

'PETUN' AND THE PETUNS

Charles Garrad

Abstract

The relationship of the Petun people with the petun (tobacco) plant is examined. It is concluded that the Petun practised tobacco shamanism.

Le lien des gens Petun à la plante petun (tabac) est ici examiné. La conclusion tirée est que cette tribu pratiquait un chamanisme tabac.

The Petun People

In this paper 'petun' or 'Petun' means the tobacco plant, and 'Petun' the Tobacco Nation/People (Khionontateronon-Wyandot). The name was not used by, or known to, the people to whom it is applied by Europeans. It remains in current use, and is used in this Research Bulletin, as a convenient and understood, if inappropriate, term.

Entrenched in the literature are a number of myths about the Petun people. Various writers have stated that the Petun lived in the Bruce Peninsula, grew large fields of tobacco for trade, were excluded by the Hurons from the trade with the French, and after 1646 had a village named St. Matthias. All these claims may be challenged. That they lived neither in the Bruce Peninsula, nor in a village named St. Matthias, has been discussed elsewhere (Garrad 1970, 1997a, 1997b). The myth that they are named for the tobacco plant because they grew large fields of tobacco for trade will now be examined.

Examination of the literature reveals that none of the French who actually visited the Petun reliably mentioned them having tobacco, and none of those who mentioned the Petun as having tobacco ever visited the Petun, nor knew firsthand what they were writing about. There is not a single reliable first-hand eyewitness mention of the Petun having, planting, growing, harvesting, curing, smoking or trading tobacco. This is not to suggest that they did not grow tobacco, as this was common to many tribes, and they may even have traded it, but the probability is that their association with the plant has another explanation.

Modern Authorities

Among the number of respected authorities who assure us of the extensive raising and marketing of tobacco by the Petun are included:

John Gilmary Shea 1855: "luxuriant fields of tobacco won for them and their fertile hills the name of Petun"; 1861: "Petuneux, that is, Tobacco Indians, from their raising large quantities of it" (1855:24, 1861:263).

Reuben Gold Thwaites 1896: "the Tionontates, called also Petuns, or Tobacco Nation, a term having its origin in their custom of cultivating large fields of tobacco, which commodity they used in a wide-spread barter with other tribes" (JR1:22).

Francis Parkman 1897: "In their original seats among the Blue Mountains, they offered an example extremely rare among Indians, of a tribe raising a crop for the market; for they traded in tobacco largely with other tribes. Their Huron confederates, keen traders, would not suffer them to pass through their country .."; "The tobacco brought to the French by the Hurons may have been raised by the adjacent tribe of the Tionontates, who cultivated it largely for sale" (1897:xliv, 47fn2).

David Boyle 1889: "As might be expected, the Tionontates displayed much ingenuity in the making of pipes .. It seems probable that pipes as well as tobacco were produced for commercial purposes" (AARO 3:14).

Andrew Frederick Hunter 1897: "Tobacco Nation .. their extensive raising and marketing of tobacco, from which their name was derived" (JR5:279 note 18).

Arthur Edward Jones 1909: "Petun or Tobacco Nation, so called by the French as that plant was its staple product" (1909:491).

James Mooney 1913: "A tribe .. first visited in 1616 by the French, who called them the Nation du Petun, or Tobacco Nation, from their having large fields of tobacco" (1913:456).

Rowland B. Orr 1913: "Petun woman ridging tobacco plants" (AARO 25:14).

This is a fanciful sketch, complete with Plains-style tepees. The plants illustrated, being large, appear to be *Nicotiana Tabacum* rather than *Nicotiana Rustica*. The inclusion of this illustration in an article on the Attiwandarons (Neutrals) may suggest that in Orr's view the Neutrals are the true Petun. A secondary writer, who argues that since the Hurons, Petuns and Neutrals all grew tobacco they should all be called Petun (Tait 1971:60-61) would agree with him.

Rowland B. Orr 1914: "They were called Petuns and Petuneux by the French because of their abundant and well cultivated fields of tobacco. Petun was their word for tobacco, and the French found the word more easily pronounced than Khionontateronon their proper name" (AARO 26:16).

Morris Bishop 1948: " .. the Petuns, the Tobacco Indians, along the shore of Nottawasaga Bay, in the neighbourhood of present Meaford and Owen Sound. .. They were sedentary

and agricultural, growing great crops of tobacco, corn, beans, sunflower, hemp" (1948:247).

