

## Sexuality in Maya and Nahuatl Sources

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THE SEXUAL BEHAVIORS of the Mayans and the Nahuas? Occasionally students or other faculty ask me how I became interested in such an obscure topic. After all, most historians focus on issues viewed as more “tangible” than sexuality, and most scholars study languages and people viewed as less “obscure” than indigenous Mesoamerican languages and people. When asked, sometimes in a hostile manner, such an impertinent question, I often express my disdain and disappointment to my inquisitor. Yet, it seems to me, those of us who practice philology are often confronted with these types of concerns, and sometimes we do not engage in an effective discourse to answer our critics.

I began to study sexuality as an undergraduate interested in issues related to gender studies. At that time I also developed a passion for Latin American Studies (particularly literature; it was only later that I became passionate about history) and Cultural Studies. For both personal and political reasons, my interest in these issues became more intense only in graduate school. Once there, I found that the best way to connect sexuality with the type of cultural history I wanted to perform was to study indigenous languages closely in order to begin an analysis of sexuality in Mesoamerican societies. So, while many scholars may think this work esoteric, I do not engage in an endeavor to uncover the roots of some “exotic” society. Instead, I remain intrigued by the potential for us to understand some of the ways in which all cultures have both derived meaning from sexual behaviors and engaged in a creative process to construct and imagine sexuality.

But I knew that the sources could present me with a dilemma. Although I surmised that I could find sexuality in the texts, I did not know the ways in which it might appear. Originally I wanted to analyze sexual behaviors and the relationship of those behaviors to broader categories of sexual identity, but I found little about either behavior or identity in Yucatec Maya documents. Instead I discovered more about the symbolic and ritualistic structures of sexual desire, and about the relationship of this desire to gender.<sup>1</sup>

Throughout my early years in graduate school, I scoured all the Yucatec texts I could find, excitedly trying to uncover anything related to sexuality. And immediately I did; I found discussion of sex, most prominently in anti-clerical petitions, but also in a wide variety of other documents. When I first mentioned my topic to Matthew Restall, he showed me a rather shocking Yucatec text which accused four priests of a wide variety of behaviors deemed illicit by the Catholic church.<sup>2</sup> As we analyzed this petition, it became quite a lesson on how much

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<sup>1</sup>Several previous works have focused on indigenous sexuality during the colonial period. For the most relevant items, see Burkhart 1989; Kellogg 1995; López Austin 1988; Ortega Noriega 1985 and 1992; Quezada 1975 and 1996; Schroeder, Wood, and Haskett 1997; Seminario de Historia de las Mentalidades 1982, 1988, 1989, and 2000; Sigal 2000, and Sousa 1998.

<sup>2</sup>Archivo General de la Nación, Inquisición (AGN-I) 1187, 2. See Restall 1997, pp. 330–331; Sigal 2000, pp. 64–65.

hides between the lines of any particular source.<sup>3</sup> We knew from the beginning that we could not read the document as a literal description of actual fact. Yet one could not easily dismiss the petition, for an unusual text can tell us much about normative acts, the vocabulary of sexual desire, and the limits of acceptable behavior.

The method that I have used throws light on the existence and importance of sexual categories and concepts to Mesoamerican peoples.<sup>4</sup> To give one brief example, the historical sections of the Yucatec *Books of Chilam Balam* discuss adultery relatively extensively: "The land was very lustful. There was excessive adultery."<sup>5</sup> This description, not likely to be an accurate account of rates of adultery for the period under question, can be used, in context, to tell us much about sexual concepts. For example, the connection between the land and lust, a common one throughout the *Books of Chilam Balam* and other texts, confirms a conclusion that I have derived from more ritualistic texts in both Yucatec and Nahuatl: Mesoamerican peoples connected sexuality with the fertility of the land. However, the text also reconfigures that connection, as here the lust of the land is not considered positive, for, in the story invented by our authors, the lust and adultery lead to the downfall of a series of Yucatec leaders.<sup>6</sup> Some types of sexual activity create a lustful land that then leads to destruction, while other sexual behaviors create appropriate fertility in the land, leading to the continuation of the life of the community and society. In no case, however, can we take the statements of the authors of these documents as actual fact about the prevalence of particular sexual acts (nor of the views of the indigenous peoples living in the time period described).

