

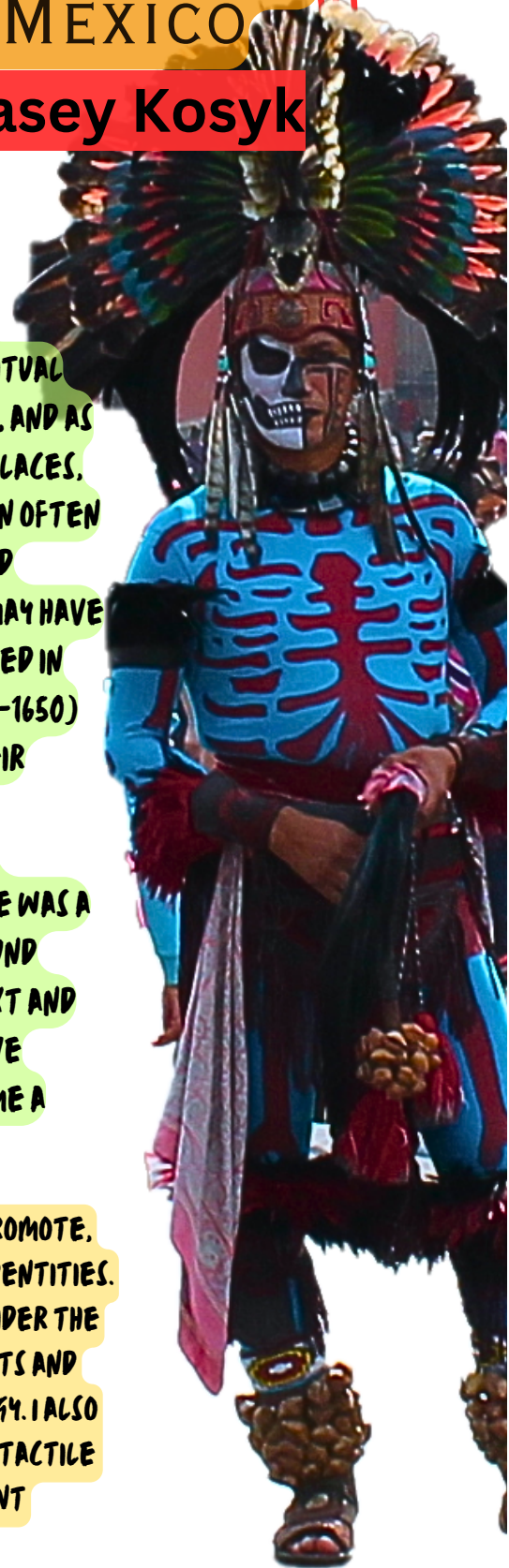
# THE POLITICS OF SOUND

## THE CULTIVATION OF SOUND IN ANCIENT CENTRAL MEXICO

Katrina Casey Kosyk

FOR ANCIENT CENTRAL MEXICANS, SOUND WAS A CONSTANT AND IMPORTANT PART OF EVERYDAY LIFE. NOT ONLY WAS IT USED FOR ENJOYMENT, BUT IT WAS A WAY OF PASSING ON CULTURE DURING RITUAL AND CELEBRATORY PERFORMANCES, AS A TOOL IN SONIC WARFARE, AND AS A MNEMONIC DEVICE, MAKING CONNECTIONS BETWEEN PEOPLE, PLACES, AND EVENTS. HOWEVER, ARCHAEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS IN THIS REGION OFTEN LUMPS ETHNIC GROUPS UNDER THE UMBRELLA TERMS "AZTEC" AND "MESOAMERICAN, REMOVING AGENCY FROM COMMUNITIES THAT MAY HAVE HAD UNIQUE FORMS OF SONIC EXPRESSION. AS SUCH, I AM INTERESTED IN HOW LATE POSTCLASSIC TO EARLY COLONIAL PERIOD (CA. A.D. 1325-1650) GROUPS FROM CENTRAL MEXICO NEGOTIATED AND MEDIATED THEIR SOUND. WE CAN SEE THE MAINTENANCE OF TRADITIONS IN THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL MATERIAL RECORD, AS WELL AS HISTORICAL AND PICTORIAL DOCUMENTS. YET, DURING THE COLONIAL PERIOD, THERE WAS A SIGNIFICANT CHANGE MADE TO TRADITIONAL WAYS OF LIFE AND SOUND BECAME MORE COMPLEX IN A CHANGING SOCIO-POLITICAL CONTEXT AND SPACE. SOUND DOES NOT HAVE ABRUPT BOUNDARIES OR DISTINCTIVE THRESHOLDS, AND THE DENSITY AND PHYSICALITY OF SOUND BECAME A FORCE OF SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION.

