



COVER: Pascual Ulew, Achí story teller who provided some of the texts in this volume. Many Mayans view their walking sticks with affection and near-reverence, for they believe them to be endowed with protective powers, especially effective when a traveler must spend the night in a lonely spot. The stick is stuck into the ground near the sleeper, and awakens him in case of impending danger.

PORTRAIT by Nancy McArthur (Li'n to her Indian neighbors) who grew up in Aguacatán, Guatemala.

ACCORDING TO OUR ANCESTORS

folk texts from guatemala and honduras

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Preface

The purpose of this volume is to make available certain materials of interest to linguists, anthropologists, and any who are interested in folklore. It is not intended to be a study in depth, but does include some notes and observations based on the texts. It consists of legends, lore, and first-person accounts originally told to investigators who were seeking a body of material for linguistic analysis.

The informants who submitted these texts are present-day Mayans,¹ many of whom prefaced their remarks with, "According to our ancestors. . . ." They are not necessarily polished story tellers; some were apologetic for their lack of skill, but they were still encouraged to relate the account so that the investigator might obtain a connected corpus of native speech. Most of the contributions were recorded without interruption on magnetic tape, then transcribed and interpreted with the help of a native speaker.

All contributions have been made by members of the Summer Institute of Linguistics working in Central America, all of whom have had at least two years' residence in their respective ethno-linguistic regions. It is their hope that some of the pleasure that has been theirs in collecting the tales might be shared by those who read them.

Mary Shaw

¹ Exceptions: Carib and Jicaque narrators, although there is probably a certain amount of Mayan influence present in these ethnic groups also.

comparative notes



MEXICO

BELICE



Mopan Maya

Cartib

GUATEMALA

Jacalteco

Kekchi

Ixil

Pocomchi

Agua cateco

Uspantec

Cubuteo Achi

Joyabaj Quiche

Rabinal Achi

Cantel Quiche

Pocomam

Cakchiquel

Tzutujil

Guatemala City

Jicaque

HONDURAS

Tegucigalpa

EL SALVADOR
San Salvador

NICARAGUA

comparative notes

This volume presents a collection of folklore--tales, legends, and first-person accounts--which has been submitted from the files of eighteen linguistic teams working in Guatemala and Honduras. Although the texts here presented were not collected primarily for anthropological study, the first section of the book presents the texts in free translation for easy reference by those who are interested in the content of the stories for anthropological and ethnographic purposes. The second section of the book has been prepared for those interested in linguistics, and gives the original language of the texts, keyed by numbers to a literal English translation.

In the group of free translations, there are included some texts which are not here printed in the original language due to lack of space. However, an attempt has been made to supply interested scholars with a generous sample of each language. Footnotes include comments by the contributors as firsthand observers of the cultures, and comments by the editor in the interest of comparative study.

One of the purposes of this study was to note some of the more salient motifs appearing in the texts. Several of the motifs occur in texts from more than one of the linguistic areas represented; others may appear in only one text. It is probable that a motif which occurs in more than one of the texts is of rather general distribution throughout the area of the modern Maya. The failure of the theme to recur, however, does not preclude its having a wide distribution. The lack of recurrence is often simply happenstance, since it was not possible at this time to ask each investigator to seek evidence of each motif.

Nevertheless, the degree to which certain of the themes did recur reveals certain significant details of the Mayan worldview. There are details which seem insignificant per se, but the fact of their being retained from the original source over centuries of time and miles of space must be regarded as significant. The nature of their significance is the subject of the following comments.

Abridged
versions

The texts included in this volume have been related by narrators not accustomed to telling their stories to out-of-the-culture listeners. As a result occasional gaps occur in the tales. When such gaps threatened to leave the reader at a complete loss, we have attempted to effect coherence by means of footnotes or parenthetical material. For example, in collecting the Jicaque texts, the linguist frequently found it necessary to question the story teller as to the significance of certain events or the connection between seemingly unrelated parts of the story. He states: "They have no background of telling these stories to naïve listeners, and so assume a general, if not thorough, prior acquaintance with them." His experience was common among the investigators.

Flash-backs

Occasionally, the story teller has realized that he has omitted some detail of the narrative and gives a flash-back to make the tale complete. Examples of this type of mechanism are found in "The Struggle Between the Serpent and the Lightning Angels" (Achi) and the Ixil story "Adam, Noah, and the Flood."

Contradictory
statements

The investigator is frequently torn between the desire to obtain a tale that is fairly logical, and the desire to get one that is free from the interference of his own culture. On one hand he is tempted to question seemingly contradictory statements in an effort to understand the tale perfectly; on the other hand, he is wary of interrupting the flow of the tale for both ethnographic and linguistic reasons. However, since these texts were originally recorded for linguistic purposes, the investigators recorded them as given, sequitur or no. One account of the ancient Achi bad man states that he "ate only crab" but that he had sold a mountain for a bun because "he just loved bread." Another tale from the same region tells of a former race of beings that had holes in their throats, and that when they ate their tortillas, the holes in their throats closed up. However, at another spot in the story, the narrator stated that they didn't eat their food, they just sniffed it and were sustained by the fragrance. Sometimes, statements which appear to be contradictions later prove not to be such, but are references to points which are quite distinct in the narrator's mind. They may subtly reveal some mental reservations well worth the investigator's noting. For example, in the K'ekchi' story "The Jasmine Flower," the statement is made: "Long ago there were only kings," but the hero of the story was originally the king's servant. However, he did eventually become a king, so perhaps in the mind of the narrator, that takes his statement out of the realm of the contradictory.

"So they say"

Liberally sprinkled throughout the tales is the self-exonerating statement, "So they say." Thus the story teller avoids

having his own veracity questioned. Such a cover statement is to be found in most of the texts. Examples are quickly noted in Jacalteco, Tzutujil, Ixil, and Achi, but the converse is also noted in the K'ekchi' woodpecker story, where the narrator goes to some pains to declare that what happened is "really true."

Other types of cover statements are to be found in some of the texts in which the narrator may have doubted the sympathies of the listener, especially if his narrations had been doubted by someone before. We are reminded here of the Achi legend of the leaf-cutter ants which states that we must preserve the life of the leaf-cutters "because Jesucristo commanded it." One does not quarrel with the deities.

Obviously, some of the texts are simply tales told for entertainment; others are in a serious vein, told for the purpose of imparting knowledge, or of inculcating moral values. Some texts turn out to be near-sermons, with the moral stated overtly, such as "The Traveler," and "A Pilgrimage to the God Chajul" (K'ekchi'), "The Twisted Tree" (Quiche), and particularly the Ixil texts "This Younger Generation!," "The Lazy Boy," and "The Man Who Was Carried off by a Buzzard."

Moral
stated
overtly

At first glance there would not seem to be any moral even suggested in the Tzutujil tale "The Woman and Her Nine Sons," but we propose that the last paragraph is appended for the sole purpose of stating a moral--women today are reminded of the fate of the woman who failed to teach her son to work.

Moral
stated
cryptically

Some of the texts of considerable length reveal themselves to be a succession of adventures or episodes in the manner of Popol Vuh. Illustrative of this style are the Mopan and K'ekchi' versions of the marriage of the sun and the moon. The non-indigenous but greatly relished tales of the rabbit and the coyote provide a chain of episode + episode + episode which may go on ad infinitum, or may be conveniently cut off at any section, with the rabbit still having the last laugh. The Pocomam tale "The Thieves" is another illustration of "trick + trick," but the account terminates after the stolen meat has changed hands four times. The Achi Sipac episodes are usually related as separate stories, but they may be told on occasion as a single narrative, combining the episodes with "and another time, Sipac...."

