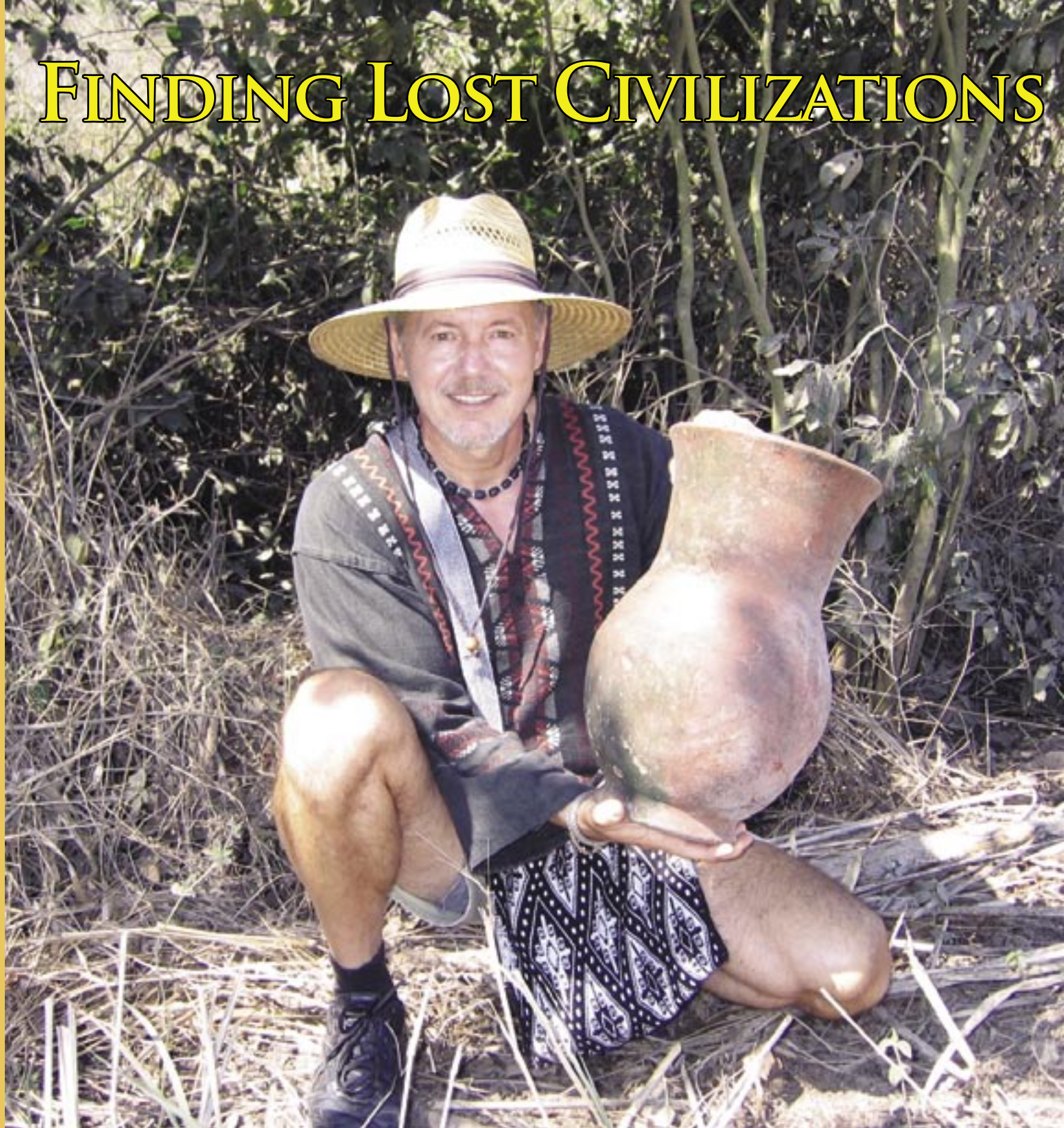




**AUTHOR  
ALEX KEREKES  
IN MEXICO**

# FINDING LOST CIVILIZATIONS





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ALEX KEREKES

PARK PLACE PUBLICATIONS  
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Finding Lost Civilizations

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## PREFACE

Some people have asked me, “Is this story true?” The answer is, mostly yes. I am not an anthropologist documenting scientific observations. What I am is a witness to history, a storytelling accidental tourist on a path less traveled, and a protector of rascals and innocents encountered during my journey into Mexico. Sit back, relax, and enjoy the excitement I truly did experience. Oscar Wilde said something to the effect that the storyteller recognizes that recreation, not instruction, is the aim of conversation, and the storyteller is a far more civilized being than the blockhead who loudly expresses his disbelief in a story that is told for the amusement of the company. I hope my story is both amusing and educational. Read on and judge for yourself.



*State of Nayarit, Mexico.*

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# FINDING LOST CIVILIZATIONS

## PART 1—THE YEAR 2006





*Guayabitos, State of Nayarit, Mexico.*



CHAPTER 1

# THE THIRTEEN STATIONS OF THE CROSS

JANUARY 2006

This story began as a tale of family, love, dedication, hard work, inspiration, and the fragments of life around us. Little did I know it was also the beginning of a thread that I would follow for three years in search of lost civilizations along the Pacific coast and mountains of the State of Nayarit, Mexico.

I first visited Guayabitos, a sleepy village primarily visited by Mexican tourists, in the mid-1990s. Its charm was that the Gringo tourist boom and invasion of Puerto Vallarta had not reached its shores. On my first trip I saw a tall cross built alongside a hill on the south end of town. I had always wanted to visit this site and ten years later I found myself at the archway entrance to the path leading up to the cross. As

my father and I approached the archway we saw a Mexican man at the entrance who told us that the site was closed to the public. I then noticed and was surprised to see that it was barred shut with a chain-link fence. Initially, I thought that the site was a public area and that the man at the entrance was a watchman. As I continued my conversation with this man I learned that his name was Pedro Guzman Sanchez and he was fifty-three years old. He was from a family of 11 children and had lived his entire life in Guayabitos. Pedro's father died when he was 78 years old and in 1988 Pedro dedicated his life in memory of his father by deciding to build a memorial in his honor.



At the south end of Guayabitos, as the Bay of Jaltemba meanders around to the town of Los Ayala, Pedro's father had owned several hectares of land at the side of the mountain forming the southern rim of the bay. And it was at this place that Pedro decided to build his memorial. Pedro told us that the site was closed because of tourists. He explained that tourists would visit the memorial to only take pictures, that women in bikinis would show up, people would go there at night to drink, use drugs, party, or for amorous reasons. Pedro went on to explain that the memorial was a place of worship, a place of respect, a place of dedication and prayer. He felt visitors showed no respect and were desecrating the memorial. The stairway to the cross, he said, consisted of the 13 Stations of the Cross; people should be solemn, praying or offering respect instead of being consumed by photography and gaiety along the way. I felt resigned to the fact that Pedro would not let us enter his private memorial. However, as we continued our conversation, an elderly fellow showed up and was quickly embraced by Pedro. Pedro then implored the man to visit the memorial. The man initially declined and said he was no longer as young as he used to be. But, Pedro insisted and opened the gateway to the

memorial. By luck and good grace Pedro let my father and I also enter. To our surprise we learned that the elderly fellow was a farmer from Saskatchewan, Canada, and that over the years he had helped Pedro construct the memorial. He explained that there were 152 stairs leading to the cross and that the concrete steps along the pathway were inscribed with the names of people who had donated money to build the stations along the way. As my father and I climbed up to the cross I was amazed at the dedication and tenacity of the human spirit. For twenty-eight years, since 1988, Pedro with his own hands, sweat, tears, and vision had toiled along the mountain incline to build the thirteen Stations of the Cross, which told Jesus' story as he carried the cross to his crucifixion on Mount Cavalry.

As we climbed past the Stations of the Cross, Jaltemba Bay opened in glorious splendor below us. The meeting of the Pacific Ocean, blue skies, and land was a wondrous sight to behold. It was truly a beautiful location and definitely a place of solitude if one were inclined to commune with his god.

When my father and I reached the top, my father noticed that the fellow from Saskatchewan seemed to be



searching the ground, from where he picked up a stone. My father asked him what he was doing and he told us that the memorial was built on the site of an old Indian village that predated the arrival of Spaniards in Mexico. He showed us the rock he had picked up and explained that it had been

used to crush corn in a stone bowl. He then said the hill was littered with these historic remnants. I looked down at the freshly tilled earth and noticed that many ancient pottery fragments lay scattered upon the ground. I was surprised that it was only after I had been told that I was standing on ancient ground that I immediately noticed that these fragments littered the earth at our feet. Marcel Proust, a French novelist, once said, "The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes." Amazed, I picked up the remnants of an old pottery bowl to examine it and realized that until this time, I had only seen ancient artifacts behind glass cases in museum halls that demanded tomb-like silence as one viewed the preserved progress of mankind. This ancient site, home of the earliest dwellers of Mexico, had now returned to its original state and was forgotten forever. As one civilization died away another rose on top of it. Today a cross stands at this place as homage to a Christian god. What stood here a thousand years before? Perhaps an altar to offer homage to gods that have since been forgotten? From earth to earth and from ashes to ashes, we rise and return. The cycle continues.

Upon returning to the entrance we were met by Pedro,

who seemed perturbed that I had taken several photographs along the Stations of the Cross. In our continuing conversation he told me that of his ten brothers, he was the only devout Catholic and that none of them helped him construct the memorial. He explained that the thirteen Stations of the Cross were built from the donations of thirteen people and that the cross had been erected by the good grace and donations of five other donors. The grand archway forming the entrance had taken several years to build and was still a work in progress. Pedro was the soul and life of this memorial and was not supported or helped by his family or the local Catholic parish priest. He explained that the old parish priest had initially been helpful, but that for the past five years the newly assigned young priest had not helped him with the project and declined to offer him any assistance whatsoever. Nor would the young priest



*Hilltop below Pedro's Cross with a view of Jaltemba Bay, Nayarit, Mexico.*

visit to bless the memorial. I thought there was some sort of estrangement between he and Pedro, and reflected on how

man's emotions and personal feelings often dominate a greater good. And that jealousy, wrongs perceived, self-righteousness, superiority, dominance, and a whole host of human frailties often control mankind's relationship with each other. Pedro's homage was a personal offering open to all believers to share in. But, here it stood guarded and closed off with a chain-link fence. How much have we actually changed over the ages? I wondered. And if in the end, we shall all become like fragments in the earth at our own hands.

At the time I had no idea that my chance encounter on that hilltop and several pottery fragments were the beginning of a wonderful journey of discovery as I followed a thread weaving its way along the path of lost civilizations.



## CHAPTER 2

# ZACUALPAN

Discovery was the opium of explorers who sought the path less traveled. To have tread where few men had gone was the fuel that fired their passion, whether it was to seek knowledge or a quest for glory, fortune, or for a god. And for just an instant, in the small pueblo of Zacualpan, in Nayarit, Mexico, I knew what it felt like to discover, learn, and to behold a treasure before my eyes.

My journey began in the town of Guayabitos, standing under a cross on a hilltop overlooking the Bay of Jaltemba. By chance I met an elderly man from Saskatchewan who pointed out to me that the site we were standing on was once an ancient Indian village. As I looked about the ground I found ancient pottery fragments and a stone tool used to crush corn. Before parting, the elderly fellow mentioned that he had heard that there was a cavern or underground area in

Zacualpan that contained mummies or relics.

I was familiar with Zacualpan as it was situated on Mexico Highway 161, north of Guayabitos, before the small fishing village of Platanitos, which my father and I had visited several times. I was curious about what the man from Saskatchewan had said and decided that the next time we traveled to Platanitos, we would embark upon a journey based on this vague indication of relics in Zacualpan.

About two weeks later my father and I and our erstwhile companion and world traveler, Rafael, found ourselves in front of Zacualpan's church, situated in the town square. I thought that perhaps the church might contain mummies, as is the case in other locations in Mexico and Europe. We saw several taxicabs parked on the street and asked one cab driver if he knew if there were any mummies or relics in the church or surrounding area. He gave us somewhat of a blank stare. We then decided to take another approach and asked him if there was a museum in town. After several seconds of deep thought he nodded and indicated that two streets ahead we should take a left turn and then two streets further up we would see a museum. We followed these directions and upon reaching the location, we could not see

any building that housed a museum. We passed a small park and then decided to stop the car so we could walk around the neighborhood. As we got out of the car a Mexican fellow stepped out of his house and we asked him if he knew where the museum was. He replied in English and pointed to the park and said, "It's over there." He then went to the gated park and opened the iron grill doors, imploring us to follow him. I am always amazed at how our way of thinking through our socialization process funnels our thoughts and perceptions to a certain viewpoint, which can be quite different when we are away from our social group. I associated the word "museum" with a building, and that's what we were looking for. In their teachings, the Toltec Indians of Mexico used to refer to this as "The Dream of the World." And that much of how we thought and behaved as adults was programmed into us from the moment we were born by the group we were born into. Don Miguel Ruiz a modern Toltec teacher, emphasizes that we should be impeccable in our word, not take things personally, do the best we can, and not make assumptions, as they are often wrong. As a traveler one of the pleasures I enjoy is the ability to step out of my own world and try to view it from a different perspective.

Anyway, as the English-speaking local fellow led us into the park or museum, he pointed out various large boulders that had petroglyphs carved into the stone. I asked him if the boulders were native to the small park and he replied that they had been transported to the site from the nearby mountains located to the east. He mentioned there were many such boulders locally. He also mentioned that he had found many pottery fragments, which he wanted to show us. He then led us into his house and showed us a small and shallow red clay bowl that was about six inches across. Painted along the outside rim were various flowers and plants. He mentioned that he had found the bowl intact in a nearby field. I examined the bowl and could tell it was very similar to the fragment of the bowl I had found in Guayabitos.



The fellow we were speaking with was named Pablo and a native of Zacualpan, although he now lived near Sacramento, California. The house we were in belonged to his family; he was home on vacation. Pablo was very friendly and offered to take us to the site where he had found the ancient bowl. My father and I went in Pablo's pickup truck while Rafael went along in another truck driven by one of Pablo's friends.

About three minutes from the house we entered a dirt road that led us to the town cemetery. As I stepped out of the truck I saw a large bone lying on the ground. I picked it up and we asked Pablo and his friend if it was one of the area's relics. We all had a good laugh as I threw the leg bone back into the cemetery. Adjacent to the cemetery was a fenced pasture where cows were grazing and being tended by Pablo's brother and another fellow. The pasture was a small plateau overlooking fields of corn, tobacco, and a stream that flowed into the ocean. The vista was panoramic and beautiful. As we walked in the pasture Pablo told us that fragments were everywhere and would surface when the field was plowed. I saw nothing at first, then as Pablo started pointing out and picking up pottery fragments, my

father and I saw that the field was littered with these relics. I was amazed knowing that this field had been plowed over a thousand times and trampled for many years by cattle and men. In spite of all this, these ancient fragments endured.



Approaching the edge of the plateau I could see that the downhill slope was littered with large boulders, which seemed to be of volcanic origin. Pablo started pointing out various markings on these boulders and I began to notice that several were carved and smoothed out to form bowls where corn and other staples could be ground. Pablo's brother called me over to the bottom of the plateau and



showed me a boulder with a petroglyph that resembled a boat with a sail. Another one resembled a warrior shooting an arrow. Almost every large boulder along the plateau and at the bottom of the slope contained a carved petroglyph. I was excited, I was fascinated, and I was astonished. I gazed upon the scene around me and then closed my eyes and journeyed back in time. This hill, this plateau, was my vil-

lage. Below me the soil was fertile and I grew corn, wheat, and other staples to sustain the people of the village. The ocean lay to the west and nourished us with a bounty from the sea. The flowing stream quenched my thirst. This village was prosperous for it sustained me in food from the land and sea and sweet water flowing from the mountains. When I opened my eyes and looked around again I knew that I was standing on top of a lost civilization. What happened to these people, who were they, how did they live, and how did they perish? Now, all that remained was a lonely pasture forgotten in time. Pablo's family owned this land, but they knew not what lay beneath their feet except that fragments from the past were scattered on the ground.

As I continued to wander the site, Pablo's brother led me to a large boulder that had a large bowl carved smoothly at its apex. At the edge of the bowl, grooves were carved downward. Was this a sacrificial altar? Where human offerings made here? Or was food simply prepared here? No one knew. This land had been passed down to Pablo's family through many generations. For the Mexican compasinos, life was hard and people were concerned with the present and not the past. And so these treasure lay here, giving up



their past in tiny fragments, begging to have its story told and its people remembered.

Another interesting boulder that Pablo's brother showed me contained several spiral designs carved into the stone. Little did I know at the time that I would again see these ancient spiral symbols in another land and that they would reveal themselves to me as part of the cosmic thread that connects us all.

Before my father and I left this sacred site I knelt down and brushed away the soil. At each movement, and with every handful of dirt, pieces of the past fell between my fingers as if thousands upon thousands of relics had been cast from the heavens and smashed upon the earth. "Who will rediscover you? I thought. And who will tell your story?"



## CHAPTER 3

# PIRATE TREASURES

**D**riving back to Guayabitos from Zacualpan I wanted to learn more of its history and thought it would be a simple matter of researching it on the Internet. Later that evening I visited an Internet café and spent several hours trying to find some information on Zacualpan. Surprisingly, about the only item of interest I could find was that Zacualpan had a population of approximately 5,000 people. Also, there was one Web site that indicated the town had a museum with exhibits of petroglyphs. I was very surprised that there was no mention of an ancient civilization or that petroglyphs also appeared in the fields below the town cemetery.

