

THE INDIGENOUS DRAMA OF MESO-AMERICA

Thesis for the Degree of Ph. D.

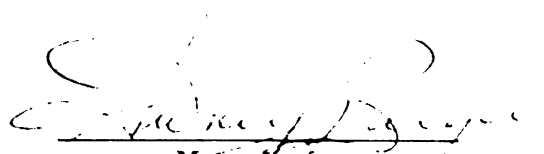
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ABSTRACT

THE INDIGENOUS DRAMA OF MESO-AMERICA

By Richard E. Leinaweaver

In the sixteenth century, two great cultures fell to the Spanish sword and torch in Middle America--the Aztec of Mexico and the Mayan of Yucatan and Guatemala. In art, architecture, astronomy and mathematics, these cultures were so advanced as to make the conquering Spaniards gaze in wonder. The social organization, the ritual, the symbolism were all so rich, complex and varied that it is inconceivable that the Mayas and Aztecs would not have developed a form of theatrical expression. This study attempts to collect the evidence of, and to determine the precise nature of this indigenous theatrical expression.

With the beginning premise that Primitive Drama and Ritual Drama have origins in religious expression, or at least in the same human impulse and expression that also manifests itself in formal religion, several chapters are devoted to an analysis of "Primitive" drama. Further,

four developmental categories of Ritual Drama are hypothesized, to the end of placing indigenous Indian theatrical forms into these various stages of development.

An essentially anthropological methodology has been used, consisting of the examination of sculpture, architecture, painting, artifacts, Indian manuscripts and the perusal of the many volumes written by sixteenth century Spaniards. Also considered were later accounts of Indian groups which were isolated from the Spanish acculturation process. Such was the case with the Abbé Brasseur de Bourbourg who in 1850 transcribed a French translation of the Mayan Rabinal Achí, the only extant major theatrical work of indigenous Middle America; the first English translation of Rabinal Achí appears in Appendix I.

In the major Middle American population centers, the Indian theatrical penchant was almost immediately channeled into the Medieval Miracle and Morality play. By admission of the friars themselves, the transition was an easy one. The basic premise of the existence of a theatrical tradition among the natives of Middle America is unchallenged.

This study gathers the visual, physical evidence in support of an indigenous theatrical expression and tradition. Masks, costumes, makeup, settings and stages are discussed and illustrated in drawings and photographs.

Descriptions of the ceremonies of blood sacrifice are analyzed for their theatrical elements. Dramatic literature is considered as far as scanty evidence and material will allow.

The native rituals and Ritual Dramas are analysed according to the author's four categories of Primitive and Ritual Drama. Finally, it is hyopthesized that the Rabinal Achí is the end form into which the various indigenous ritual and Ritual Dramatic forms would have developed.

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By

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wife, without whose help, this work might never have been completed.

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To my wife, without whose help, patience,
and impatience this work might never have
been completed.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to describe the drama and ritual-drama of those Middle American indigenous tribes which had attained a high cultural level, principally the Mayan cultures of Yucatan and Guatemala and the Nahua (Aztec) culture which dominated Central Mexico at the time of the conquest.

In the Petén area of Southern Mexico and Guatemala, a flourishing Mayan civilization of cities and great stone ceremonial centers flowered while the barbarians were overrunning the Roman Empire. The Mayans had developed the concept of zero before the Arabs brought it to Europe, and had a calendar system more accurate than the Gregorian. The Aztecs of the Mexican Central Highlands were a warrior race; but as they conquered, they assimilated much of the art, architecture, and ceremony of those they vanquished. They had been masters of Mexico less than two hundred years when Cortés and his ragged band of conquistadores came, saw, conquered and virtually obliterated the Aztec nation.

These two American cultures were the flower of the Western hemisphere, and were in many ways more advanced than Medieval Europe at the start of the Renaissance. Their art was formalistic and heavily stylistic. Their architects built structures of such great size and elaborateness as was thought impossible without use of the true arch. Their ritual too was elaborate and intricate. Each twenty-day month had a festival, and many of these contained highly dramatized ritual. In the course of his monumental compilation of Nahuatl (Aztec) literature, Angel Maria Garibay writes:

By simple deduction of analogy we could accept the existence of Aztec dramatic poetry; for where there is lyric poetry, and where the age has such complex and grandiose manifestations, the drama cannot be absent.¹

There are indications that they were on the verge of developing true drama, separate from ritual, when the entire process was arrested by the Spanish Conquest. To collect evidence of, and to determine the precise nature of this Ritual Drama is the purpose of this study.

Precedent

In spite of the recent shift in scholarly emphasis from the historical "facts" of wars, conquest, and dictatorships to the economic and social aspects of Middle

¹Angel Maria Garibay K., Historia de la Literatura Nahuatl (2 Vols.; Mexico, D.F.: Editorial Borras, S.A., 1953), I, p. 331.

America, the drama, and particularly indigenous drama, has still been somewhat neglected. There exists no major study of this topic alone, no detailed or thorough research strictly from the dramatic viewpoint.

Among theatre studies there are Antonio Magaña Esquivel and Ruth Lamb's Breve Historia del Teatro Mexicana,² Rodolfo Usigli's Mexico en el Teatro,³ J. Luis Trenti Rocamora's El Teatro en la America Colonial⁴ and Willis Knapp Jones' Behind Spanish American Footlights⁵ all of whom include an initial chapter on the "Indigenous Heritage" to what is afterward treated as Spanish-American Theatre. A recent work which contains much material valuable to this study is Samuel Martí and Gertrude Kurath's Dances of Anáhuac⁶ which, although it treats of "the choreography and music of Precortesian Dances", occasionally parallels this study when speaking of the dramatic aspects of many of the dances.

²Antonio Magaña Esquivel and Ruth Lamb, Breve Historia del Teatro Mexicana (Mexico, D.F.: Ediciones de Andrea, 1958).

³Rodolfo Usigli, Mexico en el Teatro (Mexico, D.F.: Imprenta Mundial, 1932).

⁴J. Luis Trenti Rocamora, El Teatro en la America Colonial (Buenos Aires: Editorial Huarpes, S.A., 1947).

⁵Willis Knapp Jones, Behind Spanish American Footlights (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1966).

⁶Samuel Martí and Gertrude Kurath, Dances of Anáhuac (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Co., 1964).

Several works on the origins of theatre and on primitive drama give significant, though very cursory treatment of Aztec Ritual Drama. Noteworthy among these are Loomis Havemeyer's The Drama of Savage Peoples,⁷ William Ridgeway's The Dramas and Dramatic Dances of Non-European Races,⁸ Sir George Frazer's The Golden Bough⁹ and Ivor Brown's First Player.¹⁰ Each of these works alludes briefly to the existence of indigenous American theatricals, but the subject is generally slighted in a large number of accompanying examples of deeper interest to the author. None discusses the Aztec drama in any depth, and thorough examination yields no mention, beyond the author's speculation of probability, of Mayan Ritual Drama.

Anthropologists and sociologists, however, are generally very thorough in observing and noting the complete spectrum of sociological phenomena. Therefore, surviving forms of ritual or theatrical expression among both integrated and isolated Indian groups are included. Among the best of these works are Rafael Girard's

⁷Loomis Havemeyer, The Drama of Savage Peoples (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1916).

⁸William Ridgeway, The Dramas and Dramatic Dances of Non-European Races (Cambridge: University Press, 1915).

⁹Sir James George Frazer, The Golden Bough (New York: MacMillan Co., 1960).

¹⁰Ivor Brown, First Player: The Origin of Drama (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1928).

Los Mayos Eternos¹¹ and Una Obra Maestra del Teatro Maya,¹²
 Eric Wolf's Sons of the Shaking Earth,¹³ George C.
 Vaillant's The Aztecs of Mexico¹⁴ and J. Eric S. Thompson's
The Rise and Fall of Maya Civilization.¹⁵ But again the
 surface is only touched; conclusions on antiquity and con-
 tinuity of phenomena are more important than interpre-
 tations.

It is of the utmost importance for those engaged
 in meaningful work in the field of theatre to have as
 complete a picture as possible of the origin, the growth
 and the development of drama in all major civilizations of
 the world both past and present. Since the development of
 religion was a major step in the development of civili-
 zation, and since the highly formal and ritualistic drama
 of these cultures again demonstrates the interrelationship
 between the drama and religion, there would seem to be
 justified a major study in this area of theatre history.

¹¹Rafael Girard, Los Mayos Eternos (Mexico, D.F.:
 Libro Mex, 1962).

¹²Rafael Girard, Una Obra Maestra del Teatro Maya
 (Mexico, D.F.: Editorial B. Costa Amic, 1947).

¹³Eric Wolf, Sons of the Shaking Earth (Chicago:
 University of Chicago Press, 1959).

¹⁴George C. Vaillant, The Aztecs of Mexico (New
 York: American Museum of Natural History, 1941).

¹⁵Eric S. Thompson, The Rise and Fall of Maya
 Civilization (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1954).

Sources

The major problem in writing on the indigenous drama of Middle America is a paucity of primary sources. The very wealth and magnificence of the Aztec empire made it a prize too irresistible for the Spanish adventurers. Cortés' letters to the King and Diaz del Castillo's True History repeatedly apologize for the inadequacy of the descriptive and flowery Spanish language to describe the wonders of the scene. Tenochtitlan, the Aztec capital, so impressed Cortés' rude and rustic soldiers, that they willingly risked death for its wealth. And so Tenochtitlan, and the mighty, militaristic Aztec empire were put to fierce and bloody siege and destroyed. Still another apocalyptic institution rode with Cortés to complete the razing of the empire; Renaissance humanism had not yet made itself felt in the still mystic medieval church of Catholic Spain,¹⁶ and the good and simple friars who came to claim souls for Rome found the complex thought and extreme symbolism of the Indian cultures too strange, too unlike the world as it should be. So after Cortés' soldiers had plundered the material empire, the priests plundered the cultural empire.

Since the Indians were pagans, every expression of their art or thought was therefore pagan and had to be

¹⁶Mary Wilhelmine Williams, Ruhl J. Bartlett and Russell E. Miller, The People and Politics of Latin America (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1955), pp. 75-92.

supplanted by the Christian. And so the friars, with but a few fortunate exceptions, burned the books, destroyed the idols, sculpture and paintings, and forbade all rites and ceremonies in any way connected with the pagan past. The persons of the Indians remained, but their complex and cruel but well-ordered universe was no more.

As a result of this very effective purge, we are limited to less than a dozen unquestionably pre-conquest Indian manuscripts; another half dozen or so of these codices, written immediately after the conquest, survive. But these are not without their difficulties; Aztec writing--deciphered for the most part--was beginning the transition from pictographic to glyphic; Maya writing had almost completed the change and, with only deity symbols and calendrical symbols as exceptions, remains largely undeciphered.

Thanks to the recent interest in Indian Art, and the subsequent publication of several well-illustrated volumes on the subject, additional primary sources are available. Reproductions of these, along with a personal collection of pictures of the mural frescoes of temples, scenes painted on pottery, masks, and architectural and sculptural remains, gathered during several trips to Mexico and Yucatan, will aid in creating a total picture of the subject.

Other major sources consist of the observations and written testimony gathered by the sixteenth century

Spanish chroniclers, Bernardino de Sahagún, Bernal Diaz del Castillo, Diego de Landa, Diego Duran, Toribio Benevente Motolinía and Juan de Torquemada, who, in spite of sometimes questionable motives and the definite pre-judgements of missionary zeal, offer volumes of detailed reporting of great worth to this study.

Additional clues will be examined from narratives of mythology such as the Popol Vuh, Book of the Jaguar Priest, Book of Chilam Balam de Chumayel, and the Book of Chilam Balam of Tizimin, which although written by Indian or mestizo scribes in the sixteenth century, contain what was orally transmitted and known verbatim by every Indian priest.

These, along with Angel Maria Garibay's magnificent collection and analyses of Nahuatl Literature taken from the Cantares Mexicanas, Cronica Mexicana and Anales Manuscripts will serve as the major sources of the Prehispanic eras.

Although development of the Mayan and Aztec cultures was to a large degree arrested by the Spanish conquest, many cultural traits and traditions continued, sometimes, --particularly among isolated Maya groups--with virtually no modification, but in other instances, combining with their Spanish counterparts. Therefore, later accounts by such travellers as Thomas Gage and John Lloyd Stephens, and the Abbé Brasseur de Bourbourg trace the survival of indigenous traditions. A translation of Brasseur's

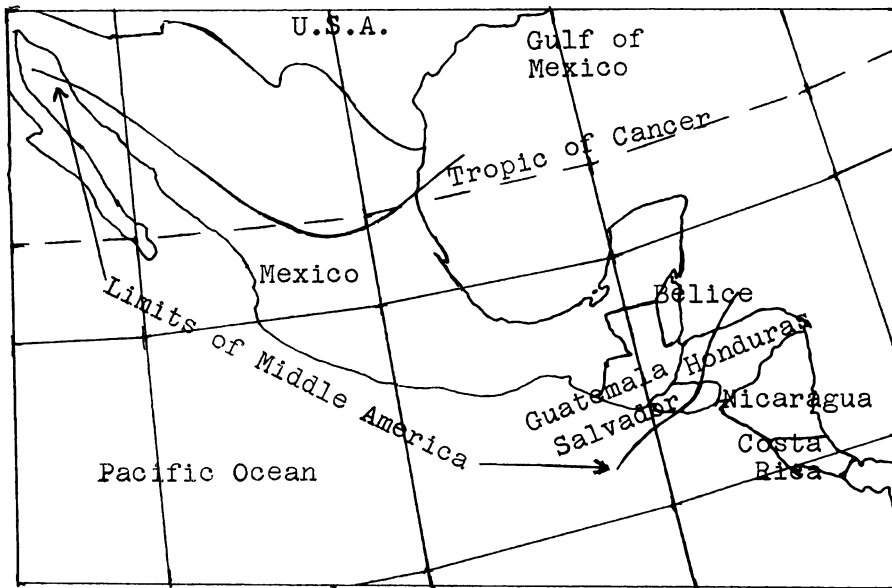


Fig. 1

Map of Middle America, showing present national boundaries and the approximate Northern and Southeastern limits of Middle America; (After Wolf, Sons of the Shaking Earth)

transcription of the Maya dance-drama Rabinal Achi, will be included as an appendix so that the English-speaking reader can, for the first time, avail himself of this exotic form.

Definitions

A few definitions will serve to set the precise limits of this study. "Middle America", or more properly "Meso-America", is a term used in anthropology and sociology to include an area roughly from Nicaragua, north to the northern Mexican deserts. For the purpose of this study, Middle America is further limited on the south by the boundaries of the Mayan culture, that is, to just east of

the present Guatemalan-Honduran border (See Figure 1).

"Indigenous", as applied to drama, simply means those forms developed by, and native to the "Indian" inhabitants of Middle America. Although later, syncretized forms will be considered, their inclusion will be for the purpose of examining surviving indigenous characteristics.

The term "Ritual-Drama", which will occur frequently throughout the work, indicates the areas on either immediate side of a cultural line which occurs when, as Nietzsche says, "The attempt is made to present the god as real and to display the visionary figure together with its aura of splendor before the eyes of all; here the 'drama' . . . begins."¹⁷ Using Jane Harrison's distinction,¹⁸ Ritual-Drama falls between true drama and dromenon, a somewhat theatricalized ritual or ceremony, at a point where ritual is ceasing to be presented, but where it is beginning to represent the "story" or the situation of a deity.

In its advance from simple ritual to true drama, Ritual-Drama goes through several stages of development, as it becomes increasingly complex or as it adds dramatic

¹⁷Friedrich Nietzsche, "The Birth of Tragedy", The Philosophy of Nietzsche, Trans. by Clifton Fadiman (New York: Modern Library, 1954), p. 991.

¹⁸Jane Harrison, Ancient Art and Ritual (New York: Henry Holt, 1913), p. 115.

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elements. To the end of thoroughly understanding the unfamiliar forms and characteristics of Middle-American Ritual-Drama, a discussion of the most popular theories on the origin of drama, examples of Primitive-Drama and several forms of Ritual-Drama will be included and an attempt made to isolate and name several classifications or stages of development. In order to achieve a common frame of reference, this discussion will precede the chapters on Middle America.

This work then is first, a study of the development of the Ritual-Drama of the Middle American Indian; and secondarily, it is a reaffirmation of the causal relationship between religion and religious ritual, to the myriad forms, religious and irreligious, which drama eventually assumes.

CHAPTER II

THEORIES OF THE ORIGIN OF DRAMA

The Indigenous Ritual Drama of Middle America took forms somewhat different from the forms of Mediterranean Ritual Drama which later developed into Occidental Drama. And yet earliest man on this continent, like his counterpart in Eurasia, was first a hunter and gatherer, and slowly progressed through a reliance on agriculture and simple tools to the development of complex social institutions and magnificent achievements in mathematics, astronomy and architecture. During the course of this development certain similarities between Old World and New World ritual and drama appear.

If we are to understand these similarities and differences and gain a perspective of the final point in drama and ceremony at which the Middle American arrived before his culture was so violently uprooted by the Spanish, it is necessary to go back to the early hunter and gatherer and to try to trace the development of his institutional forms.

There is little about which we can be absolutely empirically certain about this early man, either of the Old World or the New. But several complex theories exist

which attempt to trace the evolution of certain human expressions and institutions--Mimesis, Dance, Ritual, Music, and Poetry--into a final dramatic form. Since the earliest well-known and reasonably documented Drama was the Greek, these theories are well larded with classic examples; but, in each case, the intention is to state how Drama, not Greek Drama, originated and developed. It is the purpose of this chapter to examine these theories.

Mimesis

Man is a natural mime. Nor is he particularly distinctive from other complex animals in his proclivity for imitation. In his formative years, most of the things a child learns to do are by imitation. And when he finds spoken language inadequate, he supplements it by mime or pantomime. In fact, when language was in its formative stage, it seems likely that much more mimic accompaniment would be necessary for communication.¹

Primitive man might have taken his first mimetic step in the relating of a tale--how he stalked and killed the deer or how he defeated a foe in combat; and he recreated by imitation his feeling of pride and success

¹For further examples and elaboration on the relationship of communication, imitation and learning, see for example John J. Honigsmann, Understanding Culture (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), pp. 143-163, Ivor Brown, First Player: The Origin of Drama (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1928), pp. 3-13, or virtually any recent study on communication or learning.

and received welcome acknowledgement from his tribal audience. But simple imitation of that which man likes or dislikes cannot long be disassociated from the desire for the things he likes and the fear of, or aversion to, the things he dislikes. When hungry or when wishing to defend his home or hunting ground, he again desires to do these things, his memory recalls the previous successes and he might, through mime, recreate his success--but this time with an important difference. This time he is recreating the situation before the fact; if indeed he succeeds, subsequent contemplation might suggest a causal relationship. Thus simple imitation evolves into a manifestation of aspiration or apprehension--sympathetic magic.²

Sympathetic magic is not yet related to religion; worship is the opposite of magic because it recognizes gods who have the power to say yes or no. Magic means working a known formula to get a known result--like putting a given combination of coins in a machine and therefore receiving a package of cigarettes. "Worship, on the contrary, is filling out an application, perhaps in

²Sir James George Frazer in Chapter III of The Golden Bough (New York: MacMillan Co., 1960), divides sympathetic magic into "Contagious Magic" and "Homeopathic or Imitative Magic"; for our purposes, the less precise term "Sympathetic Magic" refers to the imitative.

triplicate."³

The mimesis of sympathetic magic is serious business. The mime does not mimic a downpour by pouring a can of water on the ground because he appreciates raindrops; "he is not wrapped in aesthetic contemplation. He is acting a downpour because he wants a downpour. The counterfeit has become a charm"⁴ and he no longer considers himself a jester visible only to his tribe; his audience has become the omniscient and controlling deities, and his

. . . primitive acting, like prayer . . . may be defined as the soul's sincere desire--transmuted into sympathetic mimicry. . . . The /primitive/ mime is a mendicant first and an artist afterward.⁵

As man's ability to comprehend the vastness and complexity of his universe increased, so did his fears. And so did his development of the concepts of the supernatural forces and the spirits he hoped might control his universe.

Led astray by his ignorance of the true causes of things, primitive man believed that in order to produce the great phenomena of nature on which his life depended, he had only to imitate them, and that immediately, by a secret sympathy or mystic influence, the little drama which he acted in forest glade or mountain dell, on desert plain or windswept shore, would be taken up and repeated by mightier actors on a vaster stage.⁶

³William Howells, Primitive Man and his Religions (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1962), p. 224.

⁴Brown, p. 5.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Frazer, Vol. II, p. 110.

And so when he wanted rain or food or sunshine, he felt he could best obtain it by acting out his desires. But his most basic concern was with life and death, and what better way was there to assert the will to live, to demand for his dull soul a victory over dark, dumb destruction, than to create and to present his own vivid example of the life cycle--birth, death and resurrection.

The food supply and man's life cycle have something in common; birth, death, and in the case of the plant food supply, rebirth; if there is rebirth in plants, a rebirth of ancestors could account for the unaccountable energies and forces in the universe. These energies and forces (spirits) are for the most part unfriendly to man; if communication could be established with them, if they could be convinced that man's pleas (prayers) were worthy, life would be less hard. If man then finds a mimetic "communication" which by coincidence works, he will perform it again each time it is needed. The "communication" thus becomes a ritual. If it does not succeed, man might rationalize that the ritual was not performed with the necessary exactitude.

Literally, a ritual is any ceremony which is conducted or performed in a prescribed form or manner. A procession is a ritual--it is pre-determined which way it will go, who will follow whom; a hazing is an endurance ritual; kicking the tires of a prospective purchase is a

ritual. All these things, although having no direct causal link to their larger context, are prescribed, pre-ordained and formally performed in a given manner--again and again.

Ritual, however discredited nowadays--and rightly so--remains as the ghostly mother of all the arts, of music, of dancing and the ballet, of the drama, of the poetic myth which accompanies drama, of painting, which brings these things to light on pottery and on the temple walls, of statuary, which represents the gods, of architecture, the first triumph of which was the building of the temple and the altar.⁷

Thus the earliest performers were engaged in the simple business of mimetically, then ritualistically, controlling the universe, of helping the corn to grow, and of defying death, by repeating again and again the ritualized presentation of their desires and needs.

There are two schools of thought on the origins of these dramatic rituals. F. M. Cornford, Jane Ellen Harrison and Gilbert Murray, drawing examples principally from Greece, contend that these rites and festivals are celebrations of the periodicity of nature and are expressions of encouragement and rejoicing to the Spirits of Spring and Fertility. They attempt, by sympathetic magic, to influence the abstract "force" representing fecundity in nature--a possibly anthropomorphized struggle between Winter and Spring, with Spring naturally winning.

⁷Lewis Spence, Myth and Ritual in Dance, Game and Rhyme (London: Watts and Co., 1947), p. 102.

William Ridgeway finds these rites, particularly those which later developed into tragedy, to be coincidental to the vegetation cycle and to be more causally related to the propitiation and veneration of dead heroes and kings in various stages of transition to deity, and thus to man's necessary belief in immortality. In either case, the important idea is that the ceremonies and rites are simple expressions of basic emotions--of felt, but not understood, needs.

Since these early stages of ritual and theatrical development will be considered in some detail in the examination of Middle American drama, an elaboration of the two theories is in order.

Ritual According to the Cambridge School

What has come to be known as the "Cambridge School of Anthropology" developed from the students and colleagues of Sir James George Frazer, principally Jane Ellen Harrison,⁸ Gilbert Murray⁹ and F. M. Cornford.¹⁰ The

⁸Jane Ellen Harrison, Ancient Art and Ritual (2d ed.; New York: Henry Holt, 1927), and Themis (Cambridge: University Press, 1912).

⁹Gilbert Murray, Euripides and His Age (Cambridge: University Press, 1913), and "Excursus on the Ritual Forms Preserved in Greek Tragedy: included in Jane Ellen Harrison, Themis.

¹⁰Frances MacDonald Cornford, The Origin of Attic Comedy (London: Edward Arnold, 1914).

theory is based on the theses of the conjectural development of human thought and institutions contained in Frazer's Golden Bough, in which he strips away all formal or ritual accoutrements and reduces primitive man to his deep concern with fecundity, with the life and death of himself and his food supply.

Murray, in his Excursus on the Ritual Forms Preserved in Greek Tragedy accepts three axioms on which he bases his argument: first, that "Tragedy is in origin a Ritual Dance, a Sacer Ludus . . . [normally representing] . . . the Aiton, or supposed historical Cause of some current ritual practice . . .";¹¹ and secondly that this Sacer Ludus¹² is "originally or centrally that of Dionysus, performed at his feast, in his theatre, under the presidency of his Priest. . . .";¹³ and finally that Dionysus is "an 'Eniautos-Daimon', or vegetation god, like Adonis, Osiris, etc., who represents the cyclic death and rebirth of the earth"¹⁴ which is to say, of the tribe and the tribal lands.

¹¹Murray, in Themis, p. 342.

¹²The reader is referred to Appendix B, "Glossary", for subsequent reference of foreign or technical terms.

¹³Murray, in Themis, p. 342.

¹⁴Ibid.

Dionysus, the Eniautos-Daimon,¹⁵ the Vegetation-Cycle Spirit is, according to Miss Harrison,

... The expression and representation of durée¹⁶...
 /which/ ... arises out of those instincts, emotions,
 desires which attend and express life ... /and which
 are/ ... at the outset rather of a group than of
 individual consciousness.¹⁷

As an example of group thinking and group emotion the
Hymn of the Kouretes, discovered in the temple of Diktaean
 Zeus, invokes "a daimon, the greatest Kouros . . . /and/
 . . . accompanied a magical dance. . . ."18

The hymn was part of an initiation rite, "the
 central ceremony of which was a dromenon or enactment of
 the New Birth into the tribe."¹⁹ Initiation into a group
 emphasizes group life and the figure of the Daimon
 represents the unity of the group.

¹⁵Literally "Spirit of the Year" (or period); Miss Harrison rejects the Frazer terms: Tree-Spirit, Corn-Spirit and Vegetation-Spirit, preferring the implication in Eniautos of a cycle of waxing and waning, and daimon to the present, genteel, sophisticated connotations in "spirit". Harrison, Themis, p. xvii and ch. 8. Although I support Miss Harrison's scholarly attempt at precision, particularly since growing seasons in Middle America do not always coincide with those of the temperate zones, I will employ my own variation of Frazer's term "Vegetation Spirit"--"Vegetation-Cycle Spirit".

¹⁶Durée, that which endures, although more properly, that which has endured and therefore will endure.

¹⁷Harrison, Themis, p. xiii.

¹⁸Ibid., p. xiv.

¹⁹Ibid.

. . . The religious conception of a Daimon arises from a dromenon . . . which . . . in its sacral sense is, not merely a thing done, but a thing re-done, or pre-done with magical intent. The magical dance of the Kouretes is a primitive form of dromenon, it commemorates or anticipates, in order magically to induce, a New Birth. The Dithyramb, from which the drama arose, was also a dromenon of the New Birth. Further, the dromenon is a thing which, like the drama, is collectively performed.²⁰

Since most food supplies are seasonal and therefore recurrent, the chief food-supply dromenon logically occurs in the Spring with its object being the inducement of fresh life for man, other animals and plants, in short, for a renewal of the year.

A particular form of this spring rite was the Dithyramb. . . . From the spring dromenon with its magical intent of the renewal of the year, arose two of the main factors in Greek religious life and indeed in Greek civilization: (1) the agones or athletic contests, and (2) that other contest significantly bearing the same name, the agon of the drama. Different though they seem, and different as in fact they became, they arose from the same root, the spring dromenon conceived of as a conflict, a dramatic setting forth of the natural happening of the spring.²¹

The agon, as expressed in the drama and by the Olympic Games, and as an expression of the elemental conflict in nature, goes back to the earliest struggles and contests, possibly even to Frazer's King of the Wood, the priest-guardian of the sacred grove of Diana, who succeeded to that office by the murder of his predecessor

²⁰Harrison, Themis, p. xv.

²¹Ibid., p. xvi.

and who restlessly awaited and guarded himself against the man who was to murder him and succeed him in the priesthood.²²

The contests, whether athletic games, ritual warfare or dance, which occur in so many primitive tribes under the symbol of Winter versus Summer or Tribe versus Death, are not so different from the formalized enactments of the same myths (or *durées*) which developed in Greece. Lewis Spence believes that

A mimetic element was also present in primitive games, that in some manner they sought to represent the life and adventures of the gods, either on earth or in their own abodes. Indeed the fact that some of the Greek games actually did so appears to clinch the matter, although I believe this idea to have been . . . subsidiary to the original intention. . . .²³

According to F. M. Cornford, the Greek Olympic Games arose from a race held by the tribe of the Kouretes, in which the victor became the daimon of the year, and thus he was the group and the group's luck incarnate.²⁴

The ritual of the Eniautos-Daimon, the Vegetation Cycle Spirit, who represents both the life of the group and the life of nature, now becomes a representation of

²²Frazer, pp. 1-7.

²³Lewis Spence, Myth and Ritual in Dance, Game and Rhyme (London: Watts and Co., 1947), p. 21.

²⁴F. M. Cornford, "The Origin of the Olympic Games", Chapter VII in Harrison, Themis.

. . . the permanent life of the group. The individual dies, but the group and its incarnation the king survive. Le roi est mort, vive le roi. From these two facts, of group permanency and individual death, arose the notion of reincarnation, palingenesia. Moreover, since the group included plants and animals as well as human members, and these were linked by a common life, the rebirth of ancestors and the renewed fertility of the earth went on pari passu.²⁵

The principal factors, then, in the increasingly complex dromenon are the agon, i.e. contest, the pathos, i.e. a defeat or death, the epiphany, i.e. the triumphant reappearance or rebirth. The ritual of the Vegetation-Cycle Spirit is similar to what happens to plant and animal life and also to the ceremony of death and resurrection enacted in the tribal initiation rite.²⁶

According to Gilbert Murray, most of the Vegetation-Cycle Spirits had a special enemy, and it was their fate to be torn in pieces, scattered over the fields, lost, sought for, discovered and recognized. In examining the myths and the various Eniautos celebrations, the similarities he finds bear a striking resemblance to the form which many Greek tragedies follow:

1. An Agon or Contest, the Year against its enemy, Light against Darkness, Summer against Winter.
2. A Pathos of the Year-Daimon, generally a ritual or sacrificial death, in which Adonis or Attis is slain by the tabu animal . . . Osiris, Dionysus, Orpheus, Hippolytus torn to pieces.
3. A Messenger. For this Pathos seems seldom or never to be actually performed under the eyes of the audience. (The reason for this is not hard to suggest,

²⁵Harrison, Themis, p. xviii.

²⁶Ibid., p. xix.

and was actually necessary in the time when there was only one actor.) It is announced by a messenger. 'The news comes' that Pan the Great, Thammuz, Adonis, Osiris is dead, and the dead body is often brought in on a bier. This leads to

4. A Threnos or Lamentation. Specially characteristic, however, is a clash of contrary emotions, the death of the old being also the triumph of the new.

5 and 6. An Anagnorisis--discovery or recognition --of the slain and mutilated Daimon, followed by his Resurrection or Apotheosis or, in some sense, his Epiphany in glory.²⁷

These characteristics, so familiar to the student of Greek Tragedy, are similarities in word only. An agon may be the complex debate between Oedipus and Creon, but in terms of this study, it must be reduced to simple terms, a single combat--real or ritual, a tug-o-war, or a dance of ritual battle. A Threnos can be a simple group keening. An Anagnorisis can be a simple "coming forth" from a cave or temple door of a personator accoutered as the god. In short, since Mr. Murray is making deductions about Primitive Drama from evidence from fifth century Greek Drama, it behooves him to reduce these classic terms to primitive context; but the reader must not be misled. The Vegetation-Cycle Spirit exists, waxes strong (proud, in Greek

²⁷Gilbert Murray, "Excursus on the Ritual Forms Preserved in Greek Tragedy", in Themis, pp. 343-344. E.O. James notes the frequent recurrence of similar characteristics in Eastern Mediterranean celebrations. "In the dramatization of the myth and ritual at the Annual Festival, lamentation, a sacred combat, the humiliation and restoration of the king and his ceremonial intercourse with the queen amid general rejoicing, frequently recurred symbolizing the yearly decay and revival of vegetation." The order of the items and the addition of the ceremonial intercourse are the important differences. In Myth and Ritual in the Ancient Near East (New York: Fredrich A. Praeger, 1938), p. 296.

tragedy), is slain by his enemy who is at the same time his murderer and the Vegetation-Cycle Spirit re-risen, and who must in turn perish at the hands of the succeeding Vegetation-Cycle Spirit who then is also avenger. In the next chapter, it will be seen how this developed into more complex myth expressed in specific dromenon and drama.

Ritual According to Ridgeway--The Tomb Theory

William Ridgeway's theory of the origin of drama--sometimes called the "Tomb Theory"--was first published in The Origin of Tragedy²⁸ and later restated in a more thorough fashion in The Dramas and Dramatic Dances of Non-European Races. It includes these basic conclusions:²⁹

. . . That (1) Tragedy proper did not arise in the worship of the Thracian god Dionysus; but (2) that it sprang out of the indigenous worship of the dead, especially of dead chiefs such as Adrastus, the ancient pre-Dorian and pre-Achaean king of Sicyon, as described by Herodotus in a passage which is our earliest authority for Greek 'tragic dances'; (3) that the cult of Dionysus was not indigenous in Sicyon, but had been introduced there by Cleisthenes . . . and had been superimposed upon the cult of the old king; (4) that even if it were true that Tragedy proper arose out of the worship of Dionysus, it would no less have originated in the worship of the dead, since Dionysus was regarded by the Greeks as a hero (i.e., a man turned into a saint) as well as a god.

Beyond these points a good part of Ridgeway's argument is negative, that is to say, he elaborates on the

²⁸William Ridgeway, The Origin of Tragedy (Cambridge: University Press, 1910).

²⁹William Ridgeway, The Dramas and Dramatic Dances of Non-European Races (Cambridge: University Press, 1915), pp. 5-6.

holes and inconsistencies he finds in the Cambridge argument, and then, sometimes tenuously, fills the resultant voids with sepulchral examples.

He does, however, present an impressive array of evidence to the end that early Ritual-Drama was held in connection with funerals. At a wealthy Roman's funeral, there were hired "keeners", dancers and mimes; the chief mime wore a mask in the likeness of the dead man and imitated his speech and manners.³⁰

Then came the imagines, which . . . were masks representing distinguished ancestors of the deceased. . . . Each was worn by a man who was chosen to resemble as closely as possible the ancestor personated and was clothed in the dress of his office. Each rode in a chariot accompanied by lictors and other insignia of office. Thus the ancestors of the dead man escorted him to the family tomb.³¹

More examples of these ludi funebres follow, from games and gladiatorial contests to human sacrifice, to complex impersonation, to complete plays (Terence's Adelphi at the funeral of Aemilius Paulus in 160 B. C.),³² apparently establishing the celebrations as standard rather than isolated occurrences.

These ludi funebres seem more frequently to occur at the temple-tombs of deities rather than men, but

³⁰Ibid., p. 7.

³¹Ibid.

³²Ibid., p. 8.

Ridgeway resolves this inconsistency by the

. . . sound principle that when a hero or heroine is found sharing a temple or a festival with a great divinity, the temple or festival has originally belonged to the hero or heroine, and that the cult of the greater personage has been superimposed upon it, for no one will plant the cult of some minor hero or heroine upon that of a great deity.³³

The continual presence of the mask is also stressed by Ridgeway; Thespis used only white masks, and these "were entirely unsuitable for Dionysiac representations, but eminently adapted for those of ghosts."³⁴ In many cultures impersonators wear masks when wishing to portray the spirits of dead men. Furthermore, there is frequently thought to be a mystical link between the ghost and the mask, and the wearers of the masks are regarded as temporary incarnations of the impersonated spirits.³⁵

There would seem to be no doubt that the dead hero-king would help his survivors. After all, the spirits at one time occupied this earth, and, though now dead, they remained anthropomorphic³⁶ and, presumably, as reasonable and open to petition as they had been in life.

³³Ibid., pp. 36-7.

³⁴Ibid., p. 11.

³⁵For detailed discussion of the use and development of the ubiquitous mask, see Kenneth MacGowan and Herman Rosse, Masks and Demons (New York: Harcourt Brace and Co., 1923); Loomis Havemeyer, The Drama of Savage Peoples (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1916), pp. 55-61; A. D. Haigh, The Attic Theatre (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907), p. 242 ff, and Chapters III and V of this work.

³⁶Havemeyer, p. 23.

. . . We must keep in view the fact that in the first primal instance man was not dealing with 'gods' . . . but with the spirits of dead men, who, by virtue of knowledge of the secrets known to the dead, were able, and at times willing, to help them and to ease their minds from the anxiety inseparable from absolute dependence on the food supply. The primary reason why these dead men should lend their aid is clear enough. They were thought of as being equally anxious with the living that the food supply should not fail. If it did, they too would starve, no offerings would be made them, existence for them would be intolerable.³⁷

So the essence of Ridgeway's theory is that behind the god for whom or before whom the ritual or drama is performed, we must look for the man, for the hero-king whom the tribe wishes to honor or from whom it wishes to obtain aid and intercession with the forces of the universe.

Compatibility of the Two Theories

It is not my intention here to resolve this disagreement between the Tomb-Theory and the Eniautos-Daimon theory, but only to state both, since evidence supporting both theories can be seen in the ritual drama of Middle America. Neither are the two theories quite as irreconcilable as might appear; it seems quite feasible for primitive minds to consider, at the death of a chieftain or hero, that they have suffered great loss and that they would like to have him back. If sympathetic magic works in other cases, why would not the reenactment of his mightiest deeds persuade the "forces" to return him.

³⁷Spence, p. 191.

Neither would it be unreasonable to hope that their hero-chieftain, like the vegetation, might someday be reborn. By the time man became sedentary and agricultural, there could easily occur to him the similarity between the seed in the ground and the interment of the dead king accompanied by the hope that each will grow anew; slighter analogies have bred stranger dogma in more sophisticated cultures.

Ivor Brown suggests a similar duality, but concludes that man had chieftains before he was a cultivator, that he would first be affected by the death of his hero-king, who was one day all-powerful and prosperous, the next day lying lifeless, powerless, his "seeming omnipotence . . . laid in the dust."³⁸ Here is the first intimation of a hero's overthrow, of tragic catastrophe. The mourning and musing of the tribe would surely be toward immortality; so much nobility could not linger in the earth.

Magic, myth and ritual would then develop into a tomb cult where "the struggle between Is and Is Not goes on."³⁹ Out of this spring passion plays in which an Osiris or Adonis dies and rises again; the rites become sacramental, that is, all participate in order that the celebrant may gain life for himself. Only then, after the death-cult-ritual is long established does man the

³⁸Brown, p. 54.

³⁹Ibid., p. 55.

cultivator see the comparison between the buried seed and the buried hero; and by then the rudiments of drama have already been established.⁴⁰

Primitive Mimetic Dance and Ritualized Mimetic Dance

These are the major hypotheses on the origins of Drama. All are based on the presupposition of the mimetic impulse and mimetic ability in man. But the examples of mimesis that have been noted so far are not art, unless one considers art as simple emotional expression, in which case one would have to say that the origin of art is not mimesis, but that mimesis springs up out of art--out of emotional expression.

Primitive Dance and Mimesis are both emotional expression; both are characterized by a physical release of emotion through movement. Together they form the simplest classification of Ritual-Drama--"Primitive Mimetic Dance".

When simple ritual--pre-ordained, repeated and in some way staged--is grafted onto this combination of Mimesis and Dance, a more formal situation develops, and this will be called "Ritualized Mimetic Dance".

The examples discussed in this chapter: the tomb rites, the sacred combats, the death-resurrection rites, seem to fall into these simple forms. In the next

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 57.

chapter the development of these mythic expressions into complex rituals and finally into something akin to what we know as drama will be considered. As the ritual increases in complexity, as the sophistication of the culture and its mythology increases, and finally as poetry is grafted to it, the development of two other classifications of Ritual Drama will also be defined.

But up to this point we have only near-random organization of the expression of profound needs. Primitive man looked about him, saw the might and inexorable forces in the universe, recognized his own minuteness, his insignificance, and out of feelings of futility and despair decided that he must do something. Dromenon and Drama are both words with roots of "to do"; and primitive man, in his first tentative steps toward hope, toward elevating his soul's worth, toward implementing progress (a concept unknown to him), toward controlling his own destiny, toward flying in the face of Fate (still a major concern of Periclean Athens) toward finding a place in the Sun, did something. At best, it was a beginning--a beginning of knowing himself, and a beginning of drama.

CHAPTER III

RITUAL DRAMA: STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT

In the previous chapter the motives and reasons of primitive man for originating Ritual Drama, or more simply, why he needed this expression, have been examined. The purpose of this chapter is to determine how it was expressed. It has been seen that mimesis, grafted onto primitive dance, resulted in the expression of a mixture of a hope and a consciousness. Hope is eternal, but consciousness grows from feeling to mythic consciousness to empirical knowledge; and for this reason, myth--the next graft on this dramatic tree--will be briefly examined.

Next, it will be seen how dance can express the increasingly complex myth, how the need for the "specialist"--the actor, develops, and how the visual aspects of personation increase. A few more examples of Ritual Drama in a more complex or sophisticated form will be followed by an attempt to isolate specific stages of development in Ritual Drama. Working forward from the simple mimetic expressions discussed in Chapter II and working backward from Aristotle's account of pre-Aeschylean Greek Ritual Drama, four developmental classifications will be defined--

"Primitive Mimetic Dance", "Ritualized Mimetic Dance", "Dromenon Drama" and "Proto-Drama", each representing the addition of new or increasingly complex dramatic elements. This background will then serve as a common frame of reference for the discussion of the Ritual Drama of Middle America.

The Grafting of Myth to Ritual

Our conjectural early mime has been seen to return from a hunt and re-enact his kill. As this pleases him, and he repeats it, and as others join with him, it becomes a re-enactment of the hunt, not a specific hunt. As the re-enactments, now enactments, naturally take on the most pleasing or most spectacular aspects of several different hunts, there is, for a time, confusion between history and myth. Malinowski sees in this, not "confusion", but

. . . a special class of stories, regarded as sacred, embodied in ritual, morals, and social organization, and which form an integral and active part in primitive culture. These stories live not by idle interest, not as fictitious or even as true narratives; but are to the natives a statement of a primeval, greater, and more relevant reality, by which the present life, fates, and activities of mankind are determined, the knowledge of which supplies man with the motive for ritual and moral actions. . . .

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Myth as it exists in a savage community, that is in its living primitive form, is not merely a story told but a reality lived. It is not of the nature of fiction . . . but it is a living reality, believed

to have once happened in primeval times, and continuing ever since to influence the world and human destinies.
 . . .¹

As questions occur to man, they must be answered. Since the simplest questions are of causal relationships, ritual and myth would first develop around the immediate causes of historical situations and events--the food supply, rain, the sun, propagation, etc., as has already been seen to be true.

Eventually the primal cause--the creation or the founder of the race--is arrived at, and becomes the predominant theme in ritual in virtually every primitive society.²

By setting forth the beginning of things in narrative form as a cult legend the primeval reality was affirmed and translated into action in a set of dramatic performances in order to make supernatural power accessible here and now. The purpose, however, was not to explain the cosmic processes, but to maintain a right relationship with . . . the spiritual forces that controlled them and regulated human affairs. Therefore, in the cult drama the . . . divine power vouched for in the legend was reenacted and made accessible in the ritual for the good of the community as a collective experience. To this end the sacred had to possess a form, visibly and audibly, so that ritual and myth were, as they have always been, two facets of the same sacramental activity.³

¹Bronislaw Malinowski, "Myth in Primitive Psychology", in Magic, Science and Religion and Other Essays (Boston: Beacon Press, 1948), p. 100.

²E. O. James, Myth and Ritual in the Ancient Near East (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1938), p. 292.

³Ibid., pp. 292-3.

"The good of the community as a collective experience" then is the most important aspect of mythic ritual. As such, it can have more specific ends, among the most obvious, didactic.

Havemeyer tells of a New Guinea initiation ceremony in which a man dresses as the mountain god. The frightened boys are led into the wilderness to his presence; he then delivers an impressive address to the end that he will be their friend if they obey the elders.⁴ In short, the dramatization of this myth acts as a school of obedience. In Australia, the actions and habits of different animals are depicted in initiation rites as part of the novice's instruction in the sacred lore connected with the totems and ancestors of the various clans. The mores and expected behavior of the tribe are other frequent subjects. In these cases, as in the Medieval Morality plays, good triumphs over evil.⁵

Communality, or its more zealous expression "patriotism", is another end of the mythic primitive drama. In simplest form, war dances, aside from their use as sympathetic magic, serve to work up the participants to a high pitch of excitement so that they are able to rush into battle and display great bravery in the face of

⁴Loomis Havemeyer, The Drama of Savage Peoples (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1916), p. 148.

⁵Ibid., pp. 126-8.

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Didacticism and communality are, of course, in addition to the earlier and simpler purposes of renewing the processes of fertility and stabilizing society in relation to the transcendental sacred "forces", or even more simply, of amusing the "forces" and inducing them to grant the desired request.

In all cases, a reality of tribal or group identity is inherent. Often the myth purports to be history. And so it is; but not in the sense of being an accurate description of an event or course of events in the precise manner or chronology in which they actually occurred in time and space; although it is doubtful whether mythological events which do not have some roots in the historical process could have any meaning. But historical discrepancy is as irrelevant to myth as it is to poetry, art and music; for they are of the same order of reality.

The purpose of myth is to express man's understanding of himself and the world he lives in, not to portray an objective picture of the world as it is. Human values must be applied to non-human phenomena.

. . . At a deeper level of experience there are recurrent situations of profound emotional and spiritual significance which can only find expression in symbolical representation. For this purpose myth and ritual often are the most adequate and efficacious ways of setting forth fundamental realities and values, since it is their primary function to communicate transcendental beliefs and concepts in their own particular mode of presentation.⁶

It may be difficult to see the "communication of transcendental beliefs and concepts" in the "leaping dance" common to almost all primitive tribes, but this is where it must be sought again, in that impulsive, almost instinctive means of human expression--the dance.

Dance as Myth and Ritual

Dance was apparently the first form of mythic expression. The "Snake Dance", the "Rain Dance", the "Harvest Dance" were and still are, rituals with sacramental significance to the participants. In the case of the ubiquitous leaping dance, this is one of the easiest in which to find "transcendental concepts", for it is simply symbolic of sexual intercourse and expresses a desire for human and/or plant and animal fecundity. Although Havemeyer would call this "unconscious drama"⁷ along with that great mass of dance which is "nothing more than a means of working up religious excitement",⁸

⁶James, p. 308.

⁷Havemeyer, pp. 12-13.

⁸Spence, p. 95.

nevertheless sexual intercourse and religious excitement seem most basic in speaking of "fundamental realities" and "transcendental concepts".

In the Upper Paleolithic Era, some twenty thousand years ago, on the wall of the cave of Lascaux in France, someone painted a dancer in a mask and wearing a spotted skin, impersonating a mythical or sacred animal.⁹ It seems evident that dancing and mimetic imitation are natural to men who have "advanced hardly at all along the road of intellectual development; they might almost be called animal functions."¹⁰

The earliest known form of true ritual dance is a dance of Lamentation in pre-dynastic Egypt. It was performed ". . . in connection with the Osirian drama . . . by persons of both sexes, who in their movements and gestures, imitated the sorrow of Isis and Nephthys . . . at the death of their brother."¹¹

The ritual dance which accompanies the Hymn of the Kouretes, the earliest dithyramb, is a prayer to the god to rejoice in the dance and song which the worshippers make to him while dancing.

⁹James, p. 23.

¹⁰Ivor Brown, First Player: The Origin of Drama (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1928), p. 53.

¹¹Spence, p. 96.

The worshippers dance around the altar of the Kouros because 'here the shielded Nurturers took the Kouros, an immortal child from Rhea, and with noise of beating feet hid him away'.¹²

The god is not present at the beginning but is bidden to "come", to "leap". The god then performs the same ritual as do the participants; he "leaps when his attendant worshippers leap and the land is fertile."¹³

The dithyramb, as it evolved into the choral ode, was still accompanied by dance, well into fourth century Greece. Indeed, in Aeschylus' plays and in other

. . . serious tragedies . . . the dance was hardly lessened in importance, and therefore such plays were a kind of composition which might well be termed *orchestikotera* (more appropriate for dancing). This harmonizes well with the fact that Thespis, Phrynichus, Pratinas, and Choerilus were all termed dancers by the ancients and that Aeschylus invented many new figures, the fact being that the drama was still merely an operatic performance. . . .¹⁴

Spence quotes Lucian in the Peri Orchesseos as stating that there cannot be found "a single ancient mystery in which there is not dancing. . . . But as all men know, many people say of those who reveal the mysteries that they dance them out."¹⁵

Essentially the dances that release instinctive emotion or which are part of a mythic ritual fall into

¹²Harrison, Themis, p. 10.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ridgeway, Dramas and Dramatic Dances of Non-European Races, p. 4.

¹⁵Spence, p. 100.

two categories: the dance that commemorates or celebrates by re-presenting, and the dance which anticipates by pre-presenting, that is, the dance of sympathetic magic.

Almost every culture has had an enactment of a mock combat in its background. As an expression of that most basic dramatic characteristic, conflict, it is one of the most ubiquitous dances which hovers on the borderline of drama. The English Morris Dance with its clashing of sticks, is first cousin to the sword dance.¹⁶

Havemeyer contrasts the dance in the drama of the savages and of the Greeks by the quantitative criterion that "in the first it dominated the whole performance, but in the second it was subordinate to the more important action."¹⁷

The dance, ritual and mimesis easily graft to each other, for they arise from the same emotions and needs, and to some extent they depict the same expressions of those emotions as myth. Dance, also, is

. . . of the nature of myth, the sister of ritual, in that it depicts and brings to light the circumstances of myth.

. . . Thus ritual is the mimetic magic by virtue of which religious acts for the behoof of the community are performed; myth is the account of those acts in words, while . . . /dance and ritual/ . . . actually bring them into view. It is thus a living frieze of ritual action from which the myth emanates

¹⁶Brown, p. 74.

¹⁷Havemeyer, p. 102.

in the choral song which frequently accompanied the sacred dance. Yet all three--ritual, dance and myth--are really one; . . . indivisible parts of a single thought-process. . . .¹⁸

From Tribal Participation to Specialist

In the course of development from the relatively simple sacramental dance as an expression of emotion to the more formal and complex rituals, there also developed the specialist or the actor. In the early ritual-dances, sacramentalism was essential; everyone had to take part, not only for his own beneficial communion with the god or "forces" but also because the entire tribe might better "overwhelm" the god by their sheer numbers. But as the dances and rituals became more complicated, as communication with the "forces" became more esoteric and involved, the need developed for a "specialist" to devote more time and attention to their performance. After all, if they were not performed exactly the same way each time, they might indeed lose their effectiveness. As time went on, and staging became more elaborate and involved, fewer and fewer of the common people could participate; although a part of the ritual--an answering chant or a preceding or subsequent general dance--was always reserved for them, the distinction between an audience and the "specialist" had begun.¹⁹

¹⁸Spence, p. 101.

¹⁹Havemeyer, pp. 102-3; 175-6.

Considering the most primal needs of individual man, it is easy to be a bit cynical in the conjecture of the first "specialist", at least while the ritual was still essentially based in sympathetic magic. We can see how this priest-medicine-man-actor might hold sway over his more superstitious fellow tribesmen.

. . . He learns by a careful study of weather conditions when a storm is due and then holds a ceremony to bring the rain. When the rain comes he claims the honor of having brought it. If animals are needed for food, he discovers through scouts or other agencies where they are likely to be found and then has a ceremony performed, telling the people that by intercession with the gods through the mystic sympathetic magic rites the deities have been persuaded to grant his requests.²⁰

The people believe and he is secure and permanent in his office.

A priest is, technically, a mediator between gods and man, and thus, in the strictest sense, everyone with a role in a religious ritual-drama is a priest. In many cultures dancing and ritual are a special branch in the education of a priest or priestess.²¹ If the chief deity is a war god, the chief roles may be taken by a warrior by reason of stronger sympathetic magic, but more than likely, if it is a war-dominated culture, as much of Middle America was, its aristocracy would probably be the warrior-priest, again by the reasoning of sympathetic

²⁰Havemeyer, p. 39.

²¹Ibid., p. 176 ff and Chapter VI of this work.

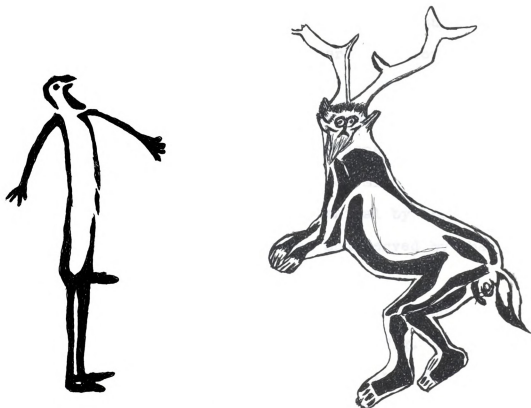


Fig. 2

Two primitive cave drawings showing animal disguise. Birdman from the Cave of Lascaux (Magdalenian Period), "The Sorcerer" from the Cave of Trois Frères (Aurignacian Period). (S. Giedion, The Eternal Present, New York: Bollingen Foundation, 1962. Birdman, p. 511, "Sorcerer", p. 504).

magic.²² So during most of the development of Ritual-Drama, the priest was both actor and stage manager.

