

OMITLÁN, A PREHISTORIC CITY IN MEXICO.

BY

WILLIAM NIVEN.

The ruined city of Omitlán is in the State of Guerrero, which lies between $16^{\circ} 10'$ and $18^{\circ} 47'$ N. Lat., and $97^{\circ} 55'$ and $102^{\circ} 15'$ W. Long. (Greenwich). The southern boundary of the State is the Pacific Ocean, and its principal port is Acapulco.

The ruins are on the eastern outskirts of a region which covers about 6,000 square miles, to the northwest of the capital, Chilpancingo. This city I visited five years ago while travelling in Guerrero in quest of minerals, and saw at the Governor's palace a collection of antiquities, including idols of stone, domestic utensils, war implements, articles of personal adornment of jade, jasper, diorite, onyx, obsidian, and even rock crystal. These objects, I was told, came from the neighborhood of the Indian village of Xochipala. I visited the place, and the chief of the pueblo showed me many articles like those in the Governor's palace.

When I returned to New York I saw the president of the American Museum of Natural History, Mr. Morris K. Jesup, and described to him the interesting antiquities I had seen at Chilpancingo and Xochipala. He immediately agreed to defray the expenses of a forty days' trip through the country. I visited Xochipala again, accepted the Indian chief's offer to furnish me with a guide, and brought back with me more than four hundred archæological objects, which are now on exhibition at the American Museum of Natural History, and comprise the Jesup Collection of Mexican Antiquities.

I had seen enough to satisfy me that I had made a discovery of great archæological importance and I began negotiations with the Mexican Government for the right to explore the State of Guerrero for antiquities. These negotiations were prolonged and were still going on when I left New York in July, 1896, for a more extended survey of the ruins. I was kindly received by the Chief of Xochipala and furnished with guides and workmen. The first indications of the ruins were observed about half a day's journey west of the village. We came upon foundations of buildings, then upon walls three or four feet high of structures, which measured from 40 to 100 feet square, and pitched our tent on the

top of a hill in a temple with clearly defined walls 300 by 200 feet. In the centre was an altar of solid masonry 15 feet square at the base, in good preservation, and nearly 20 feet high. At each corner the foundations and part of the walls of circular towers 6 feet thick were plainly visible. Photographs were obtained at various points, but owing to the trees and thick tropical underbrush it was difficult to show the altar and temple as they really appeared. Resuming our search, we travelled over ruins every few hundred feet for six miles. On the following night we camped at another temple and took several interesting photographs. A trench was dug, and in one of the altars we found a plaster wall, and on the plaster floor an abundance of beads and broken pottery and two diorite celts or chisels. After travelling six hours west over ruins at nearly every step, and crossing the great barranca of Xilitlahco, we finally reached the western boundary of the ruined city.

The first excavation was made of ruins of a building erected with unusual skill, the stone having been cut in equal dimensions, about 18 x 12 x 10 inches. We found ourselves in a circular chamber filled with dust and fragments of timber, which crumbled at the touch, and with broken plaster painted a brilliant red and white. The pigment must have been of excellent quality. Mixed with this débris were large boulders and gravel. In the centre we were surprised to find human bones, and a perfect skeleton of what has been pronounced by Dr. Wortman, of the American Museum of Natural History, to be a Mexican dog. A prehistoric Mexican dog is a novelty. Professor F. W. Putnam, of Harvard, is making a special study of the subject, and would like to have the whole skeleton which was found. The chamber was cleaned out, and on the floor were found large quantities of stone beads, idols, masks and heads of diorite.

Travelling a mile south, we entered a mound from the east and west side, following a plaster floor, from which we picked up a number of beads of green jade and serpentine. A peculiarity of this jade has been noted, that no material of the same kind is found in Mexico. The jade of Australia and South America does not resemble the jade found in these Mexican ruins. Jade found in China does resemble it somewhat, and the question is asked whether there ever was any connection between China and the ruined city.

