AN AREA CO-TRADITION FOR MESOAMERICA

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INTRODUCTION

I believe that archaeology must ultimately provide us with cultural entities which correspond approximately to the historical facts. Otherwise it makes no sense to seek explanations for past events. The establishment of correspondences between archaeological and historical cultures is, to my mind, a logical and practical precondition for chronicles of the development of prehistoric societies and their encounters and intercourse. Only to the degree to which the archaeological account is constructed on the discipline of history will we be able to generalize about the relationship of the cultural given to cultural development, or about any of the other features of cultural dynamics usually discussed under the heading "process".

Having stated the general orientation of this paper, I would now like to dwell briefly on the notion of the area co-tradition. In several provinces of the Old and New World there occur archaeological deposits which suggest that in ancient times groups of neighbouring and contemporary peoples, whatever the distinctiveness of their local cultures may have been, shared basic sets of designs for living. The Central Andes, Mesoamerica, the Southwestern United States, and part of the Middle East are examples of such provinces. Peruvian archaeology can thank Kroeber, Bennett, Willey, Steward, and Strong, among others, for their contributions to the conceptualization of the co-existence through time of a series of regional cultures exhibiting a common cultural substratum.

The area co-tradition, in its original application to Peru, has been criticized by Rowe. Martin and Rinaldo have tried to apply it to the Southwest and have been taken to task by Rouse. Discussions, pro and con, have pivoted by tacit agreement on the question of "fit". Some hold that the area co-tradition hypothesis must be rigorously applied and that it must then be determined to what extent the area conforms to the concept. Others have argued that, since no two provinces are exactly alike, the concept may legitimately be adapted to the area under consideration. This paper will attempt to answer the question: Does the area co-tradition concept fit the kind of problems we encounter in the archaeology of Mesoamerica?

It is quite true that the notions of "culture area with time depth", the "co-tradition", "horizon styles", "phases", "traditions", "developmental stages", and so on, can be regarded either as descriptive or analytic devices, or as both. But it must be remembered they are devices, tool concepts applied to archaeological data in a rigorous fashion - not to tidy it up, but to observe the particulars of the overflow. When we speak of specific misfits, we approach the viewpoint of the historian to whom each cultural whole is a unique entity, because no mismatch will ever be the same as any other in different places and at different times. From the point of
view of the analytic grid held constant in applications to different archaeological provinces, we move toward comparative archaeology which—unlike the pessimistic McKern system—has reference to historic cultures.

Neither the area co-tradition, nor any of the concepts associated with it, can be proposed as a "solution" to the problem of aligning archaeological chronicles to the historic continuum. First of all, "historic" cultures cannot be considered as the only "real" ones, since there is more than one way of usefully analyzing culture history. Even if it is granted that some analyses of history are more useful than others, the methodological categories mentioned above are much more than basic minimal units. And such "minimal units" have not yet been isolated; they are subsumed in the larger notions of "component" and "phase", for example. The true minimal unit is still the "trait", and neither archaeology nor ethnology has ever reached any agreement as to the definition of a "trait". Among the social sciences, only linguistics, with the phoneme, has established a fundamental building block for dealing with patterns. For studies of non-linguistic culture, the definition of a comparable unit remains a pressing need.

The point of this apparent digression is to make explicit that any attempt to deal with Mesoamerican data on the level of the area co-tradition is essentially a gross procedure. The objective of a direct approach to historicity in archaeological research will doubtless elude us for some time to come. It will probably be attained only as a result of more or less pragmatic attempts at concordance between archaeological and historical data.

The present paper is divided into three sections: The first deals with Bennett's definition of the area co-tradition, its application to Peru and the Southwest, and the critical discussion which attended those efforts. The second section offers, in broad outline, the tentative structure of a Mesoamerican co-tradition. The final section considers the problems of Mesoamerican culture history to which this methodology may be usefully applied.

THE AREA CO-TRADITION IN PERU AND THE SOUTHWEST

In taking stock of Peruvian archaeology, Kroeber (1944) said: "I regard all native Peruvian civilizations as a unit, a larger historical whole, a major areal culture with time depth." This comprehensive view has played an important role in the structure of Peruvian research. One expression of this approach was the concept of the area co-tradition, set forth by Bennett (1948). These are the principal features of Bennett's scheme:

1. Culture area: "The addition of time depth to a culture area forms a meaningful unit for archaeological investigation. For one thing, it allows a more precise regional delimitation, since only the territory is considered within which the component cultures formed a culture area at every time period, and not the territory of maximum expansion during a particular time period..."
2. Co-tradition: "Unlike the culture area classification, the cultures included in an area co-tradition are treated as wholes. Thus, each has its own history, its own persistent traditions. The coined word, co-tradition, refers, then, to the linkage, the interrelationships of the cultural traditions in time and space."

3. Area co-tradition: "...an area co-tradition is the overall unit of culture history of an area within which the component cultures have been interrelated over a period of time. The term is not applied merely to the cultural history of a region...neither is a co-tradition the history of a single culture."

The culture area with time depth is well exemplified in Peru. Central Andean civilization, as a whole, shared patterns of subsistence (intensive agriculture and herding), methods of cultivation (irrigation, terracing, fertilization, crop rotation, etc.), types of clothing, craft techniques (pottery, metallurgy, weaving of exceptional quality), specific artistic motifs, architectural forms, settlement patterns, broad outlines of social organization and stratification, and religious beliefs. These are the core characteristics; they are, according to Bennett, found throughout the time span of the Peruvian co-tradition and in every one of the constituent cultures. But the co-tradition is held together by still other ties:

Specific traditions link the cultures of some subdivisions throughout several time periods. Various types of horizon styles cut across some or all of the sub-regions in one time period. (Bennett, 1948)

The criteria with respect to "traits" are relatively precise. A different situation obtains with respect to boundary-making. Bennett says:

"Each coastal valley forms an isolated unit and should, theoretically, have its own local culture history. However, archaeological refinements in Peru are not sufficient to show this. Consequently, valleys are arranged into nine groups on the basis of proximity and cultural overlap. (1948)"

It is clear that we are not dealing with specific geographical areas corresponding exactly to historic cultures. The provinces within the larger culture area are generalized space units which loosely embrace distinctive archaeological configurations. The boundary is precise only because it has been arbitrarily drawn for analytical purposes. This kind of internal geography, like the overall culture area, is maintained through time. Even when such specificity is recognized as arbitrary, the continual accretion of archaeological information makes it advisable to change the detail of the analytic matrix. Thus, Bennett's regional areas changed somewhat between his publication in "A Reappraisal of Peruvian Archaeology" (Bennett, 1948) and "Andean Culture History" (Bennett and Bird, 1949). Since then Willey (1954a) has offered other modifications.

Kroeber (1939) noted that it is most difficult to set boundaries to a culture area. This is due to the historic fact that one culture tends to shade into another, rather than being terminated by some frontier line.
The contrast between the abstract accuracy of Bennett's definition and the arbitrary nature of the practical delimitation of areas and their constituents will be seen to have important consequences.

The Peruvian co-tradition has also been analysed by means of a number of devices of chronological and developmental significance: traditions, horizons, periods (Bennett's descriptive terms: cultist, experimenter, master craftsmen, etc.), and stages (Willey's developmental terms: formative, classic, and post-classic). We may conclude this initial attempt at definition with these words of Bennett on the subject of a wider utility for the idea of the area co-tradition.

Although in part an abstraction, the area co-tradition actually purports to represent a substantial unit of culture history. Various area co-traditions, once established, can be compared. Do they have single centers, multiple centers, shifting centers? What types of unity are found in each, such as political, stylistic, subsistence, environmental? Are there regular sequences of internal development? Archaeologists have been blocked in studies of acculturation and culture change because of the uncertainty of cultural continuity, but with this concept regional cultural changes can be examined and their causes sought. (1948)

I now want to turn from Bennett's proposal to the criticism leveled against it by Rowe (1950, 1951). Rowe develops both factual and methodological issues, which may be illustrated by the following summary from both statements.

In "A Reappraisal of Peruvian Archaeology", Bennett and Willey offered somewhat different space-time organization of the Peruvian co-tradition. Neither proposal appeared to Rowe to agree with the archaeology for Peru as a whole. Willey's divisions accord only with the coastal data from the Chicama Valley to Nasca. North Highlands division may prove satisfactory, but the coastal extremes, and especially the central and South Highlands must be rejected. Rowe also argues that Bennett and Willey derived named periods from the Virú Valley sequence on the North Coast and applied these elsewhere without justification. The Central and South Highlands and the South Coast do not conform. There is no great depth in the Central Highlands; Cuzco is late, already pre-Inca, and has no known predecessors. In the South Highlands, Tiahuanaco does not link the two sides of the Titicaca Basin, as Bennett claimed (Bennett and Bird, 1949). On the South Coast, the sequence of Chavin, Red-on-White and Negative "horizon styles" does not conform as it does farther north.

Willey (1951) called attention to some misinterpretation in the matter of South Coast horizons, and asserted that Rowe tended to blur the precise analytic lines along which the horizon style concept had been refined since Kroeber first proposed it. Bennett had admitted the relative weakness of the Central and South Highlands divisions prior to Rowe's criticism. But we are not concerned here with the details of this argument so much as we are with the character of Rowe's criticism. To understand it more fully,
we must turn to (1) his counter proposal for a meaningful organization of the Central Andean data, and (2) to the methodological issue he posed. With respect to the former, Rowe said:

The best solution to the problem of synthesizing the data of Andean archaeology for elementary presentation would probably be to describe the North Coast sequence, indicating differences in the essentially parallel North Highlands and Central Coast areas, and then describe the South Coast and Tiahuanaco sequences separately with notes on the incomplete information available for other Southern Peruvian areas tied to these two. The rather aberrant Cuzco sequence could be treated as a prelude to the description of the Incas. (1950)

As to the methodological issue, the argument is clearer if we assume that Rowe has stated the facts of mismatch correctly. In his suggestion for a substitute organization of the data, Rowe makes it clear that his criterion for the acceptability of any organizational scheme is its accurate delineation of the facts, and lack of facts, derived from the archaeological material available at any given time. He has stated very plainly the methodological bias to which this criterion refers:

Kroeber's general concept of the culture area as 'a substantial unit of historical development' is the basic one. We can make the data of Peruvian archaeology fit the co-tradition framework somehow, if we wish; after all, no simple classificatory scheme represents the complexity of its material adequately. But in broader perspective, acceptance of the co-tradition idea implies acceptance of Kroeber's culture area concept and of a very considerable degree of order and direction (i.e. evolution) in culture history.....I am not convinced that there is enough order and direction in cultural history to justify Kroeber's culture area concept in general and for any area; hence I am resistant to the whole idea of co-traditions.

Two quite different problems are involved in this discussion: one, how much over-all unity does the Central Andes display at different periods of its history? Two, is the culture area as defined by Kroeber an acceptable theoretical construct? Bennett assumes basic unity and accepts the culture area....I am inclined at present to take the opposite view on both problems. (1951)

Bennett's suggestion that the area co-tradition concept be employed in other regions was quickly adopted, and Martin and Rinaldo (1951) presented such a scheme for the Southwest. I will present here only a summary of some of the salient points:

1. The Southwest, in general, is a geographical, ecological, and climatological unit.

2. Culturally, the area is broadly characterized as follows:

a. It was occupied mostly by aboriginal farmers;
b. It featured three parallel and allied developments (Hohokam, Mogollon and Anasazi), each with a distinctive "flavor";

c. A uniform cultural development occurred throughout the whole area with a simultaneous culmination or climax in the three sub-cultures.

