

Indians from India in Ancient Mexico

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By Donald N. Yates



Location of Oaxaca, homeland of the Zapotecs, Mixtecs and other Indigenous peoples, in Mexico. Groups mentioned here are: Amuzgo (San Pedro Amuzgos), Chinanteco (San Lucas Ojitlan), Chontal (Morro de Mazatlan), Huave (San Dionisio del Mar), Mazateco (San Felipe Jalapa de Diaz), Mixe (San Pedro y San Pablo Ayutla), Mixteco (Santiago Juxtlahuaca), Triqui (San Juan Copala), Zapoteco del Istmo (Ciudad Ixtepec), Zapoteco del Valle (Magdalena Teitipac) and Zoque (Santa Maria Chimalapa).

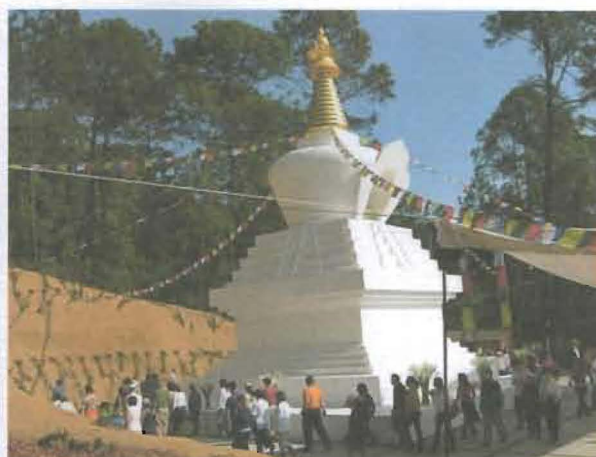
ABSTRACT: Rare alleles reported in eleven Oaxaca Indigenous populations suggest ancient gene flow of a minor degree from India, Egypt and the prehistoric Sea Peoples, as well as from Sub-Saharan Africa. The Isthmus of Tehuantepec seemed to absorb seaborne migration on both the Pacific Ocean side and Gulf of Mexico.



Oaxaqueña Patricia Hernández. "An anthropologist once examined me," Hernández told us, "and said, of all types of people, I looked most like an Indian from India."



An Indian businesswoman from India.



1) Oaxaca street festooned with flags during Guelaguetza. Papermaking, along with block printing, stencil work and flags came to ancient Mexico with the first Hindu traders by the 5th century CE. 2) Buddhist ceremony with stupa and prayer flags in Mexico, 2006. The custom of blessing the surroundings and spreading peace through flags waving in the wind originated in India with the very early Bon religion. Wikimedia.



1) Fretwork at the ancient religious site of Mitla, built by the Zapotec (8th cent. CE). 2) Kailasanatha Temple carved from living rock and dedicated to Shiva, Ellora Caves, Maharashtra, Western India, 8th cent. CE. Photo by G41rn8, 2002, Wikimedia.

Common genes can indicate shared ancestry between two populations. Genes shared by Asians and Native Americans are an obvious example. Yet *uncommon* genes can provide signs of strains that contribute to a population in lesser ways. These are almost unnoticed except in statistical analysis. Consider, for instance, the rare genes reported in eleven Oaxaca indigenous groups in central southern Mexico.¹ All adduced in extremely low frequencies, they nevertheless are part of the DNA record and provide evidence of minor inputs to this very ancient, highly mixed population. Among the surprising conclusions from analysis of the data is a strong genetic inflow from India.

Before looking in detail at some of these barely detectable alleles, what about obvious shared genes? These appear true to form. For example, [The Ancient One Gene](#), which is named for the 12,000-year-old skeleton of a baby boy found in 1968 on a Montana ranch, and which corresponds to the earliest migrations of North Asiatic peoples into the Americas, is the modal (most common) value on chromosome 3 for all eleven populations. It occurs in frequencies ranging from .40 in the Amuzgo and .65 in the Zapotecs to a high of .80 in the Zoque.

