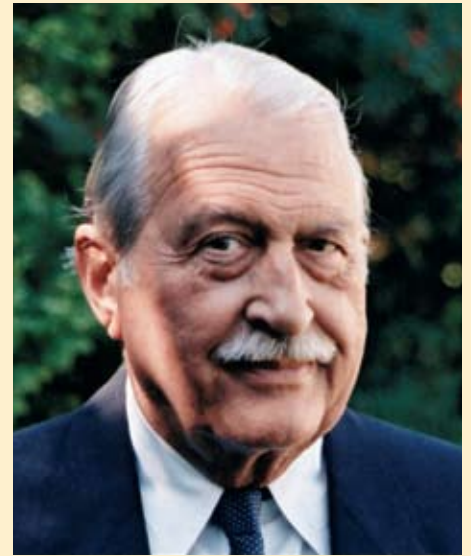


Dr. Bernard W. Hoeter

An Exciting Trip to Mexico



I met my first wife Kristine at Columbia University in New York.

She was studying archaeology; I was a German exchange student. We married a year later. As a wedding present in 1952, her parents gave us a trip to Mexico, where Kristine could study the Aztec culture. We flew there by Canadian Pacific Airlines.

After arriving in Mexico City, we first stayed at the Hotel de Cortez, opposite the Alameda, a former colonial palace, now modernized. I had a few drinks and Montezuma's Revenge caught me; the ice cubes were made from tap water.

Consequently, I asked the waiter at the Alameda if I could order a drink of *pulque*, which we believed was the Mexican national beverage and is served without ice. The waiter looked down at our table in surprise and burst out, "Señor, this is a decent place. We serve tequila. Only besotted Indians drink pulque."¹

1 *Pulque and tequila are both made from the juice of the agave cactus, known in Mexico as magui. Pulque is made from the toasted buds, via fermentation. The distillation of pulque produces tequila—also known as mescal—unless produced in the village of Tequila, Mexico.*

Mexico City is 7434 feet above sea level. Fortunately, by the time we had arrived in Mexico City in July, the usual copious Spring rains had stopped and the days were pleasantly dry and warm. We left our expensive hotel and went to stay at a bed-and-breakfast run by two Jewish refugee ladies who were, surprisingly, happy to speak German with us.

At one of the many cocktail parties we attended, we met Dr. Daniel F. Rubin de la Borbolla, curator of the Mexican National Museum of Anthropology. He invited us to visit his museum.

One day, we studied pre-Hispanic Mexico². Later, we returned to study the museum's presentation of Aztec culture. The big statue standing in the museum's courtyard was a new acquisition for Dr. Rubin; its varying apparel is so elegant that it denotes a distinguished person. This magnificent piece is one of the many that has been recently (1944) excavated from the ruins of Tula, west of Mexico City. In pre-Hispanic times, Tula was called Tollan and was the capital of the Toltecs³.

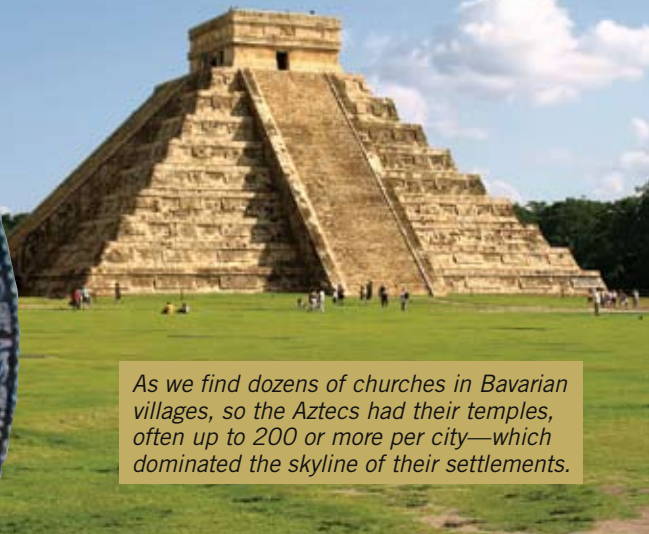
Jose Jimenez Gomez, the public relations officer of the museum, took over the second day of our tour.

2 *The Spaniards began arriving in this area early in the 16th century: Hernan Cortez landed in 1519 and Francisco Pizarro came in 1524.*



At the entrance to the Hall of Monoliths, we see the sculpted figure of the statue known as the "Sad Indian," a Toltec warrior from Tula—a city the Aztecs looted in the 14th century.

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As we find dozens of churches in Bavarian villages, so the Aztecs had their temples, often up to 200 or more per city—which dominated the skyline of their settlements.

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The Aztec calendar was discovered in 1790 while paving the Zocalo. It was transported to the National Museum in 1885. The basalt stone weighs 57,000 pounds and is over 3 feet wide. The dial is 12 feet in diameter.

He explained the Aztec calendar to us: The difficulty of hewing such a mass of basalt and moving it from a quarry, 70 miles distant, to the city—without the use of beasts of burden, will arouse admiration for

3 *The Toltecs are a people whose origin is disputed. The word is Aztec and means craftsman. They were originally thought to be a people preceding the Aztecs and Maya. All major information on their culture and history comes from Aztec and Mayan myth. This has led many modern archaeologists to argue that the Toltecs, as we understood them, never existed and that the magnificent ruins at Tula and Chichin Itza were built by various other peoples—some already known to us, others not. The nature of the Toltecs continues to be debated today. Tula was destroyed long before the Spaniards arrived. The archaeological community is again divided on the circumstances. Some state the Chichimeken, forerunners of the Aztecs, destroyed the city in 804. Others believe Tula was abandoned around 850 following internal disputes. A third faction believes the Aztecs themselves destroyed the city in the mid-14th century.*

the mechanical ingenuity of those who accomplished this feat.

The carving was begun in 1427 and finished 50 years later. The dedication of the calendar stone occurred in 1481 when the King of Mexico, Atzayacatl, and 24,000 warriors declared war on the Tarascan tribes to obtain prisoners of war to be sacrificed.

This tribe, a subset of the wide-ranging Nahua peoples, began as a migratory people and eventually settled in the valley of Mexico in the 14th Century. They were militaristic, warlike, and opulent. Their origin, however, is uncertain.

There are three hypotheses about the origin of the Aztec and Mesoamerican peoples in general, Jimenez told us.

There was the possibility of migration from Asia across the then-existing Bering land bridge.

The second theory believes in a migration from the south, from the mythical Atlantis. Those who believe

in this theory argue an otherwise inexplicable similarity between the culture of the Aztec and Maya and the pyramids and hieroglyphs of ancient Egypt. They cannot, however, explain the disappearance of the necessarily enormous landmass of Atlantis.

The third theory, strongly believed by the Mexicans themselves, is that North and Central America was the cradle of civilization and from there, migrations to Asia commenced. This theory is also popular outside Central America. Thor Heyerdahl undertook his *Kon-Tiki* adventure to support that theory, proving a vessel constructed in the manner and materials of the time theoretically could make the journey from South America to Polynesia. ▲

Dr. Bernard Hoeter was Secretary of The Society of Notaries Public of BC from 1969 to 1986. To assist Dr. Hoeter with this article, UBC History student **David Leggett** researched the Toltecs at the UBC library.

Sources

Diary notes of the author

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