
POJMOVANJE SMRTI V STARI MEHIKI IN RELIGIOZNI SINKRETIZEM V DANAŠNJIH OBREDIH OB SMRTI

(s posebnim poudarkom na kulturi *zoque*, Chiapas)

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Ključne besede: Mehika, smrt, humor, obredi

!Dime cómo mueres y te diré quién eres!

(Povej mi, kako umreš in ti povem, kdo si!)

(mehiški pregovor)

Tujec, ki ne pozna mehiškega predkrščanskega izročila in njegovega specifičnega odnosa do smrti, ostane v dneh pred prvim novembrom več kot osupel ob pogledu na skladovnice sladkornih okostnjakov in mrtvaških glav, ki krasijo poulične stojnice večjih mest v osrednji Mehiki. Dobrih štirinajst dni pred 1. novembrom kupujejo Mehičani posebne sladke kruhke v obliki okostnjakov, mrtvaške igrače in čokoladne lobanje, ki jih poklanjajo prijateljem in sorodnikom. S pisanih lobanj se smeji imena "Jorge", "Pepé", "Oscar" itd. Obdarovanje in uživanje lastne smrti spremlja poseben humor. Prijatelji si med seboj poklanjajo tudi lističe z duhovitimi in pikrimi domislicami na račun človeških napak, življenja in smrti, kot na primer¹:

Mojca vino a los zoques estudiar,
para lograr un sabio doctorado,
más, nunca se puso a pensar,
que su sapiencia aquí ha fracasado.

Más un día arribó la Calaca
y la llevé a pasear entre tumbas
sin saber que le gustaba la maraca
y el ritmo de sabrosas cumbias.

¹ Mojca je prišla študirat Soke,
da doseгла bi učeni doktorat;
a nikoli ni pomislila,
da bo znanost njena tu propadla.
In že jo Smrt, priliznjena, povleče,
da skupaj z drugimi skeleti zdaj uživa
vsa svoja umna dela in ves študij -
v temni luknji pleše svoj *danzón*.

Prišla je neki dan Lobanja,
jo peljala med grobove na sprehod,
ne da bi vedela, da tudi ples ji všeč je
in ritem vroče kumbije.

Ya que, zalamera, la Muerte la atrajo,
y, junto a otros esqueletos disfruta
de grandes estudios y mucho trabajo
bailando danzón en tenebrosa gruta.

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V Mizquicu, majhnem kraju blizu glavnega mesta, prirejajo vsako leto 1. novembra tako imenovani "festival mrtvaških glav", na katerem podelijo nagrade za najboljše kostume in igrače. Zadnji dve desetletji se po Mizquicu sprehajajo tudi "Batmani", "Drakule" in podobni filmski junaki, uvoženi iz Združenih držav Amerike. Izdelovanje sladkornih mrtvaških glav je pravzaprav mehiška izpeljanka anglosaksonskih buč na vse svete - *Halloweena*, le da je uživanje tovrstnih sladkarij povsem mehiška specifičnost. Prav tako je mehiška specifičnost, če na eni najprometnejših avenij Ciudadada de Méxica doživite naslednje: široka povorka spremlja okrašeno krsto, pred katero stopajo elegantni *mariachis* v blišču in zvoku glasnih trobent, promet pa usmerjajo veseli klovnovi v živopisanih oblačilih, ki s konfeti obmetavajo mimoidoče.

Če se oddaljimo od večjih urbanih središč, bomo spoznali malce drugačno podobo praznovanja 1. novembra. Mehiško podeželje ne pozna sladkornih mrtvaških glav, povork in festivalov, goji pa bogat repertoar tisočletja starega kulta prednikov, ki si je v zadnjih petsto letih nadel sinkretično podobo "vseh živih in vseh mrtvih". Praznovanje smrti, s specifičnim poudarkom na obredju pokojnih prednikov, zavzema v mehiškem prazničnem letu posebno mesto. Ponekod se začne že na dan svetega Luke (18. oktober) in traja vse do svetega Andreja (30. november), kulminacijo pa doseže 1., 2., in 3. novembra. Za različne avtohtone etnične skupine, kot tudi za mestiško prebivalstvo, vsi sveti niso le spomin na umrle, ampak resnično srečanje dveh svetov: sveta živih in sveta rajnih. Pokojniki v prvih dneh novembra obiščejo svoje domove, na kar se živi skrbno pripravijo. Različne avtohtone skupine in tudi mestici olupšajo hišne oltarje in pripravijo praznična jedila, med katerimi ne sme manjkati *tamales*², sladkega kruhka in kuhane čokolade³.

Sokeji⁴ in Maji iz Chiapasa okrasijo hišne oltarje, na katerih so podobe družinskih zaščitnikov in pokojnikov. Čez oltarje obokajo zeleno vejevje, med katerim prednjačijo veje ameriškega visokogorskega bora (*ocote*), ki ga tudi sicer najpogosteje uporabljajo v obredne namene. Med cvetjem, ki ga prejmejo pokojniki so najbolj zastopane naslednje

² *Tamal*: koruzna masa z dodatkom fižola, pikantne omake, mesa in (ali) zelišč, zavita v koruzni ali palmov list.

³ Sladko čokoladno pijačo, *caca*, *cacao* (soke) ali *chocolatl* (nahua), pripravljajo v Mehiki na star, srednjeameriški način: v litru vode vrejo tri kroglice surove kakavove mase (vsaj pol ure do uro), ki ji dodajo nekaj sladkorja. Ko je pijača dovolj homogena, jo v majhnih bučkah ponudijo. Beseda *caca*, ki izvira iz proto mixe-zoque-popoluca jezika, se je oblikovala približno 1400 pr. Kr. na obali Soconusca (Chiapas), kjer je predolmeško prebivalstvo začelo udomačevati koruzo, fižol, buče, čilsko papriko in kakav, ki so postali glavne živilske sestavine stalno naseljenih visoko razvitih poljedelskih civilizacij Srednje Amerike: Olmekov, Majev, Toltekov in Mexikov.

⁴ Praznovanje vseh svetih sem v Mehiki opazovala štirikrat: oktobra in novembra 1990 in 1991 v vaseh Pantepec in Tapalapa v severovzhodni kordiljeri Chiapasa (Soke), 1996 v Pantepecu in v Zahodnem chiapaškem visokogorju (Maya-Tzotzil) in 1997 v Tuxtli Cutiérrezu (Soke).

cvetlice: tagetes⁵, lilije, kale, marjete in krizanteme.⁶ Pred podobami prednikov prižgejo sveče ter *copal*⁷ in vmes postavijo obredno hrano in pijačo. Tla pred oltarji posipajo z borovimi iglicami. Sveče in kadila morajo biti prižgane ves čas praznovanja, tako kot je tudi hrana izpostavljena na njem ves čas od 31. oktobra do 3. novembra. Jedi, ki jih navadno ponudijo pokojnikom, so: *tamales*, narejeni iz palmovih listov, mali sladki kruhki, kuhana čokolada, kava ter žganje in cigarete, če je pokojnik kadil in užival alkohol. Poleg vsega tega ponudijo pokojniku tudi tisto jed, ki jo je najraje užival. Sokeji pravijo, da duše sicer ne morejo jesti te hrane, vonjajo pa jo, kar da je isto.

