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AND MONOGRAPHS**

EDITED BY F. W. HODGE

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**REPORTS ON THE MAYA
INDIANS OF YUCATAN**

BY

**SANTIAGO MENDEZ,
ANTONIO GARCÍA Y CUBAS,
PEDRO SANCHEZ DE AGUILAR,**

AND

FRANCISCO HERNANDEZ

EDITED BY

MARSHALL H. SAVILLE

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So little has been written in regard to the ethnology of the Maya Indians of Yucatan, and especially concerning their beliefs, which persist to the present time, that we publish here a translation of an important and practically unknown account of this subject. This report was printed in Mexico in 1870, but it is buried in a study by Antonio García y Cubas entitled "Materiales para formar la Estadística General de la República Mexicana," in *Boletín de la Sociedad Mexicana de Geografía y Estadística*, segunda época, tomo II, pp. 352-388. It is on pages 374-387, bears the date Mérida, October 24, 1861, and was written by Santiago Mendez, who states that he was governor of Yucatan during the years 1841-42. In connection with a study of this report, so far as it relates to the beliefs of the Maya, it will be profitable to consult the paper by Dr Daniel G. Brinton on The Folk-lore of Yucatan, printed in the *Folk-Lore Journal*, London, vol. I, part viii, 13 pp., August, 1883.

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We have also had translated the notes on the superstitions of the Indians of Yucatan contained in the work of Pedro Sanchez de Aguilar, 1639, published by the Museo Nacional of Mexico in 1892 (pp. 83-84), and the report of Francisco Hernandez on the religious beliefs of the Yucatan Indians, which was sent to Bartolomé de las Casas, evidently while Bishop of Yucatan in 1545, and is given by him in chapter cxxiii (pp. 328-330) of his *Apologetica Historia de las Indias*, a work which did not appear in print until 1875-76, the first complete edition of which was edited by M. Serrano y Sanz, and printed at Madrid in 1909.

The information contained in the Mendez report is strikingly similar to that given by Bartolomé José Granado Baeza on Los Indios de Yucatan, an account written in 1813 but not published until 1845, when it appeared in the *Registro Yucateco*, tomo I, pp. 165-178. This report of Baeza is one of the principal sources used by Brinton in his study.

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The editor has incorporated a few brief notes, and has prepared a glossary of the Indian words and a short bibliography of the subject.

MARSHALL H. SAVILLE.

THE MAYA INDIANS OF YUCATAN IN 1861

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BY SANTIAGO MENDEZ

Report on the Customs, Labor, Language, Industry, Physiognomy, etc., of the Indians of Yucatan, made by the Agent of the Department of Public Works, who signs this report, in obedience to orders of February 6, 1861.

CUSTOMS

The character of the Indians of Yucatan is such that, were they to be judged only by their customs and their habits, we would have to qualify them as stupid and devoid of reason. It seems indifferent to them to be in the shade or exposed to rain or to the scorching rays of the sun, even though they could avoid it. It does not matter to them whether they go dressed or naked. They never try to obtain commodities they see other races enjoy, even though the trouble or sacrifice it would cost to get them might be but small. In order to rest or to chat with their companions they hardly ever sit down: they squat, it being quite indifferent to them that they do it in a sun that scorches them when they might perhaps have shade two steps from where they are. Reward does not encourage them, nor does punishment admonish them; in the first place, they think they deserve more,—perhaps because they were always accustomed to be made use of,—and in the second case they consider punishment as a kind of fatality from which it is quite useless to try to deliver themselves: hence they do not reform. So long as their hunger is stilled, it is quite indifferent to them whether their meal is exquisite and varied, or whether it consists only of tortillas and chile, devouring their food in either case with astounding voracity. When they find themselves driven by utter necessity, they will work in order to remedy it, but they never do so with zeal or with the desire to improve their fortunes. They are so improvident that they may squander in one day the earnings of a week, in an exaggerated amount of dainties or in superstitious practices, and above all by intoxicating themselves, leaving their families without bread and clothing. Or, they remain idle until whatever they earned by the sweat of their brow is gone. They cultivate a cornfield and gather a good harvest from it, and even though they do not need to do so, they will sell the corn with considerable loss in order to squander the money in splendid repasts and superstitions, both of which always go together. This harvest might insure the subsistence of their family for a whole year, but their improvidence will reduce them within a few days to having to sell themselves for work (peonage).

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The love of the parents for their children, of the children for their parents, and between husband and wife, is barely lukewarm, and not at all passionate, if we are to judge from their absolute lack of signs of sympathy, pity, or condolence. They contemplate dry-eyed and rather indifferently the suffering of their nearest, and even their demise, without allowing this to change their demeanor

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or letting it interfere in the least with their general customs of life.

Although some of them can read and write, they use it very little, either because they are very slow and clumsy in the exercise of both, on account, no doubt, of the lack of practice, and also because there is but little written in their own language.

Their children have usually no other education than that which they receive from the curates, priests, choirmasters, and teachers of the catechism, which education was formerly given to them at the church doors or in the mansions of the large ranches and farms, and they were compelled to assemble every morning from seven to eight to learn the catechism. At the present day, as it is not possible to force the parents to send their children to learn even this, there are but few who learn at all, especially among the boys. When the writer of this was governor of this state in the years 1841 and 1842, he succeeded in establishing primary schools in almost all the villages, and although averse to anything that looks or sounds like despotism, he authorized, nevertheless, the mayors, justices of the peace, and chieftains (*caçiques*^[1]) to use it in order to force parents to send their children to the said schools. Unfortunately, in 1842 came the invasion by the forces of general Santa Anna, and in the effort to resist them, all the resources of the state were spent for many years in advance. Then followed our own senseless revolutions and the almost general uprising of these same Indians against the other native races, consequently these schools passed out of existence without it having been possible until this day to reestablish them. Hence this remains an unsolved problem and it is difficult to calculate the profit they might have brought (once the tenacious and persistent opposition of the Indians overcome), leaving them convinced of the advantages it might mean to further their knowledge even in the manual labor they perform. [147] [148]

Generally they train their children from a very early age to help in their agricultural labor such as their forefathers did before the conquest, or else they teach them light manual labor, such as weaving little mats or matting in general, making small bags, baskets of all kinds and sizes, leather bands such as are used by the native porters, sacks, hammocks, ropes, to prepare henequen from agave fiber, to make straw hats, and so forth. In some villages they are taught to make common pottery, and in places near the coast they are shown how to extract salt, to fish, and seamanship in general. It is very rare that they are taught other arts and crafts or trades, with the exception perhaps in cities or principal towns, where, especially when they have been reared and educated in the households of white people, they may become efficient in the art of quarrying stone, though quite primitively, or they qualify as masons, shoemakers, tailors, muleteers, drivers, and cowboys. They also provide the town with firewood, charcoal, and fodder. [149]

With regard to their marriage customs, there is little else to say except that the daughter-in-law goes to live in the house of her father-in-law, and the son-in-law goes to live with his wife's parents, which is at present the most usual way, because an episcopal edict had to be issued prohibiting the first-mentioned to avoid the very frequent abuses committed on the bride by her father-in-law and brothers-in-law. At a very early age young men marry, without repugnance, women who are much older, widows, and even girls who have children born out of wedlock. To remonstrances made by those who wish to dissuade them in view of such conditions, they will reply, "Why should I care? This happened before my time!" It is to be supposed that conjugal fidelity is not regarded very scrupulously by such couples. Their most common diseases depend largely on the seasons, and recur regularly. During summer and fall, when fresh food is abundant, the Indians are very immoderate in its use, consequently they suffer from diarrhea and vomiting. In spring and summer they have *tabardillo*, which is a burning fever, and dysentery, both of which are caused by too much exposure to the hot sun; and in winter obstinate constipation, colds, and affections of the throat and lungs. Their curative methods consist merely of abstinence and of bleeding, which they perform with a thorn or a fish-bone, and they cool their blood by drinking sour *pozole* or boiled lemonade, or else a decoction of a plant called *xhantumbú*. They never use emetics nor cathartics. [150]

