

# A Ballgame Story Reworked as Anti-Myth in the *Relación de Michoacán*: Kingship, Identity, and Remembrance Forgotten in a Tale of the Origin of the Spaniards

Una historia de juego de pelota retomada como anti-mito en la *Relación de Michoacán*: realeza, identidad y recuerdo olvidado en un cuento del origen de los españoles

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**Abstract:** Existing analyses of a Tarascan (Purépecha) narrative contained in the *Relación de Michoacán* about a ballgame contest have focused only on the paradigmatic relations between the characters in this story. Additionally, these paradigmatic understandings of this particular ballgame narrative have only been formulated in coordination with what is known of characters in related stories that contain similar elements. Resulting interpretations based on the paradigmatic relations of characters within the story and comparison with other stories explain the meaning of the story as an allegory of celestial phenomena, as all other such stories have been interpreted. This article goes further than those studies by applying a syntagmatic approach that analyzes the sequential action and transformations of the story itself. Paradigmatic or symbolic meanings are incorporated within such an approach, with the recognition that such relations are the subject of transformation through the plot of the story. By using this method, I show that the total transformations of the story are best explained as an 'anti-myth'. In an 'anti-myth', a foreign entity is explained as the opposite of some aspect of indigenous society. The ball game story in the *Relación de Michoacán* functions as an anti-myth because the remains of a dead ancestor are transformed into a deer that is a post hoc mythological precursor to the Spaniards' horses. Through this transformation the horses, as fetishized vehicles and sources of Spanish power, are represented as the results of an indigenous failure to remember one's ancestors which immediately precedes that transformation. The point of the story is revealed to be an effort to understand the nature of the Spaniards' power, and to indigenize that power in order to reclaim it.

**Keywords:** ball game; myth; resistance; narrative analysis; Tarascans; Purépecha; Mexico; 16<sup>th</sup> century.

**Resumen:** Un cuento sobre el juego de pelota contenido en la *Relación de Michoacán* presenta elementos que lo asocian a otras narraciones mesoamericanas de origen. Abundan los estudios de este cuento tarasco (purépecha) sobre un combate con la pelota focalizados en las relaciones paradigmáticas entre los personajes o dioses representados. Tales aproximaciones

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paradigmáticas se apoyan en informaciones sobre los personajes tomadas de otros cuentos con elementos similares y suelen concluir que el cuento es una alegoría de fenómenos celestiales. El presente artículo va más allá de dichos estudios en tanto se vale de un acercamiento sintagmático que analiza las acciones secuenciales y las transformaciones dentro del cuento. Se incorporan significados paradigmático-simbólicos para explicar cómo los significados se transforman a través de la trama del cuento. El método sintagmático evidencia que las transformaciones se explican mejor en tanto ‘anti-mito’. En un ‘anti-mito’ una entidad extranjera se concibe como lo opuesto en algún aspecto a la sociedad indígena. Se establece que el cuento del juego de pelota en la Relación de Michoacán funciona como un anti-mito porque en él los restos de un antepasado se transforman en un ciervo parecido a los caballos traídos por los españoles. En tal sentido el cuento ofrece un precursor mitológico para los caballos a partir de la conquista. Un fracaso indígena en la tarea de recordar a los antepasados es el antecedente y la instigación que provoca la transformación de los restos en un ciervo-caballo. En esta secuencia se “indigeniza” a los caballos de los españoles, en tanto vehículo y fuente fetichizada del poder español. Postulo que el propósito del cuento es la comprensión del carácter del poder español y la indigenización de ese poder con el fin de reivindicarlo.

**Palabras clave:** juego de pelota; mito; resistencia; análisis narrativo; tarascos; purépecha; México; siglo XVI.

## Introduction

A ca. 1540 document known as the *Relación de Michoacán* (Alcalá 2000) recounts a supposed conversation from years before between the last indigenous king and some of his advisors concerning the origin of the Spaniards, and particularly their horses. The document was written ten years after the death of that king at the hands of Spanish colonial authorities and 18 years after the uncontested entrance of Spanish forces into the Tarascan capital city; the subjugation of indigenous society by the time it is written down is part of the known context of its entry into the historical record. The story is about a ballgame between two combatants, a son who must learn his true identity and recover his father’s bones, and the origin of the horses that the Spanish conquistadors rode as they subjugated the indigenous polities and peoples of what became New Spain. Previous treatments have only suggested that the two main combatants in the first part of the narrative comprise the main elements of a solar/day metaphor, in which the forces of night and day battle. This is not an incorrect reading of the myth, but it ignores the second half of the narrative as well as the tense and ambiguous historical moment in which it was told. There has been recent research that has emphasized the nature of the document as a palimpsest of competing interests and goals, including surreptitious forms of indigenous resistance. Such a theoretical perspective has unfortunately not been extended to analyzing this ball-game story. By analyzing the full narrative as well as the context in which it was told, I propose that this narrative is not simply a metaphor for celestial phenomena, but more contextually about rulership and how rulership is gained, maintained, and lost. I suggest that the narrative is most fruitfully approached

analytically as an 'anti-myth' (Da Matta 1970; see Turner 1988), an inversion of an indigenous myth that is applied to outsiders that establishes a symbolic framework in which the relation between the two groups can be understood.

The analysis presented here therefore addresses important theoretical issues for how indigenous narratives, myths, legends, and histories are analyzed. In Mesoamerica, as elsewhere, where myths have been analyzed using structuralist and/or symbolic methods, this has been conducted using a 'paradigmatic' structuralist framework. In such a framework, the manner in which variations in terms of specific symbols (paradigms) deployed in variations of a group of related narratives is analyzed for patterning of the substitutions or 'transformations' of the paradigmatic categories. In the case of the narrative at hand, following this method has resulted in two problematic and, I argue, detrimental results. The first is that the story is treated as if it is the same as the others in a set of very well-known narratives concerning the famous Mesoamerican culture hero Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl as well as aspects of the equally famous K'iche' Maya *Popol Vuh*. In any interpretations that result from such an analysis, the narrative in the *Relación de Michoacán* cannot tell us anything new nor particular about what Tarascan elders sought to achieve by creating and telling the story. A minor corollary issue to this paradigmatic predominance is the compilation of lists of metaphorical equivalencies and associations in the formulation of deer=sun, which certainly appear to be the case in certain contexts but quickly lead to problems when other such equivalencies overlap and contradict one another. The second major problem, a familiar one related to the weakness of Levi-Straussian structuralism, is that all stories that contain similar elements are grouped together regardless of context, especially temporal context. In this way analyses of the Tarascan story up to this point have failed to address why these elders told the story as they did in relation to the historical context in which they told it, i.e. explicitly as a way to explain the Spaniards and their horses (rather than saying anything concerning 'just' celestial phenomena). While the story is introduced in the document itself as a way to explain these very issues, this aspect of the story has received scant attention, precisely because modern analysts have rushed to examine it in relation to other similar narratives, which are indeed similar but do not concern themselves with where Spanish horses come from. These similarities with other narratives are therefore significant but noting the similarities cannot possibly be said to encompass the meanings of any one narrative and why it is different in some way from the others.

I address these shortcomings by employing a method of narrative analysis developed by the anthropologist Terence Turner (1969; 1977; 1985) and which I have utilized on the much lengthier narrative of the origins of the Tarascan royal dynasty as recorded in the same document (Haskell 2018; see also Haskell 2008). This method is different because it brings back the syntagmatic, or sequential, aspect of narrative into the analysis (see especially Turner 1969; 1977). It is still necessary to compare the Tarascan story to

other narratives from Mesoamerica that contain similar elements; this helps illuminate the implications of the paradigms that are selected and deployed in the narrative. In order for these understandings to produce an analysis of this one specific narrative and its relation to the context in which it is told, these broad dimensions must be combined with an analysis that takes into account the specific progression of the characters and the plot in which their actions unfold to arrive at how and why this narrative and how it is told in its particular details would have been an important mode of symbolic action at the moment of its production and telling.

