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ESSAYS

ANTHROPOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF A QUICHÉ MYTH

Robert M. Carmack *

INTRODUCTION

Mythology

Mythology has always been of great interest to anthropologists. This stems not only from the type of communities they study (i.e., traditional communities) but also from the fact that myths are rich in symbols. Traditionally, "culture" has been the primary subject of study for anthropologists, and symbols are at the heart of the concept of culture (White, 1949). Mythology provides anthropologists with a fertile field to delve into the fundamental values and beliefs of human cultures.

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The study of myth allows anthropologists to analyze a culture on its own terms, relative to itself. In other words, the truthfulness of the myth is not as important as what it tells us about the culture in which it exists. Those who practice a certain culture believe their myths to be true, no matter how absurd they may seem to outsiders. As Leach (1969:7) states, "the non-rationality of the myth is its essence, because religion requires a demonstration of faith to suspend critical doubt." However, mythology is characterized by its exaggeration and the improbability of the events it describes. Mythical characters always partake in actions said to have taken place in some distant past. Thus, myth is primarily symbolic, and as we will see below, the relationships between symbols are close and formalized (although participants are generally unaware of their "structure").

The earliest studies of mythology conducted by anthropologists focused on cultural evolution. Myths from various communities were studied to determine their evolutionary stage and to distinguish remnants from earlier stages. Tylor (1958), Frazer (1911–15), and others associated the myths of "savages" with magic, considering it their ideological expression during the youth of evolution. The "barbarians," such as the Aztecs, Greeks, Indians, etc., preserved remnants of magic, but in the stories of their gods, they had reached the stage of religion. With "civilization," the maturity of evolution was achieved, as science dominated their ideology. However, remnants of earlier stages could still be seen in their poetry, tales, and superstitions.

During the first third of the twentieth century, among North American anthropologists, a historical orientation replaced the evolutionary one. Boas, Lowie, Kroeber, and others compared the myths of neighboring communities to reconstruct the history of their interrelations. They attempted with this method to determine the place and form in which a certain myth originated, and then trace its diffusion from one community to another. Perhaps the most famous study of this type was conducted by Boas (1916). He analyzed 75 Tsimshian myths, comparing them with those of their neighbors. He

claimed to have discovered that these myths spread to the Tsimshian from other communities, even though the different elements of the myths had distinct histories.

Another important orientation that flourished during the first half of the twentieth century, functionalism, was developed by English anthropologists. According to this method of analysis, the myth is studied in its social context because the social function of the myth is its most important characteristic. Malinowski (1954) and Radcliffe-Brown (1962) detailed how myths serve to rationalize and strengthen the groups and social relationships in society. Using a phrase from Durkheim, they argued that myths and religion provided "solidity" to the social structure.

In the last 20 years, another orientation in the study of mythology has emerged under the direction of the French anthropologist Levi-Strauss. Beginning with his famous analysis of the Greek myth of Oedipus (1963), Levi-Strauss applied his "structuralist" method to the study of a large number of American myths. For Levi-Strauss and his followers, the myth is like a language that expresses the paradoxes and enigmas that culturally astonish humans. Contradictions such as life and death, man and woman, us and them, etc., are represented symbolically in the myth. The act of expressing them, in a sense, rationalizes them. The anthropologist must uncover the structure of symbolic meaning, which fundamentally consists of a series of oppositions and mediations (Leach, 1969).

Quiché myths

Quiché culture is rich in mythology. It is internationally renowned for its fascinating myths found in the Popol Vuh and Rabinal Achí. There have been many analyses of these "classic" myths, although most of the studies were conducted with outdated orientations, either evolutionary or historical. It is time to carry out new studies of these myths, using the orientations and methods that exist in current anthropology. However, such studies must take place within the context of the folklore of the Quiché indigenous

people who still live in The Highlands of Guatemala. This latter subject is what interests us in the present essay, and not classical Quiché mythology.

Several texts of Quiché folklore recorded in the field have been published. The most important collections were made by Schultze Jena (1933), Bunzel (1965), Jongh Osborne (1965), Bremmé de Santos (1952), Santos (1965; 1966), Shaw (1971), and Mace (1961; 1967). These authors provide little analysis of their topics. The orientation of Schultze Jena, Bunzel, Osborne, and Bremmé is primarily ethnographic. Shaw's approach is narrative and linguistic, while Mace's is historical-literary. Thompson (1970) has analyzed some Quiché folklore in his study of Maya religion, with a distinctly historical orientation. Girard has also analyzed fragments of Quiché folklore (1952; 1966), applying a speculative evolutionary approach.

