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The Zoque Carnivals of Northwestern Chiapas, Mexico

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Summary and Keywords

Every year, in the days just prior to Catholic Ash Wednesday, the indigenous Zoque peoples of northwestern Chiapas, Mexico, celebrate “carnival.” In doing so, they affirm their ethnic identity, take pride in a native vision of the cosmos, and retrace their real and fictive modern and ancient family lineages. Zoque carnival is an “encounter,” or *meké* in Zoque language, which entails more than the word at first glance would imply. Scholars, however, have analyzed carnivals, be they state-promoted or not, as inversions, nationalistic celebrations, or representations of local, regional, and national history. They often argue that carnivals exist primarily to represent, celebrate, or be a logical result of cultural diversity. Why are the native Zoque carnivals of northwestern Chiapas different? What are these Zoque carnivals? What do they represent to the Zoque people themselves and to non-Zoque people? Why are carnival studies from an “encountering” ethnographic standpoint interesting avenues to develop and pursue?

Keywords: native Zoque culture, carnival, Chiapas, Mexico, indigenous religion and cosmos, rituality, cultural heritage, decolonization, ethnography of encounter, festivity studies, Chichon volcano

Carnival: A Trope for Life and of Analysis

Celebrated in the three days prior to Ash Wednesday, “carnival” has a temporally compressed and multisited origin that is layered in a complex manner, according to carnival studies’ scholars Julio Caro Baroja, Roberto da Matta, and Bulmaro Villarruel Velasco.¹ Recognized first as a “son of Christianity,” carnival is deduced to have pagan Germanic origins (winter feasts) as well as classical Greek (Dionysian feasts), Roman (Saturnalia, Lupercalia, and Isidis Navigium), and perhaps even Egyptian antecedents—if one contemplates that the Imperial Roman celebration of Isidis Navigium rendered homage to the Egyptian deity of fertility, Isis.² Etymologically, the word is traced to the Latin *carnelevarium*, or the “lifting of meat,” which refers to the forty-day period of fasting, or Lent, a strongly regulated time preceding Holy Week, during which meat consumption is reduced and other preparatory rites are undertaken to celebrate and commemorate the triumphant entry of Jesus Christ into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday as well as his act of selfless sacrifice, his crucifixion, at the hands of the Romans on Good Friday. Noteworthy is the fact that Easter Sunday takes place on the first Sunday following the first full moon after the spring equinox, making carnival, as well as Holy Week, a celebration that continues an age-old tie to a lunar, solar, and agricultural calendar.³

Today, carnival is celebrated mainly in countries of Romanic and Catholic origin, giving credibility to another important but oft-neglected historical point of influence: the Feast of Fools. Revisionist Max Harris clarifies that the Feast of Fools was undertaken in the Early Middle Ages by lower-ranked clergy, first in Northern France, and then throughout the Catholic Kingdom.⁴ Inspired by the writings of Saint Paul, lower-ranked clergy chose and were allowed temporally to exalt and enact God’s witty liturgical wisdom instead of the morally heavier daily and strongly rule-based religious dogma of the time. Human life was grueling and a truly unpleasant battle for most people throughout history. Disease, death, brutality, war, and despair, more often than not, formed normal albeit often tragic parts of life, especially to those without a position of privilege. After all, the modernly acquired gifts of knowledge, literacy, unwavering faith, democracy, dreams of a better life, and hope are hard-won privileges and time-sensitive developments.

In the New World, carnival exists in close association with the legacies of the European conquest and may include themes, or components, of Africa-associated slavery and of indigeneity.⁵ The Caribbean carnivals, for example, often contain a variety of elements that are correctly or erroneously associated with the multiethnic and culturally or religiously diverse African New World diaspora.⁶ These carnivals are truly feasts of color as carnival dress tends to feature diverse and exuberant textures, rhythmic and hip- gyrating upbeat music, masks and various other ritual artifacts such as staffs or impressive headgear, and a strong presence of sexual innuendo in the dances and dancers. Naked flesh is visible. Indigenous peoples’ areas, such as Bolivia, Southern

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Mexico, Peru, and Highland Colombia, comparatively speaking, celebrate carnivals of a much more modest, sober, and stationary nature that form part of a larger ritual and communal cycle.⁷

Clearly, no carnival is the same, both in terms of time and place, and must always be studied in all its semiotic, historical, cultural, sensory, and sociopolitical complexity and layers.⁸ Geographical, ethnic, and temporal contextualization are paramount as a truly unimaginable variety exists in terms of forms and ranges of expressiveness as well as of meaning and symbolism. Another factor of difference to always consider in the analysis or comprehension of any particular carnival lies in the sociopolitical and commercial positioning of a carnival or its groups of participants and the positions of power involved in this particular production process of culture.⁹ Some carnivals exist where government promotion, crafting, and interference have been ongoing and pivotally shaped the carnival, while others have remained or pride themselves on being largely devoid of such influences. Participants and stakeholders might state legitimately that these carnivals are truly people-based, or as said in Latin America, “*son Carnavales del pueblo*” (note that the term *pueblo* always retains the double connotation of “people” and of “a geographical location” that tends to correspond to a small and identity-carrying town). Culture and power are, thus, as inextricably connected in carnival as semiotics may be to symbolism.¹⁰ Any historical and symbolic tie discovered or represented in carnival requires close analysis, as it is a uniquely visible truth that carnival is a narrated narration where multiple narrators narrate and interact, or not, depending on roles, and form what can be recognized convincingly only in retrospect as a particular type or set of themes: be they good or bad, New World or Old World, Caribbean or indigenous, state-owned or people-governed, historical or symbolic. The Zoque *originario* peoples of northwestern Chiapas in the south of Mexico propose a novel type of carnival, that of *meké*.¹¹

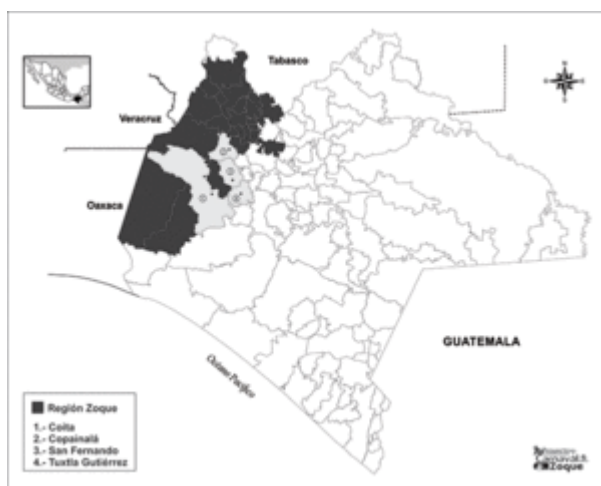
Zoque Peoples and the Zoque Area

The Zoque peoples belong to one of Mexico’s most ancient linguistic families (Mixe-Zoque-Popolucan) and currently populate the northwestern region of Chiapas, eastern Oaxaca, southern Tabasco, and, due, in part, to a dramatic and life-endangering explosion of the Chichon volcano in 1982, and earlier waves of urban immigration, numerous diaspora communities further north.¹² The Zoque language is argued to date back to at least the Formative Period of Olmec times (1200–400 BCE), and the pre-Hispanic Zoque region is thought to have been substantially larger than it is today.¹³ The Zoque are and have proved to be able traders and craftsmen, forging key connections with Tabasco, Oaxaca, and beyond, to the west as well as with the Maya areas to the north and east. They have also proved to be efficient agriculturalists, having survived to date for at least 2,500 to 3,000 years. The existence of carefully designed and cosmologically aligned archaeological sites illustrate that the Zoque culture manifested a chieftainship-level

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society by the Late Preclassic (400 BCE–250 CE) and Early Classic (250–500 CE) period: sites such as Cerro de Ombligo, Chiapa de Corzo, Piedra Parada, el Mirador, San Isidro, Iglesia Vieja, and Malpaso, among others, confirm this. Zoque iconography found on ceramics, incense burners, and on the few discovered stelae and carved stones feature a nature-based cosmology that places the jaguar, the monkey, the ceiba, the monsters of the earth motif, bats, caves, and water serpents, common also to the Olmec culture, center stage.¹⁴ Comprehensive research on pre-Hispanic Zoque symbolism is still in the beginning stages, however, and requires further scientific rigor and analytical depth.

The Zoque population currently, as counted in the 2010 national census and adjusted by the Mexican National Institute of Indigenous Languages, amounts to 65,355 individuals, of whom 32,869 are men and 32,486 women.¹⁵ A total of 4,816 individuals were reported to be exclusively monolingual in Zoque and an estimate of 59,328 individuals acknowledged speaking Zoque and Spanish.¹⁶ The following three subareas constitute the actual traditional Zoque region of Chiapas (figure 1):



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Figure 1. The Zoque area of Chiapas, Mexico, with the four municipios—San Fernando, Ocozocoautla de Espinosa, Copainalá, and Tuxtla Gutiérrez—of the central depression where carnivals take place annually.

