



Oral Traditions of Huehuetenango, Part One

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Most of the written sources of Mayan culture before the colonization have been destroyed.

Jacques Soustelle¹ discusses the resources that still exist:

In Yucatan, the most important documents and the richest in content are the Books of Chilam Balam. They are about the collection of historic records, years of prophecy, and evidently, transcriptions of hieroglyphic lost manuscripts. The whole chronology is based on the numeric count Mayan system, Katun. The Mayan books were written a little time later of the Spanish colonization in different locations, while the works mentioned so far are written in Yucatec Mayan; The Popol Vuh was written in Mayan Quiche. The title can be translated as "*Book of the Council*," because it is literally the book of those who sit on a mat, as a symbol of authority.

In addition to these texts, we have to interpret the thoughts and the

philosophy of the ancient Mayas on this basis to their archeological rests, the myths, legends, and tales that are still existing. To study the oral culture, the Popol Vuh is especially important, Gaspar Pedro González² points out that the writing of this book ended twenty years after the occupation of Utatlan in 1524. The friar Francisco Jiménez, one of the Dominicans that arrived in Guatemala in 1688, found the document in Quiche but wrote with Latin characters, and he made a translation. Among the information that contents the document mentioned are events of the origin of man and the world, the Mayan concept of the world and of life, the relationship between people and dos, and also historical data.

The beauty of folkloric narratives, in which are reflected tendencies, motives, and even subjects found in Popol Vuh, and its adaptability can be shown as survivals of ancient times and contemporary reflections simultaneously. In the current narratives of Jacaltenango, sometimes extraterrestrial and the characters of Popol Vuh are mixed. We should see these transformations with optimism, the adaptability of the narratives suggests that they will survive. The oral culture only dies when the circumstances of people do not change. Within the Mayan cultures, there are narratives with indigenous origins (pre- and post-conquest), European, and African.



1 Soustell, 1982, 148.

2 González, 1997.

The relatively few folkloric works that have been done in the Huehuetenango department to this day date back to before the worst war years and the breakup of the indigenous world because of the violence. In the oral culture of Jacaltenango, a challenge is very evident and notably in the narrative, which tells of the re-appearance of the mythical protectors of people during the violence of the 1980s. In the office of a military general, wearing the ancient clothing of Jacaltecs*, which now is not worn, they appeared and threatened him, saying that he should not mess with the Jacaltecs (please see the full version below).

The narrative legends that supposedly approach the truth or that at least are told in a style that suggest its veracity. Due to the fact that the word “legend” is used in a variety of forms, it is difficult to assign a precise definition. It is overlapped substantially with the categories of “myth” and “tale.” Unlike those categories, the legends not always involve neither the narrating either the listener in an artistic, intellectual, or spiritual level.

Which are the differences between legends, myths, and tales? A myth is essentially sacred, such as Genesis or the myth of Popol Vuh.³ The historical character of the legend and the belief systems where they are developed are situated in a familiar environment. The putative events are presented as credible, even sometimes strange, characteristic of a normal situation (two Jacaltecs men are going to Chiapas to find a job, for example).

A legend has not been composed by a series of well-defined dual oppositions, unlike most of myths and tales. Distinctions between what is natural and what is supernatural are frequently indeterminate. We use the word “legend” to try an expanded variety of pseudo-historical, historical, supernatural or fantastic. In this breve compilation can be seen examples of the whole categories. An interesting point is that a lot of informants, especially the older men and women, do not make a difference between supernatural and natural narratives; a story about President Jorge Ubico is told in the same manner as another about flying giants.

One of the most common functions of legends compiled by us in Jacaltenango, especially of legends about the origin of the village, is in illustrating the struggles of people; struggles between groups of rivals, between Mayan religion and the Christianity, between the individual personal desires and what is socially acceptable. While the narrative is discussing the distinctions between what is natural and what is supernatural, it is also analyzes, illustrates, and designs the bad and good.

Among almost all people who are dependent on the land, it can be seen that the division between the real world and the supernatural world is less distinct than among the inhabitants of urban centers.



³ Recinos, Adrián, 1954.

* The term “Jacaltecs” means people of Jacaltenango.

Generally, when the direct dependence in natural resources decreases, also it is reduced the proximity of the supernatural beings.⁴ In the municipality of Jacaltenango it is noticed that the supernatural has isolated a little while it still invading the life of people in little villages. An informant of the urban center of Jacaltenango, remarks that perhaps, since the light came these things do not happen. The youngest people teach strange explanations for the most reasonable events from a Judeo-Christian point of view:

I do not consider myself a credulous person. I don't believe on phantoms like "*La Llorona*", "*El cadejo*"* and the ghosts. All of them are product of the Demond that want to play with us. (Emiliano Montejo, Jacaltenango).

One of the most important characteristics of the culture is the fact that the caves are recognized like so especial places, and the caves figure in a lot of traditional narratives that we are compiled in Jacaltenango. Eric Thompson says the following:

Cave worship, a very important factor in ancient Mesoamerica, was a third focus Mayan religious life. A lot of vestiges, both offerings and religious architecture (altars, sanctuaries and stairways). Into the caves can be found the peregrinations and certain caverns in the regions in which the European influence has not penetrated a lot. The caves were

used for cults, culture of the gods and of the earth and in many of them have been found unnecessary in considerable quantities.⁵

To understand better a culture, any culture, is always advisable with authorities, who are, almost always, and even in the industrial cultures, the divine and supernatural beings. They are the ones who command the laws that determine the standards of culture, who show us what happens when people are disobedient or too curious. Wheter they exist or not, the important thing is that control, probably more than other factors, the form that human experience takes.

The Mythical Historically of Jacaltenango.

The stories of the origins of Jacaltenango and its small villages are a very important part of the oral culture and the identity of the municipality. They explain in great part the characteristics of the current villages. Almost all the versions of the presented legends below about the foundations of Jacaltenango, -



* "*La Llorona*" and "*El Cadejo*" are two Latin American oral traditions. La Llorona is about a woman who dies after losing her children, then her soul wanders the streets sobbing eternally because of her loss. El Cadejo, can be a dog-like creature in a white or black color; the first one takes care of drunk people and the second one takes care of children and women at night.

⁴ The author has realized the similar tendencies in Ireland and in Newfoundland. Nuttall, 1998.

⁵ Eric Thompson 1970 (1975) 139-40.

San Andrés Huista and San Marcos Huista – give the importance to the supernatural, fatidic or pre-destined origin of the place, which was to be the home of people. The anthropologist has recognized for a long time the tendencies of the societies to believe that they sacred places were not selected but reveled by a god, ancestor or other character with religious importance possibly using a person or even an animal or thing as an intermediate. Here we can notice that not only sacred places but secular villages have been reveled in a similar form, illustrating the fact that it cannot be made a marked distinction between what is “sacred” and what is “profane” in the traditional society of Mayas, the same way that in other pre-industrial groups. However, it can be noticed that the small villages relatively recent, such as Xay un laj, Inchewex, Peb’il Pam, and Nueva Catarina, which have not similar legends to explain their origin, possibly it is not only because of their modernity but also because the small villages generally recognize the biggest as their religious and historic centers.

In the following narratives, it is noticed the territorial assertions both implicitly and explicitly in naming all the places where the ancestors have passed through before coming to live and in giving importance to the siblinghood of the founders of various villages, for example which shows the relationship between people. Ending this chapter, we will give some examples of the narratives that explain the origin of the newest small villages, to illustrate the fact that the dwellers of these places still depend of

Jacaltenango or the other older communities for their identity.

In the books about the culture of Jacaltenango, including various scholar texts used by children, the history of the origins of the village is in the most frequently published stories. In oral culture, is one of the less consequent legends, in which there are a lot of variations, but the whole versions are agree that the community is of great antiquity. Most maintains the site of Jacaltecs was predestined and the motive shooted an arrow, or a staff, to reveal the site is also a common element. The mythic ancestors, B’alunh Q’ana and the wife Imox still being the basis of a religious cult that nowadays is accepted by the Catholic church.

Casaverde studied the complex of beliefs and legends during his research on the Jacalteco culture in 1970s, and here I paraphrase his value work, that I unfortunately is available just in English. According to *Casaverde*⁶ at the beginning there were not people in Jacaltenango until the mythic partner Jichmam and Jichmi’ arrived. Jichmam was named especially by God and he was attributed the responsibility and welfare of his descendants. Also, he gave him a book with all the rules to keep an organized social life. He delimited the territory, established the seeds that were to be planted in the land, established the clothing of Jacaltecs, the language, and the



⁶ Casaverde, Juvenal.

offices of the praying mayors. While he was delimiting the territory, Jichmam received a petition from the people of Santa Ana Huista for a portion of the territory. After meeting with his brother in Juntá, he gave them what they wanted. While he was delimiting the territory, Jichmam's brother slept with his wife. When Jichmam discovered what had happened, his brother Ochewal fled to San Miguel Acatán and became the ancestor of the people in San Miguel⁷; while the woman, with shame, entered to a cave in Stiya Pam. The people of San Miguel are considered among the Jacaltecs -to date- as a population without morals; they say that they sell the corpses of their own relatives (to the United States where they use them in the production of electric light), that young people are drug addicts, sexually promiscuous that when someone dies the body has to be kept in the house for a month before burying it because of men who steal corpses, and so on. The Jacaltecs narrators of the legend on the foundation of Jacaltenango adds detailly the bad act by the founder of San Miguel, that encouraged his attitude and people are still like that, compared to Jacaltecs, among whom, although the moral has deteriorated in recent years due in large to the fact that there are now many influences from the U.S., "they respect each other."

The mythical couple Jichmam and Jichmi' is considered, then such as the pair of founder ancestors of Jacaltecs. In addition to this myth of their origin there are other two versions that are not known by all people. According to one of them, Jichmam was a Lancadon child, chosen as

a victim in a sacrifice to the Lancadon gods. When his father discovered what was going to happen, he ran away with Jichmam. They arrived in San Juan Ixcay where they stayed for a few years and also Jichmam married a woman from there, Jichmi'. The Lancadon discovered where they were and went in search of Jichmam. To escape, he and his wife went to Yula, where they settled.

The other version tells that in Yula there were seven siblings, Jichmam, Ochewal, Q'anil, Wamu, Tzipo, Ixtnam 1 and Ixtenam 2.⁸ Among them, Jichmam was known as a being with more gifts and the others recognized him as them leadear. The siblings accompanied Jichmam when he went to delimit his land. When Ochewal disappointed Jichmam with his wife, the other siblings were divided. Some of them supported what Ochewal did, and some did not. Those who were in favor of Ochewal



⁷ The people of San Miguel Acatán are still considered as a Barbarian people, and nefarious rumors abound about the people of San Miguel. In San Miguel, when someone dies, they have to keep the body in the house for a month, guarding it day and night because otherwise people come to steal it and sell it to the electricity company due the electricity consumes blood. There are a lot of shamans in San Miguel who spread curses to the animal people. (Andrea Elizabeth Nolasco Nolasco, 16) Other people add that they kill people and cut off their heads to sell them to the United States and that the people of San Miguel are dangerous. They cut people's heads off and sell them.

⁸ B'alunh Q'ana is considered the father of the Jacaltecs ethnic group and his name means "Nine Stars."

said that the siblinghood was more important than sin while the others wanted to kick him out of the group. They stared to fight and Ixtenam 1 was pushed off a cliff with a stick landing on the other side of the blue river where it remains to this day.

Archeological researches in the Mayan area refer to the hypothesis that the increase in the number of wars to obtain victims for sacrifice them and the destruction of buildings was the reason why the ancient Maya of the classic period abandoned their sacred cities. The legend of B'alunh Q'ana is accord to this theory⁹. Also, it is known as the Jichmam (first father) and it is precisely caused by the fact of have been this legendary character, chosen for the expiatory sacrifice to the new gods, fact of which he managed to escape, saving his life...

The legend of B'alunh Q'ana refers that approaching the celebration of the corn rituals¹⁰ B'alunh Q'ana brought with him a complex cultural baggage that he passed on to his successors, the inhabitants of the village of Yich Kanh. From Yich principle, basis, foundation and Kanh, in Yucatec Mayan, is the name of the red shell beads that had great value among them. Kanh is day of the Yucatecan calendar and kanh in Jacalteco also can stand for skilled awake. They had to prepare for prayer and sacrifice in clamor for the rain necessary for the sowing of such venerated grain. At the end of this preparation or purification, the sages and elders were to consult the calendar or B'ISB'AL Q'INAL to determinate which of the young men or women of the town

would be the victim of the great sacrifice. The chosen victim in that occasion was B'alunh Q'ana, who was the first-born son of one of the sages and principal offerers who never agreed to sacrifice human beings, since such a practice was not proper of the population but had been imposed by the invaders from the north or Okib'a (for the Maya, the north and west are the regions from where the evils come from). From both blow winds that make people sick. The north and west winds are feared because they provoke diseases. The first one because of the cold and the second due that's where all the bad thing come from.

Knowing that his only son would be the victim of the sacrifice, this father chose to provoke his son's scape, supported by the darkness of the night, without caring about the consequences of such an action. The victim to sacrifice was already lying inside the sacred enclosure known as Po b'al, when his father furtively came to free him from his ropes giving him the staff or rod that meant his category and distinction among other men. He indicated to him that this staff would point out his destiny, as well as with this instrument he would find the place where he would finally establish his kingdom, founding a town that would eventually become great. In its continuous pilgrimage in the search



⁹ This celebration presupposes a large practice and existence, which is still practiced until the mid of the present site in Jacaltenango.

¹⁰ The language of San Juan Ixhcoy and neighboring villages such as Santa Eulalia, Soloma, is

of security and calm B'alunh Q'ana traveled through many places baptizing with names derived from circumstances or outstanding events. It is said that one of the great rivers of northern Quiché owes its name to the fact that B'alunh Q'ana, aided by his staff, crossed it with a great leap. This river is the current Xalb'a... it is said that he reached a small valley populated by people who speak a language similar to his own¹¹ known as Ixcoy, place where he stayed for some years and where he met his partner, the one who would accompany him until the end of his days, assuring him a numerous descendant. Not satisfied with his stay in Ixcoy, our pilgrim continued his search for an appropriate place to live with his wife and children, finally arriving at a paradisaical place where a river of celestial-moon-colored waters was born, which he baptized with the name of Yul Ha (element of water has always figured in the toponymy of Jacalcoy). Likewise, the elements earth, fire and wind are considered as deities because of the benefits that the Jacalteco receives from them. It is said that mountains (earth) protect these people against hurricanes. The strong winds bring misfortune to the fields and fire is capable of destroying everything and at the same time provides warmth.

He stayed here for a while, with his incipient family, which over the years grew in number. It is ignored what other locations B'alunh Q'ana went down but the tradition refers that he was buried in the proximities of Yul Ha' when he was seventy. Also, one of the most populated

centers by his descendants is the place known as Ajul¹².

As families were growing and multiplying, the leaders and elders of the community searched for new places for establishment. One of these places was Xajla'. The tranquility and peaceful coexistence of its inhabitants dedicated to agriculture, was only altered by the only disturbed by the news of the arrival of bearded men in the vicinity, a situation that according to the legend was prophesied by its founding father, who recommended the receive these foreigners in a perfect form, as a guarantee and security of their survival over centuries¹³.

We have compiled several versions of the legend about the foundation of Jacaltenango. They show a lot of variations, which, perhaps, suggesting that this legend is "degenerating" or in other words losing relevance for modern people, while other traditional narratives are still been retold. The reason of the throwing of the stall or arrow by B'alunh Q'ana is among the most constant characteristics. In Jacaltenango, the place where the projectile was embedded into the land is currently marked with a cross and known as "*las cruces*," other example among thousands of the syncretism within local



¹¹ A version of the common origin of the Jacaltecos and conceptionist refers that due to dissensions and predominance of the former, the latter separated, settling in the place they occupy today.

¹² Ethnographic historical essays.

¹³ Lenkersdorf, 1986.

beliefs. B'alunh Q'anah's wife, according to some versions, had sexual relations with (or was raped by) her brother-in-law. B'alunh Q'anah's wife, Imox is considered such as "the grandmother of all the Jacaltecs," showing some similarities between traditions that cannot be by chance.

The story of B'alunh Q'ana has several levels. In addition to the aforementioned ancestral couple, it may also refer to the memory of a powerful king of the postclassic period associated with events from Comitán to Soloma. The ancient name of Comitán was Balun Canan. G. Lenkersdorf cites documents of the XVII century that refer to the custom of calling the big towns by the name of the cacique¹⁴.

Among the current Jacaltecs exists various mythological versions about the foundation of Jacaltenango. One of them says that when the ancestors that lived in Meste (where, today lives a community of healers) were hunting in the area where is Jacaltenango today, discovered that rocky plateau seeing that there many natural springs that served for the survival of the people, they decided to work the part where today is the main town. Another version says that seeing the ancestors that the place where they lived were very small and decided to search for a better place to move, to know which would be the place, Komam (our father, B'alunh Q'ana) threw his staff, where this would fall would be the place where he would move, when went to look for the staff, they realized that it was in this place so they decided to take possession of this site called today

Jacaltenango. The bishop and Master Fr. Antonio Núñez de la Vega clarifies an association between the name "Canan" (Q'anah) and the Mayan nobility of eastern Chiapas, writing in 1695, that they also venerate as lord and guardian the indigenous they still call Canamlum in some provinces... and this surname has been used for Cham and Canan, and by him, some families of the indigenous are known, and the one they call the lion of the people and guardian of him, they mean with the name of Chan...¹⁵

The priest Mr. Ramón Ordoñez and Aguiar in their work "*Historia de la Creación del Cielo y la Tierra*," according to the system of American Gentility, speaks of the kings and lords Mayas and "Mexicans," according to his interpretation of manuscripts and codices. Most of this information comes from Chiapas and Guatemala and talks about the codices discovered by him, some native informants and the documents of the bishop Núñez de la Vega and Fr. Francisco Jiménez. In the warning, he mentions the



¹⁴ Fr. Antonio Núñez de la Vega, 275. Note 165, comments that the character was a great magician enchanter sorcerer. The devil burned him alive. He learned from the descendants to populate these parts of the Indies.

¹⁵ It seems to me like among the people of the main town there are certain disdain to the people of San Miguel. They express that the people of that place do not have education, that they are really not catholic. In addition, some people from San Miguel who are studying in Jacaltenango told me about some problems they have suffered because of their origin.

dynasty of the kings of Palenque as descendants of Heveo, son of Chavaan, grandson of Chan and great-grandson of Noah... The comments of the bishop Núñez de la Vega and the priest Ramón Ordoñez and Aguiar are based on the information obtained from the native population, the codices, and indigenous documents already written with Spanish characters. Although their interpretations are a little whimsical, trying to agree their data to coincide with the Bible, it is to be presumably that they had access to some history of Balun Canan in the east of Chiapas and collected information of Tojolabales and Tzeltales. The fact that at this time, they still calling “Chanabal” (the fourth tongue) to Tojolabal. It could be in part the memory of Tojolabales as belonging to a Q’anjobalan lordship of earlier times. It is possible that also was included the settled Tzeltales in some parts of the lordship territory (B’alum Canan is in Tzeltal the Trinitaria). Both clergymen make mention of the seven caves and seven siblings whom they call “demons.”

The above leads us to suppose that even in the 18th century, the Tojolabales and Tzeltales in the area of Comitán and Las Margaritas kept some traditions about “Balum Canan” (B’alunh Q’ana) now forgotten. For their part, these ecclesiastical scholars, may have deliberately contributed to influence the indigenous to accept their biblical interpretations. Casaverde’s 1970 version, compiled in Jacaltenango still keeps concepts such as “Jichmam was specially named by God...” In the last decades of the 20th century, the Catholic Church has

followed this policy by integrating ancestor worship into Christianity, reusing ancient pre-Hispanic shrines that link people to their ancestors as places of worship, where liturgy is practiced.

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This version was compiled in Inchewex village, which was founded at the beginning of 20th century. It does not include the detail about the escape of the sacrifice neither the seven siblings mentioned by Casaverde but it is focused on the detail of the territorial demarcation in addition to the mythical founder of Jacaltenango. This version does not present the name of the ancestor but identifies the reason behind of throw the arrow.

An especially interesting detail is the following: the Spaniards came to conquer the people... the lord did not want to be baptized. He went to hide in a cave. As we have said before, the caves are really important in Mayan myths and beliefs. The stay of the founder in the cave suggests that an association with gods or supernatural beings of Mayan theology alike with the fact that he did not want they baptized him and it is consistent with Casaverde’s report who says that, according to his research, the ancestors were inside caves.

Then, the narrator identifies the place where B’alunh Q’ana dies as a cave. Actually, the recognized place as his grave is located near to a number of natural caves, among which there is a large one that, according to some informants, was the place where Jacaltecs hid, when they were

fleeing from the Spaniards. The Spaniards passed by without realizing that Jacaltecs were hiding and thus survived.

The people who currently live in the surrounding area, who are all healers, told us that until about fifty years ago, they listened to marimba music, drums, etc. from inside the cave. Other caves in the area contains human remains although some informants say they are from people who died of cholera in the early twentieth century and are not of great antiquity.

An important aspect of this version is its function in accentuating the Jacalteco territory.

The place where the first Jacalteco lived is called Ixcán (in front of Barillas). He came with his family looking for his land. The place was called Mes 'te. The Jacalteco built there a little house with wicker – of sticks, with a wicker roof. He went as far as Victoria Guadalupe and Nentón to mark the land for his children passing through Santa Ana, Buenavista, Cantiniel, San Martín, Concepción, Ajúl and Olla.

After he arrived at Olla, he arranged his testament. Then, the lord shot an arrow. Where the arrow would fall, there the people had to stay. After that he threw the arrow, he came to look for where it fell. The lord said that in this place is the place where people have to stay. Afterwards, the lord returned for his family and even his grandchildren came to live in Jacaltenango. The village had a lot

of people. The Spaniards came to conquer the people, then the lord did not want to be baptized, so he hid in a cave and his companions built the church, finally, he died with his wife.

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The following historical notes are part of the oral anthology of Mr. Hermelindo Silvestre, a gentleman recognized in Jacaltenango for his extensive knowledge and for playing the marimba in all kinds of celebrations. Besides playing, he also builds the traditional instruments.

Mr. Hermelindo does not have a lot of interest in what he calls the legends and myths, but rather, he is fascinated by history because historical data can be verified in books but also in the knowledge of others. He also added that there are several versions of the known legends in Jacaltenango while the history is quite constant. Mr. Hermelindo is perfectly bilingual. His father always spoke to him in Spanish and his mother in Poptí. The following story is about the parents of all the Jacaltecs and how they founded the village where it is still located today. The fact that Mr. Hermelindo adds a some relatively modern historical data indicates that he considers the narrative as history. The important facts include the territorial aspect, “he went to mark his territory as far as Gracias a Dios and Nentón,” the identification of San Miguel as, on the one hand, associated with Jacaltenango and on the other hand morally inferior, a characteristic often attributed to them to

this day, and the historical fact that when the Spaniards arrived, they were accompanied by Quiche people. Another interesting factor is that Mr. Hermelindo speaks about the marriages between Jacaltecs and foreigners. Although the heritage is quite obvious in physical features of the Jacaltecos, among which are people with green eyes, red hair, etc., there are some who deny such heritage, proudly saying that Jacaltenango is “one hundred percent indigenous...”

The details about the musical tradition in Jacaltenango reflect the personal interest.

