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Essay

Torture in the Archives: Mayans Meet Europeans

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DURING THE SCORE OF YEARS NAMED 2 AHAW, or what the Christian world calls the early 16th century, Europeans began appearing over the horizon of the Mayan world. It was not a meeting of history with prehistory, or of literacy with preliteracy, but of one history and literacy with another. Europeans wrote Mayans into their history and, as we shall see, Mayans wrote Europeans into theirs.

Mayan writings have been difficult to read for those of us whose sense of literacy and history are of the European kind. In the case of the texts Mayans wrote before Europeans invaded their world, decipherment was long delayed by our reluctance to entertain either a phonetic reading of the signs of the Mayan script or a historical reading of the inscriptions on Mayan monuments (see Lounsbury 1989:216–220). Soon after the European invasion Mayan writers produced a good many texts in the medium of the Roman alphabet, but in cases where such a text seems to contradict a European one on some point of history, we have tended to favor the European account. And when our only source has been Mayan statements reported by Europeans, we have accepted these with little concern for the circumstances of the dialogues that produced them, even in the case of the proceedings of the Holy Inquisition. So it is that we have conceded a triple hegemony to European over Mayan discourse, in the first instance preserving the opacity of both the alien script and discourse, in the second instance favoring a familiar discourse over an alien one when both are written in the familiar script, and in the third instance giving more weight to the familiarity of a report written by Europeans than to the situation of the Mayans whose spoken words it represents.

What will concern us here is the past interpretation and possible reinterpretation of 16th-century alphabetic texts, some written by Mayans and others by Europeans, but all of them bespeaking confrontations between two worlds. The writings of this period are of particular anthropological interest because the distance between the two sides—the coefficient of mutual otherness, so to speak—is at its peak. Mayan writers point directly to the conditions Europeans imposed on certain key dialogues, conditions that did not have the subtlety of hegemony, which does its work implicitly and by sheer inertia, but were rather a matter of the direct application of force. On the European side, where the writings in question are reports of investigations conducted among Mayans, there is an epistemological assumption that truth can be separated from the methods used to obtain it. This assumption, as we shall see, has been shared until very recently by interpreters of these reports, whether they be historians or anthropologists.

The earliest Mayan writers to use the Roman alphabet worked primarily in two regions: highland Guatemala, where the best-known works are the Popol Vuh or “Council Book” and the Annals of the Cakchiquels, both written in Quichean languages; and

northern Yucatán, where various books written in Yucatec are named Chilam Balam or "Jaguar Spokesman," after a priest whose office was prophecy. These two bodies of work are separated by divergent branches of the Mayan language family, by a rain forest that had been occupied only sparsely for the last six centuries before they were written, and by differences in what we might call the poetics of time, but they converge when it comes to dealing with the foreign invasion that eventually displaced the Mayan writing system.

Toward the end of the Popol Vuh there is a summary account of the succession of Quiché kings, starting from the foundation of the Kaweq dynasty, continuing with the institution of a dual Kaweq kingship in the fourth generation, and reaching into the period that brought submission to the Hapsburg dynasty of Austria and Spain:¹

Jaguar K'itze, origin of the Kaweqs.

Divine Raiment in the second generation, after Jaguar K'itze.

Jaguar Divine Rooftree, who began the office of Keeper of the Mat, was in the third generation.

Divine Sweatbath and Istayul in the fourth generation.

Plumed Serpent and Divine Sweatbath, at the root of the kings of genius, were in the fifth generation.

Tepepul and Istayul next, sixth in the sequence.

K'iq'ab' and Kawisimaj in the seventh change of kingship, at the height of genius.

Tepepul and Xtayub' in the eighth generation.

Black Butterfly and Tepepul in the ninth generation.

Eight Cords, with K'iq'ab', in the tenth generation of kings.

7 No'j and Kawatepech next, eleventh in the sequence of kings.

3 Kej and 9 Tz'i' in the twelfth generation of kings. And they were ruling when Tonatiuj [Alvarado] arrived. They were hanged by the Castilian people.

The account of succession goes on for two more generations, but what is of interest here is that the arrival of Europeans among the Quiché Maya is marked by hanging.

In the Chilam Balam book that comes from the town of Chumayel, in Yucatán, there are chronicles that go by a unit of time approximating 20 years, called the *k'atun*.² Each *k'atun* is identified by the numbered and named day of its completion, reached by counting 20 rounded years of 18 score days each, or by adding 13 score days to 19 precise solar years (the results are identical).³ The day name in question is always Ahaw, meaning "Lord" or "King," but the number jumps around. Each successive period is listed in the book, but most of them pass without any notable event:⁴

4 Ahaw was the score of years when they sought and found Ch'ich'e'n Itsa'.

2 Ahaw.

13 Ahaw.

11 Ahaw.

9 Ahaw.

7 Ahaw.

5 Ahaw.

3 Ahaw.

1 Ahaw.

12 Ahaw.

10 Ahaw.

8 Ahaw was when Ch'ich'e'n Itsa' was abandoned.

6 Ahaw.

4 Ahaw was when the land at Chak'anputun was taken by them.

2 Ahaw.

13 Ahaw.

11 Ahaw.

9 Ahaw.

7 Ahaw.

5 Ahaw.

3 Ahaw.

1 Ahaw.

12 Ahaw.

10 Ahaw.

8 Ahaw was when Chak'anputun was abandoned by the Itsa' people. Again they came looking for homes. . . . Whenever it was the misfortune of the Itsa' to go out beneath the trees, beneath the bushes, beneath the vines, it was always during this score of years.

