

The Huichol Gourd Bowl as a Microcosm

Author(s): Olivia Selena Kindl

Source: *Journal of the Southwest*, Vol. 42, No. 1, Ritual and Historical Territoriality of the Nayari and Wixarika Peoples (Spring, 2000), pp. 37-60

Published by: Journal of the Southwest

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40170140>

Accessed: 19-10-2017 17:23 UTC

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

Journal of the Southwest is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Journal of the Southwest*

The Huichol Gourd Bowl As a Microcosm

OLIVIA SELENA KINDL

The Oglala believe the circle to be sacred because the Great Spirit caused everything in nature to be round except stone. . . . Everything that breathes is round like the body of a man. Everything that grows from the ground is round like the trunk of a tree. . . . It is also the symbol of the circle that marks the edge of the world and therefore of the four winds that travel there. . . . It is also the symbol of these divisions of time and hence the symbol of all time. For these reasons the Oglala make their tipis circular, their camp circle circular, and sit in a circle in all ceremonies. The circle is also the symbol of the tipi and of shelter. If one makes a circle for an ornament and it is not divided in any way, it should be understood as the symbol of the world and of time.

—James R. Walker

Huichol art has been studied by a number of authors (Lumholtz 1900, 1973 [1902]; Preuss 1911, 1912; Furst 1972; Berrin 1978; Negrín 1985, 1986; Schaefer and Furst 1996; García de Weigand 1990; MacLean 1995; Zingg 1998; Schaefer n.d.). Among these authors only Preuss (1911, 1912) stands out for having assigned an important place to the decorated gourd bowls produced by the Huichol and Cora Indians, who together with the Tepehuan and Mexicanero peoples, make up the Gran Nayar cultural region. In this paper I follow this earlier work by focusing specifically on Huichol gourd bowls (*xukurite*). I show how these objects constitute miniature models of the cosmos and act as communicative vehicles between distinct cosmological levels. I also discuss the implications of these ideas for understanding the importance of gourd bowls as a fundamental form of representation in Huichol culture.

TYPES OF RELIGIOUS GOURD BOWLS

Gourd plants grow in private gardens throughout Huichol territory in the Sierra Madre Occidental (figure 1). These plants are called *'iari* in the Huichol language and *Lagenaria siceraria* of the Cucurbitae family in Linnean terms. In Spanish these inedible gourds are vari-

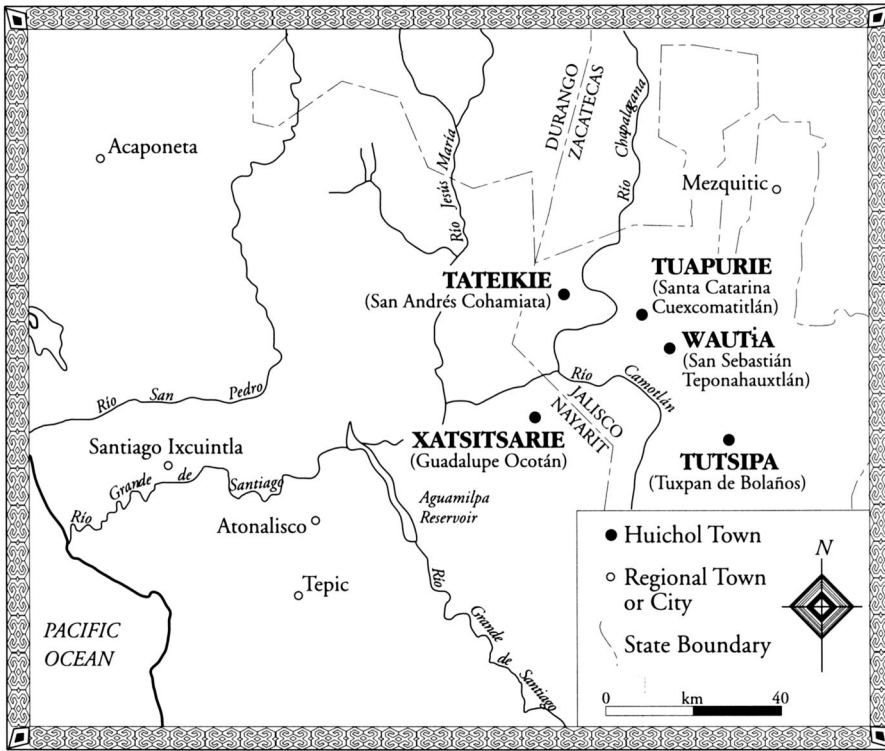


Figure 1. Huichol and regional towns, and state boundaries. Map by Susan Alta Martin.

ously known as *jícaras*, *bules*, *calabazas*, *guajes*, or *tecomates* (Medina 1996: 67).

During my field trips I observed the process of cutting, cleaning, and drying these gourds, and of decorating the resulting bowls that were destined for use in religious contexts. These decorated ceremonial gourd bowls¹ can be subdivided into at least two types: (1) effigy bowls, decorated with figures corresponding to a particular deity; and (2) votive bowls, decorated with figures that refer to the people (and their plants and animals) who offer them to the deities. This general

1. See Kindl (1997) for a more detailed analysis of domestic and commercial as well as religious gourd bowls.

distinction between various types of Huichol symbolic objects was first noted by Lumholtz (1900: 209), who indicated that “in many cases the supplicant himself is represented on symbolic objects in the shape of a human figure or a heart; but in others the god is thus depicted.”

Different types of ornamentation may appear on the inside of these two types of religious gourd bowls. Often their backgrounds are covered with paint composed of chia oil (Huichol: *tsie*; *Salvia chia*) and different colored mineral dyes. Wax figures representing deities, animals, people, and/or maize plants are placed on top of this background. These figures are decorated with beads to mark eyes, heart, or seeds. Frequently, coins, beans, maize seeds, or colored pieces of cotton or yarn are also added. In effigy bowls these figures represent deities and mythological scenes, while in votive bowls these figures symbolize prayers meant to bring a good harvest, success at deer hunting, or good health. The offering of votive gourd bowls to deified ancestors is also frequently accompanied by the offering of ceremonial arrows (*'irite*).²

The ritual uses of effigy and votive gourd bowls differ. The first type is used only in collective ceremonies, where they constitute one of many manifestations of the deified ancestors. Huichols worship these effigy gourd bowls in at least four places: (1) the *tukipa*, considered to be the dwelling of the oldest deities; (2) the *xiriki*, which are smaller shrines dedicated principally to the nearest ancestors of a kin group; (3) the House of the Governor and the town church (*teyeupani*) in the center of the community; and (4) pilgrimage sites located at specific points within the Huichol ritual landscape. A *tuki* is generally found in communal administrative or population centers, a *xiriki* is found both at such centers and at smaller ranches, and pilgrimage sites are found throughout the Huichols' ritually defined territory. At Tateikie (San Andrés Cohamiata), where I carried out most of my field research, there are also a number of *tukite* located at ranches (figure 2).

