

The Elements of Mazatec Witchcraft

by

Jean Bassett Johnson

University of California, Berkeley

Introduction

The present short study proposes to give a body of new data collected recently from a little known group inhabiting a portion of the northeastern corner of the state of Oaxaca, Mexico. In addition to these data, a limited amount of comparative material will be presented, with the purpose of pointing out the general unity of witchcraft beliefs and practices in the region conceived as a cultural entity. The new data were collected during the summer of 1938 by a small party of which the writer was a member. Thanks are due the *Instituto Panamericano de Geografía e Historia* of Mexico for financial assistance.

The Mazatecs number, according to the latest census figures, 55, 343 individuals. The percentage of monolinguality is 81.76. In the entire Republic this figure is exceeded only by that of the Choles, who have a monolinguality of more than 89 percent.¹ There are two dialects spoken in the Mazatec territory, the so-called Mazateco-Popoloca dialect, and the Mazateco-Huautla dialect, called Izcateco by Belmar.² Roughly speaking, the former dialect is spoken by those who inhabit the hot, low-lying *tierra caliente*, while

¹ Census figures supplied by Mr. B. Bevan. See also »The Chinantec«.

² Belmar, p. 1.

the latter is found in the cooler, mountainous, coffee-growing region known as the *tierra templada*.

In territories adjacent to the Mazatec are found Chinantec, Aztec, Mixtec, Cuicatec, and Zapotec-speaking peoples. These share with the Mazatec and with each other a basic complex of traits relating to every phase of life. This is most apparent in the several cases of »border» towns inhabited by two language groups. Because witchcraft is present and practiced extensively throughout the entire region, and because the data, although scant enough, are comparatively full for that phase of life, some of those data will be briefly presented here.

The following information on the practice of curing by witchcraft was obtained in the Mazatec town of Huautla de Jimenez.³ The *brujo* (witch) was first contacted through the good offices of Sr. D. José Dorantes, a Mazatec merchant of Huautla. The pretext given to the *brujo* was that one of the members of the party had a sick relative in Mexico City. After nearly a week's delay the *brujo* agreed to take the case, and after several discussions with us as to the nature of the ailment, he arranged a meeting with us. The meeting took place at his home on Saturday, July 16, and lasted from ten P. M. to two A. M. There were eight people present at the ceremony, including the members of the party, Sr. Dorantes, the *brujo*, and his wife. The *brujo*'s wife was apparently asleep, although she occasionally sat up and interjected a remark.

The *brujo* is an old man, certainly at least seventy years of age. Aside from wearing high, buttoned shoes and a wide brimmed felt hat, he appears like other townspeople. He has a slight case of *pinto*, and is somewhat palsied. He speaks no Spanish.

³ I am indebted to Louise Lacaud, Irmgard Weitlaner-Johnson, and Bernard Bevan for their generosity in permitting me to use this material, of which they were the principal collectors.

The *brujo* sat in front of a small low table. Above the table were two of the customary religious prints in color. On the table was a Mixtec basket containing six eggs. Also neatly arranged on the table were 48 maize kernels, a candle, a red paper package containing *tobaco molido*, scissors, white cotton string, a *guaje* (gourd vessel) also containing *tobaco molido*, a small square of bark paper, a paper parcel of copal, and a large red and blue *guacamaya* feather.

On a wall shelf to the left of the table stood a night light and a lighted candle; and a large number of large mushrooms, wrapped in banana leaves. There were also two dried orchids, and a short staff entwined with dried yellow flowers. Under the table was a goblet shaped copal burner, of the usual size and shape.

Procedure

1. The *brujo* asked the symptoms of the disease, although not in great detail, as these had already been explained at former meetings.
2. He chewed three mushrooms, and a stick of some unknown substance.
3. He took the six eggs from the basket, and placed them in two rows on the table. There were two turkey eggs, two speckled hen eggs, and two plain white hen eggs.
4. He invoked St. Peter and St. Paul, followed by a large number of other saints and local *virgenes*, including those of Guadalupe, *La Soledad de Oaxaca*, and the Virgin of Chihuahua.
5. He instructed the relative of the sick person to place a piece of copal in her right hand, while she repeated the name of the sick person. She then placed the pieces of copal in the burner and,
6. The *brujo* added copal dust and lit it.

7. He asked where the patient was born and where the afterbirth was buried. He said that disease came from a dry wind, *aire*.
8. He made the sign of the Cross and invoked the spirit of the sick person.
9. He invoked large numbers of saints in a rambling repetitive prayer not unlike a litany, which was followed by an invocation of the *dueños*, (*reyes*) of the rocks, rivers, mountain, thunder, earth, stars, plants, sun, moon, and *la'a*, a species of mountain-dwelling dwarf.
10. He then prayed directly to God, saying »King of — — —?«, and to San Antonio, a prayer of supplication. He picked up the maize kernels.
11. He made four twisting signs over the table, as if about to cast dice, and saying, »In the name of the Father, Son, Holy Ghost, and Blessed Trinity«.
12. He scattered the 48 kernels over the table. Some fell on the dirt floor, were picked up and laid on the edge of the table. Pausing a little, as though in deep concentration, he read the pattern, and divined as follows; 1st throw- »Confusion — — science« is uncertain if it can assist».
13. More prayers, much as above, but comparatively short. 2nd throw- »Still confused, but a little clearer«.
14. Long prayers, with further invocations of everybody already mentioned; prayers to the chief saints, and to God, Son, and Trinity, etc. He implored them for aid as though he were already supported by the lesser saints, that is, on the intercession principle. »San — — says, and San — — says«, etc.
3rd throw-»Possible hope«.
4th throw-»Death. I can see the funeral. The spirits are not with me, but hope is not entirely lacking«.
5th throw-»If you believe and have faith, there is hope«.

