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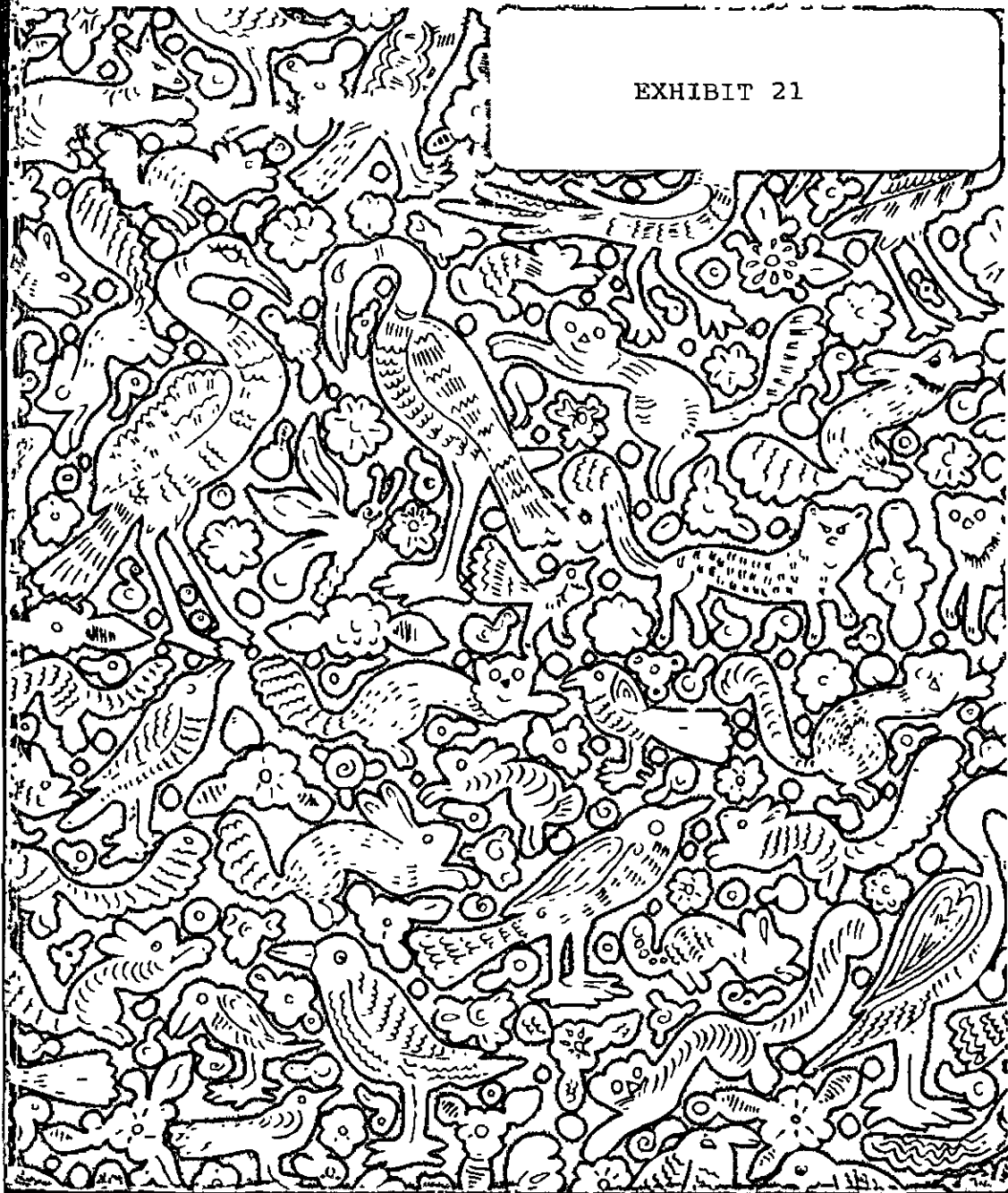
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NEWSCHOLAR

AN AMERICANIST REVIEW

VOLUME EIGHT

EXHIBIT 21



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SUBSCRIPTIONS *New Scholar* is published biannually in the Fall and Spring. Subscription rates are \$32 for institutions; individuals, \$16. Subscriptions outside the United States should add US \$4 per year for postage. Address all subscription matters, back issue orders, and change of address notices to the Business Manager, *New Scholar*, South Hall 4607, University of California, Santa Barbara, Santa Barbara, California 93106.

Appropriate articles and reviews are abstracted in ABC POL SCI, *America: History and Life*, *The American Humanities Index*, *Chicano Periodical Index*, ERIC/ChESS, *Historical Abstracts*, *Psychological Abstracts*, and *Sociological Abstracts*. A microfilm edition of the journal is available from Xerox University Microfilms, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106.

The generous assistance of the College of Letters and Science at the University of California, Santa Barbara is acknowledged and the collaboration of the Committee on Hispanic Civilization and the Center for Chicano Studies, UCSB. Thanks are also extended to the Printing and Reprographics Department of UCSB for composition.

This number constitutes volume 8, nos. 1 & 2 entire

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ISSN 0028-6613

The Vagina Dentata Motif In Nahuatl and Pueblo Mythic Narratives: A Comparative Study

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One of the basic problems of working with pre-Columbian literary comparisons is the irreparable loss of so much material. Extensive transcribed fragments of Nahuatl pre-conquest literature do exist, but there are, as far as we know, no extant Pueblo manuscripts of corresponding age. There are, however, the narrative myth bowls which illustrated the prevailing pre-Columbian Pueblo myths.¹ While it is a commonplace that the sixteenth century burning of the ancient Aztec and Mayan books was disastrous, it is becoming increasingly apparent that the breakage of ancient Pueblo pottery by twentieth century treasure hunters (who use bulldozers) is equally disastrous to comparative studies of pre-Columbian culture. But we still do have some comparable literary fragments from both the northern and the southern cultures, and through them we can draw some parallels between the surviving Mesoamerican literature (recorded by Spanish churchmen in the sixteenth century) and the surviving Pueblo literature (recorded by American anthropologists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries).

