

COMPARISON BETWEEN THE *HERRERA MANUSCRIPT* AND  
*EL LIBRO DE LOS CANTARES DE DZITBALCHE*

by David Bolles  
with additional thoughts by Nikolai Grube

On the following pages are facsimiles of one page each from the *Herrera Manuscript* and *El Libro de Los Cantares de Dzitbalche*. There is a very noticeable similarity in handwriting shared by these two manuscripts. Aside from this visual similarity, there is also a certain similarity in the spelling practices of Mayan words which, in my experience, is peculiar to these two works and is not to be found in other works written in Yucatec / Itza Mayan written before the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

Aside from these two similarities and peculiarities there are numerous other items which are also peculiar to these two works:

1) The use of certain orthographic conventions which are generally not to be found in Mayan texts before the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Chief among these is the use of **ch'** for **ch**, and both **tt** and crossed **ƚ** for **th**.

2) The frequent and unexpected use of the letter **I** at the end of words. For example, there is **lail**, meaning "thus", given in place of the standard **lay** given so often in the colonial manuscripts.

3) The use of the word **laibetic**, or in one case **lailbeetiic**, which in modern Yucatec means "for this reason". There are four examples of this word in the *Herrera* and three in the *Dzitbalche*. This term is not to be found in any of the colonial dictionaries nor in any of the colonial texts which I have worked on so far. It is, however, a fairly common term in modern Yucatec, and is to be found with some frequency in the Caste War letters and also in the modern stories which Alejandra and David Bolles and also Juan Manuel Andrade have collected.<sup>1</sup> Of course, the fact that **laibetic** or variant spellings of this expression is not found in material written before the mid 19<sup>th</sup> Century does not preclude its earlier existence.

3) The use of the word **hadzutz** which in modern Yucatec means "beautiful, pretty". There are five examples of this word in the *Herrera* and three in the *Dzitbalche*. This term is not to be found in any of the colonial dictionaries nor in any of the colonial texts which I have worked on so far. It is, however, a fairly common term in modern Yucatec, and is to be found with some frequency in the modern stories which Alejandra and David Bolles, and also Juan Manuel Andrade, have collected. The earliest occurrence I have come across is to be found in Juan Pío Pérez's *Diccionario de la Lengua Maya.*, published in the 1870's with the final date of 1877.

3) The use of the word **ɔiz** = copulation, which is to be found only in the *Herrera*, not found in the language before the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

---

<sup>1</sup> In the modern literature this word is typically spelled **lebetic** and pronounced as such. During the mid-1800's in various of the Caste War letters this is written **labetic**.

4) The improper use of the word **ppum** = arch in the *Dzitbalche*, in which the writer tried to use it for bow, as for example in **Ah Ppum ti Hul**. The correct term for archer is **ah hul**, according to the *Vienna* and the *Motul* vocabularies, and the correct term for bow is **chulul**,<sup>2</sup> which is also the name of the tree which is used to make bows. It seems that the writer of the *Dzitbalche* confused the word arco = arch with the word arco = bow.

5) The only use of the word **Lamat** as the designation for the planet Venus, as opposed to the day name in **u xoc kin**, in the Colonial literature, is to be found in the *Dzitbalche*. The Franciscan vocabularies give various names to the planet Venus, but not **Lamat**.<sup>3</sup>

A communication from Nikolai Grube (September 8, 2018) made these additional points:

1) In fact, **Lamat** is never used as a word for "star" or "Venus", not even in the Classic period, but in some publications of the 1960's and 1970's it is stated that **Lamat** means "Venus" because the day sign for the Yucatec day name is a star sign.

2) I am also very confused by the references to **Hunabku**, who never played a major role in colonial writing.

3) Also, the reference to the **Wayeb** as **hvn-kal-kin xma k'aba'** is irritating because the last month obviously only had five days.

4) I also doubt that the Maya would have talked about the death of the moon as **v cimil v** as in the 11th **kay**. The moon would have been eaten, or would have been darkened. But the death of the moon is a very European concept, very much like the **yaxil kaax**.

5) All of this has left a bad taste in my mouth. I have read the **Cantares** with the students of my Maya class last year. We worked through the Maya text because we wanted to read colonial literature other than the **Chilam Balam** books and the **Bacab** ritual. It was the first time I really read the **Cantares**. I remember that I was feeling a little bit strange because all of the text appears to be very modern, but written by somebody who obviously had great knowledge of colonial Yucatec.

