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Prologue

Scholia to the Stories of the Origin of the Indians (1701–1703)

Francisco Ximénez, O.P. (1666–c. 1729)

Introduction

The *Popol Wuj* tells the story of the K'iche' Maya people from creation to sixteenth-century Spanish contact, including the famous tale of the Hero Twins Junajpu and Ixbalanke'. Based on an unknown K'iche' source, the manuscript copy and Spanish translation made by Dominican missionary friar Francisco Ximénez (1666–c. 1729) remains the only written alphabetic source for the *Popol Wuj*, though the stories it contains are also found in oral tradition and glyphic representations.

The copy, dating from between 1701 and 1703, is contained in a longer manuscript by Ximénez that served as a kind of textbook for his fellow Dominican friars, including catechisms, prayers, and sacramental rites in various Maya languages alongside materials for the study of those languages. This manuscript, alternatively known by its call number at Chicago's Newberry Library (Ayer MS 1515) and by the title of the linguistic study that comprises its first section (*Arte de las tres lenguas kakchiquel, quiché y tzutuhil*), instructs friars on best practices for the evangelization of the Guatemalan highlands. To that end, Ximénez included the stories we now call the *Popol Wuj*, annotating it to highlight similarities and differences between Maya religious beliefs and Christian ones for his fellow friars.

In these annotations, which he referred to as scholia, Ximénez added his own theological interpretations and linguistic notes as glosses on the ancient *Popol Wuj* text. By categorizing this commentary as scholia, he drew on a long tradition of textual commentary, since the practice of compiling scholia in the margins of manuscripts dates to the 1st century BC and is generally associated with classical texts. His scholia to the *Popol Wuj*, and particularly the prologue he appended to them, make clear his editorial agenda in compiling his edition of the text. He refers to the *Popol Wuj* as “children's tales that make no sense,” nevertheless “as true as the truths of the

Gospel are for us Catholics” in the eyes of his Indigenous parishioners (p. 8). This framing complicates the general scholarly narrative surrounding the *Popol Wuj*, which has historically treated the work as a source for “pure” pre-contact Maya mythology. In translating this prologue, I aim to contribute toward the recontextualization of this artifact, acknowledging that Ximénez’s ethnographic work among the K’iche’ is inextricable from his interpretive lens as a friar participating in his order’s evangelization campaign in the Guatemalan highlands (see Quiroa 468).

My translation prioritizes a straightforward reflection of Ximénez’s colonial attitude, theological vocabulary, and wildly variant, nonstandard Spanish syntax. As a result, the translation reflects Ximénez’s meandering sentence structures, many of which are excessively long even for Spanish, while others are incomplete fragments:

“*Al mismo método de lo que dijo Apiano.*” | “In the same way as what Apianus said.” (p. 6)

“*Sin saber lo que se había aprendido.*” | “Without knowing what he had learned.” (p. 18)

While these structures compromise the text’s readability, they are characteristics of colonial-era writing, both the linguistic fluidity of the period and the informality that attends manuscripts with a limited audience. It is important to ensure Ximénez comes off as the colonial friar he is, especially since the purpose of this translation is to improve English-language scholarship of the *Popol Wuj*. The translation functions to introduce the conventions (or lack thereof) of colonial Spanish manuscripts for those who are unfamiliar with the genre. Moreover, this choice somewhat constitutes an inverse of Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s axiom regarding translation, that a translator “must not turn a good poem into a bad one.” She must not turn a rambling, essentializing prologue into a stylish manifesto either.

The translation is occasionally inelegant for the sake of avoiding anachronism and regionalism. For instance, “origin stories” was a tempting possibility for “*las historias del origen*” in the title, but the literal “stories of the origin” avoids the connotation with contemporary superhero narratives. Similarly, a people “most prone to racket” best captures Ximénez’s disdainful characterization of those whom he calls “*inclinadísimos a la bulla*” (p. 13), but “racket” has an unshakable, distracting Americanness to it. Ultimately I opted to maintain a relatively neutral dialect: “a most boisterous people.”

Finally, the text contains a great deal of specialized vocabulary and historical references which have been duly footnoted and explained. If there are further points of clarification you would like to see in this edition, [please contact me by email](#).

Source

I completed a diplomatic transcription of the *Escolios* manuscript in spring 2017 during SPAN 7559: Latin American Digital Humanities with Rafael Alvarado and Allison Bigelow. That transcription served as the source text for this translation. I standardized the transcription below to reflect contemporary Spanish orthography and make explicit my interpretation of the original (e.g. “qué será más” for “queseramas,” p. 18). I also consulted the only other complete transcription of the *Escolios*, the 1857 edition by Karl Scherzer, in correcting my own. However, Scherzer’s is non-diplomatic and contains many interpretative errors, such as his omission of *salin* (p. 16), so I relied mainly on my own work in combination with the original manuscript itself. All of my sources can be found at <https://github.com/caddington11/Ximenez>.

Format

The manuscript consists of four paragraphs spread across three folios (i.e. six sides). The paragraph structure has been retained, with new paragraphs indicated by indents and horizontal border lines. In order to ensure that the Spanish and English columns keep pace, artificial line breaks have been introduced at the end of most pages.

Orthography

While Ximénez’s irregular K’iche’ orthography has been preserved (see p. 12), my own footnotes use the standards set by the [Academia de las Lenguas Mayas de Guatemala](#), in keeping with the practices of the [Multepal Project at the University of Virginia](#).

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Prologue

Scholia to the Stories of the Origin of the Indians (1701–1703)

Francisco Ximénez, O.P. (1666–c. 1729)

Cosa es cierta y averiguada entre todos los que conocen indios que es la gente más irregular en sus cosas que se ha descubierto en toda la redondez de la tierra, y así muchos hombres de buen talento cada día se ven desalinados con sus cosas, pues cuando les parece que ya están al cabo del conocimiento de quienes son los indios, se hallan tan en los principios de su conocimiento y comprensión que todo lo que han adquirido con su estudio y cuidado para mejor poderlos gobernar no les sirve, ya en los casos que de nuevo se ofrecen. Muchos han habido que han querido dar a entender el conocimiento del indio en sus escritos de historias y sumas y otros escritos; pero pienso que les ha sucedido lo que a mí me sucederá en todos mis escritos, que aunque he procurado dar a entender lo que ellos son, al cabo pienso que no habré dicho nada.

