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# THE REPRESENTATION OF LANDSCAPE, GARDENS AND OTHER CULTIVATED SPACES IN THE CODICES AND LIENZOS (MAPS) FROM NATIVE MEXICO

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*Resumen:* Este ensayo discute la posibilidad de identificar jardines, en todos sus significados, en la pictografía nativa de México. Mientras en los estudios iconográficos recientes, elementos del paisaje tales como: montañas, valles, ríos, lugares reales y míticos, e incluso los cielos, la tierra y el inframundo han sido examinados, la representación de espacios cultivados tales como milpas, jardines vegetales y de flores, etcétera, no han sido considerados. No obstante, es bien sabido de fuentes históricas y del registro arqueológico que este tipo de jardines existieron en el mundo prehispánico.

Varios ejemplos de algunas representaciones abstractas de Inglaterra, y de una película moderna, muestran que puede ser difícil identificar la representación de un jardín de otros espacios, incluso en nuestra propia cultura. Por lo tanto, se requiere información adicional, por lo que fuentes escritas y pintadas de la época colonial tienen que ser consultadas. Este estudio examina lienzos y mapas nativos del centro de México, Puebla y Oaxaca. Entre ellos el mapa 2 de Cuauhtinchan representa un signo de “jardín” en el estilo prehispánico. De esta evidencia se puede concluir que los códices prehispánicos no sólo muestran campos y milpas, sino también jardines florales y de hortalizas.

*Palabras clave:* pictografía, códices prehispánicos, lienzos coloniales, dibujos de plantas, diseño de jardines, Mesoamérica.

*Abstract:* This paper discusses the possibility to identify gardens, in all its meanings, in the native pictorials from Mexico. While in foregoing iconographic studies, landscapes elements such as mountains, valleys, rivers, real and mythical places, and even “heaven”, earth and “underworld” have been examined, the representation of cultivated spaces such as fields or milpas, vegetable and flower bed etcetra, have not been considered. Nonetheless, it is well known from the historical sources and the archaeological record that horticulture fields and flower gardens actually did exist in the Pre-Columbian world.

Examples of some abstract garden representations from England, and a modern movie, show that it can be difficult to identify an outlined garden from other spaces, even in our own culture. This is because additional information is needed, and thus written and painted sources from the colonial period have to be consulted. This study examines native lienzos and maps from the Central Mexico as well as Puebla and Oaxaca. Among those, map 2 from Cuauhtinchan represents a sign for “garden” in the Prehispanic style. From this evidence it can be concluded that the Prehispanic codices not only show fields and milpas, but also gardens such as flower beds or horticulture gardens in its proper definition.

*Keywords:* Pictography, Prehispanic codices, Colonial maps, Drawings of plants, Garden design, Mesoamerica.

## INTRODUCTION

In this paper I want to discuss the possibility to identify gardens in all its meanings in the native pictorials from Mexico. While in foregoing studies spatial features such as landscape, *i.e.* mountains, valleys, rivers, real and mythical sites, and even “heaven”, earth and “underworld” have been examined, the representation of cultivated spaces such as fields or milpas, vegetable and flower beds etc. has received little attention. This seems somehow strange, because we know from the historical sources and the archaeological record that horticulture fields and flower gardens actually did exist in the Prehispanic world.

Everything one might imagine is represented in the pictorials, even the most complex religious concepts in the codices of the Borgia group, Vindobonensis, Nuttall etc. Thus, the representation of gardens can be expected. Indeed, there are depictions in the codices and lienzos from native Mexico which are much easier to identify as gardens than certain representations of garden in our own culture. In order to introduce the variations of such depictions I begin with some methodological remarks.

### ABSTRACT REPRESENTATIONS OF GARDEN IN EUROPE

In a couple of books on garden archaeology, especially focusing on examples from Great Britain, I came across a number of sketches and drawings, all looking more or less alike, such as the Pembrokeshire garden beds from medieval times. The garden is a reconstruction made according to the excavations at

the Harverfordwest Augustinian Priory, Wales<sup>1</sup> (figure 1) (Pattison, 1998: 67, figure 40).

