

IGNACIO BERNAL¹
1910–1992

A great tree has fallen in the mesoamerican forest, and it is unlikely that the hole in the canopy will be filled in the foreseeable future. Ignacio Bernal, one of the giants of Mexican archaeology and the world's leading authority on ancient Oaxaca, died on January 24, 1992, at the age of 81.

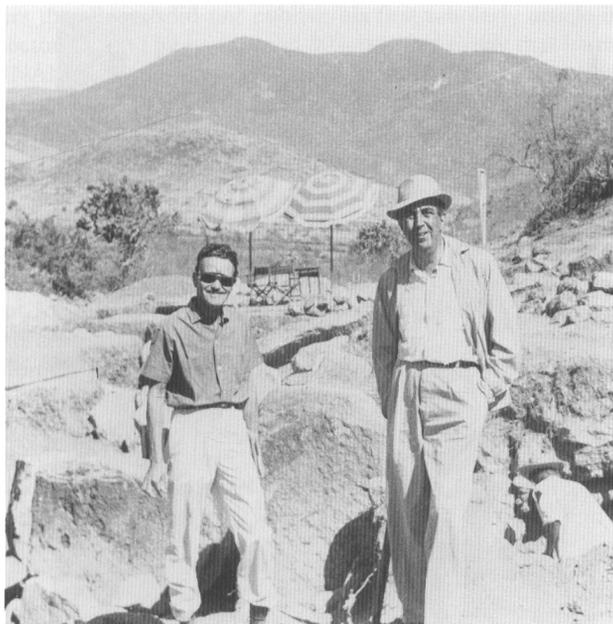
Born in Paris on February 13, 1910, Bernal came by his love of ancient history naturally; his mother was the daughter of Luis García Pimentel and the granddaughter of the legendary Joaquín García Icazbalceta. Bernal was privately educated at the Colegio Franco-Inglés in Mexico City and Loyola College in Montreal, becoming fluent in French and English as well as his native Spanish.

Despite his place in a lineage of distinguished historians, Bernal discovered archaeology relatively late. During 1932–1934, he studied law. During 1935–1940, he tried various aspects of business, but none held his interest. “I tried law and failed; I tried business and failed,” he used to joke with his friends. “I was much more successful as a playboy.” Finally, still searching for a career which would satisfy him intellectually, he returned to school in 1941 to study history.

This was the crucial turning point in his life, the point at which he met Alfonso Caso and was taken to Monte Albán in Oaxaca for three field seasons of excavation (1942–1944). Caso's anthropological approach to archaeology, which combined ethnohistory and ethnology with excavation, provided Bernal with the intellectual challenge he had been seeking. In 1943 he entered the Escuela Nacional de Antropología, receiving his diploma as arqueólogo in 1947 and his Master's degree in 1949. His doctorate in archaeology from the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM) followed in 1950. Finally a professional archaeologist at the age of 40, Bernal was by then married to Sofía Vereá, the lovely companion who would become the mother of his children Concepción, Rafaela, Ignacio, and Carlos.

During 1946–1953, Bernal worked four more field seasons at Monte Albán, taking on the task of defining the early ceramic phases at the site. His Master's thesis, based partly on a deep stratigraphic

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The team of Ignacio Bernal (*right*) and Lorenzo Gamio (*left*) carried out Oaxaca's first settlement-pattern survey, locating more than 200 sites. Photograph taken in 1967 at Dainzú.

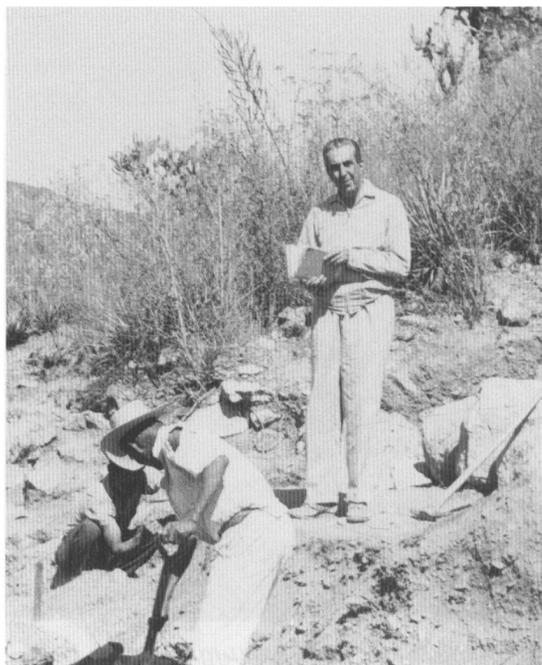
sounding in Monte Albán's North Platform, provided the original definition for Monte Albán periods Ia, Ib, Ic, and II. His doctoral dissertation gives us the definitive description of Monte Albán IIIa. By then Bernal was ready to move on from Monte Albán to other Oaxacan sites, combining ethnohistory with archaeology to answer anthropological questions about the development of Zapotec and Mixtec Indian culture.