It is true and well known to all who are familiar with Indians that they are the most irregular in their customs of all the peoples found on the globe; and as such, every day many men of good intellect find themselves mistaken¹ about their customs, for when they seem to have attained an understanding of who the Indians are, they find themselves at the beginning of their knowledge and understanding, such that everything they have acquired with their study and diligence in order to better govern them does not suffice in the cases that present themselves. There have been many who have sought to contribute to the understanding of the Indian in their histories, *summas*, and other writings; but I think that what has happened to them is what will happen to all my writings, which is that though I have sought to bring to light what they are, at the end I think I will not have said anything at all².

¹ Here Ximénez has written *desalinados* (*desaliñados* = unkempt), which does not fit within the context of the sentence. The translation reflects the possibility that he meant to write *desatinados* (mistaken), but failed to cross the T. He also uses the word *desatinos* (mistakes) to describe K'iche' beliefs elsewhere in the prologue, in the third paragraph.

² This affected modesty recalls St. Thomas Aquinas's characterization of his own work as mere "straw" (*mihi videtur ut palea*).

El Doctor Pedro Apiano, cosmógrafo del Emperador Carlos Quinto, demarcando la isla Española, los quiere dar a conocer al mundo, diciendo que son gente *in dando liberalissimi, in accipiendo cupidissimi, en el dar muy liberales, en el recibir muy codiciosos*, y que consumen todo un día dando vueltas a un palo. Algo dijo en esto, declaro en parte la natural inclinación del indio, que en dar dudo que haya quien sea más liberal en dar, pues quien habrá que no esté todo poseído de Dios, que teniendo sólo un medio real sin esperanza de otro, que esté en extrema necesidad aún del sustento necesario que lo dé con más liberalidad que el indio lo da. Y en sus festejos y funciones se ve que ni teniendo apenas para el sustento los celebra con bastantes gastos, y con tantos como otro que se halle descansado, y con bastante posible los celebra empeñándose y entrampándose para poder hacer éstas sus celebraciones de bautismos y casamientos. Ni hay gente más codiciosa, y desdichada, pues convidándose

Doctor Petrus Apianus³, cosmographer of Emperor Charles V, in demarcating the island of Hispaniola, seeks to make them known to the world, saying that they are a people *in dando liberalissimi, in accipiendo cupidissimi* (generous in giving, avaricious in receiving), and that they spend all day going around a stick in circles. To some extent this manifests the natural inclination of the Indian, who in giving—I doubt that there be anyone more generous in giving, for who will there be who is not entirely possessed by God that, having but half a *real*⁴ with no hope of another, being in a state of extreme necessity, gives away even his own vital nourishment with more generosity than the Indian does? And though he lack for food, he can be seen celebrating festivities and performances with so many expenses [...] and he goes into ever greater debt in order to have these celebrations of baptisms and marriages. Nor is there a more avaricious and wretched people, for when inviting one another to

³ “*In dando liberalissimi, cupidissimique... Alij defunctos cum aqua victuque inhumant: alij vero morte luctantes in bombiceis retiaculis inter duas arbores in sylvam ingentem, apposito victu, suspendunt, & totam diem circa suspensum saltando consumunt*” (Apianus 30).

⁴ While the *real* was the basis of the Spanish monetary system from the 14th to the mid-19th century, Ximénez would have been specifically referring to the *real de plata*, or silver *real*, which served as the currency of the Spanish colonies throughout America and the Philippines during his lifetime.

⁵ In Ximénez’s manuscript, the phrase “y con tantos como otro que se halle descansado, y con bastante posible” is found here. Since the meaning is unclear, it has been omitted from the English translation. If you have a possible solution, [contact the translator here](#).

ellos unos a otros en sus fiestas, y desde un pueblo a otro en sus festividades, se le ha de corresponder con lo mismo número y especie que él dió al otro cuando fue su convidado. Y sólo un plátano menos que se le corresponda es materia de tanto sentimiento que por aquello sólo se acaba la amistad y correspondencia de muchos años. Para esto que dijo Apiano fue un rasgo solo del conocimiento de los indios. Así me parece que el más acertado modo para dar a conocer quienes son los indios y su mayor comprensión, lo que muchos hombres de buen talento han dicho, que para definir los indios con definición adecuada es definiéndolos por contradictorias. Porque es gente que todo es extremos, y todos contrarios, y opuestos. Al mismo método de lo que dijo Apiano. Y prosiguiendo aquello digo que es gente: en el trabajo fortísimos, en no trabajar perezosísimos, en comer voracísimos, en no comer parquísimos. En sus bienes riquísimos, y sumamente pobrísimos. Y así de todas las demás cosas suyas, y todo esto tan general, que lo mismo es uno que otro, el rico y el pobre, él que es

their celebrations, and when one village invites another to its festivities, each host must correspond exactly in number and kind to what he had received as a guest. And should one fail to give just one banana fewer than owed, it is the subject of such passion that for that alone a friendship and relationship of many years can come to an end. It is because of this that what Apianus said is merely one contribution to our understanding of the Indian. So it seems to me that the most correct way of making known who the Indians are and their greater comprehension is what many men of good intellect have said, which is that to define the Indians with an adequate definition is to define them by contradictions. Because they are a people with whom everything is extremes, and opposites, and inverses. In the same way as what Apianus said. And continuing with that I say that they are a people: most strong in working, most lazy in not working, most voracious in eating, most frugal in not eating. Most rich in their goods, and extremely poor. And so on with the rest of their situation, and all this so generally, that one is the same as the other, the rich and the poor, the one who is

cacique o principal como el mazegual. Todos son iguales, y tan anñados unos como otros. Y así dijo bien él que los llamó: niños con barbas. Y a la verdad ellos son como muchachos en todo. Como San Pablo decía de sí de su edad pueril, así estos todo es cosa de muchachos, por lo cual no son sus malicias de tanto peso como lo son las de otros hombres de otras naciones, y aunque algunos digan como dice nuestro Padre Noreña en su carta que alcanzan grandes malicias, de que no hay duda, digo que como Dios Nuestro Señor suplió en los brutos con el instinto natural lo que les faltaba de talento para su conservación, así en estos les suplió de instinto que más se puede llamar así su saber que entendimiento, lo que de éste les faltaba para su conservación, porque de no ya me parece que hubieran acabado con ellos

cacique or leader just like the *mazegual*⁶. They are all the same, each as childish as the other. And so he spoke rightly who called them “children with beards.” And in truth they are like children in everything. As Saint Paul said of himself, of his youth⁷, so are all these childish ways, and as such their malicious acts do not have as much weight as those committed by other men belonging to other peoples, and although some will say, as our Father Noreña⁸ says in his letter, that they commit great evils, of which there is no doubt, I will say that just as Our Lord God made up for what the brute lacked in skill with natural instinct for the sake of his preservation, so with these he has made up for what they have lacked for their preservation with instinct, which can be better called knowledge than understanding, because if not it seems to me that they would all already have been finished off