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(1) the slope of the Gulf of Mexico area to the north of Chiapas and the southern tip of Tabasco, with the humid and agriculture-based municipios of Amatlán, Ostuacan, Sunuapa, Francisco León, Ixtacomitan, Juárez, Pichucalco, Chapultenango, Solosuchiapa, and Ixtapangajoya; **(2)** the highlands of the Pantepec area at the center (and considered to be the heartland) of the Zoque region, which

is cold in winter and pleasant in summer, features only one harvest, and encompasses the municipios of Tapalapa, Pantepec, Ocotepec, Coapilla, Tapilula, Rayón, Ixhuatán, Pueblo Nuevo Solistahuacán, and Jitotol; and **(3)** the central depression of the Chiapas area, which forms the south of the Zoque region, and consists of hot summers, moderate winters, and the less rural and fast-modernizing municipios of Copainalá (figure 2), Tecpatán, San Fernando, Ocozocoautla de Espinosa, and Tuxtla Gutiérrez.¹⁷

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Figure 2. The Temple of Saint Michael Archangel in Copainalá against the mountains of the Pantepec Highlands: heartland of the Zoque peoples.

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A karstic morphology, an ample subaquatic and a short river system, and multiple escarpments characterize the Zoque region (figure 2): elements that are found in Zoque cosmology. Caves are associated with entry into a world of enchantment, *Tsu'an*, which differ in opposing ways from our regular, hardworking lives on the earth's surface, or *Naas-jama*. Upon natural death, one passes on to *I'ps töjk kotsök*, or the great labyrinth world, where those who lived an honest, industrious, and sacrifice-making good life

may have an acceptable afterlife while those who have not will suffer. Those who commit suicide are believed to pass onto the world of great obscurity, or *Pagujk 'tsu*. This cosmological picture must also be transposed on the hours of the day, one's life cycle, and the paths of the major stars in our sky: the moon and the sun. Everything is divided into four parts: early childhood, or morning, corresponding to *Tsu'an*; adulthood, or midday, equivalent to *Naas-jama*; old age, or evening, corresponding to *I'ps töjk kotsök*; and illness in old age, or midnight, equivalent to *Pagujk 'tsu*. In all of these segments, the idea of *kojama*, or internal heart and life force, is key, as is a man and animal correspondence figure that anthropologists describe as the culture of *nagualism*, having spirit-beings, or *put'n gu ha'ma* in Zoque, according to Thomas.¹⁸ Each person is born with *kojama* and a specific *put'n gu ha'ma*; able individuals, especially healers, can acquire multiple animal or natural force companions and are conceived as having extrasensory powers, which mostly manifest themselves or are actively employed at night in a dream state.

Zoque expressive culture is diverse and multilayered due to a complex and multiply conquest-experienced sensory history. In pre-Hispanic times, the Zoque region underwent different cultural and sociopolitical invasions: first, by the Maya peoples who came to occupy centrally much of Chiapas and the south of Mesoamerica in the Classic (250–1000 CE) and Postclassic (1000–1519 CE) periods; second, by the warlike Chiapanec peoples who arrived from Central America and displaced the Zoque westward during the Postclassic period; and, third, by the Nahua-speaking Mexica imperialists, who succeeded in subjugating two (Zimatan and Guateway) of the four (Javepagou-ay and Quechula remained independent) recorded Zoque chieftainships in the 14th century.¹⁹ Spanish

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conquest commenced in 1523 with Luis Marín's reading of the "*acta de obediencia*" in Quechula. In 1564, a Dominican convent was constructed in Tecpatán, and thereafter a total of 50 were built in the Zoque area. Brutal treatment, severe tribute-paying through the nefarious system of *encomiendas*, decimation to the point of annihilation due to European-introduced diseases, and the Catholic doctrine-oriented programs of "*reduccion*" and "*evangelismo*" provoked profound and deeply felt changes in the Zoque region and culture. Native customs of regular offerings to nature were actively prohibited, and records exist describing Zoque peoples of being accused of and prosecuted for "witchcraft" on this basis.²⁰ "Idolatry" was not accepted; yet it continued and at times provoked a riot such as the one recorded in Ocozocoautla de Espinosa in 1693, as a local priest planned to cut down a ceiba—a tree seen as the carrier of the universe and a model for humankind (deep roots, strong branches, and a solid trunk). Riots and revitalization movements became more frequent and stronger toward the end of the Spanish Empire: the 1712 Cancuc uprising is one of several examples from native, though not Zoque, Chiapas.

Independence, while bringing a much-desired end to what was a terribly onerous, racially discriminatory, and unjust colonial system for most, if not all, indigenous peoples, did not provide significant improvement.²¹ In Chiapas, an official and voted upon decision was made to join the new Mexican Republic, which constituted a change from being dependent upon and subdivided in the *Capitanía General de Guatemala*, which had governed, to use a big word, the provinces of the Chiapa and the Soconusco during colonial times.²² More democratizing and official Mexican state practices arrived in Chiapas years after the Mexican Revolution ended, inaugurating a time where local strong men (*caudillos*) and the Church finally lost some of their grip over the area.²³ Before the Mexican Revolution, physical survival was the principal priority as brutal hacienda and finca modes of production indebted much of the indigenous populations, placed them in absolute slavery conditions, and tied them to the hacienda and finca owners. Room for cultural expression and identity-based rituals are likely to have been virtually nonexistent. More research is desperately needed, however, to comprehend this period between Independence and the Mexican (Mapache in Chiapas) Revolution. Hernandez Castillo writes that for the Maya mam area in postrevolutionary or modern times, a period of "desencuentro," or nonencountering, preceded a period of "encuentro," or encountering, during which the state finally developed a more culturally sensitive and supportive or promotional stance toward culture and native tradition.²⁴ This development can be said of the Zoque area as well. A strongly top-down and terribly assimilationist rural education program, run by the federal Secretary of Public Education (SEP), preceded and gradually transformed itself into a native-language inclusive and bilingual SEP educational program. Similarly, in 1975, the Instituto Nacional Indigenista (INI) opened a Centro Cultural Indigenista in Copainalá: the INI institution has since transformed into the current Comision Nacional del Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas (CDI), and since 1997, the CDI has operated an indigenous language-based radio station, XECOPA, "Voz de los vientos," in Copainalá, which plays an active and participatory community-responsive role in cultural outreach. Similarly, in the 1980s in the wake of the

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Carta de Patzcuaro, *casas de cultura*, *promotores de los artes y cultura*, and festivals emerged and were erected throughout the Mexican Republic, giving a major push to and recognition of indigenous Mexican culture.

The first Zoque ethnographers, early on in their endeavors, identified the presence of three subpopulations in the Zoque peoples: (1) “*costumbreros*,” or those who follow the Zoque customs; (2) the Catholics, who follow Catholic doctrine; and (3) the Adventists, who, as a result of Protestantism arriving in the 1930s, follow neither the native Zoque nor Catholic celebratory customs, provoking in most cases dramatic culture and language loss.²⁵ The construction of three major hydroelectrical dams in the 1960s and 1970s, with concomitant road construction and increased infrastructure, provided both serious disadvantages, such as the flooding of pre-Hispanic and historic towns (e.g., Quechula), and advantages, such as greater accessibility to and improved healthcare, sanitary conditions, and education. A dramatic and life-threatening volcanic explosion in 1982, covering most of the municipio of Francisco Leon and its inhabitants, is a lingering wound, not least because the government did little to take efficient control over the situation. Zoque history is complex and conflict-ridden.

The Zoque, named erroneously and rather insultingly after the Nahuatl word, *zoquitl*, signifying “mud peoples,” which was later adopted by the Spanish colonizers and more recently by anthropologists and culture-promoting government agents, are, in fact, “speakers of language,” or *tsuni*, *ode*, *ote*, *ore*, *yomo* (women) and *pōn* (men), depending on regional dialect preferences.²⁶ They do not conceive of the natural world as being distinct from and subservient to the human world. Rather, humans are speakers of language while other beings have other talents or distinguishing characteristics. This explains why aggressive incursions by international fracking companies are currently a matter of grave territorial and cosmological concern.²⁷ What will be the future for Zoque culture, language, and well-being?

Zoque Carnivals: *Mekés* and Intraregional Diversity

The Zoque towns of Chiapas exhibit considerable intraregional diversity and all host a distinctive set of ritual calendar-associated celebrations. Carnivals and other celebrations are described locally as *meké*, a Zoque term for “a get-together” and for “celebration.”²⁸ The rendering of homage to a saint provides the occasion to gather, making the gathering in and of itself a cause of and for joy and an experience of encountering: not a difficult semiotic connection to make when living in an area that is geographically isolated and where settlement patterns tend to be nuclear or narrowly extensive.²⁹ A historical experience of division, invasion, environmental disaster, and brutal culture change, time and time again, of course provides greater depth to the word *meké*, and the joy

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associated with once more encountering one's community fellow "costumbreros." Four examples from different towns in the central depression region of Tuxtla illustrate the diversity and sweep of the characteristics marking these celebrations.

