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## REPORTS

### THE ANOMALOUS IXIL—BYPASSED BY THE POSTCLASSIC?

BENJAMIN N. COLBY

*The Ixil differ from other Mesoamerican societies in their extensive ancestor worship and their absence of a belief in animal companion spirits. The historical and archaeological evidence shows Ixil continuity with the lowland Classic Maya with comparatively little change during the Postclassic. The conclusion is tentatively drawn that the lowland Classic Maya were ancestor worshipers, and that the predominant characteristic of those Postclassic changes outside Ixil country which led to the demise of Classic ceremonial centers in some areas and the later fragmentation of political units in others, derived from a basic religious change which was reflected in a change in the use of the 260-day ritual calendar. The new religion opposed ancestor worship and introduced a depersonalized soul belief system.*

The religious system of the Ixil of Guatemala is curiously different in two respects from those of the descendants of most other Mesoamerican high cultures. The first is a tradition of extensive and pervasive ancestor worship. The second is a lack of the animal companion soul beliefs referred to by Foster (1944) and others as tonalism. Of the 20-odd Maya groups and the much greater number of non-Maya Indian groups which are known to have been high-culture societies at the time of conquest, none evidences the core religious constellation of the Ixil. Have the Ixil independently invented a new Maya religion, or do they maintain ideas from an earlier time which elsewhere have been extinguished?

After pondering these questions and examining the available evidence, I find the best explanation to be that ancestor worship among the Ixil is a survival from the Classic period and was relatively unchanged during a possible period of control by Tula-influenced Quiche leaders (perhaps also ancestor worshipers) during the Postclassic. Elsewhere I hypothesize that the belief in fragile or tonal-like souls, which the Ixil lack, is part of a new religion that gained momentum in the Maya highlands during the Postclassic period.

#### ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE FOR ANCESTOR WORSHIP

Archaeological data suggest that ancestor worship was characteristic of the Classic Maya. Tozzer (1941:131) pointed out that Maya elite burials were found, with few exceptions, in all temple mounds that were carefully excavated. The spectacular find by Ruz (1954) of the Palenque tomb added to this kind of evidence. Coe (1956) concluded that Classic Maya temples (and one Postclassic temple in

Yucatan) were primarily funerary in purpose. Adams and Gatling (1964) and others cite evidence and make interpretations which support the belief that elite burials and the continuing use of temples for religious rituals imply some form of ancestor worship.

Maya stelae indicate the same thing. The establishment or continuation and celebration of a ruling dynasty would be a favorable condition to ancestor worship of an elitist nature where members of the ruling elite are deified after death. Describing Lintel 25 at Yaxchilan, Proskouriakoff (1963:156) says it suggests "an invocation to the spirit of some long-deceased warrior, possibly one of the victims of sacrifice in the war with Ahau, whose apotheosis is symbolized by the serpent and the mask." Thompson (1970) considered that stelae which had been placed on their heads after the Classic period were the work of untutored peasants who were trying to resurrect the stela cult but could not tell whether the stela was right side up or not. A more likely explanation is that these were attempts to weaken the still-feared power of ancestral ghosts by persons whose religious system ran counter to Classic Maya ancestor worship.

I believe that in many areas ancestor worship began to diminish if not disappear altogether during the Postclassic. The Yucatan was a notable exception, however. Because the influence from Tula was strong, I suspect that the Tula people in the Yucatan brought their own form of ancestor worship with them. According to Thompson, Landa's description of the preservation of skulls provides "... clear evidence of an ancestor cult among the aristocracy in Yucatan, and a somewhat similarly treated skull from Nebaj points to a comparable situation in

the Alta Verapaz" (1970:317). Such funeral practices in the Yucatan involved the special preservation of the skull and the cremation of the rest of the body. As Thompson also observed, the Ixil of Nebaj seemed to have a similar custom. Toward the end of the Postclassic some of the highland Maya introduced the practice of total cremation but this did not reach the Ixil (Borhegyi 1965). I would speculate that total cremation (as opposed to partial cremation with preservation of the skull) was consistent with a new opposition to ancestor worship in the sense that total destruction of the body renders the deceased more anonymous and depersonalized.

