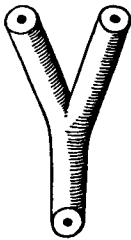


ON THE ETYMOLOGY OF THE WORD TOBACCO.*

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Without going into unnecessary details in regard to the absolutely groundless etymologies of the word tobacco, from the name of the Island of Tobago or the Mexican town of Tabasco, we have the generally accepted opinion, based on the report of Oviedo,† that the word *tobacco* originated in the name of the implement employed by the pre-Columbian inhabitants of Hayti for making use of the weed. The old historian says that they had the custom of taking some fumigations for the purpose of getting intoxicated (which they called *tabaco*)‡ with the smoke of a certain herb, and from his brief



description it would appear that this was the plant we know now by the same name. He then proceeds to describe the implement used in the operation, and gives also a rude figure of it, which is faithfully reproduced in the cut inserted here, taken from the original edition printed at Sevilla, in 1535. It is a small tube in the shape of the letter Y. The stem was

thrust into the smoke of the burning herb, the branches were put to the nostrils, and, after repeated inhalations, a state of intoxication was produced, which lasted for some time. This implement, he says, they called *tabaco*, adding expressly that such was not the name of the herb, as some people believed.|| He finally declares that this very bad vice (“*este vicio muy malo*”) had already been adopted by some Spaniards, and by even more of the negro slaves, who said that it took away their feeling of fatigue (“*les quita el consancio.*”)

* The following paper is the development, with some necessary corrections, of a note which I sent to the International Congress of Anthropology, held at New York in the month of June, 1888.

† *Historia general y natural de las Indias*. Madrid, 1851, i, 130, 131.

‡ “*Usaban . . . tomar unas ahumadas, que ellos llaman tabaco, para salir de sentido.*” (Oviedo, l. c.)

|| “*Aquel tal instrumento con que toman el humo . . . llaman los indios tabaco, é no á la hierva . . . como pensaban algunos.*”

I infer, after a careful consideration of his text, that Oviedo himself never saw an Indian using the little implement he describes and figures, and that he confused with the old custom, imperfectly known to him by mere hearsay, the one which, in his time, was already practised by some of his own countrymen.

I shall prove presently that he is certainly right in giving the name *tabaco* (or more correctly *taboca*) to the Y-shaped inhaler. His former statement that the fumigations were called so is to be traced to another source, as will be shown further on. The *taboca* is indeed the same instrument which is still in use among several tribes on the South American continent for the absorption of certain exciting powders (*niopo*, *parica*), and specimens of it are to be seen in most ethnographical collections.* It is, however, not used as a smoke-inhaler, nor can it be effectually employed for this purpose, as I have convinced myself by repeated experiments with burning tobacco-leaves.

I do not believe, therefore, that the Haytians inhaled in this manner the smoke of any herb; but I suppose they used the *taboca*, precisely like many South American Indians, for absorbing some exciting powder. This certainly may have been that of dried tobacco leaves, mixed perhaps with some other substance, as I am not quite sure that the physiological effect of pure tobacco powder would be of the intensity which Oviedo indicates.

This word *taboca* is of Guarani origin. Martius† alleges that such is the name of the tube, generally made of one of the long bones of the tapir, through which the Muras and Mauhés of the Amazon reciprocally blow into each other's nostrils the *parica* (a powder very much like the *niopo* of the Guahibos of the Upper Orinoco, if not exactly the same thing). In Guarani *taboca* is also the name of a tall bambusaceous grass, the hollow internodes of which were probably employed for the purpose mentioned before the more refined use of the bones of the tapir became a fashion. Almeida Nogueira‡ derives *taboca* either from *tabog*, the permissive form of the verb *bog* (I split), or from *itábog* (it splits stone), as the Indians

*I have described one in the Museo Nacional, Caracas (*Ethnographische Mittheilungen aus Venezuela*, in *Verhandlungen der Anthropgesellschaft zu Berlin*, 1886, page 521).

† Reise in Brasilien, iii, 1075.

‡ Vocabulario Guarani (Rio de Janeiro, 1879), 469.

are said to have used pieces of the cane, by the addition of water, for grinding holes into stones which they wanted to divide or to cut in a certain direction.

