

EARLY HISTORY

As archaeologist Dr. Phil Weigand has explained, the Huichol and their Cora neighbors had deep down roots in the area where they are now settled by the time of the Mesoamerican Classic period (ca. 200-700 C.E.). The Corachol branch of this Uto-Aztecan language family leads linguists like Valiñas, cited by Weigand, to consider the relative antiquity of this language group in the area. “This branch of Uto-Aztecan is far more closely related to the Taracahitan and Tepiman branches spoken to the north and west than to the Nahuatl languages spoken farther east and south.”¹



Western Sierra Madre ~ ©1978 Juan Negrín

From the second through the end of the sixth century, the people of the Teucaltichlán Tradition of Western Mexico built the first monumental sites of the region and its circular temple structures. The society's decline was not due to the migration of mythical ancestors of the Toltecs through that part of Western Mexico, according to Dr. Weigand, but may have been caused by the introduction of the bow and arrow from the north or metallurgy from Ecuador.

Shortly thereafter, the kingdom of Chalchihuites was founded to the east of the Sierra Madre, around the archaeological site of La Quemada, in Zacatecas. The ancestors of the Cora and the Huichol were probably able to escape this dominion in the recesses of the Western Sierra Madre, although they were influenced by their cultures.

It is likely that the round temple structure, *tuki*, and their ceremonial centers reflect the patterns of the ancient culture of Teucaltichlán from the Classic period. This is a thesis that has been long maintained by Dr. Weigand, and similar centers have been located along the Bolaños river canyon to the southeast of the current Huichol territory. Later cultures that dominated Western Mexico centered around today's volcano of Tequila and the now dried-out shores of Lake Magdalena (Etzatlán, Xochitepec, among others), still sacred to many Huichol. As anthropologist Dr. Johannes Neurath comments: “The famed post-Classic site Ixtlán del Río is located in a geographical point of highly strategic value, since it was the most viable commercial route between two of the most populated zones of Mexico, its western coast and the central region.”²

¹ Phil Weigand and Acelia García de Weigand, *Huichol Society before the Arrival of the Spanish*, Journal of the Southwest, Volume 42, Number 1 Spring 2000, (The Southwest Center, University of Arizona, Tucson), p19

² Johannes Neurath, *Las fiestas de La Casa Grande*, CONACULTA - Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia / Universidad de Guadalajara, 2002, p.62

The monumental fortified urban center of La Quemada was built between 600 and 700 C.E., to the northeast of the current Huichol territory, and those who eventually formed the kingdom of Chalchihuites extended their power over many centuries. As Phil Weigand recorded, the Huichol recall in their chants how they were once prevented for a long time from making the sacred trip to the eastern desert in San Luis Potosí by a perverted shaman who



Ruins of La Quemada ~ ©1979 Juan Negrín

was allied with the jaguars and lived several valleys to the east on a walled rock, surrounded by buildings. Since they stopped bringing back peyote from the east, because the jaguars had eaten all of it, the corn began to wilt. There was no salt, sea-shells or feathers until the Huichol, the Cora and other leaders gathered in the ceremonial center of *Teacata*, determining a strategy to defeat the sorcerer of La Quemada³.

On the other hand, the Mexican historian Salvador Gutiérrez⁴ writes: “in prehistoric times the Huicholes, the Coras and the Tepehuanos formed a single nation with the Opatas, the Tarahumaras and the Pimas”, confirming the opinions of earlier historians Ignacio Dávila Garibi and Alberto Santoscoy. The Mexican historian, J. Ignacio Dávila Garibi, wrote in “Los Aborígenes de Jalisco”, 1933 that the Huichol, the Cora and other related groups like the Tepehuan previously lived in an extensive territory called *Hikuripa*, agreeing with reports by the French investigator Diguët 30 years earlier⁵.

Hikuripa, ‘the periphery of peyote’, includes today’s states of Nayarit, Jalisco, Sinaloa, Durango, Chihuahua, Coahuila, San Luis Potosí (its headquarters), Aguascalientes and Zacatecas. Their leader, called Deer-Tail, *Maxakuaxí*, introduced the cult to a supreme god *Tewewikame* (like Our Creator Sun, *Taweviekame*, in Huichol) that he claimed to represent, saying he had been sent from heaven to earth to instruct men and prevent them from eating each other. When the Toltecs overtook the area, *Maxakuaxí* united the Huichol, Coras and Tepehuanos to find refuge in the Sierras where they still have their strongholds. This also corresponds to early versions of their oral history that the first Spanish missionaries gathered among the Cora natives in the seventeenth century.

