

DID BUDDHISTS ACTUALLY DISCOVER AMERICA?

CONCLUSION (continued from issue #144)

by F. Mark Davis, Editorial Representative,

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In addition to the real or supposed Chinese Buddhist presence in pre-Columbian America as presented by Vining, Fryer and others, there is further possible evidence in southern California, evidence of which both Vining and Fryer were totally ignorant.

In 1914, nearly a generation after the publication of Vining's *Inglorious Columbus* and more than a decade after Fryer's article in *Harper's*, Dr. and Mrs. Roger Wilson, with their daughter Adelaide, went on a picnic in Reinhart Canyon near Hemet in Riverside County. Adelaide wandered into a grove of sycamore trees (they no longer exist) in which flowed a spring of water. Then she made a discovery.

She came upon what has since been called the Engraved Rock, the Reinhart Canyon Maze, the Mysterious Maze, the Maze Stone... It was a hung boulder upon which was engraved a petroglyph in the shape of a maze resembling that which appears on old Chinese coins. It was enclosed within a large square with a swastika in its lower left hand corner.

In the early years of the following decade, Adelaide Wilson (by that time Mrs. Arnold) stimulated the interest of archeologist William Duncan Strong, a relative. Taking as his standard the weathered petroglyphs along the Columbia River in Oregon, Strong estimated the figure could be up to 2,000 years old. Some years later Mrs. Arnold learned that the swastika was a Buddhist symbol, though it has been used universally by many peoples--including the American Indians. And from the *Imperial Encyclopedia of China*, she learned of a possible visit to the continent of Fusang by Buddhist missionaries.

Though there exists no direct proof that the maze was engraved by members of Hui Shen's party, there seems to be some evidence favoring the theory. For what could have been a better marker for travellers showing where water could be obtained? Then, too, when Dr. Wisdom questioned one of the native American Indians about the petroglyph and its origin, the latter replied, "No one of our time has ever seen this stone, but I have heard of it. My father's father said it was made by the people from the sea." Another native of the region said, "That is one of those rocks made by people from the sea." When Dr. Wisdom asked, "What people from the sea?" Juan Costo, one time leader of the Cahuilla tribe replied, "You know as much as I do...They camped here long ago (because there was water nearby)...and they came from the sea."

If indeed Buddhist monks travelled to the New World in the remote past, why didn't their religion establish a permanent foot-hold? The answer doesn't seem at all difficult.

Buddhism, as we know, is a missionary religion. Buddhists, in carrying out the order of the Tathagata, have always attempted to propagate the Arya Dharma far and wide. As Asian and Caucasian bhikshus

are spreading the Buddha Word in the West today, so ancient bhikshus taught it wherever they could find receptive ears. Thus it seems likely that at one time or another bhikshus did indeed attempt to introduce the Buddha's noble religion to the American aborigine. For as Vining and others have pointed out, many of the practices of the Mexican cult of Quetzalcoatl resembled those of Buddhism, a form of monasticism being one of them. But, you may say, some of the natives of Mexico practiced human sacrifice; and that is certainly not a Buddhist practice. True, but human sacrifice was a native practice which has nothing to do with any imported religion--Buddhism or Christianity. Moreover, that barbaric custom had nothing to do with the cult of Quetzalcoatl or Kukulcan, but with the Aztec war god, Huitzilopochtli. If then there was ever an ancient Mesoamerican Buddhism, by the time of the European incursion it had become so distorted and diluted by indigenous paganism it was unrecognizable. Now, let us briefly look at what has happened to Buddhism on its home ground for an understanding of what might have happened in America.

Both Hinduism and Buddhism perished at one time in Annam--at least for a time. The present capital of Afghanistan, Kabul, was once a center of intensive Buddhist missionary effort. But when the country passed into Moslem hands, Buddhism was wiped out. In India, too, Buddhism was once a strong force, particularly in the time of King Ashoka, beginning in 236 BCE. In time, however, it all but passed away for reasons we need not examine here. Coming to our own time, Buddhism seems to be passing out of the picture in those countries dominated by communist regimes. It is then no great wonder that if the Arya Dharma had indeed penetrated into early Mesoamerica, it would have been dead or almost so by the time of the Spanish conquest.***