The authors of this scheme interpret the area co-tradition concept as involving the satisfaction of four major conditions:

1. The area as a whole must exhibit an overall configuration of culture traits which distinguishes it or delimits it from other areas:

   Thirteen characteristics are offered: a common, pre-agricultural, pre-ceramic stage; subsequent subsistence based on maize, beans, and squash; cotton raising; permanent village settlement; dwellings consisting of pit houses, or houses constructed of rough stone, mud and beams, or of storied multi-roomed houses of masonry or adobe; metate mano milling stones of evolving form; underground cists or pits for storage and cooking; crafts represented by highly developed basketry, weaving and pottery with a characteristic emphasis on painting as against textured decoration; complex ritual including kivas, ball courts, rain and fertility cults, color symbolism and a priesthood; the atlatl and, later, the bow and arrow; domesticated dogs and turkeys; an absence of monumental stone carving, metallurgy, and permanent social stratification; an emphasis on kinship in social organization, without political organization of villages into larger groups.

2. There must be evidence of linkage between regional sub-cultures, demonstrating that these groups were subjected to the same general influences. Three categories of evidence are offered here:

   a. A series of progressions or developments which run parallel in the three sub-cultures: e.g., progression from troughed metates to large, flat, concave slabs, and from pit houses to communal surface dwellings.

   b. Specific traits universally found (horizon markers?) such as the bone awl, certain bead and bracelet types, side-notched chipped plades, certain pottery shapes, and similar geometric design elements.

   c. Distribution of trade pieces (horizon markers?) including Anasazi pottery found at Hohokam and Mogollon sites and the widespread occurrence of bracelets and beads made from shells whose provenience has been traced to the Gulf of California.

3. The areal unit under consideration must have limits in space and time. Here the culture area is defined, but not the internal divisions referable to the sub-cultures:
Southeastern Utah, the eastern half of Arizona, the western three-quarters of New Mexico, southwestern Colorado, and the northern edge of Mexico. Parts of the "Greater Southwest" are tentatively omitted. Navaho-Apache history is excluded as not integral to the area. The period under consideration is from 2,000 B.C. to A.D. 1700, with a cultural climax around A.D. 1100.

4. The major cultural changes within each time period should be more or less evident in the component sub-cultures:

There is evidence for five "stages", which are listed with accompanying rough dates:

a. Pre-Agricultural and Pre-Ceramic (2000 B.C.-1000 B.C.)
b. Early Agricultural Stage (1000 B.C.-1 A.D.)
c. Formative Stage (1 A.D.-900 or 1000 A.D.)
d. Classic Stage (1000 A.D.-1350 A.D.)
e. Renaissance Period (1350 A.D.-1700 A.D.)

The above will suffice to outline the way in which the Southwestern Co-tradition has been conceived by Martin and Rinaldo. It is well to note that the authors are markedly tentative with respect to the details of their formulation. At the same time, they feel there is enough evidence to justify setting it up as a "conceptual scheme,... which may be a useful tool in tracing man's achievements, in seeing and appraising man and his deeds, and in creating comparative histories." (Martin and Rinaldo, 1951).

Rouse (1954) approaches this effort with fundamental and, in some respects, devastating criticism. His analysis proceeds from the assumption that Bennett had made his case for Peru in detail. He upholds the utility of the co-tradition concept "as an indicator of the kind of culture change which occurred in Peru". Its utility in comparative studies would be to identify "the Peruvian kind of culture change wherever it may be found".

Rouse's specific criticism runs somewhat as follows:

1. Martin and Rinaldo point to the existence of a culture area, define its limits in space and time, and list its characteristics. But, they fail to show that these characteristics are found in each main time period and in each regional division.

2. They group their internal units incoherently. The Hohokam, Mogollon and Anasazi "sub-cultures" are really cultural sequences which (a) are not coexistent throughout the whole span of the time depth for the culture area, and (b) are not geographically delimited within the broad confines of the culture area.
3. They fail to define regional traditions, delimit their regional distribution, or specify which cultures shared them.

4. With respect to the broad cultural developments which Martin and Rinaldo call stages, they do not demonstrate their pan-areal extent throughout the whole of the time depth asserted for the culture area.

Rouse offers two very interesting reasons why the area co-tradition concept is not applicable in the Southwest. First, he points out that the prehistoric peoples of the Southwest, to whom the archaeological assemblages called Hohokam, Mogollon and Anasazi presumably refer, did not remain throughout their history in restricted geographical regions, as did the Peruvian Indians. Second, this historical difference was overlooked when Bennett suggested trying the concept on the Southwestern material and when Martin and Rinaldo took up that suggestion; and this oversight was due to the fact that "Peruvian archaeologists are accustomed to trace the distribution of culture in terms of both periods and regions (whereas) Southwestern archaeologists tend to trace it only according to periods and thereby obscure the regional variations which are such an important subject of study in Peru" (House, 1954).

Rouse's critique brought forth a reply from Martin (1954) and considerable comment by Wheat, Brew and Smith, and Willey in the "Southwest Issue" of the American Anthropologist (1954). I can only sample this response here.

Martin said, in effect: Bennett's co-tradition concept has to be applicable to other cultures, since we need a design to help us study culture history, cultural evolution and cultural processes, and Bennett's plan can be modified to fit other areas. There are genuine and meaningful similarities between the several cultural traditions in the Southwest. While gaps still exist in the archaeological record, a modest hypothesis at the present time will expose and structure problems, as well as give specificity to the kind of data which is lacking.

Wheat and Brew and Smith are not perturbed if Bennett's definition has to be warped in order to apply it to the Southwest. Conceptual tools have to grow and change... (Wheat). The virtue of the co-tradition while Southwestern research is in its present state "lies in its very elasticity and vagueness, whereby it can be made to serve as a guide in any effort to compare 'cultures' on any chosen 'level'." (Brew and Smith).

Before applying the co-tradition concept to Mesoamerica, I would like to include this comment of Willey's:

In his concluding pages Wheat has struck at the heart of the matter in asking the questions: What problems are we trying to meet with the concept of the co-tradition? What performance do we expect of it? The debate over the co-tradition concept is pointless outside of these problem contexts, for a Southwestern co-tradition is not an end-all of research to be accepted or rejected in the abstract. The co-tradition concept is a device by which we attempt to express a degree
of historical intimacy. I believe it has had an important heuristic value in Americanist studies in that it has exposed the older concept of culture area to time-depth analyses ... In both the Southwest and Peru it has served as a useful point of departure for asking the questions: How much of the apparent cultural homogeneity that we can see in these areas is due to relatively late diffusions and how far back can we trace common origins? ... Such a unitary frame of reference offers a vantage point for the observation of some grades of historically interrelated or diffused phenomena but by its very definition ignores or slight others. (Willey, 1954c).

The approach which will be made to a Mesoamerican co-tradition can be illustrated by reference to the previous discussions. Bennett's definitions are indeed strict, and almost as specific in their strictures as Rouse insists. Whether Rowe is correct in every detail of his criticism or not does not make much difference since, if he were to take cognizance of Bennett's admissions of weakness for two major highland areas and his description of the broad basis for the valley groups on the coast, and of Rowe's demonstrations of misfit, it is perfectly clear that Rouse would have to reject the Peruvian co-tradition too.

Rowe's rejection of the Peruvian co-tradition, at least in part, and Rouse's use of it as a standard against which to measure the success of Martin and Rinaldo's attempt, find common ground in the criterion of fit. My own position is that this is neither the only possible nor the most useful criterion. In the first place, the perfect fit, in the sense of Rowe and Rouse, will never be observed. In the second place, a perfect fit, even if the objective were so modified as to be achievable, would still be only temporary so long as the evidence is incomplete. Finally, a perfect fit, once attained, rules out comparative work. For each culture is unique and incomparable in many respects, as is every human being. In his insistence that the area co-tradition hypothesis is well-adapted to the circumstances of Peruvian culture history, Rouse is referring not to a concept but to a kind of algebraic equation for what actually transpired there, a shorthand summary of the particular archaeological record of that area. There would not be much point to surveying the archaeological provinces of the world in search of detailed resemblances to the course of events in Peru.

As we have seen, Rowe entirely rejects the co-tradition as a concept. He does not believe it can be used to describe any given area because he does not accept the idea of broad regularities in culture history, whether in Peru or elsewhere. He considers the notion of an area co-tradition misleading unless it can be referred in every way to known archaeological relationships. To me it seems evident that Rowe's objection is rooted in a lack of interest in synthesis, as his counter-proposal demonstrates. Even his kind of organization of the data represents, for him, a summary "for elementary presentation", a kind of teaching device.

Another approach to fit is represented by the various statements of Martin, Wheat and Brew, and Smith. This view I have already described as
"making the concept fit the area". But this runs into the same objections as the insistence that the area must fit the concept, namely, that the area co-tradition would disappear as a concept and, in each province, would come to represent a description of local conditions. Therefore, while I agree to the advantages of synthesis, both within and between areas, I cannot see how the comparative objective will be furthered by robbing the area co-tradition concept of its character. The solution seems to me to involve a generalized notion of the area co-tradition, firmly held and carefully applied, with the most scrupulous attention directed to the kind and degree of fit. In accordance with this, the following approach to the use of the co-tradition concept seems reasonable.

Although a boundary must be drawn around a culture area for reference, it is impossible to make this a precise line. Furthermore, the line cannot embrace the farthest extent of manifestations characteristic of the culture area. I mentioned earlier Kroeber's view that a "real" map of culture areas would be composed of different colors for different culture climaxes and that these would shade into one another. We must temporarily ignore the areal culture outliers, and agree with Bennett in insisting on limiting the boundary so as to include only the extent of regional sub-cultures with time depth. In fact, by excluding the outliers, we may be able to understand them more fully. It is clear that the purpose of this provision is analytic, and this fact justifies its arbitrary character. But Bennett and House go too far in applying their reservations within the culture area, as well as beyond it. Within the area of climax we delimit the regional boundaries carefully, but not because the material justifies this action. Here, it seems to me, we are intensely interested in gaps, in late starts, in the early extinction of the various internal units. This kind of evidence may refer to conquest, migration, or cultural exhaustion, as well as to other processes of change which it is in our interest to determine. We can only determine them if we put ourselves in a position to see contradictions.

Another qualification with respect to the culture area is in the matter of time depth. I do not regard it as either reasonable or useful to insist on regional differentiation throughout the time scale. I am particularly concerned about this in the earlier periods. First, it is unlikely that we will ever get a situation where the differentiation is an indigenous development. Secondly, any interest that we may have in historical origins demands that we pay a great deal of attention to the places and times where a relatively undifferentiated areal culture began to be segregated into regional sub-units. It should be sufficient to recognize the existence of these regional sub-cultures for a considerable period of time during which major areal changes transpire.

