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The Mysterious Origins of the Word ‘Marihuana’

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The Mysterious Origins of the Word 'Marihuana'

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A Tale of One Thousand and One Names

> La cucaracha, la cucaracha
> Ya no quieres caminar
> Porque no tienes
> Porque le falta
> Marihuana que fumar
>
> *La Cucuracha* (Anonymous)

Few substances have attracted a greater variety of epithets than the cannabis plant and its products, modes of use and means of consumption. The note by Mr G. A. Grierson, appended to the *Indian Hemp Drugs Commission Report*,[1] which catalogues references to the hemp plant occurring in Sanskrit and Hindi literature, includes terms celebrating the spiritually and physically invigorating properties of the herb, such as *Indracana*, 'the food of Indra' and *Vijaya* or 'victory'. Drawing from the ancient Vedic scriptures of India, Monier-Williams' *Sanskrit-English Dictionary* lists at least forty terms related to hemp.[2] Franz Rosenthal's study of the use of hemp in medieval Islamic culture and its associated controversies includes catalogues of epithets drawn from the lists of medieval Muslim commentators. These include 'the shrub of understanding' and some still in use to this day, such as the Turkic *esrar*, or 'secrets'.[3] A browse through any dictionary of street slang will likewise yield a profusion of subtly allusive terms for cannabis waxing and waning in popularity through the twentieth century, from 'gage' and 'muggles' of the Jazz Age to the language of contemporary street culture. The reason for this multiplicity lies partly in the need for secrecy surrounding the use of a banned or controversial substance, but certainly also in the sentimental attachment of users to the charm of the drug's effects, assisted no doubt by the stimulation of the imaginative powers that ingestion of the drug engenders. Of all the multifarious terms associated with the cannabis plant, *marihuana* is one of the most universally recognised and used in the English-speaking world, yet its origins remain deeply obscure. What follows does not answer the question of the mysterious etymology of the word *marihuana*, but hopefully it opens the field of enquiry to those interested in pursuing the matter further.

Hexing Herbs of the American Congo

The earliest attested usage of a term resembling *marihuana*, with reference to the cannabis plant, is found in the 1894 *Scribner's Magazine* feature "The American Congo", by

John G. Bourke. Bourke was the author of the *Scatalogic Rites of all Nations,* a dissertation upon the religious, magical and therapeutic employment of urine and excrement throughout the world, famously published in the German edition with a foreword by Sigmund Freud.[4] As well as being a distinguished veteran of the American Civil War, Bourke took advantage of his later military assignments to become an amateur ethnologist, having a number of papers published, such as *Medicine Men of the Apache*[5] and *Popular Medicine, Customs, and Superstitions of the Rio Grande.*[6]

'Scribner's 1894' is repeatedly and uncritically cited in dictionary references as the earliest attested use of a term similar to *marihuana.* However, the context of Bourke's reference to a plant called *mariguan*, if this does indeed refer to *marihuana,* is of some significance. Let us look at the reference in a wider context, which reveals that Bourke was describing the native flora that flourishes on the banks of the Rio Grande River that forms the border between the U.S. state of Texas and Mexico, which includes:

> The "toloachi ," the "mariguan," and the "drago,"[7] the first two used by discarded women for the purpose of wreaking terrible revenge upon recreant[8] lovers, and the last one much employed by the "medicine men" of the Indian tribes as a narcotic to induce prophetic dreaming.[9]

Dale H. Gieringer, in his historical study of cannabis prohibition in California, has made a comprehensive review of the early history of the term *marihuana.*[10] Geiringer's study reveals numerous variants of the word *marihuana*, as used in the popular press and medical/pharmaceutical journals of the turn of the century and after. The table below lists variations of the well-known spelling *marihuana*, drawn partly from Gieringer.

Term	**Literary Source**	**Date**	**Word Origin**
mariguan	Scribner's Magazine	1894	an Indian name?
marihuma	Punch Magazine	1905	not given
mariahuana	Pacific Drug Review	1905	not given
marihuano	The American Practitioner	1912	'an Indian name'
marahuana	The L.A.Times	1914	drug peddler's term
maraguango	The Military Surgeon	1933	a 'provincialism'

Gieringer refers to Bourke's 'dubious reference to a spell-casting herb called *mariguan*'. However, this apparent dismissal ignores Bourke's deep familiarity with the region he describes and his status as a published ethnologist who managed to botanize with the aid of *curanderas* and who assiduously interviewed native informants about the folklore of the region. His mentors included historian Francis Parkman and the Director of the Board of Ethnology, John Wesley Powell.[11] Bourke makes no reference to 'spell-casting', and the discarded women's revenge with *toloachi* and *mariguan* was almost certainly by secret administration of the herbs as a poison in food or drink, the purpose being to humiliate by means of a violent and unexpected intoxication.[12] The victim would have little recollection of his bizarre behaviour afterwards.[13] The word *toloachi*[14] is used in modern Mexican Spanish to refer to *Datura stramonium*. *Datura* and other related solanaceous plants are widely used in Eurasia and the Americas as shamanic inebriants, but also are used as an intoxicant by thieves to rob their surreptitiously narcotised victims or as a kind of practical joke on friends. *Toloachi* is derived from *toloatzin*, the Aztec word for another solanaceous plant, *Brugmansia suaveolens*[15], which contains alkaloids similar to those in *Datura*.

Here is one I have loved full well,
Marihuma,
Sister of thine, with a sister-spell,
Marihuma,
Mild as the sap of the Balsam Tree,
Sweet as the odours of the Engedi,
Rose of a thornless Briar, she,
Marihuma

Anonymous Poem, *Punch*, 1905.