For the remainder of this article I will introduce the genres of documentation related to sexuality among Nahua and Yucatec peoples. In looking at a wide variety of genres, I find that each sheds sometimes unexpected light on the place of sexuality in society. The ritual medical documents, for example, ostensibly focus on something entirely different from sex, but sex enters the texts as a symbol that relates to the disease and/or the cure. As I introduce the genres, I will show both the problems and promises of each genre, after which I will provide an example of the methodology I use to "decode" the documents, to understand the often obscured place of sexuality in the text.

I use documents emanating from two different Mesoamerican groups to show that a series of trans-Mesoamerican similarities in sexual discourse exist. Cross-language research in the philology of indigenous-language texts has been little practiced, but it holds out great promise in any area of interest, especially with the many Mesoamerican sources which are not transparent in and of themselves. Such documents need to be held up to other related texts, including those produced in different languages. And, as we will see, we may gain knowledge from cross-language research even with texts that seem far more immediately tangible.

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<sup>3</sup>See the chapter "Between the Lines" in Lockhart 1999.

<sup>4</sup>On the complexities of sexual meaning in colonial texts, see Spivak 1988.

<sup>5</sup>*Libro de Chilam Balam de Tizimín*, f. 18v; Edmonson 1982, p. 62.

<sup>6</sup>Sigal 2000, pp. 86-88.

My interest in sexuality and my training in philology, queer theory, and postcolonial studies have allowed me to appreciate doubt, ambivalence, and critical distance. I argue that the texts we use provide a window into the cultural logic of Mesoamerican discourse. They provide a “smoking mirror,” if I may be permitted the use of a Nahua metaphor, an obscured view into a social structure long gone. Thus my analysis of the documents which discuss sexuality at no point attempts simply to reconstruct either the behaviors or the views the colonial Mesoamerican peoples. Rather I show in my scholarship that there exist many ways in which sexuality enters discourse—always mediated through the imaginations of our creative notaries and their clients. This entry into discourse allows me to suggest ways in which indigenous Mesoamerican authors imagined the relationship between sexual behaviors and their ever-changing world.

### **Genres of Sexualized Texts**

Here I analyze three genres of indigenous language texts (petitions, indigenous historical narratives, and ritual texts),<sup>7</sup> two genres of primarily Spanish-language texts (Spanish historical narratives and criminal trials), and the bilingual category of texts used for religious instruction (catechisms and confessional manuals).<sup>8</sup>

Petitions were intended to profess particular legal and political strategies, often meant simply to denigrate an enemy. Many Maya and Nahua petitions used sexuality to gain power over errant and/or unwanted priests and other local officials. The “shocking” petition that I mentioned above is simply an extreme example of this phenomenon. More representative are charges of priests violating their vows of celibacy through keeping concubines and/or seducing women in the confessional. Similarly, the petitioners accuse local officials, often indigenous men, of abusing the prerogatives of their offices to gain sexual access to women. On the surface most of these sources seem to stick quite close to the “reality” of the local situation, but often many things remain hidden. For example, the genre in both Nahuatl and Yucatec so consistently relates the same charges in very similar language that one can quickly make two deductions, both most likely somewhat accurate: first, priestly violations of vows of celibacy were extraordinarily widespread; and second, indigenous cabildos had a good idea of what charges the Inquisition would take seriously. In one example, leaders of several indigenous communities in Yucatan accuse their priest, Andrés Mejía, of unwarranted violence and the seduction of Maya women who had come to him to

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<sup>7</sup>For my purposes in this article, it is necessary to separate genres into categories that would not have made sense to the indigenous peoples of early Mesoamerica. For example, they would not have separated the ritual texts so clearly from the historical ones. Thus, the *Books of Chilam Balam* contain some sections that are more ritualized and other sections that are more historical, but the Maya would have considered all of them to be part of the same overall genre. On indigenous conceptions of time and history, see Enrique Florescano 1994.

