

## TLATOANI AND TLATOCAYOTL IN THE SAHAGUN MANUSCRIPTS <sup>1</sup>

THELMA D. SULLIVAN

Sahagun's works comprise one of the major sources on the *tlatoani*, ruler, and the *tlatocayotl*, rulership, and is surely one of the best. His methodology could scarcely be improved upon. As he himself states, the process of gathering this, and other data, went through three major stages which spanned the period 1559-1569. "The first turf was cut", as he puts it, in Tepepulco (today, Tepeapulco, Hidalgo), where he had as informants ten or twelve elderly *principales* (*tetecutin*), nobles and lords, and as amanuenses, four *gramáticos*,<sup>2</sup> "erudites", who had formerly been his students at the Colegio de Santa Cruz,<sup>3</sup> themselves *principales*. "All the things discussed they gave me in pictures", Sahagún states, "which was the writing they used in ancient (pre-conquest) times, and the *gramáticos* rendered them into their own language, writing the explanation at the foot of the picture". The second and third stages which took place in Tlatelolco and Mexico, respectively, followed the same procedure. Thus, Sahagún states, "...those of Tepepulco were the first sieve through which my works were sifted; those of Tlatelolco, the second; those of Mexico, the third; and taking part in all these investigations were the college *gramáticos*" (SAH: 1956: 105 ff.) There is little doubt that as aides, the *gramáticos* were invaluable. They were tri-lingual, being versed in Latin, Spanish and Nahuatl, and

<sup>1</sup> This was originally presented as a paper in the symposium entitled *Sahagún: The Man and His Manuscripts* at the Annual Meeting of the Society for American Archeology, Tucson, Arizona, May 1978.

<sup>2</sup> From the Latin, *grammaticus*, an educated and erudite person. What is called in Spanish "letrado". See Corominas, vol. II, p. 764.

<sup>3</sup> The Colegio de Santa Cruz in Tlatelolco was founded in 1536. Sahagún was among the first friars to teach there; his subject was Latin. Mendieta (1971: 414 ff.) gives a good account of the founding of the school and its subsequent vicissitudes. Sahagún discusses the importance of the school and the aptness of its Indian students in Book III, chap. xxvii.

they were *principales* in whom the pre-conquest traditions of their forebears were still alive. Thus, they could be counted on to comprehend and interpret correctly, the data given Sahagún by the native informants. While it could be argued that they may have deliberately misinterpreted the data, being influenced by their relationship with the friars, generally speaking, this does not seem to be the case. Further, it is not illogical to suppose that they may have been related to some of the informants. This is particularly pertinent to the subject of this paper, which aims to deal with some aspects of *tlatoani* and *tlatocayotl* as delineated in Sahagún's codices.

Book VIII of both the Madrid and Florentine Codices are devoted exclusively to the lords and rulers and there is no section, no book in these manuscripts in which one or the other of the ruler's activities is not discussed. Also, there is a good deal of important material, albeit in condensed form, in the *Primeros Memoriales* which has not yet been made available in translation some of which will be dealt with here.

The *tlatoani* was the supreme ruler; he had jurisdiction over every branch of government: he was the military, civil, judicial, legislative, and religious leader of his people, and he regulated the economy. A great deal has been written about the *tlatoani* and pre-Hispanic social organization, and it is not my intention to cover all this ground again. My focus will be on the ruler as surrogate of the deity and its more important implications.

The essence of the concept of *tlatoani* and *tlatocayotl* can be found principally in Book VI of the *Florentine Codex*, the *huehue-tlatolli*, or rhetorical orations delivered on all ceremonial occasions, which contained the traditions of the ancients that had been handed down from generation to generation. By his own account, Sahagún compiled these orations in 1547, twelve years before he went to Tepepulco to begin gathering the bulk of the material for the *Historia General*. Since he was in Tlatelolco at that time, it is probable that his informants were former lords and high-ranking functionaries of that area—judges, ruler's counselors, and priests—who survived the holocaust that was sweeping away their culture.

