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The Ethnic History of the Toltecs as Reflected in their Clothing*

Guiado por el interés en señalar la importancia que el análisis de las vestimentas tiene para la reconstrucción cultural, este artículo considera la historia étnica de los toltecas a través de un examen de sus prendas de vestir. Para este propósito se ha establecido la hipótesis que la historia y las relaciones sociales de un pueblo pueden ser reconstruidas gracias a determinadas características en sus vestimentas. La investigación se ha centrado en el *xicolli*. Resulta que este traje típico experimentó una cierta transformación desde el clásico y postclásico temprano yucateco, donde constituía una prenda de guerra, hasta su uso como traje ritual y distintivo de la clase alta en el postclásico tardío de la región central de México. Este cambio parece haberse originado en la región huasteca, concretamente en el área desde el cual los nonoalcas, representantes de la antigua tradición teotihuacana, emprendieron la migración hacia Tollan. La ausencia del traje característico de los nonoalcas en los testimonios arqueológicos toltecas, permite suponer que una fracción militar tolteca subyugó el segmento intelectual-religioso de Tollan.

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For scholars involved in the reconstruction and interpretation of Mesoamerican social and cultural systems, depictions of Prehispanic clothing provide a rich repository of valuable and revealing ethnographic data. The development of a system of costume analysis to utilize such information has been the thrust of my research for a number of years. As a result of developing a typology based on garment construction, I have been able to organize the clothing data from the Mesoamerican pictorial codices so as to demonstrate what was being worn in Middle America at the time of the Spanish conquest (Anawalt 1975; 1981).

Having reconstructed this Late Postclassic pan-Mesoamerican costume repertory, a base has been established from which to investigate the earlier diffusion of certain distinctive Prehispanic garment types. It can be demonstrated that evidence for historical contacts between diverse ethnic groups often exists in their costume repertoires. This is particularly true in the case of special-purpose ritual garments. These esoteric costumes often contain clues as to their probable place of origin and the rationale underlying their adoption by other peoples.

Demonstration of the possibilities for historical reconstruction inherent in certain Prehispanic garment depictions is the primary purpose of this paper. To that end, the ethnic history of the Toltecs will be reconstructed on the basis of an examination of depictions of their clothing. For the sake of brevity, the focus will be on one specific costume, a male garment known in Nahuatl as the *xicolli*.

Analysis of the *xicolli* must begin with what is known about the garment at the period of Spanish contact, and then proceed backward in time. Fortunately, an actual *xicolli* was in the collection of the Museum für Völkerkunde in Berlin until 1945, when it was destroyed by fire. From a study of the Museum catalog card (Figure 1), it can be determined that it was a sleeveless jacket with a distinctive fringed area at its hem. A short version of this garment is found on the Aztec Churubusco idol in the Museo Nacional de Antropología in Mexico City (Figure 2). An examination of this sculpture reveals that a sleeved effect was created when the garment draped off the shoulder, creating a fold in front and back of the shoulder joint. This sleevelike effect is very evident in all of the depictions of the *xicolli* found in the codices.

Among the Aztecs, the *xicolli* was a special-purpose garment worn only by gods, god impersonators, sacrificial slaves, certain administrators, and the priests (Anawalt 1974). Since priests in particular wore the costume, it is often found in association with specific accouterments connected with their office: incense bags, incense burners, and tobacco pouches (Figure 3). Priests also wore the *xicolli* when they performed sacrifices, as did some sacrificial slaves, who were dressed as the particular gods to

whom they were being offered. Among the Aztecs, the jacket was also worn by certain administrators: emissaries on official missions and the emperor's executioners, the *achcacauhtin*.

In the Late Postclassic the *xicolli* appears to have had pan-Mesoamerican distribution. Whereas it was a special-purpose garment among the Aztecs, to the Mixtec of Oaxaca it was the principal item of apparel for the aristocratic males who appear in Mixtec codices (Anawalt 1980). As Barbro Dahlgren (1954: 110) makes clear, the Mixtec *xicolli* was indeed the same sleeveless, fringed garment worn by the Aztecs. Among the Mixtec, however, predominantly red *xicolli* were worn by the nobles (Figure 4); the priests are often found depicted in white-with-black-design *xicolli* (Figure 5). The Mixtec also utilized these costumes as offerings.

