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Eight Deer Plays Ball Again: Notes on a New Codiactal Cognate

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Of the seven fanfold Mixtec codices which survived the Spanish Conquest, fully five of the documents contribute data concerning Lord 8 Deer Tiger Claw, the great Mixtec king and culture hero.¹ The five documents are: Codex Zouche-Nuttall, sides one and two²; Codex Bodley; Codex Selden; Codex Vindobonensis Mexicanus I, side two; and Codex Colombino-Becker I. Indeed, events in the life of Lord 8 Deer Tiger Claw appear to be the principal subjects of the Zouche-Nuttall and Colombino-Becker I codices.

Each codex artist expressed data according to his own interpretations, deleting or embellishing details from similar events as needed. Thus, similar and related narrative sequences are expressed differently from codex to codex depending on which parts of the available information the scribe intended to foreground or background. Similar and

related scenes appearing in different codices are called "cognates." Their elucidation is one of the keys to interpreting the Mixtec codices. As with all historical texts from Mesoamerica, comparative analyses from differing texts reveal the most complete narratives available to the historian. The authors contend that a newly identified cognate adds a new piece to the puzzle of the larger than life Mixtec king Lord Eight Deer Tiger Claw.

In Codex Zouche-Nuttall, side two, page 45-III³, Lord 8 Deer⁴ participates in a ballcourt ceremony at Tututepec with a round-eyed individual cloaked in a mantle and wearing a long, thin nose plug and a distinctive headdress (Figure 1b). This person appears to be named 7 Serpent. He offers 8 Deer a jewel or bell while an eagle dives toward a decapitated bird in the ballcourt itself. Lord 7 Serpent also processes towards the event [45-IV]. He of-

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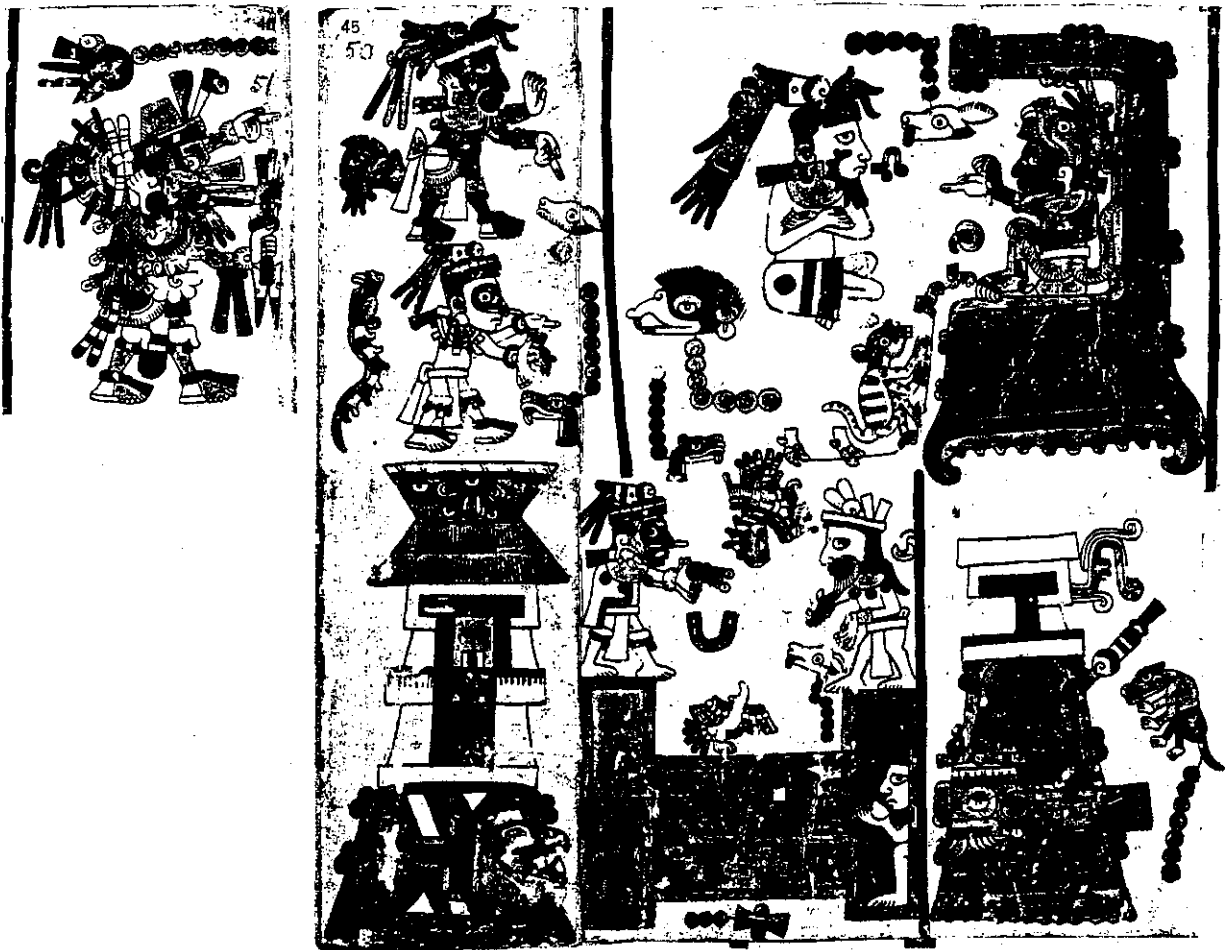