Succession
of episodes

Humor does not seem to be a characteristic of the texts (except in the gleeful relating of how "il' feller outwits big feller"), nevertheless, the Jacalteco tale of the godfathers and the giants' cave seems to provide us with a legitimate pun when the excited interloper forgets the password and cries, "Abre, Frijol!" instead of "Abre, Verjel!" ("Open, Bean!" instead of "Open, Bower!") The Caribs (non-Mayan) have a distinctive style that

Humor

includes tongue-in-cheek irony: "This room was small--it took three years to walk around it," and "she was really beautiful" (for "she was very homely"). Lavish exaggeration seems to add a humorous touch too: "He had money... more than the leaves on an avocado tree."

Fantasy

Although the Carib tale abounds in exaggerations, it confines itself to a more-or-less plausible plot. The majority of the other stories readily combine fantasy with realism: the girl and her lover went out through the keyhole (K'ekchi'), the clothes of the seven-year corpse rotted, but the flesh did not (K'ekchi'), the cooked rooster flapped his wings and splashed soup out of the pot (Ixil).

Omniscience

Associated with these supernatural abilities is the omniscience displayed in many of the tales: Santiago knew where the King of the Quiches would come up when he dived underground (Achi); the mitrado knew where his former employee had gone and the sun god knew that the devil had stolen his wife (Mopan), though there was no overt evidence to make them cognizant of the facts.

Voices

Voices may be heard coming from other than human agents, as illustrated by the pigeon heart which pled, "Don't cut me; plant me" (Mopan). Precedent for this sort of incident may be found in Popol Vuh, in which a gourd (the severed head of Jun Jun Ajpu) spoke to the maiden of Xibalba. In the Jacalteco story of the runaway lovers, one may wonder from whence come the answers made to the girl's father when he is calling her to get up in the morning; the girl is already gone. Questioning the informant, the investigator learned that the voice is coming from the urine deposited in the house by the girl before she left. This motif occurs also in the Mopan "The Sun God and His Wife," with the heroine's saliva replying to the father's questions. It may be significant that in each of these instances, the voice was coming from something that had been a part of a human body, and as such, substituted for the individual.

Talking animals

In many of the tales, we find animals talking together, which does not surprise us, but we also find instances of animals and humans conversing in tales which are told as true (Ixil tales of unfaithfulness). In these two cases the conversations occur only between a pet and his owner, a relationship which borders on the human in many Indian cultures. We note that in such cases, the pet animal refers to its owner as "my father" and to the owner's wife as "my mother" (see also Mopan "The Man Who Worked for a Mitrado").

The dead revive

The revival of the dead is not uncommon in Mayan folklore, with varying methods of revival. In the Mopan version of Hansel

and Gretel, the giant comes to life again after the girl places the pieces of his dismembered body together and the hero of the same tale comes to life again when his faithful dogs pull the death-weapon from his head. In both the K'ekchi' and Mopan tales of the sun god and his moon wife, the wife was revived after having been utterly destroyed by lightning; necessary to the revival was the gathering of her blood from the lake. The K'ekchi' tale of the jasmine flower centers around the miraculous powers of revival which are possessed by the blossom. In some stories, the being is capable of self-revival: in the Achi account of the King of the Quiches, the villain revived without outside aid after having been killed in combat. The resurrection of Christ is considered parallel to this latter type of revival--a supernatural being is impossible to kill once and for all.¹

Figuring prominently in relating how the dead are revived is the fact that if parts of the body are separated, they must be brought into proximity. The giant revived only then (Mopan "Hansel and Gretel"); the bits and pieces of the moon-wife's body were collected and put together in a vessel (Mopan, K'ekchi'). This idea may also have figured in the action of the giants in the Jacalteco tale, for they hung the parts of the rich man's body in different parts of the room. Questioning the informant as to why the poor man bothered to have the victim's body sewn back together brought the response: "If a body part is not buried with the corpse, the departed soul will wander around looking for it." One wonders too if the original version of the story might not have had the victim revive, once the blind tailor was through with his handwork.

Dismembered
bodies

The disposal of a villain by cutting him into pieces is perhaps easier to explain than is the selling the flesh of a parent for meat, as in the Quiche tale of the twisted tree. Even this motif is not unique, however. Dyk in her Mixteco Texts records a tale in which two sons cut up their father and gave the meat to their mother to eat.²

Somewhat parallel to the Quiche tale is the Tzutujil story of the nine sons who shut their mother up to perish in a steam bath. It seems likely that the two accounts were created to teach the same lesson cited above (under "Moral stated overtly/cryptically"), especially since a Mixteco story combines both motifs in the same tale.

Matricide

Although accounts of killings abound in the collection of texts, there is no account of suicide except in the Jicaque story, and here there seemed to be no logical reason for the suicide. In the informant's words, "He died needlessly." This appears in sharp contrast to the pattern of many ancient Mayan legends in which suicides abounded, especially in the stories of lovers.

Suicide

Prominent Motifs

Transformation
into animals

There is a persistent belief in a type of nagualism in which certain people are capable of turning themselves into animals. Here the idea is not that the nagual is the animal counterpart or totem of the individual, but that the animal is that individual, who has temporarily changed from human form.³ An excellent example may be found in the Ixil story of the unfaithful wife whose lover turned himself into a cougar in order to do away with the husband. The cougar behaved in a manner typical of naguals, turning somersaults as it entered the scene.⁴ The Ixil account, "Fright" also deals with a nagual; the mountain lion which dragged the blanket off the sleeping man and began jumping around with it was not behaving in a manner customary to flesh-and-blood mountain lions. Transformation into an animal is a game at which two may play--both the hero and the villain indulge in the sport in the Mopan story of the mitrado. The Jacaltec "Origin of Domesticated Animals" also relates how men turned themselves into moles in order to wreak havoc with their younger brother's fence.

The motif of "suitor-changed-into-hummingbird" is found in almost all sections of the region and is printed here in the Mopan and K'ekchi' sun-moon romance, and in the Pocomchi "Origin of Corn." In the Mopan version, the sun later turned himself into an antelope carcass in order to bait the devil's boy who appeared in the form of a buzzard. An Ixil tale reports too of a boy who turned himself into a snake simply because he didn't want to work, but there is no indication that this was just a temporary change, so it perhaps should be classed as other than nagualism. So, too, with the girl who was turned into an animal because she worked on a holy day (Ixil), the girl who was turned into a dove by a witch (Mopan), and the man who traded places with a buzzard (Aguacatec).

"Characoteles"

Among the Tzutujil, there are those who are born with a special power to enter a room unseen and disturb an adversary. Called characoteles, they may cause bad dreams, make noises outside the house at night, knock things off tables, etc. Their activities sound much like those of the "thing" that haunted the house of the K'ekchi' widow, whose tricks are delineated in "The Ghost and the Guitar."

"Siguanaba"

A classic example of an encounter with the phantom woman of the river is to be found in the K'ekchi', "The Phantom of the River." Appearing one night in the form of the beloved, the woman was standing beneath a tree combing her hair. Her rejoicing husband followed her for some distance, but when she finally revealed herself to him, he saw that she had the eyes and hoofs

of a horse. He was left immobile and mute with fear, and though rescued from the trance into which he had fallen, he became ill and died. (This legend type has been identified by Correa⁵ as "of purely indigenous origin, and is related to the Cegua or Cigua of Honduras and Nicaragua and with the Xtabay of Yucatan.") The apparition is called Ixtabay in Mopan and Xulel ha' in K'ekchi'.

An atypical Siguanaba is the old woman in the K'ekchi' tale who appeared in the night to accompany the lonely male traveler; when he invoked God's name, she screamed and took off into the air "as a horse goes." The Achi tell of the phantom woman who sometimes appears on the path at night to lure men to their destruction. (The account of this is not included among the limited number of texts presented here.)