Bishop's work is among the "better known biographies of Champlain" (Heidenreich 1976:xiv)

but in regard to the Petun it is imaginative fiction. The reference to Owen Sound betrays the source of much of this quotation as Father Arthur Edward Jones, S.J., the creator of the myth that the Petun lived in the Bruce Peninsula (Garrad 1970, 1997a).

James B. Conacher 1951: "Known as the Petuns or Tobacco Nation, because of their cultivation of that crop" (Conacher 1951:261 footnote 2).

Marcel Trudel 1966: "les Pétuns .. ce sont de grands cultivateurs de tabac" (1966a:226) "great cultivators of tobacco and corn" (1973:121).

Marcel Trudel is a superb example of a perpetuator and reinforcer of myth by repetition. From his position as Professor of History at Carleton University and the acknowledged authority on New France and Samuel de Champlain (1966b I:26-37, 186-199; 1973), he espoused and repeated just about all the entrenched stereotypes and myths about the Petun that are to be found. He assures us not only that the Petuns were great cultivators of tobacco and corn, that they occupied all the territory west of Huronia to Lake Huron, including the Bruce Peninsula, that their produce was controlled by the Hurons, who, compared with the "bourgeois" Algonquins (and presumably the subservient Petuns), were "la noblesse du pays, .. d'abord et avant tout, les Maitres du commerce des Grands Lacs" ("the nobles of the country, first and foremost the masters of trade in the Great Lakes"). Added to this he then places the lake-travelling Cheveux-relevés south west (therefore inland) of the Petun (Trudel 1966a:226, 230, 365; 1973:121,144).

Other than Tait, cited above, the host of tertiary writers following the above more prominent and respected authorities are necessarily ignored in this paper.

The French writers who were contemporaries of the Petun might be thought to be more reliable sources. Brother Gabriel Sagard was in Huronia 1623-4. He knew the Petun as Nation du Petun, Petuneux, Petuneuses and Quieunontateronons, but he states that it was among the Neutral nation where was grown "a large quantity of very good tobacco, which they trade to their neighbours" (1939:158). In 1639 Father Jérôme Lalemant recorded " .. all .. shall offer thee presents which must be the product of their own country - from the Khionontaterons or tobacco Nation, some tobacco ..", and of "The Khionontateronons, who are called "the nation of the Tobacco" from the abundance of that plant there .." (JR17:165, JR20:43). In 1653 Father Francesco-Giuseppe Bressani added "At the West, along the shores of this lake (Georgian Bay), was the nation which we called "Tobacco," because this plant was produced there in abundance .." (JR38:235), and in 1664 Father François Du Creux wrote "The Indians are passionately fond of smoking the dried leaves of a plant .. called nicotiane .. Today it is generally called tabac or petun, and from the latter comes the French name of a tribe known in Canada as the Tobacco or Petun Indians" (Du Creux 1951 I:108). Yet none of these writers certainly

knew their subject first hand. Sagard, Lalemant and Bressani got as close as Huronia, but did not visit the Petuns and cannot have eye-witnessed tobacco in their country. François Du Creux never left France. Sagard may have been borrowing from Champlain's 1619 publication and the others from his 1632 publication.

Only two French writers actually visited the Petun and had the opportunity to see tobacco there, Samuel de Champlain and Jean de Brébeuf. Neither mention it. We are left only with Champlain's unexplained use of the name of the tobacco plant Petun for the people he visited two days journey west of the Hurons, and an 'explanatory note' added by an unknown hand to his map "Carte de la Nouvelle France 1632".

Samuel de Champlain

Champlain certainly knew what tobacco was. In his certain publications, and in those ascribed to him but of questioned authorship (see later) Champlain mentioned "tabaco", "petum" and "pet_" a number of times before he reached Huronia. In 1599 he noted "tabaco" at Porto (Puerto) Rico. At Santa Domingo ca. 1600 he saw "tobacco, otherwise called petun, or the queen's herb" ('tabac, que l'on nomme autrement petun, ou herbe à la Royne') being traded commercially. In Maine ("petum") and again in Massachusetts ("pet_") in 1605 he found it growing as a crop (Champlain I:21, 78, 328, 351; III:375).