Although the Huichol have not allowed archaeological excavations to be carried out in their current communal territory, archaeologist Marie-Areti Hers is noted for having worked most extensively in the periphery of what was their land when the Spaniards conquered the area. One of her most remarkable discoveries to date was that of a prototypal stone Chac-Mool. This androgynous figurine seems to recline on its back with

³ Phil C. Weigand, *Ensayos sobre el Gran Nayar entre coras, huicholes y tepehuanos*, pp.106 to 109

⁴ *Los Coras y el rey Nayarit*, p.50

⁵ Salvador Gutiérrez Contreras, *Los coras y el rey Nayarit*, Tepic, Nayarit, México. 2001, p.50

its eyes wide open to the firmament in a flexed posture⁶ and it appears to be from the Classic period, predating these characteristic sculptures from the post-Classic period that were developed by Toltecs. She suggests that the round receptacle of the central cavity in the traditional Chac-Mool might have evolved from a receptacle like the gourd-bowl used by the Huichol to place offerings of blood, ground peyote and corn-gruel. She also surmises that this deity might have represented an oracular entity, which reminds us of the Huichol's interpretation of Our Great Grandmother Large Ear, *Tacutsi Nakawé*, who foretold the deluge.

The Chichimecs immigrated around 1115, beginning to cross Mexico from the north to found the Aztec empire of Tenochtitlán in 1325. Those who had been subdued in the current states of Jalisco, Nayarit, Zayarit, Zacatecas and Durango, maintained a certain independence from the Aztecs, as four kingdoms, or Tlatoanazgos, while the tribal groups in the mountains retained their cultural freedom in this area, widely known as Chimalhuacán. As the Spanish conquerors reported, they were famous for defending themselves with 'chimalis', or round shields⁷.

Once again, Dr. Weigand, in a personal communication, considers there is no credible basis for believing the ancestors of the Aztecs crossed Jalisco and Nayarit to found their empire. He indicates that the prime forces at the time of the arrival of the Spaniards in the region were the Cazcán Indians to the east and to the north of the Huichol, who had linguistic links to the Aztecs and had taken over the area once occupied by La Quemada, or the Chalchihuites Tradition. The other major warriors at that time were the Tarascan, or Purépechan Indians from the Southwest, who were competing with the Cazcanes for a couple of centuries before the Spaniards arrived. The tribal groups in the mountains retained some freedom in their inhospitable terrain, which became the refuge of the last Cazcán leader, Guaxicar and his troops.⁸

The *Wixaritari* consider themselves descendants of a black female dog, which links them metaphorically to the Chichimecs in general, whose name means 'dog people'. To echo Dr. Brotherston's words, they form part of 'Unknown Mexico', linked to Mesoamerica's farthest-flung former frontiers, "following a Nahuan toponymy as far as Arizona and New Mexico" "and encountering further linguistic kin of the Mexica, like the Tarahumara, Yaqui, and Pima-Papago, who are linked in turn with the Hopi, Ute (whence Utah), and Shoshoneans of the Great Basin far to the north."⁹

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⁶ Marie-Areti Hers, *Los toltecas en tierras chichimecas*, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1989, p.65

⁷ Salvador Gutiérrez Contreras, *op. cit.*, pp. 35, 36

⁸ Dr. Phil C. Weigand y Acelia G. de Weigand, *Tenamaxtli y Guaxicar: Las raíces profundas de la Rebelión de Nueva Galicia*, El Colegio de Michoacán, 1996, Secretaría de Cultura de Jalisco.

⁹ Gordon Brotherston, *Book of the Forth World: Reading the native Americas through their literature*, Cambridge University Press, 1992, pp.21 and 22. Dr. Brotherston also notes important parallels between sacred Huichol art and Anasazi art.

Notes for transliteration:

We use the x in Huichol words to indicate a sound that varies between an English sh sound, as in 'she' or a French j sound as in 'je', and a Spanish rolled rr sound, unused in English. Western Huichol use it more as an rr sound, whereas the softer 'sh' sound is used in the eastern dialects. It is universally used in the term Mexica, to denominate the Aztecs.

We use the ü symbol in Huichol words to indicate a sound that is close to the German equivalent or to the French u sound, when pronounced by some. It has often been recently transcribed as a + symbol. Sometimes it is closer to the sound of an English 'e', as in the first e of 'were'.

The other sounds are English equivalents for vowels and consonants that are generically Latin, except for the 'h' that is aspirated as in English and the 'w' that is used as in English, while in Spanish we transcribe the latter two as 'j' and 'hu'. The accentuation is used according to Spanish rules.