

Old Mexicans Felt Importance of Man

Archæology

Following are reports of some of the interesting papers presented before the International Congress of Americanists, held in New York during the past week. Others will follow in an early issue.

Mental traits of prehistoric Indian races of Mexico as revealed by their pottery remains, were described by Eduardo Noguera, of the Direction of Archæology of the Mexican Ministry of Education.

Mr. Noguera has made a statistical study of nearly 6,000 pottery samples in Mexican museums, including the art of the potters of the Zapotec, Mixtec, Tarascan, Toltec and Aztec races. This is the first study of its kind made on these civilizations.

The Indians were an intensely religious people, and their art of pottery making, which they carried to a high point of perfection, reflects their mental traits, the archæologist said. The comparative frequency of human, animal, plant, objective and geometrical motives, shows the relative importance to the ancient race of the various creatures or things they represent, Mr. Noguera believes.

The pottery of the Zapotecs of Oaxaca, a race that apparently had certain connections with the Mayas farther south and the Mexican races to the north, shows that the human figure was more important to them than any other form used as a decorative motive, suggesting that the race had left behind the totemic stage of culture and enjoyed the philosophic consolation of believing that the human being was the most important creature on earth.

In the cases of the pottery of the other races here studied, geometrical motives were more important than human ones in determining the shapes and decorations of their pots and idols and other clay objects. Human motives were much more common than animal, while plant motives were rare. Many of the geometrical symbols used on the pottery may, however, be conventionalizations of original natural forms that have lost all semblance to what they once were, he explained. This is true in the conventionalized snakes so well known in Mexican art, whose evolution can be traced from a realistic representation to a purely geometrical form.

Details of the excavation and reconstruction of the most important example of Aztec architecture now known in Mexico, were given by

Senor José Reygadas, chief of the Direction of Archæology of the Mexican Ministry of Education.

The site is at Tenayuca, northwest of Mexico City, where excavations conducted by the Mexican government during the last three years have brought to light a great quadrangular pyramid, 236 feet on one side, that once supported a temple for religious worship on its summit.

It was surrounded on three sides by a low wall of coiled snakes that still bear flecks of their ancient red, blue and green paint.

Tenayuca was known, long before the Conquest, to have been the political center or capital of the Chichimecas, a once powerful Indian race. A number of the conquistadores and early padres mentioned it when they wrote home or compiled their memoirs for posterity.

Although it was early covered with earth to protect it from destruction at the hands of the white

man, the existence of this mound was always known. In 1914 Dr. Manuel Gamio, seeing that it was fast being destroyed by the villagers of Tenayuca who were extracting the already cut stone for building material, declared it an "archæological monument" and no more destruction was allowed there.

Excavations were begun in 1925, and first the west side of the mound was cleared, showing a stairway of enormous proportions. The upper part of the stairway did not correspond to the lower, as it was set farther back and had a different inclination, and it was soon seen that it was a matter of one stairway superimposed on another at a later epoch. The outside stairway had been so destroyed that it no longer reached all the way up. Eventually the earth was taken out from between the two stairways so that the types of structure of the different epochs could be seen.

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