

HUMAN SACRIFICE AMONG THE MAYAS,
AZTECS, AND INCAS

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AZTECS, AND INCAS

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. THREE PRINCIPLE CULTURES OF ANCIENT AMERICA	1
II. THE MAYAS OF YUCATAN.	8
Two Cycles of Myths	
Itzamna	
Kukulcan	
The Toltecs	
Quetzalcoatl	
A historical figure	
The god	
Mayan Culture	
Practice of Human Sacrifice	
III. THE AZTECS OF MEXICO.	27
A Brief History	
Their wanderings and final settlement	
Building of the Aztec empire	
Origin of human sacrifice among the Aztecs	
Aztec Religion and Mythology	
Cosmogonic myths	
Possible approach to monotheism	
Four principal gods	
Quetzalcoatl, the culture hero	
Human Sacrifice Among the Aztecs	
The Aztec attitude	
Cannibalism	
A calendar of religious sacrifice	
IV. THE INCAS OF PERU	58
A Brief History	
Origin and founding of the empire	
Conflicting stories of origin	

Chapter	Page
Inca Religion and Mythology	
Sun worshippers or no?	
Chief figures in Peruvian mythology	
Chief religious ceremonies	
The question of human sacrifice	
V. HUMAN SACRIFICE, A RELIGIOUS RITE	91
BIBLIOGRAPHY	99

CHAPTER I

THREE PRINCIPLE CULTURES OF ANCIENT AMERICA

The recorded history of the aborigines of the New World is a colorful one. When the mythologies of these peoples are added to the known facts, the color and mystery are deepened. To date only limited progress has been made in revealing the true nature of these cultures, so ruthlessly destroyed by the European conquerors.

So arrogant were these invaders, so certain were they that they represented a superior civilization to those they encountered here, that many of the records of these peoples were summarily destroyed. This hasty action, plus the following centuries of abuse of native populations, has added much difficulty to the problem of those who would seek a better understanding of those ancient Americans.

Despite the difficulties involved, many scholars have attempted to penetrate the mysteries surrounding these early American cultures. As a result of their efforts, much valuable information is now available on nearly all of the native groups who first inhabited the western hemisphere. The reader can now study and marvel at fascinating revelations concerning nearly all of them. That part of the New World

which came under the control of the Spanish included a variety of cultures such as the Pueblos of the Southwest, the Chibchas of Ecuador, the Araucanians of Chili, as well as the Incas of Peru, the Mayas of Yucatan, and the Aztecs of Mexico.

These last three, the Incas, Mayas, and Aztecs, have been chosen for special attention here for several reasons. First, they present variety for study. All three represent advanced cultures, but each was distinguished by its own peculiar characteristics. The Aztecs were warlike, the Mayas, peace-loving, and the Incas were politically aggressive. Second, probably more has been written about these groups than any of the others. Although the history of the Mayas is much more speculative than is that of the other two, a study of their culture furnishes a necessary background to the Aztec story. Third, all three represent a picture of amazingly advanced societies.

"The magnificent Mayas...and their colorful barbaric civilization in the tropics are the paradox of ancient America."¹ This statement is readily explained.

The lowlands of Central America are today considered unhealthy. Modern day Indians refuse to live there, but choose the highlands of the region instead. Their ancestors, the Mayas, however, chose the lowlands and there built from primitive conditions a civilization which possessed the highest

¹Emily C. Davis, Ancient Americans, p. 171.

scholarly attainments of any Stone Age people in the world. What is more, they did this with practically no help from other tribes.

The immense empire of the Incas ultimately stretched up into Ecuador, through Peru, Bolivia, and down into Chile. All of the tribes in this area were drawn into a communal system and their life was regulated with a completeness seldom attempted by any government in any age. The Incan subject was bound to his place of residence, occupation and station in life. He was required to wear a distinctive dress, headgear or haircut denoting the province to which he belonged.

The Aztecs were a militant nation. The splendor of their civilization was mostly borrowed from their neighbors. Warlike, they were late-comers on the scene. A nomad tribe coming from a place in the north referred to only as the "Seven Caves", they brought bows and arrows and innovations to Mexico. Their empire was the result of a series of bloody conquests, and the fanatic nature of their religion helped to horrify and subdue their vassals.

The accomplishments of these early American inhabitants cannot help but lead to admiration and wonderment. Each new archaeological discovery gives rise to more questions, and more interpretations. The more that is learned, the more intriguing become these ancient Americans. On what beliefs did they base their civilizations? How did they rationalize

their own and the universe's existence? What were their relations with their fellow men? What value did they place on human life? Did they look forward to immortality? What part did religion play in their lives?

There is no better key to understanding of a people than their religion. This was the first target of the conquering Spanish invaders. Their attempts to destroy the native religions were only partially successful, but their program of coercion resulted in the destruction, or hiding and burying of nearly all religious chronicles of the natives.

Even today there is a very apparent hesitancy among the older Indians to divulge the religious legends which have been handed down to them through the generations. Information gained from these wizards has added much to existing knowledge, however.

Another hindrance to the truth concerning these religious systems comes from the Spanish contemporaries who recorded the period of conquest, giving eye witness reports. The sixteenth century represented a period of extreme intolerance in Catholic Spain. The Inquisition was laying a heavy hand on all heretics at home. Certainly no tolerance could be extended to the "barbaric religions of uncivilized savages." Neither would books be permitted to be published which treated the native religions as being anything else. Therefore, the extreme bias of many of these early writers often completely nullifies their records. Not always is this true, however, and fortunately so.

In an effort to answer the questions raised and come to a better understanding of these three culture groups, it is necessary to utilize historical facts, archaeological discoveries, the observations of early writers, interpretations of later writers, religious practices, and the mythologies of the people concerned. These mythologies are a web of fascinating contradictions, and often tend to confuse rather than inform. Even so, they are extremely valuable, because they furnish an insight into the thinking of the people they represent. It was their mythology which formed the basis of their religion.

Modern day writers have failed to agree among themselves in interpreting these legends. One of the most authoritative studies has been made by Dr. Daniel G. Brinton, whose keen knowledge of the ancient native tongues lends much weight to the importance of his work. He points out a striking similarity between the myths of this continent and those of other continents. He denies that this similarity can be explained by saying they were copied from the conquerors. These myths existed long before the white men were seen. For Brinton the explanation lies in the fact that "each is the reflex in a common physical nature of the same phenomena...the same forms of expression were adopted to convey them."² By thus analyzing the situation, Brinton adopts the "psychic unity"

²Daniel G. Brinton, American Hero Myths, p. 36.

Theory of mankind, first introduced by Professor William Robertson, who believed in the independent origin of myths.

In particular, says Brinton, the myth of a national hero is common the world over. It is the fundamental myth of many American tribes. The background of such hero myths is the general belief that at some time in the remote past a divinity created or helped to create the world and possibly the human race. Then he lived among them teaching them useful arts, giving them food to raise, making laws, and setting up religious rites. He then disappeared and was expected to return.³

Matthew W. Sterling used a little different approach in analyzing the Indian religions.

The religious ideas of the Indians have been little understood by the layman. Such terms as the Great Spirit and the Happy Hunting Ground are inventions of the white man. The concept of a ruling, all powerful deity is a political analogy applied to supernatural powers which could be conceived only by a people aware of a centralized power, such as existed only in the Old World.

Far removed from this conception was the Indian belief in a multitude of spirits whose abode was to be found in both animate and inanimate objects. His rituals and sacrifices were conducted with the sole purpose of propitiating these spirits. Underlying the conception of these lesser spirits was the belief in an impersonal, vital force, the source of all unnatural phenomena.⁴

Much space was devoted by the early Spanish chroniclers to describing the barbaric character of the religions of the

³Ibid., p. 27.

⁴Davis, op. cit., p. 11, quoting from a radio address by Matthew W. Sterling, Chief of the Bureau of American Ethnology.

Indians, especially in regard to the practice of human sacrifice. It seems only fair, therefore, to give special consideration to this point, since the passage of time and further study may result in a different interpretation of the situation. Inquiry shall be made as to whether or not such a custom existed. If it did, to what extent was it practiced? In what manner was it carried out? What was its religious significance? Also, did it serve any other purpose?

Possible results of such a later evaluation might be the development of a better understanding of, and an indication of a closer mental and spiritual relationship between the modern American and his ancient predecessor, from whom he so thanklessly inherited his homeland.

CHAPTER II

THE MAYAS OF YUCATAN

Less is known of the Mayas than of the Aztecs or Incas, but what evidence is available indicates these Indians of Central America represented an amazingly advanced civilization. An indication of their high intellectual level is shown by the fact that they were the only group of the American aborigines to have perfected a calendar. Our own calendar is only slightly better attuned to the sun and moon.

They seem to have been a peace-loving people and this eventually led to their downfall. Rivalry between the great city-states of the Mayan Empire resulted in alliances made with Toltec soldiers from the Valley of Mexico. Just how the Toltecs managed to gain so much power over the Mayas after they captured the city of Chichen Itza in 1191 A.D.,¹ or 1027 A.D.,² is not known, but it can be presumed that the Mayan culture was too soft in comparison to the hardness of the Toltec rule.

By the time the Spaniards conquered Yucatan in 1527 the glories of the Mayas were already faded.

¹Herbert J. Spinden, Ancient Civilizations of Mexico and Central America, p. 173.

²Theodore A. Willard, The Lost Empires of the Itzaes and Mayas, p. 265.

Two Cycles of Myths

Among the Mayas were found two cycles of myths concerning their origin, the central figure of the earlier being Itzamma, and of the later, Kukulcan. The ancestors of the Mayas supposedly arrived in two groups, the first and largest group coming from the east through paths cut in the ocean. Itzamma led this group, and he was recognized as their civilizer. A second group appeared later led by Kukulcan.

Itzamma

According to the traditions of the Mayas, their ancestors immigrated to Yucatan around 793 B.C.³ Writers vary on this point. Willard says they arrived in Yucatan around 200 A.D.⁴ Spinden is more nearly in agreement with Biart.⁵

The immigrants supposedly came from the east by sea. Biart believes there must be historical fact mixed with this legend, for he points to the similarity in the language of the aborigines of Yucatan and of Haiti, Cuba and Jamaica. Moreover he considers that such an immigration by sea would indicate an already advanced civilization among the people of the Antilles.⁶

³Lucien Biart, The Aztecs, p. 32.

⁴Willard, op. cit., p. 34.

⁵Spinden, op. cit., pp. 75 and 145.

⁶Biart, op. cit., p. 33.

These originators of the Maya civilization are referred to as the Chanés or Itzaes. Their leader, Itzamna, acted as a combination priest, sovereign, instructor and guide. He and his followers founded the city of Iztamal. The city of Chichen Itza became the capital of the Itza empire. Itzamna, whether real or legendary, appears as a culture hero of the Mayas, directing all phases of their life, especially their religious ritual. He invented their written language, and calendar, and instructed them in plants, arts and construction. As a legislator, he enacted many wise laws.⁷

As a god, Itzamna was represented as an old man with a high forehead, strongly aquiline nose, distended mouth, toothless, or having one large tooth in front.⁸ Even after the Maya religion became dominated by the Toltecs, this god continued to be revered, and festivals in his honor were rigidly observed. Some writers consider Itzamna as the Maya supreme deity and creator-of-all,⁹ but others say he was the son of the chief deity, Hunab or Hunab Ku.¹⁰

Hunab Ku, which means "One Only God", seems to have figured very little in the religion of the common people. He was considered too far above ordinary mortals for their

⁷Brinton, op. cit., pp. 146-7.

⁸Spinden, op. cit., p. 99.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Stephen D. Peet, Myths and Symbols, p. 393. Also, Sylvanus G. Morley, The Ancient Maya, p. 213.

comprehension. According to the Quiche Mayas of the highlands of Guatemala, the creator fashioned mankind from corn.¹¹

Votan, another Mayan deity, is also referred to as a civilizer. He was among the successors of Itzamna, and was considered the civilizer of the province of Chiapas. While Itzamna supposedly came from the Atlantic, Votan seems to have come from the shores of the Pacific.¹²

Kukulcan

Kukulcan is a very controversial figure. The legends concerning him bear such a striking resemblance to those related about Quetzalcoatl, who figures strongly in the mythology of the Aztecs and Toltecs, that it is quite possible that all refer to the same personage. Since Kukulcan has been interpreted to mean Plumed or Feathered Serpent, which is identical with the translation given to Quetzalcoatl, this contention seems quite feasible.

It is also difficult to determine if Kukulcan or Quetzalcoatl, if they were the same, were deities, or if they were historical characters, following whose rule the legends sprang to give color to the past. Quite possibly they were rulers who were deified after their deaths. Whether they were given names of already existing gods or whether that god originated with the death of the ruler is hard to establish.

¹¹ Morley, op. cit., p. 214.

¹² Blart, op. cit., p. 35.

According to one version of a Kukulcan legend, in ancient times twenty men came to the land of the Mayas. The chief was called Kukulcan and was referred to as god of fevers. The rest of the twenty were gods of fishing, fields, thunder, etc., thus, faintly resembling the gods and goddesses of the Greeks.

Another version of this myth is to be found in the locality where Kukulcan was especially worshipped, the city of Chichen Itza. The fragments of the chronicles of this ruined city indicate that its region was settled by four bands who came from the four cardinal points and were ruled by four brothers. These brothers ruled the city with a righteous rule until one died or departed. Two of the remaining were put to death because of unjust acts. Kukulcan was the remaining brother who continued to rule wisely and the country prospered. He directed the people in arts of peace and building various structures. He was the founder of the city of Mayapan. There was a temple built to him in both cities. These temples were circular in form with four doors directed toward the four cardinal points. Before departing, Kukulcan chose his successor. He then left, journeying westward, according to some accounts. Others say he ascended into heaven.¹³

The circular temples attributed to Kukulcan in this legend are of the same type found in various parts of Central

¹³Brinton, op. cit., p. 163.

America and Mexico dedicated to the god, Quetzalcoatl. Since their names have the same meaning, it would seem that the description of the coming of Kukulcan could well refer to the coming of the Toltecs and their ruler, Quetzalcoatl.

The Toltecs

For years there was much doubt if the Toltecs ever existed. They were often discounted as a mythical race. During recent years archaeological discoveries and studies seem to offer substantial proof of their existence.

As legend would have it, the Toltecs were exiled from their own nation, Tollan, and emigrated southward. They stopped many times along their journey, always erecting buildings in those places where they halted temporarily. After 124 years of wandering, they settled in a place named Tollantzinco. After another twenty years, they continued their journey and founded the city of Tollan or Tula, naming it in memory of their native country.¹⁴

The Toltecs lived under a monarchical form of government. Not only did they concern themselves with the business of agriculture and commerce, but with science, art and manufactures. Although they enjoyed a period of prosperity, a series of droughts, invasions of locusts, and wars scattered them during the rule of their eighth king, Topiltzin. Many of these Toltecs emigrated to Yucatan and others, to Guatemala.¹⁵

¹⁴Biant, op. cit., p. 39.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 40.

