

Yacateuctli and Ehecatl-Quetzalcoatl: Earth-Divers in Aztec Central Mexico

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Abstract. Two Aztec deities, Yacateuctli and Ehecatl-Quetzalcoatl, both known as patrons of the Aztec merchant class, derive from different major deity complexes yet share an association with diving waterfowl. This association originates in the pan-American tradition of the Earth-Diver, a motif previously unrecognized in the limited corpus of Aztec cosmogonical myth. By virtue of their affiliation with the Earth-Diver, Yacateuctli and Ehecatl-Quetzalcoatl invoke the demiurgical powers of mediation and acquisition to promote the mission of the merchants as the vanguard of Aztec political expansion. An examination of the relationship of the two deities to so ancient and widespread a symbolic tradition allows some insight into the structure of the Aztec pantheon as a whole. Further implications of the Earth-Diver motif for Aztec ideology are suggested by the unique physical circumstances of Tenochtitlan-Tlatelolco, island home of the Mexica ethnic group and capital of the Aztec empire.

Despite a general recognition that the “pantheon” of late-prehispanic central Mexico is anything but neatly partitioned, students of Aztec religion continue to attempt to reconcile the variants of given major deity complexes into more tractable single units for subsequent analysis (e.g., the recent discussion of Aztec goddesses by Durand-Forest [1984] and Graulich [1984]). This problem of properly delineating major deities derives in part from the patchwork documentation of ethnohistorical sources from the central Mexican highlands, in which concise and unequivocal descriptions of individual deities are nonexistent, and in part from the largely unstudied variation in religious beliefs across the region, where specific ethnic groups, cities, and even neighborhoods within cities held to their own versions of the broader religious tradition. Perhaps more importantly,

Aztec religion at the time of Spanish contact lacked a true anthropomorphism, and the consistency of identity among deities associated with anthropomorphism in its classical sense was apparently second to the properties of the natural world that a deity might represent in a given context. This latter consideration is also generally recognized (Nicholson 1971: 408; see also the excellent discussion by Brundage [1979: 50–56] of the Aztec pantheon and the “numinous continuum”), but such recognition has not obviated careful textual analysis of specific central Mexican deities as represented by one or more names in the pertinent source material. Individual deities do appear with consistency in contexts where their identity as bearers of specific traits is significant to the outcome of mythical, ritual, and historical events. This obvious tendency has kept the question of which supernatural characters are equal to which others a perennial one, and the method of deity comparison, accepting that the very unit of analysis is ambiguous, remains a fundamental approach in the study of Aztec religion.

In this article, I examine the way in which major pan-Aztec deities are able to serve specialized roles in central Mexican religion by virtue of their inherent association with fundamental and probably very ancient symbolic traditions. My attention is directed to two deities known for their tutelary relationship with the Aztec *pochtecah*, or merchants: Ehecatl, “the Wind,” and Yacateuctli, “Lord of the Van.”¹ By any former analysis, the first of these is a definite avatar of the more complex and seemingly ubiquitous deity Quetzalcoatl, “Feather Serpent.” The second deity, Yacateuctli, has generally also been associated with Quetzalcoatl, but much more tenuously, and indeed the sum of references to Yacateuctli suggests that he is more properly considered an avatar of the pan-Aztec deity Tezcatlipoca, “Smoking Mirror.” That the two merchant patrons ultimately derive from two very distinct major deity complexes is interesting in itself, although I demonstrate that this relates to the historical circumstance of each merchant patron serving as such in a different city. The difference in their pedigrees is all the more remarkable when their mutual association with a particular part of the faunal world, namely, diving waterfowl, is considered. The basis for this association is, I suggest, a common hearkening back to a fundamental theme in Aztec cosmogony, the role of the demiurge as a mediator between the two separate realms of upperworld and underworld.

Diving waterfowl are frequent players in the cosmogonical schemes of much of Native America, often appearing in the archetypal role of Earth-Diver, the demiurge par excellence sent to the bottom of the primordial sea to retrieve the mud from which the earth is created. Aztec

religion recognized this very ancient association, albeit inexplicitly, and extended the metaphor to a part of the social world where the demiurgical powers of mediation and acquisition would be eminently useful: the life and work of the merchants. The analysis suggests the interplay of two independent factors in the structure of an Aztec deity's identity: first, the quasi-historical tutelary relationship between the deity and a specific city-state, ethnic group, or social class; and second, the representation of a specific functional aspect of that relationship by reference to more fundamental symbolic structures.

An association with one or more species of animal is characteristic of many Aztec deities, the degree and nature of such associations varying widely both among deities and among the several contexts in which a single deity might figure. Certain associations are fairly constant, if their significance can only be appreciated in the most general sense: Quetzalcoatl, in whatever avatar he may appear, is necessarily a "feather serpent" simply by virtue of his name, although the suggestive melding of bird and reptile, and thus of sky and earth, does not necessarily bear the same (or any) implications in every situation. Other associations seem more fluid and provisional: Tezcatlipoca has avatars in the jaguar, the turkey, and perhaps the coyote, among other animals, yet his overall identity depends on none of these, and he may assume a variety of purely anthropomorphic forms. Still other animal associations, definitive of given deities by virtue of a shared name or iconographic correspondence, have constant and very specific dimensions: Huitzilopochtli, the mythical leader and divine patron of the Mexica ethnic group, is linked inextricably with the hummingbird, or *huitzilin*, which in combination with the noun *opochtli*, or left-hand side, constitutes his name and alludes to an equation made between the deity and the sun in its course through the southern sky.²

The case of Huitzilopochtli is in fact a noteworthy example of what an association with a species of animal may imply for the identity of a deity that is ostensibly, in textual and iconographic depictions, an anthropomorphism. In her study of the place of the hummingbird in both prehispanic and modern Mesoamerican belief systems, Hunt (1977) has emphasized the extent to which various morphological and behavioral characteristics of hummingbird species serve as the basis for a very old and, in many ways, unchanging Mesoamerican conception of the hummingbird as the embodiment of certain more general natural phenomena. By virtue of his identification with the hummingbird, Huitzilopochtli partakes in the distinctiveness of the species, bringing to his realm of supernatural influence those capacities for which the animal is known in the natural world. The hummingbird is a hovering, shimmering, deft master

of aerial wizardry, displaying a range of ability analogous to the daily activity of the sun. Mesoamerican traditions consistently recognized and appreciated this analogy; more particularly, the Mexica incorporated the analogy into the identity of their patron deity, whose preeminently solar character was thus affirmed.

As with any animal/deity association in Aztec religion, the hummingbird is by no means the sum of Huitzilopochtli's identity. For the Mexica, Huitzilopochtli was as much a legendary hero who once walked among men as he was an embodiment of certain natural forces. The importance of the hummingbird to the identity of Huitzilopochtli seems rather to have been as a point of reference within a basic core of beliefs from which the Mexica, like the many Mesoamerican cultures that preceded them, drew the framework of their uniquely configured system. It is this general process—the elaboration of a contingent tradition from the enduring principles of a more fundamental, ancient one—that Aztec animal/deity associations hint at so provocatively. Most Aztec deities were decidedly humanlike in action and aspect, yet so many paid seemingly obligatory homage to that part of the faunal world where their domain of efficacy was most usefully represented. Yacateuctli and Ehecatl-Quetzalcoatl, however obscure that aspect of their identity may at first seem, were no exceptions, and the correspondences in function and faunal association that they share point to a previously unappreciated dimension of Aztec patron deity worship.

Who Was Yacateuctli?

One preconception may be dispensed with at the start: Yacateuctli is not simply a name for a certain aspect or version of Quetzalcoatl. This notion had an early and influential expression in the pioneering monograph on the Aztec merchant class by Acosta Saignes (1945), in which the author rightly pointed to the close similarity of the ceremonies performed by the merchants of Tenochtitlan-Tlatelolco in honor of their patron, Yacateuctli, with the ceremonies performed by the same class in Cholollan in honor of their patron, Ehecatl-Quetzalcoatl. Since then, numerous authors have repeated the seeming truism that Yacateuctli is simply one aspect of that diverse personality, Quetzalcoatl (e.g., Brundage 1979: 122; 1982: 111–12; 1985: 166–67; Garibay K. 1958: 204; León-Portilla 1968: 10, Fig. 39; Van Zantwijk 1985: 143). This is, however, in contradiction to the earlier and more broadly based analysis of Seler (1960a [1904]: 1105–7). While the conclusion of Acosta Saignes (1945: 36–39) is based principally on a similarity in the ritual practices of the merchant classes of the two

cities, Seler points to passages which apparently equate Tezcatlipoca and Yacateuctli. For example, during Toxcatl, the particular festival of Tezcatlipoca, both Tezcatlipoca and Yacateuctli are said to be “born,” a passage which Seler (1960a [1904]: 1105) interprets as the erection of new images to these gods.³ A few other, less direct references also indicate that Seler, at least in a certain sense, was nearer the mark than Acosta Saignes, but these need an introduction. First, I provide a brief reassessment of the data referring directly to Yacateuctli.

