

MAYA CREATION MYTHS

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PART 2

THE DISCOVERY OF MAIZE

The same myth of the discovery of maize beneath the rocky peak of a mountain is found on the Mexican plateau and among various Maya groups.

Mexican plateau

The already cited *Leyenda de los soles* (Chimalpopoca, 1945: 121; Lehmann, 1906) is alone in ascribing the discovery of maize, apart from the smashing of the rock under which it lay, to divine intervention. Quetzalcoatl asked the ant where he obtained the maize which he was carrying. At first the ant would not tell, but finally indicated as the place the cerro de Tonacatepetl (Maize mountain). Quetzalcoatl turned himself into a black ant and accompanied the red ant to the deposit beneath the mountain, and taking some grains, he carried it to the other gods in Tamoanchan. Quetzalcoatl tried to carry the mountain away on his back, but he could not. Divination with maize grains by Oxomoco and Cipactonal revealed that only Nanahuatl could pulverize the mountain. The Tlalocs—the blue Tlalocs, the white Tlalocs, the yellow Tlalocs and the red Tlalocs—prepared themselves. Nanahuatl it was who broke open the mountain, but the Tlalocs stole the food, the white, black, yellow and red maize, the beans, the huauhtli and the chia.¹

¹ In Maya versions the other thunder gods, that is the Maya rain gods, steal

Mopan

The most detailed version of this myth circulates among the Mopan of San Antonio, British Honduras (Thompson, 1930: 132-34), and is also current among the Kekchi who may have taken the story from the Manché Chol.

Maize lay hidden beneath a great rock, only the leaf-cutting ants which had found a small crack on the rock leading to the supply, knew of it. One day the fox found and tasted some grains of maize dropped by the ants as they carried them off from beneath the rock. He ate them and found them delicious. When the ants returned at night, he followed them, but the crack in the rock was too small to let him reach the maize, and he had again to content himself with grains the ants dropped.

Back among the other animals, fox broke wind; they wanted to know what he had eaten that even his wind smelled sweet. Fox denied that he had found a new food, but the other animals, unbelieving, followed secretly and saw what he was eating. They too ate the maize and liked it; they asked the ants to fetch them more grains. The ants at first were agreeable, but, finding they could not keep all the animals supplied, they refused to bring out more maize except for themselves. The animals asked the large red ants and then the rat to help, but neither could get through the crack. Finally, they let man into the secret of this wonderful food.

Man asked the help of the Mountain-Valley gods, the Mams, the thunder gods who send the rain. There are four principal Mams and others of lesser importance. Yaluk, oldest and greatest of the Mams, was not present, when man asked their help. In turn, the three other great Mams hurled a thunderbolt at the rock, but failed to break it open. Finally, they had to send to ask Yaluk's help.

Yaluk sent the woodpecker to tap the rock to find where it was thinnest [hollow?]. When the woodpecker had done this,

the maize when the old infirm one who bursts open the rock faints from the effort. Nanahuatl, the syphilitic god, was thought to be rickety and without strength, so perhaps we may infer that Nanahuatl similarly fainted from the effort. The theft of the maize was obviously important, for it survives in several versions, although now with the legendary context forgotten, it has lost its old significance. An obscure passage in the Chilam Balam of Chumayel (Roys, 1933:99) may refer to the theft of the food stuffs.

Yaluk told him to hide behind a ledge of the rock and not thrust out his head. Yaluk, gathering all his strength, hurled his thunderbolt at the spot the woodpecker had indicated, and pulverized the rock, but he was an old man. The effort was too much for him, he fainted. Disobeying orders, the woodpecker had thrust out his head. It was cut by a flying piece of rock and bled profusely; ever since the woodpecker has had a red poll

All the maize had been white, but Yaluk's thunderbolt had burned some grain, and that turned red, and had smoked other grain which turned yellow, so now there is red, yellow and white maize [the informant surely forgot to mention black maize, charred by the thunderbolt]. Before Yaluk recovered from his fainting, the three younger Mams seized all the white maize, leaving only the damaged red and yellow for Yaluk. Yaluk was very angry.

Yaluk's maize grew well, but the white maize the other Mams had stolen did not germinate. They came to Yaluk to ask his advice. He told them to steep their maize in lime for three days and then plant it. Naturally, the crop failed again. Finally, a small crop of white maize was obtained. The Mams gave the maize to man to sow.

Yucatec. Colonial period

In mystic language which probably had little meaning for the transcriber or compiler of the present edition, the Book of Chilam Balam of Chumayel refers to the above myth in a lengthy chapter. A small part (Roys, 1933:107-12, with minor amendments by Thompson) tells us that the maize spirit or deity: "remained alone within the *gracia* [a ritualistic term adopted by the Maya for maize], within the night when there was neither heaven nor earth. Then he was pulverized [*buki*. Roys, unaware of the story of the freeing of the maize, changed this to *luki*, 'he departed'] at the end of the katun because he could not be born in the first katun. There were his long locks of hair [presumably, as Roys notes, the corn silk usually shown on the cheek in portraits of the maize god]. His divinity came to him when he came forth. He was hidden within the stone." There is mention in an obscure passage of the macaw doing

something behind the acantun, 'the stone column'. One is reminded of the part played by the woodpecker in the Mopan and Bachajon-Tzeltal versions. The rock beneath which the maize lay is called *chac ye tun*, 'great pointed rock', *ocontun*, 'stone pillar', and *zuhuy tun*, 'virgin, uncontaminated rock'. In a play on words, the maize is called *tun*, which means not only stone in general, but specifically jade, which, in turn, is a symbol for precious. These terms are applied to maize almost throughout Middle America.