While the cultural affiliations between Mesoamerica and the American Southwest, what Di Peso calls the Gran Chichimeca, are not fully understood,² their literatures contain some very definite correspondences that would appear to derive more from diffusion than from coincidence. Numerous and undeniable narrative parallels appear in the myths of these northern and southern peoples, but from the host of similar characters, plots, and motifs, this pilot study will illuminate the parallels found only in the motifs of the vagina dentata and ghost pursuit.

Thompson records some thirty instances of the Vagina Dentata scattered throughout the recorded literature of North American Indians,³ and the fact that it was a motif of Pueblo literature as early as 1050 A.D. is demonstrated by its explicit depiction on the Mimbres myth

bowls. In one of these myth bowls, the central male and female figures are faithfully depicted in the act of copulation while six smaller figures stand decorously around the rim of the bowl with ceremonial bows and arrows and prayer sticks (Figure 1). Many Mimbres bowls contain scenes of copulation, but the significance of this particular bowl is that the club-like male member is inside a vagina carefully surrounded by teeth. There is little doubt that we have in this black-on-white pottery food bowl an eleventh century Pueblo illustration of the toothed vagina.

1050 A.D. is the date Di Peso fixes for the appearance of "Quetzalcoatl cultists" at Casas Grandes in Chihuahua, Hachita, Cerrillos, and Chaco Canyon in New Mexico. These cultists of the Plumed Serpent, it seems, came into some form of economic and cultural competition with the earlier "Tezcatlipoca cultists" who had appeared about 150 years earlier and had settled further west in the Gila-Colorado-Sonora lowlands. The Mimbres people fall precisely between these two cultural apportionments, and reach their fullest development (ca. 1100) about the time when such cultural competition must have been in its apogee.



Figure 1. Mimbres bowl in an anonymous private collection. Drawn from a photograph in the Western New Mexico State University Museum.

No manuscripts have survived from this period, however, and all recorded versions of pre-Columbian myth in Mexico come to us from sixteenth and seventeenth century manuscript redactions. Unfortunately, as in the case of the Mimbres bowls, it is a fragmented record. All such manuscripts were prepared by Christian priests, by students directly under their supervision, or, late in the sixteenth century, by Indian scholars whose formal education had been thoroughly Hispanic. The Church's first attitude toward indigenous mythic narrative was that it came of demonic origin and should, therefore, be eradicated as thoroughly as possible. Even the later curiosity of churchmen concerning indigenous thought and beliefs was largely motivated by concern to better prepare priests for combating those beliefs. Consequently, students and scholars who took interest in pre-Cortesian oral texts tended to record only that which they felt had some clear "historical" quality, abbreviating or disregarding all other texts. Typical of this attitude is the statement with which Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl, grandson of the Nahua Prince Nezahualpilli of Tetzaco, prefaces his "Summary Relation":

(I shall not) treat of the fables and fictions which appear in some of their histories, being superfluous things.⁴

We will never know how many myth texts of Ixtlilxochitl's ancestors were lost during the course of the sixteenth century as a result of this attitude. Texts with erotic or sexually explicit details we can assume never found their way into script or print.

Not that Nahua society was sexually "liberated;" it was in fact universally repressive in matters of sex, punishing adultery with death and homo-eroticism with vicious torture. A number of Nahuatl stories do survive, however, in which erotic elements play some part: the seduction of Quetzalpetatl by her drunken brother Ce Acatl Quetzalcoatl (an event more implied than clearly stated) in the *Anales de Cuauhtitlan* is probably the most significant. The apparition of Tezcatlipoca in Tollan as a naked Huastecan chili-vendor whose splendid endowments incite a fury of desire in the daughter of King Huemac (*Codice Florentino*); the demand of the same Huemac for a Nonoalcan woman measuring at least four hands across the hips (*Historia Tolteca-Chicimeca* — a demand which led to war in Tollan and the death of Huemac) are other sex related incidents that come immediately to mind. But nowhere in the Nahuatl texts do we find expression of the vagina dentata motif with the explicit detail of the Mimbres bowl.

There is, however, one brief narrative in the so-called "Legend of the Suns" manuscript of 1558 (Part III of the *Codice Chimalpopoca*) which contains a transmuted version of the vagina dentata motif, a narrative which turns out to have considerable value in deciphering psycho-historical impluses for a key feature of late Aztec-Chichimec culture: the ritual "War of Flowers" in which sacrificial prisoners were captured. This story, untitled in the manuscript and which we identify as "Xiuhnel,

Mimich and the Star Demon", is the only extant Nahuatl narrative text which makes an explicit link between any erotic incident and human sacrifice, and several considerations make clear that it is a version of the charter myth by which at least some of the Chichimec peoples justified the frenetic outburst of militarism and sacrificial warfare which they initiated in the Mexican Altiplano during the tenth to thirteenth centuries. The full text of the story, which has a history of minute but crucial mis-translations,⁶ follows:

There came down two deer, each with two heads, and also these two *misoa* (cloud serpents), the first called Xiuhnel and the second called Mimich, hunting there in Godland (the desert area to the north of the Valley of Mexico, from which the Chichimecs were thought to have migrated).