The metaphors that deal with the ruler and related subjects tell a great deal about how he was regarded and what was expected of him. The *tlatoani*, which means "he who speaks", that is, "he who commands", was thought of as *iyollo altepetl*, "the heart of the city". He was addressed as *tlazotli*, "precious one", *tlazotlacatl*, "precious

lord", or *tlazopilli*, "precious prince", and likened to *chalchihuitl*, "jade", *teoxihuitl*, "turquoise", *maquiztli*, "an armlet", *quetzalli*, "a quetzal feather", some of their most highly prized objects. He was, they said, *tetzon*, *teizti*, *teuitzyo*, *teauayo*, *tetentzon*, *teixquamol*, *te-cueuhca*, *tetlapanca*, "the hair, nails, thorn, spine, beard, eyebrows, chip, sliver of nobles", who belonged to the *tlatocamecayopan*, "the lineage of rulers". He was regarded as *inan*, *ita altepell*, "the mother, the father of the city", as *in ahuehuetl*, *in pochotl*, "a great cypress, a silk cotton tree", in whose shade the people took refuge; *in tenamitl*, *in tzacuilli*, "a wall, a barricade" that protects people. His words and admonitions were likened to precious jades, precious turquoises that were sown in the fertile minds—it was hoped—of his subjects, whom they enriched. These words were *nanyotl*, *tayotl*, "maternal, paternal" pronouncements and represented *intil*, *intlappal* in *huehuetque*, "the black ink, the red ink, of the ancients found in their *imamox*, *intlacuilotl*, "their books, their paintings"; that is, they were the traditions handed down in their hieroglyphic writings and in the *huehueilatolli*, the rhetorical orations, which were adhered to rigidly. *Tlatocayotl*, "rulership", was referred to metaphorically as *pellatl*, *icpalli*, "the reed mat, the reed seat", the throne. It was considered an unsettling place where one slipped, where one lost one's footing, for the ruler was constantly exposed to the treacheries of enemies both within and without. For any one of his subjects, be he lord or commoner, it was equally slippery to stand before the *tlatoani*, having incurred his wrath; for those who had the misfortune to find themselves there, there was no way out, no exit. To be in the company of the *tlatoani* or before him was *coloyotoc*, *tzitzicazzotoc*, "to be in a place full of scorpions, to be in a place full of nettles". However, the members of the ruling class were always united. As the saying went: *netloc*, *nenahuac*, *netzitziquilo*, *nepacholo*, "they are together, side by side, clasping each other, embracing each other" (FC:VI:241-260.)<sup>4</sup>

In contrast, the commoner, for whom there are fewer metaphors, was *pacholoni*, *yacanaloni*, "one who is governed, one who is led". He was also *itconi*, *mamaloni*, *in tecuexanco*, *in temamalhuazco yetiuh*, "one who is carried, who is borne on the back, one who is upon one's lap, in the cradle of one's arms"; that is, he is carried about like a child. In a contrasting figure, he was likened

<sup>4</sup> For the convenience of the reader the Dibble and Anderson paleography of the *Florentine Codex* is cited. However, all translations of Nahuatl texts in this article are by the author.

to *cuitlapilli*, *atlapalli*, "the tail, the wing" of the Bird of State, the appendages that represented the work force that kept the state in motion; by inference, the ruler and ruling class were the head and body.

In the court orations, as I have previously designated them, and in various prayers to Tezcatlipoca, contained in Book VI of the *Florentine Codex*, it is manifest that the *tlatoani* ruled by divine right, that he was the surrogate of the deity and ruled in his name. On his election as ruler the *tlatoani* is told:

"You are the substitute, you are the surrogate of Tloque Nahuaque,  
 you are his seat (the throne from which he rules), you  
 are his flute (the mouth through which he speaks),  
 he speaks within you,  
 he makes you his lips, his jaws, his ears. . .  
 He also makes you his fangs, his claws,  
 for you are his wild beast, you are his eater-of-people,  
 you are his judge". (FC:vi:50.)