Ocozocoautla de Espinosa (Jave-pagcuay) in the Central Depression Area, 30 km West of the State Capital, Tuxtla Gutiérrez

Ocozocoautla de Espinosa celebrates a six-day-long and, according to historical memory and current ethnographic investigations, age-old carnival that begins with the "Last Rehearsal" and the "Branding of the Horse" on the evening of the Saturday preceding Ash Wednesday.³⁰ Six "*cowiná*," a Zoque term for "chief," or "house of a chief with a saint and an altar," that correspond roughly to six different neighborhoods, or *barrios*, constitute the basis for and logistical and symbolic-cosmological organization of this six-day ritual and modern town identity celebration.³¹ Each *cowiná* corresponds to a historically themed and archetypically oriented dance figure and saint or set of saints and virgins. One must remember the importance of *kojama* and the spiritual accompaniment of animals or nature's forces in this regard. The following table indicates the combinations of these forces.

Table 1. Listing of the *cowiná*, Saint and Dress Code for Each Dance Figure according to the *cowiná* in Ocozocoautla de Espinosa (the author's descriptions)

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Cowiná Dance Figure	Saint	Dress
Mahoma Cabeza de Cochi	San Antonio Abad	Young adult man dressed in a regular dress shirt, pants covered by leather gaiters, a rather large rectangular-shaped blanket that mimics a cape, a black pig-face wooden mask worn on the person's back with a cob of corn and onion in its mouth, a Spanish-faced wooden carved mask covering the person's face with <i>paliacates</i> (cloth bandanas), dried fruit and strung bean necklaces, and an elaborately decorated (either with paper flowers or some native seed such as corn, bean, or peanut) <i>capirote</i> . ³² The figure holds a wooden machete in the right hand, which serves as a guide stick in the dancing.
Caballo/ Horse	Santo Domingo	Young adult man who wears a <i>bejuco</i> —a tree wooden contraption covered with white cloth and a small constructed horse neck and head that enable the wearer to mimic the riding and controlling of a horse. The person wears regular cowboy garb and “holds” the horse by a set of reins. The back of the horse is always decorated with a satin white cloth and an oversized satin handkerchief depicting the Virgin of Guadalupe. A cowboy hat and a repertoire of brusque moves finish the figure and facilitate the idea that the horse kicks and whinnies constantly while being ridden.
Mahoma Goliath	Virgen de Natividad	Young adult man dressed in a regular dress shirt, pants, leather gaiters, a large rectangular-shaped blanket mimicking a cape, a white pig-face wooden carved mask worn on the back with a cob of corn and onion in its mouth, a Spanish-faced wooden carved mask covering the person's face with <i>paliacates</i> (cloth bandanas), dried fruit, and strung bean necklaces, and an elaborately decorated (either with paper flowers or with some native seed such as corn, bean, or peanut) <i>capirote</i> , and a wooden machete in the right hand, which serves as a guide stick in the dancing.

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David	San Bernabé	Young male child dressed in a yellow or white formal dress shirt, red cloth culottes, yellow or white stockings, red waist coat, a cross bow, and a red <i>capirote</i> .
Tigre/ Tiger	San Martin Obispo and Santa Martha	One young adult man and woman dressed with colorfully dyed <i>ixtle</i> (cactus fiber) tied around the shoulders, waist, arms, wrists, knees, and ankles and with a flattened wide type of head covering that mimics and is crafted to illustrate a jaguar head.
Mono/ Monkey	San Miguel Arcángel	One young male and female child dressed in all black clothing, a wooden carved black monkey-faced mask, a black hat, and a banana in hand or a small gourd basket with sweets or confetti.

Sunday is the official start of carnival, and a modern municipal organized procession takes place with all the *cowiná*, the people aligned with and composing each *cowiná* (including the chiefs, or *cowiná*, a *caporal*, an *embajadora*, *nanaokos*, or cooks, an *escribano*, *correlonas*, or errand-runners, and several other functions and subgroups), and the *chores* and musicians. *Chores* are young men and women who used to be associated with a particular *cowiná* and would advise the community that the carnival was about to begin: currently they serve mostly as jesters, and on Sunday, they may join the procession in groups and compete for prizes and town recognition for most creative or most authentic costume—a development that is rejected by the most traditional people of the town. On Monday, the *cowiná* visit each other, and it is probably this, together with the Plaza Dances on Tuesday, that approximate a ritual and the traditional Zoque spiritual and community meaning of *meké* most closely. In the street on Monday, and more emblematically on Tuesday in the town plazas (there are four), each *cowiná* and dance figure encounters the other and dances in epic battle. While the Mahomas Cabeza de Cochi and Goliath face the Horse and the David, the Tiger faces and encounters the Monkey.



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Figure 3. The Tiger and the Monkey in the epic battle between good and bad, daylight and darkness or night time: one of the principal dances featured during the day of the plaza dances on carnival Tuesday, Ocozocoautla de Espinosa.

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In the more Zoque-themed dance (figure 3), both Monkeys mount both Tigers, or jaguars, and thus conquer bad, evil, and obscure forces. The David

manages to do the same, but does so via a series of steps: first both Mahomas conquer the Horse, then the David conquers both Mahomas, terminating both one by one by symbolically cutting each in half and jumping over both adult men (figure 4).



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Figure 4. David battles with the Mahoma de Cabeza de Cochi in the central plaza of Ocozocoautla on carnival Tuesday.

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As life and time must always continue, Wednesday is the day of purification, and a *zapoyol* bath (a liquid mixture of ground mamey seed with water and lemon) provides a ritual cleansing. No meat is served on Ash Wednesday, which stands in strong contrast with preceding carnival days during which each *cowiná* serves to the entire town the following:

(1) breakfast (bread, *cacapote*—a cacao and corn-based type of gruel—*ponsoki* and *puxinú*—local corn and pumpkinseed-based sweets); **(2)** *pozol* (a corn and cacao-based drink); **(3)** one heavy meal (*wuacasis caldú*); and **(4)** a lighter evening refreshment (often tamales).

On Thursday, in each *cowiná*, a Head of the Pig (Cabeza de Cochi) is danced, which is a dance approximating maypole dancing and suggests certain Alpine European antecedents. This dance finishes the carnival and provides an opportunity to celebrate and thank all the *cowiná* participants for their work and strength. Zoque musicians (figure 5), featuring one flute player with a simply handcrafted reed flute and several drummers using a single-membrane wooden drum, enliven the carnival celebration, or *meké*, each day, as people and *cowiná* participants accompanying their principal dance figure perambulate freely among the *cowiná* of the town.

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Figure 5. Zoque musicians playing their traditional instruments: a reed flute accompanied by several single-membrane wooden drums.

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Outside each *cowiná*, a marimba also plays music and dancing occurs in and off the streets and the *cowiná* throughout the week. Mischievous children throw little plastic bags filled with water and talcum powder: the latter is also smeared in one's neck as a sign of welcome upon entering the *cowiná* and signifies one is a member of the town and *cowiná* at that particular moment. It also is an

homage to the God of Corn and the Sun God, who, when celebrated properly, will provide sustenance for their people and children.

San Fernando (Shahuipac) in the Central Depression Area, 20 km North from the State Capital, Tuxtla Gutiérrez

In San Fernando, carnival lasts eight days.³³ It starts and closes on Thursday prior to and following Ash Wednesday, respectively, and does so on both Thursdays with the "Dish Washing Ceremony." During this ceremony, the carnival room is ritually (by means of a Catholic prayer) opened and the women of the town proceed to wash all the dishes, pots, pans, tables, and baskets associated with the carnival. On Friday, the men enhance and decorate an altar to the celebrated saint with an arch of numerous *joyo naqués*, literally "woven flowers," referring to small floral shields crafted by cigar-like rolled up leaves decorated with flower petals depicting religiously oriented motifs and symmetrically arranged on an arch, giving import to the altar to Jesus de la Buena Esperanza, or the Good Hope, the Saint and Lord to which the celebration is offered. Saturday, the principal figures' garb (one Tiger, one Monkey, two Giants, one Bowman, several Shures or Dogs, and *variteros*, which are Little Staff Carriers) is cleaned and prepared. At night, the "Last Rehearsal," a procession to and from the town square and main *cowiná*, and a mass held in the *cowiná* ritually open the carnival. The next three days, Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday, are carnival and the Tiger, the Monkey, two Giants, the Shures, a Bowman, and numerous Little Staff Carriers leave the *cowiná* to dance in the town on the streets and at emblematic peoples' houses. Zoque musicians accompany the dancers, while other musicians hold watch at the *cowiná* altar until the dancers return. The Little Staff Carriers, embodied by the young boys of the community, open the ritual dance space by dancing in quadrille lines, or contra dance style. The Tiger and the Monkey follow and perform an interactive dance within the ritual space created by the Little Staff Carriers

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during which the Shures, or Dogs, facilitate the Monkey climbing upon the Tiger's back, who will subsequently seek to climb up some nearby post in an effort to demonstrate his force and submission to serve another being (the Monkey) both at once. The Monkey clearly conquers the Tiger, and a new day may again emerge (figure 6).



