In 1965 Dr. Alfredo Barrera Vásquez published the text and translation of a remarkable Mayan document, *El Libro de los Cantares de Dzitbalche* (Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 9, Mexico). It was and is an important contribution to Mayan literature, for without it we should be hard pressed to document Mayan lyric poetry. It is the purpose of this paper to present each of the songs in poetic translation in English (Barrera's is, as he says, severely literal and in Spanish) with a brief, specifically literary commentary (Barrera's is mainly general, historical and linguistic).

The manuscript was discovered in 1942. Barrera finds reason to believe that it was copied in present form after 1742. As with other Mayan documents, this does not preclude an earlier date for the composition of at least some of the texts, and I believe that the two dealing with arrow sacrifice (XV and XVI) probably do go back to the fifteenth century, before the fall of Mayapan, as the text claims, probably in oral form. I would guess-date ten more as being perhaps sixteenth century, while others may be as late as the nineteenth century.

I have regrouped the poems in order to juxtapose those with a similar structure and content, renumbering them in Roman numerals. (Arabic numerals refer to Barrera's ordering; he has 15 and I have XVI because I have subdivided his Song 1.) The collection thus begins with a hymn to the sun:

I. *Dawn* (14)
There are then four love songs of increasing eroticism, the last two depicting an orgiastic ritual:

II. Serenade (15)
III. The Kiss (1b)
IV. Let Us Go and Take the Flower (4)
V. Flower Song (7)

Then follow two prayers:

VI. The Orphan (8)
VII. To the Great Lord of Dzitbalche (2)

The next is a myth:

VIII. Rattlesnake and Feathered Serpent (10)

The remainder are ritual poems relating to the various cycles of the Mayan calendar: the uinal:

IX. Prayer of the Uinal Priest (9)

The tun:

X. Prayer of the Tun Priest (6)

The hab:

XI. The Specters of Uayeb (3)
XII. The Singer (11)
XIII. Quenching the Fire (12)

And the katun:

XIV. Raisers of Ridgepoles and Mounds (5)
XV. Little Arrow (1)
XVI. Dance of the Archer (13)

A notable feature of the poems is that they all have introductory "titles", usually couplets (9 of them), but sometimes double (5) or triple couplets (1). Sometimes these
appear to be more in the nature of a dedication than a title, and they may thus have little to do with the content of the poem. I have not found introductions of this sort elsewhere in Mayan poetry.

All of the poems are composed in Mayan couplets. The shortest is made up of 22 couplets; the longest has 43. (Song xv has 47, but 12 of these represent an additional "introduction" to the poem itself; Song iii is a single quatrain that appears to be interpolated irrelevantly into Song xv.) All of them make extensive use of metaphor, including the characteristic couplet kennings (disfracismos) of Nahuatl and Mayan poetry, and many attain a lyricism of imagery not commonly found in Mayan poetry.

Some of the texts appear to be divided into stanzas in the original manuscript, but these tend to be inconsistent and haphazard. Sometimes they even violate the syntax. I believe, however, that they all have natural subdivisions that can be more or less clearly identified by content. The stanzas are thematically unified and coherent and they are clearly intentional, to judge from the structural and thematic correspondence of Songs iv and v or Songs xv and xvi. Eleven of the songs are distinguishable from the other five by the clarity and regularity of their stanza structure, being composed of 3 (3 cases), 5 (4 cases) or 6 (4 cases) stanzas. (Nearly two thirds of the stanzas of these songs contain 4, 5, or 6 couplets.) These are the songs that I believe exemplify Mayan lyric poetry.

The five exceptions (Songs iii, vii, viii, ix and xiv) are not only structurally different: they are also different in theme, quality and perhaps date as well. They include a late love song of a single quatrain (iii), a late prayer to the Christian God (vii), a post-Conquest myth (viii), a late and acculturated Mayan prayer (ix), and a didactic text (xiv).

Like many products of Mayan culture, the lyric poems are extraordinarily sophisticated and subtle; but unlike many of the surviving fragments of Mayan literature, they are unusually full of expressions of sentiment and emotion. They deal with love,
abandonment, the beauty of nature, sex, fear, and of course time and death.

I. DAWN (14)

Let us begin at the beginning: at dawn. The poem begins characteristically with a dedicatory “title”, and consists of three stanzas. The first deals with the birds of the Father; the second with the birds of the Mother; and the third addresses itself to the rest of us, urging us to enjoy the dawning day as the birds do. I know of nothing of comparable lyricism in Maya. The stanzaic structure gives it the elegance of an ode.

I

H ti
T u belil
Ua u taal kin
Uay

*  
Tiic a kay, chan zac pacal
T u kablail yaax che
Tii yan xan x cip chohil
Chan x chuuleeb
Bey xan x kukanlail
Zac chich
T u lacal ciimac y ool
U y alaakoob
Yum
Ku

*  
He bix xan h colebil
Y an y aalak
H'e ... ix chan x muukuy
Chan x tz'itz'iibil
Y etel chan x chinchin baclal
Lail xan x tz'unuun
Lail
La iix

For the traveller (?)  
Who is on the road  
If the sun should come  
Here.

