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A Short Comparison

of

PRE-CONQUEST AND PRESENT-DAY MIXTEC LIFE

With Special Reference to Peñoles Mixtec

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Most of what has been written about pre-Conquest civilization in Mexico gives only a part of the total picture. In fact, much of what is available in the literature even about present-day indigenous Mexico deals only with the two better known groups of people: the Aztecs and the Mayas. Eminent Mexican anthropologists are trying to rectify this situation by further investigation of the numerous archeological sites scattered all over Mexico as well as by making investigations of the descendents of the people who left such fascinating evidences of their culture. Many sites of significance are located in the state of Oaxaca.

Oaxaca is located on the southern coast of Mexico. It is bordered on the west by the state of Guerrero, on the northwest by the state of Puebla, on the northeast by the state of Veracruz, and on the east by the state of Chiapas. The southeastern portion of the state comprises approximately one-half of the area of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec.

The state of Oaxaca has the largest indigenous population in the Republic of Mexico. Of the fifteen

linguistic groups listed by Paddock,¹ the two largest groups are the Zapotec and the Mixtec.² This paper is concerned with the latter group in general and in particular with the Mixtec speaking people of Santa María Peñoles, District of ETLA, Oaxaca, Mexico. (See Map, Appendix I)

The 10,000 square mile area inhabited by the Mixtec speaking people covers a wide range, spilling over the borders of the states of Guerrero on the west and Puebla on the north, reaching to the state of Veracruz on the northeast, and to the Isthmus of Tehuantepec on the southeast. Covering such a vast land area, the Mixtecs naturally live in several different climatic zones. Traditionally these zones have been called the Mixtec Alta, Baja, and de la Costa. Santa María Peñoles is located on the southeastern edge of the zone known as the Mixteca Alta.

Published information on pre-Conquest Mixtec social organization is limited, but Spores has made an excellent compilation of the available material. The class system that was present in pre-Conquest society seems to me to be the most significant difference in pre-Conquest and present-day Mixtec social organization.

The Mixtec community constituted the total

social universe for the majority of its inhabitants. At first glance, it would appear that the community was dissected by a two-class system composed of an aristocratic nobility and a massive common class. Closer inspection, however, reveals that the nobility, or aristocracy, must have been subdivided into (a) a ruling-caste family and (b) a supporting contingent of hereditary nobles who served as administrators, assistants, and advisers for the community rulers but who also acted as individual entrepreneurs and were entitled to receive tribute and services from a designated portion of the population. At the broad base of the structure was the common class, which was composed of groups of farmers, servants, and slaves. Commerce occupied an important place in Mixtec life, and it is possible that merchants may have enjoyed a superior status to that of the farmers. There is no evidence of a military class. The priests were drawn either from the common class or from the nobility, and while set apart from the rest of the population by their offices, they seem not to have constituted a special class.

(Spores 1967:9)

In present-day Mixtec social organization there is no hereditary ruling class and no nobility. Each town has its town officers who are elected at stated intervals. Theoretically any man could be chosen for the office of Presidente (comparable to mayor in United States civil institutions), but in actual fact only a man who has served in other minor capacities and shown his leadership potential is ever put on the slate. A man can serve only once as Presidente, but he may continue to serve the town in an advisory capacity on

an unstructured council of elders. If a man has served the town well and gained the respect of the people during his term of office, he will be called along with his predecessors to give counsel to the current town authorities. Service as Presidente does not automatically guarantee a man the position of elder statesman; petty conflicts of personality may also exclude a man from being called upon by the town authorities.³

No sharp class divisions are seen in present-day social organization. Certain persons by reasons of wealth or intelligence may have more prestige than others, but it is possible for a man to raise himself socially and economically by his own efforts. When my husband and I first went to live in Santa María Peñoles we often hired a young man named Donato Santiago to do general yard work. Because he did not own any fields but still worked in the fields of his father, he was happy to work as many days as we had need for him. One year he had the opportunity to go to live in Oaxaca City and learn to lay adobe bricks. Since that time he will not accept employment except in his trade; to work as a moso would be degrading to a man who is now an owner of fields and has learned a respected trade.

Although no sharp class divisions exist at present, certain people will seldom work for hire while others will often do so. Teenage girls can be hired for menial tasks such as washing clothes in the river, and boys can be hired for gathering and chopping wood or hoeing weeds in the garden. A widow will also wash clothes for hire, or will help plant corn and beans or uncover the young corn that has been covered with dirt turned up by the plow in cultivation. If, as often happens, the harvest was insufficient to keep a family in corn for the year, the wife may "borrow" corn from a more fortunate family and in return make tortillas at any time she is requested to do so and at the time of plowing, cultivation, and harvest, the whole family will give as many days of work as have been agreed upon for the price of the corn. A man who owns oxen will hire out his oxen by the day, and may accompany them to see that they are not overworked. He may "trade" a day of work with another man, in which case the man who does not own oxen will help the owner with the plowing of his fields in return for the use of the oxen. Men who own fields will seldom work for hire unless the work is in some specialized trade such as adobe-making, building with adobes, hewing or splitting wood (for beams or shingles),

or carpentry. Working as a language helper is equated with being a teacher and therefore has no stigma attached.

