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America's Egypt
John Lloyd Stephens and the Discovery of the Maya
BY RICHARD PRESTON

John Lloyd Stephens (1805–1852), the hyperactive American journalist who visited forty-four Maya cities hidden in the jungles of Mesoamerica, wrote books of adventure and travel that have always enjoyed a high reputation among those who know them. Although Stephens is generally thought of as a pioneering archaeologist with a flair for journalism, he would better be thought of as a pioneering journalist with a flair for archaeology. His instinct for the big story led him to the Near East, to Russia, and above all, to the Maya ruins of Central America, which he called “America's Egypt.” If any one person can be said to have “discovered” Maya civilization, it is Stephens. Both of his books—Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatán—and the later Incidents of Travel in Yucatán sold well to a public that was thirsty for documentary representations of life in unexplored regions of the globe.

Such nonfiction narratives of experience became an important part of American literature in the nineteenth century, due partly to the growth of a middle class audience that liked to read such books, and partly to the changes in the publishing industry that made even highly illustrated books affordable for people of relatively limited means. The first editions of Stephens’ books about Mesoamerica, which came to the Library as part of the Grenville Kane Collection, are indeed fine examples of the marriage of the new publishing technologies and the literature of fact.

John Lloyd Stephens grew up in New York, and he was a New Yorker to the core. He came from a well-to-do family, and became a lawyer, like his father before him. His second career grew naturally from that: he went into politics, and became a professional Democratic party hack and gifted firebrand. As "Tammany's pet speaker," Stephens stomped the city during the election year of 1834, while Whigs and Democrats bitterly contested the mayorship. On the speaker's platform, Stephens appeared before crowds as a stocky figure with short legs and gangling, gesticulating, apelike arms that seemed poorly attached to a stumpy torso. He had a hoarse, powerful voice, an elongated head, wide, mobile eyes, and a beard. In other words, he looked like the kind of man who skeptical European observers predicted would bring the American experiment in democracy to ruin. By the end of the 1834 mayoral campaign, Stephens' throat was so sore that his doctor ordered him to sea. This marked the beginning of his literary career. Like so many other traveling journalists, Stephens was driven by poor health out of a solid profession into the risky habit of writing books.

Stephens' doctor had told him to take a "mild trip to Europe." Accordingly, Stephens caught an express steamer to Constantinople, rode in an open wagon across the Ukrainian steppe to Moscow and Saint Petersburg, and ventured through Poland into France. In Paris, his imagination became inflamed with a travel-narrative by Léon Laborde, Voyage de l’Arabie Pétrifiée, recently published and sumptuously illustrated with engraved and colored plates. The book told of Laborde's visit to mysterious ruins at a place called Petra (now in Jordan). Stephens decided to head in that general direction. He went to Egypt, hired a boat to take him up the Nile, descended the river to Cairo, and then, having resolved to visit Petra, he crossed the Sinai in Turkish costume with a party of Arabs, and made it to Petra alive.

From Smyrna, Stephens sent his first literary production, a long travel letter describing the city, to Charles Fenno Hoffman, a friend of his, who was the new editor of the American Monthly magazine. "You ... who ... have a tender regard for my character," Stephens wrote to Hoffman somewhat ingenuously, "certainly will not publish me." With an even tenderer regard for the circulation figures of his magazine, Hoffman at once put the letter in print.

Hoffman knew well enough what the public wanted; he himself had just published his own personal narrative of adventure, Winter in the West, about a trip on horseback through the back-woods of Ohio. Other Stephens letters followed. "Scenes from the Levant" appeared in installments in the American Monthly in October, November, and December of 1835, and in November 1836. Although Stephens must have known that Hoffman was publishing him, he apparently did not know just how much of a celebrity he was becoming.

Next Stephens went to London, where he met the English artist Frederick Catherwood. As a young art student, Catherwood had studied the etchings of Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720 – 1778), and had become intoxicated with Piranesi's shadowy vistas of putrescent Roman ruins. Catherwood resolved to become the Piranesi of his age, to bring to the eyes of the modern nineteenth-century public undiscovered and equally haunting scenes of ruin. At the time that he met Stephens, Catherwood was exhibiting in London an immense painted panorama of Jerusalem. Catherwood made use of the camera lucida to produce this masterpiece. The camera lucida was an optical system that projected onto drawing paper an image of a scene, so that Catherwood could trace it in exquisite detail. Catherwood may have been the finest draughtsman of ruins during a century obsessed with ruins, and his association with Stephens would prove long and fruitful.

In London, Stephens also saw for the first time copies of the articles that Charles Fenno Hoffman had published, and he read some passages of his own prose aloud to an American friend, the Rev. Francis Lister Hawks. "Stephens," Hawks exclaimed, "you should write a book." Stephens modestly replied that he did not know how.

But back in New York in the autumn of 1836, Stephens decided to pay a visit to James Harper, the eldest of four brothers and head of the firm of Harper & Brothers at 82 Cliff Street. At that time, Harper & Brothers was one of the fastest-growing publishing houses in the world. James Harper, a hollow-cheeked, tooth-sucking Methodism who happened to be one of the shrewdest publishers of the age, vigorously shook the traveller's hand. Harper had grown up a farm boy on Long Island, and like many American publishers and editors of his day, he was a self-made man. He had a practical attitude toward

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books. A valuable book was one that was informative, moral, and profitable. Harper was well aware of Stephens' American Monthly letters, and he proceeded to give the fledgling thirty-one-year-old author some important information about the literary marketplace: "Travels," Harper said to Stephens, "sell about the best of anything we get hold of. They don't always go with a rush, like a novel by a celebrated author, but they sell longer, and in the end, pay better."

As he had done with his friend Hoffman, Stephens played the ingénue. He vowed to Harper that he had "never thought of such a thing. Writing a book, he said, was different from just scribbling letters of travel—a lot more difficult. Besides, Stephens added, he had not kept a good journal.

"That's no matter," Harper answered. "You went through and saw the signs. We have got plenty of books about those countries. You just pick out as many as you want, and I will send them home for you; you can dish up something."

In less than a year, Stephens had dished up a two-volume: a 180,000-word book entitled Incidents of Travel in Egypt, Arabia Petraea, and the Holy Land. Some pious critics detected the "spice of the irreligious" in the book, and found it a bit too hot for their taste. But for most readers, Stephens had gone through and seen "signs" enough to delight them. He backed up his narrative with wide but not intrusive erudition, skillfully weaving in historical set-pieces that never fell into pedantry. Edgar Allan Poe admired the book's construction and literary style. Lewis Cass, who had just returned from Egypt, lavished praise on Arabia Petraea in a gigantic 75-page review replete with lengthy quotations from the book, noting that Stephens' style had a grace "at times rising to elevation."

As a narrator describing foreign places, Stephens projects a certain Yankee insouciance. He reaches for comparisons that his American readers—especially those in New York—will understand: The Great Pyramidal at Giza, Stephens finds, "starting from a base as large as Washington Parade Ground, rises to a tapering point nearly three times as high as Trinity Church steeple." For a journey up the Nile, he learns that he can hire a boat with a crew of ten, the whole set-up costing a little more than a dollar a day. He shows a taste for genial self-mockery. At Thebes, he invites a party of Englishmen to dine on his boat, one of them "bearing one of the proudest names in England." Stephens' desperate Egyptian cook, at a loss for what to provide, steals the food for the meal from the Englishmen's boat.

Stephens has a touch for building an intensely realized scene by picking up visual and auditory cues while sketching a generalized "travel narrator's" response. We feel that he is a "typical American." He accretes physical sensations, writing in a vigorous, oral style that has the exuberance and cozy savor, as well as the occasionally excessive periphrasis, of mid-century journalism. His political training in oratory probably helped his writing. We forget how many books then were written for oral delivery; they were entertainment for the family. We forget also that in Stephens' time there were few "tourists," only "travellers," and a good storyteller could more easily parlay a journey into a profitable and critically successful book in an age when the only western visitors to many places in the world were missionaries, sailors, and travel writers.

Stephens' narrator-persona often resembles a lecturer describing panoramic pictures. In mid-nineteenth-century America, "panoramas" were a popular amusement. John Banvard of St. Louis, Missouri, went on tour with his "Three-Mile Painting," which depicted twelve hundred miles of the Mississippi River on a scroll of canvas that was hand-cranked through a gas-lit prosenium arch, while the artist lectured with a pointing stick to attentive crowds. Banvard's panorama enchanted Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, who saw it in Boston. With a similar sense of wonder, Longfellow read aloud to his family Herman Melville's story of his life among savages on a Pacific isle, Typee: A Peep at Polynesian Life. Typee and Banvard's panorama excited Longfellow and other spectators because both depicted brilliantly-colored yet factual worlds, far from genteel Victorian culture, peeped at as if through a magic window.

A salient talent for the conjuring of views came as a valuable asset to the travel writer, before photography brought every corner of the
earth to light. When Stephens entered the ruins of Petra, a Greco-Roman city cut into the living red rock of a narrow valley in what is now Jordan, he looked into the heart of a mythic, forgotten world:

For about two miles [the valley of Petra] lies between high and precipitous ranges of rocks, from five hundred to a thousand feet in height, standing as if torn asunder by some great convulsion, and barely wide enough for two horsemen to pass abreast. A swelling stream rushes between them; the summits are wild and broken; in some places overhanging the opposite sides, casting the darkness of night upon the narrow defile; then receding and forming an opening above, through which a strong ray of light is thrown down, and illuminates with the blaze of day the frightful chasm below. Wild fig-trees, oleanders, and ivy were growing out of the rocky sides of the cliffs hundreds of feet above our heads; the eagle was screaming above us; all along were the open doors of tombs, forming the great Necropolis of the city.11

The city of Petra is the antipodes of New York — an example of the wreck of human ambition, a corpse-like proof of the existence of broken covenants with a Deity. Stephens’ Petra becomes a Jeremiad to his countrymen:

I would that the skeptic could stand as I did among the ruins of this city among the rocks, and there open the sacred book and read the words of the inspired penman, written when this desolate place was one of the greatest cities in the world. I see the scoff arrested, his cheek pale, his lip quivering, and his heart quaking with fear, as the ruined city cries out to him in a voice loud and powerful as that of one risen from the dead; though he would not believe Moses and the prophets, he believes the handwriting of God himself in the desolation and eternal ruin around him.12


Stephens, not a man of exemplary piety, is not really insisting (as many American travelers after him would) that the Biblical landscape offers a confirmation of the literal truth of the Bible. Rather, he is issuing a general warning to his fellow Americans that covenants can exist between God and a nation, and can be broken. In “the handwriting of God” on the earth’s surface, he reads an omen of a possible American destiny.

Stephens’ Incidents of Travel in Egypt, Arabia Petrea, and the Holy Land was the first full-scale literary treatment of the Levant by an American. It was a big success, selling some 21,000 copies in America during its first two years. The British enjoyed it too; Arabia Petrea stayed in print in England until 1866.13

In 1838, Stephens dished up another two-volume for James Harper: Incidents of Travel in Greece, Turkey, Russia, and Poland.14 For this book and Arabia Petrea, it was rumored that Harpers’ paid Stephens $25,000 in royalties — “by no means the lion’s share,” according to Thomas Low Nichols.15 “Incidents of Travel” was becoming Stephens’ trademark. He would inject the phrase into the title of every book he published.

After his commercial and critical success, Stephens quickly mixed with the New York literary set. One day in 1838, John Russell Bartlett, who was the proprietor of Bartlett & Welford’s rare book shop at the fashionable Astor House on Broadway, suggested to Stephens that he explore some ruined ancient cities in Central America that had recently attracted attention. Bartlett showed Stephens a large folio that had just been published in Paris by Jean-Frédéric Maximilien, Count Waldeck, entitled Voyage pittoresque et archéologique dans la province d’Yucatán.16

As Stephens turned the pages, his imagination caught fire at the sight of Waldeck’s visionary and highly inaccurate lithographs of ruins in Central America. Once again, a sumptuously illustrated French work of exploration crystallized in Stephens a desire to see for himself and to write his own book — and to fill the book with pictures. It

happened that Frederick Catherwood was then in New York exhibiting his "Splendid Panorama of Jerusalem." Stephens approached Catherwood and easily convinced the artist that Central America might provide subject matter worthy of a Piranesi. Stephens (who was, after all, a lawyer) took care to draw up a detailed contract in which Stephens would pay Catherwood's expenses plus a fee; in return, Catherwood would supply Stephens with "the absolute and exclusive use of all information, drawings, and material" they might collect.\textsuperscript{17}

At that moment, by a stroke of luck, the United States' Minister to Central America died in the jungle. Stephens, drawing on his record of service to the Democratic party, secured the post for himself from the administration of President Martin Van Buren. He then purchased for himself a blue diplomatic coat that had brass eagle buttons. Bearing the official title of Minister to Central America, but with the unofficial purpose of literary journalism, Stephens departed by steamer for Central America in 1839, accompanied by Catherwood. Their nine-month journey eventually yielded Stephens' best-known book: *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan* (1841).

After landing in Belize, Stephens and Catherwood decided to make their way to the mysterious ruins of Copan, which they knew about from Count Waldeck's book. Travelling on mule back, they rode along the Motagua River and into the highlands of Honduras, passing villages desolated by a civil war then in progress. They kept their guns ready, and they tried to avoid anarchic bands of soldiers who were burning the countryside. Stephens thought that the brilliant lusciousness of nature seemed to mock human hopes. In a scene that foreshadowed Frederic E. Church's paintings of Central America, Stephens observed an earthquake-shattered church adjacent to "graves of the common people, untended and uncared for, with the barrow of laced sticks which had carried the body to the grave laid upon the top, and slightly covered with earth." He continued, describing an apocalyptic scene:

The bodies had decayed, and the dirt fallen in, and the graves were yawning. Around this scene of desolation and

\textsuperscript{17} Von Hagen, ed., *Arabia Petraea*, p. xlii.
death nature was rioting in beauty; the ground was covered with flowers, and parrots on every bush and tree, and flying in flocks over our heads, wanton in gayety of colors, with senseless chattering disturbed the stillness of the grave. 18

Such profusion of life is utterly different from the parched severity of the Sinai, and yet Central America brought forth in Stephens the same meditative strain on the wreck of human ambition that caught his fancy in the city of Petra.

After much quarrelling with their muleteer, Stephens and Catherwood finally reached the outskirts of the ruined Maya city of Copán. They had no idea by what people or when the city had been built:

We came to the bank of a river, and saw directly opposite a stone wall, perhaps a hundred feet high, with furze growing out of the top, running north and south along the river, in some places fallen, but in others entire. It had more the character of a structure than any we had ever seen ascribed to the aborigines of America, and formed part of the wall of Copán, an ancient city, on whose history books throw but little light. 19

The river and the wall became a horizon for Stephens the reporter, a sharp dividing line between the modern world and another world, lost and outside of time, beyond memory or written record: "I am abruptly entering new ground." Stephens' reportage reached new heights as the narrative voice moved out of everyday human culture, into the elemental and eternal.

Previously, there had been much speculation "written to account for the first peopling of America." Stephens noted that some thinkers had traced the New World Indians to the "sons of Noah, the Jews, the Canaanites, the Phoenicians," and many other peoples. He reminded us of the words of the Scottish historian William Robertson, who had scoffed at the civilization of the American Indians: "The inhabitants of the New World," [Robertson] says, 'were in a state of society so extremely rude as to be unacquainted with those arts which are the first essays of human ingenuity.' Then Stephens and Catherwood entered the city:

18 Central America, vol. 1, p. 74.
19 Central America, vol. 1, pp. 95-96.

We ascended by large stone steps, in some places perfect, in others thrown down by trees which had grown up between the crevices, and reached a terrace, the form of which was impossible to make out, from the density of the forest in which it was enveloped.

While their guide hacked a path through vegetable matter with his machete, the explorers passed a structure that looked like a pyramid. Abruptly they stood before a gigantic rectangular monolith, a stone stela encrusted with hieroglyphic writing, with a figure of a man on one side. This sudden apparition of writing and a human face was a mute reply to all the armchair theories that the Americas never had an ancient civilization. The city's history was written on its stones:

The sight of this unexpected monument put at rest once and forever, in our minds, all uncertainty in regard to the character of American antiquities, and gave us the assurance ... that the people who once occupied the Continent of America were not savages. With an interest perhaps
stronger than we had ever felt in wandering among the ruins of Egypt, we followed our guide, who, sometimes missing his way, with a constant and vigorous use of his machete, conducted us through the thick forest, among half-buried fragments, to fourteen monuments of the same character and appearance, some with more elegant designs, and some in workmanship equal to the finest monuments of the Egyptians; one displaced from its pedestal by enormous roots; another locked in the close embrace of branches of trees, and almost lifted out of the earth... and one standing, with its altar before it, in a grove of trees which grew around it, seemingly to shade and shroud it as a sacred thing; in the solemn stillness of the woods, it seemed a divinity mourning over a fallen people. The only sounds that disturbed the quiet of this buried city were the noise of monkeys moving among the tops of the trees, and the cracking of dry branches broken by their weight. They moved over our heads in long and swift processions, forty or fifty at a time, some with little ones wound in their long arms, walking out to the end of boughs, and holding on with their hind feet or a curl of the tail, sprang to a branch of the next tree, and, with a noise like a current of wind, passed on into the depths of the forest. It was the first time we had seen these mockeries of humanity, and, with the strange monuments around us, they seemed like wandering spirits of the departed race guarding the ruins of their former habitations... .

Who were these people that built this city? In the ruined cities of Egypt, even in the long-lost Petra, the stranger knows the story of the people whose vestiges are around him. America, say historians, was peopled by savages; but savages never carved those stones. We asked the Indians who made them, and their dull answer was “Quién sabe?” “Who knows?”

