

Monumentalizing metaphors: diphraasis in the murals of Tulum

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Abstract: At Tulum, as well as other Maya sites in the Yucatan Peninsula, mural painting traditions are related to the style and symbol-set associated with Central Mexican manuscript cultures. The murals reflect the widespread Postclassic Mesoamerican manuscript cultures flourishing from the twelfth to sixteenth centuries AD, during which iconic and logosyllabic scripts were used in the construction of regionally distinct manuscript forms. The murals at Tulum relate to manuscript culture not only in their style and symbol set, but also in their use of metaphorical dualisms, in which significant iconic elements are contrasted as an indicator of a more abstract concept. Recognizing metaphorical juxtaposition as an underlying principle of Mesoamerican ritual language, this paper discusses the process by which manuscripts become monuments and considers the sacred metaphors painted on the temples of Tulum as mechanisms for reinforcing political power.

Keywords: Mesoamerica, Postclassic, Maya, murals, metaphor, diphraasis

Introduction

The Temple of the Diving God at Tulum, in Mexico's Yucatan peninsula, overlooks the Caribbean Sea. Once the home of murals painted in a brilliant blue, all that remains now are faded traces of pigment on the off-white plaster walls. Visitors to the temple in its apogee, between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, would have been greeted first by the flowers and repeated patterns of the exterior murals as they made their way up the small staircase (Figs. 1, 8). Upon passing underneath the Diving Figure located above the door and entering the temple, visitors would come face to face with images outlined

in black against a blue pigmented background (Figs. 2, 9). In parallel scenes, male and female pairs exchange staffs laden with knots and serpents, symbolic icons of rulership (Masson 2015: 234). The female figures, identified by their *quechquemiltl* garment, are seated on small stools with their feet on knotted cords. Each pair is enclosed within a frame of intertwined serpents, from whose bodies emerge flowers with solar and nocturnal elements at their centre (Taubé 2010: 146). The scene takes place underneath a celestial band in which representations of day and night repeat themselves, above which lies another banner of repeating elements related to authority. At the end of this banner emerges the head of the Maya supernatural being K'awiil. It is against this backdrop, in this small temple, that visitors would perform rituals underneath a small window aligned with the rising and setting of the sun in the eastern Maya city of Tulum.

Alongside Maya religious iconography, the murals at Tulum employ a style and set of iconic symbols used within the manuscript traditions of Central Mexico in a synthesis of both regional traditions. The murals have been interpreted as physical manifestations of the 'social sources of kin-based power' which 'formed important components of regional political institutions' (Masson 2015: 194). More than simply emulating a foreign style and incorporating foreign symbols, the murals at Tulum also manipulate many of the metaphorical dualities which appear in ritual contexts in these manuscripts.

The development of regional hybridity in art is unsurprising, as Late Postclassic Mesoamerica (AD 1200–1521) was an interconnected place characterized by intense interregional interaction (Berdan et al. 2003). Tulum, a city located in a strategic trading location, participated in the Yucatecan coastal trade network (Freidel and Sabloff 1984; Sabloff and Rathje 1975; Thompson 1970). Tulum played a significant economic role in this network, maintaining an active relationship with other sites in the Northern Lowlands as well as participating in a more extensive trade network stretching from Tabasco to Honduras to Central Mexico (Milbrath and Peraza Lope 2003; Rubio 2014: 51). Beyond the strategic location of Tulum as a port city, it is also located near the island of Cozumel, an important pilgrimage site throughout the Postclassic period (Freidel and Sabloff 1984; Patel 2005: 91).

The presence of Tulum within these international networks is complemented by the use of an international form of visual culture, suggesting an environment in which people from many cultural groups were interacting on a regular basis. The widespread use of such an international visual culture indicates its portability and adaptability, as 'the larger the size of the public that reckons with a semiotic technology (or any of its privileged points, orders and periods), the more portable it is' (Kockelman and Bernstein 2010: 345). The trade-based economy was uniquely positioned to benefit from using a representational system so widely portable, with the potential to ease tensions in multi-

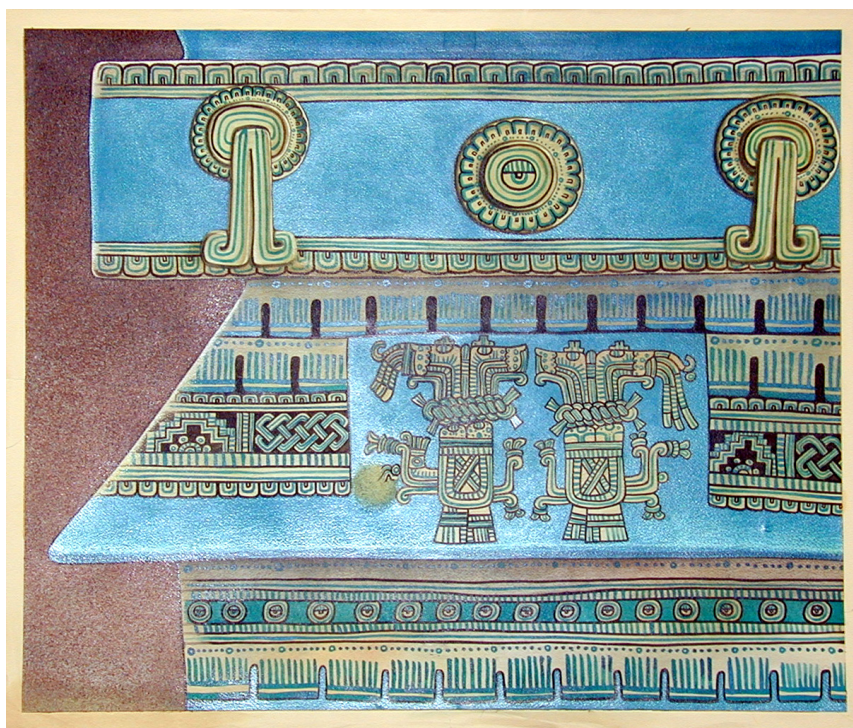


Fig. 1: Exterior of Tulum Structure 5, the Temple of the Diving God. Mural reconstruction by Felipe Davalos in A. G. Miller (1982). Reproduced with permission.

ethnic trading contexts (A. G. Miller 1982: 77; Freidel and Sabloff 1984). The spread of portable media facilitates a connecting of space among participants in this sphere of shared symbols, linking together geographically disparate political and religious organizations. The sharing of these symbols also assisted in maintaining an international elite identity through architecture laden with esoteric religious symbolism, allowing elites to mark their membership in this system through their knowledge and manipulation of significant symbols (Schortman et al. 2001: 313). The incorporation of widespread dualities within the murals at Tulum ensures the maximum portability of the murals, drawing on pan-Mesoamerican understandings of the relations between things. As a port city involved in long-distance trade and which likely had visitors from across the Mesoamerican world, Tulum had clear interest in participating in this shared system of portable symbols.