In all of the Peñoles Mixtec region there is no market so it is difficult to compare the status of merchants with the rest of the population. A few small stores in the village stock soda pop, matches, candles, soap, and salt, but the main items for sale are cerveza and mescal (beer and cactus liquor). The men who own these small bars are respected members of the community, just and fair in their dealings, or they do not stay in business long. All storeowners are also farmers, and the wives are often left in charge of the store (which occupies a small space behind a counter at the door of the house) while the husband goes to work in his fields. Most of the owners of the bars do not drink to excess, but if on occasion they do become drunk then the wife takes over the selling to see that accounts are kept straight. Manuel Chávez has kept his small store open for about nine years. Francisco López was not able to maintain the bar he opened more than a few months because he drank most of the stock himself, and rumors are that he overcharged his patrons when they became drunk.

In parts of the Mixtec Alta, particularly around Huajuapán, the people are weavers of palma and their hands

are constantly occupied with the weaving of hats. The only salable item in Peñoles is charcoal. There is no organization of charcoal makers, but each man or boy makes his own charcoal and takes his own load to the Valley for sale in the Etna or Oaxaca markets. A young boy who does not have access to cargo animals must often give half of his charcoal to an older man for taking it to market.

There was no evidence of a military class in pre-Conquest times and there is none now except as is legally required by the Federal Government. Young men of 18 through 20 years of age are required to register as "conscriptos" (comparable to a Home Guard) and perform their military service by marching each Sunday. Some older man in the community who has either been in the Mexican Army himself or has performed his military service and knows the drills and commands is placed in charge of the group. A twenty-four hour police force for the enforcement of law and order is manned by young men who are elected to their positions in the same manner as the other elected officials.

Because the entire Mixtec population is nominally Roman Catholic, there is not now any native priestly class. Certain men are chosen by the Catholic priest to

perform certain rituals in his absence. These men officiate at funerals but do not perform services of baptism or other sacramental rituals of the Church.

Although the population is nominally Roman Catholic, most people still place a great deal of faith in the powers of the tée quidè ndhū`. "Curandero" in Spanish signifies a person who heals by the use of herbs. "Brujo" signifies one who places curses by means of ritual chanting. The Mixtec tée quidè ndhū` combine both cursing and curing in their medical practice, and use more psychology than herbs. With the introduction of aspirin, penicillin, and vitamin injections, our clinic has taken many patients away from the tée quidè ndhū`. One man, however, has brought his patients to us, telling them that they are afflicted with two illnesses: he can cure one illness but the other one needs the white man's medicine.

Belief in the old ways is still strong even after all the years⁴ that have passed since~~d~~ the Peñoles Mixtecs first had contact with Catholicism, so it is not uncommon to see a passing coffin painted black and covered with cabalistic signs of the Sun, Rain, and Moon Gods, preceded to the graveyard by a censer-swinging cantor from the Catholic Church.

At the time of the Conquest the Mixteca Alta was one of the richest places in the country. Fray Bernabé Cobo, writing to a friend after a trip through Mexico wrote that he had seen in "the Mixteca Alta and Baja some of the best lands in New Spain...extremely fertile." (Paddock 1966:370) Two Spaniards who had been sent by Cortés to inspect one of Moctezuma's gold mines at Sosola near Etna, in the Valley of Oaxaca, are quoted by Paddock as saying that they had seen

a very beautiful land with many towns and cities, and a great number of other settlements, with buildings so numerous and fine that ...even in Spain they could not be better... a lodging house and fortress which is larger and stronger than the Castle of Burgos; and the people of these provinces...were better dressed than any others we have seen.

(Paddock 1966:369)

These Spaniards returned to Cortés with news of great importance:

No menos se admiraron al oír decir que no a mucha distancia del valle y en la dirección del Sur, las ondas de un mar inmenso batían las costas de la América, noticia de la mayor importancia, que se apresuraron a contar a Hernando Cortés.

