MARRIAGE AND THE FAMILY AMONG THE MAYA OF COZUMEL ISLAND, 1570

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In his obituary of the late Maya scholar, Ralph L. Roys, Thompson (1967, p. 97) calls attention to an important document, on which Roys worked, which has been neglected by those currently engaged in Maya settlement pattern research. The document in question is the Cozumel Census of 1570, which has been called only detailed account of the way the Maya lived at the time of the Spanish conquest (Roys, Scholes and Adams, 1940, p. 14). If this is the case, obviously the neglect of this source of information is a serious matter. It is the purpose of this paper to take a new look at the Cozumel Census, to see what conclusions may be drawn from it.

Cozumel Island lies a short distance off the east coast of the Yucatan peninsula. That it was not some isolated backwater of Maya culture is indicated by its status as one of three major centers of pilgrimage for people from all over the Maya lowlands, and its position on a major trade route by sea from northern Yucatan to Honduras (Roys, Scholes and Adams, 1940, pp. 5-6). The Spanish described the Island as thickly settled, but by 1549, tax lists indicate only 220 male tributaries (Roys, Scholes and Adams, 1940, pp. 6-7). Granted that the early Spaniards may have exaggerated, a major decline from disease by the mid sixteenth century clearly occurred (Thompson, 1966, p. 24). What effect this might have had on living patterns remains to be seen. The census itself is part of an account of the island provided by a priest in 1570. Up to that point, the inhabitants had been pretty much left alone, so long as they paid their tribute. Only partly christianized, they were still living in large, composite family households such as had long since been outlawed elsewhere in Yucatan (Roys, Scholes and Adams, 1940, p. 7).

While the reduction in population on Cozumel introduces one problem in the interpretation of the census, a second problem is whether or not Cozumel living patterns were representative of the

Yucatan Maya in general. Three points suggest that they were. First, there is the observation made above that Cozumel was in the "main stream" of the Maya tradition, and not just an isolated backwater. Second, composite family households, probably extended families, seem to have been standard throughout the Yucatan peninsula, judging from Spanish accounts and archaeological data (Haviland, 1968, p. 100). For example, Fray Lorenzo de Bienvenida wrote in 1548 to the Crown Prince:

Your highness shall know that in this land Yucatan there is hardly a house which contains only a single *vecino*. On the contrary, every house has two, three, four, six and some still more: and among them there is one paterfamilias, who is the head of the house." (Roys, Scholes and Adams, 1940, p. 14)

Further, tribute lists of inhabitants of Pencuyut in 1584 and towns around Tizimin in 1583 suggest composite households with composition very much like those of Cozumel (Roys, Scholes and Adams, 1940, p. 14). The 1552 ordinances of Thomas Lopez, and the instructions of 1665 to the governor of Oxkutzcab (Roys, Scholes and Adams, 1940, p. 14) indicate a concerted attempt by the Spanish to eliminate such households. The third point is that all but 9 of the 40 patronymics known for Cozumel are known elsewhere in Yucatan (Roys, Scholes, and Adams, 1940, p. 15). Such names seem to be associated with sibs (Haviland, 1968, p. 100), which suggests that a substantial segment of the Cozumel population had sibmates living elsewhere on the Yucatan peninsula.

The Cozumel census lists the members of the two villages in existence in 1570, San Miguel and Santa Maria (Roys, Scholes and Adams, 1940, pp. 18-22). The married couples are listed according to households, and the name of the head of the household is given. Unfortunately, the domiciles of widows, widowers, and children are not given. Nor is the relationship spelled out between the couples living in the same household. This, of course, allows the households to be interpreted in a number of ways. Particularly, since most groups include married couples where neither spouse has the patronymic of the head or his wife, a high incidence of neolocal residence might be inferred. Indeed, a high incidence of neolocality has been noted for Mesoamerica today, with composite households not infrequently being formed by the union of two unrelated nuclear families (Nutini, 1967, pp. 390-391). The problem with such an interpretation is that, while a certain amount of neolocality will probably exist in most societies, the high incidence in contemporary Mesoamerica

might be the result of the efforts begun by Spain in the sixteenth century to break up the aboriginal composite households.

The Cozumel Islanders might seem to refute the argument just given, for their household organization had not been tampered with up to 1570. However, it is possible to explain all the Cozumel households without recourse to neolocal residence, save perhaps in the case of founders of households. Moreover, this can be done in accord with the few bits of information at our disposal on Maya households in sixteenth century Yucatan. It is this which I attempt here, and the results may be seen in Figures 1 and 2.

