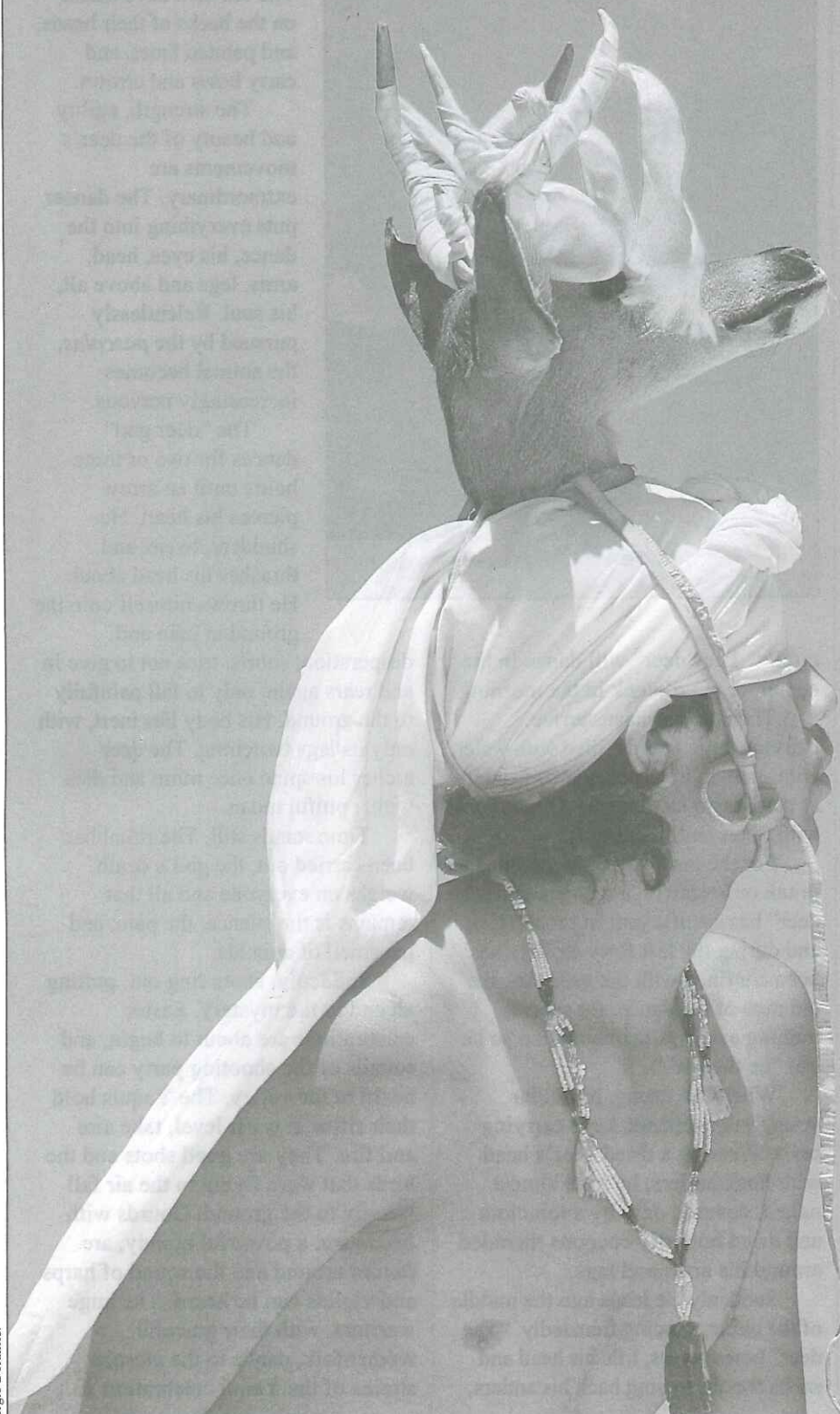


The Sonora Yaquis

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It was the hot season. The Yaqui Valley was dry and ochre-colored, like old gold gleaming in the blazing sun.

The seven tribes were celebrating "Holy Week" in Vikam, one of the oldest villages with a shrine. There is nothing for miles around; everything is dry and poor.

On a long, adobe wall, women sat silent and motionless with their children.

Yaqui women are tall and strong, like all their race. Their copper-colored skin and features seem carved out of mahogany with a chisel. Their long necks make them seem even thinner. They are dressed in mourning, with full dark skirts; their heads are covered with pink and lilac shawls.