We witness one of the magic hours in the history of archaeology, as dramatic and poignant as the day Howard Carter opened the tomb of Tutankhamen.

*Central America*, vol. 1, pp. 102–104.
Stephens' sentences form an elegiac procession of advancing clauses, much like the effect of walking through a complex of plazas. The troop of monkeys sweeping through the trees is a haunting leitmotif, for in their whispering motions, “like a current of wind,” the monkeys mimic the effect of the prose, and they suggest (before Darwinism) biological decay, parodied human form, the wreck of a world, an Ozymandian waste of time. Surely Stephens saw monkeys before entering the ruined city of Copán, but he saved that detail for this moment, to give the scene “a certain colouring of the imagination.” The monkeys create the same atmosphere as the brilliant and noisy parrots do in the jungle churchyard earlier; they heighten the contrast between the lushness of tropical life and the chaos of tropical death. Parrots and monkeys, by mimicking human voice and form, become “mockeries of humanity.”

The scene is a paradox. America, we learn, is not a New World but an Old World. The monuments stand as testimony to antiquity, a visual proof of the existence of immensely refined arts in the Americas long before Columbus. What a fantastic piece of news Stephens’ discovery of Copán was to Americans! The American continent is still rich with surprises. And yet, while Stephens revels in the mystery of the scene, he has come there to confront the stone images, to subject their writing to decoding, to attempt to recover a vanished history.

Stephens makes us aware of the chasm between his world, that of an ambassador-journalist from an industrializing nation, and the world of the present-day natives who live among the ruins. For centuries, the ancient cities have rested under the forest canopy like sunken reefs, while Spaniards and the descendants of the old people passed by them, almost unconscious of their existence. The reporter arrives on the scene, bringing objective consciousness with him. Only an ambassador from a new nation in the modern world, a scientific witness with a sufficiently sharp sense of present time as distinct from past time, could have “discovered” the cities. For Stephens, ancient history is as sharply cut off from the modern world as a city beyond a wall, seen on the other side of a river. Still, shadows are more beautiful to him than light; there is a hint in this scene that the recovery of a written history of this civilization will be a loss, for the sweetest moment to the explorer is the first sight of the object of desire, not the ravishing that must follow.

And another insight: There had been other new beginnings on this continent, which had come to nothing. Stephens, a hyperactive traveler and professional Democratic party hack, with all his hoarse faith in progress, is meditating on the wreck of a fallen American people. As at the ruins of Petra, he is a witness to a broken, avenged, and ultimately forgotten covenant with God. Stephens stands in the littered plazas to speak an elegy for this unknown people — and, at the same time, to announce the progress of American science, American enterprise.

Stephens’ paradoxical vision brings to mind the American painter Thomas Cole, one of the Hudson River School painters. At the time that Stephens was exploring the Middle East, Cole painted a series of five canvases entitled The Course of Empire. Cole’s imaginary empire, inspired by his travels among Italian ruins (and surely by Claude Lorraine) proceeds from wilderness (The Savage State), to pastoral landscape (The Arcadian), to sumptuous classical buildings packed with crowds (Consummation), through fire, flood, and sack (Destruction), and finally (in Desolation) again to wilderness without a human figure in it. Cole reads in landscape a moral allegory of the American people’s relation to their continent. His Destruction contains Biblical allusions to the plagues of Egypt, suggestive of God’s covenant with “the new Israel,” America. Manifestation of doubt over the “American experiment” was as old as the New England Puritans. If America failed to fulfill its divinely offered place in the teleology of creation as “a city on a hill that cannot be hid,” then God might withdraw His shielding hand. Thus, in the nineteenth century — an era suffused with speculation about the “stages” of cyclical and secular histories (the word is plural) — American arts and letters betray doubts about the nation’s place in one divine, singular history.

We see a similar melancholy in John Lloyd Stephens. Yet this proud and ardent Democratic party expansionist cannot resist waving Cathwood’s drawings at Europe as a pedigree of antiquity in the Americas: We, too, have our Egypt and our Rome.

* 

Stephens clearly recognized his dual role as a journalist and as a scientist. He stressed the fact that he was delivering to his readers nothing but what he had seen with his own eyes, and he insisted that Cath-
erwood's drawings were unexaggerated. He admitted that "even in this practical age the imagination of man delights in wonders." In Central America he was seeking wonders to feed a Romantic imagination — with facts. "As a traveller and 'writer of a book,' I know that if I go wrong, those who come after me will not fail to set me right."**

Stephens advanced some conclusions about the mysterious makers of the cities. The ruins, he declared, "are different from the works of any other known people, of a new order, and entirely and absolutely anomalous: they stand alone."** His guess was correct, but not readily accepted by his contemporaries. The idea that Central American civilization was entirely indigenous did not receive final confirmation until the twentieth century. And what of the extraordinary carvings?

Probably all these ornaments have a symbolical meaning; each stone is part of an allegory or fable, hidden from us, inscrutable under the light of the feeble torch we may burn before it, but which, if ever revealed, will show that the history of the world yet remains to be written.*

Stephens also concluded that the present-day Indians of Central America are the direct descendants of the city-builders. Thus the explorer could hope that somewhere, back in the mountains, he might yet see the gleam of a living city. Stephens had heard tales of such a city during his travels. He was a believer:

I turn to that vast and unknown region, untraversed by a single road, wherein fancy pictures that mysterious city seen from the topmost range of the Cordilleras, of unconquered, unvisited, and unsought aboriginal inhabitants.*

That city became the ultimate lure for the explorer, but Stephens could still report on the biggest story of all: the discovery of a monumental and mythic civilization, hidden in the American wilderness.

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** Ibid., p. 442.
** Ibid., p. 457.
Stephens and Catherwood were back in New York in August, 1840. That summer, rumors of the fabulous cities that they had found began to float through New York. Immediately all four Harper brothers called on their peripatetic author to urge him to get out a book as quickly as possible. In 1841, *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatán* came off the Harper presses, and it went through nine printings in three months. "Wonderful, wonderful!" trumpeted the *Knickerbocker Magazine.* The two volumes of the book boasted gold-stamped spines picturing some of Catherwood's mysterious hieroglyphs, and the covers had stamped on them in gold an image of a sun god from Palenque. *Central America* had a fold-out map and seventy-seven full-page steel-plate engravings, which had been copied by Harper craftsmen from Catherwood's original drawings. The illustrations were profuse and scientifically accurate. Most of them were of stelae and sculptures, showing fields upon fields of incomprehensible hieroglyphs. The price was $5.00 for the set. George Palmer Putnam estimated that the Harpers sold 12,000 sets in less than three years. That was a lower sale than Arabia Petraea, but because of the higher price for *Central America,* the book was presumably just as profitable; the book minted money for Harper & Brothers. Stephens, now in an unassailable position with his publishers, negotiated splendid royalties for himself: $1.04 per set, or more than twenty percent of the book's retail price.

Despite its five-dollar price tag, *Central America* was priced reasonably, and was directed at a wide readership. It was the first profusely illustrated work of popular archaeology ever to reach a general audience. Stephens also gave the world a more accurate story than any that had yet been written about Central America. The reader, he boasted, "will find a splendid work [Waldeck's *Voyage*] brought out with explanations and commentaries by the learned men of Paris, by the side of which my two octavos shrink into insignificance; but I uphold [Catherwood's] drawings against these costly folios, and against every other book that has ever been published on the subject of these ruins. My object has been ... to present the drawings in such an inexpensive form as to place them within reach of the great mass of our reading community."\(^5\)

\(^3\) *Von Hagen, Maya Explorer,* p. 188.  
\(^6\) Ibid., p. 196.  
\(^7\) *Central America,* vol. 2, p. 300.
Stephens and Catherwood soon returned to Central America. They located the ruins of Chichén Itzá, Bolonchen, Xampón, and many more ancient sites, always hoping to find the lost but inhabited city that filled their dreams. Their second book, *Incidents of Travel in Yucatán*, came out in 1843. In it, Catherwood’s drawings metamorphosed into more elaborate and poetic scenes. Perhaps fearful, at first, that the public would be skeptical, Catherwood in *Central America* had focused on the details of the monuments, and his drawings carried a distinctly scientific look. In *Yucatán*, Catherwood’s eye moved back to embrace the panorama, and he allowed a “certain colouring of the imagination” to creep into the illustrations, without compromising the exact and literal accuracy of his draughtsmanship. On this second trip, Catherwood brought with him one of the newly invented Daguerreotype cameras, to aid in recording detail with absolute precision. He found to his dismay that the device yielded excessively high contrasts in the Caribbean glare. The Daguerreotype could not capture the soft, poetic atmosphere that he wanted for ruins, so he continued to use his old camera lucida as an aid to his pencil drawings, and he made Daguerreotypes only as guides for the Harper engravers who cut the plates for the book.

*Incidents of Travel in Yucatán* is sumptuously illustrated; the tour de force of the book is the frontispiece to the first volume, a folded panoramic view of Uxmal nearly a yard long that cascades out of the book like a handkerchief. We see rising out of shadowy rubble a long building lit by brilliant afternoon light, encrusted with precisely rendered stonework. Before it are twenty-seven human figures and ten mules and horses. Most of the figures are Mayas. In the foreground, partly screening the view, are twisted, dead jungle trees and wind-raked palms. In the distance looms the misty form of a pyramid, shrouded in jungle foliage.

Are these engravings scientific art or artful science? Examining them, we sense how important the luxury of “embellishments” was to travel books. Just as Stephens (and Richard Henry Dana, Herman Melville, Henry David Thoreau, Francis Parkman, and Mark Twain) sometimes halted a factual narrative to extend an arm and open a panoramic view to the reader, so do the printed texts of many such narratives wed around the engraver’s rectangles. As a result of steel engraving, large-scale illustration became possible for mass printings of moderately priced books. In turn, the very presence of engraved “views” in books encouraged “picturesque” and “graphic” writing—a sort of *ut pictura, prosa*.

John Lloyd Stephens’ *Central America* and *Yucatán* are rich with engraved plates of complex and alien hieroglyphic writing. To him, these images conveyed the truth that

Architecture, sculpture, painting, all the arts which embellish life, had flourished in the overgrown forest; orators, warriors, and statesmen, beauty, ambition, and glory, had lived and passed away, and none knew that such things had been, or could tell of their past existence.**

Jungle ruins evoke the ingenuity and taste—the refinement—of an ancient people. “Savages never carved these stones,” Stephens writes. His is a vision of human history out of Edward Gibbon and Giovanni Battista Piranesi. Civilizations rise and fall in cycles; today we may contemplate a past glory with wonder and regret. “It was at Rome, on the fifteenth of October 1764, as I sat musing amidst the ruins of the Capitol,” runs Gibbon’s famous reminiscence, “while the bare-footed friars were singing vespers in the temple of Jupiter, that the idea of writing the decline and fall of the City first started to my mind.”*** For Stephens, the Maya ruins express not only romantic beauty, but a *memento mori* for a mysterious and glorious American civilization.

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** Central America, vol. 1, p. 105.
A Nahuatl Religious Drama from Sixteenth-Century Mexico

BY LOUISE M. BURKHART

The recent discovery of an important Aztec text in the final pages of a sixteenth-century Mexican manuscript — and the generosity of Mrs. Charles W. Engelhard — has enabled Princeton to acquire what may be not only the earliest identified Nahuatl play but also the earliest known manuscript of a drama written in the New World. The manuscript joins the extensive collection of texts in indigenous American languages in the Princeton Collections of Western Americana.

Within a few decades of Spain’s invasion of Mexico, most of the surviving indigenous inhabitants of central Mexico had been baptized and incorporated, in name if not entirely in spirit, into the Catholic Church. At the heart of the former Aztec Empire, in the Nahua towns and cities of the Valley of Mexico, the Mexican Church was dominated by the Franciscans, the first religious order to send friars to New Spain and the most successful in attracting converts.

One of the keys to Franciscan success was the friars’ willingness to adapt to native styles of worship. Nahua much preferred active, participatory modes of devotion to private contemplation or listening to sermons. Recognizing this, the friars not only insisted that the Nahuatl language be used for preaching, but also conducted outdoor services from open-air chapels, allowed the Nahua to sing and dance as part of their worship, condoned sweeping and flower offerings as

1 This term refers to speakers of the Nahuatl language and encompassed the Mexica of Tenochtitlan, who had controlled the Aztec Empire, as well as a number of other local ethnic groups, some of them former allies and others former enemies of the Mexica. Nahuatl, the lingua franca of the old empire, was maintained and even spread by the friars (who called it mexicano) as a language for preaching to native Mexicans, both Nahua and non-Nahua. For more about the Nahuatl text, see my article in Latin American Indian Literatures Journal 7, no. 2 (Fall 1991), where portions of the present article were previously published.

The first page of the Nahuatl play. The upper portion of the page is filled by the handwriting of an unidentified Spanish friar. With the words miércoles santo, or “Holy Wednesday,” the play begins. The opening speech is by Christ, whose name was commonly abbreviated as Xpo, from the Greek letters chi and rho. The Princeton Collections of Western Americana, Princeton University Library. Gift of Mrs. Charles W. Engelhard.
acts of religious service, and staged elaborate public dramas performed by costumed native actors.

These dramas blended the European tradition of the mystery play with the native tradition of ritual impersonation, in which actors, by putting on the costumes associated with divine figures, in a sense became those figures within the sacred time and space of the ritual. This new literary and performance genre premiered in the early 1530s, so impressing its audience that native historians recorded an enactment of the Flood in 1531 and one of the Last Judgment in 1532. Some performances involved hundreds of participants and included songs, dances, or processions in addition to the spoken script. Through the use of multi-level stages, ropes, and platforms, angels could descend from heaven, Christ or the Virgin Mary ascend there, and devils could drag people down into hell. Sets could be as elaborate as the imitation Garden of Eden, complete with four “rivers” and many live birds and animals, created in Tlaxcala in 1538.

No firm line separated drama from ritual: in 1539 a “Conquest of Jerusalem” — with echoes of the conquest of Mexico — was staged in which the Turkish soldiers were played by adult men who were ready for baptism; after they were “defeated” in the play by the “Christian” army, they actually were baptized by a priest. In later years the extravagance of these early productions was diminished, but drama remained an important component of the Nahua Church. A Nahua historian writing in the mid-sixteenth century stated that the dramatic performances, which the Nahua called neixcualli or “examples,” served to keep the devil from tricking and mocking people; this suggests that they were seen as world-ordering rituals of community defense.

Unfortunately, although the sixteenth-century friars left many tomes of Nahua script, catechisms, confession manuals, and bib-

atical readings, the survival rate for dramatic scripts was abysmal. Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century copies exist of five plays that, judging from their style and subject, may have been composed in the sixteenth century; however, even if they were, the texts may have been altered over time. Another script was catalogued in the nineteenth century but has since disappeared; yet another, from 1607, was published early in this century, and then vanished. Studies of the Nahuaual theater have thus been limited to this handful of rather problematic scripts and to the writings of contemporary observers, mostly priests. While these furnish lively descriptions, they are no substitutes for actual literary works in the native language.

This was the situation when David Szewczyk of the Philadelphia Rare Books and Manuscripts Company took a close look in 1986 at a Mexican manuscript that had come on the market from a private collection. On nine leaves near the end of the 220-leaf manuscript was recorded, in the hand of a native scribe, a sixteenth-century Nahuaual play. In consultation with Professor James Lockhart of the University of California, Los Angeles, a leading expert on colonial Nahuaual texts, Szewczyk authenticated the manuscript, determined the play to be a native composition and, relying on watermarks and two dates inscribed elsewhere in the manuscript, dated it to approximately 1590.

This meant that the manuscript, as well as being the earliest extant script of a Nahuaual play, is the earliest known dramatic script from anywhere in the Americas.

The rest of the manuscript, though overshadowed by the play, is also of some interest. The document as a whole appears to have been a sort of notebook in which a Franciscan friar, as yet unidentified, recorded a variety of doctrinal materials, as well as some home remedies, in a mixture of Spanish, Latin, and Nahuaual. Twice he turned the notebook over to native scribes to record Nahuaual material. On the first occasion, the scribe happened to write down, above the sermons he was transcribing, that he was working in the town of Tlatelolco. The second scribe, who copied the play, provided only the words “Holy Wednesday” as a heading for the script; however, it is likely that he too did his work in Tlatelolco. Along with more modern indications of ownership, including the bookplate of Florencio Gavito and a shelf number from the Sir Thomas Philips Collection, the manuscript, bound in vellum, bears on its top foreedge two Mexican library brands: the earlier being that of the Colegio Imperial de Santa

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1 The best comprehensive study of the Nahuaual theater is Fernando Horcasitas, El teatro nahuatl: Épocas novohispana y moderna (Mexico: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1974); the best in English is Marilyn Ekdahl Ravicz, Early Colonial Religious Drama in Mexico: From Tzompantli to Golgotha (Washington: The Catholic University Press of America, 1979).


3 Toribio Motolinia (de Benavente), Historia de los indios de la Nueva España (Mexico: Editorial Porrua, 1979), p. 66.

4 Motolinia, Historia de los indios, p. 72.

5 Horcasitas, Teatro nahuatl, p. 73.
The marca de fuego or library brand on the upper edge of the sixteenth-century notebook containing the Nahua or play. According to Michael Mathes, "there is no doubt that it [the sector to the right] is the second brand of the Colegio Imperial de Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco, with the adjacent [on the left] and more recent (eighteenth-century) brand of the Convento de San Pedro y San Pablo de Santiago Calimaya, both Franciscan monasteries in the city of Mexico." The Princeton Collections of Western Americana, Princeton University Library. Gift of Mrs. Charles W. Engelhard.

Cruz de Tlatelolco and the more recent being that of the Convento de San Pedro y San Pablo de Santiago Calimaya.