Ordinarily they eat two meals a day, one on rising and another in the evening. If they go to work in the field, after having breakfasted on tortillas and *atole*, they take with them a large lump of *pozole* which they use as a refreshment at noon by diluting it in water. At sunset they leave work, and, returning home, eat the second meal, generally after having taken their bath. Their usual food consists of boiled vegetables seasoned with salt, chile, and sometimes with the juice of oranges (the sour orange is used for this) or of lemons. On Sundays, if they are able to do so, they buy beef or pork; these are the only days when they eat meat, except when they kill a wild bird or a creature of the woods while hunting. Such meat they cook by baking it in a special way in the earth, or else in *pib*. The very poor among them live all the year round on tortillas and chile, and a bowlful of *pozole* or *atole*. Even the wealthiest content themselves with only one dish. This does not interfere with their being big eaters, nor devouring all they can get when it does not cost them anything. [151]

Their usual beverage is called *pitarrilia*, consisting of the bark of a plant called *balché* which they put in soak in fresh water and honey and let it ferment. After fermentation it becomes strong enough to be intoxicating. They are also very fond of liquor, and there are very few among them who do not become intoxicated occasionally, at least on Sundays. [152]

Experience, and to a certain extent tradition, are their only guides for telling the different seasons of the year; they have not the slightest remembrance of their ancient calendar system. They are accustomed to hear clocks strike where such exist, but otherwise, simply from the course of the sun, moon, and stars, they are able to regulate the hours of the day and night, more

or less. They also know when an eclipse of the moon is approaching, attributing this phenomenon to an intention of the sun to destroy his satellite, and they therefore are prepared to make a fearful racket with sticks, *mitotes*, whistles or horns (*totutos*^[2]), shotguns, and other instruments during the eclipse, believing that by so doing they can avoid the catastrophe.

They sleep from early evening until four o'clock in the morning. Their working hours, if it is at all necessary for them to go to work, last from sunrise to sunset. If they are paid, they walk or travel at all hours, even with a load. [153]

There are a few among them who are trustworthy and faithful in their contracts, and know how to keep their word and promises; but there is a greater number who absolutely lack all of these virtues, with the exception, perhaps, of the solemn promises they make to their saints, in the fulfilment of which they are scrupulously punctual.

They lie easily and very frequently, although they are aware that lies are prohibited. Generally they evade, whenever possible, a truthful answer which is to the point and fully satisfies the question.

Their principal vices are lasciviousness among both sexes, and drunkenness among the men. To do them justice though, we might as well acknowledge that it is more than probable that if other races and tribes had to live as they do, almost naked, in the complete liberty and isolation of country places, all members of one family, males and females, grownups and minors, the married and the single ones sleeping together in those little huts without any, or at best, very scant, knowledge of religion, of modesty and honor, without any fear of the consequences of unchastity to the women, without any intellectual enjoyment, reduced to the merest essentials—to satisfy hunger, thirst, sleep, and the intercourse of the two sexes, might they not be guilty of worse crimes? [154]

They are generally accused of being inclined to theft, but as a rule they steal small things of little value, and they are not known to recur to violence or murder to satisfy this tendency.

The wealthy are free money-lenders to members of their own tribe and even to those of a different stock, so long as they are satisfied they are not going to be cheated.

As in almost all of the most populated part of the Yucatecan peninsula, it is impossible to use the plow for tilling the fields; labor is reduced to clearing the tropical growth by burning it in the height of summer and sowing corn or vegetables when the rains commence, to fencing in the fields and weeding them, etc. In order to be able to cultivate at one time as much as possible of their extensive lands, the wealthy Indians pay their day-laborers and volunteers exceedingly well, either in money or in its equivalent in provisions at a price below its actual market value, especially in times of scarcity. They are guided in this by the rule, "This is sweat of my brethren and it is not right that they should pay it too dearly." If those workers are servants of some large ranch and live on the place, they are called *Luneros*,^[3] because they give their master their day's work on Mondays in exchange for the land he gives them to cultivate for themselves and for the water he allows them for irrigation of their fields. If they do not, for one reason or another, go to work on that day, he receives one real in silver instead. The customary amount of work they really are compelled to do for their master per year is twenty *mecates* of clearing of untilled land and another twenty of already previously tilled fields. Had the owner to pay for hired labor, this would amount to 12 pesos, 4 reals. In addition to this they have to give him two hours on Saturdays for what they call *fagina*,^[4] which means work around the house of any kind their patron should order them to do. On some of the ranches the obligatory field-work is reduced to half, but in this case they have to pay their real for Mondays, and always have to do the Saturday's *fagina*. Any other service or work they may be called on to do is paid or put to their account. By *milpa roza*,^[5] the first clearing of a field by felling trees, cutting and burning undergrowth, etc., is meant; while the *milpa caña*,^[6] is the clearing of fields that have already been tilled the year before, where the cornstalks are to be split and burnt in order to plant again. [155]

Those who are employed as cowboys on stock-farms receive a fixed wage, and are not subject to the Monday service nor to the usual field-work. They have to look after the cattle and horses, and they have charge of the draw-wells, the tanks, and drinking pools. They have to attend to irrigation, weeding, and sowing of the truck gardens and orchards, and in general to do all work performed on such ranches either for their conservation and improvement or else in personal service to the owners or for the advantage of its products. It is also their duty to rasp a certain amount of henequen fiber from the agave each day. Their wage is from eight to twelve reals per month and five *almudes*,^[7] of corn per week. Yet neither this latter nor the salary are paid to him as his earnings, but credited to his account against what he draws in provisions or money, so that he actually is always indebted. This, however, is the aim of the owners, in order to hold the man quite secure, even though they know very well that, should the man die in their service, they would lose that amount. They see to it, however, that he never owes too much. This really constitutes a kind of slavery (peonage) which the men try to avenge by serving as poorly as they can, even to such masters as aim to make their lot easy and agreeable by frequent gifts or bonuses. [156]

As a rule the Yucatecan Indians are regarded as being meek, humble, and not easily stirred to ire and cruelty, basing such an opinion on the fact that the most customary punishment among them was a whipping applied with moderation. This kind of punishment did not offend them, if they were informed of the reason why it was meted out to them, nor did they consider it degrading. [157]

This characteristic is still noticeable among those who have remained submissive and attached to the white people. It is quite different with those among them who have had to suffer the cruel, atrocious, and protracted martyrdom inflicted by the rebels. They are merciless to those who have fallen and still fall into their power, not only those of other tribes, but even of their own, in case they refuse to follow their tracks. They have no pity on either age or sex. [159]

The chieftains (*caçiques*) of today, as well as those who were in office in the past, and the most prominent or wealthy Indians, live just as simply as the rest, without the slightest variation. They all are respected by their subordinates, whom they do not oppress to their own advantage, nor do they demand any services from them without compensation.

The Indians are generally gay, light-hearted, gossipy, and fond of tricks, in which they can display strength, agility, and adroitness. They are also very fond of music and song, although not very gifted or talented in the execution of the former especially. At their feasts and dances, which usually are rather tumultuous and poorly organized, they still use some of the old songs in their own language, to the accompaniment of a little raucous flute, the carapace of a turtle (*hicotea*), upon which they beat the time with a hart's horn, and of the *mitote* or *taukul*. The *mitote*^[8] is a solid piece of wood of cylindrical shape, one yard long and a third of a yard or a little more in diameter, open at one side almost from one end to the other. This opening is made for the purpose of hollowing out the piece of wood until it is reduced to one inch or a little more in thickness. On the opposite side of the mouth, or opening, they fasten two oblong wings, which, starting at both ends, meet in the center and are separated from one another by a serrated edge. In order to play this instrument, they place it, mouth downward, on the ground, so that the wings remain on the topmost side, and they hit them with two short sticks whose points are covered with an elastic resin that makes them jump, so as not to deaden or confound the sound, which is of such resonance and force that it may be heard at a distance of two leagues. [160]

Notwithstanding the fact that they regard death almost with indifference, they are timid and cowardly. They never attack the enemy unless they are far superior in number. Still, they are very astute or cunning to plan ambushes and to take advantage of every occasion to surprise their foes, and then fight with great advantage, always accompanying the fighting with frightful shouting. They are generally good marksmen, and they handle the machete^[9] with admirable skill. Whenever they see that they cannot resist the onslaught, they disperse in the woods, but almost instantly come together again at a previously designated meeting-place. They are very fleet of foot and good racers, and of an almost incredible endurance for walking long distances, even with a load of six to eight arrobas [150 to 200 pounds]^[10] on their backs. They also can stand a long time without food or drink. [161]

