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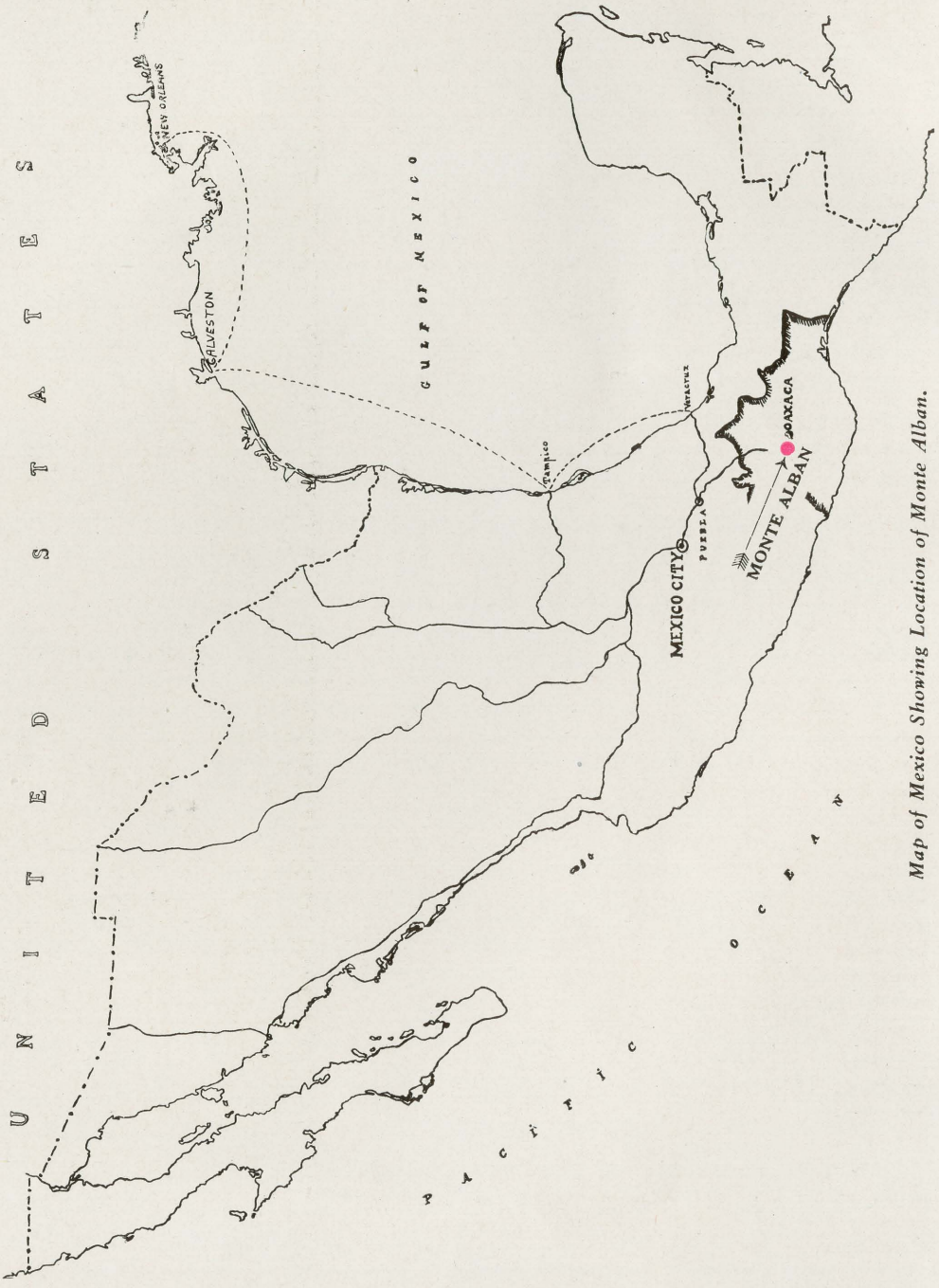
*The*  
MONTE  
ALBAN  
TREASURE



A CENTURY OF PROGRESS  
CHICAGO • NINETEEN THIRTY-THREE



U N I T E D S T A T E S



Map of Mexico Showing Location of Monte Alban.

