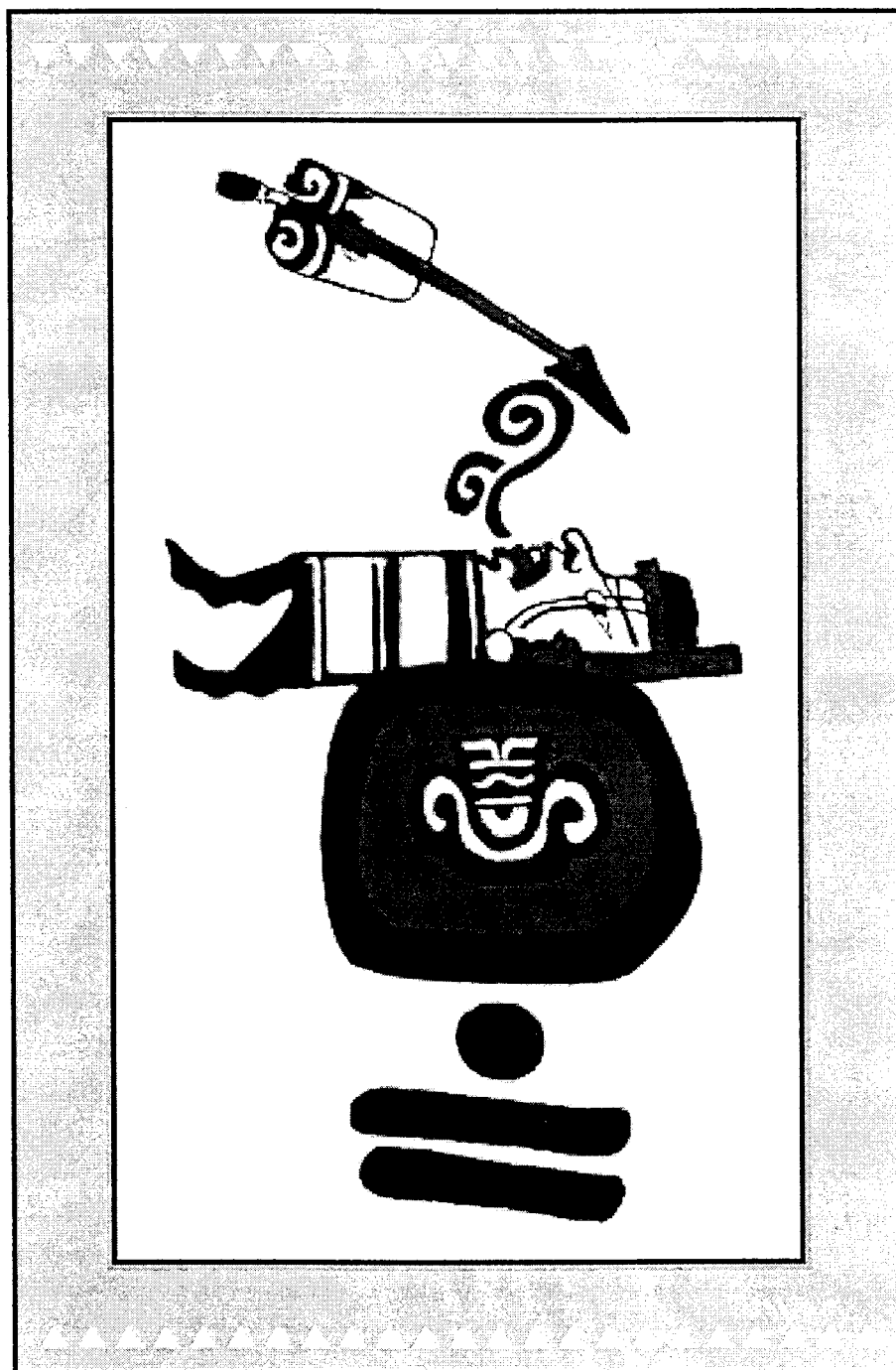


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**THE ÑUIÑE CODEX FROM THE
COLOSSAL NATURAL BRIDGE ON
THE NDAXAGUA:
AN EARLY PICTOGRAPHIC TEXT
FROM THE
COIXTLAHUACA BASIN**

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INTRODUCTION¹

The cultural legacy of the Coixtlahuaca Basin in northwestern Oaxaca consists, in part, of well-preserved examples of Archaic to Classic period rock paintings. A great number of these paintings can be found in rock shelters and caves in the relatively isolated northern portion of the Basin. The following paper describes and analyzes one group of paintings which seems particularly important because it constitutes one of the earliest, complete examples of indigenous writing from a little-known area of Southern Mexico. Furthermore, because the text or codex² is painted rather than sculpted, it is possible to reconsider the general notion that the tradition of codical painting, believed by some scholars to have developed during the post-Classic, is probably much older.

THE COLOSSAL "PUENTE NATURAL"

Over millions of years, the flowing water of the Ndaxagua³, also known as the Rosario river, has dissolved and eroded the Cretaceous limestones that constitute the north-northeastern boundary of the Coixtlahuaca Basin (Fig. 1). In the process, the stream has carved an enormous tunnel through one massive limestone block, the remnants of which can be seen where the stream enters the saddle formed between two mountains known locally as Cerro Tequelite and Cerro de la Escalera. Due primarily to fault-related changes in the small drainage basin's hydrology, what was once a resurgent stream as the Ndaxagua dropped out of the highlands into the canyon of the Xuquila River has become a steep, dry channel filled with large boulders. The saddle, together with the subterranean, dry stream channel below it, are regarded by the inhabitants as a "puente natural" or natural bridge uniting the two mountains. Resurgent streams

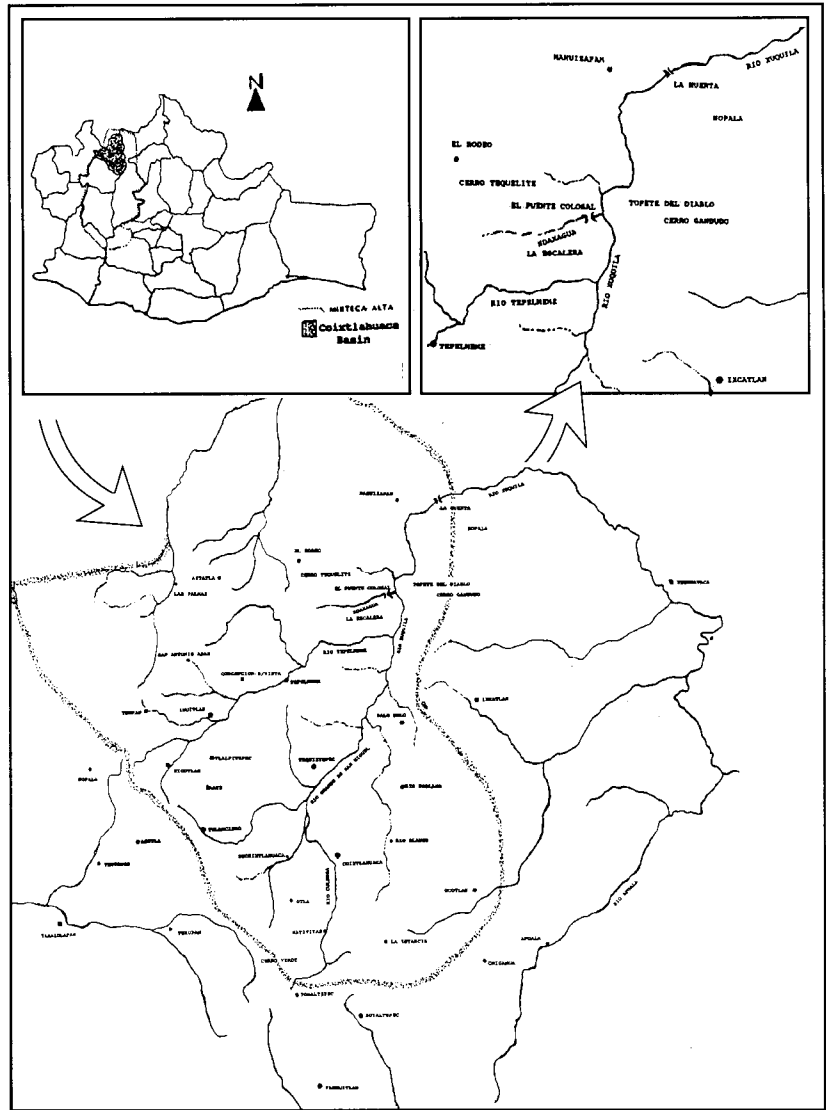


FIG. 1. The location of the Coixtlahuaca Basin in Oaxaca (upper left), its settlements and principal streams (bottom center) and the area of the Colossal Bridge on the Ndaxagua (upper right).

¹ Most of the material contained in this article was presented during the Symposium of the XVIII Maya Meetings at the University of Texas, Austin in March 1994 and previously in colloquia at the University of California, Berkeley (1991) and Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge (1992). This information constitutes part of the doctoral dissertation research on the historical cultural ecology of the Coixtlahuaca Basin.

² Among Mesoamerican scholars the term codex is used in reference to examples of indigenous writing which use pictographic conventions. The same pictographic conventions are often used for recording different kinds of information. The medium to which the paint is applied may vary and includes deer-skin hides, loosely woven cotton cloth, and both native and European paper. When stuccoed surfaces of tombs and buildings or rock walls have been painted or decorated using the same pictographic conventions employed in writing, the term "mural in codex style" is often used to describe the painted composition. Because the group of paintings about to be described appears intended to "narrate" an account using writing conventions, the terms codex or text seem appropriate and are used interchangeably throughout this paper.

³ The complete meaning of Ndaxagua has been lost. Nda is the Chocho word for water or river.

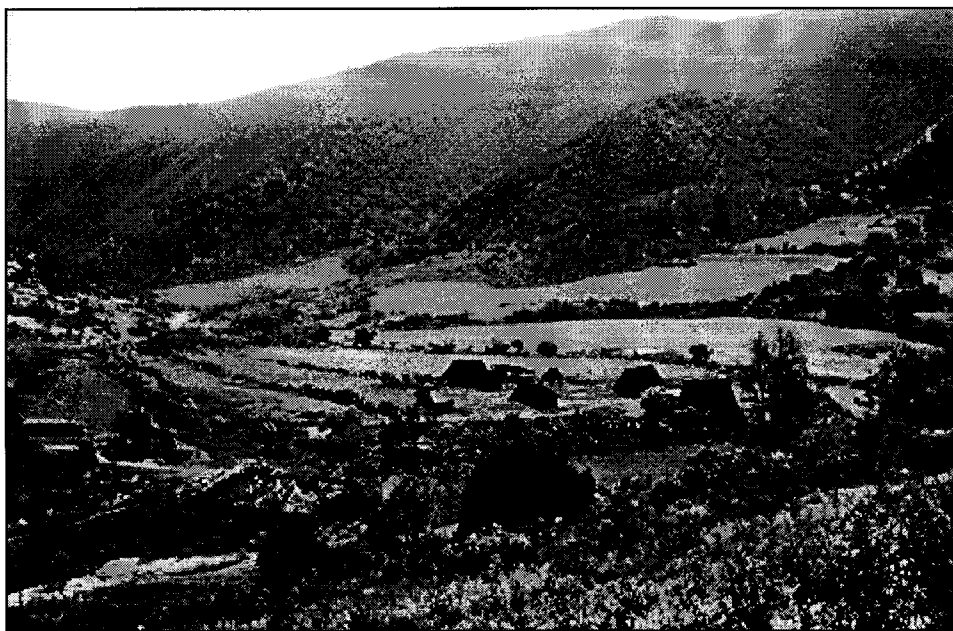


FIG. 2. The fertile valley and the hamlet on the upper Ndaxagua.

and the caves or bridges, found associated with them, are landforms that occur where weathering of limestone rock is advanced. Such limestones are described as cockpit karst.

