RAIN and DROUGHT
Climate and its representations in Mexico

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The climate of Mexico

- Trade-winds from the Atlantic and Pacific oceans
- Cold continental North winds stopped by the Neovolcanic Axis
- Mountainous land (Sierra Madre occidental, oriental & del Sur) except on coastal plains, Tehuantepec Isthmus and Yucatan peninsula
  > temperature and rain variations...
Trade-winds
Sierra Madre occidental
Sierra Madre oriental
Sierra Madre del Sur
Neovolcanic Axis
Cold winds
Tehuantepec Isthmus
Trade-winds
Yucatan peninsula
Seasons

- Alternation: dry/rainy season
- Duration of rainy season (4 to 6 months) varies according to local climate:
  - Subhumid: April-October
  - Semi-dry: June-September
- In the highlands: dry season: November-January: cold (frost), February-April: warm
- Some rain in January (period of weather forecast for the year)
- ‘dog days’ (*canícula*) (temporary decrease of the rains) at the end of July
Rainy season
Dry season
Importance of the rain

Tlaloc: Aztec Rain God

Codex Borgia
The Mesoamerican cultural area: sedentary corn cultivators
Mesoamerican linguistic families

Approximative limits of Mesoamerica
The Mesoamerican cultural area

- Indian groups of different linguistic families
- Constant circulation of ideas, techniques, goods through the whole cultural area
  - unity and diversity in the perceptions of climate
- Spanish colonisation
  - Biological and cultural mixing
  - Integration of rituals and representations from the hispanic culture
- Cultural continuity in nature representations
Rain and agriculture

- Importance of rain for subsistence agriculture
- Corn cycle // rainy season cycle
- Alliance of dry season heat and first rains humidity: propitious for sowing corn // human reproduction
Rain and agriculture: Tlaloc and corn
The rain cycle according to Mexican Indians

Clouds are created in the womb of the mountain, are pushed by the wind to the top, then fall into rain.
Inside of the mountain: the earth womb
Food symbolism

Heat + humidity // earth womb

Earth oven, earth oven meat and corn, *tamal*, meat broth
Meteorological phenomena (Mixtec)

- Dry phenomena
  - Dry wind
  - Dry lightning
  - Dry storm (devil/wind)

- Rain phenomena
  - Rain
  - Rain wind
  - Rain lightning
  - Rain storm (feathered serpent)
  - Hail
  - Dew
  - Frost/snow
  - Chahuistle
  - Rainbow (serpent)

- All associated to rain
- All come from the womb of the mountain
Weather forecast

- Attempt of a control on weather
- Importance of rain forecast, especially arrival of rainy season
- Observation of nature (short term):
  - animals
  - Planets and stars
  - Natural phenomena (clouds, wind, dew, earthquakes)
- Symbolical systems (long term):
  - 12 days (*cabañuelas*)
  - Animal symbolism
Rain rituals

• Attempt to control meteorological phenomena
• Rituals executed by:
  – a community
  – Individuals
  – ritual specialist (rain-maker, priest)
• Places
  – Sacred (church, temple, sanctuary)
  – Liminal (caves, springs, top of mountains)
• Time
  – Before the rainy season (apr-may, St Mark, St Cross)
  – Beginning of rainy season (may-july, St Isidore-St James)
  – After the rainy season (sept-nov, All Saints)
Rain sanctuary on the top of a mountain
Rain rituals:  
*Volador*

- Practised by Totonacs, Huastecs, Otomis
- A flight to secure the balance of the universe and the coming of the rain

Cf. Lammel.
Graniceros (hailers) : rain-makers stroken by the lightning (Neovolcanic axis) (even close to large cities)

Other areas : rain-makers with nahual of lightning, feathered serpent, whirlwind
Offerings for the rain

- *Copal* incense
- Sacrificed animals
- Beverages
  - Cocoa drink (blood)
  - *Pulque* (agave beer: water, blood, milk, semen)

Codex Borgia: Agave (century plant) and *pulque*
La fête des morts :
fin des récoltes, fin des pluies

All Saints :
End of the rainy season,
End of the harvest,
Offerings to the dead,
Thanks for the rain
Conclusion

• Rain and drought are a symbolic axis in daily practises such as agriculture and cooking, as well as in the representation of reproduction, vital processes, fertility and abundance.

• Continuity and constant evolution of practises, knowledge and representations

• Climate change: now a discussion topic among Mexican farmers > interpreted within their symbolic framework.
Conclusion

- Scientists and other stakeholders in the present debates on climate have rarely taken into account the folk knowledge, and even less its symbolical aspects, often interpreted as beliefs or superstitions. Yet the knowledge is not separate from the expression of the global cosmovision of a society.

- In a world where climatic risks and disasters are being worsened by human impact on nature, lessons may be drawn from farmers’ knowledge and world view.
Conclusion

• Urgency to collect data on traditional knowledge
• In Mexico: migration to US: risks of loss of knowledge on nature

Post Office in the Mixtec Highlands: queuing to receive money from relatives working in the US
References


- Many articles on rain rituals and prehispanic gods

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