

Anne Dyk (1924-1969) was born in Manhattan, Montana on July 9, 1924. She was a linguist who worked with the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL), an organization founded in 1934 and dedicated to the study of indigenous languages (first in Mexico, then throughout the world) and the translation of the Bible. Dyk first came to Mexico in the winter of 1947-48, where she did fieldwork in the Mixtec community of San Miguel el Grande. Following her research in the Mixteca, she worked in Mexico City as the secretary to the director of the Mexico offices of the SIL. Sadly, she became ill in Mexico and returned to the United States to live with her sister. She died on April 25, 1969, and is buried in Ellensburg, Washington.

We have included these selections from *Mixteco Texts*, her 1959 collection of Mixtec narratives from San Miguel el Grande, because they present a detailed account by a (unfortunately unnamed) Mixtec speaker about common "life crisis" events. You, as reader, are invited to compare and contrast the descriptions given here with similar accounts given by Frederick Starr (in the selections from his fieldnotes included in this library) as well as with the imagery in the Mixtec codices.

You may wish to read more of the narratives in *Mixteco Texts* (Summer Institute of Linguistics Publications in Linguistics and Related Fields No. 3, Norman OK: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1959) or peruse *Vocabulario Mixteco del San Miguel el Grande* (Serie de Vocabularios Indigenas Mariano Silva y Aceves No 12, Mexico: Instituto Linguistico de Verano, 1965), a dictionary of Mixtec as spoken in San Miguel El Grande compiled by Anne Dyk and Betty Stoudt.

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From: Dyk, Anne. *Mixteco Texts*. Norman: Summer Institute of Linguistics/University of Oklahoma Press, 1959.

Anne Dyk

Birth, Marriage, and Death

Birth

The woman does not know which hour, whether it will be day or night when her pains will come. As an animal waits for the hour when the men will kill it, women are the same. She does not know which hour her pains will come.

And when it has been nine months and the hour comes for it to be born, the woman goes to get the midwife who presses down on the woman and the baby is born. And when it is born the midwife cuts the cord. She cuts the baby's cord with a corn stalk, or with a scissors, or with a blade, or with whatever she has to cut it.

The man digs a hole behind the house on the edge of his cornfield. He puts the

umbilical cord in a cloth or a paper and places it in the hole. Then he transplants a little maguey (1) on top of it and it takes root. If they bury the cord and if no dirt and no garbage gets in with the cord the baby's eyes nothing (no sickness) will get in the baby's eyes. But if she does not do this and if dirt gets in with the cord the baby's eyes will matter and a cataract will form because of it, they all say.

The baby is bathed and she wraps it in a cloth. And the mother does not get up just any time. She lies down until however long it takes her to get her strength back. And she does not eat just anything; she does not eat cold things like beef, pork, mutton, cactus, peas, squash, haba beans, or doughy tortillas which are not toasted well. She only eats and drinks hot things like coffee, atole (2) and chicken. She does not eat turkey. Nor the female turkey, nor the rooster for these animals are "cold" and will harm her for she has become tender inside.(3) She can eat toasted tortillas.

Then she takes steambaths.(4) If the baby is a girl she takes four steambaths; then for four days it goes out. Then it burns again for four more steambaths and then her steambaths are ended for the baby girl. And she makes four little tortillas as a gift for the steambath. And if the baby is a boy, she takes seven steambaths and it goes out for seven days. Then it burns again another seven, and so on until twenty-one days are ended. Then she prepares food and puts it on top of her steambath-house. She makes seven little tortillas which is a gift for the steambath, she says.(5)

Then, when a month is ended she grinds corn again and she can eat anything, whatever she wants to eat.