Bachajon-Tzeltal

The Bachajon-Tzeltal version of the finding of maize (Slocum, 1965) retains the essentials of the Mopan version. The Jews [apparently regarded as the first people in the world] saw a large black ant (*xolop*) carrying maize. When it would not say where it had obtained the grains, they tied it tightly round the middle until its stomach was almost cut in half to make it tell, and that is why the ant's body looks as though it were cut in two. Finally the ant was forced to reveal that the maize was within a rock. The Jews got the woodpecker to tap the rock to see where it was thin, giving him a special beak to do the job. Two of the lightnings, the *rayos*, the *Chahuuc*, failed to smash the rock, but the third, the red *Chahuuc* split the rock open, but he fainted with the effort. The Jews hastily gathered and hid the big ears of maize; when red *Chahuuc* came to, he was surprised to see how little corn there was. He planted what was left and it grew well; the stolen corn did not grow. When the Jews asked him why theirs did not grow, he told them to cook it before sowing. When it again failed to sprout, they again went to *Chahuuc* for advice. This time he told them to put lime in it. Again it failed to grow. He did this to teach them that it is wrong to steal.

The cooking or steeping in lime the seed is a typical example of the Maya love of a practical joke. Note how the steeping in lime occurs also in the Mopan version.

Among the Tzeltal of Tenejapa it is said that God took maize from the ants who had obtained it from *anheles* (caves, hills, or springs, but also their *dueños*, the *rayos*). When man began to eat, he began to talk (Barbachano, 1946: 34).

Kekchi

A Kekchi version similar in all major, but lacking some minor, details of the Mopan story has been published by Burkitt (1918).

Mam

The Mam of Colotenango (Valladares, 1957:239-41) have different traditions of the origin of maize, one of which, collected by Señor Castañeda in 1950, is a version of that already noted, but with important elements, notably the parts played by the ant and the thunder gods, missing.

In ancient times there was no maize; people fed on the roots of a plant called *txetxina* (mother maize) with a large root and a single stalk. People noted that the dung of the wild cat, the *uech*, contained maize. They asked him where he had obtained it, and at his suggestion they sent a louse to travel on his shoulders, but the louse fell off en route. Next they sent a flea. The flea also fell off the wild cat, but he managed to jump on again, and thus locate the source of maize. The people went to the spot. It was a rock on a mountain called Paxil, "water beneath", in the municipio of La Libertad, Department of Huehuetenango. The ancients asked the woodpecker to break open the rock with his beak, and this the bird did. Thus the people obtained maize and ceased to eat *txetxina*. In La Libertad, the informant said, there is always an abundance of maize.

According to another legend recovered in the same town, maize came first from a milpa in a high up spot near Nebaj, and was the property of the *dueña* of the place. In a time of famine men sent the crow to rob grain, but the crow was surprised by the *dueña* and never returned. The *zompopo* ant was next sent, and he managed to rob grain which he gave to the people, and soon it was growing everywhere. One day the *dueña* of the maize came down to the lands occupied by humans, and seeing the growing maize, she called out "Who stole my maize?" No one answered. Suspecting it was the ant, she caught it and squeezed its waist to make it answer. Ever since the ant has had a very narrow waist. As the ants brought

man maize, it is not good to kill them, but what is one to do; one must destroy them, otherwise they will eat up the milpa.

Maud Oakes (1951:244) recounts a story of the Mams of Todos Santos that maize grew untended on the mountain called Xepaxa, about twelve miles in a direct line west of Todos Santos. A man once brought some home. His family did not know how to cook it; they roasted it and liked the taste. He collected more and finally brought back seed to sow. Omak, near Nebaj, is another source of wild maize, and there are others.

Quiché

According to the Popol Vuh (Recinos, 1950:165-67) the yellow and white ears of maize came from Paxil and Cayalá, and from them was made the present human race. The mountain cat, the coyote, the small parrot and the crow were the animals which brought the maize. They told the gods to go to Paxil and Cayalá, and showed them the road to those villages.² This land yielded other foodplants of every description. The maize hidden beneath the rock does not seem to be a Quiché tradition, but one incident, how colored maize originates, appears in a story of an old Quiché of Quezaltenango (Termer, 1957:240). A spirit living in the volcano of Siete Orejas had the only supply of maize in the world, but some evil spirits burned his maize so that the grain on the outside was burned black, that part way in was scorched, and that in the center remained untouched. Since then there have been black, yellow and white maize in the world.

In present-day Santo Tomás Chichicastenango it is told that when Jesus was crucified, he miraculously turned exposing his back. From it came white, yellow, and black maize, beans, potatoes, and all other food plants. Then he died. This legend (Tax, 1947:580) may have arisen from Jesus' words "I am the bread of life".

² The traditions current among both Mam and Quiché that maize grew wild near Nebaj, which is in Ixil territory, and those among the Mam, Quiché and Cakchiquel that it grew wild in northwestern Huehuetenango are of particular interest in view of the recent discoveries of the first domestication of corn in the Coxcatlan caves, not so very far west of the above-mentioned areas. It is possible that these traditions have a basis in fact.

Cakchiquel

The *Annals of the Cakchiquels* (Recinos, 1953:46) notes "only two animals knew there was food [maize] in Paxil, the place where those animals, the coyote and the crow, are found. The coyote was killed and in his remains, when he was quartered, corn was discovered". This maize was kneaded with the blood of tapir and serpent to make man.

The episode of maize hidden beneath a rock is current among the present-day Cakchiquel of San Antonio Palopó. Palikwala smashed the rock with a thunderbolt, and got the maize through a crack (Redfield, 1946:36).

Pokomchi

The legend of the maize hidden beneath the rock must have been current among the Pokomchi for Narciso (1960:106) recounts how the twelve thunders, sent to smash the rock within which the maize was kept, failed. Then the thirteenth, the weakest and most ill, inspired by the woodpecker who had spied through a hole the rich legacy of the gods, smashed the rock, thus giving that wonderful food to man.