The place called, Xajlá “a place with milpas was the place where the founders of Jacaltenango lived. When the Spaniards came with the Quiche leader, people came through a place about a league from Jacaltenango.

There are two brothers. Balunh Q’ana and Och E Wal. They lived in Ajúl – today the village of Concepción Huista where there are about twelve families. They threw a stick from Ajúl to see where it would fall and it fell in Jacaltenango.

Balunh Q’ana went looking for a place to live and build his houses where the population was growing. He went to mark his territory as far as *Gracias a Dios* and Nentón. While he was marking his territory, his brother abused his wife – he raped her. When he returned and realized what had happened, his

brother went to Via Linda, which is now San Miguel, to look for another place to take refuge because he did wrong to his brother. To date men can be found in San Miguel who take several women as wives. I know personally a man who has three wives, to me he did not give a satisfactory justification about his behavior¹⁶.

The Spaniards arrived to Jacaltenango in 1560 and started to build a church in 1567. Balunh Q’ana went to Ulah where Río Azul rises because he did not want to be tortured by the Spaniards.

The Spaniards sent a bishop, Ximinex, from Spain. When he arrived, he realized that there was a disease (goiter). They brought the Virgin here and some crosses and at the beginning the bishop celebrated mass in a hut. The Spanish, Turks and Indigenous married in the hut. Children began to be born who looked like the Spaniards and they all went to see



¹⁶ Regarding the etymology of the current name, there are the following two versions, 1. “Xacali”, Mexican voice that means fertile land or cultivable place and “tenango” means place. 2. “Jacal”, hut or house, (or properly speaking a walled place) tea, stick, and “Nango” means place. [Source] *W’Bex en el Breve. Monografía del Municipio de Jacaltenango, del Departamento de Jacaltenango, hecho por el Ministerio de Agricultura, ganadería y Alimentación, Unidad de Formación de Recursos Humanos, Escuela de Formación Agrícola, Jacaltenango, Huehuetenango.*

the Virgin. At the end of the build of the church they began to discuss what name they were going to give the village and they chose “Jacaltenango” because they had celebrated mass in a “*Jacal*” a hut¹⁷.

In those times there was no marimba, only the teponaxtle. That was the music of the ceremonies. They played the teponaxtle when they celebrated accompanied by violin and guitar. The marimba was introduced after by Spaniards, who began to be married by the church, which ended in 1581. (Mr. Hermelindo Silvestre, Jacaltenango, 75)

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The fact that the founder of San Miguel Acatán was a womanizer (in more complete versions it says that he raped his brother’s wife or cheated on him with her) is still more interesting considering the current reputation of people from San Miguel among the Jacaltecs, (more below). The following version is also comments on the unacceptable behavior of the ancestor of the people of San Miguel and incorporates one of the most common explanations for the present-day man of Jacaltenango. The fact that linguists consider that the Jacaltecan language belongs to the same group as Q’anjob’al it is supported by these demographic data. In addition, it is briefly

mentioned an explanation for the founding of San Antonio. This village was in Ajúl on the side of Concepción in a small valley. He says that they only grew corn and beans and had their own customs. They were delicate to each other. They could only have one woman. If one of them looked for another one they punished him. There was womanizer man and when they knew he was that they expelled him and he went where today is San Miguel and speak Q’anjob’al. He was their ancestor and left his heredity.

When the community was growing, they started to need water. Someone went so far as Mes ’te, the source of drinking water. They returned to Ajúl. Some stayed and made the village of Concepción and the rest went to Mes ’te and stayed there. In Mes ’te there is a lot of water and animals and they were also hunters of animal, deer, etc., they made their huts there. The people of Mes ’te migrated to



¹⁷ Mr. Roberto Figueroa (52) commented on having heard (1960-1980) that the origin of the inhabitants of San Antonio Huista is Amatenango; from “near the source of the Río Azul where their god Balun Canan was.” This, besides being one of the possible explanations for the Tzeltal migration to San Andrés Huista; also shows the connections between Tzxiones, Tzeltales, and Qanjobalans with respect to Balun Canan / B’alunh Q’ana.

Jacaltenango which is named because of the huts. A man did not want to go with them and he went where today is San Antonio and there he founded. In Mes 'te there is a lot of sediment -Xaj- and because of having lived in this place they called "Xajla" today Jacaltenango. (Baltazar Silvestre)

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The next narrative is about a professor that is very interested in Archeology and History. His interest is reflected on the vocabulary he uses.

In a place of Mexico, perhaps it was a Toltec group from Tabasco or San Mateo had the custom of sacrificing someone when it was not raining and they drew lots and the luck fell to a very handsome young man and when the father realized this, he was sac because he could not overcome what the people commanded.

Then, the father tried to save his son who was 14 or 15 years old. They fled and came to live in a place more or less near to *bucal* up in the mountains. They lived there for a long time, perhaps there were inhabitant, he got his wife and they multiplied until they became a village, a population. They wanted to look for a spacious place, a better place to live and thinking of the future, that people would multiply. They came through Ajúl and arrived at Mes 'te. Thee wanted to live there but they realized that the place was narrower and also was a place of sediment so they thought of choosing a wider place and to try their luck, they threw a narrow and where it would fall, that was the right

place and they came in search of the narrow. They found it in a place that still called Hatxox, in English "This is the land" that was the land where they were going to live. This is how they arrived where Jacaltenango is today.

Note: It is possible that they came from the Northeast, from San Juan Ixcay, to the north of Jacaltenango. (Jorge Camposeco)

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Although, this narrative is about the founding of Jacaltenango does not contain mythological data. What it has of interest, in addition to the declaration of the brotherhood of the towns is its social commentary. The Ladino population, although it has Spanish roots, is called "*Turco*." In the oral culture of Jacaltenango, alike other places, the word "*turco*" is frequently used as a synonym of "*moro*," of course, *moros* are antiheroes of thousands of popular legends and the most famous folkloric dances in Guatemala and also, they figure as the villains in one of the most important traditions of Jacaltenango as we will see below. Currently, the Jacaltecs say that, considering their proximity, they have a little contact with people of San Antonio, who is considered so pretentious and boastful. With delicacy, the narrator uses a traditional association to symbolically diminish Jacaltenango's neighbors and rivals.



¹⁸ Camposeco Maeo, José Balvimo.

San Miguel, San Antonio and Jacaltenango were founded by three brothers; San Antonio by Ibilaj, and Jacaltenango by Jichmam. The jurisdiction was of them. The locals were going to sow in Buenos Aires, in San Antioio to Nentón. The three brothers separated and each one stayed with his municipality. Santa Ana is new, it used to belong to San Antonio. In San Antonio there are *turcos*, or properly so called the descendants of *turcos* occupying the town and the mere Jacaltecs occupy the villages. Even the culture changed there because of the presence of foreigners; they are not the same as us.

They say that when the first Jacaltecs they came to Mes 'te but they don't know from where they came because the place is small. More hunters came here, where today is Jacaltenango. At that time, it was just bush. They arrived and saw that the place was big so they came to live here and to make their small ranches, houses with roofs of bush called "Chinam" or "Jacal." That is the reason why they named the place Jacaltenango. (Baltazar Cardenas, Jacaltenango)

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This commentary about the origins of Jacaltenango comes from a young professor in Jacaltenango, and the way he expresses we believe that the source of the information was published, an example of

the interaction of oral culture, the history and the formal knowledge. Here, Och E Wal, identified as B'alunh Q'ana's brother, is considered as a son. Q'0anil, the mythical protector of the Village (please, see below). The narrator's educational resources are reflected in his use of the phrase "the great Mayan Civilization," which demonstrates that because of his knowledge of history, he does not suffer from the unfortunate sense of cultural inferiority which is evident among some parts of the population. In this sense results of the Europhile that contaminates the formal education both among European themselves as well as among their conquered.

The name of Jacaltenango comes from the word in Nahuatl "Xacalli" which means "ranch" or "hut" so according the version it means "ranches or walled huts."

Since several centuries ago the Jacaltecs people initially settled in the Huista river valley. Anciently it was called "Xajlá," and its first inhabitants arrived to settle to this place about 1,200 years ago, fulfilling the plans of the father of the race, B'alunh Q'ana. It is one of the ethnic groups that still of the great Mayan civilization, indicating that the first children of B'alunh Q'ana were Q'anil and Ochewal. (Master, Gildardo Rubén Martínez)

The sanctuaries where the grave of B'alunh Q'ana and his wife Imox are located in the beautiful green valley of the

Río Azul, below the town of Concepción, approximately seven kilometers from the source of the river. These characters are considered as the ancestors of all Jacaltecs and, even the young people, are still respect them with the gravity they deserve, although they use the vocabulary of their generation;

They are our parents and they knew to handle the hyperspace, the telekinesis and the relationships between the society and the nature. That is why we must pray with respect when we pass through here.

Currently the pre-Hispanic associated to these characters are important religious centers for Jacaltecs, who secure that they always are decorating with fresh flowers including “Ek” or “lion’s tail” plant. It is said that ladies in charge of the task go every Saturday to clean and decorate the graves. The act of taking pictures is considered disrespectful in these sacred places. The sanctuary of B’aluhn Q’ana consist of three buildings, one is large rectangular in shape and two small ones with the appearance of altars, in front of the main building. There are a lot of evidences of the religious observances and the considerable quantities of ceramics in the surroundings but it should be noted that this valley is the home to several small villages of Mam origin (all saints) and the graves have been considered sacred from time immemorial, to this day. Among the remains obtained by our guide was a amber link (apparently really amber) with the shape of a foot or hand and about one centimeter in size in addition to the shape

with “fingers” grabbed it seems that the links used currently to avoid the damage caused to the babies because of the “evil eye,” although we believe that the most of them are of plastic and not of amber. Several graves in the valley contains human remains. The local theories about the origin of the remains suggest that some of them can be because of a infestation in the valley about 50 years, but also can be the remains of the Mayas who died because of the conquest, when, according to our informants, scape to the caves to hide.

When Spaniards came, the people were scaping from the direction of Mexico through Ajúl. They hid in a cave not so far from the source of the Río Azul (from this cave, from time to time, came the sounds of Marimba and drum until about 50 years, possibly on special dates. The Spaniards passed without noticing them. The B’aluhn Q’ana’s wife died and they buried her. B’aluhn Q’ana using his special powers he threw his staff and arrived where today you can see the crosses in Jacaltenango. When he was going to die, he asked to be buried near to his wife and they did it. (Emiliano Camposeco, Jacaltenango)

THE FOUNDING OF SAN ANDRÉS

San Andrés is one of the villages of the Municipality of Jacaltenango but it preserves a lot of differences with the others. A Jacalteco professor of the village school said that physically also they are

different. Among the differences, San Andrés has the reputation of being poorer in contrast with the other places; the condition of the houses in the village confirms it, most of the huts have roof of straw although sheet metal is the desired material.

According to some stories, the people of San Andrés came from Mexico many years or, perhaps, centuries ago, fleeing from a catastrophe that resulted when one of them sinned sexually, and also rejected the church or Christianity. To this day the San Andrés population is considered very different to others inhabitant of the Municipality of Jacaltenango. Among the characteristics attributed to them, it is said that they are freer in sexual matters and that women largely do the work of the farmer, that when a family goes out, the mother carries the heavy things while the father takes care of the children. At many versions of the legend about the founding, the offenders who began to the scape to the site of San Andrés were adulterous lovers.

The foreign origins of the people from San Andrés, and the mythical legend about their arrival to Jacaltenango are citated sometimes as explications of certain aspects about their behavior considered “strange” or “inappropriate” by the “pure Jacaltecs” who receive the signal of the television from Mexico and notice each problem reported of San Juan Chamula in Chiapas State, with laugh and a certain satisfaction, saying, “yes, people of San Andrés are alike.”

To this date, we have not interviewed to an inhabitant from San Andrés Huista and we cannot comment about their own theories on their origin, but the Catholic Church in San Andrés, although small, shows certain similarity with the Church of Chamula, especially in the treatment of the door, which is surrounded with pictures painted in beautiful and bright colors. The most of the representations are fruits, notably pineapple, one of the most important crops of the village. One of our informants says that they don’t have a reason to be jealous of their fruits. If you touch a girl, forget it, they surround you immediately with their machetes.

Also, other people have been told us that the people of San Andrés have a different concept of acceptable uses of the Jacaltecs territory than other settlers. They don’t allow outsiders to come and hunt on their land. Some gentlemen from Inchewex came to hunt within the territory of San Andrés and the owner threatened them, saying that they did not have the right to enter.

In addition to the following complete stories, we have compiled a variety of brief comments, which, although are lacking the framework of a complete legend, allude to the people from San Andrés Huista as a foreign people:

San Andrés Huista’s people came from a place called Peb’al. There was a judge there, a turpentine fell that burned a lot of people and that is why they were

fleeing (Mr. Francisco Morales López, San Marcos)

The people of San Andrés left Mexico fleeing a rain of burning oil and came to take refuge here. The church belongs to the Spaniards. (Anonymous informant, Jacaltenango)

The people of San Andrés come from a place in Chiapas called Tzisis. (Domingo López, San Marcos)

Some people say that the inhabitants of San Andrés lived in a place in Mexico called Pay'ab before coming here. (Anonymous informant, Jacaltenango)

The different events of the scape of the people from their original home to where San Andrés Huista is today are easily divided into two subtypes; A) the writing of the snail, in which the snail is involved in the story when it talks to the sinners; B) The writing of the bats, in which people are punished for wrongdoing with a plague of these creatures. Both groups are apparently and mutually exclusive. Also, both agree that the people fled Mexico after a sin generally described as coincidences between the Bible and the Popol Vuh and as the theft of a host by a woman who gave it to her adulterous lover (a motif that reminds us the motif in Genesis of Eva offering the apple to Adam). Then, the scape is result of the rejection through ignorance or lack of morals, of Christianity. This suggests a post-colonial origin of this syncretic legend. The main role of Christianity, and

the motifs of the bats plague always have been very important in Mayan culture and the rain of fire in these narratives also propose the possibility of influences of biblical sources as the Book of Revelation, or rather, it demonstrates the Mayan tradition about the rain of burning pitch and bats.

Reportedly, when the refugees from Chiapas arrived, they request permission to the authorities of Jacaltenango for living where today is the population of San Andrés Huista. Although they came from far away, the Jacaltecs considered them as siblings and welcomed them. Unfortunately, no one wanted to suggest an approximated date to the described events. The story could refer to an early moment of the Chiapas evangelization (sixteenth century) but, also could be the remain of Tzeltales rebellion of 1712, when deliberately they reject all the values and motifs of the Spanish conquerors or both events, after an initial migration, which, when the indigenous rebellion was defeated, they migrated more people with their relatives. Most of the complete versions of the mythical legend about the origin of San Andrés Huista contain the detail that the lover was at the river when received the host, a detail that is inexplicable. In the Maya area, many of the spirits and beings are associated to rivers or generally with water and as a result it seems logic for us to research the possibility that the lover in the legend had its origin as a symbol of the defeat of a god, spirit or ancestor by the new gods of the foreign conquerors. For this

legend it has to be researched the sense of the words in the original languages.

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This is a version of the group “snail.” Also, it contains one of the most general elements, the fact that the offenders are in the water when make the mistake. We don’t know the reason why they are in the water; one of the possibilities that we have took into account is the frequent association between the spirits, gods and other Mayan beings with the water. Taking this association into account, it seems possible a function of the legend as a metaphor for a struggle between two religious’ traditions. People who do not practice Christianity lose, which is consequent with what really happened in the history of the conquest of the Americas.

People from San Andrés came from Mexico. There was a village and a priest went to say mass in this village. Many people entered to received their communion, among them a woman that had lovers. She said “I’m going to see the mass” to one of her lovers and he request “Give me a little of the host” and she brought it in a jar grabbing it with her mouth. When she took out the host to give it to her lover it fell down in a creek and they went to looking for the host but they did no find it. Then, other people arrived and said “It seems like a host” and carried a part for the priest.

The priest asks for the responsible and started to pray. Then, the creek started to sink itself.

The priest said, “I’m not to blame for that, I just told you,” And the priest took a horse and left the village. Then, the gentlemen that went to the creek heard that the snails called “hutes” were screaming.

The husband of the guilty woman said “animals, why are you like this, I can’t hear you.” And the snails spoke saying “Who flees the village will be saved and who does not go will die.” And little by little they fled, the others remained and there came a rain of fire that burned the people and so they came to San Andrés from the other state. The bad woman remained and then died but her husband went where today is San Andrés. (Andrea Elisabeth Nolasco Nolasco, San Marcos Huista, 15)

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Apparently, this story is a shortened version of the previous one. Here the narrator suggest that the gravest sin was the betrayal of the husband by his wife.

There was a man married to an unfaithful woman. She decided to go to a mass and her lover request her for a part of the host and she made it. When she carried the host in her

mouth and when she took of her mouth it fell in a creek and appeared a whirlpool in the water. At the next day her husband went and a snail wanted to talk to him. He said “Why are you talking to me? You are not like that” they responded “Your wife is being unfaithful” and the snail told him all that had happened. The man went and told all what happened to the people and all of them fled due the fear of the snails. (Sebastián Nolasco, San Marcos Huista)

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This version, although it does not contain the motif of the adulterous partner, clearly it is related to the same tradition previous told. It provides information of the origin place “in Chambula in the place called Peb’al.” The informant believes that it has about one hundred years, although he doesn’t have a specific birth day, showing a very high level of continuity between the versions known to younger and older generations. From the high place where it is located, it is said that you can see the Mexican State of Chiapas. The connection between the inhabitants of San Andrés and Chiapas is only one among many other that link the

Jacaltecs with the Mexican side of the border.

Before the arrival to San Andrés, the inhabitants came in Chamula in the place called Peb’al. There were some people that did not want the communion and told their companion to go and bring communion with them. They were waiting for him at the river and he arrived. They were going to touch him but he fell into the river and suddenly a whirlpool appeared and the mother of the “hute” (a kind of a snail) spoke saying that it would be better to take all your thing and flee. A fire that burned a lot of people issued but the priest went on the horse and the people who followed him were salved and arrived to San Andrés where choose a place on a hill to have a sight of their origin place. (Marcos Ramírez Pérez, San Marcos Huista, c. 100)

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The following versions of the legend contain the important reason for the plague of bats, which we discuss detailly below. In the case of the first version, the differential aspect that sets it apart from the other is the reason of the “Collared peccary pig” that passed in front of the church and attracted the people. Taking into account that this animal has an association with the owner of the hills (please see below), is another indication of

the possibility of the metaphorical function of the story in dealing with the struggle of the invaders' religion with the indigenous settlers' religion. The style of this version demonstrates one of its functions: as a parable, alike the biblical parables of the Judeo-Christian tradition. The narrator is a lady who is very active in one of the evangelical sects that perhaps the fact that she is quite familiar with the Bible has affected her way of narrating. She said that in these days only were Catholic Christians, so they had to obey the laws of this church in the absence of the reformed sects.

Here the woman who has a lover is not married, then the gravest sin is the lack of respect from the people, and specially the woman that stole the host for giving it to her lover.

The priest came to preach the word of God in a village in Mexico called Pay'a, and during the mass an animal passed a "Collared peccary pig," in front of the church and the people, because of their ignorance, they left the church. This was the first mistake they made.

There was a woman that had boyfriend and the boyfriend didn't know anything about the word of

God and a request to his girlfriend that would bring him a host. The woman went to the mass and brought the host in her mouth for her boyfriend. They went to the river and when she was giving the host to her boyfriend it fell in the river and when it fell, it became into a crucifix. They tried to take it out but they couldn't and went to looking for the priest who went to do it. That was the second mistake. The priest cursed and a fire came and fell on them. It burned them but the good people of this village have fled before, taking two horses with a bell, which fell in the Río "Lagartero" and stays there. People there always come to see strangers when they enter the village. Long before elders from San Andrés could speak the dialect of the Mexican village. Now everyone speaks Jacalteco. (María Quiñones, Peb'il Pam)

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The other versions cited belong to the composition of the bat plague and as they are detailed provide data about the possible places of the origin of people from San Andrés. The first of them don't have the detail of the original sin made by ancestors but the narrator provides us

important information on the material culture: “They make pitas, hammocks, and petates like in Chiapas.” The narrator ends with a series of comments on the characteristics of people of San Andrés, showing that, although the Jacaltecs that are considered as a united people, barely include to the people from San Andrés in this classification.

The people of San Andrés are originating from Mexico. When they came were wearing clothes like those of Chiapas. It is said that had a plague of bats in the place called Tzotzil. They were biting to the people and perhaps at the same time there was an earthquake but they more left because of the plague of bats. The grandparents say that they used to wear the clothes of Chiapas before, a white underwear, a white shirt and a palm hat. There the *hupil* is different. They make pitas, hammocks and petates like in Chiapas. The Chamulas are just like them. In Chiapas there was a kind of small bats that are called “vampire” that suck more to the cattle and beasts more than people. These animals are found in Mexico and near of the border.

In San Andrés had the custom in which they never wanted to got married to foreign people. They didn’t sell their things there but here. They are stingy and keep their thing until times of need when they sell them for higher prices. They produce a lot of fruits as

pineapple, and so on. Besides, they are not very studious. They used to go to the coast alike the people of San Marcos to work. They have a strange custom which is that the woman has to cut firewood with an axe and carry it, while the man doesn’t do anything, only walk in front of her or sometimes he carries one of the children. (Mr. Baltazar Cárdenas, Jacaltenango)

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This version gives clues regarding to where lived the ancestors of San Andrés, also provides an etymological explanation of the word Tzotzil, the ethnic group associated with the history of San Andrés.

They came before in Peb’an in the State of Chiapas, possibly where today is Rudolfo.

They had a Catholic Church and from time to time some Catholic priest visited them. Certain day there was a loving couple who had other partners. The day in which the priest came they rang the bells to celebrate the mass. The lovers were talking in the river and the man said to the woman “You should go to the mass and bring the communion; I want to taste that.” He couldn’t entry to the church because he had a lover so said “Bring it in your mouth and take it out in your hand so we can share it.” The woman said “It’s okay.” She received the host in her hand and immediately she took it out, left the church and went with

her lover that were waiting for her in the river.

When the woman returns to the river with the host, she wanted to give it to him but the host jumped out of his hand and fell into the river. They tried to take it out but it wasn't possible because the host move itself avoiding them. That made them very afraid and the man said the woman to look for the priest and tell him what had happened. Upon hear it, the priest went to the river, took out the host, and brought it to the church. He dug a hole at the door of the church and buried the host there, replacing the earth.

The priest said "Because of what you made I will never visit this village." And he left the village. In the evening of the same day a plague of bats spread. There were so many of bats that people couldn't kill them and the bats did not let them sleep, also, they bit people and animals, pigs, chickens, dogs, horses, cows, etc. and so the animals began to have rabies.

The people thought that that place was cursed and said "We cannot live here" they made their bags and most of them went to live in where today is San Juan Chamula in Chiapas. A few families came from the south east looking for a place to live. They settled in a place that they call "Corral Ch'en" (today it is only

call "Coral") that is found at the north of San Andrés. After then they were there trying to build a church but they couldn't do it. Soon after they arrived to, they are currently. In San Andrés there is a hill called Peb'am to remember the place of their origin.

They asked permission to the authorities of Jacaltenango that at that time was constituted by men who were religious and political authorities simultaneously. They said "Let them, they are siblings." Huista (Huixh Ta) means siblings villages, the villages surrounding Jacaltenango. They call "Tzotziles" or "Sotz'iles" to the people of San Andrés but also to their relatives from Chiapas which is to say "People who came from the land of bats." It is possible that those who went to Peb'am arrived in Chamula. (Mr. Antonio Delgado, Jacaltenango)

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This narrative also provides data on the migration of the original colonizers of San Andrés, also, sociological data about the material culture, the marital patterns, and gender roles.

