

CLOSING THE WATER: ETHNOGRAPHY OF A NAHUA RITUAL

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Abstract

“Closing the water”¹ is a ritual connected to the agrarian cycle and belongs to a set of rituals which are performed for the purpose of securing an abundant harvest of maize and other crops. This case study is based on fieldwork conducted by the author in Hueyapan, a Nahua community situated in the Highlands of Morelos on the southern slopes of the Popocatepetl volcano in Central Mexico. It consists of two parts: the first provides a description of the ritual; that is, it presents the ritual itself and the sequence of its parts. The second represents an analysis and explanation of the ritual from an anthropological point of view. Since the ritual of “Closing the water” belongs to a millennial tradition of Mesoamerica related to a ritual landscape, sacred mountains and agrarian cycle, the paper shows how this tradition and this ritual were incorporated into Catholicism in a process of religious syncretism.

Keywords: Nahuas; Central Mexico; Hueyapan; Popocatepetl; agrarian cycle; ritualism; rainmaking.

Introduction

Hueyapan, which means 1) In a place with plenty of water, 2) A place with plenty of water², is a Nahua community located in the northeastern corner of the state of Morelos where it borders the state of Puebla. It belonged to the municipality (*municipio libre*) of Tetela del Volcán until 2023 when the process of creating Hueyapan as an independent and indigenous municipality (*municipio indígena*) was finished (it began in 2017).³ Its position on the slopes of the Popocatepetl volcano in the Highlands of Morelos (*Los Altos de Morelos*) is why the territory of this community is a vertical world. Speaking only of the community itself, the difference between the lowest and the highest parts is about 350 m (between approximately 2150 and 2500 m above sea level). However, its territory reaches the higher altitudes and is dominated by the Popocatepetl volcano (5465 m), that the inhabitants of the community consider the centre or navel of the world. This zone belongs to what is called the Trans-Mexican Volcanic Belt (*Eje Volcánico Transversal Mexicano*), a very volcanic and seismic mountainous region which, following the 19th parallel from the

¹ Literal translation of its Spanish original name “*Cerrar el agua*”.

² *Huey* (in Nahuatl, big, large, also in the meaning of abundance), *atl* (water), *pan* (in, in a place).

³ The election of *presidente municipal* took place in October 2022 and the winner acceded to her office in January 2023. However, the territory demarcation with the neighboring municipalities (Tetela del Volcán in Morelos and Tochimilco in Puebla) has still not been finished.

north, extends from west (Nayarit) to east (Veracruz) for a length of about 1200 km and width of 20–150 km. So earthquakes are not exceptional, nor is volcanic activity, since Popocatepetl is still an active volcano.⁴ Hueyapan has approximately 8000 inhabitants, and a good part of it is dedicated to agriculture to this day. It is like that because, being a volcanic area, the land there is very fertile and the risk of volcanic activity is compensated for by the fertile land and abundant water which has attracted Mesoamerican farmers since at least the Preclassic era. Popocatepetl as a personified being considered alive and animated became the protector of the people and without any exaggeration it can be said that living under this volcano also means living with it. There are several sacred precincts⁵ on its slopes. The most important for the people of Hueyapan is a cave called The Divine Face of Popocatepetl (*El Divino Rostro de Popocatepetl*) located at an elevation of approximately 4000 m above sea level, already above the so called “mountain” (*monte* in Spanish, in this sense meaning the forest; this means that the cave is located above the tree line) in the volcanic cone. This sacred precinct is full of crosses today, but it has been visited since pre-Hispanic times with the purpose of carrying out the rainmaking rituals. The people of Hueyapan visit other places as well, but for the purpose of this article I have omitted these, since the ritual in which I participated actually took place in the Divine Face of Popocatepetl.⁶

Description of ritual

I am going to start my paper with a description of the ritual of Closing the Water, which means that in this part I am not going to explain or analyse it. I only mention that this ritual is performed after the rainy season. In Central Mexico this usually ends at the end of September or the beginning of October. When the rains end, maize and other crops have to be harvested, and only after that is the Closing the Water performed, which in other words is nothing more and nothing less than a thanksgiving for an abundant harvest and for another year. As far as timing is concerned, this ritual corresponds to the turn of October and November, which means to the feast of the Day of the Dead (*Día de los muertos* in Spanish) which since colonial times has represented the end of the agrarian cycle, which I will analyse later. As for the specific case, that is, the ritual in which I took part as a researcher (in 2014), it was delayed one month due to prolonged rains and was not carried out until Novem-

⁴ Especially since 1994, when its activity caused climbing to the summit to be prohibited. This prohibition also influenced the performance of rituals up in the volcano, because several of the sacred precincts are located in the cone itself of the volcano. However, the authorities tolerate and allow the indigenous people to carry out their rituals in these places as part of their tradition and culture.