Several days later I read a tourist brochure for the State of Nayarit that described the small pueblo of Alta Vista.

According to the brochure an ancient culture named the “Tecoxquines” lived in this region 2,300 years ago and their capital was located in Zacualpan, which had an estimated 20,000 inhabitants!

The brochure stated the Tecoxquines also inhabited the Alta Vista area and that many petroglyphs could be found in that location. The Huichol Indians, who to this day make pilgrimages to the area to commune with their gods, also consider the area sacred ground.

I continued to scan the brochure and saw a reference to the small coastal village of Chacala, which was south of Zacualpan. Chacala was apparently Nayarit’s first state harbor because of its natural configuration. As such it had been used in the past as a safe haven for pirates. As I read about Chacala I remembered that Pedro told me that when he was a young boy his grandfather used to tell him tales of pirates raiding Zacualpan. I also recalled that when I visited Pedro’s pasture one of the fellows watching the cattle had white skin, freckles on his face, and red hair! I remembered thinking that the fellow did not look like a native of Mexico.

Who were the pirates who anchored in Chacala and raided Zacualpan? Were they English or French plying the



*Chacala Beach.*

waters looking for Spanish galleons carrying silver and gold?

The following day I drove back to Zacualpan and to Pedro's pasture to find this strange red-haired fellow. As fortune would have it he was sitting under a tree tending the cattle in the pasture. He recognized me and returned my greeting as I approached. In broken Spanish I told him that my name was Alejandro. Pointing to him I asked him what his name was. He replied that his name was Jose. When I asked him his family name, I became very excited when he said that it was Harer. I knew that this was not a Spanish name and I asked where his father had been born. He indicated that his father had been born locally. In broken Spanish I tried to find out if his grandfather had also been born in Mexico. We both struggled with trying to communicate, but as best as I could determine it seemed his family lineage was not from Mexico. I pointed to his skin and red hair and said, "No Espanol." Jose indicated that I should follow him to his house, which was within walking distance. It was a very aged and simple abode home constructed in the old style. Jose directed me to sit down while he disappeared behind a curtain that led into another room. When he returned I was stunned. He held an old cutlass sword, which he handed to

me. I examined it to see if there were any markings. Near the hilt I could make out some sort of crown and what I thought was Latin writing. As I was examining the sword, Jose produced a small object wrapped in a linen cloth. As I unwrapped the cloth, resting in the palm of my hand I held an old silver Spanish coin. It is one thing to read about history, but another to actually see and touch it! To feel its presence, and to see that part of it was alive through Jose evoked a special and indescribable feeling. Jose said that these objects belonged to his family and had been handed down through the generations. I gave the sword and silver coin back to Jose and returned to the pasture with him. Jose was leading a simple life and did not seem excited or curious to delve into the past. His struggle was with the here and now, and I wanted to respect that. Discoverers have always changed the lives and destiny of those they encountered. Often their own excitement and beliefs, their "Dream of the World," left them with little or no consideration for those they encountered. Countless civilizations and indigenous populations have been decimated in the name of progress and enlightenment or under the yoke of a new salvation. But then, this is the history of mankind. It seems that all





*Chacala Bay, Nayarit, Mexico.*

civilizations have done this to each other. And this is why only several hundred Spaniards were able to conquer the indigenous population of Mexico. So, I contained my ex-

citement, my curiosity, and my desire to know more as I said good-bye to Jose Harer, descendant of English pirates and raiders of Spanish galleons.

## CHAPTER 4

# ALTA VISTA

Several days later, in my continuing quest to learn more about the Tecoxquine Kingdom, my father, our companion Rafael, and I drove to Alta Vista. This town could be reached by driving about four miles north of the small town of La Penita, situated off Mexico Highway 200. There is a sign announcing Alta Vista and the turnoff is a winding dirt road going up towards the coastal mountains. When we arrived in Alta Vista we could see many lowland farms and ranches spread out below the town. The town itself mainly consisted of homes built along the slope of a mountain, which provided a panoramic view of the Pacific Ocean to the west.

Unsure of the setting we decided to park our car along the road to orient ourselves. As we walked along we encountered a Mexican fellow named Jesus who turned out

to be an apostatizing Jehovah's Witness whose wife's sister and parents lived in Alta Vista. We asked him if there were any petroglyphs in the area and he told us there were many. Fortune smiled upon us again when Jesus mentioned that he and his wife were going to visit a small farm further up into the mountains that had petroglyphs and that we could accompany them. We got into his pickup truck, including Jesus' two young nephews, who would show us where the petroglyphs were. Adrian was six and Manuel was eight.

We drove on an old dirt road for several miles into the mountains and stopped at a small adobe farmhouse situated on top of a plateau that overlooked the coastal plains and the Pacific Ocean. Manuel and Adrian then led my father, Rafael, and I along a small footpath behind the adobe house. As we came near the crest of the mountain we stopped in the midst of a cluster of large volcanic boulders. With the help of Adrian and Manuel I started examining the boulders and could see that many of them contained sections where bowls or altars had been carved into the stone. Among these boulders Adrian and Manuel positioned various fragments of pottery and stone implements that had been found laying about the site.

I was struck by the similarity of the setup of this smaller encampment to the site at Zacualpan. Both sites were situated on plateaus that provided marvelous vistas to the west. I sat down, closed my eyes, and tried to concentrate on nothing more than the natural elements before me and to experience what it felt like to visit this site a thousand years ago.

In my vision I was walking on sacred ground and these ancient boulders, on this crest pointing toward the heavens, were my altars. I came here looking up to the blue skies with my offerings. And when I turned with my arms outstretched looking out toward my realm, Mother Earth opened up below me tumbling toward the blue oceans. This was truly a holy spot. I could feel it no less than the ancient Tecoxquines had at one time or the Huichol Indians of today. Some sacred spots never change and need no further explanation. I sat there for a while feeling the power



of the sun, the strength of the land, and the peace that lay before me—each forming a part of the other, composing a trinity that needed no other meaning.

As my father and I walked back down to the adobe farmhouse, little Manuel mentioned that there was a stone farther down the hill that was older than the boulders. I asked him to show this ancient stone to me and followed him as he led the way back to the dirt road. I realized that it was the original pathway or route of travel used by the Tecoxquines more than two thousand years ago. As we came upon a slight bend in the road Adrian and Manuel pointed to a dark stone that was imbedded in the earthen bank of the road, which was about five feet up above ground level. I could not initially recognize anything particular about this boulder except that it was smooth and dark gray or black. Looking closer I started to recognize that there were carvings

on the stone. The markings appeared to be a series of parallel lines, some of which were spread in a fan shape. I had seen several similar stones and markings in museums and books detailing ancient Indian cultures. Although I could not say what these markings meant I had a sense that some of them were related to the sun.

Two weeks after seeing this ancient stone I was in Talapia Square in Guadalajara. I was looking at some beads, handmade jewelry, and stones on a blanket; all were being sold by a fellow who appeared to be an indigenous native, which is to say he had Indian features. The items spread out on his blanket were varied and seemed to represent ancient stones, jewelry, fossils, and like items from throughout the South Americas. The Indian noticed I was interested in some of his fossil pieces and emptied the contents of a plastic bag on the blanket. Lying before me were dozens of miniature clay pots and figures that were native antiquities. He produced a small black



stone and placed it in my hand. I was somewhat startled to discover that this small stone was etched with markings similar to those I had seen on the larger stone in Alta Vista. The Indian said the stone had been found in the ancient ruins of

Machu Picchu, Peru. Even though one has to be careful not to be fooled by fakes and reproductions, I knew that what I held in my hand was authentic. The markings and the small stone were similar to the one I had seen in Alta Vista. Could the Tecoxquines of Zacualpan, Mexico, and the Incas of Machu Picchu, Peru, be related? Did they worship the same gods? And, what was the significance of the stone markings? I'm not sure that I will ever know. However, I can say that I have

stood at the altar of the ancients, felt its power, and beheld the marvels that time has not altered since the dawn of ages. Sri Sathya Sai Babd, an Indian spiritual leader, said, "Seeing is Believing, I will believe in God only if I see Him, but are all things seen or heard or touched or tasted, as real as they



seem?" Again, I felt that I did not need to know any more than what I had just seen.

When I left Alta Vista I knew there was much more to be seen, to be heard, and to be learned. I could feel the

thread of lost civilizations weaving itself through me and knew that one day I would return in search of its lost secrets.



*Ancient artifacts, Alta Vista, Nayarit, Mexico.*

## CHAPTER 5

# THE HERB MAN IN GUADALAJARA

**D**riving from Guayabitos to Guadalajara one ascends from the coastal plains of Nayarit following Highway 200 and then onto Highway 68, passing the towns of Compostela, San Pedro Lagunillas, and onto Highway 15, which is the toll road for Guadalajara. As we passed Lagunillas and Cerro Grande, I was reminded that this was the site where my father and I once observed an unexplained phenomena, which we concluded was a UFO. Interestingly, when I recounted my UFO experience to a Compostela resident, she confirmed that many people had reported seeing unexplained flying objects around Cerro Grande. Along Highway 15 before the turnoff for the town of Jala one becomes

aware that they are driving through lava fields and that the road passes through old, extinct volcanic craters. In Jala one can ascend to the top of Volcano Ceboruco, which has interesting fauna, old steam vents, and lava forms. Further along on Highway 15D we started entering the outskirts of the town of Tequila and noticed black glass-like reflections along the banks of the freeway, which had been cut through the rolling hills. We pulled over and examined these reflections; they were large veins of obsidian. We briefly explored the area and picked up several large pieces of this glass-like stone.

Our drive into Guadalajara was scenic and pleasant although one is always reminded of the perils along the road—we saw one dead mule and four perished dogs. Four weeks later when I was returning to the U.S. the dead mule was still lying by the road.

After settling into our lodging near the Plaza de Liberacion, Guadalajara, we immediately set out to explore the central historic district. Outside the hotel we saw sev-

eral Chinese restaurants and learned that Guadalajara has a small Chinese community. To our delight we ate at an all-you-can-eat Chinese buffet for thirty-five pesos, which is about \$3.20. The food was very good.

One place I wanted to visit in Guadalajara was San Juan de Dios, which has reportedly one of the largest covered markets in Mexico with hundreds of stalls and vendors selling all manner of interesting items.

While strolling in the market I came upon a booth displaying herbs and a multitude of medicinal plants. I noticed a pole across the top of the booth from which numerous small clay figures were suspended. I began recognizing many small figures similar to those I had seen in museums and in books about the indigenous relics of Mexico. I asked the man behind the counter if any of the ancient figures were for sale. He quickly said no and then continued about his business. After several minutes he returned and I mentioned I had seen the petroglyphs of Zacualpan and had found several pottery fragments in a field. He indicated that he knew where Zacualpan was and that he had traveled through that region many times. We then started to talk about the Huichol Indians of Nayarit and their culture. Now, remember

that this conversation was taking place in broken Spanish and English, with a lot of hand movements, head nodding, and facial expressions. I learned that the herb man was an Indian who had traveled throughout Mexico and had studied the herbal medicinal secrets of many of the local indigenous inhabitants throughout the country. During our conversation I believe we both felt a true appreciation of the wonders of lost civilizations and the exciting journey of rediscovering and learning about them. As the end of the day drew near, the herb man indicated he had many more artifacts and invited my father and me to his home, which he said was located near the market.

When I entered the herb man's home I felt as if I had been transported in time. Ancient relics covered walls and any other available space that could hold an object. There were figures, pottery, stone carvings, jewelry, masks, ancient rocks, tools, weapons, and many other objects that one would expect to find in the finest museums. The herb man was very proud of these artifacts and would pick up certain items and explain to me their origin and how he had acquired them. Often, he would hand me an ancient object and let me examine it. The exciting thing about

these objects, and the experience, was that I felt as if they were transporting me back in time. Exploring ancient pasts through museums is rewarding, but everything is often in a locked, sealed, and sterile environment. But, to actually hold an ancient object and examine it brings forth a host of emotions that can't be experienced by looking through a glass case. While inside the herb man's house I could sense a power and connection to the objects surrounding me and felt history's presence as I have never felt before. I spent several hours looking at, touching, and feeling the remnants of the past that surrounded me. The herb man never offered to sell me any of the objects, nor did I ever ask to buy anything. I am grateful for that because some things are just not for sale. Being surrounded by these artifacts and hearing the herb man talk about their life and revival was a kind of knowledge that could never be bought. The value was in the experience itself.

Later that evening our host made a wonderful tea with a concoction of herbs and hibiscus flowers, which he claimed had medicinal powers. That night I had a dream within a dream. It was as if a conscious element within me was awake observing the dream, but knowing that what I was observ-

ing in the dream was also an element of the dream. In my dream I was passing through the ancient history of Mexico. Although at times I felt that I was flying, I was also wandering, looking, searching, following a thread that kept pulling me back as the ruins of ancient civilizations lay at my feet.

As my father and I left Guadalajara for Zacatecas two days later and drove along Mexico Highway 54, the meaning of this lucid dream would reveal itself.



## CHAPTER 6

# FOLLOWING THE THREAD TO CHICOMOSTOC

**I**t started without any forethought or grand design for adventure or discovery. It just happened to be that I was under a cross above the Thirteen Stations on a hill overlooking Guayabitos, where on the ground I found a thread of civilization, which took me on a journey to Zacualpan, Alta Vista, Guadalajara, Zacatecas, and back to Guayabitos. Napoleon Bonaparte said chance was the providence of adventurers. That I am, but I am also a witness to time, telling my story as I followed that thread.

Lost on the streets of bustling Guadalajara trying to find Highway 54, I pulled into a Pemex gas station and asked a truck driver if he knew the way to Zacatecas. He pointed to the road I had just left and told me to keep following it. He

said it was a good road and would take me by some grand ruins in a place called Chicomostoc.

The road left the city of Guadalajara from the north and descended into a 2,000 foot canyon called the Barranca de Oblatos, where my father and I saw an eagle take flight with a large, twisting snake in its beak. I held that rare image in my thoughts recalling the Aztec legend of the eagle and the snake, which is symbolized as a coat of arms in the center of the Mexican flag. According to popular legend, the Aztec people were wandering throughout Mexico in search of a sign to indicate the precise spot where they were to build their capital. The god, Huitzilopochtli, had commanded them to find an eagle devouring a snake, perched atop a prickly pear cactus that was growing on a rock submerged in a lake. After two hundred years of wandering, they found the promised sign on a small island in swampy Lake Tescoco. Here they founded their new capital, Tenochtitlan, which later became known as Mexico City, the current capital of Mexico. That morning I did not realize that the vision of the eagle and snake was also a sign along my path as I followed the thread of lost civilizations.

The drive to Zacatecas led us through arid valleys, high mountain plains, and dry lands. It was farm and cattle country that reminded me of sections of California, New Mexico, and Arizona. Along the route I noticed several areas where the sides of outlying hills appeared to be terraced. Although these terraces were overgrown, a distant view provided an interesting perspective: they did not follow the natural curvature of other outlying hills. I told my father I believed what we were seeing were the remnants of ancient civilizations. These terraces were possibly temples, cities, and pyramids now returning to the land's natural topography. We return from whence we came and I wondered what others would see of us a thousand years from now.

Much of the land here was partitioned into sections by hand-laid walls of stone that had been gathered from the arid ground. As we followed the undulating rise and fall of our route to Zacatecas on both sides of the road, stone walls stretched for miles and miles. It

was like a miniature version of the Great Wall of China. I am always amazed at the effort man goes through in order to mark or claim the boundary of what he believes to be his.



About twenty-five miles south of Zacatecas, to the right of the road, we passed an abandoned building with a 20-foot silver eagle mounted on a pedestal. Remembering the eagle I had seen earlier that day I quickly stopped and returned to the building. I walked up to the figure and saw that it was made of tin and that in the eagle's beak was a snake. The statue looked exactly like the live eagle and snake my father and I had seen hours before. Art truly does imitate life and I wondered if there was any relationship between the eagle I had seen earlier that morning and the statue before me. I re-

membered the war in Vietnam and the many patrols I led through the jungle. During those times I felt connected to the environment and my senses merged with life around me.

As I walked around the eagle, I felt that there was something still drawing itself to me. Feeling that pull I walked to the building behind the eagle. It was an abandoned restaurant called "Las Siete Cuevas," the seven caves. Standing there I still felt restless, as if there was something else to see. Something was trying to reach out to me, to be heard, to be seen. The thread was pulling me closer. I closed my eyes and a vision of distant hills appeared. Slowly, I opened my eyes and looked around. I noticed a stone road adjacent to the abandoned restaurant, which meandered into the hills. Next to the road I saw a small, bent, and rusted sign that said, "Ruinas." Was this the road to the ruins of Chicomostoc? I gazed toward the hills, recalling my vision, and thought I could distinguish some vague outlines on a mountaintop about a mile to the west. As I looked at these hills all apprehension left my body and I knew that the eagle and snake and the pull of lost civilizations had brought us to Chicomostoc.

As we followed the stone road and came closer alongside the mountain my father and I began to see the outline of



a vast ruin complex. The road ended at a small stone guard-house where an attendant informed us that we were at the ruins of La Quemada, which I later learned was also known as Chicomostoc.