In a place called Conete there was a woman that had a lover, although both of them were marriage. She was Catholic and one evening before she went to the mass she told to the man "It is better if we have not relations today because tomorrow I'm going

to communion” he asked “What’s that?” She explained him and he asked her that bring him a piece of the host. She did it, and brought it to where the man was, in the river. The host fell in the river and an image of Christ appeared. The nosy people around told to the priest what happened and he said “Something bad will happen here,” and the good Catholics went together on a trip until they arrived to “Margaritas.”

A plague of bats came and attacked the people; when they fled from the church they were, it began to rain but it wasn’t a normal rain but turpentine and it was burning people.

The survivors went to live in Dolores next to Chiapas near the Río Lagartero but the river overflowed and destroyed the church, then they decided to go in search of a higher place and with a water source, so they came to where they are currently, in San Andrés. They used to be known by a word that means “The Turpentine” in Popti’ (K’ul = turpentine) and they wore other kind of clothes made with muslin and their personality is very different, they are very materialists. If a woman gets married to a foreigner, they do not give her land.

The founding of San Andrés occurred before the Spanish Colonization when the

people were organized by tribes. (Mr. Herminio Silvestre, Jacaltenango)

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This version of the legend contains all the fundamental aspects.

San Marcos, Santa Ana, San Antonio and Concepción Huista, all of them came from the residence of Jacaltenango but San Andrés is different. They are Tzotziles and emigrate from Mexico and currently they are stricter because at that place there was a community with a married woman who searched other man but she had received the host. He asked her for bringing him a piece of the host. She received the host but when she was going to give it to him the host fell in the creek.

Due their mistake there was a punishment. A countless of bats came to suck the people’s blood. They could not live there then migrated to San Andrés.

And yes, it is true. I collaborated with the priest and it is another culture. They don’t want to be developed like us. Few people want to go to school and many still can’t speak Spanish. (Anonymous informant, Jacaltenango)

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The detail of the plague of bats is especially interesting taking into account

that the people from San Andrés is considered as descendants of Chamulas from Altos, Chiapas, Mexico and that their previous adversaries were people from Zinacatán, the people of bats. I offer the following cite for your consideration.

Fuentes and Guzmán cite parts of a manuscript by Gonzalo de Alvarado, brother of the *Adelantado*, who was in charge of the conquest of the Mam community in 1525. This conquest through the arms only reached to the foot of the Cuchumatanes Mountains, the site of the Mam of Zaculeu fortress, which was finally conquered after several months. According to this report, among the armies that were requested to confront the Spaniards on the plain outside Zaculeu was a force of eight thousand mountain warriors. Fuentes and Guzmán describe to this mountain warriors as (individuals) of the Mam king Caibal Balam as allies of Los Quelenes that were the current people of Zinacatán (today Mexican territory)¹⁹

People of Jacaltenango, as people in many other groups, depend mainly on oral resources, then to record their history, many versions of the same sequence of events are necessary. Together, the several versions can provide historical data and also valuable clues regarding the nature of social relations, identify and concepts of territoriality and correct behavior.

THE FOUNDING OF SAN MARCOS HUISTA

San Marcos Huista is directly in front of Jacaltenango. The both villages are separated by the deep valley of Río Azul with their coffee plantations and cliffs. The populations are connected by a road but most of people use the footpath that crosses the river. The inhabitants of San Marcos speak Jacalteco but they themselves like the people of Jacaltenango recognize that their version of the language is more similar to Concepción Huista than to Jacaltenango, and some versions of the legend about the founding suggest that some founders came from that village. Also, it can be noticed that the surnames of San Marcos are different to other parts of the municipality of Jacaltenango. It is said that in the past, there was a preference for making deals with Concepción Huista and not with the municipal capital of Jacaltenango.

On the edge of the village are the ruins, clearly visible, where the soccer field is also located. Residents have observed that in recent years the mounds have been “growing,” presumably due to the activities of soccer players and spectators, who sit on top of the mounds to watch the games. All the mounds are considered as living beings; they give the importance to the main building called “Pale Witz” or “*Padre*” (priest) Hill.



¹⁹ The tree still growing in front of the school.

The rocks on the cliffs in front of Jacaltenango, below to the part of San Marcos known as “*El Campo*” (a wide area of common land, a field) present cave art in red with a variety of images including human hands, at least a human figure, animals (deers?) and certain figures which were not possible to identify. “It’s a dinosaur!” shouted one of the children who were accompanying us. The village’s teenagers have the habit of writing their declarations of love on the paints, which places the future of these prehistoric monuments at risk. In the past, they were protected by the fact of the place were used as a dumping ground for human excrement.

At the surrounding of San Marcos’ Village there were a lot of caves associated with sinister rumors or with human remains. Recently, to the museum in the hospital of Jacaltenango was donated by an inhabitant of San Marcos, a human skull with cranial deformation that was found in a cave. It is said that other caves are the hideouts of evil beings known as “the masked” and other that contains “saints.”

The legend about the origins of San Marcos shares an important function with the one of the founding of Jacaltenango. It describes an event that occurred in the distant past at the behest of an extraordinary character, in this case of San Marcos, and, in addition to give the respectability to the territorial pretentions, also the security that they are agree with the choice of force majeure. It has to be noticed that the informants maintain the founding of the village occurred before the arrival of Spaniards and with this

statement they identify a Christian figure, San Marcos as an indigenous entity.

The versions of the legend about the founding of San Marcos compiled by us are consequent and without important variants. Besides of the interest as an example of a so common migratory legend they provide important information for the study of people’s migration.

There are signs of a rivalry between the populations of Jacaltenango and San Marcos, or perhaps of an inferiority sense for a part of people in San Marcos, describing how the saint reject Jacaltenango as a possible home. Generally, people of San Marcos are poorer than people of Jacaltenango. Someone who enjoys security in the village is considered “rich” in San Marcos and would be a “poor person” in Jacaltenango. Despite the relative penury, the people of San Marcos also manifest local pride; “No one can celebrate like us, the San Marcos’ fair is the most joyful of all.”

Before the arrival of Spaniards, a man from Jacaltenango came here and found the image of San Marcos in the bush of a tree and he went to Jacaltenango to say that there was a saint in this place. The Lord was already doing miracles. The priests came and took the image to the church of Jacaltenango, they did it three times and each time the saint returned. People began to worship this saint and in order to not leave him alone in the place, they came from Santa Eulalia, Concepción

and San Andrés to live there. The saint could not live in Jacaltenango so they founded San Marcos. All the people spoke different languages. Those from Concepción of Soloma from other parts remained and those from Jacaltenango withdrew and that is why in San Marcos they speak a language that is more similar to that of Concepción. (Sebastián Nolasco, San Marcos)

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This version of the legend provides more details, including the interesting commentary on the methods previously by fortune tellers. In this version, the saint expresses shame for being in the presence of the Virgin of Candelaria, the patron saint of Jacaltenango, perhaps an implicit comment on the relative status of the two towns. The tree mentioned in the story was located in the center of the current park until a few years, where today there is a kiosk.

In the past without a precise date, San Marcos was the land of Jacaltenango and a place where it was formerly used for cattle grazing. According to the legend, one day a man from Jacaltenango came to this place to change the pasture for his animals and found a saint standing on the seat of a tree. Surprising, he immediately returned to Jacaltenango to inform the church leaders of what he had seen. When this news reached the agents of the church, they brought

marimba and drums and they formed procession to bring the saint who was San Marcos and to deposit him in the church of Jacaltenango. Approximately twenty days later another Jacalteco arrived at the same place and found the saint again in the seat of the tree. Again, the neighbors went to bring him and took him to Jacaltenango, but again the saint returned to the place where the people had found him the first time. He did not want to stop in the church. Then, the praying mayors began to ask advices to the fortune tellers (a'be) and they with their tools asked directly to the saint why he did not want to stay there, so it was because he was ashamed of the Virgin of Candelaria. Moreover, he wanted to live alone in the place where he appeared first and again, he returns to that place. They tried to persuade him, once with marimbas, others with dances on the seat of the tree. After examining the barracks, the neighbors realized that this was not their original intention. Therefore, they decided to build three huts in the place where they wanted to stay. One for the saint and the others for Jacalteco families who would stay to take care of it. Shortly afterwards, three other family members arrived to build houses there, and little by little the village of San Marcos Huista began to grow. (Eulalia Ramírez, San Marcos)

&&&

This version doesn't agree with the previously one when the tree was the same as the one in the center of the park, but identifies it as a fruit bush. In other aspects, the narrative is consistent with the others.

This was a piece of land belonging to Jacaltenango and then some people came down to see their animals here. Suddenly they came to the seat of a tree "a chu'ulu," that is a fruit bush. When they arrived, there was an image on the tree seat. Upon seeing it, they went to report to the church of Jacaltenango. They came with marimba, with music and drum and took the image to Jacaltenango. Then, suddenly it was no longer in Jacaltenango and they looked for him and he was here again. The saint was here again. Two times more they took him and he returns. Then, according to the wise men and prayers who analyzed the image it wanted to be here and not in Jacaltenango. For this reason, Jacaltenango sent three families here to make their huts in San Marcos. So, they multiplied the people. It is called San Marcos because underneath the image of the saint says: "San Marcos." They founded the village about three hundred years ago. (Mr. Francisco Morales López, San Marcos)

&&&

This version includes historical details about the first contacts between the

population of San Marcos and Spaniards, and gives a Spanish to the San Marcos's church. Other people have said that the church was founded before the arrival of the Spaniard, which, although is obviously not the objective truth, serves as a territorial statement.

The Jacaltecs had lands here and came with their cattle, a man lost his cow, went looking for it and saw a saint at a tree and the mayor came with the Jacaltecs with marimba and drums. They brought him to Jacaltenango and put him in the church but the saint returned to his place. It happened three times. Finally, they said that the saint did not want to be in Jacaltenango but here and they, who had land here, came to live at this place so as not to leave the saint alone. The foreigners came to leave the church. A Spaniard came here and they ran away from him because they did not speak Spanish. Some intelligent people began to study Spanish, and some Spaniards married to Jacaltecs. (Mr. Domingo López, San Marcos)

&&&

This version agrees with the others, it is about the diverse origins of people from San Marcos and also it mentions the funeral practices in the past.

There was a Jacaltec who came through here and found a saint, then he went to talk to the other Jacaltecs and they came with marimba and flute, and brought the

saint to Jacaltenango but at dawn he was in the same place again. They did the same twice but finally came nine families for living here. The saint did want to live here and because of that they gathered people and built a village. Here there is a lot of water here and for this reason people also came from San Miguel, Concepción, Petatán and San Andrés, places where there is not much water. Here, the dialect is more similar to the dialect of Concepción than Jacaltenango. In the past, there was a big tree where today is the kiosk. Previously, they buried people in church when they were mayors and the others near there. When they built the street, they raised the remains. (Marcos Ramírez Pérez, San Marcos Huista, c. 100)

&&&

The diverse versions of the legend of San Marcos are examples of syncretism; the saint, a Christian character which presence in the church, in the shape of a sculpture, is approved by the formal Catholicism, also it serves as a protector being of the people in San Marcos. We have been told by several informants that the saint has appeared on difficult occasions for people of San Marcos. Recently, during the conflicts between a people from San Marcos and San Andrés, the saint appeared in the shape of a normal man to help the San Andrés team win. Currently, there are rumors which we can't search easily because of the discretion of the people; the saint has appeared and he

still appearing in one of the caves in the mountains around San Marcos. Some indiscreet girls told us that their aunts have visited him with offerings, but they did not want to say more; evidently it is a delicate matter. The cave is in the high lands between San Marcos and San Miguel Acatán. In this place of Jacaltenango, there are several communities of people from San Miguel, who are despised by people of San Marcos. Taking into account the rivalry, despite the lack of data, we tentatively suggest that one of the aspects behind the appearance of the saint can be his role as a protector of the territory of San Marcos.

THE FOUNDING OF INCHEWEX

To provide some examples of the legends about the founding of the modern villages, including a few samples from Inchewex, which was founded in the early twentieth century.

The word "Yinche'wex" has not an exact origin but the literal translation means "A Broken Pants."

There was a man who lived in San Miguel and came to work, walking all the way here. (Peb'il Pam) On the way, there was a plant called "Annona" (a rounded fruit similar to an apple). In Jacalteco it is called "che'wex."

His partner asked him: "Where do I work today?"

He answered: "Behind the Annona plant."

Yinche'wex means
 "Behind the Annona plant."²⁰ (Mr.
 Manuel Miguel Montejo, Peb'il
 Pam. 75)

Mr. Manuel continues with the history of
 the village:

One of the first gentlemen
 who inhabited the village was
 Ramón Mauris and this gentleman
 was the one who published that
 there was a spring where you can
 make houses and harvest and so
 they came... most of the settlers
 were farmers and had an interest in
 the fertility of the land. The first
 inhabitants went in 1916. The
 village expanded a lot during the
 1930s. They became concerned
 about a school and held a meeting.
 They hired the first teacher. It
 wasn't possible to pay him with
 cash so they paid him with corn and
 beans. The first school worked in
 1945 and lasted until 1956. In 1956
 they built the first Catholic church.
 In 1958 arrived the first
 professional teacher in
 Jacaltenango.

Here you can read other version about the
 founding of the village.

There was an Annona tree
 in the place called "above Oxha."
 This tree bears a fruit that, when
 ripe, opens a part attached to the
 trunk. People said that "Q'ewex"
 because some day asked to a man
 "Where had he gone? And he
 replied: "I had gone in front of
 O'ewex."

Putting the words together
 in Jacalteco would be pronounced
 "Yinhilto Q'ewex" and translating
 it into Spanish it would read "in
 front of Q'ewex."

The place hadn't name,
 then the man had the need to create
 the name of the place. But, after the
 name became into "Y'inchewex."
 Now they say "Inchewex." It was
 changed because there wasn't an
 alphabet in Jacalteco.

After searching the name
 for the place, a man decided to live
 in the site. He settled where is
 currently known as "Yitz'tzi'tzis."
 Little by little the village grew. (Mr.
 Calendario Silverstre Camposeco,
 Inchewex)

THE SUPERNATURAL, BELIEFS, LEGENDS, AND SO ON.

Although they are often about
 fantastic characters or events, traditional
 narratives such as the following also
 contain extensive data about some of the
 most visceral characteristics of society;
 territoriality, sexuality and the deepest
 longings and fears of the human heart, all
 represented within the cultural framework
 of their origin. The fantastic and
 supernatural, as imagined today, the
 concept of the real existence of "other
 dimension" or "hyperspace" may be the
 environment originated by the vast amount



²⁰ Nash, 43.

of historical and cultural information, just as the Old Testament of the Bible contains enormous amounts of data on the history and the culture of the people of the Middle East.

Besides their historical and mythical content, legends can provide culturally accepted metaphors about issues as simple as the stress of daily life and deepest such as the oppression of one culture by another. Characters from the heavens and other worlds are mingled with us; they become the heroes and villains of everyday life.

It is noticed that many people, including the young people believe, not only in the aspects of ancient religion, but also in the veracity of many of the legends, myths. Especially among young people with high levels of formal education, it seems to me that these beliefs are part of the cultural pride that is so strong among the Jacalteco population.

A 28-year-old teacher told us that Jacaltecos are considered "quite gullible" people and a 23-year-old accountant told us that trust in the veracity of supernatural beings is still important.

The opinion of two teenage girls is typical of their generation. "Some stories are made up. Others are the truth, like the stories of *"La Llorona," "El Cadejo," "El Sombrero,"* and *"El padre cerro."* It is said that the encounters with supernatural beings still occur, and one can hear statements such as, "a part of my family has always been bothered by demons."

People who have studied a lot at school or university repeat the legends, myths, and tales of their villages but they try to explain them scientifically "... now we know that the animals and the monsters really were dinosaurs, but then they didn't know that" or "The woman thought she was inside the hill but she must have really been in another dimension" or "It can be that the origin of some of the tales are the contacts with extraterrestrials or people from other planets." Not all Jacaltecos believe in the legends, however, a man told us that he doesn't believe in the legend of the Q'anil (below) hill because the data cannot be verified and because of the existence of many versions about the same tale, and other one commented that people must think less in things that don't exist and more in their families' needs.

An important aspect about the beliefs in the supernatural field, is the relationship between the culture and nature. The matter is how the physical landscape, or the mountains, trees, rivers, etc., affect the concept of supernatural, it is of an immense importance regarding to the development of the culture in a variety of levels. Obviously, the land delimits a great part of the diet, the architectural style, clothing, etc., but also determine together with the historical elements, and so on, how people think in philosophical and mythical issues.

Jacaltecos delimit the urban territory with the chapels on the hills, with traditional wooden crosses and also with a complex of legends and myths that highlight the very important division between the culture or the world of human

beings and natures, this place without rules, which is necessary for the survival of human being and simultaneously a continuous threat for the survival of society. The division is more than a simple symptom of territoriality, it delimits the division between order and chaos. Although, the supernatural beings present themselves with characteristics of real people, they also work as metaphors for natural and cultural forces. The boundaries between the village of Jacaltenango and the countryside are clearly marked. There are six chapels on the edge of the village and a multitude of crosses surrounding the urban center. This sacred "territorialism" is a feature among sedentary peoples directly dependent on land or natural sources. The functions are varied. To begin with, they provide a feeling of security, signal the possession of the land to the inhabitants and to each other, and clearly mark the division between the world of human beings and supernatural beings. The presence of places where supernatural beings/ saints, etc., appear frequently are found on the borders among the territories of human groups.

The influence of the protestant sects in the oral culture have been noticeable, in Catholic cultures they adapt the presence of legends of non-Christian origin, contrary to what happens with Protestant cultures, which due reduced number of their saints and the lack of image worship, have less tolerance to a diversity of supernatural figures. Nash²¹, within the Catholic definition of the supernatural, the indigenous communities could develop syncretic concepts, using

reinterpretations of Mayan ideas to create an acceptable identification for the Catholicism. By rejecting such reinterpretations, Protestant churches lose visceral aspects of oral culture.

There are suggestions which the leaders of urban settlements can influence in the psychological relationships of humans with nature and by association with the supernatural beings who encapsulate the natural forces. The leaders of the settlements in the villages are significantly different than the urban center of Jacaltenango. The demarcation of the inhabited area is less clear and the nature intrudes more on human activities.

Although we do not yet have enough data to make a firm statement, the examples of the legends collected to this day in the municipal capital present beings that embody the forces or mysteries of nature, notably the owner of the hills, in more malevolent form than in the versions coming from the villages, which present the being as an ambivalent character. The matter of the influence of the leaders of the settlements in the traditional narratives deserve researching. Also, there is to be taking into account that the Christianity, generally is presented in a more orthodox



²¹ W'Bex, in the "Breve Monografía del Municipio de Jacaltenango", the Department of Huehuetenango, made for the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Food, Unity of Formation of Human Resources, School of Agricultural Formation, Jacaltenango, Huehuetenango.

form in the urban centers than in the small villages.

Legend about the Hills:

**Reverent and in humility of man,
I want to praise your feats
Oh, great Q'anil! Guard of Xajlá!
That my echoing voice names you,
I will sing to the wind all your greatness,
Great Lord, C'u of my beautiful Xaljá.
I raise my verse to Sat Kan,
In the name of my ancestors,
As if I burn pom or black wax candles,
Balunh Cana who is in Sat Kan
Witness that my song, verses,
Are freshness of source, such Ha Tz'otx',
"The Earth."
Great mountain of mystery
In your abode, imposing Q'anil,
Worthy of man, who defended his
empire,
Xuan, ta C'u Winaj, just Q'anil,
I will be like a bugler, messenger
Of your silence, Xuan Q'anil, the first
one²²**

Through all the Maya region, the hills or mountains have a especial importance in religion, the cosmology and the folklore. When children in Jacaltenango draw, they always create their real environment drawing a small

village, dominated by impressive hills covered with trees. The adult people of Jacaltenango, surrounded on all sides by hills, share the trend.

The hills commemorate in the legends and myths can inspire respect, fear and affect simultaneously. The protect role that some people have performed in Mayan history has continued important in modernity in the urban center of Jacaltenango alike in all the villages populated by Jacaltecs the hill of Q'anil is very important by explained reasons in the following narratives. The protector role those supernatural beings play living in the hills of Jacaltenango is part of the Maya system since ancestral times.

The ancient pagan gods of the Earth and nature rule the jungles and fields where the Maya work. Christian saints preside over the matters of the village with the help of the pagan gods who seated at the four entrances, protect the people from "all terrors at the night and from the arrow that flies in the daytime."²³

In addition to the legends about the protect beings who guard the village there is a group of legends on the owner of the hills, the possessor of all the richness of nature hidden in the hill "in other dimension or in the hyperspace" as young



²² Erick Thompson, 1970 (75) 208.

²³ Eric Wolf was writing in 1959. Now, with global market participation, these ideas about limited goods are gradually losing their relevance.

Jacaltecs say, combining the today's vocabulary with traditional beliefs. The peak of mountains, as John Watanabe said, dominate as literal and metaphorical mountains, personify the Earth and all it produces.

In the case of the legends about the owners of hills they reflect social truths. The owner is a masculine being with authority on the feminine earth and all its resources, which reflects the tendency of authority in Maya villages. Also, they show us the importance on the social system based in a limited assets philosophy. Land deities are male, says John Bierhost, and are considered owners of the land rather than personifications of it. Frequently, a spirit is known as the owner of the hills or the hills and valleys and, so often control also the savage animals. In the comments on recent encounters with the owner of the hills, it is noted that also he possesses valuable materials such as denim, gasoline, etc. People who make deals with the owner of the hills always is punished, and there are still people who because they have more resources than their neighbors, are objects of the jealousy of those who think they received their wealth from the owner of the hills. This tendency is more noticed among the small villages.

Thus, the beautiful legends about the hills show prosaic cultural traits, especially the resentment of a person who enjoys more wealth than the neighbors, a common element among peasant peoples, and accurately described by Erick Wolf in 1959.

The indigenous community strives to abolish wealth and the redistribution of power and frowns upon all ostentation of wealth, the individual pretension to the independence that could transform the balance of equality within poverty. Their social idea is the conformist, not the social innovator, the individual, not the one who seeks power not the unrestricted power.²⁴

In legends, the rich are represented as bad or weak people who have been tempted by non-human beings. In peasant cultures in Europe, especially among the conquered cultures, one can see almost identical legends, but with the devil instead of the owner, even in the detail that the supernatural being has the physical features of the oppressors or conquerors. Identification can be seen as an aspect of "the culture of opposition." The identification of the oppressor with spirits associated with wealth is understandable and follows the internal logic of the folkloric narrative, and has been noted by Sol Tax, among others.

The presence of legends of this type must be the direct influence of the popular culture of Spain, but we must consider the undoubted importance of the generic need "demonize" our



²⁴ Nuttall, Deirdree, 1999.

oppressors in traditional cultures of this tendency is often literal.

We have noticed the identical tendencies in isolated communities of Terra Nova, where you will suspect (and the tendency still existing among older people) that more fortunate people received help from the devil.²⁵ The owner described by Siegel and Grollig is highly diabolic:

...evil, he is bent on the dreadful destruction of the Mayas. Dressed with Ladin clothes, and therefore indistinguishable from ordinary people... He goes around village trying to attract the Mayas to his abode on the top of the hill, where he kills and eats them. They often accuse outsiders, foreigners and missionaries of being Witz Akdales (owners of the hills), and for this reason many Mayas are afraid of them.

