

**BRINTON
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GARRISON**

NAGUALISM: A STUDY IN
NATIVE AMERICAN
FOLK-LORE AND HISTORY

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Содержание

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

32

Daniel G. Brinton

Nagualism: A Study in Native American Folk-lore and History

1. The words, a *nagual*, *nagualism*, a *nagualist*, have been current in English prose for more than seventy years; they are found during that time in a variety of books published in England and the United States,¹ yet are not to be discovered in any dictionary of the English language; nor has *Nagualism* a place in any of the numerous encyclopædias or “Conversation Lexicons,” in English, French, German or Spanish.

This is not owing to its lack of importance, since for two hundred years past, as I shall show, it has been recognized as a cult, no less powerful than mysterious, which united many and diverse tribes of Mexico and Central America into organized opposition against the government and the religion which had been introduced from Europe; whose members had acquired and were bound together by strange faculties and an occult learning, which placed them on a par with the famed thaumaturgists and

¹ These words occur a number of times in the English translation, published at London in 1822, of Dr. Paul Felix Cabrera's *Teatro Critico Americano*. The form *nagual* instead of *nahual*, or *nauual*, or *nawal* has been generally adopted and should be preferred.

theodidacts of the Old World; and which preserved even into our own days the thoughts and forms of a long suppressed ritual.

In several previous publications I have referred briefly to this secret sodality and its aims,² and now believe it worth while to collect my scattered notes and present all that I have found of value about the origin, aims and significance of this Eleusinian Mystery of America. I shall trace its geographical extension and endeavor to discover what its secret influence really was and is.

2. The earliest description I find of its particular rites is that which the historian Herrera gives, as they prevailed in 1530, in the province of Cerquin, in the mountainous parts of Honduras. It is as follows:

“The Devil was accustomed to deceive these natives by appearing to them in the form of a lion, tiger, coyote, lizard, snake, bird, or other animal. To these appearances they apply the name *Naguales*, which is as much as to say, guardians or companions; and when such an animal dies, so does the Indian to whom it was assigned. The way such an alliance was formed was thus: The Indian repaired to some very retired spot and there appealed to the streams, rocks and trees around him, and weeping, implored for himself the favors they had conferred on his ancestors. He then sacrificed a dog or a fowl, and drew blood from his tongue, or his ears, or other parts of his body, and turned

² For instance, in “The Names of the Gods in the Kiche Myths,” pp. 21, 22, in *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 1881; *Annals of the Cakchiquels*, Introduction, p. 46; *Essays of an Americanist*, p. 170, etc.

to sleep. Either in his dreams or half awake, he would see some one of those animals or birds above mentioned, who would say to him, 'On such a day go hunting and the first animal or bird you see will be my form, and I shall remain your companion and *Nagual* for all time.' Thus their friendship became so close that when one died so did the other; and without such a *Nagual* the natives believe no one can become rich or powerful."³

This province of Cerquin appears to have been peopled by a tribe which belonged to the great Mayan stock, akin to those which occupied most of the area of what is now Yucatan, Tabasco, Chiapas and Guatemala.⁴ I shall say something later about the legendary enchantress whom their traditions recalled as the teacher of their ancestors and the founder of their nation. What I would now call attention to is the fact that in none of the dialects of the specifically Mexican or Aztecan stock of languages do we find the word *nagual* in the sense in which it is employed in the above extract, and this is strong evidence that the origin of Nagualism is not to be sought in that stock.

3. We do find, however, in the Nahuatl language, which is the proper name of the Aztecan, a number of derivatives from the same root, *na*, among them this very word, *Nahuatl*, all of them containing the idea "to know," or "knowledge." The early

³ *Historia de las Indias Occidentales*, Dec. iv, Lib. viii, cap. 4.

⁴ More especially it is the territory of the Chorti dialect, spoken to this day in the vicinity of the famous ancient city of Copan, Honduras. Cerquin lies in the mountains nearly due east of this celebrated site. On the Chorti, see Stoll, *Zur Ethnographie der Republik Guatemala*, pp. 106-9.

missionaries to New Spain often speak of the *naualli* (plural, *nanahualtin*), masters of mystic knowledge, dealers in the black art, wizards or sorcerers. They were not always evil-minded persons, though they seem to have been generally feared. The earliest source of information about them is Father Sahagun, who, in his invaluable History, has the following paragraph:

“The *naualli*, or magician, is he who frightens men and sucks the blood of children during the night. He is well skilled in the practice of this trade, he knows all the arts of sorcery (*nauallotl*) and employs them with cunning and ability; but for the benefit of men only, not for their injury. Those who have recourse to such arts for evil intents injure the bodies of their victims, cause them to lose their reason and smother them. These are wicked men and necromancers.”⁵

It is evident on examining the later works of the Roman clergy in Mexico that the Church did not look with any such lenient eye on the possibly harmless, or even beneficial, exercise of these magical devices. We find a further explanation of what they were, preserved in a work of instruction to confessors, published by Father Juan Bautista, at Mexico, in the year 1600.

