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Materials of the Sacred: 16th to 18th Century Religious Materiality in
Michoacán

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This thesis seeks to shed a much-needed light on the artistic production in the geographical region of Michoacán, Mexico, specifically of the predominant indigenous group in the region: the P'urhépecha.¹ This thesis mainly explores the visual language and material value of P'urhépecha art in the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries. I will show P'urhépecha visual language through the artistic depictions of the *Relación de las Cerimonias y Rictos y Población y Gobernación de los Indios de la Provincia de Mechuacán* [The Relationship of the Ceremonies and Rites and Population and Government of the Indians of the Province of Michoacán]² and a *pasta de caña* crucified Christ sculpture made of *pasta de caña*, focusing on how a P'urhépecha community would have understood such images. Notions of reverence, materiality, and religion are all important to the visual language that developed from the fifteenth to eighteenth century in Michoacán.

Michoacán is located to the west of Mexico City (fig. 1) and in the fifteenth century it was home to the P'urhépecha Empire. The P'urhépecha are best known in literature as being the arch-nemeses of the Mexica,³ or “Aztecs,” yet the research that has

¹ The P'urhépecha are also known in literature, dating back to sixteenth-century early colonial documents, as Tarascans (*Tarascos* in Spanish). I have chosen to call this ethnic group by the name that they call themselves: P'urhépecha. A further explanation of the use of these words is located in the first chapter.

² In this text I will be referring to this chronicle as the *Relación de Michoacán* and the *Relación*. The edition of the *Relación* that I used for both images and text is the following: Jerónimo de Alcalá and Moisés Franco Mendoza, *Relación De Las Cerimonias Y Rictos Y Población Y Gobernación De Los Indios De La Provincia De Mechuacán*, 1. ed. (Michoacán: El Colegio de Michoacán: Gobierno del Estado de Michoacán, 2000).

³ In this thesis I will be referring to the indigenous culture that lived in Tenochtitlan, popularly called the Aztecs, by the name that they called themselves: Mexica.

been done on P'urhépecha pales in comparison to many other central Mexican populations. Archeologists and anthropologists have studied their metallurgy and other artistic practices, but little has been developed by art historians in comparison to other central and west Mexican indigenous populations.⁴

In this thesis I demonstrate, through a close visual analysis, the precise way in which male elites were depicted among the fifteenth-century P'urhépecha. Specifically, I concentrate on depictions of elite men who held sacred authority. I focus much of my argument on images from the *Relación de Michoacán*. Much of the colonial works on gender only focus on female depiction and subjugation, and in this thesis I develop how maleness was signified and therefore translated visually by the P'urhépecha. I examine the ways in which hierarchy and status are represented through important visual and material cues understood to the P'urhépecha as well as throughout Mesoamerica (fig. 2).

In the first chapter, I investigate the ways in which male elite imagery was depicted using a very specific P'urhépecha visual language. In doing so, I focus on four particular images from the *Relación de Michoacán* that depict male elites, especially in relation to other males of differing social and cultural status (fig. 3). A large portion of

⁴ A majority of the research on the P'urhépecha has been anthropologic and archaeological, while only one contemporary art historian writing an analysis of the imagery in the *Relación de Michoacán*. For only a few example of works, see: Angélica J. Afanador-Pujol, "The Tree of Jesse and the "Relación De Michoacán": Mimicry in Colonial Mexico," *The Art Bulletin* 92, no. 4 (2010); Patricia Rieff Anawalt, "Traders of the Ecuatorial Littoral," *Archaeology* 50, no. 6 (1997); Tricia Gabany-Guerrero, "Deciphering the Symbolic Heritage of the Tarascan Empire: Interpreting the Political Economy of the Pueblo-Hospital of Parangaricutiro, Michoacan" (Dissertation, University at Albany, State University of New York, 1999); Dorothy Hosler, *The Sounds and Colors of Power: The Sacred Metallurgical Technology of Ancient West Mexico* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1994); Alfredo López Austin, *Tarascos Y Mexicas*, 1a ed., Sep/80 (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1981); Helen Perlstein Pollard, *Tariacuri's Legacy: The Prehispanic Tarascan State*, The Civilization of the American Indian Series V. 209 (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993); Eduard Seler et al., *Collected Works in Mesoamerican Linguistics and Archaeology*, 2nd ed., 7 vols., vol. 4 (Culver City, CA: Labyrinthos, 1990).

my argument regarding the status of these elite males comes from the religious and social values placed upon the particular accoutrements that they are depicted as wearing (i.e. garlands, turquoise lip plugs, garments, etc.). Particularly, I focus on the way in which the P'urhépecha main priest, called the *petamuti*, is represented through imagery and materials.

The first chapter takes these ideas of imagery a step beyond the ink and paper illustrations of the *Relación de Michoacán* and connects them to P'urhépecha artifacts as well as cosmology. In order to understand the value of particular elite accessories, the religious importance of the materials by which the accoutrements of the *petamuti* are made is explained. At the end of the first chapter, I show how some of these material notions developed and changed when the Spanish arrived to Michoacán in 1521. P'urhépecha visual language, was altered to incorporate Spanish culture and religion.

My main argument in the first chapter is that the accessories that the *petamuti* and other high-ranking males of P'urhépecha society are shown wearing work as visual metonyms, thus identifying their status. The depictions of the male elites in the *Relación* adhere to the P'urhépecha understanding of how these particular males should be portrayed, namely through the high value of their accoutrements. Value is placed on the elite P'urhépecha males' embellishments through religious understanding of the materials themselves as well as through the religious significance of the *creation* of said objects.

The second chapter is a micro-study of an eighteenth-century crucified Christ sculpture, named *El Señor de la Sacristía* (fig. 4) and how the imagery of this Christ demonstrates religious imagery. *El Señor de la Sacristía* is made of a material indigenous

to Michoacán called *pasta de caña de maíz*, or corn paste. This material and the process by which it was made are all resonate the importance of materiality and facture of the P'urhépecha. Through imagery, I demonstrate that the value of *El Señor de la Sacristía* to both the Spanish and P'urhépecha people of eighteenth-century Michoacán has an overlap for both cultures. I argue that there is a particular way in which *El Señor de la Sacristía*, can be interpreted as holy by all inhabitants of eighteenth-century Morelia, Michoacán, beyond the surface of the European-Christian style.

At the end of this chapter I posit the idea that there may be correlations with *El Señor de la Sacristía*'s appearance and the early sixteenth-century depictions of the religious elite in the *Relación de Michoacán*. These connections lie in a metonymic gap, or a third space in which both cultural groups of colonial Michoacán can understand the image as sacred and requiring reverence.⁵ Such a metonymic gap occurs in this eighteenth-century piece because indigenous artisans who were familiar with their own religious visual language, as well as the European-Christian visual language that was taught to them in the sixteenth century, produced the sculpture. Though I am not speaking to the “true” intentions of the artists who produced these colonial pieces, I maintain that the accoutrements and image of the Christ have a metonymic function for both European-Christian and P'urhépecha audience.

I stress that the products of the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries in Michoacán are appropriations of European modes of artistic communication. The *Relación de Michoacán* is a particularly prime example of a P'urhépecha appropriation of

⁵ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, 2nd ed. (London, England; New York, NY: Routledge, 2009).

European artistic medium, considering that the P'urhépecha did not have a known writing system prior to Spanish contact in 1521. The document was produced by indigenous artists, under the hospice of the Franciscan Friar Acalá, and contains both text and images. The images from the *Relación* that I will analyze (fig. 3) all work within a metonymic gap of Spanish and P'urhépecha cultural and artistic contacts. This being said, the images can be interpreted by the viewer through several lenses—European and P'urhépecha, to name only two cultural groups that existed in sixteenth-century Michoacán.

Robert Nelson's work on appropriation speaks to the intricacies and ever-changing interpretations of specific images that are produced by different cultural groups.⁶ In the case of *El Señor de la Sacristía*, the indigenous population would have understood the meaning of the image of a crucified Christ, due to evangelization. Yet, I believe that this particular image was a product of appropriation because it is also imbued with deeper, P'urhépecha visual language. The language, which is examined in the first chapter, speaks to the metonymic functions of the signifiers of the P'urhépecha male elites.

I maintain that the colonial images, from the *Relación de Michoacán* and *El Señor de la Sacristía* all exist along a continuum of cultural movement that occurred in Michoacán from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, because of numerous cultural encounters. The products of these encounters inhabit a third space where they are neither entirely P'urhépecha nor are they entirely Spanish. I seek not to point out which cultural

⁶ Robert S. Nelson, "Appropriation," in *Critical Terms for Art History*, ed. Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

attribute each piece of art has, but rather place them all within a context of cultural appropriations where the P'urhépecha nobility still maintained agency. Using post-colonialist writers Olvidio Carbonell Cortés's ideas of cultural translation and Bill Ashcroft's concept of a metonymic gap, I will place the colonial productions within a third space where art is influenced by both the colonizer *and* the colonized.

This thesis uses objects and materials to establish a P'urhépecha visual language that can be seen throughout images in Michoacán. I argue that religious reverence towards an eighteenth-century Christ sculpture is informed by religious value of materials established by fifteenth and sixteenth-century P'urhépecha imagery.

Chapter 2: Evolution of P'urhépecha Elite Male Imagery from the early Early Colonial Period

In this chapter, I will examine the specific way in which the P'urhépecha elite and noble males were depicted, as well as how their depictions express the visual language of the P'urhépecha.⁷ Using images from the fifteenth to sixteenth centuries, I will show how there were very specific ways in which the male nobility and elite class were represented, mainly through their dress. For example, the nobility were depicted as wearing garlands around their heads and turquoise lip plugs. I will be one of the first art historians to analyze how value was placed upon particular materials and accoutrements, and how such elements attributed to P'urhépecha elite male imagery.

Issues of gender, materiality, and religion are all important to understanding the development of a P'urhépecha visual language of the elites. I will use the *Relación de Michoacán*,⁸ a sixteenth-century document, as well as other earlier fifteenth-century artistic products to express this visual language. Through the analysis of these images, I argue that particular materials and their products were used by elite males to signify their status as well as to express a deeper understanding of the materials' religious and cultural value in a Mesoamerican, especially a P'urhépecha, manner.

⁷ I will be referring to the predominant indigenous population of Michoacán as P'urhépecha, even though they are also known as the Tarascans. According to Warren, the word Tarascan, “derived from their word *tarascue*, which means “son –in-law” or “father-in-law” ... comes from when the Spaniards first came to Michoacán and they were given the daughters of some of the caciques.” He also goes onto explain that the use of this word in the pre-contact period was to denote “working men” and thus the lower class, but was also used in order to mean “the people” by many. J. Benedict Warren, *The Conquest of Michoacán: The Spanish Domination of the Tarascan Kingdom in Western Mexico, 1521-1530*, 1st ed. (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985). 6-7.

⁸ The edition that I will be using in this thesis is: Alcalá and Franco Mendoza, *Relación De Las Cerimonias Y Rictos Y Población Y Gobernación De Los Indios De La Provincia De Mechuacán*.

The state of Michoacán is situated in the Southwestern portion of Mexico (fig. 1). Tzintzuntzan was known as the capital of the P'urhépecha Empire, which came to be around 1500 AD.⁹ The P'urhépecha Empire was located to the west of present-day Mexico City (formally the Mexica¹⁰ capital of Tenochtitlan) and encompasses present-day Michoacán and part of the states of Jalisco, Guerrero, and Guanajuato.

The P'urhépecha first heard of the presence of the Spanish in October 1519, when Mexica ambassadors came to the *Cazonci*, or *Yrecha*¹¹ (P'urhépecha ruler), to ask for help.¹² With its capital in Tzintzuntzan, located near the Lake Pátzcuaro basin, the P'urhépecha Empire rivaled the Mexica's in size and strength by the time the Spanish arrived. The Mexica were considered enemies of the P'urhépecha. According to written

⁹ Helen Perlstein Pollard refers to the beginning of the P'urhépecha Empire as occurring in the Protohistoric period, roughly 1450-1530 A.D. This is the period when the first P'urhépecha emperor united the large region known as the P'urhépecha Empire. Helen Perlstein Pollard, "Tarascans and Their Ancestors: Prehistory of Michoacán," in *Greater Mesoamerica: The Archaeology of West and Northwest Mexico*, ed. Michael S. Foster and Shirley Gorenstein (Salt Lake City, UT: University of Utah Press, 2000).65.

¹⁰ As stated in the introduction, I will be using the name Mexica instead of the commonly used name Aztec. This is the name they called themselves in the pre-contact and into the colonial period.

¹¹ According to the anthropologist Tricia Gabany-Guerrero's talk at the 2011 American Society for Ethnohistory Conference in Pasadena, California, the word "cazonci" is actually Nahuatl in origin, and was not the word used by the P'urhépecha for their kings. "Cazonci" is loosely translation from Nahuatl as "head of the house," which in essence is that the Nahuatl would have understood the P'urhépecha king. The word *Yrecha* is the P'urhépecha word for king; however I will be using the word *Cazonci* to refer to the ruler, since that is the word used in many colonial accounts.

¹² Benedict J. Warren discusses that several chroniclers also place the occurrence of the Aztec in 1520. Warren, *The Conquest of Michoacán: The Spanish Domination of the Tarascan Kingdom in Western Mexico, 1521-1530*. 24. The P'urhépecha were not the only group who helped the Spanish conquer the Mexica and one of the most important Spanish allies were the Tlaxcalans of central Mexico, who were also long-time enemies of the Mexica at the time of the Mexica fall. For more information on the Tlaxcalan participation of the Mexica downfall, see: Charles Gibson, *The Aztecs under Spanish Rule: A History of the Indians of the Valley of Mexico, 1519-1810* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1964); Robert Ricard, *The Spiritual Conquest of Mexico: An Essay on the Apostolate and the Evangelizing Methods of the Mendicant Orders in New Spain, 1523-1572*, California Library Reprint Series (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1974).

sources, the P'urhépecha ruler refused to help the Mexica with the new invaders, which contributed to the demise of the Mexica and the fall of Tenochtitlan.¹³

The Spanish first came to Michoacán on February 23, 1521.¹⁴ By the summer of 1524, they had successfully occupied Michoacán and Hernán Cortés had begun to divide the area in order to make *encomiendas*¹⁵ for the Spanish. The first missionary friars, of the Franciscan order, arrived in Michoacán in 1525. During this same year the Cazonci went to Tenochtitlan to observe the evangelization that had occurred; the Cazonci was also baptized there that year as well.¹⁶ The Cazonci's baptism would serve as an early topos and history for the evangelization of Michoacán—mostly the idea that there was very little resistance to Christianity in this region.

The P'urhépecha nobles soon became high-ranking participants in the sixteenth-century colonial government. The Spanish presence in Michoacán affected the way that elite males represented themselves. However, I claim that the fifteenth-century ideas of materiality and accoutrements continued (i.e. signifiers of male, elite status) after the Spanish Conquest in the early sixteenth century. I believe that the shift in visual signifiers

¹³ One of the most important written sources that tells this story is the *Relación de Michoacán* itself. The Cazonci did not trust the Mexica when they asked for help, based upon their long history of warfare. Eugene R. Craine and Reginald Carl Reindorp, *The Chronicles of Michoacán, The Civilization of the American Indian Series*, (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1970). 62.

¹⁴ Warren, *The Conquest of Michoacán: The Spanish Domination of the Tarascan Kingdom in Western Mexico, 1521-1530*. 29.

¹⁵ Ibid. 78. An *encomienda* is a “grant of labor and tribute rights from the [Spanish] Crown to an *encomendero* [or, Spanish person of power] over a specified group of Indians.” “Glossary,” in *Colonial Latin America: A Documentary History*, ed. Kenneth Mills, William B. Taylor, and Sandra Lauderdale Graham (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 2002). 408.

¹⁶ Warren, *The Conquest of Michoacán: The Spanish Domination of the Tarascan Kingdom in Western Mexico, 1521-1530*.

of social concepts that occurred was not as abrupt or different from what was in place prior. I consider this period in Michoacán's colonial period to be a locus where the ideas were appropriated, not of mere oppression or hybridity.¹⁷ The P'urhépecha had a very intricate and particular way of structuring their social classes and this system of representation through class signifiers is seen through their elite imagery.

The P'urhépecha Elite

The P'urhépecha religious figures, nobility, and government officials. I will investigate males who were held in high regard. I believe that their depictions in the *Relación de Michoacán* related to their status and spoke to a larger P'urhépecha and Mesoamerican visual language, and this is my major contribution to the scholarship of this region.

The figures I will examine are depictions of the *petamuti*, or main priest of the P'urhépecha Empire. Through a close analysis of the accessories the *petamuchiera* (plural for *petamuti*) are shown wearing in the *Relación de Michoacán*, I will establish how they were understood as having high importance and rank. I will analyze the imagery and materiality of the *petamuti*'s garments and accoutrements work to show his status in the P'urhépecha culture and visual language.

¹⁷ The term "hybridity" is one that I am contesting in many ways. Hybridity, as defined by Homi Bhabha is tightly wound with power and subversion, whereas Carolyn Dean and Dana Leibson contest this notion in art historical contexts because it causes the viewer to solely look for particular instances of power tension as well as binary identities to be manifested in materials produced in a colonial space. See: Homi K. Bhabha, "Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority under a Tree Outside Delhi, May 1817," *Critical Inquiry* 12, no. 1 (1985); Carolyn Dean and Dana Leibson, "Hybridity and Its Discontents: Considering Visual Culture in Colonial Spanish America," *Colonial Latin American Review* 12, no. 1 (2003).

The second figure I will examine is the *Cazonci*, or *Yrecha*,¹⁸ in P'urhépecha, was the king. Lineage was matrilineal, even though the nobles were often polygamous, having multiple wives.¹⁹ The noble line of the P'urhépecha Empire, known as *uacúsecha* (eagles) ethnic group, was established, according to archeologist Helen Perlstein Pollard when:

the warrior-leader Tariácuri united the several polities of the Pátzcuaro Basin into a unified state during the first half of the fourteenth century. Following his death, his son and nephews extended the state beyond the Pátzcuaro Basin and began the political and economic changes that saw emergence of new Mesoamerican civilization.²⁰

In my analysis of the evolution of elite male imagery, I will use on the imagery of the *Cazonci* and *petamuti* in order to assess how male religious and governmental elites were visually portrayed.

Along with the *Cazonci* and *petamuti*, I will be looking at other groups of elite males and the way in which they are visually represented, such as imagery of men who held important positions in the government and in P'urhépecha religion. As was the case throughout Mesoamerica,²¹ people of high-ranking religious stature were also part of an

¹⁸ According to anthropologist Tricia Gabany-Guerrero's talk at the 2011 American Society for Ethnohistory Conference in Pasadena, California, the word "cazonci" is actually Nahuatl in origin, and was not the word used by the P'urhépecha for their kings. "Cazonci" is loosely translation from Nahuatl as "head of the house," which in essence is that the Nahua would have understood the P'urhépecha king as being. The word *Yrecha* is the P'urhépecha word for king; however I will be using the word *Cazonci* to refer to the ruler, since that is the word used in many colonial accounts. In the 1559 P'urhépecha dictionary of Francisco Fray Maturino Gilberti, which was the first P'urhépecha-to-Spanish dictionary in Mexico, the word "*Irecha*" in P'urhépecha is defined as "*rey*" in Spanish, or king. Maturino Gilberti, *Diccionario De La Lengua Tarasca* (Morelia, Mich., México: Balsal Editores, 1983). 62.

¹⁹ Gabany-Guerrero, "Deciphering the Symbolic Heritage of the Tarascan Empire: Interpreting the Political Economy of the Pueblo-Hospital of Parangaricutiro, Michoacan". 94.

²⁰ Pollard, *Tariácuri's Legacy: The Prehispanic Tarascan State*. 13-14.

²¹ By "Mesoamerica" I mean the regions of what are the contemporary South West of North America, Mexico, and Central and Southern America. Mainly, I am referencing the indigenous populations of these regions. More recent scholarship has expanded the connections of what is considered "Mesoamerica" to

elite class, and there was a fluid understanding of what religion was in terms of daily life. Through the visual representation of elite male figures, I will illustrate how the P'urhépecha had a significant and clear visual language which was connected to materiality and the cultural values of the material.

P'urhépecha Imagery

The objects I use to explore elite male depictions include an array of works produced in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, such as metallurgy, paintings, and lapidary pieces. My main source of early colonial imagery is the *Relación de las Cerimonias y Rictos y Población y Gobernación de los Indios de la Provincia de Mechuacán*.²² The *Relación de Michoacán*, as it is often called, is an early colonial chronicle that was commissioned by the Spanish Viceroy to Mexico,²³ Antonio de Mendoza, in 1521. The Franciscan friar, Jerónimo de Alcalá, began to interview the P'urhépecha elites and commissioned four anonymous indigenous artists to create illustrations in this chronicle. Like many other colonial chronicles, such as the Codex Mendoza, indigenous informants were commissioned by the Spanish Viceroy to tell of their history, religious concepts, and daily practices.

include South American indigenous populations for their religious and cultural beliefs that are similar. I draw a few of these connections in this thesis, but I use the word “Mesoamerica” to mean Central Mexico to Central American populations.

²² Alcalá and Franco Mendoza, *Relación De Las Cerimonias Y Rictos Y Población Y Gobernación De Los Indios De La Provincia De Mechuacán*.

²³ The Viceroy is a Spanish elite who exercised authority in the name of the Spanish King in the colonial period.

Only one of the three parts of this book remains today.²⁴ The portion that remains discusses the creation of the P'urhépecha Empire, and some of their religious rituals and beliefs. The images in the *Relación de Michoacán*,²⁵ painted on handmade European paper, forty-four in total, are integral to understanding the way in which sixteenth-century visual language evolved in Michoacán, especially in terms of signifiers of status.²⁶ These particular images are the only early colonial images that correlate to the pre- and post-Spanish contact P'urhépecha culture of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, thus it is a location where the Spanish and P'urhépecha visual culture converged, making it an essential object for colonial understanding in Michoacán.

As art historian Angélica Afanador-Pujol has noted, the *Relación de Michoacán* needs to be understood as coming from both P'urhépecha and European visual influences, as well as the fact that the artists who produced these images had a political agenda.²⁷ With these aspects taken into consideration, the images of the *Relación de Michoacán* in conjunction with other pre-contact works in order to demonstrate how the male elite P'urhépecha were depicted and understood. I will demonstrate how the visual language of the P'urhépecha developed and was understood during the colonial period.