Although Bourke does not state that *toloachi* and *mariguan* are used in combination by the wronged lovers to whom he refers, the context certainly suggests this possibility. The psychoactivity of the *mariguan* is implied by its being referred to in association with other explicitly psychoactive herbs, the *toloachi* and the *drago*. Bourke's reference to the use of *mariguan* in association with *Datura* (*toloachi*) refers us to the widespread use of cannabis together with solanaceous plants, such as *Datura* and henbane in smoking mixtures, sweetmeats and medicinal or recreational herbal concoctions in India, the Middle East and North Africa.[16] The use of *toloachi*, *Datura*, to punish unfaithful lovers mirrors the description of the use of poisoning by *Datura* to humiliate a victim in a tale of male friendship and jealousy, *The Datura Trees,*[17] by the Moroccan storyteller Mohammed Mrabet. This reflects the fact that, according to dosage, the same psychoactive plant may be used for divination, recreation, healing or as a poison. Although the *nicotiana*, plants of the tobacco species, are generally assumed to be the herb smoked by the aboriginal inhabitants of the Americas it was actually only one of many. The native peoples of the Americas smoked not

You've put a spell on me
Witch, witch, you little witch!
You have put a spell on me
Brrrr, you demon!
You have put a spell on me
You have put I know not
what in my food!

Brujeria (El Gran Combo)

only tobacco but a variety of herbs, the *kinnikinik*[18] of the aboriginal inhabitants of North America. Some of the herbal mixtures smoked included *Datura*[19], and tobacco itself was also mixed with plant resins such as liquidambar.[20] The eventual predominance of tobacco as the smoker's herb of choice has been ascribed to its intensive cultivation by European colonists for the purposes of trade.

Old Moorish Mexico and the Chinese Connection #1

The word *marijuana*, together with the use of herbal cannabis as an intoxicant, is consistently identified as coming into the U.S.A. from Mexico, being brought there by migrant workers. The words *marihuana*, *marijuana* and *mariguana*, are variant spellings of the same word, which is pronounced 'marrihwaana' or 'marrahwaana'. In dictionaries these words are identified as Mexican or South American Spanish, etymology unknown, usually citing *Scribner's* 1894 as the earliest recorded use.

Generally assumed to be an Old World plant with no pre-Columbian presence in the Americas, it is not known when cannabis was first introduced, but it was certainly cultivated by early Spanish settlers, having been introduced into Chile in the sixteenth century for the production of fibre.[21]

Weston T. La Barre, the anthropologist who made an important early scholarly study of the peyote ritual among the Indians of Mexico and the Southwest,[22] suggests that *marihuana* may 'plausibly be derived from a Chinese word for hemp, brought by Chinese coolie labourers in Western Mexico'.[23] This speculation was no doubt invited by the otherwise apparently coincidental presence of phonetic elements of Chinese expressions which refer to cannabis, such as *ma hua*, in the Mexican Spanish **ma**-ri-**hua**-na. More frequently ordered *hua ma* in Chinese, the congruent ordering of the syllables as *ma hua*, 'hemp flowers', is attested as a term for a psychoactive preparation of cannabis by Joseph Needham.[24] It is possible that there is a Chinese term relating to cannabis, of which I am unaware, that more closely approximates *marihuana*. There is certainly a wide variety of Chinese terms that refer to cannabis and cannabis products.[25] The closest approximation would be *ma ren hua*. *Ma ren* is attested as the standard term for cannabis seed and *ma hua* for the intoxicating cannabis flowers. *Ma ren hua*, if such a term existed, would mean 'hemp seed flowers,' a term which could well be applied to the fruiting bodies of the cannabis plant, the resinous 'flower heads' prized for their intoxicating powers. These often contain seeds, unless deliberately deprived of pollination to produce resin-rich *sinsemilla*[26]. The combination *ren hua* 'seed flower' is attested in a term for a preparation of cardamom.[27]

Professor Victor Mair of the University of Pennsylvania's Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations has suggested to me that the root of the word *marijuana* might be a Semitic loan word in Spanish, having an Arabic origin, later being imported to Mexico

Chinese in Mexico City circa 1925
displaying opium smoking paraphernalia

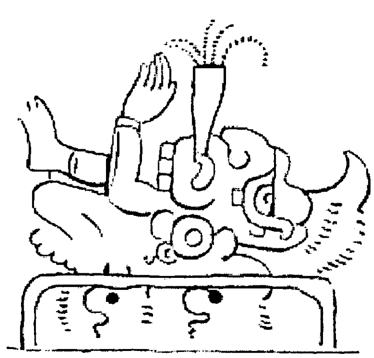
from Moorish Spain. Professor Mair has identified the consonantal group *mrj*, pronounced something like **maraj* or **mraj*, as the root of the Chinese word for 'hemp' *ma*.[28] He suggests a possible connection with the Semitic root *mrr*, meaning bitter, which he thinks predates the ancient Chinese **maraj* or **mraj* = hemp. Although one might expect any Arabic *mrj* root associated with cannabis to be well attested in Medieval Spanish, associations between the herbologies of Moorish Spain, Morocco and Mexico also have been noted. Mary Austin in her foreword to *Healing Herbs of the Rio Grande*[29] by L. S. M. Curtin, refers to the intrusion of the influence of the Moors, the Arab and North African conquerors of Spain, which, transferred from Spain to America, formed part of the overlapping of traditional Indian, Spanish, and Moorish lore. The author L. S. M. Curtin himself thanks Dr. J. P. Harrington of the Bureau of Ethnology, Smithsonian Institution, for 'proposing Morocco as a valuable source of herbal comparisons and etymologies'. He points out that the Southwest became a Spanish colony only a few generations after the Moorish hold upon most of Spain was broken and that, like many other parts of Hispanic America, 'the Southwest felt the direct and the indirect influences of that Moorish occupation of Spain: direct, in the persons of Moorish artisans, Moorish architects, and Moorish servants, who accompanied the *conquistadores* and their successors to the New World; indirect, in the infusion of Moorish customs, words, and knowledge which every Spaniard brought to the Americas'. Curtin proposes the urgent need for a thoroughgoing study of Moorish influence throughout the three Americas during the colonial period.