They do not excel in writing or in learning to write, although not a few have studied the same length of time and the same subjects as white men, but they are generally clownish and slow of understanding. It happens very often that after they have been given a clear and oft-repeated order, they will manage to execute it the wrong way, and their memory is so short that, although they attend catechism daily from the age of six or seven until they are twelve or fourteen years of age, there are very many among them who have never been able either to learn it or to commit it to memory. Those, however, who do not evade those lessons and who furthermore attend the preaching of the gospel in their own language, have obtained Catholic ideas about eternity, the last judgment, the glory of God, purgatory, and hell. [162]

As the climate of the peninsula is so hot that it exhausts our physical strength and energy, as well as reduces the needs of man who can live almost nude and in the open air and feed himself sparingly, we cannot expect that the Indian should be particularly inclined to work. We had the same experience among the other native races, although perhaps their social standard may impose greater necessities. A hut of six or seven yards in length by three or four in width, he builds himself; its walls consist of rows of sticks (which sometimes are covered with a coat of clay) and thatched with palm-leaves or grass, with a door frequently made of reeds twined together. Two or three roughly-woven hammocks of henequen, a machete, perchance a hoe, perhaps a hatchet, and, very rarely, a poor shotgun, are all his furniture. A *metate* to grind his corn, an earthen pot to boil it, another pot to cook the vegetables and the *atole*, a *comal* or flat earthenware plate to cook the corn-cakes or tortillas, a pitcher for water, one or two *jicaras* of *gúero*,^[11] an equal number of gourds cut in halves to make drinking vessels and for other purposes, are the eating utensils. A roughly-made, circular stool of half a yard in diameter and about as much in height, and which is used for shaping the tortillas as well as for a table at which they eat their meals, etc. Fifteen to twenty yards of cotton cloth for the man's clothes, for the wife's, and for the children's, which costs a real per yard, supposing the woman does not spin and weave this herself; two or three coarse needles, a reel of cotton thread, a straw hat, sandals, a handkerchief and a cotton belt; a large straw basket or hamper, a *mecapal*, and a sack of henequen, complete the list. A trough in which to wash clothes and to bathe themselves; a few pounds of corn which he sows himself, as well as chile, beans, calabazas,^[12] *camote* [sweet potatoes], and *jicama*,^[13] a bunch of bananas, the leaf of which is used to shape the tortillas, and perhaps a sour orange. His wood he himself cuts in the forest for cooking his meals and also for the fire which he keeps all night in the center of the hut; and lastly a little salt. This is the entire inventory of the necessities of life an Indian family of Yucatan needs, and which suffices even to the wealthy ones in the larger towns and principal cities. A great many of them live even without some of the things enumerated. They substitute for corn and vegetables (in case they cannot have them either for not having sown or for having lost the harvest), fruits, roots, and indigenous [163]

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plants which grow wild all over their country, and which are edible and nourishing. Shall we still ask why the Yucatecan Indian is so indolent, when he has such few and such modest necessities, all of which are so easy to obtain even in the midst of the forests and at a great distance from any other human habitation?

He instinctively hates the superiority of the white race, and even of the mestizos, to whom institutions both of long ago and of the present day, customs, greater civilization, and above all the allotment of land, give so many advantages. His almost irresistible inclination carries him into isolation, almost exile, in order to escape from the torment of seeing them and from social duties. He retires where the land is free, where he can till his field wherever he pleases. This accounts for the often very small settlements of perhaps only a couple of families in the thickets of the forests, provided they find a spring or at least a watering place, even though they might have to travel a considerable distance to provide themselves. But even those who live in larger settlements, in towns of white people, will invariably select the most retired spots in streets in the outskirts (far away from the center of the town) where to build their huts. [166]

This isolation in the big forests is the principal cause of his becoming more and more brutish, and it grows with the facility which those same isolated places afford him to satisfy the one and only desire he has acquired—drunkenness. It is there he finds *balché* and wild honey to brew his *pitarrilla*. And there are ever some of his own race or mestizos who bring him liquor in exchange for the little corn he may have stored. He gives this up with an improvidence which seems innate, though perhaps we might attribute it to ignorance.

The Indian never sees the crucifix or a simple cross or the image of some saint displayed anywhere, without going to kneel before it in reverent devotion, nor does he ever meet a priest without raising his hat or hurrying to his side to kiss his hand. He spends half of his earnings in devotional offerings which in the end degenerate into perfect orgies of religious fervor. And yet, in spite of all that, he does not feel the slightest scruple to take as concubines his sisters or even his own daughters. [167]

He does not profess half as much love and devotion to God as he shows toward the images of Saint Anthony of Padua or to the crucifix, both of which are the only ornaments he has in his little hut. He enters a church without bowing to the Holy Sacrament on the main altar, but he goes and kneels before the cross or before Saint Anthony or Saint Francis of Paula, or to any other image to which miracles are ascribed, no matter how poorly executed or how defective such an image might be. On rising from his prostrate position, he bends over to kiss the altar, to touch its board with his cheeks or forehead, then touches the image itself, if such is possible, at least with a twig of some aromatic herb or a flower which he carries home as a relic, paying it the utmost reverence. In addition to this he offers a certain amount of money for candles which he lights before the image of his saint at certain times; he pays for a determinate number of "Salve Reginas" to be sung either in the church or during street processions for his sake, and he offers prayers for the souls of departed relatives. [168]

He believes that the souls of the departed return to earth, and he therefore marks with chalk the road from the cemetery to their former abode, that they may not get lost.

He has just as deep-rooted a belief in witches and elves, and he is in very great fear of witchcraft. It is impossible to eradicate from his mind the idea that there are men who especially dedicate themselves to inflict this dreadful art on others.

He fears and respects at the same time an ideal being whom he calls *Balám* and who, so he says, is the lord of the fields. They all are therefore convinced that these fields cannot be tilled without danger even to their lives if they do not offer him sacrifices before beginning work, such as *horchata de maiz* (orgeat), which they call *sacá*; a stew made of corn and turkey, which they call *kool*; the tortilla with beans, called *bulihuah*; pitarrilla, and fumes of copal which they use instead of incense. It may safely be stated, therefore, that they adore him like God, but they are always careful that the white people do not see or notice this sacrificial offering for fear of being considered as idolaters. [169]

Alux they call certain apparitions which they believe to exist in the ancient ruins and on the hills, and they say that as soon as it grows dark in the evening these apparitions or ghosts commence to walk around the houses, throwing stones, whistling to the dogs and lashing them when they get near them, which leaves the poor beasts with a cough that kills them. They pretend that these ghosts can run with great speed, as well backward as forward; that they do not terrify those who look at them. They are wont to enter into the houses to annoy and tease people who are abed in their hammocks, not letting them sleep. They assure us that on ranches where sugar-cane is grown, and just as soon as the grinding machine for the cane is set up, they will go and turn it or they will drive on the horse attached to it, to make it trot around. They say these apparitions are of the size of a little Indian boy of four or five, and that they appear naked, with only a little hat on their heads. This belief is the cause of incalculable loss to antiquarians on account of the almost daily destruction of articles found in the ruins. The Indians will destroy without pity or regard, notwithstanding they may be offered a good price for them, all the images in clay and other objects found on the hills or in subterranean passages, because they are convinced that these objects are the ones that become alive at night and come out to walk around. They attribute to the *alux* or to their influence, all the diseases they have, as they consider their touch malignant. They say that if these apparitions find anyone asleep they will pass their hands over his face so lightly that the sleeper does not even feel it, but this causes him a fever which incapacitates him for a long time. [170] [171]