Tlatelolco, just north of what is now the center of Mexico City, was where, in 1536, the Franciscans had established a college for the sons of the native nobility. Some of the college's early graduates became lifelong assistants and collaborators of their Franciscan mentors and teachers of new generations of students, acting as cultural brokers between the European friars and the native community. By the time the play was written, the college was operating simply as a day school for local boys, but the Franciscan establishment to which it was attached remained a center for the production of Nahua or texts as well as Franciscan chronicles. It also remained a bastion for the radical Franciscanism that had flourished during the Mexican Church's early days but now embroiled its aging proponents in repeated clashes with authorities both civil and religious. It was here that, during the mid-1570s, fray Bernardino de Sahagún edited the final version of his twelve-book encyclopedia of Nahua life, the richest ethnogetic document produced in the colonial Americas — a work confiscated and suppressed by royal decree.

The friars at Tlatelolco were assisted by some of their former pupils, themselves getting on in years, who also taught at the school. Worthy of particular mention is Agustín de la Fuente, a native of Tlatelolco and longtime schoolmaster. At the time the play was composed, de la Fuente was working with fray Pedro Oroz, a scholar and chronicler who then held the office of guardian at Tlatelolco. After Oroz died in 1597, de la Fuente began a prolific collaboration with fray Juan Bautista. Bautista credited de la Fuente with three volumes of plays, which Bautista planned to publish but which, like so many colonial works, have not survived. Could the Princeton play be an earlier composition by this native dramatist?

Whoever the author was, he was a master of Nahua oratorical style, a mode of speaking the Nahua called huehuetlatolli or "speech of the elders" and which the friars attempted, with varying success, to emulate in their preaching. Formal and indirect, the speech employs the reverential form of address, which involves adding certain prefixes and/or suffixes to nearly every word that refers to the respected person. Respect is also expressed through a deferential politeness that can seem obsequious to non-Nahuas. An orator displays his or her skill by phrasing the same idea in two or more ways, such that the text becomes a web of couplets, triplets, quadruplets, couplets within couplets, and so forth. A further sign of verbal skill is to exploit the creative potential of Nahua, an agglutinative language, by inventing long compound words. The play's author performs well by all of these standards. His original compound words run as long as fourteen syllables.

The play enacts a farewell scene between Christ and the Virgin Mary on Wednesday of Holy Week. Christ takes leave of his mother prior to going to spend Passover in Jerusalem, where he will be arrested and crucified. She pleads with him not to go, appealing to his filial devotion and asserting that God can accomplish the redemption of humanity through some other means; he insists that he must go and die in order to fulfill the ancient prophecies and his father's commands. Eventually Mary yields, predicting his suffering and hoping that it will not be more than he can bear. This dialogue takes up close

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* Fray Juan Bautista, Sermonario en lengua mexicana (Mexico: Diego López Dávalos, 1666), Prologue.
to half of the text. An angel then arrives bearing five letters to Mary from Old Testament personages in Limbo, each letter embazoned with one of the five wounds of Christ. The letters are from Adam, David, Moses, Jeremiah, and Abraham. Stage directions call for a little boy dressed as an angel to come forth and recite their contents. In each of the letters the sender greets Mary, begs pardon for his sins, and presents his appeal for Christ to come and rescue him and his fellow prisoners from Limbo—an allusion to the harrowing of hell Christ is to carry out on Holy Saturday. Each correspondent also presents Mary with something that will be used during Christ’s Passion: the Cross, the crown of thorns, the three nails, the column to which he will be tied when he is flagellated, and the lance that will be used to pierce his side. Each is to be carried forth at the appropriate time by five more small boys dressed as angels. After the letters have been read, a second dialogue between mother and son ensues, in the course of which it is established that Mary, though she will not accompany Christ at this time, will go to Jerusalem with Mary Magdalene (a silent presence onstage throughout the play) and they will see Christ there the following day. They exchange blessings, Mary utters a final lament, Christ blesses her once more, and the play ends with them embracing and taking leave of one another.

The performance of this play would have been part of an elaborate series of Holy Week ceremonies. Fray Gerónimo de Mendieta’s eyewitness account of the 1595 Holy Week processions from the chapel of San José de los Naturales, the Franciscan chapel for the natives of Mexico City, provides some sense of what the Holy Week devotions of urban Nahua in the late sixteenth century were like. On Holy Thursday, Mendieta watched a procession of the Confraternity of

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"For as to why I came down here upon the earth, it was for this reason: that I should be made to suffer, that I should be made to be seen, that upon the cross I should be stretched by my arms. As a man, I will die there." Thus does Christ inform Mary of his impending death. This sixteenth-century mural, painted by a native artist after a European woodcut, ornaments the Franciscan friary at Tepeapulco, Hidalgo.

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9. This is the Limbo of the Holy Fathers, or “Bosom of Abraham,” in which were imprisoned the souls of all followers of the Judeo-Christian God who died prior to Christ’s own death. These included Adam and Eve, Abel (but not Cain), Seth, and so on all the way to Saints John the Baptist and Joseph. There they awaited Christ’s harrowing of hell on Holy Saturday: A tradition based on the apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus holds that Christ, while his body lay in the tomb, descended into hell and rescued these souls from demonic captivity, conveying them first to Eden and then to heaven.


11. Religious brotherhoods (cofradías) were voluntary organizations that shared responsibility for certain ritual observances and the upkeep of sacred images and ornaments, as well as providing assistance for members during times of crisis. These sodalities proved immensely popular among the natives of Mexico during the colonial period, forming the basis for the tradition of rotating religious offices known today as the cargo system.
the True Cross with more than 20,000 participants, including 3,000 self-flagellating penitents, carrying 219 insignias of Christ and the Passion. The next day more than 7,700 marched in the procession of the Confraternity of the Virgin of Solitude, flagellating themselves and carrying confraternity insignias. The Easter morning procession featured 230 images of Christ, Mary, and other saints, all gilded and very beautiful. Clad in white and carrying white candles, the members of the two confraternities all marched, accompanied by "innumerable" other men and women, arranged according to their neighborhoods and traditional social rankings. To Mendiesta, this was "one of the most lovely and solemn processions in Christendom."

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I began working with the Nahuatl play in 1989, at the invitation of Alfred Bush, curator of the Princeton Collections of Western Americana. What began as a translation has grown into a major project leading to a book that will comprise, along with the translation, an intensive analysis of the play in its literary, cultural, and historical context.

An important reason for paying so much attention to a mere eighteen pages of manuscript is that the Nahua author, though his style of composition is entirely native, based his play on a Spanish source that I have been able to identify. It is unusual to have the Spanish model for a sixteenth-century Nahuatl text, except in the case of bilingual texts such as some of the catechisms and confession manuals, which present Spanish and Nahuatl in facing columns. Still less common is the marked divergence between a Spanish source and its Nahuatl "translation" found in these two plays. They may be contrasted with the work of fray Andrés de Olmos, a prolific early scholar of Nahuatl who translated some Spanish works directly into Nahuatl. Although he undoubtedly relied on native assistants to help with the translation, the Spanish sources receive a fairly faithful rendering, with only a few native metaphors and personal observations added for spice. 12


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Our Nahua playwright’s attitude toward his source is closer to that of the four native interpreters who, in about 1560, translated the familiar chant from the Christmas liturgy: “There was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly hosts, praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men of good will.’” Their rendering turns the angels into a flock of the colorful tropical birds, transformations of the souls of the heroic dead, that populate Nahua poetry:

From heaven came various precious troupials, trogons, sacred spoonbills, resonating like precious bells. It seems that they were angels!

They went chirping like flutes of quetzal-green jade. They went resonating like precious bells, the various birds, the precious birds, the birds of spring, the angels. Alleluia!

The flowery troupial, the chachalaca bird, the emerald toucanet, the turquoise-browed motmot. Fine, fine was their song, that the angels were intoning: “May the deity God in heaven be praised! Alleluia!”

All the rest of the various precious little birds of heaven came flying like quetzal feathers, went singing in song: “May there be peace here on earth! Alleluia!”

Their songs came ringing like precious quetzal feathers. They came rejoicing with celestial songs. They came saying: “May peace be with people! Alleluia!”

It happened there in Bethlehem, when our precious savior Jesus Christ was born. Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

The Nahua word that was used for “to translate” was suepa, meaning “to turn”; a translation was a cuepcayotl, a “turning” of the words. Clearly, the native interpreters considered this to be a creative act and, when given the opportunity, opted to compose texts that said what they wanted to say.

The Spanish text that the Nahua playwright “turned” into the Princeton play is an auto, or sacramental drama, entitled “Star of our Salvation,” comprising 495 lines of rhymed verse. It was written by Ausias Izquierdo Zebrero, a poet and printer from Valencia, and apparently was first published in Seville in 1582. I say “apparently,” because it has so far proven impossible to locate a copy of this first edition. (It is not only Nahuatl plays that can be frustratingly elusive.) Nineteenth-century bibliographers attest to the existence of this early edition, but more recently a Spanish scholar was unable to find an edition in Spanish libraries earlier than a 1609 imprint housed in Madrid. The Houghton Library at Harvard University has a slightly earlier edition, dated circa 1590. That an earlier Spanish edition had to exist is indicated by the date of the Nahua play now at Princeton. It is possible, too, that an earlier edition included the final three speeches of the Nahua play, which have no counterpart in these or later Spanish editions. Izquierdo’s original work might have been truncated prior to reprinting, perhaps to make it fit neatly onto four leaves — even though this deprived the text of what in its Nahualet version is an eloquent concluding segment.

The play’s subject matter derives from a devotional tradition that had elevated Mary to a role in the Passion rivaling Christ’s own, such that the worshipper bore witness to the sufferings of the divine Christ through empathy with his human, and hence more easily comprehended, mother. Passion literature came to feature the planctus or “complaint” of the Virgin, lamenting the fate of her son. In the thirteenth century the Italian Franciscan Jacopone da Todi elevated the planctus to poetic drama in his Donna del Paradiso; this text became, according to George Peck, the “prototype of the Passion play.”

Another thirteenth-century Italian is responsible for a second major innovation on the way to Izquierdo’s play. Giovanni da Cauli, a Franciscan of San Gimignano, invented the Bethany farewell scene in his Meditaciones de la Vida di Cristo, a text often attributed to the Franciscan theologian Saint Bonaventure. In da Cauli’s meditation 72,

15 It was through the efforts of Alfred Bush and Willard King that I learned of and obtained copies of the 1560 and 1609 editions; I had previously been limited to a nineteenth-century edition of an eighteenth-century version of the Izquierdo play, published under another name and considerably altered from the earlier editions. The text of the two earlier editions is identical.

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“How the Lord Jesus Predicted His Death to the Mother.” Mary and Mary Magdalene strive to persuade Christ to spend Passover with them in Bethany; he insists that it is his father’s will that he go to Jerusalem. Mary asserts that God can provide for the redemption without Christ’s death. Christ promises that he will soon return, rising upon the third day. Mary Magdalene decides that the women will go to her family’s house in Jerusalem to spend Passover, and Christ accedes to her decision.

Nor was the motif of messages from Limbo original to Izquierdo. The corpus of early sixteenth-century Spanish dramas published by Léon Rouanet includes two plays with similar episodes, one in which Adam himself intercedes in the Christ-Mary dialogue, and another in which Lazarus, returning from the dead, brings Mary a letter from Adam and a coffer of Passion-related objects. Indeed, an early Nahuatl play, unknown but for a brief description, used the same motif in enacting the Annunciation; the archangel Gabriel brings letters from figures in Limbo begging Mary to accept Christ’s Incarnation.

A comparison of the Nahuatl and Spanish texts shows that the Nahuatl interpreter was not entirely fluent in Spanish, for there are various Spanish words and phrases that he misunderstood (this is also good evidence that no friar checked his work against its source). But he did do a good job of transforming Izquierdo’s choppy, sometimes stilted verse into formal Nahuatl oratory. Fray Juan Bautista characterized Nahuatl as being “so elegant, copious and abundant” that just about anything one translated from Spanish or Latin came out twice as long.

The Nahuatl playwright went well beyond a mere doubling of the text. His many additions and elaborations notwithstanding, the Nahuatl author was careful to match Izquierdo’s text speech for speech — with one exception. He inserted a farewell from Mary to the departing angel, as if the idea of not bidding goodbye to an honored guest offended his Nahuatl sense of politesse. His play as a whole features greetings and leave-takings more elaborate than those of Izquierdo’s characters; Nahuatl gods and saints were seemingly much more polite (and verbose) than their Spanish counterparts.

Adam laments, in his letter to Mary: “May you know that it was wretched me, wretched me alone, it was with me that the old sin began. It was because of my gluttony that I ate the product, the fruit, of the tree of life, which our Lord, God, the ruler, prohibited to me, there in terrestrial paradise, so that I would not eat it.” Here Adam and Eve are depicted at the moment of their fall. This is one of several Old Testament scenes painted by a native muralist in the Augustinians’ open-air chapel at Actopan, Hidalgo. In the series, the figures of Adam and Eve appear four times — an indication of their story’s importance in the friars’ preaching and its familiarity to the native community.

Other additions include the six little boys who are to be dressed as angels, one of them reading the letters to Mary and the others bringing out the instruments of the Passion. In the Spanish play, Mary reads the letters aloud to herself and no instructions are given as to the presentation of these objects. Nahuatl theater was a theater of schoolboys; it is likely that the author intended to cast the play with boys from the Franciscan school and wished to involve as many as possible. Colonial Nahuatl appear to have enjoyed dressing their children as angels to play parts in Christian ceremonies, for other texts also allude to the practice.

On a deeper level, the Nahuatl drama suggests a different conception of dramatic action from that represented in the Spanish play. The basic plot device of a conflict mediated by a third party, here the argument between Christ and Mary mediated by the angel with the
letters, is undermined by having the two characters come to an agreement before the angel arrives. While the Spanish Mary continues to protest the inevitable and lament her fate, the Nahua Mary expresses solidarity with her son and predicts the flagellation that he will undergo. She even repeats, almost word for word, lines that he spoke to her in his immediately preceding speech. Nowhere else in the play does one character echo another’s words so closely; the Spanish source contains nothing comparable.

The Nahua playwright seems to see the dialogue between Mary and Christ as a discrete textual unit, rather than as an enactment of a moment of crisis that will lead to mediation, resolution, and denouement. The two characters must resolve their dispute by themselves through the dialectical process of their dialogue, and they must express unity with one another; a new scene does not begin until the business of the old one is completed. It may be that this dialectic itself is what moves the “plot” along: In the Mesoamerican cosmos, creative power is generated through interaction and dialogue among divine entities.

Thus, the play is structured not as a continuous flow of action but as two mother-son dialogues, both of which resolve themselves into an expression of unity, represented in the final dialogue by the mutual blessings and embrace. These dialogues are separated by the reading of the letters from Limbo, a kind of “time out of time” when ancestral figures speak from the depths of the earth. This structure replicates the structure of time, which, according to Mesoamerican conceptions, was not a continuous, linear unfolding but a cyclic, repetitive, and episodic process in which periods of orderly chronological sequence were separated by non-chronological gaps.

The ancestral figures in Limbo are treated in such a way that the play’s Nahua audience could see them as ancestral to themselves, not only to Old World peoples. The native peoples of Mexico were taught that they, like all other peoples, descended from Adam and Eve; thinkers both native and European sought, and found, similarities between Old Testament scripture and indigenous historical tradition. That the native Americans had descended from the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel was a popular theory in Mexico — as it would be in North America as well. However, contradicting any convenient identification with the biblical “chosen people” was the friars’ frequent assertion that the Nahuas’ ancestors were idolaters from remote antiquity.

“...My precious child, may you want it to be as I say. May it be that I die first, so that I will not see how your precious blood will be spilled, and how your precious flesh will be broken, as you open up, as you raise up, the heavenly road of salvation. May I not see all that will befall you!” In several such passages Mary expresses her fear of what she will endure as witness to her son’s torments. To the Nahua audience, Mary’s presence at the crucifixion and entombment was familiar from religious paintings.

This pieta is one of several scenes from the Passion that a skilled native artist executed in the Augustinian friary at Epazoyucan, Hidalgo.
descended perhaps from Cain, perhaps from the idolatrous tribes that originated at Babel. All of these ancestors — indeed, all non-Christian inhabitants of the New World — were imprisoned in hell, forever enduring torments inflicted by demons. And figuring prominently among these demons were the native deities of Mexico, whom the friars identified as devils.

To the Nahua, who revered their ancestors and considered them the source of moral authority, this treatment of their past must have been distressing. However, the story of Christ's descent to hell told of the rescue of pre-Christian ancestral figures and their incorporation into the Christian order. If these ancestors could be extended to include the Nahua's own, this difficulty would be resolved and Nahua Christianity would in fact gain legitimacy by incorporating ancestral authority and grounding itself in past prophecies. The time lapse between Christ's descent to hell and Mexico's incorporation into Christianity was not an obstacle: Nahua Christians seem to have conflated the coming of Christianity to Mexico with Christ's original mission on earth. This view accords with the Mesoamerican mythic structuring of time as a repetitive regeneration of order rather than as a linear progression. It appears that the Nahua playwright was thinking in terms something like these.

According to Catholic teaching (and the Spanish play) the Holy Fathers were imprisoned in Limbo by the devil but were not subjected to tortures. But the Nahua playwright adds references to their torment by demons, that is, he treats them as run-of-the-mill condemned sinners rather than as a special class. His Mary refers to them as “our fathers who first came to live on the earth” and his Christ calls them “people's first fathers”; neither phrase has a counterpart in the Spanish text. The Spanish Jeremiah refers to himself as “your [Mary's] servant”; in the Nahuatl this becomes “I your father.” Furthermore, where the Spanish Christ says of the figures in Limbo, “these my beloved children / Look how many are lost,” the Nahua author wrote, “my precious ones and a great many others were confounded, were confused by sin.” He has extended the population to be saved beyond a select group of dead to include all who were confused by sin — a status the friars frequently applied to native persons both dead and living. Even if the Nahua ancestors were not among Christ's “precious ones,” they might still be included in this wider redemption.

