

The following is from *The Human Work, the Human Design: 2,000 Years of Mayan Literature*, translated and interpreted by Dennis Tedlock, to be published by the University of California Press. The author may be contacted at dtedlock@buffalo.edu.

A CONVERSATION WITH MADNESS

The ancient gods of Yucatán continued to hear their names during the colonial period. Among those who invoked them were healers who treated a wide variety of illnesses, using combinations of herbs and words. At some point during the early seventeenth century, some of these practitioners used alphabetic writing to create collections of curative incantations. Today their works are known only from a single compendium that dates from the late eighteenth century, based on two or more earlier sources and written in two different hands.

Prominent among the deities named in the incantations are those of the directions, the *kantul ti' ku*, *kantul ti' bakab* or “Four Gods, Four Bacabs,” and for that reason the compendium has been given the title *Ritual of the Bacabs*. The manuscript itself carries no general title, but each incantation carries a preface that names the illness or illnesses in question and describes the incantation itself as an “oration” (*t'anil*) or “dialogue” (*ya'labal*), or else refers to its intended effect on the illness by calling it a “trap” (*petz'il*) or “destroyer” (*pa'il*).

Oral tradition may have been the only immediate source for the incantations, but since the surreptitious use of the indigenous writing system continued as late as the end of the seventeenth century, it is possible that hieroglyphic sources were consulted as well. Whatever the sources, the writers added instructions as to the proper use of the incantations.

It seems clear that the purpose of the writers was to create scripts that could be memorized in advance of a performance, or perhaps read aloud. By comparison, the ritual texts in the surviving hieroglyphic books are more in the nature of prompts or outlines for what might be said by a performer, and the only instructions concern the selection of appropriate dates for rituals.

First among the illnesses addressed by the incantations are various forms madness whose symptoms include a lack of judgment, spasms, frenzy, fury, and shameless lust. The common term for all of these illnesses is *tankas* (or

tamakas), which is also a term for the Milky Way. The connection may lie in the contrast between the character of the Milky Way and that of the ecliptic, the narrow path followed by the sun, moon, and planets. The Milky Way lies at right angles to the ecliptic, and it is wider and has blurry edges. Running through much of its length is a dark rift, the Black Road that leads to the underworld in the Popol Vuh, whereas the ecliptic is the path followed by the sky's brightest lights.

Illnesses are treated as sentient beings in the incantations. The process of overcoming them involves exposing their identities, addressing them by name and tracing them back to their birth at the beginning of the present world. Once this has been done they can be exorcised, which means not only removing them from the patient but also throwing them all the way out to the edges of the living world or down into the realm of death.

The incantation translated here mentions the divinatory dates *hun ahaw* and *kan ahaw*, or “One Lord” and “Four Lord.” One Lord is the Yucatec name for the hero named Hunahpu in the Popol Vuh, who survived his own death and (with his twin brother) overcame the lords of death itself. Four Lord, according to Classic inscriptions and the Dresden Codex, is the date that marked the transition between the previous world and the present one.

INCANTATION FOR JAGUAR MACAW MADNESS

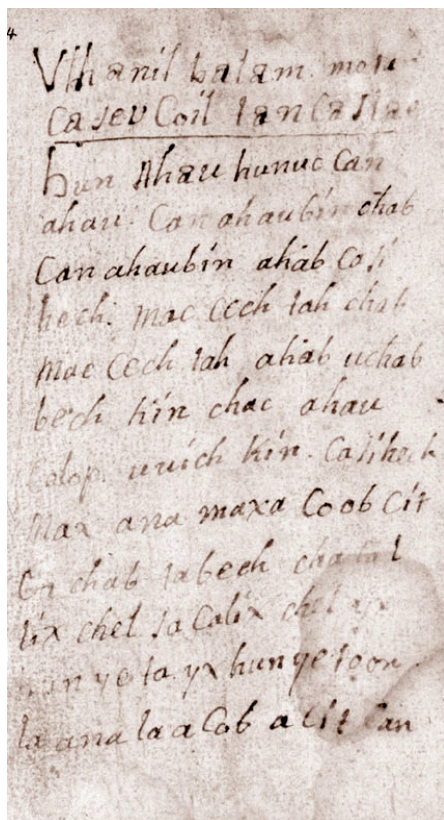
The term *ch'ab*, translated here as “chaos,” refers to disturbances in the natural order such as earthquakes and tidal waves. In the present context it describes the state of flux that existed during the darkness that separated the destruction of the previous world from the ordering of the present one. The final end of the old world fell on a divinatory date whose name, *Kan Ahaw* or “Four Lord,” can also be taken to mean “Sky Lord.” In the present world, chaos may erupt not only in the form of natural disasters but in the madness of human beings as well. In the case of Jaguar Macaw madness it takes the form of behavior that is stupid, drunken, or lascivious.

