Maximón: The Shape Shifting Trickster Provides Hope for Some of The Disenfranchised in the Highlands of Guatemala

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MAXIMÓN: THE SHAPE SHIFTING TRICKSTER PROVIDES HOPE FOR SOME OF THE DISENFRANCHISED IN THE HIGHLANDS OF GUATEMALA

By
Franklin D. Clark

A THESIS

Submitted to the Faculty of the University of Miami in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Liberal Studies

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MAXIMÓN: THE SHAPE SHIFTING TRICKSTER PROVIDES HOPE FOR SOME OF THE DIENFRANCHISED IN THE HIGHLANDS OF GUATEMALA

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Scholars often refer to Maximón, the modern Mayan deity, as a trickster. To date, there has been little research to support this title. The author of this thesis surveys existing research on Maximón's history and roles, along with scholarly literature on the nature of the trickster character, to test whether he is, in fact, a trickster. It is determined that Maximón is a descendent of the ancient Mayan gods, actively worshipped today by some in the highlands of Guatemala as part of a blended "Folk Catholicism," a trickster who has survived the religion of the conquering Spanish by shift shaping, and a hero in the tradition of Hunahpu and Xbalanque. These roles culminate during Semana Santa, when Maximón plays Judas Iscariot in the Passion of Christ. The findings of this research will help future scholars understand Maximón's purpose in Guatemalan Highland culture and religion, as both he and they face life on a shrinking planet.
To my loving wife, Rosalind, who has been there every step of the way, through the highs and the lows, in the States, in the highlands of Guatemala, and in life.
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INTRODUCTION

Maximón is a modern Mayan deity, who is a descendant of the ancient Mayan pantheon. At times, he shows attributes of many of the old gods. He is part of the folklore of the highlands of Guatemala and has survived until today to become part of everyday life for many Maya. He is a god, trickster and hero. Maximón is the modern day descendent of the trickster heroes Hunahpu and Xbalanque. The ancient mathematicians, astronomers and great warriors had magnificent, heroic gods. Many were also tricksters. For some disenfranchised Maya in the highlands of Guatemala, Maximón provides hope.

There are other modern Maya folk gods, but none is a direct descendant of the divinities of the fathers. There are other folk "deities," who are really demigods. Maximón is distinct from them. The study of this information planted seeds that have germinated into a desire to find out what the adherent to the Maximón cult believes, why he or she believes, the hope they believe Maximón provides in the face of poverty and second-class status, and if Maximón will survive in modern day Guatemala and the future.

This thesis is divided into 10 sections. The Land of Maximón explores the highlands of Guatemala, its ancient gods, and history. Modern Worship in the Guatemalan Highlands introduces blended "Folk Catholicism," dueños, Jaloj-K'exoj, cofradías and oral tradition. The History of Maximón looks at the lack of extant myth documentation of the ancient Maya gods, due to the efforts of the Spanish, the physical creation of Maximón, myths about his origins, and an introduction of his role as trickster.
Myth as it Relates to History sets down the principle that myths are not fairytales. They are important pieces to the history of a people that allow you to understand their culture. The Names and Faces of Maximón lists some of his monikers and looks at his various forms. The Roles of Maximón sets forth some of his functions in the blended Folk Catholicism of the highlands of Guatemala and further develops his trickster characteristics. Maximón's Counterparts takes a brief look at the San Martin Bundle, JesuKrista, AnDolores, Rey Pascual and Lucifer. Semana Santa investigates Maximón's most important role, that of Judas Iscariot during the Passion of Easter week. The paper concludes with sections on Alcohol in Maximón Worship and What the Future Holds for Maximón.

A few caveats before proceeding. 1. Several reference sources for this work are based on oral stories told to some of the scholars by believers in Maximón and others. These stories will be approached as any oral myth, which will be discussed below. Anthropologist Vincent James Stanzione admits in his book, Rituals of Sacrifice, that there are variations in the stories he heard. He states:

   All the stories you are about to read have a multitude of slightly different forms as they are told by individual Atiteco storytellers, where stories are told differently by different people for different purposes. I have tried to tell the stories of both Mam and MaNawal de Jesus in such a way as to emphasize the main currents I have heard in all their forms while adding bits and pieces from other storytellers to provide color to these stories' sacred scenery. (11)

Variations such as this by any of the authors will have minimal effect on the outcome of this thesis.

2. The scholarly literature this paper is built upon centers mostly on the Maximón cult in Santiago Atitlán and a few other places. The Maya have historically separated
themselves among villages, languages, etc. This makes it difficult to extrapolate findings to other tribes and villages, although a good general picture of Maximón's history, names, faces and roles will emerge as the thesis unfolds. 3. The names Mam and Maximón are virtually interchangeable in Santiago Atitlán, and are used as such in appropriate parts of the text.
CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND: THE LAND OF MAXIMÓN

The ancient Maya worshipped different gods in different locations. *Myths and legends of the World* states:

> In Mayan mythology, the gods and heroes had many different names and appearances. Stories occurred in varying forms, and scenes and figures changed and shifted with confusing rapidity. Beneath this seeming confusion, though, lay a sense that the universe was an orderly, structured place and that proper behavior toward the gods played an important role in maintaining its harmony and balance. (Wickersham 37)

The ancient Maya also often referred to their gods as "diviners" (39). The above sounds like a description of Maximón.

Information relating to the Mayan pantheon is limited because the *Conquistadores* had a policy of burning any writings about their gods (Landa III). They were very successful at ridding the Maya of almost all known religious texts. The Maya handed down their traditions orally after that. Between the years of 1554 and 1558, anonymous *Quiche* men wrote the *Popol Vuh* in Latin to capture the oral stories (Christenson 35-37). This is the most complete source of information on the subject.

The *Popol Vuh* contains myths of the various Mayan gods, demigods and heroes. It lays out the creation story, the Mayan cosmogony and the beginning of the tribes. There are three patterns in the *Popol Vuh*: A pattern of twins or twos, a pattern of the trickster, and the trickster as hero. These are all traits of Maximón. There are other sources of information about the Mayan pantheon, such as codices, but these are sparse.

The Spanish conquered the Guatemalan highlands in 1524 and brought Catholicism with them. For almost 500 years, the Maya have blended Catholicism with the native religion to form a new religion, which has some elements of each (Stanzione
This new religion is where Maximón exists, albeit usually at the perimeter. Curator, photographer and collector of Guatemalan masks and folk saints, Jim Pieper, states about him, in *Guatemala's Folk Saints: Maximón/San Simon, Rey Pascual, Judas, Lucifer, and Others*:

Maximon/San Simon is rooted in a Mayan religion that includes plurality, an acceptance or tolerance of multiple deities. In their spiritual practice, historic Maya recognized and respected the religious philosophies and beliefs of others. This openness led them to accommodate the addition of Catholic saints to the existing Mayan deities without a great deal of conflict. The addition of saints from the invading Spanish Catholics was acceptable and not threatening to the Maya. (33)

Maximón is worshipped in towns such as Santiago Atitlán, Zunil, San Andres Itzapa, San Pedro Sacatepequez, San Lucas Tolimán, Momotenango, Chichicastenango, Huehuetenango, which are all in the highlands of Guatemala.

Thomas Hart (Hart website) - author, director of Health Poverty Action, a Guatemalan based charity, and Mayan priest says this about him in *The Ancient Spirituality of the Modern Maya*:

One of the essential sights for tourists in Guatemala is San Simón (Saint Simon), or Maximón. He’s a saint, they say, but one that the Mayan priests have taken and made their own. He’s not found in any Catholic Church but hidden away in several villages, mainly in the western highlands. He’s a saint, but not like any other saint you’ve seen. He’s a mannequin who sits in a chair, wearing Western clothes and hat, and he drinks guaro¹ and smokes thick cigars while Mayan Priests burn candles at his feet and incense in his yard. His visitors are men and women from the village, businessmen from the capital, prostitutes from the coast, traders from Mexico. They come to him to ask for cures, for money, for cattle, for a husband, or to kill an enemy. (Hart 177)

In short, they are from all walks of life and are coming to him for hope.

The Lake Atitlán area of Guatemala has the most scholarly Maximón research. The lake has small villages nestled into the mountains surrounding it. The roads

¹ A native home brewed alcohol made from sugar
connecting them are steep and winding, so they would have been most approachable by boat before those roads were built (Carlsen 1997; 29). The areas around the lake were controlled by various warlords throughout its known history (Bricker 29).

Today, towns surrounding the lake are named after saints: San Lucas, San Juan, San Pablo, San Pedro, Santiago, San Antonio, Santa Catarina and San Jorge. The various communities there have distinct dress and economies, the inhabitants of which can be identified by their particular colors of clothing and the crops they traditionally grow (Carlsen 1997; 29).

In several of these towns Mayan languages are spoken, along with Spanish. They are not dialects, but are separate and distinct languages. According to anthropologist Robert S. Carlsen (Carlsen website) and writer/storyteller Martin Prechtel, (Prechtel website), many are unintelligible to those speaking the others (1994 82). This was not the doing of the Spanish. It goes back to the ancient Mayan Empire.