We parked the car and followed a dusty path to a large stone-constructed interpretive center built in the style of the ruins. This was the gateway to the lost city. I was impressed, excited, ecstatic. I had been to the ruins of Pompeii and many ancient places in Europe, but the fascinating thing about Chicomostoc was that nobody was there. No tour buses, no crowds, no noise. Only silence and the occasional soft sound of desert winds could be heard flowing along forsaken steps meandering around pyramids, altars, courtyards, and pathways long forgotten. I looked above at the bright blue skies and white clouds forming the backdrop to this ancient sandstone city and felt a great sense of wonderment. We are each a temple within, a world to ourselves, but as I stood there I felt that we are all nothing more than grains in the sands of time immortal.

As I climbed upward toward the stairs to heaven I knew that under my very feet, looking much the same as it had a thousand years before, others had stood where I stood. What did they think? What did they believe? What was their life like? Were they happy and did they also think of those before them? At that moment I felt timeless. The past, the present, and the future were one. I sat down and gazed out across the ruins and the land before me. I closed my eyes and began to travel within. A kaleidoscope of visions, tranquility, and peace passed beneath me as I soared through my inner world. Some people say that the beginning of time, the actual moment when it all began, is an event that is recorded within each of us. As the soft breeze played across my uplifted face I remembered that Djahal ad Din Rum, a 12th century Persian mystic said, "The breeze at dawn has secrets to tell you, don't go back to sleep, you must ask what you really want, don't go back to sleep, people are going back and



forth across the doorsill where two worlds touch, the round door is open, don't go back to sleep."

I wandered silently through the lost city of Chicomos-toc, once thought to be the place where the Aztecs stopped during their legendary wandering toward the Valle de Mexico. I wanted to learn more but much is left to speculation. The only fact for certain is that over a thousand years and more a thriving civilization once stood here. Arnold Toynbe, a historian, wrote about lost civilizations and said, "When we diagnose the fall of civilizations we invariably find that the cause of death has been War or Class or some combination of the two." History has a tendency to repeat itself and I can imagine another soul standing over the ruins of our civilization two thousand years after our demise asking these same questions: What did they think? What did they believe? What was their life like? Were they happy and did they also think of those before them?



Before leaving I climbed a pyramid and at its summit I lifted my arms skyward and looked up to the sun. I completed a full turn three times. Once looking at the sun, once looking at the lands that lay at my feet, and once with my eyes closed recalling the images I had just seen. Standing atop that pyramid with my arms outstretched I felt the thread pulling me closer toward some sort of collective subconscious within the galactic dust of our minds that occasion-

ally reveals itself to us. When I opened my eyes I realized that I had stood there for some time as the sun had begun its decent below the horizon.

I felt peaceful and calm as I left Chicomostoc. Reflecting upon my solitary experience I thought that there was much truth in the saying that sometimes a story is told as much by silence as by speech.



## CHAPTER 7

# IDOLS AND GODS OF COMPOSTELA

It had been a long day and was now nightfall. I had been following the thread, but wondered if the thread was weaving itself around me. Should I continue to follow it? Should I break the cycle? Should I simply walk away from it? Something had gotten a hold of me and I was restless.

Seven days before my father and I were in Puerto Vallarta walking around the central district and found ourselves on Avenida Libertad. We saw an interesting window display and walked into the Arte Popular Mexico Galleria. It was a fascinating art gallery featuring numerous ceramic and clay plates, large sculptures, and small figures of ancient Indian deities, gods, and spirits. Many of them looked like the antique figures we had seen in the museums of Nayarit, Guadalajara, and Zacatecas. Were they real? Certainly, they

looked real, mysterious, and beautiful. We approached a young lady at a desk in the rear of the gallery and asked if they were antique objects. She smiled and said no, they were reproductions. But, I felt no disappointment. It is the thought that counts and standing

in that gallery, I truly felt like I was among ancient antiquities. I remember an art dealer once telling me that after thirty years of dealing with Chinese antiquities, he had to stop. He said the reproductions were so well done that it became too difficult for him to distinguish the difference. As I gazed upon the items around me I was drawn to a large clay figurehead that was about thirty inches tall. The face was indigenous and above its head, sweeping up from the back and over the top, was a representation of either a snake or



bird, or perhaps a headdress. I asked the young lady about the artist, but all she could tell me was that the artist was from the State of Nayarit and that the figurehead in the gallery was called “Cabezza Palenque.” This figure is one of the most well-known Mayan sculptures, which was found in the Temple of Inscription, in the town of Palenque of the Mexican State of Chiapas. She also showed me a photograph of the artist in his studio standing next to another large figure he was working on. I almost bought the figurehead, as the price was actually quite reasonable. However, I wanted to know more about the artist and his work before I committed to a purchase. The young lady said that the owner would be in the gallery the following week and that she had all the information about the artist.

Several days later my father, our friend Rafael, and I decided to drive to the towns of Compostela and San Pedro Lagunillas to look at some land that was for sale. The route from the coastal town of Guayabitos to Compostela takes



you on a slow, winding mountain road that rises to a thousand meters as it enters Compostela. I have taken that route many times and I was always impressed by the sheer mountainside cliff, which is very prominent as the road begins its downward slope to the valley where Compostela is situated. When we came abreast of the sheer cliff I told my father and Rafael that one day I wanted to climb to that mountain peak because I felt it was a site the ancients revered. One of the things I had noticed is that very old civilizations that worshiped the elements or gods of the heavens, skies, sun, and earth would often construct temples and designate sacred grounds in areas with breathtaking vistas. That imposing mountaintop with its sheer cliff wall was unique and I felt it would be a grand place to commune with the gods.

Upon arriving to Compostela we parked in the town square and noticed we were adjacent to a small museum. I love these small-town Mexican museums because they have a down-to-earth feeling that exudes a genuine atmosphere.

They usually consist of ancient indigenous clay and stone figures, many of which have been found locally. I learned later that the ancient artifacts in the Compostela museum were mostly items discovered in the environs of Compostela and Zacualpan. Before we left I remembered that the unknown artist who exhibited in Puerto Vallarta was supposedly from the State of Nayarit so I asked Rafael to ask the museum attendants if they knew of any local artist who produced ancient clay figure reproductions. They thought about it for a while and said that on the main street there was a woman's boutique, and that husband of the woman running the store was an artist. Although it was not clear as to what type of artist he was, we walked down the main street and entered several women's boutiques to inquire about the artist. There were many boutiques along the main street and not surprisingly we received many blank stares in response to our query. As we stood on the main street trying to contemplate our course of action a lady walking down the street said hello to Rafael. He recognized her as a peanut and coffee vendor who sold her products in Guayabitos and mentioned to her that he was interested in looking at some land that was for sale. The lady then revealed that she had land

for sale and guided us to her home to look at the land. When we arrived I stood aside while she and Rafael discussed the land. While they were talking a car pulled alongside them and I saw the lady go to the car and receive a plastic bag. She showed the bag to Rafael, who then motioned for me to come over to look at it. I was intrigued. Inside the bag were what looked like five ancient figures. The fellow who had handed the bag to the lady parked his car and walked over to us. As we looked at these supposed ancient figures Rafael pulled out one small figurehead and told the Mexican fellow that it was a fake. The Mexican fellow looked at that piece and admitted the piece was not an ancient figure but said that the others were. He then told us the ancient figures we held had been excavated from a nearby mountain he called



Monte de Lima. I asked him to point out the mountain to me and when he did I was excited and felt a great sense of understanding, for it was the mountain range I had previously pointed out to my father and Rafael as a



possible ancient or sacred site. The Mexican fellow, whose name was Luis, then told me he was in the middle of another excavation and that he had found a three-foot statue, which he was going to extract from the ground that evening. He mentioned that it was slow work because he had to be careful not to break the statue. I was somewhat skeptical about his claims considering he had admitted to handing us one fake piece already. I asked him if he would take me to this ancient site. To my surprise he agreed and said he would arrange for some horses to transport us to the site, which would take about an hour to reach. He said at the site we would see a cave with ancient wall paintings; he thought the area was once a burial ground. We agreed to meet him two days later.

After saying our good-byes we asked around to confirm the name of the mountain Luis had pointed out. Interestingly, none of the people we stopped on the street knew the name. However, a rancher talking to a policeman stand-

ing next to city hall told us the mountain was called Monte de Lima. But, a lady in the tourist office said it was called Buenavista. We later learned the imposing mountain was named Buenavista and that Monte de Lima was a location behind Buenavista.

Later, I also learned that the pre-Hispanic inhabitants of this area were referred to as the Senorio de Mazatan. Compostela was founded in 1540 and was the first capital of Nuevo Galicia, a Spanish colonial region. At that time it was referred to as Santiago de Galicia de Compostela.

The main economic activity in this area is farming and cattle-raising. Many of us reside in urban locations, living a contemporary life without much thought that we might actually be living on top of another civilization. And so when we look at an empty field or forest, that is all we see. It is hard to fathom that under our very feet we might be standing over an ancient grave or atop a sacred site.

In Mexico many civilizations seem to have disappeared



*Cerro Buenavista, Compostela, Mexico.*

without any trace or recorded history. Such is the case of the lost city of Chicomostoc, which I had visited near Zacatecas. Much knowledge about ancient cultures, cities, sites, final resting places, and sacred grounds has essentially been lost. If you can imagine, within seventy years of the Spaniards' arrival in Mexico, the population declined from an estimated twenty five million to a little over a million by 1605 because of wars, conquests, and imported diseases. So, it is not surprising that I had met people along this journey who could easily produce ancient artifacts. Although a great deal has been found, that which still lays undiscovered vastly exceeds it. Nevertheless, one must also be wary: Mexico also abounds with a thriving industry of reproductions and fake antiquities.

After making arrangements with Luis, the amateur archaeologist, we again set off toward Compostela's main street in search of the unnamed boutique where there was a woman whose husband might be an artist who possibly was exhibiting his reproductions in Puerto Vallarta. As we continued along Compostela's main street we saw a pink boutique storefront. We entered and were greeted by the shopkeeper and repeated to him our story of searching for

an artist from Nayarit who sold his reproductions of ancient sculptures in Puerto Vallarta. He thought for a while and said perhaps the artist we were looking for was the husband of the lady in the boutique two doors down. He then said that he too had a sculpture for sale. We were not initially interested as he described it as a monkey-like object. He then motioned us to follow him to the back of his store, where he extracted a paper bundle that was hidden behind one of the shelves. He slowly unwrapped the paper and then placed the item in my hands. I was fascinated, because again my assumption was that a monkey-like figure would be some sort of an art reproduction from Indonesia or China, items that are frequently imported to home decorating stores in the U.S. However, what I held in my hands was a nine-inch clay figure of an Aztec, Mayan, or other tribal Indian warrior, or priest wearing a headdress and sitting in a cross-legged position. He had protruding eyes and large lips, which gave him somewhat of a monkey-like expression. The first thing we said to the shopkeeper was that the figure was a reproduction. He claimed it was genuine and said it had been excavated from a nearby site. We then heard someone enter the shop. The storeowner quickly took the figure from my

hand, wrapped it, and hid it behind a shelf. He then put his finger to his lips and told us not to talk about the object.

We left his shop and went two doors down to the next boutique to speak to the woman shopkeeper there, inquiring if her husband was an artist exhibiting in Puerto Vallarta. She looked at us blankly and told us she didn't know what we were talking about. Later, as I reflected upon our encounter with the shopkeeper, I realized that he was most likely the fellow the museum attendants had referred to. This was a small town and everyone is related or knows everybody. There are very few secrets and this shopkeeper was known to sell reproductions. The secrecy he exuded and the drama of his behavior was fabulous and worthy of an Academy Award. But, you never know—just maybe I actually had held the “real deal.” I laugh to myself now when I



recall the event. I so much wanted that figure to be real! This quote provides solace: “I am not a sinner, nor a saint either.

I am but a hypocrite who truly hates deceit.”

The great thing about novels that incorporate actual historical events is they make the fictional part of the story seem so real. This entire area of Mexico was once a flourishing empire of various indigenous tribes. But, what was happening here? Was there a thriving underground industry supplying fake antiquities to tourists in Compostela? Or, were ancient sites being excavated and their contents sold in an underground market?

These events left me perplexed and restless. The lure of finding ancient antiquities and lost civilizations is very powerful and consuming. It is the opium of explorers and the ruin of many men.

Later that night I pulled out my small herbal bag, which I had received as a gift in Guadalajara, and sprinkled several petals of hibiscus and two teaspoons of Manzana into a pot of boiling water. I poured the contents into a cup and drank it before going to sleep. Mohammed said, "Allah had created the dream not only as a means of guidance and instructions, but has also made it a window to the unseen."

I continued to follow the thread in my dreams.



*Artifacts excavated by Luis from Buenavista.*



## CHAPTER 8

# THE OPEN SECRET

Two days later I returned to meet Luis at our pre-arranged location and time. I was really looking forward to the trek up to Monte de Lima on horseback to see the remnants of a lost culture. Unfortunately, Luis did not show up and was not home.

Again, one would think this is the end of the story. But, the thread continued to weave a trail; this time it took me to the town of Las Varas.

Since Luis was a no-show I caught up with my friend Rafael, who was also in town to look at land that was for sale. When I met him he was talking to a local homeowner called The Professor. In our wide-ranging discussion The Professor told us that the Monte de Lima area contained many minerals and that early Spaniards had mined for silver in the region. He also mentioned there was a cave at La Lima,

and that two days before several local fellows had dug up a three-foot ancient statue from there. In some ways I believed what Luis had told me two days previously, but I was also skeptical of the origins of the pieces he had shown us because we immediately recognized that one of them was obviously a broken head from a figure sold throughout tourist shops in Guayabitos. I was not surprised that The Professor knew about the recent find because when Luis showed me the pieces he had done it openly in the street. He also talked freely about his most recent excavation and I am certain his associates did so as well. The primary industry in Compostela is agricultural and it has a small-town feel. Many people are related and their families have known each other for decades. There is still an economic gap in Mexico, which is why there is a great influx of migrants entering the U.S. from Mexico. People are essentially trying to find a better means of life and earn a sustainable livelihood for their families. Consequently, Luis was doing what he needed to do to sustain his family. Excavating for lost treasures was an open secret that many people knew about and accepted. My encounter with Luis was like a great novel incorporating elements of reality and fiction.



Afterward, Rafael and I walked over to the town square for lunch. Later we strolled over to the museum to look at the artifacts again. As I viewed the ancient objects I realized that these displayed figures, which were found in the local environs,

were very different from several of the figures that Luis had claimed to have excavated on Monte de Lima. The figures in the museum were clay-like, smooth textured, and had facial features and bodies that were somewhat rounded. I later learned that these figures were referred to as the “Chinesco” variety because the eyes have oriental characteristics. In comparison, Luis’ figures were rough textured and the facial features appeared angular and more like the type of figures one sees in Mayan or Aztec art. This was also the case with

the monkey-faced figure the shopkeeper had shown us. But there was still a possibility that Luis’ figures were authentic; some people think that the Aztecs may have originally come from a coastal zone not far away from Compostela. I felt no umbrage about these possible deceptions because it was all very interesting observing the behavior and the language used to fool the unsuspecting gringo. Nothing is what it seems, and I have enjoyed this exciting journey because many of the elements of truth are intertwined with deception. Monte de Lima exists and I have no doubt it contains ancient artifacts that are being unearthed regularly.

A good sense of humor is needed to appreciate and understand the unique set of circumstances that each journey presents. For example, when I first set foot in Compostela’s museum, I tried to take a photograph of what I thought was a large marble stone that was about five feet high, which I thought contained an ancient Aztec carving. As I took the photo, one of the attendants rushed over and said no photographs were allowed. She seemed very serious, shook her finger, and was indignant that I had taken a photograph, saying it was forbidden to take photos in all museums. But when I visited the museum on this trip, one of the attendants

mentioned to me that the Aztec stone was a reproduction. "Tap on it," I was told. It was hollow and turned out to be made of fiberglass. I burst out laughing and had Rafael take a picture of me lifting the fiberglass "Aztec Stone." The attendant then told me that the five ancient pottery figures in the museum hallway were reproductions. Rafael and I laughed again when I pointed to the main exhibit hall in a questioning manner. "No, those are real," the attendant said. When I asked her where I could buy similar reproductions she told me they were for sale in the town of Tepic. Interestingly, the day before when the shopkeeper showed us his figure, it was wrapped in a Tepic newspaper. The attendant told me there was also a small local museum I might want to visit in the town of Las Varas.

Driving home I thought: Real or fake, in some cases it makes no difference. As long as a person believes what he has or is experiencing is real, that is what counts. Sometimes, perception is everything. And sometimes, it is better to not burst that bubble. Waldo Emerson said, "Truth is beautiful, without doubt; but so are lies."

I had seen both. It had been a fascinating journey; I decided to continue following the thread to Las Varas.





*Artifact excavated by Luis, from Monte de Lima.*

## CHAPTER 9

# LAS VARAS

On the way back to Guayabitos we pulled into the town square of Las Varas and asked a local fellow in front of the municipal building if he could tell us where the museum was located. The man put his hand to his chin and deep furrows formed across his forehead as he silently thought. After a while he shook his head and told us he was not aware that the town had a museum. After he left I looked at the entrance of the municipal building and saw a sign that read, “Museo.” So much for local knowledge.