# THE MONTE ALBAN TREASURE

. . . **T**he Monte Alban Collection shown for the first time in the United States, at the Century of Progress Exposition at Chicago, is the richest archaeological find on the American Continent, as important to this hemisphere as is the tomb of Tut-Ank-Amen to the Old World.

This treasure provides an insight into a highly advanced culture that was developed on this continent centuries ago among the *Mixtec* Indians. Surprisingly, the tomb which held these tokens of an almost prehistoric civilization also reveals some aspects of an even earlier cultural epoch—the life of the *Zapotecs*.

All the treasures which compose the Monte Alban (*mön-täy-äl-bön*) collection were found in Tomb 7 on Monte Alban, in the state of Oaxaca (*wä-hä-kä*) which is far down in the southwest section of the Republic of Mexico. The great discovery was made in January, 1932. The explorations were sponsored by the Department of Archaeology of the Secretariat of Public Education of Mexico, with the financial aid of private enterprises and under the personal supervision of Doctor Alfonso Caso, Director of the National Museum of Archaeology of Mexico.

## *A Description of the Treasure Tomb*

Two models of Tomb 7, built to actual scale, have proved intensely interesting to visitors at the Chicago exhibition. One model is a reproduction of the entrance to the age-old tomb with a portion of the building that was erected above it many centuries ago; the other is a replica of the interior as it appeared after the excavation.

These models illustrate the architectural plan of the tomb. There is an open vestibule or ante-chamber, then a chamber covered with a flat stone roof, and a second chamber covered with an angular roof. These two chambers are united by a narrow passage spanned by a stone lintel. The total length of the tomb is 20 feet, the width 5 feet, and the height at the highest point is 6 feet.

The architecture, the hieroglyphic writing on the walls and the manner of construction of Tomb 7 are decidedly of *Zapotec* origin. They offer ample proof that the tomb in which were concealed the treasures of the *Mixtecs*, was used for burial purposes in the still earlier *Zapotec* era. Relics of a *Zapotec* burial were found—small clay bowls, a fragment of a funeral urn made of black clay, and stone objects, all inside the tomb. Three *Zapotec* funeral urns found at the entrance probably belonged with the *Zapotec* burial. They were in fragments. It is believed that in the Zapotecan burial ritual there was a definite significance in thus breaking the urns and throwing the pieces into the tomb.

Tomb 7 was used in the later Mixtecan period to bury the skeletons of nine individuals, which were interred with the treasures that compose the collection on exhibition. The skeletons with the treasures, were placed on an earthen ramp that filled the bottom of the tomb, rising toward the entrance.

The different colorings in the scale model show the levels of the successive earth fills in the tomb. The stone with hieroglyphic inscriptions probably was used by the *Mixtecs* in building the roof of the first chamber, but apparently the *Zapotecs* had intended to use it to close the tomb entrance.





Gold Breast Plate. It Probably Represents the God of Death.

### *Treasures of Exquisite Execution*

The discovery of the treasures of the *Mixtecs* in Tomb 7 is one of the most important events in archaeological history, for the perfection of workmanship and the exquisite detail and aesthetic value of their design shown strikingly in the many gold objects, are quite comparable to the work of the master goldsmiths of any age since then.

Though the total weight and the number of gold objects found in the Egyptian tomb of Tut-Ank-Amen are greater than the volume of objects found in Tomb 7 on Monte Alban, the *Mixtec* treasure shows refinement of technique and delicacy of craftsmanship far superior to any revealed in the Egyptian collection or by other archaeological exploration.