The civilizing power passed from the hands of the Toltecs to the Chichimecs, then to the Alcolhuas, and from them to the Aztecs.

Quetzalcoatl

A Historical Figure

In the mythology of Mexico and Central America, Quetzalcoatl is probably the most interesting but also the most controversial character. Legends concerning him are numerous. He appears in two distinct representations; as a legendary heroic but earthly figure, and as a great god surrounded by a mass of myth.

It is possible that the Quetzalcoatl of the Toltecs did exist during the eleventh century. If so, it is he who ruled when Chichen Itza was captured from the Mayas. As a historical character, Quetzalcoatl appears as a remarkable figure. He is usually described as a large bodied white man with black flowing hair and beard.

He was a scientist and a human philosopher. He established orders of knighthood, developed the various industrial arts and built up a wide trade in cotton, cacao and other products.¹⁶ He is reputed to have introduced the calendar, although others say he borrowed and improved on the calendar of the Mayas.¹⁷

¹⁶Davis, op. cit., pp. 173-5.

¹⁷Bhart, op. cit., p. 39.

Perhaps Quetzalcoatl spent his youth in Yucatan and took back to his highland home strange religious and social ideas. He opposed the idea of human sacrifice practiced by the Toltecs. To him is credited the beginning of building serpent columns at Tula like those of his temple in Chichen Itza. Cholula seems to have been founded by him as a special center for his humane religion.

He himself lived a chaste life and practiced penance by drawing blood from his ears and beneath his tongue. He was a celibate and refrained from intoxicating drink.¹⁸

The God

As a god, Quetzalcoatl is usually referred to as a Toltec god from whom the Aztecs borrowed him. As a Toltec god, he represented the more gentle and humane religious tendencies which prevailed among them. Quetzalcoatl was originally worshipped by offerings of fruit and flowers. Later, when the cruel and warlike religion of the Aztecs supplanted the more humane religious tendencies, human beings were sacrificed by the Cholulans to this peace-loving god.¹⁹

The possibility should not be overlooked that Quetzalcoatl, as a great ruler of the Toltecs, was deified after his death. He was worshipped more generally as God of the Winds or Air.²⁰

¹⁸Donald A. Mackenzie, Myths of Pre-Columbian America, pp. 257-3.

¹⁹A. Van Doren Honeyman, The Aztecs, p. 57.

²⁰Ibid., and Davis, op. cit., p. 198.

Referring to Quetzalcoatl, Friar Diego de Landa relates that the opinion of the Indians of Yucatan was that this ancient ruler had journeyed to Mexico, whence he returned, and was thence worshipped as a god.²¹

Montezuma informed Cortes that his ancestors had been led to that country by a ruler named Quetzalcoatl, who then returned to his native land after establishing their colony. The ruler later returned to Mexico and tried to get the people there to accompany him but they refused. He then left and traveled toward the east.²² If this were true, it would indicate that the Aztecs or at least the ruling class came from Yucatan.

Speculating over the stories of Quetzalcoatl, McCulloh interprets him as being Noah.²³ Some early Spanish writers thought Quetzalcoatl might be none other than the Apostle St. Thomas.

Dr. Brinton resorts to the light myth theory and interprets Quetzalcoatl as a symbol of the formation of the earth. In doing so he interprets the meaning of Quetzalcoatl

²¹ Diego de Landa, Relacion de Las Cosas en Yucatan, p. 36, cited in Zelia Nuttall, The Fundamental Principles of Old and New World Civilizations, p. 207.

²² Hernando Cortes, Historia de Nueve Espana, pp. 81 and 96, cited in Nuttall, op. cit., p. 208.

²³ James H. McCulloh, Researches on America, Being An Attempt to Settle Some Points Relative to the Aborigines of America.

as "the admirable twin", admitting, however, that the word has several translations.²⁴

Dr. Mackenzie, who does not agree with the "psychic unity" theory advocated by Brinton and others, places an entirely different interpretation on Quetzalcoatl.

It would seem that he represents an intruding people who contributed to the culture complexes of pre-Columbian America, and not only the artisans and priests of that people, but also the god or gods they had imported from their area of origin. Before the intruders reached Mexico their beliefs were of highly complex character. Their king-priests, who were called Quetzalcoatl, that is "feathered serpents" or "bird serpents", were, like the Emperors of China, also "Sons of Heaven"--that is human forms of the winged dragon god of their religion. An outstanding difference between the Quetzalcoatl and the other cults of the pre-Columbian Americans was that it was opposed to war and human sacrifice.²⁵

Mackenzie attempts to substantiate his theory by pointing out the presence in Mayan sculpture of elephants and figures of Quetzalcoatl which strongly resemble Buddhist figures of the East. He believes this would also explain the Maya's attitude toward gold and precious stones, as well as their having set up a civilization in such unfavorable climate. He therefore believes that contributors to the Mayan culture came from the Old World.

Whence came the highly cultured aliens whose civilization is represented by Quetzalcoatl? They were evidently seafarers who settled on the coastlands and introduced the dragon beliefs so like those found in India, China, and Japan.²⁶

²⁴Brinton, op. cit., pp. 66-7.

²⁵Mackenzie, op. cit., p. 257.

²⁶Ibid., p. 264.

Hewett, more in accord with Brinton, denies the historical origin of Quetzalcoatl. He attempts to connect the higher Indian civilizations of the United States with those of Mexico and Central America.

Their art was a complete expression of their religion. One motif, the feathered serpent, prevails throughout their esthetic world. In their painting, ceramics, sculpture, and architecture, it holds the commanding place. I can see in it no other significance than that of a mighty, all-prevading, spirit being.

The being pictured as a flying serpent was the most potent and most widespread of all conceptions of deity of the Indian race. Union of the major powers of earth, symbolized by the serpent, and sky, symbolized by the bird, it prevailed among all the higher cultures of ancient America. Awanyu of the Pueblos, the serpent that lives in the sky; Quetzalcoatl of the Toltecs and Aztecs...Kukulcan of the Yucatecans...are identical conceptions beyond question. The feathered serpent runs as the dominant motif through all Pueblo, Toltec, Aztec, and Maya art.²⁷

Mayan Culture

Due to the loss and destruction of many of the ancient Maya records, not a great deal is known of the life and religion of this ancient race during the height of its glory. Undoubtedly, many alterations had been made in their culture by the time the Spanish reached the shores of Yucatan.

From the writings of the early Spanish authorities, a rather detailed account of their life and religion may be obtained, but it is a picture of a people long dominated by other tribes, who had super-imposed their religion on that

²⁷Edgar Lee Hewett, Ancient Life in Mexico and Central America, pp. 281-2.

of their subjects. Little evidence was left of the old Maya religion.

Father Diego de Landa is probably the best early authority on the Mayas and their religion as discovered by the conquerors. Bishop Landa arrived in Yucatan soon after the Spanish conquest and became a friend of the deposed king, Cocom of Sotuta. This second bishop of Yucatan is considered the most truthful of the old Spanish chroniclers, because he did not hesitate to criticize the harsh treatment the natives received at the hands of their conquerors. His religious zeal, however, led him to direct the destruction of nearly all the ancient records of the Mayas. Before assigning them to a bonfire, the bishop availed himself of the chronicles to furnish information for his valuable history of events preceding and following the conquest of the Maya tribes. Despite Landa's effort to destroy all of the ancient Maya books, three were later found in Europe.

The priesthood was perhaps the most influential class in the Maya social structure. There is no indication of conflict between the nobility and priesthood, which is probably explained by the close relationship of these two groups. The highest religious offices were hereditary, the priests teaching their own sons and such sons of the nobility as were inclined toward that profession.

The high priest, called the Ahaucan (the Lord Serpent), was held in high esteem. He was considered the center of

learning and acted as adviser to the lords. Such high priests appointed the priests for the various towns, examining them to be sure they were versed in the sciences and ceremonies, and giving them instructions regarding their duties of office.

The sciences of the Mayas included computation of the years, months, and days, festivals, ceremonies, administration of sacraments, fateful days of the seasons, their methods of divination and their prophecies, cures for sickness, history of events, and reading and writing in hieroglyphics and drawings.²⁸

Another class of priests were Chilanes or diviners. These officials gave the replies of the gods to the people, and were held in such high regard that they were carried about on the shoulders of the people.

Those priests who acted as executioners in the sacrificial ceremonies were called Nacoms. Such persons were elected for life, and were held in low esteem by the people because of the nature of their job.

Slavery existed among the Mayas at the time of the conquest. Bishop Landa says it was introduced late in the New Empire era. Captive figures do appear, however, on monuments of the Old Empire era.

In New Empire times there were five different ways of becoming a slave. They were: (1) being born as one, which

²⁸Morley, op. cit., p. 171.

seldom happened, (2) being made one as a punishment for stealing, (3) having become a prisoner of war, (4) being an orphan, (5) being sold into slavery.²⁹

According to Maya belief, the following were expected to live in the Maya Paradise after death: suicides by hanging, warriors killed in battle, people who were sacrificed, women who died in childbirth, and priests.³⁰

Nearly all important religious ceremonies began with fasts.. This was mandatory with the priests and their assistants. The matter seems to have been optional with all others. Prayers were another important Maya ritual, as was bloodletting and scarification. Blood drawn in this manner was sprinkled on the idols. Burning of an incense, pom, made from the copal tree, was common. Dancing was another religious observance.

Practice of Human Sacrifice

There is no doubt that the practice of human sacrifice was well developed among the Mayas by the time the Spaniards reached their soil. Just when this practice became a part of their religion is not known. Many believe it was introduced by the Mexicans and did not exist at all or else existed sparingly during the Golden Age of Maya culture, which period

²⁹Ibid., p. 177.

³⁰Ibid., p. 221.

represented the true Maya religion.³¹ Others believe this theory is not substantiated.³² According to Popol Vuh, the sacred book of the ancient Quiche Maya, as it has been recently interpreted, human sacrifice was introduced among them as the result of a revolution during the reign of one King Cotuha. Previous to this uprising, the kingdom is described as peaceful and of a limited grandeur. A neighboring kingdom made war upon his kingdom, Iztayul. After winning the war, King Cotuha ordered many war prisoners to be sacrificed to his god as punishment for their sins, while others were made slaves.³³ This book does not indicate the date or even period of this king's reign.

Wissler interprets the practice of human sacrifice among all the higher Indian cultures as an "exceptional element in a larger complex," pointing to the fact that there were daily rounds of sacrifices calling for animals, birds, fruits, and inanimate objects.³⁴

Spence believes the Mayas accepted the bloody custom only in a limited form.

³¹Hewett, op. cit., p. 74, and Morley, op. cit., p. 211, quoting Antonio de Herrera, Historia general de los hechos de los castellanos en las islas, tierra firme del mar oceano, vol. and page not given.

³²Kenneth G. Grubb, Religion in Central America, p. 4.

³³Popol Vuh -- The Sacred Book of the Ancient Quiche Maya, English version by Delia Goetz and Sylvanus G. Morley, p. 213.

³⁴Clark Wissler, The American Indian, p. 193.

If we do not find human sacrifice among the Mayas so rampant as in Mexico it is simply because the practice in the southern sphere remained, as in early Mexico, on a lesser scale owing to the non-adoption by the Mayas of the awful conclusion arrived at by the Aztecs that the more blood shed the more rain would be likely to descend.³⁵

Spence also says that there is evidence that the Mayas had a substitute for human sacrifice. Instead of humans, little distorted dwarfs fashioned from cakes of maize paste were offered. This custom seems to have been general and to a great extent supplanted human sacrifice. The Mayas also practiced blood letting rather extensively. Such ideas of substitution would seem to indicate a higher degree of civilized thought than was evidenced among the Aztecs.³⁶

Gaspar Antonio Chi was a Maya who supplied Diego de Landa with much information for the latter's Relacion. Between 1579 and 1581 Chi dictated some accounts which have been labeled "Historical Recollections" and which are presented in a book by M. Wells Jakeman.

According to the accounts of this native, the original founders of Chichen Itza were very simple in their worship and had no idols or sacrifices.

The ancients say...that anciently, for nearly 800 years, they did not worship idols in this land. And after the Mexicans entered it and took possession of it, a captain who was called Quetzalcoatl in the Mexican language, which means....'Feathered Serpent',.....

³⁵Lewis Spence, The Myths of Mexico and Peru, p. 230.

³⁶Ibid.

introduced idolatry into this land and the use of idols for gods.

For a thousand years they did not worship idols, because the lords of Chichen Itza and their subjects wished it to be said that they were not idolaters.

It is said that the first settlers of Chichen Itza were not idolaters until Kukulcan, a Mexican captain, entered these parts, who taught (them) idolatry.³⁷

Chi admits that the Mayas did become idolaters after this time, but he insists that even then the Mayas offered human sacrifices only rarely. He declares that at the time of the conquest the natives did not eat human flesh.³⁸ This last fact is repudiated in later works, based on Landa's writings.³⁹

Willard has the following to say about the ancient religion of the Mayas:

In the very ancient days, when there were no idols and the Itzaes worshipped one god, they were very devout in the ceremony of burning incense to their deity. Even travelers on the road carried incense with them and a little plate on which to burn it. Each night they burned a little incense while they prayed.⁴⁰

Several writers make reference to the peaceful countenance of Maya sculpture of the Old Empire as compared with those of Mexico. The Old Empire era of the Mayas dated from 317 A.D. to 987 A.D.⁴¹ This represents the Golden Age of

³⁷M. Wells Jakeman, The Origins and History of the Mayas, p. 95.

³⁸Ibid., p. 101.

³⁹Willard, op. cit., p. 70.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 154.

⁴¹Morley, op. cit., p. 38.

the Mayan Empire. There are only two examples of human sacrifice known in the sculpture of this period and both of these are from Piedras Negras.

Of the eight representations of human sacrifice now known anywhere in the Maya area, four occur at Chichen Itza: two in frescoes in the Temple of the Jaguars, one in a fresco in the Temple of the Warriors, and the fourth on a gold disk from the Well of Sacrifice. Two others are from the hieroglyphic manuscripts: the Codex Dresdensis, and the Codex Tro-Cortesianus, both also dating from the New Empire. And the other two.... are found on Old Empire monuments...., both at Piedras Negras.⁴²

All this, plus the lofty and calm aspect of figures in early Mayan sculpture, would seem to indicate an august and stately faith which was debased by the vulgar practices of the Mexican invaders in the tenth century.