*  
Spread your song, little dove,  
In the branches of the ceiba.  
There too are the flycatcher,  
The little yellowbird,  
And also the cuckoo;  
And there is the mockingbird.  
They all delight the heart,  
The creatures  
Of the Father,  
God.

*  
So likewise the Mother  
Has her creatures,  
Such as the little turtle dove,  
The little cardinal,  
And also the little canary.  
And there is the hummingbird.  
These  
Are they —
II. SERENADE (15)

A love song, again with a prefatory dedication and again in three stanzas, which dress the maiden, declare love, and admit she is universally beloved. The trope at the end of stanza two is particularly effective and lyrical, and the tone is elegant and formal despite the explicitness of the preface. Barrera sees the preceding poem as an introduction to this one, but this does not seem to me a necessary assumption, despite their structural similarity.
From the hair of your head.
Put on and show off your beautiful clothes.
Put on beautiful sandals.
Have your large earrings hung
From the lobes of your ears.
Wear a good cape.
Put necklaces on your beautiful neck.
Put on armbands
To shine and flash on the breadth of your arm.
It is necessary that you look beautiful
As noone else
Here in the town,
The town of Dzitbalche.
*I love you,
Beautiful lady.
That is why
I want you to look Glorious
And beautiful,
So that you appear like the smoking star.
So that you will be loved
Even as
Existence,
The moon,
And wildflowers are.
*I

Only white,
White
Are your clothes,
Oh virgin spirit.
Go distribute the happiness of your laugh —
Distribute the goodness in your heart,
For today

Tzotzel a pol
Tz'a u lemc ech ciichcelmil a nok
Tz'a hatz'utz xanaab
Ch'uuicinzah a nuucuuch tuup
T u tupil a xicin
Tz'a malob ooch'
Tz'a u keexiloob a x ciichpam caal
Tz'a uu baakaal
Hop men hop t u nak a kab
T kailbelt caa i laac ciichpam eech
He biix (ma ix) maac e
Uay tu t cahil
H Tz'iitbalchee

*Cah in yacuma ech
X cichpan colelbil
Lai beiltic
In kaat ca (labe) ech
Haach zem pe ech
Cii(chpam) ech
T u men c u y an ca chiicpaac ech ti x buutz' ek
T u men ca u tz'iboolt ech
Tac
Lail
U
Y etel u x lol nicte kaax

*Chen zacan
Zacan
Nok
H x zuhuy
Xen a tz'a u cimac olil a chee

Tz'a utz t a puczikal
T u men helae
U zutucil cimac olil
T u lacal uinic
Lail
C u tz'ailc
U y utzil ti t eech

Is the moment of happiness
For all men
Who
Are surrendering
In goodness to you.

III. THE KISS (1b)

I agree with Barrera that the following quatrain is probably a late interpolation in Song xv (1). It is closely similar to the prefacing quatrain of the preceding poem.

III

Bin in tz'uutz' a chi
Tut yam x cohl
X ciichpam zac
Y an y an a u ahal

I am going to kiss your mouth
There among the little reeds.
Oh beautiful shining lady,
You must, you must wake up.

IV. LET US GO AND TAKE THE FLOWER (4)

Here the introductory couplet has the character of a title. There are five stanzas: the first announces a flower ceremony; the second identifies this with defloration; the third relates this in turn to a poet warrior; the fourth dedicates the ceremony to the moon and the multifaceted Virgin; and the fifth urges surrender. The Dionysiac tone of the poem and the female identification of the singer are alike unique in Maya, and the whole poem appears to preface the following one, which has the same structure.

IV

C oo x
H c kam nicte
* 
Cimaac olailil
T an c kayiic

Let us go
And take the flower.

Happiness
Is what we sing
Because we are going
To begin
Taking
Our flowers,
All the women together,
Redeemers.

Only laugh,
Let your eyes laugh,
Before the leap of a heartbeat,
Before the core of a breast.
What for then?
Because
You know
It is for the surrender
Of your feminine virginity
To him who loves.

Sing ye the flowers
And be calling
The Captain
And great father,
The Lieutenant
Half Tall Tree,
The Lieutenant
Who is the singer.

Let's go,
Let's go!
Let us give
Our hearts
Before the Virgin,
The beautiful Virgin,
The ladyship of the moon
And blossoms,
Intercessor
There on her highest throne,
The lady Christ Mary,
Virgin Fire of the Moon,
And likewise the beautiful Corn
Lady,
THE SONGS OF DZITBALCHE

X ciichpan x ah zoot
Y ete(l) x ciichpam colel
X zuhuy x ttoot much
Lai ti e tz'iiic utzil
Cuxtalil
Uay y o(k) peet(n) e
Uay y o(k) chak me
T u zuut lumil
Uay uitzil

* 

C oo x
C oo x
C on eex
Palal eex
Beey c tz'aic cici
Cimac olil
Uay tz'itil piich
Tz'itil balche

X ciih
X ciichpan u
Tz' u likil
Y ook kaax

The sweet,
The beautiful moon
Has risen
Over the forest,

The beautiful Cane Rattle,
The beautiful lady,
And virgin Rain Frog.
For it is she who gives good
And life
Here over the forests,
Here over the henequen fields
In the land around,
And here in the mountains.