Medtem ko poteka domača priprava na srečanje Sokejev in njihovih prednikov že nekaj dni pred prvim novembrom, pa čiščenje, barvanje in krašenje grobov poteka šele prvega dopoldne. Podobno je tudi med gorskimi Maji. Pokopališč skozi vse leto ne obiskujejo (prednike imajo doma na oltarjih), tako da je treba prvega novembra zjutraj najprej zavihetati mačeto in počistiti grmovje, da se nato lahko začne okraševanje grobov. Nagrobno okrasje je podobno oltarnemu: čez grob obokajo veje *ocote*-ja, ki so jih okrasili s cvetjem, pod to pa naslednji dan postavijo hrano, sveče in kadila, enako kot na domačih oltarjih.⁸

Prvega novembra popoldne preživijo Sokeji doma, kjer se ob hišnih oltarjih sreča vsa družina. Šele 2. novembra gredo na pokopališče. Pokojnikom igrajo na instrumente - navadno na *jarano*, doma izdelano violino in kitaro - se z njimi pogovarjajo, jedo in pijejo.⁹ 3. novembra obiskujejo Sokeji iz Chiapasa grobove svojih otrok¹⁰, nekateri Indijanci pa ta dan počastijo pokojnike, ki so umrli nasilne smrti. Med umrlimi vlada namreč posebna hierarhija in temu primerno je praznovanje: samo dušam odraslih in pošteno umrlih pripada osrednje praznovanje. Ker duše umrlih lahko škodijo zdravju in psihofizični harmoniji živih, se je treba od njih pravočasno posloviti.¹¹

Po predkrščanskem izročilu Sokejev zaznavajo duše umrlih (kot vsa druga transcendentna bitja) realnost živih samo prek vonja in zvoka, zato je edina možna komu-

⁵ "Flor de muerto" ali cvet pokojnika, kakor tej močno dišeči oranžni cvetlici pravijo mestici, imenujejo Sokeji *anima joya*, Indijanci Nahuja pa *sempuchi* ali *campasuchi*.⁵ Dišeče oranžne cvetove *tagetes*a uporabljajo Sokeji, Maji in Nahuaji tudi pri zdravljenju, zlasti pri t.i. *limpias* ("čiščenjih": v primeru, ko zdravljenec "izgubi dušo") in vročih kopolih (v primeru podhlajenja).

⁶ Kale, marjete in lilije rastejo v Sierru de Pantepec (pribl. 1300m nadm. viš.) kar v gozdu in v okolici naselij, medtem ko jih gorski Maji z območja San Cristóbal de las Casasa posebej gojijo.

⁷ Skupno ime za smolo različnih dreves iz družine *Burseraceae*, kateri dodajo lokalna zelišča, suhe vejice cimeta in druge dišavnice.

⁸ V Pantepecu ima le nekaj grobov kamnite nagrobne. To so grobovi tako imenovanih *ladinos* (akulturirano avtohtono prebivalstvo), vse drugo so parcele, zaznamovane s svetlimi modrozelenimi lesenimi križi, ki jih Indijanci vsakega prvega novembra zjutraj na novo prebarvajo.

⁹ Nekateri mehiške indijanske skupine poznajo tudi nočne obiske grobov; na primer Taraski iz okolice jezera Pátzcuaro v Michoacanu, ki se v razsvetljenih čolnih ob polnoči spustijo z obale na pokopališče otoka Janitzio.

¹⁰ Obstaja veliko etničnih in lokalnih različic; Totonaki iz Veracruga, na primer, počastijo umrle otroke na *octavo*, osmi in deveti dan po vseh svetih.

¹¹ Ponekod, npr. v Veracrugu, ob koncu praznovanja posipajo pot med domovi in pokopališčem s tagetesom, da se duše lažje vrnejo na tisto mesto, ki tostranstvo povezuje z onstranstvo. Sokeji in gorski Maji poznajo različne zaščitne pred nevarnostjo duš, med drugim prav tagetes uporabljajo kot terapevtsko sredstvo.

nikacija med živimi in mrtvimi - med tostranostjo in onstranostjo - prek glasbe, dišav in kadil.¹² Uporaba številnih vonjev v obredju za rajne (cvetje, kadila, aromatična hrana in pijača, zlasti pa alkohol in tobak) postane s tem povsem jasna. Avditivne in olfaktorične stimulanse, značilne elemente tako imenovanih obredov prehodnosti (*rites de passage*), so antropologi našli med vsemi kulturami sveta, vendar jim nekatere, med njimi prav srednjeameriške, dajejo še posebej visoko označevalno vrednost.¹³ Čutni efekti postanejo konkretni simboli tranzicije, ker že sami po sebi vsebujejo (ali pa nakazujejo) spreminjanje. Obredna glasba, ropot, kadila in pijača pripomorejo k prehodu v "drugo" stanje in s tem označijo tudi prehod ključnih življenjskih in socialnih kategorij. Po ugotovitvah kanadske antropologije čutil pa obstaja še posebno tesna povezava med vonjem in prehodnostjo oziroma pojmom spremembe. Vzrok naj bi bil v sami vonjalni anatomiji in karakteristiki vonjav. Vonj je vedno v prehajanju, v spreminjanju, "that is because smells constantly escape from their objects, and because of the way they normally signal processes of transformation, ..., that they are used to mediate (and manage transition) between social categories"¹⁴.

Religiozni sinkretizem

Da bomo bolje razumeli današnja sinkretična obredja smrti in pokojnikov, moramo nujno poznati pojmovanje smrti v predkolonialni Mehiki. O njem pričajo različni viri: materialni ostanki, predkolumbovski kodeksi in zgodnje kolonialne kronike. Če združimo drobce tega mozaika, dobimo le približno podobo predkolonialnega pojmovanja, saj so Španci temeljito počistili s pisanim gradivom. Tako je dal na primer prvi škof in kronist na polotoku Yucatán, Diego de Landa, zažgati vse majevske knjige, kasneje pa sam spisal zgodovino Majev.¹⁵ Da jo je prikrojil, ni dvoma, saj je gledal z dvojnimi predsodki: evropejskim racionalnim (partikularističnim) načinom mišljenja, ovitimi še v misijonarsko strast pokristjanjevanja.

Natančna določitev predšpanskih religiozних prvin je velikokrat nemogoča.¹⁶ Pri tovrstnih analizah nam je v veliko pomoč metoda pokristjanjevanja. Substitucijska politika Katoliške cerkve je bila načrtna in preiščljena: iskala je čim ustreznejše analogije, nadomeščala pomembnejše avtohtone kulte z obredjem pomembnejših svetnikov, pri

¹² Podobno vlogo glasbe, cvetja in dišav, prek katerih pridejo Sokeji v stik z zaščitniki rodovitnosti, smo pokazali na drugem mestu; glej: "Joyo naque, joyo soc toc - flor costurada, flor amarrada. Flor y el simbolismo de los floreados", *Cultura y etnicidad zoque*, San Cristobal de las Casas, Chiapas, México, UNICACH-UNACH, 1998, pp. 129-136.

¹³ Prav zato so postali obredi prehodnosti med mehiškimi Indijanci, kot tudi med ljudstvi Indonezijskega arhipelaga (Moluca) in Indije, najbolj priljubljen predmet tako imenovane antropologije čutil.

¹⁴ David Howes, "Olfaction and transition: an essay on the ritual uses of smell", in: *The Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 24 /3, 1987, p. 398.

¹⁵ Diego de Landa: *Relación de las cosas de Yucatán*, 1557. (Ponatis v: Editorial Porrúa, México, 1986).

¹⁶ Pri sestavljanju preteklosti moramo upoštevati kar najrazličnejše informacije; pri opiranju na enovrstne vire se rado zgodi, da zaidemo v zmotne razlage. Tako se včasih zgodi, da iščemo izvor v starih srednjeameriških kulturah, nazadnje pa odkrijemo, da ima religiozni element korenine v Evropi. Španci so skupaj s krščanstvom zanesli na novo celino tudi predkrščanske prvine ibernskega polotoka in v Mehiki je prišlo do večkratnega sinkretizma.

čemer je lahko prišlo do naključnih prekrivanj ali pa do koledarske spremembe evropskih praznikov.

Praznik vseh svetih je v cerkveno praznično leto vpeljal papež Bonifacij IV v 7. stoletju.¹⁷ Število mučencev je bilo tako naraslo, da jim Cerkev ni mogla pravično razdeliti godov. Zato je določila 13. maj za dan, ko se je spominjala vseh mučencev skupaj. Papež Gregor IV je iz praktičnih razlogov prestavil praznik s 13. maja na 1. november, kjer se je srečal s starodavnimi obredi za rajne duše. Verne duše (2. november) je uradna zahodna Katoliška cerkev priznala kot liturgični dan šele ob koncu 13. stoletja. Cerkev si je namreč ves srednji vek močno prizadevala ločiti uradno liturgijo od predkrščanskega obreda smrti in izkoreniniti poganski "kult prednikov". Že leta 390 je hotel Avguštin odpraviti šege uživanja hrane in pijače na grobovih, Amalarij iz Metz (780 - 850) pa je prvi vpeljal bogoslužje za umrle 2. novembra z utemeljitvijo, da je poganska obredja bolje nadomestiti kot pustiti nenadzorovana. Kljub dolgotrajnim prizadevanjem za reformo poganskih obredov so se ti v Evropi ohranili skozi stoletja, sprva na grobovih, kasneje kot hišni običaji. Danes spominjajo nanje le še prižiganje sveč in krašenje grobov. Darovanje hrane, pijače in kadil se je z grobov umaknilo na domove.¹⁸ Po vsej Evropi je bila še dolgo ohranjena vera, da se rajni te dni vračajo na svoje domove ali pa na grobovih opazujejo žive.

