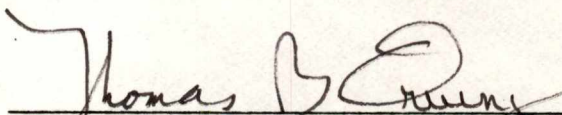
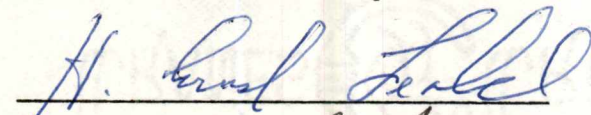
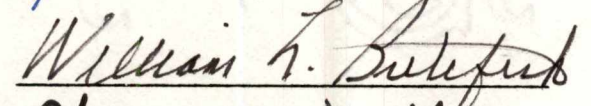
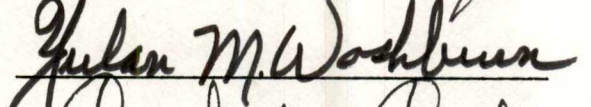
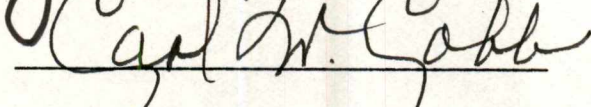


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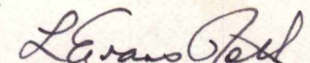
I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Anita Louise Padial entitled "American Pre-Columbian Drama: The Rabinal-Achí." I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Spanish.


Thomas B. Irving, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation
and recommend its acceptance:


Accepted for the Council:


Vice Chancellor
Graduate Studies and Research

AMERICAN PRE-COLUMBIAN DRAMA:

THE RABINAL-ACHÍ

A Dissertation

Presented for the

Doctor of Philosophy

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Anita Louise Padial

August 1981

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ABSTRACT

Rabinal-Achí is a pre-Columbian drama created by the Eastern Quiché of Guatemala, a branch of the Maya, in the 15th century. It was preserved orally due to an unusual set of circumstances, and written down in colonial times. The Quiché play is the only autochthonous American drama to have survived the Spanish conquest.

This dissertation situates Rabinal-Achí among other surviving pre-Columbian literary works and examines the historical background, character, and reliability of its controversial discoverer Charles Etienne Brasseur de Bourbourg. Through scrutiny of the text it identifies the locale of the original production and unveils consequential mythical elements in the play. It also provides the first extended literary and linguistic analysis of the drama and compares it with other classical and ancient literatures.

An important appendix to the dissertation contains the first complete and literal translation of the Quiché drama from the faithful French version left by its discoverer. The facing Quiché text was frequently consulted in order to rectify some words or phrases in Brasseur's version.

Rabinal-Achí has not yet attracted the attention it deserves, probably owing to its unavailability in English and to the questionable character of its discoverer. The present study solves both these problems and makes Rabinal-Achí available to Maya specialists as well as to experts in other fields such as archaeology, anthropology, comparative literature, and studies on the origin of drama.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Rabinal-Achí is the only known pre-Columbian drama to survive the Spanish conquest. Most scholars believe it was created in the 15th century by the Quiché Indians of Rabinal, a lowland branch of the Maya in the region that is now known as Baja Verapaz in the Republic of Guatemala. This play was copied down in Quiché and translated into French in 1852 by a priest stationed in Rabinal, Charles Etienne Brasseur de Bourbourg, and subsequently published in a bilingual edition as an appendix to his Quiché grammar in Paris in 1862.¹

Among the scarce surviving verbal expressions of pre-Columbian America, Rabinal-Achí has unique characteristics and qualities. Only the Popol-Vuh, a scriptural tale hovering between mythology and history, is richer than Rabinal-Achí in ancient legends, lore, and customs. The Annals of the Cakchiquels basically appears to be a shortened Popol-Vuh in which the historical period under Spanish rule occupies the entire second part of the work. The Books of Chilam Balam, of remarkable poetic beauty, are more limited in subject and scope than the previous works, and—without doubting their original American character—they could not be dated prior to the arrival of the Spaniards. Like the autochthonous poems—lyrical, ritual, and epic—that have been gathered by scholars from the modern American countries, Rabinal-Achí is an

¹Grammaire de la langue quiché, espagnole-française mise en parallèle avec ses deux dialectes, cakchiquel et tzutunil, tirée des manuscrits des meilleurs auteurs guatémaliens (Paris: A. Bertrand, 1862).

essentially poetic creation, but unlike those poems, is a lengthy literary work with strict unity of action, time, and place, qualities that suffice as proof of a developed poetic attitude and a capability for artistic complexity. Moreover, like the poems—and unlike the other autochthonous literature—Rabinal-Achí is a clear text; however, an alert and interested reader soon perceives the existence of a stratum of meaning besides that of the exoteric plot.

In various works that study the Mesoamerican cultures, several authors have made important observations about the locale and performance of the drama. However, there has not yet been a comprehensive, critical consideration and explication of the text nor a systematic exposition of the history of its discovery.

There is no good available English translation of the play either. An English version was published in 1977 by the King Library Press,² but only sixty-five numbered copies of the beautiful and extremely expensive book were made; the version itself is just that, an abridged version not true to the original available to us, and of no scholarly value. The following pages will undertake to make this very important piece of literature available to the English-speaking public, a task that has long been overdue. Its presentation could have great impact, not limited to the English-speaking nations, similar to the effect the "discovery" of the Popol-Vuh in the Newberry Library had a few decades ago.

²Eleanor Wolf, Rabinal, an Ancient Play of the Quiche Indians of Guatemala (Lexington, Ky.: King Library Press, 1978).

The editio princeps which we will utilize is Brasseur's French translation mentioned above accompanied by a basic Spanish-French transliteration of the original oral Quiché on facing pages. This Quiché version allegedly and probably represents the combined effort of several intelligent though unscholarly native Rabinaleros who helped the Abbé, and it is in need of critical revision and correction by a specialist. The same local "team" produced the translation written in French by Brasseur. Until a reliable, critical Quiché text is available—an achievement that may have to wait a considerable amount of time—the basic source will have to be Brasseur's version in clear French, which at present conveys the original meaning more accessibly and, in general, probably with less imprecision than the Quiché text. Still identifiable elements of the latter will be taken into account and will be compared to a few corresponding French words or passages in need of clarification or correction. This translation will appear as an appendix to this dissertation. In the quotes from the play we shall employ Brasseur's French when we want it to constitute independent proof of our assertions.

Of the original text published by Brasseur de Bourbourg a few copies remain as rare books in a few libraries. This circumstance will enhance the usefulness of the new version of Rabinal-Achí prepared for this dissertation in a language read by many in the world today.

A complication arises related to the personality of the discoverer of the play. On the one hand the Abbé Charles-Etienne Brasseur de Broubourg had the humanistic, solid formation of the French schools of his time and must have been an extremely intelligent man with a prodigious instinct for discovery: he alone made known the Popol-Vuh,

the Annals of the Cakchiquels among other documents of less importance; in Madrid he uncovered nothing less than the Codex Troano Cortesiano, to which he gave this title, and the monument of information on aboriginal writing, customs, and ceremonies from which most of our knowledge of the ancient Maya is derived: Fray Diego de Landa's Relación de las cosas de Yucatán. But on the other hand, Brasseur was, as we will see, an unscrupulous manipulator of influences and an unreliable observer and interpreter of contemporary events and situations, and his findings and works in the ancient literatures of Central America were eventually presumed to be equally unreliable. However, his research in the latter area of knowledge still has some merit, which even his most serious critics, like Raynaud, have recognized.

The best known edition at present of Rabinal-Achí is the one published as a cooperative effort between Georges Raynaud and Luis Cardoza y Aragón. In the first quarter of this century Professor Raynaud, the Director of Studies on pre-Columbian religions at the School of Higher Studies in Paris, undertook a new French translation of the drama from the extant Quiché text in Brasseur's book; Raynaud's French version was never published. More recently Luis Cardoza y Aragón, assuming and claiming the late Brasseur's dishonesty and lack of preparation for the task he performed concerning Rabinal-Achí, made a Spanish translation from Raynaud's version of the Quiché drama.³ Nevertheless, a simple observation of the available texts soon brings up serious defects in

³Rabinal-Achí, el Varón de Rabinal (México: Editorial Porrúa S.A., 1972).

Raynaud's and correspondingly in Cardoza's, which therefore have failed to supersede Brasseur's.

The main contribution in this dissertation will be to provide the essential base for the interpretation of Rabinal-Achí. There will be a succinct presentation of autochthonous literature in Central and South America in order to place Rabinal-Achí among the surviving works of the ancient cultures. Owing to Brasseur's controversial personality, it will be indispensable in a comprehensive presentation to explore his biography in relation to the discovery of Rabinal-Achí, with an assessment of Brasseur's character, deeds, and works. A careful examination of the text and the available historical facts will provide us with new evidence of the pre-Columbian authenticity of this native drama. The interpretation in Chapter V will also unveil the basic symbolism of the play hidden in the presentation of the king, the queen, and the princess, as well as in the central dance between the princess and the hero, Queché-Achí, and thus unquestionably establish the ritual character of the play. Concurrently we shall present the first literary analysis of that pre-Columbian creation, and call attention to the importance of Rabinal-Achí for comparative studies: Rabinal-Achí is not only an exceptional expression of its class in pre-Columbian literature, but also a unique document in the evolution of drama at the dawn of civilization. The Maya-Quiché drama that has reached us is a testimony to the advanced state of literary and artistic development of a people in the early Neolithic period, a culture that the Spaniards came upon and froze in time. If this development existed in other archaic cultures at a similar historical stage, it is lost to our present research resources: Rabinal-Achí is then a rare document of a time that in the

corresponding European and Asian periods is out of reach for historical investigation. It thus transcends a purely regional or continental character. As an appendix there will be a translation of Brasseur's French version, with his multiple footnotes and stage directions, which aid in the comprehension of Rabinal-Achí.

It is important to note that the old traditions among the people of Rabinal are becoming obsolete, a fact recognized implicitly by various scholars. The new generation has new interests and new involvements; movies, radio, and television have reached Rabinal. Old oral truths transmitted by tradition are losing their significance: it is hard to look upon the moon as a god in the sky when one has learned that men have already walked on it. The Indians have already once had to modify their old Mayan beliefs and customs, fitting them into the Christian mold, in order to preserve them. With the new onslaught of modern civilization, the survival of the ancient culture is once again becoming problematic, and the Indians themselves are losing interest in tradition. The task of preserving this drama is too great culturally and too important to leave to the dwindling resources and interest of the Indians. If the manifestations of the ancient native culture are to endure for posterity, a new attitude must be adopted, and new concerns must intervene: scholarly restoration and artistic recreating of the original expressions will have to take the place of naive preservations of lore.

CHAPTER II
BEST KNOWN ANCIENT NATIVE LITERATURES
IN CENTRAL AND SOUTH AMERICA

Historical and Social Background

The Spanish conquest of America is noted both for its epic nature and for its intolerance of the native customs and ideologies. These characteristics can be understood in the light of the history of Spain. In 711 Spain was invaded by Arabian and Moorish Muslims bringing with them their culture and their religion, which though tolerant of the other religions it encountered, has had few of its faithful turn away from it to embrace a new faith. The Muslims remained in Spain for almost 800 years. During all this time, the reconquest of the peninsula for Spain and Catholicism became the Christian Spanish way of life. The year 1492 marked not only the discovery of America by Christian Spain but also the fall of Granada—the last Muslim stronghold—and the expulsion of all non-converted Jews from Spain.

These three events, though seemingly unrelated, decided the course of history in the New World. For the Spanish soldiers who had been fighting in a holy war, it was their business, their very livelihood, and they were deprived of it with the end of the war. The expulsion of the Jews was an indication of the Spanish intolerance of other faiths; therefore, the discovery of America immediately provided Spanish men of arms with a new scenario to do the one thing that had been bred into them for centuries, to seek out infidels, and subjugate and convert them. With this spirit the Spanish conquistadores came to the new land.

Once there, however, a new element entered the picture: the natives had a seemingly inexhaustible amount of gold, which aroused greed in the conquistadores. Until that time war had been a livelihood; during the conquest of America it became an opportunity to amass great wealth.

The culture which the Spaniards found in America was very alien to them: alien thoughts, values, food, dress, appearance To them, the natives were primitive, ignorant and uncivilized; but Catholic Christian theology defined them as wholly human. Teaching the Christian faith and Spanish values to these people—while incidentally filling Spain's coffers with gold and silver—became the proper Christian thing to do. The means of fulfilling these two purposes—converting the natives and bringing their gold and silver back to Spain—were justified, according to the Spaniards, by the ultimate result, the salvation of those souls. William H. Prescott says that these conquerors

carried with them the sword in one hand and the Bible in the other. They imposed obedience in matters of faith, no less than of government, on the vanquished, little heeding whether the conversion was genuine, so that it conformed to the outward observances of the Church.¹

Today we know that the Spanish found a well organized society in the New World. Morley, the foremost authority on Maya society, explains how this culture functioned. There were city-states, governed by a single ruler, a combination king-high priest who formulated both foreign and domestic policies with the advice of the state council, composed of leading chiefs, priests and special councilors in each area. This king and high priest appointed town and village chiefs, utilizing something

¹History of the Conquest of Mexico. History of the Conquest of Peru. (New York: Random House, w. d.), p. 217.

like a civil service examination. These lesser chiefs administered the affairs of the towns and villages dependent upon the territorial capital, exercising both executive and judicial authority over their communities. They saw to it that buildings were maintained and repaired, that crops were sown at the time determined by the priests; they also sentenced criminals, decided civil suits, and collected taxes for the king. There were army leaders, some of whom served for life; others, more like chiefs of staff, were elected to serve for three years. There were town councilors or elders, without whose votes nothing could be done. There were aides to the towns' chief administrators, advising them, serving as liaison between the people and the local chiefs and as teachers of the dances of the town. Finally there was an ah holpop, a principal singer and the person in charge of dances and musical instruments of each town.²

The priests were of equal if not greater importance than the nobility. Fray Diego de Landa gave us an account of the duties of the high priest.

que (las) cosas de sacrificios pocas veces las
trataban si no (era) en fiestas muy principales
o en negocios muy importantes; y que éstos proveían
de sacerdotes a los pueblos cuando faltaban,
examinándolos en sus ciencias y ceremonias y que
les encargaban de las cosas de sus oficios y el
buen ejemplo del pueblo, y proveían de sus libros;
(además) atendían al servicio de los templos y a
enseñar sus ciencias y escribir libros de ellas

Que las ciencias que enseñaban eran la cuenta
de los años, meses y días, las fiestas y ceremonias,

²Bartolo Sis, the man who gave Brasseur the text of the Rabinal-Achí was his town's ah holpop as noted by René Acuña in Introducción al estudio del Rabinal-Achí (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Centro de estudios Mayas, 1975), p. 35.

la administración de sus sacramentos, los días y tiempos fatales, sus maneras de adivinar, remedios para los males, las antigüedades, leer y escribir con sus letras y caracteres en los cuales escribían con figuras que representaban sus escrituras.³

Under the high priests were the chilanes or diviners, the nacom in charge of human sacrifices and his four assistants—the chacs—, and the ahkin who specialized in religious duties.

The common people were the corn farmers, hewers of wood, drawers of water, artisans, masons, stonecutters, carpenters, lime burners, and carriers of burdens. They lived and worked as a community, working on community property, sharing the duties and the products of their efforts among themselves and giving part to the ruling classes.

At the bottom of the social class were the slaves. On rare occasions a man could be a slave by birth. Any man could descend to being a slave, depending on several actions or circumstances: (1) as punishment for stealing, a condition that ceased if and when the injured party—who was the owner—was repaid for his loss; (2) as prisoner of war; (3) as having become an orphan; and (4) as having been purchased as a chattel.⁴

The preceding is a brief overview of the society the Spaniards found upon their arrival in the continent. The Spanish crown created the repartimientos, or distribution of natives among the conquerors on the grounds that unless forced to, the Indians would not work, and that only through labor could the Indians come into communication with the

³Relación de las cosas de Yucatán. (México: Editorial Pedro Robredo, 1938), pp. 74-75.

⁴Sylvanus Griswold Morley. The Ancient Maya (California: Stanford University Press, 1946), pp. 159-180.

Spanish and thus be converted, providing cheap labor in the process. Mexico had been accidentally discovered in 1517. All reports—at that time and subsequently—told of the country's gold. In 1519 Hernán Cortés arrived in Yucatán. The stories of Cortés and his men and their adventures in the New World fill some of the most remarkable pages in the history of man. Suffice it to say that in order to subdue the very civilized natives of the continent, the Spaniards had to destroy the very foundation of their culture, to eliminate all their leaders and to eradicate all ancient knowledge. The Spaniards were aided by two circumstances: a dissatisfaction among some allied states with the Aztec empire that was ruling Mexico with an iron hand, and an old legend prophesying the return of Kukulcán, a white god of deliverance, for whom the natives at first mistook Cortés. Cortés was able to divide and conquer, urging the various Indian nations to fight one another while posing as friend of all, and finally taking over when it was too late for the natives to defend themselves against the foreign conqueror.

The history of these years was full of episodes in which the Spaniards would enter an Indian city under peaceful pretenses and then slaughter the chiefs and nobles, raze the city, burn the idols and books, and finally erect a Christian chapel on top of the pyramid.⁵ Upon traveling through places like Yucatán, the cultured visitor who expects to see only the great cities named over and over again in books and travel brochures is surprised by the abundance of unattended and unknown pyramids and temples scattered over the countryside. The same was once true of the books kept in these temples. They could be found

⁵Prescott, *passim*.

in great numbers and served as mural paintings due to their format, actual screenfolds of animal skins or bark, made up on connecting pages that could be stretched accordion-fashion to the shape of a long flat rectangle and hung on a wall.⁶ Landa explains the content of these books, what the Spaniards thought of them and how the codices were destroyed:

escribían en sus libros sus cosas antiguas y sus ciencias, y con estas figuras y algunas señales de las mismas, entendían sus cosas y las daban a entender y enseñaban. Hallámosles gran número de libros de estas sus letras, y porque no tenían cosa en que no hubiese superstición y falsedades del demonio, se los quemamos todos, lo cual⁷ sintieron a maravilla y les dió mucha pena.

The Codices

A few of these once numerous books have survived and come down to us, and they are now known under the general name of codices. Three of these are Maya books: The Codex Dresden; the Codex Madrid, also known as the Tro-Cortesianus; and the Codex Paris, all named after the cities where they are now kept. Even though they have not been deciphered, we have a general knowledge of their content. They are books of divination with a mixture of prophecy and history. The Maya had a system of writing which most experts believe to be a mixture of ideographic and phonological symbols.

There are eight Mixtec histories: The Codex Nuttall and Codex Sánchez-Soliz in the British Museum; the Codex Bodley and Codex Selden in the Bodleian Library, Oxford; the reverse of the Codex Vienna in

⁶Francisco de Burgoa. Geográfica descripción (México: Publicaciones del Archivo General de la Nación, 1934), Vol. I, p. 288.

⁷Landa, p. 207.

Nationalbibliothek, Vienna; the Codex Colombino in the Museo Nacional de Antropología, Mexico City; and the Codex Becker I, II in the Museum für Volkerkunde, Vienna. All these come from present day Oaxaca in south central Mexico and are genealogical and historical in content.

There are six painted picture books of the pre-conquest known as the Borgia group: The Codex Borgia in the Vatican library, Rome; the Codex Laud in the Bodleian Library, Oxford; the Codex Fajervary-Mayer in the Liverpool Free Public Museum; the Codex Cospi in the University Library, Bologna; the Codex Vaticanus B in the Vatican Library, Rome; and the Mexican Manuscript No. 20 in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris. These six books in Mixtec style pertain to complex and still poorly understood pan-Mesoamerican cosmogony and cosmology as well as to ritual beliefs and practices based on the augural calendar of 260 days. These last two groups of books are in pictographic writing. Unlike the Borgia and Maya groups, the content of the Mixtec histories has been practically deciphered.

It is believed that there were hundreds of these codices in Central America, but the Spaniards waged a relentless war of destruction against these documents based on the same laws and prejudices which enabled them to destroy Islamic and Jewish books in Spain. Thinking them to be "cosas del diablo" closely related to the natives' religion, the first conquistadores began burning them; likewise they destroyed the idols and slew the priests. The war waged against the native culture continued until the end of the Inquisition in the 19th century.

The children of the nobility were taken by the Spanish priests to be educated in the Catholic faith. The native legends about their origins were preserved in some cases, as we shall see, although they

frequently were contaminated with biblical stories told by the priests trying to use the natives' old myths in the new beliefs and doctrine, thus causing confusion among the young natives, and in the best of cases achieving a syncretic reconciliation of the opposing principles and practices.

Mythological Literatures

1. The Popol-Vuh. The purest, most genuine history of Meso-america that we have today is the Popol-Vuh, or the national history of the Quiché. After Alvarado's destruction of Utatlán, the Quiché capital, in 1524, the natives fled and many went to live in Chichicastenango, a few miles south. There, one of them who had learned the Spanish alphabet transcribed the national book into modern Latin characters, and explained (as quoted by Adrián Recinos):

we shall bring it to light because now the Popol-Vuh. as it is called, cannot be seen any more, in which was clearly seen the coming from the other side of the sea and the narration of our obscurity, and our life was clearly seen. The original book, written long ago, existed, but its sight is hidden to the searcher and to the thinker.⁸

The Popol-Vuh is an account of the ancient mythology and culture of the Mayas starting with the creation of man, going through the gods' actions and winding up with the origin and history of the Quiché people, up to their last kings and nobles after the Spanish conquest.

It is believed the Popol-Vuh was originally composed by some little known but highly educated member of the race—called Diego

⁸Adrián Recinos, Delia Goetz and Sylvanus G. Morley, Popol-Vuh (London: W. Hodge, 1951), pp. 79-80.

Reinoso—at about the middle of the sixteenth century. This document is now lost, but Father Francisco Ximénez copied and translated it into Spanish at the end of the seventeenth century. Ximénez's copy stood ignored in monastic libraries until 1854–1855, when Carl Scherzer and Charles Etienne Brasseur de Bourbourg found the manuscript in Guatemala. The first Spanish version was published by Carl Scherzer in Vienna in 1857.⁹ In 1861, Brasseur published a French version, with the text in Quiché and extensive notes.¹⁰ Brasseur took the manuscript, in Ximénez's handwriting, called Empiezan las Historias del origen de los indios de esta provincia de Guatemala back to France. After Brasseur's death, it was acquired by Edward E. Ayer and given to the Newberry Library in Chicago, where it now is part of the linguistic collection bearing Ayer's name. But since it appeared at the end of the Arte de las tres lenguas, both manuscripts were listed under the latter title until Adrián Recinos discovered it in 1941. He says he "noticed some differences, important omissions, and other changes which affect the interpretation of the Quiché document";¹¹ therefore, he made a new translation directly from the Quiché. The availability of the original text in addition to the new translation shook the scholarly world, and with the corresponding English version the Popol-Vuh has become widely known and studied as the most valuable document of aboriginal America.

⁹Las Histroias del origen de los Indios de esta Provincia de Guatemala, traducidas de la lengua Quiché al castellano . . . por el R. P. F. Francisco Ximénez . . . (Vienna: Carlos Gerold e hijo, 1857).

¹⁰Popol-Vuh. Le Livre Sacré et les mythes de l'antiquité américaine, avec les livres héroïques et historiques des Quichés (Paris: Arthus Bertrand, 1861).

¹¹Recinos, Goetz and Morley, Popol Vuh, p. XIII.

2. The Annals of the Cakchiquels. This book is a history written in Quiché with Spanish characters by several generations of people of the Xahil family who lived in the vicinity of Sololá to the north of Lake Atitlán. It is believed to have been begun shortly after the conquest, and in its first part it relates the ancient oral historical tradition of the Cakchiquels. Following this, there is an account of the deeds of kings and warriors, the founding of towns and succession of the chiefs of the nation up to the arrival of the Spaniards. It then becomes a sort of a diary of the community, where all noteworthy events are recorded.¹²

3. Título de los señores de Totonicapán. This is another book, written in the nearby city of Totonicapán about 1554 in the native American language with Spanish characters, which contains an abridged version of the history of the Quiché from its origins to the greatest of its kings, Quikab, who reigned until about the middle of the 15th century.¹³ At the end of this book, there is a note by several dignitaries of the nation testifying as to the veracity of the text; it reads:

Ahora a veinte y ocho de septiembre de 1554 firmamos este testimonio en que hemos escrito lo que por tradición nos dijeron nuestros antepasados, venidos de la otra parte del mar, de Civán-Tulán, confines de Babilonia.¹⁴

¹²Adrián Recinos, "Introducción," Memorial de Sololá-Anales de los Cakchiquels. Título de los señores de Totonicapán. México-Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1950), *passim*. This volume contains both titles in a confusing presentation. The Título is another document.

¹³*Ibid.*, pp. 211-213.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 241.

Although this seems to be an historical document, the curious reader observes that these people believe Cíván-Tulán, the land of their ancestors, to be in Babylon. Many documents on mythological origins were written by natives being educated by priests, and these, as explained above, in an attempt to consolidate the natives' history with the stories from the Bible, gave the Indians a new mythology conforming to the particular priest's belief of the natives' origin. There are many such manuscripts exhibiting a concoction of pre-Columbia and biblical histories--claiming, for example, that the American native descends from Israel's lost tribes, etc.

4. The Books of Chilam Balam. The Books of Chilam Balam are a group of documents from Yucatan written in the Maya language with Spanish characters during the 17th and 18th centuries. Each book is a collection of texts in different styles probably written by several people at different times, since they contain different handwritings and spellings. Abraham Arias Larreta tells us that "Chilam o Chilan era el nombre que se daba a los profetas de la casta sacerdotal maya. Balam, que literalmente significa "jaguar," fué el nombre del famoso y último profeta antes de la Conquista."¹⁵ Balam, besides meaning jaguar, is used to designate symbolically "hidden things." As in most aboriginal literatures, the texts deal with religious matters--mythical-historical, calendaric, prophetic--and themes that seem to be a series of guessing

¹⁵Literaturas aborígenes de América (San Jose: Litografía e Imprenta LIL, S.A., 1976), p. 583.

games. However, Antonio Mediz Bolio thinks they are "fórmulas simbólicas de iniciación religiosa."¹⁶

There must have been many of these books, although today we have only three important ones: The Chilam Balam de Chumayel, Chilam Balam de Tizimín, and Chilam Balam de Mani, named after the places where they were found. The most studied is the Chilam Balam de Chumayel. Mediz Bolio believes that

los textos del Chumayel, más o menos adulterados, provienen directamente de antiguos cantos o relaciones poemáticas que de padres a hijos fueron bajando, repetidos de memoria, hasta los días de la dominación española, al principio de la cual algunos de los indios (probablemente sacerdotes) que aprendieron a escribir con los caracteres europeos consignaron sigilosamente por escrito tales relaciones con objeto de que no se perdieran en definitiva. Estos manuscritos formaron así nuevos libros Mayas devotamente conservados en secreto por sus privilegiados poseedores, según la liturgia tradicional que hacía de los Yanaltés o Libros, cosa santa y oculta.¹⁷

It is believed that this last text was compiled by a learned Maya, Juan José Hoil, a native of Chumayel in Yucatán, because he stated so in a note dated January 20, 1782, on page 81 of the book. As with most native texts, we read this book without fully comprehending its message.

Poetry

In his volume Literaturas aborígenes de América, Abraham Arias Larreta has collected what he estimates to be pre-Columbian poems in Nahuatl, the language of the Aztecs, and in Quechua, the language of the

¹⁶Libro de Chilam Balam de Chumayel (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma, 1973), p. XI.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, pp. XI and XII.

Inca. The Aztecs had lyric, ritual, epic and epico-lyric poetry. The Incas had lyric, ritual and epic poetry.

The greatest amount of literature left by the Aztecs is their poetry. Daniel Brinton devoted a book to it,¹⁸ as did A. M. Garibay.¹⁹ It is in general a collective poetry obsessed by the brevity of life and the enigma of the hereafter, where only glimpses of the poet's own self come through. Parallelism, the repetition by either synonyms, contradictions or syntheses characterize the poems, which most likely were sung.²⁰

Most of Quechua poetry as is Nahuatl poetry, is associated with music and songs. The tone is cordial, placid and optimistic. It consists mostly of collective chants performed in all important events: agricultural chores, funeral ceremonies, collective working and official holidays and feasts. It is an inseparable part of the ancient Quechua culture.²¹ In the present state of our knowledge we must consider Quechua poetry to be an expression of oral transmission, since it is not proven that the Quechua had a system of writing although some scholars presume they did.

The Dance-Dramas

The natives of the Americas had a tradition of dramatic representations, from simple dances to very sophisticated dramas in dialogue

¹⁸Ancient Nahuatl Poetry (New York: AMS Press, 1969).

¹⁹Historia de la literatura nahuatl, (México: Porrúa, 1971).

²⁰Abraham Arias Larreta, Literaturas . . . , pp. 89-174.

²¹Ibid., pp. 95-133 and 195-235.

form, a tradition to which Rabinal-Achí belongs. These dance-dramas seem to have been religious-historical-magical in nature. Rafael Girard believes that

Danzas rituales, procesiones simbólicas, sainetes, juegos o representaciones teatrales al aire libre son desde tiempos inmemoriales, parte integrante del culto. Perpetuán escenas míticas y exaltan los principios morales, normativos de la conducta humana, poniéndolos, en forma alegórica, al alcance del público.²²

Several early authors give evidence of the existence of dramatic works. All the early Mexican chronicles describe sacrifices where the victim impersonated a god for a year before his death. They also mention mitotes, or feasts involving dancing and singing religious and epic poetry. Durán, Landa and Cogolludo describe one-act farces and plays.

Ernesto Chinchilla Aguilar has found two references as to the existence of these dramas in the late 16th and early 17th centuries—one in a note by Pardo in his Efemérides, and another in a document of the Inquisition. Both forbid the natives from performing their dances called tum-teleche or danzas del tun. A description of how many people participated in these performances and where they took place is included in the documents of the Inquisition.²³

Later, in the early 18th century, Ximénez gives an excerpt of a dance drama he saw performed in the town of Rabinal, the plot of which is similar to that of Rabinal-Achí,²⁴ and equally similar to what is

²²El Popol-Vuh, Fuente histórica Guatemala: Editorial del Ministerio de Educación Pública, 1952), p. 353.

²³Ernesto Chinchilla Aguilar, La Danza del sacrificio y otros estudios (Guatemala: Editorial "José de Pineda Ibarra," (1963), pp. 9-19.

²⁴Escolios a las historias del origen de los indios (Guatemala: Sociedad de Geografía e Historia de Guatemala, Publicación especial No. 13, 1967), p. 17.

described by Pardo and the documents of the Inquisition. This prompted Carroll E. Mace to suggest the possibility of a cycle of tragedies culminating with the execution of a prince.²⁵ Rabinal-Achí would, of course, be another and the only surviving example of this cycle.

Miguel León Portilla has researched the origins of drama in America. He believes

there was a perpetual cycle of religious drama which unfolded through their year composed of eighteen months of twenty days each. This form of perpetual and sacred theater actually had a double nature. On the one hand were the priests, the students in the calmécac and telpochcalli, and the people in general who took part in the festivities and plays, sometimes wearing disguises and being present during the dialogue with the gods. All of them chanted hymns and went through a set form of action, which dramatized the symbolism of the religious doctrines and the ancient myths.²⁶

After the conquest, the Spanish priests, observing how fond the natives were of plays, encouraged the writing of new dramatic representations for instructional purposes and in some cases, wrote them themselves. Today the natives perform their "Moros y Cristianos" or the "Baile de la Conquista" for tourists in the streets of Mexico and the towns of Guatemala. One simple baile seems to have survived from pre-Columbian times, "El palo volador," where four acrobats climb a tall straight pole with a rotating rectangular scaffold on top. Four acrobats dressed as monkeys begin descending on long ropes, circling in the air, in progressively larger circles until they reach the ground, where

²⁵"New Information about Dance Dramas of Rabinal and the Rabinal Achí," Xavier University Studies, VI-1 (Feb. 1967), 4.