The allele THO1=7 is a very common Native American marker. It is found at high frequencies among all Oaxaca Indigenous peoples. It is worldwide in distribution, highest in the Middle East, specifically Egyptian populations.

The corollary to predominant genes is private alleles—markers uniquely found in only a single population. These are the rarest of the rare but they are quite informative nonetheless. Quinto Cortés et al. drew attention to three of these. A value of *34 for D21S11 is found at an

extremely low frequency in Chinantecos, who live in the mountainous region of northwestern Oaxaca, where they number about 150,000. The same private allele is reported in the Rarámuri or Tarahumara, a group of Indians living in Chihuahua.

The Triqui, a pocket of 30,000 people who live in a mountainous region in the southwestern part of the state called La Mixteca Baja, have the second private allele noted by the study. This is a value of *5.3 for the TH01 locus. While unknown in other Indian groups, this marker is of high frequency in the Iberian Peninsula. Its no. 2 match is Scotland. That it crops up among the Mixtec seems to be related to ancient visitations by Atlantic facing cultures. Its distribution is similar to what the Rare Genes from History panel calls [the Odin Gene](#).²

The third private allele is perhaps the most interesting. Defined as an STR of 6.3 on TH01, it is peculiar to the Zapotecs of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec in Mexico but found elsewhere only in Tonga and Armenia! Thus, Zapotecs share origins with Pacific Islanders and Armenians. Could this be a trace of the ancient Sea Peoples? There is a persistent sign of the same type of distribution in [the Helen Gene](#), which crops up in the Mixtecs, Chihuahua Indians, Cherokee and Shawnee. Our description as part of the Rare Genes from History panel bears being quoted in this regard:

This rare autosomal lineage marker was carried in ancient times all over the Mediterranean and survives in many island populations today. Notable appearances are in Cyprus, the Balearic Islands and the British Isles. The rough center of diffusion is ancient Troy, site of one of the world's oldest civilizations and longest wars. Top matches today are Cyprus, Greece and Italy. Models of history associate the Helen gene with Greeks (often called Hellenes), Italians, Turks, Sephardic Jews, certain North Africans, Celtic migrations, the Rom (Gypsy) people and modern-day Melungeons. For unknown reasons, it makes a modest appearance in India but is minimally evident east of there. Its highest concentration is in the Lepcha, the aboriginal people of the Himalayas, where it rises to a level of 11% or 1 in 9 persons. It is found in as many as 1 in 25 Turks, Greeks or Melungeons (all of whom show the same frequency). Similarly in Northern Ireland, another island environment, it is 1 in 25 carriers. On the opposite end of the scale, where it is scarce, it is present in only 9 out of 2500 subjects in certain Japanese and Chinese. It has not even been reported in many African, Chinese and Indonesian populations. How rare is it all told? Its worldwide occurrence is 0.8%, concentrated in Mediterranean and Mediterranean-influenced populations.

Lepcha (n=48) seems like an odd match. Yet what is minor and almost unique in Oaxaca is common in this isolated northeast Indian population, who regard themselves as the original people of Sikkim and practice the pre-Buddhist religion of Bon.³ What constitutes a rare gene for the Mixtec passes for a highly frequent allele among the Lepcha. Does that mean that Lepcha people somehow migrated to southern Mexico? We don't know what the precise historical connection is, but some Mixtec undeniably share a haplotype with Lepcha and other populations categorized as Eurasian, a haplotype being defined as a DNA variant along a single

chromosome that tends to be inherited together, without changing. Below are some other rare haplotypes in Oaxaqueños with a surprising story to tell.