Further substantiation of this theory appeared in 1929. At that time a stone terrace was excavated in Chichen Itza. The entire surface of the walls of the terrace was covered with carved skulls. There were over 2,000 skulls, no two being alike. The wall is a close imitation of many such structures found in Aztec cities of Mexico. This particular structure was evidently erected during or shortly after the reign of Kukulcan. It served as a place for human sacrifice, evidenced by the many human bones which were also excavated.

An interesting difference in this and the ones found in Mexico and described by early Spanish historians, is that the ones in Mexico were decorated with actual human skulls, each set above the other on poles and tied together. The

⁴² Ibid., p. 212.

carved walls in Chichen Itza show an imitation of such poles, connecting the skulls in a vertical line. The reason for the use of actual skulls in the first cases and, of carved ones in the second, would seem to be explained by the fact that there were not enough skulls to be used for this purpose when the structure was built in Chichen Itza, because the Itzaes had not practiced human sacrifice until it was introduced by or about the time of Kukulcan. This serves as further confirmation that there was a radical change in the Itza-Maya religion around 1027 A.D., at which time the Mayas were conquered by the Toltecs.⁴³

⁴³ Willard, op. cit., pp. 261-5.

CHAPTER III

THE AZTECS OF MEXICO

A Brief History

Their Wanderings and Final Settlement

The Aztecs were a nomad tribe of doubtful origin but were probably of Nahua blood. They wandered over the Mexican plateau for generations, finally settling in the marshlands around the Lake of Tezcuco. The word Azteca means "crane people", which name was given to this tribe after it began to dwell in this marshy region.¹

Either mythical or real, Aztlan is the name given the original homeland of the Aztecs. Supposedly this nation existed somewhere to the north, possibly it was an island in the Gulf of California.

The hieroglyphic record of the wanderings of the Aztecs is a conflicting one. It is possible that the records describe two separate journeys, one having been made after turning back from the first. Disregarding the confused details of their trek, it is possible to trace their travels to the country of the Chichimec king, Xolotl, where they settled for a time. They were later driven from this temporary home and took refuge among the Colhuas at Chapultepec, whose slaves they became.

¹Spence, op. cit., p. 27.

Forced to aid their masters wage war against the neighboring Xochimilcos, the Aztecs fought valiantly with the hope that they might by so doing be rewarded with their freedom. Evidence of their bravery and astuteness in battle, however, resulted only in more severe treatment. They finally regained their liberty by horrifying their masters by the practice on a large scale of human sacrifice, for which they were driven out.

These tribes, later referred to as the Aztecs, then settled near lakes Tezcucó, Xochimilco, Chalco, and Xaltocan. It was at this time that one of their chiefs sighted in the midst of a lake an island, on which a cactus grew out of a rock. Perched on the cactus was an eagle holding a snake in its beak. This fulfilled one of their religious predictions, so this spot was chosen as the site for the city of Tenochtitlan (stone and cactus), which was founded in 1325, and which later became known as Mexico City.²

During their wanderings the Aztecs had carried an idol of their patron god, Huitzilipochtli. In establishing their new residence, their first structure was a crude temple built to house this idol. A hunting expedition was dispatched to bring a wild animal to be sacrificed to the god. Instead of an animal, they returned with a Colhuan whom they had found in the forest. The priest sacrificed the captive by tearing

²Biart, op. cit., pp. 53-7.

out his heart. Biart refers to this as the beginning of the practice of sacrificing war captives.³

Building of the Aztec Empire

During the thirty years' rule of Acamapictli, first sovereign of the Aztecs, the number of his subjects multiplied greatly. He was, however, a feudatory of Tezozomoc, king of the Tepanecs and had to assist them in waging wars.⁴

Huitzilihuitl (feather of the humming bird), son of Acamapictli, was chosen by the Aztec nobles to succeed his father on the throne. He married a daughter of King Tezozomoc, and so successively waged wars for his father-in-law, and formed so many valuable political alliances with various chiefs of the valley that he added greatly to the prestige of his people.

His brother, Quimalpopoca (smoking shield), was chosen to succeed him. His rule ended in personal disaster when he hanged himself after being taken prisoner by his enemy, Maxatla.

Itzacoatl (serpent of stone), half-brother of the ill-fated Quimalpopoca, was the Aztecs' choice for his successor as their ruler. He determined to conquer the city of Azcapozalco and allied himself with the celebrated Alcolhuan prince, Nezahualcoyotl. Aided by this ally and his brothers,

³Ibid., pp. 57-8.

⁴Ibid., p. 69.

Itzacoatl was able to free his people from subjugation. This battle took place in 1428.⁵

Itzacoatl died in 1440 at a very advanced age. He had served as king for only thirteen years but had served his country as a general for thirty years prior to his reign. Besides freeing the Aztecs from servitude, he made many important conquests, re-established the descendants of the ancient Chichimec kings on the throne of their ancestors, added to the wealth of his country by the spoils of those he conquered, and made many valuable alliances. He was considered a wise and a great ruler and directed the addition of many edifices in the city. For reasons history does not reveal, this king wished to erase the past from the memory of his people, and to accomplish this he had many records and paintings destroyed.

Itzacoatl's successor was his nephew, Moteuczoma Ilhuicamina (he who throws arrows towards the sky). It was customary for the king to capture the prisoners to be sacrificed at his coronation. Moteuczoma, already a great soldier, set out to do battle with the inhabitants of Chalco for this purpose. He was successful and his reign was a succession of military triumphs. He subjugated the entire valley of Anahuac to his laws. Following the advice of Nezahualcoyotl, he constructed a dike nine miles long, which still exists, and is known as the Albarreda Vieja.⁶

⁵ Ibid., pp. 73-4.

⁶ Ibid., pp. 75-7.

During Moteuczoma's rule the kingdom suffered from a period of droughts, severe frosts, and a big snow, which was an unknown phenomenon at that time. Despite the fact that he spent much time soldiering, he did not neglect his civil government, but made many laws which the enlargement of his empire necessitated. He erected a magnificent temple to the war god, and was responsible for increasing the number of human sacrifices. Although his laws against drunkenness were severe, his subjects worshipped him for his justice. His death occurred in 1469.

Axayacatl (the fly) was sixth king of Mexico and a very severe ruler. He was succeeded by his brother, Tizoc (the leg covered with wounds) in 1481. Tizoc died in 1486, having been poisoned by two of his feudatory magnates.

Ahuitzotl (the otter) followed his brother on the throne. He was a courageous ruler and was responsible for the construction of many magnificent buildings. He was constantly at war and his conquests expanded the Mexican empire to about the limits it had reached at the time of the Spanish conquest. In 1498 he decided to bring water into the lake around the capital city by constructing a canal. When a rainy year followed years of drought, the city was inundated. Ahuitzotl was injured when he struck his head against a door in fleeing from the flooding waters. He died in 1502 from the effects of this injury.

After his death the throne passed to his nephew, Moteuczoma to whose name was added Xoyocotzin (the younger) to distinguish him from the first ruler of that name.⁷ This was the ruler who was on the throne when Cortez arrived. His name usually appears as Montezuma.

This ruler seems to have passed as a god after his coronation. He introduced a series of very elaborate ceremonies, and dismissed all nobles except those from his own court. He lived in great luxury, and his subjects were not allowed to look him in the face. He had a fervent zeal for religion and faithfully observed the established rites and ceremonies. His hatred of idleness was illustrated by his attempts to keep his subjects always busy. Although he was hated for his pride, despotism, heavy tributes exacted, and severity at punishing the smallest fault, he nevertheless attached his subjects to him by amply rewarding those who served him, and aiding the unfortunate.⁸

Montezuma was preparing for war with the republic of Tlaxcala when Cortez made his appearance. The Spaniard made an alliance with these enemies of the Aztecs and with their aid conquered their city. Montezuma was taken prisoner and died June 30, 1520, as the result of a blow from a stone.

⁷Ibid., p. 83.

⁸Ibid., p. 96.

His brother, Cuitlahuatzin, was chosen to succeed him. He was brave and immediately prepared to repair the fortifications of the city against the Spaniards, who had been driven out. He died of small pox, which disease was brought to Mexico by a negro member of Cortez's party.

Cuauhtemotzin (descending eagle) was the eleventh and last king of Mexico. He was made prisoner by the Spaniards and tortured to secure information as to the hiding place of the royal treasures. He was later accused of conspiracy and hanged on orders of Cortez.⁹

Origin of Human Sacrifice Among the Aztecs

It is difficult to ascertain just when and how the Aztecs began the practice of human sacrifice. Biart refers to the custom as being already developed when they were still slaves of the Colhuas. Mrs. Nuttall, in her extensive study, attempts to trace the origin of the practice by using Ixtlilrochitl's Historia Chichimeca, Chapter VI, and Bishop Landa's Relaciones, p. 335. According to these early writers, the Chichimec neighbors of the Aztecs had the custom of taking the first animal killed in a hunting expedition and sprinkling its blood on the ground, then tilling the earth, and offering the animal as a sacrifice to the sun. Mrs. Nuttall believes the Aztecs developed this custom into

⁹Ibid., p. 101.

a ceremony involving the sacrifice of human beings rather than of animals.¹⁰

The Codex Ramirez gives the following account of the beginning of human sacrifices:

The people in disobedience to the god Huitzilipochtli, undertook to settle permanently in a certain place. Their idol waxed angry seeing this and said to the priest, "Who are these who thus wish to transgress and put obstacles in the way of my orders and commands? Are they greater than I? Tell them I will take vengeance upon them before tomorrow for it is not for them to give advice about matters which are for me to determine. Let them know that all they have to do is to obey."

Having said this, those who saw assert that the idol looked so ugly and frightful that they were all terrified. On that very night, it is said, when everything was quiet, a loud noise was heard in that part of the camp, and when the people rushed there in the morning they found that all those who spoke in favor of remaining in the place were dead, with their breasts torn open and their hearts torn out. In this way they were taught that most cruel of sacrifices, a custom they always practiced after that, which consisted in cutting open a man's breast in order to tear out the heart and offer it to the idols, for they claimed that their god ate only hearts.¹¹

About the only conclusion that can be drawn from these conflicting explanations is that human sacrifice was introduced among the Aztecs at some time during their wanderings, before they established their Empire.

¹⁰Nuttall, op. cit., p. 66.

¹¹"Codex Ramirez", in Paul Radin, Sources and Authenticity of the History of the Ancient Mexicans, pp. 73-4, quoted in Charles S. Braden, Religious Aspects of the Conquest of Mexico, p. 44.

Aztec Religion and Mythology

Cosmogonic Myths

The cosmogonic myths of Mexico are characterized by multiple creations. The Aztecs believed in five suns, each representing a world epoch. More emphasis is placed on destruction than on creation. The first sun was destroyed by a jaguar who devoured it, leaving the earth in darkness. The inhabitants of the earth were eaten by more jaguars. A second sun was destroyed by a hurricane, and the third, by rain or fire. The fourth sun perished as the result of a flood. One pair of humans seems to have survived each destruction and from them the world was repopulated. The fifth and prevailing sun was believed to be doomed to destruction by an earthquake.¹²

Like that of the Mayas, the religion of the Aztecs was a polytheism in which a deity was designated for each of the powers of nature and the various activities of men. Whatever was powerful, beautiful or inexplicable was deified, including the Sun, Moon, Jaguar, and Serpent. They also believed in an Earth Mother and a Sky Father. This belief is illustrated on page 62 of the "Borgian Codex", on which is found a group on a background of water. This group represents the Earth Mother.

¹² Spinden, op. cit., p. 233.

....lying on a band of lizard-skin, with two maize plants issuing from her body and growing into a large two-branched tree, in the centre of which is a flint knife or teapatl. A bird stands on its summit and its branches terminate in maize plants. Its growth is being furthered by the two streams of blood which proceed from two human figures, standing at each side of the tree. One is painted black and evidently represents the Lord of the Below; the other is painted blue-green and represents the Lord of the Above. The blood sacrifice they are jointly offering is that...performed in order to obtain germination.¹³

The religion of the Aztecs has been considered barbaric by many. Unfortunately, no contemporary layman's description of the religion is available. Such an account would be very valuable for it would undoubtedly paint the religion in a better light than did the Spanish writers. Also, their description would probably reveal that many of the names given by Spanish chroniclers as those of distinct gods were merely variant names of a few important deities. As it is, most writers list the Aztec gods in the hundreds.

Possible Approach to Monotheism

Some have ventured the belief that toward the period of the Spanish occupation, the Mexican priesthood was advancing toward the idea of one supreme god.¹⁴ There is good reason to believe that there was some inclination among the greater minds of the Aztecs toward the concept of a supreme God. This conclusion was possibly reached by Nezahualcoyotl, prince of Tezcuco, whose story is told by

¹³Nuttall, op. cit., pp. 98-9.

¹⁴Spence, op. cit., p. 54.

Ixtlilxochitl, an early Indian writer who had himself become a Christian. The author has given such a detailed description of this story that it is difficult to accept it as completely authentic.

The story is that when Nezahualcoyotl's prayers and sacrifices to the various gods failed to bring him victory on the battlefield or a son born of his wife, he declared that there must be a greater and all-powerful god. Having come to this conclusion, he fasted and offered flowers to this Unknown God. After fasting forty days, a messenger came, bringing news of a military victory and the birth of a son. The prince then built a temple to the Unknown God, Cause of Causes. No image was allowed in the temple and no sacrifices of blood were allowed.¹⁵

Following this experience, Nezahualcoyotl spent his remaining days studying astronomy and meditating on his immortal destiny. Several hymns written by him have been preserved. He died about 1470.¹⁶

Another early writer, Clavigero, says the Mexicans had an imperfect idea of an absolute, supreme being who was invisible and who was referred to as Teotl.¹⁷ Teotl is

¹⁵Obras Historicas de Ixtlilxochitl, I, pp. 247-8 and II, pp. 224-6, cited in Braden, op. cit., pp. 22-4.

¹⁶William H. Prescott, History of the Conquest of Mexico, II, p. 198.

¹⁷F. X. Clavigero, Ancient History of Mexico, II, p. 2, cited in Braden, op. cit., p. 21.

elsewhere referred to as a supreme god to which no idols were made.¹⁸

If the idea or practice of monotheism had been reached by the greater thinkers, it seems evident that no effort had been made to change the religious system of the masses who continued to worship numerous gods.

Brinton refers to the fact that both in Peru and Mexico the old religion and numerous gods were not abandoned for the purer religion, which seems to have begun to be practiced in the upper levels.¹⁹

Braden supports the latter theory when he states:

...in a civilization developed to such a degree as that of Mexico, religion will be found expressing itself in widely diverse forms, according to the classes of the population. Care must therefore be exercised not to attribute to the masses the relatively exalted religious conceptions which were here and there to be found in the Mexican records.²⁰

Four Principal Gods

Of the numerous gods worshipped by the masses of the Aztec people, there were thirteen which might be considered as principal gods. Besides Teotl, four of these seem to overshadow the rest. They were Tlaloc, Tezcatlipoca, Quetzalcoatl, and Huitzilopochtli.

