

ARCHAEOLOGY

Another Temple to the Wind God

A Deity's Sanguinary Appetite so Horrified Cortez Soldiers That They Went About Destroying His Peculiar Temples

By **EMMA REH**

NEAR the little Indian village of Prairieville—the Mexican name is Calixtlahuaca—archaeologists have made a rare and unusual discovery.

They have found one of those circular temples to the God of the Wind, seen by the soldiers of Cortez, but not one of which was ever afterward found on the Mexican mainland. The Aztec Wind God had his shrine atop a circular structure, so the musty old chronicles say, and the entrance to his lofty sanctuary was through a pair of horrible serpent's jaws whose grotesque fangs were painted red or smeared with the blood of human sacrifice and in whose deep throat an eternal fire burned.

So terrifying were these temples to the Spaniards who beheld them on their march of conquest through the Mexico of Montezuma, that they were the first of all the Aztec structures to be battered to the ground. They reminded the conquistadores of nothing less than hell itself, and they were sure that the devil had been the architect.

Part of Ruined City

For this reason the finding of the remains of such a building now is of enormous interest to archaeologists. It is part of a ruined city near Calixtlahuaca which also has just been discovered, and the round temple is as yet only partly excavated. But, as the Indian workmen remove the hood of earth and vegetation that envelops it, a structure for all the world like a giant birthday cake of stone is coming into view. It is a very fancy cake, too, five layers deep, each upper layer smaller than the one it rests upon, and, as if the resemblance were not yet sufficiently striking, the ancient bakers-in-stone had put on an "icing" of plaster which still sticks in spots along the massive masonry walls.

Leading to the topmost layer of the masonry cake on the east is a stairway of stone. It is too steep for white man's comfort, as is almost always the case in Mexican pyramids, but in its heyday must have lent itself to very dramatic

religious processions to its summit. Whatever there was waiting at the top, it must have suddenly come into view only as the last step was reached.

A little probing has revealed that this ancient broken stairway was really "new," for traces of at least one other older one within exist. Aztecs and their kindred never tore a building down when it got too small for a community. They merely heaped it over with rock and earth and put a new stone facing on the outside, plastered it, rebuilt the shrine on top, and reproduced all other details, so that the newer structure was but a larger edition of the older one within. At one time, too, when the vertical walls of the lower layer showed signs of weakness, a sloping batter was added like a buttress, making this bottommost layer of the cake a slice of a cone while the others are cylindrical sections.

All sorts of idols and pottery are found scattered about the excavations by which the archaeologists expect to tell the story of the city's past beyond the scope of history. The most interesting object that has thus turned up is a circular stone a yard across and a half a yard high carved in Aztec glyphs that signify "blood." In fact this stone is but a smaller edition of the gigantic sacrificial altar of Montezuma now in the National Museum at Mexico City, which was once the city of Tenochtitlán.

Ancient Calixtlahuaca was probably not Aztec in the beginning, but rather built by other Mexican Indians, Tarascans, or perhaps Otomi, whose archaeology is not yet well understood by archaeologists themselves. The city was built on the slopes of a low ridge of mountains, the various pyramids and mounds standing on artificial terraces connected by great causeways that were once paved in stone. This ruined site is one of the world's highest cities, ancient or modern, for it stands 8,500 feet above sea-level. It lies in the Valley of Toluca, west of Mexico City. Modern Calixtlahuaca, the Indian village on the edge of the ruins, is an enigma today, for its handful of inhabitants speak Aztec while all the other surrounding

villages for many miles do not understand them for they speak dialects of Otomi.

The Calixtlahuaca hillsides were inhabited over an enormous period of time, judging by the evidence of pottery and such tell-tale remains from at least five successive types of people, from the most primitive of "Archaic" folk to the highly sophisticated, if bloodlike, Aztecs of later times. The heavy Aztec hoof is everywhere seen, for the circular temple to the Air God is theirs, and so is the butcher stone, and many other things. Like all imperialistic peoples the Aztecs forced their arts, customs, and religion upon their victims.

Conquered and Overhauled

In the middle of the fifteenth century, Calixtlahuaca was conquered and overhauled by Axayácatl, the emperor of Tenochtitlán, the city-on-the-lake that was later to become Mexico City. A few years before the Spanish Conquest of 1521, in the reign of the last of the Montezumas, Yocoyótzin, whom Cortez was later to imprison and depose, Calixtlahuaca was razed, and the rightful owners driven away. A garrison of Aztec soldiers was placed there instead as an outpost of the empire, and the isolated handful of Aztecs there today are



THE WIND GOD

Otherwise known as Quetzalcoatl and the Plumed Serpent, in whose honor the Aztecs made many human sacrifices.

probably the descendants of those American "Romans." That is about all that history knows.

Archaeologists have always been interested in one famous example of round temples in Mexico, the "Caracol" or "Snail-shell" of Chichen Itza. This is in the peninsula of Yucatan, a thousand miles east of Calixtlahuaca, and across the Mexican Gulf. It is in the distant land of the Mayas, but not far enough away for the imperialism of the conquering hordes from the Mexican mainland.

The Caracol of Chichen is a great white circular tower whose superposed layers recede in size to the top. Some of the walls are broken and this has a spiral effect. It resembles somewhat a snail-shell.