This paper will first review Postclassic Mesoamerican manuscript cultures and the transition from manuscript to mural. It will then discuss the metaphors expressed at Tulum

focusing on the dualisms of the solar and the nocturnal and of the knot and the seat, and the presence of similar metaphors in Mesoamerican manuscripts. Finally, the impact of emulating this manuscript culture on the walls of the Temple of the Diving God within the context of ancestor worship will be considered. The use of an international style and symbol set to invoke sacred metaphors related to authority and time allowed the people of Tulum to work within a medium capable of transcending cultural boundaries and not restricted to any specific linguistic tradition. It will be argued that the content of the murals complements the monumentality of the temple through the manipulation of a metaphorically complex semiotic system in which ritually significant dualisms are employed in support of the political rulership of Tulum.

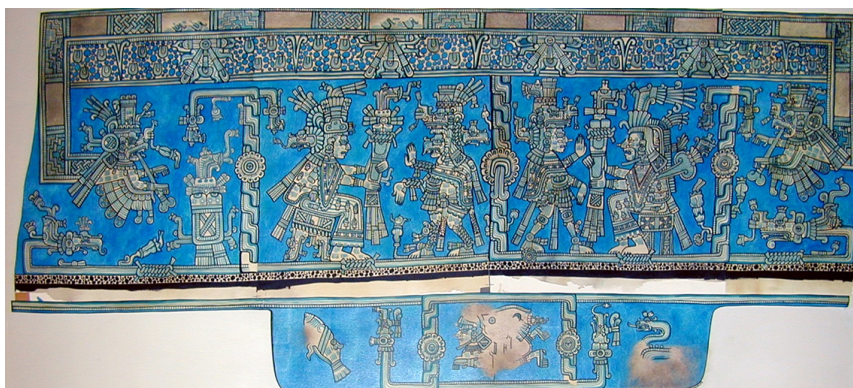


Fig. 2: Interior of Tulum Structure 5, the Temple of the Diving God. Mural reconstruction by Felipe Davalos in A. G. Miller (1982). Reproduced with permission.

Postclassic Mesoamerican manuscripts

Throughout the Postclassic period multiple Mesoamerican cultures, including the Maya, Mixtec, and Central Mexican, produced painted manuscript books on deer-hide and native paper. These manuscripts recorded important religious and genealogical knowledge and were widespread, although only a few exist today due to the destruction of many of them during the Spanish Conquest (Boone 2000, 2007; Jansen 2015). While the Maya, Central Mexican, and Mixtec manuscript traditions differ in graphic form, internal logic, and structuring principles, there is evidence of borrowing between them in the form of shared symbols, with both iconic and phonetic symbols appearing in combination to 'mutually reinforce each other in the interest of communication' (Jansen 2015: 242). Over a century of research has demonstrated similarities between the Maya and Central Mexi-

can codices related to the use of almanacs, calendrical tables, and religious iconography, with some scholars suggesting that scribes from these communities were in close contact (Nowotny et al. 2005; Thompson 1934). The manuscripts are additionally related in their use of the *pars pro toto* principle, in which elements of glyphs or deities are isolated and abstracted to serve as representations of the whole.

The Maya people produced manuscripts written in Maya hieroglyphs which most likely record a prestige language (Figs. 3, 10).¹ Maya writing is logosyllabic, using a complex script that includes both logographic glyphs representing words and syllabic glyphs representing sounds. These glyphs are often highly stylized and demonstrate a concern for aesthetics, with writing and art often mutually reinforcing and blending into each other. This fluidity is visible in the Maya word *aj tz'ib*, a noun which translates as 'scribe' but indicates the acts of both painting and writing, demonstrating their close relationship (Stuart 1987: 2). While Maya manuscripts primarily record auguries in the Maya hieroglyphic writing system, they also incorporate the Postclassic International Symbol Set used in the Central Mexican codices (Vail 2004: 10). This symbol set is a non-phonetic system of graphic representation used by many cultures across the Postclassic Mesoamerican world. Despite Maya hieroglyphic manuscripts being generally contemporaneous with the murals at Tulum, no Maya hieroglyphs are present in the murals at Tulum. This is in juxtaposition to the murals at Santa Rita Corozal, another coastal Maya site, in which Maya hieroglyphs coexist alongside the International Symbol Set (Gann 1900). The Santa Rita Corozal murals demonstrate that the mural form does not intrinsically reject hieroglyphic texts, making the lack of hieroglyphs in the Tulum murals notable.

While phonetic writing systems communicate information through the use of glyphs with specific phonetic readings, the complex semasiographic systems of the Central Mexican and Mixtec manuscripts allow information to be communicated in an iconic manner without a reliance on phonetic symbols or spoken language. Instead, the Central Mexican and Mixtec manuscripts record information through a representational code based on a precise system of pictography. These systems primarily use iconic signs, which share qualities with the referent, and indexical signs, which have a natural relation to the referent (Jansen and Pérez Jiménez 2010). Many Mesoamerican signs may be understood as both iconic and indexical: the footprint sign shares iconic qualities with a real footprint and is also a natural referent for movement, allowing the sign to be read as a journey.

Semasiographic systems may include symbols with phonetic values, but overwhelmingly

¹ There are only four surviving Maya manuscripts: the Dresden Codex, the Madrid Codex, and the Paris Codex, all of which are named based on the cities in which they reside, and the Códice Maya de México, formerly known as the Grolier codex (Martínez del Campo Lanz 2018).

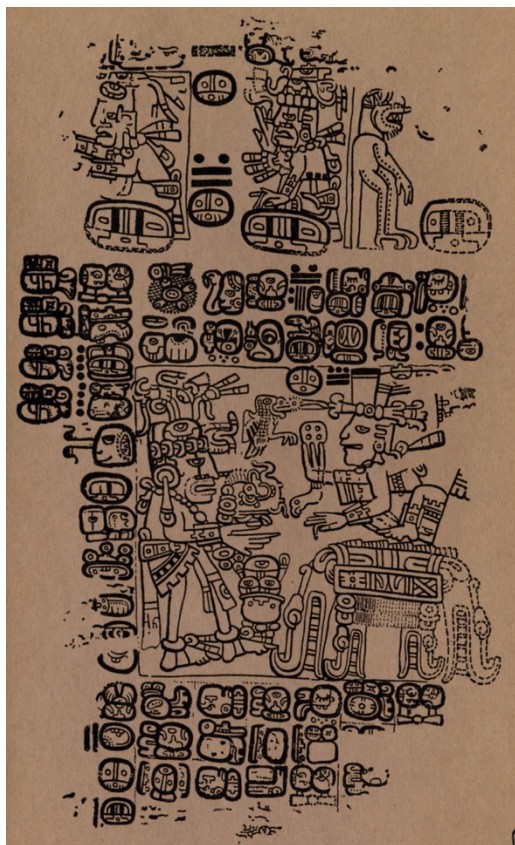


Fig. 3: Maya Paris Codex, folio 3, from Willard (1933), facsimile. Reproduced from Northwestern University Library.

rely on a more direct relationship between reader and symbol not mediated by linguistics. These systems may be broadly understood as graphic communication based on non-linguistic symbolic vocabulary (Nicholson and Quiñones Keber 1994: xv; Mikulska and Offner 2020: 41–85).