⁶ In its Taíno-Arawak origins, the term *cacique* designated a chief or leader. It came to be used more broadly in the Spanish language for the leader of any Indigenous community, including the Maya communities Ximénez is writing about here (DLE/RAE). The term *mazegual* (today *macegual* or *macehual*) comes from the Nahuatl term *macehualli*, a term roughly equivalent to “commoner” and originally used for a member of the *mācēhualtīn* social class under the Aztec (Mexico) Empire. In Spanish, it came to mean a peasant, worker, or servant (DLE/RAE). Though neither *cacique* nor *mazegual* are words that Maya communities would use for themselves, Ximénez here is drawing on a Spanish imperial vocabulary that imported and resignified concepts from various Indigenous communities across centuries of contact.

⁷ See 1 Corinthians 13:11: “When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways” (NRSVCE).

⁸ This is a reference to material bound together with the *Popol Wuj* manuscript and the *Escolios* in Ayer MS 1515 at the Newberry Library. Included in the section entitled *Tratado segundo...* is a copy of a letter from Fray Alonso de Noreña dated 25 February 1581, responding to Fray Diego Ferrano, the vicar of Tecutzilan in the Province of México, regarding the sacrament of confession in Indigenous mission territory.

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| <p>todos los que tiran a su destrucción y acabamiento valiéndose de su miseria para tener atrevimiento a lo que no se atrevieran no digo yo a otros superiores suyos pero ni a otros sus iguales. Haciéndose todos con estos miserables sabios, los ignorantes, valientes, los flojos, poderosos, los que nada pueden, tirándole al codillo como agente desvalida. Pues no hay negro esclavo que no se les atreva, y que no los maltrate.</p> | <p>by all these who throw them toward destruction and termination, taking advantage of their wretchedness to dare to do what they would not otherwise; I am saying they would neither be so audacious with their superiors nor with their equals. And so with these wretches⁹, others become sages; their ignorance makes others brave; their laziness makes others powerful; those who are otherwise incapable of anything will try to bring them to ruin¹⁰ like one who is defenseless. For there is no black slave who is not audacious with them, and who does not mistreat them.</p> |
| <p>Yo bien entiendo que todas estas historias son cuentos de muchachos, que ni tienen pies ni cabeza; pero aunque éste es el juicio que nosotros hemos de hacer de ellas por lo que a nosotros toca, no se deben así juzgar respecto de ellos que como proporcionados a sus talentos, son tan verdades éstas para ellos, como para nosotros los católicos las verdades evangélicas. Ni vale ver las contradicciones</p> | <p>I understand well that all these stories¹¹ are children's tales that make no sense; but although that is the judgment that we must make of them from our position, they should not be so judged with respect to those for whom, in proportion to their own understanding, they are as true as the truths of the Gospel are for us Catholics. Nor is it worth examining the inherent contradictions</p> |

⁹ The word Ximénez uses for the Indigenous here, *miserables* ("wretches"), designated a class of poor and destitute people granted protection under medieval Spanish law. The New Laws of 1542 used this same designation for Indigenous peoples, positioning them as easily exploited subjects who required the Crown's "protection," codified in the office of the *Protección de Indios* ("Protectorate of the Indians") (Kellogg and Ruiz Medrano 4).

¹⁰ Here, Ximénez uses the colloquial expression *tirar al codillo* (lit. to throw to one's elbow), meaning to try to ruin someone (DLE/RAE).

¹¹ The "stories" to which Ximénez refers here are the K'iche' Maya mythological and historical narratives now known as the *Popol Wuj*, which he copied, translated, and annotated in this manuscript.

que en sí envuelven, que con la cortedad de su talento no reparan en esto. Y aquí se conoce la malicia de la bestia infernal, cómo les sugirió mentiras tan adecuadas a sus talentos para más tenerlos embaucados, y como quiera que no solamente en estas historias se hallen sólo estas mentiras, o quimeras, sino también nuestras verdades católicas, y que tiene y cree nuestra Santa Fe católica, reveladas por el Espíritu Santo en la sagrada escritura, de ahí es que no se debe hacer tampoco caso de estas historias respecto de la mucha tierra que el demonio gana entre esta gente; con estos errores que entre ellos tiene sembrados, desde el tiempo de la gentilidad. Yo considero esta mala semilla y cizaña que el demonio ha sembrado entre ellos a la grama, en las viñas, esta yerba como todos saben es la destrucción de las vides, y no obstante sabiendo esto los viñadores, conténtanse con arrancar la que ven, y no advierten que va cundiendo en lo oculto, y cuando menos se piensan hallan perdida su viña, y sin remedio, porque aunque han visto algunos

surrounding them, for with such a dearth of understanding they do not notice this. And here the evil of the infernal beast is made known, how he insinuated lies so tailored to their disposition as to have them even more fooled, and how he wants them not just to find these lies or illusions in these stories but also our Catholic truths revealed by the Holy Spirit in sacred scripture, and how he has and believes our Holy Catholic Faith. It is because of this that these stories should not be paid any attention with respect to the great deal of ground the devil has gained among these people; with these errors that he has sown among them from the time of paganism. I consider these weeds¹² that the devil has sown among them to be as grass in vineyards¹³, that growth which everyone knows is the destruction of vines, and despite knowing this the vineyard owners content themselves with uprooting what they see, not noticing that it continues spreading unseen, and when they least expect it they find they have lost their vineyard; and it is not to be helped, for although they have seen some

¹² Ximénez uses the terms *mala semilla* (“bad seed”) and *cizaña* (“weed” or “tares”), both of which are used in translations of the Parable of the Weeds among Wheat related in Matthew 13:24-30, in which Christ speaks of a man’s enemy sowing weeds in his field of wheat. The idiom *sembrar cizaña* (lit. “to sow weeds”), meaning to stir up trouble, derives from this parable.

