

THE REOPENING
OF THE MEXICAN AND
CENTRAL AMERICAN HALL



FEBRUARY 25, 1944

THE AMERICAN
MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
NEW YORK CITY

The reopening of the Mexican and Central American Hall.
Amer. Mus. of Nat. Hist. 1944 57.07(74.7) 44-157617

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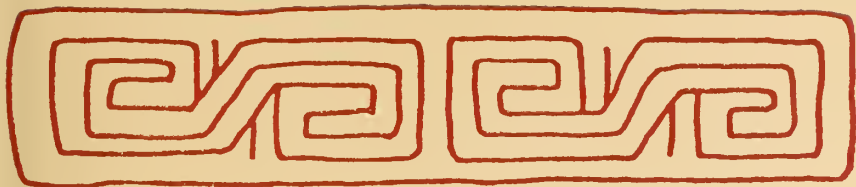
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44-157617-13416



CONTENTS

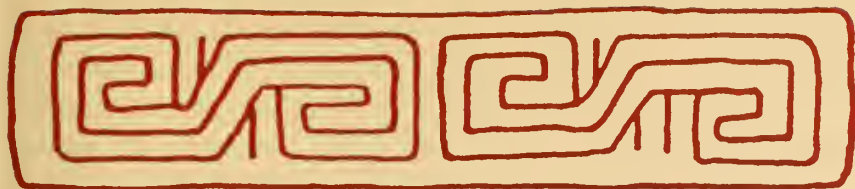
A. PERRY OSBORN, *Acting President, the American Museum of Natural History* FOREWORD

ARCHIBALD MACLEISH, *Librarian of Congress* -57.1(7) 57.1.9
. THE AMERICAN HERITAGE

A. E. PARR, *Director, the American Museum of Natural History*
. SCIENCE, ARTS, AND ANTHROPOLOGY

HARRY L. SHAPIRO, *Chairman of the Department of Anthropology, the American Museum of Natural History* x 57.1(72)
THE CIVILIZATIONS OF MEXICO AND CENTRAL AMERICA

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FOREWORD

THE TRUSTEES AND ADMINISTRATION are agreed that it would be inappropriate to celebrate this seventy-fifth anniversary year of the Museum with the war in progress. There could be no real zest in an anniversary when the minds and hearts of all Americans are preoccupied with the grim struggle in which our country is engaged.

The Museum could have made much of this anniversary by recalling to our members and the public generally the great men who have worked here for the past seventy-five years, the notable achievements in exploration in all parts of the world, the important scientific research with the discoveries and truths emanating therefrom, the important books of science, popular and erudite, written within these walls, the achievements in education, and the marvelous collections that have been brought together. The growth of the institution from its modest beginnings in the Central Park Arsenal to its position and eminence as a national and international institution could have been presented in terms of truly noteworthy and romantic achievement, a characteristic example of American free enterprise. All this must be left for some future birth year, when peace has come again.

Despite the interruptions of war, the Museum is going ahead, with the support and backing of thousands of members and friends, and it is a happy circumstance that in this seventy-fifth anniversary year the Mexican and Central American Hall could have been reopened to the public. The hall presents the cultural achievements of the great pre-Columbian civilization of Middle America in a modern and appealing setting. It is a real departure from the routine presentation

of vast amounts of material in stereotyped and uniform cases. The selection of material and its presentation and labeling are imaginative and attractive. The success of these exhibits gives great promise for future presentations of the anthropological collections of the Museum gathered from all parts of the world. The presentation is extremely timely, since perhaps never before in American history have its people been so interested in other peoples and their civilizations. Genuine interest, knowledge, and understanding of cultures differing from our own are fundamental in the establishment of a new world order. When other cultures are understood and appreciated, a newly awakened interest therein will take the place of the usual uninformed feeling of aloofness and superiority. Anthropology realizes that people are not superior or inferior, only different, so the Museum, with its great department devoted to this subject, bears a heavy responsibility in making this point abundantly clear to uninformed citizens.

Some fourteen hundred members and friends attended the ceremonies in connection with the opening of the Mexican and Central American Hall. After greetings from the Mexican Government delivered by Sr. Don Rafael de la Colina, Minister Resident in Washington, on behalf of His Excellency Sr. Don Francisco Castillo Najera, the Mexican Ambassador to the United States, the guests were addressed by Dr. Archibald MacLeish, the Librarian of Congress, on the reorientation of American thought from the cultures of Europe to the early American forms, by Director A. E. Parr on the reasons why anthropology is an essential part of a natural history museum, and by Dr. Harry L. Shapiro on the hall itself and the great pre-Columbian civilizations of Mexico and Central America. These addresses were so stimulating and interesting as to compel publication in the permanent form of this booklet. I am sure the readers of these three addresses will find themselves abundantly repaid.