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Figure 6. The Tiger bows down to the Monkey with Shures and the public looking on in San Fernando, carnival Monday.

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Figure 7. The Dance of the Giants (Goliath) in San Fernando, carnival Tuesday.

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A third dance is executed by the Giants and the Bowman, who face each other in a mostly mental standoff during which the Giants hurdle all kinds of loud, humorous, and sexually oriented jokes to the Bowman, who is not allowed to laugh or show any emotion. After several rounds of walking to and fro within the ritual rectangle, the Bowman will suddenly shoot his arrow and defeat both Giants (figure 7).

In the *cowiná*, the people wait until the Tiger and Monkey return, and when they do the principal *cowiná* areas are visited: the table of the Majordomos, the altar, the kitchen, the pozol area, and the room of the Tiger and the Giants, where they are allowed to rest (and get motivated) before going out again. On Wednesday, all is cleaned and put away for the following year, which is usually a full day's work,

considering that a paint-throwing "plebe," or rowdy people, have significantly dirtied all ritual artifacts, musical instruments, and dancers' costumes. Thursday, all the cooking and serving gear for all community-cooked meals is washed and carefully stored in a specially designated "carnival room." A regular party is organized for Wednesday evening and forms a joyous ending of the community-gathering part of the carnival: bread or

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plastic crowns are gifted to the participants that held important cargos, or duties, such as the Majordomos, the musician and different dance masters, the first cook, and the first pozol lady.

The Tiger's dress consists of several knitted pieces of hanging red, yellow, and black-dyed ixtle that recreates the spots of the yellow jaguar: this garb is regularly gifted by a male person of the community wanting to make "*meritos*," or gain prestige, in order to later request and successfully obtain one of the principal ritual *cargos*. The Tiger also dons a carved wooden jaguar-faced mask, which is owned by the *cowiná* (the people), and, when not worn, it is kept on the altar under the watchful eye and in close communion with Saint Jesus de la Buena Esperanza. The Monkey dons black clothing, a local cured animal hide, on his back and a carved wooden black monkey-faced mask, which is also one of several the *cowiná* possesses. The Shures wear several strands of ixtle around a large "San Fernando"-styled hat (a woven and broad-brimmed *sombrero* used for working in the fields) and around the waist. The Giants wear large red capes, red capirotas, as well as carved wooden European-styled face masks. The young men dancing as the Giants are usually tall, and with their tall capirotas achieve a dwarfing effect on the Bowman, who obviously symbolizes the biblical person of David. The Bowman wears everyday clothes but carries a cross bow as a distinctive feature. The Little Staff Carriers carry nothing out of the ordinary except for a meter-long wooden stick that is wrapped vertically with colorful paper. A system of ludic and socially oriented "*fines*" enable a hacienda time *tienda de raya* (company store) theme to emerge and illustrate that in Chiapas, the finca, estancia, quinta, and hacienda systems that emerged during the Reforma period need be considered in a critical and constitutive historiography of Zoque carnival. Victoria Reifler Brickler, for the tsotsil area, certainly affirms the hacienda theme for the indigenous carnivals of Chiapas.³⁴ A diverse menu of locally grown and Mesoamerican crop-based cuisine as well as the daily obligatory mid-day pozol drink, prepared by hand, are distinctive features of the San Fernando carnival and fall into the hands of the capable women of the community. The division of labor and sets of gender relations rely on local and carnival-based community ties and offer the textures of this particular *meké*.

Tuxtla Gutiérrez (Coyatoc) in the Central Depression of Chiapas, Currently the State Capital

A relatively small group, complexly held together by real and fictive kinship ties and living within a rapidly growing and modernizing capital city, continues to execute the dances, celebrations, and rituals of a rather intense but barely surviving annual agricultural and religious calendar.³⁵ Carnival does not form the most important celebration in this calendar. There are others, such as the "Lowering and Raising of the Virgins of Copoya" in January, March, and October, the "Dance of the Bull for the Holy Cross" on May 1st, the *Nasetzé* (Dance of the Earth) in Corpus Cristi or *Tonguyetzé* (Dance of the Spurs) in Octavo de Corpus, or the Dance of San Roque, the Celebration of

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the Virgin Rosario (after which the Zoque Mayordomia of Tuxtla is named), the “Chabelitas,” or the Holy Sacrament, and Christmas.³⁶

Carnival consists of two interrelated dances executed simultaneously by different actors. A Father Sun and the *Alacandú* (a young still virgin girl symbolizing the Moon) dance the *Napapoketzé*, or Dance of the Feather of the Guacamaya, referring to the large feather headdress, *penacho*, of Father Sun. The *Suyuetzé*, or Dance of the Old Women, completes the ritual and symbolic whole as the *suyus*, or old women, danced by young unmarried men who are dressed in traditional Zoque women’s dress, consisting of a hand-woven *huipil*, a *naguilla*, and a *garabato*, or digging stick, dance in a counterclockwise fashion around Father Sun and *Alacandú* in the center, thus symbolizing a protective circle and asserting their role as warriors and minor stars protecting the principal Sun and Moon in their interrelated paths through the cosmos (figure 8).



[Click to view larger](#)

Figure 8. The dances of *Napapoketzé* and *Suyuetzé* in front of the Niño de Atocha Church in Tuxtla Gutiérrez on carnival Sunday.

Photo property of the Zoque Carnival CONACyT-UNICACH Research Project.

Carnival is “levantado,” or lifted (danced), on Saturday in the northern sector of the city and Sunday in the southern sector on the streets of Tuxtla Gutiérrez. Different groups may lift the dance, and the dance travels from house to house where it is executed in full glory in front of all the saints of the house altars. A long string of tradition-oriented and family memory-motivated invitations direct the groups in the order of the

day. No house or saint may be forgotten and the dance may also be spontaneously invited by having one’s door open and meeting the dance with a smoke-emitting incense burner. At all times, a varying series of nine “*sones*” (musical rhythms) accompany the dance and the dancers, who dance from sunrise to sunset. Once the sun sets, Father Sun must be inside. The belief exists that this dance represents a cosmic and joint struggle between humans and nature. Carnival is a period of transition between one calendar and agricultural cycle and the next. Only a well-executed *Te’hatajamaetzé*, or Dance of the Carnival and Father Sun can guarantee a smooth transition. Several churches, important to the local Zoque tradition, such as the Iglesia del Cerrito, San Pascual Baylon, and Niño de Atocha, are visited and danced at during the house-to-house pilgrimage. Typical Zoque gastronomy and mischief, executed by the *suyus* in the form of smearing one’s face with corn meal or telling jokes with sexual innuendos, provide relief, humor, and a joyful spirit,

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together with Zoque music and the carnival dance. An ambiance of communion and community is created within a group of people whose family, *compadrazgo*, and ethnic ties at times are the only points of encounter.

Copainalá (Pokiø'mø) in the Central Depression of Chiapas, 67 km North of the State Capital Tuxtla Gutiérrez

The carnival of modern-day and tradition-oriented Copainalá (figure 2) features the presence of multiple “costumbristas” who gather in the municipal capital from neighboring “*riberas*,” or hillside hamlets.³⁷ It is a two-day affair and consists of a day of preparation, Saturday, and a day of the Dance of the Weya-weyá, or “he who yells and yells,” in Zoque language referring to carnival, on Sunday. Different *costumbrista* individuals carry out and take charge of the different tasks at hand through prior arrangements and a personal and family-based community system of encounter and invitation. The person who holds the image, or is the celebration’s “promoter,” invites those who will assist in the different duties by means of a gift exchange. In Copainalá, he or she who holds the image is a yearly made decision made just after carnival finishes. If one wants to receive the image, knowledge and a proven ability to follow “*costumbre*” are requisite. At the house of the “promoter” on Saturday, the *a'chej'ku*, a leaf-wrapped celebratory arch and altar, are prepared with native and locally grown as well as some store-bought plants and flowers by the men. In the kitchen, the women work to prepare the tamales and other dishes for the Dance and the “*velación*,” or wake, of the next day. The men also prepare the *cupsi*, a honey-based fermented alcoholic beverage. In the evening, carnival begins with a wake during which the Zoque musicians play “*sones*” of praise on their single-membrane wooden drums and reed flute to the altar in front of which, and on top of which, are displayed the Weya-weyá wooden carved mask and the different ritual artifact clothes donned by the Weya-weyá and his family members. A wake wards off any evil spirits and assures a good rest and a good carnival the following day. A Last Rehearsal is also executed. The consumption of the earlier prepared tamales, moderate amounts of *cupsi*, pieces of crown-shaped bread doused in honey, and coffee bring both the community and the *costumbristas* together and prepares a community-based *ethos* for the following day, thus attuning everybody’s spirit and reason for being there. It is a time to catch up, laugh, and be familiar.