Perhaps the most comprehensive analysis of the mythology of the indigenous people of Guatemala was done by Mendelson (1958; 1965). It focuses on the Tz'utujiles of Santiago Atitlán, not the Quiché. In his attempt to interpret the "scandals" of Saint Maximón, he employs a fairly complex orientation. Part of it is historical, as there is a reconstruction of the process by which Christianity became syncretic with indigenous religion. Part of it is functionalist, as it examines how the rites and myths of the indigenous people function to maintain their society in opposition to "modernist" forces. And part of it is structuralist, as it distinguishes the fundamental structure of the indigenous worldview and explains how it resolves the contradiction between two ethical systems.

The analysis of the Quiché myth presented here aims to publish another folkloric text, as well as the analytical methods already mentioned.

Social context

The myth that will be discussed later was narrated to me by some Quiché-speaking indigenous people in the western territory of

The Highlands of Guatemala. The narrative has a style similar to that of many stories and beliefs circulating in various towns in the area. All these themes derive from the traditional culture of the Quiché, that is, from what is called "la costumbre" (the custom) in these villages. They claim it comes from their grandparents and is sacred. They know that urban dwellers, especially the ladinos, mock their beliefs, which is why they keep them secret. I was able to record this myth after living among them for several months and learning their language. To preserve their trust, I will not indicate the town from which the myth comes. But this does not matter because it is typical of the peasant culture in many towns of the western region.

In the indigenous macrocosm, there are rural sectors that do not share these traditional beliefs. For example, they would be offensive to the thousands of indigenous people who have converted to Catholic Action or a Protestant faith. They would also be alien to indigenous merchants who have accumulated significant capital and adopted the ways of the ladinos. These beliefs belong to the peasant subculture, to indigenous people who live off their milpas (cornfields) or traditional crafts (not capitalist but subsistence-based). There are small indigenous merchants who are involved in the traditional subculture, because they obtain only part of their livelihood through sales. In short, the folklore we are discussing is part of the traditional subculture of The Highlands, a sector of indigenous people who retain much of the pre-Hispanic Quiché culture.

The microcosmic social context for such myths is the ancient clan or lineage (kinship groups). It is still the primary group for Quiché peasants (Carmack 1966; 1970), and it is partially maintained by passing down myths like this one from generation to generation during clan gatherings. It is the same educational process that Ximénez (1929: 5) mentioned two and a half centuries ago: "first, they suckled with milk, and almost all of them have it by heart." It is important to remember that the indigenous people who told me this myth did so to give an example of a case that, according to them, truly occurred within their clan.

The narration that will now be presented is a myth, although the peasants accept it literally. Its mythological aspect is evident in the many exaggerations it contains. It is this aspect that gives the story its essence. A man from the clan appears in the story who, to some extent, can be considered a hero. The exact time of the events is not specified, but it is stated that they happened many years ago. As we will see, the symbols are so clear and closely interrelated that the anthropologist cannot doubt that the story is an example of mythology.

THE MYTH: "The Unfaithful Woman"

"This happened many years ago when the X still lived in another canton, not where they are today. Among the X, there was a man who was a merchant. He had a beautiful wife with a nice body, neither fat nor thin. Whenever her husband went on a trip, another man would come to have sexual intercourse with her. He would sit in the same chair as the husband, at the table. One day, the husband found out about this and returned from his trip early, at 4 in the afternoon. He hid to watch. The woman went out of the house to fetch water for the temascal (steam bath). At 6 in the afternoon, the dogs barked, but when the man appeared, they started playing with him. He was already known and a friend of the dogs. Then, the husband hid behind the temascal. The man and the woman sat in front of the bath and started talking.

"Ah," said the man, "your husband is coming today."

"No," she said, "he won't come until such and such a day."

The man asked the woman if she didn't have any chicken to give him to eat tomorrow. She said yes. The man replied that maybe it was her husband’s. She said it was, but she would tell the husband that the coyote had eaten it. Finally, she invited him to come the next day to eat it.