6th throw-»She is already much better, but you must have faith in me».

7th throw-»She is now well, and you can send a telegram to prove it!»

The old man said that he had cured since he was thirteen years old, and was now over seventy. He added that the science he practiced was very old, came from the *antepasados*, and descended from father to son. During the ceremony he burned copal three times, at first on the floor between his legs, and later holding the burner in his hand. He smoked a cigar between invocations and casting the maize.

The *brujo* said that every word spoken with sincerity was heard by Heaven, and that all the objects on the table represented the Powers, which are like a bank upon which one could draw, if one had something upon which to draw. He said that he was able to draw upon the Powers, even though unable to read, write, or speak other languages.⁴

Questioned as to the significance of the objects upon the table, the *brujo* said that the prayer is written on the bark paper with the *guacamaya* feather. To further aid the cure, he said that he would pray in the church and burn candles. Questioned again as to whether we could do anything further to aid the cure, he promised instructions later. The following evening he brought six little parcels of eggs, *cacao*, copal, feathers, and bark paper. Each parcel was separately wrapped in brown paper, and contained an egg, two or three *cacao* beans, copal, and a tiny feather wrapped in a small piece of bark paper. These were to be buried in the patio of the home of the patient, oriented east and west.

In addition to the above method of curing by intercessory prayer, maize divination, and egg parcels, the widespread practice of curing by suction is very common in the Mazatec region. A type of witchcraft is also practiced in church by a body of professional *brujos*, either male or female, whose

⁴ The above is Sr. Dorantes very free translation of the *brujo's* explanation.

practices strongly resemble those of the Aztec *huehueté*. Their procedure consists of praying or interceding for or against a person. These *brujos* have a special method of diagnosis and treatment of disease, which consists principally of »laying on hands». They also bless and sell bunches of shrubs which they rub over the images of the saints. By this means, some of the magical power of the saints becomes resident in the shrubs. The services of the magic prayer-makers, exclusive of the cost of the candles with which they must be supplied, is nominal. Depending upon such factors as the type of the case, and the length of the prayer demanded, the service may cost anywhere from ten or fifteen centavos to one or two pesos. This is much cheaper than the charges of the *brujos* who divine with maize and make the egg parcels; their charge is seldom less than five or six pesos.

In addition to the above methods, which may cause sickness or death as well as cure, there is another type of »black» witchcraft practiced by a particular type of *brujo*. This practice consists of an invocation and spell which causes a piece of rope or vine to become a serpent when it is thrown in the direction of the enemy. It then goes to the enemy and destroys him.

From the town of San Cristóbal Mazatlan, the legendary capital of the Mazatecs, comes the information concerning an especial type of supernatural enchantment. This is caused by dwarfs of the mountains, the *la'a*, little old men who appear at twelve noon and midnight. They have the faces of little boys, but they are old and very strong. They seize upon a passerby, throw him down, and put a strong spell on him. There is an especial type of *brujería* (witchcraft) to cure this sort of enchantment; if one is not speedily cured, one will die.

There is yet another type of dwarf, namely, the *chikushi*, who live in caves in the mountains. People go to the caves and make sacrifices to them; if one is ill, one sacrifices a turkey.

The use of the parcel with the egg, copal, etc., is found in Mazatlan, although the bark paper is not ordinarily used. In its place the corn husk is used, known by its Aztec name, *tolomaxtle*. The bark paper, however, is known in Mazatlan, and comes from a tree bearing the Aztec names of *Yulusuchil*, *Yuluxuchil*, *Soloxuchil*, and *Xoloxochil*. In the Mazatec dialect of Mazatlan, the tree is called *tishú*. The meaning of the apparatus of curing was given as follows: *cacao* represents wealth, eggs represent strength, the feather represents the witness (Sp. *testigo*), and the bark paper or corn husk represents the vow, (Sp. *promesa*).

Mushrooms are also eaten by the *brujos* of Mazatlan, as is general throughout the entire Mazatec area. Many varieties are eaten, among which the most common are the following:

1. *Hongitos de San Ysidro*, the «little mushrooms of San Ysidro», which are called in Mazatec *steyí* and *tsami'yé*.
2. *Desbarrancadera*, in Mazatec, *tsamikíshu*. These are very small mushrooms.
3. The *tsamikíndi*, which are smallest of all the narcotic mushrooms eaten by the *brujos*.⁵

While the *brujo* is under the influence of the narcotic mushroom, it is the mushroom which speaks, and not the *brujo*. During this time, the *brujo* stays with his patient. They are alone in a corner of the house. The *brujo* sings, dances, and prays while under the influence of the mushroom. He would go mad if he took more than six mushrooms, and the patient would die. The *brujo* calls upon all the saints, and tells where the harm befell the patient. He then orders the egg, copal, etc., to be buried in the house, oriented east and west. *Aguardiente* is frequently buried with the parcel. The patient must go on a diet for fifty days, and practice continence during this time. The lack of a cure is attributed to a breach of these restrictions. Both

⁵ See R. E. Schultes, for identifications of the mushrooms.

sexes practice witchcraft throughout the region. Certain persons are able to send the »spirit» of a man into a deer; when the deer is killed, the man dies.