---

<sup>2</sup> See Roys' *Ethno-botany of the Maya*: **Chulul**. *Apoplanesia paniculata*, Presl. (Standl. & Gaumer.) Tree sometimes 30 feet high; its small flowers form in slender racemes. (Standl. 1920-26, p. 441). "Chulul. A very strong tree of this land, from which they make bows. Its heart is the strongest of any tree." (*Motul*)

<sup>3</sup> Some examples of entries from these vocabularies:

Estrella de la mañana o luzero: **noh ek .l. chac noh ek**. (vns)

Lucero de la mañana y estrella de la tarde, Venus: **Noh Ek .l. Xux Ek**. (vns)

Ah ahçah cab; ah ahçah cab ek: } luzero de la mañana. (mtm)

Ah ocçah kin: el luzero de la noche. (mtm)

Ah ppiz akab: luzero que sale a prima, y corre por toda ella, que parece la va medienda. (mtm)

Chac ek: luzero del día. ¶ Noh ek: luzero de la mañana. (sfm)

Chac ek: luzero del día. (mtm)

Noh ek: el luzero de la mañana, y estralla de la tarde; Venus. (mtm)

Noh ek: luzero o estrella de la mañana. ¶ Chac ek: luzero del día. (sfm)

Xux ek: el luzero de la mañana. (mtm)

Between my observations and those of Nikolai Grube all of the above makes one wonder what it is that we are looking at when it comes to the *Dzitbalche* and *Herrera* manuscripts, and why these various anomalies and apparently modern terms show up only in these two works.

Finally, it should be noted that the language used in the *Dzitbalche* and *Herrera* is quite different from that used in the Colonial literature. In the *Dzitbalche* in particular the language is very close to modern Yucatec. An earlier supposition by researchers was that the language of *Dzitbalche* was a separate dialect from that of the rest of Colonial Yucatan. However, given the other surviving texts from the region around the town of *Dzitbalche* such as the *Crónica de Calkini* and references to the language of Campeche in such works as the *Motul* vocabulary this supposition seems very unlikely. The conclusion I have come to is that the *Dzitbalche* and *Herrera* manuscripts are fabrications from the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

## Bibliography

Andrade, Manuel J.

1931. *Yucatec Maya Stories*. University of Chicago, MCMCA Series 49, No. 262. Chicago.

Barrera Vásquez, Alfredo

1965. *El Libro de los Cantares de Dzitbalche*. Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, Serie Investigaciones 9, Mexico.

*Bocabulario de Maya Than*

1993. Facsimile and edited version by René Acuña. Instituto de Investigaciones Filológicas, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, México.

Bolles, David D. and Alejandra K.

2001. *A Grammar of the Yucatecan Mayan Language*. Revised edition. Labyrinthos, Lancaster, CA.

*Códice de Calkini* (also known as the *Crónica de Calkini*)

1957. Facsimile and edited version by Alfredo Barrera Vasquez. Published by Gobierno del Estado. Biblioteca Campechana, 4. Campeche.

Ciudad Real, Antonio de

1984. *Calepino Maya de Motul*. Edición de Rene Acuña. Facsimile version by René Acuña. Instituto de Investigaciones Filológicas, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, México.

1995. *Calepino de Motul: Diccionario maya-español*, edited by Ramón Arzápalo. Instituto de Investigaciones Antropológicas, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, México. 3 vols.

2001. *Calepino Maya de Motul*, Critical and annotated edition by René Acuña. Plaza y Valdés, México.

Gubler, Ruth and David Bolles

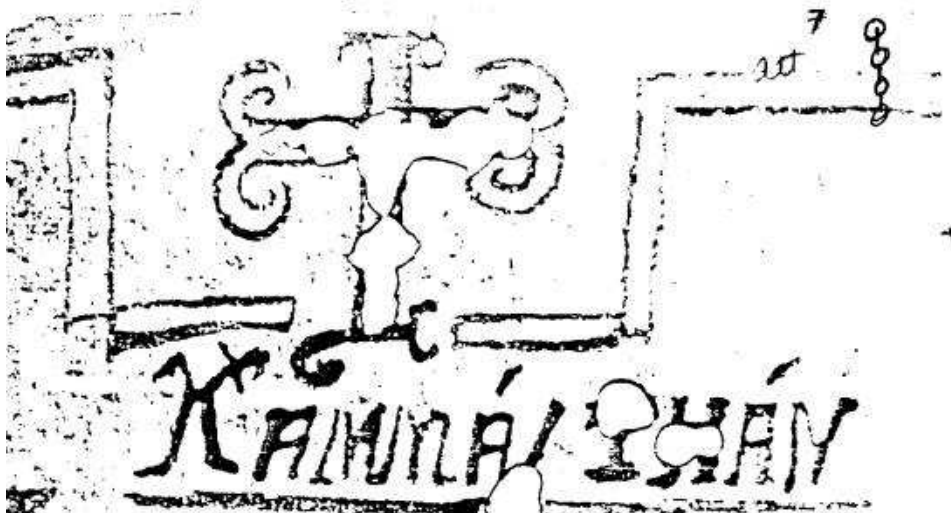
2001. *Herrera Manuscript*. Facsimile, Edited Text and Translation. A. u. G. Koechert, Hannover, Germany.

