



# Oaxaca Times

THE MONTH OF THE TOTAL SOLAR ECLIPSE

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## GUENDALEZAA

AN ETHNIC WAY OF LIFE

### THE GUELAGUETZA AS A HOMAGE TO THE RACE

The Guelaguetzta as a homage to the race was presented for the first time on April 25, 1932, on the Fortin Hill of Oaxaca, on a monumental terrace which was decorated with the unique, unimitable panorama of Oaxaca and the emerald valley as a backdrop. On that occasion, each delegation, after presenting its offering and displaying its original dances with the native musical accompaniment, went to occupy its previously reserved place under arches of flowers with the name of their region of origin.

The exposition of the Four Hundredth Anniversary of the founding of Oaxaca was enriched by these presentations, which showed to the whole State and the thousands of visitors to the feast, the products of each Region of Oaxaca. It was an exchange of knowledge, of tastes, of teachings.

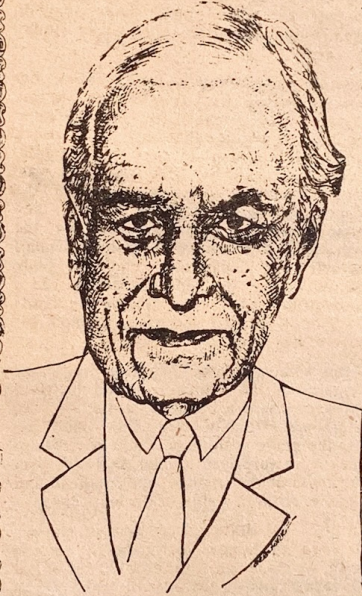
The basic idea of the feast was a success: the elements of regions apparently isolated were connected with elements of distant regions. Since that first feast, the feast of "Monday of the Hill" continued to be celebrated and came to be promoted with this name in the 1960's, as it continues to be known today.

### GUELAGUETZA

#### DRAMATIZATION OF OAXACAN CUSTOMS

Father Gay, in his "History of Oaxaca", referring to the humanitarian sentiments of our Indians, asserts that "guelaguetzta" is a free gift that everyone offers with great insistence, to one who needs it, and that carries with it the obligation to reciprocate. Surely our illustrious historian, is calling public attention to the moral and social importance of "guelaguetzta", adopted the Zapotec word according to the approximate pronunciation of the peoples of the Valley, because on the Isthmus of Tehuantepec they say "guendalezaa" or "gundalizaa". The term "guela" (in the Valley) or "guenda" (on the Isthmus) means a characteristic duality of

THIS ISSUE IS DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF OUR BELOVED RUFINO TAMAYO



The basic thing is that I am a man the same as other men, gifted just as them, with the same aspirations and concerns.

Another person among men of this world divided by prejudices and nationalisms, but united by a common participation in the same culture, the human culture, whatever might be the local and historical forms it adopts.

Rufino Tamayo

something, a peculiar or distinctive element; "lezaa" in the Valley means "relationship" ("lizaa" on the Isthmus); guelaguezaa in the Valley is the quality or condition or expression of a kinship. The "guelaguetzta" to which Fr. Gay alludes in his History is nothing more than the "guelaguezaa" of the Valley and the "gundalizaa" of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec.

Now the kinship among the ancient Indians which is defined by the word "lezaa" does not refer only to blood relatives or other close relationships as defined by Roman law or as considered by aboriginal races, but has a much broader meaning and is almost confused with friendship. If the word "lezaa" indeed embraces blood relations properly speaking, it also includes all those persons who are bound by spiritual and moral bonds, bonds of consideration and of gratitude, especially those who, according to Fr. Gay, engendered reciprocal attention for favors received.

The "guelaguetzta" or "guendalezaa" of other periods, which survives even today in the indigenous towns, is a form of quasi-familial cooperatives to help the needy for generally transcendental motives. At the birth of a new offspring, the parents receive a multitude of gifts which, although they may be insignificant in their importance, are not so in their quantity. Marriage, death, the need to carry out any project with a common effort can be accomplished very rapidly - these are the principal applications of "gundalizaa".

In a special way, when we speak of marriage, both the bride and the groom are objects of numerous gifts from all the

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# THE LEGEND OF DONAJI

In what is today the central valley of Oaxaca, there existed many years ago a great lake called "el Roaloo". The only reminder of this lake which still remains today are two small ponds which are seen in the rainy season in the valley of Zaachila. On an island in the middle of the Roaloo rose the majestic palace of the Zapotecs, Zaachila Roo, or Teotzapotlán, as it was known among the Mexicas. This palace, with its floating gardens, rivaled the grandeur of the great Tenochtitlán (Mexico City today).

In the year 14... there was a bloody war between the Zapotecs, led by their king Cosijoeza, and the Mexicas, Ahuizotl. As the fortunes of war turned against the Mexicas, Ahuizotl proposed peace, offering to Cosijoeza as a sign of friendship the hand of his daughter Coyolicatzin in marriage. The Zapotec king accepted, but had every plan to delay the wedding because he did not trust his rival. But then, as tradition relates, Cosijoeza had a strange experience.

