

Ignacio Bernal

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When invited to attend archaeological conferences, Dr Bernal would rarely sit down with the rest of the gathering to listen to papers being delivered. Instead he would position himself just outside the door, so he could both hear the dissertation inside and supervise activities outside. The latter, a melange of anything from trade politics and gossip to the mating game, were as interesting to him as the more formal, academic proceedings.

His usual response when asked for an explanation was that it was a good position from which to see if he liked the paper. If so, he would get a copy. As to the lobby madhouse, it was there that one met with colleagues to discuss things. The background noise he dubbed "the future history of archaeology."

Ignacio Bernal passed away recently, at almost 82 years of age. During his long life he lived the roles of family man, diplomat, public servant and administrator. But for his professional colleagues he was a man who made a fundamental and lasting contribution to archaeology.

Bernal began his professional education as a law student at the Free Law School. Archaeology began to attract him a few years later, first attending lectures at the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters (UNAM) and later graduating from the National School of Anthropology and History (ENAH).

A student of Alfonso Caso, Bernal's relationship with the great archaeologist developed beyond that of teacher-pupil into a life-long friendship. Caso's interest in Oaxacan archaeology was shared by Bernal and other talented contemporaries such as Jorge Acosta; both participated in Caso's pioneer work at Monte Albán. But excavations were not just limited to Oaxaca. Bernal also dug in Guerrero, Colima, and Michoacán.

On graduating, he taught at the National University (UNAM) and Mexico City College (MCC), where he chaired the Anthropology Department from 1951 to 1959. Here Bernal and professor Eduardo Noguera played a

crucial role in shaping a generation of young Americans, many of them on the Korean War GI Bill, who have since made their reputation in Mesoamerican studies.

Bernal was later to teach at many other schools. Among the best known were the University of Texas at Austin, the Sorbonne, the universities of Puerto Rico, Miami, Tucson and Oregon, the *Colegio de México*, UC Berkeley, Harvard, Cambridge, and London.

His role as an administrative director of Mexican archaeology is well known. At the National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH), Bernal was variously appointed Head of Archaeology, Director of the National Museum of Anthropology, and Director of the Institute. He also received honorary doctorates and decorations from a host of universities and foreign governments.

Bernal's *oaxaqueño* background is echoed in his bibliography which reveals his deep interest in the area from the early stages of his career. *La cerámica de Monte Albán* (1947), was followed by *La cerámica grabada de Monte Albán* (1949), *Urnas de Oaxaca* (1952), written with Alfonso Caso, the *Guide to Monte Albán and Mitla* (1957), *Monte Albán and the Zapotecs*, also written with Caso and others (1958), *Archaeology of the Mixtecs* (1958).

He went on to publish *Archaeological synthesis of Oaxaca* (1965), *Architecture in Oaxaca after the end of Monte Albán* (1965), *Ceramics of Oaxaca*, also with Caso (1965), *The Mixtecs in the archaeology of the valley of Oaxaca* (1966), and *La cerámica de Monte Albán* with Caso and Acosta. Combined, these publications comprise a most authoritative manual on the archaeology of the area.

Bernal will be remembered along with Caso and others, not just for his fundamental work in establishing the Monte Albán sequential horizon as a basis for knowledge about a Mesoamerican region. Another line of work, albeit unfinished, is represented by his celebrated *El mundo olmeca*, published in 1968, the first full-length analysis of one of the great problems in Mesoamerican archaeology, the Olmec culture.

Many partial papers accompany the major work. These include *Views of Olmec Culture* (1968), and three lectures delivered at the National Museum of Archaeology: *Las capitales olmecas*, *Los olmecas en Oaxaca*, and *Olmecas y olmecoides* (1968). He had intended to approach other Mesoamerican archaeological problems in a similar fashion but unfortunately lacked the opportunity.

But Bernal also had wider concerns, focusing beyond the regional to create a general definition of Mesoamerica. His work in this field can be compared with that of such great scholars as Caso, Noguera, Paul Kirchhoff, Wigberto Jiménez Moreno, and Román Piña Chan. His general statement on the subject finally became formulated when he was commissioned by the Pan-American Institute of Geography and History to write a program for the teaching

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of the pre-Hispanic sequence, in 1953. Research into any aspect of Mesoamerican archaeology is inconceivable without reference to his work.

Bernal's first full-length book on this theme was his highly readable *Tenochtitlan en una isla* (1959). This masterwork was followed by *II evolución y alcance de las culturas mesoamericanas* (1959), *Toynbee y Mesoamérica* (1960), *Inventory and Future Program of Archaeology in Mexico* (1960), and *La arqueología mexicana en 1960* (1961).

For many Bernal's most important work, although he did not consider it so, was his *Bibliografía de arqueología y etnografía. Mesoamérica y Norte de México, 1514-1960*, a production encyclopedic in its conception and magnitude. Such a database, composed without computer aid, has been referred to as Bernal's *Gesammelte Abhandlungen* and can be compared with the magnificent 19th century bibliographies of Colonial publications.

One of Bernal's great themes was his interest in the history of archaeology. His saga of Mesoamerican archaeology probably starts with *Cien años de arqueología mexicana (1780-1880)* (1952), and *La arqueología mexicana de 1880 a la fecha* (1952), followed by

La arqueología mexicana del siglo XX (1953), and *Humboldt y la arqueología mexicana* (1962).

His entrance address to the Mexican Academy of History, in 1974, was the charming *Arqueología ilustrada y mexicanista en el siglo XVIII*, a combination of good archaeology and good history, delivered with a sense of humor. It was the prologue to one of his most important and well-known works, *Historia de la arqueología en México* (1979).

Bernal's graduate work at the National University focused largely on historical theory and method. His studies also helped him in his overriding concern to define archaeology, a topic that was one of the most important themes in his classroom. His written works on the subject show him to be a pioneer in theoretical archaeology. His *Introducción a la arqueología* (1952), which actually precedes Caso's magnificent *A un joven arqueólogo mexicano* (1968), is a very good example of a well-grounded approach to this branch of the subject. Other theoretical works by Bernal include *Archaeology and written sources* (1962), and *Elogio a la arqueología* (1963).

For students and co-workers, Ignacio Bernal was a great archaeologist. But he was also a patient listener and a courteous communicator. Perhaps the words that best sum up the man are "a gentleman and a scholar" 