Yacateuctli is known almost exclusively from the texts collected by the sixteenth-century Franciscan Bernardino de Sahagún from his native informants, among whom were presumably included former members and descendants of the merchant class of Tenochtitlan-Tlatelolco. Yacateuctli is repeatedly invoked as the patron of the merchant class in the ceremonies recorded in book 9 (“The Merchants”) of the Florentine Codex (Sahagún 1950–82), as well as receiving a deliberate description in book 1 (“The Gods”) and incidental mention elsewhere in Sahagún’s work (*ibid.*, book 2: 129, 188–89, 213, 245; book 5: 155). Yacateuctli is also mentioned, in more passing fashion, and described as the particular patron of the merchants in other major sources (Durán 1967, 1: 120; Torquemada 1969, 2: 57–58, 272–73), although these references are not specific about the places for which their information applies. In all of Sahagún’s references to the deity, Yacateuctli is described as the patron of merchants in Tenochtitlan-Tlatelolco, an important point because Quetzalcoatl is also described, in sources other than Sahagún, as a patron of merchants, but exclusively for the city of Cholollan (see below). Most importantly, Yacateuctli is never directly referred to as an equivalent, an avatar, or an aspect of Quetzalcoatl in any context in any major source. There is a single, very late reference, in Pedro Ponce’s (1892: 5) brief seventeenth-century treatise on native idolatries, that conceivably links the two deities, but there is no clear indication of what relationship is implied between the two names (*cf.* note 17).

Translation of the name Yacateuctli is straightforward: *yacatl*, “nose,” and *teuctli*, “lord or noble”; thus, “Nose Lord” or, more figuratively, Lord of the Van, an appropriate name for the patron of a merchant class that frequently played the role of vanguard in exploration and conquest for the Mexica empire.⁴ Pictorial representations of Yacateuctli are few, and in fact only in the illustrations accompanying Sahagún’s relatively late work are the depictions of the deity provided with written glosses indicating that Yacateuctli is intended (see the depiction in Fig. 1 from Sahagún’s *Primeros memoriales*, adapted from Seler 1960b: Fig. 13). Other depictions can be considered to represent Yacateuctli on the basis

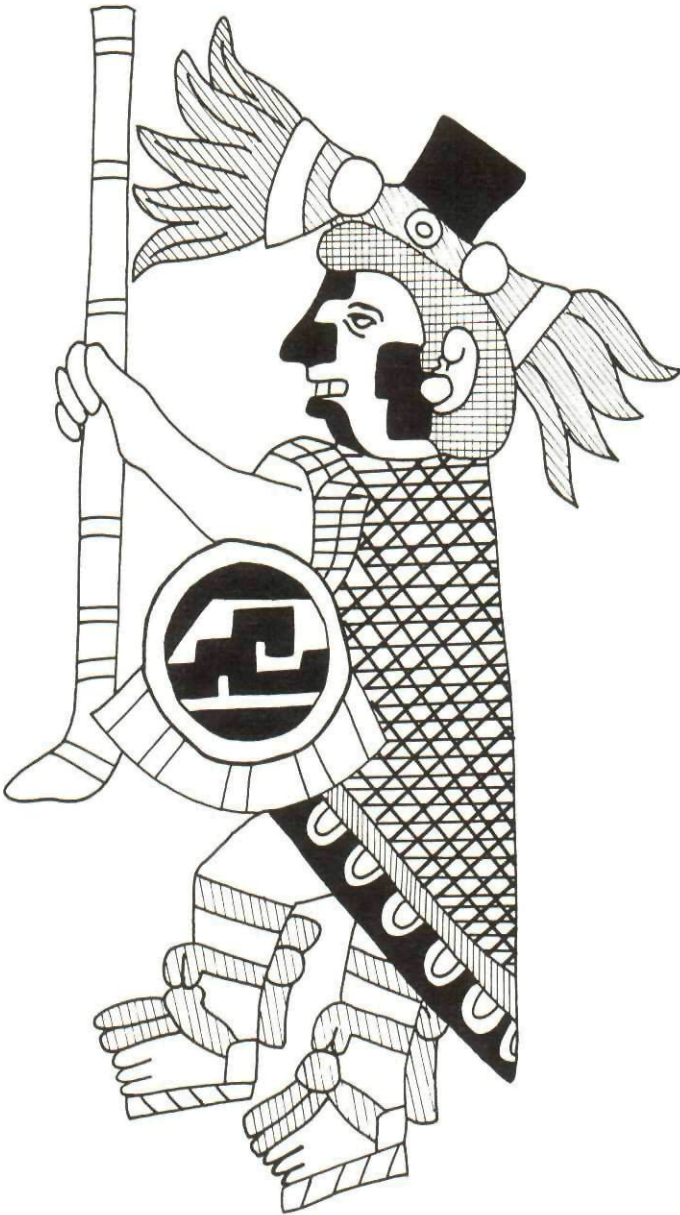


Figure 1. Yacateuctli

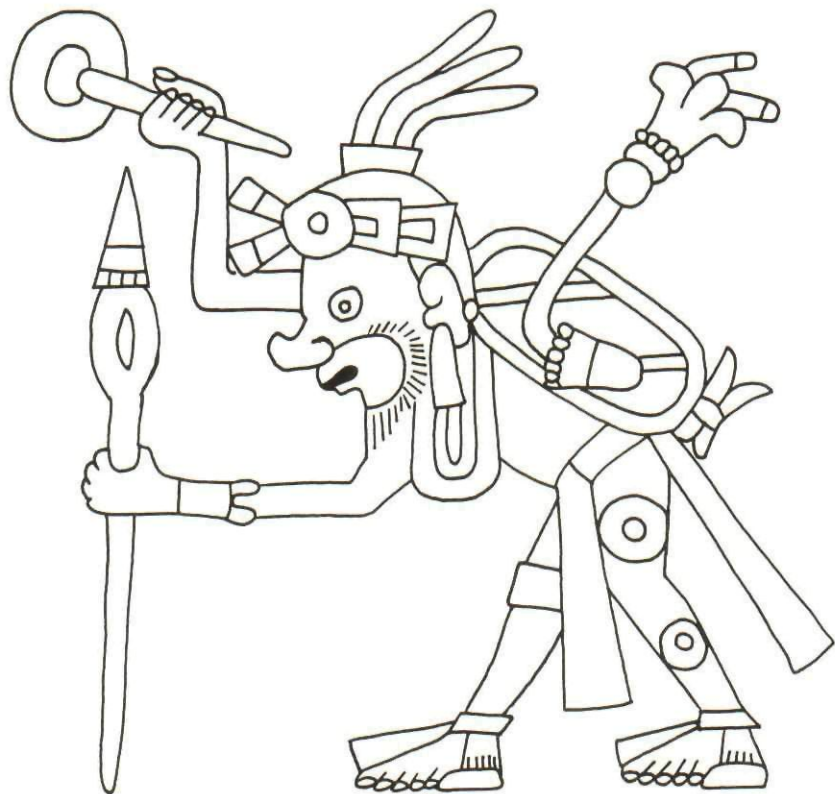


Figure 2. Yacateuctli [?]

of certain pictorial elements, such as a pack frame, a walking staff, and a quetzal bird, all appropriate accoutrements of a long-distance merchant. Common to many of the depictions (although not to the glossed depictions in Sahagún's work) is an emphasis on the nose of the figure, usually as an elongation (see, for example, the depiction in Fig. 2 from the Codex Fejérváry-Mayer, adapted from Seler 1901–2: Pl. 36). The reason for this emphasis, either pictographically or in name, is obscure. At first glance, it might seem to be a conscious allusion to the conspicuous noselike mask of Ehecatl as it appears almost invariably in pictorial sources (see below); accepting this, the suspicion that Yacateuctli is simply an aspect of Ehecatl-Quetzalcoatl is confirmed.⁵ But this leaves Seler's pointed comments on Tezcatlipoca and Yacateuctli unanswered, and we are left with Nicholson's (1971: 430) remark that Yacateuctli, while having certain associations with both Tezcatlipoca and Quetzalcoatl, must be relegated

to a problematical class of his own. Indeed, the sum of explicit references to Yacateuctli in Sahagún's work gives little indication of the deity's origin, character, or function beyond his very clear role as protector of the merchant class.

The problem is further complicated by a number of passages in Sahagún associating the merchants with several other deities, including such major independent pan-Aztec deities as Xiuhteuctli, Tezcatlipoca, and Quetzalcoatl.⁶ A key passage in this regard, and one which ultimately points to the implications of the "nose" in Yacateuctli's name, appears in book 1 of the Florentine Codex. The reference is to the bathing and subsequent sacrifice of slaves by the merchants in the festival of Panquetzaliztli: "And if someone were to bathe [a slave] ceremonially, the one whom he ceremonially bathed represented his god Yiacatecutli; or else one of all of them whom they worshipped—Chiconquiauitl, or Chalmecaciuatl, Acxomocuil, and Nacxitl, Cochimetl, Yacapitzauac" (Sahagún 1950–82, book 1: 43).