A male counterpart of the Siguanaba may perhaps be the demon who appeared in the form of a youth in the Quiche tale "Satan Disguises Himself as a Suitor," and then turned into an animal before the eyes of the girl. She died of fright on the spot.

A vestige of the Llorona figure, who is much like the Siguanaba, appears in the Mopan Hansel and Gretel tale (Hansel saves the maiden from the river monster). Although none of the tales contributed to this work concern a phantom who wept by the river, it is interesting that a sorrowing woman always goes down by the river to do her weeping: the Mopan moon-wife wept by the river when her husband beat her, the Ixil unfaithful wife wept by the river when her husband killed her lover, and the above-mentioned maiden awaited her fate there, weeping.

"Llorona"

The belief that the mountains have spirits or owners is widespread throughout the region and is manifest in tales from diverse parts of the country. This work includes a K'ekchi' text which indicates the displeasure of the "god of the mountain" with the noise made by a man's barking dogs and quarrelsome wife--parallel perhaps to the ire of the Popol Vuh lords of the underworld when the boys played ball above them. Among the Ixil, it is forbidden to climb Su'mal Mountain, because "maybe it has a soul."

Spirits of
mountains

Although the above incidents would seem to indicate that the being is malevolent, the Jacaltecs tell of an eight-year-old girl who spent a month with the "man of the mountain." He treated her royally, and invited her to come again if her parents were not nice to her. The owner of the volcano in the Tzutujil tale of Mt. Xekapoj was wealthy and beneficent, but turned malevolent when the recipients of his gifts failed to follow instructions.⁶

Giants The K'ekchi' spirit of the mountain was described as being very tall, living in a big house, surrounded by other very tall people. Is extreme height sufficient to classify this figure as a giant? Or are giants always big, burly, and bad? At least the term "giant" in this group of tales suggests the latter. One version of the Achi Sipac story says that Sipac was selling the mountains to a "bad giant." Certainly the giant of the Jicaque tale was bad, for he threatened to swallow the hero whole. When a Jacalteco informant was questioned about the habits of giants, he replied that it was their custom to steal people and take them into their caves and devour them.

Physical strength Physical strength is one characteristic that always seems to be suspect. When Sipac'na' (Popol Vuh, part 1, ch. 7) displayed his prodigious strength and helped the four hundred boys by carrying their huge corner-post for them, they decided to kill him. In the Sipac stories told today in Achi, the characteristic strength of Sipac'na' is still a prominent feature, and for no other reason the people decide he must be destroyed.⁷

Foreigners Also suspect are all foreigners. Frequently the tales reveal a common distrust of any person of non-local origin. Sipac (Achi) was selling the good Cubulco land to "the Germans and foreigners" down on the coast. According to another version, the land was being sold to a Spaniard, and in another account, to a giant.⁸ In "The Prince's Bride" (Mopan) those who pursued the prince were foreigners, and of the unique Pedro Tecomate (Aguacateco) "his father was a German, they say."

Negroes The Mopan tale also makes a point of the fact that the foreigners were black. In the more isolated regions of Guatemala many of the Indians have never seen a Negro, and if they wish to make a person seem exceptionally wicked or ugly, they refer to him as "black." In a Jacalteco tale, Judas is called a "black night man" to stress his despicable character. Of the three girls who trapped Sipac under the rock (Achi), one was black, one was white, and one was reddish in appearance similar to the Indians of the locality. The reddish girl was the smart one of the three, and the analogy is not difficult to ascertain.

Jews Since the introduction of Christianity, a new term for villain has appeared. Elliott (contributor of the Ixil texts) puts it succinctly: "The Jews killed Christ, and only a devil would do that." Hence, "Jew" equals "devil" in many of the tales, and by the same reasoning, "Judas" is another equivalent, even being used in the plural to denote Jews in general. Still another equivalent is Ximon (Simon), the name given to the Judas effigy made up for the Holy Week celebrations, and one Achi text states that greedy Achis who sell their souls to the devil spend the hereafter in the power of Ximon.

Turning from the villains of the tales to other characters, we find surprising references to kings, princesses, and the like. In some lore, the royal titles may be simply alternative designations for the hero and heroine. In the K'ekchi', Mopan, and Jacaltec tales this seems to be the case: "The Prince's Bride" (Mopan), "The Jasmine Flower" and "The Marriage of the Sun and the Moon" (K'ekchi'), "The Runaway Lovers" (Jacaltec). In additional Mopan tales ("The Man Who Worked for a Mitrado" and "Why the Rabbit Has Big Ears"), the only lady mentioned is a princess. Other published Mayan tales have often been about Indian chiefs and daughters of chiefs, and it is likely that the term "king" comes nearer to meaning "chief" in the Indian mind. In Achi tales, the Spanish term "rey" has been noted only in tales of beings before the present creation and always denoted an individual endowed with supernatural powers, often an equivalent of the patron saint of a people. Such an individual was the ancient bad-man, Yew Achi, "The King of the Quiches" who was snatching away Achis until he was defeated in combat by 'our patron saint, Santiago."

Royalty

The brave, bold action of Patron Santiago exemplifies the type of behavior ordinarily expected of a hero, and the tales here included have their share of such heroes: The Mopans tell of a hearty soul who killed the eagles who were bent on destroying the race; the Jicaques tell of the Indian who went to the underworld to stop some bad Indians from making the world fall over; the Achi, in addition to their hero, Santiago, have their deerhunter who shot the snake with horns and saved the world from destruction by flood; the hero of the Mopan version of Hansel and Gretel killed the monster that was about to devour the beautiful maiden who wept by the river.

Heroes and
bold action

Another type of bold action is one not to be performed by heroes. An Achi account of how to get riches from supernatural resources prescribes that the aspirant must erase God from his mind, and must slap an image of St. Mary,⁹ a sure means of committing oneself to the devil. To the Achi such a person could only be a villain.

The types mentioned earlier conform to the hero images found in Popol Vuh. However, a different kind of hero dominates many of the tales included here, and though imported from Europe, he has been taken to the heart of the Indian as a kindred spirit whose exploits are to be enjoyed vicariously. He is the little fellow who outwits the big fellow, the impudently clever character who always has the last laugh. The rabbit and coyote tales are favorites because of the wily rascal who leads the coyote, or cougar, or tiger from one predicament to another. The Aguacatecs' Pedro Tecomate is of the same stripe and the escape he negotiated parallels one effected by Rabbit in an Achi

Wily and
mischievous

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tale. The youngest brother in the Chuj "Origin of Monkeys" pulled precisely the same trick as Rabbit (Achi, Mopan, Quiche) when he put his brothers to drinking up the lake.¹⁰ Jesucristo outwitted the Judios (Ixil), the frogs outwitted the deer (Pocomam, Aguacatec), and one would suspect that there is not a single Mayan town where this type of adventure is not told with relish.

Creatures
befriend
the innocent

Accounts of animals and other creatures befriending the innocent are not uncommon, nor were they absent from the Popol Vuh (part II, ch. 8, 9, 11). In "The Marriage of the Sun and the Moon" (K'ekchi') dragonflies gathered up the girl's blood so that she might be revived. In the Achi legend about leaf-cutting ants, only the insect's kindness prevented people from starving to death. The Ixil who was being cuckolded had his cat to thank for saving his honor and his life. The dogs of the Mopan Hansel pulled the death-dealing bones out of their master's head.¹¹

God helps
those in
trouble

Not only are the innocent befriended by dumb creatures, but various tales also give account of how God personally helped those in trouble. In "The Prince's Bride" (Mopan), God gave a stone, a thorn, and a gourd to the prince to help him evade his pursuers. In the Mopan version of Hansel and Gretel, God told the children to give the old woman a mouse's tail to feel when she came to see how they were fattening up, and in "Adam and the Flood" (Ixil), God came immediately when He heard Adam sigh in loneliness. He also appeared to advise the imprisoned Jicaque hero to make a wax dummy to deceive the giant.

