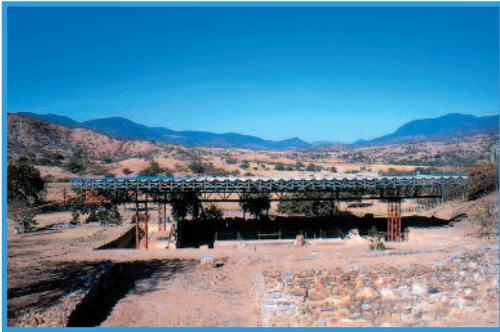


Guerrero's Archaeological Patrimony and Cultural Potential

Gerardo Gutiérrez*



Teopantecuanitlan



Cuetlajuchitlan

Photos by Elsie Montiel

Given a random combination of factors including difficult topography, a lack of paved highways and certain social strife, until very recently, archaeological research in Guerrero was minimal. Despite the efforts of a dozen or so Mexican and foreign archaeologists who fought day to day to salvage and disseminate the state's rich archaeological patrimony, the lack of exploration is evident. This turns the archaeology of Guerrero into a big black box: all kinds of unproven ideas fit. Thus, the cultures that inhabited Guerrero have been classified as peripheral, marginal, non-urban, pre-state, etc. But, actually, the state's archaeological remains show patterns of development similar to the rest of Mesoamerica and in the same time period, which means they are not backward, or marginal or peripheral.

In 1948, the Mexican Anthropological Society classified the state of Guerrero as part of the cultural region called the Mexican West. Although this erroneous notion can still be found in the literature, specialists working in



Xochipala

Colima, Jalisco, Michoacán and Nayarit have begun to leave Guerrero out of this regional classification because they consider it different from what is called the West. Unfortunately, important museums continue to promote this idea: for example, the National Anthropology Museum's Room of Western Cultures exhibits an important collection of archaeological objects from Guerrero, together with shaft tombs from the states of Colima and Jalisco, and cave art from the northern state of Baja California! This arrangement would not be particularly problematic if it were not for the fact that Guerrero's archaeological material shows evidence of autonomous development and a close relationship with the traditions of Central Mexico

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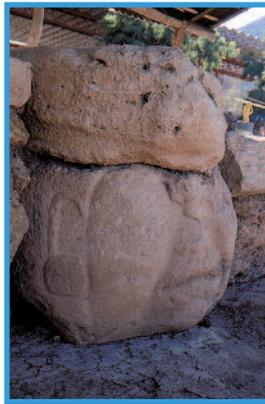
and Oaxaca, that is, two of the most important cultural nuclei of Mesoamerica.

Guerrero has no archaeological site open to the public comparable to Chichén-Itzá or Monte Albán not because the state has no monumental archaeological zones, but because they have not been explored or opened to the public. Thus, the wealth of Guerrero must be evaluated based on its potential, which is vast. Just as an example, we can mention some of the sites that have been excavated and that interested travelers may visit. I will also mention some sites that, although they have not been explored, may be visited thanks to their proximity to highways and urban areas and to their having basic tourist services.

THE ECOLOGICAL CONTEXT

We cannot understand the development of pre-Hispanic Guerrero cultures without at least

a cursory description of their geographical-ecological context. The state today is roughly almond-shaped, with a long east-west axis and a short north-south one. In general terms we can say there are three parallel strips on the east-west axis: each strip represents a unique ecological area that gives the state special characteristics. Travelers can observe these strips or ecological floors when they move along the Mexico-Acapulco highway: once they have left behind the Morelos Valley, they begin a continual descent until they arrive at the bottom of the Balsas River depression, one of the country's most important hydrological basins where the tumultuous river runs. The Balsas depression has a very hot, dry climate, where rain is scarce and the only permanent source of moisture is the river itself. Its vegetation is a low deciduous jungle, with an abundance of short trees and cacti adapted to the arid terrain. When the traveler crosses the river, he/she can see that a gradual ascent begins. This leads to the

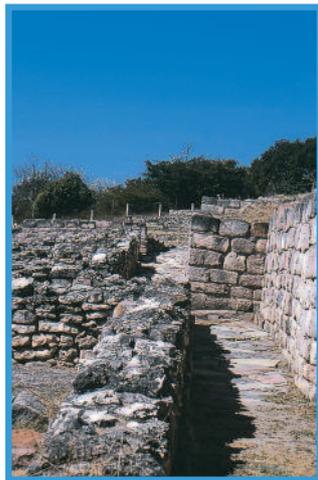


Teopantecuanitlan is the most important pre-classical site found until now in Guerrero.