### The story of the Spaniards and their horses

The text of the *Relación de Michoacán* telling the story of the ball-game playing deities is as follows:<sup>1</sup>

Dijo el cazonçi a los señores: “verdad es que han venido gentes de otras partes, y no vienen con cautela los mexicanos, ¿qué haremos? Gran trabajo es éste. ¿Cuándo empezó a ser México? Muchos tiempos ha questá fundada México y es reino, y este de Michuacan. Estos dos reinos eran nombrados, y en estos dos reinos miraban los dioses desde el cielo y el sol. Nunca habemos oído cosa semejante de nuestros antepasados. Si algo supieron no nos lo hicieron saber Tariácuri y Hirépani y Tangáxoan que fueron señores, que habían de venir otras gentes. ¿De dónde podían venir, sino del cielo, los que vienen? Que el cielo se junta con el mar y de allí debían de salir, pues aquellos venados que dicen que traen, ¿qué cosa es?”. Dijéronle los navatlatos: “señor, aquellos venados deben ser, según lo que sabemos nosotros por una historia, y es que el dios llamado Cúpanzieeri jugó con otro dios a la pelota, llamado Achuri hirepe, y ganóle y sacrificóle en un pueblo llamado Xacona y dejó su mujer preñada de Siráta-tápezi, su hijo, y nació y tomaronle a criar en un pueblo, como que se le habían hallado. Y después de mancebo fue a tirar aves con un arco y topó con una ivana y díjole: ‘no me fleches y direte una cosa: el padre que tienes agora no es tu padre, porque tu padre fué a la casa del dios llamado Achu hirepe, a conquistar, y allí le sacrificaron’. Como oyó aquéllo, fué allí para probarse con el que había muerto a su padre, y vencióle y sacrificó al que había muerto a su padre y cavó donde estaba enterrado y sacóle y echósele a cuestras y veníase con él. En el camino estaba en un herbazal una manada de codornices, y levantáronse todas en vuelo, y dejó allí su padre por tirar a las codornices, y tornóse venado el padre y tenía crines en la cerviz, como dicen que tienen esos que traen esas gentes, y su cola larga. Y fue hacia la man[o] derecha, quizá con los que vienen a estas tierras”. Dijo el cazonçi: “¿de quién sabríamos la verdad” (Alcalá 2000, 654).

### The context of the narrative

The narrative is included in the *Relación de Michoacán*, in the third section of that document. This document was written by an anonymous Franciscan friar, though J. Benedict Warren’s analysis of religious persons active in Michoacán at the time indicates strongly that one Friar Jerónimo de Alcalá produced the document (Warren 1970-1971). Upon completion it was given to Viceroy Antonio de Mendoza, so that it might help the

<sup>1</sup> I follow the 2000 edition’s paleography and spelling and in subsequent sections of this paper use the spellings of this edition, except when they are part of a direct quote from another source.

fledgling Spanish colonial order understand the natives of this region and impose control over them. It was also perhaps intended to inform a land dispute that had the potential to cause much consternation for all levels of the Spanish political order (Afanador Pujol 2015; Martínez Baracs 2005). The third section of the document can be characterized as dealing with the ‘ethnographic present’ of how the Tarascan kingdom and its upper social strata functioned ‘on the eve of the Spanish conquest’ and (contestations exist; see Stone 2004; Afanador Pujol 2015; also Martínez Baracs 2005) into the earliest years of the colonial era to some extent. As an outgrowth of this ‘ethnographic present,’ this part of the document also describes from an indigenous perspective significant events of the imposition of the colonial order up to and including the death of the last indigenous Tarascan king.

In the passage included here, the king, Tzintzicha Tangaxoan, essentially asks who the Spaniards and their mounts are, saying that their ancestors had never told them of such creatures. He speculates that surely they must have come from the sky, that place where the sky meets the sea on the horizon. To his queries, a group of “navatlato” answers by telling the story of the ballgame players. It should be noted that while this narrative has clear parallels to a story told in the Nahuatl-language sources produced by peoples in the Basin of Mexico and surrounding areas (discussed below), which are central to my argument, the fact that the men who speak are called Nahuatlato does not necessarily mean that they were Nahuatl-speakers, though it is perhaps likely. In the *Relación de Michoacán*, ‘Nahuatlato’ is a term that was generically applied to indicate a ‘translator’. This meaning builds on the literal meaning of the root of Nahuatl, meaning ‘speaker’ (Stone 2004). The fact that they use Xacona (modern Jacona) as representative of ‘west’ possibly indicates that they are not Nahuatlato from east of Michoacán but were local to the Tarascan kingdom – Xacona is in the western portion of the Tarascan kingdom but certainly not at the western limits of the landmass of Mexico. As elucidated by Warren (1985) and most recently investigated by Roskamp and colleagues (Roskamp 2010; 2015; Monzón, Roskamp, and Warren 2009), in Pre-Hispanic times there were Nahuatl speakers in the Pátzcuaro Basin and throughout the empire. Some of these Nahuatl speakers seem to have formed a politically well-connected noble community thanks to their alliance with king Tzitzispandácuare, the grandfather of Tzintzicha Tangaxoan (Monzón, Roskamp, and Warren 2009; Haskell 2013). These Nahuatl noblemen apparently served prominently as long-distance merchants and as translators for the Tarascan-speaking nobility. Perhaps in the context in which they existed, the ‘Nahuatlato’ were both Nahuatl and translators, the one identity related to the other.

### Myth and anti-myth: The analytic framework

In discussing this ball-game story as a form of anti-myth, I rely on Turner's (1988) commentary in a volume devoted to analyzing South American narratives (Hill 1988). The idea of anti-myth is not Turner's, however; he makes clear that his discussion relies on the key insights of Da Matta's (1970) article examining paired stories concerning the origins of native society and 'Brazilian' society.<sup>2</sup> According to Turner (1988, 255), "Da Matta's main point is that the structure of the Timbira myth of the origin of the Brazilians is a systematic inversion of the structure of the main Ge myth of cultural origins, the well-known story of the bird-nester and the fire of the jaguar". (Turner [1985] provides a syntagmatic analysis of a Kayapó version of this myth). Turner goes on to compare the presence of this genre of story, the 'anti-myth', in Amazonia with stories that similarly seek to explain the relationship of indigenous society with European society from the Andean culture region. "The important difference is that the Andean systems are structurally adapted for inclusion, as subordinate enclaves, within imperial or colonial states dominated by alien elites" (Turner 1988, 258). What distinguishes the Andean myths is a sense of hierarchy, of dominant-subordinate relationships that exist and interrelate the two groups, but which also rely upon a difference and a maintenance of separate identities. The cultures in which these anti-myths are told therefore posit a preservation of cultural integrity that preserves some essential aspect of itself internally while simultaneously inverting and externalizing that same aspect of itself as a mode of explaining the European other.