Resume

Clearly this story once had a very wide distribution throughout the Maya area, and no doubt investigation would reveal its presence in areas from which it has not yet been reported. It would be hard to say whether it originated in or outside the Maya area. As noted, the traditions of maize growing wild in northwestern Guatemala before its cultivation may be a true folk memory.

The Mopan tell of a tree with branches on which grew all fruits and vegetables other than maize (Thompson, 1930:134-35). Men tried to fell it, but by nightfall it was not completely cut down. Next day the cut was not visible. The second day the men hid to see what happened. The animals collected all the chips and put them back in the cut so that it healed. Then the men worked day and night till the tree was felled; since

then man has had all such vegetables. A similar myth is current in British Guiana, and one is reminded of how the felled trees and shrubs in the twins' milpa were set up by the animals in the Popol Vuh (Recinos, 1950:133).

SUN AS CULTURE HERO

Below are given a series of incidents in the life of sun on earth before he assumed his solar duties. Sometimes he is alone, but more often he is accompanied by a brother who later becomes the planet Venus or, in Quiché and Cakchiquel tradition, the moon. This last, however, is contradicted by modern legends and belief which have the moon a woman and the wife of the sun (Bunzel, 1952:428).

BOYHOOD: DECEPTION AND DEATH OF OLD WOMAN

In outline, the boys or sun alone hunt, but old woman gives all the meat they bring home to her lover. The children learn this and slay her lover, and trick old woman into eating part of his body. She tries to kill the children, but they triumph, generally after a contest of riddles, and kill her.

Mopan

The Mopan version is perhaps the most detailed (Thompson, 1930:120-23).

There were three brothers, who lived before the (present?) sun was made. The future planet venus was the eldest, the future sun was the second, the one who was later turned into a monkey and became another planet, was the youngest. They lived with their grandmother, Xkitza. The boys hunted birds with their blowguns, and gave the meat to the old woman, but she gave it to her lover, a huge monster, some say a tapir, who visited her every night. When the boys were asleep she smeared fat on their lips and threw the bones of the birds under their hammocks. When the boys woke hungry and asked for meat, the old woman told them they had eaten it, and called atten-

tion to the fat on their lips and cheeks and the bones beneath their hammocks. They believed her until one day the trogon told them the trick Xkitza played on them.

They made a deadfall trap, setting sharp stakes in the bottom. Xkitza's lover fell in and was killed. The boys cut off and roasted the animal's penis, and taking it home, gave it to Xkitza to eat. She said it was tasty. The boys laughed and some birds called out "Look at her; she has eaten her lover's penis." Xkitza was suspicious.

She sent the boys to sleep, and went down to the river to sharpen her claws. The boys asked the toad, and then the big crested lizard to spy on her. The latter warned the boys that Xkitza planned to kill them. Each put a wooden stool and a calabash, to represent the body and head, in his hammock with a blanket over both, so it looked as though all were asleep. Then they hid in the rafters of the hut. Xkitza crept in and dug her freshly-sharpened claws into each calabash in turn, believing each was a boy's head. The boys laughed in the rafters. Xkitza looked up. "I was only playing" she replied to their questions.

The boys decided to kill the old woman, but as the youngest brother did not agree with this plan, they turned him into a monkey (see below). The boys and Xkitza took it in turns to ask each other riddles. She could not answer those posed to her, and so the boys killed her; Sun shot her with an arrow.

Kekchi

A version of the above with minor variations is recorded from the Kekchi town of San Juan Chamelco, Alta Vera Paz (Goubaud, 1949:126-28).

The old lady starved the children, putting fat on their lips and fingernails while they slept. The boys set machetes, knives and pieces of broken bottles along the path followed by her lover when he came to visit the old woman. He died of the wounds he received, and the boys cut up his body and gave the meat to grandmother. "How tasty", she exclaimed as she ate the meat. They saved a leg for her lover, but, not unexpectedly, he did not appear to eat it. Next day the boys, while hunting with their uncle, told him how they had killed the

man. Later the old woman learned of her lover's death and how she had been tricked into eating part of him. She scolded them and tried to kill them as they slept. In this version the boys place bunches of bananas in their beds. The old woman drives a knife into each as the boys watch from the attic. Finally, old woman threw herself into a well. The boys cut her in pieces, buried her head and clothes, and roasted her arms, legs, and ribs. As on previous occasions, a bird sang "Died, died." "Who died?" asked the boys' uncle. When he learned, they had a big feast of the meat and danced. Everyone was happy at the old woman's death.

Mazatec-Populca

Johnson and Johnson (1939) record a story of sun and moon as children when the world was still dark, before the present sun and moon undertook their duties. A number of the incidents are unrelated to those found in the Maya area, but the following parallel Maya motives:

The boy who was later to become the sun liked to hunt, but the meat he brought home the old woman gave to her husband. Sun learned this. He killed the old woman's husband who had the form of a deer, and filled the skin with all animals which bite and sting, serpents and so forth.³ Sun left the swollen stuffed carcase lying there; the kidneys he took and gave to old woman. She ate them. Going to the well, she was greeted by the birds, who at the instance of sun, cried "You have eaten your husband's kidneys". Angrily, she hit the parrot with some plants; since then it has been green. She trod on the toad and that is why he is flat.

Her husband she found snoring.⁴ She hit him with a stick to wake him so that he would come and eat. Instead the animals poured out to sting her. The old woman said the children had won, for there had been other contests. She went to live in a volcano. When clouds cover the volcano it is sun putting the old woman's skirt over the volcano to annoy her.

³ Compare the wasps and biting insects which came forth from the logs after the death of moon (p. 30), and the deer skin full of ashes which sun carried to impress moon with his hunting abilities, and which burst. Deer skins play an important part in this cycle of legends of the sun on earth.