They also believe in the existence of the *Xtabay*, the *Huahuapach*, and the *Xbolontharoch bokolhahoch*. The first of these apparitions or ghosts may be seen, according to them, in the most isolated spots of a village or settlement in the shape of a woman dressed as a mestizo, combing her beautiful hair with the fruit of a plant they call *xaché xtabay*. She runs away as soon as anyone approaches. She quickens or retards her flight, either disappearing or allowing the one who pursues her to reach her side. This latter is the case if the one who pursues her is some amorous fellow who thinks her to be a beautiful maiden. But as soon as he reaches and embraces her, he finds that he holds in his arms a bundle filled with thorns, with legs as thin as those of a turkey, and this gives him such a terrible shock that he has fainting spells and high delirious fevers. The *Huahuapach* is a giant who may be seen at midnight in certain streets, and he is so tall that an ordinary man barely reaches to his knees. He amuses himself by blocking the traffic, opening his limbs and placing one foot on either side of the street. Should anyone inadvertently try to pass between his feet, he quickly brings his legs together and so closely presses the throat of the poor victim that he finally chokes him. The two other specters or ghosts confine themselves to repeating during the night the noises that have been prevalent in the daytime, and especially the noise made by the spindle-wheel the women use. The other one makes a subterranean noise which sounds like the chocolate-churner, but both these noises terrorize those who hear them. [172]

There is no end of superstitions among the general mass of the Indians, and the most customary form of fortune-telling is performed by means of a piece of a certain crystal which they call *zaztun*, which means a clear and transparent stone, and this enables them to see hidden things and also to divine the cause of maladies. Those who arrogate to themselves the title of a diviner are freely consulted, and they receive presents and live a very easy and carefree life. By means of their tricks and great cunning they make the simple and ignorant Indians believe, when they are ill and go to consult them, that through the *zaztun* they (the sorcerers) have discovered that some ill-intentioned enemy has bewitched them, and that in order to discover the malicious spell, they will have to wake for three nights with an abundant provision of pitarrilla, and aguardiente, food, and lighted candles. Of course, during these three nights they give themselves up to high living and immoderate drinking. While the others, their patients if we may so call them, are sleeping, or off their guard, they bury within the house or in its immediate vicinity a little wax figure pierced by a thorn through that part of the body where the complaint of their patient lies. When everybody is awake after the last night of vigil, they start certain ceremonies with the *zaztun*, and finally they go to the spot where they had buried the figure and take it out within sight of everyone, making them believe that that was the witchery. Then they start their treatment of the patient with the first and any herbs they can find, and if by mere chance these cure the ailment, they have naturally made for themselves a great reputation among the ignorant. [173]

They also perform a "healing" incantation by offering certain prayers in which they mention the diseases and the different winds to the influence of which they attribute them. They will repeat the Lord's prayer over their patient, the Ave Maria, and the Creed, and sometimes also the prayer to Saint Anthony which is included in the Mexican prayer-book. On other occasions they will resort to the *kex*, which means exchange, and consists in hanging around the house of their patient certain food and drink for the *Yuncimil*, or Lord of Death, and they believe that by so doing they are able to save, for the time being, the life of the patient by barter. [175]

To prevent bees from abandoning the hives and to make them bring home ample honey, and also that their owners may be free from sickness, they will hang in the beehives chocolate cups with *sacá* or *horchata* of corn.

They also perform the *misa milpera* (mass on the cornfield), which they call *tich*, which means offering or sacrifice, and which is celebrated in the following manner: On a barbecue or roast made with little sticks of equal length they place a turkey, and the one who officiates as priest opens the bird's beak and pours pitarrilla down its throat. Then they kill it, and the assistants carry it off to season it. In the meantime they have been cooking in the earth some large loaves of corn-bread which they call *canlahuntaz*, which is made of fourteen tortillas or broken bread filled with beans. When all is well flavored and cooked, they place it on the barbecue with several cups filled with pitarrilla. Now again the one acting the part of priest begins to incense it with copal, invoking the Holy Trinity; he repeats the Creed, and, taking some pitarrilla with a holy-water sprinkler, he flings it to the four winds, invoking the four *Pahahtunes*, lords or custodians of rain. He then returns to the table, and, raising one of the jicaras aloft while those surrounding him kneel, he places the jicara to each one's mouth for a sip. The feast then proceeds and terminates by general eating and drinking, most of all by the one who "officiated," who furthermore takes home with him a goodly supply. They say that the red *Pahahtun*, who is seated in the east, is Saint Dominick (*Santo Domingo*); the white one in the north is Saint Gabriel; the black one in the west is Saint James; the yellow *Pahahtun*, said to be female and called by them *Xanleox*, is seated in the south, and is Mary Magdalen. [176]

They very readily take their new-born babies to the baptismal font, and they never refuse to bury their dead in the cemetery.

WOMEN

It is quite astounding how in this climate woman in general passes very rapidly from childhood into womanhood, but this development is still more remarkable in the case of the native Indian woman, prompted no doubt by their mode of life and native customs. It is quite usual to see a little Indian girl of three trot daily to the woods with her parents to help cultivate the fields; very

often her excursions extend to neighboring villages, and she seems to make those trips of four and even six leagues with the greatest ease, on foot; and after she has reached five or six years, she even carries her little bundle tied on her back.

They also journey day after day out into the fields in search of firewood, small sticks perhaps not thicker than an inch or a little more, which they call *moloch*. They search for the wood themselves; they cut it and tie it with two reed or rattan rings, so that they can carry it on their backs. Then they go for water in the morning and again in the evening, having to draw it from wells forty and sixty yards deep, in buckets made of tree-bark. After they have reached the age of eleven or twelve years, they always present themselves for this particular errand, as clean as possible. They take great care to be well-washed and their hair carefully combed, almost as if they were going for a pleasure walk or to some meeting. This is particularly the case on the ranches and farms, and in almost all the villages where they have to provide themselves with water from the communal wells. [178]

Between the ages of six and eleven years the little Indian maiden attends, either at the church door or, on big haciendas, in the main building, to the teaching of our Christian religion. She goes there with bare head and with her hair hanging loose over her shoulders. [179]

All a mother teaches her daughters is how to cook, grind the corn, and shape the tortillas; to make *atole* and *pozole*; to wash clothes,—and this very poorly,—at all events. Or rather the girls learn all those things by themselves through mere observation and by helping their mothers in their daily tasks. Some mothers, however, will teach them to spin and weave their rough cotton cloth, to sew their garments, and sometimes even to embroider in a very primitive way.

They are usually accompanied by a *criada*, or housemaid, who is a kind of guardian angel and remains by their side wherever they go. When they meet the man they love, they bow their heads and look down; when speaking of their love, with the big toe of one foot they will draw lines on the ground.

While they are within their homes they wear only a skirt or petticoat of white cotton cloth, which covers them from the waist down to their knees, and in this way they will also present themselves to visitors, unless it is someone absolutely unknown to them, in which case they cross their arms over their breasts to hide them from the stranger. If one meets them in the fields or lies in wait for them over the walls of unmortared stones, they hide immediately, apparently to run away from the presence of a wayfarer, notwithstanding they are all exceedingly curious, and the love of gossip is one of their main characteristics. They are tender-hearted and desirous of pleasing, but rather in an uncouth manner, in keeping with what little education they have received. Anyone who asks them something in the name of God is welcome to their compassion and to whatever they can afford to give. [180]

Their bodily cleanliness almost borders on superstition, for they consider a person who does not wash her body everyday as not quite sane or reasonable. For their daily bath they heat a stone they call *sintun* in the fire, and when it is well heated they throw it into the water they have prepared for their bath. [181]

It is very seldom that they are happy in their love affairs, because it is generally their parents who choose their husbands. After the choice is once made, the parents of the prospective husband come to ask for the girl's hand, and if accepted they present an offering of two pesetas, which is known under the name of *pochat tancab* or *buhul*. One peseta is for the bride-to-be, the other for her mother. From the day following this ceremony the bridegroom-elect has to furnish daily a fagot of firewood to the house of his future parents-in-law. On her wedding day the bride is dressed in a *hipil* or loose garment over a petticoat or skirt, the border of which is adorned with ribbons of deep purple; while another wide ribbon of the same shade is tied around her hair. Her head is covered with a cloth of white muslin. She also has to wear shoes, a rosary around her neck, earrings and finger-rings with big cheap stones. All this jewelry may be borrowed from someone. Once the religious ceremonies over, they all proceed to the banquet, at which the newly married couple and their godfathers (sponsors) are assigned a prominent place. If the girl is not to continue living with her parents, she returns there, nevertheless, and remains for eight days, after which time the godparents come to get her and turn her over to her husband. [182]

The husband is the recipient of all the attention and care of his wife. She sews, she washes, and she grinds the corn and makes the tortillas, the *pozole*, the *atole*, and all the rest of his food with her own hands. She does all the work of her household; she has to prepare his bath when he comes home from work in the evening. These are her daily duties. In the evening, by the light of the home fire or in the pale light of a tropical moon, she sews or mends his clothes and hers and those of her children. Whenever the husband leaves home to go on a journey to some neighboring town or hacienda, the wife has to follow him; she is never allowed, however, to walk by his side, but behind, in his footsteps so to speak. If this husband gets drunk, which occurs rather frequently, and he should fall by the roadside, it is the wife's duty to remain by his side and take care of him until he is able to continue on his way. Neither the scorching sun, nor heavy rains, nor thunderstorms, nor any other danger of the road has power enough to take her away from his side. [183]

Even the fact that a woman has just been delivered of a child does not serve as an impediment to her going with the husband; she simply carries the new-born baby with her, either in a piece of cloth on her back or else mounted on one of her hips.