While bathing in a spring, Cosijoeza suddenly saw an enchanting woman; and he asked who she was and what she wanted, to which she replied: "O happy mortal, undaunted leader, pride of your warriors and formidable protector of your native land, who are the shining light in battle, who kills when war breaks out, powerful prince, I greet you! I am Coyolicatzin, the favored daughter of the emperor Ahuizotl, chosen by him to be married to you. Captivated by your fame which echoes through the forests and the mountains, and feeling the burning in my breast of the sacred fire of love, desiring to know you, I asked the gods to bring me to your presence."

Having fallen in love, King Cosijoeza sent his envoys to the Emperor Ahuizotl and shortly thereafter married, thus becoming the son-in-law of his ancient rival. The royal couple had five children, of which the last was an enchanting little girl. The king asked the pontiff Tiboot concerning the future of the newborn child, to which he replied: "Sir, at the moment your daughter was born, there in the east the continuous fire hugged the horizon, and above the zenith of

Teotzapotlán hovered a dark and vaporous cloud; these signs indicate that the infant is a sign of sad events, in the midst of which she herself will be sacrificed for love of her people." "And so," said the King, "her name should be "Great Soul." "Donají! Donají! Donají!" repeated the court enthusiastically, and thus the newborn was named Donají.

Many years later.... King Cosijoeza, feeling strong, declares war on his old ally Dzahuindanda and the Mixtecs. He loses the first battle, however, and before he can think of attacking again, he becomes concerned about the arrival of white men (Spaniards), who, according to a sixth-century prophecy, would take over their lands. While Cosijoeza sends envoys to meet with Hernán Cortez, the Mixtecs attack his capital and he is forced to flee to the hill of the Breast of María Sánchez. There Cosijoeza would have met his end if not for the arrival of Francisco de Orozco, who forced the Zapotecs and Mixtecs to enter into a treaty by which Dzahuindanda received the princess Donají as a hostage. The Spanish, meanwhile, settled in Huaxyacac (today Oaxaca).

As time moved slowly for Donají in her Mixtec prison in Danni Dipaa (Monte Albán), she grieved for her defeated people and decided that only a new attack on the Mixtecs could save her people, even if it meant her life. And so it was: Donají sent a secret message to the Zapotecs, telling them to attack; they attacked and completely defeated the forces of Dzahuindanda, while Donají herself was decapitated and her body buried before the Zapotecs could find a trace of her. Thus were fulfilled the words of Tiboot: Donají sacrificed herself for love of her people.

After some time the Zapotecs found the remains of the Princess, along the river Atoyac, where a beautiful violet iris had blossomed from her blood. As they dug out the grave with respect and veneration, they were surprised to find the head, with the roots of the iris over the forehead and temple, without a sign of decomposition.

In 1827 the State government of Oaxaca decided to honor this Zapotec heroine with a place on the coat of arms of Oaxaca. Thus, on the coat of arms is seen the head of a woman.

Despite the death of Donají, the Mixtecs and Zapotecs, who had first been allies and later enemies, were later forced to share together the yoke of slavery under the Spaniards. But just as nothing

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remained in Zaachila of the splendor of the Zapotecs, and even of the great lake Roaloo, so too the dominion of the Spanish was to disappear into history: all to be lost and confused into the obscurity of Tradition and legend.

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THE SOLAR ECLIPSE



For the ancient Mexicans an eclipse of the sun would be an ominous manifestation that the end of the world was near; it was represented by a great cat, animal of the dark of the night, devouring the most venerated deity, the father sun, the generous god who gave light and heat and whose movement indicated the order which time should have. This representation is seen in languages such as the Maya, Purepecha, and Mazahua, which express the eclipse of the sun as "the sun is eaten, bitten", or "the bite of the sun".

It is believed that the departure of the Mexicas, according to tradition from the mythical Aztlán (perhaps located in the state of Nayarit), was determined by a solar eclipse observed on January 16, 1116, at 3 PM, and which coincides with the date of the beginning of their leaving in search of the land of Aztlan in the year 1 Tecpatl, or 1116 A.D. Since they were in the valley of Anahuac, the Mexicas had the opportunity to witness another total eclipse of the sun on April 13, 1325, which could have induced the priests to end the long pilgrimage.

So writes the chronicler Fray Juan de Torquemada: that in the time of Moctezuma Ilhuicamina, after a solar eclipse many signs of evil were predicted. The Aztecs believed that the gods granted them 52 years of life, and that in the last year the world would end; thus every 52 years they performed the ceremony of the New Fire, and in the year that this ceremony coincided with a solar eclipse, they understood the end of Moctezuma and the arrival of the Spaniards.

