:103; 8:42; 9:39) indicates that this was true in Tenochtitlan as well. Married men who committed adultery with an unmarried woman were not considered adulterers, but a noble youth could be imprisoned just for looking at another man's wife (López Austin 1988, 1:292; Sahagún 1953-82, 6:122). Since virtually all of our information comes from the upper classes, it is unclear whether marital fidelity was so vigorously enforced among commoners; María Rodríguez-Valdés (1988-45) rightly warns that Aztec women did not constitute —and so should not be treated as— a homogeneous group. However, the fact that all adulterers were, like prostitutes, regarded as inhuman and "dead" suggests that adultery was at least in theory punishable by death even at the lowest social levels (López Austin 1982:167). The most popular methods of executing a pair of adulterers were stoning, clubbing, and strangling.

[16] The woman who intentionally aborted a [presumably legitimate] fetus was, along with her accomplices, killed unless the mother's life was in danger (Bialostosky de Chazán 1975:7; Ortiz de Montellano 1989:206 see also Mendieta 1971: 355). Aztec princesses were specifically warned that any adulterous behavior would disgrace the nobility and their family line (Sahagún 1953-82, 6:102).

[17] Sahagún (1953-82, 10:5) says, for example, that the great-grandmother is particularly worthy of praise and gratitude because she "is the founder, the beginner [of her lineage]." Similarly, "the good great-great grandmother [is] the originator of good progeny" (*Ibid*). This is not said of the great-grandfather, as June Nash (1978:352) has pointed out. Similarly, a maiden is one "from whom noble lineage issues..." (Sahagún 1953-82, 10:46).

[18] Carrasco (1984:43-44) notes that only occasionally did a woman hold an office or title, although some sources claim that a daughter of Moctezuma I ruled Tenochtitlan for a time. The *Historia de los mexicanos por sus pinturas* (1891: 632) suggests that Illancueitl, the wife of the first Aztec ruler actually ruled the city in his name until her death. Outside the capital, women certainly ruled from

has recently argued that women nominally held the rights to rulership which they then "bequeathed" to their legitimate sons or husbands; in this sense they "ennobled" the male members of the government. In a system where political power depended on a man's legitimate descent from a certain woman, it was imperative that women's sexuality be circumscribed.

Female sexual aggressiveness, because it was expected to result in illicit sexual relations, was therefore connotatively dangerous and bad. Immoderation, including relations with harlots, could 'dry up' a man, bringing on stunted mental and physical growth, sickness, premature old age, and even death (Ortiz de Montellano 1989:206; López Austin 1988, 1:293-96; Sahagún 1952-83, 6:113-19, 125).[19] The concern with the dangers posed by women's sexuality carried over to pregnancy, when excessive intercourse was believed to harm a fetus; after three months, intercourse was supposed to cease altogether (Sahagún FC VI: 142, 156).[20] Moreover, women, according to an Aztec allegory passed by a ruler to his son, unlike men never outgrow their sexual urges. In all of them, young and old, is "a cave, a gorge, whose only function is to await that which is given, whose only function is to receive" (Sahagún 1953-82, 6:118-19).

Immorality and all that it implies for powerful men is thus surely a major connotation of the naked bodies of the sexually aggressive Tlatelolcan "harlots", and of Coyolxauhqui's shamefully and conspicuously exposed breasts and genitals. While Coyolxauhqui's aggressiveness is never explicitly described in the texts as sexual, this is implied by her sorcery, for black magic is typically associated with female seduction and illicit sexuality in Aztec literature. A classic example is the report that four gaudily dressed Tlatelolcan sorceresses, who entered Tenochtitlan to taunt the Aztecs prior to the infamous 1473 battle, left in the company of harlots (Torquemada 1975, 1:178). In a similar

time to time as regent or full-fledged queens in the absence of suitable male successors to a high-ranking position (Schroeder 1991:159).

[19] Indeed, the harlot could be characterized as a lascivious and dissolute old woman, a "filthy old dog" who "consumes her own substance"; she is depicted as old, carrying the flowers and flowing water symbolic of her trade, in a colonial manuscript painted by Indian artists (Sahagún 1953-82, 10:55). At other times, however, as throughout Mesoamerica, she was young and attractive. Thus did three, properly married, Quiche Maya chiefs only narrowly escape destruction by refusing the advances of three beautiful young women set out by their enemies to entrap them (Recinos 1953:174-75).

[20] Breech births were often attributed to the parents' having engaged in sexual intercourse late in pregnancy (Ortiz de Montellano 1989:206).

vein, the contentious and "manly" Quilaztli, who changed herself into a beautiful eagle on a cactus to attract and provoke her kinsmen, is described in the chronicles as a sorceress (Torquemada 1975, 1:80).[21] Female sexual aggressiveness functioned in all such instances as a sign that threats to the male-constructed social order were evil and abnormal.

These interlocked themes of female wantoness, occult behavior, and refusal to serve men weave throughout the fabric of Aztec mythohistory, where their potential harmfulness to the social order is always emphasized. In one story of the initial peopling of the world, for example, two two-headed deer turned into women who, having attracted two male culture heros named Xiuhnel and Mimich with offers of food and drink, then fled from them. Mimich chased them and eventually killed them (*Leyenda de los soles* 1975:123). In a second version of the same incident, a single bicephalous deer who turned itself into a woman attacked rather than attracted a culture hero, here named Mixcoatl, who retaliated by killing her with arrows (*Anales de Cuauhtitlan* 1975:3). According to the first version, the second elusive woman's body, which was burned at her death, burst into pieces of colored stone. One of these fragments, called Itzpapalotl, "Obsidian Butterfly", was thereafter carried on Mixcoatl's back whenever he went into combat (*Leyenda de los soles* 1975:124).

Itzpapalotl, the Obsidian Butterfly, was important enough to be commemorated in sculpture, where like Quilaztli she appears with numerous features of the sorceress Coyolxauhqui. Like Quilaztli she tends as well to show up in relief on the undersides of stone objects, where visual —and thus sexual— access to her would have been denied. The evil powers of both women are symbolized by the same monstrous joints —and here extremities as well— that were seen in the relief of Coyolxauhqui. While Itzpapalotl can be distinguished on the basis of her undulating hatched wings punctuated by stylized obsidian blades, blades that also decorated her skirt and her plumed headdress (Heyden

[21] In another story, a naked woman named Chimalman, "Resting Shield", attracted a male culture hero's ill-fated arrows and, when he finally pursued her, simply disappeared (*Leyenda de los soles* 1975-124). He finally caught and impregnated her, another clear case of the close link between sex and war, but after giving birth, she (predictably) died. Gillespie (1989:77-78) notes that virtually all women who figure prominently in the early stories of the migration die premature deaths. This, she argues, eliminated them as "ennoblers" of potentially competitive royal lineages. This fits with the story of a primordial woman named Chimalmat who in the Quiche Maya creation story *Popol Vuh* is destroyed along with her sons and husband, Seven Macaw, who was a 'false sun', a "puffed up" pretender with delusions of grandeur (Tedlock 1985:86, 89-94).