Lahko bi torej sklepali, da je obredno uživanje hrane, obilica kadil in prisotnost glasbe na pokopališčih mehiških Indijancev morebiten vpliv Evrope. Da ni tako, bomo videli v nadaljevanju. Španci so, na podoben način kot v Evropi, hoteli izkoreniniti kult prednikov tudi na novi celini. Zakaj pa se je tam obdržal kljub petsto letom pokrištanjevanja, pa je naše nadaljnje vprašanje.

V 16. stoletju se je krščanstvo, pomešano s starimi iberskimi elementi, preselilo na novo celino in v Mehiki našlo še plodnejša tla. Tukaj so se bila med seboj oplodila že različna kulturna in verska izročila Srednje Amerike in se stalila v tisto obliko, ki so jo spoznali osvajalci in misionarji ob svojem prihodu.

Prvi kronisti šestnajstega stoletja: Bernardino Sahagún, Bernal Díaz de Castillo in Diego Durán poročajo o različnih praznovanjih v čast umrlih. Ta praznovanja so bila razporejena čez vse obredno koledarsko leto, največ pa jih je bilo med Azteki v njihovem 9., 10., 13., 14. in 18. mesecu.¹⁹ Najpomembnejša praznika umrlih sta bila *Miccailhuittl*, praznik "velike smrti" ali spomin na vse odrasle pokojnike, in pa *Miccalhuittontli*, praznik "male smrti" ali vseh umrlih otrok. Durán poroča, da je bil slednji praznik vseh nedolžno umrlih, pravkar rojenih ali mrtvorojenih otročičev, od tod pomanjševalnica v imenu. *Miccailhuittl* so začeli praznovati 3. avgusta in ga nadaljevali 23. avgusta, ko so rajnim na grobove prinašali naslednje darove: *tamales*, kuhano čokolado, purane, sadje, cvetno okrasje, kadila ter podobe božanstev posmrtnega življenja in

¹⁷ Niko Kuret, Praznično leto Slovencev, Družina, Ljubljana, 1989, str. 92-93.

¹⁸ Mimogrede naj omenim, da sem pri terenskih raziskavah na Dolenjskem in Kozjanskem še pred dobrimi desetimi leti srečala običaj, da so v noči s 1. na 2. november pustili rajnim kozarec vina in kozarec vode na kuhinjski mizi.

¹⁹ Azteško sončno leto je bilo razdeljeno na osemnajst časovnih enot po dvajset dni in se je končalo s petimi posebnimi presežnimi dnevi. Maji so poznali dva koledarja: sončnega, ki je bil prav tako razdeljen na osemnajst časovnih enot po dvajset dni, in obrednega, ki ga njihovi potomci v Chiapasu in Gvatemali še uporabljajo.

rodovitnosti, narejene iz ščirovih semen in lubja. Durán tudi omenja, da so na grobovih obredno plesali in igrali. Ti obredi so bili v kolonijalnem obdobju prestavljeni na 1. november, a so do današnjega dne ohranili veliko elementov, na primer: uživanje iste obredne hrane, glasba, cvetni darovi, kadila itd.

Pojmovanje življenja in smrti

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Religije in ideologije različnih civilizacij stare Mehike so temeljile na splošni kozmološki razlagi sveta in človeka v njem. To razlago je pogojevalo dobro in natančno opazovanje naravnega okolja, vremena in nebesnih teles. Stvarstvo so uravnale sile nasprotij, katerih temeljno je bilo - tako pri Majih kot pri Nahua: Praoče - Pramati. Iz tega prvega para sledi vsa nadaljnja dialektika: moško - žensko, svetloba - tema, vroče - hladno, močno - šibko, rojstvo - smrt, stvarjenje - uničenje itd.

Pojmovanje življenja je bilo v cikličnem ponavljanju: izničenje rojeva vnovično stvarjenje, smrt omogoča novo rojstvo. Rojstvo nosi seme smrti, tako kot smrt že vsebuje svoj antipod. Zato so bili isti bogovi udeleženi pri stvarjenju sveta (Quetzalcóatl, Tezcatlipoca) in pri njegovem izničenju. Bili so stvarniki in uničevalci hkrati. V tem tiči skrivnost nerazdružljivega prepletanja simbolov in obredij rodovitnosti in smrti.

Deseti mesec azteškega koledarja, v katerem so prebivalci Tenochtitlana obhajali enega svojih številnih praznikov smrti (*Miccaihuitl*), se je imenoval *xócotl huetzi* ali "pobiranje sadežev". V tem mesecu so se vrstila obredja rodovitnosti: darovanju cvetja (*tlaxochimaco*) in prazniku ognja je sledilo obredje "velikega drevesa", ko so posekali drevo s petindvajsetimi vejami in ga okrasili s plodovi "matere Zemlje" (koruza, sadje, cvetje, *tamales*). Drevo je moralo sprva ležati (horizontalna raven), kasneje pa so ga postavili pokonci in ga okrasili še s podobami bogov (vertikalna raven).

Elemente rodovitnosti in umiranja je vsebovalo tudi praznovanje boginje **Teteo innan**, imenovane **Toci** (kar pomeni "naša stara mati"). *Teteo innan* je bila mati vseh mehiških bogov, tudi stvariteljev, nekakšna "pramati". V enajstem mesecu so ji darovali plodove zemlje v obliki sadežev in hrane, hkrati pa tudi cvetove smrti *campoalxóchtl* ali tagetes. V štirinajstem mesecu ali *quecholli* so spomnili boga **Mixcóatla**. Darovali so mu sužnje, hrabrim vojščakom (bog je bil povezan z bojem) pa so na grobove postavili hrano, ki so jo nato zažgali (po naključju so to obredje izvajali okoli 1. novembra). Darovi in obredno uživanje hrane ob praznovanju mrtvih je bilo več kot le pomoč dušam v onstranstvu - bilo je simbol življenja oziroma vnovičnega življenja v smrti.

O nerazdružljivi povezavi življenja in smrti in njeni veliki simbolni vrednosti pričajo daritve človeških življenj, ki so jih namenjali vsem pomembnejšim bogovom stvarnikom. Obredna smrt je nosila poslanstvo prenavljanja oziroma vnovičnega vstajenja, zato so darovalci lastnih življenj pojmovali svojo smrt kot najvišji, transcendentni cilj. Umirali so s ponosom, saj so predstavljali samo božanstvo, kateremu so bili darovani. Sahagún poroča, da so se veselili tudi njihovi sorodniki, v trdni veri, da gredo žrtve neposredno k bogu.

Ženska, ki so jo darovali boginji Toci, je posebljala samo boginjo. Oblečena v njena oblačila je igrala božjo namestnico, zato so vsi njeni deli pomenili relikvijo. Tudi

sužnji, ki so jih prvega dne *xócotl huetzi* žive in z zvezanimi rokami in nogami pometali v ogenj, so predstavljali boga ognja *Xiuhtecutli*. Pobarvali so jih rumeno. Še preden so izdihnili, so jih izvlekli iz plamenov in jim izrezali srca. Ta so predstavljala božjo hrano, torej seme ali zametek novega ognja. Enako pomembno vlogo so imela srca (semena, sadeži) novega dežja in novega sonca. Določena božanstva so tudi uživali: darovane žrtve so razkosali, jih razdelili in pojedli, kar je pomenilo prilaščanje božje moči.