THE NDAXAGUA

The Ndaxagua lies within the municipal boundaries of the village of Tepelmeme, in the ex-District of Coixtlahuaca. The stream is part of the Xuquila-Río Hondo drainage of the Upper Papaloapan Basin system. Along its headwaters, the Ndaxagua presents a meandering channel which drains a small valley (Fig. 2). The valley floor has accumulated approximately four meters of alluvium on which a few families practice subsistence agriculture. This reach of the stream usually contains water well into the dry season. The valley rapidly narrows as the stream enters the canyon leading to the colossal bridge. In sharp contrast to its headwaters, the channel straightens and its gradient rapidly increases as it nears "El Puente Colossal" and its confluence with the Xuquila River.

Rapid runoff from the steep canyon walls in combi-

nation with the displacement by either uplifting or downdropping of different limestone blocks along its course have produced a straight and narrow channel with a steep gradient in the reach of the stream proximal to the tunnel. The waters of this now underfit stream formerly flowed into the remaining block of limestone from the west. Very large boulders are exposed in the channel bed, even inside the tunnel. However, because the stream is underfit, it transports sands and coarse

gravel only when highly localized thunderstorms occur during the rainy season.

A CAVE WITH TWO ENTRANCES

Throughout its length the subterranean channel maintains a west to east orientation, forming a cave with an opening at each end. The dimensions of the western opening and the majority of the tunnel is approximately 50 m high, 50 m wide and 250 m long (Fig 3). The eastern opening is vertically elongated and is approximately 90 m high (Fig. 4). The western opening, into which the stream flowed



FIG. 3. View of the Colossal Bridge from the southwestern slopes of Cerro Escalera as the Ndaxagua nears the cave's western entrance. (photograph courtesy of Edgar Mendoza).

at one time, is approximately at 1740 m elevation; while the opening that marks the stream's exit is close to 100 m below that. The difference in elevation is due to the significant drop in the channel's gradient associated with the displacement of the limestone block, as the stream is fault-controlled over much of its lower course.

A great number of rock paintings can be seen on the exposed rock walls both inside the cave and by each of the openings. Since the styles of the paintings differ, one can infer a considerable time depth for the use of the cave. It appears that this underground passageway with a double entrance has been revered since the Archaic. The rarity and significance of this passageway leading from the lowlands of southern Puebla into the highland Coixtlahuaca Basin is further accentuated by the dramatic change in vegetation which occurs at about the elevation where this natural landform is located. A deciduous thorn forest association with a few columnar cacti yields to a more mesic oak-dwarf bamboo association at about 1780 m elevation. At greater elevations, the dwarf bamboo is gradually replaced by an oak-palm forest.



FIG. 4. View of "El Puente" from the Topete del Diablo on Cerro Gandudo on an early morning of the rainy season. The cave's eastern opening appears in the center. Cerro Escalera (left) and Cerro Tequelite (right) are connected by this natural bridge.

THE PAINTED TEXT

Located on the southern wall, by the cave's western opening, is one of the largest early painted texts ever found in Mesoamerica (Fig. 5). The text from Ndaxagua is also unique because most extant examples of recorded information of the late Formative to early Classic periods for the region consist of calendar dates sculpted on either stone or clay, or engraved on shell or bone objects. Until now, ex-

amples of early writing, in the form of a running text, had not been reported in this area of Oaxaca; nor had painted texts been described for the Coixtlahuaca Basin and the neighboring Mixteca Baja.

Furthermore, the examples of writing found in the neighboring Mixteca Baja consist of sculpted stone assemblages, most of which have been displaced from their original positions (Moser, 1977:136).



FIG. 5. The complete Nuñe codex on the south wall near the western cave opening.

Consequently, interpreting these sculpted hieroglyph units in a proper sequence or within a broader semantic context is greatly hampered. In contrast, the complete text of El Puente, consisting of four vertical hieroglyph units arranged along a horizontal axis and painted with black, red and white pigments, unambiguously conveys the direction in which it is to be read⁴. By understanding its syntax, the text could serve as a model or a template to aid the correct reconstruction of texts from disassembled or partially destroyed stone monuments, and thus facilitate their epigraphic analysis.

A DESCRIPTION OF THE HIEROGLYPH UNITS

The two footprints together with the gen-



FIG. 6. The first hieroglyph unit of the painted text with the two bars at the bottom representing numeral ten, the cartouche-enclosed owl's face and the burning offering to the masked deity in the upper left.

eral arrangement, orientation and character of the hieroglyph units enable the observer to derive the sequence or progression intended by the artist of the painted text. The text, which we have designated as

Southern Group III, seems intended to be read from left to right, as the observer approached the cave's western opening, as if emerging from the cave.

The first three glyph units are characterized by a calendric component, consisting of a numeral associated with a day-glyph enclosed in a cartouche. The numeral system employed consists of dots and bars, each dot representing one unit and bars representing units of five.

When the numerals

1-13 are used in combination with the cartouche-enclosed day-glyph, the basic calendric system can be used in naming either days or individuals.

Above each of the first three glyph units are modifiers depicting certain events which in context contribute to the overall understanding of the principal and final action implied by the text. Also on the same wall, a few meters away, is a life-size naked male figure standing some 160 cm tall. We have designated this figure and the paintings associated with it as Southern Group II.

Vestiges of an earlier painted record depicting an altogether different composition appear above and below the text and male figure. The earlier paintings are characteristically geometric in design and were done with a red pigment.

The first hieroglyph unit (Fig. 6), done in black paint, consists of the numeral ten, in the form of two bars, immediately below a cartouche which encloses the frontal view of a night bird. Although

⁴ Winter (1994:213) briefly mentions this group of paintings and provides an incomplete sketch.



the upper section with the large eyes bears a general resemblance to an owl, the whiskers of the lower section are characteristic of nightjars (*Caprimulgidae*)⁵. Immediately above the cartouche, smoke

billows from a vase. The dimensions (height by width) of this unit are 160 cm by 35 cm. The frontal view of a masked face with what seems to represent a winged headdress can be seen in the upper left, separated from the billowing smoke by a small crevasse on the rock wall. The lower jaw is missing although there seem to be at least two dark elongated stains, suggestive of a bifid tongue projecting from the mouth below and under the rock ledge. The vis-

ible upper section of the mouth suggests a thick-lipped Cocijo-like figure⁶. Cocijo was regarded as the rain-god in most of Southern Mexico during the late Formative and Classic periods (400 B.C.- A.D. 700 A.D.) and is often represented as having a bifid tongue and buccal mask. During the Post-Classic (A.D. 1200 - 1520) representations of the rain-god from the Coixtlahuaca Basin and the Mixteca resemble the goggle-eyed Tlaloc more common to Central Mexico.

The bottom of the second hieroglyph unit consists of another cartouche enclosing what appears to be a corn kernel or celt which rests on a shallow concave support with volutes or curling

ends⁷ (Fig. 7). Below it is the numeral eleven consisting of two bars with a dot centered above them. The inside of the cartouche is red and the kernel or celt-like element is set on a white U-shaped form with

black-outlined volutes at each end. The kernel or celt element closely resembles glyph C described in the cultural material of the Zapotec of the valley of Oaxaca.

Above the cartouche there is a supine anthropomorphic figure in profile from whose mouth emerges a double sound or speech scroll. The scroll is directed at the projectile located immediately above the figure, which is falling at a 45 degree angle towards a point just above the reclining figure's head. The projectile has a black point, while the shaft is



FIG. 7. The second hieroglyph unit records the day 11 Rain of the sacred 260-day calendar. The calendric version of glyph C appears enclosed by the cartouche. The reclining figure shouts at the projectile falling towards him.

⁵ As a day sign, the owl's face is classified as glyph F (Caso, 1965b:935).

⁶ Representations of Cocijo often include a buccal mask and a headdress consisting of a band with a tri-lobed element at each end and tassels emerging from a central glyph enclosed by a cartouche. Oftentimes, the glyph associated with Cocijo is glyph C. The drawing seems incomplete since it does not have the characteristic headdress or mandible.

⁷ The approximate dimensions of the second glyph unit (height by width) are 175 cm by 92 cm.

red and the feathers on the fletching are unusually ornate. Closing the space above the projectile is a band outlined with red pigment which probably predates the hieroglyphic unit whose artist chose to leave intact.

The figure appears to be tied and has a white attire decorated with three double black lines. No arms or hands are visible. The two legs are painted black and resemble

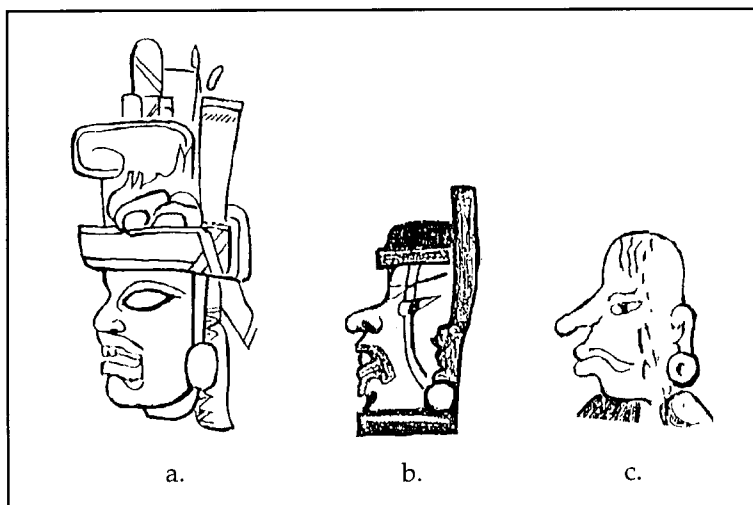


FIG. 8. Faces from an Olmec celt (a) and the anthropomorphic figures painted on the southern wall of the cave (b-c).

the hindquarters of an ungulate, like the collared peccary (*Tayassu tajacu*).

Only the left side of the face is depicted. The partially open mouth, with protruding tongue is drawn as in a grimace and outlined in red. The left upper incisor is distinctly painted white. The eye is oblique and the nose is remarkably long. The

left ear is painted red and a white earspool can be seen below the earlobe. Two black parallel stripes run from the headband across the eye and down the cheek, stripes commonly used to portray the god Xipe⁸. The facial stripes join at the earspool.

The red band around the head joins behind it with a narrow, rectangular head piece of the same color that protrudes above. The head, headdress and general attitude of the face resemble the engraving from the black slate celt from Simojovel, Chiapas (Fig. 8; Coe, 1965:747), also identified as being from Tapijulapa (Caso, 1965b:932). However, the figure does not resemble any of the "Danzantes" at Monte Albán.

The third glyph unit is the largest and most complex (Fig. 9). The dimensions of this glyph unit are 250 cm by 140 cm. At the bottom of the unit, and corresponding to the numerical coefficient associated with the previous two units, is a large circle surrounded by eight smaller circles. This appears to be the convention used for the numeral one as described by Winter and Urcid (1990). Two of the hieroglyphs from the group of paintings located on the northern wall of the eastern cave entrance have a similar numerical coefficient and would correspond to the days 1 Snake and 1 Alligator⁹ (Fig. 10).



FIG. 9. The third hieroglyph unit in the text records the day in which people from the "place of the mountain with the masked mortuary bundle of Xipe" set out to the "place of the plain of the snake" indicated by the footprints leading down from the mountain in the direction of the next hieroglyph unit.

⁸ As a day sign, Xipe is usually depicted as a head rather than in full body. He corresponds to glyph P (Caso, 1965b:931-947).