After a day's ride almost due south, we found on the side of a steep hill a large cut stone, 7 feet x 2 feet, on which is carved the figure of an Indian, and near the summit two idols, one of which measured five feet in height. About ten miles east, at a place

called Chalchiutepetl, "The Hill of the Precious Stones," we found the greatest number of green diorite and jade beads, also shell ornaments, a copper bell, dress ornaments, a seal of terra cotta, and a peculiar object resembling an Egyptian tear-bottle. Here we discovered two pyramids, one of them more than 60 feet high. The hill appeared to have been smoothed down and then faced with small cut stones about 8 x 6 x 4 inches.

Some of the most interesting idols were found here; one with curious marking on the breast—a design of fire, and on the face a striking expression of pain. They are all made of hard stone, diorite and jade. A tablet with hieroglyphics was found near this place, 3 feet $1\frac{1}{2}$ x 1 foot, and although much obliterated is an indication of what this interesting locality is likely to yield.

About ten miles south we found a quantity of bone and shell beads, and within a space of twelve inches two dozen finely formed lance heads and two small masks. Close to these was a layer of human bones four to six inches thick and twenty feet in length. The skulls appeared perfect, but fell to pieces at the slightest pressure. The canine teeth seemed to have been ground flat. This deposit of bones could be plainly seen from the cañon twenty-five feet below.

Going north, we found most of the buildings buried. In one passageway on the divide there were two chambers filled with ashes, stones and pottery, and two green stone masks, and a mile south of this we came to a wall fourteen feet in height and two and a half feet thick. The material was limestone, and the mortar in some places was as hard as the stone.

A day's journey north brought us to the remains of an arch 30 feet high, and the foundation of an edifice covering several acres. In a mound not far off we uncovered the front wall of a building. Near the top were twelve stones shaped like sugar loaves, and laid side by side with the broad end projecting. We dug up heads of trachyte and jade, and many circular stones like grindstones.

Eight miles to the westward was found a temple with the extraordinary dimensions of 600 by 200 feet. After four days spent in digging at this place, we came upon a large olla, or jar, filled with mother-of-pearl objects. Many of these were in the form of fishes, and four were kingly heads, with a head-dress. All were perforated.

My survey extended over a space of several hundred square miles. The country was a succession of ridges and ravines, and every ridge was covered with ruined structures. Until additional excavations have been made, it would be idle to speculate regarding

the inhabitants of the ruined city. But extensive research by an expedition which I expect to organize may settle many questions as to their identity.

Early in May last I received from Mexico the following translation of the most liberal concession granted by the Mexican Government for the prosecution of explorations in certain districts of the State of Guerrero; and this task is now before me.

WILLIAM NIVEN.

NEW YORK, JUNE 21, 1897.

TRANSLATION.*

Permission granted by the Citizen Secretary of State, Justice and Public Instruction in representation of the Federal Executive Government and in accordance with the faculties conceded to the same by the law of June 3, 1896, to Mr. William Niven for the exploration, extraction and copying of archæological monuments in the Mexican Republic under the following conditions :

1. Mr. William Niven, or the parties representing his rights, when they prove their representation in accordance with the formalities prescribed by the Civil Code of the Federal District of Mexico, is permitted to make in the Districts of Aldama, Hidalgo, Bravos, Guerrero and Alvarez of the State of Guerrero, whatever excavations he may think suitable in order to discover monuments and objects of archæological value or historic interest.

2. The work shall be done in the places which the concessionaire designates, after previous notice has been given to the Department of Justice in each case of exploration and in the understanding that when the place designated be private property no exploration whatever is permitted until the consent of the owner be obtained, said consent to be presented to the Inspector of Archæological Monuments.

3. The Inspector mentioned in the foregoing clause shall accompany Mr. Niven in his operations and his travelling expenses and alimentation shall be paid by said Mr. Niven, whom the Inspector shall help in his work as far as this help be not contrary to his functions as Inspector.

