

TEMPORALITIES IN  
MESOAMERICAN  
RITUAL PRACTICES

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EDITED BY

*Valentina Vapnarsky, Dominique Michelet,  
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## Temporalities in Mesoamerican Ritual Practices

### *An Introduction*

VALENTINA VAPNARSKY, DOMINIQUE MICHELET,  
AND AURORE MONOD BECQUELIN

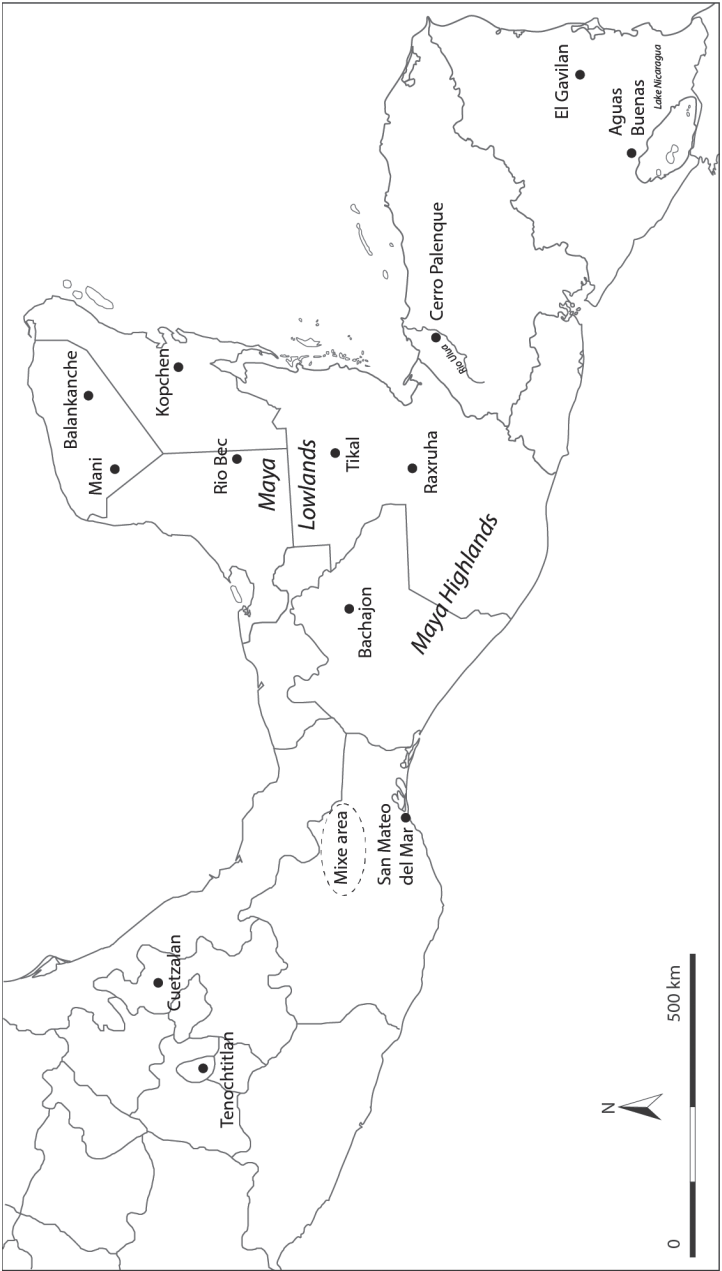
Adopting a multidisciplinary approach (in archaeology, ethnohistory, anthropology, and linguistic anthropology), the present book examines the temporal dimensions of ritual activities in past and present Mesoamerican societies, including pre-Hispanic, colonial, and modern times. The chapters engage empirically and theoretically with the multiple temporalities of ritual, in relation both to the unfolding of ritual performance and to its external and symbolic anchors. Each chapter presents new analysis of fieldwork data relative to the meaning and pragmatics of artifactual, gestural, discursive, or scriptural temporal patterns, and addresses comparative and theoretical aspects of the diverse facets of ritual temporalities. Rather than following a diachronic or a disciplinary order, the organization of the book aims to encourage interdisciplinary dialogue by highlighting features, patterns, and questions across the disciplines. Chapters are organized in five sections: I. Rhythms in Rituals, II. Ritual Multitemporalities, III. Material and Sensorial Dimensions of Ritual Temporalities, IV. Ritual Temporalities in the *Longue Durée*, and V. Ritual Temporalities in Confrontation.

The chapters take rituals as a series of specific, formalized actions that, by introducing a scenario that differs from those of everyday life activities, are expected to produce changes—from transitory to definitive—within an initial context. The focus on ritual temporalities calls for processual and pragmatic approaches to the changes aimed at by the ritual and to its relation to the context. Such approaches also engage with the essential fact that the rituals concerned here work with and

on the agencies of human and nonhuman entities, including spirits, deities, souls, ancestors, and (super)natural forces as well as objects and artifacts, and the relationships between them (see also Kreinath, Snoek, and Stausberf 2006 for critical views on ritual definitions and conceptualizations).

A variety of apparently dissimilar rituals are examined that reveal different ways and patterns of generating changes. The rituals are linked to artifact production, life cycles, agricultural work, healing, conflict resolution, crisis management, the enthronement of rulers, and the transfer of responsibilities, or practices related to the occupation, abandonment, reuse, or conversion of socialized spaces. Starting from fundamental actions such as creating, transforming, and destroying, the authors explore rituals as significant cognitive and cultural manifestations of the temporal dimensions of transition processes. This perspective has the advantage of being conducive to the joint exploration of a multiplicity of modes of action used in rites, in particular those stemming from interventions on matter and objects as well as from performativity in gestures and speech.