The reconstructed plans from Medieval and Renaissance British gardens remind me of a plan I saw in the film “Dogville” taking place in the Rocky Mountains in Colorado. In his 3 1/2 hours movie, director Lars van Trier does not provide a real town, but the action takes place on a flat surface with the plan of the houses. Dogville’s one street –Elm Street– is created through

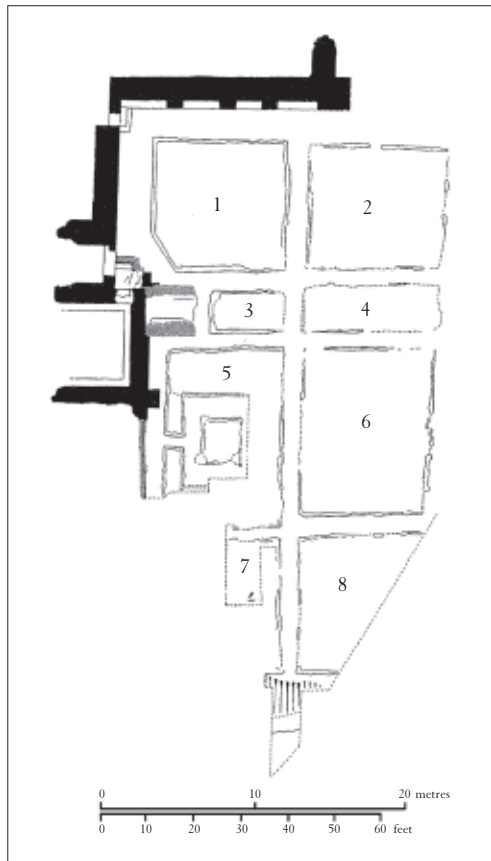


Figure 1. *Harverfordwest Priory, Pembrokeshire: garden beds by kind permission of Sian Rees* (Pattison, 1998: 67, figure 40).

<sup>1</sup>“In this garden complex, soil is roughly revetted by stone into nine square or rectangular plots of varying sizes on low-lying ground....” (*idem*)

white chalk outlines. Key objects like the town's beloved gooseberry bushes in Ma Ginger's garden are outlined as well on the ground, with labels. The garden is divided into two parts, a little path is crossing. On the left part, two gooseberry bushes are marked, on the right side a blackberry bush. However, how can the viewer know the Dogville map is showing a garden? (figure 2).

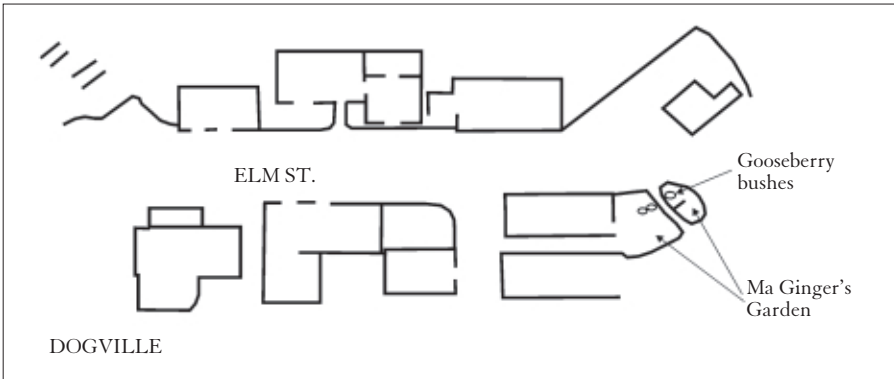


Figure 2. *The plan of Dogville, a virtual town in the Rocky Mountains, redrawn after a sketch from the Movie "Dogville" by Lars van Trier, 2004©.*

In fact, it is from the narrative of the movie, from the actors acting in the set of Dogville's chalk-lines marked plan, and the (unseen) narrator that the observer knows what the meaning of the stylized space on stage is: Ma Ginger (Lauren Bacall) runs the general store of Dogville and owns the garden. Grace (Nicole Kidman) is being chased and arrives at Dogville to hide from the gangsters. However, at the end, she is mistreated by the locals, who exploit, mistreat and chase her all over the place. Thus, she is not allowed any more to cut her way on the little path through Ma Ginger's garden. Bacall's character runs after Grace, who, after a few months, is no longer accepted in the community and attempts to escape.

