PROPHET LEGENDS ACROSS THE AMERICAS

ALL ACROSS the Americas legends exist of a being with a mixture of attributes, which make him both mortal and immortal. His birth, when mentioned, almost always has a miraculous character. The mother is impregnated by a spiritual being in the form of a North or West wind, or other spiritual entity. Often she dies at birth and a grandmother raises the boy.

Our central character is very often called "the Prophet" for his ability to see both past and future. Likewise, numerous traditions call him "the Healer" and relate that he can cure the sick, give sight to the blind and restore the crippled by his word alone. In all myths he converses with the elements and animals and has power over them. Although endowed with super-earthly attributes, he definitely walks the earth as a man. Quite universally he is recognized as the civilizing hero who introduces many arts such as writing, farming and animal domestication, and astronomy. Some of his recurrent names are the Pale God or the Dawn God. Dawn God meaning in this case the god of the dawning of mankind, as we will see later. In many Native American cultures he either fights against monsters and beasts to bring peace, or does so by vanquishing the priesthood that practices human sacrifice.

Although his feats are most well known in Central America, echoes of them linger in all mythologies from Canada down to the southern Andes. A significant collection of his stories has been gathered by H. T. Taylor.[(1)] In the following section we will differentiate between North, South and Mesoamerica in a slightly different way than the geographical fashion of distinguishing northern, southern and central parts of the continent. Mesoamerica in this section corresponds to the area that covers all of Mexico and most of Central America. This characterization reflects the common history that these two regions share.

North America:Glooskap, Manabozho and "Hiawatha"

Many of us may remember the verses:

> There he sang of Hiawatha,
> Sang the song of Hiawatha,
> Sang his wondrous birth and being,

How he prayed and how he fasted,
How he lived, and toiled, and suffered,
That the tribes of men might prosper,
That he might advance his people.

It may cause some surprise that an example of the mythology of the Prophet is actually quite familiar to Americans: the famous Hiawatha of Longfellow. There are many reasons why we might not immediately recognize the being of Hiawatha. Longfellow drew his inspiration from H. R. Schoolcraft's *Indian Stories*.[(2)] We know from his diaries that he wove the story of Hiawatha together with many other native legends.[(3)] Finally, the name of Hiawatha itself is another source of confusion. The stories of Schoolcraft refer to the Algonquian hero Manabozho, whom Longfellow mistakenly associates with the Iroquois name Hiawatha. We will see later that Hiawatha is an individual living fifteen centuries after Manabozho. There are good reasons to confuse the two figures. Hiawatha's legend of the White Roots of Peace does in effect echo the figure of the Prophet, as we will see in chapter 3, Part II.

Schoolcraft calls Manabozho the "great incarnation of the north" (north of the US). He recognizes that this myth is the most widespread among the Indian nations. The rest of his odyssey is told through Longfellow's poem. From here onwards whenever Longfellow's Hiawatha is mentioned the reader should understand that we are actually referring to Manabozho.

Hiawatha's mother is said to be a virgin, his grandmother the daughter of the moon. The West Wind (Mudjekeevis), who impregnates the mother, causes her death at childbirth. The child grows up developing great gifts of observation and communion with animals and elemental beings. After reaching manhood Hiawatha wants to fight Mudjekeevis for causing his mother's death. Mudjekeevis, who cannot be killed, puts him to a test and gives him the mission of delivering his people from monsters and beasts. (Chapter 3: Hiawatha's Childhood)

Hiawatha sets out on his new mission and fights against the great king fish Mishe-Nahma. The fish swallows him, but the hero kills the fish and is freed with the help of the squirrel and the seagull. (Chapter 8: Hiawatha's Fishing). The next challenge comes through the encounter with the magician Megissogwon, the great Pearl-Feather, living across the Great Lake. Hiawatha is first challenged by the fiery serpents, which he shoots with his arrows. Then he oils the sides of his canoe to get through an area of pitch-water. After landing, Hiawatha finally overtakes the magician by striking an

arrow at the tuft of hair upon his head, the only place where the Pearl-Feather is vulnerable. He can then strip him of his magic shirt of wampum shells. (Chapter 9: Hiawatha and the Pearl-Feather). As the civilizing hero, Hiawatha is the one who introduces picture writing. (Chapter 14: Picture-Writing)