According to the *Popol Vuh*, The highlands of Guatemala are the cradle of Quiche Mayan civilization (Christensen 260-305). They are rich in history, but today are home to the disenfranchised of Guatemala. There is a large disparity between Maya and Ladino\(^2\) citizens in many social and economic areas, especially in land ownership (Donovan and Stanzione 195). This disparity was a major cause of the brutal civil war that lasted from 1960 to 1996 (Stanzione 195).

\(^2\) People of mixed origin
CHAPTER 2: MODERN WORSHIP IN THE GUATEMALAN HIGHLANDS:
THE SYSTEM MAXIMÓN OPERATES WITHIN AND WITHOUT

Local worship has blended the Maya religion with Catholicism to such an extent that it is now a hybrid “Folk Catholicism” and has gone so far from the original intent of the Spanish, that Catholic priests who tried to stop certain worship practices in Santiago Atitlán were branded as "Protestants" by local worshippers, according to anthropologist Nathanael Tarn, writing under his nom de plume (Tarn/Mendelson website), E. Michael Mendelson (March 1958; 3). This “. . . ‘Folk Catholicism’ derives from a reinterpretation of intrusive elements according to characteristically Maya paradigms.” (Carlsen and Prechtel 1991; 37) The Maya did not blend the two religions because they were converted to Catholicism, but more to resist it and preserve their own (Carlsen 1997; 98-99). Catholicism; however, is a large part of the blend.

Adherents to this Folk Catholicism believe that life is overseen by dueños, “supernatural masters,” who intercede in every aspect of life, from birth to death, including one’s health and crops. (Mendelson March 1958; 4) They cannot be influenced: only prayed to (4). This life is based on a model known as Jaloj-K’exoij, which is “. . . a Mayan conceptualization of observed processes and patterns in the natural environment, particularly of agricultural production, is a central paradigm of the local culture.” (Carlsen and Prechtel 1991; 25). It is seen in the Mayan calendar, everyday life and in the worship of Maximón, especially during Semana Santa, when he brings in the New Year and the rainy season following the prescribed pattern year after year.

It has been, “. . . central to Mayan culture since long before the Spanish conquest,” (25) even being mentioned by its Quiche name in the Popol Vuh; using the
root word for *K’exoj* (31). Allen J. Christensen renders it as “essence” in the story just
alluded to (129) in his translation of the *Popol Vuh*.

*Jaloj-K’exoj* is actually two words, each meaning change. *Jal* is change by
evolving- life from death. The Maya had no problem understanding John 12:24 (John
website), which says, “. . . unless a kernel of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it
remains by itself alone. But if it dies it produces much grain.” It is the essence of *Jal.*
*K’ex* is the new from the old. The Maya believe that grandchildren are replacements for
their grandparents; so that “no one’s face gets lost”, (Stanzione 14) is the essence of *K’ex.*

*Jal* is external and *k’ex* is internal (Carlsen and Prechtel 1991; 26). *Jaloj-K’exoj* has
given the Atitecos the ability to integrate Spanish elements into their culture by
modifying them into an acceptable form (38). This is the *axis mundi* of the Maya in the
highlands, a term described by Mircea Eliade (26 and Carlsen and Prechtel 1994; 83).

The Maya believe that there is a corn plant at the center of the earth called
Atitecos believe that this plant can be physically fed and, as long as this is done, it will
continue to sustain life in Santiago. Some farmers have a hole in their fields to feed the
tree. (27) More commonly, the tree is fed through ritual (27-28). A lot of the Atiteco
life imagery is focused on the “Flowering Mountain Earth” tree (28).

Religious rituals take place in *cofradias* (Mendelson 1958 August; 121) with
*costumbrias*, who “. . . embrace the ‘old religion’” and are, “. . . ‘followers of the old
customs’. . .” (Carlton and Prechtel 1994; 82). These are the descendants of the ancient
Mayan theocratic system. The best explanation for how they evolved is:

Sometime after the Franciscan missionaries arrived in Atitlán they
began their attempt at converting the Indians to their Christian religion.
With the hope of converting the indigenous people to Christianity, the friars replaced Mayan deities and lords with Catholic saints and virgins while translating parts of their Christian mythology into Mayan languages. In so doing they introduced to the indigenous communities entities known as ‘cofradias’, sacred houses (Armir Jay), where the Mayanized Franciscan saints and virgins were given cult by native Mesoamericans as a sign of accepting the friars’ millennial religion.\(^3\) (Stanzione 5)

The *cofradias* were then left pretty much on their own in the middle of the 16\(^{th}\) century to develop into what they wanted to be until the 20\(^{th}\) Century.

They are currently the centers for the worship of the San Martin Bundle\(^4\) and *Maximón*, which are contemporary versions of ancient Maya divinities (Mendelson August 1958; 121) and several other deities (Pieper). Some *cofradias* have *zajorines*\(^5\) (shamans) (Carlton and Prechtel 1994; 79, 81, 85 and Stanzione 7), *brujos* (witches) and *characoteles* (they are similar to witches) (Sexton and Ujpán 1999; 81). The *Telinel* is the special priest of *Maximón* (Stanzione 53).

Anthropologist Mac Linscott Ricketts argues that shamans are the diametrical opposites of tricksters (87-88), but points out that Joseph Campbell believes they are actually the counterparts of tricksters (103). In *Cofradia* Santa Cruz in Santiago, the *Telinel*, a shaman, is essential to the folk religion centered on *Maximón* and anything but an opposite. The religion and its worship have evolved into a, “... syncretistic\(^6\) Maya-Catholic *cofradia* religion, with considerable local and regional variation.” (Carlsen and Prechtel 1994; 86).

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\(^3\) The Cofradia of Santa Cruz in Santiago Atitlán believes it was formed by two actual sons of *Maximón* (Sexton 1999 81)

\(^4\) We will discuss this in a later section

\(^5\) Most Shamans work outside of the cofradias, however, the exceptions are the ones who have Maximón as their patron (Canby 319)

\(^6\) An anthropological term meaning the blending of some elements of distinct traditions (Hart 9)
Cofradías are named for Catholic Saints; however, the “Saints” represent Maya concepts and gods and the shamanism that brings along with it (86). What started as the Maya outwardly accepting Christianity and putting on a “veneer of Catholicism,” eventually turned into what exists today, where- according to Thomas Hart- some Mayan priests consider themselves as Catholic, although they continue to perform native rituals (10) and there are even some Catholic priests who are also Mayan priests:

Perhaps an indication of how far some elements of the Catholic Church have come in meeting Mayan Spirituality they once persecuted can be found in the strange fact that there are a number of Catholic priests who are at the same time Mayan priests. I heard of two Catholic priests who are practicing Mayan Priests, two others who left the Catholic priesthood to follow the Mayan priesthood, and two former deacons who are Mayan Priests. (19)

The Catholic Church has attempted in the past to control cofradías and the worship of Maximón (Carlsen 1997; 124). In the 1940s, the Guatemalan government started regulating cofradías to a certain extent (Carlsen and Prechtel 1994: 85). When Mendelson/Tarn wrote, the Guatemalan government actually sanctioned and regulated cofradía worship (March 1958; 2). But, through the years, much of the power of the cofradías has been taken away by that same national government, by the army (during the bloody civil war that lasted from 1960 until 1996), by the Catholic and Protestant churches and through other various factors. (Stanzione 7-9).

This said, the rise of Protestantism has caused a marked decline in the local cofradías' power in the highlands, as will be discussed in detail below. As previously discussed, the cofradía system originally came from Catholicism and has common traits with Catholic worship (Carlsen and Prechtel 1994; 82), so there has not been a marked decline in their power within "Folk Catholicism" because, as Protestantism has grown
Catholicism has lost some followers, so overall they have less power, but not within Catholicism.

In fact, in Santiago, the Catholic Church provided the building used for Maximón worship. The cofradía has control over it and a Catholic priest from the Parish attended a Maximón worship service in 1992, for which he would later receive anonymous death threats. (Carlsen 1997; 38) Necessity has caused even more blending in some areas than was seen in the past.

Oral traditions are very important to the Maya and in the modern worship of Maximón. In Chamulas in the World of the Sun: Time and Space in the Maya Oral Tradition, anthropologist Gary Gossen describes the workings of this tradition to the people inhabiting the highland town of Chamula, which is in the Chiapas state of Mexico. The stories relating to Maximón being studied would fall into the “true” category illustrated by Gossen, which means they are recent stories, which could mean during the teller’s lifetime or since people came to be as they are now (in the ancient past), and are essential or primary stories (78).

If singled out for retelling by the cult, a story will fall into this category by default. These stories belong to no-one and there are no standard means by which one learns them (81). There are other kinds of stories which are told, such as frivolous stories, which include lies, puns, jokes, double entendre and riddles, (91-120) which will not be discussed. Most of the stories of Maximón are from the oral tradition. It is through these stories also, that he continues to evolve, because he is a, according to Pieper - a "true figure of the people" (23).
In fact, in a few places he is an integral part of Catholic worship. For instance, in San Lucas Tolimán they allow him to take part in the official ceremonies of *Semana Santa*, where he hangs as Judas from the front of the church building as a statue of Christ carrying his cross passes below him (Pieper 98, 101). This is because of the parish priest, Father Gregory Schaffer, who believes this religious blending is a good thing, and he has empowered the Maya in many ways and by many means (Greg website).