In contrast, the votive gourd bowl is used by individuals to offer prayers at sacred sites inside or outside of collective ceremonies. In the following section of this paper I focus on the first type of religious gourd bowl, the effigy bowl.

2. Arrows are a masculine symbol, as opposed to the bowls, which are feminine. For this reason the objects complement each other and form an opposed pair in which “the Huichol gender paradigm” is implicit (Johannes Neurath, pers. com. 1997).

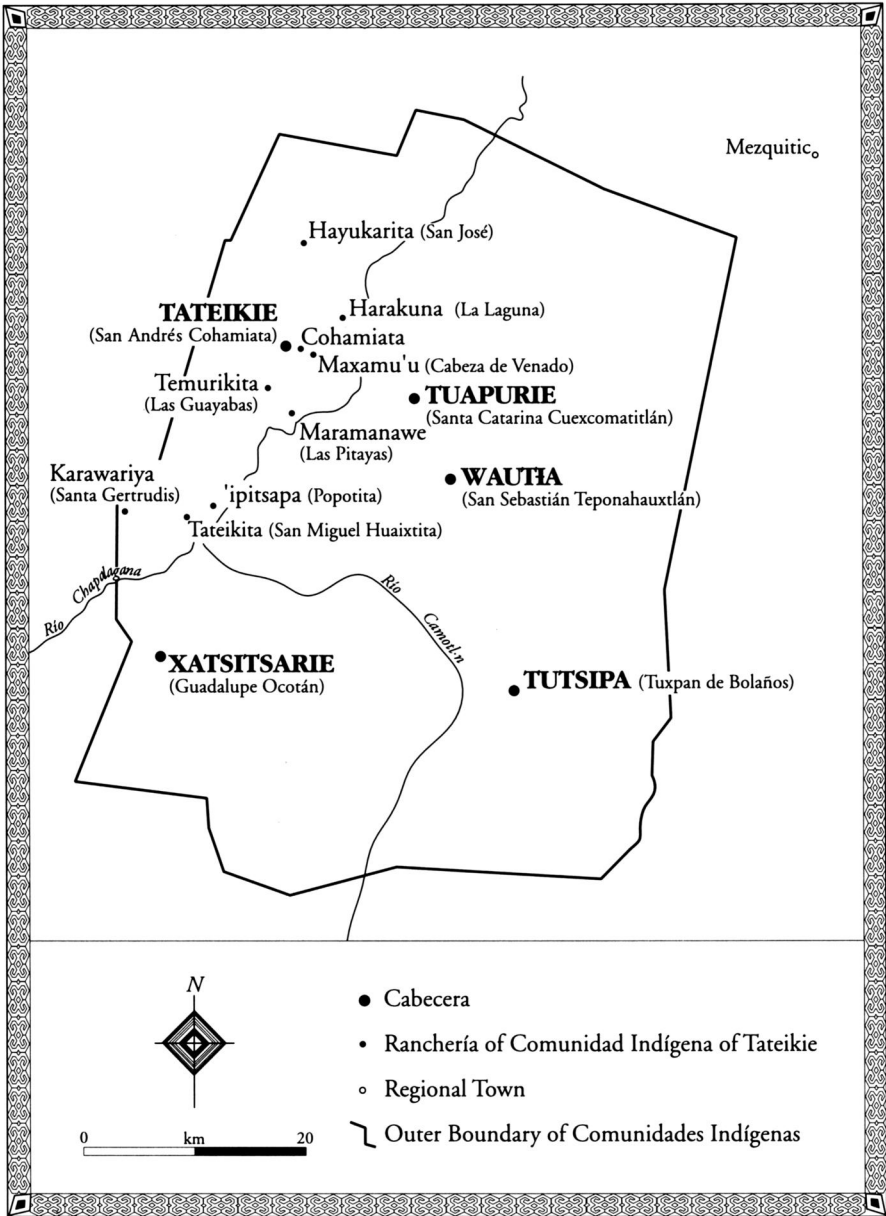


Figure 2. Huichol cabeceras (including author's study site), rancherías, and regional towns within boundaries of las comunidades indígenas. Map by Susan Alta Martin.

THE CARGO SYSTEM OF
TUKI BOWL-BEARERS (*XUKURI'İKATE*)

To understand the role of effigy gourd bowls, it is necessary to discuss the religious hierarchy of the Huichol tuki with which these bowls are associated. The tuki is a circular temple, which the Huichols tend to call *calihuey* when speaking in Mexican Spanish to outsiders. This sacred building is one of the most important places for reproducing the traditional Huichol religion, which members of the group consider to be a legacy from their remote ancestors. Huichols say that the old deities who created the world reside in the tuki; for the world to continue to exist, it is necessary to worship these ancestors in their tuki. The people in charge of this worship are the *xukuri'ikate* or bowl-bearers (in Spanish commonly called *jicareros*).

In the tuki of Tateikie (San Andrés Cohamiata) there are about thirty gourd bowls, each pertaining to a particular bowl-bearer. Upon receiving their office, bowl-bearers receive an effigy bowl that corresponds to one of the deities of the tuki. Huichols consider these gourd bowls to be inherited from an ancestral *mara'akame*, a ceremonial singer and healer. From the moment they receive their effigy bowl, the bowl-bearers are thought to embody the deity represented in the bowl, just as the bowl itself is thought to be a material part of the deity embodied by the bowl-bearer (*xukuri'ikame*). A *xukuri'ikame's* responsibility to care for this effigy bowl lasts for five years, after which the new bowl-bearer must "copy" or reproduce his predecessor's effigy bowl. When no ceremonies are taking place, these guardians keep the bowls in their houses. When participating in ceremonies or pilgrimages, however, they carry the bowls with them in their shoulder bags (*kitsiuri*). This *kitsiuri* can be compared to a "sacred bundle" or "a small portable altar that accompanies the Huichol on his migrations and pilgrimages" (Geist 1994: 138), since it contains all of the other necessary ritual paraphernalia along with the *xukuri'ikame's* gourd bowl.