With poetic feeling Longfellow also describes the hero as a prophet to his nation:

> I beheld, too, in that vision
> All the secrets of the future,
> Of the distant days that shall be…
> Then a darker, drearier vision
> Passed before me, vague and cloud-like;
> I beheld our nation scattered,
> All forgetful of my counsels,
> Weakened, warring with each other….
> (Chapter 21: The White Man's Foot)

Another staple of American lore is Glooskap. He too is an equivalent of Manabozho. In Micmac tradition Glooskap is said to have come from a country from the east, across the sea. He is a divine being in the form of a man. The North Wind impregnates the mother, and Glooskap lives with his mother and grandmother. Upon growing up, Glooskap teaches the Micmacs agriculture and animal husbandry. He is said to ride a granite canoe, a recurrent theme in many North American legends, indicating the ability to travel to the realm of the dead. The Micmacs in effect believe that Glooskap awaits them at their death.[(4)]

Other names for the being of Manabozho according to Schoolcraft are Inigorio and Micabo, according to different Indian tribes.[(5)] In the extensive research of L. T. Hansen, the prophet is called E-See-Co-Wah (Lord of Wind and Water) in Georgia, and Chee-Zoos (the Dawn God), in West Virginia. The Pawnees call him Paruxti; Wacona or Waicomah by the Dakotah,; the Chippewa, Wis-Ah-Co; the Choctaw (Oklahoma), Ee-Me-Shee; the Yakima (Washington), Tacoma (the highest mountain is named after him); the Seri (Gulf of California), Tlazoma.[(6)]

A special mention should be made of Pueblo mythology. As the Pueblo have deep bonds with the Uto-Aztecan populations of Mexico, so they also share many common elements in their mythology. A theme that frequently reappears is of the boy who doesn't know his father and goes out seeking for him. Such is the story "Arrow to the Sun," here retold in full.

Long ago the Lord of the Sun sent the spark of life to earth. It traveled down the rays of the sun, through the heavens and it came to the pueblo. There it entered the house of a young maiden. In this way the Boy came into the world of men. He lived and grew and played in the pueblo. But the other boys would not let him join their games. "Where is your father?" they asked. "You have no father!" They mocked him and chased him away. The Boy and his mother were sad.

"Mother," he said one day, "I must look for my father. No matter where he is, I must find him." So the Boy left home. He traveled through the world of men and came to Corn Planter. "Can you lead me to my father?" he asked. Corn Planter said nothing, but continued to tend his crops. The Boy went to Pot Maker. "Can you lead me to my father?" asked the Boy. Pot Maker said nothing, but continued to make her clay pots. Then the Boy went to Arrow Maker, who was a wise man. "Can you lead me to my father?" Arrow Maker did not answer, but, because he was wise, he saw that the Boy had come from the Sun. So he created a special arrow. The Boy became the arrow. Arrow Maker fitted the Boy to his bow and drew it. The Boy flew into the heavens. In this way the Boy traveled to the Sun.

When the Boy saw the mighty Lord, he cried, "Father, it is I, your son!"

"Perhaps you are my son," the Lord replied, "perhaps you are not. You must prove yourself. You must pass through the four chambers of ceremony: the kiva of Lions, the kiva of Serpents, the kiva of Bees and the kiva of Lightning." The Boy was not afraid. "Father," he said, "I will endure these trials." And so he endured these trials. When the Boy came from the kiva of Lightning, he was transformed. He was filled with the power of the sun. The father and his son rejoiced. The father said, "Now you must return to earth, my son, and bring the spirit to the world of men."

