

THE DISCOVERY OF BONAMPAK

The Lacandone View

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The mythology which has grown up around the Lacandones is every bit as extensive and varied as any indigenous mythology. The anachronism of the Lacandones in our modern world continues to attract the attention of the adventurer and romantic who returns from the jungle with awesome tales of ancient ritual and mystery.

The discovery of Bonampak created its share of controversy with overtones and intrigues far out of proportion to the importance of determining who should get the actual credit for the discovery. It was thus amusing to get the following text which was spontaneously recorded by José Pepe Chan Bor and Juan Chan Bor. José Pepe was present when the ruins were discovered, and when he recalled in this text who it was that was actually responsible for the discovery of the murals, he had a good laugh.

The text destroys the myth that has since arisen that the Lacandones frequented the ruins and performed ritual ceremonies there. They themselves were not aware of the larger ruins until the occasion narrated in this text.

The text was electromagnetically recorded in the Fall of 1965, at the Centro Lingüístico Manuel Gamio, Ixmiquilpan, Hidalgo.

The Text

1. caj tar Carlos uche', cu c'ataj ten, yaraj ten: a wiraman waj ruina? 2. in wa'ara ti'. 3. ma' in wer ba'kir a ruina. 4. bic u t'an? 5. ma' u yubej. 6. ten ma' in wer espanyol. 7. taj in wac ti'. 8. bic u t'an? 9. ma' in wiramani', quen. 10. bic u t'an? 11. ma' u yubej, xan. 12. ma' u yubej. 13. yer ti' yan yucatan a taj u t'ane'. 14. ya'araj, yet toj taquij, waj. 15. ma' toc ti' yan Sedroji'. 16. an toc ti' yan Sedroji'. 17. jen, tan u toc ch'acar ya'. 18. ya'araj ten, ma' ra' cu c'atiqui'. 19. yatoch

Interlinear Translation

1. when came Carlos long ago, he asked of-me, he said to-me: you seen-have ruins? 2. I said to-him: 3. not I know what-for are ruins. 4. what he say? 5. not he understand. 6. I not I know Spanish. 7. Lacandone spoke to-him. 8. what he say? 9. not I seen-have it, I-say. 10. what he say? 11. not he understand, also. 12. not he understand. 13. he-knows he there-is Yucatec, who straight spoke. 14. he-said, with still come? 15. not still he is El Cedro. 16. Oh, still he is El Cedro. 17. yes, is he still tapping chicle. 18. he-said to-me, not that he asked. 19. that rock that has opening, he said. 20. oh, that's-how you understood. 21. that's-why I understood. 22. that's-why I said to-him.

Free Translation

Pepe: "When Charles Frey came many years ago, he asked me, saying to me, 'Have you seen any ruins?' I said to him that I did not know what 'ruins' are."

John: "What did he say then?"

Pepe: "He did not understand me because I did not know the Spanish language long ago. I was talking to him in Lacandone."

John: "What did he say?"

Pepe: "I said I hadn't seen any. That is what I told him."

John: "What did he say?"

winic, a tunich a yan u jabnine', quij. 20. an rajen ta wu'yaj. 21. rajen tin wu'yaj. 22. rajen in wa'araj ti'. 23. tar yano' in wiraman quen ti' chiclero. 24. rajen ara'b ti', Carlos. 25. yiraman, binquij ya'araj ti'. 26. Carlos, je' waj a wesic tene'. 27. je' in wesic teche' quen. 28. ca' bin in wesej ti'. 29. binenob ich yatoch ts'ur ich c'ax. 30. c'uchene' ca' bin in wese ti'. 31. binenob ich yatoch it'ur ich c'ax. 32. c'uchene' ca' bin in wese ti', Carlos. 33. bin a eseti'. 34. binenob ich yatoch ts'ur ich yaj ch'aquirya'. 35. c'uchene' ca' bin in wirob. 36. jen tar yano'. 37. ca' bin in wese ti' Carlos. 38. ma' yiraj carem yatoch uchi'. 39. ma' yiraj. 40. ma' yiraj chen achichane'. 41. chen a chichane' ra' yiraj. 42. chen a

23. over there I seen-have, I-said to-him, the chiclero. 24. that's-why it-was-said to-him, Carlos. 25. he-seen-has, it-was-said, he-says said to-him. 26. Carlos, will you show to-me? 27. will I show to-you, I say. 28. then went I showed to-him. 29. went-they to house boss in jungle. 30. arrived I then went I show to-him. 31. went-they to house boss in jungle. 32. arrived I then went I show to-him, chiclero's. 35. arrived I then went I see-them. 36. oh, over there-they. 37. then went I showed-to-him, Carlos. 38. not saw big house previously. 39. not saw. 40. not saw only small-one. 41. only the little-one that saw.