1974: Fig. 1; cf. *Codex Borbonicus* 15), Quilaztli appears with the noxious insects associated with the sorceress —a scorpion, a centipede, and a spider— crawling in her tangled hair (Figure 5). As Cihuacoatl, "Woman Snake", another of her aliases, she could change herself into a serpent or beautiful young woman to entice men into intercourse, a mistake on their part which allegedly killed them (Mendieta 1971: 91).[22]

As I pointed out some years ago (Klein 1976:70, 1988), these figures, like Coyolxauhqui, are represented in a posture of defeat, viewed from the back and from above, like the flayed skin of an animal. That it is the woman's back we see is indicated by the shell-tipped braided back apron and large skull buckle elsewhere seen, together or singly, on her back or on the back of other evil women, such as Coyolxauhqui. Moreover, her arms and legs, bent at the knees and elbows, are uncomfortably spread to either side, and her partially fleshless head with outstretched tongue hangs upside down over her upper back, a clear sign that, like Coyolxauhqui, she has been decapitated.

Cihuacoatl's influence in the female domain was enormous, as she was seen to have the power to either mandate or grant a reprieve from death. For this reason she received regular offerings from women on behalf of their husbands and children, just as she was petitioned for mercy in the case of women having difficulty in childbirth. Even after the conquest she was reported to have 'eaten' at least one infant boy still in his cradle (Sahagún 1953-82, 8:8). Her motive may have been revenge, since her own child was a stone knife, of the kind used to sacrifice war prisoners (Sahagún 1953-82, 1:11). Louise Burkhart (1989-78) thinks that the knife represented a lost (i.e., dead) child, suggesting that Cihuacoatl's behavior was motivated by childlessness.[23]

[22] The martial connotations of her loose behavior surface today in a highland Maya belief in a "warrior woman" called Siguanaba who is half snake, half woman, a demon who detroys men by impersonating their lovers (Asturias, cited by Blaffer 1975-124-25; Sahagún 1953-82, 2:236). When Quetzalcoatl bled his member over to ruin (Blaffer 1972:14).

[23] The appearance of this knife in the marketplace at dawn indicated that Cihuacoatl had been there during the night. At times she was heard weeping at night in the marketplace; when she was, her cries were construed as an omen of war (Sahagún 1953-82, 1:11, 46-47).

In some Aztec texts, Cihuacoatl-Quilaztli is referred to as the mother or wet-nurse of the male god Quetzalcoatl or his father, Mixcoatl (*Leyenda de los soles* 1975-124-125; Sahagún 1953-82, 2:236). When Quetzalcoatl bled his member over the bones of a previous world population to create a new one, it was Cihuacoatl-

The goddess's role, in any event, clearly extended into the male-run imperium as well, an official cult having been established in the capital in the early 1430s following the Aztec conquest of several cities of which she had been patron. Her statue, which was effectively "captured" from those conquered polities, was removed to Tenochtitlan and literally imprisoned in a special building near the main temple. There, as an symbol of the state's growing military power, her "hunger" was henceforth ritually appeased with sacrificed war captives.

It is this extension of the goddess of female reproduction into the operation of a male-run imperialist government that explains the macabre necklace of human hearts, hands, and liver worn in a colonial manuscript painting of a frightful skeletal woman with monstrous joints, a protruding tongue, and the shell-tipped skirt often worn by Cihuacoatl (Figure 6). Cihuacoatl here represents not an enemy of the state so much as she does the enemy. The commentary that accompanies the image reads "This is a figure that they call Tzitzimitl . . ." (Boone 1983:214). The name Tzitzimitl refers to a group of hostile nocturnal demons collectively known as Tzitzimime who were believed to descend headfirst to earth during eclipses when, like sorcerers, they could devour the living (*Codex Telleriano-Remensis* 18v; *Codex Rios* 27v).[24] Itzpapalotl was a Tzitzimitl, and another of Quilaztli's names was, in fact, Tzitzimicihuatl, or "Tzitzimitl Woman" (*Leyenda de los soles* 1975: 124; Torquemada 1975, 1:81). As Yaocihuatl, Quilaztli was literally "Enemy Woman".

Cihuacoatl-Quilaztli's dangerous powers are further connoted in this manuscript painting by the paper banners in her touseled hair. Such banners reportedly were worn by the four Tlatelolco harlot-sorceresses mentioned earlier, who were called Cihuatetehuitl, or "Banner Women" (Torquemada 1975, 1:178). Similar banners appear in the hair of a female figure carved on a greenstone slab found in an earlier layer of construction directly underneath the famous relief of Coyolxauhqui (Figure 7). Alfredo López Austin (1979) has related this image to the story of a virgin named Mayahuel, "Powerful Flow" (Sullivan 1982:24), who was carried off by a male deity named Ehecatl who had come in search of a drink that would make men happy (*Histoyre du Mechique* 1905:106-07). Her guardian grandmother, whose

Quilaztli who first ground them up in an earthen tub (*Leyenda de los soles* 1975: 121).

[24] The Tzitzimime are referred to as "the black ones, the dirty ones, and as *tlatlacatecolo*, a term for sorcerers (Burkhart 1989:103, 214).

name was literally Tzitzimitl (Çiçimitl), summoned the other Tzitzimime and pursued the couple, devouring Mayahuel. Ehecatl, however, rejoined and buried Mayahuel's bones, from which grew the first maguey plant, source of the highly nourishing Mexican beverage known as pulque.

López Austin (*Ibid*) argues that the woman in the greenstone relief is Mayahuel herself, here giving birth to the god of pulque. In painted manuscripts, however, Mayahuel takes the form of an anthropomorphized maguey plant and never bears attributes of the Tzitzimime (e.g., *Codex Borbonicus* 8). Moreover, the greenstone relief's location directly underneath the large Coyolxauhqui relief, together with the woman's paper banners, long hair, and exposed, gritted teeth, all suggest that the figure represents not Mayahuel, but her demonic grandmother Tzitzimitl, who unsuccessfully tried to deprive man of pulque. This is supported by her skirt of skulls and crossbones, here edged with symbols of stars and the planet Venus, which appear on other figures of a flattened, monster-jointed woman who alternately either wears the braided back apron and skull buckle seen earlier or gives birth to a small male figure. Many of these sport a huge, grotesque upturned head with gaping mouth and ferocious teeth, which, as we will shortly see, suggests decapitation (Nicholson 1967: Fig. 3).