The point concerning the difference exemplified by Andean societies (see Dillon and Abercrombie [1988] and Rasnake [1988], also Silverblatt [1988]) is salient in relation to the corpus of narratives in Mesoamerica. The genre of the narrative examined here is a common one across Mesoamerica, and a theme of this group of narratives is the remembrance of ancestors as a mode of preserving and continuing hierarchy, and particularly ensuring succession to the position of sovereign. As I discuss below, a key aspect of this particular variant of the story is the relationship with the Mesoamerican ballgame as a preamble to that issue of continuation/succession of hierarchy and rulership. The *Popol Vuh* (Christensen 2007) is perhaps the Mesoamerican narrative that most explicitly revolves around the ballgame but is also explicitly about the recovery and remembrance

2 The insights and analytic framework is, moreover, consistent with a certain point of view concerning Levi-Strauss's work that originates in Amazonia but casts a wide net – this is the view that certain mythic 'structures' are durable and yet myth is not actually 'timeless', as various durable structures are applied to historical events, and so exert an influence on how historical events are understood and thus represented. The relationship works in the opposite direction as well; events have the potential, by calling for new permutations of the structures at play, have the potential to transform the structure and its parameters or framework (see especially Sahlins 1985 on this point). This point concerning Levi-Strauss's work as not exactly as a-historical as it is portrayed is made particularly well by Gow (2001; see also Fausto and Heckenberger 2007).

of ancestors. The ballgame is, among other things, a metaphor for the movements of celestial bodies, particularly the sun. If a comparison can be made with Levi-Strauss's (1969; 1978) analyses of certain Amerindian myths, his discussion demonstrates that elsewhere in the Americas a common relation established in myths is the link between a proper 'distance' (i.e. not too close nor distant) between the sun and moon and thus day and night and other temporalities with a proper social 'distance' between marriage partners. By linking the ballgame and the movements of celestial bodies with a conservation of hierarchy as proper distance, the Mesoamerican myths establish relationships between those movements and a proper distance between rulers and the rest of society as the legitimation of hierarchy and the position of the indigenous nobility (see e.g. Gillespie 1989; n.d.). As part of the conservation of hierarchy and the succession of office, what must be established and legitimized as well as is proper lack of distance, in other words identity, between the preceding ruler and the succeeding ruler. In Graulich's (1997) work, Mesoamerican myths resolve the connections between and continuity of celestially defined temporalities that are nominally discrete: days, years, and ages (i.e. the 'suns' of the *Leyenda de los Soles* [Bierhost 1992]). In other words, the deep issue of difference/identity is a theme in these narratives that is manifested and interrelated in a variety of ways, and the main theme of this specific myth and others like it is the bridging of celestial, human, and agricultural cycles.

The preceding discussion helps identify the means by which, at least in substantial part, indigenous societies in Mesoamerica conceived of themselves and their own social reproduction. Hierarchy, much like in the Andean societies discussed by Turner (and Rasnake [1988] and Dillon and Abercrombie [1988]), was a fundamental organizing principle of Mesoamerican societies. To continue to be so it must be preserved and reproduced. As a matter of political legitimacy, that continuance was both problematized and fetishized as mirroring the movements of the celestial bodies. It is this centrality of the continuation of hierarchical relations that becomes the key issue and is thus transformed in the 'anti-myth' analyzed here as a means of explicating the presence and success of the alien society. As I discuss below, however, there is an additional aspect of 'anti-myth' that is relevant: the deployment via the act of telling the story itself as a way of trying to establish understandings of the relation of contact and subjugation that it reveals. Anti-myths sometimes beget anti-anti-myths that are instantiated in concrete social action as Messianic or millenarian movements, which have played prominent roles in Mesoamerican colonial history (Bricker 1981; Román Gutiérrez 2015) and beyond (Martin 1991).

### Analysis of the story: The ballgame as initial contest

Two deities, Cupanzieeri and Achuri hirepe play the ballgame against one another, and Cupanzieeri loses. He is sacrificed by Achuri hirepe. Achuri hirepe buries the remains of Cupanzieeri in Xacona, a town in the western portion of the Tarascan kingdom. In celestially oriented analyses of the myth, Cupanzieeri is interpreted to be the sun, and when he loses the ballgame and is sacrificed and buried in the west, this represents the setting (of the) sun.<sup>3</sup> Having defeated and ‘buried’ the sun, or forced it to set in the west, night prevails (Graulich 1981). Stone (2004, 127) states that Cupanzieeri represents the “old or dying sun” and says that Achuri hirepe is his wife who represents “the waxing or waning moon”. Hurtado Mendoza (1986, 86) says that Achuri hirepe represents “the night who inspires or who gives breath to the spirit”. Marquez Joaquín (2000, 707, 717) translates Achuri hirepe as “el avergonzado humo” which Stone (2004, 272, n. 37) translates as “the smoke [that hides its face for] shame”. Graulich (1997, 187) glosses the name Achuri Hirepe as “Enveloping Night” or “Lord Night”. Martínez González (2010, 49) translates Cupanzieeri as “the sun taken by/stripped of its hair”.

3 Modern analysts (Graulich 1997; Olivier and Martínez 2015; Stone 2004) posit a one-to-one metaphorical relationship between deer and the sun thanks to Mesoamerican stories such as this one. Deer are said to ‘represent’ or ‘symbolize’ the sun. Graulich (1997, 170), for example, links Itzpapalotl to fire because she appears as a deer, “the animal associated with celestial fire” (i.e. the sun). I believe this is too simplistic. While a full discussion is beyond the scope of this paper, passages from Nahua stories (see discussion in Graulich 1997, 170-172 for summaries of the various appearances) including a bicephalic deer (or two, as in the *Leyenda de los Soles*) aids the analysis of the deer-sun relationship. The appearance of a bicephalic deer is never a positive development; it is an obstacle in various stories that Mixcoatl, or some equivalent character must overcome. Deer are in countless Amerindian ecologies and associated cosmologies the prototypical prey animal (e.g. Haskell 2018; Karadimas 2012; Viveiros de Castro 2012); it is the animal that most prominently represents something that is killed/must die for its predators to live. I suggest that a bicephalic deer is dangerous because of its two heads, which would enable it to see in opposed directions simultaneously. Given this, it would not be able to be hunted and killed. By a process of logical extension, a deer that cannot be hunted and killed would therefore not merely be unkillable but would then become a danger. Released from being the prey in a predator-prey relationship, the danger is that it will turn the tables on the original predator. In the Nahua stories the bicephalic deer is said to drop from the sky, associating it with the zenith position as well as a dangerous breach of the distance between the sky/celestial realm and the earth/terrestrial realm. The zenith position and celestial origins suggest a possible link to the sun. If the sun were to stay in that zenith position and/or become too close to the earth, disaster would ensue for humanity in the form of a constant and/or unbearable heat (such an unbearable heat is present in the *Popol Vuh* before the sun is ‘dimmed’). The sun must go down and go down in a proper path toward the horizon to prevent such a catastrophe – it must die for humankind, just as deer must die. Therefore the metaphorical relationship is not merely deer=sun but rather deer:thing that must die for humanity::sun: thing that must die for humanity. To phrase it differently, deer=sun *because of the importance of their deaths to humanity*, as deer-as-animal-that-must-die-to-produce-sustenance comes to stand for the aspect of the sun that requires that it too dies in order to establish periodicity (both diurnal and seasonal) such that the earth can be productive for humans. This is why Cupanzieeri is not merely ‘the sun’ but rather ‘the old/dying/captured sun’.



He also translates or otherwise identifies Achuri hirepe, spelled in his work as Achuri Hirepe as “the hastening night”, “the innumerable things of the night”, and “ruler of the night”; Xacona is “the House of the West”. The son Siratatapezi is said to represent “the young or morning sun”, and when he ‘resurrects’ his father the latter is transformed into the morning star, which heralds the new day (and presumably therefore the rising of the son/sun; Stone 2004). Martínez González (2011) suggests the story is about the possibility of producing new life/rejuvenation using the remains of the old life (brining in an agricultural metaphor), and discusses the perception in indigenous cosmologies that there is something about bones (and as we will see, seeds) that act as a storage for cosmic force.