“There are magicians who call themselves *teciuhlazque*,⁶ and also by the term *nanahualtin*, who conjure the clouds when there is danger of hail, so that the crops may not be injured. They can

⁵ Bernardino de Sahagun, *Historia de la Nueva España*, Lib. x, cap. 9.

⁶ Derived from *teciuhlazca*, to conjure against hail, itself from *teciuh*, hail. Alonso de Molina, *Vocabulario Mexicano*, sub voce.

also make a stick look like a serpent, a mat like a centipede, a piece of stone like a scorpion, and similar deceptions. Others of these *nanahualtin* will transform themselves to all appearances (segun la apariencia), into a tiger, a dog or a weasel. Others again will take the form of an owl, a cock, or a weasel; and when one is preparing to seize them, they will appear now as a cock, now as an owl, and again as a weasel. These call themselves *nanahualtin*.”⁷

There is an evident attempt in this somewhat confused statement to distinguish between an actual transformation, and one which only appears such to the observer.

In another work of similar character, published at Mexico a few years later, the “Road to Heaven,” of Father Nicolas de Leon, we find a series of questions which a confessor should put to any of his flock suspected of these necromantic practices. They reveal to us quite clearly what these occult practitioners were believed to do. The passage reads as follows, the questions being put in the mouth of the priest:

“Art thou a soothsayer? Dost thou foretell events by reading signs, or by interpreting dreams, or by water, making circles and figures on its surface? Dost thou sweep and ornament with flower garlands the places where idols are preserved? Dost thou know certain words with which to conjure for success in hunting, or to bring rain?

“Dost thou suck the blood of others, or dost thou wander about

⁷ Bautista, *Advertencias para los Confesores*, fol. 112 (Mexico, 1600).

at night, calling upon the Demon to help thee? Hast thou drunk *peyotl*, or hast thou given it to others to drink, in order to find out secrets, or to discover where stolen or lost articles were? Dost thou know how to speak to vipers in such words that they obey thee?”⁸

4. This interesting passage lets in considerable light on the claims and practices of the nagualists. Not the least important item is that of their use of the intoxicant, *peyotl*, a decoction of which it appears played a prominent part in their ceremonies. This is the native Nahuatl name of a certain plant, having a white, tuberous root, which is the part employed. It is mentioned as “pellote” or “peyote” in the *Farmacopea Mexicana* as a popular remedy, but its botanical name is not added. According to Paso y Troncoso, it is one of the Compositæ, a species of the genus *Cacalia*.⁹ It is referred to in several passages by Father Sahagun, who says that it grows in southern Mexico, and that the Aztecs derived their knowledge of it from the older “Chichimecs.” It was used as an intoxicant.

“Those who eat or drink of this *peyotl* see visions, which are sometimes frightful and sometimes ludicrous. The intoxication it causes lasts several days. The Chichimecs believed that it gave them courage in time of danger and diminished the pangs of hunger and thirst.”¹⁰

⁸ Nicolas de Leon, *Camino del Cielo*, fol. 111 (Mexico, 1611).

⁹ Paso y Troncoso, in *Anales del Museo Nacional de Mexico*, Tom. iii, p. 180.

¹⁰ Sahagun, *Historia de Nueva España*, Lib. x, cap. 29, and Lib. xi, cap. 7.

Its use was continued until a late date, and very probably has not yet died out. Its composition and method of preparation are given in a list of beverages prohibited by the Spanish authorities in the year 1784, as follows:

“*Peyote*: Made from a species of *vinagrilla*, about the size of a billiard ball, which grows in dry and sterile soil. The natives chew it, and throw it into a wooden mortar, where it is left to ferment, some leaves of tobacco being added to give it pungency. They consume it in this form, sometimes with slices of *peyote* itself, in their most solemn festivities, although it dulls the intellect and induces gloomy and hurtful visions (*sombras muy funestas*).”¹¹

The *peyotl* was not the only herb prized as a means of casting the soul into the condition of hypostatic union with divinity. We have abundant evidence that long after the conquest the seeds of the plant called in Nahuatl the *ololiuhqui* were in high esteem for this purpose. In the Confessionary of Father Bartholomé de Alva the priest is supposed to inquire and learn as follows:

“*Question*. Hast thou loved God above all things? Hast thou loved any created thing, adoring it, looking upon it as God, and worshiping it?

Hernandez has the following on the mysterious properties of this plant: “*Illud ferunt de hac radice mirabile (si modo fides sit vulgatissimæ inter eos rei habendæ), devorantes illam quodlibet præsagire prædicereque; velut an sequenti die hostes sint impetum in eos facturi? Anne illos felicia maneant tempora? Quis supellectilem, aut aliud quidpiam furto subriperit? Et ad hunc modum alia, quibus Chichimecæ hujusmodi medicamine cognoscendis.*” Franciscus Hernandus, *Historia Plantarum Novæ Hispaniæ*, Tom. iii, p. 71 (Ed., Madrid, 1790).