Viewing the ancient objects in the Las Varas museum



I could see that the figure shapes and facial features were similar to the figures in the Compostela museum. If the Tecoxquines were the predominant indigenous group that resided about two thousand years ago in the regions of Zacu-

alpan, Las Varas, Compostela, and beyond, it would stand to reason that the artifacts would bear a common style and similarity. Someone once said art is the signature of a civilization. In other words if someone was trying to sell a classical Greek figure as a relic from Mexico it would not stand the test of reason. So, were the figures that the Compostela shopkeeper and Luis showed me true artifacts or were they reproductions out of context from where they were reportedly found? But, then I remembered that the ancient stone carving I saw in Alta Vista was similar to the stone carving I saw in Guadalajara, which was from Machu

Piccu, Peru. In Mexico and further south there were hundreds of indigenous tribes with religions consisting of many common themes. And there was commerce between these



tribes. Consequently, various figures from Central America and further south could very well be found in the Central Coastal regions, such as in Compostela. But, the mystery remained about Luis' archeological treasures and the only way for me to know for sure would be to accompany him during his field expeditions.

As I was walking through town later that day a lady named Erendira started talking to me after I had taken a photograph of a Huichol Indian. She spoke English and we began discussing ancient sites in the local area. She said the whole area was teeming with archeological artifacts and that ancient pottery shards littered the ground in many locations. She indicated that just outside of Las Varas there were several mineral springs, known as Jamurca, that she had once visited. While walking around the springs she found many ancient pottery fragments. She also said that behind the springs there was a small hill where the owner had excavated three large, ancient figures. Erendira said many local people had found ancient figures that they sold to foreign visitors. She explained that many people were just trying to get by and essentially used the money to feed their families. When I mentioned that many reproductions were also

sold as originals she agreed, but said that in small, poor, and dusty villages like Las Varas the figures being sold were originals found in the local vicinity. She went on to say that many of the locals do not speak English and had asked her several times if she knew of any foreigners who would want to buy these figures. These items were not expensive she said; a poor farmer would be happy to accept fifty dollars for such an object.

I believed Erendira for I too have walked upon ground littered with the remnants of the past and had met people like Luis and the Herb Man of Guadalajara.

## CHAPTER 10

# RETURNING TO THE BEGINNING

**I**t had been a wonderful journey, but our time was coming to a close in Mexico. Both my father and I wanted to return to where it all began, the 13 Stations of the Cross. We asked ourselves if it had been fate, circumstance, chance, or a predetermination beyond our control that set us on the course that opened a window to the past for us.

As we slowly climbed the 152 steps toward Pedro's cross we pondered the circumstances that took us on our journey. Upon reaching the summit the splendor of Jaltemba Bay opened its warm and caressing arms to us. We are each a world unto ourselves, but standing under the cross and seeing the natural beauty before my eyes I felt almost insignificant. Norman Vincent Peale once said something to the effect that the mundane world is only clumps of earth

clinging to a rock spinning into nothing, and that we might consider other realities and leave the dust behind. The world is not enough and we should bear in mind that we are only stewards of moments in time, which is all the time we ever really have.

Many people live with the demons of their past, clouded by some wrong or circumstance, perceived or actual, or dreaming of some anointed place in the future. But the time is now and it is ever so fleeting. Unfortunately, living each moment to its fullest is not always possible. As I stood under Pedro's cross I felt I would always be grateful I was able to live the moment to its fullest with my father as we followed the thread of lost civilizations.

Standing atop that hill I recalled my amazement upon learning that most of the indigenous population died within a hundred years of the Spaniards' arrival in this region. History is a teacher and provides us an opportunity for the future. But, I wonder how much of man's nature has truly progressed. Sectarian, ethnic, class, and political violence continues to this day. If we do not learn from our past follies, how can we continue? What shall become of us? Edward Gibbon, a British historian discussing the decline and fall of

the Roman Empire, said, "History ... is, indeed, little more than the register of the crimes, follies, and misfortunes of mankind." Nonetheless, I remain optimistic.

My father and I stood silently for some time before leaving. In honor of the ancients who preceded us at this site we agreed to leave Pedro's cross without using the stairs to walk down the hill. We reasoned that the forgotten ancients did not use these thirteen Stations of the Cross to ascend to this sacred site. We started to examine the natural topography of the land to find the ancient path. I then felt the thread pulling me closer. I closed my eyes and began to visualize myself following the natural slope and inclination of the earth under my feet as it led me to the nourishing sea below. I looked for clues, such as a boulder or large stone marking the way, but mostly I let an intuitive power within me show the way. As we continued down the hill following the natural progression of the land my father saw something lying next to a small boulder. To my amazement I saw an ancient red clay water jug. We went over to examine it and were left momentarily speechless. How old was it? How long had it been there? Did the early inhabitants leave it behind?



When I look at that jug today, I know my father and I equally felt the thread of lost civilizations pulling us, guiding us and revealing itself to us as we journeyed through Mexico. Today, we are better for what we have seen, for what we shared together, and for what we have learned. It does not matter how old the jug is, for it is only a symbol to us. It was the journey shared together that was priceless.

Throughout this journey my father was at my side. He was 81-years-old and I pray to the heavens that I will inherit his heart, soul, energy, and zest for life.

Thanks Dad—I love you.

Now that I am home, sitting alone and holding some of the fragments of the past that my father and I found, I wonder if there is any hope for our collective destiny. I believe there is a reasonable answer and so I will end this story recounting a wise man's observation, "There is no need for temples, no need for complicated philosophies. My brain and my heart are my temples; my philosophy is kindness."



# FINDING LOST CIVILIZATIONS

## PART 2—ONE YEAR LATER



*Fragments from the past, Nayarit, Mexico.*





*Street musicians, Thursday market, La Penita, Nayarit, Mexico.*



CHAPTER 11

## RETURNING TO MEXICO: THE HOTEL ROBLES

JANUARY 2007

**I**t took me three days to drive to the Hotel Robles in Guayabitos, Mexico, from Monterey, California. On the first day I traveled from Monterey to Phoenix. On the second day from Phoenix to Los Mochis, where I stayed at the Cessna Motel. And on the third day I arrived at the Robles at five in the evening.

My father had arrived three days before and was checked into the Robles in the same room that we had the year previous. As I entered Room 31 I found my father sitting at the dining table where we greeted each other warmly. We reminisced and we were both amazed that a year had gone by since we had last stood in that room. My old room

was just as I had left it and we laughed when we saw that the nightstand still bore the coffee stains from our previous residency there and those of countless other guests over the past year. There was a new mattress on the bed, but to our surprise we noticed that the protective plastic that encased the mattress had been slit around the mattress edges and left to hang onto the floor. Perhaps this was an improvement; the year before both our bed sheets had large holes. In the bathroom a towel hook was missing from its base and a twisted, rusted coat hanger was there instead.

The Hotel Robles sits on the Calle Jacarandas, which runs parallel to the Bay of Jaltemba in the town of Guayabitos. It is a rambling three-story concrete-and-brick structure painted white with yellow and red trim. Each rental unit contains one or two rooms, a bathroom, and a kitchenette. There is a central courtyard to which all the rooms face. On the ground floor there are pools for both adults and children. To reach the upper levels there is a steep spiral staircase that ends at the roof.

The Robles caters to Mexican families—my father and I were the only gringos staying at the hotel. During the week the hotel is mostly empty, but starts filling up quickly on





*Old Gringo with his Hotel Robles bed sheet.*

Friday as families from the outlying interior descend on the area to enjoy the waters of the Pacific Ocean. These families often arrive with children, grandparents, and extended family members so the hotel is filled with young and old. During this period the hotel is a kaleidoscope of sounds echoing up the courtyard and bouncing off the concrete walls. The sounds of music, singing, and children running up and down the stairs and frolicking in the pool fills the air from early morning to late night. Additionally, the aroma of home-cooked meals drifts in and out of the rooms as families prepare their food throughout the day. In the courtyard and near the pool, a large parrot often screeches its heart out, frightening and annoying children and adults alike.



The owner of the hotel is Doctor Robles. Transactions at the hotel are in cash and Dr. Robles' pockets are the hotel cash register. And of course, no receipts are given. Dr. Robles also has a small storefront office offering medical services. However, I would be wary to recommend that anyone seek medical care from Dr. Robles as his claims of medical practice seemed somewhat suspect. The hotel handyman was a nice fellow named Elia and throughout the day we heard Dr. Robles yelling at the top of his lungs summoning Elia to attend to some maintenance detail. Elia seemed to take all this in stride and dutifully went about the myriad duties that would take five people to accomplish in the United States.

Our hotel room for the past two years had been No. 31, which was located on the third floor. From our balcony we had a panoramic view of Jaltemba Bay. Waking up in the morning to a view of swaying palms and the blue Pacific always warmed our hearts.

So, the fact that we may or may not have had hot water, that someone was singing or talking loudly on the street below, or that a bus was rumbling under us as 20 families disembarked, or that Dr. Robles was yelling out to Elia, was a small price to pay. There are absolutely no gringo influences



*Hotel Robles' inner courtyard.*



in the operation of the Hotel Robles. This place is truly the flavor of Mexico. My father and I love staying here.

That evening as I drifted off to sleep I recalled that while driving on Mexico Highway 15 and 200 that I had seen one dead horse, two dead mules, and five dead dogs along the road. At times the drive was beautiful and at times I was reminded that driving in Mexico could be a dangerous proposition for the unwary. This was my third trip by car to Guayabitos and I wondered if I was tempting fate and if I would make this journey ever again.

The next day as my father and I walked along the sidewalk on Av. del Sol Neuvo on the way to the La Penita farmers market, we came upon a square cover laying over a circular manhole. Truly a case of trying to insert a square cover into a round hole. We shared a laugh, but thought it was an improvement from the year before, where along the same route we came upon three other manholes that did not have any covers. In one of them we stuck a large palm tree branch to act as a warning marker for the unwary gringo tourist strolling in the evening. We laughed again when we came upon that same manhole, still without a cover and still with a palm tree branch sticking out as a warning marker.



Later that day when we returned from the market we rode home in a local cooperative van. When the van pulled up the side door did not work and the riders filed in through the front passenger door. When I entered there was no seating available and I squatted where the front passenger seat used to be and held onto the seatbelt, which was attached to the doorframe. But, then right behind me a mother and her two children climbed aboard. As we left the driver of the van pulled the passenger door shut by means of a string attached to the doorframe. We all rode quietly and content that we did not have to trek back home under the hot sun and that the ride only cost us fifty cents. To an extent this is the magic of this country. A form of controlled chaos and laissez-faire. It's as if two worlds are simultaneously coexisting. One foot in the past and one foot moving forward. But, most of all I enjoy the spirit, resilience, ingenuity, and humor of the people as they walk between these two worlds.

As my father and I ascended the stairs to our room we were filled with joy knowing the coming days would be full of laughter, good times, and remembrances. But, most of all we knew that our shared time would be bound by the love of father and son.





*Hotel Robles' balcony view from Room 31.*



*Hotel Robles' sunset view from Room 31.*







## CHAPTER 12

# RETURNING TO THE THIRTEEN STATIONS OF THE CROSS

**M**y father and I returned to the stairway on a hill in Guayabitos that led to the thirteen Stations of the Cross where, on the crest of the hill, a large Christian cross had been erected by a man called Pedro. Our journey to Finding Lost Civilizations started under this cross the previous year.

Pedro greeted us as we came upon the entrance to the stairway. He was wearing the same clothes as he wore the previous year except now his shirt was torn and tattered. This time the entrance to the memorial was open and he freely told us to pass through. We climbed slowly and rested along the way all the while marveling at the persistence, endurance, and vision that Pedro pursued in building this homage

to his father.

It was a day with the sun and sky revealing themselves ever so often between the clouds that drifted in from the Pacific Ocean. Upon reaching Pedro's Cross, Jaltemba Bay revealed its beauty to us. It certainly was a glorious place to erect a Christian memorial far preceded by pagan worship at that very spot by the original inhabitants of this region.

As we looked about the ground we both were fascinated by the sheer scope of ancient pottery fragments that littered the ground. I watched the other visitors to this memorial and not one of them looked at the ground with any realization that beneath their very feet was a place long celebrated by inhabitants a thousand years before. What these people saw was only the present, as they looked skyward admiring the cross that Pedro constructed. However, beneath their very feet the past cried out to them to be known. I could hear the ancients cry out: "See me, hear me, and learn from me." But, no one saw or heard anything.

I remembered my visits to the fallen city of Chicomos-toc and again asked myself the same questions I had asked there. On this ground an ancient civilization had been vanquished and I wondered if our own destiny is but a cycle

that has been repeated since the dawn of time. Life and worship had stood here once and was now gone. What had happened to them? Had we learned anything from them? Will others stand here a thousand years from now without any realization that we stood here before them? Will they also repeat our failures? And will they wonder what happened to us?

As I stood there I recalled that years before I had visited a very old and beautiful church in Florence, Italy. While in the church I followed a series of steps that led me to its depths. To my surprise I found that there were ongoing excavations under the church, which revealed that the church had been built upon the ruins of a Roman temple and that the Roman temple had been built upon the ruins of another pagan temple that preceded the Romans. History repeats itself: We share a common thread as we build upon each other. But, what has the past shown to the common man who goes about his everyday life concerned only with the here and now? It seems, very little. Although we have advanced technologically, mankind has remained embroiled in the same basic conflicts that existed since the dawn of ages.



*Pottery fragments on the site of Pedro's Cross.*

As my father and I sat under the shade I said a prayer to the Gods of past, the Gods of present, and the Gods of our future. I was thankful I was able to look at the ground and hear it speak to me, that I was able to look at the sky and see a ray of hope, and that I could look out to the horizon and see a vision of joy and happiness in my heart. The cycle continues.



*Los dos Alejandros in the shade next to Pedro's Cross, Guayabitos, Mexico.*





## CHAPTER 13

# THE TREES AND RELICS OF SAN PEDRO LAGUNILLAS

**I**t is interesting how we often go about our daily life without noticing the beauty or history around us. Two events occurred in the town of San Pedro Lagunillas that reminded me that there is always something to behold around us. This was the third trip my father and I had made to this small farming community. The population of the town is about three thousand people with another eighteen hundred of the townspeople working in the United States. It is an old town and dates back to the sixteenth century when the Spanish settled this area.

On this day we were visiting the town with our friend Rafael, who was considering buying a lot to build a small home. While in town we met the landowner, Andres Torres,

who led us through town as we walked to his hilltop property, which had originally been called Loma De San Sebastian but was now referred to as Loma Linda. Near Andres' property we came upon a small town square, which I had passed unnoticed during my two previous visits. Andres stopped us and pointed out three lone trees in the park. He told us that those three trees were the only ones in existence on this continent that dated back to the sixteenth century and that those trees were the type that existed in Jerusalem during the time of Christ. Interestingly, there is a reference among Christian writings that Jesus was crucified on a cross made of wood from the Terebinto tree. Andres then pointed to a small sign painted in black and white bearing an inscription in Spanish, which explained the origin of the trees. According to the sign the trees were known as Terabit (*Pistacia terebinthus*) and were living fossils. Legend has it that a religious man named Bernardo de Balbuena brought these trees to San Pedro Lagunillas in the sixteenth century. Apparently, during that time this location was the only place in the New World where these trees were able to flourish. Later, I learned that Balbuena was born in Valdepenas, Spain, around 1561, and came to the New World at the early age of two and lived in



Guadalajara and Mexico City, where he studied theology. In 1606 he returned to Spain and earned the degree of Doctor of Theology, and rose within the Church to become Abbot in Jamaica in 1610 and the first Bishop of Puerto Rico in 1620. He was also a poet, and his poetic descriptions of the New World earned him an important position among the greatest poets of Colonial America.

After leaving the park we walked a short distance through town and up to Loma Linda. The vista was breathtaking and provided a panoramic view of the town, the Laguna, Cerro Grande, and the surrounding countryside.



While inspecting the property Andres took me on a walk around the perimeter where a road had been scraped away by a tractor. Along one side of the road I noticed a four-foot adobe wall with some old, intact Spanish roof tiles lying about. Andres explained that these were remnants of the original Spanish settlement in this area. I stopped and picked up one of these tiles and felt a great sense of excitement knowing that I was holding a four-hundred-year-old Spanish artifact.

As we continued to walk I happened to glance down and noticed something irregular on the ground. I stopped



and squatted down to brush away loose earth that partially covered the object. To my great surprise I found a small bottom piece of an ancient Indian clay bowl. I showed the piece to Andres and he confirmed that Indians had lived in this area a thousand years before and that some of the objects found locally were in a small museum in town. He went on to say that some people are always digging around looking for “those” pieces and then pointed to a hole on his property. “They digged here,” he said. Did he care? I asked. “No, I don’t care,” he responded. I then asked Andreas how the “digger” decided to dig for relics on a specific spot on his land.

He explained that the treasure seekers would walk around with long steel rods that they would plunge into the ground. When they would find a soft spot they would probe around and guess that maybe something was buried there. Earlier that year I met an American treasure hunter in New Mexico who used the same method.





That afternoon we visited the town museum and saw numerous intact and ancient clay bowls that had been found in the local area. Many of these bowls contained linear striations on the inside bottom, which matched the fragment I had found on Andreas' land. It was also very exciting to see that these bowls generally matched the painted designs or styles of the fragments I had seen in Zacualpan, Guayabitos, and El Monteon.

