Weaving threads and painting bodies: Huasteca women, clothing, and embodiment during the Late Classic to Postclassic.

by

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Bachelor of Arts Anthropology Degree, from University of Victoria, 2021

An essay Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the

HONOURS PROGRAM

Department of Anthropology

Abstract

This is an emerging analysis of the use of a cape type garment, the *dhayemlaab* in the Teenek language, also known as the *quexquemitl* in Nahuatl language, among modern Huasteca women as an analogy to an illustrative group of feminine imagery, including ceramics and sculpture, from the Huasteca region. Huasteca is located in the northeast of Mexico along the Gulf coast, and this paper will explore evidence for practices of embodiment at a time of social change in the Late Classic and Postclassic periods. Multiple lines of evidence suggest that elite women used the *dhayemlaab /quexquemitl* to negotiate their social position. An integrated application of perspectives on embodiment, ethnohistorical sources, ethnography, and material culture illuminate the visible role for women as active participants in ritual practices among the Huasteca. This paper seeks to understand the relationship between body and embodiment through the dhayemlaab/quexquemitl dress used by elite women in the Huasteca to negotiate their social status during the Late Classic to Postclassic period (600-1521 CE).

Keywords: Feminine imagery, body, identity, embodiment, Huasteca, Late Classic, Postclassic.

Contents

Territory acknowledgment

I acknowledge the lək̓ʷəŋən peoples territory and the Songhees, Esquimalt and W̱SÁNEĆ Nations relationships with the land where I am privileged to live and work.

I also acknowledge Teenek peoples Huastec territory where I have had the opportunity to live, work, and collaborate with Teenek communities.

Introduction

The body is a central component in the role of the individual in society as a form to express identity and status (Houston et al. 2020:1; Joyce 2005:140; Marcus 2019; Orr and Looper 2015:xxiii). Embodying the cosmos through a sacred dress has been done by Huasteca women when wearing the cape type dress called the *dhayemlaab*, in the Teenek language, or *quexquemitl*, in the Nahuatl language. Nahuatl etymology for the quexquemitl is *quextli,* meaning "neck," and *quemi*, "to put on a piece of cloth or cape," and therefore a neck cape (Anawalt 1981:36; Stresser-Pean 2011:70). In the Teenek language, the etymology for the dhayemlaab is *dhayem* or *thayem* meaning "cloth" or "fabric," and *laab,* "sacred," meaning the sacred dress (Rocha 2014:46). I will use both words when referring to this dress as the Huasteca cultures included both of these linguistic groups and using one would be to exclude the other.

The Huasteca is a region located in the northeast of Mexico along the Gulf Coast of Mexico (Figure 1), including part of the coast at the south and the coastal plains to the east in the modern states of Hidalgo, Queretaro, Puebla, San Luis Potosi, Tamaulipas, and Veracruz (Richter and Faust 2015:3). This region also correspond to the territory occupied by the Huasteca cultures represented by Teenek, Otomi, Tepehuas, Totonacs, and Nahuas who occupied this territory from the Preclassic (B.C.E. 2000) to the Postclassic (1525 C.E.), as did their descendants who continue sharing the same area and, in some cases, the same settlements (Stresser-Pean 2001; Vidas 2009; Zaragoza 2018; 2009). Therefore, Huasteca refers both to the region and to the cultures.

Preclásico / Formativo temprano	Preclásico/ Formativo medio	Preclásico/ Formativo tardío	Protoclásico	Clásico temprano	Clásico tardío	Clásico terminal	Posclásico temprano	Posclásico tardío
2000 a.C. -1000 a.C.	1000 a.C.- 600 a.C.	600 a.C.- 100 d.C.	100 d.C.- 250 d.C.	250 d.C.- 550 d.C.	550 d.C.- 800 d.C.	800 d.C.- 1000 d.C.	1000 d.C.- 1250 d.C.	1250 d.C.- 1519 d.C.

Figure 1. Map of Mexico and Huasteca Region (Gulf Coast).

Members of each linguistic group wear this garment with variants that make them different as an identifier. The garment is made of cotton or zapupe (a maguey fibre) weaved using a backstrap loom that is sewed in a diamond shape by the union of two pieces of fabric. Depending the technique used, the cape can be weaved with a rounded end and in some other cases ends in a triangle shape. The rounded ending or "curve weave" is woven through a more complex process and it is only done by Tepehuas and Otomi women (Stresser-Pean 2001:251-254, 308-309). Different designs are embroidered on the dress of the Huasteca women including zoomorphic, phytomorphic, and geometric figures that depict diverse influences over time as a syncretic reminder of migrations and contacts. Among these influences, different techniques, materials, and colours have been included (Figure 2).

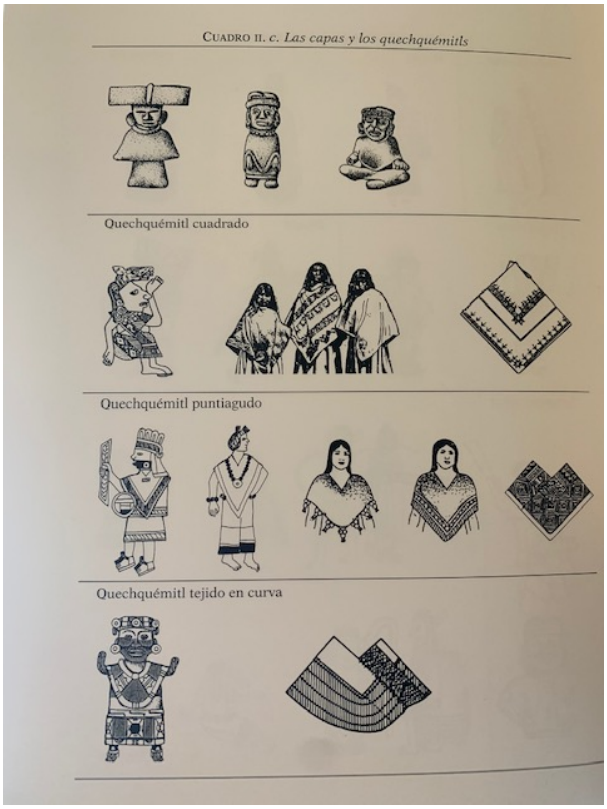

Figure 2. Dhayemlaab / quexquemitl images from archaeological representations, codices, and modern use. From top to bottom: Archaeological female figurines wearing the cape, Dhayemlaab/quexquemitl square shape, Dhayemlaab/quexquemitl triangle end, and Dhayemlaab/quexquemitl curve or rounded end (Stresser-Pean 2011:126).

Mesoamerican people made use of diverse elements as ornaments for the body, not only as a mode to express and transmit identity and communicating social organization and beliefs; but as a form to embody the experiences of life in the social realm in a constant practice (Fisher and DiPaolo 2003:227). Through the ornamented body, a person deliberately establishes their own identity and legitimizes their position within their community and to others as part of an cultural group (Cifarelli, 2017:103; Joyce 2005:143; Verducci, 2017:26). This manipulation of the body through ornamentation is based on the visual component as an narrative for society, but reinforcing the personhood (Fisher and

DiPaolo 2003:225). Scholars of Mesoamerica have demonstrated how these practices relate to status and identity and are manifest in material culture (Carter et al. 2020: 2-9; Joyce 2005:140; Orr and Looper 2014: xxv; Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1987: 7). Additionally, it is relevant to consider different narratives concerning identity in material culture and incorporate the variables of race, gender, ethnicity, and class with the negotiation of the individual in the similarities, divergent, conflicting, and situational identities as variables that are being playing by the individual in different arenas (Fisher and DiPaolo 2003:226; Joyce 206:51-53).

My focus in this study is on Huasteca cultures (Preclassic 2000 B.C.E. to Postclassic 1000–1525 C.E.; Figure 1), which were characterized by a complex body practices. These included permanent body modification like tattooing, scarification, cranial and dental modification, as well as temporary modification using clothing, ornaments, and body paint (Faust 2014: 253; Marchegay 2014: 295; 2009:131; Stresser-Pean 2011:167).

Material culture from the area of interest present anthropomorphic representations with exquisite and clear detail of the body ornamentation, in which male and female imagery share a similar level of representation. The emphasis that Huasteca people put on the ornamented body along with posture and gesture implies the relevance that self-identification among the Huasteca, in a broader sense as a member of a large social group or as part of an interest unit (Fisher and DiPaolo 2003:225-226; Marchegay 2014: 295; 2009:131; Stresser-Pean 2011:167).

In recent times, scholars have registered the equal gender representations in the imagery found associated with ritual and political contexts in the Huasteca region compared with other parts of Mesoamerica (Patel 2016; Richter 2015; Zaragoza 2018, 2015, 2009). These representations depict a variety of elements that can contribute to a better

understanding of the gendered roles of the Huasteca people in the context of social, politic, economic, and religious life. The analysis of a group of feminine imagery, including ceramics and sculpture, from the Huasteca would provide evidence for practices of embodiment at a time of social change in the Late Classic and Postclassic periods (Patel 2016; Richter 2015; Zaragoza 2018). Specifically, my research seeks to understand the relationship between the ornamented body and embodiment through the dhayemlaab/ quexquemitl as a form of dress and communication used by elite women in the Huasteca to negotiate their social status during the Late Classic to Postclassic period (600-1521 C.E.). Through the use of multiple lines of evidence and an integration on the application of perspectives on embodiment from ethnohistorical sources, ethnography, and material culture, the role of Huasteca women as active participants in ceremonial and ritual practices will be analyzed.

Objective

In this research paper I explore the insights that are opened up when scholars consider the Huasteca as a site for dynamic interaction among ethnic/linguistic groups during social change and the importance of the ornamented body and embodiment as active sites of negotiation in this multi-ethnic setting. With a particular focus on women, there is potential to understand the relationship between the ornamented body and embodiment through the dhayemlaab /quexquemitl as a pivotal component of social and political negotiations. This will provide a springboard for the review of scholars who explore dress, its significance, and the sources that can help us to appreciate the role of women in the public spheres of religion and politics.

In addressing the relevance of this garment in prehispanic times as used by elite women, I ask the following questions: How is the dhayemlaab/quexquemitl dress related to ritual practice? How does this type of dress relate to body modification? How do women negotiate relationships and status through the use of this dress? To answer the questions of the relationship between the ritual practice and the use of dhayemlaab /quexquemitl and its correlation with the use of body ornamentation, I analyze female imagery depicted and described in ethnohistorical sources, ethnographies, and material culture.

This is library-based research, with limited access to collections and not many sources available; therefore, in order to effectively address the research question, I make use of analogies to compare and contrast forms of the dhayemlaab/quexquemitl through time. This is a pilot project for further research that will provide a foundation for the review of scholars who explore dress, its significance, and the sources that can help us to appreciate the role of women in the public spheres of religion and politics.

