

## MAGUEY TAPPING IN THE HIGHLAND MIXTECO

Cornelia Mak

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 náñehen ñayuu yau te núu náñehen i a las seis jenehén, te a las doce te je ni natōo vāha ndūxi. 2. Te núu tuú te a las seis jenehén te nde a las seis jehíni, súcuan ñéhen i tāca quívi návāha nahán coñehen i, nájnūhun sava cuiyā canda yau náhnu ga jeē ñéhen i. 3. Te cuéé-ni cuéé-ni xii i jeē jéhē 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 complete 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. Jeë náñehen i cúu jeë quénehen i yácú, cúu pedazo lulí ñahmu i. 5. Te xihna gā táhú i. 6. Nuū íne stuú i te jehē stuú i ún táhú de. 7. Sín cúu tēe táhú, te sín cúu tēe ñehen. 8. Chi ndáhú yau chí jíní ñuhún inga tēe nañehen, chí núu tuú te ndáhú yau. 9. Te maa tēe ni nachuhun un suni ma cúu tahū de, te cuu ñehen de. 10. Chi nájñuhun jéhni de maa de núu tahū de yau ni nachuhun maa de. 11. Sáha i cuenta jeë maa i ni nduu yau.

12. Iyó tucu quññ jeë nájñuhun nuyoo chūne núu yau te stāca ndūxi, te chūne nuū tindohō. 13. Te núu ni ndoco ndūxi te náñehen i, te jési i nuū yau jín yúu chí jín yujnu tñlúu, siquí jeë iyó quññ jíhi ndūxi, ñuculí cúu tí, te yūcuán na te tu cúu nihín tí coho tí. 14. Yūcuán na te cuanohon i jín ndūxi te nachuhun i nuū quisi nuū ñuhún ndixi te sácá i ndúu i ndixi.

15. Te núu jícá iyó yau nde inga rancho, te tátu i ññayuu nañehen i. 16. Te núu je ni jito ndee i jeë tu cáchí najññ jeë nachuhun maa i, te ndúcú 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)

17. Yūcuán na te cuu tahū mǎá i. 18. Te íyó jeē ña tu tóo tucu ndūxi, cúu jeē núu táhú chí nañehen i, ndindúú. 19. Te núu ni sama ñayuu nañehen, te tuá jéhe tucu ndūxi. 20. Chí nde yáha unī cuūn quivī tē nacuāha tucu. 21. Jeē yūcuán áchí ñayuu: cuáhān yachī rī chí sama ndaha nuū yáu rī.

22. Te núu tatu i ĩn tēe táhú de yau, jīni nūhūn coho mǎá de xīhna gā. 23. Te tēe chíyau ún cána de tēe ni táhú te jēhmu de sūje te sūcuán sáha ĩi de, nācuetu de nuū Yāā sīhī de Remedio. 24. Yūcuán na te ni cuhīi, yūcuán na te cuu coho tēe chíyau jīin ndevāha-ni ñayuu. 25. Chí núu tuú te ndulócó xini tēe ni táhú, ñinga de xehvā, quivī de cayū de nuū nūhūn, cuajñahan de, núu najini de. 26. Te sūcuán ndoho de yēsu sīn ndixi coho de. 27. Te nīhin cacandije jeē sūcuán ndoho sáha yau. 28. Te Santo yau cuu jeē sáha ún. 29. Yāā sīhī de Remedio cúu jeē sáha jeē ndoho de núu tu sáhī de.

plant. 17. Then and can cut demonstrative they. 18. And there-is that not no seep furthermore juice, is that if cut or scrape they, both. 19. And if completive 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 hire they a man cut he maguey, is necessary drink demonstrative he first. 23. And man owns-maguey that calls he man completive 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 completive is-holy, then and can drink man owns-maguey with whatever just-that people. 25. Because if not and become-crazy head man completive 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.