



# Texas Notes on Precolumbian Art, Writing, and Culture

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## Codex Zouche-Nuttall "Obverse": Summary of Contents

by Robert Williams

### Introductory Remarks.

#### I.

Other new world civilizations besides the Maya have left written records of themselves in fan-folded codex "books" which usually read from right to left in a manner called "boustrophedon." Though composed in pictograms--not hieroglyphs--these texts are no less subtle and ingenious than other, more specific forms of information. While only about four Mayan hieroglyphic books survive, about twelve post-conquest Aztec codices, five Mixtec codices (Codex Zouche-Nuttall, Codex Vindobonensis, Codex Selden, Codex Bodley, and the Colombino-Becker complex); and a series of codices of unknown provinancelled

The Borgia Group (Codex Borgia, Codex Cospi, etc.) are extant. Apart from written content, at least four of these--Zouche-Nuttall, Vindobonensis, Colombino-Becker (though heavily damaged) and Borgia--stand among the greatest works of precolumbian art.

The Mixteca codices were painted at various times by artists (scribes) from the Mixteca Indians of what is now the modern Mexican State of Oaxaca. Since they are written in pictograms which do not comprise a true writing system as did the hieroglyphics of the Mayans, they are "remembering-books" intended to supply a thread of story for a reciter to recall upon occasion. Alas, the original Mixtecanos are long gone--victims of their Aztec overlords and, later, of the

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Texas Notes 20-24 are a single interrelated group of essays. The references for all five essays are given at the end of Note 24.

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Spanish invaders, so it is not always possible to recover in-depth information from the surviving codex books. What can be recovered is the result of an on-going scholastic process deriving from several sources: (1) the codices themselves (internal codicial evidence), (2) historical records left by Spanish friars and governmental officials, and (3) folklore. If the beautiful and elaborate codices of the ancient Mixteca people can be compared to puzzles, then each passing year notes the discovery of more missing pieces by a handful of scholars whose business is to scrutinize these objects in increasingly finer focus.

To make these books, strips of animal hide were carefully joined, folded, coated with white gesso made from a kind of glue and the ashes of shell or limestone dust, and then carefully painted. In some cases both front and back were painted and this is certainly the case with Codex Zouche-Nuttall. What is now called the "reverse" was painted first with vignettes from the life of the great culture hero Lord 8 Deer Ocelot Claw (who died about 1115 A.D.). These vignettes from Lord 8 Deer's life are not necessarily in chronological sequence. At some later time, the codex "obverse" was painted to illustrate three main sequences, each consisting of a mythico-historical series of narratives and followed by genealogies.

To facilitate recitation of the boustrophedon text, the scribe provided red guide lines to indicate the path the eye should follow, or to terminate one section and begin another. Each fan-fold codex can be opened and read one page at a time, or unfolded to whatever length may be convenient to the reader. One quickly notes that each codex is somewhat unique as to its layout and composition and we understand that the scribes had considerable flexibility in choosing their "formats." Codex Zouche-Nuttall is constructed to unfold from left to right, Codex Selden unfolds from top to bottom. Each codex is endowed with a convoluted and mysterious history. Hernan Cortez records in his treasure lists that he sent two such "painted books" to Europe. These texts are not identified by modern scholars. Mexican codex books in Europe that have been known from the time of their arrival there are usually in poor condition. Those that remained out of sight-like

Zouche-Nuttall--are in exceptional condition. In fact Zouche-Nuttall surfaced rather late.

In her introduction to the 1902 Peabody Museum (Harvard University) edition of the Codex Zouche-Nuttall, Zelia Nuttall notes that she first heard of the book which now bears her name from a colleague, Senior Pasquale Villari. Senior Villari himself had first examined the codex at the Dominican Library of San Marco in Florence, Italy, in the first half of the nineteenth century. Upon repeated and insistent inquiry Mrs. Nuttall discovered that the library had sold the book to an anonymous purchaser and it required several years more before she tracked it down to Robert Curzon, Lord Zouche of Harynworth, England. It remained unknown to the scholastic world in Lord Zouche's collection of antique writings until his death in 1873 when ownership of it passed to his heir, Robert Nathaniel Cecil George Curzon, Baron Zouche of Harynworth. Zelia Nuttall examined the book when it was transferred to the British Museum in 1898.

Zelia Nuttall arranged for the publication of the text in codex-form with Peabody Museum, Harvard, and, in 1902, three hundred finished copies were issued. Dover Books, New York, issued an edition of it based on the 1902 edition in 1975; however, it is a larger page size and is bound as a European style book. Graz, Austria, published a facsimile of the original in 1987 and this edition is the most exact and authentic reproduction of Codex Zouche-Nuttall available to date. This and subsequent essays are based upon that edition.