Figure 1. a) Codex Zouche-Nuttall 46-I;
b) Codex Zouche-Nuttall 45-II-IV

fers a decapitated head. Also approaching are Lords 1 Dog and 9 Wind *Ehecatl*, the divine Mixtec culture hero. Caso (1966:124) identified the Zouche-Nuttall ballcourt scene as cognate with the ceremony of Lords 8 Deer and 1 Motion *Tlahuizcalpantecuhli* portrayed on Codex Colombino-Becker I, page 2, and Codex Bodley, page 10-IV. If correct, Caso's identification requires that the Zouche-Nuttall scene violate the narrative order of

the Bodley scene. In Codex Bodley, the Lord 1 Motion ballgame, to which Caso refers, occurs prior to Lord 8 Deer's meeting with Lady 9 Grass at Chalcatongo (Figures 2a, b). In Zouche-Nuttall however, the ballgame at Tututepec occurs after this meeting, which is depicted on page 44.

Nancy Troike, in her unpublished dissertation, remarks that Bodley 10-III (Figure 2) could show the same procession which surrounds the ballgame

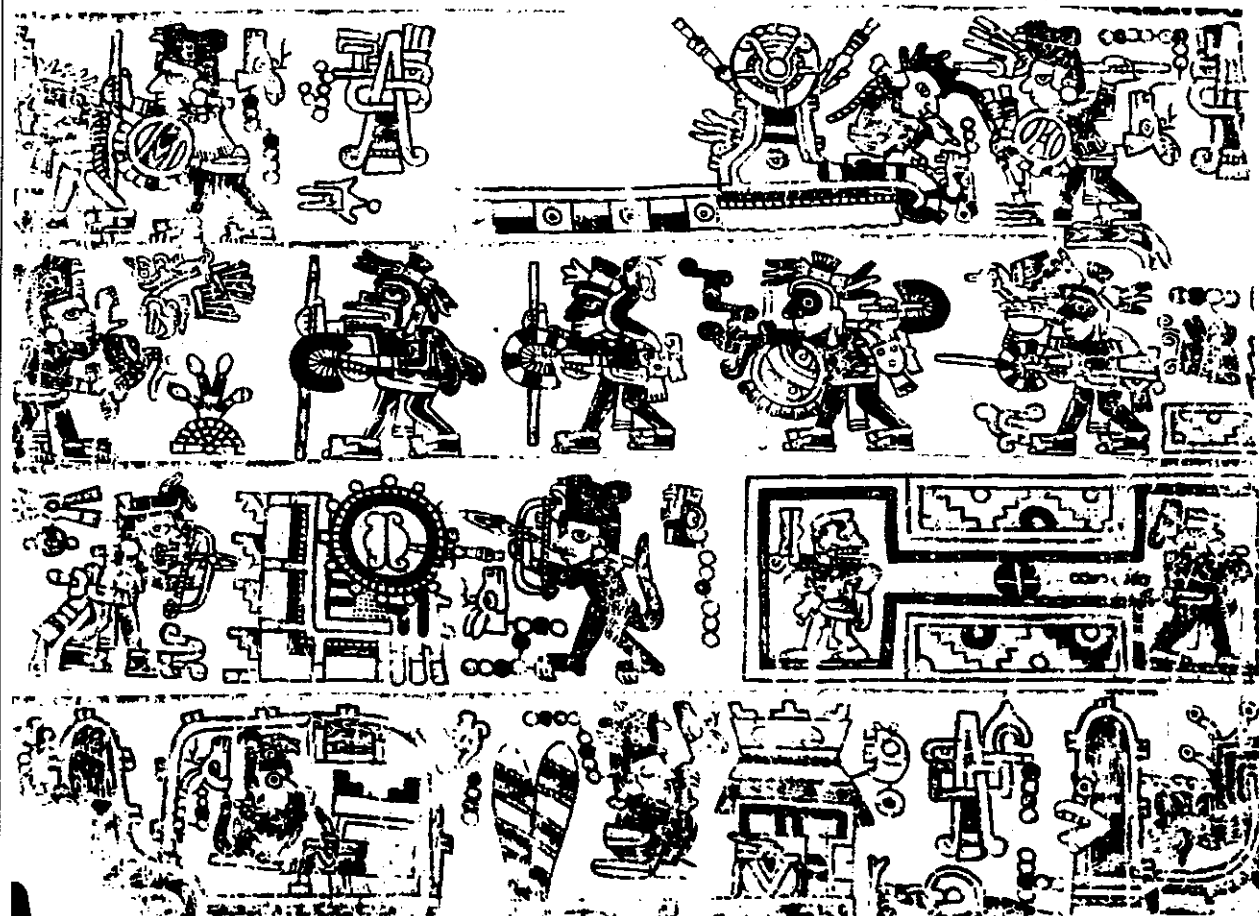


Figure 2. Codex Bodley 10-II-IV

on Zouche-Nuttall 46-46 (Troike 1974:178). Lord 9 Wind Ehecatl (unnamed) leads a figure with a serpent on his back. We believe this lord is the same as the Lord 7 Serpent pictured in the Zouche-Nuttall example. At the very point where the procession meets Lord 8 Deer, Codex Bodley shows a toponym with the diagnostic elements of the Tututepec ballcourt. These include a bound stone bundle and a diving eagle. Bodley also shows Lord 8 Deer performing a bird sacrifice above this topo-

nym. In the Zouche-Nuttall version, the sacrifice has already occurred and the decapitated bird appears beneath Lords 8 Deer and 7 Serpent. These parallels confirm Troike's suggestion that the Bodley cognate to the Zouche-Nuttall scene is the procession on 10-III, and not, as Caso proposed, the Lord 1 Motion ballcourt scene. The reader of the codices is merely presented with snapshots of the same sequence of rituals taken at slightly different moments.