These are some general observations on the relationship between the two texts. The plays, however, may be allowed to speak for themselves. I have translated in full both versions of one speech, which in the Nahuatl is one of Christ's longest passages. Here Christ is responding to Mary after she has asked him to use his absolute power as God to bring about the redemption without his having to die. The Spanish Christ speaks as follows:

Virgin, sacred woman,

oh mother, it is useless;
it is certain, in my opinion,

that that which is prophesied
cannot fail to be.

By my father it is ordained;
have patience, Lady.

By my hand it is signed,
the sentence is pronounced,

and the sad time has arrived.

Well could I remove the mourning
from this tributary world,

and suspension and tribute,
without dying on Calvary,

with power very absolute.

But certainly you know,
my Lady and mother mine,

that if thus it were not done,

that which I promised my God,
in this would not be fulfilled.
And God cannot lie,
because he is truth itself,
so it is that I have to die,
of certain necessity,
in order to redeem the world."

I have arranged the Nahuatl text in lines more closely to approximate its oral-poetic style and to render its various couplets

"Austias Izquierdo (Zehretto), "Auto llamado Luz yerna de nuestra salutacion, que trata el despedimiento que hizo nuestro Señor Jesu Cristo de su bendita madre estando en Betania", para yr a Hierusalem, en que se contiene pasagens muy notables, y razonamentos contemplativos de la pasion de christo, y de su bendita madre (Valencia[?], 1590[?]), p. 2v. The Houghton Library, Harvard University, owns a copy."
and other repetitive devices more apparent. Notice how the Nahuatl Christ shows more deference toward his mother's opinions, and how the Spanish Christ's brief allusion to prophecy becomes in the Nahuatl an elaborate defense of the ancient word:

You blessed and perfect maiden,
you noblewoman and ruler,
you who are my precious mother,
what you have said is very true and correct.
It is true that I have total power.
Everything can be done,
whatever I may want,
since I am the deity,
I am the ruler.
But first may you know
that in no way will I turn things around.
It is true that I will cause to come true
that which the prophets went foretelling.
In regard to me they went saying
that I will save people here on earth.
It will certainly come true.
I will endure everything
that they went declaring,
which lies written in the sacred book.
Nothing at all will be lost,
even if it is a little spatter of ink.
Everything will come true.
And my precious father, God,
he decreed it;
that is how the words were set down in this way.
And they will not be the least bit broken.
I will cause everything to come true.
Oh my precious mother,
may you not be very sad,
may you not be very distressed on my behalf,
for people's salvation has already been left in my hands,
the sentence has already been set down.
I will endure everything that is hurtful to people.
And this: already it has come to arrive, the day of sadness, the day of sad weeping. For it is necessary that I destroy the sad fasting-garment of the dead, the winding-sheet of the dead, that the people of the earth go about wearing. It is the old sin, original sin. Their souls are dressed in it; the demon, Lucifer, enslaved them with it. And this: oh my precious mother, if I am not stretched by my arms upon the cross there on Mount Calvary, then how will people be saved? I speak truthfully to you, oh my precious mother, and indeed you know this well. If I do not make it come true, if I do not carry out the command of my precious father, God, then there can be no salvation. Therefore may you know that absolutely never will God lie, he will never break his word, because he is a deity of truth. This: oh my precious mother, it is essential that I die, it is essential for the people of the world.

The Spanish Christ alludes to the longing of the unredeemed world for its original state of grace by describing the world as dressed in mourning garments—a situation ritually re-created within the church during Lent by draping ornaments and statuary with purple cloth. From the Nahua author this phrase evoked images not of mourning but of penitence, death, and enslavement. Nahuas did not traditionally wear special garments for mourning. However, they did wrap their dead in winding-sheets; dead people were depicted in native pictorial manuscripts as bundles wrapped in white cloth. And they did wear a special paper garment for penitential rituals. In indigenous manuscripts this garment, worn about the neck, served as a logogram for “fasting,” a common ritual activity that demanded sexual abstinence as well as dietary restrictions—and which impressed the friars despite their abhorrence of the native deities. The Nahua author’s “sad fasting-garment of the dead” suggests this native non-Christian ritual garb, especially as worn by dead ancestors; his allusion to enslavement by Lucifer echoes the fate of such non-Christian penitents who, in spite of their mortifications, were consigned by the friars to a hell inhabited by the very figures to whom those non-Christian rites had been directed. Friars even identified Lucifer with the native deity Tezcatlipoca, who was responsible for inciting and then pardoning immoral acts.

The reference to original sin is a couplet pairing Nahua and Spanish wording; the Nahua phrase I translate as “old sin” referred, in non-Christianized usage, to a kind of hereditary slavery in which the original slave’s obligations to a master had to be fulfilled by the descendants of both parties. The terms appropriated as a gloss for “sin” literally mean “to damage or break something” or “the damaging of things”; the native concept encompasses criminal activity, accidents, and a general entropy inherent in all natural processes, in addition to immorality. It is unlikely that the sort of personal moral responsibility, accompanied by guilt, with which the Christian concept is identified had made much of an inroad into Nahua Christianity.

Thus the pre-Christian Nahua world is in a sad and damaged condition, passed down from ancestral times. The people are enslaved by demons, whom they worship through penitential rituals and then join in the underworld after death; hence, in effect, the demons dress them in ritual garments and then in winding-sheets. Christ, through his own penitential self-sacrifice, will remove from them these ancient obligations, freeing them from captivity (whether on earth or in the underworld within the earth) and incorporating them into heaven. That this is the case is unquestionably true and is grounded in ancient

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prophecy — two conditions that for the Nahuas, who equated truthfulness with primordiality, were virtually equivalent. The passage supports Christianization, yet its images and allusions are profoundly Nahua.

Clearly, the Nahuatl play is less a translation than a transformation of its Spanish model. Considered in its cultural and historical context, it reads as a Nahuatl commentary on the meaning of the Passion and, by extension, of Christianization itself. As well as being the earliest extant exemplar of a rare literary genre, it offers a unique perspective on native Mexican experience under Spanish rule.

The Princeton Codex of the Book of Chilam Balam of Nah

BY JEFFREY H. MILLER

The legendary Chilam Balam, whose name means Prophet Jaguar, is said to have lived in the town of Maní, Yucatán, not long before Europeans discovered America. According to tradition, he predicted the arrival of the Spaniards. During the period following the conquest, books under the prophet's name, written in the Maya language but using European script and an orthography developed by the friars, appeared in great numbers throughout the Yucatán peninsula of Mexico.

The books of Chilam Balam are digests of the Maya Indians' sacred knowledge. Judging by the variety of their contents, these small volumes served a multitude of purposes. In them we find almanacs, medical texts, accounts of creation, prophecies, factual and legendary episodes in Maya history, maps, translations of Spanish texts, and more. Because a number of the books contain similar versions of the same passages, we know that there were older originals. In some cases the sources were undoubtedly hieroglyphic manuscripts, which in many respects were the prototypes of the Chilam Balam books. Taken together, the books of Chilam Balam represent one of our best

1 Jeffrey H. Miller wrote this article shortly before his death in 1975. The editors have supplied the references to recent scholarly works on the Maya and their books of Chilam Balam.

2 The longest Book of Chilam Balam has 482 pages, the shortest 29 pages. Princeton's manuscript Book of Chilam Balam of Nah has only 80 pages. In 1948 Alfredo Barrera Vásquez spoke of it having 84 pages. As there are several paginations, one of them apparently by William E. Gates, there may be four missing pages, or Barrera Vásquez, who never saw the manuscript, may have been in error. See Alfredo Barrera Vásquez and Silvia Rendón, eds. and trans., El libro de los libros de Chilam Balam (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1948).

Nah book. Mayas living in relative isolation have been known to retain specific pre-Columbian culture traits, but the Nah was compiled and used only 30 kilometers from the city of Mérida, since colonial times a center of commerce and Catholicism. Thus it is not surprising that the wrong questions have so often been asked of the Chilam Balam of Nah.

We must expect the Nah to reflect its time and place. If we look at the book from this perspective it offers both a record of the reactions of the Maya mind to Spanish culture and a testimony to the manner in which the latter was adapted to its Yucatecan setting. The book is also valuable for its insights into the types of ideas that appealed to a post-colonial Maya community. That the Nah contains, in addition, a text that is probably pre-Hispanic illustrates the durability of some indigenous ideas.

José María and José Secundino Na wrote, or rather copied, all but the last five pages of the Chilam Balam of Nah. From the time of its first installment in 1857 until the last entry in 1895, the book seems to have been in the care of the Nah family of Tecab, Yucatán. Other members of the family are mentioned in the text — Teófilo, for example, whose birth in 1892 and death in 1895 were entered, and Juan Nah, who was his father. Teófilo’s mother, María Mónica Uean, is credited with another son four years later by a second husband, Pablo Nah. Records are kept for persons outside the Nah family, too, indicating that it was a community rather than a family document.

In general terms, the Book of Chilam Balam of Nah is concerned with four major topics: the calendar, astrology, medicine, and community records, topics of traditional interest to the Maya going back as far as the hieroglyphic codices.

The first page of the Nah is too faded to read, but the next thirteen discuss calendrics. On page two the Christian calendar is laid out in twenty-day intervals beginning with 12 January along the left margin; along the right margin the ancient Maya unals, or twenty-day months, are given beginning with Yax. Eighteen unals plus five extra days — the wayeb or nameless days — make up the Maya haab, or approximate solar year. In the Nah, the wayeb days occur from 10 July to 15 July, and the Maya new year falls on 16 July (one poob). The next twelve pages (3–14) contain a Catholic festival or holy year, laid out month-by-month, with Maya day-names (but without their numerical coefficients, as was customary in antiquity) in the right margin. Since, as J. Eric Thompson once quipped, the day-names without their numbers are as useful as telephone numbers without exchange names, we can probably assume that the calendar was not fully functional, at least the 260-day Sacred Round part of it. It is possible, however, that the unals were still being counted, but until the motive behind including the Maya calendrical periods is discovered, interest in the first section of the Nah document seems to be limited to linguistics.

From page 15 to page 30 we find more calendrical discussion, but now the focus is on astrology. The original from which the Nah gentlemen copied these pages was surely an astrological yearbook or manuscript of the Book of Chilam Balam of Chumayel. See also Munro S. Edmondson, "The Princeton Codex of the Book of Chilam Balam of Chumayel," *Princeton University Library Chronicle* 33, no. 3 (Spring 1971): 137–142, and *Heaven Born Mérida and Its Destiny: The Book of Chilam Balam of Chumayel*, Trans. and ed. Munro S. Edmondson (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986); and Gordon Broiherton, "Continuity in Maya Writing: New Readings of Two Passages in the Book of Chilam Balam of Chumayel," in *Maya Archaeology*, pp. 241–258.


On this topic in general, see Farriss, *Maya Society.*

handbook, or an older copy of one, of the type popular in Europe; now that the Nah passage is translated, perhaps the original can be located. It divides the year into months and assigns zodiacal houses. There is a horoscope and a prognostication for blood purging for each sign, as well as etymologies for the days of the week, relating them to the seven planets of European astrology included in these pages. In addition, there is even a clumsy translation into Maya of "thirty days hath September, April, June, and November."

It is significant that the compilers, and presumably the users, of the Nah document were interested in an astrology handbook. There are pages in the Paris Codex, a Maya hieroglyphic manuscript, that apparently depict a series of constellations, and there are other reasons to suppose that the ancient Maya had a functioning zodiac of their own. Its composition, however, is still uncertain. The translation of the Nah passage may reveal some scribal interpolations relevant to this question, not to mention important new vocabulary. 12

Discussion of the manuscript's third major subject, medicine, runs from page 50 to page 53. In his work, The Ethno-Botany of the Maya, the great Maya authority Ralph L. Roys translated parts of this section. 13 He points out that the passage in the Nah manuscript called the "Libro Utal Tzacob" appears in two other colonial Maya sources, the Mena and the Setuta manuscripts. The former is said to be from the early eighteenth century. Some of this text shared by the Nah and the two other copies quite probably goes back to a hieroglyphic original. The concept of disease and cure implicit in the passage resembles closely that of the Badianus Manuscript, a traditional medical herbal prepared for the Spanish king by two Aztec physicians. It is also compatible with the Ritual of the Bacabs, a book of Maya medical incantations. 14 Taken together, the Libro Utal Tzacob and the Ritual of the Bacabs — an herbal and a book of incantations — may provide us with a good picture of ancient Maya medicine. 15 At the same time,

14 The manuscript of the Ritual of the Bacabs is in the William E. Gates Collection at Princeton, the gift of Robert Garrett, Class of 1857; it was published in an edition translated and edited by Ralph L. Roys as Ritual of the Bacabs (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1965).
the Libro Utial Tzacob shows signs of having been adapted to changes in Maya life brought about by the Spanish, horse manure, for example, is cited as a cure for abdominal pains.

The medical text in the Nah lists in paragraph form more than one hundred different diseases and their cures. Usually it offers more than one cure for a given disease. Some of the remedies may seem unusual to those unaccustomed to indigenous medicine. For "Spotted Parrot Spasm," the remedy is as follows:

Let there be taken the gum of the copal and wing of a macaw. Let them be applied to the fire with the feathers of the cardinal or the feathers of a small red parrot or any feathers that may be secured immediately. Let them be smoked immediately in copal gum and let him drink it.

This cure, from page 39 of the Nah, illustrates the Maya notion that disease can be cured by like. In the same vein, the Aztec physicians used crushed centipedes to cure sore joints.

Another principle of pre-Columbian medicine can be seen at work in this entry for dog-bite from page 79 of the Chilam Balam of Nah:

If it [the bite] is very painful, take dry excrement, burn it to ashes, and apply it to the perforation. Four times you shall apply it. He will recover by these means.16

Dogs, in the Maya mind, were associated with filth, sin, and the underworld. In Maya funerary pottery, cankerous dogs are seen in underworld settings. The medical reasoning here is that filth can cure filth. Most pre-Columbian peoples, from the Eskimos to the Incas, believed that sin and its physical manifestation, filth, caused disease.

The fourth and final subject taken up by the Chilam Balam of Nah consists of community records: births, deaths, and marriages in the town of Teabo. Because it was a sacred book of the community, the empty pages of the Nah manuscript must have seemed an appropriate place for such records. The names given in this section of the Princeton manuscript could prove useful to researchers interested in finding more about the document, its authors, the Nah family, and the Maya community of Teabo.

The full value of the Book of Chilam Balam of Nah, the last of the Maya sacred books, can be appreciated now that a transcription and translation have been made. Many scholars have commented upon the difficulty of working with these documents; words are often divided arbitrarily, misspellings are frequent, words are omitted, etc. Yet it was possible in the case of the Nah — which differs from the older Chilam Balam books with their antiquated vocabulary — to work on translation with the aid of an informant. Rich linguistic and ethnographic data pertaining to sacred and symbolic vocabulary and to other matters such as plant and animal taxonomies relating to medicine may be available using the Chilam Balam of Nah as a point of departure.

*

We have seen that the Chilam Balam of Nah treats of some traditional concerns of Maya sacred literature: calendrics, astrology and astronomy, medicine, and community records. We have seen that in calendrics and astrology, the Nah resembles its predecessors only in theme, the content having been replaced by European notions. In medicine, on the contrary, the aboriginal ideas appear in nearly unadulterated form. Considering the emphasis on medicine, the compilers of the Nah may have been practicing curers. For them, as for their neighbors in late nineteenth-century Teabo, the dictum from the Chilam Balam of Chumayel retained its meaning:

The time has not yet ended for the making of these books, these many explanations, so that Maya men may be asked if they know how they were born here in this country, when the land was founded.17

16 Both remedies are found in Roys, Ethno-Balam, pp. 208, 27; translated by Roys.

The Princeton Manuscript of the Codex Pérez

BY GEORGE E. STUART

O ur knowledge of the Maya people and their culture, past and present, comes from a variety of sources. A century or so of archaeology at scores of overgrown ruins in southeastern Mexico and Central America has provided us with the basic framework of more than 3,000 years of culture history and change. Spanish historians have given us eyewitness accounts of Maya culture in the early 1500s, before it began to change under colonial rule. And anthropologists and their colleagues in related sciences have revealed details of the present-day Mayas' language, customs, and world view.

But of all the sources available to us, none is more important than the collection of chronicles, traditions, and prophecies set down by the Maya themselves in the centuries following the Spanish conquest in the alphabetic script of the conquerors. ¹ By far the greatest concentration of such material comes from the northern Maya lowlands, and in particular, the area encompassed by the boundaries of the present Mexican state of Yucatán. A manuscript copy of one of the most important of such records, the Códice Pérez, or Codex Pérez, is in the Princeton Collections of Western Americana. It was named for its nineteenth-century compiler, Juan Pío Pérez, who lived and worked in Mérida, Yucatán. The name, some say, was ill-chosen, for both of its components hold the potential for confusion. In Mesoamerican studies, the term "codex" customarily refers to native pictorial screenfold manuscripts, such as the Dresden, Borgia, and others. And as for the name "Pérez," it was used in the early literature as a

¹ William Brito Sansores, Maya Writing, trans. Alise B. Callaghan (Mérida: Editorial Dante, 1986), pp. 73, 75.
² William Edmund Gates, Codex Pérez, Maya Prenatal (Point Loma, California, 1909);
label for the fragmentary screenfold Maya hieroglyphic codex we know today as the Codex Peresianus or the Paris Codex. Despite all this, the name given by Bishop Crescencio Carrillo y Ancona to the Juan Pío Pérez compendium endures.

