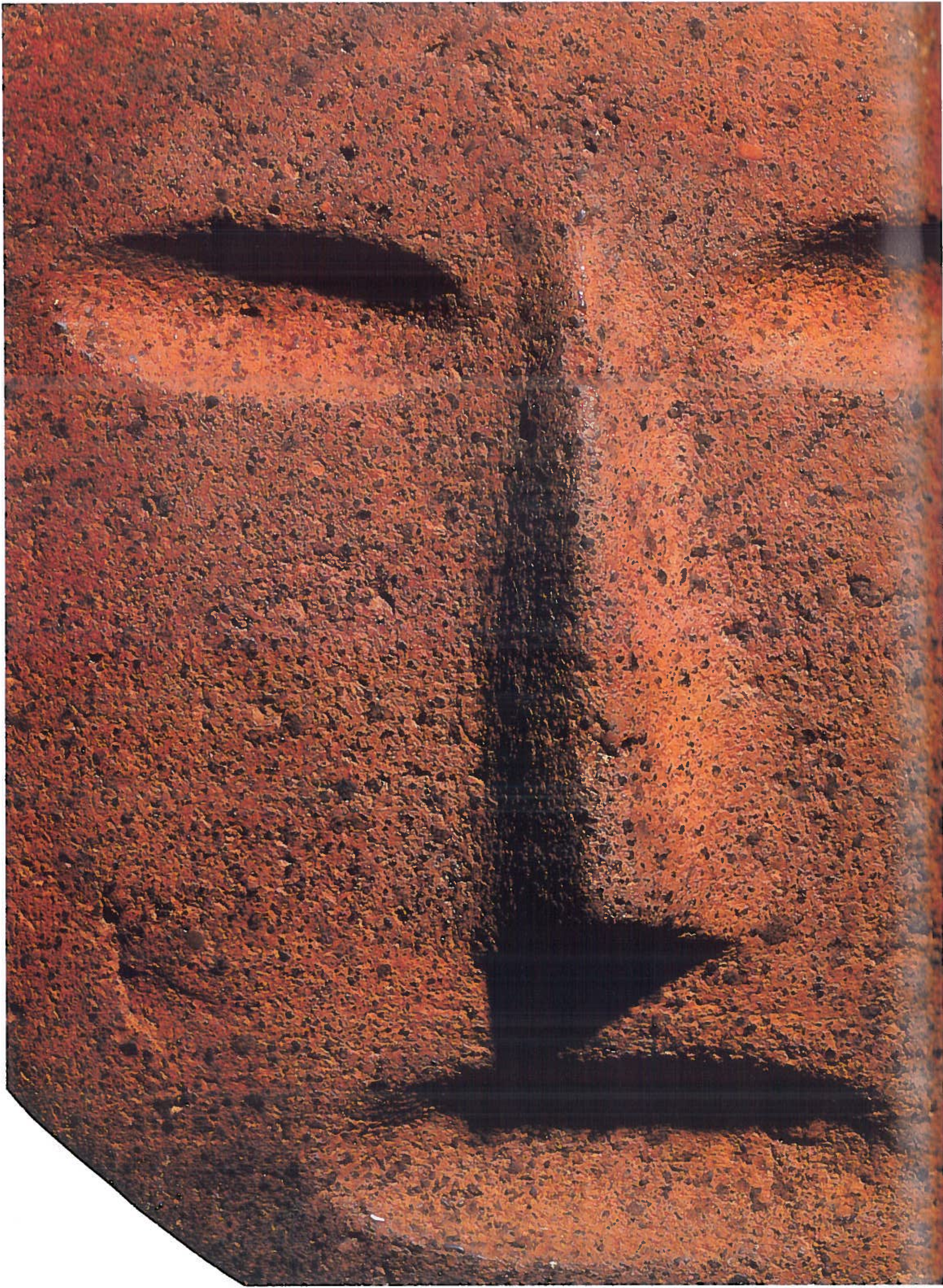


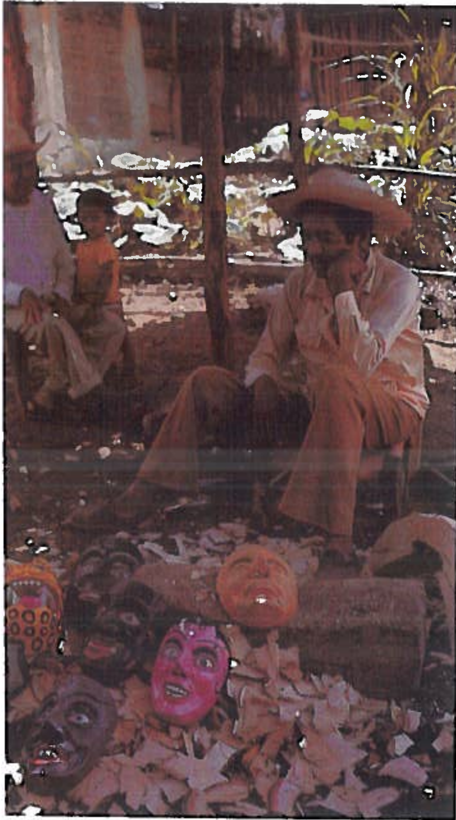
EXPRESSIONS OF BEING

MASKS AND MASQUERADE IN MEXICO AND THE ANDES

'While we are alive, we cannot escape from masks or names. We are inseparable from our fictions – our features.'

Octavio Paz

49. Mezcala style stone mask. Juntas, Rio Frio, State of Guerrero, Mexico, 300 BC–AD 300. These are probably the simplest masks found in Meso-America. It is believed they were used to cover the faces of deceased members of a ruling elite or important religious figures. H. 17.3 cm. Private collection.



50. Mask maker, Chichihualco, Guerrero, Mexico, 1979. Traditionally, particular families specialized in certain crafts and passed down their knowledge from father to son. In Mexico, mask carvers also make furniture and other domestic wooden items.

Masks disrupt the boundaries that in Western societies clearly separate human, animal and divine bodies and essences. They are used to refocus certain attributes of being over others, or create apparent alterations and transformations between different states and conditions of existence. In pre-Columbian Mexico and Peru such transformations were staged to express fundamental and powerful political beliefs, such as the divine origin of earthly power and authority; to display and demonstrate the state's ritual technology, to ensure life and well-being, or to choreograph spectacles intended to awe populations into subordination and acceptance of power and authority.

In the colonial period the Spanish intended masks to be used for character impersonations rather than to transform their user's condition of existence, though such a distinction at first might not have been readily conceived by all their indigenous protagonists. The religious theatre introduced by missionaries and priests, shortly after their arrival in 1524, expressed moral lessons drawn from Christian teachings and Iberian history and iterated political, social and economic relations, which prefigured those between indigenous and Iberian populations in Mexico. Frequently, these masquerades expressed the triumph of Iberian militarism over the societies they encountered. Occasionally however, they were appropriated and adopted by indigenous people as acts of resistance against Spanish rule and performed to reassert basic values and beliefs that continued to persist throughout much of the colonial and independence periods.

Many colonial dance dramas and masquerades have in the modern period undergone simplification. The number of characters in traditional masquerades has sometimes been reduced, as too has the former diverse repertoire of masks used to represent them. Combined with newly invented, often commoditized, secular usages, carnival festivities, folklore competitions, wrestling, children's play, comic and television heroes and villains, masks incorporate both transnational and local images. The masked characters that populate both the virtual and real landscapes create a different and unique experience and understanding of 'being' and 'becoming'.