Come,
Come!
Let's go,
You children!
Thus let us give happiness
Great, great happiness
Here in Split Fruit,
Split Bark (Dzitbalche).

V. FLOWER SONG (7)

The title couplet is the Nahuatl kenning of “Poem”, and the text is closely linked and sequential with respect to the preceding one. The first stanza invokes moonrise; the second brings the moon overhead; the third suggests a secret orgy in the middle of the forest; the fourth lists the paraphernalia for the flower ceremony; the fifth undresses the virgin maidens of the changing moon. A sixth stanza is discreetly omitted, leaving the poem structurally identical to the one before.
And begun
Its start
To the middle of the sky —
The sky where
It will suspend
Its radiance
Over the earth
And all the forest.

Only fragrant is the passing breeze
And its sweet perfumed smell.
Its center comes
To the middle of the sky,
Just lighting the earth
With its glow.
Over everything there is happiness
For all good men.

One has arrived inside
The womb of the forest,
Where there is not even anyone stirring
Who can counterspy
On anything
Whatever
We may come
To do.

One has brought rose blossoms,
First flower blossoms,
Dog jasmine blossoms,
Tangleflower blossoms (?);
One has brought copal
And cane vine;
Likewise black tortoise shell:
Likewise new quartz and flint
And new cotton,
New spinning sockets,
Great green flints;
The following lament and prayer is also identified in the title couplet as a dance. It is in six stanzas of poignant lyrical quality. The first identifies the singer as an orphan; the second recalls his first abandonment and fears others; the third implies an evil foster parent and continuous sorrow and loneliness; in the fourth he begs for death; the fifth expresses his hunger for love; the sixth asks for the strength to go on. It is a poem of compelling elegance and beauty.

VI

The lamentation song of the poor,
X ma na x pom okoot che

* The motherless, a drumbeat dance.

Hach chiichan en
I was very little
Caa cim in na
When my mother died
Caa cim in yum
And my father died:
Ay ay in yum en
Oh alas, I am my father!
Caa t ppat en t u kab
I was just left in the hands
T y icnal in laak
And company of my fellows.
Miix maac y an t en uay y okol
I have nobody here on earth:
cab
Ay ay in yumil en
Oh alas, I am my parents!

C u man ca ppel kin
Two days pass
C u cimil t en in laak
And my fellows may die.
T in ttuluch c ppatc en
I shall be left groping,
T in ttuluch hum ay ay
Groping and alone, oh alas!
Tz' u man lail kin
That time passed
T in hun ppatc en
When I was left alone,
Caa t u han
When I was wet
Ch'ah en
And dripping,
U biz en t nin u ppel tz'ul t u
And taken in fright by a stranger
kab
in his arms:
Ay ay in yumil en
Oh alas, I am my parents!

H loobil hach yaab
A man of evil, too much so;
Yayab loob
Enormous evil
T in manziic
Have I been subjected to
Uay y okol ca(b)
Here on earth.
Miix ua bi kin
Perhaps never
Bin hauc in u okol
Will my weeping end.
Miix in u onel y an
I have no relatives:
Hach chen t in hum
I am just very much alone.
Chen bey in man uay
Just so do I pass here
T in lum
In my land
H kin
Day
Y etel akab
And night.
Chen okol
Just weeping,
Okol
Weeping
Xuupzic in u ich
Consumes my eyes,
Lail xuupzic ool
And that consumes my soul.
So hard a period of evil,
Oh my father!
Take me poor.
Give me an outlet
For this pain
And hard suffering.
Give me the ending of death,
Or give me truth of soul, my
blessed father.
Poor, poor and abandoned (?)
And alone on earth.

If it is that one begs,
Groping and alone,
Begs
And begs
At the doors
Of houses
Of everyone
He sees,
Surely
He will be given love.

He has no home;
He has no clothes;
He has no fire,
Oh my father!
Take me poor.
Grant me a true spirit,
So that it will be possible
For me to suffer the pain.

VII. TO THE GREAT LORD OF DZITBALCHE (2)

The present text is subtly related to the preceding one by its third stanza. It is, however, a later text, dedicated (and titled?) in the first three couplets, but addressed as a prayer to the Christian God. It is in four stanzas. The first addresses the deity from the foot of the cross and asks for blessing; the second asks for understanding; the third asks for safety in a fearsome oath; the
fourth is a paean of praise of God and a reminder of the identity of the man doing the praying. It is a prayer of great formality and restraint.

VII

To the Great Lord,
The Captain
In the town of Dzitbalche,
The Lord of Campeche.

I have come.
I have come
To where
Thy tall tree stands.
I beseech thee
For thy joy,
Who art blessed,
My father.
Here then create
And bestow
The goodness
Of the good things lying in thy hand.
Let thy goodness
And saving word be upon me.