While Mayahuel's evil grandmother is not expressly said to have been killed in punishment of her insolence, the force of Aztec tradition would imply this. All Tzitzimime had been primordially defeated. The point is made by a (Texcocan) manuscript depiction of a woman named Zitlanmiyauh —obviously a variant spelling of Tzitzimitl— who, having left her maguey field with a bowl of maguey juice on her back, is seized by a male warrior (*Codex Xolotl*: Pl. VIII). According to the story behind this scene, the warrior, who was fleeing from his enemies, being thirsty, had asked for and been refused a drink. When the selfish Zitlanmiyauh proceeded to alert his enemies to his presence, the furious warrior, we are told, cut off her head (Ixtlilxochitl 1975, 1:346).

Coatlicue, often identified as Huitzilopochtli's mother, was also a Tzitzimitl, or enemy. Elizabeth Boone (n.d.) has pointed out that the famous eight foot high Aztec stone statue of a decapitated, dismembered, monster-jointed woman wearing the skirt of interlaced serpents that describes her name, "Snake Skirt", was probably one of several statues representing Tzitzimime reported to have once stood at the main temple (Durán 1987, 1:345; Tezozómoc 1975a:358, 360-61, 486) (Figure 8). The statue has a shelltipped braided back apron and

skull back buckle, monstermasked shoulders and elbows, and exposed, flacid breasts seen on images of Coyolxauhqui and Cihuacoatl; her necklace of human hearts and hands, like the snake that hangs between her legs, compares with that of the frightful woman labelled *"zi zi mitl"* in Figure 6.[25] Justino Fernández (1972:134) long ago convincingly argued that the two converging serpents which create the creature's monstrous head represent streams of blood gushing from the severed arteries of her neck. The interpretation explains the monstrous head of the relief figures discussed earlier. The giant snakes that likewise form Coatlicue's arms must therefore signify that, like Coyolxauhqui, she has also been dismembered.

Fernández (*Ibid*: 126, 128) observed, moreover, that the Coatlicue appears to consist of a flayed human skin worn over some other body. On the basis of numerous reports that male priests ritually donned the flayed skins of sacrificed female goddess-impersonators, he hypothesized that that body was male (*Ibid*: 119, 128, 131-32).[26] The political significance of such male appropriations of female coverings and identity is revealed by a look at the second most powerful person in the Aztec government, a close male relative of the ruler who held as title the name of Cihuacoatl. The first *cihuacoatl,* whose name was Tlacaelel, had received the title as reward for having led the Aztec army that had conquered the southern cities —including Coyoacan— where the goddess had been patron (Klein 1988). With the title went stewardship of the goddess's cult, which, like her captured statue, had been transferred to the Aztec capital. But Tlacaelel received as well the right to henceforth appear in Cihuacoatl's costume on state occasions, leading one Franciscan to write that, "they worshipped a devil in the guise of a woman, named Cihuacoatl", who "when he appeared before men, appeared as a woman" (Sahagún 1953-82, 1:69). The *cihuacoatl*

[25] Another extant, albeit badly damaged figure of this set wears a skirt of human hearts, suggesting that her name was Yolotlicue, "Heart Skirt". Although there are no references to a goddess with that name, Sahagún (1953-82, 2:138-40) says that a man and woman were sacrificed during the month festival of Quecholli in honor of the god of the hunt, Mixcoatl. The male victim represented Mixcoatl, the female victim one Yeuatlicue, who is identified here as his consort. Since Yeuatlicue would mean "That Woman", a somewhat meaningless name, it may be a misspelling of Yolotlicue. Also killed at this time were women each named Coatlicue, who were wives of two male gods, Tlamatzincatl and Izquitecatl. The women were slain like deer, recalling the deer-woman Itzpapalotl, consort of Mixcoatl.

[26] Women who were sacrificed and then flayed variously represented the goddesses Ilamatecuhtli, Tlazolteotl/Toci, Coatlicue, Huixtocihuatl, and Xilonen. See Sahagún 1953-82, 1:15-16; 2:5-6, 134-40.

appears so dressed as the goddess several times in a painted manuscript, accompanied by a gloss reading papa mayor, "supreme priest" (Figure 9).

I have argued elsewhere that Tlacaelel's public transvestism served to advertise and celebrate both his personal and the state's military victory over the southern cities (Klein 1988). I wish to suggest here that since Tlacaelel had been among those Aztec dignitaries who, years earlier, had been forced to return home from Coyoacan in women's dress, his ritual cross-dressing may have been further intended to avenge that insult. According to one source, Moctecuhzoma I put woman's clothing on one of his war captains as a sign of the latter's military cowardice; the hapless warrior was then paraded in the marketplace and, ultimately, castrated (Suárez de Peralta 1878: 104-05). Male cross-dressing signified defeat, as well, as the formerly most powerful of the lords of Tlatelolco to survive the fall of Mexico to the Spaniards was described as wandering about in the ragged dress of a woman (Berlin and Barlow 1980:74). Similarly, Tarascans upset about successful Aztec advances complained that "They have put women's underskirts on all of us!" (Krippner-Martínez 1991: 191).

Much, then, as Maya men in recent times have worn tattered women's dresses at certain saints' festivals to mock certain male public officials, Tlacaelel may have been mocking both his past and present enemies when he appeared in the captured Cihuacoatl's costume (Bricker 1973:181-83). This would explain why he so dressed when he went to meet Motecuhzoma I on the latter's triumphant return from at least one major battle (Durán 1976, II:431). Since the sources make it clear that to assume the dress or insignia of another's office was regarded as a grave insult to both the "rightful" office holder and his kin, demonstration of the ability to do so without need to fear retaliation would have been the ultimate sign of personal triumph and the enemy's total degradation (Bandelier 1880:627). In Tlacaelel's case, moreover, the act of appropriating the dress and name of another polity's patron goddess associated that polity's subordination with a loss of femininity akin to the masculinization of other enemy women such as Coyolxauhqui and Quilaztli.[27]

[27] One of the signs of the defeat and degradation of Mexico following the Spanish conquest was the public appearance of the "great lord" of Tlatelolco in the ragged dress of a woman (Berlin and Barlow 1948:74).

The mythohistorical precedent for all these flayings of women appears to have occurred near Colhuacan, a city not far from the site where, years later, the

The Good Woman

The stories and depictions of Coyolxauhqui and the Tzitzimime indicate, then, that the Tlatelolco warrioresses formed part of a mythohistorical tradition in which brazen and depriving women represented the doomed or defeated challenger of male and state authority. The dangers posed by such behavior were communicated sexually in terms of wanton and occult practices, and its unacceptability was expressed culturally as a lack or loss of femininity. This concept of the Enemy Woman certainly would seem to explain the Tlatelolcan women's nakedness and gaudy make-up, as well as their abusive language and obscene slapping of their private parts. But what explains the claim that, accompanied by young boys presumably their own children, some of them expressed their breast milk on their enemies, while others raised their skirts to expose their naked buttocks? Why were the arms taken up by still others not the darts, war clubs, and shields customary for male warriors, but rather the weaving implements and brooms emblematic of a proper female vocation?

