



Composite photograph and William Niven's colored drawing of painted stone slab ("altar"), San Miguel Amantla, Valley of Mexico. This is the same piece discussed by James Churchward in his *Lost Continent of Mu* (1926) and was the "altar" Churchward attempted to bring into the U.S. in 1931-32. Because it took several shots to photograph the entire piece, Niven made a scale drawing of the stone as well.

But "the Indians or his laborers out Atzacapotzalco way might be hoaxing him," Morley thought. They would visit Niven's diggings to find out for themselves.

On Sunday the 24th Morley and Gann met Niven at Sanborn's for breakfast. They took the tram for Atzacapotzalco, passed the Noche Triste tree, and continued on through Tacuba and north to Atzacapotzalco. About three blocks before the end

of the line, they left the car. After passing through several small villages, they reached San Miguel Amantla. Niven's diggings lay beyond an old church.

Two men and a boy were at work when they got there. A few clay heads, pottery fragments, had come up and lay on the bank.

About two hundred yards distant was another hole. A yard below the surface of the ground was a flat slab of tepetate with one edge exposed. Morley carefully noted that the other edge passed "under the earth where it had never been uncovered. The piece exposed was at least 9 feet long and half as wide, and its face had been covered with newspapers to protect it against the moisture."

When they got there the boys were busily engaged in rolling back the newspapers to uncover it. Morley was amazed. The tepetate was painted in red and yellow, similar to the colors he had seen on the questionable andesite tablets, except without any incising first. Niven called the painting his "Sun God"; the complete figure, counting its headdress, was perhaps six or seven feet high.

Morley was convinced it would have been impossible to "hoax" the Old Man. Gann took photographs of the painting. They saw similar pieces being uncovered at other locations within Niven's diggings, each at about the same depth as the Sun God.

Niven returned to work in the first trench while Morley and Gann looked on. Soon he unearthed a block of andesite about four inches high and one inch thick. It was painted red and yellow. Morley was stunned. "There could be no doubt of the genuineness of this piece," he would later write in his diary. "It came out of the bottom of the trench, from undisturbed black earth, and was still moist from the damp earth."

Morley cleaned off the block and picked the dirt out of the incised lines. They were filled with red and yellow pigment! Morley would later comment, "It was a knockout, a perfect vindication of the old man. It couldn't have come better if it had been planted so it couldn't have been planted . . . He only pays his boys 50 cents gold a day, and 75 cents on Sundays and they get nothing extra for whatever they find, which precludes their making these things to deceive Niven himself. There is too much work on them."

Still not fully convinced, Morley and Gann asked Niven about where the other pieces had come from.

Austin and Atzacapotzalco

1931-1932



Niven left Houston on the 1st of April 1931 to stay in Austin during the summer months. Furniture was put into a van. Niven and his wife Nellie rode in their son Harold's car. The small caravan departed at two in the afternoon. Along the way the van had two flat tires. "Mrs. N. enjoyed the beautiful moonlight ride," Niven wrote to a friend, but Niven himself was very tired. They arrived in Austin in the middle of the night. The change was beneficial, especially because it offered the opportunity to be near their only daughter, Elna Harrison. After a few weeks Niven continued his radio talks in Austin. He would not return to Houston.

In mid-May James Churchward lectured before a group of New York City and Philadelphia "high society" types. He talked about the large altar painting uncovered when Gann and Morley had visited Niven's diggings in 1923. "They went crazy over it," Churchward wrote to Niven on May 18, "and want me to see if I can get it to put in the Museum of the Little Church at Valley Forge, the Shrine of North America."

"Do you think the stone could be procured? . . . It would be a national affair, and your name and mine would be emblazoned in America's greatest shrine.

"The cost of transportation will not be considered, for the audience to which I lectured included . . . Stotesbury, Biddle, etc. of Philadelphia, Morgans, Vanderbilts, etc. of New York."