(Antonio Gay 1950: Vol II: 348)

The news that a great ocean beat upon the shores of the southern coast revived Cortés' dream of finding a strait that would allow him to proceed to the "spice islands" where he had originally intended to go. Cortés

even made a trip to Oaxaca and Tehuantepec with the intention of having ships built so that the journey might be undertaken that would unite the Atlantic and the Pacific. (Antonio Gay 1950: Vol II:411)

Another indication of the wealth of the Mixteca at the time of the Conquest may be seen in the tribute rolls. These tribute rolls contained hieroglyphs of the number of objects and the hieroglyphs of the towns upon which the tribute was levied.

Coixtlahuaca Province with its component communities is listed on page 21 of the Matricula de los Tributos and is represented on folio 43^r of the Codex Mendoza. Varied tribute was exacted from the province, including periodic assessments of decorated mantles, loincloths, blouses, skirts, warrior's costumes, chalchihuites (precious green stones) quetzal feathers, cochineal, and gold dust. (Spores 1967:64, quoting Robert H. Barlow, "The Extent of the Empire of the Culhua Mexico", Ibero-Americana, No. 28 (1949) 113-115)

Saville describes the hieroglyphs of the Peñafiel edition of the Tribute Roll of Moctezuma as saying that three Oaxaca towns paid a tribute each year of ten bars of gold, four fingers in width, three-fourths of a vara in length, and of the thickness of parchment. (Saville 1920:108-109)

One of the earliest records extant of the tribute exacted after the Conquest is from 1548, and concerns the

tribute, services, and/or salaries of the caciques of Yanhuitlán of the Mixteca Alta.

...they are to give to the said gobernador each day, one chicken of the land (turkey) and ten Indians for service.

Further, they are to provide each six months two jiquipiles of rich chocolate.

Further, they are to spin seven cargas of cotton every six months and weave it into cloth.

Further, they are to work a field of wheat of three hundred brazas, caring for it and harvesting the crop.

Further, they are to work four fields of maize, two fields measuring four hundred brazas en cuadro another of three hundred, and another of six hundred.

And this is what they have to give, and nothing more, and he may not request of levy more under penalty of being deprived of the privilege and being punished.⁵

(translated from Jiménez
Moreno 1940:36)

No system of tribute exists today in the Mixteca, although the heads of households are sometimes required to contribute a few pesos or give a day or two of work for some town project.

As mentioned previously, one of the goldmines inspected by the Spaniards was in the Mixtec town of Sosola near the present-day capital of the state of Oaxaca. The gold mines of Mexico were evidently very

rich, for estimates of the value of the gold sent to Spain by the early Conquistadores are given as from three to six million dollars. (Saville 1920:47,48) Unfortunately, most of the gold jewels as well as the large cartwheel of gold and the one of silver which were sent to Spain were melted down and used by the King of Spain to finance a war. The comparatively few gold jewels found in the tombs of the Mixtec rulers of Monte Alban are of elaborate work and excellent design. These jewels are now on display in the State Museum in Oaxaca City. Gold jewelry can still be bought in Oaxaca, and many painstaking copies of ancient jewelry are made. Many gold jewels found in the late 1800's were credited by archeologists as being of Zapotec or Aztec origin. As more archeological work and further study of the Codices have been done, more of the gold objects which have been found are now being identified as of Mixtec origin.

Many of the goldsmiths of today in Oaxaca are Zapotecs.⁶ As is true of many of the arts and crafts, goldsmiths are frequently members of the same family and the art of working the gold is handed down by father to son.

Working together in the fields is another area

of life in which father and son have close contact.

The extended family and the community were key features of Mixtec social organization, and the great majority of contact situations and daily activities were framed within the context of these two units.

(Spores 1967:10)

Family and community are still key features of Mixtec life. "Conformity to the norm" is basic to life and innovations are slow to be accepted by the Mixtecs. One "innovation" which needs to be re-introduced to Mixtec agriculture is the terracing of fields and irrigation.

In archeological investigations of the regions once most well-populated by the Mixtecs the remains of irrigation systems have been found. Present-day farming methods could not have supported the large populations of the pre-Conquest era,⁷ and in many instances provide minimum subsistence even for today's smaller population.⁸ Although some irrigation is used, for the most part the Peñoles Mixtecs depend on the seasonal rains and therefore do not gain as large a harvest as from irrigated land, and are not able to plant more than one crop each year.

The principal elements of Mixtec diet have not changed appreciably through the centuries since the Conquest. Maize, beans, squash, salt, and chili still

comprise the typical diet. In the Mixteca de la Costa the diet is supplemented with tropical fruits and fish. Dried fish is sold in some parts of the Mixteca Alta as it was in ancient times. Edible berries, herbs, (such as wild mustard greens), roots, nuts, and leaves (as of the avocado tree) are also supplements to the many ways of preparing corn. In ancient times

The more important domesticated or game animals such as the turkey, edible dog, deer, and wild fowl were reserved for the nobility and ruling caste. For important festive or religious occasions the commoners might be permitted to indulge in more delicate fare.