In 1948 Bernal worked at Coixtlahuaca, a sixteenth-century Mixtec center for which the Aztec chroniclers provide ethnohistoric data. He followed this up with work during 1952 in Tamazulapan, a Chocho-speaking valley that the documents describe as having been under the dominion of Coixtlahuaca. His Tamazulapan excavations also produced the first long stratigraphic sequence for the Mixteca Alta. In both Coixtlahuaca and Tamazulapan, Bernal established a pattern of working carefully back from the known (sixteenth-century documents) to the unknown (prehistory).

This pattern was continued in the Valley of Oaxaca when Bernal decided to devote several decades to the later periods of Zapotec and Mixtec prehistory. Two anthropological problems particularly intrigued him: (1) the collapse of Monte Albán as a center of Zapotec culture after A.D. 700, and (2) the possible role played by the Mixtec of A.D. 700–1500 in the decline of the Zapotec.

Bernal originally wanted to begin this research at Zaachila, the Postclassic Zapotec capital, but his efforts in 1952 were frustrated by a hostile faction of townspeople. As an alternative, he worked in 1953 at Macuilxochitl, in 1954 at Cuilapan de Guerrero, in 1956 at Noriega, in 1957 at San Luis Beltrán, and in 1961 at Mitla. While this work neither totally resolved the question of the collapse of Monte Albán nor fully clarified the relationship between Monte Albán IV (A.D. 700–1000) and Monte Albán V (A.D. 1000–1530), it contributed greatly to our understanding of the Postclassic Valley of Oaxaca. Today we can see that Mixtec immigration into the western valley greatly altered settlement patterns and architecture in that region, while the most impressive Postclassic Zapotec centers seem to have been restricted to the eastern part of the valley.

One of Bernal's most important projects of that era was the excavation of Yagul, a mesa-top ceremonial center in the eastern valley. From 1954 to 1962, with the collaboration of John Paddock, Lorenzo Gamio, and Charles Wicke, Bernal exposed at Yagul a Postclassic ceremonial center that contrasted architecturally with earlier centers like Monte Albán.



Bernal supervised the exploration of a Late Formative administrative complex at Dainzú, Oaxaca, 1967.

Various administrative duties interrupted Bernal's Oaxaca field work in the 1950s and 1960s. In 1955–1956, he served as cultural attaché to the Mexican embassy in Paris and as Mexican delegate to UNESCO. In 1962–1964, he directed the multimillion-peso project of excavation and restoration at Teotihuacán that made that Basin of Mexico city the spectacular public attraction it is today. During 1958–1968, he served as subdirector of the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, and from 1968 to 1971 he was its director. In 1968–1969, he served as president of the Society for American Archaeology. Much of this service was performed while he was simultaneously a professor at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (1948–1976) and chairman of the Department of Anthropology at Mexico City College (1951–1959).

Through it all Bernal continued to escape to the field whenever he could, and to publish articles and books. Two of his favorite long-term projects were his survey of archaeological sites and inventory of carved stone monuments from the Valley of Oaxaca. These were ongoing studies to which he could return, over and over again, whenever a vacation freed him from administration. With the aid of Lorenzo Gamio, bit by bit and with limited time and resources, Bernal succeeded in locating more than 200 sites with one or more mounds in the Valley of Oaxaca. He also succeeded in publishing several volumes of carved stones to complement Caso's classic 1928 work, *Las estelas zapotecas*. This research continued even during Bernal's tenure as director of the new Museo Nacional de Antropología in Chapultepec Park (1962–1968, 1970–1977).