Theoretical framework

Through the body and embodiment approach I will review the dynamic and transformative dimensions of the ornamented body to understand the interrelations or ritual practices of embodiment from the Late Classic and the Postclassic periods in the Huasteca. I will make my theoretical framework explicit following the argument that gender is constructed and performed within a normative system that is concrete and accepted (Arden 2008:15, 2002; Brumfiel 1996:144; Gilchrist 1999:75; Joyce 2008, 2005, 1996; McCafferty and McCafferty 1991). These rules are also confronted through dress and behaviour when times of change and stress are present. The body is a form to express identity and status and can be transformed through costume and ornament that communicates social organization and

beliefs, as well as an embodiment of experience, agency, and identity (Bachand et al. 2003; Cifarelli, 2017:103; Gilchrist 1999:109; Houston et al. 2020:1-2; Joyce 2005:142-143; Orr and Looper 2014:xxiii-xxiv; Patel 2016:265; Verducci, 2017: 39). Embodiment through body ornament transmits an identity, conveying "lived experience of bodies in the social world" (Fisher and DiPaolo 2003:227). Through the sensations and experience of the body, identity is shaped and provide support for a better understanding of the female representations in the Huasteca (Brumfiel and Overholtzer 2009:297). It is a way through which a person deliberately establishes their own identity and legitimizes their position within their community and to others as part of a cultural group (Cifarelli, 2017:103; Joyce 2005:143; Verducci, 2017:26). Previous discussions in archaeology of embodiment coincide that the material culture acts as an agent that reflects social life from ancient societies. Identity is shaped by the convergence of social control and gender performance during the socialization processes, including the social, the political, and the individual body (Brumfiel and Overholtzer 2009:316-317; Joyce 2006:51-53; McCafferty and McCafferty 2009:183-186; Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1987:6-7)

Reischer and Koo (2004:297-298) discuss the body as a symbol and as an agent in a dualistic role among society. A symbolic body operates as a "conduit of social meaning" in which a "common symbol set [is] needed to decipher those meanings" (Reischer and Koo 2004:300). The agentic body corresponds to the active part in the social word or the agency of a person; therefore there is an external and internal communication. The message is transmitted to the social world, but at the same time allows the reinforcement of personhood (McCafferty and McCafferty 2009:183; Reischer and Koo 2004:300). Along with this, the body expresses the ideal for that society and for that individual, as Reischer and Koo (2004) define "the body beautiful" in which gender construction and performance

is created. The realm of this body beautiful is not restricted to the feminine and should be considered for the gender fluidity or multiple gender identities that were recognized in the past without present biases (McCafferty and McCafferty 2009:183).

Mascia-Lees (2016:162) argues that the body is "conceptualized [as] subject and object, symbol and material, individual and social," with bodies' lived experiences functioning to communicate at the interior and exterior of society while strengthening notions of self. The symbolic body is presented as "a text upon which social meanings are inscribed" (Mascia-Lees 2016:150). The embodied body in archaeology according to Joyce (2005) the body is part of the display and performance but also embodied agency. Analyzing human remains, archeologists are able to identify the "body beautiful", mentioned by Reischer and Koo. Also, different components of ornamentation and adornment present in different elements such as figurines, murals, and sculpture. The body clad in material culture displays and embodies agency (Joyce 2005).

The Huasteca region and the dynamic interactions

A recent compilation of research in archaeology, cultural anthropology, linguistics, art, and history (Richter and Faust 2015) identifies elements past and present from Huasteca are either shared or are different from other cultural groups in Mesoamerica. Constant interactions were made between Huasteca with other cultural groups and with their neighbors from inland and from the coast. The interregional exchange and dynamics were continuous between the Preclassic period to the Conquest and relationships among groups varied over time. In particular this period of change was experienced during the middle 15th century when Aztecs expanded their empire by conquest through most parts of

Mesoamerica, including a portion of Huasteca territory (Anawalt 1981: 5-14; Stresser-Pean 2001; Stresser-Pean 2011; Zaragoza 2018; Vidas 2009).

In this multicultural region, the shared diagnostic features observed in past sculpture and ceramics corresponds to the denominated Huasteca culture (Faust 2014:253; Richter 2015:75). These analyses have focused on intra- and inter-regional relations, bringing new data to light related to long distance exchange relationships that Huasteca cultures had with other cultural groups such as the Mayan to the south and the Anasazi-Mogollon to the north of Mexico in the US southwest (Richter and Faust 2015:6). These studies bring new contributions regarding the Huasteca region, countering the view of the region as isolated or peripheral as was proposed in the past; nevertheless, cultural change and continuity in the Huasteca from the Preclassic to the Conquest remains under investigation (Palka 2015: 214; Richter and Faust 2015:6; Zaragoza 2015:59). Jade and shell objects from the coast and the Mayan area have been recorded in Huasteca, originating from the south. Copper products were exchanged from the central west Mexico with the Tarascan, obsidian obtained from Hidalgo and ceramics from central Mexico, all of which are found in Huastecan archaeological sites (Zaragoza 2009). Exchange within the area was also conducted due to the abundant agriculture products such as corn, pumpkin, beans, fruits, and fibers including cotton, pochote, and zapupe (Zaragoza 2009).

Textile production was an important activity related to women and was used as a commodity and tribute payment during the Late Classic and Postclassic periods. *Códice Mendoza*, a painted book from the Aztec empire, registered the tribute paid and it shows that Huasteca contributed high amounts of cotton and high-quality textiles (Anawalt 1981; Berdan and Anawalt 1997; Brumfiel 2006:862-863; 1996: 143-145; Patel 2016:263; Rocha 2014; Turok 1988:86; Zaragoza 2009). Opulent garments made of cotton, with bright

colours obtained by natural dyes and adorned with feathers and rabbit fur, were highly valued in Mesoamerica (Anawalt 1981: 214; McCafferty and McCafferty 1991; Morris and Karasik 2015:35-37; Stresser-Pean 2011:70-75). Elite women were in charge of the production and distribution of textiles and clothes, with valuable ones reserved for wear during ceremonies and for rituals (Brumfiel 2006:862-863; Morris and Karasik 2015:13; Rocha 2014).

Dhayemlaab/quexquemitl, a morphological description.

Modern Huasteca women from Teenek, Otomi, Tepehuas, Totonac, and Nahuatl cultures share the dhayemlaab/quexquemitl as a cultural significant garment, with particularities that make them distinctive among themselves and as a strong part of reaffirming their identity (Anawalt 1981; Rocha 2014; Stresser-Pean 2011). The dhayemlaab/quexquemitl have been produced with different techniques, shapes, designs, styles, colours, and fibers in time and space (Rocha 2014:100; Stresser-Pean 2011:86-91; Zaragoza 2018). According to Stresser-Pean (2011:71-74) in the early years of the colony, 16th century, there were three different types of ancient dhayemlaab/quexquemitl. The first one is made of one rectangular piece of fabric sewed at one side leaving a space big enough to introduce the head, the one that is made of two rectangular pieces of fabric of the same size sewed one over the other at one side leaving space for the head (Figure 3a), and the third one is the more sophisticated technically speaking (Figure 3b), consists in two rectangular pieces of fabric weaved in "curve" (Figure 3c). The "curve" weave is done when the threads from the warp are inserted in the weft, forming a curve form (Anawalt 1981; Stresser-Pean 2011). The three styles are worn by contemporary Huasteca women with distinctive colours, size, and iconographic motives (Rocha 2014:100; Stresser-Pean 2011:86-91; Zaragoza 2018).

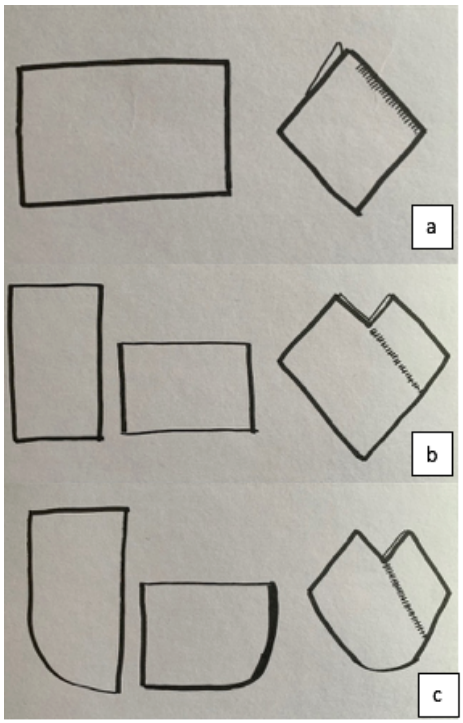

Figure 3. Three forms of the dhayemlaab/quexquemitl: a) triangular made from one rectangular piece of fabric, 2) triangular made from two rectangular pieces of fabric, 3) "curve" technique made with two pieces of fabric (Draw by the author based on Stresser-Pean 2011).

Some garments have distinctive adornments in the borders of the cape, from the simple ending edge to colourful fringes and pom-poms. According to the fashion, Huasteca women adopt these elements and integrate them in their clothes. Some of these elements are not delimited to one or another Indigenous peoples. Among the Nahuas and Teenek, it is common to observe fringes. Size is differential and seems it is related to personal decisions or fashion. The dhayemlaab/quexquemitl could be short, to the belly bottom or large covering the arms. Additionally, in both cases this garment allows women to easily breastfeed their babies while they are performing their chores (Stresser-Pean 2011:75). Nahua and Otomi women wear the cape sideways and as a head-covering when doing daily chores. Teenek women use a headdress, "*petob*", made of a bunch of threads of different

colours, maybe because of the this they are not wearing the dhayemlaab/quexquemitl in that fashion.

Colours used in the dhayemlaab/quexquemitl have varied in time. In the first half of the 20th century, the main colours used were red, yellow/orange, black, and blue; basically obtained from natural dyes (Rocha 2014:102-103. Threads were made from cotton in a variety in colours from white (*Gossypium hirsutum*) to brown (*Gossypium mexicanum*); usually used by the elite (Rocha 2014:106-107; Stresser-Pean 2011). Toxic pigments and industrial fabrics, including cotton and synthetic fabrics, started to be used when new transportation systems were opened in the 1960's (Sanchez 2017). The use of backstrap loom and embroidery started to decay moreover among young girls in some communities, principally in the townships and the surroundings (Rocha 2014; Sanchez 2017).

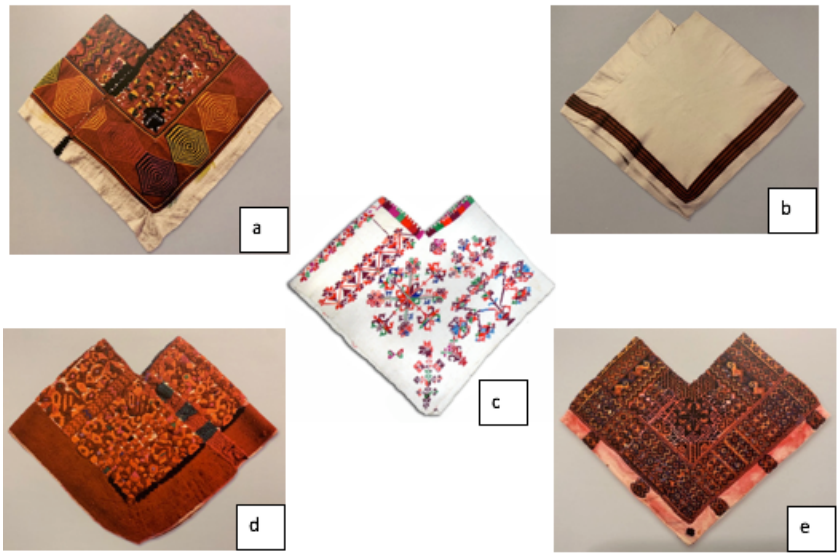

Figure 4. a) Totonac quexquemitl with "curve" stripe from Puebla (1960-1970) weaved in back loom strap, cotton and threads dyed in different colours (Stresser-Pean 2011:119-120); b) Nahua quexquemitl from Naupan, Puebla, weaved in back loom strap with red and navy blue stripe (Stresser-Pean 2011:119-120); c) Teenek dhayemlaab from San Luis Potosi, weaved in back strap loom with cotton and threads of different colours (Rocha 2014:95); d) Nahua quexquemitl with "curve" stripe from Zontecomatlan,Veracruz, weaved in back loom strap with cotton and embroidered in different colours (Stresser-Pean 2011:119-120); e) Otomi quexquemitl with "curve" stripe from San Antonio Puebla weaved in back loom strap with cotton and embroidered in different colours (Stresser-Pean 2011:119-120). All examples correspond to the decades of the 1960-1970.