Pre-Columbian Mexico and South America

51. Gilt copper mask with shell inlays, Meche, Peru, 100 BC–AD 650. The mask, originally coloured red, retains a band of painted snails along the chin. The mask was found in a burial chamber in the Huaca de La Luna at Moche. H. 26 cm. Linden Museum, Stuttgart.

An impressive ceramic tradition, consisting of often female or double-headed figurines and masks, too small to be worn, emerged from local settlements such as Tlatilco, Tlapacoya and Xochipala in the Valley of Mexico, from as early as 900 BC. Other figures and masks, dating between 300 BC–AD 300, originated in the west Mexican states of Colima, Jalisco and Nayarit, as well as Chupícuaro in Guanajuato, in central Mexico. Ceramic masks from central Mexico, although originating in localized village settlements, expressed fundamental ideas which would later spread throughout Meso-America.

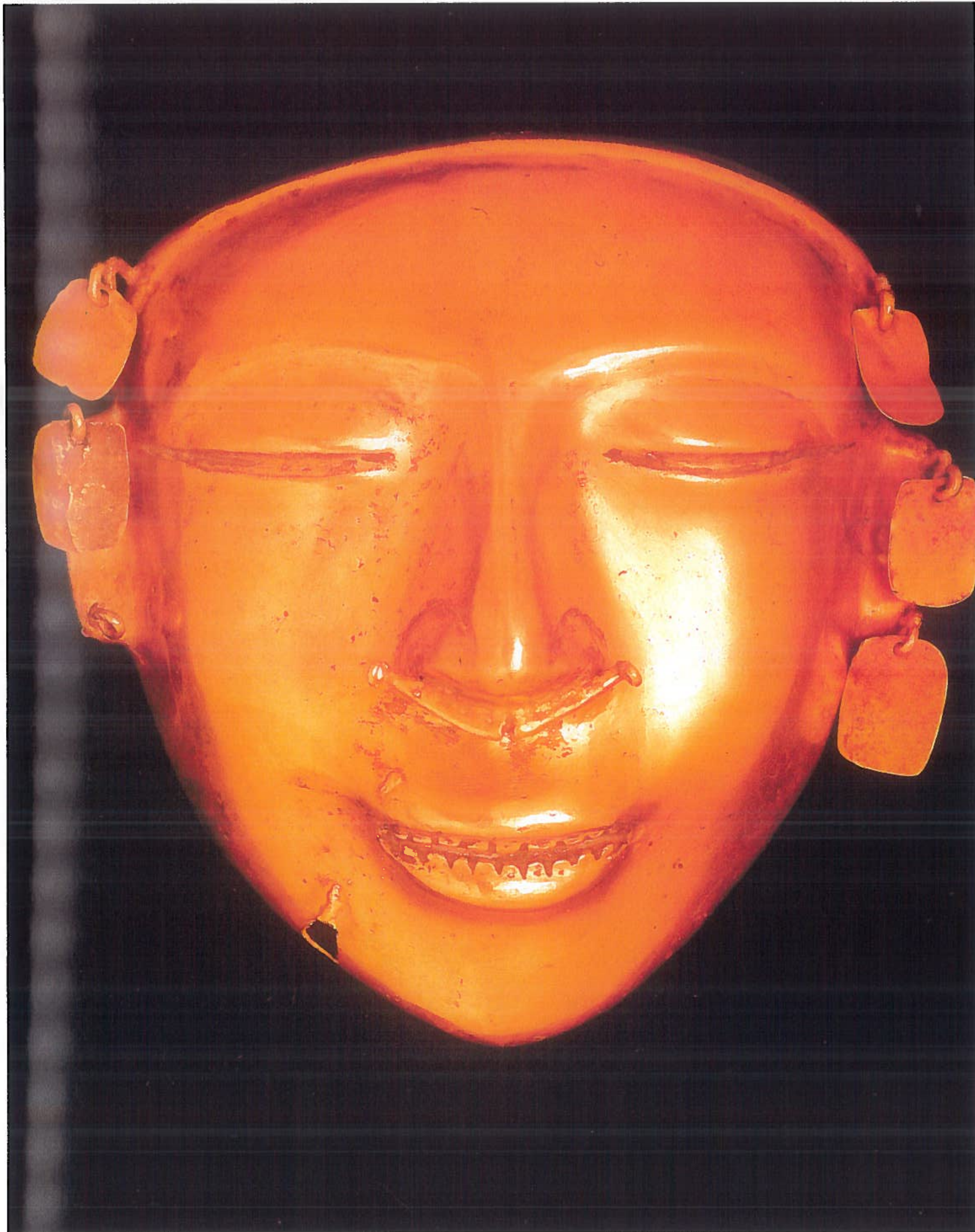
52. Cast gold mask with attached ear and nose ornaments. Quimbaya region, Colombia AD 500–1500. The teeth are shown filed down. H. 12 cm. British Museum Am1910,1202.5.

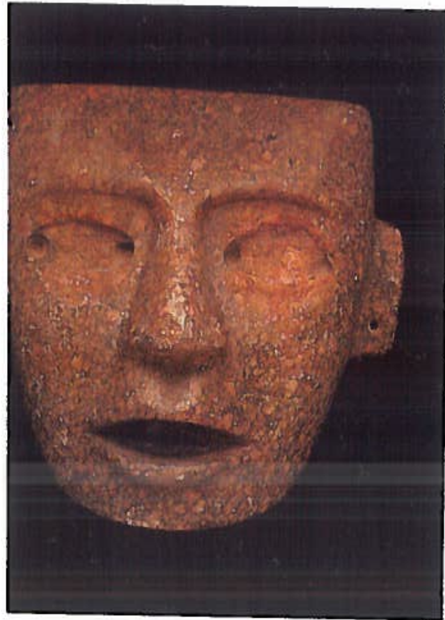
Foremost of these was a clear concept of dualism in which female and male, youth and old age, life and death were dramatically paired. One particularly impressive mask of the period had its surface cut down the centre, with the clay pulled back to reveal three different facial structures; first, a split skull, opened to reveal sections of an aged face, underneath of which was another face of a youth. It has been suggested that the principles expressed in these early works are evidence of the existence of a core cluster of deities that helped structure the region's religious and metaphysical thought for nearly 2,500 years. These beings include Huehueteotl, an ancient creator god associated with shamanism, fire and the periodic renewal of the world; Xipe Totec, related to cyclical agricultural renewal, and another important deity often depicted with feline attributes and crocodilian teeth, which may have been related to the were-jaguar or dragon ubiquitous in Olmec (1,200–400 BC) iconography.

The Olmec civilization, centered in southern Veracruz and Tabasco, influenced the sculpture and architectural styles of settlements throughout the states of Mexico, Morelos, Puebla and Guerrero, and provided an intellectual and aesthetic matrix that is believed to have remained at the heart of successive Meso-American societies.

Olmec masks were made from large stone cobbles, such as white and grey jadeite, jade, greenstone or quartzite, by using a rudimentary stone and wooden drill-based technology. Masks, mouth masks, as well as half-masks and masquettes were all fabricated. Masks may have been attached to pectorals, headdresses and loincloths, while masquettes were probably worn as pendants or ear spools (ornaments inserted into the ear lobes), making them an important part of high-ranking ceremonial regalia. Headdresses, like those in successive Meso-American societies, were particularly complex and, even at this early period, included headbands with sprouting elements and towering structures that combined feathers, vegetative and animal materials. Other headdresses made of cloth shaped into a variety of symbolic forms may have been attached to masks. In both cases, when worn with their related costumes, such regalia would have made powerful visual statements about the monopoly of supernatural power that legitimated a ruler's authority. In the later Maya (1000 BC–AD 1521) and Mixtec (AD 900–1521) civilizations headdresses expressed the names, feats and sacred attributes of those that wore them.