The Central Mexican codices, often referred to as the Borgia group, are a collection of manuscripts unified in their style and symbol set and attributed to the Nahuatl speakers of Central Mexico² (Fig. 4). These manuscripts record religious information in Central Mexican narrative pictography and focus on the mystical meaning of time (Boone 2007: 13–32). They are *teamoxtli*, divine books, in Nahuatl and record the *tonalamatl*, a divinatory almanac describing the rituals to be undertaken during various stages of

the time cycles which governed Mesoamerican life (Jansen and Pérez Jiménez 2007: 16). While many Central Mexican manuscripts communicate through ‘writing without words’ (Boone and Mignolo 1994), or narrative pictography, more recently scholars have identified Nahuatl hieroglyphic writing that was used to write place names, personal names, and calendrical glyphs (Lacadena 2008; Zender 2014: 28).



Fig. 4: Central Mexican Codex Yoalli Ehecatl, folio 62. Quetzalcoatl, seated on a throne and jaguar-skin mat, presides over mantic imagery, including day and night. Reproduced with permission from Akademische Druck- u. Verlagsanstalt.

A similar form of pictorial manuscript was created by the Mixtec people of Oaxaca (Fig. 5). Known as *ñiñ ñuhu*, or ‘sacred skin’ in Mixtec, the Mixtec codices record the genealogical history of the Mixtec people through a representational code similar to that of Central Mexico which uses iconic, indexical, and phonetic symbols (Jansen and Pérez Jiménez 2004: 286).³ The manuscripts record the political history of ruling dynasties, explaining the wars, marriages, and other events which shaped the Mixtec political landscape (Troike 1978). While historical in content, the manuscripts may also be understood as religious documents in that they record the lives of culture-heroes born of supernatural beings who go on to battle supernatural enemies.

While many scholars continue to identify the Central Mexican *tonalamatl* and Mixtec *ñiñ ñuhu* as iconographically complex art, Jansen (1982) has convincingly argued for the reading of these manuscripts as a text, with an emphasis on the consideration of poetics and other literary elements. Poetics and metaphor were of fundamental importance in Mesoamerica, and linguistic parallelisms are a particularly strong feature of Mesoamerican verbal art, with many researchers taking note of the parallel morphosyntactic structure of rituals and prayers (Bright 1990: 439; Garibay Kintana 1953: 19; Jansen and Pérez

Jiménez 2009: 15). Metaphorical diphraasis is a form of parallelism unique in its heavily metaphorical content and has been documented across Mesoamerica in Maya, Central Mexican, and Mixtec manuscripts (Davis 2016). As many diphrases combine terms which appear to be oppositional, the use of metaphorical diphraasis can be seen in some ways as ‘a dialectical space where new understandings might emerge through the integration of polarities’ (Rendon 2009: 68). Metaphorical diphraasis does not exist as an isolated linguistic practice but creates a language in itself which uses metaphor and parallelism to indicate an elevated sacred meaning (Jansen and Pérez Jiménez 2009: 119; Jansen and Pérez Jiménez 2017). Metaphorical diphraasis can also be understood as a conceptual metonymic procedure, extending beyond the linguistic into the iconic (Dehouve 2013). Following Mikulska and Offner (2020: 55), diphraasis in the Central Mexican codices ‘consists of metaphorical oral and graphic expressions approaching each other but failing to form a relationship of total dependency.’

An examination of the murals at Tulum situated within the cultural memory and social context of the Postclassic Maya must actively seek an interpretation that is ‘coherent and specific to indigenous customs, concepts, and values’ (Jansen 2015: 243). This necessarily means acknowledging metaphor as deeply important to indigenous Mesoamerican people and thus considering the importance of metaphorical associations of iconographic elements.



Fig. 5: Mixtec Codex Yuta Tnoho, folio 52. Codex-style skyband featuring stellar eyes. Reproduced with permission from Akademische Druck- u. Verlagsanstalt.

The Mixteca-Puebla / Postclassic International Style

The Tulum murals are painted in what is now referred to as the Postclassic International Style and Symbol Set, formerly known as the International Style or Mixteca-Puebla style, a tradition shared widely across the Postclassic Mesoamerican interaction sphere, particularly in the area from Central Mexico to the Yucatan peninsula (Boone and Smith 2003; Robertson 1970). While strongly associated with the Borgia and Mixtec codices, the Postclassic International Style and Symbol Set is also documented on ceramics, murals, and sculpture. The style is characterized by an emphasis on uniform, outlined, flat figures defined by the attributes attached to them, such as a shield indicating a warrior or a headdress signalling a particular deity (Boone and Smith 2003). Colours are bright and figures dominate the scene, which is often structured by horizontal registers. This style of representation is strongly associated with a widespread set of symbols intelligible across Mesoamerica, indicating a cosmopolitan and multi-ethnic world. This Postclassic Symbol Set includes a number of elements present in both Mexican manuscripts and the Tulum murals, with notable visual similarities including sun disks, serpents, and stellar eyes (Fig. 6) (Masson 2003: 194). Vaillant (1940) was the first to propose the term Mixteca-Puebla as a label for the artistic horizon originating in Oaxaca and Puebla which extended across a significant area of Mesoamerica in the Late Postclassic period. Nicholson (1960, 1982) went on to define the style based on its geometric nature, vivid colors, and the standardization and conventionalization of the symbol set. He was the first to classify the Tulum murals as part of the Mixteca-Puebla horizon, linking this Yucatecan mural painting with the Postclassic world. Smith and Heath-Smith (1980) argue that Nicholson conflates distinct Postclassic artistic phenomena, and they classify the Tulum murals as belonging to the Mixtec Codex Style, which is defined by its presentation of a narrative in which human and divine figures arranged in horizontal bands engage in ceremonial activities (Smith and Heath-Smith 1980: 31). This category also includes the Borgia *tonalamatl*, the Mixtec *ñiñi ñuhu* manuscripts, and murals found in Mitla, Oaxaca, Tizatlan, Tlaxcala, and Tamuin, San Luis Potosi (Smith and Heath-Smith 1980: 32). In regards to Tulum specifically, they note the shared iconographic motifs in the murals and Borgia *tonalamatl* and the integration of these motifs with Maya deities and 'glyph-like' elements (Smith and Heath-Smith 1980: 34). Robertson (1970) provided important commentary on what he terms the 'International Style' due to its use outside the Mixteca-Puebla area and suggests that Tulum artists may have had access to the Borgia group manuscripts. He also notes the internal complexity of the murals of Tulum, in that 'this collection of "separable parts" can be compared with the parts used to compose a sentence – verb, noun, and modifier' (Robertson 1970: 80).