To answer these questions we must look at the second major Aztec concept of the warrior woman, one that safely channelled the potentially dangerous aggressions embodied by the concept of Enemy Woman into separate, special domains of value to the male-run state. In this paradigm, which I will call the Good Woman, female aggression served to protect and reproduce men rather than contest their power, and manliness indicated heroic bravery rather than brazenness, excessive sexuality, and deceit.[28] Neither wanton nor elusive, never a practitioner of black magic, this woman was always sexually attainable for the

Aztecs would found their capital. The Aztecs, who had recently arrived in the area, had been permitted by the Colhua to settle there. Apparently wishing to provoke hostilities with their benefactors, the Aztecs asked the Colhua king for a bride for their god Huitzilopochtli. The unsuspecting king sent his own daughter, whom the Aztecs then killed and flayed. Trouble broke out when the king, who had been invited to the Aztecs settlement for the wedding, was presented with a male priest wearing his daughter's flayed skin (Durán 1967, 2:41-43; Brown 1984). Gillespie (1989:61) has opined that the male wearer of the skin of flayed women signified not the expropriation of the woman's gender identity by a man so much as the union of both sexes, a sexual composite. Obviously, I disagree.

[28] Magali Carrera (1979) has observed that visual images of Aztec women tend to fall into two categories, one of destructive, hostile women, and one of benevolent, nourishing women. She emphasizes that some Aztec goddesses can fall into either of these categories-that is, that Aztec female deities had both destructive and benevolent aspects.

right man, and remained monogamous thereafter. Far from producing aborted or subversive children, or from avoiding motherhood altogether, this warrioress was, moreover, as by now might be expected, the ideal Aztec mother.

This concept of the ideal Aztec woman worked together with that of Enemy Woman to empower the story of the Tlatelolcan warrioresses. It could do so because Aztec ideology defined the proper female spheres of production and influence, as well as the status that accrued from them, in the same male militaristic terms used to characterize the enemy. Virtually all of the tasks deemed appropriate for women were, like inappropriate female behavior, conceived of in terms of military conflict. As the major implement in Aztec woman's on-going "war" household dirt, for example, brooms were ritually used by women in mock combat with male warriors. These ritual battles honored the goddess of lust and adultery, Tlazolteotl or Toci, whom these women represented, and who was herself usually depicted in colonial manuscripts holding a shield and broom (Sahagún 1953-82, 1: Fig. 12; 2:120-21).[29] Brooms could therefore symbolize, not just the removal of domestic filth, but the removal of political and moral impurities, as well. For this reason the lacivious Tlatelolcan "Banner Women" mentioned earlier burned bloody brooms as a sign that the Aztec warriors would soon die (Torquemada 1975, 1:178).[30]

Cihuacoatl-Quilaztli, on the other hand, in Aztec manuscripts usually carries a weaving batten along with a shield, a likely reference to the belief that weaving tools, which have creative powers akin to sexuality, were also weapons capable of destruction (Figure 10).[31] During a

[29] The evidence that food preparation was perceived as a "battle" is admittedly scant, but it has to be significant that the Atamalqualiztli festival held every eight years was intended to give the maize (corn) a rest because "we brought much torment to it... we ate [it], we put chili on it, we salted it, we added saltpeter to it, we added lime. As we tired it to death, so we revived it" (Sahagún 1953-82, 2:178). Cooking could also be used as a weapon. The ancient Toltec capital city, Tula, was said to have been destroyed by an old sorcereress who, having lured the Toltecs to her hearth with the odor of her toasted maize, proceeded to slay them all (Sahagún 1953-82, 3:31).

[30] The blood on the brooms used as weapons in Aztec rituals had been let in self-sacrifice, a penitential act involving the pricking of one's skin with a sharp object, usually a maguey thorn, and then passing straws through the openings to encourage the blood to flow. The blood so released in effect removed the penitent's "sins". The Tlatelolcan sorceresses' bloody brooms, which were burned just as pentitents normally burned their straws at the completion of autosacrifice, are said to have been made of straws used in autosacrifice (Torquemada 1975, 1:178).

[31] For elaboration of the idea that weaving had sexual connotations in ancient Mesoamerica, see Peter Furst 1975:236, Thelma Sullivan 1982:14-15, and Stacy

month festival celebrating the rain gods, the breasts of anthropomorphic dough images of local mountains were slashed with a weaving batten (Sahagún FC 2:29, 141). The chronicler Bernardino de Sahagún (1953-82, 2:29) compared this batten to a machete, the rural male weapon and production tool par excellence, whose name is applied to weaving sticks today (n.d.a:10). Geoffrey and Sharisse McCafferty (n.d.a:3; n.d.b:18) have also argued that spindle whorls were metaphorical shields, since a number of clay whorls found at Cholula are painted with motifs seen on depictions of Aztec war shields. Although the chronicles do not actually describe the act of weaving as a battle, it is telling that the present-day Huichol of West Mexico, who speak a language related to that of the Aztecs, perceive it as a form of hunting, for hunting for the Aztecs was an analogue of war.[32] Huichol women help their men to trap deer through their weaving, as the loom is believed to ensnare the deer by capturing its soul (Fikes 1985:217-22; see also Schaefer 1990:330-32). As late as the seventeenth century, the Aztecs' descendents were invoking "Cihuacoatl, the female warrior" for success in deer hunting, the goddess's name here referring to the rope used to snare the prey (Andrews and Hassig 1984:98).

The household instruments flung at the Aztecs by the Tlatelolcan warrioresses thus must be understood as magical weapons, womanly counterparts to the darts and spears hurled by men. The same can be said for their exposed bodies, moreover, for the Aztecs likened the reproductive organs to weapons, and sexual intercourse and human reproduction to war. The potency of the image of the Tlatelolcan women who slapped their naked privates and exposed their buttocks can only be fully understood in light of the widespread Mesoamerican belief that exposed female genitalia can subdue aggression. The belief is well documented for many rural Mexicans living today, nowhere better than among the Maya speakers of highland Chiapas, many of whom were under Aztec control at the time of the Spanish conquest.[33] In the mock bullfights performed in Zinacantan, for example, men dressed

Schaefer n.d.a.,n.d.b, 1990:39. In these scenarios, the weaving batten is a male (phallic?) symbol.

[32] This is best seen in the legends of defiant women like Quilaztli who turn into animals at will only to attract the arrows of their male kinsmen (Torquemada 1975, 1:178). These men are expressly said to be hunters. The accounts of these incidents frequently conflate hunting and warfare (see also *Leyenda de los soles* 1975:123).