Before I left San Pedro Lagunillas I returned to the Terebinto trees and thanked the gods of past and present for revealing themselves to me. A Greek poet once said, "Look and you will find it—what is unsought will go undetected."

My journey continues.

## CHAPTER 14

# SACRED HOT SPRINGS AND DEER ROASTS

**D**uring the course of our travels I learned that the Shaman of the Huichol Indian culture made sacred offerings in lower Alta Vista at a place called the Sanctuary. The Huichols also purified their bodies and spirit in the nearby waters of several hot springs. I was not sure where these hot springs were located until I met Erendira, a local lady from the town of Las Varas. We had met by chance the previous year and in our conversation she told me of several hot springs located just outside of Las Varas at a place called Jamurca, where ancient stone idols had been found.

Deciding to explore that area, my father and I, and Rafael and his Mexican girlfriend, Paula traveled North from Las Varas on Highway 200 until we saw a sign indicating that

there were hot springs in the area. As with many locations that we have traveled to, there were no road signs indicating a direction to the actual location of the hot springs. So, we simply pulled off the highway along the frontage of several abandoned buildings. We then spotted a dirt road or path between two buildings and decided to follow it. The road wound its way through several fields and then traversed a muddy stream. We stopped our car at the stream because as we did not know how deep it was. We saw another car drive by us and it crossed the stream smoothly. We gladly saw that the stream was only several inches deep and so we continued to follow the road for several miles. We eventually came upon a parking lot, which was adjacent to a large pond. We pulled in and set out to explore. I noticed that the area had been developed into a small, park-like setting for visitors and that it had picnic tables and a large cement pool. Upon examining the pool I noticed that natural hot spring water constantly flowed through it. To maintain this constant flow of water a small dam had been built below the natural hot spring, which formed a large pond behind the dam. Within the pond a circular brick enclosure had been constructed around the ground from where the spring bubbled





*Jamurca Hot Springs, Nayarit, Mexico.*

to the surface. From this encasement water flowed through a pipe and into the pool. The spring waters continually flowed into the pool from the pipe and then spilled out through an overflow pipe that was installed in the pool. I looked at the source of the hot spring from the pond shoreline and could

actually see water bubbling up from the earth, steam rising from the water's surface, and smell a hint of sulfur in the air.

Looking upon the site I could clearly envision an Indian village or place of worship adjacent to the natural hot



spring. I started to explore the surrounding area and immediately found ancient pottery fragments lying on recently upturned soil. I then saw a small path and followed it for about a kilometer. During my walk I observed that the hot spring was located in a fertile valley that was being actively farmed. While walking on this path I was surprised to find an ancient tomb marker laying flat on the ground. Farmers cultivating their land had long since cleared most of these tomb markers and their significance had been lost to time. I recalled having once spoken to a ninety-five year old farmer from Alta Vista who told me that his property once contained many tomb markers and ancient statues, but that they had been cleared away to make room for his crops. He explained that in the early 1900's life was hard and that a bountiful harvest was needed to sustain life. He said that not much had changed for him since those early days and that his crops were his life.

When I returned to the hot spring Paula met some of her friends and we shared a meal with them. Before her friends left they invited us to a deer roast, which was being held the following day at their home in Las Varas.



The following day, my father and I and Rafael and Paula went to her friend's house thinking that we would be barbecuing deer steaks. However, when we arrived I noticed that the deer meat was cut into small strips and had been cooked charcoal black over the grill and looked just like beef jerky. We all helped with the cooking and Pepe, who was also a guest and a very funny and affable guy, instructed my father on how to prepare Mexican chili. We all had a great laugh as Pepe sang, joked, and danced around my father while he gave the instructions. When we were served the deer meat it was tougher than beef jerky and was almost tasteless. Nevertheless, it was the company that mattered and we all had a grand time.



Francisco, who was our host, took a liking to my father and I and carried on a full conversation with us in Spanish. My father and I just kept nodding our heads and saying, “Si.” Or, we raised our eyebrows and made facial expressions to show that we agreed or were sympathetic to whatever he said. While I was there I had a little air whistle in my mouth and every time I sat down or bent over for a beer I let out a

whistle. Everyone laughed when I did that and that laughter was what bound us all together. Laughter is truly a universal language. It was a wonderful time and reminded me that no matter the language barrier, laughter, goodwill, overcoming our inhibitions, and trying to understand each other are the keys to harmony and connection amongst all.



*Dad, Francisco, Grandaughter, and me, Mexican deer roast, Las Varas, Mexico.*



## CHAPTER 15

# THE TREASURES OF EL CONDE

**I**t was another sunny, pleasant, and splendid day while Rafael and I ate lunch at a small restaurant situated in front of the Municipal building in San Pedro Lagunillas. As we were preparing to leave we started talking with a young lady sitting at an adjacent table who introduced herself as Yolanda.

During the conversation Rafael mentioned that we were buying land in town to build a house and showed her our plot map. Yolanda said that she wanted to buy behind the town church and said that many farming people in the outlying area found ancient figures on their land when tilling the soil. She told us that her brother, who lived nearby, had recently unearthed some ancient statues.

I was not surprised; I had heard this many times during my travels in Mexico and had similar experiences myself. As we began to question her about these statues she looked

around and in a hushed tone told us that she had several of these objects in her home and that we could see them if we wanted to. She agreed to take us to her house, which was located four blocks from the Municipal building. As we walked to her house she told us not to tell anyone what she was showing us. Also, that if any of her neighbors would ask her who we were, she would tell them we were friends of one of her relatives living in the U.S.

Upon arriving Rafael and I sat in the living room of her home while Yolanda went to the back of the house. I could hear scraping sounds and assumed that Yolanda was pulling her treasure trove out from a hiding place. Several minutes later she called out to us and we went down a hallway and into a kitchen area. Situated on the floor were two large, brown-colored, plastic containers that looked muddy and were filled with rags, newspapers, and old clothes. Rafael and I looked down at the containers as Yolanda started unwrapping the rags. Each rag or piece of clothing was wrapped around an ancient statue. I was astounded at the quantity and quality of the statues. I started helping Yolanda lay several of these figures on the table and felt a real sense of amazement at the recent turn of events and what was



*Yolanda's statues from a shaft tomb chamber...*

unfolding before my eyes.

During my journey and fascination with the ancient history of the Old World, I felt that there was some unseen hand guiding me along the way. I made no great efforts to-



*...from San Pedro Lagunillas, Mexico.*

ward discovery. Rather, much of what I had heard or seen while following the thread of lost civilizations revealed itself to me.





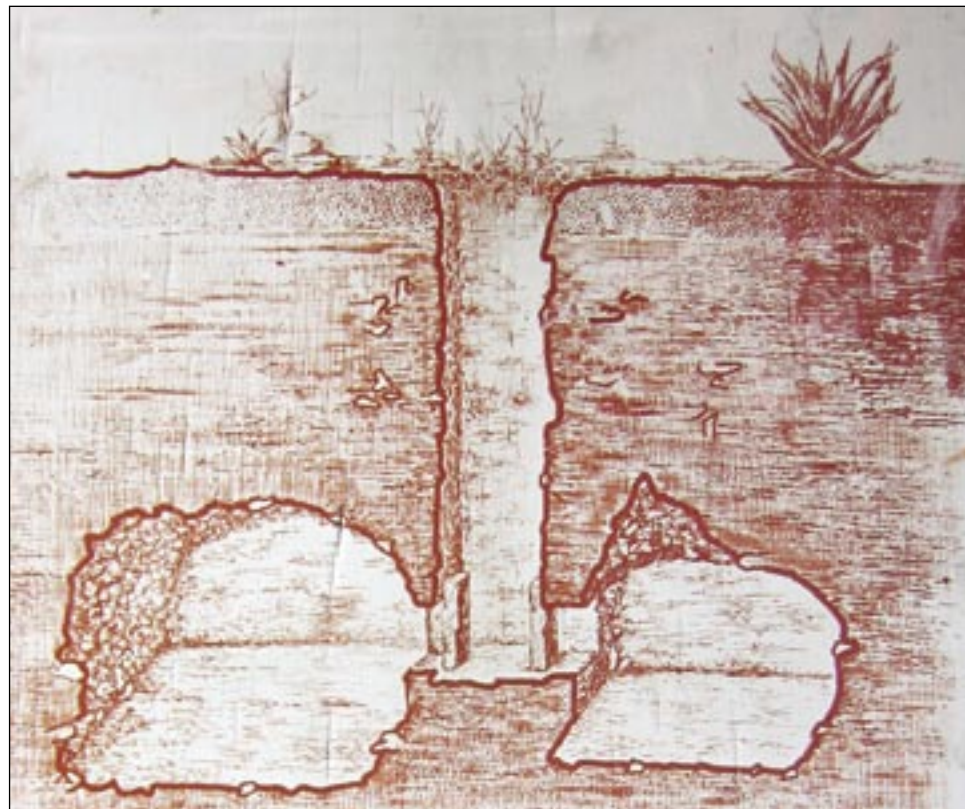
After emptying the first container Yolanda pulled back an old rag from the top of the second container and unveiled its content to me. I was speechless. Laying before my eyes was a thousand-year-old, three-foot, clay statue of a woman. I had seen similar representations in museums and art galleries selling reproductions. But, to behold this original and ancient figure arising from the depths was extraordinary. I bent over and carefully lifted it onto the kitchen table as loose earth from the burial tomb fell from the statue onto my hands and through my fingers. At that moment I felt as if I was holding something divine in my hands.

Yolanda said there were twenty-seven figures that had been unearthed. She explained that her father owned a small ranch near the village of Amado Nervo and had heard a rumor of an ancient burial tomb in El Conde. At that site her father and brother dug down about six meters until they discovered a large slab of stone covering a chamber entrance. They then dug under this large stone and entered a burial chamber, where the bones of four ancients were found. Lying among these bones were the twenty-seven statues, which now lay before my very eyes.

Five days earlier I had visited the town museum, where the curator proudly displayed its artifacts. Yolanda's figures far surpassed the town's own collection in scale and grandeur. I also remembered that in one room of the museum the curator mentioned that the figures we were looking at were actually reproductions from original statues maintained in

other museums.

I discussed what I had seen with my father that evening; he reminded me of some of the grand theatrics we had observed during our journey by those purporting to possess ancient statues. Also, museums themselves displayed figures that appeared authentic, but were in fact reproductions. And



that many a gringo had left Mexico convinced that the five hundred dollars they paid for an “ancient statue” was spent on nothing more than a clever reproduction. So, in a sense the question remains. Were they real? Did I see theatrics on a scale to match a grand performance? Or had I really felt the sands of time spill through my fingers?

I still feel a sense of awe at what I had seen, what I had felt, and what I had experienced. Perhaps, the true value of what I had seen lies in the emotions I felt and had nothing to do with reality, for I am convinced that I truly did see the treasure of El Conde while following the thread of lost civilizations.



*Statues from the El Conde Tomb, Nayarit, Mexico.*

## ANCIENT TOMBS OF NAYARIT

One month after I had seen the treasure of El Conde the following story appeared in the Mexican newspaper, *El Universal*.

### **Ancient tombs found in Nayarit**

*El Universal*

Jueves 15 de marzo de 2007

Mexican archaeologists found more than 100 bodies in 29 different pre-Hispanic tombs dating back about 2,000 years in Nayarit.

Raúl Barrera, who leads the archaeological project for the National Institute of Anthropology and History, or INAH, said most of the remains belonged to women between the ages of 35 and 40.

Archaeologists have not yet been able to determine which civilization the remains are from, although they know the find dates back to the period 200 B.C. to A.D. 600.

The tombs—located in vertical chambers—were in a type of burial ground found in Nayarit, Colima, Michoacán, Zacatecas and parts of Jalisco, but they have not been found in Mesoamerica.

The tombs have, however, been found in Colombia, Ecuador and Venezuela, Barrera said, noting that there may have been cultural and trade links between the regions.

Artifacts from these countries have been discovered on the coast of Nayarit, he said.

This type of tomb may have signified some type of a “return to the womb of Mother Earth,” the archaeologist said.

The content of the tombs varied depending on the social status of the individual, since “they held the belief that in making the crossing to the next life the dead person needed certain items for the journey,” Barrera said.

Archaeologists found figurines of warriors, ball players, pregnant women and animals in the tombs, as well as vessels and various types of jewelry.

Barrera said the sites contained only burial grounds and no dwellings, which may have been located on moun-



tains or other locations at higher altitudes.

Of the 29 tombs, 28 were found at the La Playa site and the other was at Las Lagunillas. Only 12 were still intact, the others having been looted at some point.

The actual digging and recovery work lasted four years.

This article was a confirmation that the El Conde relics I had seen were genuine, as El Conde is a locality of San Pedro Lagunillas. However, what I found interesting is that similar tombs had been found in South America, which led to the hypothesis that there were cultural links between the inhabitants of Nayarit and those regions. This could very well explain why the ancient petroglyph symbols I had seen in Alta Vista were similar to the carving of a stone shown to me in Guadalajara, which originated from Machu Pichu, Peru. The western boundary of Nayarit is the Pacific Ocean and seafaring trade could very well have occurred. The people of ancient West Mexico, whose culture was markedly different from the Aztec and Mayan civilizations, remain largely a mystery. Unfortunately, there are no hieroglyphic text or even oral traditions available to archeologists to aid in the reconstruction of the histories or beliefs of those peoples.

Much is left to speculation; what is known is principally derived from the study of artifacts recovered from shaft tombs, which is why the inhabitants of the State of Nayarit are often referred to as the “Shaft Tomb Culture.”



*Statue from Shaft Tomb, San Pedro Lagunillas area, Nayarit, Mexico.*





*Ancient pottery, San Pedro Lagunillas, Nayarit, Mexico.*

## FALSE IDOLS REVEALED

**T**he previous year my father, Rafael, and I had been treated to a magnificent theatrical performance in Layod's Boutique, a woman's clothing store in Compostela.

Art truly does imitate life and just like a scene from a movie, I remember the store owner of Layod's speaking to us in a secretive, hushed tone with a finger to his lips as he took us to the back of the store. Furtively glancing to his left and right he withdrew a black plastic bag hidden behind a shelf and then extracted a statue, which he claimed was an unearthed ancient relic.

At the time I felt that the statue was probably a fake because the style was not indigenous to the Compostela region. However, I was not certain and thought that there was an outside possibility that the statue or "mono" as the boutique owner called it, was truly a relic.

When Rafael and I entered the boutique this time, the

owner greeted us with a nod of recognition after we asked him if he had any more statues. There were no theatrics now and only a smile. We walked directly to the back of the store, where he retrieved a black plastic bag from his hiding place. With business-like precision he unwrapped ten statues and lined them up on the floor for us. "I'll sell them all for one thousand pesos," he said. We started laughing and I said, "What would I do with ten fake statues?" "Eight hundred pesos," he replied. Business must be bad, I thought. "I'll take four, for five hundred pesos," I told him. We shook hands and made the deal.

Earlier in the year while browsing the eBay site I saw that fake pre-Columbian statues, circa the 1920's, were being auctioned. Even fake ancient statues, if they were old enough, had some value.

Before I left I told the owner I wanted some reproductions that represented ancient art from the local area. "Okay, next week," he replied.

I left smiling. Maybe I could sell one of my "monos" to a gringo treasure hunter. Yes, sometimes a grand tale and dramatic performance are as enjoyable as reality.



*Fake relics, Compostela, Mexico.*

## CHAPTER 18

# THE EL MONTEON TRAIL - FINDING A SHAFT TOMB

To seek and then to discover or learn brings about a type of satisfaction that is central to humans' continued development beyond their origin.

During my journey much of what I had learned or found was accidental. However, as each small discovery was made the desire to learn and rediscover somehow propelled me forward. Strangely, there seemed to be some kind of familiarity to everything I saw and learned and I was not sure why. I found it interesting that the symbol of the Zacualpan and Alta Vista spiral petroglyphs etched in boulders seemed to hold a meaning to this familiarity, which I could not discern. So, it is with great amazement that I am about to recount my tale of how I stumbled upon the site of an ancient Tecoxquine coastal village and the discovery of a shaft tomb. But, first let me provide you with a brief historical perspective.







Hundreds of years ago large trails and small paths connected the ancient villages of the Tecoxquine Kingdom along the Pacific coast of Nayarit. After the annihilation of the Tecoxquine in the 16th century most of these coastal paths became overgrown and the existence of these interconnected villages became lost in time and to nature. Also, since these villages were primarily constructed of wood they were quickly overcome by the cycle of jungle growth and decay. The implements they used in everyday life and evidence of their existence are waiting to be rediscovered.

As previously noted, a Greek poet once said, “Look and you will find it—what is unsought will go undetected.”

My father and I frequently swam in the tranquil Pacific, which washed upon the shores of the small village of Los Ayala. The town sits in a small valley bordered by low coastal mountains to the east, north, and south. At the south end of the beach a small path that rises from the sands and meanders along a cliff that leads to another small beach sitting at the bottom of a mountain stream flowing into the ocean. It was a tranquil setting and the locals referred to this area as Playa del Beso—The Kissing Beach. Set back from the beach and at the junction of where the mountain stream flowed into the ocean is a restaurant called La Jungla.