Xiuhnel and Mimich pursued the two deer, trying to shoot them. A night and a day they pursued them and by sunset had tired them. Then they consulted one another and said, "You make a hut here and I'll make myself one over there."

Ah, soon came the malicious ones!

And then out came they who were deer, who had become women. They came calling, "Dear Xiuhnel, Dear Mimich; where are you? Come. Come to drink, come to eat."

And when they heard them then they said to one another, "Don't answer them."

But then Xiuhnel called and said to them, "You come here, my elder sister."

Then she said to him, "Dear Xiuhnel, drink."

And Xiuhnel then drank the blood, then immediately lay down beside her.

And when he laid her down, then she turned herself face down upon him, then she devoured him, tore open his breast.

And then Mimich said, "Tyo! My brother is eaten!"

And the other woman was still standing and calling, "My lover, eat."

But Mimich did not call her.

And then he took the firesticks and lit a fire, and when he had lit it, then Mimich hurriedly threw himself into it.

The woman, pursuing him, also entered the fire.

She followed him there the entire night, until noon the following day.

And then at noon he descended into a thorny barrel cactus, fell into it, and the woman fell down after him.

And when he saw the star-demon had fallen, he shot her repeatedly.

Only then could he turn back.

Then he returned, parting and tying up his hair, painting his face and weeping for his elder brother who had been eaten.

Then the gods heard him, the fire-gods, and they went to bring the

woman, Itzpapalotl; Mimich went in the lead.

And they took her and then burned her.

Then she burst open; First she blossomed into the blue flint; Thus the second time she blossomed into the white flint, and then they took the white, then they wrapped it in a bundle.

And thus the third time she blossomed into the yellow flint; no one took it, they only looked.

And so the fourth time she blossomed into the red flint; no one took this either.

Thus the fifth time she blossomed into the black flint; no one took this either.

And Mixcoatl then took the white flint for a god, then wrapped it then carried it in a bundle.

Then he went off to make war in a place called Comallan.

He went off carrying the flint, his goddess Itzpapalotl.⁷

Mixcoatl, "Cloud-Serpent," is the god-man Ur-father regarded by most Chichimec tribes as the priest and chieftan who first led them into the Valley of Mexico from the north. In the narrative which follows this story in the manuscript, he goes on to become the father of One Reed Quetzalcoatl, the great Toltec-Chichimec god-man of Tula, so revered by all Nahua peoples. This little episode of the unfortunate Xiuhnel and his terrified brother clearly indicates that the "star-demon" (*itzizimiltl*), who goes through her transformations from a double-headed deer to two deer, to two women, to one woman, is actually the goddess Itzpapalotl, "Obsidian Butterfly." Further, it is clear that the story is meant to explain how this goddess, as a chunk of white flint, became Mixcoatl's patron-goddess, and therefore a patroness of all Chichimecs.

The star-demon Itzpapalotl eats Chichimecs and is also their patroness. Mimich escapes by fleeing through fire. Burned herself, she becomes flint, the raw material of weapons and sacrificial knives. Taking her up, Mixcoatl goes immediately off to war. Three other brief textual references confirm these implicit suggestions that this were-deer "star-demon" was a dominating numen of early Chichimec consciousness, and in her "terrible mother" aspect had much to do with the initiation of the *xochiyaoyotl* or "Flower Warfare," ritual battles designed to provide prisoners for sacrifice. Two of these passages occur in Part I of the same Codice Chimalpopoca which contains the "Legend of the Suns," the Annals of Cuauhtitlan, a treasure-trove of Chichimec history, myth, and legend, and source of the finest Quetzalcoatl narrative surviving in Nahuatl. At two different places in these Annals the goddess Itzpapalotl addresses her people with direct ritual mandates for human sacrifice. The first comes in the very opening lines of the manuscript and is fragmented because of manuscript deterioration:

"And when you have gone to shoot in the four directions place them in the hands of the Lord of Fire (Xiuhcutli), the old, old God (Huehuetectli) whom three will guard: Mixcoatl, Tozpan, Ihuitl."

These are the names of the three hearthstones. In this way Itzpapalotl instructed the Chichimecs.⁸

The second passage in the same manuscript makes clear that it is arrows, i.e. war, that are to be shot in the four directions, that "them" are prisoners of war, and placing them "in the hands of the Lord of Fire" means sacrifice by fire:

And then you will go to the east
where you will shoot arrows,
likewise to the Godland in the north
you will shoot arrows,
likewise in the Region of Thorns
you will shoot arrows,
likewise in the irrigated Flowerland
you will shoot arrows,
and when you have gone to shoot,
have caught up to the gods —
the green, the yellow, the white, the red;
eagle, jaguar, serpent, rabbit,
then you will place those who will be
guardians of Xiuhtecuitli
Tozpan and Ihuitl and Xiuhnel.

There you will burn your captives.⁹

The third text demonstrates that this "Obsidian Butterfly" figure, syncretized with the ancient Toltec mother-numen, Teteo Innan, "Mother of the Gods," produced the late "terrible mother" figure of the Aztecs, Coatlicue. This text, Hymn 4 in the appendix of Book II of the *Florentine Codex*, is too long for quotation and commentary here, but the following lines from the close of the hymn make clear how thoroughly Itzpapalotl had become identified with the figure of the Mother of Gods herself in late Nahua-Chichimec religious consciousness. The hymn is specifically addressed to Teteo Innan and entitled "her song."

