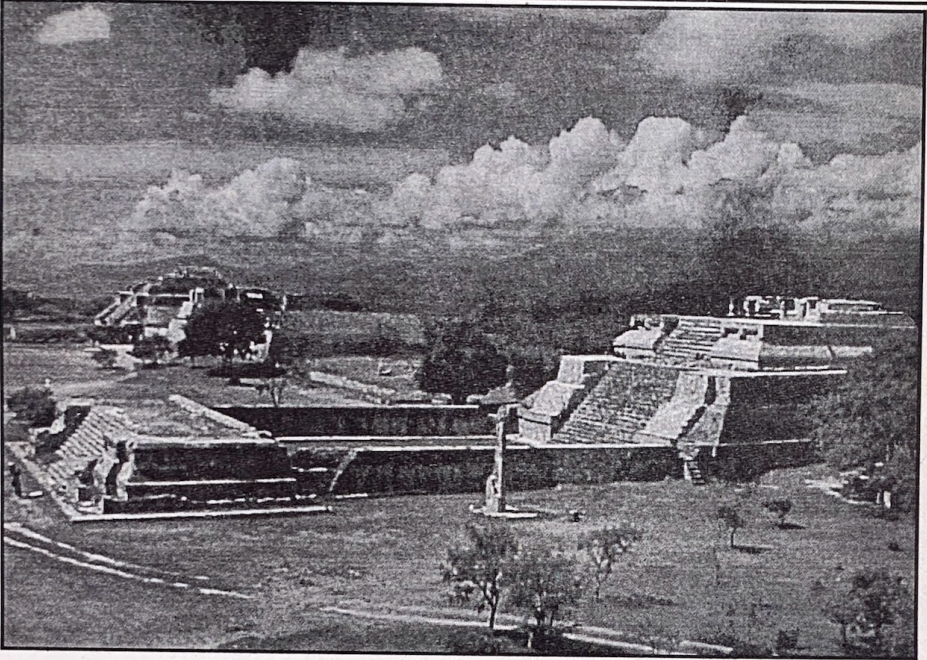




Oaxaca Times

Volume XIV No 207 EXCAVATING OAXACA • MARCH 2006 www.oaxacatimes.com



Teposcolula Yucundaa: The Next Monte Alban

Have you been talking to rocks lately? Didn't think so. But archaeologist Ron Spores has been doing that for many years already, and rocks have been telling him some interesting stories.

Late last month, Dr. Spores guided a small group of lucky visitors to the pre-Hispanic town of Pueblo Viejo Teposcolula Yucundaa, where excavations are currently taking place and seem to be in the process of uncovering what could, and quite possibly will, be a unique World Heritage

Site. Spores is the leading archaeologist of the team that, with funds from the government and the Harp Helu foundation, is conducting the excavations.

Yucundaa is located in the hilltop near the present town of San Pedro y Pablo Teposcolula, in the Mixtec region of Oaxaca. For many years, the ruins of what once was a very important City-State were covered by tons of soil and the real grandiosity of the place had been gradually forgotten.

Much of what we know about ancient Mesoamerican civilizations is what archaeologists interpret by studying their settlements; documentary information in the form of codices is limited and, when available, subject to interpretation. Early colonial documents, despite being allegedly produced with the help of the locals, have sometimes proved to be inaccurate or completely spurious (like the Nican Mopohua, a saga that narrates Virgin Guadalupe's apparition, written in Nahuatl, by a local,

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Ambulante

Initiated by rising film stars Gael García Bernal and Diego Luna, 'Ambulante: Gira de Documentales 2006,' is a national tour which will be screening 19 contemporary documentaries, both national and international, up and down the country. The programme will be screened at Cinépolis in Oaxaca between the 24th and 30th March.

Mexican hot-shots García Bernal (*Motorcycle Diaries*, *Amores Perros*, *Y tu mamá también*) aged 27 and Luna (*Sólo Dios Sabe*, *The Terminal*, *Dirty*

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Focus



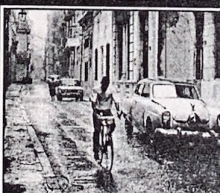
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Learn Spanish at the ICC: Oaxaca's Best Language School

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but based on the popular recreations of that tale, which was already a popular legend by the time Nican Mopohua was written - see December's issue).

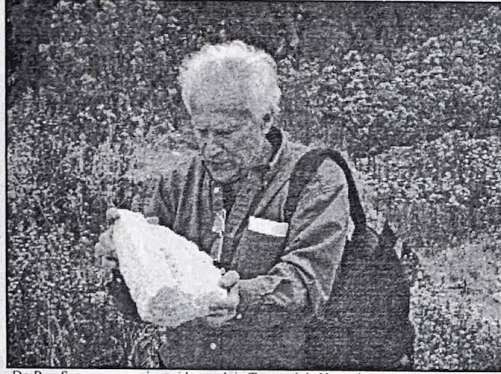
"We have a lot of documented information about the Mixtecs and their way of life, but we need to find archaeological information to support it," said Dr. Spores in a conference prior to the visit. Archaeology works pretty much like forensics, if no physical evidence in support of a certain theory is found, then it can't be considered as proven fact.

