

THE MUSICAL BOW IN ANCIENT MEXICO

M. H. SAVILLE

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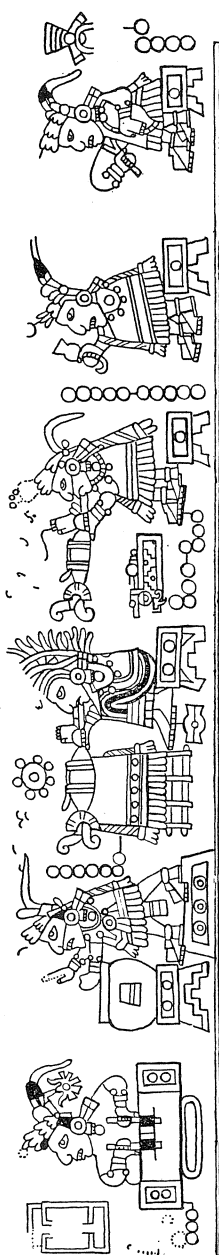
In *Science*, September 16, 1898, Professor Mason writes that Dr Carl Sapper believes the *hool* to have been introduced from Africa. Sapper states that "it is used by the Kekchi of Guatemala, who call it Marimbadie or Caramba. The same instrument is in use among the Xicaques, in Honduras, but they attach a *guacal* as a resonator." This is obviously the *quijongo* instrument. Professor Mason further says that Dr Sapper does not agree with him that the stringed musical instrument was entirely absent from the Western hemisphere, for he says: "The Lacandones have a two-armed guitar, which he thinks not to have been borrowed. The Kekchi also used strings on the scraping instruments called *su*."

Dr S. Habel, in his monograph on the Sculptures of Santa Lucia Cosumalwhuapa, published by the Smithsonian Institution in 1878, describes an instrument similar to the *quijongo* which he observed used by the Nahuatl-speaking Indians of the Balsam coast, San Salvador; he states: "I did not see, however,

any instruments of European pattern. I observed in the village of Whuisnagua (German spelling—Four-thorns; from *whuis*, 'thorn,' and *nagua*, 'four'), for the first time, their national instrument, called *carimba*. It consists of a reed five feet long and about an inch or an inch and a half thick. A brass wire is attached to the two ends, by which the reed is slightly bent. At a third of its length the wire is tied by a string to the reed, and at the same place is fastened to the opposite face of the reed an inverted *jicarro*, an oblong cup of the small kind of calabash fruit, with its opening downward. With a splint of a similar reed a foot long the two parts of the wire are touched, giving only two distinct sounds, which are varied by changing the time and rhythm. At the same time the opening of the *jicarro* is more or less closed by the palm of the left hand, which produces the melody desired." I think Dr Sapper is in error regarding the *caramba*, properly *carimba*, of the Kekchis being like the *hool* which I saw used in Yucatan.

Dr H. ten Kate, in the *Anthropologist*, March, 1898, describes and illustrates a musical bow from Patagonia, and is of the opinion that stringed musical instruments did exist in America in pre-Columbian times. Prof. E. S. Morse, in a paper delivered before the American Association for the Advancement of Science, at its meeting in Boston in August, 1898, was inclined to agree with Professor Mason as to the absence of the stringed musical instrument before the time of Columbus.

In publishing my note I merely wished to record the occurrence of the musical bow in Yucatan, without entering into a general discussion of its antiquity, although I gave a hint concerning my idea of its being purely aboriginal, in stating that the Indians using it lived remote from Spanish influences. I had searched through the ancient Mexican codices and had found a single representation of a stringed musical bow, which I shall now figure and describe. A few words concerning the Mexican codex in which it is found may not be out of place. It was published in Geneva in 1892 by Henri De Saussure, under the name of "Le Manuscrit du Cacique." He states that it had been known since 1852, and he made a copy from the original when it was in the hands of Don Pascual Almazan, of Puebla. It later became a part of the famous Becker collection, now in Darmstadt. The reproduction was made from the copy. It was



a singular coincidence that in the same year, 1892, the Mexican government published in the sumptuous volume, "Antigüedades Mexicanas," a Mexican codex under the name of "Codex Colombino," which is undoubtedly a part of the "Manuscrit du Cacique." It was formerly known as the "Codex Doremberg," from the name of the German merchant, Señor Carlos Doremberg, of Puebla, who sold it with his collection of antiquities to the Mexican government. A single page had been published by Leopoldo Batres in 1889, in his work on the "Civilization of Ancient Mexico." Of its pre-Columbian origin there can be no question, although in the "Codex Colombino" there has been written on each page a short text in the Misteca language, reproduced in the page published by Batres, but omitted in the publication of the codex in its entirety. I cannot state whether there is a Mistecan text in the Becker codex, not having seen the original. In a number of other pre-Columbian Mexican codices such written texts are found, notably in the "Codex Sanchis Solis," published by Dr Antonio Peñafiel in his "Monumentos Mexicanos," without, however, the Zapotecan text—a circumstance much to be regretted. These two Mistecan codices make a book of forty pages, the "Codex Colombino" containing twenty-four, the "Manuscrit du Cacique" sixteen. It is made of deerskin, coated over with a slight surface of white paste, really stucco, upon which the ideographs and pictures have been painted in various colors, and, unlike many of the ancient codices, has been painted on but one side of the page. It is one of the

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