The search for Spanish herb names that derive from the Semitic *mrr* root yields that of marjoram. The Spanish *mejorana* or *mayorana* like the Portuguese *manjerona*, Italian *maggiorana* and Middle English *majorane*, are all derived from the Medieval Latin *maiorana/majorana*, which probably owes its form to a confusion with Latin *major*, 'larger',[30] actually being derived from Latin *amaracus* (Greek ἄμραχος), 'marjoram' related to Latin *amarus* bitter[31] and the Semitic root **murr-* meaning bitterness or myrrh.[32] Thus the word marjoram has roots common to both Semitic and Indo European language groups. Sanskrit yields *maruvah* and *maruvakah*, meaning 'marjoram'.[33] The Spanish words *mejorana* or *mayorana* bear a significant phonetic resemblance to *marijuana*, which is almost certainly a 'Hobson Jobson' loan word from another language based on similarity of the sound to *maria-juana*.[34] The name may also have been influenced by folk etymology, where the powers of various herbs are associated in Spanish American culture with the Virgin Mary, among them the psychoactive plant *Salvia divinorum*, known as *ska María Pastora*, 'herb of Mary the Shepherdess'.


Mexican marijuana vendor circa 1930

Mexican slang for marihuana includes *orégano chino* whose meaning is given in the online *Alternative Mexican Spanish Dictionary* as 'Chinese herb', though strictly speaking this would mean 'Chinese oregano'. However, the herbs oregano and marjoram are often confused, and there is much popular taxonomic confusion about the term *orégano* in Mexico.[35] The herb marjoram is a variety of the genus *oreganum* and thus, botanically speaking, all marjorams are oreganos, but not all oreganos are marjorams. A dictionary of colloquial Spanish gives 'marjoram' as *mejorana* (earlier *majorana* or *mayorana* [36]) and 'wild marjoram' as *orégano*.[37] Thus *orégano chino* could equally well have been *mejorana chino*, 'Chinese marjoram'. It may be worthy of note that Pseudo Plutarch says in *De Fluvius* that, 'in Thrace near the Hebrus[38] there grows a plant which resembles the origanum (wild marjoram) ; the inhabitants of that country throw the leaves on a brazier and inhale the smoke, which intoxicates them'.[39]

Regardless, the slang name *orégano chino* for *marijuana* indicates a Chinese association with herbal cannabis in Mexico. By the late nineteenth century Chinese immigrants were intimately associated with drug dealing and the opium trade in Mexico.[40] It is reasonable to conclude that *mejorana (chino)* may equally well have been a slang term for herbal cannabis and have influenced the name even if it was not the actual source of the term *marijuana*. The process by which the Spanish *mejorana* may have modulated to *marijuana* is called in linguistics 'metathesis'. In metathesis the order of the sounds making up a word is altered; this occurs frequently in slang, dialectical variation and common mispronunciations. Examples are 'revelant' for relevant, 'purdy' for pretty, 'nucular' for nuclear and 'relator' for realtor. Historical instances occur in the English words bird, which formerly was *brid*, and horse, formerly *hros*. Thus, Professor Mair may well be right about a connection between **maraj* or **mraj*, the ancient Chinese term for cannabis, and its association with the Semitic root *mrr* and ultimately the word *marijuana*, through the Spanish *mejorana*.



Ancient Mexican smoker from the Codex Troana

Transpacific Contacts and the Chinese Connection #2

Although *toloachi*, the companion herb of Bourke's *maraguan*, has an accepted Aztec etymology which Blas Pablo Reko explains in his study of Aztec botanical names, he states there that 'the name *toloache* coincides with Chinese name *tolo-wan* for the same plant *Datura stramonium*, which might indicate trans-Pacific communication'.[41] Why Reko should include this speculation is not immediately clear, though he does refer at some length to possible shared roots for Aztec and Indo European words. However, for anyone considering a possible Chinese origin for the word *marihuana* this speculation that the name of its sister plant in Bourke's description, the *toloachi*, may have a Chinese association represents an odd coincidence. I have not traced *tolo-wan* as a Chinese term for *Datura*. However, Stuart's *Chinese Materia Medica* lists *man-to-lo* as referring to *Datura stramonium. Man-to-lo* is a phonetic transcription of the Sanskrit *Mandara*. The phonetic transcription *man-to-lo* uses Chinese characters, which can also be pronounced *man-da-ra*,[42] as listed in Eitel's *Chinese-Sanskrit Dictionary* as a technical Buddhist term for a sacred plant.[43] In the exhaustive study of the medicinal flora of the Indian subcontinent the *Pharmacographia indica,*[44] *Mandara* is referenced under *Erythrina indica*, the Indian coral tree, which is supposed to flower in

Indra's garden. One might note here that cannabis is also sacred to Indra and, as previously noted, is referred to in Sanskrit as *Indracana*, 'Indra's food'.[45] Curiously, the *Mandara* entry also tells us that the same tree, containing alkaloids similar to the Indian variety, is found growing in Mexico. In Monier-Williams *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, *Datura* as well as *Erthyrna* are listed under the Sanskrit *Mandara*.[46]

These odd, apparently coincidental references linking China and Mexico return us to a possible Chinese/Mexican connection between *ma hua*, 'hemp flowers' or *ma ren hua* 'hemp seed flowers' and *marihuana*. The least controversial suggestion would be a post-Columbian loan word directly from Chinese into Mexican Spanish as discussed above. The Spanish planted hemp in South America soon after their arrival, to fulfil naval requirements, hemp fibre furnishing the ideal rope for naval purposes.[47] 'Merchants and traders from China began arriving in the Americas in large numbers during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries on the Spanish ships that crossed the Pacific, ships which the Chinese built'.[48] There were early Chinese immigrants to Mexico, in the seventeenth century, before those to California[49], and the West Coast of North America was known to Chinese sailors employed on American ships or who fished off the coast of California in Chinese junks.[50] Hemp would certainly have provided the rigging and sails of all these ships and hemp seed may have been carried on board for food, the production of oil, for medicinal use or even for planting in the case of settlement.