The passage would seem to be particularly relevant to the question of Yacateuctli's identity because Sahagún (1981), in his Spanish version of the original Nahuatl text, refers to the additional deities as *hermanos* (siblings) of Yacateuctli, implying that some essential or derivative relationship existed among the members of the group:

Estos mercaderes . . . compraban esclavos y esclavas para ofrecerlos a su dios, en su fiesta, el cual principalmente era Yiacatecutli, y éste tenía cinco hermanos y una hermana, y a todos los tenían por dioses. . . . el uno de los hermanos se llamaba Chiconquiáhuatl, el otro Xomócuil, el otro Nácatl [Nácxitl], el otro Cochímetl, el otro Yacapitzauac; la hermana se llamaba Chalmecacihuatl. (ibid., 1: 69)

[These merchants . . . would buy male and female slaves in order to offer them to their god, who was principally Yiacatecutli, and this god had five brothers and a sister, and they (the merchants) had all of them as gods. . . . One of the brothers was called Chiconquiauitl, another Xomocuil, another Nacatl (Nacxitl), another Cochimetl, another Yacapitzauac; the sister was called Chalmecacihuatl.]

Some of the siblings' names, however, are apparently only alternative names for Yacateuctli.⁷ In a single passage, Sahagún directly equates Yacapitzahuac with Yacateuctli (Sahagún 1950–82, book 2: 129), and elsewhere he provides the three apparent equivalents "Yiacatecutli, Cocochimetl [Cochimetl], Yacapitzauac" (ibid., book 9: 9). Selser (1960a [1904]: 1106), for largely unstated reasons, equates each of the remaining her-

manos of Yacateuctli with another major deity or complex of deities: Acxomocuil with Tezcatlipoca; Nacxitl with Quetzalcoatl; Chiconquiahuitl and Chalmecacihuatl with earth and water deities. I know of no other pertinent references to Acxomocuil, Nacxitl, or Chalmecacihuatl, and I can only add that the keeper of the deity Chiconquiahuitl is, like the keeper of Yacateuctli, listed by Sahagún as in residence at Pochtlan in Tenochtitlan (Sahagún 1950–82, book 2: 213). Cochimetl, although an apparent alias of Yacateuctli, is equally obscure. However, the association of Yacateuctli with the very similar name Yacapitzahuac ultimately provides a clue to the significance of the deity for the merchant class. The name Yacapitzahuac, like the name Yacateuctli, derives from *yacatl*, “nose,” but with the addition of the distinct component *pitzahuac*, describing something thin or pointed; thus, “Pointed Nose.”⁸ The word *yacapitzahuac* is also used as a name for the tip of the nose, a kind of fish, and a kind of waterfowl (Siméon 1984: 157). It is the use of *yacapitzahuac* as the name for a kind of waterfowl that points to the significance of an otherwise seemingly unrelated series of passages in the *Relaciones originales* of Chimalpahin (1965).

In his *Relaciones*, Chimalpahin discusses the migration of an ethnic group, the Nonoalca Tlacoachcalca Teotlixca (hereafter simply the Tlacoachcalca), south from the Chalco region in the southern Basin of Mexico to the city-state of “Yacapichtla” in the northeastern part of the modern state of Morelos. Elsewhere I have examined in detail the several versions of this episode that appear in the *Relaciones originales* (O’Mack 1985); here it will suffice to summarize the episode in its essentials (the pertinent passages are Chimalpahin 1965: 78–79, 152–54, 156, 177–78; 1958: 117). The Tlacoachcalca, one of several composite ethnic groups described by Chimalpahin as arriving in the Chalco region sometime in the thirteenth or fourteenth century, are ostracized by the other ethnic groups in the region and leave Chalco to establish themselves in Yacapichtla, which prior to their arrival bears the “old” name of Coyohuacan (not to be confused with the contact-period city-state of that name in the southern Basin of Mexico). The central characters of the episode in all its versions are the patron deity of the group, Tezcatlipoca (sometimes specified as Tlatlahuqui, or “Red” Tezcatlipoca), and the *teomamah*, or god-bearer, Quetzalcanauhtli.⁹ As is typical of the *teomamah* character in the migration traditions of other ethnic groups in central Mexico (most notably that of the Mexica, but see also the excellent general discussions by López Austin [1973: 47–77] and Nicholson [1971: 409–10]), Quetzalcanauhtli serves as an intermediary between the ethnic group and the deity. In reading the several versions of the episode, it becomes clear that

Quetzalcanauhtli comes to serve as the avatar of Tezcatlipoca worshipped in Yacapichtla, a point emphasized in his eventual coronation as leader of the settlement (Chimalpahin 1965: 156). It is a good example, if somewhat obscure, of what Nicholson (1971: 409) has called "the localization and specialization of a generalized deity, resulting in a new aspect."

Significantly, the arrival of the Tlacochealca at their new home prompts the changing of the name of the city from Coyohuacan to Yacapichtla. If the episode followed the general pattern of relationships between patron deities and client settlements that may be seen in accounts from elsewhere in the highlands, we might expect the new place-name to be derived from the name of the patron deity. This is in fact the case, although it is not immediately apparent. Yacapichtla, or more properly Yacapitzlan, is composed of the words *yacatl*, "nose," *pitzahuac*, "pointed," and the locative suffix *-tlan*. With the first two elements taken as a compound, the toponym reads "place of the pointed nose," or alternatively "place of the tip of the nose," or even, as Peñafiel (1885: 247) first suggested, "place of Yacapitzahuac." I do not discount the first two translations, since the position of modern Yecapixtla (state of Morelos) at the southern base of the Sierra Ajusco makes the name quite appropriate as a topographical metaphor, but the last translation is the pertinent one here.¹⁰ Quetzalcanauhtli, the name of the figure whose arrival in the city prompted the new place-name, is composed of *quetzalli*, "quetzal feather" or, more figuratively, "precious," and *canauhtli*, "duck": "Precious Duck." That *yacapitzahuac* was the name of a waterfowl, and the apparent patron of Yacapitzlan was a waterfowl, is certainly more than a coincidence. Chimalpahin, who based much of his *Relaciones* on his own interpretation of pictorial manuscripts at his disposal (these are no longer extant; see Romero Galván 1977), must surely have transcribed Quetzalcanauhtli for a pictographic element representing a more particular duck, Yacapitzahuac.¹¹

Two points are established by the discussion thus far. First, Yacapitzahuac, with whom Sahagún explicitly equates Yacateuctli (see above), had not only an incidental relationship with Tezcatlipoca, as suggested by Selser, but an intimate and possibly derivative one. Whether we accept Chimalpahin's account of the Tlacochealca migration as a reflection of an actual historical process or as simply a historicized explanation of existing religious conceptions, it is clear that the relationship between Tezcatlipoca and Yacateuctli is a fundamental one.¹² At the same time, there is no apparent association of Yacateuctli with Ehecatl-Quetzalcoatli, aside from the patronage of each deity for a distinct group of merchants. Second, Yacateuctli is shown to have, in some way, an association with a particu-

lar waterfowl, as is specifically indicated by the name of his alter ego, Yacapitzahuac.¹³ This business of waterfowl leads the discussion to Ehecatl, who may also be shown to have an association with waterfowl and whose identity as such helps illustrate the significance of the patronage of both Ehecatl and Yacateuctli for merchants.

Who Was Ehecatl?

Ehecatl, “the Wind,” is a far more prominent figure in central Mexican religion than Yacateuctli and appears in numerous written and pictorial sources from around the highlands. He is also depicted in a limited number of sculptures and has a specific architectural component, the round temple, dedicated to him. In written sources, he is invariably equated with or described as a version of Quetzalcoatl, and similarly, Quetzalcoatl is occasionally referred to simply as “the wind god,” with no mention of the obviously subsidiary name, Ehecatl.¹⁴ In pictorial sources, Ehecatl may be readily identified by his distinctive costume, which has as its most prominent feature a buccally attached mask in the form of a protruding mouth and nose or beak. In at least some instances, the mask is clearly a single addition to the costume of Quetzalcoatl, as is best illustrated by the depictions of Ehecatl and Quetzalcoatl on successive leaves of the Codex Magliabechiano (Anders 1970: 61r, 62r)¹⁵ and the Codex Telleriano-Remensis (Hamy 1899: 8v, 10r). The mask is so central to the identity of Ehecatl and the wind he embodies that it may even occur alone, as it does, for example, in its depiction as the day sign *ehecatl* (wind) in versions of the *tonalpohualli*, or native calendar. Depictions of the mask vary from source to source (see Fig. 3 for the depiction in the Codex Magliabechiano, from Nuttall 1983: 61r) but always include teeth or fangs and almost always a noselike protrusion above the mouth or beak proper.