The dominant mode of interpreting this narrative has been to compare it to more well-known narratives from elsewhere in Mesoamerica (see Figure 1). “The relationship between this myth, the Popol Vuh, and Quetzalcoatl’s feats has been noted by several scholars” (Olivier and Martínez González 2015, 359; they cite Seler [1990-1998, 53]; Graulich [1997, 186-187]; Olivier [2003, 141; 2015, 213, 307-308, 322]; Chinchilla Mazariegos [2011, 163]). Olivier and Martínez González (2015, 359), in summarizing this story, characterize Cupanzeeri as similar to the Central Mexican deity Mixcoatl, and therefore also as the “father of Sirata Taperi-Quetzalcoatl”.<sup>4</sup> The fiesta of Cuingo is noted to have certain

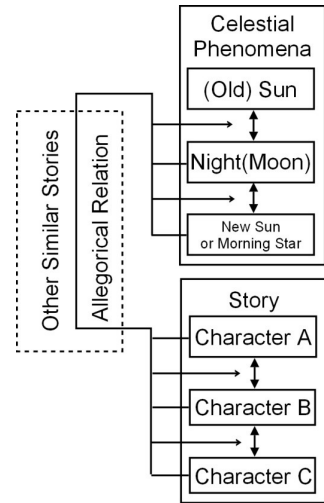


Figure 1. Graphic representation of the allegorical relationships between the characters in the story and celestial phenomenon; these allegorical relations are based on names of the characters as well as paradigmatic associations with characters from other similar stories in Mesoamerica.

4 Variations of a story in which Quetzalcoatl or Topiltzin recovers the bones of his father are included in the *Relación de la Genealogía*, the *Leyenda de los Soles* (Bierhorst 1992), and a (presumably modern-era) Totonac narrative cited by Graulich (1997, 154). Deer, particularly two-headed deer, play prominently in other narratives including the *Historia de los Mexicanos por sus Pinturas* (1941) and the *Historyre du Mechiue* (1905). In the *Anales de Cuauhtitlan* (Bierhorst 1992) certain events related to this theme take place at a place named Mazatepec, or ‘Hill of the Deer’. The various iterations contain all manner of paradigmatic transformations: in the *Leyenda de los Soles* for example Quetzalcoatl is a grown man who is with his dad Mixcoatl when the latter is killed by his in-laws; in the *Historyre du Mechiue* Quetzalcoatl’s mom dies in childbirth as opposed to his dad dying before his birth, and he kills a doe rather than a buck being involved; in the Totonac myth it is falling leaves as opposed to quails taking flight that causes the bones of the dead-but-revived father to turn into a deer. Deer are frequently interpreted to have solar associations (e.g. Graulich 1997; Olivier and Martínez González 2015), and so Cupanzeeri appears to be related to the sun as a ballplayer who lives and dies to be resurrected but also because he is transformed into a deer which itself has solar associations.

features in common with another Tarascan fiesta, Sicuindiro; both involve the sacrificing of people, flaying these victims, and dancing in their skins (Alcalá 2000, 259-261, 505). Cuingo is also the fiesta at which the people make and eat foods made of amaranth seeds in the shape of deer (Alcalá 2000, 350). The two Tarascan fiestas are said to correspond to the Mexica fiestas of Tlacaxipehualiztli, the 'Flaying of Men' (Sahagún 1981), and Ochpaniztli (Sahagún 1981), the fiestas during which the rejuvenation of the sun would be produced/celebrated (Martínez González 2010, 49; see also Olivier and Martínez González 2015, 362). Martínez González (2010, 61) also has a chart that discusses links between Tarascan, Nahua, and K'iche' concepts, noting that Tohil (the K'iche' patron god, known from the *Popol Vuh* among other documents) turns into a deer to sacrifice enemies/non-K'iche'. Stone (2004, 127) states that this is a "much-abridged version of the classic story line", though she does not give any indications of what fuller versions of the story might be or where they can be located. She also mentions the transformation of the father's remains into deer with a long mane and tail, but the explicit comparison to the beasts mounted by the Spaniards is completely absent in this passage. Only elsewhere (Stone 2004, 174) are the Spaniards and their horses mentioned in relation to this story. Stone suggests the Spaniards are constructed as linked to Cupanzieeri and thereby the onset of a new era. This is not necessarily incorrect, but it fails to analyze any aspect of the importance in indigenous sociocosmologies of retrieving and guarding ancestral remains, and therefore does not examine the important aspect of Siratatapezi putting down those remains, as I discuss below. Graulich (1997, 186) also describes the story contained in the *Relación de Michoacán* as an abridged version of 'the myth' contained in Central Mexican sources and especially the *Popol Vuh*. In his analysis, Cupanzieeri is equivalent to Mixcoatl and Hun Hunahpu while Siratatapezi is equivalent to Quetzalcoatl (Topiltzin) and Xbalanque. Achuri hirepe would, presumably, in such a comparison thus be equivalent to the Lords of Xibalba.

All of these works presuppose not only that such a comparative framework is unproblematically valid, but also that the narrative in the *Relación de Michoacán* is 'about' the same thing – using the double meaning in English of 'about' as both 'concerning' as well as 'close enough approximations'. It is furthermore presumed that the narratives from elsewhere in Mesoamerica are sufficiently well understood that once correlations across narratives have been constructed then the analysis is complete. I do not wish to cast aspersions on analyses of other Mesoamerican narratives such as the *Popol Vuh*, only to suggest that a) part of the value of such narratives is that they can be brought into service in novel circumstances and reworked to mean new things in and for those circumstances – meaning is not static or fixed – and b) as such, even if there are broad correlations between these Mesoamerican narratives, the fact that other analyses have scarcely problematized how they relate to the arrival and conquests of the Spaniards means that they fall well short of completely explaining this particular ball game narrative

(but see Gillespie 1989). I call attention to the fact that no analysis has been offered as to how or why exactly Cupanzieeri's remains turn into a 'deer/horse'. The role of the story in helping to explain the Spaniards in terms of who they are in a general sense and what might be done about them is conspicuously absent in all existing discussions of the story.

The initial setting of the story, mainly the ballgame in which his father engages, helps us understand the nature of the story. The Mesoamerican ballgame is loaded with symbolism and has been the subject of too many studies to cite. I mainly follow Gillespie's (1991) structuralist-inspired analysis of the ballgame and many of its specific aspects, which benefits also from a discussion of the symbolism of ball games in many Amerindian cultures. Gillespie's analysis boils down the ballgame and its symbolism to some fundamental ordering principles. The ballgame is about mediating between opposites. The game is played in a court that mediates between this world and the underworld. Even when discussing a level ballcourt/game (for example the only 'ball-court' in the Pátzcuaro Basin, at Ihuatzio, is on the same level as the surrounding terrain), the ritual symbolism of the game indicates that it is a means of accessing other worlds and thus mediating between this world and others. The point of the ballgame appears to have been bouncing the heavy rubber ball between two ends, thus ensuring its movement between, and mediation of, the two ends/poles. In this aspect the ball was seen as mimicking the movement of celestial bodies, including the sun. In some of the more elaborate ballcourts, markers in the form of either wall-mounted rings or markers in the ground demarcated the two territories. The most prominent striking point for hitting the ball was the hips, at which elaborate paraphernalia/ protective gear was worn (especially in the Maya and Gulf Coast areas). This practice or rule and accompanying paraphernalia served to divide the human body into two halves, with the play at the hip mediating between and temporarily uniting the two halves. The double of the ball, the severed human head (as depicted at Chichén Itzá and in other Maya art, as well as described in the *Popol Vuh*), also indicates another splitting of the human body in two: a head and a body, with the former being intimately tied to one's identity due to the unique and identifying nature of the face and the latter more of a non-sentient vehicle for the head (much as in the episode of the *Popol Vuh*). Furthermore, the timing of ballgames in ethnographic, ethnohistoric, and native historical accounts, attests to the mediating nature of the game. In some other Amerindian cultures, ball games were played at the equinoxes, i.e. at the time of the year when the lengths of the days and nights were even, and it could conceivably be unknown whether periods of day or night would prevail for the coming days and months. In the native historical tradition of Mesoamerica, the ballgame is one of a few motifs that emerges at certain key moments in indigenous histories and especially the migrations that preceded arrival at prophesied cities and capitals (Gillespie 1989; 1991). In sum, the Mesoamerican ballgame symbolically revolved around both delimiting opposed poles (day/night, the seasons as