Once again the Boy became the arrow. When the arrow reached the earth the Boy emerged and went to the pueblo. The people celebrated his return in the dance of life.[7]

Similar to this legend is the story "The Twins Visit Tawa." Here we are told of the twin grandsons of Spider Woman, called respectively Puukonhoya, the Youth, and Palunhoya, the Echo. They too go in search of their father whom they don't know. Their first trial is an encounter with beings that guard the threshold: an old man, two angry bears and Gatoya,

guardian of all snakes. Behind them the Closing Canyon bars the way. Having overcome all the obstacles they arrive at the abode of Tawa. The Sun God is angry at the intrusion and throws them into a flint oven where a fire rages. When he opens the door to the oven, the Twins leap out unscathed. By this Tawa knows that they are his sons.[8]

The element of the kivas where the initiation trials occur reappears in the tests undergone by the Twins in the realm of Xibalba—the Mayan underworld—as we will see from the retelling of the Popol Vuh. The theme of the oven where the Twins are thrown also reappears. Another element similar to Mayan mythology is the role of the Twins. The same archetypal story can be the feat of one or two youths. That there is no difference between the one or the two is elucidated by the fact that the single hero is often called the Youth or Puukonhoya. Even when the two appear together, it is the Youth who performs the active role throughout most or all of the story. The second Twin seems to be faithful to his name, the Echo.[9] It is too soon to elucidate this mystery. We will see that the Twins appear in the Popol Vuh in a similar fashion.

South America: The Two Creations

Some of the best preserved Andean legends come from the Bolivian Altiplano called the Collao. Here was situated one of the most sacred cities of the time preceding the Incan civilization: Tiwanaku. It was probably the largest ceremonial center of South America. The chronicler Juan Betanzos took down the following legend:

> *They say that in ancient times the land of Peru was dark and there was no light or day in it. In those times there dwelt there a certain people who owed allegiance to an overlord whose name they no longer remember. And they say that in those times when all was night in the land there came forth from a lake in the district called Collasuyu, a lord named Con Ticci Viracocha, bringing with him a certain number of people, though they don't remember how many. And after emerging from the lake he went to a place nearby, where is now the village they call Tiahuanaco in the Collao. And while he was there with his followers they say that he suddenly made the sun and the day and commanded the sun to follow the course that it does follow. Then he made the stars and the moon. They say that this Con Ticci Viracocha had emerged on an earlier occasion and that on this first appearance he made the heaven and the earth and left everything*

dark. It was then that he created this race of men who lived during the times of darkness. And this race did something which angered Viracocha, so he came forth the second time as has been said and turned that race and the overlord to stone as a punishment for the anger they had caused him.[10]

Although Con Ticci Viracocha performs a "creation," this is not a repetition of the first creation; rather it is a quickening or a "re-enlivening of creation" marked by the appearance of the sun, moon, and stars in the heavens. We can hear an account similar to the above from Cieza de Leon:

Before the Incas ruled or had even been heard of in these kingdoms these Indians relate a thing more noteworthy than anything else that they say. They assert that they were a long time without seeing the sun and, suffering much hardship from this, they offered prayers and vows to those whom they held for gods, beseeching of them the light they lacked. At this the sun very brilliant rose from the island of Titicaca in the great lake of the Collao, and all rejoiced. After this had happened they say that there suddenly appeared, coming from the south, a white man of large stature and authoritative demeanor. This man had such great power that he changed the hills into valleys and from the valleys made great hills, causing streams to flow from the living stone. When they saw his power they called him Maker of all things created and Prince of all things, Father of the sun. They say that this man traveled along the highland route to the north, working marvels as he went and that they never saw him again. They say that in many places he gave men instructions how they should live, be good and to do no damage or injury one to another, but to love one another and show charity to all. In most places they name him Ticci Viracocha, but in the province of Collao he is called Tuapaca or in some parts of it Arunaua. In many places they built temples to him and in them they set up statues in his likeness and offered sacrifices before them. The huge statues in the village of Tiahuanaco are held to be from those times….