Allele	Detected in	Points toward
D3S1548=12	Triqui [Mixteca Baja] (n=37)	India, Sub-Saharan Africa
D5S8181=5	All Oaxaca indigenous	A big Sub-Saharan Africa marker, found almost nowhere else
D8=9	Chontal [Maya] (n=29), Creek Indians, U.S./Mexico – Dieguenos	India, including Lepcha, highest in world is India Meitei (n=105)
D18S51=10	Huave [Tehuantepec, lit. "Sea People"] (n=29), Zapoteco del Valle (n=40)	India is match nos. 1-3, 13-15, 20 etc.
D21S11=27	Huave [Pacific side, Tehuantepec, means lit. "Sea Peoples"] (n=29)	Sub-Saharan Africa, rare in New World
D21S11=34.2	Tarahumara Indians (Chihuahua), Nootka (Canada), Creek Indians	India – Paraiyar (n=21), India – Tanjore Kallar (n=101)
FGA=29	Mazateco (n=31), Triqui (n=37)	Ancient Egypt, no. 1 is Egyptian Copts – Adaima (n=100)
THO1=5	Zoque [means lit. Sea Folk] ⁴ (n=35)	Distributed thinly all over world, except Sub-Saharan Africa
Thuya Gene	Reaches 45% frequency in Amuzgo (n=30)	Egypt, Africa, absent in India, Asia
THO1=8, 8.3	Scattered low in Oaxaqueño Indians	Sub-Saharan Africa, 36% of Namibians
vWA=10 ⁵	Zoque (n=35)	Lepcha (n=48) is no. 1, Other India = nos. 2, 3, 4 etc.

Quinto Cortés et al. make a point of calling the Oaxaca populations they study "panmictic" (see p. 409). By this they mean that the population as a whole is ancient and relatively homogenous. The people are consistently mixed from three main ancestral sources. Isolation or genetic drift has played little role in the population's structure. If there are demographic inputs as suggested by the list of rare haplotypes given above (i.e., Sea Peoples, Indians or Sub-Saharan Africans), these are likely very old. Their influence has had time to spread throughout the region. They are so old, in fact, that today's Oaxaqueños may have no traditions or collective memory about them. It takes careful statistical analysis of the forensic sort to reveal them.

We Have Met the Enemy and He Is Us

Is it even *possible* for ancient Indic peoples to have crossed the ocean in sufficient numbers or for long enough periods of time, intermarrying with the indigenous people, to leave a genetic trail in modern-day Mexicans? Are we looking at the effect of seaborne migrations in the distant past?

Anyone who has cursorily glanced at Stephen C. Jett's monumental *Ancient Ocean Crossings* (University of Alabama Press, 2017) or read Alice B. Kehoe's superlative college textbook, *Traveling Prehistoric Seas: Critical Thinking on Ancient Transoceanic Voyages* (London: Routledge, 2016) does not dismiss such a thesis out of hand.

Ideas are changing. The academic unease over Thor Heyerdahl and the Kon-Tiki expedition in the Pacific (serious books are not supposed to be popular or readable) is, hopefully, past. "Diffusionists" like Barry Fell, Graham Hancock, Harold S. Gladwin, Christine Pellech, Betty Meggers and Gloria Farley are no longer on the Index of Prohibited Books. The Bering land-bridge and "Clovis First" are nowadays both on the endangered theory list.

In detailed studies and reports from her travels over nearly fifty years, the philosopher Heide Goettner-Abendroth has linked living matriarchal societies to common origins in the Stone Age, from the Khasi in northeast India, the Sinti-Roma (Gypsies), and indigenous mountain peoples of China to Trobriand Islanders, South and Central American Indians, the Hopi, Iroquois and Cherokee. Her books include schematic maps of how people and ideas have diffused, stage by stage.⁶ For her work defining matriarchies and celebrating their characteristics as part of the human experience, Goettner-Abendroth has twice been nominated for the Nobel Prize.

How deep is the time frame for these developments? It is hard to say, since the STR mutational clock is about the same as the autosomal DNA rate of change, from 25,000 to 250,000 years (i.e., virtually unchanging).⁷ On the face of it, a match can indicate a relationship set in today's framework or a common descent dating back to remote prehistory or anytime in between.