periods of longer or shorter days, this world/underworld, body/head, upper body/lower body, one end or direction versus its opposite) and mediating between them such that a measure of balance, most prominently through alternation, is achieved and the two can work together to form more complete and productive totalities out of their mediation. For example, a ‘day’ composed of both night and day is not merely a given astronomical fact but is, in the indigenous mindset, must be produced as preferable to the alternatives of continuous daylight (which would be too hot and would not allow anything to flourish; see Footnote 3 above, Gillespie [1989], also the *Popol Vuh* [Christensen 2007]) or continuous night (which oppositionally would be too dark and cold but similarly would not allow anything to flourish). The same could be said for the year as composed of the seasons with a time of growing and a time of rest, death, and rejuvenation that then sets the stage for the next growing season (Martínez 2010; 2011).

In the narrative at hand, there does not yet appear any mediation between the two actors. At this point in the story, Achuri hirepe is dominant, having defeated and sacrificed Cupanzieeri and buried his remains in the west. Given the symbolic, mediating function of the ballgame, this initial condition serves to indicate a concern for mediating and resolving something. This first part of the narrative thus not only initiates the action but also due to the nature of that action (involving the ballgame) we get a sense of what kind of story we are in for.

### **The son, Siratatapezi**

Cupanzieeri left a wife who was pregnant among the living. This wife gave birth to the boy Siratatapezi; Seler (1990-1998, 54) notes that the name Sirata taperi [sic] has kinship denotations, indicating a link to a ‘main root’ or ‘trunk’, i.e. lineage founder/head. Martínez González (2010, 49) translates Siratatapezi, spelled in his work as Siratatapezi, as “of the lineage of his father”. The narrative explains that he was born and subsequently raised in a town among his maternal relatives. As he grows up he is an archer (and is thus similar to Mixcoatl, a prominent character in many of the Central Mexican stories, although if comparisons to those Central Mexican narratives are valid he would possess this archer identity through his father, the character more strongly linked to Mixcoatl), and he shoots various birds and animals. One such animal – an iguana – asks not to be shot and tells Siratatapezi that the father he has now is not his father, but that his real father went to the house of Achuri hirepe to conquer but was there sacrificed.

In this way the narrative does not simply state his lineage and identity, but indicates that this very identity is what is at issue – it is what has to be discovered or figured out by the character. From the boy’s perspective this is a gap in his knowledge. The story explicitly remarks upon this gap through the iguana’s words. In many ways, the name defines not the character but rather the semantic field within which the story seeks to ultimately

work – the nature of identity. His name is ironic in that it explains the character is of his father's lineage but does not explicitly explain who that father is and therefore what lineage he belongs to. Much like the ballgame establishes the kind of story in terms of its mediating function, the son's name establishes the importance of identity rather than simplistically revealing what that identity is *per se*, at least not initially. The name, like the role of the ballgame, plays a meta-commentative role foregrounding the point of telling this story. Recall that it is precisely the identity of the Spaniards that is trying to be explained; by telling this story the indigenous nobles are attempting to explain to themselves who these intruding strangers are – and also who they themselves are in relation to the Spaniards.

It is also in this action that we see clear parallels between this story and the stories told in Nahua sources concerning a conflict between combatants that represent opposed forces in which one dies and leaves a son of the dead combatant who does not know his true identity but subsequently learns it. In many of the Nahua sources, the story frequently involves that most famous of Mesoamerican characters or one of his manifestations, Ce Acatl Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl. In this regard it is important to be explicit that I do not discuss this personage as a single historical figure nor deity; rather this is the later (second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century and into the 17<sup>th</sup> century) manifestation and coalescence of ideas concerning the role of such a person/deity as a boundary figure that mediates between two poles and establishes some kind of order out of those oppositions (Gillespie 1989). The stories in the Nahua sources do not involve a ballgame among the older combatants, but there is consistently the element of a son that must recover remains of his father, who met an untimely death thanks to some member of his mother's family, as a means of becoming king himself. In the *Origen de los Mexicanos* (1941, 261-263) and the *Relación de la Genealogía* (1941, 241-243), together known as the *Cano Relaciones* and written around 1532, the father is Totepeuh, the ruler of Culhuacan. He is slain by his brother-in-law Apanecatl or Atepanecatl, and his son Topiltzin must then kill his maternal uncle before he himself can become king (see also Gillespie 1989, 185). In these two stories, as well as in the *Leyenda de los Soles* (Bierhorst 1992), the son recovers and buries/installs the bones of his dead father in a temple. In addition to the comparisons with the Nahua stories, maintaining control over or possessing ancestral remains was also key to the accession of Maya kings as instantiations of lineal succession. Such links between the data in the *Relación de Michoacán* and K'iche' and other Maya sources is noted by Olivier and Martínez González (2015; see also Graulich 1997, 186; Stone 2004), who discuss the importance in Maya stories and artwork of the handling and possession of sacred bundles, at least some of which held such remains. It appears then that the ritual importance of ancestral remains as a source of 'cosmological authentication' (Weiner 1992) and thus their appearance in such stories concerning succession and in this case the recovery of a lost identity and related birthright of rulership should not be surprising.

As noted by Gillespie (1989, 186), the *Relación de la Genealogía* contains an important detail concerning Topiltzin: his clothing was like that of the Spaniards. Gillespie's analysis of these documents as well as the many narratives surrounding the relationship between the Quetzalcoatl/Topiltzin corpus also demonstrates that the murderous/redemptive story of Totepeuh, Apanecat, and Topiltzin is structurally equivalent to the later episode involving "Achitometl's slaying of Acamapichtli the Elder in the 'new' Culhuacan, an act that led to the founding of the Tenochtitlan dynasty, as emphasized in the same two documents". In this way the founding of Tenochtitlan in the story is linked with the arrival of the Spaniards (implicated by Topiltzin's dress) and the fall of Tenochtitlan. In her work the later episode's hearkening back to the Topiltzin story is evidence of a cyclical nature of time. In this way, a somewhat similar story is also used by indigenous nobles to try to explain the presence and nature of the Spaniards. Note furthermore that in Mesoamerican conceptualizations of the cosmos and time within that cosmos, nothing can be completely novel and so something must have a precedent in the past (Boone 2000; Gillespie 1989; Hassig 2001; León Portilla 1990; Maffie 2014). The creation through conservative innovation is at the heart of the idea of anti-myth as a mode of incorporating something that at first appearance might be truly alien but which through such narrative construction is revealed to have only appeared novel but (in this newfound reality) is merely a transformed instantiation of something that was already known. It is also important to note that the production of these Nahua stories preceded the story in the *Relación de Michoacán* by at most a decade, and perhaps only by about six years.<sup>5</sup> In other Nahua versions, and there are many, Topiltzin/Quetzalcoatl, as the son of Camaxtli (similar to Mixcoatl) and Chimalman (a mother-earth goddess), becomes the morning star aspect of Venus (e.g. Histoyre du Mechique 1905).<sup>6</sup> Over time these stories developed and played off of one another, collectively constructing myths that the Spaniards' presence is really a return of the previous heroic/moral man-god Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl (which Gillespie [1989] traces and explains as the result of both indigenous schema and a dialog with the Spaniards themselves).