⁵ Another name for these sacred places is altar/altars of petition (of rain).

⁶ To the reader interested in the orography of Hueyapan and the ritual landscape of this community, I recommend another article of mine: Radoslav HLÚŠEK, “Hueyapan – Life Under/With the Volcano. Ritual Landscape of a Nahua Community”, *Axis Mundi* 12/1, 2017, Bratislava 2017, pp. 16–26. I also took the basic information about Hueyapan in the Introduction to this case study from that article.

ber 25 since, due to the rains and the harvest, it could not be performed any earlier. According to the people who participated, the prolonged rains that caused this delay were something rare and unwanted and the participants attributed this situation to the gradual extinction of faith in the sacred mountains among the inhabitants of the community, and to the gradual abandonment of the tradition and culture of their ancestors.

Participants and course of day

The total number of participants in the ritual is not important because it can be variable (this time there were ten of us). What is important is the participation of the *tiempero/tiempera* (in Spanish, ritual specialist; the one who works with weather) who is in charge of the whole ritual and without whom it could not be performed, plus the help of the *orador/oradora* (in Spanish, speaker, orator, in this meaning a person who is in charge of prayers and songs) who says the prayers and sings the songs aloud. These two can be either men or women. In our case it was a woman named doña Vicenta who was the *tiempera* and a man named don José who was the *orador*. In Hueyapan the *tiemperos* are also called *pedidores de lluvia* (rainmakers in Spanish) or in Nahuatl *quiotlazque*, which means those who take a shortcut of the rain.⁷ The others are ordinary participants who help with everything – they carry the offering, place it in the sacred precinct and accompany the *orador/oradora* and the *tiempero/tiempera* in prayers and songs.

The activities related to the ritual start very early in the morning. We woke up at three o'clock so that we would be at doña Vicenta's house at four o'clock. Waiting for the others and loading all the offerings on the four-by-four truck took about two hours, so we left around six o'clock. Going up in the truck towards Popocatepetl through the forest we drove about ten kilometres to the place where we parked at approximately eight in the morning. At about half past eight we left the place and, walking up, we arrived at the Divine Face of Popocatepetl at two in the afternoon, so we were walking for more than five hours. The ritual itself took more or less two hours (it started at three, and finished a little after five). Then we ate a little and started the descent after six, so with very little time before it got dark. We walked for more than four hours through the night forest (fortunately some of us had flashlights) and arrived at the truck at eleven o'clock at night. We lit a campfire to prepare dinner, and when we had finished we left (after midnight) in the truck to Hueyapan. We arrived in the house at two o'clock in the morning the next day. We were also stopped by the Morelos state police looking for drugs, which for a Slovak colleague of mine who accompanied us and me was an extraordinary experience and we both know very well that without our indigenous friends from Hueyapan who explained everything to the police, this encounter could have ended very differently and not

⁷ *Quiahuitl* (in Nahuatl, rain), *otlaza* (to take a shortcut), *queh/que'* (plural of agentive deverbial suffix meaning the persons who do the verb, in this case who take a shortcut).

with a happy ending.⁸ So the whole day was very hard-going, especially for doña Vicenta and her husband who at that time were 87 and 86 years old respectively.⁹

Process of ritual

The ritual itself lasted, as I already mentioned, approximately two hours and took place only in the cave of the Divine Face of Popocatepetl. The cave is full of crosses which were brought to this sacred precinct not only by people from Hueyapan but also by people from other communities (e.g. from Tetela del Volcán, Xochicalco or Metepec, all in Morelos), whose inhabitants also venerate Popocatepetl and like those of Hueyapan consider the cave as the most important sacred precinct where they perform their own rainmaking rituals. The ritual consists of songs (especially hymns), prayers, thanksgiving and, of course, the offering is also placed. It was led by doña Vicenta as the *tiemperra* and she was helped especially by don José who as the *orador* was the leader of the prayers and songs. The rest of us placed the offering, lit candles, let off rockets, sang, prayed and did what the *tiemperra* told us to do. In spite of all the participants being very tired and the solemnity of the ritual, the atmosphere was relaxed and joyful, which is very typical for Mexican indigenous people, and the solemnity of any religious event does not mean the absence of joy. They represent two sides of the same coin; complementarity represents one of the characteristic features of the culture and religion¹⁰ of native Mexicans.