The reference to the plucking out of the sun’s eye is probably an allusion to a Yucatec myth similar to the Quiché one about Seven Macaw, as told in the *Popol Vuh*. During the

previous world he pretended to be the sun, but his shining eye was removed when that world ended. The noisy birds at the entrance to the underworld are also found in the *Popol Vuh*, but not the goddess invoked here as “Foreigner” and “Doorkeeper of the Earth.” The general Mayan term for the underworld, *xibalba*, is replaced by *metnal*, from Nahuatl *mictlan*, translated as “Hell.”

Behind the various references to a lancet, the tip of the penis, and a needle for drawing blood is a ritual of sacrifice in which men of noble descent drew blood by piercing their foreskins. Judging from what the incantation reveals about this ritual, it was conceived as reenacting the myth whereby a patrilineage was founded, with the parental roles taken by the instrument of sacrifice and the foreskin, and the child emerging in the form of blood.

Incantation for Jaguar Macaw Mad-



ness, for the desire this madness brings:

“One Lord, one and only Four
 Lord, Sky Lord would have been in chaos,
 Sky Lord would have been dark when you
 were born. Who are you, owner of chaos?
 Who are you, owner of night? You are in
 chaos, Great Lord of Days, the eye
 of the sun was plucked out when you were born.
 Who is your mother, what father begets you
 when you do penance? She is Red
 Rainbow, White Rainbow, she is
 the point of the lancet, the tip of the penis,
 this is your mother, your father, begetter, to-

Citupache Can Citupachi⁵
 che max Cal sih cech u
 lool chabe u lool ahiabe
 Can chaloche Can chah
 lo tunich Casi hech u lo
 ol ahiab ah Ci tan Case
 Cech u lool chabe ce
 ech ah lo tan Case ce
 ch nite tan Case Cech
 balam tan Case Cech
 ah mo tan Case Cech
 Can tan Case max a che
 i xanation bay u la
 a hat Ca jibe che

gether behind the tree, together behind the
 monkey-throat tree when you were born, the
 desire in that chaos, desire in that darkness,
 the spitting snake was in the tree, the snake
 was on the rock when you were born, desire
 in the darkness. Master of Drunken Madness,
 you are the desire in the chaos, you
 are Master of Stupid Madness, you
 are Lascivious Madness, you are
 Jaguar Madness, you are
 Master of Macaw Madness, you are
 Deer Madness. Who is your tree?
 Who is your bush? What served as your bed,
 your bower when you were born?

⁶ Cha Cal tan Cas che sa cal
 tan Cas che ehel tan
 che hanal tan Case
 cal kan te mo sa cal han
 te mo ehel han te mo
 hanal han te mo a che
 la a che Cech mo tan Case
 cha cal has max sa cal has
 max ehel has max hanal
 has max cha cal ho ho
 max y y y Cha Cal nite
 max y y y la a che Cech
 te tan Case max tan Case
 Cech lo tan Case

The red tree of madness, white
 tree of madness, black tree of
 madness, yellow tree of madness,
 the red macaw acacia, white macaw aca-
 cia, black macaw acacia,
 yellow macaw acacia are your trees.
 These are your trees, you Macaw Madness.
 The red mamey, who is the white mamey?
 Who is the black mamey? Who is the yellow
 mamey? Who is the red viper tree?
 Who is white, black, yellow? The red frangipani,
 who is white, black, yellow? These are your trees,
 Lascivious Madness. Who is the madness?
 You are Stupid Madness . . .