The man took off his clothes. The woman admired him and told him he had a good body, better than her husband's. She also took off her clothes, showing her large breasts, and the man praised

her. The man asked her why she didn't come live with him in his house, but she explained that she couldn't because her husband had a lot to offer—he could give her meat, eggs, juice, and let her have her way whenever she wanted. They had sexual intercourse right there, before entering the temascal. Afterward, they entered the temascal, and the husband went to the kitchen to see what they were going to eat. There was a bunch of eggs ready, and in the yolks, he left excrement. He hid again to observe. The two of them came out of the temascal, very happy, and went into the kitchen. The woman lit the ocote (pine torch) and told the man to sit in her husband's chair "as a substitute for him." The man asked, "What food do you have?" "A good one," she replied. Then she made scrambled eggs in a pan. When the man ate them, he complained that they tasted like old eggs, but she replied that they were fresh. The husband noted the day the man was coming back to eat the chicken, and he left. The couple went to bed.

When the specified day arrived, the husband came back and hid once again. The woman prepared the temascal, and the man arrived. They entered the temascal together. Inside, he asked the woman when the food would be ready. She explained that it was already done, that it was a fat chicken. She said she had specially prepared the neck for him. They left the temazcal, entered the house, and the woman served him in the same dish as her husband.

"Eat, eat," she told him, “To gain strength."

A bit worried, the man asked where her husband was and when he would come back. She said he would arrive tomorrow. After finishing the meal, they went to bed. A little later, the man got up to go to the bathroom. The woman told him to use the "tubo" (a hole in the wall) that her husband had made for this purpose. While the man was doing so, the husband was waiting for the opportunity. He cut off the man's penis with a knife, and the man fell to the bed. The husband fled with the piece of the man's penis.

When the woman saw that the bed was full of blood, she didn't know what to do. She began giving the man coffee, only to

realize that his penis had been cut off. She didn't have the courage to report the incident to his family or to the authorities. So, the man died. She wrapped him in a sheet and left him by the side of the road. Meanwhile, the husband tore the man's penis into pieces, prepared it as food, and took it home with him. He told his wife about a dream he had where a man died in his bed and she had hidden it. Then, the husband said he had brought her some meat he got from a marriage, and that it was for her. The wife cleaned the meat, put it between two tortillas, and ate it. After eating, she became very thirsty and began drinking water. Eventually, she became so swollen from drinking so much that she died from it.

ANALYSIS

As Levi-Strauss (1967) demonstrated in his analysis of "La Geste d'Asdiwal," there are several aspects through which such materials can be analyzed. In the present case, I wish to discuss three aspects: the economic, social, and symbolic. It is important to note that this analysis is preliminary, and the author acknowledges that there may be other interpretations.

Economic

The myth dramatizes the conflict in the indigenous villages of The Highlands due to the introduction of commerce into a traditionally agricultural economy. Commerce takes men far away, leaving women at home. But the farmers stay in the locality, where they can easily come into contact with the merchant's wife. It is an inevitable problem created by the mixed economy. Undoubtedly, the lover in the story was a farmer because he was always available when the husband left. Thus, the two men express this economic conflict.

The division between merchants and farmers creates inequalities in goods among the members of society. Almost always, merchants are wealthier than farmers, and from the perspective of poverty in The Highlands, they seem even richer than they actually are. It is notable that the story emphasizes meat as a food. Due to

the poverty of the indigenous people, it is very difficult to eat meat frequently, and there are thousands of families in The Highlands who can only afford it 2 or 3 times a month. In contrast, merchants, in general, are accustomed to eating meat almost daily. Therefore, it makes sense that the act of eating meat occupies a central place in the myth.

The myth emphasizes that the good food and home enjoyed by the woman were a great temptation for the poor man. It almost requires the reader to sympathize with the man, as he did not have the material comforts of his neighbor. The woman recognized her economic advantage and, therefore, did not want to go out with her lover. Additionally, although the woman was controlled in the use of goods (the husband could ask her about the missing chicken), it seems she had more freedom of disposal than others. Without a doubt, among the indigenous people today, there is more economic freedom for wives of merchants than for those of farmers.

Social

The story contains a very clear lesson regarding the obligations between spouses and the importance of keeping them. The tale highlights these obligations in order to exaggerate the transgression committed by the woman: 1) a wife should not talk to another man, but the woman in the story not only talks but also bathes, eats, sleeps, and has relations with the lover; 2) a man's personal belongings are conceived as a part of his being, to the extent that they are placed in a box when he dies to accompany him to the world of the dead. Therefore, the wife must protect her husband's belongings. In this case, the woman invites the man to use her husband's chair, utensils, and even the hole for urination; 3) while a husband supports his wife correctly, she is obliged to be an obedient and content wife. The woman in the story receives good support from her husband, but instead of being grateful, she flaunts it and uses it to seduce a man; 4) sexuality between a man and a woman should be very private, with no exhibition of any kind. In the myth, the woman shows her body and that of her husband to the

stranger. They also have sexual relations in public, not in the steam bath as is customary.