<sup>8</sup>For the purpose of this article, I have excluded songs. This rich source presents unique difficulties of translation when it comes to the Nahuatl texts. I did, however, make use of songs written in Yucatec. At a later date, I will focus more on the Nahuatl songs, which have great potential for an analysis of sexuality.

confess. These charges later were recanted.<sup>9</sup> Rather than attesting to the reality of Mejía's violations, the petition signifies what elsewhere I have termed a strategic inversion of power.<sup>10</sup> Both Mayas and Nahuas, starting very early in the colonial period, used the rules of the Catholic church to overcome the power differential between themselves and the priests. Indigenous cabildos regularly utilized the Inquisition to assert their agency over clerics. Further, they used secular authorities to assert agency over errant indigenous governors and various people of African and/or Spanish descent. In these performances of power, both Nahuas and Mayas understood sexuality as a political tool.

The indigenous historical narratives provide a variety of information, comparable in certain ways to the Spanish chronicles of the conquest. As noted above, these narratives signify not actual representations of sexuality as it was performed in the past, but instead they assert a variety of moral principles. In the example of adultery, in order to portray that particular sexual behavior in a negative manner, the authors of the *Books of Chilam Balam* show that societies have fallen because of adulterers. Similarly, fray Bernardino de Sahagún's Nahuatl informants in the *Florentine Codex* argue that adultery causes societal decay. These narratives tend also to denigrate the sexual activities of perceived enemies and other outsiders. The *Books of Chilam Balam* question the sexual activity of Itzá invaders, representing them as, among other things, pederasts. One Nahuatl historical text calls certain mulattos "putos." The authors of these narratives denigrate outsiders and use sexuality to reinterpret, even manipulate, history. Thus they declare a fallen leader an adulterer. And Mexica warriors who fled the invading Spaniards are found sexually suspect. Hence the authors use sexuality to gain moral authority and political power. By rewriting history through the optic of a sexual lens, the Nahuas and Maya writing these narratives assert the moral superiority of the current community leaders, as contrasted with their predecessors and contemporary outsiders.

The Spanish-language historical narratives (including several written by indigenous peoples) also use sexuality to signify certain events and peoples. Some Spanish chronicles commonly charged indigenous peoples throughout the Americas with sodomy and sexual promiscuity. Still others argued that the indigenous peoples were sexually circumspect. While we cannot take these chronicles as factual representations of indigenous sexual activity, the debates in which Spaniards engaged can be instructive. For example, some authors (Gómara, Díaz) found that the Nahuas engaged in extensive sodomy, while others (Las Casas, Torquemada) believed the Nahuas relatively innocent when it came to same-sex sexual activity. In these debates the Spanish sources reveal as evidence the existence of several indigenous roles for men who engaged in sexual activity with other men. We can enlighten readers as to the purposes of these roles when we compare these sources with indigenous ritual and historical documents.<sup>11</sup> None of these historical texts, even when compared with each other, however, accurately depict sexual activity. They have particular political purposes in

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<sup>9</sup>AGN-I 69, 5.

<sup>11</sup>See Sigal forthcoming.

<sup>10</sup>Sigal 2000, pp. 73-79.

rereading and revising historical discourse, and in each case they use sexuality to do so. Thus my goal as a reader of these texts is to expose the political uses of sexuality, closely analyzing the role of the author in the construction of the narrative.

The documents that I call ritual texts, those that represent ceremonial activity, either through curing rites or through religious activities, come from the Yucatec *Books of Chilam Balam* and the *Ritual of the Bacabs*, and the Nahuatl *Florentine Codex* as well as a series of sources emanating from idolatry investigations. The narratives present a surprisingly cohesive (and trans-Mesoamerican) sexual cosmology, maintained from the time of the conquest through the middle of the seventeenth century. In these texts the Maya and the Nahuas both connect sexuality with the gods, the maintenance of society, and the fertility of the earth. They further relate all of these concepts to human sacrifice, a practice largely discontinued soon after the Spanish conquest. The sexual cosmology of the indigenous peoples continued well into the seventeenth century, even as the documents betray significant Spanish influence. For example, while the *Ritual of the Bacabs* invokes the preconquest gods, the text also mentions Jesus and the Virgin Mary (themselves sexualized), called upon using the same terms as with the other gods.<sup>12</sup> Each cure ends with an obligatory “amen.” The books of the *Florentine Codex*, collected and organized by a Franciscan friar, follow a distinctly European pattern of organization.