On my grave raise a cross of marijuana
I don' want tears or prayers or holy ground
Bury me in the forest with lions from my pride and I'm off, friend
Oh man! Water that marijuana cross
with wine and liqueurs seven days a week
and play me my music, norteña music

Cruz de marihuana (Pesado)

More controversial would be claims for the material, with which Blas Reko shows familiarity, that push back Asian American contacts way before the Columbian period.[51] Early examples include Charles Godfrey Leland's *Fusang, or the Discovery of America by Chinese Buddhist Priests in the Fifth Century*.[52] A more recent example of this genre is Gavin Menzies' *1421: The Year China Discovered America*.[53] Gavin Menzies book and web site[54] claim much supporting evidence for pre-Columbian Chinese contact and settlement in North, South and Central America. Menzies includes botanical, linguistic and genetic evidence in support of his claims. Significant in this regard is the suggestion, to be found elsewhere, that hemp, *Cannabis sativa*, was already established in the Americas before its introduction by the Spanish and other Europeans as a source of fibre.[55] While mainstream academic historians would appear to have little time for Menzies' book, Professor Stephen C. Jett's *Crossing Ancient Oceans: How Prehistoric Explorers Visited the Americas*[56] may receive a more sympathetic hearing. Professor Jett, Emeritus of Textiles and Clothing at the University of California, reprises the literature on evidence for the pre-Columbian use of hashish in the New World. According to Jett:

> The plant (commonly called "marijuana"), which has long been popular in the Middle East for its psychoactive effects, is generally assumed to have been a post-Columbian introduction to the warmer parts of the New World. However, Parsche, Balabanova, and Pirsig found THC (along with cocaine and nicotine) in the tissues, teeth, and hair of ancient naturally mummified bodies from both the North Coast and the South Coast of Peru—in 39 of the 60 cadavers tested and in a corporal distribution indicating ante-mortem use. These mummies ranged in date from about AD 115 to AD 1500. [57]

The controversial findings of Balabanova et al., claiming the presence of cannabis in the tissues of ancient Peruvian mummies, raise the issue of the possible presence of cannabis in the pre-Columbian Americas. According to Balabanova, Parsche and Pirsig[58] residues from hashish and cannabis were identified chemically in cranial hair of pre-Columbian Peruvian mummies. According to a later paper, they analyzed hair, skin, muscle, brain, teeth and bones from 72 Peruvian (as well as 11 Egyptian) mummies and found chemical residues of cocaine, nicotine, and hashish and their metabolites in both sets of mummies (16 of the Peruvian corpses revealed cocaine; 26 had tobacco traces; and 20 showed hashish).[59] In this connection it is worthy of note that a dictionary of South American Spanish includes *mariguanza* as being a Chilean word and meaning: (1) A superstitious ritual gesture of the hands made by a faith healer. (2) A leap performed in dances or in other physical

The Hacienda Fountain
Illustration from Bourke's 'American Congo'

exercises, or a pirouette. (3) A movement or gesture that is employed to mock a person.[60] This reference connects *mariguan* with shamanism, dance and probably cursing or spell casting. This raises the possibility of *marihuana* being a loan word from a native South American language into Spanish, of which there are many examples, principally from Nahuatal and Quechua, which are the native languages respectively of Mexico and Andean South America.[61] Notably the 'gua' syllable characteristic of the various *mariguana* type terms is present in a number of familiar loan words such as *guano* from Quechua *huanu*, 'dung', *guanaco*, a type of llama, from the Quechua *huanaco* and *guacamole* from Nahuatl *ahuacamolli*. At least one author has identified the plant called *pipiltzintzintli* in Nahuatl, the language of the Aztecs and modern Mexican Amerindians, as cannabis. José Luis Díaz[62] cites an eighteenth-century reference[63] that identifies *pipiltzintzintli* as cannabis. However, the morning-glories, cannabis and another psychoactive plant, *Salvia divinorum*, have been considered as candidates for *pipiltzintzintli*, and a precise botanical identification remains uncertain.

The presence of cannabis in pre-Columbian North America has been argued by Jack Frazier in *The Great American Hemp Industry*, but the proposal does not appear to have attracted either support or refutation.[64] Balabanova's claims suggest transpacific contact but beg a variety of questions. Why was the presence of cannabis, a well-known Eurasian species, not reported by the Spanish on their arrival in the Americas? This question can be countered by the fact that the taxonomy of the cannabis plant varies greatly according to the conditions in which it is grown and the purposes for which it is cultivated. This fact has led to a long argument as to how many distinct species or varieties exist.[65] It is possible that the fibre-producing varieties, several feet tall and woody, with which the Spanish would have been familiar, were so different in form from native varieties cultivated for medicinal or narcotic purposes, likely compact, bushy and tender, that they did not initially recognise them and that native varieties were later assumed to be escapees from those cultivated for fibre. I doubt if there has been any research to date, botanical or archaeo-botanical, which would be likely to resolve this issue.

Most controversial of all would be any suggestion that *mariguan* might have its origins in *mrr* words and even plant species carried across the Bering Strait by the Central Asian ancestors of the Amerindians.[66]

Transatlantic contacts and the African Connection

William Emboden confidently states that 'the word marijuana (marihuana) is derived from the Portuguese *maran guango* and connotes intoxication'.[67] Although I can trace neither *maran* or *guango* as words in Portuguese, this suggestion would likely place the South American origin of the term *mariguana* in Brazil. Emboden gives no source for his assertion, though it echoes the observation made in *The Military Surgeon* of 1933, that 'mariajuana (sic) is not a correct term in the Spanish language but that it is a provincialism common to Panama and derived from the word "maraguango". The latter mentioned term is a general one and is interpreted to mean smoking, drinking, or snuffing of any substance that produces the loss of clear mentality, hallucinations, delusions, or disturbed sleep'.[68]

> Everybody's getting crazy
> fallin' out 'n' hangin' round.
> My woman said, "Hey Pedro,
> you're actin' crazy like a
> clown."
> Nobody feels like workin'
> Panama Red is back in town.
>
> *Panama Red* (New Riders of the Purple Sage)