Masks and Accoutrements in Ritual and Ritual Drama

Masks, as aids in impersonation of animals, of persons, and of abstract ideas, have several times been

²²Ibid., p. 177.

alluded to. They are indeed characteristic of Drama throughout its development, preceding Drama, Ritual-Drama and simple ritual back to the earliest occurrence of sympathetic magic.

Before man had a concept of an anthropomorphic deity he had a concept of animism, the separate spirit-essence of animal and plants, and of totemism, the fraternal adoption of a sacred taboo animal by the tribe. These two concepts were demonstrated and served by the wearing of animal skins and masks.

In the previously mentioned cave at Lascaux is a painting of a man with a bird shaped head (Fig. 2), and another of a "masked figure of a sorcerer in a spotted skin of some bovida impersonating a mythical or sacred animal. . . . On its forehead are two long horns. . . ." ²³ Numerous representations of men wearing animal masks or heads at other Palaeolithic sites in Southern France and Northern Spain "confirm the evidence respecting kinship with the animal creation and the mimetic dance in the Upper Palaeolithic." ²⁴

Another early source is the ancestor mask. There is overwhelming evidence ²⁵ that actors wear masks when

²³James, p. 23.

²⁴Ibid., p. 27.

²⁵Brown, p. 45.

wishing to portray the spirits of dead men. "The actor . . . may be one who keeps the spectre from the door; or he may himself become, by the adoption of ceremonial uniform, a living version of the dead man whose spectre is abroad."²⁶ If at funerary rites ancestors are to be portrayed, it would be difficult to imagine them in the unmasked face of a fellow tribesman. The dead man, too, frequently wore a mask. Sometimes it was buried with him, but on other occasions it might be kept for a future ceremony in which the dead man, now an ancestor, would return to preside at the funeral of a descendent.

When we look at the murals depicting the seemingly anthropomorphic animal-gods of Egypt, over five thousand years old, the question arises as to whether these are meant to be real gods or if they depict personators in the masks and trappings of the gods. The question can probably never be finally resolved; nevertheless, there is a high probability that anything which appears artistically represented, and for which an image appears in nature, almost surely exists or existed.²⁷ So, if a man is depicted wearing a mask, even the serpent-like head of the Egyptian ibis, or if there are stone sculptures of masks, it is highly likely that masks existed and were

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Gieddon, p. 321.

worn in that time and place.

In Greece, at the Hymn of the Kouretes ritual, Titans, "the white clay men" were real men dressed up as "bogies" with faces painted white to perform their initiation rite.²⁸ Paint was one of the first materials used as masks in Greece.

The contrast between the ancient and the modern actor is masked by nothing so conspicuously as by the use of masks. These masks . . . were a regular feature in the old Dionysiac worship, and were probably inherited as such by the tragic stage. . . . Thespis, the earliest of the tragic actors, . . . at the commencement of his career . . . merely painted his face with white lead and purslane. Later on he employed masks; but these were of a very simple character, consisting merely of linen, without paint or coloring. . . . Aeschylus was the first to employ painted masks, and to portray the features of a dreadful and awe-inspiring character.²⁹

Early masks, that is, those depicting animistic or totem animals, usually consisted of the skin of the animal, stretched or shaped to fit the wearer. Leather remains as a major material for masks. The Mandans of the American Plains, when dancing the Bull Dance, wore the head skins of bulls, bears, wolves, and swans.³⁰

The Alaskan Eskimos have an historical myth to the effect that all animals had a dual existence, and that, at will, they could become either animal or man. When the animal wished to become a man, that is, the thinking

²⁸Harrison, Themis, p. 17.

²⁹A. E. Haigh, The Attic Theatre (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907), p. 242.

³⁰Havemeyer, p. 141.

part of the creature--it pushed up its beak or snout as if it were a mask. The human form, called the inna, also became the ghost at the death of the animal. At the "Inviting In" feast the dancers wear masks representing their totem animals, and the dancers become, or at least are endowed with the spiritual essence of, the animal. To this end, the masks are made with double faces, that is, the beak or snout of the animal is "fitted over and concealing the face of the inna below".³¹ The outer mask is sometimes pegged to the other for easy removal or is built around hinged doors which open, indicating a metamorphosis. When the dancer wears the mask of his totemic animal he needs no double face, since he already represents the inna of the animal.³²

In advanced cultures, leather usually gives way to more workable materials. In Athens

Masks were generally made of linen. Cork and wood were occasionally used. The mask covered the whole of the head, both in front and behind. Caps were often worn underneath, to serve as a protection. The white of the eye was painted on the mask, but the place for the pupil was left hollow, to enable the actor to see. . . . It varied in size according to the character of the personage.³³

In Mexico today masks are still made of wood, cloth, leather, clay, paste and paper.³⁴ Considering the number

³¹Ibid., p. 56.

³²Ibid., p. 57.

³³Haigh, p. 244.

³⁴Frances Toor, A Treasury of Mexican Folkways (Mexico, D.F.: Crown Publishers, 1947), p. 64.

of Middle American masks which will be submitted as evidence in this work, one point must be made on these materials: masks are almost never made of stone or any durable material, with the exception of the gold masks of the Aztecs and Incas, which were one of the first things in the Spanish melting pots. For the most part, the ancient masks that have survived, both in the Mediterranean and in Middle America, are not the actual ritual or dramatic masks, but artistic representations of them.

Ritual Drama: Four Stages of Development

Having examined some of these developmental aspects individually, their combination in the several stages of development will now be considered. Examples of the most primitive dramatic expressions have already been noted; it is now necessary to set the other limits--the point to which Ritual Drama can advance without becoming true drama. To this end, an example from Attic tragedy will be considered; and borrowing from Ridgeway's method³⁵ of working in reverse chronology, an attempt will be made to deduce the nature of pre-Aeschylean Drama and to determine if it was truly "primitive".

Aristotle in the Poetics notes several metabolae or chronological changes through which tragedy advanced

³⁵Ridgeway, Dramas and Dramatic Dances, p. 3.

in its evolution;

Aeschylus first introduced a second actor;
he diminished the importance of the Chorus,
and assigned the leading part to the dialogue.
Sophocles raised the number of actors to three,
and added scene painting.

. . . The short plot was discarded for one of greater
compass,
and the grotesque diction of the earlier satyric
form for the stately manner of Tragedy.³⁶

In reverse chronology, the final metabola is that
it was late that tragedy got free from the grotesque
diction of the earlier satyric form and took on the stately
manner of Tragedy. Ridgeway interprets this last to mean
that by the elimination of grotesque diction, tragedy
"became completely dignified".³⁷ While grotesque diction
could conceivably refer to a lack of decorum, that is,
the diction could be untrue to type or untrue to char-
acter, it could also refer to untoward obscenity or
vulgarity either in language or action. But we are at
least certain that the Satyr play was not "completely
dignified" nor of a "stately manner", and that it
occasionally dealt with all too human (i.e. undignified)
problems and situations.

The sixth point, that the short plot was discarded
for one of greater length, is simple enough. Greek plays,
by most standards, still appear short. We can assume that

³⁶S. H. Butcher, Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and
Fine Art (4th ed.; New York: Dover Publications, Inc.,
1951), p. 19.

³⁷Ridgeway, Dramas and Dramatic Dances, p. 34.

pre-fifth-century plays were more the length of the Medieval cycles and possibly diminishing back through time to "trope" lengths and even, as Aristotle and Miss Harrison suggest, beginning with little more than a dramatized dithyramb. So far we have short plots without thoroughly dignified diction and, probably, theme.

Point five, the addition of scene painting, would seem logically to support the short-plot idea. If there is, say, a crucifixion or a "coming forth" from a temple, any "place" could technically suffice as a specific place, supported only by a line of dialogue. If Osiris comes from the Nile or Dionysus from a mountain, the coming-forth is more important than the mise en scene. The point is that a trope-like incident or event could as well be enacted on a threshing floor, at the front of a temple or on a raised platform or scaffold, and in any of these places, painted scenery or, indeed, any scenery would represent an unnecessary luxury.

Item four is the addition of the third actor. It goes without saying that the scope and complexity of the plot or the tropic incident is limited by the number of characters possible. Reviewing to this point, we have a relatively short playlet, of a relatively free form--that is, not stately nor completely dignified--probably staged in a "limbo" or proto-platea by two actors and a dancing chorus.

The first three items listed by Aristotle can really be considered as one great development, since they seem inextricably linked by causal connection. Aeschylus' adding of the second actor made possible the increase in the prominence of the dialogue between two actors, which in turn, would tend to reduce the rôle of the Chorus. Before this, there was a Chorus and one "answerer"; the long hymns or odes of the dancing chorus probably alternated with similarly long passages by the single actor. Dialogue, at least in the more recognizable and familiar stichomythic form found in the agon probably did not yet exist.

From the evidence presented by Aristotle then, pre-Aeschylean drama can be deduced to have taken place in a staging area with little or no scenery to represent the true locale, and with long odes or speeches alternating between a single personage and a dancing chorus. It was a short work, containing probably one major "plot-incident", or, at most, a distillation of the struggle-death-lamentation-epiphany of a hero/god. Even this, however, would be difficult to stage with only one actor without considerable supplementary narrative. Apparently, the popular taste for comedy and burlesque allowed less-than-stately presentations of what was, to some minds, serious. For example, the personation of Dionysus, appropriately accoutred, in a phallic rite, while not wholly

inappropriate to his nature, would not lend itself to "the stately manner of Tragedy". Thus, divergent types began to appear.

But even as far as this drama is from our modern concept of theatre or even from the great plays of Sophocles and Euripides, it is even further from that first mimetic "hunt-telling" of the conjectural primitive tribesman. The order of development of these stages will now be considered, along with the addition and complexity of dramatic elements.

Primitive Mimetic Dance

As has already been seen, Primitive Mimetic Dance is almost exclusively dance. For the most part it is imitative of animals and their behavior, and occasionally of hunters. The animal personators usually dress themselves in the hide of the animal they represent, including the flayed head skin of the animal, and attempt to vocally imitate the sounds appropriate to the animal. There is sacramentalism, that is, the whole tribe partakes; if not the whole tribe, then a large group, e.g., all the women or all the hunters. The subject of the dance is, to use Miss Harrison's term, durées--the food supply, death and propagation. Totemic dances, Ritual warfare of divided groups, and Spring-vegetation rites would come under this heading.

Ritualized Mimetic Dance

Myth is an ordering of "knowledge"; and as it becomes more ordered, the ritual expressions of it take on more formality. As the name implies, "Ritualized Mimetic Dance", is still primarily dance, but now the dance is in imitation or reconstruction of a simple event. As in the Sacer Ludus, it frequently represents an aiteological incident. Simple language is added too, although for the most part it is probably random with the only formal language a brief narration or "ode" as in the Greek "Hymn of the Kouretes". The ritual is still sacramental, but here a specialist may begin to appear, either as the personator of the answering god or as the "narrator" or leader of the hymn. Painted or solid masks and simple symbolic trappings appear, at least on the focal figure--the god or hero/king. The simpler funeral rites described in the section on Ridgeway's Tomb Theory would fit this category.

Dromenon-Drama³⁸

This category would most nearly fit the popular concept of Ritual-Drama. For it is a very definite

³⁸Although I borrow the term dromenon from Miss Harrison (Themis, pp. 33-38), I am using it a little less broadly than she. For while by her definition all four of these categories plus the Mass and an Elks initiation could conceivably be covered by it, I am attempting to use it to indicate that stage where the spark has just lighted, that stage immediately preceding the one which is easily recognizable as Drama.

ritual and it does recognizably include several dramatic elements, notably spectacle, dialogue, and something of character. The "Dromenon-Drama" is characterized by dance separated from the "episode"; it is the staging of a moment or single event with a focus on a single person--real or allegorical--and his deed, and includes a first-person oration by the central figure along with a group hymn, ode or lamentation. Since the central figure is now a specific person, there must be individuality of mask and accoutrement along with the creation of a real or symbolic aura about the central figure, not in the sense of scenery, but as a hint of his godship or kingship given by his attendants and by their relationship to him.

These can be more clearly seen with an example from the Old World. E. O. James draws from the Tammuz Liturgies of Mesopotamia an account of the Annual Festival in which Tammuz, the suffering god, and Ishtar, the sorrowing goddess, symbolize Autumn. Amid the singing of dirges, Ishtar wandered in barren fields in her sorrowful search for Tammuz in the underworld.

In the laments of the priests and people the cry of the suffering Shepherd-god echoed until he was released by the Goddess and restored to the upper world. Then sorrow was turned into joy and defeat into victory, celebrated by a royal banquet furnished with gifts from deified kings . . . offered to Ishtar to rejoice her heart, ending with a doxology addressed to the reunited gods in the bridal chamber for their

bestowal of renewed life, vigour and prosperity.³⁹
 The vegetation symbolism is clear in this. When the growth process declines in Autumn, while Tammuz is in the underworld, the hope for the revival of the vegetation was associated with his subsequent liberation

. . . and a sacred marriage ritual to promote fertility in nature and mankind recorded in the form of liturgical texts recited or sung in the temples in Ugarit dedicated to Baal and his father. There amid stone phalli, female figurines and plaques, representations of animal masks worn by priests, and bulls' horns, the cult drama was celebrated in the prescribed manner, the texts explaining the actions performed.⁴⁰

This comes very close to the epitome of "Dromenon-Drama". Although the accounting is sketchy, there is sacramentalism in the dirges and lamentation of the priests and people, and this is separated from the "episodes" of the royal banquet and the marriage ritual. There was definite personation of Ishtar and Tammuz and possibly of the gift-giving, deified kings. The priests wore animal masks. A doxology or hymn was recited or sung to the reunited gods in the bridal chamber. There is no evidence of real dialogues, and although, technically, there were several plot incidents, it dramatized a single situation.

³⁹James, p. 300.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 87.

Proto-Drama

The final classification of Ritual Drama, and the closest one to true Drama, will be called "Proto-Drama". The prefix "proto" means "first", and in the most technical sense, it can be called first-drama. But in actuality "Proto-Drama" is still more ritual than true drama; it has all the needed ingredients for drama except those which enabled the Greeks to develop Tragedy--poetry and philosophy.⁴¹ Mimesis, dance, myth, ritual, and music gravitate easily to each other; but together they do not quite make up the drama. They still await the final ingredients to make the brew ferment--poetry and philosophy.

The dialogue of "Proto-Drama" consists of very long speeches or odes alternating between two characters or between one character and a group. The amount of dance decreases further, and it is again separate from the episodes, preceding or coming after them. Although there are probably several incidents, the plots are short. The central figure is a "historic" hero-king-god (a single concept) completing the anthropomorphism. Since he represents a specific person, there is again individuality of masks, costumes and properties. There are no more than two major impersonators, and real sacramentalism

⁴¹Harrison, Ancient Art and Ritual, p. 146.

gives way to a symbolic sacramentalism, represented by a group or Chorus.

An example of "Proto-Drama" is the Akitu Festival in Sumer which took place in the third millennium B. C.⁴² When Babylon became the capital and Marduk replaced Tammuz as the male devine figure the Akitu was celebrated in the spring. The ritual opened with elaborate purification rites and the recitation of the Enuma elish, a sacred narration. The king was then escorted by the priests to the shrine of Marduk where he was left alone.

The high-priest then emerged from an inner sanctuary, where the statue of the god stood, and divested the monarch of his regalia, slapped his face, pulled his ears, forced him to his knees before the image and extracted from him a negative confession:

I have not sinned, O Lord of the lands,
I have not been negligent regarding thy divinity,
I have not destroyed Babylon.

To this the priest replied by a kind of absolution and blessing from Marduk, and restoring to him his insignia he re-established him in his royal office for the ensuing year.

In the meantime there had been increasing commotion in the city during the search for Marduk, who was imprisoned in the "mountain" of the underworld, and whose captivity was reflected in the desolate state of the land. Mock battles ensued for the purpose of releasing him. This was accomplished on the sixth or seventh day by his son and avenger Nabu.⁴³

After the liberation of Marduk and the reinstatement of the king, the statues of the gods were assembled in the

⁴²James, pp. 55-57.

⁴³Ibid., p. 55.

Chamber of Destinies to confer upon their leader, Marduk, their combined strength for the conquest of the forces of Chaos and Death and to determine their collective destiny.

The king holding his sceptre in his hand then proceeded to the great hall to receive a fresh outpouring of divine power. Grasping the hands of the great lord Marduk, he and the other gods went forth in procession along the sacred way to the Festival House (Bit Akitu) on the outskirts of the city.

..... It is probable that it was in the Festival House that the primeval battle was re-enacted, or in some way made efficacious. Thus, at the conclusion of the rites in the Bit Akitu, a banquet was held to celebrate the triumph of Marduk, and all that this involved for the well-being of the country. Then, on the eleventh of Nisan, after the banquet, a return was made to the Esagila. There the sacred marriage was consummated by the king and a priestess, probably of the royal blood, perhaps in a chamber decorated with greenery. . . erected on one of the stages of the ziggurat.⁴⁴ By this ritual union the fertility of the fields, the flocks and men was restored because the god and goddess upon whom fecundity in nature depended were united and from their intercourse life sprang forth.

It now only remained for the gods to reassemble on the twelfth of Nisan in the Chamber of Destinies to ratify the divine decree concerning the fate of society in the ensuing year. . . .⁴⁵

The Annual Festival concluded with this final act, after which the gods returned to the cities and the men to the tilling of the soil with the confidence that the agricultural hazards of the turn of the year had been safely dealt with.

⁴⁴The "Ziggurat" or "Zikkurat" was a temple built in the form of a pyramid, not unlike the great ceremonial edifices of Middle America.

⁴⁵James, p. 57.

In analyzing this "Proto-Drama", it is interesting to note that it took several days to perform, as did the Tammuz Liturgy performance. Several sacramental groups can be determined, although only the mock battles could in any way have been general; the banquet, the procession and assembly of the gods were probably all enacted by the same group of priests, probably similar in number to the size of the Greek chorus. The ritual seems to have been divided into two parts separated by the mock battles and procession. The first part had two major roles, the king and the high-priest. The second part had only one, Marduk, unless we consider the priestess with whom Marduk had ritual intercourse. In the first part the chorus were priests representing themselves; in the second, they probably represented the gods, although it is possible that the gods were represented by the statues only. The monarch was regaled in his kingly attire as was the high-priest. Although no mention is made of masks or costume for Marduk, there was surely some real or symbolic way for the audience to recognize him as the god and not the personator. Part One took place en route to and before the shrine of Marduk with no hint of additional scenery; Part Two took place at the Chamber of Destinies, along a procession route to the Festival House, and the consummation of the royal marriage took place in a decorated chamber, apparently built especially for that purpose atop a nearby Ziggurat.

Other than the confession of the king and the recitation of the Enuma elish, there is no further indication of formal speech, and indeed, all the incidents could easily be pantomimed. Although the "Proto-Drama" lasted seven or eight days, the plots of the two parts are simple and short.

Since most of the Ritual-Drama of Middle America falls into the two more complex categories, it may serve the reader to consider another less perfect but more familiar example--the Passion Play or Mystery Play of Osiris which was enacted in the two great festivals of spring and autumn. The festivals and celebrations were highly symbolized and ritualized, but the death and resurrection of Osiris, regarded as two aspects of a single event, were represented relatively realistically with appropriate lamentation and exultation.⁴⁶

Senusert, the second king of the twelfth dynasty, visited a number of Nile cities immediately before his coronation and played the role of Horus in the Mystery Play at each town, supported by the princes and officials of his court. By identifying with Horus, the throne and the land became mystically united.⁴⁷

The victory of Horus over Seth in the myth was among the scenes, described as Horus taking possession of the Eye (i.e. of his royal power located in the crown),

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 298.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 87.

and the treading of barley by oxen on the threshing-floor, symbolizing the dismemberment of Osiris by Seth and his fellow conspirators in a vegetation setting. This was avenged by Horus (i.e. the king), who ultimately revived his father (Osiris). The coronation of the Pharaoh was then enacted in a series of scenes which included his investiture with the royal insignia, censings, the distribution of half-leaves of bread as the symbol of life, to those who made homage to him. . . . Next followed dirges in honour of the dead Osiris by two women in the guise of Isis and Nephthys as a prologue to the burial rites when the corpse had been "found" by the priests called "spirit-seekers" impersonating Thoth. The "Opening of the Mouth" ceremonies were indicated by the articles offered to them. . . .⁴⁸

The play concluded with a scene portraying the resurrected Osiris with appropriate exultation.

Here is a "play" which seems to have been interrupted by a ritual "Interlude" which bears only slight relationship to the larger work. The "Interlude" was an enactment of the coronation of the Pharaoh, and was, except for no mention of dance, a "Dromenon-Drama" in its own right. The interpolated scenes, however, were probably specifically for the anticipation of the accession of Senusert, since it was not common practice for the Pharaoh to perform in them.

The Passion Play itself was nearer "Proto-Drama" than the less complex "Dromenon-Drama". No mention is made of dance, although there likely was some movement in the lamentations, dirges and exultations which were

⁴⁸Ibid.

presumably sung or "wailed" by a group or chorus. There was a minimum number of impersonators at any given time, although at least three major characters took part--Osiris, Seth and Horus--and possibly the two sisters--Isis and Nephthys. The "episodes" were separated by lamentations, dirges and exultations which may have been general, but were more likely performed by a group of priests. The various scenes took place in different parts of the cities, and no mention is made of any attempt at formal settings other than the royal trappings and possibly the use of the Royal Barge.

These are the forms of Ritual Drama. For easy comparison and reference in the later chapters, there follows a chart containing side-by-side lists of comparable characteristics. (Figure 3)

The Pleasure Play

It may be well here to discourage any idea that all or most ritual develops into drama. Ritual continues in many forms--hazing, kicking tires, setting tables (for people or gods) in a specific way. Even those rituals which develop into Ritual Drama frequently die on the vine due to the very formality that made it Ritual Drama. Ritual Drama usually develops on a branch of the tree of a formal religion; and formal religious systems are notoriously unreceptive to new ideas and forms for their liturgy, sacraments or rites. What then can cause the

Fig. 3

Types and Characteristics of Ritual Drama

	Primitive Mimetic Dance	Ritualized Mimetic Dance	Dromenon-Drama	Proto-Drama
Dance	Almost exclusively imitative of animals.	Primarily dance, imitative of a simple event.	Dance separate from "episode".	Little dance; precedes and/or follows episode (s).
Costume and Makeup	Animal skins and painted or played animal masks.	Painted or solid masks and simple symbolic trappings.	Individuality of masks, and accoutrements.	Individuality of masks, costumes and properties.
Sacramentalism	Sacramentalism, i.e. tribal participation.	Sacramentalism, Specialist begins; personator or "Director".	Sacramentalism lesser, group still active in ritual; increase of personator role.	Sacramentalism symbolic, chorus or group represents community. One or two major impersonators.
"Diction"	Vocal imitation of the mimed animals or "forces".	A brief hymn or narration, possibly with random language added.	First person oration by central figure along with group hymn or ode.	Long speeches and odes alternating with a second person and/or the group.
Subject	Subject matter: <u>durées</u> --death, food supply, propagation.	<u>Durées</u> , but with beginnings of anthropomorphism.	Focus on a single "person" and his deed--real or allegorical.	Anthropomorphism complete. Past hero-king-god single concept.
Plot		Reconstruction of a single event.	Staging of a moment or single event.	Short Plots.
Setting			Creation of real or symbolic "Aura" about central	Simple setting or none at all.

change from the sacramental and edifying ritual presentation to the Pleasure-Play? In Greece, at least for Tragedy, it seemed to be the result of the new wine of poetry and philosophy being poured into the old vessel of ritual song and dance.⁴⁹ Virtually every high culture develops a complex ritual with the basic dramatic ingredients; but in most cases it remains as ritual. In fifth century Athens, the "Prologues and messenger's speeches and everpresent choruses that trouble us are ritual forms still surviving at a time when the drama has fully developed out of the dromenon".⁵⁰

Comedy is another way out of ritual. If Comedy developed from a different kind of ritual--a "revel song" emerging from "the rural ritual designed to make the crops grow, and held amid merry-making and the lifting of all restraints in word and action"⁵¹--then it has changed little except to lose some of the formal ritual aspects.

F. M. Cornford suggests that Tragedy and Comedy developed from precisely the same Ritual-Drama, that the plots are similar, and that the major distinctions are in the completely human hero of comedy and on the simple

⁴⁹Harrison, Ancient Art and Ritual, p. 146.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 122.

⁵¹Spence, p. 69.

emphasis on the conflict and death of the hero in Tragedy, and on "the joyful resurrection and marriage that followed" in Comedy.⁵² An emphasis on reunited lovers and the associated sexual badinage has been a major characteristic of comedy throughout history.

Ivor Brown finds an ". . . inevitable connection of comedy with Liberty. So long as primitive man goes in terror of his tyrant or his gods he cannot become a public jester."⁵³ Possibly for this reason, references to comedy are rare in pre-columbian Middle America where life was cheap, and the communized, cruel city-state was ruled with the hard hand of the warrior-priest.

Drama seems to have originated with the dance and the dirge and the incantation--collective, sacramental features--and with a deity or a hero as its theme. As such it might be moving and beautiful, but it could not change, it could not be various. Conservatism is a virtue in ritual, but it can also prevent a livelier form from breaking out of its conservative mold. "Ritual must wane that art may wax".⁵⁴ The growth of the drama from ritual is a slow one; ceremony conserves its own inertia; and

⁵²Francis MacDonald Cornford, The Origin of Attic Comedy (London: Edward Arnold, 1914), p. 212.

⁵³Brown, p. 70.

⁵⁴Harrison, Ancient Art and Ritual, p. 228.

"when the priest is stage-manager there is little hope of progress."⁵⁵

In pre-columbian Middle America the priest was still the stage-manager; and the indigenous forms of Ritual-Drama discovered by the conquering Spaniards were still, for the most part, more ritual than Drama.

⁵⁵Brown, p. 62.

CHAPTER IV

A PLACE IN THE SUN: THE SOCIO-GEOGRAPHY OF MIDDLE AMERICA

Geography

Next to the sun, the most constant presence in Middle America is the volcano. The ancient prophets spoke of five great eras, each doomed to destruction; the fifth period, in which we now live, will see the destruction of the world in a cataclysmic earthquake.¹

Mountains are the backbone of this land, dividing it into three distinct areas--the Southeastern Highlands in Guatemala and Southeastern Mexico, the Southern Highlands in Southern Mexico, and a Central Highland in Central Mexico, by far the most fertile area, the most economically and politically important of the three. (Fig. 4).

These three highlands are generally well watered and arable. North of the Central Highlands and along the entire narrow west coast is desert. Along the wider east

¹Eric Wolf, Sons of the Shaking Earth (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), p. 1.

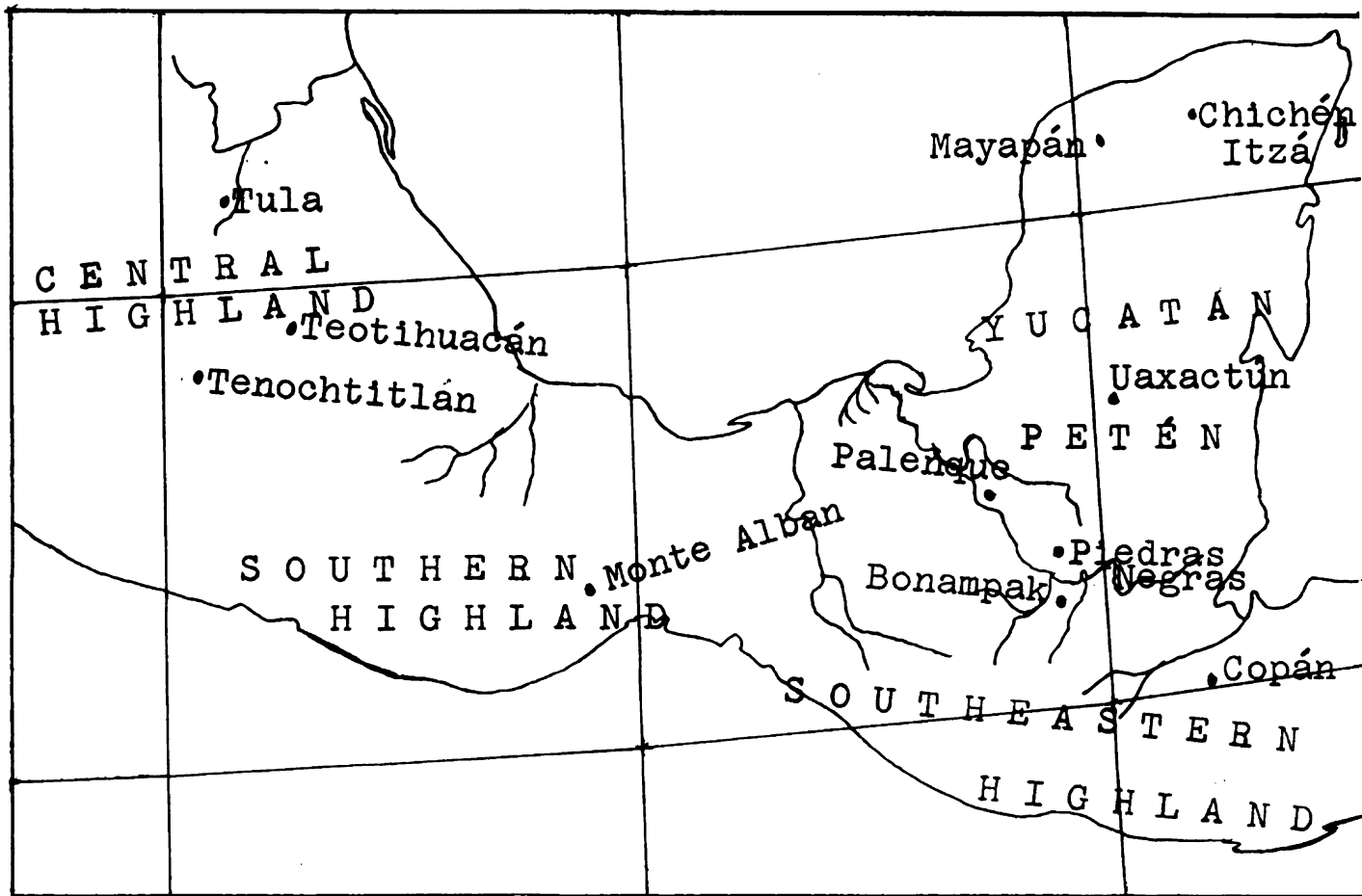


Fig. 4

Physical features, areas and pre-columbian sites
in Middle America.

coastal plain and in the flatlands of Yucatan there is heavy rainfall; in the thick tropical jungles of the Mayan Petén it rains for nine months each year and averages over one hundred inches of rainfall.

Theories of Origin

It is generally accepted that man first entered this continent around 25,000 B.C.² crossing from Siberia

²Ibid., p. 21.

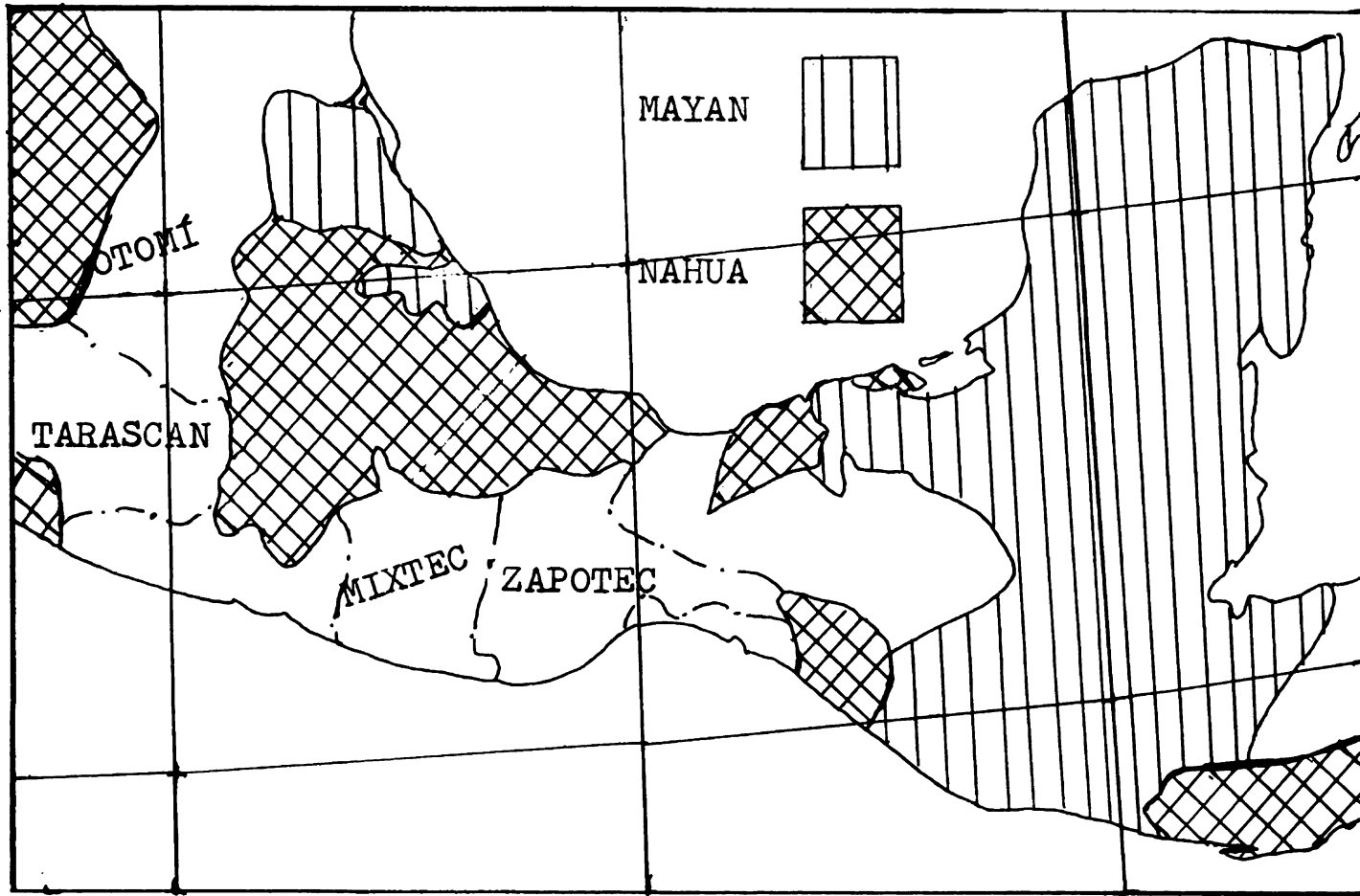


Fig. 5

Distribution of Maya and Nahua speaking peoples (after Frederick Johnson, The Mayas and Their Neighbors).

to Alaska in pursuit of herds of large game. Subsequent migrations continued probably into the Christian era. In spite of frequent romantic theories of origins of the American Indian from Egypt, the conjectural continents of Atlantis and Mu, and the even more serious attempts at identifying him with the Lost Tribes of Israel,³ the generally accepted theory is that man developed in America from the game hunter through the various

³Robert Wauchope, Lost Tribes and Sunken Continents (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), p. 28. The Lost Tribes theory is widely held to this day by followers of the Book of Mormon.

agricultural stages as he did in Eurasia.

Linguistic Distributions

Over two hundred and sixty languages have been recorded in Middle America in three major families-- Uto-Aztec (Nahua), Oto-Zapotecan, and Macro-Mayan.⁴ The constant expansion and migration of tribes have caused the great diversity of language from valley to valley and village to village. Before the third millenium B. C. the Macro-Mayan group occupied the entire east coast from Texas to Yucatan. Subsequent movements, principally by Nahua groups, left the Huastec and Totonac groups in small coastal pockets isolated from the main Mayan area of Yucatan and Guatemala (Fig. 5). The Nahua area extending from the Central Highlands to the Gulf of Mexico, is by far the most densely populated area of Mexico, accounting for some fifty percent of the population. The unmarked areas in Figure 4 represent a large number of small groups principally of the Oto-Zapotecan family.

In the century before the Conquest, Nahua was the dominant language of the Mexica state,⁵ preceding and

⁴Wolf, p. 36.

⁵Ibid., p. 41. Ancient and modern writers seem unable to settle on a term for the civilization which was centered in the Valley of Mexico and occupied the Central Highlands. In more popular literature "Aztec" is invariably used, although the Aztecs were a relatively small group. Nevertheless, it was the Aztecs of Tenochtitlan who were the conquerors of Mexico, whom Cortés conquered and

following the Aztec conquests. It became a lingua franca, the language of trade and politics for much of Middle America, and carried sufficient prestige that many people adopted it and gave up their own language.

The Maya languages of Yucatan-Guatemala are very similar to each other, indicating that they have been in the area for a long time and have been relatively undisturbed. The Huastecs and Totonacs of the Gulf Coast, although originally of the Macro-Mayan family, are now virtually unintelligible to the Yucatec or Guatemalan Mayans, due to their long separation and close proximity to other language groups.

Food Supply

Since the ninth century B.C., the diet of the Middle American Indian has remained basically the same. It consists of plant food---a basic "trinity" of maize, beans and squash. Except for the turkey, and in pre-columbian times, small fattened dogs, meat was rare. The Mayans raised bees, but used the honey principally for an

who, due partly to their penchant for human sacrifice, have held the popular imagination for three centuries. "Mexico" is a looser term, including all the Nahuaspeakers and their allies or subject peoples of the loose Aztec "nation". Nahuatl is, technically, a linguistic term; except when speaking specifically of the Aztecs or when citing other sources, "Nahuatl" will be used in this work, and will include the Aztecs but exclude the non-Nahuatl speaking tribes of the Mexico state. In sixteenth century Spanish, the "h" is sometimes omitted.

alcoholic drink. Occasional supplements to the basic diet were moths and their eggs, sesame and squash seeds, peanuts and piñon nuts, iguana, turtle, snakes and rats. But the most important food, and the one with which the most important god and ceremonies were concerned, was maize. As a result, religious concepts were geared to the cycle of planting and harvesting; and the Mayan calendar, which was more accurate than the Gregorian, was a religious instrument. Each day had a god, and the gods and their rituals were inextricably tied to the land. The amount of land required by the slash-and-burn system of cultivation, in which acreage of equal size lay fallow every other growing season, kept the size of villages small.

Ceremonial Centers

The great centers that did rise--Chichén Itzá, Mayapán, Teotihuacán,--were not true cities, but were ceremonial centers to which the inhabitants of the surrounding villages would come for rituals and ceremonies, and to worship their gods. In these centers the temple precincts were usually oriented toward the position of the sun during either the solstices or the equinoxes.

In Middle America religion was the most vigorous social force; and the earliest period is called the

Theocratic period.⁶ Priests, not chiefs, governed the various tribal groups, ". . . ever conscious that they must placate the gods who controlled all natural phenomena."⁷ Painted murals and pottery of the Theocratic period show priests but seldom warriors.

The leading figure of the society dominated by the ceremonial center is the full-time servant of the gods in whose mediation between supernatural and human beings the welfare of man depends. He is the steward of his gods on earth, their representative on earth. While he lives, he wears their symbols; when he is buried, these symbols are buried with him.⁸

By means of ceremonies and magical rites the priesthood controlled the religious calendar which told people when to clear the land, when to plant and when to harvest. Ceremonies were held "to further the tasks of cultivation"⁹ and they were always held at the ceremonial centers. Although priests lived in these centers, for the most part, the supporting populace lived in a twenty to thirty square mile area around the ceremonial center proper. But at times of the ceremonies themselves, thousands of Indians from miles around would gather there to help maintain the order and consistency of the universe.

⁶Wolf, pp. 69-109.

⁷George C. Vaillant, Artists and Craftsmen in Ancient Central America (New York: American Museum of Natural History, 1945), p. 22.

⁸Wolf, p. 79.

⁹Ibid., p. 81.

There is overwhelming evidence that every building in these centers was of a religious nature.¹⁰ The temples and palace-like structures were solely intended for the enactment of rituals or as the repositories of sacred images, including the calendar stone.

Time

The calendar inextricably links astronomy, time and the food supply. Middle America had its own vision of time, in which there are many universes, each of which had its allotted time which would end in catastrophe. When one is destroyed, there is born another universe which, like the priest-murderer, Frazer's King of the Wood, must then await its own violent destruction. The concept of the universe's time is complicated by a concern with the two mystical numbers--two, which represented the cosmic duality, and four, representing the directions and the four past universes. In spite of the great precision of calendric measurements and calculations, the Mayans curiously failed "to distinguish between past and future in the prophetic chants. What had gone before and what lay ahead were blended in a way that is baffling to our Western minds."¹¹ The calendar set the time for

¹⁰Charles Gallenkamp, Maya (New York: Pyramid Publications, 1962), p. 78.

¹¹J. Eric S. Thompson, The Rise and Fall of Mayan Civilization (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1954), p. 14.

celebrations and crises, and determined individual fate. Virtually every individual identified in codices is identified by his day-name-- Five-Rain, Two-Rabbit, One-Reed, etc.

Dualism

Probably the most essential principle of the pre-Cortesian world is the concept of dualism. It influences views of man, gods, nature and art. In many cases, specific dualistic concepts appear to be aetiological resolutions of the contradictions in nature, where opposites are frequently interdependently parts of a whole. Spirit and matter depend on each other and the chief danger to the sun (spirit) is that when it descends into the earth it may fall into the inertia of matter. The concept of Quetzalcoatl embodies this dualism. Quetzalcoatl, as do many of the important gods, takes two forms; "as Venus he is pure matter condemned to incarnation; as a dog (Xólotl) he is matter. . . ." ¹²

Two of the most frequently recurring architectural motifs are the symbols for burning water and the flowering stone. Reason cannot allow these as precise representations of "what exists in nature", but such a broad freedom of concept, which would permit the unamazed

¹²Laurette Séjourné, Burning Water (New York: Grave Press, 1960), p. 71.

acceptance of such opposites within a single entity could go far to reconcile man with the inherent paradoxes of the universe. The Great Temple at Teotihuacán reinforced this principle, for the gods of rain and celestial fire were placed side by side at the top of the pyramid.

It is only natural that the Aztec creation myth should also embody dualism. The father of the creator gods is Ometecuhtli (Two-Lord); his wife is Omecíhuatl (Two-Lady); they live in Omeyocan (Two-Place). "Fundamentally, these two deities are one, embracing the opposing principles of the masculine and the feminine. . . ." ¹³ and represent the governing dualism of the whole ancient universe.

In the religion, ritual and drama of indigenous America, seeming paradox and seeming non sequitur abound. To the mind schooled in a system of Aristotelian grammar and logic, this kind of dualism is difficult, but it is the sine qua non to an understanding of very different cultures and their expression.

¹³Paul Westheim, The Art of Ancient Mexico (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1965), p. 8.

CHAPTER V

FROM THE BEGINNINGS TO THE AZTEC FLOWERING

The beginnings of sedentary culture in Middle America are lost in the mists of time. Excluding the Maya states which will be discussed in later chapters, writing came very late to the Central Highlands. The Aztecs learned picture-writing from the Mixtecs, a culture that preceded them in the Central Highlands, but this was not until the fourteenth century.¹ So the problem of finding evidence of ritual-dramatic expression before that time is limited to sources classified as archaeological--figurines, masks, pottery paintings, murals, wall frescoes and architectural remains. And even these evidences require more interpretation than one would prefer; for except for the Olmec ritual group of Figure 10, the evidence is, for the most part, composed of simple dance and personation of totem animals and anthropomorphic gods. These are perforce the earliest and most primitive stages of development of Ritual Drama.

¹Vaillant, The Aztecs of Mexico, p. 104.



Fig. 6

Clay figurine from Valley of Mexico, c. 900 B. C. (After Wolf, p. 71).



Fig. 7

Olmec wooden mask from Guerrero. (Miguel Covarrubias, Indian Art of Mexico and Central America; New York: Knopf, 1957; Plate IV)

Early Olmec Culture

The first stone "religious" buildings that have been discovered date from around 900 B.C. From that date to about 400 B.C. was the Olmec period. The word "Olmec" more properly defines a style of sculpture which centered in the ceremonial center of La Venta on the Gulf Coast, but which spread far and wide into areas which later were definitely Maya and Nahua. Little is known of the language they spoke.

One of the earliest figurines we have is from Tlatilco in the Valley of Mexico. It dates from the ninth century B.C. and shows traces of Olmec influence. This

masked man (Fig. 6) in a ritual costume and formal pose suggests the emergence of the full-time religious specialist of that era.

Figure 7 shows an Olmec mask, which is very rare in the fact that it is made of wood. The mask is seven inches high, has openings through the eye and can be worn, although no mouth opening exists. Its use has not been determined, although carvings and traces of paint indicate it was probably ceremonial rather than funerary.

The Mask in Middle America

Since the mask is a major evidence of theatrical expression and since the wearing of masks is probably the single characteristic ubiquitous to all of the higher cultures of Middle America, it may be well to discuss them here.

To the western mind a mask is an attempt to conceal or an attempt to portray or impersonate. In pre-columbian Middle America, in such rudimentary developing theatricals as there were, this was also true; but the mask was also much more; with its help a man was transformed into the being the mask represents, and all the physical and magical qualities of the being passed to him. The ferocious characteristics of the eagle and jaguar were transferred to the warrior who wore these masks and costumes--both in his eyes and, as he hoped, in the eyes of his enemy.

As the crown represents and effectuates the sovereignty of the king, so the mask represents and effectuates the power of the deity. In the codices, gods are seldom represented without masks, as are his priest-impersonators. In the ceremonies, those priests and captives who impersonated a deity invariably wore masks for the duration of the ceremony, which sometimes lasted twenty days.

The mask both impersonates and elevates the wearer above others of his species. For instance, the dog, who has the duty of conducting the dead to a lower world, "like his model the god Xólotl, is transformed into Xólotl, thanks to the mask".² (Fig. 8)

Quetzalcóatl, whose cult spread over all of Middle America, was said to have declared, after considering the body that the gods had given him, that he would never consent to showing himself in such a form. Coyotlinahuatl (Double Coyote) proposed to correct this.³

. . . He made him first a dress of quetzal feathers . . . from the shoulders to the waist. Then he made him his turquoise mask, and took red dye with which he reddened his lips, took yellow dye, with which he made little squares on his forehead, then he drew in his teeth as if they were serpent's, and made his wig and his beard of blue feathers and of red guacamaya feathers, and arranged them very well.⁴

²Westheim, p. 94.

³Séjourné, p. 131.

⁴Garibay, Vol. II, p. 311.



Fig. 8

Pottery effigy vessel from Colima. Dog wearing human (?) mask. (Lothrop, Foshag and Mahler, Pre-Columbian Art, New York: Phaidon Publishers, Inc., 1957), p. 72.

Quetzalcóatl looked in a mirror, saw that he was beautiful, and was pleased. The costume and the turquoise mask of Quetzalcóatl have survived almost to today, in theatre and in ritual.

So masks might be worn not only as sacred and profane theatrical disguise but as expressions of aspiration to higher spirit, to identify oneself with a deity, as a funerary ornament or to impersonate a deity. The impersonations are limited to deities because in the Aztec pantheon, virtually every significant animal had been totemically aligned with a deity; and the individual, except as occasional gods may have been historical



Fig. 9

Olmec rock carving from Morelos, just South of Mexico City.
(After Covarrubias, p. 64).

personages, did not exist.

Figure 9 is an Olmec pictographic rock-carving showing three "priest"-dancers wearing masks--each one different from the other--engaged in what appears to be a phallic dance. A fourth member has doffed his mask and his costume and sat on the ground, although apparently not in exhaustion. His head appears to be still partly covered with a monkey mask--appropriate enough, since the monkey is identified with dance and fertility rites.⁵ With no additional information, the situation would have to be classed as a "Ritualized Mimetic Dance" by reason of the

⁵Wolf, p. 58.

number of participants, the totemic animal-deity masks and the evocation of sympathetic magic inherent in every phallic ritual. Although the complexity of the costumes and accoutrements would tend more to the "Dromenon-Drama", the lack of supplemental information would make this an extremely hazardous guess.

The Ritual pictured in Figure 10 shows a more typical Olmec style, which is typified by the long eyes, the jaguar mouth mask so highly conventionalized that it looks in many cases simply like a very embittered human mouth, and the too-high brow and crown. The figurines shown here were found at La Venta deeply buried, indicating

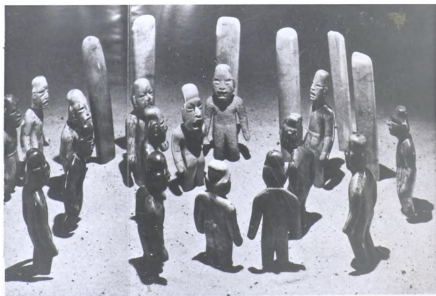


Fig. 10

Olmec ritual depicted in figurines. Height: eight inches. (S. K. Lothrop, Treasures of Ancient America; Geneva Editions d'Art Albert Skira, 1964), p. 22.

their great age. Before a miniature wall of upright jade axblades, a small figure of coarse stone confronts fifteen individuals of jade or fine serpentine. Although there seem to be no dance positions, a certain physical tension is apparent in some of the figures. A few have mouths open indicating speaking while most are either closed or "loose". Taken together, it has a distinctly ritualistic appearance, although, like Figure 9, it defies precise classification on our scale of ritual development.

Teotihuacán Culture

The mother-culture of the Valley of Mexico was what is called the Teotihuacán culture with its center at that great site. Teotihuacán endured over a thousand years. Its Pyramid of the Sun is the largest edifice ever built in this hemisphere before the Twentieth Century. Many of the cultural features of the Teotihuacáños survived in the Aztec culture. Teotihuacán was a theocracy, as were most Middle American cultures, with a very formalized ritual and art. It was probably Nahuaspeaking, but only distantly related to the much later Aztecs.

Masks are relatively common artifacts, but not of the type to be specifically worn in a ritual. Figure 11 shows two of these; both are hollowed out in the back like practical masks, but both were at one time set with inlaid stones in the eye concavities and were probably

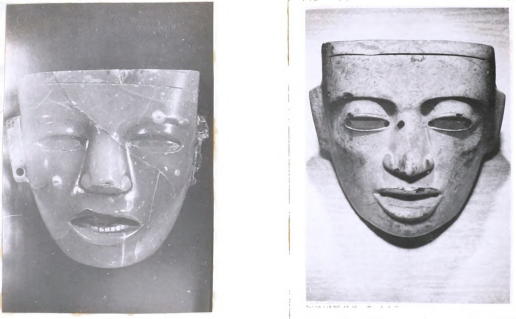


Fig. 11

Two classical Teotihuacán masks, one of onyx, one of limestone, both formerly with inlaid eyes. (Left: Lothrop, p. 45; Right: Lothrop, et al, plate VII.)



Fig. 12

Teotihuacán Bowl, height four and one half inches, showing impersonator of Xochipilli. (Lothrop, p. 47.)

not used for impersonation since the wearer could not see.

Impersonations are evident however in two artistic representations of the same culture. Figure 12 shows a classical Teotihuacán bowl. The plaster coated walls picture Xochipilli, Lord of the Flowers. The priest impersonating Xochipilli is wearing an eagle and flower mask-headress, a separate mask-piece around the mouth, and is speaking---as evidenced by the speech scroll emanating from his mouth. This kind of scroll is characteristic throughout much of Mexico for indicating speech.

The classic Teotihuacán fresco found at nearby Tetitla shows a richly dressed individual disguised as a jaguar with one knee bent to the ground. He probably



Fig. 13

Teotihuacán fresco shows impersonator of Tlaloc (28 5/8 by 83 5/8 inches)(Lothrop, et al), Plates XXV-XXVI.

represents Tlaloc, the god of rain, as identified by his large feather headress, his legs and body covered with a net, and the shield and rattle on the end of a shaft, both adorned with plumes. Again the large scroll, partly obscured by the rattle, indicates speech. To the left of Tlaloc, not shown, is his temple. True linear perspective had not been achieved by the Indians, so it is probably safe to assume that the ceremony is taking place on or before the temple. This could well be a presentation of the often cited dramatic "Hymn to Tlaloc"⁶ which will be discussed in length in Chapter VIII.

Another mural discovered at Teotihuacán shows Tlalocan, the "Earthly Paradise of Tlaloc" (Fig. 14). Tlalocan was reserved for people who had died in specific ways; there were those killed by lightning, those who died of leprosy or an incurable disease and those who died by drowning, in short, those who had already suffered and grieved--as Westheim suggests, Tlalocan is compensation for excessive suffering.⁷

When the new arrival reached Tlalocan, he intoned a long song of thanks and joined the others lolling beneath the trees or swimming in the lagoon, and passed the time

⁶See Daniel G. Brinton, Rig Veda Americanus (Philadelphia: D. G. Brinton, 1890), pp. 22-23 and Garibay, Vol. I, pp. 141-2.

⁷Westheim, p. 25.