¹⁸Honeyman, op. cit., p. 63.

¹⁹Daniel G. Brinton, Myths of the New World, pp. 74-5.

²⁰Braden, op. cit., p. 21.

Tlaloc, often referred to in the plural, was "Master of Paradise". This was a Toltec god borrowed by the Aztecs. Children were sacrificed to this god, who supposedly ruled the dwelling place of the sun. As the god of rain, Tlaloc was especially important to the agriculturists of Mexico.

Tezcatlipoca, whose name means "Shining" or "Smoking Mirror," is described as invisible and a traveler of the sky, earth, and underworld. He supposedly originated wars and discord. As sole ruler of the world, he controlled the destiny of men. It was believed that he consisted of thin air and darkness, and was visible only as a shadow without substance. He was strong and eternally youthful. One of his titles, Xoalli ehecatl, meant the "Night ind". Brinton refers to this god as a personification of darkness.²¹

More priests were dedicated to the service of this god than any other. Worship of him seems to have become universal by the time of the Conquest. Spence believes he was the only god whose worship was mandatory.²²

Quetzalcoatl was a deity worshipped all over middle America. His name means "Quetzal snake." The feathers of the quetzal bird were prized all over ancient Mexico for their rarity and great beauty. This is illustrated by the fact that this word was used to denote anything precious.

²¹Brinton, American Hero Myths, op. cit., p. 71.

²²Spence, op. cit., p. 67.

Primarily, Quetzalcoatl was the wind god. One of his titles, therefore, was Eecatl, the Aztec name for wind. His temples were always round, presumably to offer least resistance to the wind.

Quetzalcoatl has been referred to as one of the Aztec gods of foreign origin. This god seems to have been introduced among them long before they raised their banner of war, and was the long-nosed god of the Mayas, introduced under the patronage of that powerful Poltec ruler, Quetzalcoatl.

Prescott says that fruits and flowers of the season were included in the offerings to this god.²³

The creation myths found among the Aztecs at the time of the conquest differed greatly. Evidently they varied according to each locality. Two of their gods, Tezcatlipoca and Quetzalcoatl, figure in nearly all of these myths. These myths draw a confused picture of conflict between these two gods. In many of these legends, Quetzalcoatl and Tezcatlipoca appear as two of four brothers, another of which is Huitzilopochtli. There seem to have been two by the name of Tezcatlipoca which merge in the story. According to these myths, the creation of the world and its inhabitants resulted in an episode of destruction and recreation of the universe carried out by these two divine brothers.

Other myths give Quetzalcoatl the major role in the creation, such as the following:

²³Prescott, op. cit., III, p. 5.

The world was created by Tonacatecutli and Tonacaciuatl, who placed a great dragon-like monster in the primal waters. The back of the monster, which was called Cipactli, the name of the first day sign, formed the earth. After a number of the more important gods had been created, Tonacaciuatl gave birth to a flint knife, which was immediately thrown to earth. As soon as it touched earth 1600 gods sprang forth. After deliberation these decided that they would create man. They asked permission of their mother, Tonacaciuatl, who told them to apply to Mictlantecutli, the lord of the underworld. Quetzalcoatl, or according to one version, Xolotl, the dog-headed god, was sent. He managed to get bones from Mictlantecutli but on hurrying back, he dropped them. Thereupon Ciuacoatl, an earth goddess, crushed the bones, making the first pair of humans from the powder. In the other version, Xolotl obtained a very large bone, which was placed in a vessel. All the gods drew blood from their bodies, and this was poured on the bone. On the fourth day a young man emerged from the vessel, and at the end of a further four days, a young woman also emerged. The world was peopled by their descendants.²⁴

The gods then set about creating a sun. One of the gods volunteered to cast himself into a fire, which he must do to become the sun. After a number of days, he arose in the east as the sun. This sun remained in the sky and its rays so burned the other gods that they decided to commit suicide. Quetzalcoatl, the wind god, slew the gods, then exerted his strength over the winds and moved the sun across the sky.²⁵

Another version, which also presents Quetzalcoatl as one of the original creator gods, says he was miraculously conceived by his mother coming into contact with a jade stone. According to this version, his mother was said to have been

²⁴Eric J. Thompson, Mexico Before Cortez, p. 137.

²⁵Ibid., pp. 163-4.

Chalchihuitlicue, the water-goddess, who was also wife of the chief Tlaloc.²⁶

Huitzilopochtli, the god of war, was the god most venerated in Mexico City (Tenochtitlan). It was the idol representing this god that the Mexicans carried during their wanderings, and supposedly, under his direction the site was chosen for their capital city. The bloodiest sacrifices were made to him and the highest temples were his. Although some attribute a human origin to him, there are also mythical stories of him.

In these stories he often appears as the brother of Tezcatlipoca and Quetzalcoatl. Another myth represents him as born of Coatlycue, the mother of certain Indians called Centzonvitznaoa. When sweeping one day, a ball of feathers fell close by. She placed it in her bosom and finished sweeping. When she started to remove the ball, it was gone, and she later discovered that she had conceived a son. Her other sons were very angry and started to kill her, but the baby, Huitzilopochtli, sprang full born to life with bow and arrows in his hands with which he slew the brothers.²⁷

Quetzalcoatl, the Culture Hero

Quetzalcoatl is also represented as a culture hero of the Aztecs. It is interesting to note that the culture

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 159-60.

²⁷ Braden, op. cit., p. 43.

heroes of all Mexico and Central America coincide with that of Quetzalcoatl, although they go by different names according to nationality.

According to Aztec legend, Quetzalcoatl was ruler and high priest of Tollan (Tulan) where his rule was considered the golden age of the kingdom. He was continually harassed by his jealous rival, Tezcatlipoca, a clever and powerful magician. The latter finally succeeded in forcing Quetzalcoatl to leave the city of Tollan. The departing ruler traveled sadly through the country until he reached the sea shore. Some say he sailed eastward on a raft made of serpents, while others say he disappeared into the sky. All agree, however, that he promised to return in the year Ce Acatl, "one reed", which was one of the fifty-two years forming the cycle of the Mexican calendar.

Although the Quetzalcoatl culture-hero myths differ, most of them agree on his departure and his promise to return. This part of the legends paved the way for the coming of the Spaniards. By coincidence, the year 1519 was the year Ce Acatl, the year of the Aztec calendar in which Quetzalcoatl's return was expected. This marked the arrival of Hernando Cortez in Mexico.

When Montezuma heard of the arrival of some white men, he thought them to be those who were to come according to this ancient tradition to take over the rule of the country. Most of these legends represent Quetzalcoatl as being of a

fair complexion with flowing beard and hair. Montezuma, therefore, sent a complete outfit of the paraphernalia of Quetzalcoatl to be presented to the white chief. This occurred after he heard of the arrival of Grijalva. The clothes reached the coast after Grijalva had departed. Later, when Cortes arrived at San Juan, a chief came aboard his ship and dressed Cortes with some amount of ceremony, in the regalia of Quetzalcoatl.²⁸

Therefore, the legend of Quetzalcoatl proved very valuable to the Spaniards. They could well afford to be grateful to this legendary character, whose promise of return made their conquest comparatively easy.

Human Sacrifice Among the Aztecs

The Aztec Attitude

Although there is a great deal of difference in the descriptions of human sacrifice, many undoubtedly exaggerated by the writers who had a natural horror of the idea, there seems no doubt that the Aztecs were among the most cruel of those people who exercised this practice.

It is difficult to get an accurate idea of the number of human sacrifices made during a year. The Spanish writers probably would have overestimated the number, while some writers favorable to the Indians could be expected to

²⁸Juan de Grijalva, The Discovery of New Spain in 1518, p. 35.

underestimate. For example, Las Casas suggests that only about fifty to one hundred were sacrificed in a year, while Zumarrage and Acosta report that the numbers ran far into the thousands.²⁹

The majority of the sacrificial victims were war captives or slaves. Children were also sacrificed, usually by drowning or being shut up in caves to perish from hunger or fright. Women were also sacrificed to the goddesses. Sometimes criminals were made the victims, but it was most frequently the captive who was offered to the gods. Sometimes the victims were given an intoxicating drink, which made them appear to go gladly to their death.³⁰

Many writers have theorized on this practice among the Aztecs, and the comments of some are worthy of note. One of the best of the early Spanish writers was Fray Bernardino de Sahagun. Closely related to the practice of human sacrifice are the Aztec ideas concerning life after death.. Summarized by Sahagun, they were:

...the souls of the dead went to three places; one was the inferno where dwelt a devil called Mictlantecutli and his wife Mictecaciaoatl. There went the souls of those who died of sickness, either lords or princes or humble people. A dog was sacrificed at the burial of such persons, for the Indians believed that the soul crossed the river into the inferno on the dog's back and that the dog served as a guide. Another place was the earthly paradise, a place of much joy and peace without pain. There went those who were

²⁹ Braden, op. cit., p. 58.

³⁰ Ibid.

struck by lightning or drowned, or lepers, the gouty and the dropsical. The other place was the region where dwells the sun. Those killed in battle went there, as did also captives who died in the power of their enemies, those killed by sword, and those burned alive. After four years these souls were said to be transformed into various kinds of bright-plumed birds, and so fly about sucking honey from the flowers.³¹

The Paradise of the Aztecs was reserved for heroes and martyrs, and could be reached by good men only after a period of probation. Such a theory glorified war because of the alluring award it offered.³²

Montezuma made the following statement in regard to human sacrifice:

We have the right to take away the life of our enemies. We could kill them in the heat of battle as you do your enemies. What injustice is there in making those who are condemned to death, die in honor of our gods?³³

George C. Vaillant reminds the Christian world that the idea of sacrifice and martyrdom played a part in the Christian religion, when he says, "The very beautiful example of the Saviour transmutes to the highest spiritual plane this idea of sacrifice for the good of humanity."³⁴

The Aztecs did not reach such a high plane in their thinking. They reasoned that for man to survive, the gods

³¹Fray Bernardino de Sahagun, A History of Ancient Mexico, III, app. p. 260, cited in Braden, op. cit., pp. 59-60.

³²Honeyman, op. cit., p. 60.

³³Clavigero, op. cit., III, p. 411, quoted in Braden, op. cit., p. 59.

³⁴George C. Vaillant, Aztecs of Mexico, p. 205.

had to live and be strong. Therefore, they offered the gods their most valuable possession, human life. To offer captives gained from military success, the Aztecs waged war in which they needed the support of their gods. Thus, continues Vaillant, "sacrifice led to war and back to sacrifice, in an unending series of expanding cycles."³⁵

Thompson summarizes the Aztec's reasoning on this matter in the following manner:

The ancient Mexican was not an idealist. He looked on his gods as endowed with the same mixture of friendliness and ill will as he saw around him. The gods, like men, did not give something for nothing.³⁶

Hewett, while not apologizing for the Aztec's attitude in this respect, takes a more sympathetic view of the matter.

It must be pointed out that human sacrifice was practiced not at all by the northern sedentary Indians, sparingly, if at all, by the early Maya-Quiche and Toltecs. The Aztecs all but had a monopoly on this custom, and it has not been proved that they practiced it extensively in pre-Spanish times. Remember too that it was a religious custom of an intensely superstitious people who reposed fanatic faith in their gods. The Spaniards came upon them suddenly, with incomprehensible powers. They possessed unheard-of engines of destruction. They were beyond the human plane. The generation of the Conquest saw Aztec dependence upon their gods fanned into a frenzy of supplication. Sacrifice without stint or limit was conceived to be the thing that would appease them. That time brought forth an epidemic of human sacrifice never before known in America. It was a perfectly natural expression of their terror of the new enemy, and their feeling that only the gods could save them, in the belief that these demoniac beings must be appeased before they would function again in their behalf. It is not a matter for

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Thompson, op. cit., p. 137.

especial wonder that the Aztecs of the Conquest generation lost their heads through terror, and tried to get right by murdering a few thousand friends and foes alike for the satisfaction of their gods.³⁷

Cannibalism

In connection with their human sacrifices, the Aztecs often practiced ceremonial cannibalism. Vaillant is of the opinion that this rite should not be considered a vice, since it was performed with the belief that the virtues of the victim could be absorbed by those who consumed his flesh.³⁸ Prescott concurs in this opinion.³⁹

In some ceremonies, at least, it was the custom to send a thigh of the victim to the king's table, while the rest was cooked with maize. The person responsible for having captured the victim gave a banquet to which his friends were invited. Since the captive he had so offered as a sacrifice was held in a manner to be his son, the host on such occasions did not eat of his flesh, but rather he ate of the flesh of other victims.⁴⁰

A Calendar of Religious Sacrifices

Although there was some variation in the details of sacrificial ceremonies, most of them followed a general

³⁷Hewett, op. cit., pp. 280-1.

³⁸Vaillant, op. cit., p. 206.

³⁹Prescott, op. cit., II, pp. 87-8.

⁴⁰Hubert H. Bancroft, The Works of Hubert H. Bancroft, Vol. II, The Native Races, Civilized Nations, p. 309.

pattern. The masters of the captives took them to the temple and dragged them by the hair up the steps to the altar. Sometimes they fainted in the ordeal, but in such a manner they were taken to the stone of sacrifice. The victim was laid across this on his back. Two priests held his arms, two, his legs, and one, his head, while the priest in charge took a sharp stone instrument, thrust it into the person's breast and tore out the heart. The still palpitating heart was offered to the god or gods and the body was thrown head-long down the steps. The owner took it, cut it into pieces and distributed it to be cooked and eaten. Sometimes the body was flayed and the skin worn by a young man who disported himself in mock warfare with others, dressed in similar garb.

During all but a few of the eighteen months of the Aztec calendar, there was a festival calling for the sacrifice of human beings. A brief summary of their religious calendar and the rites it required should suffice to show the imagination and fanaticism of the Aztec people.

I. Atlcoualco, the first month, was dedicated to Tlaloc rain gods, and the water goddess, Chalchihuitlicue. The object of ceremonies during this month was to secure a plentiful amount of rain. Large numbers of children were carried to mountain tops, where the Tlalocs were supposed to reside. There the children were sacrificed. If the children cried a great deal enroute up the mountains, whence they were carried

on flower bedecked litters, a heavy rainfall could be expected.

During this same month, prisoners of war were sacrificed to the god, Xipe, one of the agricultural gods. This ceremony involved a mock combat in which the prisoners were given wooden swords with which they fought warriors. They were then sacrificed in the usual manner and their bodies eaten.⁴¹ Apparently referring to this ceremony, Braden gives a little different version.