They have it from their forebears that wherever he passed he healed all that were sick and restored sight to the blind by words alone....[11]

The native chronicler Juan de Santa Cruz Pachacuti confirms the two previous accounts. He too talks about a bearded man with long hair, dressed

with a long cloak. The ability to make springs burst from the ground is related in the legend of the Waters of Cacha, told by H. T. Hansen. Cacha is a city situated between Cuzco and Titicaca. There, during a drought, the prophet appeared to his people and set forth a spring thrusting his staff into the lava. The spring is known as the Fountain of Viracocha.[12]

A final point of interest comes from Calancha's *Cronica moralizada del orden de San Agustin en el Peru*. Here, apart from the previous recurring themes, we are also told that the hero, called Thunupa, came to fight against drunkenness, war and polygamy. He in fact opposed the black magician Makuri.[13] Juan de Santa Cruz Pachacuti mentions that, before their banishment by Viracocha, the idols that were worshipped required human sacrifice by their followers.[14] Mention of the fact that the prophet overcame the tradition of human sacrifice is made in legends from the city of Cacha, and from the coastal city of Pachacamac.[15]

The old Inca empire was not the only one to preserve the lore of the knowledge of the prophet. L. T. Hansen found memory of this being among the Amazon tribe of the Waikanoes. They call themselves with the name of the being, Waikano, whom they say was bearded, taught them the use of plants, and left them the ceremonies that they continued to practice.[16] Even more indicative are the legends of the Amuesha—an Amazonian tribe of Central Peru—who were in contact with the conquistadors from the very early stages of the conquest. It is among them that we find preserved a myth that gathers many of the motifs found in the central part of the Popol Vuh, one that is related to the deeds of the prophet. The Amuesha myth is of added interest because they belong to a completely different cultural group than the Inca. The myth is given in full in Appendix 1; here we will mention the main themes. The story is called "Yompor Ror and Yachor Arror," or "The Origin of the Sun and the Moon."[17] It is set at a time when "the world almost came to an end." Physical reproduction was threatened because the people had forgotten the will of the creator. A priest decided to raise a boy and a girl according to ritual procedure. Upon turning adult, the woman found two beautiful flowers, picked them up and became pregnant. The priest realized that this had been the work of the Grandfather Yos, the supreme deity. Soon after the woman was killed by Patonell, the mother of jaguars. Before dying she managed to give birth to Twins, a boy and a girl. The armored catfish, Meshet, suckled the babies. The priest asked Sha'rep, the lizard, to fetch the Twins, and the lizard did this successfully. Nevertheless they would not grow, and one day they were entrusted to Patonell's care. The text specifies at this point that "they looked like children but were already adults." One day Patonell was going to cook them because

she had no other meat. The Twins managed to deceive her and give her the beer that had been prepared for them by their "sister bee." In turn they slew the mother jaguar and buried some parts of her body in different places. The rest they cooked. When the other jaguars returned the Twins tricked them into eating the body of Patonell that they had cooked. The jaguars realized the deceit and went after the Twins. Finally, the Twins fled across a river through a bridge they had formed with their slings, and twisted its ropes when the jaguars ran across it. This spelled the end of the jaguars, which fell into the boiling waters of the lake. The Twins finally became adults, although in reality they had only pretended not to be able to grow. Afterwards the two ascended to the heavens, where the girl became the moon and the boy the sun.

What is interesting about the above myth is the mention of a period of uncertainty and danger preceding the appearance of the Twins. The women were threatened with biological sterility. The ascension of the Twins marks the beginning of a new epoch of culture. The theme of the legend is also mirrored in a Carib myth of Guiana, and in a Chiriguano myth. A similar, shorter, Amazonian myth mentions a wondrous child instead of the Twins.[18] Alfred Metraux has compiled all the Twin myths of South America. The Twin theme, he says, occurs from Panama to the southernmost tip of the continent (e. g. myths of the Ona, Yaghan, Alakaluf) and from Brazil to Peru.[19] These myths can be broadly distinguished in two categories. In one of these the Twins are antithetical entities, a sort of brother-enemies. In others they play complementary roles. Only the second ones concern us here. Various elements often reappear as a common theme. The Twins' apotheosis is their transformation into sun and moon. Additionally they are culture heroes to which the tribes owe the most important step of their cultural development. The myths just mentioned give us a foretaste of the text of the Popol Vuh, and the imagery there contained. Since the Popol Vuh is a much more elaborate myth, we will explore the above imagery through the Mayan text in the following chapters.