(Burgoa, Geográfica descripción I:287 as quoted by Spores 1967:8)

In Peñoles Mixtec the principal elements of diet are still maize, black beans, squash, salt, and occasionally, chili. Chickens and turkeys are raised principally for sale in the Oaxaca market, as are pigs and goats. On festive occasions a goat may be barbecued, and special treats of hot chocolate or coffee and bread will be served.

The dress of the ancient Mixtecs resembled the typical dress of much of central and southern Mexico.

Women wore the huipil and wrap-around skirt.... Men wore breechcloth, shoulder cape, and the henequen or cotton mantle. There were marked differences in dress depending on individual rank. Rulers, priests, and the nobility

wore the more elaborate and richly appointed garb. On ceremonial occasions the apparel of the aristocracy was brilliant with all manner of feather work, brightly colored embroidery and tapestries, gold, and precious-stone earrings. Parts of a ceremonial costume were still in the possession of the cacique of Yanhuitlán in 1544-45 and were worn on festive occasions after the Conquest.

(Spores 1967:8)

In many parts of present-day Mixtec territory the women still wear essentially the same costume as women of the pre-Conquest era. In the area surrounding Santa María Peñoles many of the younger women and girls no longer wear the typical ankle-length, wrap-around skirt made of hand-spun, hand-woven wool. Those who have begun to wear simple cotton or acetate dresses bought in the Oaxaca market do not present the attractive and graceful appearance of those who wear the old costume. The woolen skirt is the most distinguishing feature of dress in the Peñoles area. One can readily identify the town from which a woman comes by her skirt. For example, the women of Peñoles wear a skirt of brown and white wool woven in a particular pattern, while the women of Santiago Tlazoyaltepec wear a skirt of pure black wool. The poncho-like huipil of white muslin is knee length and is worn inside the skirt. The neckline is outlined with red ribbon and some embroidery. A dark blue, all-purpose cotton reboso from the Oaxaca market

completes the costume.

The Codices show Mixtec men wearing breechcloth, shoulder cape, and a mantle which we are told was of cotton or henequen. Parts of the Mixtec Alta are located at altitudes of more than 8,000 feet and winter nights can be very cold with freezing temperatures, so the Mixtecs were no doubt happy to find that the wool of the sheep the Spaniards introduced could be spun and woven like cotton and that the cloth it produced gave added warmth. Although we have never seen it, we were told when we first went to Peñoles that some of the older men on the outlying ranches still wore shirts of homespun wool. Older Peñoles Mixtec men wear white muslin pantaloons but the younger men buy their trousers in Oaxaca. Most men wear shirts bought in the market or made of cheap cotton by local seamstresses, and every male regardless of age wears the typical Mexican serape. Although the women also weave the blankets of their men, the herringbone or striped patterns do not indicate a man's town but merely reflect the skill of the weaver. The elaborate headdresses seen in the Codices have been replaced by straw hats (with a medium width brim).

Men always wear sandals except when working in muddy fields. Older boys are the next members of the

family to be shod. A family is considered quite well-off financially if the wife also has a pair of sandals or plastic shoes from Oaxaca, but only wealthy men ever buy sandals or shoes for little girls.

The house forms I have seen in reproductions of the Codices show the typical hip-roofed houses one sees today in much of the Mixteca. Yet Spores says that

Houses continued to be constructed of thatch, adobe, sticks and poles, and stone. Native civic and religious architecture retained its ancient inventory of construction materials but rapidly assumed Spanish architectural forms.

(Spores 1967:28)

In the San Miguel el Grande region of the Mixteca Alta the people construct their houses of logs, hewn square with an adze. The roofing material is of split pine shingles or "shakes". In Peñoles more houses are constructed of sticks and poles or of adobe, although there are some log houses. The stick-pole variety of houses are generally thatched while the adobe houses are roofed with shakes. A few houses are roofed with corrugated aluminum or tin roofing. A Mixtec home consists of a sleeping-storage room and an unattached kitchen.

Most Peñoles Mixtec homes are separated by at least one cornfield from the next near neighbor. In the very center of the town some houses are situated across

the trail from each other, but in no case is there the type of compound of dwellings as described by Romney for the Mixtecs of Juxtlahuaca. (1966:12) In Juxtlahuaca a group of siblings with their wives and families will occupy separate dwellings surrounding a common courtyard. In Peñoles noone has a courtyard; in fact, noone even has fences except for the corrals for sheep and goats. Siblings may live near each other or may live on widely separated plots of land. If two families are living in the same house they are the families of the father and that of his oldest son. Unmarried teenaged sons and daughters continue to live with the parents until the time of marriage.