Numerous studies have concentrated on spatial, personal, social, political, and agentive dimensions of rituality, adopting a symbolic, pragmatic, or cognitive approach. The intention of this volume is to consider the temporal dimensions of rituals, which have been the object of much less thorough attention, leaving aside well-explored questions such as the use of ritual calendars. Building upon previous work carried out by the editors on spatiotemporal boundaries (Monod Becquelin 2012), the pragmatics of temporality (Vapnarsky 2022; Vapnarsky, Pierrebourg, and Michelet 2017; Vapnarsky et al. 2020), and the materialities of ritual (Dussol, Sion, and Nondédéo 2019; Johnson and Joyce 2022; Michelet et al. 2010), the path taken by the book aims at understanding how temporal categories and processes operate in rituals; how they are sociohistorically, culturally, and pragmatically elaborated; and how rituals and temporal categories fundamentally interact. To achieve this, two levels of analysis are favored, and their interconnections are developed: at the performance level, the authors elucidate the internal processual configuration of rituals (action sequences, periods, synchronies and asynchronies, limits, liminalities, etc.); at a sociohistorical level, rituals are examined as markers and driving forces of time and history, from the perspective of how they were and are conceived, organized, and projected by Mesoamerican past and present societies. As an area where time and rituality have been the object of considerable local elaboration, Mesoamerica appears to be a particularly fertile ground for the development of new methodological and theoretical perspectives on ritual temporalities. As a corollary, it is our hope that the reflections on ritual developed in the volume, the similarities but also disparities between cases analyzed here, can contribute to the debate concerning the specificities and the very relevance of Mesoamerica as a cultural



**Figure 1.1.** Location of places and regions covered in this volume

area, a discussion that cannot be developed in the context of this volume but for which the chapters—including those from Joyce and from Geurds on Central America—provide insightful material.

The authors of this volume are especially mindful of the risk of overdrawing analogies when comparing rituals from distinct and distant periods of time socio-historical contexts and through various phenomenological materialities and methodological disciplinary approaches. The thematic sections of the volume show that the value of multi- and interdisciplinary work lies elsewhere than in analogies.

The book is a result of long-term exchanges between the authors, carried out in particular within the international cross-disciplinary network RITMO (2015–2018), in continuity with the activities of the GERM group of research.<sup>1</sup> It presents the results of collective reflection developed during the project Ritual Actions and Time: Creation, Destruction, Transformation in Past and Present Mesoamerica, and the series of conferences organized in this context.<sup>2</sup> Preliminary versions of the chapters in this book were presented and discussed at the international closing conference organized in Paris in 2018 under the auspices of the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres, at the Fondation Simone et Cino del Duca and at the Palais de l'Institut de France. While adopting a more encompassing view and exploring other facets of *temporalities in ritual practices*, the present book offers a further extension of the recent volume *Materializing Ritual Practices* (Johnson and Joyce 2022), which also brings together contributions by members of our network.

#### RITUAL TIME AND RITUAL TEMPORALITY: A BRIEF CROSS-DISCIPLINARY “STATE OF THE ART”

In archaeology, the analysis of temporalities in rituals is still emerging (see Barrett 1991; Fogelin 2007; Kyriakidis 2007; Rowan 2012; Swenson 2015). Even in a field that was more precocious than others in analyzing sequences of practices, that of funerary practices, it has been hardly forty years since the importance and potential of this research area were recognized, that effective study methods were implemented (Duday et al. 1990; Pereira 2013; Tiesler, Suzuki, and Pereira 2022), and that a social perspective was developed (Renfrew, Boyd, and Morley 2015). In fact, when archaeologists have ventured into the sphere, they have usually done so hoping to either get to the roots of the symbolic and cosmological systems that have a dialectical relationship with rites (see, for example, Rice 2009, 2019), or to explore relations between religions and social structures: for example, the control of religion by political authorities (Baudez 2002; Lucero 2003), or the question of levels of practice, particularly public rituals versus domestic or private ones (Ciudad et al. 2010; Gonlin and Lohse 2007; Plunket 2002). More recently, ritual archaeology

has paid closer attention to the material traces left by these acts, contributing to theories on materiality (Geurds this volume; Joyce this volume; see also Howey and O'Shea 2009; Insoll 2009; Johnson and Joyce 2022). Other researchers explore the integration in a historical narrative of the remains of past and abandoned societies (Johnson 2019).

In the pre-Hispanic Mesoamerican world, as elsewhere, the archaeology of ritual has long concentrated on trying to identify sets of objects or assemblages and places that are used for rituals (Gheorghiu and Nash 2013), whether conceived specifically for this purpose or not. In this cultural area, the study of ancient rituals was highly influenced by the existence of rich ethnohistorical sources (López Luján this volume) and the reading of glyphic inscriptions, particularly those from the Classic period in the Maya region (300–900 CE) (Valencia Rivera and Lefort 2006). Some fundamental ritual practices have been subject to rich analyses, such as those relative to human sacrifice (López Luján and Olivier 2010), self-sacrifice (Baudiez 2012), the dedication of monuments (Nondédéo et al. 2022; Stuart 1996), or the numerous terminal floor deposits associated with the Classic Maya collapse (Newman 2019; Clayton, Driver, and Kosakowsky 2005).