The significance of the mask is obscure, although a few clues are provided by descriptions of the costume of Ehecatl in a limited number of written sources. These sources are the Codex Magliabechiano and four derivatives of the “Crónica X” (Acosta, Códice Ramírez, Durán, Manuscript Tovar; see Barlow 1945 on the postulated Crónica X). The Codex Magliabechiano (Anders 1970: 60v) states that the mask represents a kind of horn through which the wind is blown by the god, but provides no specific indication of why the mask takes the form it has. On the other hand, written descriptions of the “idol” of Ehecatl in Cholollan in the four cited versions of the Crónica X make it clear that a bird’s beak is intended (Acosta 1985: 232; Orozco y Berra 1980: 117; Durán 1967, 1: 62; Lafaye 1972: 108). What kind of bird is less clearly stated, although Durán (1967,



Figure 3. Ehecatl-Quetzalcoatl

1: 62) notes that one feature of the beak, a warty crest, is like that of a certain duck (“*anadón del Perú*”). This association with a waterfowl is strengthened by the description of the shield of the idol in Durán, the *Códice Ramírez*, and the *Manuscrit Tovar*, which all describe the shield as covered with black and white feathers, “all of marine birds.” The *Codex Magliabechiano* (Anders 1970: 60v) similarly includes the feathers of the duck “*xumutl*” (i.e., *xomotl*) in the headdress of Ehecatl-Quetzalcoatl.

The passages in the *Crónica X* describing the idol at Cholollan are particularly significant to the present discussion because they are also the only references to Ehecatl-Quetzalcoatl that explicitly describe the deity as a patron of merchantry.¹⁶ This is an important point because it emphasizes that the very passages describing Ehecatl as the patron of Cholollan’s merchants are the same passages that suggest the association of the cos-

tume of Ehecatl with waterfowl. Whatever other associations the costume bears, in the context of the religion of the merchants of Cholollan, the association with waterfowl seems certain.¹⁷ In this light, the significance of an obscure and somewhat ambiguous reference by Sahagún to the mask of Ehecatl becomes evident.

In his compendium of faunal designations in book 11 of the Florentine Codex, Sahagún includes a large section devoted to birds, including many waterfowl. Among the waterfowl is the *ecatototl*, “wind bird,” which Sahagún (1981, 3: 246), in the *Historia general*, says receives its name because “tiene unas rayas negras por la cara, a manera de los que se componían con rayas negras por la cara a honra del [dios del] aire” (“it has some black stripes on its face in the manner of those who were decorated with black stripes in honor of the [god of] the air”; insert by the editor, Garibay K., who also gives the spelling of the bird’s name as *ehecatototl*). The same stripes are indeed described as on the face of the idol of Ehecatl-Quetzalcoatl in Cholollan by some versions of the Crónica X (Orozco y Berra 1980: 117; Durán 1967, 1: 62; Lafaye 1972: 108). The phrasing of the statement implies that the *ecatototl* received its name because it looks like the idol (or rather, the *ixiptlatl*, or impersonator) of Ehecatl, but a closer look at the sort of bird the *ecatototl* is suggests that this is not exactly the case. Rather, it would seem that Ehecatl is associated with the *ecatototl* because that bird embodies a concept essential to Ehecatl’s identity. I discuss the nature of this relationship below and also show how the waterfowl *yacapitzahuac* is similarly important to the identity of the deity *Yacapitzahuac*.

Two Waterfowl and Their Deity Counterparts

The descriptions accompanying bird names in Sahagún’s faunal lists are of varying degrees of specificity, but most are sufficiently detailed to have enabled Martín del Campo (1940) to designate the genus and species of individual birds (cf. Friedmann et al. 1950). The *ecatototl* is *Lophodytes cucullatus* (Linnaeus), the hooded merganser, and the *yacapitzahuac* is *Podiceps nigricollis* (Brehm), the eared grebe. Both birds have certain behavioral and morphological characteristics that undoubtedly provided food for thought for the native inhabitants of central Mexico.¹⁸

In terms of morphology, the males of both species are rather striking in appearance. The *yacapitzahuac*, or eared grebe (Fig. 4), has as its most distinctive characteristics a sharply pointed beak (for which it receives its Nahuatl name), a prominent tuft of feathers radiating outward from behind each eye (from which it receives a secondary Nahuatl

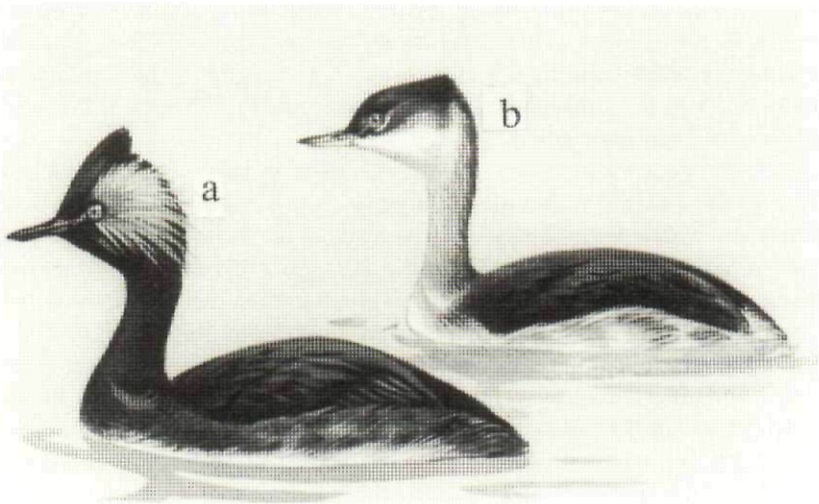


Figure 4. *Podiceps nigricollis*, the eared grebe or *yacapitzahuac*; (a) male, (b) female. Painting by John Crosby from *The Birds of Canada*, by W. E. Godfrey (1986: Pl. 2, Fig. 3). Reproduced by courtesy of the National Museum of Natural Sciences, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.

name, *nacatzoneh*, “ear-hairy”), and lobed (rather than webbed) feet. Sahagún’s (1950–82, book II: 37) comments on the *yacapitzahuac* point to these very characteristics;¹⁹ unfortunately, there is no known representation of the deity *Yacapitzahuac* and thus no means for gauging the significance of any of these characteristics for the identity of the god. Depictions of *Yacateuctli* himself suggest nothing beyond the apparent prominence given to his nose. The *ecatototl*, or hooded merganser (Fig. 5), has as its most distinctive feature a prominent crest of white feathers sharply outlined in black, which the male raises as a display during courtship and which when raised gives the impression of a hood or mask. Sahagún’s (*ibid.*: 35) description of the *ecatototl* indicates the crest but provides few other details about the bird’s appearance beyond its coloration and relative size. As I have already indicated, Sahagún’s Spanish version of the text adds that the bird has “*rayas negras*” (black stripes) on its face like those on the face of the wind god. There are in fact no actual stripes on the hooded merganser’s face; the comment conceivably refers to the prominent black border of the white crest. Sahagún (1981, 3: 247) also mentions black stripes on a white breast, which the hooded merganser does have, and thus there is little reason to doubt the original species designation by Martín del Campo. One distinctive trait of the

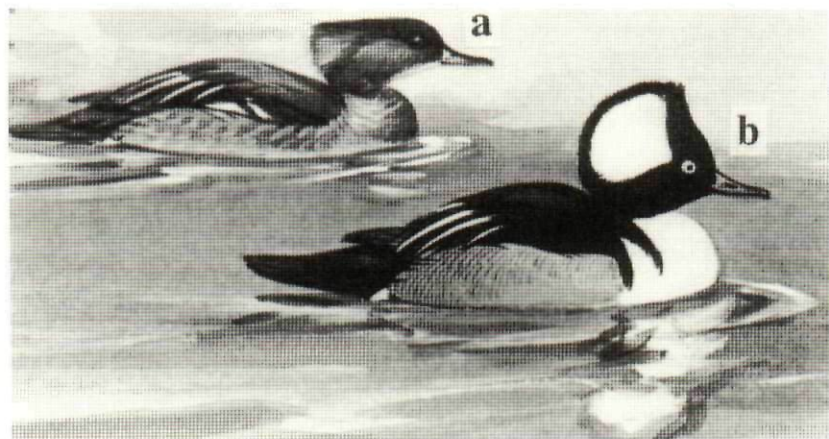


Figure 5. *Lophodytes cucullatus*, the hooded merganser or *ecatototl*; (a) female, (b) male. Painting by John Crosby from *The Birds of Canada*, by W. E. Godfrey (1986: Pl. 17, Fig. 1). Reproduced by courtesy of the National Museum of Natural Sciences, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.

merganser that Sahagún does not mention is its serrated or “toothed” bill, which it uses in capturing fish. This anomalous feature, common to all mergansers (see Fig. 6), whether or not the original inspiration for the teeth in the mask of Ehecatl, certainly underlies the association of the bird with the god. Durán’s (1967, 1: 62) description of the mask of Ehecatl includes the essential detail: “Tenía en el mismo pico unas ringleras de dientes” (“It had in the same beak some rows of teeth”) (cf. Acosta 1985: 232; Orozco y Berra 1980: 117; Lafaye 1972: 108).

