MAGUEY TAPPING IN THE HIGHLAND MIXTECO

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The maguey plant and its product, pulque, plays an important part in the economy of the highland Mixtec Indians. For this animistic people there are various taboos connected with the maguey which gives them the drink that plays so large a part in their diet, their hospitality, their compadre system, their fiestas, and their propitiation of the spirits. The maguey is supposed to be a sentient being, having feelings and giving according to the treatment it receives. In the Christo-pagan world view of the Mixtecs, the maguey has its patron saint, the Virgin of Remedies (La Virgen de los Remedios).

This text was dictated to me in 1970 by Cipriano Hernández of San Esteban Atatláhuca, Ranchería Progreso, Distrito de Tlaxiaco, Oaxaca.

TEXT

1. Núu náñeheñ ſayuu yau te núu náñeheñ i a las seis jeneheñ, te a las doce te je ni natōo vāha ndūxi. 2. Te núu tuú te a las seis jeneheñ te nde a las seis jehini, núciuñ uñéheñ i tāca quivi nāvāha nahán coñehiñ i, nájnūhun sava cuiyā canda yau náhnu ga jeē ſñeheñ i. 3. Te cuée-ni cuée-ni xīi i jeē jehē i ndūxi nde cajnū i.

LITERAL TRANSLATION

1. When scrape people maguey and if scrape they at six a.m., and at twelve and already completive seep well juice. 2. And if not and at six a.m. and until at six evening, thus scrape they every day so-that long will-scrape they, about half year will-last maguey big more that scrape they. 3. And slow just-that slow just-that wither it that gives it juice until dry-up it.
4. Jee năñehen i cúu jee quenehen i yacú, cúu pedazo lulí nahmu i. 5. Te xihna gá táhú i. 6. Nuû íne stuú i te jee ștuú i ún táhú de. 7. Sîn cúu tée táhú, te sîn cúu tée șnéhen. 8. Chi ndáhú yau chi jini nûñun șnga tée șnéhen, chi núu tuú te ndáhú yau. 9. Te màá tée ni nachuhun un suni ma cúu táhú de, te cúu șnéhen de. 10. Chi nàñùñun jéhnì de màá de núu tâhú de yau ni nachuhun màá de. 11. Sàha i cuénta jee màá i ni ndúu yau.
12. Iyó tucu quîhn jee nàñùñun nuyòo chúne núu yau te stâca ndûxi, te chûne núu tîndohó. 13. Te núu ni ndòco ndûxi te nàñehn i, te jêsì i núu yâu jîn yûû chî jîñ yujn tîfûû, sîqì jee iyó quîîl jîñi ndûxi, nucull cúu tî, te yùcuán na te tu cúu nîhin tî çoho tî. 14. Yùcuán na te cuànohon i jîn ndûxi te nachuhun i núu quîîl núu nûñun ndîxi te sàcá i ndùu i ndîxi.
15. Te núu jícà iyó yau nde șnga rancho, te tátu i hîn ûñayuu nàñehn i. 16. Te núu je ni jîtó ndèè i jee tu cáçáh najnî jee nachuhun màá i, te ndûcú i mozo nachuhun.

4. That scrape they is that take-away they membrane, is piece little bulb it. 5. And first cut they. 6. Where is flower-stalk it and foot flower-stalk it that cuts he. 7. Different is man cuts, and different is man scrapes. 8. Because is-poor maguey because need another man scrape, because if no and is-poor maguey. 9. And demonstrative man completive plant that also potential no can cut he, and can scrape he. 10. Because like kills he demonstrative he if cuts he maguey completive plant demonstrative he. 11. Do they reckoning that demonstrative they completive become maguey.
12. There-is furthermore suction-tube that like bamboo put to maguey and suck-up juice, and put in jug. 13. And when completive drain juice and scrape they, and close they to maguey with stone or with wood round, because that there-is animal drinks juice, fox is animal, and then and not can get animal drink animal. 14. Then and return they with juice and put they in pot where is-contained pulque (fermented maguey juice) and mix they become it pulque.
15. And if far is maguey at another rancho (outlying part of town) and hire they a person scrape they. 16. And if already completive see proof they that not say take-root that plant demonstrative they, and look-for they mozo (servant).