Without the labels, and without context given in the narrative, the viewer would not be able to identify the little outlined spots on the stage to represent a garden with bushes. From the examples given, it becomes evident, that it is not an easy job to identify an outlined garden from other spaces, unless one has some additional information.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup>The original plan and sections from it, as well as scenes with the actors on stage can be checked at the Dogville websites.

Before we start to study the native pictorials from Mexico, we have to find out what is known from other sources about those gardens, what are the specific types of gardens, such as flower beds or horticulture gardens, or other cultivated areas.

### AZTEC GARDENS

A good source to look at is Fray Bernardino de Sahagún's *General History of the Things of New Spain*, Book 11, about the 'Earthly Things'.

Sahagún calls the flower garden *In suchitla*. Zelia Nuttall (2002) listed five more names with the meaning of garden in Nahuatl:

*Xochitla* meaning "place of flowers"

*Xoxochitla* meaning "place of many flowers"

*Xochitepanyo* meaning "garden with walls"

*Xochiteipancalli* meaning "castle garden"

*Xochichinancali* meaning "commoner's garden"

The artists who elaborate flower adornments got the name of *xochimanque* meaning "those who bind the flowers". Sahagún's provides a nice description about the flower garden:

#### "The Flower Garden

It freshens things. It germinates, germinates in all places; it becomes green. It makes things lovely; it makes things lovely in all places. It spreads pleasingly; it extends pleasingly. It spreads blossoming; it blossoms, blossoms constantly; it spreads constantly blossoming, extending its flowers. In the flower garden things spread growing; they spread without stint.

[The plants] stand in water; they spread emerging from the water. They are watered, sprinkled.

It is very good place, a reedy place, a desirable place, desirable in all places, a sought-for place, a constantly sought place, a coveted place, a joyous place, a desirable place."

(Sahagún, 1970) (figures 3, 4 and 5).

It is known from the written sources that the Aztec nobility, namely the rulers, used to create beautiful royal gardens comparable to the gardens and parks of the European Royal families. Multi-coloured birds, all kinds of



Figure 3. *Sahagún* (del Paso y Troncoso, 1926, Atlas, vol. IV, libro XI, lám. CXX 739, 740).

flowers, fruit and even medical plants were set in flower beds, sometimes enhanced by water basins, ponds and canals. Such gardens have been described by the Spanish conquerors and consists, such as Cortes, Bernal Díaz del Castillo, Ixtlilxóchitl, Motolinía, Herrera among others. Well-known gardens or parks were the Chapultepec forest, the Peñon park and Nezahualcoyotl's gardens and woods at Texcoco.

The Spaniards showed a special admiration for the marvellous parks and beautiful gardens of Iztapalapa at the south western part of the basin of Mexico, which at the time of their arrival was governed by Cuitlahuac II, the younger brother of the Aztec ruler Motecuhzoma Xocoyotzin. Special atten-





Figure 4. *Sahagún* (del Paso y Troncoso, 1926, Atlas, vol. IV, libro XI, lám. CXXI 742).