In a quite unjustified excess of zeal, one of Champlain's editors states that "Petun was the Algonquin word for tobacco" (Bourne 1992:99 fn4). Other writers believe it to have been the Petun word for the plant (Orr 1914:16; Martin 1877:11). More detailed and reassuring is a footnote by the editors of the Champlain Society edition: "the ordinary French term (in Champlain's time) for tobacco was petun, which was the native word for the plant in one of the South American languages, adopted by the Portuguese and from them taken into French. Nicot, who in the sixteenth century introduced tobacco into France as a medicinal herb, called it nicotiane or herbe à la reine, after Catherine de Medici" (Champlain I:78 fn 1); and elsewhere, discussing the later use of the word tabac in the context of Champlain's voyage of 1603, affirmed "Champlain and Lescarbot habitually use petun to signify tobacco" (Champlain I:99 fn2).

When Champlain reached Huronia and found tobacco - petun - there, it was no novelty to him. Unfortunately, the sources do not explain why in 1616 he - or Father le Caron - associated petun with one particular Indian group when probably all the natives Champlain encountered had, and used, tobacco. When he visited that group, the Petun, he recorded that what they grew was corn (maize). His translators make him say that it was another group, the Neutrals, that grew tobacco. Although the translation will be challenged in this paper, it is accepted that the Neutrals grew and traded tobacco on the assurance of Sagard (1939:158). It may well be that it was the Neutrals to whom Champlain thought he was going, and whom he intended the name Petun to include.

Champlain's account of his 1616 trip to the Petun was first published in 1619. A substantially similar version was published again in 1632 in his name:

"The next day, I saw Father Joseph in his little cabin .. finding he was contemplating a journey to the Petun people ("aux gens du Petun"), as I had thought of doing, although travelling is very troublesome in winter; and we set off together to go to that tribe .. These Petun people ("Ces peuples du Petun") plant maize, which is called by us Turkey corn, and have a fixed abode like the rest ('ont leur demeure arrestée comme les autres'). We visited seven other villages of their neighbours and allies .. they were beginning to build two villages where we passed, in the midst of the woods. .. These people live like the Attignouaatitans (' Attignouaatit_s') and have the same customs; they are near the Neutral nation ("sont proches de la natiō neutre" 1619, "sont proches de la nation neutre" 1632) .. two days' journey from them in a southerly direction, who produce a great quantity of tobacco "qui font grand nombre de Petun" (1619) "qui font grand nombre de petum" (1632) (III:94-96, 99; IV:278-9, 282).

The phrase "qui font (sont) grand nombre de Petun (petum)" is usually translated as "that produces a large amount of tobacco" (Otis in Grant 1907:304); "who make a great deal of tobacco" (Bourne 1922 I:102); "who produce a great quantity of tobacco" and "who produce a great deal of tobacco" (H. H. Langton in Champlain III:96, 99; IV:282). Nevertheless, these translations cannot be correct. When Champlain says the Neutral are (sont), he must referring to them as people, not plants. If plants were intended the appropriate term would be "quantité", not "nombre", as used by Sagard in mentioning a "grande quantité de très-bon petun" (Sagard 1865:148). Champlain is writing about people, not plants, and his phrase literally translates to say that the Neutrals are many Petun (people) (Garrad 1995:18-20). To be a "Petun" (person) therefore is not limited to one people or place, both the Petuns and Neutrals had them.

Champlain's use of upper and lower case upper case "P" is of interest. In the Champlain Society edition of Champlain's earlier works he consistently used the lower case 'p', as in "petum" and "pet_" to refer to the plant. He then used the upper case "Petun" three times in the 1619 account, in the first two instances certainly to refer to people (III:95). In the above phrase about the Neutral he again uses the upper case "Petun", confirming a meaning of "who are many Petun people".

In the 1632 edition of Champlain's works this argument fails. The upper case "Petun" is used only twice, the third usage of the word "Petun" of the 1619 edition being changed to "petum" in 1632 (IV:282). It is accepted however that much of the 1632 edition was the work of others than Champlain himself. It contains "significant suppressions and emendations" (Champlain III:xi-xii; IV:viii), and unexplained additions to and deletions from Champlain's original texts, sometimes inconsistently between the various editions and reprintings. The credibility of the changes made in the 1632 work have been seriously challenged and discussed by a number of writers for more than a century, most recently reviewed by Georges-Émile Ciguère (1973 I:i-xxi). Champlain visited the Petun only once, in 1616, and his account published in 1619 records this visit. He had no opportunity to obtain more information by a second visit, so the additional information proposed sixteen years later in the 1632 edition cannot be his.

