
Cloud People Amidst the Ruins

Myths, Legends and Stories of Ancient Oaxaca

By Greg Stafford

ONLINE SAMPLE: Before You Read!

This is a sample of my current project. It is not a final draft, and even these portions are incomplete.

None of the ART in here is used with permission, and it is only there to be a sample of what I want to have later.

* indicates something is missing. So do many of the footnotes.

indicates a myth section, variously presented, some whose stories are blank, save for titles. But it's to give an idea of what will be there.

Many specific things will be cited as the sources for some definitive statements, like haircuts for men and women.

Enjoy, please do not pirate this, and I'll be glad to hear any comments from you on this. Send it to my email.

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Introduction

The indigenous peoples of Oaxaca (say wa-HA-ka) called themselves *People of the Clouds*. We, mechanically airborne amid those clouds, share their view from aloft. Their land is the three large valleys that join together like a Y; and the mountains. All else around is mountains, except the far jungle that ribbons the sea to the south. At the hub of the Y is Monte Alban, the oldest city in North America. The view from this distance is scientifically stark, high and aloft and it's easy for me to indulge in thoughts and ideas and immortality; that is, imaginary thoughts, immaterial.

Aground, deplaned, the earth is the solid everyday can't-be-escaped world. We deplane on the tarmac and walk into the little airport building. It is hot. Customs, *totalmente en español*, brings me to ground. Outside the terminal the dirt and poverty of modern Mexico's poorest state is immediate, loud and crowded. The barrage of taxi hawkers sweeps away any lofty idea and ideals. Past them, we buy tickets and then board the *combio*, a van commonly used for transportation. The gritty, practical details of living engage me. I can feel the escape of pressure that imposes itself on me back where I live.

Goodbye busy Westerners, though I am one of you. We *Norteamericanos* and *Europeanos*, we live by modern standards of time and space. When we enter this different time and space we need some time to adjust, and to encounter this other place, which seems so much to be another time (but is not).

I have to share this land's great story of empires and wars, gentle breast-shaped pots and savage conquerors. I'm not an archeologist or historian, but a storyteller. My personal experience, faulty notes and memory are assembled here to entertain you. I'll use science and legends, and stories of eating. Here are local legends and scientific analyses, old Spanish books and slick modern *Archeologia*, online information and local indigenous fanzine-like publications of local people looking at their own old way. We will see the living lands, too, which shape the story and the people who live upon it. The land, weather and environment eternally impose themselves, changing the world whether they are provoked by a goddess or by climate change. People too will shape these tales: the *curanderos* and *curanderas*, curators of tiny village museums, *nuestra Santa Tamale*, skeleton woman, lunch lady and *especialliamente mis amigos mayores Osvelia y Jorge*. My sources are eclectic, and my presentation is personal.

I am inviting you to please pay to see this for yourself if you can, without embarrassment. Get down, too. Tours and US\$200 rooms will teach us something of this colorful colonial city. However, cheap is better. Any of us working class schlubs who can afford air fare need to pay just a quarter of that to live better than any king of old.

Oaxaca is an up-mountain, off-road, out-of-the-way backwater place. It is and has been nearly forgotten, except by the people who are there. I love it. I will not romanticize poverty, the racist history that has caused the backwardness which accidentally preserved a pretty colonial city, surrounded and saturated by Pre-Columbian "prehistory." But it has given me its story to tell, and I am compelled to share it and to invite you into the welcoming house of a strange land. This land will not last long, as it is. So I ask those muses who gave me this story to fill me with what I need to say, to share it with those who are with us.

MAP: Where Oaxaca Is



Me, You, and Them

“Who am I?” we all ask some time or other. Some find satisfactory answers in being husband or wife, hard worker or hustler. Not me. Identification, whether of the self, “I feel, I think, I believe...” or as the other, as in “them and us;” are important to me, and will come up in this book. I do not claim or pretend to speak for Oaxacans. My intent herein is not to speak for anyone but myself. I won’t pretend to have secret mentor who revealed this to me. I won’t pretend to reveal cosmic secrets from the ancient past. These are just my personal experiences, which include being seized by the Muse of Oaxaca, and writing some of the stories herein.

My perspective is personal, particular (I lived in the old days) and peculiar (I talk to rocks, and some answer back.) So that you will know where I am coming from, here is more. I am a 60+ year old grandfather, raised as a New England boy during America’s Golden Age when the earth spawned acres of new houses for war heroes and miraculous scientific wonders. I remember the first TV, the first plastic, the

first sputnik, public school polio vaccinations and televised assassinations. Everything was perfect: fish sticks and flaked potatoes for food, personal cars for transport, and the atom bomb for protection. I didn't waste the 60s. I was nurtured by both hippy living-on-the-streets and luxury liberal college. I immersed myself in consciousness, superconsciousness and superduperconsciousness via the best of sex, drugs and rock and roll. And the worst. Liberal thought got trumped by tear gas and truncheons; pot and acid gave way to hard drugs, terminal illness, supernatural rescue and then a successful 12-month stint in a 100% committed job in Corporate America, and as a result missed Woodstock. I got married, had kids. Then for 30 years I lived in the story-book California suburb of Albany, was the stay-at-home dad, ran a pioneering game publishing company, wrote 10 professional games of my own; and practiced shamanism. After I sobered up from the fairy tale of my first marriage, I found happiness, remarried, enjoyed life in Mexico, and retired to this small rural university town of Arcata, California.

That's me, now about "us."

America, American

America is the place of the United States of America, and Americans live there. I'm one, and a proud one. Other Americans includes everyone who lives here, even including those who I find unpleasant. We are all us, and we have more in common than we differ. My tale begins with the common parts, the deep American parts of us, which are our legends and history as shown on television and popular culture, "What everyone knows," like Christopher Columbus and Cinco de Mayo. (I apologize to the many *Americanos del Sur* who will give me the particular look that says, "Sigh. We are Americans too but what do *you* know." We will be *Norteamericanos* when this is translated into Spanish.)

Westerners

The modern Western world began with Aristotle and Plato around 400 BC. At that time certain mental characteristics were established that began the divergence of the West from the East(s). With this establishment of early scientific thought and individualism, the seeds of our world were sown which would separate the corners of the world. Other great world thinkers roughly contemporary during this astonishing period include Pythagoras in Greece, Lao Tsu and Confucious in China, the Buddha and Mahavira in India, and Lord One Crocodile "One Reed" in Mexico.

Us

This flexible pronoun means "people who are reading this book." I hesitate to otherwise speculate on your identity, other than to state the obvious: you can read. Literacy sets us apart from the increasing majority, who seem to think that communication can happen in 140 spaces at a time. I'm an tech old guy. Books trump electronics, except among those who do not know books.

Central America

This is a modern political term. Central America is the string-bean shaped area in between the continents of North and South America; or more specifically, between Mexico and Columbia. It is not called "Middle America," as it could be. We use Central America to avoid confusion with Ohio, or Colorado, or Kansas, or wherever Middle America is. It includes the countries of Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Panama.

Mesoamerica

Mesoamerica is both a place and a time. Mesoamerican comes from *meso* or "middle" and *America*, or the Americas, but it also means "prehistoric, pre-Columbian, indigenous." After the conquest nothing is called Mesoamerican except ruins.

Mesoamerica is not a hard and geographic place, but a little soft at the edges. The northern border fluctuates by a couple hundred miles when climate changes. The southern border squeezes down the west coast depending on how some overlapping customs, religions and languages are sliced. However calculated, Oaxaca is always right in the center.

Anahuac

Mesoamerica is the Motherland of America. And as much I love Oaxaca and will defend her honors of being first, the massive pre-Columbian central valley deserves the credit as Biggest Mama of all. Anahuac is a vague term in prehistory, but I will use it as a place-name for the pre-Columbian Valley of Mexico.

Mexico

This is modern country that was established in 1810, 200 years ago as I write this, with a peasant revolt that threw off the cruel yoke of the Spanish Empire to be an independent land. That is only 34 years after we 13 (English) colonies had led the way. So Mexico is almost as old as USA.

Oaxaca

This book is about Oaxaca. This is a state in southern Mexico, a large valley in that state, and the modern city in that valley; and the subject of this book.

#1-Deer Makes the World

We are fortunate to have a pictographic Oaxacan account of the creation of the world. This is taken from a painted foldout deerskin document called a *codex*, specifically the so-called *Codex Vindobonensis Mexicanus 1*. We will see more about these documents later.

Normally, narrative codices begin reading the lower right of a page and move to the left to the end of the page, and then go up and right to the page joint, and then back to the left. When it reaches that joint, it goes to the top of the next page. A red line means “turn here.” Other clues are in the pictures, such as which way the figures are facing.

I’m going to dissect this one closely, to direct attention to the details that these codices supply. This also shows how these were originally used: as pictures to accompany a narrative. This allows a narrator to deliver different versions to his different audiences, as needed. You will see this later.



Imagine being in the *tianges*, the market place, of the only city that really counts: the one you live in. You only come here occasionally, to trade some corn for a fish. Everyone who has a little excess to trade comes here. You leave your corn with old Six Tooth, just like your mother had said, and explain she is sick again and you have come for medicine. She sympathizes and you hear again about her numb face and arm. Rather than engage in the matching sickness conversation that your mother would have, you bless her and slip away for the good time of the day. She won't trade your corn until later, you have a couple of tortillas in your *bolsa* (bag), and free time.

Now, where is that storyteller? Ah, same place. He's just barely started, the foldout is open!

Look! Here is the story of the creation of our world.

This is not our world now, this is not our world then! This is the Spirit World, the Sky World where things existed before there was anything! See these eight things here? Those are eight of the hours of our day, and everything here inside this picture is what is in the ninth. This is what goes on in Heaven when the fires are relit!

Here is Creator—he has no fancy clothes, no masks and no jewels. He is black because we cannot really see him--

Yes, yes, 13-deer, he is a she, thank you. My good listeners, that's my assistant 13-deer. But of course we can't see Creator so we can't see Creatrix either, and so I am just speaking now of Mystery right now. 13-deer, you'll have your chance. Now, some respect please.

Here is Mystery—it has no fancy clothes, no masks and no jewels. It is black because we cannot really see it. It has nothing except itself, and see, It speaks. [NB-here I make a hand sign. I point to anyone in the priest class] Right foot.

Here, see now, its words have become the *sounder*. It's in its left hand, It receives this from itself. Here it is! Listen! [play sound #1] And as It plays there are twenty sounds, and twenty silences, see them here? Count them if you want. Twenty nights there—stars see? And this here, [raise finger], listen now, twenty censers (with legs and a handle) are our days.

And here is a censer just like in the picture. 13-deer, light that incense and bless these people listening while we talk.

See this guy—that's you. [point to someone] Yep, unformed. You without your face. Here is what Mystery is telling you here, just before you're gonna be born. "Here is how to live: look ahead. Work hard!"

And then It says, [raise finger], listen now. "You can look up if you want to," but what happens then?" Yea, right, you go down. Down where? Oh oh, look, do we see Mystery? Nope, that's Death. That ol' farter Mr. Bones himself. Is that Mystery now? Well, yes actually, but It's got *the mask*. Yea, it is how we see it first. It's just way too much for us. We know that, of course. And how do we know it? This guy, right? The Lord of Life and Death, our dear nobility--any of you here now? {laughter} 'Course not.

Look at this—two hours of the Creation Time have gone past by now. Out of the Sky Mouth comes the Heavenly river, that beautiful thing in the sky that you see on the holy nights when you are out. That is Star Skirt there, but without her mask. Then next here, this is Sky Mountain. It's up there and it doesn't move, ever. Yu know which star it is.

Then there, in the sky, is born the first plant. It knows what it is to be—see, it is bleeding for life. Here is the first sacrifice. The grass, the cleaner and sweeper, the bearer of power; it bleeds. When the priests sprinkle the blood of sacrifices on us with their bundles, this is the blood they are sending.

Here's the new world now. The dark Underworld at the bottom, our world above it, and then the sky world—yes, the stars hang from it. Above that, up beyond the sky, is Sacred World, the Place of One. Inside that enclosure of One, see this pyramid, yea, it's everywhere. Up and down, right? Like the Sun and the moon,



and the corn and our lives. It's complete, from start to finish. There it is, the One Temple, closed and contained.

Next, here, see a start and a finish on these steps again! These nine flints on top, those are the nine dry months and these nine reeds are growing, the wet months. See here, the levels of the world are Space, then the 18 months of Time, and we see the world start to grow.

Our world see, not the finished world. Steps, not pyramids. And what do we have, first the waters of the world there, then here's the earth, the dry season. It's hard ground now. And we see it grows again, plants. MMM, look, it's Our Mother Mescal.

Sir, over there! I see you've got a bit of mother's milk, eh? Maybe you can give a cup to 13-deer for me? Ah, thank you sir, you are like the gods... {laughter} Oh... well, maybe one for me later, then?

So then here we are, two temples. The first temples ever, and you can see they are for Night and for Day. Those holy places, they are starting to come down to us now. They come down and change shape. Here, the Lord and Lady of Creation. Mystery is now two, Him and Her up there in the Sky World. The empty temples are Him and Her up there, and then here they are again but they are not in the Sky World now. They are in somewhere else, yes, on top of mountains, poised right there at the edge of the sky ready for the world to become dirt.



History Starts with Cortés

Oaxacan history starts with *el conquistador*, Hernán Cortés, the man who revealed Anahuac to Europeans and brought it down. In fact, American History, right after Columbus anyway, starts with Cortés.

Yet Cortés is a stranger to us. Most of the time the best we can do is to know, “He’s some Mexican guy, the Conquistador, right?” (Cue music.¹) Sort of, in the same manner that Columbus discovered the New world. So since we don’t know him, we’ll take a little step back.

We start where common public knowledge of American history begins: the discovery of America by Christopher Columbus. I want to look at the events of this Spanish explorer, who is now so dourly burdened with the sins of his ancestors and descendants. This story begins in the days of innocence, days of Princess Summerfall Winterspring, when Thanksgiving was still a happy feast of unity, and Squanto was our pal. Maybe kindergarten or so. Back when anyone who knew otherwise was not allowed to speak in public. The good old days, maybe 1955.

Columbus discovered America, and I can never forget my joyful childhood song about him.

*In fourteen hundred and ninety two
Columbus sailed the ocean blue
He sailed and (higher!) sailed and
sailed and (scream!) saaaaaaa-iled
to find this land for me and you!*



For me! Wonderful! That was every bit as comforting to little me as it was to know that Jesus Christ and George Washington came here just for me too.

So OK, *Christobal* is part of our story. He came here for me and you because we are Americans. We forgot (ignore? Perhaps never knew?) that our more immediate English (and other northern European) ancestors of the era loathed the explorer, his king and his queen. But US Americans know better. Columbus is part of us because, because, well, we have to. He came first and everyone knows it and even though he was a Spaniard (actually, a Genoese) we include him, since we can be generous because the northern peoples are really the winners now (proof: what do you know of Spanish History?) Chris Columbus still came first. He discovered America, and then our pilgrims landed and started Thanksgiving.

I wanted to know more. I was a smart kid who could read. Here’s the bonus I got for my curious investigation. What I found was a map that showed the Spaniards were doing some history stuff too. The books had several different-colored arrows that went all over the place. Aha, they destroyed the evil empire and got rich doing it. At last it made sense: they were stealing gold, so we could read *Treasure Island* and have some really cool Errol Flynn pirate movies. Also, I learned that Captain John Smith started Jamestown after the beautiful princess Pocahontas saved his life.

¹ Link to music

I'd moved from Virginia back to Connecticut. It was a lot colder, and with a nearly-prehistoric local history. My home town of Wethersfield, Connecticut, was settled by a protest group who broke away from the fanatical Pilgrims of Plymouth to establish their own non-denominational town. Their old, pre-colonial houses are still there! They had practically shacks, not warm suburban houses. I was a proud New England boy, but still wondered, "Why had our glorious national ancestors chosen the crappiest place in the US to settle?" Every New Englander knows bitter cold winter. "Why not where it's warmer, like Virginia?" Surely Jamestown would have liked a neighbor! Sure, I remembered Virginia is a sweltering insect hell, so why not to an even nicer place like Miami Beach? The ads said it's like heaven.



I eventually learned that someone else, led by *el Conquerer* [sic] had already grabbed the best parts of our continent. They talked about loot, but I knew what was really important: hot weather. The fort called *San Agustín* guarded their northern border. It was fifty years old (as long as my Grandpa had been in the US) when our own cold-blooded northern ancestors landed.

Glorious Jamestown, the first English effort, was in 1606. Fifteen years later the Puritans finally made it when they survived winter, thanks to the food God gave them.² US America was on it its way! American history begins!

Yes it does, but the USA as not first: Columbus in 1492, Mexico in 1512; Jamestown in 1606, New England's dear Plymouth in 1620. When northerners began struggling in the New World, the Spanish colonies had been established for a hundred years.

For the first generation or so the Spanish colonies all around the Caribbean didn't do much except exterminate most of the island-dwelling tribes. They assured everyone it was OK because they were all evil cannibals. So they discovered new food plants, medicinal plants, and wiped out a dozen unique cultures. Petty! Real history, with big wars and the crash of empires, starts with Cortés.

From the Mexican perspective, Cortés is one of the most hated men in their history. In all Mexico only two statues of him exist, neither in Mexico city.³ He is no glorious and triumphant conqueror, but a rapacious destroyer and ravisher. The name of his translator, famed in history, Malinche, is an insult today—*malinchista* is someone who favors foreigners over Mexicans. Not even the *criollos*, the *españoles*, the lordly white-skinned *guerros* that still own the country; like him.

Now, whatever else Cortés is, he is the guy with the *cojones mas grande* in all Mexican history. In the land where *Santo Macho* candles are sold, no one was more macho than Cortés, and maybe that is part of why everyone hates him. We all hate the guy who kicks our ass. That, and he also he exterminated their entire civilization. And God loved him. His own chroniclers say so!