We had visited this location on several occasions but had never ventured beyond the beach because a small barbed wire fence had been constructed behind the restaurant and prevented access to the mountains. One afternoon while I was lounging on the beach I saw several people descend from the mountains from behind a palm tree and continue along the trail to Los Ayala. Out of curiosity, my father and I went to the palm tree and were surprised to see a small and steep trail wind its way up the mountain. We



decided to follow the trail and began walking up the mountain. Half way up we stopped at a junction and tried to figure out which way to go. I looked down and noticed that the ground was littered with pottery fragments next to a toppled tree. I ran my hands through the soft earth and was surprised at the quantity of pottery shards that lay beneath the soil. We decided to follow the path to the crest of the mountain, where we met two other “locals” who explained that if we followed the path in a southerly direction it would lead us to the village of El Monteon. When we reached the crest of the mountain I noticed there were several crisscrossing paths, one of which headed in a westerly direction toward the Pacific. I also noticed that the crest of the hill was actually a small plateau and that the vegetation was much less dense than on the slopes of the mountain. I was astounded at the number of pottery fragments littering the path near the plateau junction. There were so many on the ground that I literally could not take a step without walking over them.

I closed my eyes and traveled within myself. I was searching, going back, deeper and deeper, trying to get a sense, a feeling, or a vision of where I stood. Slowly, as I traveled back I began to see, to hear, and to feel life. I was

standing in a village and this place had been my home for many generations. From here the ocean and the fertile valleys provided for my family and life was good for us. Yes, this was my home and I felt happy and content. I opened my eyes and started to walk around the plateau in search of a sign indicating that life had once existed here. Stepping around several trees and into a small clearing I saw what looked like a pile of stones. Although elated, I was not surprised that I had found an ancient fireplace. I began to scrape away the soil next to the fireplace and immediately started to unearth pottery fragments. I then went to another location and found an ancient stone implement used to grind corn. Around the slopes of the plateau were many pottery fragments and various stoneware items that apparently had been washed from the plateau. My father and I then started to follow the path leading to another small beach below the village. Looking down at the beach and then back up to the plateau I understood that this site was a natural place well-suited to support and sustain life.

Returning to the plateau I looked at the embankment, which began to slope upward because of the rise in the mountain. I saw pottery fragments embedded in the slope

banks, which rose about five feet from the round. The shards were located from the ground level all the way up to the surface. I was looking at hundreds upon hundreds of years of history. I wondered how many years of history this embankment contained. If one inch of soil represented decades of decaying vegetation, my sense was that the embankment represented a history of several hundred years. Yes, life had once existed here a long, long time ago.

We continued to walk the site and in a small clearing, my father and I found a boulder with a bowl chiseled out from the top surface, which was similar to the type we had seen in Zacualpan and Alta Vista. We then heard voices and decided to see who else was on the plateau. We followed a small rise and as we came closer to the voices we could also hear the sound of shovels and perhaps a pickaxe striking the earth.

We called out several times so as not to surprise the people we were approaching. However, as we came closer we did not hear any response. The plateau became silent except for the sounds of our footsteps. We suddenly came upon a clearing, which was the crest of the rise we had been following. We immediately saw it was an excavation in prog-



ress. I then saw several large stone slabs lying on the ground. Adjacent to these slabs I saw that a pit had been dug and realized this was the site of a tomb. Historically, the people of ancient West Mexico are identified by their burial practice and are often referred to as the “Shaft Tomb Culture.” Many of these tombs consisted of a vertical shafts about 15 feet deep leading to one or more burial chambers below. Some-



*Shaft Tomb cover, El Monteon Trail, Nayarit, Mexico.*

times, the position of the shaft was marked by a stone above the shaft. At the bottom of the shaft, the burial chamber entrance would also be covered by a large stone slab. These tombs were usually located on higher elevations than the villages where the people lived. However, since simpler and shallower sites have also been unearthed it is known that not everyone was provided an elaborate shaft-chamber tomb.

I felt the thread of lost civilizations pulling me again. Why was I here? Was it coincidence, fate, luck, or destiny? Or was it simply an innate urge to seek, to learn, to know, or discover that propelled me further? Regardless, I felt I was on familiar ground and that gave me comfort. I realized that each action led to another action that has a consequence and so, instead of going back, I continued to step forward.

As I neared the shaft tomb I noticed that the earth excavated from the shaft contained many pottery fragments. I also saw several bowls and pottery jugs that were mostly intact. Next to the pottery I saw a small amulet (about two inches in length), which was shaped like a forearm with a closed fist. Lying next to the amulet were two small clay figures, which looked as if they had been damaged during the excavation. Both figures were the head portions of larger





*Shaft Tomb contents, El Monteon, Nayarit, Mexico.*

figures. One figure was the head of a deer-like animal, the second was a human image.

After examining the objects lying near the tomb I stepped into the shaft. The shaft was only about fourteen feet deep. However, at the bottom I could see that a stone slab

had been pried away from the side of the shaft, revealing a small burial chamber. I looked inside, but it was empty. My father and I had apparently discovered an excavation in its final phase—all that was left were the items I have described.





*Standing at Tomb entrance, El Monteon Trail, Nayarit, Mexico.*



*Damaged figure from Shaft Tomb excavation, El Monteon Trail, Nayarit, Mexico.*



Before we left this ancient site I went into a clearing and, as I had done many times before, raised my head to the skies and lifted my hands up to the heavens. I closed my eyes and felt the power of the sun and its energy flow through my body. I turned slowly and began traveling within the deepest reaches of my consciousness until I passed a portal that opened into another world.

As we left this ancient site and followed the trail back to Los Ayala I knew I had walked that path before.



## CHAPTER 19

# SACRED PLACES, THE KINGDOM OF THE TECOXQUINES AND THE APOSTLE MATTHEW

**D**rinking from a coconut shell under the cool shade of the Terebinto trees in San Pedro Lagunillas, my father and I started speaking to several of the old men who gathered there on a regular basis to recount legends, tales, and days of good times past. While talking of the ancient inhabitants of the region one of the old men exclaimed, “The Apostle Matthew traveled in this area and preached the gospel.” I was somewhat astonished at this remark and tried to elicit more details. The old man insisted that prior to the

arrival of the Spaniards, the ancients worshipped Christ and that evidence of this could be found through the symbols of the Sanctuary, which was located in Alta Vista. As was the case with many legends or rumors, the old man confirmed that he had not actually visited the Sanctuary, but that he had “heard” about this when he was a young man.

The previous year my father and I had visited a Tecoxquine sacred site in upper Alta Vista. We had heard of the Sanctuary then, but had not visited it. We were very intrigued by the Apostle Matthew story and with great excitement we agreed that we would search for the Sanctuary of Alta Vista to find evidence of Christ worship by the Tecoxquines.

That evening I decided to do some research before we set out on our quest. I learned that at the beginning of the 17th century a belief emerged among the Spanish that the Apostle Matthew had traveled to the New World in pre-Hispanic times to evangelize the Indians. Apparently, this belief arose after the first written historical reference was made of Alta Vista in the year 1621, which described complex writings, symbols of crosses, and devotion to a Christ. However, a historical time line reveals that after the arrival of the Span-



iard Francisco Cortes Buenaventura in 1524, the scourges of disease, warfare, and slavery led to the extinction of the Tecoxquines. Because the Tecoxquines left no written record and became extinct within just a few decades, little was known about them and much was left to speculation or

myth. For example, when the legend of the Apostle Matthew arose the Tecoxquines had already become extinct, so the true origin of their crosses is only speculative. But because of the number of petroglyphs found at Alta Vista it is believed that this area was their central religious site.



*Spiral and cross at the sanctuary, Alta Vista, Nayarit, Mexico.*



*Cross petroglyph, Alta Vista, Nayarit, Mexico.*

Although my father and I had visited Alta Vista the previous year, all I knew was that the Sanctuary was actually located below the town and adjacent to a stream that flowed from the mountains. Also, that the path to the site was an unmarked dirt farm road that traversed through several farm fields with cattle gates that had to be opened manually. This made our quest all the more interesting.

Several days later while in the town of Las Varas my father, Rafael, and I asked a local cab driver if he knew where the Sanctuary was located in Alta Vista. He told us he did and we set off in search of the Sanctuary. As we took the turn off to Alta Vista from Highway 200 it became apparent the cab driver did not know where he was going. We got lost in a farm field and he admitted he had not actually visited the site, but had “heard” about it. With some persistence, determination, sheer luck, and several miles of dirt road we finally found the site of the Sanctuary.

The Sanctuary is located in a tropical forest setting along a seasonal creek called Las Piletas, which flows along the west side of the El Cop Volcano. At the entrance there is a path that follows the upslope of the creek and ends at the most sacred point of the site. At this location there is a

series of rock shelves and small pools that were carved into the basalt rocks eons ago. Beside these pools sheer vertical walls rise to the mountainside from the creek bed. At this spot the creek bed has an amphitheater appearance and is often referred to as La Pila del Rey, The King’s Fountain. The route from the entrance to the pool area is about a kilometer and all along the path there are numerous petroglyphs. The Spiral petroglyph was consistently carved or etched into numerous boulders along the entire length of the path. I don’t know why, but I never tired of finding a Spiral.

I found two other types of petroglyphs, which had probably given rise to the legend of the Apostle Matthew. One set of petroglyphs depicted various forms of a cross and another one resembled a human stick figure with open arms. This figure is often referred to as the Maiz (Corn) Man, which was also revered by the people of the region who appeared after the Tecoxquine had died out. Since the Tecoxquine no longer existed, each succeeding culture of the region reinterpreted the symbols to fit their own perception, notion, or belief about their meaning, which gave rise to speculation, legend, and myth.





*Sanctuary pool, Alta Vista, Nayarit, Mexico.*





*Maiz Man, Alta Vista, Nayarit, Mexico.*



*Cross petroglyph, Alta Vista, Nayarit, Mexico.*

While at the Sanctuary pool area I decided to explore the area beyond the apparent path and headed through the brush at a right angle from the stream bed. It was difficult to move because the area was dense with jungle overgrowth. Nevertheless, I continued and after a short while I came upon a clutter of stones and boulders among the trees and decided to rest. I leaned against a boulder and noticed there was a bowl-like impression in it that had been covered with dry leaves. I brushed away the leaves and saw that the bowl-



*Christ on crucifix, Alta Vista, Nayarit, Mexico.*

der was similar to one I had seen in Zacualpan, which had striations from the lip of the bowl that ran down its side. Next to the bowl I noticed a four- or five-foot rectangular carved stone that was about the width of a human body. I recalled that the Tecoxquine were known to offer the heads of captured warriors as a sacrifice to their gods and wondered if at this very spot human sacrifices had been made using the rectangular block to spread out a victim on his back with his head hanging over the edge. Using my pocketknife I began



to scrape away the soil at the base of the sacrificial bowl. After digging for about fifteen minutes I unearthed a pottery fragment and a small, dirt-covered circular object. I retrieved a water bottle from my backpack and poured water over the item. Amazed I saw that the object was a human tooth. I sat down, leaned against the sacrificial boulder, and closed my eyes. In my hand I held a sacrifice, an offering to a god. I asked myself how many sacrifices had been made at this spot. How much blood had run down this boulder and stained the very ground I sat on? I sensed fear around me and felt the vibration of pure terror swelling from the ground. I slowly rose from the ground and let the tooth fall from my hand. I kept walking and did not look back until I reached the main trail. How many? I asked. How many have been killed in the name of a god?

As I walked away from the Sanctuary following a path considered by many as sacred, I unexpectedly came upon a Huichol Indian Shaman dressed in native clothes. I don't know why, but as we came abreast of each other I raised my palms to him and with one hand I pointed to the sky and with the other I pointed to the earth. He looked at me and with a nod of affirmation he gently placed his hand on



my left shoulder as he continued on his path. Apprehension from having found the remnants of a sacrifice left my consciousness and I felt at peace. I was soon returning to Cali-

fornia: I knew that destiny had brought me to this place for a reason and that my journey would continue beyond Alta Vista. I learned that Huichol means “Healer of the Earth.”



*Huichol Indian sacred offerings, The Sanctuary, Alta Vista, Nayarit, Mexico.*





*See striation on the side of the bowl. Did water or sacrificial blood run down the side of this bowl?*



Signs explaining Tecoxquine human sacrifice ritual practices, Alta Vista, Nayarit, Mexico.





*Ancient stone artifact found laying on the ground in San Francisco, Nayarit, Mexico.*

## CHAPTER 20

# THE MEXICAN WAY

There are many ironies in life and the discovery of ancient artifacts in the Mexican town of San Francisco is something my father and I will never forget.

The main entrance to this town is bordered on both sides by a series of old warehouses that once housed a cooperative venture involved with food processing. Long since abandoned, these buildings sit idle except for a few that are involved in the production of furniture from local raw wood. The buildings on the south side of the main street sit along a seasonal stream bordered by many large tropical trees that give the area a tranquil park setting. Having driven by these buildings many times, my father and I decided to explore the abandoned site. I stepped off the sidewalk and walked about twenty feet onto the grounds and noticed what appeared to be a round-shaped rock laying among some scattered stone and small boulders. Turning over the stone I was

amazed to see that I was actually looking at the remnant of an ancient stone bowl. These types of bowls predate the use of pottery implements and are several thousand years old. My father and I rejoiced at this small discovery and were amazed that this ancient implement lay on these grounds for hundreds of years as modern man walked around oblivious to its historical significance and origin. In many of our discussions my father often remarked to me, "You see what you want to see." How true, I thought.

We continued into town and decided to follow a dirt road that meandered north along the coast. While driving we came upon a secluded beach and decided to explore it. We collected many shells and found a large dead turtle washed ashore. We then returned to San Francisco and ate lunch along the town's beach. After lunch we walked along the shoreline and found many wonderful colored rocks that had been tumbled by the ocean surf. As we collected these rocks I felt very happy and fortunate that my father, who is 83, and I could experience the same joy in finding rocks, shells, and exploring this country. Since we had collected many rocks and walked a long distance I asked my father to wait on the beach while I went to get the car. I then drove





*Dead turtle washed up on the beach.*

back to the beach and parked my car alongside a house that was next to the beach area where I had left my father.

When I walked around the corner of the house I saw my father laid out on the ground and several people tending to him. I was stunned!

The beach was very hot and when my father walked back to the street, he lost his footing while stepping over a chain across a path and fell shoulder-first. I gasped when I looked at his shoulder; it appeared collapsed and I was worried that he had broken it. Four of us lifted my father and put him in my car. There is a hospital in San Francisco, Hospital General Dr. Reynaldo Saucedo Y Andrade, and I drove us there. My father was in great pain and the drive was slow and difficult because the streets of San Francisco are cobblestones. But when we arrived the gods were smiling upon us as we discovered that Dr. Edgar Plantillas, an orthopedic surgeon, was on duty. He shook my hand and told me not to worry because he would take care of my father. He had my father's shoulder X-rayed and the gods blessed us a second time. My father had no broken bones, but his shoulder was dislocated. Dr. Plantillas said he could set the shoulder "the Mexican Way" or with a general anesthetic, which he said

was painless and preferred. But, he could not do it with a general anesthetic for another five hours because my father had just eaten lunch. Dr. Plantillas also said that he had to leave and would not be available later to reset my father's dislocated shoulder. We knew that if the shoulder needed to be set the best course of action would be to have an orthopedic doctor do it. My father said he would do it the Mexican Way. God, it was just like in the movies. We laid my father out on a table and one doctor wrapped a long sheet around my father's right shoulder. As this doctor pulled the sheet slowly, Dr. Plantillas manipulated my father's right arm straight. I held my father down and encouraged him to relax. It was awful—my father moaned and cried out in pain. I was very worried because of his age and these events were certainly a very big shock to his system. The procedure went on for several minutes as the one doctor pulled while Dr. Plantillas manipulated my father's arm. He was loudly moaning, his body as tight as a bow string, and then I felt and heard a pop. His shoulder had been set.

I really admire Dad's strength and courage—at 83 he did it the Mexican Way!!! God bless him.

However, our story does not end here. One thing leads

to another, forming a chain of events or consequences that seem to defy any logic. Let me explain.

After my father's shoulder was set I left the emergency treatment room to buy some medicines that Dr. Plantillas had prescribed for my father's shoulder. As I was passing the emergency room admittance desk I felt an unseen force, power, or aura to my left. I slowly glanced over to my left and to my utter amazement I saw about seven ancient stone artifacts laying on the floor in a pile along the wall.



One of the items was a stone bowl similar to the one I had found several hours before laying on the ground at the entrance to San Francisco. Once more I felt as if the ancients were speaking to me. The thread kept pulling me closer.

When I returned to the hospital I found out from Dr. Plantillas that these ancient fragments had been unearthed during the construction of the hospital. Later, my friend Pepe told me he had found similar stone artifacts in Alta Vista and elsewhere in the mountains of Nayarit.



I have seen many petroglyphs, ancient statues, altars, tombs, pottery, and Old World implements. However, one of the most memorable pieces I have seen lay there on the

hospital floor. The people of today walk around that piece oblivious to the thought that the ancients are watching them.



*Ancient stone carving, hospital floor,  
San Francisco, Nayarit, Mexico.*





*Old Gringo sitting under San Francisco's patron saint before his fall from grace.*



*Old Gringo recovering after his fall from grace and his "Mexican Way" treatment.*

## CHAPTER 21

# A MYSTIC JOURNEY

One evening my father and I walked through the Guayabitos town square and saw Huichol Indians selling colorful handcrafted dolls, beads, and handbags. I had seen these Indians almost every weekend when I was in town and always stopped to look at their artwork and comment on how beautiful they were. Also, I had bought several knitted shoulder bags from them. They were a gentle and friendly people and we always shared a laugh. Once when I bargained with them I told them I was a poor gringo. We all laughed and whenever we met they would say, "poor gringo," and we would all laugh again.