Fig. 14

"Earthly Paradise" of Tlaloc. (National Museum of Anthropology, Mexico.)

singing with his companions, joining in their games, and sharing their pleasures.⁸

It is interesting to note that virtually every "soul" in Tlalocan is pictured with a speech scroll, and almost every one is in some position indicating dance--many in quite energetic and extreme dance poses. The group in the far right is forming a line with hands joined through their legs; since each also has a speech scroll, presumably they are also joined in choral song or choral speech. Many characters are in definite stances indicating

⁸Alfonso Caso, The Aztecs (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1958), p. 60.

song or impassioned oration. It is interesting to speculate on a musical-theatrical heaven; it is also interesting to consider one in which, unlike the somber, silent life of the individual in a theocratic society, heaven is everyone speaking at once.

The style of the mural is similar to some of the later pictographic codices and, in a sense, could, like some of the codices, be "reminders"⁹ of actual ritual. If this were the case, the scene would depict a "Ritualized Mimetic Dance". The large number of participants indicates sacramentalism; --and a durée (life-death-immortality) is being reconstructed. In a badly deteriorated section, the god Tlaloc can be seen in his customary mask and trappings centrally overseeing the entire scene. There is no indication of a speech or narration, but definite speech or song is overwhelmingly evidenced by the major part of the participants; almost all the requirements for "Mimetic Ritual Dance" are met.

The "Ceremonial" Platform

Teotihuacán was laid out with several quasi-central plazas. The main plazas had platforms in them of varying size but mostly from eight to ten feet in height. Figure 15 shows the platform of the central plaza in front of the Pyramid of Quetzalcóatl at Teotihuacán. It

⁹Caso, p. 84.



Fig. 15

The platform of the main plaza at Teotihuacán, as restored. Hereinafter, if a picture or drawing is not otherwise identified, it is by the author.

is about ten feet high and has stairways on all four sides. It was on these platforms that the Spanish chroniclers observed the plays, farces and ceremonies of the New World.¹⁰ It is interesting to note that, to a man, the writers use the word teatro, not plataforma or tablado when discussing these platforms.

George C. Vaillant contends that the fundamental idea in Middle American architecture was "to create a

¹⁰Diego de Landa, Relacion de las cosas de Yucatán (Mérida: Alfredo Berrera Vasquez, 1938), p. 120. Hernando Cortés, The Despatches of Hernando Cortés (New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1843), transl., George Folsom, pp. 319-320. Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxóchitl, Historia Chichimeca (Mexico, D.F.: A. Chavero), p. 212.



Fig. 16

Tepeyolohtli (From Codex Borbonicus 3).

focal point for ceremonies which took place outside the buildings".¹¹ The oldest buildings known to us in America were platforms of this type--not temples; the underlying idea was to "attain elevation and thus to dramatize the

¹¹Vaillant, p. 23.

ceremony".¹² Such platforms exist in every major center in Middle America, almost always in the geometric center of the main plaza, and before one of the most important larger temple buildings.¹³ Occasionally a small dais or "altar" or figure stands on the platform.

Except for the many small, unsophisticated figurines in dance positions discovered in Teotihuacán tombs, and pictured in most collections of pre-columbian art¹⁴ the only remaining non-Aztec evidence of certain pre-columbian age are several codices. Even these are from relatively late in the Aztec period, since we know the Aztecs learned picture writing from the Mixtecs in the fourteenth century after they were well established in the Valley of Mexico.¹⁵ Nevertheless, the hints of ritual and the portrayals of the gods can safely be assumed to be older than the actual drawings, since, of all things, gods and their rites change most slowly. Indian history and mythology were handed down by word of mouth. The codices were intended as aids or reminders--a way of recalling events already known by memory.¹⁶ As such, the picture writing of the

¹²Ibid., p. 25.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴The most thorough discussion of the dance aspect is in Kurath and Martí, Dances of Anáhuac.

¹⁵Vaillant, p. 104.

¹⁶Caso, p. 84.



Fig. 17

Mictlantecuhctli (From Codex Borbonicus 10).

Aztecs and Mixtecs was quite sufficient to their ends.

The persons pictured from the surprisingly realistic Codex Borbonicus¹⁷ (Figs. 16, 17, 18) are thought to be priests impersonating specific gods.¹⁸ Just as Michaelangelo's "Hand of God" is a very human hand, so have artists throughout history and throughout the world imitated what they have seen, not what they have imagined. Extending this idea, representations of specific Middle

¹⁷Other definitely pre-conquest codices, less ritual and more historical, are Vaticanus 3773 (B), Bologna (Cospiano), Borgia, and Mapa Quinatzin.

¹⁸Kurath and Marti, pp. 52-55.

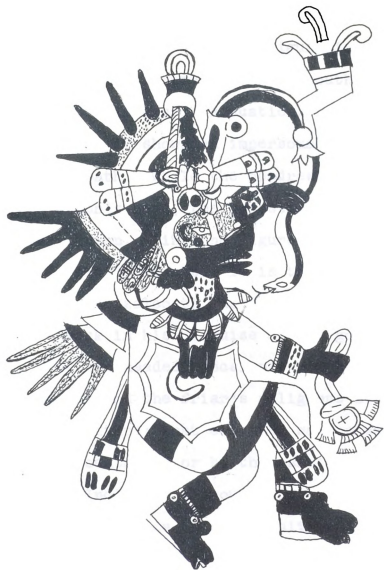


Fig. 18

Quetzalcoatl (From Codex Borbonicus 22).

American deities can, with reasonable safety, be concluded to be representations of priests or other impersonators.

Figure 16 shows Tezcatlipoca (Smoking Mirror) in his disguise of Tepeyolotli, the god of mountains. Through the jaguar skin and mask, the impersonator's

hands, part of his face and one foot show--in place of the other foot is a Smoking Mirror, characteristic of all Tezcatlipoca's disguises. The figure is in a dance position and a speech scroll comes from his mouth indicating a definite ritual-dramatic situation.

Figure 17 shows an impersonator of Mictlantecuhtli, the god of death. While the headdress and mask show a stylized death's head, the uncostumed hands and feet are again very human. Like the figure of Quetzalcóatl in Figure 18, Mictlantecuhtli is in the pose of a ritual dance. The Quetzalcóatl impersonator is wearing the long jaw-piece mask in his disguise as the god of wind.

The two headed apocalypse of the Spanish adventurer's greed and the friar's religious zeal left little of the old culture; what survived was concealed by the dust of the centuries or by the careful concealment of a few zealous Indians. Although some of these examples may seem somewhat tenuous to the uninitiated, the similarities between these simple artifacts and the circumstances of the ritual and drama to be seen in the next chapter are strong. With the coming of the Spaniards came written history--still subject to the conjecture, interpretation and prejudices of the observers and writers--but offering more easily comprehensible data for analysis.

CHAPTER VI

THE BLOOD CEREMONIES

To the popular mind, the single common fact concerning the Aztecs of Mexico is the unbelievable incidence of human sacrifice. Every schoolboy knows that the Aztec priest, standing over a victim atop a mighty pyramid, ripped out by the roots a beating heart and offered it to the sun god; beyond this, nothing.

But this alone is a ceremony dramatic enough; and although blood sacrifice did not occur at the festivals of every one of the Aztec eighteen months, it was indeed regular. By reason of this frequency, the impressive dramatic elements contained in the festivals, and the complete spectrum of complexity which the ceremonies contain, the blood rituals will be treated separately in this chapter, leaving detailed discussion of the performers, "disguises", settings, and dramatic literature to later chapters.

The Aztecs

The Aztecs displaced the Toltecs and founded Tenochtitlan (Fig. 19) in 1325; they subsequently allied



Fig. 19

The Valley of Mexico in 1521
(Wolf, p. 123)

themselves with Texcoco and Tlaxcopan and expanded into a wide and mighty federation.¹ They adopted and venerated several of the gods of the people they conquered. Thus, although the ceremonies took on a generally comparable pattern, the festivals for the entire year could only be described as eclectic.

The main Aztec concern was with the need to unify the various city states into a strong central government and a single language and tradition. The principal

¹Vaillant, p. 100. Wolf, p. 131, lists the date as 1345.

problem was the reconciliation of the violent, bloody rites of the northern tribes associated with the deity Tezcatlipoca-Huitzilopochtli with those of the more advanced and humanistic cult of the older sedentary peoples of the south associated with the god Tlaloc-Quetzalcóatl.²

The Aztec method of accomplishing E pluribus unum was a fanatically strict control of all aspects of life, including ritual and the associated dance, music and song. Severe punishment resulted from the slightest deviation of a step, a note or a word.³ These rituals were intended (as theatre from primitive to modern has always served to do) to produce "phatic communion"⁴ or rapport among members of the community, a "togetherness" reinforced by the common holding of the myths and sacred utterances of the combined past, present and future.

Human sacrifice, the Pathos of the Mediterranean Ritual-Drama and the focal point of many of the Aztec rituals, is "definitely not characteristic of the simplest human cultures . . . [since it requires] . . . considerable economic independence and advanced political organization."⁵ "Advanced political organization" was tightened by the

²Kurath, and Martí, p. 15.

³Ibid.

⁴James, p. 285.

⁵Howells, p. 228.

phatic communion of the most empathically involving of all spectacles--the ritual of human sacrifice.

Source

Fray Bernardino de Sahagún (1499-1590) was the first scientific anthropologist among Americanists. Somehow he escaped the purge of the Jews from Iberia and ended by discharging his scholarly bent as a monk in the New World. From the rubble of the once magnificent Aztec priesthood and society he gathered about him a group of native informants and picked their brains of their memories of what had been taught them in their youth. Carefully selecting them for their knowledge and integrity, he gained their confidence, and got them to relate their information in the way to which they were accustomed--in picture writing. He verified this data against the oldest of his native disciples who knew Latin and Castilian in addition to their own language.⁶ Sahagún combined devotion to scientific method with a sincere sympathy for the conquered Mexicans; and his monumental work, the Florentine Codex, is the principal source for most pre-Spanish studies of the Nahua speaking peoples.

In 1950 and 1951, Drs. J. A. Anderson and Charles E. Dibble published an English and Nahuatl version of Sahagún's monumental work under the title of The Florentine

⁶Séjourné, pp. 17-18.

Codex.⁷ Book Two is entitled The Ceremonies, and from this book will be described the ceremonies which contain dramatic elements.

Anderson and Dibble have attempted to do two things: to translate as literally as possible from the Nahuatl with reference to Sahagún's Spanish translation, and to retain the flavor of the sixteenth century by occasionally using archaic English forms. For this reason the descriptions of the ceremonies which follow are summaries and paraphrases, and references will be to the inclusive pages of each particular ritual. However, those things which Sahagún places within quotation marks appear to be calculated as actual "dialogues"--spoken parts of the rites; therefore, these alone will be set apart and quoted precisely.

The Rituals

Virtually all of the twenty Aztec months contained a major ceremony, a number of rites and rituals ostensibly in worship of the gods. In the late winter festivals these rituals were directed to the elemental gods; from April through August they directed their rites to first-

⁷Fray Bernardino de Sahagún, General History of The Things of New Spain (Florentine Codex) 12 Vols., Translated from the Aztec into English by Arthur J. O. Anderson and Charles E. Dibble, (Santa Fe, New Mexico: School of American Research and the University of Utah, 1950-1956).

fruit gods, agricultural and the younger deities; in Autumn and early Winter, they addressed the gods of the hunt, the mountains and the dead.⁸

No two ceremonies were alike, but they were generally devised in a typical general plan which usually included the following:

- (1) Ritual preliminaries: Offerings, fasting, ceremonial foods.
- (2) Procession of participants to the ritual site.
- (3) A dance or combat (real or ritual).
- (4) A sacrifice (human, quail or effigy).
- (5) A feast.
- (6) A collective dance with, or followed by, a recession.

This general structure will become apparent in the following summaries and in the detailed analysis of two of the festivals, Tlacaxipeualiztli Toxcatl and Ochpaniztli.

First Month⁹

The first month, dedicated to the Tlalocs, the rain gods, was called Quauitli eua, literally, "Tree is Raised". On mountain tops banners were hung and sacred papers were left. Following a procession to the mountain tops, priests slew a child on each mountain as a blood

⁸Kurath and Martí, p. 9.

⁹Sahagún, Book II, pp. 42-45.

offering; if the children wept before the ritual, their tears signified plentiful rain. The people rejoiced and then wept for the children. Warriors then did mock battle with captives at the shrine of Xipe Totec. Captors and prisoners did the Captive Dance.

The Seventh Month¹⁰

The seventh month was named Tecuilhuitontli. At this feast, an impersonator in the role of Uixtociuatl, goddess of the salt-makers and elder sister of the rain gods, was sacrificed. Her face was painted yellow, and she was ceremonally attired in a paper hat covered with green quetzal feathers, golden ear plugs, a shirt embroidered to resemble waves, and a skirt with a border edged in a design representing billowing green clouds. Golden bells and rattles on her ankles rattled and jingled as she walked. Her shield was painted with a water lily design and parrot feathers hung from it. Her reed staff had paper spattered with rubber, feathers and incense hanging from it. When she danced she swung the shield around in a circle and kept the rhythm by thrusting the staff into the ground.

For ten days, while there was sunlight, the salt-makers and women sang and danced in rows, holding each other with flower cords, and with flowers on their heads.

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 86-90.

They sang loudly in high treble voices. Some old men who were "keepers of the goddess" led them, and one carried a brilliant feather ornament while leading the Uixtociuatl impersonator in their midst.

On the night of the tenth day she began her vigil. They all sang and danced all night without rest, including several captives who were to die before her, as companions in her death. When the dawn broke, the priests came, painted and adorned like the god Uixtotin, with the claws of eagles. And the people came to watch, carrying flowers.

Then they took the captives, Uixtociuatl's companions in death, to the summit of the Temple of Tlaloc, the rain god, where they slew them as sacrifices. After the captives died, Uixtociuatl ascended to the summit whereupon the priests stretched her out on her back on the offering stone. A priest cut open her breast, reached in, and as the blood gushed out, tore out the heart, raised it as an offering, then placed it in a green stone jar.¹¹ Then trumpets were blown, and the body of Uixtociuatl was covered by a precious mantle and lowered from the pyramid. The actual ceremony took place in the

¹¹Sahagún, Book 2, p. 184. "And he whose breast be laid open was quite alive." The priests were apparently quite dextrous and adept at this operation; the incision was made and the hand inserted to the heart so rapidly that the victim quite literally could see, in his waning moments of consciousness and life, his own glistening heart being offered to the sun.

early dawn. When they had finished, the people dispersed to their homes, and that day there was feasting and banqueting.

The Eighth Month¹²

The eighth month was called Uei tecuilhuitl and contained a ritual to Xilonen, goddess of young green maize. For eight days before the feast there was song; it began in the early evening, and after the fires were lighted, all came forth from the House of Song, singing and dancing. Between pairs of men came the women--"light women" and harlots, all of whom were dressed richly, with unbound hair. They were joined by chieftains, warriors and captains, all ceremonially arrayed. The captains carried on their shoulders feather devices formed like trees, tied in three places with eagle feather clusters bound with ocelot skin, and on their left legs they wore real deer hooves tied to their legs with thongs.

The dancers carried pine torches before them, and held one another by the hand or about the waist, whirling about repeatedly, passing back and forth among the rows of braziers. Sometimes Moctezuma joined them. The dancing ceased about nine o'clock and all the men dispersed, the women remaining and keeping vigil.

¹²Ibid., pp. 91-99.

On the tenth day the face of the impersonator of Xilonen was painted yellow and red and she was dressed in a four-cornered paper cap, a wide turquoise neck band, a golden disc breast ornament, a shirt and skirt with water-lily design, princely sandals and a chili-red shield and rattle stick.

In the four cardinal directions she "entered, or went down into, the sand", first at Tetemacolco, then at Necoquixecan, third at Atenchicalcan, lastly at Xollococo.

All during the night, songs were sung and vigil was kept; no one slept. And when day broke the dancing began, especially by the women who were Xilonen's "court". These "priestesses" were made up and attired similarly to the Xilonen impersonator. They did not mingle with men but circled about Xilonen, singing for her "after the manner of women". On the way to the pyramid, the warriors led the way dancing a serpentine course. Drums were beaten and the priests who attended Xilonen played shell trumpets as they brought them to the pyramid, strewing and scattering incense. On the pyramid they laid Xilonen on the back of a priest and struck off her head and tore out her heart and "planted it in the blue vessel".

Afterward, everyone feasted on green maize, the women danced and offered tamales to the gods, and the old men and women drank heavily.

The Tenth Month¹³

The tenth month, dedicated to Xiutecutli, the god of fire and warmth, was called Xocotl uetzi. The priests killed fowl, cut a tree in the woods, dragged it to the temple, and raised it with an image of the god Xocotl. Slaves were adorned and the "Captive's Dance" was danced until nightfall.

The next day a great pyre was built at dawn. A procession of priests and slaves came to the foot of the temple. One priest, carrying a representation of Paynal, the god's representative, brought each slave to the fire, where he was hurled in. The writhing, smoking body was then put on the offering stone and his heart was torn out and cast before the image of Xiutecutli.

Then the "Serpent Dance" was performed by men and harlots. Youths competed for the image by climbing the tree. There was great jostling of the people.

The Fifteenth Month¹⁴

The fifteenth month, dedicated to Huitzilopochtli and his representative Paynal, was called Panquetzaliztli. Preliminary preparations included a forty-day fast by the god's priests; on the first day they took branches to the mountains. The merchants bought and prepared slaves for

¹³Ibid., pp. 104-109.

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 130-138.

sacrifice. On the second day men and harlots performed the "Entwined Dance" in the plaza of the pyramid. On the eleventh day merchants bathed and striped their slaves, and danced with them; the dancing continued for several days while the merchants fasted.

On the twentieth day, a priest impersonating Paynal descended from the temple at dawn with other priests, and made a circuit of four of the city precincts. Warriors with standards ran relays with slaves and held bloody skirmishes. Paynal descended from the pyramid to the ballcourt and slew four victims, who were dragged about the ballcourt to the four directions.

The remaining victims circled the pyramid and ascended it slowly. The priests then sacrificed the slaves, after which the nobles and old people feasted and drank wine. Then a mock battle was held by warriors and priests led by a dishevelled impersonator of Conchoatl, a minor deity.

Classification

The strictness and complexity of these ceremonies excludes the possibility of their being "Primitive Mimetic Dance". Although each contains sacramental (communal) dance, and each appears to be actually or symbolically associated with sympathetic magic, the dances are too organized, insufficiently spontaneous and on a more complex level of participation than simple group or animal

expression.

None fit neatly into the "Ritualized Mimetic Dance" category since dancing, although frequent, is consistently separate from distinct other episodes of the ritual; thus these rituals are characteristic of the two more complex classifications--"Dromenon Drama" and "Proto-Drama". A difficulty lies in the appearance of personators and impersonators; for the most part they simply appear, that is, they are visual impersonations and, except for Paynal who delivers the victims, simply "appear" as the gods. Considering the thoroughness of Sahagún's collection, it is likely that a major "hymn" or narration would be included or at least alluded to, if it did in fact exist. In Panquetzaliztli, for example, there is a ten-line "hymn"; but it was omitted here because it occurred very early in the twenty-four day festival, far from the sacrificial focalpoint of the ritual.

The complexity of these rituals necessitates one or more kinds of specialist. If not a "director", certainly an organizer would have to arrange and pre-plan the unfolding of the different features of the ritual, tell the communal participants when to begin the dance, indicate the order of god-appearance, decide the moment of sacrifice and otherwise stage-manage the "show".

The masks and trappings of the god-impersonators were certainly individualized, and though little is

described which might be considered a "setting", the god is as identifiable by his costume, makeup, and attendants as are the kings of the Elizabethan stage. No real plot incidents occur other than the unfolding of a durée--in this case, the maintenance of the sun on its course by the offerings of human hearts--and even these are not necessarily causal or sequential "plot-incidents".

All of these characteristics point to the stage of "Dromenon-Drama". Three Ritual Dramas of a more complex nature are to be considered next which will show the final stage which public Ritual Drama reached before the arrival of the Spaniards.

The Fifth Month¹⁵

The fifth month was called Toxcatl. On the first day of this month there was celebrated a great feast in honor of the god of gods, Titlacauan (Tezcatlipoca). It was the most important of all the feasts, and occurred a few days after our Easter. At this feast in honor of the god they slew a chosen youth with long hair and with no blemishes on his body, who for one year had lived as the impersonator of Tezcatlipoca. At the same ceremony, a new impersonator who would also live one more year, was

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 9-10 and 64-73.

offered to the people.¹⁶ This impersonator was the most perfect physical specimen that could be found, intelligent, personable, able to learn to play the flute, and to manifest the grace and manner of the "god of gods" as he walked through the streets.

He was much honored in his role; he was treated like a lord; the people bowed before him and kissed the earth in reverence (Fig. 20); Moctezuma himself provided the costumes and with great pomp ceremonially dressed the actor.

Twenty days before the feast of Toxcatl, they gave him four comely young women to "marry". At this time they changed his costume; they cut his hair like a war captain and gave him richer array.

Five days before he was to die, they celebrated feasts and banquets for him "in cool and pleasant places". On each of the first four days they sang and danced and feasted in different parts of the city. On the last day he travelled an appointed route and was ceremonially and symbolically abandoned along the way. When he arrived at the temple called Tlacochoalco, he was alone. He ascended by himself of his own free will; on the first step he broke his flute and shattered his whistle. When

¹⁶Comparable to the situation of the old and new Enaiutos Daimon. See Ridgeway, p. 53, Frazer, Chapters I and II and Harrison, Themis, Chapter VIII.



Fig. 20

The impersonator of Tezcatlipoca revered by the people. (From Sahagún, Book II, illustrations.)

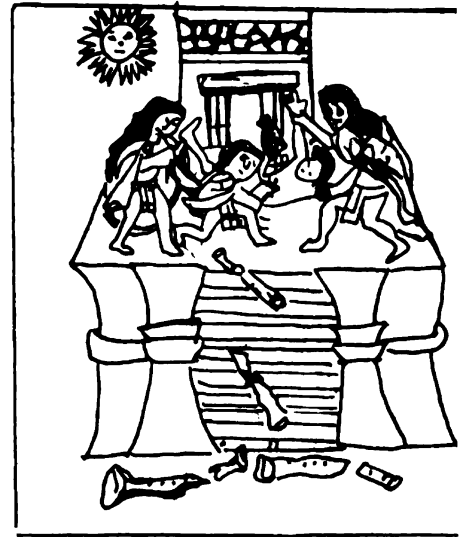


Fig. 21

The sacrifice of the Tezcatlipoca impersonator (Sahagún, Book II, illustrations.)

he reached the summit, the priests fell upon him and threw him on his back on the sacrificial stone (Fig. 21). The priest then cut open his breast, seized his heart, and raised it toward the sun. The four men carried his body down from the pyramid.

Then there was much ceremonial lighting of fires and burning of copal incense, and quail were beheaded and cast before the figure of Huitzilopochtli.

Two masters of youths caused the richly dressed women to begin the dance; they leaped, "dancing in the fashion of women". The women were in the middle of the court, holding their sacrificial banners in both hands. The priests also danced, making circles and striking the ground with their black feathered staves.

All the masters of the youths and the young warriors were spread out doing the Serpent Dance, moving back and forth, and holding hands as they danced. And a number of women danced a Popcorn Dance, wearing popcorn garlands, and painted from the thighs to the shoulders and covered with feathers. Night fell during the dance and the day of feasting ended. But the next morning, there was more dancing of the Serpent Dance, and another ceremonial death of the companion god to Tezcatlipoca, Ixteucale.

With the exception of detailed speech, all the characteristics of "Proto-Drama" are here present. Dancing did not occur until after the pathos, and then it was not general but separated into groups--a symbolic sacramentalism; the priests danced, "richly dressed women" danced, and the young warriors and masters of the youths danced--all separately and, presumably, at different times.

During the entire year of his impersonation the impersonator of Tezcatlipoca wore individualized mask, costume and properties which were distinctive and easily recognizable. He did not represent War or the Sun but Tezcatlipoca--a symbolically accoutred specific anthropomorphic deity.

The "plot" is similar to that of the Osiris Drama in that it can be reduced to the general incidents of death, dismemberment and rebirth (epiphany) of the god, including ritual intercourse with his four wives--that is, with the

four directions. But as it is extended over the duration of the festival the feeling of true drama is prevented by the fact of the "plot incidents" being spread over the entire length of the five-day festival.

It is important to understand that the "sacrificial victim" was a volunteer, unlike the slaves and captives of the previous rituals. There were only two ways to achieve the principal "heaven"--to die in battle or to die on the sacrificial stone--in the act of aiding the sun (god) across the sky. So this "actor" was either a true mystic or a very firm believer in Aztec theology.

The Eleventh Month¹⁷

The Eleventh Month was dedicated to Toqi or Teteo innan--"our Mother" or "our grandmother" (Maternal ancestor). She was the goddess of fertility and child-birth, and she caused earthquakes.¹⁸

The festival was known as Ochpaniztli, "the Sweeping of the Way". Five days passed quietly; then began the "Handwaving Dance" which lasted for eight days. After the eighth day, the mock-battle of the medicine women began and continued for four days before the House of Song and Dance. They pursued and pelted each other with matted

¹⁷Sahagún, pp. 19-20 and 110-117.

¹⁸Daniel G. Brinton, Rig Veda Americanus (Philadelphia: D. G. Brinton, 1890), p. 29.

tree parasites gathered into balls and cactus leaves and flowers. When the four days of skirmishing had ended, the impersonator of Toçì came forth, encircled by the medicine women. Then the priests of Chicome Coatì came out to receive her. It was probably here that they intoned the Song of Chicome Coatì:

O seven ears, arise, awake. Our mother, thou
leavest us now; thou goest to thy home in Tlalocan.
Arise, awake. Our mother, thou leavest us now;
thou goest to thy home in Tlalocan.¹⁹

The medicine women, knowing she was about to die, tried to console her. They said,

My dear daughter, now at last the lord Moctezuma
will sleep with thee. Be thou happy.²⁰

They then dressed her in her ceremonial attire. At midnight they led her forth to the temple. None spoke or made noise; everyone gathered around in the silent darkness. When they arrived at the place where she was to die, a priest "took her upon his back" and they swiftly cut off her head. Then they flayed her, and a priest quickly put on her skin. (Sahagún refers to the priest from here on as Toçì.) Then the "new Toçì" placed herself at the edge of the pyramid for all to see and, as quickly, came down, surrounded by the priests.

¹⁹Sahagún, p. 213.

²⁰Ibid.

And when "she" had come to the base of Huitzilo-pochtli's pyramid, she raised her arms, spread her arms and legs facing the god, and then turned about to place herself by her son, Cinteotl, who had been waiting there. Cinteotl wore a mask made of the thigh-skin of the first Toqi impersonator. They came together slowly and moved toward the temple and took their places where "Toqi" had died.

The next day at dawn, "the new Toqi" again climbed up to her place on the pyramid to be ministered to by the priests and noblemen; one applied feathers; another painted her face; others burned incense and decapitated quail for her. Then they left and returned with rich vestments and dressed her, after which they brought four captives, whom "Toqi" slew, one at a time, by sacrificially removing their hearts. "She" again descended the pyramid and moved out into the court with medicine women on either side, singing. The old priests led the procession, beating the drum and intoning the song:

The yellow flower hath opened--she, our mother with the thigh skin of the goddess painted on her face, departed from Tamoanchan.

The yellow flower hath blossomed--she, our mother, with the thigh skin of the goddess painted on her face, departed from Tamoanchan.

The white flower hath opened--she, our mother with the thigh skin of the goddess painted on her face, departed from Tamoanchan.

The white flower hath blossomed--she, our mother, with the thigh skin of the goddess painted on her face, departed from Tamoanchan.

She hath become a goddess, upon the melon cactus, our mother Itzpapalotl.

Thou hast seen, in the nine dry plains, the deer's heart on which was fed our mother Tlaltecútlī.

Once again with chalk, with feathers is she pasted. In the four directions hath the arrow shattered.

They saw thee turn to deer in the land of the gods Xiuhāel and Mimich.²¹

When they reached the platform lined with skulls, "the new Toçī" tramped upon her drum, at which Cinteotl departed in order to bear his mask, made of the thigh of the old Toçī off to the enemy lands, to set fear in their hearts. Then all departed.

When the sun was near setting, then came forth the priests of Chicome Coatl, wearing the skins of the flayed sacrificial victims who had died in the same rite with the Toçī impersonator. They came from the temple and sowed and scattered seeds among the onlookers who scrambled and fought for them. Then the priests of Chicome Coatl intoned a chant for the priestesses who proceeded singing as they went.²² The new Toçī stood waiting for them, facing them. Then "she" sent them forth and chased them, crying war cries. And all those who carried flowers spat and cast flowers at her.

Then, Toçī, guarded by the priests, moved to a wooden frame, took off the skin, stretched it out carefully

²¹Sahagún, pp. 208-209.

²²It is possible that the above Song of Chicome Coatl was sung here, although the content would seem more logical at the earlier time. It is also possible that it occurred at both places.

on the frame with the headdress, left all "her" costume, and all departed. At dawn of the next day, and for several days hence there was more dancing, first in separate groups and finally by the general population.

Here again we have "Proto-Drama". Although there is a large number of dances, they are definitely separated from the episodes. Toç1 and Cinteotl are clearly recognizable and individualized by their masks, costumes and properties; these are the only major impersonators. Several distinct groups appear to sing and/or dance--the "medicine women" (possibly midwives) in ritual combat, the priests of Chicome Coat1, and a chorus of old priests, indicating symbolic sacramentalism. There was also a general dance at the end of the ritual, the only remnant of full sacramentalism. The "Proto-Drama" took place in several places; it began at Toç1's temple, proceeded to the base of Huitzilopochtli's pyramid the next day, used the "platea" in the great plaza, included a scene at the skull platform, and returned to Toç1's temple. Durán says that a scaffold of boards and sticks was also built in front of Toç1's temple where the "victims were tied to the sticks and cruelly shot with arrows."²³ Sahagún makes no mention of this, however, and Duran's description seems to fit the Tlacaxipeualiztli more closely. Again

²³Diego Durán, The Aztecs: The History of the Indies of New Spain (New York: Orion Press, 1964), p. 245.

we have a very simple plot, similar to the Osiris and Tammuz dramas. There are several "odes", but still nothing approaching true dialogue.

Second Month

No Ritual-Drama captured the imagination of the Mexican artisans, artists and codex painters like the Tlacaxipeualiztli, the ritual of Xipe Totec "Our Lord the Flayed One". (Figs. 22, 23, 24). Originally a fertility god of the Zapotecs of the southern highlands, Xipe's cult spread throughout Middle America. Xipe is sometimes



Fig. 22

Zapotec funerary urn in the figure of Xipe Totec wearing the flayed skin of the previous Xipe, from a tomb at Monte Alban, Oaxaca. (Salvador Toscano, Arte Precolombiano de Mexico y de la Americano Central; Mexico D. F.: Universidad nacional autónoma de Mexico, 1944), p. 436.



Fig. 23

Xipe Totec. Two views of the same statue. Probably the priest rather than the god. Note loose hanging hands. Visible parts of body painted red. From Texcoco. Height: 15 3/4 inches. (From Lothrop, p. 61.)

referred to as female, other times as male, but the victim whose skin represents Xipe is invariably male. The confusion may result in certain similarities between this ritual and the Ochpaniztli (dedicated to "Our Mother" Toçī) where playing and the wearing of skin also occurs.

In the second month of the Aztec year called Tlacaxipeualiztli, ²⁴ there is an elaborate ritual including a mock combat between two groups of captives, the tototecti,

²⁴Sahagún, pp. 3-4 and 46-58.

the xipeme (those who wore the skins of men) and others who had become drunk and unruly and played the part of warriors (Fig. 25). The xipeme attacked the "warriors" and made them run; the totecti led by the Toteo impersonator Youallauan also attacked the "warriors". After a general dance, the captives were taken to the temple of Iopitli where they were held for a ransom. "Entertainments" were then provided for the xipeme and tototecti, after which they were slain in the customary manner and the bodies rolled down the temple stairs. Some of the bodies were



Fig. 24

Xipe Toteo. Front and rear view. Across the chest runs a sewn-up scar, through which the heart was torn. Face, ears and part of hair are worn separately as a mask. Connecting ties are probably rope rather than skin. (From Lothrop, et al; Plates XLIV and XLV.)

the skin of men and others

the

3



Fig. 25

Dance of the Xipeme
(The Flayed Ones).
(From Sahagún, Book II,
Illustrations, number
3.)



Fig. 26

Dedication to the sun
before the gladiator
sacrifice. (From Sahagún,
Book II, Illustrations,
number 6.)

eaten in ceremonial feasts.

The gladiatorial sacrifices then began. The captives were spread out in a given order, staying with their families. Four eagle and ocelot costumed "warriors" came forth to lead and guide the captives. Each one came quickly to the captives, displayed his shield and war club, lifting them toward the sun in dedication (Fig. 26), making formalized advances and retreats from the captives, each in his turn. Then the two ocelots and two eagles began a dramatized conflict which ended in the temple; when they again came out, they came dancing in order. They lay on the ground, crawled along, looking from side to side, then leaped up and began another mock combat. Then the Song of Xipe Totec was intoned:

O Youallauan, why dost thou mask thyself? Put on thy disguise. Don thy golden cape.

My god, thy precious water hath come down from Coapan. It hath made the cypress a quetzal. The fire serpent hath been made a quetzal serpent. Want hath gone from me.

Mayhap I shall die and perish--I, the tender maize. Like a precious green stone is my heart, [yet] I shall see gold in it. I shall be content if first I mature. The war chief is born.

My god, [give me] in part plenteous tender maize. Thy worshipper looketh toward thy mountain. I shall be content if first I ripen. The warrior chief is born.²⁵

After this, Youallauan²⁶ came forth from the temple garbed like Totec, at which the ocelot and eagle warriors again lifted up their shields and clubs to the sun. Then all the impersonators of all the gods dressed and masked as the gods appeared on their altars, emerged from the top of the temple of Topitli, proceeded in order down to the ground, and gathered around the flat, circular sacrificial stone altar, where they seated themselves according to rank on large chairs. First in rank was Youallauan whose office it was to offer as sacrifice, that is, to slay, each of the captives destined for sacrifice.

When this was done, trumpets were sounded and conch shells were blown; men put their fingers in their mouths and whistled, and there was singing. Then the Cozcateca--

²⁵Sahagún, p. 213.

²⁶Garibay, p. 335, translates this "he who drinks the night"; Brinton, p. 58, reads "nocturnal tippler".

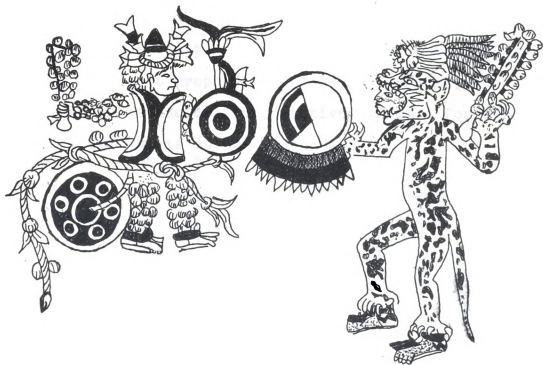


Fig. 27

Gladiatorial sacrifice. Rope ties victim to round stone altar. Victim's club has feathers attached. Jaguar-priest's club has sharp obsidian tips beneath the feathers. Part of the victim's body is also glued with feathers. (From Codex Magliabecchiano 18.)

roughly equivalent to the picador who, injuring the shoulder muscles of the bull, ineffectuates the bull's defenses---came forth, garbed in feather banners and arranged themselves around the sacrificial stone. One of the captors then seized his captive by the head and brought him to the offering stone where he gave him wine to make him brave; the captive, surprisingly cooperative, raised the wine four times to the four directions as an offering and then drank it.

Then a priest came forth to the captive and beheaded a quail, and raised the captive's shield to the

sun, and cast the quail behind him. After this, they lifted the captive onto the offering stone, where he was joined by a priest dressed in the skin of a wolf, and representing the uncle of the captive destined for sacrifice.

Old Wolf: He is as my beloved son.
 Captive : He is as my beloved father.²⁷

The Old Wolf then took a rope which was attached to the center of the stone and tied it around the waist of the captive, and gave him a war club which was set with feathers in place of the usual obsidian blades (Fig. 27). Then the priest set before him four light pine clubs with which to defend himself. Then the captor and the Old Wolf withdrew and the "contest" was begun. The captive met and fought all four of the ocelot and eagle warriors who tried to strike him on the thigh or calf or head. If a captive were "valiant and courageous" and the Cozcateca could not subdue him, there came a left-handed warrior, guised as the god Opochtli who wounded his arm and finally threw him flat upon the surface.

Thereupon they quickly seized him and raised and stretched him out upon the round sacrificial stone. Then Totec (Youallauan) gashed the breast, seized the captive's heart, and raised it as an offering to the sun; and the priests placed it in the eagle vessel. And another

²⁷Ibid., pp. 52-53.

priest carried a "hollow eagle cane" and submerged it in the open breast well into the blood which he offered to the sun. It was pronounced: "Thus he giveth the sun to drink."²⁸

Then the captor put the hollow cane and the blood of his captive into a green bowl with a feathered rim, and took it to nourish the gods.²⁹ In festive attire he went into all the temples, and with the hollow cane placed the blood of his captive on the lips of the stone images. Then the captor had the body taken to the tribal quarters where he flayed it. The flayed body was taken to the captors house where they cut it up to be eaten and shared as a favor to others. For twenty days the skin was lent by



Fig. 28

A Xipe Totec in complete array. (From Sahagun, Book II, Illustrations, No. 7.)

²⁸Ibid., p. 52.

²⁹Sahagún, p. 52, says "demons".

the captor to various persons, and it was worn for the entire feast (Fig. 28).

When they had finished with the gladiatorial sacrificial victims, there was a dance and a procession around the sacrificial stone by all the impersonators of the gods, and those who had fought the victims. Each was ceremonially attired and carried the head of one of the sacrificial victims during the dance (See Fig. 22).

And the Old Wolf took the rope which had held the victims to the stone and raised it to the four directions. Then he wept and howled like one bereaved for those who had suffered and died.

On the third day of the feast, the Tlatelulca began a dance in the skins of the victims. They were replaced by the priests who also danced in a variety of arrays. After midday the priests rested. The Tenochca and the Tlatelulca then came together in two rows facing each other, dancing very slowly in harmony. Moctezuma came forth from the palace with the two great princes, Nezaualpilli of Texcoco and Totoquiuaztli of Tepaneca at either side, and great solemnity reigned as everyone, including the princes, danced. After dark all dispersed, except the warriors and the princes who danced and sang until near midnight.

There is another part of this ceremony that is curiously omitted from Sahagún's account. In the gladiator

sacrifice, after the victim had been incapacitated by one of the eagle or jaguar priests, he was then tied to a specially erected scaffold and shot with arrows (Figs. 29, 30, 31, 32). This has been well attested by its inclusion in the Tlacaxipeualiztli by almost every codex that treats of this ritual.³⁰

Seler considers the part of the gladiator sacrifice that Sahagún described as merely a prelude to the more important arrow shooting ceremony, which he interprets as a form of the sex act and a manifestation of fertility.³¹ This may be, either in the penetration of the arrows or in the subsequent blood which drips onto the earth either fertilizing or impregnating it. The arrows are shot by a priest costumed usually as a monkey, but sometimes as a rabbit or the god of death.

Except for a brief mention of a smaller private version which occurred at the home of a captor, substituting a flayed skin for the victim and a friend in the captor's attire leaping about in jest,³² Sahagún mentions nothing at all of the public ceremony. It is possible, of course that Sahagún's informants simply declined to

³⁰Charles A. Dibble, Codex Hall (Santa Fe, New Mexico: School of American Research, 1947), p. 7.

³¹Eduard Seler, Codex Borgia (Berlin; 1904-9), 3 Vols., Vol. I, p. 173.

³²Sahagún, Book II, p. 58.



Fig. 29

Arrow Sacrifice. Surrounded by canopy of red and black paper decorations, victim is bound hand and foot to wooden scaffold. Four red flowers decorate paper crosspiece under scaffold. On another wooden scaffold is a priest in monkey costume dancing and gesturing the shooting of an arrow into the victim. (From Dibble, Codex Hall.)

relate this part of the ritual to him, or it is possible that he either intentionally or accidentally omitted it-- that Sahagún felt that it was either too sacred or too

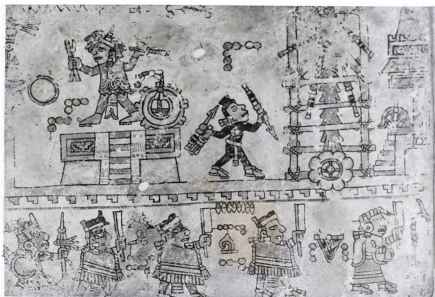


Fig. 30

Xipe with round sacrificial stone at left on stone platform. Possible monkey figure brandishing arrows and focusing on figure (obscured) bound to scaffold with arrows protruding. Front of main temple obscured to the right. (From Codices Becker I and II, *Manuscrit du Cacique*, Graz, Austria: Akademische Druck- u. Verlagsanstalt, 1961.)

profane for his readers.³³

Before considering how this added part of the ritual changes the nature of the Tlacaxipelualiztli, a few of the codices picturing the arrow sacrifice (Tlacaliztli) should be considered.

³³Antonio Magaña Esquivel and Ruth S. Lamb, *Breve Historia del Teatro Mexicano* (Mexico: Ediciones de André, 1958), p. 8.

In Codex Hall (Fig. 29) both the victim and the monkey figure are on temporary wooden scaffolds and the monkey is in a dancing position.

The pre-columbian Codex Becker I (Fig. 30) records the history of the Mixtec dynasty of the eleventh century A. D., and the inclusion of this ritual indicates a long tradition. In this Codex the very definite and immediate association of the two phases of the ritual are evident. The Xipe impersonator is still on the stone platform--not the main temple--where the "gladiator sacrifice", that is the combat between the victim and the jaguars and eagles,



Fig. 31

Arrow sacrifice in the year One-Rabbit (1506). Wooden scaffold is set on stone platform. Dancing rabbit (?) may be priest, since eagle-warrior-priest (l.c.) is also severely anthropomorphized. Dark victim probably indicates that he is a captive from another tribe. (From Codex Telleriano-Remensis in Viscount Kingsborough's Antiquities of Mexico; London: A. Aglio, 1831-1848; Vol. I.) Page-nation refers to the Codex, not the volume.

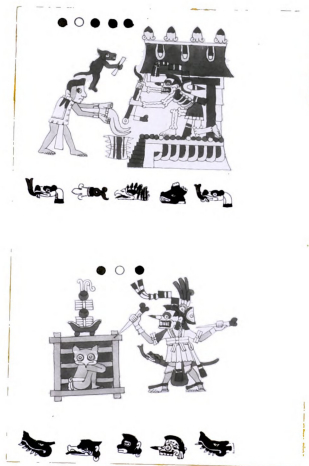


Fig. 32

A priest costumed as Mictlantlicuhtli, the god of death, removes the bone from the leg of the victim over the blood-stained sacrificial stone. In the bottom scene he has left the temple and approaches a wooden scaffold on which sits an owl-masked person. (From the Archbishop Laud collection in the Bodleian library; Kingsborough, Vol. II.)

occurred. The victim is tied to a wooden scaffold apparently set up in the main plaza of the temple to supplement the already existent stone stage. It is difficult to determine precisely the costume of the "slayer"; but the tightness of the costume would suggest a monkey which is associated with fertility.

Figure 31 shows a different "slayer"; in spite of the tail, the priest-animal likely represents a rabbit, whose fertility association is widely known.

Figure 32 shows a variation in the ritual. The removal of the leg bones of the victim is mentioned in Sahagún, but here they appear to be fashioned into the arrows. No certain victim is shown, unless the owl-disguised person on the scaffold is intended as such.

In the Tlacaxipeualiztli, Garibay³⁴ notes eleven separate spectacles, not counting the arrow sacrifice. For the most part they are group or general dances, but their separation from and insertion between the more important spectacles is reminiscent, in the most general sense, of the alternating episodes and choral odes of ancient Athens.

What this ritual has that none of the others has is, to borrow another Greek reference, an agon. The definite, though unequal, contest between the victim and the jaguar and eagle priests is indeed a competition for the highest stakes. The strict theocratic control of Aztec society, the low consideration for individual life and worth, the dualistic and fatalistic concepts which dominated Aztec thought, made any true contest unthinkable. What was so, was so; what was to be, would be; no one would contest, question or rebel. Fate ruled in Greece, too, but there a value was put on defying fate--fate was to be debated,

³⁴Garibay, pp. 334-336.

contested, even fought bitterly.

If this ritual had ended where Sahagún suggests, it would still have been noteworthy that the victim dies in a battle, rather than as a simple willing or screaming sacrificial victim. But the fact that he is only wounded and incapacitated in this agon, and then placed on a raised platform to die finally in the very act of impregnating the earth with his blood--of being, in a symbolic sense, born again; this fact suggests the general order and concept of the eastern Mediterranean Ritual-Dramas, which indeed did develop into true drama.

Tlacaxipeualiztli does not fit as neatly into the "Proto-Drama" as would be hoped. Although the qualifications of the settings, simple plot, and specialization of sacramental groups are met, there is no clear central figure. There are many Xipes in an early dance; the eagles and jaguars are collective characters; only Youallauan in his brief "coming forth" and offering of the hearts is truly individualized. The victim, the only possible central figure, represents the fertility of the earth and man, real and potential. Although he may be identified with more than the victims of some of the other ceremonies, he is certainly intended to represent a symbol-situation rather than a person.

In Aristotelian terms, Tlacaxipeualiztli rates high in spectacle. Plot is rudimentary. The Music of the

drum and chirimía (flute) is present in most of the separate "incidents" and dances. There are definite characters, but they are too little individualized to meet Aristotelian conditions. Dianoia is difficult to hypothesize; there is a central theme of fertility and rebirth, but it is clouded in such symbolism and dualism, that the western mind finds it difficult to see it clearly. Since so much of our evidence is visual, and since all of that evidence points to a heavy emphasis on spectacle with little dialogue, it is reasonable to conclude that theatrical poetry, so important to the Athenian theatre and Western theatre of subsequent ages, played a minor part in the public Ritual-Drama of the Valley of Mexico.

Ritual at the Arrival of the Spaniards

During the brief period of peaceful co-existence between Cortés' army and the Aztecs, several rituals took place. Cortés' men, at the urging of the friars, were outraged, but fascinated. One of the bloodiest skirmishes between the Spaniards and the Aztecs occurred during the ritual of Toxcotl (Figs. 33 and 34) performed before the main temple in Tenochtitlan's principal plaza.³⁵ In the Codex of 1576 (Fig. 33) can be seen an eagle priest playing

³⁵Caso, pp. 77-78. The conquistador Alvarado attempted to seize the rich jewels and gold worn by the nobles in their dance.

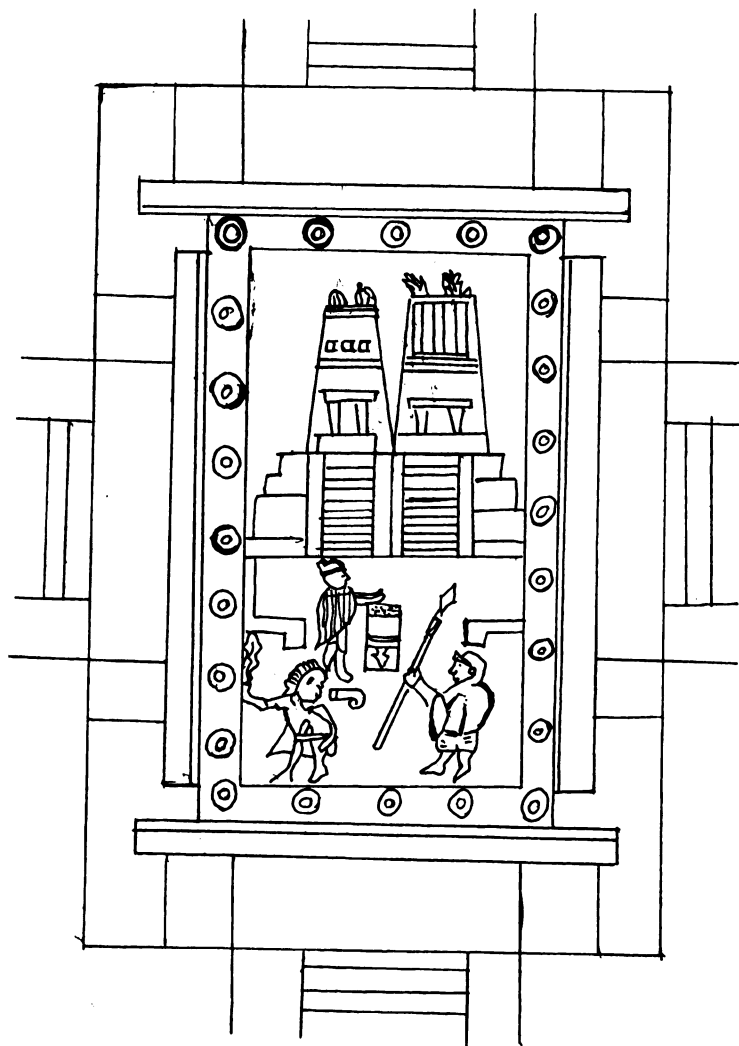


Fig. 33

The Spaniards arrive in Tenochtitlan. Front and top view appear to be simultaneous, indicating the "dance platform" in the central plaza. (From J. M. A. Aubin, Histoire de la nation Mexicaine; Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1893), pp. 32-33.

the huehuetl (drum) and an armed Spaniard attacking a speaking jaguar priest. In the Codex Azcataltan (Fig. 34) a similar scene is more realistically presented. There

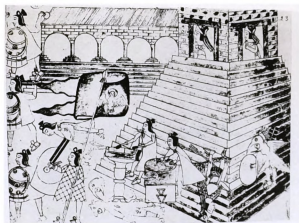


Fig. 34

The killing of the priests and musicians by the Spaniards. Codex Azcatitlan. (From Samuel Martí, Canto, danza y música precortesianos; Mexico, D. F.: Fondo de Cultura Económico, 1961), pl. XXII.

are musicians playing the two kinds of Aztec drums on the temple stairs; several bodies of Indians are strewn about, including two jaguar priests and the head of an eagle priest.

Once control of New Spain was in Spanish hands, one of the first laws written was the banning of pagan rituals. Instead, as will be seen in Chapter IX, Christian ritual would be substituted. Part of the Spanish medieval tradition was Mystery, Miracle and Morality plays, and it is into this "new" form that the indigenous penchant for ritual and spectacle would henceforth be channelled.

CHAPTER VII

THEATRICAL COMPONENTS

Before examining the extant fragments of the Nahuatl dramatic literature, this chapter will consider evidence concerning the performers, the stage and settings, the audience, costume, make-up and music--all the things that together make up theatrical spectacle.

The Setting

Chronologically, the first report by a European of indigenous theatre was in a letter from Hernando Cortés (1465-1547) to the Emperor Charles V in which he reports the building of a catapult and its placement in the plaza on

. . . a building resembling a theatre which is in the center of the square, made of stone and mortar, about fifteen feet in height and thirty paces from angle to angle. This structure is intended to be used at their festivals and sports, so that the actors on those occasions being placed upon it may be easily seen by all the people in the marketplace both above and below the arcades.¹

¹Hernando Cortés, The Despatches of Hernando Cortés, Introduction, notes and translation by George Folsom, (London: William Osborn, 1843), pp. 319-320.

The translation should more properly read "a building resembling a stage", for both stage and theatre building are included in the word teatro; just as virtually all plays in Spain were called comedias, teatro should not necessarily be translated as its cognate.

The Medieval stage with which the Spaniards could compare these platform structures was set up in a public square and was "composed of four benches, arranged in a square, with five or six boards laid across them, that were thus raised about four palms² from the ground. . . ."³ Although the Indian building was appreciably larger than this, the similarity could easily be recognized by the Spaniards, particularly when informed of its proper use.

From the descriptions of the chroniclers, from archaeological evidences and from knowledge of the remaining pre-columbian buildings in the Valley of Mexico, Ignacio Marquina,⁴ the great authority on pre-columbian architecture, reconstructed a view of the main plaza of Tenochtitlan which covers almost one complete wall of the Museo Nacional in Mexico City (Fig. 35).

²Palmo is the width from thumbtip to little finger tip with the hand outstretched--between eight and one half and nine inches.

³Obras Completas de Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra (6 vols.; Madrid: Imprenta de Bernardo Rodriguez, 1915), Prólogo, Vol. I, p. 6.

⁴Ignacio Marquina, Arquitectura Prehispanica, (Mexico, D. F.: Secretaria de Educacion Publica, 1951).

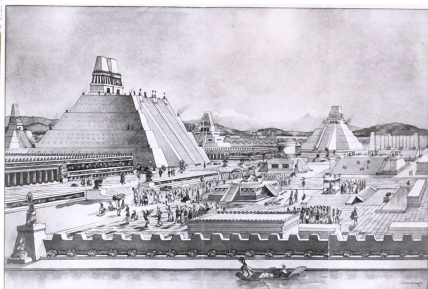


Fig. 35

Ignacio Marquina's reconstruction of the main plaza of Tenochtitlan. Photographed from the mural in the Museo Nacional in Mexico, D. F.