¹¹ *Diccionario Universal*, Appendice, Tom. i, p. 360 (Mexico, 1856).

“*Answer.* I have loved God with all my heart; but sometimes I have believed in dreams, and also I have believed in the sacred herbs, the *peyotl*, and the *ololiuhqui*; and in other such things (*oniceltocac in temictli, in xiuhtzintli, in peyotl, in ololiuhqui, yhuan in occequitlamantli*).”¹²

The seeds of the *ololiuhqui* appear to have been employed externally. They were the efficient element in the mysterious unguent known as “the divine remedy” (*teopatli*), about which we find some information in the works of Father Augustin de Vetancurt, who lived in Mexico in the middle of the seventeenth century. He writes:

“The pagan priests made use of an ointment composed of insects, such as spiders, scorpions, centipedes and the like, which the neophytes in the temples prepared. They burned these insects in a basin, collected the ashes, and rubbed it up with green tobacco leaves, living worms and insects, and the powdered seeds of a plant called *ololiuhqui*, which has the power of inducing visions, and the effect of which is to destroy the reasoning powers. Under the influence of this ointment, they conversed with the Devil, and he with them, practicing his deceptions upon them. They also believed that it protected them, so they had no fear of going into the woods at night.

“This was also employed by them as a remedy in various diseases, and the soothing influence of the tobacco and the *ololiuhqui* was attributed by them to divine agency. There are

¹² *Confessionario Mayor y Menor en lengua Mexicana*, fol. 8, verso (Mexico, 1634).

some in our own day who make use of this ointment for sorcery, shutting themselves up, and losing their reason under its influence; especially some old men and old women, who are prepared to fall an easy prey to the Devil.”¹³

The botanist Hernandez observes that another name for this plant was *coaxihuitl*, “serpent plant,” and adds that its seeds contain a narcotic poison, and that it is allied to the genus *Solanum*, of which the deadly night-shade is a familiar species. He speaks of its use in the sacred rites in these words:

“Indorum sacrifici, cum videri volebant versari cum superis, ac responsa accipere ab eis, ea vescebantur planta, ut disiperent, milleque phantasmata et demonum observatum effigies circumspectarent.”¹⁴

Of the two plants mentioned, the *ololiuhqui* and the *peyotl*, the former was considered the more potent in spiritual virtues. “They hold it in as much veneration as if it were God,” says a theologian of the seventeenth century.¹⁵ One who partook of these herbs was called *payni* (from the verb *pay*, to take medicine); and more especially *tlachixqui*, a Seer, referring to the mystic “second sight,” hence a diviner or prophet (from the verb *tlachia*, to see).

¹³ Vetancurt, *Teatro Mexicano*, Trat. iii, cap. 9.

¹⁴ Hernandez, *Historia Plantarum Novæ Hispaniæ*, Tom. iii, p. 32.

¹⁵ Dr. Jacinto de la Serna, *Manual de Min stros de Indios para el Conocimiento de sus Idolatrias y Extirpacion de Ellas*, p. 163. This interesting work was composed about the middle of the seventeenth century by a Rector of the University of Mexico, but was first printed at Madrid, in 1892, from the MS. furnished by Dr. N. Leon, under the editorship of the Marquis de la Fuensanta del Valle.

Tobacco also held a prominent, though less important, place in these rites. It was employed in two forms, the one the dried leaf, *picietl*, which for sacred uses must be broken and rubbed up either seven or nine times; and the green leaf mixed with lime, hence called *tenextlecietl* (from *tenextli*, lime).

Allied in effect to these is an intoxicant in use in southern Mexico and Yucatan, prepared from the bark of a tree called by the Mayas *baal-che*. The whites speak of the drink as *pitarilla*. It is quite popular among the natives, and they still attribute to it a sacred character, calling it *yax ha*, the first water, the primal fluid. They say that it was the first liquid created by God, and when He returned to His heavenly home He left this beverage and its production in charge of the gods of the rains, the four Pah-Ahtuns.¹⁶

5. Intoxication of some kind was an essential part of many of these secret rites. It was regarded as a method of throwing the individual out of himself and into relation with the supernal powers. What the old historian, Father Joseph de Acosta, tells us about the clairvoyants and telepaths of the aborigines might well stand for a description of their modern representatives:

“Some of these sorcerers take any shape they choose, and fly through the air with wonderful rapidity and for long distances. They will tell what is taking place in remote localities long before the news could possibly arrive. The Spaniards have known them

¹⁶ MSS. of the Licentiate Zetina, and *Informe* of Father Baeza in *Registro Yucateco*, Tom. i.

to report mutinies, battles, revolts and deaths, occurring two hundred or three hundred leagues distant, on the very day they took place, or the day after.