²⁴ Afanador-Pujol, "The Tree of Jesse and the "Relación De Michoacán": Mimicry in Colonial Mexico." 293. However, according to Eduard Seler, there are two known manuscripts of the *Relación de Michoacán*, one in the Escorial and one in Washington D.C., but the original does not exist anymore. He also goes on to explain that the order in which the manuscripts are placed is not the true order. Seler et al., *Collected Works in Mesoamerican Linguistics and Archaeology*. 4-5.

²⁵ I will be referring to this chronicle as the *Relación de Michoacán* and the *Relación* throughout the thesis.

²⁶ Angélica Jimena Afanador-Pujol, "The Politics of Ethnicity: Re-Imagining Indigeneous Identities in the Sixteenth-Century *Relación De Michoacán* (1539-1541)" (University of California, Los Angeles, 2009). 2.

²⁷ Ibid; Afanador-Pujol, "The Tree of Jesse and the "Relación De Michoacán": Mimicry in Colonial Mexico."

Elite Male Imagery in the *Relación de Michoacán*

The Petamuti (Head Priest)

The first and most integral way in which male P'urhépecha elites were depicted was in the form of religious hierarchy. The head priests, *petamuti* (singular) and *petamutiecha* (plural) in P'urhépecha, are depicted in several images throughout the *Relación*.²⁸ Their roles' significance in the development of the P'urhépecha Empire are very important, and the ways in which they are depicted demonstrate this. The *petamutiecha* wear head garlands, turquoise lip plugs, ornate tunics, and golden jewelry—all of which signify their religious status, role, and importance in P'urhépecha society. Afanador-Pujol notes that the word “petamuti” means: “the one who pronounces/speaks or determines with authority.”²⁹

The image titled *Éstos son los sacerdotes y oficiales de los cues*, or “These are the priests and officials of the temples” (fig. 5), is a hierarchical breakdown of important P'urhépecha religious figures. The head priest, labeled (fig. 6) as *petamuti* in P'urhépecha and *sacerdote mayor* in Spanish, is located in the center of the image. Around the *petamuti* are different priests, seated in groups and labeled with both P'urhépecha and Spanish words (fig. 7).

The size of the *petamuti* in the image of the priests is an initial signifier of his importance within the overall image and, therefore, within the priestly hierarchy of the P'urhépecha. The accoutrements of the *petamuti* are more significant in this image, for

²⁸ Afanador-Pujol, “The Politics of Ethnicity: Re-Imagining Indigeneous Identities in the Sixteenth-Century *Relación De Michoacán* (1539-1541)”. 45.

²⁹ *Ibid.* 92.

they signify whom the man is and his role. The petamuti's ensemble is much more elaborate and articulated than the other religious figures in this image. Afanador-Pujol observes that the petamuti is drawn with immense detail, even in comparison to the *Cazonci*, or king (as will be explained in the following section).³⁰

The petamuti is elaborately decorated, from his textiles, to his shoes and other accessories. The head priest is standing, not sitting, like many of the figures in these categorical-style images (fig. 5 and 7). The petamuti is standing with leg in front of the other, with both knees slightly bent. His arms are extended, with the priestly staff before him. The petamuti's standing stance implies action and thus more importance than the other priests depicted in this image.³¹ Through Mesoamerican as well as European images, the figures that are most important to the allegorical depictions are larger in scale than other figures. This is an instance where European and Mesoamerican visual language have similar understandings. I believe that there are many instances throughout colonial imagery in New Spain where an image can be observed and understood by European and Mesoamerican viewers. My argument is that colonial images, such as those in the *Relación de Michoacán*, exist in a space that is neither entirely Spanish nor P'urhépecha. The viewer interprets the images as a translation, as a result of both cultures

³⁰ "The regalia of the petamuti received particular attention. Artist One bestowed on him a greater luxury of details than he gave to the ruler!" Ibid. 69.

³¹ In the images that I have chosen to illuminate, the *Cazonci* and other governmental officials are often seated, usually on their throne, and only people who are demonstrating an action being carried out as standing or walking.

converging, and the location of this translation of sixteenth-century Michoacán is a third space.³² The following chapter will discuss this much more in depth.

The petamuti in the image of P'urhépecha priests wears a white garland, turquoise lip plug, white bracelets on both arms, and a patterned red, brown, black, and white tunic that goes down to his knees.³³ On his back, he carries a turquoise-encrusted gourd and in the hands of his extended arms he holds a staff with a red, white, and green striped motif. The staff in the petamuti's hands is elaborately decorated and has an arrowhead-type topping, under which is turquoise and what Afanador describes as "multicolored feathers and shells."³⁴ The staff that the petamuti carries is a interesting mix of a type of weaponry, but also a plethora of ornamental materials of value to the P'urhépecha, as well as throughout Mesoamerica.

According to cultural historian Patricia Reiff Anawalt, the materials were much more elaborate and textured than can initially be understood in the image (fig. 6):

His official regalia was a tunic made of feathers, placed in a stepped design, called *ucata-tararenguequa*; a necklace of miniature golden tweezers around his neck; a wreath of fiber or plumage on his head in a

³² This idea of a translated, third space that comes from cultural contacts is from Ovidi Carbonell Cortés. Ovidi Carbonell Cortés, "The Exotic Space of Cultural Translation," in *Translation, Power, and Subversion*, ed. Román Alvarez Rodríguez and M. Carmen Africa Vidal, *Topics in Translation*, 8 (Clevedon; Philadelphia: Multilingual Matters, 1996).

³³ Anawalt notes that this tunic-like garment worn by P'urhépecha men was called a *cicuilli*, yet the feathered one worn by the pretamuti was called an *ucata-tararenguequa*. Patricia Rieff Anawalt, *Indian Clothing before Cortés: Mesoamerican Costumes from the Codices*, 1st ed., The Civilization of the American Indian Series (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1981). 84, 92.

³⁴ Afanador-Pujol, "The Politics of Ethnicity: Re-Imagining Indigeneous Identities in the Sixteenth-Century Relación De Michoacán (1539-1541)". 69.

womanlike braid of hair; a gourd set with turquoise on his back; and a lance set with a flint point.³⁵

This elaborately-ornamented regalia is important as a signifier of the petamutiecha and speaks to a visual language of the P'urhépecha, and even Mesoamerica, in that these materials were of great value throughout sixteenth-century Mesoamerica.

The dress of the petamuti is very similar to the Chichimeca-Tolteca priests below the cave of origin (fig. 8) in the sixteenth-century *Mapa de Cuauhtinchan Number 2*, which is a map that depicts the Chichimec origins in the Nahua region of Puebla, Mexico.³⁶ The priests, namely the priest in the left of the image, who was named *Icxicoatl* (Serpent foot in English), wears a striped black and gray tunic, his hair long and pulled back in a red ribbon, and he holds a shield in his left hand a decorated staff in his right extended arm. The staff in Icxicoatl's hand is very reminiscent of the staff in the petamuti's hand in the image of the P'urhépecha priests. Icxicoatl's staff is topped with blue feathers, with a small ring and pointed tip. According to Dutch scholar Florine G. L. Asselberg, both priests in the *Mapa de Cuauhtinchan Number 2* image are Chichimeca-

³⁵ Anawalt, *Indian Clothing before Cortés: Mesoamerican Costumes from the Codices*. 92. This description is a translation from the *Relación de Michoacán*, from the section describing the *Equata Consquaro*, which elaborates on what the petamuti is wearing.

³⁶ The Nahua origins, as I mentioned previously, connect them to the early ethnic group of the Chichimecs. This is true for the Mexica and the P'urhépecha, as well. The information for this assessment is from the presentation by religious historian David Carrasco entitled "Cave, City and Tree as Places of Cosmological Change in the Mapa de Cuauhtinchan #2," at the conference entitled *Teotihuacan to Tenochtitlan: Cultural Continuity in Central Mexico, a Conference in Homage to Alfredo López Austin* on February 10, 2012. Carrasco was analyzing the images from the book: David Carrasco and Scott Sessions, *Cave, City, and Eagle's Nest: An Interpretive Journey through the Mapa De Cuauhtinchan No. 2* (Albuquerque, NM; Cambridge, MA: University of New Mexico Press; Published in collaboration with the David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies and the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University, 2007).

Tolteca, which is a reference to their ethnic group in Central Mexico.³⁷ It is my opinion that the P'urhépecha petamuti adhered to the older, Chichimeca-Tolteca imagery of priests and in doing so the P'urhépecha were referring to their Chichimeca origins. The descriptions of the petamuti in the *Relación de Michoacán* would have been understood throughout highland Mexico, based on the fact that the priest's imagery in the *Mapa de Cuauhtinchan No. 2* is found in another location; therefore, the image of the petamuti is a Mesoamerican convention. The intricacies of the petamuti's imagery and the religious values that were imbued will be further analyzed in the following sections.

The Cazonci (King)

Another image that depicts elite P'urhépecha men is one in which the government and its relationship with the people who produce goods in the empire (fig. 9). Each group of seated men represents their contributions to the P'urhépecha empire, as well as visually signifies their roles. At the top of this image is the figure of the *Cazonci* or king (fig. 10). He was the ruler and most important decision-maker for the government and the P'urhépecha empire. The Cazonci in this P'urhépecha governmental image is the largest figure and is in the highest portion of the page, which is indicative of his importance in this image.³⁸ He is depicted in three-quarter pose seated on a golden-colored throne. The

³⁷ Florine G. L. Asselbergs, "A Claim to Rulership: Presentation Strategies in the *Mapa De Cuauhtinchan No. 2*," in *Cave, City, and Eagle's Nest: An Interpretive Journey through the Mapa De Cuauhtinchan No. 2*, ed. David Carrasco and Scott Sessions (Albuquerque, NM; Cambridge, MA: University of New Mexico Press; Published in collaboration with the David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies and the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University, 2007). 123-124.

³⁸ Cecelia F. Klein, as well as other Mesoamerican art historians, has discussed the use of larger figures in relation to smaller ones as signifying their importance. The use of larger figures, in relation to others, in art is not unique to Mesoamerica. This can be seen in Medieval artwork, especially religious artwork where the Christ child and Virgin Mary are significantly larger than other figures, such as angels and apostles.

Cazonci wears noble accessories: a green head garland, turquoise lip plug, and he holds a bow to signify war. All of these noble objects and their materials will be discussed in this thesis, for they are imbued with religious value.

In contrast, the elaborate regalia of the petamuti (fig. 6), the turquoise-studded gourd, decorated staff, feathered tunic called *ucata tarárenguequa*, and golden tweezers reveal that the petamuti was a more elaborately articulated figure in the P'urhépecha culture and visual language—even more so than the Cazonci, as Afanador-Pujol notes.³⁹ Yet, *why* is the petamuti more elaborately dressed and depicted with a plethora of materials? I argue that the reason for this dress is embedded in Mesoamerican, and namely P'urhépecha, understanding of these materials as valuable and sacred. Later in this chapter I will demonstrate what many of these particular materials are and how they are connected to P'urhépecha religiosity. In order to understand the extent of the material's functions within fifteenth-century P'urhépecha and Mesoamerican culture, each material will be analyzed in the following section.

The Angátacuri (The Governor)

Along with the Cazonci, the governor or *angáta curi*⁴⁰ is an important male figure of P'urhépecha culture. His significance can be interpreted through the imagery in the *Relación de Michoacán* in a very similar way to the Cazonci. The angátacuri is also of

³⁹ Afanador-Pujol, "The Politics of Ethnicity: Re-Imagining Indigeneous Identities in the Sixteenth-Century Relación De Michoacán (1539-1541)". 69.

⁴⁰ In her dissertation, Angélica Afanador-Pujol uses the *angátacuri* to refer to the governor, whereas the description of the image in the 2000 edition of the *Relación de Michoacán* (page 550) says "*agáta curi*." The text itself notes that this position of governor was called the *agántacuri*, when referring to the *Equata Conquaro* festival in the following section. For the purpose of honoring the text over the image, I will refer to the governor position as "angátacuri" in my text.

importance in the image which depicts P'urhépecha government (fig. 11), as well in the writing in the *Relación*. The position of the governor within the colonial context is quite important, for as Afanador-Pujol mentions, “the governorship was the highest post in the colonial government that could be held by an indigenous man.”⁴¹ She goes on to discuss the issues that arose during the early sixteenth century, mainly revolving around the placement of a governor in relation to his ethnic background. The governor in the governmental image is labeled as both the Spanish *su gobernador* and the P'urhépecha angátacuri (fig. 13) and is located on a plane one level below the Cazonci and to the right. His body posture is similar to the Cazonci's in that he is seated in a turned posture. The angátacuri is larger than the other production groups that are lower on the page, but not as large as the Cazonci, which I believe is a way of making visible his status as lower than the king himself. The governor's accoutrements are what seem to be the most significant in this image because they mimic those of the Cazonci. In this scene, the governor, like the Cazonci, wears the green garland on his head and a turquoise lip plug, both a clear signifiers of elite status. However, unlike the image of the Cazonci, the governor is shown with longer hair in a red ribbon wrapped and extending backward along his neck and shoulders. The governor is also seated on a throne, though based upon its yellow color may not have been of the same material.

In this same image, the man seated to the left of the governor is an unlabeled male figure (fig. 12 and 13). Much like the other figures in this image, this man is in the same seated position, but he is not seated on a particular object, like the artisans. The unlabeled

⁴¹ Afanador-Pujol, "The Politics of Ethnicity: Re-Imagining Indigenous Identities in the Sixteenth-Century *Relación De Michoacán (1539-1541)*". 3.

figure faces the governor and appears to be on the same plane. In contrast, however, the unlabeled man does not have the same accessories as the Cazonci and the governor (garland, turquoise lip plug, etc.). His hair is short, and styled differently from the governor's (and likely the Cazonci) has his. Unlike many of the other figures in the governmental image, the unlabeled man does not carry a signifying object in his hand.⁴² Instead, he gestures with his hand, pointing towards the governor.

This hand gesture is multivalent. There is a European tradition of this hand imagery, in which a figure points towards someone important, highlighting the important figure's significance.⁴³ An example of such imagery can be seen in Italian Renaissance artist Masaccio's *Holy Trinity* (fig. 14). This painting is a crucifixion scene, with the figure of Jesus in the top center. To the left of the crucifixion is the Virgin Mary, gesturing upward toward Jesus. This gesture of pointing leads the viewer's eye to the figure of the crucified Jesus, the integral figure of the work.

In a Mesoamerican context, the gesture of pointing can be seen in many fifteenth century codices and demonstrates that the person whom the pointing finger is highlighting is significant to the allegorical function of the image. The gesture of pointing in Mesoamerican imagery can also denote a command towards the figure that is receiving

⁴² The front man of each artisanal group carries the objects that signify what their group produces. For example, the group of men located on the top right-hand side is the group of men who made bows, which is both written above them as well as signified by the bow, which is held in a presenting manner by the man at the front of the group (the lowest man, on the left side of the group). This is a prime example of the visual language of the *Relación*, which was constantly in play in some manner with the language of the text and images. This idea will be expanded upon much more in this chapter, in the section entitled "Action of Creating as Sacred."

⁴³ Many of these images can be seen in early to early-modern images of Christ and the Virgin, in which figures are pointing towards Christ or other figures who are important to the allegorical functions of such images as a whole.

the gesture. Examples of such imagery are in the Mixtec-Puebla *Codex Borgia's* "Marriage Images" (fig. 15), which shows divination imagery. The scene from the *Codex Borgia* shows sets of figures (along the bottom of the image) in conversation, which is demonstrated by their pointing gestures.

In a P'urhépecha manner, the unlabeled man (fig. 12) may be either pointing to the governor due to his importance, or he may be verbally commanding him to do something.⁴⁴ This gesture relates to power dynamics, within the P'urhépecha governmental structure. The Cazonci has the highest rank, yet the governor serves as his mediator, his speaker, and his voice.⁴⁵ Either way, this is yet another instance of P'urhépecha and European visual languages having similarities and thus resulting in a shared understanding of an image's meaning. I do not believe that this is simply a result of one culture appropriating another's visual understandings, but rather a location in the visual space where these two concepts, though minimal, have the same meaning. In this way, the gesture of pointing serves as a signifier of importance and status, as understood by both European and indigenous viewers.

Accoutrements serve as signifiers to the viewer of a figure's high status, which is the case in the governmental image. Like the Cazonci, the governor wears clothing similar to all of the other male figures in the governmental image (fig. 9), which suggests

⁴⁴ According to Afanador-Pujol, this images demonstrates how important the role of the pre-contact *angátacuri* was: According to the *Relación*, the post of governor was the equivalent of the *angátacuri*, or governor, of Pre-Columbian times. . .the *angátacuri* played multiple roles and often served as an intermediary between the ruler and others." Afanador-Pujol, "The Politics of Ethnicity: Re-Imagining Indigenous Identities in the Sixteenth-Century *Relación De Michoacán* (1539-1541)". 53.

⁴⁵ In the following section, the religious roles of the *angátacuri* will be analyzed. Once again, the *angátacuri* serves as a mediator. Afanador discusses this as well: *ibid.* 53-54, 97.

that the main signifiers in this image for elite status are a person's accoutrements (such as jewelry and head pieces), rather than simply their dress. A specific and important visual language is established in the governmental image, through the placement of the body and appurtenances of the elite males. Thus, we can conclude that the Cazonci and the angátacuri are high in their governmental status, and possess power. Both men hold governmental elite positions, and even though there are other males who carry importance status in other arenas of P'urhépecha culture, their power is depicted through their regalia.

The *Equata Consquaro* Festival

The sumptuous adornment of the petamuti is also apparent in the image of a religious festival called *Equata Consquaro* (fig. 17).⁴⁶ This celebration was one of the many annual festivals in which all the officials of the P'urhépecha Empire were required to be in Tzintzuntzan, and it concerns justice, as is apparent in the title of the image, “*De La Justicia General Que Se Hacia*” in the *Relación*.⁴⁷ Anthropologist Tricia Gabany-Guerrero explains that the main figure in the *Equata Consquaro* festival is the petamuti, who served as the person in charge of “administering justice, enforcing morality, and reciting the history of the P'urhépecha people.”⁴⁸ This concept connects nicely to Ixicoatl's image (fig. 8) in the *Mapa de Cuauhtinchan No. 2*, since the petamuti in the

⁴⁶ Afanador-Pujol notes that the meaning of the name of this festival is “Fiesta of the Arrows.” Ibid. 93.

⁴⁷ Gabany-Guerrero, “Deciphering the Symbolic Heritage of the Tarascan Empire: Interpreting the Political Economy of the Pueblo-Hospital of Parangaricutiro, Michoacan”.99.

⁴⁸ Ibid. 100.

Equata Consquaro image shares very similar regalia. I believe that this image of the petamuti and the act of retelling the P'urhépecha origins show that the petamuti was a carrier of the P'urhépecha history, going all the way back to Chichimeca-Tolteca ancestries and origin myths.

The petamuti in the Equata Consquaro image (fig. 17) is elaborately dressed like the petamuti in the image with the P'urhépecha priests (fig. 6), yet, in this image, the petamuti is wearing the golden tweezers mentioned in the *Relación*.⁴⁹ The petamuti's hair is short, unlike the hair of other nobles. The headdress he wears is also in the style of a white garland. But, the texture in this garland is much more wispy, which suggests that it is made of feathers, as mentioned in the accompanying text. He also has the turquoise lip plug, long tunic, sandals, bracelets, staff, and turquoise encrusted gourd of the governmental image of the petamuti (fig. 6). The Equata Consquaro image of the petamuti (fig. 17) shows the golden tweezers being worn as a pectoral piece. The petamuti has a red streak down the left side of his face. The red coloring indicates the ritual blood-letting that the P'urhépecha did as a sign of religious devotion.⁵⁰ The decoration on his *uca-tararenguequa* is a different pattern from the previous petamuti in

⁴⁹ It is important to highlight that the artist of figure 8 is different from the artist of 4. One of the main foci of Angélica Afanador-Pujol's dissertation's is differentiating between the different artists of the *Relación de Michoacán* as well as understanding their intentions and agency. For more on this topic, see her dissertation (extensively used in this thesis). Afanador-Pujol, "The Politics of Ethnicity: Re-Imagining Indigeneous Identities in the Sixteenth-Century *Relación De Michoacán* (1539-1541)".

⁵⁰ Anthropologist Karl Taube gave this idea to me in conversation. Further information on the act and ritual in P'urhépecha religion of bloodletting from the ear can be found in Tricia Gabany-Guerrero and Angélica Afanador-Pujol's dissertations: Gabany-Guerrero, "Deciphering the Symbolic Heritage of the Tarascan Empire: Interpreting the Political Economy of the Pueblo-Hospital of Parangaricutiro, Michoacan". Afanador-Pujol, "The Politics of Ethnicity: Re-Imagining Indigeneous Identities in the Sixteenth-Century *Relación De Michoacán* (1539-1541)".

the governmental image, with a brown background and what seems to be white feathers throughout. The gourd on the petamuti's back also has more accessories, with a red circular ornament at the tip of the top and gold-colored wide ray ornamentation as well. This particular image of a petamuti (fig. 17) also shows the golden throne which is also articulated with the Cazonci in the governmental image (fig. 9).

The petamuti is holding the familiar decorated staff in his left hand, and with his right hand points towards the *carcelero*, or jailer, to beat a woman who is labeled as a *mala mujer*, or a "bad woman." The woman is said to have committed adultery.⁵¹ The gesture of pointing works as a way of showing that the petamuti is commanding, and/or speaking to the jailer to punish this woman. As we have seen, the gesture of pointing carries meaning in both European and Mesoamerican contexts, thus this is another image that lies within the liminal space of both P'urhépecha and Spanish translation. Either way, the petamuti exhibits his power through this gesture, which can be understood by multiple viewers.

This image of Equata Consquaro is very important in that it shows an incident of the interrelation of the political and religious elites, governmental officials, and priests. The men along the bottom border of the image (fig. 18), as well as in the top right and left corners are labeled as *caciques*,⁵² or chiefs, from other areas of the province, as is

⁵¹ Gabany-Guerrero discusses the role women played in P'urhépecha society: "Woman, including female deities, are consistently portrayed in the *Relación* as being deceptive and "tricky," and the discretion and virtuousness of a woman (sexual loyalty to one man) was clearly highly valued by the writers of the *Relación*." Gabany-Guerrero, "Deciphering the Symbolic Heritage of the Tarascan Empire: Interpreting the Political Economy of the Pueblo-Hospital of Parangaricutiro, Michoacan". 94.