bin yenal yx hunpu sub 7
 hih yx hunpu sub olom
 u Col ba chab u Col baa
 hab tit kax uhi nam ye
 nal ix hunpu sub hih yx
 hunpu sub olom tituchmah
 uhi nam yenal tux oah
 haad mata Can hai olom
 ba Can ah octan Cas at
 Ci mo tan Cas he ba Can Col
 chab Canlan Cas balin
 pi chin tex to Cech Can
 u hih Cex Cantul hiba
 Cab ulubul bin ye nat

you will be where she is, a needle
 for drawing blood, a needle for gore,
 respite comes for the chaos, respite comes
 for the darkness, the bond is shaken loose
 where she is, a needle for drawing blood, a
 needle for drawing gore, the seizure
 is shaken out, there where he vomited
 water, only it wasn't water flowing, it was gore
 flowing, Master of Traveler's Madness, Master
 of Drunken Macaw Madness flowed out. What
 about the desire of chaos, the illness of madness?
 Drain them away then, you Four
 Gods, you Four Who Pour the
 Years. They will fall where she is,

ix han hinich ix han chaah
 olom ye nat ix huntah a
 Cay olom pi chin tex to ye
 nat ix huntah a Cay olom
 pi chin tex to Cex Cantiti
 hih Cax Cantul hiba Cab u
 Subul bin ye nat yx Colan
 Cas eh Can kin Chitanye
 nat yx Colan Cas eh tuchiah
 Vhab u Colba chab u Colba
 ahah tule jahix hih hih
 max Cas xan tule jahix
 kiki hia Cas tule bta pule

Yellow Sun Face, Yellow Dripper of
 Gore, where she is, the sole owner of the
 accursed gore. Drain it away then, to the place
 where she is, the sole owner of accursed gore,
 drain it away then, you Four
 Gods, you Four Who Pour the Years, it
 will fall where she is, the star of Stupid Mad-
 ness, it will lie four days in the place
 where she is, the star of Stupid Madness. He bit
 his arm, relieving the chaos, relieving
 the darkness, and he also tasted the blood of the
 monkey-throat tree, and he tasted the blood
 on the foundation stone. Well then, throw

7
 jo uCol chabe uCol chabe ?
 Cex Cantul tikie Cex Cantul
 ti ba Cab ulubul bin tan
 yot met nal yoc nal uye
 m: Canyah ual kah: Celic
 yx ma a uaye yx mac u
 hol Cab laba Ca una laba
 Ca uCol Cit Cat kuchi tan
 yot met nal humuc nac Ca
 huc nac ya uat uchi chit
 box chabla cex Cantul ti
 ti Cex Cantul ti ba Cab
 Cibin yala bat fumen nac
 ya ual kah: Cantul ti
 Cantul ti ba Cab humuc nac

the desire of chaos there, desire of darkness,
 you Four Gods, you of the Four
 Directions, it will fall into

the heart of Hell where its fa-
 ther sits, Ultimate Enemy of Fire,
 where she is, the Foreigner, Door-
 keeper of the Earth. This is its mother, this
 is its lustful father when it arrives in
 the heart of Hell. Raucous, thun-
 derous are the cries of the birds.

What about this chaos, you Four
 Gods, you of the Four Directions?"

This will be the dialogue concerning the Ultimate
 Enemy of Fire when speaking to the Four Gods,
 the Four Directions. "Raucous are the

10
 ya uat uchi chit umutit
 fumen yx mauaye ix mac
 uhol Cab chac tan chi chi
 sac tan sipip chac tan sipip
 yx ho Ca an yx ho min yal
 wabin pul kint alubic tan
 yot met nal Colan Cosba
 Cinmo tan Cosba Cin balam
 tan Cosba Cin bla uCol chab
 Cubi Co Cex Cantul tikie
 Cex Cantul ti ba Cab o o
 tin balix ha xan ma ba can
 ha's kiti ba can olombacan

cries of the birds, the bringers of omens
 on her behalf, the Foreigner, Door-
 keeper of the Earth, red-bellied birds,
 white-bellied falcons, red-bellied falcons,
 thrushes in the sky, thrushes in the clouds:
 these will portend your fall into
 the heart of Hell. What about stupid madness?
 What about macaw madness? What about
 jaguar madness? Well then, the desire of chaos
 is yours to level out, you Four Gods,
 you of the Four Directions. Aha!

The water spreads thin, but what flows is not
 water but blood flowing, gore flowing from the

'tuche ah mo balam tan la " "
 C'bt nyalabal Ca a thani
 Can tul ti'ku Can tul ti'ba
 Cab tumenel yx ma uaye
 yx mac uhol Cab

tree of Master of Macaw Jaguar Madness.”
 This will be the dialogue when speaking to
 the Four Gods, those of the Four Direc-
 tions, concerning her, the Foreigner,
 Doorkeeper of the Earth.