

# CANEK

Hombre, mito y motivo

Canek.  
Man, Myth and Symbol



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**EL GRAN MUSEO DEL  
MUNDO MAYA**  
DE MÉRIDA

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## Man, Myth and Symbol

In the town of Cisteil, municipality of Yaxcabá, during the last days of November 1761, a series of events that disturbed the apparent tranquility of the providence of Yucatan, took place. A Mayan man, who went down in history with the name of Jacinto Canek, refused to acknowledge the authority of the Spanish Crown and rebelled against the then-current political and religious order. The response of the authorities was devastating: the regime militias seized the town from the rebels, captured Canek and his followers and then condemned them to a brutal sentence.

Since then, Jacinto Canek has been ingrained as a character who transcends the boundaries of his own story's time and place. He has been a source of inspiration for artists and a topic of interest within scholars studying Yucatan's past. Today, the name Canek has become an emblem of the resistance and fight for social justice.

With the exhibition *Canek. Man Myth and Symbol* the Government of Yucatan, through the Ministry of Culture and Arts and the *Gran Museo del Mundo Maya de Merida*, along with the federal program *Apoyo a Instituciones Estatales de Cultura* (AIEC 2023), seeks to disseminate one of the most important characters in Yucatecan history, while acknowledging a legacy that remains alive in the language and life of Mayan women and men.



loginalal axo colob ychil hum pui kaab lae hum hum kaab tu cuchiic humbi pui lai v Haba el golan lae pop vo Zoo cip Zec Xul Jeyaxkin Mol cheen yax Zac Mac Ceh Kankin Muan Kayab Paax Cun Ku (Vayab Chas) 365 holiun kat catu oxhal catu hopel hum Dance co y Vayab hab na nantun pui pui lai v Haba pui pui lai v Haba	 Vinal de. Kan  Chicchan  Cimi  Manic  Iamat  Muhuc  oc  Chuen  Eib  Ben	 Flix  Men  cib  caban  Eonab  cauc  Ahau  Imix  IK  Akbal
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*Uinales* (months) from the *Chilam Balam* of Ixil  
18th Century  
Paper Manuscript  
Anthropology and History National Library





## Jacinto Canek

Scarce are documentation records regarding the life of Jacinto Uc de los Santos Canek, a man who in 1761 led the most important Mayan rebellion in Yucatan during the Colonial period. The passing of time and different points of view, molded the image of a character with legend tinges. Historical evidence allows us to trace the biography of the Mayan leader born around 1731 in the neighborhood of San Francisco de Campeche. He couldn't read or write, yet he did have a fair amount of knowledge regarding the Christian doctrine and biblical texts, even serving as a steward of the Brotherhood of Jesus Nazareno in his home neighborhood. He practiced traditional medicine and possessed a wide knowledge of his ancestors' cosmogenic beliefs, preserved in the oral and written memory of Mayan Yucatecan towns.

**Data Book of Indians from the San Antonio de Izamal Town**

1792

Paper Manuscript

Historic Archive of Yucatán Archdiocese



**Monument of Jacinto Canek**  
Cisteil, Yaxcabá, Yucatán  
Andrés Mena Sánchez  
*Taller de Cerámica Maya*  
2017





## The Rebellion of Cisteil

Canek embodied the myth of the man-god of Mesoamerican tradition and is presented as a syncretic Mayan Christian figure: in him, Jesus Christ and Kukulcan are intertwined. While being crowned as king of the town of Cisteil, he assumed the symbolic name of Jacinto Uc de los Santos Canek Chichán Moctezuma, and called upon the *caciques* of the province's towns to start the rebellion, put an end to the Spanish domain and regain their freedom.

As the news reached Merida, governor José de Crespo y Honorato ordered the organization of militias to fight the rebels. After a fierce battle, Cisteil was seized by the military detachments under the command of the captain of Thousco, Cristobal Calderón, on November 26th, 1761.

King Canek was captured a few days later on the hills of Sibac. He was then transported to Merida and, after a perfunctory trial, was condemned to be tortured and publicly executed on the Main Square of the city on December 14th, 1761.

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**Portrait of Governor José de Crespo y Honorato**

18th Century

Oil on fabric

Regional Museum of Anthropology Palacio Cantón-INAH





**The Torture of Jacinto Canek (detail)**

Fernando Castro Pacheco

1972

Mural Painting on Metal Sheet

Government Palace of Yucatán

Picture by Miguel Durán









## Canek: Motif and Symbol

In the 19th century, some of the main Yucatecan intellectuals and historians approached the Cisteil revolution and its leader, writing it off as a simple riot with no further transcendence, going as far as doubting its veracity. Within the context of the post-revolutionary cultural nationalism from the mid 20th century, Canek was taken by celebrated writers and artists as a source of inspiration for the production of their work. Artists such as Ermilo Abreu Gómez, Fernando Castro Pacheco and Enrique Gottdiener, dedicated some of their finest pieces to Canek.

In the last decades, the name of Canek has been restored in the memory of the Mayan communities of the Yucatan Peninsula, Chiapas and Guatemala, becoming a symbol of the constant fight for the preservation of their political, social and cultural rights. In this sense, Canek transcends the profile of historic and literary character to play a vital role in Yucatan's collective memory.