Here is a fact: Cortés' was one crazy mad courageous leader, fast-thinking, spoke the enemy's language of war and tribute, and was also the luckiest man on earth. For that, he gets the *cojones grandes* award. With those abilities he destroyed a great powerful empire. It is pretty easy to recognize this story: Superman versus the Evil Empire. The US really has no comparable figure of such utter ruthlessness for success. Andrew Jackson pales in comparison.

There is a generally unpopular theory of history that's called the Big Man Theory, wherein the crisis-creating or crisis-exploiting great events of human history are provoked by unique individuals. Alexander

² It was in a village whose inhabitants had all been killed by plague. The Pilgrim's friendly native guide Squanto, back home from slavery in Europe, knew where it was because he grew up there before being kidnapped.

³ One in Cuernavaca, Morelos; the other in the heights between Paso de Cortés, between the volcanoes Popo and Itza, near Amecameca (<http://www.lonelyplanet.com/thorntree/thread.jspa?threadID=1692465>)

the Great, Julius Cesar, Ghandi, George Washington—the list goes on. The alternative is the sociological idea that “numbers are history” and that trends like population, food availability, and innate human traits would make things happen anyway. Cortés’ personal history drops a pretty big vote on the side of the Big Man theory. He is much like, in his own time, the made-up hero Conan the Barbarian, except more brutal. I concur that conquest would eventually have occurred, but if Cortés had not acted immediately, first and rashly, then and there, then the Indian Nations would certainly have fallen only after many, many more years of resistance.

How bold was he? In 1519, just a generation⁴ after Chris Columbus had discovered the Caribbean islands and stranded the first European settlement in the new world, Hernan Cortés hijacked an official imperial exploration mission for his personal self-aggrandizement. Once ashore he spoke the universal language: war. As noted, widespread fatalities among the native convinced them to befriend the stranger. His powers of negotiation provoked an astonished comment from every observer. He never lost an argument without coming away with something else valuable. With that sycophantic ability he talked his way into alliances with hostile tribes, once he’d smashed a couple thousand warriors of their warriors with his 700 men, cannons, 30 horses and armored dogs. He talked his way right into the heartland of the empire, out onto the core of their island city, and into the hands of the most powerful king in the world.

“And when we saw all those cities and villages built on the water, and other great towns on dry land, and that straight and level causeway leading to Mexico, we were astounded. Those great towns and *cues* [temples] and buildings rising from the water, all made of stone, seemed like an enchanted vision from the tale of Amadis. Indeed, some of our soldiers asked whether it was not all a dream.” (? Durán, 1971; p 214) Bernal Diaz

Cortés and his crew remained there, collecting gold, courting the emperor, and causing trouble. Then messengers from the Spanish King came and it all went to hell. Cortés rushed to the sea coast, to resist the authorized governor who was trying to take over Cortés’ illegal outpost. While he was out of Teotihuacan out-talking the governor the Aztecs held a huge celebration. During it Cortés right-hand henchman accidentally murdered emperor Moctezuma (Diaz said the Spaniards all cried). Cortés went back into the city, loaded up all the gold and prepared to escape. When the Spaniards tried to sneak away 50,000 or 100,000 Aztecs attacked them. Almost everyone was killed in a fight that must have looked like the Rohirrim chopping their way among orcs at night. Cortés got out. No logical explanation exists—just stupidly repeatedly good luck. Cortés and *x men got away. If this was a game it’s the equivalent of twenty 1% success critical rolls in a row. Maybe God was with him. Maybe it is highly exaggerated lies. But his escape is history, written down. He got out.

Cortés never wrote anything but letters. One of his loyal soldiers, not an officer and not a writer, Bernal Diaz wrote his memoirs. He’s the first of several Spaniards whose documents I’ll cite. Like everyone, Diaz had his perspective and his agenda but whatever else he did for good or ill, he was a modest and hard soldier, deserving of praise for having survived many wounds and countless tropical diseases. I don’t think he lied too much in his memoirs. You can read the details about Cortés and Montezuma many other places, but the short version is this: what he did is logically impossible to do, except maybe in a badly designed Monty Hall computer game. To make a comparison in modern terms: a UFO lands in a nearby nation—maybe California or Texas. The alien leader speaks like a radio buzz, and his crew randomly slaughters mobs because it is funny. California abdicates. The alien is then invited into the White House.



The Aztec Emperor is called Montezuma, like in the US Marine Corps song: “From the halls of Montezuuuuuuu-ma...” The marines were there way later though, and it was much easier for them than for Cortés. No Mexican likes Moctezuma either, but for different reasons than hating Cortés. Everyone hates

⁴ 27 years to be exact

Cortés because he was a lying, cheating macho guy that kicked butt and won. But they hate Moctezuma for being a total wimp.

Emperor Moctezuma was not really a weenie though. He got where he was by being a great warrior. He was a killer—he'd proved himself many times in battle, and lived according to the rigid Aztec warrior code of ethics. He had many powerful friends and relatives who had helped make him Emperor. He had run thorns through his tongue and penis for the gods many, many times! He knew the touch of the gods. He was the most powerful man around, with thousands of warriors at his beck and call.

Stranger appeared. He collapsed. He let the impossible happen. Cortés arrived, planted gruesome diseases in beautiful Tenochtitlán, escaped, raised a hundred thousand enemies of the Aztecs, then came back and killed everyone despite the suitably heroic, but doomed defense of Moctezuma's brother.

One important point moderates the emperor's behavior.

Imagine that Moctezuma is just one of us, no smarter or dumber. Religiosity or superstition is sometimes given to excuse the emperor's behavior. He probably was, thanks to the beliefs and practices of his people. But he could have been as cynical as circus barker all his life and still fallen prey to the uniqueness of events.

But imagine yourself where every day of your life you have anything you want if it's food or women or comedians or a hunt or a special holy day just to see the city decorated in flowers with a parade and few hearts given to the gods for good luck. And also every day, everything you hear, read or can research says you are a god, because of what the gods did. The most important thing is to obey them. Imagine too that every time, inevitably, someone says to you:

“You are a god. Another one will visit you in 1519. When *that* star appears *there* in the sky, your incredibly powerful god friend will come and visit. The ONLY possible way you can screw up is to do the wrong thing when the Resplendent Falling God comes here to start anew.”

The priests said that, the warriors said that and of course the masses of nameless people would say that if they were ever allowed to speak to him at all. His wife said that, his brother said that, his father and cousins and whatever secret confidant he could have had said that. He studied the stars and ancient books, and the stars and ancient books agreed that this was true.

How much did he believe that? Was he a gullible religious sucker, incapable of any thought outside what he was told? Maybe a soft, spoiled nobleman isolated from reality all his life, and now terrified? Was he a cynic, disbelieving everything and lifting a hundred hearts to the Sun with a sneer like the Borgia Pope on Easter? I frankly do not think that it makes a difference, because any of those would likely have been troubled by only one thing about it: the god in question was the one who demanded the end of human sacrifice, among other high-flying morals. He'd laid the law down several centuries ago, and even though he was kicked out of town, the philosophers had followed his orders ever since.

Was it really like that? Not quite. It was more like, on that day the UFO lands in Texas, that it has a gigantic US flag and dollar signs blazing on its sides, and off walks the entire cast of the Founding Fathers at the Last Supper, with exactly 15% of women and people of color added subtly among them too, and not as servants. And one of them says, “My name is Amerigo. Here is Jesus and Belle Star. Take me to your leader.” So even though they are not *exactly* what is expected, if someone decides it is close enough, then it is going to be it.

Emperor Moctezuma, deadly warrior, now the most powerful man in the world, did not act entirely passively. The first gifts that he sent to the stranger were magical tests, traps even, to test his identification (Source). Incredibly, he refused blood as only one figure in Mesoamerican history had—the guy they were expecting. I think that the emperor was uncertain, for he lived in a world of the gods and omens. A unique event on a unique day *could be* the unique appearance of one in person.

The Emperor must have felt safe. He must have felt that he would be safe as long as he did right. He did just what people many expected him to do: to act kindly towards the ancient god-king Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl.



Maybe Moctezuma made a mistake. If we want to be gracious we can say that it was an intentional self sacrifice that is typical of all the Mesoamerican gods. In any case, *Senor Cojones* seized the moment, killed the emperor, managed to escape through the enraged and armed Aztec city like he was a video game hero, and left the last emperor of the Aztecs in the toilet of history.

Emperor Cahotemoc is the real Aztec hero of modern Mexican history. He, not a pussy like Montezuma, but is a Real Man. He led the final resistance, as Cortés razed the city, building by building, to get back his gold. Cahotemoc fought on as his city exploded under bombards and cannons, resisted his enemies on lush floating islands choked with diseased corpses, and at last the royal prince, atop the great pyramid with his jaguar and eagle warriors, died. Ironically, seven musket balls simultaneously blast the prince's chest and his heart bursts out his back to color the rising sun of the last day of Anahuac. The remains of his heart, like resplendent Quetzecoatl, falls. Consumed by death, it will rise afterwards as the planet Venus.

The Aztec Fifth Age ended then and there and—can we really consider it ironically?—right on schedule. The ruling society and its appearance changed entirely. Two thirds of the inhabitants died off in a generation. Today, *nothing* of the city witnessed by Diaz exists, except in museums. Instead over the remains stands Mexico City, now DF.

Cortés' conquests weren't over. He set up court in the ruins and tortured Aztecs to turn over their gold. He sent his lieutenants everyplace that he had heard there was gold. One of them, Pedro de Alvarado arrived in 1522 to the place that the Nahuatl called *Tzapotecapan*, where city-states warred against each other, while Aztec outposts watched passively. The royal emissaries from one powerful king, named Cosijoeza, welcomed Lord de Alvarado with the usual clouds of incense, food, slaves, priceless gold jewelry and worthless jade trinkets. More importantly, they bore a welcome message.

"Our great lord Cosijoeza, *Coquitao* of the *Tzacoteptl* people, welcomes the New Lords to the lands of his ancestors. My great lord will humbly submit to and grandly ally with the Destroyer of the Aztecs, and also he agrees to convert to worship your New God. Our prophets and gods have forewarned us of this, and the people are prepared."

Whether he was visionary or politician, the king welcomed the enemy of his enemy. Señor de Alvarado accepted, settling his allies in Acatepec, where the Aztecs used to live. He was inspired by a large nearby hill covered with white trees that reminded him of a place ~~that he had pillaged once~~, and so called it White Mountain, or in Spanish, *Monte Alban*.

He wrote back to his leader in DF,

"quote was called *quote needed "one of the most pleasant in the land etc."

After securely subduing and plundering every native that he could, Cortés selected a portion of his conquered subcontinent to be his own personal and private domain; then went to Spain to petition for his due honors. He hoped to be the Regent, the Viceroy, the king's own representative in the New World. This is a total *carte blanche*, since the king was above all law. He settled for the title of *Marqués del Valle de Oaxaca*, or Marquis of the Valley of Oaxaca, the heart of his claim. The rest of his lands ran, more or less, in a province-wide, three hundred mile swath up to DF (an area about the size of all New England states, or Indiana). He was one of the richest men in the richest kingdom in the world.

Even the richest, luckiest, most macho man alive, dies. Marquis Cortés breathed his last in Spain where he had returned to argue about his diminishing land grant with the Emperor, or perhaps to appear in court against the no-good do-gooder monk *de las Casas*. His burial had all the pomp that his social-climbing ego could bear to have paid for in advance. Subsequently, his bones have been moved eight times and hidden, like relics, over the centuries. In 1556 his bones were moved to Mexico. His tomb was desecrated and the bones hidden during anti-Spanish riots in 1836. They were rediscovered in 1947 and are now in the church he founded, Hospital de Jesus, close to the Pino Suarez metro station. They are now protected by Mexico's

Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia or more simply INAH; and apparently still by God as well. Several attempts have been made to destroy them since their revelation, the latest in 1981.

So it was established: American History begins with a clean slate. Cortés swept away everything that ever came before, because it was savage, alien, pagan, cannibalistic, ignorant and inferior in every way. The precedent is set. Prehistory counts for nothing in the modern world of gunpowder and imperial economics. Modern history is just a propellant for hip consumption. “Now! And More!”--thrusts itself to the fore. After Cortés, as they say, everything was different.

Except that... it wasn't.

Events were not entirely as the books say, or even as I've related above. While winners do write history, they make just one version, a winner's story which always includes propaganda, lies and justifications. Impartiality is nonsense, and the best that can be done is to provide as many perspectives as possible. Some versions are better, some are lies, some are truer, more detailed, in living color, some are junk, but all are incomplete.

How could it be otherwise? Pens and books record only some facts, and often key records are lost—*Book of the Gods and Rites* and *The Ancient Calendar*, by Fray Diego Durán, (Durán, 1971) was hidden away for 300 years after he wrote it. The note about Cortés' hidden bones was in a drawer for 110 years. Smart, tough and loyal to the end, the soldier Bernal Díaz clumsily wrote down his personal account as one of Cortés' captains some fifty years afterwards, and then only because he had read several accounts by others based on “ignorance and malice.” (Díaz & tr., 1963)

How could we possibly even really know “true and complete” anyway? What we know is just what we know. It's a synopsis of what has been boiled down for us. No one knows everything, we only need to know what's important to us. It's just a story. Who cares?

If truly *nobody* cares, and nobody's life is affected to cause them need, hurt or shortage, *no hay peto*. However, some histories are erroneous, some are partially correct, and some are deliberate lies. However, if a story is untrue, and its overall affect diminishes the lives of thousands of people, then a lot of people care. If there is a better version of a story, it deserves to be heard.

Eye witness accounts are best, especially raw and unedited. As eye witnesses are laid to rest, second-hand versions are better. Eventually everyone who knows has died, but old walls still stand. Naturally, among all available facts, Official Documents intrude themselves, a thick layer of crusty history over events that came before. Other facts remain. Adobe melts, stone walls tumble in earthquakes, but the hills remain. People still plant corn, pray for rain, and the closer to the desperate earth they are, the less some things are likely to change. It's not easy to change a millennia of repeated activities, despite a (claimed) monopoly on writing. When the Spaniards came a quarter million people lived in Oaxaca, and through two thirds died in the initial waves of disease, 100,000 or so survived that, and subsequent cruelty. Calling them *indio* or *esclava* (“slave”) did not erase the visible or invisible past.

Almost everything in the popular version of Cortés is, at best, partially true. We can say they are lies, but with more generosity we can say that each was 100% true in the minds of the writers who wrote for his contemporaries, and view the documents as gifts that have been accidentally bequeathed to us through history. They provide insights into the men (for they were indeed almost all men) who wrote them, every bit as much as they give us facts observed, or recorded, from the natives.

History is a story, the story of history, and is shaped by each person who wrote it. We, readers, students, wayfarers through the ruins of the past; do well to look past the simplest stories that we are given. Other stories, even other truths, lie on the ground like pot shards in a ruin. I've stumbled among them, and dutifully share them.

Sources

The Conquest of New Spain, Díaz, Bernal; Cohen, J.M, translator; Penguin, year?

The comments concerning the old soldier's lack of authorial skill are legitimate, and parts of the book are a hard slog. It is a tremendous first-hand example of his own endurance, luck and loyalty, as well as glorifying his leader; and how Europeans interpreted what they saw, through the glass of sixteenth century Spanish Christian culture. Nonetheless, it is a first-hand account of a momentous deed.

The Broken Spears, The Aztec Account of the Conquest of Mexico; León-Portilla, Miguel; Garibay K, Angel Maria translator to Spanish; Kemp, Lysander, trans to English; Beacon Press, 1990

Perhaps the best palliative to the common Eurocentric version of events, this book arranges native, usually eye-witness accounts of events before, during and after Cortés. It shows how little most of Mesoamerican life changed when a native tyrannical emperor was replaced by a foreign one. Not until disease wiped out the majority of the population did native life change significantly.

A Land So Strange, The Epic Journey of Cabeza de Vaca; Reséndez, Andrés; Basic Books, 2007

Pictures

Colombus etching, <http://macioszek.pl/ht/images/phpinfo.php?p=pictures-chris-columbus>

Princess summerfall winterpsring, <http://www.myspace.com/princesssummerfall/friends>

#A Cycle Ends with Cosijoeza



ART: Huacyac bean pods

To add: A Zapote Plant and fruit, an *Algarobas* tree

Runners reach him while he's on the road. Cosijeza, the king of the People of the Clouds, hears once again about the god's attack in the north against one of his enemies, the Aztecs. That's good, because it will neutralize one foe. Their garrison at Tree-bean Hill will do nothing about Cosijeza's important war, to regain White Lords Town, is going well. Prince Cosiopi is coming with the whole army, and soon the stars will be perfect. Critically, the ancestors gave a good prophecy. The king spent three days in the underworld, giving his blood to feed the First Grandfathers, who appeared. Great Keeper of Ancestors of the House of Death explained the vision to be support from his grandfathers, whose tombs lay inside the White Lords City. He needs only sacrifice to Frog Rain Mother at Old Tree Fort, and victory will be his.

No morning or evening owl star haunts these days. No contrary omens show themselves in the sky or blood. With his entourage and bodyguard of jaguar and eagle warriors, the king sets off. Half way to the city from Burial Place, still in the morning (for the two fortresses are close), the honor guard meets him from the Old Tree Fort. Priests censer him, lay gold about his neck and feathers upon his shoulders, offer food and blankets while the Wise Ones chant the song of welcome. The procession continues as the Wise Ones carry on their heavy official dialogue. King Cosijeza assigns his own Ears and Eyes to respond, and falls back to confer with his army commanders. The young prince, his hair just growing out, will command, but the chief eagle and jaguar will keep him safe.

The city sits on a rise, and behind it the fortress perches atop tall cliffs. Where the natural rocks are insufficient, mortared walls block the way. The king knows, from experience, that the whole hilltop is easily defended, and holds the entire populace easily. Its dry caves hide stores of corn, its wet ones hold water. Somewhere, one of them comes out of a secret place that the warriors have come from, to surprise enemies under the starlight of their approving ancestors. Another one goes all the way to Death City, though no one admits it. In another, gold, jade, books and even greater treasures hide.

But this time, for the high king, everyone is outside, assembled to honor him. The city sits at the base of the fortress, up the hill to the left. Along the road through the surrounding corn fields hundreds of bowmen are lined up, all painted and feathered alike, chanting in groups. Closer to the city, the wide route is lined with eagles to the right and jaguars to the left.

At the edge of the sanctuary three kings wait, and once again the gods are appeased with clouds of smoking heart and poison weed, gifts are exchanged, greetings are exchanged with perfect diction and formal rigidity. The three kings escort their overlord among the protecting tombs, past the ball court, and grand plaza to their royal patio where the feast will be. While exchanging political pleasantries, Cosioeza's guards check his guest quarters, which have been repainted for his presence. He retires to his quarters, as much to give another day of rest to his soldiers as to avoid more official droning. The fiesta begins close to dark, and continues for hours.

After dinner, after entertainment, the king is officially guided to his the guest quarters, which his personal staff has prepared. At each curtained door, where owl guards stand, more people stop, speak their prayers, remain behind as lord Cosijesa penetrates through the public patio, lord's patio, royal family

patio where only eight people and ten servants may go. 7-monkey, the special guest, is upon his knees. The floor is pristine, swept 260 times before he arrived. It is freshly painted, so that the patio shows the five directions of Cosijo, the old storm god, as suits the high king of divine lineage.

There, in the only privacy allowed them by ritual, the leading wise man of the settlement, 7-monkey, says to the visiting king, "We have *owens, Hur,*" mumbles the scribe. The king knows the hand-talk of the wise men—most of the pious elders could no longer use their tongues to speak. "We have omens, Sir." A small moon, limitless stars, and the Wandering War God provide dim light. Cosijoesa signals and both his servant and a guard bring torches.

"Show me," says the king. The wise man bows low and unfolds a painted deerskin before the king.

7-monkey places the deer skin, opened to three pages, to the left of a dead flower that is painted on the ground. The floor decoration is part of the message. That's a bad omen to begin with.

"Yes," says the king, gazing at the beautiful pages before him. *Jewel of Time*, as 7-monkey's day-count is known, is legendary for its beauty; Cosijoesa is practically diverted by the bright colors and flowing forms. It was painted by Lady Doe with Antlers herself, the sister of the grandmother of King Ozomatli—may he accept our sacrifices.

"I know these pages," says the king. 20-day, 13-day, year-day—every noble learns the day-counts and guardians before he bleeds. *Jewel of Time* is renowned for its "extra fours," a cult secret code that appears among the common *extras* on a page. They are the only things he does not understand on the pages before him, and 7-monkey points only at them, with the priests' counting fingers. It confuses newcomers, or the slow at thought, but Cosijoesa reads it. It looks like the same secret message his grandfather had told him about, that his father had read. He remembered the exact words, because his father had repeated them to him, as he had to his son when his hair was no longer cut. "The Doom of the People of the Clouds is to come. For some to survive, send one out of three families to the *Cañada*, one out of three to *Istmo*, and one out of three will stay here and die, on Atonement Day." The king reads the exact date, though, for the first time—just a 260 short of exactly 52 years ago!

*Date. The king knows the commoners call it *Day of Atonement* and that's on everyone's lips, full of expectation. A silly day, nonsense day, nowhere on the sacred calendar except a common occurrence.

Cosijoesa is proud of this dynastic destiny, which has brought them success. 7-monkey sees his guest's distraction, and deftly flips the *Jewel of Time* and lays two new pages out. It is an earlier version—by its style—of two pages from *Talk of Lightning*, the family version of these events. Except Cosijoesa knows these two pages cannot be placed side by side in his version. At the top, center, where both pages end, are two famous marriages, scenes of his ancestors, and their heirs. It shows, as if true, the marriage of Death and the Son of Death. And above that, in the margin: that date. 7-monkey begins to flip it closed, to end the matter, but the king defies convention and places his hand to hold it. He feels it tingle, but no killing bolt.

"Prove to me this page isn't new" he says. His bodyguard had acted to preserve his king when the scribe acted strange, and his face is on the floor, knife at the base of his skull.

"Ha wa way" he shouts, an old man. Half way raised on his elbow, he signals "do not ask me to leave it," he pleads. The king pauses—this is the opportunity of ten lifetimes! He bends over it, turns some pages carefully, and sees another version of his own ancestry—of his grandfather's wife--inserted, to make that page bend possible. At random, he turned another page—oh! The code of extra fours! He could read the future if he wishes! But each time he turns it, whatever page he looks at, there is the same message. And they say the same thing, and the same day.

"*Marriage of death and son of death,*" that is enough to know. *Atonement day.*

"Send my son word to meet me in Foot of the Rock. We will not attack. Tell my family to come there as soon as possible. My mother can come by her own if she must walk—dispatch a whole royal guard for her. Tell the underlords to bring their passage tribute, there too."

The old world is over. It is time for the payment.

“War brother,” says the king to his guard, “give this wise man a blanket to sleep under. Bring me torches, to see with.” He will take 7-monkey at his word, and spend the night studying this document. Cosjopia is educated, wise and experienced. As he reads, studies, interprets the document, the entire history of his people, the People of the Clouds, unfolds.

*We, aloft, share the view of the gods
The land lies below us, like a Y shape
And the flock turns and wheels, breaks and joins again
To make glyphs in the sky
That pass like time
And the wheeling of birds.*

Sources

This is my own dramatization of the last dynasty of Oaxacan kings, and draws on a persistent prophetic legend from my Oaxacan medicine friends. The tragedy of the last royal house will continue later.

Geography of Oaxaca

“Show me a map of Mexico,” commanded the Emperor Carlos, because everything the emperor says is a command.

Cortés first filled the scented air of the Spanish court, the most sophisticated place on Earth, with flowery Spanish words in a faulty Castillian lisp; flowing with the same courtesy, charm and flattery that had gotten him out of the prison mines, gained him command of his first fleet, made friends with the Totonac and Tlaxcalan peoples, talked his way into the Aztec capital city, bluffed into Moctezuma’s trust, and thereby greased the way to destroy all of Mesoamerica. Now, back home in Spain, his proven charm had gotten him a couple of royal pardons for numerous crimes against his loyal followers, courtly enemies and even the Crown itself.

After years of adventure and intrigue, Senor Cortés was the courtier of legend, *el conquistador*. He was no longer a backwater mercenary, but one of the richest, most powerful and (most importantly) *highest ranking* noblemen in Spain—now the Empire. The only human more powerful than the Marquis of Oaxaca was his overlord, King Carlos I of Spain, also known as Emperor Carlos V of the Holy Roman Empire (We shall just overlook the Pope here). Emperor Carlos was quite the imperial sophisticate, well educated, fluent in four languages and the originator the oft-repeated remark, “I speak Spanish to God, Italian to women, French to men, and German to my horse.”

Court was in Seville, the richest and fastest growing city in Europe; in a palace high up, far from the teeming sewer of a river where ships docked or departed for the new world. Now that Tenochtitlán was entirely razed, Seville was once again the fairest of them all. And the emperor was, without a doubt, the single most powerful man in the world. (Yes, in the world, because neither Japan nor China had been discovered yet.)

“Show me a map of Mexico.” Cortés delicately took a sheet of parchment in hand, crumpled it up, pulled it partially flat and let it float onto the most precious floor in the world (carpet from Ghent, tiles from Italy, underfloor heating courtesy of Muslims).

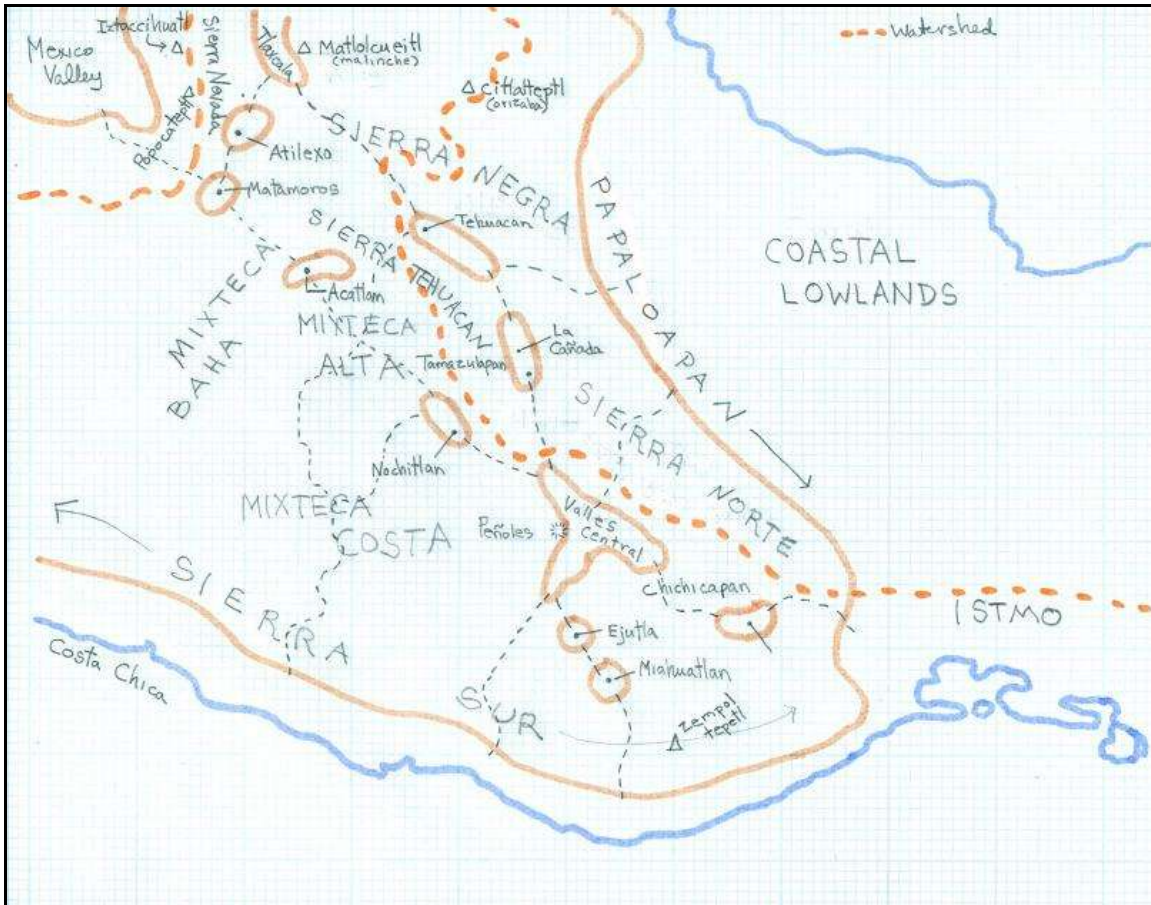
“That,” he said, “is Mexico.” The point he was making is that Mexico = Mountains.

Two continental ranges, the North and South Sierra run the length of Mexico. Part goes on northward right up into the US to become our own Rocky Mountains (and then somewhere beyond). They are steep and sharp, high and jagged, like an irregular zig zag. In fact, the Spanish term used for the mountains, *sierra*, means “saw,” like the tool that we use to cut wood. They lie in rows like Creator’s tool set; not exact and neat, but a bit tossed around as if they are still in use. They are high, steep, and hard. Only a few places are low enough to cross by foot, and sometimes these are high enough to have thin air and snow.⁵

To fly over Mexico makes the geography quickly apparent—wow, mountains forever—but the aerial distance abstracts the hard geography. It looks like a map, not steep rock. I [used to] like to drive the length of Mexico to experience its vastness. It takes a minimum of three days if you drive 6-10 hours a day (and are also sensible enough to just drive entirely around DF. I will now do anything to avoid driving there.) Conveniently for our geographic overview, everything in the north of Mexico is worthless highland desert, Aridoamerica, so we can ignore it entirely for now. When the northern Mesoamerican border moves over the ages, it is due to encroachment by these wastes, which were inhabited by semi-human *chichimecs*. Once we leave that wasteland behind the mountains are always in sight on one or more horizon (except in the

⁵ The names of the ranges are different around Oaxaca, as shown on Map 2, but they are still steep and sharp Sierras.

Mexican valley). To drive east/west cuts across the several ranges, and forces you to experience the best roads that modern highway engineering can provide to go over a continent-long drop off that has been difficult for burros. We call one of those typical roads “vomit highway” because of its steep zig zag climb. The coasts of southern Mexico are torrid lowland jungle, with huge and glorious green-stinking marshes along the coasts. These jungles are always hot and humid (rain or shine), and corn grows there. In Cortés’ time these jungles were still thick and wild enough that jaguars, pumas and crocodiles ranged wild, yet they still had cities that supplied thousands of warriors to attack their enemies in Anhuac.



It’s much nicer up in the mountains. The weather is more temperate and far more comfortable year-round. The tropical lowlands have almost regular seasons of rain and dry, but up in the mountains the weather is more erratic. Where it is sufficient for corn to grow, people live too. Many small enclaves of people exist in the little valleys.

Oaxaca is a microcosm of the country. It is mostly mountains, which limits living space. Three large valleys join to be Oaxaca, which dominates all others for habitable area. The next largest are perhaps 1/5 its size, and many mountain states are much, much less. When things go well, bigger valleys have larger populations. Those big populations set the standards of the surrounding people, just by sheer weight of their numbers. Commonly stated, they made more stuff and exported it more widely. More importantly, geography favored them to raise larger armies.

Mexico Valley, far to the north, is important for the story of Oaxaca. Mexico Valley is larger, and different tribes or city states have occasionally united the people of the valley. Only the last were called the Aztecs, who had been preceded by the Toltecs, and before them by the City of the Gods. These populous centers of civilization are always more important in mythology, history or archeology. We find more information about them. There is more to dig up, more to make up, and more to say about bigger places. As a result, the standards of the Mexican Valley have become the standard for measuring and comparison of other regions of Mexico. This area significantly shaped the western peoples of Oaxaca. It was similar in ancient times as it is today: “What happens in DF is what happens in Mexico.”

Oaxaca is much smaller than Anahuac, but just the right size to last to remain intact, with one capital for 1200* years. It was both the first great city in Mesoamerica, and the longest-inhabited. In ancient times it was as out of the way as it is today, and because things happened more slowly before than they do now, it managed to maintain its own succession of cultures. It was never conquered. Oaxaca has been heavily affected by its isolation, limited carrying capacity, socioeconomic growth rates. Cultural influx has come through the exchange of elite trade goods and wives, or most simply at the end of a spear. Yet, its position didn't entirely isolate it, nor short-change the effects it had upon its better-known neighbors. As mentioned, it was the first city in North America, and probably established the second one too. Many other innovations, unique to Mesoamerica, came from Oaxaca.

Our People of the Clouds , the whole flock, swoops as one and rises and turns and swirls, making strange momentary glyphs in the air before it reshapes, scatters, then reforms itself in a final moment of unity. A flock drops off, scatters, and descends. The birds come down, and some go among the mountainside forests. Some go among the highland valleys. Many land in the scrubland flats, in woods, on the bottom lands around rivers.

The fertile floor of Oaxaca Valley is just under a mile above sea level, a little lower than Denver or DF. This is high enough for some of us lowland people to notice a difference in breathing, when we get off an airplane that started at sea level. It has three arms that have different names, depending on who is calling it what for which reason. You can avoid a lot of confusion when visiting to know that everyplace in Oaxaca has several names. Areas and regions do, and even little towns regularly have four names, and sometimes a nickname for the fifth. I prefer the Mesoamerican feel of the archeological names, which I'll use here. The modern archeological names for the valleys are: the Mitla Valley, going east; Zaachila Valley going south, and Yucuita Valley to the north.

Other People of the Clouds settled in the mountains west of the main valley, in the region that is today called the *Mixteca*. It is divided into the *Mixteca Alta*, or High Mixteca, just west of the Oaxaca Valley, full of high, difficult mountains and small valleys. Farther west is *Mixteca Baja*, Low Mixteca. Only residents of *Alta* would call this low, as it's still mountainous, also with many small valleys. The *Mixteca Costa*, to the south of both High and Low, is a land of lower mountains and wider valleys, and is hot and arid. *La Mixteca* extends into the neighboring modern states of Guerrero and Puebla. Those regions are included in the Mixteca, and those states ill hereinafter be entirely ignored.

The *Istmo* is the Isthmus, which is the narrow bit of Mexico that is pinched down to separate Maya Land from the rest of Mexico. It is lowland jungle for its hundred miles width. Everything east of the Isthmus is Maya Land, from whence come all quetzal feathers, and some other things. West of the Isthmus are mountainous Oaxaca, to the south; and north of that, steamy lowland Olmecateca⁶.

The Names of Places

Names confer familiarity. Sometimes. The names of Mexican places are often particularly difficult for us—for example the name *Cahuacandehvui* is easy to read right over it without actually reading it. Can you say how many syllables it has, without looking back? It means nothing to us.

Oaxacan towns often have two, three or even four names. A typical example is *

I've chosen to ignore all the native names at first, and use translations into my modern English version instead. By "my modern," I mean that I. I'll change the academic names most commonly found into vernacular. I think that Sky on the Rock is better than the official "Peña where lies the sky," and much better than Cahuacandehvui. Some of these places will change names as new people take over, or new times reveal changes that have mysteriously taken place while we weren't looking. We will not see Monte Alban for quite a while.