THE "POLITICS" OF SOUND REFERS TO THE PROCESSES THAT SEEK TO PROMOTE, CAPTURE, BLOCK, OR IMPEDE SOUND, TO ENCOURAGE VARIABLE SONIC IDENTITIES. TO UNCOVER SONIC IDENTITIES CONSTRUCTED BY COMMUNITIES, I CONSIDER THE DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN PRODUCTION AND USE OF MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS AND OTHER SOUND-RELATED OBJECTS BY INVESTIGATING THEIR ORGANOLGY. I ALSO STUDY HOW SOUND IS DEPICTED IN WRITING AND IMAGES, AUDITORY AND TACTILE SENSATIONS, AND THROUGH BODILY GESTURES WHILE PLAYING AN ANCIENT INSTRUMENT.





## TLAXCALTECAS

BEFORE THE ARRIVAL OF THE SPANISH, TLAXCALA WAS HOME TO THE TLAXCALTECAS, ENEMY TO THE TRIPLE ALLIANCE (AZTEC EMPIRE). THE TLAXCALTECA POLITICAL SYSTEM WAS A REPUBLIC THAT CONSISTED OF FOUR SEÑARIOS. I WAS FORTUNATE TO BE ABLE TO ANALYZE THE COLLECTIONS OF TWO OF THESE SEÑARIOS, TEPETICPAC AND OCOTELULCO.

### SOUND-PRODUCING MATERIAL

THE TLAXCALTECAS PRODUCED A WIDE VARIETY OF MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS AND SOUND-PRODUCING MATERIALS. THESE INCLUDE RATTLES, WHISTLES, OCARINAS, RASPS, DRUMS, TRUMPETS, FLUTES, AND RATTLE BOARDS. THESE MATERIALS WERE USED DURING CHILDBIRTH, WARFARE, DANCES, PERFORMANCES, COMMUNICATION, TO KEEP THE TIME OF THE DAY, AND FOR CEREMONIES.



### POLITICS OF SOUND

IS AN APPROACH TO RECOGNIZE THE ROLES OF SOUND (AND MUSIC) WITHIN SOCIAL RELATIONS OF POWER, TO DEMONSTRATE THAT THE EXPERIENCE OF SOUND IS INFLUENCED BY GENDER, SEXUALITY, CLASS, AGE, ABILITY, PROFESSION, AND OTHER FACTORS (IMAGE TO THE LEFT IS FROM THE CODEX VINDOBONENSIS PL. 24R)

ACCORDING TO BERNARDINO DE SAHAQÚN (SPANISH CHRONICLER), MUSIC HAD AN ESSENTIAL ROLE IN RITUALS ASSOCIATED WITH FERTILITY AND THE RENEWAL OF THE CALENDAR ROUND. SOME MUSIC WAS RESTRICTED TO THE ELITES WHO USED THE PERFORMANCE TO MAINTAIN POWER AND IMPORTANCE. THROUGH ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE, IT IS UNDERSTOOD THAT EVERYDAY PEOPLES USED MUSIC TO CONTACT THE GODS AND THEIR DECEASED ANCESTORS. ON A BASIC CORPOREAL LEVEL, PERFORMANCE ENCOMPASSES THE WHOLE WORLD, AND GESTURES, POSTURE, POSITION, AND MOVEMENT WERE NONVERBAL ASPECTS OF COMMUNICATION. THE TLAXCALTECA BELIEVED THAT ANIMATED BEINGS LIVED INSIDE THE BODY OF SOUND-PRODUCING MATERIALS (SUCH AS MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS). THESE BEINGS WERE ANIMATED THROUGH THE BREATH-SOUL (THE LIFE FORCE OF A MUSICIAN TRANSFERRED TO THE WIND-INSTRUMENT THROUGH BREATH). OTHER INSTRUMENTS LIKE DRUMS COMMUNICATED THROUGH RHYTHM AND SOUND.



## **THE MOST SIGNIFICANT INSIGHTS I GAINED FROM MY EXPLORATION OF SOUND...**

There was no Nahuatl word for music and dance. Instead, music was the 'art of song' (cuicatlamatiliztli) and musicians did not play but 'sang' on their instruments. Music and sound are intertwined with religion and cosmology. For example, some musical instruments played an important role in myth, such as huehuetl and teponaztli (who were considered former court singers of the sun). Likewise, the shell trumpet was used by the god Quetzalcoatl to produce a primordial blast in the underworld heralding the creation of humankind.

There were several different contexts in which music was played and performed. Everyday peoples produced music in the household and in local township festivities, but also in ceremonies in the heart of the temple precinct. For example, in the household, rattles were used during childbirth. The huehuetl and teponaztli were used by the leaders of the local townships (older men). Whistles were used by hunters to attract game. In a more elite context, music was performed by priests who cared for the musical worship of the gods. Trumpets were sounded during sacrifices and to mark the hours of prayer each day, rattling incense ladles were used in processions, and slit drums were used during nightly rituals to accompany astronomical observations. Bone rasps and other musical instruments were used in ceremonies of grief. Priests wore bells as part of ritual garment and performed sacred chants. These sound practices were restricted.