Legends about the hills are the “migratory” type, identical legends or almost identical that appear in various contexts and belong to different places, for instance, the legends on:

...the owner of the hill, who is the more known divinity among the ethnic groups from Guatemala. He is the possessor of all the wealth that are hidden in his entrails; woods, minerals, plants, and animals.²⁶

As Charles Wagley and Jaime Búcaro have shown²⁷, in Mayan philosophy of Guatemala the mythological

legends on the supernatural “owners” of the hills have been very important. Reading the stories of the hills, it is necessary to remember which Eric Thompson says about the pre-Columbian Maya beliefs:

Essentially, Maya religion is a matter of contract between the man and his gods. The gods help man in his work and provide him food; in return, they expect payment, and most of the time that payment must be made in advance. Countless stories from Mayan folklore remind the audience of the need to pay for benefits received.²⁸

The territorial aspect of these legends is very important; every time a village names a geographical feature in the landscape it is making a territorial claim by individualizing it. The presence of legends justifies these claims with evidence of the validity of the villages’ position as an owner of the area. Peasant communities around the world define their territories by marking the boundaries with stories about supernatural characters; gods and spirits that represent the territory and the community’s aspirations.

Q’ANIL HILL

The sacred hill, named by the character Juan Q’anil, protector of



²⁵ Lara Figueroa, Celso, 1989, 6.

²⁶ Wagley, 1957. Búcaro, 1996, 29.

²⁷ Thompson, 1970, 215.

²⁸ Dionicio Montejo, Víctor.

Jacaltecs, occupies a panoramic location. When the sky is free of clouds it can be seen until Comitán, Chiapas, Mexico. The villages of Jacaltenango, San Marcos Huista, San Andrés Huista and San Antonio Huista are clearly visible from the summit, as are several small villages in the foothills. The road that leads to the summit and the sanctuaries of the three brothers “the three Juans” are covered with ceramic remains. The summit is flat and there are three main constructions, and several secondary ones made of stone. Cement crosses and altars have been built and there is a plaque commemorating the three characters so important in the mythical history of Jacaltenango, Juan Mendoza, Juan Méndez and Juan Carmelo. Shelters with tin roofs form a testimony of the masses that are celebrated on the summit. The several small stone altars made of stones show the religious rites that follow regularly at the site which is adorned flowers known as lion’s tails. A sign illustrates the current importance of the site. The place must be respected, no stones should be moved, no garbage should be left, please bring offerings. The numinosity of the Hill Q’anil is so much that, apparently, it “hit” a hill which is oriented directly in front of it, but on the other side of the valley, in San Marcos Huista. The small hill, known as “Ya’Til” is considered as an especial hill and there cannot be harvested.

The following cite from the work of Victor Dionicio Montejo is about the mythical legend of the hill and also about the associated rites with the sacred place.

Xuan Q’anil was a man known as Juan Mendoza and whose story has not died, but is preserved in the oral tradition that has come down to us through the generations... the Jacaltecs elders ascended to the top of the Hill Q’anil and burned pom and black wax candles, asking to **Sat Kan**, the heaven, the protection of **Q’anil** for the people of the village, especially when they are taken to the barracks and there are rumors of an impending war. The petition is made to **Coman Q’anil** the father of **Q’anil** which is now personified in Xuan Q’anil, since the grandparent’s belief says that “in times of war there is a Q’anil in every Jacaltecs.” In the past this story was, therefore, the center of one of the most important ceremonies of Jacaltenango and southern Chiapas, Mexico.

The legends tell that our protector, the Lightning Man always walks in front of the people of the village and he protects them destroying all the dangers and obstacles in their paths, as in the case of this group of Jacaltecs who returned invincible from a very important mission on the other side of the sea. With this, our ancestors assure that every Jacaltecs must always return to his or her land, united to the people and without losing themselves from the others.

The first Q’anil and now Xuan Q’anil is more than a simple Mayan name. Q’anil is one of the

four “chargers of the year” that according our ancient calendar were followed one another in this order: Q’ani, Watau, Ah and Chinax’. Also, he is a god of war more humanitarian than our ancestors. They chose, instead of such a bloodthirsty Tohil from the other peoples who, according to Popol Vuh, came from the east.²⁹

The following narratives compiled in Jacaltenango show us, among other things, the importance of the ray in Mayan cosmology, also found in other parts of the Mayan area. It suggests the connection with the concept of nahual. The fact that the comets and rays are the nahuals of the leaders to be an ancient feature in the belief system of the Maya...³⁰ the ray appears as a formidable supernatural agent in literature... Villa Rojas, in describing the nahuals of Oxchuch, almost always seen as animals adds:

However, others are fireballs of different types, red, yellow or green. The great importance of the ray in the local indigenous conception of the magical world is derived from the inalienable rights it has to control the rains, to protect and regulate the acts of the nahuals of lower rank that inhabit the sacred caves and to preserve the milpas, the people and the village itself from danger.³¹

Eric Thompson tries the gods of the rain who are associated with the hills and also with lightnings and thunders, which suggest the possibility of a connection

between these mythical legends and ancient ideas about the deities of nature.³² Besides its sacred importance or perhaps we must say by its sacred importance, the Q’ani Hill is associated with strange experiences to this day. A man who lives and work in Jacaltenango as painter and professor of arts, brought a group of his young students to the summit of the hill on a Sunday and when they arrived to the sanctuaries they didn’t pray, although, people say that permission must be requested to go to the hill. When they were going to descend, the man saw a beautiful and unfamiliar landscape with a lake and many cultivated fields. Despite having lived all his years in Jacaltenango, the teacher didn’t recognize the place and realized that the hill showed him these



²⁹ He came and spoke then here; comes from the infinity. The serpent’s concealer here in the dark, at night. He spoke with the one from infinity, Serpent Concealer, they talked, thought and meditated; they came together and agreed in thoughts and words: they loved each other under this clarity. At once they thought to create humanity and its substance; they created the tree and the liana, the subsistence of life and humanity and this was the darkness, in the night, by the spirit of heaven called “*un pie*” [a foot]. First “*Ray Un Pic*,” second “*Last Ray* and the third “*True Ray*.” So, three are the spirits of the heaven, who came to the “Coming from Infinity,” Serpent Concealer, at once devised the clear existence. Pop Wuj, translated by Adrián I. Chávez.

³⁰ Montagu, Roberta, 1970, 384.

³¹ Thompson, Eric, 330.

³² Casaverde, Juvenal, 32.

things to warm him that next time he should ask permission first.

According to Casaverde³³, one of the versions about the origin of Jacaltecs is on the seven siblings³⁴ including Q'anil. Also, he is recognized as a protector and God of war; as one of the chargers of the year; as an agriculture associated with the milpa and who is considered as the protector of the wind's harvest; the storms and the inundations. The informants of Casaverde said that Q'anil is also recognized by populations of San Pedro Necta and San Juan Ixcoy. They visit the summit of the hill on especial dates in the ritual calendar in which Q'anil is one of the four chargers of the year.

Among the cultural features introduced by the Spaniards to the indigenous population was the concept of the Moros as enemies, bad men. They are still remembered in the traditional dances and melodies of Guatemala, and also in the following examples of the legend of Q'anil, well known in Jacaltenango, which deals with the spirits that protect the people, supposedly speaking of a time when they were still human beings.³⁵ The spirits who appear as lightnings are recognized in the Mayan cosmology as we have seen. In several examples of the legend, it is mentioned that the Moros were in the sea, or under the sea. Apart from an implicit suggestion that the Moros are supernatural beings, this one contains an echo of a remembered belief by La Farge and Byers, also mentioned by Eric Thompson:

The Jacaltecs refer (la Farge and Byers, 1931:113) that the world was in dark. At sunrise (possibly Jesus) the Spaniards hid in caves and underwater, but they were killed. Perhaps we should presume that those who were underwater drowned.³⁶

At the beginning, heroes of this first version, when the king of Spain sent them to the "other side of the sea," they are working as porter, a modest position which



³³ The bishop Núñez de la Vega says that at these provinces the indigenous painted 7 small figures as part of their calendar days, making mention of the four chargers of the year.

³⁴ Below we discuss the fact that some informants consider that the ancestors of the people of San Andrés were Moros. Thus, the narrators are making an implicit or perhaps subliminal equation between the nefarious villains and their rivals.

³⁵ Thompson, Eric, 404.

³⁶ Stories about beings in the form of lightning can be seen in Chiapas as well, such as, for example, "*El Cazador y la Hija del Rayo*" by María González Sánchez de Zinacantan, *Cuentos y Relatos Indígenas* 5, National Autonomous University of Mexico, Humanistical Researches Center of Mesoamerica and the State of Chiapas 1994, 87-103. Also, in this story it can be seen a correspondence among the supernatural beings and a different appearance to the inhabitants alike the belief of the owners of the hills are "blond like Germans." Talking about the daughter of the ray the tale says that she became into a beautiful young woman, blond because she was the daughter of a ray.

make their subsequent victory even more glorious.

The rise from servitude to victory and bliss is a common theme in popular narratives. It is implicitly suggested that the Moros are supernatural beings or that, at least, they have supernatural powers but because they are hidden under the sea. The king of Spain can only be amazed and grateful for what the Jacaltecs porters have done, especially considering he didn't think they would survive the experience.

A prosaic and touching detail is that after the victory, the king asks the Jacaltecs to leave some of the Moros alive, because otherwise, they will not have the fine clothes they make, a motif that recurs in other versions and that unites the fantastic aspects of the legend with the daily life.

At that time, they sent people to participate in a war against the Moros. The king sent to the other side of the sea to fight. Also, there were two Jacaltecs that were as porters. They were two young men took as porters and it was known that the Moros were strong.

They were talking, thinking that they were going to be killed, but one of them said that and the other just kept thinking; the one who was talking said to the other, "it is too bad the people who are killing. If I were supernatural, I would save these people."

The other acted like a ray³⁷ and replied "Do you really want to do

something for these people?" "You would have to leave your village, your children, your family."

And he said yes. Then they went to a place above Todos Santos and the "ray" ordered him to lie down and he jumped on top of him. Nine times he jumped on top of him.

He said "Get up and try your hand at throw the pine." Then, he threw pine with a lightning. That was proof that he was good enough to flight. So, it started to rain there because of the thunder they were making.

When they arrived among the others, they scolded them because it had been a long time. Then, they said that they were far away and that's why so much time had passed. So, they left, but later the leaders of the group of people who were going to war realized that they were not normal men. In this way, the cargo was taken away from them and they no longer went as porters. When they arrived there where the king of Spain was, they asked where the enemies were.

Then, the king felt sorry for them because he thought they weren't



³⁷ In Jacaltenango, there were many narratives about the people who traveled flying to Comitán, Chiapas or that carry people in seconds to the place (please see below). A connection among these stories and Juan Carmelo seems possible.

going to return because the Moros were very strong. The king said, they had better not go because all the troops that had gone before had not returned. But one of the “rays” said that they were going. They only wanted the favor of having a guide to show them where the enemies were. Then the king said he was no longer responsible for their death because they themselves wanted to go, so they went to the seashore and when the Moros detected them, they came out from under the water where they were hiding. The one who was a normal man before said “I’ll try first and what’s left you finish? And he shot lightnings. The sea was filled with blood because the Moros were many. Then the king of Spain himself intervened and asked them not to finish with the Moros because from his country came the fine clothes. So it was that they left some of the people for not to finish the race of the Moros.

After that they returned. When they arrived near the village, above the houses, they said goodbye to their companions and the first ray, Juan Mendoza, stayed on the O’anil hill while the apprentice went to Qaje, a hill that has the reputation of being “braver” as he was braver.

Only among Jacaltecs there are “ray men.” (This version was compiled by the Institute of Mayan Tongues, Marvin Antonio Díaz told us)

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In the following version of the same legend, the Moros are identified as the “Arabs” and the Jacaltecs are sent to fight against them by the government of Guatemala instead of the king of Spain. History still emphasizes the vulnerability of the Jacaltecs, but here their vulnerability is denoted by not knowing how to speak Spanish, nor how to use weapons. This version remains the famous phrase, “*Hay moros en la costa.*” *

The narrator, a professional painter, has made a painting with the scene of the slaughter of the Arabs at sea, all wearing turbans.

Long time ago, according to the story, the Arabs, the Moors, were attacking many parts of the world and they reached to the Guatemalan coast. Guatemala’s government sent a lot of men, including many Jacaltecs to fight against them. In these times the Jacaltecs didn’t speak Spanish, they didn’t know how to use weapons and they were dying. There were two brothers from Jacaltenango who had especial powers and they went to the coast to save the Jacaltecs. They killed the Arabs and with lightnings and then they saved to the young Jacaltecs. To date, two of the hills bear their names, Q’anil and Juan Mendoza. (José Cupertino Delgado Camposeco, Jacaltenango)

* The coast is clear.



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The third compilation of the legend about the Q'anil Hill shows characteristics which are not in the previous ones. Here, the enemies are designed "Turcos" who also wanted to conquer Guatemala and they send to the Jacaltecs to help them against the invaders, again in the humble position of porters. It is not explained how the hero Juan Mendoza came to live in the hill, or perhaps we should say that it is not clear how the hill came to embody the character of Juan Mendoza. It is implicit, however, that as protector of the village his mission was traveling to defend his people. Q'anil is the protector of the village, they called by the name of Juan Mendoza. It is said that in a museum of Antigua Guatemala appear a photo of Mr. Mendoza in the clothes of Jacaltenango.

At the time of the war against the Turks (also called Moors), when they wanted to conquer Guatemala, they took the Jacaltecs for the militia. They served as porters for the soldiers, and one of the porters, Julián said to Mr. Juan "If I had supernatural powers, I would be willing to help my people," and he replied "Are you sure?" The answer was "yes" but Mr. Juan said "If you do that, you will never see your family again," but, he was sure.

The indigenous went to fill their jars with water and there, the two men went there Julián lay down and Mr. Juan jumped three times for him.

He said, "Now you can test your strength with this oak." They were able to draw lightning and Julian broke the oak. "That's not how he does it," said Mr. Juan,

and smashed the oak to pieces with his thunderbolt. When they arrived at the place where they were attacking, the Moors, the pirates left with the hidden soldiers and finished with the Moors by throwing lightning at them. (Male informant, Jacaltenango, 29 years old)

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This version of the legend serves to connect Jacaltenango without ambiguity with Chiapas. On the summit of the sacred hill, the cross commemorates Juan Carmelo has a sight of the Mexican state.

All the Juans are commemorated in the sanctuary of Q'anil they had telepathic communication. Juan Carmelo was in Chiapas when the others were in the war and he said "there is sometime my heart says." My siblings of Xajla' need me. And he flew away to where other Juans were.³⁸ He has a feeling that he was needed and he left the others there; disappeared and came with the others and said "Let me have another boat!"

Juan Méndez said to Juan Mendoza "If you agree, you will have to leave your wife and children" and he said "yes," so they came to live in the Q'anil hill.

There is a cross (on the top of the Q'anil hill) that watches over the village, another that sees where they went and another that sees for Chiapas where Juan Carmelo came from. (There was always



³⁸ The reason could come from hearing, without knowing its meaning, the saying "the coast is clear"

contact with Comitán because before it was easier to go there than to Huehuetenango. They also went to Chiapa de Corzo to sell cacao).

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Explicitly, here says that the Moors lived in the sea, a description that gives the impression that there is a correlation between them and the beings of the supernatural world; Maya cosmology includes characters that live in the water,³⁹ and that personify water. Once again, the heroes abstain from killing all their enemies and instead, they leave some “as seed.”

At that time there was a war in Guatemala with the Moors, they were persecuting the people of Guatemala. They lived in the sea. The one called Juan Méndez heard about them. All the people who went to live in the villages had to fight against the Moors. Most of them were killed. Then, the three Juans went with the others, many of whom were not very valuable. When the Juanes left with them they rested in a place where there was water because they were already thirsty. Those three were working as porters for their superiors. When they arrived at the edge of the pond near the road, they served to bring water, etc.

They were thinking about they were not coming back. One of them said “I wish we had some intelligence to kill the Moors.” One among them was a wise man, and

he kept thinking as he went to get water and the wise man told the other companions that he was going to do something. “You are willing to do something, I am going to bless you and we are going to prove if we can win the war.” The wise man blessed him jumping on him three times and seized him, because he did not want to die the Jacaltecs who were in the war. His partner jumped up and a lightning came out and struck a tree, then, the wise man made another lightning and broke the tree into pieces. That is why he who knew nothing received the power of the wise man.

“It’s going to rain,” said but they missed him because there were no clouds.

“I am going to bless you again,” said the wise man and jumped three more times over the other to give him more power to defeat the enemies. He gave him the full power he had.

They went to fetch water and the other companions were surprised. “What’s going on over there?” They asked; when they arrived. But they said they didn’t hear anything. “Who made the noise” they asked. And they said “I don’t know.”



³⁹ “Kat Mat” also is the name for a character of one of the historic legends of Jacaltenango, below.

When there was a lightning, it was very clear and as soon a cloud came and it started to rain. "Are you sure you don't know who these people are?" and the answer was "not" again. "We don't know," they said.

"What if they know something and carried the letter" asked the others. And some went to war and didn't come back and they were left thinking that they were not going to come back because the first ones never returned. Of the three who were with the bag, one of them knew that the other two were rays. The other companions said that they carried the bag and perhaps they know something, "What if ourselves are going to carry the load?" and they tried to carry it. "No". We want to load it, we don't know anything," insisted the porters, and they arrived in the capital, where they sent the best to war. The other three got together to talk about what they were going to do. Then, those already going to war said, "They are no longer going to war." "With two or three of them coming with us, we can face the war," they said.

And alone they went there in the war where the Moors were, who lived in the water. When they arrived, the Moors came out of the water. The first threw a ray into the water and more than half of them died. "Won't you leave me another little bit?" And he threw another

ray and they still only leave about two Moors, by seed, in the water. The blood was red from the slaughter of the Moors. When they returned, the other companions brought their suitcases because they were powerful people who knew how to fight. When they were approaching the town Juan Méndez said goodbye to the other. "Let's get there, but not me. Here I'm going," he said to the other and there he stayed to live on the Q'anil hill. The other one arrived in Cajé to live and the third in Kat Mat.⁴⁰ Due that the people of Jacaltenango go to the hill, thinking that the lord is still. (Edmundo Quiñones, *Peb'il Pan*, 36)

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This version of the legend is somewhat reduced in details, but contains all the basic elements.

There was a war in Guatemala. The Moors came out of sea and sent two Jacaltecs. One was very silly and said "I would like to do something for my village." "Yes?" asked the other one. He replied yes and the other, who had powers, jumped three times over that partner. He got up and threw a ray at a stick., "I'm going to set my example," said the other, and cut



⁴⁰ Some of the narratives compiled are, perhaps, relating with the identified tales by Fernando Peñalosa as type 3510. Peñalosa, 94.

off the point of the stick and the lightning struck the point. The soldiers arrived and were going to carry the things because they knew that the porters had powers, but they said “We’re going to carry – our – bags.” We are porters and we have to fulfill. They reached the river from where the Moors came out and the porters said they only wanted three men as helpers. The first one threw a ray and then the second too and the Moors died. They returned to Jacaltenango, but when they arrived, “We’re not going back to this village anymore,” they said, and they stayed at Q’anil hill. (Manuel Montejo Silvestre, Nueva Catarina)

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This version is an interesting example of how the narrators can use the traditional narratives to try or explain recent or contemporary events. Here, the abuses of labor in the twentieth century are introduced into the story.

People who don’t believe what they are saying, but it is said that three brothers left in the hills. Soldiers came when they the Moros, also known as Turks and Spaniards, were fighting. The Commission arrived and asked the municipality for someone to carry their cargo through Concepción or Nentón without paying for it. So it was in these days, and so it was until the forties of this century, when they were sent to work

without paying them. They took them to carry the things of army and to make fire, etc. one among them was a wise man. Well, in a part of Xela the soldiers sent to the war were camped and they sent the two Jacaltecs to bring water, one of them, the wise man and the other a person who doesn’t knew nothing. “I know where we are going and I will give you the power to defeat the enemies,” said the wise man. And lightning struck. It broke a pine tree or a big juniper tree and destroyed it. The army was frightened by the noise and the rays. When the war between the armies was over, they acted with rays killing the enemies and then they returned and the powerful men remained in Q’anil. (Baltazar Cardenas, Jacaltenango)

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The narrator of the following story gives a brief version of the legend of Q'anil, and mentions that he does not consider it as a description of historical events but as a tale. We have only heard expressions of doubt in the municipal capital of Jacaltenango and it seems to us that, despite the efforts of the Protestant sects, in the villages of the municipality, the traditions are still considered historically accurate.

I consider this story, basically, as a tale.

The government of Guatemala was taking people to fight against the Moors, which is a

lie because they never came to these shores. They brought many Jacaltecs, including one very clever and another clumsy one, Juan Mendoza and Juan Carmelo, as porters. The clumsy one said to the other, "I wish I could save my people." The other asked "Really?" and took him to a place above Todos Santos, where he sent him to lie down and jumped on top of him three times. "Get up and give it a try," he said and broke a tree to pieces. Thus, they finished with the Moors. Then, the two Juans said they could no longer return and went to live in Q'anil.

There are several versions of this legend, many of which are greatly exaggerated. The detail of the third Juan is a new modification. (Mr. Antonio Delgado, Jacaltenango)

The versions of the hill of Q'anil that were compiled in San Marcos Huista show, certain, differences, especially the reason of the "wise men" who transform into animals, an example of nahualism. It is necessary to take into account the diverse cultural roots that come together in San Marcos. The village was founded by people from Jacaltenango but also from Concepción Huista and San Andrés Huista; then the oral culture must show their influences and if the history of the origins of San Andrés Huista is accurate, Tzotziles or Tzeltals. This version contains a detail not found in others; the cypress which the Jacaltecs seed in front of the National Palace of Guatemala. The main reason of

the compiled versions in the municipal capital, the conversion of the heroes into rays is not present here; they become a hurricane, which is an enlargement of the functions.

There were Juan and his brother Miguel who went to some wise men who invited them. They went as porters for these wise men to take them to war. Then, they arrived at a place called Ten Pal Mail and people from San Miguel say Ten Tan Mek. When they arrived at this place, the wise men who were going to war, began to practice what they were going to do in the war.

Then, Juan Q'anil and Mek (Miguel) just looked at what the lords were and began to turn into animals, thinking that in this way they were going to win the war. One of them turned into a lion and the other into wasps named Cuj Xu. Then, they did not know that Juan and Miguel were wiser than them. Juan Q'anil and Miguel made a fire to make food for the lords and once the fire was lit, they went to get water and Miguel told to Juan Q'anil that he would like to do something similar or equal to those men. Juan Q'anil said yes and Miguel said to lie down so Mek could jump on him four times; and all at once he jumped four times and became wise. He already saw everything that the other saw. Then he said that they tested some of his wisdom and the one who became

wise was very curious to know if he could do what Miguel told him. He went running and plucked out a thick, large cypress tree that not even a human being could not lift it. Among them, they took the cypress tree and left it in front of the National Palace of Guatemala, which all people said “There came the indigenous.” And seed the tree there, as if nothing had happened and they went back to where supposedly those wise men were, as they always guessed then they knew that Juan Q’anil and Miguel already went to leave the cypress there to Guatemala and they wanted to make the food for Juan and Miguel but as they went especially for that, for carrying things they said no. And so they went, carrying the things of the lords until they came to war. The men no longer got involved, following the will of Juan Q’anil. The war was at sea and Juan Q’anil became a hurricane (kak’he, wind without water), it was over with all the enemies and they returned. They arrived near Concepción and told the wise men that they were not going to return to their families. Juan went to one place called Q’anil and Miguel to another. (José Nolasco, San Marcos Huista, 34)

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The second version collected in San Marcos Huista was told by a ten-year-old boy, showing that the younger generation also knows the traditions of the

municipality. It shows the presence of the ideas of Nahualism, but follows the convention of heroes turned into rays.