Parica and *niopo* are prepared from the pods and seeds of some species of leguminaceous trees (*Piptadenia niopo*, etc.). The powder has not yet been studied chemically, but Mr. Vicente Marcano, of this city, who brought a certain quantity of it from his voyage to the Upper Orinoco, tells me that from a preliminary investigation of its properties he is led to believe that it contains a powerful alkaloid. These trees do not grow everywhere, so that some tribes were compelled to look for other substances producing similar effects, and it appears that the leaves of the tobacco were amongst them, as is proved by the existence of the old Guarani word *petycui* or *petyngui*, which is translated by Almeida Nogueira with “*pó (powder) de tabaco para ser aspirado.*” This custom, however, is limited to the tribes of the wide-spread Guaranian family; at least I have been unsuccessful in finding its practice mentioned among the peoples of Arrawack origin.

The *niopo* inhaler of the Guahibos, as well as the instrument described and figured by Oviedo, are certainly but further improvements of the simple bone tube of the Muras and Mauhés, and as there can be no doubt that *taboca* could easily be changed into *tabaco*, it is evident that Oviedo is right with respect to the etymology of this word.

There is another word, viz., *cojoba* or *cojiba*, connected with the custom referred to, Bachiller y Morales thinks it was the old Antillean name of the tobacco plant.* It has been preserved by Las Casas in Chapter clxvi of his *Apologética Historia*.† After describing the manner in which the Haytian Indians absorbed through their noses a certain powder by means of an instrument like the one mentioned by Oviedo, he adds: “*Estos polvos y estas ceremonias ó actos se llamaban cohoba . . . en su lenguaje.*” It is very probable that the powder was made of tobacco leaves; but the word *cohoba* appears to me of Guarani origin, just like the word *taboca*. At the very first glance it looks like a compound of *cog* (to sustain, strengthen, nourish) and *hob* (leaf), so that it would be the same as the modern Brazilian word *cogonha*—i. e., the leaf which sustains or

* Cuba primitiva, 250.

† Historia de las Indias. Madrid, 1876, v., 469.

strengthens. There is, however, still another way of explaining its meaning, which agrees exactly with the quoted statement of Las Casas, that *cohoba* was the name, not only of the powder, but also of the ceremony or act of taking the powder. *Cui* in Guarani means "powder;" *cui-ú* or *cuyú* is therefore "to eat, to absorb a powder." The present participle of this verb would be *cui-guabo*, or also *cuyubo*,* and *cuyubo* could easily be transformed into *cojobo* or *cojoba*. The present participle has, in Guarani, frequently the sense of a noun, so that *cuyubo* means "the absorbing or taking of the powder," precisely as Las Casas says.

Here, however, arise two questions: How came these Guarani words *taboca* and *cohoba* to the Antilles? and was the former really used in reference to the smoking of tobacco?

Guarani words are not at all uncommon in the original languages of the Antilles, as I have shown by a considerable number of terms having reference to the culture and manifold uses of the mandioca plant.† But the cultivation of this plant spread from Brazil northward, and it is but natural to assume that its local name went with it until both reached the climatic limit of the plant. A similar assertion cannot be maintained with respect to the use of tobacco in the Larger Antilles, where at least one species of *Nicotiana* is indigenous, and the custom of smoking appears to have been introduced either from the north or the northwest.‡ The existence of Guarani words in Hayti having any connection with this custom is therefore not so easily to be accounted for.

* Almeida Nogueira, *Esbôço grammatical do Abâneé ou Lingua Guarani*, published in the sixth vol. of *Annaes da Bibliotheca Nac. do Rio de Janeiro*, 1879, p. 32, § 46.

† *Ethnographische Mittheilungen*, in *Verhandl. der Anthropol. Gesellsch. zu Berlin*, 1886, pages 515-520.

‡ A man smoking a *chamal* (*i. e.*, cigar) is represented on plate xxvi* of the Manuscript Troano (*Cyrus Thomas*, *A Study of the Manusc. Troano*, Washington, 1882, page 135, Fig. 46). Pipes of catlinite have been dug out from very old mounds in several places of the United States, and "it is within the range of possibility that the aboriginal operations at the Great Pipestone quarry may be proved to have antedated the Spanish discovery of America by many centuries" (*Edwin E. Barber* in *Amer. Naturalist*, 1883, page 764). It is true that pipes of burnt clay are common objects in the burial mounds of Southern Brazil; but it is noteworthy that they appear to be totally absent from the mounds in the Amazonian Valley (*Ladislaw Netto* in *Archivos do Museu Nacional do Rio de Janeiro*, vi, 1885, p. 447).