Obviously, such reconstruction in the face of incomplete information has its hazards. The census does not specify relationships between married couples, nor does it specify which widows, widowers, and unmarried children live in which household. Consequently, one can never be sure that a particular reconstruction is correct, and this must be kept in mind. What I have done here is to construct a theory of how Cozumel Island households were formed, and the test of the theory must be in how well it accounts for the observed facts (c.f. Burling, 1969, p. 822).

For purposes of reconstruction, I have made the following assumptions:

- 1) The Cozumel Islanders followed the widespread Maya custom by which sons and daughters inherited their father's surname, and the woman retained this after marriage (Roys, Scholes and Adams, 1940, p. 14).

- 2) Matri-patrilocal residence, a special variety of patrilocal residence, has generally been accepted as the rule of residence for sixteenth century Yucatan (Haviland, 1968, p. 100). Therefore, I assume that the Cozumel Islanders favored patrilocal residence, but on occasion practiced matrilocal residence.

- 3) Succession to position as head of the household (the "Pater-familias" of Lorenzo de Bienvenida) was on the basis of patrilineal descent (Roys, Scholes and Adams, 1940, p. 15). This jibes with a Maya emphasis on patrilineality (Haviland 1968, p. 100). Consequently, if the head of a household had siblings in residence, I assume that he was a direct patrilineal descendant of the former household head, and was not living matrilocally.

- 4) From the above, I assume that people within a family who had the same surname were consanguineal kin. It is further assumed that the surname represented by the most people is that of the core

Figure 1. A hypothetical reconstruction of family genealogies for San Miguel, Cozumel. Blacked-in triangles indicate heads of households. Postulated deceased members of families have an X through them. Some of these individuals might have been living as widows or widowers when the census was taken, but names and household affiliation of such individuals is not given. The numbers for households, as well as the names of individuals, are as given by Roys, Scholes and Adams (1941 pp. 18-19).

Figure 2. A hypothetical reconstruction of family genealogies for Santa María, Cozumel. The symbols are as in Figure 1. The numbers for the households, as well as the names of individuals, are as given by Roys, Scholes and Adams (1941 pp. 20-22).

of the group, and that those with other surnames had married into the family.

5) People who bore the same apellative name, as well as the same surname, are not likely to have been siblings. One was probably the son or nephew, or daughter or niece, of the other.

6) There is less chance of error in the reconstruction of any particular household if postulated, deceased members are kept at a minimum. Consequently, I have tried to keep the genealogies as simple as possible.

Tables 1 and 2 summarize the indicated statistics on residence for the two communities. In spite of the bias of my assumptions in favor of patrilocal residence, an incidence of matrilocality on the order of 31% of San Miguel and 47% for Santa Maria seems indicated. Granted that these figures should be taken as only rough approximations, a high incidence of matrilocality still seems real enough, and would lead me to classify the rule of residence as ambilocal. I suspect that this can be accounted for in four ways. First, there seems to have been a real tendency for the sisters of heads of houses to stay in their brothers' households. There are some 23 cases of such matrilocality for San Miguel, and 22 for Santa Maria (again, these figures must be taken as approximations). Second, when there was no son to inherit a headmanship, a husband of the deceased headman's daughter appears to have taken over. So, three cases of matrilocality in San Miguel, and seven in Santa Maria, may be explained this way. Third, there were three cases of probable matri-patrilocal residence in San Miguel, and 14 in Santa Maria. At first, this seems a small frequency if matri-patrilocal residence were the norm. However, since living with the groom's in-laws was temporary, there might not have been too many apparent cases to note in 1570. Finally, there were cases of matrilocality in both communities which cannot be explained by the above alternatives. In these cases, it looks very much as though people might have lived matrilocally if this affiliated them with a family with better resources and/or prestige than would have been the case under patrilocal residence. Indeed, this principle seems to be illustrated as well by the tendency for headmen's sisters and their husbands to live matrilocally, and by the tendency for men and their wives to live matrilocally, if there were a chance to inherit through one's wife a headmanship. In other words, I would conclude that patrilocal residence (including here the matri-patrilocal variant) was the ideal on Cozumel Island, but that this

was modified by a tendency for couples to live matrilocally if their prospects looked brighter that way.