[33] See especially Victoria Bricker (1973:16-17, 117), but also Benjamin Colby 1967:423, 4n).

FIG. 1. The battle with Tlatelolco, Durán's *Historia de las Indias de Nueva España.*
(Courtesy of the Hispanic Foundation, Library of Congress)

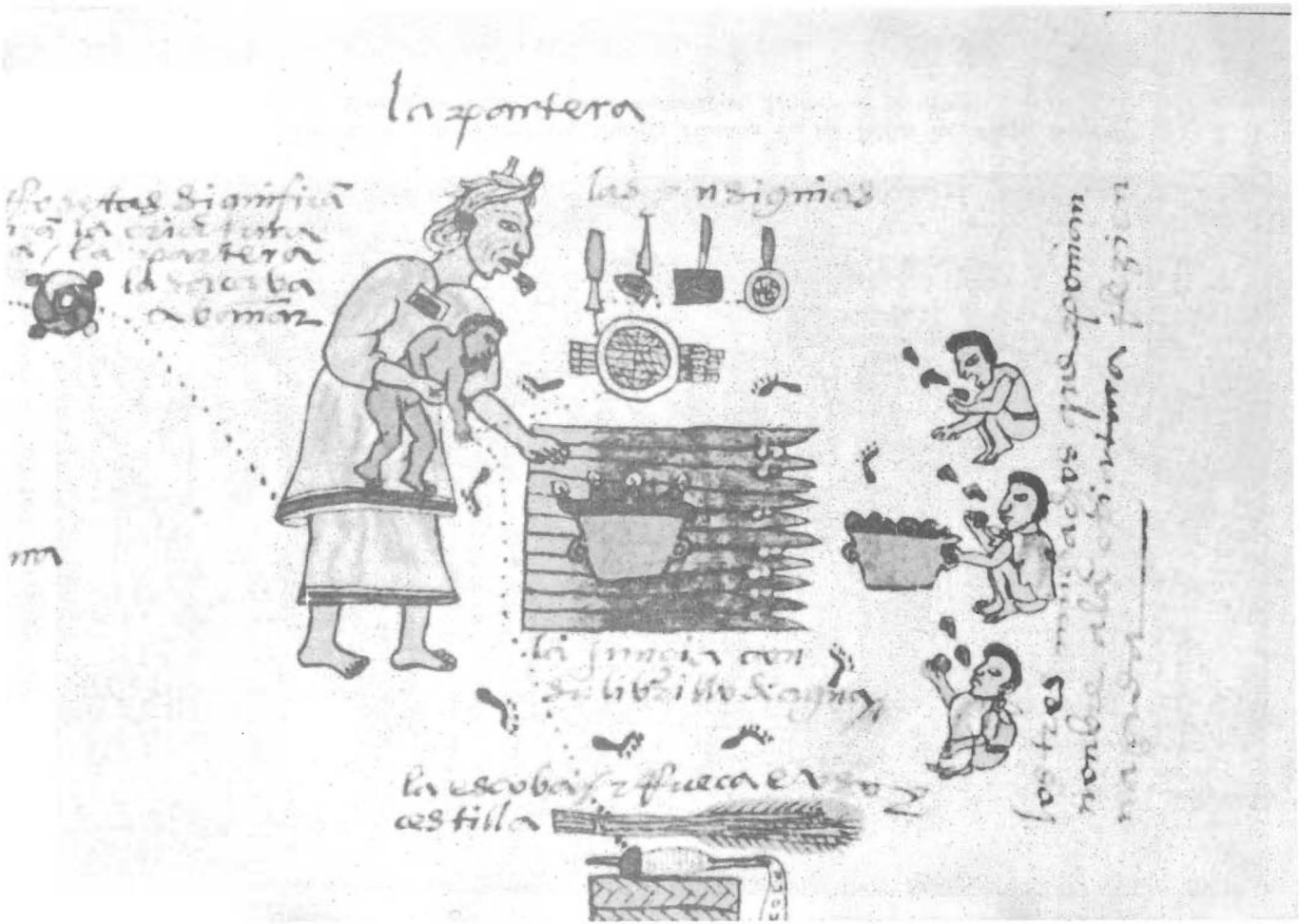

FIG. 2. Midwife bathing a newborn. From *Codex Mendoza,* 57.v
(From Echeagary 1979, lám. LVIII 57v)

FIG. 3. The battle with the Tepanecs, Durán's *Historia de las Indias de Nueva España.*
(Courtesy of the Hispanic Foundation, **Library of Congress**)

FIG. 4. The Coyolxauhqui relief. Stone. Templo Mayor.
(From Solís 1991, fig. 87)

Fig. 5. Relief of Cihuacoatl-Quilaztli. Stone.
(From Carrasco and Matos 1992, p. 43)

FIG. 6. Tzitzimitl. *Codex Magliabechiano*, 76r.
(After Nuttall 1978, pl. 76)

FIG. 7. **Tzitzimitl.** Greenstone plaque. Templo Mayor. (From López Austin 1979, fig. 4)

FIG. 8. Coatlicue. Stone.
(From Carrasco and Matos, 1992, p. 42)

FIG. 9. The *cihuacoatl*. *Codex Borbonicus*, 23.
(From Nowotny 1974, pl. 23)

FIG. 10. Cihuacoatl-Quilaztli. *Codex Magliabechiano,* 45r.
(From Nuttall 1978, p. 45)