Siratapezi has now learned who his father was and endeavors to follow in the footsteps of his father. Given the relationship between the sun and rulership well known in Mesoamerica and evident in the *Relación de Michoacán*, his destiny is to succeed to the kingship, which would be his birthright. The Nahua stories and the *Popol Vuh* relate

5 If indeed the production and initial testimony for said production of the *Relación de Michoacán* had already begun in 1538 (Stone 2004; Warren 1970-71), which is highly likely but not definitively proven. Furthermore, this is only the dating of the production of the *Relación de Michoacán*. If the recounting of the story is accurate and it was told to Tzintzicha Tangáxoan, then it must have been told to him prior to his death in 1530, making it possibly earlier than the Nahua stories.

6 Note here that it is the son that becomes Venus, not the father, as Stone (2004, 127) implies when she says that the son becomes the new sun but is preceded by the transformed father/dead sun/revived Venus.

cosmic phenomena (i.e. the movements of celestial bodies) to the issue of succession and a 'proper' king claiming the rulership against an illegitimate usurper. The two planes of existence, the human (or at least royal) and cosmic are often linked and mutually informing in Mesoamerican thought (Gillespie 1989; 2008; López Austin 1973; León Portilla 1990). Cosmic balance and harmony was to some degree ensured by kings that preserved that balance at the same time that the kings themselves were portrayed as the natural outgrowth of cosmic principles of hierarchy and power; kings are mediating figures themselves. Note, however, that it is this question of rulership and succession that is completely absent from all other previous considerations of the Michoacán version of the story analyzed here.

### **Gathering the remains, and a mistake**

With the knowledge of who his father is, Siratatapezi goes and defeats his father's killer and recovers his father's remains, presumably in the west in Xacona. When he is returning with those remains on his back, however, a flock of quails took to flight. He put down the bundle of his father's remains in order to shoot at the birds. Having been put down, the bundle of the father's remains turned into a deer but with a mane at the back of his neck and a long tail, as the Spaniards' horses have. This passage is where the direct contrast with the Nahua versions is established. In those versions, the recovery of the father's remains and installation of those remains in a temple to be remembered and worshiped is established as the same thing as the implicit recovery and recognition of the son's place in the world and the fulfillment of his birthright as king (the *Popol Vuh* is similar).

In the interpretations by others of the Michoacán version of the story as a day/astro-nomical metaphor, the story is rendered as the new sun, the young son of the dying/dead sun, being reborn the next morning, thus achieving the victory over the forces of night and reversing night's victory over the 'old' sun. But note that this is not what happens. It is likely the cultural repository of knowledge against which the listener appreciates the meaning of this new twist (and in relation to which the storyteller formulated this new twist), but it is nonetheless absent in this telling. This is now a tale of the indigenous loss of memory and identity, and simultaneously – indeed the one is transformed into the other – the identity of the Spaniards in a fetishized form of their mounts, one of the most conspicuous aspects of *their* identity.

In terms of the syntagmatic progression of the narrative and its categories at hand, the role played by animals has been reversed. Previously an iguana tells Siratatapezi who he really is right after it is said that Siratatapezi shoots at birds; in other words, a contrast is created between this iguana and the birds that the youth hunts. That act reverses his lack of knowledge – his misidentification of himself as a member of a lineage different from that of his true/biological father. That in turn enables Siratatapezi to reverse the

effects of his father's defeat in the ballgame and subsequent burial – manifested now as victory and exhumation of the remains. Now, however, it is the birds themselves rather than another animal that intervene. The quails, while possessing certain paradigmatic qualities,<sup>7</sup> serve here most fundamentally as a syntagmatic device that is required to drive the story forward and divert the action from Siratatapezi's desired outcome (installing his father's remains in a temple) to the demands of the situation in which the narrative is being told. By putting down his father's remains, Siratatapezi prevents the fulfillment of his identity, as represented by those remains, that the story had been building toward. The remains transform into a strange creature that is theretofore unheard of. This is predominantly the opposite of the plot of the *Leyenda de los Soles* in which Zolton ('Little Quail') is one of the usurpers who kills Mixcoatl; there a quail is an obstacle that must be, but successfully is, overcome by the son whereas here the quails irrevocably alter the course of the plot and thus the meaning of the story.

It is also noteworthy that this entire sequence has taken place when Siratatapezi has 'come of age'. The story explicitly states that he goes hunting after the time of his youth. This reinforces Siratatapezi's crisis of identity and recovery of birthright at the moment he is becoming a man. The three phenomena are intertwined: he cannot become a man – the man he is supposed to be – until he recovers his birthright and replaces his father, and he cannot do this until he learns his true identity and physically recovers his father's remains. In the present part of the narrative, however, Siratatapezi continues

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7 The naming of a certain kind of bird – the quails – is perhaps also significant. Quails are not commonly associated in Mesoamerican thought with rulership – that is the symbolic domain of birds that either soar at higher altitudes like eagles, and thus occupy the same realm as the sun or that are luminous like the sun. The sun is also associated with a warrior/predatory identity; eagles are raptorial birds that hunt, and hummingbirds are also quite vicious in combat. As discussed in Sahagún's *Florentine Codex* (1981) in numerous places, quails were a common sacrificial offering that were killed for the benefit of Huitzilopochtli but also other gods and goddesses. In his descriptions of the fauna of New Spain, Sahagún describes quails as taking to flight and scattering but then also once one of the birds settles back down the rest will gather to once again become a flock. For this reason it is said that they are easily captured by nets – and not, as the story at hand would indicate, be captured through shooting. Quails are present in the various versions of stories revolving around Quetzalcoatl/Topiltzin as well. Earlier in the *Leyenda de los Soles* (Bierhorst 1992) than the presence of Zolton cited in the text, when Quetzalcoatl is recreating humanity, Quetzalcoatl drops the bones of the humans of the previous era as a result of quails that were sent by Mictlanteuctli. The birds then peck at the bones as they would maize seeds, creating an equivalency between threatening humans at their establishment directly, and indirectly in the present era of humans as maize farmers by eating humans' crops (Graulich 1997, 109, 111). The paradigmatic relation between maize seeds and bones is also a common one in Mesoamerican narratives and makes sense in the alimentary code in which food gives strength and support to the body; seeds furthermore can be dried and preserved for future use just as bones are the durable and preservable aspect of the human body. In these ways quails take on an ambivalent or ambiguous symbolic characteristics: they fly but not high, they both scatter and gather, they are game but are not shot, as sacrifices they are necessary to placate the gods and thus ensure humanity's continuation but they are also threatening to that continuation.