#### CONTINUITY OF IXIL CULTURE WITH EARLIER PERIODS

There is also archaeological evidence that the Ixil have had a (relatively) greater continuity with Classic Maya cultures than any other Maya or non-Maya group. The influence of the southern lowland Classic Maya was clearly evident in the Ixil area where stelae were erected at ceremonial complexes throughout the region. When Smith and Kidder (1951) first planned a study of Nebaj, one of the three chief Ixil towns, they expected that its location between highland and lowland Maya would make it a crossroads of trade relations. Though their findings failed to support this expectation, their evidence indicated that it was occupied chiefly during the Classic period; practically nothing was found for the Postclassic. Adams (1968) and Becquelin (1969), in independent excavations in Ixil country, found that the Postclassic, from A.D. 1000 to 1530, was a period of isolation following the fall of the lowland civilization, and influences from the various highland centers were very slight. Becquelin describes Nebaj as part of a marginal cultural region within the Mesoamerican area. Both investigators found the area lacking in the fortress sites characteristic of other Postclassic regions of the highlands. According to Adams (1969:31), "Perhaps because of the isolated nature of the region the Ixil ruins show little central Mexican influence. This is in great contrast to the ruins of Iximche, the historic capital of the Cakchiquel."

The archaeological data also show a continuity with historic Ixil occupation, so that Classic and Postclassic sites can, with reasonable

assurance, be considered Ixil. Adams (personal communication) describes evidence from recently excavated graves at Ilom of an area pattern for the Ixil of family sepulchres which were used for successive generations. These graves extended through the Postclassic into the early Hispanic contact period. A figure of a man on horseback (i.e., Post-conquest) was found in the same tomb as early and late Postclassic pottery.

In the three Ixil towns today, cemeteries and cemetery temples are major loci of ritual. The displeasure of departed ancestral souls is a source of misfortune, and consequently their placation is a focus of curing and other rituals. The Ixil pray not only to their immediate lineal forebears but also to the departed souls of town leaders (b'o7q'ol tenam), native town priests (b'o7q'ol b'aal watz tiix), calendar priests (7ahq'ih), curers (b'aal watz tiix) and possibly other individuals not directly related to the praying individual.

#### FALSE INDICATION OF ANCESTOR WORSHIP

The kind of ancestor worship I think existed among the Classic Maya, and that which is practiced by the Ixil today, involves rituals for known relatives and important members of the community of the recent as well as the more remote past. This should not be confused with reference to "ancestral deities" which may or may not indicate ancestor worship. Both Vogt (1969) and Nash (1970) in describing Tzotzil and Tzeltal-speaking groups of nearby Chiapas, have used the term "ancestral deities" for the major gods of the mythology simply because they were creators or first beings. By this reasoning, the Christian God would also be an ancestral deity, a concept expressed in the phrase "we are all God's children." Paralleling the Chiapas terminology for these gods, the Ixil use the term "mother and father" (Ku-Txutx Ku-b'aal) both for the high gods and as an honorific for lesser deities. This is not what I refer to by ancestor worship.

True ancestor worship involves more than the use of honorific kin titles for deities. It is a tradition in which either or both elite and common members of a society are believed to acquire supernatural powers after death; and in which life and death, sickness, and other

matters of human concern are partly controlled by departed ancestors known in life to individuals or to living relatives and friends of individuals. No such tradition is reported for the Chiapas communities, but it clearly exists among the Ixil.

#### BENEVOLENT VERSUS MALEVOLENT NAGUALISM

Though it is not the case now, it is possible that at one time Mesoamerican ancestor worship was related to the notion of benevolent nagualism (nagualism is an ethnographic term derived from the Aztec *nahualli*). By benevolent nagualism I mean the belief that certain respected individuals in a social group have the power to transform themselves into animals for the purpose of benevolent magic, usually for the purpose of protecting the people of a town. The belief that such individuals, in animal forms, watched the entrances to a town and performed other community functions has been described for a Tzeltal group by Villa Rojas (1947, 1963). These beings were locally called *lab* but were also identified by the term *nagual*. A similar idea is expressed in myths such as the Zinacantan one in which the protagonists change themselves into animals to fight a war against some group in Guatemala. There are other cases in the ethnographic and ethnohistoric literature (e.g., Carmack 1973:358).

In addition to this benevolent concept of nagual, however, is another which appears to be more widespread in Mesoamerica. This is the notion that evil individuals will change themselves into naguals for the purpose of witchcraft against someone in their own village. This is the notion that Foster's definition of nagualism has centered on. The Aztec, from whom the term, nagualism, was derived, already had a somewhat negative association attached to it at the time of the conquest. From Sahagun (1961:31) we can infer that witchcraft was present, though it had a relatively small role in accounting for sickness and other misfortunes. I suspect that the malevolent image of nagualism was fostered by those groups whose religion was moving away from ancestor worship. Then with the coming of the Spanish priests who were quick to see the work of the devil in any aspect of native religion, the negative use of the nagual concept would have increased.