²⁶Pre-Columbian Literatures of Mexico (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1969), p. 97.

other dancers dressed as animals await them. There are dance dramas of decidedly Spanish influence, such as "El baile de los gracejos" and "El baile de la culebra" that survive in Guatemala, and Mace has written about three post-Conquest dance-dramas he found in the town of Rabinal.²⁷ In Guatemala these one-act plays, which can go on for days, are considered by most to be ritualistic in nature. In the opinion of Fabián Ymeri

Estos bailes tienen algún motivo pagano que no hemos llegado a comprender. La danza indígena es, con seguridad, de origen mitológico; pues no puede ser por el simple placer de bailar porque para el bailarín supone ciertos sacrificios que no estarían compensados con el solo gusto de bailar. Tienen que pagar el alquiler del traje, pierden tiempo durante el aprendizaje y durante los días de la fiesta, y tienen que contribuir pecuniariamente para el sostenimiento de los festejos.²⁸

The Apu Ollantay

Of all native American plays possibly the best known is the Apu Ollantay of the Inca of Perú. The play deals with the reciprocal love of a general of common origin, Ollanta, and Cusi-Coyllur, the daughter of the Inca Pachacutec, an impossible love because of her nobility. When Ollanta, basing his request on his exploits and fame as a warrior, asks the Inca for the hand of his daughter, he is rejected and Cusi-Coyllur is placed in seclusion in the Palace of the Virgins of the Sun where she later gives birth to Ollanta's daughter. Ollanta rebels and makes a stronghold of Ollantaytambo, where he defeats Rumiñahui, who had

²⁷ Three Quiche Dance Dramas of Rabinal, Guatemala (New Orleans: Doctoral dissertation at Tulane University, 1966-67).

²⁸ Antropología, cultura autóctona de Guatemala y civilización Maya. (Guatemala: w. p., 1955), p. 110.

been sent by Pachacutec. Rumiñahui decides to conquer Ollanta by treason; he joins Ollanta's forces, gains his confidence and opens the fortress gate one night for the Inca's forces, which arrest Ollanta and take him to Cuzco. There they find that Tupac Yupanqui has succeeded his father Pachacutec to the throne, and the new Inca, instead of following the laws that demand Ollanta's death, forgives him, restores his honors and betroths him to Cusi-Coyllur.

The critics who believe Apu-Ollantay is an original play base themselves on geographical fidelity, purity of the Quechua language and accuracy in historical references. Abraham Arias Larreta, who is of this belief, names several other authors of the same opinion. Then in the same place Arias mentions others who believe in the "complete colonial origin" of the Ollantay, among them Ricardo Palma and scholarly authors of the caliber of Menéndez, Pelayo and Bartolomé Mitre. There is still a list of authors who believe in the Quechua origin of the play with Spanish inspiration in some aspects, as with the use of a gracioso, a Golden Age concept.²⁹

The authority of the Quechua text of Ollantay was discussed by Vicente Fidel López and Bartolomé Mitre in Buenos Aires at the end of the last century. Mitre's most solid criticism of the Ollantay as being of Spanish inspiration was based on his scholarly knowledge of Spanish and his research into aboriginal languages. After analyzing verse forms he speaks of Spanish specifically,

²⁹Abraham Arias Larreta, Pre-Columbian Literatures (Los Angeles, Paris, Buenos Aires: The New World Library, 1964), p. 83.

que tiene su forma típica y popular en el octosílabo, el cual corresponde al antiguo trocaico de los latinos, es decir cuatro acentos rítmicos con cuatro largas y cuatro breves alternadas, apoyando los impares. Sería ya cosa de maravillarse que los antiguos quichuas hubiesen precedido a los españoles en la concepción psicológica del drama, tal cual sus grandes poetas, es decir tal cual los más grandes poetas del mundo lo crearon, y que lo vaciasen en un tipo idéntico en cuanto a su forma; pero lo sería mucho más el que se hubieran anticipado a las complicadas combinaciones que tuvieron por razón de ser la transición de la lengua latina a las modernas lenguas europeas y la adaptación de una literatura nueva a un modelo que en su formal armónica no era aplicable ya. Esto solo basta para establecer la convicción moral de que el "Ollantay" fué vaciado en el molde métrico de las lenguas del Mediodía de Europa, tomando por tipo el octosílabo español.³⁰

We must note that the text of the Ollantay previously described is not the only Quechua manifestation of this story. According to Ricardo Rojas, Manuel Palacios heard a similar legend in Cuzco, and there are reports of the existence of still another one that the archaeologist Wiener heard in Ollantaytambo; in both of these the story concludes with catastrophe instead of a happy ending.³¹

When we consider all the facts available to us, it is safe to conclude that although the core of Ollantay may be an original native legend based on history, the play in the published form we have, is a typical 17th century Spanish theatrical production, with Spanish versification, a gracioso, the theme of honor in the European sense, and a happy ending, all conforming with the Spanish dramatic art of the time. Such a play provides us with very little of the pre-Columbian

³⁰Obras completas (Buenos Aires: Guillermo Kraft Ltda., 1938), Vol. I, pp. clxxi-clxxxii.

³¹Ricardo Rojas, Ollantay (Buenos Aires: Losada, 1941), pp. 11-15.

native theater in America, and is not worthy of being studied as a typical example of it.

CHAPTER III

BRASSEUR DE BOURBOURG, PRINCIPAL EXPLORER OF PRE-COLUMBIAN LITERATURE

First Publishing. The Story as Told by Brasseur - Contradictions

Rabinal-Achí was first published in Paris in 1862 as an appendix to Brasseur's Grammaire de la Langue Quiché. The Grammaire is in Spanish, and Brasseur himself admits that it is "no tanto obra mia, como de Ximenez, de Basseta, de Flores, y de otros."¹ To say the least, it is odd to publish a grammar of Quiché in the Spanish language in France. He gives two reasons for publishing this grammar:

de guiar á los sacerdotes de aquella diócesis
en el estudio de la lengua Quiché y aun de la
Cachiquel . . . [y] . . . proporcionar á los
sabios de la Europa, tan curiosos de conocer
los idiomas Guatemaltecos, la oportunidad de²
compararlos con otros de nuestro continente.

His reasons are questionable under further analysis. The scholarly language par excellence in Europe was still French, Brasseur's native tongue. The formidable work of compiling other authors' grammars for a scholarly study did not make much sense unless he translated those grammars into French. His admission that the work was not as much his as Ximénez's and others is an understatement to say the least. Adrián Recinos has already noted that Brasseur simply copied Ximénez's grammar and published it as his own.³

¹Brasseur, Grammaire . . . , p. iv.

²Loc. cit.

³Recinos, Goetz and Morley, pp. 34 and 35.

The appendix to the Grammaire, where Rabinal-Achí first appeared, is in Quiché and French. It would seem that the drama attached in this manner to a book on grammar, would serve as an example to illustrate what was explained in the text, yet the languages--the grammar in Spanish, Rabinal-Achí in French--do not coincide. This language conflict makes no sense in spite of Brasseur's justifications.

As to the acquisition of the play itself, the discoverer tells us that shortly after arriving in Rabinal in 1855 he went with a young servant to see some ruins close by. His servant told him those buildings had been the scene of a legend that his people preserved in the form of a drama; an uncle of his had been one of the main actors and knew it by heart. A few days later, a woman came to see Brasseur saying her husband was ill. Brasseur cured him with his first aid kit, and who would the ailing man be but Bartolo Sis, actor, uncle of the young servant and the man who had memorized Rabinal-Achí? The grateful patient dictated the entire story in Quiché to Brasseur in 12 feverishly busy days, and then Brasseur translated it into French. Or so goes Brasseur's story.⁴

The first conflict arises here. Brasseur's story leads us to believe that this drama had been dictated to him from memory in Quiché. Yet in the Grammaire there is a prologue by Bartolo Sis, which reads:

Au vingt-huitième jour du mois d'octobre de
l'année 1850, j'ai transcrit l'original de ce
Ballet du Tun, propriété de notre ville de

⁴Brasseur, "Rabinal-Achí ou le Drame-Ballet du tun" hereafter this part will be referred to as Grammaire . . . II, pp. 17-19. The same story was published in the Gaceta de Guatemala, XI-79 and 80 (Jan. 14 and 20, 1860), and by Ephraim Squier in The Athenaeum, 1467 (Dec. 8, 1855), 1436.

Saint-Paul de Rabinal, pour laisser mon souvenir
à mes enfants et qu'il reste à jamais avec eux
dorénavant. Ainsi soit-il.⁵

In other words, Sis had transcribed Rabinal-Achí a full five years before the "dictation" to Brasseur! Obviously, there was no need to dictate it if it was already written down. What really happened? And where is the original manuscript? Before we attempt to approach any of these questions we need to look at Brasseur a little more closely.

Biography of Brasseur

Charles-Etienne Brasseur de Bourbourg was born in the small town of Bourbourg in northern France in 1814. One of his biographers claims he was from an aristocratic but impoverished family.⁶ Another, Herbert Adams says "he was descended, on his mother's side, from the viscounts of Bourbourg."⁷ It is doubtful that he was entitled to use the noble sounding title "de Bourbourg" at the end of his name as he did, since there is no indication of his having been viscount de Bourbourg and the Grand Larousse lists him as "BRASSEUR (Charles-Etienne), dit de Bourbourg."⁸ His appropriation of such a title indicates the pompous and vain side of his nature.

From 1835 to 1840 he studied at the College of Saint Homer in France and wrote a series of romances and moral tales. Some of the

⁵Ibid., p. 25.

⁶Diego Barros Arana, "Necrología Americana," Obras completas (Santiago, Imprenta Cervantes, 1910), Vol. IX, p. 459.

⁷Herbert Adams, Life and Works of Brasseur de Bourbourg. (Worcester, Mass.: C. Hamilton, 1891), p. 3.

⁸Grand Larousse Encyclopédie. Paris, 1960, p. 1027.

titles are: L'Exilé de Tadmor, Le Martyr de la Croix, Les Epreuves de la fortune et de l'adversité, Eugénie de Revel. The list can be extended; here we can see an imaginative, energetic and highly verbal young man from 21 through 26 years of age.

After this period he went to Ghent to study Theology and Philosophy, and traveled through Germany, Italy, Switzerland, and Sicily. Then he continued his studies at the Sapienza and the College of Rome for two years, being ordained in 1845. Carrying letters of introduction from the Congregation of the Propaganda of Faith, he came to America, first to visit Boston and then to work at the Petit Séminaire in Quebec where he is said to have taught church history. In France the date corresponds to the last few years of the Bourbon restoration.

Arriving at Quebec in the fall of 1845, and since the routes of navigation were about to be closed for the winter, Brasseur accepted an invitation to spend the season at the Séminaire of the Archbishopric of Quebec. J. B. A. Ferland focuses on Brasseur's attitude of superiority towards the Canadian clergymen at the séminaire:

Installé au milieu de ses confrères canadiens; il ne tarda pas à dérouler devant eux l'objet de sa mission et les plans qu'il avait conçus pour la régénération intellectuelle et religieuse des habitants de ce pays. Dans ce but, il se proposait d'établir une communauté de réguliers, dont il deviendrait le supérieur; l'ordre de Saint-Benoît était toutefois celui qui lui convenait davantage. Il avait même communiqué son dessein au souverain pontife, qui l'avait autorisé à fonder un institut de Bénédictins et à y admettre ceux qui consentiraient à devenir ses disciples. Pour appuyer ses prétentions à la dignité de premier abbé du futur monastère, il se déclarait l'auteur de deux ou trois romans imités de Chateaubriand, qu'il montrait avec complaisance, et de plus il distribuait gracieusement des cartes

portant une couronne de comte, et le nom
aristocratique de "Roverend [sic] Count [sic]
Brasseur de Bourgourg."⁹

As we can see, the good fathers at the séminaire took a very dim view of the pretensions of the newly arrived Brasseur, and some Canadian churchmen made fun of him and his claimed protection from Rome. Nevertheless, the fathers at the Séminaire asked him to teach a history course to some young theology students; this he did for eight whole lessons. But the course had to be discontinued because it was not successful; however, from then on Brasseur carried the title of professor:

le titre de professeur d'histoire ecclésiastique
au séminaire de Québec n'en demeura pas moins
attaché au nom de M. Brasseur. Il pouvait lui
servir en Europe, comme celui de comte lui avait
servi en Amérique.¹⁰

In 1845-46, at the Petit Séminaire Brasseur published his first "serious" book, a biography of Monseigneur de Laval, first Bishop of Québec, and he also prepared a book in two volumes, not published until 1852, with the characteristically long title Histoire du Canada, de son Église et de ses Missions, depuis la découverte de l'Amérique jusqu'à nos jours, écrite sur des documents inédits compulsés dans les archives de l'archevêché et de la ville de Québec, etc.¹¹ In this book we have the first mention of Brasseur as a compiler of historical documents. The story behind this particular research is typical of his methods of research: being left without anything to do, he attempted to browse in

⁹J. B. A. Ferland, Observations sur un ouvrage intitulé Histoire du Canada par M. l'abbé Brasseur de Bourgourg . . . (Paris: Charles Douniol, 1854), pp. 1-2.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 3.

¹¹Paris: Sagnier et Bray et Plancy, Société de Saint-Victor, 1852.

the archives of the séminaire of Quebec, but this was at first denied to him. He persisted and finally gained entrance, finding interesting documents but failing to comprehend them fully:

et put recueillir à la hâte quelques notes sur des documents incomplets, qu'il n'a pas toujours compris, et qu'il a interprétés plus tard dans un sens défavorable aux institutions catholiques du Canada.¹²

Once the book was in print, Ferland felt compelled to criticize it, for it not only lacked critical insight, but it was merely copied from his sources:

A la suite de trois pages de réflexions banales, sur le passé et sur l'avenir du Canada et de son Église, l'auteur, à notre grande surprise, s'empare de l'histoire des États Unis par Bancroft, et en donne libéralement la traduction à ses lecteurs, suivant cet écrivain dans ses idées, dans ses sentiments, dans ses phrases, dans ses expressions, et reproduisant même avec une scrupuleuse exactitude l'indication de toutes les sources désignées en note.

.....

Lorsque Bancroft manque à M. Brasseur, il traduit Smith, Montgomery Martin; ou, ce qui rend sa tâche encore plus facile, il copie Charlevoix. Ainsi porté par l'un ou par l'autre de ces écrivains, suivant que [sic] les circonstances l'exigent, il arrive à la fin de son premier volume, sans avoir fait part à ses lecteurs de ses importantes découvertes, et sans leur avoir fait connaître les sources où il puise si abondamment.¹³

Ferland then quotes M. de Laroche-Heron, who wrote for the Correspondant and went to the trouble of comparing the first 100 pages of Brasseur's text to Charlevoix and Bancroft, reporting about 90 pages either literally copied from the first or translated from the second.

¹²J. B. A. Ferland, p. 3.

¹³Ibid., pp. 6-7, 8.

Laroche-Heron further stated that in the entire first volume, dealing with the years prior to 1760, no unpublished document supported Brasseur's historical research. He went on to say that numerous well known unpublished documents had been ignored by Brasseur; consequently, facts that had already been rectified by research, in Brasseur's book were left unresolved as they were in previous authors.¹⁴ Ferland sums up his judgment of Brasseur's volumes, by saying:

L'histoire du Canada et de son Église est défigurée, dans les deux volumes de l'auteur, par les omissions, les inexactitudes, les erreurs grossières, les fausses appréciations. Les dates y sont souvent jetées au hasard, les faits dénaturés, les hommes jugés avec une partialité et une injustice qui dénotent la légèreté et la mauvaise humeur de l'écrivain.¹⁵

Ferland's criticisms and denunciations are clear and factual, and seem justifiable. Nevertheless, the reaction that leads him in 1854 to publish a book dedicated exclusively to refuting Brasseur's work seems excessive. Brasseur was only a young author who, even if he were successful in certain areas, did not merit the prestige stemming from all this attention. The alleged plagiarisms would not have upset Abbé Ferland or the Canadian clerics whom he spoke for were it not for the fact that Brasseur, who ignored the historical position of the French-Canadian church, had harshly criticized in his book a supposedly submissive attitude towards the British imperial authority. The problem was that the British government, shortly after conquering French Canada in 1763, had supported the Catholic clergy in exchange for the political

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 8 and 9.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 9.

backing of the Church. This attitude of the church became more reasonable when later the French Revolution proved to be anti-Christian in its philosophy and anticlerical in its practices.

The "shameful" agreement that Brasseur denounced in 1852, the right of the British crown to intervene in the choice of the archbishop of Quebec for the support of the Catholic clergy, was not very different from the similar right of the Spanish crown in exchange for the protection that it gave the Church, a right that several Spanish American countries, for political reasons, demanded from the Vatican after their separation from Spain. The attitude of young Brasseur is like that of an opinionated European visiting the New World: with characteristic arrogance he applied the French conflicts of the mid-1800's to Canada, which for almost a century had had its history separated from France's. The French conflict stemmed from the change from Louis-Phillipe's government, which was Voltairian, liberal and admiring of victorious England, to the government of Napoleon III, who gave France political independence, aspirations to a new empire, and for a time rekindled French patriotism. At the same time France had a resurgence of the old Catholic factions of Galicans and Ultramontains, the first having liberal and nationalistic tendencies, the second being conservative, clerical and pro-Vatican. Brasseur belonged definitely to the latter, which in spite of the predominance of liberal Catholics in the new regime, backed Napoleon III.¹⁶ Brasseur never thought that in French Canada, the joining of the interests of the British Empire with those

¹⁶Henri Guillemin, *Histoire des catholiques français au XIX^e siècle* (Genève-Paris-Montréal: Éditions du Milieu du Monde, 1947), p. 271, *passim*.

of a conservative clerical Catholicism was the natural and fruitful thing to do for both parties. But Brasseur's thoughtlessness, product of a European self-centeredness in a young ambitious writer, touched a raw nerve in the mentality and conscience of the Franco-Canadians.

The political-religious core of the problem sketched above enlightens us as to why Ferland's criticism was not well received in France, especially in the midst of the conservative pro-Vatican Catholic circles, and why the most influential and noteworthy press of this tendency ignored the allegations of the Canadian churchmen. The latter persisted in their campaign as a national crusade and for a time in France, they were suspected of having ulterior motives such as perhaps the persecution, for whatever reason, of ultraconservative elements of the French church.¹⁷

Finally, at the beginning of 1854, the French ecclesiastic authorities and the Univers, published by the Ultramontains—among whose ranks was Brasseur—recognized the latter's mistake and began to pay attention to Ferland's book, and the Canadian clergy had the joy that Brasseur "avait perdu la partie."¹⁸ Even so, the influential Univers published only a short pertinent letter from the Bishop of Arras¹⁹ and in the extensive Mélanges that its publisher Louis Veuillot made of his most memorable articles no reference to the "affaire Brasseur" was found.

¹⁷Frère Robert Sylvain, E. C., "Un singulier historien du Canada" La Revue de l'Université Laval, III-2 (Oct. 1948), 153, passim.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 163-164.

¹⁹Loc. cit.

The passion with which the errors and abuses of a young priest of very relative importance were fought is noteworthy. The same passion can still be detected in an article as recent as the one just quoted from La Revue de l'Université Laval, in which the affaire was being studied and analyzed almost a century later.

There may also be a personality factor that should be considered. Brasseur, besides having a propensity to the glitter of noble titles and the honors of scholarship, must have been a man of quick intelligence and personal charm, an unscrupulous opportunist, as capable of winning the confidence of prudent heads of the church as of kindling the obstinate opposition of those whose paths he crossed. We shall be amazed at the mobility of this man at a time when traveling was slow and difficult, and by the ease with which he cultivated, wherever he went, the friendship and admiration of heads of church and of men of learning, always to his advantage. The biographical references we have been able to consult do not even hint at anything obscure and mysterious about this capable, manipulative priest, who obviously, as we have seen and will see further, had the loyalty of powerful public figures in the unstable France of his time. It is even possible to question whether Brasseur was perhaps a secret agent of Napoleon III, first in Canada, then in Mexico, toward which this king had ambitions. We shall see later that Brasseur played a known role in the French invasion of that country.

In 1846 we find Brasseur in Boston, perfecting his English and reading Prescott's History of the Conquest of Mexico. At this time his interest in archaeology previously concentrated in Egypt shifted to the Americas, and to this study he dedicated the rest of his life.

In this same year, after being appointed Vicar-General by Monsignor Fitzpatric, the Bishop of Boston, he returned to Rome as representative of the Catholic Church of North America to the Papal court of Pius IX. He stayed in Rome until 1848, studying American antiquities in the Vatican library. Adams says that "The revolution of 1848 was the occasion of Brasseur's leaving Rome and France for a second voyage to America."²⁰ We do not know how Brasseur was originally connected with the regime of Napoleon III, but it is obvious that there was a long-standing association between the priest and the government, as will be confirmed later. On this second trip to the New World he visited New York and some inland cities in the United States, went down the Ohio and Mississippi to New Orleans, and there he took passage for Mexico. On shipboard he met M. le Vasseur, the French Minister, who appointed him almoner of the French Legation in Mexico City. Let us remember that at this time in 1848 the war between the U.S. and Mexico was near an end, that the idea of Manifest Destiny of annexing all of North America was at its height, that Brasseur traveled to Mexico through previously owned French lands in the U.S., and that there was great unrest in Mexico, which continued for several years: Santa Ana was deposed by Juárez in 1855 and the French succeeded in putting Maximilian on the Mexican throne in 1864. Oddly enough, Brasseur was traveling through this area because the 1848 French revolution gave him "occasion" to do so, and without a specific reason, since only on shipboard did he obtain a position.

²⁰Herbert Adams, p. 5.

During Brasseur's stay in Mexico, which lasted until 1851, he dedicated himself to traveling through the country and collecting books, manuscripts, and archaeological artifacts. He befriended people in key positions who greatly aided him in his endeavors, people such as the director of the National Museum, Rafael Isidoro Gandra; the custodian of the Vice-Royal Archives; the librarian of the University of Mexico, José María Andrade; and a professor in the College of San Gregorio, Faustino Galicia Chimalpopoca, who was said to be a descendant of a brother of Moctezuma. In his Bibliothèque Mexico-Guatémaliennne,²¹ Brassuer is forever recognizing someone for giving him some valuable manuscript.

At this time, Mexico was going through serious internal problems besides having just lost Texas to the United States. Santa Ana was president of Mexico, and his ideology followed basically that of the Federalistas, who

favoured limited central government, local militia, and nearly autonomous states; they tended to be anticlerical and opposed the continuance of colonial fueros, which gave special status to ecclesiasts and the military and exempted them from various civil obligations.²²

Even though there were several conservative leaders in government protecting the Church, its property and its interests, the Church had gone through a lot of political swinging back and forth between conservative and liberal extremes and had suffered for it.

A great many of Mexico's cultural treasures such as manuscripts written or collected by missionary priests had been hastily put in a few

²¹Paris, Maisonneuve and Cie., 1871.

²²Encyclopaedia Britannica, Macropedia. Chicago, 1978. Vol. 12, p. 80.

libraries by the secularist laws where they remained gathering dust. The same was true in other parts of Central America as we shall see later. Brasseur had ample opportunity, owing to the general confusion, his important connections and his clerical and diplomatic status, to pick and choose important manuscripts. He claimed he did it to save them for church and state, while in reality he was adding them to his private collection. In fairness it is important to note that thanks to Brasseur's taking these manuscripts for himself, they have been saved for posterity. Manuscripts that remained, such as the Chilam Balam de Chumayel, have been lost. We have no idea how many undiscovered and nameless manuscripts met the same fate.

From his efforts of these years in Mexico he published in 1951, in both Spanish and French, his Cartas para servir de introducción a la Historia Primitiva de las Naciones Civilizadas de la América septentrional.²³ An interesting note should be added here. Ferland, who we know was very bitter about Brasseur and who tried to demolish the Abbe's reputation with proven facts, explains why the Mexican ecclesiastical authorities had even more trouble out of Brasseur than the Canadians had had, and gives an explanation of the circumstances leading to the Abbe's departure from Mexico:

Le Mexique, avec ses souvenirs historiques, avec ses manuscrits conservés dans les monastères, les collégiales, les cathédrales, présentait un morceau appétissant à un homme qui désire faire de l'histoire et vendre ses livres. M. Brasseur se laissa tenter et fit voile vers la terre des Montézuma et des Santa-Anna, rêvant poésie, histoire, réforme sociale

²³Also Lettres pour servir d'introduction à l'histoire primitive des nations civilisées de l'Amérique septentrionale, adressées à M. le duc de Valmy (both in Mexico: M. Murguía, 1851).

et religieuse en faveur des pauvres Mexicains. Eh bien! là encore, il y eut mécompte pour lui; il fut plus mal compris au Mexique qu'il ne l'avait été au Canada; car peu de temps après son arrivée, les autorités ecclésiastiques adoptèrent des mesures pour se débarrasser et du réformateur et de ses théories. Après avoir secoué la poussière de ses souliers, il repasse la mer, emportant des notes précieuses pour l'histoire du Mexique et de son Eglise.²⁴

We have been unable to find a reason anywhere for Brasseur's being asked to leave Mexico, but found an isolated reference to an incident in which the Archbishop of Mexico might have disciplined Brasseur. Jacques Viger wrote a letter to Henry-Louis-Armand Potier de Courcy on March 10, 1853, that is kept in the files of the Séminaire du Québec, in which he asks whether it is known

que ce personnage, qui brasse les livres comme son nom l'indique, s'est fait interdire, il y a deux ans, par l'archevêque de Mexico"? "Il était allé au Mexique en touriste et prétendait avoir des vues toutes nouvelles et inédites pour réformer le clergé et faire fleurir la religion. L'archevêque s'est débarrassé de lui en l'interdistant."²⁵

We have already established that Ferland and his colleagues at the Séminaire du Québec were archenemies of Brasseur and would love any tasty bit of gossip that would help discredit him. Nevertheless, the question about that interdiction is left open. We believe a student of history should further investigate this mysterious Abbé, who may have played a significant role in the history of our continent.

²⁴J. B. A. Ferland, p. 5.

²⁵Quoted by Robert Sylvain, p. 148.

Established in the intellectual world as a scholar in American antiquities thanks to the publication of his Cartas de introducción, Brasseur returned to Europe in 1851, going first to Paris where he was able to examine M. Aubin's papers. Aubin, the leading French authority on Mexican antiquities, had just returned to Paris after living 18 years in Mexico and was busy publishing his work. Brasseur then returned to Rome and the Vatican library to continue his archaeological studies.

In July of 1854 Brasseur returned to the New World in what seems to be an aimless trip. In Washington he met Schoolcraft and Peter Force, who showed him copies of the texts by Las Casas and Father Durán. To be able to continue his journey, in New York he was forced to sell his petite chapelle de missionnaire and a manuscript vocabulary of the Yucatan language, said to be the Diccionario de Motul. He sailed from New York to Central America in October, traveled through Nicaragua and San Salvador where he did not linger because he was not offered a good field for his studies, and finally reached Guatemala on February 1st of 1855.

The situation that Brasseur found in Guatemala was one of great confusion. In 1821 the cabildo or city council of Guatemala City had proclaimed its independence from Spain and was joined by El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua and Costa Rica to form the United Provinces of Central America. Their history was a constant civil war between liberals and conservatives. The clergy was persecuted and expelled; convents were ransacked and turned into military quarters. In 1838 the eventual different nations, instigated by the church, claimed independence, and the Federation fell apart. Rafael Cabrera gained control over Guatemala and, with conservative support, returned the country to

a situation similar to the one existing during the colonial period, in which the Church regained all its previous powers and privileges.

When Brasseur reached Guatemala he found that during this turbulent period the books from the libraries of the monasteries had been thrown into carts and transported to the national Universidad de San Carlos; there they practically lay strewn around where they had fallen. Some were badly damaged and the most valuable had presumably been stolen.²⁶

Brasseur made an extraordinary number of findings in the short months he stayed in Guatemala City because of his industriousness and because he again was befriended by people in key positions. The most important were Don Juan Gavarrete, in charge of the library at the University, and Archbishop Dr. Francisco de Paula García Peláez, a historian very interested in Guatemalan antiquities. García Peláez opened his library to Brasseur, introduced him to the main intellectuals of Guatemala, and assigned him to the parish of Rabinal. Brasseur says:

Como francés, como viajero, yo debo manifestar aquí la expresion de mi reconocimiento por la benevolencia jeneral que se me dispensó en aquel pais lenajo; por el verdadero interes que me han manifestado todos los Guatemaltecos esclarecidos (sin distincion de opiones políticas) miembros del Gobierno, del Clero, de las Corporaciones religiosas, de la Facultad de Medicina, de la Universidad²⁷

²⁶Brasseur de Bourbourg "De Guatemala à Rabinal, épisode d'un séjour dans l'Amérique Centrale pendant les années 1855 et 1856," *Revue Européenne*, I (Paris, 1859), 56. Also, "De Guatemala a Rabinal. Eposodio de un viage en la América del Centro en los años de 55 y 56," *Gaceta de Guatemala*, XI-69 to 81 (1859-1860).

²⁷"Nociones de un viaje a los estados de San Salvador y Guatemala," *El Museo Guatemalteco*, 42 (Sept. 12, 1857), 1-2. In quotes from Brasseur we will maintain the original spellings without indicating every departure from the norm.

Obviously, his connections opened many doors for him.

Of this period, Jorge Luis Arriola comments

Entre los documentos que obtuvo en la capital de Guatemala, unos fueron cuidadosamente copiados por él, o por sus amigos; con otros, fue magnánimamente obsequiado.²⁸

Daniel Brinton, who had studied Brasseur carefully says: "He explored the country in all directions, ransacked the dusty books of the convent libraries."²⁹

Adrián Recinos demolishes all credibility we can give the Abbé on the sources from which he got his manuscripts during this period of his activities. While researching the Popol-Vuh, Recinos discovered that in 1856 Carl Scherzer had published his Mitteilungen über die handschriftlichen Werke des Padre Francisco Ximénez in der Universitäts-Bibliothek zu Guatemala³⁰ based on research he had done in 1854; in the foreword of this latter book, Scherzer gave a thorough description of the documents found in the copy of Ximénez's history bound to the grammar.³¹ Recinos adds:

The same manuscript appeared a little later in the possession of the Abbé Brasseur de Bourbourg, who says in the foreword to the Le Livre Sacré that he obtained it in Rabinal, and in Bibliothèque Mexico-

²⁸Popol-Vuh el libro sagrado y los mitos de la antigüedad Americana, etc. (Guatemala: Editorial Universitaria, 1972), p. 42.

²⁹"The Abbé Brasseur and his Labors," Lippincott's Magazine, I (Jan. 1868), 80.

³⁰Vienna: Aus der Kaiserlich-Königlichen Hof-und Staatsdruckerei, 1856.

³¹Arte de las tres lenguas, Cacchiquel, Quiché y Tzutuhil, Ms. in the Newberry Library, Chicago, and Empiezan las historias del origen de los indios de esta porvincia de Guatemala, Ms. in the Newberry Library, Chicago.

Guatémalienne he says that in former times it belonged to Ignacio Coloche, a noble Indian of Rabinal, from whom he got it. It is a little difficult to understand how, between 1854 and 1855, this manuscript could pass from the shelves of the University library of Guatemala City into the hands of the noble Indian of Rabinal, and subsequently to those of Brasseur de Bourbourg.³²

He proceeds to prove that these manuscripts were still in the University library and continues:

Probably the traveling investigator obtained them there with the same ease with which the other manuscripts of his celebrated collection of Americana came into his hands.³³

Brinton, who studied the Abbé and bought some of his papers after his death, admits that Brasseur "had a weakness to throw designedly considerable obscurity about his authorities and the source of his knowledge."³⁴

His stay in Guatemala City lasted a little more than two months, for on May 18 of the same year he arrived in Rabinal. He was appointed ecclesiastic administrator of Rabinal by Archbishop García Peláez so that he would be able to perfect his knowledge of the native languages. Presumably the reason that moved the Abbé to take such a post in the middle of nowhere was the fact that one of the ecclesiastic administrators of this very same town had been Francisco Ximénez himself, who had lived in Rabinal from 1703 to 1713. That parish had been the one

³²Recinos, Goetz and Morley, pp. 43-44. Brasseur claims that he received various other documents from Coloche. To our knowledge, the existence of this man has not yet been verified.

³³Ibid., p. 44.

³⁴Aboriginal American Authors and their Productions especially those in the Native Language. (Philadelphia: No. 115 South Seventh Street, 1883), p. 57.

assigned to Ximénez after Chichicastenango (1701-1703), where he had found the manuscript of the Popol-Vuh. Both towns speak Quiché, the classical Highland Maya language. Brasseur had to know these facts; he had spent two months researching Ximénez. In all probability Brasseur accepted the small and obscure parish of Rabinal because he was hot on the trail of a momentous discovery, possibly the manuscript of Chichicastenango from which Ximénez had made the copy that was in Brasseur's hands at that moment.