## II.

The "obverse" of Codex Zouche-Nuttall (museum numbered pages one through forty-one) is actually the codex reverse. Troike has stated (Graz:1987:31) that, under microscopic examination, paint from the "obverse" can be seen to have leaked through small holes in the skin ground onto the "reverse" (museum pages forty-two through eighty-four). For this reason the use of the term "obverse" in this and subsequent papers is retained for the sake of conventional use but placed in quotation marks. The same is true for the term "reverse".

The codex "obverse" actually contains forty-five pages (counting the last, or back "cover") but only forty-one are painted. The text occurs in

several sections, rendered distinct from each other--in most cases--by the use of red guide lines that, when not used to direct the order of reading, extend from the top of a page to the bottom. Otherwise, the codex artist can separate sections by the use of a discontinuous reading order; that is, without using a red line, the text can end at the bottom left of one page and continue at the top right of the next. This disturbance in the typical boustrophedon reading order is distinct and is employed on both sides of Codex Zouche-Nuttall.

Problems in reading order (for example, "obverse" pages one and two which are without red lines) are discussed in subsequent papers in this series, and, will only be mentioned here as necessary to comment on the division of sections.

### The "Obverse" Table of Contents

- I. Events in the time of Lord 8 Wind "Eagle-Flint". Codex pages 1 through 11-I.
  - A. Appearances of Lord 8 Wind, pages 1 and 2.
  - B. War with the Stone Men, page 3.
  - C. War from Heaven, Funeral, Conference & Seance, page 4.
  - D. Lord 8 Wind and the Rain God, page 5-I, 5-II.
  - E. Marriages of Lord 8 Wind and Offspring, pages 5-III, 6-I.
  - F. Supernaturals Facing Right, page 6-II, 6-III, 6-IV.
  - G. Supernaturals Facing Left, page 6-V, 7-I, 7-II, 7-III.
  - H. Lord 8 Wind and Lord 2 Rain Ocelot Skin, pages 7-IV, 8.
  - I. Lord 9 Rain, page 9-I.
  - J. Lord 3 Reed and the Balance of Warriors, pages 9-II, 9-III, 10-I.
- II. Four Genealogies, pages 10-II through 13.
  - A. The first genealogy is found on page 10-II through 11-I. It is separated from the others by a zig-zag red line dividing page 11-I from 11-II. It is the only genealogy in this section to be fully divided from the others by a red guide line. The implication is that it is related to the preceding text and separate from the three genealogies that follow it.
  - B. The second genealogy begins at the top left of page 11-II moves to the right, then down

and to the left, extending to the first two females on page 12-I.

C. The third genealogy is contained on page 12 and has the same reading order as the preceding one.

D. The fourth and last genealogy is on page 13 and has the same unusual reading order as B. and C., above. It is divided from the text to follow by a full-length red guide line at the left side fold.

III. The Ladies 3 Flint.<sup>1</sup> Codex pages 14 through 22. Just like the Lord 8 Wind Eagle-Flint section above, this narrative precedes a genealogical section.

A. Introduction, page 14. Six pairs of individuals and their places are listed.

1. Top right: Lady 3 Flint the Elder and Lord 5 Flower in House with ceiling and walls of stone and sky, walls and floor of footpath: their peregrination.

2. Top middle: Lord 1 Rain, Lord 7 Rain (see codex "obverse" pages 36-39).

3. Top left: Lord 2 Reed and Lord 4 Ocelot.

4. Bottom right: Lord 10 Vulture and Lord 10 Reed.

5. Bottom middle: Lord 10 Grass and Lord 10 Rain.

6. Bottom left: Lord 7 Death and Lord 7 Reed.

B. Events prior to the birth of Lady 3 Flint Younger.

1. Page 15-I: three pairs of personages who appeared on the preceding page.

a. Top: Lord 10 Rain and Lord 10 Grass.

b. Middle: Lord 10 Reed and Lord 10 Vulture.

c. Bottom: Lady 3 Flint Elder & Lord 5 Flower.

2. Page 15-II: river and volcano ceremonies.

a. Bottom: in a river Lady 3 Flint Elder appears from the mouth of a feathered serpent before Lady 1 Eagle, the supernatural of rivers and steambaths. At Serpent Ballcourt.

b. Middle: before the temple of Lord 9 Wind of the Split-Bundle, Lady 3 Flint Elder offers incense before someone attired as a volcano; Lord 10 Reed and Lord 10 Wind also offer gifts.

c. Top: Lord 5 Flower perforates his ear before two mountains, one of which is a volcano.