The theme of the myth deals with a serious family issue—infidelity and adultery. It is a common moral and illicit offense among the indigenous people in the rural area, and it is a cause of great conflict and instability. As we saw, it is related to the fact that some men must leave while others stay in the area. It is interesting to note that it is not explained whether the lover is a stranger or a member of the same clan as the husband. This aligns with the social reality, because infidelity and adultery can involve not only outsiders but also members of the same clan as the husband. The lesson would be very clear for any member of the clan: one should not get involved with the wife of their "brothers."

This narration reflects aspects of the legal system. It seems that the initiation of the process for transgression of the law depends on the individual participants (in Anglo-Saxon law, it is said to be "tort"). The husband takes the initiative to punish both the lover and his wife. Although he kills the lover, there is no indication that he acted wrongly. Moreover, it is clarified that the woman committed an offense by not informing the relatives of her lover's death. But justice is not carried out only by the participants; it is also executed by an invisible power. The punishment that the woman suffers seems inexorable, like a divine sanction. The law appears sacred, and its violation necessarily leads to tragedy.

In the application of the punishment by the husband, the operation of lex talionis among these indigenous people can be perceived. They are punished with the same member with which they offended. Just as the lover offended with his penis, he lost it in return. The woman offended with her body and her large breasts, and thus she was punished by having her body swell. This law sometimes operates even more concretely among rural indigenous people. As I have been told, there are cases where, in secret, they burn the fingers of thieves to match the punishment to the crime.

Symbolic

The story is rich in symbols. The meaning of some symbols is easy to uncover, while others are more abstract and difficult. In the following discussion, we will begin with the simpler associations and then examine the more abstract ones.

There are symbolic associations between food and sexuality. The meat represents the male organ, as seen in the food the husband made with the lover's penis. Just as the woman ate the penis, she had taken it in the sexual relationship. In an even more phallic reference, it was said that the woman gave her lover the chicken's neck. The eggs the lover received from the woman undoubtedly represent her genital parts. He ate them, just as he enjoyed the woman's sexuality. In fact, the very act of eating together, the man and the woman, seems to be equated with the sexual act. The woman urged him to eat well so that he would have strength, strength for the sexual act.

The temascal was also associated with sexuality. They had sexual relations there, although they also did so outside, on the ground. Perhaps the earth, juyup tak'aj ("mountains and plains"), is the primary symbol of fertility and sexuality, and the temascal merely serves as a specialized place for the act. The entrance and the room inside the temascal represent the vagina and uterus of the woman.[*]

The coyote is briefly mentioned, to whom the woman would attribute the missing chicken. For the Quiché indigenous people, the coyote represents the messenger of God Mundo, or the earth. It is believed that if the coyote causes trouble, it is by the command of God Mundo. The coyote comes to punish those who commit wrongs. When the woman falsely accuses the coyote of stealing the chicken, it symbolizes a desecration of the highest values. In other words, it

[*] Another piece of evidence linking the *temascal* with female sexuality is found in the current practices of the quiché. Women give birth and recover within the *temascal* itself. It may be that the water and the steam of the bath are also associated with certain sexual ideas. On the other hand, it is common among rural indigenous men to see the women who will become their wives for the first time when they bathe in public.

indicates that the woman violated the most important principles of society, which helps explain why her punishment was so severe.

We must note that this myth contains, in a subtle form, the idea of endocannibalism. The woman consumes part of the dead man's body, and his power is transferred to her. However, since the flesh came from someone who was bad and of the opposite sex, eating it harms her. Clearly, she didn´t eat it willingly, but the story implies that it was an appropriate act.

There are several slightly more abstract symbols that seem to express sexual dualism:

Male	Female
The penis eaten by the woman.	The swollen body of the woman.
The meat, etc.	The eggs, with yolks.
The coyote, accused by the woman.	The hen, 'very fat'.
The table where the man’s chair is.	The temascal.
The man’s good physique.	The woman’s large breasts.
The violent death caused by an external factor.	The organic death caused by an internal factor.