And so goes the rhythm of history for another two measures, with the reoccupation of Ch'ich'e'n Itsa' during 4 Ahaw and retreat during 8 Ahaw, followed by the occupation of the fortress town of Mayapan during 4 Ahaw and retreat during 8 Ahaw. But when 4 Ahaw comes again there is no renewal, and the story continues to take a different course than before:

4 Ahaw was when death came easily, when vultures entered the houses in the fortress.

2 Ahaw was when the pustules broke out, the great sickness.

This last is a reference to smallpox, which was spreading inland from coastal towns where Europeans had come ashore.

13 Ahaw was when the rain priest died. . . .

11 Ahaw was when the powerful people arrived from the east, the same ones who had brought the great sickness to our land, we who are Maya, back in the year of our Lord 1513.

9 Ahaw was when Christianity began, when baptism took place. It was also the score of years when Bishop Toral arrived. He ended the hangings in the year of our Lord 1564.

So there it is again, as it was in the Popol Vuh account of royal succession: when Europeans appear, so does *hanging*, even when the Mayan accounts in question are widely separated in space and both of them involve an extremely terse poetics of time. A long line of historians and ethnohistorians has taken both accounts to refer to executions in the form of hanging by the neck until dead. Both of the Mayan verb stems in question, *jitz'* in Quiché and *ch'uy* in Yucatec, broadly refer to the act of suspending something (or someone), which leaves more than one possibility open as to what was actually done.

The Popol Vuh account, in which "3 Kej and 9 Tz'i" . . . were hanged [or suspended] by the Castilian people," seems to contradict that of Pedro de Alvarado. "I burned them," he declares, since "after I had them at peace they plotted to kill me" (Milla 1879:77, translation mine). It seems that they had invited him into the Quiché capital, "thinking that they would lodge me there, and that when thus encamped, they would set fire to the town some night and burn us all in it," the evidence for this plot being "their confessions" (Mackie 1924:60, 62). With slight variations, this is the way historians and ethnohistorians have told the story ever since, from the 16th century right down to our own time. Several of them, beginning in the 18th century, were aware of the Popol Vuh version, but in each case they decided the matter of hanging or burning in favor of Alvarado.⁵ Adrián Recinos at least left the question of the kings' intentions open, writing that Alvarado "*suspected* that they were trying to destroy him" and that he recounted "motives which he *believed* were those of the Quiché kings" (in Recinos, Goetz, and Morley 1950:3-4, emphasis added). Robert M. Carmack also raised doubts, writing that "one of the lords [kings] 'confessed' to the *alleged* plot to burn the Spaniards" (Carmack 1981:50, emphasis added).

The death of the Quiché kings appears in quite a different light when we break out of the chain of European and Euro-American historians and consider a second account written by Mayans, in the Annals of the Cakchiquels. According to this version, the kings "were *tortured* by Tunatiuj [Alvarado]," after which they "were *burned* by Tunatiuj" (Recinos and Goetz 1953:120, emphasis added). We can guess the nature of the torture from a later passage in this same source, where Alvarado, in the course of questioning his Cakchiquel hosts on the subject of gold, threatens them with both hanging *and* burning (Recinos and Goetz 1953:123). In his time, a favorite method of interrogation among Europeans, as common then as the use of electrical wiring is now, was to tie a suspect's hands together and then hoist him by the wrists until his feet were off the ground.⁶ Just as the jurists of that time regarded confession as "the queen of proofs," so they regarded hang-

ing by the wrists as “the queen of torments” (Peters 1985:68–69). Whether or not Alvarado observed all the formalities and restraints that were supposed to attend interrogation, the partnership between torture and confession in European law was so ingrained (see Foucault 1979:37–40) that his use of torture would have seemed, for him and his fellow Europeans, mere routine.

Returning to the question of the death of the Quiché kings, we need no longer choose between Alvarado’s version and that of the *Popol Vuh* in order to construct a consistent scenario. First we can hear the kings denying Alvarado’s allegation that they have plotted against him, and then we can see them hoisted off the ground by their wrists. If they persist in their denial, custom will demand the lash as the next step, followed by harsher measures. At the end of the scene, we see them burning at the stake for the crimes they have been made to confess.