The Codex Pérez is an anthology, a compendium, a treasury of Maya ethnohistorical lore embracing several important categories of data. Among its pages appear excerpts from the otherwise lost Books of Chilam Balam of Maní and Oxxutzcab, tables of native and Christian calendars, prophecies, astrological almanacs, and history. It is one of the few documents of its kind that contains illustrations. And it may be the manuscript in which Maya hieroglyphs were used for the last time.

The contents of the Codex Pérez have been examined by several authorities and analyzed, at least in part, by many more. Following introductory notes by Carrillo y Ancona, the manuscript proper consists of three parts. In general, Part I consists of correlations of Maya and Christian dates with prognostications based on Maya and European astrology. Part II is largely devoted to prophecy and historical chronicles, including the Maní Chronicle. And Part III contains various almanacs, prophecies, and calendar data, plus the Maní land treaty of 1557.

The history of the Codex Pérez begins in the 1830s, when Juan Pío Pérez completed its transcription from a series of old manuscripts he found in the town of Maní. According to Gustavo Martínez Alomia and other biographers, Juan Pío Pérez was born in Mérida on 11 July 1798, the son of Gregorio Pérez and his wife Juana Bermón, and educated in the schools of the city. While most of his fellow students

and Theodore A. Willard, The Codex Pérez: An Ancient Mayan Hieroglyphic Book (Glen-

9 See, for example, Ralph L. Roys, “Guide to the Codex Pérez,” in Contributions to
American Anthropology and History, no. 49 (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Institution of
Washington, Publication 585, 1949), vol. 10, p. 89; Alfredo Barrera Vásquez and Sylvan-
us G. Morley, “The Maya Chronicles,” in Contributions to American Anthropology and
History, no. 48 (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Institution of Washington, Publication
585, 1949), vol. 10, pp. 1-86; Eugene R. Craine and Reginald C. Reindorp, The Codex
Pérez and the Book of Chilam Balam of Maní (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press,
1979).

A more detailed itemization of the subject matter within each section appears in the

9 Gustavo Martínez Alomia, Historiadores de Yucatán: Aportes biográficos y bibliográficos
de los historiadores de esta península desde su descubrimiento hasta fines del siglo xix (Campe-

followed the most advantageous paths to political prominence in Mé-
rida or nearby Campeche. Pérez, conspicuous by all accounts for his
extreme modesty and lack of driving ambition, remained satisfied
with his post as jefe político in the town of Peto, some seventy-five miles
southeast of Mérida at the end of the rail line that passes through
Ticul. The bureaucratic tedium of constantly handling the local land
titles and other legal documents apparently engendered in Pérez
more than a routine familiarity with the documentary record of rural
Yucatán. From this emerged a profound appreciation of the manus-
cripts and, in time, the contacts that helped Pérez bring them to
light. Early on, he apparently began the laborious copying of the ma-
terial that forms the anthology bearing his name.

Around 1835, Pérez, “on account of some political disgust, with-
drew from public life and, during two years of retirement, devoted
himself to the study of the ancient chronology of Yucatán . . . a work
which no ordinary man would have ventured to undertake.” It was
during this span, while living in Ticul, that he transcribed not only
the famed “Ticul Dictionary” but also a treasure trove of important
documents he found in nearby Maní. According to an annotation
made on his copy, he completed the Maní transcriptions on 25 Oc-
tober 1837.

The publication record of Juan Pío Pérez, and, indeed, that of the
Yucatecan books, had its beginning in English. John Lloyd Stephens’
best-seller, Incidents of Travel in Yucatán, contains two appendices that,
for scholars of the period, rivalled the author’s vivid narrative of the
ruins. The first appendix consisted of Juan Pío Pérez’s important
“Ancient Chronology of Yucatán,” a detailed explanation of the tradi-
tional Maya calendar; the second, part of the Maní chronicle tran-
scribed by Pérez.

Relatively little of Pérez’s labors reached print during his lifetime.
The “Ancient Chronology” was not reprinted in Justo Sierra
O’Reilly’s important Spanish translation of Stephens’s Incidents of

6 John Lloyd Stephens, Incidents of Travel in Yucatán, 2 vols. (New York: Harper and
Brothers, 1843); vol. 2, p. 117.

7 Juan Pío Pérez, Coordinación alfabética de las voces del idioma Maya que se hablan en el
arte y obras del padre Fr. Pedro Beltran de Santa Rosa, con las equivalencias castellanas que en
las mismas se hablan (Mérida: Imprenta de la Ermita, 1808).

8 Alfredo Barrera Vásquez and Silvia René, El libro de los libros de Chilam Balam

Travel in Yucatán, perhaps because it had recently appeared in the prestigious literary periodical, *Registro Yucateco*. When Juan Pío Pérez died on 6 March 1859, he left unfinished his largest single endeavor, a Maya-Spanish dictionary of Yucatec based on all the colonial vocabulary sources then known. The task of completing the great *Diccionario de la Lengua Maya* was taken up by the priest-historian Crescencio Carrillo y Ancona, and by Carl Hermann Berendt, an exiled German physician and political activist who had turned to Maya ethnology and linguistics. Actual publication, begun in 1866, was not accomplished until 1877 because of Maya insurgency in the northern peninsula. *In a memorial essay on Pérez that prefaces the work—a superb example of the romantic prose of Old Yucatán—Fabián Carrillo Suaste fondly recalls Pérez as a bearded man of respectable age and aspect who reminded many of the portraits of Socrates, with an affectionate and intelligent smile reflecting the soul of a wise and good man.*

The relatively small output of published works by Pérez issued during his lifetime (both the Ticol vocabulary and, as we have seen, the *Diccionario*, were issued posthumously) belies their importance for the budding Maya scholarship of the period. In 1881, much of Pérez's work reappeared, with due credit, in Crescencio Carrillo y Ancona's 671-page *Historia antigua de Yucatán*, including the "Ancient Chronology" and excerpts from the Book of Chilam Balam of Mani. In these works, Juan Pío Pérez stands revealed as the primary figure in the recovery of an entire category of data pertinent to the Maya and their ways. In his contributions to the Stephens volumes, Pérez provided access for the first time to the traditional history of the Maya themselves. More importantly, perhaps, his labors laid the firm foundations for the productive work of others, notably Crescencio Carrillo y Ancona, a priest who put the old manuscript books of Yucatán even more solidly on the map of Maya scholarship.

Don Crescencio Carrillo y Ancona was born in Izamal, Yucatán, on 19 April 1837—precisely when Juan Pío Pérez was copying Maya manuscripts in Ticol and Mani. In 1848 Carrillo y Ancona's family moved to Mérida, forced to the city by the early troubles posed by the uprising of the rural Maya east and south of the capital. He was only twenty-two when Pérez died, by which time he had already received his degrees in philosophy and theology. He was ordained to the priesthood in 1860, but he somehow found time to pursue the Maya records of colonial Yucatán, even after 1887, when he became Bishop of Yucatán. His aptitude for local history and language was such that, in the late 1860s, he was invited to join the select group of scholars working to bring Pérez's unfinished *Diccionario* to completion. The others included Dr. Carl Hermann Berendt and two of the most prominent citizens of the Yucatecan political scene: historian Don Eligio Ancona and Don Carlos Peón. The latter had inherited Pérez's accumulation of manuscripts and, around the beginning of 1868, turned them over to Carrillo y Ancona, who soon thereafter saw the Mani transcriptions for the first time.

It was during this loan of the manuscript (1868–1870) that Carrillo y Ancona added two handwritten notes to the Pérez transcription. In the first, dated 4 January 1868, Carrillo y Ancona bestowed upon the manuscript its "official" name, Códice Pérez, in honor of its compiler.


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Carrillo y Ancona returned the Codex Pérez to Don Carlos Peón around 1871, but retrieved it soon afterward. At this time, the saga of the manuscript takes a complicated turn, for a misunderstanding apparently grew as to whether the exchanges constituted loans or gifts. Whatever the case, Carrillo y Ancona again returned the original to Carlos Peón in the autumn of 1877. His explanation for doing so, contained in a third and final note added to the original, was that he felt it his duty, given that the long-awaited Pérez Diccionario was finished and, moreover, that Carrillo y Ancona was no longer director of the Museo Yucateco, a library he had founded in 1870.

At one time or another, Bishop Carrillo y Ancona had in his possession the principal manuscripts of Maya history and prophecy, among them, the Books of Chilam Balam of Chumayel, Kaua, Tizimín, Ixil, and, of course, the Codex Pérez. Except for the latter, by the end of the nineteenth century these manuscripts were part of the collection of the Biblioteca Estatal Manuel Cepeda Peraza in Mérida. All of them seem to have been removed from the Cepeda before the Revolution of 1910, for many of them ended up in the hands of that most driven capturer and preserver of Maya manuscripts, William Gates. Gates saw the coming Revolution as an irreversible peril to unique sources for the study of Maya history and culture. As he watched it gain momentum, he and his cohorts collected and copied manuscripts in an obsessive frenzy that preserved some of the most significant Maya texts not only from the dangers of civil war but also from that even more certain enemy of manuscripts, the tropical climate of Yucatán. Ultimately, some of the most important of the manuscripts saved by Gates were given to the Princeton University Library by Robert Garrett, Class of 1897. But without the intervention of Carrillo y Ancona, who brought so many of the books to light in the first place, and for the early collecting activities of William Gates,


Rivera Figueroa and Cantón Rosado, “Carrillo y Ancona,” pp. 41–42.

it is doubtful that these important texts would have survived in any form.

Among the thousands of surviving legal and religious documents, letters, dictionaries, and business transactions written in Yucatec Maya between the establishment of the city of Mérida in 1542 and the time of the “War of the Castes” in the mid-1800s, some twenty manuscripts dealing with Maya history, ritual, and prophecy are known—or at least mentioned by name in the scholarly literature. As can be inferred from the superb census compiled by Charles Gibson and John B. Glass in 1975, the precise number of manuscript sources related to Maya culture, history, and prophecy in the northern lowlands depends on how one designates and classifies them. The situation is further clouded by the question of whether certain documents mentioned in published lists actually existed. And as if that were not enough to daunt even the most dedicated lover of old papers, those manuscripts that do exist often prove to be copies or, even more confusing, partial copies of one or more of the others! All this has created a puzzle of the first order for those who sort and study the contents of the Maya documents.

The Gibson and Glass census lists some forty separate manuscripts related to the general etnohistory of the northern Maya. Subtracting those devoted to medical remedies, legal matters, historical relaciones, pure ritual, and the unique book of songs from Dzibilchaltun, there remain only twenty-four works devoted to the chronicles and prophecies of native tradition. Of those, four are known only because they are mentioned in other sources, and two of those may be alternate names of texts already in the inventory, leaving twenty, the number given by William Brito Sansores in his recent summary of Maya writings.

Of these twenty important native sources, most or all (depending on the definition by the individual scholar) fall into the category called "Books of Chilam Balam."


Brito Sansores, Maya Writing, p. 69.
In his important early work on Yucatán, the Spanish cleric Bernardo de Lizana cites the name Chiilam Balam (rendered “Chilam-Balam”) as one of several Maya seers. According to Alfredo Barrera Vázquez and Silvia Rendón, Chiilam Balam lived in Maní shortly before the time of the Spaniards. The name is but a pairing of the Yucatec words chilan, meaning “prophet” (literally, “he who is mouth”) and balam, or “jaguar,” with the substitution of m for n that often occurs in such cases. Balam was, and is, a common family name in the area. We know nothing of Chiilam Balam himself, only that his fame survived him and that his name came to be a sort of generic modifier for each of the holy books guarded by the h-menob, or native priests, in many northern Maya towns.

The Books of Chiilam Balam usually contain a mixture of chronicles, prophecies, and prayers. Examples are known from (and thus bear the designations of) the Maya towns of Chan Cah (or Chan Kah, or Chan Kan), Chumayel, Ixil, Kaua, Tizimin, Tekax, and Tusa. Other Books of Chiilam Balam were included in the literature as being from Teabo, Telchac, and Tixcocob remain unaccounted for, and the very existence of still others from Hocabá, Nabilá, Oxkutzcab, Petén, and Tihosuco remains in question. To the list of Books of Chiilam Balam, some authorities add the important Calkini manuscript, which is better defined simply as a chronicle and native geography. In the midst of this somewhat confusing picture lies the Codex Pérez.

The history of the manuscript of the Codex Pérez naturally begins with the scattering of the original texts that Juan Pío Pérez found in Maní. These, it is almost certain, no longer exist, and therefore the 1837 set of transcriptions is designated herein as the “original.” Pérez himself copied excerpts of that manuscript for John Lloyd Stephens around 1842. According to Ralph Roys, these were given to the li-

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62 Bernardo Lizana, Historia de Yucatán, devociónario de Ntra. Sra. de Iznal y conquista espiritual (Mexico: Museo Nacional, 1899), p. 38. The first edition was published in Valladolid, Spain, in 1633; an 1898 Mexico City edition was published before access to a complete original was obtained; the complete 1898 Mexico City edition replaced it, and remains the best accessible version of the work.
63 Barrera Vázquez and Rendón, Chiilam Balam, p. 14. This is the best survey of the subject.

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Unal chart from the Princeton manuscript of the Codex Pérez. The Princeton Collections of Western Americana. Gift of the Friends of the Princeton University Library.
library of the New-York Historical Society, where they may be at present. Related materials given by Pérez to Stephens at the same time form an important part of the John Lloyd Stephens Papers now in the Bancroft Library in Berkeley, California.

As noted, Don Carlos Peón of Mérida inherited the original manuscript from Pérez in 1859, and Carrillo y Ancona added three handwritten notations of his own to the original during the two separate loans of the manuscript. Upon the death of Carlos Peón, the original Codex Pérez passed to Nicolasa Peón, wife of Eusebio Escalante, and presumably remains in the Escalante family of Mérida. Fortunately, a photographic copy of that precious manuscript was made in 1936 by Raul Câmara of Mérida for Sylvanus G. Morley and the Carnegie Institution of Washington. It is now in the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology at Harvard University.

The first complete copy of the original Codex Pérez was apparently made by Carl Hermann Berendt in 1868. It is now in the library of the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. An elaborate calligraphic copy made by Juan de Dios Pinto Pérez is in the National Library of Mexico. Two additional copies, one in manuscript and one a typescript, were made by Ermilio Solís Alcalá and his son Ermilio Solís Mendiburu of Mérida. The manuscript copy is in the Biblioteca Estatal Manuel Cepeda Peraza (Crescencio Carrillo y Ancona Yucatecan Section) in Mérida; the typescript is in the National Library of Anthropology in Mexico City. A carbon copy of the typescript is mentioned as having been in the library of Frans Blom.

The Codex Pérez has been published only twice in its entirety. In 1949, the League of Social Action of Mérida issued it in the form of parallel Maya text and Spanish translation. An English version — derived mainly from the League of Social Action edition, but carefully checked against the Câmara photographs at Harvard — was published by Eugene Craine and Reginald Reinord in 1979. Both publications carry Solís Alcalá’s modifications in content and arrangement, including “corrections” which, Tatiana Proskouriakoff argues, may obscure significant points of the calendrical counts.

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97 Barrera Vásquez and Rendón, Chilam Balam, p. 20.
98 Ibid., p. 25.
99 Ibid.
100 Ermilio Solís Alcalá, Códice Pérez (Mérida: Ediciones de la Liga de Acción Social, 1949).
101 Tatiana Proskouriakoff, “The Survival of the Maya Tun Count in Colonial Times: Chart showing Maya and Christian dates, from the Princeton manuscript of the Codex Pérez. The Princeton Collections of Western Americana. Gift of the Friends of the Princeton University Library.
The Princeton manuscript of the Codex Pérez was written on seven cuadernos, or fascicles, of ten leaves (twenty pages) each, or 140 pages in all. Of those, twenty-four are blank. The manuscript was never bound. Page size is consistently 25.0 cm wide and 35.2 cm high. The contents are complete, embracing both the whole of the Pérez transcription and the annotations added by Carrillo y Ancona between 1868 and 1877.

The text runs continuously from fascicle to fascicle, occupying all of the available space except for the first two leaves (pages [1]-[4]) of the first fascicle and the final nine leaves (pages [3]-[20]) of the seventh fascicle. Two additional blank pages — one at the beginning of the Chilam Balam of Mani, the other at its end — set that text apart from the remainder of the work. These fascicles were never bound together, but were apparently obtained by Carrillo y Ancona in their present form as cuadernos of lightly lined paper for the specific purpose of making the master copies of his more important transcriptions.

Careful (but admittedly inexpert) comparison of the handwriting of the present manuscript with that of Carrillo y Ancona as it appears in the annotations on Pérez’s original indicates that they are both from the same hand.\(^3\) The hand in the Princeton manuscript, however, is rendered with far more care than were Carrillo y Ancona’s annotations on the original.

The evidence of handwriting, along with the presence of the dated annotations, leads to the conclusion that the Princeton manuscript of the Codex Pérez is nothing less than the personal fair copy belonging to Crescencio Carrillo y Ancona himself. It seems most probable that it was done late in 1877, after the composition of the third annotation, and before the original was returned to Don Carlos Peón for the last time. If so, the Princeton manuscript, which must now be added to the Codex Pérez inventory, is a version of prime importance, and one superlatively rich in association value.

By virtue of its rich and varied content, its excellent state of preservation and, now, its full accessibility to scholars of Mesoamerica and the Maya, the Princeton manuscript of the Codex Pérez constitutes one of the most important primary sources for our knowledge of the traditional native calendar, folk history, and general belief system of the Northern Lowland Maya.

