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Anthony Shelton

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Olivia Kindl, *La Jícara huichola : un microcosmos mesoamericano*

México, Instituto nacional de antropología e historia, 2003, bibl., index, gloss., ill., fig. (« Etnografía de los pueblos indígenas de México »).

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- 1 WITH THIS WORK Olivia Kindl shows herself to be one of the small number of researchers, along with Neurath, Gutiérrez and Jáuregui, who, after a century of difficult and problematic ethnographies, are bringing the same maturity to Huichol studies that has long been achieved for other Mexican groups. She uses her rather long introduction to summarize relevant previous works, making special mention of the Kunstgeschichte School, including Lumholtz, Preuss and Seler, as well as more recent ethnographies on the region. She discusses problems of methodologies in the study of the cosmological context of art works as well as issues related to social classifications and the history of mentalities, before going on to describe her own refreshingly sophisticated and inclusive, approach to the subject. Based on Dilthey and Panofsky's adoption of his concept of *Weltanschauung*, a world vision specific to a given cultural or historical epoch whose ideological content penetrates all aspects of a given society, she delimits three contexts of study ; production of gourds, their iconography and their semantics. The first part of her monograph comprises three chapters that examine the techniques, ritual and sacred knowledge necessary to make different categories of gourds, the corpus of mythological narratives that describe them, and the ritual contexts in which they are used. Olivia Kindl divides Huichol gourds between those used domestically ; those made for ritual use and those made for the external market. Women, she notes, command a monopoly over all these contexts except the third, which can be made by members of either sex.
- 2 Seeds are planted in orchards in May-June at the beginning of the wet season and harvested between October-December. Because the agricultural cycle is determined by the ritual calendar this clearly associates the gourd harvest with the female deities of growth, rain and fertility, while those women that elaborate them into ritual bowls, become affiliated with the paramount or senior deity, associated with the growing

season, Nakawé. Olivia Kindl describes the four different varieties of gourd plants the Huichol distinguish, the different coloured earths that are made into pigments and used to paint them ; the significance of their distinctive colours ; the use of imported decorative beads that they compare to droplets of water or grains of maize, and use to denote life, and the different types of native and imported wax used to make the figures that « adorn » ritual gourds. Like with most Huichol technologies, rituals and objects, the production of gourd bowls has its archetypal origin story. Just as the first ritual bowls were made by the original *mara'kame*, or ritual specialist, now too, woman receives their first instruction from one of his living forebears. While almost any woman can make bowls, those destined for ritual use must be « decorated » under the guidance of a *mara'kame*, and only few of their makers have sufficient knowledge to use them to communicate with the deities. Ritual gourds are divided between effigy and votive bowls, an important distinction that has not previously been noted in the literature. Effigy bowls are the representation of a specific deity and are consequently extremely sacred while votive bowls are used for offerings. While it is well documented that within temple districts, women are elected to care for a specific deity by taking responsibility for the effigy bowl associated with her, the organization and hierarchy of these office holders within specific locals has not, with the exception of Fike's interesting doctoral thesis, been well documented. Of special interest is Olivia Kindl's description of such organizations in two temple districts, those of Tateikie (San Andres) made up of around 30 posts, and another with 20 officers at Mukuxeta (San Sebastián). The final chapter of the section, mainly concerned with votive bowls, discusses their placement and uses in the *tukipa*, temple, during peyote pilgrimages, paying particular attention to the various places offerings are made en route, and in life cycle ceremonies, curing, materialization of ancestors and agricultural related festivals.

- 3 Olivia Kindl then turns her attention to the iconography of the bowls, but instead of focusing on votive or effigy bowls as she has in chapters II-IV, oddly, concentrates on commercial bowls on account of their more replete symbolism. Here she examines a corpus of bowls using her informants to describe the significance of each element portrayed on them. Her methodology here is much like that used by Lumholtz over a century earlier, but given the more greatly elaborated patterns within commercial bowls than anything Lumholtz could have witnessed, she is able to make interesting comments regarding symbolic associations. Of particular note here is the doubt she throws on the integrity of the much-vaunted maize, deer, peyote complex that formed one of the foci for Furst and Myerhoff's earlier works on Huichol symbolism. Olivia Kindl correctly, I think, identifies Huichol symbolism as being far more fluid and categories as having far greater transformative possibilities than has previously been appreciated.
- 4 The penultimate chapter turns to semantics. Using as her key informant, a well-known « curandera » living in Atonalisco outside the Huichol sierra, with an important collection of effigy bowls in her care, Olivia Kindl systematically reports their individual meaning and significance. This is a wonderfully rich exposition in which wax designs are confirmed to be the materialization of ancestors within wider configurations that she convincingly argues represent maps of sacred territory. Interestingly, these compositions were repeatedly described as a system of writing taught the Huichol by their ancestors.

- 5 Clearly effigy and votive bowls are redolent with symbolism and meaning for the Huichol and, as Olivia Kindl acknowledges, provide important insights into better understanding the spatial organization and structure of their complex pantheon. The form of the bowl can connote the uterus and the original cave from which their ancestors were born ; the black colour is often painted on the bowls of female rain deities to connote dark stormy skies. The uses of bowls confer benedictions, and plentiful harvests and health, but they also act as a means of communication between humans and ancestors by providing a channel for the exchange of sacrificial animal blood to the ancestors in return for sacred water, as well as tortillas, maize kernels, husks and tejuino, symbolic of sustenance, to their human subjects. What occurs within the gourd, she writes, is also believed to occur in life, making them very sacred and dangerous to handle. When old and broken, they are buried under the sacred fire in the centre of the *tuki*, returning them to the earth from which they originated. Central to Olivia Kindl's understanding of ceremonial gourds is that they do not symbolize but manifest the beings and qualities with which they are identified ; they are them ; an example of what Olivia Kindl characterizes, using Foucault's phrase, as a manifestation of an « analogical cosmology », a logic constructed by analogy and repetition, that provides continuity between human thinking subjects and the means through which they exercise their thought. The gourd bowls are microcosms, like the *tupi* and the household compound, that replicate the wider cosmological space.
- 6 Like many past authors Olivia Kindl is sometimes tantalized into making, admittedly interesting, comparisons between Huichol intellectual categories and ritual practices and those of pre-Columbian Mesoamerica. Also like many previous writers, including myself, she finds it difficult to resist synthesizing a more comprehensive cosmology by recourse to material collected from different communities. As she herself acknowledges, differences exist between communities, which still have not been sufficiently mapped and compared or explained, making such generalizations hazardous. The potential problem becomes more attenuated if one generalizes across potentially different epistemological categories such as those that may divide ritual from commercial gourds. While both categories draw, as she explains, on a common thought world, we cannot presume epistemological uniformity, or consistency in their iconographic programs and semantic significations. She herself exemplifies the problem well when discussing the freer use of colours on commercial bowls when depicting the cardinal directions, than would be permitted on ritual gourds. Nevertheless, this does not detract from the overall importance and sophistication of this significant contribution to Huichol ethnography. The work is remarkable for its synthesis of existing data with excellent additional new and rich information collected in the field. Sometimes this clarifies unclear areas of Huichol thought while in others it opens new fields for additional research. Her monograph confirms and further elaborates the Huichol's surprisingly complex but tightly structured and internally coherent cosmology that has fascinated anthropologists for over a century.

AUTHOR

ANTHONY SHELTON

Department of Anthropology, University of British Columbia, Vancouver.
anthony.shelton@ubc.ca