⁵² The word *cacique* is of colonial construction, since it was adopted from the early contact of the Spanish with the indigenous people of the West Indies, who used this word for their rulers. The Spanish began to

stated in the descriptive text of the *Relación*.⁵³ These nobles are clearly delineated from others in the crowd for they have turquoise lip plugs, pipes, and many of them are shown sitting in a seat which has functioned as a throne in other images (fig. 5, 12, and 16).

This throne-styled seat contrasts the seats of the people who are awaiting punishment in this image (fig. 19). These people are seated on small, legless seats that resemble stone cubes. The people who are awaiting punishment are labeled “as ‘lazy ones,’ or *perezosos*, and ‘sorcerers,’ or *hechiceros*.”⁵⁴ They are nude and the only signifying characteristics they have, labels aside, are their body postures. The men have their arms bound behind their bodies and several of them are crying. Their lack of clothing relates to a longstanding Mesoamerican tradition of using nudity as a form of humiliation as well as a signifier of captive or enslaved people.⁵⁵ The depiction of their posture clearly works within a visual language that can be understood by the European readers as well as Mesoamerican populations, once again making it a locus for translation and convergence of cultural understandings.

use this in all of their other contacts with indigenous groups. In the contact period, *cacique* evolved to mean people of the elite class. Later in this thesis the concept of an *indio cacique* will be addressed with the artists who produced *pasta de caña de maíz* sculptures.

⁵³ The *Relación* notes that Michoacán contained all types of people: “*Y como se llagase el día de la fiesta y estuviesen todos aquellos malhechores en el patio, con todos los caciques de la Provincia y principals y mucho gran número de gente.*” Alcalá and Franco Mendoza, *Relación De Las Cerimonias Y Rictos Y Población Y Gobernación De Los Indios De La Provincia De Mechuacán*.

⁵⁴ Afanador-Pujol, “The Politics of Ethnicity: Re-Imagining Indigenous Identities in the Sixteenth-Century *Relación De Michoacán* (1539-1541)”. 93.

⁵⁵ This information comes primarily from anthropologist Karl Taube’s graduate course on Maya History and Religion, taught in the fall quarter of 2009. Images of nude Maya captives were analyzed to show this visual function as a means of humiliation.

In the particular case of the *Equata Consquaro* image (fig. 16), the *caciques'* head postures (fig. 18) draws attention to the center of the image, where the judgements and punishments are taking place, also read as "action." The entire ritual of *Equata Consquaro* is considered a religious and moral judgement, thus the use of the *caciques* posture to show reverence towards the actions reimpose the ceremony's purpose.

The other important figure in *Equata Consquaro* scene is the man labeled *capitán general*, or captain general (fig. 20), located in the bottom, center portion of the image. The captain general is dressed in a blue *cicuilli*, which reaches the middle of his thighs. He is wearing a green garland on his head, similar to the *Cazonci's* in the governmental image (fig. 10) and sandals similar to the *petamuti's* (fig. 6 and 17). In the captain general's hand he holds a bow and arrow, like the *Cazonci* (fig. 10), signifying that he is a powerful warrior.

Afanador-Pujol has discussed the multiple functions of the captain general. He was sometimes also the *angátacuri*, or governor. Afanador-Pujol suggests that the use of this figure in a religious context reinforced the role of the governor in this culture, as well as showing how the connections of religious and governmental administration interwove.⁵⁶

The connection between the text and image of the *Equata Consquaro* image suggests that the *angátacuri* acts as governor (as Afanador-Pujol mentions) and is further reinforced by visual language. The group of *caciques* in this image, to the left of the captain general, are gesturing their faces towards him. This gesture draws attention to the

⁵⁶ Afanador-Pujol, "The Politics of Ethnicity: Re-Imagining Indigeneous Identities in the Sixteenth-Century *Relación De Michoacán* (1539-1541)". 97.

captain general, as well as his actions. As I mentioned previously in this chapter, the angátacuri tended to function as a mediator between higher ranking officials, such as the Cazonci in the governmental image and the petamuti in this particular image. The angátacuri's role is depicted through the pointing gestures and his placement between each man.

Both the caciques and the capitán general are dressed in a checkered-print cicuilli, and wear garland-style headdresses and turquoise lip plugs. The use of these accoutrements, as well as their function to articulate the regalia of the petamuti, demonstrates how the visual language of the elite class spoke in the *Relación*. Accessories, such as garlands and turquoise lip plugs, work as visual signifiers of elite male status throughout images in the *Relación*. These particular signifiers were heavily imbued with religious material value, which will be analyzed in the next section.

Materiality of the Sacred

Throughout Mesoamerica, natural resources and materials were deeply revered for their connections to the religious pantheon that strongly connected the earth to deities and people—creation myths were strongly intertwined with natural resources. The very act of using and producing goods with these materials had just as much significance as the product itself. The values of the products were multi-layered and what was considered “art” in a European context was actually very rich in sacredness to the Mesoamericans.

The P'urhépecha were no different in their understanding of the earth as important to their lives, which often translated to natural resources' deep connections to their cosmology. The natural materials that were revered by the P'urhépecha were local as well

as imported through trade. Trade is an essential mode of grasping the broader understanding of these materials.

Goods, ranging from metals to feathers to semi-precious stones, are depicted in the *Relación de Michoacán*. Their importance is recognized through archaeological exploration and accounts from their neighbor, the Mexica,⁵⁷ the P'urhépecha language, and colonial to contemporary use of these materials. Clearly the European inclusion of comprehension for “fine” resources and products influenced the way in which certain materials kept their importance in the sixteenth century, yet it is my belief that many of the materials unique to Michoacán and the P'urhépecha kept their sacred pre-contact value.

Gold and Precious Metals

The P'urhépecha region has been known for its rich history of metallurgy.⁵⁸ The production of metal goods was closely connected to the P'urhépecha cosmology, and the metals themselves. Archaeologist Dorothy Hosler's work has extensively documented the western Mexican metallurgical tradition, and for the use and understandings of metal products.⁵⁹ One of her many contributions to this field is her claim that P'urhépecha

⁵⁷ The Mexica had a long history with the P'urhépecha which includes their origin myths as both being Chichimecs to fighting for trade and land ownership for important materials and boundaries. For more on this particular relationship, see Alfredo López Austin, *Tarascos Y Mexicas*, 1a ed. (México City, México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1981).

⁵⁸ Almost every scholar who discusses the artistry of pre-contact Michoacán discusses the skill of the P'urhépecha with metallurgy. The levels of metallurgy in Michoacán far surpassed that of the other Mesoamerican regions when it was first introduced.

⁵⁹ These are but a few of her many works: Hosler, *The Sounds and Colors of Power: The Sacred Metallurgical Technology of Ancient West Mexico*; Dorothy Hosler, "Sound, Color and Meaning in the Metallurgy of Ancient West Mexico," *World Archaeology* 27, no. 1 (1995); Dorothy Hosler, Heather

metallurgy and other artistic works⁶⁰ are connected to South America. According to Hosler, this connection was made possible by the western coastal connection made by Ecuadorian seafarers who originally brought small, portable metal objects, including tweezers (fig. 21).⁶¹

The use of tweezers in a Mesoamerican context was initially purely functional. Hosler says that depilatory tools were used throughout the indigenous Americas and into modern times.⁶² The earliest productions of these tweezers in West Mexico were called “beam tweezers,” (fig. 21), and were usually made of copper and copper ore.⁶³ Beam tweezers tended to be very small and narrow (see scale at bottom of image). Their style speaks to this functionality. Hosler states that the beam tweezers: “consist of two symmetrical blades joined by a hinge, fashioned from a continuous piece of metal.”⁶⁴ These tweezers had to be made of a strong metal in order to maintain form and function.

Copper was an indigenous metal in Michoacán and there is an early history of the P'urhépecha Empire arranging and executing mining by using slaves and other laborers.⁶⁵

Lechtman, and Olaf Holm, *Axe-Monies and Their Relatives*, Studies in Pre-Columbian Art & Archaeology No. 30 (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1990).

⁶⁰ Such as ceramic styles and textile patterns.

⁶¹ Hosler, "Sound, Color and Meaning in the Metallurgy of Ancient West Mexico." 102. Also see Hosler, *The Sounds and Colors of Power: The Sacred Metallurgical Technology of Ancient West Mexico*. 80-124.

⁶² Hosler also notes that contemporary Andean men's tools of today. Hosler, *The Sounds and Colors of Power: The Sacred Metallurgical Technology of Ancient West Mexico*. 64.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ For pre-contact and colonial copper mining information, see: Elinore M. Barrett, *The Mexican Colonial Copper Industry*, 1st ed. (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1987).

P'urhépecha rulers understood copper's functions as well as where it was produced in the empire and used mining to extract the precious metal. Copper was the most commonly used and durable metal in the P'urhépecha region.

The very act of creating tweezers for depilatory reasons also speaks to the aesthetic of the P'urhépecha people, mainly the males. Images of males without facial hair can be seen throughout the *Relación de Michoacán* (fig. 5, 9, and 16). In fact, the function of removing one's facial hair was an act of gender performance and definition, as Hosler notes:

The presence or absence of body and facial hair, its length, and its treatment are universally important, and mark gender, age, status, and other socially significant attributes. The Tarascan man plucked and shaves his body hair (and from the sound of the verb *vandumpzscani*,⁶⁶ he plucked other peoples' beard hairs as well).⁶⁷

In this regard, the action of removing the hair was understood as a social ritual as well as the aesthetic result of the hairlessness as being a signifier of maleness.⁶⁸ The aesthetic of

⁶⁶ Hosler notes the definition for this word: "*vandumpzscani*, *murumpzscani* means 'Arrancarles las [barbas] a mismo' [to pluck or pull out someone's beard hairs]." Hosler, *The Sounds and Colors of Power: The Sacred Metallurgical Technology of Ancient West Mexico*. 231.

⁶⁷ Ibid. Hosler also goes on to explain that though there is nothing known regarding how the P'urhépecha felt about hair, the South American concept that body and facial hair was equated to dirt and thus affected one's health can be understood as a reason the Pan Latin American removal and lack of hair on men's bodies. For this South American reference, Hosler sites Terence S. Turner's 1980 work entitled *Not Work Alone: Cross-Cultural View of Activities Superfluous to Survival*, edited by J. Chermas and R. Lewin, pages 112-140. Temple Smith, London.

⁶⁸ Carolyn Dean discusses Inka of the Andes concept of "acting male" in contrast to "looking" female. Such Inka ideas imply that maleness needed to be achieved through action. Though this is a different region, the concept of a "behaved gender" seems to connect well to the act of tweezing for P'urhépecha males. Carolyn Dean, "Andean Androgyny and the Making of Men," in *Gender in Pre-Hispanic America: A Symposium at Dumbarton Oaks, 12 and 13 October 1996*, ed. Cecelia F. Klein and Jeffrey Quilter (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2001).

P'urhépecha men included the lack of facial hair, which can be deduced from the images of the *Relación* as well as the abundance of metal tweezers in the region.

Golden spiral tweezers (fig. 22) are highly decorative tweezers that were created in a shell shape unique to the P'urhépecha.⁶⁹ They are made of a single piece of metal, with four symmetrical pieces. Above the axe-shaped bottom of the tweezers are two spiral designs, both of which are connected to the metal pieces (fig. 23). Hosler notes that these tweezers were made of copper alloys with silver, as well as tin and bronze.⁷⁰ The result of using these alloys together was that they created colors that were particularly brilliant yellow gold or bright white silver, with improved strength.

The image from the *Relación de Michoacán* depicting the *Equata Casquaro* (fig. 16) shows a petamuti, or head P'urhépecha priest, wearing spiral tweezers (fig. 22). The spiral tweezers are worn around the neck of the petamuti, as Hosler notes was often the case in ornamental tweezers of the P'urhépecha. The vibrant yellow in the image of the petamuti reveals that the tweezers were a yellowish, golden color. Yellow appears to be used in the *Relación* to signify a golden metal.

The illustration of the petamuti is a case of metallurgy functioning as a social signifier. The signification also relays elite status, as is the case in the elite-status burial remains that contain spiral tweezers (fig. 22) placed on the body's chest region, the way in which they are depicted in the image of the petamuti (fig. 17) in the *Relación*. Noble burial rituals and their materiality will be discussed in the following chapter.

⁶⁹ Hosler, *The Sounds and Colors of Power: The Sacred Metallurgical Technology of Ancient West Mexico*. 145.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* 147.

The color and symbolism of the spiral tweezers function as a visual representation of many of the important aspects of P'urhépecha culture. They serve as a signifier of P'urhépecha social status through their materiality, the way in which they are created, as well as how they are worn. This visual language is helpful in understanding how elite males were represented through imagery as well as how tweezers functioned within P'urhépecha visual language.

Gold and Its Correlations

Copper was an abundant and functional metal⁷¹ of the P'urhépecha region, but it was not the only important metal in Mesoamerica. Gold and silver had very important religious significance to the P'urhépecha, as well as the act of using these metals, and their function. The *color* of metal pieces, even if they were made of different alloys mixed together for strength, was very important. The color of gold and silver held much more significance in a religious manner than its molecular composition.⁷² In some ways the visual element of a particular religious object carried the message of its value more than the material with which it was made.

A good example of such a product in the P'urhépecha metalwork is the above-mentioned spiral tweezers (fig. 22). They were worn by the *petamuti* in the *Equata Consquaro* festival (fig. 17) and used to signify the importance of the status of his role. Yet, the signification goes further into the cosmivision of the P'urhépechas.

⁷¹ Hosler notes that the use of copper alloys in conjunction with other metals served to strengthen the metals' functionality.

⁷² Hosler, "Sound, Color and Meaning in the Metallurgy of Ancient West Mexico." 228-231.

Gold and silver (mostly the colors of) were connected to pre-1492 deities.⁷³

Archaeologist Hans Roskamp goes further and identifies which deity in particular may have been associated with gold, golden colored metal, and the production of gold materials.⁷⁴ Roskamp believes that the deity Tlatlahuqui Tezcatlipoca,⁷⁵ or “red smoking mirror” and also known as the deity Xipe Totec, or “our lord the flayed one,”⁷⁶ was associated with goldsmithing, as the deity is considered to be by the Mexica.⁷⁷ Interestingly, Xipe Totec, a deity commonly worshipped by the Nahuas in Central Mexico in the sixteenth century, is considered to be the red Tezcatlipoca.⁷⁸ Therefore, there were exact deities who were closely associated with the literal creation of metal products in this region, which stresses that facture was religious as well.

A copper mask of the god Xipe Totec (fig. 24) found in Michoacán brings these notions of creation and materials together. Xipe Totec’s name means “Our Lord the Flayed One,” and he is also known as Tlatlahuqui Tezcatlipoca, which as mentioned

⁷³ Hosler, *The Sounds and Colors of Power: The Sacred Metallurgical Technology of Ancient West Mexico*. 228.

⁷⁴ Hans Roskamp, "God of Metals: Tlatlahuqui Tezcatlipoca and the Sacred Symbolism of Metallurgy in Michoacán, West Mexico," *Ancient Mesoamerica* 21, no. 1 (2010).

⁷⁵ Tlatlahuqui Tezcatlipoca is one of the many manifestations of the Mexica god Tezcatlipoca, or the sun god. This particular manifestation of Tezcatlipoca is related to goldsmiths, since it is highly associated with the sun. The sun’s correlation to gold will be further explained.

⁷⁶ Roskamp, "God of Metals: Tlatlahuqui Tezcatlipoca and the Sacred Symbolism of Metallurgy in Michoacán, West Mexico." 72.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ Mary Ellen Miller and Karl A. Taube, *The Gods and Symbols of Ancient Mexico and the Maya: An Illustrated Dictionary of Mesoamerican Religion* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1993). 188.

previously is the god of goldsmithing.⁷⁹ The Xipe Totec mask carries all of the characteristics of Xipe Totec: the flayed skin of the god is represented by the partially-closed eye slits and sutures down the right and left cheeks, starting at the forehead, where the mask seems to be wearing a headdress. Also important to this figure is that it is composed of copper, an important material to the P'urhépecha. I am arguing that not only is the Xipe Totec mask imbued with religious value through its style, but also through the material *and* color from which it was made.

The P'urhépecha and other central Mexican indigenous groups believed that the sun passed through the earth every day, and in doing so left gold deposits in the earth.⁸⁰ These deposits were considered excrement of the sun god as he passed through the underworld at night.⁸¹ In the case of the P'urhépecha, the sun god was Curicaueri, whereas silver is considered to be excrement of the moon goddess Xarantanga.⁸² The color of these metals was most important to these religious beliefs, which is in contrast to the European idea of pure metal having value (usually monetary).

Not only was the color of yellow gold and white silver important, but by working with such materials the religious significance is also imbued with value. Precious metals

⁷⁹ Roskamp, "God of Metals: Tlatlahuqui Tezcatlipoca and the Sacred Symbolism of Metallurgy in Michoacán, West Mexico."

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* 70.

⁸¹ Cecelia F. Klein, "Teocuitlatl, "Divine Excrement": The Significance of "Holy Shit" in Ancient Mexico," *Art Journal* 52, no. 3 (1993). 25.

⁸² Roskamp, "God of Metals: Tlatlahuqui Tezcatlipoca and the Sacred Symbolism of Metallurgy in Michoacán, West Mexico." 70.

also had connections to the sacred earth and extracting these metals as well as creating objects with the metals was deeply understood as a religious process, as Roskamp states:

metal was considered a sacred material that emanated from the gods and belonged to them, not only to the major celestial rulers (the sun and moon) but also directly to the earth deity: everything that existed inside and on her body was in fact of a holy nature. Therefore, the exploitation of the resources and the smithing process were enterprises that most likely required permission and guidance from the divine forces, obtained through special rituals performed before, during, and after the metallurgical processes.⁸³

Roskamp thus connects the sacredness of metal with the religious value in producing goods with the metal.

Metallurgy is one of many examples in which the P'urhépecha cosmovision was intertwined with daily life, male aesthetics, and visual representations. For the P'urhépecha—materials were both sacred and functional. Metals have close associations to the earth and their cosmovision.

Semi-Precious Stones

Along with precious metals, materials such as stones, feathers, and textiles were held in great value by the P'urhépecha, but not all of these materials were indigenous to their region. For example, turquoise and quetzal feathers were not indigenous to Michoacán. They were products of Pan-Amerindian trade from South West of the United States to South America. According to archeologist Helen Perlstein Pollard, the only materials that were exported from Michoacán were metal goods and foodstuffs.⁸⁴ Black obsidian was indigenous to the P'urhépecha region and was traded throughout

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Pollard, "Tarascan External Relationships." 73.

Mesoamerica. Conversely, the P'urhépecha traded with the Mexica for products such as green obsidian, jade, onyx, serpentine, pyrites, and copal.⁸⁵ Materials like obsidian and other stones were transformed by the gifted P'urhépecha stoneworkers into sacred and useful objects. These stones had significant spiritual and functional value to the P'urhépecha, as well as the rest of Mesoamerica.

Turquoise

Turquoise was among the most important semi-precious stones to the P'urhépecha.⁸⁶ The significance of this material is understood through images already analyzed in the beginning portion of this chapter. Elite men, of both religious and governmental high ranks, are depicted throughout the *Relación de Michoacán* as wearing turquoise lip plugs (fig. 5, 9, 16). Turquoise lip plugs served as a clear indicator of P'urhépecha male elites. Pollard notes that the Mexica found their lip plugs to be “very big, as well as the holes in their...lips for them.”⁸⁷ The size of the lip plugs is apparent in the images from the *Relación*.

P'urhépecha lip plugs were a mixture of turquoise mosaic-style stones surrounded by obsidian (fig. 25). Obsidian was indigenous to the P'urhépecha region, but turquoise was not. The joint use of obsidian and turquoise is a Mesoamerican tradition, that had

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ I have found differing ideas of whether or not turquoise was from the P'urhépecha region or if it was imported through trade.

⁸⁷ Pollard, "Tarascan External Relationships." 75.

great value to the P'urhépecha. A Mixtec⁸⁸ shield (fig. 26) where an elaborate depiction of deities, depicted in a codex-style manner, are intricately represented using thousands of turquoise tesserae.⁸⁹ The Mixtec were a people located in present-day Oaxaca, south of Michoacán. They controlled the trade of many precious materials (such as turquoise, cochineal, etc.) and clearly communicated with the rest of Mesoamerica through their export of small and portable luxury goods.⁹⁰ The use of mosaic turquoise was important in Mesoamerica, which is apparent through the trade of the western and southern Mexican indigenous population, since they were found all over Mesoamerica.

In the Mixtec pectoral piece (fig. 27), mosaic turquoise pieces are mixed with gold. This pectoral is very similar to the ornate spiral tweezers and lip plugs of the P'urhépecha, which were made with golden-colored metals and mosaic-style turquoise, respectively. The Mixtec pectoral piece is a combination of materials that were used by the P'urhépecha, and as explained previously, held value. The presence of these materials and designs in the Mixtec region makes it clear that Mesoamerica as a whole held gold

⁸⁸ I will be referring to the predominant indigenous group of Oaxaca as Mixtec, though this is not how they referred to themselves. According to historian Kevin Terraciano: “*Mixteca* is actually a Nahuatl name meaning ‘people of the cloud place.’ In their own language, the so-called Mixtecs referred to themselves as *tay ñudzahui*, ‘people of the rain place’ or ‘people from the Dzahui,’ the rain deity. When Spaniards arrived in the 1520s, they encountered hundreds of separate autonomous states. These states were united by a shared culture and common language, expressed in the ethnic term *Ñudzahui* (pronounced *nu sawi* or *nu dawí*).” Kevin Terraciano, *The Mixtecs of Colonial Oaxaca: Ñudzahui History, Sixteenth through Eighteenth Centuries* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001). 1.

⁸⁹ This description is adapted from anthropologist and Mixtec specialist John M.D. Pohl’s depiction of a Mixtec wood and turquoise shield in his book *The Legend of Lord Eight Deer*, in which he explains the story of the deity Lord Eight Deer through artistic representation. John M. D. Pohl, *The Legend of Lord Eight Deer: An Epic of Ancient Mexico* (Oxford, England; New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002). 47.

⁹⁰ The Mixtec acting as large traders and exporters of “luxury” goods comes from Pohl’s presentation entitled, “The ‘Other Aztecs’: Man-Gods and Eastern Nahua-Mixtec Confederacy Building on the Puebla Plain” at the *Teotihuacan to Tenochtitlan* conference at California State University, Los Angeles, on February 11, 2012.

and turquoise in high regard and in fact may have been trading these materials due to their religious and other value.⁹¹ Mixtec warriors, who were of the elite class, wore pectoral pieces such as this —thus demonstrating that status was inherent in such materials.