Suddenly, the sound of bells rang out from the sanctuary. The silence was broken.

The women, with baskets on their arms, solemnly lined up in two rows in front of the temple.

The main door opened and out of the sanctuary came two huge men, running and shouting, with goatskin hats on their heads.

As they moved, the air was filled with thousands of perfumed flower petals.

Long brown hands could be seen throwing colors and scents into the wind. The women's hard features showed the faintest trace of a smile.

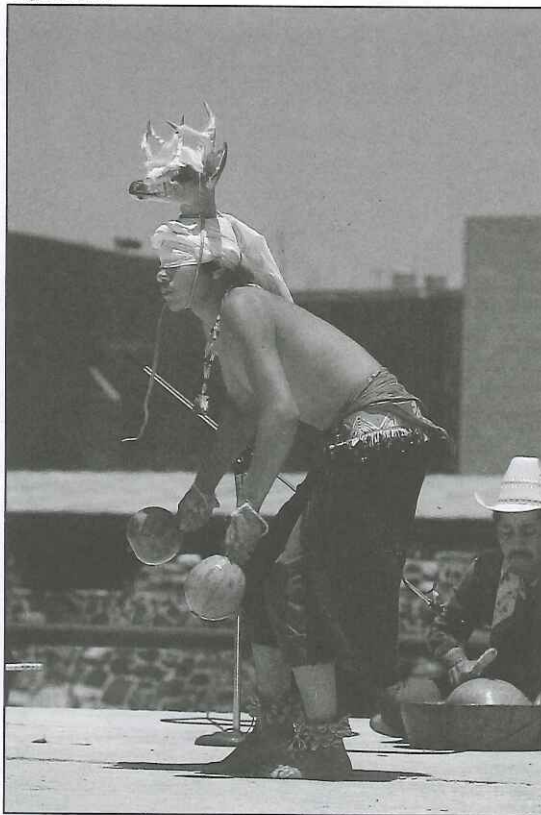
Runaway goats surrounded the valley, bleating furiously. Finally, they huddled together, in silence. A cloud of smoke rose into the air. All the men burned their masks on an enormous funeral pyre.

After their act of floral magic, the women sat still once more, marvelling at the rite, like vestal virgins.

It is Good Friday. Night falls in deathly silence. The only sound is the howling of the wind.

As day breaks, a huge canopy made of branches comes into view. Underneath, the Yaquis are seated in

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circles. The "deer" will dance in the center, at ten o'clock in the morning.

Then the musicians arrive, carrying large gourds filled with water, with smaller, upturned gourds inside, as percussion instruments. Others come with flutes and skin drums.

For the last forty days, no one has drunk or been with a woman. But "the deer" has spent a year in preparation and during the last forty days he has been confined with the *pascolas*, the old men of the dance, for special training and mystic preparation so he can "be the god."

When the strong, muscular young man appears, he is carrying bells. Wearing a dried deer's head with huge antlers, he trots almost naked, covered only by a loincloth and dried butterfly cocoons threaded around his arms and legs.

Suddenly, he leaps into the middle of the circle, dancing frenziedly. "The deer" hears noises, lifts his head and sniffs the air, tossing back his antlers,

running, jumping, writhing, now enjoying the hunt, now fleeing from the *pascolas* that surround him. The old men have masks on the backs of their heads, and painted faces, and carry bows and arrows.

The strength, agility and beauty of the deer's movements are extraordinary. The dancer puts everything into the dance, his eyes, head, arms, legs and above all, his soul. Relentlessly pursued by the *pascolas*, the animal becomes increasingly nervous.

The "deer god" dances for two or three hours until an arrow pierces his heart. He shudders, twists and thrashes his head about. He throws himself onto the ground in pain and

desperation, snorts, tries not to give in and rears again, only to fall painfully to the ground. His body lies inert, with only its legs twitching. The deer arches his spine once more and dies with a pitiful moan.

Time stands still. The ritual has been carried out, the god's death weighs on everyone and all that remains is the silence, the pain, and the smell of animals.

Suddenly, shots ring out, putting an end to the mystery. Easter celebrations are about to begin, and sounds of the shooting party can be heard in the valley. The Yaquis hold their rifles at waist level, take aim and fire. They are good shots and the birds that were flying in the air fall heavily to the ground. Gourds with *bacanora*, a powerful brandy, are passed around and the sound of harps and violins can be heard. The huge warriors, with their graceful womenfolk, dance to the *mestizo* strains of the Yaqui celebration **M**