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The pursuit of the tangled history of the Pérez manuscript takes one, albeit briefly and superficially, into still another world that deserves to be better known to outsiders — that of nineteenth-century Yucatán. It was at once the worst and best of places, both battleground of Indian rebellion and enclave of a grand elite made manifest not only in the exclusive clubs of politics and romantic literature, but also in the ornate henequén haciendas that, like Scarlett’s Tara, are no longer with us. In that curious distant corner of Porfirio Díaz’s Mexico, neither the Spanish-American urban aristocracy nor the Church that came with it could overwhelm the old Maya ways that permeated the land. In a very real sense, the cadences of prophecy and the cycles of time that ring from the pages of the Codex Pérez serve to remind us all of that indomitable spirit.


\(^3\) See the Raul Cámara photographs in Craine and Reinord, *Codex Pérez*, pp. 10, 12, 14.
Alfred Jacob Miller’s
The Indian Guide

BY RON TYLER

Among the Library’s images and artifacts of the nineteenth-century American West is a previously unpublished field sketch by Alfred Jacob Miller entitled The Indian Guide. The small pencil and watercolor sketch passed from the artist by descent to Mrs. Lawrence R. Carton and her son, William Pinkney Carton, Class of 1943, who gave it to the Philip Ashton Rollins Collection of Western Americana in 1949. It is published here, in color, for the first time, with the aid of a grant from the Hobart G. Weekes, Class of 1923, Fund.

Alfred Jacob Miller was a young man of twenty-seven when he attended the celebrated Rendezvous along Horse Creek, a tributary of the Green River in the Wind River Mountains in the southwest corner of present-day Wyoming. A western expedition, particularly one to the heart of the Rocky Mountains where no Anglo-American artist had ever gone, was probably the farthest thing from his mind when he moved from Baltimore to New Orleans in December, 1836, hoping to establish his career as a portrait painter. But when presented with the opportunity the following spring, he rose to the task, producing the only eyewitness visual record of one of America’s history’s most storied characters and events—the fur trapper and the Rocky Mountain Rendezvous. The Princeton University Library’s painting of The Indian Guide originated in this fabled setting.¹

The Rendezvous was a grand affair. It had been devised by St. Louis businessman and politician William H. Ashley in the mid-1820s to keep the fur trappers from leaving the mountains to deliver the


¹ Rae Reed Porter and Odessa Davenport, Sroatsman in Buckskin: Sir William Drum-
From British Consul John Crawford, Miller learned that Captain William Drummond Stewart was the second son of Sir George Stewart, seventeenth lord of Grandtully and fifth baronet of Murthly, and like many other sons of nobility, he had found in the United States adventure and opportunity that were denied him in Britain and Europe. He was born in 1795 at Murthly Castle on the River Tay, in Perthshire, approximately fifty miles from Perth, Scotland, and even though his brother, John, had inherited all the family titles and lands, William was a veteran of the peninsular campaign and Wellington's victory over Napoleon at Waterloo, and would be able to fulfill any financial commitments that he made to Miller.⁵

Trapped in an unhappy marriage to a farm girl and retired on half-pay, Stewart had quarrelled with his brother and had come to America in 1832 "for the sole purpose of penetrating the great wilderness of the West," vowing never again to spend the night under Murthly's roof. He landed in New York, where he met the editor, politician, and adventurer J. Watson Webb, who gave him letters of recommendation to friends in St. Louis. He headed westward, pausing to wonder at Niagara Falls before moving on to St. Louis. "I think you are quite right to see America thoroughly now that you are there," his brother wrote from Scotland.⁶

Through Webb's introduction, Stewart met William Sublette and Robert Campbell, fur traders who had just returned from the 1832 summer Rendezvous, and Governor William Clark, veteran of the Lewis and Clark expedition and now Superintendent of Indian Affairs, who maintained a priceless collection of Indian artifacts and maps in his office cum museum. He listened to their stories of the mountain "Saturnalia," one of the true spectacles that the West had to offer during the 1830s, in silence until Sublette and Campbell began preparations for their departure that spring. Then he suggested that he accompany them, offering them $500 for their trouble. Stewart impressed them as a man who could take care of himself, so they


⁶ "From British Consul John Crawford, Miller learned that Captain William Drummond Stewart was the second son of Sir George Stewart, seventeenth lord of Grandtully and fifth baronet of Murthly, and like many other sons of nobility, he had found in the United States adventure and opportunity that were denied him in Britain and Europe. He was born in 1795 at Murthly Castle on the River Tay, in Perthshire, approximately fifty miles from Perth, Scotland, and even though his brother, John, had inherited all the family titles and lands, William was a veteran of the peninsular campaign and Wellington's victory over Napoleon at Waterloo, and would be able to fulfill any financial commitments that he made to Miller. Trapped in an unhappy marriage to a farm girl and retired on half-pay, Stewart had quarrelled with his brother and had come to America in 1832 "for the sole purpose of penetrating the great wilderness of the West," vowing never again to spend the night under Murthly's roof. He landed in New York, where he met the editor, politician, and adventurer J. Watson Webb, who gave him letters of recommendation to friends in St. Louis. He headed westward, pausing to wonder at Niagara Falls before moving on to St. Louis. "I think you are quite right to see America thoroughly now that you are there," his brother wrote from Scotland.

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agreed. Just before departing, he also met the veteran explorer Prince Maximilian of Wied-Neu Wied, who was en route west with his servant David Dreidoppel and the artist Karl Bodmer to study the Indians. After a conversation with Campbell, who must have been blunt about the trail conditions and possible dangers, Maximilian decided to take a steamboat up the Missouri River rather than accompany the caravan across the prairie. Perhaps it was this chance encounter that led Stewart to take an artist with him on his later trip.7

Stewart attended the 1833 Rendezvous on Horse Creek. He returned again in 1834, this time accompanying Nathaniel Wyeth to Fort Vancouver and spending the winter exploring the Northwest. Back at the Rendezvous again in 1835 and 1836, he became one of the mainstays, contributing good food, wine, and exotic presents, and matching the mountain men’s stories with accounts of his own feats during the Napoleonic wars. Sometime in the fall of 1836 he received word that his older brother was ill with cancer. If John died, Stewart knew that he would have to return to Scotland to take charge of his family’s affairs. As he prepared to attend the 1837 Rendezvous, he realized that it might be his last. Perhaps that is why he decided to take young Miller with him — an artist who could compile a pictorial record of what might be the captain’s last trip into the wild and exotic Rockies.8

Stewart contracted with Miller, and they set out for St. Louis in April. Miller was a particularly good choice for the task. Romanticism was at its height. While in Paris, he audited the life classes at the École des Beaux-Arts and copied works of the masters, including the nude figure of the damned in the lower left corner of Eugene Delacroix’s The Barque of Dante (1822, The Louvre). Perhaps he even saw some of Delacroix’s early paintings from his well-publicized 1832 expedition to Morocco and, later, compared them to his sketches of the American West. He studied religious art in Rome and sketched through the Lake District and the Alps. Miller was well grounded in his romanticism.9

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7 Bernard DeVoto, Across the Wide Missouri (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1947), p. 18; Porter and Davenport, Scotsman in Buckskin, pp. 21–49; Ross, Alfred Jacob Miller, plate 110. For an account of Maximilian’s and Bodmer’s adventure, see William H. Coe, ed., Karl Bodmer’s America (Lincoln: Joslyn Art Museum and University of Nebraska Press, 1983).


After arriving in St. Louis, Stewart introduced Miller to Governor Clark, who repeatedly entertained them before they started on their trip. They paused at Westport (present-day Kansas City), where Stewart outfitted the expedition, then continued across present-day Kansas to the Platte River. They followed the North Fork of the Platte into present-day Wyoming, along what would soon become known as the Oregon Trail. Approximately 150 miles west of Fort Laramie, the caravan picked up the Sweetwater River and followed it into the foothills of the Rockies — Devil's Gate, Independence Rock, Split Rock, and finally South Pass, or the Continental Divide. The caravan then turned northwesterly, paralleling the Wind River Mountains into the valley of Horse Creek sometime in June, where the trappers and Indians had already begun to gather.  

David L. Brown, who attended the gathering as a member of the traders' caravan, recalled that "we came suddenly upon a long line of beautiful Indian tents ranging in regular order, and stretching away for at least two miles in perspective, and terminating in a wide and circular array of the same romantic and fairy-looking dwellings." It was an idyllic scene, reminding him of the "storied wonders of my childhood and early youth ... poring over the delightful pages of Scott and Froissart." Stewart was the hit of the Rendezvous, well-known for his open-air dinner parties, with fine wines and brandies, and canned sardines to supplement the buffalo-hump ribs and antelope steaks. He rode good horses, hunted with superb guns, told an endless succession of war stories — and even presented Jim Bridger with a suit of English armor. He more than held his own around the campfire with the likes of Bridger, Thomas Fitzpatrick, and Joseph Redford Walker.  

Miller, meanwhile, documented the entire trip, from the departure of the caravan at Westport to its arrival in the mountains. Then he

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11 David L. Brown's articles in the Cincinnati Atlas were reprinted as Three Years in the Rocky Mountains (New York: Edward Eberstadt and Sons, 1900); see p. 10. Most of Miller's sketches are in the collections of the Joslyn Art Museum in Omaha, Nebraska, and the Thomas Gilcrease Museum in Tulsa, Oklahoma. See William H. Goetzmann and Joseph C. Porter, The West as Romantic Horizon (Omaha: Center for Western Studies, Joslyn Art Museum, 1961); pp. 61-70; and Joan Carpenter Troccoli, Alfred Jacob Miller: Watercolors of the American West from the Collection of the Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, Oklahoma (Tulsa: Thomas Gilcrease Museum Association, 1990).
prowled the Rendezvous grounds, painting ceremonies, camp scenes, trappers and Indians at work and play. Many of his images form a narrative of the trip and the Rendezvous; some are portraits of specific individuals, while others are timeless depictions of the “noble savage” at home in the wilderness, or composites of exotic mountain scenery, pictures that American and European romantics alike would have easily recognized as the equivalent of postcard mementoes for Stewart.

* *

Princeton’s watercolor, entitled *The Indian Guide*, represents a scene that probably occurred shortly after the caravan arrived in the Wind River Mountains, before it reached the Rendezvous. According to Miller’s caption, it shows Stewart (on the white horse in the center), who has left the caravan on the plain below and gone up on a bluff with his interpreter to reconnoiter and question the Indian guide. Miller explained:

While availing himself [Stewart] of this useful and indispensible auxiliary, it nevertheless behooves him to keep a sharp lookout in order to guard against ambush & treachery. These guides are often picked up haphazard on the prairie, having sometimes their own projects in view. From these elevated bluffs an extended view is had in all directions over the prairie, so that, with the aid of the compass, the hills and river courses, a pretty accurate testing of the guide’s knowledge of the locality and his ability as pilot may be reached.13

*The Indian Guide* is quite similar to two other Miller paintings, one entitled *An Indian Who Asks (by Sign) What Caravan Is Seen in the Plain or What Caravan Is It That Is Seen*, now in the Eugene B. Adkins collection in Tulsa, and *Indian Guide*, in the Walters Art Gallery in Baltimore.13 Most likely, Princeton’s *The Indian Guide* is the sketch that Miller made while on the trip and kept in his studio collection until his death. It would, therefore, date from the summer of 1837. Possessing the freshness of his trail paintings, it also contains some pencil sketching along with the watercolor. The mountains at the right are outlined in pencil, and the small figure of another rider has been limned in at the far left, just above the grassy foreground and in front of the mountain. It is signed at the lower left with his characteristic “AJM” monogram. The title appears at the lower right, and the number “44” is penciled in the upper left corner.

After Miller returned to New Orleans in the fall of 1837, he set to work on a series of eighty-seven pen-and-ink washes and watercolors for Stewart, probably completing them some time in 1838. These small paintings told the entire story of Stewart’s trip across the prairie, the Rendezvous in the Rockies, and the extended hunt into the mountains that followed. Number forty-six in this series is *An Indian Who Asks . . .*, which is done with pen-and-ink and grey and yellow washes. The central trio and the right side of the painting are quite similar to the Princeton picture, but Miller has replaced the mountain at the left with shrubs and a tree, the limb of which stretches out to shade the trio. Like all of the paintings in this set (except for the individual portraits), Stewart is in the middle of the action. He seems a bit more recognizable in the wash than in the Princeton field sketch, with his hook nose more clearly delineated. Based on the title, this scene also has a slightly different interpretation. It apparently represents an Indian asking Stewart what caravan is seen below — perhaps he means, is this the caravan for the Rendezvous — rather than a conversation between the caravan leader and the guide. When Stewart returned to Scotland as the nineteenth lord of Grantully and seventh baronet of Murthly, he kept these small paintings in a “richly bound portfolio” in the drawing room of Murthly Castle, where they were “one of the Chief Attractions . . . to . . . distinguished visitors who are profuse in their compliments to me,” as Miller wrote to his brother.14

13 Ross, Alfred Jacob Miller, plate 55.
14 A Series of Watercolour Drawings by Alfred Jacob Miller, of Baltimore, Artist to Captain Stewart’s Expedition to the Rockies in 1837 (New York: Parke-Bernet Galleries, 1968), Lot 154: Ross, Alfred Jacob Miller, p. xxxii. The small paintings measure approximately 7 x 10 to 8 x 11 inches.
The third version of this composition, the Walters Art Gallery’s *Indian Guide*, was not painted for another twenty years. Miller kept his field sketches as studies for paintings that he made for the remainder of his life. Between 1838 and 1841, he used them to produce several large oils for Stewart to hang in Murthly Castle; from 1858 to 1860 he made a set of two hundred finished watercolors for William T. Walters of Baltimore (for which he received $12 each) and thirty-seven for William C. Wait; in 1867 he made forty for Alexander Brown of Liverpool (for which he was paid $25 each). *Indian Guide* was one of the set of two hundred that he painted for Walters, and it was given, along with the collector’s other works, to the Walters Art Gallery in 1931. It is quite similar to the Princeton picture, even to the point that the sketchy figure at the left has been finished, but the central figure is not quite as much a portrait of Stewart as are the first two. Miller, it seems, painted Stewart out of his later paintings, perhaps to emphasize the universality of his character types rather than to identify them with specific individuals.15

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European-influenced art relating to Indians has been criticized recently as being little more than white Americans’ perception of Indians “through the assumptions of their own culture.”16 That is true of Miller, who did not enjoy the outdoor life and declined Stewart’s offer of a return trip in 1843. His romantic point of view may be seen time and again in what Vernon Young called “the poetic essentials of Indian life before the mass invasions of the frontiers.”17 Miller frequently depicted the encounter between what he perceived to be “savagery” and “civilization,” such as in *The Indian Guide*, and in his choice of Indians to sit for portraits, not because they were great warrior chiefs or braves, but because they “approached a classical form”

15 There is no evidence of extended animosity between Miller and Stewart that would otherwise account for Stewart’s absence from the later works. Ross, *Alfred Jacob Miller*, p. xxvii, xxxii, plate 55.

and he thought them “a good specimen of the tribe.” His finished paintings do not possess the thoroughness and attention to detail of George Catlin’s or Karl Bodmer’s and, by comparison, seem almost frivolous. The sketches “show details more clearly . . . [and] tell me more about Indian material culture than do any of Miller’s other pictures,” reported ethnologist John C. Ewers. But, intended as they were as a pictorial record of Captain Stewart’s last holiday frolic in the mountains, the pictures are admirable snapshots.18

The great body of Miller’s work is more, however. He painted the 1897 extravaganza with all the romanticism and mythic power that an evening around a Rendezvous campfire would have demanded. He presented the first exhibition of paintings of the Rocky Mountains at the Apollo Gallery in New York City in 1899—the eighteen large oils that Stewart had commissioned, prior to their being shipped to Scotland— which was so popular that it was extended. But the im-
mediacy and almost coincidental detail of his field sketches rendered them of more aesthetic and documentary value than his finished paintings. "It was in the sketches for those epic pictures," Young concluded, that "he revealed his flair for conveying movement. . . . With a sometimes slapdash economy of line he caught the precise cant of a man in the saddle as he counterweights the motion of his horse. Mountains and distant caravans are softly indeterminate. Indian man and beast are interfused, grass bends with the wind, wafted smoke and shadows are differentiated — the campfire vigils have sounds." 19

The reclusive Miller was not better known during his own lifetime because his most important work was for a single patron and few of his pictures were published. 20 Now that his work is documented and well known — beginning with Bernard DeVoto's Across the Wide Missouri in 1947 — Miller is recognized as one of the earliest and most important artists to paint the American West, and the only one to depict the Rendezvous and the mountain man at work. In a work such as the Princeton Field sketch, he can also be appreciated for preserving a thoroughly romantic and immensely popular vision of the Far West and its native inhabitants.

possible. The public demanded integrity; to keep secrets only invited public distrust. "Secrecy," said Lee, "is the parent of suspicion." Ivy Lee’s basic philosophy was that an individual’s, a company’s, or a country’s reputation must rest on its actions. Words alone cannot bring about acceptance. Good public relations, Lee believed, is a reflection of the policies adopted and implemented by a company. And so Lee established the principle that public relations counselors should play a vital role in policy formation. Business leaders needed to examine their companies to determine whether their actions indeed had the public interest at heart.

In essence, Lee and others refocused the image of the businessman away from the “public-be-damned” robber baron of the late nineteenth century. This change is most visible in the remaking of John D. Rockefeller’s image, beginning with Lee’s handling of the Ludlow massacre of 1913. Lee’s press bulletins, his advice to John D. Rockefeller, Jr., to tour the mines (which had Rockefeller dancing with the miners’ wives), and his adroit handling of the public relations aspects of the Walsh Commission hearings on the episode led to an ongoing relationship with the Rockefellers that would reshape the family’s image and activities in positive ways.