Turquoise lip plugs are depicted in a vibrant blue color throughout the images in the *Relación de Michoacán* (fig. 5, 9, 16), and were a large part of the P'urhépecha elite male aesthetic. The bright blue color would have contrasted with the dark skin of the indigenous elite, thus bringing more attention to the materiality of the plugs. This idea highlights my earlier assertion that a large part of the elite male P'urhépecha visual language relied heavily on accoutrements, in particular their materiality. Along with turquoise lip plugs and the turquoise-encrusted gourd of the petamuti (fig. 6 and 17), the materiality of turquoise and its religious significance can also be understood. Although the gourd was commonly used to signify a priest, I argue that turquoise ornamented gourds are distinctly P'urhépecha, much like the ones depicted in the *Relación*.⁹²

Like metallurgy, the P'urhépecha and other Mesoamerican cultures would have seen turquoise and other stones as a product of the earth, which had functional, aesthetic, and religious significance—all of which contribute to the elevated status of males who were adorned by them. I argue that the materials of the petamuti's accoutrements were just as religiously valuable as the title and status of the petamuti himself.

⁹¹ Pohl has done extensive work connecting the Mixtec to the rest of Mesoamerica in trade.

⁹² In the Codex Mendoza, several images of a gourd are shown, usually being carried like a pouch by priests. The way the gourd is articulated in the *Relación* and decorated seems to me to be particularly P'urhépecha.

Use and Understanding of Corn

Precious materials aside, more crucial natural resources were also very important to the P'urhépecha. As is the case throughout Mesoamerica and into South America, corn was extremely essential to nourishment, and also served as a metaphor for the cycle of life and creation to the P'urhépecha.⁹³ Corn was the most important food staple for the P'urhépecha.⁹⁴

Depictions of agricultural rituals in Mesoamerica can be traced back to the Olmecs (circa 1500 BCE to 400 BCE). The Olmecs, regarded by many as the mother culture of Mesoamerica, have early imagery that shows use of cornstalk in relation to agriculture and their cosmology. The Olmecs' religious beliefs are connected to most Mesoamerican groups even today. A relief from the Olmec site of Chalcatzingo (fig. 28),⁹⁵ shows processions with objects that signified sacred aspects of life. To the left of the Chalcatzingo relief's left, the figure of a man is in profile, with his body to the left, and has outstretched arms (fig. 29). In his hands, he holds a corn stalk. The corn stalk that is lacking corn is taller than the man, showing its importance. This image leads me to

⁹³ Gabany-Guerrero discusses the language of corn for the P'urhépecha as being associated to their concepts of the body, namely blood, as well as to praying: "The root prefix, *ahtsir-*, is also found in several references to the human body and ritual practices in the *Diccionario Grande: ahsirahpeni yuriri-derramarles la sangre* [they spill their blood], *sacarsela del cuerpo* [they take it out of their body]; *ahtsirahpeni vingapequa-* quitarseles los brios [get rid of their imbalances]; *ahtsireni vandatzequareni-rezar todo la noche* [pray all night]." Translations by author. Gabany-Guerrero, "Deciphering the Symbolic Heritage of the Tarascan Empire: Interpreting the Political Economy of the Pueblo-Hospital of Parangaricutiro, Michoacan". 105.

⁹⁴ Ibid. 102.

⁹⁵ This image is a drawing from Relief 2, Station A at Chalcatzingo, Mexico, an Olmec archeological site. Carlo T. E. Gay and Frances Pratt, *Chalcatzingo, Die Amerikanischen Felsbilder = American Rock Paintings and Petroglyphs* (Graz, Austria: Akademische Druck- u. Verlagsanstalt Graz, 1971).

believe that the cornstalk is young, because of the lack of developed corn. The other men in the Chalcatzingo relief are shown carrying objects that are Olmec signifiers of rain and water, referring to agriculture.⁹⁶ Agriculture, especially the significance of corn as a staple crop throughout Mesoamerica, was understood as dependent on rain, hence it was also dependent upon the will of the rain god.

A man bearing a corn stalk with corn growing is depicted in the *Relación de Michoacán* in the governmental image (fig. 9). To the left-hand side of the Cazonci (one plane below) is a group of men who are labeled in Spanish as *mayordomos de sementeras*, or stewards of the crops, and in P'urhépecha as *tareta vaxátati* (fig. 30). The men are all in the same, seated position as the other male figures in this image. One man, in the back of the group, extends a single arm that bears a corn stalk. The stalk itself is the same size as the men in the *tareta vaxátati* group, the corn cob on the stalk is even the same size as the men's faces. As I explained earlier in this chapter, the scaled images in the *Relación* correspond to importance; therefore, the corn is significant to this image. In addition, as I also stated earlier, the accoutrements of the visual language in the *Relación* serve as signifiers of the figures. This visual language is occurring in the image of the *Mayordomos de Sementeras* through the image of the corn.

The way that corn is depicted in the hands of the *Mayordomos de Sementeras* adheres to a Mesoamerican language for corn. The different manners that corn is portrayed and articulated in the *Florentine Codex*, a sixteenth-century codex produced near Mexico City depicts the rituals and beliefs of the Mexica people (fig. 31). This

⁹⁶ *ibid.* 46.

image shows the ways that corn is rendered during the sixteenth century in New Spain by indigenous people and helps to show that the artists of the *Relación de Michoacán* had a Mesoamerican understanding of how to depict corn in the colonial sixteenth century.

The way that important goods, such as corn, were depicted adheres to my previously established visual language of the P'urhépecha. The origins of this language are clearly Mesoamerican and help show the development of many of the signifiers in the *Relación de Michoacán*. The adherence to the Mesoamerican visual language in the *Relación* also shows that many of these images and their interpretations carried into the early colonial period of Michoacán, being that the *Relación* is a product of sixteenth century Spanish Contact.

Action of Creating as Sacred

The P'urhépecha imagery in the *Relación de Michoacán* reflects their cultural and religious beliefs of materials and sacredness. I argue that objects and materials serve to signify figures' social status, which is also apparent in the images of artisans. Just as the petamuti's accoutrements work to demonstrate his status as sacred and high-ranking, I believe the value lies mostly in the materials and method of their creation. Therefore, the people who create these sacred objects are also inscribed with value on a material level.

In a common visual style depicting the different production and social groups in Michoacán (fig. 5 and 9), another image from the *Relación de Michoacán* depicts the various P'urhépecha artisans of the Empire (fig. 32). All of the figures are in a side-posed, sitting position seen in previous images from the *Relación*. Each group is labeled in

Spanish (fig. 33) by profession. Along with the labels, there are visual cues of the groups' products.

The artisans in the top right-hand side of the artisanal image (fig. 34) are labeled as *oficio de hacer guidaldas* or “office/position/craft that makes garlands” (fig. 33). The materials to make garlands are in the hands of the artisans. One man, on the top left side of the group holds what looks like red flowers, possibly used to make the garlands depicted on the caciques in the *Equata Consquaro* image (fig. 18). In the hands of the man in the front of the group that makes garlands is a green garland, which is shown on the Cazonci and angátacuri (fig. 10 and 11). In the front of the group, at the foot of the man who makes garlands is a mass of what may be the white feathers used in the petamuti's garland (fig. 6 and 17). The products and the materials they use denote the men who make garlands. They are at the top of the image, possibly alluding to their high status among the other groups in the image of all the P'urhépecha artisans.

On the right side, in the middle of the image of P'urhépecha artisans are the *plateros* or silversmiths (fig. 35). The fire and other tools they use to make their goods signifies the silversmiths, as well as two golden yellow colored objects to the top left of them. The objects appear to be pointed spools, possibly for creating textiles.⁹⁷

Interestingly, some of the P'urhépecha artisans are sitting on stools, which are very similar to the seats of the nobles (fig. 9 and 16). Unlike the Cazonci in the governmental image, the stools of the artisans are not golden in color, but are white. The

⁹⁷ The commentator for the 2000 edition of the *Relación* mentions that they think these objects may be labrets, or lip plugs, made of gold or copper. Alcalá and Franco Mendoza, *Relación De Las Cerimonias Y Rictos Y Población Y Gobernación De Los Indios De La Provincia De Mechuacán*. 556.

function of having some artisans sitting on a seat alludes to the elite imagery of the Cazonci and angátacuri in figure 6 or petamuti in figure 3, thus elevating these particular artisans (fig. 32), possibly even above the artisans who are not on seats.

The materials of each artisanal trade serve as the signifier of their work, as well as their status. The P'urhépecha artisanal image demonstrates how creating products was an important part of the P'urhépecha society. The P'urhépecha were known for their products throughout Mesoamerica and the religious significance of creating such goods may have led to pride and sense of identity with such goods.⁹⁸

Appropriation and New Translations in the Colonial Period

The culture of Michoacán changed when the Spanish arrived and occupied the P'urhépecha area in the early sixteenth century. The *Relación de Michoacán* is a product of this cultural contact. I believe that the artistic products of the early colonial period speak to the convergence of the Spanish and P'urhépecha visual languages in Michoacán. Most of the products produced were created by indigenous artisans, thus they continued to have agency and voice in this period. Though the artisans, nobles, and religious men who once had full power and control over the P'urhépecha Empire were affected by the Spanish, I believe and will demonstrate in the next chapter how their visual language endured and was still present in the sixteenth century. In the case of the elites, because they were always a smaller group within the P'urhépecha Empire who controlled most of the government and religious, there was little change in the early half of the sixteenth-

⁹⁸ Pollard, "Tarascan External Relationships." 75.

century. Mainly, the P'urhépecha elites sought to maintain their status and artisans appropriated the Spanish art they were exposed to, mixing it with their own concepts of style and imagery.

I have demonstrated several ways in which the visual language of the fifteenth-century P'urhépecha, such as the turquoise mosaics and metallurgy, maintained through the early contact through images in the *Relación de Michoacán*. There were inevitable changes and shifts in culture and visual language as a result of the Spanish occupation, as well as the unavoidable appropriations of European constructs in imagery.⁹⁹ The changes I will focus on center more on the previously mentioned accoutrements which in the pre-1519 P'urhépecha imagery were a large part of the way that elite males were signified as such.

In a depiction from the *Relación de Michoacán* (fig. 36), we see the lineage of the nobility of Michoacán who were in place when the Spanish arrived, depicted on branches of an oak tree.¹⁰⁰ The nobility are naked, except for the two men at the top (fig. 37), Don Francisco Tariácuri (right) and Don Antonio Huitziméngari (left), two half-brothers who were the sons of the last Cazonci/governor named Tzintzincha Tangaxoan—Don Antonio was the next in line for kingship.¹⁰¹ Afanador-Pujol explains that the reason for the

⁹⁹ This notion of appropriation instead of other theoretical concepts in dealing with P'urhépecha and Spanish colonial imagery is one that Angélica Afanador-Pujol beautifully fleshes out in her article: Afanador-Pujol, "The Tree of Jesse and the "Relación De Michoacán": Mimicry in Colonial Mexico." She uses appropriation as defined by art historian Robert Nelson. Nelson, "Appropriation." 116-128.

¹⁰⁰ Afanador discusses the type of tree in this image more in depth in her article: Afanador-Pujol, "The Tree of Jesse and the "Relación De Michoacán": Mimicry in Colonial Mexico." 303.

¹⁰¹ Names from: Gabany-Guerrero, "Deciphering the Symbolic Heritage of the Tarascan Empire: Interpreting the Political Economy of the Pueblo-Hospital of Parangaricutiro, Michoacan". 183. Afanador-Pujol, "The Tree of Jesse and the "Relación De Michoacán": Mimicry in Colonial Mexico." 299.

different dress and hairstyle of Don Antonio and Don Francisco is that they were baptized and had conformed to colonial rules of comportment.¹⁰² Each Don is fully dressed in a white garment and as we see with the depiction of Don Antonio (left of fig. 37), he wears black shoes. The only shoes articulated in the Pre-contact imagery¹⁰³ of the *Relación* were sandals, which were a local product of Michoacán (fig. 6 and 16).¹⁰⁴

The remaining nobles in the lineage image (fig. 36) all demonstrate the way in which P'urhépecha ruling class were signified through their accoutrements.¹⁰⁵ Each Cazonci is seated in an acorn of the sacred oak,¹⁰⁶ with their long hair tied by red, blue, and green ribbons. The Cazoncis wear turquoise lip plugs and green garlands, as depicted in the early image of the Cazonci (fig. 10). Turquoise was a clear signifier of nobility within P'urhépecha culture and depictions along with the green garlands, as discussed previously in this chapter.

The clear breaking away of pre-contact P'urhépecha imagery that worked as a signifier of elite males shows the way that imagery evolved in the early-contact period in

¹⁰² Afanador-Pujol, "The Tree of Jesse and the "Relación De Michoacán": Mimicry in Colonial Mexico."

¹⁰³ I consider images of the P'urhépecha in the *Relación de Michoacán* that depict the 15th century prior to Spanish contact to be "Pre-Contact" because they show images of how culture and visual culture was understood before the Spanish arrived.

¹⁰⁴ Pollard notes that the Mexica that the P'urhépecha men made "wonderful sandals." Pollard, "Tarascan External Relationships." 75.

¹⁰⁵ Afanador-Pujol goes in depth with the analysis as to why the other cazonci in this image are naked, but I will only focus on their accoutrements in this thesis. For more on this topic see: Afanador-Pujol, "The Tree of Jesse and the "Relación De Michoacán": Mimicry in Colonial Mexico." and Afanador-Pujol, "The Politics of Ethnicity: Re-Imagining Indigeneous Identities in the Sixteenth-Century Relación De Michoacán (1539-1541)".

¹⁰⁶ Afanador-Pujol discusses in her article that the sacred oak tree, *tocuz* in P'urhépecha, was used to keep the fires burning in the temples. People were sent to collect this wood in an act of reverence. Afanador-Pujol, "The Tree of Jesse and the "Relación De Michoacán": Mimicry in Colonial Mexico." 303.

Michoacán. Accoutrements worked as symbols of status through the P'urhépecha visual language, and the change of this is important to note. The image of P'urhépecha noble lineage is integral to understanding the evolution of the visual language of the P'urhépecha in that it adheres to the imagery of both pre- and post-Spanish occupation.

Gabany-Guerrero developed a chart that shows the petitions for particular accessories to be worn and owned by the elite males in Michoacán after the Spanish invasion (fig. 38).¹⁰⁷ The P'urhépecha nobles of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries clearly understood the Spanish had their own language of status signifying attributes, which they longed to possess as well. The chart represents a hundred-year period of the early-contact period. In this chart, we can see the commonly requested objects that the P'urhépecha nobles petitioned to obtain, which I argue in many ways worked for the nobles to assert their power through the symbolism of these objects. Though in a Spanish context, many of these objects have both a function (i.e. the horse and weapons); however, they were also translated as status signifiers by the P'urhépecha. In some ways, they could be associated with the golden-colored tweezers of the petamuti (fig. 17). Tweezers were both functional and decorative, and these spiral-designed tweezers in particular were a visual signifier of the petamuti's status. Clothing and accoutrements were clearly still carrying the same values that the P'urhépecha had imbued them with in the pre-contact period, even into the early colonial period.

¹⁰⁷ Gabany's chart is derived from Delfina Esmeralda López Sarrelangue's work. See: Delfina Esmeralda López Sarrelangue, *La Nobleza Indígena De Pátzcuaro En La Época Virreinal* (México City, México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas, 1965).

Concluding Thoughts

Through an analysis of early colonial imagery, I demonstrated that the P'urhépecha had a particular visual language that signified elite males. By select pages from the *Relación de Michoacán*, I emphasized that elite males were signified in particular ways (garlands, turquoise lip plugs, etc.) that worked with concepts of materiality and religion in P'urhépecha culture. Many of the concepts of these signifiers carried into the colonial period through accoutrements and dress. Materiality was also highly imbued with religious significance and importance, as seen in the metallurgy of the P'urhépecha, and production continued to be important into the colonial period in Michoacán. Such materials engaged the viewer through several bodily senses, including sight, touch, and sound. I assert that the value of such materials is extensively tied to the way in which the products were perceived in a sensory manner.

It is my argument that the imagery in the *Relación de Michoacán* speaks to an early, fifteenth and sixteenth century Mesoamerican visual language that was heavily influenced by neighboring artistic practices and religious beliefs. The P'urhépecha had communication with the Mexica and Mixtec of central and southern Mexico and there is clear evidence of their trade. When the Spanish arrived, though there was significant change, the P'urhépecha did not entirely lose their position in colonial art production. I believe that the elite P'urhépecha classes appropriated Spanish methods of artistic styles and in doing so they maintained elite status.

Manners of representation through dress and accessories existed in Michoacán far before the Spanish came and they continued into the colonial period. In the case of

colonial sixteenth-century Michoacán, the P'urhépecha elite and Spanish *conquistadores* and friars were confronted with one another's cultures. I believe that accoutrements work as metonymic devices,¹⁰⁸ in a visual manner, signifying the greater part of the figure's role and location within society. For Example, the petamuti's golden tweezers function as a signifier as well as a representative and reference to the petamuti's role in P'urhépecha society. However, based upon their knowledge of the particular culture, only particular parties in a colonial context can access these values.

A type of translation is necessary for both parties in the case of cultural convergence. According to translation and documentation specialist Olvidio Carbonell Cortés, the culture that emerges from colonialism, essentially the convergence of two particular cultures is multi-faceted and these two cultures do not understand one another in a particular location:

There exists a gap between the significative context of the cultural components involved, there is always an element of untranslatability that allows the modification of the originary meaning according to the structures of representation of the target language/culture.

This location, where certain aspects of cultures cannot be fully grasped is where I place many of the early colonial productions in Michoacán. The convergence of previous Mesoamerican cultures and the Spanish cultures of sixteenth-century Michoacán lie in this third space of transition and translation.

¹⁰⁸ This notion of a metonym works as Post-colonial theorist specialist Bill Ashcroft defined it in conjunction with the *metonymic gap* that I will discuss more in depth in the following chapter. Bill Ashcroft, *On Post-Colonial Futures: Transformations of Colonial Culture*, Writing Past Colonialism (London, England; New York, NY: Continuum, 2001).

Chapter 3: Epilogue: A Case Study of *El Señor de la Sacristía* as Sacred Material

In this chapter, I will shift in time and space to another colonial location in which Christian imagery is a key motivator for artistic production.¹⁰⁹ In the previous chapter, I developed the methods by which materials were imbued by the P'urhépecha with religious and cultural value. They had a long-standing tradition of incorporating materials and production into their cosmovision. Like every culture, the P'urhépecha were constantly evolving and interacting neighboring cultures' methods and material values. The P'urhépecha were still progressing in their artistic productions when the Spanish arrived. Thus, the imagery of the Spanish and Christians were incorporated and translated by the P'urhépecha.

This chapter is a micro-study of a religious sculpture, produced in Michoacán and with regional production techniques. *El Señor de la Sacristía* (fig. 4) is a crucified Christ sculpture located in the Cathedral of Morelia, the capital of present-day Michoacán.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ The image I will be discussing in this chapter is located in Cathedral of Morelia. This location is important to the colonial religious development of Michoacán because the Spanish established Morelia in 1541 with the intention of founding the capital and location for the bishopric of the region of Michoacán. The settlement was previous known as Guyangarero by the P'urhépecha. Pátzcuaro was originally intended to be the capital of Michoacán, when Don Vasco de Quiroga had transferred the bishopric from Tzintzuntzan upon his nomination as bishop in 1537. Morelia was founded by the Viceroy of New Spain, Antonio de Mendoza, in a response to the strong control that the city of Pátzcuaro had over Michoacán.¹⁰⁹ The main argument against making Pátzcuaro the capital of Michoacán was that Don Vasco de Quiroga had gained such popularity and "godlike status"¹⁰⁹ with the P'urhépecha. The Cathedral of Valladolid's construction began in 1640, was dedicated in 1706, and was completed in 1744. Valladolid was to be the New Spanish capital of Michoacán. The city was to be an example of Christianity, Spanish and *criollo* conduct and the Cathedral were to be the physical markers of this achievement. Margaret Chowning, *Wealth and Power in Provincial Mexico: Michoacán from the Late Colony to the Revolution* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999). 41.

¹¹⁰ Present-day Morelia, Michoacán was known as Valladolid in the colonial period, which it was called until 1828 when it was changed to Morelia in honor of the independence leader José María Morelos. Manuel González Galván and Judith Hancock de Sandoval, *Arte Virreinal En Michoacán* (México City, México: Frente de Afirmación Hispanista, 1978). 165.

The sculpture is made of a *pasta de caña de maíz*, or corn paste. I believe that this sculpture functions as a source of overlapping Christian and P'urhépecha religious imagery.

Through my analysis, I suggest that *El Señor de la Sacristía* is an object of religious value that is located in a metonymic gap—it is able to be understood by both the P'urhépecha and the Spanish audiences.¹¹¹ Yet, I believe that this sculpture has imagery that may have resonated with the P'urhépecha because there are several aspects of the sculpture that correlate with their religious and material values.

Materiality

As I have previously discussed, materials were very important to the P'urhépecha and the case of *El Señor de la Sacristía* speaks to such religious values of materials.

¹¹¹ The origin story of *El Señor de la Sacristía* is as follows: “*El Señor de la Sacristía* was given as a gift from the Spanish King Philip II to the Cathedral of Valladolid. The sculpture was commissioned from the finest artists in Michoacán, a Spaniard and his *mestizo* son, Matías and Luís de la Cerda of Pátzcuaro. The Christ was made of *pasta de caña*, the artistic specialty of de la Cerda, and sent to Valladolid upon its completion. When it arrived, it was placed in a box and forgotten for nearly one hundred years. One day, in the year 1738, an altar boy heard a strange knocking coming from somewhere inside of the Cathedral. After a lengthy search he finally found that the sound was coming from a closet in the back section of the Cathedral, where according to the legend, the Christ sculpture had been summoning him from within a large box. The Christ sculpture, or *cristo*, was removed from its hiding place and put on display near the main altar of the Cathedral where it has remained since. The sculpture immediately began to receive devotion and to this very day, *El Señor de la Sacristía* is the most venerated image in the Cathedral, if not in all of Morelia.” This story was first told to me by the man in charge of the archives, Pascual (or “Pascualito” as everyone called him affectionately), in the present-day Chapter of the Cathedral of Morelia. His immense pleasure while telling me this story has led me to believe that this is a story rife with community pride. commonly told. In my research, I have found that the references to the sculpture being a gift of the Spanish King as well as de la Cerda being the artist. Such books include: Oscar Mazín Gómez, *El Cabildo Catedral De Valladolid De Michoacán*, Colección Investigaciones (Zamora, Michoacán: El Colegio de Michoacán, 1996); Nelly Sigaut et al., *La Catedral De Morelia* (Zamora, Michoacán; Morelia, Michoacán: Colegio de Michoacán; Gobierno del Estado de Michoacán, 1991); Sofía Irene Velarde Cruz, *Imaginería Michoacana En Caña De Maíz*, ed. Secretaría de Cultura de Michoacán, Segunda Edición ed., Serie Recuperación De Acervos En Museos Centro Documentación E Investigación De Las Artes (Morelia, Michoacán: Impresora Gospa, 2009).

