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PART FIRST.

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In prehispanic *Tzapotecapan* which at present forms part of the territory of the rich and legendary State of Oaxaca, and principally adjoining the region of Zoque-Mixe, is found the town of *San Pablo Mitla*, famous in the annals of our History as being near the celebrated ruins of *Lyobaá* (Mictlan in the Nahuatl language), calling forth the admiration of the studios and being a souvenir of the tribes which at remote periods inhabited the land of our Republic.

Counting on a limited number of inhabitants, perhaps not reaching

2,516 (1901), with rudimentary industry and sterile ground, it appears to be influenced by the same melancholy quiet of the ruins that surround it.

There is scarcity of water and vegetation and the temperature is hot, its huts of straw being distributed along sinuous streets; at these huts can be seen as a rule, a group of dirty and naked boys, unkempt women, hungry dogs, lean oxen and poor implements of labor, which remind one of primitive agriculture.

The town is situated in a small valley surrounded by high mountains of bare rocks; the hot rays of the mid-day sun and those of the afternoon beat down on the sandy ground, without the wearied traveller being able to encounter any crystalline spring in which to quench his thirst, nor any refreshing shade under which to recover his strength.

Living here is unbearable during the Spring, Summer and Autumn and only towards the end of the latter or in Winter can visits be made to Mitla.

Its topography and geographical situation gives us the key to this troublesome climate, as it is $71^{\circ} 50' 80''$ North latitude and $20^{\circ} 38' 47''$ East longitude from the meridian of Mexico, and the thermometer in the shade and at its maximum indicates from 30° to 35° centigrade.

The present town takes its origin in the time before the Conquest, having been founded in 1528 and up to 1712 it received the title of a *town*, instead of that *Congregation* which it previously had; but we have no data that it was ever in flourishing conditions.

Its small industry consists of wool spinning, in which the women are preferably employed, using ancient spinning wheels and looms.

Its inhabitants, of almost pure Tzapoteca race, do not remind us of the energetical *Cosijoeza* nor the enchanting *Peláxila*.

Encrusted in one of the indian buildings (palace No. 4) is the parish church and Rectory, being equally in ruins, abandoned and dirty. They appear to belong to forgotten periods; as the Curate is almost never seen in the town where his congregation reside nor do the latter, excepting very seldom, go to the church or Rectory.

The want of religious practise amongst the inhabitants of Mitla, and a certain way of thinking and speaking of the palaces, appear to indicate that they have not abandoned their belief nor idolatrous practises.

An Ethnologist will still find a great deal to explore amongst these indians.

Mitla has not been the scene of any remarkable events, and its inhabitants only mention the following:

"On January 21st 1860 a passage of arms took place in the hills near this town, between the liberal party coming from Tehuantepec and Juchitán, headed by Lieutenant-Coronel D. Porfirio Díaz at that time, and the reactionary party of General Marcelino Cobos. The former were 508 men in number and the latter more than 1,000. The fight was initiated energetically on both sides, and Mr. Díaz was forced to leave his positions as he was abandoned by the Juchitecos; but reuniting his forces he again charged and recovered same, as well as the enemy's artillery."

Rains are scarce in Mitla and earthquakes are frequent and intense.

In the present political division it is ranked as a Municipality, depending from the District of Tlacolula.

Ecclesiastical circumscription considers this town as a parish and its parish priest directs others in the vicinity such as those of Matatlán, Ocotepec, Guila, Guelavia, los Ríos, las Albarradas and the haciendas and ranches in the neighborhood.

Compared with an *oasis* in the desert called *Mitla*, is the house of Mr. Felix Quero, where the traveller finds a bountiful table, clean bed and amiable and willing people; counting on the services of this gentleman and his esteemed family, every needs is satisfied and the hours pass less slowly and monotonously.

By whom (a) and when (b) were the admirable buildings of Mitla constructed?

(a) The *Tzapoteca* being driven from their former region in the North of our territory, in those far-off times according to tradition, they found that the lands immediately near the Gulf coasts were occupied by their predecessors who had emmigrated, the *Ulmeca* and the *Xicalanca*. They went along the coasts of the Great Ocean by Jalisco, Michoacan and Guerrero and penetrated into the territory of Oaxaca, then called *Diddjazaa* and owned by the *Petela*, a race belonging to the Southern civilization.

The emmigrants brought with them the culture we can see in the monuments they have left of *Casas Grandes* in Chihuahua, and on coming into contact with the *Petela*, they modified theirs more and in a better sense, but without losing their originality.