Although the Maya codices contain no depictions of personages wearing *xicolli*, the Yucatec "Relaciones Geográficas" mention them being worn in the area in the 1570s (Asensio 1898 – 1900, I: 81, 245; II: 29, 154). Also, "Codex Madrid" (1967: 84) shows *xicolli* being presented as offerings. In the Michoacan area, the Tarascan men wore a short, wide tunic which Sahagún (1950–69, Book 10: 189) calls a "*cicuilli*, the so-called sleeveless jacket".

Returning to the Valley of Mexico, the *xicolli* appears to have had considerable time depth on the Mesa Central. One of the wall murals from Teotihuacan shows a figure carrying an incense bag and making an offering of incense. This personage wears a garment with a scalloped or fringed hem which Selser (1960, V: 415) refers to as a *xicolli*.

Since this distinctive costume appears in the costume repertoires of both the Central Mexican Aztecs and the Teotihuacanos, it can be anticipated that the intervening people, the Toltecs, would also have worn it; indeed, two of the early chroniclers make reference to a Toltec *xicolli*. Fray Diego Durán (1967, I: 78 – 79), one of the foremost Spanish missionary-ethnographers, when discussing the Toltecs, mentions the *xicolli* as worn by the disciples of Topiltzin Quetzalcóatl at the time of his exodus from Tula. Four of these disciples are depicted in Durán's *Atlas* (1967: Plate 2) wearing tunic-like garments reaching to the ankle, costumes which Durán defines as *xicolli*.

The colonial Indian historian, Alva Ixtlilxóchitl (1965: 41), also mentions the *xicolli* in relation to the Toltecs. When commenting on the lives of Toltec rulers, he speaks of the kings using "great shirt-like *xicole* which reach to the knees and are the same type [of material?] as their capes and loincloths".

The Spanish friar Torquemada was also aware of the *xicolli*. He writes of it being worn in Tlaxcala and describes the garment as a cloak or gown which was open in front (1975, II: 290). The friar, in discussing

the early Toltecs, makes a further interesting observation involving costume. He speaks of the early migrations of a group of people who subsequently became one component in the multiethnic composition of Tollan (Tula), Hidalgo. Torquemada (1975, I: 254 – 255) states that this group wore long tunics that resembled a priest's cassock, opened in the front, with wide sleeves that did not reach the elbow. This description of the tunic precisely fits Durán's depiction of the Toltec *xicolli*. In light of Mesoamerican costume patterns, the *xicolli* must be the garment in question.

Nigel Davies (1977), in his recent book "The Toltecs", points out that Ixtlilxóchitl and Torquemada, when mentioning these *xicolli*, could not have been referring to the clothing of the Tolteca-Chichimeca, since they emerged from the northern deserts as a semi-barbarous people who are frequently depicted wearing animal skins. Davies (1977: 148) thinks the passage on early Tollan in Torquemada's description clearly refers to the more sophisticated Nonoalcas, westward-moving migrants from Panuco on the Gulf Coast. Since elaborate tunics are hardly typical of the inhabitants of the wilder northern and western zones of marginal Mesoamerica, such clothing must have been worn by peoples coming from the east and enjoying a more complex level of civilization. Davies' speculation will be investigated through an examination of the Toltec costume repertory.

TOLTEC COSTUME DATA

The extant contemporary data on Toltec costume come from the site of Tula, Hidalgo, and Toltec period monuments of Chichén Itzá in the Yucatan. Toltec clothing depictions are found on stone sculptures, bas relief wall panels, painted murals and scenes found on portable objects. This latter category includes the metal disks found in the Sacred Cenote of Sacrifice at Chichén Itzá. In the case of the Yucatec figural images, it is not always easy to distinguish between Toltecs and Mayas. In making such distinctions, I have followed Tozzer (1957: 148 – 184) and Lothrop (1952: 31, 35, 37 – 44).

Since the *xicolli* essentially covered only the trunk of the body, no ornamentation for the head or limbs will be considered. As a result, the Toltec costume charts (Tables 1, 2) are confined to items that clothed only the torso. The body coverings of male Toltecs fall into eight categories: belts, loincloth, hipcloth, aprons, *quechquemitl*, feathered capes, skirts, and tunic/armor.