¹³ See John 15:1–8, which uses the image of a vine for the Church.

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| <p>retoños que asoman les parece cosa tenue, y que no hará daño, no ocurriendo con tiempo al daño, después se hace irremediable. Así mismo entiendo sucede con estos indios, y sus errores con esta mala semilla y cizaña que el demonio dejó sembrados entre ellos de estas historias de su origen. Que oyendo cada día, y viendo por sus ojos todos los retoños asomar de las supersticiones que tienen, los más lo toman a casa de cuentos y risa. Sin reparar en el origen y raíz de adonde proceden, para procurar al remedio con tiempo. Es nuestro Dios muy zelador de su honra y culto, y no permite compañía en sus adoraciones, y así aunque nos parezca cosa de poca monta es cosa de mucho peso en el divino acatamiento.</p> | <p>sprouts come forth, they think them weak, and that they will do no harm, not recognizing the damage in time, and then it becomes irremediable. Just so do I understand it to happen with these Indians and their errors with these weeds that the devil sowed among them in these stories of their origin. Which, upon hearing them every day, and seeing with their own eyes all the sprouts coming forth from their superstitions, most of them make light of the stories. Without noticing the origin and root of where they come from, to seek the remedy in time. Our God is jealous¹⁴ in his honor and worship, and does not permit company in his adorations, and so although it may seem to us a thing of little importance, it has great significance in terms of divine reverence¹⁵.</p> |
| <p>Yo me he llegado a persuadir viendo nuestras verdades católicas envueltas en estos desatinos, lo uno a lo que dice el Nuestro Padre fray Domingo de Vico en el cap. 101 de la segunda parte de su <i>Theologia</i></p> | <p>I have become convinced, seeing our Catholic truths cloaked in these mistakes, first, of what our¹⁶ Fray Domingo de Vico says in chapter 101 of the second part of his <i>Theologia Indorum</i>¹⁷ that these</p> |

¹⁴ “Zelador: a zealous, or a jealous Person” (Stevens 406).

¹⁵ Ximénez uses the term *acatamiento*, which now means submission to authority (DLE/RAE) in a generic sense, but is used here to encompass the obedience rendered specifically to God. A lexicographer contemporary to Ximénez defined *acatamiento* in this sense as “Presence, Aspect, also Reverence, Respect, Honour” (Stevens 6).

¹⁶ Ximénez calls his fellow Dominican priests, including Vico, by the title of “Nuestro Padre” (lit. “our father”) to distinguish them from the priests he cites from outside of the order.

¹⁷ Domingo de Vico’s *Theologia indorum* (1552–1554) is a lengthy theological manuscript written in K’iche’ for the purpose of evangelizing the highland Maya.

Indorum a que estos indios descienden de las diez tribus que se perdieron de los judíos, y que no volvieron a su patria, y así conservaron por tradiciones todos los sucesos que nos refiere el sagrado texto y el demonio se los fue envolviendo en muchísimos errores. Y lo otro, a que de no ser así que descienden de aquellas diez tribus. El demonio como tan sabio, alcanzando por algunas conjeturas la venida del Santo Evangelio a estas partes, les sugería estas mentiras envueltas en muchas verdades católicas de las que nos enseñó el Espíritu Santo en la sagrada escritura, con fin de que oyendo los indios lo que habían de enseñar los ministros del Santo Evangelio de Dios, y sus obras, de la encarnación del Verbo, de María Santísima y los demás santos más se arraigasen en sus errores pensando: que aquello que se les enseñaba era lo mismo en todo que lo que ya ellos sabían del demonio por boca de sus sacerdotes. Y así se [vió?] por el efecto luego, en error que se levantó en este Reino de Guatemala recién conquistado esto, que todos abrazaron luego,

Indians descend from the ten tribes who were lost from among the Jews¹⁸, and who did not return to their homeland; and thus they preserved in their traditions all the events that the sacred text relates to us, and the devil went about tangling them up with many errors. And second, if they do not descend from those ten tribes, the devil, being so clever, bringing about the arrival of the Holy Spirit to this area through some conjectures, insinuated to them these lies wrapped in many Catholic truths which the Holy Spirit taught us in Sacred Scripture, so that when the Indians heard what the ministers of God's word had to teach, and their works, about the incarnation of the Word, Mary Most Holy, and the other saints, they would settle more deeply into their errors, thinking that what was taught to them was the same as what they already were taught by the devil through their own priests. And the effect of this could be observed later, in errors brought about in this recently conquered Kingdom of Guatemala¹⁹, later embraced by all,

¹⁸ Ximénez and Vico endorsed the then-popular theory that the indigenous peoples of the Americas were descendants of the ten "Lost Tribes" of Israel, whose deportation from the Kingdom of Samaria after its conquest by Shalmaneser V of Assyria is chronicled in the biblical Second Book of Kings.

¹⁹ The *Reino* or Kingdom of Guatemala, also called the *Capitanía General* or Captaincy General of Guatemala, was a division of the Viceroyalty of New Spain from 1542–1821.

que Hunahpu era Dios, el que les predicaban. Y Hun-Hunahpu *erat filius Dei*. Y Xuchinquetzali, que es la que en esta lengua llaman Xquic, era Maria Santísima. Y que Vahxaquicat era San Juan Baptista. Y que Huntihax era San Pablo Apóstol se parecía a los disparatos, que ellos ya tenían sabidos de boca del demonio, era fácil a él persuadirlos a ellos. Y como quiera que ellos sean tan incrédulos, y desconfiados de lo que los Padres les dicen, de ahí es: que no sé que asientan totalmente a nuestras verdades católicas. Porque son de esa calidad los indios, que como se lo diga otro indio como ellos, no hay cosa más cierta para ellos, pero si se lo dice el Padre o el español a quiénes tienen total aversión no hay remedio de asentir a lo que se les dice, y si hacen en la apariencia que asienten, más es por temor, que por otro motivo alguno. En esta materia, son defectuosísimos, nuestros hijos los indios, y siempre están con dos corazones tocante a lo que se les dice;

that Hunahpu²⁰ was the God preached to them. And that Hun-Hunahpu *erat filius Dei*.²¹ And that Xuchinquetzali²², who is called Xquic in this language, was Mary Most Holy. And that Vahxaquicat was Saint John the Baptist. And that Huntihax was Saint Paul the Apostle. It all seemed like the nonsense that they had learned from the devil, so it was easy for him to persuade them. And since he wants them to be so incredulous and mistrustful of what the priests tell them, this is why I do not know if they entirely assent to our Catholic truths. Because the Indians are of such a quality that if another Indian like them tells them something, there is nothing more true to them, but if it is said by a priest or a Spaniard to whom they have total aversion, there is no way to get them to agree to what they say, and if they appear to agree, it is more out of fear than for any other reason. In this matter they are most defective, our Indian sons, and they are always of two minds²³ regarding what is told to them;

²⁰ In this passage, Ximénez recounts an incident from the first years of Dominican missionary activity in Guatemala (in the 1530s), in which an Indigenous “pseudo-prophet” preached equivalence between K’iche’ Maya deities and Christian figures. He also included this incident in his 1715 *Historia de la provincia* (57).