### *Emperor Charles V Recognized the Art of the Mexican Indians*

At the beginning of the sixteenth century when the Spanish conquerors came into contact with the Indian tribes of this continent, the art of the native goldsmiths had reached a degree of perfection that astonished the European invaders who acclaimed the superiority of the native Indian artistry above that of the contemporary European goldsmiths. And it was during this period that Benvenuto Cellini, in Florence, Italy, reached fame for his masterpieces in gold.

So it is understandable that even so long ago gold work, feather mosaics and precious stones from America were sent to European rulers and were found worthy of place in the exhibits of such a famed collector as Emperor Charles V of Spain; ancient treasures gathered in the old churches and convents of New Spain were placed side by side with the masterpieces of the Renaissance goldsmiths in Europe.

But the Conquerors took home loot which to the superstitious and imaginative Europeans of centuries ago, was more important than mere art. Jade, they thought, was a cure for kidney and liver trouble. The name, jade, means *kidney stone*. Mixtecan art in jade is abundant. There are fine samples in the Monte Alban collection. And tradition says that King Phillip II of Spain wore a gorgeous Mexican jade bead suspended around his wrist by a chain wrought from the gold of the *Mixtecs* of Mexico, to protect himself from liver trouble. Just such beads are shown in this collection.

### *Alabaster, Jade, Rock Crystal, Obsidian, Gold Work*

The objects included in this collection, aside from their incomparable artistic value, have the scientific worth of having given us data hitherto undiscoverable on the clothing, the writing, the adornment or the otherwise recorded life of one of the most highly cultured peoples of Pre-Columbian America—or for that matter, of the world at that time.

An art strong and exquisite, and perhaps new to our supposedly more erudite civilization, has revealed itself in the gold adornments and carved jades, the rock crystal and obsidian and in the delicate, strong and beautifully elaborate carvings of jaguar bones. Refined and exquisite taste characterizes this work, and no flaw mars the detail of its execution. A sober simplicity shows in the alabaster vases, in the decoration of the bracelets, in the combination of pieces forming the necklaces.

Even if the motifs are ritualistic and if the *Mixtecs* used their gods and symbols to decorate finger rings, earrings and pectoral plates, the religious idea was not an obstruction. It did not dull nor hinder the artistic inspiration which created above everything an era





Rock Crystal Bowl, the Largest Ever Found on the American Continent.

of pure art on our continent, which stands by itself despite the fact that its symbolism is not yet understood; an art characterized by the strength of its design and strikingly suggestive of the pure lines of the pyramids.

### *A Surprising Cultural Life Is Revealed*

The aesthetic value of these jewels, however, is not more surprising than the cultural revelations they imply. With such goldsmiths and carvers of miniatures, these people must have had just as excellent craftsmen in other fields of art; they must have been comparably advanced in thought. The magnificent painted codices and ceramics which they left indicate a high refinement. Unfortunately little of their poetic, scientific and religious conceptions is left except the few and brief narratives of the missionaries and conquerors. It is the archaeologist's task to unveil the mystery hidden by the ages—to recreate the spirit of these peoples, and to make known the secrets of their marvelous civilization.

Centuries of civilization and long phases of culture must have passed before a people could have attained such mastery of art as is proved in this exhibition. Only step by step is man capable of rising to cultural heights that would inspire the creation of such exquisite pieces. The beauty of these treasures is demonstration of the high degree of cultural attainment of the old *Mixtecans*.

The discovery of Tomb 7 will aid to a better appreciation of the Pre-Hispanic cultures in America and will help to prove that man on this continent, by his own efforts and without contact with the cultures of the old continent, could rise from his first status as nomad hunter to become successively agriculturist, founder of empires, and builder of cities; and at the same time could develop an art capable of leaving us "such rich things and so artistically made that they seem more like a dream than made by human hand."

### *Their Processes Are Followed Today*

The gold and silver objects were made by two processes. The most important pieces were cast, and those made out of thin plates of gold and silver were hammered.

