The Mayan Account of the Spanish Conquest (1540-1546) in the
Chilam Balam of Chumayel

EXCERPTS

The Chilam Balam are sacred texts of the Yucatan Maya that record history, myth, religion, prophecies, medicine, and calendars. Each town compiled its own texts; the excerpts here are from the town of Chumayel.

La ix u katunil
Yax hulci ob español essob
Uay
Tac lumil lae
T u uuc pis tun
Bułuc ahau
U katunil
Ti ix hop’i xpnoil lae
T u habil quinientos dies y nuebe años Dª 1519. . .

That then was the katun period¹
When the Spaniards first arrived
Here
In these lands.
On the seventh measured tun
Of 11 Ahau
Was also the katun period that began
Christianity,
In the year or our lord fifteen nineteen,
1519 V [1546 M].² . .

T u kin y an sulim chan
T u kin y an chikin putun
Uiilnom che
Uiilnom tunich
Ah satal uil
Ychil ah buluuc ahau katun
Buluuc ahau u hop’ol u xocol
Y oklał lay katun y an ca uli tz’ulob

At that time there was Zulim Chan;
At that time there were western Chontal.³
Hungering were the trees;
Hungering were the rocks.⁴
The destroyer hunger
Was during the katun of the lord of 11 Ahau.
11 Ahau was the beginning of the count
Because this was the katun when the foreigners arrived.

Ti u talel ob
Ti likin ca uli ob e
Ti ix hop’i christianoil xan i
Ti lakin u tz’oc than
Ych can si hoo
U hetz’ katun
He u kahlay ucho i
Bal t u mentah ob . . .

When they came,
They arrived from the east.
When Christianity began also,
In the east was its word completed.
Heaven Born Merida
Was the seat of the katun.⁵
This is the account of what occurred,
Of what they did. . .

Ca oci num ya
Ca oci christianoil
T u men lay hach christianob

When misery came,
When Christianity came
From these many Christians


¹ katun: a period of 7200 days, app. twenty years. Tun: 360 days. 11 Alau: Mayan calendar cycle beginning in 1539.
² V/M: different Mayan calendars. Edmonson notes that the Franciscan missionaries reached the Yucatan in 1546, and Merida in 1549.
³ Zulim Chan: the rain god. Chontal: the Maya of Itzá, the last to be conquered by the Spanish in the late 1600s.
⁴ A serious drought afflicted the northern Yucatan during this period.
⁵ Merida: Mayan city captured and named by the Spanish in 1541. Most of the Yucatan Maya were defeated by the end of the decade.
Who arrived
With the true divinity,
The True God.
For this indeed was the beginning of misery
For us,
The beginning of tribute,
The beginning of tithes,
The beginning of strife over purse snatching,
The beginning of strife with blowguns,
The beginning of strife over promotions,
The beginning of the creation of many factions,
The beginning of forced seizure for debts,
The beginning of forced imprisonment for debts,
The beginning of village strife,
The beginning of misery and affliction,
The beginning of forcible separation,
The beginning of forced labor for the Spaniards
And the sun priests,
Forced labor for the town chiefs,
Forced labor for the teachers,
Forced labor for the public prosecutors,
By the boys,
The youths of the towns,
While the force of great suffering
Afflicted the suffering people.
These were the very poor,
These were the very poor who did not rebel
At the oppression
That was inflicted on them.
This was the Antichrist
Here on earth,
The Earth Lions of the towns,
The Foxes of the towns,
The Bedbugs of the towns
Are the bloodsuckers of the poor peasants here.
For indeed the time is coming soon
Of the day of the coming
Of tears to the eyes
And the presence
Of our Lord
Who is God.
The justice of our Lord
God will descend
Everywhere
In the world.
God will be very angry
And something will come
From Yellow Death
And the Destroying Spirit,
The oppressors
On the face of this earth.