

# Field Museum News

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## LACQUERED WOODEN VESSELS TELL INCA HISTORY

By ALEXANDER SPOEHR

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AND ETHNOLOGY

Lacquered wooden vessels from Peru, examples of the beautiful workmanship of the Incas, have been installed in Stanley Field Hall. They take the place of the giant panda, Su-Lin of Brookfield Zoo fame, which has been transferred to a case containing the animals most closely related to it, in the systematic collection of mammals, Hall 15.

The vessels in the new exhibit include bowls, cups on elaborately carved bases, and *keros* or vases of wood from which the Incas, both before and after the Spanish conquest of Peru in 1532, drank their *chicha* or wine. The dark wood of which these vessels are made forms a pleasing background for the colored design, and subdues somewhat the beautiful, bright colors of the lacquered decorations in red, yellow, black, green, and white. The combination gives these vessels a mellow, rich appearance.

The lacquered and carved decorations and the functional parts are heavily laden with religious and historical significance for those able to ferret it out. For instance, jaguars such as the two carved supports of the small seat in the center of the case often represent the Peruvian creator-god, who was at the same time the god of fertility. The jaguar also appears in the carved bases for the stone seats displayed in the aisle of Hall 9 (Peruvian Archaeology Collection), as well as in the form of carved decorations for various vessels, and as masks on the figures depicted in them.

### WEAPONS AND BATTLE METHODS

An example of the historical records contained in some of the decorations is shown by one of the wooden bowls in this exhibit (*see accompanying illustration*) on which is depicted warfare between Peruvian soldiers armed with mace and thrusting

spear, and their enemies from the trans-Andean region, armed with bows and arrows. To defend themselves, the Peruvians used round or square shields, apparently of wood, in addition to wooden helmets and padded cotton quilts. This bowl is one of the vessels made in the Peruvian highlands during the period of the Incas. Such vessels contain much authentic information concerning the wearing apparel, fighting habits, and other ethnological matters.



War in Peru under Inca Empire

Scene from the history-revealing decorations on a Peruvian lacquered wooden vessel now exhibited at Field Museum. By force of arms the Incas welded together the most extensive New World empire of pre-Columbian times, conquering as far north as Ecuador, and as far south as northern Chile. The Peruvian soldiers are recognizable in picture above by their helmets, maces, and thrusting spears, while their less civilized opponents, jungle tribesmen, are armed only with bows and arrows. The vessel was made at about the time of the Spanish conquest in 1532.

The presence of a variety of animals, birds, fishes, and reptiles is noticeable not only on these Incan and colonial vessels, but also on the earlier vessels of pottery in the Peruvian cases in Hall 9. Viracocha, the creator-god, usually represented by the jaguar or puma, was supposed to have the power of transforming himself into other animals and also of causing thunder, lightning, rain or hail. In addition, the first in the lineage of each clan was supposed to have been turned into a falcon, condor, or other bird or animal. Hence, the Peruvian wares are fairly alive with figures of birds, fishes, and animals, as well as human figures—sometimes in conventionalized form—wearing masks and costumes representing these other figures.

The tendency of many of the early potters to conventionalize makes it difficult to understand many of their designs. For instance, a personage shown on two vases on the east side of Case 29 in Hall 9 requires some explanation. The first thing that

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## EXPEDITION TO GUATEMALA OBTAINS 25,000 PLANTS

By JULIAN A. STEYERMARK

ASSISTANT CURATOR OF THE HERBARIUM,  
AND LEADER OF EXPEDITION

The Field Museum Botanical Expedition to Guatemala, sponsored by Mr. Stanley Field, President of the Museum, and conducted by the writer, completed its work in May, after having been in the field since last September. Mr. William H. Coibion,

of University City, Missouri, accompanied the expedition as volunteer assistant.