⁹ The glyph for 1 Alligator is the first number and day sign combination of the 260-day sacred calendar. The lance or projectile stuck through it, which in most contexts implies conquest, could be interpreted as emphasizing the importance of this day since it "anchors" the calendric system. The late Classic stela from Guadalupe Santa Ana portrays a similar projectile traversing a date (Caso, 1965a:858, 861).

The cartouche encloses a highly abstract motif which resembles a vessel with a sinuous flame-like motif painted white and outlined in black against a red background. Both the vessel and flame are decorated with internal parallel lines that outline their shapes. Small short cylindrical shapes interrupt the lines in the vessel, while small rings interrupt the lines in the flame. The motif resembles glyph N (Urcid, personal communication, 1993). However, most early representations of glyph N usually consist of a pair of compact and rather short elements that lack the freedom and tongue-like appearance of the motif we see in this cartouche-enclosed glyph (Fig. 11).

Above the cartouche is a mountain glyph with a diagonal band and angular corners. Resting on the mountain glyph is an object which is difficult to identify because the painting is partially destroyed. The object resembles a masked mortuary bundle in profile with two parallel double stripes that make a 45 degree angle with the top of the mountain glyph. The bundle's bands appear as a mirror image of the diagonal band of the mountain glyph. Three circular elements decorate a band that runs vertically along the left side of the bundle. The two circles at the ends of the band are painted white and have a red center, while the middle circle is red and has a black center. A parted, palmate leaf with sharp sinuses, whose shape suggests an aroid, is attached to the headband. The stem rises a short distance and then gently curves so that the drooping lamina of the leaf appears in front view to the left of the bundle. Red pigment may be seen along the inside of the stem from the point of union with the bundle through the midrib of the leaf¹⁰.

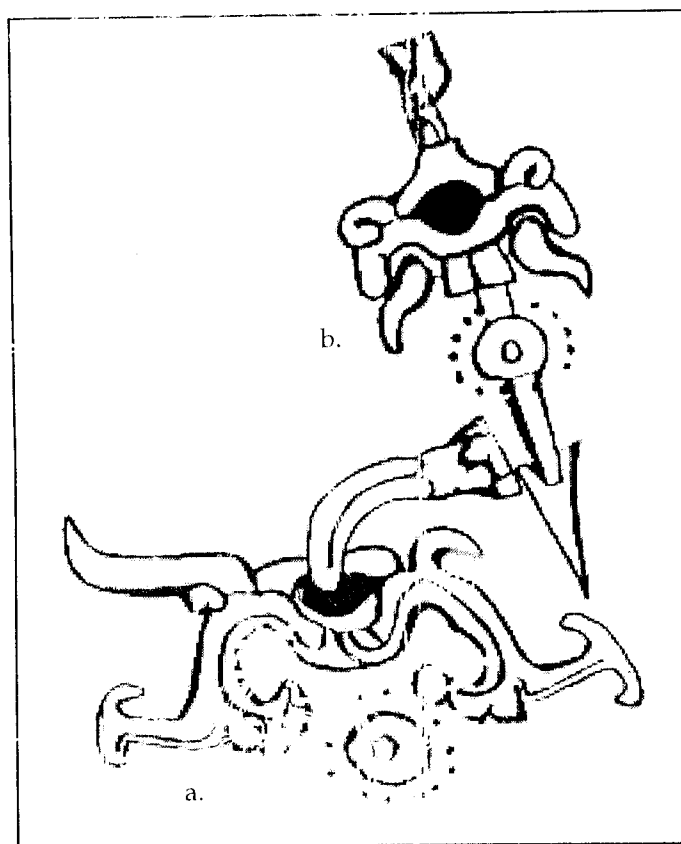


FIG. 10. The sacred days I Snake (a) and I Alligator (b) painted on the northern wall near the eastern cave opening.

A double-winged element with a comb-like crest and resembling a stylized flower seen in cross-section through the calyx rests directly upon the bundle. Connected to it and directly above is a circinate element that in cross-section resembles the inner spiral of a conch shell. At the tip of each of its radial rib protrusions are small circular elements with white centers, conventionally used to represent water drops. Inside and associated with all but one of the radial ridge protrusions is a bisected ovate element, possibly representing leaves.

Because the ovate elements could be depicting leaves, the spiral element might represent an

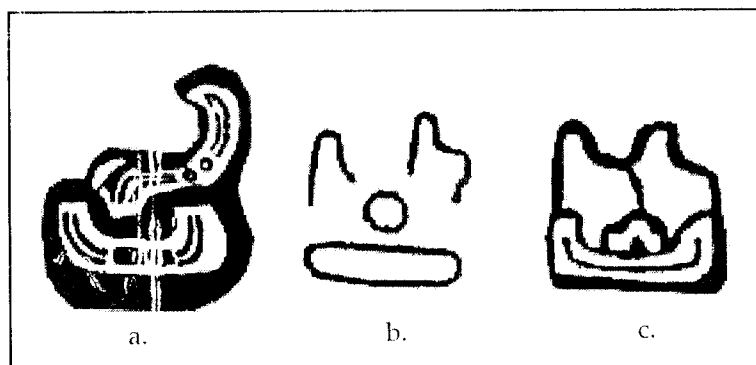


FIG. 11. Glyph N from the third hieroglyph unit (a) and examples from carved stone monuments at Monte Albán (b-c).

unfolding tendril, although such an icon has not yet been identified in other Nuiñe materials. A third possibility is that the spiral element represents flowing water. A comparison with examples which depict flowing water suggests that this is a plausible

¹⁰ Urcid (1994:63, fig.6) recently reported on two loose fragments of a stone monument located along the western side of Building J at Monte Albán (MA-J-53). The carving depicts a human head associated with a leaf not unlike that found emerging from the side of the bundle of hieroglyph unit III.

connotation for this glyph. Figure 12 illustrates the convention used for representing flowing water on engraved stones from Miltepec and Tequixtepec del

Two footprints with four toes each are shown descending from the mountain glyph in the direction of the fourth glyph which is an exquisitely conceived coiled, decorated rattlesnake¹² (Fig. 13). Two ornaments consisting of a tassel and a leaf-shaped nasal appendage suggest that it is a snake of great importance. The two footprints seem to indicate that the snake represents a toponym, i.e. the "place of the snake", to which the action of walking is directed. The snake could be an early reference to the place of the "plain of the snake" or Coixtlahuaca. According to the record found in the early colonial painted manuscripts from the area, this is the name by which the principal village and region have been known at least since the beginning of the post-Classic period (ca. A.D. 1100).

Standing some 500 cm behind the snake, at the point which would mark the threshold of the western entrance of the tunnel, is a life-size figure of a naked man painted in red pigment (Fig. 14). Although the man is not part of the text, it is not clear whether he was intended to contribute meaning to it or not. Even though his rendition is very naturalistic as compared to the more rigid forms prevalent in the text, the face is similar in style to that of the anthropomorphic reclining figure of the second hieroglyphic unit and is probably of the same period (Fig. 8b-c). The

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¹¹ In Classic and post-Classic contexts, water drops and jade or green stone beads are metaphorically equivalent and convey a connotation of preciousness to the object they are associated with. In the case of the text, these seem to be allusions to the precious nature of both the circinate element and sound scroll.

¹² The dimensions of this hieroglyph unit are 130 cm by 124 cm. By comparison the snake glyph from the cave's eastern entrance (Fig. 10) is only 17 by 33 cm in size. It has a double tassel and what appear to be two bifid tongues. However, it does not present the leaf nose ornament or the everted snout of the snake in the text.

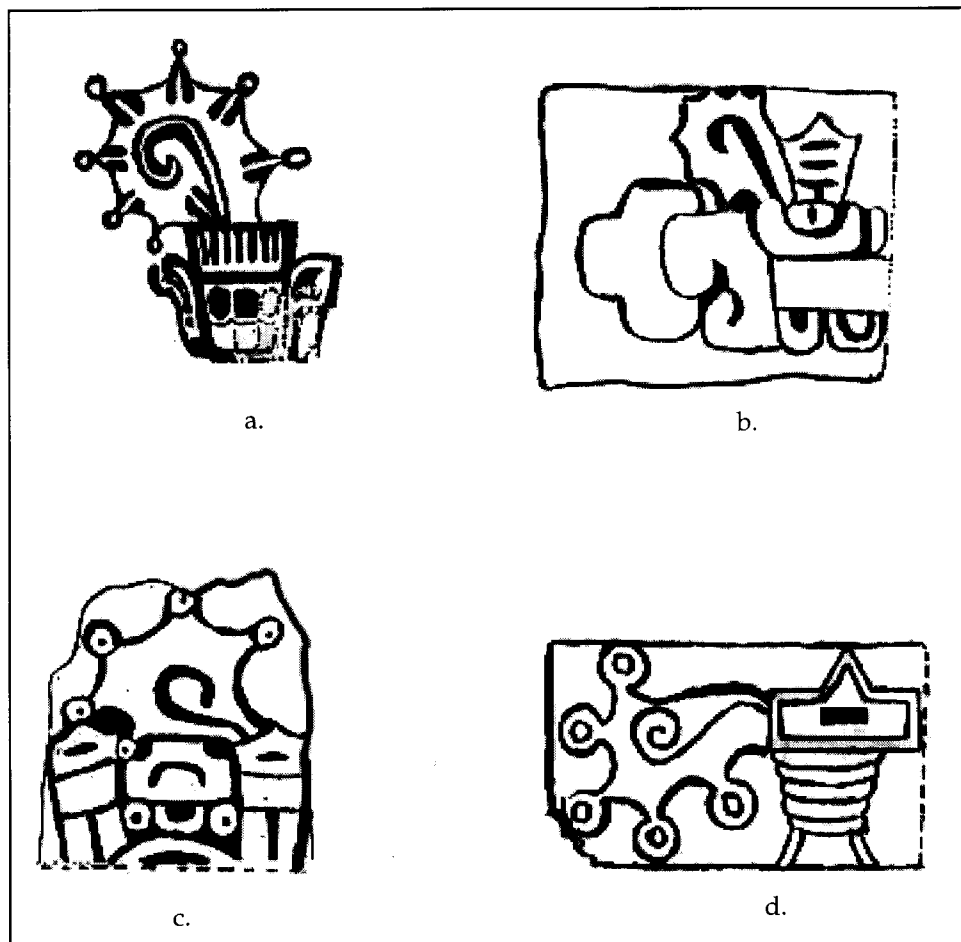


FIG 12. The glyph depicting flowing water in the painted text (a) and on carved stone monuments from Mitepec (b), Tequixtepec del Rey (c) and Huajuapán (d).

Rey (Moser, 1977:38-39, 48-49; Joyce, 1994:74) and the Dupaix drawing of a Nuiñe stone sculpture from Huajuapán (Paddock, 1966:198; Moser 1977 27-29). However, these examples lack the ovate elements associated with the water droplets.

Another component of the glyph unit is a thick sinusoidal line which rises from the right upper end of the bundle using the scroll convention which represents sound. The sound scroll is decorated at two points along its length by a pair of small rings similar in appearance to the water droplets described earlier¹¹. Particularly relevant to completing our understanding of the encoded meaning, would be the identification of the "sled-like" container or bundle which rests on the top of the sound scroll.

proportions and freedom with which the naked man's body has been depicted resembles those found among some of the "danzantes" from Monte Albán.