In 20th-century contexts the garment was often worn over a blouse of European influence made with commercial fabric sewn by Huasteca women. During the colonial period there were changes in technology and regulations for the use of type of fabric, style of dresses, and adornments for Indigenous people, mestizo (mixed European and Indigenous heritage), and white people (Tuñón 1999:28). Huasteca women have been described wearing this garment and a long skirt. Friars and explorers succinctly mentioned Huastec peoples dress and ornaments in early accounts during the Colonial period (Anawalt 1981; Rocha 2011; Stresser-Pean 2011; Zaragoza 2018). Among these early accounts after the Conquest, Fray Bernardino de Sahagun registered some information provided by Nahua people, mainly Aztec, but not any direct communication with the Huasteca (Vidas 2009:39). No blouse was mentioned in early descriptions, but it was mentioned the corporal painting after the conquest. Many Huastec women were topless and used this cape when they were outside their houses (Rocha 2014). The dhayemlaab/quexquemitl is used by Huasteca women principally in rituals and ceremonies. In the recent past, Huasteca women only wore a skirt and were topless while they were at home, using the dhayemlaab/quexquemitl to go out. Photography of the 20th century (Anawalt 1981; Rocha 2014; Stresser-Pean 2011) shows women outside their houses topless but using the dhayemlaab/quexquemitl as a headdress.

A myriad of different designs have been used as part of the decoration of this garment with a variety of techniques adapted and adopted over time. Cross-stich is common among the Teenek, while embroidery was common among the Nahua and Totonac. The designs depict geometric, zoomorphic, phytomorphic, and anthropomorphic elements distributed all over the corpus of the garment. According to paintings, lithographs, and photos from the 18th, 19th, and middle 20th century; Teenek dhayemlaab/quexquemitl

iconographic designs were moderate in comparison with those made after the 70s. Also, fringes were included in this new fashion. Early description of the ornamented body were made by the Spanish friars and historic accounts over the next centuries from explorers, military, and anthropologists. Formal ethnographic research in the 20th century include the work of Irmgard Johnson in 1953 (Rocha 2011:101) and Donald and Dorothy Cordy in 1968, Guy and Claude Stresser-Pean (2011), and Rocha (2011, 2014). The dhayemlaab/quexquemitl has been a feature that has been contributing with reaffirming identity among Huasteca women (Zaragoza 2018). Iconographic designs have been modified and adoption of new elements are imprinted in the corpus of the dress while new techniques and materials are incorporated in the manufacture of this iconic dress.

Approaches to Dressed and Ornamented Body

Travelers accounts from the Historical periods, including the Colonial (1525-1825 C.E.) and Ethnographic (C.E.1825 – present), narrate the different types of dress worn by Indigenous women in different parts of Mexico (Tuñón 1999:45-46). They also described the type of body adornment, including body paint (Charnay 2016: 281). Early ethnographic narratives described the differences and similarities of dress among women in Huasteca, and collections were made that serve as a reference for researchers and Indigenous women in current times (Rocha 2014; Tuñón 1999:45-46). Research done by Stresser-Pean (2011), Rocha (2014), Turok (1988), Pomar (2005), and Morris and Karasik (2015) serve as references of change and continuity of dress from the prehispanic period to modern times for the Huasteca and the Mayan area. This is augmented by new research of the iconographic corpus from sculpture, murals, and figurines, including the work of Carter, Houston, and Rossi (2020); Faust (2014, 2009); Richter (2017); Taube (2015); and Wyllie

(2017, 2015). Similar research to compare and contrast iconographic features present in architecture and material culture is broader for other cultural areas, such as the Mayan area. Research of the ornamented body, specifically related to body paint, tattooing, and scarification has been marginal (Carter, Houston, and Rossi 2020; Vela 2010); therefore the sources are limited and only refer to certain cultural areas (Luckach and Dobereiner 2020; Vela 2010).

Argument

Through the analysis of the dhayemlaab/ quexquemitl and its continuum of use among Huasteca women, it is apparent that this garment provided them with a reaffirmation of identity in a multicultural area (Rocha 2014; Stresser-Pean 2011; Zaragoza 2018). Consistent practices in techniques, type and shape, and iconographic elements have been in use by Huasteca women over a significant period of time (Zaragoza 2018). Variations were integrated over time as cultures are dynamic, adapting, and adopting new features and meanings. Migrations and dynamic regional exchange is evident through the material culture all over Mesoamerica (Palka 2015; Zaragoza 2018). This tells us that most of the shared practices prevailed as a unifying form of group identity in a shared territory. Additionally, dressing the body was an intrinsic part of the relationship between human beings with their deities as a communication object (Astor-Aguilera 2010; Morris and Karasik 2015; Turok 1988). Embodying the cosmos and landscape is a form in which Huasteca women have negotiated their identity among different Indigenous groups and in later times with mestizos (Colonial, Historical, and modern periods) and Spaniards (Conquest and Colonial times). Mesoamerican concept of cosmos are based in an

"interrelated whole in pertaining time and space" that can be transited and connected by using communication objects (Astor-Aguilera 2011:23-24).

In more recent times, the dhayemlaab/quexquemitl as a "sacred dress" has limited use for rituals and special events in the social, political, and religious life of the Huasteca women, but is no longer restricted to the elite as in prehispanic periods. In modern times, most Huasteca women wear the dhayemlaab and learn how to weave and become familiar with the symbols, the colours, and their meanings. I argue that embodiment of the dhayemlaab/quexquemitl has been an important part of ritual and represents the link that the person has with their lineages and ethnicities through time. Cultural knowledge has maintained meaning, but some iconography has been modified and/or integrated to the corpus depicted in the dress, an explicit narrative that can be identified by members of the same community, but also includes individual or familiar stories. In other cases, the iconography included describes cultural and identity revitalizing process by the textile art. As it is the case of Magdalenas town in Chiapas, according with oral stories, Tzeltal women lost their textile traditions for several generations and one night Santa Lucia appeared to one woman and asked her to recover their ancient heritage through textile and the designs. They asked neighboring Tzotzil women artisans to teach them the embroidering technique. Tzeltal women adapted their own designs in their garments that became their community identity. This revitalization process happened at the beginning of the 20th century (Morris 1984: 26; Turok 1988:41-54). The dress and the iconography displayed are intrinsic part of the ceremonial life in the "cargo system" a civil-religious and political position held for a stipulated time (Chance 1996) in which men and women embodied the cosmos to communicate with the "saints" during rituals. Covering the saints or crosses with a *huipil* (blouse) has been an important ritual within Mesoamerican cosmological practices as a

form to establish communication between the worlds (Astor-Aguilera 2011; Morris 1984; Morris and Karasik 2015; Turok 1988; Stresser-Pean 2011). In this case, the dhayemlaab/quexquemitl is a map depicting cosmological elements related to the human world when the woman dress this garment. The symbols depicted refer to the creation of life, including the *astros* that rule the seasons and the harvest. When women wear the cape, it become a three dimensional element that situates her at the centre of the universe or the centre of the cosmos, with the capability of transposing the three worlds: underworld, middle world, and other world. The strong link that Indigenous people have with their territory and the identified sacred landscape is portrayed in the dress. Negotiation of status and reaffirmation of identity have been used by women from different statuses after the Conquest and up until modern times (Morris and Karasik 2015; Morris 1987, 2009; Rocha 2014, 2011; Schaefer 2002; Zaragoza 2018; Turok 1988).

I build my argument off the work of Morris and Karasik (2015), who have previously analyzed dress and iconography among Classic Maya elite women who negotiated their status as they legitimized their rights of rulership. These authors used analogies with modern Maya women from different parts of Chiapas as a pathway to interpret the prevalence of iconographic symbolism and meaning, the changes, and integration of new connotations. Among the Huastec, Rocha (2014) studied the dhayemlaab as a map of the universe through the analysis of a textile collection. She provides descriptions of signs and meaning from different Teenek women, along with the organization and position of the symbols in the garment.

Comparison in the use of textiles and gender among three different cultural contexts in Prehispanic times was undertaken by Brumfiel (2006). Her review of changing gender relations, ideological domination, and the interests of women's status under the Aztecs

complements my argument. Ornamented bodies become the symbolically embodied cosmos when performing in rituals and in the process transmit messages under a narrative that allow them to reinforce their identity and negotiate their status (Anawalt 1981; Faust 2014; Joyce 1996; 2005; 2006; 2008; 2014; Luckach and Dobereiner 2020; Marchegay 2009; 2014; Richter 2015; Zaragoza 2018).

My argument concerning ritual and the body is based on the discussion that rituals contribute, as a social strategy, to the creation of the social body (Bell1992:97). Bell (1992:101-102) argues that the body interacts and responds to a specific context and environment as a form of manipulation and domination. Rituals are a dynamic process that incorporates special production, situations, and meaning into a particular context that situates the person into a new experience. The process of ritualization events relates activities and personal experiences " as manifest individual agency, practice, and interpretation that seek to transform and generate specific outcomes" (Astor-Aguilera 2011:17). Production of textiles, designs, and the process of dressing are part of these rituals (Astor-Aguilera 2011:17). I will use the concepts of the representational uses of the body in relation to levels of analysis presented by Scheper-Hughes and Lock (1987:7-8): the individual body; the social body; and the political body. For these authors, the body operates as a "symbol and artifact," which is naturally and culturally created in a specific context.

The contribution of this research is to provide an overview of the existing evidence for analysis of the significance of the dhayemlaab/quexquemitl in Huasteca over time. Specifically, this paper expands insight into the garment's relevance as a form of embodied landscape and cosmology that reaffirms women's identities and rights to their territory from Prehispanic times to modern day.

Methods and Analysis

I use three lines of evidence to initiate an analysis of how Huasteca women negotiated their social status and ethnicity through the dhayemlaab/quexquemitl. These lines of evidence consist of ethnohistory, ethnography, and material culture such a female figurines as sources through which insights into exchange, dress, and embodiment can be collected. These three categories of evidence have been selected as a representative sample of the dynamic interactions among multiethnic groups in Huasteca, with the aim of investigating dress and embodiment as active sites of negotiation in this multicultural setting. As I use analogies, a number of criteria were applied to improve the analogical understanding and in the selection of the female figurines, these are outlined below along with the reasoning for these decisions. The limitations of the research are also outlined.