Sunday begins with the communal consumption of *tsata*, a thick banana, black bean, and fried pigskin (*chicharon*)-based stew that is considered a local and traditional delicacy. As people gather and finish their breakfast of *tsata*, the Weya-weyá and his family, consisting of a wife, danced by an adult male, two daughters, or *palomitas*, doves, danced by two young girls, and two “*novios*,” or prospective husbands, danced by two adult men, prepare to “*salir*,” or go out. The Weya-weyá leads the procession, which is really a pilgrimage moving from church plaza (and barrio) to church plaza and to different houses following people’s prior submitted requests: he dances with his family and the two prospective husbands to verify whether the latter are worthy of marrying his daughters. Weya-weyá is a man who regularly lives in the mountains, thus adopting an important mythic importance of being a guardian of the mountains, a communicator to the gods (both Christian and nature-based, such as the wind, the clouds, the rain, and the feared thunder), and a keeper of the animals, which, in Zoque’s cosmic vision, are visualized as important human spirit companions.³⁸ The latter is a direct reference to the start of Lent.

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Weya-weyá descends from the mountains to the town to encounter his family and to tell everyone that the time of Lent and the Crucifixion of Christ are upon them: they must refrain from eating meat (corresponding to the animals he as mountain keeper keeps in an enclosure at night, which is when human spirit companions are most likely to escape by way of dreams and begin paths of desire that might not be in the best interest of the wake person) and follow other restrictions. The Dance of the Weya-weyá on Sunday is a dialogue in which the Weya-weyá meets his family and speaks with his wife to verify how things are going. She responds that their doves are ready to be married and await his approval of the two prospective candidates they have selected. Weya-weyá responds if his cigars have been prepared properly and if his rifle has been cleaned. The wife says yes, and provides evidence by handing over the cigars and the rifle to him. Weya-weyá reviews the work and approves. Then he “pulses” (measures by touch one’s health) the prospective husbands in a quadrille-styled dance, measuring the force and responsive power of one “novio,” who is momentarily and quite dramatically suspended in the air (figure 9). After repeating the same sequence with the other novio, approval is given and the novios may dance with the doves. The entire family rejoices in dance, bringing an end to the sequence. The good life prevails, and life as well as cosmic cycles can continue.



[Click to view larger](#)

Figure 9. The Dance of the Weya-weyá: testing the strength and commitment of the soon to be son-in-law, carnival Sunday in Copainalá.

Photo property of the Zoque Carnival CONACyT-UNICACH Research Project.

The Dance is repeated at all the previously arranged locations, with the upbeat accompaniment of the Zoque musicians, moderate quantities of cupsi, and honey-doused and crown-shaped pieces of bread. At the end of the day, another communal meal brings closure and provides the necessary opportunity for thanking all participants, who part to travel back on time to their hillside communities.

The *Meké* and *Homo Ludens Mesoamericanus*: An Encountering of Meanings

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Many common themes emerge from the carnival descriptions, and these may be advantageously organized and analyzed. In all towns, Zoque carnival is a joyous and cosmically oriented community affair where rules and tradition prevail. Ritual duties, or *cargos*, are transferred only through a system of *meritos* and with the approval of the entire Zoque or costumbrero community. The indigenous Zoque carnivals feature a type of *homo ludens americanus* and exhibit several pre-Hispanic motifs: the presence of a centrally powerful or ancestral-type figure in the dances, the presence of the jaguar and the monkey in two carnivals, the consumption of certain Zoque-type foods and certain modes of feasting, and the presence of Zoque music. The process of ascertaining the precise origin of each component in carnival is ongoing, but the presence of 17th century-styled dress, dance form, and allegorically themed and evangelical theater-styled dances appears irrefutable: one might therefore be tempted to conclude that the Zoque carnivals are colonial in origin and execution. Elements of a revitalization or regional identity movement origin, however, such as the Weya-weyá who descends to the town to warn about the coming of Christ during Holy Week, as well as several hacienda-related elements such as the *tienda de raya*, or company “store” in the San Fernando carnival or the ritualized corporal punishment sequence in the Mahoma and David Dance in Ocozocoautla, provide a more complex layering to the Zoque carnivals. Such layering begs the question as to what extent these carnivals are purposefully (state)-crafted historical performances or true historical embodied memories. Without a documentary record, this link may be difficult to establish, making indigenous carnivals challenging, but worthwhile to investigate, as they straddle and expose the borders between remembering and writing. Specific space- and place-related themes must also be further analyzed, as an “encountering ethnography” methodology also affirms.³⁹

The Zoque hope to continue to celebrate mekés but a continued ability to find celebration in each other’s coming together is undergoing new challenges as newer generations are being pulled actively and relentlessly into a digital and totally globalizing world. Will social media platforms provide the support the costumbristas require to transition into the next century? Only time and clever semiotic and historical analysis will be able to tell and contributing, hopefully, in the creating of a bridge from a hyperacademic dichotomizing view of the past and of carnivals to a more inclusive and less antagonistic frame of interpretation. The task of encountering meaning and its variations—personal, private, public, communal, colonial, modern, prehispanic, and inter- and intraethnic—is a necessary key feature of what will hopefully become a somewhat brighter and equanimous world for *homo ludens mesoamericanus*, and humankind in general, in a possible and nearby future.

Discussion of the Literature

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Comparatively speaking, especially in relation to the Maya peoples—probably *the* most favored researched ethnic group in Chiapas, and perhaps even in Mexico—not a great deal has been written theoretically or interpretatively yet about the Zoque peoples, and even less about their celebrations.⁴⁰ A few works stand out, however. Rodríguez León, Ruíz Pascacio, López Espinosa, and Zea Chávez have provided Chiapas with the first comprehensive description of the Tuxtla Zoques by presenting an authoritative narrative, though not historical explanation, of the celebrations associated with the *Mayordomía de la Virgen de Rosario*: carnival being one of a complex annual cycle.⁴¹ The Zoque scholar, Juan Ramón Álvarez Vázquez, wrote an interesting thesis on the dances of the Tuxtla Zoque, which contains a narrative and photographic documentation of the Tuxtla carnival dances as well as those in San Fernando and Ocozocoautla, for comparative purposes.⁴² The best works on the Ocozocoautla carnival are the master's thesis of Manuela Loi, an Italian student who obtained her degree in Mexico studying this Mexican topic under the able guidance of Andres Medina, who has written interestingly on the Maya Tenejapa carnival and the Maya vision of the cosmos, more generally.⁴³ Noriega Rocha provides a very unpretentious, clear, and illustrative treatise on the Ocozocoautla *cofradías*, which includes ample information on carnival in Ocozocoautla de Espinosa and several of its formative components.⁴⁴ Adding to these upcoming trends and scholars, Newell provides several first descriptive works stemming from a more comprehensive and actively ongoing Mexican Consejo Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnología Federal Research Project that aim to research and report upon the contents and nature of the Ocozocoautla, San Fernando, Copainalá, and Tuxtla carnivals, both through visual and narrative illustration.⁴⁵ Flores Martínez and Newell follow with a material-centered analysis and description in the footsteps of Zoque natives and San Fernando residents Edwin Gutiérrez Gallegos and Karla Roblero Velázquez, who, like San Fernando-based social anthropologist Gustavo Anza, have written useful and first descriptive works on the San Fernando carnival.⁴⁶

An older generation of writers on carnival exists before the more recent and often more multivocally oriented works. The previous writers provide interpretatively interesting scholarship. Their works, however, tend to be shorter, more general, and generalizing, limiting themselves in scope. Miguel Lisbona Guillén penned several early descriptive works on the Ocozocoautla carnival, either as a single author or as a co-author with Carlos Uriel del Carpio Penagos.⁴⁷ He states, however, that carnival is a complex topic requiring in-depth study and much fieldwork, none of which he reports he completed to his own satisfaction. Carlos Uriel del Carpio Penagos argues the same, though it must be noted that he provides several first-of-a-kind informative reports on Zoque (Copainalá) and Maya carnivals (Tila).⁴⁸ In this same generation, Carolina Rivera Farfán wrote about the San Fernando carnival and compared it to the Ocozocoautla carnival.⁴⁹ She seems to have arrived largely at the topic of Zoque carnival as part of examination of other themes, however, much like Lisbona Guillén, who began his career in the Zoque area examining social structure and religion. Important contributions to a general body of emerging scholarship on Zoque carnivals are the recordings of the traditional music of the Tuxtla Zoques by Puertarbor and the work by Sergio de la Cruz Vázquez on the Tuxtla Zoque

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ritual calendar.⁵⁰ Together with the Rodríguez León et al. ethnography, a vivid picture of parts of the life and culture of the Tuxtla Zoque can now emerge. More in-depth work is necessary on San Fernando, Ocozocoautla de Espinosa, Ocotepec, Tuxtla, Copainalá, and other as yet undescribed carnivals of the Zoque area. It is simply unbelievable that virtually no written material exists to date on the Copainalá and Tapalapa carnivals. It is important to remember that Chiapas is an extremely young area institutionally speaking and that one can hardly speak of a defined Zoque field of study: most work still takes place on the thesis and exploratory level. Hopefully, a new generation of both Zoque and non-Zoque scholars will bring about necessary changes and provide depth and scope in developing not only a productive area of study, but also the necessary documentary evidence and to encourage and facilitate the survival of the Zoque peoples, their ways of life, their celebrations and spirituality, their language, and most of all, their carnivals, into the future.