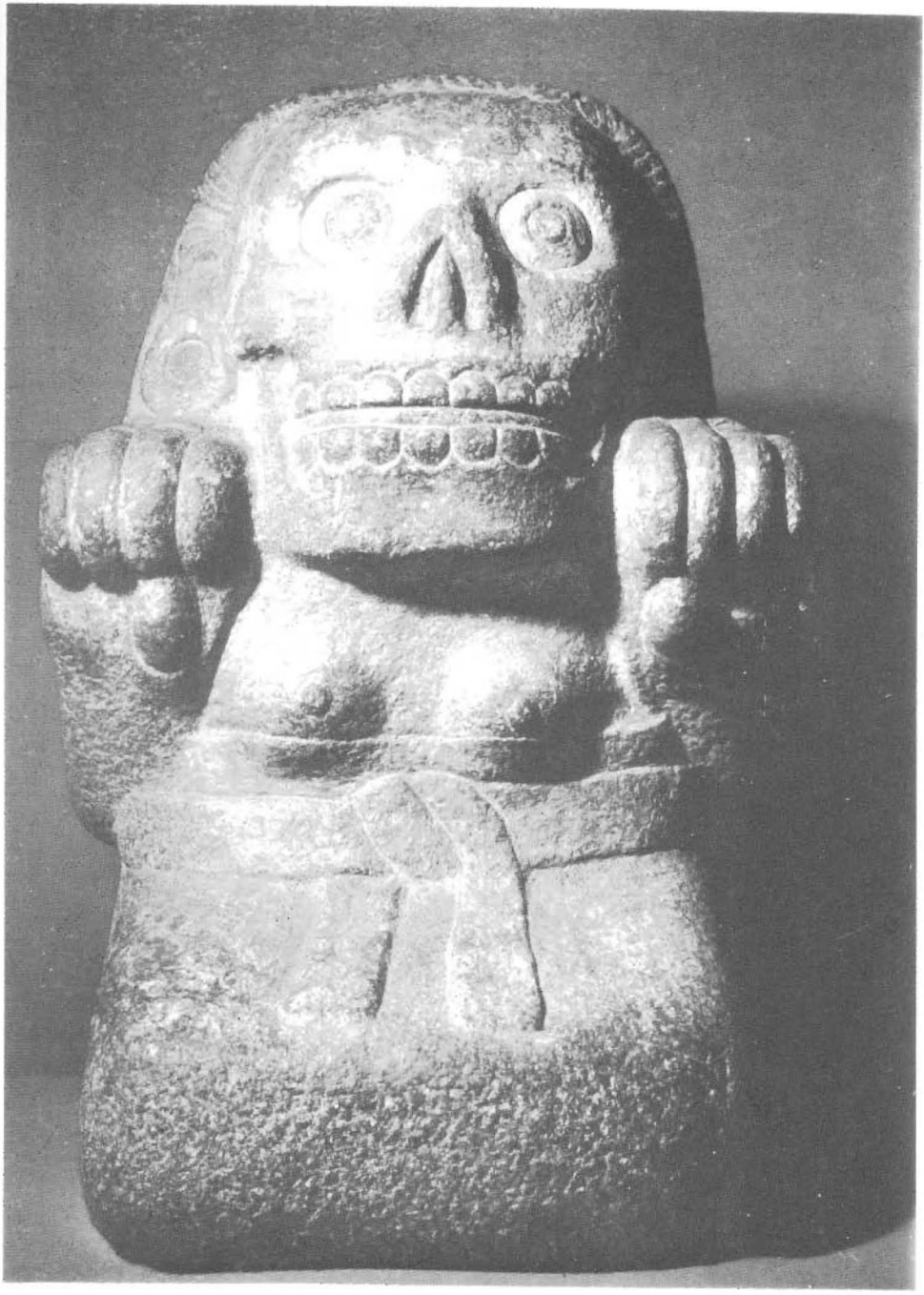

FIG. 11. Cihuateteo. Stone. (From Matos 1988b, p. 81)

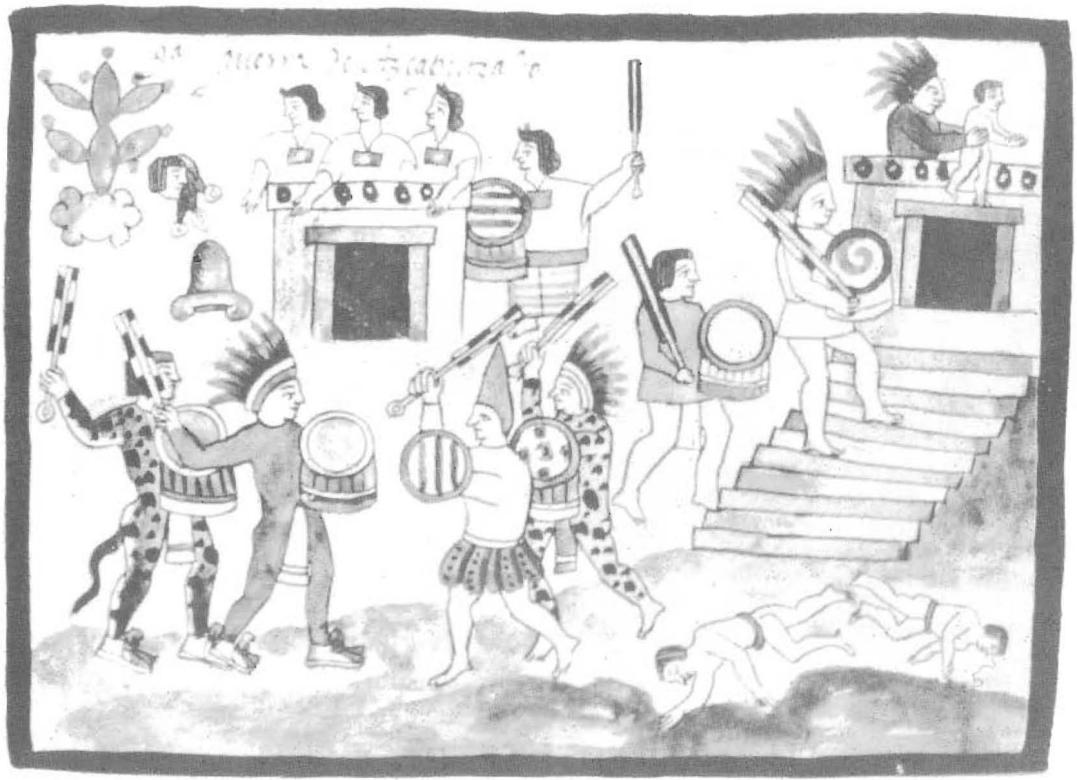

FIG. 12. The Battle with Azcapotzalco. Tovar Manuscript.
(From LaFaye 1972, pl. III)

as "Grandmothers" lift their skirts to expose their (theoretically) female genitals in order to keep the bull from killing their ceremonial husbands. Victoria Bricker (1973:16-17) explains that the Zinacantecos, like their neighbors, the Chamulas, believe that women can tame or cool "hot" male objects such as bulls and guns. Chamulans contend, in fact, that their women actually fought alongside their men during the Caste War of 1867-1870, and that they did so, like some of the Tlatelolcan women, by exposing their buttocks to the enemy so that the Ladino guns would not fire.

According to one rendition of this event, these posturing women functioned as human shields, saving their men by literally receiving the enemy's bullets in their anuses (Bricker 1973:117).[34] As with us, the Aztecs rooted the word for shield in their words meaning "to be covered", "to be defended", "to be protected" (Siméon 1977:103). This association of the protective war woman with the chief item of male armor, the shield, may date back to Pre-Aztec times in Central Mexico, since the chief deity at the Classic period site of Teotihuacan appears to have been a militaristic woman whose face or body was literally a shield (Taube 1983; Klein n.d.). In Aztec mythohistory the caretaker of the national patron and war deity Huitzilopochtli is sometimes described as a woman named Chimalma, "Shield" (*Codex Azcatitlan* 3; *Codex Aubin* 1980:13), while the mother of the god Quetzalcoatl, the founder of the Aztec nobility, was called Chimalman, "Resting Shield" (*Leyenda de los soles* 1975:124).[35] That the female organs were associated with shields may also account for a reference to Huitzilopochtli having emerged from his mother's womb on a shield (Garibay 1940:7).