When the war started some gentlemen were in a river. They went down into the river and saw that there were many dead. One of them said: “Let’s go help the others,” and two men who carried water went and reached to a tree. “I’m going to be a snake” said one “And I’m going to be a tiger” said the other “And I’m going to be a bee” said another, the last one said he was going to be an ant. But they kept talking about how they were going to win. The porters were listening to everything. One said “Is the tiger going to go down to the water?” to the other. “The bee will never kill, it will only sting,” they said, “We better help instead of these gentlemen.”

“Get off,” Q’anil said to the other and passed over him. “Look up,” he said. We will give a signal to the other they said and arrived in Guatemala when it started to rain. They just threw lightning in the water where the enemy was and blood came out in the water and almost all of them died. But the women asked them not to kill all the men so as not destroy their people. And Q’anil said “all right” and so the war ended; the other men were still talking about what they were going to do, that they were going to transform themselves into animals. After that

Q'anil said that he was not going to return to his village but would stay up on the hill. (Baltazar Roberto, San Marcos Huista, 10)

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We have compiled an incomplete version by Mr. Hermelindo Silvestre, 74 years old. In which it is said that there were three brothers, Juan Méndez, Juan Carmelo and José Carmelo who wanted to fight with the Jews, but the gentleman did not want to tell the story because he does not believe it due to the existence of several versions. He added that they arrive in March to pray on the hill, and that when there are Jacaltecs in the army, they go to the hill to pray for their brother. Taking into account the information we have about the history of the “rays,” the following narration shows that supernatural heroes have not lost their importance in modern times.

During the violence, as in 1983, two men, dressed in white (traditional Jacaltenango male clothes, which is now hardly used, except for traditional festivities) came to the office of a general in the military field and said “Leave the Jacaltecs in peace and don’t kill innocent people.”

The general was paralyzed and the men came out. After that, the general told the soldiers to go out and look for the men, but there was no one. They disappeared. It is said that were the immortals of Q’anil. Before that the Virgin appeared (dressed in a resplendent white

crown) to the general, behind the institute of Jacaltenango (next to the market), and said, crying, that he should stop killing innocent people but the general didn’t notice. (Male informant, 23 years old)

Legends On the Hill’s Owner⁴¹

The old man assured that it was a Paxil... because in this place, people could disappear, that is to say, they could enter this place and remain in it... they returned to this world and explained what they had seen and lived in this place where they found many fruits, much corn, much nance, many things to feed themselves. Many times, this place is explained in its location as being in the interior of the hills.⁴²

The belief in the owner of the hills is common, not only among the elders of the village, but also among the young people, including those who have achieved educational levels and currently work as professionals. Among other factors, the commitment of the belief complex is due to the fact that everything that the owner of the hill represents is fundamental in the Jacalteco culture; the disdain for personal greed, the respect that this category of legends receives contrasts with some others. Still, many people believe in the deals made with this character, sometimes

⁴¹Luna Soto, 1995.

⁴² Obviously there is a concordance too with the beliefs associated to the Q’anil hill.



presented as “a German” or a “blond man.” Taking into account that many of the owners of the coffee farms have been Germans, and the exploitation of the workers, among them Jacaltecs, the analogy of the owner of the hill, distributor of wealth and owner of nature, with the German owner, is logical. A gentleman from San Marcos explained to us that although there are many hills alive, or containing a being, among them there is a supreme one. The mounds of San Marcos are identified as living beings; the largest Palewitz, is the father while the others are his children. In the village of San Marcos Huista, several informants have told us that the wise men, among them their own and recently deceased relatives, became into mounds after they died. The father of a man, according to his family, turned into a hill near Quetzaltenango and has returned in the dreams of his relatives to explain his situation. The belief that ancestors become hills/inhabitant hills death is comparable to beliefs among other Maya groups, also connected to the idea of the owner of the hill;

(The) “Fathers” and “Mothers” live in the sacred mountains that encircle their villages and on the heights that dominate the sources and the residential groups. In the case of Zinacatán they meet to deliberate on the mountain of Calvaro and there they expect offerings... they provide the people with their food and punish according to their merits; the punishment is sometimes a ray.⁴³ They have large corrals in the interior of a huge mountain, and in them they enclose jungle animals as jaguars, ocelots, coyotes and others.⁴⁴ An

informant also explains that there are people who have the hope of making a pact with the being:

Juanón is the owner of all the hills. I know that is known from Mexico to Tijuana Baja California because once I talked with someone there. You only can to talk to Juanón at night. In Xela⁴⁵ there is a Juanón and my brother-in-law went to talk to him. He went down in a cave up to seven meters. Each time he went down he carried a Creole rooster. When he went down, he removed the neck of the chicken and left drops of blood for every step until he reached the door which was a stone corner and they asked for something there. He had to make four visits to receive the money and at four my brother-in-law got drunk and didn't go. Another lady sold her son to Juanón and he gave her 25,000 quetzals. (José Nolasco, San Marcos Huista, 34)

The informant, son of a gentleman recognized as one of the wise men of San Marcos, was born when his father was in his eighties. The gentleman was one of the caretakers of the village, he died recently (his son is now 34 years old). According to the family, he did not really die but went to live inside a hill where he is now.



⁴³ Thompson, Eric, 380.

⁴⁴ Quetzaltenango.

⁴⁵ Pop Wuj, 65^a.

Among the elements which make these narratives important is the fact that they clearly illustrate the philosophy of “limited assets” that permeates the culture, just as in many other cultures, especially peasant cultures and the existential conflicts between the desire to have and the knowledge of greed as unacceptable in society. Legends offer a sight of a wonderful and unattainable world except when one enters in an extraordinary way, carried by the owner of the hill, or in another unusual manner;

When people walk alone in the Muj’lu’bal there is a kind of brown vine snake (small reptile) and when you step on it you suddenly lose consciousness and you don’t remember where you are and you see big cities, large extensions of land surrounded by barbed wire, and money, treasures and all kinds of animals. (Jesús Jerónimo Esteban Hernández, Inchewex)

But people who enjoy splendor and wealth always suffer a punishment that makes them a thousand times their selfish, unsociable selfish, unsociable and generally vile.

... they are carried to the houses on the hills and are transformed into animals, pigs, chickens, all kind of domestic animals. This place is like another dimension in which exists but you cannot see it. So, beliefs and legends serve as a kind of self-control within society. Selfish desires are part of the human condition, but many cultures, including Jacaltenango

culture, are considered as evil and the society acts to prevent the selfishness creating these didactic and illustrative legends.

Speaking about the religious aspect of the hill’s owner’s beliefs, we have been told by our informants that the being still receives attention. A hill near to San Marcos, called Yin Pay Ip, is known as a sacred place and people go there to pray, asking for a good harvest, and that there will be no problems and that nothing bad will happen to the church.

The marvelous land has antecedents in the history of the Maya people. In the Popol Vuh we find this description:

...they found a very good mountain full of good food, rich in yellow and with corn; rich in patashte, cocoa, there was an abundance of sapote, annona, nance, breadnut, honey; it was full of many foods...⁴⁶

The following examples illustrate the points we have already discussed.

PALLEWITZ HILL

The legend of Palewitz, a hill near the ruins of Yaxwitz, has its root in a pre-Columbian cosmology. In addition, it shows the philosophy of limited resources so central to Latin American and peasant cultures worldwide, as we have said above.

⁴⁶ It is said that the armadillo is the chair of the hills.



Among the salient points in several of the versions of the Palewitz legend is the fact that the lady rested beside the hill. Of course, the place where the supernatural being is most likely to be found is near her home. However, in Jacaltec region, and doubtless in other parts as well, the trails leading from one village to another, or leading to commercial centers or to the lands have sites recognized by all as “*descansos*,” where people pause in their travels to eat, relax, etc. although this point deserves more attention, the evidence suggests that at these places, as well as the banks of rivers and near dirty creeks, one frequently encounters supernatural beings, or properly speaking, the legends, etc., of these beings are connected with the rest areas. Following the patterns of universal folklore logic, the implication is quite clear. The trails are cultural incursions into the realm of nature and the world of supernatural beings. They are liminal paths and thus are environments that don’t respect the normal rules of nature and culture.

The possibility that these trails are of great antiquity also deserves research because if the narratives have many years of being associated with the same places, they may contain much historical information. The legend of Palewitz Hill is one of the best-known legends in the Jacaltec area.

Besides the legend itself, the numinosity of the hill creates a situation in which strange or disturbing experiences are attributed to the supernatural powers of the place. A man who was walking next to Palewitz found himself lost. He, finally,

found his way but knew that the confusion was due to a reason of the special place. On another occasion, some men were hunting deer on the hill with their dogs when the dogs disappeared into the mountain in confusion. The men slept in the bush and the next day the dogs returned safely, they were simply distracted by the mountain as a warning. Now, most of people take advantage of the road and don’t walk the trails near Palewitz, so alarming encounters are now rare.

The form of the legend, which we can easily identify as an example of the migratory type, is fairly constant, dealing with a supernatural world inside the hill, the source of the owner’s wealth (who can make his animals revive) and the experience of a lady from the natural world, taken inside the hill to work for the owner where she found a man turned into a pig condemned to die and revive eternally. The first version was compiled in the village of Inchewex. An unusual feature, the naming of the lady involved and an approximate date.

In the vicinity of the hill a lady was traveling and without noticing it, she was inside the hill. Then, a spirit spoke to her, the owner of the hill ordered her to sacrifice a pig that was inside the hill. When she was slaughtering the pig, the hill spoke her and said that when she killed it she must to keep it heart: “Because I have been killed several times, and a little later, I come back to life.” At the moment when the lady was uncovering it, the owner arrived

and asked her where the heart was. The lady couldn't deny that she had hidden the heart and as the owner insisted that the pig's heart be given to him, the lady had no choice and gave it to him. The owner took it and threw it into a corral of stones and when the heart fell, the pig came back to life again. The pig spoke her again, saying that she hadn't given the heart and asked her to tell his family that he was a pig and that every 2 or 3 days killed it. The lady spent 3 days inside the hill preparing the pig's meat. The owner thanked her very much for the work she did, he paid her with certain amount of money and immediately she was out of the hill and returned to report to the relatives of the man who had turned into a pig. The name of the lady who had within the hill was María Ros Pal. In this case, "Ros" is the Jacalteco word to say "rose" and not the surname in Spanish. The data date from approximately 70 years ago. (Candelario Silvestre, Inchewex)

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This version is partly remembered by the daughter of the previous narrator.

There was a woman who didn't have job and was looking something. One day as she was resting on a hill, a gentleman appeared, and offered her a job. She had to kill pigs and get their hearts out. The animal soon

revived. The man was the owner of a hill a kind of spirit. (Manuela Justina, Inchewex)

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Generally speaking, this kind of legends are about putative events that are set in the vague but distant past. This version contains a clue regarding to an approximate date; the protagonist of the story was paid with "old money."

There was a lady who was going to Jacaltenango to sell herbs, passing by the Palewitz road. A blond man appeared on a donkey. He had his head covered with a hat and offered her a job because the lady was a pig butcher and took her into the hill where there was a pig pen. She began to kill the pigs and when she removed the heart of the animal, she would throw them back into the pig pen and another pig would immediately appear. When the lady wanted to kill the last pig, it spoke to her saying "*Comadre*", please kill me and when you take out my heart, throw into the fire so that I will no longer suffer because when I lived on earth, Mr. Palewitz gave me money, that's why I was rich. But I am very sorry, because he transformed me into a pig, into a horse, into cattle, and, when he



* *Comadre* is a colloquial and confidence way to call a woman who could be a neighbor or a close friend.

wants to sit down, into an armadillo.”⁴⁷

When the lady wanted to throw the heart of her *comadre* to the fire, the owner came immediately. Palewitz sais: “Please, give me that heart, don’t kill her because she has not yet finished canceling everything, I gave her when she lived on earth.”

When the lady retired, Palewitz gave her two bags of pure coins (the weight they had before) and when she wanted to leave, she realized that she was already on the road where Palewitz had found her. (Jesús Jerónimo Esteban Hernández, Jacaltenango)

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It is said too that the Mayan priests always dressed in white just like the clothes of Jacaltenango the men used to wear, and the owner of this hill is called Palewitz, or “*Cerro sacerdote*.” *

They say that once a lady had difficulty going to bring cargo, she was a porter and when she was working, she got tired under her load and rested on the seat of the Palewitz hill and when she saw a man standing very close to her, a man asked her where she was going; she answered that she was looking for work and he offered to find her a job. So, the lady went with the man. The man said to her “Kill that pig,” cut out its heart and

throw it where the others are.” After that, the pig spoke to the lady and said “Don’t kill me. If you kill me now, I’ll be a pig tomorrow.” Then, the lady realized of the situation and did not kill the pig. The lady returned to her home.

People also say that always a person wore in white is seen. Due that they called Pale Witz to this hill. (Mr. Juan Camposeco, Jacaltenango)

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This is a standard version, besides the detail of the lady looking for a pig to kill it when she met with the owner of the hill. The comment of the narrator who don’t know if the being were a devil or the owner of the hill, demonstrates the influence of Christianity. This narrator lives in a village where there is a Protestant community. The Protestant sects have the tendency of associating supernatural beings that are not within the beliefs Christian system as diabolical.

I don’t know if it’s the devil or the owner of the hill, the hill itself but there is a city inside.



⁴⁷ In the Pop Wuj, there are many descriptions of bats, among them is one that speaks of hell, “house of bats was the name of the fourth torture, only bats were inside, they screamed, flew locked inside the house, they had no way out.” Pop Wuj, 29.

* Priest’s hill.

Once a lady from Jacaltenango came looking for a fat pig to kill it and found with a man.

The man asks her “What are you doing?” “Where are you going?” And she explained him what she was going to do. He asked her for the favor of kill one of his pigs. “Where?” asked the lady. “Here,” he said, “Just close your eyes” and took her inside the hill. When the lady was going to kill the car it spoke to her, saying “*Comadre*, when you take out my heart do it in pieces, otherwise I will live again.” But the man came and grabbed it, threw it in the corral and the pig came out again. The lady finished her work, went to get her pig and return to her home. (Manuel Montejo Silvestre, Nueva Catarina)

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This version of the legend about the owner of the hill, the character is called “El Cadejo,” which represents a mixture of terms and a somewhat unusual use of the term, although, nowadays people say “El Cadejo” to designate any male and evil character. The owner of the hill, generally, would be considered as more ambivalent than really bad entity, but here its evil side is highlighted and compared with the “good” Christianity, which at the end saved to one of the potential victims.

Before the circumstances, described, a gentleman had asked for money from this man on the hill

who may have been Cadejo or the devil himself and gave him money. “But only when I need you, I will call you.” “Okay,” said the man. In this man’s house came the Cadejo with mules, money, etc., and he became very rich. Ten years later the Cadejo told him, “You have to come with me to be one of the workers on my farm (which was here, near the Río Azul) and the man had to go, although the character has not a farm, he just told that to the man so he wouldn’t scare him, to trick him.

Then, it took the man inside the hill. There was a lot of people and a lot of wealth, like in a city. It already had the man in its possession. The Cadejo killed the man and took out his heart, as a punishment. He threw his heart out where there were a lot of punks. When his heart fell on the ground, he became a bigger pig than the others. One day there was a lady and the Cadejo appeared again and told the lady if she wanted to work with him on the farm.

“I am going to pay you well,” said.

The lady agreed and entered to the hill with the Cadejo. She was sorry to accept the job, but she just said it to herself, “How am I going to escape from here,” she taught. Then, she asked him for what work she had to do, the Cadejo replies “First, you have to

butcher the big pig,” she was slaughtered of pigs. “And, how am I going to kill it by myself?” she asked. “You’re going to do it alone, I’m not going to give you an assistant” said the Cadejo, “Well” said the lady sadly, and began to do things to kill the pig. But the pig spoke and said to the lady.

“I’m going to let you to kill me. I will lie down and you could kill me, but on one condition,” said the pig... “When you take out my heart, do me a favor; taking it and burning it, otherwise the Cadejo will use it to resuscitate me and I will have to live again.”

The lady was frightened by the animal which gave her the recommendation.

“Well,” said the lady, “I agree.” Then, the pig was going to lie down and the lady put the knife in and killed the pig. She started to remove the parts and when she came to the heart, the Cadejo appeared again and said, “This heart is mine.”

“Do me a favor and give it to me in my hand,” she cut the heart and taking into account what the pig told her, she didn’t want to give it to the Cadejo. Then, the Cadejo threw the heart into the corral for it became into a pig. The lady was rejected for took the job and searched a way to scape. She told a lie to the Cadejo, that she would gladly go to work with him, but on

one condition, that he let her go to visit her family because she was going to her house when he spoke to her. So, the boss accepted her condition.

“I’m going back” said the lady “I’m just going to tell my family that I found a job here,” so the woman went to her house to tell her family what happened and to look for a solution to her problem, that the Cadejo was not good, that she was afraid and that she was going to look for a way to flee when the Cadejo came looking for her. The solution that the lady did was to give herself to God so that God would help her, thinking that God was the only solution. She began to pray and was saved. (José Cupertino, Jacaltenango)

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A small variation in this version is that the hill owner asks the lady if she can cook pork rind instead of asking for her services like a pig slaughter. The fact that the narrative was narrated by a young man with a formal education is illustrated in his statement “He covered her eyes and traveled through hyperspace.” Perhaps you can see literary influences of influences from his childhood stories in the description of the hill with “pearls and treasures in bags,” in addition, the “degeneration” of the legend among young people is noted. Although the belief in the owners of the hills is represented here, the central reason lacks, the “pig” which really is a man who sold his soul to obtain

richness during his life time and now he has to be punished forever. Perhaps this lack is an isolated case of a memory failure of an individual or such shows a change in the concept of “limited assets” among the young generations.

A lady was resting on the road that goes through Palewitz when an immortal person appeared. The elders say that he spoke to her in dialect (Poptí). He asked her she could cook pork rinds, and she said yes, and accepted a job because he was offering her a lot of money.

The man covered the lady's eyes because he was going to take her to a place she didn't know and so they went. He covered her eyes and they traveled through hyperspace. She only felt a wind blowing. When she woke up, she was in a cave where there was a lot of money, pigs, and other wild and domestic animals, so she saw money, gold, pearls and treasures in bags.

She cooked the pork rinds for the man and he paid her, he gave her pork rind and asked her if she wanted to come back when she was over.

The man lived alone in a very special place. Once again, they went on a trip returning in the same form. She didn't know the way they have traveled. He left her in the same place, telling her that remove her the blindfold from her eyes in about fifteen seconds.

When she removes the blindfold, the man was gone. He told him before if she wanted to come back, he could bring her back he could take her back and would gladly pay for it. (Male informant, 23 years old)

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This version emphasizes the wealthy appearance of the owner of the hill, "The man was very well dressed. "It has the central motifs of the legend, although the whole story seems to be in a reduced form.

A lady, a pig slaughterer, met a gentleman coming from her village. He told her that he wanted a favor and that he was going to pay her well. "I want to kill one of my animals and I know you are a slaughterer," he said. She agreed. They walked to a big house and she started killing pigs, taking out the hearts and throwing them in the same corral. When she started to kill one of the animals, the pig spoke to her, and said, "Please, do not throw away the heart." But burn it because the thrown away hearts became pigs again. A man turned into a pig when he died, as a punishment. The heart was burning when the man appeared and removed it from the fire and ordered her not to burn the hearts.

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This version has the appearance of being a short version of the complete

legend of Palewitz. The lack of details, for instance, the deal made between the owner and the man before he dies, in addition to his transformation into a pig.

A lady went out to travel, to take her things to sell. Her loads were many and she got tired and rested by the side of the hill. A man appeared. The man asked the lady where she was going.

The lady said that she was looking for a work and the man told her that he would give her work, and they went to the man's house. He said, "Kill that pig, take out the heart and throw it where the others are." And he went somewhere else.

Then the pig spoke to the lady. "Don't kill me, because if you kill me, tomorrow I'll be a pig again." When the man saw that the lady had not killed the pig, he sent her back.

They say that from the hill comes a man covered with a white blanket, similar to the blanket of the priests. (Compiled by the Institute of Mayan Tongues, translated by Marvin Antonio Díaz)

Legends that are associated with specific physical aspects of the landscape tend to be preserved from the oral culture as long as their content remains relevant to the culture. The physical aspects of the landscape (in this case, the Palewitz Hill) encourage the relationship of the story and serve to confirm the putative events.

LEGENDS OF PALEWITZ, SAN MARCOS

The ruins of San Marcos are on the edge of the village, and the central square serves as a soccer field for children. People go up the main building to watch the games and say that a few years ago someone flattened the top to make it more comfortable; as a result of it, the remains of a tomb and the foundations of some superstructure can be seen. The municipal building is known among the inhabitants as "Palewitz" but our researches have not revealed a special connection with the hill of the same name, discussed above.

Although the "small volcano" known as "Palewitz" is a pre-Hispanic temple, it is considered a hill, and the beliefs and legends associated with the place follow the pattern of hill legends. Like many of the hills in Maya area, it is rumored that the "small volcano", besides being a living character, contains or is the door to another world, and quoted like the following reflect this quality: It was a mountain and when a lady arrived, she saw that there saw that there were peacocks that were from the hill. The Mayor of Jacaltenango came to dig. (Mr. Domingo López)

Among the other beliefs associated with the "small volcano" are that it has "windows inside," that bats can be seen near the site, and fly in through a window at the top.⁴⁸



⁴⁸ Below, we discuss about a legend compiled in San Marcos Huista that maintains that the president Rafael Carrera came to this village, and that he was chosen by the Virgin.

And that the small mounds around the big one is the children, while the main mound is a big old man. The name “Palewitz” means “Father Hill,” priest hill, and they say that formerly the priest, dressed in the white clothes of Jacaltenango, went out at night and walked near the village. In addition to the supernatural legends associated with the archeological site, it is said that the place was involved in an important stage of Guatemalan history.

Here was a governor, Rafael Carrera. They took a bell down from the church to use as a cannon and he was going to throw the enemies from here to the ruins. After he came to the power, he put the bell back where it is now in the church. A priest in his robe comes out the little hill called Palewitz in the evenings. (Mr. Francisco Morales López, San Marcos)⁴⁹

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This statement from a young woman from San Marcos shows a legend in a rudimentary form and also seems to be a modern adaptation of ancient beliefs. Generally, the being is represented as the owner of nature, here it says that “he stole animals to take them into the hill.”

There was an owner on the hill. Once a man went to the owner, got angry and went to Xela. The owner, a man-hill type stole animals to take him into the hill. Before he went fought with someone and took his horses within the hill. The horses had

horns. He used to give money to people and then he took them inside the hill. (Eulalia Ramírez, 15)

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The following two narratives relate to the growth of the hill, at an imprecise date in the past, a reason also found in the Popol Vuh; we present a cite from that epic for its consideration.