Yet the central, more specific problem of the relations between rituals and temporalities has itself hardly been touched except for some specific cases, such as rituals seen from an archaeobotanical perspective (Morehart 2017). Certainly, in Mesoamerica the important issues of timekeeping and of the ceremonial, political, and divinatory aspects of calendars have received close attention (see, for example, Alcina Franch 1993; Boone 2007; Edmonson 1988; Olivier 2012, 2022; Pharo 2013; Rice 2009). They are linked to such Mesoamerican fundamentals as the cyclical vision of history (Navarrete Linares 2004; Stuart 2012) and the political reference to ancestry (Jansen and Pérez Jiménez 2017). However, due to the narrow definition of ritual practice in archaeology and ethnohistory, which is mostly restricted to the domain of religion, one aspect that has not been examined is the ritual and temporal dimension of production activities as transformation (see, however, Wells and Davis-Salazar 2006). Although the ritual interlinking of destruction and creation with transformation can be glimpsed in several studies (Mock 1998; Newman 2019; Stanton, Brown, and Pagliaro 2008; Walker and Lucero 2000), much work still remains to be done in this area. To address the issue of ritual practices and its temporal dimensions, archaeology could benefit from developing an approach that aims at an ordered reconstruction of gestures, that is, of temporal sequences, in line with the tradition of “behavioral archaeology” (Michelet this volume; Schiffer 1976; Skibo and Schiffer 2008) and of work on *chaînes opératoires*, the technical and cognitive processes involved in object making (Lemonnier 1976; Leroi-Gourhan 1965). This epistemic move enables a shift of focus away from (religious) meaning

toward the structured organization of productive activity. Such an approach makes fairly general reference to Bourdieu's theory of practice (1977), but it more concretely gives rise to a whole range of research in dialogue with theories in sociology and anthropology (e.g., Giddens 1979; Sahlins 1981) dedicated to individual or collective action as an effect of social agents' creative capabilities as they organize their practices in such a way as to transform and produce new states (Dornan 2002; see also Andrieu et al. this volume and Arnauld and Andrieu this volume).

In anthropology, in the tradition of the first works by Hubert and Mauss (1897), building on Durkheim, or by Van Gennep (1981 [1909]), the relationship between time and rites has often been understood through rites of passage that show spatially and temporally marked chains of sequences, at the end of which either an initial situation or the state of a person is transformed. Elaborations of this view have discussed the temporal orientation of rituals, while specifying patterns of time manipulation depending on the type of rituals. One famous analysis is the statement by Lévi-Strauss that ritual has the function of overcoming and integrating three oppositions: those of diachrony/synchrony, periodicity/aperiodicity, and reversible/nonreversible time. Thus historical rites, which recreate the past so that it becomes the present, are inverse to death rituals, which convert present people into past beings, and distinct from control rites, which adjust the here-and-now to fixed schemes established in mythic times, equating the present with the past (Lévi-Strauss 1962, 283).<sup>3</sup> While time-reversal rituals—and the tension between irreversibility and repetitiveness they instantiate—have been the object of some discussion (e.g., Leach 1961; Gell 1975, 1992), authors have more often stressed that ritual actions should be viewed as repetitions of past “archetypal” actions (Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994), to which participants may connect through “deference” processes (Bloch 2004): for example, when they say they are following a tradition or acting as their ancestors did. Such reenactment rituals involve mythical, ancestral, or historical actions which are reperformed in the ritual present (Pitrou this volume; López Luján this volume). Other studies have focused on the inaugural dimension of rites, sacrifices in particular (Lambek 2007; see also Chosson, Begel, and Becquey this volume). Van Gennep's work, and especially its emphasis on process, was also developed by elaborating the perspective on liminality and stressing the intimacy of the ritual with social formation and transformation (Turner 1969 and subsequent work, such as Nahum-Claudel 2019; see also Monod Becquelin and Breton 2002; Breton, Chosson, and Monod Becquelin this volume, for Mesoamerica).

In contrast to views that treat rituals by means of dichotomies that are reintegrated by the ritual (Bell 1992, 21), practice-based and interactional approaches have emphasized the contingent and contextual nature of ritual. Ritualization is then seen as the key concept to address the strategic aspects of rituals, the fact they are



performed as practical ways of dealing with specific circumstances and that they act with and on flexible categories. Being rooted in the body as much as it is sociohistorical, ritualization may maximize or minimize its differentiation from other forms of practices, in cultural specific ways (Bell 1992, 92–93; Joyce this volume). According to this view, features such as repetition are not intrinsic to rituals. Following a more cognitive approach, it has also been suggested that variations in ritual frequency and intensity give them distinct transmission capacities: for example, unrepeated initiation rites are characterized by a strong intensity (Whitehouse 2004). However, cognitive perspectives linking the experience and conceptualization of time to the specificities of rituals have been scarce (see, however, Bloch 2012; Gell 1992).