Methods of maize divination vary with the individual diviner. The reading of the pattern of the cast maize is generally the basis for the divination. In Mazatlan there is an extraordinary variation of this: the maize kernels are thrown upon twenty cards bearing animal pictures. The pattern is interpreted from a *cuaderno*, a notebook which may be obtained in any store.⁶

Throughout the whole of the Mazatec area, the articles of witchcraft, save the mushrooms, are sold openly in the markets. The entire complex, that is, eggs, feathers, copal, *cacao*, and bark paper, are generally sold together. They are quite expensive: large feathers cost from twenty to fifty *centavos*, bark paper about thirty *centavos* for a piece 4" x 6", while *cacao* and copal are usually sold two beans or pieces for one *centavo*. There are two grades of bark paper, the coarse, which is cheaper, and the fine grade, which is more expensive.

From the Mazateco-Popoloca towns of S. Pedro Ixcatlan and San José Independencia comes the following information regarding curing and witchcraft.⁷

»The witch puts down a *petate*, and over it a white cotton cloth. Around the sheet he places small antique figures.⁸ Then he casts the maize three or four times and divines

⁶ The material referring to Mazatlan was made available through the courtesy of Miss Louise Lacaud and Mr. B. Bevan. Dr. Alfonso Caso has suggested that the cards used in this type of divination may represent the hitherto undiscovered Mazatec *tonalamatl*, which is reported to consist of twenty animal names. See Bauer, p. 865.

⁷ Material collected by Irmgard Weitlaner-Johnson. Her informant was Sr. Mauricio Vista, a native of S. Pedro Ixcatlan, now serving as *Secretario Municipal* in S. José Independencia.

⁸ Such a figure is preserved in the Municipal offices in S. José Independencia. It is a copal censer of Mixtec origin, with three legs and a long handle, now missing.

according to the pattern. Sometimes the pattern says that it is necessary to kill two chickens. They kill the chickens and throw them upon the cloth. If they jump around a great deal, the person will get better. Then they make a broth (of the chickens), and call in four witnesses, who eat the broth at the corners of the cloth. Afterward, they take a leaf of *cacao*, and put in eggs, and make a parcel with *cacao* and a little feather of the *guacamaya*. *Cacao* indicates money which the patient pays. Also they put in a stem of bamboo, which indicates *aguardiente*. The egg indicates strength. They wrap up the eggs, etc., in parcels, and bury them where there are crossroads, or where the sick person is, or they hide them. The bones of the chickens are buried. They use 24 kernels of maize. They take them from the middle of the ear; the ear has twelve rows of kernels. The witch speaks his own (special) language».

»They have in the center of the cloth a little figure, and they cast shells sometimes. Then they kneel down in an especial way around the little figure».

»In order to make rain, the witch goes to the mountains, where there are springs. He enters a cave, praying. He brings one or two turkeys. When he enters the cave, it thunders, because the spirits are angry. It is said that the thunder is caused by little old men. The witch sprinkles water about so that it will rain. He leaves the birds alive there, as a token of payment. Chickens also are taken».

»When witches are curing, they call upon the »Lord of the mountains, of the earth, of the water, of the sun, etc.»

»When a person dies, they collect a seed called »*Alegria*», and put a little bunch of them with the corpse. This indicates money in the other world, so that the dead person will not die of hunger».

»To find a lost animal or object, one takes some mushrooms at night. One commences to speak (after falling asleep). It is not permitted to keep an animal around which might cry out and disturb the sleeper, who goes on speaking

while another person listens. The sleeper tells where the lost animal or thing is, and the next day there it is when they go to find it. In addition to the mushrooms, some people use a seed called »*Semilla de la Virgen*», others use »*Hierba Maria*».

»The people also fear the Masters of the earth, who live underground. Each place also has its spirit, and these spirits are able to kill those who have annoyed them.»

»At night, persons' real names are not said. They are called by the name of any object whatsoever, for example, »chair», »table», etc. If real names were used, one would become ill — the masters of the mountains would take one's fortune, cause one to become ill, and one would die.»

»When the owl cries in the night, someone is going to die». »Witches powder the claws of the *tigre* and make a drink of it, which they give to the sick person whom they are curing».

From the foregoing data, the essential unity and cohesiveness of the witchcraft beliefs and practices in the Mazatec territory is readily seen; and it is also possible to show a similar unity between the practices of the Mazatecs and those of peoples in adjoining regions. It will not be difficult to show that practically every element, viewed singly in its occurrence among the Mazatecs, also occurs among the majority of the other groups, although the significance of any given element may vary to a considerable degree as it is traced from group to group.