There is great variation in the formal styles of Olmec stone masks, which range from impersonal naturalistic facial models to those with zoomorphic characteristics including upturned fleshy snarling mouths, feline snouts, split or divided heads, and flamed eyebrows. Naturalistic masks, though devoid of any personal attributes, were sometimes decorated by light geometrical incisions, which traced the profiles of what may have been the deities or supernatural beings that infused them with their power and





53. Stone mask, Teotihuacan, State of Mexico, Mexico. Like fig. 5, this is a highly stylized mask showing the influence of the Mezcala style from north-east Guerrero, AD 300–650. H. 22 cm. British Museum Am1849,0629.5.

54. Olmec-style mask of greenish jade, recently repaired and restored. The engraving has been refilled with cinnabar and is visible in red. Arroyo Pesquero region (?), Veracruz, Mexico, 900–600 BC. H. 16.5 cm. Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection, University of East Anglia, Norwich.

authority. Many of these compositions represent beings that combine feline, serpent and bird attributes, that may have symbolized the domains of earth, water and sky, over which a ruler claimed dominion. These masks may have expressed the transmission of ancestral authority from a group's mythical founder to a line of chiefly successors, which consecrated each ruler as a necessary intermediary between the divine and everyday world.

While Olmec masks were believed to achieve shamanic transformation between rulers and supernatural were-creatures, the large numbers of masks made at the central Mexican city-state of Teotihuacan around AD 300–650, may have been used in mortuary practices. Teotihuacan masks are austere at best, but their stone surface provided the template for rich compositions of precious inlays, including turquoise mosaic work. The complexity and highly developed nature of headdresses throughout Meso-America, made from cloth or paper and incorporating feathers, vegetable matter, masks and animal attributes taken from felines, birds and even snakes, suggest they were intended not only to signify rank or express the attributes of their wearers, but to invoke supernatural protection and force, and contribute to achieving passage between different worlds. The close contiguity between these worlds suggests their boundaries, as well as the line between life and death was permeable, and that power could continue to be wielded by ancestors from the afterworld. Olmec and Teotihuacan stone masks were usually drilled for suspension. Nevertheless, because of their weight and lack of eye-holes, they were more likely either attached to costumes or to mortuary bundles to acknowledge an ancestor.

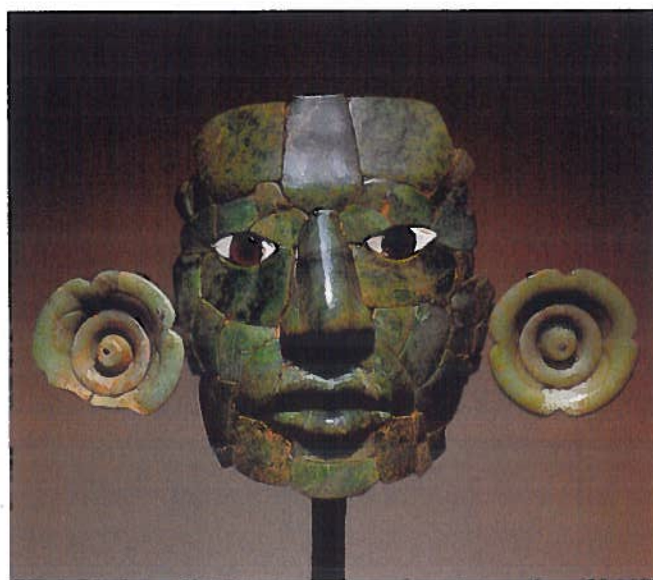
Ancestors, preserved in mortuary bundles, remained potent in the world of the living. Bundles were arranged on low-standing altars, usually showing one protruding hand, a mask covering the position of the face, and a bunch of feathers attached to the back of its head. Mixtec mortuary bundles were sometimes protected in caves. Although these caves were long looted before having been excavated, they may have acted as sanctuaries in which the masked mortuary bundles of a city's founding ancestors were guarded. Like their Olmec predecessors, these masks are usually depicted with open mouths as if they were in the act of speaking – perhaps providing omens from the world of the dead to the world of the living.

Maya stone masks have also been found in funerary contexts, providing firm evidence that they too were connected to mortuary beliefs and practices. Maya mortuary masks are much more naturalistic than those that preceded them, and were probably intended as portraits of the deceased with whom they were associated. Stone, however, was only one of the materials used by the Maya to make masks. Murals and polychromatic vases depict a rich variety of masks that differ considerably from those found in tombs. The Bonampak murals (fig. 56) show a lively scene of entertainers and musicians, whose masks have no surviving counterparts. A mural fragment in Tulum, a

56. (*above left*) Mural painting of a Water Goddess. Tepantitla Palace, Teotihuacan, State of Mexico, Mexico, AD 300–450. The goddess wears an ornate feather headdress with an owl-like mask and richly decorated costume. Water, symbol of fertility and abundance, drips from her fingers and from the branches of the tree behind her. She is attended by two acolytes. The scene has often been identified with accounts of Tlalocan, the Aztec aquatic paradise reserved for those who had died by drowning.

(*above right*) Mural painting of musicians and entertainers. Room 1, Structure 1, Bonampak, State of Chiapas, Mexico, AD 790–2. Among the elaborate masks of the entertainers, crustacean and crocodile headdresses can be identified. These masks do not, however, correspond to the iconography of known Maya supernaturals and their meaning is elusive.

55. (*Left and below*) Mosaic mask in jade, obsidian and shell. Maya, AD 250–900. The large ear spools identify the mask as representing an important lord. H. 15 cm. Private collection.



57. Jade mosaic mask with eyes and mouth inlaid with shell and pyrite. Maya, Tikal, Guatemala, AD 527. This portrait mask was found in a high-status burial chamber and probably represents the deceased with whom it was interned. H. 33 cm. The University Museum, University of Pennsylvania.

pre-Columbian Maya city, depicts a priest making a bird offering, wearing a turquoise mask, streaked with two horizontal lines of red that outline his eye and mouth and extend to his ear spool. Although it has been argued that Maya masks were associated with shamanistic transformation, this depiction is rare in illustrating the use of mosaic masks in religious ceremonies.

With the exception of a few masks fabricated of beaten gold dredged from the sacred well at Chichen-Itza, and a copper masquette in the British Museum's collection, believed to represent the merchant god Ek Chuah, metal masks are rare in Meso-America.

Although most of the surviving masks from the early period of Meso-American civilization were made of stone or pottery, wooden masks were

58. (*overleaf*) Stone mask of Xipe Totec (god of agriculture), Aztec, AD 1200–1519. The low relief carving on the inside shows the god dressed in his typical conical headdress and wearing a flayed skin. He carries a rattle stick, the symbol of agricultural fertility, and a human skull. The mask still bears traces of red pigment, a colour closely associated with Xipe Totec. H. 22.8 cm. British Museum Am1956,+.6.

also carved, and the application of fine mosaic techniques was practised. Accounts of post-classic civilizations (AD 1200–1519) – Mixtec, Zapotec, Maya and central Mexican – give a much fuller appreciation of the full extent of mask usage in Meso-America. The *Relacion de Michoacán*, part of a compilation of data instigated by the Spanish in the sixteenth century, which included historical and religious descriptions, recounts Mixtec mortuary practices. It describes how after death a ruler's body was burned on a funerary pyre, and his ashes mixed with those of his clothing and gold and silver ornaments, which were collected together and wrapped in a cloth bundle. 'On the bundle they put a turquoise mask, his gold earrings, his green feather headdress, his gold bracelets, his turquoise and seashell necklaces, and a round of gold on the back' (Headrick 2007, p. 54).

