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The Laguna Calendar

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FOREWORD

Given a limited opportunity at the Jemez Field School, in 1934, to study and investigate the calendrical systems of the local Indian communities, we became interested in this subject, and since then have carried to further extent our particular phase of the investigation, namely, that of the day and year counts of the Laguna Indians.

We are particularly indebted to Mrs. Walter K. Marmon (a full-blood Lagunan and resident of Laguna Pueblo) who has assisted greatly in the compilation of this material and has aided with the Keresan translations and interpretations. She has very kindly checked over our work, so that we are able to present this paper with the knowledge that it meets with her verification and approval.

B. P. D.
M. A. M.
NOTE ON KERESAN PRONUNCIATION

In translating the Keresan words it has been found that the Spanish pronunciation well adapts itself to this purpose. The vowels, therefore, should be pronounced thus:

a—as English “a” in “papa”
e—as English “ä” in “máte”
i—as English “i” in “police”
o—as English “ö” in “móat”
u—as English “u” in “mule”

As to the consonants, it is to be remembered that pronunciation is thus:

c and g are hard before “a,” “o,” and “u”
ch is pronounced as in English “chair”
h is silent
t (as here used) is quite explosive
y is pronounced as in English “yet”
z is pronounced as “s” in English “sin”

THE LAGUNA CALENDAR

The pueblo of Laguna lies about fifty miles west of the Rio Grande, slightly south of the latitude of Albuquerque, New Mexico, on the bank of Rio San José, in Valencia County. It is said to be the youngest pueblo, but it was established in July, 1699.¹ The language spoken in the pueblo is known as Keresan.¹

Located, as the village is, on the route from west to east that has been used by white men since the coming of the Spaniards to the Southwest, and which, today, is a transcontinental highway, one might suppose that Laguna would long since have been the scene of scientific studies and investigations. Some studies, admittedly, have been made, but, in general, written material is not abundant. When the present study was begun, no direct references could be obtained. Therefore, the information here presented is based upon personal knowledge and upon information secured from Laguna Indians.

So far as can now be learned, the Lagunans have had no very accurate system of “year counts.” Those who have not adopted use of modern calendars, keep track of time as did their ancestors, by particular events or phenomena, or by saying that such-and-such a thing occurred when so-and-so was a little boy. They have no eras, cycles, or periods of several or many years.

The movements of the sun along the horizon are observed, or have been up to the present generation, by everyone in general, so that they know, at any time, the solstices, etc. They recognize twenty-eight days to a “moon.”


The moons are grouped into four seasons: ti tra, "spring"; ke shrai ti, "summer"; ha yai tzi, "fall"; and ko ko, "winter." So far as could be learned, no correction is made for the lunar-solar discrepancy.

It is interesting to note that Spanish terms have been adopted for each day of the week excepting Wednesday. For this day, the Indian term has been retained: sinna ka ai tra ni (sinna, "middle"; ka ai tra, "day"; ni, "it happened"—thus, "the middle time"). A unit of twenty-four hours is known as a day, ka ai tra. There seems to have been no aboriginal week, like the Zuñi ten-day period.

As nearly as possible, the title of this paper, "The Laguna Calendar," is translated into the Keresan: Ka waic Keh' sha ti. About the time that the Spanish explorers came to this region, the Lagunans maintained a beautiful lake a mile or two west of their present village. They called the lake Bu ne ya nu Ka waic. Bu ne ya nu in the Lagunan tongue is "west," Ka waic, "lake," hence "lake to the west." The Spaniards beheld this placid, sky-blue lake and gave it the name Laguna (from their Spanish word, laguna, meaning a depression in the earth where water collects and is maintained.) This natural lake site had existed long before the Europeans ever trod the region, for the Lagunans have a tradition that at one time a great sea serpent, Tsi tzi shra weec, lived in this lake (Tsi tzi, "water"; shra weec, archaic word for serpent). In a region where scarcity of water means the pangs of thirst for all life, the Lagunans held for the lake, Bu ne ya nu Ka waic, all due respect, because they owed much of their economic prosperity and security to the lands bordering the lake, on which flourished maize, their very life food. Standing on the eminence of their village, they were in easy view of this expanse of water. But treachery is ever present in one way or another. The story goes that, because of the existing jealousy in the neighboring tribes, the lake dikes were secretly let loose one stormy, sandy night—a stormy night was chosen so that no tell-tale tracks of the perpetrators could be traced. What a flood it was that came past Ka waic village that night, and along with it, Tsi tzi shra weec (the sea serpent) whose bellowing the people dreaded and of whom they were in constant fear! The Lagunans contend that the course of the Río San José was entirely inundated and changed at this time. Keh' sha ti means "year"; thus, one has "Laguna Year."