If the husband, for one reason or another, is called before a court of justice, he appears accompanied by his wife, simply because it is her duty to go with him and to act as his defender. She does this wonderfully well; she speaks with such warmth and so fluently, with such courage and enthusiasm, absolutely free from her usual bashful shyness, that one cannot help but admire her. And this absolute devotion on her part to the service of her consort does not weaken even with the ill-treatment she receives at his hands in return, for whenever he is intoxicated he treats her to a liberal whipping—he beats her with his bare hands even, or with a stick. [184]

Under such circumstances marital fidelity on the part of the women is not, nor can it be, very deep-rooted, and frequently her seducers triumph over her virtue. However, if the husband surprises them and the woman succeeds in escaping him, he denounces her to the next court of justice and demands that she be given a certain number of blows. She invariably receives them quite resignedly, and after the ordeal returns peacefully to her domestic duties. If the woman is the offended one, she also goes before the judge and demands that her rival be treated to the same punishment. Any sickness that might befall them after this misadventure, they unfailingly attribute to witchcraft instigated by their offenders. Witchcraft enjoys such wide popularity among Indian women that there is hardly one among them who cannot relate one and even many cases of the black art in her family. To their minds superstition and credulity go hand in hand, and if one tells them of some strange occurrence ascribed to enchantment, they believe it as readily and as firmly as if it had happened to themselves or as if they had witnessed it. And if one immediately afterward asks them whether it is day or night, they will answer doubtfully, even after having looked at the sun—so wrapped up in the tale have they become. [185]

They are very fond of dancing and of music, but they do not perform the former either gracefully or freely, nor have they any variety or art in its execution. They have no talent or gift for playing an instrument either. They are wont to sing in their idle moments or even while at work, but sadly and in a monotone. [186]

The woman who finds herself pregnant works until the very last moment before the child is born, and resumes her tasks immediately afterward, as soon as the baby is attended to. They leave their children so much to themselves, and give them so little care, that they are forever creeping around on the floor in all the mire and dirt, and always completely naked. A diaper and a tiny *hipil* are all they get for the first few days of their life. Around wrists and ankles they occasionally will tie tiny cords made of blue cotton to protect them, so they say, from epilepsy. Those who can afford to do so will hang a little rosary of beads interspersed with wooden honey-berries around their necks and put tiny earrings in their ears.

A pregnant Indian woman will not go outdoors during an eclipse, in order to avoid her child being born with spots or ugly birthmarks on its body; nor do they visit women who have just given birth to a child, because it is their belief that the babies would become ill with pains in their bowels. [187]

As soon as the child is six months old they name a godfather and a godmother for the ceremony of opening the baby's limbs for the first time. To this end they set a table with some kind of pottage, and the godfather makes nine rounds of the table, with the baby placed astride one of his hips, which is the way in which it will be carried thereafter by its mother. Then they place in the child's hands, if it is a girl, a needle, a spindle, and the implements with which they weave their cloth; if it is a boy, he is given a hatchet, a machete, and other implements he is expected to use when grown up. These godparents enjoy the same distinction as those at the christening.

The women do not care about knowing their own age, and they keep track of the age of their children only until they have attained about six or eight years; after that they forget it. Although they grow into young manhood or womanhood very quickly, really old age comes late, except in the appearance of the women, who at the age of thirty-five look like women of forty-five. [188]

Their most common diseases are pleurisy, intermittent fevers, and jaundice, while fits, fainting spells, and hysterics are exceedingly rare.

As a rule the women are abstemious, economical, and very hospitable. They love work, and are fond of raising chickens and turkeys, which they sell in order to enable them to buy what they most need, or else they prepare such fowl for banquets, marriages, christenings, the day of All Souls, or for the novenas which they celebrate for the Holy Cross or the saint of their special devotion. They do not fancy all manner of necessities, nor do they pretend to live on the work of their husbands; rather they work constantly in order to dominate them, and in this they succeed generally, at least to a certain degree. They will upbraid them if they undertake anything without asking their advice. They do not forget offenses they may have received until they are avenged. In their old age they are liable to commit small insignificant thefts, and they especially seem to like to become mendicants, even though they do not need to be. They seem to do this as a kind of compensation for what in their earlier days they may have given to the poor. [189]

Sentiments of gratitude do not last long. However, we must in this case always except those who were reared in the homes of white people. With few exceptions (when perhaps poor methods or little care in their education, or perchance bad example and ill-treatment dominated), these Indian girls are virtuous, assiduous, disinterested, and very well-disposed toward all the different branches of service and ready to learn whatever they are taught. They are modest, and are fond of dressing themselves nicely and decently. They are so affectionate, true, and grateful, that many a time they grow old in the service of one family, and if this family meets with misfortune and perhaps becomes impoverished, they will go to work outside to help support them, of which I could mention many cases. Just the opposite happens with the men, who, although they were [190]

educated in a white family from early childhood, and many a time with the same care as the white children, the cases are rare that they do not gradually drift apart, become estranged, give themselves up to vice, and finally forget their benefactors entirely.

DRESS

The ordinary costume of the men consists of a shirt of white cotton like ours, worn outside the white drawers of the same material, which are wide and reach to the calf of the leg; a belt, white or in colors, is worn around the waist under the shirt; a kerchief; a straw hat, and sandals consisting of only soles which are adjusted to the foot by cords of agave fiber, complete his costume. While at work in the field they take all their clothes off and wear only a loin-cloth, which they call *huit*, consisting of a piece of cotton cloth fastened around the hips, the points passing between the thighs to be fastened to the belt below the navel. From this belt hangs the sheathed machete on the left side. [191]

When they go out, the Indian women wear on their heads either a piece of cotton cloth of about half a yard in width by two and a half yards in length, the ends of which hang down the back, or else they tie a red kerchief around the head, a very bright red being their favorite color. A *hipil* of cotton is fashioned like a wide sacque-coat, with an opening in the center to put the head through, fitting around the neck, having openings on the two sides for the arms. This *hipil* reaches to about the calf of the leg, falling on a skirt or petticoat, also of white cotton, three or four fingers longer. It is fastened around the waist under the *hipil*, which falls loosely over it. The hem of both the skirt and the *hipil* are very often roughly embroidered in blue or red thread. For traveling they wear sandals like the men. [192]

LANGUAGE

The Indians of Yucatan speak the Maya language, though somewhat adulterated through contact with Spanish. Several Spanish expressions have gradually crept into their idiom, especially in cities and principal towns where the Indians are in almost constant intercourse with whites and mestizos. Many among them can speak Spanish perfectly well, but as a rule they avoid it, and will answer in Maya to those who speak Spanish to them.