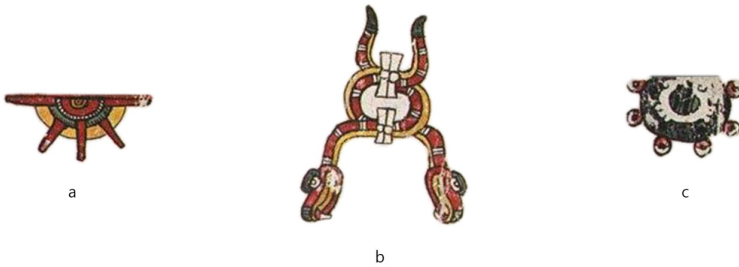


Fig. 6: Common elements of the Postclassic International Symbol Set from the Central Mexican Codex *Yoalli Ehecatl*, folio 57. a: Sun disk; b: Intertwined serpents; c: Stellar eyes. Reproduced with permission from Akademische Druck- u. Verlagsanstalt.

Robertson's nomenclature was continued by Boone and Smith (2003), whose description of the style is largely similar to Nicholson (1960). Under their schema, the Tulum murals are stylistically classified as the Coastal Maya Mural variant of the Postclassic International Style, which also includes other regional subsets of Aztec, Mixteca-Puebla, and highland Guatemalan. The nearby sites of Tancah, Xelha, and Santa Rita are among other examples of the Coastal Maya Mural subset (Chase and Chase 1988; Farriss et al. 1975). These murals also exhibit common Mesoamerican metaphors, such as the spear and shield motif present at Xelha, which not only identifies the figure as a warrior but also associates him with the attribute of courage (Genet 1934). At Santa Rita Corozal, murals manipulate the Postclassic International Style while utilizing Maya hieroglyphs within the same visual space (Gann 1918; Chase and Chase 1988). Despite the demonstrated ability to read and write in Maya hieroglyphs, the painters chose to emulate the Postclassic International Style of representation. The coexistence of Maya hieroglyphs and the Postclassic International Style indicates the usefulness of this style and set of associated symbols in communicating information without any reliance on the logographic literacy of the viewer. At the same time, the Tancah and Tulum murals are also 'strikingly similar' to the Paris, Madrid, and Dresden codices and demonstrate the participation of Tulum within an international interaction network bringing together Central Mexican and Maya traditions (Taube 1992: 4). This brief introduction to the concept of the Mixteca-Puebla style demonstrates the visible relationships between the Tulum murals and the Borgias *tonalamatl* and Mixtec *ñiñ ñuhu* manuscripts.

From manuscript to mural

The painting of the Tulum murals required an adaptation of the Postclassic International Style and Symbol Set, prevalent in manuscript and ceramic form,⁴ to a monumental form appropriate for decorating a Maya sacred space. How was this translation between media negotiated? And how did the mural production process differ from the production of manuscripts? A discussion of the roughly contemporaneous Maya Paris Codex (Fig. 3) serves well as a starting point of comparison for the Tulum murals. The Paris Codex was likely produced in Mayapan, another Yucatec Maya site, which has been argued to have been the centre of Late Postclassic Maya manuscript production based on similarities between the Mayan codices and Mayapan carved stelae (Love 1993: 13; Špoták 2015: 20). The Paris Codex, like other Maya manuscripts, includes calendrical and religious information depicted through iconography and hieroglyphic texts. Both the Paris Codex and the Tulum murals are manifestations of regional styles produced by the Postclassic Yucatec Maya and include similar scenes in which a figure on a throne or stool receives objects from another figure (Love 1993: 8–9). The most obvious manner in which the Paris Codex differs from the Tulum murals is in the hieroglyphic texts, which provide a linguistic complement to the iconography.

How does Postclassic Maya art translate from manuscript to mural? The evidence suggests that translation involved both visual and material similarity. As Boone (2000: 23) writes, 'in both Nahuatl and Mixtec-speaking Mexico, books were paintings.' Manuscripts and murals were painted using similar techniques and tools. The painting surface for both was a white plaster made from calcium carbonate brushed over the stone and bark-paper structures of murals and manuscripts respectively (Rossi et al. 2015: 125). This material similarity between manuscripts and murals extends beyond plaster, with chemical analyses indicating that the pigments used in Postclassic Maya murals are generally the same as those of the Maya codices (Buti et al. 2014: 177). San Bartolo, a Preclassic Maya site dating to 300 to 100 BC located in the Guatemalan Peten, is home to some of the earliest Maya writing and presents evidence helping to tie the two practices together. In the murals of San Bartolo, red lines are present underneath the mural pigments and outline the intended murals in a manner similar to that of Mesoamerican manuscripts (Saturno et al. 2006). Work by Ruvalcaba et al. (2007) on the Códice Maya de México has used infrared spectroscopy to identify similar outlines of red, black, and brown underneath the final manuscript image. While the San Bartolo murals predate the Códice Maya de México and Tulum murals by over a thousand years, the red outlines shared by the muralists of San Bartolo and the scribes of the Códice Maya de México connect these practices through time and space and are indicative of both the careful planning involved in crafting a manuscript or mural and the continuity of these production practices throughout

Mesoamerican history.

The commonalities between manuscripts and murals may also be considered in light of Schapiro's (1973) argument on the inherent perceptual properties of flat images, which views images constructed on flat prepared surfaces as innately organized by an edge, a natural focal point in the centre, and the spatial categories of above, below, right, and left. The painting of a codex style on a temple wall extends the affordances of the manuscript page to masonry walls. Before the *qj tz'ib* even picks up their brush, they are operating under a similar spatial framework in the construction of both manuscripts and murals. An important distinction, however, is that the murals allow for a more embodied experience of the flat plane, in which first the painter, then the temple visitors, move through a monumental codex, physically entering into these ritual pages.

The material similarities between manuscript and mural production, the lack of linguistic differentiation between painter and scribe in the term *qj tz'ib*, and the shared outlining practice suggest that manuscripts and murals belonged to the same category of representation. Thus, the creation of a codex-style mural may be seen as the construction of a monumental codex, involving the same processes, pigments, and practitioners on a grander scale. The remaining portion of this paper explores relationships between manuscript and mural by reviewing the presence of two metaphorical dualisms painted on the Temple of the Diving God.