Marked distinctions in marriage forms existed among the various classes. Herrera comments on the elaboration of overtures of betrothal, gift-exchange, and ceremony among the ruling caste and the nobility as opposed to a lack of such observation among the common people. Community endogamy was standard for the common class.... Community exogamy and caste endogamy were characteristic features of marriage among members of the ruling class.... Residence, at least for the ruling caste, was ambilocal. It is probable that marriage among the commoners was governed to a considerable extent by spatial proximity. (Spores 1967:11)

Descent was reckoned bilaterally by the ruling caste, and inheritance of property and title descended in the same fashion, with the oldest male probably receiving the most favorable consideration. (Spores 1967:10)

Ideal betrothal patterns among the present-day

Pefoles Mixtecs still have elements of a somewhat elaborate ritual. Zenen Martínez once told us about his own experience in asking for his bride.

On fiesta days the mothers of girls of marriagable age (that is, from about sixteen through eighteen years) accompany their daughters to the fiesta with the purpose of showing them off to prospective grooms. Boys and girls are there, dressed in new clothing. The boys look at the girls and the girls look at the boys, but no word passes between them. If a boy sees a girl who interests him he will after that often pass near her house with the hope of seeing her.

Seeking a bride in the approved manner can be expensive and slow. Being refused is embarrassing. Therefore, many young men will not wait for all the proper ceremonies to be carried out, but will steal a girl from where she is watching her father's sheep in the hills and take her to his home to live with him. The girl may decide to stay with him or she may decide to run home to her parents. In either case the boy's father must go to the girl's father and ask forgiveness for his son's action.

The approved method of gaining a bride is for the boy to ask his father or some older person with a reputation for success in asking for brides to go to the home of the girl in whom he is interested and ask her father for her hand in marriage. The boy's representative may be given a refusal that first day or he may be given some encouragement to return. The girl will tell her mother if she does not wish to marry the boy. She is usually very reluctant to indicate her willingness to marry, however. If the representative has been encouraged to return he will return every fifteen days until he is given a final answer.

When I became interested in Natividad I would always pass close above her house on my way to ⁹ work in the mine down-river. Even if I saw her we did not speak.

Three other young men had asked for Natividad's hand before I did. She had refused all of them. I was the fourth she refused. Then I found another representative who guaranteed results in asking for brides. He made several trips and I became discouraged. Then he told me not to be discouraged for we were about to win. One day Natividad's father, Alejandro, finally said "yes". That very day the priest arrived, so two days later we were married.

I had a fine dress and a new reboso for Natividad to wear for the wedding but she would not accept them. I told my mother, "If she refuses to do this, think of all the trouble she may cause me later by continuing to be so disobedient." My mother wanted a daughter-in-law so she encouraged me to go ahead and marry her. I thought that if she gave me further trouble I could easily leave her. So we were married by the priest with Natividad wearing her Mixtec skirt.

Later I discovered that Natividad did not want to wear my gifts because her father should have given me a complete outfit of new clothes, but since he is very hard-fisted with his money he would not buy them and she was ashamed.

This description of ideal betrothal customs in present-day Peñoles shows that certain customs have evidently not changed much since pre-Conquest days. The comment by Herrera quoted by Spores that "the elaboration of ceremony" was "lacking among the common people" may have been due more to a contrast of elaborateness of ceremony rather than to its complete lack. Present-day ideal behaviour in asking for a bride will frequently extend the waiting period for two or three months until a final answer is given, with a visit by the prospective

groom, his father, and the go-between to the home of the bride each fifteen days. Gifts of food and liquor are taken to the father of the prospective bride at each visit. As was indicated by the informant, the groom exchanges a gift of clothing with the bride (given by her father) for the wedding ceremony.

Some young men either do not have the patience to wait the required length of time to obtain a bride in the ideal manner, or else they do not have the money to pay for all the gifts which are expected. Young people today have far more frequent contact than the young people had even thirty years ago. A federally supported school which all children are required to attend and the activities of the school, such as the introduction of dancing by the Mexican school teachers, have contributed to breaking down some of the older patterns of courtship to the dismay of the elder citizens.

Present-day Mixtec communities are much smaller than were pre-Conquest communities. With smaller communities, marriages between related individuals is frequent, but no pattern of cousin marriage, either proscribed or prescribed, is discernible in Peñoles.

A description of the actual marriage ceremony among Mixtec nobility at the time of the Conquest as

given by Herrera says that

...the priests and nobles with gifts of gold and other jewelry went to the home of the desired girl; and it was customary for armed men to go out on the road to prevent the betrothal of the girl, and they fought and committed robbery, in a most barbarous fashion. In the betrothal there was no ceremony other than to enter the chamber which was covered with mats and decorated with willow branches to obtain consent to marry from the girl.