In this reconstruction, centrally located before the great pyramid supporting the twin temples of Tlaloc and Huitzilopochtli, stands just such a platform as Cortés describes. It is very similar to the one at Teotihuacán (Fig. 15) and those of the Mayan area which will be seen in Chapter X. In its proximity and physical relationship to the temple behind it, the Tenochtitlan platform stage is comparable to the early Athenian tragic stage.⁵

In this reconstruction, Marquina has a spectacle occurring on the platform stage, with an audience on

⁵Brown, p. 13.

three sides with the fourth side seemingly reserved for an important personage whose party watches from atop another lower platform. Although it is difficult to determine the precise nature of the conjectural spectacle, the apparent bodies at the foot of the platform and the conflict on the round stone suggest the Tlacaxipeualiztli sacrifice.

The pre-columbian Codex Borgia seems to depict just such a staging (Fig. 36). The rectangular platform is surmounted by a large round area on which the dramatic situation is occurring.⁶ The two figures at the top wear mask-headpieces of a bird (either the eagle or parrot) and make-up. What may be speech scrolls emit from their mouths, although they connect to what may be phalli in the hands of the two figures beneath them. The right figure

⁶Codex pictographic writing presents several difficulties to the Aristotle-oriented occidental viewer. First, there is no linear perspective at all; persons are always in profile and individual panels bear a relationship more analogous to the sentences of a paragraph than to a painting or photograph. Secondly, there is a loose hierarchichal perspective in the sense that the most important aspect of any particular panel is usually centered although seldom greatly larger than the surrounding depictions. Thirdly, as particularly exemplified by figures 33 and 36, the depiction is drawn simultaneously from several angles; in figure 36, there appears to be a top view of the round stone, a side view of the platform, a profile view of the players on the stone but in a relationship suggesting a top view, and the seeming observers depicted from several different angles. Lastly, a profusion of date signs and deity signs adds frequently confusing clutter. In figure 36, the page is mounted 90° counterclockwise to Kingsborough's accurate reproduction for easier reference.

of these two appears to be costumed as a jaguar as does the central figure of the bottom trio. The left figure of the two wears a similar headpiece but without the jaguar costume. He holds the phallus in his left hand which may indicate that he is the left-handed "reserve" dispatcher in the Tlacaxipeualiztli sacrifice. If this is the case, the two naked figures are prisoners awaiting sacrifice; the "jaguar" figure between the two prisoners is so elaborately masked that his face is completely invisible.

Immediately to the left of the circle stage, on either side of the sequence line are two very curious



Fig. 36

Codex Borgia. A simultaneous vertical and horizontal view of a square stage platform with the round stone top. (From Kingsborough, Antiquities of Mexico, Vol. III.)

figures. They appear to be wearing masks of Mictlante-cuhtli, the god of death, but they are wearing claws or talons on their hands and feet, and they are obviously female. In symmetrical balance to the right of the stage are two similar figures. The upper one is somewhat obliterated but enough can be seen to conclude that it balances and approximates the opposite figure. The lower figure, an old female, also wears the claws and the death mask but with a different headpiece.

The remaining figures--around the top from this angle, but technically around the platform base--are all focused on the spectacle. They may represent the audience, or more probably, due to their ornate costume and makeup, attending priests. The ceremonial arrows which five of them carry again suggest the arrow sacrifice of the Tlacaxipeualiztli.

Similar platforms are described by Juan de Tovar (1543-1626)⁷ and José de Acosta (1539-1600).⁸ Almost every known pre-columbian site has such a platform--almost invariably centrally located in the plaza of the main temple. The two oldest buildings known to us in

⁷Juan de Tovar, Códice Ramirez (Mexico, D. F.: Editorial Leyenda, 1944), pp. 158-161.

⁸José de Acosta, Historia Natural y moral de los Indios (Mexico, D. F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1962), Book V, Chapter 30.

Middle America were platforms of this type, one at Cuicuilco in the Valley of Mexico and one at Uaxactun in Maya country.⁹ Their open summits indicate that there was no idea of enclosing the ritual but only to elevate the spectacle to the vision of all.

Sahagún enumerates all the places where the impersonators died, that is, where the blood rituals took place, but it is almost invariably the temple of that month's deity, and without further elaboration of setting.¹⁰

Tezcoco had a poet king, Netzahualcóyotl, who held, according to the chronicler Ixtlilxóchitl (1568-c.-1648), ". . . in the patio [of the palace] . . . dances and other pleasing and entertaining dramatic representations."¹¹

Fray Juan de Torquemada reports that the principal events were held in the main plazas, but that others were held in the patio of the house of the major Lord.¹²

Confirming the existence of stages, actors and dramas, and supplying valuable details of the performances themselves, is the chronicle known as the Códice Ramirez.

⁹Vaillant, Artist and Craftsmen in Ancient Central America, pp. 24-25.

¹⁰Sahagún, Part 3, Book 2, pp. 165-179.

¹¹Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxóchitl, Historia Chichimeca (Mexico, D. F.: Editorial Mexico, A. Chavero, 1892), Cap. XLII, Vol. 2, p. 212.

¹²Fray Juan de Torquemada, Monarchia Indiana (Mexico, D. F.: Editorial Chavez Hayhoe, 1943), p. 551.

Written by the Mexican padre Juan de Tovar (1543-1626)¹³
from accounts by the Indians it tells us that the temple
of Quetzalcoatl, in Cholula,

. . . had a central patio where dances and witty farces¹⁴ were staged on the god's feast day; for this purpose there was, in the middle of this patio, a small theatre (stage), about thirty feet square, curiously whitewashed, which was elaborately decorated for the celebration; it was surrounded with arches made of all kinds of roses and feathers, and birds, rabbits, and other pleasant things were hung at intervals. Everyone gathered there after eating and the players came out and presented farces, pretending to be deaf, lame, blind, one-handed, or stricken with colds, and to have come to ask the god to heal them. The audience laughed heartily as the 'deaf' made absurd replies, the 'cold victims' coughed and blew their noses, and the 'lame' limped about recounting their miseries and complaints. Other actors played the part of insects, some being dressed as scarabs, and others appeared as frogs, lizards, and so on, and once on stage they told the audience about their activities. . . . Young men of the temple dressed up as multicolored butterflies and birds and climbed up in some trees that were planted there, and the priests of the temple shot at them with blowguns. The attacked and the attackers made clever remarks that greatly delighted the onlookers. After this was over, the celebration ended with a dance¹⁵ in which all the performers took part.

The beauty of the stage setting and the varied tone and subject matter of these "farces", are particularly impressive. The first is a realistic travesty in which human misery is ridiculed; the second is built around a

¹³Juan de Tovar, Código Ramirez (Mexico, D.F: Editorial Leyenda, 1944), p. 551.

¹⁴Corresponding Spanish: Entremeses. Usually "farce" but also "interlude" or "playlet".

¹⁵Corresponding Spanish: un gran mitote o baile; mitote is also translated as "riot, uproar, confusion".

transfer of man's mental powers to the animals surrounding him; and the third is a delicate and suggestive spring rite dedicated to Xochiquetzalli, the goddess of the flowers, of beauty, and of desire, that is to say, the Venus of the Mexican Pantheon.

Another dramatic ceremony to Xochiquetzalli was described by the sixteenth century chronicler, Fray Diego Durán (d. 1588)¹⁶ who writes:

The dance¹⁷ they liked best was the one made with adornments of roses, with which they crowned themselves and for which dance, in the principal momoztli of the temple of the great god Huitzilopochtli, they built a house of roses and made artificial trees very full of fragrant flowers and they seated the goddess Xochiquetzalli nearby. While they danced, some boys dressed as birds and butterflies entered, bedecked with rich feathers, green and blue and red and yellow; they climbed the trees and moved from branch to branch sipping dew from the roses. Then Indians representing the gods came out, clad as the idols were dressed on the altars, and began to shoot at the birds in the trees with blowguns. Xochiquetzalli, the goddess of roses then came and took the blowguns from their hands and made them sit down near her, paying them the homage that such gods merited. She gave them roses and wafted incense around them and made them go to her representatives who 'comforted'¹⁸ them.

¹⁶Diego Durán, Historía de las Indias de Nueva España (Mexico, D. F.: Imprenta de J. M. Andrade y F. Escalante, 1880), p. 231.

¹⁷Many of the dramatic representations are simply called bailes (dances) by the Spaniards. Even in the nineteenth and twentieth century the more correct title for the Rabinal Achí (See Appendix I of this work) and the name by which it is most commonly known, is Baile del Tun (Dance of Tun); this, in spite of the fact that dance represents less than a quarter of the actual performance.

¹⁸Corresponding Spanish: Hacíales dar solaz.

Jose de Acosta describes a feast to Quetzalcoatl in Cholula where he noted "a small carefully whitewashed stage near the lower step of Quetzalcoatl's temple."¹⁹ This stage was elaborately decorated with "branches, wreaths of flowers, feathers and had birds, rabbits and fruits suspended from it, all arranged picturesquely."²⁰

The pre-columbian stage then, was of two types: the front of the main temple where the more formal Ritual-Dramas were presented in an audience-spectacle polarization situation; and the square platform stage, usually called in tourist literature "dance-platforms", for the popular theatre and the less formal Ritual-Dramas. The platform stage would suggest a theatre-in-the-round type of spectacle, contrary to Allardyce Nicoll's contention that "even in the most primitive form of drama, there was one side to the action."²¹

Scenery was largely limited to festive decorations such as Acosta and Tovar describe above, with no attempt to recreate a specific place. Sahagún does mention one occasion where there was built "a [counterfeit] house,

¹⁹Jose de Acosta, Historia Natural y moral de las Indias, Lib. 5, Cap. 30, p. 443.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Allardyce Nicoll, The Development of the Theatre (New York: Harcourt and Brace, 1957), p. 20.



Fig. 37

Ms. from the Selden collection of the Bodleian Library. (From Kingsborough, Antiquities of Mexico, Volume I.)

upon the round altar [or pyramid]."²² Durán also mentions building "a house of roses" for scenery.²³

Such a structure appears to be represented in the Selden manuscript (Fig. 37). In the upper right a speaker wearing the mask of Mictlantecuhctli is seated on a tzompantli, a platform similar to the platform stage, but elaborately decorated with real or carved skulls. On this building appears to be a house built out of temporary materials, in the conformity of a skull.

In most cases, however, the participants alone formed a dramatic spectacle. Processions of priests,

²²Sahagún, Book II, p. 102. The clarifying words in brackets are the translator's.

²³Durán, p. 231.



Fig. 38

Priest-Warrior of the Order of the Eagle from a Teotihuacán fresco. (From Kurath and Martí, p. 101).

nobles and victims bedecked in their brightly colored costumes and heavily feathered headpieces and accoutrements encircling the plazas and the levels of the temple-pyramids focusing on the enactments of the blood sacrifices on the summit, was colorful spectacle indeed.

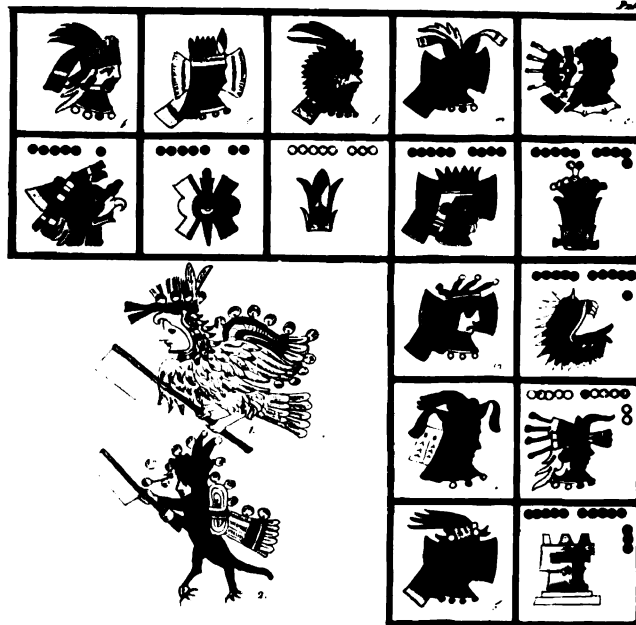


Fig. 39

Codex Vaticanus 3738 showing masks, makeup and symbols of specific deities and the complete attire for the Orders of the Jaguar and Eagle (From Kingsborough, Antiquities of Mexico, Volume II).

Masks and Costumes

As is suggested by the accounts of Tovar, Durán and Acosta, the "disguises" generally fell into two categories--animals and the gods.



Fig. 40

A tribute list showing ceremonial masks and costumes. Mendoza collection. (From Kingsborough, Antiquities of Mexico, Volume I).

Sahagún tells us that Paynal, the god's representative, wore on his face the humming-bird disguise²⁴ and that the impersonator danced arrayed as a squirrel during Teotl eco.²⁵ During the "Dance of the Gods" on the moveable feast of Atamalqualiztli which occurred every

²⁴Sahagún, Book I, p. 1.

²⁵Ibid., Book II, p. 168.

eight years, "all came forth as humming-birds, butterflies, honeybees, flies, birds, giant horned beetles, black beetles And still more took the form of birds, large owls, screech owls. . . ." ²⁶

Bird impersonation was probably realistic with feathered mask, headress and winglike arms (Figs. 34, 38, 39). The two warrior-priest orders, the Jaguar and the Eagle, are invariably pictured as wearing the costume and mask-headress of their respective animals (Fig. 26, 27, 31, 34, 39 and 40).

The jaguar (or tiger) and eagle, due to their ceremonial importance, are, with the monkey, the most common representations in art and ritual in pre-columbian Middle America.

The monkey disguise represents either Xochipilli, the god of flowers, spring and fertility (Fig. 41) or stands as a fertility figure in its own right (Figs. 29, 30, 42 and 43). They are shown as realistic or anthropomorphic, and are also associated with pulque (fermented cactus juice) and inebriation. Many are comedians ²⁷ as those associated with sexual functions and inebriation

²⁶Sahagún, Book II, p. 163.

²⁷Kurath and Martí, p. 100.

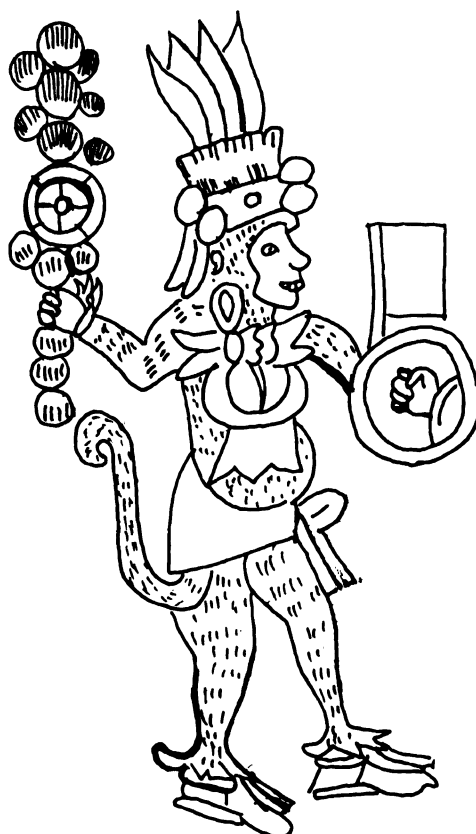


Fig. 41

The god Xochipilli disguised as a monkey with complete skin and tail but with human hands, feet and possibly face protruding. Codex Magliabecchi 55. (From Kurath and Martí, p. 103.)

have been in so many cultures. The monkey-dancers in the Codex Vaticanus 3738 (Fig. 42) are shown gayly cavorting about a platform on which is built a house of flowers inside of which is a naked couple. The sun-god oversees the ritual from above with appropriate fertility symbols.

The gods appeared in various degrees of anthropomorphism of their totem or symbolic animal, or in various degrees of stylization of the animal or personal characterization of the deity (Figs. 41, 44, 45).

Although Durán's comparison to the demon and the underworld are anachronistic, his description of a



Fig. 42

Fertility ritual in Codex Vaticanus 3738 (From Kingsborough, Antiquities of Mexico, Volume II.)

coronation ceremony gives us valuable information; there appeared at the festival

. . . the king and lord of the underworld dressed up to look like a fierce demon. Instead of eyes he wore shining mirrors; his mouth was huge and fierce, his hair was curled up around two hideous horns, and on each shoulder he wore a mask with mirror eyes. On each elbow was a mask, on his stomach another and on his knees also other faces with eyes. With the shining of the mirrors which represented eyes on all these parts, it looked as if he could see in every direction. He was hideous . . . abominable. . . .²⁸

²⁸Durán, p. 180.



Fig. 43

Monkey disguise in the Comelagatoazte, a gyrating device used in a fertility ceremony dedicated to the sun. (From Codex Selden, II.)

In a land of brightly colored birds, it was natural that one of the basic costume features would be colorful feathers. Not only the god impersonators, but their priests too, wore specific arrangements of plumed costume and headdress.²⁹

Paper was frequently used in the making of crowns, headdress and "hand-props".³⁰ Shields were made of wood, and usually adorned with feathers, flowers and leaves.³¹

²⁹Sahagún, Book I, pp. 1, 4, 14; Book II, p. 143. Also see Durán, p. 231.

³⁰Sahagún, Book I, p. 21. Paper was common among the Aztecs. It was made from the bast fibers (inner bark) of several trees, principally the wild fig (amatl) "and related trees of the moroceae family and the genus ficus". Dibble, Codex Hall, p. 3.

³¹Sahagún, Book I, p. 21.

Makeup

Face and body makeup was diverse and symbolic with no attempt at realism or conformity to human facial features. Yellow ochre was frequently used to paint the face, as in the ritual of the seventeenth month when the impersonator of Llama tecutli had her nose and forehead yellowed with ochre against the rest of her blackened



Fig. 44

Earthenware figurine probably of Xochipilli, goddess of flowers, wearing mask and with body decorated with plant motifs. (From Martí, Canto y Danza, p. 110.)



Fig. 45

Mixtec priest with body painted red wearing the conical hat of Quetzalcoatl, the double mon-acle of Tlaloc, and a jaguar mask over the lower portion of his face. (From Jacques Soustelle, La Vie Quotidienne des Aztèques, Paris: Hachette, 1959; p. 24.)



Fig. 46

The "dancing" Xólotl, showing makeup and costume of the god. Codex Borgia 10. (From Caso, p. 20.)

face.³²

The entire body of the Lord of the Four Directions was covered with a black unguent and his face was blackened with a thick coating of soot pasted with amaranth seed.³³

³²Sahagún, Book II, p. 143. The face of the impersonator of Uixtociatl also was painted yellow in the feast of Tecuilhuitontli. Ibid., p. 86.

³³Ibid., Book I, p. 21.





Fig. 47

Head of an Eagle "knight"
from the Valley of Mexico
(Nahua). (From Salvador
Toscano, Arte Pre-colombino
de Mexico y de la America
Central; Mexico, D. F.:
Instituto de Investigaciones
Estéticas, 1944, p. 8.)



Fig. 48

Man wearing the entire
head of a wolf, covered
with Mother-of-pearl.
Toltec from Hidalgo.
(From Lothrop, p. 48.)

The god impersonator who danced the role of
Xochipilli had his face painted "red and burnt" (black?)
and on his lips was painted the imprint of a hand (Fig.
46); he wore a crown of feathers and a wing on his back.³⁴
As can be seen by the representation of the gods in

³⁴Ibid., p. 13. The hand was probably painted in
very low bas-relief with liquid rubber. See Book II, pp.
193-194.



Fig. 49

Wooden mask encrusted with mosaic of turquoise and colored shell. Face framed by animal jaws and standing animal figures at sides. Aztec or Mixtec. Height, 7 1/4 inches. (From Lothrop, p. 64.)

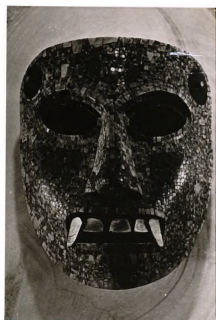


Fig. 50

Part human, part jaguar mask covered with mosaic mother-of-pearl, turquoise and pink shell. Mixtec. Height, 6 1/4 inches. (Lothrop, et al, Plate IX)

Figure 39, face makeup appears more common than the masks in depicting the gods.

Masks

In addition to those references already discussed there are frequent mentions of masks in the rituals and in the popular representations. Unfortunately, few of masks survive which might have been actually worn for t



Fig. 51

Turquoise mask "without mythological attributes". Nahua. (From Toscano, p. 481.)



Fig. 52

Turquoise and red shell mask from Guerrero, height, 9 inches. (From Disselhoff and Linné, p. 36.)

purposes. The reason for this is simple: the masks were mostly made of wood, cloth, leather, clay, paste and paper.³⁵ Some gold masks were used, but these found their ways quickly to the Spanish melting pots.

Many of the masks were brightly painted, but one of the most popular forms of decoration was mosaic (Figs. 48, 49, 50), which also added to their durability. In

³⁵Frances Toor, A Treasury of Mexican Folkways (Mexico, D. F.: Crown Publishers, 1947), p. 64.

spite of the weight, these masks were almost certainly worn in presentations.³⁶

Figures 47 and 48 are sculptured heads wearing animal masks. The actual animal skin was probably used and supplemented with makeup on the uncovered face, as the different colored mosaic on Figure 48 suggests.

Figures 49 and 50 are actual wooden masks which can be worn. Both have holes for the eyes and small openings at the mouth. These, too, are stylized representations of animal masks; figure 49 probably represents a stylization of a wolf similar to figure 47, while figure 50 seems to suggest a jaguar.

Figures 51 and 52 appear to have no animal or mythological attributes. Since the mask in figure 52 has no eye or mouth openings it was probably not used in the rituals, but it is of thin wood, and is cut cleanly at the forehead in the style and size of practical masks. Figure 51 is a practical mask whose well-defined eyes, exaggerated lower teeth and turquoise measles or pimples suggest possible use for comic effect.

The Florentine Codex contains many references to the ritual use of the mask, from the terrifying mask looking in two directions worn by the Llama tecutli

³⁶Toscano, p. 480.

impersonator,³⁷ to a general wearing of maguey-leaf masks by children and pregnant women in the New Fire Feast.³⁸ Identification of tribes and groups by masks also occurred; for example, if a "song were to be intoned after the manner of the Huasteca"³⁹. . . the masks had arrow marks painted on the face, noses pierced like jug handles, teeth filed to a point, and conical heads."⁴⁰ Jeronimo de Mendieta (1528? - 1604) confirms that actors "imitated other nations by changing their language, wearing appropriate mask and imitating their voices."⁴¹ From the sacred Ritual-Dramas to the "farces" and entertainments, the mask was an integral part of impersonation.

Organization and Training

The organization of the Ritual-Drama bore resemblance to the social and political structure. The priests were the stage managers who planned and directed the dramas and the entire festivals.⁴² Other social groups, from the

³⁷Sahagún, Book II, p. 144.

³⁸Ibid., Book VII, p. 27.

³⁹A Gulf tribe of Mayan ancestry.

⁴⁰Sahagún, Book VIII, p. 45.

⁴¹Jerónimo de Mendieta, Historia eclesiástica indiana (Mexico, D. F.: P. Chavez H., 1945), Vol. I, p. 151.

⁴²Kurath and Martí, p. 81.

honored merchants to the lowly slave, participated in one way or another. Since the theatre was to a large degree didactic, demonstrating religious creeds and national history, and correcting customs,⁴³ it was natural that it should be in political hands.

In the early fourteenth century, Netzahualcóyotl, the poet king of Texcoco, established schools of poetry in the Calmecac, the school for priests and nobles. Great care was taken that "both verse and language should be polished and serious in tone", because in the poetry, songs and paeans were "related memorable events of the past and present" and were "exalted their kings and other persons worthy of being remembered."⁴⁴ Instruction in song and dance was an official institution. Durán reports that

. . . in all the cities, there was some big house near the temples where lived instructors who taught dancing and singing. These houses were called cuicacalli which I translate as 'house of song'; its only use was for classes in song, dance and playing musical instruments for boys and girls. It was of such importance that it was considered a crime with heavy penalties if the students did not regularly attend.⁴⁵

The supreme lords of the land were called tlatoques from the verb tlatoa, which means to speak. The nobles

⁴³Havemeyer, p. 219. Also see José Juan Arrom, El Teatro de Hispanoamérica en la Época Colonial (Habana: Anuario Bibliográfico Cubano, 1956), p. 35.

⁴⁴Torquemada, Vol. I, p. 147.

⁴⁵Durán, Historia, Vol. II, p. 227.

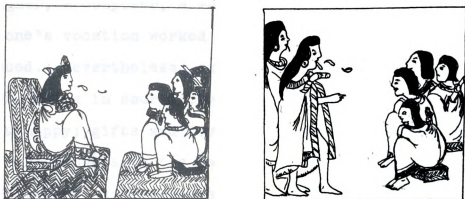


Fig. 53

Actors, entertainers, storytellers born under the sign of One-Flower. (From the drawings of Paso y Troncoso in Sahagún, Book IV, Illustrations, 17 and 18.)

were all trained in speaking and singing and the ceremonies occasionally took on political overtones as various groups, replete with their own singers, dancers and musicians, gravitated to one noble or another.⁴⁶ The king himself frequently sang and told pleasantries and proverbs, and he was surrounded by jesters and entertainers.⁴⁷

The Actors

Those born under the fourth sign, called One-Flower, were thought to be "much given to song and joy;

⁴⁶Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl, Relaciones, Vol. II of Obras Historicas de Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl; 2 vols. (Mexico, D. F.: Editorial Nacional, 1952), pp. 293-294.

⁴⁷Sahagún, Book VIII, pp. 29-30.



a jester, an entertainer"; he would become "a poet, a designer, a composer, a master of song."⁴⁸ Whether or not one's vocation worked out quite this neatly is not pursued. Nevertheless, except for the slaves who took roles ending in sacrifices, the lot of the performer was not unhappy; gifts and favors were distributed by the king and other nobles to the performers;⁴⁹ and nobles and even the low-born, when they were unsuited for warfare, attempted to win fame and distinction by performing and composing songs and poems about famous deeds of kings and nobles.⁵⁰ The buffoon seemed to be a special category--the only true professional actor; he was "pleasing, delicate, of flowery mellifluous speech, an agreeable speaker . . . [who] . . . makes people laugh, amuses them, dances--dances continuously."⁵¹

As Kurath and Martí have noted,⁵² each stratum of Aztec society was represented in the more formal Ritual-Dramas. Priests stage managed, officiated and impersonated

⁴⁸Ibid., Book IV, p. 23.

⁴⁹Ibid., Book IV, p. 26.

⁵⁰Juan Bautista Pomar, "Relacion de Tetzcooco" in Relaciones de Texcoco y de la Nueva España (Mexico, D. F.: Salvador Chavez Hayhoe, 1941), pp. 39-40.

⁵¹Sahagún, Book X, p. 38.

⁵²Kurath and Martí, p. 81.

the gods themselves; they also trained the youths in the calmecac and cuicacalli, schools for nobles and commoners respectively. The king and the equivalent of his cabinet took part in certain dances during calendric festivals. The Orders of Eagle and Ocelot performed ritual combats, and fought and killed captives during Tlacaxipehualiztli and Panquetzaliztli. Guilds of merchants, goldworkers, featherworkers and lapidaries had special deities and participated significantly in their rituals.⁵³ War captives and slaves had the leading roles in sacrificial ritual and were frequently trained as musicians. Women participated less, having less social status than men, but female slaves took the roles of the sacrificial goddesses; harlots danced with warriors at the Xochiquetzalli and various age groups of women took part in several dances.

Considering that the calendric ceremonies of the Aztecs fell into at least three of the subdivisions of Ritual-Drama, it is not surprising that the degree of sacramental participation would vary so widely. Nevertheless, the priest-nobles were the principal actors, stage-managers and presumably, "playwrights".

⁵³Sahagún, Book II, pp. 33-34, 69-70, 87-88, 79-80.



Fig. 54

Singer and Musicians born under One Flower.
(Sahagún, Book IV, Illustrations 19 and 20.)

Music

Virtually every kind of indigenous theatrical spectacle was accompanied by music. Curiously, in the present land of the guitar, there were no stringed instruments, only percussion and wind;⁵⁴ there were the large ground drum (huéhuetl) and the two-toned drum (teponaztli) beaten with rubber tipped sticks. The conch-shell horns, flutes and chirimía--a kind of flute--provided the tonal variety. Percussive music was also created in dances by the golden bells and golden turtle shells worn by the dancers.⁵⁵ Gourd rattles and the chicahuaztli, rattles on a stick, served as accompaniment

⁵⁴Magana-Esquivel, p. 7.

⁵⁵Sahagún, Book VIII, p. 28.

and as male and female fertility symbols.⁵⁶

Martí notes several kinds of indigenous music; among them were religious songs which accompanied "their ritual theatricals", "humorous music and music for pantomimes"⁵⁷ both of which were used in the secular fiestas and in the theatrical representations.

The musicians were usually priests or old men or old women who were trained as composers and performers. The musicians and singers, especially as they became composers and leaders of song or dance, held fairly high rank in the social scale, and frequently formed an institution of traditional privileges.⁵⁸

Sahagún describes the good singer as one of "good sound voice", with "well rounded words". He "enunciates clearly in full voice, in falsetto, softly"; he "accompanies judiciously, gives the pitch", he practices and improves his voice; he composes original songs, sings other songs and instructs others.⁵⁹ Although Sahagún also mentions bad singers,⁶⁰ the good singer appears to be a full-time

⁵⁶Kurath and Martí, p. 84.

⁵⁷Martí, Canto, Danza y Música, p. 316.

⁵⁸Abraham Arias-Larreta, Literaturas Aborígenes: Azteca, Incaica, Maya-Quiché (Los Angeles: The New World Library, 1964), p. 29.

⁵⁹Sahagún, Book X, p. 29.

⁶⁰Ibid.

professional who could serve well as the singer-dancer-actor of the musically accompanied Ritual-Dramas.

Summary

Although the organization and presentation of the Ritual-Dramas appears to have been well-organized and reasonably disciplined, and although the performers--the actors and musicians--had formal training, the emphasis of Middle American Ritual-Drama was on focal spectacle. In terms of Aristotelian elements, Spectacle and Melody were constant and dominant; Character was relatively unimportant: each deity had and represented one dominant characteristic; dialogue, except in rare exception, was limited to the single hymns or, in the later stages of Ritual-Drama, odes or orations. Plot was technically non-existent, for one major incident was the whole object of the presentation. There was indeed dianoia, in the sense that one single, uncluttered, vital theme was demonstrated, pointed up, emphasized and repeated.

Technically there were "playwrights" and actors; but the priest-stage-managers knew what theatrical workers have always known and sometimes feared--that an audience would really prefer to see and hear sights and sounds rather than be exposed to ideas. Pageantry and spectacle were the dominant theatrical elements in the Aztec domains.

CHAPTER VIII

THE LITERATURE

Besides its ritual origin Aztec Drama had other beginnings in the dance. The dance was a primary method of aesthetic expression, an exaggerated representation of the influence of the sun on man and his world.¹ As in the blood ceremonies, "hymns", or songs or poetic declamations were added to the physical event of great bodies of people moving in complex patterns to complicated rhythms.²

Areitos

Throughout the Aztec empire and extending all around the Caribbean islands³ at the time of the arrival of the Spaniards, was the popular areito (sometimes areyto) which Lopez de Gomora described as "like the moorish zambra . . . (which) . . . the Indians dance while singing

¹Francisco Monterde, Teatro Indigena Prehispanico (Rabinal Achí) (Mexico: Imprenta Universitaria, 1955), p. x.

²Vaillant, Aztecs of Mexico, p. 162.

³José Juan Arrom, Historia de la Literatura Dramática Cubana (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1944), p. 5.

romances in praise of their idols and their kings and notable events of the past. . . ."4

Fernandez de Oviedo (1478-1557) confirmed the subject matter noting that areitos also included "how former chiefs died, how many and who they were and other things which they did not wish to be forgotten."5

The accompanying songs were sung in meter and in stanzas6 and in addition to mythical and historical subject matter, dealt occasionally with "trifles such as a little fish which was caught and escaped. . . ."7 But in the rich imagery and symbolism of the Aztecs, even such "trifles", would have a deeper fabled or proverbial meaning.8

In spite of Las Casas' description of the "trifles", most writers agree that even the narrative and topical songs were non-popular in character, that is, that they

⁴Francisco Lopez de Gomara, Historía General de los Indias in Biblioteca de Autores Españoles. (Madrid: Imprenta de la Real Academia de la Historia, 1852), Vol. XXII, p. 174.

⁵Gonzalo Fernandez de Oviedo, Historía General y Natural de las Indias (Madrid: Imprenta de la Real Academia de la Historia, 1851), Part I, Book V, Cap. I.

⁶Torquemada, p. 550.

⁷Bartolomé de Las Casas, Apologética Historia de las Indias (Madrid: M. Aguilar, 1927), Cap. CCIV, p. 538.

⁸Fernando Ortiz, "Preludios Étnicos de la musica afrocubana", Bimestre Cubana, LIX (1947), p. 27.

were songs not of the masses but of the ruling classes;⁹ indeed, the concept of song as religious expression was absolute.¹⁰ Virtually every ritual contained song and dance, and although the following songs and poems are very brief, evidence indicates that the interpolations of music and dance lengthened the performances considerably.

The Manuscripts

Once a tribe was subjugated by the Spaniards, one of the first jobs of the friars was to learn the language of the tribe, and to translate the native languages into a phonetic script using the European alphabet; thus, in the sixteenth century, dictionaries abound. Many of the anonymous manuscripts of the sixteenth century are but transcriptions in Nahuatl of the myths remembered by the surviving Indians. Religious poems, fragments of ritual and epic poetry which were retained in the keen memory of oral tradition and only generalized in the Indian pictographic codices, were now transcribed with some precision.

Several of these manuscripts, notably the Cantares Mexicanos¹¹ and the MS. Matritense del Palacio, both in

⁹Merle L. Simmons, "Pre-conquest Narrative Songs in Spanish America", Journal of American Folklore, 73 (April-June, 1960), pp. 103-111.

¹⁰Irene Nicholson, Firefly in the Night (London: Faber and Faber, 1959), p. 117.

¹¹Literally "Mexican Songs" but with connotation as in "Song of Solomon".

the Biblioteca Nacional de Mexico and the Codice del Palacio Real in Madrid form the major sources of the chapter on dramatic poetry in Garibay's excellent Historía de la Literatura Nahuatl. The major difficulty of these theatrical dialogues is that they are written in separated single lines with no indication of the identity of the individual who speaks the line. Thus there must be inferred from the content not only who speaks which line, but also the identity of the speaker.

The Hymn to Tláloc¹²

The Hymn to Tláloc offers the best example of the obvious changes in speakers. Garibay divides the poem into six sections with three specific characters, the god, the priest, and the victim, and an Introduction, possibly by another priest. The Hymn is part of a ceremony which is in progress in a house of green laurel, which stands on the holy pyramid dedicated to Tláloc. The priests sound timbrels to invoke rain, and Tláloc (Fig. 13) calls one of them, who is about to die, to the Land of the Fleshless, where he must pass his term of four years before returning to life.

¹²Garibay, Vol. I, pp. 141-142.

- Prologue:¹³ In Mexico are offered petitions to the gods
amid banners of paper
and from the four points of the compass
come people on foot.
It is the time of the flood of tears.
- Priest: I, too, was created by my god;
Festive bundles of bleeding thorns
I carried to the sacred court.
Ah, you are my ruler, O Magic Sovereign,
and in truth you are the creator of our
sustenance
and though you are the first above all
man could only cause you shame; and earn
your contempt.
- Tláloc: If some shame me
it is that they do not know me well;
But you are my holy order,
My sacred jaguars--priests.
- Priest: From Tlalocan in a ship of turquoise
he left and Acatonal is not seen . . .
- Ah, go to all parts
go and become known even in Poyauhtlan:
With timbrels of fog
man is transported to Tlalocan!¹⁴
Oh my brother Tozcuecuech . . .
: . . . : . . . : . . . : . . . : . . . :¹⁵
I will depart forever.
It is the time of your Flood of Tears.

¹³Garibay, Vol. I, pp. 141-143. The opening speech is not identified as to its speaker by Garibay, but simply listed as Enunciado general, comparable in western theatre to "Prologue", and probably given by another priest.

¹⁴Tlalocan is the "Land of the Fleshless". Nicholson gives this four lines to Tláloc (Firefly in the Night, p. 46), and eliminates the character, The Victim. Miss Nicholson notes no source for this work, and it is possible that she translates directly from the Nahuatl of the MS Palacio; the total meaning in her version is significantly different from that of Garibay, the recognized authority.

¹⁵The omissions are the manuscripts'.

Victim: Ah, I was sent to the place of Mystery
 under your reign!
 and I spoke to the prince of the oracles¹⁶
 I will depart forever;
 It is the time of the Flood of Tears.

Ah, we shall spend four years
 until the resurrection
 without being known,
 people without number
 in the House of the Fleshless, the House
 of the Quetzal feather;
 the transformation is accomplished:
 it is the dominion of the Increaser of Man.

Priest: Ah, go to the four corners of the earth
 Extend your knowledge even to Poyauhtlan.
 With timbres of fog
 Man is transported to Tlalocan!

Another hymn to Tláloc exists, perhaps simply
 another version of the same, or perhaps a simple difference
 in the memory of the Indian informers. In this dialogue
 no "victim" appears, but much of the context is similar.¹⁷

Officials: The god appears in Mexico,
 his banners flying in all directions
 and no one weeps.

Tláloc: I, the god, have returned again;
 I have returned again to the place that
 abounds in blood sacrifices;
 There, when the day grows old I am seen
 as a god.

¹⁶Corresponding Spanish: presagios, literally
 "omens, presages". Miss Nicholson translates: "the Sad
 Forebodings", (p. 47).

¹⁷Rubén M. Campos, La producción Literaria de los
 Aztecas (Mexico, D.F.: Talleres gráficos del Museo Nacional,
 1936), pp. 223-224. Also see Arrom, El Teatro de Hispano-
 america en le epoca colonial, pp. 22-23. The ceremony is
 described in Sahagún, Book II, Cap. 5.

- Officials: Your work is that of a noble magician;
you have truly become one with our flesh;
we have become one and the same;
and who would dare provoke thee?
- Tláloc: Certainly, he who provokes me will meet an
unhappy fate;
my priests seized tigers and snakes by the
head.
- Officials: In Tlalocan, in the mansion that grows green,
they play ball, they hurl arrows.
- Tláloc: Go forth, go forth to where the clouds
abundantly stretch out,
where the thick fog forms the cloud home
of Tláloc.
There with power I lift my voice and cry aloud.
Go forth to seek me, seek the words that I
have said,
as I rise in my glory and terror and cry aloud.
- Officials: After four years they shall go forth
not to be known, not to be counted,
they will descend to the beautiful house
in order to be united and to know the doctrine.
- Tláloc: Go forth, go forth to where the clouds
abundantly stretch out,
where the thick fog forms the cloud home
of Tláloc.

Both dialogues are similar, in a sense, to mystery plays; they re-assert the dominion of Tláloc over the dead, the four years of nothingness in the "Land of the Unfleshed", and the happy, eternal romp of the worthy dead in Tlalocan.

Song of Netzahualcóyotl

The dramatized history of heroes and gods took on the peculiar native form of alternating dance-song and dramatic sketches or "melodramatic sequences" comparable

to cinematographic techniques¹⁸ where only the essence of thought and feelings are portrayed in minimal dialogue.

Netzahualcóytl was the poet-king of Tezcoco, a benign and popular ruler who did much to advance the arts in Anáhuac. Garibay places the following "song", also from the Cantares Mexicanos (f. 28v) between 1486 and 1502. Bearing the inscription Icuic Netzahualcóytlzin (Song of Netzahuacóytl), the work is divided by Garibay into four parts.¹⁹

Part I: A Prelude by a singer: An invitation to sing and an evocation of Netzahualcóytl to come forth.²⁰

Netza: I, Netzahualcóytl, weep.
With what shall I go?
With what am I to perish
in the region of the dead?

(The song continues on the same theme.)

A Poet: Only the song can be our shroud,
The warriors destroy our books.
To think there is joy here!
Let no one have a home in this world,
One must leave the beautiful flowers.

(The invocation to the king continues.)

Part II: Netzahualcóytl sings a monologue "in the same tone" containing "beautiful metaphors" such as

¹⁸Arias-Larreta, p. 41.

¹⁹Garibay, Vol. I, pp. 95-97.

²⁰The Hymn to the Kouretes and the Tammuz ritual begin in the same fashion. See Chapter III of this work.

"my heart feels like a perfumed flower . . .
 within my heart breaks the flower of the song".²¹

Part III: A dialogue between a macaw and a quetzal bird.

The dialogue refers to war and sacrifice and is
 clouded in the extreme symbolism so common to
 Aztec works and so enigmatic to the western mind.

Macaw: I, a red and yellow macaw,
 I flew over the earth,
 My heart was enraptured.

Quetzal: I, the quetzal, in the season of the
 divine rains,
 I sing among the flowers
 I give my song, my heart is full of
 ecstasy.

Macaw: The water blossoms,
 Its foam blossoms over the earth,
 My heart is full of rapture.

Quetzal: I am saddened, afflicted, I weep.
 No one has a home on this earth
 I say I am Mexican; I must follow my
 pathway.
 Let us go to Tehuantepec,
 The Chiltepec perishes,
 The Tehuantepec weeps.

Macaw: O Mexican, my friend, do not be annoyed,
 That the Chiltepec perishes,
 The smoking star shall fall on him,
 Let him of Xochitlan perish
 Let him of Amaxtlan weep,
 As the one from Tehuantepec weeps.

Part IV: Three voices and an epilogue. One voice is that
 of a poet. The theme is ephemeral life "with

²¹Unfortunately, Garibay does not translate the
 entire Song of Netzahualcóyotl. All of the translation
 which appears in Garibay is reproduced here.

interminable repetition and insistence".²² The second voice belongs to Netzahualpilli. The third one is that of a captive praising the king. The epilogue is probably sung by all. From this part is extracted the following excerpt:

There where dawn is, the light weaves your dwelling.
Your flowers open their petals like emeralds
Your song is like a slow rain of jewels.

Song of the Turtledoves

Of a less serious, less royal and less religious nature is the "Song of the Turtledoves", also found in the Cantares Mexicanos (f. 67v). Garibay²³ finds seven scenes (tiempos) indicated; the first is a "mimed prologue" in which a singer named Tozcuatectli (Shaved-yellow-head) sings that he comes from

the land of the ravens
where the shells clamor
and the trumpets sound alarm.

He identifies himself as a "bird of flint" or "red macaw" and concludes saying

I have come from the land of green vegetables
I am only a deer who comes to scatter flowers.

²²See Appendix I, Rabinal Achí. After laboring through a complete work with the peculiar native characteristic of each character repeating or summarizing what the preceeding character has just finished saying, it is understandable why Father Garibay speaks of "interminable repetition and insistence", and why he omits the entirety.

²³Garibay, Vol. I, pp. 374-377.

In the second scene there is a true dialogue between two women named Chalchiuhuene and Nanotzin. The scene seems barely related to the lyricism of the preceding scene, focusing on the all too human problems of the two women.

Chalch: Have you perhaps hurt yourself, my sister Nanotzin?

Nanotzin: I don't know yet, Chalchiuhuene.
Let's go home. My mother is there.

Chalch: You came alone, --you saw him, --Woman who supports man!
I like your house.

Nanotzin: Let's go to my house; my mother is there.

Chalch: Nanotzin, where did he go?

Nanotzin: I would kill myself, my friend!
I do not understand him yet, for sure.
Here is my mother.

(They arrive at the house where the mother awaits.)

Mother: Come in quickly with me --thus --
I would be in peace, and in peace
remain.

(Two other women arrive, Quetzal Miyahuaxochitl and Quetzalxochitl.)

Quetzal Miyahuaxochitl:

My heart hates itself, my mother:
those who are happy, those who live in pleasure,
perhaps they will pass here yet: you blame me
for it!

My husband lived in content, my mother:
perhaps I was seen? But perhaps I understood?
Ay, now I weep, I, Quetzal Miyahuaxoch, woman
of pleasure.

Some arrive before me: in this way I will die,
laughing at myself!

What? You with me, my friend?

I weep for this reason: in this way will I die.
laughing at myself!

Quetzalxochitl:

I am Quetzalxochitl,
I love myself for I am a beautiful woman.
I scold my friends
Cozcamalintzen and Xiuhtlamiyahuatzin
for having lived loosely
and washed their hair very prettily.
Mother of mine, O Mother of mine,
I beseech you to scold my friends
Cozcamalintzen and Xiuhtlamiyahuatzin
Who have lived loosely
and washed their hair very prettily.

There follows a lyric and more serious poem by
the king Abui Zotl in the third scene, contrasting the comic
problems of the women.

In the fourth scene there is a dialogue between
a singer and a woman in which she asks,

What shall I do? My man considers me
a red flower of the forest.
But the time will come when I will wither
in his hand and he will leave me.

The subject matter for non-religious drama seems indeed
to be universal.

The fifth and sixth scenes are also dialogues
which contain material already covered. In the last
scene several women sing.

Champotzin: What value do you set upon me, Mother?
I am a beautiful necklace and you destroy me:
all in good time you find your own pleasure
but my heart is broken.

Yet even now my heart is refreshed.
I hear the drum, I hear the drum thundering:
my heart is made happy with the song of
turtledoves.
I am Champotzín, an Otomí woman.
Let me offer my gift of quetzal feathers.

Two more women appear whose songs contain such obscure symbolism that even Garibay cannot fit them into the dramatic piece. Garibay concludes that this "song" deals with the ladies of the houses of pleasure which were virtually a state institution in Tenochtitlan.²⁴

Song of Bold-Face²⁵

There is another interesting piece in which the characters, all forest creatures, sing alternating jesting and truthful verses. With the exception of the deer-rabbit, who represents the god of maguey wine, all the creatures are birds. They come from Tlalocan²⁶ in order "to give pleasure to the gods for whom he lives" (the sun) "and to our mother" (the earth). In spite of farcical elements, it incorporates feelings and references to the divine.

Garibay compares the scene to that found in the Bonampak murals²⁷ which seems to be a Mayan dance of celebration to the gods of rain, whose Aztec equivalent rules over Tlalocan whence this scene's characters have

²⁴Garibay, Vol. I, p. 377.

²⁵Ibid., pp. 378-384. Cantares Mexicana numbering f. 67r.

²⁶See Chapter V, Figs. 13 and 14 of this work.

²⁷See Chapter X, Figs. 66 and 67 of this work.

come. Because both scenes contain serious and non-serious elements, and because of certain similarities in disguise, Garibay concludes the possibility of common origin for the Mayas and Nahuas.²⁸

The piece seems to divide into eight episodes. The first character who appears is a broadly winking, mischievous man named "Bold-Face" (Caritravieso).

Bold-Face: Hullo, Milord, I've come, I come laughing,
 I'm Bold-Face;
 my flower-song is woven and spreading.
 Where's the head of the house?
 I come from there, where the White Flowers grow:
 You'll always find a trumpet to welcome you
 there.
 The water-moss shines like the sun.
 Where's the head of the house?
 O that this would be the beginning, that they
 would present
 fragrant flowers: there will be pleasure with
 those.
 The flowers quiver as they come: there will
 be pleasure with them.

The flower metaphor would at first seem to refer to young women, but in Aztec symbolism they might also refer to songs or to sacrificed hearts. Once admitted to the presence of the listeners and of those who he supposes wait for them, "Bold-Face" renews his song, significant because of the allusions to the mansion from which he came:

²⁸Ibid., p. 380.

Bold-Face: Many flowers tremble:
 I come to sing my songs: the flowers are enraptured.
 I, Bold-Face, come from where the water comes forth.
 I come to sing my songs: the flowers are enraptured.
 Your heart values many flowers:
 I bring them to you, carry them on my shoulders to your house!

I come bringing flowers which have no roots or stems.
 I come bringing fragrant flowers:
 Since your house is where the Flowers grow Straight!
 We have come to give pleasure to our gods, through whom all live and to our mother.
 Land of knapsacks, place where the land is parceled out and sown with flower seeds!
 Only the quetzal feathers could become lazy and surrender.
 Fine feathers are distributed: there is a house of aquatic moss there:
 Land of knapsacks, place where the land is distributed and sown with flower seeds!

The final lines refer to a scene from Tlalocan, with its "houses of aquatic moss" and its quetzal feathers "bathed by the sun that comes inclining to the earth"²⁹ as described in old documents.

In the third part of the manuscript is found a dialogue between two characters: one is called by many names: Deer, Two-Rabbit, Rabbit-Inflamed-by-Drink, who seems to resemble the god of the maguery and its fermented liquor, which maddens and causes men to be enraptured. The second character is Quetzalcóxcx, announcer of the

²⁹Ibid., p. 381.

dawn of day.

Rabbit-Maddened-
With-Drink: I am he who comes, the Deer,
Two-Rabbit, Rabbit-Maddened-With-Drink,
Deer-With-Great-Antlers.
O Milord, O my friends,
Open your folded flowers,
Your pages of festive songs.

The Flowering Tree
is ringed about, is upright, stands erect
and scatters flowers.
In the time of the rains you are heard;
in its branches you go flying, Precious
Pheasant,
and making song!

There follow several lines by individual voices;
Garibay feels they were accompanied and interspersed with
music of some duration, while the singers danced. Then
the mysterious Pheasant, symbol of the Sun, replies:

Precious Pheasant: Ah. This opening will admit me,
Your house is gay and bustling:
I will dance before them.

There follows a collective dance and song after
which comes more dialogue.

Bold-Face: Here I come singing again:
I'm Bold-Face, the magnificent turtledove,
My song resounds.
I shall include it in a painting
In the flowery courtyard:
My song resounds.

Angry-Rabbit appeared in the rainy season.
Though it is now the time of flowering,
still he shivers;
Look at him my nephews!

Now the gilded butterfly is sucking
the blooming flowers of my heart.

Oh, my friends I am shaking down the
sweet-scented flowers.

I am shaking the flower of war
and I come from the place by the battle-
field.

I am a quetzal bird and I come flying
from the place of anguish, from the
place by the battlefield.

The meaning of this dialogue is clearer if we
consider the constantly recurring double metaphor of
flowers. Garibay suggests the following equation:

Flowers = songs = hearts offered to the gods.³⁰

The triple implication, remote and difficult for us, was
for the primitive spectators familiar and charming
symbolism. Angry-Rabbit belatedly replies to the challenge
with beautiful images.

Angry-Rabbit: I am the precious thrush, I come flying
I have changed into a flower.
I am the angry Rabbit.
Behold me, my wrath is terrible. Lock
yourselves up in fear!
Sparks fly from my eyes,
I walk laughing and I come from the
flowering patio:
I have changed into a flower.
I am Angry-Rabbit,
Behold me, my wrath is terrible, Lock
yourselves up in fear!

More difficult yet is the final scene in which we
find a new character called Chahuichalotzin--"Parrot
shiny as oil". The speech is divided into four brief
stanzas: each one seems to contain internal stage

³⁰Ibid., p. 383.

directions for the personator.

Shiny-Parrot: I come, now I come anew, I shiny-Parrot:
Here I sing: hear my song.
I beat my caparison and cause it to resound
here beside my nephew,
my beflowered, tortoise caparison.

I pushed on, until I arrived here from
Panotla:³¹
I, Shiny-Parrot, went there to play
my song.
I beat my caparison and cause it to resound
my beflowered, tortoise caparison.

Now I begin, now I sing;
I come from the interior of Tula³²
I can sing my trill opened out upon the
land and the flowers unfolded.
I have already come; hear my song:
Robber of songs, my heart,
How shall you retain them? You suffer
sadness.
Like a painting:
take the black ink
and lay on the red.
Who knows if when they are faded and wilted
You will suffer sadness still.

The ubiquitous Nahua lament on the transitory nature of all things is heard anew; but the written word survives the writer. Writing was fairly new to the Aztecs, and the discovery of the written word as an immortality was certainly an idea significant enough for public dramatic presentation.

³¹Or Panuco, an ancestral home/source. Garibay, p. 383.

³²The ancestral home which all "cultured" tribes of Mexico claimed.

Epic

Some of the poetry recorded by the Indian chronicler Tezózomoc seems to be in epic form. The following piece recorded in the Cronica Mexicáyotl³³ concerns the struggle between Huitzilopochtli and his nephew Copil, and takes on added theatrical interest in that the narrative sections seem to read exactly as stage directions.

Flower-of-the-Creeper, the sister of Huitzilopochtli, is being addressed by her son, Copil.

Copil: Mother, I know him well, there goes your brother!

Flower: It is true, you have an uncle called Huitzilopochtli. . . . He it is, he who abandoned me, who left me sleeping, who went away in secret along the road. That is the reason we came to live here, on this craggy hill.