It was during his search for new carved stones in the Valley of Oaxaca that Bernal discovered Dainzú, the site that was to become his last great excavation. Planning to spend only a few days in 1966 uncovering a partially exposed monument, Bernal and Gamio found that it was only one of an extensive series of Late Formative carved stones, many of them depicting ball players. Bernal continued to work at Dainzú until 1972, uncovering an enormously important civic-ceremonial center occupied from the Middle Formative until the Spanish Conquest.

In 1977, Bernal retired as director of the Museo Nacional to devote himself to writing up his backlog of data. To those who knew him it is not at all surprising that he produced 16 more publications, including the final report on Dainzú, while in his seventies.

When one considers that Bernal did not publish his first scholarly article until he was 37—and did not receive his doctorate until he had turned 40—it is fair to say that he made up for lost time. To his degree from UNAM he added honorary degrees from Berkeley, Cambridge, St. Mary's, and the University of the Americas. France awarded him the Légion d'Honneur in 1964; Britain the Royal Order of Victoria in 1975; and similar honors were bestowed upon him by Italy, Belgium, Germany, Denmark, Yugoslavia, the Netherlands, and Senegal. He was awarded the Lucy Wharton Drexel Medal in 1971, and the Kidder Medal in 1986. He was elected a foreign fellow of the U.S. National Academy of Sciences in 1980. His publications number at least 267, and many of them are likely to endure as permanent classics in mesoamerican archaeology.

Bernal's death represents more than the loss of a single great individual. He was the last of a generation of brilliant Mexican scholars who shaped the archaeology of their country during the middle decades of this century. Alfonso Caso, Jorge Acosta, Eduardo Noguera, Ignacio Marquina, Wigberto Jiménez Moreno, Alberto Ruz, and Bernal were known for more than their excavations and analyses. They were a cohort of elder statesmen whose gracious and gentlemanly demeanor often hid the passion they felt for their field, and cooled the occasional sparks that flew when they insisted on high standards of scholarship. They knew the literature in many languages, acknowledged the contributions of their predecessors, showed no chauvinism toward foreign colleagues, and cared much more about prehistory than politics. Bernal was the last of them, and his death signals the end of a generation to whom we owe an enormous debt.

KENT V. FLANNERY

AN ANNOTATED SAMPLE OF BERNAL'S WRITINGS

In 1990, on the occasion of his eightieth birthday, Bernal's children published his complete bibliography (*Ignacio Bernal: Bibliografía, 1947–1988*, by Concepción, Rafaela, Ignacio, and Carlos Bernal. Edicupes, México, D.F.). Their efforts would make it superfluous to list all 267 of Bernal's works here, and I will therefore restrict myself to annotating 20 landmarks of his publishing career. Some of my comments are drawn from an earlier tribute, coauthored with J. Paddock (Contributions of Ignacio Bernal to the Study of the Zapotec and Mixtec: A Minimal Survey, in *The Cloud People*, edited by K. V. Flannery and J. Marcus, pp. xxv–xxviii. New York, Academic Press, 1983).

- 1947 Los calendarios de Durán. *Revista Mexicana de Estudios Antropológicos* 9:125–134. (This was Bernal's first paper for a refereed journal, and it reveals some important traits of future work: a profound interest in historical sources, fascination with Aztec archaeology and ethnohistory, penetrating clarity in stating complex questions and defining their implications.)
- 1948 Exploraciones en Coixtlahuaca, Oaxaca. *Revista Mexicana de Estudios Antropológicos* 10:5–76. (This paper summarized the first effective combination of archaeology and ethnohistory ever undertaken in Oaxaca.)
- 1949 *La cerámica de Monte Albán III-A*. México, D.F. (This mimeographed version of Bernal's doctoral thesis presents the definitive description of Early Classic Oaxaca pottery.)
- 1952 *Urnas de Oaxaca* (with Alfonso Caso). Memorias No. 2. Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, México, D.F. (A monograph-length compendium of Oaxacan ceramic sculpture, this book attempted to interpret prehistoric funerary urns in the light of sixteenth-century data on Zapotec religion.) *Introducción a la arqueología*. Fondo de Cultura Económica, México, D.F. (Considered by many to be the best text on archaeology in Spanish.)
- 1958 *Exploraciones en Cuicapan de Guerrero (1902–1954)*. Informes No. 7. Dirección de Monumentos Prehispánicos, Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, México, D.F. (In addition to combining his work with that of earlier researchers, Bernal reveals the lack of fit between ethnohistoric and archaeological data at Cuicapan.)
- 1959 *Tenochtitlán en una isla*. Serie Histórica No. 2. Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, México, D.F. (This important book on the Aztec was later translated into English as *Mexico Before Cortez*, Anchor Press/Doubleday, New York, 1975.)
- 1962 *Bibliografía de arqueología e etnografía: Mesoamérica y norte de México (1514–1960)*. Memorias No. 7. Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, México, D.F. (This was an exhaustive bibliography of everything published on Mesoamerica and northern Mexico up to 1960; it contains more than 30,000 entries.)