Champlain's maps reflect the change in usage from petum (1616) to petun (1632) but both words, meaning the people, are given a lower case 'p'. This probably only indicates Champlain did not personally etch the plates.

Champlain's reason for associating his intended hosts with tobacco is not explained. Speculatively, it can be accepted that his journey was in response to an invitation likely accompanied by a gift of tobacco, this being "the manner of the country" (JR15:27). That Champlain might have interpreted this as an invitation to go to where the tobacco was grown, i.e. the Neutral country (Sagard 1939:158) is in accord with his expected absence for three months. Also to be considered is that his potential 'Petun' hosts were actually Neutrals, present in the Petun country. If he did expect to journey to a tobacco-growing area he was disappointed. Instead, he got no further than an area two days away where "maize, which is called ... Turkey corn" was the principal staple. It was there he learned that it was a separate group further south which he mentions for the first time as the Neutral nation who were the "Petun" (people). That his hosts in the Petun country were Neutrals is mentioned (Champlain III:94-101, IV:278-283).

The map Champlain prepared to accompany his 1619 edition was not finished, but was the basis of the completed 1632 map, "Carte de la Nouvelle France 1632". This map was accompanied by a "Table for Identification of Noteworthy Places on this Map" (Champlain VI:224-252). The table provides notations, keyed by letters and numbers, to the map, which cannot be other than substantially Champlain's work. These are followed by added unnumbered 'explanatory notes', the first of which reads:-

"Gens de Petun, c'est vne nation qui cultiue ceste herbe de laquelle ils font grand traffic avec les autres nations, ils ont de grands villages fermez de bois, & sement du bled d'Inde"

"The Tobacco People is a Tribe which cultivates this herb, in which they have a great trade with other tribes. They have large villages enclosed by tree trunks, and sow Indian corn" (Champlain VI:248).

This is the first mention of the Petun (people) growing and trading petun (the tobacco plant) associated with Champlain, but it is not what Champlain said in 1619. The 1632 'explanatory note' says the Petun were no longer one village; the "seven other villages of their neighbours and allies" (III:95; IV:279) had also become Petun; all (presumably) were now both growing and trading tobacco. The Petun now had "large villages enclosed by tree trunks". All this may well be true, but Champlain did not say this at the time he was there, and he had no further opportunity to observe the Petun personally. Would he have added information brought to him by later travellers? This is not impossible, but the subject of his books is his own travels and observations (Trudel 1973:309). There is no known instance of his adding information from later sources which amended his own writings.

Further, the most likely candidate for providing new information from personal observation before 1632 might be the Recollet Father de la Roche Daillon, who passed

through the Petun country in 1626 (Le Clercq 1881 I:264). But the inclusion of new Recollet information in a work that suppressed reference to the Recollet experience in New France, even deleting mention of Father Joseph le Caron (Champlain IV:278fn1), seems unlikely.

The unknown author of the `explanatory note' lacked Champlain's descriptive precision. The `explanatory note' says "fermez de bois" (enclosed by tree trunks), but Champlain wrote, of a Huron palisade, "clos & fermez de pallissades de bois à triple rang" ("enclosed and fortified by wooden palisades in three tiers (1619)/ rows (1632)"). Champlain had earlier attacked an Iroquois defensive palisade, and was obviously impressed enough to observe others closely and in detail (III:122; IV:301-302).

The impression left with the reader is that the `explanatory note' purportedly describing the Petun resulted from a too-hasty reading of the Huron description by someone else who lacked Champlain's depth of interest in and knowledge of the subject. The `explanatory note' has no reliable credibility, and does not reliably describe the Petun.

The supposed Petun "great trade with other tribes" requiring fields of tobacco is false. It was the Hurons who traded "large quantities" of tobacco to the Montagnais on the St. Lawrence (JR6:273), and the Neutrals to "their neighbours" (Sagard 1939:158).

Experimentation indicates that the degree of protection the young *Nicotiana Rustica* tobacco plant requires was such that it was grown in protected plots, not open fields (Garrad 1996). In 1724 Father Joseph François Lafitau described the limited, careful and sacred nature of tobacco growing in gardens even after a century of Christian missionary effort (Lafitau 1977 II:83). That this description equally applied to the Petun a century earlier would seem a most reasonable proposition. There may well have been some trade in it, but there is no reliable hint anywhere in the primary sources that the Petun were involved in growing tobacco to trade in "large quantities", or even that they themselves had grown the tobacco they had in their possession. Not impossibly, the Petun were the "neighbours" to whom the Neutrals traded tobacco. It seems probable that the greater the reverence in which tobacco was held, the more likely it would be grown in specially designed gardens, away from other crops (Goodman 1993:24).