Use of Analogies

Using analogies for comparative data has been relevant for anthropologists and archaeologists in researching the past in relation to the present, but has been troubled (Chance 1996; Lamoureux-St-Hilaire 2020; McAnany and Woodfill 2020; Stahl 1993). Debates around analogical reasoning and the value for interpretation, particularly in the shift from the processual to the postprocessual archaeology are not behind us, it is still a discussion regarding the challenges that this methods could bring in archaeological interpretation (Lamoureux-St-Hilaire 2020; Stahl 1993). Additionally, scholars have expressed concerns in using analogies and have discussed the issues in the models that have been used to improve archaeology in the last decades (Chance 1996; Lamoureux-St-Hilaire 2020; Stahl 1993). Despite the generated discussion and critiques through time (Chance 1996; Lamoureux-St-Hilaire 2020; McAnany and Woodfill 2020; Eppich 2020; Stahl

1993), analogies are wide spread and used as a preferred tool to understand the past. Archaeologists are offering heuristic analogies to explain attributes of a cultural context from the past and the information about contemporary people in order to understand the archaeological evidence and its interpretations. Making use of datasets from ethnohistorical, ethnographical, and archaeological lines of evidence to apply analogies will allow the identification of similarities and differences from the ethnographic and archaeological contexts to make an interpretation (Chance 1996; Stahl 1993:252).

Mesoamerican archaeologists have access to a numerous collections of datasets that can be used for the interpretation of the archaeological evidence. Basically, those related to ethnohistorical compendiums, after the conquest to the historic periods, and to ethnographic research from the late 19th and 20th century. Recognizing the meanings, strengths, and potential issues using analogies, it is important to consider the form in which the comparative approach is going to be applied to the analogues. This also includes the form to address the challenges in the use of these methodologies. Scholars (Chance 1996; Lamoureux-St-Hilaire 2020; McAnany and Woodfill 2020; Eppich 2020; Stahl 1993) have expressed different avenues to strengthen the use of analogies; that included the following guidelines: Selection of relevant comparative case studies related to according to time and space integrating contextual arguments, determination of terminology that addresses the inherent comparative significance recognizable by the intended audience, and being transparent in the use of comparative cases highlighting similarities and discrepancies.

It is relevant to recognize that ethnographic analogy presents errors in replicating contemporary stereotypes when associating women as passive agents and their activities to the private and restricted to the domestic sphere; while men are active and open agents participating in the public sphere. Archaeological data has been frequently analyzed under

those nineteenth century models of gender with contested interpretations that do not reflect historical changes by inferring the male dominance, dividing female/private and male/public spheres, from contemporary society. Ethnographic and ethnohistorical data often neglects changes happened in history related to gender systems that seemed ecstatic over time and these mistakes from ethnographic analogy are common used in Mesoamerican archaeology (Brumfiel 2006; Patel 2016; Richter 2017).

My comparative approach permits a review of the similarities and differences between the ethnohistoric, ethnographic, and material culture evidence to have a better scope of the use of the dhayemlaab/quexquemitl over time among Huasteca women. Additionally, through this extensive time there are certain periods that lack direct or indirect evidence. Cultures are dynamic in time and space; therefore, any postulation on finding regularities from the past to current times should be reviewed, pointing out similarities and differences (Chance 1996).

Limitations

During the collection of data some limitations were identified that should be addressed in order to proceed with the analysis. The search started looking into online museum collections for Huasteca female figurines corresponding to the Late Classic and Postclassic depicting ornamented body such as paint, tattoo, scarification, and dhayemlaab/quexquemitl. My aim was to analyze Huasteca female figurines from different museum and archival collections online, selecting those that have body ornament in the upper body and corresponding to the Late Classic to the Postclassic periods. I found issues in creating a data collection to compare and contrast features. Among those problems, I discovered that most of the online databases lacked information for context in the catalogue

labels; available photographs were of poor quality, with objects depicted only from the front side or as ¾ image. I wanted to have a good overview of the body decoration and this would have facilitated a better analysis of the imagery. Having a detailed visual record of the different iconographic elements from the figurines would have improved the quality of the dataset. Even at magnified scale, most of the pictures available online presented deficiencies. Given these limitations, the balance of my study outlines a prospective approach, using the limited data available to illustrate the potential for comparative analysis to illuminate the dynamic role of the dhayemlaab/quexquemitl in Huastecan women's embodied negotiation of identity and social position in the context of changing circumstances over the course of centuries.

Criteria for Object Selection

A number of criteria were applied to select the material objects pertinent to understanding the salience of the dhayemlaab/quexquemitl in women's embodied practice. Material evidence was selected from modern times consisting in a collection of dhayemlaab and quexquemitl from Huasteca. Rocha (2014) provides an analysis of a collection and it is complemented by the collection online from cultural government institutions, including the National Institution of Anthropology and History (INAH) and from the National Council of Culture and Arts (CONACULTA). Also, photographic and lithographic material was reviewed to consider in the sample. The selection of this material evidence was limited to the Huasteca geographic area from four cultural groups: Teenek, Tepehuas, Nahuatl, and Otomi as these groups still use this dress today. The images provided in codices were reviewed from the cataloguing of Prehispanic clothes made by Anawalt (1981), which constitutes a rich compendium. To limit the chronological scope of this research, I selected

the cultural changes that started during the Late Classic as a time of political fragmentation (Patel 2016) to the Late Postclassic in which Aztec with the Triple Alliance expanded its empire to the area of interest.

The aim of material culture selection was primarily focused on female imagery in figurines, usually related to more private ritual contexts, including burials, and sculpture, as well as forms intended to be viewed by more people in public spaces, in the form of body ornamentation like painting, tattooing, and/or scarification in the upper body in the period extending from the Late Classic to Postclassic. Due to restricted availability of primary imagery, as discussed above, I based my exploratory analysis on representative and recurrent imagery presented in literature by scholars. The requirements I pursued were to have a good insight of the iconography from different angles that clearly show the symbols inscribed in the Huastec figurines and sculptures. Also, I selected imagery from sites that covered a geographical demarcation that provided a better scope of the differences and similarities of the material culture. Those sites correspond to Tamohi and Tamtok, in the state of San Luis Potosi, in the northern boundary on the coast plains, Vista Hermosa, in the state of Tamaulipas, in the northern coast, and Isla de Sacrificios/Cerros, state of Veracruz, located at the south of the Gulf of Mexico coast. A sample was chosen of four figurines that were associated with elite burials and one sculpture monolith that was located in a public place.

Context and Relevant Sources

During Prehispanic times Huasteca was a crossroads of contact for interregional exchange between the coast of the Gulf of Mexico, connected to the highlands and Yucatan area to the south, but also as part of a route from Central Mexico to the southeast of the United

States (Faust and Richter 2015; Zaragoza 2009). The connection to the Tehuantepec Isthmus to the south brought the Huasteca in contact with the Mixtec and Zoques from the modern states of Oaxaca and Chiapas, as expressed in the origin myth related to their migration in search of Tamoanchan. These dynamic exchange routes connect the Huasteca people with the rest of Mesoamerica and the North American cultures over long period of time (Davila 2015:128; Palka, 2015:217; Zaragoza 2015:59). Among exotic goods that were exchanged from different natural environments, ideologies traveled, and adaptation and adoption of them in different spheres such as political, religious, cultural occurred in both directions. Recent studies of dress in the Huasteca has permitted the comparison with other Mesoamerican traditions allowing identification of elite hierarchy and their costumes, including ornamentation with cosmological symbols in the ornamented body (Richter 2017:293, 2015:75-76). Richter (2017:295, 2015:75) emphasizes that Huasteca sculpture provide a good scope in the way Huasteca "constructed and negotiated their identities within the Huasteca and in relation to other cultures of Postclassic Mesoamerica."

Female imagery demonstrates a shift in body representation between the Classic to the Late Classic and Postclassic, with an increase in and greater complexity of body ornamentation through time. Based upon context and forms of body ornamentation, the female imagery analyzed in this paper pertain to elite women. There was a proliferation in the production of anthropomorphic figurines showing different attributes, including the type of dress, ornaments, and body modification such as cranial deformation, earlobes, septum perforation, and dental modification (Stresser-Péan 2001; Zaragoza 2018). Over time, the increase of body adornment including body painting, tattooing, and scarification was more evident in the torso of elite female figurines (Faust 2016:253-254; Marchegay 2009:131; Richter 2015:75). The particular style of the anthropomorphic sculptures in the

Huasteca area is considered by scholars "diagnostic" for the Postclassic period, and it suggested that there was a unity during the above mentioned period (Richter 2015:75).

Recurrent signs and iconography in the figurines present an amalgam of iconographic styles from Huasteca and the wider Mesoamerica that indicates the form in which Huasteca people negotiated their identities in a region of confluence of different ethnic groups due to the exchange route in which they were situated (Richter 2015:75). Bodily public representations, such as sculptures, represent a tactical depiction of the way in "which embodied identities were shaped not simply signaled" (Joyce 2005:143) through practices that include the individual/personal experience. Ceramic anthropomorphic figurines with these emblematic motifs are commonly found in burial contexts in which same sex figurines are buried with the person of the same sex (Zaragoza 2018). Iconographic elements depicted in these figurines are related to natural and supernatural elements as emblems of ritual practices and to the cosmogony that provided political and social legitimacy (Faust 2016:262; Morris and Karasik 2015:13-15).

Experiencing the body in ritual contexts involves language, identity, and power addressing the social body (Bell 2009). When performing rituals, the symbolic use of dress and ornament is a medium for transmitting messages to those watching. Practices of dress allow the individual to reaffirm their identity through the ornamented and dressed body, whether in ephemeral or permanent form. Therefore, through wearing the dhayemlaab/quexquemitl, women emphasize the relationships between the individual and the embodied person in front of society (Anawalt 1981; Bachand et al. 2003; Faust 2014; Joyce 2005; Lukach and Dobereiner 2020; Marchegay 2014; Richter 2015; Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1987; Zaragoza 2018). As mentioned, cultures in the region of interest depicted bodies with a myriad of symbols for the Postclassic period with religious

connotations (Candelaria 2011:35; Faust 2014:267, 271, 273; Marchegay 2009:131; Stresser-Péan 2001; Zaragoza 2018). Iconographic elements present in the imagery represent narratives related to sacrifice, generally of blood and depict cosmological elements as a form to link the individual with the sacred realm (Faust 2016:266-167, 2009:205; Morris and Karasik 2015:13-15).

Past elite women wove, embroidered, and painted different signs as part of a complex iconography to be depicted during ceremonies and rituals of bloodletting. An example is the Maltrata monolith in the Huasteca for the Late Classic period that is similar to the representation of bloodletting seen in Lintel 24 of Yaxchilán. They embodied the cosmos to endorse elite's rights to rule and maintain a position of dominance and power as a body practice and performance to express identity and status (Houston et al. 2020:1; Joyce 2005:140; Marcus 2019; Orr and Looper 2015:xxiii). The ornamented body was an active agent participating in the social world in which women's embodied-self negotiated status during changing times (Patel 2016; Reischer and Koo 2004:298-299).