Professional musicians and singers resided in the palaces and provided elites with court music. The court musicians directed the music of large circular dances, in which often hundreds of dancers took part. In these dances, the public would have been segregated by class, with elite and elderly forming the inner circle.

Children would dance with their parents. A high-ranking group of court musicians were responsible for composition and instrumentation of new chants and dances in honour of the ruler. Noble warriors gathered in the "house of the song" (cuicacalli), a building near the palace, to practice dance and songs which were performed at the temple precinct. Youths of commoners were carefully trained in musical practice here.

Musical instruments were highly valued because their sound was the voice of the gods such as Xochipilli and Macuilxochitl. Priests were the mediators through whom a god sang. Musical instruments were associated with precious objects and sometimes stored in temple sanctuaries.

My project was too big, and I have a lot of questions I need answered. I'd like to explore the Colonial period next.



I WANTED TO END MY CHAPTER AT BUILDING 21 WITH SOME MUSIC. HERE IS A SONG FROM THE CANTARES MEXICANOS, WHICH WAS A BOOK THAT HELD HUNDREDS OF AZTEC AND TLAXCALTECA SONGS THAT WERE PRESERVED SOON AFTER THE SPANISH CONQUEST. THE LYRICS ARE PRESENTED IN BOTH NAHUATL (THE INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE OF THE MEXICA AND TLAXCALTECAS) AND ENGLISH. THE LYRICS IN THIS MANUSCRIPT ARE DESCRIBED AS POEMS BECAUSE WE HAVE THE WORDS, BUT NOT THE MUSIC. MANY OF THEM DO HAVE DRUMBEAT PATTERNS TRANSCRIBED WITH SYLLABLES TI, TO, QUI, AND CO. FOR EXAMPLE, SEVERAL SONGS HAVE THE DRUMBEAT COTO COTO COTI TICOTI TICOTI. THE SONGS WOULD HAVE BEEN ACCOMPANIED BY TWO DIFFERENT KINDS OF DRUMS: THE TEPONZATLI, A HORIZONTAL LOG DRUM WITH TONGUES CUT INTO THE WOOD (XYLOPHONE), AND THE HUEHUETL, AN UPRIGHT DRUM WITH A SKIN. ANCIENT MUSICIANS WERE UNDER GREAT PRESSURE TO FOLLOW THE RULES OF PRODUCING SONGS EXACTLY AND ERRORS IN PERFORMANCE WERE SEVERELY PUNISHED.

1 Xochicuicatl  
 2 Xompehua xoncuica can ticuicanitl huiya mā temaco  
 Xochitl ma yca ona-huielo ma ya onnetlamachtilyan in  
 tlpca ohuaya ohuaya.  
 3 Can monecuiltlonol ticuicanitl huiya canin ticyamaceuh  
 Xochitl aya canin ticyayttac in cuicatl tictemaca ya nican  
 xochimecatl in Mocamacpa quizticac tonteahuiltia ÿ ma  
 ya ica onnetlatlamachtilya in tlpca ohuaya Et.  
 4 Nihualchocay nihualicnotlamati çan nicuicanitl huiya  
 tlaca anichuicaz yn toxochiuh ohuaye maic ninapantiaz  
 cano ximohuaya huaye nihuallocoya ohuaya ohuaya.  
 5 In çan no iuhqui xochitlaya ypan momati in tlpqui can  
 cuel achic tocō-totlanehuico a yn xopanxochitli  
 xonahahuicacan ohuaye nihuallocoya ohuaya ohuaya.  
 6 Quetzalpapalocalco ompa ye nihuitz ayaō ye mitoma ye  
 nocuic ahuayya onhuiya nepapan Xochitl ÿ nepapan  
 tlacuillo y ye noyol nichuicanitl ayaon ye nictoma ye  
 cocuic ohuaya ohuaya.

1 Flower Song  
 2 Strike up a song, singer. Let flowers be given: let there  
 be pleasure: let there be happiness on earth.  
 3 Whence your riches, singer? Where did you get these  
 flowers, where did you find these songs you give?  
 Flower garlands issues from your mouth: you're giving  
 pleasure: let there be happiness on earth.  
 4 Here I'm weeping, grieving, I, the singer: I wish it  
 weren't that I can't be dressed in these, our flowers. I  
 wish that I could go away adorned in these --- to the  
 place where all are shorn. Here I'm grieving.  
 5 And earth itself seems like these flowers: briefly we  
 borrow Green-Place flowers. Be Pleasured! Here I'm  
 grieving.  
 6 I come from the House of Butterfly Plumes, setting  
 free my songs. My singers heart is a multitude of  
 flowers, a multitude of paintings. Yes, I'm setting free  
 my songs.



Here are some small sound clips of musical instruments from Late Postclassic to early Colonial Tlaxcala.

If you'd like to contact me to discuss my research or the Building 21 BLUE Fellowship, please send me a message at <https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Katrina-Kosyk>