No one knows for certain when cannabis was introduced into Brazil, Portugal's main colony in South America. The words for marijuana in Brazilian Portuguese include maconha, liama, and diamba, which closely resemble West and South African terms.[69] The word maconha is reportedly derived from ma'kaña meaning marihuana in a Bantu dialect spoken in Angola.[70] Angola, in West Africa, was a source of labourers for the Portuguese slave trade. Cannabis was introduced into Africa at an early date and the renowned ethnobotanist Richard Evans Schultes estimates that the period of ca. 2050 - 1050 BC saw the first introduction of Cannabis into Africa.[71] However, the first physical evidence that the plant reached the African continent is not given until ca. 1310 - 1450 AD.[72] The Portuguese themselves brought hemp seed to Brazil to grow as a source of fibre. Once it was sown, slaves no doubt would have used the plant as they had in their native land, referring to it by its name in their native language. Islam reached West Africa by 900 AD, almost 600 years before the beginning of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and, if not established earlier, the use of cannabis as an intoxicant likely followed the spread of Islam and Middle Eastern culture through trade.[73] However, pre-Columbian transatlantic contacts with the Americas have been argued for with as much enthusiasm as transpacific contacts and it is possible that cannabis reached the Americas from Africa or the Mediterranean before its introduction by the Portuguese. Interested readers are referred to the annotated bibliography of the literature compiled by Sorenson and Raish.[74] The author would also recommend Gilmore, *Across before Columbus?* which includes critical reviews of the contributor's papers.[75]

Conclusion

If *marihuana* is not just a folk term of unidentifiable origin, a nineteenth-century neologism with no recoverable etymology, then it is certainly a loan word influenced in form by the euphonic combination of the Spanish girl's names *maria-juana.* We must also ask why, given that the Spanish introduced hemp into South America in the sixteenth century, is the Spanish *cáñamo* not the universal term for hemp in Spanish America? *Cáñamo*, however, generally refers to hemp cultivated for fibre, while the term *marihuana* is used specifically to refer to the resinous flowering tops of the cannabis plant, preferred for smoking because this part of the plant contains the highest concentration of psychoactive compounds. This suggests that any search for the etymology of *marihuana* lies within the language of a culture familiar with the psychoactive effects of the flowering tops of the cannabis plant. Three major possible alternatives exist. Firstly a pre-Columbian Spanish word of which *mejorana*, possibly as slang *mejorana chino* for *marihuana*, seems a significant contender at least for influencing the form of the word. Secondly one must consider the possibility of a pre- or post-Columbian loan word from another ethnic group present in South America. Foremost amongst these must be the Chinese because of their association with the drug trade and the importance of hemp in all its forms in their culture. The Chinese *ma (ren) hua,* 'hemp (seed) flowers', may at least have influenced the form of the word *marihuana.* Thirdly we must consider the possibility of a loan word into Spanish from a native South American language, such as Nahuatl or Quechua, particularly if further evidence is found to support the pre-Columbian presence of cannabis in South America. Ideally the biological data of Balabanova et al. needs to find supporting paleobotanical evidence. All these speculations beg the question 'at what point did hemp start being cultivated and used in the Americas as an intoxicant and by whom?' This is particularly important where the strains imported by the Spanish or Portuguese were for fibre production and therefore probably low in psychoactive compounds. What ethnic groups may have been familiar with the psychoactive properties of cannabis, either prior to its introduction by the Spanish or after, and initiated its cultivation and exploitation of its psychoactive properties? Moorish peoples, the Arabic and North African former conquerors of Spain? Slave labourers brought from Africa? Chinese sailors, merchants or immigrants? Or, especially if it can be established that hemp was present in South America before Columbus, native South American peoples?

Notes on illustrative material:

Original lyrics from the song 'Brujeria' by El Gran Combo from the album *Aqui No Se Sienta Nadie* (CD: Combo 2013, 1979), composed by: Jorge "Güiro" Borrego.

Tú me hiciste brujería
Bruja, bruja, brujita
Tú me hiciste brujería
Brrrrrr, demonio
Tú me hiciste brujería
Me echaste, no sé qué, en la comida

The 'Mexican Smoker' illustration comes from Joseph D McGuire, *Pipes and Smoking Customs of the American Aborigines* (University Press of the Pacific, 2003, reprint of the 1899 edition).

All Mexican photographs come from Ricardo Pérez Montfort, *Yerba, Goma y Polvo: Drogas, ambientes y policías en México 1900-1940* (Ediciones Era/Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes-INAH, 1999), which contains photographic documentation on the consumption of drugs, especially marijuana, opium, cocaine and morphine, during the first half of the twentieth century in Mexico.

The Hacienda Fountain. This illustration from Bourke's *The American Congo* is by Gilbert Gaul (1855-1919). William Gilbert Gaul was known for his portrayals of Civil War army life and his later paintings and illustrations of Western Indian themes. He had a successful career as an artist and illustrator for magazines and travelled to the West many times. He lived on Army posts and among Indians, photographing and sketching frontier scenes to complete later at his New York City studio or Tennessee home. Gaul not only drew and painted the Indians but travelled widely to cover subjects in Mexico, the West Indies, Panama and Nicaragua. In the 1880's, Gaul, along with 10 other artists, was commissioned by the U.S. Government to create a visual census of the country's Native American tribes. The resulting book remains one of the most complete histories ever produced on the subject.

Notes

[1] On 2[nd] March 1893 a question was raised in the British House of Commons concerning the effects of the production and consumption of hemp drugs in the province of Bengal, India. In response, the Government of India convened a seven-member commission to look into these questions. The Indian Hemp Drugs Commission Report was completed the following year and comprised some nine volumes and 3,698 pages. It is by far the most complete and systematic study of marijuana undertaken to date. Mr Grierson's note formed part of the Report.

[2] Sir Monier Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970).

[3] Franz Rosenthal, *The Herb. Hashish Versus Medieval Muslim Society* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1971), pp. 35-36.