There are twelve divisions of the year, the moons corresponding to our months. In terms of the Gregorian chronology, these divisions are as follows:

January—Me u tsi tra Ta va tra (Me u skra, "lizard"; tsi tru, "to cut"; ta va tra, "moon")—This is the first moon—the month when it is cold enough to freeze the ground, and thus to cut the lizard's tail along with the freezing and crackling of the earth. (The Lagunans, from long natural observation, learned, in the distant past, that the lizard buried itself in the winter.)

3. See note on pronunciation given on page 4.
The theme of the Winter Solstice is the recounting of the journey from the North, that is, the first migration. The songs are in the form of a poem or narrative, mentioning every incident that occurred en route.

Photograph by Bailey
DÁRAWAĐÍ GOCASHIO, OR HARVEST DANCE AT LAGUNA, DECEMBER 26, 1935

The Christmas week celebration (Noche Buena) is purely of Spanish origin. There is mass in the church on Christmas Eve, which is followed by Indian dancing. Such dances as the Harvest Dance (Dá ra walet), Comanche Dance, Butterfly Dance, and other dances of an entertaining nature are given. Practically the same dances are performed on each of the following three days.

On New Year's Day and the two following days, the same kind of dances as those given at Christmas time are danced. On January 6, King's Day is celebrated, another purely Spanish innovation. During the night, several kinds of dances, some masked, are given, such as the Comanche Dance, Deer Dance, and some of the ceremonial dances. The

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dances take place in the homes of the newly elected officers. Presents are brought to these officials—presents of corn and fruit, chiefly. The dancers are fed in the homes of the officials, along with the relatives, clan members, et al. of the officers. Finally, there is a dance in the council house, after which the dancers and spectators go to their homes. On the following three days there is dancing in the ca kā tī (the modern plaza).

The ceremony of Placing the Prayer Sticks comes next, the Tsai tiu go wā cha ni Ka tso tru tia (Tsai tiu go wā cha ni, "war captain"; Ka tso tru tia, "cuts," thus "the war captain cuts the prayer sticks"). This ceremony takes place sometime during the first part of January. The date is arbitrary; however, the ceremony occurs soon after the new officers of the pueblo have been installed. The participants make preparations by cleansing themselves for four days. Before the cleansing rites take place, three or four of the men are sent to Tz bĩ na (Mt. Taylor) or its near vicinity to gather ha cā caa (fir branches—symbolic of eternal life). They bring the branches back to the pueblo, where they are then boiled. The beverage that results from this boiling is drunk by all the participants of the ceremony. Every morning for four days this beverage is drunk, each one drinking until he has forced himself to the point of vomiting. During these four days, very little food is eaten; the food that they do eat consists only of corn—in the form of corn bread, ma tzi ni (paper bread), and ha yā ni (corn gruel). Some nourishment is necessary, even in this period of fasting, to give strength for the night journeys which are made for the purpose of placing prayer sticks in various distant places—usually in the four directions. The War Captain goes to the north, Sho tī kote, a peak north of Paguate (kote, "mountain peak"). His assistants go in the other directions: to the Rio Puerco or Sic china (Sic, a kind of plant that grows along the river; china, "river") in the east; to Petúch, a high rock mesa to the south; and to Tz bĩ na (Mt. Taylor) to the west. These journeys present no difficulties, nor do they consume a

The Laguna Calendar

great length of time, for the War Captain and his helpers put on the ha tra tzé ya (sacred paint) which makes them light of feet and tireless. Each morning, Tsai tiu go wā cha ni (the War Captain) gives a somewhat mournful cry in the early morning hours, from four eminences of the village. His cry is an invocation for rain, and for general prosperity of the Lagunans during the coming year. He is dressed in the ceremonial costume, and carries the ceremonial bow and arrow, which is usually handed down from one War Captain to another; in case the bow or arrow is broken, the War Captain in office makes a new one. Not many people see the Tsai tiu go wā cha ni, as he strolls about the village in the very early morning hours. The significance of the entire ceremony is that it is a prayer for rain.

In days past, although no observance is now made of it, the Lagunans had another dance, the Scalp Dance. They never went out to wage war, but if they were raided and, in the chase after the marauders, were successful in obtaining an enemy scalp, that event was reason for the Ka nak a sh (Scalp Dance). The warriors, carrying the scalp raised high above their heads on a slender pole, approached the village from the south, singing war songs. In the pueblo, the women heard them coming and went out to meet them, singing and jeering at the enemy scalp.