The church, "manages an orphanage, a medical facility, construction company (that trains craftsmen), a coffee plantation, and administers extensive education and land reform programs" (Pieper 99). The Parish has also bought up land, provided farming plots to 4,000 families (land website) and built over 3,000 homes on some of it (Maldonado 8). Through Father Greg, the Maya in this village— including those involved in the worship of *Maximón*— are treated with respect and given an opportunity to provide for themselves.
CHAPTER 3: THE HISTORY OF MAXIMÓN

Maximón is not just part of Mayan mythology, but also part of a living religion. (Stanzione 16) Where did this mystifying divinity come from? He is believed to be the modern day version of the ancient Mayan god Mam, the Ancestor (13). I have not found this god mentioned by this name in the records of the ancients, such as the Popol Vuh or the codices, but this is not a problem.

There is sufficient evidence from the early Spanish colonial period to establish that he was worshipped prior to the conquest. Friar Diego de Landa was sent to the Mayan area of the Yucatan Peninsula of Mexico by the Catholic Church in the 16th Century. According to translator William Gates, in the notes to Yucatan Before and after the Conquest, his translation of Landa's Relación de las Cosas de Yucatan, he states:

The position of Diego de Landa in history rests upon two of his acts, one the writing of the book that is herewith published in English for the first time, and the other the famous Auto de fè of July 1562 at Mani, at which, in addition to some 5000 'idols,' he burned as he tells us twenty-seven hieroglyphic rolls, all he could find but could not read, as 'works of the devil,' designed by the evil one to delude the Indians and to prevent them from accepting Christianity when it should in time be brought to them. Both acts were monumental, one to the ideas of his time, and the other as the basis and fountain of our knowledge of a great civilization that had passed. (Gates in Landa iii)

Landa destroyed much of the extant evidence of Mayan worship; however, he did capture his observations of their religious rituals in his manuscript. The book describes certain worship observances that resemble modern Maximón practices, such as erecting gods, moving them to particular locations at specific times and storing them in houses (62-7). Mendelson/Tarn quotes one Pio Perez as describing cult worship of a god called Mam (grandfather) to bring in the New Year, which falls during Semana Santa. The ceremonies described are similar to some modern Maximón cult practices. This was a
dressed up wooden idol, who was discarded at the end of the old year (1958; 5, 1959; 58 and Tozzer 139f).

Pieper quotes one Lopez de Cogolludo in a 1688 document as also stating that they would make a doll called *Mam* and worship it (15). There is adequate documentation to show that there was worship of a god named *Mam* at the time of year *Maximón* is most feted, and also using similar rituals.

Who is he? Stanzione compares *Mam* in his role as the “Lord of Sexual Hunger” to the deities of swirling rain clouds, thunderbolts, earthquakes living in subterranean and celestial abodes, but does not name which one he is (13) and states that, “... *Mam* acts as much like the hero twins of the *Popol Vuh* as he does the Central Mexican *Tezcatlipoca*.” He is sometimes an axe-wielding rain deity not unlike *Chak*-Xib-*Chak*, while at other times he is the incarnation of the conquistador Pedro de Alvarado. *Mam*, therefore, is a multivalent being from many places and many times.” (16) He is clearly a Mayan god, even though he is not explicitly seen in the surviving Maya texts.

The ancient Mayan god he appears most like to me is one called God L, “The Smoking God.” He was a god of the underworld; associated with agricultural fertility and merchants. He smokes a cigar, is often painted black and sometimes carries bundles (Bezanilla 34). As will be shown, these are all attributes of *Maximón*. There are also similarities to the god *Ekchuah*, a divinity of the merchants, who was dressed in black (Landa 46). It is not important to equate him with one god, since he is one of the few survivors and therefore has taken characteristics of many (Stanzione 43).

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7 An Aztec trickster deity (Stanzione 15) who creates conflict (Bezanilla 8)
In *K’atchikell*⁸ Ma’chimon (Maximón) signifies Ma’ grandfather and Chimon tied up. Stanzione says Ma is “he” and Ximon is “to tie up or bind together” (54). Hart says that the name comes from the word *max*, which means tobacco in several Mayan languages (185).

There are many accounts of his physical creation. One is that he was carved out of magic wood by the *Nawales,*⁹ but after falling out of favor with the local men, a story that will be discussed later, they dismembered him and now he only walks about in spirit. (Stanzione 39). Some believe Maximón was created at the beginning of the world (Mendelson 1959; 58). There is a story in San Andrés Itzapa that the owner of a bus company created San Simón (Maximón) to boost his ridership (Hart 177), but as Stanzione says, “Who can be certain of their creation (36)?”

The oldest surviving Maximón figures and masks can be traced to the 18th century (Pieper 12, 14-15). The bodies can be made of reed bundles, fabric or wood (26). The masks, which form their heads, are usually made of wood (49). They have changed in look over the years, evolving with the times in which they belonged (19). Usually, Maximón is seated in a chair, hat on- waiting for anticipated offerings (39). He is normally found by himself on an altar, but this is not a hard and fast rule (39). In Panajachel, the local *Cofradia* has an altar with four life-size Maximón figures, one miniature replica, *Rey Pascual*, and a host of Catholic saints. Many towns have public shrines, but many more individuals have personal altars in their homes (65).

Is there a body of myth surrounding Maximón? The most popular story concerning his beginnings is that the *Nawales* who created him did so for him to watch

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⁸ A Mayan language
⁹ Ancient merchants who travelled the earth seeking out wealth and fortune. There were between three and twelve of them (Stanzione 21)
the village and their wives while they were away on business. There was a major problem in town with adultery and Mam was just the man to stop it. While the Nawales were away, he set about to his task. He transformed himself into the exact image of one of the departed Nawale’s wives, a woman who was having an affair with a man in the village. (Stanzione 36)

He encountered the man and arranged a secret meeting in the woods the next day to eat soup and have sex. The soup, though, had been altered through witchcraft. Maximón enjoyed having a man inside of him, but he was doing this to rid the town of adultery, so, to this end, he changed himself into a man in the middle of the sex act. This drove the lover insane and caused him to run naked into the woods and die. The villagers all came to witness his naked dead body and still present erect phallus. (37-38) In another version of this part of the story, Mam was the lover, and while having sex with the wife, the real lover came upon them. In this telling, the wife went insane. In both accounts, the guilty party was the one who went mad. (38)

Upon their return, the Nawales learned of what had happened. More approved of Mam’s actions then disapproved, although they believed he might have been overzealous and admonished him. When they went away on subsequent business trips; however, Maximón started having sex with many of the wives in the village (Maldonado 7), so they dismembered him so he could not walk or grab. To make him ugly so the women would not want him, they twisted his head around and in its place gave him a gruesome old man’s face. From this point forward he became just a spiritual being (Stanzione 39-40) and has become the Lord of Sexual Heat, making sure that men and women come together to reproduce (57-58).
Mendelson/Tarn describes the creation myth(s) this way:

An esoteric legend with many variants involves the following themes: (1) a conflict between some married and unmarried “ancestors” following upon interference by the latter with the former’s wives; (2) the decision by the married to make an Image which would “keep order in the land”; (3) the search for a tree out of which they could make it and the tree’s self-revelation in kalsha’um on the north end of the village; (4) the maddening of the suitors by the clothed image assuming the shapes of the beloved; (5) the breaking of order by indiscriminate sex relations between the image, in male or female form, with other Indians of both sexes; (6) the breaking up of the image in its present form to render it powerless. (1959; 58)

Pieper interviewed one Father Francisco, pastor of San Andres Catholic Church in San Andres Ixtapa. He related the following story about the creation of Maximón from Santiago Atitlán, which has been memorialized in his master's thesis at the University of Merida, Yucatan, Mexico. It is about a merchant whose wife is unfaithful while he is away on business, so one day he:

. . . and the other salesman who travelled with him, decided to find out the truth. They decided to leave on their trip, just like always.

Now the women of Atitlán have three important jobs to do each day. In the morning, they clean house, from 5 to 8 A.M. From 8 until 11 they wash clothes in the lake. By the middle of the day, they go to market, and in the late afternoon they stay home and weave. So the men left at 4 A.M. for their business trip like always, and they hid their suitcases. (122)

The businessman then went into his house and hid in the attic. His wife entered and had sex with another man, which sent the man into a rage, making him strangle his wife and her lover.

He ran to the mountains and found his friend. They decided to make a doll from reeds and banana leaves and leave it at the scene of the crime, so the authorities would believe the doll committed the murders. They did not have time to complete the arms:

The problem began in the morning, when the women realized that the woman had not left her house to begin washing clothes in the lake.
And soon they began to smell the dead people. So they called the authorities. And when they arrived, they found the dead couple. They observed the doll in the attic, and they could hear noise going through the reeds.