The ruler spoke for the deity, that is, gave orders for the deity; and in the name of the deity, punished those who did not obey. Tloque Nahuaque, literally, "Lord of the Near, Lord of the Close" figuratively means the supreme lord who is everywhere, in everything, and upon whom all depend. It is one of the numerous names of Tezcatlipoca, "The Mirror's Smoke", (not "Smoking Mirror"), who ruled the world. He was also called Yohualli Ehecatl, "Night, Wind", that is, invisible, impalpable; Moyocoyatzin, "Capricious Creator";<sup>5</sup> Monenequi, "Tyrannical One"; Titlacahuan, "Our

<sup>5</sup> León-Portilla (1966:169) interprets this as "Señor que a sí mismo se piensa o se inventa", basing himself on the following interpretation by Mendieta (1945: 1: 95): "Y también le decían *Moyucuyatzin ayac oquiyocox*, *ayac oquipic*, que quiere decir 'que nadie lo crió o formó, sino que él por su autoridad y por su voluntad hace todo'. However, his sphere of action is wider than just the creation of himself, although it could be argued that the creation of himself implies the creation of all things. Another description of *Moyocoyani* can be found in the *Florentine Codex*, Book III, p. 12: *Auh yníc moteneoa moicoia*, *in tlein qujiocoia*, *in tlein quilnamique*, *niman quichioa: aiac quijocoia*, *aiac queleltia*. . ., "and he was called Moyocoya[ni] because whatever he thought, whatever was in his mind, he did; no one invented him (or "invented for him"), no one impeded him". Sahagún (1956: 1: 278) in the corresponding Spanish texts states: "... llamábanle Moyocoyatzin por razón que hacía todo cuanto quería y pensaba y que ninguno le podía impedir y contradecir. . ."

Master" (literally, "we are his slaves"); Teimatini, "Knower of People"; Techichihuani, "Adorner of People"; Telpochtli, "The Youth", meaning young warrior; Yaotl, "The Enemy"; Necoc Yaotl, "The Enemy on Both Sides", that is, the fomentor of discord; Moquequelo, "The Mocker"; Ipalnemoani, "Giver of Life"; and Teyocoyani, "Creator of Man", among others (FC:vi:1-45.) His was the power to bestow riches and honors and snatch them away at a whim. As one text states:

He thinks as he pleases,  
 does as he pleases;  
 he mocks us.  
 As he wishes, so he wills.  
 He puts us in the palm of his hand, he rolls us about;  
 like pebbles we spin and bounce.  
 He flings us this way and that,  
 we make him laugh; he laughs at us. (FC:vi:51.)

This was the deity for whom the *tlatoani* acted as surrogate: capricious, arbitrary, willful; a friend or enemy depending on his whim; somewhat sadistic, he rolled people around in the palm of his hand like pebbles and laughed at their helplessness. The ruler may have been regarded as mother and father of the people, the great cypress, the great silk-cotton tree under which they could seek protection, but on occasion he became a wild beast; he bared his fangs and showed his claws. He could be capricious and arbitrary, also. He was, in short, a despot.

The investiture of the new *tlatoani* took place in the temple of Huitzilopochtli. He was dressed in a green cape that had the same design of bones as that of the *xicolli*, sleeveless jacket, on the figure of Huitzilopochtli in the festival of Toxcatl. Toxcatl was a festival in honor of Tezcatlipoca, with whom Huitzilopochtli was identified, for as Jiménez Moreno has stated (1976: M.S.), "...heroes were deified in the image and likeness of a deity with whom they tended to merge. Tezcatlipoca appears to have been the numen in whose image and likeness... Huitzilopochtli, priest and leader of the Mexica, [became deified]". The merging of Huitzilopochtli, the young, vigorous warrior who vanquished all his foes, with Tezcatlipoca, who was Telpochtli, "The Young Warrior", and Yaotl, "The Enemy" is, of course, a logical fusion. Boys who went to the *telpochcalli*, school for warriors, were placed in the service of



you shall provide nourishment for the Sun [and] the Lord  
of the Earth.