When doña Vicenta arrived in the cave, she shouted the welcome: “We are here, don Goyo¹¹, we are here. Open the doors so we can enter the throne” (in Spanish: “*Ya llegamos, don Goyo, ya llegamos. Abra las puertas para que entremos al trono.*”). Then she lit the copal in the censer that was burning throughout the ritual and was not allowed to go out until it was all over. Throughout the ritual, a quince stick was used for cleansing and to ward off evil. In the meantime, in honor of don Goyo, some of the participants also let off rockets without which it is impossible to imagine any celebration, be it religious or profane. The welcome was followed by three songs led, like the others, by don José and by prayers he said himself. He read them from his notebook of Catholic songs and prayers called Religious Songs (*Cantos religiosos* in Spanish). The first was dedicated to the Virgin Mary (Fairest Dove, Most Lovely Maiden – *Buenos días, paloma blanca* in Spanish), the second to the Holy Cross and Christ (Let Us Praise and Exalt – *Alabemos y ensalcemos* in

⁸ The armed policemen were only interested in us, the two foreigners. They checked our documents and asked us many questions about the purpose of our presence there, in such a remote place and at midnight. Doña Vicenta and the others as native residents explained everything to them in a very cordial way and the meeting ended without problems.

⁹ Among other things I will never forget how on the descent through the forest at night I had to go back about three hours so that I could support doña Vicenta and prevent her from falling by this way. Although she did everything she could, sometimes she fell. Fortunately, nothing happened to her.

¹⁰ Since I do not want to complicate the matter, I use the singular to speak in general terms in this article. But we must keep in mind that Mesoamerica as a cultural area, to which Central Mexico belongs, has been such a varied region that we cannot speak of Mesoamerican culture and religion but of Mesoamerican cultures and religions.

¹¹ Don Goyo or don Gregorio are the names commonly attributed to Popocatepetl not only in Hueyapan but in all communities around the volcano.

Spanish), the third again to the Virgin (Oh Mary, My Mother – *Ó María, madre mía* in Spanish). During these three hymns the participants tied bouquets of the white flower called little stars (*estrellitas* in Spanish)¹² to the crosses in the cave and then placed the offering. This consisted of food (tortillas, tamales, bread, mole, chocolate and fruits such as oranges, bananas, chayotes and watermelons), alcoholic beverage (Anís, Rancho de Jerez), cigars that were lit and placed in the shape of a cross on a stone (don Goyo likes not only to eat and drink but also to smoke), holy water and cotton. Once the offering was placed, doña Vicenta gave two thanksgivings, one in Spanish, the other in Nahuatl.¹³ The first was dedicated to all those who worked with the weather above, it means to *tiemperos* who worked for the whole world so that there would be abundant rain and harvest. The thanksgiving in Nahuatl¹⁴ was accompanied by the crying of the *tiemperra* who feared she would never return because of her advanced age.¹⁵ After these thanksgivings the ritual continued with the prayer of the Sorrowful Mysteries of the Rosary. Among the particular mysteries the following songs were sung Come, Sinners (*Venid pecadores* in Spanish); Hail Blessed Cross Sacred Wood (*Salve Cruz bendita madero sagrado* in Spanish); Praises to the Holy Cross (*Alabanzas a la Santa Cruz* in Spanish); O Lord, Forgive Me (*Perdón, oh Dios mío* in Spanish) and Farewell, Queen of Heaven (*Adiós, Reina del cielo* in Spanish). Then the ritual continued with the hymn Holy God (*Santo Dios* in Spanish) followed by the Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary (*Letanías de la Santísima Virgen* in Spanish) known also as the Litany of Loreto (*Letanías lauretanas* in Spanish). After the litanies were finished, don José closed the prayers and songs with: “Let us go in peace in the name of Christ. Amen” (in Spanish: “*Vayamos en paz en nombre de Cristo. Amen*”). The whole ritual was concluded by doña Vicenta invoking God with the following words: “May God give us the strength to come again, to leave you your delicacies, heavenly Father” (in Spanish: “*Dios que nos de la fuerza para venir otra vez, a dejarles sus manjares, Padre celestial*”).

Once the ritual was over, we packed up all the things and the offering (only the flowers were left behind) and started our way down to the place where we had left our truck. It is important that during the whole day, from the early morning until the end of the ritual, a fast should have been kept. Usually the participants can eat when the ritual is over and the offering is eaten (first don Goyo, then the people). In our case we had to make an exception because everything took a longer time than usual.

¹² Egyptian starcluster, in Latin *Pentas lanceolata*.

¹³ If I do not specify the language, it is always Spanish.

¹⁴ The translation of thanksgiving in Nahuatl is as follows: “*Thank you, thank you, masters, eat all that we bring, we could not come earlier but here we are, I could not come because I got sick. Give me a little of your greatness for me and so I will come again to greet you*” (“*Tlesojkamati, tlasojkamati anmejuatsitsitsin ximo tlakualtikān non tlonon otī kuakika akuel otik kualakjke kualkan manauasinko nan tikate akuel niuis ono kogo xi nech magilikan se grandeza para ne ma non nemi ulis oksepa amech tlapaljuitin*”). I would here like to thank my friend Isela Vidal Saavedra from Alpanocan, Puebla, for translating this thanksgiving for me.