Invoking a
holy name

A deity will come to the aid of distressed souls who merely repeat his name. When an Achi town was threatened with inundation by water gushing suddenly from a rock, those who cried out, "If only Patrón Santiago were here!" found that suddenly the flow was miraculously stopped--their patron had come instantly when his name was spoken, even though he was busy at war in Guatemala City. The K'ekchi' traveler began to pray when he became suspicious of the witch who had joined him, and when he mentioned God's name, the witch took flight. The Mopan hearty soul attempted to fly with eagles' wings "In the name of God" and was successful.

Punishment by
the spirits

Not infrequently the deities punish their errant subject.¹² These may be recorded as curses placed on the entire race, or simply as punishment for a single individual: Jesucristo hid away the world's supply of corn because his people weren't remembering him daily ("When God Hid Away the Corn" Achi); the Tzutujil spirit of the volcano snatched away the girl whose father failed to follow his instructions. In the Jacaltec legend, the turkey deliberately disobeyed God's orders as to the proper time to "crow," so was condemned to be mute forever. Because a cow

refused to believe the report that God was born, the Chuj relate that all cows now must pay the penalty. The hearty soul who destroyed the eagles was punished by the thunder god for eating his corn (Mopan), likewise the man who lied to Jesucristo about what he was planting (Achi), and the blind man who repented giving his gold chain for recovering his eyesight (K'ekchi'). Achi lore also cautions young girls against losing their temper when they have trouble getting their fires to burn. If they knock the wood about in their ire, the spirit of the fire may bring a fever upon them.

Repeatedly the texts seem to be teaching the value of following instructions. The tales from the Tzutujil and Pocomam spell it out plainly: the Pocomam youth who followed instructions not only saved his own life, but gained a boxful of money as well; the Tzutujil girl who did not follow instructions was carried off by the whirlwind. In contrast, the K'ekchi' woman followed implicitly the instructions for ridding her house of a ghost, and was successful; the Mopan Gretel laughed when she had been told not to and disaster followed. The Aguacatec man told his wife of his three days as a buzzard, even though he had been warned not to, and he died within five days.

Follow
instructions

Hexing and magic curing are widespread throughout Indian Guatemala. Texts on witchcraft are available in most of the languages represented here, but, rather than include several texts devoted to the subject, we have printed but one or two, noting subtler references to the art included in the other tales. Mopan furnishes us with a good example of hexer-curer combined into one. The sun-god stuck thorns into grains of red corn, then threw them onto the roof of the victim's house to give him a toothache. This done, he made himself available as curer and successfully relieved the distress he had caused. In every community there are those who are accused by their neighbors of causing illness just to be able to make money in curing it.

Magic curing
and cursing

Magic curing and cursing usually require the recitation of certain prayers or incantations. However, none is mentioned when Pedro Tecomate (Aguacatec) sprinkled the dust of the dead over the mule-drivers to render them comatose. Those who can cast spells must be able to communicate with spirits who will do them the favor of molesting the intended victim. The Tzutujil tell of a man at Amatitlan who purportedly communicates with Aximon (the Judas dummy) and persuades him to work evil against a victim.

Not only are sorcerers capable of causing a person to sicken and die, the Pocomam text describes how they mistreat their victims even after death. This would seem to identify them with demons or spirit creatures who have power over the soul

Mistreating
the dead

once it has left the physical body (see also Mixteco Texts, p. 111).

Fright

Fright is not merely an emotional state, but is an illness which must be treated with magic and medicine. A common treatment for fright is effected by rubbing a live chicken over the body of the patient. If the chicken dies in the process, it is a good sign that the illness has passed into the fowl; the ceremonial bird is then burned and "the smoke takes the sickness." Fright comes upon those who have witnessed a frightening event, seen a ghost, etc. (See Ixil account of fright). The victims are often left speechless for a time (see K'ekchi' "The Phantom of the River"), waste away, and eventually die.

Retribution

Vengeance and retribution appear throughout the tales. Some of the incidents cited above (see "Punishment by the Spirits") should be included here. The retributive cause of toothache is overtly stated in the Achi account of Sipac and the popcorn: because some people tricked him, he cursed all people to suffer aching teeth. In the Mopan tale, the devil cursed the human race with toothache because of the treatment he had received at the hands of the sun god.¹³ When Patrón Santiago refused Yew Achi's offer of wealth, his children were cursed with poverty (Achi). Active retribution between characters on a more equal footing characterizes the rabbit-and-coyote stories. With their running fights between the two main figures, so too the Chuj story of the younger brother who left his tormentors stranded in a tree.

Fate

"You'll get rich, if that's your fate, after meeting with Ximon Judas." But not even the daring meeting with the demon who owns immeasurable wealth assures one of riches if it is his assigned fate to be poor (Achi). According to the Tzutujil, some are marked at birth with signs of their inescapable destiny: some are born to be sorcerers, some to be midwives, some to have power to change themselves into nagual animals.¹⁴ In the Popol Vuh, (part II, ch. 6) the mouse revealed to the twins that it was not their destiny to make cornfields, and that it was not his destiny to die at their hands. In part II, ch. 13, one of the lords of the underworld revived after being killed because it was not his time to die.

Recurring incidents

One notes similar incidents which appear in tales from diverse parts of the country. One such motif is the attempt on the part of an individual to drink the river dry in order to gain the treasure at the bottom: Rabbit sets Coyote to the task in order to get the cheese at the bottom (Achi, Sayula Popaluca); in the Mopan and Quiche versions, the prize is gold. In the Chuj tale "The Origin of Monkeys," the youngest brother put his older brothers to drinking the lake dry in order to get the beautiful dance costumes which he said were at the bottom. In one Mopan

tale, the main character developed an insatiable thirst after eating boa, and drank the river right up to its source. The motive for his action and the results of it vary greatly from the above pattern, but there is probably a common genesis.

Enticing someone with a crab to a vulnerable position under a rock occurred in two of the texts submitted, (Tzutujil and Achi), the Achi text being remarkably similar to the original account in Popol Vuh (part I, ch. 8) although the narrator and his peers have no recent acquaintance with the Popol Vuh. This would seem to be a clear example of preservation of motif through centuries of oral tradition.

The Popol Vuh was checked in vain in an effort to find some account of tossing corn water¹⁵ or some such substance on a path to make it slippery, since that incident appeared in three different texts. Until opportunity for further research presents itself, it would probably be safe to assume that this motif too had indigenous origin and is centuries old.

Waiting by the water hole for one's adversary is perhaps not too novel an idea in an animal story, and the mere fact that it occurred in three of the texts included here probably does not identify it as a typical Mayan motif whose inclusion in a narrative must indicate ties with another tale in which it occurs. The incident nevertheless occurs in the Mopan and Rabinal-Achi versions of the rabbit and coyote story, and in the Aguacatec story, "The Deer and the Crab."

Similarly, hiding in the hollow of a cliff would not seem particularly novel, and just as Sipac'na' did it to save himself from the four hundred youths (Popol Vuh, part I, ch. 7), so the deer hunter did it when the snake with horns came down the arroyo (Achi "The Struggle Between the Serpent and the Lightning Angels"). In an Ixil text, a remnant of the race was saved when a few men hid behind the cataract. In the Pocomchi tale of the origin of corn, the heroine hid in the hollow of a cliff while her young husband went to make peace with her father, eventually turning into corn.