Two behavioral patterns characteristic of each bird bear particular mention. First, neither bird, as Sahagún notes, is a year-round resident of the central highlands; the breeding range of both is generally restricted to Canada and parts of the northern United States. They are migratory birds and would ordinarily have spent only four or five months of the year in Mexico (approximately October to March, but with considerable yearly variation). Second, both birds obtain their food (primarily fish in the case of the merganser, aquatic insects for the grebe) by diving underwater, where they remain hidden from view, often for remarkably long periods of time. The first of these characteristics is perhaps significant to the association of the two birds with their respective deity counterparts; the notion of a natural entity that is absent from the central highlands for a large part of the year and that makes a regular annual return has a very suggestive correspondence to the life of the typical central Mexi-

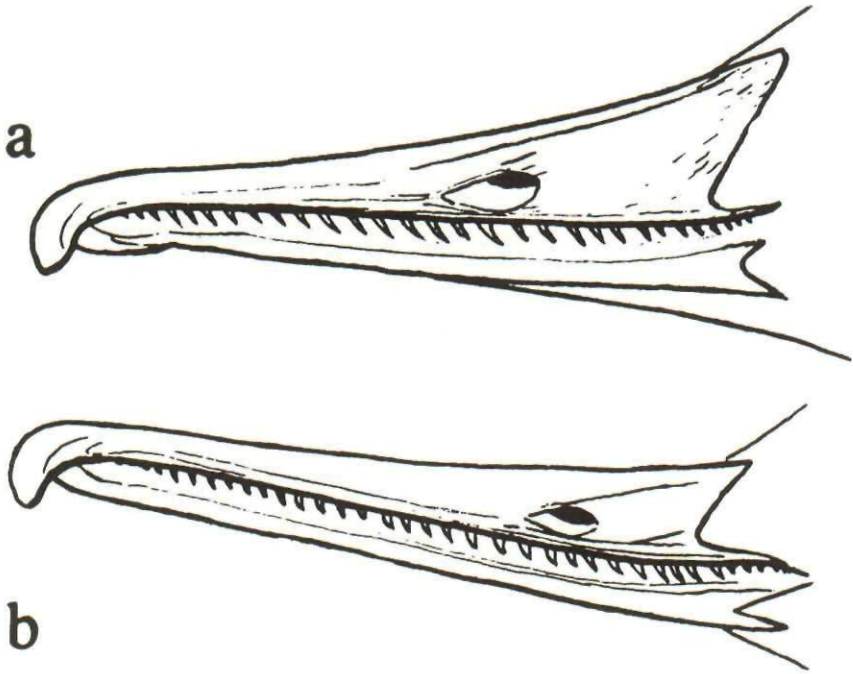


Figure 6. Bills of the (a) common and (b) red-breasted mergansers (hooded merganser similar). Drawing by John Crosby from *The Birds of Canada*, by W. E. Godfrey (1986: 120, Fig. 36). Reproduced by courtesy of the National Museum of Natural Sciences, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.

can long-distance merchant. I have been unable to find any reference to the scheduling of trade expeditions anywhere in the highlands (undoubtedly it varied), but a general association of the itinerant *pochtecah* with migratory waterfowl is certainly plausible, if not inevitable. Of greater significance, perhaps, is the association of the two deities with diving birds. This is supported in a rather indirect way by the widespread occurrence of diving waterfowl in the role of the cosmogonical agent Earth-Diver in the mythology of many parts of the New World, particularly North America.

While diving waterfowl are not the only creatures to serve as Earth-Diver (other animals, particularly aquatic mammals such as the muskrat, beaver, and otter, may assume the role), they are certainly among the most common (see Kongäs 1960). In the typical North American Earth-Diver myth, an original solitary deity is described as all alone on a tiny island in the middle of the primordial sea. The deity is anxious to expand his tiny piece of land, so he commissions or creates an animal, perhaps a diving

bird like the loon, to dive down to the bottom of the sea to bring back mud. The animal dives and obtains the mud, often somewhat fortuitously after bumping his nose on the bottom, and returns to the surface. The deity then uses the mud to expand his island and thus creates dry land. There is no obvious equivalent of the Earth-Diver story in the small corpus of Aztec mythology that has been preserved, and indeed Rooth (1957: 508), in her classification of indigenous North American creation myths, notes that Earth-Diver does not appear in the Mesoamerican tradition as a whole. Nonetheless, a certain structural correspondence may be seen in some of the fragments of central Mexican cosmogony that do survive.

Both Quetzalcoatl, the major deity from whom Ehecatl derives, and Tezcatlipoca, the apparent source of Yacateuctli's identity, are among the handful of Aztec cosmogonical deities named in myth (see Nicholson 1971: 397–403 for a general overview). The two deities are especially prominent in their roles as demiurges, agents commissioned by other pre-existing deities to carry out tasks of creation or acquisition. Quetzalcoatl in particular appears in a myth accounting for, most notably, the creation of the modern human race. In all three preserved versions of the myth (Jonghe 1905: 25–27; Velázquez 1975: 120–21; Mendieta 1980: 77–78), a central event is Quetzalcoatl's descent into the underworld on a commission to retrieve the bones of a former race of men to use in the creation of the new, modern race. While in the underworld, he meets the Lord of the Dead, Mictlanteuctli, from whom he must obtain the necessary bones. He does so, but he trips in his flight back from the underworld and the bones break and scatter. He regathers the bones and returns to his fellow gods, and the creation of humanity ensues. Because the bones have been accidentally broken into pieces of unequal length, the resulting modern race has people of different heights. In one version of the myth (Jonghe), Quetzalcoatl is replaced by Ehecatl, and in another (Mendieta) by Xolotl. The appellation Xolotl, "Servant," perhaps stresses the deity's role as a subordinate demiurge.

In another myth, emphasizing the role of both Tezcatlipoca and Quetzalcoatl in the establishment of dry land, the two gods are assigned the task of restoring the division between the earth and the waters of heaven following the deluge that has ended the final premodern era (Jonghe 1905: 25, 31; Garibay K. 1979: 32). The sequence is again a descent by the gods down to (or into) the earth from heaven, where they then manage either to raise the skies back up from the flooded earth or, alternatively, to split the swimming earth monster in two to form both earth and heaven.

In their details, such myths have little similarity to the typical Earth-Diver myth cited above, but in terms of their general structure, the simi-

larities are, I think, definite and significant. In both the Aztec myths and the generalized Earth-Diver sequence, the focus is a descent into an underworld to retrieve the necessary ingredients, or to effect the necessary changes, that will make human life possible. The agent in each case is a figure commissioned for the task by a higher authority because of his special skills.²⁰ This basic cosmogonical principle, inherent in the identities of Quetzalcoatl and Tezcatlipoca as demiurges, surely underlies the association of their avatars, Ehecatl and Yacateuctli, with species of birds that elsewhere would readily serve in the role of Earth-Diver. The cosmogonical dimension in the identities of Ehecatl and Yacateuctli must in turn have a significance for their shared role as patrons of merchants. The reasons that both gods were assigned to such a role may be found in a further extension of the cosmogonical principle represented by the Earth-Diver to the actual role of the merchant class in Aztec society.

Earth-Diver is above all a mediator between two realms, however they may be distinguished: heaven and earth, earth and underworld, sky and water. Diving birds are a perfect natural embodiment of this concept, ably traversing sky and water while regularly swimming about at their boundary.²¹ Similar abilities no doubt governed the choice of other animals—otters, beavers, turtles, and so on—to represent Earth-Diver in myth elsewhere in the Americas, and indeed across the world (see Count 1952 on the worldwide occurrence of the Earth-Diver motif). Cast in terms pertinent to Aztec culture, Earth-Diver was a highly appropriate symbol of the merchant class in its role as the mediator between the domestic core of a political unit and the foreign realm exterior to it. The merchants, as is best known for the case of the Mexica of Tenochtitlan-Tlatelolco, were the venturers into the social and political unknown and often served a central role in facilitating the later territorial expansion of their city-state (see especially Acosta Saignes 1945; Chapman 1957; Hassig 1985: 113–26). Just as the creator god sent Earth-Diver to fetch mud to create more dry land, so did the emperors of Tenochtitlan-Tlatelolco send their long-distance merchants out to sovereign city-states to retrieve both exotic goods and information on how conquest of such distant areas might be achieved. Commodities and military intelligence were, in a sense, the mud brought back by the merchants to expand the Mexica domestic core.

The metaphor of Earth-Diver must have been especially powerful for the Mexica, living as they did on an island in the middle of a lake, an island made progressively larger by the reclamation of mud from the lake bottom. Certainly the Mexica were intimately familiar with the ways of waterfowl, as the detailed and provocative passages on these birds in Sahagún's book 11 attest. In view of this familiarity, the nesting habits

of the yacapitzahuac, or eared grebe, bear special mention despite the failure of Sahagún's account to include any discussion of them. Godfrey (1986: 28) has described the eared grebe's nest as "a soggy heap of vegetation usually floating or built up from the bottom or on a dense bed of vegetation" (cf. McAllister 1958: 303).