The trophy was brought into the village and a great bonfire was built in the center of the ca kā tī (plaza), in which an all-night dance was held in celebration of the victory. Both men and women took part in this dance. The man who had procured the scalp was given the most honors, such as having his face painted with ha tra tzé ya—the sacred paint that only warriors could wear when going in quest of an enemy—representing heroic deeds done, and being adorned with ceremonial paraphernalia. He had a prominent place in the dance. The dance was continued for four days, ending at sundown on the last day.

The first mask-dance of the Lagunans occurs early in the year, in February or March. This is the Chá ku na,
which is the name of one of the orders of the Ká tsina people. (When the Chá ku na people emerged from their underground chamber, Ship’ apu, the Corn Mother gave them buckskin, moccasins, feathers, shells, etc., to wear; she gave them bows and arrows for fighting; and gave them food in abundance. The Chá ku na people received all of these things because they were the first to emerge from Ship’ apu.) This dance is also called the Black Mask Dance, although Chá ku-na does not mean “black mask”; it is known as the Black Brothers’ Dance, likewise.

The masks worn by the participants are black, and a long tongue protrudes from the mouth. This position of the tongue is symbolic of great thirst. A tradition runs that one of these Chá ku na brothers dared a race with Má steh tru wey, a fleet runner of the Ká tsina. This was when Eya di co (the Earth Mother) was still young and soft. Their course lay along the edge of the earth, Ka wey shru-puutra (ka wey shru, “water”; puutra, “edge”—thus “where the earth and the water meet—the edge”). The starting point was in the North, Ti däd, each runner going toward the South—one along the right edge, the other along the left. When the Chá ku na brother was nearing the south curve of the course, he became almost famished from thirst and from excessive panting, and his tongue protruded. He uttered a mournful dirge in his distress. His feet were sore from the burning, soft earth. Today, all these characteristics are symbolized by the masks that are worn by the participants of the ceremony. The feet are kept moving constantly, because that Chá ku na of the long ago experienced terrific heat on the soles of his feet. (Má steh tru wey won the race.)

The next ceremony is that of Co chí ya tzi (Easter Sunday.) Co chí ya tzi means “it has overcome,” referring to the victory over death. This ceremony is purely of Spanish origin. The day before Easter finds the Laguna women busy in the preparation of home-made foods. Early Easter morning, the women don their best clothes and, thus attired, go from house to house to invite their particular clan folk to come to their homes to eat. During the day, there is dancing in the main plaza. The Corn Dance, Comanche, and other dances for entertainment are given.

After Easter, there is quite a long cessation of yearly ceremonies, as at this time spring work in the fields occupies much of the time until the Harvest dances of the late summer months.

The Summer Solstice is given the latter part of June; it again has an arbitrary date—either a few days before, or a few days after the twenty-first. At this time the sun reaches its northernmost point, which is called Ti daá mi Shu ko (Ti daá mi, “north”; Shu ko, “corner”—thus “the north corner time.”) The songs then sung recount again the journey from the North—the Ship’ apu story.

On June 24, San Juan’s Day (Tsá as sko) is celebrated. This is of Spanish origin. It is the special day for all those who have been christened “Juan.” On this day the mothers and sisters of the Juans throw bread and other edibles from the tops of houses to those below who are clamoring to grab these escultents. Navahos come from long distances to take part in the grabbing.

On June 29, San Pedro’s Day is celebrated as San Juan’s Day, this time for those named “Pedro.”

Santiago’s Day, celebrated on July 25, is in honor of those who have been called “Santiago”; the observance is as on the other Saints’ Days.

August 10 is San Lorenzo’s Day, and is celebrated as above, for those christened “Lorenzo.”

The Pilgrimage to the Salt Lake Region (Ku wah mi-nati e) is made yearly, the people going to Salt Lake, midway between the towns of Quemado and Salt Lake, in western New Mexico. This journey is undertaken with much ceremony and many rites. Tradition tells us that long ago Minna coy’ a (Salt Mother), a personified being, came down from the North, through the northern pueblois, looking for a place to make her home. She stopped at Ka waic (Laguna)
and for some time thought she would reside there. Then she became afraid that, in time to come, too many people would live near and would pollute the land about her. She decided to go way off, to an uninhabited place, and so she chose western New Mexico. During her wanderings, she came to the home of the Parrot Clan in Zuñi, where she was accorded great hospitality. Upon leaving this home, she made a promise that in the years to come the Parrot Clan should have sole charge of the rites in connection with journeys to the salt lakes. And so at Laguna the Parrot Clan (Sha wi ti Háno) has sole charge of this pilgrimage, although other clans also make up the party. The date is an arbitrary one, and is set by the Parrot Clan. They prepare prayer sticks as an offering to Minna coy’ a.