Carlos Anthuan Hernandez Zaragoza's thesis work on Copainalá traditional music and musician "uncle" Luis Hernandez is an important example to follow in this respect: his documentation efforts are not only thorough and sensitive, but entail all of the indispensable community permissions and intergenerational collaborative efforts. It is important that local and native students involve themselves in these works as identity and survival are always constructed locally, intergenerationally, and communally.

Primary Sources

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Carnival is a complex social expression of an intangible nature; it features multiple and predominantly experience-based cultural dimensions. The Zoque carnivals take place in a place and context where colonialism (European, internal, and later postcolonial) has wreaked havoc upon existing social contexts in several significant ways, not the least of which concerns the documentary record. Archives in Chiapas have been, and are still upon occasion being burnt purposefully, or accidentally, at various pivotal historical points in time, sometimes even for no apparent reason. Moguel Villatoro, reporting on a more or less recent research project that aimed to carry out the very first preservation diagnosis on twenty-five Zoque municipios, explains that of the twenty-six archives that were located in nineteen municipios, virtually all existed in poor states of conservation, citing spores, humidity, rodents, and dirt as the major culprits; they also exhibited varying degrees of disorganization, with the exception of civil registries that were in acceptable order.⁵¹ The remaining six civil registries, eighteen ecclesiastic archives, and twenty-two municipal archives were never located, either due to a lack of accessibility or to a lack of interest on behalf of the corresponding authorities. The tropical climate of Chiapas is not favorable toward documents of any kind. Moreover, colonial documentation was either sent to Guatemala, of which Chiapas formed a part, or to Spain or Rome. Virtually nothing stayed safely in Chiapas, making colonial primary documents as well as primary historical records rarities in the area. Moguel Villatoro calls for more historical research and researchers for the Zoque area, and identifies several productive avenues with which to start: the ecclesiastic archives of Cintalapa, Copainalá, Tapalapa, Tapilula, and Tecpatan, as these in some cases still date to the earliest dates of religious indoctrination in the area. Research in the Archivo General de Centro América in Guatemala City, the Archivo General de la Nación in Mexico City, the Archivo Histórico Diocesano de San Cristóbal de las Casas, Archivo Histórico del Estado, and in private collections such as those of Frans Blom, Alfonso Villa Rojas, Norman Thomas, Thomas A. Lee Whiting Jr., Carlos Navarette, Jan de Vos, Félix Baéz-Jorge, Dolores Aramoni, Laureano Reyes Gómez, Andrés Fabregas Puig and Miguel Lisbona Guillen, undoubtedly will yield results on the Zoque peoples in general, albeit little precisely on Zoque carnivals. Carnival and other celebrations have always been seen, and to a certain extent seem still to be seen as rather frivolous celebrations, not ones of which official or nonofficial notice were or are taken. A rudimentary search in four principal newspapers in Chiapas for newspaper articles on carnival published in the 1980s and 1990s in 2015, for example, yielded little of convincing substance, suggesting that carnival is not only an overlooked and ephemeral topic of research, but also is one that is both purposefully ignored and mythicized.⁵²

Examples of known primary documents that speak about the Zoque people and some of “their idolatry,” described mostly by colonial priests, are:

- *La Relación de Ocozocoautla*; found by Carlos Navarette in the private collections of Frans Blom and published as “La relacion de Ocozocoautla, Chiapas,” *Tlalocan* 5(4) (1968): 368–373.

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- *Arte Breve y Vocabulario de la lengua Tzoque* published in 1672 or 1652 by Fray Luis Gonzalez and reproduced and printed by La Grasserie in 1898.
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Links to Digital Materials

Audiovisual Archive “Carnaval Zoque”

Tequio Mequé: Comida Zoque en Tuxtla Gutiérrez Chiapas

Music and Celebrations Zoques of Tuxtla, Chiapas, ¡Viva el mequé! Recordings.

¡Jule, jule! El carnaval coiteco, Chiapas, 2014-2016 *Te´ore ejtzangi´mä Piku kubgyubä*.

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Notes:

(1.) Julio Caro Baroja, *El Carnaval* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 2006); Roberto Da Matta, *Carnavales, Malandros y Héroes: hacia una Sociología del Dilema Brasileño* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2002); and Bulmaro Villarruel Velasco, *El Carnaval de la Capital* (Mexico City: Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana-Xochimilco, 2016).

(2.) In the name of Saturnus, the god of agriculture, a public sacrifice, a public banquet, and gift exchanges among the people took place. The celebration is believed to have taken place for seven days, centering around what is today Christmas, December 25th. The processions undertaken by the slaves (with permission of their owners) are understood as having had certain parallels with carnival, explaining the linkage. Lupercalia celebrations are thought to have taken place on the 15th of February and are associated with the herder deity Faunus; they celebrated fecundity as well as purification. A ritual offering was made at the beginning of the celebration in a cave on the Palatine Hill, which was believed to have been the cave where Lupa, the she-wolf, suckled Romulus and Remus, founder twins of Rome. Both celebrations undoubtedly provided important preexisting steps for subsequent carnival celebrations. For further reading, see José Guillén, *Urbs Roma. Vida y Costumbres de los Romanos III. Religión y Ejército* (Salamanca: Ediciones Sigueme, 1994).

(3.) Caro Baroja, *El Carnaval*, 13-26.

(4.) Max Harris, *Sacred Folly: A New History of the Feast of Fools* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011).

(5.) Da Matta, *Carnavales, Malandros y Héroes*.

(6.) Richard D. E. Burton, *Afrocreole. Power, Opposition, and Play in the Caribbean* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997).

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(7.) Carlos Uriel del Carpio Penagos and Miguel Lisbona Guillén, "El carnaval zoque de Ocoatepec: Registro etnográfico y comentarios," in *Estudios del patrimonio cultural de Chiapas*, ed. Alejandro Sheseña Hernández, Sophia Pincemin Deliberos, and Carlos Uriel del Carpio Penagos, 249–272 (Tuxtla Gutiérrez: Universidad de Ciencias y Artes de Chiapas, 2008); Carlos Uriel del Carpio, "Notas sobre los ch'oles y el carnaval de Tila," in *Memoria del encuentro de intelectuales Chiapas-Guatemala*, 43–57 (Tuxtla Gutiérrez: Gobierno del Estado de Chiapas, 1990); Petul Hernández Guzmán, *Carnaval de Tenejapa. Una comunidad tzeltal de Chiapas* (Mexico City: Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social, 2006); Andrés Medina Hernández, "El carnaval de Tenejapa," *Anales del Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia* 12 (1964): 323–341; Gillian E. Newell, "Cinco Carnavales Zoques: Una mirada fotográfica exhibida en diez lonas," in *Patrimonio, Territorio y Buen Vivir: Una mirada desde el Sur*, ed. José Luis Sulvarán López and Miguel Sánchez Álvarez, 85–106 (San Cristóbal de las Casas: Universidad Intercultural de Chiapas, 2017); Gillian E. Newell, *¡Jule, jule! El carnaval coiteco 2014–2016. Te'ore ejtzangi'mä Piku kubgyubä* (Tuxtla Gutiérrez: Universidad de Ciencias y Artes de Chiapas, 2018); Jaime Torres Burguete and Cecilia Alba Villalobos, "El Carnaval de Chenalhó," in *Estudios del patrimonio cultural de Chiapas*, ed. Alejandro Sheseña Hernández, Sophia Pincemin Deliberos, and Carlos Uriel Del Carpio Penagos, 209–224 (Tuxtla Gutiérrez: Universidad de Ciencias y Artes de Chiapas, 2008); and Haydée Quiroz Malca, *El carnaval en México. Abanico de culturas* (Mexico City: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 2002).

(8.) Jacques Derrida, "Differance," *Margins of Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982); Leiba Faier and Lisa Rofel, "Ethnographies of Encounter," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 43 (2014): 363–377; Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973); and Marcel Mauss, "Essai sur le don: Forme et raison de l'échange dans les sociétés primitives," *l'Année Sociologique, seconde série*, 1923–1924.

(9.) Miguel Lisbona Guillén, "Un carnaval inventado. El disfraz de lo Zoque en el Chiapas contemporáneo," *Revista de museología KOOT* 3, no. 4 (2013): 103–115; and Carlos de Oro, "Las paradojas de la preservación de las tradiciones del carnaval de Barranquilla en medio del mercantilismo, la globalización y el desarrollo cultural," *Revista Brasileira do Caribe* 10, no. 20 (2010): 401–422.

(10.) Leiba Faier and Lisa Rofel, "Ethnographies of Encounter," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 43 (2014): 363–377; Umberto Eco, *Signo, Traducido por Francisco Serra Cantarell* (Colombia: Letra E, 1994); and Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967).