The original manuscript of Chichicastenango was not in Rabinal, but only two weeks after Brasseur's arrival, on June 3, he wrote to a friend that he had discovered a manuscript, the text and dialogue of Rabinal Achí, which dealt with "los mismos personajes de Ximenes, Padilla y otros."³⁵ It is important to know that Ximénez, in his Escolios a las Historias de los indios, the very same document published by Scherzer which later appeared in Rabinal and in Brasseur's hands, describes a "baile" called the Quiché-Vinac,³⁶ which Ximénez said was at that time still being performed and of which he gives a short description. The plot of Quiché-Vinac is similar to yet not exactly the same as that of Rabinal-Achí. Brasseur may have come to Rabinal requesting to see this play. It is also possible that Brasseur found a manuscript already written; this thesis is supported by Brasseur's words to Padilla.

³⁵"Dos cartas inéditas del abate Brasseur de Bourgourg, dirigidas al doctor, José Mariano Padilla, fechadas en Rabinal el 23 de mayo y el 3 de junio de 1855," Anales de la Sociedad de Geografía e Historia de Guatemala, XVI (1940), 302.

³⁶Ximénez, Escolios . . . , pp. 16-17.

Brasseur was thought to be a master of languages. When Herbert Adams met Brasseur in 1873 he was very much taken by the man. He was especially impressed by the many languages the Abbé spoke.

I found him to be the most interesting man I had ever met, for up to that time I had never encountered a true cosmopolitan. The Abbé told me that he spoke twelve different languages and had a reading acquaintance with more than twenty. Judging from his perfect command of English, German and Italian, I thought him a master of tongues. I heard him converse with persons of different nationality and apparently with as much ease and facility of expression as when he talked English with me.³⁷

It should be presumed that a man who learned languages with ease, who lived in Mexico from 1848 to 1851 and who had spent several months traveling through Central America, living in Guatemala City and publishing in Spanish, spoke fluent Spanish. Yet René Acuña tells us that when Brasseur reached Rabinal,

Llegó con un ama de llaves de edad canónica,
llamada Rufina Alfaro, que hablaba francés y
que le servía de intérprete porque él no
hablaba bien español³⁸

Carroll Mace adds that "Brasseur was the only priest in the history of Rabinal to record baptisms in Latin."³⁹ This circumstance tends to reinforce the doubts we may have regarding his knowledge of the Spanish language, since he did not venture to write the relatively simple church records in Spanish. Obviously Brasseur worked with half-truths. He spoke some languages fluently, but Spanish was not one of them. He claimed to have gone to Rabinal to perfect his knowledge of Quiché. He

³⁷ Adams, p. 12.

³⁸ Acuña, p. 23.

³⁹ Mace, "New . . .," p. 12.

spent about twenty months in Rabinal and left for Paris in January of 1857. According to Diego Barros Arana he left "creyendo adelantados sus estudios, i temiendo que el clima comprometiese su salud."⁴⁰

Once in Paris Brasseur published his Histoire des nations civilisées du Mexique et de l'Amérique Centrale durant les siècles antérieurs à Christophe Colombo . . .,⁴¹ a massive collection in four volumes that saw the light between 1857 and 1859 and was widely discussed. Unfortunately, in it Brasseur was led by his imagination to attempt to interpret the histories and glyphs. The first three volumes deal with pre-Columbian America, the last with the Spanish conquest. The work did bring Brasseur to the attention of scholars and government. In 1859 he was appointed by Victor Duruy, Minister of Public Instruction, to lead a "scientific" expedition into Mexico; this expedition left France on May 12 of that year and lasted eighteen months. Speaking of the information gathered in this and previous trips, Barros Arana tells us that

En 1862, cuando se disponía la invasión militar de México, él pudo no solo dar informes geográficos muy interesantes sino suministrar un mapa manuscrito que fué de grande utilidad al ejército expedicionario.⁴²

Brasseur again visited Central America in 1862, and in 1864 he was appointed member of another scientific exploration. Adams explains:

At this time the French government was endeavoring to establish political ascendancy in that region He remained in those regions for about a year, encountering many difficulties on account of the political

⁴⁰Barros Arana, p. 461.

⁴¹Paris: Arthus Bertrand, editeur, 1857.

⁴²Barros Arana, p. 466.

complications of France with the New World. The Emperor Maximilian endeavored to persuade Brasseur to remain in Mexico and become the general superintendent of museums and libraries and the minister of public instruction, but the Abbé declined.⁴³

It has been reported that Brasseur declined saying "Rogué a su Majestad que me permitiese continuar en América Central la misión que me confiara el gobierno francés."⁴⁴ The fact is that shortly after this, we find him in France.

The close relationship between Brasseur and the government of Napoleon III is now clearer. His role seems one of gathering information. He no longer lacked money to travel as he chose, and even declined a high position with what seemed to be a stable regime in Mexico, a post that would have made available to his collection any manuscript that could still be found in that country. His declining the position may indicate at this time he had more important work in the inner circles of power in the metropolis itself. This theory is further supported by the fact that in 1869 Napoleon granted him the Legion of Honor, and that shortly afterwards when in 1871 Napoleon III abdicated after his defeat in the Franco-Prussian War,

Abrumado por la pérdida de la protección oficial, e incluido, como dice su biógrafo Moreel, en el grupo de los cortesanos de Napoleón III, el abate abandona discretamente el estrado en el cual se ha movido hasta entonces.⁴⁵

⁴³ Adams, p. 9.

⁴⁴ Taken from Arriola, p. 54, who in turn took it from León Moreel, L'Abbé Brasseur de Bourbourg, Librairie Outteryck, Bourbourg, France. We have not been able to locate a copy of this rare book.

⁴⁵ Arriola, p. 58.

While he was performing his lesser known activities, Brasseur was still writing. In 1861 he published the first volume of a series of original documents in the native languages of Central America, a series that he completed in 1864. That first and most important volume is the Popol-Vuh, already mentioned. The text would have been received with the interest it deserved had it not been for an unfortunate incident. In 1860 another French priest, Abbé Manuel Domenech, published a volume on glyphs of the Canadian Indians. Brasseur was asked to give his opinion on it before the Geographical Society in Paris, and he said that it proved how the savage natives of North America were able to record a great number of historical facts. This was published in the bulletin of the Society, on p. 46 of the volume corresponding to the first semester of 1861. Shortly afterward, it was proven that this original manuscript was nothing but an old notebook of a German youth depicting obscenities. Brasseur lost considerable credibility and prestige, and his works with him.

His next work is the Grammaire that contains as an appendix the Quiché play studied in the present dissertation, the second on original documents in the native languages published in 1862. The third volume of the series resulted from a trip Brasseur made to Spain in 1863 to explore the libraries in that country; there he found Landa's Relación de las cosas de Yucatán, which he copied and translated into French.⁴⁶ In this book Brasseur explains some theories of his—that the writing of the Maya was phonetic and therefore he knew their secrets, that the

⁴⁶Relation des choses de Yucatan de Diego de Landa. (Paris: Arthus Bertrand, Maisonneuve et Cie., 1864).

ancient civilizations of the other continents had learned their sciences from the Americas, that ruins such as Palenque belonged to the legendary Atlantis, etc.—which caused many a scholar to mistrust and scorn him. This volume was followed by what Brasseur considers to be the fourth of his collection of original documents in the native languages, his Quatre lettres sur le Mexique⁴⁷ This 460 page volume is a further explanation of his theory where he brings in an enormous amount of quotes and facts.

In 1862 Brasseur made his fifth trip to America, in the company of a group that included the artist Henri Bourgeois. The published fruits of this expedition was an illustrated work called Monuments anciens du Mexique.⁴⁸ On his return trip home, Brasseur stopped again in Spain hoping to find some original documents sent there by the conquistadores. In the library of the Royal Academy of History in Madrid the librarian showed him an original manuscript. He borrowed it, obtained permission to reproduce it, and took it to Paris, where it was named the Codex Troano-Cortesiano in honor of its old owner D. Juan Tro y Ortolano and because it was believed to have once belonged to Hernán Cortés. This document was returned to Madrid, and it is now also known as the Codex Madrid.

Using Landa's text, Brasseur endeavored for two years to translate the text and published it in two volumes, the first containing Brasseur's explanation of the writing system of the Maya language

⁴⁷Paris: Maisonneuve et Cie., 1868. See bibliography for complete title.

⁴⁸Paris: Arthus Bertrand, 1866. Text by Brasseur, illustrations by M. de Waldeck.

together with a reproduction of the manuscript. The second contains a Maya grammar and vocabulary, with a translation of the vocabulary into Spanish and French.⁴⁹ Brasseur later explained the reasons for some of the errors he had made in this work, but still defended it. These reasons can be found in the Revue Archaeologique for March 1870 and October 1871 and in the preface to his Bibliothèque Mexico-Guatémaliennne, already quoted, published also in 1871. This last book was written after the fall of Napoleon III. In it he records a great many of the literary works he had collected in Europe and America.

Still working on classifying all the collections of documents pertaining to the ancient history of America, the Abbé visited Rome in December of 1873. He died in Nice on January 8, 1874. After Brasseur's death his papers were put up for auction. Pinart and Aubin bought part of them and this collection is now in the National Library in Paris. Other parts were bought by American collectors and are in the United States. As far as we know, there has not been a systematic effort to examine all of Brasseur's papers to date.

Reputation

As we have examined Brasseur's life, we have found the man to have been an energetic, intelligent, unscrupulous person with important connections of an unclear nature with the government of Napoleon III. He was an unsurpassed collector of native documents with very little critical insight. His weaknesses so much upset most of the critics that

⁴⁹ Brasseur de Bourbourg. Manuscrit Troano. Études sur le système graphique et la langue des Mayas (Paris: Imprimerie Imperiale, 1869-70).

they condemned the man and his work at first sight without bothering to look further. An example of the attitude of the critics is Bartolomé Mitre who wrote a critical review of the Bibliothèque Mexico-Guatémaliennne. Mitre was so appalled by the obvious errors in Brasseur's works that he refused to look beyond these into the findings themselves and condemned the author and his work. Mitre claims that Brasseur's studies "carecen en su mayor parte de valor histórico y científico."⁵⁰ He adds that

Dirigido por su imaginación más que por su ciencia, se extravió persiguiendo ilusiones etimológicas que le condujeron á conclusiones incompletas ó arbitrarias envueltas en un palabreo exhuberante [sic]. Su método no es científico, su criterio es escaso, su estilo difuso, su sistema carece de base racional y sus investigaciones son, en gran parte, fruto del trabajo ajeno que con frecuencia trató de obscurecer.⁵¹

In another article Mitre adds that Brasseur was

un charlatan ignorante, su erudicion era escasa, su ciencia no iba mui léjos, sus teorías eran inconsistentes, sus juicios basados con frecuencia en documentos apócrifos o falsos, sus conclusiones tan arbitrarias como desprovistas de criterio, i todas sus obras una cosecha en parte ajena, acompañadas de un palabreo que irrita cuando no fatiga al lector.⁵²

After this judgement Mitre expresses his doubt as to the authenticity of the Popol-Vuh, recognizing the grammar in Brasseur's Grammaire is not only copied but that where Brasseur tries to correct it he changes it, and finally brushes aside Rabinal-Achí without further study.

⁵⁰ Catálogo razonado de la sección lenguas americanas (Buenos Aires: Imprenta de Coni hermanos, 1909), p. 19.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 22.

⁵² "Algo sobre literatura americana," in Diego Barros Arana, Obras completas (Santiago: Imprenta Cervantes, 1910), Vol. IX, p. 305.

Mitre's judgement of Brasseur may be extreme, but it is typical of the attitude many authors had towards Brasseur in view of his many blunders. Yet some other authors knew of Brasseur's weakness but still recognized the authentic character and importance of the documents he had uncovered and preserved. The most important of the latter scholars is Daniel Brinton. Brinton read everything Brasseur published, and after the Abbé's death was one of those who purchased part of Brasseur's collection. Brinton knew and judged the Abbé's work better than anybody else. He says:

It has often been remarked that it requires one kind of talent to collect historical materials, but quite another kind to use them properly—to generalize from them wisely. The Abbé Brasseur is a case in point. No more intelligent, enthusiastic, conscientious collector and collator of ancient documents can anywhere be found: no more visionary, daring, hazardous speculator on his accumulations can be imagined. His devotion to his theory quite obscures his judgement.⁵³

Brinton then proceeds to prove the absurdity of Brasseur's judgements, but is quick to add that

these eccentricities we can well afford to pardon when we consider the invaluable accessions to aboriginal literature we have gained through him.⁵⁴

Unfortunately, during many years the attitude that prevailed was one of condemning both Brasseur's judgements and discoveries. The Popol-Vuh itself was viewed by many with mistrust until 1941, when Andrés Recinos uncovered Ximénez's handwritten copy in the Newberry Library in Chicago. He went to Sylvanus Morley with his discovery, and together with Delia Goetz, who translated the sacred book of the Maya

⁵³Brinton, The Abbé . . . , p. 80.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 81.

Quiché into English, published the book. Morley's name and impeccable reputation in backing the authenticity of the book changed people's views on the Popol-Vuh, and it is now accepted as an incomparable historical reference. The time has also come to review other discoveries by Brasseur. As a scientist Brasseur's value is small, but as a discoverer of aboriginal works he is unsurpassed.

Rabinal-Achí, being the only entirely authentic pre-Columbian dramatic piece in existence, is of the utmost importance, not only to Maya specialists, but to all scholars of anthropology, archaeology and ancient letters. It is the only example we have of an advanced dramatic piece in an archaic society, a work that needs to be considered in the study of the origins of drama.

Theories About the Original Manuscript

We have had the opportunity of studying Brasseur's works and character, and have discovered the Abbé to be very good at half-truths, capable of taking a single small fact as a cornerstone and building a whole house to his own benefit. We have learned that his title of Professor of History comes from eight lessons he gave in Quebec; that his Histoire du Canada is an exercise at copying other authors and twisting their words to make them say what he wanted to say; that some of the old unpublished manuscripts that the above work was based on were already published and well known; that his Grammaire is not really more the work of Ximénez and others than his own, as he himself conceded, but exclusively the work of Ximénez and others; that he stole Ximénez's Historias del origen de los indios from the library of the University of Guatemala; and so on.

In light of these facts the story of the grateful Indian dictating his people's most precious heritage to Brasseur, a man he had known for less than two weeks at very best, must be doubted. What cannot be doubted is that Brasseur was a very quick and intelligent, unscrupulous opportunist trying to establish himself as a scholar and an expert in native American culture. Stealing someone else's work or taking advantage of another's discovery was natural to him, but he would never falsify a document or take something he knew was a falsification because that would damage the reputation he was trying to build for himself. Of all the faults that have been attributed to Brasseur, falsification has never been one.

But let us return to the question, how did Brasseur get hold of Rabinal-Achí? From the beginning, authors interested in aboriginal American studies have seen discrepancies in the information that has come down to us. Daniel Brinton says:

The Abbé Brasseur asserts that he wrote down this drama from verbal information, at the village of Rabinal in Guatemala; but a note by Dr. Berendt in my possession characterizes this statement as incorrect, and adds: "Brasseur found the MS. all written, in the hands of an hacendado, on the road from Guatemala to Chiapas. The original exists still in the same place." It was a weakness with the Abbé to throw, designedly, considerable obscurity about his authorities and the sources of his knowledge.⁵⁵

Unfortunately, this hacendado has never been found and the original, if it ever existed, is still lost.

Carroll E. Mace pointed out the discrepancy in the Grammaire itself which contains both Brasseur's story of the grateful native

⁵⁵Brinton, Aboriginal . . . , p. 57.

Bartolo Sis dictating the drama to him, and a statement by Sis in Quiché and translated into French stating he wrote the play on October 28 of 1850, five years before Brasseur's arrival in Rabinal.⁵⁶ Mace believes

The actual events were probably quite simple. After arriving in Rabinal, he must have heard about the Rabinal-Achí, made the acquaintance of the Indian who had written it down and obtained permission to copy it. Brasseur translated it—probably with the help of the Indians—and published it in Paris in 1862.⁵⁷

Pedro Henríquez Ureña believes that both stories can be reconciled, that Sis did write the drama and read it, thus dictating it to Brasseur.⁵⁸ René Acuña expands this theory saying:

Si se recuerda que el abate fue a Rabinal con el propósito de iniciarse en las lenguas indígenas, se comprende que lo más probable es que ni siquiera haya podido leer el presunto manuscrito.⁵⁹

This is a reasonable theory, except that if Brasseur could not yet read a manuscript in Quiché, how could he write one? Let's remember Brasseur could not even write Spanish and traveled to Rabinal with an interpreter. The scene we reconstruct with the disparate information we have is: Sis dictating in Quiché to Brasseur; two young men helping, about whom Brasseur says "ne connaissaient pas un mot de grammaire . . ., ils m'expliquaient les formes et la composition des phrases de ce drame indigène . . .;"⁶⁰ to top it off, the housekeeper Rufina Alfaro

⁵⁶Mace, "New . . .," pp. 12-13.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 14.

⁵⁸Rabinal Achí. Version Villacorta, (Buenos Aires: Editorial Nova, 1944).

⁵⁹Acuña, p. 33.

⁶⁰Brasseur, Grammaire . . . II, p. 19.

translating into French for Brasseur. This scene, befitting a farcical play, could not have resulted in a book which Georges Raynaud, a scholarly specialist and professor at La Sorbonne, says contains fewer mistakes than other works of Brasseur's.⁶¹ Francisco Monterde ignores the story of the dictation and says that Sis memorized the Rabinal-Achí and wrote it down for posterity in 1850.⁶² Monterde adds that the Abbé transcribed it with the help of some natives.

We must observe that René Acuña voiced his preoccupation with a handwritten copy that Esteban Xolop, the man now in charge of the representation of the drama in Rabinal, has in his possession. It seems that Brasseur sent two copies of the Grammaire to the area, one to his servant Nicolás López in Rabinal, who had helped with explanations of the text, and the other to the neighboring town of Chiac to a man whose surname was Tecú and who Acuña believes to be Brasseur's second native servant.⁶³ Through a long involved history, the book finally reached the hands of the Alvarado family. This book is now sacred to the people of Rabinal. Its owner demanded money and goods given to him in exchange for its use in rehearsals; therefore, the book was copied twice according to Mace, in 1920 by Nicolás Pérez and 1952 by Eugenio Xolop.⁶⁴ However, Acuña affirms there is one copy from 1913 and one from 1920, and

⁶¹Quoted by Luis Cardoza y Aragón, Rabinal-Achí . . . (México: Editorial Porrúa S.A., 1972), xii l. c.

⁶²Teatro indígena prehispánico (Rabinal Achí) (México: Ediciones de la Universidad Nacional Autónoma, 1955), pp. xiii l.c. and xiv l. c.

⁶³Acuña, pp. 18-19.

⁶⁴Mace, "New . . .," p. 15.

that he has a partial transcription of this second version.⁶⁵ What really preoccupies Acuña is that this copy has "la ortografía tradicional, con los clásicos signos fonéticos que inventó a mediados del XVI el padre fray Francisco de Parra."⁶⁶ The only explanation Acuña can find for this is that Xolop's copy comes from a text that was not Brasseur's.⁶⁷ Acuña believes that thanks to the successive copies the text of the drama has not suffered major alterations, unavoidable in mere oral transmission.⁶⁸ Yet, in the introduction to the book, written two years after concluding the text, and where he can rectify some of its errors, Acuña says

quiero dejar bien claro que, ahora, estoy persuadido de que el "original" del Rabinal Achí de Esteban Xolop Sucup descende directamente del manuscrito de Miguel Pérez, ya que el nombre de éste, y la fecha "1913" se leen claramente en la última página del cuaderno de Xolop. Por otra parte, el encabezamiento de la copia de Esteban, el elenco de personajes, la reproducción del "prologoillo" de Sis, la división en escenas y la numeración de los parlamentos, apuntan sin duda alguna a la edición de Brasseur (1862). ¿Habría que concluir, por lo tanto, que el manuscrito de Pérez era una copia del texto publicado por el abate? Pero, entonces, ¿quién es el responsable de las variantes ortográficas?⁶⁹

He further states that Carmelo Sáenz de Santa María, a researcher of Guatemalan history and linguistics, told him about another old deteriorated copy of the Rabinal-Achí, but that as of that date, he had not

⁶⁵Acuña, pp. 19-20.

⁶⁶loc. cit.

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 34.

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 137-138.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. vii.

seen it.⁷⁰ To reconstruct the facts of what probably happened, we must remember that Brasseur went to Rabinal knowing it had been Ximénez's parish for about ten years, either searching for a very old manuscript from which Ximénez had copied his Historias, and/or with a definite knowledge of a drama that had been performed in Rabinal the previous century. It is reasonable to assume that what he actually found was Sis' manuscript of the Rabinal-Achí. To us, Sis' manuscript would be vital, the lost source, but it is safe to assume that to Brasseur the five year old manuscript must not have seemed of any importance; it was not an antiquity, he knew the writer and respected the contents of the paper, but it is doubtful he gave any importance to the paper itself or to Sis' role other than for having preserved the whole drama by memory. As to the good copy that resulted, in all probability Brasseur used the services of his sharp young servants, and relied on them greatly to make his French translation.

In regard to the whereabouts of the original manuscript, if Berendt was correct and it is still in the hands of some hacendado on the road from Guatemala to Chiapas, we can still hope it will appear some day. On the other hand, if Brasseur did get the drama from Sis' notes, the theory that Brasseur paid no attention to Sis' manuscript because at that time it was neither old nor valuable, is valid and probable. In any event, it would be very interesting to study the manuscript Brasseur turned in to Auguste Durand for publication. The answer to this riddle may lie there.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. vii and viii.

CHAPTER IV

PRE-COLUMBIAN AUTHENTICITY OF RABINAL ACHI

The Survival

Since most pre-Columbian literature was either destroyed, lost or adulterated, an explanation of how the Rabinal-Achí was saved becomes necessary. Carroll Mace gives two reasons: "the circumstances of the founding of the town by Dominicans in 1538 and its relative isolation until about 1939."¹

The story of how the town was founded by the Dominican priests is the following. The area of Tezulutlán had been the so far unconquerable "Tierra de Guerra." Bartolomé de Las Casas believed the only way to inculcate faith in the natives was by persuasion instead of force and war as was being done by the Spanish soldiers. Las Casas, in an effort to prove his point and change the treatment given to the Indians, agreed in a written contract to enter the Land of War, and by peaceful means to see that the Indians accepted Christianity, considered themselves vassals of Spain, and paid tribute to the Spanish king in gold or by whatever means they had. In exchange, not a single Spanish soldier was to enter the region.

To gain access to the Indians, Las Casas and three other Dominicans wrote verses in Kekchi relating some Christian stories and set them to music. They taught these songs to native merchants and sent them, along with some trinkets, to the fierce tribes. Upon being asked for more, the merchants said they knew no more, but that the Spanish priests,

¹"New . . .," p. 8.

good men unlike the other Spaniards, could teach them the rest. Soon the Indian chief was converted, and to this day, instead of "Tierra de Guerra" the land is known as Verapaz.²

The tribe of Rabinal was moved at that time from the mountainous region to a valley about thirty miles to the east. Mace believes the Rabinal Indians were encouraged to perform their traditional bailes as evidenced by the great number of these they still preserve.³ As to the isolation of the area, we know that during the first few years following colonization by the Dominican priests, no Spaniards were allowed into it. The area remained with relatively little outside contact after that.

Robert Carmack reports that

the Guatemalan Indians were virtually unknown to the Western world at the time of independence in 1821. Several years of political instability followed in Central America, creating a climate uncondusive to contact with the outside world.⁴

Toward the middle of the 19th century, Guatemala began to open up to the world; however, the area around Rabinal was still very difficult to reach, the main reason being purely topographical.

The Rabinal territory has a gradual northward downgrade from the Sierra de Chuacus to the Rio Negro. Topography here is characteristically rugged, often intersected by steep barrancas.⁵

²Erna Ferguson, Guatemala (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1938), pp. 206-209.

³Mace, "New . . .," p. 9.

⁴Quichean Civilization (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), p. 217.

⁵John W. Fox, Quiche Conquest (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1978), p. 233.

The area was reachable only on muleback until roads were built around 1939.⁶ Even now, on manifesting a desire to visit Rabinal last year, we were advised not to go during the rainy season because we would not be able to reach the town.

There is also an isolation of the culture: the Indians are still suspicious of anyone wanting to learn about anything they consider sacred, and when asked about these matters, they rarely if ever seem to give an open straightforward answer. Thus the natives have been able to keep the little that is left of their heritage. Knowing the war waged on native cultures by the Church, we understand their need for secrecy. We have seen how the Inquisition forbade them to perform their dances in Chapter II. Brasseur gives a further account of the various means the priests used to eradicate the bailes, and explains how the natives developed their cultural isolation in order to preserve their culture.

Pero con estas diversas tentativas no se consiguió hacer olvidar a los indios sus bailes históricos y religiosos, cuyo recuerdo se encuentra á cada paso en los nombres de las poblaciones y puntos que los rodean. En los lugares donde los misioneros se negaron á tolerar dichas diversiones, hicieron de ellas objeto de reuniones secretas, que se transformaron en algunos parajes en una especie de franc-masoneria en que nadie podia ser admitido sino despues de muchas pruebas. . . .

Como quiera que sea, estas representaciones continuaron verificandose, con mas ó menos magnificencia⁷

Such were the circumstances that aided in the preservation of Rabinal-Achí until its discovery. Another fact that determined the

⁶Mace, "New . . .," p. 10.

⁷Brasseur, "De Guatemala . . .," No. 79, p. 6.

possibility of its survival was that Bartolo Sis, the town's Ah holpop in charge of dramas, was capable of writing it down, to preserve it for future generations. Still something else helped in the preservation of Rabinal-Achí, noted by Acuña: the very short time that individual priests served in Rabinal, a fact that permitted town traditions to go on undetected. In the first seventeen years of the parish from 1685 to 1702, there were twenty-one priests assigned to it; then Ximénez had it from 1702 to 1714, and in the next thirty-two years, 1714 to 1746, the town had thirty-four more priests.⁸

Historical Evidence

When Brasseur discovered Rabinal-Achí, he was certain he was dealing with a historical drama, and he assigned the events related in it to the 13th century.

Está lleno de alusiones á los usos y costumbres de los pueblos de la Vera-Paz, tales como deben haber sido en el siglo XIII, que es probablemente la época en que tuvieron lugar los sucesos de que se hace mencion en el curso de la pieza.⁹

This date has been revised as more was learned about the Quiché's history. Munro S. Edmonson says that "Su ambiente es el de las guerras de linaje del siglo XV . . .,"¹⁰ thus placing it two centuries later.

The Rabinaleros as a people of a common language are called the Eastern Quiche. In modern times this group is made up of the communities

⁸Acuña, p. 15.

⁹"De Guatemala . . .," No. 81, p. 6.

¹⁰"Historia de las tierras altas Mayas según los documentos indígenas," Desarrollo cultural de los Mayas, Evon Z. Vogt and Alberto Ruz L., eds. (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1971), p. 290.

of Rabinal, Joyabah, Cubulco, San Andrés Sajcabaja and San Miguel Chicaj. A brief overview of the history of these people up to the wars of the 15th century is provided by Fox:

The Eastern Quiche were allied with the Central Quiche fairly early in the Late Postclassic Period. Although the exact nature and origin of this political relationship are not yet known, the Eastern Quiche were a key provincial group within the Quiche state from its inception until its fragmentation. Sometime following Cakchiquel independence, the Rabinal rebelled against Central Quiche domination.¹¹

This latter period, after Rabinal gained its independence from the Quiché, seems to be the date of the conflict mentioned in Rabinal-Achí. Furthermore, "Sometime between about 1440 and 1470, the Quiché also conquered the Pokoman and Yaqui town of Quilaha, east of the Rabinal Quiché." This event is mentioned in Rabinal-Achí. However, since the Cakchiquel conquered Rabinal shortly before the Spanish conquest,¹² it is safe to assume the time to have been after 1440 but before the early 16th century. According to Angel María Garibay, the sacrificial dance was introduced in Mexico in 1456;¹³ so it is logical that the play was conceived after this date. In view of the facts available we concur with Acuña in placing the events described in Rabinal-Achí in the second half, if not toward the end of the 15th century.¹⁴ In view of this historical evidence it would be difficult to accept the possibility that Rabinal-Achí could be a 19th century elaboration.

¹¹Fox, p. 230.

¹²Ibid., p. 261, 230.

¹³Veinte himnos sacros de los nahuas (México: UNAM, 1958), pp. 178-179.

¹⁴Acuña, p. 115.

Geographical Evidence

Modern scholars studying the Quiché often base their research on the sites and events mentioned in the early documents, first of the conquistadores and priests: Alvarado, Cortés, Bernal Díaz del Castillo, Las Casas, Landa, etc.; later on the native documents: the Popol-Vuh, the Annals of the Cakchiquels and the native títulos. Lately, a new document is being consulted for its evidence, Rabinal-Achí.

Many of the places named in Rabinal-Achí have been located and are being studied, while some other sites are presumed to be in the area of Rabinal but have not yet been located. The text mentions fifty localities that René Acuña has placed in a table stating: (1) the old name; (2) its meaning; (3) its identification, lack of identification, or tentative identification with an archaeological site; and (4) the various native documents that mention this old name.¹⁵ In a separate study not quoted by Acuña, John W. Fox has identified some old sites as the ones mentioned in Rabinal-Achí. Acuña believes that in Rabinal-Achí, Cakyug is called by its full name, Tzak Cakyug Zilic Cakocaonic Tepacanic,¹⁶ while Fox believes that this name suggests "a four-part confederated settlement."¹⁷ Observations like these, although differing, do not exclude each other, and indicate that Rabinal-Achí provides solid basis for historical and geographical study.

One thing that catches our attention is the difficulty in determining the locations of the places mentioned in Rabinal-Achí. This does

¹⁵Acuña, table between pp. 114 and 115.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 112.

¹⁷Fox, p. 254.

not happen in the Apu Ollantay, where there is no question of the existence or location of the places mentioned. Paradoxically, this also suggests the authenticity of Rabinal-Achí and in the same measure reinforces our negative impression of pre-Columbian originality with respect to the Ollantay. A clear designation of place is suggestive of a fabrication; a genuine literary creation would tend to assume public geographical knowledge.

Brasseur thought, because his servant told him so, that the place where the action of Rabinal-Achí occurred was Kakyug, about two miles north of the present-day town of Rabinal. This supposition was later taken as fact, by Brasseur himself among others. However, the Dominicans did not move the natives from Kakyug to Rabinal, but from further away. Kakyug was close only by coincidence and was never the seat of the people of Rabinal. Eventually Brasseur tried to correct his mistake and said Zamaneb had been the original seat of Rabinal but later was moved to Kakyug, which he thought was the last seat of the Rabinales before the Dominican priests moved them to present-day Rabinal.¹⁸ This supposition makes no sense: Kakyug, besides being a hill too small on top is too close to Rabinal itself. Brasseur also claimed to have visited the ruins of Zamaneb.

The location of Rabinal-Achí in Cakyug would be, as Mace observed, an indication that Rabinal-Achí had been conceived after 1538, the year in which the present-day Rabinal was founded by the Dominicans.¹⁹ The Quiché text places the fortress of the king of the Rabinal in Cakyug.

¹⁸"Nociones de un viaje . . .," p. 4.

¹⁹Mace, "New . . .," p. 18.

Chiri mi-x-el-vi hun takon zamahel chuxmut cah,
 chuxmut uleu, chuvach ahaurainak tzak Cakyug-
 Zilic-Cakocaonic-Tepecanic u bi, u chi, u vach
 la tzak, la qoxtum.²⁰

Mace explains that this appears this way because

Before the migration of 1538 the Rabinal-Achí, or whatever it was called at that time, probably used place names of the area where the Rabinal tribe then lived, but after years of residence in the new town, the Indians naturally would replace them with the names of mountains and valleys near their new home.²¹

Acuña recorded how many times each ancient site is mentioned in Rabinal-Achí and concluded that seven of these—the list includes Kakyug—are in the valley around modern Rabinal and that each of these is mentioned only once in the drama. Let us remember that there are fifty town sites mentioned in all. Of the remaining forty-three, thirteen localities are around Zamaneb and these are mentioned thirty-four times. That is, out of the total of ninety-four mentions of localities, 7.45% correspond to locations around Rabinal, while 36.17% correspond to locations around Zamaneb. The emphasis is thus definitely on Zamaneb. Acuña adds that we can follow the route the main character Queché-Achí took after his departure from his home until he was captured by enemy forces:

Desde Pan Tzahachac, situado a pocos kilómetros al oeste de Lemoa, entre El Quiché y Totonicapán, ha venido en respuesta a los deseos de su señor. Su ruta está perfectamente trazada: Cholochic Chah, cerca de Chichicastenango; Chi Nimché, en las vecinidades de Cabrikán; Pan Chalib, en la entrada oeste de Xoyabah, y Xol Chacah, estrictamente en las vecinidades de Zamanib [sic]. Cuando se hallaba

²⁰Brasseur, Grammaire . . . II, p. 40.