*Pasta de caña*¹¹² is a sculptural medium that was used in the colonial period to make saint sculptures, known as *santos*. The material consisted of a processed paste from the inner portion of a stalk of corn. Several primary chronicles attributed *pasta de caña* as originating from sixteenth to eighteenth-century Michoacán.¹¹³ The process of creating *santos* of *pasta de caña* became a Christian expression of religious faith, as the bishop Don Vasco de Quiroga instilled workshops in Pátzcuaro for this very purpose.¹¹⁴

The process by which a *pasta de caña* sculpture was created is as follows:

First an armature or skeletal foundation was constructed of dried maize leaves fastened together with fibers of the agave cactus; for fingers and toes turkey feathers were used. Then this framework was roughly covered with a paste composed of the pith of cornstalks mixed to a spongy mass with the ground-up bulbs of a local orchid. To ensure strong joints and extremities, these parts were

¹¹² I will continue to refer to the medium as *pasta de caña* as opposed to the entire title mentioned in the introduction: *pasta de caña de maíz*. Andrés Estrada Jasso mentions in his introduction of his book the many names for this material, such as: “‘caña de maíz;’ otros, aludiendo a la parte utilizable, le dicen ‘medula’ o ‘corazones de caña de maíz,’ ‘cañas descortezadas y secas,’ o también ‘Fibras largas de la pasta de caña de maíz’ [‘corn stalk;’ others allude to the parte utilized, saying ‘spine’ or ‘heart of the corn atalk,’ ‘long fibers of the corn stalk’]...to reference a few. Translation by author. Andrés Estrada Jasso and Universidad Autónoma de San Luis Potosí, *Imágenes En Caña De Maíz*, Segunda ed. (San Luis Potosí, S.L.P., México: Universidad Autónoma de San Luis Potosí, 1996). 19.

¹¹³ Sofía Irene Valarde Cruz mentions in her book *Imaginería Michoacana en Caña de Maíz*, that the following documents discuss *pasta de caña*: Matías Angel de la Mota Padilla and José Ireneo Gutiérrez, *Historia De La Conquista Del Reino De La Nueva Galicia* (Guadalajara, México: Talleres Gráficos de Gallardo y Alvarez del Castillo, 1920).

¹¹⁴ Don Vasco de Quiroga applied his ideas of Utopian society, heavily influenced by Thomas More’s work, to “build a new social order within the confines of Spanish colonialism, from the household up to the community level.” One of the main strategies that he implemented was to establish hospitals, which functioned mainly as community centers, throughout Michoacán. A large part of his evangelization process included establishing trade schools and giving indigenous people a sense of pride in their work. James Krippner-Martínez, *Rereading the Conquest: Power, Politics, and the History of Early Colonial Michoacán, Mexico, 1521-1565* (University Park, PN: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001); Ricard, *The Spiritual Conquest of Mexico: An Essay on the Apostolate and the Evangelizing Methods of the Mendicant Orders in New Spain, 1523-1572*.

Pasta de caña sculptures can be found throughout Mexico, even in the colonial period. Sculptures were likely produced in Mexico City and even the Phillipines. Some *pasta de caña* sculptures were found in Spain as well. For more on this topic, see: Antonio F. García-Abásolo, Gabriela García Lascurain, and Joaquín Sánchez Ruiz, *Imaginería Indígena Mexicana: Una Catequesis En Caña De Maíz* (Córdoba, España: Publicaciones Obra Social y Cultural CajaSur, 2001).

bound with strips of cotton or agave cloth. After the figure was dry a fine coating of the paste was spread over it in a manner of stucco, and later the coloring was added to its proper tints. To give luster, a quick-drying oil, known to the natives, was applied. The profuse blood (which can be seen on *El Señor de la Sacristía*) was simulated by a compound of cochineal and lampblack. Head and beard were made of human hair or modeled and stained black.¹¹⁵

As the aforementioned explanation implies, the process of making *pasta de caña* was long and required skill (fig. 39-42). Almost every material that was utilized in this process was indigenous to Mexico, from the orchid paste used to bond the corn, to cotton and cochineal¹¹⁶ used to tint the simulated blood of Christ's wounds.

The image of Christ became central to the depiction of maleness and Christian religion in colonial Michoacán. The use of particular imagery in the representation of a crucified Christ is essential to understanding how the priests of colonial New Spain approached and executed conversion and instilled Christian thought in the P'urhépecha of Michoacán. In this chapter I will explore later colonial (eighteenth-century) religious materiality in Michoacán.

Imagery of *El Señor de la Sacristía*

El Señor de la Sacristía (fig. 43) is a *pasta de caña* sculpture of a crucified Christ, depicted in a full-human form in the round. The sculpture's entire body is on display, save his lower pelvic region that is cloaked in a red silken cloth with golden embroidery.

¹¹⁵ Pál Kelemen, *Baroque and Rococo in Latin America*, 2d ed., 2 vols. (New York, NY: Dover Publications, 1967). 53.

¹¹⁶ During the Colonial period, Oaxaca dominated the cochineal production. Michoacán could have easily gotten this dye pre-contact through its control of the Pacific coast trade route—if they needed it.

The image is clearly multivalent and possesses visual language of the European-Christian artistic community, many Mesoamerican, and *mestizo*¹¹⁷ visual cues.

Beginning with the head of *El Señor de la Sacristía* (fig. 44), the first element of significance is the use and appearance of the human hair. The human hair of the figure is a light brown color and curled, which indicates a Spanish mode (fig. 51). Indigenous hair would have been darker and straighter; therefore, it appears that the hair was intended to depict Jesus in European likeness.

The Christ sculpture is depicted as wearing a gold crown, forming the shape of a cross in the back. Based upon an inventory dating between the years 1731 and 1784, the crown was part of *El Señor de la Sacristía*'s aesthetic.¹¹⁸ I believe that the crown's function may have had a particular ceremonial purpose, considering it is not shown in every contemporary photograph of *El Señor de la Sacristía*. The mention of the golden crown in the eighteenth-century inventories may speak more to its monetary value than to its particular use at the time. There is only a vague description of the crown, thus making it impossible to state for a fact that the crown in the recent photographs is *the* crown used in the eighteenth century. The woven crown is similar to those seen in European crucifixion sculptures as well as throughout New Spain, and the style of the band around the head is quite common. The golden metal of the crown on *El Señor de la Sacristía*'s

¹¹⁷ The Spanish term *mestizo* refers to miscegenation, and is a person who is of one indigenous and one Spanish parent.

¹¹⁸ The following is my translation of the inventory: "In the gold retablo, the image of the crucified *El Señor* in its niche with glass windows and velvet curtains with gold braid [crown], his wooden cross inlaid tortoise shell and bone..." Sigaut et al., *La Catedral De Morelia*. 151.

head (fig. 46) is composed of thin golden strips interlaced into a pattern, creating a woven design.

The sculpture's eyes are not entirely closed (fig. 46); *El Señor de la Sacristía*'s face is not depicting the pain and pathos that is often associated with crucifixion images. The sculpture has almost a mild expression with no agony or pain. The Christ sculpture is not wincing, and no strain can be seen through lines in the face or other muscle tension. According to Héctor Bautista Mejía's "Pasta de Caña" chapter in *Arte Del Pueblo: Manos De Dios: Colección Del Museo De Arte Popular*, this depiction is a particular style called *cristos dormidos*, or "sleeping Christs," which are particular to Michoacán.¹¹⁹

Around *El Señor de la Sacristía*'s neck is a ring of what is meant to be blood (fig. 43). It is very dark and the lines are much thicker than those on the sculpture's face. The blood is depicted in a way that mimics a burst of rays, similar to how a sun's rays may be illustrated, with *El Señor de la Sacristía*'s face being the center. These rays may also be a means to depict the holiness as well as the wounds of Jesus.

The body of *El Señor de la Sacristía* (fig. 44) seems to follow many of the sculptural types and motifs that were present in colonial New Spain, namely with its wounds. The bleeding wound on the viewer's left is of a slash caused by the Roman soldier who stabbed Jesus when he was on the cross, which was part of Church doctrine.¹²⁰ The deep wound on *El Señor de la Sacristía* is a horizontal line intended to

¹¹⁹ Héctor Bautista Mejía, "Pasta De Caña," in *Arte Del Pueblo: Manos De Dios: Colección Del Museo De Arte Popular*, ed. Landucci (Mexico City, Mexico: Landucci, 2005). 447-448.

¹²⁰ The Bible states: "But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs; but one of the soldiers opened his side with a lance, and immediately there came out blood and water." St. John 19:33-34. Doctrine Confraternity of Christian, *New Catholic Edition of the Holy Bible: The*

be blood, which is apparent by the red toned pigment, likely cochineal.¹²¹ The blood, a thick and dark stream, descends the entire torso, originating from the wound and draining somewhere behind the garment that *El Señor de la Sacristía* wears around the waist.

The arms of *El Señor de la Sacristía* are out-stretched to each side of the body, in the traditional crucifixion depiction. The sculpture's arms are thin, in comparison to the thick torso and the thickness of the calves. The arms are also long in comparison to the length of the legs, giving the illusion of long limbs. Similar to the feet, the hands of *El Señor de la Sacristía* are darker. The nails for the crucifixion are placed in the middle of the palms.

The sculpture's legs are portrayed as wounded in a similar manner. The knees of *El Señor de la Sacristía* (fig. 43) are bloodied, with the red pigment depicting blood dripping from the kneecaps down the knees and halfway down the shins.¹²² The ankles of the Christ are marked with two dark lines each, as if to denote that the ankles had been tied. The legs of *El Señor de la Sacristía* are bent at the knees. The degree of the bend is apparent in an older photograph (fig. 47), where the distance of the Christ's body from

Old Testament, Confraternity-Douay Version: With the New Confraternity of Christian Doctrine Translation of the First Eight Books, and a New Translation of the Book of Psalms from the New Latin Version Approved by Pope Pius XII: And the New Testament, Confraternity Edition: A Revision of the Challoner-Rheims Version Edited by Catholic Scholars under the Patronage of the Episcopal Committee of the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (New York, NY: Catholic Book Pub. Co., 1953). 146.

¹²¹ See earlier section of this chapter in which I explain the pigmentation process of *pasta de caña de maíz* sculptures.

¹²² The knees of *El Señor de la Sacristía* present potential signs of having been restored when compared to the differences between all of the images of this sculpture (see figures 46 and 50). Perhaps the discoloration here, which resembles restoration, is in fact what occurred at the other locations where the pigmentation is much darker? Such as the hands and feet of the sculpture?

the cross is more noticeable. This leads more to the idea that the Christ figure is separate from the cross and of a different material.

El Señor de la Sacristía's feet are crossed, with the right over the left. The toes are dark, which is possibly indicating death of the body. The sculpture's feet are nailed in the middle of the top of the instep, demonstrated by a single gold nail. As can be observed, *El Señor de la Sacristía*'s body is not portrayed symmetrically.

The entire body of *El Señor de la Sacristía* is marked with double lines, which mimic those placed on the ankles. The viewer may be led to assume that these marks are intentional slashes. The marks coincide with the story surrounding Jesus's crucifixion, which I believe is either a function of the doctrine the population of Michoacán was taught, and/or a product of being in contact with other crucified sculptures.

Corn as Religious Material

In the analysis of P'urhépecha materiality and religious value in the previous chapter, corn clearly contained important value to Mesoamericans, especially the P'urhépecha. The P'urhépecha were an agricultural culture, meaning their cosmovisions and understanding of religion and the world was tightly connected to their sustenance crops. Corn was a major aspect of this belief.

Ritualized Associations with *Pasta de Caña*

The calendar is very important in understanding the use of the materials as well as the visuals used by the P'urhépecha and other Mesoamericans in relation to *pasta de caña*. The way in which particular ceremonies are performed, as well as *when* they are

performed within the P'urhépecha calendar is integral. According to archaeologist Helen Perlstein Pollard's analysis of the "Prehispanic Tarascan Calendar," (fig. 48) the month that she labels as *Caheri Uapanscuaro*, which she notes meant "great barrios," occurred from October 26 to November 14 in the Gregorian Calendar.¹²³ This is a significant period in time, for it was often when corn is harvested both contemporarily and prehistorically. Seeing as the P'urhépecha were an "agrarian civilization," a festival which centers around harvesting would be expected. According to Pollard, the use of language that pertained to corn was a result of their agrarian life.¹²⁴

While looking at this Mesoamerican calendar (fig. 48), I would like to note the period of time in which *El Señor de la Sacristía* is venerated in Morelia. The Christ sculpture is venerated on July 7, which falls onto the P'urhépecha month of *Caheri Cascuaro*, also called the "Great feast of Lords" according to Pollard's chart. This month is defined as such in the *Relación de Michoacán*: "Cahera Cónsquaro. The festival of the extension of lordship (July 7)."¹²⁵ Lordship could be seen as the way in which Jesus was accepted into the P'urhépecha community in colonial Valladolid, and this time in July, which is also the time of planting and green, young corn stalks, all ties into an indigenous Christian identity with *El Señor de la Sacristía*.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, corn was very important throughout Mesoamerica. Ritualization also can be connected to the use of corn by the P'urhépecha

¹²³ Pollard, *Tariácuri's Legacy : The Prehispanic Tarascan State*. 141 and 150.

¹²⁴ Ibid. 141.

¹²⁵ "La fiesta de la extensión del señorío (7 de julio)." (Translated from Spanish into English by author). Alcalá and Franco Mendoza, *Relación De Las Cerimonias Y Rictos Y Población Y Gobernación De Los Indios De La Provincia De Mechuacán*. 703.

as well as the connections of corn to the creation of *pasta de caña*. According to many scholars, P'urhépecha priests would create sculptures of a material almost identical to *pasta de caña* in the likeness of their deities and processed with them onto the battlefield before combat.¹²⁶ These priests are pictured in the *Relación de Michoacán* (fig. 5) in the image of the priests. The priests to the right of the image, (fig. 49) labeled *thivímencha* are said to be “*los que llevaban los dioses a cuestras,*” or “those who carried the gods on their backs.”¹²⁷

The religious materiality of *pasta de caña* could have much more significance to the P'urhépecha. In looking through the *Relación de Michoacán*, there are many references to the use of maize and one particular reference to the religious application of the material. One reference appears within the section originally entitled “*De Donde Vinieron, Sus Dioses Mas Principes, Las Fiestas Que Les Hacían,*”¹²⁸ which refers to a location where there is much revelry, drunkenness, and they consumed toasted corn. In the P'urhépecha language, this “toasted corn” is called *uaníta*, or *tsipáta*.¹²⁹ Interestingly,

¹²⁶ Two of such scholars are: Robert G. Cruz Floriano, “Cornstalk Paste: *Pasta De Cana De Maíz*,” in *Saints & Sinners : Mexican Devotional Art*, ed. James Caswell, Jenise Amanda Ramos, and California Heritage Museum. (Atglen, PA: Schiffer Pub., 2006); Luis Enrique Orozco, *Los Cristos De Caña De Maíz Y Otras Venerables Imágenes De Nuestro Señor Jesucristo*, Colección Gente Y Región (Guadalajara, México: Amateditorial, 1970).

¹²⁷ Alcalá and Franco Mendoza, *Relación De Las Cerimonias Y Rictos Y Población Y Gobernación De Los Indios De La Provincia De Mechuacán*. 564-566.

¹²⁸ “From where they came, Their Principle Gods, The Festivities That They Did” (Translated into English from Spanish by author). Ibid. 331.

¹²⁹ Pablo Velásquez Gallardo, “Maíz Tostado De Grano De Mazorca O De Elote.,” in *Diccionario de la Lengua Phorhépecha : Español-Phorhépecha, Phorhépecha-Español* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1978). 66.

it is the goddess of corn, *Uinturópati* (also written as *Vinturópati*), who is considered to have been a somewhat peripheral deity.¹³⁰

In the *Relación de Michoacán*, there is a short mention of a P'urhépecha festival in which corn is used. The festivities took place during the month of *Cahériuapánsquaro*, in which people “*bailaban con unascañas de maíz a las espaldas.*”¹³¹ The use of corn stalk as garments correlates with P'urhépecha ritual, considering materials such as paper were often used for dressing deities. The use of dance and materiality is not exclusive to the P'urhépecha, but is much more pre-Hispanic in its origins. Performances, like dance, were later outlawed by many evangelizing powers for fear of their subversion.

Later in the passage from the *Relación de Michoacán*, it explains that the two festivals that are being described (one of which includes the dancing with corn stalk) are called *Cuingo* and *Coríndaro*.¹³² The result of both festivals is human sacrifices to the goddess *Cuerávaperi*, mostly of slaves.¹³³ Dancing with corn stalks is important, since *El Señor de la Sacristía* and other *crustos de caña*, or Christ sculptures of *pasta de caña*, are made from the pith, or inside of the stalks of corn and not the kernels. Furthermore, contemporary religious ceremonies (fig. 50) in which indigenous Christian men process with corn stalk reference such pre-contact practices in Michoacán.

¹³⁰ José Corona Núñez, *Mitología Tarasca* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1957). 77.

¹³¹ “danced with the canes of on their backs.” Translation by author. Alcalá and Franco Mendoza, *Relación De Las Cerimonias Y Rictos Y Población Y Gobernación De Los Indios De La Provincia De Mechuacán*.332.

¹³² *Ibid.* 332.

¹³³ *ibid.*

Christ as the Corn Deity

Though much less is known in scholarship regarding the corn deities of the P'urhépecha, there are many many connections between other Mesoamerican cultures and their understanding of the role and image of Christ. The Maya of the Chamula region of southern Mexico believe that Christ is highly associated with the Sun-creator deity.¹³⁴ Anthropologist Gary S. Gossen did extensive fieldwork with the Maya of this region and noted that the more contemporary Chamula believe that Christ is like their sun-creator. This is a very interesting and important connection, which Gossen states can be seen through their placement of Christ imagery in the Chamula Christian Church. The Chamula also believe that maize came from their sun deity:

The sun gave mankind maize from his body. This is reflected in a ritual term, *šohobal*, which is frequently used in reference to maize foods. It means “radiance” or “halo of the sun.” According to Chamula mythology, maize (which is “hot” in the hot-cold scheme of food evaluation) came from a piece of the sun’s groin (not his penis) and included a part of his pubic hair, which is the silk of the ear of the maize...maize is the staple of the Chamula diet...¹³⁵

This association between the sun, Christ, and maize is essential to understanding how Christ and the correlating imagery of areunderstood by indigenous groups.

In many colonial contexts, tortillas were used in place of and interchangeably with the Eucharist.¹³⁶ Since tortillas are made from maize and the Eucharist is said to be

¹³⁴ Gary H. Gossen, *Chamulas in the World of the Sun: Time and Space in a Maya Oral Tradition* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974). 41.

¹³⁵ Ibid. 40.

¹³⁶ This information comes from lectures from anthropologist Karl Taube’s graduate course on Maya History and Religion, taught in the fall quarter of 2009. For other more contemporary Maya religious rituals, tamales are ritually made and consumed. Tamales, like tortillas, are made from maize.

Jesus's body, the connections are very important. The interrelations with corn, the sun, and Christ are all present in *El Señor de la Sacristía*—the sculpture is made of corn, in the image of Christ, and adorned with gold.

Accoutrements of *El Señor de la Sacristía*

Based upon *El Señor de la Sacristía*'s ornate accoutrements, I argue that there may have been resonance with petamuti imagery, as well as noble male imagery. In my investigation of this sculpture, I was struck by the Christ sculpture's crown and its likeness to the imagery of the Cazonzi (fig. 10) from the *Relación de Michoacán*. The golden, braided crown is in many ways similar to the garlands of the P'urhépecha nobles depicted in the *Relación de Michoacán*. I contend that the elaborate use of gold for the crown of *El Señor de la Sacristía* may have referenced the image of the petamuti. The petamuti in the *Equata Consquaro* image (fig. 16) is adorned with golden accoutrements—like the golden crown of *El Señor de la Sacristía* (fig. 46). This connection to materiality, as well as its sacredness resonates strongly with P'urhépecha, and Mesoamerican, religious value of gold.

The Golden Sun Deity

The materiality of the gold itself is likewise a multi-layered and highly entwined visual concept in the colonial period of New Spain. As I discussed in the previous chapter, archeologist Hans Roskamp discusses how the significance of gold is closely tied to creation as well as deities to the P'urhépecha.¹³⁷ Gold was said to be the sun god's,

¹³⁷ Roskamp, "God of Metals: Tlatlahuqui Tezcatlipoca and the Sacred Symbolism of Metallurgy in Michoacán, West Mexico."

or the Curicaueri's, excrement as he passed through the earth when the sun set each day. The production of metallurgy also contained religious connotations, which connects to the idea of early conversion and missionaries' use of the sun god when converting indigenous people in early contact period.¹³⁸

I believe that the golden crown of *El Señor de la Sacristía* is one of many accessories that the sculpture wears that lie within a metonymic gap between the European, P'urhépecha, and now *mestizo* and *criollo*¹³⁹ populations of eighteenth-century Valladolid, Michoacán. This gap exists because the crown has meaning in the colonial context, mostly to the Spanish-Christians, yet also has an indigenous significance. Thus, the interpretation of the crown depends on the viewer's cultural and religious background.

The crown functions as the "halo" that the Chamula reference in their concepts of maize, *šohobal*, yet also serves the Christian purpose of the "crown of thorns."¹⁴⁰ In terms of the crown's style, it is also important to note that the P'urhépecha population would also have understood the visual language of such a crown. The P'urhépecha kings, or *Cazonci*, wore very similar crown as the crowns placed upon *El Señor de la Sacristía*,

¹³⁸ Refer to the previous chapter of this thesis, in section entitled "Materiality of the Sacred" for a more in-depth analysis of P'urhépecha materiality. (Page 18-31).

¹³⁹ The colonial term *criollo* is a person of Spanish who was born in the Americas.