The office of *xukuri'ikame* is undertaken by both a man and his wife. The wife makes the gourd bowl, and the two together care for it throughout their term in office. The wife's making of the gourd bowl also corresponds to the roles of two important female deities in Huichol mythology (Zingg 1998). The first, Our Grandmother Growth (Takutsi Nakawé), is one of the creators of the world; the second, Tatei 'utianaka, is a deified ancestor who takes the form of a fish. Tatei

'utianaka is a very important deity with respect to the gourd bowls because she appears in mythological narratives as the first woman to teach the ancestors of the Huichols to make religious gourd bowls. She transmitted this knowledge after returning from Wirikuta and was the first ancestor to have carried out the pilgrimage to the desert. The gourd bowl dedicated to Tatei 'utianaka was described to me as black, with designs in the shape of fish on the inside (figure 3). Huichols identify these fish as *mixi* (catfish), and because of their dark color "each one of these fish is like an ear of black maize." This point is corroborated by Lumholtz (1900: 214), who indicated that "ears of corn are depicted by short painted stripes or rays, and also by the painting of a fish, which is called by the Mexicans *bagre* (catfish)."

I was not permitted to see the effigy bowls of the tuki of Tateikie because of their high sacred value, but their respective bearers described them to me. The principal bowl-bearer is called the *tsaurixika*. He and his wife care for one of the largest gourd bowls of the tuki. This bowl-bearer is linked with Tamaatsi Kauyumarie (Our Elder Brother Kauyumarie). He indicates to his companions the proper manner for carrying out rituals and is the principal singing shaman of the tuki. His gourd bowl carries designs made of beads pressed into figures made of beeswax on its interior surface. These designs include two deer, a snake, five people, and three maize plants. It is painted black with chia-seed oil and is closely associated with the seasonal round of ceremonies that the group of xukuri'ikate oversees.

In March, for example, peyote collected during the previous year's pilgrimage to the desert of Wirikuta, San Luis Potosí, is placed in the *tsaurixika*'s bowl. Then, when the subsequent year's pilgrims (Spanish: *peyoteros*) return from Wirikuta, an offering of bitter *atole* (*tsinari*) is placed in the same gourd bowl to begin the Peyote Dance (Híkuri Neixa) in May or June. This ceremony is concluded in the tukipa of Tateikie when the *tsaurixika* places his bowl near the central fire of the tuki. At that point the *peyoteros* put sacred tobacco called *yá*, which they carried during the pilgrimage, into the bowl of the *tsaurixika*. The ritual dissolution of the *peyotero* group is accomplished

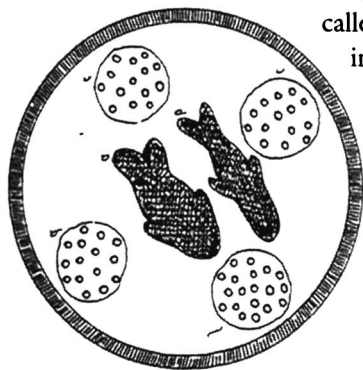


Figure 3. Inside of gourd bowl. Illustration by Magalí Aguilera Hernández.

around this bowl and ends when the tsaurixika lets the tobacco fall into the flames. This action marks the finale of the pilgrimage cycle and the end of the peyoteros' period of *communitas* (Turner 1974: 10, 1988: 137–70). The ceremonial bowl symbolizes the unity of this social group; hence the dissolution of the group and the completion of the cycle must be carried out through this object.

The tsaurixika has a companion or helper called Tunuwame. In Tateikie, the bowl-bearer who embodies this god is considered to be this tuki's tutelary deity or "owner"; hence the tuki's name: Tunuwmetia (Under Tunuwame). Each tuki has a different tutelary deity; in this case an ancestor named Tunuwame was a singing shaman (*marakame*) who later became a deity. The bowl-bearer who embodies this shaman fulfills the role of a *marakame* whose specialty is narrating the myth of the birth of the deer to the other bowl-bearers. The bowl guarded by this bowl-bearer contains a stone idol, which constitutes another materialization of the ancestral singing shaman.

The *'irikweikame* fulfills another important function among the bowl-bearers of the tuki of Tateikie. He cares for the main staff (*'itsi*) of the tuki's guardians and guides the pilgrims in Wirikuta and during deer hunts. He is the only *xukuri'ikame* to care for five different effigy bowls.

The bowl of Tatei Niwetsika (Our Mother Maize) contains grains or ears of maize. According to Huichols, "this goddess is every grain of maize . . . therefore we call her 'our life'" (Leal Carretero and García Muñoz 1992: 200). The sacred bowl connected to this deity contains wax figures in the form of livestock. During the agricultural rituals dedicated to maize, the participating bowl-bearers deposit different colored ears of maize in this bowl. Tatei Niwetsika is primarily embodied by the woman who holds this office. For the Parched Maize Ceremony (*Xarikixa*), this bowl-bearer toasts grains of maize on a *comal* (ceramic griddle; Huichol: *xakí*), and her husband distributes them to the participants to begin the planting. For this ceremony, this bowl-bearer is called *Xakí* and is easily recognized by the colorful sash she wears around her head and into which is inserted one or two *muwierite* (feathered shaman's wands).

The bowl of Tatei Kewimuka, a goddess linked to the western rains and the *milpa* (maize field) who at times takes the form of a serpent, contains a large candle. Inside the bowl are wax figures in the form of lightning bolts or lines that represent rain. Tatei Kewimuka is also con-



Figure 4. Gourd bowl dedicated to the sun. Photo by Antonio García.

sidered to be one of the Mothers of the Deer (Neurath, pers. com. 1997), of whom Huichols request “life, deerhunting, squash and good maize harvests” (Leal Carretero and García Muñoz 1992: 198).

The guardian of Tawexikía cares for the bowls of Our Father Sun. A bowl-bearer from Tateikie described to me the figures depicted in this bowl. They consist of lines that refer to sunrays, green corn, and “designs of the god Tawexikía.” Based on a gourd bowl that I observed in a family shrine in Atonalisco, Nayarit, and that was dedicated to the sun (figure 4), I conclude that this “design” refers to images of the sun or eagles engraved on Mexican coins.

The gourd bowl of Tatewarí, Our Grandfather Fire, includes figures in the form of deer. As Huichols explained it to me, the fire is akin to the sun, which in turn is related to the deer. This explains the presence of this animal in the bowl.