Discussions on the distinctiveness of ritual time with respect to other social times have thus grown more complex over the years, moving beyond simplistic oppositions such as cyclic versus linear (e.g., Bloch 1977) to encompass the intricacies of contrasting regimes of temporality (e.g., Gell 1992; Pitarch 2011; Schieffelin 2002), and the combination of multiple temporalities (see below). Some have even suggested that the specific rhythmicities of ritual (such as “an extraordinary union of the quick [internal tempos] and the changeless [of punctilious recurrence of rituals as wholes]” [Rappaport 1999, 225]) are nodal to a ritually generated state of the mind and society (Rappaport 1992, 1999) or that ritual operates as “a virtualizing wherein the chaotic formations of actuality are slowed down” (Kapferer 2006). It is now clear that expressions such as “atemporal” or “time out of time” used to describe ritual time conceal a great deal of complexity. Also, against the view that ritual should be defined essentially in relation with myth (Lévi-Strauss 1971), and ritual time be dependent on mythic time, it has been argued that rituals articulate an individual experience with a set of traces of collective memory. Ritual memory, constructed through the words, gestures, and objects of the ritual, appears to be key to the sociocultural elaboration of images of historical change (Severi 1993b, 1996).

The notion of “frame” (see Bateson 1972; Goffman 1974) has led to a consideration of the specificity of ritual interactions with a view to resolving two problems: how to describe the rite’s internal organization and dynamics—particularly its temporal organization into oriented sequences of actions—and how to describe the effects that rites have on everyday life or in an ecological or social environment (Dehouve 2007; Handelman 1998; Handelman and Lindquist 2005; Kapferer 1983; Pitrou 2016a). Pragmatic theories such as that of ritual condensation (Houseman and Severi 1998 [1994]; Severi 2002)—which consider contradictory connotations to be combined in each sequence of ritual action, and multiple perspectives to coalesce in paradoxical identities—lead to treating ritual time as a heterogeneous texture made of parallel timelines that may unite and disunite according to a variety of dynamics. Fractality, reversibility, simultaneity, anachronicity, synchronicity, and

asynchronicity may interact in a complex ritual scenario formed by a combination of semiotic and material elements and especially revealed by the textual and prosodic subtleties of ritual speech (see, for Mesoamerica, Becquey 2017; Hanks 2006; Lira 2017a, 2017b; Monod Becquelin and Breton 2002; Vapnarsky 2022, this volume).

Recent sensory approaches to ritual and the materialities they are made of—taken as entities with processual, relational, and agential properties that emerge in action (Barad 2007; Dupey 2013, 2019; Erikson and Vapnarsky 2022; Johnson and Joyce 2022; Pitarch 2022; see also Okoshi this volume) and affect the ritual experience as well as the formation of religious subjectivities (Cohen and Mottier 2016)—potentially multiply the temporal layers and textures at play in rituals (Lupo 2022, this volume). However, as with other aspects of rituality—in particular ritual speech and multimodal communication, to which we turn below—they have rarely been analyzed from the point of view of their specific temporalities.

The expression of time in language and speech has been amply studied in linguistics, including the study of temporal shifters (Jakobson 1957) and temporal frames of reference in enunciative approaches (Benveniste 1966; Fleischman 1982, 1990) and more recent cognitive and pragmatic perspectives (Desclés and Guentchéva 2012; Evans 2013; Le Guen 2017; Le Guen and Pool Balam 2012; Núñez and Sweetser 2006; Tenbrick 2011). It has received less attention in linguistic anthropology (but see Basso 1996; Faudree and Pharaoh Hansen 2014; Kockelman 2007; Vapnarsky 2017). Within this approach, the Bakhtinian concept of chronotope (Bakhtin 1978 [1975])—originally the matrix where the main temporal and spatial sequences of a narrative work intersect—has been extended to analyze situated verbal practices, in particular the discursive negotiation of multiple spatiotemporal frames (Lempert and Perrino 2007; Silverstein 2005).

However, temporal aspects of speech have been considered mainly from the point of view of the specificities of narration in comparison with ordinary discourse. The temporal dimension of ritual discourse, by contrast, has itself been subject to little analysis, as demonstrated by recent publications on ritual communication (e.g., Keane 2004; Senft and Basso 2009; Stasch 2011; Tavárez 2014). Yet it opens the door to very promising perspectives. The treatment of language as action, initiated by Malinowski (1935) and theorized especially by Austin (1962) and by subsequent pragmatic approaches, implies conceiving of words as agents of context transformation and modification that are therefore associated with a transition between the performance's before and after (Duranti and Goodwin 1992). A set of analyses has made it possible to elucidate some of the modalities by which linguistic forms of ritual discourse effect such transformations, particularly those concerning relations of authority (e.g., Bloch 1975; Duranti 1993; Lempert 2012; Merlan and Rumsey 1991) or the states of the person (e.g., Monod Becquelin 2000; Lupo 1995;

Pitarch 2013; Signorini and Lupo 1989). There has also been some elaboration of the role of ritual utterances in the establishment of specific systems of interpersonal relations and in the construction of frameworks of co-participation and co-activity (e.g., Hanks 1996, 2006, 2013; Haviland 2000; Pitrou 2012, 2016b).

These approaches have contributed to altering perspectives on rituals, causing a shift from a symbolic analysis often centered on cosmologies (Geertz 1957, 1973; Galinier 2004 [1994], among others) to a conception in terms of a situated, emerging, participatory experience (Hanks 2006; Senft and Basso 2009; Vapnarsky 2022). On the basis of local ethnotheories of communication, other authors have questioned the conception of action used in ethnological and pragmatic theories, in order to emphasize the notion of “event,” introducing a more integrative view of verbal and nonverbal actions (Merlan and Rumsey 1991). The recent development of analyses and theories on multimodality—the fact that communication operates through multiple modes (verbal, vocal, gestural, postural, gaze, etc.)—has expanded this view to the level of microinteractions as well as to the spheres of invariants and cognition (Enfield 2009; Goodwin 2002; Haviland 2004).