What, then, about the score of years named 9 Ahaw in Yucatán, when Bishop Toral arrived and “ended the hangings”? Here, the realization that the reference was not to execution (as in Roys 1933:138n) but to torture was first hit upon by Alfredo Barrera Vásquez and Silvia Rendón (1948:156n) and recently repeated by several scholars in the English-speaking world.⁷ Strong support for the torture interpretation comes from the corresponding chronicles in the Chilam Balam books of Mani and Tizimin, both of which focus on 1562 (falling within 9 Ahaw) as a year when hangings were in progress.⁸ That was the precise year in which Fray Diego de Landa, head of the Franciscan order’s missionary efforts in Yucatán, invoked the Holy Office of the Inquisition in response to reports of backsliding among Christian converts.

The friars under Landa’s command, armed with a questionnaire, conducted a survey over broad areas of Yucatán. Large numbers of suspected “idolaters,” which is to say worshipers of Mayan gods, were arrested and put on trial. When they seemed reluctant to talk, the friars “chose the remedy of hanging them by the hands with a rope, arms stretched out and turned forward, rather than torment,” as Landa put it (Scholes and Adams 1938:I:294, translation mine), though he was in fact describing “the queen of torments.” Where necessary, the friars next used the lash, or weighted the feet of the suspended suspect with stones, or spattered his skin with hot candle wax or splashed it with boiling water, or tied cords around his arms and thighs and tightened them by twisting sticks, or brought pulleys into play. Or else they laid him out and propped his mouth open with a stick, pouring water in until his belly was swollen, at which point they stood on it until water mixed with blood welled out of his mouth, nose, and ears. After confession came penance, which might mean receiving as many as 200 lashes, wearing a conspicuous yellow shirt marked with a red cross for up to three years, or entering into slavery for up to five years.⁹

As extreme as inquisitorial procedures might seem, they can be interpreted as an extension of sacramental confession, which, as Jorge Klor de Alva points out, was itself “an important part of the European technique of domination, serving . . . as a mechanism of social control, by subjecting personal behavior and subjective ideas to the public scrutiny of non-Indians” (Klor de Alva 1988:40). In fact, sacramental confession had risen to its full importance in Roman Catholic life during the same period (the 13th century) in which confession became firmly established as necessary for the full conviction of criminals under Roman canonical law (Peters 1985:46). Judicial confessions obtained by torture were not valid unless they were repeated voluntarily, which brought them into line with sacramental confessions. But the threat of force remained, since those who denied their tortured testimony, which still counted as evidence against them, were subject to further torture. With such procedures already in place, there came a new Church doctrine that heresy was identical to serious criminal offenses. This had the effect of sending heretics, who were “thieves and murderers of souls,” down the path of tortured confession, and led to the establishment of the Holy Office of the Inquisition (Peters 1985:53–69).¹⁰ In effect, inquisitorial procedures were a criminalization of ordinary sacramental confession and penance.

Judging from the records of Landa's proceedings, one of the most productive witnesses was a man named Juan Kowoh, who testified, through an interpreter, in the trials at Sotuta.¹¹ Yes, he was a Christian, and he remembered well who had baptized him, but he confessed that he had forgotten the four prayers of the Church. Then, under oath, and having made the sign of the cross, he declared that he possessed three idols, just three and no more. Admonished to be truthful, he admitted to having another twenty idols. When he denied having any more than twenty-three, torture persuaded him to reveal three additional idols. Then, after further persuasion, he confessed to having yet another idol, making twenty-seven idols in all.

But it was when the questions turned to human sacrifice that Juan Kowoh really got to talking. Late one night, it seems, he and Diego Pech, the village headman, went with the local daykeepers (diviners) to a cornfield, where they gathered up ten idols and carried them into the church. No, they did not genuflect when they went before the altar. They had a youth with them, stripped to the waist, his hands tied behind him, wearing a blindfold or white cotton cloth, and they sat him down where an acolyte would sit. On the floor in front of the altar, facing in the same direction as the crucifix, they stood the idols in a row on a carpet of leaves from a castor-oil plant, along with two large candles. In front of the idols they rolled out a long mat, and on this mat they placed a large flint knife whose handle was wrapped in white cotton cloth. Now they pulled up benches on both sides of the mat and sat down. The youth wept when they summoned him, but Diego Pech said:

"Be courageous, be consoled. We are not about to send you into the place of fear, into the world below, but into heaven, into glory, just as those who came before us did, those whose custom it was to do as we now do." The youth replied:

"Do as you will, for God who is in heaven will help me." Then Gaspar Chim, a daykeeper, said:

"Untie him before it dawns, before anybody comes along. Let's do what must be done."

So they untied the youth and threw him on his back on the mat, with four men holding him still by his outstretched arms and legs. Pedro Ewan, the daykeeper who had been appointed to wield the white knife, made an incision on the left side of his chest and pulled out his heart. Cutting it loose from its veins and arteries, he gave the heart to another daykeeper, who cut two little crosses into its point and raised it as high in the air as he could reach. Then he handed it to someone else—no, Juan Kowoh could not remember who—and it was that person who put it in the mouth of the largest of the ten idols, whose name was Iguana House.

After they had filled a large calabash with the blood of the youth, they took his body, his heart, the calabash, and the idols to the house of Diego Pech, and Juan Kowoh went home.