The bowl-bearer of Tamaatsi 'eká Teiwari (Our Elder Brother Wind Neighbor) cares for a clay bowl covered by another inverted clay bowl. The bowl-bearer who corresponds to this deity explained to me that “the bowl is covered so that the rain doesn't fall, and it is uncovered

when one wants it to rain.” These actions are carried out in the tuki during the rituals related to the rains. The relationship between wind and rain appears in mythological narratives, according to which Tamaatsi ’eká Teiwari is the elder brother of Tatei Nřariwame, the rain goddess. When rain becomes scarce, Huichols ask the wind god to go look for his sister. He has the ability to dispatch her to where rain is needed.

The *hakeritsixi* are child bowl-bearers, generally a boy-girl couple. They participate mainly in rituals related to the sacrifice of an animal. Because of their youth they are also called *angelitos* in Spanish. These bowl-bearers are said to have the purest souls of all living Huichol people. This is why they are the only ones considered appropriate to give the sacrificer the knife he uses to kill the animal. This knife, incidentally, is handed to the sacrificer on top of the gourd bowl into which the first blood of this animal will spill.

Although the *tsikwaki* (ritual clown) also forms part of the group of bowl-bearers, he is distinguished from them by the fact that he does not care for a gourd bowl “because he already has his mask,” as a Huichol explained to me. Therefore, it appears that in this case, the *tsikwaki*’s mask is equivalent to an effigy bowl.³ The *tsikwaki*’s ritual role consists in making jokes and scaring people, even during the most solemn moments.

In addition to these bowl-bearers, the inhabitants of San Andrés mention others. I learned of the existence of a bowl-bearer for Tamaatsi Paritsika (Our Elder Brother Dawn, the deer god), Tatuutsi Maxakwaxi (Our Great-Grandfather Deertail), Takutsi Nakawé (Our Grandmother Growth), and Tatei Yurienaka (Our Mother Earth). The bowl-bearers also include several *kawiterutsixi* (councilmen), who have a special status since they are considered to be the wisest men of the community. They form part of the Consejo de Ancianos (Council of Elders) whose members designate the bowl-bearers for the different hierarchies through their dreams. The *nauxakame* of the San Andrés tuki is also a *kawiteru*. His function is to narrate myths to the other bowl-bearers through his chants.

The tuki of Mukuxetá (Tierra Morada) in Wautia (San Sebastián Teponahuaxtlán) has approximately twenty bowl-bearers. The main circular tuki building at Mukuxetá is surrounded by several small square xirikite corresponding to different effigy bowls, and the bowl-

3. As we will see later, this mask is also equipped with a *nierika*, the word Huichols use to designate the circle located in the center of most religious gourd bowls.

bearers live in their respective shrines with their bowls for the duration of their cargos. Engraved and painted stone disks (*tepari*) are also fixed above each shrine's door. Like the bowls, the *tepari* designs refer to the deity who lives in that *xiriki* and is embodied by the cargo-holder. Thus, for example, *xirikite* dedicated to Tayau (the sun), Tatei 'utianaka (the fish goddess), Tatei Yurienaka (Our Mother Earth), Tateitema (the mothers), Tatei Kiewimuka (the deer mother), and Tatei Xapawiyeme (a deity who takes the form of a *chalate* fig tree [*xapa*]) are all located around the tuki at Mukuxetá.⁴

The bowl-bearer for Tatei Yurienaka at Mukuxetá showed me his effigy bowl. In fact, there were three bowls painted black, with one bigger than the other two. They included wax figures in the shape of a human being, maize plants, and livestock. The figures were decorated with beads of different colors, and inside of each bowl shone a Mexican coin with the eagle side up. According to the description of the bowl-bearer of Tatei Xapawiyeme, the corresponding bowl is dark blue with a red outside edge. The wax figures decorating it represent doves. A star, which is also a peyote flower, shines in the center.

It is interesting to note that bowl-bearers do not exclusively care for the effigy bowls in Wautia. Instead, every member of the civil hierarchy—the traditional authorities (*'itsikate*) related to the House of the Governor—cares for both a staff of authority (*'itsi*; Spanish: *vara*) and a gourd bowl. The inhabitants of this community explain this difference from the practice in San Andrés by the fact that in the main community of Wautia, the tuki and the House of the Governor form a single building.⁵ Still, the effigy bowls associated with the tuki and its *xirikite* continue to be thought of as embodiments of the deities that inhabit those sacred buildings.

GOURD BOWLS AND SACRED TERRITORY

Among their ritual tasks, bowl-bearers must go on pilgrimages each year of their five-year term of office. These treks take them to one or

4. Xapawiyeme is associated in turn with Takutsi Nakawé, who according to myths, saved Watákame from the deluge by advising him to make a canoe out of a *chalate* tree.

5. Hinton (1972: 38) pointed out a similar conflation in his study of the Cora community of Jesús María. He showed that religious images of Catholic origin and “the three Cora gods” were worshiped together. “Most of the prayers are directed separately to each one in order,” adding that “each one of them has its pagan representation in a votive bowl called a ‘tecomate.’”

several of the following places: Wirikuta, San Luis Potosí, in the east; Haramaratsie at San Blas, Nayarit, in the west; Xapawiyemeta at Lake Chapala, Jalisco, in the south; Hauxa Manaka at Cerro Gordo, Durango, in the north; and Teekata in the center of the Huichol sierra itself. During these journeys the pilgrims carry gourd bowls dedicated to different deities.⁶ Because each deity resides in one or more places, these bowls are deposited at a large number of sacred sites (Preuss 1932: 447–48). Indeed, it probably would be impossible to enumerate all of these sites. Nonetheless, in order to provide a basis for understanding the logic of Huichol spatial orientation, I will mention some sites that are considered to be most important, along with the colors and deities that correspond to them.

Huichols say that the gods of the directions communicate the appropriate color to use in gourd bowls directly to the bowl-bearers through their dreams. Bowls painted black, for example, tend to refer to female rain deities because of the darkness or night sky associated with them and because of the germination of seeds. These bowls are taken to Tatei Haramara (Our Mother the Sea), who lives in the west on a sacred rock pillar just off the coast of San Blas, Nayarit. Red, on the other hand, tends to be associated with male fire deities as well as the sun, daylight, and the dry season. Such bowls are taken to Burnt Mountain (Reu'unaxi) in Wirikuta. Blue and green pertain to Xapawiyemeta, in Lake Chapala to the south (cf. Mata Torres 1972: 67). The north is associated with white or yellow and the center includes all these colors, which produce a color similar to that of “spotted” maize.