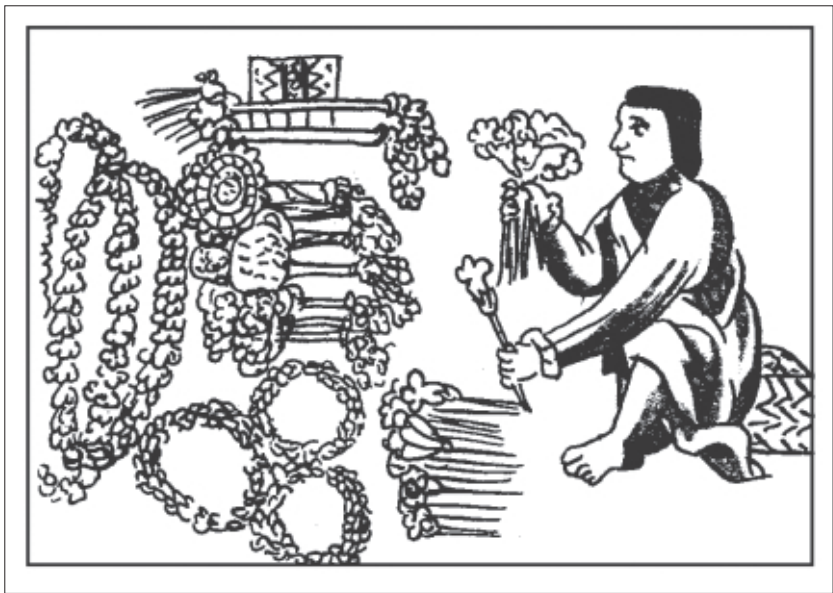


Figure 5. *Sahagún* (del Paso y Troncoso, 1926, Atlas, vol. IV, libro XI, lám. CXX 739, 741).

tion was paid to a square pool surrounded by broad pathways, and filled with fish and aquatic birds.

The so called Uppsala map shows the basin of Mexico at the time of the conquest. It is supposed to have been made by Alonso de Santa Cruz. The possible location of the Iztapalapa garden is indicated by a gloss which says “*Iztapalapa*”. However, even though there are many green areas with some vegetation, forests and water spread out all over the map, the supposed location of Cuitlahuac II’s garden does not show any characteristic features such as flowerbeds, plants, trees, pools, ponds and the like. But the gloss, as well as its actual location at the rim of the lake, allows us to define where the garden is supposed to be located. Thus, just like with Lars van Trier’s ‘Map of Dogville’, we would not be able to identify the Iztapalapa garden on the Uppsala map without specific additional confirmation (figure 6).

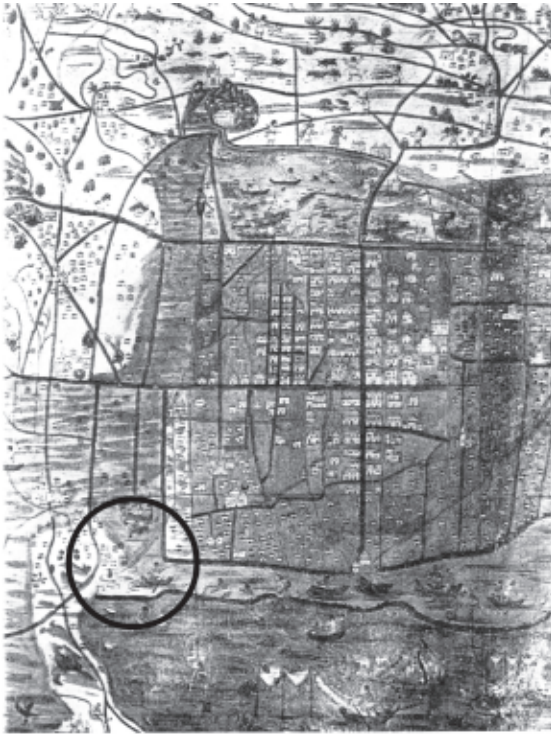


Figure 6. *Uppsala Map after Linné (1948).*

## GARDENS OUTSIDE THE CENTRAL VALLEYS

While there is sufficient information on the existence of pre-Columbian gardens in the Central Valleys in the written manuscripts, the situation in the other parts of Mesoamerica seems to be more difficult. In the Early colonial period, maps and the so called *lienzos*, combining pre-Columbian and European elements, were to be found in large number in the states of Puebla, Michoacan, Oaxaca, Veracruz, Guerrero among others. I will start with such Post-conquest manuscripts including images from our own culture, before I look at the few pre-Columbian pictorials. Are there any depictions of gardens to be found in the early colonial maps? My examples are taken from *lienzos* which I have studied more in detail (see König, 1993; 2000).