Landa knew, from ethnological investigations he had carried out some years before, that the four men who held the youth by his arms and legs would have been playing the roles of the Thunderstorms (Chak) of the four directions (Tozzer 1941:119). He had also taken a few notes on the god named Itsam Na or "Iguana House," but what he did not know was that the "house" in question enclosed the entire earth, from above and below, and that the god who was that house appeared as a giant iguana with one head above and a second head below (Thompson 1970:212–224). Iguana House was equally a god of heaven and hell, and when the youth in this story replied to Diego Pech by saying, "God who is in heaven will help me," he was not choosing Christianity over his native religion, but was saying something that made sense on either side of the boundary between them.

The testimony fairly bristles with the word "idol" (*ídolo* in Spanish), which belongs to a specifically Christian lexicon for the denigration of the religions of others. Judging from the lexical evidence for Yucatec (Barrera Vásquez 1980), the friars (or their interpreters) had only two likely choices when they asked about "idols." One of these was *kisín*, which

originally referred to a god of death. But if, at this early date, the friars had not yet succeeded in investing *kisín* with the Christian meanings of "demon" and "idol," which it has today, then they must have resorted to *k'uul*, which originally referred to gods and icons of gods but eventually (and ironically) came to mean both "God" and "idol." *K'ulche*, which combines *k'uul* with the word for "wood," became the term for carved images of saints. Here the irony is even deeper than it might seem, since Landa, in his role as ethnologist, had found that the "idols" most esteemed in Mayan tradition had been the wooden ones (Tozzer 1941:111).

One of Landa's best informants had served as district governor in Sotuta, the very town that now yielded stories of human sacrifice. That was Juan Kokom, whom Landa himself would later describe as "a man of great reputation, learned in their affairs, and of remarkable discernment and well acquainted with native matters. He was very intimate with the author of this book, Fray Diego de Landa" (Tozzer 1941:43-44). Juan Kokom was no longer in office at the time of the trials, having been succeeded at death by his brother, Lorenzo, during the previous year. Lorenzo Kokom was also unavailable for questioning, having committed suicide a few days before the inquisitors arrived in town, but his name came up in the testimony.¹² Only a couple of months before, it was said, he had taken three boys to Chi'ich'e'n Itsa', where he removed and burned their hearts and had their bodies thrown in the well. In the town of Sotuta itself, while the resident friar was away, he had cut out the hearts of two boys in the church, delivering a sermon in which he warned of the coming of a great storm. All would be lost, he said, if the ways of the ancestors were forgotten and the gods no longer received their accustomed sacrifices.

Landa must have been saddened when the testimony implicated his own close associate, the late Juan Kokom. It was said that just before Juan's death, he and his brother Lorenzo had jointly carried out the sacrifice of a pair of boys in the local church. On that occasion Lorenzo had asked the Lord God to accept the hearts and restore don Juan to good health. On a previous occasion, before Juan's illness, the two brothers had placed "idols" in the churchyard and performed sacrifices there. They tied two girls to crosses, stood the crosses up, and then sermonized, saying:

"Let these girls die crucified, even as Jesus Christ did, he whom they say is our lord, though we do not know whether this is so." Then the brothers took the girls down and cut them open, offering their hearts to the "idols" and their bodies to a nearby well.

It was while the trials at Sotuta were under way that Yucatán received its first resident bishop in the person of Francisco Toral. Jurisdiction in matters of the faith now belonged to the bishop, but he was willing to let Landa continue, provided that he made no use of torture. Landa insisted that without torture the Indians would not confess, and he refused to go on unless authorized to use it (Scholes and Adams 1938:I:lv). In the end, amid rising complaints about Landa's past actions from both colonists and Mayas, Bishop Toral opened an investigation of his own, calling upon the services of both clergy and laypersons. It was the Inquisition itself that became the principal object of their inquiry. According to the figures they compiled, 6,330 persons had been subjected to penances, while another 4,549 had been tortured.¹³ Those who were maimed or crippled as a result of torture numbered 32, while those who died numbered 157, not counting 13 persons who were known to have committed suicide before they could be arrested and another 18 who disappeared under circumstances that pointed to suicide. There were two cases in which a suspect already incarcerated in a monastery managed to end his life by striking himself in the throat with a stone, as if to make doubly sure of not having to speak. And finally, 140 persons were convicted posthumously, resulting in the disinterment and cremation of their remains.

In the absence of torture, surviving witnesses from Landa's trials now recanted much of their previous testimony. Some of them, as in the following case, explained how and why they had produced it:

Juan Ka'wich told Francisco Kan and Juan Tsul, who were also prisoners and who are citizens and *principales* of this said pueblo, that he and the six mentioned above had raised false testimony

and had said when they examined them that they had sacrificed certain children in the church and in the cemetery and in the forests outside the pueblo. . . . And he said to them, "Look here, when they question you, say what I have said, for these others, my companions, have done likewise," referring to those mentioned. And they said to him, "Why have you told such a big lie and so bad a thing?" And he said to them, "Why shouldn't we have said it since they hung some of us twice, others three times, and because it seemed to us that we were already at the point of death when we said it?" [Tozzer 1941:81n, with orthographic emendations]