Codices from prehispanic and early colonial years contain relevant social, cultural, political, and religious information about different cultural groups and the type of relationships they maintained. Over the years, these books have been analyzed by scholars with different disciplines to understand various topics. Here, I review codices relevant to Huasteca peoples and focus on types of women's dress in relation to social, cultural, political, and religious contexts as previously analyzed by experts in the area and the topic of this project (Anawalt 1981; Stresser-Pean 2001, 2011; Vidas 2009, 2009a; Zaragoza 2018, 2009). Also, early written narratives from 17th- to 19th-century travelers, explorers, and intellectuals were analyzed from diverse sources (Stresser-Pean 2011; Tinajero 2005; Tuñón 1999).

Huasteca cultures lack written, ideographic, or pictographic documents from Prehispanic or Colonial times. The references that scholars have are those from accounts of their neighbors and from the Aztecs, who conquered part of the Huasteca territory. Also, there are early colonial narratives written by Spanish soldiers, early colonists, and missionaries with Indigenous informants. In both cases, there is a subjectivity in describing Mesoamerican Indigenous groups. Vidas (2009:39-54) presents accounts that describe the Huastec. According to Aztec descriptions, Huasteca people received that name from the Nahuatl word *cuaxteca*, which derived from a lord whose name is *Cuaxtecatl*. Some scholars identify this king as Quetzalcoatl, the Mesoamerican hero. Sahagun, a Spanish missionary, left one of the most important narratives related to religion, daily life, politics, and economic relations from different Indigenous groups in the early years after the Conquest. The myth of origin of Huasteca peoples was narrated to Sahagun by Nahua informants.

According to Sahagun's account, the Huasteca people were in search of Tamoanchan, a terrestrial paradise, and traveled north from the modern country of Guatemala to central Mexico. The goddess Mayahuel discovered a fermented beverage made with the maguey and known as *pulque*. The deities invited the lords of the region, including Cuaxtecatl, to a feast to celebrate the discovery, with the condition to have only four glasses of pulque because after that they could get drunk. Cuaxtecatl had another glass and got drunk. He took his clothes off and offended the deities, who wanted to punish him, but the lord left, traveling northeast with his people to a place named Panotlan. Since that day, Huasteca peoples were known in central Mexico for being naked and getting intoxicated. This story is the Aztec version transcribed by a Spanish missionary (Johansson 2012; Vidas 2009) and is almost the same as the account of the Spanish soldier Bernal Diaz

del Castillo, who described the Huasteca people as drunkards, sodomites, and evil (Vidas 2009). Codex Borbonicus, an Aztec book written before or shortly after the conquest that received the name from the Palais Bourbon in France where it was kept for a while, depicts the lusty goddess Tlazolteotl surrounded by Huasteca youths, which reaffirms the preconception and bias that Azteca people had against the Huasteca peoples (Stresser-Pean 2012; Vidas 2009).

In the Codex Mendoza, an Aztec account which dates from the 16th century describes the life of Indigenous peoples before the Spaniards arrival and it is named after the viceroy of New Spain Antonio de Mendoza, Sahagun refers to the abilities of the Huasteca women for weaving beautiful fabrics and dress colourfully dyed that were known as *centzontilmatli* (from Nahua *centzonti* "coloured bird" and *matli* "fabric"), also depicts the tools employed in weaving and spinning (Anawalt 1981; Berdan and Anawalt 1997; Rocha 2014; Vidas 2009; Zaragoza 2018). Sahagun also mentioned that Huasteca peoples dyed their hair in different colours, including yellow and red, and described painted designs in their dress such as heads of monsters and water vortex (Johansson 2012). Huasteca women, *guasteca* as Sahagun refers to them, wore skirts and blouses with bright colours and some are like nets, possibly referring to gauze fabric, in general, women had a neat appearance (Rocha 2014). In other accounts (Rocha 2014) described women being topless wearing only a skirt, some others mentioned painted body.

Textile production was made in the households, no workshops were known in Mesoamerica prior to the arrival of Spanish people (Anawalt 1981:11 Stresser-Pean 2001, 2011; Zaragoza 2009, 2018). Among the equipment is the backstrap loom, which is described and depicted in that account with sufficient detail, that according to Anawalt (1981:11), they can be reconstructed by using "modern analogues." Different types of

fabrics were used by Mesoamerican peoples, including cotton in different colours, *ixtle* or *zapupe* obtained from different types of maguey depending on the region, and bark (Anawalt 1981; Stresser-Pean 2011). Garments were highly decorated with different embroidered, painted, resist-dying, or stamped designs. Different techniques also were used, including brocade, gauze, tapestry, and warp-and weft-face stripes (Anawalt 1981:11). Unfortunately, preservation of textiles and clothes are limited in most parts of Mesoamerica due to taphonomic processes, but those recovered illustrated some of the techniques, materials, and weaving abilities of Mesoamerican women.

Weaving and textile production was of high social importance and it is manifested in roles of divinity, royal, and elite in codices. Dress included both iconographic and ritual symbolism, and among them is the dhayemlaab/quexquemitl. There are different types as I described before and can be appreciated in the codices, murals, figurines, and sculpture from the archaeological record. Ancient Mesoamerican women wore this cape in different fashion, the length varies depending on the Indigenous group as do the colours depicted, iconography integrated, and adornments hanging like fringes that could be pompoms like or having precious stones such as jade (Anawalt 1981:11-15; Pomar 2005:33-35; Stresser-Pean 2011:70-89).

Anawalt (1981) presents an analysis of dress representations in Prehispanic period from almost all known codices in which describe with detail the different garments used by Indigenous people prior, during, and after the conquest. Codices and historic accounts refer to the richness of the textiles and the way the women were dressed with beautifully decorated dresses, including Huasteca women. Aztecs illustrated deities and/or priestess wearing this cape in ritual contexts in the Codex Telleriano-Remensis, from the sixteenth century and that received the name from the archbishop of Reims who obtained the

manuscript, and Codex Borbonicus (Anawalt 1981:36-37). Also in central Mexico, Tlaxcaltecas depicted goddesses in ritual contexts wearing quexquemitl, as illustrated in the Lienzo de Tlaxcala, painted cotton sheet describing politic alliance of the Tlaxcaltecas and Spaniards to defeat the Aztec empire (Anawalt 1981:71). In the central-west, the Tarascan in the Relation de Michoacán showed a goddess and an elite woman in a ceremony wearing the quexquemitl (Anawalt 1981:89). In the Codex Zouche-Nutall for the Mixtecs, elite women depicted as warriors in the battle field wear quexquemitl (Anawalt 1981:108, 126-127). The Selden Roll also presents this female garment (Anawalt 1981:108). Mixtec women, goddesses, impersonators, and elite women in the codices also wear the quexquemitl. In the Oaxaca Relaciones Geográficas or Burgoa there is no mention of this dress. Social conventions regulated the use of materials, designs, and techniques for dressing and adornment among Prehispanic peoples, and according to Anawalt (1981:3),these customs and laws dictated how, when, and who should wear the different garments.

As an example, the Códice Vaticano 3738, folio 61r., an account from the 16th century, describes and depicts two females that are described as Huasteca and Aztec (Figure 5). The personage, at the left, is wearing a red dhayemlaab with a cream stripe (the colour possibly is related to the natural colour of the local coyuxi cotton that goes from cream to brown) is referred to be a Huastec. The Aztec woman wears a long blouse, referred to as *huipil* in Nahuatl with different colors. Codices illustrate the different relations among the different ethnic groups and migrations in Mesoamerica provide information on how different influences permeated from one region to another through time. Adoption and adaptation of deities, ideologies, and ornaments were relevant to strengthening links, but also as a strategy for expansion.

Figure 5. Huasteca woman wearing a dhayemlaab in two colours at left. Aztec woman wearing a huipil at right (Codice Vaticano, Lam. 61r.).

As a component of source-side criticism (Stahl 1993:253), prehispanic codices should be reviewed with a critical lens that considers the biases of the dominant culture. Codices written right after the Conquest and those from the early years of the Colony need to contemplate the biases of the nationality and gender of the author, the narrator, and the translator from Indigenous language to Spanish. In addition, gender and biases of the interpretation of the information provided needs to be addressed when using the source as part of the analogy (Brumfiel 2006; Patel 2016; Stahl 1993).

During the first years of the Spanish conquest, a large number of Indigenous people died due to various waves of pandemics. Europeans brought with them diseases such as

small pox that almost eradicated original populations in America. Those populations that survived were subject to social changes, principally for people who were concentrated in Spanish-type towns under colonial norms and rules. For the people who lived in the countryside, those norms were more relaxed (Vidas 2009).

Additionally, ethnographic reports must be critically analyzed, considering the possible tendency of the writers to objectify or overemphasize cultural differences of the people they study. Nonetheless, there are few direct accounts referring to the life, customs, and ideology of the Huasteca (Zaragoza 2018). Carlos de Tapia Zenteno writes about the Huasteca in the 18th century related to their daily life, cosmogony, and ideology. Other documents pertinent to the region are known documents but lost (Zaragoza 2018). As another category of external description are accounts of visitors traveling through the area who made some reference to Indigenous peoples in the region.

Indigenous elite before the conquest maintained their noble position and privileges in the new Spanish social and political system, but they also payed tribute to the crown (Anawalt 1981). Similar social conventions from the past prevailed with the Europeans, and there were regulations that differentiated use of materials, style, ornaments, and dress and maintained distinctions between nobility and commoners. Commoner Indigenous people should use only dress made of coarse fibers, such as *ixtle* made of maguey, and cotton according to regulations of New Spain. New designs and techniques were adopted not only from the European but from Asia as well. The caste system established in the 16th centuries provided categories for descendants of the mixed ethnic groups, regulating who, where, and how certain techniques, materials, and designs should be worn by each caste (Anawalt 1981; Pomar 2005: 35-36; Sanchez 2017:6; Tuñón 1999:27, 40). This system was discontinued in the 18th century due to the multiple combinations that were almost

impossible to track and register (Sanchez 2017:6; Tinajero 2005:67). Alongside these regulated practices of dress, new techniques were implemented in the textile industry, including the pedal-weaving loom operated by people concentrated in workshops. Men integrated to this industry in mass fabric production basically in big towns (Sanchez 2017:8-9; Tinajero 2005:69-70).

Also important to consider are the European and Asian influences mediated through the Manila galleons that brought exotic products in their route to Spain from China, Philippines, and India. These new goods contributed to the integration of new materials, designs, and styles in dress and adornment, influencing different social strata (Tinajero 2005:69). New garments were integrated into Indigenous and mestizo dress, illustrated by the case of the *rebozo* or shawl (Sanchez 2017:7; Sandoval 2015:9; Tinajero 2005:70-71; Tuñón 1999:25). Prehispanic iconography was incorporated in European style clothes among Indigenous elite, who could not wear Indigenous dress due to sartorial norms, as evidenced in caste paintings from the 18th century (Sanchez 2017:8-9; Sandoval 2015:9-10).