The *Lienzo de San Pedro Yolox* is from the Sierra de Oaxaca region. Its original from 1596 has been lost, or its location is unknown. This copy which was probably made in the 1830's shows European style; however, there are several pre-Columbian elements as well. Around the 1860's, the document was acquired by the Museum für Völkerkunde at Hamburg, Germany (figure 7).



Figure 7. *Lienzo de San Pedro Yolox (Chinantec)*, copy from c 1830 by Eduard Harkort. Courtesy Museum für Völkerkunde Hamburg©.

In the lower right corner we see a lively scene showing the foundation of the community and the foundation ceremony. In the centre, some genealogical information is given. In a little distance from the Christian church building in the upper left there is a stone fence and some plants, such as trees, bushes or a hedge. But how can we define the quality of the site: is it a cemetery, or a garden, or something else? The fact that we deal with familiar European styles and contents does not help at all. Again, it is some additional information from a later lienzo of the neighboring village of Santiago Comaltepec which allows defining that we actually see a garden on the Lienzo de Yolox. The Lienzo de Santiago Comaltepec, still preserved in the village archive, clearly shows that the garden belonging to the church of San Pedro Yolox was actually situated in front of the building and closely attached to it (König, 1993: 155-178).

The Lienzo Seler II (or Coixtlahuaca I), from the Coixtlahuaca basin of Oaxaca, is a Mixtec or Mixtec-Chocho Lienzo document from the early Post-Conquest period with almost pure inscriptions in the pre-Columbian native style as we find it in the Mixtec codices from the Mixteca Alta and Baja. It was purchased by Eduard Seler before 1897 and is housed today in the Ethnologisches Museum Berlin. We can see the community's border and boundaries. Some towns are located outside and others inside the spotted border line. There are five genealogical rows, and a New Fire ceremony. However, the lienzo also shows the Spaniards, churches and hung natives. At first glimpse, we can make out a chequered quadrangle on the lower part of the lienzo, which might symbolize a multi-cultivated field. Left from it, we can see traces of other quadrangles with some plants inside. Are these gardens, like vegetable gardens or fruit tree gardens? Again, we cannot define, and it is even difficult to decide upon the style – European, or native, or mixed? (figures 8 and 9).

The next example is a map showing the community of Cuauhtinchan in the State of Puebla which was painted as late as 1705. The Mapa del pueblo de Cuauhtinchan is a mixture of a landscape painting and a European map on a grid. The lot surrounded by trees, and the smaller plant beds attached to the convento are clearly identifiable even without specific knowledge (figure 10). Obviously, there was a long tradition in the production of pictorials in the Cuauhtinchan area in the pre-Columbian times. Five historiographic manuscripts from the 16th century survive showing topographic features and events such as migration and place founding which took place between the 12<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. Like in the Lienzo Seler II, European styles and native painting in the typical Aztec style are combined (figure 11).



Figure 8. *Lienzo Seler II (Coixtlahuaca I, Mixtec, Chocho), lower left.* Courtesy *Ethnologisches Museum (Ex-Museum für Völkerkunde) Berlin*©.



Figure 9. *Lienzo Seler II (Coixtlahuaca I), lower right.* Courtesy *Ethnologisches Museum (Ex-Museum für Völkerkunde) Berlin*©.



Figure 10. *Mapa del pueblo de Cuauhtinchán* from 1705. *Archivo General de la Nación, Catalogue no. 655* (Yoneda, 1981: 164, 165).



Figure 11. *Mapa de la ruta Chicomoztoc-Cuauhtinchán (MC2)* (Yoneda, 1981: 123).

THE SIGN OF ‘GARDEN’ IN THE MAPA DE LA RUTA  
CHICOMOZTOC-CUAUHTINCHAN (MC2)

The map 2 from Cuauhtinchan is the one which gives a sign for “garden” in the prehispanic style. It shows a flower bed and plants with green stems and leaves, yellow and red flowers, and a white blossom which might symbolize the cotton plant. Keiko Yoneda who has studied the mapas de Cuauhtinchan believes that probably a specific glyph existed in prehispanic times symbolizing cultivated space. The lines dividing the quadrangles are supposed to represent the furrows<sup>3</sup> (figure 12). Now, that we have found at least one clear example of a flower sign we can try to find out about other cases in the prehispanic codices.