²¹Mace, "New . . .," p. 18.

en este último sitio, el sonido de las trompetas y del tambor le revelan que los Aguilas y los Tigres de Rabinal se encuentran bailando el Lotzo Tun. El se presenta en medio de ellos, reta al Rabinal Achí, y es capturado. Obviamente, tanto ésta como la acción que se desarrolla después, tienen lugar en las vecindades de Xol Chacah, y, para ser preciso, en la montaña, de Zamaneb, donde se encuentran aún los vestigios del primitivo asiento rabinalense.²²

We agree with Acuña in placing the action west of the Rabinal region and closer to the domain of the Central Quiché. Moreover, it is important to note that when the action begins, Queché Achí is close to the western entrance of Xoyabah, near Zamaneb. We must examine Xoyabah in more detail.

Early in the Late Postclassic Period, Xoyabah was part of the Rabinal regional group known as the Chahoma, but during the Late phase was firmly tied to the Central Quiché.²³

Ximénez says that the Quiché border with Rabinal was at Xoyabah,²⁴ and there is evidence of its being a frontier stronghold of the Quiché to hold back the Rabinal.²⁵ It is plausible that the occupancy of this border stronghold could have shifted back and forth between the Quiché and the Rabinal during times of war.

²²Acuña, pp. 113-114.

²³Fox, p. 242.

²⁴Historia de la Provincia de San Vicente de Chiapa y Guatemala (Guatemala: Biblioteca "Goathemala," 1929), Vol. I, p. 484.

²⁵Ibid., pp. 49, 125, 195-196. Fr. Antonio de Remesal, Historia general de las Indias Occidentales, y particular de la Gobernación de Chiapa y Guatemala (Guatemala: Colección "15 de septiembre," 1966) II, 245, III, 1254, 1922; Adrián Recinos, Popol Vuh. Las antiguas historias del Quiché (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1953), pp. 235-236; Adrián Recinos, Crónicas indígenas de Guatemala, (Guatemala: Editorial Universitaria, 1957), vol. 20, pp. 178-179.

Xoyabah, or Xolabaj, is also known as Pueblo Viejo-Canillá. Fox carefully describes this site, its location and its buildings.²⁶ The specifications that follow are of great import for the understanding of the Rabinal-Achí text, a fact that has not yet been observed. Fox explains:

Plaza features at Pueblo Viejo may have cosmological significance. For example, the 45°-225° axis is the median between north-south and east-west cardinal axes. Moreover, the seven inset terraces on the main temple's two tiers may correspond to the seven celestial levels.²⁷

To support this theory Fox quotes Eric S. Thompson, who claims:

the thirteen celestial layers were arranged at six steps ascending from the eastern horizon to the seventh, the zenith, whence six more steps led down to the western horizon. Similarly, four more steps led down from the western horizon to the nadir of the underworld, whence four more steps ascended to the eastern horizon. Thus there were really only seven celestial and five infernal layers.²⁸

Fox concludes from this evidence: "Therefore, the highest temple and the ball court's sunken playing alley, aligned on the same axis, may reflect the sky-underworld dichotomy."²⁹

If Fox's theory is correct the Rabinal-Achí repeated imprecation "a la faz del cielo, a la faz de la tierra"—a mere "Verdadero idiotismo quiché"³⁰ according to Luis Cardoza y Aragón—suddenly acquires a

²⁶Fox, pp. 237-242.

²⁷Ibid., p. 241.

²⁸Maya History and Religion, Civilization of the American Indian Series, no. 99 (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1970), p. 195.

²⁹Fox, p. 242.

³⁰Rabinal Achí. El varón de Rabinal (México: Editorial Porrúa, S.A., 1972), p. 31.

transcendent meaning. The characters are standing, "entre le ciel et la terre,"³¹ and it would be difficult for them to stand "between heaven and earth" unless they were at a temple in which the heavens and the earth were represented by means of terraces or, better yet, unless they were standing, as we can deduct from Fox's observation, in front of the main temple itself at Xoyabah.

Thus the close examination of the text conducted adds up to the consideration of the mythical elements in the archaeological sites as provided by Thompson and Fox. Together with the previous critical observations of Mace and Acuña, they constitute acceptable evidence of the locale of the action in the play. Having established the location of "between heaven and earth" as Xoyabah, Kakyug as possible locale is eliminated and with it, the possibility that Rabinal-Achí could be a post-Columbian elaboration.

Customs and Religious Practices

Rabinal-Achí says in his first speech that he carries with him his zahcab and his zalmet. Zahcab was translated by Brasseur as "verniss blanc." Cardoza y Aragón, following Raynaud, translates it as "white earth," with which sacrificial victims were painted and which later became a symbol and a magical means of victory.³² The word zalmet is of doubtful meaning. Both Brasseur and Cardoza are satisfied with "herbs used for magic" though Cardoza specifies that met means "cotton." From the comments of different observers and texts we may conclude that

³¹Brasseur, Grammaire . . . II, p. 39.

³²Cardoza, p. 32.

zalmet is "tobacco." Eric Thompson notes that the Mazatec always carried tobacco with them in little gourds fastened to the girdle or some part of their clothing; that in the Codex Borbonicus, an Aztec book, the same tobacco gourds are prominently displayed; that tobacco was an important substance to medicine men and priests. Its uses were numerous: to strengthen the teeth, help withstand the fatigue of the road, alleviate tiredness, help put people to sleep and help digestion. For these purposes tobacco was generally ground and mixed with lime, then chewed; this was the custom among the highland and lowland Maya. Tobacco was also used as an offering to the gods, for divination, as a talisman, in burials, in the declaration of war and, of course, for the pleasure of smoking.³³

The way tobacco was used in the declaration of war is explained by Eric Thompson, who is not sure of the symbolism:

The priest, apparently impersonating the god of fire, burned at midnight a number of balls of tobacco, pronouncing at the same time the names of certain deities. Later, two men were dispatched to place two balls of tobacco, two blood-stained arrows, and some eagle feathers in enemy territory, in the house of the enemy chief, or in the enemy's city or chief temple. "This indicated an act of witchcraft as well as a declaration of war." The symbolism of the arrows and the eagle feathers, as insignia of the military orders of Jaguars and Eagles, is obvious; the significance of the tobacco is less certain.³⁴

Considered all the important properties and uses of tobacco it is doubtful that it would not be mentioned in Rabinal-Achí. It is therefore reasonable to assume that tobacco is the zalmet, "herbs used for magic."

³³Eric Thompson, pp. 108-123.

³⁴Ibid., p. 121.

There is an analogy between what Queché-Achí does in the play and the procedure for a declaration of war as explained by Thompson above. Queché-Achí is the son of Balam-Quiché, a Balam being a priest. In his fourth speech the young warrior explains that his father has sent him saying:

Run to sound the alarm and return; for I have
sheltered under my roof a herald sent between
heaven and earth; take in your hand your strength
and your bravery, the shaft of your arrow,
the mat of your shield; return to the side of
the mountain, to the entrance of the valley!³⁵

Unfortunately, there is something missing here in both the Quiché and French texts, that Brasseur marks with dotted lines. As the play reads, the Balam sends only one warrior, his son. There is not the slightest indication of troops following Queché-Achí, while Rabinal-Achí is accompanied by his Eagles and Jaguars. Queché-Achí was only emitting challenges and war cries in several places.

Queché-Achí says: "then there I have imprinted my sandal in the freshly seeded ground and in the one that had given its fruit." Foot imprints seem to be one way of marking boundaries; putting up land signals is often mentioned in the play. Acuña says that these boundaries, "según se puede inferir de la que sigue en una piedra del Xtincurún, era la planta de un pie grabada a huecorrelieve en la roca."³⁶

The apparent discrepancy of there being twelve Eagles and twelve Jaguars in Rabinal-Achí instead of the usual thirteen is not such; Luis

³⁵This and the following English quotations of the play are taken from our translation, which constitutes an appendix to this dissertation.

³⁶Acuña, p. 114.

Cardoza believes that the supreme chief also carried the honorary title. This likewise occurs in the Popol-Vuh where "el Consejero-Jefe tenía también su barrio. En resumen, . . . había un Consejero en Jefe, y doce consejeros; total trece . . ." ³⁷ There is archaeological evidence of twelve kinship-based social units. Fox has made the observation that the twin cities of Tzak Pokoma and Cahyup may have been districts of a single community since they had similar characteristics and complementary facilities; Tzak Pokoma had seven plazas and Cahyup five. Fox adds: "The 12 plazas at the two sites may correspond to 12 kin-based social units." ³⁸

Rabinal-Achí provides an example of a ritual preceding a human sacrifice. The victim is treated with all honors, and he demands such honors. First he wants a proper seat, then there is a sort of trial where his fate is decided: to be sacrificed. Following that he is given food and twelve different alcoholic beverages to drink. Next he is dressed with a garment that has been compared by Brasseur to a shining scarf. ³⁹ Then he demands to "dance" with the young virgin princess. ⁴⁰ Finally he performs a war dance with the twelve Eagles and Jaguars. There is a sequence in the play that may have a purely allegorical meaning without correspondence to actual custom: Quiché-Achí is allowed thirteen times twenty days, a complete Venus year, to return to

³⁷Cardoza, p. 36, footnote.

³⁸Fox, p. 265.

³⁹Grammaire . . . II, p. 107.

⁴⁰Luis Cardoza y Aragón believes that Queché-Achí did not judge dancing with the princess despectively for religious reasons. Found in a footnote on p. 77.

his country; when this time has elapsed he returns to his enemy to be sacrificed. The meanings of the sacred Venus year will be explained in the next chapter. Here let us observe an intriguing bit of evidence: the Venus year of 260 days is very close to the duration of a normal human gestation, 266 to 270 days from ovulation to childbirth. When we consider the significance of the "dance" of the virgin princess with Queché-Achí, and the waiting period of nearly nine months that follows it, is the Queché-Achí granted nine months to assure male descendants of this very brave man for the nation of Rabinal since he himself would not agree to join it?

That Queché-Achí returned voluntarily does not lack verisimilitude in the context of Mesoamerican custom. In the process of actual sacrifices, "Normally, the victim cooperated with the sacrificers, for he or she was guaranteed a place in heaven."⁴¹

⁴¹Thompson, p. 180.

CHAPTER V

RABINAL-ACHI AS A RITUAL DRAMA

Historical versus Ritualistic

Most criticism has traditionally held Rabinal-Achí to be a strictly historical play. In more recent studies, however, the possibility that this play might be more ritual than historical is being advanced. Furthermore, many believe like Abraham Arias Larreta that "no hay una sola manifestación cultural indígena que no tenga un contenido religioso."¹ According to Carmack "the Rabinal Achí is a fairly accurate transcription of some of the dialogue and scenario accompanying one of the important ceremonial dramas presented in pre-Hispanic times by the Rabinal Quiché."² Samuel Martí has pointed out that some authors believe Rabinal-Achí is a ritual play related to water and fertility while others see similarities with the Tlacaxipehualiztli feasts of the Aztecs.³ Acuña points out that the cycle of representation when Rabinal-Achí was first performed began on January 20, the date on which the 360-day year cycle of Guatemala began. He finds a similarity between the water goddess and the young princess and promises to "examinar el simbolismo religioso del R.A.,"⁴ but neglects to do it; in

¹Arias Larreta, Literaturas . . . , p. 184.

²Carmack, p. 46.

³Canto, danza y música precortesianos (México: w. p., 1961), pp. 55-58.

⁴Acuña, p. 91.

passing he merely refers to a possible allegorical significance without dwelling on it.⁵

An experienced scholar once illustrated the characteristic feeling of frustration accompanying the efforts of those who approach the American native texts: "You don't read the Popol-Vuh, you read at it." It is difficult to comprehend the meaning contained in the native texts; much of the language in them is in "lenguaje figurado" as the Chilam Balam de Chumayel constantly affirms. This book further states

pero no está a la vista todo lo que hay dentro de esto, ni cuánto ha de ser explicado. Los que lo saben vienen del gran linaje de nosotros, los hombres mayas. Estos sabrán el significado de lo que hay aquí cuando lo lean. Y entonces lo verán y entonces lo explicarán y entonces serán claros los oscuros signos del Katún.⁶

We can only attempt to point out some religious symbolism in Rabinal-Achí. Further explanation is left for others that will hopefully follow once the importance of Rabinal-Achí has been recognized. In this interpretation we shall employ cultural analogies.

Donald Collier says the Plains Indians believed that sun dances were necessary for the well-being of the tribe because they guaranteed rain and freedom from hunger and disease; that the dance ceremonies were rich in symbolism because they included the sun, other powers in heaven and on earth, the goddess mother, and the four cardinal points.⁷ As will be explained later, there is a relationship between all

⁵Ibid., pp. 94-95.

⁶Libro de Chilam Balam de Chumayel, p. 16.

⁷"The Sun Dance of the Plain Indians," América Indígena, III-4 (1943), 361.

aboriginal native cultures in the continent, a relationship based on race and common basic religion. Given this relationship, it seems reasonable to expect the possibility of an analogous religious element in a Maya dance performance.

Several circumstances point to there being ritual significance in Rabinal-Achí. Mace, who has witnessed the care taken in preparation of the performance, reports an involved process: the natives burn candles at five of the mountains mentioned in the play; observe sexual abstinence before and after the performance; on the eve of the performance place their masks against the church door, pray and burn candles; repeat this at the cemetery, and the entire cast with the exception of the young girl spends the night at the encargado's house. Mace adds that the members of the cast "assume their roles as a religious obligation."⁸ Mace's observations bring us to Thompson's, who notes "a cardinal requirement in carrying out any ceremony: the need for ritual purity. That, of course, was the purpose of continence and fasting before rites."⁹ Thompson's interpretation can reasonably be extended to the above-mentioned preparations as prerequisites for performing Rabinal-Achí. The natives assume their roles in the play as a religious obligation as members of a cofradía, which is a quasi-religious organization.

Before attempting to recognize any specific relationship between a given character of Rabinal-Achí and a Maya deity, we must realize that

⁸Mace, "New . . .," pp. 6-7.

⁹Thompson, p. 184.

the entire Maya pantheon of gods can be reduced to expressions of a single primordial god. The cultured ruling classes were particularly aware of the essential nature of their gods; conversely unsophisticated laborers needed to worship and believe simply and unquestionably in the various gods concerned with their different survival needs. Thompson points out that "during the Classic period, the worship of Itzam-Na approached monotheism among the ruling classes"¹⁰ and that Itzam-Na "came near to incorporating most of the other major gods in his person as his various aspects."¹¹ Thompson's theory is supported by José Díaz Bolio, a prestigious scholar native of Mérida, and Maya speaker who has dedicated a lifetime to the study of the Maya. In his voluminous treatise, Díaz-Bolio identified Itzam-Na as the Yucatec rattlesnake. Furthermore, he has discovered that on the representations of the gods the rattles of this particular snake are to be found, indicating that all these native cultures are of common ancestry.¹²

The next step in the interpretation of Rabinal-Achí is to keep in mind that the play was a performance created by and for the castes who possessed the historical knowledge, the priestly and military leaders of the Maya people, who were the ones particularly aware of the essential monotheistic nature of their religion.

Now we can focus our attention on the secondary characters of Rabinal-Achí—the young princess, King Hobtoh, and the latter's wife—

¹⁰Ibid., p. xxiv.

¹¹Ibid., p. 210.

¹²La serpiente emplumada; eje de culturas (Mérida: Registro de Cultura Yucateca, 1964), passim.

endeavoring to verify the existence of any relationship between the characters and what we know of Maya mythology. Of these three, the one that immediately catches our attention is the young virgin princess alternately called Chuch-Gug, Chuch-Raxom, and Yamanim Xtecokib, who came from Tzam-Gam-Carchag. This character at once gives the impression of being symbolical. Her role is played by a woman, while the other female roles in all the bailes are played by men. To assure the purity in the ritual and guarantee her virginity the natives cast in the role a ten to twelve year old girl. Chuch-Gug means Mother of the Precious Feathers; Chuch-Raxom, Mother of the Green Feathers, and Yamanim Xtecokib, Bright Green Stone. The precious green feathers are the feathers of the quetzal and a symbol of Quetzalcóatl, or Kukulcán Gucumatz in Quiché, the plumed serpent. Likewise green stones can be linked to the main god. Green was the color of royalty among the Maya. Quetzalcóatl is prominent in native religion, as Díaz Bolio indicates:

Es inexacto que el culto de la Serpiente Emplumada haya tenido sólo "una fase pasajera" en la vida del área maya o de Yucatán. Al contrario: constituye la columna vertebral de la cultura y nace y muere, inseparablemente, con ésta.¹³

Díaz Bolio further states that "el color verde, por consiguiente las piedras verdes, como lo son el jade y la turquesa, pueden ser emblemas solares."¹⁴ Quetzalcóatl is also the sun god. The princess' name in its entirety is then allegorical to Quetzalcóatl, through the precious green quetzal feathers and the green stone.

¹³Ibid., p. 50.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 287.

The princess' place of origin in the play, Tzam-Gam-Carchag, could only be linked to the known place called San Pedro Carchaj, Cobán, although this is far to the northeast of the locale of the play; the question of the word Carchag as probably designating origin is left unanswered. But the word Tzam provides a different kind of clue when we utilize the authority of Díaz Bolio. As he explains, the root "tza" "la tenemos por onomatopeya del ruido que hacen los cascabeles cuando son vibrados por la serpiente" ¹⁵ The "tza" element in the word designating the princess' origin is thus related to the god. The remaining element Gam could easily be can, ¹⁶ which means: four, snake, gift; it is the root of can-t-ah: to count, tell; of can-ah: to learn, of can-b-ez-ah: to teach. In its meaning of snake it is precisely an element of Kukulcán, a name Quetzalcóatl took among the Maya. In "can" are found several attributes of Quetzalcóatl, the great teacher, the one who taught how to count, from whom came mathematics, the knowledge in which the ancient cultures of Mesoamerica excelled. As a teacher the god was worshipped; there was a statue of Quetzalcóatl in the centers of learning to which sacrifices and gifts were made. ¹⁷ Accumulated clues reinforce each other: can means snake; the Tzab can ("Tzam-Gam")

¹⁵Ibid., p. 15. Díaz-Bolio's theory is that the sacredness of the rattlesnake comes originally from its ability to count the time by adding a new rattle each year. Therefore, the rattlesnake was to the natives the wisest of animals and became deified.

¹⁶The spellings in the aboriginal languages vary greatly from author to author, resulting in an added difficulty in translating and interpreting the old native texts. Their phonetics were rudimentary.

¹⁷Díaz-Bolio, p. 99.

is the rattlesnake,¹⁸ and in a ceremonial play must represent Quetzalcóatl. Although the only verbal indications given to the audience of the play regarding the mysterious princess are the names and place words that we have just seen expressed: Quetzalcóatl is a male god, while the young princess is female. However, the aboriginal American gods often had dual sexes,¹⁹ and Díaz-Bolio found one feminine figure of the cult of the Plumed Serpent, of which he showed a picture.²⁰

Let us now examine the princess' role and motions on the scene as described by Brasseur from direct observation:

Queché-Achi salue la princesse qui s'éloigne en dansant devant lui, de manière à avoir le visage tourné vers lui; il la suit de la même manière, en dansant et en balançant comme une écharpe devant elle; ils font ainsi le tour de la cour au son des trompettes et retournent ensuite auprès du roi.²¹

This scene is reminiscent of a snake dance, with the dancers facing each other swinging like a scarf, says Brasseur, endeavoring to give a graphic image of what he saw on the scene. The way a scarf swings is undulating, the movement of the snake. Sahagún reports a dance similar to this in Mexico "called a serpent dance, because they moved back and forth, and from side to side, and met each other face to face."²²

¹⁸Ibid., p. 18.

¹⁹See Thompson, pp. 273, 294-95, 304, 309, 312, 324 and 326.

²⁰Díaz-Bolio, p. xxx, plate 74.

²¹Grammaire . . . II, p. 111.

²²Quoted by Samuel Martí and Gertrude Prokosch Kurath, Dances of Anáhuac. Viking Fund Publication in Anthropology Number Thirty-eight. (Chicago: SOL TAX, 1964), p. 42.

The sparing presentation of the princess who is, as a last grace, given by the king to the defeated warrior, Queché-Achí, while warning him of the symbolic and nonfactual nature of this temporary possession, suggests that the princess is a character susceptible of being interpreted as an allegorical figure in which a transcendental message is concealed.

However, Brasseur did not even attempt to interpret this figure or her name. Without any connection and in flagrant contradiction to the content and wording of the text, the virgin princess appears in both the Quiché and French cast of characters as the Rabinal-Achí's wife. It is reasonable to assume "Rabinal-Achí" instead of "Queché-Achí" is only a slip of Brasseur's pen when he composed a cast of characters befitting European dramatic literature; still, casting her as anyone's wife is inaccurate to say the least. Whether or not it was only a lapse with Brasseur, it became an inexcusable error in the Spanish version that Cardoza published—following the French professor Raynaud—claiming it corrected the Abbé's inaccuracies. Instead, Cardoza evidently reproduced the Abbé's cast of characters, adding a prolix annotation full of mistakes, but not correcting or taking care to explain the listing of this princess as the wife of Rabinal-Achí instead of the virgin mate of Queché-Achí as she appears in the play.

Once we perceive the existence of a second stratum of esoteric meaning in the character of the young princess, the other two characters become more accessible to our understanding. The most obscure is King Hobtoh. Brasseur interpreted Hobtoh's name as a combination of

'hob pour oob, cinq, et de Toh, abrégé de Tohil, signe du neuvième jour du mois quiché, et représenté par atl, eau, dans le calendrier mexicain.²³

Thus Brasseur suggested a numerical meaning, related to the calendar. Cardoza in his translation of Raynaud says the name of the king could be translated into 'fina-lluvia' although it is more likely that it means "cinco-lluvia," indicating the birthdate of the King.²⁴ Cardoza does not explain the association. We find that the combination of hob (five) and Tohil, pointed out by Brasseur, is more significant than the Abbé realized because Tohil was the name preferred by the Quiché for the primordial god, again the plumed serpent.²⁵ Likewise, the number five is linked to the primordial god in his Venus manifestation (the relevance of the number five will be developed further on).

In the light of the previous analysis, Hobtoh's wife is clearly seen as an allegorical figure for Ix Chebel Yax, wife of Itzam-Na, the primordial god—and the successive findings continue to reinforce one another. One of the demands of Queché-Achí is a cloth woven by her: "Je vous emprunterai le tissu brillant, le tissu éclatant, broché d'or, aux couleurs si vives, travail de ma mère."²⁶ Let us notice that Queché-Achí calls the enemy queen "my mother." Ix Chebel Yax is, according to Thompson, the goddess of weaving; her activities are those of a creation goddess; she is the old red goddess "O" of the codices, whose "glyph is usually the head of an old woman with zac prefix . . . root of zacal,

²³Grammaire . . . II, p. 37.

²⁴Cardoza, p. 25.

²⁵Díaz-Bolio, p. 7.

²⁶Grammaire . . . II, p. 105.

'to weave'.²⁷ the reverence shown for her work indicates that it was sacred, a quality fitting Ix Chebel Yax. It is particularly significant that King Hobtoh, Rabinal-Achí, and Queché-Achí always refer to this character as nu te (meaning 'my mother') and Xokahau (meaning 'my queen and mistress'). The translation of the latter word offers some difficulty: xoc means "to count," "to obey," "to respect" but is also a mythical fish; ahau in an isolated form means "king" or "prince" and is always a term indicating great authority. Brasseur conveniently reduces the complexity of Xokahau by translating it into "queen." The revered cloth that she wove and her title-name together define her as the mother-goddess of creation, Ix Chebel Yax.

Another allegorical element is the counting of time. Thompson already saw that: "The magic of numbers probably meant more than pinpointing historical events."²⁸ Díaz-Bolio demonstrates the magic of the numbers 5, 8, 13, 20, 52, and 104.²⁹ It is a very complicated numerical game; we are fascinated by the coincidences in the operations and how the learned members of those ancient societies manipulated these numbers. In Rabinal-Achí we have 13 times 20 days, the Venus or sacred year, mentioned with the war and with the sacrifice, and coincidentally related to Quetzalcóatl, who legend says became the star called Venus in the west after his death.³⁰ The number five appears in King Hobtoh's

²⁷Thompson, p. 206.

²⁸Ibid., p. 25.

²⁹Díaz-Bolio, pp. 83-84.

³⁰Quoted by Díaz-Bolio on p. 81 from Mendieta.

name, which is the number associated with Venus and Quetzalcóatl. Díaz-Bolio sees

el simbolismo de la cifra cinco en estrecha relación con el dios de La Serpiente de Plumas. El calendario de la estrella Venus, en efecto, conforme al desarrollo fiel de sus tablas, ofrece, entre los veinte emblemas que lo integran, sólo cinco "portadores" o iniciales de los respectivos años (o sea revoluciones sinódicas del planeta, que integra 584 días).³¹

There are further symbolic linkings, pointed out by solid, discerning scholars, of Quetzalcóatl-Venus to the number five, namely: the tower of "El Caracol" in Chichén-Itza, dedicated to the observation of Venus, adorned with five bands instead of the usual three in other buildings, the pectoral jewel of the god-star being an object with five points,³² the fact that his glyph comprises five elements, an uncommonly rare feature in Maya writing.³³

It becomes more and more evident that simple interpretations fail to grasp the meaning of this play; they do not even succeed in finding an elementally satisfactory meaning: Brasseur's calendaric interpretation of Hobtoh's name as well as Cardoza's translation of it, which fails to explain a seemingly simple association as "fina-lluvia" or "cinco-lluvia," do not even satisfy a complacent reason nor a limited curiosity. Moreover, these explanations do not correspond to a ceremony of a people who normally composed their lore in "lenguaje figurado."

³¹Ibid., p. 141.

³²Loc. cit.

³³Thompson, p. 250.

There are several allusions to the geographic cardinal points in the play. Queché-Achí gives a war cry at each of the four corners of the courtyard while wearing the sacred scarf, and upon returning to the King after the dance around the courtyard, he announces he has "manifested" himself wearing the scarf "aux quatre coins, aux quatre extrémités . . ."³⁴ Soon he tells the king that he has shown the princess at the four corners while dancing with her; again he asks to fight with the twelve Eagles and the twelve Jaguars to amuse himself "at the four corners." Finally the four cardinal points are mentioned as part of the homeland where Queché-Achí used to seek his nourishment, the homeland to which he has bid farewell.

The drums used for the ceremony are ritual instruments themselves. Samuel Martí says about the sacred nature of these two instruments:

La importancia religiosa del huéhuetl y el teponaztli, que casi podemos considerar como instrumentos sacros, queda confirmada por su escasez y por sus representaciones en los códices, las pinturas murales, la decoración de vasos sagrados, y en pequeñas ofrendas votivas que se han encontrado en varias tumbas.³⁵

Queché-Achí seems proud that his leg bone will become the drumstick of the toponovoz, probably the specific name of the tun (or drum) used in this play; we must notice that "toponovoz" has the same root of "teponaztli" one of the Mexican drums mentioned by Martí in the previous quotation; and the description of the teponaztli coincides in detail

³⁴Grammaire . . . II, p. 109.

³⁵Instrumentos musicales precortesianos (México: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1968), pp. 32-33.

with that of the Rabinal-Achí tun. Quetzalcóatl was also the god of song and dance, one of his many attributes.

Because of all the evidence now laid before us it would be difficult to doubt the allegorical and ritual nature of Rabinal-Achí. The actions of the people in the play, and especially their names signal to the central presence of the primordial god in it.

Dance, Music, Costumes, Scene

Although we have the text and description of Rabinal-Achí as it survived up to the 19th century, many elements of the original performance have been lost: original costumes, masks, instruments and ceremonial objects as well as the precise acting and movements. From archaeological evidence we are aware that the Maya dance was similar to Oriental dances in its movements. Martí and Kurath have copied some symbolic hand positions from the Codex Dresden and have included plates of Maya statues strongly reminiscent of Oriental poses. These authors affirm: "It is evident that in both the Maya and Oriental dances the intent is not to copy nature but to reveal symbolically its magic and supernatural essences."³⁶ It is impossible for us to know to what extent the original dance movements survive, or whether they survive at all in the sporadic and necessarily poor performances in present-day Rabinal.

The Rabinal-Achí dances as described by Brasseur over a century ago befit the scene sequence in the text and seem to be quite close to the original movements, but they give us only a partial and pale idea of

³⁶Martí and Kurath, p. 26; illustrations on pp. 27-30.

the color, grandeur and impressiveness that characterized the ancient performances as reported by the first Spanish chroniclers, as they came into contact with the new culture before the nobles and priests were gone.³⁷ Let us not forget that the dances of the tun were an art for and by the ruling classes, rich in garments, jewelry, weaponry and other paraphernalia; the inhabited palaces and temples provided a frame for the performances. (Cf. Bonampak where the paintings show this court ceremony.)

The two kinds of dances of Rabinal-Achí—to which the "zapateo" must be added—are the snake dance, already discussed, and the war dances that occur during most of the play. Martí and Kurath describe the latter: they were performed to the beat of

warrior's airs which incited to courage and vengeance. These dances were similar to a tournament, simulating quarrels, struggles or battles, and the words of the chants recalled the valiant deeds of former renowned captains. These dances were called Holcan Okot and Baatel Okot, dance of the warriors or dance of the combats.³⁸

Brasseur has given us a description of what he saw during the first performance of the play on January 20, 1856.³⁹ As the play opened, Rabinal-Achí and his warriors were dancing in a circle when Queché-Achí jumped into the midst of them and delivered his first speech. The scenography calls for dancing to go on all the time except during two speeches shortly after the play begins: Brasseur explains

³⁷ Martí and Kurath, pp. 38-66, reproduce Sahagun's description of similar ceremonies.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 32.

³⁹ Grammaire . . . II, pp. 22-23.

that the scenes were interrupted from time to time by an austere dancing circle. It can be inferred from his description that only the performers in each scene—still numerous groups on that occasion—participated in the dance. Not until the end of the play, after the sacrifice, did the entire cast join in, as in modern curtain calls. There is no mention of the audience joining the dance as described by the early chroniclers.

The music of Rabinal-Achí was played, in the 1856 performance that Brasseur witnessed, on a drum and two trumpets, with the musicians sitting in the middle of the stage.⁴⁰ Acuña says that the instruments used (in modern times?) are the tun, one trumpet and a turtle shell.⁴¹ The drum or tun was played in 1856 by Bartolo Sis, the town's ah holpop, keeper of the drum and of the activities associated with the music. The tun was described by Brasseur as being

une sorte de tambour formé d'un grand troncon de bois creux, n'ayant que deux ouvertures longitudinales, au-dessus desquelles le musicien joue avec deux baguettes, également garnies de boules de gomme élastique à l'extrémité: il rend un bruit ronflant et sonore que l'on entend à une grande distance.⁴²

Mace reports that the old drums are no longer made of wood, that they are now metal.⁴³

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 23.

⁴¹Acuña, p. 95.

⁴²Grammaire . . . II, pp. 9-10.

⁴³Two Spanish-Quiché Dance-Dramas of Rabinal (New Orleans: Tulane Studies in Romance Languages and Literature No. 3, 1970), p. 47.

Brasseur had the music copied down simultaneously at the time of the staging by two young men, one of them a musician and the other his young servant, Colash López, the same person who, along with another servant, aided so cleverly in the transcription and translation of the drama.⁴⁴ Of all the music which Brasseur collected, he thought that that of Rabinal-Achí was the most genuine, probably unchanged for centuries since native music was not subject to changing fashions.⁴⁵

The men Brasseur used to annotate the music of Rabinal-Achí were not experts. Brasseur expressly declared that he used two annotators "Pour être sûr de ne rien perdre de son originalité."⁴⁶ He did not say whether the two resulting annotations were identical and if not, how he arrived at the final annotation that was published. Furthermore, there can be little doubt that the two young men transcribed what they heard only approximately. In the first place, they used the modern Western notation, which is at least as unsuitable for transcribing pre-Columbian music as it is for oriental music; the bar system, as well as the notation corresponding to exact pitch in tones and semi-tones, could only constrain the archaic American music and turn it into a debased likeness.