Travelers narrating their experiences in New Spain, Mexico, during the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries, such as Thomas Gage, Marquise Francis Calderon de la Barca, Paula Kolonitz, together with explorers such as Desire Charnay and Carl Nebel, left detailed accounts and lithography (Figure 6) of their experiences (Charnay 2016; Rocha 2014:27; Tinajero 2005:71; Tuñón 1999:53). They described the politics, landscape, and people, including the quotidian life of Indigenous people from urban and rural towns, including dressing and adornment. The use of these accounts requires source-side criticism that recognizes their subjective interpretations and observations related to gender, nationality (western culture), class, and age. Among other potential sources, anthropologists visited the

area and did some archaeological and ethnographic research at the end of the 19th century, as for example Caecile and Eduard Seler (Kroefges 2012). Unfortunately, however, almost all the pictures Selers took are damaged. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the explorer Schuller describes the coloured parade of Teenek women with their *zayem* (dhayemlaab) in the town festivity. Schuller makes emphasis in the weaving designs all over the cape (Zaragoza 2018).

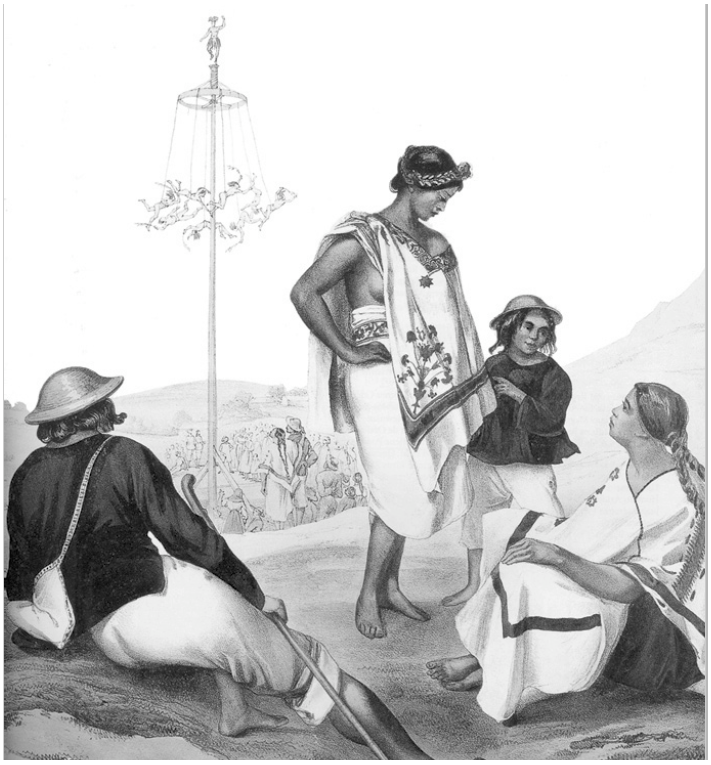

Figure 6. Indians from the mountains of Guauchinango (Puebla), Carl Nebel 19th century.

Rocha 2014:116

Twentieth-century anthropological writings are another potential source that must also be critically reviewed, recognizing biases from the ethnographic accounts produced by male anthropologist, male informants, and/or the traditional bias of western culture. We need to consider how anthropological narratives underrepresented women and their active roles in society and in producing culture. In the second half of the 20th century,

anthropologists realized that only mentioning women in their ethnographies did not resolve the analytical invisibility related to women (Mascia-Lees 2016:148). Fortunately, after a hiatus in Mexican research during the decades of the 80s and 90s due to a lack of academic encouragement to young students, a new generation of young scholars is doing research with an holistic and gendered perspective (Palka 2015; Rocha 2014:39, 2012; Zaragoza 2018, 2009; Vidas, 2019, 2009, 2008, 2002).

The four corners of the world

There is an intimate relationship between the Huasteca people and their landscape that can be understood in a sensorial approach in which people recognize and interact within their territory (Rocha 2014: 45, 2012; Urquijo 2010:3-4; Vidas 2019, 2008). Landscape is compared to the human body in both the sacred and profane world. Mountains, caves, rivers, and other natural features are the places where deities inhabit; but they also represent female or male body features. Some places are sacred and only can be visited by religious specialists who perform ceremonies and other places have communicative properties with the ancestors. Physical features are part of a symbolic dimension to the Huasteca people (Rocha 2014, 2012; Urquijo 2010:4; Vidas 2019, 2008; Zaragoza 2018).

Religious and cultural syncretism is also a product of negotiation and confrontation, and the dynamic products are manifested in modern Indigenous people (Vidas 2019:9). This process over centuries included an interregional exchange in Mesoamerica, migration processes, conquest, and colony. Oral tradition among the Huasteca people explains the origin and the relationship between people with their scared landscape and the subsistence base derived from the maize (Rocha 2014; Zaragoza 2018). Huasteca women make use of

symbols to explain their intrinsic relationship with the landscape and cosmology as a form of affirming their identity in a territory where mestizos and Indigenous groups now coexist (Rocha 2014, 2012; Urquijo 2010; Vidas 2019, 2012). The tree of life represents the directions of universe and all the things in all dimensions were interrelated and connected underworld, the middle-world, and the upper-world, the human plane represented in the middle world (Schele and Freidel 1990; Zaragoza 2018). Each direction had an attributed colour, the north is red representing divinity, east is orange and represents the light and the life, the west is green and represents the death and the infinity, south is pink representing the mother earth and the feminine (Rocha 2014; Zaragoza 2018). These colours are those used among contemporary Huasteca women, but among the ancient Maya people the cardinal points and colours were different, north was considered white related to the cold and winter, the west was black related to the dying sun, the south was yellow representing the side of the sun, and the east was red and the most important direction related to the sun (Schele and Freidel 1990).

Preliminary Results

Feminine imagery: Body and embodiment

In order to provide meaning from this analysis, the data collected from different time periods in the Huasteca provide a better scope of the changes and continuity in the use of dhayemlaab/quexquemitl. Modern Huasteca women differentiate themselves from other groups inhabiting in the same area by the colours, shape, and symbols depicted in their dhayemlaab/quexquemitl. Dynamic interrelations influenced adaptations and changes in clothing though time but relevant meanings survived, even with modification in

representations. Similar type and shape in the dress has been maintained by Huasteca women at the same time as slight differences have been purposely adopted to make a statement of their own identity.

The dhayemlaab/quexquemitl represents the cosmos and the relationship with their territory. Its diamond shape represents the earth plane with the four cardinal points and the center marked by another smaller diamond, the neck hole. When wearing the sacred dress, the dhayemlaab/quexquemitl, women are actively transiting through three worlds: the underworld, the middle-world, and the upper-world. This allegory reinforces women's position in relation with their ancestors and related to divinity (Rocha 2014; Morris and Karasik 2015; Zaragoza 2018). The representations of the body are part of the construction of identity in which the body as the visible entity is manipulated by the daily or ritual practices through dress, adornment, ornamentation, posture, and gesture (Fisher and DiPaolo 2003:225).

Iconographic elements present in the dhayemlaab/quexquemitl and those from prehispanic female figurines illustrate some similarities in meaning and some in representation. Other have been adapted and incorporate Christian, European, and modern signs as a demonstration that cultures are not static. Codices and historic narratives highlighted the ability of Huasteca women in textile production and the quality of their weaving adorned with multiple colours and the paintings of distinctive elements such as monster heads and whirlpool motifs (Rocha 2014). Also, in the past four decades, the number of elements has increased in comparison with those present in the first decades of the 20th century. For the purposes of this paper and according to Rocha's compilation of modern signs and meanings, I explore analytical potential using the image of a Huasteca girl from the decade of the 70s. The image (Figure 7a) depicts a Teenek girl wearing a

dhayemlaab/quexquemitl and a headdress, *petob*, made by threads of colours. The fabric was made of cotton weaved in a backstrap loom, decorated by cross-stitch designs in different colours from commercial yarn. This is an example of a long and

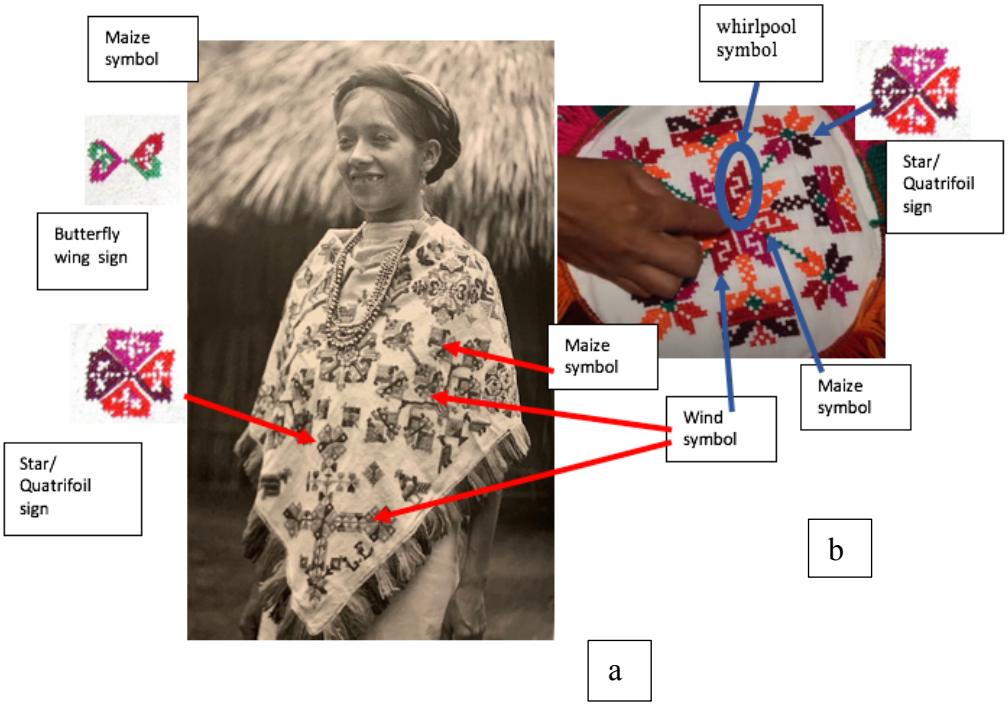

Figure 7. a) Teenek girl from the 70s wearing a modern dhayemlaab/quexquemitl with some symbolic elements and b) detail of a modern, 2019, tortilla warmer with some symbolic elements.

triangular shape finished with yarn fringes divided by the same colours used in the body. She wears a white skirt made of cotton, commercial fabric, and a blouse under the cape. In the past, the fabric used in the skirt was dyed in dark purple with natural dyes. Now the use of commercial fabric in black is common. Several long necklaces and earrings are part of her adornments that complement the ceremonial dress. Usually Teenek women add ribbons at the back of the dhayemlaab/quexquemitl. In some cases, women use a white handkerchief in the head to protect them from the sun, and they mention that in the past it was a small dhayemlaab/quexquemitl. Otomi women still use a small dhayemlaab/

quexquemitl over their heads (Rocha 2014; Stresser-Pean 2011). To the right of Figure 7(b) there is a *tortillero*, a tortilla warmer, that depicts the whirlpool and maize symbols entangled in the star as a central element. The quatrefoil sign/star and the flower designs are located in an alternative sequence forming a circle.

