

The Ethnographic Q'anjob'al Project

Un informe en español



COVER / FRONTISPIECE: The situational setting of divination and counseling. *Left:* The diviner is counting the divinatory layout of the seeds of the coral tree. *Right:* A client family from San Pedro Soloma: husband, wife and toddler. *Background:* Another client waiting. The consultation deals with several separate problems. San Juan Ixcoy 1983. See PLATES 31-38.

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Existence and Identity:
Reconciliation and Self-organization
through Q'anjob'al Maya Divination

Re-creating Social and Subjective Order
in San Juan Ixcoy and San Pedro Soloma,
Guatemala

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THE BOOK

The book is based upon my fieldwork (15 months altogether; 1980/81 and vacations 1983-86) in the Q'anjob'al (Kanjobal) area in the north-western highlands of Guatemala. It covers my collaboration with a diviner who uses the pre-Hispanic 260-day calendar in his consultations. This calendar and the divination system associated with it represent a "*pre-scientific*" *theory of the order of life*.

Q'anjob'al Maya divination is the quest for reconciliation and self-organization. The diviner's consultations constitute a psychosocial therapy in which the existential problems and preoccupations of the clients are interpreted.

This book focuses on the *comprehension of a culture in terms of subjective identity and existence* as presented from the inner conceptual perspective and implied in the communicative interaction of one specialist key informant and his numerous clients.

The present book is a *documentation* based on the transcripts (made by my Maya consultants) and my translations of 14 consultations including divinations of a Q'anjob'al Maya diviner. It presents an *analysis* of the consultations. It provides a *theoretical framework* and attempts to explain several aspects of them.

Moreover, I present several model dialogs in which the diviner assumes the roles of both the diviner and the client, as well as in-depth interviews on concepts or beliefs and on aspects of the life cycle and of rituals.

Various ethnographic and anthropological discoveries are highlighted in this book: e.g., the discovery of a cult of a Holy Bundle (Ordenanza) as a community therapy, the analysis of the client's problems, the derivation of interpretations of the problems, counsels, therapeutic concepts and procedures and their theoretical explanation in terms of affect processing.

Several examples of therapeutic proposals are documented and analyzed. This implies salient episodes, central concepts, the outline of procedures, and verbatim model instructions for the client. An interesting case concerns the reconciliation of a couple within the consultation. The central therapeutic procedure of an 'open declaration (confession)', as observed by me, is analyzed and theoretically interpreted, inter alia, in terms of affect processing models. An analysis of the psychosomatic concept of mistrust in Q'anjob'al Maya divination is presented.

Moreover, the book deals with reinforcing social identity and social control, existential domains, an analysis of a complete case of consultation, a new theory of the emergence of ideas in terms of cognitive science and a

statement on an anthropology of reconciliation. It contains a photographic documentation (color plates) e.g. of a divination session and of the ceremony for the Holy Bundle (*ordenanza*).

Contents: I. Introductory chapters: A. Plan of the book: Overview / B. The 260-day calendar in Mesoamerica and divination as a folk theory of action / C. Fieldwork in San Juan Ixcoy / D. Ethnographic context / E. The cult of the holy bundle (*Ordenanza*) in San Juan Ixcoy. II. Core chapters: 1. Divination and counseling: Terminology, concepts and beliefs as a system / 2. Day-name associations: Cultural themes and basic needs / 3. The analysis of the client's problems / 4. Techniques of interpretation and the derivation of interpretations / 5. Therapy, counsels and psychosocial healing / 6. Reinforcing social identity and social control / 7. Existential domains: Corresponding divination cases and beliefs / 8. An analysis of a complete case / 9. Learning how to participate in consultations (and how to divine) / 10. Theoretical considerations of Q'anjob'al Maya divination and consultation. III. Data appendices. IV. Photographic documentation: Color plates. Glossary. Index. Addenda 1-4.

The *core chapters* have, in general, the following structure: I present *verbatim texts* documenting concepts, thoughts and actions of topical interest. The texts are accompanied by my *analytical commentaries* contributing to comprehension. Special emphasis is placed on the *elucidation of concepts, beliefs and procedures*.

Furthermore, the chapters are organized in terms of a Developmental Sequence. The order of the chapters follows, in general, the explication of conceptual and technical presuppositions of divination and counseling, as well as the unfolding of the consultation session: 1. Stating the problem / 2. Divination and (diagnostic) interpretation / 3. Therapy (or counsel). As systematic aspects, ordering individual as well as culturally relevant episodes, I consider the reinforcement of social identity and existential domains representing (daily) life, and finally the session as a whole unit and the learning of participating in it.