According to Neurath (pers. com. 1997), in Tuapurie (Santa Catarina Cuexcomatitlán), black and purple (*tairawime*) are linked with the west, whereas red and yellow are associated with the east. White is associated with the north, dark blue with the south, and spotted with the center. In Santa Catarina, the main colors used to paint gourd bowls are black (which can be replaced by dark blue) and red. This expresses the basic opposition between dark and light, night and day, west and east, and feminine and masculine (ibid.).

Lumholtz (1900: 14) also mentions this correspondence among the cardinal directions, colors, and deities who inhabit each place, although these correspondences are slightly different than those described here.

6. These pilgrimages, however, are not exclusive to bowl-bearers. Anyone can make votive (as opposed to effigy) bowls and ask for help from deities through the messages inscribed in them.

He mentioned that “the color of the south is red; of the north, white; of the west, black; of the east, white; of the region above, blue or green; of the region below, brown.” In San Andrés the colors associated with universal directions also apply to the five colors of maize, peyote, and deer. Huichols there divide all of these into five species, each with its respective color.

Huichols also tend to identify the attributes of the wax figures in religious gourd bowls by their respective colors. For instance, one man in San Andrés specified that wax figures of men and children are decorated with yellow or white beads, whereas women have red mixed with white. Male animals are decorated with black beads whereas the females have white beads. In contrast, a woman from the same community decorates male deer with blue or green beads and the females with white or yellow. She decorates maize with the same colors because, as she explained, “the cornfield is transformed into a deer.” She covers the stalk and leaves with green beads, while the ears are distinguished with white beads. Based on this explanation, it appears that the maize plant is considered to be masculine whereas the ears and grains of maize are feminine. This reasoning is also congruent with mythical narratives, according to which Tatei Niwetsika, the Maize Mother, is each grain of maize. The masculine character of the stalk is probably explained because Watákame was the first to cultivate maize. Because of its tubular form, the stalk can also be associated with arrows (*'iré*), staffs of authority (*'itsi*), and candles (*katira*) or torches (*hauri*), all of which have masculine attributes.

In the case of the figures with human forms, the woman made no gender distinctions based on the color of the beads. She pointed out that the heart (*'iyari*) was indicated by a red bead in the center of the body and that the eyes had to be made of black or blue beads. Although we generally find basic oppositions between “hot” or bright colors such as white, yellow, or red, and “cold” or dark colors such as blue, green, and black, the choice of colors with respect to beads in religious gourd bowls appears to be relatively arbitrary.

The linkage between religious gourd bowls and cardinal directions is also manifested in how these bowls are used in rituals. Huichols in San Andrés, for example, use a religious gourd bowl to drink from the baptismal font located in the altar of the town church (*teyepani*). The bowl is filled with water from five parts of the font in the form of a four-petaled flower—the four sections first, the center last. Through

this apparently insignificant gesture, Huichols indicate the five directions of the universe using a religious gourd bowl. In this context, the ritual action of marking the universal directions is linked to the symbolism of the figures in the center of the bowls. These consist of a wax circle decorated with five beads: one in the center and four around it. Therefore, in this ritual action, as much as in Huichol color-directional symbolism, we find a recurring structure representing the cosmos with its center and the universal directions in these gourd bowls.

THE GOURD BOWL, A MODEL OF THE COSMOS AND A COMMUNICATIVE MEDIUM

Many native peoples in Mexico place themselves at the symbolic center of a larger territory constituted in terms of mountains, lakes, and other landscape features or ceremonial centers (Galinier 1990: 112).⁷ Similarly, a number of Huichols from Tateikie hold that the ultimate center-point of the world is found in their own community, which they consider to be the “navel” of the world, where all things originated. In their understanding, Tateikie is more important than any other Huichol community because it has always been the most populous Huichol ceremonial center. Routes are laid out to the cardinal directions from the ceremonial center of San Andrés, and all along these routes are sacred sites with a symbolic connection back to the center. A mountain east of San Andrés called Paritsikatsie, for example, is often used as a place to leave offerings to the rising sun if one cannot go all the way to Wirikuta. According to Johannes Neurath (1996: 290), among the Huichols a “system of symbolic correspondences associates temples with sacred sites (caves, mountains, rocks, outcrops, springs, lakes, the Pacific Ocean, etc.), deities (who are deified ancestors), the five cardinal directions [and] the vertical levels of the cosmos (the underworld and the world above).”

This organization of sacred territory is a kind of “homologous system” (cf. Perrin 1994: 198) that obeys a principle of “spatial replication” (cf. López-Austin 1994: 170–71), a principle that can also be recognized in gourd bowls. Specifically, a common structure is present

7. Galinier (1990: 112) proposes a mechanism of “metaphorical association” which implies that “on the symbolic plane, the halves are linked to sacred mountain peaks, from which the space of the community is projected.”

in both the configuration of Huichol sacred territory and in the composition of the figures in the effigy gourd bowls. Various authors, including Lumholtz (1900: 161–68) and Preuss (1911: 297), have also been aware that Huichol gourd bowls constitute such a world image or *Weltbild* (Preuss 1911). Indeed, from this perspective, Huichol gourd bowls may be thought of as a materialized way of thinking about the larger sacred territory. They constitute a small-scale model of cosmological space, connected with a mental map.

This point was made clear when Doña Andrea, a mara'akame who lives in Atonalisco, Nayarit, explained to me the significance of the figures included in the religious gourd bowls that had been passed down to her from her ancestors. As she explained the meanings of the figures, she also recalled the succession of sacred sites to which the figures referred. Each figure referred to the others and they helped her remember myths about the deity which the figure represented and the places to which she had once made pilgrimages. These objects were linked to a mental map for her; in consulting it she found not only a configuration of sacred territory, but also an account of the deities that live in distinct areas.⁸

Although religious gourd bowls, particularly effigy gourd bowls, refer to a mental map through which Huichols shape their conception of space, these gourd bowls are also used in rituals to communicate between the world of humans and the world of the deified ancestors. Lumholtz (1900: 161), for example, proposes that “votive bowls . . . must be considered as drinking-gourds offered to the gods, who, so to speak, drink in the prayers of the people.” He describes some of the symbolic figures that adorn various ceremonial gourd bowls, explaining which prayer they “contain” and to which god they pertain. Similarly, I was able to observe that when these gourd bowls stained or changed color, these changes were read as bad omens transmitted from the gods. These bowls, then, allow a connection to be made between humans and the “other world” (cf. Perrin 1994: 195). They are like channels or doors through which spiritual communication may pass. They permit both exchanges of gifts and the communication of messages between