Every collection of tales, of course, has its share of references to treasure troves. In texts appearing here, the bounty always seems to be in the hands of the nonhumans, with a human being eventually coming into possession of it. In the giants' cave, the poor Jacalteco found money, axes, machetes, and cloth; in the volcano, the poor Tzutujil found suitable dance clothes for his daughter; in the witch's house, the hero of the Mopan version of Hansel and Gretel found gold in abundance. An Achi who desires wealth, may sell his soul to the demon Ximon for a portion of his vast treasure hidden in Xum Hill. (Other areas also

report that anyone whose source of income is not obvious must have made a pact with the local equivalent of Ximon.)

Brothers
mistreat
brothers

Brothers who mistreat brothers form the basis for another theme which has appeared in at least two of the tales, and is traceable to Popol Vuh: in both Chuj and Tzutujil tales, older brothers are jealous of their youngest brother and mistreat him as Jun Batz' and Jun Ch'owen mistreated Jun Ajpu and Xbalanque'. However, the Tzutujil tale allows the older brothers to bring about the demise of their little brother without a hint of condemnation for their act. The Chuj version follows the Popol Vuh account in its climax and justice finally reigns. The Mopan version of Hansel and Gretel records a sister's constant disloyalty to her older brother, but the entire motif is quite distinct from the brothers vs. brother theme--her older brother was kind to her and she was simply foolish and unappreciative.

Strife
between
co-god-
fathers

Just as siblings should be loyal to one another, so it is assumed that fellow godparents will be helpful to one another, but strife between co-godfathers is the theme of tales from three widely divergent regions: Pocomam, Jacaltec, and Carib. However, these do not seem to involve any real malice, except perhaps for the misdeed of the gorilla in the Carib story. (The monkey probably wondered what the fuss was all about.)

Unnatural
growth

When the poor mistreated maiden, Xquic', was sent out to gather a netful of corn from a single stalk, the gods befriended her by causing a whole field of corn to spring up and mature immediately so she might accomplish her impossible task (Popol Vuh, II ch. 4). Miraculous growth also rewarded the planter who told the truth to Jesucristo--he had an abundant growth appearing in three days, and in seven days it was ready to harvest (Achi). Coming straight from Popol Vuh, part II, ch. 5, the Chuj narrative tells of the miraculous growth of the tree which the wicked brothers were climbing and in which they eventually became monkeys.

A comb thrown away by the fleeing Jacaltec lovers grew immediately into such a choked mass of thorns that the pursuing father was unable to pass. This is perhaps the same phenomenon that took place in the Mopan tale when the prince threw down a thorn in the path of the foreigners. An overnight growth of weeds served as punishment for Jun Ajpu and Xbalanque' (part II, ch. 6) when they merely pretended to work in their cornfield.

Magie
appearance
of obstacles

The magic appearance of an obstacle in the path of pursuers (as in Jacaltec above) is another motif which recurs frequently. Other miraculous appearances in the Jacaltec account include a slough of mud which appeared from a bar of soap, and a lake which grew from a little basin. In the Mopan tale, the

lake grew from a gourd, and a mountain grew from a stone to hinder the pursuers.

The phenomenon of tools and other inanimate objects working without benefit of an animate agent dates from preconquest days as evidenced by the Popol Vuh. In part II, ch. 6, the hoes and axes of Jun Ajpu and Xbalanque¹ worked the field without the twins' lifting a finger. In part I, ch. 3, the pots and grindstones rose up to help in the destruction of the race of wooden men. In the Achi legend, the race of beings with holes in their throats let their hoes work their fields by themselves, and the women's grindstones ground the corn by themselves. In the Mopan tale, the wife of the thunder god was a big green grindstone that worked alone.

Tools
work
alone

"Because they didn't suffer" God commanded that the race of beings with holes in their throats be destroyed after seven years of existence (Achi). The Ixil account, "Adam, Noah, and the Flood," details two means employed by God to destroy a wicked generation (flood and fire). This latter is perhaps a vestige of the rain of resin related in Popol Vuh, part I, ch. 3, when the race of wooden men was destroyed. We note that the destruction of the nonhuman races was complete, but that the destruction of the human race, while never quite one hundred per cent effective (as in the Achi legend in which the leaf cutter thwarted God's plan to eliminate humans by hiding away the corn), is momentarily expected by many (during hard rains, earthquakes, etc., these fears are voiced).

Destruction
of a race

Other enemies of the race attempted to dispense with humans individually: eagles who carried people off one at a time were a motif in a Mopan tale, while buzzards performed the same office in the Ixil account "The Man Who Was Carried Off by a Buzzard." In the "The King of the Quiches," the Yew Achi was carrying them off at an alarming rate until St. James on Horseback stopped him (Achi).

The people with holes in their throats built their houses in just one night. ("It wasn't hard, they just whistled and the rocks and other building materials came flying through the air.") In "Adam, Noah, and the Flood," (Ixil), the councilmen built the ark overnight, once God's message got through to them. "Overnight" as a proper unit of time for a prodigious feat is also to be found in Popol Vuh: Sipac'na¹ made six volcanoes in one night (part I, ch. 4).

Built
overnight

Above, in the discussion of destruction of a people, differences were noted in the results of the campaigns against the human and the nonhuman races. In general, it seems that tales of a "golden age," when deities and mythological beings walked

Before the
light came

ACCORDING TO OUR ANCESTORS

the earth, are purported to have happened "before the light came."¹⁶ Sipac, the people with holes in their throats, the King of the Quiches, St. James on Horseback, Jesucristo, the "apostles," and the Jews all inhabited the Achi world before humans did. The age ended when the light came and human beings were left "planted."¹⁷ One Achi account states:

"Our Father was thirty years old when he was being chased. While he was being chased, he planted three thousand of us. The light came; the sky became clear on March twenty-fourth. On March twenty-fifth he was tied on the cross of his passion.... Our ancestors held their council, then they got up and began their work, their service. They performed their duties to the holy apostles through the year (sweeping and watering the streets for processions, etc.) They carried their responsibilities; they carried their staffs of office."

Those legends which are told for the truth, and relate fabulous exploits by supernatural beings or by superhumans, occupy the niche reserved for the era before the light came. Other more mundane accounts belong to the current epoch.

Pact with
"Dios Mundo"

Adam, according to the Chuj account, experienced difficulty when he began to till the soil, because of the cries that came up from the earth when his hoe cut in. God finally had to intervene in order to persuade the earth to allow men to plant their cornfields. Much the same tale is told by the Achi--the earth¹⁸ (the spirit of the earth) finally agreed to submit to pain on promise of offerings and the final recompense of men's bodies for his own food. People today who enclose their corpses in wood and masonry are not keeping their part of the bargain; therefore the defrauded earth occasionally causes a death in a place where the body cannot be buried so he can have some meat.