to hunt, even when he has those physical remains and is on his way to realizing his transition into both adulthood and rulership.<sup>8</sup> By introducing this ‘variant’ to the more well-known Central Mexican versions, this story reveals that the role of hunting is not simply a part of a deity’s identity as is commonly assumed of the Mixcoatl/Camaxtli – Topiltzin/Quetzalcoatl relationship. As revealed in a combined reading of this story and the Central Mexican myths, Siratatapezi’s destiny is not to simply replicate his father, but to build on his father’s identity. There is a reason why Topiltzin/Quetzalcoatl figures prominently as a ‘first king’ rather than his father – though of the same lineage he is a different kind of being, one that adds an element of historical and cultural legitimacy (see especially Gillespie 1989). Siratatapezi’s destiny is not necessarily to not hunt, but rather to *not only* be a hunter. It is worth noting that in outward appearance the Tarascan king is very much a hunter: he is depicted in various places in the *Relación de Michoacán* wearing a deerskin garment with a solar emblem on the back and holding a bow. As I (Haskell 2008; 2013; 2018) have demonstrated elsewhere, however, the novelty of the kingship in the *Relación de Michoacán*, as in Central Mexican narratives (see Gillespie 1989), is that thanks to the unique ancestral character of Taríacuri the Tarascan kings are dually composed of both masculine qualities (e.g. hunting, solar associations, warfare, fire, wild game) and feminine qualities (e.g. farming, fishing, fertility and aquatic deities). Here again, kings are mediating, or in this logical construction, encompassing and unifying entities that are unique and constitutive of the social structure (see also Sahlins 1985). Siratatapezi’s mistake is thus a double failure – not only does he put down the remains of his father thus preventing his father from being remembered and worshipped but he also prevents his own ‘creation of the kingship’ by becoming the kind of novel being that kings in general must be.

At this point in the story, the estrangement that prevailed between Siratatapezi and his father that was overcome is now reintroduced in transformed/opposed terms. Previously Siratatapezi had been estranged from his father thanks to the divide between the world of the living and the world of the dead, not having known one another while alive, and the boy’s specific lack of knowledge concerning his father. Now, with the miraculous transformation of the remains into a deer-like animal, the relationship becomes one involving two living beings that are not merely different species but a known entity – a human being of a specific lineage – and a universally (rather than specifically) unknown entity, i.e. a deer the likes of which has never been seen before. That identity of the deer/

8 In the middle of a rite of passage involving his father’s remains and his own identity, then, the story draws a parallel to what I suggest is a key to understanding the sun:deer relationship as revealed by the bicephalic deer of some Nahua stories. Siratatapezi is essentially caught looking back at what he used to be rather than focusing on what he must become. He is in the middle of the rite much like my suggestion that a bicephalic deer would be in the middle of the sky, unable to be killed/forced to set, and thus precarious/dangerous.

horse is itself an inversion, if one of the translations of the character's names above is valid. Martínez González (2010, 49) glosses Cupanzieeri as "the sun taken by/stripped of its hair." Therefore, while in this previous stage of the story the sun is characterized by a lack of hair (which is logical within the cultural frame of an old/dying/captured sun that due to these various phenomena or actions lacks hair, since grasping an enemy's hair is a sign of capture), the lifeform that results from Cupanzieeri's magical rejuvenation has instead a surplus of hair.

Finally, the liminal state created and experienced by Siratatapezi is obviously related to the context of the narrative being told and the implied presence of the Spanish by and on the deer-horses and their imposed reign – the Tarascan nobility and particularly the royal dynasty exists in a liminal state as the dead king's sons are alive (though young) and not in power, having been usurped by the Spaniards who have in turn favored formerly subordinate nobles in regional governance.<sup>9</sup>

### The identity of the Spaniards

The narrative thus serves to comment upon the identity of the Spaniards precisely through the horses that many of the Spaniards rode upon. Being mounted was part of the Spaniards' power in addition to being part of their strangeness. As rendered by this narrative, however, that power is the direct result of, and the transformation of, the indigenous god Siratatapezi forgetting to honor Cupanzieeri. The figurative vehicle whereby Siratatapezi would regain his birthright and establish himself (being reborn through the rite of passage) as new sun (and/or ruler) is transformed into the literal vehicle by which the Spaniards are able to move and in effect conquer the indigenous people (see Figure 2).<sup>10</sup>

The symbolism and relationships between Siratatapezi, Cupanzieeri's remains, horses, and Spaniards can be further elaborated upon, particularly if the combined identity of deer/horse is emphasized. Modes of conveyance can be significant in stories (e.g. Levi-Strauss 1978), and the manner in which Siratatapezi likely bore his father's remains is pertinent to the Spaniards and their horses. Sacred bundles, two prominent types of which are 'mummy bundles' and 'god bundles', were frequently borne on the backs of human devotees in Mesoamerican cultures (see Haskell [2015], Olivier and Martínez González [2015], and such bundles – *tlaquimilolli* in Nahuatl, *pisom g'agal* in K'iche'

9 On the politics involved in the production of the document and the manner in which a non-royal indigene, Don Pedro Cuinierángari, had occupied the office of governor for the majority of the years since 1530 when the last king was executed by Nuño Beltrán de Guzmán, see Afanador Pujol (2015), Haskell (2018), Martínez Baracs (2005), Stone (2004), Warren (1985).

10 The centrality of the horse in such an understanding and mode of representation would be fetishized; I do not mean to imply that this was the only advantage, nor do I underestimate the essential role of indigenous allies in the conquests of the numerous states of Mesoamerica in the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

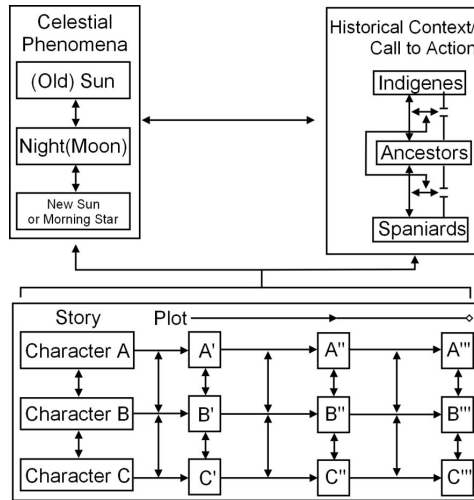


Figure 2. Graphic representation of the total system of syntagmatic and paradigmatic transformations of the story, indicating how the story was reworked in the early years of the colonial era to explain but also contest Spanish power. In this system, the unfolding action (represented by arrows pointing rightward), and the subsequent transformations of the characters (represented by the “prime” notation as in geometry), constitute the meaning. The allegorical relationships to celestial phenomena are preserved, and they help constitute the new, fuller meaning of a birth of Spanish power and implied possibility of a rebirth of indigenous power that is dependent upon the failure or success of remembering indigenous ancestors.

– are well illustrated in Central Mexican documents, for example in the *Tira de la Peregrinación*; see *Codice Boturini* 1964-1967). Additionally, in the *Relación de Michoacán* (Alcalá 2000, 405) when slain deer are carried to another place to be eaten/offered to others, they are said to have to be borne on the backs of the hunting party. In a Totonac myth cited by Graulich (1997, 154), after the son exhumes the bones of his father, he is said to carry them on his back, in exactly the same manner as a sacred bundle. If I am correct in the conveyance of the remains of Cupanzieeri in this way, here too the relationships become inverted: Siratatapezi bore his father’s remains on his back whereas if we follow through with the implications of the transformation contained in the story, the transformed bundle of remains-cum-deer/horse serves as the mounts of the Spaniards, carrying them on their backs.<sup>11</sup>

11 Roskamp (1998, 221) notes that the P’urhépecha word *tuytzen* that is used to refer to deer and hence extended to horses refers generally to any animal that can be used to carry cargo or people. Furthermore, and to complete the implicit associations between mummy and god bundles, the Spaniards as