It is possible to take this interpretation a step further and search for symbols that serve as intermediaries between dual expressions. According to Leach (1969:11), mediation occurs by introducing an element that is abnormal and anomalous. In the duality of male and female, water can be interpreted as such an intermediary. It is the substance that connects the penis to the swollen woman, as she consumed it after eating the flesh. It is also associated with the temascal, where the man and woman came together in sexual relations. The anomaly of water is evident in its ability to transform into vapor.

The dualism that plays a central role in this myth is the opposition between commerce and agriculture. It seems that the

woman serves as an intermediary between the two occupations, having relationships with both the merchant and the farmer. Moreover, she is portrayed as an abnormal woman: unlike a typical woman, she is aggressive, unfaithful, and sexually explicit.

Another dualism, only briefly observed in the narrative yet prominent in other Quiché stories, lies between the surface and the interior of the earth. This is symbolized in this case by the sexual relationship of the man and woman on the surface of the earth and their relationship inside the temascal. Entering the temascal is likened to penetrating the earth's interior. For the Quichés, the coyote is the ultimate intermediary between the earth's surface and interior. This stems from the fact that the coyote lives in caves, emerging suddenly to roam the surface of the earth.

Finally, several Freudian symbols that are almost universally recognized can be identified. The myth seems to convey a connection between a false penis (the severed one) and a false pregnancy (the woman's body swelling). This may symbolize the fear rural men have of impotence and women of infertility. There are various Quiché tales where men lose their virility and die. While I have not been able to confirm if such crimes truly occurred, the belief is a serious one among them. Infertility is a significant issue for rural indigenous women because procreation is their primary obligation within the family. It is common for men to leave their wives due to infertility or take a second wife. An infertile woman is deeply unfortunate.

We have already mentioned that the narrow entrance and the spacious room of the temascal symbolize the woman's vagina and uterus. It has also been noted that the myth is highly phallic—the neck of the chicken, the eggs, the severed penis, the hole for urination. Additionally, there is a clear concern regarding the remnants of the body. Along with urine, excrement is introduced. In both cases, these are associated with unpleasant acts like eating old and illicit eggs, and cutting the penis with a knife.

COMPARISONS

If we compare the myth previously explained with other folklore tales collected among the Quiché and other groups from The Highlands of Guatemala, we will find many parallels. It is important to highlight the most significant ones and discuss their meaning.

Perhaps the closest parallels can be found in the myth of Maximón, told by the Tzutujil people of Santiago Atitlán (Mendelson 1965: 153-166). They say that the "saint" Maximón was created for the adulterers, as there were many of them. He transformed into young men or virgins, punishing the guilty. But he himself became an old man who lived with a prostitute. Nevertheless, he continued to fulfill his role as a punisher, sending diseases to the sinners. Mendelson explains that, according to the ethics contained in the belief in Maximón, sexuality is not bad but dangerous. He also identifies Maximón with Judas, a "saint" who is both good and evil, receiving much attention during Holy Week.

We can see a parallel between Maximón and the husband in the previously analyzed Quiché myth. Like Maximón, the husband asserts that illicit sexuality is dangerous. There are also interesting dualisms in the myth of Maximón, such as the earth (represented by San Martín) and the sky (Jesus Christ), the man and the woman, the old man (Maximón) and the young man (San Martín). The conflict between indigenous and Christian religion is expressed through Judas, an appropriately anomalous character.

A story from Patzún, a Cakchiquel town, resembles the Maximón myth (Slaw 1971: 78-79). It tells of a man who quarrels with his wife and is tempted by a spirit (tzan k'opoj). The spirit had been hiding everything and transforms into a damsel to destroy the man. It is a sexual matter because the spirit seeks sexual relations with the man, and he takes her left breast. In addition to its sexual symbolism, it recalls the Maximón myth due to the spirit's transformations and the danger that illicit sexuality brings.

A similar story comes from Cantel, a Quiché-speaking town (Slaw, 1971: 214). A man and a woman had sexual relations, and the woman was punished with death when the "devil" transformed into a young man. The devil here is equivalent to Maximón, who transforms to punish the guilty. It is noteworthy that, just like in the previously mentioned myth, the woman receives her punishment due to a deception by the shapeshifter.

In another story from Joyabaj (Slaw, 1971: 221-222), a shapeshifter (the "devil") was the murderer who ended up in prison. He escapes through a dirty hole, where the water from the bathroom flowed. Once free, he becomes a "warlock " who can heal the sick. When the authorities try to catch him, he always transforms into a cat or a dog.