Designs in the dhayemlaab/quexquemitl show the tree of life, in form of cross, located lower part of the front of the dress. The morning star, Venus, or the quatrefoil sign is in the frontal centre. Two lateral designs are the flowers in a vessel, included the signs of maize and wind, at the bottom are two birds facing each-other. In 2009, Teenek women (Figure 8) are portraying similar designs. Huasteca women transmit their knowledge along with the techniques and in the process new additions, changes, and stories are integrated or adapted in the corpus of this dress. In this process, women as individuals create their own garment. In doing this, they recreate the lived experience of their own body, as part of their self, from the contextualization of the garment to the selection and arrangement of the designs that would integrate their own body-self narrative, as the embodied self (Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1987). That is when producing their garments, women are exerting agency and power as an active participant in constructing and reproducing their functions in society, as the "agentic body" (McCafferty and McCafferty 2009; Joyce 2015, 2006; Reisher and Koo 2004). In the social life, participating in ceremonies in the community, Huasteca women are part of a symbol, as a "symbolic body", as Reisher and Koo (2004) refer as a "conduit of social meaning" that can be read by the narrative imprinted in their garments to be decoded as a whole, for the community, or as a specific, for the individual and family. In other words, Huasteca women and the dhayemlaab/quexquemitl are open and active agents in the community in reaffirming and legitimizing their identity; but also

serve to communicate stories and narratives in the private level of their household (McCafferty and McCafferty 2009; Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1987).

Figure 8. Teenek women participating in a ceremony wearing dhayemlaab/quexquemitl in 2009, Aquismón, S.L.P. (Photo courtesy of Xanvil A.C.)

Wearing the universe, painting the landscape

When performing rituals, the symbolic use of dress and ornament is a medium for transmitting messages to those watching and in the process allow the individual to reaffirm their identity through the ornamented and dressed body, whether in ephemeral or permanent form, as I have elsewhere described. Therefore, through wearing the dhayemlaab/quexquemitl, women emphasize the relationships between the individual and the embodied person in front of society (Anawalt 1981; Bachand et al. 2003; Faust 2014; Joyce 2005; Lukach and Dobereiner 2020; Marchegay 2014; Richter 2015; Scheper-

Hughes and Lock 1987; Zaragoza 2018). As mentioned, cultures in the region of interest depicted bodies with a myriad of symbols for the Postclassic period with religious connotations (Candelaria 2011:35; Faust 2014:267, 271, 273; Marchegay 2009:131; Stresser-Péan 2001; Zaragoza 2018).

Iconographic symbols present in the imagery represent narratives related to sacrifice, generally of blood and depict cosmological elements as a form to link the individual with the sacred realm (Faust 2016:266-167, 2009:205; Morris and Karasik 2015:13-15; Schele and Friedel 1990:66-74). These signs include some related to corn, the cross of winds, butterfly, jade, feathered serpent are depicted in ceramics and sculpture are found depicted on the female and male figurines as tattoo or scarification (Figure 9 a, b, c). These characteristics prevailed in the material culture that allow scholars to review the significance that the body, clothes, and ornamentation had in the Huasteca culture. Performativity is relevant in reviewing clothing as a more in-depth examination of the reflection of the individual and body practices were part of performances during life in Prehispanic times (Joyce 2005:146 Bachand et al. 2003:240). Huasteca prehispanic female imagery ceramic and stone figurines have more complex iconographic representations that repeat in diverse combinations but that are identifiable as embodiments of the cosmos as an inscription on the body (Candelaria 2011: 34-35, 87-91; Faust 2014:262-269). It is important to clarify the differences between iconography and iconology when analyzing symbols. Iconography correspond to the visual images and symbols that are recognized by a common group; while iconology involves the historic interpretation of the iconographic images and traces its origins, including historic changes and continuity (Astor-Aguilera 2010:18-20). As this research is a prospective approach, I only address the iconographic interpretation.

The Mesoamerican cosmological worldview divides the world in four corners corresponding to the four cardinal points and the centre (Morris and Karasik 2015; Schele and Freidel 1990; Zaragoza 2018). Additionally, the quadripartite embodied the horizontal level including the four cardinal points or directions and the vertical level with the three part layers of the universe. Mesoamerican cultures connect this symbol with a portal that joins all realms and directions in the vertical and the horizontal levels, as a whole interconnected (Astor-Aguilera 2010; Winzenz 2017). This symbol is also related to natural features in the landscape that serve as portals, such as mountains, caves, water. Among other physical thresholds are architecture features, including tombs. Additionally, intangible portals can be trespassed or connected by performing rituals, such as the bloodletting (Astor-Aguilera 2010; Morris and Karasik 2015; Schele and Freidel 1990). Performing body modifications, specifically tattoo or scarification was made by instruments that inflicted pain and bloodletting as a for of sacrifice. This sacrifice was visible as a permanent mark in the ornamented body (Faust 2009:205).

Representations of quadripartite, or quatrefoil, elements are found in the figurines that are related to *chalchiuitl* or jade that had symbolic connotations in Mesoamerica in relation to water deities or supernatural beings and as symbols of preciousness. The god of rain, known as Tlaloc by the Aztecs, is related to this symbol and also with the green/blue colour of the water, known as *Yax* in Maya and Teenek (Huastec) languages. Quetzalcoatl or the Feathered Serpent are part of the same iconographic signs as the god of rain, and is related to the place of origin who has its realm in the mountains, caves, water holes (cenotes), rivers, lakes, and the sea (Faust 2014:265). These watery places symbolize the womb and the origin of life (Astor-Aguilera 2011; Morris and Karasik 2015; Winzez 2017). In these mythical accounts, this symbol is related to the turtle's carapace as a creation story.

Quadripartite or quatrefoil is also represented as a flower or a star. The tree of life trespasses and connects all worlds through the centre that has attributed the green-blue colour, *yax* in Teenek and Maya language. Among Teenek women this essential tree is surrounded by corn, the alimentary base of their people and is related to the deity *pulic Dhipaak* (Rocha 2014; Zaragoza 2018). Huasteca people are the descendants of the maize people according to their origin myth (Vidas 2019). For Nahua women, the tree is surrounded by the "cotton-snake" or "feathered-serpent" represented by a design in form of steps that also related to corn (Zaragoza 2018). The diamond shape of the dhayemlaab/quexquemitl is an allegory of the cosmos and the axis mundi that reaffirm female position as part of the universe and a metaphor of the same tree of life (Rocha 2014).

Among the relevant motifs in the imagery is the pointy shape symbol of the maize, that has received as well the appellative of "the soul or spirit of maize" that is a constant (Faust 2009:214). This element has been also related to the fire drill by archaeologists from the beginning of the 20th century, including Seler, Ekholm, and De la Maza. Specifically, Seler who was an expert in prehispanic iconography according to Faust (2009:214) compared it with the butterflies representations from the murals in Teotihuacan. Recent research made by Faust (2014; 2009) analyzed Huastec figurines carrying this symbol and related them as new fire figurines as part of the ritual of bloodletting iconography. Fire and butterflies were related in Mesoamerican mythology, particularly to the Aztec goddess *Xochiquetzal* (from the Nahua etymology *Xochi*-flower and *Quetzal*- bird/colourful, multicoloured/precious flower), that was a versatile deity that was represented by flowers and butterflies. *Xochiquetzal* was the matron of the artisans and weavers and was also represented by the fire symbol (Dawns 2013:46-48). Stresser-Pean (2011:78) address that

Xochiquetzal figurines representations use a rounded ended quexquemitl with the frontal strip often covered by geometric designs.

Other signs related to nature are present in the body of the figurines, such as maize (the soul or spirit of maize) resembled butterfly wing from Teotihuacan representations, thunder, and wind (Candelaria 2011; Faust 2014, 2006). This symbol is a represented by a double-outlined motif that has insert one or two dots (Figure 9) that make it similar to an insect wing. New fire ceremonies of renewal were performed by Mesoamerican peoples responding to a cycling renewal and maintaining the equilibrium in the cosmos. Seler (Faust 2006) argues that it is a metaphor of the wing-like spark of flame as the Central Mexican represented flames as butterflies in Late Postclassic and Faust (2014, 2006) discusses the embodiment of these symbols as communicating setting. Wearing these symbols along with the distribution in their bodies on the figurines "symbolically and literally" position them in the center of the world and embodied the cosmos (Faust 2014:286).

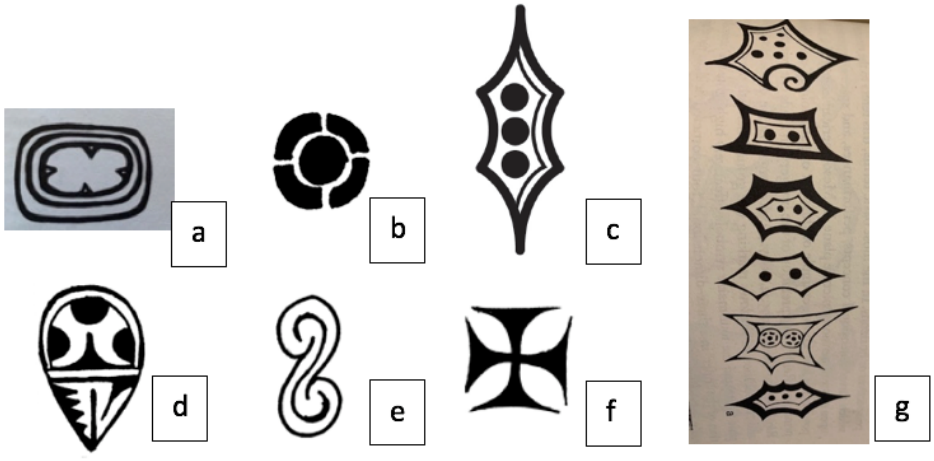

Figure 9. Symbols, a) and b) Quatrefoil or quadripartite, c) Butterfly wing / Fire drill, d) Maize, e) Celestial or whirlpool sign, f) Wind, g) Butterfly wing / Fire drill variations

The quatrefoil or quadripartite motif were represented as *chalchihuitl* disks (Figure 9b) made of jade that also represented water or blood (Faust 2014:263; 2009:214) is depicted as part of the border of the body paint in Figure 10. Also, it is related to the watery goddess *Chalchihuitlicue* (the one that wears the jade skirt) and to the Postclassic rain god Tlaloc, who wears chalchiuitl disks as googles (Faust 2014:265). Its shape is divided in four pieces representing a threshold that was related to the sacred entrance to the other world present in the landscape, including mountains, caves, springs, rivers, lakes, and other water bodies. The polychrome effigy vessel (Figure 10) of a female figure shows an intricate design on her torso with some identifiable symbols, including the butterfly wing or fire drill located at the centre of the chest as one of the most important motif of the composition. A celestial symbol is entangled in the butterfly wing/fire drill motif in both sides. The wind symbol is located laterally in equal side. A series of quatrefoil sign, jade disks, is located at the waist surrounding the body. Clothing, the dhayemlaab/quexquemitl, is represented by these configuration of designs. The observed shape that surrounds the torso of the figurine is similar to the Huasteca dress.