The casting was done by the process known as *Cire Perdue*, still used by dentists for gold mountings. This process consists of making a center of clay and charcoal powder upon which the object to be reproduced is modeled in wax. This is covered with a second coat of clay and charcoal powder. The wax is then melted by heating and the gold fills up all the spaces the wax had occupied, thus reproducing exactly all the modeled details. The old Mexicans used to break the cast, taking out the gold jewel to polish it and to file away any slight imperfections. They used a similar process to form silver and copper objects.

The hard stone objects, such as jade and rock crystal, were carved by means of grinding powders which shaped and polished them. Probably they also used sapphires with which they were familiar. Some of the jade, rock crystal and obsidian pieces show an ability to work these hard stones exquisitely.

The carved jaguar bones in the exhibit also show a great ability and an admirable technique in execution, comparable to that of the best Chinese and Hindu ivory carvers. The hieroglyphics carved on these bones, and other objects tell us that the jewels were made by a native race of Indians who lived in the western part of the area that is now the state of Oaxaca, in Mexico. A few relics of this racial group were already known before Tomb 7





*Reception Car on the Mexican Presidential Train.*

was discovered—paintings, gold and jade jewels and wood carvings, all evidencing high artistic achievement.

The time of the burial of the jewels cannot be placed exactly, but, judging by their style it could not have been later than the 15th century.

In sending to the Century of Progress Exposition the objects found in the richest tomb of North America, the Mexican government wishes to demonstrate how man on this continent by his own efforts could rise to the high degree of culture shown by the exquisite work of the *Mixtec* goldsmiths and miniature sculptors. The display was made possible by the courteous invitation extended by President Rufus C. Dawes of the Century of Progress Corporation, to the Mexican Government. The President of the Republic of Mexico ordered the collection sent to Chicago on the famous Presidential train which was specially built a few years ago by the Pullman Company of Chicago, and which gives a fine setting in the modern art of North America, for these gems of an equally impressive North American civilization that preceded us by many centuries.

For their efficient cooperation in making this exhibit possible we are greatly indebted to the National Railways of Mexico, the Pullman Company of Chicago, the Missouri Pacific Lines, the Texas & Pacific Railway and the Chicago & Alton Railway.

## *Description of Objects on Display*

Cases marked with odd numbers are to the right, those marked with even numbers to the left.

### CASE NUMBER I

*Upper Section:* Gold pectoral necklace, made of gold beads and rattles.

*Central Section:* Five gold pectoral plates, representations of Xochipilli, (*sō-shē-pēl-yē*), the god of love, the god of flowers, etc. The head of the god is represented as coming out of a pheasant head. A gold squash made of hammered gold used by priests to carry a mixture of tobacco and plant juices. The mixture stimulated and helped the priests to endure the long periods of fasting before ceremonies. A gold fan holder made of filigree and hammered gold, representing a serpent. The fan was completed with colorful, Quetzal feathers or plumes.

*Lower Section:* A necklace made of jaguar teeth. Probably belonging to the *Felis Concolor* Linn family. The green tooth was found in the silver bowl.

### CASE NUMBER II

Display of seashell objects; the seashell comes from both the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. The display comprises necklaces, finger rings, bracelets, elliptical plates used to represent human eyes on mosaic mask, and pieces of mosaic. The largest piece of seashell, in the central section, represents the sky with the stars. Oaxaca pearls are famous.

Tecalli bowl, the largest ever found in Mexico. Tecalli is a gypsum stone found in the northern part of the state of Oaxaca. It is somewhat comparable to alabaster.

### CASE NUMBER III to the right, and CASE NUMBER VI to the left

Jaguar bones with hieroglyphic writing. All the hieroglyphs can be read easily as they are similar to the Aztec writing. Although all this writing has a religious symbolism it is not possible to ascertain the use of these bones. They probably are books. Case Number VI, lower section, contains 2 jade nose plugs, 1 jade bead representing the head of a bird, a jade fan holder in the shape of a serpent, and jade beads.

### CASE NUMBER IV

All the pearls on display in Case Number IV came from the Pacific Ocean. The largest one is 23 karats and has been valued at \$5,000. The collection comprises more than 3,000 pearls.