Belt: Almost all male Toltecs are depicted wearing some type of belt. Sometimes it is just a simple band that encircles the waist one or more times (Table 1, examples a, c) or a long, tasseled cord that wraps around several times (example b). Toltec males are occasionally depicted wearing a back mirror or shield tied at the waist by two ribbons which produces a belt-like effect (example d). These depictions are all from Chichén Itzá: examples a and c from metal disks recovered from the Cenote of Sacrifice, b and d from wall panels.

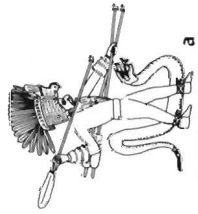
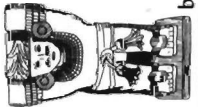

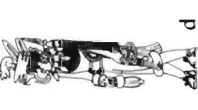
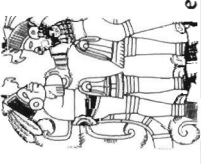
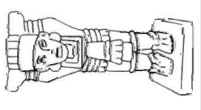

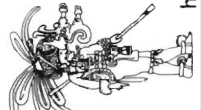
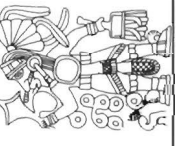

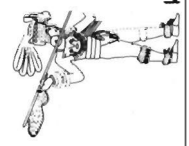
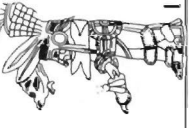
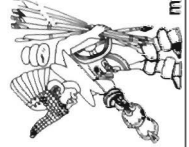

Loincloth: In the Toltec costume repertory the loincloth does not appear as frequently as in the Aztec (Anawalt 1975; 1981). It was, however, a definite part of the Toltec costume repertory as is evident in Table 1, with depictions from a vase at Tula (example e), an atlantean figure from Tula (example f), and wall panels at Chichén Itzá (examples g and h).

Hipcloth: This garment appears repeatedly in the Late Postclassic pan-Mesoamerican costume repertory. Judging from modern ethnographical analogues, it was a square piece of material folded on the bias into a triangle and tied at the waist so that the point fell over one hip or at the back. It was occasionally worn in the latter manner by the Toltecs, as can be seen on example i, a depiction found on a bas-relief from Tula. Far more often, however, the point of the hipcloth was worn at the front, giving the effect of a short triangular apron.

Apron: The apron is perhaps the most distinctive Toltec body garment. It seems most probable, however, that it was indeed an early Postclassic variant of the later hipcloth (Guzmán 1959: 968). Example j is an atlantean figure found in Tlaxcala; examples k – m are from Chichén Itzá; example n is an atlantean column from Tula.

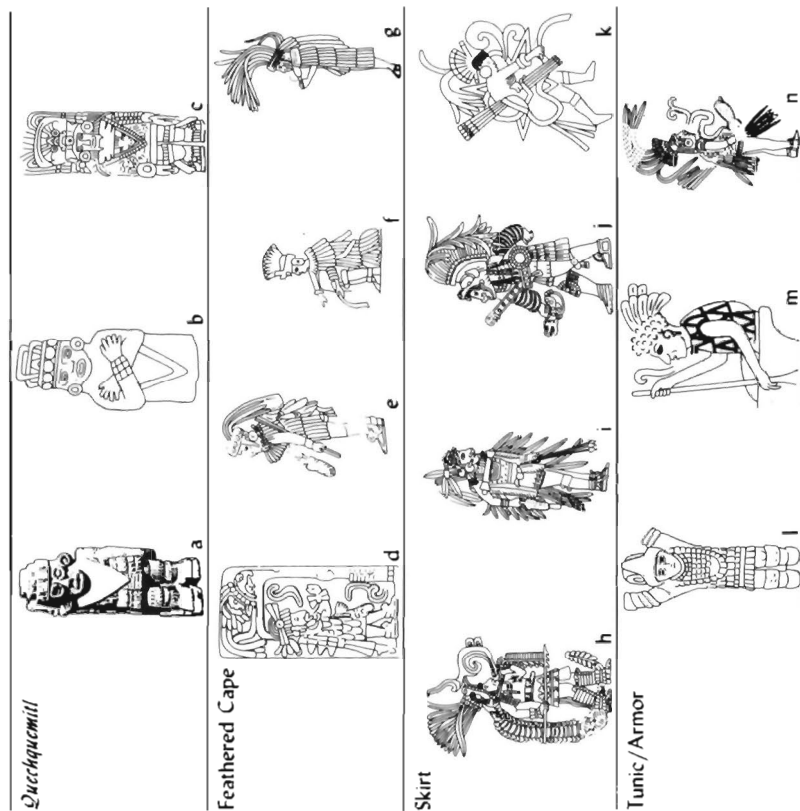
Quechquemilt: The first category of Table 2 is the *quechquemilt*, a distinctive garment which the Aztecs used only for goddesses and their human impersonators. As a result, it is surprising to find this female costume of the Late Postclassic on Early Postclassic male figures. However, such androgynous implications are not without precedence in Late Postclassic Mesoamerican iconography. Three of the Borgia Group codices (“Fejérváry-Mayer”, “Laud”, and “Vaticanus B”) contain female figures who wear both *quechquemilt* and the quintessential male garment, the loincloth. Also the “Tovar Calendar” (Plate VII) contains a depiction of a male celebrant at the festival Hueytecuilhuitl who wears what appears to be a *quechquemilt*, although this may have been a mistake on the part of the colonial artist (Anawalt: 1982). On Table 2 the *quechquemilt* examples all come from Tula: example a, a Tlaloc statue found in the ball court; example b, a stone idol; example c, stela 1 at Tula.