I see what is good
And things of evil
Here
Where the lands are.
Give me thy light,
My true father.
Give me great understanding
In my thought
And in my knowledge
So that I may honor thee
Forever
And ever.
THE SONGS OF DZITBALCHE

Liikic u puul yahil
T u uey cizin ti u okol
Ua ma hah
Baax c in tzeectic t ech i
Cimic in na
Cimic in yum
Cimic in co(lel)
Cimic in u alaak
Ua bax c in tzolic in yum
C in ba... haah

Raise the curse of pain
From the witch devil over me
If it is not true
What I here swear to you.
Let my mother die;
Let my father die;
Let my wife die;
Let my livestock die,
If what I tell my father
Be (not) true.

As for me,
I love thee,
Blessed father of heaven,
Who art great
Upon thy seat
On high.
Hence then
Do I honor thee,
Oh blessed
And sole god.
Thou, who givest the good
And likewise the evil things
Here
On earth,
It is I
Calling upon thee,
Who art the great father
And governor.

VIII. RATTLESNAKE AND FEATHERED SERPENT

Although its structure resembles that of the other songs, this text is a brief myth, rather than a prayer or lyric. It still could have been intended as part of a ritual. It begins by dedicating (or titling?) the work in a single couplet. Three stanzas follow. The first addresses the sermon to all mankind; the second invokes the authority of the ancient gods to identify the coming of the Centipede with seven necklaces (the Spaniards of the 7-day
week); the third is an oblique description of life under Spanish rule, expressed with typically Mayan indirection.

VIII

Ah tzaab can
H kuukul kuul can
*  
Ti t eech uinic
Tal in u iilic baax t en
Uay
Peten
Uay
Nouakan
Uay
Te lum
  *
C u (uc)hben h ua paach uincoob
He biix xan h ppuuz
Ma liicil coh octeil
Lumoob ma ix
Maic x uinic
Bay an on
Tz'ooc u y antaal lemc eech
Yaab kin uay
C u ximbance u ba
X ah chaapaat
Hum uuc u tiichil u pol

Yaat chen
  *
Laiti ca u ilic
U kaatal t a beel
U tial u hant eech
Y etel u tial u tz'a t eech loobil t ah cuxtal
Ua ma t a naatiic
Baax c u kaatic t eich
Ma tun hel

Rattlesnake
And Feathered Serpent.
  *
For you, mankind,
I come to see what I do
Here
In the forest,
Here
On the plain,
Here
In the land.
  *
As was told by the giants
And also the hunchbacks,
Before there came to arrive
In these lands anyone
Who was a man
As we are,
You had been introduced
For a long time here
When there marched himself by
The Lord Centipede —
The one with seven necklaces which were on his head —
Exactly just he.
  *
So you saw
He was crossing your path
To eat you
Or to give you trouble in your life.
If you did not understand
What he asked of you,
And so did not answer
Ca kuuch u kinil
U y antah ma maix
L u alic ti e
Ca t u y uub
He caah tz'iqicinah i
T u men laitiel
Ma ix u ...chahal u tz'iiic
Leil u nuctah ti el
Ah x chapaat
Lai
Ti nuce tii
Lai betic
Haach t u chah lobil
Le baax c utz'iiic u y aal
Nuca tiel
T u men h tabz(a)biel

T u men

When the time arrived,
Then there was noone
Who spoke to him.
When he heard that,
He really began to have a fit
Because of the fact that
No reply (?) was given him.
That made sense
To Lord Centipede,
And that was what
It meant to him.
This fact
Embittered him with great evil
Which came to be spoken
And understood by him,
Because he was the one who was deceived
Thereby.

IX. PRAYER OF THE UINAL PRIEST (9)

Like the other texts in this collection, this prayer begins with a title couplet. In two subsequent breathless “stanzas” it escapes from the formalism of the other poems, and it is my impression that it is a late ritual text, but it is not too late to refer directly to the 20 day cycle, the *uinal*, and the 360 day cycle, the *tun*. Otherwise, it appears to refer in the fragmentary second stanza to the Christian Creator... and there it breaks off, incomplete...

IX

Paay chi h ziit h bolom t(u)m
Opening speech of the great *tun*
priest,
Uinal te h miatz
Sage of the twenty days.

*Uinat te paay chi
The twenty day opening speech
H miatz tz'ac yah
Of the sage and curer of illness
Ti u y an pomol chi kaax
Who has wild bubble sap,
Beec kaaxin
Wild oak (resin)
Ti kal
Ti kal o hom
Ch'iiic lum
Paak
Bacal che
H bohom
Bey (li)kin bey xaman
Bey (chi)kin bey nohhol
Ti c u taal t u cam ppel
Xaay beil can
Tuux y an u popil
Nahil bel
H miatz
Hunnaab ku i
Laiil c u kaazic
Ti uinic
Tahl han
Cuuxtal
Uay
Y okol (ca)b
Ti maax ac u kaat u tz'a u baa
Y ol h cambal
U uay
T lumil
(Y) an u tz'iiic t u toh y olal
H t u men u yumil

