



This plant of Agave shawii in Baja California is a developmental monstrosity. As an addendum to the 1985 Symposium on the Genus Agave, Donald J. Pinkava announced that John R. Pasek had requested the photograph above to be projected on the screen. Some participants immediately thought of XÓLOTL, the pre-Columbian deity who changed himself into a monstrosity of an Agave. As the audience marvelled at the Agave monstrosity on the screen, the plenary session was declared closed.

Editorial

XÓLOTL and QUETZALCÓATL in Relation to Monstrosities of MAGUEY (Agave) and TEOCENTLI (Zea), With Notes on the Pre-Columbian Religion of Mexico. According to the Aztecs and their predecessors in pre-Columbian Mexico there were several creations and destructions of the world. We now theorize that each cycle ended with an eclipse of the sun. When the god TEZCATLIPOCA was ruling the world as the sun, his enemy QUETZALCÓATL knocked him from the sky, the former falling to become a Jaguar on earth. Tezcatlipoca now rules over the shadow kingdom of night as the god of darkness, the patron of youth and princes, but also of sorcerers and evil ones. He presides over feasts and banquets. As Tezcatlipoca tried to return from night to day one foot extended into day and was torn off by EARTH MONSTER to be replaced by a Smoking Mirror by which Tezcatlipoca detects events in his alter-universe of daytime. As soon as Tezcatlipoca had fallen from the sky, Quetzalcóatl became the sun, until he too was struck down in the next cycle of destruction to become the Plumed Serpent. Since a feathered snake is a monstrosity, he exists today as an incarnation of XÓLOTL, the god of monstrosities (see below).

Next came TLÁLOC and then CHALCHIUHTLICUE to become progressive suns. With each new cycle of creation and destruction of the world, men ate food plants which were progressively less wild and more refined, finally eating TEOCENTLI, the "Grain of the Gods" now considered the ancestor of modern corn. With each successive destructive cycle human beings were destroyed by converting them first to fish, then birds, then monkeys, finally giants. When the last world was destroyed, the gods killed the giants and all humanity. Unfortunately the sun was also lost in the battle. All the gods (the

stars of the heavens) gathered at TEOTIHUACÁN so that one could volunteer to be sacrificed to the sun.

Not one but two gods volunteered, one rich and one poor. The rich god offered fine possessions in sacrifice as preparation. The poor god offered only spines of MAGUEY (*Agave*) stained with his own blood. To become the sun the god or gods had to leap into the flame of the sacred brazier to emerge pure so as to illuminate the world. The rich god tried three times to hurl himself into the fire but failed due to his inability to give up the realm of darkness. The poor god who had offered only *Agave* spines stained with his own blood succeeded. Before the new sun would move across the heavens from east to west, he demanded that the other gods (stars) be killed in sacrifice. This strong new sun of humble origin was HUITZILOPOCHTLI, the Blue Hummingbird on the Left, who became the alter-ego of Tezcatlipoca when the latter, the rich god, finally leaped into the brazier after the flames had weakened and (in something of a shadow sense) also became the sun, although he retained his alter-ego realm of the night. Venus, the Morning Star (Quetzalcóatl) shoots an arrow at the sun but is killed each morning as it is returned. Eventually all the gods are dead but Xólotl, the Evening Star (alter-ego of Quetzalcóatl). Xólotl, god of monstrosities and doubling, used sorcery to withstand the arrows of the sun. First, he changed into a doubled or monstrose Maguey, then into a doubled or monstrose Teocentli (*Zea*), eventually becoming the AXOLOTL, aquatic stage of the Tiger Salamander (*Ambystoma trigrinum*). The feathery gills of the Axolotl make it appear to be a plumed water serpent and at the same time a monster.

XÓLOTL-QUETZALCÓATL is a twin god, considered the god of all twins and monsters. [This pre-Columbian concept correctly recognizes that many monstrosities of growth are due to a doubling and re-doubling.] Interestingly, this god of monsters is the archetypically good god, indicating a belief by the ancients (probably the Toltecs) in the

potential good of novelties and inventions which might at first seem somewhat bizarre. As the Plumed Serpent, depicted as bird and snake, Quetzalcóatl is the beneficent god of all mankind. As the Axolotl this last remaining god seemed to be killed by the arrows of the sun but actually split into an ethereal EHÉCATL (plumed god of the wind) and a serpent-like (but often rather dog-faced) terrestrial CÓATL (perhaps originally the adult slithering form of *Ambystoma*, which may have been considered a monster because dog-faced and serpent-like but having legs). In any event the twin deity in his dog-faced serpent state penetrated the world of the dead and stole the bones of the dead humans of past destroyed worlds. Escaping with the bones but with the infernal demons of the dead in hot pursuit, the twin deity emerged Phoenix-like as the beautiful Quetzalcóatl. Taking *Agave* spines, he sacrificed some of his own blood, sprinkling it over the bones to bring to life the human beings of the present world. Quetzalcóatl is the god of resurrection, the "precious twin" who appears in the heavens as the Morning Star and again in the afternoon as the Evening Star (Xólotl). Being devoted to life, he resurrected the other gods as well. His earthly representation as TLAHUITZCALPANTECUHTLI has two faces, one of a living man, the other a skull.