Copil: It is well, my mother, now I know. I must go and find him wherever he has settled and established his home; and I must kill and devour him. And I must also destroy and overcome those he took with him, his princes and his serfs. And I know full well what and how much shall be the reward of anyone who is successful in capturing all his wealth. I shall be that one, I shall enjoy it all: all his jade stones, gold, quetzal feathers, and splendid plumage, the dappled cocoa and

³³Hernando Alvarado Tezózomoc, Cronica Mexicáyotl (Mexico: Imprenta Universitaria, 1949), p. 39 ff. Except for a few minor changes, the translation is Nicholson's in Firefly in the Night, p. 121-123.

the speckled cotton, the innumerable flowers,
the many different fruits.
But do not worry, my mother, and do not be sad.
Strengthen me with your inspiration!

Copil leaves his mother, dresses for battle, examines
carefully the battlefield-to-be, and returns to the little
hill with his maiden, Azcaxochitl. Huitzilopochtli sees
Copil, recognizes him, and speaks to his nobles.

Huitzil: Sires, be strong and bold: prepare yourselves,
for now my treacherous nephew comes. I shall go,
I shall go forth to destroy him and to kill him.

(He approaches Copil.)

Copil: Who are you? And whence come you?

Huitzil: It is I. Where is your house?

Copil: Over there. On the steep hill.

Huitzil: It is well. Are you not he to whom my sister
gave birth?

Copil: Yes, it is I. It is my duty to capture you and
kill you.
Why did you secretly leave my mother sleeping and
unsheltered?
There is no doubt that I must kill you!

Huitzil: It is well. Come.

Huitzilopochtli and his warriors pursue, capture, and kill
Copil on the little hill. Huitzilopochtli then cuts off
his head, opens his breast, and tears out the heart.

In both Tezómoc's and Adrian Leon's translations
from the Nahuatl which appear side by side in this edition,
the Spanish is the same: Pasaste trabajos, oh Sacerdote.
In speaking to the god Huitzilopochtli, the servant

addresses him as "Oh Priest".³⁴ This is one of the few places where the translations precisely agree, and it offers evidence of the use of this "epic" as a true theatrical presentation. For most probably, the god is a priest dressed as a god, and it would be easy for a people who live with the incongruities of Burning Water and Flowering Rock to consider the actor as both god and priest.

Poetry Contest

In still another section of the Cantares Mexicanos³⁵ is a group of stanzas called the "Huexotzinco Songs" which is said to be a collection of "the poetic production of this ancient 'republic'".³⁶ Garibay concludes that these are an example of the royal poetry contests of Netzahualcóyotl and other kings and princes.³⁷

In the first ten years of the sixteenth century, Tecayehuatzin, king of Huexotzinco called together various princes from the surrounding country. They were gathered in a patio filled with trees and flowers, sitting around flower-covered drums. Seventeen characters are mentioned

³⁴Tezómoc, p. 43.

³⁵Garibay, pp. 344-350. Cantares Mexicano
numeration f9v to f12r.

³⁶Ibid., p. 343.

³⁷Ibid.

in the work and eight are perfectly identified with their respective poems.³⁸ The opening speech was by Tecayehuatzin who called the meeting.

Tecay: For how short a time and through all time
may I enjoy these emeralds and jewels
which are the princes!

I interweave like flowers
this meeting of the princes;
with my songs; I circle
here among the drums.

I am giving a feast at Huexatzinco,
I, the king Tecayehuatzin:
Emeralds and Quetzal feathers I assemble here:
There are my princes.

There follow several songs on the traditional themes of grief and sadness in my house,³⁹ speculation of life after death⁴⁰ and the melancholy knowledge of the eventual end of this life,⁴⁰ interspersed with lesser efforts which tend to support the plurality of the contestants. One set of three stanzas is distinctive although no speaker is identified.⁴¹

Ah, it is you, the red bird of the Sun,
it is you, king of the Gods:
And you are the first to have seen the dawn and
you are singing here.

³⁸Ibid., p. 344.

³⁹Ibid., p. 346. "The Song of Motenehuatzin".

⁴⁰Ibid., pp. 346-347. "The Song of Ayocuan".

⁴¹Ibid., p. 348.

Strengthen then my heart in desire
 shielding flowers: they are flowers of the Sun.
 What will my heart do?
 Do we come and go in vain on this earth?

I will perish in the same way
 that the flowers have always perished.
 Will my renown someday be nothing?
 To the few flowers, to the few songs!
 What will my heart do?
 Do we come and go in vain through the earth?

After this sad invocation to the solar gods, the
 god himself in the disguise of the flowered hummingbird⁴²
 intervenes in the contest and speaks a short poem.

Hummingbird: I have finally arrived at the branches
 of the flowered tree,
 I, the flowered Hummingbird:
 The fragrance delighting my beak,
 I am made happy by this
 Sweet flowers: they are delicious on my
 lips.

Three of the princes, and possibly all in a
 chorus reply to the voice of the god and render him final
 homage with this supplication.

Oh giver of life,
 We adorn our supplication with flowers.
 Now to please you do we humble ourselves
 near the flowered drums.
 Now the drum is protected; now it is guarded:
 in the house of Spring your friends wait for you:
 Yaomanotzin, Micohuatzin, Ayocauhtzin
 Now with flowers do the princes sigh!⁴³

⁴²Huitzilopochtli (Hummingbird-on-the-left) was
 the chief deity of Tenochtitlan. See Chapter V of this
 work.

⁴³Garibay, p. 349.

It is conceivable, of course, that the event actually took place, in which case the basic concept of a literary contest alone could, in the broadest sense, be called dramatic. It is conceivable, though less likely, that the event was handed down with some accuracy by professional rememberers with or without the aid of the pictographic manuscripts.

It is also possible that the event was commemorated by reënactment on certain occasions. And this possibility is the most interesting to this study. In spite of an essential lack of conflict and central figures, the fact of impersonating the eight to seventeen participants, the individual and group recitation of poetry--even though not in the form of true dialogue--and the appearance of a god in his hummingbird disguise are all undeniable theatrical elements.

Ceremonial Dialogues

On important occasions, predetermined speeches were exchanged which were more narrations than stycomythic dialogue. These exchanges were used as persuasive lessons for youth, as harangues, and for various formal occasions.

When the chiefs and nobles left their children at the calmecac, the boarding school where they lived during their entire training, the chief or noble would prepare a banquet to which were invited the priests, the well-born

and the old men. Sahagún states that "old men", not the father, made the entreaty.⁴⁴ After a lengthy, polite and formal greeting to the priests, thanking them and god for their presence, the entreaty continues,

We have dreamed; we have quickly arisen. Now, what will the boy, (this) small child, be? Surely we shall not offer him a spindle and a batten. For he is your chattel, your charge. We now pray to the lord Topiltzin, Quetzalcōatl, to him who is feathered in black, that he may enter the priests' house, the house of weeping, of tears, and of sadness, where grow and ripen the sons of our lords.⁴⁵

A long paeon to the god follows with praises for the fine and sinless work which the school performs. The speech ends with a formal dedication of the youth to the priesthood.

In your noble laps, on your revered backs, in your valued protection we place the child. Grant him (your love), for we give you our child. Grant him your love; give him (your protection). May he be planted here that he may be reared and wax strong; that he may do penances all night and all day, going about on elbow and on knee, calling and crying out to our lord, weeping, sad, and sighing.⁴⁶

The priests reply. Fully one-third of the reply is a repetition of what the old ones have said, finally accepting the youth formally.

⁴⁴Sahagún, Book IV, Part 3, p. 59.

⁴⁵Ibid., pp. 59-60.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 60

A comparable exchange occurred when young men were placed in the telpochcalli.⁴⁷ In this case the fathers first spoke a prayer enumerating the things they hoped their sons would learn at the school. The priests replied in similar fashion, although with a much longer and more detailed answer than the noble fathers received.

A similar format was reported by Alonso de Zorita at the succession of a ruler. At the summit of the temple, after being vested in the robes of state, the new king was addressed by a high priest admonishing him to perform well the duties he enumerated. After hearing the speech, the new ruler replied, promising to do all that was asked. There followed an exchange of amenities and thanks after which the king descended to the courtyard and accepted the formal speeches of fealty by the other lords.⁴⁸

When a youth married, a similar exchange of formal speeches occurred, the father telling the son all the things expected of him, and the son offering acknowledgement and gratitude for the good advice.⁴⁹ Likewise an exchange between mother and daughter occurred before the marriage ceremony.⁵⁰

⁴⁷Sahagún, Book III, Part 4, pp. 49-51. Telpochcalli is the commoners equivalent of the Calmecac.

⁴⁸Alonso de Zorita, Life and Labor in Ancient Mexico (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1963), pp. 92-95.

⁴⁹Ibid., pp. 140-147.

⁵⁰Ibid., pp. 147-151.

While these last examples are much more ritual than drama, they do incorporate role-playing, dialogue (in the sense of cues and pre-determined speeches) and some formal staging. And even these examples offer evidence, however closer to ritual than to drama, of the seeds and potential of drama which existed in the Aztec domains.

Summary

Although "Primitive Mimetic Dance" certainly existed among the more isolated tribes of the Central Highlands at the time of the Spanish conquest, the more advanced forms of Ritual Drama were most in evidence. The blood sacrifices were either "Ritualized Mimetic Dance" in the lesser ceremonies, or "Dromenon-Drama" in the ceremonies to Xipe and Toçī.

But in the Hymn to Tláloc, and the songs of Netzahualcóyotl, the Turtledoves and Bold-Face, all the requirements for "Proto-Drama" are in evidence. There was some dance, but it preceded or followed the episodes. In each case, there were at least two characters of distinct identity, with appropriate individuality in masks, costumes and/or makeup. Although from this distance of time and culture, it is difficult to think of these simple incidents as plot, it must be remembered that these manuscripts were not intended as "acting editions", that they

were to serve only as reminders to the trained actor-priests who were already familiar with the piece. It is unsafe to conclude that the spoken words were the total piece; in addition to the interpolated songs and dance, it is quite possible that these isolated episodes were only the formal part of the piece and that the ceremony was filled out just as the Commedia dell'arte actor filled out the simple scenario.

Sacramentalism was little in evidence in the works noted in this chapter. Where it existed it was either a dance separated from the plot incident, or it was largely symbolic as in the case of the oficiantes of the Hymn to Tláloc.

Speculation on the kind of drama into which these forms might eventually develop would be interesting but pointless. For the fact is that the Spaniards came and conquered Mexico, physically and spiritually. It is ironic indeed that the friars accomplished much of the spiritual conquest of the New World by channeling the theatrical talents and traditions of the Indian into the didactic miracle and morality plays which they brought with them from Spain.

CHAPTER IX

INDIGENOUS TRADITIONS SURVIVING THE CONQUEST

Cortés conquered Mexico in 1521 and with the conquering Spaniards came the medieval Miracle and Morality plays. The Indians witnessed the miracle of their conquest by a small band of some two hundred soldiers, and probably wondered at the morality that affected "liquidation" of over three-fourths of the twelve to fifteen million native inhabitants of Mexico.¹

Miracle and Morality Plays

For those remaining, there was a new outlet for their tradition of theatrical ritual. The missionaries, who arrived in great numbers in the first two decades after the conquest, recognized this tradition early and incorporated it into the Loas and Autos Sacramentales of the medieval church, which were adapted and translated into Nahuatl and used to spread the dogmas and doctrines of the new religion.

Native actors were used, speaking Nahuatl, using native gesture, employing familiar staging techniques,

¹Wolf, pp. 30-31.

and altogether giving the gospel physical manifestation in Mexican flesh and form.² The names of local persons and places were frequently substituted for their biblical counterparts.³ In the Comedia de los Reyes⁴ (Drama of the Kings), written in Nahuatl at the beginning of the seventeenth century, the "Four Priests of the Jews" become, in the Nahuatl version, local priests: One Teopixqui, Two Teoxqui, Three Teoqui, Four Teopixqui. The prophet of the piece is several times spoken of as "the prophet whose name was Balám" or as "our ancestor Balám who was the prophet".⁵ Thirty-four major stage directions occur in each version; virtually all movement is accompanied by the direction "Music of the wind is played".

To this day, dances, pantomimes, masquerades and ceremonies are incorporated into Catholic practices of traditional Spanish festivals and Holy Days, particularly Corpus Christi.⁶

²Arrom, p. 19.

³Willis Knapp Jones, Behind Spanish American Footlights (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1966), p. 18.

⁴Agustin de la Fuente, Comedia de los Reyes (Florence: Salvador Landi, 1902), pp. 85 and 109.

⁵Ibid., pp. 85, 89, 109, 113. Balám or Balán is the native word for the high priest.

⁶Mariano Picón-Salas, A Cultural History of Spanish America, trans. by Irving A. Leonard (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1962), p. 63.

The earliest certain example of the combined tradition was The Conversion of Saint Paul performed in Mexico City in 1530.⁷ The piece was blatantly didactic; it was written to show the still-pagan Aztec nobles how a great warrior and noble, Paul, saw the light. Since the performers were Indian, in Indian costume and setting, the hero, for all practical purposes was an Aztec warrior and noble, who gave a fine example for the Aztec audience to turn their faith from the pagan gods to the Christian god.⁸

In 1535 The Judgement Day was performed to celebrate the arrival of the Viceroy Mendoza and the first printing press in the New World.

The stage, a broad platform, open on all sides and raised several feet above the ground, had been erected on the main plaza on which had stood, but a few years before, the magnificent old and new palaces of the Moctezumas. It was profusely decorated with natural flowers and branches of trees, the latter forming wide arches on each of the four sides of the stage, which was reached by broad stairways.⁹

Along with Spanish and native dignitaries the Viceroy and the Bishop sat in temporary boxes surrounded by an audience of over ten thousand Indians.

The Judgement Day is about a woman, Lucy, who refuses marriage and leads a happy life with many lovers;

⁷J. H. Cornyn, "An Aztec Drama", Books Abroad (July, 1934), p. 262. Records of the Mexican Cabildo of January 9, 1526 contain references to an earlier showing of the Christmas play, Los Pastores; but nothing more is known of it. Jones, p. 460.

⁸Cornyn, p. 263.

⁹Ibid.

Lucy represents not license (since the Aztec culture was quite puritanical), but plural marriage, of which the nobles partook; and the Spaniards, not wishing to offend the still-powerful Aztec nobility, chose Lucy as a more subtle symbol of god's displeasure. On the road to her final damnation, Lucy encounters such allegorical personages as Time and Holy Church who warn her of the approach of the Day of Judgement. Lucy hurries to her confessor intending to marry her present lover, but she is told that there could be no mercy for a sinner like her.¹⁰ Before meeting her final damnation Lucy encounters other allegorical figures--Penitance, Confession, Death and Anti-Christ; unfortunately it is not recorded how these characters were represented.¹¹ Over one hundred of these medieval Comedias were written in Nahuatl in the pursuit of the Indian soul. As pressures on the government and the church increased, the native dramas ceased to be acted and less than twenty survive.¹²

El Tepozteco

In Tepoztlan, a village in the state of Morelos, the grafting of native and Christian tradition has survived

¹⁰Jones, p. 19.

¹¹Cornyn, p. 263.

¹²Ibid., p. 262.

to the twentieth century. In September there is a festival called Altepe-ilhuitl (Day of the People), which would appear to have little religious concern. However, as will be seen in the text below, there is frequent and sometimes disguised reference to the old and new gods.

Midway through an oration in the Tepozteco drama, truth is attributed to "the aunt . . . who shines there in the heavens";¹³ the Nahuatl name Te-ahuitzin is a present-day substitution for Tecī or Toçī, the ancestor of gods and men and the antecessor of Our Lady of Guadalupe. The Indians associated the Virgin with the moon. When the grain was gathered, the Mexican people held a great festival in September in honor of Tecī who was identified with the harvest moon. The Tepozteco play seems to have been written to take the place of this ancient autumn festival.¹⁴ There are the usual references to the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, but the most important figure is that of Tepoztecatl, who in pre-conquest days was the patron god of this area, closely associated with the god Ome Tochtli.¹⁵ His name survives today as that of a legendary chieftain of the ancients.

¹³Robert Redfield, Tepoztlan, A Mexican Village (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1930), p. 230.

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 230-231 Note.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 25.

The dance-drama at this festival commemorates the valorous defense of Tepoztlán by Tepoztecatl against the attack of neighboring tribes. The festival is characterized by much drinking, dancing and music; and on September eighth, the village men enact the successful defense of the temple on the cliff against the seven attacking towns of the valley. In the late afternoon a tall wooden tower is built in the plaza which represents the teocalli, the great pyramid common to Aztec ceremonial centers (Fig. 35). Onto this climbs a man representing El Tepozteco followed by others in the roles of his fighting men. Wearing red and yellow tunics and feather headdresses, they beat drums in challenge. Seven men riding seven burros come to attack the teocalli and are driven off with arrows.¹⁶ El Tepoz-teco delivers his traditional defiance in Nahuatl.¹⁷

Tepozteco: Who are you who have come here?
Not even did you give greetings; you came
introducing yourselves like little dogs.

What time is this right now when I am
enjoying myself,
When I am happy, and when I am sleeping?
You have completely ruined my sleep;
You have deeply troubled my sleep.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 123.

¹⁷Ibid. In the present day the attackers have been given speeches of reply but the older form contains only the single oration.

I strengthen my heart.
 Come forward, thou of Cuernavaca:
 Why dost thou come to seek me?
 Right now when I am here celebrating my
 fiesta.
 Is it possible you come right now when I
 am remembering
 Her, the Virgin Holy Mary who
 is here giving me fully my essential strength
 and my valor?

I strengthen my heart.
 Come forward, thou of Yautepec!
 Why dost thou seek me,
 where are surrounding me here
 my four mountains, the seven hills, the
 seven wells
 and the seven stony hillsides;
 they are my valor and my essential strength.

I fortify my heart!
 Come forward, thou of Tlayacapan:
 Why dost thou seek me?
 It is quite true as she, our aunt, said
 who shines
 there in the heavens,
 She, the moon, has made her dwelling
 foundations.
 Twelve stars she has
 like flowers placed on her head.

She has surpassed, there in the sky, all;
 and here on earth;
 and everywhere in the universe.

Come forward, thou of Huaxtepec!
 Why dost thou seek me; at this very moment;
 just at this time;
 Is it possible--when I am celebrating
 my fiesta;
 when I am remembering the year-day;
 when I am remembering my mother,
 the roseate Virgin and
 the precious only son, altogether divine,
 perfect as God
 the Father, God the Son and God the Holy
 Ghost,
 ever blessed in heaven and here on earth,
 and also everywhere in the universe.

I fortify my heart!
 Come forward, thou from Tlalmanalco!
 Why dost thou seek me?
 Come forward, all of you!
 Come to hear how great is my fame, my
 majesty.
 Far over there where you gloried in your
 power;
 where you had your pleasures; where you had
 your recreations,
 I took from you your war drum,
 and your teponaztli,
 I fortify my heart!
 Beat for them on the drum their shame of
 having been conquered!¹⁸

There follows rejoicing and dancing. The form of this "dance-drama" is similar to several that are described in Chapter IV--general dancing, ritual combat, an oration by an identifiable hero-god, and further dancing. Although the modern version seems to be adapting to western tastes by the addition of subsequent dialogue, the ancient source of the piece seems easily traceable.

Güegüence

Fernandez de Oviedo, who was in Nicaragua in 1529, was the first to describe the ritual and dramatic presentations of the Nahuatl-speaking natives.¹⁹ Daniel Brinton,

¹⁸Ibid., Appendix B, pp. 227-234. The verse is in trochaic meter, as was most Nahuatl oration of this type. Cuernavaca, Yautepec, Tlayacapan, Huaxtepec and Tlalmanalco are cities or tribal centers.

¹⁹Oviedo, Lib. XLII, Cap. XI.

the leading Americanist of the nineteenth century, noted that within the memory of living Nicaraguan natives there were five different classes of bailes (literally "dances", but including more than dance):

1. Simple dances
2. Dances with songs
3. Dances with prose recitation
4. Scenic recitations with music by a single actor, called logas²⁰
5. Complete dramas, with music, ballets, dialogue and costumes²¹

All were called bailes.

Although most of these are accompanied by songs and some by true dialogue, the first four categories seldom reach the development of a true plot or the depiction of character or emotion.²² Most of the "complete dramas" were religious or historical plays, arranged by the clergy "and offer little interest".²³

Brinton's source for the comic Baile del Güegüence dates from 1874 when several copies were compared and compiled by Dr. C. H. Berndt.²⁴ Berndt stated that the

²⁰Probably a corruption of loa which in Spain began as a rhymed prologue and gradually developed into a longer dramatic form, finally differing little from the farces which followed. George Ticknor, History of Spanish Literature (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1891), Vol. II, pp. 527-529.

²¹Brinton, The Güegüence, pp. xxiii-xxiv.

²²Ibid., p. xxvii.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid., p. xli.

Nahuatl parts were not understood by the natives even then. Brinton dates the comedy as seventeenth century or before.²⁵ As is the case with all the native dramatic works, the author is unknown, although he was almost certainly Indian rather than Spanish.

Although a few modern expressions have crept into the text, there is strong evidence of ancient native tradition. Unlike all the dramas introduced by the Spanish priests which had either a religious or didactic end, Güegüence has neither a moral nor any hint of a religious tone. Differing from the stock Spanish comedies of the same age, the play has no prologue or epilogue, no monologues or soliloquies; the female characters (including the "heroine") do not say a word, and there is no division into scenes. Indeed if there is any divisional similarity, it is to the theatre of ancient Greece, for at least sixteen times the action is interrupted by dancing. There is no reference to romantic love or gallantry, so typical of Spanish literature,²⁶ in fact the passages which speak of women are quite coarse and obscene.

Further indication of the pen of a native author is the tedious repetition by one speaker of what the

²⁵Ibid., p. xlii.

²⁶Ticknor, II, p. 539.

previous speaker has said, which seems characteristic of Middle American theatrical poetry.²⁷

Gov:²⁸ No, not satisfied; the Royal Court would like to know it.

Güe: The clever Governor Tastuanes does not know it. Well, then, let friend Captain Alguacil suspend in the quarters of the leading men the music, dances, songs, ballets and talk, and I will open my tent to the royal court.

Gov: My son, Captain chief Alguacil, suspend in the quarters of the leading men the music, dances, songs, ballets and such like, to please this good-for-nothing Güegüence, and he will show his tent, to please the royal court.

Alg: At your service, Governor Tastuanes. I pray god to protect the leading men, (and they suspend) the music, dances, songs, ballets and talk (to show) the tent of the royal court.

(Güegüence and the boys dance around the stage with the tent.)

Güe: I pray god to protect you, Governor Tastuanes. Let me offer you my tent, to show to the royal court. Heft it, boys. . . .²⁹

²⁷See Appendix I of this work, Rabinal Achí.

²⁸The reader of Spanish can see from the corresponding original text the curious combination of recent and archaic Spanish with Nahua and Latinized Nahua words and phrases. Brinton, The Güegüence, pp. 38 and 40.

Gob: Pachigüete no pachigüete, Güegüence, asamaquimate mollule mo Cabildo real.

Güe: No chiquimate mollule Sor. Gob. Tastuanes: pues mayagüe amigo Cap. Alg. M., campamento Srs. principales, sones, mundazas, velancicos, necana y palparesia mo tinderungia tuma güiso mo Cabildo Real.

Gob: No pilse Cap. Alg. M. simocagüe campamento Sres. principales, sones, mudanzas, velancicos, necana y paltechua consolar sesule Güegüence.

²⁹Ibid., pp. 39 and 41. The interpolations are Brinton's.

It is, of course, axiomatic that repetition is one of the basic comic devices, and it cannot be said that the natives did not find this amusing. However, the same kind of formal repetition occurs in the very serious Rabinal Achí and in the short ritual pieces already noted, none of which can in any way be considered comic. The Indian linguistic trait of repetitious parallelism will be discussed in detail in Chapter XII.

The comic devices of Güegüence, excluding repetition, number only two. The assumed deafness of Güegüence, which in itself may have been ludicrous or grotesque enough to incite laughter, causes misunderstanding of the other characters lines, which in turn result in amusing quid-pro-quos. The second device is the generous usage of obscenities. While both of these devices are common to European drama as well, both were also mentioned by the earliest Chroniclers³⁰ as characteristic of the native farces.

The period of performance of Güegüence was around September thirtieth, the festival of Saint Jerome. The production casts were usually undertaken by a single patron of the festival whose principal outlay was in serving food and drink at each rehearsal and performance. In former times, there were daily rehearsals for from six to eight

³⁰See for example, Durán, Historia, Tomo II, p. 231.

months.³¹ For this principal reason, Güegüence was for a long time discontinued, and is now given only on rare occasions.

Masks

Of all theatrical characteristics which seem most constant and widespread in Mexico, the mask is most noticeable. In the great metropolitan centers, the European theatrical traditions dominate, and masks are seldom used. But in the villages and pueblos at the traditional fiestas and celebrations, whether for the tourist or for the native, masked impersonations are the rule.³²

The masks are made of the same materials and probably in the same manner as those discovered by the sixteenth century chroniclers, whose descriptions of the masks fit many seen today.

Masks are made of wood, cloth, leather, clay, paste, tin and paper, sometimes with genuine hair and teeth. They are painted, lacquered or left in natural state. The features are subordinated to the materials and one finds in them the same plastic vigor as in the best and most primitive sculptures.³³

Just as the masks themselves are a tradition, maskmaking seems to be a carefully guarded family tradition.

³¹Brinton, The Güegüence, p. xli.

³²Kurath and Martí, p. 165.

³³Toor, p. 64.



Fig. 55

Animal masks today. Both from Guerrerro: Dance of the Tlacoleros. Left: Toor, p. 78; Right: Justino Fernandez, Mexican Folklore (Mexico, D. F.: Eugenio Fischgrund, 1954), p. 64.

Tepozteco had three maskmakers who were brothers. The duty of making the masks had "always" been in their family. Before the carnival they devoted their full time to the making of the traditional masks.³⁴

Although the modern masks are largely of Santiagos,³⁵ Moors, and colonial personages,³⁶ some are indigenous. The animal masks of Figures 55 and 56 are typical of these.

³⁴Redfield, p. 153.

³⁵Santiago (Saint James) was the patron saint of Spain and his name became the battle cry during the purge of the Moors from Iberia.

³⁶Kurath and Martí, p. 165.

The eagle and jaguar (tigre) which represented the pre-columbian orders of warriors are still represented. The skull and ribs of death are universal, but the modern representations in Figures 56 and 58 would seem to draw a direct line from the impersonations of Mictlantecuhtli (Figs. 32, 36, 37). The Devil offers fertile soil to the native imagination. For while he almost invariably bears the basic characteristics of horns and tail of the medieval tradition, in practice, (Fig. 57) he frequently resembles the ancient native deities or the devils of the maskmaker's imagination.



Fig. 56

Cow, Death, Tigre and Bear. Masked and costumed dancers from Zacatlán, Puebla. (From Toor, plate 18).



Fig. 57

The Devil; black mask; from Guererro. (From Fernandez, p. 69).



Fig. 58

Death. From the Dance of the Conquest. (From Soustelle, facing p. 72).

Folklore

Most of the mythic representations have been transferred to at least a surface appearance of Christian mythology, but underneath this façade, there is still recognizable such "forces" as "death", "the enemy", "a devil", or "a malignant thing", which could as well go by the Nahuatl title as by the Christian. In the Otomí villages in the state of Hidalgo, a pagan story is enacted called La Virgen y las Fieras (The Virgin and the Fierce Beasts).

The virgin comes out of her hut and enters the forest enticed by the trill of the birds and the enchantment of the flowers. When she is deep in the woods, she realizes she has lost her way. Her situation becomes

dangerous when she is attacked by unfriendly presences. She asks for help from the animals who love her. At her call there appear lions, tigers, wolves, bulls, deer and all kinds of animals who shield her, beat off the malign spirits and save her. In the representation of these hostile spirits there has come to be, in many places, something of popular Christian mythology.³⁷

In the mysteries of unknown malignant forces and in man's relationship to nature represented by animal personifications, the indigenous tradition lives on, clinging to the ancient convention of the mask as a representation of the form of the formless.

The government of Mexico, unique in Latin America, recognizes, encourages and publicizes the Indian heritage of its people, particularly in the arts. In a publication of the Secretary of Public Education are contained the scripts of various modern theatrical adaptations of ancient themes, including "Quetzalcoatl", a stage adaptation of the Toltec legend using three sets with music; "Sacniete", a reconstruction of the public life of the ancient Mayas, one act in verse; "Xochitl", a reconstruction of the popular legend in verse; "Tlahuicole", a reconstruction of an Aztec gladiatorial struggle; "The Festival of Tláloc", a reconstruction of a floral offering in the lake of Xochimilco, in verse; "Anahuac", a reconstruction of the

³⁷Carlos Merida, "Prehispanic Dance and Theatre", Theatre Arts, XXII, No. 8 (1938), p. 567.

splendor and fall of Tenochtitlan, and others.³⁸

Most of the works are in verse, as were virtually all the Aztec pieces. And although they are all short plays and have taken on a more western plot construction, the themes and the very fact of their publication indicate the survival of the indigenous theatrical tradition in the theatre of today.

³⁸Ruben M. Campos, El Folklore musical de las ciudades (Mexico, D. F.: Publicaciones de las Secretaría de Educacion Pública, 1930), pp. 203-266.

CHAPTER X

THE MAYAS:

FROM THE BEGINNING THROUGH THE SPANISH CONQUEST

Although it is generally agreed that the Mayan culture was a much higher civilization than that of the Aztecs, we know relatively little about it. The Yucatan jungles are not friendly to man, and there was little gold to inspire the Spanish search for souls. As a result first hand reports by the Spanish conquerors are few. Moreover, the Classic period of Mayan culture declined in the ninth century A. D.;¹ the culture was shaken by conquest by the Itzá of Mexico in the tenth century and by the subsequent decentralization of government;² and lastly, when the Spaniards arrived, the Indians had still not recovered from the great hurricane of 1464 and the plague of 1480.

The Spaniards did not conquer Yucatan for twenty years after the fall of Tenochtitlan; Mérida, the Spanish capital, was founded in 1542, and not until 1697

¹Gallenkamp, p. 181.

²Ibid.

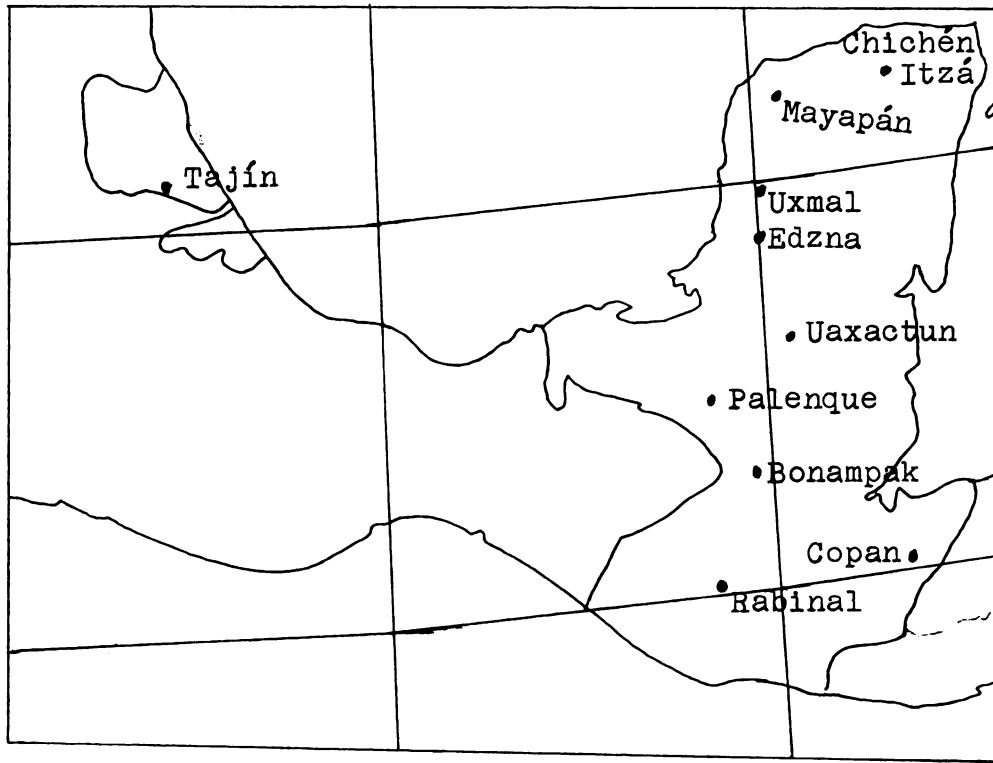


Fig. 59

Ancient sites and distribution of Mayan speaking peoples. After Fredrich Johnson in Carl Ruppert (ed.), The Mayas and Their Neighbors (New York: Appleton-Century Co., 1940).

did the last native stronghold, Tayasal, fall to the Spanish.³

Language and Culture

Although the glyphic writing of the Mayas (examples of which will be seen in figures 71, 72, 73, 74) has recently received major study, it is still largely

³Ibid.

undeciphered. Eric Thompson⁴ catalogued 492 main signs plus 370 affixes and over 800 portraits of deities which also represent numbers and dates.⁵ By the time the Spaniards took down the many Mayan dialects in their semi-phonetic European alphabet, the old glyphs and pictographs, mostly from the Classic period, had lost all meaning even to the natives.

Unlike the bloodthirsty and puritanical Aztec culture, the Mayan civilization was characterized by aesthetic and intellectual enjoyment, spiced with erotic and phallic elements in much of its artistic expression.⁶ For the Mayan there was the present and the "non-present" exemplified by "the strange failure to distinguish between past and future in the prophetic chants. What had gone before and what lay ahead were blended in a way that is baffling to our western minds."⁷ The symmetry, simple elegance and restlessness of Mayan art, along with the

⁴J. Eric S. Thompson, A Catalogue of Maya Hieroglyphs (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1962), pp. 7-9.

⁵Egyptian symbols, by comparison, number around 700; in Ptolomaic times they ran into thousands. Pictographic language requires at least 600 signs, while the number required for a syllabary may drop under one hundred. (Ibid.)

⁶Kurath and Martí, p. 18.

⁷Thompson, The Rise and Fall of Maya Civilization, p. 14.



Fig. 60

Restored stone platform at Chichén Itzá,
Yucatan. The platform fits de Landa's
description below.

Mayan philosophy of "moderation in all things", has drawn
a comparison to Athenian culture from more than one
scholar.⁸

The Platform

One of the first Europeans to write of the Yucatan
Maya was Fray Diego de Landa (1524-1579) who described the
ruins at Chichén Itzá which were already abandoned when
he saw them. From atop the largest structure he saw

⁸Ibid., p. 13.

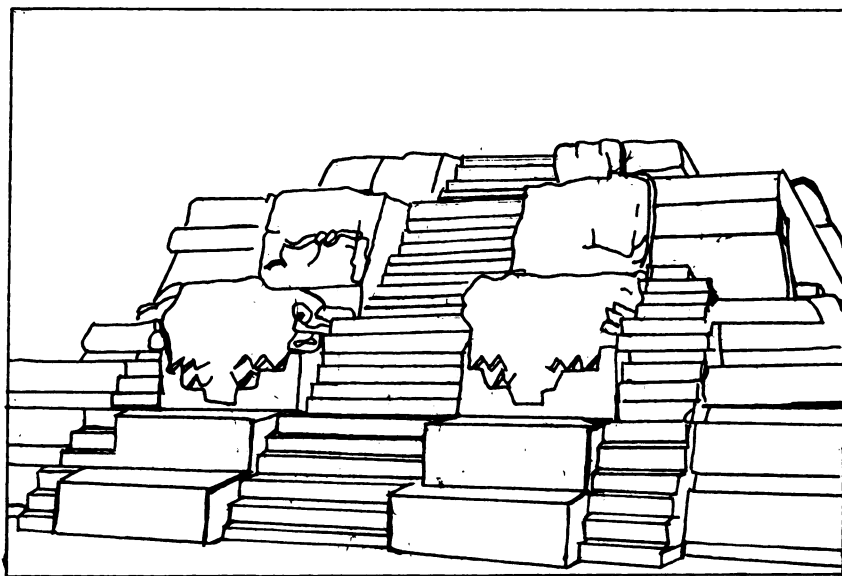


Fig. 61

Structure E-VII sub at Uaxactun, Petén. Oldest permanent structure in America: fourth century A. D. (After Tatiana Proskouriakoff, An Album of Maya Architecture [Washington: Carnegie Institute, Publication # 533, 1940], p. 29.)

In front of the north steps, some distance away, two small theatres of stone, with four staircases and pavement made of flagging on top of which they [his native informants] said they presented farces and plays for the enjoyment of the people.⁹

Figure 60 shows one of these structures as it appears today after restoration. The stage height is approximately twelve feet, offering excellent viewing to all of the standing audience except those crowded within a few feet of the base.

⁹Diego de Landa, Relacion de las cosas de Yucatan (Mérida: Alfredo Berrera Vasquez, 1938), p. 120. Corresponding Spanish, farsas y comedias.

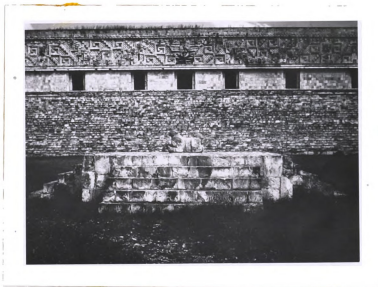


Fig. 62

Stage platform at Uxmal, Yucatan, in front of the "House of the Governors".

The Mayan stage, similar to those of the central highlands, was the simplest form of elevating the spectacle for easy viewing. Figure 61 is a drawing of the oldest permanent building of this hemisphere,¹⁰ identified as Structure E-VII sub, which was discovered under several layers of subsequent pyramids at Uaxactun. E-VII sub is a platform, only slightly larger than the stage building at Chichén Itzá.

Every Mayan site the writer personally visited has at least one platform similar to these. Some are not as

¹⁰Vaillant, Artists and Craftsmen in Ancient Central America, pp. 24-25.

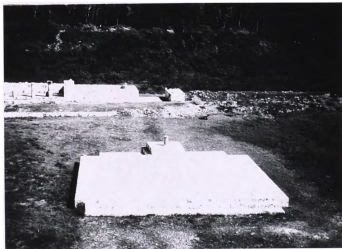


Fig. 63

Stage platform at Edzna, Yucatan, viewed from atop the dominant building of this courtyard.

high (Figs. 62 and 63), but all are either directly in front of the most imposing building (usually a temple) or in the exact center of a court. Thompson lists other sites which contain these platforms and courts, and concludes, partly because of the presence of stelae in the same courts, that the audience came to view some religious ceremony there.¹¹ The seeming affinity and interdependence of religious ritual and theatre would allow both theories.

¹¹J. Eric S. Thompson, Maya Archaeologist (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963), p. 84.



Fig. 64

Relief from a ballcourt at El Tajín, Vera Cruz, depicting a true or ritual sacrifice. The knife-wielding priest is speaking, and both he and the victim wear the costume of the ballgame participants. (After Covarrubias, p. 192.)

The ballcourts and the various levels of the temple stairways are other possibilities for staging areas.¹² Lewis Spence believes that the ballcourts were originally the setting for a religious ritual in which the priest-ballplayers, enacting the gods, propelled the heavenly bodies (represented by the ball) through their proper orbits, originally only in one direction--to the west. It later developed into a deliberate contest in which the priests

¹²Alfred Kidder and Carlos Samayoa Chinchilla, The Art of the Ancient Maya (New York: Thomas Crowell and Co., 1959), p. 34.





Fig. 65

Possible stage platform supported by Atlantean figures within the Temple of the Warriors at Chichén Itzá.

(gods) were opposed by demonic underworld forces who attempted to drive the sphere backwards.¹³ A bas-relief on the wall of the ball court at Chichén Itzá indicates that the game ended in a grisly ritual in which the loser lost his life and his skull was used in the next enactment. Figure 64 shows a ritual which may be taking place in a courtyard with one person shown sitting on a platform; but both the "victim" and the speaker are wearing the great belt and knee pads of the ballplayer, indicating that the two apparent "stages" may symbolize the side walls of the

¹³Spence, p. 91.

ballcourt.

Another stage possibility is a platform backed by the wall within the structure atop the temple of the Warriors (Fig. 65). The stone floor is less than two feet high and offers no view to an audience on the ground level. If its use were theatrical, it would have to be assumed that this was a "private theatre" for those persons privileged of entrance to this building--at most, fifty people at one time.

Bonampak

In 1946, in the thickest jungle of the Usamacinta valley, a site was discovered and given the name Bonampak --"painted walls".¹⁴ The site was still venerated by the Lacandon Mayas and concealed from the eyes of outsiders.¹⁵ Inside the largest of eight buildings atop a terraced acropolis were discovered three narrow, steeply vaulted rooms whose walls were completely covered with painted murals. Unlike virtually all other pre-columbian, Middle American murals--indeed all art--whose very essence is extremely abstract symbolism, the Bonampak murals were starkly realistic.

They vividly portrayed various aspects of their culture--processions, rituals, musicians, warfare, the

¹⁴Gallenkamp, pp. 121-122.

¹⁵Ibid.

judgement of captives. Unhampered by occult symbolism or florid embellishments, the mural contains the earliest positive evidence of theatrical performances and gives a detailed picture of masks, makeup and accoutrements of the Mayan actor of the eighth century.¹⁶

"Room One" shows much about the dramatic ritual of Bonampak. On the East wall an orchestra appears to be awaiting or participating in a procession.¹⁷ The instruments, which are depicted in the act of being played, include the great tun--a drum standing approximately four feet high and concealing all but the head and shoulders of the drummer, an antler scraping on a tortoise shell, and sonajas, large timbrel-rattle type percussion instruments possibly two and a half feet in length. Behind the actors on the North wall, separated from the other musicians by the masked actors, are the trumpeters (Fig. 66), their instruments, almost as tall as a man,

¹⁶Stele at Bonampak is the earliest dated Mayan monument and dates from 328 A. D. Hieroglyphs on the mural, however, indicate a date near the end of the eighth century. (Gallenkamp, p. 125.)

¹⁷Most of the individuals in "Room One" stand arow, from which fact a procession is usually deduced. However, the Mayans seldom attempted a perspective in depth, and the row of individuals is very possibly a result of this flat perspective and the convention of always portraying figures (invariably at least the head and feet) in profile. (Ignacio Bernal, Mexican Wall Paintings /New York: Merton-UNESCO, 1963], pp. 8-9.)



Fig. 66

Bonampak mural showing actors in costume.

held high in the act of playing.

Between the musicians are the actors (Figs. 66 and 67)¹⁸ accoutred, according to Bernal, as nature gods. Five of the six actors in this group wear masks which

¹⁸These pictures are of the reconstructions painted in the Museo Nacional in Mexico City by Antonio Tejada and Agustín Villagra Caletí, who were commissioned in 1946 by the Mexican government and the Carnegie Institute to copy and reconstruct the murals, which though remarkably preserved, show the ravages of time and the tropics.

cover the entire head, making speech impossible for at least one of the actors and certainly difficult for the rest.

The roles appear to be mostly of water creatures. From left to right, standing, they are: A shrimp, an unidentified creature, a crab, and Mam, the old nature god; seated are: the young Maize god identified by his headdress, and a crocodile.¹⁹ The Maize god and Mam, who has a definite mouth opening, would appear to be the major characters in this piece, since the masks of the other characters hinder speech.

The production appears to have definite sexual implications. All the actors and musicians are wearing what appear to be flesh colored phalli of exaggerated size hanging from the waist. Three of the characters appear to be nude or nearly so; and Mam is holding a long staff or rod in his left hand which may also be phallic. In the eye of "the shrimp" appears the sign "IK" which is a sexual or fecundity symbol.

The general theme of the production is apparent. All of the characters appear to be wearing Maize symbols. The two standing characters on the left have the symbols fashioned into a kind of crown; the four sea creatures

¹⁹Bernal, Captions to Plates 9 - 11. Unnumbered page of contents following plates.

have the symbols protruding from their earlobes, or in the case of the crocodile, his aural orifice. Even the ends of the antennae of the crab appear to take the Maize symbol form.



Fig. 67

Bonampak Mural. Detail of Figure 66.

While the usual assumption is that all the characters portrayed in Room One are standing awaiting the procession, the attitudes of the actors tend to contradict this. The crab appears to be making definite threatening gestures at the Maize god who, with the crocodile, appears to be in an attitude of supplication, focused on Mam. The shrimp figure appears to be giving the maize symbol to the unidentified figure whose left hand is extended to receive it. The actuality of the performance is supported by the fact that the musicians too are in the act of playing their instruments. As a stage picture, the scene lacks focus, but considering Mayan notions of time, it is presumptuous to judge the scene as a single theatrical moment.

Masks and Accoutrements: On Painted Pottery

In the late Classic period, human figures were painted on pottery with increasing frequency and, in the central lowlands, with increasing realism.²⁰ Men accoutred as animals or with animal characteristics continued. In Figure 68, painted on a common plate, is seen a man, probably dancing, disguised as a bat. The bat (zotz) is the totem animal of the Zotzil Maya, and is the ritual form of their

²⁰Lothrop, p. 120.



Fig. 68

Mayan dish showing painted "dancer" accoutred as a bat. Reddish brown over orange; width, 11 1/4 inches. (From Kurath and Martí, Fig. 41.)



Fig. 69

Polychrome Maya jar of the Classic period, height, 7 3/8 inches. (From Lothrop et al, Plate LXXX.)

god, Chamalean.²¹ On the polychrome jar in Figures 69 and 70 are two scenes, both involving deer, occurring either simultaneously or consecutively. At the left of Figure 70 there is a stylized tree growing from a human head, possibly symbolizing the earth. Two human figures sit in its branches and a serpent is coiled around the trunk.

²¹Brinton, Annals of the Cakchiquels (Philadelphia: D. G. Brinton, 1885), p. 41.



Fig. 70

Watercolor by M. Louise Baker of the extended scene on jar in Figure 69. (From Lothrop et al, Plate LXXXI.)

Beneath the tree sit men disguised as deer. To the right of the tree stands a man in ceremonial dress who holds a bunch of bamboo spears in one hand and who is blowing a large conch trumpet.

In the scene to the right stand two men with spears, identically dressed, apparently guarding the deer figure between them. One of the men is blowing a conch trumpet; the other seems to be removing the antlers of the deer figure. Above the deer figure is a bird, probably a vulture. The deer figure is wearing a blanket covered with death signs in the form of cross-bones.

Figure 71 also demonstrates animal accoutrements. The opening glyph on this pottery dates it at 754 A. D.²²

²²Lothrop, p. 120.

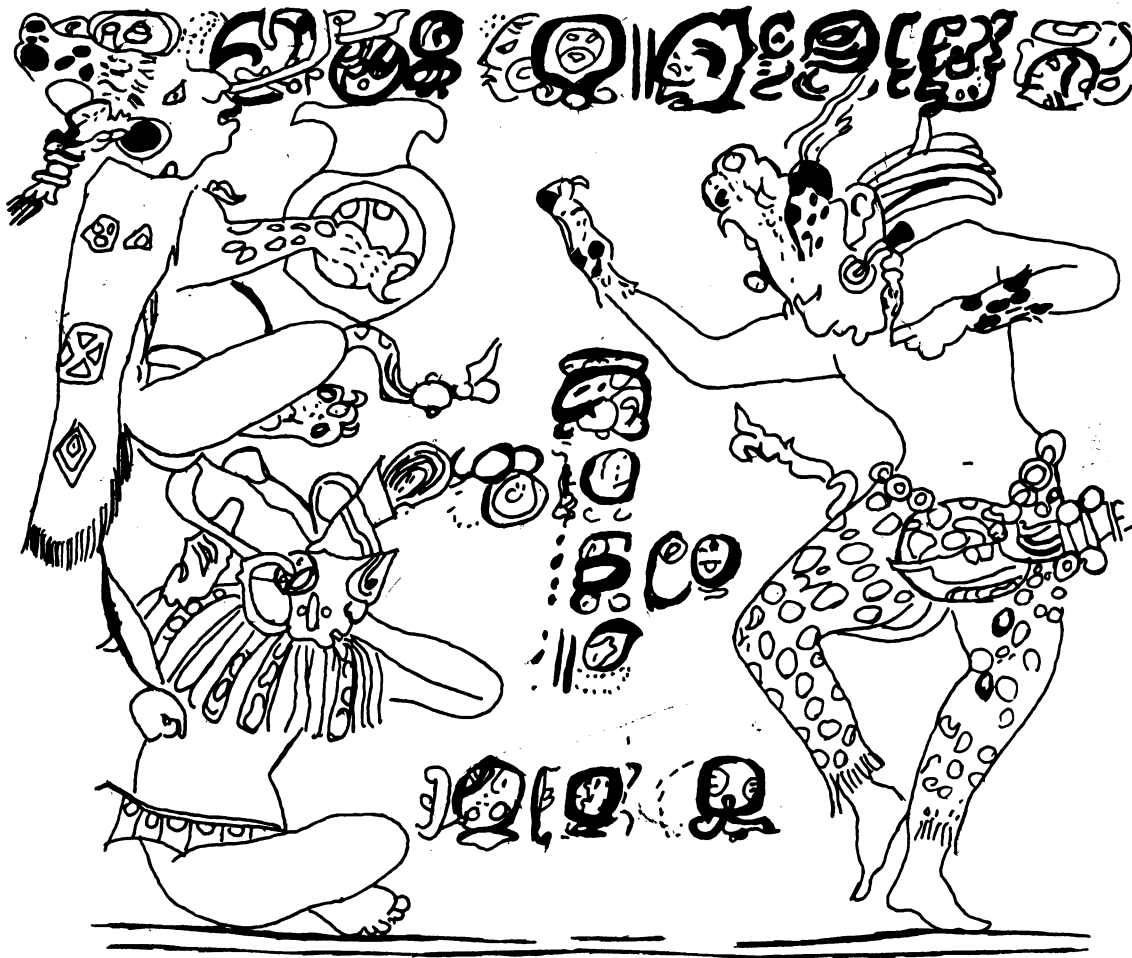


Fig. 71

Painted panel from a polychrome jar picturing a dancing man wearing jaguar-skin trousers, gloves and headpiece. Actual size. Classic Maya. (After Lothrop, p. 122.)

The principal dancing figure and the seated figure with speech scroll wear spotted jaguar-skin trousers, headpiece and gauntlet. The lower figure, less clear, wears no animal costume but appears to be wearing a vizor mask. What may be a mask also appears on the back of his head. It has been suggested that he is about to be sacrificed.²³

²³Ibid.



Fig. 72

Two figures from the Codex Peresianus (Perez) showing ceremonial disguises. The figure on the left wears a mask of the raingod; the figure on the right wears a bird mask. (After J. A. Villacorta and C. A. Villacorta, Codices Mayas, Dresdensis, Peresianus and Trocortesianus (Guatemala: Tipografia Nacional, 1930), page unnumbered.

Masks and Accoutrements: In Codices

The pre-columbian Dresden Codex and Perez Codex²⁴ give other examples of the theatrical disguises of gods and animals (Figs. 72, 73, 74). Figures 72 and 73 show men wearing mask and headdress of the animal or the god, but wearing ceremonial attire. Figure 74, from the Dresden Codex shows three of the four characters in complete animal attire, while the fourth wears the disguise

²⁴Theodore A. Willard, Codex Perez (Glendale, California: Arther H. Clark Co., 1933), p. 6. The other definite pre-conquest Codex is the Troano-Cortesianus or Tro-Cortesianus.

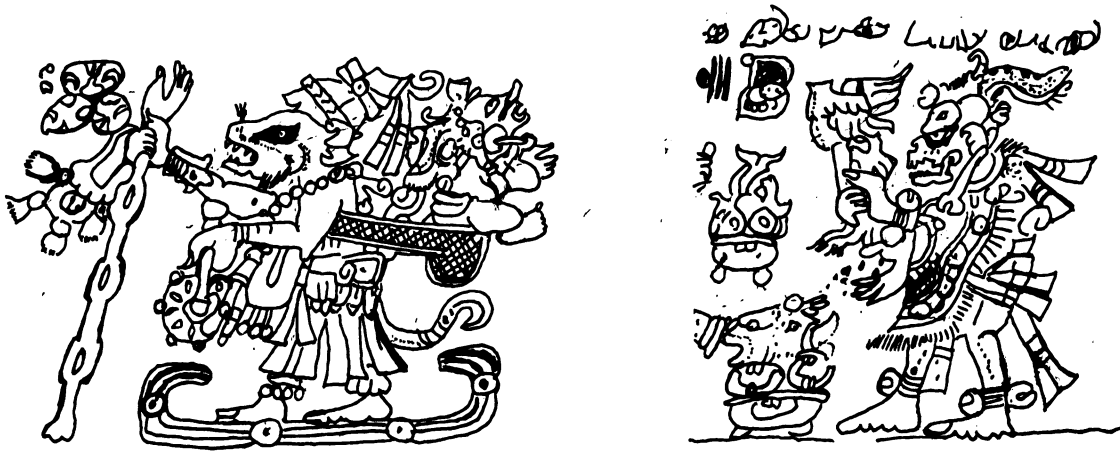


Fig. 73

Two figures of the Dresden Codex showing masks and costumes. The figure at left walking on water wears a mask-head and the tail of an animal, probably a jaguar. Along the left border of this page (not shown) run thirteen "IK" signs, similar to that seen on the mask of one of the Bonampak actors. The figure on the right wears the mask and accoutrements of the god of death. (After Villacorta and Villacorta, Dresden, p. xxvii.)

of a deity. Unlike the figures preceeding and following this panel in the codex, this appears to be an incident or situation depicted scenically, whereas the other figures appear to have little or no relationship to each other.