In rolls,
In rolls five deep,
Herbs of the land
And plants:
Borage
And heliotrope,
As east and north
And west and south
He comes to the four
Divided paths of heaven,
Where stand the mat
And roadway house
Of the sage,
The sole god,
He who judges
Over men,
Distributing food
And life
Here
On earth
To whoever gives himself
(In) spirit as a student
Of what is here
On the earth,
Surrendering in truth of spirit
To him who is the source of
fatherhood,
Of Fire,
Water,
Wind,
And Earth,
The Fatherhood of this
The earth,
Before everything
That has been made
By the Father
And sole god,
He who is
The one who
Gives good
And evil
Ichil maloob
Y etel lob
T u men lai t
T i e
C u tz'iiic u zazilil
Y'okol cab
T u men
Lai ti u yumil
*  
T u lacal baal y an
Y an l u kab
Bey kin
Bey h u
Bey x buutz' ek
Be u lol zaz caan

Bey muyal
Bey chaac
Bey h x lelem
Bey h uz
Bey ch'iiich
Bey baal che
Bey ...

To good men
And bad.
Because he is
The one who
Gives brightness
To the earth.
Because he
Is the Father.

*  
Everything there is
Falls from his hand.
Hence the sun;
Hence the moon;
Hence the smoking star;
Hence the flower of the bright sky;
Hence the clouds;
Hence the rain;
Hence lightning;
Hence gnats;
Hence birds;
Hence animals;
Hence ...

X. PRAYER OF THE TUN PRIEST (6)

The title quatrain identifies this as a prayer of the priest of the tuns. The stanza structure is not clearly marked (as it is not in the preceding prayer). I believe it to be late. With some difficulty, I believe that five stanzas can be recognized beyond the title-introduction. The first is a salutation; the second claims goodwill on grounds of penance and suffering; the third calls God's attention to the suppliant's virtue and cleanliness of body and soul; the fourth disclaims any other supernatural allegiance; and the fifth is given over to praise.

Kama than

Prayer of
The father
Who supports
The tuns.

Oh my fathers,
I come,
Only bowed down is my forehead,
My face.

It has been nine days that I have
not tried
Nor yet looked upon a woman,
Nor yet prolonged the occurrence
Of evil-minded thoughts.
I have been pressed
And poor.

Wherefore I am come with my
new pants,
With my new tunic,
And just as may be seen, my
father,
As for me
Without befalling evil
Or sin before thy face,
My true father
And sole god.
Thus it is that just in bright
clarity,
With my soul bright,
Am I come
To see thee in thy station.

For it is to thee that I entrust
The protection of my will
And my thought here
On earth.
It is only to thee
That my heart speaks
Here
In this world.
XI. THE SPECTERS OF UAYEB (3)

The introductory quatrains titles the piece. The three following stanzas are expository — in the manner of a sermon rather than a ritual or prayer. The first identifies the context as that of Uayeb: a time of sorrow as the solar year ends; the second equates this period with measurement of the year’s sins; the third produces the threat that enough sin will occasion the end of the world. To my knowledge, the ideology of the 365 day *hab* has never been so succinctly nor so elegantly expressed elsewhere, in or out of Maya.

XI

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>T u men t eech</th>
<th>H uayah</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nohochil kin</td>
<td>Yaab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ca tz'ic u(t)z uay</td>
<td>T kaal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y okol cab</td>
<td>Kin eek</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ti t u lcal baal</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y an u cuuxtal</td>
<td>U kinil t okol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T u men teec(h)</td>
<td>U kinil kaziil baal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tz'ann eech</td>
<td>Chakaab cizin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A laattleil lum</td>
<td>Hekaab miitnal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuux c u cuxt(al) t u lcal uin(ic)</td>
<td>Innan utzil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y etel t eech u ha lohll</td>
<td>Chen y an lobil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ca tz'ic utzilil</td>
<td>Ah uat</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For it is thou,                
Greatness of the sun,          
Who grantest good here         
On earth                      
To everything                  
That lives.                    
For it is thou                  
Who hast granted               
The sustaining land            
Where all men live,            
And thou art the true redeemer 
Who will grant goodness.

The specters,                   
The torturers                  
In the month                   
Of black days.                 

The time for weeping!         
The time of evil things!       
Loosed (?) is the devil!       
Opened is hell!                
There is no good;              
There is only evil,            
Groaning,
And crying.
Finished is the passage
Of one count,
Of the whole year
Which is the year of the named
(gods).
Now there begins a month
Of the nameless ones.
The days of sorrow,
The time of evil.
The days turn black.
There is no beautiful brilliance
From the eye of the sole god
For his children
Here
On earth.

Because on these
The days divine together
To measure the sins of earth
In all people:
Men
And women,
Small
And great,
Poor
And rich,
Wise
And stupid;
The Lord Serpent,
The Captain,
The Governor,
The Lieutenant,
The Rain Priests,
The Speakers,
The Constables:
All men.