Figure 12. *Mapa de la ruta Chicomoztoc-Cuauhtinchán (MC2)* (Yoneda, 1981: 124, 128).

<sup>3</sup> “Existen dos representaciones del campo de cultivo visto de una cierta altura, que son: el topónimo 30 del MC2, que representa una huerta – con las plantas que están pintadas de verde (hojas y tallos), blanco (¿algodón?), amarillo y rojo (¿frutas o flores?) – y el 67 del MPEAI que representa el topónimo Chololtecamilla (chlolteca: nombre gentilicio + milli: sementera + tlan: sufijo locativo que significa la abundancia = la sementera de chololteca). Como el MPEAI conserva considerablemente la tradición indígena hay la posibilidad de que en la época prehispánica existiera un glifo que represente el campo de cultivo en forma cuadrangular, con las divisiones internas que posiblemente representan los surcos.” (Yoneda, 1981: 48).

## GARDENS IN THE PRE-COLUMBIAN MIXTEC CODICES

Among the place signs and place names in the prehispanic *Codex Zouche Nuttall* from the Mixteca Alta in Oaxaca, we find a sign on page 69, consisting of a feather platform standing for “field” and some plants on it, maybe two maize plants with blossoms and a reed plant in between. This sign resembles the supposed garden sign we just saw on the *Mapa de Cuauhtinchán II* (figure 13). Other such examples can be identified in the famous Pre-Hispanic *Codex Vindobonensis*. On page 11 of *codex Vindobonensis* we can see the sign for a maize field. It is most interesting that the sign has been incorporated in the process of the initial founding of places. On this and other pages the measuring and building of platforms and buildings takes place. Obviously the cultivation of fields forms part of the act (figure 14).

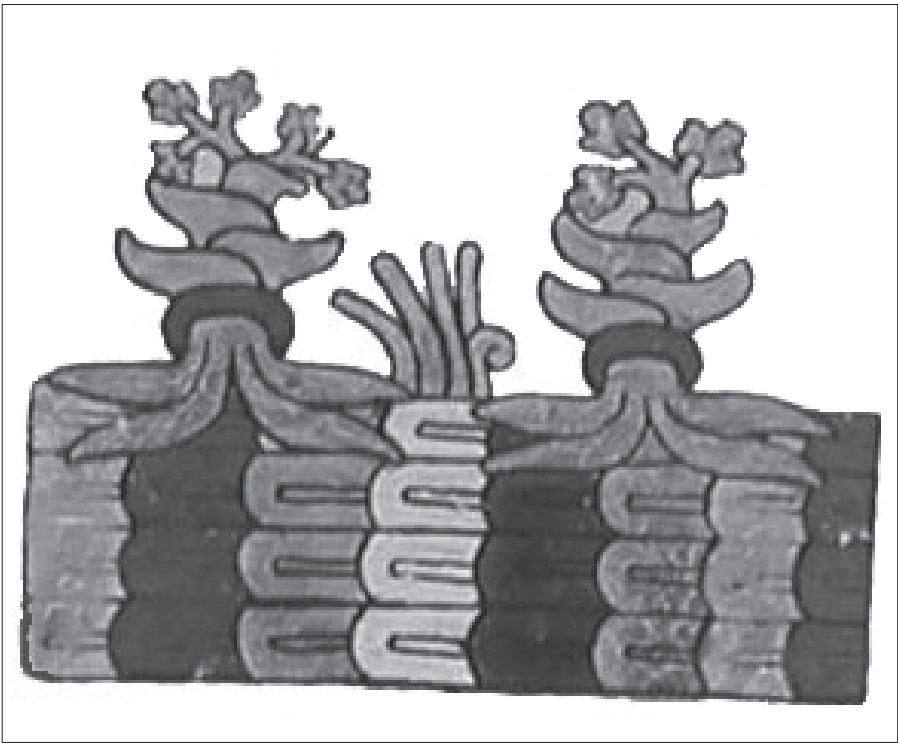


Figure 13. Codice Zouche Nuttall (*Mixtec*) after facsimile edition (Anders and Jansen, 1992: 69).