A. PERRY OSBORN

THE AMERICAN HERITAGE

Archibald MacLeish



IT is almost impossible for the living generation to recognize changes in the history of ideas as they occur. The living generation can recognize intellectual changes in the past, the shifts of attitude which constitute the turning points in the history of ideas, but the changes which the living accomplish themselves seem to them so natural that the quality of change is not apparent.

There are, nevertheless, occasions of one sort or another, moments of crisis and therefore of recognition, when changes in the direction of ideas become perceptible, as a change in a ship's course is sometimes felt at night in the altered movement of the hull against the water, or in some changed vibration of the ship itself. The time in which we live is a time for such preceptions—and not least in the American continent. There are many men, not only in the United States but elsewhere among the American Republics, who believe, by one sign or another, that a profound change has already occurred, or is in the present process of occurring, in the American attitude toward the whole American experience, historical and prehistorical as well.

During the first three or four hundred years after the discovery—down, that is to say, to the present generation—the American attitude toward America and toward American prehistory was an attitude determined by several very simple and very obvious facts. The Europeans who came to America felt themselves at first in a foreign land, and later in a land which, though not foreign, was not “home” either—“home” being eastward across the Atlantic still. What William Bradford wrote of the little colony at Plymouth could have been writ-

ten as well, and would have been understood as well, in the Portuguese settlement of Olinda on the Brazilian coast, or in the French settlement at Acadia, or the British settlement at Jamestown, or at any other point along the American main. "If they looked behind them," wrote Governor Bradford, "there was the mighty ocean which they had passed, and was now a main barr and goulfe, to separate them from all the civill parts of the world." If they looked before them "what could they see but a hideous and desolate wilderness, full of wild beasts, and wild men, and what multitudes there might be of them they knew not . . ." Even Las Casas and Sahagún—even the Spanish historians of the early settlements who were most friendly with the Indians—felt themselves foreigners in a foreign land looking back in time upon a past they might labor to understand but could never share.

Throughout the colonial period, and through the wars of freedom, and on beyond into the first few generations of independence, the American nations were part of one body, spiritually, with the European societies from which their settlers came. Throughout this long period, Americans of European descent did not think of the pre-colonial history of the American continent as "their" history. They thought of it as a strange and savage and even hostile history with which they could have no intellectual or emotional commerce. Its works of art had nothing to say to them. Its myths were not interpreters between *them* and the inexplicable face of nature: *Hiawatha* was valued as an image of the mind of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, not as an image of the American past as the Iroquois or the Algonquins knew that past. American history, read backwards from the present toward the past, veered off from the American continent at whatever point in time the ancestors of the particular settlers had entered that continent but, at the very earliest, at the point when Europeans first became conscious of it.

The point of attachment, the point of anchorage, of all American perceptions about America during this long period was a European point. And the European attachment, the European tether, did not only limit and halter American thinking and feeling about American prehistory. It haltered and tethered also the feeling of the European

Americans about their *own* American history, their own experience of America. Because the point of reference was a European point for each American community, and because, moreover, it was a different point in Europe for different communities, it was assumed that there was no American experience common to them all—that there were merely a number of experiences of America by a number of different racial and cultural groups. The fact that these experiences were almost precisely the same experiences for all the American colonies and nations—the fact that the experience of the American continent as a whole was a common experience to a degree unparalleled in any other continent—was completely obscured by the fact that the peoples of the American nations saw the American experience, not with their own eyes, but in the reflection of the differing European mirrors in which they all continued, generation after generation, to observe their American world.

To the Spanish-speaking peoples of America, the discovery of the continent, the feeling out of the coasts, the penetration of the harbors, the first settlements between the surf and the silence, the wars with the Indians, the advancing frontier, the colonial experience, the infection of the idea of freedom, the wars of freedom—all these were aspects of the *Spanish* experience of America. To the English-speaking Americans, the same history, the same experiences precisely—the same events in the same order on the same earth—were reflections of the *English* experience of America. And so in the fragments of the American history of the French, and the Dutch, and the Scandinavians, and the others. There was in fact a common American experience such as men in equal numbers, and scattered over an area of equal size, have never before known in the world's history. Yet it did not seem to the Americans to be a common experience because those who endured it and survived it and built their futures out of it saw it in the mirrors of European language and European culture and European preconception in which they were obliged to look—not, like Perseus, for their own protection, but by the habit of their birth.

It is precisely this dependence upon the European mirror which now seems to many of us in the countries of America to be changing, and to be changing in such a manner as to produce a profound alter-

ation, a basic reorientation, in the posture of ideas. It has become fashionable among intellectuals who pride themselves on their sophistication to deprecate any discussion of the recognition of common cultural and spiritual interests in the Americas as rhetoric inspired by the current foreign policy of the United States. One can understand suspicion of rhetoric no matter how evoked or in what cause. But it is not only possible, it is quite probable, that those who dismiss all discussion of the changed American attitude about America as a mere vapor of rhetoric given off by the Good Neighbor Policy are permitting their sophistication to blind their preceptions.