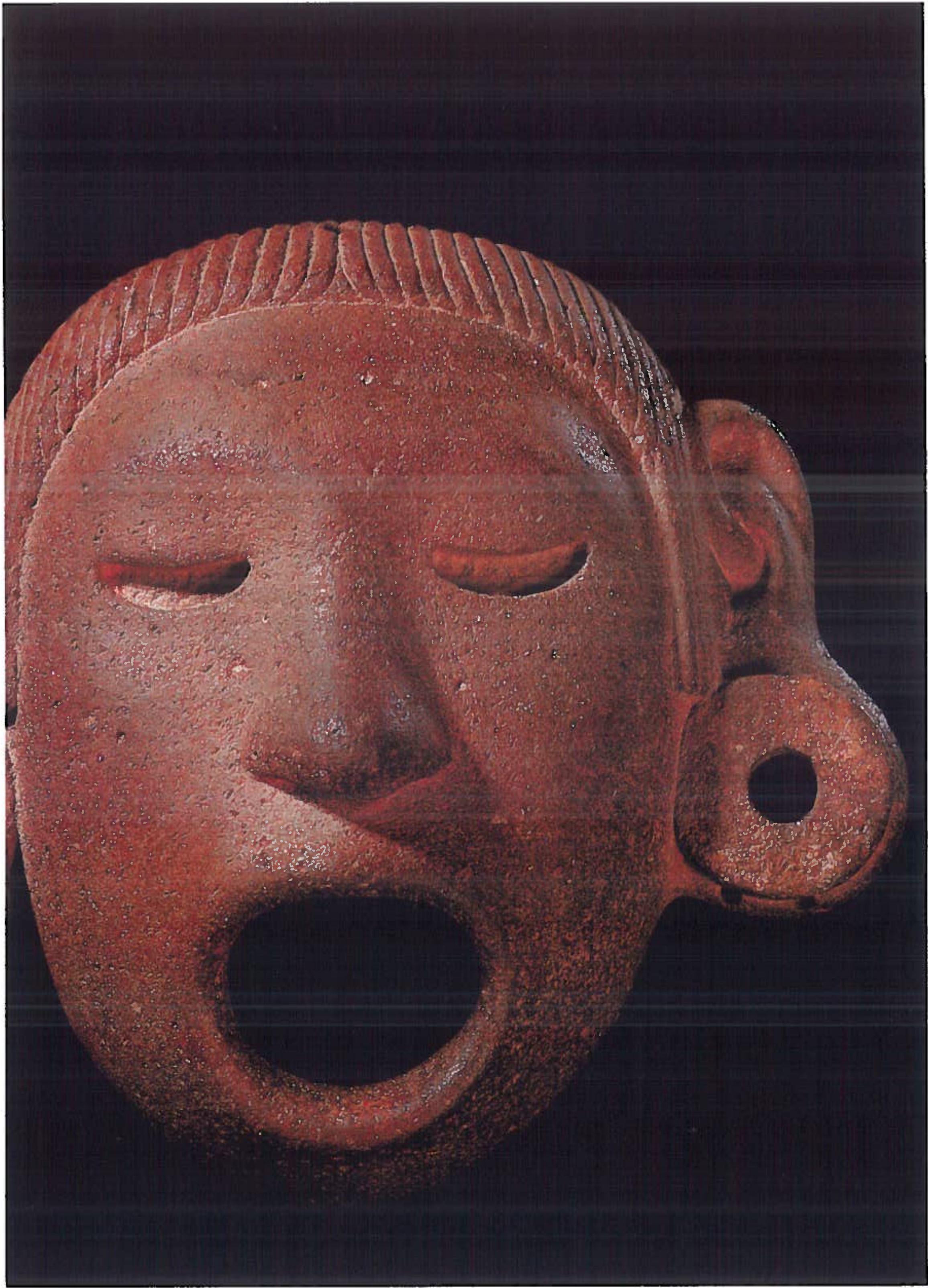
The Aztec (AD 1200–1519) placed masks over mortuary bundles before cremation, but after cremation secondary bundles were made with the deceased's ashes and dressed in even finer clothing and more elaborate masks. Mortuary masks usually represented the deities with whom the deceased was closely affiliated. These associations combined religious beliefs and political privileges to commemorate, legitimize and continually consecrate the system of theocratic rulership.

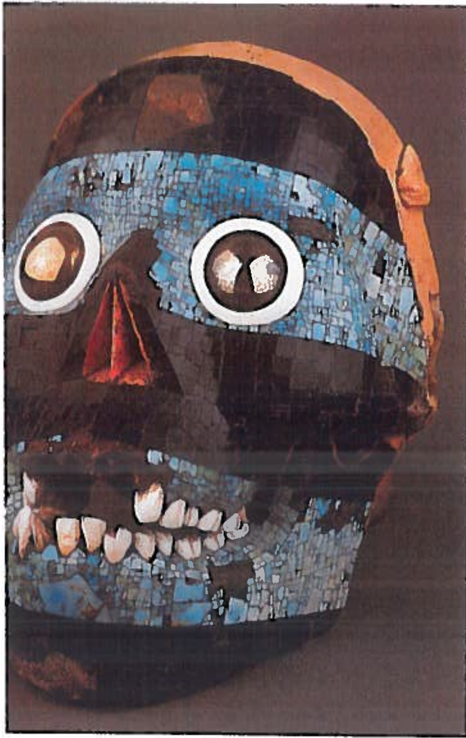
Some masks in Aztec times, with their related costumes, were monopolized by high-ranking priests to impersonate deities during ceremonies or used in ritual battles. Animal costumes complete with their hoods, most commonly representing the two military orders of jaguars and eagles, were used in battle. Some magnificent depictions of these costumes are shown in the murals of Cacaxtla, in Tlaxcala, but their memory persisted well after the conquest, in paintings in Catholic convents, as well as in post-Conquest codices such as the *Codice de Tlatelolco* (*c.* AD 1550) and the *Codex Durán* (*c.* AD 1581).

Human skulls were considered prized war trophies and provided another material used for masks. A recent study lists eight skulls (preserved in museum collections) decorated using turquoise, lignite, shell and obsidian, sometimes with a cut away back section to enable them to be mounted on the head. Although the Maya, Mixtec and Aztec all used these, the most common trophies might have been masks and costumes made of the skin of vanquished enemies. None of these have survived, though they are depicted on the inside of two stone masks in the British Museum (see fig. 58). Finally, masks were used in forms of entertainment performed during the cycle of ritual celebrations, perhaps associated with buffoonery as they are today.

Masquerade in the Andes

Meso-American civilization seems to have been more organized like a theatre state, which thrived on spectacle and the reiteration of political ideology and the celebration of its power, than the civilizations that grew up along the coastal deserts and mountainous areas of South America. Although there





59. Mosaic covered skull, believed to represent the God Tezcatlipoca. Mixtec/Aztec, AD 1200–1519. The skull may have belonged to an important man-god closely identified with Tezcatlipoca. Subsequent mosaic decoration would have made it an important and perhaps powerful reliquary. H. 20.3 cm. British Museum Am,St.401. Donated by Henry Christy.

were similarities in the usage of masks, architectural ensembles were not constructed as dramatic staging devices for religious ceremonies, and the stylistic decoration and materials used to make masks was always distinct.