But there are still problems of a less subtle nature, such as the unreliability of the instruments. In this respect, musicians, composers and musicologists unaware of archaeological realities, may offer naive misjudgments. It is enlightening to reproduce at length the report of a

⁴⁴Grammaire . . . II, p. 23.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, p. 23.

social visit that Jesús Castillo, a foremost authority in Quiché music, paid to a professor at the National Conservatory in Guatemala:

Nuestra conversación, que trató exclusivamente de motivos arqueológicos, recayó sobre la estructura musical del ballet "Rabinal Achí". Aquel catedrático se encontraba muy intrigado en vista del atonalismo que la nota más grave del tun (que aquí es el bajo de la danza) determina sobre el conjunto (los instrumentos restantes, el contralto y el tiple, son dos trompetas metálicas).

Mi colega había establecido ya la fórmula tonal de la música de "Rabinal Achí," tal como la publicó Brasseur de Bourbourg . . . pero no sospechó, tan sólo, que tal fórmula, cuando el "tun sagrado" salió de mano de sus constructores, pudo haber sido muy distinta. Nuestro interlocutor, por lo que pudimos ver, no tenía la menor noticia sobre la modificación de altura o de intensidad que sufren las lengüetas del tun. En consecuencia, había establecido la tonalidad de "Rabinal Achí" sobre bases falsas, y nosotros, al publicar estos detalles que aparentemente no presentan mayor importancia, lo hacemos también con el objeto de prevenir a los futuros etnofonistas guatemaltecos contra las falsas conclusiones que resultan cuando se estudia sobre asuntos extraños o poco conocidos.⁴⁷

Although these are very learned and opportune considerations, still Castillo did not explain the full extent of the naive judgment made by the unnamed professor (of frequent occurrence among musicians as just stated). Firstly, it should be observed that the concept of atonality is a negative one which presupposes the system of tonality ingrained in Western culture. Secondly, even if the primitive instruments did not drastically lose their pitch, a drum never has the exact pitch of other instruments that permits to detect half tones clearly; this is equally true of drums capable of producing more than one note, such as the kettledrum of the modern symphony orchestra. In no way

⁴⁷ Jesús Castillo, *La música Maya-Quiché* (Guatemala: Sociedad de Geografía e Historia, 1941), pp. 36-37.

could the note recorded by Brasseur's servants for the tun represent an atonal element as such; it is rather a harsh dissonance by which the recorder was probably rendering, in a simple way, the unharmonic characteristic of the drum in relation to the other instruments in the group.

The specialist Castillo himself inadvertently fell into the mistake of applying modern musical terms or elements of judgment—without proper acknowledgement—to the ancient autochthonous Maya-Quiché music when he detected the presence of the "dominant" and absence of "sub-dominant" notes in the latter; the concepts involved in these terms only make full sense for the diatonic scale, and they are in principle irrelevant to other scales such as the pre-Columbian ones. The specialized anthropological study of native music as it exists today is the only research that could achieve scientific results in the present situation. Even under ideal conditions, the reconstruction of the original music of Rabinal-Achí would now be impossible since we cannot hear it any more, and original notations of any sort do not exist. Even this becomes an idle consideration upon discovering the cultural situation in the last decades in the Maya-Quiché zone as reported by Vera Kelsey and Lilly de Jongh Osborne, who witnessed local modern representations of dance-dramas:

Music for the dance is almost the least factor considered. . . . a marimba, drums and fifes, anything that will pound out the rhythm is satisfactory. As whatever the melody, the rhythm is the same, no special music is necessary for any dance except the secular El Son.⁴⁸

⁴⁸Four Keys to Guatemala (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1948), pp. 104 and 105.

In Rabinal there are not even any local musicians left; Acuña states that for the representation of Rabinal-Achí "Los músicos son contratados y vienen de Chajul."⁴⁹

Of the numerous cast reported by Brasseur in 1856, only the seven main characters have performed in recent years: King Hobtoh, Rabinal-Achí, Queché-Achí, the princess, one servant and two bearers.⁵⁰

All of these wear costumes but only the speaking characters now wear masks.

The early costumes, according to Bernardino de Sahagún's description:

se componían con cabelleras y máscaras pintadas, con narices agujereadas y cabellos bermejos, y traían la cabeza ancha y larga como la usan los cuextecas, y traían las mantas tejidas a manera de red.

De manera que los cantores tenían muchas y diversas maneras de atavíos, de cualquier areito, para los cantares y bailes.⁵¹

For the 1856 representation, Brasseur had to provide the people of his parish with money so that they could buy the materials needed—"plumes et les étoffes"—⁵² to make the costumes. The result of their efforts could still be recorded admiringly by Brasseur:

Les acteurs, au grand complet, étaient recouverts de leurs costumes nouveaux, la tête couronnée de leurs diadèmes de plumes flottantes en éventail, non tels qu'on les voit dans l'opéra de Fernand Cortez, mais à peu près comme ceux des chefs comanches ou apaches qu'on montre au musée de M. Catlin,

⁴⁹Acuña, p. 95.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 91.

⁵¹Historia General de las cosas de Nueva España (México: Editorial Porrúa S.A., 1975), p. 468.

⁵²Grammaire . . . II, p. 20.

à Londres. Ce qui leur donnait un caractère particulièrement original, c'était le masque en bois dont chacun avait recouvert son visage; ces masques étaient fort bien sculptés et peints, entièrement d'accord avec le rôle des personnages qui les portaient, une ouverture étant pratiquée pour les yeux à l'entour et au-dessous des sourcils et une autre à la bouche. C'était un souvenir par-⁵³ fait du masque de théâtre des Grecs et des Romains.

After we read Brasseur's enthusiastic description, Kelsey and Osborne's testimony becomes extremely disheartening: these observers reported that costumes, now rented, could be made of fabric or animal fur and were used indiscriminately to symbolize any human character. To their taste,

Incredibly gaudy, made of cheap velvets and silks in a clamor of clashing colors, ruffled and fringed and ribboned, they are further embellished with gold braid, tinsel, imitation jewels, coins and mirrors.⁵⁴

Besides these garments, Kelsey and Osborne also report plumed and rosetted hats, high red or black leather boots, wigs with red or blond curls and an umbrella carried by the leading dancers; the masks, now made of papier-mâché instead of wood, were usually smaller than the face; therefore, the neck and exposed parts of the face were tightly wrapped in cloth.⁵⁵

This deplorable situation finds confirmation in Acuña's description of relatively recent performances of Rabinal-Achí in the town of Rabinal. The princess and the two bearers wore a hat and a cloth covering their faces instead of a mask. Queché-Achí, Rabinal-Achí, King

⁵³Loc. cit.

⁵⁴Kelsey and Osborne, p. 103.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 104.

Hobtoh, the characters with speaking parts, all wore masks; the latter were indescribable according to Acuña: he could not describe them even through he held them in his hands.⁵⁶ All the information Mace gives about the masks is that

The masks of the two protagonists have crescent shaped slits on the cheeks, and when I asked the purpose they served, I was told by the Xolop family, and later by other informants, that Rabinal-Achí and Quiché-Achí had lived before the sun came up, and that they could breathe underwater.⁵⁷

These masks had been made by the Sis family.⁵⁸ Acuña reports that all the characters held something in their hands: Hobtoh, Rabinal-Achí and Queché-Achí each had a silver dish with noisy coins strung up to it in their left hand and a small ax with a kerchief tied to it in their right; the slave carried an ax in the right hand and a kerchief in the left; the princess held only one small handkerchief; the bearers, a large kerchief in each hand. The following details made a little more sense: the single tiger bearer carried a wooden shield on his back with two tigers carved on it; the shield that the bearer of the eagle carried had a double-headed eagle on it.⁵⁹

In pre-Columbian times dramatic representations were held outdoors in the plaza in front of the temples. The 1856 representation of Rabinal-Achí was held in front of the parish church.⁶⁰ As explained in

⁵⁶Acuña, p. 94.

⁵⁷Mace, Two Spanish . . . , p. 99.

⁵⁸Mace, "New . . . ," p. 6.

⁵⁹Acuña, pp. 93-94.

⁶⁰Grammaire . . . II, p. 21.

Chapter IV, Brasseur thought the play had originally been performed at Cakyug, an archaeological site in ruins situated at walking distance to the north of Rabinal. Given this fact it is possible that this could have been the last native scenario of Rabinal-Achí before the European Brasseur intervened.

The ruins at Kakyug have been neglected for years: they are eaten up by the underbrush and even a modern structure to house archaeological tools has been built on top of them. Through the courtesy of Lic. Lillian Irving de Vides' recent photographs of these ruins, we can observe the condition they are in. The small town of Rabinal does not maintain them and obviously neither does the Guatemalan government.

The play has been performed infrequently. Kelsey and Osborne, in their book first published in 1939, reported that it had not been performed since 1859, mainly because of financial impossibility. These shrewd observers nearly a half century ago realized the extent of the critical situation and feared for the little that was left of aboriginal dramas, Rabinal-Achí in particular:

Its elaborate ceremony and expensive costumes are beyond the capacity of any village at present. . . . Changing economic and social conditions, the time, labor and money involved have already debased and simplified old rituals until their original significances are lost.⁶¹

There may have been some activity that Kelsey and Osborne did not know and did not report, according to imprecise reports gathered by Acuña.⁶² In 1955 Francisco Rodríguez Rouanet interviewed Esteban Xolop,

⁶¹Kelsey and Osborne, p. 109.

⁶²Acuña, pp. 121-122.

the man in recent times in charge of Rabinal-Achí; Xolop claimed to have represented the part of Queché-Achí when he was twenty-five years old (that would make it in approximately 1930). Xolop said the dance had been discontinued for eighteen to twenty years but he had brought it back to life because he possessed the musical instruments and a copy of the text.⁶³ Acuña adds that this last revival of the dance apparently happened in the 40's.⁶⁴ Mace refers to the performances of the same period, somewhat at variance with the previous dates.⁶⁵ Upon considering the vagueness and imprecision of the notion of time among the Indians,⁶⁶ these discrepancies should not surprise anybody.

This surge of activity must have been "la mejoría que precede a la muerte." In the more recent performances the play has lost most of its cast and it is a slow and boring spectacle by comparison with post-Columbian farces still being performed in Rabinal.⁶⁷

Several factors besides those already listed militate against the survival of Rabinal-Achí. The spectacle is not only expensive, but it requires months of preparation owing to its difficulty. The dance in itself is long and tiring to the extent that in order to produce an adequate performance, as Brasseur observed, it is necessary for actors to have stand-ins to take their places when they become too tired to

⁶³"Notas sobre una representación actual del Rabinal-Achí o Baile del Tun," Guatemala Indígena, II-1 (1962), 45.

⁶⁴Acuña, p. 122.

⁶⁵Mace, "New . . .," p. 6.

⁶⁶Mace, Two . . ., p. 99.

⁶⁷Mace, "New . . .," p. 16.

continue.⁶⁸ This play is also an exceptionally serious undertaking, particularly for the dwindling number of those who hold, however weakly, to the ancestral traditions. Those playing the parts are superstitious about the exact lines and steps and the rituals that precede it, fearing that a mistake might enrage the gods, who therefore would punish them.⁶⁹ This fear, not present in relation to other autochthonous dances and post-Conquest plays, must be a strong deterrent to producing Rabinal-Achí, and characteristically it persists as a superstition outliving knowledgeable belief and worship; Kelsey and Osborne had already observed that the dancers had only a vague conception of the significance of steps or words, being content to perform according to tradition.⁷⁰ Mace's more recent testimony reveals a chaotic disintegration of the lore of legends: the people of Rabinal are very quick at supplying, in any given circumstance, whimsically strange stories; they seemingly ignore, for instance, the circumstances involving the foundation of their town in 1538, and believe or perhaps simply tell credulous strangers

that before the sun first appeared their town was built by giants—las gentes de antes—who hurled its foundations into place from the nearby mountain of Caj-Yub and then retired into the mountain where they were⁷¹ later joined by the characters of the Rabinal-Achí.

Mace's writings abound in incidents such as those described above,

⁶⁸Grammaire . . . II, p. 23.

⁶⁹Mace, "New . . .," p. 7.

⁷⁰Kelsey and Osborne, p. 103.

⁷¹Mace, "New . . .," p. 9.

indicating that the present inhabitants of Rabinal are totally confused about their cultural heritage. There are no formal historians or custodians to protect it.

Although the actors taking part in dance performances still consider it an honor to be chosen and take themselves and their roles very seriously, the difficulty, cost, incomprehensibility of the text for modern generations, and even the vague feeling of awe accompanying the representation of Rabinal-Achí are making it fall into obsolescence. The younger generation of Rabinal lacks interest in the play, to the extent that Mace in 1970 reported: "Esteban Xolop predicts the end of the Rabinal-Achí when he dies."⁷²

⁷²Mace, Two Spanish . . . , p. 10.

CHAPTER VI

LITERARY AND COMPARATIVE STUDY OF RABINAL-ACHI

Critical Consideration of the Quiché Play in the Light of Classic Greek Drama

In the classic study and definition of drama done by Aristotle in the 5th century B.C., he listed "six constituent elements of tragedy," after defining the genre. They are, in order of importance: structuring of events (plot), character (ethos), thought (dianoia), verbal expression, song composition and visual adornment (spectacle).¹ This part of the dissertation will analyze Rabinal-Achí as a poetic expression in the light of Aristotle's teaching (except for the two last elements which were treated in Chapter V because they constitute the non-verbal aspect of Rabinal-Achí). Then the linguistic characteristics of the Quiché drama will be analyzed.

1. Dramatic action and plot. Rabinal-Achí fits squarely into the dramatic genre. From the moment we read the first lines of the text and Brasseur's initial stage directions (describing what he observed), we receive a vivid impression of spectacle, action and dialog. The action of the drama begins at a late point in the story; however, at no time is this arrangement the epic in medias res followed by the tale of things past. Instead, this first action consists of the event--the capture--that precipitates a crisis. This same event is followed by the

¹Aristotle, *Poetics*, tr. and annot. by Gerald F. Else (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1967), pp. 25-29, passim.

main characters' revealing of their conflict, thus integrating the story of previous action into the plot. In broad terms this is the formal pattern of Greek tragic drama.

The unfolding of the conflict follows a very peculiar time sequence. The play opens with the challenger Queché-Achí appearing among the enemy Rabinal-Achí and his warriors, and Rabinal-Achí catching his foe with a slip-knot rope. The series of accusations and answers starts at once, revealing the conflicts in reverse chronological order: reciprocal recriminations and defense regress from the most recent to the most distant events in time, gradually revealing the deeper causes of the quarrel. In the first scene Queché-Achí speaks six times and Rabinal-Achí seven, both exploring all previous events and grievances. In the second scene Rabinal-Achí reports the capture to the king his father; he reminds the king of Queché-Achí's misdeeds against the kingdom, summarizing the accusations of the first scene. King Hobtoh, in spite of the past hostility by Queché-Achí who once abducted the king himself, seems to like the young warrior and thinks of gaining his allegiance and services in exchange for the king's granting him the highest possible status. Rabinal-Achí, jealous and angry, threatens to forsake the defense of the kingdom. In the third scene Rabinal-Achí returns to the prisoner to inform him of the king's generous offer, but Queché-Achí proudly and violently rejects it and repeats his rejection before the king. The latter answers enunciating the charges to his prisoner as they had been summarized by Rabinal-Achí in the second scene; Queché-Achí repeats every accusation word for word, admitting the envy and covetousness that provoked his actions, and admits guilt. Still proud, Queché-Achí demands that he be given treatment befitting a

hero before sacrifice, insisting that he be given the best food and drink and the magic or symbolic scarf woven by the queen; he also claims the right to dance with the princess and to be the first to enjoy her mouth and her face. Finally, he demands to be allowed to amuse himself in warlike fashion with the powerful Eagles and Tigers, and that he be permitted to return and say farewell to his mountains. The sacrificial death of the hero ends the story.

2. The epic subject. We have already noted the basic similarity to Greek tragic drama in the way the play presents at the outset a critical central event ("peripety") which is followed by a revelation of conflict, with subsequent crisis and its resolution. A return to Aristotle's 4th century B.C. observations on the nature of poetry, still valid in contemporary criticism, seems to be in order.

Aristotle could perceive that dramatic forms were superseding the old epic forms and satirical expression in his time, and that in tragedy the poets kept to the names of prominent persons—Orestes, Agamemnon, and the like—although he also noted that "in some cases only one or two of the names are traditional, the rest being invented," and that there were yet other plays where none of the names were familiar.² Rabinal-Achí could be classified as belonging to the group with the mixed characters: the two young heroes must have been identified by the original audiences as real persons or at least as the leaders of two distinct Quiché groups, while the other characters who have symbolic, composite names, could not have been identified as real persons. Homer

²Ibid., pp. 22, 23.

had used legendary-historical subject matter, and Greek dramatists used both historical and epic-poetry material for their plots. The Rabinal-Achí "material" is of an epic character, and the events reported in it have been recognized by scholars as historical conflicts that occurred in the 15th century.

From the laborious argument that goes on between Rabinal-Achí and Queché-Achí, a series of events could be reconstructed, involving either history or the epic recreation of history which constitutes the subject matter of the drama. There had been great disorder--much feasting, squandering of food and bad administration--in the Quiché kingdom, disorder that resulted in a food crisis. The Quiché king called on his lords, blaming Rabinal; he said the Quiché kingdom had been provoked. Queché-Achí answered his king's call: he razed two or three towns, kidnapped the king of Rabinal—who was later rescued by his son—and took some of Rabinal's vassals as prisoners. He was taking them to the Quiché mountains but had to release them before reaching his mountains. The captives were too weak and ashamed to return home, they had to settle down away from their native land. This is one of the charges laid by Rabinal-Achí. During this incursion Queché-Achí had seen the richness of the mountains and valleys of Rabinal, and wanted to seize part of that territory. In the meantime the Uxab and the Pokomams had decided to invade Rabinal. Queché-Achí warned them of the strength of the Rabinaleros, and later when the Uxab and Pokomams retreated, Queché-Achí let them go. This is another action for which Rabinal-Achí accuses Queché-Achí, thus indicating a previous alliance between the two princes. At this point the King of Quiché sent his son, Queché-Achí, to stake out his boundaries in Rabinal and utter his war cries. In this

process the young warrior was captured, the point at which the action of the play begins. After Queché-Achí is brought into the palace of Rabinal, the action concentrates on the trial of the hero and the pre-sacrificial offerings and favors granted to him, all culminating in his death. With these legendary-historical events a simple but forceful plot is created by means of the conflicting reactions of Rabinal-Achí and his father, and the haughty behavior of the imprisoned hero.

3. Ethos and dianoia. The plot, as well as the story serving it as dramatic material, centers around the deeds and character of Queché-Achí; he is unquestionably the real protagonist. The important character named Rabinal-Achí is a brave and honest warrior—he will not be bribed—with an only too human component of insecurity and jealousy; still he is the flattest among the three important male characters of the play, just a rigid military leader. His father, King Hobtoh, is shown to be in sympathy with the fallen hero. Against his wishes he must carry out the law and condemn the enemy warrior to death. The queen and the princess are only presences and symbols. The remaining speaking characters, the two slaves—Ixok-Mun and a nameless slave—are reminiscent of the Greek chorus; they speak to warn Queché-Achí of what is wrong and must not be done. Queché-Achí, unbendingly haughty when confronting the king and his son, obeys these two slaves without uttering a word. The Eagle and Jaguar knights are likewise similar to the Greek chorus, setting a martial pantomime.

In the complicated prose of his Poetics, the Greek philosopher states that those who perform the action

must necessarily have certain traits both of character and thought (for it is thanks to these two factors that we speak of people's actions also as having a defined character, and it is in accordance with their actions that they either succeed or fail) . . . by "plot" I mean here the structuring of the events, and by the "characters" that in accordance with which we say that the persons who are acting have a defined moral character, and by "thought" all the passages in which they attempt to prove some thesis or set forth an opinion . . .³

The problems of conduct in Rabinal-Achí are simple and well defined—they are very far from the conflicts of conscience of Agamemnon or Orestes—; nonetheless the deeds in the Quiché play lead us to characterize the agents as being either right or wrong. This is particularly true in the case of Queché-Achí, whom we are judging throughout the action; this trait by itself would be enough to point to him as the hero of the play.

In the same section of Poetics, the philosopher expands his notion of "thought" and adds an interesting judgment comparing the best models he has in mind with those of the poets of his time:

Third in rank is thought. This is the ability to state the issues and appropriate points pertaining to a given topic, an ability which springs from the arts of politics and rhetoric; in fact the earlier poets made their characters talk "politically," the present-day poets rhetorically.⁴

The question arises: to what extent is "thought" ("dianoia") a major element in Rabinal-Achí? The events happening on the stage of classic Greece were more involved both morally and politically. Greek plays were spawned in the most mature and brilliant cultural flowering we have

³Ibid., p. 26.

⁴Ibid., p. 28.

ever known, having the genius of Homer as a precedent three or more centuries before, and that of Plato and Aristotle later on. Also the city that gave birth to the great tragedies and first comedies was the immediate heir of Solon the lawmaker. Present-day classical scholarship has pointed out the importance of "logos" or reason and the rational principle in the art of tragedy.⁵ Nevertheless, the more we ponder the multiple aspects involved in this dramatic element, the deeper we become involved in the critical appreciation of the Quiché play, eventually realizing that the element of "dianoia" is represented in the long arguments that occupy almost half of the dialog of Rabinal-Achí, the very arguments that we will find to be "legalistic." We think of the unemotional character of those dialogs—that is, they display the emotional tension that may be felt in a courtroom—and remember the similar characteristic which recent scholarship has pointed out in Greek tragic drama. We should establish a basis for this comparative approach by quoting at length from a classical authority:

The spirit of Dionysius is Protean, infinitely diverse yet single: lop off a limb here and he will grow a new one there. And there is no doubt that Nietzsche caught and characterized the essential thing about that spirit: that it is ecstatic, irrational, self-contradictory, wild, refractory to discipline, gay yet menacing, eternally the same yet eternally the other. Lesky speaks for many scholars when he identifies the Dionysiac ecstasy, Ergriffenheit, as the root of the tragic drama. Yet he himself speaks of the "logos-bound world of tragedy," and I would insist on that distinction. Nothing either in the traditions about Thespis or in the extant plays, earlier or later, shows any trace of the "Dionysiac ecstasy." Peretti has

⁵After the already classic Paideia by Werner Jaeger, cf. Gerald F. Else, The Origin and Early Form of Greek Tragedy (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1965).

shown that the actors' speeches in the earliest extant plays follow a strict rational pattern, dry rather than emotional: no touch of Ergriffenheit in them. And when the choruses reach a high point of emotion, their feelings are either fear or grief—not ecstasies, Dionysiac or other.

.....

Actually, as Cantarella pointed out, the logos, the speech or discourse of the tragic actor, is not only un-dithyrambic and un-Dionysiac, it is anti-Dionysiac. The tragic hero presents himself as an irreducibly separate person. His self-awareness is at the opposite pole from the Dionysiac frenzy of self-abandonment, the drowning of all individuation in a mystical unity. There is no place in the development of the tragic actor for Ergriffenheit or "possession," Dionysiac or other.⁶

Here is the relatively cold, argumentative speech of tragedy, for which Thespis abandoned the epic meter and followed Solon's use of iambic and trochaic verse.⁷ Aeschylus sought an even simpler tone, limiting his choice to the iambic; commenting on this development, Aristotle explained that

when speech came along the very nature of the case turned up the appropriate verse. For iambic is the most speech-like of verses. An indication of this is that we speak more iambs than any other kind of verse in our conversation with each other, whereas we utter hexameters rarely, and when we do we abandon the characteristic tone pattern of ordinary speech.⁸

Speech is also what we have in Rabinal-Achí, at times sprouting in deeply felt poetry but more frequently being "the ability to state the issues and appropriate points pertaining to a given topic"—which are

⁶Ibid., pp. 30-31, p. 69.

⁷Ibid., p. 64.

⁸Poetics, p. 23.

Aristotle's words defining *dianoia*—,⁹ an art more rhetorical than poetic. Still the "Dionysiac" spirit lies underneath, and some of its "frenzy" becomes evident in famous moments of Greek tragedy or can be felt, partial or subdued, in the lamentations of the chorus; in the Quiché drama the poetic spirit is also present but with restrained lyricism, as in the charming descriptions of nature and the doleful farewell of Queché-Achí to his mountains and valleys, and any frenzy is left to the dance. And regarding the ritual esoteric substratum that is felt more and more as the play nears its ending, the presence of logos is precisely what determines the allegorical expression in two levels of meaning.

Pondering the Aristotelian element of "thought" opens up a farther-reaching consideration. Aesthetically and artistically oriented observations prove to be legitimate and valid, but how could anybody attach any stylistic label on a creation that already shows such artistic complexity, when basic elements of judgment are lacking? Even when calling it "archaic" or "primitive" we are only categorizing it in a frozen mold from our enormously distant vantage point in history. But in its own existence, in its stage of development following models that are lost for us, how can we tell for sure whether the original Rabinal-Achí was an expression corresponding to a Maya Aeschylus or an Euripides, or even a less inspired follower? Was it an art of youth or decadence? We will acknowledge the universal reach of classical observations about figures of speech, literary genres and the like; if Aristotle's

⁹Ibid., p. 28.

observations on dianoia could serve as a hint, the superabundance of rhetoric in Rabinal-Achí would point to an art of decadence.

After finding such similarities between Rabinal-Achí and Greek tragic drama as it is analyzed by Aristotle, should Rabinal-Achí be called a tragedy? Possibly, in a loose sense. Not so in the strict sense of the word. It has been pinpointed that the dying saint, the martyr is not tragic because death for him does not involve suffering (pathos,¹⁰ the ever-present third part of the tragic plot according to Aristotle¹¹) but salvation—the way to fulfill his existential being at once on earth and in heaven. The Maya "victim cooperated with the sacrificers, for he or she was guaranteed a place in heaven" notes Thompson.¹² To this universal belief and behavior the Quiché hero adds his unbending haughtiness. Rabinal-Achí begins with the Aristotelian "peripety"—sudden reversal of fortune—, but there is not the additional necessary mistake of Greek tragedy in the hero's deeds nor any flaw in his otherwise good moral character.¹³ There is no tragic choice either: the imprisoned young warrior could have chosen to accept King Hobtoh's offer of adoption, honors and riches, to become one of the greatest warriors, and gain the hand of the virgin princess; precisely this alternative—a situation all but pathos, unavoidable tragic

¹⁰Brought up by Wolfgang Kaiser, Interpretación y análisis de la obra literaria. Spanish translation in which the author contributed directly. (Madrid: Gredos, 1961), p. 495.

¹¹Poetics, p. 37 ff.

¹²Thompson, p. 180.

¹³Poetics, p. 38.

ruin—illustrates the desirable character of the hero's fateful choice, for him the attainment of his full measure of greatness.

4. Unities of action, place and time. The unity of action, highly esteemed by the Greek philosopher Aristotle when he theorizes in Poetics on the superiority of drama over epic, is achieved in Rabinal-Achí in a striking manner. It is indeed interesting to note that the Quiché play likewise conforms to the so-called unities of time and place, which became predominant in the classic Greek drama of the 5th century B.C. and much later returned as a set of rules in the Italian drama of the Renaissance and in the neo-classic drama in 17th century France. It did not affect Spanish or English theatre so strongly.

Aristotle never mentioned, much less defined, any unity of place, and he only observed the occurrence of what later was labeled a "unity of time" in that "so far as its length is concerned tragedy tries as hard as it can to exist during a single daylight period, or to vary but little . . ."¹⁴ The action of Rabinal-Achí is easily encompassed in an imagined day between sunrise and sunset; that is the impression given by the flow of events, the fast pace at which they succeed one another. There is no indication of a day passing until at the very end Queché-Achí requests and is implicitly granted 260 days of freedom in order to pay a last visit to his mountains. The hero backs away dancing, disappears for a moment; then, without returning to where the king is seated, he approaches the Eagle and the Tiger warriors grouped in the

¹⁴Ibid., p. 24.

middle of the stage and around the sacrificial altar, and speaks the last words of the play:

And you, oh Eagles, you Tigers: "He is gone!"
 you have doubtlessly said . . . No I am not gone;
 I have only gone to greet for a last time the image
 of my mountains, the image of my valleys . . .

Brasseur, in an attached footnote, was the first to interpret that Queché-Achí had only gone off a few paces, since the mountains could be contemplated from the palace itself. Brinton gives a similar, though somewhat emotional and distorted interpretation:

One more request he proffers—that for thirty times twenty days he may be free to take one last look at his native mountains. It is received in silence. The hero disappears and the guards whisper, "He is gone." But he enters in a moment, and tells them he is no coward to flee, that life to him is without attractions; and concludes "Come, ye Eagles, come, ye Tigers, do your duty, obey your orders; but let your beaks and your claws tear so that I die in an instant; for I am a warrior, and I have shown it on my mountains and in my valleys . . ."¹⁵

This episode is difficult to interpret in its totality, since the request, the tacit concession, and the number of days seem to have an esoteric, allegorical meaning—as shown in the analysis in Chapter V—which must be carefully studied. A number of days coinciding with the year of Venus, Quetzalcóatl's planet, is important and "real," although this reality may belong to a transcendental realm. The hero goes and returns and nothing has changed on the stage; everybody remains in place and retains the same attitude that they had when Queché-Achí disappeared. It is possible that the hero indeed leaves in a cosmic, supernatural

¹⁵Brinton, "The Abbé . . ." p. 85.

journey; the 260 days of Venus' orbit granted to Queché-Achí are a "reality" which does not alter the poetic single day of the drama.

Writing on the differences between epic and tragedy, Aristotle commented on the tendency of the former "toward extra extension of its bulk," while

in the case of tragedy it is not possible to represent many different parts of the action as of the time they are performed but only on the part on the stage . . .¹⁶

This is all he ever said about "place," and on this none too clear passage the neo-classic rule of spatial "unity" was based. It happens naturally that many classic Greek plays have a single locale, and the same concentration is naturally achieved in Rabinal-Achí: the first and third scenes occur in front of the palace-fortress; the second and fourth in its central courtyard.

Linguistic Analysis

The aim of this part of the chapter will not be to study the language of Rabinal-Achí per se, but to examine the language to the extent that it determines the literary expression. This will help us to interpret and enjoy the literary work. In other words, our linguistic approach will have a stylistic aim. Of course, a specific approach through stylistics is not applicable to the consideration of Rabinal-Achí, since we lack the needed information to establish the historical relationship of the work to a well-known body of literature, to its time, to its author if he is known, in order to distinguish and determine a "style." Nevertheless, we can discover linguistic devices that

¹⁶Poetics, p. 64.

were first observed in the ancient classics of our European tradition, devices which suggest universality of human expression.

The aspect of sound will be left aside altogether. There is much not yet known about it and we are not prepared to break ground in this direction. Even after knowing the Maya language and its Quiché dialect in particular, it would be necessary to solve the riddle of the ancient language by a separate and extensive work of scientific scholarship. Occasionally we have taken advantage of observations in this area made by some eminent scholar—such as Díaz Bolio—and we may dare to advance a hypothesis that includes the consideration of sound, endeavoring to understand a term lacking sense. But arriving at a systematic and historically reliable perception of characteristics such as rhythm, rhyme, alliteration, onomatopoeia, or harmony in Rabinal-Achí would by itself require a complete dissertation.

A text we do have, however much it is in need of critical revision. For that text we must be grateful to the Dominican friars, to a mindful Rabinal native like Sis, and to an opportunistic adventurer like Brasseur, trained in the humanistic French schools. Words we do have, and combinations of words.

An examination of the words in Rabinal-Achí quickly reveals a scarcity of adjectives and a full measure of noun subjects and objects. In the attributive function the preposition-noun group or the noun in adjectival function prevail—"ahau Chacachib, Zamanib" ("prince [of] Chacachib and Zamanib"); "chuvach cah, chuvach uleu," "chuvach chi cah, chuvach uleu" ("to the face of heaven, to the face of earth"). This attribution by means of nouns, along with several other stylistic devices which will be analyzed below, contributes to an extraordinary

abundance of nouns, which are characteristically found in emphatic position ending the sentences. In the system of our Western literature, the Rabinal-Achí speeches would be described as having a nominal style.