¹⁵ Doña Vicenta and I saw each other for the last time in December 2023, when she was already 96 years old. She told me that since then (November 2014) she had not been to the cave. Because of her age she can no longer go there. The truth is that I had the privilege to accompany her on her last visit to the Divine Face of Popocatepetl.

People were very tired and so we had to eat something before the ritual. Nor did we eat after the ritual in the cave itself (only a very little), which is unusual. But we did not have time; it was late already, it was cold and a strong wind was blowing. That is why we went down immediately after the ritual, which does usually not happen. We walked back through the forest at night and ate only when we were at the place where we parked our truck.

After our return I did not visit doña Vicenta all day. We were all very tired. None of us left the house, we had to rest. I went to visit her only the next day. She and her husband were already well rested (so was I) and she told me that she had not dreamed of anything while sleeping after our return, but the next night she saw in her dream a big fat man, dressed in a white shirt, trousers and hat, and only his tie was black. It was don Goyo himself and he told doña Vicenta that he was happy with the offering (it means he accepted the thanksgiving by means of ritual), he had eaten well and that was why he was fat. Dreams are very important for the *tiempos*, as I will explain in the next part of this case study.

Analysis and explanation of the ritual

The ritual of Closing the Water is the regional expression of a more general Mesoamerican worldview that is linked to the ritual landscape, agrarian cycle and rain-making. It is a millenary tradition incorporated in the process of Christianization during the colonial era into the Catholicism brought to what is today Mexico by the Spaniards. It is true that the missionaries made a huge effort to create a church according to the example of the first Christians, untouched neither by the medieval heresies nor by the Protestant Reformation in the New World. However, due to the universal requirements of Catholicism (and Christianity in general) and most of all due to the completely different worldview, tradition and religion of indigenous Mesoamericans, they failed. With regard to this situation the neophytes could not be expected to accept the new faith in its official and normative form and content. The syncretism that naturally occurred was thus the logical result of missionary activity in such a different environment in terms of cultural and spiritual tradition.¹⁶ A process in which people pick and choose elements of their indigenous culture and mix them with elements of the invasive culture to create a new combination, as we could define religious syncretism,¹⁷ then emerged from native (Mesoamerican) and from Spanish (Christian) roots and from these two sources something new was created that reflected the two original sources. It was not, however, identified in its totality with either of the two.¹⁸ It was a mutual, not a unilateral process (the Mesoamericanization or Indigenization of Catholicism \longleftrightarrow Christianization of Mesoamerican

¹⁶ Radoslav HLÚŠEK, “Duchovná conquista rituálnej krajiny mexických Nahuov”, in: Peter Vyšný (ed.), *Európa a mimoeurópsky svet: kontakty, konfrontácie a konflikty. Zborník príspevkov z medzinárodnej vedeckej konferencie konanej na počesť a pamiatku docentky Gertrudy Železkovovej*, Trnava 2019, p. 98.

¹⁷ David CARRASCO, *Religions of Mesoamerica*, Long Grove (Illinois) 2013, pp. 155–156.

¹⁸ HLÚŠEK, “Duchovná conquista”, p. 99.

religion and tradition) and it could be said that Catholicism did not replace the original religion but was incorporated into it in a transformed form.¹⁹

I have already mentioned complementarity as one of the fundamental traits of Mesoamerican religion. Another is territoriality, which means that the territory inhabited by an ethnic group or community has been reflected in its worldview and conceptualization of space, mythology and ritualism. As far as our topic is concerned, the ritual of Closing the Water is closely related to the ritual landscape of Hueyapan. Paraphrasing the Mexican ethnohistorian of Austrian origin, Johanna Broda, one of the most prominent specialists on this topic, the ritual landscape is made up of the places of worship (both artificial and natural). It is a landscape culturally transformed through history. It connects the political centres (with their temples – pyramids, later replaced by churches) with places in the countryside where shrines of lesser importance are situated; these shrines (later chapels or crosses) highlight natural phenomena and are linked to the cult of hills, caves and water.²⁰ It is a humanized space. Popocatepetl and its sacred precincts, among them the Divine Face of Popocatepetl, represent a part of the ritual landscape of Hueyapan. It is also the most important mountain and sacred place. Popocatepetl dominates the ritual landscape not only of Hueyapan but also of all the communities located on the southern slopes of the volcano.²¹ It is perceived as the navel of the world and the centre of the universe and is also considered the protector of these communities. Personified as don Gregorio/Goyo, he is the benefactor who takes care of the communities and provides them with water and abundant harvest. All of it has a close relationship with the agrarian cycle. In Central Mexico, as mentioned before, the rainy season lasts more or less from June to the end of September. The indigenous people had to adapt to this natural cycle from pre-Hispanic times in order to survive in the semi-desert environment.²² So the agrarian cycle is closely related to this natural cycle and to the alternation of drought and rains. From pre-Hispanic times, which we have well documented from Central Mexico by colonial chroniclers,²³ rituals associated with the mountains have been practiced with the purpose of ensuring abundant water and harvest. This ritualism was incorporated into Catholicism and its liturgical calendar. That is why nowadays the rainmaking rituals begin as in the pre-Hispanic past about a month before the arrival of the rains (preparation of the fields for planting) and end about a month after their end (after the harvest). In