Malevolent nagualism is rare among the Ixil,

however. When the Ixil refer to witchcraft they speak of an evil supernatural, the *tx'i7 la naq*. On the rarer occasions when anything like the nagual concept is spoken of there are two terms, *nawal* and *win* (the latter also a Quiche word), which are used. These may have come from contact with other Indian groups in the lowland plantations because their usage is infrequent and varies among individuals (see Saler 1964 for a description of informant variation in such beliefs in a Quiche town). In some other Mesoamerican groups, notably in Chiapas, old men are considered more likely to be witches of the malevolent nagual type and are feared. This seems to be prevalent and pervasive. Some of the Chiapas communities have homicide rates that are among the highest on record, and these homicides are, for the most part, the killing of suspected witches.

I know of no such cases of witchcraft homicide among the Ixil. The Ixil believe that a man's "life-thread" is cut, his life shortened, if he engages in witchcraft. Hence old age is proof of good behavior. It would be unsettling to have it otherwise in an ancestor-worshipping group, because ancestral ghosts actively intervene in human daily life and can cause sickness if displeased. If these individuals were thought to have been basically evil during their mortal life as witches they would be very feared as ghosts. Further, if one were to suspect another of witchcraft, killing him would be a sure way to bring his ghostly retribution in a society that believes in ancestral spirits.

#### TONALISM

Tonalism is an ethnographic term that, over the years, has gained currency in Mesoamerican writings. The term was derived from the Aztec but its meaning has changed from earlier usage. In the ethnographic literature tonalism has come to stand for the belief that each person's soul exists in the form of an animal wandering about, perhaps in the real world, or perhaps in some protected area inside a mountain. The individual's fate is directly tied to the animal. If the individual dies, his animal soul dies and vice versa. In Zinacantan this notion of an animal soul or companion spirit is called *chanul* and is associated with another kind of soul, a fragile, anonymous *ch'ulel* which after death merges into some sort of soul pool and before death is highly susceptible to loss wholly or in part (Vogt 1969).

This concept of the companion spirit, however, does not exist in the classical Nahuatl of Sahagun's texts. There one finds three different usages of *tonalli*: (1) as an extension of one's idea of personage in terms of the plot of land he owns, his ration of food or drink, and his personal privileges; (2) the sun or heat; (3) day, birthday; fate or personal talents and abilities (which are associated because of the belief that one's personal characteristics and fortunes are determined by the day he was born and/or baptized on).

In Ruiz de Alarcon's text of 1629 the meaning of *tonalli* may have undergone some change in emphasis where the chief concern is with sickness and soul loss. This difference may reflect partly the fact that Alarcon's informants represented the rural peasantry rather than the highly educated informants of Sahagun. However, he did his studies 100 years later and time change is probably the major factor. The greater concern with sickness and soul loss more probably reflected the devastating impact which European diseases and the consequent steep population decline had on native religious beliefs. Also in Alarcon's definition may possibly exist the influence of such hispanic notions as *susto* (sickness through fright and soul loss or damage). Since most of the days of the 260-day ritual calendar were animal names, one can see how, with the loss of actual calendrical rituals, the notion of an animal soul might develop further as the combinatorial elements of divination receded in usage. Possibly such names were at times confused with the Aztec term *nahual*. In any event the standard modern usage for the term, tonalism, in Mesoamerican ethnography as described by Foster does not reflect the meaning of *tonalli* during the time of Sahagun's informants. By tonalism I will mean the standard usage as set by Foster to refer to contemporary beliefs about animal companion spirits.

The Ixil lack tonalism. They do not think of wild animals as the souls of people. Wild animals are cared for and herded by deities working for the earth god, according to one myth (Colby and Colby 1974), but they are not connected to individual humans. The various means of identifying a child's animal companion reported elsewhere—among them, naming the child according to the day he was born or leaving him overnight in a temple to be

visited by the beast—are absent here; the Ixil name their children after older living or recently deceased family members. Ixil sickness and other misfortunes are explained to a large extent by the willful actions of supernatural beings—either departed ancestors who are in communication with living people, or deities who react in very human ways to earthly behavior—and not by soul loss or the misadventures of animal companions.