Religiozna simbolika stare Mehike je bila zelo figurativna in konkretna, vsaj ko je šlo za resnična človeška telesa. Azteki so poleg tega poznali tudi abstraktnejšo, simbolno obliko uživanja božjega telesa. Lomljenje ščirovega kruha, ki so ga bojevniki užili pred vojskovanjem, presenetljivo spominja na krščansko obhajilo. Z uživanjem tega kruha so vojščaki prejeli moč boga *Huitzilopochtlija*. V tem primeru gre za isto simbolno obliko, ki jo pozna današnja krščanska evharistija.

Napak bi bilo, če bi trdili, da so vse srednjeameriške kulture poudarjale življenje in smrt na tako drastično ekspliciten način, kot sta ga poznala vrhunca dveh izrazito ekspanzivnih imperijev, azteškega in majevskega, ki sta fenomen človeškega darovanja vpeljala relativno pozno in bolj iz politično-ideoloških vzrokov, seveda z religiozno prevleko. Arheološke najdbe dokazujejo, da je izrazito poudarjanje človeških žrtev v večji meri prisotno šele v postklasičnem obdobju (900-1520 po Kr.).²⁰

Kozmični model

Vsaka mehiška piramida, ki je bila za podstavek templju, je upodabljala majhen kozmični model. Razvitejše civilizacije Srednje Amerike so si kozmično realnost predstavljale kot geometrijsko telo stopničasto piramidalne oblike, zgrajeno iz več horizontalnih ravni stvarnosti ali svetov, ki jih med seboj povezujejo vertikalne kozmične osi. Središče stvarstva je bil svet dane zemeljske realnosti. Imel je obliko pravokotnika, ki ga je na vsakem vogalu podpiral en božji steber (štirje *Tlaloki* pri Aztekih). Vsaka stran neba je simboliziralo eno božanstvo, ena barva, lastnost itd. Središčno, navpično os so navadno upodabljali v obliki *ceibe*, svetega drevesa ali drevesa življenja. Središča vasi (trgi) gorskih Majev iz Chiapasa imajo še danes pravokotno obliko. V sredini trga stoji *ceiba*, na vsakem izhodu pa stoje po trije svetlo modri križi. Ti niso krščanski znak, temveč ostanek majevske dediščine. Križ je predstavljal štiri strani neba z vsemi njihovimi religiozno-simbolnimi pomeni. Prostor je v stari Mehiki igral več kot geometrijsko vlogo. Bil je svet.

Pod ravno tuzemske stvarnosti so si Maji predstavljali štiri spodnje svetove, Azteki pa v poznem obdobju kar devet. Vsak svet ali raven je igrala posebno vlogo in imela svojega božjega zaščitnika, navadno par. Enako so si predstavljali tudi zgornje ravni ali svetove. Maji so poznali devet zgornjih svetov, Azteki so jim dodali še štiri, tako jih je bilo skupaj trinajst. Najvišji zgornji svet je bil svet boga *Omeotla*, ki je imel moški in ženski značaj hkrati, najnižji spodnji svet pa je bilo kraljestvo smrti.

²⁰ Predhodne arheološke najdbe, razen nekaj izjem, ne upodabljajo človeških žrtev. Protoolmeške reliefne skulpture okostnjakov, ki so jih našli v Izapi v Chiapasu, so tako za svoj čas (8. st. pr. Kr.) prava izjema. Tudi v zgodnjeklasičnem obdobju (200-900 po Kr.) je tovrstnih upodobitev malo, saj so v Teotihuacanu našli le dve freski, ki predstavljata smrt.

Bog življenja in bog smrti ter posmrtno življenje

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Zemlja, kot štirivogalna ravna ploskev, je ljudstvom stare Mehike predstavljala središče stvarstva. Vladali so ji tako imenovani "gospodarji zemlje", z najstarejšo boginjo, iz katere so izšla vsa druga božanstva staromehiškega panteona. V neposredni povezavi s tem svetom so bili tudi bogovi, ki so podpirali zemeljsko ploščo in njene štiri vogale. Zgornje svetove so si stara mehiška ljudstva predstavljala kot "goro sveta" ali piramido s trinajstimi stopnicami, šestimi na vzhodu, šestimi na zahodu in eno središčno na vrhu neba. Različnim nebesnim ravnem so vladala različna božanstva, stvarniki človeka, živali in rastlin. Spodnji svetovi so v skladu z zgornjim oblikovali podzemno piramido z devetimi stopnicami spodnjega stvarstva, štirimi na zahodu, štirimi na vzhodu in središčno, ki ji je vladalo božanstvo podzemlja.

Sonce je v štiriindvajsetih urah obšlo vse stopnice: vsako jutro se je po vzhodnem stopnišču vzpelo do zenita in popoldne po zahodnem spustilo za obzorje. Od tod se je odpravilo na nočno pot. Tako kot mora ponoči sonce obiti vseh devet spodnjih svetov, so morale tudi duše umrlih na dolgo pot po devetih podzemljih, da so prišle v *Mictlán*, svet mrtvih ali senc (pri Aztekih), ki mu je vladal *Mictlantecuhtli*, bog smrti. Potovanje v *Mictlán* je bilo težko. Duše so šle najprej prek gora, potem prek osmih puščav, nazadnje pa so morale prebroditi široko reko. Celotna pot je trajala štiri leta, duše pa so bile ves ta čas izpostavljene nevarnostim: lahko so jih poškodovale krušljive skale, zadele strupene puščice ali ostri obsidianovi noži. Zato so poznala nekatera ljudstva stare Mehike posebna obredja za duše pokojnikov, ki so trajala natanko štiri leta po smrti svojcev. Tovrstna obredja so se v prirejeni obliki ohranila do danes. Sokeji jih po špansko imenujejo *cabo del ano*. Ob vsaki obletnici smrti postavijo pred pokojnikovo sliko na hišnem oltarju cvetje, kadila, sveče in hrano. Tla posipajo z borovimi iglicami, kamor pokleknejo poklicane žene molivke. Osem večerov zapovrstjo molijo rožni venec, deveti dan zjutraj pa vse darove s hišnega oltarja odnesejo na grob, kjer ponovijo deveti obred.

Vse duše pa niso šle v *Mictlán* - ta je bil le za tiste, ki so umrli normalne smrti. Junaška smrt je pokojnika vodila neposredno v nebo, v *Tonatiuh ichan*. Duše umrlih vojščakov so tam spremljale boga sonca na poti od vzhodnega obzorja do zenita, duše žena, umrlih pri porodu (*mohihua quetzque* ali "hrabre žene"), pa so ga spremljale od zenita do zahodnega obzorja. Po štirih letih so se spremenile v kolibrije. Duše umrlih v nesrečah (utopljenici, zadavljenici itd.) in po hudih boleznih so šle v *Tlalocan*, svet boga dežja *Tlaloca*. V *Tlalocanu* je vladala večna pomlad, trpljenja pa niso poznali. Otroška smrt je vodila v kraj blizu *Tlalocana*, v *Chichihuacuauhco*, kjer so morale duše čakati na uničenje tega sveta in reinkarnacijo v nova človeška bitja. Medtem so se hranile z mlekom, ki je kapljalo z vej svetega drevesa *huahuahuete*.

Medtem ko je dan rojstva (konstelacija zvezd in vpliv bogov) določal usodo življenja na zemlji, je usodo posmrtnega življenja določal način smrti. Mehiški pregovor še danes pravi: *Dime cómo mueres y te dire quien eres* ("Povej mi, kako umreš, in ti povem, kdo si!"). Zasluzno življenje na zemlji in moralne vrline, ki so še kako pomembne za posmrtno življenje kristjanov, niso imele nobenega vpliva na posmrtno življenje starih Majev in Mexikov. Prihodnost je bila v umiranju samem. Zasluznejša smrt je določala zasluznejše

posmrtno življenje. Sicer pa tudi navadna smrt ni vodila v pekel, temveč v *Mictlán*, kraj, kamor pridejo duše sicer res po dolgi in naporni poti, a ko pridejo, so deležne gostoljublja njegovega gospodarja *Mictlantecuhtlija*. Ljudstva stare Mehike niso poznala pekla in njegovega terorja kazni. V *Mictlánu* (ali *Metnali* pri Majih), ki je bil zadnji svet podzemlja, je tudi ponoči sijalo sonce in duše so živele podobno kot na tem svetu.