The murals of Tulum

The city of Tulum was known as Zama in Yucatec Maya, meaning City of Dawn (A. G. Miller 1982: 3). Located on the eastern edge of the Yucatan Peninsula, with a spectacular view of the Caribbean Sea, it was inhabited in the Late Postclassic period with a principal occupation from AD 1200–1521 (Fig. 7). The main complex of Tulum is enclosed within masonry walls on three sides and contains both ceremonial and elite residential architecture, including the Temple of the Diving God, the Temple of the Frescoes, and the one of El Castillo. Within Mesoamerica, politics, religion, and monumental construction were closely related. Joyce (2000: 72) describes the role of monumental art and architecture in the Mesoamerican world as 'products of high culture', which are 'particularly effective material expressions of the exclusivity that stemmed from the limitation of legitimacy to an elite.' Monumental architecture is a means of both legitimizing and generating social power, a conspicuous display of the ability of leaders to accumulate and consume resources which reinforces their status in the social hierarchy and thus attracts more followers (Abrams 1994: 94; Demarest 1991). The murals adorning the Tulum monuments do not only display political power, but also create and reinforce it. Monumentality,

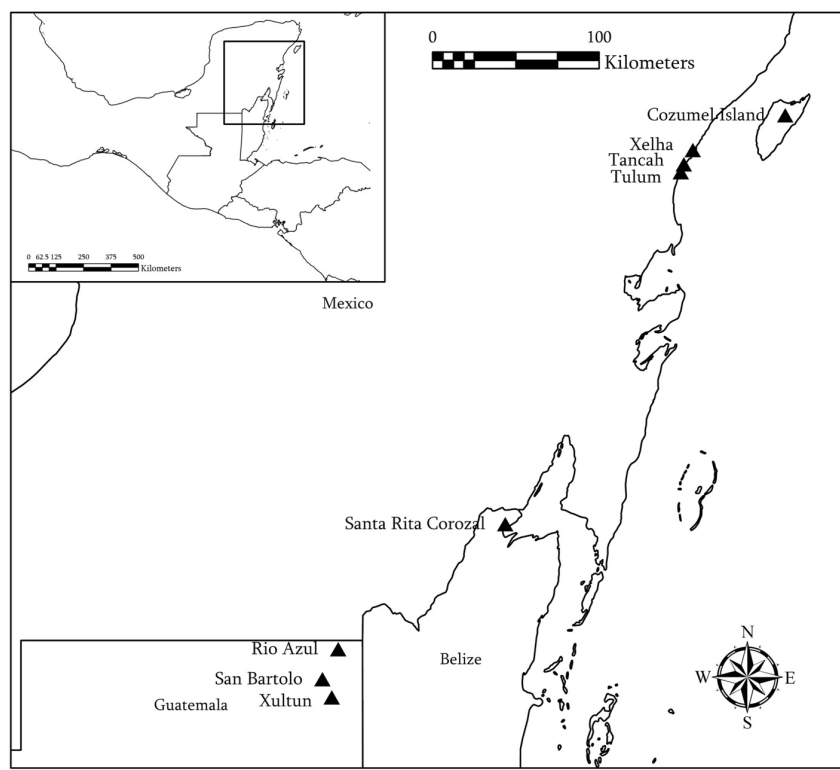


Fig. 7: Map of the Yucatan peninsula with the location of Tulum and other sites mentioned in the text.

rather than being static, crafts a dynamic and ‘ongoing, constantly renegotiated *relationship* between thing and person, between the monument(s) and the person(s) experiencing the monument’ (Osborne 2014: 3). The murals as a monument evidence particular conditions of possibility: social organization of labour, elite manipulation of symbols for political purposes, and the existence of a pan-regional Mesoamerican semiotic system.

The centring of male ancestors within the niches of the outer façade of the Temple of the Frescoes and the presence of ceramic ancestor effigy censers in association with temples suggest a relationship between the structures, ancestor worship, and political legitimization (Masson 2015: 224, 234). Sacred spaces often balance restricted access to the building with the need for community members to partake in rituals within the space, creating a necessary experience of mediated access to the divine. The temple walls at Tulum enclose the ritual area, while also disclosing key religious beliefs through the mu-

ral surrounding this separate space. The location of the murals within buildings in the walled city and in an area of ritual significance suggests a primary audience of ritual practitioners, possibly both local and itinerant.

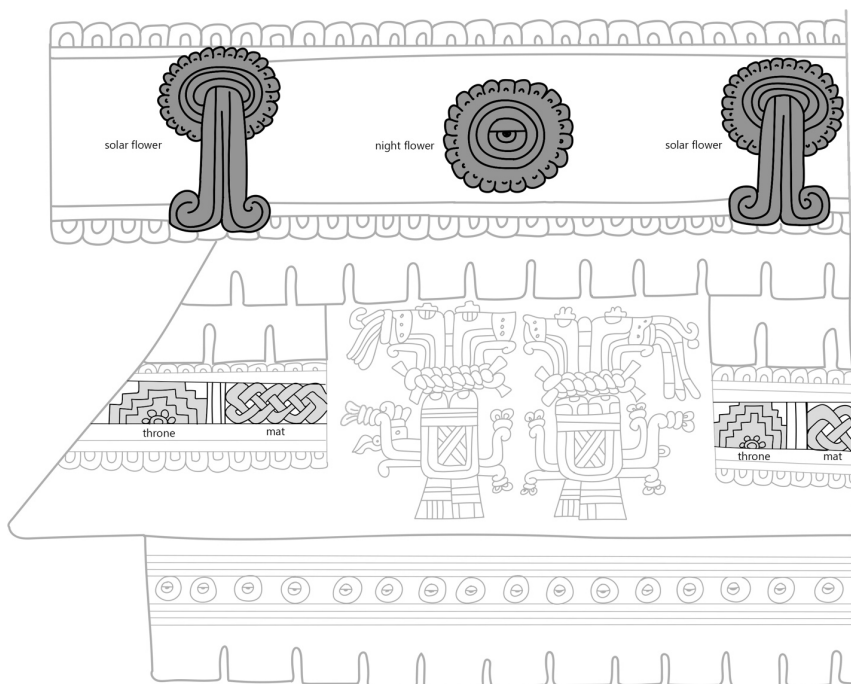


Fig. 8: Metaphorical diphrasis in the exterior mural of the Temple of the Diving God. Metaphors for time in the upper register are highlighted in dark grey: note the alternating floral day and night elements. Metaphors for authority are highlighted in light grey: note the alternating mats and thrones in cartouches. Line drawing by author after Davalos in A. G. Miller (1982).