Now is the measuring of sins by
these days,
Because the time of these is
coming. (?)
THE SONGS OF DZITBALCHE

The introductory couplet appears to be a title, perhaps identifying the author, at least in general terms. Five stanzas follow. The first places us at the beginning of a directionally oriented holiday; the second reiterates that we are at the very moment of dawn; the third refers to the disappearance of Venus with the rising sun; the fourth disposes of the moon; the fifth expresses joy at the dawn of a significant day.

XII. THE SINGER (11)

The singer
And player.

The sanctified day
Begins
In the towns
And settlements.

The exhibitor begins
In brightness.
The sun
Is at the rim of the sky.
It goes
And goes,
So (to) the south,
And to the north,
And to the east,
And to the west,
Fresh comes its light
Over the earth.
Darkness departs
And divides.

He arrives
To give (light).
Cockroaches
And crickets,
Coatis
And hummingbirds (?)
Are running off
With the appearance
Of magpies,
White doves,
Sapsuckers (?)
And partridges,
Little quail,
Thrushes,
And white mockingbirds,
While the red ants run (?) anew.
These wild birds
Must begin to sing
Because he who is rising
Has originated the need for happiness.

The beautiful star
Is flaming
Over the forest,
Smoking
As it sinks,
THE SONGS OF DZITBALCHE

Lamat

* U taal u cimil u
Y ook yaxil kaax
* Cimmaac olilil
Kin kuilail
Uay
Tee t cahalil
T u men tumber kin
C tal zaztal
T t u lacal uinicil t cah
Muul ba
Uay
T cahalil

And sinks.

* The death of the moon comes
Over the green of the forest.

* The happiness
Of the holy day
Is here,
Here in the village,
Because the new sun
Comes to light up
All of mankind who live
Assembled together
Here
In the village.

XIII. QUENCHING THE FIRE (12)

The preceding two texts lead logically to the present one. The
title couplet identifies the moment as being that of the death and
rebirth of fire at the beginning of the year. There are six stanzas.
In the first, the sun sets and the musicians assemble; the other
participants appear in the second stanza; by the third it is dawn;
the fourth stanza meets the new year with rejoicing; the fifth
strikes the note of renewal of all the cycles; the sixth specifically
emphasizes the katun, though still in relation to the passing
years.

XIII

Kiiliiz tuup

Quenching the (fire of the)

Y ok uitz

ancestor
On the mountain.

* Kaman kin

Taken is the sun
At the rim of the sky.

T u haal caan
In the west

T chikin
Is the stone drum,

Tunkul
The trumpet player,

H huub

In the village.
Y etel zacatan
Tii t hhoopz
X kay luuch

Xiix tun t u lacal (pax)
Tut tazahal oc

X ppitum c u bin u kuuchul
T u tanleil popil nah
Yum
Ahau can
Ti an xan h hol poop

Y etel h chaacoob
Bey yum
Ah culel y etel u amtahatz'aob
Tz' u kuchul h pax
Kayoob
H paaltz'amoob
H okotoob
H ualak
Zutzihoob
Bey h ppuuz
Y etel nacyaoob
T u lacal u uinicil
Tal t u pach ah ahau can
T u cimac o lil
C u beetabil
T u ch(u)muc kiuicil
C cahtalil

Tz' u hooppol y oocol kin
T u haal na caan
T u tiibit
(Ta)al u hooppol
Lai! x ...... pom ..... 
Yum caan
Kamiic u buutz'
Kak
U tial u chiil
T cu y iich

And grasseed (?) rattler,
Who begin
The little song of the twisted calabash
So that everything (resounds?),
So that they assemble.

The acrobats will arrive
Before the council house
Of the Father,
Lord Snake,
Where also are the Head Councillor
And the Rain Priests,
Along with the Father President and his fellows.
The musicians have arrived,
And singers,
And actors
And dancers,
Contortionists,
Acrobats,
Together with hunchbacks
And spectators.
The whole population
Will be following the Lord Snake,
And will be delighted
At what is to be performed
In the middle of the square
Of this village of ours.

The rising of the sun has begun
At the edge house of the sky,
And has shown
That the beginning comes.
There is the incense (burner?)
So that the Father of Heaven
Will receive the smoke
And fire
For the mouth
And holy face
Yum
Kin
*C
C on eex
C on t chum yaax che
C oo x tz'aic c keex
U tial tumben haab
Tz'oooc
Tz'ooocil u maan yaayaa kinil
C oon eex u muulail tam balil
Cahalil
C on i
Lakin
U tz'ay u xocom cheil

Kiliiz
Kam kak
Y ookol uitz
*C
Taalz eeix l t u lacal baal tumben
Pul eex t u lacal baal h uuchben
Yum
Ku
Tz' u tz'iic cah c manz
U lobil kin
Uay
T cahalil
T u men u cahtal u laik kin
U laik uinal
U laik haab
U laik kaatum
*C
U tial u tal uchucpahal un kaal haab
U tial h katun
C oon eex
C tz'ailc
Tumben xuul tum
T u hol cahnalil
C caaxtic h zac tuniich