“To practice this art the sorcerers, usually old women, shut themselves in a house, and intoxicate themselves to the degree of losing their reason. The next day they are ready to reply to questions.”¹⁷

Plants possessing similar powers to excite vivid visions and distort the imagination, and, therefore, employed in the magical rites, were the *thiuimeezque*, in Michoacan, and the *chacuaco*, in lower California.¹⁸

6. In spite of all effort, the various classes of wonder-workers continued to thrive in Mexico. We find in a book of sermons published by the Jesuit Father, Ignacio de Paredes, in the Nahuatl language, in 1757, that he strenuously warns his hearers against invoking, consulting, or calling upon “the devilish spell-binders, the nagualists, and those who conjure with smoke.”¹⁹

¹⁷ Acosta, *De la Historia Moral de Indias*, Lib. v, cap. 26.

¹⁸ Of the *thiuimeezque* Hernandez writes: “Aiunt radicis cortice unius unciaē pondere tuso, atque devorato, multa ante oculos observare phantasmata, multiplices imagines ac monstificas rerum figuras, detegique furem, si quidpiam rei familiaris subreptum sit.” *Hist. Plant. Nov. Hispan.*, Tom. iii, p. 272. The *chacuaco* and its effects are described by Father Venegas in his *History of California*, etc.

¹⁹ “In Mictlan Tetlachihuique, in Nanahualtin, in Tlahuipuchtin.” Paredes, *Promptuario Manual Mexicano*, p. 128 (Mexico, 1757). The *tlahuipuchtin*, “those who work with smoke,” were probably diviners who foretold the future from the forms taken by smoke in rising in the air. This class of augurs were also found in Peru, where they were called *Uirapircos* (Balboa, *Hist. du Perou*, p. 28-30).

They have not yet lost their power; we have evidence enough that many children of a larger growth in that land still listen with respect to the recitals of the mysterious faculties attributed to the *nanahuatlín*. An observant German traveler, Carlos von Gagern, informs us that they are widely believed to be able to cause sicknesses and other ills, which must be counteracted by appropriate exorcisms, among which the reading aloud certain passages of the Bible is deemed to be one of the most potent.²⁰

The learned historian, Orozco y Berra, speaks of the powers attributed at the present day to the *nahual* in Mexico among the lower classes, in these words:

“The *nahual* is generally an old Indian with red eyes, who knows how to turn himself into a dog, woolly, black and ugly. The female witch can convert herself into a ball of fire; she has the power of flight, and at night will enter the windows and suck the blood of little children. These sorcerers will make little images of rags or of clay, then stick into them the thorn of the maguey and place them in some secret place; you can be sure that the person against whom the conjuration is practiced will feel pain in the part where the thorn is inserted. There still exist among them the medicine-men, who treat the sick by means of strange contortions, call upon the spirits, pronounce magical incantations, blow upon the part where the pain is, and draw forth from the patient thorns, worms, or pieces of stone. They know how to prepare drinks which will bring on sickness, and if the

²⁰ Von Gagern, *Charakteristik der Indianischer Bevölkerung Mexikos*, s. 125.

patients are cured by others the convalescents are particular to throw something of their own away, as a lock of hair, or a part of their clothing. Those who possess the evil eye can, by merely looking at children, deprive them of beauty and health, and even cause their death.”²¹

7. As I have said, nowhere in the records of purely Mexican, that is, Aztecan, Nagualism do we find the word *nagual* employed in the sense given in the passage quoted from Herrera, that is as a personal guardian spirit or tutelary genius. These tribes had, indeed, a belief in some such protecting power, and held that it was connected with the day on which each person is born. They called it the *tonalli* of a person, a word translated to mean that which is peculiar to him, which makes his individuality, his self. The radical from which it is derived is *tona*, to warm, or to be warm, from which are also derived *tonatiuh*, the sun. *Tonalli*, which in composition loses its last syllable, is likewise the word for heat, summer, soul, spirit and day, and also for the share or portion which belongs to one. Thus, *to-tonal* is spirit or soul in general; *no-tonal*, my spirit; *no-tonal in ipan no-tlacat*, “the sign under which I was born,” *i. e.*, the astrological day-sign. From this came the verb *tonalpoa*, to count or estimate the signs, that is, to cast the horoscope of a person;

²¹ *Historia Antigua de Mexico*, Tom. ii, p. 25. Francisco Pimentel, in his thoughtful work, *Memoria sobre las Causas que han originado la Situacion Actual de la Raza Indigena de Mexico* (Mexico, 1864), recognizes how almost impossible it is to extirpate their faith in this nagualism. “Conservan los agujeros y supersticiones de la antigüedad, siendo cosa de fe para ellos, los *nahuales*,” etc., p. 200, and comp. p. 145.

and *tonalpouhque*, the diviners whose business it was to practice this art.²²

These *tonalpouhque* are referred to at length by Father Sahagun.²³ He distinguishes them from the *naualli*, though it is clear that they corresponded in functions to the nagualistic priests of the southern tribes. From the number and name of the day of birth they forecast the destiny of the child, and stated the power or spiritual influence which should govern its career.