Table 1 : Toltec costume repertory. Examples of male torso garments

Belt				
Loincloth				
Hipcloth				
Apron				
				

- a Chichén Itzá, Disk D, Cenote of Sacrifice (Lothrop 1952: fig. 32).
- b Chichén Itzá, Structure 2D1. Upper Temple of the Jaguars (Tozzer 1957: fig. 65a).
- c Chichén Itzá, Disk B, Cenote of Sacrifice (Lothrop 1952: fig. 30).
- d Chichén Itzá, Structure 2D1. Upper Temple of the Jaguars (Tozzer 1957: fig. 526).
- e Tula vase (Tozzer 1957: fig. 505).
- f Tula atlantean figure (Tozzer 1957: fig. 67).
- g Chichén Itzá, Structure 4C1 (Monjas), Toltec Annex (Tozzer 1957: fig. 138).
- h Chichén Itzá, Structure 2D1, Lower Temple of the Jaguars (Tozzer 1957: fig. 541).
- i Tula, stone bas-relief (Tozzer 1957: fig. 608).
- j Tlaxcala, atlantean figure (Tozzer 1957: fig. 68).
- k Chichén Itzá, Disk E, Cenote of Sacrifice (Lothrop 1952: fig. 33).
- l Chichén Itzá, Structure 2D1. Lower Temple of the Jaguars (Tozzer 1957: fig. 185).
- m Chichén Itzá, Structure 2D1. Lower Temple of the Jaguars (Tozzer 1957: fig. 534).
- n Tula atlantean column (Guzmán 1959: fig. XIV).

Table 2: Toltec costume repertory. Examples of male torso garments



- a Tula, Tlaloc statue found in a ball court (Tozzer 1957: fig. 223).
 b Tula, stone idol (Tozzer 1957: fig. 187).
 c Tula, stela 1 (Tozzer 1957: fig. 552).
 d Tula, sculpture (Tozzer 1957: fig. 593).
 e Chichén Itzá, Disk F, Cenote of Sacrifice (Lothrop 1952: fig. 34).
 f Chichén Itzá, Structure 2D1, Upper Temple of the Jaguars (Tozzer 1957: fig. 396).
 g Chichén Itzá, Disk H, Cenote of Sacrifice (Lothrop 1952: fig. 1).
 h Chichén Itzá, Structure 2D1, Lower Temple of the Jaguars (Tozzer 1957: fig. 194).
 i Chichén Itzá, Disk C, Cenote of Sacrifice (Lothrop 1952: fig. 31).
 j Chichén Itzá, Structure 2D1, Great Ball Court (Tozzer 1957: fig. 474).
 k Chichén Itzá, Structure 2D1, Upper Temple of the Jaguars (Tozzer 1957: fig. 286).
 l Tula, atlantean figure (Tozzer 1957: fig. 67b).
 m Chichén Itzá, Disk G, Cenote of Sacrifice (Lothrop 1952: fig. 35).
 n Chichén Itzá, Disk E, Cenote of Sacrifice (Lothrop 1952: fig. 33).