Turning now more specifically to the matter of regional sub-cultures, I believe that these can only be defined as Bennett has done, That is, they must be arbitrarily delimited geographically, just as is the case for the culture area as a whole. (It is on this point that House most heavily criticized the Southwest co-tradition). The sub-cultures must, of course, share the core cultural inventory described for the larger
area. Each region within the culture area should also reflect the develop-
mental stages which describe the evolution of the areal culture as a whole
(although there are legitimate qualifications here too). Two or more sub-
cultures might be expected to share a common tradition or traditions
form time to time, although this may not invariably be the case. Also,
form the point of view of areal unity, one would expect the kind of mani-
manifestation described as horizon markers or horizon styles in several or
all of the regional cultures. In addition to their shared traits, which
may reflect parallelism or diffusion, the regional units must each ex-
hibit a residuum of individuality which sets them apart. This may take
either the form of peculiar traits or that of a distinctive configuration
of the same traits found elsewhere.

The above then are some of the considerations and qualifications in-
volved in setting up an area co-tradition. The basic "arbitrariness" of
this system is connected with rigidly held boundaries, both for the areas
themselves and for their constituent sub-cultures. Within the culture
area, correspondences are sought of minimum conditions rather than con-
cordance with an over-all ideal. The aim should always be to hold the
geography constant by boundaries and the chronology constant by the tradi-
tional devices of relative or absolute chronology. Then we are free to
measure the extent to which the distribution of specific elements in space
and time does not accord with our reference lines.

The foregoing has dealt with methodology in terms of the inner con-
sistency and problem orientation of a particular system. Practically
speaking, the application of any scheme cross-culturally runs into a
critical problem which Rouse pointed out but failed to develop fully.
Since each archaeological province offers material organized in terms
of local interests and research traditions, the data are structured ac-
cordingly and attempts at comparative analysis must immediately re-
conile mutually unintelligible systems of thought. This problem is
not easy to overcome, as is clearly evident in many of the shortcomings
of the ensuing discussion.

THE MESOAMERICAN CO-TRADITION

The Culture Area

It would hardly be startling to assert that somewhere between the
Río Grande River and the Panama Canal lies a "Mesoamerican culture area",
but to specify its precise limits would be something else again. It
will not be easy to define boundaries so that they will apply usefully
to a time span of more than 2000 years. The construct will have to
accomodate the interplay of three variables: the culture complex, its
gEOGRAPHY, and its archaeology.

A number of students have given considerable attention to defining
the boundary of a Mesoamerican culture area. I will not burden the pre-
sent account with a history of the efforts of Wissler, Seals, Mendizábal
and others in this direction, since the area which will concern us will
be considerably smaller than any of those proposed by these authors, and
the culture elements considered definitive will be quite obvious and
well within the scope agreed upon by all scholars. It might be useful,
as a basic reference point, however, to note the statements by Caso and
Kroeber on the subject.

Caso (1953) states:

When we speak of 'cultural horizons in Mesoamerica', we refer to a
particular zone of American culture which extends approximately from
the southern part of Tamaulipas on the east to the Sinaloa River in
western Mexico....

The southern boundary begins at about the mouth of the Motagua River,
continuous south almost to Sensitive, Honduras, then turns east,
following the present border of El Salvador and Honduras to the big
bend of the Lempa River, and follows this stream to the Pacific
Ocean.

Kroeber (1939) is essentially in accord with this southern boundary.
In the north he has spot-checked the archaeology to determine where
Mesoamerican diagnostics like pyramid mounds and masonry construction, as
well as the pottery and linguistic affiliations characteristic of the area,
fail out. In the west, basing himself on the earlier work by Sauer and
Brand at Aztatlán and by Kelly at Chametla in Sinaloa, Kroeber finds that
pyramid mounds extend no farther north than northern Nayarit, while low
earth mounds are reported from Sinaloa and Sonora. He suggests that the
northern frontier of Mesoamerica should be traced approximately through
northern Nayarit. Across the Sierra Madre, on the Central Mexican Plateau,
the northern limit of pyramid mounds extends into Durango. But, for a
number of reasons, Kroeber puts Durango in a doubtful category, including
only the Zacatecas complex in the sphere of Mexican high culture. This
agrees with Spinden's early "northwest frontier". In the state of
Veracruz, Kroeber carries the northern boundary to its eastern terminus
between the Maya-speaking Huastecs and the "barbarous tribes beyond the
Pánuco". Kirchhoff's (1913) boundaries agree very closely with those of
Kroeber and so will not be reviewed here.

In this quick North-South frontier survey, we have in a sense
assumed propositions which have not yet been demonstrated. Therefore, I
will now give some attention to the character of the hypothetical culture
area whose "limits" have been referred to. Kirchhoff (1913) has published
a painstaking culture element distribution study in which he has plotted
the occurrence of traits from the southeastern United States to the Central
Andes. In this study he distinguishes among exclusively Mesoamerican
traits, traits shared with other culture areas, and traits present in
other culture areas but not in Mesoamerica. The list of specifically
Mesoamerican traits is quite long, and it does include a few items like
the rubber ball game which are only "essentially Mesoamerican in nature";
but I will quote it here to establish the range of possibilities. A
comparative trait list for Mesoamerica and other areas is given in Table 2 at the end of this paper.

A certain type of digging stick (coa);
The construction of gardens by reclaiming land from lakes (chinampas);
The cultivation of lime-leaved sage (chía) and its use for a beverage and for oil to give luster to paints;
The cultivation of the century plant (maguey) for its juice (agua miel), fiber for clothing and paper, and maguey beer (pulque);
The cultivation of cacao;
The grinding of corn softened with ashes or lime.

Clay bullets for blow-guns;
Lip plugs and other trinkets of clay;
The polishing of obsidian;
Pyrite mirrors;
Copper tubes to drill stones;
The use of rabbit hairs to adorn textiles;
Wooden swords with flint or obsidian chips along their edges (macuahuitl);
Corselets padded with cotton (ichcahuipilli);
Shields with two hand-grips.

Turbans;
Sandals with heels;
One-piece suits for warriors.

Step pyramids;
Stucco floors;
Ball courts with rings.

Hieroglyphic writing;
Signs for numerals and relative value of these according to position;
Books folded screen style;
Historical annals and maps.

Year of 18 months of 20 days, plus 5 additional days;
Combination of 20 signs and 13 numerals to form a period of 260 days;
Combination of the two previous periods to form a cycle of 52 years;
Festivals at the end of certain periods;
Good and bad omen days;
Persons named according to the day of their birth.

Ritual use of paper and rubber;
Sacrifice of quail;
Certain forms of human sacrifice (burning people alive, dancing dressed in the skin of the victim);
Certain forms of self-sacrifice (extraction of blood from one's tongue, ears, legs, sexual organs);
The flying game or ritual (juego del volador);
13 as a ritual number;
A series of divinities; Tlaloc, for example;
Concept of several other worlds and of a difficult journey to them; Drinking the water in which a deceased relative has been bathed.

Specialized markets or markets subdivided according to specialties; Merchants who are at the same time spies; Military orders (eagle knights and tiger knights); Wars for the purpose of securing sacrificial victims.

When Caso described the limits of the Mesoamerican culture area, he noted that "This delimitation for Mesoamerica is valid only from the 16th century". (1953:226). Now the same kind of problem, from the point of view of this paper, confronts us in the matter of culture traits. While Kirchhoff's list is very useful in giving substance to the general impression that we are dealing with an areal configuration of marked integrity which is quite distinct from adjacent configurations, it does not yet give us a neat conformance to the requirements laid down by Bennett. The list is really a grand average in space and in time. As a list, it fails to describe the specific contexts for these characteristic traits. While by no means disregarding the importance of Kirchhoff's list, we still must present the evidence with more direct relevance to the problems of this paper. This means that we are going to have to refer to the archaeology. Two things can be determined by means of the archaeological evidence: (1) The culture elements which show sufficient persistence to be reckoned as true markers of a culture area with time depth will be singled out. (2) The distribution of characteristic assemblages with time depth can be used to establish the outer limits of the area within which we assert a co-tradition.

Various authorities have described the development of Mesoamerican culture history in terms of somewhat different evolutionary categories. There are also differences in the placement of particular archaeological assemblages on one side or the other of the various stage divisions. But regardless of the differences in detail, there seems to be a general consensus on the broad course of Mesoamerican culture history. Radiocarbon dating has established a date of approximately 1500 B.C. for the early horizon of Zacateenco in the Valley of Mexico. This we shall use as the provisional base line for the reckoning of a sedentary maize agricultural tradition in Mesoamerica. Prior to remains characteristic of settled agricultural villages, only a few scattered finds allow us a glimpse of the long antecedent period of early hunters and proto-agriculturalists. These finds are cited and commented upon by Armillas (1948); Caso (1953), and Willey and Phillips (1955).

From Early Zacateenco on, the archaeological record contains an infinitely fuller and more coherent expression of the historical continuum. Sedentary village life based on maize cultivation produces a food surplus adequate to support a growing population, greater density of settlement, and increasing specialization of human endeavor. Villages develop into urban centers. Ceremonialism becomes an important theme in Mesoamerican life, expressed in great monuments and in powerful art styles. Linked
with ceremonialism are learned developments in astronomy, the calendar, mathematics, and writing. Trade becomes institutionalized and the exchange of products and ideas involves the entire area. There is a long period during which these themes are elaborated, and in outstanding cases, fantastically embellished. Then follows a series of oscillations for which the archaeological record indicates temporary hegemonies, the breakdown of top-heavy cultural structures in certain areas, and possibly considerable movement of peoples.

Different students have variously interpreted this continuum. It is pertinent to consider these differences in interpretation. Coe's discussion of the Formative, also published in this journal, represents a refinement of the prevalent Formative-Classic-Post Classic stage sequence, distinguishing an early Formative stage of village agricultural, pottery-making societies from a late Formative stage (Proto-Classic) in which the fundamental materials for Classic elaboration—writing, calendar, monumental architecture, etc.—were developed. A similar hypothesis is presented by Caso (1953) who distinguishes a two-stage pre-Classic following primitive agriculture and pottery. These stages, which coincide with Armillas' (1948) Formative, Caso calls "Archaic" and "Formative". The agreement on a unitary Classic stage (Armillas' "Florescent") is quite general. What some have called the Post-Classic and others the Militaristic, is, however, divided by Caso into a "Toltec" and a "Historical" or pre-Conquest stage.

It is clear that the various proposals to organize Mesoamerican history represent the imposition of different perspectives on more or less the same data. Some of these divisions are true developmental stages, others are really time periods. But, whatever the bias of the various schemes, the important point for present purposes is the fact that Mesoamerican culture history shows a progression of distinctive configurations through time from any point of view. It is this fact which allows us to seek time-depth diagnostics for the Mesoamerican culture area as a whole.

The approach here used is that these diagnostics are better described as having depth in time if we can show their persistence through at least two phases of this "progression of configurations" than if we argue, say, that such and such a trait lasted so many years. I prefer the three-stage organizational scheme because it seems to me to tie-the so-called ProtoClassic manifestations to their logical antecedents in the evolution of a surplus-producing agricultural economy. In contrast, an unconscious teleology is involved in classifying these developments according to their affinity to the subsequent Classic florescence. I will use the Formative-Classic-Post-Classic scheme here in order to avoid any tendency to employ effects in explaining causes.

Our attention is focused on the earliest of the developmental stages because the obvious items involved need only to be established as "early". The selection is made from Armillas (1948), Wauchope (1950), Caso (1953), and MacNeish (1954).