If a relation of cause and effect exists between a change in political policy and an alteration in the basic conceptions of a hemisphere, it is the alteration in conceptions and not the change of policy which must be assumed to play the causative rôle. If a relation of cause and effect exists, in other words, it is the changed American attitude toward the American experience which has made the Good Neighbor Policy feasible rather than the Good Neighbor Policy which has produced the change in attitude. Had there not been an underlying modification of the picture of themselves and of their history which Americans of all the American nations accept as true, the Good Neighbor Policy could not have been enunciated, much less realized in practice. In an American hemisphere which saw itself in the terms which obtained throughout the American continent fifty years ago, or even twenty-five years ago, the enunciation of any such policy as the Good Neighbor Policy would have been an act of the utmost political futility, and not merely because the methods of North American commercial expansion had created suspicions of the good faith of the United States throughout the rest of the American continent, but because the fundamental common assumptions upon which any such statement of policy must stand were altogether lacking. What has changed in our time is not so much the expressed intention of the Government of the United States toward the hemisphere, as the attitude of the American peoples toward their continent and themselves, which means toward the history of the continent on which they live.

Why this change has come about is in one sense easy, and in another sense difficult, to say. It is easy to see that the European mirrors

have been broken—or, better, tossed away. It is not altogether clear whether the mirrors have been tossed away because of a declining European authority, moral and spiritual—a declining authority related in some way and in some measure to the collapse of Europe before the attack of Fascism—or whether the reason must be looked for elsewhere. What is certain, however, is that the mirrors are gone. The proof of that is before us in many things but most notoriously perhaps in the American reaction to the effort of European phalanxes, or European propagandists, or European dictators, to put the mirrors back in our hands. To the American mind throughout the American continent there is something grotesquely anachronistic and even absurd in the solemn conspiracies of organized gangs in European countries to make America again a spiritual dominion of Europe—to reduce the nations of the American continent to the moral or spiritual authority of European states or powers.

The belief of men in Europe that they can reconstruct the colonial mentality in the New World by school boy salutes, secret oaths, official corruption, and terroristic murder affects most American minds much as they might be affected by the sight of Don Quixote's horse and armor. The New World, as Amerigo Vespucci and the early map makers understood those words, was, it is true, a place for crown colonies and spiritual dependencies and the exercise of European dominion. But the New World, as those words are understood in the American continent today, is not an area on a map in which European colonies can be planted or dependencies established. It is a province of the human spirit, in which the prescriptive rights run only to mankind.

But the absurdities and misadventures of Fascist Europeans, who do not understand what the New World has become, are merely proofs and indications of the change. They are not the change itself. The change, if there be one, is a change as affirmative and creative as these misadventures and follies are frustrated and negative. The change is a change in the American acceptance of the American experience and of the American history as our own. As yet this acceptance is individual and personal rather than general and notorious: private rather than public. It is found in the individual experi-

ences of individual men—experiences of which each man must speak for himself. And yet the individuals who have made these personal discoveries are scattered throughout all the American nations. There are American writers in all the American languages who have discovered that the ancient history of America is not a foreign history but a history in some sense their own, and there are men of all the American cultures who have come to realize, separately, and yet together, that there is an American experience and that it is their experience and that they are part of it.

It is this, I think, that explains in largest part the new importance of Mexico and of Mexican history and prehistory in the lives of many individual Americans of the United States. It is sometimes suggested that the new importance of Mexico in the North American consciousness is a matter of mode or fashion—that the great contemporary Mexican painters created a vogue for Mexican art and through Mexican art for Mexican life and the Mexican country. It is true, of course, that the genius of Rivera and Orozco has exerted a powerful influence upon the North American mind and imagination. But to attribute the North American preoccupation with Mexican things solely to these two or to the music of Chavez—to the work of a handful of Mexican painters, musicians, and writers—would be to attribute a greater power to the arts than even the arts can claim.

I can only testify for myself in this matter, but so far as my own knowledge goes, it seems to me clear that something more general and more inexplicable than the influence of any artist or any group of artists is involved. One may intensely admire the work of an artist and still not feel that the country he presents in paint is in any sense one's own, or that its past is a past in which one has any personal share or concern. And yet it was precisely this I felt when I first saw Mexico—when I first really saw it, going up on foot and mule-back from the coast near Vera Cruz over the mountains behind Jalapa, and through Tlaxcala to the pass between the volcanoes and thus to the valley of Mexico. It was a country altogether foreign in its altitude, its clear air, its unmistakable and incommunicable mountains. Yet it was not a foreign country. It was a country of an antiquity greater—or so it seemed to me—than the antiquity of Persia. But it was a

country of the New World and its antiquity was the antiquity of the New World, not the old—and therefore mine.