Feathered cape: A cloak of overlapping feathers was obviously a part of the Toltec costume repertory. It appears to have been a single rectangle of material with feathers attached. Example d comes from Tula; e – g are from Chichén Itzá.

Skirt: What appear to be short skirts or kilts cover the hips of males engaged in activities such as ball games and warfare. Examples h – k are from Chichén Itzá.

Tunic/armor: In all of the extant costume data, I have been able to find only three examples of garments that might possibly be considered *xicolli*. However, none of these has the *xicolli* front opening and each appears to be some form of battle dress. The first is an atlantean figure from Tula who wears what looks like a quilted tunic very similar to the *ichcahuipilli*, the quilted cotton armor of the Aztec period. Note that the garment on the atlantean figure is not open in the front.

The second example, from a scene on one of the metal disks from the Sacred Cenote at Chichén Itzá, is a warrior rowing a boat in a battle scene. He, too, appears to be wearing quilted armor. The final example is also from a battle scene on a cenote disk. He wears what appears to be a feathered tunic with a feather trim at the hem. A very similar martial garment, the *ehuatl*, was part of both the Tlaxcalan and Aztec costume repertories. The *ehuatl* was a tunic-type garment and did not open in the front.

This constitutes the range of Toltec body garments but the anticipated *xicolli* is missing. According to modern acculturation theory, clothing is often very sensitive to ethnic assimilation. Retention of a people's distinctive costumes usually depends upon whether that group is in a subordinate or dominant position in the acculturative process. In the case of the sophisticated Nonoalcas, however, their reputed superior intellectual position in Toltec society should logically have preserved their unique dress. What explanations can be offered for this inconsistency?

The lack of the reported *xicolli* in the Toltec archaeological record could perhaps be dismissed as a data problem: through a fluke of fate no evidence of the garment survived. However, this explanation is difficult to accept because, at the time of Toltec occupation in northern Yucatan, the *xicolli* was being worn, although apparently not by Toltecs. Evidence for this anomaly occurs at two sites. At Chichén Itzá, on one of the disks from the Sacred Cenote, the *xicolli* is worn by a Maya captive who is being interrogated by a Toltec warrior (Figure 6). The captive wears one of the principal diagnostics used by Tozzer (1957: 153 f.) and Lothrop (1952: 39) to identify the Early Postclassic Maya: a long bead inserted through the septum of the nose. In contrast, the Toltecs often wear one or more button-like beads attached to the side of the nostril.

The second occurrence of the *xicolli* in Yucatan appears on a wall panel at the site of Kabah (Figure 7). Again, it is worn by warriors who have a long bead inserted through the septum of the nose. The appearance of the *xicolli* at these two Yucatec sites furnishes evidence of the garment being worn in a Toltec-occupied area and time period. As a result, the explanation for the apparent absence of the jacket in the Toltec costume repertory as a lack of data is greatly weakened. An alternative explanation must therefore be sought. In so doing, it is instructive to consider the contrast between the use of the *xicolli* in Central Mexico just before Spanish contact and its prior use in Yucatan in the Early Postclassic period.

The Aztecs wore the *xicolli* only as a special-purpose garment for religious or other important ceremonial events; it never appears in Aztec martial contexts (Anawalt 1974; 1981). This is also true of the Mixtec, for whom the jacket was the standard dress of the noble class but was never worn as military costume (Anawalt 1980). However, among the twelfth century Maya of Yucatan, the *xicolli* appears on warriors engaged in active battle. This association of the jacket with martial activity is long standing. It dates back to the Classic period where *xicolli* are worn by certain Jaina figures who carry rectangular shields (e. g. Houston 1966: 153).

From this brief review, it is obvious that the contexts in which the *xicolli* is found changed dramatically between Early Postclassic Yucatan and Late Postclassic Central Mexico. What happened, and where? There is evidence that this transformation may have been generated in precisely the area from which one component of the future multi-ethnic Toltec society reputedly came.

