

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)

munity is never certain

Literally hundreds of remedies for ivy poisoning have been proposed. A few work. Most recommended is a five per cent. solution of ferric chloride, or ferrous sulphate, in water and alcohol; to be washed on and allowed to dry without wiping before one goes into a poison-ivy-infested place. If the poisoning actually develops, it can be oxidized off with the same solution, or with one of potassium permanganate.

Better, though, avoid the plants altogether if possible. Poison ivy is easily recognized. It is either a tree-climbing vine or an erect, sparsely branched shrub, with three-parted, usually notched leaves. The same description holds for its western kinsweed, poison oak. The flowers are in irregular clusters, tiny greenish-white. The fruits, ripening in late autumn, are thin-fleshed white berries.

Poison sumac grows only in acid-water bogs, along with tamarack, pitcher-plants and sundews. It looks like ordinary sumac, which however never grows in such wet places, except that its bark is light gray rather than brownish. It can best be distinguished by its fruits, which persist into the following year. They are drooping loose clusters of white berries, instead of the erect, dense, red-brown fruit-masses of the ordinary sumac.

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Physicians who studied 20,000 cancer cases in Memorial Hospital, New York, report their opinion that inheritance is not an important factor in the genesis of cancers among children, with the exception of glioma of the eye.

PUBLIC HEALTH

Chicago Fair Visitors Need Not Fear Dysentery

AMEBIC dysentery is no more of a danger in Chicago now than in any other city in the country, agreed health officials at the Conference of State and Provincial Health Authorities of North America.

Discussion of the outbreak of last summer and fall brought out the following points:

Plumbing is the first line of defense against amebic dysentery.

The Chicago outbreak of amebic dysentery was the first due to infected water that has ever occurred in a civilian population anywhere at any time; the disease has always heretofore been traced to infected food handlers.

Sanitary inspection of plumbing when a building is erected is not enough to protect the public health. Such inspections should also be made at later dates to detect defects that may result from changes in the plumbing system after the building has been in use.

When Dr. Herman N. Bundesen, Chicago's health commissioner, described at the Conference the fight made by the city against the amebic dysentery outbreak, he reported that 660 of the public buildings and hotels in the city had been rigidly inspected and all defects in plumbing corrected.

The plumbing in the Chicago hotel which was found responsible for the outbreak is probably no different from plumbing installed in any building 20

to 30 years ago. Because of this and the fact that five out of every hundred persons in the general population are carriers of amebic dysentery, the disease may break out anywhere at any time.

The disease did not spread throughout the country from the Chicago epidemic, no material outbreaks elsewhere having been traced to Chicago except those cases known to have been contracted in Chicago.

Amebic dysentery is probably a factor in the present increase of cases of so-called appendicitis. Many amebic dysentery cases are known to have been wrongly diagnosed as appendicitis and the mistaken diagnosis probably has not been detected in many more cases.

The dramatic way in which Chicago's health commissioner announced the outbreak to the world through the press and over the radio was termed "one of the most judicious and courageous things any health officer ever did."

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AGRICULTURE

Corn Crop Not Yet In Serious Danger

DROUGHT, though confronting the nation with the prospect of the worst wheat crop failure in history, has not yet become seriously menacing to the corn crop. So the U. S. Weather Bureau has stated, as the result of a week's survey of weather and crop conditions.

"In Iowa," the meteorologists state, "the early crop is growing fairly well and being cultivated, but fields are dusty; chinch bugs are destructive in the south. Satisfactory growth is reported from eastern Kansas, throughout the South, and in the Middle Atlantic States."

The optimistic tone of the report, however, is qualified by the statement that over considerable areas a large percentage of the later-planted seed corn is still lying in the dust, ungerminated. In Iowa this includes approximately one-third of the acreage, while in the eastern Ohio valley all late-planted corn is dormant.

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