

ARCHAEOLOGY

Mixtec "Family Album" May Hold Secret of Lost Language

Less Known Than Mayas, Mixtecs Wrote in Hieroglyphics; Accompanying Spanish Script May Prove Key

A KEY to the as yet unread Mixtec hieroglyphs of ancient Mexico may be contained in an ancient Indian "family album" written on deerskin.

This codex, or manuscript, was brought to light by Miss Emma Reh of Washington, D. C., student of Mexican archaeology, who hopes an attempt will be made to decipher the imperfectly legible family history of a line of ancient Mixtec chieftains recorded in the deer-skin book.

Because the unread native hieroglyphs are accompanied by Mixtec handwriting in the Spanish alphabet, there is hope that study of this manuscript will provide means of understanding the symbols in which Mixtec Indians wrote.

Mixtec culture thrived in Mexico well before the better known Aztec civilization which existed at the time of the Spanish conquest in 1521. Even less is known about Mixtecs than the Mayas who built great stone cities farther south in the Yucatan peninsula of Mexico.

The document has added value because its origin is known. The majority of Indian picture writings now existing in museums have been rediscovered in forgotten European archives where they were sent as curiosities of the New World centuries ago, or have been bootlegged out of Mexico in secret, contraband trade in antiquities.

The new-found Mixtec manuscript, now in the National Museum at Mexico City, comes from Oaxaca, in southern Mexico. It folds into a book of eleven accordion pleats, and is read from back to front. Writing, pictures and glyphs are in black.

The "album" begins with a line of three Indians seated before a house, the elegance of which attests to their noble standing. They wear the regal Indian headband, and their name-signs above their heads show that they are called Two Alligator, Four Deer, and Nine Dog, respectively.

Their story begins in the Indian year "Three House." The Spanish date 1300 occurs on page two.

On this page begins a long line of marriages between Indian nobles and native women. Bigamy is performed on page three, where a chief marries two wives at once. Town names in hieroglyphs accompany each married couple.

Great-great-grandfathers and grandmothers pictured on the first eight pages dress as Indians and wear the queer hieroglyphs above their heads which tell their personal names.

On page nine, however, a significant change takes place. The native men and women acquire Spanish names, even Spanish clothes. Christian crosses appear. This happens in 1610. It is known that the Spanish crown allowed Indian nobles to be called "Don" and "Dona." From this page on, these "civilized" Indians wear Shakespearean hats.

The family record ends in 1684. It may have served as "proof of nobility" in some Indian legal claims before the Spanish Viceroy, Don Luis de Velazco, who is mentioned within.

Indian codices had various functions.

Some were family records such as these. Others were religious or historical. Certain ones were "maps," or agreements between Indian towns as to their hereditary land limits.

Of the latter, some still exist in Oaxaca. Indians believe if they lose these "pergamins" they lose the right to their lands. None but the Indian elders ever see them.

A half-breed of Tlaxiaco described such a "map" to Miss Reh. It belongs to a nearby Mixtec town and is brought out only during local cornfield wars over boundaries, which rage fiercely and frequently there. Fighting is largely done with stones, as in pre-Spanish times.

This document is said to have shrines, human figures and roads painted in black and brown on deerskin, the roads being indicated by human footprints. The "map" is kept rolled around a cylindrical green stone, the whole folded in another deerskin for protection.

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PHYSICS

Dust Storms "Make Air Blue" By Light-Scattering Effect

BLUE LIGHT during a dust storm has no necessary connection with the color of the dust itself, but is an effect of the scattering of light that strikes the microscopically tiny particles that fill the air. This explanation of a phenomenon often noticed this spring is offered by



MIXTEC FAMILY RECORD