Ritual speech has often been linked to a past temporality due to its more formal, stereotyped character, and to its possible references to mythical or foundational events as well as to the discursive and cognitive sedimentations to which it is subjected, which can turn it into a sociohistorical artifact (Cuturi, this volume; Hanks 1993, 2010; Romero this volume; Tavárez 2014). However, viewing rituals as emerging, creative situations has led this relationship with time to be reconsidered as a relational, indexical, dynamic construction between the past and the contemporaneity of the ritual performance’s context (Keane 1997; Schieffelin 2002). Indications of this anchoring, configured by different scales of embedded contexts, from the sociohistorical to the microcontextual (Hanks 2006), can be found in linguistic forms and their variation (see Hanks 1984, 2017; Monod Becquelin et al. 2010 for Mayan; Severi 1993a), but also in gestures, music and dance, or artifacts. While some works have analyzed forms of effectiveness in prophetic speech (e.g., Csordas 1997; Vapnarsky 2009), a more recently recognized characteristic of ritual communication is the significant amount of speech anticipation in comparison with nonritual spoken forms (Senft and Basso 2009). This is an important element for understanding not just the specificities of temporal projections in rituals but also the forms of participant and chronotopic coordinations at play.

This volume focuses on Mesoamerica. In this area, anthropological studies have reflected on ritual time along three main lines: the elaboration of ritual and divinatory calendars (Tedlock 1992); the cosmological conflation of spaces and times and its structuring role in ritual actions and symbolism, such as in oriented ritual deposits or circuits (Dehouve 2007; Galinier 2004 [1990]; Geist 1996; Gossen

1974; Hanks 2017; López Austin 2001; Pitrou 2016a; Vapnarsky 2003); the analysis of death rituals and of reenactment rituals such as Indigenous carnivals (Monod Becquelin and Breton 2002; Neurath 2017; Rubio Jiménez and Neurath 2017; Ruz 2005). Historical anthropology but also philology and iconography have addressed the superposition and conflict of temporal regimes produced by colonization and its consequences for religious innovations (Gruzinski 2002; Navarrete Linares 2004; Ruz 2017; Tavárez 2022; see also in this volume the chapters by Cuturi, by Gaillemín, and by Romero). A few works in anthropology and linguistic anthropology have elaborated on the combination and dynamics between multiple temporalities in rituals, by considering the specifics of ritual speech, actions, and artifacts (Dehouve 2021; Hanks 2017; Lira 2017b; Martínez 2017; Martínez Ts'ujul 2021; Pitarch 2011; Vapnarsky 2022, this volume).

The lines of inquiry that emerge from this brief “state of the art” survey show that the understanding of ritual activity and its temporal dimensions can be considerably stimulated and enriched by being situated in a context of multi- and interdisciplinary dialogues such as those proposed in this volume.

## SYNOPSIS OF THE BOOK

### RHYTHMS IN RITUALS

Conceiving rituals as series of moments that succeed one another according to a clearly defined “before” and “after” does not account for the complexity of the temporal processes at work. It proves more productive to take a methodical inventory of the multiplicity of rhythms and synchronicities as well as asynchronicities at work in ritual dynamics. Central to this is the very precise reconstruction of sequences of gestures, occurrence of material elements, coordinated actions, and spoken words, as well as the consideration of the forms of transformation (changes and transitions)—internal or external, induced or performed—that lie at the heart of observed ritual actions. This offers new clues for the understanding of forms of reenactments, ritual reiterations and cyclicity, and their relation with human practices and nonhuman agencies.

In the first contribution to this section, “Night and Day in the Templo Mayor at Tenochtitlan: The Different Renderings of Huitzilopochtli’s Creation Myth,” Leonardo López Luján addresses the fundamental rhythm of the night/day cycle and, through it, the question of the reenactments of actions present in origin myths. The chapter shows how the miraculous birth of Huitzilopochtli and his triumph over his lunar sister and stellar brothers, a metaphor of the victory of the day over the night, opened the way in Tenochtitlan to multiple celebrations. With the Templo Mayor as a stage, these ceremonies reenacted the rebirth of the sun early

every morning. The mythoastronomical periodicity functioned as a powerful mode of institution and ritualization of night/day temporality.

Not all the rites carried out in pre-Hispanic times, or later, have as their origin the commemoration of a myth with more or less fixed dates, nor are they always performed within the framework of calendar cycles. Strictly speaking, untimely events (such as a delay or insufficiency of rainfall over one or more years) or events inscribed in other temporalities (the life cycle, for example) also gave rise to retroactive and proactive rites, inscribing these events in specific temporalities. In the chapter “Probable Occasional Ceremonies at the End of the Maya Classic Period,” Dominique Michelet explores how, away from religious calendar requirements, seemingly profane events or processes became temporal anchors and triggered new ritual chronologies.

In “Ritual Speech and the Transformation of Time: The Grammar and Voice of Temporalization in Yucatec Maya Rituals,” Valentina Vapnarsky concentrates on the complexities and plurality of time in ritual performances and how they are configured through ritual speech. Based on the comparative analysis of performances of agricultural, land, and therapeutic rituals practiced by contemporary Yucatec Maya, she pays particular attention to how the main dimensions of linguistic temporality—indexical anchoring, aspectuality, textual and vocal rhythmicity—are mobilized depending upon the specific purposes and the agentive participation frames of rituals. It is argued that the rhythmic and chronotopic composition of the ritual speech induces specific causalities and a proper experiential texture of temporality that are both essential components of the ritual performative and transformative action.