8. Lévi-Strauss (1966 [1962]: 23) reflects on the character of the “small-scale model” or “miniature” in works of art, and argues that “graphic or plastic transposition always involves giving up certain dimensions of the object: volume in painting, colour, smell, tactile impressions in sculpture and the temporal dimension in both cases since the whole work represented is apprehended at a single moment in time.”

human beings and the gods. This implies two interrelated movements: from gods to humans (through advice, messages, or divine gifts) and from humans to gods (through offerings and prayers; cf. Bonte and Izard 1991: 624). In this sense, these gourd bowls are a kind of medium that permits communication in a continuous exchange between deities and humans. For Huichols, this communicative mediation is conceived to occur through processes of microcosmic “reading” and “writing,” both of which are accomplished through the use of religious gourd bowls.

“READING” THE GODS

Juan Negrín (1986: 5) defines the term *nierika* as an “image of god,” accessible above all to *mara’akate*, thanks to their capacity to “see beyond appearances.” For Lumholtz (1900: 108) the *nierika* “symbolizes the face (hence a mask is a *neali’ka* [*nierika*]) or aspect of a god or person: in fact, it may be said to be the Indian expression for a picture.” Negrín focuses on analyzing just such “pictures,” the yarn paintings that numerous artisans make for sale, which are also called *nierika*. Both authors, however, explain that the word has a large number of referents. It may designate “front shields” (*nama*), masks, disks of engraved stone (*tepari*), “the holes in the walls of a god-house,” “round netted shields,” “diminutive ceremonial deer snares,” and even “the round mirrors bought in Mexican stores” (Lumholtz 1900: 108).

Neurath (1996: 289, 307) also discusses the use of the latter by peyote-seekers of the community of Tuapurie, referring to them as “mirrors between two worlds” (cf. Negrín 1986: 5). But these mirrors do not simply reflect a faithful appearance of whatever is found in front of them. Rather, they also permit one to see “beyond appearances” on the surface of the image reflected in it. This includes, then, a dimension that cannot be reduced to an image or picture. In his discussion of *nierika*, Lumholtz (1900: 212) also reaches the same conclusion: “This comprehensive use of the word *neali’ka* [*nierika*] as signifying ‘front-shield,’ ‘face,’ ‘appearance,’ and ‘picture’ suggests that the Huichols have in it a veritable word for ‘symbol.’”

The interpretation of *nierika* as a richly meaningful symbol takes on particular relevance in relation to the circles of wax covered with beads, also called *nierika*, commonly found in the center of religious gourd

bowls. Generally, such a circle of wax is adorned with five beads placed to correspond to the five cardinal points of the Huichol sacred geography. Indeed, according to explanations given to me by various Huichols, this nierika is specifically meant to represent the earth upon which the figures of animals, people, and plants contained in the gourd bowls live. This is why people's feet, animals' paws, and plants' roots should always point toward the center of the gourd bowl, while their heads are oriented toward the edge. As a Huichol woman explained to me when showing me some votive gourd bowls that she had made: "the center is the place from which everything grows."

Lumholtz (1900: 161 and *passim*) also mentions the close relationship between religious gourd bowls and the deified ancestor Tamaatsi Kauyumarie:

Elder Brother Kauyuma'li, the god who taught the ancient people how to obtain favors from the gods, is the one who also showed them how to adorn drinking-gourds for ceremonial purposes. He and the other gods shape the world with the help of votive bowls and ceremonial arrows. In order to secure the necessary blood to smear on the votive bowls, these shapers of the world had to kill a doe, who was a woman, whereby they offended the underworld people. During the fight that ensued, Kauyuma'li saw his chance to snatch from his opponents their votive bowl, which contained *hi'kuli* [*híkuri*].

Híkuri (peyote, *Lophophora williamsii*) is a crucial substance in the lives of the Huichol people, particularly for its ability to bring the knowledge that allows one to become a mara'akame and begin to communicate with the gods. Indeed, in the pantheon of Huichol gods, híkuri is a divine being capable of taking on various forms, transforming the world, and informing mara'akate about that transformation. Tamaatsi Kauyumarie is considered to be the first of these mara'akate. He communicates by transforming himself into deer, eagles, peyote, or even other living mara'akate in order to transmit divine messages.

Peyote also influences visual perception, an effect that can be perceived as transformations of figures in religious gourd bowls. Mara'akate watch the flames of the ceremonial fire during their nocturnal chants after consuming peyote, looking for the images through which Tamaatsi Kauyumarie manifests himself. In the same way, gourd bowls should be "read" outward from the center of their beaded nierika in

order to comprehend the messages contained there. The forms that Tamaatsi Kauyumarie adopts in gourd bowls serve as signals to the mara'akate who read the peyote messages that are being transmitted to them by the other gods. Because of its capacity to take on a number of aspects or forms, this deity occupies a central place in the Huichol cosmovision; it aligns Huichol people with their sacred world.

Here again, the concept of the image for the Huichols encompasses much more than a simple reflection or picture. It is not limited to the realm of appearance, but rather constitutes a type of door through which one can pass to travel to the different levels of the universe. To put it another way, if Western culture distinguishes between reading a text and seeing (or admiring) a work of art (cf. Leroi-Gourhan 1991 [1964]: 269), it seems to me that Huichols join these two actions to “see” religious gourd bowls and also to “see through,” or “read,” them.

“WRITING” OUR LIVES

Huichols claim that the wax figures they place in effigy gourd bowls are similar to writing. This notion is linked to the name of the creator deity of gourd bowls, Tatei 'utianaka. The root *'utia* means “engrave, write” and the verb form refers to “the messages of our ancestors” (Ramírez de la Cruz 1993: 151). Upon listening to explanations of the figures “written” into religious gourd bowls, however, it became clear to me that these figures are not meant to faithfully reproduce reality any more than mirrors are thought by Huichols to accurately reflect the images before them. Rather, these figures are meant to create a kind of “written” reality as a counterpart to the “reading” of messages from Tamaatsi Kauyumarie and the other ancestor-deities.