STATURE, PHYSIOGNOMY, COLOR

Generally speaking, the Indians of Yucatan are of about the same stature as all intertropical races, of a round face, straight black hair, rather coarse, not very pronounced eyebrows, very little beard or none at all, a low narrow forehead, black and expressive eyes, a somewhat flat nose, small but outstanding ears, protruding cheekbones, a regular mouth with thin lips and beautiful teeth, a stout neck, broad chest and shoulders, arms, thighs, and limbs of robust and muscular build. Their hands and feet are small, and the toes of their feet stand closer together than the heels. They have no hair on their bodies except on the head. Their color is a copper-brown, darkened through constant exposure to the sun, especially as they go about almost totally naked. The color of the women is therefore much lighter, and this is also the case with such men as have been reared from childhood in homes of the white people. Among the women there are some very pretty ones, slender in form, with an airy but graceful carriage, and a very sweet voice; but the hard work to which they are subjected from early childhood causes them to lose their beauty at an early age. There are also some truly fine types among the men. [193]

SAVAGE TRIBES

Of real savage tribes there are none in Yucatan. After the greater part of the peninsula, cities as well as villages, had been reconquered from the possession of the Indians who had taken them during their insurrection in 1847, which was general, the most tenacious and unruly ones among them settled in the eastern part of the peninsula, where they have built several towns, the principal one being Chan-Santacruz. From these fastnesses they frequently sally forth to attack and even to raze our absolutely defenseless villages. These attacks cause frightful suffering not only to members of other tribes and races, without regard to sex or age, but they are at times even greater among those of their own race, who at one time or another have either absolutely refused to join their ranks, or, after following their lead for some time, have deserted, and returned to live in peace among the white people. [194]

Another and by far the most numerous band of those rebellious Indians went to settle in the south of the peninsula, and by virtue of the treaty they celebrated with General Vega have given up all hostilities, although they remain in complete independence of national as well as of state authorities, and in peaceful business intercourse with this city (Mérida), and also with Campeche and other points in close proximity to their abodes. Colonel Juan Sanchez Navarro drew a map, which he presented, together with his report, before the government of Yucatan on April 12 of the present year, on which map he gives an approximate idea of the localities on the peninsula still occupied by rebellious Indians who maintain a hostile attitude and those who have agreed to peaceful intercourse. The first mentioned he calls the eastern group, and the last named the southern one. [195]

NOTE BY ANTONIO GARCÍA Y CUBAS

[196]

After having written about several groups of aborigines who inhabit the central part of the republic, I wish to extend these notes with the aid of documents in my possession to the Indians of Tabasco and Chiapas.

The customs, habits, and inclinations of all those Indians in general do not, with any certainty, evoke any hope for the improvement of their race and their subsequent utility and usefulness to the nation. The task I have set for myself is a very delicate one, and there may exist a great many people who will attribute to lack of patriotism the frank statement of many defects in our population; but I observe that our nation is not moving toward its aggrandizement with the alacrity and speed which the progressives among the authorities wish to see. Therefore I consider it necessary to study and point out the defects. I do not wish it to appear as if the conceptions expressed in these lines were imputations of my own imagination, and I wish to state, therefore, that whatever is said in this report is extracted from official documents in my possession.

[197]

The aborigines living in the towns and villages of the district of Jalpa, and the same may be said of the rest of the Indians of Tabasco, despite their docility, prefer the wild, uncivilized life of the mountains to the advantages of communal life, if by so doing they are able to evade all public responsibilities and duties. They come together only for their religious festivities, and on all such occasions they are given to drunkenness and gluttony to such a degree that they contract very serious diseases which in a great many cases hasten their demise. With very few exceptions they live in complete vagrancy, and they propagate without respecting any degree of blood relationship. They insist on curing their diseases with all sorts of roots and plants, which, however, mostly impair their health, causing great mortality, especially among children. This may be regarded as the principal cause why very few among their number reach the age of fifty years.

[198]

The aborigines who inhabit the borders to the river Usumacinta and its tributaries are for the greater part natives of Yucatan, and are like all the rest of their kind, very fond of drinking. The Indians of Tenosique, about forty years ago, were known as very honest and trustworthy, but their intercourse with the rebels and emigrants from Yucatan have demoralized them to a great extent.

These and other defects, with but a few honorable exceptions, are revealed in the documents treating of the Indians of the district of Comitán, state of Chiapas, which, however, I am not going to enumerate, so as to avoid repetitions, and by so doing make this article altogether too long.

All the above mentioned shows the decadence and general degeneration of the aborigines, as compared with the very scant elements of vitality and vigor that might help in the movement toward progress in our republic. The same customs, the same reserve and diffidence which characterized the Indian of colonial days is manifestly still his today under the so-called protective laws of the republic, which barely give him the title of citizen. Yet, as I have stated before, I do not belong to those who despair of his ultimate civilization, and I believe that the most efficacious means of effecting this is by crossing his breed or race by way of colonization, introducing other nations and elements to come in contact with him.

[199]

That this efficacious means of stopping the infinite defects which retard, if they do not hinder, the natural progress of our nation, has not been attained, to my idea, lies in the fact that so far no protective laws have existed which, founded on prevision, afford guaranties and procure work for colonists. There are no laws that fix the boundaries of the immense stretches of waste-land within our country, nor a careful study of climate, geology, and production. There is not, to my knowledge, any report establishing the best methods of making all our territory productive either through sales or the renting of all lands that cannot be tilled by their original owners. Our own elements, as we have tried to demonstrate in this article, are either heterogeneous or too scarce and insufficient to accomplish the task of carrying the nation onward on the road of aggrandizement. Hence it is, according to my idea, colonization, and colonization alone, that may serve as the final remedy for our national ills.

[200]

If we had today laws such as I have had reference to, we would at this very moment see European colonists arrive continually, attracted by hopes of a splendid future which our fertile soil and our salubrious climate offer to the industrious and enterprising man. Our population would increase daily at the same pace with the United States of Brazil and Buenos Aires, where European immigration forms an element of prosperity.

It remains for our government to fix in the most decisive way the answer to this question in the interest of the future of our country.

[201]

ANTONIO GARCÍA Y CUBAS.

Mexico, *May 1st, 1870.*

NOTES ON THE SUPERSTITIONS OF THE INDIANS OF YUCATAN

[202]

INFORME CONTRA IDOLORVM CVLTORES
DEL OBISPADO DE YVCATAN.
MADRID, 1639

BY PEDRO SANCHEZ DE AGUILAR

The abuses and superstitions in which those Indians of Yucatan believe and the abuses which they cherish are mostly inherited from their forebears, and are as numerous as they are varied in kind. I am including in this report all I was able to investigate, so that they may enable the curates to disapprove them publicly, and in their sermons to reprimand the Indians on account of them.

They believe in dreams which they try to interpret to suit the occasion.

On hearing the cawing (or cackle) of a bird they call *kípxosi*, they interpret it to mean poor success to whatever enterprise they are engaged in at the time. They consider it as a bad omen or foreboding, as the Spaniards do with the female fox or the cuckoo. [203]

If, while the Indian is traveling, he stumbles over a big stone among a pile which had been dug up to build or level a road, he venerates it by placing on the top of it a little twig, brushing his knees with another one in order not to get tired. This is a tradition of his forefathers.

If he happens to be traveling near sunset, and he fears that he will arrive late or even at night at the village he is bound for, he will drive a stone into the first tree he finds, believing that this will retard the setting of the sun. Another superstition to the same effect is the pulling out of some of his eyelashes and blowing them toward the sun. These are superstitions that came down to him by tradition from his forebears.

During lunar eclipses they still believe in the tradition of their forefathers to make their dogs howl or cry by pinching them either in the body or ears, or else they will beat on boards, benches, and doors. They say that the moon is dying, or that it is being bitten by a certain kind of ant which they call *xubab*. Once, while at the village of Yalcobá, I heard great noises during an eclipse of the moon which occurred that night, and in my sermon the next day I tried to make them understand the cause of the eclipse in their own language, according to the interpretation from the Philosopher: "The lunar eclipse is the interposing of the earth between the sun and the moon with the sun on top and the moon in the shadow." With an orange to represent the sphere of Sacrobosco, and two lit candles on either side, I explained to them plainly and at sight what an eclipse really was. They seemed astonished, and quite happy and smiling, cured of their ignorance and that of their forefathers. I gave orders to their chieftain (*caçique*) that he should punish in the future all those who made a noise on such occasions. [204]

They also call certain old Indian shamans when a woman is in labor, and, with words of their former idolatry, he will enchant her and hear her confession. They do the same with some other patients. I could not find out all about this, for which I am very sorry. [205]

There are some Indian medicine-men who, with similar enchantment, are supposed to cure the bites or stings of snakes, especially of the rattlesnakes, of which there are a great many here. The victims of such bites are sometimes delirious, and often the flesh around the wound will decay until they die. The remedy the wizards give them, according to what I heard, is to make them eat human excrement or drink the juice of lemons, or else they will take a domestic fowl and place its beak on the wound, and have it suck in this way the poison of the snakebite. The hen or chicken will of course die, and they immediately replace it by another live one, and repeat that until all the poison is absorbed.