It seems to me, however, that a clew may be found in the statement made by Las Casas, that in a certain region of the northern part of Hayti there lived two tribes, the *ciguayos* and *mazoriges*, who spoke a language or languages totally different from the one used in the remainder of the island. Of the first he says: "They called themselves *ciguayos*, because they wore their hair very long, as in our Castile do the women."* Now, this name *ciguayos* is a genuine Guarani word, with a Spanish ending, composed of the transitive verb *cig* (to clip, to cut round) and the negation *ey*, † so that it has exactly the meaning alluded to by Las Casas. He further observes that this people did not call the gold *caona* (which is Carib), but *tuob*. Here, again, we have a Guarani word, *itayúb*, literally "yellow stone." ‡ The name *mazoriges*, or perhaps *mazariges*, is almost identical with the Guarani *mbo-çca-îga*, to have watery eyes, to be blear-eyed, || an epithet which is met also elsewhere as an ethnographical denomination.

It follows herefrom that there lived in northern Hayti at least one tribe that spoke a language of Guaranian stock which was different from the general language used in that island.

The *ciguayos* must have come from the South American continent, following in all probability the Arrawacks, when these were partially driven from the mainland. Not being very numerous, they were pushed by their hostile neighbors as far north as the country allowed, until they finally maintained their ground against their enemies. This, of course, cannot be proved as a historical fact, but I think it would be difficult to give a better reason for the existence of those isolated tribes in the north of Hayti.

These people were no doubt acquainted with the use of some exciting powder, and had their *tabocas*, which they went on using in their new home. But then it is evident that they did not smoke tobacco, but used it as *snuff*, and so we arrive at the same conclusion, viz., that Oviedo's report refers, not to smoking, but to the absorption of tobacco powder through the nose.

*"Se llamaban *ciguayos* porque traian todos los cabellos muy luengos, como en nuestra Castilla las mujeres." (Historia de las Indias. Madrid, 1875, i, 434).

† Almeida Nogueira, 93, 127.

‡ Almeida Nogueira, 180.

|| Almeida Nogueira, 88, 245; Ruiz Montoya, *Tesoro de la lengua Guarani*, fol. 371 verso.

This circumstance does not disprove the derivation of the word "tabaco" from *taboca*. But we have other and older testimony for the smoking of tobacco, from which a different origin of the word may be deduced.

The Spanish discoverers of the new world had in Cuba, in the first days of November, 1492, the earliest opportunity of seeing Indians in the act of smoking tobacco, although the dried leaves of this plant had already been noticed some days before (October 15) among the cargo of a boat belonging to a native of one of the Bahama Islands.* Under date of the 6th of November the journal of Columbus brings the first condensed report of smoking *cigars*; Las Casas gives a more detailed description of the habit, which he probably drew either from some writings of Columbus or from verbal information of eye-witnesses.† He relates that the two men who had been sent out by the admiral to reconnoiter the country returned on Monday, the 5th of November, and reported, among other things, that "they had seen on their way many Indians carrying fire-brands in their hands and certain dried leaves rolled into another dry leaf, like the paper muskets the children make about Whitsuntide. At one end these rolls were lighted, and at the other the Indians sucked at them, so as to inhale the smoke together with the air, whereby they comforted their limbs and got almost intoxicated, saying that it took away their weariness. These muskets" (he adds), "or what else we may name them, they call *tabacos*." ‡

* *Fernandes de Navarrete*, Coleccion de los viages y descubrimientos que hicieron por mar los españoles (Madrid, 1825), i, 28. See also *G. V. Fox*, An Attempt to solve the problem of the first Landing-place of Columbus in the New World (Rep. of U. S. Coast and Geod. Survey, 1882, page 361). *W. Irving*, Life of Columbus (London, 1885), i, 184.

† *Navarrete*, Coleccion, i, 51 (note); *Las Casas*, Historia de las Indias, i, 332, 333.