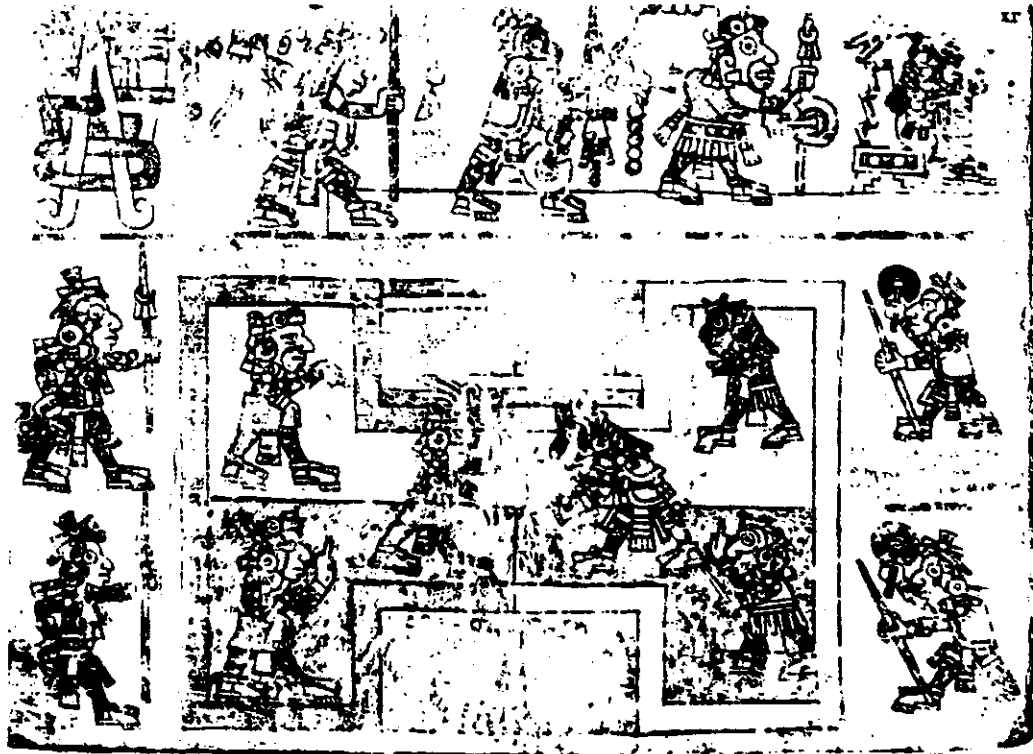


Figure 3a. Codex Colombino-Becker 11

It follows, then, that Caso's suggested Colombino-Becker I page 2 cognate is equally erroneous. However, a cognate procession/ballgame ceremony sequence can be found on Colombino-Becker I, pages 11 and 12. Although none of the individuals in the court itself are named in the Colombino-Becker I, the ballgame ritual described therein occurs after a procession and in the proper order according to the codices Bodley and Zouche-Nuttall. Two of the participants on the right side of the court wear the black face paint worn by individuals in the Zouche-Nuttall and Bodley ballgame/procession scene.

Although Codex Bodley compresses the narrative of the ballcourt event, employing only an abbreviated and telegraphed toponym, Codex Colombino-Becker I expands the scene to the better part of two pages. (Figures 3a, b). The explanation for this emphasis is actually found in the Codex

Zouche-Nuttall, where we are clearly told that the ballgame event occurred at a believed to be Tututepec (Smith 1973:67b-68a).⁵ Tututepec is a site of major importance in the Codex Colombino-Becker I. Lord 8 Deer's ballgame at this place is duly amplified.

The differences in the three narratives are, we believe, worthy of special note. The independent appearance of the ballcourt/procession sequence in three codices is good evidence it was perceived as a real historical event. However, the differences between the versions reveal shades of interpretation. A codex from Tututepec emphasizes that site's role. In contrast, the Codex Bodley scribe reduced Tututepec to a small stone bundle and diving eagle toponym. Smith identifies such distinctions as "regionalism" (1983). Differences in the ballgame/procession scene from codex to codex are a good example of regionalism.



Figure 3b. Codex Colombino-Becker 12

The Lords of the Procession

The presence of Lords 7 Serpent and 9 Wind in the ballgame/procession sequence attests to Lord 8 Deer's importance in the Mixtec world. This pair are specifically named in all three codaical examples: Bodley 10-III, Colombino-Becker I, 12-II, and Zouche-Nuttall 45-IV through 46-I. However, we believe these figure are not gods *per se*, but rather deity impersonators sent from the Place of Reeds, the site ruled by Lord 4 Jaguar (see Bodley 10-III). Interestingly, according to our proposed reading order, Lord 8 Deer's first ballgame, as pictured on Colombino-Becker I, 2, and Bodley 10-