(Spores 1967:24)

In Peñoles the rejected suitors of the bride will often molest the participants in the wedding festivities and attempt to kidnap the bride. Wedding feasts generally last three days at the home of the bride. In Zenen's description of asking for his bride it should be noted that he "asked for her hand". The Mixtec marriage ceremony consists of taking the hand of the bride and placing it in the hand of the groom, then tying together the ends of the shawl that have been draped over their heads. A marriage ceremony in the Catholic Church or civil marriage in the chief town of the District, San Pablo y San Pedro Etla, is considered an unnecessary expense by most Peñoles Mixtecs. The Catholic priest is not a local resident, and therefore a couple may have a child ready for baptism by the time he makes another trip to the village. He will often encourage people to have their marriage sanctified and the children baptized at the same

time for a special reduced fee.

Community endogamy is still most common, but some men will find brides in other towns and bring the girls back to the village to live. If the groom is a younger brother, or if the bride's father has more land and more prestige than the father of the groom, the young couple may make their permanent home with her parents. In some instances the young couple will live for two or three years with her parents before settling down with his parents or before building their own house. The oldest son will always bring home his bride because the house and surrounding lands will be his upon his father's death.

The only comments I have ever heard Teresa Velásquez (the widow who works for me) make about the inappropriateness of marriage partners were in the following connections:

1. Hipoloto Chávez left his wife and four children and took the godmother of their children as his wife. After living with her about two years he returned to his wife. Society did not sanction his living with the godmother of his children.
2. Camarina Hernández has lived with and left two men that I know of and is now living with a third. According to Teresa, if Cami had left her first husband after a short (unspecified) length of time, then

her action would not be considered incorrect. However, having lived with the man long enough to have two children by him, she should have stayed with him.

Monogamy is most frequent in both present-day and pre-Conquest marriages.

Lineage depth and continuity of bloodline were of great importance in the case of the ruling caste.... While polygyny was allowed for the upper classes, only the offspring of the principal wife...could inherit title....

(Spores 1967:13)

Although I have heard of one or two men in the Peñoles Mixtec area who have two wives, I do not know what arrangements would be made for the inheritance of the children of the two wives.

Ceremonies of birth and death were evidently attended with a great deal more ritual by pre-Conquest Mixtec nobility than is seen at present.

Birth was observed by bathing the mother and the child in "holy" water. If a boy was born, a dart was placed in his hand, while a girl was given a spindle, both symbolic of future roles. On the third day the placenta was buried in an olla. The mother bathed for twenty days, and there was feasting, singing, and dancing in honor of the God of Cleanliness. There was a feast at the completion of the first year of life. At seven years of age at least some boys went for training in what Herrera calls "monasteries."

(Spores 1967:23)

When a Peñoles Mixtec child is born the mother bathes three times in the hina, or steambath house, and

then she is ready to resume her daily tasks, barring unforeseen difficulties with the birth. The umbilical cord is always cut with a sharpened piece of cane and never with a knife.* The placenta is buried. A child's day of birth is remembered best by his saint name, but mothers will often be unsure what year the child was born when there are other smaller children in the home. Children are nursed until a new baby is born, and will sometimes cry to be allowed to nurse even then. The youngest child will be placated and comforted with the breast until he is at least four years of age.

The death rate is very high among small children. Nearly every woman I have questioned has borne twice the number of her living children. Principal causes of death in the first year of life are due to infections at birth (which sometimes take the life of the mother as well, or cause her much suffering through succeeding years), diarrhea (frequently caused by poor hygiene), and malnutrition (due in part to the malnutrition of the mother and in part to the belief that babies should not be given any solid foods until the age of two). Childhood diseases such as measles, mumps, chicken pox, and whooping cough return to the village in three to four year cycles and ravage the community of pre-school age children. (One

fall forty-five children died in two weeks from complications from the measles. We arrived in the village and began treating the children, and there were only two more deaths.) Although these diseases are not the primary causes of death, they are responsible for pneumonia or nutritional illnesses which cause killing bouts of diarrhea and vomiting.

Death is not attended with the great ceremony and feasting described by Herrera for a ruling cacique in which slaves were strangled and buried with him to serve him on his journey to the after-world. He was shrouded with fine cotton mantles and many jewels of gold were placed on his person. (Spores 1967:24) When a baby dies at birth or before baptism, the cantor does not usually accompany the father to the graveyard. When an adult dies, all of his ritual relatives are called¹⁰ to help wash and lay out the body and honor his memory by feasting and drinking for a day. Generally only the mother or wife is crying while other friends and relatives are quietly joking and laughing and enjoying the opportunity for visiting the occasion affords. If one did not see the body, it would be difficult to differentiate the actions of most people attending the wake from their actions at a wedding feast. For burial the body is wrapped in a

woven straw mat if the family is poor or placed in a locally made wooden coffin (see page 8 above), and carried to the graveyard where friends and members of the family have already dug the grave. At the grave each person attending the ceremony throws a handful of dirt into the grave to help cover the coffin. Burials are always held at night for adults.