Equally significant was Lee’s role in the development of trade associations. He served as publicist to ASCAP, the National Automobile Chamber of Commerce, the Anthracite Coal Operators, the Copper and Brass Research Association, the Cotton Textile Institute, the National Dairy Council, the American Petroleum Institute, the United States Shipping Board, the International Sugar Council, and the Association of Railway Executives, among others.

Lee also advised a host of non-profit organizations over the years, including full-time work for the American Red Cross during World War I, and, later, the Rockefeller interests (the General Education Board, Colonial Williamsburg, Cairo Museum, Laymen’s Foreign

Mission Inquiry, Riverside Church, and the Rockefeller Foundation), educational institutions (Princeton, Harvard, and Georgia Tech), the American Legion, the American Historical Association, the New York Metropolitan Opera Association, and the American Shakespear Foundation.

Lee traveled abroad on a regular basis and was intensely interested in the shaping of American foreign policy. He supported international organizations through the League of Nations Non-Partisan Association and the World Court Committee; he promoted American diplomatic recognition of the Soviet Union, and was active in the Council on Foreign Relations and the Institute of Pacific Relations.

Because of Ivy Lee’s importance to the development of mass communications in a democratic society, the Library is especially grateful to his family for providing the funds that will make access to his papers easy and their conservation certain.

— Ben Primer
Curator, Public Policy Papers

AN EXHIBITION OF HISTORIC MAPS

The quincentenary of Columbus’ first voyage to America provided the occasion for an exhibition of some of the maps that have traced the expansion of Western knowledge of the world. “From Circle to Sphere: Historic Maps Since Columbus” placed on display maps by most of the historically important cartographers and many of the finest mapmakers working in Europe and America from the fifteenth century to the early twentieth century. Included in the exhibition were works by Martin Waldseemüller (ca. 1470 – 1518), Abraham Ortelius (1527 – 1598), Sebastian Münstcr (1489 – 1552), Henricus Hondius (1587 – 1655), Willem Janszoon Bleau (1571 – 1638), Nicolas Sanson (1600 – 1667), and John Cary (ca. 1751 – 1835).

The exhibition was visually rich, with colorful and elegant examples of the mapmaker’s art arrayed in the main gallery of Firestone Library from 17 January through 12 April 1992. An introductory section displayed virtually all of the significant editions of Claudius Ptolemy’s Geographia, one of them hand colored, from the first edition of 1475 to Gerard Mercator’s scholarly edition, published in 1584. The first printed map — a woodcut in the 1472 Augsburg edition of St. Isidore’s Etymologiae — showed the world as it was known
to the seventh-century archbishop of Seville; his "T-O" diagram had been reproduced throughout Europe in manuscript for some nine hundred years. But only a year after it appeared in this printed version, Hartmann Schedel (1440 - 1514) produced a woodcut map of the world in which some of the major features of the lands in Europe, Africa, and Asia are clearly recognizable. Schedel's map appeared in Liber chronicarum, the famed "Nuremberg Chronicle" of 1493, said to be the last pre-Columbian view of the world published in Europe.

The exhibition was divided into thematic sections, within which the development of mapmaking was traced chronologically. "The New World," for example, showed the evolution of knowledge about the size and shape of the American continents, as well as increasingly accurate depictions of smaller portions of the land that became the United States. One section was devoted to "California as an Island," another to "The Northwest Passage," and yet another to the increasingly sophisticated globes produced by the likes of Vincenzo Coronelli (1650 - 1718), founder of the Cosmographical Academy of the Argonauts, and James Wilson, our first globemaker, whose 1819 globe shows the boundary between Spain and the United States established by the Adams-Onis treaty.

John Delaney, leader of the Rare Books and Special Collections cataloguing team, has written and produced an illustrated catalogue of the exhibition which he also organized and mounted. The catalogue may be purchased for $5 from the Princeton University Library, 1 Washington Road, Princeton, New Jersey 08544.

IMAGES OF PRINCETON, 1890 - 1935

The Princeton University Archives has been awarded a grant from the New Jersey State Library (a division of the New Jersey State Department of Education) which will enable us to reformat two large collections of fragile glass-plate negatives documenting places and events on campus from the late nineteenth century to around 1935. The award, which totals nearly $15,000, will be used to make contact prints and 4 x 5-inch polyester negatives of the 1,150 images that were captured by Edward C. Kopp (1870 - 1936), a Princeton jeweler and amateur photographer, and Harold R. Wanless (1898 - 1970), a member of the Princeton Class of 1920.

Kopp recorded activities around campus from about 1890 until his death. His photographs of the campus are the candid scenes of an amateur photographer and were taken over many years. They include images of buildings and grounds, construction projects, athletic events, P-rades, Reunions, Lake Carnegie, the Graduate College, and commencement. Among them are a fair number of stereoptic plates. Kopp's photographs came to the University as part of an exchange with the Historical Society of Princeton in which the Archives transferred glass plates of views of the town to the Society.

The Wanless negatives are the recent gift of the University Archives at the University of Illinois. Wanless, who served as photographic editor of the Princeton Pitorial, remained at Princeton following graduation, teaching in the geology department before going to Illinois where he was a member of the faculty. He gave the glass-plate negatives to Illinois, and the archivist there has now given them to Princeton. They cover the period from 1916 to 1922, and include photographs of buildings and grounds, the cemetery, athletic events, theater, the Dickinson Hall fire, bonfires, the Pyne estate (Drumthwacket, now the official residence of the governor of New Jersey), military training (including an artillery exhibition), the interiors of buildings, and various portraits of individuals and groups.

The photographic collections in the Princeton University Archives, with images from 1843 to the present day, are among the most used holdings. Last year the Archives provided 279 copies of photographs to forty-nine different researchers who used them in publications ranging from Sports Illustrated and Newsweek to high school and college textbooks. Besides journalists, many other researchers also used the collections: genealogists looking for photographs of family members who attended the University, scholars looking for illustrative material on faculty members, student activities, or Princeton architecture, for example. The collection is heavily used for University publications such as the Princeton Alumni Weekly.

Two somewhat unusual projects are also underway. The staff of the Archives is working with two major film companies, one shooting a television series, "The Young Indiana Jones Chronicles," in which Indy's father is a Princeton professor teaching here just after the turn of the century, and the other the latest Ken Burns project, a history of amateur baseball from the Civil War to World War I. The period photographs from both the Kopp and Wanless collections are invaluable resources for these enterprises.

--- BEN PRIMER
Princeton University Archivist
HEMINGWAY, WEEKES, AND FORSYTH

Limited first editions of major American writers are always welcome gifts to the Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, especially when the author's first two books were published abroad on private presses. Copy No. 12 of Ernest Hemingway's *in our time* arrived last December not only in prime condition but carrying with it three direct Princeton associations and two tangential.

The donor is G. Allan Forsyth, Class of 1953, who writes from New York City describing how he came by the copy and why he feels "it's time to share it with the whole Princeton family." On the front endpaper is the previous owner's signature: H. G. Weekes / Paris / Christmas 1924. Hobart Godfrey Weekes, Class of 1923, known to his friends as "Hobie," joined the staff of *The New Yorker* in 1928 as an editor, not a writer, and he remained in that post for fifty years, notably as guardian of "Talk of the Town," the popular opening feature of the magazine. On the rear endpaper is pasted a printed label which reads: "Shakespeare and Company" / Sylvia Beach / 12, rue de l'Odeon / Paris — VIe. Sylvia Beach, born in 1887 the daughter of a Presbyterian minister, had lived in Princeton for almost ten years before settling in Paris in 1916. By 1919 she had opened her first bookshop which, two years later, she moved to the rue de l'Odeon. By that time she was a close friend of Gertrude Stein and Ezra Pound and soon to be publisher of James Joyce's *Ulysses*. She first met Ernest and Hadley Hemingway in December of 1921 when they found her haven of a bookshop shortly after arriving in Paris.

Hobie Weekes may well have known Sylvia Beach long before

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Christmas 1924, since he was a student at Oxford following his graduation from Princeton and doubtless toured the continent. But what is the nexus between Weeke and Forsyth? Allan explains it concisely. “I never met [Hobie],” he writes in his letter. “His sister, Helen Weeke McKernon, was executor of his estate and my wife Susan was the attorney who worked with her. Susan found Mrs. McKernon a warm and cultivated person who loved her brother and Princeton. When Susan told her of my Princeton connections, Mrs. McKernon gave me this book.”

And the two tangential associations? In October 1924, Scott Fitzgerald wrote from the south of France a brief but now famous letter to his editor at Scribner’s, Maxwell Perkins. In the opening paragraph he talks about in our time without mentioning the title, and he forgets the correct name of the press, but the content is unadulterated praise for a writer he had not yet met: “This is to tell you about a young man named Ernest Hemingway, who lives in Paris (an American), writes for the Transatlantic Review and has a brilliant future. Ezra Pound published [edited?] a collection of his short pieces in Paris, at some place like the Egotist Press. I haven’t it here now but it’s remarkable and I’d look him up right away. He’s the real thing.”

During this same month another Princetonian, Edmund Wilson, Class of 1916, was writing in The Dial, a New York literary monthly, about Hemingway’s first two books, Three Stories and Ten Poems* and the more recent in our time. He called his composite review “Mr. Hemingway’s Dry-Points” with reference to Goya’s etchings and Hemingway’s bullfighters. He had little enthusiasm for the poems, but he sensed at once that this young American journalist had found his own distinctive voice and in these “dry compressed little vignettes” had “almost invented a form of his own.” After quoting Chapter 6 in its entirety (eleven sentences) he called Hemingway “remarkably successful in suggesting moral values by a series of simple statements of this sort.” He praised his “cool objective manner” in a book that “constitutes a harrowing record of barbarities: ... not only political executions, but criminal hangings, bullfights, assassinations by the police, and all the cruelties and enormities of the war.” The paragraph ends with a sentence not even Hemingway would have expected from a critic of Wilson’s stature: “I am inclined to think that [this] little book has more artistic dignity than any other that has been written by an American about the period of the war.”

No commentary on in our time — the Weekes-Forsyth copy or any other — would be complete without mention of two other Americans in Paris. William Bird had left New York in May 1921 to be the European manager of Consolidated Press. Hemingway arrived in December as foreign correspondent for the Toronto Star. The two men met while covering an economic conference in Geneva in June of the next year. When Bird talked of buying a printing press, Hemingway suggested Ezra Pound’s poetry for his first volume. By October, Bird had set up the Three Mountains Press in a shop on the Île St-Louis, engaged Pound to edit a series of prose books reflecting trends in contemporary writing, and began devoting his spare time to finding handmade paper and suitable designs. The first volume (March 1923) was not Pound’s poems but his autobiography up to his sixteenth year: Indiscrétions; or, Une revue de deux mondes. In a postscript Pound talked of new work to come in the series, the work of five other authors who “have set out from five different points to tell the truth about moeurs contemporaines, without fake, melodrama, conventional ending.” Hemingway’s contribution came last, for reasons too complicated to explain here. Thus we have this elaborate colophon on page 31 of in our time:

Here ends The Inquest into the state of contemporary English prose, as edited by Ezra Pound and printed at the Three Mountains Press. The six works constituting the series are:

Indiscrétions of Ezra Pound
Women and Men by Ford Madox Ford
Elinus by B. G. Windeler with Designs by D. Shakespear
The Great American Novel
by William Carlos Williams
England by B.M.G.-Adams
In Our Time by Ernest Hemingway
with Portrait by Henry Strater.
In her comprehensive bibliography of Ernest Hemingway,3 Audre Hanneman suggests that the title is “apparently an ironic allusion to the twelfth line of the Episcopalian ‘Evening Prayer’: ‘Give peace in our time, O Lord.’” It is just as likely that the Ezra Pound postscript cited above led Hemingway to choose the simplest possible translation of moeurs contemporaines.

Simplicity, in fact, is everywhere in this slim volume, from cover to colophon. The edition was limited to 170 copies. William Bird chose the tan boards and the lowercase black lettering and publisher’s device printed over a collage of red maps and newspaper headlines. The woodcut frontispiece came from the “boxer portrait” of Hemingway by his friend Henry (Mike) Strater, a graduate of Princeton living in Paris. The Reves handmade paper, cut to 10¼ inches by 6½ inches, edges untrimmed, was made to Bird’s specifications. The eighteen short chapters, most of them only a page or less, were never intended to be titled. A stark Chapter 1 opens the first of twenty-two text pages, with these eight sentences comprising the whole of the first “story”:

Everybody was drunk. The whole battery was drunk going along the road in the dark. We were going to the Champagne. The lieutenant kept riding his horse out into the fields and saying to him, “I’m drunk, I tell you, mon vieux. Oh, I am so soused.” We went along the road all night in the dark and the adjutant kept riding up alongside my kitchen and saying, “You must put it out. It is dangerous. It will be observed.” We were fifty kilometers from the front but the adjutant worried about the fire in my kitchen. It was funny going along that road. That was when I was a kitchen corporal.

How many readers could have guessed in 1924 that the soon to be famous Hemingway style was here in miniature, boldly printed? Drunk, going, road, riding, kitchen: five simple words repeating and overlapping and then suddenly punctuated by funny. It was one of many stylistic patterns Hemingway was developing. He had had ad-


What is perhaps Bertram's best known work, however, is the version of the Bible printed in 1588, which came to be known as the "Geneva Bible." Based on the first French Protestant Bible prepared in 1535 by Pierre Robert Olivétan, the later work is an attempt to correct the defects in Olivétan's version. Olivétan, a cousin of John Calvin and a biblical scholar, was criticized for his version of the New Testament in the 1535 work; evidently, the church hierarchy objected to the version because of Olivétan's "supposed ignorance of the languages."

To rectify the problems in the earlier version, Bertram recruited a team of Geneva pastors for the revision. The most notable of these was Bèze, a leader in the Protestant Reformation and Calvin's successor in Geneva. Bèze brought to the project a considerable knowledge of the New Testament, having published a critical edition of the Greek version some years before. The earlier work, first published in 1565, featured the Greek text together with Bèze's Latin translation and commentary. It is a version of the Scriptures that must have been well known to local readers; several Geneva editions had appeared by 1588.

Bertram integrated the work of Bèze with that of other New Testament scholars, including Münster, Tremellius, and himself, to create a version that was both a reflection of Calvinist doctrine and a departure from it. One of the distinctive features of this and other editions was the use of the divine name Yahweh in the Old Testament, a form that remained in use for centuries in the Protestant Bible in France.

Following the last page of the "Interpretation des noms Hebreuex"

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4 "This information comes from a brochure compiled in 1991 by the Ramsey (New Jersey) Free Public Library for an exhibition entitled "That rascal's Bible: A Guide to the Rare Philip Frieneau Exhibits."

5 "That Rascal's Bible."

6 Dictionnaire historique et biographique de la suisse (Neuchâtel, 1921). s.v. "Bertram, Cornelle."


in the Frenneau family Bible are several blank leaves on which additional manuscript annotations appear. followed by a bibliographical oddity: a 1587 Geneva edition of the Psalms that seems to have been added as an afterthought. Although the earlier Bible appears to be a bibliographically distinct item, with its own title page, different publication date, and a new sequence of signatures, this edition of the Psalms is usually cited in bibliographies as part of the other work, as if to suggest that both works were intentionally bound together.

It is entirely possible that this is what happened. Bèze was also responsible (together with the poet Clément Marot) for this versification of the Psalms. Both men, though not exactly contemporaries (Marot died in 1544), shared a similar involvement with French Protestantism and spent time in the locus of the movement, Geneva. The 1587 edition of the Psalms, then, was as much a product of this movement as was the 1588 Bible. Binding together both books not only unites two works emanating from the same person’s scholarship but also brings together two translations published in Geneva at almost the same time.

The complete Bible is a reflection of Calvinist doctrine and of the ties between Swiss and French Huguenots. (Bèze in fact attended two gatherings of Huguenots and wrote a history of the Reformed Church in France.) Nor is it surprising that this version of the Bible was treasured by the Frenneau family. The handsomely bound volume now in the Library bears witness to the history of a family and to the history of a religious movement.

—SCOTT CARLISLE
Rare Book Cataloguer

Friends of the Library

THE MID-WINTER DINNER

The gala mid-winter gathering of the Friends of the Princeton University Library, held on the evening of 11 January 1992 at Prospect House, celebrated the publication of the first three volumes of The Letters of Samuel Johnson (The Hyde Edition), edited by Bruce Redford. After a reception and dinner, the program began with welcoming remarks by the chairman of the Friends, Professor David A. Robertson, Jr. The Viscountess Eccles and Professor Redford then spoke to the capacity crowd, and their comments are printed here for the benefit of those members who were unable to join us for this very special occasion.

REMARKS BY MARY HYDE, VISCOUNTESS ECCLES

What a wonderful party! Bruce and I will never forget that so many of our best and wisest friends have gathered to celebrate a book which has its origin in the library at Four Oaks Farm. In that library Donald Hyde and I collected more than half of the known manuscript letters of Samuel Johnson. I must tell you why and how we made this collection. Bruce will tell you how it came to be the foundation of the volumes he is editing with such skill.

Don and I shared a consuming passion for Johnson, his writing and his character. Boswell described him in the most widely read biography in English. But Johnson’s letters are direct evidence of the strength of his mind and his kindness of heart.

Long ago, Don was doing a great deal of legal work for Colonel Ralph Isham, first trying to help him secure more Boswell papers and, later, helping him to find a buyer for the vast archive. I loved the twists and turns of the endless negotiations — and what fun it
was — taking part in the chase for Johnson manuscripts, particularly letters. We bought at auction and in bookshops here and in England.