Maize cultivation and sedentary settlement can be observed at the very outset of the Formative. Pottery is already being made, as are other clay
items including griddles (comales), hand-modeled figurines and earplugs. Obsidian stonework also appears early in the Formative. Weaving is indicated, but there is a question whether the earliest material utilized was maguey fiber or cotton. There are traces of jade and turquoise, but these are hardly diagnostic for the early Formative. Somewhere in the latter part of the initial stage of development, according to Armillas, technics of intensive agriculture develop. This cannot be considered as demonstrated for the Formative, although chinampas are characteristic of the Valley of Mexico later on. If, however, such a development were ultimately to be established for this nascent period of Mesoamerican high civilization, it would give us a logical antecedent for the rise of monumental architecture, imposing ceremonial or urban centers, writing and the calendar, and dated monuments. The evidence for mound architecture consists of isolated mounds during MacNeish's "Temple Formative" and mound groups around plazas during the "Proto-Classic". The existence of the calendar and dated monuments, however, can only be inferred:

We must also believe that the remarkable hieroglyphic and calendrical systems of the Maya were evolved during the Archaic, for when the oldest dated stelae were erected at the beginning of the Classic Period, those systems were in full working order...Caso has recently brought forth weighty arguments tending to show that bar-and-dot numeration...may have been originated in Oaxaca...and if the very early date on the famous stela of Tres Zapotes, in Vera Cruz, has been correctly read and if it recorded a contemporaneous event, one might have to look to the southern coast of the Gulf of Mexico for the place of origin..." (Kidder, 1950).

I would say that the following traits are old enough and, as comparison with Kirchhoff's list will show, endure long enough to constitute a verifiable, distinctive pattern: maize agriculture, village and later more intensive settlement, a ceramic complex including pottery of characteristic and widespread forms, griddles, figurines (hand-modeled and later molded), and earplugs; obsidian, jade and turquoise worked in a variety of forms and ultimately with pre-eminent skill; pyramid mounds, writing, the calendar, position numeration and the concept of zero, and dated monuments. Most of these first appear in the late part of the Formative, when the ultimate features of Mesoamerican culture were being defined. Others, which may be somewhat later, nevertheless should be included because they persisted through a long development. While hieroglyphic writing alone would distinguish Mesoamerica sharply from all other areas in the New World, I prefer to look to the combination of traits rather than to any single element to define this culture area diachronically.

Some investigations along the margins of the high culture hearth should help us fix a relatively firm boundary for the persistent civilization in Mesoamerica. The districts to be surveyed are: (1) the western part of Mexico north of Oaxaca, (2) a northern arc from Sonora in the west to the Veracruz-Tamaulipas border on the east, which dips
south on the central plateau through lower Durango and Zacatecas and northward over the eastern Sierras to the Pánuco; and (3) the southeastern peripheries of the Guatemala highlands and Honduras.

West Mexico

By now, considerable work has been done in west Mexico, even though it does not begin to account for the whole area. Kelly, Armillas, Sauer and Brand, Noguera, Porter, Ekholm and Borbolla have worked in west and northwest Mexico and have turned up highly suggestive material. However, very little synthesis has been attempted beyond setting up such capacious generalizations as "the Tarascan area", which in its widest extent includes Michoacán, parts of Guanajuato, Zacatecas, Jalisco, Colima and Nayarit.

It can hardly be doubted that at least part of this area, especially inland Michoacán and some of its environs, presents a distinctive configuration. The peculiar architecture of the stone tombs (El Openo) and yacatas (Tzintzuntzan) and above all the prolific and brilliantly elaborated figurine industry form an abstract pattern whose meaning will be fully clarified only by more excavations. This is an area I wish to view in greater detail than will be necessary for the provinces to the north or northeast.

It goes almost without saying that the occurrence in this area and in the Valley of Mexico of numerous ceramic horizon markers (pottery and figurine types) points to western Mexico as an area of research which should produce important understandings about Mesoamerican culture history. I have subdivided the presentation into three parts: a) Guerrero, b) the hazily defined "Tarascan area", and c) western Mexico up to lower Sonora.

Guerrero: Three districts have been explored: the Middle Balsas region, Costa Grande, and the Guerrero coast. In the Middle Balsas, the archaeology suggests a cultural sequence from the Late Formative through Classic and post-Classic levels which can presumably be aligned with the chronology of the Valley of Mexico by horizon diagnostics. The archaeology reveals a complex mound-plaza-platform development. Construction features are stucco and plaster floors and walls. There are ball courts with rings, stone house foundations, architectural stone sculpture (tenoned heads), and sculpture in the round. The array of technology includes chipped stone (rare), axes and other copper tools, legless metates and bark beaters. Ceramics include pottery and figurines, both "local" and "imported". The local pottery consists principally of relatively simple, incised ware without supports and "formative-like" figurines. Apparently alien are painted wares with swollen leg supports and figurines resembling those of Teotihuacán. Since the exact sequence of this complex is not available to me, I find it hard to know how to interpret the material; whether as a long-lived late Formative or as an expression of some kind of evolutionary development. Certainly there does not seem to be enough material in this complex to enable us to define a succession of Formative–Classic–post–Classic stages.
The ceramic sequence in the Costa Grande district resembles that of the Middle Balsas, and here too there is a ceremonial center of some size. The mounds are characterized by adobe and stone fill. An Olmecoid figurine was found here. On the Guerrero coast, two sites yield "formative" ceramic traits which later gave way to Teotihuacán-like pottery. But these coastal sites do not relate clearly to the inland complexes described above, nor does their real developmental depth parallel the succession of pottery styles.

Michoacán and adjacent regions: Some generalizations about the region are in order. The yácata mound structure is peculiar to central Michoacán. When viewed from the air, the structure resembles a kind of "T" whose crossbar is a rectangular mound, and whose stem is short and bulbous at the end. All sides rise steeply in large steps. The interior is coarse rubble, with an intermediate retaining surface of broken rock and an exterior surface of stone slabs. The archaeology of Michoacán is also characterized by a florescent expression of clay modeling. There are many human and animal forms, both true effigies and effigy vessels. The modeling is realistic and expert; the human figures are presented in various activities and their dress is portrayed in rich detail. The pottery vessels of the area generally feature simple bowls, bowls with tripod and annular supports, large jars and some stirrup spout vessels. Painted decoration (red-on-buff, red-on-brown, etc.) occurs amid a strong accent on monochrome as does some polychrome and al fresco pottery. Relationships with other areas are specific with respect to items recognizable from other localities, but vague in the sense of not supporting any notions about historic relationships. Cross-ties are clearest with the Valley of Mexico, and apparently least specific with Oaxaca. Relationships with adjacent regions may be recognized in certain items shared with Guerrero to the south and Nayarit-Colima-Sinaloa to the north.

El Openo: Here are found stone tombs built into the ground; as seen from above, these show a T-shape, the stem representing a passageway. They often hold multiple burials. There are figurines with punched fillet collars, others like Vaillant's "C" and "D" types at Zacatenco, and still others of greenstone with Olmecoid mouths. Other artifacts include pottery effigy whistles, jade ear spools, barbed and stemmed triangular projectile points of refined workmanship, composite silhouette jars, some negative painting, and a zoomorphic bowl with four tall hollow legs. Noguera equates El Openo chronologically with the Valley of Mexico Formative and regards it as a relatively advanced complex which may have influenced the latter.

Tzintzuntzan: The yácatas found at this site were described above. The stirrup spout jars occur here too. Negative painting is common, as are footed vessels and polished black ware. Other elements of the Tzintzuntzan complex include stone sculpture, with human and coyote figures; obsidian and rock crystal ornaments (jade is scarce); the use of copper, silver and gold and the techniques of gilding and lost-wax casting; pipes; and the chac-mool concept. A sequence suggested for this site correlates it with Teotihuacán or Proto-Classic, with the very late Classic (Coyotlatelco, Mazapan), and
with Aztec times. Al fresco and negative painting, rudimentary stone tombs, and stone carvings with Teotihuacán and El Openo-Olmecoid affinity characterize the first period. A little metal comes in during the next period, which also marks the beginning of mound-building. The full-blown complex described above characterizes the Post-Classic or Aztec horizon.

Chupicuaro: This station is of some interest to us because of its position on the Lerma River in southeast Guanajuato, at once marginal to Michoacán and related to it, and occupying an "inside" position between the Tarascan sites proper and the Valley of Mexico. There are no big architectural structures here, but considerable refuse suggests the occupancy of a sizeable community. There is a large cemetery where simple, extended interment is the general rule. However, single skull burials are found, and some of these are cut, suggesting "trophies" or perhaps some sort of purposeful stylized treatment. The abundant grave offerings include pottery, musical instruments and jewelry. The grave complex exhibits an interesting feature in the form of clay-lined fire-boxes placed near the burials. Later these fire boxes are set more formally in the midst of a burial group. Slant-eyed figurines (Vaillant's N-4, "intrusive in the Valley of Mexico") appear to cross-date the early phase at Chupicuaro with late Ticoman and Cuicuilco-Teotihuacán I. The pottery here is characterized by an absence of al fresco or negative painting at any time. Monochrome black ware occurs in the form of shouldered vessels, tripod, pedestal and ring stand bases and effigies. This ware is sometimes incised. Red-on-buff and other painted wares, including polychrome, occur in the early phase at Chupicuaro.

In late times, perhaps coeval with Teotihuacán II, figurines with classic style headdress (H-5) and fragments of burned adobe walls and floors appear. This phase grows out of its predecessor. There are some shifts in ceramic emphasis and more wares recognizable elsewhere are found. However, there seems to be no great change in the basic life pattern.

Western Mexico from Michoacán to Sonora: Little purpose would be served by presenting the kind of detailed account of the archaeology of this area that was given for the region to the south. Individual phases are defined in Colima, Jalisco, Nayarit, Sinaloa, and Sonora, which show specific pottery relationships both with adjacent areas and with Mexican high culture centers. Although there are suggestive items at Chumilucuaro, Delicias, Apatzingán, and Aztatlán, and mound structures have been noted here and there, the kind of information required to include this area within Mesoamerica proper is not evident in the material I have canvassed. By the time one reaches Sinaloa, evidence of stone architecture and ceremonial centers is lacking, and only vessels with leg supports, certain peculiar design elements, obsidian flake blades and spindle whorls represent, according to Ekholm, the surviving nexus of "Mexican" traits.
Northern Frontier of Central Plateau

Very little material is available from this area, except for information on two outliers of Mesoamerican culture in Zacatecas and another more dubious site in Durango. At La Quemada in Zacatecas there is a hill-top fortress which bears some resemblance to the yacatas described above. Among the truncated pyramids there is an aberrant type which looks as if it continued to a point. Construction may be broadly described as rubble, or more precisely as slightly worked flat rocks, well fitted together. A feature distinctive of La Quemada is a group of round columns of similar construction, found inside one room. At Chalchihuites the ruins, although less imposing, are similar to those at La Quemada. At both sites is found a sort of cloisonne ware, as well as pottery with thick paint-filled incisions and red-on-buff ware. In Durango, the site of Zape marks the northern limit of distribution for Mesoamerican pottery traits. An earth-masonry pyramid and room clusters have been found there. Beyond Zape there is a 100-mile hiatus before Southwest influence is encountered in the Chihuahua culture. Like the evidence from the northern area of West Mexico, the archaeology of the Central Plateau gives the impression of late date and sporadic occupancy, rather than indigenous development through two or more stages of complexity.