Canek

Raúl Cáceres Carenzo

1988

Printed Poster

Archive of Fernando Muñoz Castillo Theater





## Canek

Canek y el niño Guy están de buen humor y juegan juegos inocentes. Canek ha hecho, con un pañuelo blanco, un conejito. El conejito mueve las orejas, retoza y se duerme entre sus manos. De pronto se incomoda, salta y se va corriendo y desaparece, feliz, bajo la sombra de los árboles. Guy se queda con sus hermosos ojos verdes abiertos y se sonríe.

Ermilo Abreu Gómez

*Canek (fragment)*

Ermilo Abreu Gómez

Illustration by Paloma Díaz Abreu

*Lecturas Primer grado*

Public Education Ministry,

2020





Scene from *Canek, algún día  
supimos leer las estrellas*  
Josué Maychí (acting and script)  
Picture by Gerardo Valdez  
2022





Cisteil Cross  
Teresa Ramayo Lanz  
Black and White Photography  
1998



Mauricio Vila Dosal  
**Gobernador del Estado de Yucatán**

Loreto Noemí Villanueva Trujillo  
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Ana Eugenia Méndez Petterson  
**Directora General de Museos y Patrimonio**

Nelly Alonzo Lope  
**Directora Técnica del Gran Museo del Mundo Maya de Mérida**

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Gerónimo Ricardo Can Tec  
**Traducción al maya**

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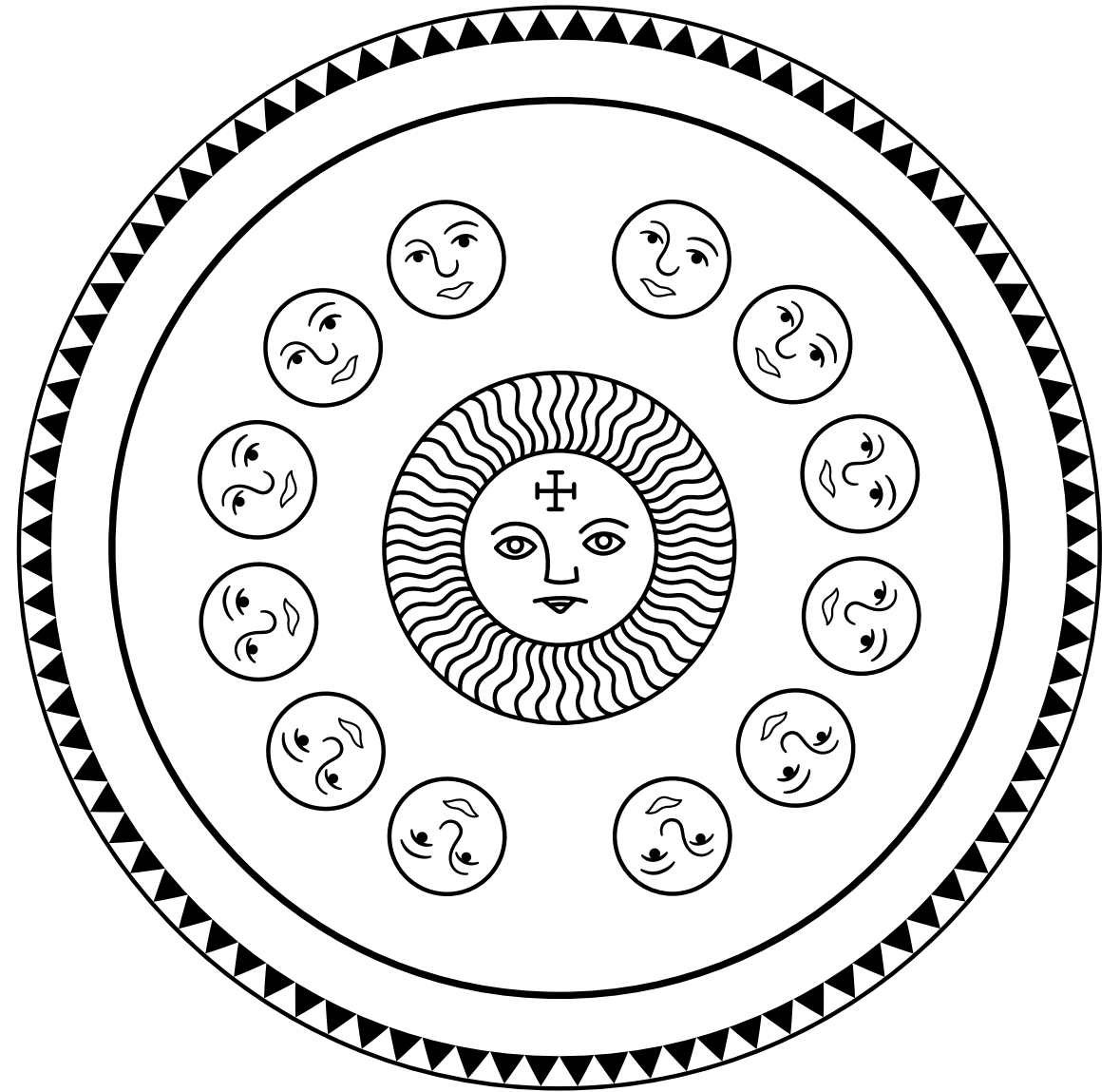
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