Ten years ago and more I wrote a poem of the Conquest of Mexico called *Conquistador*. In a foreword to that poem I wrote these words: "I hope that the strength of my attachment to the country of Mexico may to some degree atone for my presumption as an American in writing of it." Today I would not write those words. I know very well why I said what I did, but today I would not say it. Today I would feel no presumption in writing, in whatever words of admiration, of Mexico, or of any part of the American continent. For, though I should not dare to say I felt myself at home, or in my own country, in any part of the American continent, neither could I say of any part of it that I felt myself *abroad*, or in a foreign world, or in a world with which I could have no commerce or communication.

How many there are in my own country or in the other countries of the continent who feel as I do, or who would understand my feeling, or who would understand the words in which I try to speak it, I cannot say. I think there are not few. I think, as the recognition grows that the mirrors have been laid aside or broken, there will be more, and many more. But whether I am right or not, I can only bear witness to my own personal sense of a change in our American perception of ourselves. Which may, perhaps, have consequences as profoundly important and as far reaching as the reorientation of the European mind which followed the recognition of the existence of a European culture. But which, in any event, will justify our claim of right to praise this continent as we praise the things our lives attach to.

SCIENCE, ARTS, AND ANTHROPOLOGY

A. E. Parr



THERE are so many people who wonder what any object of beauty, wrought by the hands of man, has to do in a natural history museum, that it seems necessary to say a few words about why even art has come to be a legitimate part of the natural sciences, before the next speaker goes on to tell you the ideas and the story behind our new hall.

In the old, but still hale and hearty, tradition of the natural history museums, man and nature have generally been regarded as mutually exclusive of each other. Nature exists only where man and his works are absent. Natural conditions are what you find at the end of trail, but not what you left behind at the old homestead.

It was Darwin's theory of the descent of man which first secured from us a reluctant recognition of the fact that anthropology might have a legitimate place among the subjects of natural history. To the extent that man might be related to the apes it seems necessary to admit the study of man within the precincts of zoological knowledge and research. We are forced to concede that the Neanderthal bones must belong among our exhibits, under any definition of a natural history museum.

Beyond this limited field of undeniable common interest, the union between anthropology as a whole and the natural sciences in general has not as yet attained to any great perfection of harmony, but there is reason to hope that we may finally be on the threshold of a more mature appreciation of the relationships between nature and man, and of a greater happiness in the relationship between the sciences dealing with these two subjects.

As anthropological collections and anthropological knowledge grew and branched out, the representatives of the older museum sciences of zoology and other natural history subjects behaved very much like an elderly husband with a young wife who did not turn out the way he expected her to and whose developing charms he is therefore unable to appreciate.

When the Cromagnon man was discovered, it was found that this kindly old soul had not only left his empty skull behind but also a magnificent artistic expression of the visions which the skull had once contained. It therefore becomes necessary for us to take the art with the bones, and art becomes a legitimate, although not cheerfully accepted, subject of natural history. Gradually the evidence of the artifacts has become as important as the evidence of the skeletons in our study of the evolution of man.

But the study of man as a natural history subject cannot be confined to the observation of his prehistoric remains alone. Darwin himself had made many references to the characteristics of the primitive living races in his discussions of man and his relatives. So it became necessary to include the so-called savage tribes and their works in the collections and the studies of the natural history museums.

Still, none of this growth of the anthropological subjects seemed very pleasing to the older branches of museum scholarship. Instead of seeing in the study of human natural history, which includes all branches of anthropology, the highest expression and application of their own sciences, they saw in it mainly a competitor for space and financial support.

In a certain sense, anthropology has been a losing competitor here in our own Museum. Our anthropological collections multiplied in size and in value until they have come to be among the finest and best in the world. Anthropological research by a brilliant staff greatly increased the scientific prestige of our entire institution. But when it came to a question of means for presenting the subject to the public by the best methods of exhibition it would always seem to have been a matter of bread and water for anthropology while the rest of the Museum was living off the fat of the land. We hope and intend that the reopening tonight of the Hall of Mexican and Central American

Archaeology, in which we have done as much as can be done under wartime restrictions, will prove the symbol of a new maturity in the attitude of the Museum toward the problems of man and nature.

In the biological sciences we must forget the frontiers-day definition of natural conditions, which excludes from our interests and from our main exhibits any part of nature on which man has left his mark. We must be ready to recognize man himself as one of the greatest natural forces of his own environment and in the environment of all other living things with which we have any real concern. We must be willing to let our eyes move on from nature as we found it to nature as we made it and must live with it. Dustbowls, Japanese beetles, and vanishing fisheries have brought the importance of man-made nature home to us, while virgin lands have shrunk to insignificance through the expansion of human influence.