¹⁹ Radoslav HLÚŠEK, *Nican mopohua. Domorodý příběh o zjavení Panny Márie Guadalupské*, Bratislava 2014, p. 51.

²⁰ Johanna BRODA, “Ritos mexicas en los cerros de la Cuenca: los sacrificios de niños”, in: Johanna Broda – Stanislaw Iwaniszewski – Arturo Montero (eds.), *La Montaña en el paisaje ritual*, Ciudad de México 2001, p. 296.

²¹ The eastern and the western slopes are dominated by both Popocatepetl and Iztaccihuatl. Iztaccihuatl is not seen on the south side of Popocatepetl, so it does not figure in the ritual landscape of communities located south of this volcano.

²² Although it is true that mountainous areas, such as Hueyapan, are not semi-desert, in general Central Mexico is. In any case, the rainy season takes the same length of time in the mountains as in the lowlands of Central Mexico.

²³ See Johanna BRODA, “Tenochtitlan: procesiones y peregrinaciones mexicas en la Cuenca de México”, *Arqueología mexicana* 131, Ciudad de México 2015, pp. 72–79.

the Catholic liturgical calendar these dates correspond to the feasts of the Day of the Cross²⁴ (*Día de la Cruz* in Spanish, May 3, requests for rains, in Hueyapan Opening the water²⁵) and Day of the Dead²⁶ (November 1 and 2, thanksgiving for the harvest, in Hueyapan Closing the water).²⁷ Thus the agrarian cycle is defined in time. The *tiemporos* have known very well that it does not make sense to perform these rituals earlier (or later). The essence of these rituals is not to provoke the rains, since they have known very well that the rains do not come faster. The essence is to ensure that the rains come on time, that they are not delayed and that there is neither too little nor too much of them, and that hail that could destroy the harvest is avoided. Regarding the space, the agrarian cycle links the ritual landscape and the sacred mountains with the communities and the fields.

In Mesoamerica, the conceptualization of space by means of the ritual landscape, sacred mountains and ritualism represents something that Mexican anthropologist Alfredo Lopez Austin calls the core part (*núcleo duro* in Spanish) of the indigenous worldview.²⁸ This has always had as its central point the environment and the constant interaction of humans with it. From this point of view the hills and mountains have had a central role as structural axes of this worldview and as sacred spaces in which agricultural rituals are performed.²⁹ The mountains did not lose their importance in the indigenous worldview, and faith in the process of Christianisation and as part of the core part have preserved their meaning and position in the indigenous religion to this day. The hills and mountains, among which the volcanoes stand out, are still considered to be full of water which must be released to the fields. This has always been done through appropriate rituals. To this day it is also believed that their interior is filled with the grains of all crop plants, which takes us back

²⁴ That is why there are so many crosses not only in the Divine Face of Popocatepetl but in all the sacred precincts located in the mountains (another reason is that the missionaries baptized the sacred places of the natives by means of the crosses). The crosses are oriented to where the people want the water to flow. That is to the fields, which in the case of the Divine Face of Popocatepetl means to the south. That is why for the people of Hueyapan the north (followed by the east) is the most important cardinal direction, because the rains normally come from the north (and the east), meaning from the volcano. On the Feast of the Holy Cross in the monastic architecture and art of 16th century New Spain, see Monika Brenišnová, *Del convento al hombre. El significado de la arquitectura conventual y su arte en la Nueva España del siglo XVI*, (Tesis de Doctorado), Praga 2017, pp. 96, 100, 135–137.

²⁵ Literal translation of its Spanish original name “Abrir el agua”.

²⁶ In this way the agrarian cycle is related to the dead ancestors, which was already common in pre-Hispanic times. That is why the feast of the Day of the Dead complied with the pre-Hispanic tradition.