Aztec literature accordingly equates sexual intercourse with warfare and conquest, implying male penetration of the worman's shield. Chimalma(n), or "Resting Shield", succumbed sexually to Quetzalcoatl's future father only after deflecting the arrows he fired at her while she stood, naked, on her shield (*Leyenda de los soles* 1975:124). Equally telling, a Chalcan song metaphorizes male sexual arousal as the grasping of a plumed shield on the battlefield (Garibay 1968:57; see also Quezada 1975:62-70). The song, which was composed to taunt an

[34] The story invokes Gilbert Herdt's (1981:173, 22n) report that Sambia men in New Guinea metaphorically refer to the female genital area as a whole as a "shield".

[35] In *Codex Azcatitlan V* several women appear as caretakers of Aztec deities during the early stage of the migration.

Aztec ruler who had tried unsuccessfully to defeat Chalco, portrays him as incapable of seducing women, and thus as one whose "spindle cannot dance", whose "weaving stick cannot weave" (Quezada 1975: 62-70). The Aztecs thus fall into that common, if not universal category of peoples who have defined warfare in terms of male/female sexual relations —who have, in other words, construed the opposition of war to peace, aggression to resistance, and victory to defeat, in terms of gender (Freeman 1989:304-05).[36]

Like the ancient Greeks, finally, the Aztecs likened childbirth to battle, and the parturient to a mighty warrior. The woman who was having a difficult labor was urged "to seize well the little shield", and "to imitate the brave woman Ciuacoatl, Quilaztli" (Sahagún 1953-82, 6:160). A Spanish writer reports that a newly delivered Aztec noblewoman was told:

> [Thou hast] accompanied thy mother, Ciucoatl, the noblewoman Quilaztli... Thou hast made war, thou hast skirmished, thou hast exerted thyself, thou hast taken well, seized well thy shield, thy club. Now our lord hath moved, hath placed apart, to one side, the tribute of death (*Ibid*:194).

The midwife praised her because she had been brave like an eagle or ocelot warrior, a direct reference to the two highest male military orders, and because like them she "had taken a captive, had captured a baby" (*Ibid*: 167, 179; cf. 180, 185).[37]

[36] Freeman (1989:304-05) credits Helene Cixcus's (1986) argument that the couple provides the basic organizational pattern of Western thought, the result being that every opposition is not only sexed, but has a gender; she explains its facile relation to warfare in terms of Elaine Scarry's (1985) point that "war is a contest".

[37] The comparison was played out in the male arena as well when Aztec warriors declined to join their kin in ritually eating the remains of the war captives they had presented for sacrifice. According to one chronicler, the warrior contended that he had to abstain from the rite because he regarded his prisoner as if he were a "beloved son" (Sahagún 1953-82, 2:54). The ideological nature of this trope is made clear in the additional comment that at the time of capture, the captive in turn referred to his captor as his "beloved father" (*Ibid*:54). The male identification of warfare with childbirth may be an example of male discursive appropriation of the terms of female sexuality, a reversal of the process I have been emphasizing. It is often noted, for example, that Aztec rulers, like their patron deity Huitzilopochtli, were addressed as "father and mother of all" (Durán 1967, 2:134). While this incorporation of the female productive sphere into the realm of men may imply a recognition of the unique powers of women, it serves the same (male) political ends as the militarization of the discourse on women.

This equation of the parturient with the male warrior was clearly honorific for the former, surely functioning to encourage women to take the risks of reproduction by assuring them of a status theoretically as great as men's. It formed, moreover, part of a broader tendency to describe the ideal Aztec woman, who as we have seen was actually comparatively passive and domestic, as a manly warrioress. One ruler, for example, assured his daughter that by behaving well she would be honored as though she were "in the halls of those who through their exploits in war merited honor"; she would thus "assume the shield like the good soldiers" (Sahagún 1953-82, 6:97, 11n). Women born on the day One Flint were expected to become courageous, strong, hardy, and "reckoned as a man"; those born on One Deer, another auspicious day, were "considered as a man, esteemed as if a man . . ." (*Ibid,* 4:9, 79). Whereas Enemy Woman's aggressiveness, then, was seen as merely brazen and unfeminine, that of the good Aztec woman, indeed ideal femininity itself, was characterized as brave, and as manly.

Women who died in childbirth, despite their failure, accordingly were described as having "suffered manfully" and young warriors tried to steal their hair or middle finger to increase their own bravery in battle (Sahagún 1953-82, 6:164, 162).[38] Those childbearers who died along with their first child, moreover, were accorded an afterlife that approximated that of warriors who had died in battle or on the enemy's sacrificial stone. Dead warriors were said to go to a special paradise at the eastern horizon, where they daily escorted the rising sun to its noontime zenith; after four years they joyously returned to earth as birds and butterflies to suck nectar from the flowers (*Ibid,* 3:49). The dead women, like women who had been killed in warfare, took over this responsibility each day at noon, when, dressed for war, they conducted the sun from zenith to its disappearance at the western horizon.

The breast milk *expressed* by the Tlatelolcan women, then, like the small fighting boys who accompanied them, surely refers to this analogy of motherhood to warfare; it suggests that the women intended to weaken the Aztec warriors by reducing them to the status of infants.[39]

[38] Less noble youths tried to get a forearm so they could paralyze the inhabitants of houses they wished to rob (Sahagún 1953-82, 4:101, 103, 162; 10:39). To prevent all of this, the deceased's male kin guarded her body for four nights prior to her burial (*Ibid,* 6:161).

[39] Sütterlin (1989:73) reports, in contrast, that some women in Australia and New Guinea claim that they hold or present their breasts in times of danger to show that they are mothers and therefore should be spared.

At the very least it manifested Tlatelolco's contempt for the Aztecs, much as the army of youths sent by the Aztecs against Cuitlahuac was apparently formed to show contempt" for that city (Durán 1967, II:20). The same analogy is implicit in an Aztec hymn dedicated to Cihuacoatl-Quilaztli, in which she is repeatedly addressed as "Our Mother", "War Woman" (*ibid,* 2:236). The Tlatelolco warrioresses, however, clearly represent an abuse, a misdirection of female sexuality and woman's reproductive weapons, which opposes them to the good wife and mother. It is this misplacement of their aggressions that identifies them instead, with the state's metaphoric nemesis, Enemy Woman.