Where are you going, son? They told to Two Feet. *

I’m not going anywhere, I’m just breaking down the mountains, I move them by day and at dawn he said at once he spoke. He said to a Cerbatanero Shblananké:

When did you see each other? I don’t know you, what is your name? Said Two Feet.

I don’t have name, I am only a boy, I rather set traps in the mountains, I am poor, I own nothing, you son; I only go to the small and big mountains. I waw a mountain, little one was really growing it wasn’t very high, but it rises and grows over the other mountains. That is why I couldn’t hunt birds there, you son.⁵⁰

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⁴⁹ Chave, Adrián, Po Wuj, 21^a.

* Kab’raqan a mythical character. His name literally means Two Feet.

⁵⁰ Santa María (Quetzaltenango). Volcano that erupted violently and caused earthquakes in 1902. From Santa María was born the Santiaguito, which remains permanently active, possible relation with the myth.

In addition to its other attributes, this short or fragmentary version seems like a description of the struggle between old and new beliefs. Interestingly, the priest cannot win while the elders succeed. Perhaps the story represents an affirmation of indigenous ideas, considering again the cultural effects of the colonization in other parts of the world, the suggestion is reasonable.

In San Marcos Huista, a hill began to rise, and the people were frightened. They called the priest, who went to pray and performed ceremonies and the hill stopped growing. Then, the Palewitz began to grow, and the elders (the Shamans) went to pray and make their ceremonies. Thus, the hill stopped to grow, and it went to Santa María. (Edgar Quiñones, *Peb'il Pam*, 16.⁵¹)

The second version about the grow of Palewitz also offers an explanation for the discovery of archeological devices by the inhabitants of San Marcos Huista. The description of the massacre of Tekemburro⁵² suggests the belief of nahuals and it makes us remember the descriptions of the first encounters between the indigenous of the Americas and Spaniards, on their horses. Perhaps, details like the statement that Palewitz came originally from Totonicapán, give us clues about people's pre-Hispanic migration. Obviously, the toys and tools that Palewitz left for the people of San Marcos are the archeological artifacts.

The one from Palewitz was originally from Totonicapán, above Quetzaltenango and he went to stay here on the hill of San Marcos. The Jilomal lords (wise men who take care of the village) cut him off because he was going to occupy all of San Marcos, he was going to grow. The men here found the best sages who there at this time and they said among themselves that it would be better to take him to another place and there in the place called Witz ib la Chech (place where today is the domestic pigs) they went to find



⁵¹ It has the same name of the volcano in the eastern of Guatemala.

⁵² The following cite of Eric Thompson seems highly pertinent here; "A notable use of caverns in the Yucatan peninsula was as a source of "virgin" water used in ceremonies, since the water, like all participants and utensils that entered into the ritual, had to be free of contamination. The water that filtered from the ceilings of the caves was as pure as the purest. That is why in the caves where there were infiltrations... they placed many clays and sometimes stone vessels under the stalactites to collect the drippings, especially under those farthest from the entrance, where there was less danger of being contaminated by the presence of women. Due that the number of enormous fragments of scattered on the floor of the most recondite chambers of the labyrinthine caves, where the darkness and the difficult and even dangerous access ensured that no one was dwelling. In these caves are rarely or never found sherds of incense burners or polychrome pottery. The caves were, therefore, annexes of the ceremonial center as well as of the peasant religion." 230.1.

him. He was on an animal that he called “Tekoamburro” it’s like a donkey/monster. And they were preparing themselves but they didn’t know that he and the animal were separated, they thought that were part of the same person and pulled up the big stone on the animal and thus the hill fulfill to escape. The stone stayed there. Before he left, Palewitz gave a lot of things to the people of San Marcos, as toys, stones to grind, but of small size, masks and other things. It keeps giving away and that’s why people still finding thing on the top of the volcano. (José Nolasco, San Marcos Huista, 34)

The beliefs associated with the “small volcano” of Palewitz, San Marcos, are still very influential in today’s life, as is clearly seen in the following narrative collected from a 15 years old girl, which unmistakably reflects the presence of a concept of limited assets. The girl is studying a course in high school and, after having related the following, she commented that, perhaps, it is not worth studying, that since they were rich before and lost everything, they will never enjoy prosperity again.

This narrative is considered by her and her siblings as a true history of her family; the “red stone” of the picture show, for them, its veracity.

My grandfather was wise. He had two hearts and he always knew what was going on with people,

even in the United States. When he was born thirty-three years ago, my dad had a leather tie and a pebble in his hand, where his power came from. When he was born, the small volcano was also small.

They grew up at the same time and thus, they never realized that the hill was changing. Palewitz is a person and so he appears at night, time that always went to fight with Palewitz. He said “Saint Simon, come here” and the Saint came out with his cane. My dad’s stone had a sword engraved on it and the sword grew just like the staff and they fought. The red stone we have (see photo above) is a trophy that my dad earned when he won once. It came one night and the hill said “If you keep winning, you will be rich, but if you don’t, you will be poor for life.” In these times my parents were rich. They had the first store in San Marcos and they went all the way to Concepción with their mules to bring things to sell. People still talk about how they were rich. They had about twelve mules. But that night, my mom went to the hill too and she was watching what was going on. She didn’t want my dad to get involved in these things and she and grandma went to consult a wise man, who recommended burning the stone my dad was born with. He said it would be better to do it in the cemetery. When they burned the stone, it shone and jumped. Then

the small volcano diminished, the half of it was gone. There was fear when Palewitz was destroyed.

My dad came to ask Palewitz where he was. The hill went out and said, "You will see that you will never have friends" and went to live in San Pedro to avoid problems, he left because he already had no one to fight with and no one came to visit. From then on, we are poor because of my mom, because she burned my dad's stone, we still have the red stone that he won as trophy.

The legends and beliefs associated with the ruins of San Marcos are very important for people living in the surrounding area.

OTHER LEGEND ABOUT THE HILLS

The hill called "Bálsamo" or "Box IX" is on the road between San Marcos and San Andrés, and next to a cave where a creek born. Alike the "small volcano," Palewitz, it is said that there are bats inside. Also, some informants have commented that in rainy times, ceramic pottery get out the water.⁵³

The ancestors entered in Box IX through which the water flows, but in the dry months, and came inside to ask for wealth and life from the hill. It is said that the hill is alive. (Baltazar Silvestre, San Marcos Huista)

This comment was translated for us by a 15 years old girl, Elisabeth Nolasco,

you can see the influence of modernity in the vocabulary, "a center of recreation."

The hill is on the road between San Marcos and San Andrés. Inside of the hill there is a pool, a farm, all a recreational center but also there is a lion there that forbids the passage. Some people say that they have been there also a family live at this place. Drums are heard inside at night, while in the morning the hens are screaming. (Sebastián Nolasco, San Marcos Huista)

Evidently, the hill shares with other sacred hills in the area, including the Palewitz building, the typical characteristics of sacred hill in Maya culture. The following is a complete narrative, describing putative events associated with an individual who requested wealth of the hill. The narrator added that there are people currently living in San Marcos who are enjoying the riches borrowed from the hill.

Mysteriously, they were able to buy vehicles and other things, apparently, without resources. "Sure," said, "It's to say that here in San Marcos are wealth, in



⁵³ A very generalized superstition among the Mayas from Yucatán and that recorded too in the Quiché book called Popol Vuh... Vumilech, or Lord Deer. The chiefs and founders of Quiché nation bid farewell to their children before their departure from this world, telling them that the time has come for them to return to their home in heaven and that our "Lord of the Deer" is waiting for them there. *Adrián Recinos, 1954, 406,7. Please, see also Siegel y Grolling. 147-8. Wisdom, Charles, 128.f.*

Jacaltenango, it would be other thing!” In addition, there are rumors that their own father, a wise man, recently, died, he is not really dead but went to live inside a hill near Quetzaltenango.

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This narrative has a fascinating resemblance to European legends about people’s visits to the other world, also considering as a place under the earth or inside the hills or mounds (ruins). Reaching to the detail that the man couldn’t eat something offered by a relative from another world is identical. Thus, we see that despite the numerous superficial differences, the human beings have inside a basis of experience, imagination, desires that unify us through the geographical and temporary distance. The detail of snakes is a valuable clue, regarding to the ancient origins of the history. According to Eric Thompson... the Tzultach carry the process of identifying rain gods with natural features such as mountains, springs and rivers.

He adds that the snakes are the servers sent by them to punish the men. The story was narrated to our informant by his father, the same gentleman who was a sage and that currently, it is rumored that he still living within the hill near to Quetzaltengano. The sage man knew, personally to the man of this story.

There (near the Bo Ix hill) very strange things were seen, for instance, animals that had never been seen before, drumming and engine noises were heard from inside. One man was going to bring

palm trees to make hats up to the top of Nentón. He would go every Friday and when he came in Bálsamo always started to sing and finally, cry because he was poor and tired of so much work of which nothing ever came of it. One day a cloud appeared to him about four meters by ten meters, thick and tall, in the middle of the road and he could not pass and he lowered his load that he was carrying, took out his machete and went to cut that cloud that was visible and the cloud said to him, “Friend, where did you go?”

He got scared and when he saw it was a man, it wasn’t a cloud anymore, he said “Why are you crying so much?” and the man said “Because I am very tired, and I don’t get anything out of what I am doing.” “Ah,” he says, “yes, I have seen you. All the times you have cried I have been with you.” “How?” asked the man, “I haven’t seen anyone.”

He said, “Yes”, “I have been with you, I have something for you,” “if you want it.”

All right, sir, “said the man, thinking between giving him a cut or some money, but the man said to him, “If you want, close your eyes for a while.” And he said “how



⁵⁵ Grollig, in Siegel & Grollig, 106.

about if I close my eyes and you kill me?”

He said “Go away,” “so you can see that I was going to give you something” and the man thought to himself, well, how bout if I close my eyes for a while, and he did it and when he opened his eyes he was no longer in the place where he was talking, he was walking in a very strange place where he had never been, arriving to a small village where people were working, it was about nine o’clock in the morning. The man said to him, “If you live here, you don’t get anything.” He asked, “Why?”

“Because you don’t want to eat the stuff here,” he replies. And they went there to the master’s office. When they arrived, the boss came in and the man wanted to enter but two snakes came down, the water cantil (like the rattlesnake but it stays in the water), they came down to sting him or bit him and the boss scared the animals and they didn’t bother him anymore.

They went in there where the things he was going to give away were and the boss told him “This is yours, here is your name” but the offered him another, bigger package. The man began to see which one weighed more and brought the heavier one. The boss told him to come to a street in front of the office and came out in a skipper. It was daylight and

suddenly he mentioned “Thank God I was able to accomplish that,” he said and suddenly he tripped and the box he was carrying came over him and he went rolling down like a cliff. He could no longer reach it but reached out his belt and reacted, he came back on top of it. He was on the shore of the Bo’Ix river and it was already dark, he was there for about an hour. When they met it was about 2 o’clock in the morning, and he returned at 3 o’clock in the morning. But there was daytime. (José Nolasco, San Marcos Huista, 34)

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The hill Muj’lu’bal is located near the village. The lagoon where an important archeological site is also located, has the same associations as the other sacred hills; this legendary narrative underlines the role of the owner of the hills as the provider of all good things. There is also an association between the owner and the sacred deer of the Maya.

The Muj’lu’bal has a man inside, in an underground. There was a man who never had a good harvest. In a evening, when he was in his land on the hill a man on a horse arrived, and request him a bit of peanut plants. The man gave



⁵⁴ The term was invented by Arnold Van Gennep, the Rites of Passage, University of Chicago Press, 1960, translation of Les Rites de Passage, Paris, Noury, 1908.

other seed to the farmer, and he sow it. From then on, he had good harvests. The man on a horse was dressed in black. When he left the place, the man realized that the tracks were not horse but deer.⁵⁴

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We also compiled the following comment which also contains an association between the owner of the hills and deer, although here the animal follow to the being. The narrator, a professional painter has made several painting representing the owner on a horse with deer following him.

A hunter was passing by a hill when a man on a horse appeared with some deer following him. The hunter said that the deer have not been killed because they are his property. (José Cupertino Delgado, Jacaltenango)

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Here, we notice how it can be used the structure of traditional legends to mock. This narrative represents modern manipulation of ancient beliefs and, perhaps, offers a hint that the beliefs of the owners of the hills were losing power several decades ago.

It was said that inside this hill *mum'lu'bal*, a strange being lived and some gentlemen from the village of La Laguna, Municipality of Jacaltenango, decided to go to ask him for wealth. They arrived at the hill and began to say: "*Muj'lu'bal, chonh hul ko*

txonhotokobalhanh ta metan como meb'a onhan."

They repeated that phrase several times and some guards of the hacienda who controlled the smuggling of contraband from Mexico to Guatemala were listened them. Then they went to these gentlemen who were asking for riches from the hill and the hill didn't answer the men. And so, the guards came against them and started to beat them; they told them that they were lazy because they came to ask money from this hill. After they beat them, at about one o'clock in the morning, they went back to La Laguna and told them that if they came back again, they were going to shoot them with guns. (Candelario Silverstre, Inchewex)

It is said that among the population of Jacaltenango, the celebration of the carnival is of the owners of the hills, due that, in that time, people didn't work because of the appearance of strange people, they could hear music in the mountain and some looked at the devil. This simple narrative of the encounter of some Jacaltecs with supernatural beings who live in the surrounding of the village is a fascinating example of how traditional narratives can illustrate the relationship between people with the forces of nature.

Talking generally the world of the spirits and the humans don't crash, with the exception of the especial circumstances, which are frequently when the social rules are broken, or during a

particular era of the year. In the social sciences, is used the term “liminality” to describe these special days.⁵⁵ These are times when anything strange can happen if one observes the rules. Frequently, must take into account precautions avoid an unwelcome encounter.

One aspect of many of the supernatural beings in peasant cultures is clearly illustrated here, in their role as personification of nature. In this narrative, the supernatural beings have the faces of animals, and as a warning-not to meddle with supernatural things- the faces of men also become the faces of animals.

The mention of Ash Wednesday shows the mixture of pre-Christian ideas and the Christians who always are noticed in the mythology and the folklore of Maya regions.

At carnival time, after the Ash Wednesday there were a belief that on this date always stranger things happened. On one occasion two Jacalteco hunters decided to verify the rumors and went to a place called Ak'al yich sow, between Yinchewex and Hujlinah. But before they arrival, they began to hear a noise like children's cries, sounds of marimba, tun, rockets, etc. They decided to approach the place where they hear the noise. Each time they heard it louder and louder but they didn't understand, because the people were not visible. The noise was coming from several places, from several hills to a flat place, where they were apparently

celebrating. There they gathered. Although they heard the celebrations, the hunters didn't see something.

They went further down and saw people with human bodies but with animal faces. Suddenly one of the hunters turned around to see his friend and this companion had the face of a beast. “You have the face of an animal, too,” replied his friend. “We are not going to enter Jacaltenango like this, we are not normal,” they said. And they went to sleep and, in the morning, they were normal again. The experience was a test. Don't get involved in supernatural things.

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Sometimes the contrasts between the basically animistic belief and the modern life of the people of Jacaltenango seem enormous. Currently, many people have televisions, vehicles and other devices of the end of the millennium. A great number of men have lived in the United States and at least in the municipal capital, there are each time more people with professional certificates, *licenciaturas*, and so on. But when one is traveling within the green landscape of Jacaltenango, the majesty of the hills that really dominate the sight has that any person can believe in all the stories about them.

RECENT ENCOUNTERS WITH THE OWNER OF THE HILLS

Although society is changing, and these changes reach even the most isolated villages of Jacaltenango, encounters with the owners of the hills continue, resulting in deals made between humans and the spirit that can be cited as explanations for unexplained wealth or exceptional luck.

The informant's grandfather lived in the village of La Laguna. He was one of the first founder of the village. One day he was walking along a hill by the pasture when he met a man with green eyes, tall, and dressed in black. This gentleman offered him wealth, possibly for his soul, but he refused. The informant had a friend who supposedly sold his soul to the owner of the hill, and died after two days.

There used to be roads inside Palewitz Hill. There always the owner of the hill appeared on a white horse, adorned and on a deer or a mule. A man from the village of Tzibaj saw him five years ago. He went to work on the Palewitz hill, to work in his field. He had seen a huge pig, a big one; the big animal he was scared looking at the pig and the pig was looking at him, the animal turned into a man, big and tall. He wasn't afraid and didn't want to ask the man anything, they just stared at each other. It was not normal, the worker thought, I'd better not go to work. On the way back to his home, he began to feel fear and heat.

Another man passing by saw a big mule with golden reins. He passed by and the mule was

alone. He went to his land and after three hours he returned again to his land and passed by that same place and saw again the mule in the same place and the man said: "This poor mule has no owner, he has nothing to eat," and he takes the mule to his house in Tzibaj. He took the mule and they arrived near the village when the well-dressed man came down and caught up with him and said, "Why are you bringing the mule through the village?" "I saw him, I felt sorry for it because it wasn't eating something, so I decided to brought it to my house to eat something," he said.

The well-dressed man said, "This is my mule, why are you taking things that are not yours?" the man repeated "Because I felt sorry for it." The well-dressed man took the mule and mounted on it, while he was mounting the mule disappeared. The man asked himself, "why do I get into matters aren't mine?" and he got scared. (José Cupertino, Jacaltenango)

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This fable shows us more clearly than ever that the philosophy of limited assets is exceptionally important in the conception of many peasant societies. If someone is richer than others, there must be a nefarious reason. The narrator explained to us that the blanket was something highly prized among the Jacaltecs in the past, much like money is today. In fact, in colonial times it served as

a tribute payment and in the codices and tribute plates it is found as a tribute payment as well. In the Popol Vuh the mantas are mentioned.

There was a man who worked as a day laborer but despite his poor position was so rich. A friend said “Bring a lasso and your horse” and he arrived at the time he said and they went out through a place where there are no houses and suddenly in the night there was a house. A gentleman opened the door and it was full of blanket rolls and he gave it to the gentleman and brought it to his house. They came back, and “come in,” said the rich laborer to the other, “I want to show you something.”

There was no money in their house when they left and already in the morning the drawer was full of money. The gentleman always came home with loaded mules. People say he had a deal with the owner of the hills.

People who are rich because of the hills sell their lives to them. They turn them into animal when they die. This story is the truth and it is about a man who lived in the times of the informant’s father’s time. (Male informant, 29)

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Rumors, memories, and fables circulating about encounters with the owner of the hill are good to confirm the

legends which involve the being and thus are attributed the survival of the gender.

“LA LLORONA”

Legends about “La Llorona” are common among the Mayan population and also the other populations of Guatemala and other parts of Central America and Mexico, although of course they show cultural and regional differences.⁵⁶

According to Casaverde,⁵⁷ in Jacalteco culture is considered that the natural state for an adult person is the marriage and that the single adults are strange. People say that a single adult remains incomplete until after his death. It is believed that when a single person dies the spirit is rejected by God and cannot enter to the spirit world, but has to return to Jacaltenango to look for a mate before being accepted. In the case of women, return as “La Llorona.” It is said that she chooses among the young men of Jacaltenango and her choice usually dies three days after their encounter with the being, becoming into her mate, and thus accepted by God. When a married person dies, he enters the spirit world of the spirits because it is understood that the partner will join him or her after death.

Currently, in Jacaltenango, there are several theories about the origin of the being known as “la Llorona.”



⁵⁶ Casaverde, Juvenal, 116.

⁵⁷ It is cited in Nash, 423.

Some people say that she is the spirit of single women:

Their spirits come out their bodies while they sleep and walk on the streets. They look like normal women but their feet do not touch the ground (Anonymous Informant, Jacaltenango) Others say that ... she is a woman who walks at night. She says she gets scared when she walks and screams too. (Angélica Felipe Andrés José, 17 years old)

They are souls of separated women, divorced or single. To go out at night in the form of this being, one of them places a glass of water at the base of the bed and sleeps upside down. They want to bath the men in the river, then, the men become weak and die after a while. Sometimes Las Lloronas go out in groups of three or four. (Male informant in his thirties)

The traditional versions of the legend, as it is known in Jacaltenango, demonstrate very obvious lessons; be wary of sexual relations outside the control of society and avoid intimate relations with strangers. The current situation in Jacaltenango, in which many of the young men have traveled to the United States to work, leaving their wives, added a very modern commentary, although not completely serious in expressing the frustration of a young woman who has to live alone, with her children or family while her husband works in other places, we see the flexibility of the belief adapting to current circumstances.

The events described in the legends about the owner of the hills are often associated with liminal areas, roads, trails and landings. They are places where culture has invaded nature, places that really belong neither to one nor the other. In Jacaltenango the legends about La Llorona are also generally located in liminal places, near rivers or dirty creeks, that passed through village and can be used to dump garbage. In these cases, there is also a collision between culture and nature, although is an invasion of nature matter (the creek) in the culture (the village).

This description of Inchewex is the typical traditional Llorona:

Near to the sources of water, there was La Llorona. She wanders late at night looking for men to bath them in the sources of water and if she succeeds in bathing that person 2 or 3 days later, he dies. In order to save themselves, they had to shout for help to the neighbors. So, that they could help them. To get help, a married woman had to run away, what she had to do was to run out and go to where the man was and get between La Llorona and the man. Then, she had to take off her traditional skirt in front of her and had to say: "Stand down, bad woman, why are you go around chasing men?" And La Llorona and the men were saved. Sometimes she is heard crying at night. It is said that they are the spirits of unmarried women who liked to "play" with men. (Jesús

Jerónimo Esteban Hernández,
Inchewex)

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In this fable the being is associated again with the water, here in the place where women wash the clothes. The man who saw her, fled but she caught him. Although we cannot consider that the narratives of this type are, properly said, legends, these stories or brief tales are depending to the legends and vice versa. When encounters with supernatural beings are still reported, these reports confirm the traditional details of the legends, and the legends give credibility to the strange or horrifying experiences, otherwise unexplained. This seems to be a variant related to the concept of female supernatural beings who take their souls out of the body to wander at night and commit acts not accepted by society.

My dad's mother-in-law was bad and when he went to visit her, on the way back the flashlight he was carrying went out, which was rare because the batteries were new and he met a woman who brought a vase. There where there was a basin where the women carried water. He didn't recognize the woman and thought she was his *comadre* and began to talk to her. When she responded she as incomprehensible, she was just mumbling. He turned around and she was in front of him again. He came home and went to bed, also heard the sound of the woman on the stone (the bridge in front of the

door) and he screamed and his dad started to grab the woman but no one was there.

In this narrative we see again the idea that female sexuality is powerful and even magical; when it is controlled by society, here represented by a married woman who removes her traditional skirt in front of the immoral being and thus they banished her. In a society where all visible power is male, the fact that in the stories about La Llorona, the man is threatened and also saved by women (or female beings) is revealing and indeed typical of patriarchal societies where women are viewed with a combination of contempt and fear.⁵⁸ Comparisons can be made between these attitudes and those toward black people, for example, in racist societies.

Once my grandfather was drinking a lot when suddenly he was walking down the street when some women started to chase him, when he ran towards a cross. Las Lloronas never came close, he ran home and shouted to his mother, "Mom, I'm being chased by La Llorona." His mother said, "Wait for me son, I'll scare them now!" My great-grandmother removed her traditional skirt in front of them, and they never bothered him. (José Cecilio Domingo Camposeco, 12)

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This brief commentary shows the fact that currently many of the supernatural beings of Jacaltenango are

compared with characters of the Christian cemetery.