#### RITUAL MULTITEMPORALITIES

As suggested in the previous section, rituals embed, conflate, condense, or unfold a plurality of temporalities. They elaborate time compression and expansion, rhythmic variations in and across the different temporalities, including during the performance. They produce chronological disruptions so as to create generative relations between distinct chronotopes and distinct ontological domains. Thus, rituals activate links between past, present, and future times; they connect and articulate different orders of time and action, such as those of life cycles, technical activities, lived rhythms, political organizations, and historical or cosmic orders. It is a matter of inquiry whether, within a ritual, multimodal and multisemiotic aspects can converge, structuring a unique robust temporal frame, or if they always present divergences, involving dialectically contrasted temporal anchorings and forces.

This section starts by exploring a specific temporal figure that articulates moments and events of different orders. This is “temporal compression,” which

Danièle Dehouve, in her chapter “Time Compression in Aztec Ritual Artifacts and Gods,” elaborates from the conceptual trope “metalepsis” and cognitive blending theory. Based on the analysis of artifacts that are part of Tlapanec and Mexica ritual deposits, as well as on the attire of the Aztec gods, the author shows how material and sensory expressions imply a temporal compression that condenses the time of the ritual, of the myth, and of future events that they are supposed to influence. The rhetorical device acts as a cognitive operator fundamental to temporal rituality.

In the following chapter, “*Witz and Tz’uultaq’a*: Ritual Temporality in Caves at Raxruha, Alta Verapaz, Guatemala,” Chloé Andrieu, Carlos Efraín Tox, Divina Perla-Barrera, Julien Sion, and Fidel Tuyuc Nij explore a converse multitemporal ritual setting, that of temporal accumulation. The Alta Verapaz caves, where the authors conducted archaeological investigations, were important pilgrimage sites during the Classic period. Today, these same caves are the main locations for the Maya Q’eqchi’ to interact with the *tz’uultaq’a* (the spirits of the mountain caves). Given the lack of any sedimentation process, the objects deposited over a long time have accumulated in continuous layers, remaining visible for ritual practitioners and participants of different ancient and recent times. Although the superimposed and intermingled layers of artifacts and sherds result from ritual acts produced by distant historical groups in distinct types of ceremonies, synchronically the accumulation creates an inclusive sensorial and temporal configuration that resignifies successive series of ritual gestures, their causal links, and the density of nonhuman and human agencies involved.

The two final chapters of this section address the relation between the temporal structuring of ritual practices, life processes, and social and cosmic orders. In “Myth and Ritual: Temporality through the Lens of Analogy,” Perig Pitrou revisits the relation between myth and rites, from the perspective of their temporal properties. Reversing the temporal perspective of ritual actions as reenactments of past mythic ones, the author elaborates on how mythic actions also depend on a way of imagining the past from the present, and how this projection is grounded in analogical schemas that capture the power of entities capable of bringing life as technical actions. A dual temporal logic of succession and synchronization is illustrated with myths and rituals related to maize cultivation.

It is the ritual imbrication of the life process par excellence, pregnancy and birth, and mythohistoric orders and temporalities that are explored in the chapter “Male Pregnancy and the Rebirth of the Year: Actors and Temporalities in a Tseltal Instauration Ritual (Bachajon, Chiapas)” by Alain Breton, Marie Chosson, and Aurore Monod Becquelin. In a unique ritual that precedes the Maya Carnival of Bachajon, the parodic impregnation and pregnancy of a male-authority-to-be-substituted acts both as an image of the renewal and succession of annual civil office (*cargo* system) and as the prelude to the rebirth of the solar cycle, the day-and-night

alternation restored from darkness and the renewal of the social order. The analysis of the different sequences of actions and of the accompanying ritual dialogues and prayers reveals the multitemporal and multispatial transformative dynamics that underlie what can be considered as a ritual of instauration.

#### MATERIAL AND SENSORIAL DIMENSIONS OF RITUAL TEMPORALITIES

The third section furthers the multidisciplinary reflection on materialities in ritual practices, initiated in Johnson and Joyce (2022). A broad view on the range of materialities that are agential in rituals is adopted: aspects as diverse and as durable or ephemeral as substances and artifacts present in ritual deposits; pits or niches where deposits are made; written signs; and breath and voice, odors or colors, and bodily engagements with them. Materialities are seen here as entities with processual, agential, and relational properties that emerge through diverse relationships created and unfolding during and around ritual practices—which echoes the view in linguistic anthropology that words take their meaning and efficacy from emerging speech, performances, and situations. Materialities, together with the complex sensorium of (in)visibility, textures, odors, tastes, and thermic feelings they stimulate, generate and transform in different ways the temporalities of the ritual performance. They act as phases and sequence markers, function as transition operators, and may index parallel times. They are also essential for memorability and thus strongly involved in the sense of repetition, sometimes deviation, attached to ritual practices. Considering sensations—such as the perception of duration—as biocultural constructs calls for detailed and meticulous ethnographies and opens to the study of the cultural affordances involved (Canna 2019). The chapters explore all these different aspects.

