

## SHANTOLO

### THE DAYS OF THE DEAD IN A NATIVE VILLAGE SOUTH OF THE HUASTECA

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#### SUMMARY

The cult of the dead was an essential feature in the religion of ancient Mexico. In our days, the Nahua Indians south of the Huasteca, who have preserved the pagan traditions within the Christian framework, invite their ancestors each year to a feast prepared for them in the family home. This feast, now celebrated at All Saints, is called "Shantolo", a corrupt form of the Latin "sanctorum".

A path of petals guides the dead to the family altar, at the foot of which the ritual offerings are laid out. The dead arrive at midday on two consecutive days, the children on 31st October, the adults on 1st November. The master of the house welcomes them with incense and with prayers in the native language.

In the afternoon, groups of comic dancers arrive, dressed like the local whites or mestizos. The men wear masks, their partners, men dressed as women, have or should have their faces hidden by a veil.

They go from house to house, receiving small offerings. They represent the dead, but one must not say so. They are those who died very long ago, so no one remembers them, and one can joke freely with them. They are supposed to have become whites in the other world.

These dancers appear occasionally during the whole month of the dead. On 30th November, they celebrate among themselves a final ceremony where they appear laden with necklets and crowns of flowers. During this ceremony, the master or the mistress of the dance lifts the mask or veil from each one and blows a cloud of eau de vie in his face. They say that without this liberating rite they risk, after their death, to remain masked or veiled forever.

1970. Nahua (Aztec) Indians.

16 mm film, color, optical sound track, Indian music.

Length 19 minutes (219 meters)

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