The expedition was highly successful, bringing back for the Herbarium 25,000 dried and pressed plant specimens, representing 11,000 separate collections. In addition, 200 living orchids, ferns, bromeliads, aroids, begonias, cacti, and many other kinds of beautiful and odd tropical plants were obtained to be grown for display in Garfield Park Conservatory. About 100

separate lots of seeds were also brought back to be grown at the conservatory and at botanical gardens elsewhere in the United States. These seeds were collected from some of the most beautiful and ornamental types of tropical plants found on the trip.

### ZOOLOGICAL SPECIMENS ALSO

A dried specimen of "teosinte," indigenous to Guatemala and long held to be the only wild relative of corn, was collected for exhibition in the Museum's Hall of Plant Life. Some of the crude natural chicle or chewing gum, as it flows from the sap of the tree, as well as preserved leaves and flowers of the tree, were obtained for an educational exhibit on the source and preparation of chewing gum, to be prepared by the N. W. Harris Public School Extension. For the Department of Zoology, some bats, mice, frogs, lizards, snakes, fishes, mountain crabs, snails, "screw worms" (the larval stage of a fly), and other specimens were collected.

During the seven months, plants were collected from many regions never before



explored by botanists. Hundreds of species new to Guatemala or Central America were obtained, and many of the plants found are new to science. About twenty-five different mountains and volcanoes were visited. Six weeks were spent exploring all parts of the two highest volcanoes in Central America, namely Volcán Tajumulco and Tacaná. These rise to heights of 13,800 and 13,300 feet respectively, and harbor a wealth of plant life, ranging from rich rain forest jungles to pine, oak, and fir forests, and to alpine herbaceous vegetation such as is found on the high peaks of the Rocky Mountains. Another six weeks were spent exploring the rich flora of Volcán Santa Mariá, Santa Tomás, and Zunil. Ascents were made to the summits of each volcano and mountain, and some, like Volcán Zunil, had never before been scaled. In the Oriente (eastern) part of Guatemala, a botanically unexplored section, three months were devoted to collecting in the departments of Zacapa, Chiquimula, Jutiapa, and Jalapa. Within this region there were explored, for the first time by a botanist, Volcán Ipala, Volcán Quezaltepeque, Cerro Brujo, Volcán Suchitán, El Barriol, Tixixí, Nonojá, Volcán Jumay, Montaña Miramundo, the desert of the Motagua River valley, Sierra de Las Minas, and Lakes Guia, Atescatempa, Ipala, and Retana.

#### NOTABLE VARIATIONS IN FLORA

The most interesting result from these explorations was the discovery that each of the mountains and volcanoes has many species not found on any of the others. In other words, endemism is very accentuated, and this indicates how remarkable and diversified is the flora of Guatemala. Much more exploration will be needed to gain a clear idea of the wealth of the flora.

The expedition's last six weeks were spent in exploring the jungles of the Atlantic area. This included trips to the Montaña del Mico, the picturesque canyon of the Rio Dulce, Lake Izabal in which many alligators and some manatees live, the lowland jungles of the Motagua River valley, and the mountains and coast around Puerto Barrios.

The tops of many of the smaller volcanoes, ranging from 4,500 to 7,000 feet, were found to be luxuriantly covered with beautiful cloud forests. These forests are the natural habitat of the quetzal, national bird of Guatemala (*which is represented by a group in Hall 20 of the Museum*). Such forests, because they are daily washed by the moisture of hanging clouds, have abundant dampness, manifested by a dense jungle of vines and large trees whose limbs are everywhere covered by masses of hanging mosses and liverworts, epiphytic orchids, ferns, aroids, bromeliads, begonias, peperomias, and other plants. Masses of "Spanish moss" festoon the branches of the trees, and everywhere in these cloud forests are

gorgeous tree ferns, towering to heights of fifty and sixty feet. The effect is a scene lovelier than can be described. Yet, although presenting an appearance completely tropical, like that of the hot rain forest jungles of the lower elevations, the cloud forests are very cool and immediately change the visitor's idea of tropical weather. The climate throughout the highlands and mountains in Guatemala is cool enough to necessitate the use of blankets at night.