For the most part pre-columbian Mayan theatrical disguise seems to divide handily into animal and non-animal. The animal disguises usually include what appears to be the actual skin of the animal and frequently a mask or headpiece strongly suggestive of the animal's head. The non-animals are usually gods dressed and masked in their traditional attire (sometimes with animalistic suggestions too) or of priests in ceremonial attire, making no theatrical pretense about what appears to be determined ritual.





Fig. 74

Four figures from the Dresden Codex showing masks and costume. Villacorta says they are paired, and bravely identifies the female on the left of each pair and the male on the right. From left to right they represent "an animal", a deity, a bird and a dog who is either speaking or barking. (After Villacorta and Villacorta, Dresden, p. xiii.)

Masks and Accoutrements: In Figurines and Masks

Unfortunately, clay and pottery figurines and masks are seldom found in the precise environment in which they were buried or abandoned. They are usually unearthed, legally or surreptitiously, from graves or ancient dumps; and unlike the codices, stelae or buildings profuse with date signs, they are difficult to date or even to locate precisely, because of their use in barter. But the Mayan figurines and masks pictured in Figures 75 through 79 all seem to have an intrinsic theatrical relevance.

Figures 75 and 76 are of men in positions of dramatic tension. The priestly cape and earplugs in Figure 75 would suggest a serious ritual, as would the death mask. The highly stylized costume and headdress of



Fig. 75

Solid pottery statuette of a Maya "actor-dancer" wearing ceremonial dress and a large death mask from his waist. 12 cm. from the Island of Jaina. Stovenhagen collection. (From Martí, p. 53.)



Fig. 76

Pottery figure from Campeche of a man with upraised arms in ceremonial dress. The headdress consists of spikes surmounted by loops probably representing hair. Chin-cheek mask is of flexible material. Height, $8 \frac{3}{4}$ inches. Classic Maya (From Lothrop, et al; plate LXIX.)

Figure 76 suggest more than an individual oration.

The statuettes in Figure 77, both called "dancers" by Martí,²⁵ indicate more specific use of the mask. The

²⁵Martí, pp. 78 and 195. Corresponding Spanish bailarín. Considering the all-inclusive term baile (dance) as used in the alternative title of the Rabinal Achí,



Fig. 77

Two undated, but pre-columbian, Mayan figures from the Col. Stavenhagen collection. Left figure, 21 cm.; right figure, 11.8 cm. when wearing mask. (From Martí, left p. 78; right p. 195.)

figure wearing the gigantic mask is curious, for the features of the mask itself are distinctly un-Mayan. The statuette with separate mask tends to support Spence's theory of the sacred ball game's relationship to theatrical ritual,²⁶ since the figure's ceremonial attire appears to include

Baile del Tun, and noting that the subject of Martí's book was dance, the translation of "actor" for bailarin is definitely not precluded.

²⁶Spence, p. 91.



Fig. 78

Muscovite mask from Guatemala. Height, 5 1/4 inches. Late Classic Maya. (From Lothrop, et al, plate LXVI.)



Fig. 79

Mask made of fired clay, originally painted in various colors. Height, 6 5/8 inches. (From Kurath and Martí, Fig. 25.)

the waist-yoke and knee pads, characteristic of the Middle American ball-players. The two-part man and mask figurine is not uncommon among the Totonocs of the Tajín area,²⁷ but is rare in the present Maya area.

²⁷William Spratling, *Mas humano que divino* (Mexico, D. F.: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1960). See pictures on pp. 11, 12, 21. Spratling calls the culture *Remojadas*, sometimes identified as Totonacs or "Culture of Tajín, p. 19.

Both of the masks in Figures 78 and 79 are of practical size (considering the small Mayan features) and of relatively light material. The mask in Figure 78 lacks any ceremonial distinction, although it was found with the ear plugs and necklaces, and the back of the mask was definitely hollowed out for human wearing.²⁸ The more ornate mask in Figure 79 is a more likely subject for ritual or theatrical conjecture, since it suggests two layers, that is, a mask worn over another mask.

Scriptural References

Most of the extant Mayan manuscripts are of a "scriptural" nature; almost all contain a "Genesis" which would lend itself easily to ritualization or dramatization. The sacred book of the Yucatan Mayas was The Book of Chilam Belam of Chumayel written at the beginning of the sixteenth century but probably originally transcribed from older hieroglyphic manuscripts.²⁹ It contains prophecies, fragmentary historical narratives, rituals, and mythological accounts of the creation of the world. Sanchez de Aguilar (1555-1648) states that in their assemblies, the Mayans had players³⁰ who dramatized old

²⁸Lothrop, et al, Caption to plate LXVI.

²⁹Ralph Roys, The Book of Chilam Balam of Chumayel (Washington: Carnegie Institution, Publication No. 438, 1933), p. 5.

³⁰Corresponding Spanish, Farsantes.

fables and stories from these books.³¹

The Book of Chilam Balam of Chumayel contains a section entitled by Roys "Interrogation of the Chiefs",³² a ritual in dialogue form ostensibly examining the knowledge of the chiefs of the town. It states seven "Questions" (which are not always questions) asked by the "head-ohief" of the lesser chiefs; the form and theme place it only slightly closer to dramatic dialogue than to a catechism format. A "Chapter of Questions and Answers"³³ in the same general format treats of genesis and general cultural, geographical and historical information about the tribes.

The Book of Chilam Balam of Tizimin contains several references to impersonations and dramatic rituals. An impersonator of a god cast lots in one ritual to determine the final outcome of the country's affairs.³⁴ Leopard impersonations³⁵ and disguises of the blue heron

³¹Pedro Sánchez de Aguilar, Informe Contra idolorum Cultores del obispado de Yucatan (Mexico, D. F.: Museo Nacional de Mexico, 1892), p. 98.

³²Roys, pp. 88-98; MS pagination, 28c-48c.

³³Ibid., pp. 125-131; MS pagination 66c-71c.

³⁴Maud W. Makemson, Book of the Jaguar Priest (A translation of the Book of Chilam Balam of Tizimin with commentary) (New York: Henry Schuman, 1951), p. 36.

³⁵Ibid., p. 9.

and the hummingbird by the wizards³⁶ are also mentioned. The end of each katun (twenty years) saw the enactment of rituals,³⁷ described in the manuscript.

On the day of the Katun³⁸ . . . the people performed the figures of the dance known as Ix Toloch. . . . The other rituals were then presented and the other heavens of the Moon were honored by appropriate dances³⁸ to the gods on high, on whatever days should prove to be fortunate. . . .³⁹

A ritual is described taking place at the Well of the Cavern⁴⁰ on the day of the new tun (year). The people hear once more the orations of the priests of the gods Pop and Zam, who "are about to destroy themselves on account of their grievous injuries. . . ."⁴¹

Then they walk twice around the cave and around the well, stopping at the altars. One at a time they rub their hands over the smooth stone and read the words: 'Justice exists. Heaven exists'. Thereupon the great priest Chilam replies: 'Perhaps so; perhaps not'.⁴²

³⁶Ibid., p. 43.

³⁷Gallenkamp, p. 91.

³⁸The reader is again reminded of the very broad scope of the word "dance" (baile).

³⁹Makemson, p. 13.

⁴⁰Probably the cenote, Spanish corruption of Tz'inote, the great quarry-sized well in or near every Mayan settlement. The stage platform seen in Figure 60 had a paved path leading directly from it to the Sacred Well, less than a hundred yards away.

⁴¹Makemson, p. 15. (MS, p. 8.)

⁴²Ibid.

There follows a long lamentation by the great Chilam of the sufferings of the Mayans under the Itzaes, the loss of tradition because the rituals are less frequently performed, and a warning to respect the prophecies.⁴³ If one can separate the emotions of the speech from the topical references and cultural differences, the lamentation compares favorably to many of Aeschylus' in the depth of its collective and personal grief and suffering.

The Popol Vuh, the Book of Knowledge (Counsel) of the Quiché Maya, mentions the dances of the Puhuy (owl), of the Cux (weasel), of the Iboy (armadillo), of the Xtzul (sow-bug), and of the Chitu (wading birds), which are the names of certain "theatrical pastimes" --sometimes only mime, sometimes mixed with dances, dialogue and music.⁴⁴

The Annals of the Cakchiquels is the sacred book of a Mayan nation of Guatemala.⁴⁵ The Cakchiquel literature included chants, poems, orations and dramas which, though lost to us, are referred to in The Annals.⁴⁶ They

⁴³Ibid., pp. 15-16. (MS, p. 8.)

⁴⁴Georges Raynaud, Preface, "Rabinal Achí", included in Francisco Monterde, Teatro Indígena Prehispanico (Mexico: Universidad Nacional Autónoma, 1955), pp. 126-127.

⁴⁵Daniel G. Brinton, The Annals of the Cakchiquels, p. 9.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 17.

were sung or spoken in connection with the ceremonial dances and accompanied by the tun (drum), the Xul (reed flutes), small bells attached to their feet and ankles, zoch (gourd rattles) and whistles.⁴⁷ These xahah (dramadances) usually dealt with legendary subjects and were a favorite pastime of the Cakchiquels.⁴⁸

The form of The Annals is similar to epic narrative. The work begins with a genesis in Tulan.⁴⁹ Subjected there to onerous burdens the Cakchiquels decide to leave.

A bird called 'the guard of the ravine', began to complain within the gate of Tulan, as we were going forth from Tulan. 'You shall die, you shall be lost, I am your portent', said this brute to us. 'Do you not believe me? Truly your state shall be a sad one.'

. . .
Then . . . 'the owl', seated on a red tree, complained and said thus: 'I am your portent', he said. 'You are not our portent, although you would like to be', we answered this owl. . . . Then another bird called the parroquet complained in the sky, and said: 'I am your portent; ye shall die'. But we said to the brute, 'Do not speak thus; you are but the sign of spring. You wail first when it is spring; when the rain ceases, you wail'. . . .

Then we arrived at the sea coast. . . . 'There is no means of passing, nor is it told of any one who has passed the sea', said all the warriors of the seven villages. 'Who can, who will find means to pass the sea? In thee alone, my brother, in thee alone have we hope', said they all. We said to them, 'You may go on; you may be first. Who will find the means

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸Ibid., pp. 45-46.

⁴⁹Or Tula, the geographical birthplace or Garden of Eden of most of the Meso-american tribes.

of crossing, while we are here?' All of us spoke thus, and then all of them said: 'Have pity on us, our brother, since we are all stretched on the shore of the ocean without seeing our hills and plains. As soon as we were asleep, we were conquered, we the two oldest sons, we the chiefs and guides of the warriors of the seven villages, oh my brother. Would that we had passed, and could see the burdens given us by our mothers and fathers, oh my brother!' . . . Our ancestors Gagavitz and Zactecauh, said: 'We said to them, 'we suffer also, our brother, we do not live stretched out on the shore of the ocean, where we cannot see our mountains where they are, as you say, oh you warriors, you people of the seven villages. We shall pass over at once.' Thus we spoke; and soon all of them rejoiced.'⁵⁰

This is almost a straight script separated by little more than what can be interpreted as stage directions. The scene contains specific legendary personages, the perennial anthropomorphized animals, and a sacramental "chorus" of ancestors. Although the story carries as scripture alone, the dramatization of it could be easily accomplished with little or no theatrical adaptation.

Another epic narrative relates the traditional origin of the festival in honor of Gagxanul, "the uncoverer of the fire". In their wanderings the Cakchiquels came to a frightening volcano in the midst of its violent eruption. For a year they waited to pass, and could conceive of no way to "capture the fire".

. . . When he arrived at the mountain they spoke to our ancestor, Gagavitz, and all the warriors said to him: 'Thou our brother, thou hast arrived, thou in whom is our hope. Who will go down to the capture of this fire? Who will descend for us, who

⁵⁰Ibid., pp. 77-78.

are seeking our fortune, oh thou our brother?' So said all; and we replied: 'Who of you wishes that I shall try my fortune? He has a heart of a hero, that fears not. I will go first.' Thus spoke Gagavitz to them: 'You must not fear so soon.' . . . 'I will go with you,' said Zakitzunun, . . . The two said together: 'There is no use of bows or shields.' They laid them aside. . . .⁵¹

They then cleverly diverted a stream into the bowels of the volcano and entered it, captured the fire (extinguished it) and emerged victorious.

All the warriors of the seven villages said: 'Truly his power, his knowledge, his glory and his majesty are terrible. He died, and yet he has come down.' So said they.

Therefore, when he had arrived they seated him on the throne . . . and all said: 'Oh our brother, you have conquered the fire of the mountain; you have reduced for us the fire. Ye are two heroes; one is the first hero, and one follows him. Ye are our heads, our chiefs.' . . . Then he said to them: 'The heart of the mountain has come as my slave, my captive, oh you my brethren, my kinsmen.' . . . Hence comes the dance called 'the heart of the mountain Gagxanul.' They say this dance is executed violently, with many troops (of dancers), nor can one count those who join the noise.⁵²

Again, the dialogue and stage directions are there, needing only real or symbolic settings and properties. The written Mayan language had virtually no punctuation. Therefore, seemingly extraneous words and phrases were necessary--most noticeably the beginning and ending of a quotation with a variation of "he said". Therefore, these narratives

⁵¹Ibid., pp. 97.

⁵²Ibid., pp. 99.

probably represented the closest approximation to a written dramatic script possible for the Mayan syntax. In order to clarify this difficulty of syntax, the preceding Gagxanul "narrative" now will be seen in modern form with only extraneities removed.

(At the side of a volcano warriors are standing about.
Gagovitz enters.)

First Warrior:⁵³ Thou our brother, thou hast arrived,
thou in whom is our hope.

Second Warrior: Who will go down to the capture of
this fire?

Third Warrior: Who will descend for us, who are
seeking our fortune, oh thou our
brother?

Gagovitz: Who of you wishes that I shall try my
fortune? He that fears not has the
heart of a hero. I will go first.

Zakitzunun: You must not fear so soon. . . . I
will go with you.

Gagovitz: (Laying aside his weapons) There is
no use of bows.

Zaktzunun: No, nor shields.

(Gagovitz and Zaktzunun divert a mountain stream into
a cave in the volcano, then follow the waters into the
cave. There is great consternation among the Warriors.
After a time the smoke diminishes and Gagovitz and
Zaktzunun emerge from the cave.)

First Warrior: Truly his power, his knowledge, his
glory and majesty are terrible. He
died and yet he has come down.

⁵³The lines of the three Warriors could easily be
a chorus speech.

(They seat Gagovitz on a throne.)

Warriors: Oh our brother, you have conquered the fire of the mountain; you have reduced the fire for us. You are two heroes; one is the first hero, and one follows him. You are our heads, our chiefs.

Gagovitz: The heart of the mountain has come as my slave, my captive, oh you my brethren, my kinsman.

(A noisy and violent dance ensues.)

The Arrival of the Spaniards

The subjection of the Mayas by the Spaniards was accomplished with appreciably less upheaval than there was in the Valley of Mexico, principally because the Mayans were a less warlike people than the Aztecs and because the wealth of Yucatan was not great enough to cause the acts of greedy desperation seen in the rich Central Highlands.

Some of their theatrical traditions still existed under the Spanish rule. Fray Diego de Landa (1524-1579) wrote of the native actors.

The Indians have delightful ways of entertainment; particularly they have actors who perform with great skill, to such an extent as that they hire themselves to the Spaniards for nothing other than to observe the jests the Spaniards pass with their servants, their wives, and on themselves over their good or bad serving; all of this they act later with as much art as attentive Spaniards could.⁵⁴

⁵⁴Fray Diego de Landa, Yucatan before and after the Conquest, Translated by William Gates (Baltimore: The Maya Society, 1937), chapter 22, p. 36.

The bailes were a favorite pastime of the Mayas⁵⁵ and well into the sixteenth century, Sánchez de Aguilar was to write that "They had and still have players who dramatize old fables and stories. They address extremely clever jests and mottoes to elders and judges who are too harsh, too easy-going, or too ambitious."⁵⁶

But the missionaries prohibited the presentations⁵⁷ and the government supported the ban.⁵⁸ The missionaries felt that the bailes glorified ancient customs incomprehensible to them and that, since they were held at night, they led to sin.⁵⁹ But the popularity of the theatrical tradition made the ban impossible, so the missionaries contented themselves with suppressing the most objectionable features--drunkenness and debauchery, and changed the names of the festivals to those of Christian saints.⁶⁰

In addition, "very distinguished religious men" attempted to channel the theatrical instincts and training

⁵⁵Brinton, Annals of the Cakchiquels, p. 46.

⁵⁶Sánchez de Aguilar, p. 98.

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸de Landa, pp. 157-158.

⁵⁹Sánchez de Aguilar, p. 98.

⁶⁰Brinton, Annals of the Cakchiquels, p. 46.

of the Mayas into presentations of didactic value⁶¹--
miracle and morality plays, just as was done to the
Nahuas of the Central Highlands.

⁶¹Monterde, p. xi.

CHAPTER XI

THE MAYAS: SURVIVING FORMS

On the surface at least, the diversion of the Mayan theatrical tradition into European forms was successful. Thomas Gage, one of the first non-Latins to travel extensively in the New World, noted in Guatemala in 1629 an apparently loosely interchangeable plot involving either Saint Peter or John the Baptist.¹

The dance which doth draw to it the people's wondering is a tragedy acted by way of dance, as the death of St. Peter, or the beheading of John the Baptist. In these dances there is an Emperor, or a King Herod, with their Queens (richly) clothed, another clothed with a long loose coat who represents St. Peter, or John the Baptist, who whilst the rest dance, walks amongst them with a book in his hands, as if he were saying his prayers. All the rest of the dancers are apparelled like captains and soldiers, with swords, daggers, or halberds in their hands. They dance to the sound of a small drum and pipes, sometimes round, sometimes in length forward, and have and use many speeches to the Emperor or King, and among themselves concerning the apprehending and executing of the saint. The King and Queen sometimes sit down to hear their pleading against the saint, and his pleading for himself; sometimes they dance

¹The beheading of John the Baptist has captured the Mayan imagination. The David and Goliath drama, discussed later in this chapter, also contained some seeming confusion of John the Baptist with one of the principal characters.

with the rest. At the end of their dance they crucify St. Peter head downwards upon a cross, or they behead John the Baptist, having in readiness a painted head in a dish which they present unto the King and Queen, for joy whereof they all again dance merrily and so conclude, taking down him that acted Peter from the cross.²

The Mayan flare for severe symbolism and abstraction made an easy transition to the allegorical characters of the European Medieval tradition, and the loa, which seems to cover virtually all the short religious plays, became very popular in Guatemala.³ In a manuscript of 1850, there is a "loa to celebrate the birth of the son of god among the four elements."⁴ The four Chacs, the rain-gods who were also the personified four directions, made Earth, Air, Fire and Water easily assimilable. While the four elements lauded the Baby Jesus, Jacob and Mary, there were occasional references to names unheard of in the Christian pantheon, e.g., Divino Milchisedec.⁵

The Mayan actors took their roles very seriously, and engaged in elaborate preparation, sexual continence

²Thomas Gage, Travels in the New World (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1958), pp. 246-247. This work was first published in 1648.

³Gustavo Correa and Calvin Cannon, "The Loa in Guatemala", in Native Theatre of Middle America, Vol. 27 of the Middle American Research Series (New Orleans: Tulane University, 1961), Part I, pp. 5-103 and Appendix E which contains the texts of various Loas.

⁴Correa and Cannon, p. 64.

⁵Ibid., p. 65.

and intense concentration.

Most of the Indians who take part in this dance are superstitious about what they have done, and they seem almost to believe that they have actually done what they only performed for the dance. When I lived amongst them, it was an ordinary thing for the one who in the dance was to act St. Peter or John the Baptist to come first to confession, saying they must be holy and pure like that saint, whom they represent, and must prepare themselves to die. So likewise he that acted Herod or Herodias, and some of the soldiers that in the dance were to speak and to accuse the saints, would afterwards come to confess of that sin, and desire absolution as from blood-guiltiness.⁶

This devotion to the role and identification with it is supported by other writers,⁷ and it also existed among the Nahuas of the Central Highlands.⁸

During Holy Week in Chichicastenango, Guatemala, there is a curious combination of ceremony and episodes, and of levels of illusion. On Wednesday afternoon, a Judas impersonator enters the patio of the convent. He is dressed as a local official (alcalde) with a white mask, and is followed by a crowd of shrieking little boys. The Padre opens a door, comes out, shakes Judas, deals him a few cuffs on the ear and gives him fifteen pesos.⁹

⁶Gage, p. 247.

⁷Ruth Bunzel, Chichicastenango, A Guatemalan Village, Publication No. 22 of the American Ethnological Society (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1952), pp. 200-223.

⁸See Chapter IX and XII of this work.

⁹Bunzel, p. 215.

Various scenes of the Passion of Christ are represented the following days; but the most interesting detail is the easy transition from live actors to effigies, which the audience, apparently lacking the traditional balance between empathy and aesthetic distance, easily accepts. Effigies are used in the more fatal aspects of the roles, but human representations of Judas, Jesus and Mary wander through the streets of Chichioastenango with the same reverence, disdain and total acceptance of their reality as the impersonators of Toç1 and Xipe Totec wandered the streets of Tenochtitlan, receiving the kneeling veneration of the Aztecs.

By Good Friday the Judas effigy was hanging in the door of the church. The veneration of the Christ effigy took on an intensity and urgency seldom seen in theatre.¹⁰ The scenes then follow the popular story of the Passion with one exception. After Jesus is interred, the procession returns from Calvary; a group of young men take down the Judas effigy, and begin stripping off the clothing and tearing it apart.

It is all done viciously and roughly. . . . The boys go rushing down the steps and then one picks up rocks and throws them after the others. Finally they have Judas completely undressed, and this same violent youth grabs the straw figure and with a loud cry hurls it down the steps to the street. Then he dashes down

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 218-222.

after it, and picks it up again and again and throws it down, kicking it and shouting. By this time the rest of the crowd has come down and someone sets a match to the figure and it blazes up at once, amid loud shouting. With the flaring up of the fire, the excitement of the crowd subsides somewhat.

. . . This burning of Judas is not a pretty business. Part of it is the reaction to the emotions of the day--of the whole week. . . . But there is more to it than that. Judas is, possibly, the symbol of Ladino treachery. In this they are venting the pent-up resentment of centuries of misrule. No Indian would dare lay hands on a Ladino at any other time. But this is a lynching. Father R. reports that the Judas business in Momostenango was so 'sadistic' that it had to be stopped.¹¹

Whether the representation is of the Four Chaos or the Twelve Apostles, the Mayan audience achieves an easy empathy.

Survival of the non-Christian

The Spaniards brought other amusements with them which the Mayans easily assimilated. Gage reports that in Chimaltenango on the 26th of July in 1629, a feast was celebrated with "bull-baiting, horseracing, stage plays, masks (sic), dances, music, and all this gallantly performed by the Indians of the town."¹²

The Indians of Chiapas, along the Grijalva River were taught to act sea fights

. . . with great dexterity, and to represent the nymphs of Parnassus, Neptune, Aeolus and the rest of the heathenish gods and goddesses. . . . As for the acting of plays, this is a common part of their solemn pastimes. . . .¹³

¹¹Ibid., p. 223.

¹²Gage, p. 172.

¹³Ibid., p. 146.

Gage reports the survival of a dance "which they used before they knew Christianity" in which the participants dressed in the feathered attire of their ancestors and sang the praises of "their heathen gods".¹⁴ Another dance, accompanied by drums, shells and pipes, consisted of an animal hunt in which there was great yelling and shouting and "speaking by way of a stage play, some relating one thing, some another, concerning the beasts they hunt after."¹⁵ The dancers were costumed as lions, tigers, wolves and eagles, wearing the skins and headpieces representing the animal.¹⁶ A plot complication and possibly even a sub-plot occurs, for some of the dancers hunt an animal threatening to kill the beast they are hunting.

. . . Others, instead of hunting after a beast, hunt after a man, as beasts in a wilderness should hunt a man to kill him. The man thus hunted must be very nimble and agile, as one flying for his life, and striking here and there in defense at the beasts, but at last they catch him and make a prey of him.¹⁷

Unfortunately, Gage does not resolve the parallel part of the double plot, and the fate of the hunted beast is not determined. A situation of men hunting a beast while

¹⁴Ibid., p. 245.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Ibid.

beasts hunt a man shows a more than primitive grasp of dramatic irony.

A ceremony involving the rain-gods (Chacs) has survived into the twentieth century in Yucatan. After a period of sexual continence and some preliminary ceremonies involving virgin water, and the drinking of an alcoholic beverage by the participants, the drink is forced down the throats of birds who are dedicated to the Chacs and then killed.¹⁸ Four boys, representing frogs (the attendants and musicians of the rain gods) are tied by the right leg to one post of the altar.¹⁹ During the ceremony, they croak in imitation of frogs announcing the approach of a storm. An older man, impersonating the chief Chac is carried to a clear space a few yards from the altar. Several times the impersonator makes sounds like thunder and brandishes his wooden knife (lightning). Sometimes four Chac impersonators, one at each corner of the altar, play the role of the Chief Chac.²⁰ Each time

¹⁸Thompson, The Rise and Fall of Maya Civilization, pp. 238-239.

¹⁹Ibid. The same ceremony is described in Robert Redfield and Alfonso Villa Rojas, Chan Kom: A Maya Village (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1932), pp. 141-143. Redfield's and Thompson's accounts of the ceremony are essentially the same.

²⁰Thompson, p. 239. Redfield does not report this.

the presiding shaman recites a prayer or offers balche (an alcoholic drink), they dance nine times around the altar. After the gods have "eaten" the food on the altar, the "remainder" is divided among the participants.²¹

This ceremony which survives into the twentieth century, is virtually pure "Ritualized Mimetic Dance". Great stress is laid on the imitative magic. The croaking of the frogs, the thunder noises, the impersonation of the Chief rain god bearing rain and lightning symbols are basically magic.

The Dance of the Conquest

"El Baile de la Conquista" or the "Baile de Tecum" exists today throughout most of Middle America. In spite of its ubiquity and popularity with the native population, it probably dates from no earlier than the beginning of the nineteenth century.²² An early reference to the Dance of the Conquest in Yucatan was by John Lloyd Stephens in the 1830's.

²¹Thompson, p. 240.

²²Barbara Bode, "The Dance of the Conquest of Guatemala" in Native Theatre of Middle America, Vol. 27 of the Middle American Research Series, pp. 224-225.

In a village not far distant, . . they gave a fiesta with a scenic representation called Shtol. The scene is laid at the time of the Conquest. The Indians of the village gather within a large place enclosed by poles and are supposed to be brought together by an invasion of the Spaniards. An old man rises and exhorts them to defend their country; if need be, to die for it. The Indians are roused, but in the midst of his exhortations a stranger enters in the dress of a Spaniard and armed with a musket. The sight of this stranger throws them all into consternation; he fires the musket, and they fall to the ground. He binds the chief, carries him off captive, and the play is ended.²³

Stephens simple description readily fits the diverse specifics that the Dance of the Conquest takes in the individual Mexican and Guatemalan villages.

The Guatemala versions dramatize the warning to the old king of Utatlán that the Spanish forces are advancing toward the Quiché homeland, the preparation for battle by the young king Tecum Umam, and the climactic hand-to-hand encounter in which Pedro de Alvarado kills Tecum. The river is already running red with Spanish and Indian blood, and the Quiché warriors now peaceably embrace the religion of the conquistadores.²⁴

The cast usually consists of nineteen members divided into three groups: the royal family of the Quiché, led by the king, Quicab Tanub; the Spaniards, led by

²³John Lloyd Stephens, Incidents of Travel in Yucatan (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1962), p. 96. First published in 1843.

²⁴Bode, p. 211.

Alvarado; and "the Indians", led by Tecum Umam.²⁵ In addition to the leaders there are two other important characters--Indio Ajitz, the priest-witch-doctor, and Don Quirijol (sometimes Crijol) whose function seems to be to provide comic relief, especially during the heated contest.

The actors are dressed in masks and colorful costumes which are usually rented from costume houses.²⁶ The masks are carved from light wood and are smaller than the face. The exposed portion of the neck and lower face is covered by a tightly wrapped scarf, and the rest of the actor's head is concealed by a long, usually blonde, wig and a headpiece.²⁷ Occasionally the masks have no mouth openings which makes the actors' speeches difficult to understand. Tecum wears two masks during the performance, and frequently three. One has normal features; the second, which he wears in battle, has a frightened look and bushy eyebrows; the third is a yellowish death mask with eyes rolled back and blood streaming down the forehead and mouth. The three masks are not always of the same individual's features but Tecum can be identified by his symbol, the quetzal, which is carved onto the

²⁵Bode, p. 213.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Ibid.

forehead of each mask.²⁸

In spite of the late origins of "The Dance of the Conquest", it contains, in addition to the use of masks, many characteristics of native theatrical tradition. Formal divisions of acts and scenes are ignored. The accompanying music, besides incidental rattles and tinkling ornaments, is supplied by the native drum and chirimía, a simple oboe-type instrument which produces a "melancholy, weird melody".²⁹ Music accompanies the dancing only, and when the pacing actors are speaking, the music is still. Miss Bode reports that all three of the groups dance in their places,³⁰ but in the two anonymous manuscripts of Chimaltenango and San Pedro la Laguna it is indicated that only the Indians dance, not the Spanish.³¹ In the Chimaltenango manuscript, stage directions many times indicate that individuals dance during their own speeches.

²⁸Ibid., p. 214.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Ibid., p. 245. Also see Jesus Castro Blanco, "El Baile de la Conquista" in Guatemala Indígena, Vol. II, No. 1 (Guatemala, 1962), p. 66. "Indios y españoles danzan confundidos. . . ."

³¹Anonymous, "Diálogo u 'original' del Baile de la Conquista" in Guatemala Indígena, Vol. I, No. 2 (Guatemala, 1961) and Anonymous, "Baile de la Conquista" in Guatemala Indígena, Vol. II, No. 2 (Guatemala, 1962).

Most of the versions have the dialogue in verse and, in the case of the Chimaltenango manuscript, in rhyme, with very long speeches and long sections where each character alternated exactly four lines of verse with other characters. Miss Bode's manuscript is in "imperfect eight-syllable verse, mixing assonant and consonant rhyme". The rhetorical dialogue is filled with the characteristic repetition of parallelism, indigenous words, and an abundance of geographical and personal names in which the Indian appears to delight.³²

Although the "Dance of the Conquest" is in every way secular, ritualistic elements remain. Although the Quichés are baptized, Tecum dies exhorting the gods of the hills. The sorcerer Ajitz uses his supernatural powers throughout the play frequently calling on the sacred volcanoes. Preparations (costumbres) for the performance are highly formalized, and always take place at midnight.

All the costumbres take place at midnight. The Ajitz and the dancers go up to the mountain, Canchoy, where the encantos³³ Tecum Umam, Rey Quiché and Rey Ajitz, live in the hills. They burn copal and ask the gods of the hills for permission to do the dance, and especially to play the roles of the encantos. The dancers do this so that nothing will happen to them. On this first trip to the mountain, they recite the Maya days in order to

³²Bode, p. 225.

³³Spirits of once live people.

choose the day to make the second costumbre. Then, about fifteen days before the dance, they all go again to an altar on the mountain. The Ajitz burns incense, the others dance around him and serve him chicken and aguardiente. The third time they go to the mountain wearing their masks and carrying their costumes in a bundle. Candles are burned atop the bundles, the group dances, and the Ajitz performs the incense ceremony. This occurs about eight days before the dance. During the months of practice, the dancers must also burn candles in their houses so that nothing will happen to their families.³⁴

The Mayans are not concerned with such questions as origins, authorship or antiquity of this baile; nevertheless, they prepare for and perform it with seriousness and exactitude. As late as 1957, the performance of the "Dance of the Conquest" was still a major force in folk life.³⁵

David and Goliath

Near the Guatemalan town of Camotan there is performed another baile adapted to a biblical tale but of pre-hispanic origin.³⁶ The theme is the dramatization of certain myths of the sacred book, Popol Vuh; but the struggle between Hunahpu and Hun Camé has been changed little to conform to the combat of David and Goliath (Gavite and gigante Golillo).

The work is an ancient one, possibly dating back to the tenth century in an earlier form, before the Chortí

³⁴Bode, p. 233.

³⁵Ibid., p. 226.

³⁶Arrom, p. 11.

and Quiché had separated from the main body of Mayans.³⁷

The drama, called variously "Dance of the Giants" or simply the "Historia"³⁸ tells of the hero-gods, Hunahpu and Ixbalemque who fight against the forces of the mythological giants led by the Black Giant. The story symbolically represents aspects of the Mayan theogony, cosmology, astronomy and the arithmetical and chronological elements of the Classic Period of Maya civilization. The date and frequency of rehearsals and performances combine and interplay to form significant numbers in the Mayan calendar.³⁹

The blocking of the participants is invariably in relation to the positions of the solar gods or lunar gods, and the circular and angular movements of the actors are in precise symbolic relationship to the four directions and the various concepts attached to each.⁴⁰ The eight actors who begin the play divide into two groups facing each other, one to the east and one to the west. The white file on the east is composed of the king (the sun-father), two Gavites (one symbolizing the young sun,

³⁷Rafael Girard, "Una Obra Maestra del Teatro Maya" in Cuadernos Americanos, Vol. XXXVI, No. 6 (1947), p. 159.

³⁸Combining "story" and "history".

³⁹Ibid., p. 160.

⁴⁰Ibid., pp. 161, 162, 167 and 182.

Hunahpu, the other the young moon), and a "Captain" (representing Ix Mucané, moon mother and consort to the sun-king).⁴¹ Representing the malignant forces of the universe, the four on the dark, west side are a black giant (the Camé of the underworld), a white giant (symbolizing the seven lords in the power of Hun Camé) and two "privateers" (Armadores).

Much of what might have to be inserted as exposition in modern drama is accomplished by the symbolism of spatial relationship of characters and by the further symbolism of costumes. Admittedly, little exposition is needed, since the Mayans are as familiar with these "scriptural" characters and their story as the Athenians were with Oedipus, or as Americans are with the story of Job.

The costumes, undistinguished to the modern eye, carry significant meaning to the symbol-accustomed Mayans. The Giants are the only characters who wear masks which are of large and heavy wood, one painted white and the other black.⁴² The king wears a cardboard crown whose points resemble feathers, and a basically yellow costume to symbolize, along with triangular "solar rays" cut and

⁴¹Ibid., p. 163.

⁴²Ibid., p. 174.

sewn into the costume, his "sunship".⁴³ The veiled "Captain" represents the lunar-terrestrial goddess Ixmucané, and "her" costume is covered with lunar glyphic symbols which exactly correspond to the glyphs covering the stelae at the Copán ruins of the Classic Period.⁴⁴ The "Gavites" are dressed basically alike, except for symbols on their costumes indicating one is a solar Gavite, and one a lunar Gavite.⁴⁵ All the principals, including the giants, carry a wooden sword in the right hand.⁴⁶

The blue-costumed giants wear a complex of symbols which indicate at one time that they represent (1) all the malignant forces which were absolute rulers of the earth before Hunahpú (Gavite), the Maya-quiché hero-god, vanquished them, and (2) that they are still powerful stellar bodies, but consigned by their defeat to the Underworld.⁴⁷

The Wizards (Armadores), representing nocturnal beings, are dressed in dark colors and carry timbrels

⁴³Ibid., pp. 163-165.

⁴⁴Ibid., pp. 168-169.

⁴⁵Ibid., pp. 171-172.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 173. The pre-Hispanic Mayans used wooden weapons with stone blades and attachments. Girard concludes that this use of wood alone places the origin of the tradition into the mythical age.

⁴⁷Ibid., pp. 173-174.

from which they derive their magic powers.⁴⁸ Two musicians complete the participants. They play the sacred tun (drum) and the native wind instrument (chirimfa). No other class of instruments is allowed because of the serious nature of the presentation.⁴⁹

The piece falls into five parts which Girard labels Entrance, Crossover,⁵⁰ Terror, the Sling, and Death.⁵¹ The Entrance is more an Overture--the musicians play, the participants dance and ritually purify the staging area.

The Crossover contains the struggle between the White Giant and the Black Giant, who stand face to face in silence for a long time while the wizards frantically shake their timbrels. Soon the White Giant initiates the action advancing toward his adversary. Various movement follows in which the actors dance from East to West and back.⁵²

In the third scene, The Menace, the Black Giant threatens his rival, furiously beating the floor with his sword while he makes grimaces and terrific leaps trying to

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 175.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 176.

⁵⁰Cruzada, possibly "Crisis".

⁵¹Ibid., p. 177.

⁵²Ibid.

touch or wound the White Giant who defends himself and tries to escape and return the thrusts. The quarrel is suspended for a time when the giants render homage to the sun; but it is renewed again with even greater fury. During the entire scene the Black Giant maintains a threatening attitude not only toward his adversary but toward the audience. Finally the triumph goes to the Black Giant as he succeeds in decapitating the White Giant "because his strength is greater".⁵³ In effect this scene represents the conflict that took place in Xibalbá between Vucub-Hunahpú and Vucub-Camí in which the former was defeated. The head of the conquered one is hung in a tree but is transformed into a gourd.⁵⁴

The Gavités enter in the fourth scene, The Sling. They represent the twins Hunahpú and Ixbalamqué who try to avenge the death of their father, the White Giant. Solar Gavité, the principal role, is played by a young man who is less than twelve years old, although in the more complicated spoken parts of the drama the master of ceremonies, who is also director, prompter and general manager, is substituted for him.⁵⁵ In this scene the wizards are arranged on both sides of Gavité who, trusting

⁵³Ibid., p. 178.

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵Ibid.

in the tremendous magic power round about him, challenges the Black Giant, protecting himself with a red handkerchief which also serves to provoke his adversary. The giant shoves the material with the point of his sword and makes Gavité fall back, but he returns to the charge and now it is he who makes the giant yield the field in front of his magic handkerchief. Five times the business with the handkerchief is repeated. Then Gavité performs several steps of magic passing his handkerchief over the entire body of his adversary, making a gesture of blowing and cleaning the mask in order that his magic influence penetrate the Black Giant. Gavité abruptly points the sword to the West and directs his gaze to the East as if imploring supernatural help in so difficult a case; he then offers tribute to the sun.⁵⁶ Up to now the piece has had the mute character of a ballet. The last scene begins with the giant's threats:

Go!lillo

Oh Captain of the gods, lead the armies that serve my banner; tell them today we march to conquer a kingdom. May your strong arms protect you from death by my power. But wait--where are those strong arms? Ah, I quake and tremble at the sure death advancing on me in this most formidable adversary. I know that when your weapons touch me, I will become only ashes. But come, without further exertion or "kindness", let us begin, and determine your courage and whether you are indeed a valiant soldier.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 179.

Gavité

I answer your challenge. With my hands and arms I will kill you, and I approach your death with great caution. There was much good in your advice; I will indeed keep my soldiers well prepared and close at hand. But your strength will not help you escape from hell! (Advances sword in hand.)

Golillo

Such daring from this badly reared little shepherd! So you wish to pit your 'strength' against mighty Golillo. Thus will I crush you in my arms, tear you into a thousand pieces, and then eat them. Seven kings I have fought and seven kings I have conquered. The ruler of the world, and this impudent little shepherd wishes to cross swords with me! Then let the drum play and the trumpet sound that the badly bearded shepherd of little luck may hear the world tremble at the stamp of my foot. (Musicians play. Gavité and Golillo perform a dance.) Come, poor luckless child, do not be afraid of me; there is nothing to fear in me.⁵⁷

There follows a pantomime of precise spatial movement and relationship in which Gavité defeats Golillo with his sling, castrates him and finally beheads him. Pieces of flesh, symbolized by handkerchiefs, are ripped from Golillo and offered to the Sun and the four directions. Gavité offers the sword and head of Golillo to the king and the Captain.⁵⁸

Gavité

Here I bring you this giant's head and sword, taken in battle by the power of my sling. It will be to conquer the entire world; but if you do not conquer it, it will be your conqueror.

⁵⁷Ibid., pp. 179-181. The form is Girard's.

⁵⁸Ibid., pp. 181-183. Girard finds that with given symbols and carefully drawn positions, the dance exactly parallels the "mythical" account in the Popul Vuh.

King

Thanks be to god for the death of this giant. Now there will be singing and rejoicing among my people, Gavité. Give me my crown, Gavité and let us begin royal praises. May it be forever. Amen.

At this point, the king returns the head and sword to the Black Giant who will be his vassal forever. The drama ends as it began, with praises to the sun-king-god.⁵⁹

This is a much reduced description of this Mayan dramatic piece. Omitted were such details of the numbers of points in the king's crown, glyphic symbols on the costume, points of hems, solar rays, all of which had ritual meaning to the Mayans. These were further complicated by one number moving to or from proximity to another number, thus changing the relationships of the multi-level symbols. The Mayan calendar is a mathematical marvel whose symbols and mathematics are impossible for the layman to fathom; it is also the major ritual expression of a deeply ritualistic people. The numbers of units, sub-units, sub-sub-units, etc., are in a much more fastidious and workable system than ours. The calendar and its mathematics are also more intimately tied to astronomy, theoretical religion and man's place in the universe than is ours.

In short, the "Dance of the Giants", which on the surface appears to be a simple, even naive, dramatic piece,

⁵⁹Ibid., pp. 184-185.

by an awareness of the mathematical and symbolic relationships, becomes a profound and sophisticated dramatization of one of the most important and integral myths of Mayan "scripture".

CHAPTER XII

THE RABINAL ACHÍ

Charles Etienne Brasseur de Bourbourg¹ was born in France in 1814. In the middle of the nineteenth century he was appointed Abbé of the small town of Rabinal in Guatemala. He was immediately fascinated by the strange civilization around him, and soon became one of its chief reporters and apologists.²

For most of his life he studied the Quiché-Mayas and reported his findings objectively. In 1859 the Indians performed the Baile del Tun (Dance of Tun); and the work was published along with Brasseur's French translation, in 1862³ under the title Rabinal Achí (Warrior of Rabinal). It is to Brasseur's credit that he

¹Since most of Brasseur's works appear in Spanish and since he is most frequently written about by Spanish-writing authors, the Spanish version of his name, Carlos Esteban Brasseur, is more frequently seen.

²His own bibliography contains eighteen major works of his own. Brasseur, Bibliothèque Mexico-Guatemalienne (Paris: Maisonneuve and Cie., 1871), p. 26ff.

³Arrom, Teatro de Hispanoamérica en la Época Colonial, p. 20.

was able to convince his shy parishioners to reveal to a European priest the secrets of an art which traditionally had been handed down to them by their ancestors.

Much later in his life, confused and perplexed by the strange and complex customs and writings of a past civilization whose concepts he could not fathom, and plagued by doubt and cynicism, Brasseur wrote Quatre Lettres, denying all his previous writings and resolving all confusion by mystical relationships and solutions.⁴

Freed of empirical requirements and the demands of science, he found answers readily enough, as do all mystics. . . . The pyramids of Egypt . . . /and/ . . . those of Mexico . . . must have descended from some common ancestral civilization--Atlantis!⁵

For Brasseur, Horus and Quetzalcoatl became one and the same, as did all cultural resemblances.

Brasseur was held in such high regard by Americanists and academicians that most archaeologists and historians, although in complete disagreement and greatly disturbed, were unwilling to condemn him publicly. After ten years of being ignored and grieved by the silence, Brasseur died, a broken man.⁶

⁴Wauchope, p. 44.

⁵Ibid., p. 42.

⁶Ibid.

Rabinal Achí--Background

The Rabinal Achí was presented periodically during the three centuries of Spanish dominion. Possibly the ecclesiastical and civil authorities permitted, and even stimulated these presentations. Some native spectacles formed part of the public entertainments and were repeated annually in each local festival on the day of the patron saint. The Rabinal Achí was not performed during, and for some time after, the period in which Iturbide, the Mexican dictator, incorporated the Central American lands which had seen the splendor of the Mayas into Imperial Mexico (1821-1823).⁷ Probably it ceased because no one encouraged these theatrical representations due to political changes then occurring.

Almost thirty years had elapsed when Bartolo Ziz, the last repository of this oral tradition, recorded all of the speeches and the poems of his forefathers. At the beginning of the work appears the following note:

The twenty-eighth day of October, 1850, I have transcribed the original of this Ballet of Tun, property of our city of San Pablo of Rabinal, in order to leave my memory to my descendants, which will always endure with them. Amen.--Bartolo Ziz.⁸

⁷Francisco Monterde, Teatro Indigena Prehispanica (Rabinal Achí), p. xiii.

⁸Charles Etienne Brasseur de Bourbourg, "Rabinal Achí ou le Drame-Ballet du Tun" in Collection de Documents dans les langues indigènes pour servir à l'étude de l'histoire et la philologie de l'Amérique Ancienne, (Paris: Arthus Bertrand, 1862). The volume is very rare in this country. Various translations from the French into Spanish

Brasseur entitled it the Rabinal Achí in 1862; he included with it an "Essay on the Poetry and the Music, on the Dance and the Dramatic Art of the Ancient Mexican and Guatemalan Populations".⁹

According to the written notes of Bartolo Ziz, the work was previously known as the Ballet of Tun. The gifted memory of that old man retained the text of the anonymous drama for some three decades, just as it was retained and transmitted orally by the ancient Queché-maya, the respected guardians of this tradition.

In the form in which it has come down to us, it was performed, in the Queché language, in 1856, on the day of the conversion of San Pablo, January twenty-fifth.¹⁰ Brasseur, who had earned the confidence of the natives, translated it from Queché to French, helped by his indigenous servants and, thanks to the performance, he was able to determine the scenic movement of the drama.

Professor Georges Raynaud, who was director of studies on the pre-columbian religions in the Sorbonne, disagreed with Brasseur's version, noting that the "fairly

exist along with several adaptations (also in Spanish) made more palatable to the modern ear. The versions most heavily used in this work and from which the complete script of Appendix I is taken are Brasseur's and Francisco Monterde's in Teatro Indígena Prehispánico.

⁹Brasseur, pp. 6-23.

¹⁰Monterde, p. 15.

defective" work was accompanied by a "queché-tzotzil-Spanish-French vocabulary sufficiently bad in itself and made detestable by the foolishness of Brasseur".¹¹

Raynaud subsequently developed another version in which he included notes which mark those points on which he disagrees with Brasseur's interpretation.¹²

Raynaud speaks of "the only piece of the ancient American theatre that has come down to us";¹³ and states that he was unable to discover, either in form or in content "the smallest trace of a word, of an idea, of any event of European origin".¹⁴

Rabinal Achí: Dramatis Personae

Rabinal Achí has a large cast, although there are only five speaking parts. Large groups of supers appear, for the most part, during different moments in the play, which may mean that the cast runs close to a hundred, or that there was a constant large body of persons in a convention similar to the constant presence of the Greek chorus. It could also mean that the group represented

¹¹Georges Raynaud, "Preface to Rabinal Achí", included in Teatro Indígena Prehispánico, p. 124.

¹²George Raynaud, "Rabinal Achí" in Anales de la Sociedad de Geografía e Historia, Vols. V, VI, Nos. 1-3, (September, 1929) (March, 1930).

¹³Raynaud, in Teatro Indígena Prehispánico, p. 123.

¹⁴Ibid.

various aspects of the body politic and social, and was simply addressed by different names at different times--in short, a specialization or itemization of sacramentalism. The characters, in order of number of lines and degree of importance are:

1. Queché Warrior (Cavek-Queché-Achí), a prince of the Yaquis (Nahuatl: Strangers) of Cumen and son of the king of the Quechés.
2. Rabinal Warrior (Rabinal Achí), son of Chief Hobtoh.
3. Ahua-Hobtoh ("Five-Rain", after the day of his birth), governor-chief of Rabinal.
4. Ixok-Mun, favorite slave of Rabinal Achí.¹⁵
5. Mum, a slave of Rabinal Achí.
6. Precious-Emerald, a princess, bride of the Rabinal Warrior. Non-speaking.
7. Xox Ahua, wife of Hobtoh (possibly chief wife among several). Non-speaking.
8. Twelve yellow eagles--Warriors of Rabinal.
9. Twelve yellow jaguars--Warriors of Rabinal.
10. "A great number" of warriors and servants of both sexes who take part in the dances.

Only the first seven, plus the leader of the Jaguars and the leader of the Eagles participate in the

¹⁵Monterde, p. 4 lists him simply as a servant.

action. The rest appear only in the many dances or in the ritual combat.

Rabinal Achí: Subject and Plot

The subject of the drama is limited to the capture, the questioning, and the death of a warrior who committed reprehensible acts. The past history of the warrior is gradually revealed through the dialogue between the Queché Warrior and the Rabinal Warrior.

Brasseur's title for the work--Rabinal Achí (Warrior of Rabinal), no doubt took into account, most importantly, the place where it was performed. But the title is not completely appropriate, for Rabinal Warrior is not the true protagonist: he is only a victorious warrior, a fortunate conqueror of his enemy. As will be seen, Queché Warrior is the principal figure of the drama, because the play moves around the vanquished one, as is evidenced by the fact that Rabinal Warrior has no lines in the second half of the work while Queché Warrior has the major portion of the lines in both acts. A more appropriate title would be The Prisoner of Rabinal. The native title, Dance of Tun, seems to have little relevance to the subject matter; a tun was the Mayan year of 365 days¹⁶ and probably indicated that the dance-drama was

¹⁶Gallenkamp, p. 85.

performed at an annual festival or ceremony. The tun is also a native drum which is indeed used in the play to accompany the music and dance, but it is hardly of importance enough to warrant the title of the work.

The plot is a simple one; while half of the dancers dance in a circle simulating an attack, the two warriors insult each other and make arrogant allusions to the other's respective merits. The dance is then interrupted. Caught and subjugated by the lasso of Rabinal Warrior, and tied to a tree, Queché Warrior hears from the mouth of the enemy the account of his feats from the most recent to the most remote, after which the music plays once more and the dance is renewed, continuing until the end of the scene.

Rabinal Warrior reminds the captive how he provoked Rabinal's men when they were in their fortress; how he lured them with deception in order to conduct them to arid lands where hunger would exhaust them. He reminds him, too, that he kidnapped the governor, with his complete retinue, when he was in the place of the Baths, where he detained him until the same Rabinal Warrior liberated them all. Finally he speaks of the grievances that caused him to destroy various towns. Queché Warrior tries to bribe him; Rabinal Warrior refuses the offer and tells him that he is going to inform his governor so that the governor can decide whether or not the captive may leave.

On so doing he strips him of his weapons.

The governor, when he learns from Rabinal Warrior that the Queché has fallen into his hands, agrees that he should appear before him if he is willing to surrender himself respectfully and to repeat immediately to him his confession.¹⁷ Queché Warrior, on being informed of the governor's intention and freeing himself of his bonds, tries to hurl himself onto Rabinal Warrior, but Ixok-Mun restrains him.

He adopts the same stubborn attitude before the governor, and petitions him to grant him the honors that his rank merits. Once again Queché Warrior hears the retelling of his feats and again refuses to humble himself; he would prefer to go to the sacrifice with dignity. He continues his disdain and refuses the food and drinks which are offered him in accordance with the ritual. Briefly, he shows off the mantle that the governor's wife wove; he then dances among the court with the beautiful Precious Emerald and finally claims the privilege of pitting himself against the distinguished warriors, of whom he speaks sarcastically.

Queché Warrior disappears briefly; he has gone to say goodbye to his valleys and his mountains. On

¹⁷Jones, p. 12, contends that the governor requires Queché Warrior to become one of the governor's Council of Twelve Eagles and Twelve Jaguars and to fight for him. Professor Jones cites no specific source for this contention.

returning he speaks nostalgically of his land which he held so dear, and of the squirrel and the bird who, unlike himself, may die on the branch of the tree where they had lived. And thus he gives himself up to sacrificial death.

Dialogue and Poetry

The single most noticeable and difficult characteristic of most of the literature of indigenous Middle America is parallelism. The abundant reiterations hinder modern comprehension of the simplicity of the exchanges, and seem to prolong interminably the dialogue which, except for parallelism, develops the central theme quite simply.

Compounding this problem for the modern non-Latin reader, is a convention of courtesy of form. Each speech begins with a salutation and closes with a phrase of courteous leavetaking. Conventions of courtesy, like those in use in every language, and whose true feeling or meaning is diluted by usage, are kept for their phonetic enchantment. Each character replies in this form and repeats in part the speech which he just finished hearing. The speech continues with a question equivalent to "Is not this what you have just said?", as if he were trying to obtain a confirmation or establish a compromise. Or else he firmly confirms his long iteration with a ratification: "Thus you spoke". Such repetitions lengthen the speeches without progressing the action and without adding much new information.

The content and thought of any literature depends on the intellectual, social and psychological aperceptions and values of the individual and the people. The poetic expression of that content may be relatively independent of time and place; its form is rhetorical or linguistic. The rhetorical form (metaphors, etc.) is relatively independent of specific time or place.