(11.) Donald B. Cordry and Dorothy M. Cordry, *Trajes y tejidos de los indios zoques de Chiapas* (Mexico City: Miguel Ángel Porrúa/Gobierno del Estado de Chiapas, 1988 [1944]); Puertarbor Producciones Culturales, *¡Viva el Mequé! Zoques de Tuxtla. Música y celebraciones* (Tuxtla Gutiérrez: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes and Fondo

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Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 2013); and field interviews, 2014–2018, research project “Carnaval Zoque: la naturaleza presente en la tradición y modernidad en Chiapas,” CONACyT-Facultad de Humanidades, UNICACH, Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Mexico.

(12.) Lyle Campbell and Terrence Kaufman, “A Linguistic Look at the Olmec,” *American Antiquity* 41, no. 1 (1976): 80–96; Miguel Lisbona Guillén, *En Tierra Zoque: Ensayos para Leer una Cultura* (Mexico City: Consejo Estatal para la Cultura y las Artes de Chiapas, 2000, 17–38); “reubicados,” or relocated Zoque communities, can be found in the non-Zoque municipios of Acala, Chiapa de Corzo, Ocosingo, Simojovel, Villaflores, and Benemérito de las Américas in Chiapas, as well as in Guadalajara, Chihuahua, and Cancun further north in the Mexican Republic. Dominguez Rueda, in an excellent ethnography, comments upon a community growing in Boston as well. For further reading on relocated communities, consult the following: Marina Alonso Bolaños, “‘Somos otros, pero recordamos de dónde venimos como zoques’: aproximaciones a las generaciones post-erupción y sus dinámicas regionales,” *Entre Diversidades. Revista de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades* 4 (2015): 59–82; Fortino Domínguez Rueda, *La comunidad transgredida: los zoques en Guadalajara* (Guadalajara: Unidad de Apoyo a las Comunidades Indígenas de la Universidad de Guadalajara, 2013); Miguel Lisbona Guillén, “Olvidados del neozapatismo: los zoques chiapanecos,” *Estudios sociológicos* 24, no. 2 (2006): 305–330; on the explosion of the Chichon volcano, see Félix Baéz-Jorge, *De Cuando ardió el cielo y se quemó la tierra: Condiciones socioeconómicas sanitarias de los pueblos zoques afectados por la erupción del volcán Chichonal* (Mexico City: Instituto Nacional Indígena, 1985); and Laureano Reyes Gomez, *Los zoques del Volcán* (Mexico City: Comisión Nacional para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas, 2007).

(13.) Eliseo Linares Villanueva, “La región zoque de Chiapas y Tuxtla Gutiérrez en la época prehispánica,” in *Zoques de Tuxtla*, ed. Roberto Ramos Maza, 59–100 (Tuxtla Gutiérrez: Instituto de Cultura y Arte de Tuxtla, 2017); and Lisbona Guillén, *En tierra zoque: ensayos para leer una cultura*, 17–38.

(14.) Hugo Rodríguez Díaz, *El inframundo zoque: estudios de incensarios procedentes de cuevas del Occidente de Chiapas*. Unpublished licenciatura thesis (Chiapa de Corzo: Escuela de Arqueología, Universidad de Ciencias y Artes de Chiapas, 2016).

(15.) Instituto Nacional de Lenguas Indígenas, *Indicadores básicos de la agrupación zoque, 2010. Estimación del INALI con base en los datos del Censo de Población y Vivienda, INEGI, 2010* (Mexico City: Instituto Nacional de Lenguas Indígenas, 2018).

(16.) See Ortiz Herrera for a detailed explanation of the complexities surrounding Zoque language loss in the Zoque area: María del Rocio Ortiz Herrera, *Lengua e historia entre los zoques de Chiapas: Costellanización, desplazamiento y permanencia de la lengua zoque en la vertiente del Mezcalapa y el corazón zoque de Chiapas (1870–1940)* (Zamora and Tuxtla Gutiérrez: Colegio de Michoacan and Universidad de Ciencias y Artes de Chiapas, 2012).

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(17.) Alfonso Villa Rojas, "Configuración cultural de la región de Chiapas," in *Los zoques de Chiapas*, ed. Alfonso Villa Rojas, José M Velasco Toro, Félix Báez-Jorge, Francisco Córdoba, and Norman D. Thomas, 13–42 (Mexico City: Instituto Nacional Indigenista, 1975).

(18.) Félix Báez-Jorge, "La cosmovisión de los zoques de Chiapas: Reflexiones sobre su pasado y su presente," in *Antropología e historia de los mixe-zoque y mayas*, ed. Jose Luis Lorenzo Ochoa and Thomas A. Lee Jr., 383–411 (Mexico City and Provo, UT: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México and Brigham Young University Press, 1983); Laureano Reyes Gómez, *Introducción a la medicina zoque. una aproximación etnolingüística* (San Cristóbal de las Casas: Universidad Autónoma de Chiapas, 1988); and Norman Thomas, *Envidia, brujería y organización ceremonial: un pueblo zoque* (Mexico City: Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1974).

(19.) Alfonso Villa Rojas, "Notas sobre los zoques de Chiapas, México," *América Indígena* 33, no. 4 (1973): 487–524; Alfonso Villa Rojas, "Configuración cultural de la región de Chiapas," in *Los zoques de Chiapas*, ed. Alfonso Villa Rojas, José M Velasco Toro, Félix Báez-Jorge, Francisco Córdoba, and Norman D. Thomas, 13–42 (Mexico City: Instituto Nacional Indigenista, 1975); and José M. Velasco Toro, "Perspectiva histórica," in *Los zoques de Chiapas*, ed. Alfonso Villa Rojas, José M Velasco Toro, Félix Báez-Jorge, Francisco Córdoba, and Norman D. Thomas, 43–151 (Mexico: Instituto Nacional Indigenista, 1975).

(20.) Dolores Aramoni Calderon, *Los refugios de lo sagrado: religiosidad, conflicto y resistencia entre los zoques de Chiapas* (Mexico City: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 1992).

(21.) Margarita Nolasco Armas, "Chiapas indígena," in *Los pueblos indígenas de Chiapas: Atlas etnográfico*, ed. Margarita Nolasco Armas, 15–22 (Mexico City: Gobierno del Estado de Chiapas y Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 2008); and Margarita Nolasco Armas, "Ser indio en Chiapas: la condición indígena en el siglo XX," in *Los pueblos indígenas de Chiapas: Atlas Etnográfico*, ed. Margarita Nolasco, 81–89 (Tuxtla Gutiérrez: Gobierno del Estado y Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 2008).

(22.) Jan de Vos, *El Sentimiento Chiapaneco: Ensayo sobre la independencia de Chiapas y su agregación a México* (Tuxtla Gutiérrez: Colegio de Estudios Científicos y Tecnológicos del Estado de Chiapas, 1998).

(23.) Jan De Vos, *Vienen de lejos los torrentes: Una historia de Chiapas* (Tuxtla Gutiérrez: Colegio de Estudios Científicos y Tecnológicos del Estado de Chiapas, 2010), 263–279.

(24.) Rosalva Aída Hernández Castillo, "Invención de tradiciones: encuentros y desencuentros de la población mame con el indigenismo mexicano," in *Anuario 1994*, ed. Centro de Estudios de México y Centroamérica, 146–171 (Tuxtla Gutiérrez: Universidad de Ciencias y Artes de Chiapas, 1995).

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(25.) Félix Báez-Jorge, "La cosmovisión de los zoques de Chiapas: Reflexiones sobre su pasado y su presente," 384–386.

(26.) Five Zoque dialectical subareas are identified by Wonderly and the Instituto Nacional de Lenguas Indígenas, with the following self-designations: (1) the *Tsuni* of the Central Zoque area with Copainalá, Ostuacán, and Tecpatán municipios; (2) the *Ode* of the Northeast Zoque area with municipios Ixhuatán, Ocotepec, Tapilula, Pantepec, Rayón, and Tapalapa; (3) the *Ore* of the northeast Zoque area with municipios Amatlán, Chapultenango, Ixtacomitán, Juárez, Pichucalco, Reforma, Solosuchiapa, and Jitotol; (4) the *Ote* of the Northern Zoque area in the municipio of Francisco León; and (5) those without a self-designation for having lost the language in the southern Zoque area with the municipios of Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Ocozocoautla de Espinosa, and San Fernando. For further reading, see the following: William Wonderly, "Some zoquean phonemic and morphophonemic correspondences," *International Journal of American Linguistics* 15 (1949): 1–11; and *Catálogo de las Lenguas Indígenas Nacionales: Variantes lingüísticas de México con sus autodenominaciones y referencias geoestadísticas* (Instituto Nacional de Lenguas Indígenas 2009), 296–299.

(27.) Fermín Delesma Domínguez, "Tierras zoques de Chiapas. Enclave de la defensa nacional," *Ojarasca de La Jornada* April 14 (2017): 240.

(28.) Donald B. Cordry and Dorothy M. Cordry, *Trajés y tejidos de los indios zoques de Chiapas, México, traducido por Andres Fabregas-Puig* (Tuxtla Gutiérrez: Gobierno del Estado de Chiapas, 1988).