According to Torquemada (1975, I: 254), the *xicolli*-wearing peoples who migrated to Tollan came from the Panuco area of the Gulf Coast, heartland of the Huastec Indians. Since the chronicler, when speaking of the early migrations to Tollan, makes particular mention of the westward moving group's unique costume, the inference is that these people were wearing a distinctive garment that was typical of their Panuco homeland. Although archaeological data from the Huasteca are sparse, evidence does exist that the *xicolli* was indeed worn at the Early Postclassic Huastec center of Tamuín (Figure 8). Also, the elaborate red frescos of this site, like most of the art in the area, exhibit strong Toltec influence.

Davies (1977: 148 f.) contends that the westward migrating group mentioned by Torquemada were the Nonoalcas, latter-day bearers of the intellectual and religious tradition of Teotihuacan. With this in mind, it is of particular interest that Du Solier (Marquina 1951: 415) considers the frescos at Tamuín to represent a religious procession involving a multi-

tude of attributes connected with Quetzalcóatl in his different personifications. The Nonoalcas are suggested by Davies (1977: 122, 170, 177) to have introduced the Quetzalcóatl cult at Tula.

Suggesting that the elite Nonoalcas may have contributed to the transformation of the *xicolli*'s symbolism from martial to religious answers one set of questions but raises another. If the distinctive *xicolli* was indeed the Nonoalcas' prestigious costume, why does it not appear somewhere in the Toltec remains of Central Mexico? The answer to this question may lie in the militaristic nature of Toltec society.

The clothing information represented in the archaeological record emphasizes, not the intellectual or religious side of Toltec life, but rather its strongly martial focus. It can be assumed that a militaristic state would have possessed a nobility dedicated mainly to war, and that hence this emphasis would be reflected in the archaeological remains of the society. However, considering the nature of Mesoamerican culture, one would also expect the role of the Toltec intellectual and religious elite, the priesthood, to be represented. Perhaps the oft-told tales of a schism between the military and religious factions of Tollan are not so apocryphal. If the intellectual elite were indeed overrun, then their unique garment should not be expected to necessarily appear in the archaeological record.

SUMMARY

In the interest of demonstrating the value of costume analysis to cultural reconstruction, this paper has considered the ethnic history of the Toltecs through an examination of their clothing. To this end, an hypothesis has been posed that the history and social relations of a people can be reconstructed through the appearance of certain distinctive garments in their costume repertory. The investigation has been carried out by focusing on the *xicolli*.

It has been found that this distinctive jacket underwent a transformation from Classic and Early Postclassic Yucatec use in warfare to use as ritual and upper class apparel in Late Postclassic Central Mexico. This change appears to have been generated in the Huastec region, precisely the area from which the Nonoalcas, bearers of the ancient Teotihuacan tradition, migrated to Tollan. The absence of the Nonoalcas' distinctive costume in the archaeological record lends credence to the speculation that a Toltec military faction overpowered the intellectual-religious segment of Tollan.

In conclusion, it is hoped that the speculations emerging from this investigation can serve as a point of reference for future research, as well

as alerting scholars to the multiple values of costume analysis. Certainly one of the most intriguing aspects of Middle American research is the appearance in the present of remnants of the past. This is particularly true in the case of certain Indian garments, the *xicolli* being a case in point. Not only were Nahuatl speakers still wearing a version of the jacket in the Valley of Mexico in the 1930s (Figure 9), but the garment occasionally appears today in certain dances as well. This is of particular interest because Fray Torquemada, who gathered his data in the late 1590s, speaks of certain Indians of his day dancing in the costume of Panuco, "imitating," he states, "those nations [from which they originally came]" (1975, I: 255).

