DEPICTING PERSPECTIVE: THE RETURN OF THE GAZE IN CODEX TELLERIANO-REMEMSIS (C. 1563)

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Folio 46r of Codex Telleriano-Remensis [Fig. 1] may be read in terms of the fragments that compose it as well as in terms of a unity that conveys a connection between the apparently disconnected scenes. The unity is in part the result of the limits imposed by the surface on which the pictographs where painted. Contrary to traditional pre-Colombian codices that were either painted on a folding screen, a lienzo (cloth), or a tira (linear strip), Telleriano-Remensis is painted on the page of a book. The codex, as the structure of the page indicates, is a new


2 The continuities between folia, for the most part, correspond to the simultaneity of verso and recto folia in our experience of book structures. Whereas the flow from recto to verso entails discontinuity, the juxtaposition verso/recto may lend itself to creating a continuous text. This sequence — verso/recto — is particularly manifest in the sections of Telleriano-Remensis dedicated to the tonalamatl (Book of the Days) and the veintena, feasts of the twenty months of the agricultural year-count. As for the xiuhamatl (Book of the Years), often referred to as the annals, the strip of year-sequences offers an apparently homogeneous series of dates under which events are inscribed. There are two main sections in the xiuhamatl corresponding to antiquity. The first series corresponds to the migration story of the Mexica (Aztecs) in which dates placed at the bottom of the page have a more or less consistent correspondence with place names but the events are scattered all over the folia and the movement denoted by feet patterns suggest the meandering Chichimecs moving between recto to verso. The dates are not colored with the characteristic use of xihuitl, the color turquoise that also means year. Although the strip of dates suggests a xiuhamatl, the lack of consistency and combination of different pictographic forms suggests that the tlacuilo drew his information from a variety of sources formatted in diverse prototypes ranging from events organized according a year list to events organized in terms of a cartographic space. The second series locate the time strip on the top section of the page and use xihuitl to color the dates. The sequence of the events from the ancient times flow seamlessly into the colonial period. Formally the rupture between the migration story of the Mexica is much more abrupt that the transition to the colonial period. In defining the formal characteristics of pictographic writing before and after the Spanish invasion we must attend to the invention of new pictorial vocabularies for inscribing events, institutions and people in consonance to the Mesoamerican tradition. Although I have
Fig. 1. Codex Telleriano-Remensis, fol. 46r. Courtesy of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris.