

"Diving God" in Ancient Maya Carving

Archæology

By EMMA REH STEVENSON

In Mexico, where archæology is not at all a dead thing, the scientist must often cope with the passions of the living as well as with the ruins and relics of the dead.

In the Zapotec village of Zaachila in the valley of Oaxaca, where religious feeling runs high, a number of important prehistoric stone carvings have been found incorporated in a four-century-old Christian church. The position they occupy suggests that they must have been of great importance to the Indians in precolonial times, and the Director of Archæology of the Mexican Department of Public Education is planning to remove them to the city of Oaxaca where their significance may be studied.

The ten-foot doorstep of the church of Santa Maria of Zaachila is a single monolith which still shows the signs of ancient carvings in spite of the wear and tear of four centuries of footsteps. But a smaller slab, apparently of much harder stone, has resisted the years much better and shows beautiful carvings of a style that indicates strong Maya influence. This slab is the first stone of the floor just inside of the doorstep.

T. B. Vaccine Honors

Medicine

The grand cross, highest rank of the Legion of Honor, has been conferred on Dr. Albert Calmette of the Pasteur Institute, who developed a preventive vaccine treatment for tuberculosis. His collaborator, Dr. C. Guerin, was given the rank of officer of the distinguished order.

Some 52,772 children have been vaccinated at birth in Paris and the provinces since July 1, 1924, when the vaccine was first put at the disposal of physicians, Dr. Calmette told members of the Academy of Medicine. Cards of 5,749 vaccinated infants born in tuberculous surroundings are kept in the Pasteur Institute files for record and observation. Infants in the group under one year of age present a mortality of 3.1 per cent. while that of unvaccinated children is 8.5 per cent. The general mortality has been reduced more than half. Among the vaccinated children who have reached ages of from two to three and a half years, the tuberculosis deaths have been practically nil. The vaccine is administered at birth and a second dose seems to be unnecessary.

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It is divided into three segments framed by grooved lines. The first segment represents a god similar to the famous Maya "Diving God" so-called because he is always found in the act of descending from heaven in a jack-knife dive. In the case of the Zaachila stone, the god appears to be dropping from a sort of a vault which looks like a symbolized upper jaw with all its teeth. The god wears plumes in his hair and the "language sign" comes from his mouth. He has with him his "penache," the label by which one who is skilled in reading the Maya sign language could tell his name. A necklace hangs from his hands, and is probably meant to represent the well-known collars of jadeite pebbles so popular with ancient Zapotecs and Mixtecs, and for which Oaxaca is famous.

Receiving the god on the ground below, seated crosslegged on either side and facing the center, are two other human figures, probably beating drums, and wearing curious crownlike headgear. They are not dressed alike, in spite of their symmetrical position, and they may represent different sexes. The language sign also comes from their mouths.

The second and third segments of the slabs are similar to the first, except that the figure of the Diving God is found only in the latter. The figures are likewise seated crosslegged, the soles of their feet turned out, and they are occupied with drumshaped objects. The spaces are filled with scrolls whose meaning has not been studied.

The faces of some of the seated figures are completely obliterated, while others are only partly destroyed so that faces are concavities. At first appearance it might seem that the position of the slab at the first step down from the threshold explains the destruction, but on reconsideration it is evident that if it were only the natural wear of feet, the destruction would be uniform and not just in spots.

The fact that the slab is laid down on the most stepped-on place on the floor makes it appear deliberate, and it was probably done to demonstrate to the early Indian converts the impotency of their native gods. In the National Museum at Mexico City there are a number of wooden "huehuetls," ancient drums used by the Indians, carved (*Turn to next page*)

Chicken Pox and Measles Serum

Medicine

Chicken pox may be added to the list of diseases that can be prevented by vaccination.

Dr. Jean V. Cooke of the Washington University School of Medicine at St. Louis, Mo., has reported to the American College of Physicians that inoculation of exposed children with serum from convalescent patients has successfully prevented cases of both chicken pox and measles.

Though the former disease is sufficiently mild as not to require general protective measures, its appearance in epidemics in institutions causes considerable difficulty, especially in the very young children affected. Of a total of 369 cases of exposed children, vaccinated for chicken pox described in medical literature, Dr. Cooke declared, only 74, or 20 per cent., developed chicken pox. Of 206 unvaccinated exposed children observed as controls, 158, or 77 per cent., contracted the disease. Such

immunity is temporary but serves to protect orphanages and schools from the inconvenience of an epidemic.

The preventive treatment for measles, said Dr. Cooke, should be concentrated on account of the danger of complications on infants and young children under five years of age. Results with this method show, he stated, that almost 90 per cent. of children given convalescents' serum during the first week after exposure fail to develop the disease.

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Belgian Research

General Science

Belgium, taking advantage of its industrial prosperity, is raising a 200,000,000 franc fund (\$5,600,000) for the promotion of scientific research along mechanical and chemical lines, according to information received by the U. S. Department of Commerce. The fund will be administered by the government.

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