Concrete attributes and predicates corresponding to concrete subjects are the norm in the play, although there are exceptions as in the following concrete predicate for an abstract noun subject: "Mapa Beleh-Mokoh, Beleh-Chumay x-bec u mukic, u pizic va oyeualal, va achihihilal kumal c'ahaua . . .?" ("is it not into Beleh-Mokoh, into Beleh-Chumay where that rage and bravery have gone to have themselves buried and entombed by us princes . . .?") This example appears at face value as a concretization of something abstract (virtues being buried), but a correct interpretation will not miss the primary metonymy ("rage" and "bravery" for "raging and brave warrior") that produced the apparent abstract terms in the first place.

Upon considering groups of words in Western literature, we find ourselves with forms that were defined in ancient times as devices for eloquence, and which became a traditional study in Western culture. The theories and doctrines of rhetorical figures as devices or resources to be learned in order to beautify or adorn language consciously have been expressly rejected since the Romantic period; however, contemporary scholarship accepts the rhetorical figures which have been identified by the ancients, since they are found in linguistic and stylistic analyses of texts, modern as well as ancient. The fact that they are found in Rabinal-Achí, a creation of a people belonging to a continent cut off from the rest of the world, and in a state of civilization centuries behind the Classical Mediterranean cultures that listed the "flores rhetoricales," indicates that these figures are indeed natural,

universal, spontaneous resources of the human language. This judgement is reinforced by the manner in which the words are used in the Maya play; their combinations may conform essentially with one or another rhetorical figure (as in the metonymy already discussed), but the concrete, individual figures do not bring to mind anything that we may have read in Golden Age literature. In other words, at no time does the poetic language of Rabinal-Achí arouse the suspicion of any kind of contamination from Spanish letters.

Parallel expressions and pre-Columbian metaphors and symbols were ascribed to Rabinal-Achí, without any elaboration or exemplification, by Miguel León-Portilla in his brief treatment of the drama.¹⁷ Angel María Garibay Kintana had called attention to the prevalence of parallelisms and pairing of synonyms and metaphors ("difrasismo") in Nahuatl poetry, incidentally noting that such devices are found in "las más disimilares literaturas"¹⁸ Garibay supposes the repetitive stylistic resources have mainly mnemotechnic and teaching purposes.¹⁹ This sort of explanation—figures of speech as a teaching device—is no more applicable to archaic and primitive modes than to modern attitudes and tastes, as exemplified by the fondness for double and multiple formulas in baroque literature. When we read both modern and ancient examples without stopping to analyze, what we feel without having to rationalize is either a simple delight in the conceptual, or the suggestive, magic power of words.

¹⁷León Portilla, p. 105.

¹⁸Historia de la literatura náhuatl, 2nd ed. (México: Editorial Porrúa, 1971), I, pp. 19-20, 65 ff. He also repeats it in his extensive study Poesía náhuatl.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 387-8.

Dámaso Alonso has studied these devices in Golden Age verse and prose; Gracián, the theorist of "agudeza" and brevity, abounds in examples in verse, like this simple pairing by Góngora ("agudamente" alluding in separate paronomasia, to the name of a ministro, Arroyo):

Arroyo, ¿en qué ha de parar
tanto anhelar y subir?
tú, por ser Guadalquivir,
Guadalquivir por ser mar.

Or in the extreme of ingeniousness by the same poet—two extended parallels in a complex sequence—:

Mientras por competir con tu cabello,
oro bruído al Sol relumbra en vano,
mientras con menosprecio en medio el llano
mira tu blanca frente el lirio bello;
Mientras a cada labio, por cogello,
siguen más ojos, que a clavel temprano,
y mientras triunfa con desdén lozano
del luciente marfil tu gentil cuello;
Goza cuello, cabello, labio y frente,
antes que lo que fue en tu edad dorada,
oro, lirio, clavel, cristal luciente:
No sólo en plata, o viola trocada
se vuelva, mas tú, y ello juntamente
en tierra, en humo, en polvo, en sombra, en nada.²⁰

These examples should suffice to make us feel the difference between Spanish and Mesoamerican poems, even when both expressions handle essentially similar linguistic devices, which are universal. Other examples are found in ancient Hebrew poetry, especially the Psalms; in one case we see a pairing of metaphors, in the other a synonymic double formula:

He drew me up from the desolate pit,
out of the miry bog (40:2)

²⁰ Baltasar Gracián, Agudeza y arte de ingenio (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe S.A., Colección Austral, 1957), pp. 297, 201.

But they flattered him with their mouths;
they lied to him with their tongues (78:36)²¹

Or in another archaic, primitive expression we find an even more striking example:

So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him,
male and female he created them. (1:27)

The parallel expression is here inverted, a chiasmus. The initial section of Genesis, corresponding to an archaic culture like the Maya, is an opportune example of the use of repetition for poetic or expressive effect (not merely mnemotechnic or didactic). We can observe the use of the anaphoric construction through the successive endings of the stages of Creation (the six days of divine work):

And there was evening and there was morning, one day.
.....
And there was evening and there was morning, a second day.
.....
And there was evening and there was morning, a third day.²²
.....

And so on. Since otherwise Genesis is notably devoid of parallelism, so the chiastic repetition of the first example—"God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him"—has a tremendous expressive force, which continues through the resolution—"male and female he created them." This verse has provoked negative reactions and controversial interpretations of the Old Testament.²³

²¹The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha. Expanded Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 686, 716.

²²Ibid., pp. 1-3.

²³The current scholarly editions of the Bible, both Jewish and Christian, do not seem able to handle the diversity and fundamental nature of interpretation and avoid reporting it. Leone Ebreo saw in Adam a primordial androgyne, and in Genesis a source of Aristophanes'

The parallelistic constructions of Rabinal-Achí were not created for non-learned spectators any more than those of Genesis were for the non-learned; they are intensifiers to reach naive as well as learned sensitivities. That poetic figures are devices for forceful expression in cultural works transmitting knowledge to the respective people is another question. The Bible is in part revelation, teaching; one of the springs of poetry observed by Aristotle is the human appetite for learning.

In Rabinal-Achí we also have these didactic-aesthetic expressions. The first line of the Quiché drama is already a synonymic double formula ". . . vorom ahau, cakom ahau." (" . . . infamous prince, hateful prince"). The same speech contains an anaphoric pair: "chuvach cah, chuvach uleu" ("à la face du ciel, à la face de la terre" in Brasseur's French; "to the face of heaven, to the face of earth"; "chi" [preposition and adverb of place] proclitic with "huach" [forehead, face]: "ch'uac" or "ch'uach;" alphabetic symbols must be accepted with a degree of "tolerance" for sounds which do not coincide with those in Spanish or French).²⁴ The anaphora "chuvach cah, chuvach uleu" is a

fable in the Symposium, since the word for "rib" in Genesis is the one equally meaning "side" (like the Latin "costa"; the New Oxford Annotated Bible suggestively italicizes "rib" in the corresponding note on p. 4). The Cabalistic tradition read the text literally: the new being is an androgyne, thus resembling God; it may be observed that this interpretation finds support in the comparative study of ancient conceptions of God's nature.

²⁴The Maya language lacks the Spanish sounds "d," "f," "r," and "s." The "h" of textual notations, with variations in pronunciation, is equivalent to the Spanish "g" or "j." There are several consonant pronunciations close to the "ch" and, likewise close, an aspirated "t" "tildada" or "double," hard and soft; there is a phoneme "k," hard and soft, different from the hard "c" found in both the Spanish and Maya languages; there is an explosive "double" "p," hard and soft, achieved

sort of formula or inclusion constantly enunciated, serving as a poematic link for the whole drama.

Anaphoric repetition persists, becoming the predominant linguistic device. In the second speech: "Qui-ta-vi-ba cah, qui-ta-vi-ba uleu!" ("aussi vraie que voilà le ciel, aussi vraie qu'existe la terre" Brasseur translates, somewhat debilitating the Quiché anaphora for the sake of variety [words with our underlinings]). An asyndetic seriation (that is, leaving out conjunctions) with anaphoric repetition and final intensification ensues: 'mi-x-c'at yauic chupam r'al nu chab, chupam r'al nu pocob, ruq nu yaquim vit, nu yaquim v'icah, ruq nu chincu, nu galgab, nu zahcab, nu zalmet, ruq nu couil, v'achihilal." ('you have just delivered yourself to the shaft of my arrow, to the mat²⁵ of my shield, to my Toltec club, to my Yaki ax, to my bone bracelets, to my metal bracelets, to my white varnish, to my zalmet—this term was explained in Chapter IV—, to my strength, to my courage'). Expressive as well as emotional intensity is heightened at the end by the metonymic 'my strength,' 'my courage' for the subject of those virtues.

by introducing the lips between the teeth; an unvoiced cluster "tz"; a voiced cluster "dz" which is also represented by an inverted "c." These different phonemic sounds are peculiar and must be learned by listening and imitating the native speakers. There is a contamination of the Spanish "r" sound in Maya words normally pronounced with "l" (Santiago Pacheco Cruz, Compendio del idioma maya [México: w.p., 1948], pp. 7-11). The "r"-"l" confusion and substitution is well known in various linguistic areas of the world. The present-day Quiché dialect has a velar or uvular sound represented by an "r"; the French Brasseur may have contributed decisively to this spelling, and in his Quiché text there seems to be some hesitation or variation between "c," "g," or "h" and "r" for the same words.

²⁵Erroneously translated by Brasseur as "pointe" and "fils" respectively; see Appendix I.

Let us consider again the multiple anaphoric construction quoted in the last paragraph. The greatest Spanish writer, Cervantes, as a prose stylist second to none in Western literature, was a master with anaphoras: "A mí ni me mueven promesas, ni me desmoronan dádivas, ni me inclinan sumisiones, ni me espantan finezas enamoradas" says his gypsy character Preciosa. It is the same linguistic device, here similarly resting on the repetition of the pronoun; but now we breathe, in addition to the air of Cervantine freshness, the atmosphere of a distant culture.

In the following paragraph, Rabinal-Achí speaks for the second time, repeating exactly the same long asyndetic seriation, followed by several binary anaphoras. Then Queché-Achí speaks for the second time, and the new extended accumulation of binary anaphoras becomes terribly heavy in a French—or Spanish, or English—translation.

There are remarkably beautiful passages in the drama, particularly those by Queché-Achí, such as his farewell to life at the end. The predominant figures are the same throughout: parallelisms, anaphoras or double formulas with synonyms, and metonymic metaphors.

Nature and Tone of the Dialog

Repetition in Rabinal-Achí not confined to linguistic forms or poetic devices constantly occurs as a normal feature of dialog which clarifies the content of discussions and arguments. One aspect of this argumentative repetition is somewhat "legalistic": the victor addresses the vanquished warrior blaming him at length for all his past provocations, abuses, "unjust" warlike behavior, in a sort of summation of legal prosecution; the prisoner answers the charges at equal length,

alternating with the accuser. During practically all the first and third scenes (of the four that make up the play), whatever one of the young warriors says, the other repeats before responding; if one says "A," the other retorts "did you say 'A'? Then I say 'B'." The antagonists need to clarify every detail in a prolix recall of their conduct to be able to impose or accept a "fate"; it is a kind of contractual relationship needing to be laboriously defined. Repetitious clarification is for the most part absent during the second scene in the conversation between Rabinal-Achí and his father King Hobtoh; but when Rabinal-Achí threatens to stop defending the kingdom of his father because the latter is considering the adoption of the defeated warrior, Hobtoh repeats his son's words before responding. At the beginning of the final scene, the defeated prince Queché-Achí and King Hobtoh repeat each other's dialog once, but after Queché-Achí has made his decision, the situation is settled and is accepted by the victim as well as his conquerors. The dialog then flows without any further need for repetitious clarifications.

The wondrously repetitive argumentation in addition to the piling up of linguistic devices that has already been analyzed may prove to be, when read in a translated version, unbearable to Western mentality and taste. By the same token, Edmonson has stated this "monotonous, heroic and totally nonromantic style and the obscure and archaic language rule out the possibility of European authorship that has sometimes been hinted."²⁶ There is no amount of poetic ability capable of lightening that load for European readers in a faithful translation; on

²⁶Edmonson, p. 272.

the other hand a reconstruction truthful to the spirit of the drama but which would shorten it considerably could become a beautiful story as well as a libretto for a modern oratory or opera-ballet. An unusually beautiful example of a modern work with this inspiration was done by Carlos Girón Cerna in his Quiché-Achí²⁷ Yet the literal translation is needed as a document for information and reference for many scholars and readers already interested in Maya history, archaeology, lore and art, as well as those concerned with the comparative study of the ancestral beginnings of theatre. The judgment contained in this paragraph does not affect the original Quiché drama; its possibilities and undeniable beauties, inseparable from it in its synthesis of authentic spectacle, music, dance and poetry have already been vindicated.

Rabinal-Achí and the Origins of Drama

When we compare the ancient Quiché drama with the first recorded expressions of Western drama, a historical circumstance which attracts our attention is the remarkable absence of any correspondence between the artistic development of the dramatic expression—the dramatic genre—and the level of culture. Thespis is still a protodrama, still with a single actor and an incipient chorus; one must proceed almost a century onward to Aeschylus, already separate from Solon and at a distance of several centuries from the great Homeric epic and twice as far from the

²⁷(Printed in U.S.A.: w.p., 1975). Girón Cerna recognized Queché-Achí as the protagonist and named the work after him. This play was performed in Guatemala city at the Escuela Normal de Señoritas in 1946 and repeated in the summer of 1947. It was translated into English by Nora Thompson and performed in this country at the Irvine Auditorium of the University of Pennsylvania on March 31, 1950.

Bronze Age, in order to find the crystalization of the dialog form and dramatic expression. With no need to take into account the multiple literary and aesthetic aspects of the Greek tragedy and comedy that prodigiously flourished in the 5th century B.C., and even less to compare the aesthetic achievements of cultures diverse in extreme, it is legitimate to affirm what appears as a simple observation: the dramatic form had a relatively faster and more complete development in the Maya world than in the pre-classic Greek until its culmination with Aeschylus. It is at this point that our attention is called to the fact that the Maya culture that produced Rabinal-Achí had reached a stage equivalent to the Neolithic, while with the advent of tragedy ancient Greece was at the threshold of Plato and Aristotle—that is, in the process of civilization we are contemplating a relative distance of many centuries between the Maya and the Greeks of Thespis, Solon and Aeschylus.

In any study comparing Rabinal-Achí with the drama of other ancient cultures, the observation of the former paragraph should be useful. Only taking it into account will it be possible to study, for instance, significant similarities with the Japanese traditional drama, although the latter has a relatively late and slow development. This lack of correspondence between certain artistic expressions and other cultural achievements, a phenomenon detected by simple observation, leads to the formulation of problems of great interest—problems that go beyond the purpose and plan of the present study.

Hypothetical problems for future investigations open in several directions. The most recent archaeological and anthropological studies have shown remarkable correspondences between the remnants and lore of the Far East—Japan, eastern Siberia—and that of Western North America

down to the ancient peoples of Mexico, correspondences that point to ancestral migrations and common cultural origins. The cardinal studies of José Díaz Bolio go beyond his native Yucatán and contribute valuable links to the above-mentioned research. In the light of the observations contained in these pages it would be interesting to explore possible common artistic elements—including dance and spectacle—, content, motifs and ritual aspects in Rabinal-Achí and the ancient Japanese drama, which goes back in its literary history to the 14th century A.D., that is, a relatively recent epoch in historical Eurasian times. This formulation does not pretend to advance any conclusion, although new avenues for possible future investigation are foreshadowed.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

This study provides the beginnings of a comprehensive analysis of Rabinal-Achí. The study situates the drama among other pre-Columbian literary works, analyzes the contribution of its controversial discoverer, gives further evidence of its authenticity, explores its symbolism and presents the first literary analysis of the Quiché play. Moreover, of great importance is the English translation made from the original text and Brasseur's French version. The major contribution of this study is to make Rabinal-Achí accessible to English-speaking scholars in various fields such as archaeology, comparative literature, and anthropology, many of whom have no idea of the existence of a native pre-Columbian drama.

The chapter on Charles Etienne Brasseur de Bourbourg, the discoverer of Rabinal-Achí, is one of its primary contributions. An impartial assessment of Brasseur's historical background, character and reliability was very much needed. This biographical study will be valuable to scholars approaching the numerous documents Brasseur found and published. Since the Abbé was the main discoverer and preserver of the most important documents from pre-Columbian times, any scholar approaching them must be able to assess the validity of the works themselves and the judgments or comments added by Brasseur. For this purpose the chapter on the French priest should be helpful to future researchers.

Another contribution of the study has been the updating of speculation on both the locale and the date of the original Quiché drama. Brasseur thought Rabinal-Achí was describing events that had occurred in Kakyug in the 13th century. Both his locale and date have been rejected by later scholars, who moved the date up to the 15th century and pointed out the impossibility of Kakyug as being the locale. This study suggests that the actual locale for the drama was Xojabah, or Pueblo Viejo Canillá.

Since, as far as we know, the Maya's cultural expressions were always centered on their mythology, and at first glance mythical elements seemed to be absent from Rabinal-Achí, some scholars were confused about the nature and originality of the Quiché play. This study has discovered key Mayan mythological patterns by identifying the Queen, King Hobtoh's wife, as an allegorical figure for Ix Chebel Yax, the creation goddess, and by pointing out the veiled relationship of the king and the princess to the Maya primordial god, Quetzalcóatl.

This study has also provided the first literary analysis of the Quiché drama, comparing it to the first great dramatic expression of Western culture, the classic Greek tragedy. It has also done the first extended linguistic analysis of the play and found several seemingly universal rhetorical and linguistic devices used in it. A comparison of these devices to those used in Spain's Golden Age literature and in the Bible, has uncovered no evidence that these two literatures exercised influence on Rabinal-Achí, which helps to support the conclusion that the Quiché drama is autochthonous.

As an important appendix to the dissertation, we have provided a translation into English of the French version of the Quiché drama. For reasons clarified especially in the introduction to the translation, every possible attempt was made, to the point of at times bending the English language, to keep the translation as close as possible to the French (and therefore to the Quiché). We have especially endeavored to preserve the beauty and lyricism of the particularly archaic language and the constant repetitions. The content of Rabinal-Achí is clearer and easier to understand than most native texts.

As another possible contribution we have discovered Rabinal-Achí to be a very advanced dramatic piece in what is considered to be a primitive society, a point which has far-reaching consequences in the study of the origins of drama. It is a "fact" of Western scholarship that drama begins in Greece with Thespis, but with this new evidence it becomes possible to speculate that some preceding race in a related area may have experienced a flourishing of drama before the invention of writing—extraordinary flourishing and total decay—lost forever in pre-historic night. The Quiché drama that has reached us appears as a singular testimony of the dramatic expression of a people in the cultural stage of the Neolithic, a stage that was "frozen" by the Spanish conquest. The Spanish discovery of the new continent in which archaic but complex civilizations already existed, represented a unique opportunity in history, for modern European man could peer into a culture with many complex aspects of civilization, a culture centuries ahead of primitive cultures being now studied by anthropology. The Spaniards obtained an unprecedented and never repeated success in what was one of their purposes, that of Christianizing and Hispanicizing entire

geographical areas and peoples with totally different cultures; thus the unique opportunity to study the process of civilization was lost to a great extent. What was saved from the ruthless Spanish destruction of Maya documents and traditions—as well as those of the other American peoples—is a minimum sample of the cultural expressions of the conquered. Rabinal-Achí, in this light, while retaining its regional and continental values, becomes a precious, rare document of a stage of civilization that in corresponding epochs of Asia and Europe is lost to other than prehistorical investigation. To have approached this difficult problem is a contribution of the present dissertation.

This study has made evident a fact implicit in scattered observations by several scholars and alert observers: the local tradition of presenting Rabinal-Achí as a spectacle—from the days of grandeur when the play was a performance by princes and priests down to the faint efforts of the elders in our times—has clearly indicated that the proper production of Rabinal-Achí now exceeds the physical and spiritual resources of the town of Rabinal. Rabinal-Achí can no longer be the old agonizing effort of popular transmission, subject to adulteration and contamination from the surrounding culture. Because of the importance of this play, the study suggests the participation of all Guatemalans to assure the continuation of the Maya-Quiché tradition. The responsibility should become a national cultural direction. Left alone, Rabinal-Achí as a spectacle will disappear; with the sponsorship of national and international cultural groups, it will become a respected and admired work of recovery and restoration by scholars and artists of Guatemala and abroad.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX I

ILLUSTRATION OF DIFFICULTIES WITH TRANSLATING

AN OLD QUICHE TEXT

" . . . r'al nu chab, . . . r'al nu pocob" ("à la pointe de ma flèche, au fils de mon bouclier"¹ "le fils de mon arc, l'enfant de mon bouclier").²

These lines contain the only clearly detectable translation error we were able to pinpoint in Brasseur's French version. The transmitted recital, directly or through Sis's 19th century ear and pen (or in an unreported old priestly manuscript), must have rendered a sound close to the Quiché "hual" ("child") of present-day dictionaries; the "waw" with velar "h" (equivalent to Spanish "g" or "j," see last chapter, footnote No. 24) was recorded as an aspirated "r" by the French Brasseur ("r'al")--another example of the doubtful and problematic character of "r" notations. The Quiché text shows evidence of several hands; the letter "q," for instance, is found with its Spanish and equally French silent "u," or without it as in transliterations from Semitic and other Middle-Eastern languages--perhaps an idea of the French priest who switched from Egyptian to Amerindian subjects and believed that the Mayas had been related to the Egyptians. The French translation "fils" had the needed qualities to precipitate a small comedy of errors. Some of the "team" workers may have nodded to a term that sounded or looked like "filos" (for an arrow) or "hilos" (for a bow; further down in the French version "flèche" was changed to "arc"). Meanwhile, Brasseur kept

¹Grammaire . . . II, pp. 29, 29|31.

²Ibid., p. 43.

thinking of "fils," and apparently being as unhappy as we are about that translation, in the first instances he substituted a sensible but unwarranted "pointe de ma flèche" for "fils de ma flèche"; further down he must have thought that "fils" could be restored accompanied by the more compatible attribute "de mon arc"; still further down Brasseur returned at will to "flèche" and opted for a creative translation disregarding the original Quiché.³ So far the hypothetical comedy of errors. Upon considering the language of a drama presumably originated five centuries ago, the investigation cannot rely exclusively on a single modern dialect, and lacking the original language—which will have to be reconstructed with philological tools by comparison of data from later related linguistic forms—, it can only avail itself of the opportunity to compare other related dialectal expressions. The reconstruction work has already been started in the Centro de Estudios Mayas of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, which in 1970 published firstly a Diccionario de elementos del maya yucateco colonial.⁴ In it we find the root "hal" and derivative "hal-al," "cañas delgadas de las que los indios hacen flechas." This is probably the utterance or script forgotten or misunderstood by the 19th century Quiché assistants to Brasseur; the same word is equally compatible with "shield" since the Mayas made very strong shields with matted reeds.⁵

³Ibid., p. 53, 63, 69, 71, 73, 75, 97, 111, 113, 115, 117.

⁴Mauricio Swadesh, Ma. Cristina Alvarez, Juan R. Bastarrachea (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1970).

⁵Victor W. Von Hagen, World of the Maya (New York: The New American Library, printing of 1964), p. 130.

In order to illustrate the puzzling nature of this kind of investigation, we shall relate another interpretive avenue that we pursued for a while, although it seems to tread on less solid ground than the former. In Celso Narciso Teletor's Diccionario castellano-quiché y voces castellano pocomán⁶ we found "lal," and knowing the protean nature of the "r" (see above and last chapter, footnote No. 24), considered the possibility of a correspondence with "r'al." "Lal" has several meanings, among them "arder como pimienta en los labios"⁷ and "burlar,"⁸ which could be worked in, without excessive imagination, as "burn of my arrow," "tricks of my shield." This hypothesis points to a most ingenious combination in the same word of anaphora and paronomasia (or pun with "lal") worthy of the wittiest 17th century conceptista--already a good reason to suspect that the hypothesis is wrong.

⁶Guatemala: Re-Rajau, 1959.

⁷Ibid., p. 22.

⁸Ibid., p. 28.

APPENDIX II

The basic text for this translation is the edition in French by Charles-Etienne Brasseur de Bourbourg discussed elsewhere in this dissertation. As shown, the problems of the Quiché text that has come down to us are manifold and complex, and finding the unceasing hesitations between widely different linguistic interpretations experienced by scholars dealing with the native language, reassured this judgment. Those problems are compounded by the fact that Quiché lexicography is still in its infancy; therefore the work to produce a critical edition reasonably faithful to the ancient Quiché text will be long and arduous. In the meantime, as has already been pointed out, it appears that the French translation put together by Brasseur with the group he selected of native speakers of Quiché who likewise knew Spanish is reliable and acceptable. The French text is less likely to induce us into serious error than would be the extant Quiché text by itself.

The feeling of the reliability of Brasseur's text is further strengthened by another circumstance: the French priest strove to produce a translation as close as possible to the original language of the play, and the Quiché writing is clear enough so that we can closely compare both texts and establish correspondences. Not only did Brasseur not strive for elegance; he did not

attempt to alleviate the effect of the unending repetitions of all kinds in the Quiché idiom. Admittedly, here and there he substituted a few synonyms. Given the present situation in which a clear, accessible original text is lacking, it is indeed fortunate that Brasseur opted for uncompromising literalness.

For the same reason, the translation we made from Brasseur's French is decidedly literal. We have not striven for an elegance which would give a misleading impression of the linguistic "manner" of the French and presumably the Quiché text. Even our respect for English idiom has occasionally been stretched to the maximum in order to attain the closest possible rendering of the original concepts in French, which themselves show at times a marked peculiarity (not unbecoming the subject). Without any effort on our part, the result has in general a somewhat archaic flavor, hopefully also befitting the subject.

It will always be possible to abridge and paraphrase the basic text of the Quiché play making it more enjoyable to Western taste without missing or betraying the spirit and poetic beauty of the original. In the attitude proper of a doctoral dissertation it has been our purpose to adhere not only to the spirit but to the letter and thus provide a useful linguistic key or tool for scholarly endeavors. Perhaps the same tool may prove to

serve equally as a faithful source for creative efforts.

The few changes correcting clearly detectable errors by Brasseur will be indicated. Our few footnotes will be marked by asterisks to distinguish them from the original footnotes by Brasseur, or will follow the latter ones in brackets.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

- AHAU-HOBTOH, King of the Rabinaleros
- RABINAL-ACHI, AHAU-GALEL-RABINAL, son of King Hobtoho.
- CAVEK-QUECHE-ACHI, Prince of the Yaqui of Cunén and
of Chahul, son of Balam-Achí-Balam-Queché, king
of the Quechés.
- THE QUEEN, wife of King Hobtoho.
- THE MOTHER OF THE GREEN FEATHERS, THE PRECIOUS EMERALD*
- A SLAVE
- IXOK-MUN, Rabinal-Achí's favorite slave.
- THE TWELVE EAGLES AND TIGERS, warriors of Rabinal.

A great number of other warriors and slaves of both sexes
who take part in the dance of the Xahoh-Tun.

Prolog by Bartolo Sis

On the twenty-eighth day of the month of October
in the year 1850, I have transcribed the original of this
Ballet of the Tun, belonging to our town of Saint-Paul of
Rabinal, in order to leave my memory to my children and
that it remains with them for ever more. So be it.

*In this cast of characters it reads "épouse de
Rabinal-Achi." It must be a slip of Brasseur's pen since
there is no indication whatsoever of it in the play.

Rabinal-Achí
or
The Ballet of the Sacred Drum

Scene 1.

QUECHE-ACHI

speaks for the first time.

(He brandishes his noose threateningly toward the head of Rabinal-Achí, while continuing to dance to the beat.)

Come then, infamous prince,¹ hateful prince! This truly is the first whose stock and trunk I cannot sever, the prince of Chacachib and of Zamanib.² Catk of Rabinal! . . . Behold what my word says to the face of heaven, to the face of earth. In this way, I will not

¹Infamous: the text reads vorom ahua, "piercing prince, who pierces," from the verb voró, "pierce, perforate," but ordinarily used meaning to commit sodomy, which history accuses the princes of Verapaz of doing.

²Chacachib and Zamanib, two villages or perhaps two districts of the same [village], of the dominion of the house of Rabinal, plural of Zaman whose meaning is not clear, was situated in the mountains of Xoyabah, at about 10 leagues S.W. of Rabinal; its ruins are still known by the name of Beleh-Tzak, Beleh Qoxkun, "the Nine Fortresses and the Nine Palaces."

have long speeches with you. May heaven and earth be with you, oh Galel-Achí Rabinal-Achí.

RABINAL-ACHI

speaks for the first time.

(Seeing the audacity of his enemy, he brandishes in turn his noose, and, as he continues to dance, he threatens his enemy.)

Hail, proud warrior, chief of the Cavek-Queché!
Is it thus that your speech says to the face of heaven, to the face of earth? "Come then, infamous prince, hateful prince! Is this truly the first whose stock and trunk I cannot sever, the prince of Chacachib and of Zamanib, Ca'uk of Rabinal?" . . . Is it thus your word says? . . . But as truly as you can see a heaven, as truly/as there is an earth, you have just delivered yourself to the shaft of my arrow, to the mat* of my shield, to my Toltec club, to my Yaqui ax,³ to my bone bracelets, to

*Cf. Appendix I. Instead of Brasseur's disparate variants, I am rendering "shaft" (made of a reed) and "mat" (made of reeds), in harmony with the literal nature of this translation.

³The word yaqui is repeated in the text with club and ax. It means first all that is foreign and refined at the same time; it designates the grasshopper and the nations of Toltec origin for their civilization, such as the Mexicans and all those who spoke their language.

my metal bracelets, to my white varnish, to my magic herbs,⁴ to my strength, to my courage. But be it so or not, I have conquered you with my white rope, with my shining noose.* So says my word to the face of heaven, to the face of earth. May heaven and earth be with you, brave warrior, my prisoner, my captive.

(Upon saying these words, Rabinal-Achí throws his slip knot adroitly toward the head of his adversary and pulls him toward himself.)

RABINAL ACHI

speaks for the second time.

(At this moment the dance, which had continued with the threats and evolutions of the two warriors, stops as well as the music. There is a silence during which both enemies face each other with equal anger. Rabinal Achí speaks again. There is no more dance or music during the following two speeches.)

⁴I have not been able to discover anything about zalmet, following the explanation given to me by my young servant, Nicolás Lopez, they were "herbs used for magic." [Cf. my interpretation of zalmet as "magic" tobacco in chapter IV.]

*The text reads lac = lake. I believe this to be a misprint or error in the text for lacs and have translated it thus.

Hail, proud warrior, my prisoner, my captive. Thanks be given to the lord of heaven, to the lord of earth.⁵ Truly heaven has delivered you to me, earth has given you to me, when they pushed you toward the shaft of my arrow, to the mat of my shield, to my Toltec club, to my Yaqui ax, to my bone bracelets, to my metal bracelets, to my white varnish, to my magic herbs . . . Say then, if you can, where are your mountains, where are your valleys? Where have you received the day, whether it is on the side of the mountain or the bottom of the valley? Aren't you the child of the clouds, aren't you the child of the mists? Haven't you come fleeing before the spears and the war? . . . so says my word to the face of heaven, to the face of earth. In this way I will not have any long speeches with you. May heaven and earth be with you, my captive, my prisoner.

QUECHE-ACHI

speaks for the second time.

Alas, may heaven and earth hear me! In truth is it your mouth that speaks? The expressions of the speech that you cast to the face of heaven, to the face of

⁵The text says chire chicah, chirech uleu, "to the one of his heaven, to that one of earth."

earth, before my mouth and to my face are poor indeed.⁶

"That I am a brave one, that I am a man, is what your mouth says. That you have fled before the spear and war?" it further says. What! I am a brave man, what! I am a man who could have been made to flee before the spear and war! But here is what your word again says: "Declare then the name of your mountains and your valleys, your mouth has said." What! I am a brave man. What! I am a warrior, and I am to declare, just to please you, the name of my mountains and my valleys! Is it not clear as day that I was hatched on the side of the mountains, at the bottom of the valley, that I am the son of the clouds, the child of the mists? How could I be the one who would make my mountains and my valleys known? Ah, rather heaven and earth disappeared! Here is what my word says to the face of heaven, to the face of earth.

In this way we will not need to repeat any long speeches with you, oh Galel-Achí Rabinal-Achí. May heaven and earth be with you!