It must be recognized, however, that the ideological parallel between the domestic, reproductive woman and the militarily successful man was intrinsically assymmetical and fictive. This is evident in the fate of the dead parturients, who, in contrast to the dead warriors, went to live and work in the western sky, the place of darkness and the sun's descent, where the Aztecs located the entrance to the land of the dead. These unhappy women also returned to earth at night and on unlucky days to look for their lost female clothing and equipment —that is, for their lost femininity (*Ibid,* 6:162-63, MacLachlin 1976:50). Like the Tzitzimime, and especially Cihuacoatl-Quilaztli, they might wreak havoc at these times —specifically sickness and deformities such as hare lips and crossed eyes on other women's children. They were therefore regarded by the living as "inhuman ones, mockers of the people", and as hateful, furious, and immodest (*Ibid,* 4:41, 107). Children were kept indoors and offerings made to statues of them, statues which may well be those we see today of macabre skeletal women with attributes of the Tzitzimime (Figure 11).[40]

In Aztec ritual, moreover, women never impersonated male deities; they never wore men's outer coverings to signify the destruction and expropriation of their masculinity. Nor were male deities ever represented as effeminate in Aztec literature.[41] Opposition to the state was

[40] My emphasis here on the negative implications of the fate of women who had died in childbirth is at odds with that of other Aztec scholars, who argue that the fact that Aztec women were offered an afterlife similar to that of dead warriors essentially put them on an equal ideologicial footing (see, e.g., Sullivan 1966, 1982; McCafferty n.d.b., 1988).

[41] Burkhart (1989) says one source states that the god Tezcatlipoca impersonated a woman in order to seduce his rival Quetzalcoatl, and so disgrace him, but she does not cite her source and I am unaware of it. In one incident, however, Tezcatlipoca did turn into an old women who destroyed the Toltecs with the odor of her toasted maize. In this story, however, as elsewhere, Tezcatlipoca is alliend

always expressed in terms of opposition to "male", or "manly" men, whether by unfeminine women or effeminate men. Women's militarism, as we have seen, was nearly always metaphorical, and it is clear that their feminine weapons, when misemployed in actual warfare, were in the end regarded as a sign of desperation and a joke. An Aztec song addressed to an enemy speaks derisively of "your arms of woman . . . your shields of woman", and adds that one can only laugh at them (Garibay 1940:40). This is consistent with the report that the Tlatelolcan ruler intended for his women warriors to serve only as a temporary diversion, and by the fact that the strategy failed (Durán 1967, 2:263). Barlow understood this when he characterized the Aztec version of their story as a mockery of the defeated enemy, pointing out that in the Tlatelolcan version, the women fight like real men.

Conclusion

The power of the discursive motif of the fighting woman to resolve the inherent contradictions in these various representations of Aztec women is perhaps most apparent in this Tlatelolcan version of the story. For here, and only here, in the oral history of the Aztecs' enemies, do we finally see women who take up real arms to defend their people, and who, like the Good Woman, support the efforts of their government. The ease with which Enemy Woman could be transformed into such an opposite is further manifest in a later, Spanish copy of a second, abridged version of the same manuscript whose illustration we have been studying. For some unknown reason, the abridged version, now known as *Codex Ramírez,* eliminated all reference to the lecherous Tlatelolcan warrioresses and, unlike the original, did not illustrate the battle (*Codex Ramírez* 1975:69-70). The copiest, Juan de Tovar, however, because he hoped his manuscript would persuade his fellow Jesuits to double their efforts to convert the natives, commissioned numerous new illustrations, for which his artist often turned to the original for inspiration (Couch 1989:151, 191, 194; LaFaye 1972:60-61). In doing so, the artist elected to use a modified version of the original depiction of the Tlatelolco battle to illustrate the story of the earlier

with the forces of evil and is described as a sorcerer; elsewhere he is portrayed as a "sodomite" (e.g., Sahagún 1953-82, 3:12). His behavior is thus socially decidedly undesireable.

battle with the ill-fated Tepanecs (Couch 1989:369) (Figure 12).[42] The strutting naked mothers to the right of the original have been eliminated in the copy, and the naked women on the nearby rooftop, who hurled their brooms and weaving tools at their advancing enemy, have been converted into an unarmed, well dressed, sequestered group. The doomed women are defended by a lone, likewise fully dressed woman armed exclusively with a male war shield and club (*Ibid*: 42, Pl. III).

The secret of the effectiveness and flexibility of the motif of the Aztec War Woman in these various texts and pictures is their mutual dependence on male values to characterize both ideal and undesirable female behavior, and by means of these, appropriate political behavior for women. Because aggression itself, like bravery, was essential to a state which depended on warfare, the wrongdoings of Enemy Woman were, like the virtues of her opposite, the Good Woman, identified with male strength and aggressivity, and the visual and verbal signs of the one overlapped —indeed were partially identical to— those of the other. It was this shared signage that made it possible for the Aztecs to so effectively combine, if not conflate, the contradictory messages of these concepts in single motifs such as that of the Tlatelolcan warrioresses, and for their enemies and successors to so readily adapt them to another purpose. In the end, of course, this same reliance on male rhetoric helped to ensure that all women, both "good" and "bad", like the state's political enemies, were doomed to lose the contest.[43] In Aztec ideology,

[42] The illustration in the original of the Coyoacan remembrance of the war with Azcapotzalco was later used as a model for the illustration of the later Aztec war with Coyoacan.

[43] Marina Warner (1981-215-17) makes the same point with regard to the ancient Greek Amazons, who by virtue of being admired for their speed, courage, aim, and endurance, simply reaffirm male superiority. I have considered the possibility that the story of the Tlatelolcan women was a post-conquest invention inspired by the conquerors' keen interest in the legends of the Amazons, but see no evidence of a relationship (see Leonard 1949:36-52). Likewise, I know of no biblical or other medieval/renaissance European prototype. George Devereux (1981:29-30, 57, 60), citing Herodotus, Plutarch, and Artemidorus, does discuss ancient Egyptian, Etruscan, and Greek incidents in which exposed female genitalia, actual or graven, were used to insult an enemy by imputing cowardice. Similarly, the Arabs who in the tenth century were trying unsuccessfully to defend Moslem Crete from the Greeks reportedly placed on their city walls "a strange woman, a sort of sorceress, who gesturing and swinging her body indecently, challenged the Byzantines" (Vassilos Christides 1984: 180). That such body language is probably a universal is indicated by Cervantes de Salazar's (1985:721) claim that the Spanish conquistador Cristóbal de Olid presented his buttocks to the Aztecs a show of his contempt for them. For no other culture than the Aztec, however, have I found a story of naked, obscene women, who fight with their own body parts and excretions, having been sent into battle.

those who fought with their femininity were simply part of a discursive strategy that bolstered, not just the sovereignty of the state itself, but concomitantly the power and authority of men.

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