Like the supine figure discussed above, only

the left side of the man can be seen. He wears an ear spool and leg-band ornaments on each leg close to the ankles. His erect penis bleeds profusely and the



ejecting liquid might be confused with a man urinating if it were not for the gravity of his predicament, for his hands are bound behind his back and he bleeds similarly from a wound at his side¹³. His cheeks are also bleeding. A wide red stain also covers the area underneath his neck, suggesting a cut across the throat as in an intended decapitation. However, blood flow from this area would be profuse and appears less discrete than that from the smaller wounds on the penis and side respectively. The penis and oversized testicles have been placed in front of the leg rather than at the intersection of the two legs. The mouth is drawn back and the general expression of the face is that of an impassive sacrificial victim. Another strange feature is the exaggerated long nose. The hair has been rendered by four wavy lines.

Below the figure is a flat pedestal that appears to have been cut into the rock where someone could have either stood or deposited offerings. In front of the figure, beginning at the same level as the

lower thorax and extending upwards to the level of the lips is a stenciled impression of an extended forearm and left hand. Immediately below it is a rather crude flower made up of four petals divided in half. The arm and hand appear to be older than the naked man, while the flower appears to be a recent addition to the composition, although it is uncertain how recent. Above are draping wavy lines possibly dating to an earlier period and reminiscent of the very early geometric figures found about 5 m to the west along the same wall (Southern Group I).

THE AGE OF THE ÑUIÑE CODEX

Even though the sample of early paintings from the southern Mexican Highlands is small and a systematic study of known paintings is lacking, we



FIG. 13. The magnificent coiled rattlesnake to which the footprints lead is probably an early reference to the "plain of the snake".

have attempted to provide an approximate age for the cave paintings as well as to interpret their meaning. The age of the text was inferred on the basis of comparing styles and themes found in other areas of Mesoamerica. Dating on this basis is a standard procedure in archaeology and iconography, as it allows the broader contextural framework to emerge and the inconsistencies in previous interpretations

¹³ Blood and semen are often considered synonymous substances in Mesoamerica. In the present context, where the bound individual is making the supreme sacrifice by giving up his most precious life-fluid, the same metaphor applies.



FIG. 14. The penitent, bleeding naked man and the stenciled arm and hand on the south wall. The crude flower to the left appears to be more recent graffiti.

and conclusions to be revealed and discussed.

The painted account from the "Puente Natural" at Ndaxagua probably dates to the transitional period between the Late Formative to Early Classic (200 B.C.-A.D. 300) of which virtually nothing is known for the Coixtlahuaca Basin area. That the cartouche and numeral constitute the basis for early writing in the Coixtlahuaca Basin is not surprising since this convention appears to be widespread throughout a broad area that includes most of Oaxaca and Classic period sites in the states of Morelos, Puebla, Chiapas and Veracruz. The use of these conventions in the Coixtlahuaca area is generally attributed to the Nuiñe, the Classic period regional cultural manifestation believed to have been centered in what is today the Mixteca Baja (Paddock, 1966:176-195; 1983:208-211;

1989; Moser 1977; 1983:211-213; Winter, 1991b:147-162; 1994:211, 213). Regionally, this time period is poorly understood even in the Mixteca Baja, the proposed cultural core area, where only one site has been systematically excavated (Winter, 1991a; 1992; 1994:214-216).

The prevailing idea is that Nuiñe elites either borrowed or shared some writing conventions and other cultural materials, such as anthropomorphic urns, with the Zapotec from the valley of Oaxaca during Monte Albán IIIa which corresponds to A.D. 300-500 (Winter, 1991b:154-155; Joyce, 1994:66; Winter, 1994:204,211). However, Marcus (1992:120) considers that the carved inscriptions on the stone monuments from San Martín Huamelulpan, a village in the Mixteca Alta just to the south of Coixtlahuaca, which have been placed chronologically between Late Monte Albán I and Monte Albán II (200 B.C.-A.D. 300), already contain hieroglyphs in the style of the Zapotec calendar.



During the post-Classic, bar notation was discontinued in the Coixtlahuaca Basin as it was in the rest of the Mixteca Alta, the Baja and the Costa¹⁴. However, it continued to be used among the neighboring peoples of the Cañada de Cuicatlan and the valley of Oaxaca until the early Colonial period.

By comparing the style of several of the

hieroglyphs from the text to the representations found on cultural material from the valley of Oaxaca, we have attempted to establish an approximate age for the painted text. For this purpose we have se-

¹⁴ Another example of discontinued use is the substitution of the day-sign Owl for House at the end of the Classic in the Coixtlahuaca Basin and the rest of the Mixteca. For a recent comment on this substitution see Urcid (1992:I:147, fnt. 21, p.362-363).

lected to compare the style of: a) glyph C; b) the mountain glyph; c) the representations of snakes found at "El Puente".

DATING BASED ON GLYPH C

One of the best known icons from Monte Albán and the valley of Oaxaca is glyph C. It has been used as an indicator of different periods or phases of occupation in the region¹⁵. While representations of glyph C within an epigraphic-calendric context are rare, they occur frequently in noncalendric contexts where they are found in the headdress of clay effigy vessels representing Cocijo, the rain god.

The representation of glyph C in association with the rain god has been treated briefly by Paddock (1966:134-135) and more elaborately by Schuler-Schömgig (1970:28-29). An example of non-calendric use of glyph C is the elaborate representation that can be seen in the headdress of a Cocijo urn at Museum für Völkerkunde, Berlin (Fig. 15a, Cat. # 24094). The urn is considered representative of Monte Albán IIIa style (300-500 A.D.; Schuler-Schömgig, 1970:35). A thermoluminescence date range of 74 B.C.- 690 A.D. is reported for this urn (Schuler-Schömgig, 1987:II:63) which places it generally within the Classic, but unfortunately does not improve our resolution.

The example of Glyph C which constitutes the central element of the headdress of Cocijo Urn # 5 presently exhibited in the Frissell Museum of Zapotec Art (Fig. 15b) is again a more elaborate form than the example from Ndaxagua. Although of unknown provenience, the urn has been placed chronologically within the Transition Phase (Monte Albán IIIa-IIIb; 600-700 A.D.). The glyph was one of those treated by Leigh (1966:256-269) as the Zapotec glyph C, which he made equivalent to the day sign water for periods II and Transición (IIIa), although he also considered it to be the day sign alligator during periods II and IV (*ibid.* p. 263).

In a recent study on the evolution of Zapotec writing, Urcid (1992:I,II) proposes a reclassification of the day-glyphs by securing their position in the Zapotec calendar. He further determines that Leigh's

classification of Glyph C is based on what are actually two different day-signs from their incipient forms (*ibid.* v. I: 140-141) and confirms that the stylistic sequence proposed by Caso and Bernal (1952) is correct. Finally, he correlates the calendrical versions of Leigh's water glyph to the nineteenth day position which corresponds to the rain god Cocijo on the Zapotec calendar (Urcid, 1992:I:142). He places the known examples of the calendric glyph C in a chronological context; however none of these appear to be identical to the one in the text from El Puente (*ibid.*:II:157).

Although he does not discuss it and apparently does not distinguish between calendric and non-calendric use, Leigh (1966:259, 261) believes

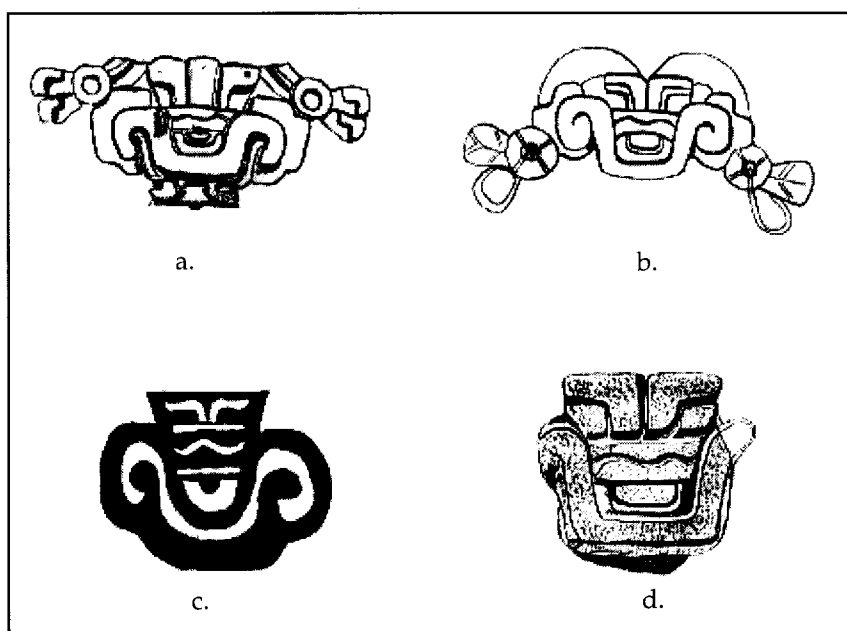


FIG. 15. Glyph C in the painted text (c) and examples found on ceramic effigy vessels from the Valley of Oaxaca representing different periods: Monte Albán II-IIIa (d) and Monte Albán IIIa (a-b).

that glyph C is set on the U-form with volutes during the transitional period from Monte Albán II and III, and that it is during this time period that the "double streams", resembling streamers with tassels flowing out in opposite directions, were added. He further states that during IIIa, teeth were added immediately below the supporting U-form. The form of glyph C with one tassel, as represented on two stone monuments, Stela I (Marcus, 1983:327) and Md. II-1 (Urcid, 1994b:70), belongs to the later period Monte Albán IIIa-IIIb.

¹⁵ Caso (1965b:941) proposes that Glyph C on pottery urns first appears during the transition period between Monte Albán II and IIIa.

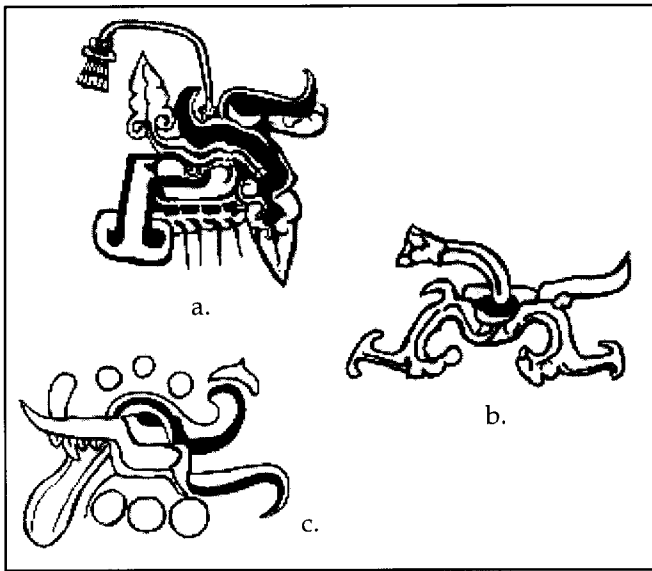


FIG. 16. Snake representations from El Puente (a-b) and Oxtotitlan, Guerrero (c). For the purpose of illustration, the representation of "b" has been reversed.

Glyph C in the second hieroglyph unit from "El Puente" is within a calendric-epigraphic context (Fig. 15c). It is identical to that found on a clay fragment collected by Seler at Cacique, Etla (Fig. 15d), although it is improbable the example was used within a calendric context. The style of glyph C on the fragment is considered representative of the transitional phase between Monte Albán II and IIIa (Cat. #35368; Schuler-Schömg, 1970:33). The representation of this glyph at "El Puente" also suggests an early date, either Monte Albán II (200 B.C.-A.D.100), the transition between periods II and IIIa (A.D. 200-350, Paddock 1966:12) or early IIIa. These periods correspond roughly to the Ramos Phase, or Ramos-Las Flores transition of the Mixteca Alta, and could eventually correlate with a yet undefined Late Nūdee, the transition between Nūdee and Nūiñe, and an early Nūiñe Phase for the Mixteca Baja (Winter, 1994:204).