The correspondence of such a nest with the construction of a *chinampan* agricultural bed at Tenochtitlan-Tlatelolco is remarkable (the hooded merganser, on the other hand, is a hole-nester [Phillips 1986 (1922-26), 2: 251]).²² As I have already indicated, the usual breeding range of the eared grebe is far north of the Valley of Mexico, and it is uncertain that the bird would have built nests in its winter habitat. Sahagún (1950-82, book 11: 37) specifically notes that the yacapitzahuac "does not rear its young here." Nonetheless, Friedmann et al. (1950: 13) report the collection of a specimen in full breeding dress in Veracruz, and Salvin and Godman (1897-1904: 442) indicate that while the eared grebe is generally considered only a winter visitor to Mexico and Central America, "specimens in full summer plumage have been obtained in the Valley of Mexico and Guatemala, so that it is possible that the species may breed there." This is also suggested by the description of the plumage of the yacapitzahuac in Sahagún's work (see above), which includes a comment on the distinctive ear tufts of the grebe, evident only when the bird is in breeding plumage. I think it very likely that natives of the Valley of Mexico did in fact observe, at least occasionally, the construction of a grebe's nest and recognized its basic similarity with their own *chinampan* techniques.

References to Earth-Diver symbolism in Mexica texts, beyond those that may be inferred in the cosmogonical myths, are apparently few and obscure, but a number of passages involving waterfowl are suggestive: In the festival of Etzalcualiztli reported by Sahagún, the humble founding of Tenochtitlan in the lake is celebrated. At one point in the ceremony, the participants leap into the water, splashing and quacking like ducks and other water birds (cited in Soustelle 1961: 3-4). This practice perhaps derives from the recognition of a link between the Mexica's making of a new home in the middle of the lake and the metaphorical role of waterfowl in the creation of a habitable world in the midst of an otherwise uninhabitable expanse of water. The *Crónica X* also provides an interesting sequence in the historical account of the Mexica's early years on the lake. Shortly after establishing themselves on their island home, the Mexica are perceived by their Tepanec overlords at Azcapotzalco as a threat to the Tepanec empire. In hopes of crushing their seemingly indomitable spirit, the ruler of Azcapotzalco, Tezozomoc, demands increasingly extravagant tribute from the Mexica. The Mexica are inevitably able to comply thanks

to the intervention of their patron deity, Huitzilopochtli. It is undoubtedly significant that the final extravagance demanded by Tezozomoc is a large floating raft planted with living stands of the range of Aztec cultivars in which a duck and a heron nest on eggs, which are to hatch on the moment of delivery of the tribute (see especially Durán 1967, 2: 57–58). It is the ability of his new vassals to follow through with this order that convinces Tezozomoc that the previously humble Mexica are destined to overthrow him and establish themselves as the new rulers of his empire. Again, waterfowl and the creation of productive land in a body of water are intimately connected with the notion of imperial mission. This is part of a general association of original cosmogony with perceived historical process that, if examined more closely, could probably be seen to permeate much of the ethnohistorical material relating to the development of the Mexica empire. As Davies (1987: 27) has recently noted, “The foundation of Tenochtitlan, like that of any new city, in itself is tantamount to a cosmogony which represents the beginning of the world.”

Discussion and Conclusions

The use of a cosmogonical metaphor of obviously very ancient origin as a part of the identity of two Aztec deities might seem to suggest that the two deities are themselves very ancient. This is in fact suggested for Yacateuctli in a passage in the Florentine Codex describing the festival of Teotleco, “Arrival of the Gods,” in which Yacateuctli and the god of fire, Xiuhteuctli, are said to arrive “only last of all because indeed they were already old” (Sahagún 1950–82, book 2: 129). Certainly the existence of an apparent pictorial equivalent of Yacateuctli in Postclassic Maya manuscripts and other Maya iconography (“God M”) indicates some antiquity for a long-nosed deity in Mesoamerica (Thompson 1966: 165), although I am skeptical of claims for a Yacateuctli at Classic Teotihuacan (e.g., Séjourné 1959: 30, Fig. 12). Ehecatl-Quetzalcoatl has similarly been suggested as the identity of a duck-billed figure on Panel 5 of the South Ballcourt at Classic El Tajín, Veracruz (Delhalle and Luykx 1986), and while the direct transference of an Aztec deity name to so early a context is gratuitous, the association of the duck-billed figure with a cosmogonical scene is significant. A recent paper by Kennedy (1982: 285–89) attempts to account for the occurrence of ducks in Olmec iconography (including the famous Late Formative Tuxtla Statuette) in terms of their role as symbols of mediation between the physical world and the spiritual world of hallucinogenic trance, but again it is impossible to infer any immediate historical connection of these concepts with the Aztec tradition. Nicholson (1979: 36–38)

has commented on and summarized other possible earlier representations of Ehecatl-Quetzalcoatl in a variety of Mesoamerican contexts.

In terms of analogous (or better, homologous) traditions contemporaneous with the Aztec notion of Ehecatl as a cosmogonical agent, the most obvious and best-documented example is that of the deity 9 Wind as he appears in a number of Mixtec pictorial manuscripts. Nicholson (1978) has pointed to the many correspondences between representations of the central Mexican Ehecatl-Quetzalcoatl and those of the Mixtec 9 Wind; in iconographic terms, the two are nearly identical, and both deities wear the characteristic buccal mask. Most notable is the prominent place accorded 9 Wind in what are apparently cosmogonical scenes, including depictions of 9 Wind descending to earth from an upperworld inhabited by creator deities (*ibid.*: 68–70). A thorough comparison of Aztec and Mixtec cosmogony would undoubtedly provide further specific correspondences between the two traditions, emphasizing the pan-highland nature of Postclassic cosmogonical conceptions.

But whatever course the historical development of cosmogonical agents in Mesoamerican religion may have taken, I think the diving waterfowl metaphor inherent in the identities of Yacateuctli and Ehecatl must be viewed as the result of the Aztec's own recent transformations, using an ancient principle, of the two major deity complexes of Tezcatlipoca and Quetzalcoatl in the context of a specialized tutelary function, namely, the patronage of merchantry. The allusion to waterfowl is not to a specific deity but to a specific capacity, a capacity recognized in the cosmogonical roles of the two major deities and emphasized and epitomized by their adoption of an association with waterfowl. Here, then, is the significance of the emphasis on the nose in the identities of the two merchant deities, Yacateuctli in his name and Ehecatl in his costume: it is an allusion to the link between original cosmogony and actual cultural practice. The nose is the most convenient symbol of the role of Earth-Diver in obtaining the raw materials for creation and of the importance of such a cosmogonical principle to the mission of the merchants in obtaining the raw materials of empire.

Thus two factors are involved in the identity of the merchant patrons. The first is the general association of the given major deity complex with the city-state or region from which the merchant class originates: Quetzalcoatl was the central deity of Cholollan; Tezcatlipoca (as Huitzilopochtli and otherwise) was the central deity of Tenochtitlan-Tlatelolco. The second is the specific association of each patron with the essential capacities of mediation and acquisition by allusion to a fundamental symbol of cosmogony, a species of diving waterfowl. My identification of the

second factor emphasizes an aspect of Aztec religion that with few exceptions (e.g., Horcasitas 1988 [1953]) has not been systematically examined since the early comparative efforts of Daniel Brinton (see especially Brinton 1882), that is, the role of pan-American symbolic traditions in the development of what is nonetheless a distinctively Aztec ideology. My very narrow focus on the merchant deities could easily be expanded to other aspects of Aztec religion, as I hope my more general references to cosmogony suggest.

The first factor, the association of major deity complexes with specific regions, is far from a settled matter, and the apparent opposition of Yacateuctli and Ehecatl as patrons of the merchant classes of different cities deserves a closer look. Motolinia (1980: 65; cf. Mendieta 1980: 86) seems to imply that the worship of Quetzalcoatl as principal deity was general in both Cholollan and the surrounding provinces, the very provinces that had escaped conquest by the Triple Alliance of Tenochtitlan, Texcoco, and Tlacopan, all three cities where Tezcatlipoca, in one form or another, was dominant in the religion. This suggests that the difference in deities worshipped by the merchants simply reflected an opposition between a general Valley of Mexico cult of Tezcatlipoca and a cult of Quetzalcoatl prevalent in the independent provinces east of the valley (although it is not clear how Mixcoatl, the patron of independents Tlaxcala and Huexotzinco, would fit such a scheme). A recent book by Gillespie (1989) considerably complicates this issue by its suggestion that many of the ethnohistorical data referring to Quetzalcoatl are suspect as truly representative of prehispanic notions because of the later native accommodation of the Spanish Conquest to pre-Conquest modes of thinking. While Gillespie specifically postulates the post-Conquest construction of the historical character Topiltzin-Quetzalcoatl as a response to the dominant role played in the Conquest by Cortés, references to Ehecatl-Quetzalcoatl in Cholollan are probably not entirely free of suspicion in this respect, since Cholollan was the scene of one of the first major military maneuvers on the continent by Cortés, the brutal massacre of his Chololtecan hosts. Certainly other questions of interpretation assuming the post-Conquest construction of pre-Conquest tradition may be raised, but I think none would detract substantially from the analysis presented here.