Once again, we see a shapeshifter who serves as an intermediary. He is abnormal, being both an animal and a man, good and evil, dirty and clean (he can heal). Just like the husband in the referenced myth, this story focuses on the power and the ability of the shapeshifter to deceive, rather than on the violence with which the deception was carried out. Although the symbolism isn't explicitly warned in the story, there is an obvious association between the dirty hole and the anus.

The danger that illicit sexuality brings is the lesson of a story recorded in Chichicastenango (Bunzel 1952: 320-341). A married man had sexual relations with another woman "in the field." His punishment was a serious illness, sent by God Mundo and the dead. These deities must be appeased to relieve the man. The priest-shaman (chuchkajaw) determines that he deserves to be whipped for his crime, but instead, he cures him by initiating him into the cult of God Mundo.

It seems that this case highlights the usual way to punish adulterers: a corporal punishment administered by the leaders of the clan (Bunzel did not understand the importance of the clan in such cases). The story dramatizes that such an act is dangerous because it offends the sacred. There is much additional symbolism in the story,

especially the symbol of "four"—there are gods in four directions, four tzité beans, four assistants who help in the initiation, the main ceremony involves four "deer," etc. Some sexual symbolism appears when the cured man and the priest-shaman exchange women to dance. In another similar story from Chichicastenango (Bunzel 1952: 352-365), the sexual symbols are even clearer: a rooster and a hen are sacrificed in place of the guilty party; the priest-shaman takes the animal by the neck and decapitates it. Then, he eats the sacrificed animals, and although the transgressor cannot eat them, he dreams that he ate raw meat.

Sexuality is the theme of a legend from Lake Atitlán (Jongh Osborrne 1965: 46). The beautiful daughter of an indigenous man who lives on the mountain above the lake bathes in it. The lake falls in love with her, and she with it. The father does not like this, so he places the volcano as a guardian of the damsel. As the damsel no longer returns to bathe, the lake becomes displeased, and thus the wind arises, blowing over the lake itself.

There are certain parallels between this story and the symbols already discussed. Water once again is associated with the female (the damsel bathes there), and the volcano with the male (the father’s guardian). Sexuality is dangerous, as seen in the strong wind that causes problems for those who travel across the surface of the lake.

There are two stories from The Highlands that express a special interest in the dead body and endocannibalism. Like the previously described myth, they are didactic-moral stories set in a rural environment. One comes from Cantel (Fox 1966: 122-124) and deals with the importance of parents educating their children. A young son, not taught by his father how to gather firewood, grows up still unaware of this task. After his father dies, his widowed mother tries to help him gather firewood in the field, but he refuses. He shows his mother a crooked tree and tells her that if she straightens the tree, he will gather the firewood, but if she cannot straighten it, he will kill her. He kills her, dismembers her body, and gives it to his sister to sell at the market.

The son in the story resembles the husband in the referenced myth. He himself punishes the flaw of his mother very violently, but, as in the case of the husband, there is no evidence that he acted incorrectly. He is also deceitful regarding human flesh. Although it is not explicitly stated in the story, the implication is that he will eat the flesh. There is dual sexual symbolism, as seen in the leading roles played by the father and the mother, the son and the sister. We also note that the story includes an economic theme, related to the gathering of firewood.

The other story comes from Cubulco (Neuenswander and 1966: 169-173). According to the tale, God and God Mundo made an agreement for men to provide food to God Mundo in exchange for burying their dead wrapped in mats. When men began burying their dead in coffins, God Mundo became angry and sent diseases. This is how the many diseases men now suffer from began. The story highlights the same concern about the danger (diseases) that comes from disobeying traditional customs. It also expresses a form of endocannibalism because the bodies are eaten by the World. Several other dualistic symbols are present, such as life and death, the earth and the sky. Clearly, the conflict between traditional and modern life (represented by the coffin) is at the heart of the story. It resembles the conflict between commerce and agriculture in the previously discussed myth.

Finally, there is a story from Cubulco (Shaw 1971: 48-50) closely resembling the same myth, despite having a different narrative. It tells of Sipac, a man who sells land to foreigners and boasts of his wealth. He tries to use his riches to have sexual relations with three damsels ("goddesses"). They agree but first demand he retrieve a crab under a stone. The smartest of the three, a yellow skinned one, tricks him by making her ribbon look like a crab. She lures him deeper under the stone and then pushes it over him. Trapped, Sipac moves, causing earthquakes.