People, deities and sometimes activities or objects will be treated the same way. Stories based on myth, magic, or the cycles of time and space are different when we see the metaphors more clearly. It will be confusing at first, but metaphor always is. Like maps, they are only a guide, not the way.

⁶ Do get the right name here

The First Americans

I doubt that the Americas' earliest inhabitants will ever be found.

Archeology, at least good archeology, is strapped to Science. The necessary artifacts to prove something are scarce at best. Such remains are accidental to the makers of them. Archeologists spend most of their time either looking for a place to look for something, or sifting through dirt and refuse. Almost everything they encounter is broken, in pieces. They love pottery because it doesn't rot and there is lots of it in the refuse heaps of cities. Every so often a gorgeous, intact stash of goods is found that was buried as an offering, or hidden away from invaders. Those help to organize the trash into recognizable patterns.

When people have no pottery, their remains diminish tremendously. Broken tools, remains of tool making, and bones are all that is left to throw away. When people move around a lot their garbage is strewn over a larger area, and thus never builds up enough to be found or recognized as such. When they have no permanent dwellings it is significantly more difficult to find where they stayed. If they have moved by boats then their stopping places are even farther apart than if they were walking. And if the places that they stayed, maybe even for long times, are underwater, exploring them requires massive technology that is warranted only by a pay off like underwater Alexandria, not possible campfires on the Pacific coast.

That is why I don't think the true origins of North America's earliest inhabitants will ever be found. They were moving, had negligible durable goods, moved long distances by boat, and stayed at places that have been underwater since the last glacial melting.

The scientific explanation of people in the New World is a neat story. For people who do not care about supporting facts, The First Americans came over the land bridge from Berengia to America, hot on the trail of herds of migrating megafauna. As a story, it rates right up there with the theories of the Spanish monks, who suggested they were the Lost Tribes of Israel; or more modern alternative science who made them survivors from Mu, Lemuria, or Atlantis.

I do not doubt that the population of the Americas came from Asia. It is clear from archeology, language, and DNA testing that they came in more than one group, and at different times.

I do not doubt that the land now called Berengia existed, as said, about 12,000 BP when the glaciers locked up more of the finite amount of water in the world, and it went when they melted. I am not confident that it was populated with animals and humans during the period that is important to the migration issue. Archeological measurements of ancient conditions are much more accurate now than then the story of the "land bridge" began, and indicate a very harsh climate. Evidence for megafauna or humans is dismal.

I do not doubt the existence of the "ice corridor" between the two notable glaciers⁷. This retraction of ice occurred and separated these chunks several times. The period(s) proposed in the migration theory here is 8,000 BP, when the glaciers had melted and released their water again.

However, I doubt that the First People came that way.

Let's imagine the single small band of hunters that is going to trek the path from Berengia to the Promised Land, where animals knew no fear. All they have to do is travel through the absolutely new strange terrain between those looming walls of ice, forward despite the biology and superstition and mythology and anti-social and holy smokes, we will soon be up to our groins in incest that might keep them back. The ecosystem is tundra-like, thus relatively easy to get through compared to mountains. I am not pretending that herds of megafauna wandered down that wrecked land of tundra. Why would the people go?

Well, maybe they were exiled, driven out, got lost or were following a Manitou. They set off. There's plenty of water along the way, since they are walking between two melting glaciers. They are all strong and carry as much dried meat and pemmican as possible. Studies show creatures can carry 1/3 of their weight

⁷ Name these

without breaking down, and this = 30 days worth of food sufficient to go that long without taking damage. (*, alexander logistics) Of course, these earth-wise people can stretch it to double that because those prehistoric people were really tough; or they were magical if in a legendary tale; or because... um, because they *must* in a science story, since no other story is known.

The corridor is about 400 miles long. With 60 days worth of rations, they need travel only 6.6 miles per day. The Roman Army and US Army (when men walked) both used to expect movement of 20 miles per day. Piece of cake!

Not really. Neither of those forces move that way in strange territory, neither are slowed down by elders and children, and tundra-like though it is, the land between the melting glaciers will have plenty of cliffs and hills, washes of gravel and gigantic stones, icy rivulets and crushing torrents make things deadly.

Ten miles a day is pretty good for healthy and hardy hikers, based on the knowledge of experienced backpackers. But that is fast for elders and children. So these travelers either go without elders and children, or those move as fast as vigorous adults. And they will abandon everyone unable to keep up. Nonetheless, ten miles per day it is.

So it takes only 40 days to do it, within the extended ration limit of carried food. At the end of the run is a land much like Berengia but where animals have no instinctive or learned response to humans, it is heaven. Easy pickings, say some scientists; but not enough to cause exterminations, add others. This little heroic band is sufficient to populate all of North America. It's an unworldly tale of heroism to remember forever.

But it's a magical story, a shame to science. Evidence for it is negligible, and its acceptance for this long is imbedded in academic tradition, not accumulated evidence. That this mammoth has stood in the living room ever since its conception, along with the Clovis Horizon (see appendix), is a shame to rational science. These have insisted on arrival, by the magic corridor, around 12,000 years ago, for reasons that defy good science.

The Guy*

Now, X years after he is dead, his students have also begun to succumb to retirement and cessation of publication and support of their old, silly theories. Good evidence of earlier occupation will not be set to impossible standards, or to arbitrary dismissal.

One piece of negative evidence impresses itself upon me. No indigenous culture has anything like this heroic flight in their cosmological or ancestral mythology. No one sings about their handful of ancestral survivors struggling through this make believe corridor.

North American myths fall into two major types, wherein people either migrated from island to island, or came right from where they live. Many of the latter category include what are called emergence myths, wherein the latest Ancestors came out of a hole in the ground and into the current world. I feel a temptation to connect the heroic icy tunnel migration with the usual vaginal symbolism, the idea of the few people getting through, and the image of a whole new world. It is useful for story, but no material evidence matches it. Everyone who came from the ground knows exactly where their ancestral origin was. Pueblo people of the US SW often came from Place of Emergence is in the Grand Canyon and, perhaps near to those secret sites that we will see only if we are credentialed scientists, or academics, anyway⁸.

I do not wish to argue with fundamentalists of science or mythology on what is right or wrong on the truth of the emergence issue. Nonetheless, the other common story is of travel from island to island.

These days, numbers of Japanese fishermen in their little fishing boats are blown from their fishing waters before being rescued and towed to Seattle's harbors. People had been getting about on water since a batch got to Australonesians crossed the waters of the Wallace Trench about 30,000 years ago.

The end of the last glacial period was about 12,500 years ago, but it reached its maximum extent in Siberia from 18,000 to 17,000 BP, and much earlier in Europe 22,000–18,000 BP. During the 6,000 years from maximum to minimum (now) the seas rose about 120 yards, or 360 feet. A similar rise would flood out almost every major city in the world (Viva Oaxaca, a mile up!). In ancient days, when thousands of people

⁸ Or went down that sacred waterway with the right people, before it was forbidden; I wish it had been me.

lived along the sea shores, they too would have been flooded out, albeit over 1500 generations. Plenty of time to just move inland, really; until we recall that Indonesia went from being a fantastically wonderful abundant tropical subcontinent to being more than 17,000 islands today. During that 1500 generations boats got better and better. Little archeological data remains because boats rot, but we know people got around.

The entire western coast of North America averages 200 yards deep, then drops off rapidly. When the earliest boaters landed and camped the sea level was somewhere between 120 yards lower than now. The width of the coastal zone is about 25 miles, often less, rarely up to 60 miles out. Somewhere in that zone between their tide and ours are the camps of the first Americans.

And one thing that we know is that they came often.

Modern Glottochronology uses facts derived from words to discover relationships between languages, and also to calculate how long two related languages have been separated. It's not a new science, and after more than a century two facts are now base theories; proven enough for authorities to accept them as laws for further analysis and development. They are:

1. Languages change at rate of 15% per thousand years; and
2. One thousand years makes the two separated languages unintelligible, due to pronunciation, new vocabulary, changes to grammar or syntax and so on.

This method indicates that eight or more separate starting groups migrated to and settled in North America. Soon after the end of the Ice Age these ancestral groups began to separate in groups that grew, and then separated themselves into other groups. Sometimes these early peoples moved considerable distances.

One of these groups, is actually a bit more complex than the organization chart indicates. The indigenous California people were very content to live in narrow valleys that ran up and down the hills of their stream stream bed. Separation was the rule, and when recoverable facts were recorded, 64 different languages are noted. These were not different like Spanish and Italian, although such differences were common between neighboring valleys within each of the 64 groups. They are different like Spanish and Russian or Turkish. Some tongues have relations outside of the state, others none, or a few with neighbors, some with only relatives who are distant in distance and time. These are the ones that we, who have come after the destruction of these entire nations, can account for. I cannot doubt others were lost and I can attest that some are unknown to our record keeping of authorized scientific truth.

Multiple origins are apparent. Multiple successful landings, we see, of people numerous enough to reproduce, survive, and expand their numbers. And 12,000 years isn't enough, in my unscientific estimate, to account for them all.

Nor is an arrival of 12,000 years sufficient for people to travel from Berengia to Tierra del Fuego, at the tip of South America, unless they went at a fair jog all the way, pausing only to have babies and bulk up on the magical food that must also have fallen upon them as they passed through increasingly alien climate zones.

People arrived by sea, often, from different places and peoples along the Asian coast, and settled colonies of various sizes and various degrees of success from Alaska to Tierra del Fuego. DNA indicates five successful migrations from Asia to the New World. Finally, it is apparent that the northern latitudes share many fauna, so they must have crossed somewhere. People may also have come that way, but the Beringia land bridge doesn't work. I shall let scientists worry about that one.

#Sitting on a Log

There was a time before the time you can imagine. It was a bad time. No one could live then except the Changer. Changer knew the chants. Changer had the sight. Changer had the touch. Changer floated upon the dark motionless sea, cold and alone.

I am Changer, says the floating thing. I am Floating Log, says Changer. I am Place says the Log. Changer is there on the log, with Piercer. Piercer has a long nail on his finger. Changer has a Long Nail, and he cuts himself on the carrying place. Piercer cuts himself and there is Hearing Organ where the blood is from. Twister pierces himself and makes the Speaking Organ where the blood is from. Changer bleeds himself again and there is Reproductive Organ there.

The Sacrificer scatters his blood in four directions, and where it lands upon the water from the deep, up rise the north birds. The Bleeder sprinkles blessings with the holy grass sticks, and where it lands on the log, up come the west birds. The Keeper of Life brings down the blessings and the swimming birds circle there. The Maker blesses with his blood and the east birds settle upon the log.

“Fly little ones, fly,” sang the Maker, “Find your Place, find your time.”

The eight ones flew off. The winged ones went away, far and high and deep. Maker sang.

“Fly little ones, fly,” sang the Maker, “Find your Place, find your time.”

They flew to every part of the world.

“Fly little ones, fly,” sang the Maker, “Find your Place, find your time.”

“Fly little one, fly,” sang the Maker. The first ones to return were the sea birds.

“We are young and little,” they sang back, “we found nothing in the South.”

“Fly little one, fly,” sang the Maker. The next ones were black birds.

“We found nothing in the West,” they sang, “there is just a hole there.”

“Fly little one, fly,” sang the Maker. The next to return were the Lightning Birds.

“We found this,” sang Serpent Lightning, “We bring back this Sky Fire,” said Eagle Lightning.

“That is not what I want now,” said Maker.

“I came from the Invisible world,” said Bird Lightning, not boasting but offended. “I came from Above,” Serpent Lightning said. “I came down and receive no blood,” cried the Sky Fire. “This place is not worthy of me,” and it went away, back up. Sky became unreachable. Sky has obscured the Above. The Angry Flyer covers the sky.

“Fly little one, fly,” sang the Maker. Finally, up floated grebe, dead.

Here is the Maker singing, here is the healer with his hands, here is the breath from the Maker. The singing and the healing and the breathing bring life back to grebe. Grebe is the Great Healer.

All the birds sang now, but nothing occurs. The song is not complete. “Where are the missing ones?” they ask, “Where are the ones who went away?” Eagle, Lord of Laws, said, “Whoever made them go must be banished, or bring them back.”

Maker agrees to make a replacement for himself. He makes the Great Singer, Butterfly.

Synopsis: Maker sings for Lighting Snake to fly back, but it refuses. Then he threatens it. Then he throws a rope made of feathers into the sky, climbs up and sends the Lightning down. Now 10 birds sing, and at last the one from Below rises. *h is dead, but has mud in his mouth.

Great Singer fails at the Great Healing. It fails. Then he asks for help from the Little Proponents, advocates, helpers. They then do the Greater Healing, and the Deep Diver comes to life and spits out mud. Great Singer becomes Great Healer.

From that, two more birds come from below = 13 bids

Great Healer becomes Great Maker. With the mud he makes the earth. He addresses it as Great Jaguar, etc.



Fortunate indeed is the life in the Land of Rain. Here the world is born. Here the gods live.

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The Sky

We moderns have lost so much of Nature. Something inside of many of us aches without finding resolution, without knowing why. I will invite you to go somewhere far away from home, as simple as you can bear, without electricity (or at least without radio, TV, internet). Eat well. Listen. Just see what entertains you, or catches your interest. If you are lucky, you will lose yourself, and satisfy that hunger.

One time, in the wilds, I spent every dawn and dusk settled into a blind, waiting for deer to show up. I would ground myself, breath carefully, and relax into the place. Sitting still was difficult enough, with aches and pains as distractions. Settling in was harder, with thoughts and ideas distracting me. Nonetheless, after a week I would sit and settle and relax. It was pleasant. Satisfying. One time it was day when I sat and began, and night when I got distracted. That was the one of the most satisfying experiences I have ever known, that timeless peace.

Darkness is far, far away from us, so we know nothing of the stars. How many of us have actually *seen* the Milky Way? I invite you to go to anyplace that there is no ambient light so that you can experience it. If you live in a city, you cannot go anywhere within two days drive and expect to see the darkness. We have so much ambient light bouncing around that it is omnipresent around urban centers. Go two days outside of any suburban presence. If it looks like your headlights are not working like usual, you are there. If we just sit for a while without any light, the dark is tangible. After a while, if unrelieved, it invades other senses. It feels heavy. It squeezes out air. When senses are lost, we fill the void. Lights appear, we hear strange things, and panic is really quite possible. The simplest solution is to speak aloud (softly!). The harder solution is to listen to nature or hear one's own body. Sensibly, we avoid such lack of sensation, and mostly we sleep when it is dark.

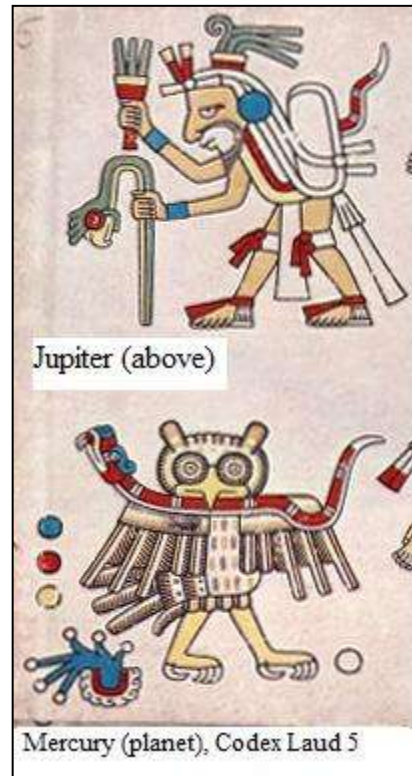
Any light whatsoever is a relief. One glowing end of a punk stick will, eventually, allow most of us to see each other's movements if we sit in a small circle.

Clear night is not dark. The stars shine. I don't mean the urban stars—those are just a training version of the night sky where only the brightest celestial bodies shine through the pollution of industry and light. If the Milky Way isn't so bright that it's intrusive, keep heading away from the cities.

The night is dark on the ground, unless the moon is up. But the cloudless sky, without or without the moon, is bright. Stars are *everywhere*, except in the Milky Way, which is a bright broad smudge of soft light in a band going from horizon to horizon, framed on both its obscure edges by stars. With little effort it is easy to find the BRIGHT stars, including the planets. If you have the time, and decent eyes, you can see one star, at least, is tinged red. Others sometimes look pale red, maybe blue even.

Anatomically modern humans have lived on earth for 100,000-200,000 years or so. We can be sure that some of us have been watching the sky for the whole time. I think that we've been watching for far longer than that, although proof of such is impossible.⁹ Nonetheless, AMH have been around for 5,000-10,000 generations.

That's a long time to watch the same movie, even in slow motion.



⁹ Stafford, *The Ten Gods*, unpublished. :D

How long is it? Let's use the shorter number, 100,000 years, for convenience. That is enough for the skies to have gone through an entire precessional cycle (26,000 years) almost four times. We, at the end of that time period, are entering a new astrological house—this is the dawning of the Age of Aquarius.¹⁰ Ending now is the end of the Age of Pisces, which began about 2,166.66 years ago, more or less, which we mark as the birth of Jesus, our Point Zero. Before that was Taurus, roughly covering the time from the start of agriculture, and so on back through time. Since the first AMH the Age of Aquarius three times already.

The importance of the sky to ancient people cannot be overstated. The Mayan interest is labeled “star obsessed” but people of ancient Mesopotamian, Chinese and Indian all exhibited the same fascination.

Some celestial features are prominent and are seen in similar terms all over the world. The Milky Way is one, generally being labeled as a road or river, or animated as a snake, all around the world. The Pleiades are important to everyone, often with birth or beginning implications. But in general, specifics about the heavenly features vary around the world, even though generalities, like the planets having powers and wandering, are similar.