¹⁴⁰ "And they [the Roman soldiers] stripped him and put on him a scarlet cloak; and plaiting a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head, and a reed into his right hand; and bending the knee before him they mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" Matthew 28:28-29. Confraternity of Christian, *New Catholic Edition of the Holy Bible: The Old Testament, Confraternity-Douay Version: With the New Confraternity of Christian Doctrine Translation of the First Eight Books, and a New Translation of the Book of Psalms from the New Latin Version Approved by Pope Pius XII: And the New Testament, Confraternity Edition: A Revision of the Challoner-Rheims Version Edited by Catholic Scholars under the Patronage of the Episcopal Committee of the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine*. 46.

as can be seen in the images of elite P'urhépecha males in the *Relación de Michoacán* (fig. 5, 9, 16, and 36). Both populations, the indigenous as well as the European, would have understood the royal connotation of the image of this particular crown.

Religious Value—Holy Lordship

Though *El Señor de la Sacristía* is a Christian image, used in the later colonial period of Michoacán, I believe that there are many religious connections to the P'urhépecha of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Based on the fact the Jesus Christ is an image of a religiously significant male to the Christian world, I sought to understand how P'urhépecha people would have understood crucifixion imagery. Using *El Señor de la Sacristía*, I would like to suggest that there are many interesting and important overlaps between this sculpture and P'urhépecha religious male elite imagery.

To further understand this notion, I examined the neighboring Nahua¹⁴¹ use of sculptural Christ imagery. Mainly, I was seeking to understand how reverence could be associated with a crucified Christ sculpture, through an indigenous lens. The imagery of the crucified Christ is important to the European Christian population of Valladolid, yet many of the elements contain indigenous qualities and may have made the sculpture of *El Señor de la Sacristía* invoke reverence on a Mesoamerican level.¹⁴² By observing the lack

¹⁴¹ The Nahua are a large indigenous population who speak Nahuatl (the lengua franca of Mesoamerica), which included the Mexica of the pre-contact period. That is to say, the Mexica were Nahua but not all Nahua are and were Mexica. In this case, I am referring to contemporary central Mexican Nahua.

¹⁴² As Angélica Afafador-Pujol stated in her dissertation, *The Politics of Ethnicity: Re-imagining Indigenous Identities in the Sixteenth-Century Relación de Michoacán* (1539-1541), “Michoacán did not have a homogenous population. Numerous ethnic groups lived in the Lake Pátzcuaro area. The area was multilingual, with Nahuatl, Otomí, and P'urhépecha speakers often struggling for resources and political leverage across the pages of archival records. . . . Furthermore, the Spanish conquest and colonization efforts had fomented the relocation of indigenous populations, many of which had traveled with the Spaniards as

of strained expression on the face of *El Señor de la Sacristía*, or most of the *cristos dormidos* for that matter, I was struck by the possible ways in which such an expression could be interpreted. Perhaps the pristine condition of the Christ's face can be associated with the idea of the "perfection" and beauty.

The Mexica¹⁴³ had a tradition of choosing a "beautiful" youth in order to sacrifice him for the ritual known as *Toxcatl*, in which the youth was to live for a year as the impersonator of *Tezcatlipoca*.¹⁴⁴ In the Florentine Codex, the celebration is described, and an in-depth analysis of how the youth was chosen based upon his physical perfection. The descriptions of the body, mostly emphasizing his long and lean body, with smooth

allies in the war of conquest. Colonial documents attest to mixed populations within individual towns, but also to Nahuatl and Otomí settlements whose populations were homogenous. People with Nahuatl names abound in court records: they are listed as chiefs (*caciques*), noble men and women, sculptors, interpreters, and employees of the church." 13-14. Based upon this information, there was room for Mesoamerican influences, beyond the P'urhépecha, in Michoacán during the colonial period. Also see the previous chapter where I make connections of the P'urhépecha material culture and the Mexica and Mixtec visual culture of the fifteenth century.

¹⁴³ I acknowledge that the P'urhépecha and the Mexica were not the same indigenous group and did not share all of the same cosmology; however, I am using these known rituals of the Mexica in order to make a pan-Mesoamerican assumption about imagery as well as concepts of beauty which could have been influential in the development of the evangelical images of early New Spain. As stated before, much less is known of the P'urhépecha than some other Mesoamerican cultures who were close to them and it is important to note that some exchange of ideas and ritual was known to occur in Pre-Contact time. I am also using Afanador-Pujol's archival information which she used to assert in her dissertation that Michoacán had more than one indigenous population in the colonial period. Afanador-Pujol, "The Politics of Ethnicity: Re-Imagining Indigenous Identities in the Sixteenth-Century *Relación De Michoacán (1539-1541)*". I am also using arguments given by Cecelia F. Klein in her presentation entitled "Cholera and the Pre-Columbian Roots of *Iztapalapa's El Señor de la Cueva*" on the "Crisis: Art, Christianity, and Identity in Mesoamerica" at the "Crisis and Opportunities in Latin America," Latin American Studies Program, conference on April 23, 2010 at the University of California, Riverside campus.

¹⁴⁴ Bernardino de Sahagún, "General History of the Things of New Spain: Florentine Codex," in *General History of the Things of New Spain: Florentine Codex*, ed. Arthur J. O. Anderson, Dibble, Charles E., Jay I. Kislak Reference Collection (Library of Congress) (Santa Fe, N.M.; Salt Lake City, Utah: School of American Research; University of Utah, 1950).

skin and lack of blemishes, and his perfectly proportioned face that was also unblemished, seems very reminiscent of the *El Señor de la Sacristía*.¹⁴⁵

The beauty of the Christ image is present much earlier in Christian imagery than Spanish contact with the Americas. However, I argue along the lines of art historian Cecelia F. Klein in that an image of a “beautiful,” youthful crucified Christ figure would also have held meaning to the indigenous population of Michoacán, not to mention all of Mesoamerica. Klein states that the feminine quality of such a sculpture is particular to this festival and to the youth who is to impersonate Tezcatlipoca, and such Christian imagery seems in some ways to replace such imagery.

This idea of lordship can also be tightly connected to the above-mentioned ritual of Toxcatl, in which the youth is considered the lord while he was acting as an impersonator and he received signs of reverence from the Mexica community: “Since he impersonated Titlacauan, he was indeed regarded as our lord. There was the assigning of lordship; he was importuned; he was sighed for; there was bowing before him...”¹⁴⁶

Concluding Thoughts

The likeness of *El Señor de la Sacristía* to other European modes of depiction in regards to a crucified Christ harkens back to my analysis of P'urhépecha visual appropriation in the colonial period. The artist who created *El Señor de la Sacristía* in

¹⁴⁵ This is the argument that Cecelia F. Klein makes for the *El Señor de la Cueva*, which is also a crucified Christ sculpture that she believes may be of *pasta de caña*. Cecelia F. Klein, "The Aztec Sacrifice of Tezcatlipoca and Its Implications for Christ Crucified," in *Power, Gender, and Ritual in Europe and the Americas: Essays in Memory of Richard C. Trexler*, ed. Peter J. Arnade and Michael Roche (Toronto, Canada: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2008).

¹⁴⁶ Sahagún, "General History of the Things of New Spain: Florentine Codex." 68.

this style and form was clearly aware of European iconography and style, yet I believe that there are still elements, many of which I discussed previously, that speak to the P'urhépecha visual language of elite males. The conceptual location for *El Señor de la Sacristía*'s imagery is in the metonymic gap—the location where an artist who is trained in European modes, yet is still aware of his indigenous visual culture.¹⁴⁷ As a viewer, this specific *cristo de caña* is accessible from different layers of European and P'urhépecha visual understanding.

El Señor de la Sacristía's exact production and authorship may be a mystery, but the environment in which it was produced is within grasp. The different layers of Spanish and P'urhépecha communities interwove themselves to produce the colonial community of Valladolid. *Cristos de caña* have come to represent a metaphor for early contact in all of colonial New Spain, as the religious historian Jennifer Schepher Hughes notes:

For historian William B. Taylor, these *cristos* also serve as an apt metaphor for emerging indigenous Christianity, which he regards as an authentically Indian construction, assembled, as pastiche, from adopted European symbols and meanings."¹⁴⁸

This thesis hopes to dispel the automatic reaction many scholars have had in the past, to see *pasta de caña* merely as a product of hybridity¹⁴⁹ and not as a multi-layered artistic medium, and therefore an expression of an artist's abilities as well as agency.

¹⁴⁷ Ashcroft, *On Post-Colonial Futures: Transformations of Colonial Culture*.

¹⁴⁸ Jennifer Schepher Hughes, *Biography of a Mexican Crucifix: Lived Religion and Local Faith from the Conquest to the Present* (Oxford, England; New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010). 36.

¹⁴⁹ I am referring to post-colonial writer Homi Bhabha's concepts of hybridity. See: Bhabha, "Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority under a Tree Outside Delhi, May 1817."

El Señor de la Sacristía is located in a metonymic gap of European and P'urhépecha visual conventions and methods of depicting religious male elites. Through the translation of European imagery, a colonial image of a crucified Christ emerges—also in a third space of interpretation.¹⁵⁰ I cannot speak to the intentionality of the artist who created *El Señor de la Sacristía*, but he was very likely indigenous and aware of both Spanish and P'urhépecha visual languages. A Spanish, *criollo*, *mestizo*, or P'urhépecha viewer would have interpreted *El Señor de la Sacristía* as the image of Christ, but each person's background would have influenced how they interpreted the sculpture's signifying attributes.

¹⁵⁰ Carbonell Cortés, "The Exotic Space of Cultural Translation."

Chapter 4: Conclusion

In this thesis I analyzed several images in order to develop the P'urhépecha male elite visual language and how it relates to religious materiality. By looking at the primary images from the sixteenth-century manuscript, the *Relación de Michoacán*, I demonstrated how important P'urhépecha male figures were depicted prior to Spanish occupation of Michoacán. Focusing on the multivalent aspects of *El Señor de la Sacristía* as connected to the visual language of P'urhépecha elite males, this analysis examines possible ways in which colonial imagery produced by the P'urhépecha and their descendants maintained indigenous agency, especially in the eighteenth century. I propose that materials' religious values continued from the initial P'urhépecha religious notions into colonial Michoacán as a Christian environment.

I examined objects that spoke to a male elite aesthetic for several reasons. Elite males are depicted the most frequently and with the largest amount of agency in the *Relación de Michoacán*, and their significance was not something I wanted to overlook. When the Spanish arrived and occupied Michoacán in 1524, the patriarchal society of the P'urhépecha was perpetuated. Power was understood in terms of male relations. By understanding the way that P'urhépecha male elites were depicted, we can see the progression of these modes into the later colonial period.

In dealing with *El Señor de la Sacristía*, I did not want to simply view the image and materiality of the Christ as a product of hybridity. The term hybridity that I am

referring to is that which was coined by the post-colonial theorist Homi Bhabha.¹⁵¹ In his book *As art historians Carolyn Dean and Dana Leibsohn put it, the term hybridity: “homogenizes things European and sets them in opposition to similarly homogenized non-European conventions. In short, hybridity is not so much the natural by-product of an ‘us’ meeting a ‘them’, but rather the recognition— creation—of an ‘us’ and a ‘them.’”*¹⁵² I did not merely want to pick apart *El Señor de la Sacristía* in order to show what was European and what was indigenous; neither did I wish to discuss how powerful and oppressive one group was over another.

Instead, I used the lens of appropriation, as art historian Robert Nelson understands it: “appropriation is not passive, objective, or disinterested, but active, subjective, and motivated.”¹⁵³ Nelson alludes to the fact that there is action in the act of appropriating works of art, which give agency to the group that appropriates. By developing the early practices of the P'urhépecha, I was able to show that there was a longstanding tradition of material and religious value in Michoacán prior to Spanish presence. The P'urhépecha were in communication, through commercial trade of materials, with many other Mesoamerican groups and thus had been practicing a type of appropriation with their visual language as well. Thus, I am not dealing with static visual and material cultures—they were constantly evolving and changing.

¹⁵¹ Bhabha refers to hybridity as a source and locus of tension and competition for power. I do not believe that *El Señor de la Sacristía* is necessarily a product of such power struggles. For more on Bhabha's concepts of hybridity, see: Bhabha, "Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority under a Tree Outside Delhi, May 1817."

¹⁵² Dean and Leibsohn, "Hybridity and Its Discontents: Considering Visual Culture in Colonial Spanish America." 6.

¹⁵³ Nelson, "Appropriation." 118.

Since I was primarily focusing on how an image could be interpreted, I found that post-colonial cultural translation theory was a good means of analysis. According to translation and documentation specialist Olvidio Carbonell Cortés:

context in which a text [or piece of art] is produced is of the utmost importance to any theory of cultural criticism that seeks to clarify the movement of signification that takes place in the semiotics of exotic worlds and alien spaces...¹⁵⁴

Historical events as well as notions of material value portrayed the context of the *Relación de Michoacán* as well as *El Señor de la Sacristía*. Carbonell Cortés states that there exists a gap between the two parties involved, in this case the Spanish and the P'urhépecha, where a signifier cannot be translated nor understood.¹⁵⁵ Many of the elements of materiality, religion, and imagery of the P'urhépecha *and* the Spanish exist in this space.

My thesis looks at production, materiality, and religion in colonial Michoacán. I on male elite images from the focus on *El Señor de la Sacristía* as a product of the ever-evolving religious environment of Michoacán. Multiple layers of value have been placed upon this particular *cristo de caña* and I analyzed how the sculpture could have been understood.

I also suggest that *El Señor de la Sacristía* exhibits imagery that would have resonated for P'urhépecha viewers and their descendants. The way that the Christ image is portrayed adheres to many of the conventions of European-Christian, yet they could also be understood in a P'urhépecha view. I believe that a P'urhépecha person may have

¹⁵⁴ Carbonell Cortés, "The Exotic Space of Cultural Translation." 81.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

understood the importance and religious value of *El Señor de la Sacristía* due to the cultural overlaps in both Spanish and P'urhépecha visual languages.

El Señor de la Sacristía is a visual manifestation of a metonymic gap. A metonymic gap is a literary function in post-colonial theory that plays on the colonized language and in some ways inserts the indigenous mode of communication. According to post-colonial theorist Bill Ashcroft defines the metonymic gap as:

the gap of silence installed in the text when some aspect of the operation of the mother language is imported in the text as a cultural synecdoche. Language used in this way allows the post-colonial to mediate the apparent fracture between signifier and the 'referent' through a constitution of the text as a transitive and transformative field of work. The abrogation of the ideology of a standard grammar which accompanies the appropriation of the colonial language is perhaps the most practical step in this process. Language is always an *act*, a message event, in which signification is the constructive achievement of the writer and reader functions, the field on to which the text tactically inserts its urgent material and political representations.¹⁵⁶

I shift the focus of this theory more to the interpretation of an image, replacing Ashcroft's word "text" for depiction—in this case of *El Señor de la Sacristía*.

It is in this gap, of both untranslatable and metonymic function where I place the signifying imagery of P'urhépecha male elite by the eighteenth century in colonial Michoacán. *El Señor de la Sacristía* is neither purely Spanish-Christian nor is it purely P'urhépecha. It is within these subtle overlaps of interpretation that the value of *pasta de caña*, gold, corn, and many other materials exist.

¹⁵⁶ Ashcroft, *On Post-Colonial Futures: Transformations of Colonial Culture*. 113.

Figures



Figure 1. Map of Mexico, with Michoacán highlighted in magenta, www.maps.com.



Figure 2. Map of Mesoamerica, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Chunchucmil-Mesoamerica-Map.png>.



Figure 3. Images from the *Relación de Michoacán* that will be analyzed in this thesis, from *Relación de las Cerimonias y Rictos y Población y Gobernación de los Indios de la Provincia de Mechucacán*, Jerónimo de Alcalá and Moisés Franco Mendoza, 2000.

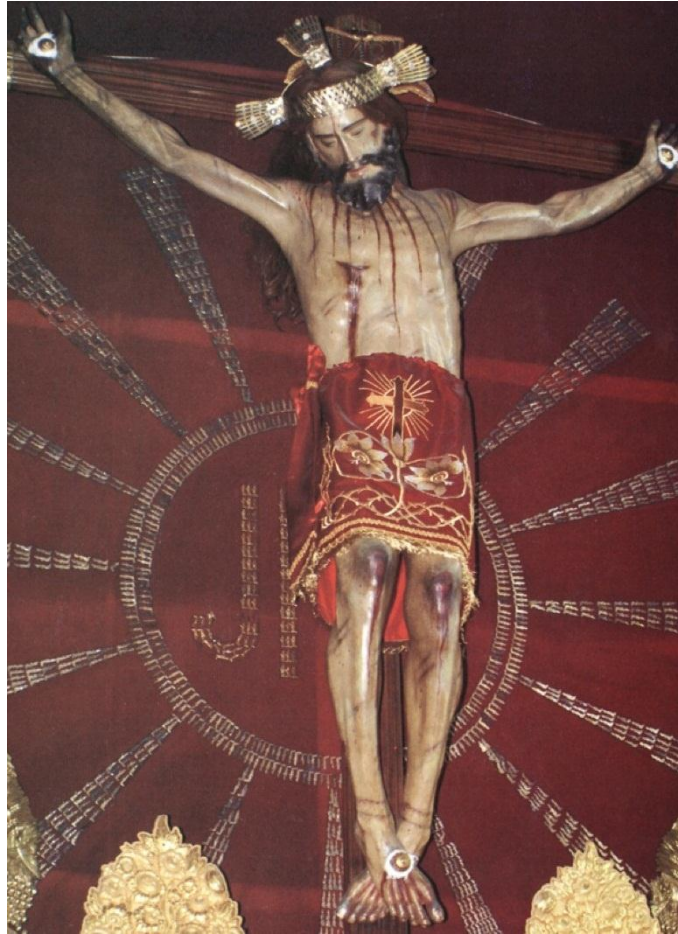


Figure 4. *El Señor de la Sacristía*, Cathedral of Morelia, from postcard in souvenir shop, 2010.



Figure 6. Detail of the *petámuti*, *sacerdote mayor*, from Figure 5, *Lámina XXX, Éstos son los sacerdotes y oficiales de los cues* [Those who are the priests and officials of the temples], from the *Relación de Michoacán*, from *Relación de las Cerimonias y Rictos y Población y Gobernación de los Indios de la Provincia de Mechuacán*, Jerónimo de Alcalá and Moisés Franco Mendoza, 2000.

[LÁMINA XXX]

Éstos son los sacerdotes y oficiales de los cúes.
Those who are the priests and officials of the temples.

los que ponían encienso
cúritecha
Those who put incense

petámuti
sacerdote mayor
Head priest

sacrificadores
axáméncha
Sacrificers

los que tenían de los pies a los sacrificados
hopítiecha
Those who had the feet of the sacrificed

los que llevaban los dioses a cuestras
thiví-mencha
Those who carried the gods on their backs

pazáriecha
los sacristanes
Sacristans

Those who brought branches
los que trayen ramas
curízitacha

Those who performed the ceremony of the war
los que hazían la cerimonia de la guerra
cuirípecha

Those who played the drums
los que tañían
los atables
atápacha

Those who dragged
los que los lleban
arrastrando

Those who played the horns
los que tañían las cornetas
púngacucha

Figure 7. Explanation of Figure 5, *Lámina XXX*, *Éstos son los sacerdotes y oficiales de los cúes* [Those who are the priests and officials of the temples], from the *Relación de Michoacán*, from the *Relación de Michoacán*, from *Relación de las Cerimonias y Rictos y Población y Gobernación de los Indios de la Provincia de Mechuacán*, Jerónimo de Alcalá and Moisés Franco Mendoza, 2000. English titles added by author.

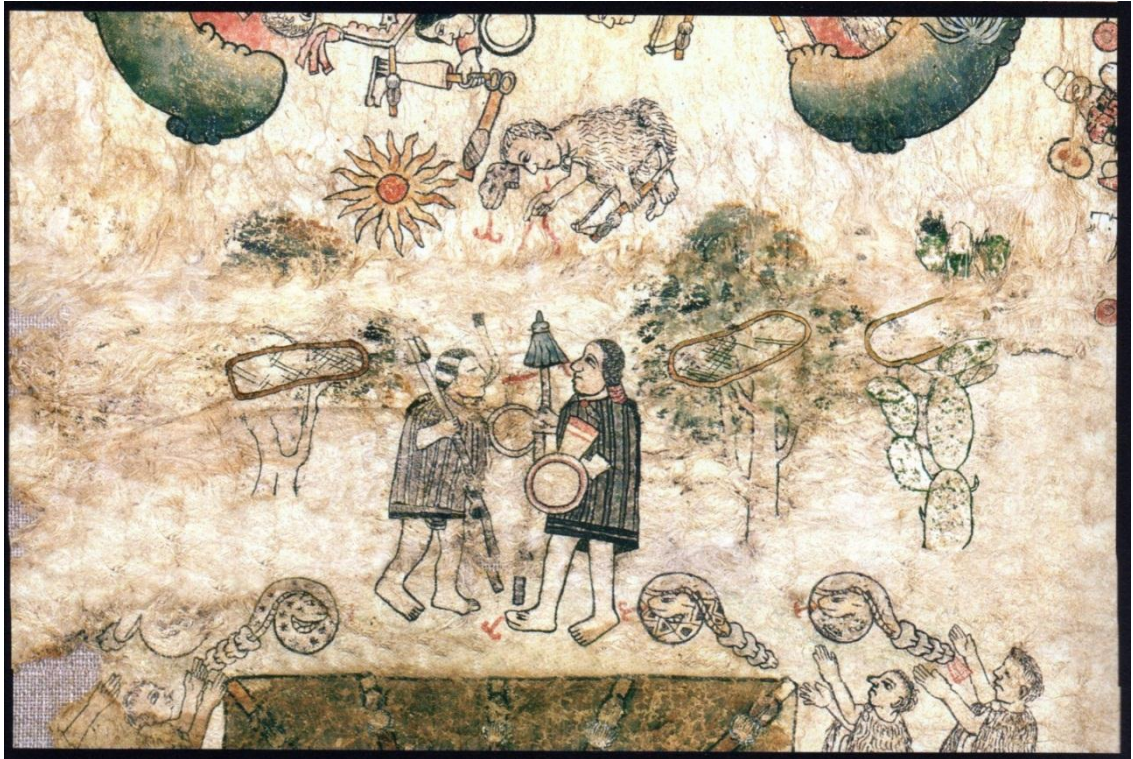


Figure 8. Quetzaltehueyac (left) and Ixicoatl (right) from the *Mapa de Cuauhtinchan No. 2, Cave, City, and Eagle's Nest: An Interpretive Journey Through the Mapa de Cuauhtinchan No. 2* David Carrasco and Scott, 2007.