### CASE NUMBER V

*Upper Section:* Gold mask of Xipetotec (*she-pä-tō-tēc*), the god of the goldsmiths and the Springtime. This gold mask is a masterpiece of goldsmithing. It represents the face of a man sacrificed to fertilize the earth;

A gold pendant representing a falling eagle, symbol for the setting sun, with a butterfly in the beak, symbol for fire;

A gold pheasant head coming out from a solar disc. It carries in the beak the symbol for jade;

A gold pheasant head. It carries in the beak the symbol for jade.

*Central Section:* Two gold pheasant heads with the moon symbol in their beaks; 3 small gold pendants representing the Rain God, the Opossum God and the tiger;

A gold disc symbolizing the sun;





*Gold Beads, Turtle Shell Shape.*

Different samples of gold beads and rattles;

A gold pendant, representation of the Moon, decorated with four small serpent heads.  
*Lower Section:* Three Tecalli bowls, probably used for ceremonial purposes.

#### CASE NUMBER VII

*Upper Section:* A gold pectoral plate. It represents a human head decorated with feather headdress and a jaguar or serpent helmet. On the face it wears a mask made of a human lower jawbone, thus indicating that it represents the god of the dead. On the lower portion of this plate there are three hieroglyphs which can be read as follows: "year 10 wind;" "year 11 house;" and "day 2 flint (knife)." (See color reproduction on page 4.) This is the largest pectoral plate of its kind found in Mexico.

*Central Section:* Gold finger rings with representations of ascending or descending eagles. The ascending eagle symbolizes the rising sun; the descending eagle symbolizes the setting sun. All these representations are completed with the symbol for fire, a butterfly carried in the beak, or the symbol for jade.

*Lower Section:* Samples of gold beads and rattles, a sheet of hammered gold representing a butterfly, and 2 finger rings.

#### CASE NUMBER VIII

*Upper Section:* Gold necklace. The gold beads of this necklace represent jaguar teeth. (Compare this necklace with that of jaguar teeth shown in Case Number I.)

To the right and left of this necklace two silver finger rings with symbolisms similar to those shown in Case Number VII.