In “The Materialities of Ritual Practices: An Archaeology of Traces of Stylized Events,” Rosemary Joyce’s analysis of marks, residues, and other traces left by ritual acts challenges previous definitions of events, while highlighting the implication of materialities in the making of ritual temporalities. Based on a sustained investigation of deposits excavated in western Honduras sites dating to the Formative Period (1500–500 BCE) and Late to Terminal Classic Period (500–1000 CE), her approach calls into question the way archaeologists and ethnographers are accustomed to think about time, as an unfolding, unidirectional flow along which moments can be placed and separated from each other. Ritual events, seen following Deleuze and Guattari (1980) as emergent, “visible striations in otherwise smooth matter,” appear to be heightened moments, as much future-oriented as they are past-oriented (see also the chapters by Pitrou and by Gaillemin).

With “Recreating the Memory of the Origins: Sociocultural Meanings of ‘Graphic Symbols’ in Land Titles,” Tsubasa Okoshi invites us to consider a very



different dimension of materiality, that of paper and the voice, of the graphic trace, as embodying the acts of writing and reading and so contributing to ritual practices intended to maintain and reaffirm the social order in territories during Mayan colonial times. The analysis concentrates on a neglected aspect of colonial Maya land titles: its graphic, maybe punctuation marks. Their presence and rhythmic distribution in the manuscripts, interpreted as a translation of breath and prosodic aspects, tend to show that the titles were read out loud in ritualized performances, which reproduced in audio form the scene of the foundation of the territory. The sociocultural functions of these documents appear to depend on the internal and external temporal dimensions of their oralization, intimately attached to fixed as well as evanescent materialities.

In “Substances, Subjects, and Senses: Temporality of Perception in Nahua Rituals,” Alessandro Lupo analyzes the sensory dimensions attached to objects, substances, words, and gestures in “soul illnesses” and ritual offerings to the dead among the Nahuas of the Sierra del Norte of Puebla. The author shows that the sensory properties not only vary depending on the contrasted perspectives and perceptive capacities of the various ritual human and nonhuman protagonists, but that they also change according to different temporal phases of the ritual that they contribute to establish. Playing a major part in the appropriation of the goods and essences that circulate during the performances, the ritual sensorium appears to be a complex and composite agential medium, with its own transformative dynamics.

#### RITUAL TEMPORALITIES IN THE *LONGUE DURÉE*

In Mesoamerica, rituals are not situated in a time that is more or less external to them: they constantly found, re-found, and model time. This holds true for rituals that reenact origin myths or the birth and death of ancestral or supernatural entities, as seen in the first chapter of the volume, and for ceremonial offerings of foundation (or abandonment) or enthronement ceremonies. This is also constitutive of so-called calendrical rituals, which have a very strong presence, especially in Mayan archaeology and epigraphy, since rituals of this kind are literally the processes that drive the celebrated cycles. The instituting and sociohistorical power of such rituals rests on their ability to connect individual actions with collective phenomena. But the fact that rituals mark time, and can hence function as cognitive, experiential, and material structures of social and historical memories, certainly does not mean that these markings are set in stone. On the contrary, if we step back and look at the long term, we discover that these traces, whether material or memorial, are continually subject to a process of re-elaboration by human groups. It therefore proves necessary to consider the transformation of temporal patterns—temporality



in and through rites—in the course of the history of Mesoamerican societies. The comparison with societies of Central America with less clear traces of practices of timekeeping is of particular interest in this respect.

In the cross-disciplinary chapter “Rituals of Inauguration: Temporalities and Spatialities in the Maya Area and Mesoamerica,” by Marie Chosson, Johann Begel, and Cédric Becquey, the authors bring together archaeology and ethnology to analyze rituals of founding houses or other buildings and specific spaces (milpas, household enclosures, etc.), both in pre-Hispanic and modern times, eventually questioning the very notion of foundation rituals. Their comparative study reveals that, in many cases, such rituals do not constitute single initial events but are rather part of series of recurrent rites necessary for occupying and using spaces of various types. What is at stake is not so much the creation—or the ensoulment, as commonly assumed in the literature—of a new inhabited or cultivated space but the continuous renegotiation between humans and the masters of the terrestrial spaces that any anthropic land use requires in Maya practices.

In “Monuments and Mounds as Time: A Brief Argument for the Isthmo-Colombian Area,” Alexander Geurds critically argues for a historical and temporal view of ritual. His proposal is all the more stimulating in that it unfolds in a cultural context for which, contrary to neighboring Mesoamerica, the question of Indigenous practices of timekeeping is unclear and has hardly been discussed. Considering public ceremonial places marked by a high number of stone sculptures and regularly arranged and multiplied mounds in Nicaragua, the author highlights how repeating practices of ritual action may have generated a sense of history, due to the long-lasting character of monumental spaces of earth and stone but also to processes such as the weathering of the igneous rock, which provided sensorial clues for the aging of stones and the passage of time. These ritual practices may have developed a sense of momentum, resulting in—and perceivable from—increasing numbers of sculptures being crafted as responses to collective disruptions provoked by such predictable and unpredictable events as volcanic eruptions and political tensions.

How ritual practices and the ordering of temporalities are affected by major disruptions is precisely the focus of the chapter “The End of the Long Dynastic Time in the Southern Maya Lowlands (750–810 CE),” by M. Charlotte Arnould and Chloé Andrieu. The authors reconsider the so-called Maya collapse of the end of the Classic period (ninth and tenth centuries CE), especially its initial phase, an era of increased warfare and dynastic endings, which preceded the dramatic times to come and introduced significant political and sociocultural changes. The political powers that were then shaken and eventually destroyed rested on the rulers’ mastery of the rhythmic repetition of public ceremonies, guarantors of the world’s continuity through the renewal of calendrical cycles. What can be commonly taken

as a chronological series of disconnected events would in fact represent the loss by the elites of their ritual hold on time (past, present, and future), in particular their knowledge and control of the longest-practiced calendar cycle, the *baktun*, with the emergence of new temporalities in political action and its ritual foundation.