‡ "Hallaron estos dos cristianos por el camino mucha gente que atravesaban á sus pueblos, mujeres y hombres, siempre los hombres con un tizon en las manos, y ciertas hierbas para tomar sus sahumerios, que son unas hierbas secas metidas en una cierta oja, seca tambien, á manera de mosquete hecho de papel, de los que hacen los muchachos la pascua del Espíritu Santo, y encendido por la una parte del por la otra chupan, ó sorben, ó reciben con el resuello para adentro aquel humo, con el cual se adornecen las carnes y quasi emborracha, y así dix que no sienten el cansancio. Estos mosquetes, ó como los llamáremos, llaman ellos *tabacos*."

Here we evidently have a description of smoking cigars just as we smoke them, and we find, in accordance with Oviedo's first statement,* that the burning leaves, in a particular shape, were called *tobacos*.

In this latter circumstance I see a proof that Oviedo was acquainted with the original of the journal of Columbus or some other report left by the Admiral from which Las Casas made the abstract published by Navarrete. To the same source point, in my opinion, the following words in Oviedo's narration: "They burned the leaves of that herb, after having them bundled or wrapped up, like the pages at the court blow out their puffs of smoke." †

There can be no doubt that Las Casas knew the first part of Oviedo's work (printed at Seville, in 1535), as he mentions it several times in his own *Historia*, which he began to write in 1552. He was, however, not the man to copy from an author with whom he had had rather serious quarrels in 1519, at Barcelona, about his favorite idea in regard to the manner of treating the Indians, ‡ and it is even singular that he lost the opportunity of pointing out the incongruities in Oviedo's report concerning the matter in question. I believe, therefore, that both drew from the same sources, but that Oviedo unfortunately mixed up those older records referring to Cuba with what he heard at Santo Domingo about the former use of tobacco in Hayti.

One thing is certain at all events, viz., the word *tabaco* was not the name of the plant universally so called now. Unfortunately we know very little of the language or languages spoken in Cuba before the Spaniards set their feet upon the Pearl of the Antilles, and this little is to a great extent apocryphal. Some respectable authorities, however, believe that in one part, at least, the language was of the Arrawack branch, and I shall adopt this view as a working hypothesis in order to ascertain whether it leads to an acceptable interpretation of the word *tabaco* quoted by Las Casas.

I do not think that it came from Hayti. The Indian languages, poor as they are in many respects, are nevertheless very rich in

*See before, note 3.)

† "*Quemaban las hojas de aquella hierba arrebuadas ó envueltas de la manera que los pajes cortesanos suelen echar sus ahumadas.*" (Oviedo, l. c.)

‡ *Amador de los Ríos* in the Life of Oviedo, printed in the first volume of the *Historia* (Madrid, 1851), page xxx.

terms referring to every-day life. It is therefore inconceivable that in Cuba they should have adopted the name of a particular instrument, which perhaps they did not use, for something quite different.

In order to solve the pending problem we must not forget that the word *tabaco*, as written by the Spaniards, is probably not a faithful rendering of the term used by the Indians. We ought likewise to remember that colloquial intercourse between the Indians and the European discoverers at that time could be but exceedingly limited, amounting to little else than a kind of gesture language, giving origin to many capital mistakes and false interpretations.

Let us suppose, then, that a smoking Indian was asked by one of Columbus's messengers, who at the same time pointed to his *cigar*: "What is this?" or "What do you call this?" If the former altogether guessed the general meaning of the inquiry he might as well understand: "What are you doing there?" And then his answer very naturally would have been: "I am smoking" or "I will smoke." This phrase in modern Arrawack would be "*dattukúpa*," which is the first person singular in the future tense of the verb *attukun* (to eat sucking, for instance, fruits), used also either with or without the noun *yuli* (tobacco) for *to smoke tobacco*.* Quite in the same manner the lower classes say in Spanish *chupar tabaco* (to suck tobacco), the objective noun being sometimes dropped when the meaning is sufficiently clear from other circumstances.†

The future tense of Arrawack verbs is generally formed by dropping the final *n* and adding the termination *pa*;‡ but there are instances where this syllable is incorporated in the word, probably in consequence of a metaplasmic change, a feature extremely common in most American languages.|| If we perform this transposition in the word *dattukúpa* we obtain *dattupaku*, and as the first syllable has a very dead sound it would be very likely that a foreign ear lost it altogether, so that *tupaku* remained, which is almost identical with *tabaco*.