Ahuiya! O Goddess upon the barrel cactus,
Our Mother, Aya, Itzpapalotl.
Xoh! Aya, let us look on her;
on the Nine Plains
she fed on the hearts of deer.
Our Mother, Aya, Lady of the Earth.
Xoh! With new chalk, new plumes,
are you anointed;
in the four directions arrows are broken.
Xoh! To the deer transformed;
Across the Godland to behold you
come Xiuhnel and Mimich.¹⁰

In other words, the little narrative of "Xiuhnel, Mimich and the Star Demon" describes how a figure central to mythic justification of sacrificial warfare, an institution of great importance in late Nahua society, came into being, came to Chichimec consciousness. It is our observation

that this consciousness springs from an explicitly erotic fantasy which is, in fact, a transmuted fantasy of the vagina dentata.

The metaphoric figure of vagina as mouth is, in the wonderful algebra of the unconscious, a reversible equation (the irrationality of the unconscious breaks down the discriminating faculty which distinguishes analogy from equality in a figure of imagination). As Freud pointed out many times, in the unconscious opposites are equal. Vagina as mouth, mouth as vagina — there is no difference in that dream-like state of pre-consciousness from which mythic narrative emerges. Eliade points out that this vagina dentata reversal motif is especially prevalent throughout world mythology in Earth Mother figures:

A number of South American iconographic motifs represent the mouth of Mother Earth as a vagina dentata. . . . It is important to note that the ambivalence of the chthonian Great Mother is sometimes expressed, mythically and iconographically, by identifying her mouth with the vagina dentata.¹¹

The figure of Teteo Innan, as the line "Our Mother, Aya, Lady of the Earth" demonstrates, is an Earth Mother figure par excellence, as are the syncretic figures which derive from her.

In "Xiuhnel and Mimich" we find a specific instance of this vagina dentata reversal. Xiuhnel responds to a coy sexual invitation in the darkness but in the moment of possession the deer-woman-demon reverses the situation and eats him, then seeks to consume Mimich with the same trick. In all the later Nahua goddesses derived from the syncretism of the Mother of the Gods and this voracious Obsidian Butterfly, the mouth continues to be an obsessive feature. Cihuacoatl ("Snake Woman"), an avatar of the Aztec Coatlicue ("Skirts of Snakes") is described by Father Durán as ". . . the main goddess . . . revered and greatly exalted in Mexico, Tezcoco, and all the land."¹² Sahagún's informants list her first among the Nahua female deities, and suggest that she is foremost in potentiality.¹³ The informant of Durán particularly remembered the open mouth and ferocious teeth of the idol, and the drawings which accompany the text emphasize that feature (Figure 2). She was a voracious idol, and many prisoners fell victim to her appetite. Fire sacrifice was a feature of her ritual, and numerous details identify her also with the earth.

The priests went once a week to visit the sovereigns and warn them that the goddess was famished. Then the rulers provided the repasts; a captive taken in war, to be eaten by the goddess. He was led to the temple and delivered to the priests, who took the prisoner and thrust him into the chamber of Cihuacoatl. He was slain in the usual way: his heart was extracted and offered up. They also ripped off a part of his thigh, casting the body outside crying out loudly, "Take this for it has been gnawed on!" feigning that the goddess had spoken. The priests outside lifted the dead body, considering it to be the "leftovers" of the goddess. It was

given back to the owner for having fed the goddess. . . . This ceremony was performed every eight days. I explained that in pictures the goddess was always shown with a large open mouth. She was always famished, and thus in this temple and in honor of this goddess more men were slain than in any other.¹⁴ (Emphasis added.)



Figure 2. Cihuacoatl (From the *Atlas of Durán*).

This description of a central temple ritual at the height of the Aztec period (early sixteenth century) solidly confirms a link in Aztec-Chichimec consciousness between oral fixation and human sacrifice, a link whose genesis we find described in the little narrative of Xiuhnel and Mimich. Mimich escapes, but since this tale became a tribal myth, it must have been understood that in some sense the goddess, transformed to the multicolored flints into which her body blossomed, continued to pursue all Chichimecs, a pursuit which required ritual defense.

Among the Zuni Pueblo Ruth Benedict recorded in the 1930s extensive versions of similar myths in which female figures pursue men. These tales likewise involve two brothers, known in Zuni as the Ahaiyute or Little War Twins, who were also among the favorite protagonists in the eleventh century Mimbres myth bowls. In one tale, the twins have been warned by their grandmother to stay away from an evil old woman near Twin Buttes, but they go despite the warning and meet the old woman who combs their hair and then sends them out for firewood.

A little later the boys come back, each with an armload of wood, and the old woman made a fire and put lots of stones in the fire to make them hot. She put a big cooking pot on the fire and filled it with water. The two boys piled wood on the fire to make it burn hard, and the stones got red hot and the water boiled. Then she said to the Elder Brother, "Sit here on my left side." She combed their hair again, and after a while she bit the neck of the elder brother, and he died, and then she bit the neck of the younger one and killed him too.¹⁵

As with the Nahuatl myth, this act of the female biting the male becomes associated with implicit sexual fears. But the Pueblo myth continues; the Ahaiyute are immortal, and their souls go out of their bodies as the old woman boils one and bakes the other between two hot stones. As she comes back to eat the cooked meat, the souls of the twins plague her by shouting from water jugs or cooking pots that the meat has been defiled by excrement or urine. In her anger, the old woman breaks bowl after bowl until the two brothers at last go into her nostrils, scratch the inside of her nose until she begins to sneeze. Then she coughs, and finally dies.