peaks of the Southern Sierra Madre, the second ecological strip, characterized by a temperate to cold climate, with a predominance of holm oak and pine forests. The terrain here is both precipitous and beautiful, with enormous mountains and crags crisscrossed by deep ravines. Continuing on his/her way, the traveler will begin to descend again until he/she arrives at the warm, sunny Pacific coast, traditionally divided between the Costa Chica ("Little Coast"), from Acapulco to the southeast, and the Costa Grande ("Big Coast"), from Acapulco to the northwest. The vegetation along the coast is that of a medium, sub-evergreen jungle, but it has been almost completely cut back to make way for large pastures for cattle grazing. These strips or ecological floors display an enormous diversity of animal and vegetable life, useful to Man, which is why from very early times trade among their inhabitants played a primordial role for Guerrero's cultural development.

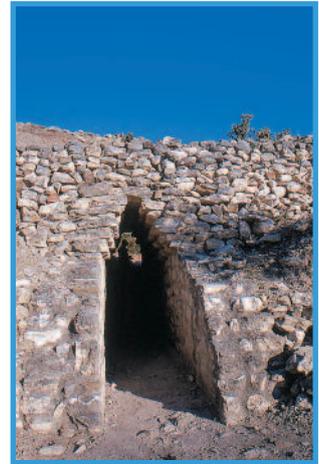
THE ARCHAIC PERIOD (8000-1800 B.C.)

It is still not possible to establish when the first settlers came to the state. But we can estimate that bands of hunters and gatherers had established temporary camps in the region before agriculture and ceramics production were introduced, 4,000 years before Christ. Cave art, together with triangular flint projectile tips, found in ancient camps in the Huamuxtitlan Valley, provide information about these cultures. Perhaps the most impressive example of ancient art in the state is found at Piedra Pinta, Totomixtlahuaca, an archaeological site located in a rock formation on the south side of the Omítlán River, which has more than 100 geometric designs carved in the rock. None of these designs have stylistic parallels with later Mesoamerican iconography. Near Totomixtlahuaca is the Cueva del Diablo (Devil's Cave) in Ocoapa, which amazingly pre-



Cuetlajuchitlan testifies to the high degree of urbanization Guerrero's pre-classical cultures achieved.





Xochipala's architecture is characterized by decorative "screws" and the false Mayan vault.

serves pre-ceramic cave painting with designs similar to those of Piedra Pinta. What is interesting about this cave is that over the first drawings, new figures are painted in the pre-Hispanic Olmec style. This would seem to indicate that Olmec customs were imposing themselves on local art in Guerrero.

PRE-CLASSICAL PERIOD (1800 B.C.-A.D.300)

Many portable objects and mural paintings, plus monumental architecture with styles similar to Olmec remains from the Gulf of Mexico Coast, the Tehuantepec Isthmus and the Chiapas and Guatemala Pacific Coast, have been found in Guerrero. Baby-faced figurines have been found in Chilpancingo and Tlapa, and a jade plaque depicting a man with Olmec features was found in Olinalá. Pre-classical clay figures can also be seen at the local museum in Azoyú. Magnificent pre-classical cave art is found in the Juxtlahuaca, Oxtotitlan caves and, of course, in the Cueva del Diablo in Ocoapa.

Teopantecuanitlan is the most important pre-classical site found until now in Guerrero; it shares many stylistic traits with sites in Central Mexico and the Morelos Valley, like Chalcatzingo. Teopantecuanitlan confirms that Guerrero societies reached a level of complexity that anthropologists call a chiefdom by the year 1000 B.C. In San

Miguel Amuco, another stone slab also carved in the Olmec style can be seen. The Cuatlajuchitlan archaeological site is an example of a society that existed toward the end of the pre-classical period. The Highway of the Sun (from Mexico to Acapulco) passes underneath it, near the Morelos Pass check-point. Cuatlajuchitlan is a very well preserved site which testifies to the high degree of urbanization the Guerrero cultures achieved in the pre-classical period, mainly because of the existence of an incipient rectangular pattern in their streets.

During this period, powerful, wealthy political entities developed in the region's main valleys: the Balsas Chilpancingo Basin; Muchitlan, Tlapa and Huamuxtitlan. Similar political entities emerged along the foot of the southern slope of the Southern Sierra Madre mountain range, on the Small and the Large Coasts. We can infer that these early political entities formed their economic niches as intermediaries in the system of exchange of goods between the Pacific Coast and Central Mexico.

