

NOTE ON THE DISCOVERY OF TEONANACATL

In a recent issue of the *Anthropologist*, Dr LaBarre has erroneously given credit to Mr R. E. Schultes for the discovery of *teonanacatl*, the narcotic mushroom of the Aztecs.¹ Mr Schultes states in his published identification of the mushrooms merely that he "learned" of their use by the Mazatecs of Oaxaca.² In the interest of stricter accuracy, the present writer feels it to be essential that the actual facts of the discovery of this interesting narcotic should be known.

During Easter week, 1936, Mr R. J. Weitlaner of Mexico City spent four days in Huautla de Jimenez, Oaxaca, where he was engaged in linguistic investigation, and where he obtained for the first time the full Mazatec calendar. Mr Weitlaner learned from Sr Jose Dorantes, a Mazatec merchant, of the existence and use of the mushrooms in curative witchcraft and divination. Sr Dorantes also described his own reactions upon eating three of the mushrooms. Recognizing the mushrooms as *teonanacatl*, Mr. Weitlaner communicated the news of his discovery to Dr B. P. Reko, who sent the specimens to botanists for identification.

In July, 1938, the writer, accompanying Misses Louise Lacaud, Irmgard Weitlaner, and Mr Bernard Bevan, spent some weeks in Huautla de Jimenez, charged with continuing the investigations commenced by Mr Weitlaner, who generously placed his data at our disposal. We were able to collect a considerable amount of data on witchcraft and the use of the mushroom, which are now published.³ While in Huautla, we met Mr Schultes and Dr Reko, who were collecting ethno-botanical data and specimens. At that time, and later, when he was preparing his identification of the mushrooms, Mr Schultes had access to our data, for which he generously gave me credit. Mr Schultes did not know of the previous discovery by Mr Weitlaner, and for this reason failed to mention him in his first paper on *teonanacatl*.

Dr La Barre's brief report accompanied another communication, and was based on a short, personal communication from Schultes, and was published before Schultes' paper appeared.

References to *teonanacatl*, while not common in literature, are by no means unknown. I append herewith a short bibliography of the more important older works:

W. LaBarre, *The Peyote Cult* (Yale Publications in Anthropology, No. 28, New Haven, 1938).

Excellent bibliography on *teonanacatl*.

Fr. T. de Motolinea, *Historia de los Indios de nueva españa* (tratado 1, cap. II), p. 23.

Orozco y Berra, *Historia antigua y de la conquista de Mexico*, tomo III, p. 437.

Fr. B. de Sahagun, *Historia de la nueva españa*, tomo III, p. 242.

¹ W. LaBarre, *Note on Richard Schultes' "The Appeal of Peyote"* (*American Anthropologist*, Vol. 1. No. 2, 1939), pp. 341-342.

² R. E. Schultes, *Plantae Mexicanae: The Identification of Teonanacatl, a Narcotic Basidiomycete of the Aztecs* (Botanical Museum Leaflets, Vol. 7, No. 3, Cambridge, 1939), pp. 37-54.

³ J. B. Johnson, *The Elements of Mazatec Witchcraft* (Ethnological Studies, No. 9, Gothenburg, 1939), pp. 128-150; *Some Notes on the Mazatec* (Revista Mexicana de Antropologia, Vol. 1, No. 2, 1939).

- J. de la Serna, *Manuel de ministros de Indios* (Anales del Museo Nacionales, tomo VI), pp. 303 and 385.
- A. Toro, *Las Plantas Sagradas de los Aztecos y su influencia sobre el Arte PreCortesiano* (23rd International Congress of Americanists, New York, 1928), p. 112.

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DERIVATION OF THE WORD 'ALASKA'

The derivation of the word *Alaska* may be reduced to a formula:

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|-------------------------------|---|
| 1) Alaska, | Proper noun applied to a Territory. |
| 2) aláxsxaq (aláxsxaḡ) | Original pronunciation* in Aleut. |
| (Unalaska) (Umnak) | |
| a) alá- - - - , | Partial root without meaning. |
| b) - - - x - - - , | Root index derived from the proper index - - - ḡ indicating the sea. |
| c) - - - - sxa - , | "An element occurring in nouns implying the objective of the action expressed by the root."
(R. H. Geoghean) |
| d) - - - - - q, (- - - - - x) | Nominalizing suffix, nom. case. |
| Un. | Um. |

At this point it is perhaps best to define certain terms used in this paper which refer only to the Aleut language.

- 1) Partial Root: The first three phonemes, usually VCV in nature from which various primary roots may be formed by the addition of a
- 2) Root Index: This is usually a consonant, sometimes a consonant plus a vowel, which designates the real primary root together with its semantic associations, and differentiates the root from any other root not a homonym.
- 3) Primary Root: This consists of the meaningless partial root plus the root index, which together expresses a definite morphologic value and to which suffixes may be attached.

For example, separating the here correctly spelled Aleut word for Alaska into its parts we have *aláyxsxaq*

- | | |
|------------------|--|
| a) ala- - - - , | Partial root without meaning. |
| b) - - - ḡ - - - | Root index, meaningless in itself, but which coupled with <i>alá- - -</i> pertains to the sea. (Contrast <i>alás- - -</i> quiet, silence.) |
| c) aláy- - - , | The complete primary root, always initiating an Aleut word, to which suffixes may be attached directly. |

In b) above, it is indicated that the root index, - - - ḡ -, is not the true index which is - - - ḡ -. Herein lies the entire secret of the morphologic analysis of *aláxsxaq* (Alaska) and the cause of failure in the past.

Note carefully: (In Aleut a medial fricative surd, 'x', may shift to a medial sonant fricative, 'ḡ'; a velar surd fricative, 'ḡ', may shift to a velar sonant fricative,

* Phonetics used are those authorized by the Smithsonian Institute in its pamphlet, *Phonetics for the Transcription of American Indian Languages*.