

ARCHAEOLOGY

Scintillating Smiles Linked Ancient Mayas with Zapotecs

ONE OF the anecdotes about Paul Revere tells of his identifying a Revolutionary hero among Bunker Hill's dead by dental work he had fashioned for the man.

Now, archaeologists digging at the mountain city of Monte Alban, in southern Mexico, have unearthed significant dentistry there. By eccentric styles in dental work the Zapotec Indians of Monte Alban proclaim a cultural relationship with the most brilliant of all the ancient Americans, the Mayan Indians in Yucatan.

Monte Alban tombs have given up no recent additions to the spectacular treasure trove of 1931. But they have yielded something shining in the form of human front teeth inset with tiny disks of iron pyrite—fool's gold, the stuff is sometimes called because of its valuable-looking glint. Ancient smiles, Mayan or Zapotec, must have been decidedly flashing with pyrite mirrors for trimming. Never before has this style of tooth mutilation been found outside the Mayan area.

Another Mayan style of mutilated teeth discovered in Monte Alban is that of filing the two front incisors to make a figure T, the distinguishing mark of the Mayan sun-god. Several pottery funerary urns found in Monte Alban this year depict a Zapotecan corn god with T-shaped front teeth.

Bones from fifty-odd Monte Alban tombs explored since 1932 reveal that the Zapotecs also imitated their Mayan neighbors in skull-flattening. Dr. Daniel de la Borbolla, anthropologist of the Mexican National Museum, finds that the eight well-preserved human skulls recovered from the graves were artificially deformed, Mayan style.

These skulls show the Zapotecs to have been broadheaded, as Mayas are today, and this is the first inkling of the physical type of ancient Monte Alban's inhabitants.

Dr. Borbolla counts about twenty styles of tooth mutilation and decorations in the archaeological material of southern Mexico. One Monte Alban skull had front teeth neatly incised with fine vertical lines so that the whole

set gave the effect of a fine-toothed comb.

Spanish missionaries wrote that certain Indians filed their teeth like saw points. Landa, monk of Yucatan, said that old women did the work, grinding teeth down by means of stones and water.

There is no proof that Indian "dentists" used anesthetics. Making the T-shaped sun-god incisors must have been painful, as the tooth was cut entirely through. But as the mutilation was apparently religious in its motive, the pain may have been a sacrifice.

Since archaeologists began working at Monte Alban, they have asked how old the place was, what the relationships of the people might be. Recently the sacred ball game of Monte Alban revealed the city's age as a thousand years past. Now, the sacred forms of dentistry point to significant relationship between the city and the leaders in American civilization of that time, the Mayas.

Science News Letter, June 16, 1934

ANTHROPOLOGY

"Race," German Magazine, Promotes Nordic Movement

NORDIC ideas and culture are to be promoted by a new German magazine named "Rasse" ("Race") which has opened offices and begun publication in Leipzig. The new publication is sponsored by the organization known as the "Nordic Ring," and is edited by Dr. M. Hesch, of the Institute for Ethnology and Anthropology in Leipzig. In the list of associate editors appears the names of several non-German scientists, in Vienna, London and the Baltic countries.

"Rasse" announces as its purpose "to carry Nordic ideas to ever-widening circles, and at the same time to gather all Nordic racial strength, so that the effort may again be made to renew our culture out of the Nordic spirit. Absolute scientific dependability and plain, popularly understandable language, will give the publication its stamp.

Science News Letter, June 16, 1934



Poison Ivy

VACATIONERS need only to hear those words of bane, "poison ivy," to have some of the joy taken out of holiday life. Probably no plant that grows in the Western Hemisphere is more dreaded; and indeed few can so thoroughly ruin an outing as this blister-raising, itch-engendering pest.

There is no part of our country really free of it or its equally troublesome relatives, poison oak and poison sumac. There is no poison ivy in the western deserts, to be sure, or out on the wind-swept grass floor of the Great Plains. But there are inviting (and poison-oak-infested) moist canyons in the desert, and cooling (and equally ivy-cursed) timber strips along the slow flat rivers of the plains. It is as pervasive as sin, and if its wages are not identical, it is quite capable of making the wayfarer wish he had fallen into the sin instead of into the ivy.

The plant is strictly American, though it has some poisonous relatives in the Orient, one of which is a source of a lacquer that sometimes makes trouble for sensitive persons. Captain John Smith, traditionally of Münchhausen tendencies, appears to have been the first to describe its effects, and to his credit be it said that he presented an accurate and conservative account. The weed, wrote Pocahontas' protégé, "being touched causeth reddness, itching, and lastly blysters, the which howsoever, after a while they passe away of themselves without further harme." Surely, if anything, an understatement!

But perhaps Captain John Smith was not very sensitive to ivy poisoning. Many persons are thus insensitive, and many more appear to be totally immune; though this im- (Turn to Next Page)