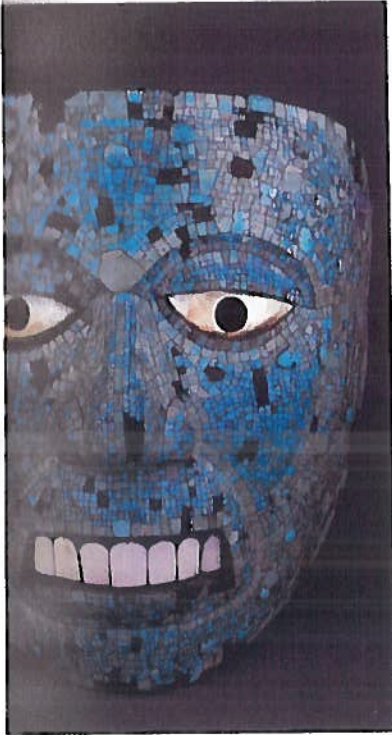
Clay masks were few. Some red terracotta masks found in the Chicama area of Peru (500–250 BC), and a few zoomorphic masks made in Paracas, also in Peru (300 BC–AD 200), are among the earliest known. Much later (AD 500–700) in northern Peru, and later still (AD 1200–1500) in Ecuador, small coarse grey masks were recovered from burial sites. Clay masks have also been found in the Tolima area in northern Colombia and from the Nariño region in the south of the country. Other ancient traditions included that from the Ocucaje region of Peru, in the Ica Valley (c.400 BC), where masks were made from red or brown cloth, stitched to mortuary bundles. Nazca (100 BC–AD 700) and Chancay civilizations (AD 1000–1450) used relatively naturalistic, wooden heads to take the place of masks on mortuary bundles; the first often covered with coloured feathers, while the latter were painted red.

At Paracas burial sites nearly shapeless mortuary bundles, in which human remains had been wrapped in multiple layers of fine woven and embroidered textiles, some containing mouth and face masks made of sheet gold decorated with stylized geometrical facial features, have been discovered. Masks made of silver, with feline and serpent features, wide gaping eyes, feline teeth and serpent-like fangs, were also made by the Tiwanaku civilization in Bolivia. Given the thinness of the metal, these masks might also have been attached to mortuary bundles and it has been suggested that they may have been attributed shamanistic powers capable of transforming their wearers into the composite animals they depict. At least one historical source, the *Waruchiri*, confirms this latter interpretation where the protagonist of the story, the god Ñamsapa, although paying dearly for taking the land and establishing his people, was credited with having devised the means through which a being's powers and qualities could be transferred from one to another.

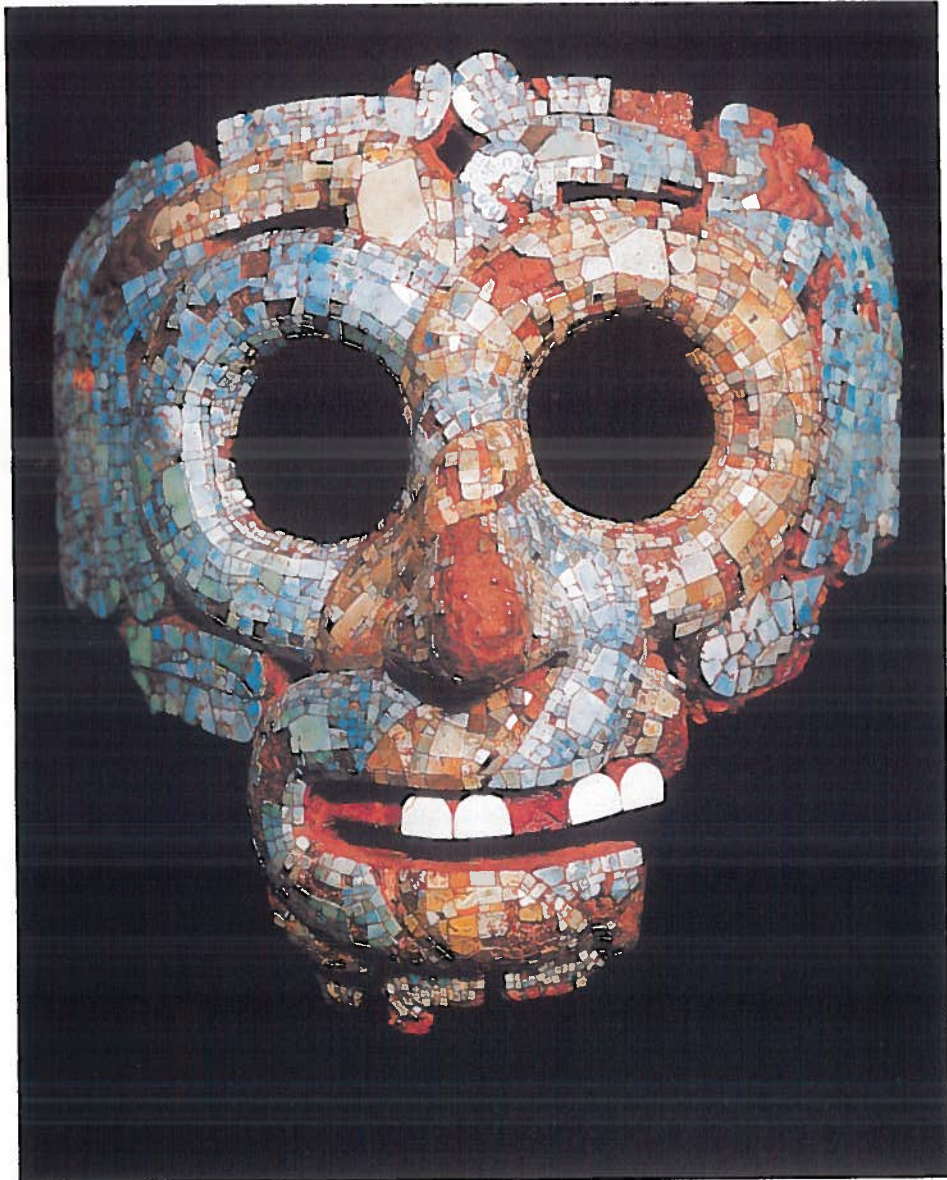
Moreover, chronicles of the Indian Rebellion of 1571 describe how the protagonists danced so their bodies became filled with their 'god's words', an observation that alludes to the importance of ceremony in achieving transcendence. Others have suggested masks served a protective function, guarding the corpse from the prey of ominous beings that potentially threatened it.

Feline attributes characterized masks as far north as Tumaco (250 BC–AD 800) in Colombia and demonstrate the widespread distribution and the importance given to feline anthropomorphization. Felines, often represented impersonators by humans wearing mouth masks, were also commonly depicted on Nazca ceramics.

In the Cauca Valley in Colombia, the Calima culture (1000 BC–AD 650) made rounded, expressionless gold masks which have been attributed mortuary functions. In Peru, by Moche times (100 BC–AD 650), mortuary masks were



60. (*above*) Mask of turquoise mosaic. Mixtec/Aztec, AD 1200–1519. This mask has been variously identified as representing Quetzalcoatl, the Plumed Serpent, Tonatiuh, the Sun-God, and Tlaltecuhtli, the Earth Monster. Few surviving Aztec masks other than those representing Tlaloc and Xipe Totec are easily identifiable. H. 16.8 cm. British Museum Am,St.400. Donated by Henry Christy.



61. (*right*) Mask of turquoise mosaic. Mixtec/Aztec, AD 1200–1519. The heads of the serpents encircling the wide circular eyes meet to form the nose. The mask is believed to represent the Rain-God, Tlaloc, the deity most commonly portrayed on turquoise masks. H. 17.8 cm. British Museum Am1987,Q.3.

commonly made from hammered sheet copper or gold, with nose, teeth and other features separately constructed and attached using solder. The rise of Sican culture (AD 800–1350), at the end of the Moche period, introduced new religious beliefs from the Highland Huari civilization in southern Peru and Bolivia, which initiated major political and cosmological changes. Sican, and Chimu (1300–1470) civilizations, which partly overlapped, both in northern Peru, believed their founding ancestors arrived by sea. This had a direct influence on the contents and elaboration of elite burial sites and gave rise to new forms and symbols which combined maritime and lunar themes. New motifs included the octopus, sea birds, and *strombilus* and *spondylus* – divine beings strongly related to the crescent Moon that played a major role in controlling tides and weather conditions, on which maritime

and land-based resources depended. Sican mortuary masks were made of gold, though many similarly styled Chimu examples, constructed through the same techniques originally developed by the Moche, were made from silver to allude to the luminescent qualities associated with the lunar deity.

Documentation of Inca masquerade is as sparse as that for the civilizations that preceded it. The political divisions of the Inca Empire were distinguished by their characteristic masquerades. Farmers wore fox heads and pelts over their heads and shoulders and other animal characters were incorporated into other important ceremonies. The *Llamallama* dancers wore animal skins and masks to imitate herders, while the Choquela used *vicuña* (animals native to the Andes) skin costumes. According to Garcilaso de la Vega, an early chronicler, the most important ceremony of the year, *Inti Raymi*, dedicated to the Sun, included a large number of masked dancers wearing lion skin costumes and headdresses and the bodies of condors, while others dressed and acted as buffoons. In another of the four principal annual state ceremonies performed in Cuzco, capital of the Inca Empire, men wearing puma costumes initiated the sons of noble families into manhood. Jaguar and puma masks were thought to represent the animals into which the Inca ruler's ancestors had been transformed.

62. Mural painting of a man in a full avian costume including a helmet-like mask enclosing the back and top of the head, wings and talons. Structure A, Cacaxtla, State of Tlaxcala, AD 700–900.

Colonial Mexico and the Andes

Spanish adventurism was directed against the political, religious and military hierarchies that upheld the distinct theocratic states within Mexico and South America. The war against Mexico was initiated in 1519, while in Peru aggressions did not begin until 1532 and took a further fifty years before the Spanish consolidated their rule. The destruction of the indigenous states brought with it the end of state sponsored religious ceremonies and their associated masquerades; the use of masks as insignia, and elite mortuary practices which guaranteed the transmission and legitimization of ancestral authority. Nevertheless, community and domestic-based religious beliefs, and their related ceremonies, continued to linger.

Masks were widely used throughout Latin America in Saint's day celebrations and to fulfill promises of displays of adoration to the Virgin Mary or a saint. On feast days at the shrine of the Virgin of Guadalupe (a celebrated incarnation of the Virgin Mary) on the outskirts of Mexico City, and at Marian shrines throughout the Americas, hundreds of masked performers still express annually their devotion to 'Our Lady'. Carnival witnesses an even more remarkable outpouring of masked personages and dances. Many saint's day ceremonies coincided with former indigenous ceremonies, readily encouraging the identification of native and Catholic world views.

Catholic saint's day ceremonies, particularly Corpus Christi, those dedicated to the various manifestations of the Virgin Mary – and in Cuzco, Christ himself

– were overlain and reinterpreted using Andean, and new hybrid beliefs and rituals that emerged from the encounter of the two civilizations.

Masked and costumed devils and angels, terrestrial spirits and star gods, are particularly ubiquitous throughout the Andes. They appear in Corpus Christi celebrations, reminiscent of *Oncoymitta* – a pre-harvest ceremony intended to invoke protection against drought – in the Ecuadoran provinces of Cotopaxi and Tungurahua. Dancers wear elaborate costumes consisting of richly embroidered bands hanging from a wooden pole balanced across their shoulders, tail aprons and breastplates decorated using Catholic and national icons. Elaborate headdresses supported on a willow frame and adorned with embroidery, silver coins, mirrors, jewellery and plastic dolls, surmounted by feathers, have particularly impressive luminescent qualities while masks are usually made of felt or wire netting, and have a coin suspended from their nose.

Devils appear in large numbers in the Andes, choreographed and organized by brotherhoods, which sometimes can assemble over a hundred dancers to perform the *Diablada*; a dance that grew out of the Dance of the Seven Deadly Sins, which was introduced into the southern Andes in the sixteenth century by Jesuit missionaries based in Juli. The performance was intended to visualize Catholic moral values and the incommensurability between good and evil. It reaffirmed the existence of sin and the Devil, the unavoidable damnation of those still connected to pre-Christian beliefs and the inevitable triumph of the Spanish over native peoples. Each sin was originally identified by the characteristics of the different demonic masks worn by participants. Lucifer and Satanus are still identified by their grotesque, horned masks, but the only sin still expressed by a unique mask is that of lust represented by a coquettish small-horned female devil, sometimes identified as Lucifer's wife. In Oruro, Bolivia, the dance is performed in honour of the Virgin of Socavón, who, with the help of Saint Michael eventually banishes Lucifer and his Devilish hordes back to the mines from which they came. There is also a Mexican version of the Seven Deadly Sins, which uses masks adorned by particular animal representations to characterize each of them. Another Andean dance drama, the *Danzante*, which includes a green painted devil mask decorated with reptiles, supposedly once involved its protagonist eating, drinking and dancing for days without respite, until he died from exhaustion.

Other Andean dance dramas enact historical events. The death of Atahu -alpa (the last emperor of the Inca Empire, 1497–1533) is widely distributed in Peru and Bolivia and may date to the sixteenth century. It is performed in Oruro, for the Virgin of Socavón and most famously in the villages of Huánuco, in honour of Santa Rosa. The Morenada Dance, involving masks representing African slaves and their white overseers is also performed during Oruro Carnival.

63. Monkey masks and costumes, Oruro, Bolivia, 1984. Carnival celebrations incorporate many characters and animals in addition to those directly related to the story of the battle between good and evil. These monkey characters show the strong influence of rural beliefs on Oruro's urban carnival. British Museum Am1985,32.54,55.

Nineteenth and twentieth century masquerades can be divided into three categories, based on their historical antecedents and make-up. The first category includes performances originally derived from the Catholic one-act *auto sacramentals*, a genre directly imported from the Iberian Peninsular and used to impress the importance and implications of the Catholic faith to the indigenous population. These plays were dogmatic and moralistic and necessarily highly allegorical, with actors sometimes representing abstract categories related to Eucharistic transubstantiation, time, virtue, the world and penitence. Other performances, such as 'mystery plays' were more complex and included the dramatization of the Nativity, the Three Kings, the Passion and the Resurrection and dated from the European Middle Ages. Dramas incorporated conversations between Jesus and Mary, enactments of Christ's descent into Hell, and episodes from the lives of saints and miracle stories.