Then when the baby it ten days or twenty days old it is baptized. The women make pulque (6) and fatten a little pig or a ram or a goat. And if she is getting better and if they are poor folks the father gives just eggs for his compadre to eat, and chile sauce. And if she is getting better he prepares many jugs of pulque. And the man's compadre (7) makes two big jugs of atole and comes with it for his compadre to drink, and with two hundred breads. He comes with the atole and pours it for his compadre the baby's father to drink. And the father of the baby sets out the bowls and dishes up the food and tortillas for his compadre to eat. And before he has finished eating what is in his dish the compadre goes to get the jugs of red water (tequila). He comes and passes it around to his compadre and they all drink. Then the hired men begin to play the violins and guitars, and to do a little dance and they begin to dance and to embrace their compadres and comadres (godmothers). Then they begin to fight with the people who have assembled. They wound each other. That is what they do on account of the baby.

Marriage

The boy says to his father: "Go now on a courtship errand for a certain girl because I want her to be my wife," he says to his father. So he goes on the courtship errand and speaks to those people with a prepared speech for such occasions.(8)

He arrives he goes to the man who owns that girl. "Good day, sir," he says. "Good day, woman," he says. Then he sits down in the house and talks. He says: "Do not be sad, for I have come on business to you. My son sent me to come and talk with you to see what you would say about the child who is your daughter whether or not she will marry my son. If not then I will know and can tell this to my son and he will

look somewhere else," says the man who owns that son.

Then the man who owns the daughter says: "Poor you, if that's what your son is thinking I will question this girl. I will question her and we will see what she says. And then you come again eight days from now to get the verdict and we will see how we stand with these children, if they like it or not," says the man who owns that daughter.

Then that man left and went to his house. Eight days went by and he went again to find out the verdict. He came and he says again: "Good day, sir," he says. "Good day, woman," he says. He sat down again in the house and says again: "Do not be sad for I have come again on the business which I came for several days ago. My son is not giving up for he has sent me again because it pleases him that your daughter should be his spouse. And that is why I have come again; so what has your dear wife decided?"

Then the man who owns that daughter says: "Poor you, go fetch your son and come back with him. We will question him whether or not he is sincere in wanting to be the spouse of my daughter for she likes your son. Let us question them so that it will not happen that they get tired of each other and leave each other and make fun of us before the justice and authorities. We will be ashamed if it happens that they do thus to us, and poor us," says the man.

"All right then," says the other man. And he left and came back after eight days with his son and his wife and with some food depending on how well he likes the other man. He went to buy a little jug of pulque, three pesos worth of breads, one kilo of sugar, and some coffee and came with it and with a leg of barbecued goat meat. He comes with this wife and his son.

They all come and they question their children: "Daughter dear, speak truthfully how, whether it's true that this boy is to be your spouse. It must not be that tomorrow or in the future something happens; I do not want you to make fun of me by saying: 'I would not have gone with him; you forced me to. Now I have not gotten along with him,' you will say," he says. "You will send me to hell and it does not please me that you should do thus to my compadre and my comadre. So what do you say?" he says to her.

Then the girl says: "No, once for all I have chosen. I have decided firmly that I will be his spouse. If he dies (for as life comes we all die) I am free to marry another man. And the same way he, if I die he is free to look for another woman. Or if he should leave me...but that is his fault. But I will not commit adultery, for if I do thus, God will punish me," says the girl.

"Good, and you, lad, what are you thinking about in looking for a wife to take her as a companion for life? Or how long will it be and when she becomes wrinkled and ugly you will mistreat her? For when her children are born she will become ugly and wrinkled. She is no longer like when she was young. And if you are a good man, you will not beat her, you will take good care of her. And you will not drink pulque. You will buy clothes for her and you will buy food for you to eat with her. Then she will be all right. But if you mistreat her and she becomes ugly and wrinkled, will you get tired of her and leave her? What do you say, so that you will not do thus, so that God will not be angry with all of us," he says.

Then the boy said: "No, once for all I have decided that she be my wife. I will not leave her at all if she also likes me, for I like her, and will not leave her. That is why I am looking for her to be my spouse. No, I do not do those things at all. Some people do thus, but I, I will not do that way. People are different. They do not all do the same. But I, I do not like to do that way with women, for it is a serious sin to do thus. If I marry her I will not drink pulque and there will not be a compadre for me. God-fathers and friends are the cause of those things, of ruining ourselves, but I will not do thus," he says.