Various Huichol women have stated to me that by forming wax figures and by placing them within gourd bowls, these figures “are given their own life.” The action of forming the figures in the gourd bowls, of “completing” them through the craftwork process, changes these figures into living things. According to these women, all that occurs within the gourd bowl will occur simultaneously in reality, and vice versa. Consequently, these gourd bowls are handled very carefully, and it is preferable that no one touches them except the person who made them (or an initiated person such as a mara'akame or kawiteru). I was able to see this for myself when I observed how Doña Andrea picked

up effigy gourd bowls from the xirikite of her ancestors. While picking up the gourd bowls from their altars she directed prayers to her ancestors so that they would permit the removal of the bowls from their place. She then made a number of counterclockwise circuits around the fire located in the patio in front of the shrines. After “uncovering” the gourd bowls by taking them out of the cloths in which they were wrapped, she also spoke to the gourd bowls, saying that they should not be startled by the presence of strangers. All of these precautions point to the sacred and “delicate” (*maiwe*) (cf. Perrin 1994: 195) character of these gourd bowls (figures 5, 6, 7, and 8).

The woman from Tateikie told me an interesting anecdote in this regard: when she was young and began to plant her cornfield, she drew maize plants in her gourd bowls, but without drawing in their roots. Later she realized that her maize crop was not growing well and died in

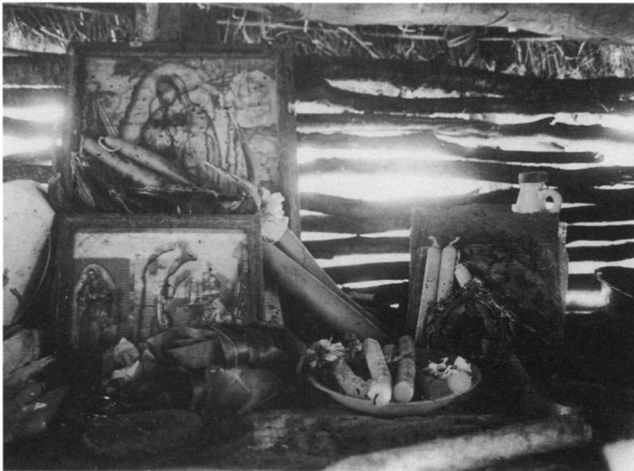


Figure 5.
Altar in Doña
Andrea's maternal-
line xiriki. Photo by
Antonio García.

Figure 6. Layout
of Doña Andrea's
home: (a) xiriki
of Doña Andrea's
paternal-line
ancestors; (b) xiriki
of her maternal-line
ancestors; (c) cere-
monial fire for
paternal-line xiriki;
(d) ceremonial fire for maternal-line xiriki; (e) sleeping area; (f) kitchen; (g) sleeping
area; (h) granary; (i) washroom. Illustration by Magali Aguilera Hernández.

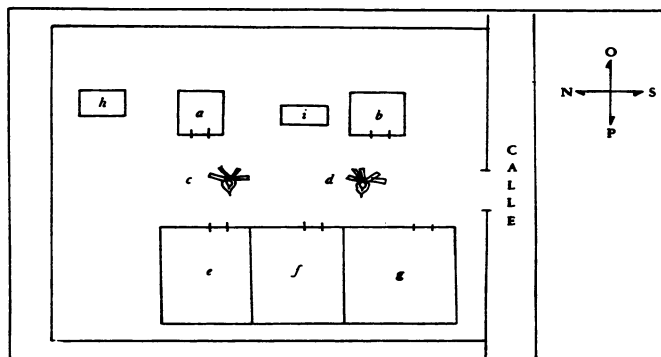




Figure 7. Doña Andrea making counter-clockwise circuits around the fire.



Figure 8. Doña Andrea speaking to gourd bowls.

the field for no apparent reason. A little later, she had a dream in which a gourd bowl adorned with maize plants with very long roots appeared. When she awoke, she went to look at the maize in the field and realized they lacked roots. Afterwards she drew the maize plants in their votive gourd bowls, remembering to draw in the roots, and from then on the plants in her field “were born” with healthy and abundant roots.

The important point here is the Huichol conception of the power of the written image. The trance or dream image perceived in the figures of the gourd bowl permits one to recognize divine messages, but the written images that are formed of wax in these gourd bowls also have creative powers that connect with natural phenomena. In fact, in this system of thought, there does not appear to be a sharp distinction among the natural, the supernatural, and the cultural. On the contrary, these three realms are tied together in a process of creation that is itself comparable to a process of fertility and growth.

CONCLUSION

Lumholtz (1900: 161) argued that “votive bowls are not considered quite as valuable” as ceremonial arrows in Huichol culture. However, the importance of studying these apparently humble objects became more and more evident to me as my fieldwork progressed. In fact, insofar as the *xukuri'ikate* occupy a fundamental place in the religious hierarchy and are in charge of both fashioning and caring for the ritual bowls of the deified ancestors, these objects play a central role in the cosmogony and rites of Huichol society. They are links connecting the human world with the world of the deified ancestors.

Huichol gourd bowls also configure topography and temporality. On the one hand, points of reference in relation to sacred territory and the Huichol conception of the universe are established through these ritual bowls. On the other hand, the same votive bowls are deposited in different sacred sites visited by Huichols, where they are exposed to the elements until they disintegrate with the passage of time. With regard to the effigy bowls, we know that after five years they are buried beneath the *tuki's* central fire. Thus, they are reintegrated into the earth and become part of it.

But for Huichols, space and time are linked. This disintegration of effigy bowls should be considered one aspect of a universe capable of regenerating and transforming itself as it passes through cycles of life and death (Galinié 1990: 509–10). Just like living beings, stars, and everything else in the world, gourd bowls follow the stages of the life cycle as it is conceived by the Huichols: they are born, develop, and die in the same way as human beings.

From a purely formal perspective, the figures inside the bowls do not attempt to reproduce reality faithfully; they do not obey the classical mimetic laws of figurative representation. However, Huichols say that these figures and the gourd bowl that contains them are indeed representations of deified ancestors or human beings, depending on whether it is an effigy or votive bowl. How are we to understand this apparent paradox? It is resolved by remembering that for Huichols what matters most is the action of forming the figures and placing them in the bowls, thereby giving them their own existence. Through the actions carried out on these objects, a metonymic relationship is established between the person who fashions the bowl, the spatio-temporal context into which it is inserted, and the figures it contains. This helps us to understand the Huichol idea that everything contained

in the world also contains the world. In other words, each Huichol bowl constitutes a microcosm in itself, not a mere image or portrait of the universe. ✦

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The fieldwork that made this article possible was supported by the Centro Francés de Estudios Mexicanos y Centroamericanos of the French embassy in Mexico and by the Escuela Nacional de Antropología e Historia. I would like to thank in particular Casiano Martínez and his wife, Benita and María Clara Mijares, Samuel Moreno, and Doña Andrea Ríos, who provided valuable explanations of their culture with friendliness and patience. I would also like to thank the community of Tateikie, whose inhabitants have received me hospitably during my repeated stays. I also acknowledge the participants in Jesús Jáuregui's seminar, Anthropology and History of the Gran Nayar, for their enriching discussion and invaluable help during fieldwork and the preparation of materials included here. I would also like to thank Antonio García and Arturo Gutiérrez for the photographs that illustrate this work. I also acknowledge Paul Liffman and Philip E. Coyle for their valuable help in preparing the translation of the final version of this article.