Pepe: "He didn't understand that either. He knew that there was a Yucatec fellow who could talk to us since his language was intelligible."

John: "Did he come along with Charles when he came?"

Pepe: "No he was still there at the chicle camp in El Cedro."

John: "Oh, he was there at the chicle camp in El Cedro?"

Pepe: "Yes, he was there tapping chicle trees. The man who taps chicle trees said to me, 'He is not asking about ruins. He wants to know if there are any ruins that have entrances in them'."

John: "Oh, that is why you were able to understand him."

Pepe: "That was why I was able to understand what he wanted. That was why I told him that I had seen them. I told the man who taps chicle trees that I had seen them over there. Then the man who taps chicle trees said to Charles that I had seen some. Then Charles Frey asked if I would show him where this was. I told him that I would show them to him."

chichane' ra' yiraj. 43. je' ca' tar jileje'. 44. jen, je' u ca' tare'. 45. jen, yet taquij Carlos.

46. ca'tur ca' tar tun. 47. jen, ca'tur ca' tar. 48. rajen ca' bin in wesob ti' jileje'. 49. bin a wesej. 50. bin in wesej. 51. ta junan? 52. rajen, yej a sucu'un, tun. 53. yej in sucu'un. 54. yej a sucu'un. 55. tar yanin wirob u bin yuc. 56. a wire'ex u bin yuc. 57. in wiraj u bin yuc. 58. rajen bin in cay ts'ajob. 59. rajen ca' yiraj a sucu'une' ca' ya'araj. 60. ix je' baca'an acarema'. 61. jero' in payob Jile. 62. jera'. 63. jera', quen ti'. 64. tar yir Jileje'.

42. only the little-one that saw. 43. will again come Healey. 44. oh, will he again come. 45. yes, with come Carlos.

46. two again come, then. 47. yes, two again come. 48. that's-why again went I show-them-to-him Healey. 49. went you show. 50. went I show. 51. alone? 52. that's-why with your brother, then. 53. with my brother. 54. with your brother. 55. there was-we saw it go deer. 56. you saw-you it go deer. 57. I saw it go deer. 58. that's-why sent we crookedly kill-it. 59. that's-why when you older brother saw then said. 60. wow, here-is that's-right the large-one (ruins). 61. there we called Healey. 62. here-it-is. 63 here-it-is, I-said to-him. 64. came see Healey. 65. the

"They returned to the chicle camp at El Cedro. Later I came to the chicle camp to take him to see the ruins. I took him to see the ruins, but he actually did not see the large house where the murals are. He only saw the small house." (This has only one entrance, that is why it is considered small to the Lacandones.)

John: "Oh, he only saw the small house and did not see the large place."

Pepe: "He only saw the small house. Charles would come again, but then he would come with Giles Healey. The next time two of them came to see the ruins. That was when I showed it to Healey."

John: "Did you go alone to show them the ruins?"

Pepe: "No, I went with your older brother, Carranza."

John: "Oh, I see, you and my older brother went to show them the ruins."

Pepe: "There we suddenly saw a deer go running by there. Both of us went to see if we could kill the deer. Carranza went one way then I entered another way. That was when your older brother saw it. Then he said, 'Here is a large set of ruins'. This is what we called Giles Healey to come and see. 'Here it is', we said to him.

65. u q'uin u ts'abar u ts'on a sucu'un, uch bente. 66. bente
ca' ts'a'b ti' a sucu'un. 67. yuc tus esic. 68. tus yuc esej.
69. raji' tus esej.

time it was-given his gun your brother, old 20 gauge.
66. 20-gauge then was-given to-him your older brother. 67. deer
accidently showed it. 68. accidently deer showed. 69. that-one
accidently showed.

"That was the day that your older brother, Carranza, earned his 20-gauge
shotgun. Yes, it was a deer that accidently showed him where the ruins were
that had the murals. Well, can you imagine a deer accidently showing where the
ruins are."

John: "Was it actually a deer?"