So the authorities had one explanation for the deaths. The husband couldn't have done it. The poor man was away on a business trip. They concluded that the doll had to be a god, and that only a god could know about the infidelity of the woman. Only a god could protect women from this sin. They reasoned that if it doesn't have arms, his power is even stronger, because he could strangle someone without arms. In this reed doll was converted into the god of fidelity, the god to give protection to the virgins. Even today, girls, when they get to be fifteen years old, they make a costumbre [ritual] with Maximón, so he will protect them against sin and the loss of virginity. Then people began to venerate this god. (123)

Is he a trickster? Tricksters are “usually comical yet serve to highlight important social values . . . as they profane nearly every central belief, but at the same time they focus attention precisely on the nature of such beliefs (Hynes and Doty Introducing 1-2) and “. . . the trickster is often the official ritual profaner of beliefs. Profaning or inverting social beliefs brings into sharp relief just how much a society values these beliefs (Hynes Mapping 37).

Thus, Maximón controls others by being out of control himself; and hence he is a trickster. There are many more myths surrounding his existence, which will be talked about in detail when his roles are discussed.
CHAPTER 4: MYTH AS IT RELATES TO HISTORY

Myths are not fairytales. They are part of the history of a culture. (Bricker 3). If you trace any myth into the past, you will find a certain amount of truth. There may be folk stories intertwined, but the essence of the myths I have studied over the years have contained fundamental truths. They are essential if you want to understand someone’s culture. As Joseph Campbell stated:

Mythology has been interpreted by the modern intellect as a primitive, fumbling effort to explain the world of nature (Frazer); as a production of poetical fantasy from prehistoric times, misunderstood by succeeding ages (Müller); as a repository of allegorical instruction, to shape the individual to his group (Durkheim); as a group dream, symptomatic of archetypal urges within the depths of the human psyche (Jung); as the traditional vehicle of man’s profoundest metaphysical insights (Coomaraswamy); and as God’s Revelation to His children (the Church). Mythology is all of these. The various judgments are determined by the viewpoints of the judges. For when scrutinized in terms not of what it is but of how it functions, of how it has served mankind in the past, of how it may serve today, mythology shows itself to be as amenable as life itself to the obsessions and requirements of the individual, the race, the age. (1948; 382)

The Popol Vuh is a perfect example of a source that relates both myth and history. It is certain that everything related did not happen exactly as written, however the parts that represent the original Popol Vuh, which the Spanish destroyed, contain essential kernels of truth.

Everything handed down orally or in writing is not myth. “In societies where myth is still alive, the people carefully distinguish myths, that is, ‘true stories’ from fables or tales, which they call ‘false stories’ (Eliade 1976 24-25). Tales can be told at any time, but myths can only be told during sacred time periods (25). The “. . . telling of myth is the way in which a society affirms its own reality. (Hyde 157).
Myth is an integral part of everyday life in the highlands of Guatemala. Some Maya understand their Jaloj-K’exoj through myth (Carlsen and Prechtel 1991; 27). It is used to determine what a person should do and when, however it is not used to control things in nature but to celebrate them (Campbell 1948; 384). This is a deep-seated respect for the natural world held by a majority of Maya.

Myth is eternal and chronological time is irrelevant, with today’s hero being the same as yesteryear’s (Bricker 3). “The Maya treat legendary and mythical events as part of a single genre . . .” (5). This is one thing that makes it possible for Maximón and his religion to operate in modern day Guatemala, even though he is competing with other religions, television and the shrinking globe. Place is also irrelevant to a certain extent. The storytellers in Stanzione would switch from place to place, like from Bethlehem to the Guatemalan coast, in the middle of a story (98).

The role of mythic confusion- giving Jesus and his religion to the Maya (Stanzione 65) will be looked at, focusing on the influence it has had, and still has in cofradía worship. Trickster tales, which are often relegated to the false story category (Eliade 1976; 25) stated above, and myth, will be discussed. Maximón, his counterparts and their worship will be looked at through a template best described by Stanzione in the opening words (preface) of Rituals of Sacrifice. "The stories I tell here are also stories of a people who manifest their change as human beings through the transformation of their mythologies in order to provide meaning for themselves in a constantly changing world of conflictive religious beliefs and practice." (xxi).
CHAPTER 5: THE NAMES AND FACES OF MAXIMÓN

Maximón has many names. He is Mam. He is sometimes called Rajawal Ruchulew (Lord of the Earth), Rilaj Acha (the Old Man) (Stanzione 43), Rilaj Mam (Venerable Grandchild), Yanmch’or (Virgin Whore- his feminine side), (Carlsen 1997; 24) AjB’eyom (a rich merchant and man of the road) (Stanzione 43), Ajawal Ch’ol Tz’jj (Lord of Ordered Words), Ajawal B’iix (Lord of Song) (52), the Lord of Sexual Heat (57), Ch’eeep (a rain deity) (58), Rajawal Kamnaq (Lord of Death) (59), and GaxParr Reyes (97).

He has the alias San Simón. He is also San Pedro, San Andres, San Miguel, Pedro Alvarado (Mendelson 1959; 59, March 1958; 5 and Maldonado 7) and God the Father (Pieper 11). These names break nicely into two groups: from Mam to Rajawal Kamnaq, the names are Mayan deities and from GaxParr Reyes to Alvarado they are Catholic and Spanish.

As will be seen, these are many names for many gods who really are one (Stanzione 52). This is not just a Maya phenomenon. The Old Testament is full of names for God the Father, such as Elohim and Jehovah or Yaweh, and descriptive names for his attributes, such as Yaweh Jireh and Yaweh Shalom. Likewise the New Testament is full of names for Jesus, such as Emmanuel and descriptive names such as the Alpha and Omega, the Good Shepherd, etc. (Names website)

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10 Both Peter and Andrew, who were brothers
11 Translated into English as God. The plural of El, meaning strong one.
12 Translated into English as Lord
13 The Lord will Provide
14 The Lord is Peace
15 God Amongst Us
Mam has many faces. He started as nothing more than a bundle, and in San Jorge, he still has that form (Pieper 33, 131). In Rituals of Sacrifice, the Maximón of Santiago Atitlán looks like an image of an ancient Mayan god (Stanzione 40 and Mendelson 1959 plate D and page 57). There are two statues of him in Quetzaltenango that look like Mayan gods with Spanish mustaches: hybrids (Hart 182).

If you look at the existing evidence, such as the codices, you will find that the gods of the Maya can change in appearance (Pedro González 51). It makes sense; various cultures in various locations would depict their gods differently. This changing of looks is also a characteristic of a trickster, being able to shape shift to fit the situation you find yourself in. It is also one of Mam’s qualities.

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16 A textile wrapped around an unknown core and tied up. Maximón's name contains the word (ximon) for "tied up."
CHAPTER 6: THE ROLES OF MAXIMÓN

Maximón’s roles are as many as his names (Stanzione 10). He is a conduit to the Spirit worlds of both the Maya and Catholic, who can make your dreams come true (Pieper 19). He is a god who can go anywhere, from the cofradías, to the home and even onto the coffee fincas (155-57).

As Mam, he is the creator and created who has transformed himself over the years to survive when many have conspired against him (Stanzione 12-13). Even though he lives within a part of the Christian Church, Maximón is the “First God” and “Primal Lord” (60). He is a god who demands sacrifices, challenges his believers, and cannot be hidden from, even in sleep, for he inhabits dreams (44-45). He employs healers in San Andres Itzapu (Pieper 117, 123-29) and has a "healing clinic in Samayac, Suchitepequez (147-50).

He is the one made out of a sacred tz’ite, a tree that Maya priests use in prophecy. Although he is a god who grants wishes, he is made of the same substance as the second attempt at creating man in the Popol Vuh, wood, and is therefore a descendant of that race; possessing their flaws. He is the god who you can lure with tobacco smoke, enjoys having a cigar or cigarette (50-51), is always the life of the party and the last to leave (61). He dances to the marimba at midnight to usher in the Mayan New Year (Pieper 29). What is more, each of the following is also a manifestation of Mam.

As Rajawal Ruchulew (Lord of the Earth), he receives annual sacrifices from his believers before his death during Semana Santa- to nourish him during his yearly journey

\[\text{17 The seeds of the tz’ite tree were used to determine that making men from wood was a good idea.}\]

\[\text{18 These are different than the sacrifices given throughout the year for favors requested}\]
to the underworld (Stanzione 56). As Rilaj Acha (the Old Man) he is a shape shifting matchmaker (13), a rich, powerful man who wears multiple Stetson Hats, which are gifts from the businessmen he has helped as AjB’eyom (a rich merchant and man of the road) (43-45). Many companies in Guatemala have small (8-24 inches tall) Maximóns (Pieper 25) "watching over them."

Although not advertised by most cofradias, you can call on him to bring evil on others by burning black candles (29-30, 139-41). As Ajawal Ch’ol Tz’jj (Lord of Ordered Words) and Ajawal B’iix (Lord of Song), Mam sings and prays (Stanzione 52-53), plays instruments and calls forth spirits from other realms (60).