That the Petun possessed tobacco is certain because tobacco residues have been found in smoking pipe-bowls on Petun archaeological sites. That it could be grown in the Petun homeland under limited and controlled conditions has been demonstrated (Garrad 1996). But the repeated assurance that they had "a great trade with other tribes" in tobacco they had themselves grown in fields is not supported by the primary literature, by experimentation, or considered probability. The careless acceptance of spurious sources, sustained by repetition, and supplemented by unjustified assumptions as to why the Petuns were so called, created a myth.

The Native Usage of Tobacco

The early European casual observers could not have known the extent that the native Indian people knew and exploited the narcotic, toxic and hallucinogenic properties of local plants in a religious context (Lafitau 1977 II:82-86). "The fact that hallucinogenic plants were sacred, and that the hallucination was a spiritual communication, meant that their consumption was strictly regulated. The responsibility of experiencing, and employing, an altered state of consciousness fell to the shaman, the most spiritually gifted vision seeker in Amerindian societies .. Being more spiritually adept than common visionaries, the shaman not only travelled extensively through the spirit world but also had access to many more spirits, particularly those helpful to mankind, than any one else. Access (by the shaman) to the supernatural world was through an altered state of consciousness, perceived by onlookers as a trance. These trances were induced primarily by ingesting hallucinogenic plants .. the plant used more than any other was tobacco. Tobacco's main function was to induce hallucinations in shamanistic rituals ... at the time of contact tobacco was valued primarily for its psychoactive powers". The type of tobacco native to North America was the potent *Nicotiana Rustica* (Goodman 1993:22-23, 25).

The primary literature contains examples of what might be termed the every-day, public use of tobacco by ordinary persons in personal worship and ceremony, in propitiation, in medical applications, and as gifts, when it was thrown onto the fire or into lakes and rivers, left in a special place, smoked in pipes, given to accompany an invitation, etc. Tobacco smoke was swallowed, inhaled, and blown out, sometimes over a sick patient. "For the tobacco shaman, however, the offering took the form of ingested tobacco which ... allowed contact to be made with the supernatural world". Such a process, involving trance, would require privacy and special facilities, the presence of assisting adepts and initiates, and the planned prior selection of observers and participants. These requirements would be best met by a secret Medicine Society, to which admission was controlled (Goodman 1993:26; Steckley 1985:13-17).

Petun Shamans and Sorcerers

That the Petun included sorcerers was reported on the very first contact, when Father Joseph le Caron accompanied Champlain to the Petun in 1616. While Champlain left a positive account of the visit, Le Caron reportedly suffered cruel ill-treatment from the Petun "at the instigation of their .. sorcerers and magicians" (Le Clercq 1881:106). The Jesuits regarded going to the Petuns and Neutrals as "combating .. against the demons" (JR18:247). The sorcery specialisations inventoried by Father Jean de Brébeuf in 1636, and Father Paul Ragueneau in 1648, such as controlling the weather, predicting future events, finding things that were lost, and healing the sick (JR 10:193.195; JR33:221), were probably conducted so publicly that the Jesuits could not but be aware of them. That neither observer mentioned tobacco shamanism, the induction of a trance state through hallucinogenic tobacco, does not mean it did not occur, but that it occurred privately, even secretly, certainly with the Jesuits excluded. Yet it was known to occur. The Huron expression *auhoirhie okihouanteni* implied "strong tobacco can induce a state of trance in which an individual either travels to meet an *oki* spirit or is possessed by one" (Steckley 1985:14). It is suggested that when the first French visitors, still welcome as

novelties who had not yet earned the distrust of their hosts, enquired of the Huron the name of the people west of the Nottawasaga River, they were shown tobacco, which the visitors recognized as petun, referring not to its cultivation and trade, but to the prominence with which tobacco was put to sacred use among the Petun shamans.

Conclusion

As the Nipissings (sorcerers) were so-called by the French "because they make a special profession of consulting their Manitou, or talking to the devil" (JR5:219), it is similarly concluded that the Petuns - the Tobacco Nation - were so called because of the extent of tobacco shamanism practised there. The Tobacco Nation were not so much tobacco growers, or tobacco traders, as tobacco users, in a highly specialised shamanic context.

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