Your true home, your property, your patrimony is the  
House of the Sun in heaven. FC:vi:171.)

The warrior's duty was to become "the mother and father of the Sun and the Lord of the Earth"; that is, their source of nourishment, either by dying in battle, or being taken captive and sacrificed, or by taking captives himself and sacrificing them as substitutes for his own flesh and blood. The rewards for the valiant and dedicated warrior came in the form of riches and elevation in rank and honor, until one day he would become one of the ruler's most trusted aides, or on his death, take the place of the ruler himself. Cowards were executed. If for some reason the ruler wished to spare him the ignominy, such as in the case of a near relative, he was taken to the battlefield and allowed to be killed or captured (CMA:f. 65 r.)

Closely connected to war was the singing and dancing that took place every night which apparently was regarded as a substitute for battle. The *Primeros Memoriales* text states that, "when there was singing or dancing or when mushrooms were to be eaten, the ruler ordered the songs to be sung" (CMA:f. 54 r.) Singing and dancing, according to another text, stirred up the young warriors and served as a means of communicating with the deity (FC:vi:90), probably through the ecstasy produced by the hallucinogens, and Sahagún states that war strategy was planned at this time (SAH:1956:ii:123.) It must be remembered, too, that the gods of the dance —Xochipilli, Macuilxochitl, Ixtlilton, and others— were essentially solar fertility gods. The blood of the warriors that nourished the Sun, also nourished Tlaltecutli, Lord of the Earth who provided man's sustenance. So important was this singing and dancing that a singer or dancer or musician who erred in any way was put to death.

Other important occupations of the ruler were as follows:

The guarding of the city by day and by night.

The regulation of the market by the *pochtecatlatoque*, merchant lords, which included the fixing of prices, and the punishment of vendors who did not comply.

Ordering that the ball game or *patolli* be played. In these there was heavy betting on both sides and, says the *Primeros Memoriales*

text, they were like war. "One was killed there, one's head was split open", states the informant in reference to the losing team. As for the one who lost his wager, he continues, "he was sold, he became a slave" (CMA:54 r.)

Agriculture was a vital concern of the ruler and, was inextricably linked to war as will be seen. Drought and famine, which were all too frequent, it appears, brought into play the ruler's responsibilities as economic as well as religious head of state. When the harvests for two successive years were meagre, a text in the *Primeros Memoriales* tells us, he comforted the people and, on a more practical level, ordered them to plant magueyes, prickly pears, and *cimatl*, a legume whose root was eaten. If the drought persisted, as religious leader of his people he ordered that sacrifices and auto-sacrifices be made to the Tlaloque, the gods of rain, and in the realm of imitative magic, that the roads be swept, for it was believed that the winds swept the roads in advance of the gods of rain (*Ibid*, f. 54 v.)

Also, for a period of eight days during the festival of Huey Tecuilhuitl, "The Great Festival of the Lords", which came at the end of June and the beginning of July, a period of chronic food shortage, the ruler distributed food to all his people and even to the people of the surrounding areas (SAH:1:174 ff.) This festival immediately followed that of Tecuilhuitontli, "The Little Festival of the Lords", which was celebrated at the time of the summer solstice (Broda:1978:166) and appears to have important implications with respect to the ruler as surrogate of the deity. In effect, Huey Tecuilhuitl is a celebration of his vast powers. These include the regulation of agriculture and may be reflected in the distribution of food at that time which, beyond being an act of generosity on the part of the ruler, served to affirm his control like that of the deity, over the life and death of his subjects.