The Temple of the Diving God, or Structure 5, is a small temple named for the distinctive diving or descending deity figure located above the main entrance. Diving deities are present in the Maya codices, and similar figures appear in the architecture of the Maya sites of Coba, Sayil, and Chichen Itza (Masson 2015: 226). The identification of these diving figures has been debated, with scholars arguing for identification as a wasp or bee deity (Roys 1993: 63), deified ancestor (Masson 2015: 221), or maize deity due to the maize foliage on their heads (Taube 1992: 41). The upper façade of the temple (Figs. 1, 8) features alternating floral motifs with bifurcated scrolls or night eyes at the centre. Offerings of tamales in baskets are surrounded by interlacing stepped and woven iconographic elements, below which is another night eye border. In the interior mural

(Figs. 2, 9), visible against the back wall as soon as one enters the temple, the upper border is framed by an alternating step-terrace and woven-knot design from which the head of K'awiil, a Mesoamerican supernatural being associated with rulership, emerges. Below this knot-terrace band is a skyband with interlacing solar ray and stellar eye signs, reminiscent of the skybands of the codices (Fig. 5). Two sets of male and female pairs sit within entwined serpent bands. The serpents frame the scene, and their bodies are marked with floral motifs and woven-knot elements. The female figure of each pair sits on a throne and receives a staff or bundle featuring icons of rulership. The presence of finely dressed figures exchanging symbols of rulership suggests these are ancestral Maya figures who, through their interaction with the supernatural, are justified in their rulership (A. G. Miller 1982: 91). The identification of these figures as human or divine is complicated by the ways in which the subjects of ancestral worship blur the boundaries between these two supposed binaries (Masson 2015: 194; Loooper 1991). Along the bottom of the scene is a horizontal black spotted motif, suggesting a jaguar pelt, below which appears a swimming God N, an elderly male supernatural being associated with the creation of the current world, who is flanked by more serpents with floral eye motifs on their bodies (Milbrath 1999: 74). In the following discussion, the murals painted on the exterior façade and inner wall of the Temple of the Diving God are approached as an extension of manuscript culture. Acknowledging the importance of metaphor in Post-classic Mesoamerican manuscripts, the discussion centres on metaphorical dualisms in a reading of the Temple of the Diving God and reflects on the role of these murals in legitimizing kingship in the intercultural city of Tulum.

Metaphors for political authority

The mat and throne is an enduring and widespread symbol of rulership and authority across Mesoamerica. This metaphor of divine power derives its form from the woven mats and thrones on which many Mesoamerican leaders would sit, with these elements eventually taking on a symbolic meaning related to rulership. The Classic Maya of Copan portrayed their rulers and nobles seated on thrones and associated with mat/knot symbols, which in combination 'metaphorically established the lordly status of the wearer' (M. E. Miller and Schele 1986: 71). More recently Wagner has called into question the identification of these so-called 'mat' icons, arguing instead that they are tied knots relating to Maya ancestor worship (Wagner 2006). While the 'mat' icon is now widely understood to be more likely a depiction of a 'knot', the metaphorical association between the motif and political authority remains. As a pair, the mat/knot and the throne is an integrated poetic hendiadys, in which these terms are coupled together as a metaphorical representation of sovereignty (Jansen and Pérez Jiménez 2007: 9).

The Paris Codex illustrates this metaphor for authority within the Maya manuscript tradition (Fig. 3). A Maya maize deity, identifiable due to his headdress and nose-piercing, presents an image of K'awiil to the enthroned figure in a ritual related to the ending of the k'atun, a period of time in the Maya calendar equivalent to 7200 days (Špoták 2015: 67). The anthropomorphic figure is seated on a throne with a caiman mat and may be an ancestral deity (Špoták 2015: 68). Between the figures lies a bowl with tamales, which serve as an omen for abundance and represent value (Vail and Hernández 2013: 175). The throne is decorated with skyband elements, similar to the throne infixes within the Tulum mural. Between K'awiil and the ruler is a bird, likely related to the Principle Bird Deity present in many Maya myths and associated with change of office in the Postclassic manuscripts (Taubé 1987: 6). The surrounding text, poorly preserved in some areas, records parallel statements related to death and dynastic succession, linguistically connecting this divine presentation of ritual objects to rulership and succession. The hieroglyphic text also includes a number of other metaphors, including *kab ch'en*, or earth cave, as a diphrastic metaphor for a city, and *tok' pakal*, flint and shield, as a metaphor for war (Špoták 2015: 26). On this manuscript page, visual and linguistic diphrastic metaphors coexist and are complemented by the content of the hieroglyphic text, with the caiman-skin mat and skyband throne reinforcing the hieroglyphic statements of rulership and power.

Turning to the Central Mexican codices, an example of this metaphor for authority may be seen on Folio 62 of the *Codex Yoalli Ehecatl*. It records the periods which comprise the ritual calendar along with the deities who preside over each day (Fig. 4). The patron of the period on folio 62 is Quetzalcoatl, the wind deity, identified by his large shell pendant. He is seated on a throne adorned with a jaguar-skin mat and presides over a series of prophetic symbols, the collective meaning of which remains poorly understood (Anders et al. 1992: 326). Quetzalcoatl sits on the mat and the throne in a position of power over time, with his hands appearing to present the esoteric symbols.

Now, to Tulum. Knots are present on multiple architectural facades within the compound. The Temple of the Diving God is abundant in knot motifs located in cartouches, bundles, on the bodies of serpents, and decorating the limbs of deity figures. The upper façade of the temple exterior (Figs. 1, 8) features an alternating banner of knot and step-terrace motifs, an abstraction of the feet of the throne in the Central Mexican and Mixtec traditions (note Quetzalcoatl's throne in Fig. 4). This banner is repeated inside the temple, directly above the interacting figures. It is reinforced through an arrangement of deified ancestors seated on thrones who place their feet directly on the knots which are fixed to the serpent bodies (Figs. 2, 9). Horizontal bands of jaguar pelts are also present throughout many of the murals, invoking the jaguar pelts on which rulers are seated. The knot and the throne, metaphorical representations of power, are ever

present in these murals and reinforce the connection between the temples and political authority. The use of the knot-and-throne metaphor is particularly important at Tulum when noting that these temples ‘may have commemorated the genealogies of important governing kin groups at this site, perhaps reflecting accession to office’ (Masson 2003: 199). The Central Mexican manuscripts, by nature of their religious content, use the mat and the throne as a method of representing the authority of supernatural figures. The Maya manuscripts relate this dualism to political authority and the succession of office. Within the Temple of the Diving God, the Maya use the dualism to demonstrate the political authority of ancestral deity figures through repetition of the metaphor.