Ko govori o pojmovanju starosti, razlaga Laureano Reyes Gómez primerjavo sončnega obhoda s človeškim življenjem v današnjem izročilu Sokejev²¹. Sonce ima šestnajst različno poimenovanih dnevnih faz: vzhod, tri dopoldanske faze med vzhodom in zenitom, zenit, tri popoldanske faze med zenitom in zahodom, zahod, tri nočne faze med zahodom in polnočjo, polnoč ali čas nič in tri temne jutranje faze med polnočjo in vzhodom. Analogno sončnim fazam imenujejo Sokeji en zdrav življenjski cikel, na primer: *noman pijtu jama*²² (dete), *kimun jama* (otrok pri osmih-devetih letih), *yujk jama* (adolescent - "ko sonce žge"), *kujk jama* (sončno poldne ali tudi "človekovo poldne"), *jama dsu'e* (zrelost), *tsai'a*, *pitse'a*, *notjeykah jama* (zaton), *tsu'an* itd. - adolescent je rastoče sonce, mladenič je poldne, zrel človek je rano popoldne, pozna srednja leta so več faz zahajajočega sonca (do devetinpetdesetega leta), s šestdesetim letom je človek vstopil v noč; od tega leta pa do petinosemdesetega poznajo Sokeji tri faze noči, ko nastopi "mrk" ali rizična točka odhoda. Opolnoči pride že na vrsto zanostitev, novo seme sonca, ki mu sledijo tri embriološke faze do rojstva ali vzhoda. Ta ekliptični obhod sonca (človeka) kaže na predkolumbovsko izročilo sončnega obhoda okoli piramide in na prepletanje smrti in novega rojstva. Smrt je torej prehod v novo rojstvo.

Sklep

Naj sklenem svoj prispevek z naslednjimi mislimi:

Na območju današnje Mehike je kljub prepletanju več predkolumbovskih religioznih izročil in preplastevanju le-teh s krščanstvom mogoče ugotoviti, da so se med omenjenimi etničnimi skupinami ohranili tisti bistveni elementi, ki so povezani s predkolumbovskim, predazteškim in celo predmajejskim kultom rodovitnosti: življenja in smrti hkrati.

Medtem ko je načrtna španska evangelizacija uspela zabrisati meje med elementi različnih kulturnih izvorov in izkoreniniti marsikatero predšpansko religiozno prakso, so na dejanskem obrednem kot tudi miselno-simbolnem nivoju ostale zelo evidentne tiste kulturno-religiozne sestavine, ki so neposredno vezane na najbolj temeljno eksistencialno bistvo fizičnega in kulturnega preživetja določene (čeprav transformirane) družbe: njeno nadaljevanje. To je predvsem vidno v kultih rodovitnosti in kultih prednikov med preživeli avtohtonimi skupinami. Navsezadnje je vidno tudi v dejstvu, da je mnogo elementov avtohtonih kultur prevzela mehiška mestiška in urbana sredina. Umreti v Mehiki, pa čeprav v tridesetmilijonskem glavnem mestu, ni isto kot umreti v Evropi.

²¹ Laureano Reyes Gómez, "Gradación zoque de la edad", *Cultura y etnicidad zoque*, San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas, México, UNICACH-UNACH, 1998, pp. 167-187.

²² *Jama* (hama) pomeni sonce.

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THE CONCEPTION OF DEATH IN ANCIENT MEXICO AND THE RELIGIOUS SYNCRETISM OF PRESENT-DAY DEATH RITUALS

(With Special Emphasis on the Zoque Culture, Chiapas)

Marija Mojca Terčelj

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Key words: Mexico, death, humor, rituals

!Dime cómo mueres y te diré quién eres!
(Tell me, how you die, and I'll tell you, who you are!)
(Mexican proverb)

A foreigner who is not acquainted with Mexican pre-Christian tradition and its specific attitude to death, could be surprised during the days preceding November 1 when he is confronted with the stacks of candy skeletons and skulls which embellish the street stalls of all major towns in central Mexico. About a fortnight prior to November 1, Mexicans buy special sweet bread with coils of dough depicting skeletons or skulls baked on top, toy skeletons and chocolate skulls, to present their friends and relatives with them. From these multi-coloured skulls names like “Jorge”, “Pepe”, “Oscar” smile at you. These presents and the indulgence in one’s own death are accompanied by a particular kind of humour. Friends exchange little notes with witty and pungent ideas about human errors, life and death, like for instance¹:

Mojca vino a los zoques estudiar,
para lograr un sabio doctorado,
más, nunca se puso a pensar,
que su sapiencia aquí ha fracasado.

Más un día arribó la Calaca
y la llevó a pasear entre tumbas
sin saber que le gustaba la maraca
y el ritmo de sabrosas cumbias.

¹ Mojca came to study the Zoques,
to become a learned doctor;
but never did she think,
that all her science would fall through here.

One day the Skull came,
and took her for a walk among the graves,
not knowing that she likes dancing too and the
hot rhythm of the cumbia.

And look, the sweet talking Death is already dragging Mojca.
To join the other skeletons and indulge
in her highbrow works and bookish study -
in a dark pit she now dances her *danzón*.

Ya que, zalamera, la Muerte la atrajo,
y, junto a otros esqueletos disfruta
de grandes estudios y mucho trabajo
bailando danzón en tenebrosa gruta.

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In Mizquico, a small place close to the capital, every year a “Festival of Skulls “ is organised on November 1, during which prizes are given to the best costumes and toys. In the last two decades Mizquico has seen an invasion of “Batmen”, “Draculas” and similar movie characters, imported from the USA. The making of sugar skulls is actually a Mexican derivative of the Anglo-Saxon *Halloween* pumpkins, but that the sweets are actually eaten is an exclusively Mexican phenomenon. Another entirely Mexican feature is the following scene on one of Mexico City’s main avenues: a large parade accompanies a decorated coffin, in front of which elegant *mariachis* march in the glitter and sound of loud trumpets, while traffic is directed by merry clowns in multi-coloured clothes who sprinkle the spectators with confetti.

But as soon as we leave behind the major urban centres, we get to know a rather different kind of celebrations November 1. In the Mexican countryside there are no sugar skulls, parades or festivals: here people foster the rich repertoire of a millennia old ancestor cult which in the course of the past five hundred years has taken the syncretic image of “all living and all dead”. Celebrating death with special emphasis on the ritual of the deceased ancestors occupies a special place in the Mexican festival calendar. In some places activities start as early as St Lucas’ Day (October 18) and last until St Andrew’s Day (November 30), culminating on November 1, 2 and 3. To the various autochthonous ethnic groups and to the mestizo population All Saints Day does not only remind them of the dead, but also of the real encounter of two worlds: the world of the living and that of the deceased. During the first days of November the deceased visit their homes and the living prepare for this occasion very carefully. The different autochthonous groups and mestizos ornate their house altars and prepare festival dishes which always include *tamales*², sweet bread and *cacao*³.

The Zoques⁴ and Mayas from Chiapas decorate their house altars on which we find portraits of the family’s patron saints and of the deceased. Over the altars arches of green branches twigs are set up among which the major role is reserved for branches of the American high-mountain pine (*ocote*) which is generally used for ritual purpo-

² *Tamal*: maize dough with added beans, spicy sauce, meat and/or herbs, wrapped in a maize or palm leaf.

³ Sweet chocolate drink, *caca*, *cacao* (Zoque) or *chocolatl* (Nahua) is prepared in Mexico in the old, Mesoamerican way: three cubes of raw cacao are boiled in one litre of water, to which some sugar is added (boiling takes half an hour to one hour). When the drink is homogenous enough, it is served in small cups. The word *caca* is derived from the proto Mixe-Zoque-Popoluca language which formed around 1400 BC on the coast of Soconusco (Chiapas), where a Pre-Olmec people domesticated maize, beans, pumpkins, Chilean peppers and cacao which later became the staple food of the permanently settled, highly developed agricultural civilisations of Mesoamerica: the Olmecs, Mayas, Toltecs and Mixtecs.

