I have undertaken a comparative methodology explicating the ritual practice of time organised and systematised in a variety of Mesoamerican calendars—the Long Count calendar of the classic Maya, the 260-day calendar and the 365-day calendar of the postclassic Yucatec Maya, and the 52-year calendar of the postclassic Aztec.

Various calendars and their associated temporal ritual practices serve diverse functions and have several meanings according to the linguistic, cultural and religious context. The concept of time and related world-view are reflected by the ceremonial practice of a specific calendar of a cultural system. The ritual practice of time has been analysed concerning the ritual’s relation to the cosmogony (cosmological time) and the past (historical and pre-historical time), space (spatial-temporal time), its social meaning and function (the sociology of time), power (the politics of time), the future (eschatological/apocalyptical time), and the philosophy (ontology) of the order and the quality of divine/sacred time.

A comparative summary of theoretical perspectives of the symbolic meanings and ritual practices of the calendar time are in the concluding part synthesised in an analytical model based upon the theoretical framework (and arguments) of the previous four parts of the book. Furthermore, a section examines accessible information of whether several ritual practices of time of the various calendars were simultaneously performed within a culture.

1. The Heterogenous Data

A wide array of heterogeneous sources has constituted the basis of the book.¹

¹ It is indeed disconcerting for the analysis that a great part of the primary data of the classic Maya Long Count rituals derive basically from the late classic period (c. 600 AD – c. 900 AD) and from a limited number of sites. It is also disquieting that we do not know when and where exactly the Burner rituals of the 260-day period and the 365-day calendar New Year ritual were observed in postclassic Yucatán. Moreover, the analysis of the 52-year
The character of the source has had a decisive impact upon what we are able to find out about the ceremonial practices. There are two general types of sources: primary and secondary. A primary source consists of information produced either by the ritual performers, the participants or by eyewitness reports. The version of the insider is here presented. Secondary sources are, as revealed by its designated name, information presented by people whom never experienced the events themselves. Being a projection back in time the historical secondary source is regressive or retrospective by either an insider (members of the culture in question) or an outsider (people not belonging to the culture in question). Due to the extant material, two types of information have been employed in the study of the ritual practice of time:

1. Primary sources: Rituals expressed in logosyllabic writing and iconography commissioned by the Indigenous religious specialists of the pre-European/pre- Christian period.
2. Secondary sources: Colonial historical reports compiled by Spanish Catholic ethnographer missionaries and to a lesser degree contemporary ethnography.

These sources have diverse functions in communicating information making the analysis of the historical religious ritual practices challenging.

The Primary Sources

No primary sources, except some insignificant data from the almanacs of the Codex Dresden, are available for the explication of the postclassic Yucatec Burner rituals of a 260-day period.

Primary data to the rituals of the 365-day calendar have been accessible since the New Year ritual of the 365-day calendar is delineated on pages 25–28 in Codex Dresden, on pages 34–37 in Codex Madrid and on pages 19–20 in Codex Paris. But the postclassic Maya codices are ritual guides or manuals, containing short cryptic texts commenting portrayed actions, where deity performers act as instructors modelling how to conduct a ceremony. They do not illustrate or delineate a “human” New Year ritual. Moreover, the manuals only treat aspects of the ceremonies of Wayeb and of Pohp.

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1. For a methodological analysis of sources to Mesoamerican religions cf. Pharo (n.d.).