As the Lord of Sexual Heat, Mam turns the hearts of men and women toward each other in passion and insures that women are fertile (57-58), and as Ch’ee (the last rain deity), he does the same thing for the earth by making sure it is fruitful. In fact, he is lord of all sexuality on the earth (41). When a worshipper binds him in rope, he is trying either to win the heart of a woman, or to protect his girlfriend or wife from another man (Pieper 29). In Cofradia Santa Cruz, certain women are given sons by Maximón by “capturing his figure.” These sons are the zajorines, brujhos and characoteles mentioned above. (Sexton and Ujpán 1999; 80-81) It seems he is still up to his old tricks; he is just doing them in spiritual instead of physical ways.

As ‘Rajwal Ch’ojlal’, he rules the world of fertility for humans and brings order to a sexually chaotic world (Stanzione 13). As Mendelson/Tarn stated:

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19 We will be looking at Mam’s role in Semana Santa in great detail further into this paper
20 Some say wearing Stetson hats makes him a Ladino. He is that but he also is not. (Stanzione 43)
21 Shamans (Sexton 1999; 81)
22 Witches (Sexton 1999; 81)
23 People similar to witches (Sexton 1999; page 81)
Thus the Maximón with, on the one hand, the prostitute wife he is said to live with and the thinly disguised fertility ritual aspects of his participation in Holy Week and, on the other hand, with the terrible sanctions of illness and madness which he still is said to wield against sexual offenders embodies both the similar problems and the different solutions of the two religions in an almost incredibly self-contradictory manifestation of religious symbolism. Lord of that primal relationship between self and other, the sexual relationship, he seems to stand for all the unresolved questions about the moral nature of men and gods with which a blended religion confronts the modern inhabitant of Santiago. (March 1958; 9)

Yamch’or is Tz’utujil for his female name and it stands for his sexual promiscuity (Carlsen 1997; 25). Mam can turn himself into anyone, like an ideal sex partner for a man or a woman (26). The problem is, the price for taking him up on his pleasurable offer of sex is death, because he exists to enforce community norms, such as sexual fidelity (26).

Mam’s woman is YaMry KasteYan. She is also part of his female side (Stanzione 56). She is involved in the ancient Nawale stories. In one, she seduces every Nawale in town, in a tale reminiscent of the creation of Mam (29). In another story, she is a cantina owner named Magdalena and Jesus almost falls in love with her while stopping by on a trip (108).

According to Robert Carlsen, sexuality, because of its close relationship to agricultural fertility, is also a very large part of the Semana Santa Festival in Santiago Atitlán, which will be looked at in detail. In one ceremony, Maximón ritually copulates with the fruit brought from the coast on Wednesday of Semana Santa, which represents female slaves (1997; 152) and at the end of the parade on Good Friday, he rushes towards Jesus, bows to the four corners of the world, takes a few sexual thrusts at Jesus, and is

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24 A Mayan language centered in Santiago Atitlán
whisked away to be dismantled and placed in the rafters (157). This is done to curb his “. . . potentially disruptive and now unnecessary hypersexuality.” (153)

In modern times, he has grown into the role of being a political caricature (Navarrete Linares 475-76). The Maya in the highlands of Guatemala and Chiapas can dress Maximón to take on the look of the “other”: Ladinos and whites, Christians and capitalists. (471, 475 and 476). Some character roles he has played have been the finca owner, Guatemalan soldier and hated politicians, such as Jorge Ubico in military garb (473-75) and Efraín Ríos-Montt (475). He can also take on quite a Mayan look (474 and Pieper 25), so this part of his propensity for shape shifting can be both repulsive and attractive to the Maya (Stanzione 482).

He is the “. . . Great Imitator, who adopts the many ways of those around him (Hyde 77). Also, “trickster myths are ritual vents for social frustrations” (Hynes Inconclusive 206). This role of the trickster may have profound implications in bringing about change. According to sociologist Lewis Hyde, in describing tricksters' "dirt"25 rituals, which are sanctioned by those being parodied, poking fun at authority figures sometimes leads to the demise of those figures. He goes on to say, "Historians have recently provided us with a number of specific cases that demonstrate this general model. It now seems clear, for example, that carnival's ritual debasing of the Pope played a key role in the Reformation in Germany. (188 and Scribner 303-29). Even if it was not a key role, any responsibility would be significant.

And this may be Maximón's most profound role, the trickster whose traits can be, according to historian and Catholic theologian William J. Hynes:

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25 Hyde argues the trickster does the "dirt work" that brings order to chaos and helps us make sense of the world by acting as a fool (Hyde 172-199)
. . . (1) the fundamentally ambiguous and anomalous personality of the trickster. Flowing from this are such other features as (2) deceiver/trick-player, (3) Shape-shifter, (4) situation-invertor, (5) messenger/imitator of the gods, and (6) sacred/lewd bricoleur. Not every trickster necessarily has all of these characteristics. (Hynes Mapping 34)

Maximón exhibits most of these attributes.

Hynes, and coauthor, anthropological historian William G. Doty, argue that a trickster may be hard to define because of the many traits he displays, (Hynes and Doty Historical 17). He brings unspeakable taboos into the open (Hyde 187), is not inferior to other deities because of this role, (Hynes and Doty Historical 22) is admired, but is also “represented as thievish, deceitful, parricidal, incestuous . . .” (Makarius 66).

But don’t get him wrong. Maximón “…is amoral not immoral. He embodies and enacts that large portion of our experience where good and evil are hopelessly intertwined. (Hyde 10) He can help people look inside themselves and into the future (283) and symbolizes our quest to transcend our existence and gain knowledge (Ricketts 87). But, he cannot be pigeonholed and must be considered in context because myths from different areas should be looked at in light of their local social situations (Makarius 81). In our case, this is the blended Folk-Catholicism of the highlands of Guatemala.

In the Popol Vuh, the Maya put an emphasis on the Underworld and as seen above, that part of the essence of Jaloj-K’exoj is that life comes from death, so Mam’s manifestation as Rajawal Kamnaq (Lord of Death) is very important and overlaps with his role as Ch’ep.

And as death he is the transforming essence of all life on the face of the earth. He makes things look one way when in reality they are transforming into their very opposite. He is the dry season . . . and it is the

26 A term introduced by Claude Lévi-Strauss (1962), describing a type of thinking and symbolization; the opposite of "engineer". The engineer creates specialized tools for specialized purposes. The bricoleur is a "jack-of-all-trades", who uses few, non-specialized tools for a wide variety of purposes. (Bricoleur)
sacrifice of himself as ‘death’ at Semana Santa that brings the world back to life. He is the dust who wants to become mud. He is the dryness in the wind that cries out for rain. And although he is death and dust he is also the sacrificial being who gives himself up to bring the healing rains. It is in this way, through his death, that he initiates the oncoming rainy season. It is only his spittle that fertilizes the earth goddess so she can regenerate herself with the attire of a new green ‘skirt’ and eventually a world covered in fruitful abundance. (Stanzione 59-60)

He is also the father of prayer makers and dueño of madness (Mendelson March 1958; 5).

If the Mayan roles of Maximón are amalgamations of various “old” gods, his Catholic roles of San Pedro, San Andres, San Miguel, Pedro de Alvarez and Judas Iscariot are muddled and probably the same:

The confusion of personalities appears to hinge a good deal on the name Simon, an interesting fact given the present-day etymology of Maximón as Mam-Shimon and frequent mention of Judas as Simon Judas: (1) Peter is, of course, Simon Peter; (2) Peter in Rome fought Simon Magus; a figure called San Pedro Maro Magro figures in church ritual in Holy Week and we find that Peter, a great healer, is in Chichicastenango holder of the keys of heaven and hell, identified with the masters of the medicine bundle, patron of diviners and sorcerers; (3) St. Simon and St. Jude Thaddeus share one feast day and there is evidence of confusion between Jude and Judas in popular Catholicism. G. Streser-Péan tells me that in Huasteca, for instance, there is a feast for the hanged on 28 October, apparently associated with the old Maya hanged goddess Ixtab, and that he found associations between Jude and Judas in his informants’ minds; (4) Judas, son of Simon, is a frequent New Testament reference. Add all this to the fact that, in the iconography, Peter, Andrew, Jude and Simon are usually old men. It may also be worth noting that Peter ‘betrayed’ Christ as well as Judas and that, in Atitlán, he is still patron or dueño of roosters. These remarks should afford clues to the meaning of the Indians’ reference to Maximón as Primer Apostol . . . (Mendelson 1959; 59)

The Spanish and Mayan languages had many similar sounding words that had very different meanings, so it is easy to see how the confusion started and continues.
As San Pedro, he was the first Apostle (59) and “the holder of the keys out of the ‘Santo Mundo’” (Stanzione 48). As San Andres he was the first called by Jesus and was Peter’s brother (Mendelson 1959; 59), and also points to the Mayan twin or brothers or twos theme. As San Miguel he was the first angel (59). As GaxParr Reyes, he is the real bringer of the gifts to the Christ Child, the one guided by the star in the east. He is also Jesus’ teacher. (Stanzione 97)

He has another role, and that is fundraiser for the cofradias. Researching popular periodicals online, you would read that:

He is one of Guatemala’s goodtime guys. A snappy dresser, he loves a drink and a cigar and has a reputation as a womanizer. In spite of this, Maximon is a cult figure, a special sort of saint in the highlands of Central America. Depending on who you ask, Maximon is a god, a pagan saint, Jesus’ brother, Judas Iscariot or a devilish deity. (Matheson website)

A long line of people slowly winds its way to the altar amidst a dense cloud of smoke, carrying candles, guaro (liquor), herbs, or simply prayers. They lay their offerings at the feet of popular saint "Maximon", who they believe helps and protects them in times of trouble . . . The Maximon chapel on the outskirts of town is the area's main attraction. The route to the temple, a narrow dirt road, is lined with street stalls selling images of the "saint" and a rainbow of colored candles. . . According to Lara, the cult of San Simon is good business for the indigenous association that manages it, due to the money offerings left by believers as well as the sales of liquor, candles, cigars and food. (Global Information Network website)

I do accept an offer to be led to Maximon, Santiago's famous pagan deity, renowned throughout Guatemala for his appetite for liquor and cigars. Francisco leads me through Santiago's narrow alleys to a tiny, cinderblock house. Inside, chanting in an indigenous dialect, a member of a cofradia (religious brotherhood) kneels before Maximon. Seated in the center of the dark, dusty room, his life-size figure arrayed in a ribboned cape and traditional trousers, Maximon is a ghoulis presence. The carved grimace on his wooden face shifts and flickers in the scarce light from candles scattered across the floor” (Gonzales website).