4. The Inspector shall keep in duplicate a diary of the work done and an inventory of all the objects which are discovered and of the moulds and photographs that have been taken, and shall send monthly a copy of this diary and of the inventory to the Department of Justice.

5. Mr. Niven binds himself to be responsible that the historical objects which are discovered shall not be damaged. The Inspector shall in this respect exercise special vigilance. He shall advise the Department when such damage is done, and by the simple fact that the damage has been done intentionally the present permission will become void.

6. The monuments of easy transportation shall be taken to the Capital of the State or Territory in which the discovery has been made, so that thereupon the Department of Justice can determine their final destination.

7. The objects which according to the judgment of the Inspector are not easily transported on account of their large dimensions or excessive weight, shall remain in the place where they are found and the Department of Justice shall dispose as regards them.

* The original Spanish text is appended as a foot-note.

8. If from the excavations result the discovery of ruins of ancient settlements nothing shall be taken from them until the special case be decided by the Department of Justice.

9. All the work needed for the explorations described in this present permission, and also all the expenses of transportation of the objects found to the settlement nearest to the place where they were discovered, shall be for account of Mr. Niven or his legitimate representative.

10. All the material found in the explorations which have been mentioned shall be the property of the Mexican Government. Mr. Niven or his legitimate representative are permitted to take moulds and photographs, but are obliged to give to the Inspector one copy of each mould and photograph taken.

11. In case two or more similar pieces are found, the Inspector shall give the concessionaire one of said pieces, immediately notifying the Department of Justice.

12. The Department of Justice shall communicate this permission to the Governors of the States and Jefes Politicos of the Federal Territories, when Mr. Niven considers this expedient, in order to stimulate these functionaries within the sphere of their attributions to help the concessionaire in his operation.

13. The material, original specimens, moulds and photographs, which in accordance with this concession are to be exported, shall be exempt from all export duties, but shall always be subject to the inspection of the delegates of the Mexican Government.

14. Failure on the concessionaire's part to comply with any of the obligations imposed by the foregoing clauses shall be cause that this concession be declared void by the Administration.

15. This permission will last 5 years counted from the date of its publication in the official Daily Paper, and gives the concessionaire exclusive right to make explorations in each of the places where he commences to explore, as long as he keeps up the necessary work.

16. This permission shall become void for the following reasons as well as for those specified in the foregoing clauses :

I. If the work of exploration be not commenced within a year from the date on which this present permission is published in the official Daily Paper.

II. If the work of exploration is discontinued for more than two consecutive years.

MEXICO, APRIL 7, 1897.

(Signed)

J. BARANDA.

SECRETARIA DE ESTADO DEL DESPACHO
DE JUSTICIA É INSTRUCCIÓN PÚBLICA.

Permiso concedido por el C. Secretario de Estado y del Despacho de Justicia é Instrucción Pública en representación del Ejecutivo Federal, en uso de las facultades concedidas á este por la ley de 3 de Junio de 1896 al Sr. Don Guillermo Niven, para la exploración, extracción y copia de monumentos arqueológicos en la República Mexicana, bajo las condiciones siguientes :

1. Se permite al Sr. Guillermo Niven ó á las personas que representen sus derechos acreditando dicha representación, de acuerdo con las formalidades prescritas por el Código Civil del Distrito Federal Mexicano, que practique en los Distritos de Aldama, Hidalgo, Bravos, Guerrero y Alvarez del Estado de Guerrero, las excavaciones que creyere conveniente, con el fin de descubrir monumentos y objetos arqueológicos ó de interés histórico.

2. Las obras se llevarán á cabo en los lugares designados por el concesionario dando éste aviso previo á la Sria. de Justicia, de cada caso de exploración, bajo el concepto de que, si el lugar designado fuese de propiedad privada, no se permitirá ninguna clase de exploración sino despues de obtenido el consentimiento del propietario, haciendo constar dicho consentimiento ante el Inspector de Monumentos arqueológicos.