Bishop Toral came to the conclusion that the evidence compiled by Landa was largely false. He reduced some sentences, revoked others, and released all prisoners. Landa fought back for a time, but in 1564, the year the Chumayel book gives for the end of the hangings, he left Yucatán and took his case to Spain, just ahead of a royal summons that would have forced him to appear there. One of the eventual outcomes was that King Philip II removed jurisdiction in matters of the faith from monastic orders and exempted all Indians from prosecution by the Inquisition.¹⁴

What, then, has been the verdict of historians and ethnohistorians on the two sets of evidence, before and after Bishop Toral took over? The earliest discussion of this issue was by France V. Scholes and Ralph L. Roys (1938:599–600), who came down on the side of the testimony that was taken under torture.¹⁵ Their key argument was that the evidence obtained by Landa agrees with what we know about the Maya culture of the time from other sources. They ignore the embarrassing fact that the principal source consulted by themselves and other scholars has long been Landa's own *Relación de las cosas de Yucatán*, which he wrote several years after he had played the role of inquisitor. We might also wonder how or why his Maya witnesses might have gone about concocting *believable* testimony that did *not* have some degree of fit with their own culture.

The anthropologist Alfred M. Tozzer fell into line with Scholes and Roys, and he remarked that "the data collected by the Inquisition furnish an amazing amount of new material on the sacrifices and idolatry of the natives" (Tozzer 1941:80n–81n).¹⁶ Speaking, perhaps, in his character as an archeologist with a feel for artifacts, Tozzer improved on his predecessors by declaring that "the thousands of idols collected and destroyed could not have been fabricated out of the imagination" (1941:81n). Roys, writing independently of Scholes, stated that "Landa's inquisition of 1562 was effective in putting an end to human sacrifice in the regions governed by the Spaniards" (Roys 1943:83), thus accepting Landa's findings and seeming to justify Landa's actions in one and the same sentence. In subsequent discussions of syncretism in Maya religion, William Madsen (1967:386), J. Eric S. Thompson (1977:29), and Victoria R. Bricker (1981:20) all cited Landa's findings on human sacrifice as fact without mentioning the problem of Toral's reinvestigation. And then there came Nancy M. Farriss, a social historian who, like Scholes and Roys, raised the issue of torture only to dispose of it: "The original confessions are . . . too circumstantial, too detailed, and too much in agreement with other evidence to be dismissed as fabrications simply because they were obtained under torture" (Farriss 1984:291).

With the exception of Bricker, all of these authors have allowed the terms "idol" and "idolatry" to slip out of their accounts of testimony and into their own discourse, thus implicitly aligning themselves with a Christian view of Mayan religion.¹⁷ Landa himself was both explicit and precise about this matter: "They knew well that the idols were the works of their hands, dead and without a divine nature, but they held them in reverence on account of what they represented" (Tozzer 1941:111). His concern was thus with idolatry in its weak sense as the worship of "false gods" rather than in its strong sense as the deification of material objects. Curiously, Tozzer took a harder line than Landa, arguing (in his footnote to this same passage) that the artifacts themselves were regarded as gods.

Maya confessions appear in quite a different light when we break out of the chain of writers who have read them primarily as a source of cultural and historical facts and consider the work of Inga Clendinnen. Her approach is that of interpretive social science, in which texts, instead of being mined for facts, are read as historically situated cultural

constructs in their own right. She observes that "men subjected to the *garrucha* [hoist] could do little more than affirm or deny propositions put to them, and then, later, when their confessions were taken, to flesh out with details the skeletal account already provided" (Clendinnen 1987:122). But it is not only torture and the propositions of interrogators that mediate the testimony. Many of the texts, rather than being direct transcripts of proceedings, are the sworn statements of interrogators and of Spanish laypersons who witnessed confessions, taken down after the fact during Bishop Toral's reinvestigation. Landa and the friars working under him kept no trial records until he learned of the bishop's arrival, at which point he began compiling confessional texts and having them sworn to (Clendinnen 1982:331, 343). They were written in Spanish, in the third person ("he said that he did such-and-such"), on the basis of what was heard from the accused through an interpreter, and then read aloud to the interpreter and translated back to the accused, who could be tortured again if he withheld his affirmation.

In the matter of "idolatry," Clendinnen gives full exposure to a flaw in the evidence that was downplayed by Scholes and Roys and ignored by Tozzer. In Toral's investigation, Spanish laypersons testified that some of the "idols" Mayas turned over to inquisitors looked suspiciously old and even mossy, and that Mayas had been seen hunting for artifacts in ancient ruins in an attempt to come up with enough possible idols to match the numbers they had given under torture (Clendinnen 1987:83).¹⁸ As for confessions of human sacrifice, it was Landa himself who was the first to extract these, and he was the *only* interrogator to come up with sacrifice stories of a blasphemous character, which is to say that they took place in churches or cemeteries, or involved crucifixions (Clendinnen 1987:122). Moreover, his discovery and pursuit of human sacrifices occurred at a time when he was under great pressure, having already heard of the arrival of Bishop Toral and knowing that he would soon be faced with the problem of justifying his investigation and obtaining permission to continue it (Clendinnen 1982:331, 343).