Figure 9. Lámina XXXVIII from the *Relación de Michoacán*, depicting the Cazonci and his government, from *Relación de las Cerimonias y Rictos y Población y Governación de los Indios de la Provincia de Mechuacán*, Jerónimo de Alcalá and Moisés Franco Mendoza, 2000.



Figure 10. Detail of the *Cazonci* [king] from Figure 9, *Lámina XXXVIII, Relación de Michoacán* from *Relación de las Cerimonias y Rictos y Población y Gobernación de los Indios de la Provincia de Mechuacán*, Jerónimo de Alcalá and Moisés Franco Mendoza, 2000.



Figure 11. Detail of the *angatacuri* [governor] from Figure 9, *Lámina XXXVIII, Relación de Michoacán*, from *Relación de las Cerimonias y Rictos y Población y Gobernación de los Indios de la Provincia de Mechuacán*, Jerónimo de Alcalá and Moisés Franco Mendoza, 2000.



Figure 12. Detail of man seated from *Lámina XXXVIII, Relación de Michoacán*, from *Relación de las Cerimonias y Rictos y Población y Gobernación de los Indios de la Provincia de Mechuacán*, Jerónimo de Alcalá and Moisés Franco Mendoza, 2000.

[LÁMINA XXVIII]*



* Para facilitar la lectura de las láminas XXVIII, XXIX y XXX, se añaden estos cuadros que corresponden a la ubicación de las imágenes.

Figure 13. Explanation of *Lámina XXXVIII, Relación de Michoacán*, from *Relación de las Cerimonias y Rictos y Población y Gobernación de los Indios de la Provincia de Mechuacán*, Jerónimo de Alcalá and Moisés Franco Mendoza, 2000. English added by author.

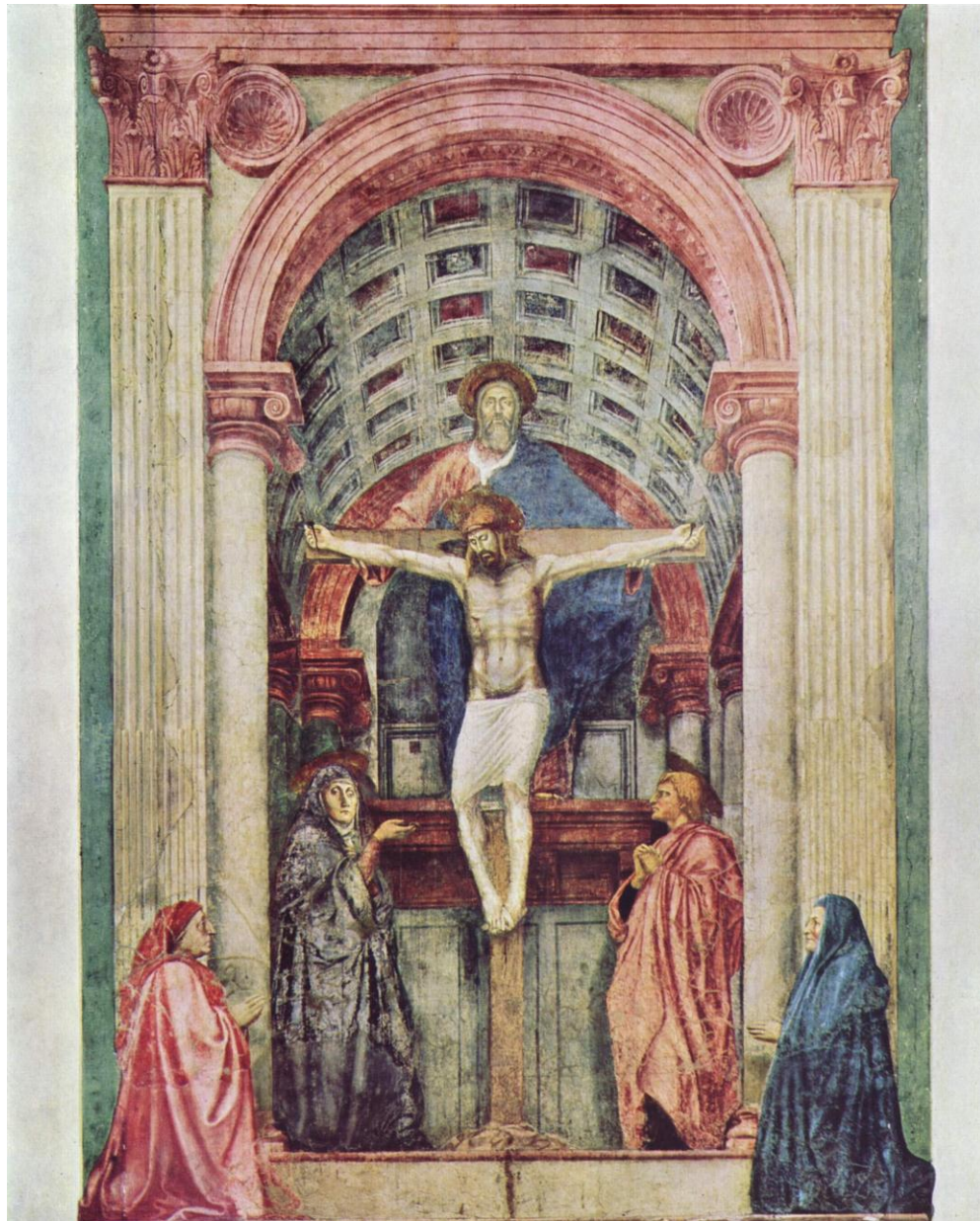


Figure 14. *Holy Trinity*, Masaccio, 1425, from *The Art Book*, Adam Butler, Claire Van Cleave, and Susan Stirling, 1994.



Figure 15. Marriage Scene from *Codex Borgia*, from *Los Templos del Cielo y de la Oscuridad: Oráculos y Liturgia, Libro Explicativo del Llamado Códice Borgia* (Museo Borgia P.F. Messicano 1) Biblioteca Apostólica Vaticana; Anders, Ferdinand; Jansen, Maarten E.R.G.N.; Reyes García, Luis, 1993.



Figure 16. Lámina II, *Había una fiesta llamada Equata cónsquaro* [There was a festival called *Equata Consquaro*], from the *Relación de Michoacán*, from *Relación de las Cerimonias y Rictos y Población y Gobernación de los Indios de la Provincia de Mechuacán*, Jerónimo de Alcalá and Moisés Franco Mendoza, 2000.



Figure 17. Detail of the *Sacerdote Mayor* [Head Priest], from Figure 16, *Lámina II, Había una fiesta llamada Equata cónsquaro* [There was a festival called *Equata Consquaro*], from the *Relación de Michoacán*, from *Relación de las Cerimonias y Rictos y Población y Gobernación de los Indios de la Provincia de Mechuacán*, Jerónimo de Alcalá and Moisés Franco Mendoza, 2000.



Figure 18. Detail of the *caciques* [Nobles], from *Lámina II, Había una fiesta llamada Equata cónsquaro* [There was a festival called *Equata Consquaro*], from the *Relación de Michoacán*, from the *Relación de las Cerimonias y Rictos y Población y Gobernación de los Indios de la Provincia de Mechuacán*, Jerónimo de Alcalá and Moisés Franco Mendoza, 2000.

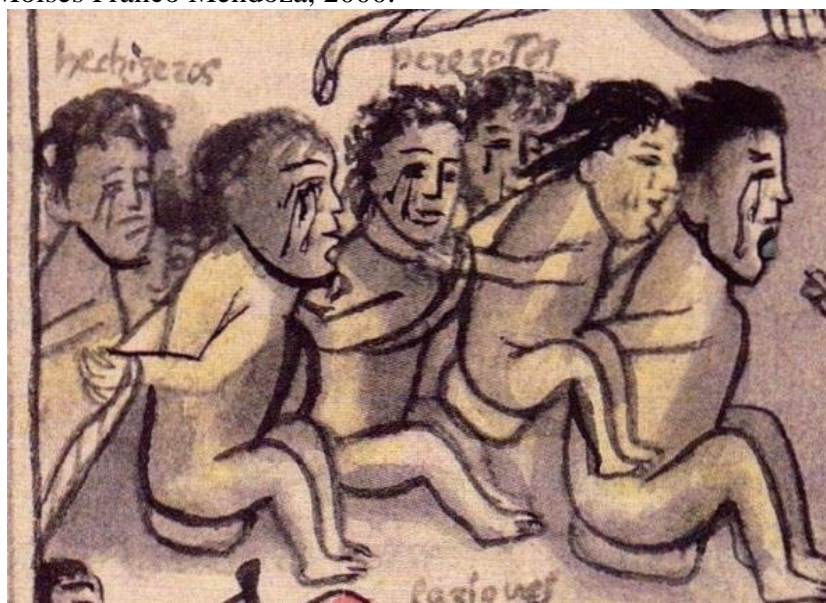
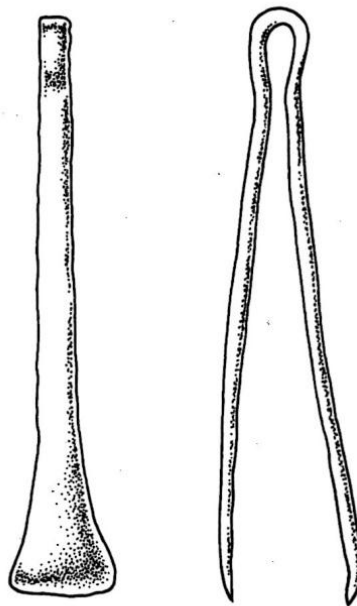


Figure 19. “*hechizeros*” and “*perezosos*”, from Figure 16, *Lámina II, Había una fiesta llamada Equata cónsquaro* [There was a festival called *Equata Consquaro*], from the *Relación de Michoacán*, from the *Relación de Michoacán*, from the *Relación de Michoacán*, from the *Relación de las Cerimonias y Rictos y Población y Gobernación de los Indios de la Provincia de Mechuacán*, Jerónimo de Alcalá and Moisés Franco Mendoza, 2000.



Figure 20. *Capitán general* [Captain General], from *Lámina II, Había una fiesta llamada Equata cónsquaro* [There was a festival called *Equata Consquaro*], from the *Relación de Michoacán*, from the *Relación de Michoacán*, from the *Relación de Michoacán*, from *Relación de las Cerimonias y Rictos y Población y Gobernación de los Indios de la Provincia de Mechuacán*, Jerónimo de Alcalá and Moisés Franco Mendoza, 2000.



0 1 2cm

3.13

West Mexican beam tweezer. Front and profile view. In profile view in some specimens, the blade begins to angle in toward the tip at approximately the midpoint (see tweezers illustrated in Meighan 1976, for example).

Figure 21. West Mexican beam tweezer, from *The Sounds and Colors of Power: The Sacred Metallurgical Technology of Ancient West Mexico*, Dorothy Hosler, 1994.

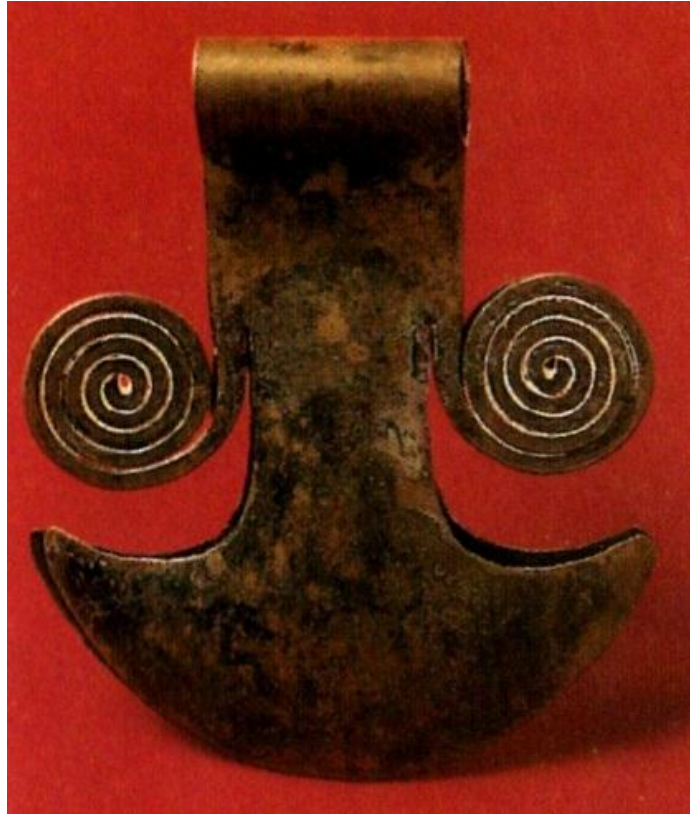
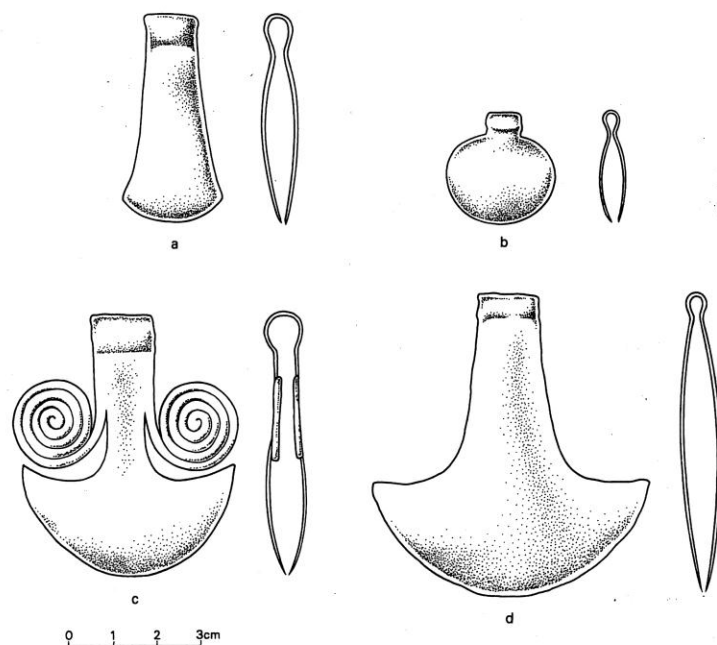


Figure 22. Spiral Tweezer, from the Museo Nacional de Antropología, Mexico City, from *Arte Tarasco*, Pastrana Flores, Gabriel Miguel, 1999.



Shell tweezer designs; front and profile.

Figure 23. Reconstruction of spiral tweezer fabrication sequence, from *The Sounds and Colors of Power: The Sacred Metallurgical Technology of Ancient West Mexico*, Dorothy Hosler, 1994.

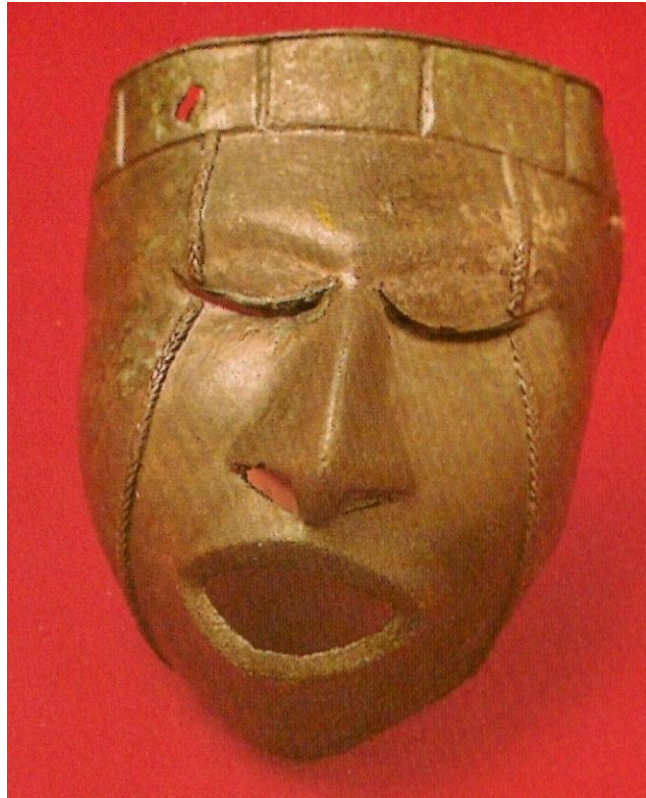


Figure 24. Copper Mask of Xipe Totec, located at the Museo Nacional de Antropología, Mexico City, from *Arte Tarasco*, Pastrana Flores, Gabriel Miguel, 1999.



Figure 25. Turquoise and obsidian lip plugs, Museo Nacional de Antropología, Mexico City, from *Arte Tarasco*, Pastrana Flores, Gabriel Miguel, 1999.



Figure 26. Mixtec turquoise and wood shield Museo Nacional de Antropología, Mexico City, 2011. Photograph by author.



Figure 27. Mixtec turquoise and gold pectoral piece, *The Legend of Lord Eight Deer: An Epic of Ancient Mexico*, John M. D. Pohl, 2002.

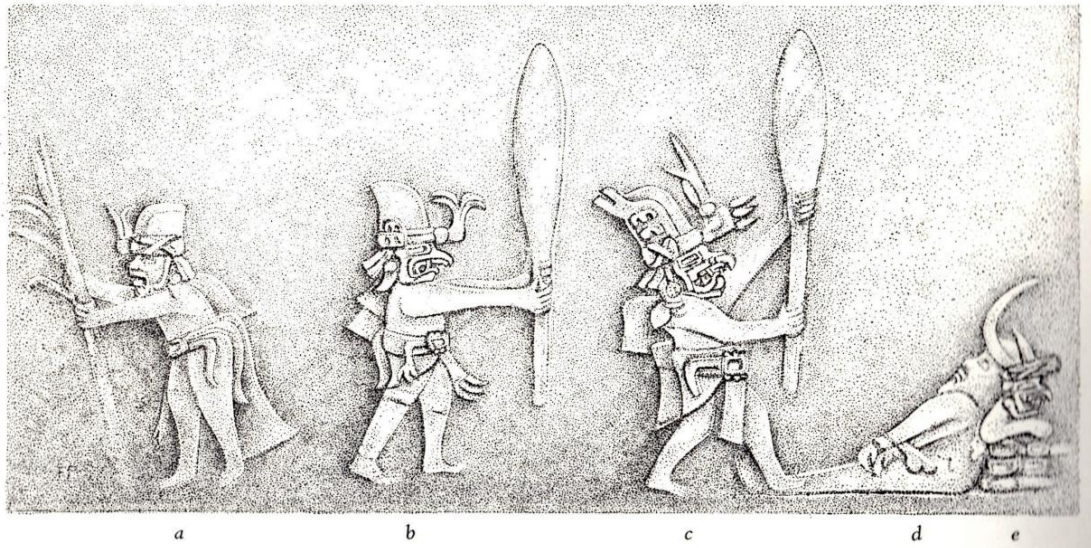


Figure 28. Relief 2, Station A, Chalcatzingo, Mexico, from *Chalcatzingo*, Carlo T. E. Gay, and Frances Pratt, 1971.



Figure 29. Detail of Olmec figure with corn stalk, Relief 2, Station A, Chalcacingo, Mexico, from *Chalcacingo*, Carlo T. E. Gay, and Frances Pratt, 1971.



Figure 30. Detail of *Tareta Vaxátati*, *mayordomos de sembreras* [Stewards of the crops], from Figure 5, *Lámina XXXVIII*, *Relación de Michoacán*, from *Relación de las Cerimonias y Rictos y Población y Gobernación de los Indios de la Provincia de Mechuacán*, Jerónimo de Alcalá and Moisés Franco Mendoza, 2000.



Figure 31. Images of corn from the *Florentine Codex*, from *Los Señores del Maíz: Tecnología Alimentaria en Mesoamérica*, Virginia García Acosta and Ignacio Pérez-Duarte, 1990. Compiled by author.

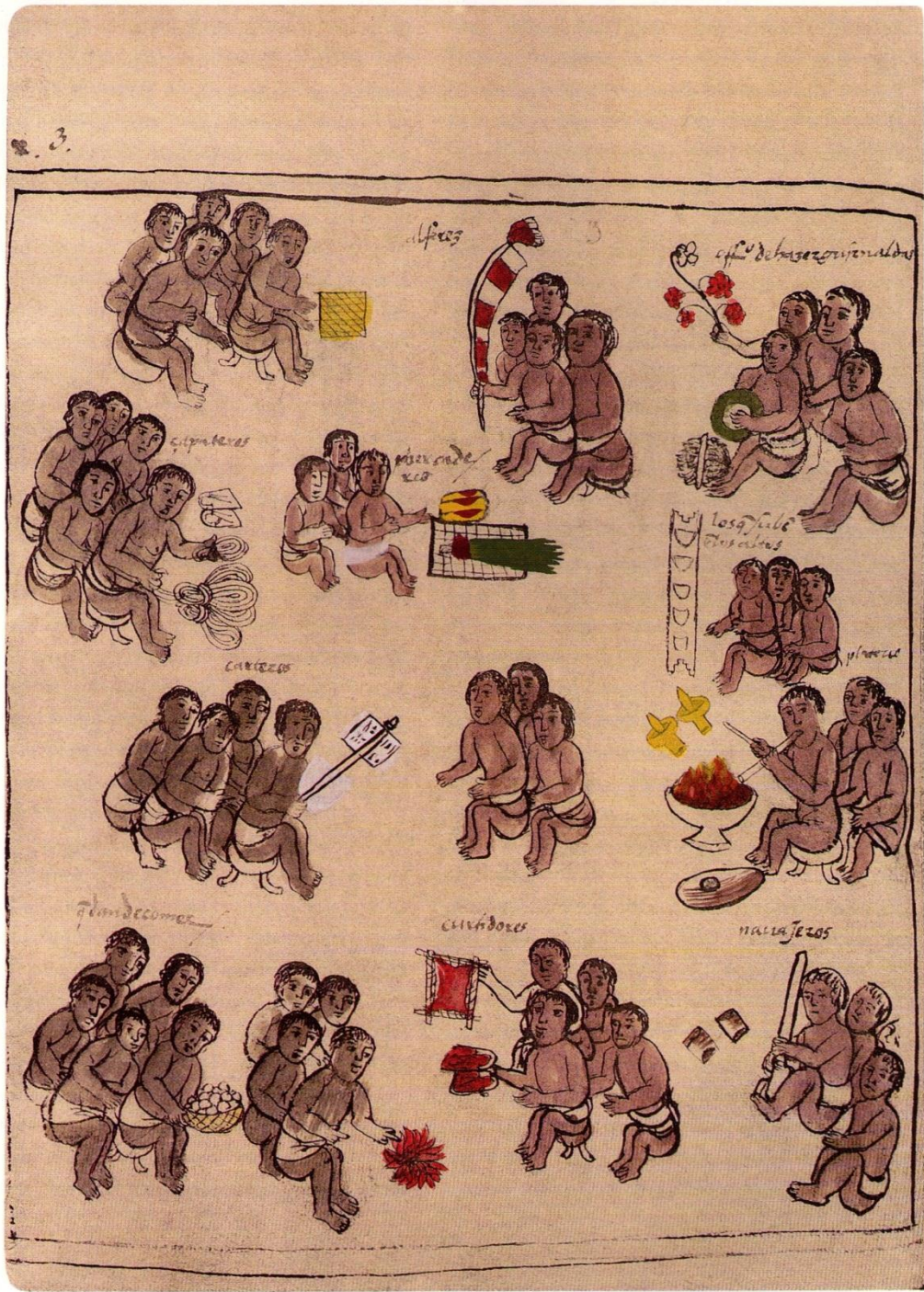


Figure 32. Lámina XXIX, Image depicting artisans, from the *Relación de Michoacán*, from *Relación de las Cerimonias y Rictos y Población y Gobernación de los Indios de la Provincia de Mechuacán*, Jerónimo de Alcalá and Moisés Franco Mendoza, 2000.

