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Dennis Tedlock (translator and interpreter), *Rabinal Achi: A Mayan drama of war and sacrifice*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003. viii, 361. Hb $35.00.

Reviewed by Karl Taube
Anthropology, University of California, Riverside
Riverside, CA 92521-0418 USA
taube@ucr.edu

The *Rabinal Achi*, a colonial text of the K'iche'-speaking Maya of Rabinal, Guatemala, is an unusual document for a number of reasons. For one, it is a lengthy text of a Maya dance drama concerning historical events before the Spanish conquest. The content is almost entirely pre-Hispanic and concerns such themes as courtly elite behavior and the arraignment and execution of a prisoner, the rebellious K'iche' war leader Cawek of the Forest People. For the colonial period, there is no Maya dramatic text of comparable length and complexity. However, as a dance drama, the *Rabinal Achi* is as much a performance as it is a text. Although early colonial forms must have existed, the earliest known version dates to 1850, the manuscript recorded by Charles Etienne Brasseur de Bourbourg. Brasseur came to Rabinal in 1855, soon after he acquired the famed K'iche' epic *Popol Vuh*. While temporarily serving as the parish priest in Rabinal, Brasseur learned of the *Rabinal Achi* drama. Although he did not obtain the manuscript then owned by Bartolo Sis, he was able to transcribe the K'ichean text. In addition, Brasseur helped revive the dramatic performance, which he witnessed in 1856, the first time it had been played in some 30 years. As it turns out, his 1862 publication of the *Rabinal Achi* in French and the Achi dialect of K'iche' also helped ensure the continuity of the drama in Rabinal, as Brasseur sent a copy of the book to his assistant in Rabinal, Nicolas Lopez. Transcribed versions of the Achi K'iche' text from the Brasseur edition of 1862 have continued to be used by dance masters in Rabinal to this day.

Given the great importance of the *Rabinal Achi*, it is not surprising that a number of versions of this text have been published since the early work of Bras-

seur. The new volume by Dennis Tedlock is a welcome addition for a number of reasons. For one, most previous published versions are based on the French translation by Brasseur. The Tedlock volume is the first English translation from the original Achi K'iche' text in the Brasseur edition. In addition, Tedlock also makes use of the copy of the 1862 Achi K'iche' text made by Manuel Pérez of Rabinal in 1913, as this version contains important conventions not recorded by Brasseur, including couplets. Tedlock also benefited by interviews with José León Coloch, the current director and producer of the *Rabinal Achi*. Tedlock is very well suited for this major task. An expert in K'iche' language and culture, he has already published an excellent translation of the *Popol Vuh*, now in its second edition. His extensive knowledge of K'iche' sources as well as linguistics assisted with many of problems in translation, including the term *worom* 'pierced' in reference to the Rabinal ruler of Red Mountain, Lord Five Thunder. Although Brasseur and others took this to be a sexual insult, in his French translation of the *Rabinal Achi* Alain Breton interpreted *worom* as a reference to nose piercing, a well-known ritual of high office among the Late Postclassic Chichimec of highland Mexico. Tedlock notes that in the K'iche' *Zaq K'oxol* drama the term is clearly honorific, being used by a noble in reference to his son.

One of Tedlock's major contributions is his treatment of native New World texts and oral narratives not simply as sources of symbolic or historical information but also as literature, with their own aesthetic rules and conventions. One of the preeminent figures in the field of ethnopoetics, he is especially interested in performance, in terms not only of speech utterances and attendant pauses but also gestures, costumes, and other props. The *Rabinal Achi* is ideally suited for such a focus because it continues to be performed in Rabinal. In 1998 Tedlock and his wife, the anthropologist Barbara Tedlock, were able to witness and record two complete performances in Rabinal with video and photographs, and many of these photographs appear in the volume. Throughout the translation, Tedlock provides detailed information concerning dance steps, poses, and other body motions. In his 1862 publication, Brasseur presented the *Rabinal Achi* as prose, sectioned European-style into distinct paragraphs. However, with his recording of the performances and interviews with José León Coloch, Tedlock realized that the *Rabinal Achi* is in poetic verse, with extensive use of couplets and triads.

Along with relating the *Rabinal Achi* to colonial and contemporary K'ichean sources, Tedlock also compares many aspects of it to pre-Hispanic Mesoamerican traditions, especially those of the Late Classic Maya (600–900 CE). Tedlock's use of ancient Maya texts and imagery is excellent, and although some specialists in Classic Maya iconography might quibble with certain points, Tedlock makes a compelling case that there is considerable thematic continuity from the Classic period, including the courtly presentation and arraignment of prisoners, and particular performances, including dancing with shields and axes. Tedlock also relates certain themes of the *Rabinal Achi* to other cultures of ancient

Mesoamerica. Thus he compares the Eagle and Jaguar dancers of the *Rabinal Achi* to Eagle and Jaguars warriors of Late Classic Cacaxtla as well as the Late Postclassic Aztec. According to Tedlock, the dancing of Cawek with Eagle and Jaguar relates to the Aztec gladiatorial battles on the *temalacatl* stone, in which prisoners, although doomed, fought bravely against Eagle and Jaguar warriors. The comparison is apt, as Cawek also faces his imminent death with courage and resolve.