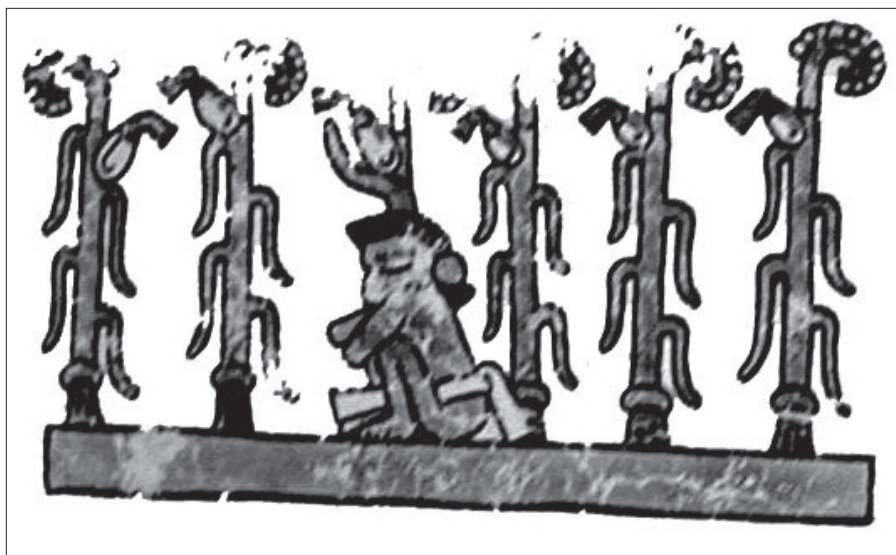


Figure 14. Codex Vindobonensis (*Mixtec*) after facsimile edition (Anders, 1974: 11).

On page 7 of codex Vindobonensis, another sign with plants and flowers on a feathered platform is depicted. It resembles the sign in *Codex Zouche Nuttall* page 69. Altogether I have chosen four examples of possible specific garden signs in the native pictorials, and there is a good chance to find more of them in the codices. We can expect signs symbolizing either horticulture or flower beds. What is needed is a systematically total check of all the codices. The association of hypothetical garden signs within the context of the page has to be defined. Possible accordance with the information in other sources, either pictorials or written documents has to be examined. However, gardens in many instances do not leave permanent tracks as do caves, big stones, rivers or mountains which usually do exist up today. Thus, the identification of gardens in pictorial representations from the prehispanic times will remain a difficult task (figure 15).

#### WHAT AND WHERE IS PARADISE?

Finally, I want to discuss a well known metaphor from our own culture, which is paradise, or the Garden of Eden in the bible. The metaphor is also



Figure 15. Codex Vindobonensis (*Mixtec*) after facsimile edition (Anders, 1974: 7).

well known in the whole Islamic world, and it seems to be of a specific Old World origin. However, just like the case of the Life Tree in Middle Asia and elsewhere, but also in all Mesoamerica, the metaphor of the garden to function as paradise, or “land of milk and honey”, seems to have been used in Mesoamerica since ancient times. Tlalocan, the realm of the important rain god, called Tlaloc in Nahuatl, is shown on the mural of Tepantitla at Teotihuacan, the famous classic site north of Mexico Tenochtitlán. It has been compared to paradise, where an idealized nature is visualized by lively scenery, fertile landscape or panorama, full of chatting and singing people - obviously happy guys. There are rivers, water, butterflies and abundant trees, fruit, and flowers, particularly in the green fields in the lower section of the painting (figure 16). Just like the landscape on the Cuauhtinchan map from 1705, the Tepantitla mural can be generally understood up today by the observer, even though he comes from a different culture and although there is a time gap of almost 1300 years between him and the painter (figure 17, Fragment from the Tepantitla mural [Teotihuacán], redrawn after De la Fuente, 1996: 233).