²¹ *Erat filius Dei* is Latin for “was the son of God.”

²² Again, Ximénez equates a Nahuatl concept with a K’iche’ one, equating the Nahuatl goddess Xōchiquetzal (mother of Quetzalcoatl) with the Maya goddess Ixkik’ (mother of Junajpu and Ixbalanke) while arguing that both had been erroneously equated with the Christian figure of Mary (mother of Jesus Christ).

²³ Ximénez uses the phrase *estar con dos corazones*, literally “being of two hearts.” While this seems to be a quirk of Ximénez’s rather than a common idiom, “of two minds” is the proper idiomatic rendering in English.

veráslos con mucho cuidado acudir a la iglesia más en días que ellos celebran, que en los días de precepto, y es el caso que les llena mucho más que la devoción la concurrencia que entonces hay de tambores, y trompetas, y ruido de campanas, porque son inclinadísimos a la bulla, y si hay *tun* o baile en que se representa alguna bobería o alguna antigualla de las suyas, y de su gentilidad lo que yo digo, y me lo aconsejó así un religioso docto, y de exemplar vida, que había gastado muchos años administrando indios que murió ya decrépito llamado el Reverendo Padre fray Juan de San José de mi sagrado hábito, es que estos instrumentos de que vian [usan?] como es el *tun*, y la caja grande que llaman *cohom* o *nimacohom*. Tienen pacto con el demonio, en dichos instrumentos, y según son ellos de funebres sólo el demonio puede ser el autor de tales instrumentos; y aunque los Padres antiguos les dieron ciertas historias de Santos en su lengua que cantasen al *tun*, en lugar de las que ellos cantaban de su gentilidad, no obstante, yo entiendo que eso cantan en lo público y dónde el Padre los oye; y que allá en secreto

you will see them diligently attending church more on the days that they celebrate than on the days of precept²⁴, and it is the case that more so than devotions, they are far more satisfied by gatherings, where they have drums and trumpets and the noise of bells, because they are a most boisterous people, and if there is a *tun*²⁵ or dance in which some nonsense or vestigial lore of theirs from their pagan times is performed, what I say—and I was counseled thus by a learned religious of exemplary conduct who had spent many years administering Indians and died very old, Reverend Father Juan de San José of my holy habit—is that these instruments they use, like the *tun* and the big crate they call *cohom* or *nimacohom*. They have a pact with the devil in these instruments which according to them are funereal, only the devil could be the author of such instruments; and although the earlier Fathers gave them certain saints' stories in their language to be sung to the *tun*, to replace the stories they sang under paganism, nevertheless I understand that they sing this in public where the Father can hear them and then in secret they make

²⁴ The days of precept, now known as holy days of obligation, are the feast days on which all Catholics are obliged to attend Mass other than Sundays. The term “days of precept” refers to the fact that this obligation is laid out in the first of the five Precepts of the Catholic Church, considered to be an addendum to the Ten Commandments.

²⁵ Here Ximénez uses the K'iche' word for drum, *tun*, metonymically to refer to the dances at which it was played.

hacen muy lindas memorias de su gentilidad. De estas cosas, y otras muchísimas que han llegado a mi noticia, intento el formar estos escolios, a esta su historia de ellos anotando lo que es historia antigua, y citando a la historia, que queda antes puesta. Y anotando lo que[y?] toca en punto de nuestra Santa fe católica para que más comodidad tenga el que se quisiere aprovechar de este mi trabajo. Advertiendo, aquí, y teniendo por cosa cierta, que el día de hoy están en los mismos errores, y disparates, y aunque parece que no es más que tal o cual centella de aquel fuego, es mucho el incendio que hay entre ellos. Y aunque a la verdad pareciera a muchos materia imposible arrancar esta cizaña, del todo, no hará poco servicio a Dios en procurar arrancarla con continuo desvelo, y predicación, y enseñanza continua, que por nuestra cuenta corre sólo el desmontar, y plantar, y regar esta sementera de la Iglesia, con el riego de la enseñanza, y por cuenta de Dios el incremento de estas plantas. Que aunque no coja fruto alguno de su trabajo, le aseguro muchas coronas de gloria, como no le faltarán al Apóstol Santiago, en cuya vigilia esto escribo, muchas coronas de gloria aun no habiendo podido convertir a

sweet memories of their paganism. Based on these things, and many others that have come to my attention, I am attempting to assemble these scholia to their history, noting what is ancient history and citing the foregoing stories. And noting what pertains to our holy Catholic faith for the greater convenience of whoever wishes to take advantage of my work. Cautioning here and holding it to be true that unto this day they maintain the same errors and absurdities, and although it seems to be but a flash of fire, there is much conflagration among them. And though in truth it will seem to many an impossible task to uproot these weeds from the whole, it will be no little service to God to try to uproot it tirelessly, with preaching and constant teaching, since it is merely our responsibility to till, plant, and irrigate this field of the Church with the water of teaching, and it is God's responsibility to grow these plants. Even to him who does not reap any fruit from his work I guarantee many crowns of glory, such as are enjoyed by the Apostle James, on whose vigil I write this, many crowns of glory even without having been able to convert to