One of the forms of human sacrifice was the gladiatorial. Within the temple enclosure there was a large flat circular stone, several feet in diameter, resembling a mill stone. On top of this the victim was tied with a chain long enough to allow him to move about freely. He was given a weapon and allowed to defend himself against the attack of a Mexican warrior. If he succeeded in defeating, one after the other, seven opponents, he had redeemed his life. If he fell, he was carried dead or alive to the altar and the usual sacrifice made.⁴²

It might be that the ceremony described by Thompson was one that took place in a different locality than the one described by Braden.

II. Tlacaxipeualiztli, the second month, was dedicated to Xipe. Many prisoners were sacrificed during this month.

III. Tozoztontli, dedicated to Tlalocs and Coatlicue, rain-goddess and patroness of agriculture, involved a flower feast and the sacrificing of more children to the Tlalocs.

⁴¹Thompson, op. cit., p. 176.

⁴²Braden, op. cit., p. 58.

IV. Huei Tozoztli was a month honoring the maize god, Centeotl. Bloodletting by piercing the ears was performed during this month, but evidently there were no human sacrifices.⁴³

V. Toxcatl was dedicated to the god, Tezcatlipoca, and it was during this month that one of the most outstanding feasts took place. The young man to be sacrificed was chosen a year ahead of time. He was treated royally the entire year, ~~since he was supposed to represent the image of Tezcatlipoca.~~ The people bowed before him and he lived in great luxury. Twenty days before the sacrifice, he was married to four beautiful virgins. They were feasted and banqueted with great ceremony before the sacrifice. The victim set the hour of his death, and when that time came, he mounted the stairs to the altar, ~~breaking a flute on each step.~~ When he reached the altar, he was sacrificed in the usual manner.⁴⁴

During this same month, a feast was held also for Huitzilopochtli, and a youth who had impersonated him was sacrificed. These youths were expected to receive great honors in the next world, rising to divine rank themselves.

Captives were also offered to these gods during this month, and all children were given small cuts on their chests, stomachs, and arms.⁴⁵

⁴³Ibid., p. 30.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 54.

⁴⁵Thompson, op. cit., p. 182.

VI. Etzalqualiztli involved more offerings to the Tlalocs to secure more rain for the young crops. Among other ceremonies, a young boy and girl were placed in a canoe filled with the hearts of sacrificial victims, towed to the center of a lake, where the boat was sunk and the children drowned. Also, priests of the Tlalocs, who had committed some wrong during the past year were punished by being half-drowned in this lake.⁴⁶

VII. Tecuilhuitontli honored the goddess of salt, Huixtocihuatl, with a festival in which the women danced. A woman chosen to represent the salt goddess was sacrificed at this ceremony. Women victims were usually slaves.

VIII. Hueitecuilhuitl, which means "the great feast of the rulers" involved an eight-day festival to Xilonon, goddess of the tender ears of corn. A slave girl, who danced throughout the eight-day festival was sacrificed by having her head cut off. Decapitation seems to have been practiced in the agricultural sacrifices. This particular one symbolized the gathering of corn.⁴⁷

IX. Tlaxuchimaco was dedicated to Huitzilopochtli, the war god. Many turkeys were killed as offerings and tamales were made for a great feast. No human sacrifice is mentioned in connection with this festival.⁴⁸

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 183.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 184.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 185.

X. Xocotlhuetzi was the month during which a very cruel sacrificial performance was carried out in honor of the fire god, Xuihtecutli or Heuhuetectl. The captives were forced to dance with their captors. They were then thrown into a fire, from which they were dragged while still alive, and sacrificed in the usual manner, by having their hearts torn out.⁴⁹

This version of the Aztec rite honoring their fire god, derived from Sahagun's description, varies quite a bit from the picture drawn by one of his contemporaries, Motolinia. The ceremony witnessed by Motolinia took place in the city of Cuautitlan. Again the variance in detail might be due to the difference in locality, or it might possibly be as Hewett suggested, that the presence of the Spaniards resulted in the Aztecs resorting to extremity in their efforts to please their gods. If so, the following episode given by Motolinia, might have represented a furtive effort on the part of the Mexicans to secure their god's support in throwing off the yoke of their conquerors.

On the day before one festival in Cuautitlan they set up six great trees, like the masts of ships, with steps leading up to them, and on that cruel night... followed by a yet more cruel day..., they beheaded two female slaves at the top of the steps before the altar of the idols. Up there they flayed their bodies and faces and cut out their thigh bones. In the morning two of the leading Indians put on the skins, even the skin of the face, like a mask, and took the thigh bones,

⁴⁹Ibid.

one in each hand, and slowly came down the steps, roaring like savage beasts. Down below in the courtyards a great crowd of people, all apparently terrified, cried: 'Our gods are coming!' When the two men reached the foot of the steps the people began to beat their drums, and to the backs of the men dressed in the skins they attached a quantity of paper, not folded, but sewed in the form of rings, a matter of some four hundred sheets. To each of them they gave a quail, already sacrificed and beheaded, and tied it to his lip, which was pierced. And thus the two danced, and many people sacrificed before them and offered them great numbers of quail, for it was also for the latter a day of death. And as the quail were sacrificed they were thrown before the two dancers, and there were so many that they covered the ground where they trod, for more than eight thousand quail were sacrificed that day....The two men dressed in the women's skins did nothing but dance all day.

On this day there was committed another greater and unheard of cruelty, which was that at the top of the six poles which they had erected on the day before the festival they bound and fastened to crosses six men, prisoners of war, and down below there stood around them over two thousand men and boys with their bows and arrows. As soon as those who had bound the captives to the poles came down, a shower of arrows was fired at the victims, and then, shot full of arrows and half dead, they were quickly untied and allowed to fall from that height. The violence with which they struck the ground broke and shattered all the bones in their bodies, and then they were made to suffer a third death, being sacrificed by having their hearts cut out. After that they were dragged away and their heads were cut off and given to the ministers of the idols. The bodies were carried off like sheep, to be eaten by the lords and principal men. On the following day they feasted on that unutterable food, and all danced with great rejoicing.⁵⁰

XI. Ochpaniztli, the following month, honored Teteoinan, mother of the gods, also called Tocitzin. A slave woman was chosen to impersonate this goddess and was not told

⁵⁰Toribio Motolinia, History of the Indians of New Spain, translated and edited by Elizabeth A. Foster, pp. 667.

that she was to be sacrificed. After some ceremony, she was beheaded and skinned. The skin was donned by a youth who then proceeded to sacrifice other prisoners. This ceremony was followed by a military review.

XII. Teotleco, meaning "the return of the gods" witnessed a variation in the sacrificial method. Victims were thrown into a furnace and burned alive.

XIII. Tepeilhuitl called for more human offerings, this time to the gods of the mountains. Four women and a man were sacrificed, following which their heads were mounted on poles and their bodies cooked and eaten.

XIV. Quecholli was dedicated to Mixcoatl, god of hunting. The penance of bloodletting was performed, and a hunting expedition took place. No mention is made of human sacrifice for this month.

XV. Panquetzaliztli was the month honoring Huitzilopochtli. A dance was held every day for twenty days. At the end of this time captives were sacrificed. A mock battle took place between captives and slaves, in which wooden swords were used, some having obsidian blades. Those who survived the battle were sacrificed.⁵¹

Another phase of this ceremony involved the making of an idol representing the god, Huitzilopochtli. According to Acosta, this idol was made of a dough mixed with honey,

⁵¹Thompson, op. cit., pp. 186-90.

although some say human blood was used.⁵² This idol was placed in the temple. Following a program of consecration, human sacrifices were made to the idol. It was then broken into pieces and distributed to the people to be eaten.⁵³

XVI. Atemoztli was another month during which the Tlalocs were honored, but the usual sacrifice of children is not mentioned.

XVII. Tititl brought a feast to "the old princess", Ilamatecuhtli. A woman representing this goddess was sacrificed.

XVIII. Izcalli was dedicated to the fire god, Xuihtecutli. It seems that human sacrifice accompanied these ceremonies only once every four years.⁵⁴

At the end of a cycle (fifty-two years) there was an interesting ceremony held, which is usually referred to as the New Fire Ceremony. During the five useless days (nemontemi) of the final year, the people let the fires in their homes go out and destroyed their furniture. There was great fasting and fear of catastrophe. On the last night children were not allowed to go to sleep for fear they might turn into rats. At sunset the priests ascended the Hill of the Star and watched the heavens. When certain stars reached

⁵²Nuttall, op. cit., p. 93, citing Cortes, op. cit., p. 105.

⁵³Braden, op. cit., pp. 72-3.

⁵⁴Thompson, op. cit., pp. 190-1.

the center of the heavens, it was considered a sign that the world would continue. At this moment the priests kindled a fire in the breast of a freshly sacrificed victim. This new fire was taken to the temples to kindle new fires on the altars there. The following day there was feasting, blood-letting and more human sacrifice.⁵⁵

From the "Codex Mendoza" comes the mode of the Mexicans of recording the conquest of a tribe. The hieroglyphic name of this tribe was recorded along with a picture depicting the destruction of the pyramid temple which stood in the center of their capital city. Their chieftian was taken prisoner and sacrificed by having his heart torn out. His flesh was distributed and eaten. In this manner the conquered people were shown that they no longer existed as an independent people and their rule had been absorbed by the Mexican government.

⁵⁵Vaillant, op. cit., pp. 200-01.

CHAPTER IV

THE INCAS OF PERU

If the Mayas were the intellectuals of ancient America, and the Aztecs the great fighters, the Incas of Peru were the political geniuses. The chief and official tongue of the Incas was Quechua. The people who spoke this language represented an advanced type of civilization, although they did not have a method of writing.

A Brief History

Origin and Founding of the Empire

Just where these people came from and how they established their vast empire is another of the unanswered questions of history. There is more evidence available concerning the origin of the Incas, however, than can be found about the Mayan Empire.

A. P. Means seems to have drawn a logical picture of the early history of the Incas from the maze of tradition handed down to us. Means is possibly the best authority of recent times on the Incas. He says that the Incas were not, as were the Mayas, a whole people.¹ "In reality about 1100 A.D.

¹Philip A. Means, "The Incas: Empire Builders of the Andes," National Geographic Magazine, LXXIII, (February, 1938), p. 225.

the Incas were a small tribe of Quechua-speaking llama herders dwelling on a cold and lofty plain some leagues southwest of Cuzco."²

Elsewhere, Means indicates his awareness of the existence of conflicting data in reference to the date and origin of the Incas. He points out that the story of the Inca dynasty is so filled with legend that it is difficult to set a date for its beginning. Most legends and writers ascribe the origin of the dynasty to Manco Capac and his sister-wife, Oello and their associates. The date varies. Father Montesinos would put it during the early part of the Tiahuanaco I period of the highlands. That would be some time before 600 A.D. Don Felipe Huaman Poma de Ayala dates Manco Capac as contemporary with Christ. Captain Pedro Sarmiento de Gamboa places his death as 665 A.D. All other early writers would seem to agree that Manco Capac existed around 1100 A.D.³

The unreality of these figures makes it difficult to refer to them as historical characters. Sinchi Roca is the first Inca chief who is surrounded with enough realistic description to allow him to be considered as real.

Means is of the opinion that the chroniclers are in general agreement that the Incas came to the Cuzco region

² Ibid.

³ Philip A. Means, Pre-Columbian Art and Culture in the Andean Area, pp. 104-5.

from the south, probably the Lake Titicaca region or even Tiahuanaco.⁴ From this homeland the Incas migrated, probably because their land was not fit for agriculture. Although they were much like other tribes, they had an inborn genius for growth and organization. Inspired by the idea of a manifest destiny, they migrated from their home country down into the fertile valley of Cuzco. Legends vary on this story, but Means suggests this as the most authentic.

Manco Capac and his sister-wife, Mama Ocllo, led this march. They were able to subjugate the inhabitants by the following method, which appealed to the superstitious nature of the people:

A beautiful lad named Roca was clad in a garment thickly covered with spangles of burnished gold and, thus arrayed, he appeared at the mouth of a cavern above Cuzco where the rays of the sun fell upon him and made him gleam dazzlingly.

Pointing aloft to that radiant figure, which seemed to be a part of the sun fallen to earth, the astute strategists persuaded the wonder-struck multitude that the shining boy was the Son of the Sun, to whom their entire allegiance was due.⁵

In this manner Sinchi Roca (War Chief Roca) became the divine monarch of the dwellers of that valley. This took place between 1100 and 1140 A.D., and was the beginning of the great Inca Empire.

⁴Ibid., p. 105.

⁵Means, "The Incas", op. cit., pp. 227-8.

The Incas from Sinchi Roca down to Pachacutec (the eighth) did not marry their sisters, but chose their wives from the daughters of powerful chiefs. After this, evidently the empire had become so powerful that it no longer required the support of such chiefs, so beginning with Tupac Yupanqui the practice of marrying sisters was reestablished for the purpose of preserving the holy purity of the royal blood.

Following the conquest of the people of the valley of Cuzco, more territory was added to the empire by other Inca rulers. Whenever possible, such additions were made without resort to warfare.

According to Means, the sixth Inca king seems to have been the only one who was cowardly. During his reign the Chancas, a tribe of Indians living north of the Inca Empire, became dangerously menacing. The situation became so desperate that it was evident something had to be done.

Prince Hatun Tupac, son and heir to the Inca throne, took an army to meet the Chancas, who were sending an army against the Inca kingdom. The Prince had received mysterious counsel in a dream from a deity who announced himself to be the Creator God, Viracocha. The prince and his troops were victorious, whereupon the prince, out of gratitude, took the name of his counselor, the god Viracocha. Having replaced his father as ruler of the empire, he concluded a very

successful rule and is referred to in history as the Inca Viracocha. ⁶

By the time the Spanish arrived, the Empire had grown too large and was beginning to split into two parts. There was friction among the heirs to the dynasty and his half-brother to whom the Emperor had left one-third of the Empire. The half-brother, Atahualpa, had conquered and imprisoned his brother and rightful heir, Huascar. After the Spanish conquered Quito in 1532, Atahualpa had Huascar killed. ⁷

The rule of the Incas was generous to all who accepted it. It was totalitarian, but differed from the usual examples of such rule. No one was allowed to want for food, clothing, shelter or recreation. Idleness was not allowed. Everyone, regardless of social station was required to have some useful employment. ⁸

Conflicting Stories of Origin

The legends found among the natives at the time of the conquest of Peru gave contradictory information concerning the origin of the Incas, ruling class of Peru. Nearly all agreed that the Incas were not originally of the Cuzco region. Where they came from, however, was a matter of controversy.

⁶Ibid., pp. 237-9.

⁷Means, Pre-Columbian Art, op. cit., p. 106.

⁸Ibid., p. 109.

Many of the accounts gave a divine origin to the Incas, so it is difficult to sift out the facts. Since the rule of the Incas depended on the divinity of their origin, they naturally supported belief in such legends.