Of Father
Sun.
*Let's go!
Let's go to the Fort of the Ceiba!
Go make our offering
For the new year!
It is over!
The miserable days have passed!
Let us meet each other
At the village.
Let's go then
To the east
To make offering to the counted pole
Of the ancestor
Who obtained fire
On top of the mountain.
*Bring all the things that are new.
Throw away all the things that are old.
The Father
God
Has granted that we might pass
The evil days
Here
In the village,
Because there begins another day,
Another month,
Another year,
Another katun.
*So it comes to complete another roll of years
For the lord of the katun.
Let us go
And place
A new end stone
At the gate of the village.
Let us find a white stone,
XIV. RAISERS OF RIDGEPpoles AND MOUNDS (5)

Here we move further in the direction of the katun, and by implication the classical mystique. The introductory couplet gives the title, and apostrophizes the ancestral Maya. While this feature relates the text to the others in this collection, the remainder is a didactic text on the antiquity of the katun count. It is in two paragraphs, one on the ancient cities and the other on the modern ceremonies. It appears to have the character of a sermon or invocation to the katun ceremonies.

XIV

H ua paachoob
Y etel ppuz(oob)

* Raisers of ridgepoles
And mounds.

Tz'u lam
Kaa(bet)
U ppizil
U xociil
Ua hay ppel haab
Ua katum kin maan(aac)
Le u kinil uay
Te cahobaaleil
H nucuuch
Chaac uincoob
Lai tiob liiz u pa(ak)leil
U uchben cahob
He lah c ilic
Uay
Peten
H chakan
T u lacal lail
Cahooob
Ttittanoob y ook lum

It is urgently
Necessary
To measure
The count,
Either of how many years
Or katun days have passed
Since that time
Of the settlement there
Of the great
And powerful men,
Those who raised the walls
Of the ancient cities
That we see here and there
Here
In the forest
Of the plainsmen.
All of them
Are cities
Scattered over the land
Here,
Here and there,
As we have seen,
And made to squat,
Squatting
On the heights
Of the mountains.

This is the assemblage
Into the cities.
Let us give
The explanation of it,
Of what we see here and there,
What we know.
For day by day
We just see
When we have halved the sky,
The manifestation
Of what was handed down to us
By the ancient people
Here in these villages,
Here in this land,
Which we shall give
As the truth of our hearts,
So that it may be possible
To read
What is on its face
There in heaven.
At nightfall we shall thus divide it
In the middle,
And perhaps thus the total
Will instruct (us).

XV. LITTLE ARROW (1)

This is the introduction to the arrow sacrifice ceremony, presumably for the ending of the old *katun* and the beginning of the new, though the texts do not say so. It begins with what I believe to be a “title” couplet: “small and clefted (thing) /
stick”, which is a kenning for ‘arrow’. Then there follows a two stanza introduction, the first declaring the antiquity of the dance, and the second identifying the scribe by lineage and place (Dzitbalche), and dating the dance to 1440. (Unlike Barrera, I accept this date.) Between the two paragraphs is a later interpolation, quoted as Song III (b) above. There follow six stanzas of ritual poetry. The first invites the archers to step forward; the second describes the victim; the third addresses him and tells him he will go to heaven; the fourth urges him to be brave and to take comfort in the beautiful girls provided to him; the fifth assures him that everybody who is anybody will witness the ceremony; and the sixth urges him to be of good cheer, as he is to be a messenger directly to God.

XV

X kolom  
Che  
*  
U hanalteil h okot  
H uuchbeen uincoob  
Zuuc u beiltahaal  
Uay t cahob e  
Ma ili c ohoc  
H zaac maxoo  
*  
Laiil hanalteah  
Tz’(ib)taab  
T un men yum  
Hah ba(la)m  
U h ca uabiil  
Noh ah culeel  
Tut cahil  
X (tz’it)balche  
T tuum  
U hum pic  
T cahil hum  
Tz’iitbalche  
T t haabil  
T hum pic

Small clefted Stick.  
*  
The feasting of the dancers,  
The ancient people,  
A custom performed  
Here in these towns  
Even before the coming  
Of the white people.  
*  
This then is the festival  
Written  
By the father,  
The true jaguar (?),  
The great grandson  
Of the great captain  
There in the town  
Of Dzitbalche,  
On what was then  
The millennium  
In the town of the millennium,  
Dzitbalche,  
In the year  
Of the millennium,
Four hundred
And forty.

* Oh lads!
Stout fellows!
Men!
Shield bearers!
They should step forward
To the center of our plaza
So as to test their strength
In the Little Arrow Dance.

In the center of our plaza
There is a man
Tied to the bottom of the column,
A stone
Beautifully painted
With lovely indigo,
And a scattering of many balche flowers
That should thus perfume his hands
As well as his feet,
As well as his body too.