Pact with
the devil

Another pact which appears in Achi lore is that which was made between Jesucristo and the devil. God (Jesucristo) was unable to form the world by himself, so he got the devil to help him, and together they made the world and the underworld. Therefore, the devil has equal authority with God, and some souls go to be with him and some with God ("The Netherworld" text). This legend, like so many others, gives a folk explanation of a certain condition believed to exist. There are an abundance of "how" and "why" stories included in these texts, some of which are listed here:

"How" and
"Why"

- Chuj Origin of monkeys (tale of the same title)
 Why cows are eaten and hides are used for sandals
 ("When God Was Born")
 Why Indians are second-class citizens ("Why Indians
 Have to Work Hard")
 Why we make offerings to the earth ("Chuj Pantheon")
 What causes earthquakes ("Chuj Pantheon")
- K'ekchi' Origin of pinkeye and origin of whooping cough ("Mar-
 riage of Sun and Moon")
 How the coconut got its marks (tale of the same title)
- Mopan Origin of toothaches ("The Sun God and His Wife")
 Why rabbits have long ears (tale of the same title)
 Why buzzards eat carrion ("The Flood")
 Why pigeons have red legs ("The Flood")
 Why the parrot's head is white ("The Flood")
 Origin of whooping cough ("The Sun God and His Wife")
- Jacalteco Origin of corn ("Runaway Lovers")
 Origin of domesticated animals (tale of the same title)
 Why the turkey was made mute ("The Chicken and the
 Turkey")
- Tzutujil Why we have earthquakes ("The Woman and her Nine
 Sons")
 Origin of Lake Atitlan ("St. Peter and the Church Bell")
 How Mt. Xekapoj got its name (tale of the same title)
- Jicaque Why the western portion of our land is poor ("The
 Creation")
- Ixil Origin of the copal custom (tale of the same title)
 What makes lightning ("Lightning")
 Origin of dark-skinned people ("Origin of the Copal
 Custom")
 Origin of Godfather Rock (tale of same title)
- Achi Why the Cubulco church is smaller than the Rabinal
 church ("The People With Holes in Their Throats")
 Why Cubulco has fewer people than Rabinal ("The King
 of the Quiches")
 Why natives of Cubulco are poor ("The King of the
 Quiches")
 Why Cubulco land is not productive ("Sipac, the
 Mighty")
 Why our teeth ache ("Sipac, the Mighty")
 Why Belejuj Mountain is barren ("Sipac, the Mighty")

What causes lightning ("The Struggle Between the Serpent and the Lightning Angels")

Why we must not kill leaf-cutters ("When God Hid A-way the Corn")

Why leaf-cutters are thin-waisted ("When God Hid A-way the Corn")

Why we have earthquakes ("Sipac, the Mighty")

Why Quezaltenango is rich ("The King of the Quiches")

Popol Vuh also had its share of "how" and "why" stories: where monkeys came from (I, 3), why deer and rabbit tails are short (II, 6), why the mouse's eyes pop and its tail is slick, why the toad has its present shape (II, 7), where the sun, moon, and Pleiades came from (II, 13).

Natural Phenomena

Sun Perhaps there are more folktales about the sun than about any other natural phenomena. As noted above, in some areas, the sun and moon are thought to be brothers who assumed their places in the sky in the "before-people" era (Tzutujil, Mixteco, Popol Vuh). Among other peoples, the belief is held that the two celestial bodies are husband and wife (Mopan, K'ekchi') while others traditionally regard them as mother and son (Achi, which also ascribes the name "Jesucristo" to the sun and "Maria" to the moon, or "Our Father" and "Our Grandmother"). Achi lore teaches that the sun goes around the earth, lowering behind the mountain at night, passing through the water under the earth, and coming back again the following day.

Eclipses A common belief is that an eclipse is evidence that the sun and moon are fighting and the sun must be distracted before he causes the total demise of the moon, in which event all would die. This belief may very well relate to the Mopan tale of the sun-god's mistreatment of his wife, the moon. A less common belief perhaps is the one held by some of the Achi: that a snake belonging to the devil is eating up the moon.

Earthquakes The mighty Cabrakan (Popol Vuh, I, 4), boasted "I shake the heavens," giving us background for the belief currently held among the Chuj that earthquakes are really sky-quakes. The Tzutujil and Achi share the lore that earthquakes result when the hapless crab hunter heaves the rock which still pins him to the ground, while the Jicaque believe that woodpeckers are hammering on the corner posts that support the earth. Osborne (p. 56) records the belief that an old witch is bothering the snake with horns which is under the earth.

Thunder Additional tales might perhaps reveal some relation existing between thunder and volcanoes. We have a hint in that direc-

tion in a distinction noted in the two versions of the sun-god's courtship (K'ekchi' and Mopan). Where the two tales are running almost identical in incident, the K'ekchi' says that the father called on the volcano to shoot lightning at the runaways while the Mopantale credits the thunder-god with the assist. The similarity in sound between distant thunder and the rumbling of an earthquake in distant mountains is variously reported among the Cubulco Achi; some say it is due to a fight between two big hills, one to the north, one to the south of town; others say demons inside a volcano are fighting among themselves.¹⁹ The drum used by the thunder god to send the hearty soul into the sky is doubtless thought by the Mopans to be the source of the noise of the storm.

Whether it be discharged by thunder, or by a volcano, lightning is associated with crawly creatures in both Mopan and K'ekchi'. The Achi also associate the two as noted in their tale about lightning, but the flash and the noise come from the angels' shotguns as they fire at snakes.

Lightning

The belief that the sky is solid is attested to by the Jicaque tale in which the giant, forgetting how tall he was, hit his head against the sky and died.²⁰ The sky is apparently conceived of as formed like an inverted saucer over the face of the earth, with the whole unit floating in the sea. One version of the Sipac story (Achi) says that he did not stay beneath the rock, but "went to where the sky meets the earth and entered under the edge." It is believed that there is just space enough to squeeze through. The same concept may be indicated when the Mopan Hearty Soul went up to the sky by means of thunder's drum, "he went to get up at the edge of the ocean."

Sky

Ideal Behavior

The majority of the texts printed here have proved fruitful in revealing something of the people's view of the world and their relationship to it. Some of the tales are frankly told to inculcate moral values. Others, even though they proclaim no obvious message, contain incidental occurrences or comments which disclose meaningful values held by the people.

Some tell a legend in defense of a certain belief held by the people (i. e., the belief that leaf-cutting ants should be revered is defended in "When God Hid Away the Corn," Achi). Others, such as the Pocomam "Two Sons" story, seem designed specifically to teach proper behavior. Here, the outline of ideal behavior stresses the importance of a proper farewell (to the father, and later, to the employer), the preference of wise counsels over riches, the wisdom of being noncommittal, how to

accept hospitality, and finally (and most important) the duty of a son to a father. The proper son who obeyed the moral code was rewarded with wealth and happiness. The son who disregarded the code lost all.

Hard work

Hard work is a virtue lauded in many of the texts. In the Jacalteco tale of the two godfathers, the poor hard-working man found a treasure trove when he was suffering misfortune trying to earn a living. In the Tzutujil tale of the nine brothers, the youngest brother was killed because he was lazy, and the mother was killed because she had not taught him to work. The Quiche mother also was punished because she had not taught her son to work, and the Ixil boy who didn't like to work turned himself into a snake. The Ixil man who had narrowly escaped the buzzards wondered where his food would come from, then it occurred to him that he was supposed to work. And the Achi who encountered opposition from Dios Mundo were dutifully trying to carry out "Jesucristo's commandment to work." The owners of the hoes and axes that worked alone didn't suffer²¹ (i. e., work hard), so were destroyed after seven years (Achi). Once again, precedent may be found in Popol Vuh: the twins didn't work hard, so didn't deserve the lunch brought to them (II, 6).

Vocations

Something of the types of work performed by the peoples represented by these texts may be found in the texts themselves. Foremost, of course, is the cultivation of corn (Mopan, Jacalteco, Ixil, Achi, and others), but the common task of gathering firewood is mentioned in texts from Tzutujil, Quiche, Jacalteco, and Ixil. Reflecting the area from which the tale comes, the Mopan text speaks of the occupation of rubber gathering, common in Peten.

Although every area has its tailors, tailoring is a more specialized task, and only an Ixil text refers to it. Gathering wild fruits, berries, and other products occasionally occupies some of the people, and specific mention is made of gathering honey or beeswax in at least four of the texts (Achi, Rabinal-Achi, Mopan, and Jicaque). Hunting is not nearly so common as it once was, but the Mopan, K'ekchi', and Jicaque texts contain references to blowguns in good Popol Vuh fashion. The Achi have modernized the weapon and their legendary deer hunter uses a shotgun instead; the Chuj perform ceremonial rites to a rifle.