Finally, I would hardly be doing justice to the iconographically complex figure of Ehecatl-Quetzalcoatl if I did not emphasize once again that his association with diving waterfowl is not the sum total of his identity. In the case of his patronage for the merchant class of Cholollan, his link with waterfowl is, I think, indisputable; the teeth in the bill of the hooded

merganser serve as the most tangible evidence that the most pertinent waterfowl was the *ecatototl*. Nonetheless, the many other aspects of his costume, including elements of the mask itself (particularly its noselike projection, described by Durán as a “warty crest”), undoubtedly allude to other aspects of the deity’s identity not considered here.²³

Notes

An earlier version of this article was presented at the Eighty-sixth Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association in Chicago in November 1987 as part of a symposium entitled “Regional Expressions of the Feathered Serpent in Mesoamerica and Beyond.” The author wishes to thank Susan D. Gillespie, organizer of the symposium, for the opportunity to present the paper as well as for many useful comments on a later draft. Doris Heyden and three anonymous reviewers provided much constructive criticism. Norman McQuown gave incidental help in translating a number of Nahuatl terms. The author also wishes to thank Phillip Arnold, Raymond D. Fogelson, Alan L. Kolata, John Janusek, Sissel Johannessen, and Cheryl Sutherland for their comments. He acknowledges sole responsibility for any errors or omissions in the article.

- 1 In this article, I use the generally accepted spellings of Aztec deity names and toponyms (e.g., Quetzalcoatl, Tenochtitlan) regardless of whether there is a more accurate phonetic representation. The only exceptions are those deity names ending in *-teuctli*, which is so often rendered by the phonetically less accurate *-tecuhltli* or *-tecutli* (see especially Andrews 1975: 407 on this point). I also have chosen to spell the name of Yacateuctli’s principal alias in the more accurate form, Yacapitzahuac. For Nahuatl words other than proper nouns, I standardize the spellings along the lines suggested by Andrews (*ibid.*) and Karttunen (1983), with the exception that I do not mark vowel length. All direct quotations from sources are provided as they appear in the cited editions, without corrections of spelling or orthography. All English translations of Spanish passages are mine.
- 2 Andrews (1975: 440) translates Huitzilopochtli as “Left Hand Like a Hummingbird,” a nearly literal translation which respects the usual Nahuatl rule that the first element of a compound noun stem modifies the second (cf. Karttunen 1983: 91). Such a translation would seem to create difficulties for an interpretation of the name as an allusion to the sun in the southern sky, the “Hummingbird on the Left” (i.e., South), as the name is often translated. In fact, aside from a suggestive native tale about an encounter by the wandering Mexica with a local Valley of Mexico deity, Opochtli (Garibay K. 1979: 47), from whom Huitzilopochtli obtains certain items, there is little direct textual evidence for any specific interpretation of the name’s significance to Nahuatl speakers. Nonetheless, the association of Huitzilopochtli with the sun is convincingly argued in comparative analyses such as that of Hunt (1977; also see below).
- 3 Seler cites the manuscript of Fray Bernardino de Sahagún preserved in the Biblioteca del Palacio Real, Madrid (the *Primeros memoriales*). The connection is perhaps more explicit in Fray Diego Durán’s description, also cited by

Seler, of the festival of Pachtonli in honor of the goddess Xochiquetzal. Here the priests await the arrival of "Yaotzin," as signaled by the appearance of an infant's footprint in a ball of maize dough. When the god finally arrives,

se concluía la fiesta de aquella noche, avisando a todo el pueblo de que allí a tres días habían de llegar los *Yacateuctin*, que así los llamaban, que los esperasen. Los cuales eran tres señores, y al uno llamaban *Yacatecutli*, y al otro *Cuachtlapucohcoyaotzin* y al otro, *Titlachahuan*. (Durán 1967, 1: 154)

[the festival of that night was concluded, (the priests) telling all the people that in three days the *Yacateuctin* would arrive, and that they were summoned to wait for them. These were three lords; one was called *Yacatecutli*, another *Cuachtlapucohcoyaotzin*, another *Titlachahuan*.]

Cuachtlapucohcoyaotzin, "Warrior with Open-Weave Mantle," is, as Thompson (1966: 160) suggests, a synonym for *Yacateuctli* (note the net mantle worn by *Yacateuctli* in Fig. 1). The terminal *-yaotzin* (enemy, warrior) in his name also suggests that, like *Titlachahuan*, he is an avatar of *Tezcatlipoca* (see Nicholson 1971: Table 3 for the definite synonyms of *Tezcatlipoca*). *Yacateuctli* thus appears here as a member of the more general category of *Yacateuctin* (i.e., *yacateuctin*, simply the plural of *Yacateuctli*), the other two members of which are equivalent to himself and/or *Tezcatlipoca*. Thompson (1966: 160) also points to the black patches on the face of *Yacateuctli* as he is portrayed in the Florentine Codex, a version of facial painting shared with representations of two aspects of *Tezcatlipoca*, *Omacatl* and *Tlacochealcayotl*.

- 4 Andrews and Hassig (1984: 244) consider the first half of the name to derive from *yabca*, "one who has gone," and thus they translate *Yacateuctli* as "Goer Lord," also appropriate to the role of the deity (cf. Garibay K. 1958: 204). Certainly a pun involving both meanings cannot be excluded, but as will become apparent below, the "nose" translation reflects an essential aspect of the deity's identity. Wigberto Jiménez Moreno (in a personal communication cited by Acosta Saignes [1945: 39]) suggested that the name *Yacateuctli* derived from a palatalization of *Ce Acatl Teuctli*, the calendrical name for *Quetzalcoatl*. While this is entirely possible, it nonetheless begs the question of whether *ce acatl* was not chosen as a calendrical name for *Quetzalcoatl* because it seemed to contain the syllables in *yacatl*. And again, further punning in either direction cannot be excluded.
- 5 This would also be supported by a single passage in Durán 1967, 1: 65, if "Yecatli," given there as a "second name" of *Quetzalcoatl*, were in fact a corruption of *yacatl* (nose) and not *ehecatli* (wind); either corruption is a possibility. See Karttunen 1983: 76 on the phonetic reconstruction of *ehecatli*.
- 6 A number of authors (Monzón Estrada 1983 [1949]: 75–77; Van Zantwijk 1985: 133–41) have attempted to assign particular deities mentioned in such passages to particular *calpoltin* (wards) of merchants in Tenochtitlan-Tlatelolco, but their assignments are based on, at best, very tenuous evidence.
- 7 There is an apparent contradiction between the passages in the number of siblings: in Anderson and Dibble's translation of the Nahuatl, the phrase "Chiconquiahuitl, or Chalmecacihuatl" implies that the two names are of a single deity, making a total of five deities other than *Yacateuctli* worshipped by the merchants in this context. Sahagún apparently misread the Nahuatl when

making his Spanish translation and counted “five brothers and a sister,” recognizing the *-cibuatl* suffix in Chalmecacihuatl as indicating a female deity. The “four males plus one female” formula suggested by the original passage is reiterated, with slightly different content, by Durán (1967, 1: 120) in a passage on a rite of the merchants in the festival of Xocotlhuetzli:

Este mismo día los mercaderes ofrecían cinco esclavos, los cuatro varones y una hembra. A todos los lavaban y purificaban, como era uso y costumbre purificar los esclavos que habían de representar ídolos. Presentados y ofrecidos estos esclavos, al uno le ponían el nombre Yacatecutli, y al otro, Chiconquiahuitl y al otro, Cuauhtlaxayauh, y al otro Coyotl inahual, y a la india ponían por nombre Chachalmecacihuatl.

[This same day the merchants would offer five slaves, four males and one female. All of them would be washed and purified, as it was the usage and custom to purify slaves that were to represent idols. Once these slaves were presented and offered, to one they gave the name Yacatecutli, to another Chiconquiahuitl, to another Cuauhtlaxayauh, to another Coyotl inahual, and to the Indian woman they gave the name Chachalmecacihuatl.]

In this case, Chiconquiahuitl and Chalmecacihuatl (Chachalmecacihuatl) are definitely not equated, but the essential composition of four-plus-one stands. This numerical formula, so prevalent in Aztec religion, presumably relates to a concern for replicating the spatial model of the earth (four cardinal directions and a central axis) through ritual. I suspect that the mention of Yacateuctli plus *five* other names in Sahagún's Nahuatl text is simply an indication that the single deity, Yacateuctli, necessarily implies a four-plus-one identity. Note that the Nahuatl text states that the merchants would bathe a slave representing Yacateuctli *or* one of the other five names, not Yacateuctli *and* the other five. Given Durán's inclusion of the name Yacateuctli itself in the group of four-plus-one, it is likely that one of the five “other” deities in Sahagún's Nahuatl text is a deliberate substitution for Yacateuctli. As will become apparent below, the most likely candidate is Yacapitzahuac (Yacapitzauac). The four-plus-one aspect of Yacateuctli's identity probably also has some relevance for his relationship with Tezcatlipoca, since the latter god is especially prominent as a quadrupartite personality (see Nicholson 1971: 398, 409).