On the basis of style, and because it appears to be less elaborate and lacks both tassel elements and teeth, the rendition of glyph C from "El Puente" was probably painted between 200 B.C. and 300 A.D.

Dating based on the evolution of the Mountain Glyph

Another well-known motif used as part of many locatives or place signs is the mountain glyph. The third hieroglyph unit at "El Puente" contains the mountain glyph characterized by a rectangular platform with a shorter elevated center and diagonal bands. Except for the lack of tripartite finials, the

representation is virtually identical to the way the carved stone monuments known as "conquest slabs" from Building J at Monte Albán depict several conquered places. These monuments are attributed to the period of Monte Albán II (150 B.C.- A.D. 150).

The representations of the mountain glyph or the contexts in which it is portrayed during later periods presents marked differences to the example from the cave. Stone monuments on the South Platform of Monte Albán record several period IIIa scenes on stone monuments believed to relate the inauguration of a lord named 12 Jaguar (Marcus 1993:325). The mountain glyph on two of these monuments, the Estela Lisa and Stela 8, both purportedly from period IIIa, exhibit rounded corners and lack the angular parallel lines that characterize earlier representations.

The banded rectangular mountain glyph on a stone monument from Etla also resembles that of hieroglyph unit III at "El Puente" (Caso, 1965a:861, fig. 23). The monument was probably carved sometime between Monte Albán periods IIIb and IV, which corresponds to the end of the Classic. The prevailing view is that this time period is characterized by the reutilization of earlier motifs. Although the mountain glyph seems identical to that of the painted text, other elements in the carving, such as an elaborate owl¹⁶ and the personage with the step-fret snake headdress suggest a late date for the Etla stone.

Dating based on the representation of the Snake

There are no reported painted representations of snakes for periods I and II at Monte Albán. The snakes from "El Puente" bear a striking resemblance to the Formative period small snake painted at Oxtotitlan, Guerrero (Fig. 16)¹⁷. The snake in the fourth hieroglyph unit is done in a style whose compact and neat composition resembles the incised decoration of Formative period ceramics from Central Mexico and the Early Classic (period IIIa) examples from Monte Albán (Caso and Bernal, 1965:883-884). However, carved stone examples of

¹⁶ The representation of the owl seems relatively more elaborate than that of the first hieroglyph unit.

¹⁷ The snake from Oxtotitlan measures approximately 20 cm in length. It has been identified as a Cipactli or Alligator, although it has also been suggested to represent a primitive plumed serpent (Grove 1990:540-541). The element on the upper right resembles a stylized rattle. Note that there appears to be a leaf nose ornament on the slightly everted snout.

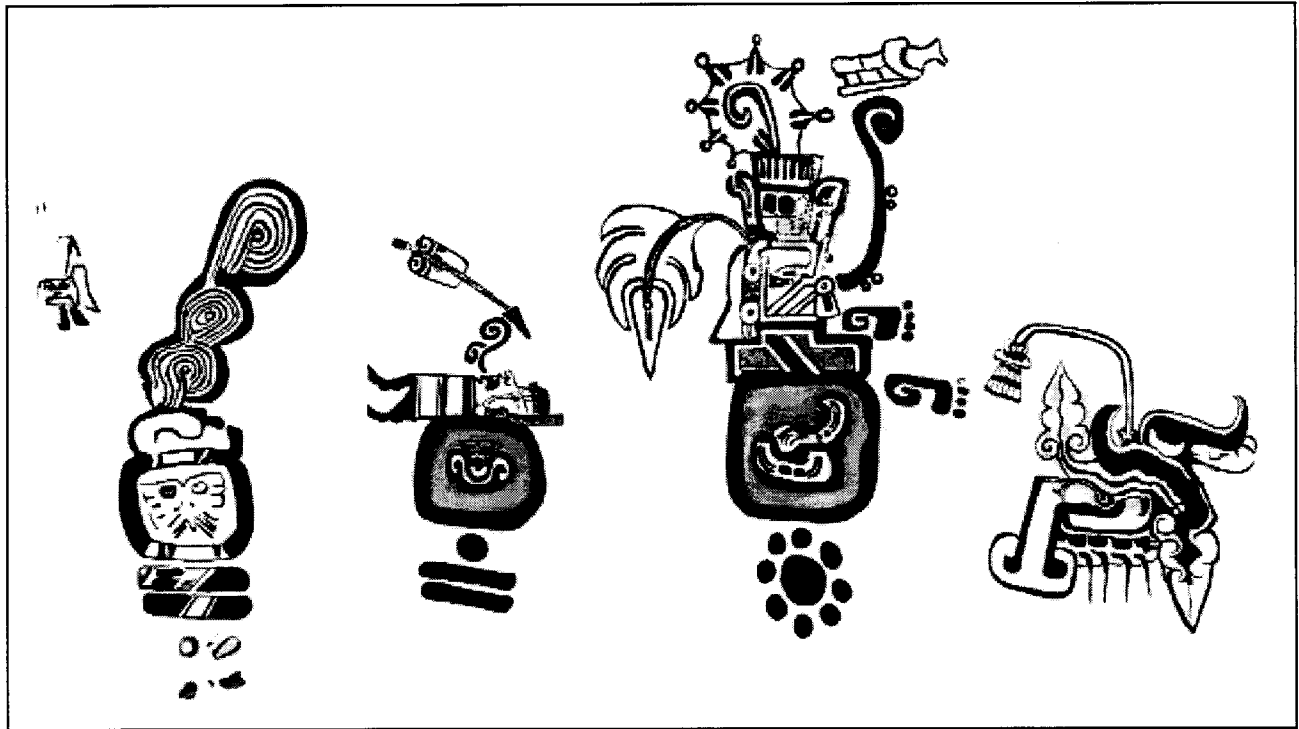


FIG. 17. A drawing of the complete text.

period IIIa and IIIb appear very different from the snake representations at "El Puente". Stela I, belonging to a late period IIIa, shows a rather elaborate rattlesnake supporting a one-tasseled glyph C on its head (Marcus, 1993:327). Other examples which purport to represent snakes include a stone sculpture (Caso, 1965a:857, fig.18), the headdress of the figure on the stone monument from Etla (ibid. p. 861, fig.23) and the headdress on the figure of the mural painting on the north wall of Tomb 104 at Monte Albán (ibid. p.865, fig.28). Rather than representations of snakes, these highly stylized examples appear to allude to the wind god. The only similarity they share with the snake on the cave wall is the deflected or everted upper jaw. The bifid tongue, rattle, leaf-nose ornament and tassel are lacking in all three examples.

On the basis of our analysis and comparison of the style of three different elements, it appears that the text could have been painted between 200 B.C. and A.D. 300. Given the small sample size of known Nuiñe paintings and cultural materials obtained from controlled archaeological contexts, this date range is only tentative. Additional information about regional cultural interaction between the Coixtlahuaca Basin and the valley of Oaxaca is necessary to further refine our interpretations of these and other materials ascribed to the Nuiñe. Nonethe-

less, the text is an early example of codex style painting, which has generally been regarded a post-Classic period development. A painted text such as this, found in a conspicuous location, could have been appropriated as the prototype for the codices painted on deerskin hide during the post-Classic period without requiring cultural continuity in the area (Fig.17).

THE MEANING ENCODED IN THE PAINTED TEXT

The text brings together a group of well-developed painted images placed strategically on a well-lit rock surface near the cave's western opening (Fig. 18). The painted images, their location with respect to each other, and the portal or threshold environment of the cave entrance constitutes the semasiographic context in which the text should be analyzed.

Unlike the vertical arrangement of glyphs found on Zapotec stone monuments, the text presents a horizontal "narrative"¹⁸. It is difficult to assign a language to the Nuiñe text. Winter (1994:219),

18 As in the painted text, Mixtec-style codices usually present a horizontal format. The text usually runs in a boustrophedon progression from right to left. We have described the text from "El Puente" in the direction it appears to run (from bottom to top) also in a boustrophedon fashion between each hieroglyph unit, but in a progression from left to right.

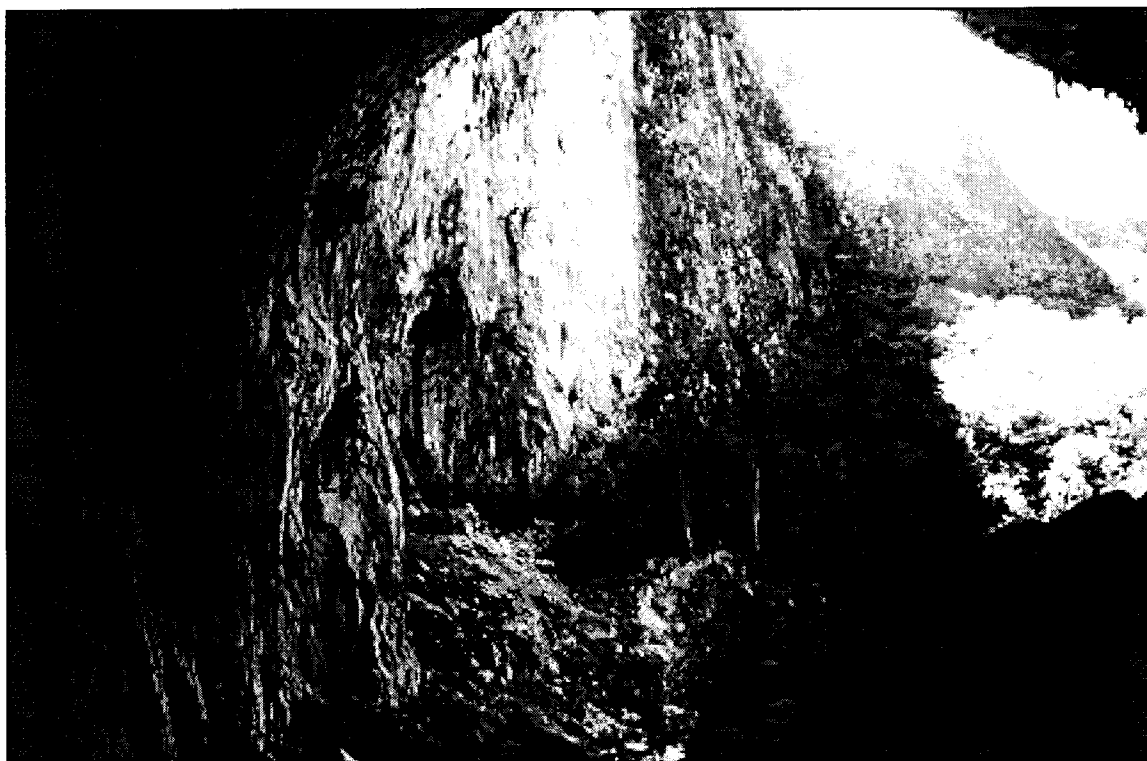


FIG. 18. The western cave opening and the threshold or portal effect.

by proposing that an early variant of Mixtec was spoken in the Mixteca Baja during the Late Urban stage (A.D. 300-800), suggests that the Nuiñe glyphic system could constitute a written form of Mixtec. Moser (1977) had earlier proposed that Nuiñe writing and iconography constitute a Mixtec prototype. However, in his recent study, Urcid (1992a:I:334) states that a Mixtec prototype is inconsistent with the fact that 16 of the Zapotec day glyphs have been identified in the Nuiñe calendric system. He concludes that Nuiñe writing is a system derived from Zapotec or a regional manifestation characteristic of the Mixteca Baja (Urcid, 1992b).

Our interpretation of the day-names within cartouches runs counter to three currently held hypotheses. When a stone monument presents two different forms of cartouches enclosing dates, Moser (1977:177) proposes that those within round cartouches refer to names of people, while those enclosed by square cartouches refer to dates and events. On the other hand, Marcus (1992:284), in discussing the lintel from Tomb 3 at Xoxocotlan, by Monte Albán, believes the 15 calendar days depicted there to be the names of the ancestors of the entombed personage, although none of the day glyphs are enclosed by cartouches.