[4] Captain John G. Bourke, *Scatalogic rites of all nations: A dissertation upon the employment of excrementitious remedial agents in religion, therapeutics, divination, witchcraft, love-philters, etc., in all parts of the globe / Based upon original notes and personal observation, and upon compilation from one thousand authorities* (Washington, D.C.: W. H. Lowdermilk & Co., 1891). This volume includes a discussion of the religious use of intoxicants. Bourke must have influenced the twentieth-century theories of R. Gordon Wasson. Like Wasson, Bourke posits the ingestion of the hallucinogenic fly agaric mushrooms as a proto-religious practice and links Eurasian mushroom shamanism with the use of *teonanactl*, a psilocybe mushroom species in South America, as described by Sahagun and others. He also identifies both the veneration and abomination of mushrooms as deriving from their power to intoxicate. On this basis Bourke's must be one of the earliest English language discussions of these matters.

[5] Captain John G. Bourke, Third Cavalry, U.S. Army, "The medicine-men of the Apache," *Ninth annual report of the Bureau of Ethnology to the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution*, 1887-88, pp. 443-603, pls. III-VIII, figs. 429-448.

[6] John G. Bourke, "Popular Mexican Customs and Superstitions of the Rio Grande," *Journal of American Folklore*, 7 (24), (1894): 119-146.

[7] I have not traced a Mexican narcotic plant called *drago*. In Mexico the latex of *Croton lechleri* is known as *Sangre de Drago*, 'Dragon's Blood', and it is used to heal wounds, cuts, injuries and for vaginal baths before childbirth. It has anti-tumour, cicatrizing, anti-diarrhoeal, anti-inflammatory, anti-bacterial, anti-fungal and wound-healing properties. However, the reddish dried saps and secretions of a variety of other plants are also commonly referred to as *Sangre de Drago*, and one of these may have psychoactivity.

[8] Unfaithful.

[9] John G. Bourke, "The American Congo," *Scribner's Magazine*, vol. 15, issue 5, (New York: Charles Scribner's, May, 1894): 596 - 597.

[10] Dale H. Gieringer, "The Origins of Cannabis Prohibition in California". Originally published as "The Forgotten Origins of Cannabis Prohibition in California," *Contemporary Drug Problems*, Vol. 26 no. 2, Summer 1999. Revised by the author Feb. 2000, Dec. 2002 (New York: Federal Legal Publications, 1999).

[11] Robert Mendoza, "En la margen del Río Bravo: Catarino Garza's war with the U.S. and Mexico, LareDos," *A Journal of the Borderlands*, Monday, August 29, 2005, http://www.laredosnews.com.

[12] "These are plants of a dark and secret tradition, used in rites of witchcraft, occasionally to harm enemies, or to confuse an unfaithful spouse." José Luis Díaz, "Hallucinogens in prehispanic Mexico," *Arqueología mexicana* 10 (59), (2003): 78-80. Quoted in John L. Sorenson and Carl L. Johannessen, "Scientific Evidence for Pre-Columbian Transoceanic Voyages To and From the Americas," *Sino-Platonic Papers* 133 (April 2004) an occasional series edited by Victor H. Mair of the University of Pennsylvania's Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations, http://spp.pinyin.info/.

[13] Intoxication by a strong dose of *Datura* is characterised by entry into an entirely different reality. The victim may be ambulatory, but his actions will relate to the fantastic realm he temporarily inhabits, and he may be a danger to himself and others. Except for the initiated, recollection of the experience is usually poor.

[14] Also *toloache*, *tolach*.

[15] Blas Pablo Reko, *On Aztec botanical names* (*De los Nombes Botánicos Aztecas*), translation, introduction and index by Jonathon Ott, (Berlin: VWB - Verlag für Wissenschaft und Bildung, 1996).

[16] See, for example, Dr. Jamal Bellakhdar, *La pharmacopée Marocaine traditionnelle: médecine arabe ancienne et savoirs populaires* (Paris: Ibis Press, 1997).

[17] Mohammed Mrabet, *M'Hashish*, (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1993). Stories from Morocco translated by Paul Bowles.

[18] *Kinnikinik*, also *Kinnickinnick*, *Kinnickenick*, etc., is an Algonguin word that means 'smoking mixture' or 'something to smoke'. Sometimes identified with the bearberry, *Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*, *kinnikinik* is also applied to other smoking herbs and mixtures thereof.