la fe verdadera más que a siete españoles por su sumo trabajo y desvelo en su oficio de Apóstol. Porque es de tan superior calidad el grano del Santo Evangelio, que dado caso, que todo el caiga sobre piedras duras, nunca al sembrador le faltan colmadísimos frutos de su sementera, lo que no tiene otra sementera alguna; que si se pierde todo se pierde, y más pierde el que siendo sembrador de la palabra divina, se mete a sembrador del grano terreno. Irá anotando mi cortedad todo lo que alcanzaré, tocante a aquesta historia, y dando noticia de muchas cosas de los indios, no con ánimo de que vean su barbaridad, y bestialidad, sino de mover a compasión de que se pierdan estos que son redimidos con la preciosa sangre de Xpto. Va. Na. llevando ante todas cosas sabido que las causas principales de no olvidar en el todo estos disparates, y haber sentádoles tan mal la fe, fue por haberse plantado en estas partes de la ley de Dios con tantos escándalos, muertes, robos, estruendos y alborotos, y habiéndola recibido de miedo de la muerte que temían como lo nota muy bien el Illustrísimo y

the true faith more than seven Spaniards through his great and tireless work in his Apostolic office. For this seed of the holy Gospel is of such superior quality, that even if it all falls upon hard soil, never does the sower want for most abundant fruits from his field, which is true of no other field; if he loses it, he loses all, and he loses more who being the sower of the divine word becomes the sower of a great²⁶ field indeed. I will briefly note all that I can regarding this history, making known many things about the Indians, not in order to show you their barbarity and brutality, but rather to move you toward compassion for these who are redeemed by the precious blood of Christ our Life²⁷, for they are being lost; understanding above all that the principal reasons for not letting these absurdities go, and for the faith having not sat well with them, was because the law of God was planted here alongside so many scandals, deaths, and robberies and such turmoil and tumult, and having received it out of fear of death, as is well observed by His Excellency the Most Reverend²⁸ Fray Bartolomé de las

²⁶ Here Ximénez writes *grano terreno*, literally “seed field.” Based on the context and his frequent orthographical and grammatical errors, I have translated it as if it were a mistaken rendering of *grande terreno*, a “great field.”

²⁷ Here Ximénez uses the phrase *Xpto. Va. Na.*, in which *Xpto.* is a common abbreviation for the name of Christ in Greek (“*Christos*,” *Χριστός*) and *Va. Na.* is short for *Vida Nuestra*, “Our Life.”

²⁸ The titles *Illustrísimo* and *Reverendísimo* were used for a bishop in this time period. The former has been rendered as the equivalent episcopal title in English, “His Excellency,” rather than its literal meaning, “Most Illustrious.” The latter

Reverendísimo Señor Don fray Bartolomé de las Casas, en sus escritos y disputas contra el Doctor Sepúlveda, y el Muy Reverendo Padre Remesal en su historia, por más que ciertos historiadores modernos lo quieran sepultar. Y después de tan mal plantada la fe ha sido peor regada, pues aunque algunos ministros zelosos han procurado arrimar el hombro, luego descaece con la muerte, o ausencia de tales ministros, que cuidaban de dar buen riego a estas plantas; y también porque no tienen en dónde aprender saltin aquellos que saben leer para que de ellos se difundiera a los demás por falta de libros en su idioma que tratan de la fe católica más que las dos partes de su teología del Nuestro Padre fray Domingo de Vico, y el catecismo que como no han pasado de manuscritos, es muy raro el que se halla, y tengo por experiencia que los indios que han tenido

Casas in his writings and disputes with Doctor Sepúlveda²⁹, and the Very Reverend³⁰ Father Remesal³¹ in his history, however much certain modern historians would like to bury this. And after having been so poorly planted, the faith has been watered even worse, for although some zealous ministers have sought to put their shoulders to the wheel, later the faith fades with the death or absence of these ministers who took care to water these plants well; and also because they have no place to learn, even³² those who know how to read, so that they might spread the faith to the rest, for lack of books about the Catholic faith in their language, other than the two parts of our Fray Domingo de Vico's theology, and the catechism, which are very rarely found since they remain only in manuscript form, and I know from experience that the Indians who have had

has been rendered literally, as “Most Reverend” continues to be in use for Catholic bishops (outside the United Kingdom and Commonwealth nations, where it is reserved for archbishops, akin to the Anglican system).

²⁹ This is a reference to the Junta de Valladolid, a debate on the Spanish treatment of Indigenous peoples held in 1550 at the Colegio de San Gregorio in Valladolid, Spain. Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda argued for the status quo, stating that the use of violence in the subjugation of Indigenous peoples was legitimate under just war theory. Bartolomé de las Casas argued that such violence was unjust based on the high degree of civilization found among Indigenous peoples, as compared with the great brutality of Spanish conduct in the Americas. Ximénez aligns himself here with Las Casas' characterization of Spanish conduct, as well as his broader program of nonviolent evangelization.

³⁰ The title *Muy Reverendo* or “Very Reverend” has a special use in the Dominican Order, where it is bestowed on those who hold the honorary title of *Sacrae Theologiae Magister* or Master of Sacred Theology.

³¹ Antonio de Remesal, O.P., *Historia de la Provincia de S. Vicente de Chiapa y Guatemala de la orden de ñro glorioso padre Sancto Domingo: escribense juntamente los principios de las demas provincias de esta religion de las Indias Occidentales, y lo secular de la gobernacion de Guatemala*, 1619.

³² Here Ximénez uses *salтин*, a variant of *saltem* (also *saltem*), a Latin restrictive particle: “It serves to point out that which still remains or holds good, in spite of or by way of exception to something opposed to it” (Lewis and Short).

dicha de leerlos han recibido mucho bien en sus almas, que si se hubieran impreso dichos libros muchos, o todos hubieran gozado de este bien; y ha sido tal la desgracia de estos pobres, que habiendo consultado tantos disparates a su Majestad, sus ministros, y otros que no lo son, no ha habido quien esto lo tome en boca, que no dudo de su piedad, y deseo, del bien de su[s] vasallos, y más de estos, que tiene a su cargo como menores, que no dudará gastar lo necesario en esta obra, para que todos gozasen de este bien. Esto era lo que habían de consultar, y no que aprendiesen la doctrina cristiana en lengua castellana, como lo han consultado, que no dudo afirmar, que él que tal consultó fue algún ministro que el demonio tomó para acabar de borrar de estos pobres la poca noticia, que tienen de nuestra Santa fe porque que otra cosa se siguiera. De esto más: que después de ingentísimo trabajo, esto es dado que se llegase a conseguir, saber la doctrina cristiana como papagayos sin inteligencia alguna de lo que habían aprendido. Yo quisiera, que me dijera el que tal intentó,