⁴ In a parallel passage the buzzing of the bees and wasps was compared to the sound of snoring.

Mixe

Miller (1956:71-99) relates Mixe stories which contain elements of the childhood of sun and moon. Indeed, in the last two stories the boy and girl are called sun and moon. They kill their grandfather and give his flesh (in one case his testicles) to his wife to eat. The water in which the meat is cooking calls out to her "You are boiling your husband". The children filled the old man's petate with stinging insects; the old woman hits it and gets stung. The dummy in bed episode appears in a different context and with a pleasant twist to it: the dummy contains bean soup; when it flows from the "wound" the "murderer" supposes it to be the victim's blood.

The bird (humming bird in one version; *salta-pared* in others) appears while she is arranging her loom to weave. She takes it in her bosom and becomes pregnant.

In a fragmentary version (Carrasco, 1952) the two children—boy and girl—kill the old man. As they cooked some beans they heard a voice saying "You killed your grandfather; now you eat him". The old lady chased them; after adventures they ascended to the sky to become sun and moon.

Zapotec

The Zapotec of Mitla tell of a childless woman married to a lazy old man (Parsons, 1951:324-28), with whom lived an orphan boy and his sister, later to become respectively the sun and moon. Every day they hunted; the boy with his blowgun killed birds and hares, and sometimes he killed a deer. They brought the meat to the old woman, but she gave it all to the old man; the children were very hungry. San Anton told them where to find two deer, but again they were given no meat. San Anton next told them to kill and skin two more deer and stuff them with every sort of stinging insect.

They killed the old man, took out the heart and filled his corpse with stinging insects. They gave the heart to the old woman, saying it was the heart of a deer they had killed. While it cooked she went to the river to wash. The frog called to her "Eater of your own family". She shook the old man to wake him for his meal; the stinging creatures came out and stung

her and she realized the old man was dead. Her brother told her to build a fire in the *temascal*, the sweat house, to kill the children. However, San Anton told the children of the plan, and bade the boy make an escape hole on the far side of the *temascal* and put thorns and maguey leaves on the fire to make it spark so the woman will think you have burned.

The children escape from the *temascal*: with chile smoke from the blowgun,⁵ they suffocate the old woman, but are pursued by her brother. There follow the various incidents of the well-known tale of the Magic Flight. Finally, they kill the pursuing brother and took out his eyes. By a trick the boy got the stronger right eye, the girl, the weaker left eye. The sun had offered her a rabbit for her stronger eye, suggestive of the rabbit in the moon belief. God made the boy the sun because he had the stronger eye; his sister, the moon. They still quarrel about the eyes.

Cakchiquel

The Cakchiquel of San Antonio Palopó (Redfield, 1946:252) have a version of sun's boyhood partly reminiscent of the above incident of the *temascal*.

There were three brothers, the elder ones became the sun and moon, the youngest they turned into a monkey, because he told stories on them. The brothers worked their milpa by magic; they prayed and the hoes did the work [as sun and moon did in the Popol Vuh]. The youngest boy told grandmother. She scolded the brothers, and since then the hoes have not worked unaided. After the youngest had been turned into a monkey, sun and moon threw their grandparents into the *temascal*, and then threw them in the fire. Grandfather, turning himself into a *pisote*, escaped to the coast.⁶ Later the brothers took up their celestial duties.

Other tales of the hero children incorporating motifs already discussed are in Chinanteca (Weitlaner, 1952), Mixtec (Cruz, 1946:217-19), and to a still lesser extent in Sierra Popoluca (El-

⁵ In the Mopan version of the escape of sun and moon, sun fills the old man's blowgun with ground chile pepper so that when he takes a breath to shoot the escaping couple, he is temporarily incapacitated by the ground chile.

⁶ The *pisote*, *inter alia*, functions as a creator god, and that might have significance in this passage, but *pisotes* are also regarded as clowns, and grandfather had just suffered the indignity in the *temascal* of having an ear of maize thrust in his anus. Accordingly, the clown aspect seems to fit better.

son, 1947). Slaying of deer lover and filling the skin with wasps etc. is recorded from Miahuatlan, Puebla (Barlow and Ramírez, 1962) and the Chatino (Cicco and Horcasitas, 1962). The latter have the old woman burned to death in the *temascal*.

PERILS OF TREE CLIMBING

In these stories sun, while still on earth, gets rid of unwanted brothers. They are turned into monkeys or from their dead bodies other animals are created. In some versions their fates are apparently sealed when their grandmother laughs at them.

Quiche

In the Popol Vuh (Recinos, 1950:126-27) the twin heroes Hunahpu and Xbalanque, who later become the moon [morning star?] and sun are mistreated by their elder half-brothers, Hun Batz and Hun Chouen, and by their grandmother and they were given almost no food. Their half-brothers even tried to kill them. The four brothers went out hunting. Hunahpu and Xbalanque with their blowguns shot many birds in the top of a tree, but the dead birds were caught in the branches. They persuaded Hun Batz and Hun Chouen to climb the tree to retrieve them. As the elder pair climbed, the tree grew taller and bigger; they called out in fright for they could not climb down. Hunahpu and Xbalanque told them to loosen their loin cloths, tie them below their stomachs and pull the long ends from behind. They did so, but the loin-cloth ends became tails, and they were turned into monkeys. Indeed, *batz* is the general Maya name for howler monkey, and *chuen* is a day name in the Maya calendar corresponding to the Aztec day name Ozomatli, 'spider monkey'.

When the youngsters returned, their grandmother was anxious and sad. They told her Hun Batz and Hun Chouen would return but with animal faces, and on no account must she laugh at them. The twins began to beat the drum, play the flute and sing. Soon Hun Batz and Hun Chouen arrived and began to dance to the music. The old lady began to laugh and the mon-

keys ran off. Three times they danced and three times she laughed. The fourth time they ran off, they did not return. They stayed in the trees.