The *tonal* was by no means an indefeasible possession. It was a sort of independent *mascotte*. So long as it remained with a person he enjoyed health and prosperity; but it could depart, go astray, become lost; and then sickness and misfortune arrived. This is signified in the Nahuatl language by the verbs *tonalcaualtia*, to check, stop or suspend the *tonal*, hence, to shock or frighten one; and *tonalitlacoa*, to hurt or injure the *tonal*, hence, to cast a spell on one, to bewitch him.

This explains the real purpose of the conjuring and incantations which were carried on by the native doctor when visiting the sick. It was to recall the *tonal*, to force or persuade it to return; and, therefore, the ceremony bore the name “the restitution of the *tonal*,” and was more than any other deeply imbued with the superstitions of Nagualism. The chief officiant

²² On these terms consult the extensive *Dictionnaire de la Langue Nahuatl*, by Rémi Simeon, published at Paris, 1887. It is not impossible that *tona* is itself a compound root, including the monosyllabic radical *na*, which is at the basis of *nagual*.

²³ Sahagun, *Historia de Nueva España*, Lib. iv, *passim*, and Lib. x, cap. 9.

was called the *tetonaltiani*, “he who concerns himself with the tonal.” On a later page I shall give the formula recited on such an occasion.

8. There is some vague mention in the Aztec records of a semi-priestly order, who bore the name *naualteteuctin*, which may be translated “master magicians.” They were also known as *teotlauice*, “sacred companions in arms.” As was the case with most classes of the *teteuctin*, or nobles, entrance to the order was by a severe and prolonged ceremony of initiation, the object of which was not merely to test the endurance of pain and the powers of self-denial, but especially to throw the mind into that subjective state in which it is brought into contact with the divine, in which it can “see visions and dream dreams.” The order claimed as its patron and founder Quetzalcoatl, the “feathered serpent,” who, it will be seen on another page, was also the patron of the later nagualists.²⁴

The word *naualli* also occurs among the ancient Nahuas in composition as a part of proper names; always with the signification of “magician,” as in that of *Naualcuahtla*, a chief of the Chalcos, meaning “wizard-stick,” referring probably to the rod or wand employed by the magi in conjuration.²⁵ So also *Naualac*, the “wizard water,” an artificial lake not far from the

²⁴ See Ch. de Labarthe, *Révue Américaine*, Serie ii, Tom. ii, pp. 222-225. His translation of *naualteteuctin* by “Seigneurs du génie” must be rejected, as there is absolutely no authority for assigning this meaning to *naualli*.

²⁵ *Anales de Cuauhtitlan*, p. 31. The translator renders it “palo brujo.”

city of Mexico, surrounded by ruined temples, described by M. Charnay.²⁶

9. The belief in a personal guardian spirit was one of the fundamental doctrines of Nagualism; but this belief by no means connotes the full import of the term (as Mr. H. H. Bancroft has erroneously stated). The calendar system of Mexico and Central America, which I have shown to be substantially the same throughout many diverse linguistic stocks,²⁷ had as one of its main objects, astrological divination. By consulting it the appropriate nagual was discovered and assigned, and this was certainly a prominent feature in the native cult and has never been abandoned.

In Mexico to-day, in addition to his special personal guardian, the native will often choose another for a limited time or for a particular purpose, and this is quite consistent with the form of Christianity he has been taught. For instance, as we are informed by an observant traveler, at New Year or at corn-planting the head of a family will go to the parish church and among the various saints there displayed will select one as his guardian for the year. He will address to him his prayers for rain and sunshine, for an abundant harvest, health and prosperity, and will not neglect to back these supplications by liberal gifts. If times are good and harvests ample the Santo is rewarded with still more gifts, and

²⁶ *Les Anciennes Villes du Nouveau Monde*, pp. 146-148, figured on p. 150. On its significance compare Hamy, *Decades Americaneæ*, pp. 74-81.

²⁷ *The Native Calendar of Central America and Mexico* (Philadelphia, 1893).

his aid is sought for another term; but if luck has been bad the Indian repairs to the church at the end of the year, bestows on his holy patron a sound cursing, calls him all the bad names he can think of, and has nothing more to do with him.²⁸

10. A Mexican writer, Andres Iglesias, who enjoyed more than common opportunities to study these practices as they exist in the present generation, describes them as he saw them in the village of Soteapan, a remote hamlet in the State of Vera Cruz, the population of which speak the Mixe language. This is not related to the Nahuatl tongue, but the terms of their magical rites are drawn from Nahuatl words, showing their origin. Every person at birth has assigned to him both a good and a bad genius, the former aiming at his welfare, the latter at his injury. The good genius is known by the Nahuatl term *tonale*, and it is represented in the first bird or animal of any kind which is seen in or near the house immediately after the birth of the infant.