the good fortune to read them have derived much benefit for their souls, which if many of the aforementioned books had been printed, all could have enjoyed this benefit; and the misfortune of these poor ones has been such that, having brought so many absurdities before His Majesty, his ministers, and others who are not, no one has spoken of this; I do not doubt his piety and desire for the wellbeing of his subjects, and especially of these who are in his charge like children, and that he will not hesitate to spend what is necessary for this work, so that all may enjoy this benefit. This is all they had to consult, and may they not learn Christian doctrine in the Castilian language, as they have accessed it thus far; I do not hesitate to affirm that he who taught it thusly was some minister who the devil took hold of in order to finish removing from these poor ones what little consciousness they have of our Holy faith because he followed something else. What is more: after this most ingenious³³ work, he managed to get them to know Christian doctrine like parrots without any understanding of what they had learned. I would like him who tried this to tell me

³³ Ximénez uses the cliché *ingentísimo trabajo*, built on the adjective *ingénito*, a variant of *ingenioso* (Bluteau 88, 3).

qué hubiera sacado, de que a él se la hubieran enseñado en lengua hebrea, o griega, más que desesperarse para cogerla de memoria, y después de todo eso, se quedara *tan quam tabula rasa*. Sin saber lo que se había aprendido. Procuren los que tratan de administraciones saber la lengua de su partido qué será más fácil que un hombre capaz, y docto, y que sabe su obligación la aprenda, pues no tiene otra cosa que hacer fuera de su administración, que no querer reducir a todos los indios, que apenas tienen tiempo para buscar su vida, y sobre todo su rusticidad, y que tampoco pueden dedicar del todo a sus hijos a la enseñanza, porque son sus pies, y manos, para ayudarlos desde que empiezan a andar para buscar lo que han menester. Y no andar entretenidos en fundar haciendas de ganado y cacaguatales, con grande molestia de los indios, y menoscabo de su pobreza, cosa tan vedada, y justamente por

what he would have gotten out of it if they had taught it to him in Hebrew or Greek, besides exasperating him in order to cram it into his memory, and after all that he was left *tan quam tabula rasa*³⁴. Without knowing what he had learned. May those who handle administration try to learn the language of their jurisdiction; what could be easier than for a capable, learned man who knows his obligation to learn it? For he has nothing else to do outside of administration, and not wanting to relocate³⁵ all the Indians who hardly have time to make a living, and above all their backwardness, and neither can they entirely dedicate their children to learning, for they are their helping hands and feet from the moment they begin to walk to search for what they need. And not distracting themselves by founding cattle farms and cacao plantations, to the great detriment of the Indians and to the deepening³⁶ of their poverty, which was justly prohibited by

³⁴ “*Tan quam tabula rasa*” is a misspelling of “*tamquam tabula rasa*,” “like a blank slate.” Ximénez is sardonically manipulating Avicenna’s characterization, adopted by scholasticism, of the human intellect as a blank slate from birth.

³⁵ Ximénez uses the verb *reducir*, or “reduce,” here in reference to the Spanish colonial practice of forcibly relocating Indigenous people into settlements modeled on Spanish towns. These settlements were generally known as *reducciones*, or “reductions,” though in New Spain they were also called *congregaciones*, or “congregations.”

³⁶ While *menoscabo* literally means “lessening,” rather than “deepening,” the context indicates that Indigenous poverty is deepened rather than lessened by these agricultural practices. As such, this seems to be a double negative that is acceptable in Spanish but not in English.

| | |
|---|---|
| <p>su Majestad en sus Leyes de Indias. Que con eso tendrán tiempo para todo. Y les sobrar , y cumpliendo como deben, y defiende [de] el ilustr simo Se or Montenegro en su <i>Parrocho de indios</i>, no dudo, que tendr n gran premio, de su Divina Majestad.</p> | <p>His Majesty in his Laws of the Indies³⁷. So with all this they will have time for everything. And they will have it excessively, and doing their duty as they should, and as is defended by His Excellency Montenegro in his <i>Parrocho de indios</i>³⁸, I do not doubt that they will receive a great reward from his Divine Majesty³⁹.</p> |
| <p>Ni menos a nadie, haga fuerza el ver tantos desatinos como en su gentilidad subieron, y que todav a conserven algunos, o los m s de ellos, porque si bien ello bien se mira mucho mayores los tuvieron nuestros antepasados, y hoy en d a no faltan siendo gente m s capaz, y doctrinada, y cada d a estamos viendo mil l stimas de los que apostatan de la fe, pas ndose al juda simo, a la secta de Mahoma, de Lutero, y de Calvino.</p> | <p>So shall anyone who makes the effort to look at such nonsense as that which arose under paganism and which some still sustain, or the majority of them do; for seen rightly, our own ancestors made even greater mistakes, and there are still many made today when people are more capable and better taught, and every day we are seeing great shame as people apostatize from the faith, crossing over to Judaism, to the sect of Mohammed, that of Luther, and that of Calvin.</p> |

³⁷ The term *Leyes de las Indias*, or Laws of the Indies, refers to the entire body of laws promulgated by the Spanish Crown to govern its empire, but Xim nez is most likely referring specifically to the compilation published in 1681 under Carlos II. The compilation included the New Laws of 1542, which initially prohibited and ultimately only somewhat reformed the *encomienda* system of forced Indigenous labor. Xim nez is likely alluding to these laws here.

³⁸ Alonso (or Alfonso) de la Pe a Montenegro, bishop of Quito, Ecuador and president of the Real Audiencia de Quito from 1653 to 1687, issued his five-volume *Itinerario para parrocos de indios, en que se tratan las materias mas particulares tocantes a ellos para su buena Administracion* in manuscript form in 1666 (Locatelli 1). It was then published in print at Madrid in 1668 and at Antwerp in 1698 (3). A manual for the evangelization of indigenous peoples, it was used both among missionaries and pastors in his diocese and in judgments issued by the Real Audiencia de Quito. Evidently, it also circulated in New Spain as well.

³⁹ While *Su Majestad* or His/Her Majesty generally refers to Spanish monarchs, *Su Divina Majestad* or His Divine Majesty is a title reserved to God.