Then the fathers and the mothers were happy and they accepted the words. Their wives made broth and coffee. And the three couples ate the food, the coffee and the breads. The men opened the jug and began to drink pulque all of them. They got drunk, they sang, they yelled, and they talked about their enemies. Then the man and the woman and their son went home.

Then once again they came back and they discuss together that the boy should serve one year before the parents marry off the children.(9) So it was that the boy gave breads, pulque and meat to the girl's father. Each month he went to the man's house with food for them. At the end of one year they go to register them. Then eight days later they married them. Eight sheep, or ten little goats, or a cow go to her father's house and fifteen boxes of corn, and eight bundles of panela, (10) and one box of salt, and a box of chile peppers. The animals are killed and there is food.

Then they go get the bride and a skirt, her rebozo (11), her earrings, her necklace, her ring, her comb, her ribbon, pins for her hair, her oil and her head piece. And they put huaraches (12) on her feet.

That girl's father buys the boy's trousers, his shirt, his hat, his blanket and his huaraches, and the men dress him.

Then they all sit down at the table and on the table is an image and a candle burns before the image (13). A new mat is put on the floor and they sit down with the god-mother and they eat. After eating they all get up and the women pull the others along and they go to the priest. When they get there, the priest puts a rich-looking cloth on her head. They recite the catechism. The priest puts money in their hand and they transfer it into each other's hands.

Then that's all and they return to their house and when they get there they sit down. That is the story of how they marry; that's how they give their children in marriage.

Death and Burial

If he is on his sick bed, and if it is a father or mother, the youngest child, the last born, takes care of him. He makes atole and toasted tortillas, and gives him something to drink, washes his clothes, puts on water to heat and bathes him. If he wants to warm himself by the fire, or if he wants pulque to drink, the child gives him whatever he wishes to drink for he is a sick man.

If he wants to make out his will, he calls for the town officer in order that their inheritance be divided and this one child (the last born) is left in authority with all the other property for he is the child who took care of the elderly sick person.

Then when he dies, the children prepare lots of food, beans and corn and panela for the dead. And after he died they go to buy three or four meters of manta cloth and he is wrapped in the cloth. They fix a box coffin for him. And they begin to gather the relatives together and they chant in front of that corpse. They buy fifteen or twenty candles and set them up around from his feet to his head the candles burn. And they wail and cry.

Then the corpse goes into the box. If he was a very poor man in this world, he will also be poor in the world of the dead, they say. If he had money while he lived in this world, his children say: Our father's money must go in for him to drink pulque. Because that is the way he lived in this world because he had money and he drank pulque, so let us put in money to go with him, poor man. He will not get money to drink pulque there, they say. And they put in one or two pesos with him and the same way they put in his good clothes. A gourd goes in for him to drink water. Some tortillas go in for him and a little shoulder bag go in the box. If money does not go with him he will not get anything at all with which to buy tortillas to eat in the place where he is going, they say. Nor will he get pulque to drink, they say. Nor will he be able to get a gourd with which to drink water, or a shoulder bag, or a cloth with which to wrap his tortillas, they say.

Then they go with the box, they chant and do the rosary. They go to a house in town to where one of his houses is, and there they put the coffin in the house, and they (the men) go to dig the grave. They drink two or three liters of pulque where they dig the hole deep where the dead body will be and they bury him. And when the hole is deep which they dug, the hired men who dug the hole climb to the top of the church and ring the bell. The town officers charge three pesos for ringing a bell for a dead person. And if the bell does not ring, the people get angry. It is a sign that someone has died and if it does not ring they do not know that one of their friends died. A bell for a dead child rings differently, it makes a different tone; and a bell for an adult is awesome. When they have put the body in the hole they cover it up with lots of dirt and they take stones and throw them hard against the dirt in order to make the dirt firm on the grave, they say. Then they go back home and the burial for the dead adult has ended.