Furthermore, Urcid (1992:I:331) referring

(except for the year bearers and glyph W) most probably have a nominative function, i.e. they refer to names of individuals". Since many of the later Zapotec inscriptions have been interpreted as genealogical records, the numeral and day signs found in this context are considered to represent names rather than dates. Neither of these conditions seems applicable to the painted text since it lacks a modifier that would anchor it in the solar year and it is definitely not a genealogical record.

On the basis of the "events" portrayed and the overall progression implied by the text, it would seem appropriate to consider the day signs within the context of the sacred calendar of 260 days. There is evidence that the cave was used ritually at least during the Classic and post-Classic as the numerous ceramic sherds lying scattered on the surface of floor attest.

There is no allusion to the solar calendar being used at "El Puente", since neither a Zapotec year sign or the early interlocking "A-O" sign, reported from the tomb of Yucuyūnahui (A.D. 300-500) is found there. Nonetheless, it is highly probable that the cave was used to keep track of the sun's movement relative to the earth from season to season. The cave's basic orientation and the angle of incidence of the sunrays at different times of day

specifically to Monte Albán II texts and contrary to the usual interpretation given linear texts as calendrical, states that "if there is no triple anchorage for an event (year-month or trecena-day), the glyphs accompanied by numbers

throughout the year make it an ideal solar observatory. It is possible that the artist took into account the position of the sun and time of year when drafting both the text and the naked man, since at certain times of year sections of the text are in full sunlight¹⁹.

The general idea conveyed by the text is that an offering was burnt to a deity that resembles the rain-god on the day 10 Owl. The position for the day sign Owl appears to correspond to the third day of the Zapotec calendar (Urcid, 1992:I:146-149; 1994a:84, fig. 5). The ritual was followed by the event in which the reclining figure with Xipe attributes shouts at the projectile on the day 11 Rain. The projectile directed at the figure by itself implies sacrifice as do the Xipe attributes. Xipe is the god that we know from post-Classic sources to represent the revegetation of the earth at the beginning of the rainy season²⁰. A similar connotation may be inferred in this case, as the Xipe cult is already present during the early Classic. In the following hieroglyph unit we find what resembles a mortuary bundle that either speaks or produces sound and from which a plant derives nourishment in the form of blood. The bundle is moved from a mountaintop location to the "place of the snake" on day 1 glyph N²¹. The mortuary bundle appears to be adorned with the circular elements, an allusion to "chalchihuites" or precious stones, a modifier that indicates that the bundle and its contents are precious. The mortuary bundle with its two stripes could be that of Xipe, the deity of revegetation, as proposed above.

The theme of groups migrating with, or keeping their gods' mortuary bundles, becomes quite widespread among many different ethnic groups during the post-Classic period. The allusion to carrying a bundle from one place to another which we find at El Puente on the Ndaxagua represents an early use of this theme.

The naked man with the unusual representation of a bleeding penis once again implies sacrifice. The size of the text seems intended to convey a suprahuman quality, as though emphasizing the text's god-like association and the involvement of deities. The presence of a masked deity to which an offering is made is a clear reference to a god. The mortuary bundle from which the plant derives nourishment seems to allude to Xipe or some other earth deity. The attribute of the decorated sound scroll again suggests that the general theme is deity-related.

THROUGH THE CAVE TUNNEL WEST TOWARDS ETERNITY

The colossal natural bridge on the Ndaxagua is located between the warm, semi-arid lowlands and the temperate highlands which, by comparison, are relatively moist. People moving between these two areas appear to have attached such significance to this natural subterranean passageway that a painted testimony was left on the cave walls. It seems plausible that the text was meant to be read after traversing the cave from east to west (towards the Coixtlahuaca Basin) and appears to involve the idea of transformation. This is reflected in part by the size and composition of the two groups of paintings located at the two "mouths" of the tunnel. At the eastern entrance the paintings associated with the northern wall are comparatively small and painted only in red. In addition, most of the day-signs are not enclosed in cartouches despite the fact that they have numerical coefficients associated with them. However, the glyphs of the text on the southern wall, by the western mouth of the cave, are of an unprecedented large size and well-organized along a horizontal axis. The day signs are all enclosed in cartouches. White and black pigments have been added to the composition. Furthermore, while at the eastern entrance, the general impression is that of disar-

¹⁹ On the basis of a limited number of field observations, it seems plausible that the cave was used as an observatory. In mid-November, during the early part of the dry season the painted text is best seen between 11:30 A.M. and 12:30 P.M. The sun begins to shine directly on the part of the text distal to the cave opening about twenty minutes later, once it has crossed over the bridge. At 14:50, although the limestone surface is still brightly illuminated, the sun's rays begin to be blocked by the canyon's rock wall which casts shadows on the text. In early February the sun's rays begin to illuminate the stream bed by the western entrance at about 13:30. The rays are shining directly on the sacrificial victim at 14:10, and the snake glyph and the top of the third hieroglyph unit about three minutes later. It continues to shine on the second hieroglyph unit the longest, while the third unit and the naked man fall into the shadow of the rock outcrop. Shortly after this time the high cliffs of the canyon begin to block the sun's rays from reaching the cave's western entrance. It seems likely that the sun's rays would penetrate deepest into the cave at summer solstice.

²⁰ The phenomenon of revegetation that accompanies the arrival of the rainy season is particularly striking in the area. Many species in the deciduous thorn-scrub and cactus forest association which had been dormant and leafless during the dry season rapidly respond to the first rains by blossoming and subsequently developing exuberant foliage.

²¹ Urcid (1994a:84, fig. 5) has demonstrated that glyph N represents the day sign for the soap plant, which occupies the 12th position on the Zapotec calendar. During the post-Classic, in the Mixteca and much of Central Mesoamerica, this position is occupied by the day sign Grass.

ray, the linear form of the text found at the western end suggests that in the process of traversing through the cave, a complete structuring and change in size has occurred.

If we consider that the wind direction inside the cave is reversed between day and night, again the idea of transformation comes to mind. During the night, a cool mountain wind blows from the west descending into the cave. During the day a warm gentle breeze blows from the east, and upon entering the cave through the eastern opening, it is transformed into a cool wind that blows out through the western cave opening.

In pre-Hispanic Mesoamerica, possibly since the Formative, caves have been considered entrances to the underworld. Furthermore, west was regarded as the direction associated with death and eternity. The presence of the bleeding sacrificial victim at the threshold of the cave's western opening suggests transformation through death.

Although we are uncertain about the auguries and meaning associated with each of the dates found on the text, the following is an example of how it could have been used. The patron deity presiding over each day and each "cocij" or period of thirteen days in all likelihood varied in time for different regions. Our example makes use of post-Classic Central Mexican sources for identifying those deities presiding over each of the dates given by the text. We are not in any way suggesting that these same deities would have been identified with these dates during the late Formative and early Classic periods in this area of Oaxaca.

After locating the three dates taken from the text on the 260-day calendar, we find that beginning with 1 Crocodile as the first day, the day 10 Owl would correspond to the 23rd day and fall in the second "cocij" or "trecena"²², which was ruled by Quetzalcoatl (Siarkiewitz, 1995:53; 195, tab.I). 11 Rain would fall 196 days later on day 219, in the 16th "trecena" ruled by Itzpapalotl. 1 Soap Plant (Grass) would fall 133 days later on day 92 of the next calendar cycle, in the 7th trecena, which was ruled by Tlaloc. If we assume the text's account as occurring on successive days, a total of 329 days would have elapsed since the offering was burnt and the bundle was moved from the mountain to the "place of the snake". If we consider the association of the cardinal directions of these days in the sacred calendar, we

find that 10 House corresponds to north, while 11 Rain is associated with the east (Séjourné, 1983:56-60). 1 Soap Plant is associated with the south. Dates allusive to the west appear to be absent.

The other two days reported, 1 Alligator and 1 Snake, on the north wall by the eastern entrance, are associated with the east. The full significance of these dates and their relationship to other days found painted inside the cave remain poorly understood at this time.

A comparable theme to that found in the text at Ndaxagua has not been reported for any other area. The text does not appear to involve the ritual transformation of the shaman which we find in Early and Middle Formative cave paintings. Nor does the text appear to make any reference to a specific ruler or to royal succession, a concern often portrayed in monuments dating from the middle Classic and lasting through the post-Classic periods. However, there do seem to be allusions to rulership, through the speech scroll and possibly the headband of the reclining figure, as well as in the decorated band and sound scroll of the deity's mortuary bundle. Speech scrolls depicted in front of male personages usually refer to commands or verdicts. The role of a ruler as speaker appears to be quite ancient since sound is often depicted as a small comma-shaped element in front of the mouth of what appear to be depictions of rulers carved on Olmec celts. The same idea continues to appear in the post-Classic period, i.e. the Nahuatl term for ruler "tlatoani" literally means "he who speaks". The ruler also had the power and ability to communicate with the ancestors. Taken in this context, the speaking mortuary bundle could be an allusion to the ruler's need to obtain counsel from ancestors and deities. The theme in which rulers consult mortuary bundles is often portrayed in the post-Classic codices.

Stone monuments from periods I and II at Monte Albán seem to reflect a major preoccupation with sacrifice and conquest as may be observed on the Conquest slabs. The painted text of Ndaxagua resembles Formative and early Classic themes in the idea of sacrifice, but the idea of sacrifice is also a

²² Trecena is a term used in association with the sacred calendar. It is derived from the Spanish word for thirteen. Used in this context it alludes to the way the sacred calendar of 260 days is arranged as 20 groups of 13 days. Each of these groups would represent a "trecena". For divination purposes each "trecena" was associated with one of the 20 patron deities that ruled during the particular day.

recurrent theme during the post-Classic. There are no post-Classic period paintings on the cave walls of Ndaxagua.

CONCLUSIONS

The paintings just presented are of exceptional value given their age, overall quality, condition and size. The text appears to be significant in that it constitutes an early and complete painted record which alludes to ritual use and passage through the cave formed by the Ndaxagua. The text and naked man seem to have been intended to be seen by someone using the cave as a passage between the Xuquila River and the Coixtlahuaca Basin.

Many questions remain however. What language was the text written in? The use of Zapotec style calendar glyphs is not necessarily a prerequisite for Zapotec to have been spoken in the area. Is Nuiñe a regional style created by either the Zapotec, Mixtec or Popoloca-speaking inhabitants of the area as a result of their interactions, or does it represent a distinct culture belonging to one group? The prevailing view is that the Nuiñe style, culture or cultural complex appear during the Classic period which coincides with the historical appearance of the Zapotec (Bernal, 1965:802). Caso (1965b:945) comments on the similarity between the Zapotec calendar and the calendar used by different peoples in Mesoamerica. Because the Nuiñe calendar seems to have used the same day signs as those found in the Zapotec calendar, the circumstances that led to its abandonment and the adoption of the post-Classic period calendar could perhaps be correlated with events of the Classic and especially those of the Terminal Classic, when local hilltop sites were abandoned and first Ixcatec and then Chocho-speakers are believed to have arrived in the area. We know very little in fact about this cultural manifestation locally and regionally. Unfortunately, the relative isolation and difficulty of the terrain in which Nuiñe sites are found translates to a paucity of information and a poor understanding of the area and its dynamics during the Classic. "El Puente" is presently located in an area that is largely uninhabited. However, there are many abandoned Classic period hilltop sites in its vicinity, some of which may even have Formative period antecedents. Was the cave a place used primarily for ritual, accessible to only a few members of a nearby village, or was it used by

different villages? Is the text an early form of public art?