- 8 The emphasis on noses is reiterated in yet another alias of Yacateuctli provided elsewhere by Sahagún (1950–82, book 1: 74), Yacacoliuhqui, “Curved Nose.” The same alias is provided by Torquemada (1969, 2: 57, 272–73), who probably derives his information from the work of Sahagún (see León-Portilla 1983: 189, 205), and by Ponce (1892: 5; cf. note 17). I disregard the comment by Torquemada, cited widely in the literature, that the name Yacacoliuhqui, which he translates “Nariz aguileña” (aquiline nose), refers to the prudence and sagacity of the merchants. This is a thoroughly European conception of the relationship between nose shape and commercial wits and is obvious as such in his commentary.
- 9 I do not consider here a third character in the episode, more obscure but probably also significant to the discussion at hand, the group leader, Yacahuetzcatzin (“sharpened nose”?). The possible implications of his name will be apparent below.

- 10 See my more thorough discussion of the etymology of Yacapitztlán in O'Mack 1985.
- 11 Zimmermann (1960: 12) also notes "errors" in name transcription in the *Relaciones*, although Chimalpahin did not necessarily make mistakes. Rather, he may have worked with pictorial manuscripts already provided with written glosses, or he may have provided acceptable but alternative names for particular pictographic elements. I have seen only one other use of the word *quetzalcanauhtli*, in Alvarado Tezozomoc 1980: 434, where it is given as the name of a kind of duck.
- 12 I avoid the obvious question of how Yacapitzahuac, if he was original to Yacapitztlán, came to be worshipped in Tenochtitlán-Tlatelolco. The simplest answer is that he was carried there by the Mexica following their conquest of Yacapitztlán in the fifteenth century, an event recorded by Chimalpahin (1965: 83; see Nicholson 1971: 409–10 on the general Aztec phenomenon of deity confiscation following military conquest). This might also account for the note in the *Relación de Yacapitztlán* of 1580 (Gutiérrez de Lievana n.d.) that the patron deity of the city at contact was "yaotzintitlacahua," that is, Tezcatlipoca, a statement consistent with Chimalpahin's account of the Tlacoachcalca migration but giving no indication of the existence there of a "Yacapitzahuac." Had Yacapitzahuac been claimed by the Mexica, perhaps the conquered city reverted to a less specialized form of worship of their original tutelary deity. Such an interpretation, however, relies on a too liberal acceptance of the historicity of Chimalpahin's account. Instead, I think it can be reasonably assumed that, like most deities in the pan-highland religious system, Yacapitzahuac was recognized for his domain of efficacy by the population at large. His relationship with merchantry is at least hinted at in Chimalpahin's account, a relationship I examine in some detail in my master's thesis (O'Mack 1985).
- 13 Perhaps significantly, the name of another hermano of Yacateuctli, Xomocuil (Acxomocuil in the Florentine Codex), whom Seler (1960a [1904]: 1106) equates with Tezcatlipoca, has also been translated by at least three authors as deriving from the name of a kind of duck, the *xomotl* (Siméon 1984: 779; Spence 1923: 343; Van Zantwijk 1985: 140), although such an analysis is debatable.
- 14 While Ehecatl is invariably related to Quetzalcoatl, references to Quetzalcoatl in the source material do not invariably (or even usually) refer to the specialized wind aspect of this complex character. The distinction made by Nicholson (1979) between the wind deity, Ehecatl-Quetzalcoatl, and the quasi-historical hero Topiltzin-Quetzalcoatl, while not without its problems, should be emphasized here. My discussion has no immediate bearing on the identity of Topiltzin-Quetzalcoatl.
- 15 I accept Boone's (1983) conclusion that the Codex Magliabechiano is the most accurate version of the lost prototype from which the Magliabechiano and its several cognates derive. Thus I disregard the corresponding passages in the other published members of the Magliabechiano group, which in any case add nothing pertinent to the present discussion. In the case of the "Crónica X," which I cite further on, no single derivative is unequivocally primary (see Barlow 1945), and slightly variant information occurs in all four cited versions. Thus I choose to cite all pertinent passages in spite of the redundancy that is usually evident.

- 16 See also the reiteration by Durán (1967, 1: 170): “Quetzalcoatl, dios de los mercaderes y joyeros, el más reverenciado y honrado que había en Cholula. . . . A este Ehecatl hacían grandes ofrendas y grandes sacrificios” (“Quetzalcoatl, god of the merchants and jewelers, the most revered and honored that there was in Cholula. . . . To this Ehecatl they made great offerings and great sacrifices”).
- 17 The previously cited passage of Ponce (1892: 5) is an exception to the lack of other references to Ehecatl as patron of the merchants. Ponce does refer to Quetzalcoatl (not Ehecatl) as a merchant god, although he does not indicate to what places this information applies. The passage is worth citing in full here both for its unparalleled, if unelaborated, equation of Quetzalcoatl and Yacateuctli and for the possible further association with waterfowl it suggests for the merchant gods via a third deity name, Amimitl. Ponce lists a variety of deity names with brief comments: “Huitzilopochtli. Taras. Dios de los de mechuacan, quetzalcoatl, yacateuctli, Dios de los mercaderes y por otros nombres, Yacacoliuhqui, y amimitl otro Dios Piltzintectli” (“Huitzilopochtli. Taras. God of those of mechuacan, quetzalcoatl, yacateuctli, God of the merchants and by other names yacacoliuhqui, and amimitl another God Piltzintectli”).
- The punctuation of this, the only published version of the original Spanish text, makes the passage difficult to interpret, but it at least indicates both Quetzalcoatl and Yacateuctli as names of the (single) merchant god. It also apparently provides both Yacacoliuhqui and Amimitl as alternate names for that god (the recent English translation by Andrews and Hassig [1984: 211–18] alters the punctuation of the original published version and thus changes the meaning of the passage to one indicating Amimitl as “another god,” not associated with the merchant god; the original “y por otros nombres yacacoliuhqui, y amimitl,” however, seems unambiguous). Amimitl, “Water Arrow,” the patron of the lake city of Cuicuilhuac in the southern Valley of Mexico (Sahagún 1950–82, book 1: 79), is largely obscure in nature but is associated both with fishing (Torquemada 1969, 2: 59) and, as is clearly indicated by his “song” collected by Sahagún (Garibay K. 1958: 113–16), with the hunting of waterfowl.
- 18 For comparative purposes, I have primarily consulted Godfrey 1986: 28–29 on the eared grebe and Phillips 1986 [1922–26], 2: 241–55 on the hooded merganser. See also Salvin and Godman 1897–1904.
- 19 For both the yacapitzahuac and the ecatototl, compare the nearly contemporary and very similar descriptions of the sixteenth-century physician and naturalist Francisco Hernández (1959: 329, 335, 339). His use of identical names for the two birds indicates the currency of faunal terminology in the highlands of the day.
- 20 It is worth noting that in the first Aztec myth, as in the generalized Earth-Diver sequence, the mission of acquisition succeeds only after some unintentional incident (Earth-Diver bumps his nose or the like; Quetzalcoatl trips and drops the bones).
- 21 Interestingly, the yacapitzahuac, like all the members of the grebe family, is able to walk on land only awkwardly due to the attachment of its legs at the very rear of the body, the adaptation that makes it such an excellent diver. This perhaps emphasizes its role as a mediator between sky and water, since it is largely restricted to those media. Even more suggestive is the eared grebe’s

- ability to alter its specific gravity while swimming, enabling it to submerge rapidly to the point that only the head or bill is visible, and then to submerge completely without any noticeable disturbance of the surface of the water (Godfrey 1986: 25).
- 22 A number of authors (most notably Wilken 1985) have questioned the validity of ethnohistorical accounts of how chinampan agricultural beds were constructed in prehispanic and early-colonial times, concluding that no chinampan ever floated and that aquatic vegetation never formed a significant component in chinampan construction. However, in a recent review of the chinampan literature (O'Mack 1989), I have emphasized that the notion of the chinampan as a floating garden derives from the prehispanic symbolic equivalence of a productive agricultural plot and the primordial earth as first created from a swimming monster in the primordial sea. This association, along with the attested early-colonial practice of using raftlike seedbeds constructed of aquatic vegetation to transport seedlings to the chinampan (see Leicht 1937), indicates the importance of the "floating" model of chinampan construction in Aztec thought.
 - 23 Brundage (1982: 80–84) has also recently commented on the association of Ehecatl's mask with waterfowl, similarly pointing to the significance of an aquatic bird as symbolizing "at once both air and water." He also suggests other possible faunal aspects of the mask, including crocodile, serpent, and jaguar associations. See also Nicholson 1979: 36 for mention of "both avian and reptilian features" in the mask, a characterization which of course recalls the Quetzalcoatl complex as a whole.

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