Aside from his discussions of related pre-Hispanic material, Tedlock also places the *Rabinal Achi* squarely in the context of the Spanish colonial period. He notes that during this time, the drama was a celebration of a time when Rabinal was independent of Spanish rule and had the political strength and authority to commit executions: "For Mayans, such productions recalled a time when the legitimate use of lethal force, which underlies the authority of all states, had yet to be usurped by foreign invaders." As political statements, such native historical dramas featuring the execution of captives were considered a threat to Spanish rule and were widely suppressed. Tedlock also notes that popular Spanish plays such as *Carlomagno* influenced the *Rabinal Achi* and related K'iche' dramas.

Aside from placing the *Rabinal Achi* in historical context, Tedlock also relates the book and the performance to the social memory and religious beliefs of Rabinal. He notes that only the dance master owns the book, and teaches the script to the performers by reading aloud. This is a manuscript rather than print culture, and this was surely also the case with the pre-Hispanic Maya codices, which are known to have been owned and read by priests in Postclassic Yucatan. Although the *Rabinal Achi* book used for recitation is treated as a sacred object to be prayed over and treated with reverence, new copies are periodically made by dance masters. The sacred nature of the book derives not from the written pages but from the characters of the drama. In an account of José León Coloch praying over the current book, Tedlock writes, "It was not the script as a physical object that he was treating as sacred, but the act of giving life to the voices of the play's characters, who are themselves ancestral beings." Although not a performer, an important figure in the *Rabinal Achi* drama is the Road Guide, a native priest who is the emissary, contact and "road" to the spirit world. Before the performance, the Road Guide prays over the dance masks and offers them candles and incense. Tedlock notes that the dancers impersonate the spirits of the characters, beings that reside in a cave in Red Mountain, the nearby ancient city where the historical events occurred. Both the Road Guide and the dance master journey to Red Mountain to ask the permission of the spirits to impersonate them. A similar tradition has been noted by Garrett Cook for the K'iche' community of Momostenango, where dancers impersonating animal spirits visit a sacred shrine at Monkey Rock to ask their permission, thereby avoiding accidents and other misfortunes. During the *Rabinal Achi* performance, the dancers look to the mountains and wail, signaling their close connection to these ancient and sacred places.

As both a written volume and a dramatic performance, the *Rabinal Achi* is a living text that continues to express the relation of Rabinal to its ancestral past and its surrounding world.

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WENDY AYRES-BENNETT, *Sociolinguistic variation in seventeenth-century French: Methodology and case studies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. xii, 267. Hb $95.00

Reviewed by FRANÇOISE GADET
*Sciences du Langage, Université de Paris-X
Nanterre, France*
gadet@u-paris10.fr

Wendy Ayres-Bennett (WAB hereafter) is a British French-language scholar, well known to philologists and historical grammarians. She is an authority on 17th-century language matters, in particular on Vaugelas and the *remarqueurs* (authors of observations on *le bon usage*, destined for those wishing to speak good French at a time when it was the mother tongue of a minority living in France). In this most recent contribution, she departs from preconceived ideas and typical disciplinary boundaries by using sociolinguistics to look at the history of the language in a project that brings to mind the work of Milroy 1992 on English and Lodge 1993, 2004 on French.

   The book has several objectives. First, in the face of the distorted image given by literary texts alone, which equates standardization with the elimination of variation, it sets out to inform on the diversity of usage in this period with data concerning variation. WAB considers that ordinary and nonstandard usages in the 17th century can shed light on the perception of literary texts, leading to better understanding of genres through the status of the variants. The second objective concerns the methodological consequences of the study of the sources from a sociohistorical perspective. When the only documents at our disposal are written, where is the best place to look for traces of ordinary language use? How should we go about interpreting nonstandard forms without precise knowledge of the demographic and social attributes of speakers and information concerning the context of use? How should we distinguish between *populaire*, *familier*, *vulgaire*, and simply *oral*? With the changing semantic and pragmatic values of forms, judgments run the risk of being anachronistic. The third objective is to confront variation and change. Variation in the past allows us to consider continuity and discontinuity, and to see how new forms enter the norm, as well as how variants disappear. Broadening the sources used has the result that certain features considered to be recent are found in the historical texts, challenging the apparently innovative nature of contemporary spoken French.