Mesoamerica: One or Two? The Prophet and the Twins

It would not be possible to do justice to the wealth of material from Mesoamerican sources. We will enter into the analysis of the deepest Mayan esoteric document, the Popol Vuh. Other such documents exist, for example the Chilam Balam or "Book of Prophecies." In this part we will deal with the most "exoteric" material, Mexican and Guatemalan legends pointing to an individual who lived in Mesoamerica. Although Steiner never mentioned the

exact site of the Mexican Mysteries initiated by Vitzliputzli, he did point towards this area of the Americas. It should come as no surprise that we find here the most abundant material about this initiate.

We will give an example of a retelling of a legend, where the prophet appears as a healer. The powers of prophecy and healing stand here in an interesting, mutual relationship. I have taken the liberty to weave together three very similar legends. Most of the plot belongs to the *Legend of the Pass of the Popocatepetl*. The general content of the legend has been preserved and amplified with two other legends that propose the same themes: the *Prophecy at Cholula* and the *Legend of the Lightning Tree*.[(20)]

At that time the visions increasingly came to haunt the Prophet Kate-Zahl. He had seen far into the future into a time when human sacrifice would resurface and the people would forget his teachings; everything he had lived and fought for would be of no use.

Weary and heart-rended the Prophet sought loneliness to commune with the Great Spirit on the top of the volcano Popocatepetl. There, he sought strength to renew his teachings or ask God to take him to His bosom. On the ascent Kate-Zahl noticed that the jesters were following him at a distance. These were the dwarves and hunchbacks whom he had healed. They were united to him by a deep bond of love. Vainly did he try to dissuade them from attempting the perilous journey.

Now the heavens rumbled and the lightning struck; soon the mountain was wrapped in a snow blizzard. After a time Kate-Zahl turned to the jesters that were following him. Retracing his steps, he found them huddled together, frozen and lifeless. He tried to bring them warmth but realized he had lost the gift of healing.

On the pass of the Popocatepetl, the lightning struck again, the thunder roared. Looking down on the valley, Kate-Zahl beheld a vision of the destruction of Tula. Now he felt that he had lost the favor of the Almighty and renewed his prayer to be taken up to Him. His life felt useless and useless his teachings; he doubted there would be any real future in store for the earth.

The lightning struck again and the mountain shook. Only now it was as if heaven and earth were swept away. A golden sun shone over a new earth and a new heaven, and down in the valley he beheld Tula, the city of his love, but now a far more resplendent Tula than the one he knew. Restored were all its former glories. New temples of unsurpassed beauty rivaled with each other. Everywhere were

gardens, sculptures of precious stones and frescoes. He admired the inscriptions telling of times of old. Now he noticed that everybody could read them. Humanity had outgrown its infancy of war and destruction and entered a Golden Age of Learning.

Returning down to the valley, Kate-Zahl told his people of the visions. When they brought him the sick and deformed, the Prophet realized he had recovered the gift of healing. But even more marvelous to behold was his countenance. His lineaments and white hair showed him as much older. A new wisdom lit up in his deep peaceful eyes.

In Central America as in Peru legends re-propose the theme of the initiate who helped overcome human sacrifice. An example is the *Legend of The Priests of Ek Balaam*, the priesthood of the tiger. This legend shows in essence how the presence of the initiate was more than the sacrificing priesthood could bear. They were overwhelmed by his power.**(21)**

Quite different from any of the previous legends is the *Legend of the Woman*, preserved in Yucatan. In Yucatan reigned a lovely, cruel and heartless queen, with skin the color of old ivory and hair as blue as the wings of the raven. Knowing that the prophet could not be hurt or poisoned, she decided to entrap him in a dungeon. On the evening of his arrival the volcano started to belch dark smoke from its summit. At the queen's signal the prophet fell into the dungeon. Then the mountain exploded and the palace crumbled. In the palace, only the queen and a guard survived. After escaping from captivity the prophet healed the people who had been wounded and burned.**(22)**

Most, if not all, of the elements that have been introduced above reappear in the esoteric content of the Popol Vuh. A few additional elements appear in other sources, particularly the Chilam Balam or Book of Prophecies.