My brother-in-law went home one night and a beautiful woman appeared under the bed. When he saw her, he realized that the woman had a face made of bone. That is how he knew she was the demon called La Llorona. (Female informant, 23)

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This fable, related by a ten years old child, is located in the village of San Marcos Huista, and seems that there is an association between La Llorona and the sacred hill called Bo Ix. If this is the case, the association represents a mixture of traditions.

Once my friends went to give food to the horse and arrived at about six o'clock. They left the horse, and better said one of them "let's go to the house" but, "I'm hungry" said the other one, "let's go get some mangoes," and even though the other wanted to go, they went to get mangoes. One climbed up the tree and the other one stayed behind. The one who was in the tree looked down and saw to La Llorona. "Run" he said because he didn't want that La Llorona catch his friend. He threw a mango at her head, only bones were left. He ran away and caught up with the other one.

"Why did you run?" asked the friend. "Because I saw just bones," he said. "I didn't see anything."

"Then, I didn't either." They were near the Bálsamo hill. They reached the village and La Llorona that was chasing them, was left with a man. He looked at her and she undressed. The man said, "I'm going to hug her," but when he hugged her, all bones appeared.

&&&

La Llorona is a beautiful woman. She hadn't husband when she died, due that she continues looking for men. (Baltazar Roberto, San Marcos Huista, 10)

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In this memory, the narrator was initially surprising because the "woman" who he saw was outside the house after the normal time for women in Jacaltenango, again, showing the association between broken social rules and the supernatural. In addition, there is an association between La Llorona and a "dirty creek." I was walking late one night and saw a woman dressed in a long skirt. You don't normally see women out of the house that late and I was surprised. I thought about walking her home but when I walked by her side she started going in the other direction, moving as her feet were not touching the ground. I followed her and she went under the bridge of a dirty creek. I realized that she was not a normal woman and I return to my house in a hurry, scared. (Male informant, 23)

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In the following narratives it is noticed that the man who is tempted by La

Llorona dies, while a child who reject her is saved.

A man went out at night and came to a street where he saw a woman. "What a beautiful woman!" he said and went to hug her but he couldn't hold her and in fear he ran home and asked the lady to open the door. "I saw to La Llorona," said the man. "You are lying," said the lady. "It's true" said the man and his face became like a balloon and he died. (Manuel Leonardo, San Marcos Huista, 10)

This narrative is atypical of the brief narratives and memories or fables style usually associated with La Llorona. It is not entirely clear why the boy was her victim. Perhaps, it is assumed that by inviting his girlfriend to his land in the early hours of the morning he had evil or unacceptable intentions.

La Llorona appears as the boy's girlfriend but never lets him see her face until they have finished eating and finished the job. After seeing La Llorona, the boy dies, a test of what can happen when one breaks the rules of society.

The lands, like the roads, rivers, etc., are liminal places in that they are neither of the culture nor of nature. In the Jacaltecan zone the lands are generally outside and sometimes far from the village, intrusions of the culture in the hills and plains.

It is said that in the past, in Jacaltenango, about a hundred years ago, there were Las Lloronas.

There was a boy there who had a girlfriend. He arrived to his girlfriend's house and invited her to his land where he had planted corn, pumpkins, chayote and *chipilín*. * He said, "Let's go there, early, tomorrow morning. We are going to meet where there's a stone there (near the main church in Jacaltenango)." "I'm going to wait for you, if you get there first, wait for me and if I get there first, I will wait for you."

The boy only slept for a while, and as he had not clock, woke up too early and when she arrived said "Why are you coming too late? I've been waiting for you for an hour. Let's go, you go ahead and I'll be in the back."

When they arrived at the field, it was about one o'clock in the morning. "Remove the *chipilín*, the corn and the pumpkin," said the boy. And she began to remove everything and put it together and he also began to remove it; when they finished removing everything, they put it together and he asked the girl if she had any food with her. And she replies, no, but she never shown her face, just her back.

Then the boy said "I'll get the food, let's eat together" and he

* It is a plant and popular crop, originally from Central America.

sat down but she didn't want to sit next to him. He gave her food and she didn't want to receive it, at last he took out the food and went to leave it in front of her and when he turned to see her, she turned back. She showed her face and it was ugly. She was a demon that she turned into the shape of the girl.

The "girl" started to laugh "Now I've already won you," she said to him, "Now, the day after tomorrow we will see each other," she said to him and the girl disappeared.

When he went to see where they gathered the harvest, there was only what he had removed, and there was nothing left of her.

He returned with diarrhea and fever the same night. He arrived at his girlfriend's house. She waited for him but when he didn't arrive, she came back. He was very sick and two days later he died. (Berta Noemí Miguel Silvestre from *Peb'il Pam*, 17)

"EL SOMBRERÓN" AND "EL CADEJO"

The Sombrerón is one of the best-known figures in Guatemalan folklore. Although the Sombrerón and the Cadejo are different characters, sometimes the traditions are mixed. Some of the young people consider him as a kind of demon, or perhaps, the "mere devil," explaining; "The devil can present himself in the form of an animal, a person or anything."

In the first example, "El Cadejo" looks a lot like elves and European fairies, and even the reason to leave braids on the horses is also found in many parts of Europe. Considering that horses were introduced to the Americas by the Spanish invaders, it does not seem likely that this folklore motif made its first appearance on this side of the Atlantic at the same time.

"El Sombrerón" put the people on his horse and left them without a path, lost. He also left braids on the horses to indicate his preference for horses with long tails and to indicate his presence. Thus, the people knew, "El Sombrerón" used my horse to go out.

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This commentary has an association between El Sombrerón and the dirty creeks a characteristic that it shares with "La Llorona" and names the being as a demon that announces death. As we have seen above, dirty creeks can be identified as liminal spaces where they belong neither to culture nor to nature.

If it appears is a sign due when it appears to a person some relative dies. It scares people and says that it steals a person's courage or energy. It is a dwarf, the same demon that turns into various forms, it can be a girl. It only appears in dirty creeks. Once he appeared on the bridge in the form of a turkey and people were afraid.

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Here is introduced another name for the, generally known as “El Sombrerón.”

“El Charro” is a big hat with a small person inside. When you walk by it you feel a chill. It only scares people. It is also known as “El Sombrerón” and the “Duende.” He appears in hidden places (female informant, 23).

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Here we can see an association between “El Sombrerón” with bats; these animals are almost always considered evil, and as -facts- said above, are described in the Popol Vuh as inhabitants of hell, among other things:

Once upon a time, my aunt was walking down the street when, suddenly, a bat scared her and they both stopped. When she left, “El Sombrerón,” a short man with a big hat, came out. My aunt screamed and the gentlemen came to see her. “El Sombrerón” disappeared and she walked home scared. (José Cecilio Domingo Camposeco, 12).

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Once again, you can notice here that “El Sombrerón” is connected with water, along with an implied rabbit that it is better not to walk at night because these hours belong to non-human beings. It is also noticeable that the narrator speaks of the past. The fact that now most of the

villages have electric lights is affecting the oral culture:

“El Sombrerón” from Welt⁵⁸ used to wander at night on the banks of the rivers. In the village of Inchewex it is found the people who walked at night. “El Sombrerón” frightened them away. Due that, people were afraid to walk in these places (Adán Camposeco, Inchewex, 29).

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“El Cadejo” is usually considered as a type of demon. The descriptions are not very consistent. The most frequent motif is that this being dragging a cross. In the first example, it also disturbs the horses, leaving braids in their hair.

The hair was dragging a cross along the roads; it went out at night, and the cross sounded like a bell so when people heard it they were frightened by the noise it made at night. It is thought that this “Cadejo” comes to take care of the horses, and some of them make a very difficult braid to untangle. The secret is making a formal braid and the next day, the braid made by “El Cadejo” will be already untangled. (Adán Camposeco, Inchewex)



⁵⁸ Another hill in the area

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An informant suggests that other creature known as “El Taramculus” is the same spirit.

“El Sombrerón” appeared on bridges to scare people and also people passed by the houses dragging a cross. “El Sombrerón” is the same character as “El Taramculus.” It could even drag a cross and thus showed its power. They hear the noise of the wood of the cross. They heard the noise of the cross and the people who misbehaved and were superstitious were afraid. “El Sombrerón” watched over the water (José Cupertino, Jacaltenango).

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Talking about “El Taramculus,” the informant thought that is the same as “El Cadejo” but he was not sure.

It was (no longer exists) an animal that looks like a cat and its paws carried a kind of iron. At nightfall it would go down some flagstones and walked on the slab trying to scare the family. A man who heard it went out to see him but it disappeared (male informant, Jacaltenango, 23).

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The most common narratives are about “El Cadejo” dragging a cross are other examples of syncretism.

“El Cadejo” is dragging something – chains or a cross. It is the size of a rabbit (male informant, Jacaltenango, 29).

A lady heard the noise of someone dragging a chain and she went out to see and saw the demon dragging a cross with a chain (female informant, Jacaltenango, 23).

Thus, the term “Cadejo” is used in Jacaltenango for a variety of spirits, always male, but appearing in different forms.

OTHER SUPERNATURAL LEGENDS

Besides the large number of legends of the owners of the hills, etc., there is still a variety of less easily classified narratives that also deal with the supernatural world. Many of them contains, apart from the descriptions of events or strange beings’ historical data, for instance, those describing frequent trips to the Chiapas city of Comitán, which was the commercial center for the Jacaltecs because it is closer than Huehuetenango. In addition to the practical reasons for going to Comitán, the Jacaltecs people ace a historical connection with the place, reflected in traditional narratives and the popular religion from the fact that one of the protectives being of Jacaltenango came, according to informants, from Chiapas to the fact nowadays people receive the television signal from Chiapas and not from Guatemala, and say “we feel more Chiapanecs than Guatemalans.” A recurrent motif in the narratives of various kinds is the to Comitán by characters who

just closed their eyes and they were there or that they could arrive in about five minutes when normally the trips take three days, etc.

Some of the references to Comitán are brief as the following:

A man who liked to drink invited his friend and told said to him: jump and close your eyes. When he opened his eyes, they were in Comitán. Also, he paid for the liquor with twenty pesos and they gave him change for one hundred pesos. (Anonymous informant, Jacaltenango)

This legend is about not only a strange incident but also it contains information about the life, economic, among others of people from Jacaltenango. Evidently, it deals with a kind of witchcraft, but the role of the guide is not clear. The historical details are very interesting that the Jacaltecs went to sell cocoa and they had to hide from Mexican officials on the border between the countries. Evidently his story belongs to the same tradition as the previous one.

Four Jacaltecs decided to go to sell cocoa to Comitán, Chiapas. Among these 4 gentlemen there was a guide who knew the way, because he had to go through paths to hide from the security of migration on the side of Mexico. They arrived to Comitán, sold their merchandise and with the money they bought liquor to sell at the fair in Jacaltenango⁵⁹ but the guide began to drink and the other three

were very worried because they would not be able to sell their liquor at the fair. Then, the guide told them not worry, they had to get home. And they prepared their load before going to sleep so that the next day everything would be ready. And they sat down each one next to his load, so that they could lie down a little and so they could sleep. So, they all fell asleep. And when one of them woke up, he began to hear fireworks and drums and asked the guide what was going on. He told him that they were already in Jacaltenango. Since the trip takes three days.

The guide begged the three of them not to tell him anything about what had happened, otherwise they would die.

Then, their merchandise was sold, and they began to drink liquor and between conversations they drank and one of them told other people what had happened to him. About three days later the four Jacaltecs died for not obeying what the guide had told them.

The events belong about 100 years ago. (Candelario Silvestre Camposeco, Inchewex).



⁵⁹ The Candelaria's titular day, February 2.

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We have compiled several legends and narratives of a place known as Juj li Na, or Pozos Azules. The nature wells are filled with water during the rainy months. Some people say they are connected to the sea, and others that it has a subway connection to one of Guatemala's large lakes. Atitlán or Amatitlán. The place is referred to with comments like this:

The blue wells are connected with the sea. Time ago, when there was rain, began to rumbling and people say that it is the sea. The same thing happens with the Ix Tam hill, near Nentón, when it is going to rain. (Baltazar Cárdenas, Jacaltenango).

The stories are etymological in explaining how the wells were created. On the other hand, the undeniable presence of the wells tries to confirm the legendary events. In the first narrative we see a reduced story of its mythical origins that today, although it has not lost its poetic beauty, the absence of coherence of a complete story is present.

A long time ago there was an old couple, the gentleman in his white clothes and the lady in her traditional clothing. They had lived perhaps sixty years together and the gentleman no longer knew that his wife had a supernatural quality and as the time passed the lady told her husband that she wanted to go to bathe in Pozos Azules where at present no one bathes. They arrived to the wells and the lady took off her clothes getting ready to bathe

and told her husband to wait for her that it didn't matter how long it would take but he had to wait for her. So, she told him that she was going to realize something that she had wanted to do for a long time and that it was the most cherished, greatest dream that she could realize on this earth and her husband was in admiration, also he asked himself what was the reason and why she had not told him in all the time they had lived together.

Then she went into the well and sank into the water. At that moment the he became worried and desperate, thinking that his wife had died from lack of oxygen. Minutes passed and the gentleman waited, becoming more and more desperate. He was about to go to call the neighbors of the village when suddenly he saw his wife coming out of the well, exhaling strongly, and bringing with her some shells from the sea and other unknown objects. The man began to see her as a stranger and not as his wife.

At that moment the lady confessed to him that she had fulfilled the biggest dream of her life and that she was ready to die. The lady got dressed, and they went home. In three days, she passed away. (Emiliano Camposeco, Jacaltenango, 23)

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The narratives that still showing certain relationship with a version known

in Atitlán about the brothers Sojuel with powers very similar to those of the Jacaltecan heroes and in which similar events take place. Given that in both cases the events are located around the Atitlan Lake, the connection becomes more possible.

The following narrative contains a combination of relatively modern details with others, probably mythical. The fact that the two sons of the king went to work on an estate has to be a fairly recent addition, influenced by the experiences of the Jacaltecs experiences on the coffee estates.

Initially, the power and tyranny of the estates bosses is underscored, they had problems with their bosses. They didn't want to pay them their wages a statement that sounds very much like what the people of Jacaltenango say of their experiences on coffee estates in the 20th century. However, the exceptional intelligence of the Jacaltecs, and their supernatural powers, give them a moral superiority in the face of economic power.

The especial gifts of Jacaltecs are so powerful that they can change the nature, and cause that the lake diminish when the boss mocks them.

The scape of the brothers, which took place under the earth, leaves visible traces in the geography that can still be seen a feature that indicates the mythical origin of the story. The narrator suggests that his subway journey ends in Pozos Azules, a place a few kilometers from Jacaltenango.

The fact that the protagonists of the story are two, and that they are brothers, should remind us of the two characters in the legends about the protective beings mentioned above.

In the past, the two sons of the king (the cacique⁶⁰) of Jacaltenango went to the estates to earn money. They went to Atitlán Lake or possibly Amatitlán. Where they worked everyone envied them a lot for certain qualities they had, like their intelligence. They had problems with their bosses.

They did not want to pay them their wages. So, the two brothers got angry and said that if they were not paid, they would make the lake disappear. The boss did not want to pay and even he did not believe them and made fun of them. The brothers got angry and started to make the lake disappear. To this day there is a hole under the lake.

The lake began to shrink. That people got angry with them and tried to kill them. Then they, fleeing, entered the lake and traveled from under the earth. With their supernatural powers they could open a path under the earth because they were being pursued.



⁶⁰ Generally the eldest, who exercises authority and is assisted by several assistants who are in charge of executing his orders.

By that time there was already an army following them, the soldiers above ground, using the noise they were making under the ground to follow.

At every certain distance they would come out to the surface of the earth to see how many were still following and they went back into the hole again and kept digging as fast as they could until they had a great distance and reached Jacaltenango and the army that was following lost the tracks.

But even they wanted to make sure they were not being followed. They got as far as fifteen kilometers from the village back to Jacaltenango and told everything to their father. The father scolded them, called them to attention for having gone to show the powers that they possess.

Possibly they came out where today is Pozos Azules.

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This narrative, also belongs to the same tradition as the previous one, although here the Jacaltecs workers are seven instead of two, and in order to make the water rise, they turned themselves into stones and put themselves into the river. The narrative also of a supernatural association with the founding of Juj Li Na.

In Atitlán there were a farm. The owner was an exploiter and did not

pay the workers including the seven compatriots who had gone over there to work. They decided to destroy the farm with their supernatural powers. They wanted to kill the owner's relative to take revenge. They turned into stones and covered the river so the water started to rise and as the farm was in a pot its was going to be covered. There were people living nearby with supernatural powers who went to see what was blocking the river. The workers decided to run away and went under the ground to hide from the people. Some came out at Saj Bana'h the first time, in another stream. Where they came out there are currently some water sources. Yich Tenam and Xatxaj. They left in Tzibaj where there is a water source that only appears in summer. The seven men were supposedly the founders of Juj Li Na. The wells are connected to Atitlán Lake. (Anonymous informant, Jacaltenango)

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This version of the legend of Juj Li Na is really fascinating. The two protagonists provide us with an excellent example of nagualism. They turned animals. In addition, it shows us how traditional narratives can be used to describe, mock or demonize real oppressors. Here the owner of the farm is depicted as an anthropophagus in comparison to the Christian Jacaltecs. There is a suggestion of a rivalry between the Jacaltecs and the Quiches.

There were two Jacaltecs working in Mog 'a por by Atitlán Lake. One was called Zul and the other X'quana. People say that they were wise they turned into little animals. Perhaps, they were sorcerers. Every month or fifteen day they brought dried fish to the owner of the farm and they asked him to sell the fish to them at such an hour. They went to wait. The owner said: here you go and he pulled out two heads of people by the hair. The Jacaltecs said: we are Christians. The water was rising because they wanted to destroy the farm with the water. There were men who wanted to know who were trying to destroy the farm and the houses. They heard that there were two Jacaltecs and they were searching but they were not there.

The water stopped. People in Jacaltenango searched for the mountain that was called "Cola de Caballo" cut of a piece and reduced themselves to the size of a lizard and got on a stick above the water of the lake.

Those searching were looking at the reeds in the lake but did not realize that the two Jacaltecs were there.

Finally, they looked for them on the stick but then the Jacaltecs were under the water. There was a path under the land that the Jacaltecs followed. They came out where today are Pozos Azules in Xul.

The gentlemen who were looking for them arrived and the Cacique Balunh Q'ana was coming asking: What are you doing here? Those who came were Quiches. He warned: You live far away. You better go. They walked back to the farm.

This story was created because when rains a lot the wells overflow. The X'quana dries up in April and the Xul does not stop.

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We have compiled some versions of a legend that deals with an eagle that threatened the Jacaltec people until someone killed it⁶¹. The fact that the story is associated with a cave is not surprising. Many legends in the Maya region deal with caves. In this case is interesting that the cave is not only associated with a supernatural being but also with a presence of ancient remains. It is important to remember the importance of caves as ceremonial or sacred centers in the past and present.

When people went out to work it was very dangerous because there was an animal that took people and this animal is the eagle. According to the story it has killed many people and ate them in a cave called "Ticha." The eagle took



⁶¹ This legend can be associated with 3124 and 3126 identified by Peñalosa, 86-87.

refuge with her young and to prevent that eagle take more people, they made⁶² big baskets so that when the eagle wanted to carry people, the eagle would take no more than the basket that was wore on the head as a kind of hat.

But on one occasion, he took a very strong and very smart man. The animal took him to Yicha. When the eagle wanted to eat him, he had to fight the birds with the bones of people who had been killed by the eagle. So, he killed all the eagles and they were free of these dangerous animals.

The man who killed the eagles could not leave the cave because he was in a great crag and started calling for help about almost a day. And finally, a man heard him and told him: please, go to Jacaltenango and tell that the eagle is dead and I'm trapped on a crag that only an eagle could fly out of here.

Due the new, people of the village organized themselves by carrying ropes made of cattle hides to be able to rescue him, they began to throw the bodies of the eagles so that the people could see what the birds looked like. When they returned, the people who went to the rescue returned very happy and began to celebrate with traditional music such as the marimba, reed and guitars made of "*pumpas*"⁶³.

(Candelario Silvestre,
Jacaltenango)

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This version of the legend contains the interesting details that the cave in addition to be the home of the horrible animal was full of remains, as many of the caves in Jacaltenango, and artifacts. Here, the heroism of the man is less emphasized than the fact of his intention to remove things of value.

In the middle of a hill there was an eagle that flew through the town and grabbed people by their faces to take them to its cave for their young. To go out on the street, women had to carry a basket on their heads so when the eagle came, it would carry the basket and the woman would escape. Instead of a basket the men wore hats.

One day two men who knew how to climb well said that they were going to prevent the eagle from carrying people. One of them had



⁶² In this passage in Spanish is used the word "fabricar" that means "to make" or "to produce" but the word is not commonly used in the area, so that word indicates the modern influence of the urban centers in the rural cultures.

⁶³ Shell of a type of gourd. Alfonso Arrivillaga Cortés has extensively studied this type of instrument. In the Na Bolom Museum in San Cristóbal de Las Casas is one of these instruments.

to climb up and the other was going to stay below. They went to look for the nest. The smartest one stayed in a tree that was close to the eagle. He got there with his knife. The young were there but the eagle was not. The man was waiting for the eagle to kill it. When he arrived, the eagle was ready to receive him with his knife and when he arrived, he killed it and solved the problem.

The man noticed that there were many skulls and also valuables, gold, etc., and he said that he was going to return alone to take the things and he did not say it to his partner but the other one noticed because he was hidden in the back and when the first one arrived said: you will never be able to take the thing out because I am going to cut the tree and the first man was already on a tree. The one who had been in the cave cut down a tree so that the other could not follow him not thinking that he himself would be trapped while the second man could not climb, and the bull, trapped, died in the cave where he is still on a large crag. (José Cupertino, Jacaltenango)

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This version of the legend clearly shows the transition between tradition and modernity: an eagle... actually, a pterodactyl. This narrative of the past that deals with a ferocious animal that threatened the Jacaltecs is linked to the recent story by the report about the

discovery of some ancient artifacts and the subsequent death of the adventurer who described it.

About a century ago there lived an eagle, probably a pterodactyl because they did not know the term then. It was in a cave and came to Jacaltenango to grab people and due that people wore baskets on their heads. The animal carried the baskets but many people died and it also ate dead animals. A man entered the horse carcass and grabbed the eagle and carried it to the cave. He came out and killed the animal with his spear. He was a hero. Five years ago, some gentlemen with land near the cave saw a person going up. The person wore a red hood. About ten years ago a man went up to the cave. Since no one could enter he wanted to try. He went up and found some jade things, some sculptures and ceramics. He came back with the thing, but he had a dream that same night that he was going to die for taking the things and came back with most of the things. He sold some of them and died two years later. (Male informant, 23).⁶⁴



⁶⁴ A gentleman from Jacaltenango remember that he entered into a cave in 1969 and found the staff of a king, a seal, some braided palm mats, some rubber rags, some green spearheads and a stone heart. In addition, he found several pots of black and red colors. Some were large and filled with animal skulls including an unrecognized one with a very long beak.

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The *Tiltik*⁶⁵ is generally considered as a monster of the hominid type. It also appears as the main character in one of the collected tales (please see below). We consider the following narrative to be a legend because the narrator believes it to be a historical event. There are several points of interest in the Tiltik story. First, the harquebus carried by the gives a clue to the putative date of the legend. The harquebus was the weapon used by the Spaniards for the conquest of the Americas.