After she was dead the two Ahaiyute came out of her nose. The old woman lay there dead. Then they took an arrow point and skinned her from her feet up, and left the body in the house. They went out and got grass and weeds and brought them back to the house and stuffed them into the old woman's skin. They stuffed it full and sewed up the feet. They put her dress on it, and it was just like the old woman. They put a stick in each leg and tied a belt around the waist.¹⁶

They leave the body standing in a corner while they go through the old woman's house, into four rooms, and finally pass the fourth room into

another world. In this other world, they wander into a village, steal ceremonial lightning and thunder-making equipment from the people, who wake up and chase them back to the old woman's house. "The people could not catch them, but they said, 'Never mind, we will get you some day.' "

The Ahaiyute then take the stuffed body of the old woman and tie it to the elder brother who runs as if the old woman were chasing him. The younger brother runs ahead, shouting to his grandmother that the evil woman is about to catch his brother. The grandmother runs out, smashes the old woman's head with a stone as the twins laugh, pointing out that the body is already dead, and add, "That old woman was mean, so we killed her. We kill everyone who kills people and now the people need not be afraid any more, because we have killed all the monsters in this country." But despite this assurance, as in the Nahuatl myth, the continued pursuit of the Zuni immortals, and hence of the Zuni peoples, by the old woman's avatars has been established.

In a variant of this tale, the old woman is identified as Atocle Woman who delouses the twins before she bites their necks and roasts them. Again, their voices call out that she has eaten dung, and she ejects the boys by sneezing, upon which she falls dead.

Upon being killed, like all *kachinas* (immortals) she became a deer. They stole all her rainmaking ceremonial objects and stuffed her as a huge deer to fool their grandmother.¹⁷

In yet another myth, the twins meet the "toothed vagina" more explicitly; in this story, their grandmother warns them specifically to stay away from eight girls living nearby with their grandmother, saying, "Don't go there. They have teeth in their vaginas. They will cut you and you will die." Of course, the twins decide to visit the girls despite the warning, and in preparation make themselves false penises of oak and hickory. Since there are eight girls, the twins invite the six young *Lehaci* and their grandfather along, and when the girls and their grandmother urge the group to lie with them,

All the men took out their false members. They used them cohabiting. They broke the teeth from the women's vaginas. The blood ran. When the oak members were worn out, they put them aside and took the hickory ones. By daylight the teeth of these women were all worn out. They were broken in pieces. . . . These women never killed men any more.¹⁸

This is the myth depicted on the earlier mentioned *Mimbres* bowl with the seven figures involved in copulation (Figure 1 — the Ahaiyute were often seen as a single character in many of the tales, and hence the seven painted characters would be the six *Lehaci* and the Ahaiyute). *Mimbres* potter-story-tellers generally depicted the penis as a bar with a circle head, but in this particular bowl, the penis is very definitely clubbed, hockey-stick shaped, and thus the design focuses on the false members fashioned of oak and hickory.

One further myth of the Ahaiyute concerning copulation and then pursuit by the female exists in a number of versions in which the twins have intercourse with a girl (often a number of girls in succession who then become the same girl) whom they afterwards shoot full of arrows. She, however, pursues them as a ghost, asking in each *kiva* she passes where her husbands are. As in the Nahuatl narrative, the "toothed vagina" is not specified here, but the ghost pursuit by the female is so terrifying to both the twins and the people with whom they seek protection that it becomes dramatically implicit in the role reversal and female pursuit itself. In the myth, the twins go from *kiva* to *kiva* until at last in the Knife Society they are admonished for having killed the girl but are then given a stone knife and a war club with which to dispatch the ghost. They are instructed to scalp the girl, lay her on her back with the injunction to count the stars, a task she can never finish, and then to return to the *kiva* with the scalp for use in ceremonies, a tale which is given as the charter for scalping ritual and ceremonial societies.¹⁹

In all of these myths and their variants, both Pueblo and Mesoamerican, we have static narrative parallels appearing with great clarity and regularity. While not every myth contains all of the elements, when they do appear, these narrative elements almost always appear in the same order,²⁰ and may be summarized as: The initial curiosity of the male (generally two brothers), the deer to woman (or woman to deer as in the *kachina*/deer complex), the devouring of the male by the female, the pursuit of the male by the female (or pursuit by the female's followers or possibly even the pretended pursuit), the fear that comes with the pursuit, the use of fire sacrifice in some form, the explosion (or sneeze as a form of explosion), the flint — as arrow point, stone knife, or flakes of stone — and the preservation of the body or some memento of it (or transformation of it) for ceremonial purposes. In every case, the basic thrust of the narrative seems to be the terror generated in the male by the pursuit of the female, and in both Chichimec and Pueblo versions, the tale is used to provide a charter for some type of ritual murder.

While *Mimich* and the Ahaiyute escape the pursuing female, there is the suggestion in all of the myths that either the transformed evil woman, or her followers from the other world, will continue the pursuit. If this fantasy was adopted as representative of some enduring anxiety (otherwise we would not have the myth), then some answer, some response to or appeasement of the evil was needed. *Mimich* in the Nahua myth has been provided with fire (for escape as well as a medium of ritual protection) and with a flint goddess to which he can direct his ceremonial offerings. The Ahaiyute have been presented with rain-making equipment, scalps, the stuffed body of the vanquished woman, flint again in the arrow points and the ritual stone knife, and the wooden male members, all of which become ceremonial.