[19] Joseph D. McGuire, *Pipes and Smoking Customs of the American Aborigines* (Washington, D.C: Government Printing Office, 1899). P. 50 et passim.
[20] Joseph D. McGuire, op. cit. See p. 15 for the use of 'gums, such as storax, tacamahaca, and liquidamber' in connection with tobacco. See p. 21 for the Indians of New Mexico smoking 'the leaves of various plants, as they use various mixtures in their religious rites'. See p. 18 for 'tobacco mixed with various aromatic substances'. See also Francis Robicsek, *Smoking Gods. Tobacco in Maya Art History* (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1978). Robiscek discusses various possible explanations for the powerfully intoxicating effects of the 'tobacco' smoked by the native inhabitants of the Americas, as reported by early colonial observers.
[21] Siler et al., "Marijuana Smoking in Panama," The *Military Surgeon*, 73, (1933): 269.
[22] Weston La Barre, *The Peyote Cult* (Norman, Okla., U.S.A.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989).
[23] Weston La Barre, "History and Ethnography of Cannabis", in *Culture in Context, Selected writings of Weston La Barre* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 1980).
[24] Joseph Needham, "Spagyrical Discovery and Invention: Magistries of Gold and Immortality, Alchemy and Chemistry", in *Science & Civilisation in China*, Vol. 5, pt. II, (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1974). 'The addition of hemp (*ta ma, huo ma, Cannabis sativa/indica*) to the contents of incense-burners is clearly stated in one Taoist collection, the Wu Shang Pi Yao (Essentials of the Matchless Books) which must place it before +570 [570CE]. That the psycho-pharmacological properties of the plant (commonly called hashish, marijuana, etc.) were known in the Han or before is clear from the statement in the Shen Nung Pen Tshao Ching under *ma fen* (hemp seeds): 20. "To take much makes people see demons and throw themselves about like maniacs. But if one takes it over a long period of time one can communicate with the spirits, and one's body becomes light, a characteristic prelude to material immortality". The same entry also gives the synonym *ma pho*, a technical term [hemp blooming metamorphosis]. Later on, *ma hua*, hemp flowers, became yet another synonym'.
[25] Shao Hong and Robert C. Clarke, "Taxonomic studies of *Cannabis* in China," *Journal of the International Hemp Association* 3 (2), (1996): 55-60. 'Besides the general name *Da Ma* (great hemp), the Chinese vernacular terms for *Cannabis* include *Huo Ma* (fire hemp), *Xian Ma* (line hemp) and *Huang Ma* (yellow hemp). The fruits of *Cannabis* are called *Ma Zi* (hemp seed) and *Huo Ma Ren* (fire hemp seed). The female inflorescences are called *Ma Fen* (fragrant hemp branch). The terms *Da Ma, Xian Ma*, and *Huang Ma* for the plants and their products and *Da Ma Zi* or simply *Ma Zi* for the fruits are usually applied to the fiber and seed producing *C. sativa* cultivars and landraces. *Cannabis* smoking is not popular or widespread in China. The terms *Da Ma* and *Huo Ma* are only rarely used to denote smoking *Cannabis* in the south and east of China. However, *Huo Ma* is much more commonly used by traditional Chinese pharmacists to denote the cleaned hemp seeds incorporated into local herbal stomach remedies'.
[26] Another Spanish word, from *sin*, without (from Latin *sine*) + *semilla*, seed (from Old Spanish dialectal *semilia*). *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, Fourth Edition, 2000, http://www.bartleby.com/61/.
[27] Rev. G. A. Stuart, *Chinese Materia Medica* (Shanghai: The American Presbyterian Mission Press, 1911).
[28] Personal correspondence. The references are to be found in Axel Schuessler, *A Dictionary of Early Zhou Chinese* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987), and William H. Baxter, *A Handbook of Old Chinese Phonology* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1991).
[29] L. S. M. Curtin, *Healing Herbs of the Upper Rio Grande* (Santa Fe, N. M.: Laboratory of Anthropology, 1947).
[30] Dr Ernest Klein, *A Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the English Language* (Amsterdam-London-New York: Elsevier Publishing Company, 1971).
[31] Ernest Weekley, *An Etymological Dictionary of Modern English* (London: John Murray, 1921).
[32] Modern English 'myrrh' is derived from the Greek *murrha*, from a Semitic source **murr-*, to be/become bitter, akin to Akkadian *murru*, Arabic *murr*, Hebrew *mōr*, myrrh.
[33] Klein, op. cit.
[34] The expression 'hobson jobson' refers to a word in one language which is borrowed into another, but in the process transformed into a homophonic form where the pronunciation and thus spelling may be altered to approximate words or syllables more familiar in the borrowing language. For example, visitors to what is now Malaysia encountered the Malay word "kampong," which meant a group of buildings enclosed by a wall. They heard "kampong" as "compound," and gave the English word that new meaning. There may be poetic ornamentation, as in the term 'hobson jobson' itself, which originally referred to the roll call of native soldiers under British colonial rule. Their recitation of Hussein! Yacoub! and so on, was rendered by European ears which could not identify the sounds, as their doing their 'hobson jobson'.
[35] 'Several plants are named thus in different parts of Mexico, and there is little clear information about those. Some plants that have been identified as "Mexican Oregano" are *Poliomintha longiflora*, *Lippia berlandieri* and

Plectranthus amboinicus (syn. *Coleus aromaticus*).' See the highly informative 'Gernot Katzer's Spice Pages', http://www.uni-graz.at/~katzer/engl/.

[36] Ernest Weekley, op. cit.

[37] Salvatore Ramondino, ed., *The New World Spanish/English English/Spanish Dictionary* (New York: New American Library, 1996).

[38] The modern Maritza, which rises in Bulgaria and later forms the border between Greece and Turkey before discharging into the Mediterranean opposite the island of Samothrace.

[39] Joseph D. McGuire, op. cit.

[40] Ricardo Pérez Montfort, *Yerba, Goma y Polvo. Drogas, ambientes y policías en México 1900-1940* (México: Ediciones Era/Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes-INAH, 1999). Photographic documentation on the consumption of drugs, especially marijuana, opium, cocaine and morphine, during the first half of the twentieth century in Mexico.

[41] Reko, op. cit: 'Toloache - toloa-chin (*toloa* that which bends, inclines; *chin*, reverential suffix: bending/pendant flower). Originally the flower known today as *floripondio* (*Datura suaveolens = Brugmansia* suaveolens) now *Datura stramonium*. For a review of the relations between new and old world daturas see John L. Sorenson and Carl L. Johannessen, op. cit.

[42] Bernhard Karlgren, *Analytic Dictionary of Chinese and Sino-Japanese* (Paris: Libraire Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1923).

[43] Ernest J. Eitel, *Handbook of Chinese Buddhism. Being a Sanskrit-Chinese Dictionary with Vocabularies of Buddhist Terms in Pali, Singhalese, Siamese, Burmese, Tibetan, Mongolian and Japanese* (New Delhi: Asian Educational Service, 1992).

[44] William Dymock , C. J. H. Warden, and David Hooper, *Pharmacographia Indica. A History of the Principal Drugs of Vegetable Origin Met with in British India* (London : Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1890-1893).

[45] Mr G. A. Grierson, C.I.E., Magistrate and Collector, Howrah, "On References to the Hemp Plant Occurring In Sanskrit And Hindi Literature" in *Report of the Indian Hemp Drugs Commission* (Simla, India: Government Central Printing House, 1894), 7 vols.

[46] Monier-Williams, op. cit.