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27 The Underworld (Stanzione 48) or Sky-Earth continuum (11)
28 Parr is skunk, which is the animal transformation of Mam (Stanzione 97)
This is a vital role, because the highlands of Guatemala are a poor area that relies on tourism (Poverty website).

In the preface of Rituals of Sacrifice, Stanzione posits the question, "I often wondered exactly how the Traditionalists of Santiago brought together such unlikely religious partners in their rituals of Semana Santa as are the trickster Mam of Atitlán and the humble Jesus left by the Franciscans." (xviii) The answer is through the most important role of Mam, as Judas Iscariot (Pieper 93) and his common name, Maximón.

Before looking at this role in depth, some additional background is needed.
Through native priests, people pray to various dueños of natural functions, such as the wind, rain, corn, animals, etc. The most important of these, the “chief dueño,” is the San Martin Bundle, which is a “bundle wrapped in velvet and containing sacred objects” (Mendelson March 1958; 5). In other towns, San Martin is not a bundle, but a statue of San Martin on his horse (August 1958; 122). Even though it is named for a saint, it is really related to an ancient Mayan earth god (March 1958; 5). In Santiago, the San Martin Bundle is also called el Rey, the King (5). He rules over nature spirits (6), who in other places are called Mames 29 (7) and other dueños, both spiritual and physical (August 1958; 123). Followers worship him with a secret deer and tiger dance, where the participants wear deer heads and skins and others wear tiger skins, 30 and which they perform once a year in most cofradías, but seven times a year at Cofradía San Juan in Santiago Atitlán (122). Canby describes this as a jaguar dance (328). This is a popular subject in paintings seen in art galleries around the lake.

San Martin, “. . . is associated with the original life essence of the world (Carlsen and Prechtel 1994; 87). There is evidence tracing this back to the ancient Maya. There is a bundle in the fourth section of the Popol Vuh named P’isom Q’aq’a. The contents of the bundle were not visible because of the bundling. B’alam Ki’tze left it for his people. (Christenson 254-55)

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29 Although there has been some doubt that Mam and mames are related. However, the Quiche in the Highlands have myths of the Mam, who is a solar deity (Tedlock 125), however, intertwined are four Mames- created in the beginning of the world, who represent the four directions (North, south, East and West) (Villa Rojas 121) and the “Year Bearers”. We have seen that this is a role Maximón has

30 The tiger dancers also carry stuffed squirrel carcasses. This morning, prior to learning this, my wife and I passed a man setting up his sales stand on the side of calle Principal in Panajachel. There was a dead squirrel hanging next to it. I guess the owner was asking San Martin to bless his stall.
The worship of the San Martin Bundle may be the part of the blended Maya/Catholic religion that best relates to the ancient Mayan practices (Mendelson August 1958; 124). Also, the bundles are maintained by a naybesil shaman, a position that can be traced back to pre-conquest times. Some of these naybesil remain celibate for life (Carlsen and Prechtel 1994; 86). San Martin physically dwells near Maximón on altars; however, he has little interaction with him, unlike the following folk deity.

*JesuKrista* originally was Jesus, the Nazarene, brought to the highlands by the Spanish, although some believe he has been a Mesoamerican deity forever (Stanzione 64). In Santiago Atitlán, *JesuKrista*, or *Ma Nawal JesuKrista* was forged together with *Maximón* in post-conquest Guatemala in “creative utopian confusion of Franciscan millenarian dogma interwoven with native Tz’utujil Mayan religious worldview” (9). Despite this mythic confusion, he is beloved by them like a son (64).

He is the other hero twin to *Mam* (46) and like his counterpart; there are many myths about him, including his birth, where he came from and his death (65). Out of all the personages brought by the Spanish, he is the folk saint who has become the most Mesoamerican (68). He was born of a woman who is roughly the equivalent of the Virgin Mary (64) *AnDolor* (153). He is the “*Justo Juez del Santo Mundo*,” the “Just Judge of the Spirit World” and lives with *Mam*, working together to cure the ill (46). He is also *Salvador del Mundo* (62), but as *Avtur Mund* a Mayan rain deity and maize god after his death and resurrection (11, 81).

As the discussion of the proceedings of *Semana Santa* will show, he is secondary and subservient to *Mam*, at least in Santiago. If you visit a local *Maximón* cult site, you
will see him in a glass case behind *Mam*. The San Martin stands for the practices of the old religion of the ancients and *JesuKrista* stands for the God of the new religion of the Spaniards (Mendelson March 1958; 5). *Maximón* is the God of the old, living in the new world, the trickster; the ancient Mayan deity who is still alive today, especially during *Semana Santa*, when he takes on the role of Judas, the betrayer of Jesus. Both Catholic and Protestants have equated *Maximón* with Satan, and there is a certain anti-Catholic Judas worship, but the worship of *Maximón* is not Satanism (Carlsen 1997; 24). It is part of the blended religion forged over the years.

*AnDolores* is the mother of *JesuKrista* in Santiago Atitlán (Stanzione 153). She is an integral part of *Semana Santa*, especially the procession involving her Son (292-95). She parallels the Biblical Mary very well, with a few exceptions.

There are other deities or spiritual figures that you may see on altars with *Maximón*, such as *Rey Pascual* and Lucifer (Pieper 31). *Rey Pascual* is in the form of a skeleton, often with a crown on his head and a scythe in his hand. He is a healer and communicator with the dead (31, 169). He sometimes has his own shrines (169). There are several myths, both Mayan and Spanish, concerning his origin (169-75, 187). Unlike *Maximón*, *El Rey San Pasqual* will listen only to just people who are asking for good things (187).

Lucifer was introduced to the Maya by the Spanish (197). He is the caricature version of Satan that came from sixth century European Christianity (196-97). "Prayers and offerings are made so one will be left alone and not tempted, acted against, or pursued by the negative forces of the lower spiritual world" (197). Praying to a sinister force to be left alone is not uncommon around the world (197). *Rey Pascual* and Lucifer
both have their own ritual dances (177, 210). They do not really interact with Maximón, except that you will see them with him on common altars.
CHAPTER 8: SEMANA SANTA

There are other Maximón festivals, such as San Miguel on September 29, and San Andres on November 30 (Mendelson 1959; 57), but Semana Santa is the most important one. The rituals actually begin on the first Friday of Lent (Stanzione 157). It is hot, dry and dusty at this time of year (230). Maximón’s role in Semana Santa centers on ushering in the wet season and fertility (Carlsen 1997; 152). This is very serious business, especially in Santiago Atitlán, where during the 1990 Semana Santa celebration, Jerónimo Quiejo Pop, left the hospital after being shot for being the aj’kun (shaman of the town) and telinel for Maximón, was smuggled into town in the middle of the night and fulfilled his obligations (151-57). Telinel comes from the root telek, which means shoulder. He carries Maximón on his shoulders during Semana Santa (152).

Before making his appearance for Semana Santa, Maximón is stored dismembered in the rafters of the cofradia (Mendelson 1959; 57) or in the rafters of an adherent or Telinel, depending on which town you are talking about. He is assembled and dressed in multiple sets of clothes, which are gifts from adherents (57). Telinels are very important during Semana Santa, as they are charged with carrying Maximón during all the Semana Santa ceremonies (Carlsen and Prechtel 1994; 88).

In Santiago Atitlán, there is much going on throughout Semana Santa. On Holy Monday, Mam’s clothes are washed (Mendelson 1959; 58), while- at the same time in the church- the Saints are removed from the walls and washed, along with the rafters of the church building31 (Stanzione 239). Keep in mind that in most villages, Maximón inhabits the far outskirts of Catholicism and his worship is not officially sanctioned by the local

31 This brings to mind the sweeping of the house to remove hametz prior to the Jewish Passover, which is where Easter came from
church. On Tuesday night, he is raised up on an eight-foot tall post (Mendelson 1959; 58) after being adorned in his clothing (Stanzione 260).