The participants in the ceremony perform body ablutions before they go into the lake to get the salt. It is only with due invocation and prayers that Minna coy’ a gives up her salt. When there is any lack of the proper observance, the lake remains as a liquid so that no salt can be secured, but when properly propitiated, Minna coy’ a is in a favorable mood, and the salt is hardened and may be secured in large sheets, like layers of ice. Then the people say, “Ka ot’ a,” which is translated, “She gives up herself.” No filth of any kind is permitted within two miles of the lake region.

Any Lagunan bringing back salt from the western lakes must first come to Laguna and present his salt to the Parrot Clan to be blessed. After that, he may go on to his own home. In 1934, the Paguate people decided to let this custom lapse; on returning home, they cut across country, failing to come to Laguna to have their salt blessed. That year they were visited by very destructive storms and loss of crops. The elders saw this as resulting from non-observance of the proper rites and customs. And so in 1935 the old custom was again observed, and the people of Paguate were favored with good weather and successful crops.

After the pilgrims have returned to Laguna, their clan relatives, gathered at one home for each clan, perform purifica-
is considered very precious because it is brought from a great distance; it must not be wasted.

September 19, San José’s Day, is more or less of a home-
coming day at Laguna. Formerly, ceremonies were not held on Saints’ Days in the outlying Laguna villages, but Indians from all these villages came to Laguna to celebrate on San José’s Day. History tells us that at one time the Lagunans’ San José Fiesta was observed on the 19th of March, but, finally, the date was changed to September 19, because the ideal September days were more suitable for pilgrimages, and also because there was a plentiful harvest at this time. The day is observed by a Harvest Dance.
About September 12, or a week before San José's Day, there is a general clean-up in Laguna pueblo. One individual of each family of all the outlying pueblos is asked to go to Laguna to help. This usually lasts for two days. The church is whitewashed inside and plastered outside; the plaza is cleaned and its walls plastered and repaired, etc.

Some time between the 19th and 30th of October, comes the Kátsina Corn Dance (Ya kaa Háno Ká tsina Gó ca shro). The exact Laguna translation runs thus: Ya kaa, "corn"; Háno, "people"; Ká tsina, "mystical beings"; Gó ca shro, "dance"—thus "Corn Dance of the Ká tsina people." This dance is held at an ideal time, when the summer's harvest is at its best. The preparation for this ceremony is similar to all the other mask-dance preparations. The participants fast for eight days before the final occasion. Many varieties of the Ká tsina dancers are represented; they dance to the Corn Dance songs. Originally, the Ya ka Háno (Corn Clan) stood preéminent at this occasion, for they were the offspring of the Ká tsina Corn. Some of the paraphernalia worn at this time has its symbolism dating back to the Ship' apu story: When the Ká tsina people first emerged from the Ship' apu underground chamber, the Ká tsina Corn Clan was the last to emerge. The other Ká tinas had already donned all the colorful ceremonial trappings, and all their Mother Corn had to offer the Corn clans were ears of corn to be carried in the hands, and red, white, yellow, and blue spots on the body—which represent grains of red, white, yellow, and blue corn.

The Hunters' Dance (Ko wo wa né eh, "those who hunt"): From time immemorial the Indian has been engaged in the pursuit of hunting. He goes forth on his quest with all due rites. He carries with him, in a small buckskin pouch, turquoise, coral,* and the sacred meal. When he is out in the mountain fastness he makes of this an offering for good luck in his hunt. Every night while in camp he composes new songs, sings, and dances. It is a custom among the Laguna hunters, while in the hunting camp, never to eat the evening meal until all the hunters get back from the day's outing; if all are not back in due time they go in search of them. The women at home gather a blue-flowered plant, dry it, and then burn it. The incense is supposed to draw deer to the scene of the huntsmen. In all due respect to this rite, the hunters go forth. They bring back their quarry with an equal amount of ceremony. When a hunter returns, he lays the deer always with head to the North. The women folk place all their best ceremonial costumes on the neck of the deer, for they regard the deer as a personified being, bringing to their homes all the attributes of health, well being, and long life. The skins of the deer they tan very carefully, for originally this was the only article of dress that the people had. The meat is jerked and dried for future use. The head and carcass are cooked and clan members of the hunter and his wife are invited to partake of the "stew." A few days after the homecoming, the hunters give their dance; they sing all the songs they had composed while in camp; they mention

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6. Said to have been traded in from Mexico.
the fleetness of the deer, the beauty and grandeur of his antlers, the majestic mountain scenery, etc. This practice has been carried on from time of antiquity, and is still followed.