According to an informant, the capture method described was recently used in a war by the Guatemalan Army for the same purpose against peasants, so once again it can be seen how oral culture demonizes adversaries, a function that at least somewhat relieves social pressures.

The narrator's words were translated by his grandson Damián and it Spanish reflects the cultural differences between their generations.

Once again, it can be noticed the connection between Jacaltenango and Chiapas, especially, the importance of the Río Lagartero, mentioned, for instance, in the San Andrés foundation's legends.

A man went to harvest corn in a place called "Aq taj" (located to the west of Jacaltenango where it borders with Concepción Huista). But people warned him that it would be better to go back, nothing else. So, the gentleman answered that he was carrying a machete, a

harquebus and a knife to defend himself from the giant or "Tilik."

At dusk the giant arrived where the gentleman was sleeping, and the giant tied him by the thumbs of his hand and foot; wrapped him in his own mat and blankets and tied him up. Also, the giant ate the beans and tortillas that the lord brought to eat. The gentleman because of the giant's power, saw how he ate his things but could do nothing about it. But suddenly, a strong wind was heard. There were two people coming to rescue him. These people are the ones who take care of the town "Aq 'toma" in Jacaltenango. These 2 characters took the evil giant in a matter of minutes. They took it to the Río Lagartero (Chiapas, Mexico) and plunged him into the depths of the river. The two characters arrived where the gentleman who almost was killed by the giant. Then, they started to untie him from the sheets and also to hit him with a stick trying to get him to react normally



⁶⁵ Identified as type 3532 by Fernando Peñalosa, 1996, 94. Mario Tejada suggest that it is linked to the cycle of narratives dealing with Ek Xiv Chac so well known in Maya dree. (See Blaffer, Sarah C. also). Furthermore, it should be noted that the rabbit as "trickster" is a character found in oral culture throughout the Americas. The rabbit has been associated with the moon since pre-Hispanic times. Tejada, Mario.

after the shock, and they went to drop him off at his house and warned him not to go the place alone, that it was better to take company and that it was not good to be too macho because if the two characters had not been there, he would be dead. (Candelario Silvestre, *Inchewex*)⁶⁷

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The following tale about Mr. Pilín is apparently incomplete. An important point is that the bush cat is considered an unlucky animal, associated with witchcraft⁶⁸, while the deer has many mythical associations⁶⁹ and it is particularly associated with the owner of the hills.

The man in the story was saved because he made a wooden cross. Despite other possible interpretations, Mr. Pilín's story basically depicts once again the current authority of Christianity over ancient beliefs by representing a kind of struggle between religious symbols.

Mr. Pilín decided to go to bring corn in a place called "Ojob'na" but he made an agreement with another gentleman named Juan Silvestre. But Mr. Juan was not up and could not accompany to Mr. Pilín. So, Mr. Pilín went alone and when he went out to the edge of the village, an animal appeared to him like a wild cat and when he saw it, he gave it a machete blow. But nothing happened to the animal and he continued and an animal like a deer appeared.

He made a cross of sticks and hid and, being hidden, he fell asleep. But it was the cross that helped him so that this demon turned animal could not attack him. But Mr. Juan Silvestre passed three times where he was hiding, but he could do anything.

Mr. Juan Silvestre passed later and when he arrived to Ojob'na's place, he started shouting to Mr. Pilín but no one appeared. It was strange because Mr. Pilín had left early in the



⁶⁷ See the tale about Tiltik, below.

⁶⁸ According to Grollig; There are certain animals that walk around at night. When one of these animals starts howling near the house, people say that a person is going to die. The animal is the bush cat... These animals live in the bush and when they arrive, they give a bad sign to the house. The bush cat is a special animal for the Mayan priests. If someone kills a bush cat the Mayans burn them because it is a very bad animal. Siegel y Grollig, 161.

⁶⁹ Also, the deer has a very special place in Mayan culture since ancient times, when it was the corporeal representative of a god and had associations with the sun. (Soustell, Jaques, 1998, Thompson, Eric, 1975) According to Adrian Recinos, Recinos, 1954. 406-7. A superstition recorded in the Popol Vuh that he was called Vumilech or Lord Deer. The chiefs and founders of the Quiche nation, bidding farewell to their children before their departure from this world, tell them that the hour has come when they must return to their home in heaven and that there the Lord of Deer is waiting for them. The deer is identified by Stratmeyer (Stratmeyer, 1979, 108), as one of the animals in charge of the naguals.

morning and when Mr. Juan Silvestre returned to his home, asked what had happened with Mr. Juan Pilín and someone told him the story and said that while he was sleeping, he had a dream that if he had put on the cross, he could have died.

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This narrative shows once again the numerous connections between Jacaltenango and Chiapas:

Some time ago, he says that when it rained very hard or it rained a lot here in the village; when it rained for weeks, people were very scared because water came out of the hills and watered the village. The rivers and Río Azul grew. Then, it is said that the Coman Comi. Our parents took care of us, they considered themselves as wise men. They have powers to take care of us and also happen to take or close the openings or drains of the sea (which was considered as navel of the sea). They burst around here near the village when it rains very hard.

On the other hand, those of Chiapas are also known as Comoan Comi', as they say they are known by the locals. When these heavy rains fall, the river rises and the river grows and those from Chiapas come floating to bring come to bring wood, that is to say, big sticks, between the mountains because they say that there are not much

wood or big sticks in Chiapas. They say how the drums and whistles sounded, saying that they were going, carrying the sticks. (Antonio Feliciano Méndez, Jacaltenango)

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These fables demonstrate the proximity of the supernatural and the natural in everyday life. It can be noticed the tendency to apply Christian terms to explain strange events or beings.

My d saw a girl about three feet tall in the river. He was passing by with his dad, he was still a boy, he was about 13 or 14 years old when, suddenly he saw a girl there. And he said to his dad: look at the girl and my grandfather saw and spoke to her, in Spanish as he worked on the farm and just turned around and dived into a well of water. They came back to see her and she was not there, they saw pure water. He asked my dad what was that and my dad said that it was the queen of water because water also has its own being. (José Nolasco, San Marcos Huista, 34)

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In the church, many people were frightened. It appeared in the form of a doll resembling a gorilla. The witness is a gentleman. His name is manual Pasil (Manuel Basilio). The figure appeared in the middle of the night to frighten people. After he was frightened in the

church he came out and appeared as a man with a beard. Perhaps it was the devil (Candelario Silvestre, Inchewex)

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A gentleman had a date with his girlfriend in Jacaltenango and had another date with his other girlfriend in a village. He went to visit the girl in Jacaltenango at 5 or 6 o'clock. He arrived at her house where her father sold liquor and put some liquor in his jar. I was walking through the village Yich Caje when I heard that there were a lot of people coming from the village. He approached them, hid to wait for the people who were talking but he did not understand them. Women, men and children passed by. When they approached, he came out with a seal and everyone was speechless. He was surprised and went to apologize to the people thinking they were normal people. He apologized and continued and after walking for a while he heard them start talking again. He never saw who was talking. (Male informant, 29 years old)

&&&

The dead come back to bother people. They look normal but with a paler face. Some do it to hurt people and others because they have left something unfinished (the

informant's father) went to the other side. He went down to a rest and there was a boy resting. When they were nearby, one of the friends he was traveling with said something to the boy and the ghost grabbed his charge, jumped up and disappeared. The men can communicate with whistles and the men who were walking heard the ghost said, whistling: wait for me. (José Cupertino, Jacaltenango)

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Here is the justification for the skulls found in many of the caves to show the veracity of the existence of the characters.

Men come with masks to look for people who are working in the mountains and ask for food like pozole and if they don't give them food they kill them, but in the case of people of San Marcos, they are the ones who kill the masked men. They hide in the caves and the skulls that are found in the caves are of these masked men. Furthermore, they steal from boys and girls who are alone. They put wire in their heads, one that goes through the brain and out through the ears, and another that comes out through the nose, and so they sell them. They give them nothing to eat but bread and in three years they die. The masked ones have to suck blood and come back again after being killed. I myself saw one

of the masks in Nopila. (Andrea Elisabeth Nolasco, 16)

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Obviously, healers are not supernatural beings, but people with special gifts, however, all reports about them suggest their closeness to the supernatural world. When one informant's grandfather was born, they say there were demons under the bed. Apparently, people who are born with the powers to do good, are very vulnerable and there are always bad guys who want to harm them. The same gentleman, as a child, was frequently attacked by evil spirits. When he reached a certain age, an old man appeared and gave him a jar with fluid in it. He had to move from Jacaltenango to San Marcos. When he did it (an impossible feat for a normal man) he was given all his powers. This gentleman, as an old man was sitting one day in the backyard of his house, talking with a friend when all suddenly a fireball appeared coming from Mexico. His friend pushed him out of the way and saved him; when the fire hit the ground, they saw that it was the tip of a pike. One time, this man helped someone with a bad foot. Strange thing, like a thread, came out of the wound.

The following narrative is about healers who misuse their powers. Some people are born with special powers. They can heal. If they abuse their powers, accepting payment or showing what they can do just to impress people they are punished. For instance, a man who accepted tribute for healing people became an alcoholic and a boy who opened his

hand "to show a city" became an epileptic. (Antonio Delgado, Jacaltenango)

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The next fable shows the power of dead. Whatever you ask in the cemetery, you receive.

My father told of a man who had dreamed of a dead man who told him he was coming to bring the man's daughter (the narrator's father) and he said "no" he better take him instead. I'm old and she is young, he was about to turn eighty and went to the cemetery to make his request. Whatever you ask for in the cemetery, you get. A few days later the old man was praying at the chapel of San Antonio when he was killed by lightning. He always wanted to die quickly, and he was praying for that at the moment of his death. His daughter is still alive. (José Cupertino, Jacaltenango)

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The legend about Kat mat is fairly common, with few variations in Jacaltenango, or properly speaking, in the head of the municipality. Some refer to Kat Mat as a hero and others do not. The most important characteristic is that it speaks the idea that an individual can embody a disease. Then, it is mentioned the following passage taken from the Popol Vuh as a suggestion of the pre-Hispanic mythical origin of this belief.

Immediately they all entered the council. The so-called Hun-Camé

and Vucub-Camé were the supreme judges. To all the lords Hun-Camé and Vucub-Camé pointed out their functions and to each one they indicated their attributions.

Xiquiripat and Cuchumacuic were the lords of these names. These are the ones who cause the bloodshed of men.

Others were called Ahluph and Ahalganá, also lords and the office of these was to swell men, to cause pus to ooze of their legs and to dye their faces yellow, which is called Chuganal. Such was the trade of Ahulpuh and Ahalganá.

Others were Mr. Chamiabac and Mr. Chamiaholom, sheriffs of Xibalbá, whose rods were made of bone. The occupation of these as to flay men until they became only bones and skulls, so they died and were taken away with their bellies and bones stretched out. That was the occupation of Chamiabac and Chamiaholom, so called.

Some others were called Ahalmez and Ahaltocob. The office was causing some misfortune to befall men, either on their way to the house, or in front of it, and they found them wounded, lying face up on the ground and dead. That was the office of the called Ahalmez and Ahaltocob.⁷⁰

In San Marcos it is said that the same belief regarding measles, a plague

that caused the death of many of the children before the vaccinations arrived. Although the legend could be historical, some versions contain details that suggest the supernatural. In these legends and in other commentaries, we have been told of the enormous intense fear caused by cholera fatal disease. It is said of many of the human remains in the caves of the municipality of Jacaltenango that they are the remains of the dead from the plague. A native of Todos Santos told us that in his youth in the early 1920s, there was an outbreak of the disease and people fled. The dying, desperate, took refuge in the caves where their bones are found today.

Kat Mat was an immune man to the disease Cholera who always cared for people with the disease. Finally, the people got angry and blamed Kat Mat for the existence of the problem. They started chasing him and he ran away. Finally, he jumped off a cliff and into a hollow tree. People threw sticks into the tree until they saw the blood coming out. (Juan Camposeco, Jacaltenango)

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This version shows how the landscape and oral culture are interrelated. The fact that it is still a place known as “la



⁷⁰ Recinos, Adrian, Popol Vuh.

mata de Kat Mat” (Kat Mat’s bush) that must contribute to the persistence of the tradition in providing a daily reminder of historical events.

My father related that an incurable disease appeared and a lot of people were dying. Several healers were trying to cure the sick but the disease never touched a single one, Kat Mat and the healers said that he was the disease and they gathered the people and chased him, so he hid in his cave. They found him and killed him with knives connected to sticks and then set fire to him; that is the way Kat Mat died. There is a tree growing at the mouth of the cave where he died and the place is called “*La mata de Kat Mat*.” When people ask “Where are you going?” they say “I’m going to *La mata de Kat Mat*.” (Anonymous informant, Jacaltenango)

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It is said that in 1673 came the disease Cholera Morbos and four or five people daily died. It was the number of people was decreasing. There was someone who helped people and didn’t get sick, this poor man was tooked to Costa Rica when the Nicaraguans came to fight there. Also, it is mentioned Hermabn Watz who wanted to be president. He says that he vaccinated the soldiers against Cholera and there was the Jacaltéc Catarina Mateo and that is why he

was protected from Cholera Morbos and he was blamed. He was in Costa Rica about 1742 – 1743. They no longer made war because of Cholera.

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Kat Mat came walking from there. The disease appeared at the same time he did, but it didn’t hit him. (Anonymous informant, Jacaltenango)

This version suggest that the man Kat Mat had supernatural powers and that he could run backwards, and so on.

Kat Mat was working on a farm in Chiapas. The same day he returned to Jacaltenango the Cholera Morbus started and people were dying. Kat Mat went to help people, bringing the dead and those who were dying to the cemetery. The people were frightened and suspicious and the gentlemen decided that for some reason it was all the fault of Kat Mat who arrived at the same time as the disease and who was not hit by the Cholera. They said that he brought the disease and warned the people to kill him. Kat Mat went to the chapel of San Sebastian to pray and when he was praying people surrounded him, all of them with sticks and stones. He started running backwards and could see where he was running with a special sense. Finally, he jumped off a cliff and landed like a toad in

hole at the bottom. Some people went to see what happened and when they found him alive, they took a sharp stick and pierced him with the stick. That's how he died. (Anonymous informant, Jacaltenango)

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Kat Mat went to work in Mexico, in Chiapas. There a disease started, Cholera, which cause the death of many people. He returned to Jacaltenango and, soon after, the disease started here and then he decided to help them. He knew how to heal people and helped many people. He was not affected by the disease. The people realized that there was Cholera and they blamed him that he brought the disease, so they wanted to kill him and he started to run away. He jumped from that ravine Wiconh'in, there he decided to jump and fell to the bottom, approximately one hundred meters and ran away. People followed him to Yichaz, in a grove of sapote. There, in the place was a coyew bush. He decided to hide there in a bush. The trunk at the top was hollow. People were looking for him and could not find him, until a man placing fruit noticed it and said "he is hidden here" and the man hid further up the top of the bush. They gathered all the neighbors and put a knife on a stick and blood fell, so they killed him.

On the run, Kat Mat jumped houses with his supernatural powers. (Anonymous, Jacaltenango)

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Kat Mat went to the army and he was very alcoholic and when the Cholera came, people started to die and they only buried them with mats. He just took them and maybe for the drink or something. Some said maybe he brought the disease because he never got sick and they organized and looked for him and he hid in some caves under the church and people killed him. (Anonymous informant, Jacaltenango)

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The study of the supernatural is considered very important in developing an understanding of a society. Hidden in the texts are communal desires and fears that, perhaps, the individual cannot mention for reasons of discretion or taboos within the society. In cases where there has been a conquest of one culture by another, two important points are invariably noted: In the narratives dealing with the supernatural, the gods, etc., of the earlier religions appear, although in reduced forms; that the instigators of the conquest and/or their gods also appear, often depicted as fighting with native beings, and on many occasions depicted as demons, devils or other evil beings.

Historical Legends and Narratives

In this section it is included not only the narratives that can be nominated as legendary but also the commentaries about the formal history. Most of people in Jacaltenango are agree with the historical relates as real events. Also, it is recognized that the most important for the current culture is what people think, and not necessarily what actually occurred. Functionally, if most of people believe something, then is the subjective truth of the village, and affects their present as if it were what really happened. As “historical legends” are considered the narratives about people, supposedly real and not supernatural that are preserved in oral culture.

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The following legend is a mixture of history and the supernatural; of course, Rafael Carrera really existed, but here he can be seen as a peasant from San Marcos instead of his homeland in the east, transformed into the president by supernatural or magical actions, instead of his military and political skills. In real life, Carrera was the political opponent of Justo Rufino Barrios, who, according to informants, hated the Jacaltecs because when he came from Mexico, he passed Jacaltenango as a guerrilla, and did not have the support from the Jacaltecs. When he became president, he was the enemy of Jacaltecs people and he ordered he death of the mayor. The truth is that Barrios implemented an apolitical policy against the communities and the Catholic Church

while General Carrera present himself as the champion of the Catholic Church.

It is believed that the “lady” who appears in the following narrative must be the Virgin of Candelaria. Then Juvenal Casaverde’s comments on this subject illuminate the text. According to him writing in 1976⁷¹ of the Virgin of Candelaria, who is the patron saint and protector of Jacaltenango, when the mythical ancestor of the Jacaltecs, and his army went to fight against the foreign invaders, trying to expel them. Jichmam lost the battle, and perceived the submission and probable extermination of the Jacaltecs under the yoke of a Spanish government. Returning to Jacaltenango, he had a vision of a lady with a white face, dressed in the costume of Jacaltenango who was to be the savior of the Jacaltecs, intervening with the Spaniards for their safety.

Immediately after his arrival in Jacaltenango, Jichmam began to search for the lady among all his descendants, but did not find her. He cried, but said that the Jacaltecs race would survive the conquest because of the lady’s help. He then went to live in a cave in Stiya Pam, where he still is, taking care of his descendants.

Here is remarked the frustration of an illiterate people, whose lac of literacy effectively limits their ability to determine their future within an oppressive system.



⁷¹ THERE IS NOTHING TO COPY IN THIS FOOTER, SEE PAGE, SEE BOOK.

The peasant's rise to the position of president is supported and assisted by more powerful and aided by entities more powerful and important than human beings.

115 years ago, there was a man who lived here and wanted to buy a pig and went to Jacaltenango. He was going to sleep on the bank of a river when he met a lady. The lady said to the man "Rafael Carrera."

- What? – asked him.
- I'm coming to tell you that you are going to be the government because those people suffer a lot. They give nothing to the poor.
- Forgive me madam – said the man, but I cannot write or read Spanish. – How am I going to be president?
- Take this wood and this pen and see if you can't write. He takes it and started to write.
- He writes – I cannot speak Spanish. Forgive me madam. I cannot write but if he orders it to be government, I do it. And he showed it to her.
- But I don't have a gun, I'm not going in like that – said the man.
- You are going to leave the pigs and you are going to sleep next to the village and at dawn you are going to see that you have the materials you need.

- He asked - And who are going to be my partners?
- Your workers are going to be your companions and they are going to go with you. And so, it was.

When dawn broke, he had his materials. At night he went to fight with the enemies in Jacaltenango and in the morning he was back again.

The gentleman came on a horse and many people came with him, Rafael Carrera. When he arrived at the cemetery in Jacaltenango he looked back and forth. San Marcos spoke him, speaking of San Marcos to Jacaltenango. I'm going to be with you, he said.

- Where is the Judge? Rafael Carrera asked.
- Here I am – he said.
- Sorry, but I'm not going with you.
- Is the food ready and where are you going to sleep? – asked the Judge to Mr. Rafael Carrera.
- Because you have to go.
- No, I'm not going to stay here because if I stay here San Marcos is going to help me. So, I'll stay here. And he stayed there.

Once Rafael Carrera arrived to San Marcos and saw that there was no Virgin here but only male saints

and he said he was going to bring a Virgin because of the lack of one did not grow the village.

- I'm going to come here when I'm the government and also, I will send you a Virgin – he said.

Then, he had to take a bell down from the church and next to a little stream he arrived and he put the bell on a cannon; they left a target on a hill and he aimed it and dropped a bomb. It broke down once, he fixed it and he threw it again, so it didn't break down anymore.

The judge said that it was not good. A gentleman was going to the place of the bad judge and that good gentleman was going to enter in place of the bad judge and the commander. His name didn't appear on the list of signatures and so they killed him. He showed them the way to San Marcos and people came to San Marcos to see that people were not bad even though their names didn't appear on the list. Then they put him in a chair and covered his eyes, so they began to kill him. (Mr. Domingo López, San Marcos Huista)

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In the history of the Jacalteco Pancho Villa, Mexico's famous revolutionary peasant, Mexican soldiers encounter the Jacalteco man when he is searching for snails near the border,

piecing together domestic details with putative historical events.

Mr. Pancho Villa, a native of Mexico, rose up against the president of Mexico who was Mr. Carranza. Pancho Villa decided to come to Guatemala to fight for his right. Then he got help. He started to gather men to go to war and the soldiers started to raise awareness to the people to join them and threatening to kill them if they didn't join. They started to kill the cattle. These were what Pancho Villa's soldiers fed on.

There was a man from Jacaltenango who was walking along the border of Mexico and Guatemala, looking for snails and he met the soldier and they told him to join them thinking that he was



⁷² Pancho Villa, (Doroteo Arango) 1878-1923. In 1910 he supported Madero against Porfirio Díaz. After Madero was assassinated, he supported Carranza's constitutionalist army against Victoriano Huerta. Captured by Huerta, he managed to flee to Texas and on his return, he carried out an extensive campaign in which he occupied Chihuahua, Ciudad Juarez. Torreon, Saltillo, Zacatecas, etc. He broke with Carranza when he saw that he separated from the revolutionary line which demanded the application of the agrarian reform expressed in the Plan de Ayala in 1911. In 1914 he imposed Eulalio Gutiérrez as president together with Emiliano Zapata. He continued his campaign until Carranza's death, after which he retired to the Canutillo farm where he was assassinated by his political enemies.

Mexican, the man explained that he was just looking for some snails.

The head of the soldiers made a deal with him to go and get tortillas for them to eat.

Due the war, they could no longer get tortillas. They only fed on cattle. So, the gentleman told his mother and the lady prepared the tortillas and the gentleman took them to where they had been ordered. It was not only once or twice and the gift she was given for the tortillas was a mule.

The man returned very happily for what he had been given. The man's mother was a widow. A few weeks after she had gotten the mule, the lady got married and the husband took him to work and rode her and eventually the mule died. On the other hand, the soldiers who were at war, little by little arrived in Comitán.

The president of Mexico learned that the weapons had been taken to Guatemala and took four enemies as prisoners. They from Jacaltenango and Pancho Vila's soldiers confronted the government soldiers and the our Jacaltecs were freed. After they were freed, they were offered to choose what they liked from the stores that were abandoned because of the war.

When they returned with one of the men was carrying a load

of glass plates and in the course of the trip, he had in the course of the trip he had an accident and dropped them and most of them broke. The other 3 picked other things of value.

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This rather strange story combines very ordinary things with curious events; the most interesting details the cry of the drunkard to the devil before dying. A transparent function of the legend is to represent the Jacaltecs as extraordinary men, who could defeat even the devil's pawns. The Jacaltecs can be seen in their familiar role as heroes when Mexicans thank them for having helped. Perhaps there is, considering the boastful tendency of Jacaltenango oral culture, an implicit suggestion that the Jacaltecs were specially selected by God.