¹⁹ But since a death had to result (the death of *Xiuhnel* in the Nahua and the symbolic deaths of the twins in the Pueblo stories), there is the

suggestion that often an appeasement in the form of a human sacrifice was necessary. If the pursuing female kachina, ghost, or goddess wanted hearts or other parts of the body, then certainly the way to protect one's own body was to offer her someone else's. The war which Mixcoatl goes off to create, carrying the swaddled white flint fragment of Itzpalatl, is a direct consequence of the encounter between Xiuhnel, Mimich, and the were-deer. It is the first Chichimec *xochiyaoyotl* or "sacrificial flower war" intended to gather "hearts and flowers" in propitiation of the goddess's appetite. Seen this way, the "flower wars" become an elaborate displacement of masculine anxiety from the female sexuality which generates it to the battlefield where it is enacted and then to the temple ritual where it is appeased in fire and blood. It would appear to be a male-dominated development from start to finish and suggests, to say the least, an extensive fear and possibly subjugation of women in early Chichimec culture. Certainly not all human sacrifice in the pre-Columbian world, or even among the Nahua peoples in particular, has its genesis in this single male erotic fantasy of the vagina dentata, but it is interesting to note that the stone knife sacrifice, scalping, and the flaying of victims all appear in these particular myths.

Di Peso proposes ritual cannibalism to explain several incomplete burials at Casas Grandes in Chihuahua, but there is no evidence of human sacrifice among the Pueblo peoples in the northern areas of the Gran Chichimeca.²¹ At least eight probable instances of cannibalism from the Pueblo period (900-1300 AD) have been excavated in the Southwest, most recently at Burnt Mesa on the San Juan River. None, however, show evidence of ritual; survival is a likely explanation in several cases.²² If we see these parallel myths described above as possibly indicative of the human offering to the goddess, there must have been other factors in the south that were not present in the north. In this regard we might point out the homosexual overtones in the myths, and note that although ritual and social homosexuality was widespread throughout the Americas, in the Nahua cities it was brutally and savagely punished.²³

According to traditional psychoanalytic theory, one of the most common motifs in the psychogenesis of male homosexuality is an irrational castration anxiety generated by the fantasy that the female genital is in some way a castrating instrument.²⁴ This particular fantasy is found explicitly mentioned or enacted in mythologies from the New Hebrides to the Amazon.²⁵ The New World myths related above enact such a fantasy in the suggestions of seduction (or the actual seduction in many cases), then the savage attack by the woman, with the neck or the entrails or the heart being substituted for the male genital. This is not to suggest, however, that the pre-Columbian American male of Mesoamerica and the Grand Chichimeca suffered from wide-spread homosexual delusions. Psychiatric definitions of homosexuality have considerably deviated from the classical Freudian terms, and the mythic use of an erotic fantasy is often quite different from the individual or personal use of it.

There is, further, specific evidence in the 16th century Nahuatl texts of that masculine anxiety before the energy of female sexuality which we are suggesting lies somehow at the root of the Chichimec obsession with sacrificial warfare. In Chapter 21 of Sahagún's *Florentine Codex*, Book VI — among the so-called *huehuetlatolli* texts or "discourses of the elders" — we find a lengthy admonition from a noble Nahua father to his son on matters of sexual conduct. The upshot of his advice is "Don't give yourself over to sexual excess," and the threat behind this advice is that he will finally at some point "dry up" and no longer be able to satisfy the desires of his wife, who will then abandon and cuckold him.

"And if you ruin yourself impetuously, if too soon you seduce, you discover, women on earth, truly the old men went saying, you will interrupt your development, you will be stunted, your tongue will be white, your mouth will become swollen, puffed; . . . you will be enfeebled, weakened, emaciated . . . And you are like the bored maguey, you are like the maguey: soon you will no longer give sap. Perhaps it is this way with you, a man, when you have already consumed yourself, when you can no longer say anything, no longer do anything to your spouse. Soon she hates you, soon she detests you, for truly you starve her. Perhaps then her desire arises; she longs for the carnal relations which you owe your spouse. Already you are finished, you have completed everything. Perhaps you are incapable. Then she will ignore you, she will betray you. Truly, you have ruined yourself impetuously, you have consumed yourself."²⁶

And to cap off this warning the father has a "word or two" which he hopes will "inspire" the young man to caution, a final *exemplum* to clarify what awaits old men who do not guard their energies against the insatiable needs of their women.

In the time of lord Nezahualcoyotzin (priest-king of Texcoco from 1430-1472), two old women were seized. They were white-headed; their heads were like snow; it was as if they were wearing shredded maguey fiber. They were imprisoned because they had committed adultery, had betrayed their spouses, their old men. It was young priests, youths, who had violated them. The ruler Nezahualcoyotzin inquired of them; he said to them:

"O our grandmothers, listen! How do you feel? Do you perhaps still require the carnal act? Are you not satiated, being as old as you are? And how did you live while still in your girlhood? Just say it, just tell me, since you are here for this reason." They said to him: "Master, ruler, our lord, receive it, hear it. You men, you are sluggish, you are depleted, you have ruined yourselves impetuously. It is all gone. There is no more. There is nothing to be desired. But of this, we who are women, we are not the sluggish ones. In us is a cave, a gorge, whose only function is to await that which is given, whose only function is to receive. And of this, if you have become

impotent, if you no longer arouse anything, what other purpose will you serve?"²⁷

The *huehueltlatolli* texts are thought to be among the first materials with which Sahagún began his monumental ethnographic labors in the 1540s. Parts of the doctrine, morality, ritual, and rhetoric contained therein certainly must represent the high, old "Toltec" tradition (*Toltecatoytl*) of the Altiplano and probably reach back in some form at least to Teotihuacan itself. But just as surely, the received texts are formed in a syncretism of some sort with Chichimec traditions. Numerous prayers to Tezcatlipoca (a deity of Chichimec origin) and evocations of the *xochimiquiztli*, the "flower death" of sacrifice, and the *yaomiquiztli* or "War Death" are found especially in the first chapters of the Sahagún collection. In fact, in the discourse quoted above, several paragraphs earlier, the young man is encouraged to emulate and envy the fate of a certain young Mixcoatl of Huexotzinco "who came to die in war in Mexico." A song in his memory is quoted, in which the dead warrior is exalted for his heart "like fine burnished turquoise" which "comes up to the sun."²⁸ The juxtaposition of these two texts in a single discourse, one an injunction to sacrificial warfare and the other a warning to beware the early loss of potency and the social consequences of inability to meet the sexual needs of a woman, offer further argument for the psychic interaction of these issues in Nahua-Chichimec consciousness.