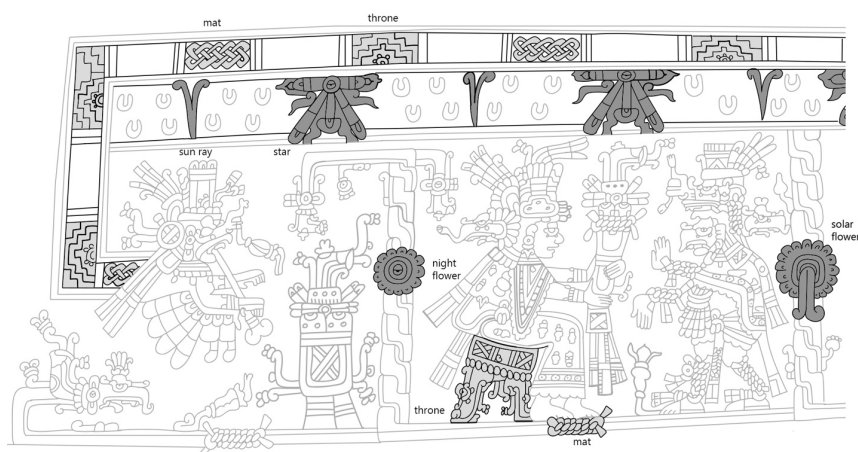


Fig. 9: Metaphorical diphrasis in the interior mural of the Temple of the Diving God. Metaphors for authority are highlighted in light grey: note the figure seated on a throne with his feet on a mat and the repeated mats and thrones in cartouches in the upper register. Metaphors for time are highlighted in dark grey: note the solar/night flowers and the skyband with repeating sun rays and stars. Line drawing by author after Davalos in A. G. Miller (1982).

Metaphors for time

Day and night are natural metaphorical complements, references to which appear throughout the Tulum murals. The juxtaposition of the sun and night, of order and chaos, was fundamental to Central Mexican cosmology (Boone 2007: 60–1). The pairing is often used in Mayan manuscripts as a substitution for the word *tz'ak*, a term with varied meanings including time, healing, order, and completeness (Stuart 2003: 1). Yucatecan primary sources, such as the seventeenth century Maya Chilam Balam manuscripts of Chumayel and Tizimin which record traditional indigenous knowledge,

include textual uses of the day and night dyad in the context of prophecy, a context which is paralleled in the Borgia manuscripts (Hull 2012: 86–7; Boone 2007: 60). The sun also occurs as a lunar and nocturnal referent within the Central Mexican manuscripts, playing on the ‘interpenetration of opposites’ and adding an additional layer of meaning to this metaphor (Galinier in Graulich 1981: 51). The association of day and night with both totality and prophecy helps in interpreting their abundant presence throughout the Tulum murals.

In the Maya codices, the day and night pair appears written phonetically with hieroglyphs as *k'in ak'ab'*, such as on folio 26 of the Dresden Codex where it is followed by another diphrastric metaphor of *waqj' ha'*, bread and water, another couplet related to fate (Davis 2016: 85). Interestingly, the glyphs for day and night also function as name glyphs for supernatural beings known as the Paddler Gods, who paddle the watery underworld in a canoe accompanying the deceased on their journey to the afterlife (Stuart 2016). In some situations, the diphrase appears in the Maya codices as an integration of Maya and Central Mexican motifs, such as on folio 57 of the Dresden Codex in which a skyband containing the Maya glyph for night, *ak'ab'*, and the Central Mexican symbol for day, *ilhuitl*, is accompanied by an eclipse element (Fig. 10).



Fig. 10: Maya Codex Dresden, folio 59. Reproduced with permission from Sächsische Landesbibliothek – Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Dresden.

In the Central Mexican manuscripts, the duality appears both in skybands and as an independent motif in scenes of prophecy. Skybands, across manuscript groups, use symbols of the sun, moon, and stars to indicate that an event is taking place in a celestial realm,

such as on folio 52 of the Mixtec Codex Yuta Tnoho, in which cultural progenitors are depicted performing rituals among a banner of star signs (Fig. 5) (Anders et al. 1992: 84). Apart from in skybands, the day and night dualism in the Borgia manuscript tradition may be identified through its use of a Central Mexican solar ray and a stellar eye motif (Fig. 6). Returning to *Yoalli Ehecatl* folio 62, in which Quetzalcoatl is seated on a mat and throne presiding over prophetic symbols, one sees a day and night diphrase in the far left, to the right of vertically aligned calendrical symbols and above a collocation of arrows and a conch shell which suggest war (Fig. 4). In this context of prophecy, the day and night has been interpreted as a sign of insecurity about the future and potential danger (Anders et al. 1993: 326). In both cases, the metaphor evokes otherworldly powers, depicting a world in which supernatural beings arrange the structure of time that governs human life.

The relationship between day and night is first suggested in the skybands at Tulum, in which sun rays painted in the Central Mexican style are interspersed with stellar eyes associated with the night (Figs. 2, 9). This alternating day-and-night skyband places the figures in the murals within an otherworldly realm, a convention so widespread as to likely be immediately familiar to the viewer. The dualism of day and night is manifested also in the floral decorations which appear in both temples on the upper facades (Figs. 1, 8) and on the bodies of serpents (Figs. 2, 9). Flowers in Mesoamerica have been long recognized as indicative of the Flower World, a realm of the universe in which the sun lives with the spirits of deceased warriors. The Flower World has been extensively researched by Hill (1992) and Taube (2010) and is a pan-Mesoamerican concept, of particular importance in the Aztec region, of a solar realm expressed iconographically through flowers. The floral motif appears in two forms, differentiated by the iconic depiction of a stellar eye at their core, reference to night, and a bifurcated volute (Figs. 2, 9). The bifurcated volutes are interpreted by Taube as the flowers themselves exuding fragrant breath, another reference to the Flower World in which the sun lives (Taube 2010: 157). The systematic alternation of these floral motifs should be read in consideration of both the cosmology of the Flower World and the presence of the stellar eyes. These symbols are iconic representations of day and night, utilizing the *pars pro toto* principle often employed in Mesoamerican artistic traditions by allowing one aspect of a graphic form to stand in for the broader concept. These floral invocations of day and night appear on the serpents, widely associated with ideologies of rulership and power in Mesoamerica (Masson 2015: 236). The day and night floral motifs incorporated in the intertwined bodies of the serpents enclose the scene within day and night, quite literally encasing these figures within a celestial world of time, power, and prophecy.