(29.) Susana Villasana Benitez, *La organizacion social de los zoques de Tapalapa, Chiapas. Un analisis de la identidad socio-cultural* (San Cristóbal de las Casas: Universidad Autónoma de Chiapas, 1988).

(30.) 82,059 inhabitants; *Jave-pagcuay* means those who fight with pedernal stones; Marcela Loi Denti, *El ciclo de Carnaval en Ocozocoautla de Espinosa, Chiapas: Pastores, reyes, bufones y cohuinás*, unpublished master's thesis (Mexico City: Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, Instituto de Investigaciones Antropológicas, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2009); Newell, *¡Jule, jule! El carnaval coiteco 2014–2016. Te´ore ejtzangi´mä Piku kubgyubä*; Newell, "Cinco Carnavales Zoques: Una mirada fotográfica exhibida en diez lonas," in *Patrimonio, Territorio y Buen Vivir: Una mirada desde el Sur*, ed. José Luis Sulvarán López and Miguel Sánchez Álvarez, 85–106 (San Cristóbal de las Casas: Universidad Intercultural de Chiapas, 2017); Newell, "Reflexiones en torno a un significado del carnaval de Ocozocoautla de Espinosa, Chiapas," *Anuario 2012*, ed. Centro de Estudios Superiores de México y Centroamérica, 170–198 (Tuxtla Gutiérrez: Universidad de Ciencias y Artes de Chiapas, 2013); Jorge Alberto Noriega Rocha, *Contribución al reconocimiento de las cofradías como parte del patrimonio cultural zoque* (Ocozocoautla de Espinosa: Artes Gráficas, 2010); and Carolina Rivera Farfán, "El carnaval de Ocozocoautla," *Revista del Consejo* 5 (1991): 27–32.

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(31.) Dolores Aramoni Calderón, “La cowiná zoque, nuevos enfoques de análisis,” in *Cultura y etnicidad zoque*, ed. Dolores Aramoni Calderón, Thomas A. Lee, and Miguel Lisbona Guillén, 97–103 (Tuxtla Gutiérrez: Universidad de Ciencias y Artes de Chiapas and Universidad Autónoma de Chiapas, 1998).

(32.) A pointed hat of conical form associated with doing penitence in the Catholic tradition. Originally associated with the Spanish Inquisition, the capirote was used to cover one’s face when performing penance and signifies, thus, public humiliation.

(33.) 30,060 inhabitants; *Shahuipac* means place of the monkeys; Gustavo Anza Jiménez, *San Fernando: Historia y actualidad una mirada transcultural* (Tuxtla Gutiérrez: Editorial Fray Bartolomé de las Casas, 2014); Jorge Eduardo Flores Martínez and Gillian E. Newell, “Primeras notas de campo sobre la elaboración y uso del ixtle (ishtli) como elemento principal en la preparación del traje del tigre y shures en el Carnaval de San Fernando, Chiapas,” *Pobacma* 4, no. 2 (2015): 49–63; Edwin Gutiérrez Gallegos and Karla Ivonne Roblero Velázquez, *Danzas y Símbolos: Conflictos étnicos en el carnaval de San Fernando, Chiapas* (unpublished licenciatura thesis, San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas: Facultad de Ciencias Sociales, Universidad Autónoma de Chiapas, 2014); and Carolina Rivera Farfan and Thomas Lee, “El carnaval de San Fernando Chiapas: los motivos zoques de continuidad milenaria,” in *Anuario 1990*, ed. Centro de Estudios Superiores de México y Centroamérica, 119–154 (Tuxtla Gutiérrez: Universidad de Ciencias y Artes de Chiapas, 1991).

(34.) Victoria Reifler Bricker, *El cristo indígena, el rey nativo. El sustrato histórico de la mitología del ritual de los mayas* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1989).

(35.) 500,000 inhabitants; *Coyatoc* and the Nuhua *Tuchtlan* mean place of the rabbit.

(36.) Juan Ramón Álvarez Vázquez, *Te’ Hatajamaetzé. La Danza del Carnaval. Patrimonio Histórico-cultural de los zoques de Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Chiapas* (unpublished licenciatura thesis, Jalapa, Veracruz: Universidad Veracruzana, Facultad de Antropología Histórica, 2010); Sergio de la Cruz Vázquez, *Calendario festivo de la Mayordomía zoque de Tuxtla* (Mexico City: Comisión Nacional para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas, 2017); Félix León Rodríguez, Gustavo Ruíz Pascacio, Omar López Espinosa, and Omar Zea Chávez, *Los Zoques de Tuxtla: Como son muchos dichos, muchas palabras, muchas memorias* (Tuxtla Gutiérrez: Consejo Estatal para las Culturas y Artes de Chiapas, 2007); and Puertarbor, *¡Viva el Mequé! Zoques de Tuxtla. Música y celebraciones*.

(37.) 6,550 inhabitants; *Copainalá* means “place where the snakes run,” whereas *Pokiø’mø* refers to the “place where one descends running.”

(38.) Newell, “Cinco Carnavales Zoques: Una mirada fotográfica exhibida en diez lonas.”

(39.) Faier and Rofel, “Ethnographies of Encounter,” 363–377.

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- (40.) Juan Pedro Viqueira, "La otra bibliografía sobre los indígenas de Chiapas," *Nuevo Mundo Mundos Nuevos*. [En línea] *Bibliografías*, 2002; and Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*.
- (41.) León Rodríguez et al., *Los Zoques de Tuxtla: Como son muchos dichos, muchas palabras, muchas memorias*.
- (42.) Juan Ramón Álvarez Vázquez, *Te' Hatajamaetzé. La Danza del Carnaval. Patrimonio Histórico-cultural de los zoques de Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Chiapas*.
- (43.) Loi Denti, *El ciclo de Carnaval en Ocozocoautla de Espinosa, Chiapas: Pastores, reyes, bufones y cohuinás*.
- (44.) Noriega Rocha, *Contribución al reconocimiento de las cofradías como parte del patrimonio cultural zoque*.
- (45.) Newell, *¡Jule, jule! El carnaval coiteco 2014-2016. Te'ore ejtzangi'mä Piku kubgyubä*; Newell, "Cinco Carnavales Zoques: Una mirada fotográfica exhibida en diez lonas," 85-106; and Newell, "Reflexiones en torno a un significado del carnaval de Ocozocoautla de Espinosa, Chiapas," 170-198.
- (46.) Flores Martínez and Newell, "Primeras notas de campo sobre la elaboración y uso del ixtle (*ishtli*) como elemento principal en la preparación del traje del tigre y shures en el carnaval de San Fernando, Chiapas," 49-63; Gutiérrez Gallegos and Roblero Velázquez, *Danzas y Símbolos: Conflictos étnicos en el carnaval de San Fernando, Chiapas*; and Gustavo Anza Jiménez, *San Fernando: Historia y actualidad una mirada transcultural*.
- (47.) Miguel Lisbona Guillén, "La fiesta del carnaval de Ocozocoautla. Una discusión en torno a las transformaciones rituales y la identidad étnica," in *Anuario 1994*, de Centro de Estudios Superiores de México y Centroamérica, 194-218 (San Cristóbal de las Casas: Universidad de Ciencias y Artes de Chiapas, 1995); and Carlos Uriel del Carpio Penagos and Miguel Lisbona Guillén, "El carnaval zoque de Ocozocoautla: Registro etnográfico y comentarios."
- (48.) Carlos Uriel del Carpio, "Exploración etnográfica en el área zoque de Chiapas," in *Anuario 1990*, ed. Centro de Estudios Superiores de México y Centroamérica, 84-118 (Tuxtla Gutiérrez: Universidad de Ciencias y Artes de México, 1991); and Carlos Uriel del Carpio, "Notas sobre los ch'oles y el carnaval de Tila," in *Memoria del encuentro de intelectuales Chiapas-Guatemala*, 43-57 (Tuxtla Gutiérrez: Gobierno del Estado de Chiapas, 1990).
- (49.) Carolina Rivera Farfan and Thomas Lee, "El carnaval de San Fernando Chiapas: los motivos zoques de continuidad milenaria," in *Anuario 1990*, ed. Centro de Estudios Superiores de México y Centroamérica, 119-154 (Tuxtla Gutiérrez: Universidad de Ciencias y Artes de Chiapas, 1991); and Carolina Rivera Farfan and Thomas Lee, "El carnaval de Ocozocoautla," *Revista del Consejo* 5 (1991): 27-32.

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(50.) Puertarbor, *¡Viva el Mequé!*; and De la Cruz, *Calendario festivo de la Mayordomía zoque de Tuxtla*.

(51.) Henry Moguel Villatoro, "Diagnóstico y propuestas para el rescate de los archivos municipales de la antigua provincia zoque de Chiapas," *POBACMA* 4, no. 1 (2015): 35–45.

(52.) Unpublished Social Service Research Report by Licenciatura en Arqueología de la Universidad de Ciencias y Artes de Chiapas student Adriana Gómez Espinosa, June 2015 (in possession of the author).

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