Complex Easter ceremonies among the Mayo, Yaqui and Cora in northern Mexico, all include masks to represent Pharisees – an ancient Jewish sect considered the opponents of Christ – as well as in the case of the Cora, monsters. At the end of these ceremonies, all these societies burn their masks as a symbolic act of community purification and regeneration.

A second category of dance drama includes the many different versions of combat plays, organized around a military struggle between antagonistic factions. These were introduced into northern Spain from Aragon or Burgundy in France as early as the twelfth century. They choreographed enactments of triumphant Spanish battles in the re-conquest of the Iberian Peninsular, and often included the miraculous appearance of Santiago, a figure who had gained considerable prestige by the twelfth century, and had become central to the success of the struggle against the Moors and the establishment of the Spanish nation. New World versions of these dance dramas included the Dance of the Conquest, the Dance of the Plumes and the Dance of the Corteses, and deploy masked protagonists in what are essentially re-enactments of an apostolic struggle led by the supposedly divinely elected Spanish vanguard. The Dance of Moors and Christians nevertheless maintained its popularity, despite its fragmentation into various versions including the Dance of the Negros or *Negritos*, performed in Michoacán, Oaxaca and Chiapas, in which the usual red Moor masks are replaced by black masks representing Africans.

The structures of these combat plays are never static and around the 1940s there emerged in Guatemala a new version known as the Dance of the Mexicans. These used masks depicting Guatemalans and Mexicans, identified by their wide brimmed sombreros and black moustaches, to recall the brief Mexican annexation of the country after Independence.

What is notable about this category of dance dramas is their malleability, both in Mexico and Peru, to undergo reversals in narrative structure that

64. Kekchi masks, Aguacate, Belize. Early 20th century. The masks represent the Devil, his Father, Mother, Wife and two minor Devils who spread lust, dishonesty, drunkenness, hatred, jealousy and death. The Devil commanded the Kekchi to perform the dance regularly in honour of his sovereignty over the world. H. of largest: 46 cm. British Museum Am1938,1021.450, 451, 452, 453, 454, 455. Donated by Thomas Gann.

enable them to recount stories of indigenous resistance and revisionist historiographies. In the Valley of Oaxaca, one version of the dance reverses the outcome of the aggression by enacting the victory of the indigenous population over the Spanish, and in Guadalajara, West Mexico, in another version, the Dance of the Tastoanes, Santiago renounces his allegiance to the Spanish and joins the indigenous factions which he leads to victory.

It has been estimated that there are about one hundred versions of combat plays in Mexico, and their many variations and wide geographical distribution have produced an equally wide variety of masks and masquerades. Moors and Christians, while not narrowly prescriptive racial terms, are often visually represented by dark or red masks, often decorated with moustaches, and white/pink faces, with carved beards respectively; the masks of the leaders of both groups may also be surmounted by crowns.

The third category of dance dramas includes those that retain elements from pre-Conquest Mexican history grafted or hybridized with later narrative episodes, choreographies or religious cycles. These include the Dance of

65. (*right*) Six masks representing Pedro Alvarado and the Spanish soldiers who conquered the Indian nations of Guatemala. Kekchi, Belize. Early 20th century. Collected by Thomas Gann. H. of largest 22 cm. British Museum Am1981,06.17, 22, 23, 24, 40, 55.

66. (*far right*) Leather helmet masks representing tigers, used in ritual battles during the Festival of the Cross (3 May). Zitlala, State of Guerrero, Mexico. 20th century. H. of largest 26.1 cm. Royal Pavillion and Museums, Brighton and Hove.

the Tlocololeros, the Tecuanes, and the Tepejuanes, and ritual battles such as that performed in Zitlala on the Day of the Holy Cross (30 April), all of which incorporate a masked tiger as their principal protagonist.

The characters in the Dance of the Tlocololeros – which in Chilapa and Mochitlán in the State of Guerrero, wear costumes made from sacking, wide brimmed, tapered straw hats, wooden masks and wield whips – are accompanied by a dog, Maravilla, with whom they go in search of a tiger who is devastating their fields. The hunters with the crackle of their whips may represent the coming rain and the tiger, the passing dry season. The ritual combat in Zitlala, where protagonists use only leather helmet masks to protect their heads against blows from thickly knotted lengths of rope, is thought to represent the remnants of a blood-letting sacrifice also intended to invoke the change of seasons.

Old men dances, performed widely in the Mexican state of Michoacán, always incorporate masks representing their broken and near toothless old protagonists who stagger around on walking sticks. According to some writers these masks represent the old Aztec fire god, Huehueteotl, while others argue they are a satirical depiction of old arthritic, wide-mouthed and drooling Spaniards.

Although they blur the boundaries between myth and history, contemporary dance dramas iterate community and foreign morals, values and behaviour, and inter-ethnic relations, and are important expressions of ethnic or local identity, and religious devotion. In some dances such as the Morenada and Diablada, as performed in Puno, Peru and Oruro, the Catholic and Spanish colonial origin of the dances are complicated by the sudden appearance of individuals garbed in the wings of a condor wearing a metal bird mask, or

68. (*opposite*) Prints of masked wrestlers, Mexico City, 1993. Mexican wrestlers command loyal popular followings. Often bearing names that identify them with legendary heroes of the past, or the comic-book tradition of American superheroes, wrestlers are sometimes romanticized as the embodiment of virtue and ethical values. Collection of the author.

67. Elaborate Devil masks such as these are made for an annual devil mask competition (16 September). The masks characteristically have a proliferation of horns, but vie for the most grotesque features. Teloloápan, State of Guerrero, Mexico. 20th century. H. 41.9 cm. Royal Pavillion and Museums, Brighton and Hove.

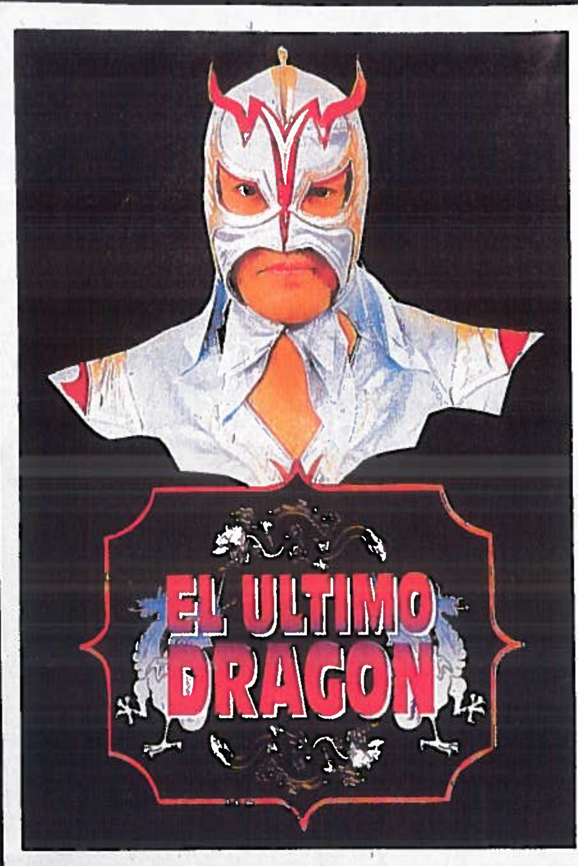
a lion skin covering their head and shoulders. They wonder between one dance group and another echoing pre-Hispanic masquerade styles. Masked clowns, which were also part of pre-Columbian ceremonials, appear in dance dramas in Guerrero and Oaxaca in Mexico, often to help control the crowds, and prepare and ritually cleanse the dance patio, while among the Huichol in Jalsico, the only masked character to traditionally participate in ceremonies appears in a crude wooden mask, during the Bull Ceremony, playing the role of a buffoon who makes obscene remarks, while squeezing faeces from a cow's bladder on those who aren't lucky enough to escape his approach.