Some Points to Consider about "Indians"

Historians have traced Indic civilization back more than 10,000 years, about the same antiquity as conservatively agreed upon for Native Americans. One of the *Vedas*, or sacred hymns set down in Sanskrit, says that India's first calendar began in 8576 BCE. Robert Heine-Geldern, who belonged to the important Viennese school of ethnography, estimated that deep-water voyages from India reached directly into America as early as the 2nd century CE, in other words in Roman times.⁸ According to well-supported research, a short list of plants with decisive evidence for movement from the Americas to India during the ensuing centuries includes agave, amaranth, milkweed, annatto, chili pepper (by 800 CE), certain squashes, arrowroot and basil.⁹

According to our book about world trade as reflected in the Tucson Artifacts, "The sea lanes and trade winds fostered by the Indian Ocean monsoons and fast-moving currents of the West Pacific Warming Pool along with the 'conveyor belt' of the Japan Current made a seaborne journey from Egypt, Arabia and Persia to India, the Spice Islands, China and the Pacific Coast of America the most profitable one in all commerce for nearly a thousand years."¹⁰ Gold and other metals, food and drugs were the prizes borne home.

What went the other way of the exchange? Though the round-trip distance was six thousand miles, Hindu merchants sailing a variety of junks, outriggers and galleys exported, it seems,

slaves and iron tools. America was known as Patala ("The Opposite Land," Pantla, Atlan, Tlan and Tolan. The evidence of more than casual contact and of lasting influence lies in the stone monuments of the Mayas, Olmecs and Zapotecs, built with prestigious iron chisels and by Hindu slaves of the lower or criminal classes.

"Beginning in the 1st century BC, Hindu stone carvers achieved miraculous feats of sculptural and architectural design."¹¹ Incredibly, they removed thousands of tons of solid rock to create temples within mountains, at Kailasanatha and Ajanta. The key was iron tools and slave (or religious devotee) labor. "Over a period of several centuries, thousands of temples and tens of thousands of religious sculptures were carved in stone throughout India and Southeast Asia." Between 320 and 550, the Gupta Empire established a golden age of learning in India and spread Hindu-Buddhist-Shaivite ideas, art and architecture to the Americas, especially, it seems to the Mayas, Teotihuacan Culture and Zapotecs during their classic periods.

The anti-diffusionists maintained that Mexico's stone sculptures and buildings were "somehow" fabricated without metal. However, in 1978, Suzanne Lewenstein showed experimentally that nothing of the sort could be done. Her graduate students failed to make hard stone tools shape a soft slab of volcanic tuft or limestone with intricate details. Volcanic glass was even more useless, since it shattered, while bone and antler were used up quickly. Metal tools were then reported at some Maya ruins and archeologists noticed examples in indigenous picture books. Theodore Willard had argued for metal alloys in his 1933 book, *Lost Empires of the Itzas and Mayans*.¹²

Other items in the India-Mexico docket include the gold-copper alloy tumbago, calendar, bark cloth and paper, patolli and parchisi games of chance, blood-letting rituals (as specific as the Hindu ones of drawing a thorn through the tongue or penis), typhus, cholera, yellow fever and hookworm, tantric signs and mudrā (seen at Ek Balam and mentioned by Kehoe),¹³ perhaps the use of a form of namaste, sweet potatoes, pineapple, Asian chickens (used for ceremony, not food), mulberries, corbeled arches, stelas, stupas, lingams and maize.

Hindu historian Chaman Lal visited Mexico in the 1930s and wrote that the physical appearance of many natives reminded him of relatives of his. Mexican archeologist Rama Mena concluded in his book *Mexican Archeology* that Maya physical types were generally "like those of India, and that Nahuatl, Zapotecan and Mayan languages had affinities to Indo-European."¹⁴

Could "Indians" justifiably have been called Indians?