When eight days have passed, on the ninth day they put up a marker on the grave, they say (14). They prepare food and pulque. All the people come with a trough of tortillas, two liters of pulque and a box of cigarettes for people to smoke, and with a peso; everyone chips in a peso. Then whatever fiesta these people sponsor we bring two pesos to their house. If they come with sixty tortillas, they go home with ninety tortillas (15). More tortillas are added to what they came with; thirty more are added for them to take home. And that's the way they come when they come to set up a marker for the dead. They go again and put up a cross on the grave of the dead one. And so the doings of the ninth day are done.

If the dead one is a child, its godfather and godmother come; she sews a little shirt for it to wear. She comes and she eats tortillas and drinks a mouthful of pulque, as if it were water with which she washes the tortillas down her throat; otherwise she would choke. For pulque is what she likes. The godmother carries an incense burner containing incense and live coals and she takes the lead holding the incense burner and tosses out smoke and incense from the burner as she goes. And the godfather goes carrying the coffin box of the little child; he goes to bury the child. And the man who serves in the church gives holy water; the man who carries the holy water and a cross goes first. The woman whose child died goes wailing loudly as she goes

because her baby died.

Then when four days have passed since her child died, they also go to set up a marker for it. The women prepare food and pulque and they go to fix up the grave for the baby. She carries green dirt and lime to put on the grave. She puts up a little cross so she will know where she buried her child. Many babies are buried there and she thinks she would forget where her baby was buried. Then they go to the town officials to have the baby's head (name) taken off the lists. If they do not, its name will continue on their list and when the child would be eighteen years old they would look to see where me might have gone, and they ask for a fine from them. That is why they go to take off the child's head (name) off the registration list.

NOTES

1. The **maguery** is a highland Mesoamerican plant, genus *Agave*, with many pointed, fleshy leaves radiating from a central heart.
2. **Atole** is a beverage of maize gruel, served hot and flavored with sugar and cacao or vanilla
3. This discussion of "hot" and "cold" foods relates to a pan-Mesoamerican hot/cold medical system in traditional Mesoamerican belief, a healthy body is one that maintains an equilibrium between "hot" and "cold" temperature extremes. Illness is caused by imbalance; that is, a sick person's body is either too hot or too cold. Treatment of such imbalances (or prevention of imbalances when a person is in a vulnerable state, such as after childbirth) often involves eating or avoiding certain types of foods, which are themselves categorized as "hot" or "cold."
4. A **steambath** (also called a temescal or sweatbath) is the Mesoamerican equivalent of the sauna or sweatlodge, an enclosed structure in which water is splashed on heated rocks to generate steam for cleansing and medicinal purposes.
5. In traditional Mixtec belief, steambaths are occupied by (female) steambath spirits, who must be given gifts/offerings in thanks for the use of the steambath. Failure to provide such payment may result in illness.
6. **Pulque** is a sweet, milky white alcoholic drink made from the fermented sap of the maguery plant.
7. A **compadre** is a godfather; a **comadre** is a godmother.
8. The multi-step "marriage negotiation" described in the following paragraphs is a practice common throughout Mesoamerica.
9. "Bride service" (in which a groom has to work for his fiancée's family for a certain amount of time before being able to marry) or the payment of a "bride price" (in which a groom has to offer a certain amount of cash or goods in "payment" for a bride) are both practices found throughout Mesoamerica.
10. **Panela** is a loaf of brown sugar.

11. A **rebozo** is a shawl.

12. **Huaraches** are sandals.

13. A **manta** is a cape or blanket.

14. Throughout Mesoamerica it is believed that it takes a dead person's soul nine days to complete the journey to the Otherworld.

15. This practice of food redistribution, in which guests bring food to a fiesta and are given food to take home, is common in indigenous Oaxacan communities.