Mopan

The Mopan version is very similar (Thompson, 1930:122-23). The boys who were to become sun and venus wanted to get rid of their youngest brother. They shot a bird which stuck in the top branch of a tree. They tied a blanket round the waist of the youngest boy [surely a loin cloth in earlier recountings of the tale], and sent him up the tree to retrieve the bird. When he was almost at the top Sun told him to call out *wacwacwacwacwac*, imitating the chatter of the spider monkeys. The boy did so, and climbing higher, began to chatter like a spider monkey and to swing from tree to tree. The blanket turned into the animal's fur and the dangling end into its tail. Sun told him he must remain there. From him are descended all monkeys. Later he became a planet or the evening star [the present-day Mopan think of morning and evening stars as unrelated].

Cakchiquel and Mam

The Cakchiquel of Palopó (Redfield, 1946:252) tell the incident of the youngest brother being turned into a monkey after being sent to climb a tree.

Among the Mam of San Miguel Acatan (Siegel, 1943) Jesus got his elder brothers to climb a tree which grew taller as they climbed. They also were turned into monkeys. Jesus stripped bark off the tree, and with it formed a lake at the base of the tree.

Bachajon Tzeltal

In this version and the following the tree is brought down and the climbers killed. The Tzeltal version (Slocum, 1965:7-18) tells of two brothers who lived with an old woman, "grandmother". Each day the elder, Yax Kahkal, 'green [or first?] sun', killed his brother, 'youngest of the family'. He

chopped the body in pieces, but the wasps and bees collected the pieces and restored the child to life.⁷ Younger brother watched the old lady spinning cotton thread. He took a handful of the cotton seed piled beside her [presumably she had been carding the cotton], and going into the forest, threw it up into a tree where it turned into a beehive. From that all our honey derives, but some fell to the ground, and from that came the hives which certain bees make on the ground.

Younger brother persuaded older brother to climb to the top of the tree to get the honey. Older brother greedily ate it, but when younger brother asked him to throw some down, he threw down, three times in succession, only wax. Younger brother molded the wax and in the top set pieces of palm wood which he had sharpened. The wax turned into moles [*Slocum* wrongly translates as gophers], the sharpened wood becoming the teeth. For that reason the old people say the mole has no bones.⁸ Younger brother started to cut down the tree. Older brother told him to stop. Younger brother showed him his tiny machete, and asked older brother how he could possibly cut down the tree with such a small blade. The tree fell, but it was because the gophers gnawed through all the roots. Elder brother was smashed in pieces. The larger pieces became the large animals such as the deer, peccary, and tepescuintli; the smaller pieces became the birds. His clotted blood (*stonch'ich'el*) became a bird, the *xtonch'ich'* (a pun).

Grandmother accused younger brother of having killed his brother when the latter failed to return home, but he denied it. He told her to shell corn to feed the animals which would come to the hut, and she must grab those she liked to keep as pets in the hut. The animals and birds which eat corn were those that came. She caught them by their tails. The boy told her that if she laughed at them they would escape leaving their tails behind. Nevertheless, she could not help laughing, and the pets ran off leaving their tails behind. That is why

⁷ Compare with the collection of the pieces of moon after she had been hit by her father's thunderbolt in the Mopan story. The collectors then were dragonflies (Thompson, 1930:128).

⁸ It is extraordinary how many characteristics of animals are explained in these stories. We have already learned how the woodpecker got his red head, and why certain animals have short tails or no tails. Other explanations of this kind account for the green color of parrots, the flatness of toads, the pinched waists of ants, the crested heads of iguanas, white around deer's scut, and so on.

deer, rabbit, peccary have no proper tails. The only one she caught again was the rabbit. This our heavenly mother, the moon still holds. It can be seen even today in the middle of the moon.⁹

Palencano Chol

The Palencano Chol version closely resembles that of the Tzeltal (Aulie and Aulie, 1951) which is understandable since they are neighbors.

Our mother, the moon, had seven children by her first husband who died. Our father, the sun, wanted to have intercourse with her, so she used to send the children away each evening to work in the milpa and they returned next day. She became pregnant. When the baby, son of sun, was born, she tried to hide him, sending the other boys each day to work in the milpa, but they suspected, and hiding, they saw their half brother come out. He wore a small hat, red like fire it was, and red were his small trousers, and he had a tiny old machete. When the boys came, the mother was making tortillas; son of sun was hidden in a large pottery jar.¹⁰ Later, the boys took their young half-brother to the milpa. On his fifth trip to the milpa, they killed him. After they had been home a short while the dead boy arrived carrying a peccary on his back; his brothers were amazed. The same thing happened next day. On the third day all went to the forest. There was a hive at the top of a high tree. Son of sun told his brothers to climb up to fetch the honey. He asked them to throw down some honey; they threw down only wax. Four times they hit him on the head with the wax. He grew angry. He made ten little moles and put them in the ground. They ate the roots; the tree

⁹ Laughter seems to have been the password for liberty. Among the Mopan of British Honduras (Thompson, 1930: 124), Venus had the animals penned up. When his wife laughed at him because he was so ugly, the animals in their pens broke out and scatter. Venus grabbed some, such as the deer, the rabbit, the brocket and the peccary, but again their tails broke off in they escaped.

Rabbit in the moon, once considered a purely nahuatl concept, has a wide distribution. It is reported from the Mopan (Thompson, 1930: 64), the Zapotec (Parsons, 1936: 326), as already noted, tell how sun gave moon a rabbit in return for the brighter eye.