Certain of the tombs at Monte Alban and Yagul in the Oaxaca Valley have yielded richer treasure than has been found in any other archeological sites in Mexico.

Tomb 7 was filled with hundreds of pieces of Mixtec-crafted gold, silver, copper, rock crystal, jade, alabaster, turquoise, obsidian, pearl, amber and human and animal bones. While the chamber in which the burials and offerings were located was of Zapotec construction--it was common practice for the Mixtecs to re-use Zapotec tombs--the Mixtecs cleared the tomb and filled it with their own dead with offerings of unmistakable Mixtec authorship.

(Spores 1967:49)

Many writers have said that the Mixtecs were not architects and did not build any great monuments of stone but rather concentrated their artistic efforts to the working of gold. Several stones found around the Convento de Yanhuitlán show however that some of the Mixtecs did use stone carvings to ornament their buildings.

I knew the Mixtecs excelled in jewelry, pottery and picture writing, but all the sources I'd read, admitting this, had pointed out that these were minor arts. The Mixtecs, they said, were gifted only in small decoration. One authority flatly stated there was not a single known piece of Mixtec architectural sculpture.

Yet here I had stumbled on one. What is more, El Rey was two feet tall.... I felt like a genuine discoverer.

(Parmenter 1964:263)

The piece Parmenter describes here was a bas relief carved in rock of a Mixtec warrior.

He was advancing in profile with his right hand raised, while his left arm carried his shield. The size of his headdress indicated he might indeed have been a king.

(1964:263)

Later...Don Gabriel directed my attention to the dark-gray stone on the right side of the arch....

Looking at it head on, I could not discern any reason for special interest. But when Don Gabriel led me under the arch and pointed to the side of the stone, I saw ample cause for excitement. It was a great serpent head, built into the arch in such a way that the fierce reptile was biting the dust.

Obviously, the head was meant to run horizontally and as I bent to study it in its true direction my admiration kept growing.... This head was nearly four feet long and it was the work of a master sculptor accustomed to working in a monumental style....

(1964:278)

Both stones described by Parmenter were used by the Spaniards in building, and both used in such a

way as to

demonstrate the superior status of the Christian religion. Could it be they [the Dominican friars] felt the old religions retained enough vitality to need repeated degrading?

(1964:280)

As was mentioned previously, the "Mixteca is a key area to knowledge of Mexico...but knowledge of this territory is extremely deficient." (Peterson 1959:80) Peterson lists ten sites where "work is urgently needed". Spores gives a list which fills fifteen pages "where all information has been derived from the Atlas Arqueológico or from my own field observations", complete with the present names of the towns, locations by latitude and longitude, and in many cases, what type of structures are present. (Spores 1967:32-47) It is evident however that some progress has been made since Spinden wrote in 1928 "As for the Mixtecs we only know that they produced pottery of great beauty somewhat similar to that of Cholula." (1928:246)

Further study in archeology will be sure to give more light on the life of the Mixtecs in the pre-Conquest era.

FOOTNOTES

1. Mixteco, Popoloca, Chocho, Trique, Amuzgo, Mazateco, Cuicateco, Chinanteco, Zapoteco, Chatino, Mixe, Chontal, Huave, Mexicano, Zoque. (Paddock 1966:inside covers)
2. The Mixtec people refer to themselves as the Cloud, or Rain People, and in many areas of the Mixteca one might assume that this designation was given because of their dependence upon rain for agricultural purposes. The name Mixteco, however, is a corruption of the Aztec word mixtla "cloud". (See Appendix II) The Aztecs probably gave this name because they first encountered them at such high altitudes that they found the Mixtecs literally living in the clouds (early morning ground fog.)
3. This information and all information concerning the life of the Peñoles Mixtecs is culled from unpublished texts collected by my husband, John P. Daly, or from my recollection of life as we have seen it since we first went to live in Santa María Peñoles in March of 1957 in connection with our work with the Summer Institute of Linguistics in Mexico. Published works on Peñoles Mixtec are listed in the SIL Bibliography.
4. Jiménez Moreno gives 1570 as the date that Peñoles (or Itzcuintepc--see Appendix II) was first occupied by a Dominican cleric and 1578 as the year the Vicarage was built. This building is still standing and is used for all functions of the local Roman Catholic Church.
5. Los indios eran, en efecto, un manantial de riquezas y el cimiento sobre que levantaban su fortuna los españoles residentes en Oaxaca. No sólo por respirar el ambiente puro, ni por contemplar el transparente cielo de Antequera, se determinaron a permanecer en ella sus primeros pobladores.... (Antonio Gay 1950 Vol II:495)
6. A very interesting study could be made to determine if these Zapotec-speaking goldsmiths are actually descendents of the ancient Mixtec goldsmiths. As the conquerors, the Mixtecos were fewer in number than the Zapotecs, and with intermarriage through the centuries the original language could be lost. There are Mixtec barrios still in some Oaxaca Valley towns where, although everyone speaks Spanish, the barrio is referred to as Mixtec.