In my first book I most extensively analyzed these ritual texts, as they helped me to understand the broad outlines of a “cultural matrix” within which the Maya developed meanings from sexual behaviors. The sexual cosmology represented by the ritual texts presented me with an approximation of part of this cultural matrix. Here the texts, intentionally archaic, showed ceremonies which could be effective only if large numbers of people believed in their efficacy. The rites in the Nahuatl and Yucatec narratives discussed below emanate from rituals practiced primarily by commoners. The large-scale ceremonies shown in the *Books of Chilam Balam* and the *Florentine Codex*, by contrast, emanate from state-sponsored rituals run by nobles. The obscurity of such documents, however, mandates that we engage in extensive interpretation. In addition to focusing on the authors of these texts, first I reconstruct the various literary influences, both European and Mesoamerican, present in the texts. Second, I deconstruct the mythologies the ceremonies intend to present to their audiences. Finally, I work to uncover the relationship between a sexual discourse and the mythological structures presented in the texts. Throughout my analysis of the ritual texts, I constantly remember that the narratives only approximate the ceremonial discourse of the time—we, of course, cannot witness the ceremonies themselves.

In contrast with the ritual texts, the bilingual catechisms and confessional manuals have a well-known provenance and use, but little connection with traditional Mesoamerican cosmology. They form part of an effort to engage in a religious conquest, and thus primarily represent the views of the priests (in fact, the views of the few priests who wrote the manuals). The confessional manuals

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<sup>12</sup>See Sigal 2000, pp. 107–08.

are intended to control self-presentation, and they are particular types of colonial documents into which the indigenous peoples had little input. In fact, the priest intended the confessionals to alter indigenous notions of right and wrong, sin and self-control. Despite the lack of indigenous input into the catechisms and confessional manuals, the authors did engage in a creative process of revising the texts to deal with what they perceived as indigenous realities. These types of documents show slow, subtle changes in the ways in which the indigenous populations understood sin and the act of confession. They also show, importantly, that attempts at a conscious maneuver to engage in such a cultural conquest largely failed (neither Nahua nor Maya people understood either the clerical concept of sin or the proper place of Catholic confession). In analyzing these sources, I focus on the language of the texts in order to represent some approximation of the views of the priests and, more importantly, to signify a clerical discourse designed to insert the Catholic concept of sin into the indigenous cultural matrix.

The final genre, that of the criminal trial, is the one place in which we can discover something about daily sexual activity. In my research for my dissertation and first book, I avoided criminal trials, as I made a decision to analyze the broader parameters around which Yucatec peoples organized their thoughts about sexual desire. Thus I focused my attention on the relationship between sexuality, state formation, and religious discourse. I did this primarily because nothing had been written about Yucatec sexuality, and I believe that most importantly we need to understand the cultural implications of sexual desire. In the Nahua case, several scholars have begun to analyze the history of sexuality, so I have greater latitude. The criminal trials in the Nahua region pay a great deal of attention to sexual violence and adultery. There we see patterns of behavior, often signifying the tensions within any particular community. Yet we cannot assume that these trials represent norms of activity, because they signify the “margins” and show the influence of the Spanish legal system. The acts shown are beyond the outer limits of acceptable behavior in Nahua society. Indigenous peoples knew how to manipulate the system, and they developed arguments for legal success. However, in coordination with the other genres, the criminal trials present examples of behaviors that can be analyzed as significant acts which challenge family and/or community cohesion. So, when a criminal trial presents a case in which a Nahua woman is killed for her alleged adultery, I can analyze that case based on my notion of Nahua cultural norms, a notion developed out of my reading of a series of Nahuatl texts. Rather than suggesting that such a case signifies some universal trans-historical form of gender contestation, I show ways in which it re-signifies a particular social construct related to marriage and sexual relations outside of marriage. I analyze the criminal trials as another form of sexual discourse in which indigenous people create a narrative to mediate their relationships with each other and with the colonial state.