KEYWORDS:

260-day calendar

Mesoamerica

Divination

Guatemala

**Q'anjob'al (Maya) /
Kanjobal (Maya) /
Kanhobal (Maya)
Existence
Identity
Reconciliation
Self-organization
Social order
Subjective order
Philosophy (non-western)
Cognitive anthropology
Cognitive science (problem solving)
Ethnopsychotherapy
Medical anthropology
Mesoamericanistics**

Pour plus d'information comparez, svp, l'article en français "La divination chez les Q'anjob'al Maya (San Juan Ixcoy), Guatémala: existence, identité et réconciliation".

Un informe en español:

El calendario de 260 días y las adivinaciones y consultas conectadas con él constituyen un rasgo cultural co-definiendo el área cultural de 'Mesoamérica'. Yo trato las adivinaciones y consultas Q'anjob'ales como un modo de resolver problemas personales y encontrar ideas para reorganizar la vida propia. El libro consiste en cuatro partes: I. capítulos introductorios (e.g., el calendario de 260 días, el contexto etnográfico); II. capítulos nucleares (cf. 1o.); III. Apéndices (entrevistas, p.e., ciclo de la vida, estadísticas, etc.); IV. láminas en color.

1°. Considerando los Q'anjob'ales se trata de una *documentación* escrita y ampliamente verbal y un *análisis* de (parte de) su *cultura tradicional*, de sus problemas cotidianos o existenciales y de su *espiritualidad* Maya. Yo quisiera apuntar la documentación del culto de la '*ordenanza*', un bulto sagrado conteniendo posiblemente una *cédula* que marca – y provee – la *institucionalización* de los 'cargos de la comunidad' en la Audiencia de Guatemala en tiempos coloniales, o de las normas respectivas. Además quisiera destacar el *contexto funcional* de las consultas y adivinaciones.

El desarrollo de problemas cotidianos de los clientes, la adivinación y la derivación de una interpretación del problema presentado así como la terapia, la resolución del problema o el consejo de intervención, el manejo de la identidad social en situaciones de incertidumbre y las esferas existenciales cubiertas por las consultas son descritos y analizados detalladamente.

2°. Considerando la *antropología cultural y social* se trata de un análisis de una *mentalidad*, de una *comprensión* de una cultura respecto a la existencia e identidad subjetivas y sociales como se presenta conceptual y comunicativamente en las conversaciones e interacciones de un terapeuta clave y sus numerosos clientes. Se analiza el *contexto* de creencias y de acciones derivadas de ellas. Se trata de *explicar teóricamente* varios aspectos de las consultas.

3°. Para la *(etno)psicoterapia* se trata de una amplia documentación verbal (*protocolos*), de comentarios explicativos y de un *análisis estructural* y también *teórico* de una *terapia única de desconfianza y aversión*. Tal documentación intensa y verbal es extraordinaria.

4°. Para el *patrimonio cultural de Guatemala* tenemos un ejemplo de la contribución indígena a la cultura guatemalteca y a su orientación multicultural subrayando la variedad en la unidad nacional. Tal análisis puede, p.e., contribuir a la comprensión interétnica y – ojalá – a la reconciliación. El aspecto de la *reconstitución del orden social y subjetivo* en este contexto cultural merece una atención especial.

5°. Considerando el conocimiento más amplio del patrimonio cultural de Guatemala, a través de una traducción española de mi libro, yo quisiera apuntar la posible contribución de la tradición Q'anjob'al Maya al *patrimonio cultural mundial*:

- Yo quisiera llamar su atención al caso de la *adivinación Ifà* en África occidental, declarado como patrimonio mundial por parte de la UNESCO (cultural world heritage).
- Yo no estoy completamente seguro, pero yo pienso que la terapia involucrada en las consultas y adivinaciones Q'anjob'ales constituyen
 - un modelo único *individualmente terapéutico* (p.e., cap. 5, especialmente 5.8, cap. 10.7.4);
 - un *modelo posible de reconciliación* que pueda ser importante para una “tecnología social de la paz” (cf. la referencia a van Binsbergen) y tal vez para una reconciliación de toda la sociedad guatemalteca (p.e., cap. 10.7).