The painted text treats a theme that is not simply shamanic as the paintings at Oxtotitlan and especially Juxtlahuaca suggest. Rather, at "El Puente" we find a more complex theme involving the use of the sacred calendar, transformation through death and the transport of a speaking mortuary deity bundle to the place where the seat of rulership is to be established. The painted text parallels a recurrent migration theme found in post-Classic and early colonial period documents. Its location and that of the remaining paintings seem to suggest transformation by passing through the cave or underworld. A full inventory of the remaining paintings from the colossal bridge over the Ndaxagua is currently being prepared. How the cultural legacy found there was incorporated into the history and worldview of later inhabitants of the Coixtlahuaca Basin will be presented in the following section and in subsequent articles.

THE CAVE IN ETHNOHISTORICAL CONTEXT

Of the numerous caves found in Mexico, only a few have been identified in documentary sources. While references to caves in pre-Hispanic documents abound and are usually represented in ritual contexts, those in colonial documents generally lack the ritual modifiers and are less explicit, especially in terms of location. In colonial documents, caves usually constitute part of some visible landscape feature, such as a mountain, in which the cave serves only to designate it as an attribute in the place sign²³.

One of the locations where Mesoamerican concepts related to a worldview most perfectly converge, is at the Colossal Bridge on the Ndaxagua, in the Coixtlahuaca Basin of northwestern Oaxaca. The antiquity of the paintings left on the rock walls of this formidable sacred place and the numerous references to it found in the codices and early sixteenth century accounts substantiate most of what has been

²³ Most often, allusions to caves in colonial documents take the form of boundary markers on the painted map of a village. Since the purpose of most of these village documents was to draw up the territorial extension, rarely are cave representations placed in the middle of a colonial painting or map. Since Spanish authorities were aware that cave worship had been particularly important in pre-Hispanic times, and several cases of idolatry during the early colonial period involved cave rituals, Indians were particularly careful to hide most information on caves for fear that these would be discovered, their contents destroyed and the entrances closed.

transmitted in the oral and written histories of the peoples of Mesoamerica about the pre-Hispanic view of the cosmos and especially of man's place and transcendence in creation.

Apparently, the perception or connotation of "El Puente" on the Ndaxagua was not always that of a natural bridge between two mountains, as is the secular view of present-day local inhabitants. Rather, there is increasing evidence that it was considered a very sacred place. In the following pages, using a number of different sources, I will attempt to establish historic and cultural contexts for the cave and present evidence which defines its importance as a shrine and its use during the post-Classic (A.D. 1000-1520) and early Colonial periods²⁴. Some of the sources which allude to the cave include written colonial sources, early colonial paintings which are known locally as "codices" or "lienzos"²⁵, a pre-Hispanic engraved bone found in the cave, local informants and a few ethnographic sources.

THE RELACION DE IXCATLAN

Perhaps the single most unambiguous reference to "El Puente" is found in the first lines of the *Relación de Ixcatlan*, the 1579 report from that neighboring village (Velázquez de Lara, 1984:227). It provides a simple explanation for the presence of the cave, suggesting it was made by a famous unnamed captain who ordered the mountain perforated from side to side so that a river could be channeled through it and its waters used for irrigating the cotton fields. Offerings of cotton were placed in the cave during the celebration of unspecified rituals (ibid.:228)²⁶.

Another reason suggesting that the Ndaxagua cave is the one described in the *Relación* is the reference its informants made to the paintings, skulls and bones found inside. The paintings, we are told, include arrows, *macanas* and helmets that resemble duck heads²⁷; the latter are probably the buccal masks of several anthropomorphic figures painted on the northern wall of the cave. Of the two natural bridges in the area, only the cave over the Ndaxagua contains paintings. It is also the only one that is both large, dry and well-ventilated, a place where bones and skulls could have resisted decomposition.

CODEx RIOS AND DURAN

Although the famous captain who made the

cave remains unidentified, given the suprahuman feat attributed him, it seems plausible that he would have been a deified ancestor or god²⁸. However, the vague, obscure, almost impersonal references to what must have been a well-known account could be attributed to the Indian's awareness of the general invalidation and rejection by colonial authorities of pre-Hispanic worldviews. At least two Inquisitional trials had been held in Yanhuitlan and neighboring Coixtlahuaca, which could explain the fear and loss of trust on the part of the Indians when it came to revealing details of the old belief system. However, two sources from outside the Coixtlahuaca Basin area, *Codex Rios* (p.9) and Durán (1951:II:75-76), provide some insight as to his possible identity, describing how Quetzalcoatl opens a tunnel through a mountain on his flight from Tula²⁹.

THE SELDEN ROLL AND THE FRAGMENTO GOMEZ DE OROZCO

Two related Coixtlahuaca pictographic documents depict a cave similar to that of "El Puente" (Fig 3 and 4). The complete document, known as the *Selden Roll*, depicts a cave with two entrances (Fig. 19)³⁰. Both the first part of the *Selden* and the partially erased portion of the *Fragmento Gómez de Orozco* deal with Quetzalcoatl's descent from heaven during the Creation of the Fifth Sun (Caso, 1954:14; Burland, 1955:15). However, neither Caso (1954:17; 1961:256) nor Burland (1955:14) identified the two representations of the earth monster as a tunnel or a cave with two entrances. Rather, they considered

²⁴ Forthcoming articles will deal with more extensive explanations of these data.

²⁵ The Coixtlahuaca Basin "codices" record portions of the area's history and reveal aspects of the pre-Hispanic worldview.

²⁶ Cotton growing cotton is associated with Quetzalcoatl who we are told had great interest in its cultivation and was responsible for producing even coloured varieties (Sahagún, 1989:I:208).

²⁷ Two cave paintings with projectiles were previously discussed (Fig 7,p.8; Fig. 10, p.10)

²⁸ A god can be referred to as a "mayor capitán" or principal captain (Sahagún, 1989:I:37).

²⁹ The cave could have also been made by the avatar dressed with the turtle shell carapace who accompanies Quetzalcoatl on his descent from heaven and who seems to have the ability to penetrate mountains using lightning bolts or knives (*Codex Vindobonensis*, 48c; García, 1729:328; *Codex Zouche-Nuttall*, 19b). Emerging from the cave in the *Selden Roll* is a similarly dressed flying warrior who has flint knives in his hands and feet.

³⁰ While the front of the *Fragmento Gómez de Orozco* portrays only one cave entrance, the back side refers to the origin of the nobility and the first generations of Coixtlahuaca's principal dynastic line.

these to be different locations. While Caso identified the lower representation of the earth monster as Chicomoztoc, Burland referred to it as the "hill of flowers"³¹.

Despite its more elaborate form, the rest of the account in the **Selden Roll** closely parallels that in the Nuiñe codex of "El Puente". The codex presents an offering, a sacrifice and the transport of Xipe's mortuary bundle to the "place of the plain of the snake". In the **Roll**, Lord 2 Dog commissions four priests to go to the oracle-temple of Quetzalcoatl just outside the cave's western opening. Upon making an offering to Quetzalcoatl's mortuary bundle, they return with the bundle carried on the leading priest's back. The four emerge from a stream bed, suggestive of the channel of the Ndaxagua at the point where the canyon is left behind and one emerges onto the valley floor (Fig. 20). The priests enthrone the bundle and make fire, which can be interpreted as acts of legitimization associated with the foundation of a community or **altepetl**. The cycle of legitimization and community foundation is completed, when at a later date, the mortuary bundle of Tezcatlipoca is carried through the same cave³².

THE SCEPTER OF QUETZALCOATL

On the basis of my study of the cave paintings from "El Puente", I inferred that the place was probably used for ritual. This suggestion is confirmed by the **Relación de Ixcatlan** (Velázquez de Lara, 1984:228). However, it is not clear what kinds of ritual were performed or in what context they were carried out.

The engraved mountain lion femur recovered from Ndaxagua was found at the entrance of the cave on the same side as the painted account and the figure of the bleeding naked man (INAH #4744; Parmenter, 1991)). It is difficult to ascribe a function to this bone object that is 21 cm long, but it seems plausible that it was a precious offering left at the cave entrance. Its size, modified ends, quality of the engraving and the wear marks suggest it could have

³¹ The footprints on the **Fragmento Gómez de Orozco** enabled Caso (1954:15-16) to propose that they entered the earth through the open maw of the earth monster before returning to heaven. Burland (1955:14) considered the space between the earth's jaws (eastern cave opening) and the "hill of flowers" (the western cave opening) a hiatus in the story.

³² While Caso (1954:17; 1961:256) identifies this bundle as Tlaloc's, Burland (1955:16, 26) identifies it as Yaotl's, which is another name for Tezcatlipoca.

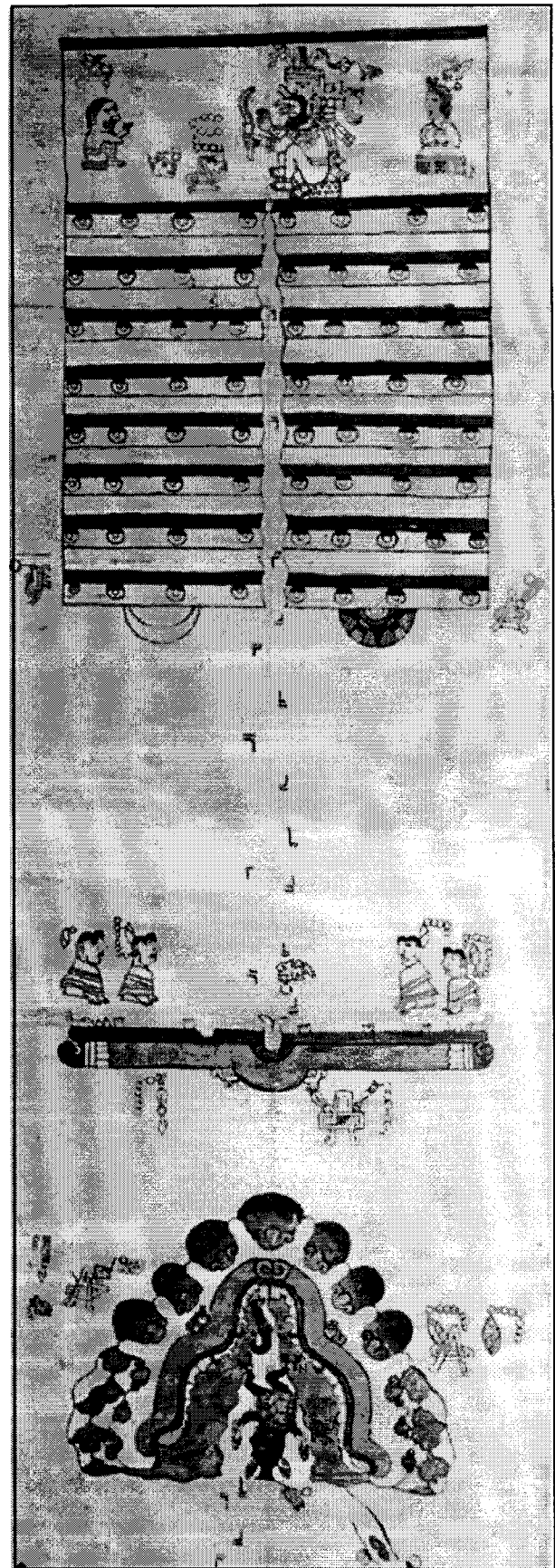


FIG. 19. The descent of Quetzalcoatl to earth and his passage into the Underworld as depicted on the **Selden Roll**.

been used as a scepter or "vara", an heirloom that each ruler would hold in his hands during accession or other ceremonies and pass on to his successor. The object Quetzalcoatl holds in his hand, as portrayed on the **Selden Roll** (Fig. 19), is similar in shape to the bone. In addition, the theme of creation of the Fifth Sun recorded on the bone (Fig. 21) also alludes to Quetzalcoatl's descent into the Underworld, as depicted on the opening scene of the **Roll**. The three holes on the bone may have served to tie the feathers seen on Quetzalcoatl's scepter on the **Roll**, turning it into a fan or to emphasize its precious nature.