Dances

In every community of Guatemala, the drama-dances still are an important part of town festivities. For these occasions, colorful costumes are usually rented, often being brought to town with great ceremony. The importance of the dance costumes is reflected in at least two of the tales: Chuj "Origin of Monkeys," and Tzutujil "How Mt. Xekapoj Got Its Name." The general at-

titude toward these dances is that those who participate in them are contributing to the welfare of the community, for they are always performed in honor of some deity whose favor the community covets. The dances are of post-conquest tradition, but are thoroughly integrated into community life. The person who contributes to the maintenance of tradition is looked upon as one who is interested in the welfare of the community. The belief is strong that to discard tradition is to invite disaster upon the entire area. The "Chuj Pantheon" text points up this attitude, affirming "because this is how our ancestors taught us...that's why we believe this way.... It is necessary that we fear the destruction of the sky--that would mean that we would die, that the world would be destroyed." Pertinent here is the attitude of the Achi toward his worship of Dios Mundo--because of his offerings to the deity, the whole community benefits. This attitude would also account for the statement at the end of the Mopan "Sun God" text: "It was very evil that the sun god had stolen his wife." He had incurred the wrath of the devil, and the whole race had been cursed with susceptibility to toothache as a result.

Tradition and
community
welfare

Ancestors, too, must be revered and their traditions maintained, or disaster is sure to come. The Chuj text is a mine of information concerning an attitude that is general throughout the region:

Ancestors

"This is where we worship, because this is what our ancestors said. Our ancestors did many things. They knew a lot.... But among us, these things have almost disappeared and it is dangerous. We don't know but what these things might kill us. Our ancestors left many things arranged in this world, that is why things aren't too bad with us.... That's why we believe in these things...because that's what our ancestors said...except we can't be exactly sure about it."

When ill, the Achis burn candles to the ancestors (as well as to Dios Mundo, God, and the devil), asking forgiveness for neglecting them. If one has been in good health, it's reasonably sure that he has not been troubling himself to make offerings and prayers, but when sickness strikes, he must make up for lost time in case it has come as punishment for neglect of the ancestors' rights.

On All Saints' Day, the ancestors return to visit their former homes where the household altar is set with food and drink for them to enjoy. If the ancestor was one who liked to drink, an eighth of liquor is put on the altar for him. Marimbas are hired to play tunes over the graves so that the returned spirits may

dance or at least enjoy the gaiety. After twenty-four hours, they return to "la gloria" and the Father "puts them away."

Respect
for
parents

Ideally, elders are respected, and children are obedient.²² However, the Ixil text, "This Younger Generation" points up a complaint registered by many a father who remembers the good old days. He recalls when a youngster would remove his hat in greeting and bow his head in respect before an elder. He would eat last, and thank his parents profusely for their abundant goodness to him, but rare is the child who conforms to this pattern today. The Ixil account of the lazy boy who became a snake also gives rules for ideal behavior for a youth. An Achi curer may divine that the cause of one's illness is disrespect of the parents. He attempts to obtain a confession to that effect and, in the prescribed treatment the patient must kiss the parent's feet and hands, and if solvent, pay a fine. The behavior of the sons in the Pocomam tale perfectly contrasts the ideal with its antithesis in child-parent relationship, culminating in the ideal happy ending--the son reunited with his elderly father, to care for him in his final years.

Mother
obeys
sons

Although boys are subject to their mothers in their early years, by the time a boy enters his early teens she often can no longer manage him, and in a few years more, she is largely taking orders from him. In "The Twisted Tree," the mother had missed her opportunity to train her son, and when she scolded him as a grown man, she was not only wasting her breath, but was incurring his wrath. The grown sons in the Tzutujil story are not condemned for punishing their mother--it was apparently their right. The custom of giving orders to the mother dates back at least to Popol Vuh (part II, ch. 6). Customarily when a mother is widowed and her son is grown, he is the man of the house and she is subject to him.

Willful
daughters

Willful daughters appear in some of the texts: In "The Jasmine Flower" (K'ekchi'), the king "always did what his daughter wanted," and so permitted her marriage to a servant. Another K'ekchi' father was indulgent with his daughter, coming immediately to shoot a hummingbird when she imperiously demanded it. In the Jacalteco story "The Runaway Lovers," the father pursued his runaway daughter only reluctantly. (He had originally urged the marriage, but the girl had been persuaded to elope rather than going through the usual formalities). In reviewing the Tzutujil tale "How Mt. Xekapoj Got Its Name" one suspects that the daughter might have objected to the indignity prescribed by the spirit of the volcano and persuaded her father not to comply (to her later regret). In the Mopan version of Hansel and Gretel, the sister who should have been obeying her older brother invariably disobeyed his orders and invariably got them in trouble.

A moderate amount of beating is acceptable in the training of a wife, and the K'ekchi' account, "A Visit with the God of the Mountain," reports how one man was commanded by the mountain spirit to beat both his wife and his dogs to stop their noise. On the other hand, the K'ekchi' tale, "The Phantom of the River," tells how excessive beating led to one wife's running away. Similarly, the wife of the sun god (Mopan) was persuaded to join the devil when her husband beat her without reason. Perhaps it is being hinted in the Jacaltec story that a little wife-beating would have been in order in the case of the runaway lovers, in order to stop the nagging wife from insisting that her husband continue on a fruitless chase.

Wife
beaters

Turning from family relations to relationships in society, we note various practices which are condemned by word or hint in the texts. Bragging may be tolerated, but is not approved of. Some texts state specifically that men should not praise themselves, and the Jicaque text "How the Birds Were Created" effectively illustrates this people's reluctance to brag on themselves. The Achis' Sipac bragged on his own strength, and people immediately sought his undoing, and in "The Lion and The Man" (Aguacatec), the boasting lion soon was relieved of his title by the man to whom he had boasted.

Bragging

Bragging is one manifestation of a prime flaw--pride. Pride is abominated among the Mayas, and Popol Vuh, particularly part I, is adamant in condemnation of pride, finally in chapter 9 stating: "God objects to pride and to boasting." In the Jacaltec legend, the turkey, proud of his size, refused to accept God's place for him and so was turned out into the pasture, rather than being allowed to sleep in the house. In several stories, pride led to the destruction of the individual--in the Chuj "Rabbit and Coyote" series, if the coyote had not wanted to be a hero, he would not have been burned up; in the Pocomam, the frog would not have been killed if he had not been so proud of his singing, and the Pocomam tale of the runaway animals concludes with the demise of the man who bragged that "they couldn't hurt him."

Pride

Pride is frequently accompanied by avarice, envy, and covetousness, all identifiable in several of the texts. In the Chuj tale of the origin of monkeys, the proud older brothers could not bear it when their youngest brother appeared in his fine dance clothes; striving to get some equally fine costumes for themselves led to their undoing. In the Jacaltec tale of the two god-fathers, the wife of the rich man was proud, and scornful of the occupation of the poor man, but when times improved for the latter, she and her husband immediately became covetous. When they found the source of his riches, they could not content themselves with a moderate amount of treasure, but greedily took

Envy

several animal-loads of booty from the cave, at last coming to an unhappy end.