Beyond the clear sexual theme, there is a resemblance between Sipac and the wife in the analyzed myth. Like her, Sipac boasts of his material possessions and uses them for illicit

relationships. Both face violent punishment after being deceived by a magical character (the yellow damsel in Sipac's story). The story also carries sexual symbolism: the volcano (Sipac) is masculine, and the water (where the maidens bathe) is feminine. Sipac is phallic, as he undresses and enters the stone prone. The hole under the stone represents the vagina. The crab acts as an intermediary between water and land, being an animal that moves between both.

A link connecting Sipac's story to the myth above lies in a short Tzutujil tale from San Pedro La Laguna (Shaw 1971: 239). It tells of a woman with nine children, one of whom, while searching for crabs, becomes trapped under a stone and becomes the patron of earthquakes. The other children transform into celestial bodies like the sun and moon. In the end, they lock their mother in a temascal, where she dies. The tale suggests the woman failed to care for her trapped child, meriting her punishment. The association between the temascal, women, and death reappears, while the crab-seeking son mirrors Sipac, linking him to the earth (trapped beneath it).

CONCLUSIONS

A myth originating from the traditional indigenous sector of western Guatemala has been analyzed. It has been argued that, due to its exaggeration, historical stance, and rich symbolism, it qualifies as a true myth. Its economic, social, and symbolic aspects have been examined. Finally, comparisons were made with other indigenous myths of Guatemala, suggesting shared forms and functions. To conclude this study, the application of mythological analysis methods in anthropology will be discussed.

Cultural history

Comparing the myth with stories from neighboring communities reveals aspects of its history. While parallels exist in style, function, symbols, and overall meaning, identical myths have not been found in collections. This suggests a certain degree of local isolation and limited cultural exchange. Such cultural differentiation

aligns with known variations in clothing, crafts, language, and other elements among indigenous communities.

At the same time, the comparison confirms the existence of a shared culture, especially among Quiché-speaking indigenous groups (Quiché, Cakchiquel, and Tzutujil). They share concerns about the dangers of illicit sexuality, the seriousness of family relationships, the role of deception and shapeshifting by heroes, the contrast between male and female, and the concept of endocannibalism. These are symbolic elements partly inherited from pre-Hispanic Quiché culture, as evidenced by comparing current myths with those recorded in 16th-century chronicles.

Although these documents cannot be analyzed in detail here, some clear parallels can be noted. For example, a central theme in the Popol Vuh (Cook, n.d.) is that social unity is achieved in a potentially conflictive situation through the magical power of shapeshifting. This is evident in the actions of Xbalanqué and Junajpú in their conflict with their brothers, as well as in C'otujá K'ucumatz's role in the Quiché kingdom. Another theme in the Popol Vuh (Sloane, n.d.) concerns the opposition and violence resulting from illicit sexual relationships, such as the troubles brought to Junajpú's family by Xquic' and the violence endured by the fathers of the damsels when wearing the cloaks of Balam Quitzé, among others.

It should also be noted that the *Rabinal Achí* (Monterde, 1955) focuses on the sacrifice of the body (endocannibalism, though not explicitly mentioned) of a Quiché man detained after committing a crime. Interestingly, the drama includes sexual symbolism, as seen in the Quiché Winak's attempt to dance (or perhaps have sexual relations?) with the princess of Cobán.

The Cakchiquel Chronicles are equally informative. In one case (Recinos, 1957: 139), a woman kills and eats the body of the husband of the daughter of the Quiché king, K'ucumatz. In another, the sacrifice of Tolk'om (Villacorta, 1934: 211) involves dismembering his body, eating part of it, and throwing the rest into Lake Atitlán. These acts,

along with the symbolic contrast between flesh (male) and water (female), echo the previously analyzed myth.

Other passages from the Annals of the Cakchiquels confirm the suggested connection between water and women. One passage (Villacorta, 1934: 211, Q12) explains that Lake Atitlán symbolized the women exchanged between the Cakchiquels and Tzutujiles, even referring to the lake as the "vagina" (coon). Additionally, in the same reference, there's an association between K'ak'awitz and the lake, producing a cloudy wind (sutzucumatz), closely resembling the Lake Atitlán tale mentioned earlier. Another entry (Villacorta, 1934: 217) ties water to illicit sexuality.

These parallels between pre-Hispanic and modern mythology demonstrate that creating a "cultural history" of Quiché myths could be highly significant.