Aristotle is lionized as a philosopher, and in the Middle Ages as the Knower of All Things. He, and others of his time, was heir to a prehistoric system of thought, imagery and knowledge based upon oral tradition, symbolic representation, and accumulated data. Its loss to literacy is as irreplaceable as the hunter-gather lifestyle once people depart from it. Drawing upon that old knowledge, “He was proud to state it as known that the gods were originally stars, even if popular fantasy had later obscured the truth.” (Santillana, 1969, p 4) I think this is a general truth for humankind regarding the gods and planets, although not the only source of divinities.

In Mesoamerica planets are one source of divine beings. Dismiss ideas of frozen balls of gas, and also of western human-like and humanized deities. It is better to think of natural powers, or spirits instead of gods. Also dismiss every concept you have about the deities of planets from western traditions. Mesoamerican planetary deities are not the same. We will come back to them later.

The sky is considered to be opposite the earth in both its essentials and its details. A key difference is that it is stable, whereas our earth is not. Essentially, everything that is living, dies. People live long or short lives, a field flourishes or fails, rains are early or late, empires rise and fall; but they all will die. And over, the sky goes on through its endless and predictable cycles, neat and clean despite complications caused by the wanderers. *Flower and Song* means everything, and we of the earth who grow and die are the flowers, while the eternal song is that of the skies. It is permanent, and comfortably predictable since even those weird wanderers follow their own special patterns. It doesn't change.

Comfortable, but there is a problem: the sky does move. A thing called the precession of equinoxes makes it rotate slowly around a wiggly center point. It is very slow, and moves in a counter-clockwise direction.

Knowledge of the precession is considered to be an important scientific event. Indeed, when we read the news of its discovery somewhere between 147 BC to 127 BC by the Greek Hipparchus, it is treated as a very big deal. Proof of earlier knowledge is presented in *book by *author, who shows how plainly the Mithraic holy images reveal knowledge of the passing of an earlier house—that of Taurus, slain by Mithras. According to *Hamlet's Mill* it was known at least 4,000 years ago (Santillana, 1969, p 3), and probably around 10,000.

Mesoamericans certainly knew of it. If they did not know it before they settled down, they would afterwards. Several centuries of sky watching, fixing things with horizon sightings, will reveal the movement. Monte Alban used the same landmarks to site on for a thousand years.

People around the world had different interpretations of the constellations, and so it is surprising to notice that both Mesopotamians (inherited by our astronomical system) and Mesoamericans named the identical constellation Scorpio. In general their constellations are little known to us, but what we know will be detailed below.

Known Mesoamerican Stars

¹⁰ http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N9oq_IskRIg&feature=related

*Some that are recognized today and by the ancient Mesoamericans include, but are not limited to, the following: the Pleiades, Orion's Belt and Sword, the Big Dipper, the Little Dipper, Gemini (?), Castor and Pollux in Gemini, Scorpio, Taurus, Polaris, Rigel, Sirius, Betelgeuse, and the Southern Cross.

THE OLD WAY

Life as gatherer-hunters is unimaginably dangerous. Humans in small groups are not on top of the food chain, and must live the life of prey animals that survive by running away. In large groups, with wariness and wit, men armed with sticks and stones can kill almost anything, but still with great danger. Nature, the collective of everything "out there" past the campfire, is omnipresent, omnipotent and will, eventually, win against every living person.

People living on the edge of survival do not romanticize anything. Life is reduced to its basics, and practicality, embedded in tradition, rules all. A vivid example is given in *The Old Way* (Thomas, 2006) Elizabeth Marshall Thomas shares her experiences among the !Kung, or Bushmen, of the Kalahari Desert in the 1950's, when she accompanied her family to live among them. It was the first meeting of the two cultures, and one of the last opportunities on Earth to witness a primal hunter-gatherer society in its natural state. They lived in one of the most hostile and difficult environments in the world, with minimal material goods and possessions. Their way of life is like a skeleton of human culture, ready to expand in any direction, except with less. Their way of life offers parallels to the ancient hunter-gatherer People of the Clouds that are useful to understand the start of society in Mesoamerica.

I am not, in any manner, implying any contact between these ancient peoples since the first groups of people exited our primeval homeland and walked across the lush lands of the modern Straits of Hormuz. Nonetheless, the character of life in Neolithic times requires certain parallels that are consistent across the world. The natural environment imposes the critical differences in food supply, and life in most of Mesoamerica enforces more lush conditions than the arid desert of the Kalahari. Oaxaca's seashore, jungle, mixed scrub bottomlands and high forests all certainly provided far more food and opportunity than the bleak Kalahari. *Anyplace* is lush compared to the Kalahari.

Food availability is the key difference for long-term survival. (Sufficient food implies sufficient water). More food allows for more people per area. However, despite a relatively denser population, evidence indicates that most foraging peoples still lived in family groups of 5-20 individuals. The seasonal gatherings must have been more fun and dangerous than among the !Kung, since the richer environment allows more people within the same walking distance. However, whereas a larger overall population allows the entire culture to survive, it actually adds another dangerous competitor for the anonymous family band.

For more than a hundred generations people who lived the slow, difficult life of foragers. Foragers don't wander randomly over the country, but settle into going back and forth across a claimed territory, going to wherever the food is supposed to be. They settle into a territory and relationships with neighboring bands. After remaining in an area for a dozen generations people will start to know every rock, tree and bush. When people are hungry the old folks remember rare occasions in the past when food was found here or there. They mark rocks to remember, and tell stories of "why people ate underground termites when Killer Summer was king, at the place where the eyes watched from the rock."¹¹

All humans living in and as a part of nature acutely know life and death. They recognize that parts of the known, discernable world are alive; and that humans share this vitality. The lives of animals and plants, which are born and have spawn and then die, are similar human life. The lives of natural things are slower. For instance, it takes a long time for a mountain to grow up, or a river to change its bed. They don't speak human languages, but they can be understood. It is possible to converse with them, to learn from them, and

¹¹ Find a rock pecking in Oaxaca to reference

sometimes to bargain with them. This idea of “the living world” and humanity’s part in it is universal. In the Old Way it is called “the world,” and in the modern world is called Animism. The world is alive.

Among the Valley People of the Clouds the life force is called *pi* or *pee*, variously translated as “wind, breath, heart, breath, spirit, power.” These are all metaphors, poetic representations of something that all of those apparently separate things share. All animals have this sound as the first part of their name such as deer, *pichina*; cottontails, *peela*; or fish, *pella*. Humans are *peni*. Finally, great natural forces have *pi*, such as *Pezalo*, *Pitao Cozaana*, *Petela*, *Pitao Cocijo* and others. The essential life force for all these things is the same.

Among the People of the Clouds the only certain proof of life was movement, and anything that moved was alive. People, animals, wind, earthquake, fire and river ought not surprise us. Getting into details, like the bubbling foam on top of chocolate or mescal, provides insight and amusement.

In a living world some parts are dead.

I have a favourite story. An anthropologist was talking to his Native American informant at the edge of a field, and he said, “So, I suppose you think that all of these rocks out there in the field are alive?” And his informant goes, “No... But some of them are!” (Pendell)

All of the rest are dead. We may be polite and say they are sleeping or dreaming, but only some geological features are alive. The omnipresent and omnipotent schism of Living and Dead cannot be escaped. It filters every other experience of people who are prey.

Human beings naturally categorize our experiences. Some categories are hard-wired, built right into our carnal biology, like male and female. Some seem to be hard-wired, built into our responses, such as friend or enemy, predator or prey, leader and follower. The duality is so essential to nature that people find opposites in all of the world: alive or dead, day or night, wet season and dry season, human and not-human, within the campfire and outside of it, dangerous and not, prey and predator, fire and fuel.

Daily life with predator/prey is inherent when everyone always has half an ear listening for any of the thousand signs of danger approaching. That conflict is essentially “Us versus Everything that wants to eat us.”

Exactly who “us” is varies. Family groups are the start. Biology doesn’t give choices in small groups living in the wild. Blood relatives are always us. In-laws are also us, because our sisters go there, or their sisters come here, as wives. When we have a lot of food then “us” is whoever eats it, and they qualify because they do the same when we go their camp.

People are generally equal, except for their authority and reputation. For property, the Old Way are generally egalitarian. That is, the members of a group share property as equals, none of them vying to have more than the others. For one thing, no one wants more than the family can carry around, so possession of non-functional goods is counterproductive. When someone possesses an excess of food, goods or talent, they share it out among others according to whatever system of exchange is valued at that time. The result is that good hunters, whose meat provides the essential product of distribution, obtain admiration and status for their skills, and recognition of their leadership ability in those circumstances. Leadership is gained only through authority, which is volunteered by the others. Leadership is distributed to those who are most skillful, so that the best hunter leads a hunt and the best land-knower leads the walk to the next camping site. The best arrow-maker gives his extra arrows to others and receives a gift from the best basket maker. This is all done without thanks, often in a non-ceremonial context, simply because it is the way that things have always been.

Thomas points out how communal duties are shared among the !Kung. Most duties are shared by everyone. Everyone brings in a nearby wealth of ground food. Anyone can make a shelter out of the living brush. Men and women both care for children at the hearth site, and everyone keeps watch at night.

Two roles are strictly gender-oriented, without exception. Men hunt, while women bear children. Biology determines this, and tradition explains it. Women are more magical and powerful than men, because they make new people. Men need protection from this power, which is every bit as dangerous as it is miraculous.

“Women never took part in hunts and would not touch hunting equipment. To do so would harm the hunt and the hunter, not the woman... The power of men was fragile and required direction and development. The power of women was strong and exuded from them naturally, from the day they reached the menarche... No skill is required to menstruate or ovulate, and if one is pregnant, one gives birth with or without past experience. Hunting, in contrast, requires much skill and knowledge, much experience and hard work, with no guarantee of success.” (Thomas, 2006, pp. 177-178)¹²

The gender standard softens when groups live in a richer environment that doesn't require every woman to bear, nor every man to hunt. Differences might be of swapped social roles (women hunters, men doing women's tasks), and/or of sexual roles. The customs might recognize some kind of third gender (other-than-appears), or two others (men-women and women-men) and/or sometimes combined as hermaphroditic, or entirely genderless. Among some Native Americans certain important rituals require the presence of such people, and cannot be carried out without them.

Both men and women participate in activities with blood. Blood is life, as everyone knows through witnessing it. If we lose ours, we will die. If an animal loses his, it will die. Except sometimes women have too much life, and expel it. This astonishing abundance is the source of unique, deadly magic against men.

People live within the world of nature, of life; and they live within a society of reciprocity, of giving gifts to equalize relationships between members. In many little ways, in every way imaginable, the great powers give life to humans through rain, earth and corn. Sometimes for reasons entirely unrelated to the powers act angry or careless because something is not in balance, is not reciprocal. The best thing to do is to offer them the ultimate gift: blood, especially your own, and especially from the two very human organs of speech and pleasure.

Morality, as a way to behave towards others (generally with social restraint) exists only insofar as it defines how we behave among Us, whatever our numbers might be. The outside world does not warrant our value judgments, any more than an avalanche makes judgments about our camp beneath it. People who are not us are not real human beings and do not fit within any code of morality. No spirit power cares about what people do, as long as the balance of nature is kept.

While the great powers are indifferent to humans, and every other form of life, some lesser powers prey upon them, or perhaps just require humans as hosts to manifest. Diseases, for instance, occupy humans and sometimes kill them. (The misery they can cause makes them malevolent, whether they are at core indifferent or not.) Since they don't live in this world, they live in the other world, where things are that have no bodies.

These beings, the entities and powers of this world and the Otherworld, are not humans, but they are people. Not everyone understands or interacts with them the same way. Perhaps interaction is forbidden, like women's menstrual secrets to men or men's hunting secrets to women. Maybe it is impossible for one gender to do, like offer blood from one's penis. Maybe the invisible entities wish to conceal themselves from some people. Maybe some people are just stupid. Who understands the mystery of nature? Whatever the cause, people understand the powers differently. Yet, in rites, everyone who can participates to their ability.

Everyone knows the Otherworld. It includes everything that is known, but is not material. It is a thing, but not a concrete thing. Rage, for instance, is a real thing, but must manifest itself to affect the world. The Otherworld includes things that are an absence, like the dead, and Death itself. Dreams are of the Otherworld, where our own Otherworld soul parts go wandering around, unsure and insecure.

The Otherworld is essentially everything that is not tangible. Pe, Life Force, is such—movement is only the manifestation of the mystical power, not pe itself. It's possible to see or sense pe, just as it is possible to see other spirits during rites. When an immaterial power is sensed in the physical world, it is magic. Likewise the extension of physical senses into immaterial realms is magic.

¹² The same beliefs are held by *Aleuts* and *Greenlanders*, held as rigidly as a hunter poised with his spear at an air hole. (*reference). The original pygmies (reference: *The Little People*, Turnbull?). These are all groups that lived in marginal territories.

Fire is the universal power of life. The center of safety is the camp fire, and the hearth fire is the source of comfortable warmth and nourishment. Fire is a powerful and capricious being, a burner who hurts and destroys as well as First Teacher. Fire taught humans how to be safe, how to cook, and how to make wood and stone tools. Fire taught how to make a “little day” inside the shelter for people, and lit the fire of curiosity inside ourselves.

Other spirit beings, the entities and powers of this world and the Otherworld, are not humans, but they are people, or beings. Not everyone understands or interacts with them the same way. Perhaps it is forbidden, like women’s menstrual secrets to men, or men’s hunting secrets to women. Maybe it is impossible for one gender to do, like offer blood from one’s penis. Maybe the invisible entities wish to conceal themselves from some people. Maybe some people are just stupid. Who understands the mystery of nature? Whatever the cause, people interpret the magic differently.

Everyone has their own spiritual contact, since all people possess *pe*. All people have at least two souls. First is the apparent, physical body; a fragile and endangered husk on legs, whose existence has one purpose: to die. It is like every other part of nature. It lives and dies and is digested by the wilderness. People rise and fall, slower than flowers but faster than mountains. As the body rots, the immaterial part goes to join the rest of the ancestors, which includes everyone who has died.

Many people have more than one invisible soul, or spiritual part. The hunters of the Old Way often have one or more animal souls. They inhale the last breath of their prey and, forever after, have its soul as part of them. Sometimes this animal magically helps them to hunt. That is why some men are better at hunting rabbits, others deer, or others the great mastodon.

Some people have special powers. Some of them cure diseases, using healing beings from among the ten thousand plant people. Some interpret dreams, and give advice on avoiding the bad in them. Some lead ceremonies, like when the sun needs help to make the day longer; or specific rites such as making boys into men. Someone might have hunting powers, berry powers, medicine finding, deer sensing or wooing others’ wives. These include magical healers, healing herbalists, buriers of the dead, dream interpreters, artists and singers. The source of these powers varies from culture to culture.

Although everyone has their own spiritual contact, and some have powers, the spirit world and influences can easily overwhelm a person. Some people are singled out to be special interpreters of the invisible world, and to have interactions with it, to manipulate it, and to protect from it. This is the first profession, that of *intercessor*. These individuals have undergone special initiation into the ways of the spirits by having been killed or dragged into the Otherworld by disease, yet and coming back to life. Since they were dead they know the Otherworld and can go back and forth. They are magical beings, not of this world or the other one. They interact with the forces of nature that usually act entirely without regard to humans, and can change the weather, slow or flood a river, or cause a landslide. Some can command the ultimate force of Death, and send it where they wish it to go.

The popular modern term for this intercessor is *shaman*, a Siberian word now used to include all kinds of ancient supernatural workers that are listed above. The Siberian practices are of the same root as the American ones, and it’s appropriate to use it in a Mesomaerican context. However, I am going to narrow it more towards its original meaning. A shaman is a spiritual traveler who goes to the Otherworld to gain supernatural information and assistance. He or she wields powerful magic. These individuals actually go there, on purpose. They report to us that there are actually two Otherworlds, one that is Above, and another that is Below. Great Powers reside there, mirrored as dichotomies of above/below: sky/earth, day/night, male/female, hard/soft, light/dark and so on and on. They are reached by supernatural means, perhaps flying, climbing a tree, or going into a hole or cave. Shamans have a special soul, a shape changing soul to turn into the creature of their need—jaguars, eagles and lightning.

When a Great Power changes, causing earthquakes or drought, the shaman must go visit it to see what is wrong, what must be done, and find out what it wants in order to make the world stable again. When an earthquake changes the ground, moving mountainsides and rivers, someone must go to the Heart of the Earth to learn, perhaps to dissuade or ease the pain of the great being. If the rains stop, or the deer go away, or the babies all have a strange illness; the shaman goes. When the shaman works, everyone attends. No one is separate from this, nobody escapes the power of the Other Side, everyone is needed to help. In a small group or large autumnal gathering, everyone participates. All who can or must will sing, dance and

participate in the rites. In the very least, people witness. Before the gathered community the shaman goes to the other world. He seeks the desired entity, then begs, requests or commands it to help. Sometimes he does it silently alone, in a hole or wrapped and tied up in a blanket, or up in a tree. Often the magical journey is dramatic, with miraculous stunts, apparitions, unearthly sounds, violence and wounding done to the shaman.

These rites work. Not always, not often, but regularly. Remember that these are actions in a no-nonsense society. If an action is supposed to heal, and does not, then the community will withdraw whatever authority they had given to the now-proven fraud. A rite to call rain needs to call rain, or a vision seeking the deer must bring the hunters and animals together. A shaman, or other intercessor, has an obligation to do what he can, but not to do what he cannot.

No one chooses to be a shaman, any more than they choose the day to be born. They are chosen by the Other Side, perhaps being struck by lightning, surviving a disease or horrible wound, or given powers in dreams. Sometimes people are born holy, with a special connection to the Other Side from birth, just like some people are born as monsters, tainted instead of blessed. But shamans are also Those Who Know. They have old knowledge and songs, taught to them by their teachers, or directly by the powers. They know where things came from, how to work with them, and how to work with them with the people.