Pío Pérez, Juan

- 1877 *Diccionario de la Lengua Maya*. Published by J.F. Molina Solis, Mérida, Yucatan.

Roys, Ralph L.

1931. *The Ethno-Botany of the Maya*. Middle American Research Institute, New Orleans.



V. TOHL-TAN-HARL  
YVM-CHRISTO-TI-TEEX  
VAY-TIUL-FANTA YGLEFIA  
V-TIAL-CA-A-DREX-A-UO  
LALEEX-TIAL-A-YACUN  
T-CEEX-CHEN LAIZI-YEEEL-A-TZ  
CCEEX-A CHIN-POLI-CEEX-V-YU  
TZILIL-VAY-TA-CAMALILEEX-LA  
VAY-PETEM-ITZREX-LAIBETIC  
C-DIIB-TRIC-LAIL-HUN-NA-V-TIA  
CA-CAIV-NEEX-BAILX-C-LALIC-TEEX  
TV-CHI-YVM-CUOBIBLAM VICARI  
CHRISTO-MEHYBIL-HUN-IVAA  
V-OR-X-CIICHFAN-ZUHUY-CEZEL  
BIL-IX-MARIA-V-IVA-TRIL-U-A  
LOHI-CILICH-CELEM YVM CHIN  
IC-MEYUS-VETEL-TV-HACARL-  
LAAKAL  
CILICH-CELEM-YVM-IVAY-YO-KO  
CAB-UTIALEIL-V-D-IC-YACUNAC

Herrera Manuscript, folio 7r.

**V-V-A-K-A-Y-K-A-Y**  
**V-OTZIL-X-M-IN-NA**  
**X-POM-DIKOOT-CH-E**

<p>             JZAN-GIICHANAN-CAR              CIM-INAD-CRA-CIM-IN              AY-AY-SIA-YUMEN-              CHAT-PAATEV-TV-KIN              TIXNAL-IV-LAAR-              MIIX-MAR-YANTEN              VAY-VO-KO-CAS-              AY-AY-YUMILEY              CU-MAN-APPEL-KIN              CU-CIM-TEN-IV-LAAR-              TIN-TTULU-CH-CIN-AT-              TIN-TTULU-CH-IV-AY-AY         </p>	<p>             H'KIN-YETEL-HKAB              CHEN-DIKOOT-DIKOOT              XUUPZIN-AY-VICH              LAIL-XUUPZIN-OLL              YAM-LOUB-HACH-CHICH              AY-AY-YAM-CHATEA              OTZIL-DANTEN              LEIL-YAH-IVU-              ZATEM-VJOC-CIN-              VA-ZATEM-OLAZ              IN-CICH-OLEY         </p>
<p>             JZ-MAN-LAIL-KIN-              TIN-HVIN-PAAT-CEN              CRA-TV-HACH-CH-              V-BIZEN-T-NIN-              V-APPEL-DOL-T-KAB              AY-AY-IV-YUMILEY              H'LOOBI-HACH-YAAB              YA-YAB-LOUB-TIN              IVAN-IV-VAY-JOISA              CA-MIIX-JA-BIKIN              BIKIN-LAVE-IV-VO-KO-              MIIX-IV-VOYE-VAY              HACH-HEM-TIN-HVIN              CHEB-BEY-IV-MAN              VAY-TIN-LVIN         </p>	<p>             OTZIL-OTZIL-CA-BAW              TV-HVIN-YU-              VA-YAM-CH-              TV-TTULU-IV-HVIN              VART-MEN-PAAT              TV-HOL-IVAH-IVAHIL              TV-LACAL-MAC-              HELL-V-IV-YACUMBI              IVAN-IV-TIN-IVARI              V-IV-IV-IV-KAR              AY-AY-YAM-CHATEA              OTZIL-DANTE-              V-TIAC-CRA-PAATEC              IV-IVU-IV-         </p>

El Libro de Los Cantares de Dzitbalche, folio 5r.