Los Tlocololeros: a structuralist interpretation of a Mexican dance drama

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Abstract
This article describes various jaguar or ocelotl masquerades performed in the region around Chilapa, State of Guerrero, Mexico. It argues that the timing of the performances, often to coincide with the feast day of San Marcos or Santa Cruz, suggests that the dances mark the transition from the dry to the wet agricultural season. Furthermore, the two feast days with which they are most commonly associated may form part of a more inclusive ceremonial round dedicated to agricultural activity. Certain similarities are then noted between these performances and pre-Hispanic central Mexican beliefs about the ocelotl and the divinity, Tezcatlipoca. It is suggested that though the present meaning of dance dramas like the Tlocololeros may be quite distinct from any pre-Hispanic version, there nevertheless subsists strong structural parallels between them.

Key words
Tlocololeros, dance-dramas, jaguar, Guerrero, masquerades

Resumo
Este artigo descreve várias mascaradas ocelotl ou jaguar representadas na região em redor Chilapa, Estado de Guerrero, México. Argumenta-se que o tempo das representações, tende a coincidir com o dia de São Marcos ou com o de Santa Cruz, sugere que as danças marcam a transição da estação seca para a estação agrícola húmida. Além disso, os dois dias de festa com os quais tais representações se encontram comumente associadas podem fazer parte de um ciclo de cerimónias mais vasto dedicado a a actividade agrícola. Algumas semelhanças entre estas representações e crenças pré-hispânicas do México central acerca do ocelotl e da divindade Tezcatlipoca são identificadas. Pese embora o
The sun was good. The men of the llano were men of the sun. The men of the farms along the river were men of the moon. But we were all children of the white sun.

Rudolfo Anaya, Bless Me, Ultima (1972)

Dance dramas incorporating the *ocelotl* or jaguar, the Mexican mountain tiger (*Felis glaucula*),¹ are widely distributed throughout the Republic. This paper however, is concerned only with one conjunction of such dramatic representations in the various small settlements within the municipalities of Tixtla and Chilapa located in the folds of the Sierra Madre Sur, south of Chilpancingo, the capital of the state of Guerrero. Within this area, in the villages of Zitlala, Acatlán, and Atliaca, the dance drama known as the *Tlocololeros* is performed as part of the ceremonies dedicated to supplicate the rain between the feast days of San Marcos (25th April) and the Santa Cruz (3rd May); ceremonies which for many of their participants culminate in the pilgrimage to a well nearly 200 metres in diameter and 300 metres in depth, not unlike the *cenotes* found in Yucatan, located at Ostotempa.² Four rain deities, the main recipients of

¹ There is not one but various species of *ocelotl* found in Mexico. *Felis glaucula* refers to the white *ocelotl*, *iztac ocelotl* in Nahuatl. Other species include *Felis hernandesii*, a species in which the colour red predominates, *tlatlauhqui ocelotl*, and *Felis Pardalis*, the smallest member of the family, which the Mexica called *tlacocelotl* (León-Portilla, 1980: 172).

² The well is an important ceremonial centre that attracts pilgrims from many of the communities in the area, particularly between the days of San Marcos and the Santa Cruz. According to Sepulveda (1973: 10-11), about 50 metres down in the well is a tree which,