¹⁰ The sun child is similarly hidden in a pottery jar in a creation legend of the Pipil of Izalco recovered by Schultze-Jena (1935). In humming bird's courtship of moon, he hides in a gourd (see below). Red is the color of the sun in Mexican plateau art.

fell; the brothers were smashed in pieces. Son of sun went home. His mother asked what had happened to his brothers. On the fourth day he told her to shell four baskets of corn. He went to the milpa, and returned with his brothers who had been converted into tame animals, one peccary, two ducks, two male turkeys, two raccoons (?), two pigs, two chickens, two armadillos, two deer, and two hen turkeys. Our mother fed the animals. She did not weep much, but sun's son said nothing: he was angry.

Kekchi

A somewhat decultured version of the creation of monkeys is current among the Kekchi (Dieseldorff, 1926-33, vol. 1, pp. 5-6). A sick man sent his children to work in the milpa but they played. They set light to thirteen gourds of tobacco to make their father think they were burning the milpa, but he came to see what they were doing. When they saw him coming, the boys climbed a tree and began to chatter like monkeys. Night overtook them in the tree and they turned into monkeys.¹¹

SUN COURTS MOON

This story has a more limited circulation, and is not reported, except for isolated details, outside the Maya area.

Mopan

The story is given in full by Thompson (1930:126-29). The future sun fell in love with XT'actani, a fine weaver, who lived with her grandfather, T'actani. To impress her, he passed by her hut carrying a deer he had hunted. As deer were scarce, he stuffed the skin with ashes, grass and leaves, and each day paraded past her hut with it on his shoulder to give the impression he killed a deer every day. T'actani, suspicious, told his daughter to throw water on the path. Sun slipped; the skin

¹¹. The idle in milpa theme with some trick or magical intervention (such as the hoes which do the work in the Popol Vuh) is widespread (cf. Thompson, 1930:163-65).

burst, the ashes and grass poured out, and XT'actani laughed at him. Sun changed into a humming bird, and darted from flower to flower of a tobacco plant before the hut. At XT'actani's request the old man shot the humming bird with his blowgun. She took it into her room, where it revived, and in the night, resuming sun's human shape persuaded her to flee with him.¹² She later became the moon. To delay pursuit, sun covered the old man's *sastun* (jade or crystal), in which he could see everything, with soot and filled his blowgun with ground chile. When the old man drew breath to blow the pellet he nearly choked to death.

Nevertheless, Chac was persuaded to hurl a thunderbolt at the couple fleeing in a canoe. To escape it sun turned into a turtle, moon into a crab to escape the blow, but the bolt killed moon. Sun collected her remains in thirteen hollow logs with the aid of dragonflies. When they were opened thirteen days later, twelve contained snakes and noxious insects. They escaped and since then those stinging and biting things have been in the world.¹³ The thirteenth contained XT'actani. The deer trampled on her and with his hoof formed her vagina. Sun cohabited with her, the first sexual intercourse in the world.

Kekchi

Dieseldorff (1926-33, 1:4-5) gives almost the same story as the Mopán in a version collected, I understand, by Paul Wirsing. The informant was one of the Kekchi-speaking Cuculs, supposed to belong to the large body of Manché Chol absorbed by the Kekchi. The sun is called Xbalamque, 'jaguar sun', (cf. Xbalanque of the Popol Vuh). The blood of the girl is gathered in twelve jars. There follow the incidents of the noxious insects and the trampling by the deer.

12. In two representations on pottery of the sun wearing the deer's skin (see below) a humming bird is also depicted, clearly references to this incident. In the Palopó legend the hero takes the form of a humming bird (see below). In the Chatino myth of the sun and moon (Cicco and Horcasitas, 1962:74), the mother of the twins becomes pregnant from fondling a brightly colored (humming?) bird in her bosom. The Mixe, as noted, have the same myth. A ball of bright feathers tucked under her huipil caused Coatlicue's pregnancy. There is a case for identifying Huitzilopochtli, 'humming bird on left,' her son as the sun.

13. A Palencano-Chol myth (Anderson, 1957) has the Pandora's box incident. The dog was responsible for loosing all those pests on mankind.

Further material was communicated by Paul Wirsing to the late Mrs Elsie McDougall. When the old man inhaled the powdered chile, he writhed in pain and that caused the first earthquake. Moon did not change into a crab but slipped into an armadillo shell. Her blood was gathered in thirteen pottery jars.

In another version, collected by Burkitt (Gordon, 1915:120-21), the girl is called Matactin and the sun Li Cagua Saque, 'our lord sun'. The dragonflies collect the girl's blood in thirteen jars. Thirteen days later Sun poured their contents into a fountain. From twelve came snakes, worms and reptiles; the thirteenth held Matactin. Sun ordered the deer to conduct her to the sky.

In still another variant, also collected by Burkitt (Gordon, 1915:116-17), sun, attracted by the girl, borrowed turtle's shell and held it before his face so that it cast a shadow over the girl. While she rested in the shade, sun threw the shell over her and captured her. After the stealing of his daughter, the old man constructed an enormous blowgun so that its pellet would reach even the sun on high. Sun threw powdered chile into the blowgun as the old man drew breath; his hard coughing was the beginning of whooping cough in the world.

When he finally fired, the clay ball struck sun causing him to let go of the girl. She fell in the sea, smashed to pieces. Small fish gathered the pieces and patched them with their silvery scales. Then, each holding in his mouth the tail of another, they made themselves into a net and tried to lift the girl to the sun. Because of his heat they could not reach sun. Instead, they left the girl in the sky, where, as the moon, she still tries to overtake her lover. The fish became the milky way.

Cakchiquel

A long tale from Palopó written in Cakchiquel with Spanish translation is given by Redfield (1946:292-370). The old man Mataktani had two daughters. One caught a humming bird who turned into human shape and became her lover. Every evening when sun set he came to be with her. Her conversation with him was overheard by her father but she denied that there was a man with her.