IV, is against two different opponents: Lord 1 Death (Colombino-Becker I) and Lord 1 Motion (Bodley). However, Lord 1 Motion clearly wears Lord 1 Death's skeletal head, which we take to be a mask.⁶ Thus, both the procession and the ballgame itself may have involved ritual deity impersonation.⁷

Lord 8 Deer followed each ballgame/procession ritual with a round of conquests. We suggest that ballcourt ceremonies played a key role in conquest warfare, most likely through the formation of alliances. We also suggest that the ceremonies involved specific deity impersonators. These include Lords 7 Serpent and 9 Wind Ehecatl in the procession and Lord 1 Motion and/or 1 Death in the ballgame.

Notes

1. The recognition of this proposed cognate is a product of the informal seminar on Mixtec codices held at the University of Texas at Austin in Fall 1992. Robert Williams led the group under the professorship of Linda Schele. This unique seminar continues at the time of this writing and the authors would appreciate comments from interested parties.

2. We have chosen to use the term "side" because of historical confusion about the terms "obverse" and "reverse." In all cases, our "side" refers to the obverse as it is currently understood. The same applies to our use of reverse.

3. Roman numerals following page numbers refer to the "band" or register where the cited sequence can be found.

4. Despite the appearance of only seven dots, the authors feel that the narrative sequence (Z-N 45-II-III-IV-46-I) and the visible "claw" identify the individual as Lord 8 Deer.

5. According to Smith, the Mixtec called Tututepec *Yucu dzaa*, or "Hill of the Bird." We also note that the cognate outlined above does not necessarily depend on the Tututepec identification. The toponym, even if it identifies a locale other than Tututepec, remains constant.

6. He is shown as human in the Colombino-Becker I.

7. The topic of deity impersonators is obliquely mentioned in Caso's *Interpretation of Codex Bodley*, with reference to Lord 1 Motion Tlahuizcalpantecuhtli on side two of the manuscript (1960:55). He also remarks on the deity's identification with the planet Venus.

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