There is much dancing, praying and talking to him as they hoist him up (Mendelson 1959; 58). Everything preparatory during Semana Santa takes place at night because the Sun is sleeping, the stars are a better way to determine exact ritual times than the Sun and because creation, for the Maya, has always taken place at night (Stanzione 258-59).

On Wednesday morning, the Telinel brings him to the municipal building and places him in the midst of fruit brought from the Pacific Lowlands just for this purpose (58). At noon Maximón is taken to the Catholic Church by the Telinel, placed on a post there and left until Christ, who is dead, is removed from the sanctuary on Good Friday (58 and Mendelson1959; 58). Gifts of fruit, candles and incense are brought to him (Mendelson March 1958; 1).

The running of San Juan Carajo, a phallic fertility race takes place on Holy Thursday (Carlsen 1997;155). The race is named for Saint John, because after Jesus’ capture, he ran back and forth through town attempting to find out what was going on (Stanzione 147-48). It is also to replicate the in and out motion of sex (293-94). In fact, the name Karajo (Carajo) really means penis; not race (293). This is so the Catholic authorities over the years would believe the Atitecos were venerating Saint John, when in fact they were doing an ancient fertility ritual (294).

This race opens the way for JesuKrista to come on Good Friday as Salvadore del Mundo (295) On Holy Thursday in Santiago, the Martín and Maria bundles are “taken out, danced, flowered and incensed” to help insure the rainy season will come and they
are then placed in piles of flowers. They are “Sky-Earth bundles and these dances are ancient; probably as old as the Deer-Jaguar dances (289). During Holy Thursday, the people in Santiago eat sacrificed chickens and turkeys, cooked in chiles and ground maize and meditate on the Last Supper (108). That night, JesuKrista waits in the Church with San Nicolás, his advisor, AnDolores and San Juan (289).

On Good Friday, the cofradia church members place the cross in a hole in the floor of the sanctuary at noon. The hole is the navel of the earth, or vagina of the earth and is where Jesus will pass to the underworld. (299) At 3:00 PM he is taken down and placed in a coffin (303-04). After the Good Friday procession is finished, there is a large all night party in Santiago, which features marimba music, dancing and “copious amounts of mountain-stilled liquor” (310-11).

Thus, Mam plays Judas during the Xiineem Jesus, the procession on Good Friday (157), which is his ritual sacrifice (163, 296-303). He is then taken apart and placed back in the rafters (Mendelson 1959; 58). The focus of this festival is on Jesus, but in Santiago Atitlán, Maximón is as much a part of the ceremony (Stanzione 309-10). His name is Judias Skaryota, in Tz’utujil, and his story is a Mayanized version of the biblical account. Judias betray him after receiving 30 pesos in pure silver, but it is actually a flock of birds who tell the K’uluntun Winaq’ soldiers where to find him. (147)

These K’uluntun Winaq’ were a mythical, warlike people, the belladonna people (named after a poisonous plant), who still sacrificed their children when Jesus walked the earth (88-89). They were cannibals and ate children “. . . stewed up in a toasted red chile, achiot, and wild-broad-bean paste.” (91) They planned to capture and kill Jesus soon after his birth (96). It appears the king of the K’uluntun Winaq’ plays the part of Herod
the Great and the people are the Herodians and their soldiers, the latter two who eventually do capture Jesus in the Biblical account and have him put to death.

In Santiago Judias is not hated as the Christians hate Judas Iscariot, but venerated (Mendelson 1959; 58). This is not true in the entire Mayan world. In Maya Saints and Souls in a Changing World, John M. Watanabe describes a similar four-day Semana Santa festival where, without being called Mam or Maximón, Judas is paraded through the streets in effigy, hung in front of the church and then set on fire on Easter Monday (120-23).

There are other Semana Santa celebrations in highland villages, such as San Lucas Tolimán, where Judas is hanged on the front of the Catholic Church by the cofradia (Pieper 98-101). In Momostenango, they hang and burn San Simón, who is a central figure of the ritual (Cook 145). That is the name preferred there, not Maximón (150). There, the mask and clothing are stored in a house and the body is created anew each year out of bunchgrass (150). The superstructure of his body is a cross (153). He is burned at noon along with the willow tree that shaded his image during his short life (150-151). The burning itself is not a ritual. No one pays attention to it and no cofradia officials are present for it (151).

There are also private domestic burnings and hangings of Judas, similar to family picnics, with figures created just for this purpose (Pieper 164). Prior to these fiestas, Judases are placed in front of homes and churches to await their fates (160-167).

The ceremonial hanging, burning, or destruction of Judas, represents for some the death of evil, good overcoming evil, or even the continuation of Christian tradition. The ritual destruction of Judas allows the scattering of fragments of people's pasts, prayers, wishes, and forgiveness, and sometimes far more. Ridding one's self of, or giving wishes or prayers to,
the infinite; the use of water to wash or cleanse; and burning with fire to
eliminate or cleanse are all ritual elements used in many cultures. (163)

The Spanish imported the *Semana Santa* Festival, but it is no longer exactly the
same as it was upon its arrival. It is another example of the Maya transforming a
Catholic festival into one of their own. It has many similarities to the ancient *Uayeb* (a
five-day period) and its rituals, at the end of the year (Mendelson 1959; 58 and Landa 62-7). There are also many similarities between the *Uayeb* and Easter, which both have to
do with life coming from death (Mendelson 1959; 59).

It is unknown exactly who first associated *Mam* with Judas Iscariot. It may have
been the Catholic priests, as shown above, or the Mayan people and their priests. (59). It
begs to be asked, how can Judas be adored? Here is an answer:

The Mam can be adored at the same time as the Christ, because a
cyclical\(^{32}\) system, in adapting itself to a crisis system,\(^{33}\) has been able to
merge two “critical” rituals, thus inserting, without destroying, itself at the
heart of divine intervention into the human world. The price paid for
survival by the old system is the branding of the Mam as “Judas the
Traitor.” Needless to say, Folk Catholicism has always and everywhere
involved cyclical as well as crisis ritual . . . (March 1958; 7-8)

`Thus the Trickster, who has many names, faces and roles, lives until the next
year. And during that year, even though he sleeps in the rafters, he dwells in the *cofradia*
to be prayed to and worshipped. He is there for the adherents and the tourists alike. *Mam*
shifts shapes and changes personas to get the job done (Stanzione 13). He needs
*JesuKrista* because tricksters need polytheism or at least other supernatural powers (Hyde
13), which *JesuKrista* provides. And with his role in *Semana Santa*, this trickster has

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\(^{32}\) Like the Mayan calendar

\(^{33}\) The first is the crisis between the one year and the next (*Uayeb*) and the second is the death and rebirth of Jesus Christ (Mendelson March 1958 page 7)
also bound two religions together; in fact, he may be the only one who could have done this (Mendelson March 1958 6, 9). Therefore, the trickster is also a hero.
CHAPTER 9: ALCOHOL IN MAXIMÓN WORSHIP

Alcohol and hallucinogens were used in ritual ceremonies (Balchē website) in most of Mesoamerica (Andrews 2, 15); however, they may have only been used by the religious and civil leaders. Shamans, priests and chiefs would get intoxicated during certain ritual ceremonies (2) and go into a euphoric trance (15-16). The concoction consumed was called balchē and consisted of mead brewed with the hallucinogenic bark of a tree (15). This was a natural outgrowth of the belief that their ancient gods drank balchē; there were actually gods of inebriation and even a god of balchē, named Acan (15-16).

When the Spanish arrived, the use of alcohol spread to the general population (Garrard-Burnet 348). Drunkenness of the principales started in ancient Mayan rituals (Carlsen 1997; 82), was practiced in colonial times (95, 97) and is still practiced in the modern cofradias (82). Alcoholism became a steadily growing public health issue in Guatemala (Garrard-Burnett 343). Alcohol is involved in many Maximón rituals, including much of Semana Santa worship (Carlsen 1997; 153-155, 168) and so does the celebration of the Mayan New Year in San Lucas Tolimán (Pieper 111).

There is also a lot of alcohol consumption in a similar Holy Week festival in the Mam tribal area of Santiago Chimaltenango (Watanabe 121). A sample of other descriptions of alcohol use are these. Stanzione describes working in Cofradia Santa Cruz in Santiago, “. . . performing ritual, drinking and asking questions about Mam . . .” (46) and also describes drinking during many rituals, including the main processions of

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34 de Landa bears witness to this, at least for the festival he described (80), however there is also evidence that indicates it may have been imbibed by more than just the religious leaders (Andrews 15).

35 This is a Mayan tribe; not to be confused with Mam, one of Maximón's names.
Semana Santa (292). Santiago is described as a “village of hard drinking Traditionalist people” (142). Luch Chavajay, former cofradia leader died, “. . . years of ritual drinking having finally destroyed his liver.” (Carlsen 1997; 168). The one cofradia confronting this alcohol use is the healing clinic in Samayac, Suchitepequez (Pieper 147).
CHAPTER 10: WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS FOR MAXIMÓN

Separation has served the Maya well in being able to continue to worship the old way, so it has helped *Maximón* survive. What does the future hold for him? How will he do in the face of his two biggest challenges: globalization and Protestantism? There is already much skepticism in various highland communities about *Maximón*, and especially his priests (Hart 178-182). Will this trend continue into the future?