In the anthropological sciences we are finally ready to cast aside the egotistic distinctions which made the primitive races legitimate subjects of museum display but kept us from applying the same scientific methods of scrutiny to our own exalted existence. Some day soon we hope to see in this Museum an anthropological treatment of the history and the problems of our own civilization, as objective and instructive as any presentation ever made of the structure of other cultures. Today we are here to see some of the evidence of a great culture which died but left its seeds behind to continue their growth in the rich soil of a new civilization and to bear their bloom in the colorful artistic tradition of our neighbors to the south.

THE CIVILIZATIONS OF MEXICO AND CENTRAL AMERICA

Harry L. Shapiro



SEVENTY years ago this Museum, soon after its establishment, received its first collection of Mexican antiquities. Twenty years later, largely through the efforts of the Duke of Loubat, this modest beginning had grown into a major collection, requiring an entire hall for its proper housing and exhibition. The fifty years that have elapsed since the dedication of our first hall of Mexican and Central American archaeology have witnessed changes in its location and alterations in its installation. Tonight we are again celebrating its reopening in a new guise which we owe to the benefaction of one of our trustees. Thus, this hall, which enjoys the dignity of being one of the most venerable in the annals of the Museum, is also one of the most vigorous and vital, adapting itself to contemporary demands and reorganizing its content to fit the advances of archaeological scholarship and research. This capacity of a great and complex institution to discharge its intellectual duty by keeping its exhibits abreast of modern knowledge augurs well for its future.

The hall which we are presenting to you this evening represents an epitome of a great civilization whose seat lay within the area of Central America and Mexico. In the centuries preceding the arrival of Columbus and Cortez, this civilization developed and flourished, now in one part of the region and now in another. But these diverse expressions, distinguished as they were by their local genius, were nevertheless united and sustained by a common tradition that reached back into the antiquity of the region. Just as we differentiate, geographically and historically, various phases of Western civilization, recognizing the cultural distinctions as well as the cultural unities of

English, French, Italian, and Spanish art, so it is possible to think of Maya, Toltec, Aztec, and Zapotec as local developments of a basic community. This common heritage never received a name; it has none now, largely because the historical connections which establish its unity have only recently been discovered.

Although scholars are still debating the precise antiquity of man in the New World, there is little doubt that the Indian immigrants on their arrival in the Western Hemisphere were endowed with only a primitive stone culture. Indeed, they probably entered this continent via Bering Strait at a time when no civilization had yet developed in the Old World. The most they can be said to have brought with them were the mere rudiments out of which a civilization might be forged. These primitive hunters and wanderers, moving south into the empty New World, gradually occupied and settled it out of their own increase. In certain places they achieved an agriculture and sedentary life made possible by the development of peaceful arts. In two or three areas at most these settled forms of life evolved into authentic civilizations. One of these was Middle America, where from native sources a civilization arose that reached heights comparing favorably with the achievements of many of the great traditions of the Old World.

Thus, the prehistoric civilization of Mexico and Central America, by its insulation from the civilizations of the Old World, contributed nothing to them and received nothing from them. It was born from a primitive fragment of the Old World, and it developed in continental isolation, cut off by vast seas and great stretches of continent from all contact with the active centers of civilization in Europe or Asia. This segregation of the centers of New World culture from the currents of Old World civilizations confers upon them a special significance in the panorama of human experience. It means that here in prehistoric America new and independent experiments in civilization were developing and unfolding in their own fashion and according to their own patterns.

Under these circumstances it is to be expected that the great civilizations of the New World would exhibit features peculiar to themselves and that the idiom of their expression would offer some imped-

iments to those accustomed to the dialects of other cultural traditions. There is, indubitably, much in the arts and customs of the civilized Indians of pre-Columbian Mexico and Central America that is foreign, not to say downright repulsive, to our sensibilities attuned to other canons of esthetics and behavior. The grotesque funerary urns of Oaxaca with their crowded symbolic decoration certainly ring no bell for our conditioned reflexes. The abhorrence of the Mayan artist for broad undecorated spaces and his itch to fill every nook and cranny of his monuments with figures and designs seem foreign to our satisfaction in the balance and relief of emptiness. To our eye, trained, at least until recently, to delight in the perfection of natural proportions, the apparent disregard of the Mexican artist for realism may interfere at first with our appreciation of his skill in detail. In fact, the preoccupation of our esthetic tradition with the human body and the glorification of its sensuous aspects is completely lacking in pre-Columbian art, which, on the contrary, tends to treat the body as an element in a design.

These characteristics illustrate the differences which motivated the artists of the New World as against those of the Old. They explain perhaps why Western civilization has found it difficult to understand the essence of this exotic and strange art. For although pre-Columbian masterpieces have been known to European collectors for more than four hundred years, they have been prized during this time only for their rarity, their technical finish, or their value to scholarship.

One might reasonably ask why it has taken us so long to recognize the virtues of Mexican art, if indeed they are as transcendent as we are coming to believe. The answer, I think, lies not in the deficiencies of the art but in the eye of the observer. Mexican art had the misfortune of first coming to the notice of Europe when cultivated Europeans were thoroughly possessed by the classic tradition. Indeed, I think I am safe in asserting that the art of Mexico was the first great esthetic tradition outside the familiar Mediterranean pattern to challenge the prejudices of modern Europeans who were unable by education, training, and conviction to accept readily the beauty of an exotic artistic medium. Only after European taste had become flexible

and receptive by acquaintance with the Chinese, the Hindu, and the African idioms, not to speak of the newly discovered products of long forgotten Old World cultures, was it ready to appreciate the neglected riches of prehistoric America.

But aside from esthetic experiences, Middle American civilization also offers a record of the evolution of culture which is pertinent to the understanding of civilization wherever it arises. Although the archaeological history of Middle America is still fragmentary, it is already possible to discern the outlines of its growth. We know that man existed in this region for millenia, probably as a simple hunter. Gradually he developed an agriculture based upon native American plants, and at the beginning of the Christian era well-established civilizations were already in their full creative vigor, constructing temples for their highly organized religious systems, decorating them with sophisticated art, and producing the manifold amenities of civilized life. We have records of the development and decline of whole civilizations, such as the Maya, which yield evidence on the factors and conditions that shape the destiny of a culture. From the same sources we can trace the influence of one culture upon another, adding thereby to our appreciation of culture dynamics. These results, still tentative and partial, may eventually contribute profoundly to our understanding of the problems of culture growth.

In unfolding such an archaeological progress of a civilization, one of the primary necessities is a chronological frame of reference—a series of events on a time scale. This fundamental obligation has pre-occupied the attention of archaeologists for a generation or more. They have struggled to define the characteristics of each phase of Middle American culture and have been gradually tying them into a chronological pattern by which they can relate each phase of culture growth to all others in the area. The difficulties of such a task are inconceivably complicated and require much hard, patient, and often tedious work.

In the absence of historical records, the archaeologist by necessity has had to develop a method of extracting information from the excavated rubble of the past. The rewards come as the recovered pieces of information fall into their allotted places and add another

brick to the slowly rising edifice of reconstructed knowledge. The Museum may justly take pride in the pioneering rôle which it has played in this achievement. The chronological sequences which are displayed in the exhibition hall for the first time are in a large measure the result of excavations and research by scholars from this institution.

As one contemplates the various aspects of the civilization we have been discussing, one cannot, I think, avoid a profound sense of that community of striving that everywhere characterizes mankind. For here, in this exotic culture, with all its peculiarities of style, the by-products of the human spirit are basically like our own. It is impressive that without knowledge of the developed arts and of the achievements of the Old World, these pre-Columbian civilizers, these craftsmen and artists, created them afresh. The search for economic stability and fairly constant sources of food led here, as elsewhere, to the discovery of agricultural techniques, which in turn permitted the assemblage of population in cities and towns. By virtue of these concentrations of people, specialization of labor was made possible, and technical skills emerged in independent but familiar patterns. The complexities of social organization and control found tentative solutions here that echo those known to us in the Old World. Here in Mexico and Central America was evolved an original and noble architecture, designed to house the gods and the rites of organized religions. The ineffable need for artistic outlets found esthetic expressions in painting, sculpture, and innumerable minor arts. The craving of man for an ordered and accepted body of knowledge and belief found comfort here, too, in a native lore vested in the priesthood. The members of this body observed eclipses and other natural phenomena, developed an original calendar, invented the zero before it was known to Europeans, and recorded much of their knowledge and history in a written language which has only been partially deciphered. These are only a few of the developments of civilization which the natives of Middle America were able to achieve by their own efforts. But they are enough to illustrate the solid advances for which they were responsible and to confirm the extraordinary parallelism between their road to civilization and the familiar avenues of the Old World.

The Hall of Mexican and Central American Archaeology which you have been invited to inspect has been designed to serve two interests: the general and the specific. In two rows of cases flanking the central aisle of the hall, in the wall cases at either end and in the foyer of the hall, we have installed the treasures of our collections. That does not mean that your individual taste might not prefer some piece tucked away in a less prominent position. In fact, we expect that your explorations will uncover much of distinction outside the special cases. But it was our intention to place prominently a selection of fine representative pieces which might serve to give the visitor a general impression of the art of the region without distracting him with analyses. Here is an abundant range of styles and objects, some of them heavily marked by local convention, others possessing a universal quality rising above time and place.

In a series of alcoves along one side and elsewhere in the hall, we have arranged exhibits for more specific interests. Here, various regional cultures are defined and the time sequences analyzed and characterized. These, we hope, will prove invaluable for students studying the history of the region and for the casual visitor whose fancy has been captured by the more general exhibits.