Quetzalcóatl is the hero founder of agriculture and industry, the plumed serpent god of wind and life. As the wind of the storm clouds, he flies with plumed wings, but when he once again causes TLÁLOC and the rain of the storm to give life to the plants, his goodness slithers over the ground to become re-doubled in the crops. On July

16, AD 750, at the time of a solar eclipse, with Venus appearing extremely close to the sun, Quetzalcóatl, the good god of agriculture—as well as of science, industry and art—set off into the Caribbean on a raft of serpent skins, not to be seen again until a predicted return in the Nahuatl year CE ÁCATL. Quetzalcóatl's directional orientation among the gods made him the "white" god and he was often depicted having a beard. One can imagine the consternation of MOTECZUMA II when in the year Ce Ácatl (AD 1519) "giant winged canoes" of Cortés were cited off the coast of Mexico. The ships landed on Maundy Thursday of 1519 but Cortés did not disembark until the next day which was GOOD FRIDAY to the Spaniards but was, by strange coincidence, the birthday of Quetzalcóatl in the Aztec calendar! This was Year 1 of the new order, wherein the patron of agriculture, science, industry and art, who did not demand massive human sacrifice, had returned! Surely the white-faced and bearded Cortés with his strange hat and shining armor, coming as he did in a winged canoe, appeared every bit as monstrose as Quetzalcóatl, himself a monstrosity and alter-ego god of monstrosities. Interestingly, present-day Corn (*Zea mays*) is considered by many modern botanists to be a monstrose redoubled derivative of Teocentli (see *Desert Plants*, Volume 3, Number 4), and useful economic cultivars of *Agave* to be pentaploid or other ploidal monstrosities or re-doublings! One naturally wonders if the good of Quetzalcóatl did not indeed slither over the ground to become instilled in these crops as Xólotl stirred to miraculously produce these good monstrosities! —F. S. Crosswhite.

Agave and the Pre-Cortés Religion

Continued from back cover

hooks, then piercing the chests with a stone knife to rip the still-beating hearts out as an offering. But such sacrifice to Xiuhtecuhtli, whom they saw as the old god HUEHUETÉOTL, was merely calendric and became perfunctory. To be on the safe side all old fire was extinguished at the end of its lifetime (52 years) and a strong new fire created which was distributed to all the hearths. Sacrifice to the god of hunting involved shooting arrows into an *Agave*, since the Aztecs were no longer major hunters, then carrying bound victims (as if they were deer) to the tops of pyramids where their beating hearts were liberated from their chests. To the agricultural Aztecs, this sacrifice too seems to have been a token event.

The hallmark of the MÉXICA of TENOCHTITLÁN was sacrifice to Huitzilopochtli, their Hummingbird God of Sun and War. Making of the intoxicating drink PULQUE from *Agave* by the Méxica necessitated "castrating" the plant by removing the embryonic reproductive structures or flowering stalk so that flowers and seeds were not produced. The energy ebbed from the leaves and flowed into the central heart of the plant. Pulque was a liquid having a flame to warm the human spirit. Although Xiuhtecuhtli was god of the Center, the symbolic color of the Center and the Up and the Down was green rather than the red or yellow of flame. The preciousness of the center and the up and the down of the present is epitomized by the Jade, referred to as CHALCHIHUITL. Aside from the green heart of the rosette of the *Agave*, another word, CHALCHIHUATL ("Precious Liquid") refers to the nectar flowing from it. By castrating the *Agave* to make pulque, the Aztecs seem to have realized that they were depriving the pollinating hummingbird of his CHALCHIHUATL. As children of Huitzilopochtli the Aztecs determined to remedy the deprivation and to regularly feed their chosen god. The word Chalchihuatl also came to mean "Nectar Fed to the Gods" in the sense of human blood. The Méxica brought captives of war first directly to the temples at the tops of the

pyramids, gave them pulque to drink and dedicated them to Huitzilopochtli. From that day on their bodies contained the Chalchihuatl belonging to the hummingbird god. The captives lived peacefully as servants of their masters and were fattened for a good length of time. During famines and other occasions of religious need, including calendric ceremonies, the captives were again taken to the temples and for the second time willingly drank pulque, but this time the *Agave* nectar pulsating through their veins and vessels was liberated and offered to Huitzilopochtli as the beating heart was ripped from the chest. Then the flesh of the victims was cooked and eaten by the Méxica in a solemn communion. This vigorously prosecuted sacrifice largely superceded sacrifice to the "old, wrinkled" god of fire, just as harvest of polysaccharides to make pulque from turgid decapitated *Agave* replaced normal flowering which would have resulted in an old wrinkled monocarpic *Agave* (truly a HUEHUEMAGUEY) drained of its nourishment to nurture other life. One needs little imagination to see how the Aztecs must have compared this monocarpic wrinkling with the concept of fire being drained of its energy in supporting life (through domestic heating and cooking). The Aztecs simply came to prefer draining the energy of the Jade Heart (Chalchihuatl) of the Maguey themselves before the Chalchihuatl became dissipated! But Huitzilopochtli had to receive his share. The powers and strengths of the cardinal directions were probably seen as instilled into the central Chalchihuatl as the outstretched *Agave* leaves yielded their energy to the inner heart of the plant, just as Huitzilopochtli, in thankfulness to the Aztecs, ensured that tribute from conquered cities in all directions flowed incessantly to Tenochtitlán, the heart at the center of the empire.

The sacrifice of Chalchihuatl to Huitzilopochtli in the temples legitimized the drinking of pulque by all celebrants in the sacrifice until the wee hours of the morning on a typical sacrificial night, until Quetzalcóatl, the Morning Star, again chased away Tezcatlipoca and the forces of night. The *Agave* goddess MAYAHUEL had 400 nipples to suckle the multitudes. To dedicate the Templo Mayor to Huitzilopochtli, the Tenochca sacrificed 20,000 captives, the entire male population of major districts of Oaxaca. The quantity of pulque involved must have decimated major *Agave* populations as well.

Drinking of pulque during the normal course of the day, rather than when sanctified by a religious occasion, was reserved to

Continued on page 50