⁴ I have been able to witness the celebration of All Saints in Mexico four times: in October and November of 1990 and 1991 in the villages of Pantepec and Tapalapa in the north-eastern cordillera of Chiapas (Zoque), in 1996 in Pantepec and in the western high mountains of Chiapas (Maya-Tzotzil), and in 1997 in Tuxtla Gutiérrez (Zoque).

ses. Among the flowers given to the deceased the most commonly used are: tagetes⁵, lilies, marigolds and chrysanthemums.⁶ In front of the images of the ancestors candles and *copal*⁷ are lit and in between ritual food and beverages are placed; the floor before the altar is strewn with pine needles. The candles and incense must remain lit during the entire celebration period, and the food too is set before the altar from October 31 to November 3. The dishes usually offered to the deceased consist of *tamales*, made of palm leaves, sweet rolls, cocoa, coffee, brandy and cigarettes, if the deceased was a smoker and enjoyed alcohol. Beside all this the deceased is also offered his favourite dish. The Zoques say that though the souls cannot eat the food, they can smell it and that amounts to the same.

While the domestic preparations for the meeting of the Zoques and their ancestors are under way already some days prior to November 1, the cleaning, painting and embellishing of the graves has to wait until the morning of November 1. A similar sequence is observed among the mountain Mayas. Cemeteries are not visited during the year (since people have their ancestor on the house altars) and as a consequence in the morning of November 1 they first of all have to swing the machete to clean the shrubs before they can start decorating the graves. The grave ornamentation is similar to those on the house altars: over the grave an arch of *ocote* branches is erected, decorated with flowers and under this arch food, candles and incense will be placed during the following days, just as it is done with the home altars.⁸

The Zoques spend the afternoon of November 1 at home and the whole family congregates around the house altars. On November 2 the cemetery is visited. There they play for the deceased on instruments - usually on a *jarana*, a home-made violin and guitar - they talk to them, eat and drink.⁹ On November 3 the Zoques from Chiapas visit the graves of their children¹⁰, while some Indians worship on this day the deceased who were the victims of a violent death. Among the dead a special hierarchy is indeed observed and celebrations are adapted to it: the central celebration is dedicated exclusively to the souls of adults and to those who died honestly. Because the souls of

⁵ "Flor de muerto" or flower of the dead as the mestizos call the strongly scented orange flower, is called *anima joya* by the Zoques, *sempuchi* or *cempasuchi* by the Nahuatl Indians. The strongly scented orange flowers - *tagetes* - are used by the Zoques, Mayas and Nahuas also for healing purposes, especially for so-called *limpias* ("cleansing", when a patient has "lost his soul") and in hot baths (in case of hypothermia).

⁶ Marigolds and lilies grow wild in the woods in Sierra de Pantepec (approx.. 1300m a.s.l.) and close to settlements, whereas the mountain Mayas from the area of San Cristóbal de las Casas have to grow them.

⁷ Common name for resin of different trees from the family of *Burseraceae*, to which local herbs are added, dry cinnamon sticks and other aromatics.

⁸ In Pantepec only a few graves have tombstones. They are the graves of the so-called *ladinos* (autochthonous population turned mestizo), the rest are lots marked by light blue-and-green wooden crosses, which the Indians repaint on the morning of every November 1.

⁹ Some Mexican Indian groups also visit the graves at night; for instance the Tarasca from the environs of Lake Pátzcuaro in Michoacan, who in lighted boats set out at midnight from the coast to the cemetery on the island of Janitzio.

¹⁰ There are many ethnical and local varieties; the Totonaca from Veracruz, for instance, worship dead children on *octavo*, on the eighth and ninth day following All Saints.

the dead can do harm to the health and psychophysical harmony of the living, it is necessary to take leave from them in time.¹¹

According to the pre-Christian tradition of the Zoques the souls of the dead (like all other transcendent beings) can perceive the reality of the living only through **smell and sound** and therefore the **only possible communication between the living and the dead** - between **this world and the other world** - is through music, smell and incense.¹² The abundant use of smells in the rituals for the dead (flowers, incense, aromatic food and drinks, and especially alcohol and tobacco) is thus quite clear. Auditory and olfactory stimuli, characteristic elements of so-called rites of passage (*rites de passage*), have been discovered by anthropologists among all cultures of the world, but some of them, and among them precisely the Mesoamerican ones, attribute a particularly high significance to them.¹³ Sensory effects change into concrete **symbols of transition**, since all by themselves contain (or refer to) change. Ritual music, noise, incense and beverages are instrumental to the transition into the “other” state and also denote the transition of the essential vital and social categories. According to the findings of the Canadian anthropology of senses there exists a particularly close connection between smell and the **transition** or the concept of change. The reason for this seems to be in the very olfactory anatomy and in the characteristics of smells. A smell is continuously in transition, changing, “that is because smells constantly escape from their objects, and because of the way they normally signal processes of transformation, ..., that they are used to mediate (and manage transition) between social categories¹⁴.

Religious syncretism

In order to better understand the present-day syncretic rituals of death and the deceased, we have to know about the conceptions of death in pre-colonial Mexico. There are several sources on this issue: material remains, pre-Columbian codices and early colonial chronicles. If we combine the pieces of this mosaic, all we get is an approximate idea of pre-colonial conceptions, because the Spaniards thoroughly eradicated all written material. Take for instance the first Bishop and chronicler on the peninsula of Yucatan, Diego de Landa, who had all Mayas books burned and later wrote a history

¹¹ In some places, for instance in Veracruz, the end of the celebrations is marked by strewing the road from home to the cemetery with tagetes, to make it easier for the souls to return to the place which connects this world with the other world. The Zoques and mountain Mayas have various protective means against the dangers the souls threaten them with, among others tagetes are used for therapeutic purposes.

¹² How a similar role is played by music, flowers and aromatics, through which the Zoques enter into contact with the protectors of fertility, is discussed elsewhere, see: “*Joyo naque, joyo soc toc - flor costurada, flor amarrada. Flor y el simbolismo de los floreados*”, *Cultura y etnicidad zoque*, UNICACH-UNACH, 1998, pp. 129-136., San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas, México.

¹³ For this very reason the transition rites among the Mexican Indians as well as among the peoples of the Indonesian Archipelago (the Moluccas) and India have become the favourite subject of the so-called anthropology of senses.

¹⁴ David Howes, “Olfaction and transition: an essay on the ritual uses of smell”, in: *The Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 24 / 3, 1987, p. 398.

of the Mayas himself.¹⁵ There is no doubt that he faked this history for he have viewed it with a double prejudice: that of a European rationalist (particularist) way of thinking, wrapped in addition in his missionary zeal to christianise.

Accurate determination of religious elements as pre-Spanish is often impossible.¹⁶ In analyses of this kind we can, however, deduce quite a lot from the method of evangelisation. The substitution policy of the Catholic Church was systematic and pre-meditated: it always looked for the closest possible analogy, replaced major autochthonous cults with the rituals of major saints, and in this process accidental overlapping or calendar modifications of the European festivals may have occurred.

The festival of All Saints was introduced in the church festival year by Pope Bonifatius IV in the 7th century.¹⁷ The numbers of martyrs had increased to an extent the Church was no longer able to award every saint his own day. May 13 was therefore determined to be the day to remember all martyrs. For practical reasons Pope Gregory moved the festival from May 13 to November 1, where it met with the ancient rituals for the deceased souls. All Souls (November 2) was accepted by the official Roman Catholic Church as a liturgical day only toward the end of the 13th century. Throughout the Middle Ages the Church engaged in huge efforts to separate the official liturgy from the pre-Christian ritual of death and to eradicate the pagan "ancestor cult". As early as 390 AD Augustine wanted to abolish the custom of consuming food and drinks over graves, and Amalarius of Metz (780 - 850) was the first to introduce mass for the dead on November 2, with the justification that it was better to replace pagan rituals than to leave them unsupervised. In spite of centuries of efforts to reform pagan rituals they survived in Europe throughout the centuries, in the beginning at the graves and later as house customs. Nowadays only the lighting of candles and decorating of graves remind us of those customs. Offering food, beverages and incense moved from the graves to the homes.¹⁸ Throughout Europe the belief survived for a very long time that the deceased return to their homes on these days or to watch the living from their graves.

The above short survey might induce us to conclude that the ritual consummation of food, the abundant incense and the presence of music in the cemeteries of Mexican Indians might be the result of European influences. We shall see below that this is not so. The Spanish wanted to eradicate the ancestor cult in the New World in the same way as they had done in Europe. Our next question must then be: how did it manage to survive five hundred years of christianising efforts?

