

Comparison between the Herrera Manuscript and El Libro de Los Cantares de Dzitbalche

by David Bolles

Below 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 20th 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 20th 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 modern stories which Alejandra and David Bolles, and also Juan Manuel Andrade, have collected.¹ Of course, the fact that **laibetic** is not found in material written before the 20th Century does not preclude its earlier existence.

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

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**,² which is also the name of the tree which is used to

¹ In the modern literature this word is typically spelled **leibetic** and pronounced as such.

² 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*)

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**.³

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 20th Century.

³ 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: lucero del día. ¶ Noh ek: lucero 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: lucero o estrella de la mañana. ¶ Chac ek: lucero del día. (sfm)

Xux ek: el luzero de la mañana. (mtm)

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V. TOHL-TAN-HARL
 YUM-CHRISTO-TI-TEEX
 VAY-TIUL-FANTA YGLEFIA
 V-TIAL-CA-A-DREX-A-VO
 LALEEX-TIAL-A-YACUN
 T-CEEX-CHEN LAIZI-YEEEL-A-TZ
 CCEEX-A CHIN-POL-I-CEEX-V-YU
 TZILIL-VAY-TA-CAMALILEEX-LA
 VAY-PETEM-ITZREX-LAIBETIC
 C-DIIB-IZIC-LAIL-HUN-NA-V-TIA
 CA-CAIV-NEEX-BAILX-C-LALIC-TEEX
 TV-CHI-YUM CUOB/BALAM VICARI
 CHRISTO-MEHYBIL-HUN-IVAA
 YG-OR-X-CIICHFAN-ZUHUY-COZEL
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 IC-MEFUS-VETEL-TV-HACAL-L
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