I remember one time haggling with the Huichols about the price of one of their colorful shoulder bags. They wanted two hundred pesos and I offered one hundred and fifty. We

could not agree on a price and I did not buy the shoulder bag. Later that evening I walked by the town square and saw the Huichols huddled up and preparing to sleep on the ground in the square. When we saw each other we waved and one of them yelled out, "poor gringo." We all laughed and I walked up to them and asked if everything was okay. They said, no problem. As I walked away I thought of how I had haggled over the shoulder bag. Essentially, the fifty-peso difference was only about four dollars and fifty cents. As I was walking home to a warm and comfortable bed I thought about the Huichols sleeping on the ground and I felt very humble and foolish for haggling over a few dollars. That evening my father and I gathered together several pairs of shoes, clothes, and food that we would not take back with us upon our return home. We then took all these items and presented them to the Huichols. I also paid the full price they had asked for the shoulder bag. The Huichols were very grateful for the clothing and in return offered me a small Huichol shoulder bag as a sign of appreciation. We all shook hands and I felt a sense of kinship and solidarity with these people. I have encountered this type of feeling and kinship with all peoples throughout my travels and experi-

ences. I am optimistic that goodness in people is the prevailing characteristic of mankind. Since that day my father and I became good friends with the Huichols in the town square of Guayabitos.

As I was preparing to go back to California I returned to the town square to see what wares the Huichols were selling. I came upon an old and weathered man who was selling several plastic jars containing a white cream. I asked him what it was and he made a rubbing motion with his hand on his arm. He then said, "peyote, peyote." I looked at him and made a motion with my hands indicating I was eating something and said, "peyote." We both started laughing and he motioned for me to sit down next to him. As I sat down he began speaking Huichol and at some point his voice took on a rhythm that sounded as if he was reciting a poem or prayer. He then pointed toward the mountains of Nayarit and made a sign indicating that the two of us should go into the mountains. I nodded my head up and down. It seemed like the old man was the grandfather as there was always a middle-aged man and woman and a beautiful younger woman with the group. The younger woman always had a smile and that night she wore a turquoise linen dress and



*Huichol Indian, Nayarit, Mexico.*



pink shirt. They then all started packing up and put their wares in an old 1960 Ford pickup truck. The son, his wife, and daughter got in to the front seat. The old man got in to the back bed of the truck and motioned for me to join him. I was somewhat skeptical, but everything I had experienced thus far made me feel safe with them. A guidebook I read said the Huichols are the most original and pure people in Mexico. They lived in the isolated mountains of Nayarit and steadfastly maintained their cultural lineage and ways without intermixing with the early Spaniards, settlers, and other tribes of Mexico. There was something trusting about these people and so I climbed aboard. The truck headed in the direction of the coastal mountains in an easterly direction toward the town of Tepic. Somewhere along the road the truck turned off the roadway and started following a single-lane dirt road that continued up into the mountains. We traveled about another half hour and stopped. It was a half moon and I could tell the road ended in a small clearing. I looked around and noticed a small stable housing about six mules. The family loaded their wares on one mule and motioned for me to climb onto one of the mules. When I did they all got on their mules and we started to ascend further along

this path, which appeared to wind itself further toward the top. After another thirty minutes we reached an area that I could best describe as a plateau with a slight depression. The area looked as if it were sitting in the cone of an old volcano. In this clearing I noticed there were about fifteen earthen and straws huts formed into a circular pattern. As I looked around I realized I had entered a Huichol village. I was somewhat surprised, as the Huichol are known to live in isolation deep in the Sierra Madre Mountains. While the husband and wife and daughter unloaded their wares the old man took me around to several huts and introduced me. I saw that the families were all working on handcraft items that were being sold in towns along the coast. My guess was that these Huichols used this small village as some sort of way station from their homes as they went to the coastal area to sell their artwork. The old man then took me over to his hut and motioned me to sit down. I looked around and saw that it was one big room partitioned into cooking, eating, and sleeping areas. As I sat there the mother and daughter were preparing food. Using a mix of sign language, Spanish, English and gestures I tried to tell them that I was from California. When the food arrived there was this interesting

and tasty mix of vegetables, cactus, and fruits or plants that I had never eaten or seen before. Essentially, it appeared to be a vegetarian meal. After we ate the old man motioned me to follow him. We walked through the village to this lone straw hut that had several village men sitting on the floor around a fire. The central point of the hut roof was open and you could look out to the moon and stars. As I sat down next to the old man he began an Indian chant that was picked up by the other men in the circle. As the men were chanting they were passing around a cup made from a coconut shell. As the cup was passed to me I took a sip. It tasted like sour hibiscus tea. As the cup was passed around the circle the chant would pass over to each man in the circle. After several sips of the cup I began to feel very relaxed and somehow connected to everything around me. I could hear every sound around me, from the chanting to the crickets outside. As the cup continued to be passed around I began to realize that I was also chanting with the men in the room. I don't know how or by what power, but at one point the chant passed onto me. I closed my eyes and became one with the room and the Huichols. To this day I can't tell you what I chanted, but I did chant in congruence with the circle around me. Later,

as I opened my eyes I felt transported through that open ceiling. I felt as if I were standing next to the Milky Way and that I could reach out and touch the half moon next to me. I was floating in the skies, I was one with the universe, and I was at peace. I closed my eyes again and felt drawn back down to the hut. When I opened my eyes I was laying on a straw mat. Kneeling next to me was that young and beautiful Huichol girl. In her hands she held some sort of smoldering grass or moss, which she gently blew onto me. The smoke drifted over my body, which she then fanned across me. I lay there in a trance amazed by her beauty. I wanted to be with her, to feel her, to touch her, to caress her. I stretched out my right arm toward her and turned sideways. She took my hand and laid with her back to me. With my left hand I reached over her and pulled her in close to me. I then fell asleep. I awoke the next morning alone and not certain whether I had dreamed last night's event. I decided that it did not matter whether the evening was real or imagined. I felt wonderful and grateful for the experience.

I was now ready to return home.

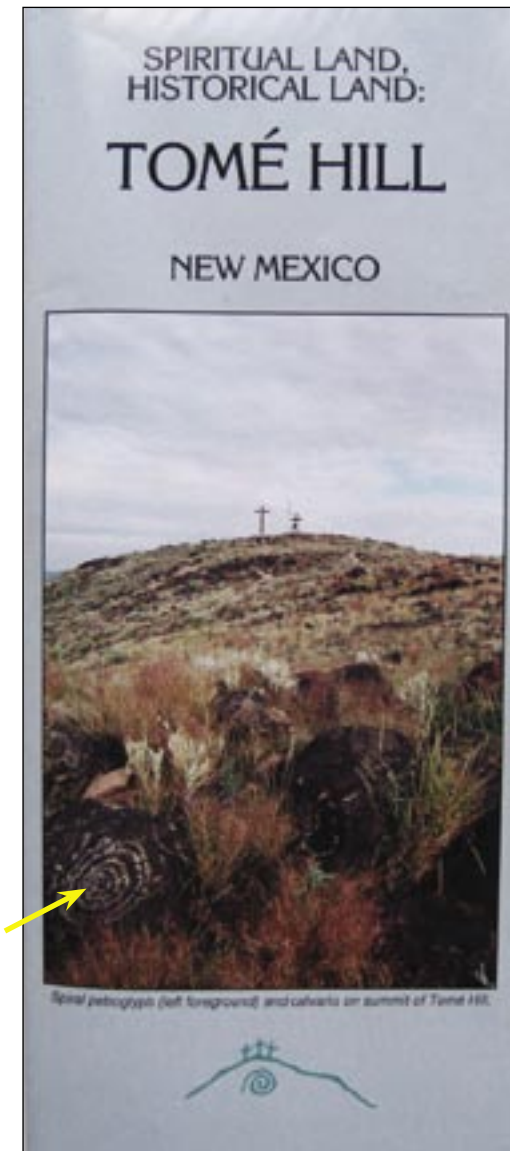
## CHAPTER 22

# THE COLLECTIVE UNCONSCIOUS

In August 2007 I was in the town of Socorro, New Mexico, when I stopped at the tourist information office and picked up a brochure describing a place called Tomé Hill. I was immediately astonished to see that the Zacualpan and Alta Vista Spiral petroglyphs of Mexico were also depicted on a boulder in the foreground of the brochure for Tomé Hill.

Were the Tecoxquine Indians of Zacualpan and Alta Vista, Mexico, related to the Indians who lived in Tomé, New Mexico? What was the meaning of the Spiral? Just as I had experienced in Mexico, I felt that thread of lost civilization again weaving its way through me. There was a presence in my subconscious and I was embarking upon a journey that seemed preordained. It mattered not whether my eyes were open or closed. I was walking a path I had never followed before, but yet it was all so familiar. What would I find? What would I learn?

So I went in search of the Spiral on Tomé Hill.





*Tomé Hill, southern slope.*





Tomé Hill rises 500 feet above the Rio Grand Valley and is bordered to the east by the Manzano Mountains and the Rio Grande River to the west. The hill is a prominent point in this valley and is considered a religious and sacred

site. There is a shrine at the top of the summit with three large wooden crosses erected in 1947 by the Brotherhood of the Penitente. As I climbed Tomé Hill along its southern slope I felt as if I had followed this path before.



*Crest of La Tomé Hill.*



*Tomé Hill—western view.*

When I reached the summit I recalled the feeling of serenity I had experienced when I found the Tecoxquine sacred site at Alta Vista and when I stood upon the crest of a pyramid in Chicomostoc. Mankind throughout the ages has selected prominent sites as places to commune with their gods. And Tomé Hill was certainly such a place. As I had done before in other sacred places I raised my arms to the

skies and gave homage to the unseen force that had brought me to this location. The horizon opened up to me and I could feel the power of the sun upon me and felt my spirit rise up to the heavens. I turned to the north; I turned to the east and then to the south and then to the west, coming full circle. I felt the power of life flow through me and rise above to the skies.





*Handprint petroglyph, Tomé Hill.*





*Tomé Hill, eastern slope.*

On Tomé Hill I did not feel the heat of day, nor did I feel thirst. I was filled with energy I could not explain except to say that some force was drawing me to the Spiral. Possessed, I searched the western slope, and then the southern and northern slopes. At each point of the compass I felt stronger and my pace quickened. The thread of lost civiliza-

tions was pulling me closer and closer and I felt a gathering sense of excitement as I started running from boulder to boulder along the eastern slope. And when I saw the Spiral, a burst of joy and happiness released itself from within me as I have never felt before. The thread of lost civilizations had brought me to this place.

Throughout this journey I have felt some force or power guiding me, revealing itself here and there. I learned that archeologists from the University of New Mexico have discovered more than 1,800 petroglyphs on Tomé Hill. Among several of the common petroglyph types encountered included symmetrical crosses, human figures, circular designs, handprints, spirals, and geometric designs. Interestingly, a small number of petroglyphs are isolated circle elements thought to be more than 2,000 years old. At the time these first petroglyphs were chiseled or pecked into rocks on Tomé Hill, the desert culture of the region was greatly influenced by the arrival of several innovations from Indian groups to the south in what is present-day Mexico. However, the most fascinating aspect of Tomé Hill was that the site also contained petroglyphs similar to those in Alta Vista, Mexico, which were also estimated to be around 2,000 years old. Although I felt as if I was on a path of new discovery, much of what I felt also seemed very familiar. My sensing was that my journey would end when the Spirals would reveal themselves to me.

It is an interesting journey when one finds that what he believes to have discovered actually has been previously



*Spiral, Alta Vista, Nayarit, Mexico.*

revealed by many others. The author Max Firsch said it well when he observed that it's precisely the disappointing stories, which have no proper ending and therefore no proper meaning, that sound true to life. After leaving Tomé Hill I learned that the connection between the Tomé Hill Spiral





*Spiral petroglyph, Zacualpan, Mexico.*



*Hohokam Indian Spiral, Phoenix, Arizona.*

and the Alta Vista Spiral was very mundane. Apparently, ancient Spiral petroglyphs, drawings, and paintings abound throughout the world and in many disparate cultures. Spirals have been found in Europe, all the Americas, and elsewhere.

Although I was initially disappointed I still could not explain the energy I had felt as I embarked upon my quest. Nor could I explain my compulsion to follow as the thread



*Spiral in Italy.*

of lost civilizations pulled me forward. My dreams, my visions, and the familiarity I felt when I walked these sacred places was truly genuine!

As I continued my quest I was reminded of author Kurt Vonnegut who said that he wanted to stay as close to the ledge as he could without falling over. Out on the ledge you see all kinds of things you can't see from the center.

I too wanted to peer over the edge!





*Spiral in Scotland.*

Carl Jung theorized that in addition to our immediate consciousness there existed a layer of the unconscious that was inborn and not derived from personal experience. This deeper layer he called the “collective unconscious,” which he believed was a system of a collective, universal, and impersonal makeup that was identical in all individuals. He used the term “collective” because he believed that this part of the unconscious was not individual but universal; in con-



*Spirals in Ireland.*

trast to the personal psyche, it has contents and modes of behavior that are more or less the same everywhere and in all individuals. Another theorist observed that all cells come from other cells and that as these cells evolved they conveyed a collective and instinctive memory. And that each individual both draws upon and contributes to the collective memory of the species.

Visual patterns that seem to be universally found in children and in man's earliest artwork consist of grids, dots, **spirals**, zigzags, circles, and curved lines. This implies that symbolic imagery is part of the ancestral mind embedded in our collective unconscious.

My experience of familiarity was not unique. One author wrote, "We have all some experience of a feeling, that comes over us occasionally, of what we are saying and doing having been said and done before, in a remote time—of our having been surrounded, dim ages ago, by the same faces, objects, and circumstances—of our knowing perfectly what will be said next, as if we suddenly remember it."

I had a vision and I had a dream and I felt the pull of lost civilizations. Although I believed the collective unconscious provided a meaning to the familiarity I felt as I followed the Spiral, I still thought that another revelation was awaiting me.

As writer Kahlil Gibran said, "Trust in Dreams, For In Them is The Hidden Gate To Eternity."





*A journey's end, Cabo San Lucas, Baja California, Mexico.*



I am nothing more than an accidental tourist and I have not followed a course I charted. Every time a revelation occurred to me during this journey I was truly surprised.

Interestingly, about a month after seeing the Spiral on Tomé Hill my vision became clearer when I visited Faces of Mexico, a small ethnic art shop in Cabo San Lucas, Mexico. There I came upon a copy of a female figure found in a tomb from the Shaft Tomb Culture of Nayarit, Mexico. When I saw the figure a sense of calmness overcame me and I smiled with joy, for I finally understood.

**The Spiral symbolizes creation and infinity. It is our conception, birth, life, and the human spirit. It is the beginning and a time without end—the Spirit of Mankind.**

In the end, the only thing I can say with certainty is that I am still amazed by this experience and do not fully understand it. I can only speculate and remind myself that when thinking in terms of the vast cosmos—the significance of the individual man—adds up to nothing, except to that individual—during that brief instant that he existed—if he even existed in the being or essence he thought he did.





# FINDING LOST CIVILIZATIONS

## THE RIVIERA NAYARIT

### EPILOGUE



## EPILOGUE: RETURNING TO ZACUALPAN

The thread of lost civilizations has woven its thread upon the path that my father and I have followed for several years. We have often walked upon the ashes of the past with a sense of familiarity and it has always pained us to see this thread become thinner and thinner as we have seen in Zacualpan, Chacala, Guayabitos, and elsewhere. As the coastal zone of Nayarit from Puerto Vallarta to San Blas develops, many of these ancient sites have fallen prey to oblivious progress and developers who devote themselves to the god of profit and the commercialization of what is now known as the Riviera Nayarit. Let me recount my visits to the towns of Zacualpan, Chacala, and the Luz Del Monde petroglyph site.

My father and I traveled with great anticipation to Zacualpan to return to the sacred site where the lost Tecoxquine civilization had once thrived. I was eager to visit the ancient petroglyphs and worship spots, which were situated at the bottom of a small hill below Pablo's cow pasture located behind the town cemetery. As we drove up to the area we immediately saw that a large metal coral had been constructed adjacent to Pablo's pasture and that acres of land had been scraped clear by a bulldozer to make way for new homes.



We parked and followed a path downhill that paralleled the old cow pasture. At the bottom I started looking for the very large boulders upon which the ancient Tecoxquines had carved their symbols.

As I walked the base of the hill I could not find most of the petroglyphs I had seen the previous year. I then started to notice that in those locations where the petroglyphs once stood the ground seemed freshly dug. It began to dawn on me that some of the ancient boulders had been ripped from the earth and taken away. Where these magnificent boulders once stood was now a vacant site. I searched several times and was very dismayed to see that many of those wonderful and ancient petroglyph carvings, which had been there for more than a



thousand years, had finally fallen prey to thieves, ignorance, or greed.

I saw a barbed wire enclosure below the metal coral where an ancient ceremonial site once stood. I crawled through the wire and was again dismayed to see that much of the site had been destroyed. The previous year many boulders with ancient carvings and ceremonial bowls surrounded this site; it was easy to envision it as a sacred place. But all that remained were three bowls that had been carved into a natural stone formation. The essence of the site had been desecrated. I stood there in disbelief and shocked silence. I recalled the amazement and joy I felt last year when I had been shown the site. Now, all I felt was disappointment and sadness.