To the south and east, immediately adjoining the Mazatec territory, are the Cuicatecs. They are a small group, numbering 9, 221; only 62.29 percent of the group are monolingual. Those who are known as witches have a certain knowledge of the herbs of the fields, and are equipped with bits of cork, crystals, marbles, beans, feathers, little idols of stone, herbs, etc. The witches practice as doctors and diviners, and earn honoraria, and it is believed that they can cause sickness in other persons by their black arts. In order to cause a person to become ill, they take a gift to the

»Lord of the mountain», which consists of a chicken, eggs, bamboo tubes of *tepache*, candles, and copal. These the witches leave on the mountain. In order to cure, they suck, and extract from the patient beans, hairs, fish-bones, etc. In cases of serious illness, they also take a gift to the »Lord of the mountain», and if the patient dies, the witches disclaim the fault, saying that the *aire* was very strong.

They believe in the evil eye. — In Teutila they believe in *naguales*, and in the owl as a bird of evil omen. — He who carries with him a *guacamaya* feather will have luck with women. — *Pisiete* is prepared in the following manner in Teutila: a leaf of fresh tobacco is well ground, mixed with a handful of lime, and sometimes a clove of garlic is added. This is sprinkled about where they work, in order to repel serpents or other venomous creatures. The same preparation serves to bewitch an enemy. The powdered *pisiete* is taken in the mouth and blown toward the enemy; it is believed that thus the enemy becomes sick or dies. If the bewitched one notices that someone has blown toward him, he can protect himself by drawing a line in the earth and spitting in the line, this being sufficient to protect him from danger.

Concerning agricultural sacrifice among the Cuicatecs, it is stated that in San Andrés Teotilalpam they still sacrifice animals in the fields in order to obtain a good harvest. Dogs and turkeys are the victims. The dogs are burned alive, and the turkeys are decapitated, and the seed and agricultural implements are sprinkled with their blood.⁹

⁹ Adan, E. p. 149 et seq. »Hay entre ellos de cierta habilidad y conocimiento en el manejo de las yerbas del campo, llamados brujos, — su equipo profesional consiste en bagatelas, como taponés de corcho, cristales, canicas, frijoles, plumas, idolitas de piedra, yerbas, etc. Estos individuos fungen, cobrando honorarios, como médicos y adivinos, y se cree que tienen poder para producir, por medio de su arte, enfermedades en otras personas. — Para enfermar a un enemigo llevan al »Señor del Cerro» un presente que consta de una gallina, canutos de tepache, vela y copal que los brujos dejan en el cerro. Para curar dan chupetones y extraen del cuerpo del paciente, frijoles, cabellos, espinas de pescado, etc. En casos de enferme-

The *pisiete* mentioned above figured in the curing ceremony described from Huautla de Jimenez; it was also prescribed by the *brujo* as a part of the treatment, and was to be administered to the patient by »pricking it in the veins». We listed the substance as *tobaco molido*. Starr, in his »Notes upon the Huautla district», states that »*Pisiete* is a green powder of the leaves of a plant. It is universally carried in little gourds which are fastened on the girdle. — It is used by the people to take away fatigue and also in *brujería*. In *brujería* it is used a) to protect against witchcraft and b) to cause witchcraft. It is used in *brujería* before the sun rises; a pinch is placed between the lower lip and the teeth, a sip of wine is taken, and formulae repeated. — It was impossible to gain the formulae». ¹⁰

Bauer also mentions the use of *pisiete* among the Mazatecs¹¹, as does Seler, who renders it by the proper Aztec name, *picietl*.¹²

dades graves llevan tambien presente al »Señor del Cerro» y, si el enfermo se muere, los brujos se disculpan diciendo que no tenia remedio, que el aire era muy fuerte». »Creen en el mal de ojo, — En Teutila creen en los naguales, y en la lechuza como ave de mal agüero. — El que lleva consigo una pluma de guacamaya tiene suerte con las mujeres. — El *pisiete* lo preparan en Teutila de la siguiente manera: se coge una hoja de tabaco fresco, se muele bien, mezclándola con una puñado de cal y, algunas veces, se le agrega un diente de ajo; esto se riega donde trabajan, para ahuyentar a las viboras o cualquier bicho venenoso (es cierto que se ahuyentan). Esta misma preparacion del *pisiete* sirve para hacer daño a los enemigos: se coge polve *pisiete* en la boca y se sopla a la persona enemiga; se cree que con esto adquiere enfermedad o se muere. Hay manera de defenderse, or sea la contra del *pisiete*: si el atacado llegase a notar que lo han soglado, inmediatamente raya la tierra y escupe en la raya, siendo suficiente para que no le pase nada. — En S. Andrés Teotilalpam sacrifican todavía animales en los campos para obtener buena cosecha: perros y guajolotes son las victimas; a los perros los queman vivos y a los guajolotes los degüellan y rocian la semilla e instrumentos de labranza con la sangre.»

¹⁰ Starr, p. 74.

¹¹ Bauer, p. 862

¹² Seler, »Zauberei».