The most powerful person in the village is the high priest of the native cult. One who died about 1850 was called “the Thunderbolt,” and whenever he walked abroad he was preceded by a group of chosen disciples, called by the Nahuatl name *tlatoques*, speakers or attorneys.²⁹ His successor, known as “the Greater Thunder,” did not maintain this state, but nevertheless claimed to be able to control the seasons and to send or to

²⁸ Eduard Mühlensfordt, *Mexico*, Bd. i, s. 255.

²⁹ The word is derived from *tlatoa*, to speak for another, and its usual translation was “chief,” as the head man spoke for, and in the name of the gens or tribe.

mitigate destructive storms – claims which, sad to say, brought him to the stocks, but did not interfere with the regular payment of tribute to him by the villagers. He was also a medicine man and master of ceremonies in certain “scandalous orgies, where immodesty shows herself without a veil.”³⁰

11. Turning to the neighboring province of Oaxaca and its inhabitants, we are instructed on the astrological use of the calendar of the Zapotecs by Father Juan de Cordova, whose *Arte* of their language was published at Mexico in 1578. From what he says its principal, if not its only purpose, was astrological. Each day had its number and was called after some animal, as eagle, snake, deer, rabbit, etc. Every child, male or female, received the name of the day, and also its number, as a surname; its personal name being taken from a fixed series, which differed in the masculine and feminine gender, and which seems to have been derived from the names of the fingers.

From this it appears that among the Zapotecs the personal spirit or *nagual* was fixed by the date of the birth, and not by some later ceremony, although the latter has been asserted by some writers; who, however, seem to have applied without certain knowledge the rites of the Nahuas and other surrounding

³⁰ The interesting account by Iglesias is printed in the Appendix to the *Diccionario Universal de Geographia y Historia* (Mexico, 1856). Other writers testify to the tenacity with which the Mixes cling to their ancient beliefs. Señor Moro says they continue to be “notorious idolaters,” and their actual religion to be “an absurd jumble of their old superstitions with Christian doctrines” (in Orozco y Berra, *Geografia de las Lenguas de exico*, p. 176).

tribes to the Zapotecs.³¹

Next in importance to the assigning of names, according to Father Cordova, was the employment of the calendar in deciding the propriety of marriages. As the recognized object of marriage was to have sons, the couple appealed to the professional augur to decide this question before the marriage was fixed. He selected as many beans as was the sum of the numbers of the two proponents' names, and, counting them by twos, if one remained over, it meant a son; then counting by threes any remainder also meant sons; by fours the remainder meant either sons or daughters; and by five and six the same; and if there was no remainder by any of these five divisors the marriage would result in no sons and was prohibited.

It is obvious that this method of fortune-telling was most auspicious for the lovers; for I doubt if there is any combination of two numbers below fourteen which is divisible by two, three, four, five and six without remainder in any one instance.³²

The Zapotecs were one of those nations who voluntarily submitted themselves to the Spaniards, not out of love for the Europeans, but through hatred of the Aztecs, who had conquered

³¹ For instance, J. B. Carriedo, in his *Estudios Historicos del Estado Oaxaqueño* (Oaxaca, 1849), p. 15, says the *nahualt* was a ceremony performed by the native priest, in which the infant was bled from a vein behind the ear, assigned a name, that of a certain day, and a guardian angel or *tona*. These words are pure Nahuatl, and Carriedo, who does not give his authority, probably had none which referred these rites to the Zapotecs.

³² Juan de Cordova, *Arte en Lengua Zapoteca*, pp. 16, 202, 203, 213, 216.

them in the preceding century. Their king, Coyopy, and his subjects accepted Christianity and were generally baptized; but it was the merest formality, and years afterwards Coyopy was detected secretly conducting the heathen ritual of his ancestors with all due pomp. He was arrested, sent to the city of Mexico, deprived of his power and wealth, and soon died; it is charitably supposed, from natural causes. There is no question but that he left successors to the office of pontifex maximus, and that they continued the native religious ceremonies.

12. The sparse notices we have of the astrology of the Mixtecs, neighbors and some think relatives of the Zapotecs, reveal closely similar rites. The name of their king, who opposed Montezuma the First some sixty years before the arrival of Cortez, proves that they made use of the same or a similar calendar in bestowing personal appellations. It is given as *Tres Micos*, Three Monkeys.