This etymology, methinks, is quite acceptable, both phonetically

* *Th. Schulz, Arawakisch-deutsche Wörterbuch*, in the eighth vol. of *Bibl. lingüistique américaine* (Paris, 1882), p. 103.

† Not to be confounded with *mascar tabaco* (to chew tobacco).

‡ *Th. Schulz, grammat. der arawak. Sprache* (in the volume quoted in note 20), p. 198.

|| *Almeida Nogueiras Apontamentos sobreo abaicenga* (Rio de Janeiro, 1876).

and logically; and, if so, it would appear that the Arrawack hypothesis after all is not so groundless as its opponents allege.*

The Spaniards, of course, never thought of inquiring into the real meaning of the word, which was to them a matter of no interest whatever. Those comparatively small bands of adventurers who opened the gates of the New World adopted unhesitatingly any name, whether right or wrong, they heard or believed they heard for the many new and strange productions of an exuberant nature, which pressed on them at every step. We may thus understand how it resulted that the word *tabaco* came soon to be so universally used for this most important commodity that it superseded altogether the real name which the inhabitants of the Antilles had for the plant, so that the latter is not even once mentioned in the profuse writings of Oviedo, Las Casas, and the other historians of the Spanish conquest in the West Indian Islands.†

DRINKING TOBACCO.—In the discussion at the meeting of the Society upon the paper of Mr. John Murdock "On the Siberian Origin of Some Customs of the Western Eskimos," published in the last number of the ANTHROPOLOGIST, especially concerning their habit of swallowing the smoke of tobacco, Col. Flint remarked that the Chinese used the same expression for smoking as they did for swallowing their soft-boiled rice, which they did not chew.

In connection with this remark it may be mentioned that Nares's Glossary quotes the *Literary Gazette*, September 11, 1819, p. 588, as authority for the assertion that the Turks use the phrase translated "drinking tobacco."

In Webster's dictionary the fourth definition of *drink* is "to inhale; to smoke, as tobacco (*Obs.*)." His quoted authority, how-

* Albert S. Gatschet (*Volk und Sprache der Timucua in Leitschrift für Ethnologie*, xiii, 196) says: "In many American languages the word for tobacco and to smoke is derived from to eat," and he quotes several examples of it. The etymology proposed in the present paper brings even our word tobacco under the same rule, a circumstance which gives some additional weight to my interpretation.

† Bachiller y Morales (*Cuba primitiva*, p. 251) mentions that *L. Rosny* published a series of articles on tobacco and matters connected with it in the second vol. of *Revue Américaine*. These publications I have not seen.

ever, the water poet, Taylor, 1630, only gives "drank tobacco" in the same manner and doubtless with the same meaning—not inhalation but actual swallowing, as was frequent during that generation in England.

The word tobacco does not occur in Shakspeare, but many references are found among his cotemporary dramatists, and even more among those immediately succeeding him. Some of these are as follows:

In "Miseries of Enforced Marriage," v. 6, by George Wilkins, 1607, appears the line:

Feed well, drink tobacco * * *.

In "The Roaring Girl," by Middleton and Decker, 1611, one of the personages says of some tobacco:

This will serve to drink in my chamber.

Another reference is from Donne's Satires, I, 87 (Donne flourished 1610-'20):

• * * Till one (which did excel
Th' Indians in drinking his tobacco well).

That actual swallowing of the smoke was the mode in England at the time mentioned is shown by several contemporary illustrations of customs in which the pipe is in the mouth or hand and the smoke issuing from the nostrils.

Also by an old epigram in which tobacco is said to "make a chimney of the nose." In the mode of smoking now common, that of cigarettes being excepted, the nose is not concerned in the operation.

The interest of the subject consists in the fact that the English voyagers who introduced the smoking of tobacco did it in the style found by them among the natives of North America, and that this mode of use was so exclusive that the phrase "drink" became applied to it.

G. M.

THE correction in relation to Count Ercolani and the discovery of the circulation of the blood, in the Notes and News of the January number, was by Dr. Robert Fletcher. By an oversight his initials only were printed instead of the full name.