Sacrifice to ensure fertility of the fields also occurs among the Mazatecs, according to Starr,¹³ and according to the same author, similar practices occur among the Mixe¹⁴. Parsons, speaking of the Zapotec, states that »At Santo Domingo in time of drought an offering of turkeys and bread is made to the Earth — the turkeys are killed on the mountain, Cerro Pelón, for the blood to soak into the ground — four turkeys, two male, two female».¹⁵ And, »Within a few miles of the town of Villa Alta we found among the Zapotec plenty of evidence to show the survival of ancient religious rites. Among certain pre-Cortesian ruins on the top of a hill venerated as »the hill which is good», we noticed curious holes in the ground, in the pedestal of a cross, and in the base of an ancient stone wall. In these holes we found eggs, flowers, little circles or rings of bread, *cacao* beans, and other objects deposited as offerings. Moreover, a strong odor of blood and the peculiar blackness and consistency of the earth within the holes pointed to a sacrifice recently performed. Large piles of turkey feathers which lay scattered around proved conclusively that turkeys had been the victims».¹⁶

Gillow remarks that the Mixes sacrifice in caves,¹⁷ and Beals reports similar practices among the same group. Cave sacrifice is a feature of wide distribution and considerable significance. Among the Tlaxcallans there are »rain-bringers, Kiatlaske or Tesitlaske», who bring gifts to the caverns of Malintze.¹⁸ The Aztecs went to »a cave of the Cú called Topico» in procession, where they left the skins of certain sacrificed victims as offerings.¹⁹ The Cuicatecs also sacrifice

¹³ Starr, p. 78 Decapitated turkeys or sheep are used.

¹⁴ Starr, p. 55 Decapitated turkeys or chickens are used at Quesaltepec and Alotepec. While the blood is sprinkled, a formula is said.

¹⁵ Parsons, p. 216

¹⁶ Bevan, p. 65.

¹⁷ Gillow, Chap. 10

¹⁸ Starr, p. 21.

¹⁹ Sahagun, Book II, Chap. I., p. 53.

in caves,²⁰ while the Mitla farmers sacrifice to Lightning in his cave in the mountain region to the north of Mitla.²¹ Another custom widespread throughout Southern Mexico is the worship of and sacrifice to the mountain deities, known to the Mazatecs as the »*Señor del Cerro*«. The »Lords of the Mountains« play an important rôle in witchcraft,²² and indeed are the central figure in Cuicatec witchcraft; he lives on the *Cerro Chere*.²³

The »Lords of the Mountains« are particularly important in the selection of witches, for not everyone can be a witch; special talents and gifts belong thereto, which the »Lords of the Mountains« grant only to their favorites. Such gifts are the power to work miracles, and a kind of bodily invulnerability or resistance. So that they may prove themselves, the incipient witches must voluntarily, and more frequently, involuntarily, undergo ordeals. If people are doubtful that the candidate is worthy to be a witch, the candidate may be seized by several sturdy fellows and assaulted with *machetes*. If he lives, nothing can equal the devout worship with which the proven witch is honored.²⁴

The belief in cave and mountain dwelling dwarfs is almost as widespread as the custom of cave sacrifice, and in some instances, is connected with it. Parsons mentions a type of dwarf among the Zapotec which closely resembles the description of the *la'a* among the Mazatec.

Divining with maize is universal in Southern Mexico, and innumerable variations in details exist. The number of kernels employed is the most variable factor, and consequently has a purely arbitrary significance in the several cases.

²⁰ Information from Messrs. R. J. Weitlaner and B. Bevan. In S. Andrés Teotilalpam, *aguardiente* is placed in bamboo tubes and sacrificed in caves.

²¹ Parsons, p. 211. Dr. Parsons mentions other cave shrines of the Zapotec.

²² Bauer, p. 858.

²³ Information from Mr. R. J. Weitlaner.

²⁴ Bauer, p. 861—862.

Divination with chickens or turkeys seems to have a somewhat more limited distribution. Data are available which show that this type of divination occurs not only among the Mazatec, but also among the Chinantec²⁵, and among the Zapotec of Mitla, where the *bruja* kills a chicken upon a cross drawn upon the ground; if it dies with its head toward the east, the patient will recover.²⁶

Parcels of various objects, such as eggs, copal, feathers, *cacao*, etc., are buried for various purposes among the Cuicatec²⁷, the Mixe²⁸, and the Zapotec. The offering generally has the purposes of warding off or curing illness, or of satisfying the earth. Starr, however, states that the Mazatec bewitch others by taking three feathers and three *cacao* beans to a *brujo*, who buries them on the property of the victim before sunrise.²⁹ Bauer records in detail two cases of the use of the curing parcel among the Mazatec, one from the Mazateco-Popoloca district around the Rio Tonto, and the other from Huautla. In the former case, one egg, seven pieces of white bark paper, seven pieces of brown bark paper seven colored parrot feathers, many *cacao* beans and pieces of copal were grouped around the egg with a corn husk or a banana leaf, and tied around both ends with the inner bark of a tree. While the bundle is being prepared, the witch repeats the necessary prayers — and the person then buries it in a convenient place, in the fields, or in the house. In the fields, it is frequently buried in the four corners and in the middle, and serves to keep drouth away, and ensure a good harvest. The bundle may be used for good or evil.³⁰

According to the Huautla practice described by Bauer, the bundle must be made where the witch does his work,

²⁵ Information from Sr. Ismail Aguirre, Ojitlan, Oax.

²⁶ Parsons, p. 120.

²⁷ Information from Messrs. Weitlaner and Bevan.