[47] 'Hemp from Spain was introduced into Chile about 1545' (Jose D. Husbands, Bulletin 153, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Plant Industry, 1909, p. 42, as quoted in Lyster H. Dewey, "Hemp, Introduction into South America," *Yearbook of the United States Department of Agriculture*, 1913). See also Erich Forster, "History of Hemp in Chile," *Journal of the International Hemp Association*, Vol. 2, no. 3. According to Erich Forster: 'Spain was a very strong naval power, and depended upon hemp ropes and sails to outfit their vessels plying the Atlantic Ocean to the resource-rich New World. Hemp was sown in many places almost immediately upon arrival, in the hope that they could produce their own hemp, and not depend on foreign merchants for this important strategic resource. Mexico, Chile, Peru and Colombia all had their initial crops, but only Mexico (California) and Chile had any long-term favourable results'.

[48] C. R. Boxer, "Notes on the Chinese Abroad in the Late Ming and Early Manchu Periods," *Tien Hsia Monthly*, vol. 9, Aug-Dec., 1939, and W. L. Schurz, *The Manila Galleons* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1959). These and further references are to be found in Stan Steiner, *Fusang: The Chinese Who Built America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979). The bibliography is available at: http://www.cprr.org/Museum/Fusang.html.

[49] Homer Dubs and Robert S. Smith, "Chinese in Mexico City in 1635," *Far Eastern Quarterly*, vol. 1 (1942), pp. 387-389. See, *A History of Chinese Americans in California: Early Contacts*, http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online_books/5views/5views3a.htm.

[50] James Culleton, *Indians and Pioneers of Old Monterey* (Fresno, California: Academy of California Church History, 1950).

[51] For a useful summary, commentary and evaluation of material available up to 2000, see the research paper by Zhang (Charlie) Minhua, *A Review of Theories and Evidences on Pre-Columbian Contact between Chinese and Americans* (2000) http://hussle.harvard.edu/~zhang/.

[52] Charles Godfrey Leland, *Fusang or the Discovery of America by Chinese Buddhist Priests in the Fifth Century* (London: Trübner & Co., 1875). See also Edward P. Vining, *An Inglorious Columbus; or, Evidence That Hwui Shăn and a Party of Buddhist Monks from Afghanistan Discovered America in the Fifth Century, A.D.* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1885).

[53] Gavin Menzies, *1421: The Year China Discovered America* (New York: Morrow, 2002).

[54] http://www.1421.tv/.

[55] Chris Conrad, *Hemp Lifeline to the Future* (Los Angeles: Creative Xpressions Pubs., 1993). See chapter 3 for reports that 'hemp' was found growing in the Americas by Europeans upon their arrival.

[56] Stephen C. Jett, *Crossing Ancient Oceans: How Prehistoric Explorers Visited the Americas* (New York: Copernicus Books), publication expected in 2005.

[57] As quoted in John L. Sorenson and Carl L. Johannessen, op. cit.

[58] Svetla Balabanova et al., "Drugs in Cranial Hair of Pre-Columbian Peruvian Mummies," *Baessler Archiv. Beiträge zur Völkerkunde*, (NF) 40, (1992).
[59] Franz Parsche et al., "Drugs in Ancient Populations," *The Lancet*, 341, (Feb. 20, 1993):#503.
[60] *Vox Diccionario de uso del espanol de America y Espana* (McGraw Hill, 2004).
[61] Ralph Penny, *A History of the Spanish Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).
[62] *José Luis Díaz, "Ethnopharmacology and Taxonomy of Mexican Psychodysleptic Plants,"* Journal of Psychedelic Drugs, *11 (1979): 71-101.*
[63] *A. Alzate y Ramirez (1772)* El cañamo, algunas costumbres de los indios. Gacetas de Literatura de México *4:95 -10.*
[64] Jack Frazier, *Great American Hemp Industry* (Peterstown, W.V.: Solar Age Press, 1991).
[65] See for example: R.E. Schultes et al., "*Cannabis*: An example of taxonomic neglect," *Harvard Botanical Museum Leaflets*, 23 (1974): 337-367.
[66] For an author who extends linguistic and religious associations into such remote regions, see Charles Graves, *The Asian Origins of Amerindian Religions*, Bochum Publications in Evolutionary Cultural Semiotics, Vol. 37 (Brockmeyer, Universitätsstr. 140, 44799 Bochum, Germany).
[67] William Emboden, *Narcotic Plants* (London: Studio Vista, 1979), Rev. and Enl. edition. Authoritative and encyclopaedic in scope, Professor Emboden's *Narcotic Plants* remains a key work of ethnobotany.
[68] Siler et al., "Mariajuana Smoking in Panama," *The Military Surgeon*, 73 (1933): 269.
[69] Ernest L. Abel, *Marihuana: The First Twelve Thousand Years* (New York: Plenum Press, 1980).
[70] *Dicionário universal da Lingua portuguesa*, http://www.priberam.pt/dlpo/dlpo.aspx
[71] R.E. Schultes, "Random Thoughts and Queries on the Botany of Cannabis" in *The Botany and Chemistry of Cannabis* ed. Joyce and Curry (London: J. & A. Churchill, 1970), pp. 11-38.
[72] M. P. Fleming. and R. C. Clarke, "Physical Evidence for the Antiquity of Cannabis sativa L. (*Cannabaceae*), in *Journal of the International Hemp Association*, 5(2) (1998): 80-92.
[73] Many Africans came to the New World as Muslims and managed to keep their religion intact, while others converted to Christianity. Although there is dispute over the percent and numbers, some historians believe that Muslims comprised up to 20 % of some plantation's slaves. Certain African Americans practiced Islam into the early years of the twentieth century. See, for example, Sylviane A. Diouf, *Servants of Allah: African Muslims Enslaved in the Americas* (New York: New York University Press, 1998).
[74] John L. Sorenson and Martin H. Raish, *Pre-Columbian Contact with the Americas across the Oceans: An Annotated Bibliography* (Provo, Ut.: Research Press, 1990). Two vols.
[75] Donald Gilmore, *Across Before Columbus? Evidence for Transoceanic Contact with the Americas Prior to 1492* (New England Antiquities Research, 1998). John L. Sorenson and Carl L. Johannessen, *Scientific Evidence for Pre-Columbian Transoceanic Voyages*, op. cit.

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