¹⁵ Diego de Landa: *Relación de las cosas de Yucatán*, 1557. (Reprinted in: Editorial Porrúa, México, 1986).

¹⁶ In recomposing the past we have to take account of the most different information sources; relying on a single section of sources often leads to erroneous explanations. It often occurs that the origin is searched for in ancient Mesoamerican cultures, and that in the end we discover that the religious elements have their roots in Europe. Together with Christianity the Spanish brought with them pre-Christian elements from the Iberian peninsula to the New Continent and this caused a range of syncretic developments in Mexico.

¹⁷ Niko Kuret, *Praznično leto Slovencev, Družina, Ljubljana, 1989*, pp. 92-93.

¹⁸ It is worth mentioning that field research which I carried out in Dolenjsko and Kozjansko some ten years ago among others revealed the custom that during the night between November 1 and 2 a glass of water were left for the deceased on the kitchen table.

In the 16th century Christianity, mixed with ancient Iberian elements, was transferred to the New World and found an even more fertile soil in Mexico. Here indeed the different cultures and religious traditions of Mesoamerica had already fertilised one another and melted into the specific form the conquerors and missionaries met with upon their arrival.

364 The first chronicles of the sixteenth century: Bernardino Sahagún, Bernal Díaz de Castillo and Diego Durán report on different celebrations in the honour of the dead. These celebrations were spread all over the ceremonial calendar year, among the Aztecs most of them were concentrated in the 9th, 10th, 13th, 14th and 18th months.¹⁹ The principal festivals of the dead were *Miccaiuitl*, the festival of the “great death” or the memory of all deceased adults, and *Miccalhuitontli*, the festival of the “little death”, that of all deceased children. Durán reports, that the latter was the festival of all innocent who died immediately after birth and of dead-born babies, which explains the name’s diminutive form. The celebrations of *Miccaiuitl* commenced on August 3 and were continued on August 23 when the following offerings were brought to the graves of the deceased: *tamales*, cocoa, turkeys, fruit, flower ornamentations, incense and images of the deities of **life after death** and **fertility**, made of foxtail grass seeds and bark. Durán also reports that people used to dance and play music on the graves. During the colonial period these customs were transferred to November 1, but even today they still preserve many ancient elements, for instance: consummation of the same ritual food, music, flower offerings, incenses etc.

The conception of life and death

The religions and ideologies of different civilisations of ancient Mexico were based on a general cosmological explanation of the world and man in it. This explanation was determined by reliable and accurate observation of the natural environment, the weather and the celestial bodies. The creation was governed by opposite forces, who - with the Mayas as well as with the Nahuas had their origin: in the first Father - the first Mother. From this first pair all the remaining dialectics follow: man-woman, light-darkness, hot-cold, strong-weak, birth-death, creation-destruction etc.

The conception of life lay in its cyclical repetition: destruction gives birth to new creation, death enables rebirth. Birth carries in it the seed of death, as much as death already contains its antipode. Therefore, the same gods were involved in the creation of the world (Quetzalcóatl, Tezcatlipoca) and in its destruction. They were creators and destroyers at the same time. Here lies the mystery of the inseparable interconnectedness of the symbols and rituals of fertility as well as of death.

The tenth month of the Aztec calendar, during which the inhabitants of Tenochtitlan celebrated one of their numerous festivals of death (*Miccaiuitl*), was called

¹⁹ The Aztec solar year was divided into eighteen time units counting twenty days each and ended with five special surplus days. The Mayas had two calendars: a solar one which was similarly divided into eighteen time units of twenty days each, and a ritual calendar, which is still used by their descendants in Chiapas and Guatemala.

xócotl huetzi or “picking the fruit “. During this month a number of fertility rituals took place: offering flowers (*tlaxochimaco*) and the festival of fire was followed by the ritual of the “big tree”, when a tree with twenty-five branches was cut down and decorated with the produce of “mother Earth” (corn, fruit, flowers, *tamales*). The tree first had to be stretched out flat (the horizontal level), later it was erected and decorated with images of the gods (the vertical level).

Elements of fertility and dying were also incorporated in the celebration of the goddess **Teteo innan**, called **Toci** (meaning “our grandmother”). *Teteo innan* was the mother of all Mexican gods, even of the creators, some kind of “the Mother”. During the eleventh month she was offered the produce of the earth in the form of fruit and food, but also the flower of death *campoalxóchitl* or tagetes. During the fourteenth month or *quecholli* the god **Mixcóatl** was remembered. To him slaves were sacrificed and food was placed on the graves of brave warriors (the god was connected with war) and then burned (accidentally, these rituals were performed around November 1). Offerings and ritual consummation of food as part of celebrating the dead represented more than only assistance to the souls in the other world - it symbolised life or the new life in death.

The inseparable connection between life and death and its high symbolic value is witnessed to by the sacrifices of human lives, dedicated to all the major gods, the creators. Ritual death carried in it a message of renewal or resurrection and therefore those who sacrificed their own lives viewed their death as the highest, transcendental goal. They died proudly since they represented a deity to which they were sacrificed. Sahagún reports that their relatives too rejoiced, firmly believing that the sacrificed beloved would join god directly.

A woman sacrificed to the goddess Toci personified the goddess herself. Dressed in the goddess's clothes she acted as god's deputy and all her parts were therefore reliquaries. Even the slaves who were thrown into the fire alive and with tied arms and legs on the first day of *xócotl huetzi* represented the god of fire *Xiuhtecutili*. They were painted yellow and before they actually died they were dragged out of the fire and their hearts were cut out. The hearts represented divine food, that is the seed or embryo of new fire. An equally significant role was played by the hearts (seeds, fruits) of the new rain and the new sun. Certain deities were also consumed: the sacrificed victims were cut to pieces, divided among the people and eaten and this act amounted to taking possession of divine power.

The religious symbolism of ancient Mexico was highly figurative and concrete, at least when real human bodies were involved. But the Aztecs also knew a more abstract, symbolic form of consuming god's body. The sharing of foxtail bread which warriors ate before going to battle cannot fail to remind us of the Christian holy communion. By eating this bread the warriors were endowed with the strength of the god *Huitzilopochtli*. In this case the same symbolic form is involved as is known in present-day Christian Eucharist.

It would, however, be erroneous to claim that all Mesoamerican cultures focused on life and death in such drastic and explicit ways as was the case with the peaks of two notably expansive empires, those of the Aztecs and the Mayas, which both introduced the phenomenon of human sacrifice relatively late and primarily for political and

ideological reasons, though, of course, under a religious cover. Archaeological findings prove that the striking focus on human sacrifices was not really common to any greater extent prior to the Post-classical period (900-1520 BC).²⁰

The cosmic model

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Every Mexican pyramid which functioned as the base of a temple represented a small cosmic model. The more developed civilisations of Mesoamerica imagined cosmic reality as a geometric body of terraced pyramidal shape, constructed with several horizontal levels or worlds, interconnected by vertical cosmic axes. The centre of the universe was the world of the given earthly reality. It had the form of a rectangle, supported at every corner by a divine pillar (four *Tlalocs* with the Aztecs). Every side of the sky was symbolised by one deity, one colour, one property etc. The central vertical axe was usually depicted in the form of a *ceiba*, a holy tree or the tree of life. The centres of the villages (markets) of the mountain Mayas in Chiapas still have a rectangular form today. In the centre of the market stands a *ceiba* and at each exit from it stand three light blue crosses. These are not Christian signs though, but belong to the Mayan heritage. The cross represented the four sides of the sky with all their religious and symbolic meanings. In ancient Mexico space played more than a geometric role. It was holy.

Below the level of earthly reality the Mayas imagined four underworlds, and the Aztecs in their late period even nine. Every world or level played a special role and had its divine protector, usually a pair of them. Similar was the idea of the upper levels or worlds. The Mayas knew nine upper worlds, the Aztecs added four more so that there were a total of thirteen. The highest upper world was that of the god *Omeotl*, who had a male and female nature alike, and the lowest underworld was the realm of death.