⁶In this translation we have replaced the particle "La," your grace, your highness in the third person for the French Vous or Votre [equivalent originally to the English "you" and "your"] given that the reverential particle used too often is of an insufferable and very tiring monotony in our language.

RABINAL-ACHI

speaks for the third time.

Hold, brave warrior, my prisoner, my captive!
Is it thus that your mouth speaks to the face
of heaven, to the face of earth? "What! I am a brave man,
what! I am a warrior, and I would say the name of my
mountains and of my valleys! Is it not clear as day that
I was hatched on the side of the mountains, at the bottom
of a valley, that I am the son of the clouds, the child
of the mists?" Is this not what your speech said? Well
then! if you don't declare the name of your mountains,
the name of your valleys, let it please heaven, please earth,
either in chains, or in pieces, I will take you to my
lord, before my master, inside of my great fortress, in-
side of my great palace. Here is what my mouth says to
the face of heaven, to the face of earth. There-
fore, may heaven, may earth be with you, my prisoner,
my captive.

QUECHE-ACHI

speaks for the third time.

Alas, may heaven and earth listen to me! Is it
not thus that your word speaks to the face of heaven,
to the face of earth? "We will indeed find the means to

make enter and exit the words of this dialogue that we shall enunciate with you to the face of heaven and of earth. Behold what to pull it out of, what to make it descend from, since you will manifest and you will declare the name of your mountains and of your valleys: but if you do not declare them, let it please heaven, let it please earth, chained or in pieces, I will take you before my lord, before my master." Thus speaks then your mouth to the face of heaven, to the face of earth. Look at me, oh heaven,⁷ look at me, oh earth! To whom then shall I reveal the name of my mountains, the name of my valleys? Would it be to you, kind singers, birds of brilliant yellow feathers? I am the valor, I am the courage of the king of the Yaqui of Cunen, of the Yaqui of Chahul.⁸ Yes, ten times, King Balam-Achí, Balam-Quiché has descended the path of the clouds and the mists to come to my mountains, to my valleys. Where is there then from which to make come out, where is there from which to pull out from me these words and these speeches that we have just enunciated

⁷Caroh, which we translated for "look at me," is another form of ahcarroc which, being a supplicating interjection, does not have a well-defined meaning and is translated into "alas," etc.

⁸Cunen and Chahul are two locations still known today, they are attached to the parish of Nebah, situated at about 15 leagues to the north of Santa Cruz del Quiché and at more than 30 to the northwest of Guatemala City: it is a countryside covered with extremely interesting ruins.

with you to the face of heaven, to the face of earth.
Thus, may heaven and earth be with you, oh Galel-Achí,
Rabinal-Achí!

RABINAL-ACHI

speaks for the fourth time.

Brave warrior, Cavek of the Quiché nation! Are you the one I favor well, are you my elder, are you my young brother? How then could my heart have forgotten it had seen you, it had observed you behind the great walls, behind the great castle! Is it indeed you who imitated the cry of the jackal, who made heard the cry of the wild cat, who imitated the cry of the lion⁹ and the cry of the tiger, behind the great fortress, behind the great castle, to provoke us, us, the beautiful young people, and make us come out in front of the high walls, in front of the great castle, to gather the yellow honey, the new honey which is served to my lord, to my master,

⁹The word utuy, which I translated for "lion" or "puma," has thus been translated by my young servant from Rabinal. Nevertheless, Father Domingo de Basseta, in his Vocabulario de la lengua quiché, a manuscript of my collection, makes of it a, I believe, not quite so terrible an animal, but without designating it specially, saying: "Utuy, un animal á manera de liebre que se come," it is apparently a kind of hare or rabbit. [Despite his doubting, Brasseur made the cat mew and that "lion" roar, accommodating to European mentality the corresponding Quiché word which is the same for each animal; apparently Brasseur did not know that the puma's cry does not even approach the sound of a roar.]

the old one, King Hobtoh.¹⁰ Thus then, for what purpose display and exhibit your bravery and your courage that you have paraded so much up to this moment? Are those not they which have provoked us, which have pushed us forward, us the twelve lords, each the master of a fortress and a castle? . . .*

. . . Is it not truly thus that you spoke to us: "Come then, you youths, the twelve brave young ones, the twelve heroes, come here a moment to listen to what has to be made known to you! For everything has melted, everything has been consumed, deteriorated in front of each one of your dining rooms, of each of your cellars; everything has been absorbed like in the pumice stone. The grasshopper and the cricket, alone, have remained to interrupt the silence inside the walls and the castles of those beautiful children, of those bright youths; for barely nine or ten of their castles and their fortresses are still found. Thus then let us cease biting these beautiful youths, this white lineage; for behold that we

¹⁰Hobtoh, name composed of hob for oob, "five," and of Toh, abbreviation of Tohil, sign of the ninth day of the Quiché month, and represented by atl, water, in the Mexican calendar. [Brasseur's groping in the dark is apparent here; see our reading of this name in chapter V.]

*There are frequent unexplained ellipsis marks in both the Quiché and French texts. At times, as in this place, the mark occupies what is left of a line and the beginning of the following line.

have begun to eat the "laka-chuca, the large bean, the laka-ixtapacal, the oval laka-caquix, and the laka-tzuleyuhi."¹¹ Is this not what the provocation addressed to us the princes and the lords said? Is there nothing that could satisfy your senseless desire for anger and courage? Is it not in Beleh-Mokoh, in Beleh-Chumay¹² where that rage and bravery have gone to have themselves buried and entombed by us the princes, there in Chi-Qotom, in Chi-Tikiram,¹³ such as these places are called? But behold that you will have to pay for your restlessness, here, between heaven and earth. Thus you have said your last farewell to your mountains and your valleys; for here we will cut your stock and your trunk, here between heaven and earth! It will not come to you again, neither at day, nor at night, to descend from your mountains to your valleys: for in truth, it is here that you will die, it is here that you will finish, between heaven and earth. That is why I will announce you to the face

¹¹These names written in italics are those of diverse kinds of frijoles [Spanish in the original] or other vegetables very sought after by the natives.

¹²Beleh-Mokoh, Beleh-Chumay, "the Nine Knolls and the Nine Elbows," names which seem to allude to the tombs in which the defeated were buried.

¹³En-Tikiram, name of a chain of mountains which extend north of the plains of Rabinal; on the brow of one of its hills we find the ruins of Cakyug, one of the main villages of the Rabinal Indians, at a distance of one league from the present day village, and the place of the scene of this drama. [Cf. "Geographical Evidence," Chapter IV above.]

of my lord, to the face of my master, inside the great walls of the great castle. So says my word to the face of heaven and of earth. Thus let us cease the long speeches. May heaven and earth be with you, Cavek-Queché-Vinak!

QUECHE-ACHI

speaks for the fourth time.

Hail, brave warrior, oh Galel-Achí Rabinal-Achí! Is it not thus your word speaks to the face of heaven to the face of earth? "Why then put forward your bravery and your courage, your word says?" But they are, truly, the ones that first provoked our lord and our master, otherwise there was no reason for my return and my arrival at my mountains and at my valleys. It is from here that the herald that was sent has left, from between heaven and earth, from in front of this domineering fortress, of Cakyug-Zilic-Cakocaonic-Tepecanic,¹⁴ names of the mouth and of the eye of this fortress and this castle.¹⁵ Were they not closed here, the ten bags of

¹⁴Cakyug-Zilic-Cakocaanic [sic]-Tepecanic, names of the main town and whose meaning is "Fire guarded by the rampant snake irritated and rising."

¹⁵The name of the mouth and the eye, that is of the master; the mouth for the one who speaks and commands, the eye for the one who sees and watches.

pek* and the five bags of cacao which were presented to the face of my lord, of my master, of Balam-Ahau, Balam-Achí, Balam-Queché, names of the mouth and of the eye of my fortress and my castle . . .

. . . As soon as he heard these things, King Balam-Ahau, Balam-Queché, for this same thing, right there he wished the death of the king of Chacachib Zamanib, of the Cauk of Rabinal, to the face of the Uxabs and the Pokomams.¹⁶ "Let us act in good agreement."¹⁷ Let word be sent that I want to see the bravery and the courage of the king of the mountains and the valleys of the Quiché; that he come to take his share of my beautiful hills and my rich valleys; that my brother and my elder then thus arrive, that he come to take his share here between heaven and earth, of these happy mountains, of these cheerful valleys, that he come to sow, that he come to collect in these fields where from all parts crowd the sprouts of our gourds, the sprouts of our bright gourds and of our white beans." It is thus that your challenge and your war cry spoke, sent to

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See Brasseur's footnote 23 below.

¹⁶ Uxabs and Pokomams, names of the peoples who were masters of Verapaz before the people from Rabinal and who were pushed to the north; what is left of them today inhabit Coban and its surroundings. [The Pokomams now live in Mixco and Palín near Guatemala City.]

¹⁷ Word for word, "Let us do a good and beautiful thing."

the face of my lord . . .

. . . But behold how in its turn the challenge and the cry of my lord and of my master was emitted. "Hail, hail, my courage and my bravery! Run to sound the alarm and return;¹⁸ for I have sheltered under my roof a herald sent between heaven and earth : take in hand your strength and your bravery, the shaft of your arrow, the mat of your shield; return to the side of the mountain, to the entrance of the valley!" . . .

. . . Thus came to speak the call and the cry of my lord and of my family: I was absent, I was occupied in placing the boundaries of the land at the setting of the sun, there where the night comes in, where an extreme cold oppresses; where the water is frozen,¹⁹ at the place called Pan-Tzahaxak. In turn, then, I took the shaft of my arrow, the mat of my shield; I returned to the foot of the mountain, to the entrance of the valley, and there I emitted my first challenge, my war cry in front of Cholo chic-Huyu and Cholo chic-Chah, as these

¹⁸This phrase is obscure in the text that I compiled, where I find the following variant: in place of chi oh-at-tohel, "run to sound the alarm," which is directed to Balam Achí's son, I also find chi ho-at Tohil, "go then, oh Tohil" (name of the main divinity of the Quichés) which does not lack here a very beautiful meaning either.

¹⁹These words designate the most elevated summits of the Cuchumatanes, beside the present day town of San Pedro Solomá to the N.W. of the Quiché.

places are called . . . I left from there, and in the same manner I gave a second time my challenge and my war cry in the places called Chi-Nimché Paraveno of Cabrakán.²⁰ I left from there, and in the same manner I was going to utter for a third time my challenge and my war cry, there, in the place called Panchalib.²¹ I equally left from there and I came for the fourth time to utter my challenge and my war cry at Xolchacah, as that place is called. It was there that I heard that it was occupied, among the twelve Eagles and Tigers, upset with anger, beating on the bloody drum, the drum of the battles.²² The sky was in turmoil, earth trembled with tumultuous noises, at the terrible agitations of the twelve, the irritated Eagles, the furious Tigers, gathered with their slaves, men and women . . .

²⁰The name Cabrakán is still found nowadays in that of Cabricán, small village at approximately 7 leagues N.W. from the town of Quetzaltenango.

²¹Panchalib or Pachalib, old town of the Agaab, people of the banks of the river Chixoy or Lacandon, to the west of Rabinal. [We believe it to be the present day Panahachel.]

²²Lotzo tun, lotzo gohom, "bloody drum," "battle drum." Lotzo comes from lotz "sangrar, espinar," says Ximénez, "to draw blood," "to pierce oneself with thorns," from the use to draw one's blood by means of thorns to appease the divinity before every important action and to rub it on war instruments which in this way were consecrated.

. . . Thus there I began my chant to the face of heaven, to the face of earth. Thus spoke my word to the face of heaven, to the face of earth: "Come then, infamous prince, hateful prince. It is well the first whose stock and trunk I cannot sever, the prince of Chacachib and of Zamanib, Ca'uk of Rabinal." Behold then what my word has said. What is there that you may have to do, powerful lord, since I have not been able to ruin you nor to destroy you, that I have done no more than sing out the expression of my word to the face of heaven and of earth, oh Galel-Achí, Rabinal-Achí. Speak then in turn still once more. Thus may heaven and earth be with you, oh Galel-Rabinal-Achí.

RABINAL-ACHI

speaks for the fifth time.

Hail, brave warrior, Cavek-Queché-Vinak! Is it thus your word speaks to the face of heaven, to the face of earth? Doubtlessly here is the speech that you have just delivered and there is no cause to change the words you have uttered. "Truly from here has left the envoy that was sent, which we have dispatched to the mountains and to the valleys of Queché." But truly it is not a crime nor a grave transgression that we have sent him to hear King Balam, King Balam-Queché, at the moment in

which he wished the death of the King of Chacachib-Zamanib, the Cauk of Rabinal, by the hands of the chiefs of the Uxabs and the Pokomams, here between heaven and earth. "Let us act in good agreement, let the king of the mountains and the valleys of Quiché send then his courage and his valor; let him come to take his share of these beautiful hills and these rich valleys, let him come to sow, let him come to reap. Well then, we shall sow, we shall reap in these fields, where from every part crowd the sprouts of our gourds, the sprouts of our bright gourds and our white beans." Thus at first our speech spoke to the face of heaven, to the face of earth. For this then you came for no reason to provoke us and to threaten us for no reason, here between heaven and earth . . . "Thanks be given to heaven, thanks be given to earth, you yourself have come to expose yourself in front of our palace and our fortress; it is for this that we will renew the quarrel; we will provoke the war and we will fight these chiefs of Uxab and of the Pokomams; thus then I will let you command and give your orders; go, run up there then in front of the Great Road where the bird goes to drink the water, in front of the place called Cholo chic-Zakchun . . . But do not grant those chiefs of Uxab and the Pokomams the satisfaction that they covet. Do not let them return to their mountains and their valleys; destroy them and tear them to pieces

here between heaven and earth ." Behold what my word said at first. But in truth there was no need for you to see and look at these chiefs of Uxab and the Pokomams; for they were transformed into gnats and into flies, into large and small ants; in long lines they began to climb the flanks of mount Equempek-Ganahal, as it is called. Thus then I directed my eyes and my look toward heaven and earth; at the next instant I saw these princes of Uxab and of the Pokomams, and my heart swelled, my spirit was shattered upon seeing you, in observing that you had granted satisfaction to the heart of the princes of Uxab and of the Pokomams. It was there that I emitted my cry of war and my challenge against you: "Hail! Hail brave warrior, Cavek-Queché-Vinak! Why then have you let them pass so easily these chiefs of Uxab and of the Pokomams for them to return to their mountains and their valleys? Heaven and earth are hearing me. Well, yes, they expected, in our mountains and in our valleys, that you would emit your challenge and your war cry to these princes of Uxab and of the Pokomams. How then have you answered, emitting your challenge and your war cry to these Uxab and these Pokomams, when they emitted in return their own challenge and their war cry? Hail! Hail! chiefs of Uxab, chiefs of the Pokomams, return quickly, hear what has to be said to you here, between heaven and earth."

It is thus that you spoke, and then these chiefs of Uxab and of the Pokomams responded: "Hail, hail brave warrior, Cavek-Queché-Vinak! It is then true that we have been allowed to return to our mountains and to our valleys. Is it not here that we have been conceived, we and our vassals, up to the places where the black clouds and the white mists descend, where the cold oppresses, where the water is frozen, up to the places where the shadows begin, the greenish shadows, where the yellow almond begins,²³ the rich cacao, where gold mines and silver mines are found, where embroidered fabrics are made, where works of sculpture are made, by our vassals? Those are our vassals: they do not have to toil in order to make a living;²⁴ without troubling themselves, they see enter among them one after the other, a bag of pek or a bag of cacao. Because they are embroiderers, sculptors or carvers, and they will be for ever more. As to the vassals of Galel-Achí, of Rabinal-Achí, it is only with pain and hard toil that they obtain a bite with which to live, and forever it will be thus.

²³The yellow almond, ganal pek, a kind of cacao of inferior quality. ["Ganal" is only an adjective, not part of the name. Here it modifies both "pek" and "cacau".]

²⁴Mana go qaxcoquiricvi huper chacap tzukubal que, literally "there is no suffering of the piece, of the half for their support."

Everything for them consists in having a foot that looks backwards and another that looks forward; lame and one-armed, behold the grandchildren to be born, for ever the descendants of Galel-Achí of Rabinal-Achí." So spoke the challenge, the cry of war of the chiefs of Uxab and of the Pokomams, because of the furor that devoured their soul . . .

. . . And you answered "Hail, Hail, princes of Uxab and of the Pokomams. Is it then thus that your words speak to the face of heaven, to the face of earth? As far as the vassals of the brave warrior of Rabinal-Achí, he need not blush in the face because of the means they employ, to seek their subsistence and earn their living, at the four ends, at the four corners of the world, at the summits of the earth or at the slope of the hills, in one or in two seasons; because they have strength and courage. As to the vassals of Your Lordships, on the contrary, they are lost, they are dispersed in their voyages, when one sees them in long lines wander off, returning, from their mountains and their valleys: perhaps there may be one, perhaps two, who will return to their fortresses and their castles; for they are attacked and they are assassinated in the midst of their searches and of their traffic . . . As far as the vassals of the brave hero, of Galel-Achí of Rabinal-Achí, if one, if two among them wander off, one, two also return

to their fortresses and to their castles." So you spoke to these chiefs of Uxab and of the Pokomams . . .

. . . But behold what my word has said: Hail, hail, brave warrior, Cavek-Queché-Vinak! The challenge and the war cry that these chiefs of the Uxabs and of the Pokomams have emitted has been heard. But let heaven, let earth hear me! It is only very true that they were full of rage, abandoning these places between heaven and earth to our vassals and to our children; it is only very true that they have not been able to take their part of these beautiful mountains, of these cheerful valleys; and it is truly a miracle that you have come to end so many days and so many nights between heaven and earth; that you have come to break the shaft of your arrow and the mat of your shield; that you have come to break the strength of your arm and the instrument of your power. Nothing has turned out well for you, and it is only very true that you have not been able to come into possession of these places, between heaven and earth; for you know where the boundaries of your land are found, which join beyond the slopes of the hills and the bottom of the plains. It is then very true that it is I who am the brave warrior, the Galel-Achí Rabinal-Achí, that it is I who have reigned constantly here with my vassals, here between heaven and earth. Behold what my word says to the face of heaven, to the face of earth. May heaven

and earth be with you, brave warrior, Cavek-Queché-Vinak!

QUECHE-ACHI

speaks for the fifth time.*

Alas, alas, may heaven and earth hear me! It is only very true that I have not been able to take my share here between heaven and earth, of these beautiful mountains, of these cheerful valleys. Is it in vain, is it without any profit that I have come here to waste so many days and so many nights, between heaven and earth? Have my bravery and my courage served no purpose? May heaven and earth hear me! Let us go then to my mountains and my valleys. So says my word to the face of heaven, to the face of earth. I ascended then the slopes of the mountains at the entrance of the plains, and there I set my signs at the extremity of the Camba, for thus it is called.²⁵ And behold what my word says to the face of

*"Sixth time" in both the Quiché and French texts; this is a simple error which continues for the speeches of both Quiché-Achí and Rabinal-Achí. The error concerning Quiché-Achí is compensated when he speaks for the fourteenth time. These successive errors will be corrected accordingly.

²⁵Camba, name of a place close to the plain of Rabinal.

heaven, to the face of earth: will it not be allowed for me to go crush the master of the Camba under my sandal, over the heads of the sons, over the heads of the vassals of Galel-Achí, of Rabinal-Achí? Thus spoke the anguish of my heart. But even though it would become necessary for heaven and earth to punish me, my word says still: from there I have left again, and I have gone to set my signs at the extremity of the mount and the plain of Zaktihel,²⁶ and I have emitted my challenge and my war cry. May heaven, may earth hear me! Is it very true that I have not been able to take my share here between heaven and earth? And from there I have descended to the winding stream,²⁷ and then I began to contemplate the freshly seeded earth, and the one that had already given fruit, the earth where the cornstalks hasten to blossom, and to yellow, the same as the white and yellow bush beans and beans of all sorts . . .²⁸

. . . Then my word has said to the face of heaven, to the face of earth: will it not then be permitted to

²⁶Zaktihel-huyu, or Mount of the limestone rock, at a short distance from the plain of Rabinal.

²⁷Chi-run, "To the water that runs," name of a hamlet and of a beautiful creek that rushes into the river of Rabinal.

²⁸Here there is a nomenclature of beans, understandable only in the country and to the natives.

me to take some thing from this freshly seeded earth, from the one that has given its fruit, by the shaft of my arrow, by the mat of my shield? . . . There then I have imprinted my sandal in the freshly seeded earth and in the one that had given its fruits: from there I have departed another time and I have gone to set my signs at the extremity of the Xtincurun, in front of the Ximbalha, such as it is called.²⁹ From there I have also gone to set my signs at the extremity of Quezentun, as it is called,³⁰ and there I have sung, because of the anguish of my soul, during thirteen times twenty days and thirteen times twenty whole nights;* because I had not been able to take my share here, between heaven and earth, of these beautiful mountains and of these cheerful valleys. So said my word to the face of heaven, to the face of earth. May heaven and earth hear me, alas! Is it then true that I have not been able to take my share here between heaven and earth, that I have come uselessly, without any profit, to waste so many days and so many nights? Behold

²⁹Localities neighboring the plain of Rabinal.

³⁰Another locality less than 2 leagues from Rabinal; the summit of Quezentun is covered with ruins; it is a knoll whose name plays a great role in the history and legends of the country.

*Two hundred and sixty days, the planet Venus year; see interpretation of this time interval in Chapter VII.

what my word says to the face of heaven, to the face of earth. Thus I have come to break the strength of my arm, the instrument of my power; my valor and my courage have been of no use . . . And my word has said then to the face of heaven, to the face of earth: let us leave for our mountains and our valleys. Behold what my word has said, and then I have ascended the mountains and the valleys of my country, my word has said. May heaven, may earth be with you, oh Galel-Achí Rabinal-Achí.

RABINAL-ACHI

speaks for the sixth time.*

Hail, hail, brave warrior, Cavek-Queché-Vinak!
 "My children! . . . Why have you taken my children? . . . You had nothing to do with them . . . Return them then to their mountains, to their valleys. For if you do not return then, let it please heaven, please earth, I will overturn the whole world, says then my challenge." For I was absent, I was busy putting up the boundaries of the territory, there at the extremity of Mucutzun,³¹ as it is called, when you carried off my noble children,

*"Seventh time" in both Quiché and French texts. See my previous footnote.

³¹This place is found beyond the plain where today rises the San Gerónimo plantation, beyond the town of Salamá.

my beautiful children by the shaft of your arrow, by the mat of your shield, without your heart being troubled from hearing my challenge, my war cry. Then I ascended the slope of the mountain and the side of the plain, and went to set my signs in Penahachel, for such is the name of this place.³² There was where I emitted my challenge and my war cry against you. Only there you finally released these beautiful, these noble youths there at the Great Forest of Cabrakan-Paraveno, as it is called. There was little to go before they would reach then the mounts and the plains of Quiché: it is from there that they returned and that they began to ascend the slopes of the mountains and the sides of the plains; with their bowels dried up and their stomachs full of air, they returned to this side. However, they did not return to their fortresses and to their castles but fixed their dwelling in the place called Panamaka.³³

. . . It is equally thus that you came to remove my lord and my master, there to the spring named to the

³²If this is the place still known by this name, it is the small market town of Panahachel, which dominates the lake of the same name, called Atitlan.

³³This is probably the same place as Pamaka or Panmaka, which Ximénez translated into En el Agua caliente, locality better known by the name Zacualpa, in the mountains to the north east of Quiché. [This locality is actually to the S.E. of Quiché and S.W. of Rabinal.]

Bath of Tohil.³⁴ Was it not true that I was absent, that I was just about to set the boundaries of the territory in Tzamha, in front of the Quluvach-Abah,³⁵ so named? Then still I turned my eyes and my looks toward heaven and earth. The horizon where the clouds ran was immense, the horizon where the mists rolled in front of the lofty walls of the great castle: it is there where I once again emitted my challenge and my war cry, to the face of heaven, to the face of earth. Well, behold what my word then said: "Hail, hail, brave warrior, Cavek-Queché-Vinak! . . . My lord, my father! . . . Why did you come to carry him off from inside his great fortress, his great palace? . . . You had nothing to do with him . . . let him then return within his great walls, within his great palace, said then my speech." But your heart did not allow itself to be touched, hearing my challenge and my war cry. And my word said still: "That if you do not release my lord and master, let it please heaven, please earth, I will move the entire universe, I will travel

³⁴Ch'Atinibal, "to the bath," better chi r'Atinibal-Tohil, "To the bath of Tohil," place famous in the ancient Annals of the Quiché, where the God Tohil would have bathed and would have been caught by two immodest girls. See the Livre Sacré, page 263. [Cf. Recinos, etc., pp. 194-199]

³⁵Next to the present-day town of San Raimundo at about 8 leagues to the north of Guatemala City. [Just off the old road to Rabinal from the capital.]

through the earth and the heavens without stopping!" So my word expressed itself. But your heart did not allow itself to be touched any more, upon hearing my challenge and my cry of war. I climbed over the slopes of the mountain, to the end of the plain, and I went again to set my signs between the great walls, within the great palace. But I only perceived there the horizon of clouds, the horizon of mists rolling and ascending always within sight of the great walls of the palace: only the cicada and the cricket sang, they alone interrupted the silence within its great walls and its abandoned buildings. My soul was grieved by this, my heart was grasped by agony, and I again began to run among the mountains and through the valleys, until I had reached the mountains and valleys of Quiché, until I had reached the places where my lord and master was harshly locked within four walls.³⁶

I moved impetuously with the shaft of my arrow and the mat of my shield, with my Toltec club and my Yaqui ax, with my valor and my courage. It was only thus that I again saw my lord and master, who was very well locked, alone, within four walls of rock and of limestone, and that I carried him off in my arms, by the shaft of my

³⁶Xa-nim tzakim chirih, tzakim chivach chupam
akam-chun, "well strongly walled from behind, walled in front, and within, with rock and limestone."

arrow, by the mat of my shield. For, in truth, if I had not been there, truly you would have severed the stock and the trunk of my lord and master, between the mountains and valleys of Quiché. Behold how I succeeded in seeing him again, by the shaft of my arrow, by the mat of my shield, and equally to bring back to within his palace, to his castle, my lord and master.

. . . Is it not also you who destroyed two or three localities of a tribe, such as the towns of Balamvac, whose sandy soil creaks, of Calcaraxah, of Cunu, of Gozibal-Tagah-Tulul, such as they are called? When then will the allurements of your heart for this bravery and this daring cease? But behold that you will be made to pay for it here between heaven and earth. Thus I will announce the news of your presence,³⁷ within the lofty walls of the great castle, to the face of my lord, of my master. This is why you have addressed a last farewell to your mountains and to your valleys: for it is here that your stock and your trunk will be severed, here between heaven and earth. Truly this will be so. Thus few words remain to be repeated with you. May heaven and earth be with you, Cavek-Quiché-Vinak!

³⁷X-tin yopizah, "I will announce" or "I am going to announce," this is an expression totally Cakchiquel; the Quiche would say ch'in or X-ch'in yopizah. This is not the first time that the forms of this dialect are present in the course of this drama, the style of which they adorn.

QUECHE-ACHI

speaks for the sixth time.

Hail, brave warrior, Rabinal Achí! Is it thus that your speech says to the face of heaven, to the face of earth? Certainly there is no place for changing the words that you have just pronounced to the face of heaven, to the face of earth, before my mouth and before my face. Doubtlessly it is I who have sinned in obeying from the very first the orders of our lord and master. "They have called us, they have provoked us!" said the words of our lord and master, the King of Tekentoh, of Teken-Tihax, of Gumarmachi at Taktazib, Taktazimah, of Cuxumaah, of Cuxumacho, of Cuxuma-Zivan, of Cuxuma-Tziquin, the names, the mouth and the eyes of our lord, of our master. "Come then, you, the twelve brave men, the twelve heroes, come hear what has to be made known to you, his words said to them and to you at first. For in truth it is because of the ruin, of the squandering and of the disorder which occur in these dining rooms and these cellars of the great fortress and of the great castle that there are no more than nine or ten of these noble children, of these noble sons, inside the great walls of the castle."³⁸

³⁸These words allude to banquets and parties, famous not long ago among the princes of Verapaz, which are known in history and the remnants of which I have seen on Rabinal's patron saints days.

Behold what were his first words to them and to you. Yes, doubtlessly, it is because I had not been able to take my share here between heaven and earth; it is because of the longing that gnawed at my heart that I carried them off and forced them to come with me, these beautiful, these noble youths, while they were off guard in a bamboo forest,³⁹ busy searching for bees, of yellow honey and of white honey. I discovered them, and my word exclaimed to the face of heaven, to the face of earth: "Will it not be allowed to me to carry off these beautiful, these white youths who thus come to my mountains and my valleys?" My speech added: "I will take them before my lord, before my master in the mountains in the valleys of Quiché." And my word continued: "Behold then something of this earth recently sowed, of the one which has already given fruit, where the stalks of white corn, the yellow wax beans and the white beans hasten to blossom!" From there I returned toward the place called Pan-Cakil; for my heart ran towards those beautiful, those white youths. . . .

. . . It is then because of this that you came to emit your challenge and your war cry: then my heart, my

³⁹Iximché, "large species of bamboo;" this is the name of the old town of Tecpán-Guatemala, capital of the Cakchiquels, and it is not impossible that this be the place itself, or its surroundings, which is the subject of this passage.

heart moaned from listening to your challenge and your call: it is because of this that you have come to Panahachel and that again you have emitted your challenge and your war cry. But then there I let them go, those beautiful, those noble youths, there at the Great Forest of Cabrakán-Pan-Araveno, as it is called.⁴⁰ Little was lacking for those beautiful, those noble children, to arrive then to my mountains and to my valleys of Quiché. In this manner they returned, those kind, those illustrious youths, their bowels dry and bloated, and retook the path of their mountains and their valleys. However, they did not get to reenter their fortresses and their castles: and behold why still they settled once in the place named Panamaka . . . In truth, it is I who has sinned also, when I took your lord and master, there to the place called To the Bath of Tohil; for, since he was about to bathe, I carried him off by the shaft of my arrow and the mat of my shield; I took him down between my mountains and my valleys, to the mountains and to the valleys of Quiché, because of the envy that gnawed at my heart, because I had not been able to take for myself these places between heaven and earth. It is thus that I locked him in a building of rock and limestone, that I

⁴⁰Here is a variant in this name, which is called Paraveno above.

walled him in, that I sealed him within four walls . . . Doubtlessly, it is I who has still sinned, in the words that you say: "It is you who destroyed two or three localities of a tribe, such as the towns of Balamvac, where the sandy ground creaks, of Calcaraxah, of Cunu, of Gozibal-Tagah-Tulul, so named." In truth it is I who has sinned then because of the envy that devoured my heart, and that I am going to pay now here between heaven and earth . . .

. . . My mouth and my face have nothing else to say; only the squirrel and the bird that are there before my eyes, have they maybe something to sing to you, powerful lord? . . . Is it that your speech has not also said thus: "I am going to announce the news of your presence; to the face of my lord, of my master, within the lofty walls of the great castle. You have said a last farewell to your mountains and your valleys, because here we shall sever your stock and your trunk, between heaven and earth." So said your word. But is it not possible that we act in good agreement, as good brothers, that I enrich you, that I adorn you with my gold and with my silver, with the shaft of my arrow, with the mat of my shield, with my Toltec club, with my Yaqui ax, with everything I possess, even with my sandals; that here everything may serve and be used by your children, by your sons, here between heaven and earth, as a sure pledge that you will

let me return to my mountains and my valleys? So says our word to the face of heaven, to the face of earth. Heaven and earth be with you, brave warrior, Galel-Achí Rabinal-Achí!

RABINAL-ACHI

speaks for the seventh time.

Hail, brave warrior, Cavek-Queché-Vinak! Is it thus that your word says to the face of heaven, to the face of earth? "Will it not be possible that I adorn you and that I enrich you with my gold, and with my silver, with the shaft of my arrow, with the mat of my shield, with everything I possess, even with my sandals, that here everything may serve and be used between heaven and earth? said your word" . . . But what will I go and say then to the face of my lord, to the face of my master? That there had been a brave warrior, that there had been a hero with whom we had fought behind the lofty walls of the great castle, during thirteen times twenty days, during thirteen times twenty nights, where our sleep had been without rest, that likewise I had adorned myself with his gold, with his silver, with his Toltec club and with his Yaqui ax, with everything he possesses, even with his sandals. And I would go and say to the face of my lord, to the face of my master, that I had let him

return to his mountains and his valleys! What, would I go and say these things to the face of my lord, to the face of my master! But I am heaped with riches by my lord and master; I have gold, I have silver; I have the shaft of my arrow and the mat of my shield, my Toltec club and my Yaqui ax; I am heaped with goods by my lord and master, within his great fortress, his great palace. So then, I am going to announce the news of your presence within the walls of his great fortress, to the face of my lord, of my master. If my lord and master tells me to return you to your mountains and to your valleys, yes, if my lord says thus, in truth I will let you go. But, if he says to me my lord, my master: "Introduce him before my mouth, before my eyes, that I see his face, to what measure it is the one of a brave man, of a warrior." If this is what my lord and master says, in the same way, I will make you appear before him. So says my word to the face of heaven, to the face of earth. May heaven and earth be with you, brave warrior, Cavek-Queché-Vinak!