Comparing the ornamental painting of some of the vases of Janos and Casas Grandes, with the decoration of the panels existing on the walls of the Mitla palaces, we find the same style: *the Grecian pattern enclosed in a quadrilateral*.

This theory and its archaeological proofs are due to Lic. Alfredo Chavero, the great Mexican Archaeologist.

The *Meca* origin of the Mitla builders is proved by the wall paintings, comparing some of the figures with those of the "Borgiano" and "Porfirio Díaz" manuscripts of antiquity.

(b) According to an approximate calculation, the so-called palaces must have been built in the VII or VIII century of our Era, but with a certain lapse of time occurring between the four groups we know of.

Doutrelain, a famous architect says: "Examining the plans of these palaces, it can be seen that these monuments are not all contemporaneous. It is probable, in view of the greater simplicity and more exact symmetry of the principal palace (that of the columns), that it is later than the other two, whose arrangement is more com-

plicated and less harmonious. But notwithstanding this, as the similarity of building and decoration is so perfect, it may be believed that if not simultaneous, still no very long period transpired between the building of the column group and the rest."

In a recent exploration, Mr. Marshall H. Saville found, at $1\frac{1}{2}$ kilometres East from the town of Mitla, and covered with an artificial hill of earth which the Indians call "pasa á carrera" (pass by running), a part of the walls of a great hall, which so to speak, represents the embryo of the palace walls treated of.

Along said wall can clearly be seen, arranged with symmetry, large vertical stones, alternating with others of smaller size, and between them all are imbedded fragments of large clay vases. At a place near this, was also found the oven where they were burnt.

III

The oldest description so far known of these palaces, although the details are somewhat confused and contradictory, is that given by Fray Francisco de Burgoa, of Oaxaca; giving also the object and ceremonies held there in times before the discovery of Columbus.

It literally reads as follows:

"They built in this square this beautiful house or Pantheon, with stories and subterraneans, the latter in the concavity which was found under the earth, equalling in style the halls which enclose it, having a spacious court; and to build the four equal halls they worked with what force and industry they could secure from a barbarous people.

"It is not known from what quarry they could cut such great pillars of stone, that with difficulty two men could embrace them with their arms extended. These, although without capital or pedestal, straight and smooth, are more than five yards long composed each of a single stone, and served to sustain the roof. The roof was of flat stones two yards or more long, and one broad, and half a yard thick, laid upon the pillars successively. The flat stones are so much alike and so well adjusted one to the other, that without mortar or cement they appear in their construction like tables brought together. The four halls are very spacious, covered in the same way with this kind of roof. The walls excelled in execution the work of the most skilled artificers of the world, so that neither the Egyptians nor the Greeks have written of this kind of architecture, because they began at the lowest foundations and followed upwards, spreading out into the form of a crown, which projects from the roof in breadth and appears likely to fall.

The centre of the walls is of a cement so strong that we do not know with what liquid it was made. The surface is of such a singular construction that it shows something like a yard of stones. The sculptured blocks serve to hold innumerable little white stones that fill it, beginning with the sixth part of an ell and the half of an ell

wide and the quarter part of an ell thick, so smooth and similar that it seems as if they were made in a mould. Of these there was so great a variety, and they were so connected one with the other, that various showy pictures an ell wide each, the length of the hall, were constructed with a variety of decoration on each as high as the capital. And it was so neat that it exceeded the description, and what has caused astonishment to great architects was the adjustment of these little stones without mortar or any instruments. They worked them with hard flints and sand and produced a building of so much strength that, being very old and beyond the memory of the living, it has lasted to our times. I saw it much at my ease thirty years ago (1674). The rooms above were of the same style and size with those below, and although portions were somewhat ruined because some of the stones had been carried away, they were very worthy of consideration. The door frames were very capacious, composed of a single stone of the thickness of the wall at each side. The lintel or architrave was a single stone which held the two below.

"There were four halls above and four below. They were divided in this way: That in front served as a chapel and sanctuary for the idols, which were placed on a large stone that served as an altar at the great feasts or at the funeral of some king and principal chief. The Superior gave notice to the lesser priests or inferior officers that they should arrange the vestments and decorate the chapel, and prepare the incense. They went down with a great escort without any of the people seeing them, nor was it ever permitted them to turn their faces toward the procession, being persuaded that they would fall dead in the act of disobedience. Upon entering the chapel the priest put on a large white cotton robe, and another one embroidered with figures of beasts and birds in the manner of a surplice or chasuble. Upon his head he had something after the style of a mitre, and upon the feet another invention woven with threads of different colors, and thus clothed he came with great pomp and circumstance to the altar. Making great obeisance to the idols he renewed the incense, and began to talk very much between his teeth with these figures, the depositories of infernal spirits. In this kind of communication he continued with these deformed and horrid objects, that held all overcome with terror and amazement, until he recovered from his diabolical trance, and told the spectators all the fictions and

orders which the spirit had persuaded him of, or which he had invented.