It will not, I think, be out of place to mention briefly the technical problems of the hall itself. It has long been an ardent wish of the Department of Anthropology to house its splendid Mexican and Central American collections in a setting worthy of their exceptional character. At various times ambitious and elaborate plans and models were created toward that goal, but inexpediency or, more realistically, lack of funds prevented the accomplishment of these projects. Meanwhile, the physical aspect of the hall had gradually deteriorated to such an extent it was felt something must be done at once, even if the ideal were impossible and the times seemed unpropitious. That decision was reached a year ago. One of the trustees, who prefers to be nameless but whose devotion to this hall is well known, generously provided the necessary support, and the administration approved the plans. Since this is a period of priorities and of rationed material, our garment was necessarily cut to fit the cloth. Although we have been handicapped by these shortages, the

results achieved, I think, have well justified the effort. We have used simple means; we have broken here and there with Museum traditions in décor; we have completely reinstalled the entire hall. To those familiar with the older embodiment of it, this newer garb will, I think, seem revolutionary. We hope you all will enjoy it, but we present it to you not as the ultimate hall, not as the most imposing, but rather as a tentative creation which in the future may be replaced by a more perfect one.

So many hands and so many minds have cooperated to produce the final result that it is a matter of considerable satisfaction to me to point out that this has been a truly joint enterprise. We have profited from the suggestions and criticisms arising from the various members of the staff, from the Director down. To all of these we are indebted. The burden of the planning of the hall and of devising the exhibits has, however, fallen upon Dr. Gordon F. Ekholm, Assistant Curator in Mexican Archaeology, and Mr. Clarence L. Hay, Research Associate in the Department of Anthropology. Their unswerving devotion, their erudition, and their enthusiasm are fittingly embodied in the hall. To Mr. Victor W. Ronfeldt, Mr. Joseph Guerri, Mr. Paul Richard, and to Miss Katharine Beneker, upon whose taste and skill we have leaned heavily, the execution of the installations is largely due.

It gives me great pleasure also to acknowledge the invaluable assistance of Mr. René d'Harnoncourt of the Museum of Modern Art, who installed at very short notice but with his usual consummate skill, the temporary exhibit of post-Columbian arts and crafts. We were fortunate in being able to borrow from the collections of Mrs. Dwight Morrow and Mr. d'Harnoncourt the splendid examples you will see.



1. Stone figure from Costa Rica. Height, 60 inches



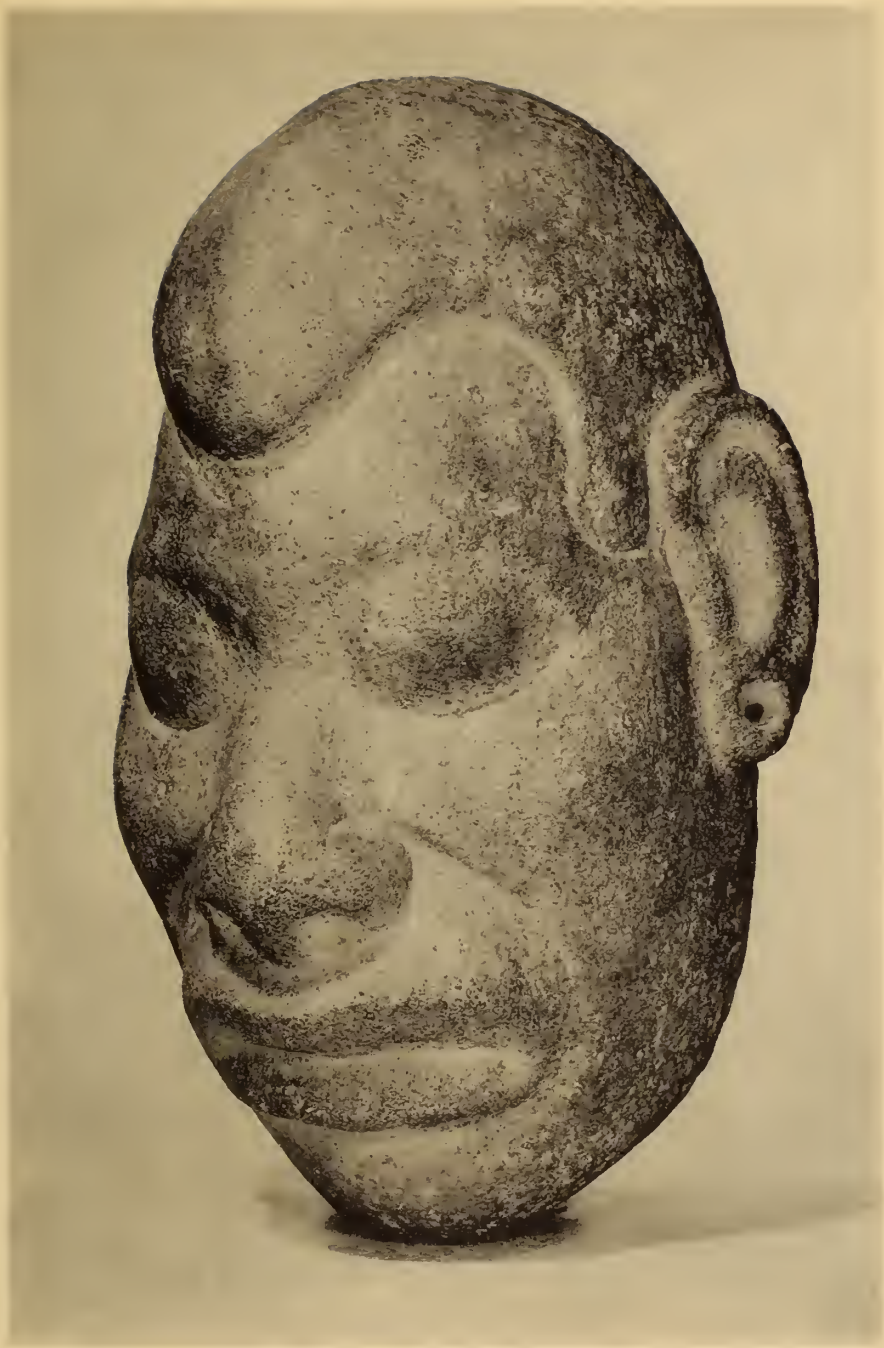
2. Carved stone disc, backing for mosaic mirror, probably from Vera Cruz. Diameter, 6 inches