When they build new houses, which occurs every ten or twelve years, they will not inhabit nor even enter them unless the old wizard has been brought even from a distance of one, two, or three leagues to bless it or consecrate it with his stupid enchantment. This, however, I have only heard, and I am now sorry never to have recorded it personally. [206]

They are fortune-tellers, and they perform this feat with a heap of grained corn, counting always two and two grains, and if it comes out in even numbers, the fortune-teller will continue counting one, two, or three times over until it comes out uneven, bearing all the while in mind the main facts or reason for which he had been called on to tell the fortune, *vera gratia*. Once a girl ran away from home, and her mother, like any true Indian woman would have done in a similar case, immediately called one of those fortune-tellers, who drew lots on all the different roads until the fortune told of or pointed to a certain road the girl had taken and where she would be found. They sent out to look for her and found her in the village to which that road led. I punished that wizard, who was a native of a village at one league from Valladolid, and while I examined him with patience and slowly, I found that all the words he used in that so-called fortune-telling, while he counted the grains of corn, were no more than "Odd or even, odd or even" (*huylan nones*, [207]

caylan pares). He could not even tell me whether those words were meant as an invocation to Satan. In fact, he seemed not to know what they meant, for this particular wizard was a very great simpleton, almost imbecile.

In this city of Mérida it is publicly known that there exist several Indian sorceresses (witches), who by using certain words can open a rosebud before it is time for its opening, which is given to the one they wish to attract to their lascivious desire. They let him smell of it, or they place it under his pillow; but should the person who gives it to him smell its perfume, she is said invariably to lose her mind for a long while, calling to the one she expected to inhale it, and in whose name the rose was opened by the witch—a worthy matter which serves as medicine as well as punishment, especially if it hits the double mark. It has also been assured that the Indian women of this city are wont to throw a certain enchantment into the chocolate which is ready for their husbands to drink, and by it they become bewildered. This I only heard however, and I could not vouchsafe its truth. [208]

I will also note here what I saw as a child, and that is that they used to drown in a hole young puppies of a breed of dogs they raise as pets as well as for food. These are a kind of dogs, with but little or no hair at all, which they call *tzomes*.^[14] It is an old Jewish dogma of *cosher*. See the Apostle, *ut abstineant se a suffocatis*, etc.—that they abstain from the food of animals dying by smothering or any kind of natural death.

OF THE RELIGIOUS BELIEFS OF THE INDIANS OF YUCATAN IN 1545

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REPORT OF FRANCISCO HERNANDEZ

When our people discovered the kingdom of Yucatan they found crosses there, and one cross in particular which was made of stone and mortar, of a height of ten palms, and was erected in the center of a court or enclosure, very prominent and fair, and crowned with battlements; it stands alongside of a sumptuous temple and is very much frequented by a great number of people. This is on the island of Cozumel, which lies near the mainland of Yucatan. It is said that this cross was really adored as the God of Water or Rain; as often as there was a drought they went to sacrifice quail before it, as will be told later. When asked whence or through whom they had first heard of that sign, they replied that a very handsome man had once passed through their country and that he left it with them, that they might always remember him by it. Others, it is said, answered that it was because a man more resplendent than the sun had died on that cross. This is referred to by Peter Martyr in chapter I of his Fourth Decade. [210]

I shall refer to another tale or report which is very unusual and new regarding the Indies, and which until now has not been found in any other part of them. As this kingdom, on account of its close proximity to it, comes within the jurisdiction of my bishopric of Chiapa, on one of my visits I disembarked and remained at a very healthy port. I met there a clergyman, good, so it seemed, of mature age and honest, and [one] who knew the language of the natives from having lived there several years. As it was necessary for me to return to my episcopal residence, I nominated him as my vicar, and ordered and entreated him to travel inland and visit the Indians there and preach to them in a certain way in which I instructed him. After a certain number of months (I even believe it was one year), he wrote to me that on his trip he had met a principal lord or chief, and that on inquiring of him concerning his faith and the ancient belief all over his realm, he answered him that they knew and believed in God who was in heaven; that that God was the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. That the Father is called by them *Içona*,^[15] and that he had created man and all things. The Son's name was *Bacab*,^[16] who was born from a maiden who had ever remained a virgin, whose name was *Chibirias*,^[17] and who is in heaven with God. The Holy Ghost they called *Echuac*.^[18] They say that *Içona* means the great Father. *Bacab*, who is the son, they say killed *Eopuco*,^[19] and flagellated him, crowning him with a crown of thorns, and placed him with arms extended on a pole, not meaning that he should be nailed to it, but tied (and in order to show him how, the chief extended his own arms), where he finally died. He was dead for three days, but on the third day he returned to life and went up to heaven, and he is there with his Father. After this immediately came *Echuac*, which is the Holy Ghost, and he filled the earth with all it needs. When asked what *Bacab* or *Bacabab* meant, he said it meant the son of the great Father, and that *Echuac* meant merchant. And very good merchandise did the Holy Ghost bring to this earth, for he filled men with all their faculties, and divine and abundant graces. *Chibirias* means mother of the Son of the great Father. He added, furthermore, that at a certain time all men would have to die, but he did not seem to know anything of the resurrection of the flesh. When asked how they came to know all these things, the chief replied that the lords taught their sons, and in this manner it descended from one age to another. They also assert that in olden times, long ago, there came to the land twenty men (he gave the names of fifteen of them), but because they were very poorly written, and furthermore as they do not have great importance for this report, I do not copy them. Of the five others the vicar says he could not obtain their names. The principal one was called *Cocolcan*,^[20] and they called this one the God of all kinds of fevers. [211] [212] [213]

Two of the others are the Gods of fish, still another two the Gods of farms and homesteads [landed properties], still another was the God of Lightning, etc. They all wore long gowns or mantles, and sandals for their feet. They had long beards, and wore nothing to cover their heads. These men ordained that the people should go to confession and should fast, and some people fasted on Fridays because on that day *Bacab* had died. The name of this day (Friday) is *Himis*,^[21] and they honor it in their devotion on account of the death of *Bacab*. The chiefs (caçiques) know all the particulars of those things, but the common people believe only in the three persons, *Içona* and *Bacab* and *Echuac*, and in *Chibirias*, the mother of *Bacab*, and also [in] the mother of *Chibirias* called *Hischen*,^[22] whom we consider to have been Saint Ann. All this above stated is from information I have received in a letter from that reverend father whose name is Francisco Hernandez, and I still have his letter among my papers. He also stated that he took the said chief to a Franciscan friar who lived near there, and that the caçique repeated all he said before the friar, and they remained both greatly surprised at it. If all those things just stated are true, it would seem that that part of the land had been (long ago) informed about our Holy Faith, for in no other part of the Indies have we ever found such news. It is true that in Brazil, which belongs to the Portuguese, it was stated that traces of the wanderings of Saint Thomas the Apostle had been discovered, but such news could not very well fly over through the air, and furthermore it is quite certain that the country and kingdom of Yucatan give us more special and singular cases to ponder over, and of far greater antiquity, if we think of the great, exquisite, and admirable way the most ancient buildings are constructed, also of a certain lettering in queer characters which are not found anywhere else. Finally these are the secrets which only God knows.

GLOSSARY

Alux, h'lox, or more fully *h'loxkatob*. According to Brinton the meaning is "the strong clay images." He writes in his paper, The Folk-lore of Yucatan, that "the derivation of this word is from *kat*, which, in the Diccionario Maya-Español del Convento de Motul (MS. of about 1580), is defined as 'la tierra y barro de las olleras,' but which Perez in his modern Maya dictionary translates 'ollas ó figuras de barro'; *ob* is the plural termination; *lox* is strong, or the strength of anything; *h'* or *ah*, as it is often written, is the rough breathing which in Maya indicates the masculine gender."