"When he was obliged to make human sacrifices, the ceremonies were doubled and the assistants bent the victim across a great stone, and opening the breast with some knives of flint they tore it apart with horrible contortions of the body, and laying bare the heart they tore it out with the soul for the Demon. They carried the heart to the Chief Priest that he might offer it to the idols, putting it to their mouths with other ceremonies. The body they threw into the sepulchre of the blessed as they called it. If after the sacrifice any one wished to detain those who officiated, or to demand some favor, he was informed by the inferior priests that he could not go to his house until his gods were appeased, commanding him to practise penance. . . . etc.

. . . . "One hall was the burial place of these priests, and another hall was for the kings of Theozapotlan. . . .

"The last hall had another door at the rear into an obscure and fearful opening that was closed with a great stone to shut the entire entrance, and into it they threw the bodies of those that they had sacrificed. . . . and there have been men and curious priests of good faith, who in order to undeceive the ignorant entered below and went down some steps. . . . where they found a species of alleys like streets. . . . they ordered that infernal place to be perfectly closed up with masonry, and the upper halls were separated from the lower ones, the fragments existing up to now". . . .

"One high hall was the Palace of the Chief Priest in which he gave audience and slept. . . . and such was the authority of this minister of the Devil that no one dared to pass through the square and to avoid it they had the other three halls with gates at the rear through which the officers entered both above and below. They had outside passages and alleys for entering and going out from an audience. . . .

"The second hall was that of the priests and their assistants. The third that of the King when he came and the fourth that of the other leaders and captains. . . .

"All the halls were well covered with mats and very clean. . . ."
(Burgoa, Vol. II of Second Part of his Geographical History, page 285 up to 260).

It appears that the good priest refers in his description only to the

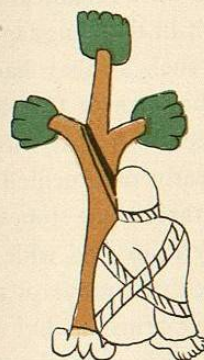
group of the *hall of columns* and it is doubtful that "*he saw it at his ease 30 years ago*" as there are no traces of a second floor, hidden doors in the lower floor, or the existence of the famous subterranean which "*infernal place*" was covered with "*masonry*."

Mr. Holmes and Mr. Saville are of the same opinion, and they are two of the most reliable explorers.

IV

What were the causes for the destruction of these monuments (a) and in what period did it take place? (b)

In extensive and serious works, as well as in novels and similar books, an error has been made, of which we are ourselves responsible, in a work recently printed¹ in them it is asserted that King *Ahuizotl*, indignant at the cruel and treacherous death committed by the inhabitants of Mitla on some Nahuatl *pochteca*, had sacked this City, passing its inhabitants through with knives and burning their magnificent palaces.

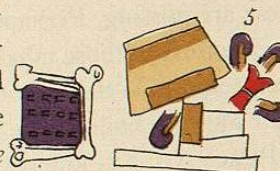


Regarding the treacherous death of the *pochteca* this is perfectly true; but it happened in *Mitlancuauhtla*, a place situated between Coatzacoalcos and Tehuantepec, although belonging to the Tzapoteca.

This did not occur under the reign of Ahuizotl, but in that of *Motecuhzoma Ilhuicamina*, who in effect cruelly punished said act. (Tezozomoc. Duran.)

The rivalry between the Tzapoteca and Mexica was increased with the lapse of time; as can be seen in the "*Mendoza Manuscript*" (Part First, Illustration 16, Fig. 5) Ahuizotl made Mitla his tributary, after having destroyed Oaxaca.

Undoubtedly to this event, the Dominican Rios refers, on treating of the "*Telleriano-Remensis Manuscript*" when on page 40 and following, in the first left hand column, he wrote: *Year of two rabbits and of 1494, the*



¹ Compendium of the General History of Mexico from prehistoric times up to the year 1900, written by Dr. Nicolás León. *Mexico and Madrid*. 1901.—2. 4th Com. pp. 576 and 296 illustrations taken from Manuscripts of antiquity, authentic photographs and paintings by the most well known Mexican and foreign artists.