Unfortunately, so far as I know, there has not been published, and perhaps there does not exist, an authentic copy of the Mixtec calendar. It was nevertheless reduced to writing in the native tongue after the conquest, and a copy of it was seen by the historian Burgoa in the Mixtec town of Yanhuitlan.³³ Each day was named from a tree, a plant or an animal, and from them the individual received his names, as Four Lions, Five Roses, etc. (examples given by Herrera). This latter writer adds that the name was assigned by the priests when the child was seven years old (as among the Tzentals), part of the rite being to conduct it

³³ Quoted in Carriedo, ubi suprá, p. 17.

to the temple and bore its ears. He refers also to their auguries relating to marriage.³⁴ These appear to have been different from among the Zapotecs. It was necessary that the youth should have a name bearing a higher number than that of the maiden, and also "that they should be related;" probably this applied only to certain formal marriages of the rulers which were obliged to be within the same *gens*.

13. I have referred in some detail to the rites and superstitions connected with the Calendar because they are all essential parts of Nagualism, carried on far into Christian times by the priests of this secret cult, as was fully recognized by the Catholic clergy. Wherever this calendar was in use, the Freemasonry of Nagualism extended, and its ritual had constant reference to it. Our fullest information about it does not come from central Mexico, but further south, in the region occupied by the various branches of the Mayan stock, by the ancestors of some one of which, perhaps, this singular calendar, and the symbolism connected with it, were invented.

One of the most important older authorities on this subject is Francisco Nuñez de la Vega, a learned Dominican, who was appointed Bishop of Chiapas and Soconusco in 1687, and who published at Rome, in 1702, a stately folio entitled "*Constituciones Diocesanas del Obispado de Chiappa*," comprising discussions of the articles of religion and a series of pastoral letters. The subject of Nagualism is referred to in many

³⁴ *Hist. de las Indias Oc.*, Dec. iii, Lib. iii, cap. 12.

passages, and the ninth Pastoral Letter is devoted to it. As this book is one of extreme rarity, I shall make rather lengthy extracts from it, taking the liberty of condensing the scholastic prolixity of the author, and omitting his professional admonitions to the wicked.

He begins his references to it in several passages of his Introduction or *Preambulo*, in which he makes some interesting statements as to the use to which the natives put their newly-acquired knowledge of writing, while at the same time they had evidently not forgotten the ancient method of recording ideas invented by their ancestors.

The Bishop writes:

“The Indians of New Spain retain all the errors of their time of heathenism preserved in certain writings in their own languages, explaining by abbreviated characters and by figures painted in a secret cypher³⁵ the places, provinces and names of their early rulers, the animals, stars and elements which they worshiped, the ceremonies and sacrifices which they observed, and the years, months and days by which they predicted the fortunes of children at birth, and assign them that which they call the Naguals. These writings are known as Repertories or Calendars, and they are also used to discover articles lost or stolen, and to effect cures of diseases. Some have a wheel painted in them, like that of Pythagoras, described by the Venerable Bede; others portray a lake surrounded by the Naguals in the form of various animals.

³⁵ So I understand the phrase, “*figuras pintadas con zifras enigmaticas*”

Some of the Nagualist Masters claim as their patron and ruler Cuchulchan, and they possessed a certain formula of prayer to him, written in the Popoluca tongue (which was called Baha in their time of heathenism), and which has been translated into Mexican.³⁶

“Those who are selected to become the masters of these arts are taught from early childhood how to draw and paint these characters, and are obliged to learn by heart the formulas, and the names of the ancient Nagualists, and whatever else is included in these written documents, many of which we have held in our hands, and have heard them explained by such masters whom we had imprisoned for their guilt, and who had afterwards become converted and acknowledged their sins.”³⁷

The Bishop made up his mind that extreme measures should be taken to eradicate these survivals of the ancient paganism in his diocese, and he therefore promulgated the following order in the year 1692:

“And because in the provinces of our diocese those Indians who are Nagualists adore their *naguals*, and look upon them as gods, and by their aid believe that they can foretell the future, discover hidden treasures, and fulfill their dishonest desires: we, therefore, prescribe and command that in every town an

³⁶ *Popoluca* was a term applied to various languages. I suspect the one here referred to was the Mixe. See an article by me, entitled “Chontales and Popolucas; a Study in Mexican Ethnography,” in the *Compte Rendu* of the Eighth Session of the Congress of Americanists, p. 566, *seq.*

³⁷ *Constit. Diocesan*, p. 19.

ecclesiastical prison shall be constructed at the expense of the church, and that it be provided with fetters and stocks (con grillos y cepos), and we confer authority on every priest and curate of a parish to imprison in these gaols whoever is guilty of disrespect toward our Holy Faith, and we enjoin them to treat with especial severity those who teach the doctrines of Nagualism (y con rigor mayor á los dogmatizantes Nagualistas).”³⁸

In spite of these injunctions it is evident that he failed to destroy the seeds of what he esteemed this dangerous heresy in the parishes of his diocese; for his ninth Pastoral Letter, in which he exposes at length the character of Nagualism, is dated from the metropolitan city of Ciudad Real, on May 24, 1698. As much of it is germane to my theme, I translate as follows:

“There are certain bad Christians of both sexes who do not hesitate to follow the school of the Devil, and to occupy themselves with evil arts, divinations, sorceries, conjuring, enchantments, fortune-telling, and other means to forecast the future.