On November 1, All Saints' or All Souls' Day is celebrated, instead of October 31. This is a ceremony practically of Spanish origin. There is much food preparation by the women during the day previous. Then, about noon of November 1, some of these foods are placed on the graves of the dead so that they, in some way, may partake of this food.

DIVISIONS OF THE DAY

Through long centuries of observation, the Lagunans have developed the ability to tell the time of day by position of the sun, and of the night by the position of the principal and important constellations in the heavens. Even today, many of the people, especially the older ones, pay no attention to modern timepieces; they rely on time as Nature designates it.

There are twelve divisions of the day recognized, which seemingly are based on summer observations; these are indicated as follows:

1. *Tsa ska*, "new day"—The time after the midnight hour.
2. *Gá ma she ti*, "crowing"—Awakening or crowing of the rooster, first, second, and third crowing.
5. *Di tsi a tsi*, "sun high in the heaven"—About nine or ten o'clock.
6. *Sinna tsi u*, "middle of the day"—Noon.
7. *Pu niska ca*, "the sun making a downward curve toward setting"—A little past noon.
8. *Haú we no tzo tze*, "it is getting nearer"—Sun nearing the western horizon—six or seven o'clock.
9. *Gó pe ne*, "it has gone in; it has gone"—Sunset.
10. *Ká ta ya*, "white light"—Twilight.
11. *Gó tsa ma tsa*, "approaching late night"—Late evening.
12. *Nu we ha ti* (*Nu we, "middle"; ha ti, "time"—thus "middle time")—Midnight.
THE LEGEND OF SHIP'APU’

According to tradition, my people came from a land of the North many, many years ago, from a place called Ship’ apu. Ship’ apu was in an underground pit or chamber, and in this underground chamber dwelt the Indians. The mother of these people was a beautiful woman, Nau tzi tee by name, meaning “Beautiful Corn.” Reason, a great power—the Great Spirit, we might call it—had created the earth, the sun, the stars, and all living creatures. Nau tzi tee saw that everything was beautiful. She saw the sun in the sky, but she wondered where it would look the best. She tried having the sun rise in the north, but that was not becoming to the earth. Then she tried the west and the south, which also failed to be effective. She then tried the east, and that was very becoming and beautiful. A beautiful light glowed clear across the eastern horizon. Thus the first day came and went.

Ship’ apu being in an underground chamber, how were the people to come out of this dwelling place? Nau tzi tee, the mother of these people—the Kátsina people—said, “Who shall open a way out of here so that we may ascend from this cavern?” She asked E sto a mut (Arrow Boy) to pierce a hole through the Earth. E sto a mut did as he was told, and at once pierced a hole through the earth, but the hole was too small. Nau tzi tee then called on the badger to make the opening larger. He at once began scratching and digging upward through the earth with his sharp claws. The opening was large enough now, and Nau tzi tee and her children came forth. As they came forth she said to her children, “Go now your way in all directions, each taking with you your customs and ways, but always remember that you forget not your home here. Cast your thoughts and prayers back here often, for I am ready always to hear you.”

7. Legend related to Miss Marmon by her clansman, Mr. Paul Johnson, of Paguate.

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It had been foretold that the Kátsina people were to journey south from Ship’apu for many weary years before they would find a permanent dwelling place. Thus the journey began from Ship’apu—a weary wandering. First they came to Kush Kutrid (White House), where they stopped for some time. They next came to the land of Huli-hulika, then to a marshy place—here they rested. A little way from this place Ais ti ya and her sister, Hi da ti ya, two beautiful maidens, rested and turned into stone. The people came next to the land of Chip Mountain and Bear Mouth Mountain. The journey continued. They rested next at Questi (Paguate). (All these places are still known to the Lagunaans.) They wandered on till they came to Ko chin’ni na ko, the spring five miles south of Questi. Here the Kátsina people drank of the water. Lastly they came to a lake region, and the people saw that it was beautiful and suitable for a habitation, and so they all said with one accord, “This shall be our dwelling place,” and because of the beautiful lake near by, they called it Ka waic, meaning lake, the present site of Laguna.

It has been told that long ago my ancestors prophesied that from the East would come the white man who would conquer us in many ways—that we would eat his food, drink his drink, and that after we drank his drink and ate his food we would no longer think as an Indian thinks—beautiful things.