As I followed the circumference of the hillside I was again deeply dismayed to see that another ceremonial site had been seriously damaged to clear the area for the town's small sewage pumping station. However, I understood that what was important to the people of this area was basic sustenance. Taking care of life in the here and now was the first priority.







*Petroglyph site below Pablo's cow pasture, Zacualpan, Mexico.*

Unfortunately, the history of this once-thriving and ancient community is lost. What is known is that the original people of this region were known as the Tecoxquine or Tequectequi, which translates to “Head or Throat Cutters.” This name apparently derived from the Tecoxquine religious practice of using warrior prisoners for sacrifice; their severed heads were later offered in a ritual ceremony to their gods. They inhabited an extensive region covering the entire southern coast of the State of Nayarit and the neighboring

coastal and mountain regions of Jalisco. They were mainly farmers, fishermen, salt producers, and traders in cacao and cotton. The Tecoxquine were organized in a series of villages under the control of Teuzacualpan in the Chila Valley, the modern-day town of Zacualpan. Apparently, their commercial links allowed them to establish intensive trade, which reached the southern portion of the State of Sinaloa and to Michoacan in the southeast.

I walked amongst the ancient fields of Zacualpan and I came upon an excavation site for a new home. Lying there amid the soil of past and present I saw the cycle of time immortal. In the midst of the debris lay an ancient tool used to grind corn; lying next to it was a broken Coca-Cola bottle. Like the Spiral petroglyphs of the Tecoxquines, a conver-

gence of the past, the present, and the future lay before me. On this site a new generation will rise from the ashes of the old. And again I wondered if, a thousand years from this moment, will they know us or would someone ask, "Who were these people?"



## EPILOGUE: RETURNING TO CHACALA



During my wanderings I learned that ancient petroglyphs were located in Chacala, which sits upon a natural bay and a fertile valley. My father and I set out one day to learn where several of these petroglyphs were located. I met a local fellow there and asked him if he knew

where the town petroglyphs were located. He told me that they were once located at the north end of the bay at a high point that looked over the bay and town. However, he also mentioned that except for one or two boulders, the petroglyphs had been excavated to make way for development.

My father and I then drove down to the wharf below the office of the Port Captain and asked a local fisherman if he knew where the petroglyphs were located. He gestured over to the north point of the bay, which was located several hundred yards from the wharf. I noticed that the shoreline along the northern tip of the bay was below a hill and contained many large boulders. I then started clambering over these boulders toward the north point and saw that the hill-top appeared to have been leveled with heavy machinery. When I reached the north point I stopped below a large boulder and immediately noticed an ancient Spiral petroglyph etched into it.

Higher above the Spiral, I saw some sort of plaque that looked like an open book, which appeared to have been attached to a boulder just below the crest of the hill. I could also see that freshly tilled earth covered a portion of the





plaque and that it was partially damaged. I then climbed atop the hill and was dismayed to see that the site had been leveled to make way for building sites. Nearby, a man sat alone next to a boulder and appeared to be somewhat distressed. When I asked him if he was okay he nodded and went on to say that since his childhood he had visited this site, which he considered spiritual. After his wife passed away two years ago and in accordance with her wishes, the family had placed a small memorial at this site to honor the place she deeply cherished. But now it had all been desecrated. The land had been excavated, the ancient symbols

destroyed, the memorial to his wife damaged, and the spirit of this place ruined.

As I left the hilltop I remembered the ancient summit of Tel Megiddo in Israel. There, researchers have found evidence that the city upon that mound had been destroyed and rebuilt about twenty-five times. The cycle of life continues, but I found the Chacala hilltop somewhat disturbing. In one swoop, evidence of an ancient civilization—including a present-day memorial to a loved one—had been simply swept away.





## EPILOGUE: LA LUZ DEL MUNDO

Situated on the other side of a hill to the south of Guayabitos is the small town of Los Ayala. It was from Los Ayala that I followed the El Monteon Trail to the Playa del Beso and then onto a hilltop plateau where I found an unearthed tomb and signs of an old civilization.

The road out of Los Ayala is Highway 208 and it meets Highway 200 at a “T” intersection. Across from this intersection on the east side of Highway 200 is a church called La Luz del Mundo, which means, The Light of the World.

Much of the coastal region of Nayarit is open to land speculation and business ventures to develop it into a favored resort destination—The Riviera Nayarit. Consequently, land around Guayabitos, Los Ayala, and the surrounding area is rapidly being commercialized and sold to resort developers, speculators, and the baby boomer generation from the United States and Canada. So it is not surprising that history and evidence of a lost civilization that has sat dormant for



many years is now in jeopardy.

La Luz del Mundo archeological site is such a place.



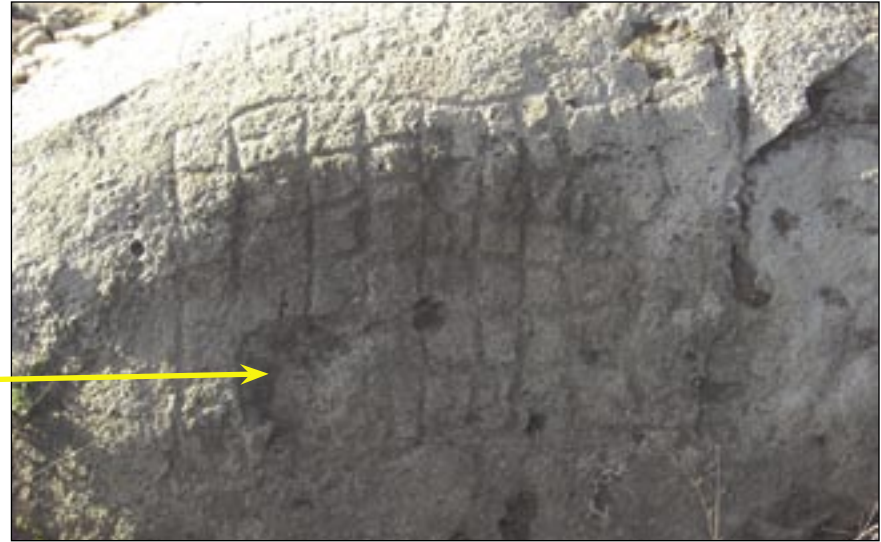
*Construction around petroglyph boulders.*

*Petroglyphs next to home construction.*





*New road for development through a petroglyph site.*



*Petroglyph.*



*Petroglyph site being cleared and sub-divided.*



*New subdivision homes on site.*

In March 2008 we celebrated my father's 83rd birthday in Guayabitos. Somehow we both sensed that this was the end of our four-year journey into Mexico following the thread of lost civilizations. As my father and I close this chapter in our lives we thank the gods for letting us hear their whispers and opening our eyes to the beauty that lay beneath our feet. And we shall always be ever so grateful for the wonderful people of Mexico we met during our journey. But, most of all I felt a great sense of contentment that not only was I able to follow the thread of a lost civilization, but that I was also fortunate enough to have rediscovered the love of a son for his father.





## PETROGLYPH PHOTO LOG



*Sun Spiral, La Luz del Mundo site, Nayarit, Mexico.*

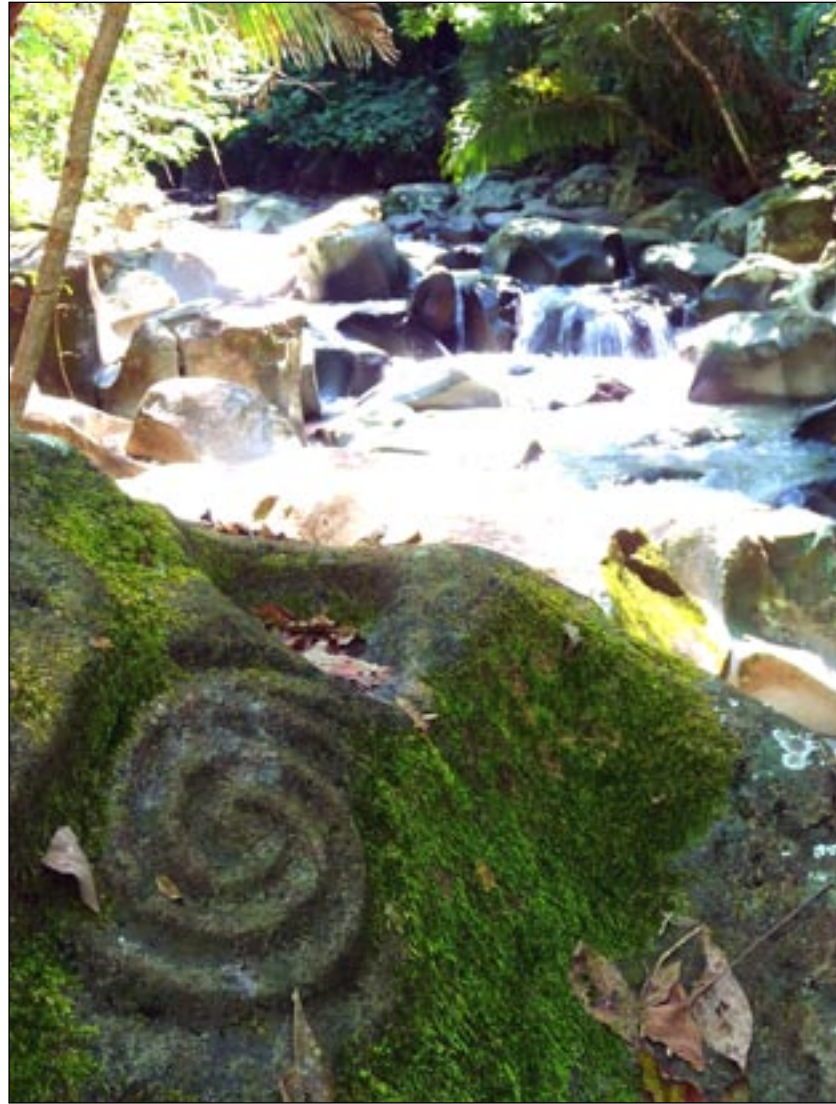


*The work crew: Leucracia, Old Gringo, Pepe, and Angel—preparing to find ancient burial sites, armed with Lay's Potato Chips, digging implements, and watermelon. Alta Vista, Nayarit, Mexico.*





*La Luz del Mundo site, Nayarit, Mexico.*



*Alta Vista, Nayarit, Mexico.*





*Crocodile petroglyph, Alta Vista, Nayarit, Mexico.*



*Armadillo petroglyph, Alta Vista, Nayarit, Mexico.*





*Connecting Spirals, La Luz del Mundo site, Nayarit, Mexico.*



*Spiral representing falling star or comet, La Luz del Mundo site, Nayarit, Mexico.*





*Bowl and squares, La Luz del Mundo site, Nayarit, Mexico.*

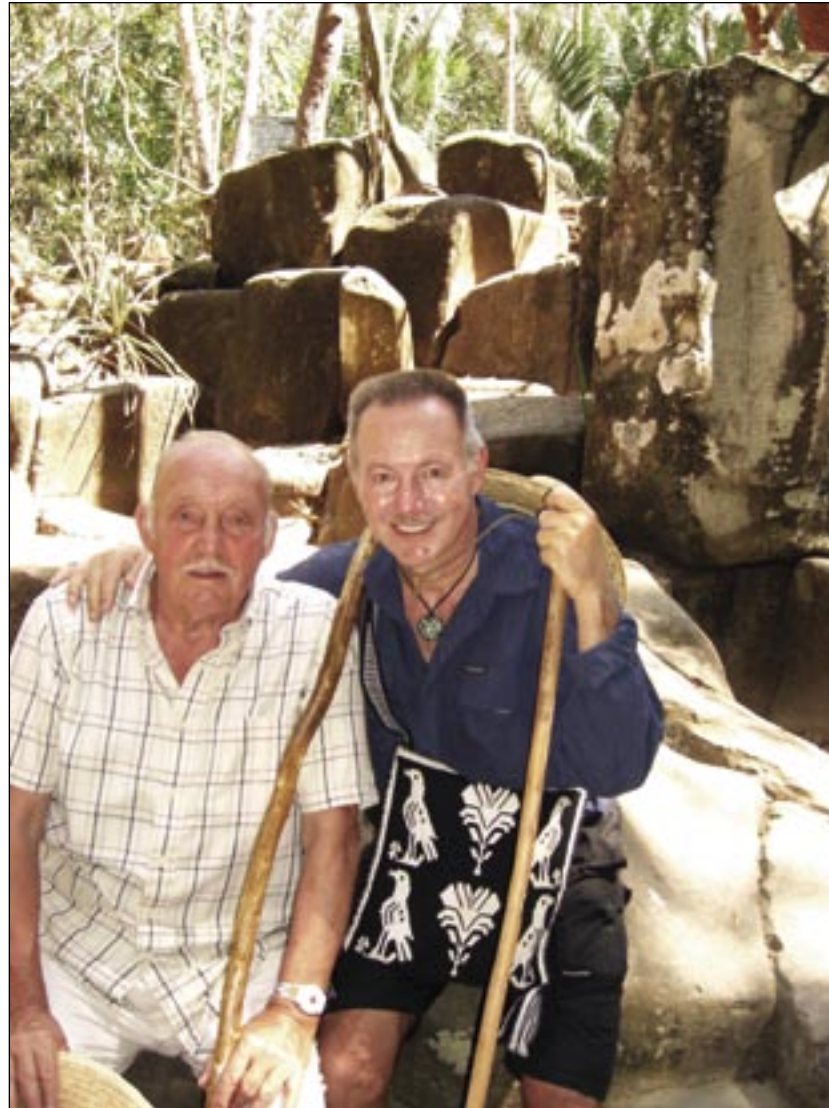


*Spirals and circular grooves, possible star chart, La Luz del Mundo site, Nayarit, Mexico.*





*Ram or deer with spiral horns, Alta Vista, Nayarit, Mexico.*



*Los dos Alejandros, Alta Vista, Nayarit, Mexico.*





*The Spiral, La Luz del Mundo site, Nayarit, Mexico.*

What became of them? And what will become of us?

The Universal Law of Karma ... is that of action and reaction, cause and effect, sowing and reaping. In the course of natural righteousness, man, by his thoughts and actions, becomes the arbiter of his destiny.

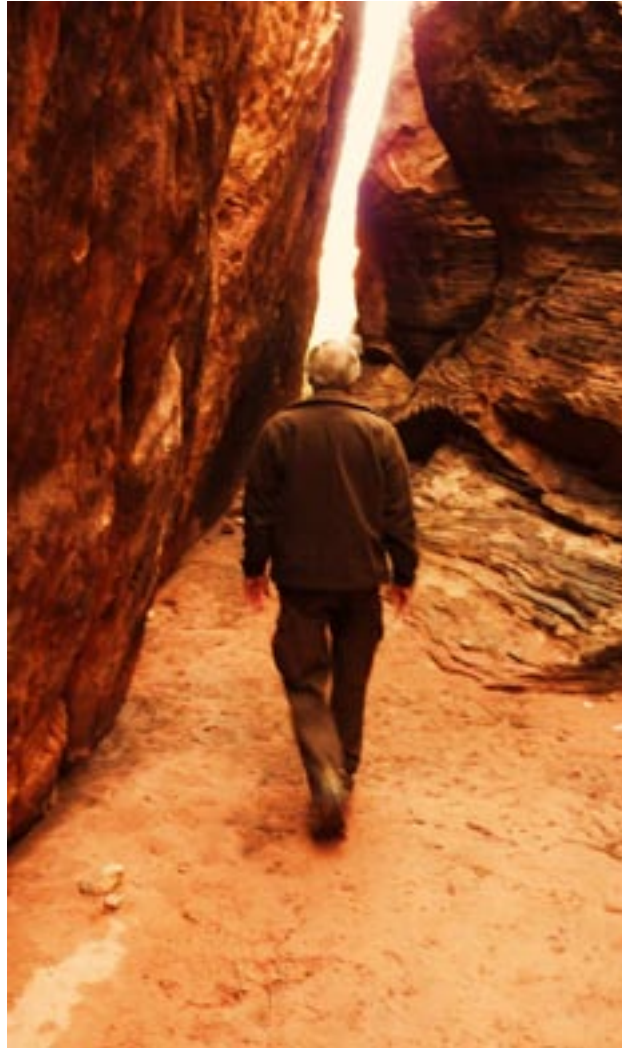
*Paramahansa Yogananda*

*Remember, We Are All Connected*





*My Journey Continues* 





# FINDING LOST CIVILIZATIONS

This story begins with the discovery by a son and father of several ancient artifacts under a cross in a small Mexican coastal town, and chronicles their journey to learn about a lost civilization that left behind these artifacts. As clues are revealed, interesting local natives are encountered, ancient symbols and artifacts are uncovered, and the bonds of a father and son are rediscovered. Intriguingly, the meaning of one symbol reveals a universal connection between all mankind.

TRAVEL IN THE STATE OF NAYARIT, MEXICO

HISTORY OF THE TECOXQUINES INDIANS

DISCOVERY OF ANCIENT ARTIFACTS

DESCRIPTION OF LOCAL PEOPLES

FOLLOWING THE SPIRITUAL PULL OF SYMBOLS

REDISCOVERY OF THE BOND  
OF A SON AND HIS FATHER

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