We are not prepared on the basis of this initial study to make statements about diffusion of Chichimec and Pueblo myth. Several points are apparent, however. The very close relation between the 11th century Mimbres bowl and the 20th century Zuni narrative of the twins and the eight girls (the bowl almost a direct illustration of the tale), demonstrates an incredible cultural continuity of some eight centuries duration in that region. Clearly, there seems to be a more direct line of descent from the 11th century Mimbres to the 20th century Zuni than from the Mimbres to the 15th century Nahua-Chichimecs. Any link then between Mimbres and Chichimec mythology would seem to refer us back to some pre-Mimbres horizon, perhaps to some original "Chichimec" protomythology. The structural parallels we have indicated would seem to suggest some such early contact or common origin, probably at very remote historical levels. From the evidence of those parallels, we suggest a characteristic of that substrata of belief might have been a deep fear of a female spirit (an aspect of the Earth-Mother perhaps?) whose pursuit of men demanded blood offerings or some type of ritual murder.

REFERENCES

1. See the monograph by Pat Carr, *Mimbres Mythology*, Southwestern Series 56 (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1979), which establishes the relationship between the myth bowls and the centuries-later redactions of the myths.
2. Charles C. Di Peso, *Casas Grandes and the Gran Chichimeca* (Santa Fe: The Museum of New Mexico, 1972). Reprinted from *El Palacio*, 75:4.
3. Stith Thompson, *Tales of the North American Indians* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1929), p. 309.
4. Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl, *Obras Históricas*, ed., Alfredo Chavero, Vol. II (Mexico City, 1892), p. 19.
5. This incident, in its historical aspect, may well be less erotically motivated than it first appears. When the ruler Huemac orders his Nonoalcan subjects (an ethnic minority living within the city of Tollan) to bring him a woman "four hands wide in the hips," and the Nonoalcans, predictably, become upset. "Who does he think we are?" they say and arm for rebellion, finally driving Huemac into a cave and shooting him full of arrows. *Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca: Anales de Quauhtinchan*, eds., H. Berlin & S. Rendón (Mexico: Antigua Librería Robredo, de José Porrúa e Hijos, 1947), p. 69. This request was probably not literal, however, but part of a ritualistic examination ceremony to determine legitimacy in the Toltec ruling order, and excluded the Nonoalca because they did not understand the metaphoric intent of the request, thereby demonstrating their illegitimacy in the order of things. The evidence for this interpretation is found in chapter IX of Ralph Roys' edition of the Book of Chilam Balam of Chumayel, a compilation of sacred and historical texts apparently from Xiu Maya tradition. This chapter, which Roys entitles "The Interrogation of the Chiefs," records a series of ritual questions and answers "in the language of Zuyua" which the neo-Toltec conquerors of Yucatan used to separate valid candidates for office from the upstarts, the impure, the illegitimate. Apparently only a select few, probably of the pure Toltec line, were taught the correct responses to the questions, and this secret lore became their "shibboleth." On page 97 of Roys' edition this "question" appears:
"Son, bring me here a farmer's wife, an old woman, a dark colored person. She is seven palms across the hips. It is my desire to see her." What he wants is the green fruit of the squash-vine. This is the language of Zuyua.
6. The various translations of this important Chichimec myth offer a classic illustration of how a small ambiguity in the linguistic structure of the original can produce divergent and even contradictory versions in translation, hopelessly confusing any meaningful interpretation. The line rendered "And when he laid her down, then she turned herself face down upon him, then she devoured him, tore open his breast" is ambiguous in the original. In Nahuatl, pronoun objects are indicated by the verbal prefix *qui-* which has no contrasting gender morpheme: "niman ye ic itlan moteca aui in oquitecac niman ipan hualmixtlapachcuet niman ye quicua quelcoyonia." Only the context, therefore, determines whether she devours him or he devours her — obviously a question of some importance for any attempt at interpretation of the narrative. There are, as far as we are aware, no previous English versions of this text and only two Spanish ones: in Primo Velázquez's complete edition of the Legend of the Suns MS (see note 7) and in Angel M. Garibay's anthology of Nahuatl narrative, *Épica Náhuatl*. Velázquez translates: *Después que se echó con ella, se volvió boca abajo sobre ella, la mordió y la agujeró* "Then he threw himself down with her, turned face-down over her, bit her and opened her." Garibay renders the line rather more explicitly: . . . luego con ella se tiende, la oprime, la mordisquea, y al fin la desflora — . . . then he lies down with her, presses upon her, bites her, and finally deflowers her."

In short, both Spanish versions read the original Nahuatl as an attack on the female were-deer by Xiuhnel. The object pronoun ambiguity continues through the narrative in such a way that both Velázquez and Garibay are able to follow this rendering through the passage, both interpreting the one who goes weeping as the sister of the devoured or deflowered. But such a translation leaves the flight of Mimich through the fire — very explicit in the original — totally unmotivated and nonsensical, and drops Xiuhnel from the story for no reason whatever. Obviously, the psycho-historical significance of the myth can emerge only when the pronouns are put in their proper order and the flight of Mimich, together with the subsequent sacrifice of the pursuing demon, Itzpapalotl, are understood as consequences of her appetite. Walter Lehmann had already supplied such a version in his 1938 paleograph and German translation of this text (see note 7) previous to both Spanish mistranslations. He renders this important line as *Und nachdem sie ihn auf den Boden gelegt hat, da wandte sie sich mit dem Gesicht nach unten über ihn. Da frisst sie ihn. . . macht sie ihm ein Loch in die Brust* — "And after she has laid him on the ground she turns herself face-down on him. Then she devours him, makes a hole in his breast."