#### DIVERSIONS AND PERILS

In some remote areas traversed by the expedition, as many as seven mules were required to carry equipment and collections. Among many interesting experiences was singing American popular music and dancing at night around a fire to amuse a hut-full of Indians, who considered such an exhibition only a proper and just reciprocation by the expedition members for the hospitality extended. Other memorable experiences included descending a 2,000-foot treacherous steep *barranco*; exploring for plants around waterfalls; hiking twenty-five to thirty miles up or down a mighty volcano in one day, and making the return trip the next, in order to find rare plants and study ecological zonal changes; returning at night over slippery pitch-black mountain trails and having to go gingerly without light until pine was found for torches; swimming in a lake infested with alligators; climbing after orchids in trees alive with molesting ants, and falling chest-high into treacherous quagmires and floating mats of aquatic vegetation surrounding mountain lakes.

The purpose of the expedition was to gather data and herbarium material to serve as a foundation for a flora of Guatemala upon which the writer is collaborating with Mr. Paul C. Standley, Curator of the Herbarium.

#### A GEOLOGICAL EXPEDITION TO WORK IN MARYLAND

Mr. Bryant Mather, Assistant Curator of Mineralogy at Field Museum, will leave June 10 to engage in a geological expedition in Maryland for a period of approximately three months. Geologists from the Maryland Geological Survey and the Johns Hopkins University will be associated with him from time to time.

Intensive work will be confined to the Catocin Mountain—South Mountain region. A thorough knowledge of the features of these mountains, and of the rocks of which they consist, is of importance to the understanding of the geology of the eastern United States. In a central valley the underlying metamorphosed volcanic lavas are exposed, while the two adjacent mountain ridges are composed of very ancient sandy sediments. In addition to having been uplifted into a great overturned arch fold, the rocks of the region have been subjected to extreme pressures and high temperatures, as a result of which

only traces remain of their original structures and stratification. Secondary structures have been imposed upon them, two types of which are of especial significance: first, laminations or cleavages in directions unrelated to the original stratification; and second, the linear stretching of the mineral grains of which the rocks are composed. Field studies of these and other features will be made, using recently devised techniques.

It is expected that the expedition will yield many specimens for laboratory study and microscopic investigation, as well as for exhibits demonstrating remarkable geological phenomena.

#### LACQUERED WOODEN VESSELS

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strikes the eye is a large face, greatly exaggerated in size. A mouth-mask with whiskers, a turban-like headdress, pendant ear-ornaments, and a number of incidental faces are a part of this design. To the left of the face are seen the figure's two hands grasping a club. The body is represented to the right of the face by the striped lower section of the design. Above that, extending to the right and encircling the vase, is a cloak representing a caterpillar with its long, spotted body and its many feet on either side. At the end of the caterpillar there appear a small head and two hands (or feet?). This vase evidently was made by someone whose tribal ancestor was supposed to have been turned into a caterpillar.

Probably most enchanting to the casual observer are the animal and portrait jars belonging to what is called the Early Chimú period. The bodies of many of these jars are animal figures, with hollow handles above forming a semi-circle from the top of which extends the neck or spout through which the liquid in the jar was poured. The modeling of these jars is very interesting and brings to mind the modern use of animals for such things as flower pots, charms, and decorative pieces. The Peruvian jars, however, probably had religious significance.

This recently installed lacquer-work exhibit in Stanley Field Hall, as well as the Peruvian pottery, gives an insight into the tastes, skills, habits, and religious traditions of the ancient South Americans. The textiles, gold work, and other examples of South American arts and crafts on exhibit in Hall 9 and in Stanley Field Hall are a rich field for those who wish further knowledge of the life and times of these early peoples who left no written record behind.

Largest of all seals is the elephant seal. A habitat group containing an enormous bull and four other elephant seals, collected on the beach of Guadalupe Island off the northwestern coast of Mexico, is in Hall N.





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