²⁸ Gillow, Chap. 10. For Zapotec, see Parsons, pp. 120, 121, 301.

²⁹ Starr, p. 78.

³⁰ Bauer, p. 860.

that is, at the bedside of the patient. The egg is placed on the floor so that the pointed end points toward the patient. Five *cacao* beans and five tiny feather bundles are grouped on each side of the egg. The feathers are tiny, not large, as those at Rio Tonto; they are wrapped in a tiny piece of the fibrous bark of the mulberry tree, so that only the ends of the feathers protrude, and tied with bark string. The ten *cacao* beans and the ten feather bundles are equally separated on both sides of the egg, so that the points of the feathers lie next to the point of the egg. The witch then lights ten copal pieces and prays. After this, he wraps the parcel in a banana leaf, and buries it loosely under the bed of the patient, without stamping the earth down tightly. There it remains until the sick person recovers, when it is dug up, wrapped in fresh banana leaves, and buried again near the house, or hung up in a nearby tree to ward off evil spirits. The bark paper represents clothing, the white type, shirts, the brown, the outer garments; the feathers represent decoration, the *cacao*, money. Bauer also noticed the occurrence of soul-loss among the Mazatec; the soul is recaptured in a large jar at the place of its loss, as among the Zapotec.³¹

The Mazatec share with all the surrounding peoples the general belief in the *nagual* in some form or another. According to Diaz, the territory of the Mazatec was known as the »Land of the deer«, because there were great numbers of tame deer which were venerated as gods, and could not be hunted.³² In former times, each *cacique* took for himself a sacred animal which was honored as a god.³³ The general *nagual* belief extends to the Quiches of Guatemala.³⁴ The Mazatec also share the general Central American belief in the owl (Sp. *tecolote*, *lechuza*), as a bird of evil omen.

³¹ Bauer, pp. 860—861.

³² Diaz, p. 31.

³³ Bauer, p. 858.

³⁴ La Farge and Byers, p. 141.

Copal is used by the Mazatec not only in witchcraft and curing, but in all other religious ceremonies as well, a trait likewise shared with Central America generally. The Zapotecs, in addition to using copal in the above mentioned ways, also bury it, as do the Mazatec, and use it in a peculiar form of divination as well. The copal is burned in a bowl of water, and thus a significant figure is formed on its under side.³⁵

Cacao in *brujeria* invariably has the connotation of wealth, undoubtedly because of its Pre-Conquest use as a medium of exchange. Among the Zapotec, *cacao* is offered to the earth, and at various shrines, while the Mazatec inter it with the dead.³⁶

Plumes of brilliantly colored tropical birds, principally the *quetzal* and the *guacamaya*, were an essential part of every religious ceremony of the Aztecs.³⁷ The merchants and the travelers went to the greatest pains to »find out where the feathers (plumes), and the precious stones can be had.«³⁸ In ancient times, plumes were similarly used by the Zapotec, as well as by the groups further to the south. Seler gives interesting details concerning the connection of the *guacamaya* plume with the Aztec calendar and gods.³⁹

³⁵ Parsons, p. 120.

³⁶ Bauer, p. 859.

³⁷ Sahagun, Book I Feathers were also used in curing, p. 230.

³⁸ Sahagun, Book I, p. 42.

³⁹ Seler, »Das Tonalamatl«, p. 35 »Das Wort cueçalin oder Cuetzalin heisst allerdings Feuerflamme, oder *Llama de juego*, wie Sahagun in seinem spanischen Texte übersetzt. Mit demselben Worte bezeichnet man aber auch die langen rothen Federn des Schwanzes und des Flügels des Vogels *Alo*, d. h. des rothen Guacamayo. (Vgl. Sahagun I cap. 2 pp 2) Es ist also diese Devise des Windgottes nichts anderes als der Flügel des rothen Guacamayo. Der rothe Guacamayo is der Vogel der Sonne, der *Xilohuela copijcha*, wie die Zapoteken sagen, der *Cuetzaltonameyotl*, wie es auf Mexikanisch heisst, d. h., »der rothe Papagei, der Abglanz der Sonne«, der Bruder des *Quetzaltotl*. »Der Guacamayo und der Quetzalvogel sind die beiden Himmelsvögel, die im Wiener Codex (Blatt 17) zu sehen sind, einen Ballspielplatz das Symbol der vier Bewegungen (*nahui olin*), d. i. das Symbol des

Paper must have been a commodity desired second only to plumes and precious stones. Its only use among the Aztecs was ceremonial, and it was indispensable as an article of adornment. It was used in penitential rites, as crowns for the images of gods, the god of the merchants was covered with paper, and paper was covered with *ulli*, liquid rubber, and used in sacrifices. The victims were frequently covered and clothed with paper, priests customarily wore undergarments of paper, it was burned with copal, and offered with plumes. Copal was frequently kept in paper pouches, and it was variously painted for different ceremonies. There were many grades and types of paper, known by various names, (*amatetewitl*, *tetenitl*, etc.), and tremendous quantities were used. In certain feasts for Vitzilopuchtli, the god of war, pieces of paper 20 fathoms long, 1 fathom wide, and 1 finger thick were used.⁴⁰ The paper was made from several plants. *Maguey* paper was perhaps the most common, while those types of paper made from the bark of trees were more costly. The *amate* tree supplied the bark for most of the true bark paper.