*Human Cranium Decorated With Turquoise Mosaic.*

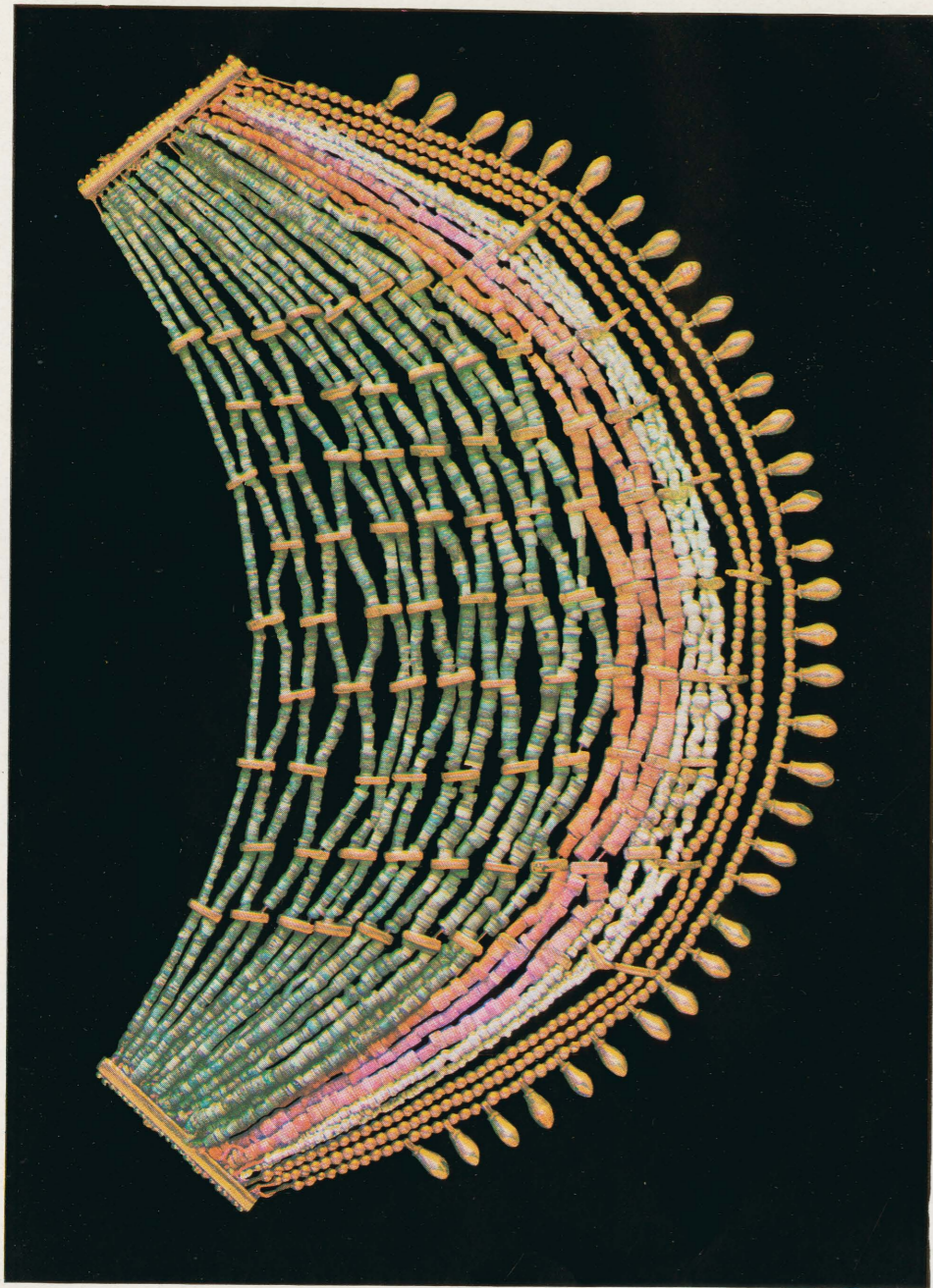
The other two sections contain silver objects. Two false finger nails are worthy of notice, one of gold, the other of silver. They were worn in the little fingers, one on each hand, to symbolize day and night.

The silver bowl shown in the central section is in the shape of a squash (a fluted shape, as is now called). Up to the present time it is the only silver bowl found in Mexico. There are three silver pincers used to pull out the hair from the face. The alabaster bowl, in the lower section, presents a very rare shape. It was probably made to represent a clay vessel.

#### CASE NUMBER IX

Jade objects found in the tomb. The Mexican jade is mineralogically different from that which is found in China. The first is jeadite, the second nephrite. Jade pebbles have been found in the river beds in Mexico, but the exact location of their origin is still unknown.





Pectoral Necklace Made of Gold, Turquoise, Red Sea Shell and Pearls.  
(One-fourth of actual size)

*Upper Section:* The jade collection comprises beautifully carved finger rings, a bird head, the eyes made of gold, a small turtle.

*Central Section:* Ear plugs of different sizes and colors, large and small, jade beads. Notice the large prismatic beads of white jade, and the lip plug representing a pheasant head.

*Lower Section:* Samples of jade beads of different colors and sizes.

#### CASE NUMBER X

Objects made of hammered gold or silver. The ten bracelets shown in the upper section were found in the bones of the forearm. Two small circular objects made of gold and silver. One half represents the day and the other the night. There are two scroll earrings characteristic of Quetzalcoatl (kēt-tzāl-kwātē), the wind god. The gold sheets were probably used to decorate leather belts.

#### CASE NUMBER XI

*Upper Section:* Materials, beads, mosaic, animal bones and small black clay vessels of Zapotec origin.

*Lower Section:* Three funeral urns representing the god of water and the god of fire. They were found at the entrance to the tomb mixed with the debris, stones and earth. These urns are of Zapotec origin, thus their different appearance from all the other objects in the collection.