After war, the next most important function of the Aztec ruler was governing the people; that is, law-making and its handmaiden the meting out of justice. An adjunct to this was the selection of judges who, in addition to heading the tribunals, were the ruler's most trusted counselors. Their choice was one of the ruler's most important functions, for when he died, the new ruler would be chosen from their ranks. The *tlatoani*, of course, was the ultimate court of appeal. In his prayer to Tezcatlipoca, the newly-elected ruler says:



It is said that [the rulers] will make pronouncements  
 for you . . .  
 and that they shall make pronouncements for your sire,  
 the mother of the gods, the father of the gods,  
 Huehuetotl (the Old God) who sits in the hearth, in  
 the turquoise enclosure,  
 Xiuhtecutli, who bathes people, who cleanses people,  
 who metes out, who accords, the destruction, the glorification  
 of the commoners, the people (FC:vi:41.)

It is apparent in this text that, although the ruler functioned as the surrogate of Tezcatlipoca, the powers transmitted to him did not originate in this deity but in Huehuetotl-Xiuhtecutli, the Old God, the God of Fire. The name Xiuhtecutli is derived from *xihuitl* which means, "fire", "turquoise", "year", "plant", and "comet"; and *teculli*, "lord". As the text states, Huehuetotl-Xiuhtecutli was not only the father of Tezcatlipoca, he was also the progenitor of all the gods including, and most particularly, the Sun. Huehuetotl-Xiuhtecutli dates back to the time when all was still in darkness, before the beginning of time; that is, before the creation of the Fifth Sun, for Fire existed before the Sun. The Sun was created from the sickly flesh and twisted bones of Nanahuatzin, and the Fire which purified and transformed them. Thus, the powers passed on to the ruler by Tezcatlipoca, which he inherited from his father, Huehuetotl-Xiuhtecutli, are primordial. They pre-date the creation of the Fifth Sun which according to Davies and others symbolized the rise of Toltec hegemony from the ashes of Teotihuacan. For the ruler to trace his powers to Huehuetotl-Xiuhtecutli meant, by implication, tracing them back to Teotihuacan where, according to legend, the Fifth Sun was created, and earlier. This appears to have been an important factor in the legitimization of the Aztec rule. The relationship between the Aztec ruler and Huehuetotl-Xiuhtecutli is manifest in the vestments of the rulers. In them the *xihuitl*, the turquoise stone as well as color, symbolic of Xiuhtecutli, predominate: the *xihuitzollli*, the turquoise diadem; the *xihuitlmalili*, turquoise color net cape with turquoise stones knotted into it; and the *xihuyacamitl*, or turquoise nose adornment, which as Doris Heyden states is a stylization of the *xihucoatl*, fire serpent (Heyden:1972:4.) The *xihucoatl* was the weapon of Xiuhtecutli which Huitzilopochtli, in a clear bid for dynastic power, wielded in order to vanquish his sister, Coyolxauhqui, and his brothers, the Centzon-

huitznahua. The *xiuhcoatl* and the *mamalhuaztli*, the fire sticks, were symbols of the power and authority of Huitzilopochtli, the Aztec numen, and of the ruler himself.

The association of fire with rulership, *tlatocayotl*, is clearly evidenced in the dynastic plates of the *Primeros Memoriales*. The first three Mexica rulers, Acamapichtli, Huitziliuitl, and Chimalpopoca, wear on their heads the *cozoyaualolli*, a rosette of scarlet macaw feathers, also a symbol of fire. *Cozo-* is the same root as *cozol-* which, in turn, is the same as *cuezal-*. *Cueزالin* was the name for the tail and wing feathers of the scarlet macaw (FC:xi:23.) *Cueزالin* also means "flame" and Cuezaltzin was one of the names of Xiuhtecutli, God of Fire.