### **A Method**

In my interpretive framework and methodology, I analyze the specific sources, down to the level of individual words and even in some cases syllables

within words. This method allows me to discuss the structure of the language. For texts that Spaniards translated, I find the meanings hidden behind the translations of Maya and Nahuatl terms into Spanish. The act of translation was a cultural process in which meanings were necessarily altered, and the priests, notaries and other linguistic intermediaries often did not accurately translate indigenous social realities into Spanish. By reading and retranslating the Nahuatl and Yucatec sources, I distinguish the presence of indigenous cultural norms. With both Spanish and indigenous-language documents, I provide extensive analysis and contextualization by, for example, discussing the *Florentine Codex* in the context of the various sources upon which it was based. I find classical European texts, pre-conquest Nahuatl codices, and medieval religious documents which relate to the production of the *Codex*. I then analyze the various components of any particular part of the text in order to uncover its relationship with Nahua and Spanish historical realities and literary genres.

Here I present one example of my methodology, in which I engage in a philological analysis of a particular ritual text, providing it with a cross-cultural and cross-language context, then deconstructing particular aspects of the sexual myth structure which the narrative develops. This text emanates from both a Nahuatl and a Maya document. Both the anonymous *Ritual of the Bacabs* and Hernando Ruiz de Alarcón's *Treatise on the Heathen Superstitions that Today Live Among the Indians Native to this New Spain* are obscure collections of texts with little to provide any context.<sup>13</sup> Although Ruiz de Alarcón provides some commentary for the Nahuatl documents, the Maya texts have no such contextualization. Further, Ruiz's analysis of the texts is full of such intense condemnation that one needs to use great care in analyzing his commentary.

Both of the documents provide extensive discussion of sex, and they relate sexuality directly to a complex set of fertility rituals. Both texts were produced in the early seventeenth century. The Yucatec text was anonymous, but it appears to have emanated from several different related documents (recopied in the same hand), each of which was designed to accompany a shaman or curer as he or she performed his or her duties. Little is known of the history or provenance of the *Ritual of the Bacabs*. The Nahuatl and Spanish document produced by Ruiz has more context, telling us that it comes from testimonies that he collected while in Guerrero. Ruiz attempted to document the "heathen superstitions" of the people of New Spain in order, presumably, to aid in the eradication of such superstitions. He transcribed and translated the texts, and he added a significant amount of commentary. He also greatly influenced the textual production (at several points he says that he does not reproduce the original text for the sake of protecting his readers from improper language and influence).<sup>14</sup>

One set of documents presents cures for scorpion stings. The Maya text relates the scorpion to the penis-piercing ritual:

The scorpion's statement is for its stinger . . . . You take your grand-

<sup>13</sup>The *Ritual of the Bacabs* has been published in Roys 1965 and Arzápalo Marín 1987. For Ruiz de Alarcón see the 1984 edition by Andrews and Hassig.

<sup>14</sup>For example, Ruiz de Alarcón 1984, p. 133.

mother's virginal needle and introduce it into your penis with your grandmother's virginal fire. This will introduce pain into your penis . . . . This is your penis; this is the genealogy of your mother and your father.<sup>15</sup> As I have shown elsewhere, this document incorporates penis piercing as a sacrificial and fertility ritual.<sup>16</sup>

The text ostensibly presents a cure for scorpion stings. Like other similar sources, it uses an incantation which engages in some communication with the scorpion itself and with supernatural forces. The bulk of the document provides the instructions for the penis-piercing ritual. The curer uses the needle, or stingray spine, to pierce the foreskin of the penis, which sheds extensive amounts of blood. That shedding of blood allows the curer to engage in visions in which he sees and communicates with the gods.<sup>17</sup> Here the curer demands that the gods get rid of the scorpion sting. So the penis, signified elsewhere in this and other rituals as a penetrator, itself is pierced by the stingray spine, a possession of the "grandmother," a description commonly used for the Moon Goddess. This reversal in which the penis pierces and is itself pierced by the possession of a female deity signifies the necessary gender duality and parallelism present in traditional Maya religion.<sup>18</sup>