¹ Consuelo D. Quinto Cortés, "Genetic Characterization of Indigenous Peoples from Oaxaca, Mexico, and Its Relation to Linguistic and Geographic Isolation," *Human Biology* 82/4 (Aug. 2010), pp. 409-32. The populations studied are: Amuzgo (n=30), Chinanteco (n=40), Chontal (n=29), Huave (n=29), Mazateco (n=31), Mixe (n=30), Triqui (n=37), Zapoteco del Istmo (n=30), Zapateco del Valle (n=40) and Zoque (n=35). The 15 autosomal DNA loci which have STR frequencies given are the standard forensic marker locations: D8S1179, D21S11, D7S820, CSF1PO,

D3S1358, TH01, D13S317, D16S539, D2S1338, D19S433, VWA, TPOX, D18S51, D5S818 and FGA. These are the same set reflected in DNA Consultants' database, atDNA 5, which has about 600 reference populations from the literature, including more than 70 indigenous North and South American populations.

² See also Donald N. Yates and Teresa A. Yates, *Cherokee DNA Studies II: More Real People Who Proved the Geneticists Wrong* (Longmont: Panther's Lodge, 2021), pp. 137ff.

³ V. K. Kashyap, "Concordance Study on 15 STR Loci in Three Major Populations of Himalayan State Sikkim," *Journal of Forensic Science* (2002), pp. 1163-67.

⁴ The Zoque, believed to be coeval with the Olmec, now live in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec and parts of the states of Tabasco and Chiapas, in other words, straddling the narrow "waist" of Mexico between the Pacific Ocean and Gulf of Mexico. In the U.S. Southeast they are synonymous with the Soque and Sokee. They are likely descended from the Bronze Age Sea Peoples; see Donald N. Yates and Teresa A. Yates, *Cherokee DNA Studies II*, pp. 44, 115, 119, 155, 157, 254. In Mexican art they are often depicted wearing a mustache and displaying a fish.

⁵ The allele vWA=10 is extremely rare everywhere.

⁶ See esp. the maps in *Matriarchal Societies: Studies on Indigenous Cultures across the Globe*, trans. Karen Smith (New York: Peter Lang, 2013), pp. 47, 125, 214, 242.

⁷ Our blogpost summarizes the literature, "[Evolution and Ancestry: DNA Mutation Rates](#)" (Oct. 23, 2012).

⁸ Robert Heine-Geldern, "Problem of Transpacific Influences in Mesoamerica," in: R. Washoe, ed., *Handbook of Middle American Indians*, vol. 4 (Austin: U of Texas P, 1966), pp. 277-95.

⁹ John L. Sorenson and Carl L. Johannessen, *World Trade and Biological Exchanges before 1492* (New York: iUniverse, 2009).

¹⁰ Donald N. Yates, *Merchant Adventurer Kings of Rhoda: The Lost World of the Tucson Artifacts*, 2nd ed. (Longmont: Panther's Lodge, 2018), p. 5.

¹¹ Gunnar Thompson, *American Discovery: Our Multicultural Heritage* (Seattle: Argonauts Misty Isles, 1994), p. 225ff.

¹² Thompson, p. 226 (with illustrations).

¹³ Alice Beck Kehoe, *Traveling Prehistoric Seas: Critical Thinking on Ancient Transoceanic Voyages* (London: Routledge, 2016), p. 180. The whole subject of the diffusion of Asiatic material objects and cultural traits is discussed by Kehoe in a sensitive and critical fashion on pp. 177-82.

¹⁴ Thompson, p. 223. When the American marine Gene D. Matlock (b. 1928) went to Mexico and took a B.A. in Spanish and Latin American Affairs, he noticed close cultural and religious ties of Mexico with India. Matlock went on to write, among other books with extravagant titles, one called *India Once Ruled the Americas* (N.p.: iUniverse, 2000). Another clarion call, and sweeping reduction, is Stephen Knapp, *Mysteries of the Ancient Vedic Empire: Recognizing Vedic Contributions to Other Cultures around the World* (Detroit: World Relief Network, 2015). The topic seems to attract disbelief and disrepute, maybe of a colonial ethnocentric nature.

Correspondence address:

Donald N. Yates
dpy@dnaconsultants.com