7. Legend of the Suns MS., Walter Lehmann, ed. and trans., *Die Geschichte der Königreiche von Colhuacan und México*, "Quellenwerke zur alten Geschichte Amerikas," Vol. I (Stuttgart, 1938), pp. 358-62. The most accessible version of this text is in Primo F. Velázquez, *Codice Chimalpopoca*, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Instituto de Investigaciones Historicas (1975), pp. 123-4. Present translation is prepared by W. Gingerich.

8. Anales de Cuauhtitlan MS, in Lehmann, *Die Geschichte*, pp. 49-52. Also Velázquez, *Codice Chimalpopoca*, p. 3.

9. Anales de Cuauhtitlan MS, in Lehmann, *Die Geschichte*, pp. 65-66. Also Velázquez, *Codice Chimalpopoca*, p. 6. Notice that the name of the third hearth-stone has changed from "Mixcoatl" to "Xiuhnel."

10. Codice Matritense del Real Palacio and Codice Florentino MSS, in Angel M. Garibay, ed. and trans., *Veinte himnos sacros de los nahuas* (Mexico: UNAM, 1958).

11. Mircea Eliade, *Rituals & Symbols of Initiation: The Mysteries of Birth & Rebirth*, trans. W. Trask (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), pp. 62-3.

12. Diego Durán, *The Book of the Gods and Rites and the Ancient Calendar*, trans. by D. Heyden and F. Horcasitas (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971), p. 210.

13. Informants of Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, trans. A.J.O. Anderson & C. Dibble, Bk. I (Santa Fe: The School of American Research and The University of Utah, 1950), p. 3.

14. Durán, *The Book of the Gods*, pp. 216-17.

15. Ruth Benedict, *Zuni Mythology*, I (New York: Columbia University, 1935), p. 59. The Zuni tales have been chosen to represent the body of Pueblo tales in these instances (the versions of the Hopi, Tewa, etc. often vary only in the names given to the characters) because the first anthropologists to reach the Pueblo peoples in the 19th century contended that "the Zuni is almost as strictly archaic as in the days ere his land was discovered." (Frank Hamilton Cushing, "Outlines of Zuni Creation Myths," *Bureau of American Ethnology*, 13th Annual Report, 1891-2 (Washington D.C., 1896), p. 341.) They believed that the white man had made no impression on the Zuni, and that the Zuni tales did not reflect the customs and beliefs of the contemporary narrators but reflected the customs and traditions of many generations past. (Benedict I, p. xiv.) The recordings by Benedict have been chosen because they seem to us to be the most complete and are by far the most readable. Dennis Tedlock, in "On the Translation of Style in Oral Narratives," *Journal of American Folklore* 84 (1971), pp. 114-133, has expressed a preference for the English style of Bunzel's translations, but the Benedict volumes have the added advantage — for the beginning researcher

— of including detailed summaries of and comparisons with the previous tale collections of Cushing, Bunzel, and others.

16. Benedict, I., p. 60.

17. Printed only in abstract, in Benedict, I., p. 75.

18. Benedict, I, p. 54.

19. Benedict I p. 68.

20. The significance of this observation is indicated by Vladimir Propp in his *Morphology of the Folktale* (Austin, University of Texas Press, 1970), pp. 21-3.

21. Charles Di Peso, *Casas Grandes: A Fallen Trading Center of the Gran Chichimeca*, 3 vols. (Flagstaff, AZ: Northland Press, 1974). While there are a few headless skeletons and a few heads without bodies found in Pueblo burials the examples are so rare that most archeologists seem to conclude at this time that such burials represent a disturbed grave and a reburial rather than the practice of sacrifice and decapitation. Hamilton A. Tyler in his *Pueblo Gods and Myths*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1975), p. 113, concludes that human sacrifice probably did not exist in the Pueblo culture for the simple reason that the culture itself "is so short that any memory of such a practice would still linger among the whole tribe."

22. Lynn Flinn, C. Turner II, A. Brew, "Additional Evidence for Cannibalism in the Southwest: The Case of LA 4528," *American Antiquity* 41: 3 (July 1976), pp. 308-318.

23. First on the list of Nezahualcoyotl's famous Eighty Ordinances (c. 1430-72) is the following provision for punishment of homo-eroticism:

. . . The active agent (of the couple) was tied to a pole and all the young men of the city covered him with ashes in such a way that he was buried, and the passive one had his entrails pulled out through the anus before being likewise buried in ashes.

(from Ixtlilxochitl, *Obras Historicas*, Vol. II, pp. 187-8).

24. Paul Friedman, "Sexual Deviation," *American Handbook of Psychiatry*, Vol. II (New York: Basic Books, 1959), pp. 594-95.

25. Mircea Eliade, *Myths, Rites, Symbols*, eds., W. Beane & W. Doty, Vol. II (New York: Harper Colophon, 1975), pp. 408-9.

26. *Florentine Codex*, Book VI, p. 117. This version is derived from the Anderson-Dibble translation.

27. *Florentine Codex*, Book VI, pp. 118-19.

28. *Florentine Codex*, Book VI, p. 115.