In analyzing the parallelism of Mayan poetry, George Raynaud contends that it is partly a result of the linguistic form of the language.

The base of all prosody is repetition. A word, a fragment of a phrase, a phrase, all of a series of phrases are repeated two, three, five, ten times; the repeated word might be without some significance, a simple shout; the phrase or the series of repeated phrases also might be repeated at more or less regular intervals and they end by becoming a refrain of a song. Whatever the repetition was, its reappearance at vocalic intervals more regularly each time, forms a harmony and then they attain cadence, the rhythm each time more complicated, each time more perfect; alliteration, assonance, rhyme. For various reasons, but in general, linguistical causes, many peoples stopped in different phases of this science of metrical forms.¹⁸

Many languages use or have used parallelism. The bible contains many examples, although less extreme than the Mayan, of how parallelism, the use of slightly varied repetition, gives subtle new meanings to some words and completes and clarifies others.

¹⁸Raynaud, in Teatro Indigena Prehispanico, pp. 131-132.

The Mayan was also greatly concerned with symmetry and balance in art, in society and in religion. The equilibrium of balance, particularly as exemplified by the constant pairs and quadruples¹⁹ occurs throughout indigenous Middle America. Gods, heroes, chiefs, insults, qualities, defects and phenomena of nature are represented in pairs, sometimes joining in the perfection of balance, a pair of pairs.²⁰

In addition to the parallelism of single verbs, nouns, and adjectives, Rabinal Achí contains parallelism of phrases, of sentences and indeed of whole paragraphs. Since parallelism is the essential constant of the entire work, which is contained in Appendix I, one example will suffice here. In the first scene of this translation, Queché Warrior, after speaking the required courtesy and after repeating a part of the speech of Rabinal Warrior, says:

But here you also said: 'Speak. Reveal the location of your mountains, your valleys.' [parallelism of nouns] Thus you spoke. Come, come! Would I be courageous; come, come! Would I be stalwart [parallelism of clause] and at the same time would I reveal the description of my mountains, the description of my valleys? [parallelism of phrase] Isn't it clear that I was born on the side of a mountain, on the side of a valley? [parallelism of a pair of phrases] -- I,

¹⁹Kurath and Martí, p. 200. Raynaud, in Teatro Indígena Prehispánico, p. 134. Also see Chapter IV of this work.

²⁰Raynaud, in Teatro Indígena Prehispánico, p. 134.

the son of the clouds, the son of the mist? again
 Come, come! Would I tell, would I reveal verb
parallelism my mountains, my valleys? Ah, how the
 skies overflow; how the earth overflows sentence
parallelism.

Considering that this speech is both preceded and followed by speeches of the Rabinal Warrior which reproduce long sections of it word for word, it is easy to see that, until the reader becomes accustomed to it, the reading will be tedious.

But for an audience accustomed to this convention, it would sound no more strange than do many biblical passages.

Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. . . .
 (Genesis I: 26-27.)

It must be assumed that the spectator of the work was particularly charmed by that which, for the modern reader, is wearisome: the insistence on the convention of salutation or farewell, the themes and infinite variations of parallelism, and the way in which each speaker seems to demonstrate his excellent memory of the other characters' words.

Spectacle and Music

Because of the nature and amount of dance in Rabinal Achí, music and spectacle are inseparable. The

play begins to the melancholy sound of the tun, the sacred drum; immediately there is a kind of round dance²¹ in which Rabinal Warrior, Ixok-Mun, Eagles and Jaguars take part. Queché Warrior darts among them with threatening gestures while the tempo of the dance increases; then the drama continues vocally.

In 1856 the orchestra consisted of two trumpets and the sacred drum.²² At various other performances they probably also used wood or clay flutes (Xul) and hollow gourds filled with grain.²³ Several times during the play, the dialogue is interrupted by a dance, each time accompanied by the martial music of the drum and trumpet.

The performance that Brasseur saw took place on a stage platform (estrade) which, after the morning mass, was constructed in the courtyard under the balcony of his parsonage. Brasseur mentions no formal scenery even though the first part takes place before the fortress and the second part takes place inside of it. All of the characters wear costumes and many wear masks,²⁴ which in the case of the noble personages and the Eagle and Jaguar warriors could be indeed spectacular.

²¹Brasseur de Bourbourg, p. 22.

²²Raynaud, in Teatro Indigena Prehispanico, p. 130.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Brasseur de Bourbourg, p. 20.

The death of the Queché Warrior, although relatively unspectacular here, gives a hint of having been more exciting in the past. Queché demands to be allowed to die by combat. Whether it would be true combat or the unequal conflict of the Tlacaxipehualiztli,²⁵ it would terminate in the victim's heart being raised to the four directions. Raynaud believes this omission indicates that the work is truncated out of Mayan obeisance to the new "civilized" rulers.²⁶

Form and Structure

The form and structure of Rabinal Achí invites comparison not only to "Proto-Drama" but to the ancient theatre of Athens.

There are three main characters, Queché Warrior, Rabinal Warrior, and Hobtoh, the governor. Even though all three are distinct individuals, the work is essentially a two character play as was the theatre of Aeschylus. The two divisions of the play consist of dialogue between Rabinal and Queché in the first part, and between Queché and Hobtoh in the second, and the use of the masks could allow the entire work to be done by two actors.²⁷

²⁵See Chapter VI.

²⁶Raynaud, in Teatro Indígena Prehispánico, p. 137.

²⁷In actual practice, Brasseur reports that the roles were so demanding and the masks so heavy that two or three actors shared one role. Brasseur de Bourbourg, p. 23.

The number of lines and amount of business of the secondary characters approximate that of the choragos of the Greeks.

Masks are worn as they were in the Greek theatre and as they usually were in "Proto-Drama".

Dance accompanied by music punctuates and separates the "episodes". For the most part it is of a sacramental nature, either general or group, as when the Jaguars and Eagles dance.

The long alternating speeches of two characters compare easily with those of The Suppliants and are even longer than those of The Song of the Turtledoves and The Song of Boldface, the longer Nahuatl pieces discussed in Chapter VIII.

The Unity of Time is in effect in Rabinal Achí as it is in many of the Greek tragedies and as it is in "Proto-Drama" due largely to the short, simple plots. The only difficulty of verisimilitude relative to actual time is when Queché Warrior leaves to take one last look at his mountains and valleys. After a general dance by the other characters, he returns, possibly in less time than it took Oedipus' servants to find the shepherd he was seeking.

A theme of conflict with fate is suggested. The Queché Warrior, by not humbling himself or submitting to the will of his adversaries, challenges fate, which

they represent, which implacably condemns him to death. Here, as in the Greek tragedies, the catastrophe was foreseen, and the spectators knew it beforehand. What was more important was the development of the course by which Queché Warrior arrived at his end;²⁸ it was the inexorable course attached to a ritual, invariably ending in the final act: the death of Queché Warrior.

One noteworthy characteristic of structure is a "modern" technique, usually identified with Ibsen or Pirandello--retrospective exposition. The dialogue of Rabinal Achí reveals knowledge of the actions which the conquered one brought into being. The spectator who might arrive near the end of the first part of the presentation would know as many details as would one who had stayed there from its beginning. But a spectator leaving before the conclusion of the first part would miss hearing the more remote (in time) exposition. As the play progresses, one retrogresses into the past, since the dialogue recalls the details in a reverse process.

A Recent Production

In 1955 the Dirección General de Bellas Artes arranged to celebrate the Primer Festival de Arte y Cultura in Antigua and included, with the help of the

²⁸Monterde, p. xxvi.

Instituto Indigenista Nacional, the Rabinal Achí. Esteban Xolop Sucup, about fifty years old, was organizer and proprietor of all the props, costumes, instruments, etc. Xolop said that the Rabinal Achí had not been performed for eighteen or twenty years, but that nevertheless, it would be given according to exact tradition.²⁹

The preparations, as reported by Francisco Rodriguez Rouanet who witnessed them, were elaborate. A series of rites were performed in the twenty days preceeding the performance, and sexual continence was required of everyone connected with the performance for thirty days before and thirty days after the performance.³⁰ Each performer, in order to get permission from "the spirit of the high land" to perform the dance had to take candles, chocolate, bread, fruit, aguardiente (an alcoholic beverage) and incense to offer and pray at "Calvary" (the Catholic church) and to the five mountains mentioned in the dance.³¹ Within the principal mountain of the five, it is believed that King Hobtoch still lives. Stories abound of people,

²⁹Francisco Rodriguez Rouanet, "Notas Sobre una Representacion Actual del Rabinal Achí o Baile del Tun", in Guatemala Indigena, Vol. 2, No. 1 (Guatemala: Instituto Indigenista Nacional, 1962).

³⁰Ibid., p. 26. Similar abstinence before the rituals among the Aztecs are reported by Sahagún in Book II, The Ceremonies.

³¹Ibid., pp. 46-47.

still alive, who were given aid or great wealth by King Hobtoho who still lives in a cave in this mountain, along with the Princess and the Eagles and Jaguars. The cave is difficult to find and is guarded by a great snake and other animals which are all tied up and "inoffensive".³² The myth lives still.³³

The dramatis personae in this performance were somewhat reduced from Brasseur's list. The principal roles were of course the same; the princess Precious Emerald was still a non-speaking role; but Hobtoho's wife was eliminated, and Ixok-Mun and the servant were combined into one role. The twelve yellow eagles and twelve yellow jaguars were reduced to one symbolic representative (cargador) for each order. The many servants and warriors noted by Brasseur were eliminated.³⁴

The costumes, as reported by Rodriguez, were disappointingly unspectacular.³⁵ A description of the three main characters will serve:

The Warrior of Rabinal, the Warrior of the Queché and the chief Hobtoj wore masks, short pants of silk that reached a little lower than the knee with adornments on the borders, a large blouse of the same material with decorations on the sleeves and kept down with a belt, and shoes. The head was

³²Rodriguez, p. 47.

³³"Myth" not in its current usage, but as the twilight of reality and truth as discussed in Chapter II.

³⁴Rodriguez, p. 49.

³⁵Ibid., pp. 49-51.

covered with a handkerchief which hid the hair and the ears; then they put on the mask and a nightcap adorned with feathers. The Warrior of Rabinal used a white "breastplate" that covers the shoulders and the breast. The Warrior of the Queché had a gilded "breastplate" a little shorter; and the king Hobtoh wore a species of small white gorget. The colors of the garbs varied on each one. . . .

These three characters carry in the left hand a silver plate which simulates a coat of arms. . . . In the right hand they carry a small taper with a handkerchief tied to the end of the extremity.³⁶

The Princess was dressed like any ten year old Queché girl. Muy (the character combining Ixok-Mun and the servant) was a man dressed as a quite ordinary woman except for a mask and a long handkerchief simulating long hair.³⁷

The Eagle and Jaguar were dressed in the same basic attire as were the three principals, including masks. The Eagle carried a shield engraved in the shape of an eagle.³⁸ The Jaguar wore a breastplate of carved wood showing two jaguars; the plate was connected to a frame of wood from which hung a profusion of feathers.³⁹

The performance was in January during the festival of the town of Rabinal.⁴⁰ But rehearsals began in

³⁶Ibid., pp. 49-50.

³⁷Ibid., p. 50.

³⁸Ibid., p. 51.

³⁹Ibid., p. 50.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 48.

September, principally because most of the actors could not read, and the lines couldn't be memorized by individual study.⁴¹ Due to its sacred nature, the work may not be performed in part; thus the early "runthroughs" began early in the evening and lasted almost until dawn.⁴² Before each rehearsal, each actor prayed before his house altar, took a ritual swallow of aguardiente in the patio, and crossed himself.⁴³

The "Watch of the Masks" occurred the night before the performance. On the altar, in addition to its more conventional religious paraphernalia, were the costumes, masks, drum and trumpets to be used in the performance, and before which burned paraffin and fruit; thus was gained permission to perform and protection against accidents from the god.⁴⁴ After the performers were costumed but before the performance began, aguardiente was sprinkled on the inside of the mask in an individual ceremony accompanied by a prayer in Queché; after the prayer the actor took a drink, and put on the mask.⁴⁵ Only the musicians drank during the performance (whenever there was unaccompanied dialogue), and they ended up quite drunk.⁴⁶

⁴¹Ibid., p. 51.

⁴²Ibid., p. 52.

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 53.

The music was performed on a drum and two trumpets, which Xolop and the musicians agreed were five hundred years old.⁴⁷ The notes of the trumpets were long, and the rhythm was carried by the drum; the music was monotonous, simple and repetitious, such variety as there was being determined by which character was speaking.⁴⁸

Rodriguez' unfortunately brief article describes a modern production which seemed to differ little from that described by Brasseur in 1850, principally in the reduction of the unwieldy number of "supers", and in slightly more modest costumes.

The work, and that production, seem to be truly "native". But in spite of the confidence that Professor Raynaud had in the uncontaminated purity of this work, it is a little difficult to believe that it had passed across more than three hundred years of Spanish domination without the dialogue having been influenced in some way by the sensitivity of the "rememberers", the translators and the public, not exclusively Maya or even Indian.⁴⁹

In any human work (and more so in the theatre) if the work is preserved by oral tradition, they influence

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 55.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 54.

⁴⁹Monterde, p. xxx.

it most who year after year interpret it. The least that can happen is that time cripples it little by little. Thus it probably was with the Rabinal Achí.

But the reader of the complete work will be rewarded for his patience. Notwithstanding the annoying redundancies, there is, throughout the dialogue, a delicate poetry, not only in the rhythm that results from the reiteration of words, but in the similarity of phrases barely different one from another. Moreover, in Rabinal Achí there is a poetry more suggestive than evocative for the present reader--different from that which undoubtedly occurred to the spectator of those times--in the references to places of complicated and familiar names. And there is, finally, an original tone which has kept (in spite of the difficulty of translation) some of the primitive vigor of this work in the persistent details.

The Rabinal Achí presents a new world for the contemporary reader, seldom seen among the mists of a past which history and criticism have still not been able to adequately explain.

CHAPTER XIII

CONCLUSIONS

The present study has brought to light evidence of each of the four stages of development of Ritual Drama in Middle America.

Dance, Animism and Sacramentalism, the essence of "Primitive Mimetic Dance" have been seen on the frescoes and painted pottery illustrated in Chapter V and in the Chacs Ritual (Rain Dance) of Yucatan in Chapter XI. The tradition survived in aspects of the more complex rituals, such as the Old Wolf in the Tlacaxipehualiztli ritual and the Aztec Dance of the Gods in which the dancers were made up as hummingbirds, butterflies, honeybees, flies, birds, giant horned beetles and large screech owls.

"Ritualized Mimetic Dance" was evidenced in the rituals of the blood ceremonies in celebration of certain Aztec months. The rituals of the seventh and eighth months focused primarily on single, simple events. Painted masks and deity symbols were worn by a god personator who was sacrificed. Communal songs and dances were performed, and the definite form and sequence of the ritual suggest a directing authority.

The more complex blood-ceremonies of the Aztecs appear to be examples of "Dromenon-Drama". Dances are separate from distinct "episodes" in both Toxcatl and Tlacaxipehualiztli. Each has a central figure (Toçî and Xipe Totec) on whom the entire production is focused; Toçî and Xipe Totec are both individually accoutred and surrounded by symbols of their godship; and each has, according to Sahagún, an "oration". The scene depicted on the Bonampak murals, if we accept the probability of any "orations" or dialogue, places "Dromenon-Drama" among the Mayas as early as the ninth or tenth century.

If the Nahuatl Güegüence (Chapter IX) is eliminated for containing too many European elements, the remaining examples of "Proto-Drama" are both Mayan--the Dance of the Giants and Rabinal Achí. Although the antagonists of the Dance of the Giants are now called Goliath and David, it is well known that they represent the anthropomorphic forces Hun Camé (Evil) and Hunahpu, a Mayan hero-god symbolized by the sun. Each of the antagonists is easily recognizable by his mask, costume, movement and speech. Long speeches by only two characters demonstrate a simple plot, and other characteristics of the work fit easily into the "Proto-Drama" category.

Because the Rabinal Achí is the only extant major work of indigenous Middle America, and since its authenticity has never been seriously challenged, it is possible

to consider the Rabinal Achí as the culmination of Middle American indigenous drama--the form at which the Aztecs and Mayas would have naturally arrived. For although it is, technically, "Proto-Drama" it is also a play, recognizable, though somewhat strange, to the western ear. Each of the characteristics of "Proto-Drama" (Fig. 3) is complied with, and the only seeming disparity is the very human characters, Queché Warrior and Rabinal Warrior; compared to the hero-king-god of "Proto-Drama".

But it is very likely that many of the more obvious allusions to Mayan deities were eliminated out of deference to the conquerors; so also was the real sacrificial death at the end of the play. Even so, sacred allusions remain--the mountains, the sun, the four directions.

It must be remembered that the natural order of things is not a separated Church and State; quite the contrary, these two institutions seem to grow from the same seed, through the same trunk; and only with extreme difficulty is the separation accomplished; indeed many cultures have not yet accomplished it.

The Mayan Warrior was a sacred individual; the Mayan Chief was a priest-warrior. These ideas were in the constant forefront of a Mayan audience viewing the play.

It is interesting to note that the theories of primitive drama discussed in Chapters II and III are substantially supported by the evidence of Nahua and Mayan Ritual Drama. The Cambridge Theory fits most easily, due to the abundance of ceremony dedicated to deities of corn, rain and fertility. Ridgeway's Tomb Theory, if not strongly supported, at least is not refuted. Quetzalcoatl, Tezcatlipoca, Huitzilopochtli are all subjects of legends dealing with their once human activities. The likelihood of each one being a now-deified hero-chief of the distant tribal past is high.

Two of the dramatic pieces discussed in Chapter VIII present problems to the four developmental categories in this study. The Song of Bold-Face, which Garibay divides into eight episodes, contains so many seemingly unrelated incidents, episodes, and characters, that it more easily suggests several pieces which are not separated in the Cantares Mexicanos manuscript. The other is Netzahualcóyotl's Poetry Contest in which there is again no central figure or incident and no conflict or resolution. It is of course conjectural that the piece is a dramatic script; but its dramatic potential is as significant as other sections of the Cantares Mexicanos manuscript. Further study of the Cantares Mexicanos manuscripts might solve these problems. A study of this and other manuscripts in an attempt to determine their

possible or probable use as dramatic "scripts" would be a major undertaking in itself.

Another area for further study would be in the rituals and dances of other peoples of this hemisphere. Although there are less pre-conquest and sixteenth century materials available on these peoples, other than Mayan and Aztecs, the number of studies and the data being unearthed increase daily. The drama of the Quechuas (Inca) of Peru merits a major study. Evidence exists of Ritual Drama and Dramatic Dance among certain groups in the Carib and Arawak areas around the Caribbean sea.

Lastly, a study might be undertaken to more precisely define and characterize the several stages of development of Ritual and Ritual Drama, in more detail and with a broader geographic base of data than that of Chapters II and III of this work. With the number of studies of indigenous peoples increasing throughout the world, such classifications, subject to constant new data, might aid in determining the stage of cultural development of any given peoples--a kind of cultural Carbon-14 test. For some kind of religious feeling is common to all cultures, that is, to any group of intelligent beings; and ritual is the expression of this feeling.

It is no longer completely visionary to consider the possibility that a thorough understanding of just such

cultural phenomena as those discussed in this study might aid in the understanding and acceptance of any alien culture--of our own world or of others.

APPENDIX I

RABINAL ACHI

Preface to the Translation

This first English version of the Rabinal Achí is translated from Brasseur's original with generous reference and comparison to Francisco Monterde's Spanish version contained in Teatro Indígena Prehispánico. Monterde is a competent scholar and avails himself and the reader of modern studies which were unavailable to Brasseur.

The source for all subsequent translations and adaptations is Brasseur's "Rabinal Achí" with a text in Queché and his translation into French, contained in Collection de Documents dans les langues indigènes pour servir à l'étude de l'histoire et la philologie de l'Amérique Ancienne.

Georges Raynaud made still another French translation, generally unavailable in this country but included as "El Varón de Rabinal" in Anales de la Sociedad Geográfica e Historia printed in Guatemala in 1929-30. The preface to this work is included as an appendix in the Monterde version, and many of Monterde's numerous footnotes and

explanations are based on Raynaud. Various other translations and adaptations exist in Spanish, notably José Antonio Villacorta, "Rabinal Achí, tragedia danzada de los Quichés", Anales de la Sociedad de Geografía e Historia, XVII (Guatemala, 1942), and Luis Cardoza de Aragón, "El varón de Rabinal" also in Anales de la Sociedad de Geografía e Historia, VI (Guatemala, 1929).

A word of explanation on the footnotes is needed. Monterde includes one hundred and forty-five textual footnotes which follow the text on pages 95-120. Most of the notes derive from Brasseur and Raynaud with a few by Monterde. Many of these notes have interest only to the anthropologist, the linguist, or the Americanist. For this reason some have been eliminated from this translation and others have been shortened to include only the information necessary to the understanding of the work or those dealing with theatrical or production elements. To those, several by the present translator have been added.

The footnotes of this translation will run consecutively, but for purposes of identification and reference, after the footnote itself, the corresponding number of Monterde's footnotes will appear. As far as is possible the various sources of the notes will be identified as following:

(CB) Brasseur de Bourbourg
 (GR) Georges Raynaud
 (FM) Francisco Monterde
 (RL) Richard Leinaweaver

Although the number of footnotes is discouraging to a reading with any dramatic flow or continuity, particularly in the first scene, the notes are absolutely essential to the understanding of the work either dramatically or historically.

Cast of Characters

Chief Hobto¹, governor² of the town of Rabinal.³

Rabinal Warrior,⁴ highest dignitary among the warriors;⁵
 son of Hobto¹.

¹Hobto¹ Ahua: "Five-Rain", designating the day of the chief's birth. The term ahau, in all the tongues of the Maya family, does not indicate "king"; it plainly has the meaning of "chief" with all the inconsistency the term implies. (1,5 GR)

²Rahau²: "Supreme chief, governor". (2 GR)

³Rabinal: Probably means "family" (or line, house) of rab. (3 GR)

⁴Rabinal Achí. Achí: Warrior of nobility. Raynaud suggests the Spanish and French equivalent Varon which translates as noble man, not nobleman, even though Varon (baron) has been for some time nobility de facto. Monterde suggests the Nahuatl equivalent is tlacatl which means ruling class (literally "speaker"). The only word in English which possibly corresponds to "Achí" is "knight", but this has such specific denotation that it would be both anachronistic and ludicrous as the title of a Mayan personage. If the reader will bear in mind the nobility and importance of Rabinal Achí and Queché Achí, the word "warrior" will then suffice. (RL)

⁵Galel-Achí: Literally, "Standout among the Warriors", implying something closer to "the most equal of the equals"--designating high rank. (RL - 5 GR)

Queché Warrior,⁶ governor of the Grand Council of Cuñén and Chahul,⁷ son of the Wizard of the Warriors,⁸ Wizard of the Envoltorio,⁹ Governor of the Queché men.

⁶Queché: This name, designating the unity of three great tribes, is, perhaps, a defacing of a primitive name; a phonetic-geographic defacing which obliges one to return to the epoch of the migrations. The primitive name quitzé, or better, ah quitzé, "Those of the Woven Bundle" (mythological heros) a religious name which had been given to those towns, had its origin in a sacred object of great potential magic guarded by and almost always surrounded by its portable oracle which constituted its safeguard. (6 GR)

⁷Rahaual yaqui: A title carried by those members of the Queché tribal Grand Council who were charged in a special manner with keeping watch over and protecting the people from the yaqui. Yaqui: This name has no relation to the actual tribe of the Yaquis of Northern Mexico. It designates "stranger"; literally, "men or things that are not of the place where we live". In all places, in all times, the towns have despised their neighbors, applying extravagant epithets to them. Perhaps the Quechés employed this term yaqui with great pleasure because in their language it had various secondary meanings: "frauds, vigilants", (in running away and spying) and "langosta", a very small but very harmful animal. Cunén: "Medicine men" or "blood-letters". Chahul: Meaning "The Arrow's Hole". Cunén and Chahul still exist to the North of Santa Cruz de Queché, near Rebah. There are many ruins. (7 and 8 GR; 9 FM)

⁸Balam Achí: Balam, in all of the tongues of the Maya family similarly designates the jaguar and the magician, the wizard, since it is to them that the power of metamorphosis into the jaguar is attributed. (10 GR)

⁹Balam Queché: The position of this title before that of Balam Achí makes me suppose that its exact meaning was, plainly, Wizard of the Queché. Nevertheless, I give in my translation: Wizard of the Woven Bundle (Hechicero del Envoltorio) which is the name, or more exactly, the title of the foremost among the four founding, mythical heroes of the Queché people, and we know by the Titulo de Totonicapán that after their disappearance from the terrestrial world their sons (and subsequently their descendants) took their titles. (11 FM)

The wife¹⁰ of Chief Hobtoh.

Precious Emerald, Mother of the Green Feathers, Mother of the Green Birds,¹¹ promised bride of Rabinal Warrior.

Ixok-Mun: servant.¹²

A servant of Rabinal Warrior.

Twelve yellow eagles, twelve yellow jaguars,¹³ young warriors of the town of Rabinal.

Numerous warriors, numerous servants.

The action takes place in Cakyug-Zilic-Cakocaonic-Tepecanic.¹⁴

¹⁰Ixokil: This form of Ixok "wife", seems to have a meaning of superiority. Poligamy was permitted among the great chiefs; chiefly for political reasons. One may translate "Ixokil" as the principal wife. (14 GR) Brasseur lists her as the Queen. (RL)

¹¹U Chuch gug: "The Mother of the green feathers". U Chuch raxon: "The Mother of the raxon". The raxon were very highly esteemed green plumaged birds. (GR)

¹²Mun: The frequent translation "slave: is excessive. It has been suggested that in spite of the feminine name which follows--Ixok-Mun, this character was a man and this seems to be confirmed by the fact that women didn't speak in the drama. (17 FM) "Favorite slave of Rabinal Achí". (CB)

¹³Cot: ("Eagles") and Balam (Jaguars) are like the quauhtli (eagles) and the océlotl (Jaguars) of the Nahuas, titles which are carried by some warriors to demonstrate their valor and which gave them the right to cover themselves with the skins and heads of those animals. These warriors constituted the flower of the army. (18 GR)

¹⁴As there is no known legend or myth which refers to this town, I conjecture that the translation "Red healing wounds, irritated and aggravated" suggests that it is excessively fanciful; but it nevertheless seems to me less strange than (Brasseur's) "fire guarded by the viper which is painfully, agitatedly ascending". The ruins

Scene I	In front of the fortress
Scene II	Within the fortress
Scene III	In front of the fortress
Scene IV	Within the fortress ¹⁵

found one league to the north of the actual Rabinal, situated above a high mound which dominates the prairie, are easily visible from the present town. (19 GR)

¹⁵The play has been variously divided into acts and scenes, although in each case admittedly arbitrarily. Monterde's divisions are into Act I, scenes i, ii, and iii for the first three scenes and his Act II is the final scene. The scene divisions of this translation correspond to Brasseur's. There is no mention of any performance having an act break. (RL)

SCENE ONE

In Front of the Fortress

(The Warrior of Rabinal and his people dance in a circle. The Warrior of the Queché suddenly arises and begins to dance in the middle of the circle moving his short spear as if he would like to wound the Warrior of Rabinal in the head. With each revolution the movement of the circle becomes more rapid.)

QUECHÉ WARRIOR

Come here odious chief,¹⁶ despicable chief!¹⁶ Will you be the first whose very root, whose trunk I cannot cut; that chief of the Chacach,¹⁷ of the Zaman,¹⁸ the Caük¹⁹ of Rabinal! This I swear to do before heaven and earth; and for this reason I need not say more. Heaven and earth be with thee,²⁰ O most remarkable of the Stalwarts--Warrior of Rabinal.

¹⁶Vorom ahau, Cakon ahau: They have obscene meanings which Brasseur and Monterde decline to translate. Brasseur says they deal with sodomy and substitutes infâme (infamous) and odieux (odious). Monterde uses violentador (irascible) and deshonesto (dishonest). (20 RL)

¹⁷"Baskets".

¹⁸"Fields": Cahcach and Zuman were situated on the mountain of Xoy Abah, some ten leagues to the southwest of Rabinal. Their ruins may perhaps be those now known by the name of Belehe Tzal, "The nine walls", Belehe Qoxkun, "The nine fortresses". (22 FM and CB)

¹⁹Caük: There are many possibilities as to the meaning of this word. According to other texts it is one of the forms of the name Cavek (or Cavik, or Cauek, or Cauik); which is the name of one of the three tribes which constituted the Queché peoples. (23 FM)

²⁰"That the heaven, the earth be with thee" is merely an expression of protocol. (25, 26 GR)

RABINAL WARRIOR

(As he starts to dance he twirls a lasso with which he threatens to subdue his enemy.)

Aha! Courageous warrior. Chief of the Cavek Queché. Thus you spoke before heaven and earth: "Come near, odious chief, despicable chief. Will you be the only one whose very root, whose trunk I cannot cut. I, chief of the Chacach, of the Zaman, the Caŭk of Rabinal." Did you not say that?²¹ Yes, by all means! Heaven and earth bear witness!²² Surrender to the son of my arrow, to the son of my shield;²³ to my mace, to my yaqui axe,²⁴ my net, my accoutrements, to my sacrificial earth,²⁵ to my magic herbs,²⁶ to my vigor, to my courage. Be it thus or no, before heaven and earth will I bind you with my strong lasso. Heaven and earth be with thee, courageous warrior, my prisoner and my captive!

(He snares him with the lasso which he pulls in order to bring his prisoner towards him. The music stops and the

²¹In Queché our quotation marks do not exist. "He says", once placed before and once after the citation, are used instead. (28 GR) One and sometimes both of these are omitted in this translation. (RL)

²²Literally "Here is the heaven; here is the earth". With this recorded expression the personage takes the entire world as his witness. (29 GR)

²³Monterde interprets "son of my arrow" as "point of my arrow", as did Brasseur (31); but "point of my shield"? It is better to keep the Queché idiom in order that the style lose none of its color or, if not, simply omit the word "son". (RL)

²⁴The mace and the axe are always treated as "yaqui" in this text. (32 GR)

²⁵Zahcab: The white earth: with which the victim was rubbed before the sacrifice. After sacrifice it was a symbol (and a magic means of victory). (33 GR)

²⁶The exact meaning for "zalmet" is unknown, but Brasseur's native servant indicated the meaning of "magic herbs". In Sahagún the anointing with herbs preceded the sacrifice. (34, CB FM)

dance is interrupted. There is a prolonged silence during which both men, feigning anger, face each other, without musical accompaniment or dancing.)

RABINAL WARRIOR

Now, valiant warrior, my prisoner and my captive. Already your heaven and earth wither! Truly the heaven and earth have delivered you to the son of my arrow; to the son of my shield; to my yaqui mace; to my net, to my accoutrements, to my sacrificial earth, to my magic herbs. Speak now. Reveal the location of your mountains and of your valleys;²⁷ and if you were born on the side of a mountain, at the back of a valley. Are you not a son of the clouds, a son of the mist?²⁸ Have you not come flying before spears, before war?²⁹ Thus speaks my voice before heaven and earth. For this reason I will speak briefly. Heaven and earth be with thee, prisoner and captive!

QUECHÉ WARRIOR

Ah, heaven and earth hear me! Is it true that you said that, that you threw such absurd words at heaven; at the earth, to my lips and my face?³⁰ That I am a courageous man, a stalwart man? Thus spoke your voice. Come, come! Would I be courageous--come, come! Would I be a stalwart man and would I have come hurled by spears, by

²⁷To "reveal your mountains, your valleys, etc." Not only did the fact of knowing the civil state of his enemy give him magic power over him, but also it was a species of dishonor for a vanquished warrior (and for his people) to make this kind of a revelation. "Mountains and valleys" means the entire country. (35 GR)

²⁸It seems that "son of the clouds, of the mist" has a double meaning: the one serious, "having come from the high mountains"; the other ironic, "without importance, imaginary". (36 GR)

²⁹Simple deserter, in flight or escape, coward. (37 GR)

³⁰To my lips, to my face, (or to your mouth, your face): Queché expression which one is able to translate plainly by "to me", "to thee". (39 GR)

war? But here you also said: "Speak. Reveal the location of your mountains, your valleys." Thus you spoke. Come, come! Would I be courageous; come, come! Would I be stalwart and at the same time would I tell, would I reveal the description of my mountains, the description of my valleys? Isn't it clear as day that I was born on the side of a mountain, on the side of a valley, that I am the son of the clouds, the son of the mist? Come, come! Would I reveal, would I make known my mountains, my valleys? Rather that the skies and the earth disappear. For this reason I will speak briefly, remarkable among the Stalwarts, warrior of Rabinal. Heaven and earth be with thee!

(The dance is renewed--the music starts to play. (FM)

RABINAL WARRIOR

Wait! Valiant warrior! My prisoner, my captive. Does your mouth speak thus to the face of heaven, to the face of the earth? "Come, come, would I be courageous? Come, come, would I be a stalwart one, and at the same time would I reveal my mountains, my valleys? "Isn't it clear as day that I was born on the side of a mountain, on the side of a valley--I, the son of the clouds, the son of the mists?" Did not your voice speak thus? Very well, if you will not reveal the description of your mountains, the description of your valleys--heaven and earth witness that I will make you go, dead or in chains, before my governor, before my ruler, to my vast walls--in my vast fortress. Thus do I speak before heaven and earth. Heaven and earth be with thee, my prisoner and my captive.

QUECHÉ WARRIOR

Ah, heaven and earth hear me! Your voice spoke thus before heaven and earth: "You can change and destroy the voices, the words which I speak to you before heaven, before earth. Here there is something to compel the birth of these words, something to compel their departure, in order that you will be able to reveal the description of your mountains, the description of your valleys. If you do not tell them--if you do not reveal them, witness the heavens and the earth that I will make you go, dead or in chains, before my governor, my ruler." Thus spoke your voice before heaven and earth. Ah heaven! Ah earth! Whom should I tell, to whom reveal the description of my mountains, the description of my valleys? To you, oh

birds who sing like nightingales; to you eagles?³¹ I, the courageous one, I the stalwart man, chief of the Grand Council of Cunén, of the Grand Council of Chahul! I, the Wizard Chief of the Stalwart Ones, Wizard of the Envoltorio, ten times have I come down the road from the clouds, from the mist, from my mountains, from my valleys to go to war. How to cause the words to descend, to cause the words to rise; the things that I would speak to you before heaven, before earth? Heaven and earth be with you--remarkable among the warriors of Rabinal.

RABINAL WARRIOR

Courageous warrior of the Cavek Queché, are you my favorite? Are you my elder? Are you my younger brother? Wonderful! And how then could my heart have forgotten having seen you there in the vast walls, in the vast fortress! No doubt you were the one who imitated the bark of the coyote, the one who imitated the cry of the fox, the scream of the squirrel, of the jaguar³² outside those immense walls, in the vast fortress, in order to bring us,³³ the white children, the white son,³⁴ to you; in order to take us from the vast walls, before the vast fortress; in order to feed us with wild yellow honey,³⁵ which our governor drinks, our ruler, our

³¹Tziquin: "Bird", has immediately the sense of "eagle" which could very well be used in the present case because the Warrior of the Queché says the word ironically. (42 GR)

³²One imitates the screams of the animals in order to cause the hunters to leave the walls of the fortresses and come outside. (44 GR)

³³The "call" of the men, like the call of the animals, means provocation. "To call" has the sense of "challenge", "provoke". (45 GR)

³⁴White (or good) children, white (or good) sons indicates the subordinates, the vassals, subordinates of the tribe, and also the warriors, subordinate to the great chiefs or to the supreme chief. (46 GR)

³⁵"Yellow, green" is to say "rich, excellent"; honey seems to have been a tribute (or a very esteemed gift); in consequence, the hunters hoped that by a good capture, they would merit this tidbit, or that they would consecutively permit them to offer it to the supreme chief of the town. (47 FM)

grandfather³⁶ Hobtoh.

Therefore, why must you boast, as you have done, and provoke my determination, my bravery? It was not those calls which called us, which brought us to the twelve chiefs each one the chief of his rampart, of his fortress.³⁷ Truly, did you not tell us: "Come here, young men, you twelve valiant young men, you twelve heroes; come and hear that which you must do, because all your food, all your drink were dissolved, consumed, destroyed, transformed into pumice stone."³⁸ The crickets only, male and female, still make their song heard on the walls, in the fortress of those white children, of those white sons; for now almost nothing remains, only nine or ten of their houses and fortresses. There we have ceased feeding on the white children,³⁹ on the white sons, because now we eat the fried dish, the great bean, the plate of crabs, the plate of parrots, the mixed plates."⁴⁰ Was this not the advice that you gave to the chiefs, to the warriors? Was there not something in this which went beyond the desires of your bravery, and boldness? And Belehe Mokoh, Belehe Chumay⁴¹ with that bravery, that boldness, had they not become accustomed to defeat, become accustomed to burial by our warriors, by our chiefs, in the places called Cotom and

³⁶"Grandfather", "ancestor", "ancient", "father" are titles of respect. (48 FM)

³⁷Brasseur, pp. 36-37, indicates an omission here in both the Queché and French versions, by elipses at the end of this line and at the beginning of the next. No explanation is given. (RL)

³⁸Disappeared--as a liquid in a porous stone. (51 GR)

³⁹"We have left the killing to our warriors because by dint of killing them one by one, no more remain." (53 GR)

⁴⁰This listing of dishes could signify: "We no longer kill, we no longer eat your warriors in the sacrificial meals partly because now there are no more; for another reason because our victory has left us rich and permits us other foods". (54 GR)

⁴¹Belehe Mokoh: "Nine hillocks". Belehe Chumay: "Nine cubits": the place of an important Queché defeat. (55 FM)

Tikeram?⁴² Behold you must atone for this calamity under heaven, above earth.

Thus, you have said your last goodbye to your mountains, to your valleys, because here we will sever your root, your trunk, under heaven, above earth. Nevermore will you be able, either by day or by night to descend to your mountains, to your valleys. Now you must die here, here you will disappear,⁴³ between the sky and the earth. That is why I go to announce you to my governor, to my ruler in the vast walls, in the vast fortress. Thus speaks my voice to the face of the sky and of the earth. For this reason I will speak briefly. Heaven and earth be with thee, man of the Cavek Queché!

QUECHÉ WARRIOR

Eh! Valiant warrior, most remarkable among the Stalwarts, warrior of Rabinal! Is it thus your voice spoke before heaven and earth? "Why boast of my courage, of my daring?" Thus you spoke. It was they who first called, first provoked my governor, my ruler. This was the only reason for my coming, for my departure from my mountains, from my valleys. From here departed the summoning message, between the heavens and the earth, in front of the ramparts of the commander of Cakyug-Zilic-Cakocaonic-Tepecanic, the names of the mouth and the eye of this fortress and of this castle.⁴⁴ Wasn't it here that the ten loads of cacao were held, the five loads of perfect cacao⁴⁵ destined for my governor, my ruler,

⁴²Cotom: Means "sculptured, engraved" or "regulated, ordered". (56 FM) Tikiram is the name of a chain of mountains to the north of the prairie of Rabinal and Cok-Yug, where Rabinal Achí took place, would be situated above one of the narrow passes. (CB)

⁴³Death is not a complete destruction, however immediate, but a kind of disappearance as is indicated in the feeling of: "Place of vanishment, of the disappearance" of the name Xibalbá, subterraneous place beyond the tomb, illuminated during the night by the sun and by the moon in the day. (57 FM)

⁴⁴"The name of the mouth and of the eye", that is, of the ruler, the mouth through which one speaks and commands, the eye through which one sees and watches. (CB)

⁴⁵Tribute. (59 GR)

Wizard chief of the Warriors, Wizard of the Jaguar; names of the mouth and the eye of my fortress and my castle.⁴⁶

Since that message was presented, the chief, Wizard chief, Wizard of the Jaguar, for that reason desired the death of the Chacachs, of the Zaman, of the Caŭk of Rabinal, in front of the Uxab; of the Pokoman.⁴⁷ Let us agreeably proceed. Let them go and say that you wish to see the courage, the daring, of the chief of the Queché mountains and valleys; to come and take possession of my beautiful mountains, of my beautiful valleys. Come, then, my brother and my elder.⁴⁸ Come and take possession here, between the sky and the earth, of these beautiful mountains, of these smiling valleys. Come and sow your seeds, build your lairs, there where the sprouts of our cucumbers crowd our good pumpkins and the sprouts of our bean plants. By this he confirmed your defiance, your cry of summons, before my governor, my ruler. In this way the defiance, the war cry of my governor, my ruler was offered: "Ah! My courageous one! My warrior, go sound the alarm and return immediately because a message of summons has arrived, which arrived beneath the heavens, above the earth. Raise your vigor, your bravery, son of my arrow, son of my shield; return as soon as possible to the mountainsides, to the valley's slope." Thus came the challenge--the war cry of my governor, of my ruler.

I had already departed. I put the landmarks⁴⁹ there where the sun sets, where the night begins, where the cold tortures, where the ice tortures, in the place called

⁴⁶Ellipses again in Brasseur's text. (p. 41)

⁴⁷The Uxab and the Pokomanes pertain to the Maya group. These towns dominated Verapaz before the arrival of the Ah Rabinal. Afterward they were separated or removed a great distance toward the North. Those that exist today founded Cobán and its environs. (60 CB)

⁴⁸"Elder, brother" means "Kinsman"; in short, it is a simple convention of courtesy. (61 FM)

⁴⁹In those countries of intensive agriculture the boundaries of the land had greatest importance; in America territorial property, familial or individual ownership did not exist. (64 FM)

Pan-Tzahaxak.⁵⁰ Then I brandished the son of my arrow, the son of my shield. I came back to the side of the mountain, to the side of the valley. There, for the first time, I hurled my challenge, my war cry, before Cholocho-Huyu,⁵¹ Cholocho-Chah⁵² called thus. I went from there and in the same manner I hurled my challenge, my war cry, for the second time, to Nimche Paraveno, to Cabrakan,⁵³ called thus. I went from there and hurled my challenge, my war cry for the third time at a place named Panchalib.⁵⁴ I went from there. I was going to hurl for the fourth time my challenge, my war cry to Xol Chacach,⁵⁵ called thus. It was there I found the twelve yellow eagles,⁵⁶ the twelve yellow jaguars, sounding the great drum of

⁵⁰These places were to the West and over high snow-capped mountains. In effect, Pan-Tzahaxak "in the leaf-insects", would be, according to Brasseur, the name of the highest summit of the Cuchumatanes, and was the actual hamlet of Soloma, to the west of the Queché. (65 CB)

⁵¹"Row of Hills". (66 GR)

⁵²"Row of Pines". (67 GR)

⁵³Nimche Paraveno, Cabrakan: Nimche: "Great forest". In regard to the second name it has been impossible to find an interpretation of Paraveno, a word that doesn't seem to be Queché. Cabrakan, "Great giant of the earth" serves to designate the earthquakes or the gods who cause them. (68 GR)

⁵⁴Panchalib: "In the river bend", of the river of the mountain. Perhaps it was an ancient town of the Oga, "the nocturnals"(or lonely ones). A river bank town of the Chixsoy or of the Lacandón to the west. (69 FM)

⁵⁵"Between the giant reeds" (uncertain translation, 70 FM).

⁵⁶The names of the colors are frequently employed as superlatives. A passage from the Anales de los Xahil makes me believe that such in this text as in the present, "yellow" signifies the relationship between the high dignitaries and their inferiors. Brasseur, who is never moderate in epithets, here translates it as "enraged, passionate, or hot headed". (73 FM)

blood,⁵⁷ the small drum of blood.⁵⁸ The heavens shook, the earth trembled with the great noise, the great excitement of the twelve yellow eagles, the twelve yellow jaguars reunited with the servants of the great warriors. My song was initiated there to the face of the sky, to the face of the earth. "Come, come odious and despicable chief!! Will you be the first whose root, whose trunk I will never sever; this chief of the Chacach, of the Zaman, the Caŭk of Rabinal." Thus did I speak. What would you do, oh chief, since I have not been able to annihilate nor destroy you; since I have only been able to voice my thoughts, to sing before heaven, before earth, remarkable among the stalwarts, Warrior of Rabinal? Speak now in your turn. Heaven and earth be with thee, remarkable among stalwarts, Warrior of Rabinal!

RABINAL WARRIOR

Ah! Valiant warrior; man of the Cavek Queché. Is it thus your voice spoke before heaven and earth? Are these words you have spoken truthful without variance? "A message of summons truly departed from here; truly we were called to the Queché mountains, to the Queché valleys." But certainly it was no crime that we sent to hear him, the Wizard chief, the Jaguar Wizard, when he desired the death, the disappearance of the chief of the Chacach, of the Zaman, of the Caŭk of Rabinal, by those of Ux, by those of Pokoman, here under heaven, above earth. Let us agreeably proceed in order that the chief of the Queché mountains, of the Queché valleys may come with his courage, with his daring. May he come and take possession of the beautiful mountains, of these rich valleys. May he come to plant, come to make his home." Well and good! Let us plant, let us make our homes, there where the sprouts of our good cucumbers crowd together, where the sprouts of our good pumpkins, of our good bean plants are crowded together. Thus spoke our voice to the face of the sky, to the face of the earth.

⁵⁷Latz tun, the great tun of war. The tun (tunkul in Yucatan, teponāztli in Mexico) always much employed, is the great sacred drum. (71 GR)

⁵⁸Lotz gohom: the small war drum. The gohom (Tlapam-huehuētl of the Mexicans) is the small drum. (72 GR)

That is why you provoked us needlessly, why you threatened us in vain, between the heavens and the earth. Thank heavens, thank earth you have come to present yourself before our walls, our fortress. That is why we will accept the challenge: we will accept the strife; we will fight the Uxab and the Pokoman. Consequently I will instruct you as to the mission of the summons. Go. Run hard by the Royal Road where the bird drinks in the water;⁵⁹ to the place called Cholochoic-Zakchun.⁶⁰ But do not give in to those who would take you to the chiefs of the Uxab and the Pokoman. Do not relinquish the struggle in their mountains, in their valleys. Annihilate them! Destroy them! Between the heavens and the earth.

Thus spoke my voice. But in truth it was not necessary that you should see, that you should look at the Ux, at the Pokoman, because they were transformed into flies, into butterflies, into an army of ants, large and small; and only their columns and files showed brightly ascending the slopes of the mountain called Equempek Gamahal.⁶¹ Then I directed my eyes and my gaze toward the heavens and toward the earth; and in that very moment I saw the Ux, the Pokoman; my heart sank, my soul was hurt seeing you, observing that you had agreed to that which those of Uxab, those of Pokoman desired. Then I hurled my war-cry, my challenge against you: Eh! Eh! valiant warrior, man of the Cavek Queché: Why do you move so easily among the Uxab and the Pokoman in their mountains, in their valleys? Heaven and earth hear me! Certainly they expected in our mountains, in our valleys that you would hurl your challenge, your war-cry against the Ux, against the Pokoman. How have you replied now? With your shout of defiance? With your war-cry against those of Ux, those of Pokoman, those who had hurled back your challenge, your war-cry? Ah! Ah! Let them return quickly, those chiefs of Uxab, those chiefs of Pokoman to listen to my commands here between heaven and earth."

Thus spoke your voice. Then the chiefs of the Uxab, the chiefs of the Pokoman answered you: "Eh, valiant

⁵⁹Here, probably, the bird is the eagle. A place where the eagle drinks, meant a very high place, crossed only by a mountain road. (75 GR)

⁶⁰"Prepared white lime". (76 GR)

⁶¹"Beneath the cavern of the dry yellow ear".
(78 FM)



warrior, man of the Cavek Queché, abandon this struggle in our mountains, in our valleys. Weren't we born here, with our children, our sons, where the black clouds, the white clouds come down, where the cold tortures, where the ice tortures, where there is nothing to envy. Far away, with my children, my sons, are found the branches, the green branches, the yellow cacao for the market; the fine yellow cacao, the gold, the silver, the embroideries, the golden jewelry. Here are my children; here are my sons; there, if they want to work, suffering does not exist for them, real or relative; even while you stand there, a load of cacao is arriving to be purchased, a load of fine cacao.⁶² For they are embroiderers, sculptors and goldsmiths and it will be so forever. But consider your children, look at the sons of the most remarkable one among the stalwarts, of the Warrior of Rabinal. With great pain, with great suffering they can barely subsist, and it will be thus forever. One of their legs is in front, another leg behind; there are only cripples and the one armed;⁶³ the nephews, the grandsons of the most remarkable among the stalwarts, of the Warrior of Rabinal, from dawn to dusk, forever." This he answered to the challenge, the war-cry of those of Ux, of those of Pokoman, because of the fury which devoured their hearts. And you replied to them: "Eh, eh! Chiefs of Uxab ah, chiefs of Pokoman! Did your voices speak thus before heaven, before earth? In that which concerns those children, those sons of the Warrior of Rabinal, they do not blush over the means of their existence, their subsistence and their living is under the wide sky, at the four corners of the earth, from the peaks of the earth, to the sides of the mountains; because they are vigorous, because they are brave and valorous. Your children, your sons, on the contrary, are lost, dispersed; they come and they go; they move in long lines; returning to their mountains, to their valleys. Perhaps from there only one or two may return to their walls, to their fortress, because they are annihilated, they are pursued while they search for

⁶²"My administrators, my subjects, have a life so much easier and happier containing so much that the country gives them (plants and minerals) they must add up the great commercial profits of their artistic industries; fortune comes while they sleep." (80 GR)

⁶³Your officials, your subjects, have no industry, they are very poor; they are always ready to leave, to migrate, no matter where, to escape their misery. (82 GR)

their food, their source of living. Among the children, the sons of the valiant one, of the most remarkable warrior among the stalwarts, of the great Warrior of Rabinal, if one or two go away, then one or two come back to your walls, to your fortress." Thus spoke your voice to the chiefs of Uxab and Pokoman.

But this is what my voice said: Eh, eh! Courageous warrior, man of the Cavek Queché. The challenge, the war-cry hurled by the Ux, by the Pokoman has been heard. Heaven and earth hear me! It was certain that they would be so enraged on account of having to abandon their places between the heaven and the earth to our children, our sons. It was certain that they could not take possession of those beautiful mountains, of those smiling valleys. It is a miracle that you have come to end so many days and so many nights under heaven, above earth; that you have come to shatter the point of your arrow, the hardness of your shield; that you have come to break the force of your arms, the instrument of your power. You have obtained nothing and it is certain that you have taken possession of nothing under heaven, above earth. You know where the limits of your land were which forms a junction at the sides of the mountains, at the start of the plains. It is also certain that I am the valiant one, the great warrior, remarkable among the stalwarts, the Warrior of Rabinal, who reigns constantly here with my children, with my sons, here between heaven and earth. Thus speaks my voice to the face of the sky, to the face of the earth. Heaven and earth be with you, valiant warrior, man of the Cavek Queché!

QUECHÉ WARRIOR

Ah! Ah! Hear me, heaven and earth! It is certain that I have not managed to take possession here, under heaven, above earth, of these beautiful mountains, of these smiling valleys. Was it useless, in vain, that I came here to conclude so many days, so many nights under heaven, above earth? My courage, my bravery, therefore, have they served me naught? Heaven and earth hear me! Now let us go there, to my mountains, to my valleys. Thus speaks my voice before heaven, before earth. I walked along the sides of the mountain, at the start of the plain; there, on the point which is called Camba,⁶⁴ I placed my landmarks and here my voice spoke to the face of the sky, to

⁶⁴Camba: Neighboring place to the prairie of Rabinal. (CB)

the face of the earth. Could I not call the chief of Camba to come out, in order to crush him under my sandals,⁶⁵ to place my sandals on the heads of the children, the heads of the sons of the most remarkable among the stalwarts, of the great Warrior of Rabinal. Thus my heart speaks its complaint. But even if heaven and the earth would punish me, my voice would still say: I went away from there again to place my landmarks at the peak of the mountain and of the plain of Zaktihel;⁶⁶ and I hurled my challenge, my war-cry. Ah hear me heaven and earth! Is it true that I have taken possession of nothing here under heaven, above earth? From there I came down immediately to the mouth of the river and then I saw and considered the freshly sown lands; the lands of the yellow corn, of the yellow beans, of the white beans, of the birds with talons. My voice then said this, before heaven, before earth: Can I not carry away a little of this freshly sown earth, with the help of the son of my arrow, the son of my shield? Then I took possession by imprinting my sandals there in the freshly sown earth. From there I went immediately to plant my markers over the Xtincuran point, in front of Ximbalha, called thus.⁶⁷ I went from there, too: I went to plant my markers at the point called Quezentun;⁶⁸ there I sang out because of the anguish in my heart, during thirteen times twenty days, thirteen times twenty nights,⁶⁹ because I hadn't succeeded in taking possession, between heaven and earth, of these beautiful mountains, of these smiling valleys. Thus spoke my voice before heaven and earth: Alas heaven, and earth! Hear me! Is it true that I have succeeded in

⁶⁵"To conquer, to surrender, to submit to vassalage, to tribute." (85 FM)

⁶⁶Zaktihel: "Limestone". Near the plain of Rabinal. (CB)

⁶⁷Neighboring localities near the plain of Rabinal. (CB)

⁶⁸A terrace covered with ruins less than two leagues from Rabinal, cited in the Quezentun legends. (CB) (91 FM)

⁶⁹The ritual period of the moveable feasts. Although the text didn't give the reason why the activity lasted this long, it is an interesting fact: it shows, once more, the intimate relation of religion and magic with war. (92 GR)

taking possession of nothing here under heaven, above earth; that I came uselessly, in vain, to waste many days, many nights. Thus spoke my voice before heaven and earth. I came, consequently, to the end of my strength, the end of my energy; my valor, my daring, no longer served me. My voice said this to the face of the sky, to the face of the earth. I headed for our mountains, our valleys. My heart now told me to run from mountainside to mountainside, to the side of the valleys; thus spoke my voice. Heaven and earth be with thee, most remarkable among stalwarts, Warrior of Rabinal!