Hunting, killing animals for food, imposes a great spiritual problem upon the hunter. Animals provide good, high quality food for everyone but they must be killed, sent to Death. It is clear that their death = our life. There is the crisis: we hate death and fear its mystery, yet inflict it daily upon the animals and plants. It is part of the larger crisis, variously expressed as “What is life and death?”, “What is my purpose?”, or “Why am I in this miserable place?” These are perplexing questions, resolved in ancient times through ritual action, often called religious practices.

Religious means reconnect. The natural duality imposed by animal-level survival is extinguished, erased, and transformed during a religious rite. Hunter-gatherer societies have traditional community dances, often trance dances of amazing endurance and duration. A component of these rites is a sacrifice. Some sacrifices include truly valuable things being destroyed. Food is burned or buried or left to rot, and gorgeously fashioned items are thrown into pits and lakes. The “waste” of the sacrifices often shocks anthropologists; outsiders who cannot understand no matter how many details they record, or how they interpret its wasted costs. A successful reconnection requires a sacrifice, provides a refreshing infusion of deep, personal and cosmic unity, and is generally as deep as the sacrifice was high. The effects of this temporary ceremonial integration provide long-term harmony to allow people to survive for the rest of their time.

Public, communal ceremony was essential to spiritual well being, social harmony, and individual fullness. Group work is important. Purely spiritual work like prayer, with attention exclusive to the Other side, is good; and singing, dance or movement are good, in their own right. However, when these are combined in a meaningful way, a living ceremony transcends the individual, the group, this world, and that world.

These traits will reappear throughout the history and mythology of Oaxaca, and all of Mesoamerica, changing form and myth through time.

Tehuacán Culture

Archeologically, the 2,500 year period of humans foragers is called **Lithic Stage, Paleo-Indian Period**. We can decipher this archaic terminology of archeology just like we can learn the several names of a Oaxacan village. Sometimes these era names have a real ring to them, almost musical. They usually fall flat with a thud that begs for mockery. Here we dissect “Lithic Stage, Paleo-Indian Period.”

A “Stage” is a long period of time that’s divided into “Periods.” “Lithic” means “stone age,” and “Paleo” is “ancient, old, prehistoric.” “Indian” means “indigenous, non-European.”

Today the word “Indian,” or *indio*, is a common pejorative in Mexico that means “bumpkin” or “stupid.” To restore some dignity to the people, the term *indigene* (in-day-hen-ay) is preferred by the indigenous people I’ve talked to. However, most actually prefer to be labeled Zapotec, Mixtec, Chatino, or whatever people they belong to. Many say they are Yucuitan or Juquilan, identifying primarily with their *puebla*.

So “Paleo-indian” was once ok for the name of a Period, but not for people, even for the scientifically pure and heartless archeologists, who call these people the Tehuacán, after the valley, just north of Oaxaca state but within my story territory, area where the first artifacts were discovered. So the Tehuacán culture defines the materials and extrapolated ways of life for the hunter-gatherers who lived in modern Mexico from Zacatecas, north of the Mexican Valley to Oaxaca. All had the same set of stone tools, language and life style for 2,500 years; up to about 7,000 years ago.

Not much archeology remains from those 125 generations of men and women. They were wanderers, walkers without pack animals of any sort, and so they didn’t want to carry heavy stuff around. They lived in houses made of perishable sticks and hides, used bone and wood tools that rotted away, and never had too many of them at any one time.

Update— One single stone point from this culture has been found in Oaxaca. Other remains, including campfire and flint knapping sites, are near Mitla and confirm their presence. These big game hunters actually got to this valley pretty late, since they’d already been in the Mexican Valley since *date. All the remains of Mexico taken together are pretty meager, but foragers are sparse wherever they live. The people who inhabited the lands from the highlands of Zacatecas, north of Mexico Valley,

One of the wild plants that was extremely useful to the earliest people was the Maguey, a plant whose every part was used.

#The Magic Plant

Heart of the Land, keeper of life, made the land before humans came. The inhabitants were, at first, all people and spoke the same language. When the earth was still soft the 400 plants grew upon it, some in the jungles, some in the mountains, some in the deserts. Every plant had a lover, a family and friends from their land. Some people are other plants or mountains, some are rivers or heroes, others animals or humans.

Ever since he burnt his tail stealing fire Possum has been very casual, cautious and entirely unambitious. One day Packrat sees him sleeping under a shady tree and wakes him up.

“Hey, Lazy boy,” says Packrat. “You better get up and start saving seeds. Rain says he is going away to find a wife and won’t be back for a long time.”

“There’s plenty of time,” says Possum, and goes back to sleep. Then Rain goes away, and the land gets very dry. Many days later Packrat sees him sleeping. The tree is dry, with only dead leaves that are falling off. Packrat wakes Possum again.

“Hey, slug-a-bed,” says Packrat. “Rain is gone and won’t be back for a long time. You better get to work. It’s hard even for me to find food.”

“I’ll do it later,” says Possum, and goes back to sleep. Many days pass and the land is parched and dry. Packrat sees him sleeping and wakes him up a third time.

“Hey, Loser,” says Packrat. “Rain is gone, and even I can’t find a seed. The river is dry. Even your tree is dead. You better take cover.” Then he went leaping off to find someone else to bother. He was right, though. No leaves shade Possum, so he gets up and ambles about, as he usually does, looking for bugs and dead things to eat. But he finds nothing. Even the dead things are just husks that are almost too hard to bite and get stuck between his teeth, and when he bites bit off that are small enough to swallow they just move around inside his stomach like chips of flint. He gets pretty hungry, and tired; but he is too hungry to sleep, and staggers on.

At last he finds his way to Packrat's house.

"Friend Packrat," he shouts, "This is Possum, your old and very best friend, come to visit. Will you let me in?"

"Not a chance," says Packrat. "I have a wife and 400 children in here. I warned you. Now suffer the consequences."

Possum goes away, dragging himself over the parched ground. He looks upward and sees Rain coming! Alas, no—it is Vulture who circles low overhead, eager for a meal, unable to take his eye off his prey. "Food!" he cries weakly, using one of his five words. Soon he'll be unable to keep himself, and he'll land and peck out Possum's tender eyes.

That's when Possum sees a green plant, with shade. He says, "If I am going to die, then I am at least going to be in the shade when I do," and crawls off to it.

"Whoa," says the plant, "Where are you going?"

"Just to shade myself," says Possum, "So I can die in peace."

"No thanks," says the plant. It is a she. "No need for carrion here, just worshippers."

"Hm, and what does that cost me?"

"If you have to ask, you cannot afford it," says the plant. Possum, upon the edge of death, figures that he's got nothing to lose. He agrees. "Then crawl into my shade," says the plant. "I am Maguey."

"Ouch!" As he goes in, Possum is scratched by a spine and his blood runs into the earth at the root of the plant. "What's that about?"

"The start of my worship," says Maguey. "Would you prefer to give me your life, or just some blood?" Possum is sitting in the shade now, and Vulture overhead is spiraling upward and outward, looking once more for the dying thing that's hidden.

"Oh, blood for sure," says Possum. "I'll even carry around that spike to use if you want."

"I want that," says Maguey. "Snap off that spine and keep it sacred. You will need it."

"For what? I already paid for the shade with this scratch."

"I'm better than that," says Maguey. "If you pierce yourself for me I will give you gifts."

"Like what?"

"Bleed." Possum has little to lose, so he prepares to scratch himself again. "Oh no, a special way," she says, "from the ear." Possum does this, and she says, "I will show you how I am drink." Possum drinks deeply and is refreshed now.

"Is there more?" he asks.

"Bleed, from the tongue." Possum does this, and she says, "I will show you how I am food." Possum is strong and encouraged now.

"Is there more?" he asks.



“Bleed, from the shin.” Possum does this, and she says, “I will show you how to find fibers.” Possum is makes clothing from it.

“Is there more?” he asks.

“Bleed, from the penis.” Possum does this, and she says, “I will show you how to find magic.” Possum chews his way into her heart, and there he finds pulque. He drinks it and finds his way out to the daylight again. He stands up, and falls over, laughing.

“What is this *wonderful* stuff?” he asks. He starts to rise, unsteadily, laughing.

“Meet Pulque, my daughter, my heart, the life of my soul,” says Maguey. And she continues. “I am going to die now, worshipper of mine, and there is one more bleeding that can be done.”

Now, Possum has already scratched his arm, stabbed himself in the ear, tongue, shin and penis. He fell down again. He stops laughing as he tries to imagine what he might put that spine into next.

“No thanks, goddess,” says Possum. “You’ve saved my life, given me drink, food, clothing and pulque. I couldn’t ask for more, thank you. I will pass on any more blood letting.”

“You have much to learn about sacrifice, party-boy,” says Maguey. “You are now the water bearer. Take my daughter and go now, and where ever you walk will be where waters will flow. Where you stop my children will grow. Now go.”

So the marriage couple left, stopping to celebrate, sharing the blessing and making many new friends. Wherever Possum walked when he was drunk, the rivers are now crooked and twisted, along his staggering and stumbling path. Where he walked when he was sober, the rivers now flow straight.

[story continued below, The Son of Possum”]

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THE FARMERS

*#Corn (1)

Look! Here is the story of the creation of our world. This is not our world now, this is not our world then! This is the time before now and then, when the world just got unstuck from the day One-one.

Nothing is more important than corn.

Story to follow, how corn sacrifices itself so people can live, the "Kill me father!" story

Village Stage

Archeologically, Oaxaca (and the rest of Mesoamerica) entered the second part of the Lithic Stage around 7000 BC or so. The Old Way, the Foragers, phased into the Archaic Period, as people slowly settled down into little villages and grew maize and anything else they could eat. It lasted for 5500 years--275 generations-- to 1500 BC. Enough time for our zodiac to change two houses.

By 7000 BC the climate had warmed enough so that the environment was similar to that of the 20th century. The Valley of Oaxaca and the many smaller valleys around it were forested along their rivers, and also covered with pines on the higher mountain slopes. Brush woodlands, largely mesquite, grew wherever it could between rivers and mountains. Deer were numerous, plus sheep and goats of the high sierras. Jaguars and puma topped the land dwelling predator chain, with crocodiles and giant snakes as added dangers in the tropical lower lands.

It was also perfect for cultivating maize, a food crop that was coaxed into existence in Tehuacan and Oaxaca Valleys around 5000 BC or so when the residents made a deal with Corn Mother and the tiny seeds of grass enlarged over the centuries to become an abundant foodstuff.

For a thousand years the people of Oaxaca lived in small villages, cultivating their many food plants and augmenting them with wild game and the early domestic food animals of turkeys and dogs.

Their agriculture was slash and burn. That is, they would enter a forested area and slash away the underbrush and burn everything off. The remaining ash helped to fertilize the soil.

The first areas settled by villages were the regions of alluvial soil. These are the areas that have fertile soil and a good source of water. They are generally close to a river or a stream. Sometimes simple irrigation ditches are dug, along with simple low dams to collect water for the crops. However, Oaxaca never had the extensive irrigation system that many early civilizations developed. At times, wells are dug, rarely going deeper than five feet to reach the water table. In dry times the crops are watered by carrying a pot full of water from the river or well and watering each plant individually.

These villages were small, generally with twenty to one hundred people living in them. The buildings were small, and general purpose. No differences have been found among them, indicating a fairly egalitarian society without significant class differences.

Villages seem to have had considerable contact between neighbors. There was presumably less where mountain ranges intervened, but nonetheless, some.

Pottery is a significant characteristic of these villages. This allowed the storage of food from season to season. Typical are wide-based pottery storage containers buried into the ground.

Tehuacán Museo & sushi

We had two days off in a row! Nearly a miracle here, where everyone works on Saturdays at Berlitz (and most other businesses as well).

We decided to take a little road trip. We wanted to visit the little town of Tehuacán, in the state of Puebla, for two reasons.

One, in the Coe book we had read that the museum there had samples of the complete history of corn. Corn, or more properly, maize (*maíz*), is the backbone of pre-Columbian American history. It provided the main staple that allowed the population to increase to urban levels. Its history used to be a mystery. For instance, when I was a kid the teachers told us that corn was some kind of hybrid grain rather miraculously assembled from mysterious predecessors which had yet to be discovered. Recently this was proved to be untrue. It is a plant which underwent successive improvements as people nurtured it over centuries.

The second reason we wanted to visit Tehuacán is that we had visited it briefly and liked the looks of it. The visit was on the famous Love Motel sojourn on our return from Texas. We liked the *puebla* because it seemed prosperous, friendly and especially because it had about a million pet shops and pet veterinarians. These are just about non-existent in Oaxaca. We wanted to see the pet-friendly town.

It took us about six hours to drive from Oaxaca to Tehuacán on the *camino libre*. Mostly hot and dry. But we got to see those mountains, and be in a pseudo parade!

We were relying on the Sanbourne book for directions in Tehuacán. It lists places to stay and eat, and also has maps. It was what guided us to the Love Motel in the first place (though they did not identify it as such. It has apparently changed owners since the book was done.) But we were looking for a different hotel it had recommended, and which we had seen in driving around on our first trip when we were seeking food. But the map of the city was abominable. It has many sights such as the prison, jail or railroad station (which is not used anymore) shown, and streets marked, but not named, making it nearly useless. The address of the hotel was, at least, correct. Nonetheless, my Streetwise skill proved useful once again, and within a very reasonable time we found our way there, booked a room and parked. The room was only US\$26 a night. New looking, clean, amidst many eating places. And, we discovered, just about across the street from the museum! Depending on where the museum was, that is, not trusting the Sanbourne's map.

To our delight the bed was comfortable (actually, the room had 3 double beds in it!), the towels were fluffy, a shower high enough we didn't have to duck to wash our hair, and cable TV! Down side: the bathroom door was lower than my head. But I am getting used to that. Well, it was Thursday night, and since we had cable that meant that we could watch *Gilmore Girls* (one of the few shows we regularly watch down here). We had an hour to look around, and went looking for the museum, and thought we found it. It was closed of course (being a holiday and late at night), but we saw an aquarium, a pet shop, and went to look more closely. The proprietor/owner was a young man named Israel who knew some English and wanted to use it. So we chatted for a while, him expressing his desire to see the US but not being able to now that he has a one-year old son. Since he wanted to see Disneyland we assured him he could use his son as an excuse in the near future to visit the US. He complained that there was no place to learn more English or practice with native speakers in Tehuacán. "I ask my teacher how I pronounce my name in English, and she no tell me!"

"Lo mismo en Español," I assured him. He seemed a little disappointed at that.

We got back, watched *Gilmore Girls*. A rerun, but Suzanne had never seen it. Then we went out to eat.

We decided to go to a Sushi restaurant that was just a few doors down from our hotel. Now, the sushi in Oaxaca was a disaster. The "cronchy rolls" and *mezcal* in a sake bottle were just too much. But this is Tehuacán! So we tried it.

And it was surprisingly good! We didn't try the raw fish part, which we were sure would have been frozen. But the rolls we did eat were delicious and fresh. The tempura had heavy, thick batter too (same as in Oaxaca) but we didn't mind. At least they had wasabi here! We liked it. Afterwards I told the owner (who wore a little Japanese jacket to take the order) that it was better than in Oaxaca, and now we would have to come to Tehuacán if we wanted sushi. He smiled. We wished our Spanish was good enough to ask him

why he opened a Japanese restaurant in this little town. Sure, we could ask that with our Spanish, but probably not understand the answer. Maybe by the time we go back!

Next morning we walked to the nearby zocalo for breakfast. Delicious. Sitting on the sidewalk table we were again reminded that this town doesn't get many tourists. Then we strolled to the museum which was supposed to open at 10 AM. Well, it is Mexico, and the day after a fiesta, so it opened at 10:30.

It is a cute little museum. It has an entryway with a minimal sales shop, one large room with artifacts, another with basketry and a third with an exhibit of the ecology of Tehuacán Valley.

The artifacts were quite handsome. We had never before seen the articulated statues, tied together in the display with string. And there were several nice statues, though I kick myself for not writing down the name of the striped goddess. In addition to this one was another, which had holes in it so when a fire was made inside it smoke could come out from its mouth and hands. There were also a number of flutes with animal heads on them, like this opossum. There were also a couple of cups shaped like breasts, as we had seen in the museum near Cerro de las Minas. It was a little irritating that the artifacts were not labeled to tell us where they came from, nor what era they were from.

And the maize. The tiny ear **in the photo** is about the size of a nickel, and is thousands of years old. Then some that were only small, others medium, others larger. Plus thousand-year-old husks of other plants domesticated ages ago.

These were all discovered by a scientist who had set out to discover them. He chose the place in Mexico where he thought the most samples would have been preserved because of the dryness, which was Tehuacán, and scored by eventually assembling the entire sequence from the original wild plant to domesticated ears. So maybe Tehuacán is not the place where the domestication of maize occurred, but it is the place where it is best documented.

Suzanne, who makes baskets, was wowed by the basketry display. I thought it was interesting. The nature display was mostly interesting because the local names of the animals were there, labeled over the badly stuffed displays. I was astonished (yes, astonished, not surprised) to discover that the deer were white tail deer, like on the east coast of the US, not the mule deer common to west. Astonished because muleys are adapted to live in mountainous country, the white tail in forests and fields. Ain't nature wonderful!

The entire museum took about an hour and a half, at most. It is typical of these small town museums, even though this one was an official government one. But it was a sweet little place.

Afterwards we looked around the town a bit more, then got in the car and looked for the Chinese restaurant we had seen. After all, if they can make sushi, why not Chinese? We found it after a while, meanwhile viewing the other parts of the town. But after reading the menu I decided it was unlikely to be good (Chinese food was a tiny part of the entire menu) and since we were not really very hungry we decided not to ruin the experience and took off.