### The narrative as 'anti-anti-myth': A call to action

The translation of indigenous power, understood and formulated within an indigenous framework, to Spaniards produced by indigenous forgetting might appear to produce a gloomy picture from the indigenous peoples' point of view. Power had been or is definitively at risk of being permanently transferred to the Spaniards; whereas the indigenous elite (and their gods) had previously monopolized power (or so they would and did claim), now it appeared to be the Spaniards' 'turn' as Cupanzieeri had been defeated and buried, his remains exhumed to usher in his son's reign, only to be transformed into the vehicles of the Spaniards' ascension to power. The meaning of that assumption of blame on the indigenous side can be explored further (following Turner 1988). It is an essential fact that as rendered in the story, the Spaniards possess power *not* due to any inherent qualities they possess. The one quality that they do possess that is explicitly the subject of the story (the advantage of riding on horseback), they only possess because the indigenes involved have failed at something: Siratatapezi's failure to remember (literally, physically, and metaphysically). The story internalizes blame, but does so in order that it might be redressed. By this logic, then, in order to reverse the present reversal (overcome their subjugation by the Spaniards and be 'reborn' into power) the indigenous people must correct their failure that was transformed into Spanish power in the first place. By doing precisely what Da Matta and Turner discuss as defining features of anti-myths, it establishes a provisional understanding upon which an Anti-Anti-Myth can be formulated that identifies a route by which that projected identity of the other and its position of power over indigenous society can be overcome. The implicit meaning of the present story then is to establish the fact that while the Spaniards appear to have usurped power for now, the story also serves to identify the means by which that reversal of the usurpation can be achieved – by (re)discovering, remembering, and honoring one's familial and sociohistorical roots. By couching this argument in the context of a ball game story, such an outcome is rendered not only possible but also perhaps proper – as a manifestation in human affairs of a more powerful and encompassing cosmological phenomenon of balanced alternation and mediation.

Explaining the identity of the horses and thus the Spaniards within this particular story also achieves a rhetorical force through the inclusion of the implications for the life-cycle and passage into adulthood for Siratatapezi, and by extension the native people in whose pantheon he occupies a place. The story, like the coming of the Spaniards, has placed the indigenous people of Michoacán in a precarious position – a state of liminality. Siratatapezi cannot achieve his destiny and claims his birthright without also squaring himself in relation to his multiple potential identities and choosing the proper one: First he must choose to know himself by believing the iguana, then to choose to

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beings carried on horseback were at times speculated by indigenous peoples to be superhuman and at least potentially god-like entities (see e.g. Townsend 2003).

know and transform himself into that known but as yet only potential inheritor of his father's mantle, and finally he chooses to become distracted from that potential role for himself by deciding to chase what he was in his youth as opposed to what he should be. This present arrangement is one in which the transformative knowledge he has gained is rendered fruitless in terms of being unable to lead to the future that is desired. Siratatapezi lacks meta-knowledge; he lacks an understanding of what to do with knowledge and how to overcome obstacles to the implementation of that knowledge. This liminal phase of knowing but only with incomplete knowledge gives the myth a significant rhetorical force for the indigenous peoples. The relationship between this stage as a stage in the life cycle of an individual deity with the contentious colonial context in which this narrative is being told, with its even greater senses of anxiety and uncertainty, is clear.

Additionally, this distinction between knowledge and meta-knowledge has been transformed into a new dichotomy via the appearance of the deer-horse and the implied presence of the Spaniards via the horse. As proposed by the story, the solution to the Spanish colonialist project, represented by the horse, is to take up the cause of indigenous social reproduction, thus reversing the mistake that led to the deer-horse in the first place. The second transformation in this new relation is the broader question of 'what to do with this knowledge', specifically in relation to the horses and more so the Spaniards. The story, in other words, has both good news and bad news. The good news is that the Spaniards are only powerful because they originate in a failure of indigenous social reproduction and thus to reverse that failure would be to strip the Spaniards of their power. The bad news is contextual and meta-pragmatic: how exactly should indigenous peoples do this? Elsewhere (Haskell 2018) I have discussed how the chief priest's narrative in the *Relación de Michoacán*, the lengthy story that supposedly tells of the origins of the royal dynasty and their transformation into possessors of legitimate rulership through their own auto-poietic qualities, was specifically formulated to single out the last king's son, Don Francisco Taríacuri, as the only legitimate heir to his dead father's position. Here I think finding such a single rhetorical point is not feasible given available evidence. For one, we are not sure exactly who told the story of Siratatapezi, and thus we cannot gauge his place in or loyalties to the pre-Hispanic regime. On a more general point, however, the narrow solution must be answered in relation to that meta-pragmatic question faced by the people of Michoacán and indeed by all indigenous peoples in colonial situations: what is the most effective and powerful way to be 'us'? (such issues have been investigated in contemporary Michoacán and Jalisco by Roth-Seneff [2015] and Liffman [2015], respectively; see also Whitten 1988, Fischer 1999).<sup>12</sup>

12 This question of indigenous identity is of course itself the inverted form of the colonialists' contradiction as explicated by Bhaba (1994) of how to produce the colonized as reproductions of the colonizing culture while at the same time producing them as still imperfect copies, lesser, and thus deservedly colonized.

If honoring the past as metonymically signaled by the remains of the ancestors, then the questions raised by this proposed solution of remembering and honoring the dead begin immediately. Can we only do so in private? Is it necessary to do so publicly and thus provoke rebukes and punishment from the Spaniards? Will our ancestors protect us – in essence does the revolution begin immediately upon our resumption of the old ways and ancestor veneration in particular? How exactly will they protect us? Is it enough for only the nobility and the uppermost nobility, led by the sons and closest allies of the last king, to carry forth the memory and the position of the ancestors? If only kingly succession is required, then what of the all-important question of the last king's remains – as claimed by Guzmán in the *Proceso contra Tzintzicha Tangaxoan* (Scholes and Adams 1952) and in the *Relación de Michoacán* (Alcalá 2000), the remains of the last king were scattered in a river. While there is testimony that some indigenous peoples recovered some of those remains, this begs the question of whether it was enough to be efficacious. I do not presume this list of anxious questions even approaches a total account of the uncertainty of the times; there almost assuredly arose countless additional questions concerning the Spaniards and how indigenous and Spanish society could or should relate.

### Conclusion

The analysis presented here extends our understanding of the ball game story in the *Relación de Michoacán* beyond previous works focused on the metaphorical celestial meanings. Such a celestial metaphor, for the movements of the sun, are an essential beginning point in which we can understand the importance of the sun and its properties and cyclicity as they were important in their own right but also as they were tied to producing an understanding of the role of hierarchy and the kingship. It is that aspect of reproducing hierarchy, and how hierarchy was usurped and transformed, that as an essential aspect of the story and indeed the instigation for its formulation and oration, as I have discussed. By incorporating the syntagmatic, or sequential, aspect of the story in addition to the purely paradigmatic aspect, the analysis presented here reveals the explanation of the origin of the Spaniards and their horses as a transformed aspect of indigenous society. The horses, and the power of the Spaniards that they both represented and effected, are as a result rendered to be the transformed body of an indigenous ball player/sun god. That transformation only happens however because that god's son forgets his essential task of installing his father's remains in order to succeed him as ruler; Spanish power was fetishized, and its origins internalized within indigenous society as the consequence, so the story goes, of an indigenous failure to properly preserve one's ancestors and therefore also one's own identity. The analysis yields insights into how an indigenous understanding was provisionally explicated in and through this story concerning how to deal with the Spaniards, what defines indigenous society, and how the relation between the two might be understood and transformed by action involving

one pole – the indigenous one. As a corollary, I have argued that this understanding establishes potential but quite broad fields of action that would constitute resistance – to right the wrong of forgetting, and to literally embrace the past as a way to reset the terms on which they would relate with the Spaniards.

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