QUECHE-ACHI

speaks for the seventh time.

And well, let it be thus, brave warrior, Rabinal-Achí! If you announce the news of my presence to the face of your master, within the great walls of his great

palace, announce me then. Thus may heaven and earth be with you, Galel-Achí, oh Rabinal-Achí.

SECOND SCENE

(Rabinal-Achí comes into the presence of King Hobtoth. King Hobtoth is seated on a low arm-chair, decorated with tapestry in the ancient manner, having at his sides the queen, his wife, surrounded by slaves, by servants and by warriors, Eagles and Tigers.)

RABINAL-ACHI

speaks for the eighth time.

Greetings, oh King; greetings, oh Queen! I give thanks to him who is in heaven, I give thanks to earth for your being here spreading your shade and majesty, under the canopy of green feathers,⁴¹ within the great walls of the great palace. Likewise as I am here before you, your bravery and your courage, and that I have arrived before your mouth and before your face, within the great

⁴¹ Muhibal gug-raxon, "canopy" or "shade" of green feathers; it was a precious weaving of quetzal feathers and of gold which formed the canopy over the throne of the kings of these regions and a privilege that was only theirs.

buildings of the palace, in the same manner this brave man, this hero with whom we have fought during thirteen times twenty days and thirteen times twenty nights, behind the lofty walls of the castle, where our sleep has been without rest, heaven has given him to me, earth has delivered him to me, throwing him on the shaft of my arrow, against the mat of my shield; I have taken and tied him, I have taken and rolled him up with my white noose, with my white strap, with my Toltec club and my Yaqui ax, with my carved bone bracelet, my wristlets and my magic herbs. Likewise I have opened the mouth of this brave one, of this warrior, without him protesting; immediately he has declared to me the name of his mountains and of his valleys, to my mouth, to my face, to me the brave one, to me the hero! It is this brave one, it is this warrior who mimicked the doleful cry of the jackal, who imitated the cry of the wild cat, who imitated the cry of the lion, behind the great walls of the castle, in order to provoke and to spy on the beautiful and white youths. It is this brave one, it is this hero who has made die nine or ten of these noble youths; it is also this brave man by whom Your Majesty was carried off there at the Bath of Tohil. It is this brave warrior who has ruined two or three localities, next to Balamvac, where the sandy soil creaks, such as is its name. Until when will your heart cease to give itself the satisfaction that it longs for from this pride

and from this daring? Have we not received the message of our lords and masters, princes each of a castle, of a palace, from the prince Teken-Toh, from the prince Teken-Tihax, from Gumarmachi, from Taktazib, from Taktazimak, from Cuxumaah, from Cuxum-Zivan, from Cuxuma-Cho, from Cuxumacab, from Cuxuma-Tziquin, such as their names are designated, their mouths and their faces? But behold that he has just paid for his misdeeds, here between heaven and earth. Thus then, in this place, we will sever his stock and his trunk, here between heaven and earth, oh my lord, oh King Hobtoth!

KING HOBTOH

speaks for the first time.

My bravery, my courage, thank heaven, thank earth, that you have arrived within the walls of the great castle, in front of my mouth, in front of my face, of me your Lord, of me King Hobtoth! Thanks then to heaven, thanks then to earth, for what heaven has given you, that earth has delivered to you this brave one, this hero, that it has thrown him on the shaft of your arrow, in front of the mat of your shield, that you have tied him, that you have rolled this brave one, this hero! At this same instant make him come in before my mouth and before my face, that I see his mouth, that I see his face, to what extent he is a brave one, to what extent he

is a hero . . . for it is truly he that you have announced, this brave one, this warrior. But that he make no noise, that he make no scandal going through the gateway of the great fortress, of the great palace: for here he must be esteemed, he must be honored within the great walls of this palace. For here are found his twelve brothers, his twelve kinsmen, the guardians of the treasures, the guardians of the precious stones. Their mouths and their faces are not yet complete; perhaps he has come to complete their number within the great fortress and the great castle? Here there are also twelve powerful Eagles and Tigers; likewise their number is not complete, and perhaps this brave one has come to complete them? In these places there are also silver seats and thrones; there are some where they sit, there are some where no one has sat yet: perhaps this brave one, perhaps this warrior has come to be seated there? There are here twelve kinds of drinks, twelve kinds of treacherous liquors, which are called ixtatzunun,⁴² drinks so sweet, so fresh and inebriating that are enjoyed before going to bed here in the vast walls of this castle, liquors of

⁴²Ixtatzunun is translated word for word for these words: "You, wait, hummingbirds." It is a strange name for liquors, pleasant without doubt, but that had the treacherous quality of intoxicating strongly. From there doubtlessly the ambiguous name of fermented drinks in general quiy and matul, that mean equally "sweetness, gaiety" and "poison."

kings; perhaps this brave one has come to enjoy them? Here there also are cloths of an admirable fineness, gold weaves, whose brightness is dazzling, work of the Queen my mother: is this dazzling cloth, work of the Queen my mother, that perhaps this brave one, perhaps this warrior has come to wear for the first time? Here is also found cloistered the Mother of the Precious Feathers, who has come from Tzam-Gam-Carchag: perhaps this brave one, perhaps this warrior has come to be the first to see her face; has he come to dance with her within the buildings of this great palace; perhaps this brave one has come to be our son-in-law or our brother-in-law within the walls of this great palace? Let us see then whether he is obedient, whether he is humble, whether he bows, whether he lowers his head upon entering. Thus says my word to the face of heaven, to the face of earth. May heaven, may earth be with you, Galel-Achí, Rabinal-Achí!

RABINAL-ACHI

speaks for the ninth time.

Oh King Hobtoh, forgive me before the face of heaven, before the face of earth! Thus my word says to Your Majesty: behold then my strength, my bravery which you have given me, which you have entrusted me, to my mouth, to my face. I will then leave here my arrow and

my shield. Keep them, lock them within their sheaths and their arsenal! Let them rest; for I too shall rest, for, when we should have slept we had no rest because of them. Thus then I leave them within the walls of this great palace. Behold what my word says to the face of heaven, to the face of earth. May heaven, may earth be with you, my lord and master, oh King Hobtoh!

KING HOBTOH

speaks for the second time.

My courage, my bravery, is it thus that your word says to the face of heaven, to the face of earth? "Behold my strength, behold my courage, behold my arrow and my shield which you have given me, which you have entrusted me before my mouth and before my face. I leave them to you then for you to keep, for you to lock them within the walls of this great palace, within their sheaths and their arsenal." Is it thus what your word has said?

. . . But how would I keep them, how would I lock them within their sheaths and their arsenal? What then will you use to protect us against those who would come to show themselves at the summit of the earth, at the foot of our territory? What weapons would you have then to protect our vassals and our children, when they go out in search of earning their bread at the four corners, at the

four extremes of the earth? Behold then once, twice yet these weapons which you will seize, behold your strength, behold your courage, behold your arrow and your shield, behold that I give them to you, oh my courage, oh my bravery, Galel-Achí Rabinal-Achí! Thus may heaven, may earth be with you!

RABINAL-ACHI

speaks for the tenth time.

Very well then, behold that I will retake my strength and my bravery which you are giving me, which you are entrusting me, before my mouth and before my face. Thus then I will retake them once, twice, says my word to the face of heaven, to the face of earth. It is why I will leave you for a moment within the lofty walls of your palace. May heaven, may earth be with you, my lord and master, oh King Hobtoth!

KING HOBTOH

speaks for the third time.

That is extremely good, my loyalty and my bravery! Be careful then that you do not fall into some ambush and that you may not be wounded, oh my loyalty, oh my bravery, Galel-Achí Rabinal-Achí. May heaven and earth be with

you!

THIRD SCENE

RABINAL-ACHI

speaks for the eleventh time.

(He goes to get Queché-Achí in the forest where he is tied.)

Hail, brave warrior, Cavek-Queché-Vinak! Behold me then after having announced you within the walls of the great fortress, to the face of my lord, of my master. My lord and master has thus expressed himself having the following said to you the brave one, the warrior: "That he make no noise, that he make no scandal, but that he humble himself, that he lower his face, upon entering through the gateway of the fortress, through the gate of the great palace, here between heaven and earth. For here he must be respected and honored within the walls of the great fortress; for here the interior of the fortress of the great palace is full of people; it encloses twelve of his brothers, twelve of his kinsmen, guardians of the treasures, guardians of the jewels. Their mouths and their faces may not yet be complete; perhaps this brave one, this hero has come to complete their number? Here there are also twelve powerful Eagles and Tigers: their

number may not have been completed either, and perhaps this brave one, this warrior has come to fill it? There are also in these places seats, silver chairs and thrones; perhaps this brave one, perhaps this warrior has come to be seated there? Here also is found cloistered the Mother of the Feathers, the Mother of the Precious Feathers, the Bright Emerald, come from Tzam-Gam-Carchag; her mouth is still virgin; her face has not yet been touched; perhaps this brave one, perhaps this hero has come to be the first to receive this mouth and these eyes? Here there are still twelve kinds of inebriating liquors, twelve delicious poisons, as sparkling as they are fresh, drinks of the king who commands within the walls of this great palace; perhaps this brave one, this hero has come to enjoy them? We also have here cloths of extreme fineness, gold weaves, whose brightness is dazzling, the work of the Queen my mother; perhaps this brave one, this hero has come to wear its beauty for the first time? Has he doubtless come as a son-in-law or a brother-in-law, here within the tall buildings of the great palace?" Thus has spoken my lord and my master. I come then to warn you not to make any noise, not to make any scandal, when you enter through the gateway of the fortress and of the great castle; humble yourself, bow, as you enter the presence of my lord, of my master, the old one, King Hobtoh. Thus speaks my word to the face of heaven, to the face of

earth. We have then no more long speeches to repeat together. May heaven and earth be with you, Cavek-Queché-Vinak!

QUECHE-ACHI

speaks for the eighth time.

Hail, brave warrior Rabinal-Achí! Is it thus your word speaks to the face of heaven, to the face of earth? "I have announced the news of your presence to the face of my lord, to the face of my master, within the great walls of the palace," says your word. This is why I come to bring you my message to you the brave warrior: "Introduce him before my mouth, before my face, at the gateway of the great palace, that I see his mouth, that I see his face, to what extent he is a brave man, to what extent he is a hero. Go warn him not to make any noise, not to make a scandal, when presenting himself before my mouth, before my face: that he humble himself, that he bow his head; for if he is brave, if he is a hero, he must be obedient and humble. For here he will be esteemed and honored within the walls of the great castle, of the fortress, has said my lord and master." Is it thus your word says? . . . What, would I then be a brave one, would I then be a hero, if I humble myself, if I lower my head! Behold with what I will humble myself, behold my

arrow, behold my shield, behold my Toltec club and my Yaqui ax! It is with those that I will humble myself, with what I will lower myself, when entering through the door of the fortress and the great palace! Let it please heaven that I crush the greatness and the majesty of your lord, of your father! Let it please heaven that I strike with my fists his lips and his mouth, within his great fortress and his great palace, and you, receive the first effects, you the brave warrior, Galel-Achí Rabinal-Achí!

(Upon saying these words, he threateningly approaches Rabinal-Achí.)

IXOK-MUN

speaks (coming between them)

Brave warrior, Cavek-Queché-Vinak, stop! Do not kill my bravery and my courage, the Galel Rabinal-Achí!

FOURTH SCENE

QUECHE-ACHI

speaks for the ninth time.

(He advances in front of King Hobtoh.)

Hail warrior! It is I who has just arrived at the entrance of the great fortress, at the entrance of the great palace where you cover everything with your shadow and with your majesty; it is I who have come to announce my fame to your mouth and to your face. I am a brave one, I am a warrior; for he has come to emit to me his challenge, his war cry, that one who is your bravery and your strength, the Galel Rabinal-Achí, to my mouth, to my face: "I have announced the news of your presence to the face of my lord, of my father, within the great walls of the palace, and the word of my lord, of my father has said: 'Then introduce this brave one, this warrior, before my mouth, before my face, that I see his mouth, that I see his face, to what extent he is brave, to what extent he is a warrior. Thus then you will advise this brave one, this hero, that he make no noise, that he cause no uproar, that he humble himself, that he lower his face, upon crossing the entrance of the great fortress, the entrance of the great palace,'" has said your

bravery and your courage to my mouth, to my face. Well, I too am a brave one, I too am a warrior, and If I am to humble myself, if I am to lower my head, behold with what I will humble myself, with what I will bend my knee! Behold with what I will humble myself, behold my bow, behold my shield, with which I will crush your splendor and your glory, with which I will strike you on the mouth and the lips, and behold how you are first to sample it, powerful lord.

(Upon saying these words, he lifts his club against the king.)

IXOK-MUN

speaks for the second time.

Brave warrior, Cavek-Queché-Vinak! Beware not to kill my lord and master, King Hobtoth, within his great fortress, his great palace, where he is enclosed.

QUECHE-ACHI

speaks for the tenth time.

Well then, have prepared my seat and my throne, for this is how, in my mountains and my valleys, the honors that are due me are rendered; there I have my seat and my throne. It is not I who will be exposed to the

wind, it is not I who will be exposed to the cold! So says my word to the face of heaven, to the face of earth. May heaven, may earth be with you, oh old one, oh King Hobtoth!

KING HOBTOH

speaks for the fourth time.

Brave warrior, Cavek-Queché-Vinak! Thank heaven, thank earth, that you have arrived within this great fortress, the great palace where I spread shade and majesty, I the old one, King Hobtoth! Thus then, speak, tell us why you came imitating the woeful cry of the jackal, the cry of the wild cat, the cry of the lion behind the high walls, behind the great castle, to provoke, to spy, to make these beautiful youths go out, these noble vassals, who have thus been attracted outside the high walls of the castle into the bamboo forest, where they tried to discover the product of the bee, the yellow and white honey, which serves my feeding, I the old one, King Hobtoth, within the high walls of the palace. It is you yourself who abducted the nine or ten beautiful and noble youths, and little was left for them to be dragged up to the mountains and valleys of the Quiché, had been not there my bravery and my valor, who succeeded in making them return; for, in truth, there you would have severed

the stock and the trunk of these noble vassals, of these noble youths. Truly it is also you who came to carry me off at the Bath of Tohil; it is truly you who seized me by the shaft of your arrow, by the mat of your shield; it is you who locked me in a prison of rock and limestone, it is you who had me cemented within four walls, in the mountains and the valleys of Quiché: it is there where you would have ended up cutting my stock and my trunk in the Quiché mountains and the valleys. This is why I have my courage and my valor, the Galel-Achí Rabinal-Achí, who, in turn, pulled me out of captivity by the shaft of his arrow and the mat of his shield. If it had not been for my bravery and my courage, surely my stock and my trunk would have been severed. Behold how I was returned to the inside of my fortress and my great palace. It is still you who have destroyed two or three localities, such as the towns of Balamvac, where the sandy soil creaks, at Calcaraxah, at Cunu, at Gozibal-Tagah-Tulul, as they are called.

. . . When will you have finished satisfying the unruly desires of your heart, to the inclination of this bravery and this courage? Until when will you continue to give them impetus, to stir them to that extent? Is it not that this valor and this bravery had themselves buried and entombed down there in Qotom, in Tikiram? Is it not that this bravery and this valor had themselves

ruined and covered up at Beleh-Mokoh and at Beleh-Chumay, by us, we each a king and master of a fortress and of a castle? But behold that you will be made to pay for these misdeeds here between heaven and earth. Thus you have said your last good-by to your mountains, for in truth it is here that you will die, that you will perish, between heaven and earth. Heaven and earth be with you Cavek-Queché-Vinak!

QUECHE-ACHI

speaks for the eleventh time.

Oh King Hobtoth, pardon me to the face of heaven, to the face of earth! Behold the words that you have enunciated to the face of heaven, to the face of earth, for in truth it is I who have sinned. Thus say your words: "Is it not you who made to leave, you who have carried off the noble, the beautiful youths, whom you had attracted to a trap while they tried to obtain the product of the bees, the yellow and white honey that is served at my table, I the old one, King Hobtoth, within the walls of the great palace?" your word has said. Yes, truly it is I who has sinned, because of the envy that devoured my heart, because I had not been able to take my share of these beautiful mountains, of these cheerful valleys, here between heaven and earth. Your word still

says: "Is it not you who has carried me off, you who has lifted me up there, from the Bath of Tohil, is it not that I was there bathing then?" says your word. In truth, it is still I who has sinned, because of the envy that rent my heart. And your word also says: "Is it not you who has ruined two or three localities, such as the towns of Balamvac, where the sandy soil creaks, of Calcaraxah, of Cunu, of Gozibal-Tagah-Tulul?" says your word. Truly, it is I who has sinned, because of the envy that gnawed my heart, because I had not been able to take my share of these beautiful mountains, of these cheerful valleys, here between heaven and earth. Your word still says: "You have said a last farewell to your mountains and to your valleys, says your word; for it is here that you will die, that you will finish; it is here that we will sever your stock and your trunk, here between heaven and earth!" Yes in truth I have infringed upon your orders and your commands to the face of heaven, to the face of earth, because of the envy that devoured my heart. But if it is necessary that I die here, that I end my career, behold what my word says to your mouth, to your face: Since you are so rich, since you have such an abundance of possessions, within the walls of this great palace, I will borrow your table and your cup, the beverages of the king, called ixtatzunun, the twelve beverages, the twelve sweet poisons, so sparkling and so fresh,

the liquors of all kinds that you enjoy when you go to sleep, within the buildings of this great palace; I will borrow from you the marvelous things of my mother, of my Queen; I will enjoy them for a moment as a supreme sign of my death, of my end, here between heaven and earth. Behold what my word says. May heaven and earth be with you, oh King Hobtoh!

KING HOBTOH

speaks for the fifth time.

Brave warrior, Cavek-Queché-Vinak! It is thus that your speech says to the face of heaven, to the face of earth: "Give me your table and your cup, that I may borrow them and that I may enjoy them a moment, says your word, as a supreme sign of my death and of my end." Behold that I give them to you, that I present them to you. Slaves, men and women, have my table and my cup brought, that they be given to this brave warrior, Cavek-Queché-Vinak, as a supreme sign of his death and of his end, here between heaven and earth.

A SLAVE

Very well, my lord and master! Behold that I give them to this brave one, to this warrior, to Cavek-Queché-Vinak! (Some slaves bring a low table loaded with dishes and a full cup.) Enjoy a little from the table, from the cup of my master, the old one, King Hobtoh, within the great palace where he resides enclosed, oh my lord, oh my master, brave warrior.

(Queché-Achí eats and drinks with some scorn; then he goes to dance in the middle of the court, after which he returns.)

QUECHE-ACHI

speaks for the twelfth time.

Hail, King Hobtoh, is this your table, is this here your cup? In truth there is nothing of value to speak of, there is nothing there that has an effect on my mouth, on my eyes. Go then to taste a little of mine, in my mountains and my valleys, of the excellence, of the sweetness, of the taste of the beverages, of drinks so sparkling and so full of freshness, that I enjoy in my mountains and my valleys . . . Now behold what my word says to the face of heaven, to the face of earth: Are these your table and your cup? But this is the head of

my father that I see and that I gaze upon! Will it not then be possible that the same be done, that the bone of my forehead, the skull of my head will thus be worked, that it be chiseled and painted in colors inside and out? Then when you will go to descend into my mountains and my valleys to trade with bags of pek or cacao with my children and my vassals, in my mountains and in my valleys, my children, my vassals will say: "Behold the head of our grandfather, of our father." Thus will my children and my vassals repeat in memory of me, for as long a time as the sun will shine . . . Behold then the bone of my arm, behold then the drumstick mounted in silver, whose noise will resound, exciting the crowd within the walls of the great castle; behold the bone of my leg that will become the beater of the toponovoz⁴³ and of the drum, and that will shake heaven and the earth because of it, within the great fortress, within the great palace . . . Behold what my word still says: I will borrow from you the brilliant cloth, the glittering weave, brocaded in gold, of such bright colors, work of my mother, of my queen, so that I can adorn myself within the walls of the great palace, at the four corners, at the four ends, as a supreme sign of my death and of my end, here between heaven and earth.

⁴³Quiché word origin of the Mexican word teponaztli, for tun.

KING HOBTOH

speaks for the sixth time.

Brave warrior, Cavek-Queché-Vinak! What is it then that you desire, that you ask for there? However, I grant you this as a supreme sign of your death and of your end, here between heaven and earth. Slaves, bring the brilliant cloth, the glittering weave, brocaded in gold, of such bright colors that you have worked, my Mistress, within the walls of this great palace, that it be given to this brave one, to this hero, as a supreme sign of his death here between heaven and earth.

THE SLAVE

Very well, my lord and master! I will give this brave one, this hero, the object of his desire. Behold, brave warrior, this cloth brocaded in gold that you desire, that you request, I give it to you, but do not be haughty and do not damage it.

(The slave puts on Queché-Achí a sort of bright scarf with which he adorns himself.)

QUECHE-ACHI

speaks for the thirteenth time.*

You, the musicians, you the drummers, what do you think, if now you play an air for my flute or for my drum? Very well, play then the great tune, the small tune, play then on my Toltec flute, on my Yaqui drum; play then my Quiché flute, my Quiché drum, that were played at the entrance of my prisoners, of my captives in my mountains and in my valleys; let the sky feel the excitement, let the earth tremble, let our foreheads, let our heads bend down to the sound of our steps resounding on the ground, beating rhythmically with the slaves, men and women, to the face of heaven, to the face of earth.⁴⁴ May heaven and earth be with you, oh you the musicians, oh you the drummers!

(Queché-Achí dances a round in the middle of the court and goes to each corner to emit a war cry.)

*The indication of order of speech is omitted here in Brasseur's original, which will compensate the error that began with Queché-Achí's fifth speech. In the following speeches, the numerical order is correct in the original.

⁴⁴These words that the text gives so clearly and in such few words are a perfect image of the American dance; the Spaniard has strongly described it with the name zapatear, a very exact translation of yiic, "to turn hitting with the foot," and xahic, "to beat the ground and dance rhythmically." [It is called the "Son" Quiché.]

QUECHE-ACHI

speaks for the fourteenth time.

Hail, oh King Hobtoth! May I be pardoned, I beg you, before the face of heaven, before the face of earth. Behold what you have lent me, what you have granted me, I have just returned it and left it at the entrance of the great fortress, of the great castle; keep it, lock it in its covering and in its chest, within the great walls of the palace; you have granted me the object of my desires, of my request, to the face of heaven, to the face of earth, and I have manifested this to the inside of the great palace, at the four corners, at the four ends, as a supreme sign of my death and of my end, here, between heaven and earth. Thus says my word between heaven and earth. But if it is true that you are so opulent and so rich in all kinds of goods, within the great walls of the castle, allow me then to borrow from you the Mother of the Precious Feathers, the Bright Emerald, come from Tzam-Gam-Carchag, whose mouth is still virgin, whose eyes have not yet been touched; that I be the first to enjoy her mouth, that I be the first to enjoy her face, that I may dance with her, that I may display her within the great walls of the palace, at the four corners, at the four ends, as a supreme sign of my death and of my end, here, between heaven and earth. Thus may heaven and

earth be with you, oh King Hobtoth!

KING HOBTOH

speaks for the seventh time.

Brave warrior, Cavek-Queché-Vinak! What is it then that you wish, that you ask? . . . Nevertheless I grant you the object of your desire and your prayer; for here is confined the one who is the Mother of Feathers, the Mother of the Precious Feathers, the Bright Emerald, come from Tzam-Gam-Carchag, whose mouth is still virgin, whose eyes have not yet been touched; I grant her to you, brave warrior, as a supreme sign of your death and of your end, here between heaven and earth. Slaves, let the Mother of the Feathers, the Mother of the Precious Feathers be brought here, that she be given to this brave one, that the object of his desires and of his request be given to him, as a supreme sign of his death and of his end, here between heaven and earth.

THE SLAVE

Very well, my lord and master! Here I give her to this brave one, to this hero. (The princess is brought to Queché-Achí.) Behold her, brave warrior, Cavek-Queché-Vinak, I give you the object of your desires, of your

prayer . . . But be careful not to offend, be careful not to hurt the Mother of the Precious Feathers! Be content to show her, to dance with her within the walls of the great palace.

(Queché-Achí greets the princess who withdraws dancing in front of him, in such a way as to have her face turned toward him; he follows her in the same manner, dancing and swinging like a scarf in front of her; thus they circle the court at the sound of trumpets and they soon return next to the king.)

QUECHE-ACHI

speaks for the fifteenth time.

Oh King Hobtoh! Pardon me to the face of heaven, to the face of earth. Behold the token that has been given to me to accompany me; I have shown it and I have danced with it face to face, at the four corners, at the four ends in the interior of the buildings of the great palace.* Keep it now, confine it within the walls of the

*"à l'intérieur des édifices du grand palais" on this instance only in Brasseur's text, instead of the Quiché repetitive and Brasseur's usual "au dedans des murs du grand palais," "au dedans des hautes murailles . . .," etc. This change could indicate that Queché-Achí has led the princess into some recess in the buildings, thus suggesting that he indeed used "the mouth" of the hitherto virgin princess, not heeding this time the mysterious, usually uncontested warning of the slaves. If

great castle. My word says still: allow me to borrow from you your twelve powerful Eagles and Tigers, whom I have encountered day and night, their weapons in hand; that I may take them from you to amuse myself with them, with the shaft of my arrow, with the mat of my shield, at the four corners, at the four ends within the walls of this great palace, as a supreme sign of my death and of my end, here between heaven and earth. Thus, heaven and earth be with you, oh King Hobtoth!

KING HOBTOH

speaks for the eighth time.

Brave warrior, Cavek-Queché-Vinak! Is it thus that your word says to the face of heaven, to the face of earth? "That I may borrow from you the twelve powerful Eagles and Tigers." Well then, I grant you the twelve powerful Eagles and Tigers that you desire, that you wish before my mouth, before my face . . . Go then, you, my Eagles and my Tigers, conduct yourselves in a manner that this brave warrior may go out to amuse himself for a

Brasseur had any essential reason to make this change, it must have been a non-verbal indication--in the dance possibly--; otherwise it would be a simply synonym for the sake of variety, since there is no indication of change in the Quiché text, which repeats the usual formula "chupam u nimal tzak u nimal qox tun." Until further exploration is done of this problem, we decided to keep Brasseur's text as it is.

moment by the shaft of his arrow, by the mat of his shield, at the four corners and at the four ends.

(Queché-Achí goes out with the Eagles and Tigers and executes with them a war dance around the court. Without delay they return to the front of the gallery where the king is seated with the princesses.)

QUECHE-ACHI

speaks for the sixteenth time.

Oh King Hobtoh, pardon me, I beg you, to the face of heaven, to the face of earth! You have granted me the object of my desires and of my request, these powerful Eagles and Tigers, and I have gone to amuse myself with them, to the shaft of my arrow, to the mat of my shield. Are these then your Eagles, are these then your Tigers? There is not much to say about them to my mouth, to my face; for there are some of them who see and there are others who do not see; they have neither beaks nor claws. Come and see mine for a moment in my mountains and in my valleys, what an admirable sight, what an admirable look is theirs, how they speak and fight admirably with teeth and claws.

KING HOBTOH

speaks for the ninth time.

Brave warrior, Cavek-Queché-Vinak! We know very well the teeth of the Eagles and Tigers that are in your mountains. What is then the sight, what the looks of the Eagles and Tigers, that are there in your mountains, that are there in your valleys?

QUECHE-ACHI

speaks for the seventeenth time.

Oh King Hobtoh! Pardon me, I beg you, to the face of heaven, to the face of earth! Behold what my word still says to your mouth, to your face: grant me, if it is possible, thirteen times twenty days, thirteen times twenty nights, to greet one last time the image of my mountains, the image of my valleys, where I roamed the four corners, the four ends, seeking, hunting what helped to sustain my table and my meals . . .

(No one answers these last words of the Queché-Achí: then he backs away dancing, disappears for a moment. Then without returning to the gallery where the king is seated, he advances towards the Eagles and the Tigers that are still in the middle of the court, around a kind of altar.)

QUECHE-ACHI
continues alone

And you, oh Eagles, you Tigers: "He is gone!"
you have doubtlessly said . . . No, I am not gone, I
have only gone to greet for a last time the image of my
mountains, the image of my valleys,⁴⁵ where I wandered
seeking my food, my favorite dishes at the four corners,
at the four ends.⁴⁶ Alas! May heaven and earth hear
me! My bravery and my courage have been of no avail to
me! I have traced my path to heaven and on the earth,
walking through the tall grasses, holding aside the
branches in the woods . . . My bravery and my courage
have been of no avail to me! Alas! May heaven and
earth hear me, is it true that I must die, that I must
come to an end here between heaven and earth! . . .
Oh you, then, my gold and my silver, you, the shaft of my
arrow, the mat of my shield, my Toltec club, my Yaqui
ax! You, then, all my spoils, down to my sandals, all of
you, return then to our mountains, to our valleys! Go
carry my news to the face of our lord, of our master!

⁴⁵From the fortifications of the palace of Cakyug, where this scene occurs, Queché-Achí could perfectly greet the mountains of Nebah, whose tall summits are seen to the west next to the mountains of Meavan.

⁴⁶Allusion to the pleasures of hunting.

For here is what he says, our lord and master: "It has been too long a time since my bravery and my courage is busy seeking, hunting the favorite game of our table, our lord and master is saying now." But he will not say that I only expect death and my destruction here between heaven and earth ! . . . Alas! May heaven help me, may earth hear me! If it is true that I must die here, that I am to come to an end between heaven and earth, let me be able to change my fate with this squirrel, with the bird, which die on the branch of the tree or in the new growths, where they find what will satisfy their needs, here between heaven and earth! . . . To you, then, Eagles, to you, Tigers, finish then, do your duty, fulfill your mission; but do it in a manner that your teeth, that your nails need only an instant to put me to death; because I am a brave man and I have proven it, in coming from my mountains and my valleys. Thus, may heaven and earth be with you, oh you, Eagles and Tigers!

(The Eagles and the Tigers surround Queché-Achí, they bend him down over the sacrificial stone and sacrifice him. As soon as he is dead, all the actors are joined in a general round with which the piece ends.)

END OF THE DRAMA-BALLET OF THE TUN

APPENDIX III

[illegible]

Source: John W. Fox, *Quiché Conquest* (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1946), p. 18.

APPENDIX IV

RECENT PHOTOGRAPHS OF KAKYUG



Top of the small mountain at Kakyug, to the north of Rabinal.



Ruins of Kakyug, with modern structure on top. View of the mountains of Quiché in the background.



Palace in ruins, Kakyug.



Walls of Kakyug.



Stone wall of Kakyug.



View of Rabinal from Kakyug.

VITA

Anita Louise Padial was born on July 18, 1943, in Havana, Cuba, and received her elementary and secondary education in that city. In 1966 she obtained a Bachelor of Education degree from the University of Havana. She worked as a simultaneous translator and an English teacher until 1966.

At the end of 1966 she came to the United States of America and has been employed as a teacher for the Knoxville City Schools since 1967. She became an American citizen in 1972. In 1973 she obtained a Master's degree from The University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

She belongs to the Tennessee Education Association, the National Education Association, the Archaeological Institute of America, the International Society for Phenomenology and Literature sponsored by The World Institute for Advanced Phenomenological Research and Learning, and to the National Honor Society Phi Kappa Phi. She was president of The University of Tennessee Chapter of the Spanish Honor Society Sigma Delta Pi for 1977-1978 and chairperson of the Public Relations Committee for the Knoxville Education Association that same year. She is chairperson of the Mid-Atlantic/Appalachian Race Desegregation Assistance Center task force in Lonsdale School, where she serves as a teacher and assistant principal.

She is married to Angel Manuel Vazquez-Bigi, a professor of the Department of Romance Languages at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. She has a son, Ricardo A. Casado.