[LÁMINA XXIX]

	alférez Official who carry the flags	oficio de hacer guirnaldas Job of making garlands
zapateros Shoemakers	mercaderes Merchants	los que suben en los altos Those who climb high
	carteros Postmen	plateros Silversmiths
[los] que dan de comer Those who eat	curtidores Tanners	navajeros Knife makers

¹ Alférez. Oficial que lleva la bandera.

Figure 33. Explanation of Figure 32, *Lámina XXIX*, Image depicting artisans, from the *Relación de Michoacán*, from *Relación de las Cerimonias y Rictos y Población y Gobernación de los Indios de la Provincia de Mechuacán*, Jerónimo de Alcalá and Moisés Franco Mendoza, 2000. English titles added by author.

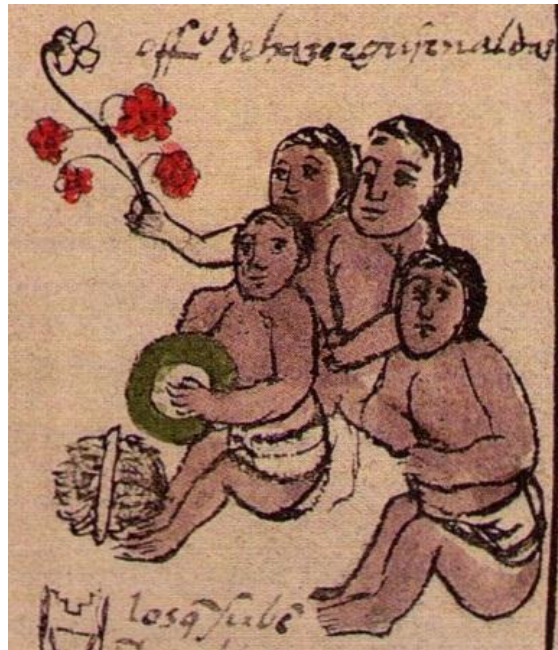


Figure 34. Detail of *Oficio de hacer guirnaldas* [Job of making garlands], from Figure 32, *Lámina XXIX*, from the *Relación de Michoacán*, from *Relación de las Cerimonias y Rictos y Población y Gobernación de los Indios de la Provincia de Mechuacán*, Jerónimo de Alcalá and Moisés Franco Mendoza, 2000.



Figure 35. Detail from *Lámina XXIX*, *Plateros* [Silversmiths], from the *Relación de Michoacán*, from *Relación de las Cerimonias y Rictos y Población y Gobernación de los Indios de la Provincia de Mechuacán*, Jerónimo de Alcalá and Moisés Franco Mendoza, 2000.

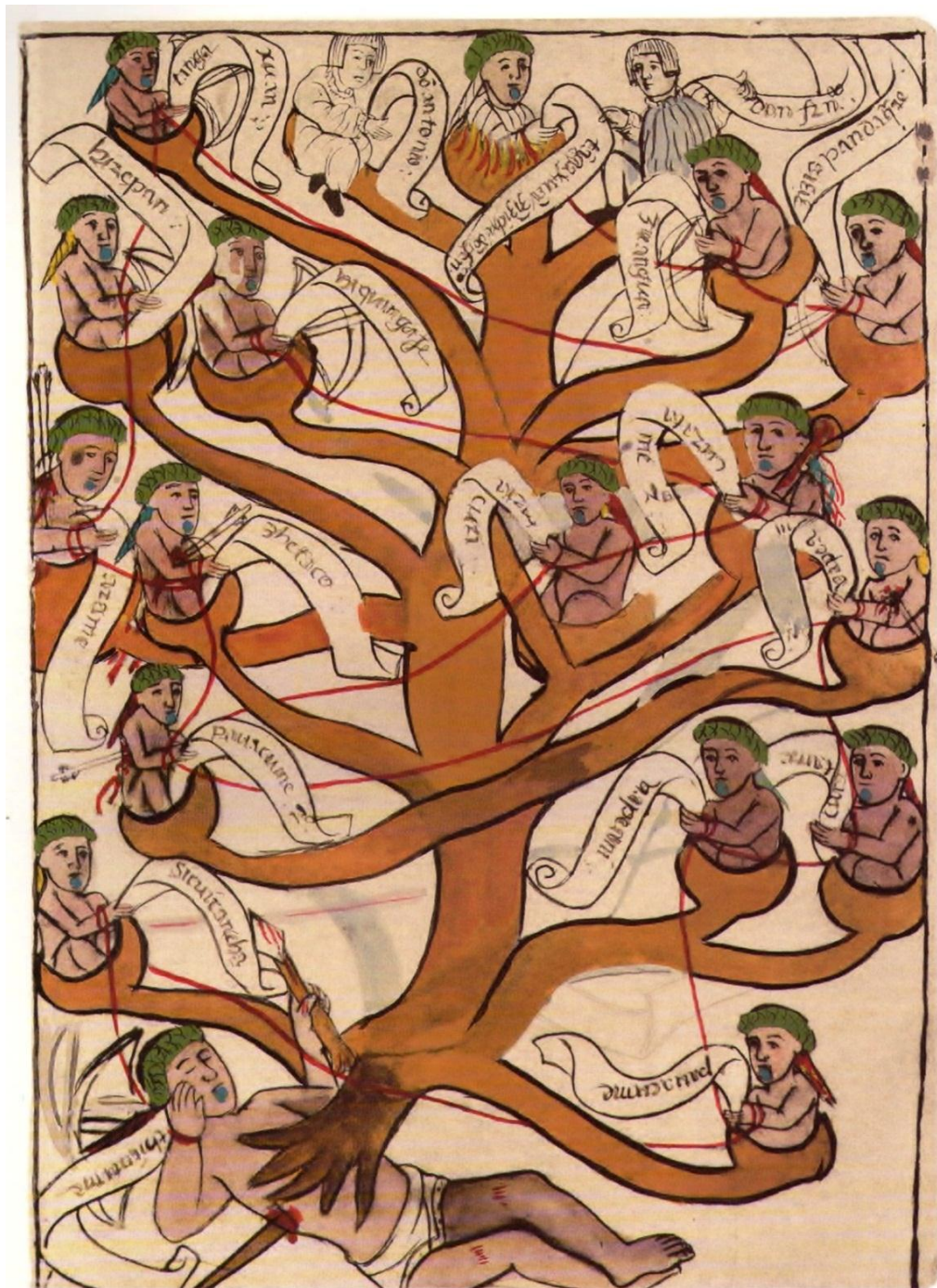


Figure 36. Lámina XXVII, *Genealogio de los señores de Pazquaro y cuyacan y Michuacan* [Genealogy of the nobles from Pátzcuaro and Cuyacan and Michoacán], from the *Relación de Michoacán*, from *Relación de las Cerimonias y Rictos y Población y Gobernación de los Indios de la Provincia de Mechuacán*, Jerónimo de Alcalá and Moisés Franco Mendoza, 2000.



Figure 37. Detail of Don Francisco Tariácuri (right) and Don Antonio Huitziméngari (left), from Figure 36, *Lámina XXVII, Genealogio de los señores Pazcuaro y cuyacan y Michuacan* [Genealogy of the nobles from Pátzcuaro and Cuyacan and Michoacán], from the *Relación de Michoacán*, from *Relación de las Cerimonias y Rictos y Población y Gobernación de los Indios de la Provincia de Mechuacán*, Jerónimo de Alcalá and Moisés Franco Mendoza, 2000.

Table 13: Petitions in Spanish by P'urhépecha Nobles, 1542 - 1642

Year	Caballo	Espada o Arma	Vaca	Silla y Freno
1543	1			
1555	4		1	
1576		1	1	
1589	6	1	2	
1590	12	4	2	
1591	3	3		1
1592	3		1	
1593			1	1
1596	1			
1606	2	1		1
1620	1			1
1629	1			
1633	3	1		
1641	1	1		3
1642	2	2		1

Source: Information compiled by Gabany-Guerrero from Sarrelangue (1965: 345-367)

Figure 38. Petitions in Spanish by P'urhépecha Nobles, 1542-1642, from *Deciphering the Symbolic Heritage of the Tarascan Empire: Interpreting the Political Economy of the Pueblo-Hospital of Parangaricutiro, Michoacán*, Tricia Gabany-Guerrero, 1999.

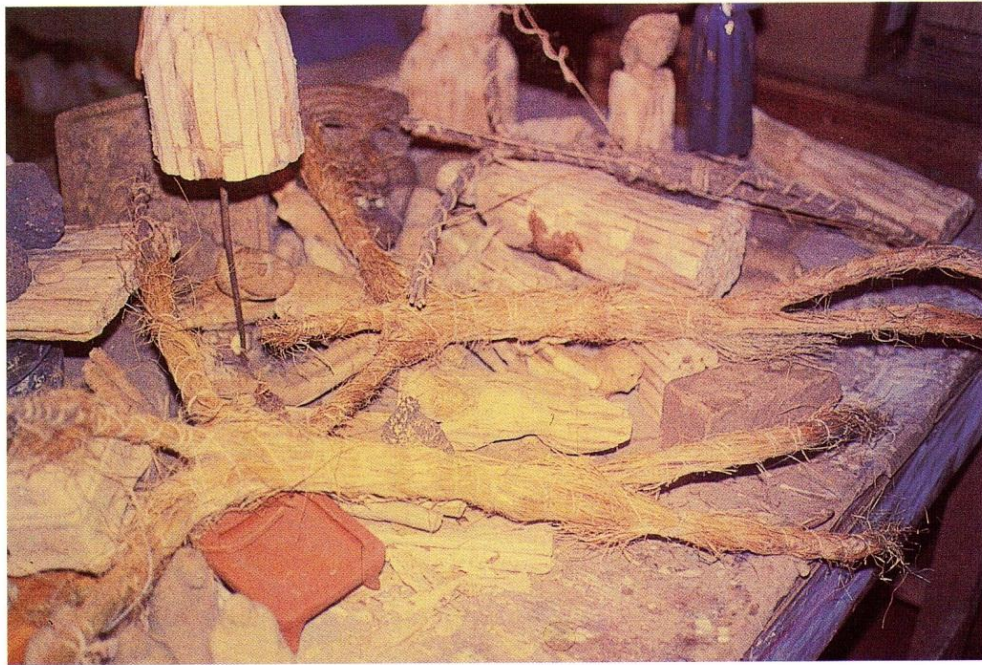


Figure 39. Corn stalk for the base of the pasta de caña sculptures. Contemporary pasta de caña studio, from *Imaginería Michoacana en Caña de Maíz: Estudio Histórico y Catálogo de Imágenes en Morelia, Tupátaro, Pátzcuaro, Tzintzuntzan, Quiroga y Santa Fe de la Laguna, Michoacán, Siglos XVI-XVIII*, Sofía Irene Velarde Cruz, 2003.



Figure 40. Corn pith and orchid bulb made into a paste, from *Imaginería Michoacana en Caña de Maíz: Estudio Histórico y Catálogo de Imágenes en Morelia, Tupátaro, Pátzcuaro, Tzintzuntzan, Quiroga y Santa Fe de la Laguna, Michoacán, Siglos XVI-XVIII*, Sofía Irene Velarde Cruz, 2003.

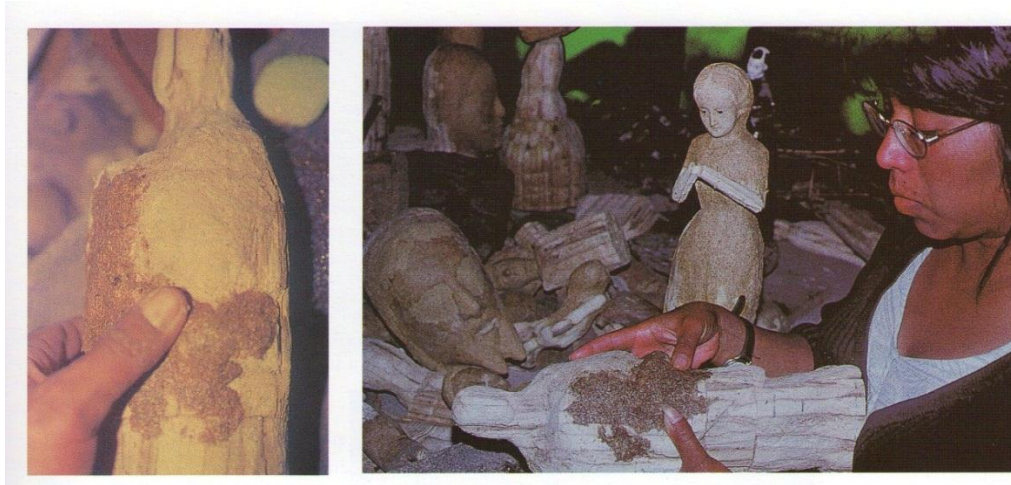


Figure 41. Corn paste is spread on the base of the sculpture, from *Imaginería Michoacana en Caña de Maíz: Estudio Histórico y Catálogo de Imágenes en Morelia, Tupátaro, Pátzcuaro, Tzintzuntzan, Quiroga y Santa Fe de la Laguna, Michoacán, Siglos XVI-XVIII*, Sofía Irene Velarde Cruz, 2003.



Figure 42. After paste is dry, the sculpture is painted, from *Imaginería Michoacana en Caña de Maíz: Estudio Histórico y Catálogo de Imágenes en Morelia, Tupátaro, Pátzcuaro, Tzintzuntzan, Quiroga y Santa Fe de la Laguna, Michoacán, Siglos XVI-XVIII*, Sofía Irene Velarde Cruz, 2003.



Figure 43. *El Señor de la Sacristía*, Cathedral of Morelia, from postcard in souvenir shop, 2010.

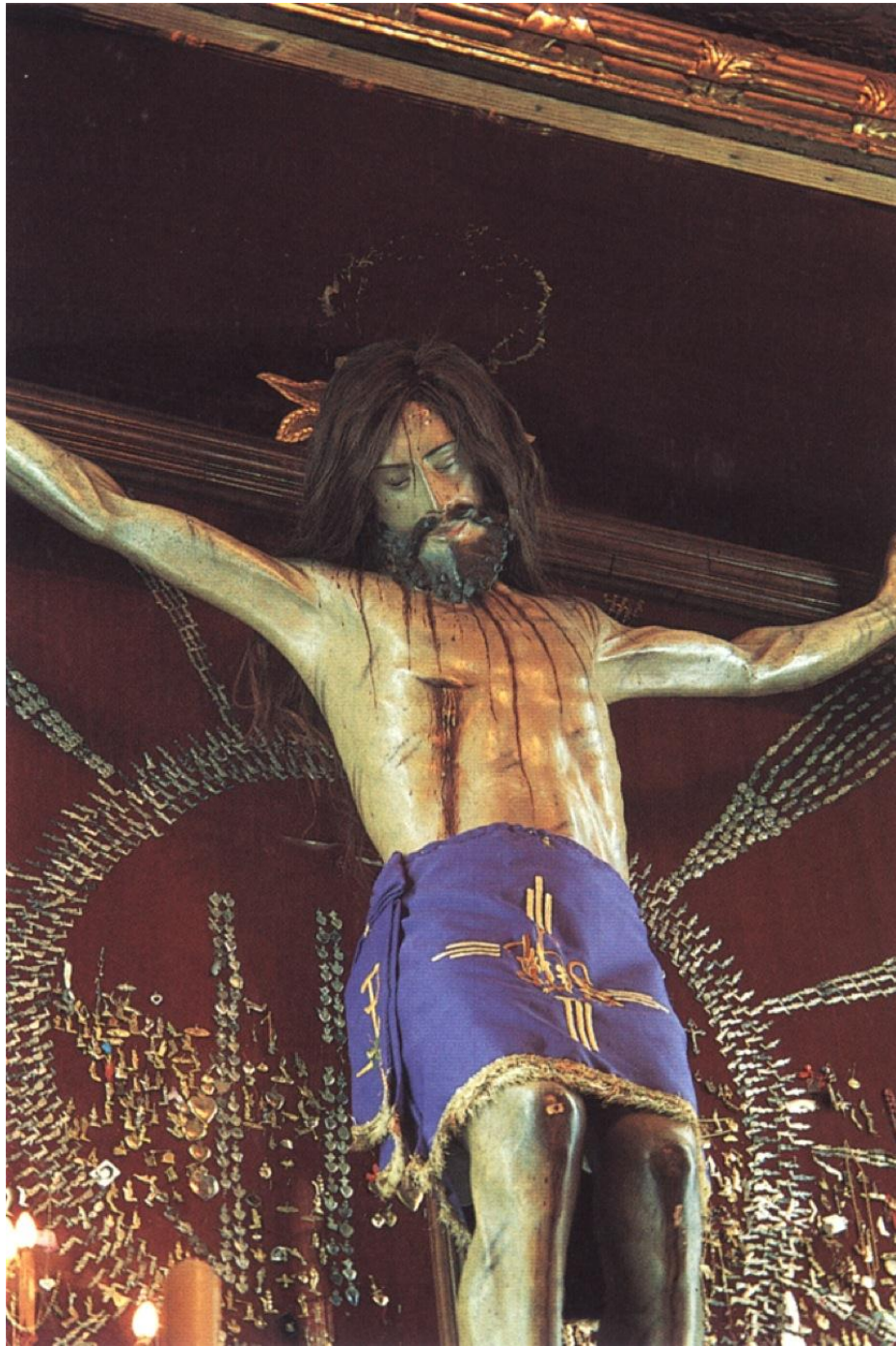


Figure 44. *El Señor de la Sacristía* in blue garment, Cathedral of Morelia, from *Imaginería Indígena Mexicana: Una Catequesis en Caña de Maíz*, Antonio F. García-Abásolo, Gabriela García Lascrain, Joaquín Sánchez Ruiz, 2011.



Figure 45. Detail of figure 44, *El Señor de la Sacristía*, Cathedral of Morelia, from *Imaginería Indígena Mexicana: Una Catequesis en Caña de Maíz*, Antonio F. García-Abásolo, Gabriela García Lascurain, Joaquín Sánchez Ruiz, 2011.



Figure 46. Detail of *El Señor de la Sacristía* with crown, Cathedral of Morelia, <http://bancoimagenesmorelia.blogspot.com/2007/07/en-catedral.html>.



Figure 47. Older photograph of *El Señor de la Sacristía*, Cathedral of Morelia, *Catedral de Morelia: Tres Ensayos*, Manuel González Galván, 1989.

Table 7.3 The Prehispanic Tarascan Calendar

<i>Tarascan Months</i> 1541	<i>Matlatzinca Months</i>	<i>Aztec Months</i> (1521)
Apr 9–28 (?)	In Thacari (great time)	Hueytozotli Apr 14 (long watch)
Apr 29–May 18 (?)	In Dehuni (to roast maize)	Toxcatl May 4 (dry thing)
May 19– <u>Jun 7</u> Mazcuto	In Thecamoni (?)	Etzalcualiztli May 24 (maize/beans meal)
Jun 8–27 Ecuata Conscuaro (great gathering)	In Thirimehui (small change)	Tecuilhuitontli June 13 (small feast of lords)
Jun 28– <u>Jul 17</u> Caheri Conscuaro	In Tamehui (great change)	Hueytecuilhuitl Jul 3 (great feast of lords)
Jul 18–Aug 6 Hanciuascuaro (catch rebels)	In Iscatholohui (small death)	Tlaxochimaco Jul 23 (small feast of dead)
Aug 7–Aug 26 Hicuandiro (purification)	Ima Thitohui (great death)	Xocotlhuetzi Aug 12 (great feast of dead)
Aug 27–Sep 15 Sicuindiro (flaying)	Itzbacha (broom)	Ochpaniztli Sep 1 (sweeping)
Sep 16–Oct 5 Charapu Zapi (small moss)	In Toxiqui (small moss)	Teotleco Sep 21 (gods arrive)
Oct 6– <u>Oct 25</u> Uapanscuaro (barrios join)	In Thaxiqui (great moss)	Tepeilhuitl Oct 11 (mountains)
Oct 26–Nov 14 Caheri Uapanscuaro (great barrios)	In Thechaqui (night heron)	Quecholli Oct 31 (flamingo)
Nov 15–Dec 4 (?)	In Thechotahui (the twins)	Panquetzaliztli Nov 20 (raising flags)
Dec 5–Dec 24 Peuanscuaro	In Teyabihitzen (fall from above)	Atemoztli Dec 10 (water falls)
Dec 25–Jan 13 Curindaro (bread offer)	In Thaxitohui (grandfather)	Tititl Dec 30 (shrunk)

Figure 48. Prehispanic Tarascan (*P'urhépecha*) Calendar, *Tariacuri's Legacy: The Prehispanic Tarascan State*, Helen Perlstein Pollard, 1993.



Figure 49. Detail of *thivímencha* from Lámina XXX, *Éstos son los sacerdotes y oficiales de los cues*, from the *Relación de Michoacán*, from *Relación de las Cerimonias y Rictos y Población y Gobernación de los Indios de la Provincia de Mechuacán*, Jerónimo de Alcalá and Moisés Franco Mendoza, 2000.



Figure 50. Contemporary procession with young corn stalks, Capacuaro, Michoacán, from *México, Genio que Perdura*, Antonio Vizcaíno, María del Carmen Aguilera García, and Porfirio Martínez Peñaloza, 1988.

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