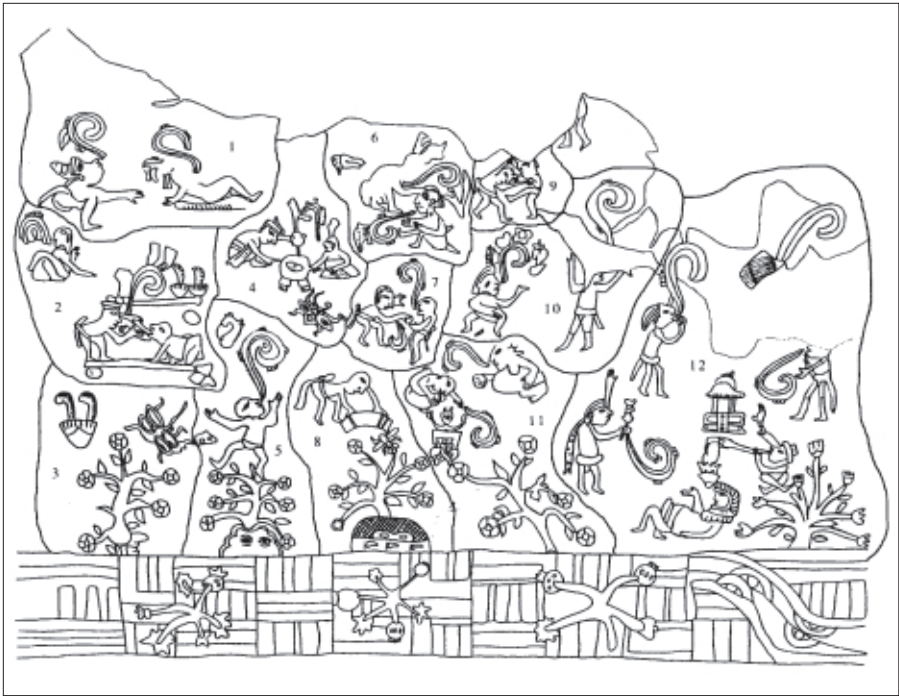


Figure 16. Fragment from the Tepantitla mural (Teotihuacan)  
redrawn after (De la Fuente, 1996: 246).

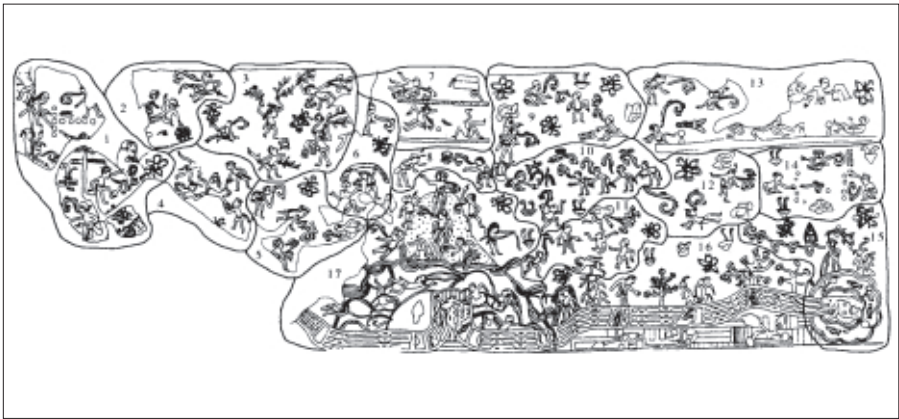


Figure 17. Fragment from the Tepantitla mural (Teotihuacan)  
redrawn after (De la Fuente, 1996: 233).

## CONCLUSION

We have seen two different types of representing gardens:

1. One, which demands pre-information or pre-knowledge on the subject; independently who the observer is, belonging to the author's same or any other culture.

2. Another one, which is more or less comprehensive for any observer, no matter his special qualification, or cultural affiliation.

For the identification of gardens that might be depicted on murals, in the codices, or any other media we need to know if some special code or graphic communication system has been applied, and, if so, how the icon or sign for garden should look like. In some exceptional cases such as the Iztapalapa garden, other sources are helpful, written and oral testimonies for example, or the archaeological evidence.

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