“These are those who in all the provinces of New Spain are known by the name of *Nagualists*. They pretend that the birth of men is regulated by the course and movements of stars and planets, and by observing the time of day and the months in which a child is born, they prognosticate its condition and the events, prosperous or otherwise, of its life; and the worst is that these perverse men have written down their signs and rules, and

³⁸ *Constitut. Diocesan*, Titulo vii, pp. 47, 48.

thus deceive the erring and ignorant.

“These Nagualists practice their arts by means of Repertories and superstitious Calendars, where are represented under their proper names all the Naguals of stars, elements, birds, fishes, brute beasts and dumb animals; with a vain note of days and months, so that they can announce which corresponds to the day of birth of the infant. This is preceded by some diabolical ceremonies, after which they designate the field or other spot, where, after seven years shall have elapsed, the Nagual will appear to ratify the bargain. As the time approaches, they instruct the child to deny God and His Blessed Mother, and warn him to have no fear, and not to make the sign of the cross. He is told to embrace his Nagual tenderly, which, by some diabolical art, presents itself in an affectionate manner even though it be a ferocious beast, like a lion or a tiger. Thus, with infernal cunning they persuade him that this Nagual is an angel of God, who will look after him and protect him in his after life.

“To such diabolical masters the intelligent Indians apply, to learn from these superstitious Calendars, dictated by the Devil, their own fortunes, and the Naguals which will be assigned to their children, even before they are baptized. In most of the Calendars, the seventh sign is the figure of a man and a snake, which they call Cuchulchan. The masters have explained it as a snake with feathers which moves in the water. This sign corresponds with Mexzichuaut, which means Cloudy Serpent, or,

of the clouds.³⁹ The people also consult them in order to work injury on their enemies, taking the lives of many through such devilish artifices, and committing unspeakable atrocities.

“Worse even than these are those who wander about as physicians or healers; who are none such, but magicians, enchanters, and sorcerers, who, while pretending to cure, kill whom they will. They apply their medicines by blowing on the patient, and by the use of infernal words; learned by heart by those who cannot read or write; and received in writing from their masters by those acquainted with letters. The Master never imparts this instruction to a single disciple, but always to three at a time, so that in the practice of the art it may be difficult to decide which one exerts the magical power. They blow on feathers, or sticks, or plants, and place them in the paths where they may be stepped on by those they wish to injure, thus causing chills, fevers, ugly pustules and other diseases; or they introduce into the body by such arts toads, frogs, snakes, centipedes, etc, causing great torments. And by these same breathings and magic words they can burn down houses, destroy the growing crops and induce sickness. No one of the three disciples is permitted to practice any of these arts without previously informing the other two, and also the Master, by whom the three have been taught.

“We have learned by the confession of certain guilty parties

³⁹ Rather with the Quetzalcoatl of the Nahuas, and the Gucumatx of the Quiches, both of which names mean “Feathered Serpent.” Mixcohuatl, the Cloud Serpent, in Mexican mythology, referred to the Thunder-storm.

how the Master begins to instruct his disciple. First he tells him to abjure God, the saints and the Virgin, not to invoke their names, and to have no fear of them. He then conducts him to the wood, glen, cave or field where the pact with the Devil is concluded, which they call 'the agreement' or 'the word given' (in Tzental *quiz*). In some provinces the disciple is laid on an ant-hill, and the Master standing above him calls forth a snake, colored with black, white and red, which is known as 'the ant-mother' (in Tzental *zmezquiz*).⁴⁰ This comes accompanied by the ants and other small snakes of the same kind, which enter at the joints of the fingers, beginning with the left hand, and coming out at the joints of the right hand, and also by the ears and the nose; while the great snake enters the body with a leap and emerges at its posterior vent. Afterwards the disciple meets a dragon vomiting fire, which swallows him entire and ejects him posteriorly. Then the Master declares he may be admitted, and asks him to select the herbs with which he will conjure, the disciple names them, the Master gathers them and delivers them to him, and then teaches him the sacred words.

“These words and ceremonies are substantially the same in all the provinces. The healer enters the house of the invalid, asks about the sickness, lays his hand on the suffering part, and then leaves, promising to return on the day following. At the next visit

⁴⁰ In his Tzental Vocabulary, Father Lara does not give this exact form; but in the neighboring dialect of the Cakchiquel Father Ximenes has *quikeho*, to agree together, to enter into an arrangement; the prefix *zme* is the Tzental word for “mother.”

he brings with him some herbs which he chews or mashes with a little water and applies to the part. Then he repeats the *Pater Noster*

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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