The earliest recorders of these myths found many variations among the natives as to the origin of their rulers and their civilization. In 1542 the Licentiate Don Cristoval Vaca de Castro, de facto governor of Peru, instituted an official inquiry concerning the ancient lore of the Cuzco Indians. The results of this inquiry were published in a document by Don Marcos Jimenez de la Espada under the title Discurso sobre la Descendencia y Gobierno de los Ingas.

According to the reports of four elderly Indians who were quipocamayos, historiographers or accountants, as published in this document, Manco Capac, the first Inca, originated at Pacaritambo. He was the son of the sun and came out of a window in the rock. Two of the quipocamayos who said they were natives of Pacaritambo, stated that their forefathers had told them, enjoining secrecy, "that Manco Capac was the son of some chief of Pacaritambo who never knew his mother, for which reason his father always called him Child of the Sun." The people finally took this seriously, so the father, "perceiving the advantage he might derive from it, and assisted by two medicine-men, improved it for

extending the sway of his tribe."⁹ Thus, it appears that among the Indians themselves, there was not complete acceptance of the stories of divine origin.

The royal accountant, Agustin de Zarate, published in 1555 a Historia del Descubrimiento y Conquista de la Provincia del Peru. He says:

In all the provinces of Peru there were principal chiefs, called in their language curacas...These chiefs kept their Indians at peace, and were their captains in the wars which they waged against their neighbors, without their being a chief for the whole until, from the direction of the Collao, from a great lagoon called Titicaca (which is there), that has eighty leagues in circumference, there came a very warlike people whom they called Ingas. These go with their hair cut short and their ears perforated, and with round pieces of gold in the holes that still more enlarge them...They call themselves Ringrim, signifying ear. And the principal one of them they named Zapalla Inga, which is "only chief," although some claim that they called him Viracocha Inga. The latter is to say "foam or grease of the sea," for as they did not know from what land they came, they fancied he had originated in that lagoon... These Ingas began to settle the city of Cuzco.¹⁰

Pedro Pizarro gives a brief note on the origin of the Incas in his Relacion del Descubrimiento.

These Indians say that an Inga was the first Lord. Some say he came from the Island of Titicaca, which is an island in a lagoon of the Collao... Other Indians claim that this first chief came forth at Tambo. This Tambo is in Condesuicos, six leagues, more or less from Cuzco.¹¹

⁹Adolph F. Bandelier, Aboriginal Myths and Traditions Concerning The Island of Titicaca, Bolivia, p. 206.

¹⁰Ibid., quoting Agustin de Zarate, Historia del Descubrimiento y Conquista de la Provincia del Peru (reprint in Vol. II of Historiadores primitivos, chap. X, p. 470.)

¹¹Ibid., p. 208, quoting Pedro Pizarro, Relacion del Descubrimiento, p. 234.

Garcilasso de la Vega was born in Cuzco. His father was a Spaniard and his mother, an Inca princess. In his Comentarios Reales, he refers to conversations he had as a boy in Cuzco with his mother's brother. This aged Indian made the following statement in regard to the origin of the Incas.

You must know, therefore, that in ages past all this region and country you see around us was nothing but mountains and wild forests, and the people in those times were like so many beasts, without religion or government: they neither sowed, nor ploughed, nor clothed themselves, because they knew not the art of weaving with cotton or with wool.....

Our Father the Sun, beholding men such as before related, took compassion on them, and sent a son and a daughter of his own from heaven to earth to instruct our people in the knowledge of Our Father the Sun, that they might worship and adore him and esteem him for their god, giving them laws and precepts whereunto they might conform their lives, like men of reason and civility... With these orders and instructions Our Father the Sun placed his two children in Lake Titicaca, which is about eighty leagues hence, giving them liberty to go to and travel wherever they pleased; and in whatsoever place they stayed to eat or sleep, they should strike into the ground a little wedge of gold which he had given them, being about half a yard long, and two fingers thick, and where with one stroke this wedge would sink into the earth, there should be the place of their habitation and the court unto which all people should resort....Thus Our Father the Sun, having declared his pleasure to these, his two children, he despatched them from him, and taking their journey from Titicaca northward, at every place where they came to repose they tried to strike their wedge into the ground, but it took no place, nor would it enter. At length they came to a poor inn, or place wherein to rest, about seven or eight leagues southward from this city, which to this day is called Pacarec Tampu, which is as much to say, "The Shining or Illuminated Dormitory." This is one of those colonies which the Prince planted, the inhabitants whereof boast of this name and title which

our Inca bestowed upon it; whence he and his queen descended to the valley of Cuzco, which was then only a wild and barren mountain...¹²

The same writer would date the appearance of Manco Capac about 1022 A.D.. In opposition to this, Montesinos' tangled description of the early history of the Incas would place Manco Capac in existence prior to 600 A.D.. Although the picture he draws is very confused, this early writer has presented a detailed work which is worth some consideration. The following is his version of the settlement of Cuzco.

There were four brothers and sisters who set out together. The youngest brother killed two of his brothers, and the other fled in terror. The remaining one, Tupac Ayar Uchu, also called Firua Pacari Manco, led his sisters to the site on which Cuzco was founded. These sisters, who were also the wives of Tupac, were instructed by him to show great reverence to him as son of the sun. He referred to Illatici Huira Cocha as supreme god, and did not practice idolatry, worshipping only this god as creator of the world. Tupac's son, Manco Capac, succeeded him and increased the power of his father's realm, allying himself with neighboring tribes.

Other notes taken from this history are of interest because they indicate the origin and development of certain customs and religious practices, as well as the growth of the kingdom.

¹²Ibid., pp. 212-3, citing Garcilasso de la Vega, Comentarios Reales, Vol. I, p. 14.

Inti Capac, a later king, ordered women who did not take husbands at the age of fifteen to be set aside to serve the sun. His son, Manco Capac (second of that name) had houses of retreat established for women who were called Mothers of the Sun. These women were highly respected and no man was allowed to look at or touch them. ¹³

Sacrifices to the sun of boys and girls by the Indians were made during the reign of King Titu Yupanqui Pachacuti. ¹⁴ The author does not indicate whether this was supposed to have been the beginning of such sacrifices.

A later king, Sinchi Apusqui, noticed that his subjects worshipped many gods, all equally with the ancient god. He ordered that the great Pirua god would be called by the name Illatici Huira Cocha instead of Huira Cocha, which had become the custom. The addition of this title greatly enhanced the god, for illa meant "glory" and tici, "foundation." Thus, his title meant "glory and void and foundation wherein and whereon are all things." ¹⁵ Because of this action, the people called this king, Huarma Vira Cocha, which means "the boy Huira Cocha." He was a wise and strict ruler.

The seventy-eighth Peruvian king, Tupac Cauri, on being told that the writings or letters of his people were the

¹³Fernando Montesinos, *Memorias Antiguas Historiales Del Peru*, translated and edited by Philip A. Means, p. 36.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 43.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 50.

cause of a great pestilence, commanded that no one should sell qiulcas, the parchments and leaves of trees on which they wrote, and no one should use letters. Thus, writing was lost, and from this time on quipos were used.¹⁶

This same king was buried by his heir, Arantial. With the king were buried his legitimate wife and favorite concubines. Some say that children were also buried with him. The manner in which Arantial buried him was:

He took out his liver and heart and deposited them in a vessel of gold and silver, and they preserved the body, embalmed in certain aromatic preparations, which preserved it without spoiling. From this, the Ingas, who afterwards succeeded to this monarchy, took the custom.¹⁷

The power of the kings was greatly reduced by the growth of vice and disobedience. Finally matters were taken into hand by a lady of royal caste with the aid of her sister, son and some others. This woman, named Mama Ciuaco, had a young son about twenty years of age. The lad possessed a striking personality and high ideals, for which he had gained the title Inga. This title, meaning Lord, his friends added to his real name, Roca.

His mother, assisted by him and others, carried out a plan which resulted in his being accepted as the ruler of the people of the city of Cuzco. Mama Ciuaco and her sister made a dazzling garment of gold and jewels for her son. She then

¹⁶Ibid., p. 64.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 65.

sent him to a cave, which was in accessible view of the city. There he stayed hidden for several days while she spread the news that the Sun had come and taken him off to the sky, saying the boy was his son and he would return him shortly so that he might reign as king of Cuzco.

At the end of four days, the boy appeared at noon at the mouth of the cave, a dazzling spectacle in his garment of gold. After a short time, he disappeared. During the following several days, he repeated this performance. There then followed a period during which his mother and others made sacrifices to the Sun, beseeching him for the boy's return. Finally, they were led to the mountain by the mother, who found the boy, apparently asleep, on a rock. He returned with the people and told them his father, the Sun, had sent him to rule them and restore them to the glories of their ancestors. He was accepted as their ruler and this was the beginning of the Incas. ¹⁸

Inca Roca (Montesinos uses the spelling, Inga) made war against his enemy, King of Andaguailas, and defeated him. Following their defeat, the surviving troops were treated benignantly by Inca Roca.

The young ruler married his sister, Mama Cura, who was aware of the conspiracy which had resulted in his being placed on the throne. He established a law requiring that men should

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 65-79.

marry only one woman and she should be his kindred, so as not to mix families. Marriagable age should be from eighteen upward, so that the persons would be old enough to carry on their duties. All flocks and fruits of harvest were to be held in common. From this community stock pile all the population was to be supplied.

The Sun was to be regarded as supreme of the gods and great sacrifices made in his temples. Inca Roca had a convent erected to house maidens whose services were to be used in the temple of the Sun. These maidens were to be of royal blood. ¹⁹

When he died, Inca Roca's successor and son, Lloque Yupanqui, had his father's body embalmed and buried with all his vessels and garments. Thus arose the custom of burying the Incas with their property. Sacrifices also accompanied the funeral ceremonies.

An illustration of the generosity of the Inca rule is found in the action of Huaina Capac, ninth Inca. Following a military victory, he made sacrifices to the Sun, and ordered the release of all war captives, asking for their friendship. ²⁰

Later writers, drawing from these and other sources, continued to give conflicting pictures of the Indian

¹⁹Ibid., p. 81.

²⁰Ibid., pp. 122-23.

traditions. Charles De Wolf Brownell, writing in the middle of the nineteenth century said:

According to Peruvian mythology, the whole country was, in early times, as savage and barbarous as the neighboring nations of the East. Manco Capac, and his sister and wife, Mama Ocllo Huaco, two children of the Sun, settling in the valley of Cuzco, began the work of regeneration. They taught the arts of civilized life, and from them sprang the long line of the Incas whose glorious kingdom was at the height of its prosperity when discovered by the Spaniards.²¹

A more recent study by Carleton Beals presents two versions of the ancient legends.

On an island in Lake Titicaca, the Sun created a man and woman, the Inca Manco Capac, and his sister wife, Coya (Queen) Mama Ocllo. He bade them set forth to found their kingdom at the spot the golden staff, with which he had provided them, should on being struck into the earth bury itself from sight.²²

This seems to represent the same story as given by the aged Inca to Garcilasso de la Vega. The second version presented by Beals is a bit different.

Eight brothers and sisters, four incestuous pairs, clad in shining raiment spangled with gold, went forth from the Tavern of the Dawn. Three pairs turned to stone, but the mightiest of them, Manco Capac, who traveled furthest, sank the golden staff in Cuzco-- "navel of the world"--and there in that densely wooded valley, he and Mama Ocllo rounded up the miserable inhabitants and founded that capital of his new realm.

He taught the multitude new ways of agriculture. Mama Ocllo instructed the women in domestic art.²³

²¹Charles De Wolf Brownell, The Indian Races of North and South America, p. 531.

²²Carleton Beals, Fire On the Andes, p. 30.

²³Ibid.

Inca Religion and Mythology

Sun Worshippers or No?

The common conception of the Inca religion is that it was merely a sun worship. There is much evidence to repudiate this idea. Even early authorities denied that it was exclusively a sun worship, although they readily admit that worship of the sun was an important part of their religion.

Christoval de Molina, one of the earliest and presumably one of the best informed writers, states that, "they did not recognize the Sun as their Creator, but as created by the Creator," which was "not born of woman but was unchangeable and eternal." ²⁴

An even more authoritative source may be referred to. In 1571, by the order of the viceroy, Don Francisco de Toledo, an Inquiry was held among the oldest Indians, mostly those of noble birth, in various parts of the country. In answer to questions about the nature of the old religion, a great deal of uniformity resulted. All agreed that Viracocha was worshipped as the ever-present divinity and creator. It was he alone that answered prayers and helped the needful. When prayers were offered to the Sun or deceased Incas or idols, it was with the expectations that these would intercede in

²⁴Christoval de Molina, The Fables and Rites of the Incas, pp. 8-17, English translation, cited in Brinton, op. cit., p. 175.

their behalf with Viracocha. ²⁵ The sun, therefore, was considered merely one of the creations of the Creator.

In a comprehensive study of the Andean civilizations of South America, published by the Smithsonian Institution Bureau of American Ethnology, the greatest god of the Incas is recognized as being the Creator god, Viracocha. The sun's position is described as follows:

The most important servants of the Creator were the sky gods, headed by the Sun, who was believed to be the divine ancestor of the Inca dynasty. The Sun protected and nurtured crops, and his cult was naturally preeminent among an agricultural people...The Temple of the Sun in Cuzco housed images of all the sky gods of the Incas and a host of supernaturals besides; its most important image was not of the Sun but of Viracocha. ²⁶

Rafael Karsten sheds further light on the subject by stating that the sun deity did not enjoy the same respect in all parts of Peru as it did in the Cuzco region. Other heavenly bodies replaced it in importance. East of the Andes there are but few traces to be found of a sun worship.

Where a sun deity enters into the creed of the Indians he rather forms part of their mythology than their religion. It is natural that in the hot tropical virgin forests the sun should have less importance as a dispenser of warmth and fertility than in the cold

²⁵Informacion de las Idolatras de los Incas e Indios, in the Coleccion de Documentos Ineditos del Archivo de Indias, Vol. XXI, p. 198, cited in Erinton, op. cit., p. 175.

²⁶John H. Rowe, "Inca Culture At the Time of the Spanish Conquest," in The Andean Civilizations, Vol. II of Handbook on South American Indians, edited by Julian Steward, p. 294.

mountain regions. In a hot climate the sun may be regarded rather as a malevolent than a beneficent being.¹²⁷

This would indicate that the sun was not considered supreme by the Incas themselves, since they allowed their subjects to worship other lesser gods. The Sun Cult was of extreme political importance to the Incas, but even they seemed to feel the need for a higher type of religion, as Means explains:

In religious matters the Incaic policy was no less magnanimous than it was in other respects. At the commencement of their career the Incas gave the people over whom they were about to rule to understand that they were Children of Inti (the Sun). From that time onwards the religion of the Inca State was a cult built around Inti and his sister-wife, Mamaquilla (Mother Moon), and other heavenly bodies. It was a beautiful and admirable kind of nature worship, singularly free from human sacrifice and from other cruelties such as those which made the faiths of Mexico, Yucatan, and other regions so horrible. The ritual, observed at the great Temple of the Sun (now the Church of St. Dominic) in Cuzco and at lesser temples throughout the land, was impressive, rational, and colorful.