The god of life, the god of death and life after death

Earth, a four-cornered flat surface, meant to the peoples of ancient Mexico the centre of the cosmos. It was ruled by the so-called “masters of the world”, including the oldest goddess from which all other deities of the ancient Mexican pantheon stemmed. Directly connected with this world were also the gods who supported the earth plate and its four corners. The upper worlds were imagined by the ancient Mexican peoples as “the mountain of the world” or as a pyramid with thirteen steps, six to the east, six to the west and a central one on top of the sky. Different celestial levels were ruled by different deities, the creators of man, flora and fauna. In accordance with the upper worlds the underworlds formed an underground pyramid with nine levels of the subterranean creation: four to the east, four to the west and a central one ruled by the deity of the underworld.

²⁰ Previous archaeological findings, with few exceptions, do not depict death nor human sacrifices. Proto-Olmec relief sculptures of skeletons found in Izapa (Chiapas) were a high exception in their period (8th century BC). During the Early Classical Period (200-900 AD) there are few such depictions: in Teotihuacan only two frescoes were found which represent death.

In the course of twenty-four hours the Sun travelled across every step: every morning it climbed the eastern steps up to the zenith and in the afternoon descended by the western steps behind the horizon. From there on it went on its nightly journey. In the same way the Sun has to travel all nine underworlds, the souls of the deceased had to cover the long road through the nine underworlds to arrive at *Mictlán*, the world of the dead or shadows (with the Aztecs), ruled by *Mictlantecuhтли*, the god of death. The journey to *Mictlán* was very hard. The souls first had to cross mountains, than eight deserts, and finally they had to wade across a wide river. The whole journey lasted four years and all the time the souls were exposed to various dangers: they could be injured by falling rocks, hit by poisonous arrows or by sharp obsidian knives. Some peoples of ancient Mexico therefore had special rituals for the souls of the deceased which lasted exactly for four years after their death. Such rituals have been preserved into the present, though in a modified form. The Zoques call them (in Spanish) *cabo del ano*. Upon every anniversary of his or her death they place flowers, incense and food in front of the deceased's picture on the house altar. The floor is strewn with pine needles and women prayers kneel there. Eight nights in a row they pray the rosary and on the ninth day they carry all the offerings from the house altar to the grave where the ninth ritual is repeated.

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Not all souls, however, went to *Mictlán*, because it was reserved to those who died a normal death. A heroic death sent the deceased straight away to heaven, to *Tonatiuh ichan*. The souls of fallen warriors there accompanied the god of the Sun on his way from the eastern horizon to the zenith, and the souls of women who died in child birth (*mohihua quetzque* or "brave women") accompanied him from the zenith to the western horizon. After four years they changed into humming-birds. The souls of those who died in accidents (drowned or suffocated etc.) or in great pain went to *Tlalocan*, the world of the rain-god *Tlaloc*. In *Tlalocan* eternal spring reigned and no suffering ever occurred. A child's death took it to a place near *Tlalocan*, to *Chichihuacuauhco*, where the souls had to wait until the destruction of this world and to be reincarnated into new human beings. Until then they were fed by milk which dripped from the branches of the holy tree *huahuahuete*.

While the day of birth (the constellation of the stars and the influences of the gods) determined a person's fate on Earth, the fate of a deceased's life after death was determined by the way he died. A Mexican proverb of the present still says: *Dime cómo mueres y te dire quien eres* ("Tell me how you die and I'll tell you who you are!"). A deserving life on Earth and moral virtues which are of the utmost significance to life after death of a Christian, did not have the least impact on life after death of the ancient Mayas and Mixtecs. The future was harboured in the act of dying. A more deserving death led to a more deserving life after death. But even a quite normal death did not lead to hell, but to *Mictlán*, the place at which the souls arrive only after a long and hard journey, but when they get there, they enjoy the hospitality of its master, *Mictlantecuhтли*. The peoples of ancient Mexico did not have to fear hell or the terror of punishment after death. In *Mictlán* (or *Metnal* with Mayas), the last world of the underworld, the sun shone even at night and the souls lived similarly as in this world.

Laureano Reyes Gómez explains the comparison of the Sun's journey with man's life in the present-day tradition of the Zoques²¹. The Sun has sixteen differently named daily phases: sunrise, three morning phases between sunrise and the zenith, three afternoon phases between the zenith and sundown, sundown, three nightly phases between sundown and midnight, midnight or zero time and three dark morning phases between midnight and sunrise. In analogy with the Sun's phases they call one healthy life cycle for instance: *noman pijtu jama*²² (child), *kimun jama* (child from eight to nine), *yujk jama* (adolescent—"when the sun burns", *kujk jama* (high noon or "man's high noon"), *jama dsu'e* (maturity), *tsai'a*, *pitse'a*, *notjeykah jama* (sundown), *tsu'an* etc.. - an adolescent is a rising sun, a young man is high noon, a mature person early afternoon, and the senior middle years are several phases of the setting Sun (until the age of fifty-nine), upon his sixtieth birthday a person enters the night; between sixty and eight-five years of age the Zoques know three phases of the night; when "solar eclipse" occurs or the risky point of departure. But when midnight comes new insemination already occurs, the new semen of the Sun, which is followed by three embryological phases up to birth or sunrise. This ecliptic journey of the Sun (and of man) indicates that there must have been a pre-Colombian tradition of the Sun's passage around the pyramids and to the interconnectedness of death and rebirth. Death is thus the transition into rebirth.

Conclusion

I would like to conclude this article with the following reflections:

In the area of present-day Mexico despite the presence of several interwoven pre-Columbian religious traditions and overlaying Christianity it is possible to establish that among the mentioned ethnic groups those essential elements have been preserved which are connected with Pre-Columbian, pre-Aztec and even pre-Mayan fertility cult of life and death alike.

Whereas the systematic Spanish evangelisation succeeded in erasing the boundaries between the elements of different cultural origins and eradicate many pre-Spanish religious practices, on the actual ritual as well as mental and symbolic level those cultural and religious elements have remained quite evident which are directly connected with the most fundamental existential essence of physical and cultural survival of a certain (though transformed) society, that is its **continuation**. This is quite evident from the fertility cults and ancestor cults among the remaining autochthonous groups. And, after all, it is also evident from the fact that many elements of the autochthonous cultures were adopted by the Mexican mestizos and urban centres. To die in Mexico, even in a capital which counts thirty million of inhabitants, is not the same as to die in Europe.

²¹ Laureano Reyes Gómez, "Gradación zoque de la edad", *Cultura y etnicidad zoque*, San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas, México, UNICACH-UNACH, p. 167-187.

²² *Jama* (hama) = the Sun.

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BESEDA O AVTORICI

Marija Mojca Terčelj, mag., etnologinja in filozofinja, je kustosinja Slovenskega etnografskega muzeja za stike Slovencev z neevropskimi kulturami. Kot nova raziskovalka Oddelka za etnologijo in kulturno antropologijo Filozofske fakultete v Ljubljani je med letoma 1988 in 1994 v presledkih raziskovala kozmologijo, medicino in obredja rodovitnosti med Indijanci Zoques v Mehiki. V Slovenskem etnografskem muzeju je zaposlena od leta 1996. V letu 1997 je v muzeju pripravila študijsko razstavo z naslovom Baragova zbirka predmetov iz Severne Amerike, leta 1998 pa razstavo in obsežni katalog z naslovom Iz dežele sončnega sijaja in mesečevih senc : Beblerjeva indonezijska zbirka. Vzporedno pripravlja doktorsko nalogo z naslovom Sokejevska kozmologija kot interpretacijski model in kot predmet etnološke (antropološke) razlage.

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Marija Mojca Terčelj is an M.A. in ethnology and philosophy and curator at the Slovene Ethnographic Museum for the Relations between the Slovene and Foreign Cultures. As a new researcher at the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology of the Faculty of Arts in Ljubljana she studied with intervals from 1988 to 1994 the cosmology, medicine and fertility rites among the Zoques Indians of Mexico. She has been employed at the Slovene Ethnographic Museum since 1996. In 1997 she prepared in the museum a study exhibition entitled *The Baraga Collection of objects from North America*, and in 1998 the exhibition and extensive catalogue entitled *From the land of sun shine and moon shadows: The Bebler Indonesian Collection*. She is also working on her doctoral dissertation on the subject "Zoques cosmology as an interpretation model and as the object of ethnological (anthropological) explanation."