

metamorphosis is achieved the rain is already there in his person. Only if the metamorphosis is incomplete does the operation fail. So, entirely convinced, he is himself the bear that lets itself be trapped, the illness that escapes from the body that holds it, the full ear of maize that is desired, the huge fish falling into the net; all, in fact, that is needed for the community. This naturally implies previous observation of phenomena, but faith in the efficacy of the imitation lies in something other than a mechanical view of the universe.

Study of the archaeological material from the archaic Pre-columbian period, composed mainly of naturalistic representations of animals and women, will help to make this clear. The former are easily explained. The custom of modelling images of animals the people needed in abundance is not only mentioned in ancient documents but has been observed by many modern ethnologists. The female figures, on the other hand, have been so argued about that the understanding of this magical phase becomes more and more difficult. If, as some have suggested, these female images represent an earth goddess, it means that the concept of divinity enters history several centuries earlier than it theoretically should; for archaeological collections show that this advanced concept closes the archaic period and is always accompanied by a number of cultural characteristics entirely lacking in earlier times.

Moreover ethnology seems to show clearly enough that the fundamental psychological attitude of primitive man is to assimilate the multitudinous forms of nature to himself. Such assimilation contradicts the principle of singularity or wholeness inherent in the idea of divinity. The American anthropologist, Clew Parsons, tells how the Pueblo Indians speak familiarly of girls as "white maize", "yellow maize", "red maize", and adds that young virgins take the parts of these important crops, impersonating them in certain ceremonies. These symbolic representations form the theme of many tales of the Zapotec Indians from southern Mexico:

“A man met a boy and a girl at the cross. ‘I am Corn,’ said the boy, ‘and she is Beans.’ That year they had five crops at Mitla.”

And again:

“Lightning brought out two flower vases and from them came out two girls, one girl had no colour . . . the other was red and very attractive. Then he said to Pablo: ‘Now which of these girls will you take? Here you have the crops.’”<sup>1</sup>

Tales of this kind are valuable because, besides showing that the custom of personifying natural phenomena persists to our day, they allow us better to understand the mechanism of the magic rite: the apparition of the girl maize or bean has such splendid consequences that every effort is made to encourage it. That is, the magical activity consists in performing pantomimes in which human beings assume the rôles of animals, plants, and clouds, which are thus conjured up and enacted according to the needs of the group. It is, then, legitimate to suppose that the female archaic images represent the good things needed by the Indians in abundance, a hypothesis that seems to be confirmed by the most significant relevant material from any Pre-Columbian archaic centre, that found in Tlatilco, a suburb of Mexico City.

Owing to its perfect cultural integration and the fact that its date (1500 B.C.) has been fairly accurately established, Tlatilco is like a beacon on the road of prehistory. From its unique position it throws light both on the dark periods before it and on the equally dark ones that follow. Here in Tlatilco certain more evolved ways of life—the beginnings of a social structure, division of labour, collective participation in ritual—become manifest for the first time in Meso-america, and it was perhaps these new forms that helped the inhabitants to attain an artistic expression infinitely superior to that of their predecessors or immediate followers.

The objects from Tlatilco are full of unusual spontaneity. Among the ceramic objects—sometimes brilliantly free in