On the way home we took the *cuota*. After six hours to get there (Did I tell you they were hot and dry?) it was just two and a half hours to return on the *cuota*. Suzanne mentioned that it was quite an engineering feat to have made this new road through the mountains, but I said I thought it must have followed some older road. Thus on the way I kept my eyes open and sure enough, here and there were the old road. Or rather, the old burro path. Sometimes it seemed it might have been large enough for wheeled vehicles, but many parts I saw were nothing more than paths.

Most of the countryside we went through was quite bleak as well, and I doubted that the indigenous folk could have made it through. There was not even water for most of the trip. Occasional valleys with trees and corn, but not much. And a lot of mountains, not hills, mountains. I had to admire that even burros ever got through. Imagine my surprise when I later learned that the invading Aztecs had apparently taken this route into Oaxaca!

And so, back to Oaxaca. Our cute little city and home. We had school the next day, so sacked out early after a notably pleasant outing.

A crime Against Nature

As an aside, it is a crime that the Mexican corn industry is currently being destroyed by the United States agricultural subsidies. Almost 60% of the maize sold here is from the U.S which can undercut the prices because the farmers receive massive subsidies from the government. This is in essence like removing a country's ability to sustain itself. Two additional facts increase the offense. First, the subsidies are illegal according to NAFTA, a policy which the US constantly exploits to its advantage by breaking the rules which it set up. Second, the introduction of genetically modified maize makes the farmer dependant upon manufactured seeds, to the detriment of the variety which is native. Criminal, I say. But enough politics.)

*#The Sons of the Sun

Look my friends, upon the stories of our world. See here, these are not the stories of our world now, nor even of our world then. This is a tale of before, when the world was still soft and pliant and things were still being made.

Fortunate indeed is the life in the Land of the Rain God. Here the world is born. Here the gods live. The whole Corn Family comes from here, as everyone knows. The Sun was born here, and Lightning has organized time and space. But this is a story from before that, when the world was not finished.

One day the good woman 7-Rain is by her river, this one that we call the River of Holding. In case you



have forgotten, this great big *olla* here is the one that's called Great Holder, and out of it comes all of the life that is in the waters. 7-rain here, she is one of the water family—look at that nose ornament! And here she is, on what day? Yes, the Starting Day, when magic happens.

She is singing that song that the girls sing on Young Corn Day, you know the one, "*Come through the air, come floating on down...*"

...but of course I can't sing it, I'm a man. 13-deer, maybe you... {laughter} Oh! Secret Sign! OK, OK, of course not. I forgot it's sung by virgins. {laughter}.

So she is, 7-rain is singing it, and it isn't a song for brides and prostitutes yet, it is just a song for the corn. So there she is, and as she's singing it out in the water she sees something moving. She's a Water Woman, so she knows everything in the water, and she hasn't ever seen this before. She calls it to shore and it swims over, but she can't not only doesn't know what it is, but she can't even see it! It is dark and unknown, unseeable like the night. She only hears him, she hears his hands singing in return to her song, it is the hand song. This is magic day, and even though she cannot see the gestures, she knows what this means.

Who is snickering over there, is that you little bee-poo? Do you want to tell us what this is, eh? What' the ol' night-time hand song? Ohhh, nooooo, of course not. Well, me either. I wouldn't dare, here in this sunlight. But there she is, our Grandmother 7-rain, on the magic day with the night-time hand song.

That happened to my sister you know. Came home one day big as a calabash. “I don’t know what happened ma, it was all hands in the dark.”

Yea, so 7-rain goes home and says that to *her* Mother, and what’s the Great Mother of Waters say? I know what she says, because, you know, she is the Mother of Waters after all, she says, “What? Who’re you? Here knead this masa and stay away from my comal.”

Did I say calabash? Yep, well look at this, here is one. But that’s not her son. That’s just part of what he is. It’s what the priests keep in the calabash... that’s right. He’s Tobacco Man, the poison weed that we use to carry our prayers to the other side, and to bless to drive away evil. He’s the one who carries prayers, and...

Yes 13-deer, ...and who collects a tortilla for his blessing. Anyone here want a poison weed blessing? 13-deer has a censer with some tobacco, go over and let her smoke you with it if you wish. Put the tortillas on her bolsa there... oh, yes emerald lady, a squash is quite fine.

This is he, the sacred smoke. He is exhaling it, just as 13-deer is blowing it upon you.

Lady 9-rain is of most esteemed parentage. She was born when the Sun, Our Father, came down upon the Water of Lineages, the host sacred and holy water in the world. Here is their child, Lady 9-rain, who is born from those boiling waters. She is steam, she is scalding smoke, the holy vapor that covers lakes and the way to the spirit world. And her husband is much the same, a sacred vapor, a gateway for the gods to come in and the prayers to go out. This is the Day of Smoke and Steam, which they celebrate down at the river. Holy Smoke day.

Their child is 5-deer, a beautiful girl, who is taken by the habits of her parents. She consorts in the water rites—see her nose decoration? There is no problem with this, it runs in her blood. Heck, she lives in the stream! But it’s not like everyone in those orgies is a stranger, and no matter how many masks some gods wear, they are known. 5-deer is a good woman, and thinks only of her son. She is poor, but her son is of good heritage. She knows it, there is no mistaking it.

*story of his childhood, gets heart again

When his man hair begins to grow she knows she can no longer keep him. Her brothers offer to sponsor the boy, and to see his hair cut like that of a man, but she refuses them. She walks barefoot to the king’s house, to his palace on Parrot Hill.

Great King, Lord Warpath Spear, she says to him. I have come all the way here to present my son to you, that he may have your blessings and find his way in the world.

Jade Face, you have come a long way with a stranger, I know not this boy, nor to have lain with you.

In the smokes and the steams, she says, when the night hand is singing down by the river.

He laughs at her and he says, those are fatherless boys, with no blessings of blood.

The light that’s inside of him can be no one’s but yours, she says. When King Warpath spear sees the eyes in the boy’s face he knows it is true, but he can’t admit that, because those are fatherless boys, without father’s blood.

My infinite lord, says 5-deer, are you not fatherless too?

Blasphemy! cries Lord Warpath Spear, left side magic! Take these people from my palace and cast them into the wilds. You are forbidden to ever return to my court, or to return to my light.

So Lady 5-deer and her son are dragged from the palace and thrown off the hill, they slide down right here see..., thunk, off the hill.

Poor Lady 5-deer, she’s so sad. She can’t last long in that jungle. We don’t need details, she dies there. At first 3-reed is too unhappy to do anything, but then he gets heart again, as always. He knows a son’s duty, and begins to gather the materials for this.

That is when he meets 1-vulture Ascending Eagle, here after he has been pushed off the hill. He*

They make her a mummy despite the king's desires, and put it in a temple

they bring low his quetzal bird.

They decide to go East to meet Dad,

They have to follow his trail, which goes straight up

They are refused admittance to the house

You must be purified!

They agree, and go into the temescal. Overheated, etc. both same solution of survival

Smoking test with poison weed, 2 solution

Bats attack, one kills and one quells

Hot rock for seat, one remains, one cracks it

Swallowed by croc, one cuts his way out each way

Along the way men follow, "that's like me" and "that's what I'd do" and so on.

Confront the East Lord, the Sun himself, old 1-death, get rewards, granted inheritance of night people and day people,

That is why, each holy day, the men in the village do the Jesus and Devil dance

*fin

Time

Art: Codices 20 days

A unique and unifying factor to Mesoamerica is their 260-day calendar, which moves alongside the 365-day solar year.



It is one of the unifying features of the Mesoamerican cultures. The actual days and years do not coordinate across the cultures, so the Anahuac, Mayan and Oaxacan peoples celebrate their starting-cycle fire-lighting ceremonies at different times. But they all use the same 20x13 sacred calendar alongside the annual solar calendar of 365 days, and also the 52-year cycle that comes about from the interaction of the two calendars.

Oaxaca is the oft-cited origin of the calendar. Its earliest undisputed appearance is an early stone-built temple. To this, in its time, we will return (see "San Jose Mogote," below.)

The Magical Calendar

A unique and unifying factor to Mesoamerica is their 260-day calendar, a rolling set of magical dates that wheel over the mundane, seasonal annual calendar. It goes by many names, but for now it is simply "the 260."

The number 260 is derived from 20 days x 13 numbers. Days are named, numbers are numbered, umm, numbered. A dot system of 1 through 13 marks the day number. The days and numbers start off together at number 1, day crocodile; called 1-crocodile. The two series click along together for 13 days, but on the fourteenth day the numbers start all over again with 1, so the fourteenth day is 1-jaguar, the fifteenth is 2-eagle, and so on.

These twenty names and thirteen numbers click forward a day at a time, and after 260 days the first day is reached again, 1-crocodile. This completes a cycle, a 260.

Each day and each number have magical meaning.

In fact, each 13-day period, or hereinafter simply "a 13", has a magical meaning too, but

most important for an individual is the day that he is born. The awesome act of a new human life is stamped with the power of the day. He is a manifestation of a special moment in time and space, and he will forever bear the traits of that moment. A person *is* his birthday, and the magical powers behind that are his traits to bear in the word. Everyone is named for their birthday, so that a person born on the fourteenth day of the cycle is named One Jaguar, after his birth day of 1-jaguar.

The 360, Annual Calendar

A Mesoamerican year is of 360+5 days.

This year is the year as measured in the sky, where the gods and the goddesses march out and across or around, in their guises as planets and constellations. Their celestial regularity provides a framework of Time upon which the delicate edge of Life exists. Even the Travelers have cycles, as the measures of the ancestors showed on the ancient bone, wood, bark, and painted images. The stones show it where Ancestors pecked out secret messages of survival and magic.

Sun is the steady one, the regular pacer whose precise steps measure the year, called thus the solar year. His counting is perfect, no matter which mask he wears. His steps are perfect, but his path varies. A day, a living moment of time, begins at sunset when Sun goes Below. As long as he makes it through under there, he rises in the east.

The measured year is important for everyone, because it tells when Rain is going to come, and the type of luck to be expected by the days that he does arrive. It tells when the war stars are rising, and when to do 18 ceremonies that are critical to keeping the cosmos, the people, and the individual in balance, so no one slides down the slippery slopes to doom.

The solar year is perfectly divided into eighteen 20s of twenty days each. Each of these 20s has a public ceremony during it to help align the worlds of Sky and Underworld, of Time and Space, into Here and Now. Sometimes the day of the ceremony is set by number, at the start a 20, for instance. Sometimes the rites are held when a measurer appears in a certain place. Sometimes the precise date is determined by a seer, or the elders, like starting the magical dance that will bring the rain.

The annual calendar is 360 days long. A mathematical precision is set into the cosmos, and all Mesoamerican peoples will express this interest in the ages to come. We'll see more of it later.

The solar year is, of course, actually 365 days long. The perfection of the universe, as expressed in the 260 and 360 calendars, has actually been mutilated by cosmic events of the creation times. As a result, time was broken and an extra 5 days are necessary to fill the gap. These are all clumped together at the end of the good year, and are all very, very unlucky days to be born. While it is bad enough to be born on a day that says you will be a drunk, to be nameless must put a person on the available-for-sacrifice list pretty quickly.

Just as the 13 numbers and 20 names click past each other to make the 260, so do the 260 and 360 click past each other. The nice round numbers make some computations regular. For instance, each year has its first day on only one of four possible names: reed, flint, house or rabbit. They are called "year bearers," because every year begins with that sign. Every four years the name cycle repeats itself, but as mentioned above the numbers revolve through the day names at a different cycle, so the start day of each of those years is different. The four names of reed, flint, house and rabbit each get repeated 13 times before the whole series cranks back to when the 360 and 260 both start on the same day again. These make a total of 52 years, sometimes called a "bundle."

When the new cycle begins the remnants of the old one are bundled together and taken to the mountains, where the right star at the apex signals the start of the rites. A new fire is begun, the old year is set afire, life is given to the fire, and it is taken to the fire Temple, and then to all of the houses in the land.

To make things simple, here are the results, from Williams. These are the names of the 52 years, in order.

Table 3.1. The Fifty-Two Years in the Mixtec Calendar and Their Numbers in Sequence

No.	Year	No.	Year	No.	Year	No.	Year
1.	1 Reed	14.	1 Flint	27.	1 House	40.	1 Rabbit
2.	2 Flint	15.	2 House	28.	2 Rabbit	41.	2 Reed
3.	3 House	16.	3 Rabbit	29.	3 Reed	42.	3 Flint
4.	4 Rabbit	17.	4 Reed	30.	4 Flint	43.	4 House
5.	5 Reed	18.	5 Flint	31.	5 House	44.	5 Rabbit
6.	6 Flint	19.	6 House	32.	6 Rabbit	45.	6 Reed
7.	7 House	20.	7 Rabbit	33.	7 Reed	46.	7 Flint
8.	8 Rabbit	21.	8 Reed	34.	8 Flint	47.	8 House
9.	9 Reed	22.	9 Flint	35.	9 House	48.	9 Rabbit
10.	10 Flint	23.	10 House	36.	10 Rabbit	49.	10 Reed
11.	11 House	24.	11 Rabbit	37.	11 Reed	50.	11 Flint
12.	12 Rabbit	25.	12 Reed	38.	12 Flint	51.	12 House
13.	13 Reed	26.	13 Flint	39.	13 House	52.	13 Rabbit

In the codices a special mark is used to denote one of the four year bearers. It looks like an A with an oval in it. It is usually decorated with a reed, flint, house or rabbit in it, plus a number of dots to show its number.

An entirely new 52-bundle starts on year 1-reed, day 1-crocodile. This sign comes up often, and is generally interpreted as “start a new 52 bundle,” and I believe that this is exactly correct as far as the local opinion. The historical codices include political and religious content to reinforcement local collective beliefs. But I have doubts that they can be counted backward today to find historical kings and leaders in every example. Sometimes this mark appears to say “Start here,” for a new story. I do not think that some leaders listed are any more historical than Kings Dan or Amleð in *Historia Danorum*, Brutus or Lear in *, or Y in Persia; all of which can accurately be compared with the historical codices. They are ancient heroes and gods, strung together here as part of “the past.”

The 260, Magical Calendar

Some basic questions concerning the origins of the 260 have been answered.

Scholarly opinion notes its documented origin to be in Oaxaca. The oldest records in stone are found there, and they use the system of number-name, in fact naming Four-earthquake***check** as a sacrificed victim. Carvings from the earliest urban time, in the first city, include many names.

The People of the Clouds deserve credit for the stone carved samples. They have that credit, even though bits of the system—some name symbols, some other numbering methods—appear before the standard is set into Oaxacan stone.

But the 260’s actual origin, before it was set into stone, was developed or influenced from afar. Parts of the calendar symbol system came to the upland city people from somewhere down land. Whoever made the approved list knew about animals that are not found in Oaxaca or Anahuac valleys. Everyone in Mesoamerica knows of the Monster Earth. It is often portrayed as a crocodile, the ever-hungry creature whose body is the dirt and rock, and the first day-name is crocodile. However, no crocodiles live in the mountains, nor do any monkeys, another day-name. Both used to be found in nearby lowland jungles—two kinds of monkeys and three kinds of crocodiles. Several precious birds, widely accepted as symbols in the numbering system, also come only from the jungle lowlands. These all point to the Coastal Lowlands, Istmo or south coast origin, or influence. During that period when the magic calendar was being perceived and perfected by seers somewhere, the villages were largely established and some were very old, but not most. While most people lived in stick huts and raised corn, squash, beans and chili; a few were already going from place to place carrying rare, treasures far from their sources. I don’t know what parts of crocodiles they carried, but they carried huge packs of bright feathers, as well as smaller loads of fancy stone mirrors, precious rocks, and magical carvings. It’s easy to imagine someone eventually carrying baskets of live monkeys, birds and small crocodiles far inland to worship centers that treasure them.



The 260 is **magical insight, a system** to understand the variable influences of nature that oppress so heavily on world that they vary its everyday reality, which is hard enough already. The 360 goes along just fine, counting its eighteen 20’s to let farmers participate in their world. But it is not perfect anymore (hose damned +5 days!), and the 260 reveals the magical influences that are the result of the break, The hidden powers are *a priori* neither good or evil, but are impersonal forces, great spirits that wear masks of reality and appear in many places of the cosmos. With the 260 and a bean seer to interpret it, people can get advice and insight into what they can do to alleviate the cosmic forces. The 260, with its seers, provides insight for priests on what parts of their annual ceremonies might be influenced, and if adjustments should be made. It is a book of magical insight, of advice to gain harmony, of mantic prophecy, of knowing the universe, and through the birth names, one’s self.

We know more or less when it was developed, which gives an idea of who as well. Since it was delivered apparently intact to the first city ever built, it was obviously developed and finished in all basics during the 5500 years of farming villages. Certainly the necessary ingredients lay to hand: curiosity, clear skies, sedentary life, horizon landmarks, and some important people who do not work—the elderly. Some among them spent time watching the sky, memorizing old star chants, and telling the young men where to sit so

that they can start singing at the exact moment that something disappears in the west, or rises in the east. They remember the facts, discuss their meanings, and shape a larger picture of their world with the weary calm, wisdom that comes only after surviving years of tragedy, comedy and boredom. Or perhaps a single brilliant person in those 200 generations listened to all the songs one time, saw all the seven planets in the sky and was lightning struck with the insight, its implications, patterns and symbolism.

The big mystery is “why 260?”

A number becomes significant when it appears several times in nature. What appears to modern people to be coincidence is not—it is a mask for a power, one of the ways that the invisible world impresses itself upon the known, material world.

Modern Maya day keepers say the 260 is the time for a woman to gestate a child. OK, is there anything else to reinforce the number that is equal to greatest magic of nature here? Well, corn’s gestation period from planting to harvest is about that too. I think the clincher on the number was when Lord Sees the Sky discerned and proved the 260 day Venus cycle. More on that later, but after that third insight the 260 was permanently imbedded in the philosophy of Mesoamerican stone age seers.