Much like the **Selden Roll**, the two cave entrances represented by the open jaws of the earth monster divide the account on the bone into three plains: the sky, the Underworld and the earth's

Tlahuiztlalpantecuhtli or Mixcoatl, armed with darts and an atl-atl, descending into the Underworld to meet the God of Death. The western entrance, incised on the distal portion of the bone, opens unto the earth's surface where water symbols perhaps allude to the Ndaxagua before it enters the Underworld (Fig. 3). In reverence to the sacredness of the place and to the event of Creation, three male deities can be seen kneeling by the same cave entrance.

THE ORIGINS OF THE XOXO-TOLTECA, CHILDREN OF QUETZALCOATL, AND THEIR ENTRANCE INTO THE COIXTLAHUACA BASIN

According to the account in the Coixtlahuaca Basin codices, sometime during the middle

Classic period a people began migrating from an area in the Central Mexican Highlands to the Puebla-Tlaxcala corridor. Known today as the Chocho, these people distinguished themselves by stating that they had migrated from Chicomoztoc under the tutelage of their patron deity Quetzalcoatl, on whose day and year they had emerged from the cave³³. They also recorded the origin of the founder of the Basin's principal dynastic line, Lord 7 Reed, as



FIG. 20. The four priests on the **Selden Roll** carrying the mortuary bundle of Quetzalcoatl emerge from the stream bed of the Ndaxagua. They all carry the accoutrements necessary for the foundation of an **altepetl** or community.

surface. The eastern entrance of the cave in the proximal part of the bone opens towards the heavens. There we see the two gods involved in the last Creation, Tezcatlipoca and Quetzalcoatl, and a smaller male figure, perhaps Quetzalcoatl as

emerging from a jade **chalchihuitl** in the "river of reeds" (Fig. 22). This scene is recorded in the ruler section on the bottom of the **Lienzo de Tequixtepec**

³³ The date of emergence from Chicomoztoc was 1 Reed 9 Wind, an auspicious date which is the calendric name for Quetzalcoatl (Caso, 1961:253).

I (Parmenter, 1982:61,83) and on the back side of the **Fragmento** (Caso 1961:255; Parmenter, 1982:40,61), as well as on the lower section of **Codex Tlalpatepec** (Caso, 1961:255; Parmenter, 1982:38, 39). Reeds or **tules** used in this locative evokes the name of Tollan or Tula ("place of reeds"), the Toltec capital³⁴. The principal dynastic line of Coixtlahuaca claimed kinship to the royal house of Tula. Claiming that they were children of Quetzalcoatl, and that the founding ruler had emerged from a jade stone in the "river of reeds" may have given rise to the name by which these people came to be known, the Chocho or Green people from the Nahuatl word *xoxo* or the reverential Mixtec words *tocuijñuu* used in reference to them (Reyes, 1976:I-II). Throughout Mesoamerica green is a metaphor for preciousness or things deserving high esteem as Reyes distinctly points out when he refers specifically to these people.

After two generations of rulers, the Chocho settled in the northern section of the Puebla-Tlaxcalla Basin at a site characterized by what appear to be two snow-capped mountains. The third ruler 12 Flint, and his spouse who bore the same name, had four children, each of whom is recorded as an ancestor to the principal houses of Cholula, Culhuacan, Mexico-Tenochtitlan and Coixtlahuaca (Caso, 1979:I:124; II:410-411). With the exception of Cholula, the glyphs for all these places had been previously identified. Kartunnen (1983:54) provides a definition for the Nahuatl word *choloa* which she says means to jump or flee. It follows that the glyph on **Tlalpatepec** of the man jumping over the wall, could be identified as the place name for Cholula, where 2 Flint marries into the ruling house.

Lienzo Tequixtepec I depicts three of 12 Flints' children separated from a fourth by a cave entrance. The fourth child, Lord 7 Water, travels south into the Mixteca and enters the Coixtlahuaca Basin through what could be "El Puente" represented on the codex as a cave entrance (Caso, 1979:II:222)³⁵. It seems logical to assume that rulers would have chosen to legitimize their rights by using this sacred passageway into the Coixtlahuaca Basin. The act of legitimization of rulership would be

³⁴ On **Tlalpatepec** two rivers are depicted, one with a jade or turquoise necklace and the other with quetzal feathers instead of reeds. The blue-green quetzal feathers were considered precious and were for the exclusive use of the nobility.

³⁵ Parmenter (1982:54-55,65) identifies this cave entrance with Chicomoctoc.

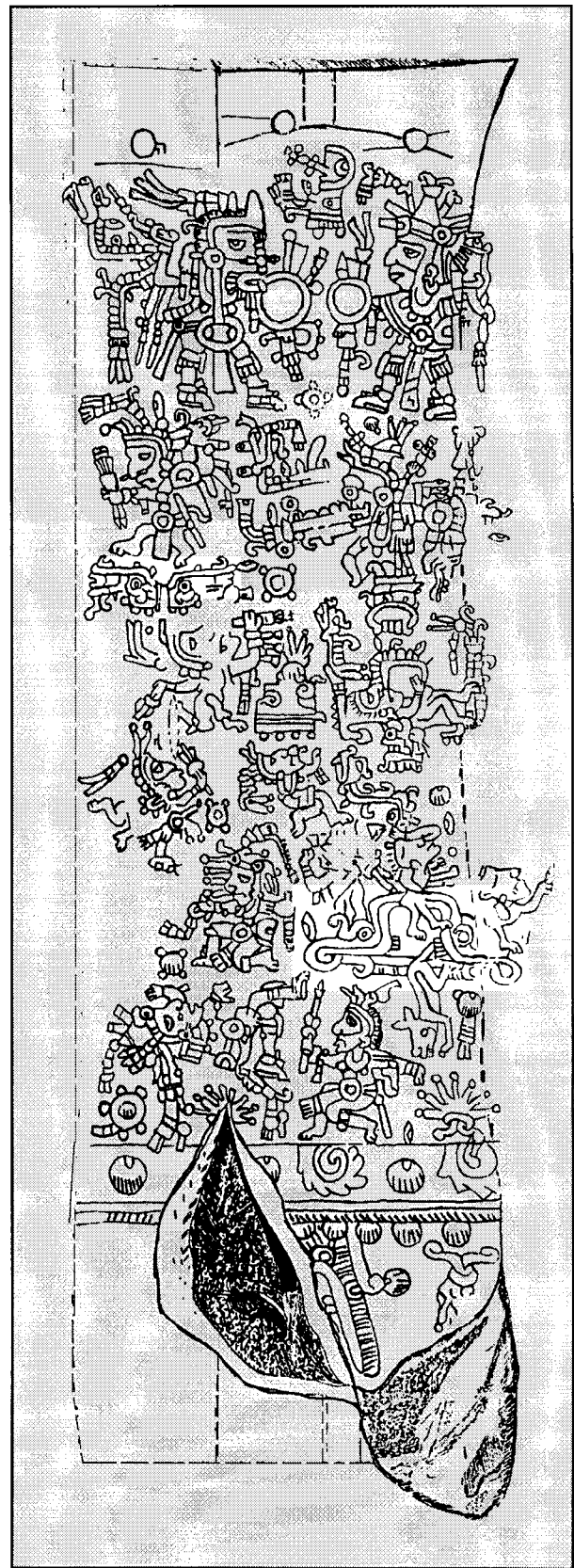


FIG. 21. The account of the Creation of the Fifth Sun engraved on a mountain lion femur found at "El Puente". The two cave entrances have been highlighted. (Rollout drawing of the engraving modified from the original and after Parmenter, 1963, unpublished).

finalized with the reenactment of Creation at this sacred ancient shrine. Aside from procuring the mortuary bundles of the two gods involved in the Fifth Sun's Creation, and passing them through the cave, incorporating this place into the tradition of the origin and settlement of the Coixtlahuaca Basin, would give the Chocho the claim to antiquity and rightful ownership to the lands of the Basin, including those surrounding "El Puente".

of temples in his honor, and they raised his statue and they painted his figure".

It cannot be a mere coincidence that we find a penitent, male figure at the threshold to the Underworld with a rope attached to the arm band so close to the shoulder (Fig. 14). Motolinía's statement also lends credence to the claim being made by the codices that members of the principal dynastic line of the Coixtlahuaca Basin were blood relatives of the aforementioned royal houses which would later become

post-Classic power centers. Furthermore, the account suggests that Acolhuatl is none other than Lord 12 Flint, father of these four children.

During the origin of the 5th Sun, Quetzalcoatl is said to have



FIG. 22. Lord 7 Reed emerging from a piece of jade in the "river of reeds" symbolizes the origin of the *Xoxo-Tolteca* or Chocho, the people of the Coixtlahuaca Basin. Photograph by Carlos Rincón Mautner, courtesy of the Honorable Ayuntamiento of the village of San Miguel Tequixtepec.

A PAINTING THAT RECORDS THE ORIGIN OF COIXTLAHUACA'S KINSHIP TIES

A clue to both the identity of the naked male figure and the interpretation given to the stenciled arm painted on the south wall by the western cave entrance can be found in an account recorded by Motolinía (1979:7), who lived in Tehuacan, a village just north of the Coixtlahuaca Basin in 1540, and who visited the Mixteca in 1541. He may have heard the tale when he passed through Coixtlahuaca (O'Gorman, 1979:XXIX).

"An Indian man whose name was Chichimecatl tied a ribbon or leather belt to the arm of Quetzalcoatl, high up close to the shoulder, and for such deed and event they called him Acaliuath (Acolhuatl) and it is from him that the Colhua came, ancestors of Moteuczoma, lords of Mexico and Culiuacan [Culhuacan] mentioned earlier, And this Quetzalcoatl the Indians regarded as one of their principal Gods and they called him the "God of Wind and all places". They built an infinite number

descended to the Underworld where he would meet the God of Death. Having recovered the bones and ashes of the people of the previous creation, he bleeds his penis. The blood falls on the remains and by blowing on them with his buccal mask, he animates and brings new life.

The naked figure in the cave appears to be making the supreme sacrifice for regeneration as he bleeds from the penis, the side and throat. The stenciled arm and hand located in front of the figure could have been interpreted as Acolhuatl's. This tradition could have served to establish the relationship between Quetzalcoatl, the creator deity, and the Basin's main dynastic line.

SUMMARY

The evidence that we have been able to assemble suggests that the cave at "El Puente Natural" was considered to have been the place where the earth was created and the epoch known as the Fifth Sun began. Rulers may have come to the cave to make sacrifices and engage in rituals allusive to the

reenactment of Creation. On-going research evidences a common understanding of cosmology and a similar appropriation of it by the elite in the Mesoamerican cultural sphere. What seems remarkable is that we can find new evidence to support that the roots of Coixtlahuaca's, and Mesoamerican post-Classic, worldview appears to have been based quite strongly on the interpretation of the evidence of prior human occupation. The example presented further underscores how and to what extent the cultural traditions recorded in a locality could have been appropriated and used to influence post-Classic society one thousand years later.

Until recently, our knowledge of the indigenous worldview was poorly documented and understood for this area in the Southern Highlands of Mesoamerica. It seems clear now that, independent of the Mixtec origin tradition from Apoala, the people of Coixtlahuaca had their own unique version of Creation and a program for legitimization of rulership that is similar to the traditions we find recorded in the Central Mexican area.

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