Now having differentiated between tonalism and two forms of the nagual concept (the benevolent form possibly coming down from the Classic period), I wish to suggest one way in which the spread of tonalism can be studied in the ethnohistorical materials. My hypothesis is that those individuals who are named after the day on which they were born will have been brought up under the new religion which includes tonalism. Their greater anonymity lies in the fact that they will not (except through chance) be named after previous members of their lineage and many people of all ranks and abilities will have the same name. Any political or religious system which is based on lineage or ancestor worship or both is certainly weakened by such a practice.

We can see this practice taking place among the Quiche in the *Popul Vuh*. The *Popul Vuh* lists the various generations of the Quiche kings, which, after the earliest ones, are always in pairs. Up until the tenth generation of rulers no day names appear. However in the tenth generation, Quik'ab the Second rules together with 8-Vine. In the eleventh generation Cauutepech shares the rule with 7-Noh. Finally, in the twelfth generation both rulers represent the new religion: 3-Deer and 9-Dog. I think this indicates that the Quiche went through a period in which the two religions coexisted, but where tonalism finally predominated.

One might go even further on this basis. According to the *Annals of the Cakchiquels*, Quikab the Second (my interpretation is that this is Quik'ab the Second, not Quik'ab the First, who controlled the Quiche empire at its maximum, including perhaps some form of dominion over Chajul) was overthrown by his sons. This was a period of revolt. The alliance between the Quiches and the Cakchiquels was breaking up. The Cakchiquels, during this time, appear to have come under the domination of the tonalists, judging from the names of the

leaders mentioned. Thus the final domination of the tonalists marked the end of the alliance, a period of increased warfare between tonalists and non-tonalists, and revolt against existing non-tonalist political structures.

The ethnohistorical materials available to us are fraught with problems, seeming discrepancies, and obscure references. It is difficult to extract a single unified picture of Maya history from them. However, given hypotheses such as the linkage of tonalism with the practice of naming persons by the 260-day ritual calendar provide a specific point of reference which might be more easily tested and, if supported, should facilitate the unraveling of other questions.

At this point it is difficult to speculate about the origins of tonalism. It does not seem to have originated in the Mexican highlands, though elements of it are there, such as the Aztec linkage of a person's fate to the day he was born or baptized on. Thompson speculates that personal day names were a trait of some Nahuatl group in the Gulf Coast area. He mentions that some of the Putun Maya had personal day names but without the essential numbers (1970:31). On the other hand if the Putun were influenced by the Toltec they would not be tonalists, unless the Toltec changed (perhaps after the time of the move to Chitzen Itza by some of the Tula leaders?). Thompson also mentions that a Maya group at Tipu on the Belize River had personal day names in 1655 (1970:70). Possibly tonalism was behind the collapse of some of the southern Maya lowland centers. We may well be dealing with a phenomenon that spread insidiously through many Maya groups. It certainly was spreading rapidly at the time of the conquest. Under the Spanish, further depersonalization and increased accusation of witchcraft, often associated with malevolent nagualism, seemed to characterize much of the area. With the epidemics and other trials of the conquest, further breakdown of traditional means of social control and the introduction of European notions of witchcraft probably hastened the process. Defensive killing of suspected witches among Mesoamerican Indian groups today seems to occur more frequently in the areas under stronger Hispanic influence.

A possible counterargument to the hypotheses presented here concerns the Spanish

conquest. Even if one grants the survival of a Classic Maya feature through the Postclassic, isn't it stretching things too far to have it survive the Spanish conquest as well? In answer to this question there is evidence that the impact of Hispanic culture was much less drastic for the Ixil than for almost any other Maya group save the refugee "Lacandons." Ladinos (Spanish-speaking Guatemalans) did not come to the Ixil area until 1890. Earlier in the nineteenth century, Ixil country was virtually autonomous. In the late sixteenth century, during the first period of missionary attempts, priests operated out of Sacapulas, visiting the Ixil towns but not maintaining a permanent residence (Colby and van den Berghe 1969). During the entire colonial and national periods, reports of visits to the Ixil area are marked by the mention of hardship, bad climate, or intractability of the natives. To this day the Ixil maintain more elements of the precolumbian calendar than any other group (Miles 1951).