Monumental metaphors

In the Temple of the Diving God, the deified ancestors of Tulum are placed within the pages of a religious manuscript, seated on representations of authority and encased within a banner of celestial power. The people who painted these murals and who used these buildings lived during a period of Mesoamerican history during which both trade goods and art styles were shared across long distances (Berdan et al. 2003; Berdan and Smith 1996; Boone and Smith 2003). It is in this context of intense interregional interaction that the painters of the murals at Tulum crafted an aesthetic that integrated Maya religious figures with a style and symbol set derived from Central Mexico. The Tulum murals are not unique in demonstrating stylistic and symbolic links to the Valley of Mexico, and are representative of a broader Yucatan tradition of Maya mural painting in the Mixteca-Puebla or International Style seen at Santa Rita Corozal, Mayapan, and Tanchah (Chase 1981; Chase and Chase 1988; A. G. Miller 1982). The Tulum murals demonstrate strong ties to the Mixtec Codex Style, including their narrative component, the structuring of space using horizontal registers, and the geometric flat style of depicting figures, and utilize iconic symbols found in the Borgia manuscripts. The murals, however, do not simply imitate or reproduce the pages of a divinatory *tonalamatl* or a genealogical *ñii ñuhu* manuscript on a larger scale. Rather, Maya elements such as deities and tamale offerings are incorporated into the murals, integrating local religious and iconographic customs within this foreign art style. The integration of Central Mexican and Maya elements within the context of political and religious power suggests that local elites 'may have selected these international motifs for murals whose meaning and use were tied to local political and religious processes' (Masson 2003: 194).

The shared metaphors in Postclassic manuscripts and the murals at Tulum, the material similarities between manuscript and mural pigments, and the lack of Mayan linguistic differentiation between painting and writing demonstrate an ontology of the painted image that transcends the materials on which they were painted. Additionally, the use of shared metaphors in the Maya, Mixtec, and Central Mexican manuscripts is notable for both the consistency in the combination of metaphorical elements and the regional modification of these metaphors which allows them to appear in different iconic forms. An acknowledgement of the metaphorical complexity of the graphic system used at Tulum encourages scholars to engage more critically with the oft-held assumption of an evolutionary trajectory for writing, which implicitly identifies phonetic writing as more complex and desirable than other forms of graphic representation and devalues semasiographic or iconic systems (Boone and Urton 2011).

But why not use Maya hieroglyphs alongside the Postclassic Symbol Set, such as in the murals at Santa Rita Corozal? Maya hieroglyphic writing was not foreign to the Maya

of Tulum. Across the Postclassic Yucatan new hieroglyphic stelae were erected at sites like Mayapan, and existing stelae were reset or rededicated at Tulum, Ichpaatun, and Lamanai, which speaks to a continued awareness of Maya hieroglyphs (Lothrop 1924; Masson 2015: 56–7). However, in the little circulated ‘Meditation on the Indies,’ written by López Mendel in the early post-contact period, literacy in Maya hieroglyphs at the time of conquest is described as limited to priests and some *caciques*, indigenous political leaders (López Mendel 1565: 28). It is reasonable to expect that this was also the case at Tulum, indicating that most of the populace would be unable to read Maya hieroglyphs. The adoption of a non-phonetic symbolic system was thus useful in communicating religious and political authority to the visitors of the temples through a more accessible visual form, particularly when considering the international nature of the period. Furthermore, the iconographically complex scene may have ‘enchanted’ the viewer in the Gellian sense, with the technical skill of the painters, the complexity of the style and symbol set, and the underlying metaphors interacting to craft an experience of awe and wonder (Gell 1992).

While it is impossible to know the intended audience of the murals, it may be that the use of the International Style and Symbol Set without accompanying Maya hieroglyphs was an intentional attempt on the part of ruling elites to engage the non-literate majority population using a visually stimulating iconic system. As ritual participants, potentially both literate and non-literate, worshipped within the small space oriented towards the sun, the murals were not merely religious decoration. As Bell (1997: 226) observes, the ‘context in which ritual practices unfold are not like the props of painted scenery on a theatrical stage. Ritual action involves an inextricable interaction with its immediate world, often drawing it into the very activity of the rite in multiple ways.’ In this sense, the murals at Tulum, through their construction of a monumental codex-style mural in which ancestral leaders are surrounded by icons of authority and time, create a space in which the inhabitants of Tulum may enter into and stand within an adapted manuscript page, much as the deified ancestors enter into the fresco themselves, injecting the political into the religious.

What then, does it mean to be enchanted by images of the ancestors? According to McNany (1995: 11) and Masson (2015: 196), ancestor worship is the ritual commemoration of kin-group ancestors and involves constructing ancestral images for ritual celebrations. The celebration of lineage both strengthens community bonds and legitimizes political power held by descendent communities by associating these deified ancestors with esoteric religious symbolism. Indeed, the enchantment experienced by visitors to the Temple of the Diving God, an architectural symbol of religious political power, may also have secured ‘the acquiescence of other people in their intentions or projects’ (Masson 2015: 194).

By embedding significant metaphors about power within buildings and by utilizing complex conceptual associations between metaphors, the Maya at Tulum imbued their architecture with sacred meaning for the purpose of of kin-based political legitimization. The murals of these temples brought visitors face to face with a monumental expression of political power reinforced through religious symbolism, and may have functioned as a mechanism for enforcing structural power through the visual manifestation of the connection between deified ancestors and the divine. The murals serve as mechanisms for the remembrance of cultural values across generations among elite classes while incorporating internationally recognized symbols, reflecting their participation in the Post-classic Mesoamerican world. These structures allow for the invocation of a shared social memory, imbued with mythohistoric celebrations of cultural leaders and their association with deities and reinforced through metaphorical manipulations like those present in manuscript forms.

Conclusion

The Temple of the Diving God is a monument which manipulates metaphorical dualities present in the manuscript traditions of Mesoamerica in service of the political ideals of the Maya of Tulum. Incorporating metaphorical content within the Temple of the Diving God and utilizing an art style associated with the divinatory manuscripts causes the structures to undergo an ontological transformation, turning them into representations of sacred metaphor. The formal parallel structure of the murals, in which pairs interact in mirrored ways, is echoed through the parallelisms within them. From a metalinguistic perspective, this essay creates a conceptual diphraze, crafting an analytic argument drawing on the same parallel structure of Mesoamerican sacred metaphors by bringing together the complementary yet distinct traditions of manuscript and mural. The metaphorical parallelisms of the solar and the nocturnal and the mat/knot and throne, serve as catalytic agents in transitioning the Temple of the Diving God from plaster and pigment to an invocation of time, authority, and fate in direct association with ancestral deities. The inclusion of the ancestral deity alongside these metaphors is a powerful mechanism for reinforcing political power, particularly when considering that ancestral rulers do not appear in the Central Mexican manuscripts from which the murals heavily draw. The painting of the structures at Tulum in a style and symbol set strongly related to ritual manuscripts may be best understood as both a monumentalization and politicization of the manuscript form.

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