In the end, whether we frame a hypothesis that the sacrifice stories are "ethnographic fact," or else that they are "dark fantasies," Clendinnen (1982:344–345) warns that we cannot prove it, and that we "cannot know" whether the sacrifices with crosses actually took place. But when she allows herself to speak in terms of what is "possible, even probable," she finds it difficult to let go of the case of Juan Kokom, finding it "likely" that he carried out child sacrifices in which he "experimented" with the use of crosses (Clendinnen 1987:188). Wishing to remain skeptical, we might add to her own reservations about the sources that many of the persons who were named as sacrificers, Juan Kokom included, were conveniently dead at the time of the trials. And not wishing to fall into the familiar trap of reducing Indians to passive victims, we might further suggest that the witnesses who singled out Kokom knew full well that he had been (as Landa put it) "very intimate . . . with Fray Diego de Landa." They might have seen Kokom as a collaborator with the very enemy who was now interrogating them. By telling stories about Kokom, they turned the missionary effort back upon itself and put Landa in the awkward position of having to act against his own friend. Kokom could no longer be punished in the flesh, but Landa had his bones removed from holy ground and cast in a field (Gates 1937:iii).

With or without Juan Kokom in the picture, we must also put into question the notion that Mayas "experimented" with child crucifixion. If the inquisitors of Yucatán were anything like their counterparts in Europe, it was precisely when they focused on what they considered to be diabolical rituals that they were most likely to distort the testimony by asking suggestive questions (Ginzburg 1990:158). As in Europe, the resulting narratives would have fit models already known to the inquisitors, and we may well ask what sort of model could have guided Landa in the present case. The clearest answer is provided by the tales of Jewish ritual murders that circulated throughout Spain at the end of the 15th century. The most sensational story was that of the Santo Niño de la Guardia, which resulted in the trial and execution of six Jews and six Jewish converts to Christianity (Kamen 1985:15–16). According to their own testimony, taken under torture, they had carried out a ritual in which they crucified a Christian child, a boy, and then *cut his heart*

out. The trial took place in 1491, a year before the expulsion of the Jews from Spain and 20 years before any Spaniard set foot in Mesoamerica. So whether the experiments of Sotuta were fact or fantasy, they were well within the reach of a specifically Spanish imagination.

The long-standing preference for Alvarado's account of events in Guatemala is no less disquieting than the preference for recanted and otherwise problematic confessions from Yucatán. The Mayan authors of the *Popol Vuh*, like those of the Chilam Balam books, constructed a terse chronology in which torture by hanging at the hands of Europeans became the marker of one whole era, in this case a generation of kings rather than a score of years. Historians and ethnohistorians, in their haste to credit the European version of events, have failed even to raise the question of the methods that might have been used to extract the kings' confessions, except perhaps for Carmack's quotation marks around the word "confessed." Yet it is these same confessions that secure Alvarado's story about what happened in Guatemala, just as similarly tortured confessions secure Landa's story about what happened in Yucatán.

The historian Natalie Zemon Davis, who deals with 16th-century France, has been interpreting archival material as fiction, not in order to sort out false stories from true ones, but in the realization that stories in general are made by their tellers rather than springing directly from events (Davis 1987:3). The writers of conventional history, on the other hand, attempt to work toward a single story line in which contradictions within and among the sources have been quieted down. In the present case, historians and ethnohistorians alike have preferred a story in which friars are shocked by the discovery of human sacrifice among their own parishioners to an alternative story in which friars become possessed by fantasies about the power of Satan in a land very new to the Christian faith, just as they have preferred a story in which an astute conqueror thwarts a plot against his life to one in which his paranoia leads him to murder his own hosts. The suggested alternative stories might have a greater appeal than the standard ones for readers whose taste runs to tragedy, but they remain stories.

Whatever the truth status of the trial documents, it remains that the testimony taken by means of torture tells a far more interesting story, at least when read by Europeans and Euro-Americans, than the testimony taken without it. For anthropologists, the attraction of secret rituals that syncretize the respective supreme sacrifices of the Maya and Christian religions has been irresistible. It might seem difficult to give up these rituals, but we need not do so unless we insist on an objectivist stance. If instead we take a phenomenological approach, the testimony takes on a new interest as the *intersubjective* production of Christian inquisitor and Maya witness, a convergence of imaginations more than an objective account of real events. This convergence takes place within a monstrously asymmetrical dialogue, to be sure, but one in which there is nevertheless an exchange, with *real* violence traded for a *narrative* of violence. The inquiring Christian, whose religion is founded on a *reported* act of sacrifice in a *remote* time, moves ever closer to the *experience* of the sacrifice he imagines the Maya to be enacting in the *present* time. The Maya, for his part, cannot stop the torture, which is the most direct expression of the Christian's desire, without revealing at least the outlines of the object of that desire, and he cannot stop further interrogation without producing a highly *realistic* account—which is to say "circumstantial," "detailed," and "in agreement with other evidence"—of the longed-for sacrifice. If the Maya has never heard tales of Jewish ritual murders, he may be surprised when the Christian's imagination demands the crucifixion of children, as if to collapse the Nativity and the Passion into one. But then, going beyond the response of a passive victim, the Maya pictures these children as tied to crosses, not nailed, and changes them into little girls. The Christian wants to know what priestly words went with this ritual, but when the Maya obliges by putting words in the mouth of the late Juan Kokom, he gives voice to doubt, saying:

"Let these girls die crucified, even as Jesus Christ did, he whom they say is our lord, though we do not know whether this is so."