#### CONCLUSION

In summary, I see the following socio-religious developments as having occurred in the Maya area: The Classic lowland Maya were predominantly ancestor worshipers. The Guatemalan Ixil, who were influenced by the lowland Maya, were also ancestor worshipers during the Classic period. In the early Postclassic the Quiche leaders of highland Guatemala and leaders in northern Yucatan were influenced by the Toltec, if they were not actually Toltec themselves. Since Tula represented a form of ancestor worship also, the religious changes that resulted were not radically opposed to the existing system. The same ceremonial centers continued to be used though new construction and modification of older structures took place. During the height of the Toltec-influenced Quiche empire under Quikab the First it is probable that the Ixil were under their dominion for a certain period.

Very shortly after this period, however, a radically different religion, which might have existed in some parts of Mesoamerica previously, began to gain ascendance in many of the Maya areas. This new religion gave increased importance to the 260-day calendar to the extent of naming an individual according to the day he was born on. This characteristic, along

with total cremation (as opposed to the previous partial crematory practices in some areas where the skull was preserved and decorated) suggests that the individual and his lineage were downgraded almost to anonymity. This new religion involved tonalism, a belief that a person's soul has the form of an animal but that he has no direct control over the safety of that animal (and hence his own safety which is linked to it). It may also have included the kind of fragmented soul belief that exists in Zinacantan. The new religion viewed the nagual, formerly a benevolent form of elitist magic, as malevolent, as the agent of witchcraft. All of these ideas had the effect of downgrading the aristocracy, reducing elitism, loosening allegiances of the common people toward a sometimes distant head figure and causing much internal strife. The Ixil were spared these changes. One other group, the Quiche, changed only in part (or changed in full only just before the conquest) so that ancestor worship and tonalism existed side by side; the Cakchiquel, however, changed in full and broke off from the Quiche.

When the Spaniards arrived they were fortunate to find a fragmented politico-religious structure both in Guatemala and the Yucatan. When they took over, the trend toward spiritual anonymity was hastened through the downfall of native leaders and the destruction of those elements of public religion which might have had a mitigating effect on the depersonalizing influence of tonal beliefs. Tonalism has persisted throughout Mesoamerica to this day except that the calendrical day naming system was extinguished by the Catholics and replaced by Christian baptism.

This admittedly speculative description of precolumbian religious events should be regarded as a set of hypotheses which are hopefully specific enough to permit the possibility of disconfirmation as more archaeological evidence is found and analyzed. Faced with the unusual characteristics of Ixil beliefs and their striking contrast with those of other Maya groups, these hypotheses account for the existing data better than any other I am aware of.

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## A LINGUISTIC LOOK AT THE OLMECS

LYLE CAMPBELL  
TERRENCE KAUFMAN

*This paper explores the hypothesis that the archaeological Olmecs, at least in part, were speakers of Mixe-Zoquean languages. The hypothesis is supported by not only geographical and temporal correlation, but by Mixe-Zoquean loan words in other Mesoamerican languages, many of which refer to things diagnostic of the Mesoamerican culture area. Also the cultural inventory revealed in Proto-Mixe-Zoquean vocabulary provides additional support.*

A paper on Olmec linguistics might seem pretentious, since presumably the last Olmec died long before any linguistic records were made. However, the linguistic identification of the Olmecs is a recurring question in anthropological literature (cf., for examples, Jiménez-Moreno 1942; Coe 1968; Bernal 1969; Joesink-Mandeville 1972; Sharer 1974; and others). This interest, however, seems to have generated little more than poorly founded linguistic speculations, which would seem to justify a re-examination of the linguistic identification of the Olmecs. The purpose of this paper is to examine one particular hypothesis in depth, that the Olmecs, at least in part, were speakers of Mixe-Zoquean languages.

The geographical distribution of speakers of Mixe-Zoquean (henceforth MZ) languages cor-

responds closely to that of the Olmec archaeological sites (Fig. 1, map of Olmec-MZ area), suggesting as a hypothesis for further investigation that the archaeological Olmecs, at least in part, may have been speakers of Mixe-Zoquean languages. To our knowledge, this hypothesis was first presented by Terrence Kaufman (1969a, 1973, 1974), who argued that the glottochronological time depth of MZ of 3,500 years (around 1500 B.C.) correlates with the first glimmerings of Olmec civilization.

Although the geographical and temporal correlation of MZ languages with Olmec civilization leads to sympathy for the Olmec-MZ identification, the strongest support comes from purely linguistic considerations. We will consider first MZ words borrowed into other Mesoamerican languages, followed by implica-