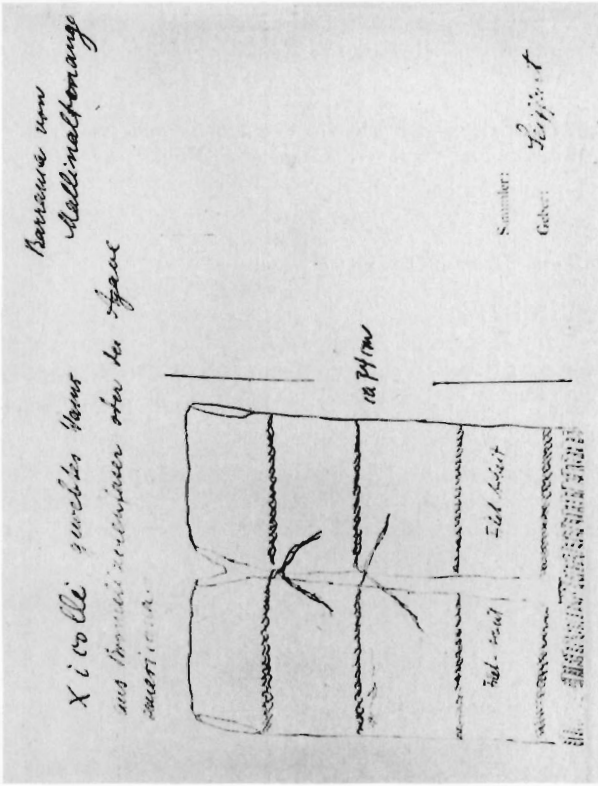
Inasmuch as modern *xicolli* was worn during the dance "Promenade of Negritos" in Los Reyes in the state of Hidalgo (Figure 10), heartland of the ancient Toltecs, Torquemada surely would continue to be impressed with the amazing tenacity of this distinctive garment!

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Fig. 1: Drawing of a *xicolli* that was in the collection of the Museum für Völkerkunde, Berlin, until 1945 when it was destroyed by fire (Museum catalog card, Museum für Völkerkunde, Berlin).
Fig. 2: The Aztec Churubusco idol wearing a *xicolli* (Museo Nacional de Antropología, México).

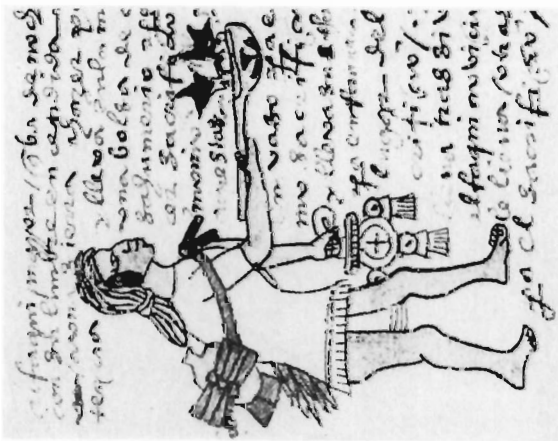


Fig. 3: Aztec priest wearing a xicolli (Codex Mendoza 1938, III: fol. 63 r.).

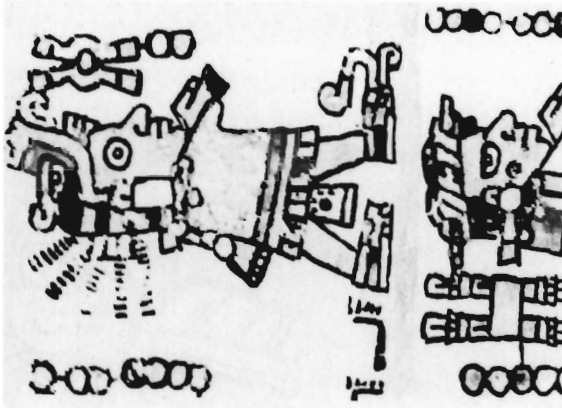


Fig. 4: Mixtec noble wearing a red xicolli (Codex Bodley 1960: 14).

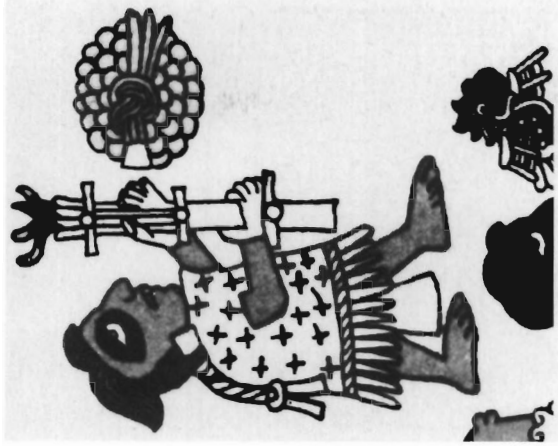


Fig. 5: Mixtec priest wearing a white-with-black-design xicolli (Codex Zouche-Nuttall 1902: 70).