Mataktani sent the louse to get two hairs from each as evidence of the man's presence, but he was too heavy [with blood?]

to climb. Next the old man sent flea on the same mission, but humming bird hid in a gourd, and flea had to report failure. A mouse, sent on the same mission, got the hairs, but climbing up to the rafters, he knocked against a gourd which fell on the sleeping couple and awoke them. They realized what had happened. Next morning, on being taxed, the girl confessed. Maktani agreed to accept humming bird as his son-in-law, but set him several tests. These, being outside the theme, will not be summarized.

Later, the couple decided to move away to escape the domination of the old man. He had a magic blowgun, by sucking through which he could bring back anyone it was aimed at. Humming bird put lime, chile and soot in the blowgun before the couple fled. Maktani, incapacitated by the intake of these, sought the aid of his *capitanes*. He asked one to thunder and strike his daughter with a thunderbolt. When the girl was thus killed, humming bird placed her bones in a pottery jar which he left in charge of an old woman, promising to return for them. A week later there was much noise in the jar and the old lady was frightened and closed [*cerró*] the jar. Humming bird returned after two weeks. Opening the jar, he found the bones had turned into those animals which work the honey and the wax to make the candles which serve the glory of God.¹⁴

MOON'S ADULTERY

These incidences in sun and moon's story appear to be of limited distribution today, but they are of particular interest because there is archaeological evidence for their currency during the Classic period.

Mopan

The following events are also referable to the period before sun and moon took up their duties in the sky (Thompson,

¹⁴ Translation not clear, "animales que trabajan mucho la miel para la fiesta v la cera". Throughout the translator uses the word *gorrión*, although the Cakchiquel word *ts'unum*, 'humming bird', is used. Sun is not mentioned save for the passage which implies that it is the sun who joins the girl as soon as he completes his day's work at sunset. Clearly, any idea that these events predate the appearance of the present sun is lost.

1930:130-32). Sun built a hut for himself and moon, and his elder brother Xulab, the future morning star, came to live with them. Sun suspected an intrigue between his wife and morning star. He had an old woman make him a tamale with center of chile, gall of birds and annotto. He put it under his arm so that the heat of his body would cook it [anticipation of solar heat?]. He gave it to the guilty couple who, on starting to eat it, vomited and drank all available water trying to get the taste out of their mouths.

His wife, XT'actani, was so angry, she was persuaded to fly on the back of a zopilote to become the mistress of the king vulture. Sun borrowed deer's skin, and hid under it, feigning to be a dead deer. The zopilotes came to feed on the carcass. When the one who had carried off XT'actani came close to peck out his eye, sun caught him and forced him to carry him on his back to the white stone "palace" of the king vulture (it was his nest, white with bird droppings). Finally he persuaded her to return to earth with him.

The time had come for sun to take up his duties. He, his wife, and his elder brother morning star ascended into heaven. XT'actani, as the moon, was as bright as sun; it was perpetual day and the people complained that they could not sleep. Sun took out one of her eyes; since then she has given only a soft light.

Classic Period Maya

Various scenes on pottery vessels of the Classic period certainly depict sun's ruse of hiding under the deer's skin. The best example is on a painted Tepeu 2 vase from Yalloch (Gann, 1918:pl. 19a; Thompson, 1939; fig. 3). The deer's front legs are bent forward like human arms, a position impossible for a deer; human hands and legs are visible; beside the sun under deer is a humming bird, sun's guise; beyond is a vulture. Above the hidden sun hovers an insect with extended proboscis, surely to represent the blowfly which, at sun's request, sent word to the vultures of the deer carcass. Another example is the Camara vase now in the Bliss collection (Lothrop, Foshag and Mahler, 1957: pl. 81). Here, again, the deer's forefeet are bent the wrong way and the outline of the rear legs is human not that of a stag. A sort of blanket with cross-bones on the animal's

back may indicate that he is supposed to be dead. Above, a king vulture flies down. One personage blows a conch trumpet, another holds an antler in his hand as though he had just wrenched it off the animal's head. If that refers to some incident in the legend, it has not survived. This vessel, too, is referable to Tepeu 2.

A carved brown jar from San Agustín, but probably of Copan manufacture (Smith and Kidder, 1943: fig. 27b) shows a kneeling figure with a deer draped around him. As a humming bird also appears in the scene, it is a reasonable assumption that sun is in the act of hiding beneath the deer skin. This is late Classic or immediate post-Classic.

Kekchi

A Kekchi version given to Mrs. Elsie McDougall by Paul Wirsing follows in the main the Mopan account. Not an affair with Morning Star, sun's elder brother, but the action of Chocl, "cloud", sun's younger brother, caused the break-up of sun and moon's marriage. Cloud used to pass to and fro while moon sat bathing herself in her washtub (*batea*). Sun could not see his wife and suspected that cloud's interest was more than fraternal. He struck moon and her crying drew the interest of the zopilote. When sun borrowed deer's skin he tied a cloak in its place, but it was too short to cover deer's hind-quarters and these became bleached. Similarly, the zopilote's feathers became bleached at the extremes which were not covered by sun's body as he rode on that bird.

Quiche

The hero brothers Hunahpu and Xbalanque after their adventures on earth and after vanquishing the rulers of the underworld, Xibalba, ascend to the sky to become the sun and the moon (Reinos, 1950:163). The same is the fate of the hero brothers in the stories of the Cakchiquel of Palopó (Redfield, 1946:252). This is difficult to understand since elsewhere throughout the Maya area the moon is female and almost invariably the wife of sun. Moreover, as Xbalanque is the name of the sun (borrowed from the Kekchi?), Hunahpu, 'l Ahau',

must be the moon. However, there is good evidence that I Ahau was the morning star in Yucatan (Thompson, 1950:219). One can only suppose that at some time this identification of the younger brother with the moon was made, perhaps as a result of non-Maya influences.