²⁷ See Johanna BRODA, “Ritos y deidades del ciclo agrícola”, *Arqueología mexicana* 120, Ciudad de México 2013, p. 60.

²⁸ The core part is an essential part of the worldview, the organiser of the components of the system, the part that adjusts innovations, repairs the system after its weakening, dissolution or loss of its elements. Its hardness does not imply immobility; there are transformations, but of long duration. Alfredo LÓPEZ AUSTIN, “La cosmovisión de la tradición mesoamericana. Primera parte”, *Arqueología mexicana*, edición especial 68, Ciudad de México 2016, p. 23.

²⁹ Alejandra GÁMEZ ESPINOSA, “El cerro-troje: Cosmovisión, ritualidad, saberes y usos en una comunidad *ngiwá* del sur de Puebla”, in: Johanna Broda – Alejandra Gámez (eds.), *Cosmovisión mesoamericana y ritualidad agrícola. Estudios interdisciplinarios y regionales*, Ciudad de México 2009, pp. 80–81.

to pre-Hispanic times when the concept of the Sacred Mountain (*Monte sagrado* in Spanish) as the source of all life and place of abundance was developed.³⁰ The Nahua god of rain and fertility Tlaloc had his dwelling inside the mountains, the aquatic paradise called Tlalocan which, among other examples is demonstrated to us in a very illustrative way by means of beautiful mural paintings in the Tepantitla Palace in Teotihuacan, the metropolis of the Mesoamerican Classic era.³¹ Doña Vicenta, as well as other people from Hueyapan told me the same thing about the Divine Face of Popocatepetl several times. Apart from the fact that they see the cave as the throne of don Goyo, which means as the centre of the world, they also call it Tlaloc or Tlalocan and do not forget to add that it is full of the grains and seeds of all the plants. It is the source of the abundance given to the indigenous peasants when they perform the appropriate rituals. We must not forget that the caves and hollows in pre-Hispanic times were considered to be the places of origin not only of crop plants but also of mankind.³² I was also told that Popocatepetl is connected with the sea, which means with the symbol of fertility par excellence. This view is also documented in pre-Hispanic times; the Aztecs, for example, believed that Ajusco, a mountain located in the south of the Valley of Mexico, was connected to the sea.³³

Popocatepetl means don Goyo, but other mountains and hills along with all the nature and the whole Earth are also considered to be alive. The personification of Popocatepetl as don Goyo is also demonstrated by the faith that he can appear in person. He usually has the appearance of an old man who can be seen walking in the volcanic cone or anywhere on the volcano. He is dressed in very ragged clothes and his feet do not leave footprints in the volcanic sand.³⁴ The belief mentioned by the Mexican anthropologist Julio Glockner in the works cited in note 33 about several indigenous communities located on the slopes of both Popocatepetl and Iztaccihuatl was mentioned to me several times in Hueyapan. Don Goyo appears to people in person from time to time, which usually happens when the volcanic activity of Popocatepetl increases. In this way, by his appearance, don Goyo sends his message. Usually, it is the message that the volcanic activity does not represent any danger for the people, so they do not have to be afraid (as has happened several times since 1994 when the volcano awoke to an intensified activity). But this message is almost always accompanied by a call for mankind to behave in a better way towards the

³⁰ Alfredo LÓPEZ AUSTIN, “La cosmovisión de la tradición mesoamericana. Segunda parte”, *Arqueología mexicana*, edición especial 69, Ciudad de México 2016, pp. 52, 72. On the importance of the Sacred Mountain in the monastic architecture and art of 16th century New Spain, see Brenišínová, *Del convento al hombre*, pp. 100–101, 124.

³¹ For a more recent interpretation of the paintings in Tepantitla and further literature see Monika Brenišínová and Markéta Křížová, *Dějiny umění Latinské Ameriky* [History of Latin American Art], Praha 2018, pp. 38, 336n7.

³² Raúl Carlos ARANDA MONROY, “Cosmovisión y reinterpretación del paisaje en el sureste de la Cuenca de México”, in: Broda – Gámez (eds.), *Cosmovisión*, pp. 106–107.

³³ Johanna BRODA, “Simbolismo de los volcanes. Los volcanes en la cosmovisión mesoamericana”, *Arqueología mexicana* 95, Ciudad de México 2009, p. 47.

³⁴ E.g. see Julio GLOCKNER, “Mitos y sueños de los volcanes”, *Arqueología mexicana* 95, Ciudad de México 2009, pp. 67–69; idem, *Los Volcanes Sagrados. Mitos y rituales en el Popocatepetl y en la Iztaccihuatl*, Ciudad de México 2012, pp. 272–273.