Be of good cheer,
Gallant man.
You shall see the face
Of your father in heaven.
It will not be necessary
That you return
Here
To earth
Wearing the feathers
Of the little hummingbird
Or wearing the skin
Of the bluebird (?),
The Handsome Deerman,
The Great Jaguarman,
The Little Nightingale
Or the Little Yellowbean.
Take heart,
And keep thinking
Only of your father.
Do not be afflicted.
Not evil is the treatment of your
kind.
Beautiful are the girls
Joined with you
In your appearances
As you come (along).
It will not do to show fear.
Keep your mind upon
Whatever may happen to you.

Indeed the great lord is coming,
The Head Counsellor;
He will be coming
Together with his Captain;
Likewise the Lord’s man
Of Campeche:
Indeed he will come there,
And at his side will come
The Great Lieutenant of Ake.
In fact the Governor of (Merida?)
is coming.

Laugh then
And rejoice your heart,
Because as for you there,
As is being told you,
You are to report the word
Of (your) fellow men
Before the face
Of our blessed father,
According to the custom here
On earth,
That came to pass long, long ago ...
In written stone ...
XVI. DANCE OF THE ARCHER (13)

This last poem begins with a title quatrain identifying it as the arrow sacrifice. There follow six stanzas of didactic poetry instructing the archers on how to perform it. The first tells them to run three times around the victim; the second instructs them on how to prepare their arrows and anoint themselves; the third tells them to make the first circuit around the victim; the fourth tells them to shoot on the second circuit but to take care that the victim die slowly, as that is the will of God; the fifth tells them to shoot twice on the second circuit without interrupting their dance; the sixth identifies the ceremony with the rising sun. It is striking that the structure of this poem is identical to that of the preceding one, thus underlining their close relationship.

XVI

X okoot
Kay
H ppum
T huul

X pacum
X pacum che
Ti hum ppel
Ti caa ppel
C oo x zuut
Tut hal che
T alca okoot
Tac ox ppel
Ciiliiz u tan a pol
Malo ppil h a u ich
Maa menttic x ttil eich
Tial caa ch'a u tohol

A ci zuuzma u yee a huul
A ci xaab cheiltma u zumil a ppum

The dance
And song
Of the archer
Who shoots.

Little scouts,
Little scouts of the trees —
Once,
Twice
Let's go around
In front of the rim of trees
In running dances —
Just three times.
Just raise your forehead;
Blink your eyes well.
Don't make any little mistake
So you will hit the mark.

If the tip of your arrow is just filed;
If the string of your bow is well smoothed;
If you have soaked in catsim sap
the face of the feathers
Just on the butt of the shaft (?) of
your arrows;
Then just anoint yourself
With the fat of a buck
On the muscles of your arms,
On the muscles of your legs,
On your knees,
On your balls,
On your ribs,
On your chest.

Make three times
A running turn
Before
And behind
That footed stone
That is painted
There where there is tied
That man,
The youth,
The pure
And virgin man:
Make the first (turn).

On the second turning
Take your bow;
Place your arrow shaft true,
Straight at his chest.
It is not necessary
To use all your strength,
So that your arrow
Will be jabbed
Right to the heart:
Do not wound him
To the depths of his flesh,
So his strength may suffer
Little by little.
That is the wish
Of the holy Father
Ku  

*  

T u caa zuut  
Ca tz'aa  
Ti leil ocom tum  
Cho  
Ca zuut  
Ca tz'a e ca hulic  
Ca hulic  
T u caa ten  
Lailo  
Y an a beiltic  
X ma ma a paatic  
A u okoot  
T u men bail  
U mentic  
Malo chima(l)  
H batel uinic  
Tut teetal  
U tial u tz'a utz  
T y iich yum  
Ku  

*  

Lail c u tippil kin  
T y okol kaax  
T lakin  
C u hoppol  
Hul  
Ppum kay  
Leil chimal  
H bateil  
U tz'aiocoob  
T u lacal

God.  

*  

On the second turn  
Shoot at the one  
At that footed stone  
That is indigo.  
When you turn,  
Shoot then;  
Then shoot  
A second time.  
This is what  
You must do  
Without pausing  
In your dance,  
Because these  
Are the deeds  
Of good shieldbearers  
And warriors,  
Before electing  
To delight  
The eyes of the Father  
God.  

*  

This then is the appearance of the sun  
Over the forest.  
In the east  
Is beginning  
The arrow  
And bow song.  
They the shieldbearers  
And warriors,  
They render it  
Complete.

So we end as we began, with the rising sun. In purely formal terms as well as in terms of content, theme and expressive quality, we have here a collection which fully justifies designation as Mayan lyric poetry. It is a pity that we have so little of it.
La Colección de Cantares de Dzitbalche constituye una muestra extraordinaria de la poesía en lengua maya de Yucatán. En 1965 Alfredo Barrera Vásquez publicó una traducción de estos Cantares al castellano. Aquí Munro S. Edmonson ofrece otra traducción, en este caso al inglés. Al publicarla, reconoce expresamente el valor de la aportación original de Barrera Vásquez. En su presentación Edmonson distribuye de manera distinta los poemas, tomando como criterios su contenido y las semejanzas de sus estructuras. Para mayor claridad, señala como referencia el orden adoptado por Barrera Vásquez.