Archaeology can provide both diachronic and synchronic analysis of old civilizations: When excavating, it is possible to find different layers and know then the successive stages of development. Also, by uncovering one specific layer, it is possible to know what kind of constructions were developed during one particular stage and to know how its inhabitants' lives were organised (In the case of Yucundaa, the remains of where once stood the centre of a City-State (the political form of organization of the Mixtecs) with all of its impressive religious and civic buildings).

Spores also emphasises that the excavations of Yucundaa include not only the site (the religious and civic buildings and the royal abodes), but actually the whole city. The project aims to uncover and preserve some of the common-class housing which is another unique feature of the

place. "We have found remains in an area of 290 hectares but we think the whole city might cover up to 600 hectares."

The Mixtec social class system had the form of a pyramid, pretty much like our societies, but their neighbourhoods, so to speak, reflected this condition. The higher classes lived on the hilltop and the lower



Dr. Ron Spores conversing with a rock in Teposcolula Yucundaa

classes lived on the slopes. But the team's interest is to further investigate the common class; Dr. Spores explains, "By investigating these houses, we expect to obtain more information of the whole social structure, and not only the ruling class."

Already such investigations have brought about important findings. Stone-carved figurines were found in hearths inside the popular housing. This could suggest that the noble Mixtecs, afraid of

being tried by the inquisition, hid them among common people and would escape the stake if the figurines were found. Of course this is interpretation and further investigation would confirm the theory or simply leave the question unanswered.

What is known through documents and proved in-situ is that the original city was abandoned around 1530 as a consequence of a terrible pestilence. The people, both locals and some Dominican friars, moved down to the ball of the hill abandoning forever the hilltop palaces and the housing on the slopes. Today, only one man, Don Carlos, and his family, live on the hill and practice the ancient farming techniques of the original inhabitants. Another unique factor of the site is that the team has managed to obtain permission from the authorities for Don Carlos and his family to continue living in the same place. In Dr. Spores' words, "We are *dando vida*, giving life, to the site."

It is difficult to tell exactly when "the next Monte Alban" will be open to the public; thousands of archaeological working hours and equal amounts of bureaucratic paperwork are still needed, but the Pueblo Viejo Teposcolula Yucundaa is already an important source of new information about our past.

¿Which School?

I learned to speak Spanish in just a couple of weeks - and it was fun!

Just off Alcalá, tucked away in a peaceful courtyard, is the ideal setting in which to start sussing out your verbs from your pronouns *en español*.

The teachers are inspiring, switched on and know their language inside out. You can really tell they've been carefully selected for the ICC rather than just shown how to follow a text book. The learning approach is very hands-on, emphasizing the importance of actually speaking Spanish from day one. The teaching technique focuses strongly on the functional and communicative aspect of the language leading you carefully through the various aspects of grammar.

You also get the chance to meet Mexicans and reinforce what you've practiced in class by getting involved with the cultural integration component of the programme. Taking advantage of the optional home stay placements, field trips and lectures will help you build up your vocabulary at the same time as learning about life and culture in

Mexico.

I got to make the most of my stay in Oaxaca through the organised workshops; weaving with indigenous women, Mexican cooking classes and salsa dance lessons. The staff are on hand with advice about where to get a good lunch locally to the best beach resorts. They are so helpful and friendly - you'll hardly need make use of the free internet access.

It's always difficult trying to find the right school in a country or even a city to which you have never been before, and even though the ICC charges 50 cents more than the average school, I want to emphasize average, it really is the quality you're paying for.

The ICC is also impressively linked with a number of enterprising community initiatives: 'OTZoom' photo competition and the 'Mano de Obra' short story contest. It truly does live up to its name of being the Instituto de Comunicación y Cultura

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Ambulante

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Dancing: Havana Nights) aged 26 may well have been picked up by Hollywood talent scouts and more importantly by some of the world's most talented independent film directors, but they have certainly not forgotten where they come from. Whilst fulfilling pressing work schedules, they have spent the last half year promoting this recently initiated project.

Set up by Canana Films in cooperation with the popular multiplex chain Cinépolis and the Festival Internacional de Cine de Morelia, the organisers of the Ambulante tour say one of its main aims is "to put members of the public in contact with national talent they may not yet be familiar with as well as filling the existing gap within current commercial distribution."

Ambulante hopes this carefully chosen set of documentaries will reach a new audience of viewers, give life to up-and-coming projects, as well as uniting artists, musicians and cineastes with the general public by offering an altogether different cinema-going experience. As well as providing entertainment, García Bernal (pictured left) hopes that the chosen documentaries will "arouse dialogue, create controversy and mobilize the public mind to find a new way of perceiving reality that goes beyond the limits of current physical and mental boundaries."