Earth. So don Goyo calls the attention of humans to the fact that their behaviour is not good, that it does not suit him and that it can provoke catastrophes. The indigenous people as holders of millenary knowledge are those whom don Goyo chose as his messengers. Such are the explanations of doña Vicenta and many more people, not only from Hueyapan.

The most important part of the whole ritual is probably the offering that is placed in the cave and dedicated to don Goyo. What it contains has already been mentioned. The placing of the offering has represented a substantial part of Mesoamerican ritualism and religion since pre-Hispanic times and has been preserved to this day. This practice reflects another feature typical for Mesoamerican religion which was incorporated into Catholicism in the process of Christianisation. It is the principle of reciprocity. The indigenous people have not venerated supernatural beings (neither the pre-Hispanic gods nor the Christian God and saints) for pure love; the reasons for their devotion have always been pragmatic. Because their religion and spirituality have been oriented more to life here on Earth and less to the afterlife, it has always been necessary to win over the supernatural beings who dominate the forces of nature over in order to have a good life. However, their help is not free. Simply said: "If I want something from you, I must give you something so that you will give me what I need."³⁵ This is done by means of rituals, and the offering represents a substantial and inseparable part of them. The offering that we placed in the Divine Face of Popocatepetl was complemented, as I have already said, by cotton and flowers called little stars. Both, by their whiteness, associated with water and clouds, have their symbolic meaning.³⁶ As doña Vicenta and the others explained to me, the colour white is important because of its relation to water and rain. That is why they always bring little stars and not other flowers. To get a broader explanation, I mention the flower of the dead called in Nahuatl *cempoalxóchitl*³⁷, which is used during the Day of the Dead celebration all over the country and is not only very popular but also inseparable from this celebration. The reason for my question about this flower was very simple – the agrarian cycle usually ends at the time of the Day of the Dead, so this flower is found everywhere. However, the reaction of the *tiempera* was that it could not be used in the set of rainmaking rituals (and therefore not in the ritual Closing the Water), because it is orange, like the lightning. So the flower of the dead placed in the offering of the rainmaking ritual can provoke storms, which are not desired.

Although the content of the offering is more or less always the same, sometimes it can happen that the owner of the mountain (in our case don Goyo) asks for something else (e.g. clothes or shoes). This does not mean in such a case that the usual things are not included, but that something extra is added to them. The question is how the *tiempero/tiempera* finds out about such a wish. The answer, as I read in

³⁵ HLÚŠEK, "Hueyapan – Life", p. 22.

³⁶ E.g. Yucatec Mayas of Quintana Roo link the cotton also with the deceased see: Arturo GÓMEZ MARTÍNEZ, "Tramas, colores y texturas, elementos gráficos para el estudio de la cosmovisión en textiles indígenas mexicanos", in: Broda – Gámez (eds.), *Cosmovisión*, p. 72. As we already know, the dead are also related to the agrarian cycle.

³⁷ Aztec marigold or Mexican marigold, in Latin *Tagetes erecta*.

many books and articles and as it was given to me in Hueyapan and other communities, is that everything related to the ritual comes to the *tiempero/tempera* in dreams.³⁸ That is why it is very necessary and important for the *tiempero/tempera* to learn to remember his/her dreams, because when he/she is dreaming messages will come to him/her from don Goyo or from the owners of the other mountains. What the *tiempero/tempera* finds out in his/her dreams must be done in reality. That is why it can happen that at the last moment something is changed in the offering or even the sacred precinct in which the ritual is going to be carried out is changed for a different one. So the dream world and everything that happens in it is the real world in which everything that has to be done is revealed to the *tiempero/tempera*.

The *tiemperos*, and doña Vicenta is no exception, obviously emphasise the concept of strength as well. They say that it is as much about the strength of the Earth as it is about the strength of the people and these two must be in balance. The Earth and the natural elements (the sun, air, water, animals, plants, etc.) provide their strength to people so that they can survive. On the other hand, the Earth as such is alive and must be nourished, which is done by means of rituals and offerings. In this way the collective strength of the people nourishes and strengthens the Earth so that it can sustain the people. It is an infinite cycle which allows the natural order to continue and function. The strength also comes from the songs and prayers that represent an inevitable part of the rituals. And the rituals themselves take place in special places (altars of petition) which are full of strength and are considered navels of the world. It can be said that in these sacred precincts people acquire strength, vital energy and life itself by means of rituals and at the same time they provide their strength to the Earth. Once again we return to the principle of reciprocity that has been present in Mesoamerican religion since pre-Hispanic times.