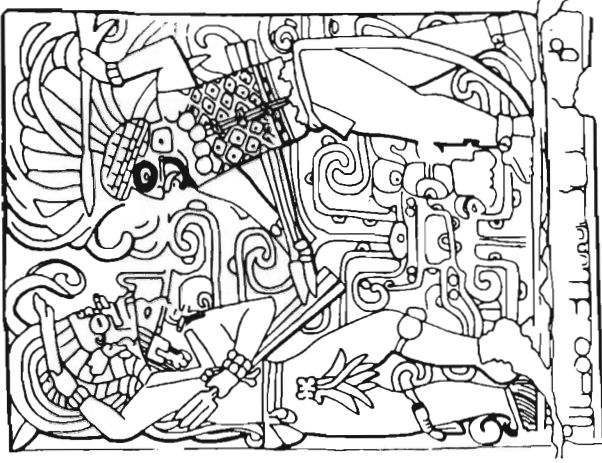
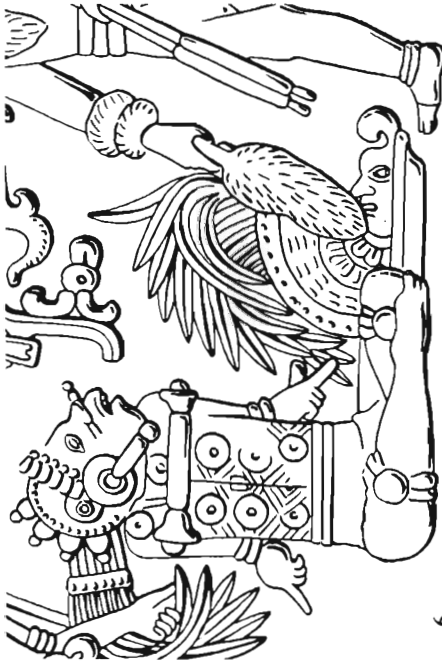


Fig. 6: Maya war captive wearing a *xicolli*. From a metal disk, Sacred Cenote, Chichén Itzá (Lothrop 1952: fig. 30).
 Fig. 7: Maya warrior wearing a *xicolli*. From a door jam, Kabah (Tozzer 1957: fig. 603).
 Fig. 8: *Xicolli*-clad personage in a ceremonial procession. From a fresco at the Huastec site of Tamuin (Marquina 1951: fig. 118).

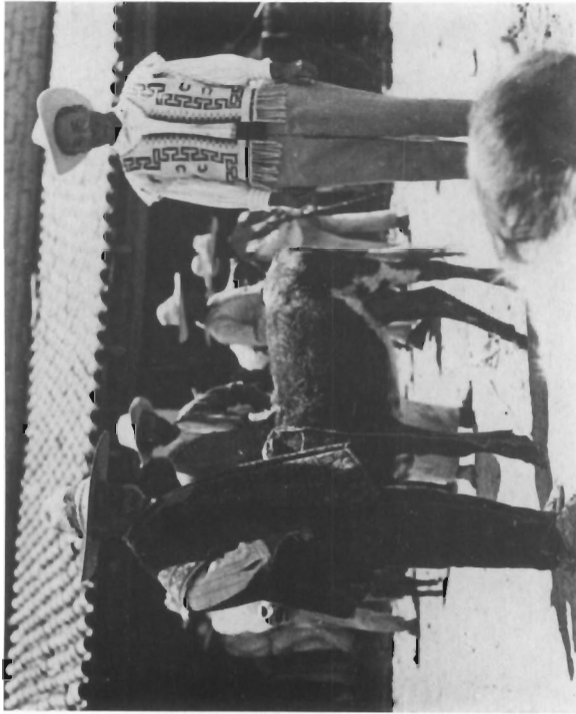


Fig. 9: A twentieth-century *xicolli* (now called *cotorina*) being worn in the animal market of Xochimilco, Mexico, April, 1931 (After I. W. Johnson).



Fig. 10: Modern *xicolli* being worn in the dance, "Promenade of Negritos," in Los Reyes, Hidalgo, Mexico (Carrillo et al. 1971, II: fig. 322).