RABINAL WARRIOR

Ah! Valiant one, warrior, man of the Cavek Queché. My children! Why did you carry off my children, my sons? You had nothing to do with them. Leave them in their mountains, in their valleys. If you don't leave them alone I will upset and overturn the earth and the sky. Thus said my challenge. For I had gone away; I was occupied with placing the landmarks of the earth there at the point called Mucutzunun,⁷⁰ when you kidnapped the white children, my noble sons, at the point of your arrow, by the force of your shield, without your heart caring to hear my challenge, my war-cry. Then I ran from mountainside to mountainside, to the sides of the valleys and put my markers on the place called Panahachel.⁷¹ There I hurled my challenge, my war-cry against you. Only then and there did you release these beautiful children, the white sons, there at the Great Woods of Cabrakan Paraveno, called thus, at just a short distance from the Queché mountains, from the Queché valleys. From there they returned, they ran from mountainside to mountainside, to the sides of the valleys; with empty bellies, with hollow stomachs, they returned. Nevertheless, they did not return to their walls, to their fortresses, but they settled near the place called Panamaka.⁷² Then you

⁷⁰Buried "hummingbirds or hidden spears". Further off from the city of Salamá. (94 CB and FM)

⁷¹It is as yet actually the town of Panahachel "in the matazanas (possibly "place of magic") near the lake of the same name, also called Lake Atitlán (more precisely Atitán "place of the magic ancestral grandmother"). (95 CB and FM)

⁷²Perhaps it may have been the actual Tzacualpa, the Pamaca of the Popol Vuh in the mountains to the north-east that Ximénez translated as "In the hot Water". (97 CB)

encountered my governor, my ruler, there at the fountain called the Bath of Tohil.⁷³ Was I not absent, was I not on the point of placing the landmarks in the earth, there in Tzamha,⁷⁴ before the place called Quiluyach Abah?⁷⁵ Then once more I turned my eyes, my contemplation, toward the heavens and the earth. Great was the horizon over which the clouds ran, the horizon where the mists roll, before the high walls of the vast fortress. There I hurled my challenge, my war-cry, at the face of the sky, to the face of the earth.

My voice spoke thusly: Eh, eh, valiant one, stalwart, man of the Cavek Queché! Why did you come inside the vast walls, inside the vast fortress to kidnap my governor, my father? You had nothing to do with him. Permit him, then, to return inside his vast walls, inside his palace! Thus spoke my voice; but your heart was not touched by hearing my challenge, my war-cry. My voice also said: If you do not release my governor, my ruler, may heaven permit, may the earth permit, that I overturn and upset the earth and the sky. May the heavens run over, may the earth run over. Thus spoke my voice. But your heart was not disturbed hearing my challenge, my war-cry. Then I climbed up and down the slopes of the mountains, to the flat plains, and I went to place my landmarks among the vast walls, within the vast fortress. But I saw only the horizon where the clouds moved, the horizon where the mists rolled by constantly rising to the vision of the vast walls of the palace. The cicada and the cricket alone sang; they alone interrupted the silence of those vast walls, of those abandoned buildings. But my soul grew desolate, my heart grew faint, and I ran anew along the sides of the mountains and the sides of the valleys until I arrived at the mountains and valleys of the Queché; until I succeeded in finding my governor, my ruler, walled up behind and in front with stone and lime. I hurled myself at it with the son of my arrow, and the strength of my shield, my stranger's mace, my stranger's axe, my valor, my daring. It was thus, alone, that I saw my governor again, my ruler imprisoned completely alone in the stone

⁷³Tohil, principal tribal god of the Quechés. Thermal fountains, at six leagues to the southwest of Cubulco. (CB)

⁷⁴"Home of the Point". (99 GR)

⁷⁵"Rocas enfrentadas" (facing the cliffs). Near the town of San Raimundo, eight leagues from Guatemala. (CB)

and lime.⁷⁶ I carried him away from there in my arms by the son of my arrow, by the strength of my shield. For truly, if I had not been there, you would have severed the root, the trunk of my governor, my ruler, among the mountains and valleys of the Queché. That is how I came to see him again, with the help of the point of my arrow, by the force of my shield, and I led my governor, my ruler inside the walls of the palace. Didn't you destroy two, three towns; the cities with narrow streets of Balamvac⁷⁷ whose sandy soil resounds with footsteps; of Chi-Calca-raxah⁷⁸ of Chi-Cunu,⁷⁹ of Chi-Gozibal-Tagah-Tulul⁸⁰ called thus? When will your heart cease this mad drive toward valor and daring? But you will pay for it, under heaven, above earth. I will announce the news of your presence inside the high walls of the vast fortress, to my governor, to my ruler. That is why you have said your last goodbye to your mountains, to your valleys, because here your root and your trunk will be severed, here between the heavens and the earth. It will truly be thus. For this reason I will not speak abundant words. Heaven and earth be with thee, man of the Cavek-Queché!

QUECHÉ WARRIOR

Eh, valiant one, stalwart, Warrior of Rabinal! Is it thus that your voice speaks to the face of the sky, to the face of the earth? I will not change the words you have spoken to the face of the sky, to the face of the earth, before my mouth and before my face. Without

⁷⁶Captive. It doesn't seem that Middle America had known our prisons, places of punishment, of long detention. In the buildings to which one can apply this name, the captives were openly confined until the day on which they were to be sacrificed. (102 FM)

⁷⁷"The Sparrow-hawk Wizard". Vac, the Sparrow-hawk, is the messenger of the Huracán "Giant Masters", great gods of the lightning, of the fire, of the sky. (104 GR)

⁷⁸"On the shore of the green reeds". (105 GR)

⁷⁹"The doctors" or "the obscenities" (or male organs). (106 GR and FM)

⁸⁰valley full of herbs and of red zapotillos (fruit). (107 GR)

doubt it is I who have transgressed in obeying the orders of our governor, our ruler. "They provoked us, they challenged us", had said the voice of our governor, of our ruler, the chief of Teken Toh,⁸¹ the chief of Teken Tihax,⁸² Gumarmachi,⁸³ and Taktazib,⁸⁴ Taktazimah⁸⁵ Cuxuma Ah,⁸⁶ of Cuxuma Cho,⁸⁷ of Cuxuma Zivan,⁸⁸ of Cuxuma Cab,⁸⁹ of Cuxuma Tziquin.⁹⁰ These are the names, the lips, the eyes of our governor, of our ruler! "Come then, you others. The twelve bold ones, the warriors; come to listen to the orders." This was the voice which spoke to them at the beginning; and later to you. In truth this is the cause of the misery, the destruction, the disorder which existed in the rooms of the great fortress. Now on the vast walls, in the vast fortress there are only nine or ten white sons inside the vast walls of the fortress.⁹¹ This was the voice which spoke to them and to you. It is because I was unable to conquer anything here; and because of the envy which raged in my heart, I forced the white children to come back, I forced the white sons to return while they were distracted in Iximché⁹² looking for the beehives of

81"Angry rains". (108 FM)

82"Heaped flints". (109 FM)

83"Carved gourds". (110 FM)

84"Young forests". (111 FM)

85"Rows of pillars". (112 FM)

86"Clusters of reeds". (113 FM)

87"Clusters of lakes". (114 FM)

88"Clusters of narrow valleys". (115 FM)

89"Clusters of soil". (116 FM)

90"Clusters of birds (eagles)". (117 FM)

91Bad administration had caused the ruin; the vassals dispersed to great distances and the faithful and loyal departed. (119 GR)

92Iximché: "Bamboo of the big kind". (CB)
 "Species of tree called "Ramón", seemed to the brasimium, Brinton pointed out. Iximché is also the name of the city (Antigua, Guatemala) of the Cakchiqueles. (120 FM)

yellow honey, of green honey. When I saw them, my voice said before heaven, before earth: "Would I not be able to kidnap those white children, those white sons, in order to place them within my mountains, my valleys?" My voice said: "I will conduct them before my governor, my ruler, to the Queché mountains, to the Queché valley." And my voice replied: "Here then is something of these freshly plowed lands which have already born fruit of the white open ears, of the yellow beans, of the white beans."

From there I returned toward the place called Pan Cakil⁹³ because my heart went out to the white children, to the white sons. For this reason, then, you hurled your challenge, your war-cry. Then my heart, my heart groaned at hearing your challenge, your war-cry. It was for this that you came to Panahachel, to hurl your cry. But immediately I let them go free, there in the Great Wood, in the place called Cabrakan Pan-Araveno. The white children, the white sons had only a short way to go before they arrived at my mountains, at my valleys, at the Queché mountains, at the Queché valleys. Thus returned the white children, the white sons, with dry and swollen stomachs. They continued the march by the sides of the mountains, by the sides of the valleys. Nevertheless, they did not get as far as their walls, their fortress; they approached, instead, the place called Panamaka. Truly it was I who transgressed when I kidnapped your governor, your ruler there in the place of the baths of Tohil; for while he was bathing himself I kidnapped him, by the strength of my arrow and of my shield. I brought him to my mountains, to my valleys: to the Queché mountains, Queché valleys because of the envy that raged in my heart, because I had not been able to take possession of anything between the heavens and the earth. Thus did I confine him, then, in the walls of lime and stone; I buried him behind the lime, the stone. Without doubt it is I who transgressed; in your own words you said: "You destroyed two or three towns; the deeply ravined cities of Balamvac, where the sandy soil resounds with footsteps; of Chi-Calcaraxah, of Chi-Cunu, of Chi-Gozibal-Tagah-Tulul, called thus." Certainly I transgressed then, because of the envy that consumed my heart, and here I will pay for it now under heaven, above earth. There are no other words in my mouth, in my heart. Only the squirrel, only the bird, here before my eyes, will perhaps have something to sing, mighty chief! Did not your voice also say: "I will

⁹³"In the Red (or in the fire)". (121 FM)

announce the news of your presence to the face of my governor, my ruler, within the high walls of the vast fortress? You have said your last goodbye to your mountains, to your valleys, because here we will sever your root, your trunk, here beneath the heavens, above the earth?" Thus spoke your voice.

But could we not proceed agreeably and honestly as brothers? I would adorn you; I would decorate you with my gold, with my silver, with the son of my arrow, with the strength of my shield, with my stranger's mace, with my stranger's axe, with all that I possess, even with my sandals. I would work here, I would serve you and your children as your son, here beneath the heavens, above earth, as supreme sign that you will let me return to my mountains, to my valleys. Thus speaks my voice before heaven and earth. Heaven and earth be with thee, valiant warrior, remarkable among the stalwarts, great Warrior of Rabinal!

RABINAL WARRIOR

Ah, valiant warrior, man of the Cavek Queché! Didn't your voice say before heaven, before earth: "Could I not adorn you, and decorate you, with my gold, with my silver, with the son of my arrow, with the son of my shield, with all that I possess, even with my sandals; to work here, to serve, under heaven, above earth?" Thus spoke your voice. But what then would I go to say to the face of my governor, of my ruler? That a valiant warrior had fought us behind the vast walls, the vast fortress, for thirteen times twenty days, thirteen times twenty nights; so that our sleep was without rest or repose. And then, suddenly, I am adorned, I am decorated by his gold, with his silver, with his stranger's mace, with his stranger's axe, with all that he possessed, even his sandals. And I would say to the face of my governor, of my ruler, that I had then allowed this warrior, following this battle, to return to his mountains, to his valleys! Could I say this to the face of my governor, to the face of my ruler? I am already well provided for; I am heaped with gifts from my governor, my ruler; I already have gold and silver; I have the son of my arrow, the son of my shield, my stranger's mace, my stranger's axe; I am well provided for, I am already heaped with gifts from my governor, the ruler on those vast walls, of the vast fortress. For this reason I will announce the news of your presence inside the walls of his vast fortress, to the face of my governor, of my ruler.

If my governor, my ruler, tells me to let you depart to your mountains, to your valleys, yes, if my governor says it, then I will allow you to go to your

mountains, to your valleys; I will permit you to leave. But if my governor, my ruler says: "Bring him before my lips, before my eyes, in order that I may see that his face is that of a valiant one, of a warrior; if my governor, my ruler, says that, I will take you to appear before him. Thus speaks my voice before heaven and earth. Heaven and earth be with thee, valiant one, stalwart, man of the Cavek Queché!

QUECHÉ WARRIOR

Very well, so be it, valiant one, stalwart, great Warrior of Rabinal! If you announce the news of my presence to the face of your governor inside the vast walls of his vast fortress, announce me now. Heaven and earth be with thee, most remarkable among the stalwart ones, Warrior of Rabinal!

Scene Two

(Before the chief Hobtoah, who occupies a low seat, with the back of the seat adorned with ancient workings. Near him, his wife, surrounded by slaves, servants, warriors, eagles and jaguars.)

RABINAL WARRIOR

I salute you, oh King. I salute you, oh Queen.⁹⁴
I give thanks to heaven, I give thanks to earth that you are here, spreading the shadow of your protection, your shelter, under the awning of green feathers, within the vast walls of this vast fortress. Since I am a valiant one, a stalwart, and since I have arrived before your lips and before your face, inside the great buildings of the fortress; in the same manner I have captured another valiant one, a stalwart, who confronted us for thirteen times twenty days, for thirteen times twenty nights, behind the high walls of the fortress, where our sleep was without rest or repose. Heaven has delivered him to me, earth delivered him bound to me, cast down by the son of my arrow, by the force of my shield. I have tied him, I have bound him, with my strong cord, with my strong rope, with my stranger's mace, with my stranger's axe, with my net, with my manacles of chisled bone, with my magic herbs. Likewise, I made his lips declare themselves without murmur or protest. Soon this valiant warrior spoke the names of his mountains, of his valleys, to my face, to me, the valiant one, the hero.

It was this valiant one, this warrior, who imitated the cry of the coyote, who imitated the cry of the fox, who imitated the cry of the weasel, behind the vast walls of the fortress, in order to bring forth, in order to provoke the white children, the white sons. It was this valiant one, this stalwart, who destroyed nine or ten white children, white sons. Also it was this valiant one who kidnapped you in the baths. It was this valiant warrior who laid waste two or three towns; the deeply

⁹⁴Brasseur uses Roi and Reine; Monterde uses Jefe (chief) and Señora (Mrs.).

ravined city called Balamvac, where the sandy soil resounds with footsteps. Will not the desire of your heart put an end to this bravery, to this audacity? Have we not received messages from our governors, our rulers, each one the governor of his walls, of his fortresses, saying that he must pay for his misdeeds: the chief of Teken Toh, the chief of Teken Tihax, Gumar-machi Tactazib, Tactazimah, Cuxama Ah, Cuxuma Zivan, Cuxuma Cab, Cuxuma Tziquin? These are their names, their lips, their faces. Now he comes to pay the penalty beneath the heavens, above the earth. Here we will sever his roots, his trunk; here between the heavens and the earth, oh my governor, chief Hobtoh.

CHIEF HOBTOH

My valiant one, my stalwart! Thanks be to heaven, thanks be to earth that you have arrived at the walls of the vast fortress, before my lips, before my face, before me, your governor, I, chief Hobtoh. Consequently, I give thanks to the heavens, thanks to earth for what heaven has given you; that the earth has delivered to you this valiant one, this stalwart; that he was hurled onto the son of your arrow, before the force of your shield; that you have conquered him; that you have bound up this valiant one, this stalwart. Now let him be brought before my lips and my face that I may see just how brave, how heroic are his lips, his face. But let him make no outcry, and let him make no commotion when he arrives at the entrance to the great fortress; that way he will be esteemed, he will be admired⁹⁵ within the vast walls of the fortress. For there will be found his twelve brothers, his twelve kinsmen, guardians of the treasures, guardians of the precious stones. Their lips, their faces, are not complete; something is missing. Perhaps he has come to complete their number in the vast walls, in the vast fortress. Here also there are twelve strong eagles and jaguars; their number too is not complete; perhaps this valiant one, perhaps this stalwart has come to complete them. Here there are great benches of precious metals and silver thrones; there are some where one may be seated; there are others where one may not be seated: perhaps this valiant one, this stalwart, has come to seat himself in those. Here there are twelve drinks, twelve

⁹⁵The dignified and heroic attitude of the captive who is going to be sacrificed was liked and admired.
(126 GR)

intoxicating liquors called Waiting-Hummingbird: Sweet drinks, refreshing, light-hearted, pleasing, attractive, appealing; of which one drinks before sleeping, here in the vast walls of the fortress, the chief's liqueurs; perhaps this valiant one came to drink them.⁹⁶ Here there are very fine and well woven materials; brilliant, splendid, the work of my mother,⁹⁷ of my wife; for this splendid work of my mother, of my wife, perhaps this valiant one, this stalwart, intends to be the first wearer of its delicateness. Also here is the Mother of the Feathers--Precious Emerald, brought from Tzam-Gam-Carchag; perhaps this valiant one, perhaps this stalwart intends to be the first to see her lips, her face; perhaps he came to dance with her, within the vast walls of this vast fortress. Perhaps this valiant one came in order to become the clan's son-in-law,⁹⁸ brother-in-law of the clan in the vast walls in the vast fortress. Let us see then if he is obedient, if he is modest, if he humbles himself, if he bows his face on entering. Thus says my voice before heaven, before earth! Heaven and earth be with thee, remarkable among the stalwarts.

RABINAL WARRIOR

Chief Hobtoch, give me your blessing, before heaven, before earth. My voice speaks thusly: Here is my strength, my bravery, that you have given me, that you have affirmed to my lips, to my face. I will leave here my arrow, my shield. Keep them, then; guard them in

⁹⁶Probably this contains an ironic threat. In effect, these liquors were reserved for the stalwarts of the tribe; but they were not denied to the conquered enemies before they were executed. (129 GR)

⁹⁷"Mother", a title of great respect without the meaning of any true filial relationship. (130 GR)
As are other blood titles: Queché and Rabinal call each other "brothers" and "father". (RL)

⁹⁸In Guatemala, as in Mexico and in many other regions of Middle America and of the old world, a captive warrior, if he was of great bravery, at times was able to escape death when the tribe who had captured him adopted him. It is evident that one of the major reasons, even conditions, of this adoption was his marriage with someone of the tribe. By being married into one of the clans one became son-in-law or father-in-law of the different age groups of the other clans. (132 GR)

your covered house, in your arsenal; let them rest there; I, too, will rest because when we should have been sleeping, there was no rest for us because of him. Consequently, I leave them with you, inside the walls of this vast fortress. Thus speaks my voice before heaven, before earth. Heaven and earth be with thee, my governor, my ruler, chief Hobtoh!

CHIEF HOBTOH

My valiant one, my warrior, does not your voice say this before heaven, before earth?: "Here is my strength, here is my daring; here is my arrow, here is my shield, that you have given me, that you had affirmed before my lips, to my face. I deliver them unto you, then, in order that you may keep them; in order that you may guard them in the vast walls, in the vast fortress, in your covered house, in your arsenal." Is this not what your voice said? But how will I keep them, how will I guard them in their covered house, in their arsenal? What weapons will you have, then, to protect us against those who might come and be seen at the head of the lands⁹⁹ at the feet of our lands?⁹⁹ What weapons, then, would you have to protect our children, our sons, when they go out from these lands to seek their nourishment in the four corners, in the four extremities. Here, once again and one last time, you must take your valor, your daring, your arrow, your shield, that I here give to you, my valiant one, my stalwart, remarkable among warriors, great Warrior of Rabinal. Heaven and earth be with thee.

RABINAL WARRIOR

Very well! Here, then, I will take back my vigor, my bravery, that you have given me; that you have entrusted to me before my lips, to my face. Thus I will take them once again and one last time. Thus speaks my voice to the face of the sky, to the face of the earth. This is why I

⁹⁹"At the head of the lands, at the feet of the lands" is to say, at the limits of the lands. In all of the countries whose principal wealth is agriculture, the well marked demarkations of the cultivable lands are of imperious necessity very frequently indicated in other texts. Therefore, to show oneself at the feet or the head of the land of a tribe, without previous authorization, constitutes a violation of territory--a casus belli.
(133 GR)

will leave you for a moment inside the high walls of your palace. Heaven and earth be with thee my governor, my ruler, chief Hobtoho.

CHIEF HOBTOH

It is well, my valiant one, my stalwart! Be careful: do not fall into some trap nor be wounded my valiant one, my stalwart, remarkable among the warriors, great Warrior of Rabinal! Heaven and earth be with thee!

Scene Three

RABINAL WARRIOR

(He frees the Queché Warrior of the ties that fastened him to the tree.)

Greetings! Valiant warrior, man of the Cavek Queché. I have returned having announced you within the walls of the vast fortress, before the face of my governor, my ruler.

My governor, my ruler, ordered me, brave warrior, to say to you: "Let him make no uproar and let him cause no commotion when he arrives at the entrance of the vast walls, of the vast fortress, here below heaven, above earth; but let him humble himself, let him bow his head; that way he will be esteemed, he will be admired within the walls of the vast fortress, for the interior of the vast walls, of the vast fortress will already be crowded. Already there are twelve of his brothers, twelve of his kinsmen: guardians of the treasures, guardians of the precious stones. Their lips and their faces are not complete; perhaps that stalwart comes to complete this group. There are also twelve strong eagles and jaguars. Their number too is not complete; perhaps that valiant one, that stalwart, comes to complete one or the other. Also there are benches of precious metals and silver thrones; perhaps that valiant one, that stalwart comes to sit in them. Here, also, is the Mother of the Feathers, Precious Emerald, who comes from Tzam-Gam-Carchag. Her lips are inviolate; her face has not been touched: perhaps this valiant one, perhaps this stalwart comes in order to take the first taste of her lips, her face. There are also twelve kinds of intoxicating liquors, twelve delicious poisons, cool and sparkling: drinks of the chieftain who rules within the walls of the vast fortress; perhaps this valiant one, perhaps this stalwart comes to drink them. There are also very fine and well woven materials: brilliant, resplendent, the work of my mother, of my wife; perhaps this valiant one, perhaps this stalwart, comes to use them first. Will he not also come like my people's son-in-law, brother-in-law of my people, here within the high building of the vast fortress?" Thus said the voice of my governor, my ruler.

I come then, to warn you against making an uproar, from causing a commotion when you arrive at the entrance of the high walls, of the great palace; I come to warn you that you should bow down, that you should kneel, when you enter the presence of my governor, my ruler, the grandfather, the chief Hobtoh. Thus speaks my voice before heaven, before earth. Our conversation need continue no further. Heaven and earth be with thee, man of the Cavek Queché!

QUECHÉ WARRIOR

Eh! Valiant one, Stalwart, great Warrior of Rabinal! Does not your voice speak thusly before heaven and earth? "I have conveyed the news of your presence to my governor, before my ruler, on the vast walls of the vast fortress." Thus spoke your voice: "For this reason I come to warn you, valiant one, stalwart. Bring him so that he may appear before my lips, before my face, on the vast walls, in the vast fortress; so that I can see in his lips, so that I can see on his face if he is brave, if he is a valiant warrior. Go to warn him to make no uproar, to cause no commotion when he comes before my lips, before my face; let him humble himself, let him bow his head; because if he is a valiant one, a stalwart, he should be submissive and humble. For here he will be esteemed and honored, here within the walls of the great fortress. Thus spoke my governor, my ruler."

Did not your voice say this? Come, come! Would I be a hero, would I be a stalwart, if I were to humble myself, if I bowed my head? Here you see how I will humble myself: here, with my arrow; here, with my shield; here, with my stranger's mace; here, with my stranger's axe; that is how I will be humble, how I will bow when I enter the gates of the fortress, of the great palace. If heaven and earth permit I will demolish the grandeur and the majesty of your governor, your ruler. If heaven and earth permit, I will strike with my fist those lips and that mouth, within the great fortress and the great palace, and you, take some of those injuries first! You valiant warrior!

(On saying these words he approaches and menaces the Warrior of Rabinal.)

IXOK-MUN

(Interposing himself between them)

Stop, valiant warrior, man of the Cavek-Queché, do not kill my valiant one, my stalwart, the most remarkable among the warriors, the great Warrior of Rabinal!

Scene Four

QUECHÉ WARRIOR

(Advancing beofre the chief Hobtoth.)

I salute you, warrior! I am he who has just arrived at the entrance of the great fortress, at the entrance to the great palace, where you extend over all your shadel¹⁰⁰ and your majesty. I am he whose presence was announced to your lips, to your face. I am a valiant warrior, a stalwart, to whom your valiant warrior, your stalwart, the great Warrior of Rabinal, came to hurl his challenge, his war-cry, to my lips, to my face.

He said: "I have announced the news of your presence to the face of my governor, to my father, within the vast walls of the vast fortress. The voice of my governor, of my ruler spoke thusly: Bring this valiant one, this stalwart, before my lips, before my face, in order that I may see on his lips, in order that I may see in his face, how valiant he is, how great a warrior he is. Advise this valiant one, this stalwart, that he must make no uproar, that he must not raise a commotion, that he should humble himself, that he should bow his head when he enters the great fortress, when he enters the great palace." This your great warrior said to my mouth, to my face.

Well then? I am a valiant one, I am a warrior, and if I must humble myself, bow my head and bend my knee, then this is what I will humble myself with: here is my arrow, here is my shield with which I will destroy your splendor and your glory; with which I will strike your mouth and your lips; that is how you will be tested, mighty chief!

(Brandishing his weapons toward Hobtoth.)

¹⁰⁰In the hot countries one of the principal symbols of the chiefs who were obliged more than others to sit in the open air was the parasol or sunshade (see Fig. 35). The number of his "shade carriers" matched the rank or degree of his dignity. (136 GR)

IXOK-MUN

Valiant warrior, man of the Cavek-Queché, do not attempt to kill my governor, my ruler, chief Hobtoh, within the vast walls of his great fortress wherein we stand!

QUECHÉ WARRIOR

Command then, that they prepare my bench, my throne, because thus it was in my mountains, in my valleys, that my destiny was celebrated, that the day of my birth was celebrated. There I have my bench, there I have my seat. It is not I who will be exposed to the wind; it is not I who will be exposed to the cold. Thus speaks my voice to the face of the sky, to the face of the earth. Heaven and earth be with thee, chief Hobtoh!

CHIEF HOBTOH

Valiant one, stalwart, man of the Cavek Queché: I thank heaven and earth that you have arrived within the vast walls of the vast fortress where I extend forth my shade and my majesty, I the grandfather, the chief Hobtoh. Speak then. Reveal why you imitated the cry of the coyote, the cry of the fox, the cry of the weasel beyond the vast walls, beyond the vast fortress, in order to provoke, in order to bring forth my white children, my white sons, in order to bring them outside the vast walls, the vast fortress, in Iximchi; in order to try to find, to discover the yellow honey; the green honey of the bees, the nourishment that was mine, the grandfather, the chief Hobtoh, on the vast walls, in the vast fortress?

You were also the one who kidnapped the nine or ten noble children, the white sons who were about to be taken to the Queché mountains, to the Queché valleys, if my boldness, my bravery hadn't been found vigilant; because there you would have severed the root, the trunk of these noble children, of these white sons.

You came also to kidnap me there at the baths of Tohil. There I was seized by the son of your arrow, the strength of your shield. You shut me up among the stone and lime walls, among the Queché mountains, among the Queché valleys; there you would have finished by severing my root, my trunk in the Queché mountains and valleys. But my valiant one, my stalwart, the most remarkable among the stalwarts, the great Warrior of Rabinal, freed me from there, pulled me out of there, by the strength in his arrow and in his shield. Had it not been for my valiant one, my stalwart, you would have certainly severed my root, my trunk. Thus he again brought me to the vast walls, to the vast fortress.

You also laid waste two, three towns; the deeply ravined cities of Balamvac, where the sandy soil resounds under the footsteps; of Calcaraxah, Gunu, Gozibal-Tagah-Tulal, called thus.

When will the unrestrained desire of your heart, your determination, your boldness cease to dominate you? When will you allow them to act, when will you allow them to move. Did not this determination, this daring remain buried, concealed, in Cotom, in Tikiram, in Belcheh, in Belehe Chumay? Was not this determination, this daring, buried, concealed, by us, the governors, by us the rulers in each of the walls of the fortress? But you will pay for these misdeeds here between heaven and earth. You have said your last goodbye to your mountains, to your valleys, because here you will die, you will perish, under heaven, above earth. Heaven and earth be with thee, man of the Cavek Queché!

QUECHÉ WARRIOR

Chief Hobtoh, with your permission before heaven, before earth. True are the words, the opinions that you have expressed before heaven, before earth; for truly it is I who have transgressed. Your voice also said: "Haven't you called to and provoked the white children, the white sons, in order to bring them out to seek, to discover the yellow honey, the green honey of the bees, nourishment for my table, the grandfather, chief Hobtoh, inside the walls of the vast fortress?" Thus spoke your voice. Certainly it is I who am the transgressor because of the envy that eats at my heart, because I had not been able to obtain possession of these beautiful mountains, of these beautiful valleys, here between the heaven and the earth. Your voice has also said: "It was you who came to kidnap me; who seized me in the baths of Tohil. Thus said your voice. Again, in truth, it is I who am the transgressor, because of the envy which rends my heart. Your voice also said: "You laid waste two or three towns: the deeply ravined cities of Balamvac, where the sandy soil resounds with footsteps; of Calcaraxah, of Gunu, of Gozibal-Tagah-Tulul." Thus said your voice. Certainly it is I who am the transgressor, because of the envy that consumes my heart, because I haven't been able to obtain possession of the beautiful mountains, of the smiling valleys, here between heaven, above earth. Your voice also said: "Say a last goodbye to your mountains, to your valleys; let your voice speak, because here you will die, here your life will end; here we will sever your root, your trunk; here between the sky and the earth." Thus said your voice. Certainly, I disobeyed your laws, your commands, because of the envy that devours my heart.

If it is necessary that I end my life here, that I meet death here, then this is what I say to your lips, to your face: Now that you are well provisioned, that you are so rich, here in the high walls of the great palace, I will borrow from you some of your table, the chief's drinks called Ixtatzunun; the twelve liquors that intoxicate, the twelve poisons so sweet, so refreshing, so lighthearted, that are drunk before going to bed, within the vast walls of this vast fortress; I will borrow from you the marvels of your mother, of your wife. I will taste them immediately, as supreme symbol of my death,¹⁰¹ of my end, here between the sky and the land. Heaven and earth be with thee, chief Hobtoh!

CHIEF HOBTOH

Valiant warrior, man of the Cavek Queché! Thus spoke your voice before heaven, before earth: "Grant me your food, your drinks. I will borrow them and taste of them now, as the supreme sign of my death, of my end." Then I give them to you. Then I grant them to you. Slaves, serving women, let my food, my drinks, be brought. Let them be given to this valiant one, this stalwart, man of the Cavek Queché, as the supreme sign of his death, of his end, between the sky and the earth.

A SERVANT

It is well, my governor, my ruler. I will give them to this valiant one, to this stalwart, man of the Cavek Queché.

(The servants bring a table loaded with food and drinks.)

QUECHÉ WARRIOR

(Eats and drinks with disdain. Then he goes to dance before the court. Afterwards he returns and says:)

Oh chief Hobtoh! Is this your nourishment, is this your drink? There is little to be said; there is nothing in any of them that tempts my lips or my eyes. If you could taste for an instant in my mountains and valleys the excellence of the beverages, the sweet, refreshing drinks that I taste in my mountains, in my valleys! My

¹⁰¹These concessions, these favors, in articulo mortis converted themselves from then on into symbols of impending sacrifice. (137 FM)

voice says this to the face of the sky, to the face of the earth! Is this your table and your foods?

But there is the goblet from which you drink. It is the skull of my ancestor, the skull of my father,¹⁰² which I see, which I observe! Will you not be able to do the same with my bones, with my skull; to engrave and paint my mouth and my face? In this way, when my children, my sons, leave my mountains, my valleys, to barter five loads of cacao, five loads of fine cacao from my mountains, from my valleys, my children, my sons can say: "Here is the head of our ancestor, of our father." This will my children, my sons, repeat in my memory as long as the sun is in the sky.

Here is also the bone of my arm; let it be the handle of the gourd of precious metals that will resound, that will produce noise on the vast walls, in the vast fortress. Here is also the bone of my leg; let it be the drumstick of the great drum, of the little drum, that will make heaven and earth throb on the vast walls, in the vast fortress.

Here is that which my voice also says: "I will borrow from you the splendid gold brocade, well designed, the work of my mother, of my wife, in order that I may adorn myself within the vast walls of the vast fortress, to the four corners, to the four extremities, as the supreme sign of my death, of my end, here beneath the heavens, above the earth."

CHIEF HOBTOH

Valiant stalwart, man of the Cavek Queché! What do you wish, then, what is it that you ask? No matter what, I will give it to you as the supreme sign of your death, of your end, here beneath the heavens, above the earth. Slaves, servingwomen, bring the golden brocade,

¹⁰²As did other peoples, the Quechés had goblets made of the skulls of famous defeated enemies. The more noble the warrior had been, the more adorned and highly esteemed was the goblet. It was then a sign of glory for a captive to know that his skull would be a goblet, and it is this that our hero ardently demands. Until he petitions that the bones of his arms be made the handle of the instrument of religious and military music formed of a gourd; he demands that the bones of his legs serve as drumsticks to play the war drum. In order to support his high pretensions, he makes pretensions to an antecedent or hereditary right, seeming to recognize the skulls of his forefathers in the goblets that are presented to him.
(138 GR)

the work that you have done in the vast walls, in the vast fortress; let it be given to this valiant one, to this stalwart, as a supreme sign of his death, of his end, here under the heavens, above the earth.

A SERVANT

Very well, my governor, my ruler. I will give this valiant one, this stalwart that which he asks. Valiant one, stalwart, here is the gold brocade you desire, which you asked for. I give it to you, but do not damage it. Do not mistreat it.

(The servant gives Queché Warrior a kind of mantle in which he wraps himself.)

QUECHÉ WARRIOR

You, musicians and drummers, play now a song on my flute, on my drum. Let them play, then, the great melody, the brief melody. Let my stranger's flute, my stranger's drum, my Queché flute, my Queché drum, play the prisoner's dance, the captive's dance of my mountains, of my valleys, in order that it make the sky shake, in order that it make the earth tremble. May our foreheads, our heads be bowed when the beating of our feet echoes off the sun, when we dance, keeping time to the music, beating the ground, with the slaves, with the serving-women, here under heaven, above earth. Heaven and earth be with you, oh musicians, oh drummers!

(He dances in a circle before the court and goes to each corner to hurl his war-cry.)

Oh chief Hobto! With your permission before heaven, before earth. Here you have that which you had lent me, that which you had given to my. I come to return it, to leave it at the entrance of the great fortress, of the vast palace; keep it, guard it in your shaded arch, within the vast walls of the vast palace.

You agreed to my petition, to my desires, before heaven, before earth; and I have worn and shown it in the vast walls, the vast fortress, in the four corners, at the four extremities, as the supreme sign of my death, of my end, here between heaven and earth. But if it is true that you are rich and wealthy, now grant that I borrow the Mother of the Feathers, the Mother of the Little Green Birds, Precious Emerald, brought from Tzam-Gam-Carchag, whose lips are as yet untasted, whose eyes have not yet been touched, in order that I might first taste her mouth, that I might first touch her face, that I might dance with

her, that I might exhibit her in the vast walls, in the vast fortress, in the four corners, at the four sides, as the supreme symbol of my death, of my end, here under heaven, above earth. Heaven and earth be with thee, Chief Hobtoth.

CHIEF HOBTOH

Valiant one, stalwart, man of the Cavek Queché! What do you wish then, what is it that you seek? No matter what, I grant you that which you wish; here is the Mother of the Feathers, the Mother of the Little Green Birds, Precious Emerald, brought from Tzam-Gam-Carchag, whose lips are as yet untasted, whose eyes have not been touched; and I grant her to you, valiant warrior, as the supreme symbol of your death, of your end, here, under the sky, above the earth. Slaves, bring forth the Mother of the Feathers, the Mother of the Little Green Birds; give this valiant one, give this warrior that which he desires, that which he entreats, as a supreme symbol of his death, of his end, under the sky, above the earth.

IXOK-MUN

Very well, my governor, my ruler. I will give her to this valiant one, to this hero.

(Precious Emerald is brought to Queché Warrior.)

Here she is, valiant warrior, man of the Cavek Queché. I give you that which you desire, that which you request; but do not offend, do not hurt the Mother of the Feathers, the Mother of the Little Green Birds, Precious Emerald. Content yourself to only dance with her within the walls of the vast fortress.

(The Queché Warrior salutes Precious Emerald, who keeps herself separated from him while they dance, always turning her face toward him. He follows her in the same way, undulating before her, while rippling and flaring the mantle. In this way they do turns around the court, to the music of the trumpets, and afterwards they return to a place near the Chief Hobtoth.)

QUECHÉ WARRIOR

Chief Hobtoth, with your permission before heaven, before earth. Here I return her whom you lent me, whom you granted me as a companion. Now I have exhibited her. I have danced with her face to face to the four corners, to the four extremities, within the buildings of the great

palace. Now take her back, guard her, enclose her within the vast walls of the vast fortress.¹⁰³

My voice also says: Grant that I borrow the twelve yellow eagles and jaguars whom I met by day, by night, with their weapons, their arrows in hand. Lend them to me that I may amuse myself with them, at the point of my arrow, with the strength of my shield, in the four corners, at the four sides, within the vast walls, in the vast fortress, as a supreme symbol of my death, of my end, here between heaven and earth. Heaven and earth be with thee, Chief Hobtoh!

CHIEF HOBTOH

Valiant warrior, man of the Cavek Queché! Your voice spoke thus before heaven, before earth!: "Grant that I borrow the twelve yellow eagles and jaguars." Thus says your voice. Very well, I grant you the twelve yellow eagles, the twelve yellow jaguars which you desire, which you request to my lips, to my face. Go then, oh my eagles, my jaguars! Proceed so that this valiant one, this stalwart, may amuse himself and his warrior's prowess with the point of his arrow, the strength of his shield, in the four corners, at the four sides.

QUECHÉ WARRIOR

(Comes forth with the eagles and the jaguars, and performs with them a war dance round about the court. Afterwards he returns to the royal platform where Chief Hobtoh is seated with his family.)

Chief Hobtoh, with your permission before heaven, before earth. You have granted me that which I wished, that which I requested: the yellow eagles, the yellow jaguars. I have exercised with them the art of war with the son of my arrow, with the son of my shield. Are these, then, your eagles? Are these then, your jaguars? They are almost nothing to speak of before my lips, before my face, because some of them see; some of them do not see; they have neither the eagle's beak nor the jaguar's

¹⁰³Of all the favors that they granted him, the only one that the stalwart of the Queché hasn't taken contemptuously is the dance with Precious Emerald. Nor does he pretend to have in his country someone more beautiful. Galantry? More probably, religion. (GR) Neither did he scorn the mantle. (142 FM)

claws. If you could but see for a moment those of my mountains, of my valleys! What a magnificent sight is theirs, and they fight magnificently with teeth and claws.

CHIEF HOBTOH

Valiant warrior, man of the Cavek Queché! We know well the teeth of the eagles, of the jaguars that are in your mountains. What is, then, your image, your picture, of the eagles and jaguars who are in your mountains, in your valleys?

QUECHÉ WARRIOR

Chief Hobtoth, with your permission before heaven, before earth. Thus speaks my voice one more time to your lips, to your face: Grant me if you can, thirteen times twenty days, thirteen times twenty nights to say one last goodbye to the face of my mountains, to the face of my valleys, where I used to live, to the four corners, to the four directions, to see again my place of hunting, my place of rest and nourishment.

(No one answers Queché Warrior who dances and disappears for a minute.¹⁰⁴ Afterwards, without returning to the royal platform where chief Hobtoth is sitting, he approaches the eagles and the jaguars who are arranged in the middle of the court around a sort of altar.)

And you eagles! You jaguars! "He has departed", you no doubt said. I had not departed; I went only to say goodbye to the image of my mountains, to the image of my valleys, where I used to hunt something to nourish me, for my favorite game in the four corners, at the four extremities.

Ah heaven and earth hear me! My courage, my daring, have served me nothing. I searched for my way under heaven, I searched for my road over the earth, crossing the grass, crossing the thistles. My determination, my daring have served me nothing.

Ah heaven and earth hear me! Must I really die, must it end here between the earth and the sky? And you now my gold and my silver! You son of my arrow, son of my shield! My stranger's mace, my stranger's axe, my

¹⁰⁴Brasseur, pp. 116-117, contends that Queché Warrior could actually see his far off mountains from the high walls of Cakyug.

wreaths, my sandals, all return to my mountains, to my valleys!¹⁰⁵ Carry the news of me to my governor, my ruler, because the voice of my governor, my ruler said this: "It has already been too long that my determination, my bravery, have been on the hunt." Thus said the voice of my governor, my ruler; let him no longer say it since I await only my death, my end, my destruction, here between the earth and the sky! Heaven be my aid! Earth hear me! If it is true that I must die, that I meet death here under heaven, above earth, why can I not change places with that happy squirrel, that bird, who die on the limb of the tree, on the branch of the tree, on which he lived, on which he ate,¹⁰⁶ under heaven, above earth!

And you eagles! You jaguars! Come now! Do what must be done! But let your teeth, your claws kill me quickly, because I am a great Warrior who comes from my mountains, my valleys. Heaven and earth be with all of you! Oh eagles! Oh jaguars!

(The eagles and the jaguars encircle Queché Warrior, stretching him out on the sacrificial stone in order to open his breast.¹⁰⁷ After his death all the actors dance in a circle.)

THE END

¹⁰⁵The "effects" of the victim, especially his weapons, were sent to the city of his origin. (143 GR)

¹⁰⁶They die there where they lived in their little native country. (144 FM)

¹⁰⁷Brasseur has omitted saying if the eagles and the jaguars made a gesture which symbolized the act of pulling the heart out by the roots and presenting it to the sun and to the four cardinal points. This took place before the conquest. (145 FM)

Rabinal Achí Music¹⁰⁸

Opening Dance.

Moderato. 1st trumpet

2nd trumpet

Drum

Andante

¹⁰⁸Brasseur de Bourbourg, pp. 1-7. The pagination is misleading; this volume of the Collection des documents contains some one hundred and seventy pages of the Grammaire first; pagination begins again from page one to page one hundred and nineteen of Brasseur's Essai sur la Poesie et la Musique and the Rabinal Achí; then the pagination begins again with pp. 1-7 of the above music.

Entrance of Rabinal Warrior

Three staves of music in 3/4 time. The top staff (treble clef) contains a melody of eighth and quarter notes. The middle staff (treble clef) begins with two measures of rests, indicated by a double bar line with a slash, followed by a melody of eighth and quarter notes. The bottom staff (bass clef) also begins with two measures of rests, indicated by a double bar line with a slash, followed by a melody of eighth and quarter notes. The piece concludes with a final measure in the bottom staff.

Song of the Queché Warrior

Two systems of three staves each, all in 3/4 time. The first system: the top staff (treble clef) has a melody of eighth and quarter notes; the middle staff (treble clef) has a melody of eighth and quarter notes with two measures of rests indicated by a double bar line with a slash; the bottom staff (bass clef) has a melody of eighth and quarter notes with two measures of rests indicated by a double bar line with a slash. The second system: the top staff (treble clef) has a melody of eighth and quarter notes; the middle staff (treble clef) has a melody of eighth and quarter notes with two measures of rests indicated by a double bar line with a slash; the bottom staff (bass clef) has a melody of eighth and quarter notes with two measures of rests indicated by a double bar line with a slash.

Presentation of Queché Warrior to the King



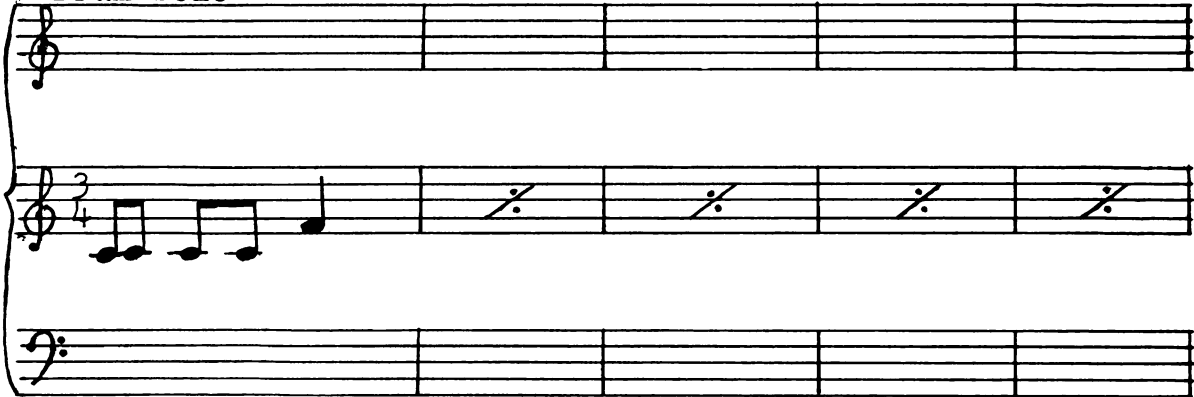
War Song

Alegro



The Death of Queché Warrior

Drum solo



Drum solo

Three staves of music. The top staff is a treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 3/4 time signature. The middle staff is a treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 3/4 time signature. The bottom staff is a bass clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 3/4 time signature. The music consists of a series of eighth and sixteenth notes, with some measures containing rests or other rhythmic markings.

1st trumpet



1st trumpet

Three staves of music. The top staff is a treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 3/4 time signature. The middle staff is a treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 3/4 time signature. The bottom staff is a bass clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 3/4 time signature. The music consists of a series of eighth and sixteenth notes, with some measures containing rests or other rhythmic markings.

APPENDIX II

GLOSSARY AND GAZETTEER OF FOREIGN TERMS¹

- Agon. Gr. Contest, struggle, debate.
- Aguardiente. Sp. "Fire-water".
- Aiton. Gr. Supposed historical cause, e.g. Genesis.
Aiteological.
- Areito. (Areyto) Sp. A dance accompanied by song,
narration or dramatization.
- Aztec. N. A Nahuatl people who from their capital in
Tenochtitlan, ruled the Central Highlands.
- Baile. Sp. Dance, but in sixteenth and seventeenth
centuries included other forms: recitation,
drama.
- Balche. M. An alcoholic beverage.
- Booyal Ché. M. A "licentious dance".
- Calmecac. N. School for priests and nobles.
- Chacs. M. Gods of rain.
- Chilam. (Chilan). M. Jaguar-priest.
- Chichén Itzá. M. Mayan city of Northern Yucatan.
- Chirimía. N. A native "flute".
- Codex. (pl. Codices). Lat. Indian books, manuscripts.
- Cozcateca. N. The ceremonial Eagle and Jaguar priest-
warriors of the Tlacaxipehualiztli.

¹Code: N. = Nahuatl; M. = Mayan; Sp. = Spanish;
Gr. = Greek; Lat. = Latin.

Conquistadores. Sp. Conquerors, usually sixteenth century Spanish conquerors of America.

Costumbres. Sp. Formal preparations for a ritual or Ritual Drama.

Cuicacalli. N. House of Songs.

Cuicani. N. Singer.

Cuicatl. N. Song with musical accompaniment.

Daimon. Gr. Spirit, force, demon.

Dromenon. Gr. A thing done ritually, enacted.

Durée. Fr. That which endures (endured), e.g. birth, death, food/hunger, etc.

Encomienda. Sp. A feudal system of forced Indian labor.

Eniautos-Daimon. Gr. "Year-Spirit". Vegetation deity.

Epiphany. Gr. A "coming forth", resurrection.

Huastec. N. A Mayan people on the Gulf of Mexico.

Huehuetl. N. The large, ground drum.

Huitzilopochtli. N. The major deity of the Aztec pantheon.

Ik. M. A glyphic symbol representing fertility.

Katun. M. Twenty year period.

Kouretes. Gr. An ancient Hellenic people.

Ladino. Sp. Latin Americans with principally Spanish (as opposed to Indian) blood.

Loa. Sp. A short religious play.

Macehualcuicani. Singer who sings and dances.

Maize. Sp. Indian corn.

Maguey. Sp. A cactus plant valued primarily in its fermented state.

Mayapan. M. A major Mayan center in Yucatan.

- Mestizo. Sp. Of mixed Spanish and Indian blood.
- Mictlantecuhtli. N. God of death; rules over Mictlan,
an Aztec "heaven".
- Mitotaia. N. To dance.
- Mixtecs. N. A Nahua speaking people of the Central
Highlands.
- Nanotzin. N. "Motherhood". A name for the Mother-Goddess.
- Nahua. N. A major linguistic family of the Central
Highlands.
- Olmec. N. An early Mexican people of the LaVenta area.
- Ocelotl. N. Jaguar who represents the earth.
- Paynal. N. A representative of a god.
- Petén. N. A jungle region of Southern Yucatan.
- Quetzal. N. A brightly colored bird of tropical America.
- Quetzalcoatl. N. "Plumed Serpent". A major deity of
many Middle American peoples.
- Sacer Ludus. Lat. A ritual dance.
- Telpochcalli. N. School for commoners.
- Tenochtitlan. N. Aztec capital in the Valley of Mexico.
- Teotihuacán. N. An early ceremonial center in the Valley
of Mexico.
- Teponaztli. N. The small two-toned drum.
- Tezcatlipoca. N. A principal Aztec deity.
- Tlacaxipehualiztli. N. Second month of the Aztec year.
- Tlaloc. N. God of rain, ruler over one of the heavens,
Tlatocan.
- Toçl. N. "Our Mother", "Our Grandmother". Aztec deity.
- Tun. M. Great ceremonial drum; also the year.

Xipe Totec. N. "Our Lord the Flayed One". Aztec deity.

Xochipilli. N. "Lord of the Flowers". Also related to fertility, dance, drama.

Xólotl. N. Another deity form taken by Quetzalcoatl.

Xul. M. Native flutes.

Zapotec. N. An advanced people of the Southern Highlands.



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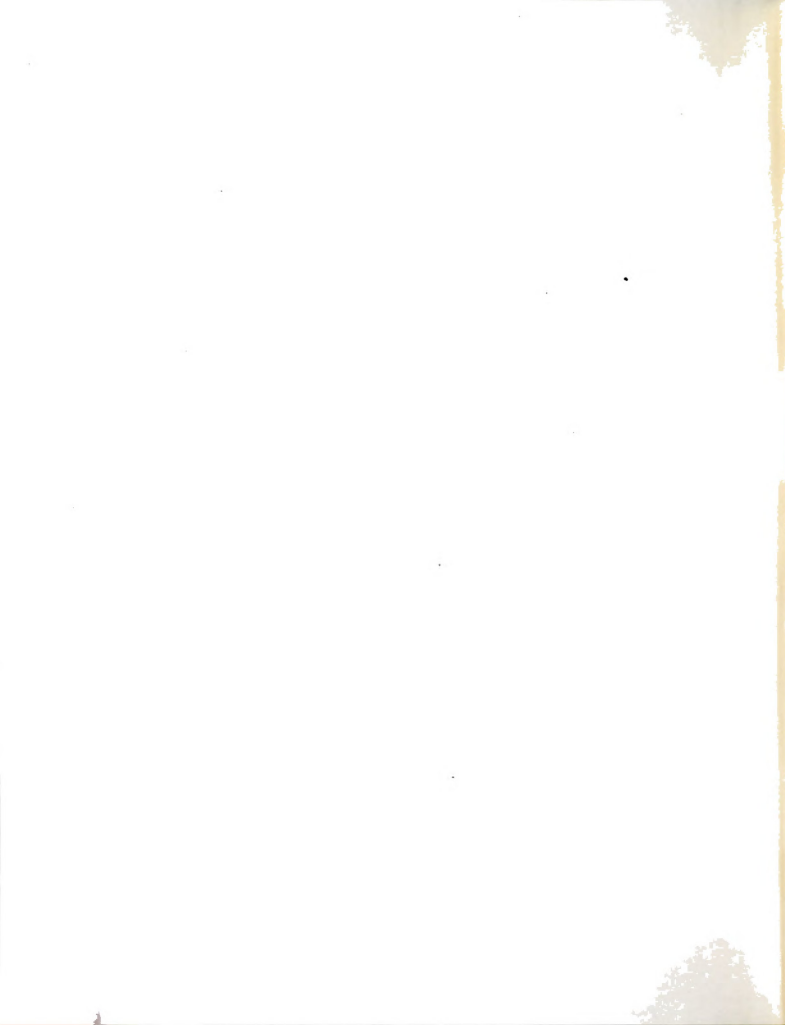
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