It must also be pointed out that these first three rulers also wear rawhide capes, symbolic of their Chichimec origins, and that they sit on *toloicpalli*, bundles of unwoven green reeds, in contrast to the subsequent rulers beginning with Itzcoatl, who wear the turquoise adornments mentioned above and sit on *tepotzoicpalli*, seats of woven reeds with backrests.<sup>6</sup> As Doris Heyden has pointed out, reeds are a symbol of political power (Heyden:1976:M.S.) which the *toloicpalli* and the *tepotzoicpalli* shown in these plates bear out. However, the two different types of seats help us take her observation a step further. It would appear that the bundles of unwoven green reeds which serve as rulers' seats symbolize the inception of political power—unconsolidated power—while the reeds woven into seats with backs symbolize consolidated power.

As we have seen, the ruler belonged to a line of succession that symbolically started with Huehuetectl-Xiuhtecutli. The *tlatoani* acted as surrogate for Tezcatlipoca and, in the final analysis, for Huehuetectl-Xiuhtecutli. He was regarded as a deity and venerated as such. His identification with the god of fire was so close that in the festival of Izcalli, which was in honor of Xiuhtecutli, the figure of the god was dressed in the vestments of the ruler, and quail were sacrificed and offerings were set down before it (FC:i:12; SAH:1956:i:56.) Furthermore, on the day Ce Quiahuitl, 1 Rain, criminals who had been sentenced to death and some captives were sacrificed to give strength to the ruler, so that he would be able to carry on his burdensome task of ruling for another year. The *Florentine Codex* texts affirms that,

<sup>6</sup> The same is true of the first three Tetzcoacan rulers and the first five rulers of Huexutla.

...by means of them (the sacrificial victims), Moctezuma  
 was nourished,  
 by means of them his destiny was fortified,<sup>7</sup>  
 by means of them he was given new life,<sup>8</sup>  
 by means of them he was reprieved [from death],  
 because of them he became a boy once more so that he might  
 live a long life... (FC:iv:42.)

This symbolic rejuvenation and nourishment of the ruler with human blood, served to remind the people of the total identification of the ruler with the old god, Huchuetotl-Xiuhtecutli and was a way of legitimizing his powers.

This account of the sacrifice of criminals and captives to infuse the king with new life has a deeper significance for us in that it throws light on the subject of human sacrifice in general as practiced by the Aztecs and their predecessors. Why the sacrificial victim was the representation of the deity to whom he was sacrificed, is a question that, to my knowledge, has never been satisfactorily answered. I believe this text gives us an important clue. Like the ruler to whom sacrifices were made to give him the strength to carry on in the arduous work of governing, so all the gods, not just the Sun, had to be nourished in order to continue to do their work. The Aztec economy, like that of the Teotihuacanos, the Toltecs, and their descendants, was agriculturally based and the growth-death-renewal cycle characteristic of nature predominated in the lives of the people. This is clearly manifested in the eighteen festivals of twenty days each that followed the solar year. The death of a victim representing the god of fire, or the god of rain, or the goddess of new corn, for example, was the means by which the life force of the individual was transferred to the deity so that his energies could be renewed and he could continue to function. The energies of the gods were as finite as man's; like man, the gods became weary. For example, in the festival of *Atamalqualiztli*, the *Eating of Water Tamales*, celebrated every eight years, only tamales made with corn dough mixed with water were eaten; no condiments or other additives were permitted so as to give the corn a respite and a chance to regain its strength (CMP: f. 253 v.)

The reason, then, that the sacrificial victim was arrayed in the

<sup>7</sup> *Motonalchicacoa*, literally, "his day-sign was fortified".