In a related Nahuatl text, Ruiz de Alarcón provides us with more context for the scorpion. The document recalls a Nahua myth in which the scorpion was created. This is one of the most telling incantations in the treatise, as it symbolizes the seduction of men by women. Here Xochiquetzal, the Nahua goddess, seduces a man and turns him into a harmless scorpion.<sup>19</sup> She says to him:

My older Brother, Yappan, I have come. I, your older sister, Xochiquetzal, have come to greet you.

After establishing this kinship connection, Xochiquetzal then engages in sexual activity with the man, Yappan. The man in the text was to become a powerful and deadly being and, in order for the transition to take place properly, he could not have sex.<sup>20</sup> He eventually was seduced by Xochiquetzal, after two other goddesses failed to do so. After the seduction, a man/god, Yaotl, guarding Yappan, says:

Are you not ashamed, priest, Yappan, because you have ruined things? For however long you will live upon the earth, you will be able to do nothing upon the earth, you will be able to achieve nothing. The commoners will call you "Scorpion." Indeed I have called you, I name you "Scorpion."

Yaotl then cuts off the scorpion's head, and we are told that "because of Yappan's having sinned, the goddess Citlalcueye decided that all those who were stung by a scorpion would not die."<sup>21</sup>

<sup>15</sup>Arzápalo Marín 1987 (facsimile), ff. 160–162; Roys 1965, pp. 54–55; Arzápalo Marín 1987, pp. 385–86. Roys translates this text very differently. He does not interpret the double entendres. Nor does he translate much of the document, because he believes it simply related to the concept of "curses."

<sup>16</sup>See Sigal 2000.

<sup>17</sup>See Schele and Freidel 1990; Sigal 2000.

<sup>18</sup>See also Sigal 2000.

<sup>19</sup>Ruiz de Alarcón 1984, p. 204.

<sup>20</sup>Elsewhere I analyze this text more extensively. See my "The Erotic Goddess and the Phallic Scorpion: Maya and Nahua Rituals," unpublished manuscript.

<sup>21</sup>Ruiz de Alarcón 1984, pp. 204–205. The quote is on 205.

Xochiquetzal seduced and deceived Yappan. She was an extremely powerful being, one who used her femininity to demand that the man/scorpion adhere to her wishes. She defeated him, and then Yaotl castrated him.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, both the Nahuatl and the Yucatec texts present castration as a vital element of the ritual. The Maya text shows a penis-piercing ceremony in which the pierced member signifies the power of the person pierced: he can engage in the cure for the scorpion sting. The Nahuatl text presents a ceremony in which the cutting off of Yappan's head leads to his loss of power. The inherent contradiction, however, is resolved by the texts themselves: the scorpion is beheaded in both texts and in both this animal loses its power. The men who gain power, the curer in the Maya text and Yaotl in the Nahuatl text, symbolize the warrior complex of Mesoamerican societies. They are the powerful men in the societies, and they will engage in castration, both simulated through the penis-piercing ritual and literal through the cutting off of the (phallic) head of the scorpion. The assertion at the end of the Maya text, "this is your penis," signifies the phallic nature of the scorpion itself.

The power in the Nahuatl text moves from Yappan to the goddesses to Yaotl. Yappan begins the document in a move to become an extraordinary being with the ability to destroy human life. He instead becomes a simple scorpion. The goddesses begin the text with little power, as they cannot dissuade Yappan from his course of action. Xochiquetzal changes that by using sexual desire, here seen as her most powerful attribute, to attract Yappan and cause him to fail. She also uses a fictive kinship connection with Yappan<sup>23</sup> in order to symbolically represent her authority. Finally, Yaotl himself begins the text as a simple guard for Yappan, but later chastises him and cuts off his head. Yaotl's transformation signifies the power of the warrior. Thus the goddesses maintain their power and protect the community through sexuality, while Yaotl aids them through violence.