Atole. Nahuatl *atolli*, or *atlaolli*. Corn-meal gruel.

Balám. Tiger or mountain-lion. The word was applied also to a class of priests and to kings as a title of distinction.

Balché. A fermented liquor made from wild honey and the bark of a tree.

Buhul, buuhul. A section of a stick of wood split lengthwise in the middle.

Bulihuah. Tortillas made of corn-meal and beans. From *bul* or *buul*, beans; *uah*, tortilla.

Caçique. Antillean word meaning a lord or chief.

Camote. Nahuatl *camotl*, a kind of sweet-potato.

Canlahuntaz. Large loaves of native bread. From *canlahun*, fourteen; *taz*, tiers, or layers.

Comal. Nahuatl *comalli*, clay griddle.

Hipil. Nahuatl *huipilli*, a woman's chemise.

Huahuapach, ua ua pach. According to Brinton (op. cit.) it means giant crab.

Huit, uith. Loin-cloth.

Jicara. Nahuatl *xicalli*, corrupted into *jicara*, a calabash.

Kex. To barter or change; also used as a name for ex votos placed on altars.

Kipxosi, kipchoh, cipchoh. "A diviner bird among the Indians."

Kool. A dish prepared by cooking corn with chicken.

Mecapal. Nahuatl *mecapalli*, leathern band used over the forehead for carrying burdens.

Mecate. Nahuatl *mecatl*, rope or cord made of maguey fiber.

Metate. Nahuatl *metatl*, a stone on which corn is ground.

Milpa. Nahuatl *milli*, cultivated land; *pan*, a postposition.

Mitote. Nahuatl *mitotli*, a dance.

Moloch. Brush-wood or kindling.

Pahatun, pah ah tun. The four *pa ah tunes*, the lords of rains, are, according to Brinton, "identical with the winds, and the four cardinal points from which they blow.... The name *pahatun* is of difficult derivation, but it probably means 'stone, or pillar, set up or erected.'"

Pib. An underground oven.

Pochat tancab. According to the author of this report the phrase has the same signification as *buhul*: the offering made to a girl by a prospective bridegroom.

The words seem to be: *poc*, to wash or rub; *hat*, numerical termination serving to count split-wood; *tancab*, outside the house, or in the patio. [219]

Pozole. Nahuatl *pozolatl*, or *poçol atl*, a drink of cooked corn.

Sacá, zacá. Orgeat of corn; from *za*, corn gruel; *cá*, or *caa*, duplicative particle.

Sintun, zintun. A heated stone for heating water for bathing purposes. From *zin*, to haul, girdle or encircle; *tun*, stone.

Taukul, tunkul. A wooden drum.

Tich. A mass celebrated in planted fields. See Brinton, op. cit.

Xaché xtabay. According to the author, the name of a plant. The first word, *xaché*, is evidently *xach* or *xachah*, to comb. *Xtabay* may be *x-*, a prefix, indicating feminine gender; *tabal*, to deceive.

Xanleox, x'kanleox. From *x-*, prefix denoting feminine gender; *kan*, yellow; *lox*, to strike with the closed fist. Brinton simply gives "yellow goddess" as the equivalent.

Xbolonthahroch bokolhahoch, X bolon thorocho bokol (or bookol) h'otoch. From *x-*, prefix denoting feminine gender; *bolon*, nine; *thorocho*, sound of a spindle revolving in its shaft. Brinton says, "The name therefore signifies 'the female imp who magnifies the sound of the spindle.'" *Bokol* or *bookol*, to stir; *h* or *ah*, to indicate the rough breathing which in Maya denotes the masculine gender. [220]

Xhantumbú, xkantumbub, or xkantun bub. A small plant used for medicinal purposes.

Xtabay. See etymology under *xaché xtabay*.

Xulab. Spelled by Sanchez de Aguilar *xubab*. An ant which attacks beehives.

Yuncimil, Yumcimil. The God of Death; from *yum*, universal father or lord; *cimil*, death.

Zatzun. A quartz crystal; from *zaz*, clear; *tun*, stone.

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NOTES

- [1] For the meaning of this and of other Indian words, consult the [glossary](#).
- [2] *Fotuto* is a musical instrument used by the Carib Indians and also by the negroes of the Antilles.
- [3] *Luneros* are Monday-workers.
- [4] *Fagina*—*faena*, manual labor.
- [5] *Milpa roza* is, literally, field cleared of underbrush and ready for planting.
- [6] *Milpa caña*, literally cane field.
- [7] An *almud* is a dry measure equivalent to twelve English bushels. There seems to be an error in the quantity here.
- [8] The author here seems to have confused the meaning of the word *mitote* (see [glossary](#)). In Yucatan the instrument he describes is called *tunkul*.
- [9] The *machete* is the large knife which the Indian men of Yucatan invariably carry with them.
- [10] The *arroba* is the Spanish measure of twenty-five pounds.
- [11] We have been unable to find the meaning of the word *güero*.
- [12] *Calabaza* is the Spanish for pumpkin; but the Mexican pumpkin is different from that raised in our latitudes.
- [13] *Jicama* seems to be a local word not in the dictionary.
- [14] *Tzomes*, according to Sanchez de Aguilar, is the name applied to hairless dogs. The common appellation is *kúkbil*, or *kikbil*. *Tzom* in Maya means a horn, also a proboscis. The word *tzomes* is close to *tzimin*, pl. *tzimines*, the name of the tapir, which has an elongate snout. Alonzo Poncé who was in Yucatan in 1588, speaks of tapirs being called by the natives *tzimines*, and further states that they call horses by the same name, a definition to be found in the Maya dictionary of Pio Perez.
- [15] The names to which we call attention in notes 15 to 22 represent, with a single exception, in misspelled form, well-known Mayan deities. It is interesting to note the early influence of the Spaniards on the religious beliefs of the Maya, as evidenced by the

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interpretation given to Father Hernandez by the old caçique. There is a curious mixture of old and new in the account. Dr Seler has identified the various deities spoken of, and a description of their attributes will be found in Brinton's Primer of Mayan Hieroglyphs. Içona is *Itzamna*, chief of the beneficent gods, the personification of the East. According to Brinton the name means "the dew or moisture of the morning." Brinton writes, "He was said to have been the creator of men, animals, and plants, and was the founder of the culture of the Mayas. He was the first priest of their religion, and invented writing and books."

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- [16] According to Brinton the *Bacabs*, or *Chacs*, were the offspring of *Itzamna* and his consort *Ix-Chel* (spoken of by the caçique as *Hischen*).
- [17] *Chibirias* is identified by Seler as *Ix-chebel-yax*, who, according to Brinton, was "the inventress of painting and of colored designs on woven stuffs."
- [18] *Echuac* is *Ek Chua*, said by Landa to be the god of the cacao planters, hence, as cacao-beans were the medium of exchange, the god of merchants, as here related. It is difficult to understand the confusion by which this god has been interwoven in Christian beliefs as the Holy Ghost.
- [19] *Eopuco* has been interpreted by Seler as *Ah uoh puc*, or *Ah-puch*, the God of Death, or God of Evil. Brinton believes that "these words mean the Undoer, or Spoiler, apparently a euphemism to avoid pronouncing a name of evil omen." In modern Maya he is plain *Yum cimil*, lord of death.
- [20] *Cocolcan* is *Cuculcan*, or *Kukulcan*, the same as the Nahuan *Quetzalcoatl*. *Kukulcan* was the feathered or winged serpent god, a deity of culture and kindness.
- [21] *Himis* is *Imix*, the name of the first day of the twenty-day month of the Maya calendar.
- [22] *Hischen* is *Ix-Chel*, the consort of *Itzamna*. Brinton states that the word means "rainbow," and that the goddess was also known as *Ix Kan Leom*, "the spider-web" which catches the dew of the morning. Her children, according to Brinton, the *Bacabs* or *Chacs* were "four mighty brethren, who were the gods of the four cardinal points, of the winds which blow from them, of the rains these bring, of the thunder and the lightning, and consequently of agriculture, the harvests, and food supply. Their position in the ritual was of the first importance. To each were assigned a particular color and a certain year and day in the calendar."

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