22. Te núu tatu i hín tèe tahu de yau, jíni núhun coho màá de xihna gà. 23. Te tèe chiyau un cána de tèe ni tahu te jéhmu de sùje te súcuan sáha ií de, nácuetu de nuu Yaë shìi de Remedio. 24. Yűcuán na te ni cuhi, yűcuán na te cuu coho tèe chiyau jìni ndéváha-ní nåyuu. 25. Chi núu tuú te ndulóco xíni tèe ni tahu, nínga de xehva, quiyi de cayù de nuu núhun, cuajnáhàn de, núu najíni de. 26. Te súcuan ndóho de yèsù sin ndíxi coho de. 27. Te níhin cìcàndìje jeë súcuan ndóho sáha yau. 28. Te Santo yau cuuí jeë sáha ún. 29. Yaë shìi de Remedio cuuí jeë sáha jeë ndóho de nuu tu sàhi de.

plant. 17. Then and can cut demonstrative they, 18. And there-is that not no seeŋ furthermore juice, is that if cut or scrape they, both. 19. And if competitive change person scrape, and no longer gives furthermore juice. 20. Because until pass three four days and re-give again. 21. Therefore say people: go quickly I because change hand to maguey my.

22. And if him they a man cut he maguey, is necessary drink demonstrative he first. 23. And man owns-maguey that calls he man competitive cut and burns he copal (pine sap) and thus makes-holy he, chants he to god female of Remedies (La Virgen de los Remedios). 24. Then and competitive is-holy, then and can drink man owns-maguey with whatever just-that people. 25. Because if not and become-crazy head man competitive cut, fall he gully, enter he burn he in fire, fight he, if drunk he. 26. And thus suffer he even-though different pulque drink he. 27. And strong believe that thus suffer does maguey. 28. And saint maguey is that does that. 29. God female of Remedies is that does that suffer he if not make-holy he.
FREE TRANSLATION

When people scrape off (the top of the bulbous part of a maguey plant at the base of the innermost stems where the juice will seep down), if they scrape it at six a.m., then at twelve noon the juice has seeped down sufficiently. And if not, then at six a.m. (they scrape it) and at six p.m. (it has seeped sufficiently), that is how they scrape it every day so that they (will be able to) scrape it a long time, so that the bigger maguey plants can be scraped for about half a year (and will continue to give juice). And little by little it gives less juice until it dries up.

Scraping the maguey means that they take away the outer membrane, that is, a little piece of the bulbous part ("thin like paper" at base of the innermost stems). But first they cut-out (a small square). He cuts at the base of the flower-stem (just above the bulbous part). The man who cuts is different from the man who scrapes. Because the poor maguey (if one man does both), so it is necessary that another man does the scraping, because if not then the poor maguey (because men do not treat it as is proper). The man who planted the maguey cannot cut it, but he can scrape it. Because it is as if he kills himself if he cuts a maguey that he himself planted. People suppose that they themselves have become the maguey.

Then too there is a suction tube like a hollow bamboo tube which they set in the maguey (juice) and suck up the juice, and they put it in a jug. And when the juice has been drained off they scrape it (again), and they cover over (the place where the juice collects) with a stone or a round stick, because there are animals that drink the juice, that is, foxes, and then they can't get to drink (the juice). Then they return with the juice and they put it in a pot that has some pulque (fermented maguey juice) in it, and it mixes (with the old pulque) and becomes pulque.

If the maguey plants are far away, over in another rancho, then (the owner) hires someone to scrape them (and collect the juice). And if (the owner) knows from experience that the plants that he plants don't take root well, he looks for someone else to plant them for him. Then he himself can cut them (when they are mature). And it sometimes happens that the juice doesn't seep out well, either because of (some failure in)
the cutting or the scraping. And if the person who did the scraping changes with someone else, then again the maguey won't give juice anymore. After three or four days it will begin to give again. That's why people say: I must go quickly (to collect the juice) so that my maguey won't be in changed hands.

And if people hire a man to cut their maguey, it is necessary for him to be the first one to drink from it. So the man who owns the maguey calls the man who did the cutting and he (the man who cut) burns some copal and thus he makes the pulque holy, as he chants to the Virgin of Remedies (La Virgen de los Remedios). Then it has become holy, and then the man who owns the maguey can drink (the pulque), along with anyone else. Because if not, the man who cut may become crazy, or fall into a gully, or burn himself in the fire, or have a fight, if he gets drunk. This will happen to him even though he drinks pulque from some other plant (that he did not cut). People believe strongly that the maguey will cause this to happen to them. It is the saint of the maguey who does this. It is the Virgin of Remedies who causes him to suffer thus if he doesn't (first) make it holy.

RESUMEN

Entre los indígenas de la Mixteca Alta, Oaxaca, se cree que el maguey tiene las características de un ser conciente. El texto revela algunos de los tabúes, reglas y creencias que giran alrededor del cultivo de esta planta, cuya patrona es la Virgen de los Remedios.