Northeast Mexico

As we cross the eastern Sierra, the Pánuco River dividing Veracruz from Tamaulipas appears also to separate the northernmost extension of Mesoamerican civilization (Huasteca) from what Kroeber called "the barbarous tribes across the river". MacNeish, who has developed a more coherent picture of the archaeology of Tamaulipas than had previously been available, has worked also to the south, where he has extended Ekholm's Huasteca sequences backward in time (MacNeish, 1954; Ekholm, 1944). Archaeology on either side of the Pánuco River has in no way contradicted Kroeber's statement that here Mesoamerican civilization came to a halt.

The Southern Limits

In the Comayagua Valley of Spanish Honduras, Canby (1951) describes a long sequence at Yarumela which yields a succession said to extend from a very early Formative horizon to the Classic. Pottery, which is well made and well finished, but simple and lacking in appendages such as handles, feet and spouts occurs in the earliest level. The ware becomes more distinctive in the second level and a lone solid figurine head, identified as "Playa de los Muertos or Lenca", occurs. Mound building begins in the third phase, which also marks the appearance of Usulután ware with nipple tetrapod feet. This phase is considered coeval with materials recovered from under the ash layer at Cerro Zapote in eastern Salvador, with the Copan Archaic and, in part, with Early Chukumuk and Miraflores, mostly on the basis of "identical shapes and treatment of the Usulutan ware". The "Classic" phase yields Ulua-Yojoa polychrome and "the idea of a highland sphere typified by 'bold animistic' and lowland
sphere typified by 'bold geometric' is adequately supported here."

One is tempted to draw the southern Mesoamerican boundary as a line running north from the mouth of the Río Negro at the Gulf of Fonseca on the Pacific coast of Honduras passing through Tegucigalpa and reaching the north coast of Honduras somewhere east of the mouth of the Ulua River. This would envelop within the Mesoamerican culture area almost all of the sequences for which any reasonable argument could be made. Reports like those of Canby (1951), Shook (1951) and Thompson (1943), however, define stages by cross-tying pottery and art styles, so that it is difficult to grasp the character of these "cultures" at different places. It has not been possible, in the kind of overall effort demanded by this paper, to employ basic site reports for the kind of information needed. Most summaries slight general cultural data, especially on the Formative stage level, in favor of pottery horizons. Thus, the proposal I am about to make is based on the assumption that the kind of impressive cultural endeavor manifested at sites such as Kaminaljuyú and Copán would not have been overlooked even in summaries despite the characteristic emphasis on pottery and art styles which features the archaeological accounts from this region. With the understanding that much less work has been done on the peripheries of these southern regional centers than has been done in the heartland of the Southern and Northern Maya, and acknowledging the sometimes amazing discoveries at places like El Baal, I would agree to a southern boundary of the Mesoamerican climax which is drawn along the edge of the Guatemalan highlands and terminates on the east in the vicinity of the Río Ulua, rather than embracing a collection of sites whose cultural-developmental reference is indistinct. This boundary is amenable to correction on the basis of the requirements which have been more or less evident in the review thus far.

I propose now to summarize the principles involved in drawing the boundaries of a Mesoamerican culture area with time depth and state the line this delimitation will take, both on the north and on the south.

1. The mapping of the Mesoamerican culture area attempted here recognizes that important sites, indeed important regions, will for the time being remain outside the projected area.

2. The reason for this is the insistence, which I believe to be methodologically useful, on a criterion of developmental rather than merely chronological time depth, for the included regions.

3. It is more useful, in my opinion, to leave out areas whose cultural-developmental profiles can be worked out only by more archaeology and more pertinent synthesis, rather than to assume their involvement in the climactic traditions. When regions are included in a climax area, their special qualities, and lack of other qualities, tend to be obscured because their distinctive configurations are immediately averaged out with the complex of all other included regions. It is better to leave questionable regions out, then, and let the argument develop for, rather than against, inclusion.
It is obvious from the above that the proposed boundary is not to be regarded as "permanent". On the other hand, it should be treated at any one time as if it were historical rather than methodological. Adherence to the arbitrary character of the outline will develop the contradictions we seek and will clarify more historical details than could be explained through the use of a more flexible boundary.

On this basis, the following boundary for the Mesoamerican culture area with time depth is indicated (see Map 1):

In the west: Guerrero and the Michoacán "Tarascan" areas cannot be lumped together, it seems to me, if only because of the striking difference in architecture. The case for an indigenous developmental sequence has not been made for Guerrero, and I therefore exclude this region from the culture area. The inclusion of Michoacán is also doubtful, although this region is by no means lacking in a native cultural tradition as Guerrero seems to be. The elaborate figurine-stone grave-yačata complex appears to give Michoacán a character of its own. I suggest including Michoacán, with the exception of the complex manifested at Chupícuaro. Its marginality to the "Tarascan area" is emphasized by the different burial complexes. With Michoacán, both the western extension and the northwestern limits seem to be fixed. None of the material developed north of Michoacán along the coast speaks for regional integrity and developmental time depth.

The north: On the central plateau, the Zacatecas and Durango sections referred to above are in an area which today is inhospitable to native agriculture. There may have been oscillation in this respect over the time period with which we are concerned. Nevertheless, neither the archaeological nor the ecological data encourages the notion of a long occupancy or of a regional culture of integrity. Michoacán-like architectural features suggest a period of migration or colonizaton which, compared to the longevity of the culture area as a whole, was probably brief. For these reasons I would not include the extensions into Zacatecas and Durango.

The northeast: This is the most clearly marked frontier, especially with MacNeish's extension of the time depth for the Huasteca area (1954), so that there seems to be no reason to cavil at drawing the line at the Pánuco.

Here then is the boundary: In the north, it starts at Tampico on the Veracruz coast, runs along the Pánuco River for a short distance, forms a line along the western boundary of Veracruz to the northern border of Hidalgo, from where it follows along the state line of Hidalgo and México and Michoacán to the western edge of the plateau. Then the border runs south and southeast with the plateau through Michoacán, turning south again to the sea along the western border of Oaxaca. In the south, as indicated above, the border follows the arc of the Guatemala highlands, turning at the Río Ulúa and terminating at the mouth of this river.
Map 1

Proposed Regions of the Mesoamerican Co-tradition
Regions of the Co-tradition

The Mesoamerican culture area includes: (1) The Mexican states of Veracruz, Hidalgo, Puebla, Tlaxcala, México, Morelos, Michoacán (on the central plateau), Oaxaca, Chiapas, Tabasco, Campeche, Yucatán and Quintana Roo; and (2) British Honduras, Highland Guatemala and an adjacent strip of Spanish Honduras. The area likewise takes in Mesoamerican culture of unequivocal time-depth. I will deal now with the geographic subdivisions to which ancient co-traditions may be assigned.

Ideally, each internal region should be treated as a small culture area and its borders established by the same procedure used to fix those of the major culture area. But in Mesoamerica, as in Peru (see Bennett, 1948), the archaeology is not sufficiently refined to allow us to do this. We must examine regional sequences and, if they give evidence of relative climax or of intensity through time, assign the cultural characteristics of the sites to the surrounding geographic regions which then are said to be sub-culture areas with time depth.

This methodology is already suggested by charts (Fig. 1) such as those of Coe and Lathrap (in the previous issue of this journal), Armillas (1948) and Ekholm (ms. 1955) and, in Holden's grouping of Post-Classic archaeology and ethnohistory by geographic regions in her paper in the previous issue. The charts presented in Fig. 1, however, do not presume to portray continuous units. Note that some columns have geographic headings ("Valley of Mexico", "Oaxaca" or "Guatemala Highlands"), while others are named after a site ("Kaminaljuyú"). Now unquestionably all of these are considered by their authors to have some areal significance beyond the confines of the excavated sites, even beyond the areal spread from which the sequence was derived. However, the parallel columns of the charts suggest that we are dealing with areal sub-cultures which (1) abut on one another, and (2) together preempt the entire culture area. While the various authors may believe that such a construct could be produced, they are not - in the presentations referred to - particularly interested in such precise outlines. On the other hand, the chart reproduced in this paper does constitute an attempt to divide Mesoamerica into a series of contiguous sub-areas. Its parallel columns are an appropriate means for suggesting such an arrangement, in contrast to the free-standing and not necessarily rectangular columns that would more accurately represent the others. The distinction between mine and the other papers is one of problem and of corresponding point of view. The papers of Coe and Lathrap and Holden are oriented toward reconstructing Mesoamerican culture history during particular stages; this paper is concerned with methodology and proposes rigid boundaries, not because they are "true" or "accurate", but because their arbitrary character and the arbitrary assumptions on which they are based provide an analytic tool whereby some problems of history stand out in relief. This said, one may usefully survey the comparative chart (Fig. 1) to see how proposed co-tradition units correspond to the regional sequences of the authors referred to above.

It will be noted that the following constituents of the Mesoamerican Area Co-tradition are proposed:

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1. The Mesoamerican Highlands: a) The Western Plateau (defined earlier and therefore omitted from the sequences to be summarized below); b) the Valley of Mexico and all of the plateau south of the northern frontier of Mesoamerica, with the exception of the Michoacán area and Puebla, which will be referred to as the Valley of Mexico and vicinity; Puebla, Oaxaca; Chiapas; Highland Guatemala.

2. The Mesoamerican Lowlands: Central Lowlands; Yucatan Peninsula; Southern Veracruz-Tabasco; Central Veracruz; Northern Veracruz.

The Valley of Mexico and Vicinity

The peoples of the north-central part of the Mesoamerican culture area passed through a development from small, scattered village farming (Early Zacatenco) to an elaborate socio-cultural organization replete with autocratic government, a stratified society, a variety of occupational and local groupings, organized warfare, spreading hegemonies and refined systems of tribute and taxation. Underlying the intricate social structure was a competent subsistence technology based on intensive agriculture, and knowledge and skills which went beyond the crafts to writing, mathematics and a complex calendrical-astronomical system. The Valley of Mexico represents only one of the ten regional cultures proposed in this paper. But its character and history constitute one of the two best-described sub-patterns in Mesoamerican high civilization. An account of the cultural developments in the Valley of Mexico will be given at some length in order to provide a reference base for the other sequences. A description of this region is also useful as a pillar of the proposed Mesoamerican co-tradition.

The earliest known agricultural settlements in the Valley of Mexico are represented by several sites typified by the earliest phase at Zacatenco (ca. 1500 B.C. by radiocarbon dating). The first pattern encountered is of a maize-growing society in which hunting and collecting presumably still play a fairly large part. Pottery and weaving, perhaps with cotton, are already practiced. The pottery vessels are simple containers (ollas and basal angle bowls), mostly monochrome (a darkish red bay ware) with rather rudimentary decoration. A characteristic feature already in evidence is the hand-modeled clay figurine, and, to a lesser extent, a complex of small objects such as clay whistles and rattles. Ear plugs are shown on the figurines. The stone work includes obsidian blades struck from prismatic cores and "laurel leaf" projectile points, as well as a footed, troughed metate. A few jade and turquoise pieces are found. We know nothing about the character of the housing at this time. Burials are casual and are carried out in diverse ways.

Early Zacatenco, encountered in deep refuse deposits, is considered to have been a long occupation. In the succeeding phases, the ramification of pottery vessel shapes and decoration is evident while the utility ware persists with small modification. An added emphasis on ornament occurs, along with an increase in jade, which was used for pendants, beads, and
small celts. Along with a general proliferation of figurines and the development of new types, the figurine complex is "invaded" by Olmec forms (Tlatilco). This represents the first suggestion of outside influences, aside from some possible early trade contact with the west.