REFERENCES CITED

- Berrin, Kathleen, ed.
1978 *Art of the Huichol Indians*. New York: Harry N. Abrams in association with the Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco.
- Bonte, Pierre, and Michel Izard
1991 *Dictionnaire de l'ethnologie et de l'anthropologie*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
- Furst, Peter T., and Salomón Nahmad
1972 *Mitos y arte huicholes (Colección Sep-Setentas)*. Mexico City: Secretaría de Educación Pública.
- Galinier, Jacques
1990 *La mitad del mundo: cuerpo y cosmos en los rituales otomíes*. Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Centro Francés de Estudios Mexicanos y Centroamericanos, Instituto Nacional Indigenista.

García de Weigand, Celia

- 1990 *Huichol Indian Beadwork: Techniques and Designs, 1920 to 1980*. Monographs in Western Mesoamerican Research no. 1. Flagstaff, AZ: Northern Arizona University.

Geist, Ingrid

- 1994 Simbolismo puesto de cabeza: apuntes para la ritualidad huichola. *La Palabra y el Hombre: Revista de la Universidad Veracruzana* 91:135–50.

Hinton, Thomas

- 1972 *Coras, huicholes y tepehuanes*. Mexico City: Instituto Nacional Indigenista.

Kindl, Olivia

- 1997 La jícara huichola: un microcosmos mesoamericano. Licenciatura, Escuela Nacional de Antropología e Historia, Mexico City.

Leal Carretero, Silvia, and Pedro García Muñoz

- 1992 *Xurawe o la ruta de los muertos: mito huichol en tres actos*. Guadalajara: Universidad de Guadalajara.

Leroi-Gourhan, André

- 1991 *Le geste et la parole*. Vol. I: *Technique et langage*. Paris: Albin [1964] Michel.

Lévi-Strauss, Claude

- 1966 *The Savage Mind*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. [1962]

López-Austin, Alfredo

- 1994 *Tamoanchan y Tlalocan*. Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica.

Lumholtz, Carl

- 1900 Symbolism of the Huichol Indians. In *Collected Memoirs of the American Museum of Natural History* Vol. 3: *Anthropology*. New York: American Museum of Natural History.

- 1973 *Unknown Mexico: A Record of Five Years' Exploration among the Tribes of the Western Sierra Madre*. Glorieta, N.M.: Rio Grande Press. [1902]

MacLean, Hope

- 1995 Huichol Indian Yarn Paintings and Shamanism: An Aesthetic Analysis, Ph.D. diss., University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada.

Mata Torres, Ramón

- 1972 Vida y arte de los huicholes: El arte (Part II). *Artes de México* 19(161):3–124.

Medina González, Emma Isabel

- 1996 Jícaras y guajes prehispánicos procedentes de contextos arqueológicos húmedos: análisis integral para el conocimiento y conservación de un artefacto arqueológico. Licenciatura, Escuela Nacional de Restauración, Mexico City.

Negrín, Juan

- 1985 *Acercamiento histórico y subjetivo al huichol*. Guadalajara: Universidad de Guadalajara.
- 1986 *Nierica: espejo entre dos mundos: arte contemporáneo huichol*. Mexico City: Museo de Arte Moderno.

Neurath, Johannes

- 1996 El centro ceremonial tukipa en la comunidad huichol Tia-purie. In *Procesos de escenificación y contextos rituales*, ed. Ingrid Geist, 287–315. Mexico City: Universidad Iberoamericana, Editorial Plaza y Valdés.
- 1998 Las fiestas de la Casa Grande: ritual agrícola, iniciación y cosmovisión en una comunidad wixárika, Ph.D. diss., Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Mexico City.

Perrin, Michel

- 1994 Notes d'ethnographie huichol: la notion de ma'ive et la nologie. *Journal de la Société des Américanistes* 80:195–206.

Preuss, Konrad Theodor

- 1911 Die Opferblutschale der alten Mexikaner erläutert nach Angaben der Cora-Indianer. *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* 43:293–308.
- 1912 *Die Nayarit-Expedition: Textaufnahmen und Beobachtungen unter mexikanischen Indianern*. Vol. 1: *Die Religion der Cora-Indianer*. Leipzig: Druck und Verlag von B. G. Teubner.
- 1932 Au sujet du caractère des mythes et des chants huichols que j'ai recueillis. *Revista del Instituto de Etnología, Universidad Nacional de Tucumán* 2:445–57.

Ramírez de la Cruz, Julio (Xitakame)

- 1993 *Wixárika niawarieya: la canción huichola*. Guadalajara: Universidad de Guadalajara.

Schaefer, Stacy B.

- n.d. *To Think with a Good Heart: Wixárika Women, Weavers, and Shamans*. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press. Forthcoming.

Schaefer, Stacy B., and Peter T. Furst, eds.

- 1996 *People of the Peyote: Huichol Indian History, Religion, and Survival*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.

Turner, Victor W.

- 1974 Foreword. In *Peyote Hunt: The Sacred Journey of the Huichol Indians*, ed. Barbara Myerhoff, pp. 7–10. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

- 1988 *El proceso ritual*. Madrid: Taurus. (Translation of *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. Chicago: Aldine, 1969.)

Walker, James R.

- 1917 The Sun Dance and Other Ceremonies of the Oglala Division of the Teton Dakota. *Anthropological Papers* (American Museum of Natural History, New York) 16(2):55–221.

Zingg, Robert M.

- 1998 *La mitología de los huicholes*. Eds. Jay C. Fikes, Phil C. Weigand, and Acelia García de Weigand. Trans. Eduardo Williams. Guadalajara: Secretaría de Cultura de Jalisco; Zamora: Colegio de Michoacán; Zapopan: Colegio de Jalisco.