1. Caso (1984:1:55-57) has a slightly different interpretation of these events which which be presented in in Texas Notes 23 and 24.

- d. Page 16-I, top: Lord 10 Wind and Lord 10 Motion at a place with offerings associated with Lady 1 Eagle, the supernatural of rivers and steambaths.
- C. Page 16-I, middle right: the birth of Lady 3 Flint Younger. Possible death of Lady 3 Flint Elder.
- D. Events subsequent to the birth of Lady 3 Flint Younger.
1. Page 16-I, middle left: Lady 3 Flint Elder enters a cave in the side of a mountain, Lords 10 Grass and 10 Reed are there. A river flows beneath the mountain.
  2. Page 16-II, bottom: at the above-mentioned river are Lords 9 Wind and 7 Flower (supernaturals).
  3. Page 16-II, top: Lord 5 Flower and Lady 3 Flint before...
  4. Page 16-III, top: ...Lord 5 Wind Above Flames and Lord 5 Eagle Above Star.
  5. Page 16-III, bottom: Lady 3 Flint Elder in a river. Five supernaturals, two of whom (Lord 4 Deer and Lord 4 Death) appear on pages 37-II to 38 of this "obverse."
  6. Page 17-I, top: Lady 3 Flint Younger before Lord 7 Rain who sacrifices a bird.
  7. Middle: Lady 3 Flint Elder and Lord 5 Flower sacrifice a dog and bird with Lords 10 Grass and 10 Rain.
  8. Bottom: Lady 3 Flint Elder in a river with Lords 4 Deer and 4 Death.
  9. Page 17-II-18-I: The Marriage of Lady 3 Flint the Elder and Lord 5 Flower (reads from bottom to top). The interesting question here concerns the order of marriage in relationship to Lady 3 Flint Younger's birth. If she was born before her mother married Lord 5 Flower, are we dealing with a "virgin" birth?
  10. Page 18-II-18-III: Lord 12 Wind's First Descent from Heaven. Two columns of text, read from top to bottom, then bottom to top.
  11. Double page 19: The Marriage of Lady 3 Flint Younger and Lord 12 Wind.
  12. Page 20-I: Lady 3 Flint Younger, Lord 12 Wind and thirteen "people-plants."
  13. Page 20-II: Extermination of Lineage of Lord 12 Lizard and Lady 13 Vulture, War with the Stone Men and the Funeral of the Sons of 12 Lizard and 13 Vulture.
  14. Page 21-I: War from Heaven #2, same year as that on page 4, but different day, different actors, different site.
  15. Page 21-II: Lady 1 Death events.
  16. Page 22: The Marriage of Lord 7 Death and Lady 1 Snake. A like-in-kind event to that marriage of Lady 3 Flint the Younger and Lord 12 Wind shown on double page 19, above. The codex is even structured in folding so that double page 19 and this page can be placed side-by-side for comparison. It is important to note that this section illustrates three marriages none of which seem to demonstrate offspring.
- IV. Five Genealogies.
- A. #1: page 23. A discontinuity in text occurs between this page and the next.
  - B. #2: page 24. A discontinuity in text occurs between this page and the next.
  - D. #3: page 25-31. This is the genealogy of Lord 8 Deer Ocelot Claw, the subject of the entire codex "reverse". A full-length red guide line divides page 31 from page 32.
  - E. #4: page 32-33-I. A full-length, zig-zag red guide line divides page 33-I from page 33-II.
  - F. #5: page 33-II-35. A full-length red guide line divides page 35 from page 36.
- V. Pages 36-39: The Peregrination of Four Lords from Apoala. According to the established layout of this "obverse", this narrative section precedes a genealogy.
- A. At Apoala.
  - B. At Rain God Place.
  - C. With Lord 9 Wind at Hearts Temple.
  - D. At the place of Two Valleys and a Volcano.
- VI. Pages 40-41: Genealogy.
- A. Page 40: atypically, this abbreviation shows not a conventional genealogy, but four couples in parallel columns (males at the top, females at the bottom). All face to the left, toward page 41.
  - B. Page 41: a typical marriage list and genealogy which reads from lower right across the bottom, then from upper left across the top, terminating at the top right.