A relevant factor here may be the presumed population reduction on Cozumel Island prior to 1570. As stated earlier, this may have caused changes in household composition. Specifically, some households may have been effected more than others by population decline, and this could have produced some flexibility in residence rules. For example, if the family of a man's wife were small, they might have made it worth while for her husband to remain in matrilocal residence. Or, for other reasons, a man might sometimes have found it worthwhile to join a large household through matrilocal residence, letting his own die out. In this way, too, younger brothers could get out from under the control of an older brother. In other words, I see a rise in the incidence of matrilocality as the accompaniment of demographic changes, causing a shift from patrilocal to ambilocal residence.

It is of interest to note that, in some conservative Indian communities on the Yucatan peninsula today, a shift to Hawaiian cousin terminology has taken place (Redfield, 1941, pp. 196-207). Such terminology is generally favored by the ambilocal extended family and ambilineal descent groups (Murdock, 1960, p. 14). This would suggest that the shift in residence pattern proposed for Cozumel Island in 1570 was part of the trend in this direction. Caution is certainly called for here, however. It is true that, in some of these conservative communities today, the extended family does persist (Redfield, 1941, pp. 191-5). Unfortunately, while we are told that there is an emphasis on patrilocality and the patrilineal line, exceptions are implied. Yet, there are no statistics at our disposal on this.

My reconstruction of San Miguel families suggests a frequency of crosscousin marriage on the order of 10%, with a lesser frequency for Santa Maria. Consequently, I doubt that cross-cousin marriage represented much more than a tendency to marry someone close at hand. By marrying one's cross-cousin, one married someone who had grown up in the same household. Perhaps, there was some cross-cousin marriage between members of different families as well, but I suspect that the situation was much like that of cross-cousin marriage in Mesoamerica today: "... sporadic, incidental, and not entirely institutionalized" (Nutini, 1967, p. 397). The basis of this conclusion is that the census was taken by a priest who lived for five months with his "flock", and who seems to have had good rapport with them (Roys, Scholes and Adams, 1940, pp. 25-26). At this time, the church

had a ban on cousin marriages, extending even to third cousins (Nutini, 1967, p. 397; Roys, Scholes and Adams, 1940, p. 15). Had cross-cousin marriage been a regular thing on Cozumel, I would expect the Priest to have commented on this.

In sum then, I think the Cozumel census tells us much about household composition which applies to sixteenth century Yucatan in general. I think it suggests that, prior to the upset of Spanish conquest, the Yucatan Maya lived in patrilocal extended family households, as reported by the Spanish, with perhaps some matrilocality. It also suggests to me that cross-cousin marriage, while not unknown, was an incidental thing. Obviously, it would be desirable in the future to come up with more data, for we are still far short of real assurance on these matters. We might yet, in the future, have to change some of our ideas on marriage and the family among the Yucatan Maya. At the moment, however, there is no reason to question the veracity of the early accounts.

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TABLE 1
RESIDENCE IN SAN MIGUEL *

Household:	Couple:											
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1	P	M	P	M	P	P	M	P				
2	P	P	M	P								
3	P	M	M	M	M	P						
4	P	P	P	M	P	M	P					
5	P	P	P	M	P							
6	P	P	M	P								
7	P	P	M									
8	P	P	P	M	P	M						
9	P	P	M	P								
10	P	P	P	M	P							
11	P	P	P	P	M	P	P	M	M	M	P	P
12	P	P	M	P								
13	P	P	P	M	P	M	M	P				
14	P	P	M									
15	P	P	M	P								
16	P	P	M	P	P	M	P	P				
17	P	P	P	P	M	P	M	P				

* M-Matrilocal residence; P-Patrilocal residence

TABLE 2
RESIDENCE IN SANTA MARIA *

Household:	Couple:												
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1	P	P	P	M	M	P	P	M	M				
2	P	M	M	P	M	P							
3	P	P	P	M	P	M							
4	P	P	P	M	M	M	P	M	M	P			
5	P												
6	M	P	M	M	M	P							
7	P	M	M	P	P	M	P	M					
8	P	M											
9	P	M	M	P	M	M	P						
10	M	P	M	M									
11	P	P	P	M	P	P	P	P	P	M	P	P	
12	P	M											
13	P	P	M	P	M	P							
14	P	P	M	P	M	P							
15	M												
16	P	P	P	P	M	P	M	M					
17	M												
18	P	P	P	M	M	P							
19	M	M											
20	P	M	P	M									
21	M	M	M	M									
22	P	M											

* M-Matrilocal residence, P-Patrilocal residence

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