#### CASE NUMBER XII

All the turquoise objects found in the tomb are exhibited in this case. The source of turquoise in Mexico has not yet been found, but as in the case of jade there is sufficient evidence to suppose that it exists.

The pectoral necklace in the center of the case, the upper section, is a reconstruction made with the materials found in the tomb. (See color reproduction on page 12.) It is made of turquoise and gold beads, coral and red seashell beads, pearls and gold beads. The first pictorialization of this necklace is in a drawing found among the Mixtec and Mexican paintings, the original of which is in the Nuttall Codex. The turquoise mosaic, on exhibition, was used to decorate masks probably made of wood or some other organic material which deteriorated rapidly.

#### CASE NUMBER XIII

*Upper Section:* To the left, hammered gold bracelet representing two coiled serpents. In the center, gold pectoral plate with four parts representing the following symbolisms: a court showing a ball game, symbol of the sky with stars, a representation of the sun—symbolized by a disc, the symbol for the moon represented by a flint knife, and finally the earth monster represented by a crocodile head. This piece is completed by a decoration of feathers and rattles. (See color reproduction on front page.) To the right a solid gold piece, probably a buckle, decorated with a spider. This piece weighs almost a pound. It is the heaviest ever found in Mexico.

*Central Section:* Hammered gold crown and eagle feather. The crowns worn by warriors were made of red leather and decorated with eagle feathers. This crown probably belonged to a very important chief.

*Lower Section:* A necklace made of the largest gold beads ever found in Mexico, and samples of gold beads of different sizes and shapes.



#### CASE NUMBER XIV

Samples of gold beads found in the tomb. Notice the necklace made of gold beads representing turtle shells. Some of the beads are of filigree work.

#### CASE NUMBER XV

*Upper Section:* Gold decorations of heads of gods, used with the ribbon worn on the forehead. Two gold pincers to pull out the hair from the face.

In the central and lower setting: Gold and jade bead necklaces, gold bead necklaces.

#### CASE NUMBER XVI

*Upper Section:* Necklace made of gold beads and rattles.

*Central Section:* Gold beads representing turtle shell (see color reproduction on page 10) and gold plates used to complete the decoration of the large pectoral necklace similar to the one shown in Case Number XII.

*Lower Section:* Gold beads.

#### CASE NUMBER XVII

*Upper Section:* Human cranium decorated with turquoise mosaic. The turquoise mosaic symbolizes the blue *Texcatlipoca* representing the god of day, while the black *Texcatlipoca* represents the night. (See photograph on page 11.) The human cranium decorated with this turquoise mosaic is one of the rarest and most important mosaic pieces found on the American continent. Different kinds of mosaic and gold sheets are shown in the central section. They were used to complete the decoration of this cranium. The lower section contains gold bracelets.

#### CASES NUMBER XVIII and XIX

Jaguar bones with hieroglyphic writings. With the others in cases Number III and VI, these bones complete a most extraordinary and the only collection of carved bones of this kind ever found on the American continent. In the lower section of Case XVIII; a Tecalli bowl with carvings of sacred animals, and four jade necklaces with beads of different sizes, colors and shapes. In the lower section of Case XIX; two Tecalli bowls and samples of gold beads.

#### CASE NUMBER XX

In this case there are objects made of obsidian, amber, clay and jet. The objects comprise ear plugs, necklaces, beads and obsidian knives.

#### CASE NUMBER XXI

*Upper Section:* Rock-crystal bowl. (See photograph on page 6.) The artist who made this beautiful piece probably spent many years to complete it. Rock-crystal occupies the seventh place in the Mohs' table of hardness. It is extraordinarily difficult to work. This bowl is the rarest piece found in the tomb. There are four ear plugs which, with a few beads, complete the rock-crystal collection.

Birdseye View of Upper Meseta of the Ancient City of Monte Alban.  
(From "Holmes' Ancient Cities of Mexico.")