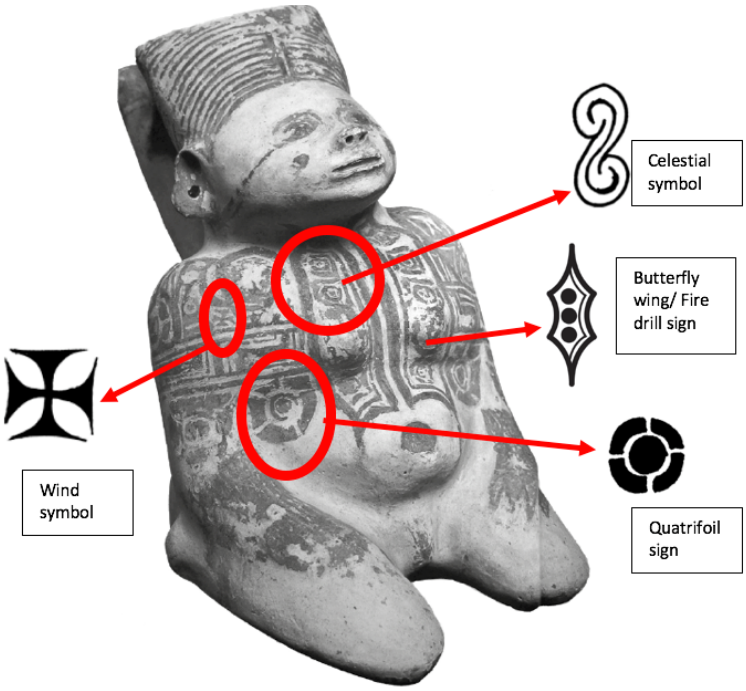

Figure 10. Female polychrome effigy vessel adorned with motifs corresponding to the wind, celestial or whirlpool sign, butterfly/fire drill symbol in the central and lateral parts of her torso, and a series of quatrefoil symbols surrounding her waist.

Additionally, it is necessary to say that there is difficulty to identify if it is a textile representation or an emulation of the cape through the body decoration, such as tattooing or painting. I need to highlight that in this case, the garment looks loosely like a woven textile due to the binding of the breast. The other figurine (Figure 11) corresponds to a polychrome female representation with body ornament painted, tattooed, or scarified with the butterfly wing or fire drill motif in the central part of the torso as a dominant element. Two maize symbols are present in the lateral front of the torso. In this example we can notice the difference on the body decoration that clearly depicts the breasts.

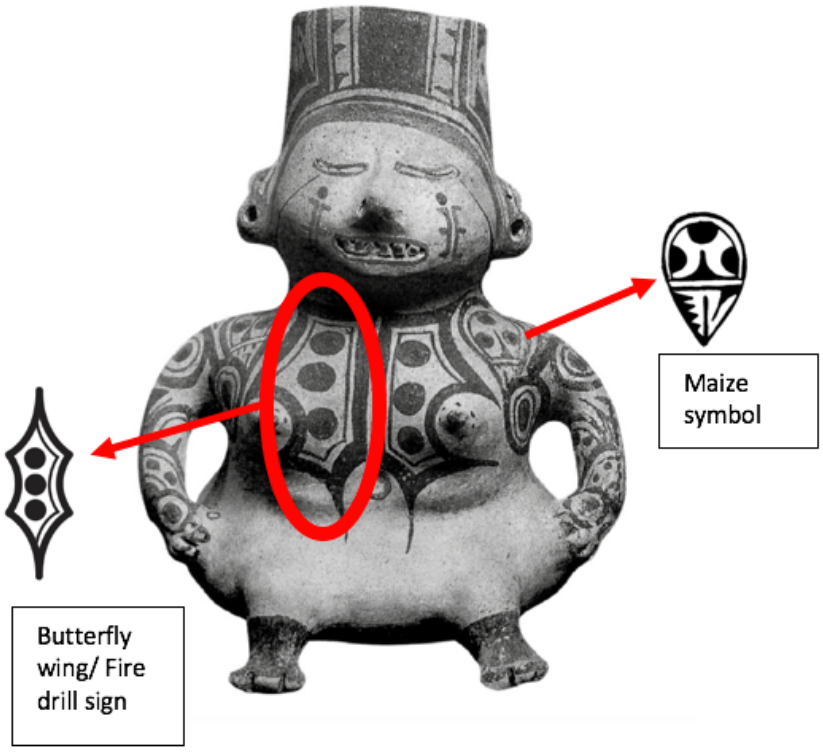

Figure 11. Female polychrome figurine depicting the butterfly wing or fire drill sign as a central element in her chest, surrounded by a pair of maize symbols in the lateral portions.

The female sculpture (Figure 12) presents identifiable designs as relevant elements in the centre of her torso, including the butterfly wing/fire drill motif, the quatrefoil/quadripartite sign, and the start or quatrefoil symbol in her arms. Quadripartite emblem is connected to sacrifice, specifically the ritual of bloodletting to establish communication to the other realm and their ancestors (Astor-Aguilera 2011; Morris and Karasik 2015; Winzenz 2017). This motif is present in iconography across Mesoamerica since the Preclassic, but increased its occurrence in the Late Classic and Postclassic periods. A remarkable example in the use of this emblem in textiles, are from Yaxchilán depicting royal females offering her blood to communicate with their ancestors, the Lintel

24 Lady Xook and the Lintel 17 Lady 6 Balam (Morris and Karasik 2015; Morris 1987, 1984; Winzez 2017).

Royal women in the Mayan area during the Classic period had an important role in communicating with the other realm, they displayed iconographic elements in their ornamented body, including their huipiles and headdresses, when performing rituals of bloodletting (Morris and Karasik 2015; Morris 1987, 1984; Winzez 2017). The quadripartite element also has been attributed to the female domain as it is related to the caves and watery places that are attributed to the womb, as a place of beginning, as the origin of life, as a birth passage as an allegory of the constant need of restore and maintain equilibrium in the cosmos (Winzez 2017:278-280). As previously examined, this motif has an overlapping symbolism in Mesoamerica. Ancient Huasteca women continued using the quadripartite emblem in their ornamented body on public imagery, possibly in performing rituals, to communicate with their ancestors in a symbolic journey through realms. Elite women embodied the universe and legitimized their lineage with strategic symbols that allowed them to negotiate their power roles during difficult times.

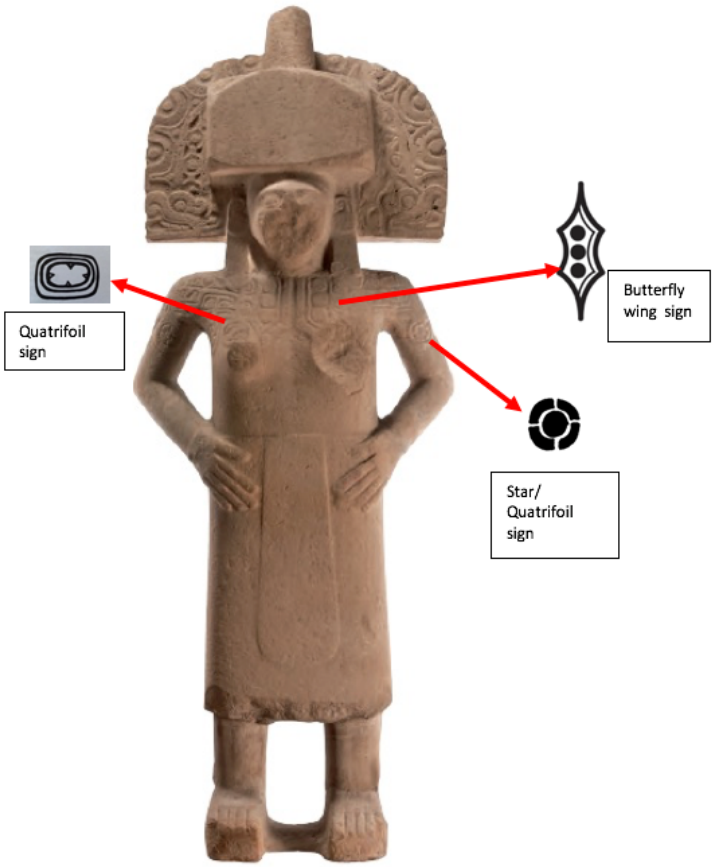

Figure 12. Female sculpture depicting the butterfly wings/fire drill as central element in her torso and the quatrefoil/quadripartite motifs located laterally. A series of star/ quadripartite signs are located in her arms.

Designs and meanings have been modified, some elements have been lost, some other changed or assimilated, and others remain in the collective imagery among Huasteca women. Cultures are dynamic and the imagery reflect the variations over time. It is essential to recognize limitations in the analogies and comparative approaches when using ethnohistorical and ethnographic sources. There is a hiatus in time where information is scarce and in other cases it is necessary to identify any bias from the accounts and sources. As this is a preliminary approach, I started a thread in which similarities and contrasts are highlighted for a further analysis that includes a broader ancient Huasteca imagery and contemporary dhayemlaab/quexquemitl from the Otomi, Nahua, Tepehuas, and Totonacs.

Conclusion and future directions

This research paper has provided an initial baseline for future analysis that should include a broader sample of material culture, including ceramics and stone figurines from the Postclassic period. Evidence provided in this paper confirms that Huasteca women have been transmitting cultural knowledge through the dhayemlaab/quexquemitl, which is considered a "sacred cloth" as its name indicates. Women transmitted their knowledge generationally through the weaving activity to their daughters, who added their new bodily experiences of the time they were living. Social and cultural changes and disruptions have passed on over a millennia in which cultures were object of dynamic external influences. Additionally, in times of crisis people strengthened their symbolic elements to reinforce the bonds with their ancestors and their cultures. Even if those features were concealed for outsiders, the meaning and symbolism were recognized by the members of the community.

Bodies have been the conduit in which meaning is transmitted to society as an active agent. Huasteca Prehispanic figurines are useful for inferring concepts of body as an agent for symbolic communication and of regular performance of social identity, including gender, age, status, and ethnicity in a dynamic region with high intensity interaction that allowed women to be identified also as cosmopolitan individual. Some variants in performance and representation reflect the negotiations of identity in difficult times of cultural change. Embodying the symbols in the ornamented body as communicating objects between realms. Indigenous world views integrate those realms in an entangled world were human and non-human beings are linked and share the horizontal and vertical layers of the quadripartite and diamond shape of the universe (Astor-Aguilera 2011; Morris and Karasik 2015; Morris 1987, 1984; Rocha 2014; Winzez 2017). Application of analogies and

comparative approaches to interpret the archaeological data relying in the ethnographic and ethnohistorical record should be addressed with caution, recognizing the implicated biases (Chance 1996; Eppich 2020; Lamoureux-St-Hilaire 2020; McAnany and Woodfill 2020; Stahl 1993). In this preliminary research, I am not suggesting that the dhayemlaab/quexquemitl and its iconographic designs remained unchanged over a millennia. Cultures are dynamic and peoples adapted and adopted social, cultural, and political changes. Additionally, people kept intact and generationally transmitted features and cultural patterns.

Taking into account, respecting and recognizing the importance of non-Western Indigenous peoples world view and perspectives is an opportunity to undertake analysis and understanding through analogies, in a good way. There is a good opportunity here to explore future research

The analysis of a more ample sample of female figurines and representations from the Huasteca will provide further evidence to confirm or not that Huasteca women negotiated their status by embodying landscape and cosmological features as iconographic designs in the dhayemlaab/quexquemitl.

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