The story we have started sketching here is not the only one we could reconstruct from the documents, but it and others like it hold the promise of being something more than mere additions to the interpretations already offered by those who rely on the authority of history in the conventional sense. We make a definite break with that authority so long as we put the inquisitors and their witnesses back together in the same time and place and keep them there, rather than bracketing the inquisitors and their methods out of the picture in order to get at data on the Maya. Such bracketing has been the ethnohistorical equivalent of what Johannes Fabian calls "the denial of coevalness" in objectivist ethnographies, where face-to-face encounters disappeared in the distance as an omniscient third-person narrator took over (Fabian 1983:31). The difference is that the persons bracketed out by the writers of such ethnographies were themselves, whereas ethnohistorians have bracketed out the *ancestors* of ethnographers.

Perhaps changes in the writing of ethnohistory have been slow to come because the ancestors are embarrassing. Like it or not, Klor de Alva (1988) has pointed out that Bernardino de Sahagún, "the father of modern ethnography," developed his field methods on the model of sacramental confession as administered by missionaries. And Carlo Ginzburg (1990:159) has argued that inquisitors had "an anthropological attitude," at least in the sense that they were committed to a "confrontation between different cultures" by means of dialogue. Be that as it may, the likes of Landa (and even the more gentle Sahagún) were finally devoted to the extirpation of the cultures they were confronting, whereas cultural anthropologists have tended to be cultural conservationists.

At the most general level, the embarrassment of ancestry lies in the fact that the roots of most of us who presently do ethnohistory and ethnography in the Americas, like the roots of our ecclesiastical predecessors, reach eastward across the Atlantic. Whatever revisionist stories we might choose to tell about 16th-century Guatemala and Yucatán, and with whatever choices of descriptive detail and interpretive apparatus, it remains that the Popol Vuh and Chilam Balam accounts do not take the form of prolix narratives, but rather follow a laconic poetics in which torture becomes a metonym for the experience of a whole generation. The otherness of the Mayan sources is not finally reducible to the terms of our own chosen discourse. It seems fitting to return to those sources at this point, all the more so because they do not end on a note of torture.

The account of royal succession in the Popol Vuh continues beyond the Kaweq kings who were tortured and burned, first naming their sons, who were appointed to succeed them by none other than Alvarado, and then ending with the the first Kaweq heirs to take Spanish names, who were still living when the Popol Vuh was written:

Black Butterfly and Tepepul were tributary to the Castilian people. They were the surviving sons in the thirteenth generation of kings.

Don Juan de Rojas and don Juan Cortés in the fourteenth generation of kings. They are the sons of Black Butterfly and Tepepul.

The Cortés line died out in 1788. Members of the Rojas line still live amid the mounds that mark the eastern district of the ancient Quiché capital, but they lost their last remaining royal privilege, the right to hold serfs, with the coming of liberal reforms in 1801 (Carmack 1981:321, 362).

Before the score of years when "Bishop Toral . . . ended the hangings" was over, Landa would spend several years trying to clear himself in Spain, answering the questions put to him (without torture) in the high courts of his countrymen (Scholes and Roys 1938:602–604). As if in compensation for the long delays that attended his case, he was eventually exonerated and sent back to Yucatán in a new role, nothing less than that of successor to the late Bishop Toral. Most of his term fell in 9 Ahaw, the score of years that carries his rival's name, but it reached into the next score, 7 Ahaw. Was Bishop Landa immortalized in his turn? Here is the answer, as recorded in the Chilam Balam book of Chumayel:

7 Ahaw was when Bishop Landa died.

The same characterization of 7 Ahaw is given in the books of Mani and Tizimin.¹⁹ Landa's first entry into Yucatán, back in 11 Ahaw, passes without notice in all three accounts, and they all give the next score of years to Bishop Toral. In the Maya poetics of time only 7 Ahaw is Landa's, and his only reward, coming in 1579 by Christian reckoning, is death.

Notes

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¹This is a revised version of my own published translation (Tedlock 1985:224); the Quiché text may be found on folio 55 of the Popol Vuh manuscript, which is reproduced in facsimile in Ximénez (1973) and accurately paleographed in Schultze Jena (1944). Quiché words, here and elsewhere, are written in the alphabet recently adopted by native speakers of the Mayan languages of Guatemala (see Academia de las Lenguas Mayas de Guatemala 1988), except that vowels are limited to the five found in early documents.