7. Recent well-documented studies by Cook, Borah, and Simpson have placed the Indian population of Central Mexico--roughly Mesoamerica west of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec--at from 20 to 28 million at the time of the Conquest. According to numerous independent indications, the pre-Conquest population of the area was much larger than that of the present. (Paddock 1966:234-235)

8. The Romneys give a population figure of 250,000. (Romney 1966:1)

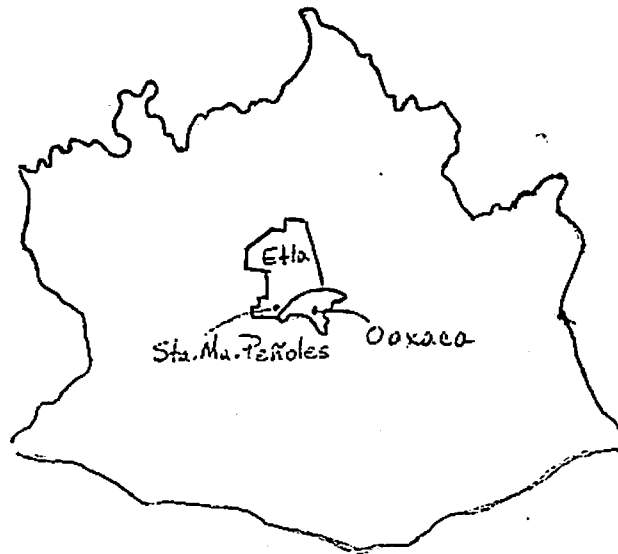
9. The trail which passes below her father's house does not permit one to see if members of the family are at home. Unless one is gathering wood in the hills or trying to locate lost animals, the trails are always used.

10. The Peñoles Mixtec kinship system shows that ritual kin terms are of comparatively recent origin. The terms all contain Spanish morphemes which have been accommodated to the Mixtec morphemic pattern. A volume on Oaxaca kinship terms which discusses in detail the Peñoles Mixtec kinship system (as well as many others) is in preparation; William Merrifield, editor.

Appendix I



Map of Mexico outlining the state of Oaxaca



The District of Etna in relation to Oaxaca

Appendix II



Aztec glyph mixtla "cloud" from which the name Mixteco is derived. (Spinden 1928:224)

The aztec name for Santa María Peñoles is Itzcuintepec or "Dog Mountain". The people of surrounding towns call Peñoles ñññ ñññ "town-dog". At this point one cannot say whether the Mixtec name gave rise to the Aztec or the reverse.



Aztec glyph for the Day Sign itzcuintli "dog"



Alternate Day Sign itzcuintli "dog's ear" (Spinden 1928:226)

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DATOS SOBRE CODICES

Segun Códices Mendoza Pag. 16, IZCUINTEPEC fue conquistado por los AZTECAS, bajo el régimen de Moctezuma II en 1503-1520.

El geroglifico de IZCUINTEPEC se encuentra junto con los de TLAXIACO, (TLACHQUIYAUHCO) y CENZONTEPEC.

Esto nos sugiere que Peñoles fue conquistado en la misma expedición Azteca, durante la cual, que fueron conquistados TLAXIACO Y CENZONTEPEC. Códice Mendoza pintado y comentado mas o menos en el año 1550.

Se entiende que el geroglifico de Peñoles debe ser un Cerro de Perro, IZCUINTEPEC O YUCU NIA. Efectivamente Cerro de Perro en los Códices Mixtecos, por ejemplo en el Códice Celden Pag. 11, allí vemos un Cerro de Perro con sus Gobernantes, EL SEÑOR 11 (ONCE) PEDERNAL. (El día del calendario en que él nació) Aparte de este nombre tenía otro nombre: VENUS AGUILA ANTORCHA, su mujer se llama: III TIGRE TIGRE JOYA.

Otro Cerro de Perro aparece en el Códice Nutlall Pag. 72 como un lugar que fue conquistado por el Rey Mixteco 8 VENADO de Tilantongo, pero no podemos estar seguros si uno de estos Cerros de Perro se refiere a Peñoles.