Then in 1947 — a stroke of fortune — Ralph Isham let us acquire the Johnson material from the Boswell papers found at Fettercairn House in Scotland before the rest of the collection went to Yale. This cache included a hundred and nineteen Johnson letters used by Boswell in The Life: Johnson to his early friend Edmund Hector, to his young friend Bennet Langton, to his stepdaughter Lucy Porter, to Joshua Reynolds . . . on and on.

An even bigger prize came our way in September 1948. We acquired the famous R. B. Adam library of “Johnson and His Era,” a three-generation collection. Among the many manuscripts were over two hundred letters — long, marvelous ones, thirteen, sixteen pages — written to Mrs. Thrale on his tour to the Hebrides with Boswell; the brutal letter to the forger, James Macpherson; and most moving, the pathetic letter ending his long friendship with Mrs. Thrale.

The Adam Collection was such an enormous addition that we had to build onto the farmhouse. We celebrated the opening of our library in April 1949. Very soon thereafter, Johnson scholars from this country and abroad made their way to us. One of the first was Dr. R. W. Chapman, secretary to the Oxford University Press. He had been at work for well over thirty years on his edition of Johnson’s Letters. He arrived with page proof in his suitcase.

Don and I had met Dr. Chapman in Oxford a few years earlier. Now, Fritz Liebert of Yale and Don had arranged a country-wide lecture tour for him. The first talk was in New Haven, the next here at Princeton. Chapman came back to Four Oaks that night for the first of many visits. He was a fascinating, eccentric, challenging guest. Very social, he revelled in talk way into the night. He needed only four hours’ sleep, and was up before dawn for his cup of tea. He worked all day in the library. I was his slave, fetching and carrying. But there was a reward after lunch, when he let me record names of the owners of letters from his proof sheets. I was making provenance cards for letters here and elsewhere, always with the hope of collecting “photostats.” We were credited with only a handful of letters and we had hundreds. I asked him why so many of the locations were years out of date: “Don’t scholars want to know locations?” “I must thank the people who helped me,” he answered. “Don’t worry. I’ll
give you all my ‘Raw Materials’ when Oxford publishes.” He did — a trunk full!


Don died in 1966. By then, it had become clear to scholars that a new edition would be welcome.

Professor Jackson Bate at Harvard, a good friend and frequent visitor at Four Oaks Farm, kept grumbling about Chapman’s edition. One weekend at Four Oaks in September 1976, he reported that he had stayed up all night figuring out on a yellow pad — which I still have — just how long it would take to produce a new edition. Explaining to me, he said, “with over half the original letters here, this is where the work has to be done. I’ll help. We’ll have a Committee. We’ll all help. You and Miss McTernan (my remarkable secretary) — you can do it.” He wrote out a work schedule for us: the hours, weeks, months, and years. As I remember, he allowed us an annual holiday of two weeks.

Impossible dream! though I knew Jack was right in one thing: no serious scholar could attempt a new edition without working with the Hyde letters. But I, certainly with all the other things I had to attend to, did not have the freedom even to contemplate his program.

Time passed. Then, the year after I married David Eccles, a letter arrived from the Oxford Press asking if an eighteenth-century scholar, someone I admire and like, could come and “use” our library to work on a “small volume of selected Johnson letters.”

This is what spurred me to action. I didn’t like the idea of a “small selection” of Johnson’s letters. I wanted what Jack Bate argued for — a new comprehensive edition.

David said, “Well, get on with it. Who do you want to be the editor?”

That I knew. I wanted Bruce Redford. He had impressed me very much when he was a graduate student at Princeton, working on the correspondence of James Boswell under Charles Ryskamp. Now, Bruce was in the English Department at the University of Chicago.

“Get in touch with him,” David said. This was the twenty-third of May 1985, and a few days later we were flying to England. There was little time. I telephoned Professor [William F.] Shellman in Princeton to ask how to reach Bruce.

“Bruce?”, Billy asked. “He’s right here. Do you want to talk to him?”

“Yes! Could you both come to Four Oaks for lunch on Sunday? I have something important in mind.”

They came, and after the luncheon guests departed, Billy and Bruce, David and I settled down to talk.

I said, “I feel there should be a new edition of Johnson’s Letters. I’m considering several possible editors.” This was wholly untrue. I had my eye only on Bruce. I asked him “Would you be interested?”

“Yes, very much.”

“Would you accept?”

And, right away, he said, “Yes, if I can work things out with the University of Chicago.” And — mirabile dictu — he did!

After we returned from England, David, Bruce, and I met with Herbert Bailey at the Princeton University Press. We outlined our plans for the new edition. A few days later, September seventeenth, we met again. The new edition of the Letters of Samuel Johnson, to be edited by Bruce Redford, was accepted by the Princeton Press.

We agreed that in every aspect of the book the aim must be to achieve the highest possible standard. We knew we had nothing to fear on the score of scholarship. But what about the design, paper, printing, and binding of the volumes? Could these be such that people would say, “This is an example of the best that can be done in America?”

Well, you must judge, and Bruce will tell you how the book was made.

REMARKS BY BRUCE REDFORD

You will remember what Caliban tells his companions in Act III of The Tempest:

Be not afeard: the isle is full of noises
Sounds and sweet airs that give delight and hurt not;
Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments
Will hum about mine ears, and sometimes voices . . . .

This room tonight has something of Prospero’s isle about it, and one of the most delightful sounds humming in my ears is the unforget-
table voice of Robert H. Taylor — passionate collector, eloquent writer, and devoted friend of the Princeton University Library. In one of his collected essays, published by the Library over a decade ago, he addresses himself to fledgling scholars of English literature, emphasizing the need for a symbiotic relationship among librarians, collectors, and scholars. Robert Taylor sums up by reminding his audience: “In the field you have chosen much of your work will be done in libraries. I earnestly urge upon you the necessity for getting on friendly terms immediately with the librarian, wherever your work may call you. Try to understand his problems . . . He is a collector, of course, though not necessarily a private one. Like all collectors, he has a craving for the physical possession of desiderata. Understand the reason for this craving: it is, among other things, the tribute they pay to the prized achievement of the past.”

Mr. Taylor concludes his exhortation by gathering scholars, librarians, and collectors into one capacious community of those who care for the written word. His final sentences have as much application to us now as they did to his original audience: “The reason we are together in this room tonight is because we love the English language and the rich and varied excellence of its literature. That is the common habitation of scholars and collectors alike—a habitation compounded, as Sir Henry Wotton declared all good architecture to be, of firmness, commodity, and delight.”

“Firmness, commodity, and delight”: these three terms apply to The Letters of Samuel Johnson, viewed as a literary achievement, a collective scholarly enterprise, and as a stunning example of book-making. It would be both presumptuous and tiresome of me to try to give you now a sense of Johnson’s varied achievements as letter-writer—one of the greatest letter-writers of his century, itself an epistolary golden age. He excelled in every conceivable form: in the letter of advice and exhortation (as one might expect from his moral essays) but also letters of tender mockery, comic narrative, biting irony, vivid travelogue, and, above all else, letters of consolation, one of the finest of which is presented for the first time in this new edition. Tonight I will simply apply to Johnson the letter-writer what Dryden said of Chaucer: “Here is God’s plenty.”

What I can do this evening is to describe a remarkable partnership— a rare example of collectors, scholars, librarians, publishers, and printers collaborating to achieve a work that would satisfy Johnson’s own passion for the beautiful united with the useful.

To begin with “the onlie begetter,” Mary Hyde Eccles herself: where else could one find, combined in a single remarkable woman, a collector of worldwide renown, a major scholar whose range extends from Shakespeare to Shaw, and an influential adviser to several of the most important libraries in America and England? Mary’s unique vision and resourcefulness found ideal partners in Princeton University Library, Princeton University Press, and Stinehour Press in Vermont. The Library provided research headquarters and access to curators and collections beyond compare. It allowed me to take advantage of Alfred Bush’s editorial expertise, honed on The Letters of Thomas Jefferson: to consult Steve Ferguson and Bill Stoneman about early printed books, John Logan about Continental sources, and Mary Ann Jensen about eighteenth-century actors; to steal Marcia Levinson away from Inter-Library Loan and tap her expertise in historical scholarship, copy-editing, and computers. To be able to move back and forth between the Hyde Collection and Firestone Library was an inestimable advantage, in terms both of textual decipherment and explanatory annotation. For example, many of Johnson’s letters to Hester Thrale are severely mutilated—crossed through, rubbed out, and even in certain cases patched over, all by the anxious recipient herself. With unrestricted access to the majority of these letters, I was able to peer and twist, use magnifying glasses and high-intensity lights, and even have certain patches steamed off; these operations, combined with access to the Library’s ultra-violet machine, have yielded several important new readings. And Firestone’s rich collection of primary materials made the job of annotation incomparably less difficult. Many of Johnson’s letters are full of cryptic allusions — to literature, to politics, to medicine, to law, commerce, and theology. In the Hyde Edition, you will find answers to the following questions, answers based on the combined resources of Princeton and Four Oaks Farm libraries:

What did Johnson do with the orange peel he assiduously saved?
Why was he so fond of Balsam of Peru?
How did he pass sleepless nights during his final illness?
When did he learn about brewing beer?
What was his favorite maxim? (The answer: “Be not solitary, be not idle” — an injunction we seem to be carrying out quite happily this evening.)

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Early in the project I decided that I would try whenever possible to examine in person every surviving Johnson letter, since first-hand scrutiny of manuscripts is the only secure way of establishing, or at least postulating, what has since been deleted, torn off, or eaten away. There was an additional consideration as well: though Johnson himself changed comparatively little in the act of writing, and almost never went back to revise, I wanted to try to reconstruct his first intentions, whenever these were in evidence. The fact that well over half the surviving letters now lodge outside of Somerville (New Jersey) made this mission considerably easier. My travels took me all over America and Britain — but I drew the line at Japan and Australia, which now possess (unless something has changed in the last two months) a total of three letters. Japan has now become ardently Johnsonian, and any letter that shows up at auction stands a good chance of migrating east.

One of our aspirations was unsuccessful: to locate the originals of Johnson’s letters to Boswell, which (with one exception) did not turn up in the great Malahide and Fettercairn archives. However, in several cases I was able to get one step closer to the missing originals by transcribing the copies prepared for the printer of the Life of Johnson. Boswell set his young children to furnishing several of these copies, and it was both delightful and exasperating to try to sort out the corrections of a ten-year-old from those of the Master himself. Since several of Johnson’s most captivating letters were written to Mrs. Thrale’s young daughters, I cannot help but think that he would have enjoyed the idea of this unusual bond between young and old.

From the beginning Princeton University Press showed a discerning interest in the project, especially noteworthy in an age when fewer and fewer university presses are willing to take on multi-volume projects. The managing editor, the head of production, the literary editor, and the director himself — all are here tonight, and all were instrumental in the complicated process of gestation and delivery. Over the years I began to think of myself as inhabiting a triangle, with its apex outside of Somerville and its base formed by William Street, connecting the Press and the Library. But this triangle is actually a quadrilateral, for Lunenburg, Vermont, defines a fourth point of importance. Stephen Stinehour and the staff of Stinehour Press worked closely with Princeton and our gifted designer, Mark Argetsinger, to make the handsomest books possible. No detail was overlooked: type, paper, binding, illustrations, all were selected and combined with great dedication and artistry. I can promise you one thing — that if you pick up a volume or two of the Letters and spend a few minutes turning the pages, you will find that the dulce (the sweet, the pleasing) is acting precisely as Johnson thought it should: as gateway to and enhancer of the utile.

When I was very young one of my favorite books was the story many of you know, called “The Little Engine That Could.” My parents, who are here this evening, would respond patiently to my insatiable demands for yet another traversal of the tale, and I can still remember the delicious look and feel of the paper, as well as the admirable illustrations — portraits, perhaps, of The Letters of Samuel Johnson in their blend of the alluring and the didactic. As I began to consider my remarks for this gathering, I thought of retelling the story as an allegory of the Johnson project — but then I was deflected by a recent New Yorker cartoon, which shows an eager young kindergarten teacher informing her charges: “Remember, children, that the little engine that could was a locomotive of the female gender.” So I will content myself with postponing the discussion of locomotive gender and leaving you with the following confession: six years ago, when the hill loomed sharply before us, I used to repeat quietly to myself: “I think we can, I think we can...” Now I am delighted to declare: “We thought we could.”

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At the end of Professor Redford’s remarks, he and Lady Eccles presented the three volumes of The Letters of Samuel Johnson to University Librarian Donald Koepp. As he accepted the gift — each volume wrapped in gold paper and tied with gold ribbon — Mr. Koepp declared them “too beautiful to unwrap,” but promised nevertheless that “these volumes will be shelved and on-line by tomorrow morning.”

Then Lady Eccles presented Professor Redford with “a token of gratitude for all the work he has done on Johnson’s Letters, and for work still to do” — a pair of gold cuff-links, “which Colonel Isham created with his friend, Stanley Marcus, when the Boswell papers..."
were finally gathered together and sold to Yale.” Lady Eccles explained that “the design is based on an engraving of a head of Johnson by Edward Burch for Dr. Charles Burney, Jr., found on a seal at Malahide Castle. Ralph Isham gave pairs of the Neiman Marcus cufflinks to special friends who had helped him in the long struggle of the Boswell papers: Professor Pottle, Fritz Liebert, Don Hyde, and a few others. Don was very proud of his links. He wore them often, and always on Johnson and Boswell occasions. He willed them to me, and they have given me much pleasure. Now, I want more than anything to give them to you, Bruce.”

With this moving and appropriate presentation of a gift that will surely be treasured by its recipient, the evening drew to a close.

Cover Note

The earliest dated American manuscript in the Princeton University Library is a Mayan hieroglyphic text, inscribed on a conch shell, which still contains the red pigment indicating that it is nothing less than the ink pot of a Classic Maya calligrapher. On the cover of this issue are the initial two red letter hieroglyphs engraved into the body of the shell in the first of three columns of four hieroglyphs each. They give us the date of the inscription in the more abbreviated of the two Maya systems of marking time, the Calendar Round: 1 Ahau 3 Zip, or 17 March 761 A.D. in our modern calculation. The date marks a Period Ending in the Long Count — the more extensive of the two dating systems.

Michael Coe first published and translated this text in 1973 in a Grolier Club exhibition catalogue, The Maya Scribe and His World. He noted there that this particular Period Ending, marking the completion of half a katun (that is, 3,600 days), was of unusual importance and “widely observed among centers in the Maya lowlands.”

The eighth-century date is followed by the hand-scattering glyph — a sign derived from a Period Ending ritual which, as Peter Mathews points out, is also found on a stela depicting in stone a commemoration by the Yaxchilan ruler Bird Jaguar of the same event on exactly the same date.

When Man arrived in the Americas, so too arrived the motivation

to record experience for magic or for memory. Fragments of petroglyphs and paintings, artifacts and architecture suggest the record of complex migrations down the hemisphere — and the millennia. These ancient reaches toward the means to reproduce both images and ideas were nowhere more fully realized in America than by the Maya in the tropical lowlands and pine-furred highlands of Southern Mexico and Guatemala. Texts survive with precise dates that reach back to the second century A.D.; and by the time of the Classic phase of Maya civilization — the fourth through the ninth centuries A.D. — the inscriptions had reached an efflorescence in both elaborateness and extent which, like the jungles where most of them survive, continue to frustrate attempts to bring them under control. No body of texts of comparable size and importance resisted total translation for so long, nor promises to deliver so much information about so sustained a civilization. It now is clear that unlike other ancient textual bodies, the Maya inscriptions are not a code to be broken the instant the correct key is discovered. They are instead so complex a writing system that they yield their secrets glyph by glyph, with the speed of our knowledge accelerating perceptively only in the last two decades. The first generation of Mayanists read only the calendrical and numerical inscriptions with any confidence. The current school believes that at least 85 percent of the texts are now open to interpretation. In the past few years texts recording the dynastic history of rulers of important ceremonial centers have been deciphered to general agreement, and the pace of translation gets brisker as a greater corpus of texts becomes accessible and our knowledge of the Maya languages still spoken grows more sophisticated.

Recent discoveries, some of the more important by David Stuart, Jr., while an undergraduate at Princeton, have revealed the unexpected knowledge that the vocation of calligrapher was pursued among the Maya not just by craftsmen, but at times by members of the royal families themselves. And — perhaps most startling of all — they often signed their works! To match this latter act of self-conscious identification by an artist one must reach back to the ancient Greeks.

The time has come when even the difficult and obscure ritual texts can be read as more than a date and a grouping of linguistic elements. A rich American literature and a detailed history — our own
ancient Egypt, as John Lloyd Stephens called it — is about to reach the public consciousness.1

Representative of the vast body of hieroglyphic texts which survive in stone, stucco, clay, and more rarely, in shell, wood, and paper, is this inscription on a conch shell which had been fashioned into a calligrapher’s ink well. Brief as it is, it promises to breathe at least a fragment of life into the ancient scene on the Island of Jaina, off the Yucatecan coast, where a Maya noble dipped his pen into the brilliant red pigment contained in this inscribed well to write some of the texts that promise to open wide the ancient American world to us now, twelve centuries later.

The conch shell was given to the Library by Frank E. Taplin, Class of 1937, and Mrs. Taplin. The glyphs on our cover were drawn for us by calligrapher Marjory Pratt of Pennington, New Jersey.

— ALFRED L. BUSH
Curator, The Princeton Collections of Western Americana

1 Two works that have begun this process are Linda Schele and David Freidel, A Forest of Kings: The Untold Story of the Ancient Maya (New York: Morrow, 1990), and Linda Schele and Mary Miller, The Blood of Kings: Dynasty and Ritual in Maya Art (New York: Braziller, 1986).

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