THE CLASSICAL AND EPICLASSICAL PERIODS (A.D. 300-1100)

Teotihuacan-style objects, plentiful throughout the state, can be used as chronological markers. The Malinaltepec mask is perhaps the most beau-

tiful Teotihuacan object found in Guerrero. For this period, there is also iconography in monumental sculpture, like that at Piedra Labrada, Ometepec, Yu kivi, Metlatonoc, Texmelincan and Huitzapula, the last two situated in the municipality of Atliztac. Teotihuacan incense burners have also been found at several sites in the Tlapa Valley, particularly in Contlalco and Mezcala.

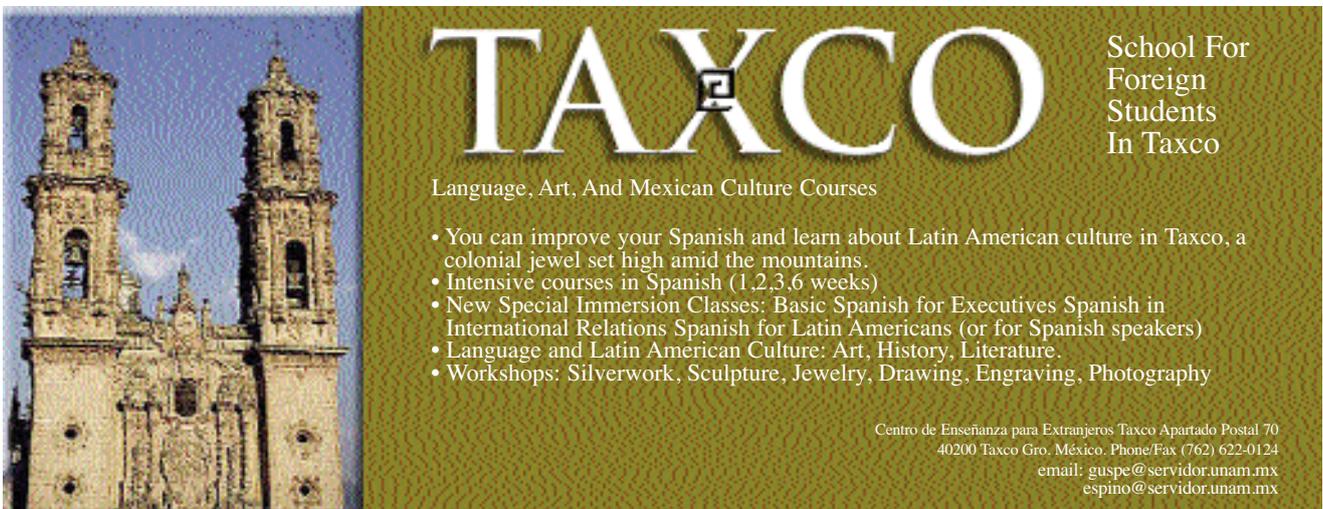
In addition to classical-period pieces, several stone sculptures seem to mark the transition to the epiclassical period (A.D. 700-1000) linked to the iconography of Xochicalco and even Tula. This is the case of some slabs in Texmelincan. Judging by their size, I believe that the civic-ceremonial centers of Texmelincan, Contlalco, Alcazauca and Xochipala played a dominant political role in the region.

The first political entities organized as states probably developed in Guerrero during the classical period, perhaps imitating Teotihuacan and Monte Albán. But after the collapse of Teotihuacan (A.D. 600-650), the area may have broken up politically and been reorganized under local authorities. The political fragmentation probably lasted until the twelfth century when state-like political entities like Tlapa-Tlachinollan in eastern Guerrero emerged and began to accumulate sufficient power to dominate their weaker neighbors.

THE POST-CLASSICAL PERIOD (A.D. 1100-1522)

This period is represented by the reemergence of political entities that managed to concentrate power and reorganize the area politically. The existence of metal-working and two kinds of ceramics used for exchange, Yestla-Naranjo and Azteca III, are used as chronological markers for the post-classical period.

The end of this period is characterized by the domination and incorporation of local lords into the Aztec Empire. A large number of pictorial documents register the names of the largest settlements and political entities from the Balsas River to the Small and Large Coasts. These references in the codices have been of great help in locating archaeological sites. Settlements abandoned in the colonial period can be identified by the remnants of churches and colonial pottery, particularly a glazed majolica-ware type ceramic. Sometimes, transition sites can be found when these items are uncovered together with obsidian. Post-classical sites worth visiting include Contlaco, around Tlapa, and Cerro Oztuma on the Michoacán border. Actually, a large number of sites all over Guerrero from this and other periods need to be explored and opened to the public. This is why we say that the wealth of Guerrero's archaeological patrimony has yet to be discovered. ■■■



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