The strong impression of increased cultural development at Ticoman is provided by the advent of still other figurine types, the occurrence of footed vessel forms and polychrome decoration, and the appearance of flared, hollow-core ear plugs and pottery stamps and seals. There is some indication here of a more elaborate ceremonialism, although this inference is based entirely on portable objects. Sporadic traces of house foundations, along with considerable adobe in the deposits, give us solid evidence for some architecture.

The culture of the Valley of Mexico now seems to increase spectacularly in complexity, chiefly in connection with a burgeoning ceremonialism. South of Mexico City is the circular terraced mound at Cuicuilco. To the north of the modern capital, in the initial phase of Teotihuacán, the Pyramid of the Sun and that of the Moon were erected. Other mounds were built in Morelos and Puebla during this period. The center of interest is specifically Teotihuacán and its environs. Here develops a whole complex of public architecture, both ceremonial (Temple of Quetzalcoatl) and habitable (the sprawling "apartment house" multiple dwellings). While the pyramids and temples are the core of the development, their setting becomes a kind of urban community. Epic frescoes occur on some of the buildings.

The accompanying ceramic complex, characteristic of Teotihuacán's third phase, consists of the slab-footed cylinder tripod vessel, the florero, the candelero and the paint-on-stucco technique which Lathrap has referred to in the previous issue as the X-T traits, along with the Thin Orange ware of foreign provenience. The major buildings are of adobe with brick veneer, while the apartment houses are constructed of rubble masonry finished with plaster. Figurines continue, but the trend toward stylization which has long been evident culminates in the technique of mold-manufacture. Sculpture seems to play a minor role at Teotihuacán, aside from the stone "masks".

Along with the ceremonialism-urbanism architectural motif which be-speaks a major shift away from village life to a more highly organized and regulated society, the Teotihuacán period was characterized by the rise of ceremonial centers of the same kind, if not on the same scale, at other points in the Valley of Mexico and vicinity; and by extensive relations with distant as well as nearby sections of Mesoamerica. Linne describes in detail a variety of alien wares at Teotihuacán, ranging from West Mexico to the Peten. At the same time, he calls attention to a theme which Lathrap has brought out in his paper in the previous issue, namely the widespread dispersal of X-T traits throughout much of Mesoamerica. Contemporary archaeological opinion seems to agree that this "diffusion" was perpetrated by a militant Valley of Mexico People who introduced their culture to Oaxaca, Highland Guatemala.
and other regions by the convincing device of actual conquest. In this light, the imports at Teotihuacán might be exotic products introduced into their homeland by the increasingly cosmopolitan Mexicans.

Once Teotihuacán proper closes down — and the meaning of this is still unclear — something of the tradition survives at Azcapotzalco and, possibly, Xochimilco. A new ceramic tradition, Coyotlatelco, is encountered at Teotihuacán and Azcapotzalco and above floor at Tetitla and Atetelco near Teotihuacán. Its historic significance is far from clear. Armillas (personal communication) has suggested that this ware may be an extension of the orange ware found throughout the Teotihuacán phase. The ceramics include geometric red-on-white pottery and mold-made figurines with exuberant headdresses and detachable arms and legs. It appears to be a long-lived tradition, for it underlies Mazapan occupations at Tetitla and Atetelco and also occurs along with Plumbate in the pre-Mazapan levels at Tula, whose establishment may date from a period 100 to 300 years after the close of Teotihuacán III. At Tula there follows a new ceramic interval, after which this site attains its peak with the Mazapan occupation. This occupation appears to indicate the origin of the Toltec culture which, among other things, left an indelible mark on the culture of the Yucatan Maya. The Toltec phase at Tula produces a series of characteristic traits. It is of more interest for our present purposes to note the existence in the Valley of Mexico of a powerful cultural configuration, between Teotihuacán and the Aztec climax; one which made a strong impression on subsequent Mesoamerican history.

A surface layer of Aztec II sherds, overlying the ruins of Tula, speaks of another period of cultural fluctuations in the Valley of Mexico. These fluctuations mark the era of local cultures which characterize the region after Teotihuacán and which in turn are followed by another powerful development of more general significance. A final interval of localism is concluded by the emergence of Texcoco, Tenochtitlán and the Aztec Empire which was destroyed by the Spaniards. For illustrative purposes, one might compare the post-Classic period in Mesoamerica with the "declines" which intervened between regional classic cultures in Peru and the Tiahuanaco horizon and again between the spread of Tiahuanaco and the Inca. Unlike the classic Peruvian cultures, however, Teotihuacán influence overflowed its original regional confines and spread to the far reaches of the Mesoamerican area. In contrast to the Andes, Mesoamerica had two horizons comparable with Tiahuanaco. The ebb and flow of powerful and influential climaxes in the Valley of Mexico demonstrates that, developmentally, this particular sub-area did not follow the pattern seen in Peru or, for that matter, in the Maya sub-area of Mesoamerica.

Puebla: We hear of Puebla early in the record of the Valley of Mexico. When the Spaniards arrived in Mesoamerica, the giant site of Cholula was a flourishing metropolis and a manufacturing center for many importing districts. Its archaeology is as cosmopolitan in character as it is incompletely worked out. Noguera aligns Teotihuacán and "Zapotecan" strains in the artifacts with the tombs and other excavational levels at Tehuacán. He postulates an early Zapotec cultural phase of "late Archaic
period" and takes this to mean that Oaxacan culture derived its stimulus from a migration of Zapotecan people from the north. This migration took place, Noguera suggests, during the time when the Teotihuacán culture was just emerging in the Valley of Mexico. According to his account of what happened thereafter, the Oaxacan Zapotec flourished and expanded and later returned to Tehuacán, this time from the south. Now they felt the impact of a developed Teotihuacán culture. Noguera does not believe that Mexicans from Teotihuacán occupied the Tehuacán site; their influence on the local culture represents an acculturation of the resident Zapotec.

The pyramid at Cholula underwent successive reconstructions. The last three periods equate in time with Aztec I-V and are characterized primarily by Mixteca-Puebla polychrome pottery. This is a key area which cannot yet be fully described, but which played a crucial role in the culture history of highland Mesoamerica as is generally agreed, by virtue of its position as a bridge between the powerful climaxes in the Valley of Mexico and those of Oaxaca and the Guatemala highlands. It seems reasonable, therefore, to keep this region separate instead of combining it with a northern or southern region. In the first place, Puebla does seem to play a characteristic role all its own. In the second place, recognizing it as a distinct region allows us a more clearcut operational field for the understanding of the widespread Mesoamerican diffusions.

Oaxaca: Oaxaca, if only because of its cultural precocity, deserves to stand by itself. The earliest horizon so far described here, which is probably coeval with Tlatilco in the Valley of Mexico, shows a well-developed architecture, mural art, and evidence of the "Olmec influence" observed in the north. This initial phase, which has been named Monte Albán I, has a long duration and provides numerous cultural cross-ties with Southern Veracruz-Tabasco, with the Guatemala highlands and with Oaxaca. Oaxacan influence is characterized by its Mayoid rather than Mexican. The introduction of writing and the calendar may perhaps be referred to the earlier part of Monte Albán I. Evolved structures and the Danzantes murals are features of the early complex. The Monte Albán II phase, which emerged after foreign cultural influence had begun to diffuse into Oaxaca, shows specific affinities with Holmul I in the Maya area. Mexican influence becomes dominant with the transition to Monte Albán III, and it seems that the so-called Teotihuacán "X-T complex" equates here with the initial part of Teotihucan in the Maya area. This would make the appearance of the complex in Oaxaca earlier than the arrival of Mexican traits in Guatemala. The material from Monte Albán provides an invaluable clue to the direction of movement, and tends to confirm the view of a cultural flow from the Valley of Mexico to the south and east.

Already in Monte Albán II, vaulted construction appears and early forms of the diagnostic Zapotecan funerary urns are found. The exuberant elaboration of these and other features following the impact of Mexican X-T traits in Monte Albán III marks the culmination of this site as a ceremonial center. From then on, the site is a cemetery whose most
recent levels contain the magnificently furnished Mixtec graves. The ceremonial center of Coixtlahuaca, the graves at Monte Alban to the south in the Valley of Oaxaca, and the Mixteca-Puebla pottery horizons in Puebla emphasize the overlapping florescences in the culture history of Oaxaca. Parallels with the later history of Peru suggest themselves.

Mixtec codices represent one of the important manifestations of writing. An earlier beginning in Oaxaca gives the writing-calendar complex an apparently longer span here than in the Peten. This area provides an important part of the evidence now being collected to show that the origins of the Central Maya writing and calendar must be sought outside Guatemala. The coincidental occurrence of Olmecoid art features and early steleae in several places, but with a special concentration in the Olmeq hearth in Southern Veracruz-Tabasco, suggests that Oaxaca and the Central Maya area were both recipients of this complex, possibly from the Olmec. If this is so, it is rather remarkable that the Olmec penetration of the Valley of Mexico did not also bring the calendar and writing to the early time horizon there. Perhaps we are confronted with cultural configurations of differential receptivity in these several areas. It is also possible that the Olmec "intrusion" into the Valley of Mexico is an importation while that into the southern and southeastern area represents an early migrational stratum.

Chiapas: This political division is among the least known provinces of Mesoamerica. Spotty archaeology suggests that Chiapas should be split according to its topographical affinities with the coastal plain on the Gulf Coast side, with the Guatemala Highlands, and with the Pacific Coast of Guatemala, respectively. This apportionment will perhaps ultimately take place. There is, indeed, no reason to maintain the integrity of a modern political division for a Mesoamerican area co-tradition which refers to prehistoric times. Nevertheless, the other alternative would be to let the contradictory affinities of Chiapas receive more clarification before assigning its territory to other regions. I personally tend to favor the second alternative.

Highland Guatemala: The history of the Highland Guatemala region is one of halcyon days in the early period and of an ultimate defensive retrenchment before the Conquest. Here, during the Las Chareas phase, we can recognize a pre-architectural "village-farming" stages, but Coe has pointed out quite specifically how rich an early farming culture this is. It is of interest to note the presence here of "Type A" figurines and, as a feature peculiar to this region and time horizon, the mushroom-shaped sculptures.

The archaeology shows a nice cultural development in terms of cross-ties with sequences such as Usulutan and "nubbin-footed" vessels in Providencia and the beginnings of mound construction elsewhere. These features grow in importance during the subsequent Miraflores phase, suggesting a progression of considerable refinement compared with the "Chicanel" interpolation between Mamom and the initiation of architectural construction at Uaxactun. At any rate, Miraflores is the most florescent mound building period in the whole Kaminalju-yu sequence and echoes of its characteristic features (which include the construction of log tombs, stone vessels, a variety of pottery wares, and many mushroom stones) sound through the Guatemala highlands and along the Pacific
slopes of Guatemala and Chiapas. The basic affinities of the Guatemalan Highlands during this time appear to be with El Salvador.