3. El Inspector de que habla la cláusula anterior acompañará en sus operaciones al Sr. Niven y

sus gastos, de viaje y de alimentación, serán costeados por el referido Sr. Niven, á quien el relacionado Inspector auxiliará en sus tareas en cuanto no fuere contrario á sus propias funciones de Inspector.

4. El Inspector llevará por duplicado un diario de los trabajos que se efectúen y un inventario de todos los objetos que se fueren descubriendo y de los vaciados y fotografías que se hicieren y enviará mensualmente un tanto de ese diario y de ese inventario al ministerio de Justicia.

5. Bajo su responsabilidad se obliga el Sr. Niven á no deteriorar en lo mas mínimo los objetos históricos que se descubrieren. El Inspector ejercerá á éste respecto especial vigilancia, dará aviso al Ministerio siempre que tal deterioro se efectuare, y si ese deterioro fuese intencional por ese solo hecho quedará nulificado el presente permiso.

6. Los monumentos de fácil trasporte serán conducidos á la Capital del Estado ó del Territorio en que se hubiere hecho el descubrimiento, para que en seguida la Secretaria de Justicia disponga de su final destino.

7. Los objetos que á juicio del Inspector no fuesen de fácil trasporte por sus grandes dimensiones ó por su peso excesivo, se dejarán en el lugar donde se encontraren para que de ellos disponga la Secretaria de Justicia.

8. Si de las exploraciones y excavaciones resultare el descubrimiento de ruinas de antiguas poblaciones, nada se tocará de ellas sino hasta que se decida el caso especial por la Secretaria de Justicia.

9. Todos los trabajos que requieran las exploraciones de que se dá cuenta en éste permiso, asi como todos los gastos de conducción de los objetos encontrados hasta la población mas cercana á los lugares en que fueren descubiertos, serán por cuenta del Señor Niven ó de su legítimo representante.

10. Todos los materiales que en las exploraciones de que se ha hablado fueren encontrados, serán propiedad del Gobierno Mexicano, pero se permitirá al Sr. Niven ó á su representante legítimo que saque moldes y fotografías de los objetos descubiertos, y tendrá la obligación de entregar al Inspector un ejemplar de cada molde y de cada fotografía que se sacare.

11. En el caso en que se encontraren dos ó mas piezas iguales, el Inspector entregará al concesionario un ejemplar de dichas piezas, avisando desde luego á la Secretaria de Justicia.

12. El Ministerio de Justicia dará conocimiento de éste permiso á los Gobernadores de los Estados y Jefes políticos de los Territorios federales cuando lo considere conveniente el Sr. Niven, á efecto de excitar á los referidos funcionarios para que, en la esfera de sus atribuciones, auxilien las operaciones del concesionario.

13. Los materiales originales, moldes, y fotografías que con arreglo á ésta concesión se exportaren quedarán exentos de todo derecho de exportación pero siempre sometidos á la inspección de los Delegados del Gobierno Mexicano.

14. La falta de cumplimiento por parte del concesionario de alguna de las obligaciones que se le imponen en las anteriores cláusulas dará motivo para que administrativamente se declare la caducidad de ésta concesión.

15. Este permiso durará cinco años contados desde la fecha de su publicación en el Diario oficial y constituye á favor del concesionario el derecho exclusivo de hacer exploraciones en cada uno de los lugares en que las emprenda mientras esté practicando las obras necesarias.

16. Este permiso caducará por los motivos siguientes además de los especificados en las cláusulas anteriores :

I. Por no empezar los trabajos de exploración en el término de un año contado desde que se publique en el Diario oficial el presente permiso.

II. Por interrumpir los trabajos de exploración por un período de dos años consecutivos.

MEXICO, 7 de Abril de 1897.

J. BARANDA.