As a trickster, *Mam* is, “the creator of his own work,” (Stanzione 16) which has served him well up until now. Will this be enough to allow him to survive on a shrinking planet? Carlsen believes global factors are the most important determinants affecting *Maximón* today (1997; 167). As seen above, there are articles in the popular press that have taken him around the world. Some worshippers have exported *Maximón* shrines to places like Olympia, WA (Hill website), New Orleans, Los Angeles, Indio, CA and Kansas City (Pieper 34, 225-39). The shrine in Olympia offers email prayers to *Mam*. There are now even two internet Shrines (Shrine website).

In one of them, which is on the Santiago Atitlán website you can make cyber-offerings to *Maximón*. It looks like he is adapting to life in the early 21st Century. Moreover, they are mass-producing *Maximón* statues in the People's Republic of China for worldwide consumption. Therefore, he may do more than just survive and wind up prospering by partaking in the globalization that is supposed to doom him. The people of Guatemala have started successfully exporting the vegetables and fruits grown on their small family farms (Produce website). It is not farfetched to see *Maximón* mimic this success by globalizing himself.
A second part of globalization is that, as the world grows smaller, modern intellectual ideas reach the remotest villages. As mythologist Joseph Campbell states in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*:

> One knows the tale; it has been told a thousand ways. It is the hero–cycle of the modern age, the wonderful story of mankind’s coming to maturity. The spell of the past, the bondage of tradition, was shattered with sure and mighty strokes. The dream-web of myth fell away; the mind opened to full waking consciousness; and modern man emerged from ancient ignorance, like a butterfly from its cocoon, or like the sun at dawn from the womb of mother night. (387)

It is certain this has played at least somewhat of a role in the decline of *Mam* worship, although Campbell is painting with a broad brush and this may be somewhat of an oversimplification in the current study. Stanzione states it this way, “As progressive modernization has entered the Guatemalan highlands and destroyed traditional life in Santiago Atitlán the *Cofradia* system has subsequently become less and less important . . . “ (181) There is truth in what Campbell has said, but even more in what Stanzione has said.

Along with the *cofradías*, *Maximón* himself appears to be becoming less important; however, they have both been a part of Folk Catholicism for over 400 years, so it is much different than a native population suddenly coming into contact with a foreign population and their god(s). Seaman has also noted a marked decline in the power of the *cofradías* (85), at least in Santiago Atitlán, which started in the 1950s (Stanzione 7) and has continued to the present (181).

The single biggest threat to *Maximón* is Evangelical Protestantism. As seen above, Mayan religion blended well with Catholicism and its Saints, which became associated with Mayan deities and beliefs. Catholicism also shared the idea of priests
with the native religions, so it enabled Mayan cult worship within its belief system. Protestantism does not have this set of intermediaries; it is just the individual and God. It is not easy to blend Mayan worship with a system such as this. (Pieper 35)

Mendelson/Tarn believes that *Maximón* “appears to hypnotize the people and to consume the energies which could be channeled into more profitable endeavors” (March 1958; 9). Protestantism is based on a focus on two things, Jesus and the Bible, it is designed to refocus you and can negate this “hypnotism.” The myths of *Maximón* worship are complicated and confusing in comparison to the easy to understand message of the Evangelicals (Stanzione 94). Protestantism is simple in its message, aggressive in its methods, and cuts through the separation that permitted the blending of Catholicism with the “Old Religion.”

It has also been very successful in the highlands (Carlsen and Prechtel 1994; 82 and Stanzione 64). Stanzione, even though not a proponent of Protestantism and its practices, makes a point that some of the success it has in converting the Traditionalists in Santiago and causing them to turn from *Maximón* worship is that it has:

... gotten them out of ... begetting dozens of malnourished children, staying drunk for two weeks at a time, and spending the entire family fortune on marimba music for the saints, liquor for the Principali, and mountains of food for guests and the band. Sometimes in life it isn’t necessarily what we gain that liberates us, but what we give up that gives us our freedom. The evangelicals have been able to give up a lot of tedious costmibre, freeing themselves from a confusing and costly past. (309)

Pieper also relates a story told to him by a man whose father gave up drinking when he became a Christian (35).
There exists only one cult worship site that attempts to cure alcoholism (148). So, if we are witnessing Maximón’s demise, some of it may be due to utilitarian factors, such as addressing alcohol usage and money/family matters.

Another reason that Protestantism has had such an impact is that it is chipping away slightly at the Ladino/Maya disparity that exists in Guatemala, although the power is still heavily weighted in favor of the Ladinos (Scotchmer 206). This is deeply ingrained in society wherever the Maya and Ladinos coexist. Peter Canby, former editor of New Yorker Magazine tells the following story in relating this form of underlying racism in a region, which even though it is not in the highlands of Guatemala, is in a similar demographical area inhabited by the Maya:

The city of San Cristóbal de las Casas, the capital of highland Chiapas, sits in a rich, well-watered mountain valley. Visitors are sometimes told that the valley was uninhabited when the Spanish arrived. The Maya believed that it had once been a lake and would someday be a lake again. They had therefore located the milpas in the less fertile but safer uplands.

This story seems harmless enough until you begin to think about it. For one thing, like a number of similar stories that circulate in the Ladino community, it casts the Maya as foolish and superstitious, while portraying the Spanish as sensible and industrious. Second, according to the story, no one was displaced when the Spanish moved into the San Cristóbal valley, so its settlement seemed a neutral or even benign act. (233)

He then goes on to describe, based on documentation from the time of the conquest, that they were, in fact, removed by force by the Spanish (233-34).

If a church, or anyone, is addressing this problem, even in a small way, it would be seen by the Maya as better than anything they had observed in the past 400 years. There is another factor involved in his purported demise. His role as sexual intermediary

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36 It is in Samayac, Suchitepequez  
37 And listed on their website as official fact checker
may no longer be needed in the modern Maya world (Stanzione 14). Protestantism takes roles like this over in toto, whereas Folk-Catholicism allowed him to operate as a "quasi-saint."

It is not the purpose of this paper to attempt to “prophesy” with any certainty Mam’s fate in the highlands or those of his cofradías. That would be pure speculation. But never count a trickster out of the game. As grim as the above picture appears, it is known that sometimes Protestants use the services of local folk shamans for some types of healing ceremonies (Carlsen and Prechtel 1994; 88) and may visit Mayan shrines for ritual purposes, at night when they cannot be seen (Hart 22). A Mayan priest in Zunil claims he has two pastors as clients (22-23). Some may consult shamans and keep Mayan idols in their houses (Canby 325). Maybe these are the beginnings of a blending of Maya and Protestant worship practices.
CHAPTER 11: CONCLUSION

It has been shown that Maximón has amazingly survived being driven underground as the Conquistadores attempted to eliminate the ancient Mayan religion and has continued to be worshipped in several areas of the highlands in several different ways, even today. It has also been shown that he is a god descended from the ancient Mayan pantheon, who represents many, if not all of them in his various roles. He was originally created by the ancient Nawales to be a protector, but sometimes has been unpredictable in how he provides the protection. We have seen him in the role of trickster and hero.

He is given the trickster role to become a hero, just like his ancestors, Hunahpu and/or Xbalanque, who, along with JesuKrista, he is also descended from, and in this character of Judas Iscariot, which culminates during Semana Santa, he inherits the rich religious heritage of the Mayan Empire. It has been shown that Maximón, as shape shifter and trickster has allowed all the gods and their attributes to endure, so he is one of a very few survivors.

Maximón represents the resilient Maya in all their struggles against oppression. It has been shown that the adherent to the Maximón cult believes he provides hope for blessings for his/her family in the physical and spiritual realm, in exchange for offerings of money, alcohol, tobacco and food. The adherent also believes because of his history and culture, so Mam worship is the modern day equivalent of the "Old Religion."
Many used to believe Maximón provided hope in the face of poverty and second-class status during the days when Catholicism was his only competition, and some still do today, when he is also facing antagonists such as globalization and Protestantism.

It has been shown that he is still a part of everyday life for a diminishing number of people in the highlands of Guatemala. He is part of a legitimate religion, and as such, is part of the religious landscape in the areas he is worshipped. It has also been shown that the odds are not in favor of Maximón flourishing in the future, or even surviving; however, it is the nature of the trickster to make you believe he or she is defeated to win the victory.

He may survive as long as the Maya continue to have second class status and need an outlet for their frustrations in a god who can look like them one day and “the other” the next. He may survive as long as the Maya continue to hold onto their rich religious heritage in the face of outside influences. He may survive because tricksters sometimes have the ability to reshape the world around them. (Hyde 257) One thing is certain. If Maximón survives, it will be because he is a trickster.

Nothing is ever finished in the study of mythology, because it changes with the moment (Lévi-Strauss 5). Likewise, nothing is ever finished in Guatemala. The tops of many buildings have rebar rods sticking up just in case they want to add on in the future. So it is with Maximón the Mayan deity, and the story of his future as yet untold.

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38 They reinforce concrete
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