The following Santa Clara phase is a kind of retrenchment. The Southern highlands have, during the period just described, remained isolated from the Valley of Mexico. But now (Esperanza) there comes a thorough penetration of the "X-T complex" and a Mexicanization of Highland Guatemala culture. The general feeling among archaeologists is that an invasion took place, although the local peoples were not exterminated. Regional tradition in the utility wares continues, although the showy objects and architecture are Mexican of Teotihuacán pattern. The period marked by magnificently furnished tombs is coeval with the era of Mexican contacts. The early ebullience expressed in Miraflores (while the highlands were isolated from Teotihuacán) and the persistence of utility wares which are indigenous to the region, suggest that the notion of invasion should be regarded merely as a working hypothesis. An alternative explanation of the growth of Mexican influence is the possibility of the kind of wholesale importation, extending even to architecture, which might be characteristic of a prosperous and successful "nouveau riche" culture. While the relative plausibility of the invasion hypothesis is incontestable, it may be instructive to consider that we have perhaps not sufficiently understood the meaning of trait diffusion if we insist on the impossibility of even major importations by means other than physical conquest. It is interesting, though, that in Highland Guatemala the X-T traits do not appear as an antecedent catalyst but come in the midst of the full bloom of Esperanza.

The culture history of the Guatemala Highlands extends past the Plumbate-Fine Orange horizon to Conquest times. I wish to call attention here only to the late Mexicanization on the Plumbate horizon, and to the withdrawal to fortified sites during the period before the Conquest.

2-as Central Lowlands

A history of the Petén-Honduras area, the region in which Maya culture attained its most eloquent expression, is virtually out of the question in the ordinary sense of a continuous account. From the earliest Mamom levels -- believed to be roughly coeval with the early village farming culture in the Valley of Mexico, which they resemble in many ways -- to the sudden break in the archaeological record for the Petén, important cultural developments of vast interest to the present account occurred. Unfortunately, however, the weight of exploration here has directed attention to the grandiose architecture and fabulously elaborated art, at the expense of both a refined chronological account and an understanding of the life of the society as a whole prior to periods covered in ethno-historic accounts. With respect to the latter these reports ranging from native codices to accounts such as Landa's, do allow considerable projection backward in time. But ultimately the picture is static rather than continuous. There are excellent suggestions that the society was relatively conservative and that the Central Maya were favored in the elaboration of their culture by relative isolation. Even
conceding that the range of socio-cultural change was in fact small, it is highly important that an account in more refined units be worked out in the future, one on which a continuous chronicle could be based.

Lowland Maya civilization in the Petén-Honduras region developed by elaboration of a settled agricultural base identified at Mamom (Uaxactun) and other early-horizon sites. The basic similarity to the Valley of Mexico is made clear by the presence of some hunting, figurines and bird whistles made from clay, emphasis on monochrome pottery, and the absence of supports on the pottery, as well as by other shared traits. A subsequent period is the ill-defined Chicanel. This may relate, Janus-like, both to Mamom "village agriculture" and the phases of elaborate architecture, and dated monuments. This is evidently the phase into which that curiously isolated expression of a modest formative culture anchored late in time called the Copán Archaic fits. Nothing yet found locally gives the antecedent culture; the Copán acropolis rests directly on the archaic remains. It is "late" by virtue of the presence of Usulutan ware which characterizes many sites in and around the southern part of Mesoamerica. The Copán Archaic tradition is attributed in its origin to Salvador. The marginal site of Playa de los Muertos shows many Tlatilco-like items such as stirrup-spout forms and evolved figurines of a type established in the Valley of Mexico as well. I mention these details to express the direction of relationships with different areas manifest in the Preclassic stage at Petén-Honduras, as well as the very fact of ramified ties with other areas. As in the Valley of Mexico, however, these incursions of foreign elements, whether imported or brought in by foreign peoples, become part of a differentiating regional culture profile instead of tending to make different areas uniform.

Once dated monuments and pyramid mounds appear, a period estimated at about 600 years must be described in terms of a collection of traits. But perhaps Longyear's reconstruction of history at Copán will provide an illustrative model. The Archaic, so-called, is late with respect to Mamom. Longyear suggests that the people lived in thatched huts clustered in groups corresponding to the family band and that maize and game were relied upon for subsistence. Longyear deprecates "trade" here, considering the figurines as "curiosities" brought back by travelers. This would not, however, explain the strong emphasis on Usulutan in the Copán Archaic complex. Tlatilco-like influences are more prevalent, in general, at other eastern and southeastern sites, though perhaps such alien Mexican items as appear below the Copán acropolis were received from an intermediate station closer at hand than the Valley of Mexico.

Despite the apparently sudden transition to a wholly different level of social life suggested by the construction of the acropolis, local wares of the Archaic persist on the later level, although now the complex is dominated by polychrome basal flange bowls, tripod vases and swollen supports described as "mammiform." Numerous obsidian blades, metates and manos, extended burials in graves or slab cists (recalling some manifestation of this sort of thing at El Arbolillo?) are part of the complex. The burials are accompanied by offerings. Longyear finds his deus ex machina for the
Archaic-acropolis transition in an advanced Maya people of the Guatemalan Petén who drifted into the area bringing the polychrome basal flange bowls and tripod vases, a priesthood associated with ceremonial centers, and an attendant stratified social organization with considerable division of labor. The local populace remained but was subordinated to the invaders. They were trained by the priestly leaders and specialists from the Guatemalan Petén to work on the ceremonial centers. This culture change represents a consolidation and preparation for the erection of the first dated stela at Copán.

The peak of Petén-Honduras civilization is usually correlated with the appearance of the dated stelae which, however widely they occur elsewhere, are nevertheless one of the most powerful themes in the climactic cultural configuration of this region. Centers flourish from the Usamacinta drainage to Copán. How these centers were related is not clear. Some authorities believe that the standardized monument dating strongly suggests coordination with, but not necessarily control by, a single center. A transition to local styles, according to Longyear, obliterates the basal flange. There are suggestions of an incursion of X-T traits in the Highland and Lowland Maya area after the first third of the Tzakol period. Longyear notes that the general distribution of flanged bowls and tripod vases characteristic of early Classic Maya gradually disappears, and local styles intensify and gain character. Perhaps this "breakdown of centralized control," or temporary dislocation, is consequent on integration of alien culture elements before an ultimate florescent outburst.

The full classic at Copán, continuing Longyear's reconstruction, sees the completion of the acropolis and the building of outlying additions, and the proliferation of dated monuments. Copador is the dominant polychrome pottery at Copán, although trade wares and other trade objects are in considerable evidence. Despite the obvious geographic isolation of the Central Maya area, the local available natural resources contrasted with the raw materials of the multitude of objects found here leave no doubt that this period carried on much trade with many parts of Mesoamerica. Jade is an especially important diagnostic in this connection, for its absence locally and the abundance of its occurrence in the archaeological sites provide a striking contrast and a clue as to the dependence of this region on trade for many of the things out of which the configuration is shaped. Corbelled vault architecture, stucco facing on rubble fill, ball courts, stucco and stone relief, sweat houses, glyphic writing, an intense expression of mathematic-calendrical-astronomical activity and extensive record-keeping -- as well as the characteristic ceramic modes and art style -- are outstanding elements in the complex characteristic of the Classic (Tzakol-Tepeu) culmination of Central Maya culture.

The dramatic picture of a sudden abandonment of the Central Maya centers is somewhat modified by Longyear in his account of what happened at Copán. Here, he believes, the priests and upper classes abandoned the main body of the populace. Left without the leaders required to maintain this highly structured society, the people dispersed into village clusters not far from the old cities or ceremonial centers. To these they kept returning, apparently ceremonially, as is indicated by burials in the rooms. It is in the room
deposits referred to the period when the Copaneros went back to live near their fields that the pottery sequence breaks sharply and Plumbate appears. To the extent that Plumbate is a sensitive horizon marker, we may infer that at a time when the Valley of Mexico still had a long course of history before it, Maya civilization in this Central region had already collapsed.

2-b: Yucatan Peninsula

Thompson (1940) calls attention to the Yucatan peninsula as a region within which there existed stylistic subdivisions (Puuc, Chenes) which he attributed not to sequential development in time but rather to the co-existence in the area of groups which had wandered in from different cultural hearths and established themselves in the savannas and scrub forests. He suggests that the Puuc-Etzná-Xcalukin complex may have diffused from southwestern Campeche, "an archaeological lacuna."

Brainerd (1951) subsequently reported the definition of a dozen or so chronologically consecutive phases, the first three of which he called "Formative" and the rest of which were distributed through the "Yucatan Regional and Florescent" periods and subdivisions of the Mexican period. He found the Early Formative at Mani Cenote, the Middle Formative at Santa Rosa Xtampak and Dzibilnocac (Chenes sites in northwestern Campeche). Late Formative materials came from the latter two sites and from Chichén Itzá, Yaxuna, Holactun, and Mayapan. Brainerd states:

The occurrence of Formative pottery in Yucatan sites, as explored by this survey, may be characterized as light but remarkably consistent. With a partial exception of the Puuc sites, every major ruin sampled showed pure or nearly pure Late Formative deposits in the bottom of the trenches (1951).

He goes on to note that there probably was a large, well distributed population in Yucatan in the Late Formative period and that "the locations of Formative sites were clung to with surprising tenacity by the late Maya peoples."

The Late Formative here apparently was coeval with the Uaxactun phases Mamom and Chicanel (Early Formative seems to have no cross-ties). The Regional and Florescent appear to have been coeval with the Petén Classic. The initial phase of the Mexican period corresponded to the Toltec occupation of Chichén Itzá, while its last phase is represented by Mayapan.

The occurrence of such a very early horizon as the Yucatan Early Formative -- not yet recognizable as part of the Mesoamerican Formative pattern -- is an important piece of evidence. Brainerd suggests an early time horizon for the development of ceremonial centers and theocratic societies in Yucatan. He contrasts the feeling of an unbroken succession here with the abruptness of
the onset of the Initial Series period in the Petén, although he notes that
the appearance of stelae and vaults in the latter region may mark the change
better.

This appears, then, to be an area of very long and consistent occupation,
as well as of a somewhat early appearance of the ceremonial complex (though not
of the stelae, so far as is yet known) relative to the Petén. We may be getting
closer to the origins of Maya culture in time and space as we move toward
Tabasco and Veracruz. The coastal belt would then be hearth and channel for
Mayoid spread. The increasing demands for a very early dating of La Venta-
Tres Zapotes may possibly derive some support from Brainerd's results. In
any case, Thompson's suggestion that Puuc originated in southwestern Campeche
seems to have been made largely because that area was little understood at
the time of writing (1940). This hypothesis seems to be less necessary to-
day, although Brainerd too finds less consistency in the evidence from Puuc
sites. This area appears, in any event, to have had a long chronological
history with an extended early period of cultural progress, followed by a
1000 year-long florescence, and then by the invasions, realignments, and sub-
sequent decline.

* * * * *

I shall not dwell on the particular details of these regions, except to
develop a bit further the note on which the Yucatan sketch ended. The zone
along the Gulf of Mexico has already suggested itself to various writers as
a corridor of movement for Maya peoples, considering the early time horizons
for Huasteca culture in northern Veracruz. Now, with Brainerd's materials,
it appears that another locale for early developments exists in Yucatan. It
is of utmost importance, therefore, that we keep the intervening districts
distinct for closer investigation. For these methodological reasons, and
because of the distinctive character of the Olmec-La Venta and Tajin culture
climaxes, the suggestion here made is for a separate regional status for
South Veracruz and Tabasco, for Central Veracruz, and for Northern Veracruz.

The foregoing summaries of the proposed regions offer a sketchy outline,
drawing on materials referring to the history of the regions, to their separate
traditions, and to their relations with other areas. The attempt has been
to outline general configurations, rather than to spot particulars as evidence
for a "demonstration." Only a very tentative case can be made for the sub-
divisions described in terms of their climax patterns. But I think that,
with the exception of Chiapas and Puebla, we can see a separate developmental
configuration for each of the regions and it only remains to list them here
in geographic terms (see also Map 1).