<sup>8</sup> See Molina, "resucitar, levantarse", one of the meanings of which is *nino, quetza*.

vestments of the god to whom he was to be sacrificed, and was considered his image and likeness —*ixiptlatl* which also means “substitute”— was because he was destined to become one with the deity. The life that went out of him upon his death was immediately incorporated into that of the deity; in short, he was sacrificed so that the god might live. Since the gods personified aspects of the natural phenomena, and the elements and heavenly bodies which controlled them, human sacrifice guaranteed their perpetuation and with it the cyclical renewal of plant and animal growth that sustained life on earth. Those who died in battle, which meant, as captives who were sacrificed, or slaves purchased by the merchants for sacrifice, went to the House of the Sun to provide nourishment not only for Tonatiuh, the Sun, but also for Tlaltecuctli, “Lord of the Earth”. That is, the transference of their vital forces to the gods kept the universe —both heaven and earth— alive and functioning. The model for this was the creation of the Fifth Sun in which the vital forces of all the gods that were released when they sacrificed themselves, combined to put the Sun in motion so that it could do its work.

Thus, as was stated earlier, the principal concern of the ruler was war. Although acts of auto-sacrifice by drawing blood from various parts of the body, as well as sprinkling the blood of decapitated quail before the idols provided the gods with some sustenance, their real strength derived from the blood of warriors who died in battle or captives or slaves who were sacrificed. In the case of ignoble slaves who were purchased for sacrifice, once they were ceremonially bathed —that is purified— they achieved the status, so to speak, of war captives and became eligible to fuse with the deity. Fusion with the deity, however, was not deification. Only rulers were deified. This is made clear in the text that follows:

The ancients said that he (a ruler) who died became a god. They said, ‘He has become a god’, which meant he had died. And thus (the people) were deluded so that those who were rulers would be obeyed. All who died were worshipped as gods: some became images of the Sun, others images of the Moon, etc.” (meaning other heavenly bodies and natural phenomena). (FC:x:192.)

(It must be recalled that this is history as rewritten by the Aztecs after Itzcoatl ordered that all the ancient codices be burned.)

Two concepts basic to Aztec rule are implicit in this text:

1) That only rulers and nobles can become gods. Since the word *miqui* means both "to die" and "to be sacrificed", it is probable that both meanings are applicable in the above text; that is, "all who died (or were sacrificed) were worshipped as gods".

2) The Aztec dynastic line was legitimized by the deification of the Teotihuacan rulers whom they claimed as ancestors. This made the Aztec ruler not only the surrogate of Tezcatlipoca and Huehuetotl-Xiuhtecutli but also a descendant of gods, the defunct rulers of Teotihuacan who had become deified. The subsequent deification of the Mexica leader and hero, Huitzilopochtli, merely followed the pattern established in Teotihuacan.

### Summary

In the dual divine identification of the king with Tezcatlipoca and Huehuetotl-Xiuhtecutli resided the sweeping powers of the ruler and the legitimacy of his rule. The Aztec *tlatoani* had a formidable task: he not only had to govern his people but, in the final analysis, he also had to keep the universe alive and in balance. War was of first importance, in order to provide captives for the nourishment of the gods. The world of the gods was a mirror image of life on earth. Every god, like every individual, had a function to perform and for the god to cease to function was catastrophic for man as it was catastrophic for the gods for man to cease to function. To feed the gods, (not just the Sun) was to feed man. Thus agriculture, which was the basis of the economy, depended on war. In order to discharge these heavy responsibilities the ruler had to be endowed with extraordinary powers. He acted as surrogate of Tezcatlipoca, in military matters, and of Huehuetotl-Xiuhtecutli, in civil matters. But in effect, all the powers derived from Huehuetotl-Xiuhtecutli a deity associated with Teotihuacan and even pre-classic times. He was mother and father of the gods, most particularly of the Sun, a central deity in the Aztec pantheon. This link with Teotihuacan and earlier times was the means by which the Aztec ruler legitimized his rule.

In essence, this is the Aztec *tlatoani* as revealed in the Sahagún manuscripts. Sahagún's informants, as well as his aides, who themselves were of the ruling class, may have colored some data in their favor, omitted some, and misinterpreted some, but in the main they provided a fairly precise picture of the Aztec *tlatoani* and *tlatocayotl*.

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