As we have seen (p. 33) a weaker eye or the loss of one eye explains moon's diminished light in myths from other groups.

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

There are a number of dominant motifs which are worth recapitulating: the boys are mistreated by the old woman and are kept hungry; they kill her lover who is in the shape of a deer or a monster; by subterfuge they get the old woman to eat part of her lover, although the animals tell her of this jeeringly or as a warning; alternatively the boys fill the deer carcass with stinging creatures which sting the old woman when she strikes the carcass; in revenge she tries to kill the children; they warned by animals places dummies in their beds; alternative plot involves smothering in temascal; boys kill her after she fails to answer riddles. There is an emphasis on blowguns: the boys hunt with them; moon's father-grandfather has a magic one which sucks people in or will send a pellet to hit the sun in the sky; sun in the Mopan legend hurls his blowgun at mountains to make a tunnel through which he can crawl instead of climbing over the peak, and the hero brothers of the Popol Vuh use their blowguns as bridges over streams and to hide in during their night in the house of bats.

The unwanted brother or brothers are sent to climb a tree to get a bird or honey and are changed into monkeys or the tree is toppled over and the smashed pieces of their bodies are changed into various animals; they return to the old lady's hut in their new forms; as she cannot refrain from laughing at them, they are forced to keep their animal forms for ever; catching the animals by the tails as an explanation of some having very short or hairless tails appears at one point or other of the cycle. In sun's courtship of moon and subsequent life, the deer plays many roles. These are so varied and intimate that they suggest some now lost religious notions on the relationship of deer to moon and sun. The old woman's lover is seemingly a deer, at

least his carcass is that of a deer; sun deceives moon about his prowess as a hunter by carrying a stuffed deer skin on his shoulder; he crouches under a deerskin as part of his scheme to recover his wife; a deer forms moon's sex organs. According to a Tzeltal tale (C. A. Castro *Los hombres verdaderos*) the deer loses his antlers every year because he put his head under a woman's skirt, and the woman's heat burned them off. The nature of the incident suggests that moon was the woman; in one Kekchi version sun orders the deer to conduct moon to the sky: a Cakchiquel story recorded by Otto Stoll relates that on short day the sun is drawn across the sky by two deer, whereas on long days two jabali pull him.

The young moon was a keen weaver, and she was weaving when sun visited her. According to Wirsing she brocaded a humming bird on the cloth when sun came in that guise. This is of interest for the moon goddess is a patroness of weaving. The insertion of chile pepper in the blowgun is a rather widely distributed motif.

The Pandora's box episode could represent a post-Columbian introduction, but the considerable variation in details suggests the possibility that this is a very ancient story brought from the Old World in pre-Columbian times. As noted, the capture of the vulture motif is represented on pottery of the Classic period, but the story seems to survive only in the lowlands and among the neighboring Kekchi who probably obtained it from the Manché-Chol they absorbed.

The deprivation of one eye suffered by moon so that she will give less light is widespread, although accounts of how the eye was lost vary. Rabbit in the moon, often regarded as a plateau belief, appears in two distinct parts of the Maya area. It may have diffused thither in post-Columbian times (Tlaxcalan allies who accompanied Alvarado to Guatemala and stayed on there conceivably carried tales from the plateau to Guatemala, but merchants were, I have supposed, the great spreaders of folk-tales). Quarrels between sun and moon widely believed to cause eclipses are omitted from the discussion since they are subsequent to the creation.

There can be little doubt that material on the subject which would have widened the distribution of motifs has been overlooked. Isolated motifs unrelated to the cycle of creation myths have not been cited and stories in Popol Vuh concerning the

hero brothers not found in the folk tales of other groups — the journey to Xibalba, the trials and the ball game etc. — have also been excluded.

The names of individuals deserve investigation. Note for instance XT'actani, Matactin and Matakani. Xbalanqué of the Popol Vuh clearly is the same as the Kekchi Xbalamqué. Dieseldorff tells of a half-civilized Kekchi, who on being accused of theft swore his innocence by the sun which he pointed at and called *li cagua* Xbalamké, 'our lord sun'. This is good evidence for supposing that the Quiché obtained their cycle of legends of the two heroes from the Kekchi. Indeed, the entrance to Xibalba is said to have been near Coban. However, it seems likely that the Kekchi, in turn, obtained these stories from the Manché-Chol whom they absorbed in such large numbers as they expanded northeast wards.

The stories we have reviewed vouchsafe us deep insight into Maya thought and poetry, for who but a poet could paint us that word picture of the little fish, each holding his companion's tail in his mouth to form a net to lift moon to the sky. They are a welcome respite from the aridity of so many present-day methods in archaeology. G. K. Chesterton came near the truth when in *The everlasting man* he wrote:

"We do not submit a sonnet to a mathematician or a song to a calculating boy; but we do indulge the equally fantastic idea that folklore can be treated as a science. Unless these things are appreciated artistically, they are not appreciated at all. When the professor is told by the barbarian that once there was nothing except a great feathered serpent, unless the learned man feels a thrill and half a temptation to wish it were true, he is no judge of such things at all. When he is assured, on the best Red Indian authority, that a primitive hero carried the sun and moon and stars in a box, unless he claps his hands and almost kicks his legs as a child would at such a charming fancy, he knows nothing about the matter."

I at least feel moved to clap my hands and —but for age— to kick my legs when I pass in memory those stories of the creation and the doings of the heroes before sun took up his duties. That is the reason I do not tabulate the motifs. Chesterton has a good point, but it must not be carried too far: clap hands at the myths, but mute applause for his reasoning by crossing fingers.

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