1. Highland Mesoamerica

a. The Valley of Mexico and Vicinity (México, Morelos,
   Tlaxcala, Hidalgo)
b. Puebla
c. Oaxaca
d. The Western Plateau (Highland Michoacan)
e. Chiapas
f. Highland Guatemala
2. Lowland Mesoamerica

a. Central Lowlands (Lowlands from Usumacinta drainage through the Petén and British Honduras to the Ulua River, in Spanish Honduras)
b. Yucatan Peninsula (Yucatán, Campeche and Quintana Roo)
c. Southern Veracruz-Tabasco
d. Central Veracruz
e. Northern Veracruz

III. THE CO-TRADITION: CONCEPT AND PROBLEMS

Among the difficulties which stand out in my own surveys of the literature on Mesoamerican archaeology, and in the various papers appearing in the previous issue, are a problem of temporal period alignment and a problem in alignment of developmental stages. Not only are these problems deeply interwoven, but they represent a picture of how methodological biases can intensify the difficulties of historical reconstruction. Among the complications presented by the culture historical picture of Mesoamerica are the fact that "Classic" traits show up in the "formative" period, and the fact that it has become questionable whether the Valley of Mexico "had a post-Classic". It is evident that these complications bring out clearly the need to overcome biases of interest both as to area and aspects of culture surveyed. Perhaps the argument is worth reviewing if we wish to distinguish the methodological issues more clearly. The point of departure for the evolution of the problems mentioned above are, it seems to me, the following traditional positions in Mesoamerican archaeology:

1. The Mesoamerican "Classic" was presented on the model of the Central Maya beginning with the earliest Initial Series markers in that area and ending with the abandonment of the Petén sites.

2. The whole stage-time structure, in my opinion, was organized around this fulcrum, making the developmental stage equivalent to the time period. The fact that the Classic Maya complex included dated monuments encouraged this. Thus, once any correlation was established with the Christian calendar, absolute dates for the upper and lower limits of the "Classic Period-Stage" were set.

3. Even if we assume that the stage and the period designated as Classic coincided for the Central Maya, it is clear there was no justification to extend this stage-time equivalence to other regions in Mesoamerica. Nevertheless, Spinden's "Archaic" was now accorded an absolute upper limit date by horizon-marker cross-ties, without considering or acknowledging that the Central Maya stage implications were also being transferred in their entirety. This is the source of subsequent discussions which sought to demonstrate that "Classic traits" at this or that place "occurred in the Archaic."

4. The assumption, which was prevalent for a time, that Maya history involved an abandonment of the Petén and an outright mass movement and implantation...
tion of Maya high culture in the Yucatan or Northern May area gave rise to the notion of a Post-Classic; and here too the time limits were set precisely by the last dated monuments in the Petén and environs. This notion of the Post-Classic was again defined in terms of the Maya, but this time referring to the Northern Maya, whose late history was placed after that of the Central Maya. Here, too, because a lower limit absolute date was available, this limit and the stage idea wedded to it were wholly transferred to the horizon line of Plumbate distribution.

Most arguments over the existence of a Post-Classic stage in a particular region can be traced to this assumption. We are now examining this conception of the late time period in areas like the Valley of Mexico, where the argument for a Post-Classic stage needs reconsideration. In order to be reestablished or reaffirmed it seems to require the scrupulous application of developmental criteria alone; by now a great deal of evidence has to be re-evaluated.

These issues are certainly relevant to the discussion here of the kind of problems for which the area co-tradition is methodologically appropriate. This fact will become even clearer as we mention some questions to which the area co-tradition applies.

The questions raised in Mesoamerican culture history are largely historical rather than processual. One reason for this is our preconception that history (i.e., trade, migration, conquest, and invention) explains the phenomena suggested by archaeology. My contention is that this bias is really tailored to a pessimistic assumption that archaeology can never deal with "real cultures," and that therefore we must limit ourselves to tracing dispersals of traits. Thus, we talk about the spread of Olmec influence, of influences from Teotihuacan, and of the diffusion of a Plumbate horizon followed by oscillating periods of still other Mexican invasions. We always assume that where these influences are not found they were not present. I think this a dangerous assumption, not vindicated in ethnological theories or studies which distinguish acculturation as "achieved diffusion."

The point of these examples is not to deny the reality of the problems posed in Mesoamerican culture history. Unless we want to be totally -- and uselessly -- skeptical, we must assume that these patterns of culture spread are real. But we have to recognize at the same time that our task is to render these problems more specific, to develop the suggestive evidence more sensitively in behalf of an enriched culture historical account.

In order to do this, we have to accept the fact that much more than historical accident is involved in the events of culture contact. We have to understand the nature of a culture configuration better. We have to attain greater knowledge of the kinds of process, and of the course of process relative to varying configurations of culture. The complexity of the task is further increased by the need to translate the lessons of ethnology into the common denominators of archaeological data.

One crucial part of the job is to get real units of culture history, which means viewing archaeological assemblages from the point of view of
configurations, not trait lists. Another important part is to trace the
distribution of traits more accurately in space and time. For the former
problem, that of tracing out real cultural units in space and time, the notion
of the tradition is a useful model. For the latter, a strict application of
all archaeological techniques of stratigraphy and seriation, together with a
clearly conceived and rigorously applied model represented by the hoizon, is
essential.

The question now arises: Where does the area co-tradition methodology
help and in what ways? To answer this we must consider what kind of analytic
model is involved. I believe it can be shown that the whole notion -- the
culture area, its constituents and their interconnections -- are really exten-
sions of the Tradition Concept. Traditions exist on many levels of complexity.
When we speak of a pottery tradition, we may be talking about a technique of
manufacture, a persistent decorative device, a characteristic vessel shape,
or a combination of these elements. It is important, in any case, that we
have an identifiable characteristic or complex of characteristics which, in a
given area, shows persistence through time. It is not alone the nature of
the unit but also its stubborn "holding on in time" while other expressions
are relatively transitory which gives it meaning.

Depending on the frame of reference with which we are concerned, the
unit may be simple or complex, the time may be relatively short or relatively
long. A culture area -- the sort of definition offered earlier in this paper
of the Mesoamerican area -- is a large spatial framework. The maize agricul-
ture-pottery-writing complex asserted to represent its distinguishing con-
figuration is the corresponding unit which may be called "the tradition of
the Mesoamerican culture area."

Again, in the regional descriptions, the regions compared with one
another are segregated on analogous lines, and united during certain time
periods by a spatial spread. The same method is followed for entities of
lesser complexity until one deals with a specific minimal unit like bay ware
in the Valley of Mexico area. (In connection with the procedure followed in
this paper, by the way, it is only correct to say that the regional "tradi-
tions" vis-a-vis one another have not been as rigidly described in these
terms as they should have been.)

The same "gestalt" approach prevails in the notion of the horizon style
as a consistent pattern of smaller trait units -- although here again there
are degrees of complexity, theoretically, which correlate with the time units
involved. The horizon style, then, conceptually, is really the tradition idea
applied to time rather than space. And its application for analytic purposes
is absolutely analogous with the ideal demarcation lines on a schematized
geologic chart. It structures time by being used as if it had not time
depth itself.

It is perfectly clear then that this methodology of the area co-tradition
relates to arranging the data for analytic purposes. What can such arrange-
ment of data in space and time do for us? Basically, it is designed to answer
questions on the basis of "where," and "when" and "what." It is excluded from
answering directly questions based on "how" and "why." The how-and-why ques-
tions are processual questions and contribute to historical explanations by
indicating the range of possibilities inherent in a particular set of cultural
postulates. The area co-tradition concept can clarify time alignments, show
something about the historicity and the geography of cultures, point to ori-
gins of spreading traits and complexes, and reveal the extent and degree of
interpenetration of cultural modes. It can indicate, for example, whether
"The Valley of Mexico and vicinity" should be a larger area or a smaller.
In this sense, it contributes to culture historical reconstruction by making
available better organized data against which to project ideas that involve
process. These ideas are obtained from the study of living people. If such
studies were ideally pursued, we would know what a trait is. We do not, as
yet, but there are many things we do know, specifically and generally, about
the conditions of cultural exhaustion, selective borrowing, the relationship
of certain kinds of social stratification to certain kinds of economic-techno-
logical factors, the fact of different world views and their relationship to
different language structures and different subsistence patterns. We should
draw on the information we have, and we should develop specific and explicit
analogies, so that we may render conscious and explicit the ethnologic principles
involved in many of these decisions concerning migration, conquest and other
agents of diffusion.

The concept of developmental stages cross-cuts the distinction I have
made here between history and process, since it purports to describe histori-
cal realities while assuming quite correctly that there are regularities which
may be derived from the study of history and applied to the analysis of the
progress of a culture through time. These regularities are not, as Rowe has
implied in a quotation cited above, simple-minded determinants in a single
direction. Rather, they are an expression of the belief, supported by ethno-
logical and prehistorical data, that there are cultural systems, each of which
has a range of potential. Within that range, to be sure, there is ample room
for selection, presenting numerous possibilities for different development.
But even with respect to accidents, the system represented by a given culture
is selective in the degree and character of its response.

In conclusion, I want to say that the notion of developmental stages
is useful as a culture historical tool for two reasons. To the degree that
it is descriptive, it outlines the different courses of development, as among
the regions of a culture area (Valley of Mexico vs. Petén-Honduras, for example.)
Only when we see such differences can we try to explain them. This gives us
another means of approach in describing the course of history. To the degree
that it is explanatory, it provides us with an additional tool for understand-
ing the "why" of history.

It is here that problems of history and process conjoin; it is here that
ethnology and prehistory have much to offer each other; it is here that
plausible answers to the "how" and the "why" of history reside. To the extent
that it contributes to the whole by refining the data, the area co-tradition
is a useful and sophisticated methodology.
TABLE 2.
(Kirchhoff, 1943)

GENERAL SUMMARY OF TRAITS COMMON TO MESOAMERICA
AND OTHER CULTURAL AREAS OF AMERICA;
AND
TRAITS SIGNIFICANT BECAUSE OF THEIR ABSENCE IN MESOAMERICA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trait</th>
<th>So. East</th>
<th>So. West</th>
<th>Meso-amer.</th>
<th>Chib-cha</th>
<th>Andes</th>
<th>Amazonia</th>
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38
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<th>Susquehanna River Valley</th>
<th>Shenandoah Valley</th>
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<td>Tennessee Valley</td>
<td>Mississippi Valley</td>
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**Geographic Regions:**
- Hudson River Valley
- Delaware River Valley
- Susquehanna River Valley
- Shenandoah Valley
- Georgia, Carolinas, and Florida
- Southern Appalachian
- Ohio Valley
- Tennessee Valley
- Mississippi Valley
- Gulf Coast Region
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x - present.

o - absent.

***

NOTES

1. Ekholm (1940) offered a summary of the archaeology of northern and western Mexico; and I am indebted to Professor Willey for making available notes which allow me to bring Ekholm's picture up to date and specify many things more exactly.

2. I have made liberal use, in the pages which follow, of the summaries of archaeological data by Coe, Lathrap, and Holden which appeared in the previous issue of this journal. The materials used are for the most part of a general nature and the specific references used in each case will not be cited here.
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<table>
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<th>Author(s)</th>
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Phillips, Philip and G.R. Willey

Rouse, Irving

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