Other masked dances, such as those involving tiger hunts and combats, although perhaps retaining their pre-Columbian inspiration that associates them with religious ideas about the alternation of the seasons, might also encode more recent narratives about the conditions of life in haciendas (large estates or plantations) and their rich landowners. This hybridized and individualistic mix of personages and historical events is particularly evident in Carnival.

Huejotzingo Carnival, in Puebla, Mexico, re-enacts the notorious deeds of an eighteenth–nineteenth century bandit, Augustín Lorenzo – who robbed from the rich to give the poor – his love and abduction of the daughter of the town's mayor, the resulting battle and his eventual pardon. The performance brings together large groups of masked participants, sometimes numbering over two thousand people.

In the Carnival of San Juan Chamula, in Chiapas, episodes taken from the Tzotzil Caste War, the French Intervention, and the conflict with Guatemala, jostle for space with persons disguised in animal and other masks. Chamula Carnival contrasts sharply with the carnivals in the Tlaxcalan villages of Santa Ana Chiautempan and Contla. Here masquerades incorporate finely carved masks of white men, formal black suits and top hats, and black umbrellas in imitation of rich nineteenth-century city dwellers. Other men dress as women to dance with their dandyish partners in the Dance of the Catrines. Umbrellas are used to symbolize the much-desired rains that seldom fall on these parched lands. The Carnival of Pinotepa on the Oaxacan coast, includes grotesque Negritos masks and the diminutive Tejorones masks from nearby San Pedro Jicayán. The Tejorones ridicule rich hacienda owners or the inhabitants of the city. Each of these four Mexican carnivals is unique and contains characters and historical episodes specially linked with the area in which they are celebrated.

Masks and masquerades remain a common form of popular expression throughout Latin America and reflect the ontologies and different historical fictions that have helped form the cultural identities of the continent's diverse people and communities.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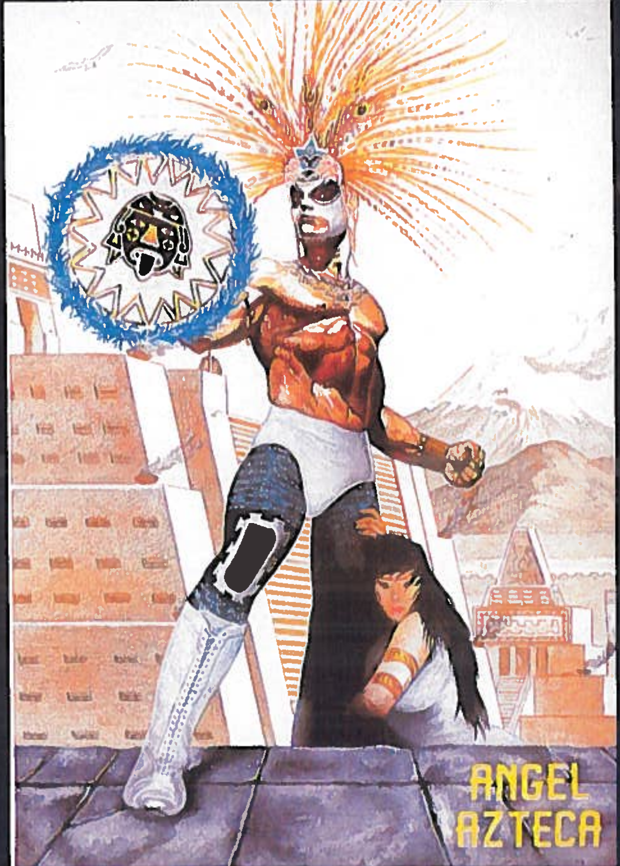
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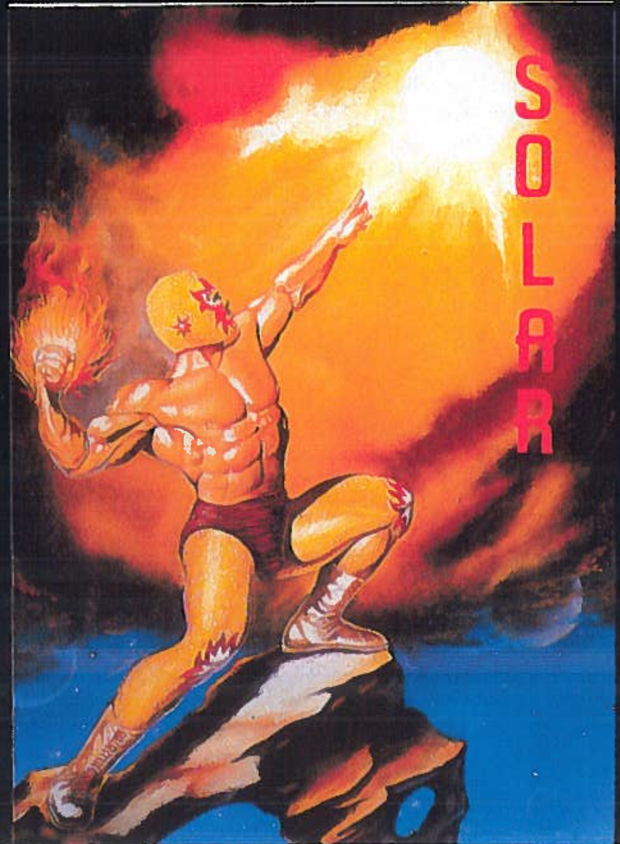
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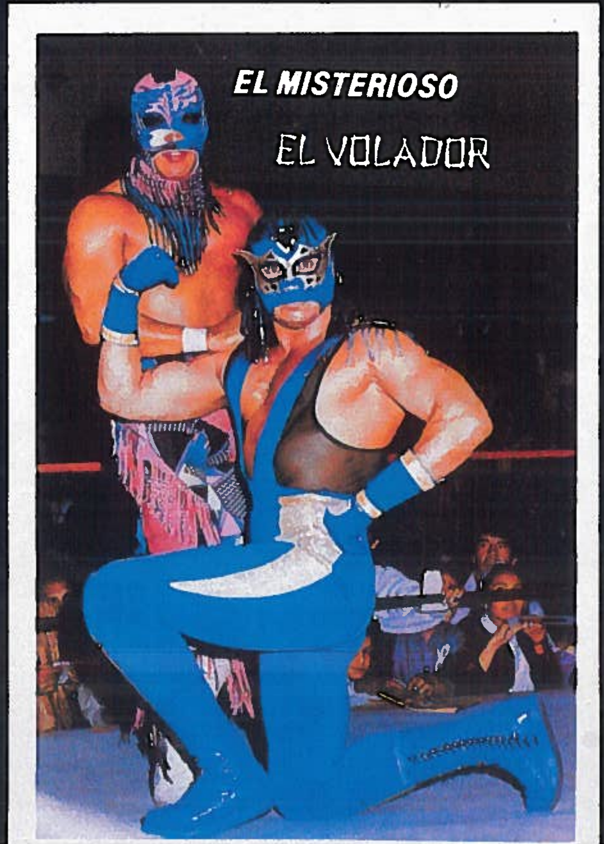
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