I conclude this case study by pointing out the fact that the rainmaking rituals, including Closing the Water, represent a procession or pilgrimage, another feature obviously present in Mesoamerican religion since time immemorial. There is no space here to develop this complex and specific topic; there are in any case numerous articles and books dedicated to this issue.³⁹ I just want to mention here that the procession serves as a means of connection between the cave of the Divine Face of Popocatepetl (or the sacred precincts located in the mountains in general) and Hueyapan in the centre of which the Church of Saint Dominic, the saint patron of the community, is located. So the pilgrimage of the people to the cave and back represents the intertwining of centre and periphery and in general of the whole ritual landscape of the people of Hueyapan.

³⁸ On the meaning of dreams in the rainmaking rituals, see more in Yleana ACEVEDO WHITEHOUSE, *El camino del héroe. Soñador de la lluvia y granizo*, Bloomington 2014, pp. 308–364.

³⁹ Among many others see Patricia FOURNIER – Carlos MONDRAGÓN – Walburga WIESHEU (eds.), *Peregrinaciones ayer y hoy. Arqueología y antropología de las religiones*, Ciudad de México 2012, pp. 53–151; Susan TOBY EVANS, “Las procesiones en Mesoamérica”, *Arqueología mexicana* 131, Ciudad de México 2015, pp. 34–39; o Victor TURNER – Edith TURNER, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture. Anthropological Perspectives*, New York 1978, pp. 1–103.

Conclusion

The ritual of Closing the Water which has been carried out in Hueyapan since pre-Hispanic times, and in which I had the opportunity to participate, reflects a millenary Mesoamerican tradition that has survived to this day thanks to its incorporation into Catholicism in the process of religious syncretism. It is part of a set of rituals linked to the agrarian cycle and the ritual landscape in which the high mountains stand out, especially the volcanoes, in our case Popocatepetl. The belief that this and other mountains are full of water and considered places of abundance is still alive not only in Hueyapan but in all the indigenous communities located in its surroundings. And in general we can say the same about all Mesoamerican mountains and hills and about almost all indigenous communities (at least about those located in the mountainous areas). Historical and archaeological sources (both indigenous and Spanish) confirm the presence of rituals related to rainmaking in ancient times. The long tradition has not yet been interrupted and therefore ritual specialists of today, that is, the *tiemperos*, who are in charge of performing these rituals and responsible for the welfare of their communities are followers of their pre-Hispanic predecessors and represent evidence of the vitality of Mesoamerican culture and religion adapted to changing conditions and circumstances.

So far I have not said how someone can become a *tiempero/tiempera*. In general there are three ways or three possibilities. The first is that he/she learns everything necessary from an older *tiempero/tiempera* who serves him/her as a teacher. This was the case with doña Vicenta. The second is by means of dreams when it is announced to a person that he/she was chosen to become *tiempero/tiempera* just in dreams. However, most of my informants (and not only in Hueyapan) and almost all works dedicated to this subject reveal another way – strike of lightning (which represents the association with the storm, it means with rain and water). It is true that the strike of lightning is considered to be the most common sign that one has been chosen by the personified mountains (for example by don Goyo) and should become a *tiempero/tiempera*. Of course, that is if that person survives the strike. If not, his/her soul goes “to the heights” (“*a lo alto*”), as the indigenous peasants say, to work with weather, which means that he/she becomes a *tiempero/tiempera* although already in another world. If he/she survives, his/her mission is to work with the weather here on Earth. However, there are several cases when one did not accept his/her mission and refused to become a *tiempero/tiempera* because he/she did not want to change his/her life or considered the work of a *tiempero* too difficult. All my informants agreed that in this case the chosen person did not do well, he/she became ill, which means that he/she did not have a good life until he/she accepted his/her mission. When he/she stopped rejecting it and accepted the will of the supernatural beings, his/her life became good again and he/she joined the crowd of the *tiemperos* who have maintained the weather and ensured abundant harvest by means of millenary rituals carried out on the mountains considered full of water and abundance. They are precisely the ancient rituals adapted and incorporated into Catholicism that represent the central point in the preservation of this ancient tradition. As Johanna Broda, already mentioned several times, says: “ritualisation in the process of Christianisation was a fundamental factor which enabled cultural reproduction

of native ethnic groups in Mexico.”⁴⁰ And although the modern era threatens this ancient tradition more than the era of Christianisation, it still continues and it can be assumed that, in a transformed form it will also adapt to the new times.⁴¹

(Written in English by the author)

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⁴⁰ Johanna BRODA, “La ritualidad mesoamericana y los procesos de sincretismo y reelaboración simbólica después de la conquista”, *Graffylia. Revista de la Facultad de Filosofía y Letras* 2, Ciudad de México 2003, p. 23.

⁴¹ Personal communication with the aforementioned Mexican anthropologist Julio Glockner in January 2018 when we met in Hueyapan and went to visit a young *tiempero* named Angelino who continues in this tradition.

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