Both texts demand gender parallelism. They require both male and female actors in order to prevent the scorpion from killing. In fact, in both texts, female power seems to predominate. The lineage of the grandmother/goddess controls much of the Maya text, and she possesses all of the implements used to engage in the penis piercing ritual. In the other text, the Nahua goddesses engage in the most important actions to prevent Yappan from gaining power. Yaotl's actions are subsumed under the more pertinent acts of the goddesses. Both documents see the ritual power of feminine sexuality as immense.

Neither Ruiz de Alarcón nor the anonymous Maya scribes can be considered blank slates—they all influenced the re-production of the scorpion story based on their own imaginative and interpretive frameworks. Ruiz places this text in a treatise related to curing, and he makes his framework clear as he calls the curer

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<sup>22</sup>The man's head, which Yaotl cuts off, is explicitly linked to the penis. Further, the scorpion is later called *Pelxayaqueh*, which is a metaphor for the penis. Ruiz de Alarcón 1984, p. 208. I am currently in the process of writing an article on the castration complex and the scorpion. Implicit in both Maya and Nahua rituals, castration had important phallic connotations, but clearly these connotations differed from the castration complex in modern Western psychoanalytic literature.

<sup>23</sup>She is not really his older sister. This is simply a respectful form of address.

“one who has a pact with the devil.”<sup>24</sup> The Maya authors, while they have a more obscured presence in the texts, clearly want to assert their own knowledge related to curing rituals. The logical consistency of the myth and the support of other ritual sources show that the portrayal of gender and sexuality, however, was influenced as much by the cultural imaginary of a broader sector of Mesoamerican peoples as by the particular goals of the authors. Thus extirpation, curing, the power of the curers, and the cosmological connection between sexual behavior and the gods each forms part of the story of the ritual text.

### **Concluding Remarks**

The ritual documents are formal texts that provide information about a broad mythological discourse. They present a clear case of gender complementarity which much of Mesoamerican society maintained throughout the colonial years.<sup>25</sup> The concurrent use of the Yucatec and Nahuatl texts leads to my significant interpretation about rituality and gender parallelism across Mesoamerica. The scorpion was a rather esoteric symbol of sexual desire. The Maya and the Nahuas had a set of symbols regarding gender complementarity, symbols dependent on the structure of heterosexual intercourse and its role in creation and fertility. The mythology of both groups gave some importance to castration. In both cases, goddesses and women were perceived to have great symbolic and ritualistic powers.

The Yucatec scorpion text is so obscure as to be virtually indecipherable without the aid of the Nahuatl document. With the help of the Nahuatl text, however, the symbolic structure of Yucatec lineage and kinship, the importance of castration, and the relationship between the scorpion and sexual desire become clear. Further, the Maya text allows us to interpret its Nahuatl counterpart by showing us the connection between blood rituals, the piercing of the penis, and the mythology of the scorpion.

These highly ritualized texts would hardly seem good examples of the influence of colonization. Yet both documents present a variety of postconquest innovations. The Maya text’s discussion of virginity relates to postconquest concepts of sexuality. The context of extirpation was evident in Ruiz de Alarcón’s act of collecting the text. Indeed, the historical context points out the importance of my methodological framework. As a graduate student, I became interested in history primarily because the methods within ethnohistory present us with a critical edge in which we can discern the always mediated historical indigenous voice. My analysis of the ritual texts provides an example: indigenous myths and rituals are filtered through the minds and quills of (perhaps) fickle notaries, powerful curers, and ambitious priests. By taking apart the filtering mechanisms, we approximate the voice of the indigenous informant.

Our interpretation of the documents can be extraordinarily misleading unless we begin by “reading between the lines,” engaging in a close textual analysis, followed by an interpretation of the metaphors and symbolic representations presented. The potential for this work, particularly when supported by a comparative examination, is enormous, as this type of method can alter not only our know-

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<sup>24</sup>Ruiz de Alarcón 1984, p. 157.

<sup>25</sup>See Sousa 1998.

ledge of sexuality among the indigenous peoples of early Mexico, but more broadly such an analysis can change the ways in which the history of sexuality may be written and the paths we must take in order to confront issues related to sexual desire.

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