3. Jade tiger in the La Venta or Olmec style, from Necaxa, Puebla. Height, $3\frac{3}{8}$ inches



4. Carving on one end of a stone yoke, from State of Vera Cruz. Height, $4\frac{3}{8}$ inches



5. Head in stone, probably from Vera Cruz. Height, 7 inches



6. Corn goddess, Aztec. Height, 20 inches



7. Effigy vase of "plumbate" ware, from El Salvador. Height, 7 inches



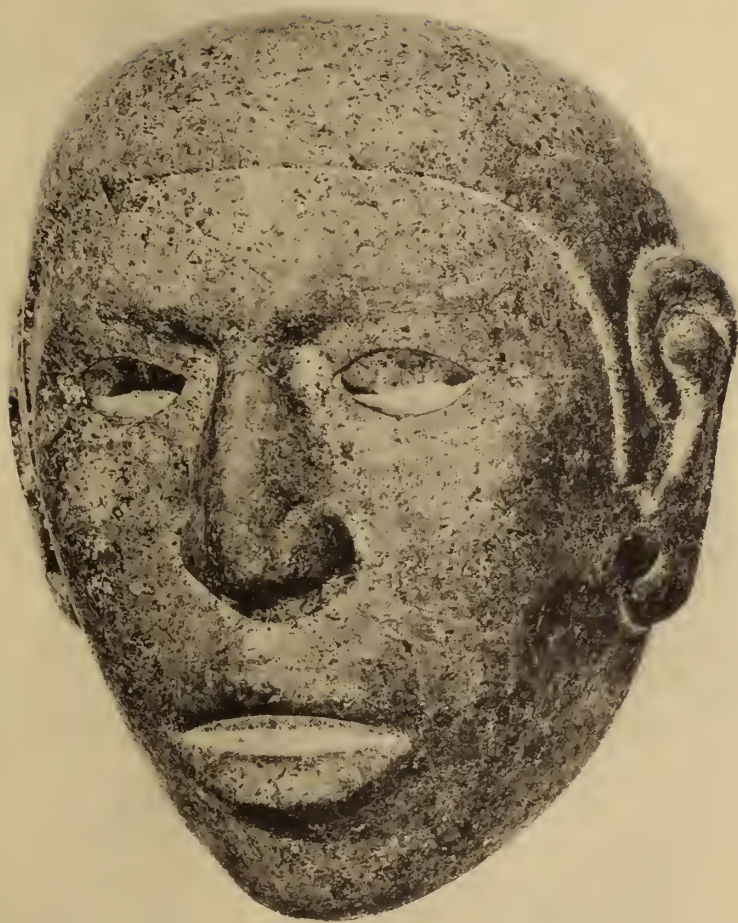
8. Seated figure in coarse stone, from Oaxaca, Mexico. Height, 9½ inches



9. Male figure in coarse lava, from State of Michoacán. Height, 22 inches



10. Head of monkey in black stone, State of Guerrero, Mexico. Height, 5½ inches



11. Mask of green stone, northern Vera Cruz. Height, 7 inches



12. Head of baked clay, Central Vera Cruz. Height, $4\frac{1}{4}$ inches



13. Seated clay figure, Central Vera Cruz. Height, 13 inches



14. Clay figure with elaborate costume, from Chiapas, Mexico. Height, $6\frac{1}{4}$ inches

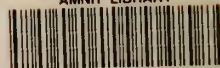


15. Head of Maya corn goddess from Copan, Honduras, limestone. Height, 12 inches



16. Votive axe of green jade, Mexico. Height, 11 inches

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