Starr refers to modern bark paper-making among the Otomís. The bark is beaten with a stone, and is made by the women with some attempt at secrecy. It is used only for *brujería*, and little figures are cut from it.⁴¹ Today the paper is known as *cua-ámatl* in Aztec. Lopez y Fuentes describes its use as follows, »— He observed that the earth in the patio had been recently removed, and — digging, he disinterred three little figures of *cua-ámatl*, completely stuck through with spines. Moreover, he took out three eggs,

Himmels, auf den Fittigen tragend. Mit seinem Schmuck, dem cuetzaltonameyotl, wird am Tage nahui olin das Bild des Sonnengottes geschmückt. Der rothe Guacamayoflügel charakterisirt also Quetzalcoatl als den Gott der vier Bewegungen (nahui olin), d. h. der vier Richtungen, oder des Himmels». For the place of the *guacamaya* in the calendar, see p. 17, et seq.

⁴⁰ Sahagun, pp. 32, 40, 41, 46, 61, 68, 72, 73, 85, 87, 94, 95, 110 etc.

⁴¹ Starr, p. 81.

painted black, and three *cempoalxóchitl*, the flower of death.»⁴²

Mr. Rodney Gallop has observed and collected similar figures of bark paper among the Otomí of the state of Puebla⁴³ Parsons reports one occurrence of the use of the *muñeco* in bewitching among the Zapotec,⁴⁴ but so far as is now known the bark paper is made in the *rancherías*, and brought to town to be sold in the markets. The entire tree is cut down, the trunk conveniently sectioned, and the bark beaten until it lifts away from the wood. No especial beater is used; any hard stick of wood will serve.

The use of various magical plants to find lost objects is not restricted to the Mazatec alone; the Zapotec use a plant called »*bador*, the little children»⁴⁵, which is administered in the same way as *yerba Maria* by the Mazatec. The leaf is beaten well, and a tea made thereof. It is probable that the Chinantec use it, since it is well known to those who live in the vicinity of Ojitlan.⁴⁶ The Aztecs used narcotic plants in a similar way.⁴⁷

The use of a semi-divine mushroom seems to be today confined exclusively to the Mazatec territory, although in former times it undoubtedly had a much wider distribution. The Aztecs knew these mushrooms under the Nahuatl term, *teonanacatl*, »divine mushroom». Siméon, deriving his information from Sahagun, states the following, »Teonanacatl.

⁴² Lopez y Fuentes, p. 120— »El dia anterior, en el patio de su casa, observó que la tierra estaba recientemente removida y, — se puso a cavar en el mismo sitio, desenterrando tres muñecos de cua-ámatl, papel de madera, todos atravesados por espinas. Además, extrajo tres huevos de gallina, pintados de negro, y tres cempoalxóchitl, la flor de muerto.»

⁴³ Personal communication.

⁴⁴ Parsons, p. 141.

⁴⁵ Parsons, p. 312.

⁴⁶ Information from Sr. Ismail Aguirre, Ojitlan, Oax.

⁴⁷ Brinton, p. 14, quotes from the *Confesionario* of Nicolas de leon, »Hast thou drunk *peyoll*, or hast thou given it to others to drink, in order to find out secrets, or to discover where lost or stolen articles were? »

Espèce de petit champignon qui a mauvais gout, enivre et cause des hallucinations; il est médicinal contre les fièvres et la goutte». ⁴⁸ Further data on this most interesting feature of Mazatec witchcraft are scanty. Apparently the Zapotec do not use mushrooms, and the Cuicatec, although they know of their use among their neighbors, do not themselves employ mushrooms. ⁴⁹

The wide distribution and similarity of the idea of intercession with the saints and souls, who are addressed by persons knowing the »Words of Power», in the Middle American area is highly significant. Furthermore, it is generally believed that the saints and souls may be coerced into doing evil as well as good. This pattern of invocatory ceremonialism revolves about the principle of magical coercion of the gods, and is perhaps one of the most fundamental Middle American traits.

Conclusions

In dealing with the non-material aspects of modern Middle American cultures, there are found three comparatively distinct strata, firstly, the European overlay, more or less completely acculturated to the indigenous mass, secondly, the great body of indigenous beliefs and practices which exhibit some sort of a fundamental unity throughout the entire area, and thirdly, variations and especial local developments of these indigenous beliefs among the individual groups. A fourth and minor group is formed of variations upon of the European overlay.

Nowhere, naturally, does the European overlay appear so obviously as in the more superficial aspects of the religious life. In the beginnings of the process, the acculturation was

⁴⁸ Siméon, p. 436.

⁴⁹ Information from Mr. R. J. Weitlaner, who also states that narcotics are used for divination by the Otomí of Pahuatlan, Sierra de Hidalgo, Puebla, and particularly in the towns of Sta. Ana Tlachichilco and S. Pablito, near Pahuatlan.

forced, but after the first great cut into the pattern of aboriginal theopathy, acculturation proceeded almost without conscious effort. Thus the Catholic saints have fallen heir to the attributes of their pagan predecessors, and in religious tales which have been told by the aborigines for two or more centuries there is seen the final product of this process of acculturation, which strove to express unfamiliar action in a familiar locale and idiom. Then, too, the Huautla *brujo's* explanation of the bark paper and the feather in the curing apparatus seems to be an obvious and traditional rationalization, a reconciliation of the old to the new, which represents a completed line of acculturation. Yet, curiously enough, the other three articles of the curing parcel retain their aboriginal connotation.