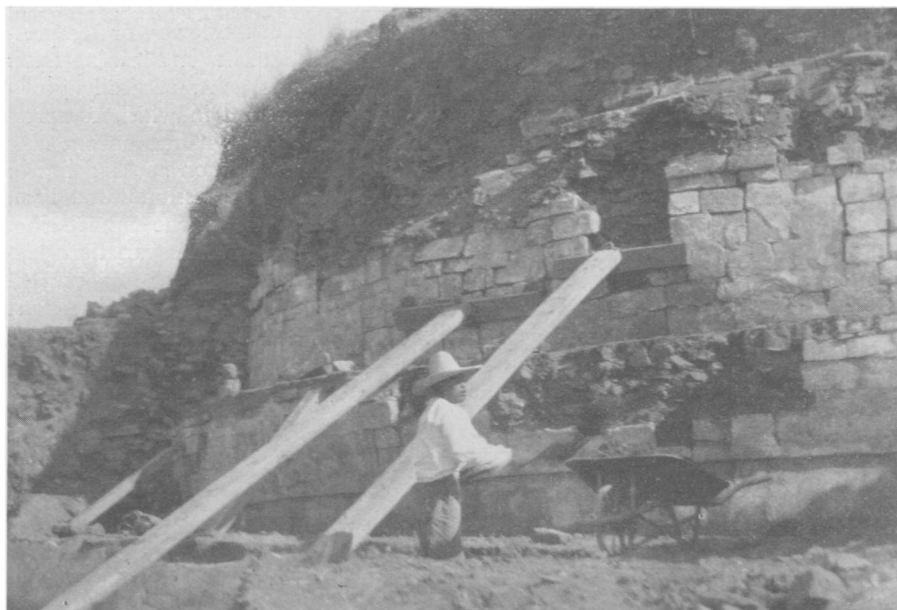
Not because it looms into the skies for almost a hundred feet, but because the windows in the topmost turret seem to have been deliberately placed for accurate observation of the sun at different stations of the tropical year, was it called the "Mayan astronomical observatory," by Carnegie Institution archaeologists now working there.

Bishop Landa, writing shortly after the Spanish Conquest of Yucatan, in the middle of the sixteenth century, when he still had the opportunity to learn a lot of Mayan lore direct, says that Quetzalcoatl, the God of Air, otherwise known as the Plumed Serpent, came from the Mexican mainland and conquered Yucatan. He built himself a magnificent round temple in Chichen Itza. When the conquering Mexican band built the city of Mayapan a little north of Chichen Itza, another such round temple was constructed there. The Mayapan round temple does not exist today for it was destroyed by lightning in 1867. But a sketch made before, shows it was modeled after the "Snail" of Chichen.

Hidden Chambers Suggested

A third round building was discovered, also in Yucatan, by Dr. Herbert Spinden of the Brooklyn Museum, in the Mayan maritime town of Palmul on the Caribbean coast. The building is in four round receding sections, the uppermost turret having a room with windows. From fissures behind a ruined altar come currents of cold air, suggesting hidden chambers.

The fourth and last of the round buildings known in the Republic of Mexico, is one much earlier by thousands of years, and built long before Quetzalcoatl was born. It is at Cuicuil-



PRAIRIEVILLE'S TEMPLE

To the God of the Wind—a rare and unusual discovery. The soldiers of Cortez, terrified by the horrors committed within these temples, destroyed all they could find. The famous Caracol, or snail shell temple, at Chichen Itza, Yucatan, which is thought to be another of the round temples to the Wind God, is shown on the front cover.

co, "The Place of Singing" near Mexico City. It sits in a thirteen-mile lava sheet that conservative estimates put at at least three thousand years. The molten lava that flowed from a crater's mouth on the horizon partly inundated the round structure, at places to a depth of 25 feet.

That burning sheet not only sealed in the proof of antiquity in the case of this mysterious "round pyramid," but also formed an American "Pompeii" where one may see today bits of life as it was in the Valley of Mexico 2,000 years before the time of Christ.

The Cuicuilco structure is not tall and majestic as is its nearest round neighbor at Calixtlahuaca, but looks more like a stack of lowly "wheats" than like an aristocratic cake. And the volcano poured its lava syrup generously around. The Cuicuilco structure is by far the most primitive of the four, but nothing is known of its past, and all racial memory of its history has faded.

The Air God, or Quetzalcoatl, to whom the other three round temples were built, stood with the Mexicans something as Christ stands in the Christian world, in some of his aspects, at any rate. He appears to have been a great popular leader who lived on in myth after his death. He was an exceedingly human sort of god, and at one time got very drunk. It was a lady that plied him with pulque, led him

astray and caused him to lose his power among his people. That, however, did not prevent his soul from ascending to the Evening Star, when he died.

Saint Thomas in America

Quetzalcoatl is represented in many guises in ancient chronicles, for he had many jobs on earth. In one guise he was a "fair god" with blue eyes and light hair. He was variously explained by Christian conquerors who heard this tale. Some said he was a Norseman drifted by chance to the Mexican coast, where he gained renown and power, but the strangest version, and one held for many generations after the Conquest, was that Quetzalcoatl was really Saint Thomas who had wandered into the American wilderness, and became a god in Mexican legend.

The temples that were later built to him were round, because as God of the Air, his most important job, he must have them round. One Mexican Colonial historian says that their shape was round because as air circulates around all, so the temple of the Air God had to manifest his qualities.

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Illiteracy in the United States has been reduced to a point where fewer than five persons out of every 100 over 10 years of age are now unable to read and write.