During last year's Cine Morelia festi-

val, Luna (pictured right) noted that in a country which doesn't have a huge cinematic output of its own, Mexican documentaries are very relevant. He explained that the tour initially came about as an idea for a way of promoting the award-winning documentary *Tropic of Cancer*, an exploration of various families who survive by hunting animals which they sell on the

not received commercial distribution in Mexico.

Dirdamal, 24, was born in Monterrey and has been involved in several human rights activities, including an immigrant project in Veracruz and an educational project with the Tarahumaras, an endangered indigenous group in northern Mexico. With photographic grace and a sophisticated understanding of his subjects Dirdamal displays moving footage of his subjects as they search for the sustenance their native countries can't provide, facing the same intimidation and corruptive danger in Mexico as they will eventually find north of the border in the United States, when and if they ever get there. While exposing hypocrisies in Mexican culture and without taking a political stance, *deNADIE* confronts the viewer with a story of immigration we only thought we understood.

Other documentaries, which will be screened as part of the cycle, include *Grizzly Man* by Werner Herzog, the story of Timothy Treadwell's sensational life living among the grizzly bears of the Alaskan wilderness. *XV en Zaachila* by Rigoberto Perezcano is set in a town with: a family, a daughter, a ball to be killed, eight godfathers, a party that lasts 2 days plus 850 guests ... all for one girl's quinceñera. *More details at: www.ambulante.com.mx*

Vanessa Gray



freeway, which García Bernal was very keen to support.

A major part of the programming has been dedicated to Mexican documentary, with the aim of giving a platform to the up-till-now, very much under-promoted national talent in this genre. Included within the programme, which is made up of 12 Mexican and 7 international documentaries, is first-time filmmaker Tin Dirdamal's *deNADIE*, which won the Audience Award for Documentary at this year's Sundance film festival but has still

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Lila gets Down to Business

Mexican musicians raise funds for indigenous women



Lila Downs (left) sings with the Mariachi to raise funds to support the further education of Oaxacan women (right)

Last month, Lila Downs teamed up with famous Mexican musicians Eugenia León and Celso Piña to raise much needed money for the Guadalupe Musalem Scholarship Fund. The organiser Casa de la Mujer said it was a great success, 7000 people attended, but despite the record-breaking numbers they had not raised as much as they hoped to.

Members of the crowd say that it keeps getting better and better. This year the concert started off with a remarkable vocal performance from León, followed by Downs' infectious energy, combining rhythm and movement with her Latino Grammy winning voice, and was wrapped up with the electrifying cumbia sounds of Celso Piña's accordion.

The fund, created in 1995 with the purpose of supporting young indigenous

women who lack financial resources, is a part of an initiative by Grupo de Estudios sobre la Mujer 'Rosario Castellanos,' a non-profit organisation founded in 1977 with the aim to create a fairer and more equal society that respects women's rights. The education and empowerment of women is the key in developing a stable and self-sufficient society and this initiative is a welcomed response to the desperate situation of many indigenous women in Mexico.

The scholarship is awarded to those who show a regular willingness to be of service to their communities. A good academic performance in school also helps to secure a place. 'Without the support of the fund, these women would not be able to finish high school,' says the Casa de la Mujer. 'The recipients get 1800 pesos per month, as well as mentoring from the organisation.

Since 1996, 29 young women have received the scholarship. The results have inspired women to respect their future as well as support their communities. 'One of the beneficiaries echoed this outlook when she said that this will 'give me the opportunity to get an education and give something back to my home in Oaxaca for future generations.'

Guadalupe Musalem Merhy, a friend of the organisation became ill and for that reason an account was set up to help with her medical treatments. After her death, 25,756 pesos remained and the group decided to use this to start the scholarship fund. The fund now depends on donations and the annual concert given by Downs and other selected musicians.

For more info about the Lila Downs concert and how to donate to the Casa de la Mujer visit: www.casamuj.org

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The country initially struggled, and people even complained about government officials not being able to understand English, the state language, but Mandela was planning for the future. He knew that if blacks of this generation could get into decision making positions, then blacks of future generations would not need to fight over something as 'ridiculous' as equal rights. Bachelet's thought process is no doubt the same and her judgement will hopefully not be made by men or women, but that age-old sexless judge we have all come to know as time.

Despite the advances in women's rights since the turn of the 20th century, the glass ceiling is still an all too familiar reality for women around the world. Unfortunately, Women's Day still has to use itself to draw attention to the inequality suffered by women, but we should look forward to a time when IWD doesn't carry any political, social or religious connotations, but is celebrated solely to rejoice the beauty of what a woman IS.

To celebrate International Women's Day, Cine Pochote is hosting a programme made entirely by female directors for the entire duration of March (see p13)



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