

## Symbolic Ciphers in the Eyes of Maya Deities.

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To G. T. GOODMAN, the American journalist and archaeologist<sup>1</sup>, we owe very important studies on the arithmetic and chronology of the ancient Mayas. But the fine results obtained in the mathematical part of the inscriptions have induced that writer to over-rate vastly the rôle which numbers played in their civilization. He almost reveres numerals and takes them to be the foundation and aim of all Mayan thinking. Here criticism has to set in and show the limitations of a theory that tries to explain facts in a very unilateral way, being, indeed, more Pythagoric than the Pythagoreans.

So, for instance, GOODMAN published in his treatise on "The Archaic Maya Inscriptions" a chapter dealing with the Numeric Features of Personages which begins with the phrase: "I have stated my belief that, with the exception of the priests and their assistants, all the personages of the codices and inscriptions, ornaments and accessories, were composed of numerical signs." According to this really bold theory he then dissects the head of God B into six parts, giving to four of them a definite numerical value and presuming that the other two also express some number<sup>2</sup>.

What happens in reality is that the Maya figurative representations are adorned in different parts, on the front, the eyes, the cheeks, etc., with symbols or emblems, some of them being numerical signs. These ciphers, however, are not employed here in the sense of giving a numerical value to the personage, but to indicate some quality associated in the mind of the Mayas with the respective numerical signs. Four, for instance, is the number of world regions the sun traverses, that is, the cardinal points. So "four" became the holy cipher of the sun-god. The hearth of the Mayas is composed of three stones, so "three" symbolized "fire" and ideas associated with it<sup>3</sup>. Also "ten", represented by two bars, which alluded to the sticks of the fire drill, was used to indicate "fire", "drouth", "dry season"<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> For biographical data see S. G. MORLEY's Review of J. T. Goodman's life and work. *American Anthropologist*. N. Y., vol. 21 (1919), p. 441-445.

<sup>2</sup> *Biologia Central-Americana*, edited by GOODMAN and SALVIN, Part VIII. Archaeology. Appendix: The Archaic Maya Inscriptions. London, 1897, p. 85.

<sup>3</sup> H. BEYER: *La Cifra Tres in el Simbolismo Maya*. *Memorias de la Sociedad Científica „Antonio Alzate“*, Mexico, 1926. Vol. 45, p. 459-466. Also: *Mexican Folkways*, vol. 3 (1927), p. 24-30 (with English translation).

<sup>4</sup> H. BEYER: *La Cifra Diez en el Simbolismo Maya*. *Revista Mexicana de Estudios Historicos*, Mexico, 1927, vol. 1, p. 3-7.