Although they carried the Sun Cult with them everywhere they spread, the Incas were not bigoted or intolerant with regard to it. As their realm expanded they came into contact with many local cults; and, whenever these were not too low, bestial or bloody, their deities were gradually admitted to and conjoined with those of the State religion. This was a cardinal point of the general Incaic policy of generous rule.

A striking example of this point concerns the ancient, pre-Incaic concept of Viracocha, the benevolent Creator-God and Sky God whom we have noticed as being of utmost importance in the art of the Tiahuanaco II period. When the Incas first heard of him is not known.

¹²⁷Rafaél Karsten, The Civilizations of the South American Indians, p. 355.

If, as some Chroniclers believed, they themselves came originally from Tiahuanaco, it is possible that they had possessed him in their hearts from their very beginnings. Or they may first have heard of him at the time when Mayta Capac, the third Inca (ca. 1195-1230), conquered Tiahuanaco and its region. However, this may have been, the Creator-God Viracocha seems to have made himself a vital and invigorating influence in the life of Prince Hatun Tupac who, guided by the God, vanquished the Chancas and afterwards took the name of Viracocha. Later, under the Inca Pachacutec, the great sacred city of the coast, Pachacamac, was conquered. It had long been a place made holy by the worship there of Pachacamac, who was the coastland counterpart of Viracocha in the highlands. This conquest, notwithstanding the fact that the cult of Pachacamac on the coast was then, and afterwards, on a distinctly lower moral and psychological plane than was the worship of Viracocha in the highlands, seems to have caused the Inca Pachacutec to ponder deeply on the whole concept of an illimitable, omnipotent, and imponderable Creator.

As a result of his pondering, Pachacutec convoked a meeting of all the Sun-Priests in the realm in order that they might put in good order and define the tenets and dogmas of the State religion. When they had done so, the Inca asked them if, after all, they could not conceive of some God loftier and more potent even than the Sun. On their declaring that they could not, the Inca laid before them his own majestic concept of a God who was omnipresent but invisible, all-powerful but intangible, timeless and a God who was benign: Viracocha. Thereafter, the worship of the Creator became a super-cult, restricted to the ruling caste, replete with moral and philosophical beauty.²⁸

Markham also points to the fact that in a temple at Cuzco, Viracocha was represented by a gold oval slab, which resided in a higher place than the images of the Sun or Moon.²⁹ The hymns dedicated to this god convinced Markham

²⁸Means, Pre-Columbian Art, op. cit., pp. 109-19.

²⁹Sir Clements R. Markham, The Incas of Peru, p. 90.

that there was definitely an approach to monotheism among the intellectuals of Peru. Speaking of these hymns, he says:

We know from them that, in their inmost hearts, the intellectual and more instructed section of the Incas and their people sought for a knowledge of the unseen Creator of the universe; while publicly conducting the worship of objects which they knew to be merely God's creatures.³⁰

Markham recognizes the fact, however, that Viracocha was worshipped mostly by the Incas, and that his worship played a relatively small part in the religion of the masses.

The cult of Viracocha was confined to the few. The popular religion of the people was the worship of the founder or first ancestor of each ayllu or clan. The father of the Incas was the sun, and naturally all the people joined in the special adoration of the ancestor of their sovereign, combined with secondary worship of the moon, thunder, and lightning, the rainbow, and the dawn, represented by the morning star, Chasca. But each clan or ayllu, had also a special huaca, or ancestral god, which its members worshipped in common, besides the household gods of each family.³¹

Chief Figures in Peruvian Mythology

Viracocha.--The central figure in the mythology of the Quechua-speaking Indians was Viracocha. One cycle of legends presents him as the Infinite Creator, the Primal cause; another, as a wise ruler and teacher. Therefore, he, as was true with the gods of the Aztecs and Mayas, plays a dual role as a god and culture hero.

Among Viracocha's titles were those of Ticci, meaning "the Cause," or "the Beginning," and Illa ticci, which meant

³⁰Ibid., p. 103.

³¹Ibid., p. 104.

"the Ancient Cause," or "the First Beginning."¹³² He was credited with having made the sun, the moon and the dawn.

It would seem that the natives were actually worshipping this god when they gave offerings to rivers, streams and the like, as they considered him the creator of these things.

This interpretation is given by a very early writer.

.....it was not that they believed that some particular divinity was there or that it was a living thing, but because they believed that the great God, Illa Ticci had created and placed it there and impressed upon it some mark of distinction, beyond other objects of its class, that it might thus be designated as an appropriate spot where at to worship the maker of all things; and this is manifest from the prayers they uttered when engaged in adoration, because they are not addressed to that mountain, or river, or cave but to the great Illa Ticci Viracocha, who, they believed lived in the heavens, and yet was invisibly present in that sacred object.¹³³

The Smithsonian handbook described Viracocha's place in the Inca religion and mythology as follows:

Viracocha, the Creator, was the theoretical source of all divine power, but the Indians believed that he had turned over the administration of his creation to a multitude of assistant supernatural beings, whose influence on human affairs was consequently more immediate. He lived in the heavens, and appeared to men at crises. He was also a culture hero, as it was believed that after the creation he had journeyed through the country teaching the people how to live and performing miracles. He finally reached Manta (in Ecuador), and set off across the Pacific Ocean walking on the water.³⁴

¹³²Brinton, American Hero Myths, op. cit., p. 170.

³³Relacion Anonyma, de los Costumbres Antiguos de los Naturales del Piru, p. 138, quoted in Brinton, American Hero Myths, op. cit., p. 170.

³⁴Rowe, op. cit., p. 294.

The above description combines Viracocha, the god, and Viracocha, the culture hero. As the latter, he is pictured as an old man with flowing robe and beard. After traveling through the country teaching the people, he disappeared toward the sea and was expected to return.³⁵

Means asserts that the worship of Viracocha began long before the Incaic period. He was evidently worshipped as a benevolent Creator-God and Sky-God during the Tiahuanaco I period. He is represented in a Monolithic Gateway at Tiahuanaco, which probably dates from the Tiahuanaco II period (600 A.D. to 900 A.D.).³⁶

Viracocha has also been referred to as an Inca. Means has attempted to rationalize the truth of this legendary character of the Incas. His conclusion is that the name belongs rightfully to both a god and an Inca ruler. According to Means, Prince Hatun Tupac took the name Viracocha after his victory over the Chancas. This prince replaced his father as ruler and became the seventh Inca.

Con.--Viracocha is not the only mythical character referred to as creator of the universe, nor is he necessarily the oldest. Con appears as the supreme power, invisible and omnipotent spirit in Quito and Peru long before the time of the Incas. Con is described as a spirit without bones or

³⁵Peet, op. cit., p. 396.

³⁶Means, Pre-Columbian Art, op. cit., pp. 86-7.

flesh. He created the universe and mankind, presenting these creatures with every type of food and pleasure. Because man offended Con, the god took away the abundance of food and turned the land into a desert. The human race was turned into animals.³⁷

Pachacamac.--In most legends concerning him, Pachacamac is considered as having been the son of Con. He took pity upon the human race after his father had punished them, and created all things anew, making men and women in their present form.

A temple was raised to this god on the coast of Peru, south of Lima. People evidently made pilgrimages to this temple from distant parts of Peru. There were no images in the temple to represent this god, since he was considered to be a spirit only.³⁸

* Bollaert disagrees with Means in regard to the worship of Pachacamac. The former describes the adoration of Pachacamac as simple and pure and says it was corrupted by the Incas. In reference to the conquest of the city of Pachacamac by the Incas, Bollaert says:

.....the intrusive religion of the Sun was in danger from the older and purer one of Pachacamac; however, after much negotiation, it was arranged that Pachacamac

³⁷William Bollaert, Antiquarian, Ethnological and Other Researches in New Granada, Ecuador, Peru and Chile, With Observations on the Pre-Incarial, Incarial, and Other Monuments of Peruvian Nations, p. 220.

³⁸Ibid.

should retain his temple, and that another should be built there to the Sun, as the father of the first and Pachacamac. After a time the Incarial priests erected a statue of wood to represent the formerly invisible Pachacamac, and invented oracles. Faith in the immortality of the soul was one of the fundamental ideas among all the Peruvian nations; and, first, Con, then Pachacamac, and later, the Sun, were the judges of the human race.³⁹

It is interesting to note that Bollaert completely ignores the Viracocha Cult which Means emphasizes.

Chief Religious Ceremonies

The chief religious observances of the Incas were closely related to the solar year and its bearings on agriculture. Rayni, a festival of the winter solstice which took place during the first month, followed the filling of granaries after harvest. It was in special honor of the Sun, and sacrifices of llamas, lambs and the first fruits of harvest were offered.⁴⁰

The second great festival was Situa, which took place at the beginning of the rainy season, when sickness was prevalent. The object of this ritual was to drive out all sickness. Prayers were offered to the Creator to drive disease and evils from the land. Warriors took part in a kind of relay race, running and shouting, "Go forth all evils." They passed this message to other groups who relayed it until

³⁹Ibid., p. 220.

⁴⁰Justin Winsor, Narrative and Critical History of America, Vol. I, p. 237.

the last group reached the banks of the river, where they bathed. The river supposedly carried the evils to the ocean. The people of the city shook their clothes and shouted, "Let the evils be gone!", and also bathed. A torch-lighted procession took place in the evening and the torches were thrown into the river.

A special pudding, Sancu, was prepared and eaten that same night. The people also smeared the pudding on their faces and on the doorways of their houses.⁴¹ According to Molina's description of this pudding, it was mixed with the blood of sacrificed animals.⁴² The huacas and malquis were bathed, and sacrifices, dancing, and feasting accompanied the other ceremonies of the day.

The third great festival at the summer solstice was Huaracu, when the youths were admitted to a rank which was equivalent to knighthood. Before their initiation ceremonies, each youth presented a llama for sacrifice. These llamas bore the names of the youths.⁴³

The following month the water sacrifice was made. The ashes and cinders of all the year's sacrifices were thrown into rivers, across which dams had been built. The dams were then removed so that the ashes were carried swiftly away.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 238.

⁴²Christoval de Molina, Narratives of the Rites and Laws of the Incas, English translation by C. R. Markham, pp. 35-6.

⁴³Winsor, op. cit., p. 239.

The people followed along the banks carrying torches. When they reached the bridge at Ollantay-tampu, two bags of coca were hurled into the water. ⁴⁴

There was a new fire ceremony once a year, when the sacred fire was rekindled by collecting the sun's rays on a burnished metal mirror. ⁴⁵

The Question of Human Sacrifice

As with the Mayas, so in the case of the Incas, the existence or extent of the practice of human sacrifice poses a debatable question. There are both early and later writers who argue strongly that human sacrifice did not exist at all among the Incas. Others picture the religious practices of these people as being as bloody as those of the Aztecs. Still others would compromise these two schools of thought, and admit that on rare occasions human beings were sacrificed by the Incas.

Among later writers, both Winsor and Means have presented good arguments in favor of the humane nature of the Inca religion. Means describes the religion as "singularly free from human sacrifice and other cruelties." ⁴⁶ He insists that many of the early chroniclers purposefully set out to vilify the Incas and their rule.

⁴⁴Ibid., pp. 239-40.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 240.

⁴⁶Means, Pre-Columbian Art, op. cit., p. 109.

The ultimate object of the denigratory school of Chroniclers of which Toledo and his stooge, Sarmiento, were most prominent members, was to justify, or to attempt to justify the overlordship in the Andean Area of the Kings of Castile.⁴⁷

Means has evaluated the early chroniclers and would rate as the four best ones, Father Miguel Cabello de Balboa, Father Bernabe Cobo de Peralta, Captain Pedro de Cieza de Leon, Garcilasco de la Vega. He ranks Garcilasco as supreme among the chroniclers. He believes this writer, who was himself of Inca blood, used all available sources, which were many at that time.

Means criticizes other early writers. He says that Sarmiento de Gambo distorted the facts, but despite himself, gives a valuable history of the Incas.

Father Valera's works were never published, but were extensively utilized by Montesinos, who never gave credit for them. Montesinos' work was poorly written and often is incoherent.

Filipe Huaman Poma de Ayalla, a pure blood Indian, wrote in such poor Spanish that his book is mostly valuable for the numerous illustrations which shed light on Indian culture of the period of the Conquest.⁴⁸

Winsor's argument against the existence of human sacrifice among the Incas takes a little different approach from

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸Ibid., pp. 115-17.

that of Means! He credits ignorance of the language as being responsible for the mistakes of most early writers who believed that the Incas sacrificed humans.

The sacrifices were called runa, yuyac, and huahua. The Spaniards thought that runa and yuyac signified men, and huahua, children. This was not the case when speaking of sacrificial victims. Runa was applied to a male sacrifice, huahua to the lambs, and yuyac signified an adult or full-grown animal. The sacrificial animals were also called after the names of those who offered them, which was another cause of erroneous assumptions by Spanish writers. There was a law strictly prohibiting human sacrifices among the conquered tribes; and the statement that servants were sacrificed at the obsequies of their masters is disproved by the fact, mentioned by the anonymous Jesuit, that in none of the burial-places opened by the Spaniards in search of treasure were any human bones found except those of the buried lord himself.¹⁴⁹

Winsor takes issue with William H. Prescott, who accepted the idea that human sacrifice was practiced. Prescott based his belief on the writings of Sarmiento, Cieza de Leon, Montesinos, Balboa, Ondegardo, and Acosta. He concluded that these outnumbered and outweighed Garcilasco, who was probably prejudiced because of his Inca origin.

Thus, Winsor attempts to discredit the evidence of all these on the basis of a misunderstanding of the words yuyac and huahua, or on a general ignorance of the language. Ondegardo, he says, wrote at a time when he knew little of the language and had no interpreters (1554). At that time he was a judge at Cuzco, and all the annalists and old men had fled to the forests, following an insurrection.

¹⁴⁹Winsor, op. cit., p. 237.

Among the early authorities who deny the existence of human sacrifice, Winsor names Francisco de Chaves, who was one of the most able original conquerors; Juan de Oliva; the Licentiate Alvarez; Fray Marcos Jofre; the Licentiate Falcon, in his Apologia pro Indis; Melchior Hernandez, in his dictionary under the words harpay and huahua; the anonymous Jesuit in his narrative; and Garcilasco de la Vega. The quipus also assert that there was a law prohibiting human sacrifice. ⁵⁰

Winsor further argues that the very nature of the Inca religion was opposed to the idea of human sacrifice. Their sacrifices, he says, were not offered with the idea of atonement or expiation, as was true with the Aztecs, but rather were offerings of thanksgiving. The festival Situa was an exception, for it involved the idea of effacing sins by washing.