The origin of the 20 is easy. Everyone agrees that it is derived from the number of digits on human hands and feet. I think that is fine as far as it goes: we can count up to 20. But why not ten or five, then? The Maya will use a base five system later, when they develop more numbers.

It is because the 20-day measure was already established. It is used in both the 260 and 360 for the same purpose: to measure a sacred period of days. It was familiar, established by ancestors and proven to be useful. Certainly the 20-day names were different. Those used to lead this chapter, and which are universally used in the existing painted codices, are later developments. We will deal with that later.

The codices show the 20 day signs divided into many different ways. They appear as both 4x5 and 5x4 when days are laid out in some of the 260 almanacs. Occasionally we see these 20 days laid on a horizontal plane, with directions. This is our world, the world of humans, the space where we live. In the magical documents the 20 day names are most often divided into five directions with four days each. The order usually begins in the East, followed by North, West, South, and Center.

The same 20 terms are used to delineate both time and space, and this reveals the constant of the universe. This reveals a secret of mythical thinking—time and space are apparently separate, but they are actually the same thing, or rather, the same 20 things. We will see this again later with Lightning, in the “First City” chapter.

So toes and 20s, the natural counting limit goes into the perfect year 18 times, nice!

But why 13? That question is the real mystery. One answer is that you divide 20 into the 260 day pregnancy, and you have 13 of them.

I think the answer is easy to find in the sky.

Sources

Bitch here about the use of the wrong terms, alligator, etc

The Olmecs

##Cool Stuff

Official papers are full of deliberations, contemplations and dissertations about why or how the Olmec people, as they are popularly called, began. I think the answer is pretty simple: everyone likes cool stuff. Smart guys, these Olmecs.

There they were, living in the god awful swamps of the *tierra caliente*, the hot lands of the Gulf coast and trying to figure out a way to improve their lot in life. For pete's sake, their first distinct settlements were in the middle of swamps! They didn't have much that other people didn't have, except some incredible carving skills and, apparently, that cleverness.

We actually have absolutely no samples of their woodwork. This is not surprising considering the tropical climate of the lowlands, where nothing organic lasts for long in the voracious appetites of jungle nature.

But somewhere along the way they got crazy for stone. They had some decent local stone sources to make things, at *place. Nothing fancy, though. Earliest manifestations *date

Giant Heads, date?

Jade and jadite, jet, obsidian, flint sources

I imagine there must have been somebody who just wanted to get out, anywhere other than the miserable, hot, sweaty coast. We can never know the reasons, but I am sure it was something like, "Dad, I am going to go get some very cool stuff."

And his dad said, "Yea yea, Cool stuff indeed. Foot-in-Sky," for that was the son's name, "Why can't you just go out and break your back planting corn and collecting rubber and digging *chinampas* like the rest of us? Lazy is all you are. Go on, get outta my house and take those crazy carvings with you. And get a haircut."

Foot-in-Sky went off with his carvings and a ball of rubber. He took some of his wood carvings, even though he couldn't carve worth a damn and did just crude, clunky things. He was gone for a while. Finally, though, he came back with a big load of gorgeous quetzal feathers. The two slaves each bore whole bunches, carefully wrapped and stacked six feet high over their heads. No had ever seen them before in this land. Three foot-long green feathers that glisten in the sunlight! Oh, and also two different kinds of chile peppers. Foot-in-Sky was no dope, so he gave a couple to his father and most of them to the local big shot as a gift, and one of his two slaves too, as an offering to the gods. Ensuring appropriate reciprocity, the big shot gave him some fields to drain and a couple of slaves to work them.

The big shot gave half to his artisans and told them to make something beautiful for him, and the other half among his friends and saved some for whoever he wanted to impress. It worked, so that the next time the big shot invited his friends to help him give a feast, everyone nearby joined in. It was huge, and big shots from all around came because they had seen the cool feathers that the messengers were wearing. They brought all their people, and the big shots all got a quetzal feather everyone else got a lot of pozole and elotes with a new chile flavor. It was such a success that they called him Mr. big Shot after that.

At the feast Mr. Big Shot gave one of his daughters to Foot-in-Sky, and also some more slaves to plant corn for him. He started going back and forth, carrying rubber to the mountain and bringing feathers back.

One day the big shot called Foot-in-Sky to him. "My clever son-in-law, Foot-in-Sky," he said, "some of the other local not-quite-so-big shots are ambitious, and they sent off their own explorers and traders. Now they have quetzal feathers too. I need something to make me bigger."

"We could name our god after the feathers," said Foot-in-Sky, who could see where this was going.

"OK, yes, we'll try that, good idea. I don't think it will stick, but we will try. We need something else."

"I'll work on it."

So the next time he comes back from the mountains, he's got a whole bunch of guys with him. They speak something strange but they catch on quick. "These are ball players," says Foot-in-Sky. "They'll show you what they are using our rubber for up there besides burning it to the night gods."

Within no time at all the Olmec are planning out a ball field, choosing who among them will play, who gets to be sacrificed for the first game and so on. For a while it is fun, whipping all the teams of the wanna-be big shots and sacrificing their best players.

Mr. Big Shot, and the Son of Mr. Big Shot, were so famous that they got volunteers to build a big platform for their family to live on. But after a while the other locals got their own teams, and other platforms were built too.

"It's tough to stay on top. Everyone has a ball team now," said Mr. Big Shot. "I need something else to keep me on top here."

"Oh, I know! Let's have the stone carvers make a gigantic carving of you in a ball player's outfit!"

"Everyone is carving stones."

"Oh, well, we'll have them make them big. Really big."

"Good idea, I'll do that. But really, here's the point: I need more cool stuff."

When the Mr. Big Shot asks politely, and he's your father in law, you go without complaining. So off Foot-in-Sky went again, but this time going up to some other mountains. He took slaves to carry all the goods. He had rubber balls again, and some more of his deformed wood carvings, which still misshapen and ugly, but everyone was copying them because Foot-in-Sky was very rich and lucky, and obviously his gods were the ones to attract. And he took some of the quetzal feathers, and a bunch of pretty shells.

This time he came back with a load of little stone mirrors, shaped mica and three different kinds of chile. Mr. Big Shot had the mirrors sewn into his cloak and a big one hung as his chest pectoral. He and Son of Mr. Big Shot got so famous that they got volunteers to build a nicely-shaped mound, like a little mountain, so that everyone could see when they made sacrifices.

And so it went, with fortunate Foot-in-Sky and others trekking out to the distances to get more cool stuff. Among the treasures that they found and traded for were the quetzal feathers from Chiapas, magnetite mirrors from Oaxaca, Scarlet Macaw feathers from Honduras, jade and jadite from *la chica coasta* in Guerrero, serpentine from Puebla, jet (a black stone) from *, and obsidian from the Valley of Mexico.

The Lord's House

For ninety hundred years the villages of Oaxaca, indeed throughout México, have been small, rarely more than a hundred or so inhabitants. Here several families lived together, raising corn and other staples, making pottery and hunting the local fauna to supplement their diet. Simple irrigation was widespread. Nearby villages were probably grouped into some kind of organization, though this is difficult to tell exactly. Most of the people in the Oaxacan Valley were probably Zapotec, though this does not imply any kind of political unity.

This situation was reproduced throughout most of México, though of course with different ethnic groups. Regional differences were defined by their specific food stuffs. The lowland tropics grew tropical fruits while the coastal regions had more fish and shell fish, for instance. Pottery styles were different in different regions.

Yet, despite the relatively simple way of life, long-distance communication occurred. Luxury goods were regularly traded between regions. As some communities manufactured or collected the most desirable items and traded them over distances for other luxury items, those villages became more distinct thanks to the profusion of these elite goods. Long-distance trade was conducted and obsidian, pottery vessels and figurines, green stone, serpentine, pearl oysters and marine shell jewelry became marks of prestige for certain places and people. Carved jades, magnetite mirrors and decorated pottery were especially important. As these items were shared across a vast area we come to recognize the so-called Olmec Period.

The Olmecs are the modern name for the people who lived in southern Veracruz. They built towns amid defensible swamps and, because they were the first to be discovered with this set of traits, it was thought that they were the original site for a culture that they spread far and wide. Now, after more research, it is realized that they were just one of many peoples with these traits, and that the culture did not really start there and spread out. Nonetheless, this title is still used to describe the collection of these widespread traits.

In various places the manufacturing centers, the centers of trade, gradually became larger and more distinct from their neighbors. Thus we find towns, centers of mercantile expansion. In Veracruz it was San Lorenzo, in México Valley it was *place, etc.*

In Oaxaca it was a town on the site now called San José Mogote. With a population of around 1000 people it was probably the largest single city in all of Mesoamerica for its time. It was the sole provider for the much-sought magnetite mirrors that were traded across much of Mesoamerica. Not surprisingly, it was also the Oaxacan site where the most of the imported, elite goods are found. It was the most important site in Oaxaca for almost a thousand years, until end of Middle Preclassic, circa 400 BC.

However, this does not imply it was a capital of the area. It was located in the northern, or ETLA, valley. Nearby was another larger village of Huitzo, with perhaps 300 inhabitants. Two other towns were of comparable size, both also much larger than their neighbors, one called Yeguih in the Tlacolula Valley, the other being Tilcajete in the southern Valle Grande. These also had about 300 inhabitants, while everyone else lived in their little villages. And between these three arms of the valley, more or less in the center where they met, no one lived, probably because it was a dangerous war zone.

Yet, for its uniqueness and size, San José Mogote was not a city. Indications are that it was more like an oversized village. It lacked one of the characteristics of a city, in that it did not seem to have a political hierarchy of rulers and commoners which are found in all cities.

This is not to say that all the people were equal. The magnetite mirrors were manufactured by only a few of the households, and those households were assuredly wealthier than the others. Some of the signs of this inequality are found in that favorite find of archeologists, the burial sites. San José Mogote had two types of graves, one common in which the deceased were laid out prone, extended, with a few simple grave goods. The others had corpses flexed, as if they had been wrapped in blankets, and those fancier, elite goods buried with them. Some of the men were, furthermore, buried with multiple women, presumably their wives. Furthermore, they often had deformed skulls of the same type which, later, were practiced by the elites wherein the infants are bound to a board to reshape their skulls. Some people say this was to make their heads the same shape as a ripe cob of corn, the staple food and basis for religion and life itself. Differences also can be found in the houses. The elite houses were often whitewashed, and analysis of their diets indicates that they ate more venison.

Yet, for all those differences, they shared more in common with their neighbors. Their houses were not significantly larger, nor in more prominent places. They also had all the same facilities, such as the underground food storage pits, food preparation areas, areas to work stone, make pottery and prepare wood. Thus the elite households still did their own work.

The religion was the usual ancestor worship, as indicated by the burial of people in the houses or front yards, as had been going on for centuries. In addition, however, are now found two prevailing symbols in Oaxacan villages, as well as many other Mexican sites. These two were the caiman, or crocodile, with fiery eyebrows; and the jaguar. These are thought to represent, respectively, the powers of the sky and fire, and of the earth and earthquakes.

These were quite likely the symbols of two moieties in the village that shared responsibilities. A moiety is a social grouping which transcends kin and family. It is believed that the custom was similar to that still practiced in many mountain communities which were the least impacted by Spanish influence. In these places two moieties share the village responsibilities, often (though not always) alternating each year. Each has their own patron Saint, and each is responsible for making all the arrangements for the respective fiestas. In this manner the social responsibilities for a large population are equally shared.

San José Mogote in this phase had built some large public structures, quite out of the ordinary for a village. The largest was an 18 meter-wide, stone faced pyramidal platform, 2 meters high. Access was via two narrow staircases. One of the extensions of the platform still had visible carved heads with feline and avian features, indicating that it had some religious or symbolic function. This platform did not have any signs of residences on it, again indicating its social function. Interestingly, it was constructed mainly of stone from nearby, but also had stone from other ETLA valley areas, implicating participation by other communities. These all combine to indicate that it was probably a center for religious ceremonies for much of the area around it.

ROSARIO PHASE

San José Mogote continued to grow in the next, Rosario Phase. The structure was expanded to include several full-fledged stone buildings, also for public use. One, called Structure 19, was on top of a high hill. It measured 22 by 28 meters, and was sitting on large quarried limestone blocks. The west-facing staircase led upward to a lime-plastered platform that had a wattle and daub temple on top, and other structures as well.

A significant sculpture was found there. It had been built around 600 BC. In one corridor connecting two buildings the archeologists Kent Flannery and Joyce Marcus found Monument 3, a bas-relief sculpted figure was of a man whose chest had been cut open, with swirls that could be blood or extruding organs. It was placed between buildings so that it would be walked upon by anyone crossing between them. This became common later as a sign of contempt for the conquered.

Between his legs are symbols that are similar enough to some later glyphs that they can be read as 1-eye, or maybe 1 earthquake. This is a calendar-name. People in later codices were commonly named after the day that they were born, so we will later meet such personages as Eight-deer.

This is the earliest known example of writing in all Mesoamerica. Since this was the largest settlement in all Mesoamerica, the inference is that writing was first used in Oaxaca. Furthermore, the calendar name indicates that the 260-day Mesoamerican calendar was in use as early as 600 BC, yet another first for Oaxaca.

And it implies more. This is clearly a symbol of the sacrifice of a prisoner. The man is naked, a sure sign of someone being shamed, for nudity was considered to be shameful, and later prisoners were paraded naked before their captors. And it is apparently a heart extraction, another form of prisoner sacrifice. And, as stated, it was set to be walked upon by everyone passing between buildings.

These are all signs of warfare. Coupled with the fact that the wattle and daub temple was burned down at some point we have more signs of conflict. These indicate a very early start for the so-called warfare-sacrifice complex of practices which later pervaded all of Mesoamerica. And with warfare comes another step along the road to true urbanization.

Soon after the temple was burned down the atop of the pyramid was constructed an elaborate house much larger than the others in the town. This is the first example of a house with an interior patio surrounded by rooms, all with limited access into it. This is the house of an elite family, set apart from the others. Furthermore, there is a large, two-chambered tomb, lined with stones that is the earliest example of this type, which was later common for the Zapotec elites.

Here we have the first signs of social differentiation, with the emergence of a social elite. Here, to complete the list of items associated with urban life, are the first indications of real social hierarchy.

Late San José Mogote had at last assembled the features to be labelled a city, though its population was still small and it did not exert its control over a widespread area. Its prominence was not to last long. Even though it continued to grow afterwards, it was superceded by another city built nearby, the monumental Monte Albán.

San Jose Mogote

The week before we had spent half a day searching for San Jose Mogote, but never found it. The directions in the Moon book were entirely wrong. But we still wanted to visit the site, so back in Oaxaca we went to the Tourist Center and asked directions. The guide there gave us clear and explicit instructions. Go out Road #* and turn left just after the water parks. We left and got there quickly.

San Jose Mogote is pretty close to the city of Oaxaca, and is historically important because it was a large population center in 1500 B.C., before Monte Alban was built, around 500 B.C.

You can see Monte Alban from the site.

We started at the museum in the town. These little museums are generally owned and maintained by the community, not the state or federal government. They vary widely in quality, but overall are nice little displays of one to three rooms, always with the local artifacts and, generally, other local historical highlights as well. **Wax eloquent about the local pride.**

State about the way they are opened, etc.

When we got there a woman was just locking up and another American, carrying his backpack, was just leaving. She said she had to attend some other business, but she promised to send someone else to open for us. While we were waiting we talked to the other tourist, a young man named Damian who was from Austin. He told us he was just bumming around the country and become enamored of these local museums. He was trying to figure out how to make his doctorate thesis on them. I offered him a ride back to the city when we were done, which he accepted.

This museum was of one largish room and one smaller. The larger room had some very nice artifacts from the village period. In particular, the shell necklace was interesting. The collection of early pottery figurines from the pre-urban era had its own charm. *describe the individuality

The site had been occupied during the Monte Alban era, too. A set of five funerary urns are displayed that were found, buried together. The one in front is of Cosijo, the primary deity who was rain and fertility. Here is another one. These kinds of images are found all through Oaxaca for this period. The most famous piece in the museum is of a quality that is usually taken away by anthropologists for the big city museum. It is a brazier called the diablo enchilado, or "red devil." People are not allowed to take photos of it.

The smaller room of the museum was about the later history of the town itself. The museum is located in the former hacienda of the local *casique* (leader) and there were photos of the early 20th century family, documents including some annual cost sheets for food and clothing for the family, a little model of the hacienda, etc. There was also a section about the revolution and how the town became what it is.

With Damian in tow, we went to view the site. Damian knew very little of Mesoamerican history so we got to show off our knowledge to him as we looked it over. The new town is built right on top of the old one, and so we cut through peoples' yards and along the side of the school to get there. It is not extensively dug or reconstructed.

We have already visited almost all of the *zona arqueológica* in the state that are prepared for the public, and so we are down to "class two" sites like this one.

But here is a picture of the main stairway, and here is one of the stairway that go up one side. You can almost see Damien and I in it, for size comparison. The excavated side of the pyramid is surrounded by something like a ditch or (if it was filled with water) a moat, and in one part are several round stones. At Monte Alban the signs said that these may be an indication of influences from Teotihuacan. There are no explanatory signs at San Jose Mogote, so we are led to speculate that the archeologists think the same here.

The ball court is not fully excavated. Nonetheless, its distinctive I-shape is visible. Some men were hard at work digging out the outside when we were there.

At the end of our tour we drove home, stopping at a roadside stand for a hearty lunch of *pollo asado*. Damien told us about his time in Zimbabwe while in the Peace Corps, and we mutually expressed dismay over the political conditions there, also about the gross living standards of the U.S. compared to the rest of the world, and our anticipated difficulties when we move back.

Yet To Come

The pattern here will be followed through to the end, with various first-person visits, plus the archeological and mythic stories, through the periods of Mesoamerican history, to now.

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For now