²Here and elsewhere, Yucatec words are written in the orthography of Barrera Vásquez (1980).

³The word "precise" is meant in terms of Mayan astronomy, whose measurements go by whole days. By the measure of Western astronomy, the solar ("tropical") year is 365.2422 days long; 19 such years last 6,939.6018 days, which, when rounded off to 6,940, leave 260 days to complete the 7,200 days of a *k'atun*.

⁴This translation is informed by a comparison of those of Roys (1933:135–144) and Edmonson (1986:51–59), and by consultations of the largest dictionary of Yucatec (Barrera Vásquez 1980); the Yucatec text may be found on pages 74–82 of the Chumayel manuscript, which is closely paleographed by Roys (1933:15–62). My translation combines features of the first and second chronicles given in the Chumayel book, which, when considered together, imply two different occupations of Ch'ich'e'n Itsa' (see Roys 1933:204–205). In the case of the final entry for 9 Ahaw, I follow Edmonson (1986:56) in reading Bishop Toral as the actor in the ending of the hangings and in treating the 1546 of the manuscript as a scribal transposition of 1564, but on most other points of difference I prefer Roys.

⁵For retellings of Alvarado's story, see Díaz del Castillo (1982:459) and Gómara (1964:316) for the 16th century; Fuentes y Guzmán (1969:86) for the 17th; Ximénez (1977:136–137) for the 18th; Milla (1879:76–77) and Bancroft (1886:648–649) for the 19th; and Villacorta (1938:338), Recinos, Goetz, and Morley (1950:3–4, 230n), Carmack (1981:146, 308), Bricker (1981:32), and Lovell (1985:59) for the 20th. Fuentes y Guzmán (1972:296) tells a conflicting story in the second part of his large and disorganized work, confusing the present episode with one that took place a generation later, in which a Kaweq heir was hanged for rebellion. Ximénez, Milla, Villacorta, Recinos, and Carmack were all aware of the Popol Vuh version.

⁶I say "Europeans" so as to discourage the reader from falling into a *Leyenda Negra* characterization of Spaniards. The judicial use of torture saw a major revival from the 13th through the 18th centuries, and although it was more common (and longer-lived) in the parts of Europe (such as Spain) where Roman Canonical law was strongest, it saw extensive use in England during the 16th century, which is to say at the time of the events described here (Peters 1985:80; Langbein 1977:94–119). One of its English applications, ironically, was to Catholics suspected of being Spanish agents (Langbein 1977:83, 138).

⁷See Farriss (1984:508), Edmonson (1986:56n), and Clendinnen (1987:190), all of whom explicitly disagree with Roys.

⁸For translations of the relevant passage, see Craine and Reindorp (1979:140) for the Mani book and Edmonson (1982:164) for the Tizimin.

⁹For documents describing these tortures and penances, see Scholes and Adams (1938:I:24–68, 189–232; II:193–221, 232–259); much of this material is described or quoted in English translation in Tozzer (1941:76n–80n).

¹⁰These developments bring to mind the routine employment of torture by government security forces in present-day Guatemala (Simon 1987:126–128, 140–141, 169). It might be said that the

contemporary heresies have been political rather than religious, were it not for the divine inspiration claimed by General Ríos Montt (a Protestant) during his regime. But there remain differences: security interrogations are extra-judicial, secret, and seldom leave the witness alive.

¹¹The narrative that follows is based on documents that appear in Scholes and Adams (1938:I:106–107) and Clendinnen (1987:195–200); the same material is described or quoted in English translation by Tozzer (1941:79n, 118n–119n).

¹²For the key document bearing on the cases of Juan and Lorenzo Kokom, see Scholes and Adams (1938:I:71–129); Tozzer (1941:44n, 116n) quotes from, discusses, and augments this source.

¹³The primary documentary source for these statistics is in Scholes and Adams (1938:II:209–221); see also Tozzer (1941:79n, 85n) and Clendinnen (1987:76).

¹⁴For detailed accounts of the conflict between Toral and Landa and its outcome, including the legal aspects of the case, see Scholes and Roys (1938:593–604, 618–619) and Tozzer (1941:82n–84n).

¹⁵A similar passage signed by Scholes alone appears in Scholes and Adams (1938:I:lxv–lxx).

¹⁶Tozzer cites the version of the argument authored by Scholes alone (see Note 15).

¹⁷For examples of Tozzer's use of these terms, see the quotations in the preceding paragraph; for the others, see Scholes and Roys (1938:607, 610, 613–614, 617), Roys (1943:50, 72, 82), Madsen (1967:385, 387), and Thompson (1977:28–29). Farriss uses the terms so freely as to produce many passages that sound more like church history than social history (for example, Farriss 1984:289–292, 312–314, 317–318, 340–341).

¹⁸Scholes and Roys (1938:596) erroneously reported this same testimony as coming from Mayas rather than Spaniards. Scholes mentioned it briefly (without attribution) in Scholes and Adams (1938:I:lxviii).

¹⁹For the Mani passage, see Craine and Reindorp (1979:140); for Tizimin see Edmonson (1982:163).

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