A few examples of fundamental aboriginal beliefs have already been mentioned; were the data sufficient, it would be possible to multiply them almost indefinitely. A basic fact concerning them, however, is readily perceived, namely, that in the relation of belief to demonstration of that belief, the belief is the constant, while the manifestation is the variable. A case in point is the ceremony preliminary to the well known Totonac game of *Volador*, as it is played in Papantla. Here, »an old woman, the so-called *bruja* (witch) makes offerings of copal, *aguardiente*, and a fowl, which are placed in the hole when the pole is put in position».⁵⁰

All the basic elements of the curing parcel as occurring among the Mazatec were known to most of the groups of Middle America, but so far as is now known, only the Mazatec use them all in the characteristic manner previously described. This indicates, perhaps, not only an ancient and continued diffusion, but a high degree of selective acculturation as well. The difference in the sum total of culture in all its aspects, from group to group in Middle America, was comparatively so small as to permit readily the diffusion and acceptance of almost any given culture trait. While

⁵⁰ Fewkes, p. 249.

this does not hold for the calendar with all its complicated ramifications, or for highly technical processes, yet it is particularly applicable in the realm of non-material culture of an unsophisticated nature.

Concerning the mechanics of this widespread and continuous diffusion, Sahagun remarks that the merchants among the Aztecs »travelled over the whole land, bartering, trading, buying in some place and selling in another what they had purchased. They also travel through towns, along the seashore, and in the interior. There isn't a place they do not visit — they are very sly in their deals with strangers in learning their languages, as well as in their tactics».⁵¹ A second great center of trading and of »travellers» was and is the Zapotecan area. Thus was long range diffusion effected; but of greater significance in the long run was the great volume of short range trading, that is, between village and village, and between directly adjoining localities, as is the custom today.

In such a way, both material objects, and to a lesser extent, their non-material aspects as well, were diffused, but were always incorporated into the body of the recipient culture with great variability and a high degree of adaptive acculturation. For example, the Mazatec have a simplified agricultural calendar, shorn of the greater part of its mythological significance, while the nearby Cuicatec, and the central and northwestern Chinantec have none, although they know of its use among their neighbors. The Mazatec curing parcel, with all its elements, then, seems to represent a very localized adoption and fusion of certain fundamental elements of great antiquity and wide distribution in Middle America.

⁵¹ Sahagun, Book I, p. 41.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- ADAN, ELFEGO, *Los Cuicatecos Actuales*. An. Mus. Nac. Epoca 4 a, Tom. I, México, 1922.
- BELMAR, F. *Lengua Mazateca Oaxaca* 1892.
- BRINTON, D. G., *Nagualism*. Proc. Am. Phil. Soc. vol. 33—34, 1894—95.
- BEVAN, BERNARD, *The Chinantec and their Habitat*. Inst. Panamericano de Geo. e Hist. Mexico, 1938.
- BAUER, WILHELM, *Heidentum und Aberglaube unter den Maçateca-Indianern*. Zts. für Eth. vol. 40, 1908. pages 857—865.
- DIAZ, B. DEL CASTILLO, *A True History of the Conquest of New Spain, The Conquest of New Spain*, vol V, Ser. II, Vol XL London, 1915 The Hakluyt Soc. trans. A. P. Maudslay.
- FEWKES, W. J., *Certain Antiquities of Eastern Mexico* 25th Ann. Rep., B. A. E.
- G. LOPEZ y FUENTES, *El Indio, Mexico* 1935.
- GILLOW, BISHOP E., *Apuntes Historicos, Mexico* 1889.
- KRICKEBERG, W., *Los Totanaca* trans. P. Aguirre, Sec. de Educacion Pub. Mexico, 1933.
- LAFARGE, O. and BYERS, D., *The Year Bearer's People*. Mid. Am. Ser. Pub. 3 Tulane Univ. 1931.
- PARSONS, E. C., *Mitla*. Univ. of Chicago press 1936.
- SAHAGUN, FRAY B. de, *A History of Ancient Mexico*. Trans. Fanny R. Bandalier Fiske, Univ., 1932 (First four books only).
- SCHULTES, RICHARD EVANS, *Plantae Mexicanae II*. Botanical Museum Leaflets, vol. 7, no. 3, pp. 37—54, 1939.
- SELER, ED., *Zauberei im alten Mexiko*. Gesammelte Abhandlungen, Band II, no. 5 pages 78—86.
- — *Das Tonalamall*. Ext. du Compte Rendu du Congrès Int. des Américanistes. 7e ses. Berlin 1888.
- SIMÉON, RÉMI, *Dictionnaire de la Lengue Nahuatl ou Mexicaine*. Paris 1885.
- STARR, F. *Notes upon the Ethnography of Southern Mexico*. Proc. Davenport Acad. of Sciences. vol. VIII 1899—1900.

University of California, Berkeley

November, 1938.