

Earthquake Reveals Mexican Jewels

Archæology

By EMMA REH STEVENSON

It is an ill wind that blows no good, and Mexico has found a new use for earthquakes.

One of the recent "temblores" that shook the southern state of Oaxaca until it rattled, broke open an ancient tomb of some king or high priest of the high mysterious mountain city of Monte Alban and poured out fifteen beautifully carved jade objects, precious funeral contributions of long ago. Another severe quake was felt in the same region on June 16.

The mystery of Monte Alban has never been solved by archæologists and there are none to say who were its builders. It is tacitly assumed that they were Zapotecs or Mixtecs, who are believed to have been culturally a cross between the Toltecs of the Valley of Mexico to the north and the Mayas to the south. No systematic research has ever been conducted at the site to determine the truth of any of the assertions.

The jade articles which were disgorge by the earthquake, however, speak a loud Maya tongue. The carved faces are suspiciously like those on ancient monuments at Yaxchilan, Palenque and other Maya cities of the early Maya Empire which flourished in Southern Mexico and Guatemala during the first 500 years or more of the Christian Era.

All the articles are pierced for sus-

pension, showing that they probably formed the precious necklace of some high noble, for the wearing of jade was a privilege reserved only for the upper class among prehistoric Americans. The find contains several small idols with folded arms like little mummies, two carved heads, a number of large beads the size of a walnut carefully polished and grooved, four tube-like "beads" several inches long, so highly polished and expertly finished that they look machine-made, and most beautiful of all is a flat jade plaque about three inches long carved to represent a seated figure with a flowing headdress of plumes and wearing little else in addition except a long breechcloth.

The possibility that Monte Alban was not a Zapotec or Mixtec city but perhaps a forerunner of the Maya cities that flourished farther south, is strongly suggested by the nature of the art of the jade articles. If the Mayas came from the north and were descended, as some scientists believe, from the same stock that under other conditions produced the Toltecs, then Monte Alban might have been a point in the long trail of a slow migration. There is no other ancient city in Mexico just like Monte Alban, built for some unknown reason high above the green valley below, accessible only along steep mountain paths.

It crowns a mountain ridge a thou-

sand feet high overlooking the modern pink-and-green city of Oaxaca, and was deserted when the Conquistadores came. It is today an enormous and complicated system of pyramids, terraces, sunken courts, crumbling walls like fortifications, and stumps of foundations of old buildings. None of these ruins remain intact or in anywhere as good condition as those of another prehistoric city called Mitla, on the other side of Oaxaca, which was still occupied by the Indians when the Spaniards came.

The angles of pyramids and sharp edges of walls of Monte Alban are today rounded by nature with earth and vegetation, and all is wrapped in a shroud that only allows the general effect to be seen, like objects under a sheet. The precious gift of jade that the recent earthquake poured out into the green lap of Monte Alban gives an idea of what may be hidden within the mounds with their vaulted burial chambers.

The objects were sent by Martin Bazan, inspector of archæology for the State of Oaxaca, to the Direction of Archæology of the Mexican Department of Education, in Mexico City.

Science News-Letter, June 30, 1928

Spitsbergen With "S"

Geography

Spitsbergen, not Spitzbergen, is the correct way of spelling the name of the popular hopping-off place for polar aviators. So announced the United States Geographic Board here in response to a query as to the official spelling.

Spitzbergen, with the "z", was the original spelling, as given by the discoverer of the archipelago in June, 1596, a Dutchman named Barentz, and it means "pointed mountains." This name was applied because it consists mostly of mountains and pointed hills. However, most English and American maps and atlases spell it with an "s". Also, in the treaty of 1920, which gave sovereignty over the islands to Norway, and to which the United States was a party, the English text spelled it the same way. Hence, the U. S. Geographic Board has adopted the "s" as official.

Science News-Letter, June 30, 1928

Rays Harm Plants

Botany

Extra doses of ultra-violet light are not so good for plants as for animals, it appears from experiments carried on here by E. M. Delf, K. Ritson and A. Westbrook, working at Kew Gardens and Bedford College.

The experiments were undertaken with the idea of finding the possible effect of the light on plants brought from the south to northern countries, where there is much less sunshine. Seedlings and older plants were given treatments with quartz mercury vapor lamp, similar to those given human beings. Germination and growth were retarded and in older plants, leaf-formation was partially inhibited and flower-formation and budding were held back.

Science News-Letter, June 30, 1928

Sunflowers For Silage

Agriculture

Where corn is not a dependable silage crop, it has been found desirable to use sunflowers in its place, and so successful has experimentation along these lines been that it is now advocated that sunflowers be grown in crop rotation schemes.

A mixed silage of corn and sunflowers makes a more palatable and nutritious silage than sunflowers alone, and this has caused the planting of the two together. With the effective feature that sunflowers are very good in controlling weeds, the plant is slowly becoming an agricultural necessity.

Science News-Letter, June 30, 1928

During the tulip craze in seventeenth century Europe, one man exchanged 12 acres of land for a single tulip bulb.