Lying

In general, lying is not to be condoned, and those who lied to Jesucristo about what they were planting reaped what they sowed (Achi). From the same group of stories, however, comes the account of one who lied to Jesucristo's pursuers and his action is tacitly approved, indicating that the motive for the lie is to be considered before passing judgement. The Pocomam tale of the frog and the hawk states specifically that the frog died because he didn't tell the truth. In the Mopan tale of the flood, the buzzard and one of the doves added to their misdeeds by denying them, and the evil alligator in the Mopan story "The Burro" not only hoped to return evil for good, but lied when questioned about his intent. The dog who lied to his Ixil master about the faithfulness of his wife was beaten to death, but the condemnation expressed in the tale falls on the master, not the deceitful animal. Neither is there an overt condemnation of the Tzutujil brothers who evaded the truth concerning the whereabouts of the brother they had pinned beneath the rock.

Evading the truth, the Jacalteco youth avoided losing his bride to the father who was pursuing them, and in the Jacalteco tale of the co-godfathers, the blind man evaded answering the giant's question as to what he had sewed up. Sympathies are with the individual who lied in these cases, as they are with the rabbit in Rabbit and Coyote tales, and with the rascally Pedro Tecomate in the Aguacateco text. In the Quiche story "The Necklace that Bit a Man," it is difficult to decide whether to condemn or to commiserate with the poor fellow who mistakenly popped a snake into his mouth, thinking he was hiding a valuable necklace.

Stealing

Sympathies are with the needy firewood gatherer of the Jacalteco story who stole treasure from the giants' cave, although stealing would be tagged as a sin by any Indian to whom the question might be put. As in the case of the lie, under certain circumstances, stealing is quite excusable. On the other hand, the wicked Indians in the Jicaque tale had been decapitated for stealing horses' tails and were confined to the underworld. In the Achi description of the underworld, among those that are sent there are "those who steal cattle, horses, and corn." In the absence of extenuating circumstances, these deeds are inexcusable.

Deceit

Deceit and trickery also depend upon their circumstances to determine whether the act is good or bad. It was bad when the sun god deceived the girl by passing her house repeatedly carrying a stuffed deer-hide (K'ekchi' and Mopan). It was bad when Sipac deceived people with gourds that contained no honey. But it was not bad when the people in turn deceived him by giving him popcorn with rocks in it. Nor was it bad when the rabbit repeat-

edly tricked the coyote, or when Pedro Tecomate tricked the mule drivers. What makes the difference? Apparently trickery is to be condemned when the strong man does it; but it is considered clever strategy when employed by the little fellow to outdo the big fellow, or when, as in the case of the youngest brother in the Chuj tale, the underdog uses it to turn the tables on his oppressors.

According to the Achi account, incest is another reason for persons to be consigned to the netherworld, and, although not mentioned specifically in this text, sexual relations within the godparent system are considered incestuous, as they are also in the Ixil area (cf. Ixil "Godfather Rock"). In both regions, the phrase "he spoke with her" implies sexual relations.

Incest

Deviation from the ideal behavior, then, is permitted in certain of the points listed above, while other misdeeds are held to a hard and fast line. "He did differently" is the Achi circumlocution for an act that one might not care to mention by name, but it is clear that "different" equals "evil," and an individual either conforms to the code or is considered wicked.

"Different"
equals "evil"

Footnotes

- 1 It was impossible to kill the witch in the Mixteco tale "The Man Who Tried to Kill a Witch" Mixteco Texts, p 104.
- 2 "The Creation of the Sun and the Moon" Mixteco Texts, p. 104
- 3 "The Creation of the Sun and the Moon" in Mixteco Texts relates how two boys killed their father whom they met in the woods in the form of a deer.
- 4 An Achi Indian related as truth an account of a fellow passenger on a bus who turned into a dog and began turning somersaults when the two were alone in the brush a bit back from the road.
- 5 El Espíritu del Mal en Guatemala, pp. 74,75.
- 6 Some lore regarding the spirit of the mountain designates such a deity as the owner of the wild animals whose permission must be obtained whenever a man sets out to hunt. (Correa, p. 59; Osborne, p. 40; Mopan "The Owner of the Wild Animals" in this volume). Correa also identifies him as one of the spirits which take away one's soul when he suffers from "fright" and the one who offers riches to those who enter into pact with him, but who after death must live with him. (Correa, p. 60).
- 7 There is a good possibility that the action against a strong individual may be rooted in jealousy. Jealousy is generally

feared, and frequently one will be careful to avoid the appearance of well-being or prosperity for fear of inviting witchcraft by envious neighbors. Some carry this precaution so far as to never admitting to being in good health. The reply to the question "How are you?" usually brings the answer "Oh, just fair."

- 8 The god of the mountain and his companions (K'ekchi' text) were very tall and spoke a language that their captive could not understand. Both characteristics stamped them as foreigners.
- 9 A local Ladino once became angry and gave an image of San Antonio a good kicking around. The entire Indian community feared reprisal from the Almighty, and were greatly relieved nothing happened.
- 10 Precedent may be found in Popol Vuh in which the twins outwit their oppressive half-brothers by sending them up into a tree that grew into infinity.
- 11 In Achi lore, Jesucristo, fleeing from the Jews, commanded the cedar tree to open up. It complied, and he hid inside, escaping his enemies. Therefore, it is considered wrong to use cedar for common purposes, or even to touch an axe to it unless it is to be used for religious images.
- 12 The subjects, or charges, of deities are frequently called their "children," a tradition at least as old as Popol Vuh (part III, ch. 1). Residents of a town will refer to themselves as children of the patron saint of that town, the patron saint having acquired the rank of deity.
- 13 Even today it is generally believed that toothaches are caused by worms in the teeth, an idea that has persisted for centuries. The wise old couple in Popol Vuh (part I, ch. 6) could "take worms out of teeth," relieving toothache. Osborne's collection includes the tale of the snake with horns who writhed in pain because of the worm in his teeth.
- 14 Cf. Mixteco Texts, p. 104
- 15 Waste water from soaking corn to make tortillas.
- 16 This division into eras is widespread in both time and space. In Popol Vuh, part III, ch. 1, the gods decided to create the human race, for "the time for the dawn has come." Mixteco Texts (Mexico) includes a tale of what happened "when the sun rose." (p. 3)
- 17 This figurative expression is solidly fixed in the general Achi

vocabulary; it is not merely one story teller's allegory.

- 18 Osborne, in her Folklore, Supersticiones, y Leyendas de Guatemala, relates a tale (p. 40) of a hunter who failed to ask permission of Dios Mundo, "the owner of all that exists in the world," before he went hunting, and suffered the loss of a hundred sheep as a result.

To enlarge a bit upon the character of Dios Mundo, we list here a few items of information from Achi lore: "He sees us; he watches us, whatever we do. We are his children here in the world. Whoever pays his offerings stays alive.... Only because of the World (Dios Mundo) we have money.... It is he who maintains and feeds us."

Dios Mundo is capable of anger, pleasure, jealousy, and is honored with special offerings on the Day of the Holy Cross in May. Frequent offerings of candles, incense, chocolate, liquor, and bread are made to him under a (certain kind of) fig tree, at the base of a large rock, or in a roadside shrine. When a chicken is used in the treatment of fright, the blood is sprinkled on the ground for Dios Mundo to drink.

"We ask his permission to plant our cornfields; we ask him to give us crops. Thanks to us (Indians) he gives crops to everyone.... Now Ladinos are learning to do it too.... When _____ was elected mayor, he won because he made offerings to Dios Mundo."

- 19 They also tell that there was once a great stone (really a big frog) sitting on top of the volcano Fuego. Demons fighting inside annoyed him and he gave a great leap into the sea. He used to call for rain, but now since he is gone there is not much rainfall.
- 20 Language describing the relation of the stars to the sky (Achi) says they are "on the face" of it, not "in" it.
- 21 Achi lore teaches that there is reward in suffering; "If we suffer here, we won't suffer in the hereafter."
- 22 In most Mayan languages there is a single word which may be used to denote either belief or obedience. Ideally, what one believes, one obeys.