### Conclusions.

The Codex Zouche-Nuttall "Obverse" can be divided into six main sections consisting of three narrative complexes, each followed by a genealogy. The three narratives are called complexes because each contains more than one event. In some cases the same events are repeated, apparently to consider different contexts and for elaboration: this refers to the War with the Stone Men (pages 3 and 20-II) and the War from Heaven (pages 4-I and 21-I). A reduction of the contents reveals Codex Zouche-Nuttall's "obverse" structure, or, format, as follows:

- I. Lord 8 Wind Eagle Flint. Pages 1-10-I.
- II. Four Genealogies. Pages 10-II-13.

III. The Ladies 3 Flint. Pages 14-22.

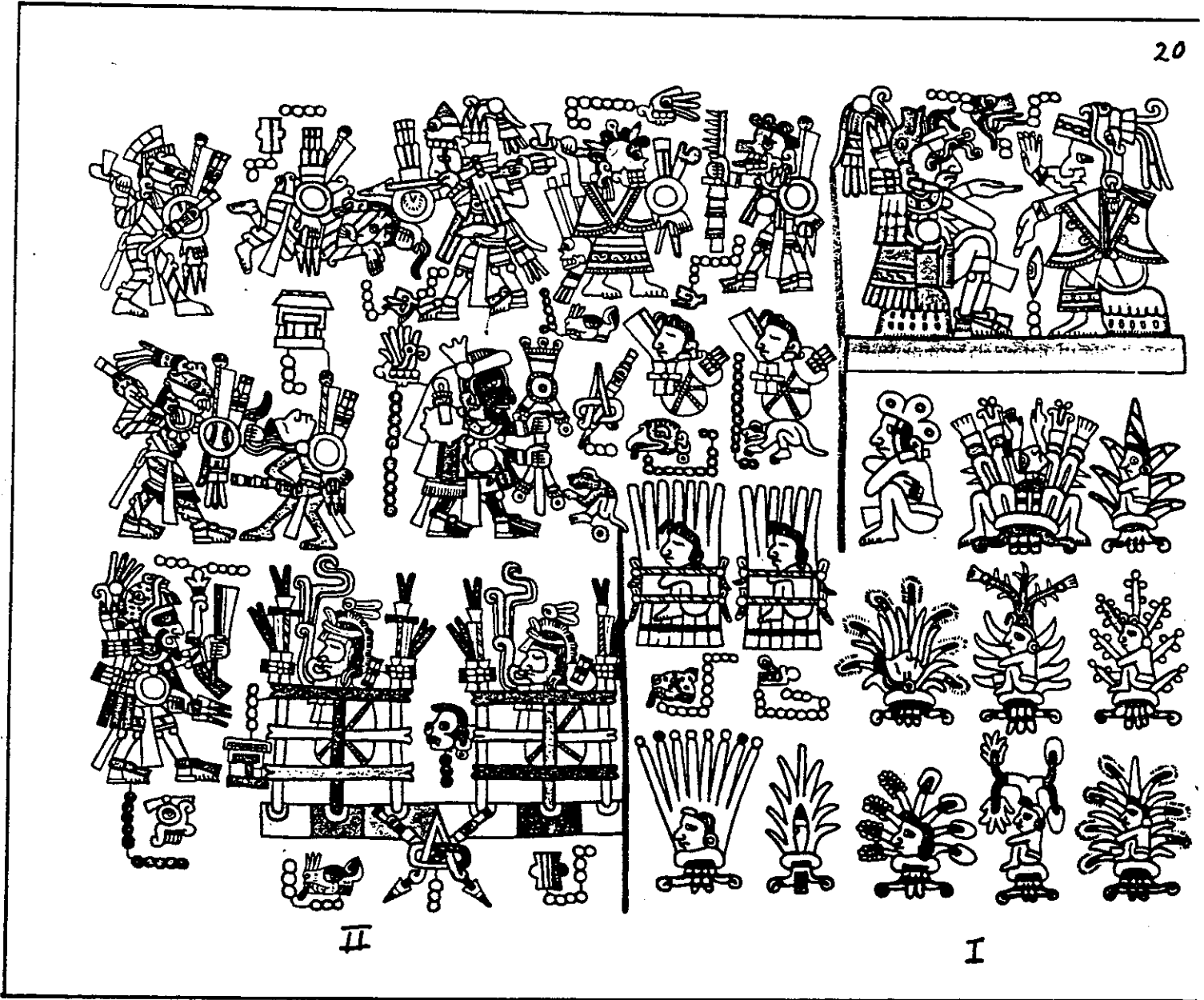
IV. Five Genealogies. Pages 23-35.