Y más comunmente las hechiceras, que tan continuamente castiga la Santa Inquisición, y también vemos cada día los muchos abusos, y supersticiones, que se [vian / usan] no sólo entre gente rustica; pero aun entre gente más capaz y docta. Y esto en donde la fe catholica se halla más floreciente. Pues que mucho que mucho de todo esto se halle en la gente tan rústica, tan poco doctrinada, y tan tierna en la fe, que aun no hay doscientos años, que la conocen. Pues aun todavía suele haber quienes oyeron de sus antepasados, los errores que tuvieron en su gentilidad y que les oyeron contar la felicidad humana, a su modo tenían, antes que entrase el dominio de los españoles, pues como gente tan rustica, no reparan en el bien que se les ha seguido, de entrar en el gremio de Nuestra Santa Madre Iglesia, sino que tan solamente hacen memoria de los maltratos, que suelen tener con gente de mal alma,

And even more commonly the witches⁴¹, whom the Holy Inquisition continuously punishes, and also daily we see the many abuses and superstitions observed among not just backwards people, but even among more capable and learned people. And this where the Catholic faith is found to be flourishing. But much of all this is found among people so backwards, so little taught, and so young and inexperienced in the faith, which they have known for less than two hundred years. So there still tend to be some who heard from their ancestors the errors that they held under paganism and who heard them tell of the human happiness, which they had in their way, before the onset of the dominion of the Spaniards, for being such backwards people, they do not notice the goodness that has come along with them, of entering into the bosom of Holy Mother Church⁴², but rather exclusively remember the mistreatment that they tend to receive from people with corrupted souls,

⁴¹ Here Ximénez uses the term *hechicera* rather than *bruja* for “witch.” The two terms had distinct meanings and legal consequences: under the Inquisition, *hechicería* was a broader term for superstition, marginalized medicinal practices, and magical ritual; *brujería* was specifically applied to demonic activity, and therefore carried a far harsher punishment (Schlau 123–124).

⁴² Here Ximénez uses the term *gremio*, meaning “lap” (Stevens 204, 3), as the image for belonging to the Catholic Church. “Por translación llamamos gremio, el amparo y refugio del que acoge a otro y le favorece: y el gremio de la Iglesia llamamos la congregación de los fieles, la comunión de los Santos, porque los ampara y abriga a todos” (Covarrubias 898, 1). In English, the image is rendered with the slightly altered formula “[enter into / return to] the bosom of Holy Mother Church.”

causando en sus malos tratos, mil
desesperaciones en estos miserables, y que
blasfemen el Santo nombre de Dios, y su
Santa fee católica en sus adversidades y
trabajos y si ello bien se mira el concierto
que suelen tener en sus repúblicas dudo que
haya nación alguna más concertada. Pues
entre ellos jamás se pueda deuda sin pagar,
ni culpa sin castigar, que me río yo del
concierto que se pondera de las abejas en
sus repúblicas, teniendo repartidos entre si
todos los cargos, y tequios⁴⁰ de todo el
común, ayudándose unos a otros, con tal
sugezión a los que tienen nombrados por
cabezas de sus calpules, y parcialidades, que
apenas se hallará indio que entre ellos no
obedezca a su cabeza de calpul, en lo que se
le en carga, y si tal caso se da todos se
conjuran contra él a que sea castigado. No
dudo que tienen muchas cosas vituperables,
más también tienen otras muy loables,

who by their poor treatment cause great
despair among these miserable ones; and so
they blaspheme the Holy name of God and
the Holy Catholic faith in their adversities
and works, and looking at the harmony
they tend to have in their republics⁴³, I
doubt there is a more harmonious people.
For among them no debt goes unpaid, nor
does any offense go unpunished; I laugh at
how the harmony of the bees is praised in
their republics, having divided up all
common duties and tasks among
themselves, helping one another, with such
submission to those they have named
leaders of their *calpules*⁴⁴ and factions that
you will hardly find an Indian among them
who does not obey his *calpul* leader, in what
he assigns him, and in such a case everyone
conspires against him so that he is
punished. I do not doubt that they have
many reprehensible customs, but they also
have others that are very laudable,

⁴⁰ *Tequio*, del náhuatl *tequitl* 'tributo', 'trabajo'. m. Méx. Tarea o faena que se realiza para pagar un tributo. (DLE/RAE)

⁴³ Here Ximénez uses the term *repúblicas de indios* to refer to *reducciones* (see footnote 25). However, it should also be noted that the term *república de indios* or "Indian republic" was distinct from the *república de españoles* or "Spanish republic" under the laws governing New Spain. While the *república de españoles*—that is, citizens considered Spanish under the law, including those of Spanish parentage born in America (*criollos*) and a limited number of mixed-race people who could buy the privileges of Spanishness—was subject to a set of laws comparable to those that governed Castile itself, the Indigenous subjects of the *república de indios* were far more stringently governed.

⁴⁴ *Calpul*, from the Nahuatl *calpulli* meaning "large house" (DLE/RAE), used to designate an organizational unit roughly equivalent to a clan. Under the Aztec (Mexico) Empire, an *altepetl* or city-state would contain many *calpulli*, which would be assigned plots of land to cultivate and various organizational, sociopolitical, and religious tasks to perform. Again Ximénez is using Indigenous concepts adopted into Spanish upon contact elsewhere in New Spain and applying them to the K'iche' Maya.

y que ojalá se hallarán entre otras naciones. Todo cuanto yo alcanzaré escribiré en estos escolios, para dar la mayor noticia que pudiere de esta gente, a los venideros, y que no ignoren sus cosas. Suponiendo como supongo que muchas no se saben, por el secreto tan grande que entre si guardan, de miedo el Padre o del español. Y especialmente, de sus juntas, que ellos suelen tener entre si. Y más si son cosa de idolatria esas es tal el secreto que guardan que ni el muchacho más tonto, hay remedio, que se descuide en manifestarlo, y sola por conjeturas, se suele rastrear algo.

that God willing will be found among other peoples. I will write in these scholia all that I can, to make these people known as well as I am able, for those to come, so that they will not be ignorant of their customs. Supposing, as I suppose, that many do not know about them, because of the great secrecy they observe among themselves out of fear of the priest or the Spaniard. And especially about their assemblies which they tend to have among themselves. And moreover if those are idolatrous, the secret they keep is such that there is no hope that even the most idiotic boy would carelessly reveal it, and only by speculation can anything be ascertained.

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