- 1963 *Teotihuacán: Descubrimientos, reconstrucciones*. Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, México, D.F. (Bernal's overview of the massive exploration and reconstruction going on at Teotihuacán.)
- 1965 Archaeological Synthesis of Oaxaca. In *Archaeology of Southern Mesoamerica*, pt. 2, edited by G. R. Willey, pp. 788–813. Handbook of Middle American Indians, vol. 3, R. Wauchope, general editor. University of Texas Press, Austin. (Still a classic synthesis a quarter of a century later.)
- Architecture in Oaxaca After the End of Monte Alban. In *Archaeology of Southern Mesoamerica*, pt. 2, edited by G. R. Willey, pp. 837–848. Handbook of Middle American Indians, vol. 3, R. Wauchope, general editor. University of Texas Press, Austin. (A complement to Jorge Acosta's chapter on the architecture of Monte Albán.)
- Ceramics of Oaxaca (with A. Caso). In *Archaeology of Southern Mesoamerica*, pt. 2, edited by G. R. Willey, pp. 871–895. Handbook of Middle American Indians, vol. 3, R. Wauchope, general editor. University of Texas Press, Austin. (An excellent introduction to the pottery of Monte Albán I–V.)
- 1966 The Mixtecs in the Archaeology of the Valley of Oaxaca. In *Ancient Oaxaca*, edited by J. Paddock, pp. 345–366. Stanford University Press, Palo Alto. (Bernal's first extensive exposition of his theories about the differences between the eastern and western Valley of Oaxaca in Postclassic times.)
- 1967 *La cerámica de Monte Albán* (with A. Caso and J. R. Acosta). Memorias No. 13. Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, México, D.F. (This giant report on the ceramics of Monte Albán I–V, sometimes referred to as “the Bible of Oaxaca Archaeology,” is one of the most comprehensive, well-illustrated, and “user friendly” studies of mesoamerican pottery ever produced.)
- 1968 *El mundo olmeca*. Editorial Porrúa, México, D.F. (This eloquent work on Formative Mexico was later translated into English as *The Olmec World*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1969.)
- 1974 *Yagul: El Palacio de los Seis Patios* (with L. Gamio). Instituto de Investigaciones Antropológicas, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, México, D.F. (The first major monograph on a Monte Albán V administrative center.)
- 1979 *Historia de la arqueología en México*. Editorial Porrúa, México, D.F. (A major work in Spanish on the early history of archaeology in Mexico.)
- 1980 *A History of Mexican Archaeology*. Thames and Hudson, London. (An English version of his 1979 book, this work reveals Bernal's great mastery of early references and his love of history.)
- 1986 *Le mexique des origines aux aztèques* (with M. Simoni-Abbat). Le monde précolombien, vol. 1. Editions Gallimard, Paris. (A major synthesis of Mexican prehistory, written in Bernal's first foreign language and published in the city of his birth.)
- 1988 *Exploraciones arqueológicas en Dainzú, Oaxaca* (with A. Oliveros). Serie Antropológica No. 59. Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, México, D.F. (A report on one of the most important early ceremonial centers in the eastern Valley of Oaxaca, with data on the Precolumbian ball game.)

NOTE

¹ I am grateful to Bernal's family, and especially to Carlos Bernal Vereá and Ignacio Bernal Vereá, for aid in preparing this obituary. The lead photo was taken at Dainzú in 1967. All photos appear courtesy Ignacio Bernal Vereá.