Functionalism

Regarding the social function of the myth analyzed here, it has been noted that its context is the society of rural, traditional farmers. Today, this type of myth is told by clan leaders (chuchkajaw) during group gatherings attended by men, women, and children. These are serious occasions where, as the story comes from the mouth of the patriarch and priest, everyone present accepts it as absolute truth. Myths unite the clan in shared beliefs and values of right and wrong, establishing criteria by which members may be judged in cases of violating ancient laws. The association of these laws with a close-knit group, like the clan, and with sacred matters serves as a very strong form of social control.

The comparison made between the various stories clarifies that the main theme they address is the erosion of traditional life by modern forces. Thus, there are references to the effect of commerce in a primarily agricultural society, new forms of burial, the sale of land to foreigners, the introduction of Christian ideas, etc. Against these modernist influences, myths function both to highlight the problems they bring and to support traditional values. However, as Levi-Strauss (1967: 29-30) reminds us, myths do not represent the reality

of the social structure, but rather "the inherent possibilities and latent potentialities." For example, one should not believe that the myth analyzed above suggests that a husband truly has the right to kill or physically punish the stranger or his adulterous wife. Nor is there any right to bury the dead in a petate, nor to harm the seller in the village of Cubulco (see the myth of Sipac). Moreover, while adultery is a problem for the indigenous people, women who commit it generally do not dare to do so in the temascal or in the husband's bed. By presenting the problem in this extreme and symbolic way, the myth can function to reveal to the interested parties the final conclusion they might reach if such transgressions were not controlled.

Finally, we must recognize the function that myths serve in maintaining traditional authority in the rural sector. In almost all the stories we studied, the subordination of women to men is expressed. There is also a subordination of children to parents, although as children grow up, they achieve superiority over their mothers. The authority of the priest-shaman (chuchkajaw) is supported by the fact that myths turn transgressions into ritual offenses. To alleviate the danger (illness, death, etc.) brought by the offense, it is necessary to approach someone who can pacify the invisible powers of God Mundo, the dead, or a shapeshifter like Maximón.

Structuralism

A small structuralist analysis of the symbols of the myth has already been presented. We found a series of opposing elements, with the most important being the dualism between the masculine and feminine. We must add to this same dualism the opposition between commerce and agriculture, because commerce is represented by the husband (masculine) and agriculture by the woman (feminine), who is associated with the farmer. Also, through the comparison of this myth with other indigenous myths, we learned that the opposition between the surface and the interior of the earth fits into this same dualism: the surface of the earth is represented in various myths by volcanoes, associated with men (masculine); the

interior of the earth is represented by the temascal (steam bath) and holes, even lakes, all associated with women (feminine). Thus, we can integrate the various oppositions in the myth into a single main opposition: that between men and women.

We had suggested as intermediaries between the oppositions of the myth: 1) the water (male/female), 2) the guilty woman (commerce/agriculture), and 3) the coyote (the surface/the interior of the earth). From the perspective given by the comparison of other myths, it is clear that the husband should be the intermediary par excellence. He resembles Maximón, the devil, and other shapeshifters who appear in the stories. The abnormality of the husband is not manifest in the myth, but in retrospect, it is clear that he was magical and powerful: everything he did turned out well; he managed to deceive the woman with a repulsive piece of meat; he had dreams and he killed the man without remorse for his actions.

The husband's mediation can be integrated with that of the water: it was the husband who gave the woman the water that transformed into her fatal drink. It is also not difficult to see a connection between the husband and the coyote, if it is correct that the husband identifies with the shapeshifters from other stories. The coyote must be a transformation of the husband, his alter ego (nahual). This interpretation is supported by a widespread belief among rural indigenous people, according to which a man can transform into a coyote.

The reconstruction of the structure is completed if we accept that the husband also serves as an intermediary between the opposition of tradition and culture. He does so through his power to resolve the problems arising from the conflict. His control of the situation is expressed in the myth through his ability to deceive and punish adulterers. There was no need to apply the usual criminal judgment in that social sector to maintain traditional rules. It is interesting to note that, just like the other shapeshifters who serve as intermediaries in the conflict between traditional and modern life (Maximón, the devil, etc.), the husband represents a mix of the

traditional and the modern, for example, the merchant, while still maintaining a traditional family.

In this short study, only a small part of the existing Quiché mythology has been touched upon. It would be interesting to test whether the analysis presented here aligns with broader studies on this subject. By making comparisons between cultures that share a similar general story and social condition, we can uncover at least a part of the deep message of Guatemala's indigenous folklore. It is hoped that the analysis presented here of the fascinating myth of "the unfaithful woman" will be a step forward in this captivating journey.

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