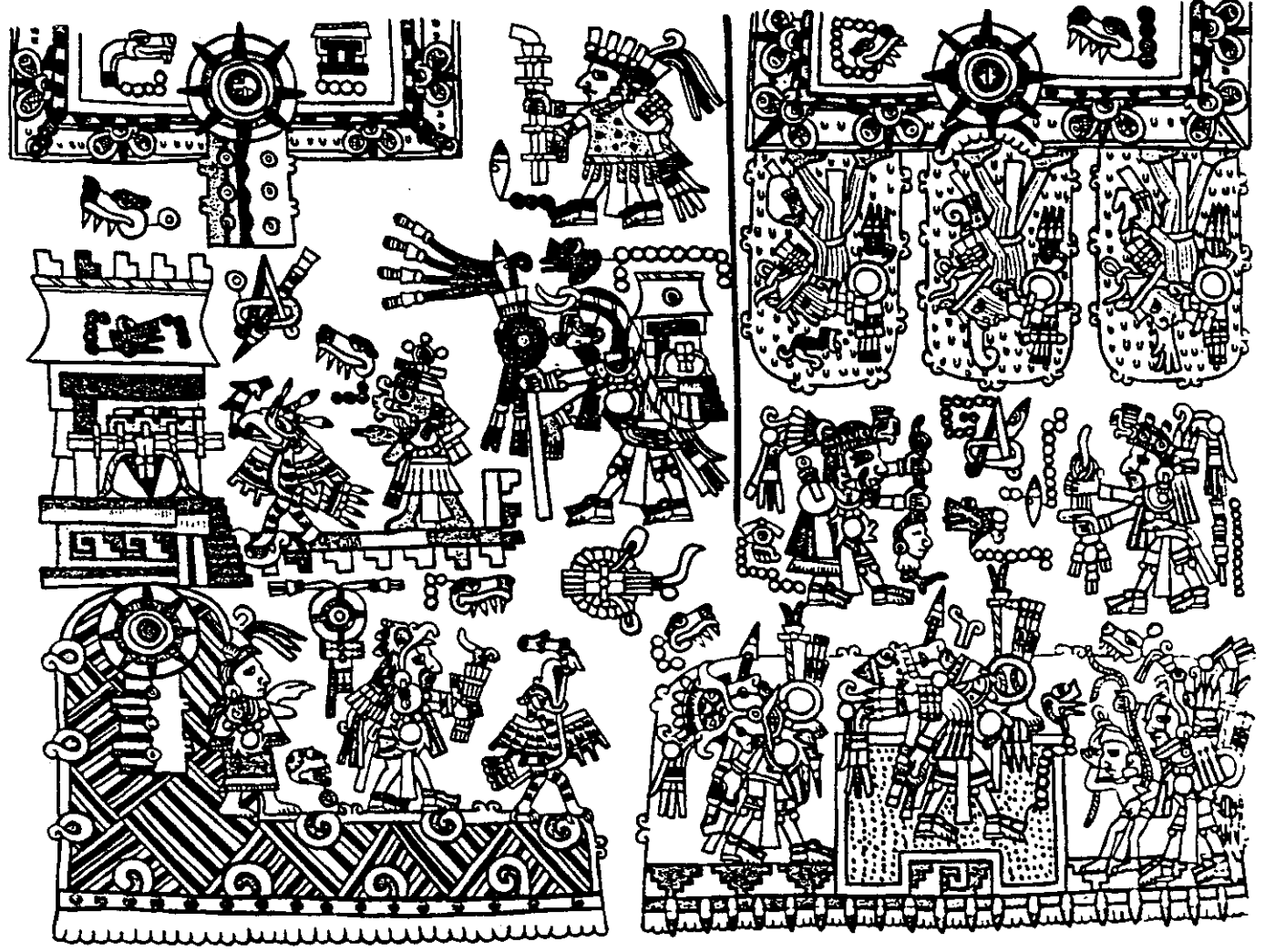
V. Peregrination of Four Lords from Apoala.  
Pages 36-39.

VI. Genealogy. Pages 40-41.

And, finally, it is productive to note that many of the so-called "genealogies" on Codex Zouche-Nuttall "Obverse" do not appear to be typical genealogies, but, rather, lists of important families without obvious connections of intermarriage such as we see in Codex Selden. That all such families are in some way related seems obvious because of their grouping, but connections by virtue of their offspring are not often provided in the Codex text.

CODEX ZOUCHE-NUTTALL "Obverse," Pages 20-21. The scribe ends text on page 20 at the lower left and begins text on page 21 at the upper right. This discontinuity is one way to end and begin sections without using a red guide line.





II

I

Page 20-II is the second relation of the "War with the Stone Men," only now is added information regarding the lineage extermination by Lady 9 Grass. Page 21-I is the second telling of events in the "War from Heaven."