The ancients and even up to this century the different ethnic groups of Mexico attribute to eclipses the cause of epidemic illnesses, or the birth of children with a harelip because the mother looked at the eclipse. In order to avoid this latter, mothers were advised to put a red ribbon in their hair or on their clothing.



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... GUENDALEZAA

AN ETHNIC WAY OF LIFE

FROM PAGE 1

"lezáas" or relatives, in the widest sense, to help them form a new home. It is understood that when a son is freed from paternal authority in order to marry, he is lacking sufficient necessities to be able to fulfill all the obligations of his new status; and so, beginning with his relatives properly speaking, he is given donations of value, depending on the means of each person, which will form the base of his family patrimony. In many parts of the State of Oaxaca, the parents' setting apart a portion of their goods for their son or daughter who marries is a solemn and emotional occasion which causes the new spouses to meditate deeply on the transcendental step they are about to take in their lives. Some towns still preserve the almost sacramental speeches that parents or closest relatives of the couple pronounce on such a solemn occasion. These speeches are called "livaanas" in Zapoteco. "My son" - says the father to his young man - "I hand over to you this piece of land, part of that which I have watered with my sweat in order to earn our living, to support my family, from the bosom of which you have come out. I received this land from my parents in a moment such as this, and they commended to me that I care for it at the cost of my life. I believe that I have fulfilled my duty, for I have been able to raise you, even up to joining you with the woman who is to be your companion. Defend this land that will soon gather my bones, so that just as I have done, you may hand it over to your children when the occasion so calls you."

The rest of the relatives, as well as the friends of the engaged (together they form the whole town), then offer gifts of various types, indispensable for the beginning of family life. Since as a general rule the new spouses, because of their poverty, need to build their own hut separate from that of their parents, to create a new home, all the lezáas, or lizáas, or guetzáas cooperate in the construction of the family domicile. This is the time when one observes the productive spirit of cooperation of our Indians. One yokes his oxen in order to bring cart-fuls of palm to be stacked at the location of the hut; one is in charge of bringing rocks, sand, or gravel; some braid the ropes that will be used; some offer a cow to be used to feed all those working in the construction of the house; then, on the appointed day, everyone gathers to work on the project. The whole town gathers at the place. All the relatives and friends collaborate in the most spontaneous and generous manner thinkable, and in a few hours of communal work, executed amid laughter, jokes, and fireworks, the house which is to be a new home is completed. The "guelaguetza" has accomplished the singular marvel of bringing to completion, with the concentrated effort of general help, a project which, left to the isolated effort of the newly married couple, would require extra time, money, and sacrifice that they would have no way of developing except over a long period of time.

What one can say of the cooperation of the "lizáas" to help the newly married, can be said in the case of the death of one of the relatives, or on any occasion in which it might be necessary to apply common effort to benefit one of those who participate in this unique kinship, which engenders

wondrous material and moral results in the individual and collective life.

But the fundamental characteristic of the "guelaguetza", which transforms it from a moral factor and a solidarity into almost a juridical institution, is that it constitutes a veritable mutual assistance society which by its influence makes more tolerable the wretched life of our aboriginal races.

The fact of giving a gift on a certain occasion engenders the right, sanctioned only by the custom, of the person who makes the gift, to receive general help when he might need it. As a result there is exact knowledge of all the persons who form the "guenda-lezáa" or "guela-guetza". By virtue of this very structure, this association which embraces the vast majority of the inhabitants of a town, is not formed by a determined number of components; it does not have a governing board, it distinguishes no hierarchy except that of affection among the members, and it can be said that this local grouping has as its primary substance and aim familial and friendly relations within a particular community. This very bonds of communal living are the material with which it works, flexible and pulsating as life itself, and the spontaneous impulses of this communal living determine its functioning. No one is obliged to take part in the "guela-guetza", but the very demands of society, feelings of trust, unity, common concerns, draw the inhabitants of a town, if it is not very big, to form their "guela-guetza" in order to enjoy together the general feeling of joy and happiness or to share their common anxieties and hardships. In the settlements of a few thousand inhabitants there are several of these indigenous communities of mutual assistance which, originating through the natural affections of actual kinship, when they widen their field of action include even persons outside the family ties of blood or affinity, but bound by spiritual, moral, or social ties.

Such an interesting and rare grouping without doubt does not fit into any of the categories of juridical or moral entities of European law. However, it can be said that a type of cooperative not yet regimented or completely defined enters into its character. Therefore, thinking now of the work of society, when it comes to incorporating our aboriginal races into the current of collective awakening, this rare and beautiful fruit of our native customs could be transformed into an efficient product to better the condition of our towns, in a juridical institution with precise functions and organs, according to the classical expression of Spencer, which impels its evolution from a state of decreasing generality to a state of increasing complexity. The cooperativism signified in the "guelaguetza" could be systematized so as to reflect not only a conglomerate of sentimental relations, inconsistent and ephemeral, but associations of a positive and acting solidarity, institutions which resist the various types of clashes which have engendered the pitiful crises of society.