Their ritual was almost exclusively devoted to thanksgiving and rejoicings over the beneficence of their Deity. The notion of expiation formed no part of their creed, while the destruction involved in such a system was opposed to their economic and carefully regulated civil polity. ⁵¹

Speaking of sacrifice, William H. Prescott says it consisted of animals, grain, flowers, and sweet-scented gums,

⁵⁰Ibid., pp. 237-8. For other authorities on this matter, Winsor refers to Markham, Royal Commentaries, 1, 139; cf. Bollaert's Antiq. Researches, p. 124; and Alphonse Castaing on "Les Fetes, Offrandes, et Sacrifices dans l'Antiquite Peruvienne" in the Archives de la Societe Americaine de France, n.s. iii, 239.

⁵¹Ibid.

and sometimes human beings. When the last was the case, a child or beautiful maiden was usually selected to be the victim.

But such sacrifices were rare, being reserved to celebrate some great public event, as a coronation, the birth of a royal heir, or a great victory. They were never followed by those cannibal repasts familiar to the Mexicans and to many of the fierce tribes conquered by the Incas. Indeed, the conquests of these princes might well be deemed a blessing to the Indian nations, if it were only from their suppression of cannibalism, and the diminution, under their rule, of human sacrifice.⁵²

Markham, another later authority, doubts if human sacrifice was more than a rare occurrence. According to him, Polo de Ondegardo in 1554 made the first accusations as to this. Valera denied the truth of Ondegardo's statement, saying he knew scarcely anything of the language and had no interpreters at the time of the inquiry.⁵³ This would be in agreement with Winsor's evaluation of Ondegardo's work.

Ondegardo was followed by Molina and others, including Sarmiento, whose instructions were to make the Incas appear in as unfavorable a light as possible.

Markham further cites Valera as saying that there was a law among the Incas prohibiting human sacrifice. The very existence of such a law would indicate that the practice had existed at some time. Cieza de Leon, whom Markham considers the most unprejudiced of all early writers, believed that humans were objects of sacrifice only rarely, if ever.

⁵²William H. Prescott, Conquest of Peru, Vol. I, p. 95.

⁵³Markham, op. cit., p. 109.

Both Valera and Garcilasco say that the huahuas (children) and Yuyacs (adults) which were sacrificed were lambs and full grown llamas and not humans.

Mrs. Nuttall sheds some light on this matter while discussing the origin of the Incas. She quotes Garcilasco, who, using Valera as a source, refers to an intruding race, which supposedly introduced human sacrifice and ritualistic cannibalism into Peru. This race, "had come from the region of Mexico, peopled the regions of Panama and the Isthmus of Darien and all those great mountains which extend between Peru and the new kingdom of Granada."⁵⁴

If, as has been suggested, the Incas themselves did not practice human sacrifice, but did find it necessary to pass a law forbidding it, such an invasion of foreign elements, might serve as an explanation for the existence of such a law.

Somewhat in line with this, Wissler believes that it is clear that the practice did prevail at one time but that the Incas must be given credit with having prohibited it.⁵⁵

Dobbins has the following to say about the custom:

The Peruvian temples were accordingly never polluted, like those of Mexico, with the blood of human victims; and the Incas even went farther, and signalized their

⁵⁴Nuttall, op. cit., p. 151, citing Blas Valera, apud Garcilasco de la Vega, Commentarios Reales, Lisboa, 1609, lib. I, cap. XI, pp. 13, 14; lib. II, Cap. VI p. 42.

⁵⁵wissler, op. cit., p. 193.

zeal against such horrid rites, by suppressing them in all the countries they conquered.⁵⁶

Bollaert refers to the belief in an evil spirit, Supay, which was found early among the people of Peru, and to which children were sacrificed. He does not specify, however, that this was a practice of the Incas or even that it still existed at the time of the Incaic period.⁵⁷

Rowe, in a rather recent study of the Incas, comes up with the conclusion that human sacrifices were made only on rare occasions, such as in case of a pestilence, famine or war reverses. Also, he believes that two hundred children were sacrificed at the coronation of a new emperor. Other humans were sacrificed if the emperor went to war or became sick.

He further states that human victims for sacrifice were chosen from among the citizens of newly conquered territory, the handsomest being chosen.

Boys and girls were also collected as a part of the taxation from the various provinces. They were required to be physically perfect and were usually ten to fifteen years old. The girls were usually selected from the Chosen Ones at the Convents. They were feasted before being sacrificed and the older ones were made drunk.

⁵⁶Frank S. Dobbins, Story of the World's Worship, pp. 384-5.

⁵⁷Bollaert, op. cit., p. 220.

The victims walked around the image representing the god to whom they were being offered, two or three times. They were then strangled with a cord. Their throats were then cut or their hearts removed and offered to the idol. Blood was poured on the ground or smeared on the idol.

Sometimes a sick Indian, who feared death, offered his son as a sacrifice in an effort to appease Viracocha or the Sun, so that his own life might be spared.⁵⁸

As sources Rowe uses Cobo, Molina, Morua, Cieza de Leon, and Polo de Ondegardo. The validity of most of these has already been questioned.

Molina says that Ccapac-cocha, as human sacrifice was called, was instituted by Pachacutec Yunca Yupanqui. Children were strangled and buried with images of silver. Such ceremonies, this early writer indicates, were carried out in a very reverent manner.⁵⁹

Montesinos, who has been accused of deliberately vilifying the Incas, draws a gruesome picture of an incident which supposedly took place during the early history of the Incas. The ruler, Sinchi Roca, defeated the Andaguailas, and, following his victory, prepared to return to Cuzco in a triumphant march. What seemed to be a lengthy procession or parade entered Cuzco. It was a spectacular affair, and included human drums made from important enemy captives. "Their

⁵⁸Rowe, op. cit., p. 306.

⁵⁹Molina, Narratives, op. cit., pp. 54-9.

skins were peeled off while they were yet alive, and filled with air, they represented their owners in a very lifelike fashion (and the victors) played upon their bellies with sticks out of contempt."⁶⁰

Many captives marched in the parade. One of the Lords of Andaguailas was carried naked on a litter, surrounded by drums made of his relatives. The Inca Sinchi Roca ordered the captives' hearts to be torn out. They were burned and the ashes were scattered to the winds.⁶¹

Regardless of whether or not humans were included in the Inca program of offerings, their system of sacrifices was elaborate. It called for llamas, huanacus, vicunas and their lambs, pumas, antas or tapirs, birds and plumes, maize, edible roots, coca, shells, cloth, gold, silver, sweet woods, guinea-pigs, dogs; in short, everything they valued.⁶²

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⁶⁰Montesinos, op. cit., p. 93.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 95.

⁶²Markham, op. cit., p. 108.

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CHAPTER V

HUMAN SACRIFICE, A RELIGIOUS RITE

It would be difficult for anyone to deny the fact that religion played a very important part in the life of the ancient Maya, Inca and Aztec. Neither can their religious philosophies be summarily dismissed as ignorant superstitions. Who can deny the striking similarities between theirs and contemporary theologies throughout the world?

Did not Itzamma, Viracocha and Quetzalcoatl serve in a similar capacity their respective cultures as Christ served the Jewish race? Also, as their history verifies, they likewise introduced their religious ideas and heroes wherever they extended their influence and control.

A study of such representative groups as have been discussed here cannot help but lead to concurrence with Dr. Eduard Seler. Supporting the "psychic unity" theory, Dr. Seler said that there is "in all parts of the world a certain fundamental uniformity in religious ideas, still more in religious practices, in spite of a wide difference in details."¹

Although on first glance the religious systems of these peoples seemed to consist of a confusing mass of deities,

¹Mackenzie, *op. cit.*, p. 37, quoting *Mexican and Central American Antiquities*, Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin 28, p. 275.

whose functions overlapped, closer observation reveals that remarkable progress had been made toward the development of a concept of one supreme god, who was omnipotent, omnipresent, and invisible. The worship of such a god was apparently replacing the old religion among the intelligensia in many places. Largely for political reasons, no effort was made to revise the religion of the masses.

The ancient Maya religion was a simple faith devoted to a single god. This religion was later corrupted by more aggressive though less scholarly invaders.

The ruling class of the Aztecs, among whom the idea of monotheism was introduced by the prince, Nezahualcoyotl, could hardly afford to destroy the fanatic faith of the masses in their numerous gods. Awe and fear on the part of conquered and neighboring tribes were necessary to retain the Aztec Empire. The vicious circle involving military and political achievements, and satisfaction and support of the gods clearly illustrates this point.

The Incas were no less obligated to retain their Sun Cult, which was responsible for their control over the imaginations of their subjects. Although years of good government and generous treatment had undoubtedly endeared this ruling class to their subjects, they could hardly afford to abandon the basis on which they had exerted their right to rule. Therefore, the Viracocha cult was reserved for the members of the Inca or royal family.

The standard of values of the ancient American was not unlike those prevailing in other parts of the world. The same is true as to their relationship with their fellow men. Rivalries between nations, tribes, provinces, and families existed as they did in Europe and often they were settled by similar means, warfare or political intrigue. Empires rose and fell. Cultures thrived and decayed.

Slavery existed in varying degrees. Social position was inherited, as was the right to rule. Crimes against the laws of society were punished, often with more apparent justice than they were in the Old World. Members of the nobility were often required to conform to stricter rules of conduct than were the masses. By such means were they reminded of their duty as leaders of the people.

Much serious contemplation was devoted to the idea of immortality. The hereafter of these people varied in degrees of desirability. Access to their equivalent of Paradise was based on earthly acts and the manner in which the persons died. This last was undoubtedly devised by the priestly class to support their theories regarding sacrifice.

Instances of human sacrifice have been found the world over. It should not be surprising that the practice was discovered among many Indian tribes. In discussing the devolution of sacrifice among primitive cultures, Tylor says,

.....the ruder conception that the deity takes and values the offering for itself, gives place on the one hand to the idea of mere homage expressed by a gift,

and on the other to the negative view that the virtue lies in the worshipper depriving himself of something prized.²

As a religious rite, the custom of offering human beings to a god involves the idea that the most precious of all possessions is life itself. Therefore, people in many ages, zealous to please a deity in whom their faith was placed, have offered up their loved ones to prove their devotion to a god. Instances of such practices or expression of willingness to perform them are found even in the Bible.

The practice of killing human beings as a religious rite should be distinguished from the custom of cannibalism found among many barbaric tribes. Human sacrifice as it was practiced among the Aztecs, Mayas and Incas was not performed for cannibalistic reasons. When the flesh of human victims was eaten by the worshippers, it was done so in an air of respectful solemnity, for it was believed that the virtues of the dead, acquired by his sacrificial death, could be transferred to those who consumed his flesh.

Thus, the idea existed among all these people that a person who died on the sacrificial block was destined to receive the highest of honors in the hereafter. Even with an eternity of glory and possible deification as an inducement, it was seldom that the victims went joyfully to their death.

²Frederick W. Hodge, editor, Handbook of American Indians North of Mexico, Part II, p. 402, quoting Sir Edward Durnett Tylor, Primitive Culture, II, pp. 375-6.

There seems no reasonable doubt that human sacrifice was practiced rather extensively by the Aztecs at the time of the Spanish conquest. It was, however, increased to a frenzied pace by the fanatic masses, when they felt the yoke of the Spanish rule upon their shoulders. More and more blood was spilled in a vain effort to bring down the wrath of their gods upon the invaders.

In times past the pompous and gory spectacle of their festivals had served them well. By effectively awing neighboring tribes, the Aztec Empire had managed to maintain a strong hold even over tribes it had not attempted to crush militarily. Perhaps the priests hoped to subdue the Spanish in the same way, since they obviously objected to the gruesome practice of sacrificing humans. Instead the result was the conquerors, and the Catholic priests who followed, set out to destroy the native temples and all remnants of the Aztec religion.

The ancient Itza-Maya was the most scholarly of all the early Americans. His religion appears to have been a simple and beautiful faith in a supreme creator. Incense, flowers and fruits served as offerings to this deity, who was not represented by any idol. An invisible god was not beyond the conceivability of these people.

Unfortunately, the Itza-Mayas were not able to withstand pressures from both inside and outside their empire. They were forced to submit to the rule of the Toltecs, who

delighted in decorating Maya monuments and temples with scenes depicting their victory over their more accomplished neighbors. It was following the fall of their capital, Chichen-Itza, that the Maya religion was revised. The introduction of idolatry and human sacrifice among the Mayas must be credited to the Toltecs. The Mayan god and culture hero, Itzamma was adopted and worshipped by the Toltecs.

By the time the Spanish arrived in Yucatan only remnants of the old Maya religion remained. Probably much valuable information concerning the theology of these ancient scholars could have been preserved by Bishop Landa, had he been more of a historian than a priest, bent on conversion of his heretic subjects.

It is doubtful if later Inca rulers concurred in the practice of human sacrifice among their subjects. Probably these wise politicians were attempting to wean the people away from the ancient practice. There was a law forbidding it at the time of the conquest, and this was enforced in each province which was added to the empire.

The accounts of Montesinos and some other early writers leave the impression that they might have read or heard descriptions of the religious rites of the Aztecs, and purposely drew a similar picture of the Peruvians. There is also the fact that the Incas did not use any form of writing, but relied on their quipos to record their history. Since these could be interpreted only by specially trained Indians,

and since many of the early writers suffered from insufficient knowledge of the language when they were gathering their material, it would be easy to see how misunderstandings could arise.

It seems almost useless to attempt to rationalize the colorful but contradictory figure, Quetzalcoatl. Until some new discovery or revelation is made, which can disentangle the mass of mythology surrounding this personage, little new can be added to the sea of interpretations heaped upon this name.

Does Quetzalcoatl represent a god, a man, an intruding people? Quite possibly all three are correct. This title could have belonged to the peace-loving Toltec ruler-priest, who attempted to introduce a new religious cult among his people, patterned after that of the Mayas. Since it was a custom to deify important personages after their death, Quetzalcoatl may have taken his place on the altars of worship following his death or disappearance.

Other Toltec rulers may have adopted the name of Quetzalcoatl, or it may have become a term generally used to refer to all their succeeding rulers. Thus, the peace-loving philosopher may have absorbed credit for all the acts of his successors.

Eventually, the Mayas may have come to regard the word Quetzalcoatl as representing the entire Toltec race, which subjugated them.

Such an interpretation neither adds to nor detracts from the mystery of the Plumed Serpent, whose influence was so widespread. Thus, the puzzle remains; perhaps to be solved by some persistent archaeologist, ethnologist or historian.

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