#### RITUAL TEMPORALITIES IN CONFRONTATION

The previous section introduces the question of how, in various moments of their history, Mesoamerican populations and their neighbors have arranged their temporalities—or invented new ones—in reaction to situations in which several conceptions of space-time have come into contact and, usually, into conflict. Part V further develops this topic with the highly disruptive case of Spanish colonization and evangelization. The chapters inquire into various semiotic and discursive modes through which traditional Indigenous conceptions of time and Catholic missionary teaching were confronted.

The first chapter investigates the semiotic properties of evangelical texts and their implication in the reconfiguration of Indigenous temporalities, with a focus on pictorial representation. In “To Figure, to Condense, and to Stretch: Temporalities and Gestures in the Colonial Catechisms of Mexico,” Bérénice Gaillemain explores the visual strategies invented to convert the colonial catechisms into images to penetrate the Indigenous mind. The author deciphers the visual figurative means and the temporal recourses and manipulations used by the missionaries to transfer Christian time markers, Catholic liturgical sequences of gestures, and complex ritual actions. All these were intended to replace the Nahua ritual universe—as imagined by the missionaries in a fraught dialogue with their Indigenous interlocutors—with the Christian logic of mnemonics, time marking, and religious temporalities.

In the following chapter, “The Liturgical Challenge to Historical Temporality: From St. Dominic’s Ways of Prayer to the Contemporary Ikoots *Mipoch Dios* (God’s Words) of San Mateo del Mar (Oaxaca, Mexico),” Flavia Cuturi analyzes some theological and semantic principles that characterize the liturgy of the Huave of San Mateo del Mar and that of their Dominican evangelizers. It focuses in particular on “monosemic intentions,” a principle which prescribes the association of ritual words and gestures with a unique and constant meaning. Based on a meticulous study of Huave ritual discourse, the author questions the way these principles affect the macro and micro temporalities constitutive of the liturgies, arguing that they counter the potential effects of history (change, oblivion, individual creativity).

The last chapter reverses the perspective. In “Biblical Landscapes and Migration Histories: The ‘Ten Lost Tribes of Israel’ in Colonial Highland Guatemala,” Sergio Romero reveals how, as early as the mid-sixteenth century, the K’iche’ Maya

incorporated the Old Testament for their own benefit in order to capture exogenous historicity and traditions and to legitimize their power and continuity, subtly relying on the colonizers' history. The analysis makes explicit the tense confrontation between Maya lords and Dominicans that resulted in the dialectical articulation of Maya and Christian temporalities found in these texts, and the solutions Maya scribes developed to make Christian timescales and cycles compatible with Maya conceptions of time and elite political agendas.

At the end of this journey in the intricacies of temporalities and ritualities in Mesoamerica, we hope that, beyond the richness of the cases presented in each chapter, and their diversity in terms of historical periods, disciplines, and analysis, the reader will also perceive the convergent threads that the whole reflects. This is seen in particular in the many echoes between the texts, within and between sections, such as the temporal dialectics between the primacy of performance versus the primacy of the model (for example, in the chapters by López Luján; Breton, Chosson, and Monod Becquelin; and Geurds), the foreground on ritual as a creative emerging process (for example, in the chapters by Vapnarsky, Lupo, Andrieu et al., and Michelet), and the view of rituals as confrontations and strategies (for example, in the chapters by Joyce, Cuturi, and Romero), to name but a few examples. As a result of the multifaceted approach to temporality and the comparative perspective adopted in the volume, which were made possible thanks to the reasoned confrontation of a variety of Mesoamerican fields, new research topics and questions emerge. We hope they might contribute to further our understanding of temporality in ritual practices, in and beyond Mesomerica.

## NOTES

1. The GERM (Groupe d'Enseignement et de Recherche sur les Mayas et sur la Mésoamérique), based in Paris, has developed cross-disciplinary conferences, teachings, and publications on several related topics such as *Espacios mayas: Usos, representaciones, creencias* (Breton, Monod Becquelin, and Ruz 2003), "Decir y contar la diversidad" (Monod Becquelin et al. 2010), "Thick Boundaries: Alterity and Continuity in Mesoamerica" (Monod Becquelin 2012), and "Measures and Textures of Time among the Mayas: The Spoken, the Written and the Lived" (Vapnarsky, de Pierrebouurg, and Michelet 2017).

2. The four main conferences were Ritual Temporalities: Action Sequences, Processes and Coordination, Abbaye de Royaumont, October 22–24, 2015; *Time in Recomposition*, Rome, Università Sapienza, November 3–5, 2016; Materializing Temporalities, University of California at Berkeley, September 20–22, 2017; Temporalities in Mesoamerican Rituals: Interdisciplinary Approaches, Paris, November 14–16, 2018. A book stemming from one of

these conferences was edited by Lisa Johnson and Rosemary Joyce under the title *Temporalities in Mesoamerican Rituals: Interdisciplinary Approaches* (Louisville: University Press of Colorado, 2022).

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3. Lévi-Strauss comments on the classification of Australian rituals from the Cape York peninsula, proposed by R. Lauriston Sharp.

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