

# AN INTERPRETATION OF THE CAVE UNDERNEATH THE PYRAMID OF THE SUN IN TEOTIHUACAN, MEXICO

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*The cave recently discovered underneath the Pyramid of the Sun in Teotihuacan, Mexico, is analyzed both according to historical written sources and reports of cults to cave deities, prominent in Mexico for millennia. Different cave rites are discussed in an effort to determine the function of the grotto. The Teotihuacan cave is compared with the mythical Chicomoztoc, Seven Caves, place of creation in ancient Mexican mythology. The author suggests that the cavern may have determined the site for the building of the Pyramid of the Sun and that later Aztec accounts of rulers being buried underneath the pyramid may have been based upon fact.*

## DISCOVERY AND DESCRIPTION OF THE CAVE

TOWARD THE END OF 1971 a depression at the foot of the main stairway of the Pyramid of the Sun in Teotihuacan was examined by Ernesto Taboada, then in charge of the archaeological zone, who found the entrance to a seven-meter deep pit that had been filled in with rocks and rubble many centuries ago. When cleared, it revealed an ancient, semi-destroyed stairway cut out of bedrock, leading down the pit. This man-made stairway led to a natural cave-tunnel penetrating the bedrock underneath the pyramid and ending in a series of chambers in the form of a cloverleaf. Like the main facade of the pyramid, the mouth of this tunnel faces west (Fig. 1). Archaeologist Jorge Acosta of the Instituto Nacional de Antropología was in charge of clearing and consolidating the find.

Federico Mooser, a geologist of the Mexican National University's Institute of Geology and consultant to the Institute of Anthropology, examined the cave. In his opinion it is a natural formation, the result of a lava flow that occurred more than a million years ago. As it flowed into the Teotihuacan Valley, bubbles were formed, and when new lava flowed over them, the bubbles remained as subterranean caves and often served as outlets for springs. The tunnel and four end chambers were formed this way, although the latter show man-made modifications. In addition, two other chambers branch off on either side of the tunnel about midway. Ancient Teotihuacan man also plastered the walls with mud and roofed parts of it with basalt slabs. Some of these slabs are in situ on part of the ceiling.

The existence of this cave must have been known when the Pyramid of the Sun was built, inasmuch as the entrance to the 103 meter long tunnel coincides with the middle of the pyramid's original central stairway (discovered recently by Acosta during Son et Lumière installations) and the tunnel itself ends in a series of chambers almost directly under the center of the pyramid.

Although no remains of mural painting or decoration are visible, the cave-tunnel once was partitioned by a series of walls that crossed from one side to the other. These walls indicate that parts of the grotto were closed off at different times. Originally 25 to 30 chambers were formed this way. Walls in situ when the archaeologists penetrated the cave contained openings in the upper half that from all indications were made long ago by vandals. The cloverleaf, or four-petal flower, at the far end of the tunnel is formed of four chambers. If different sections were sealed off one by one, this natural cloverleaf would have been the first to be closed. This suggests an early cult to caves in which these end chambers would have constituted the sancta sanctorum.

In these chambers numerous vessels of crude manufacture were found, together with two thin basalt discs beautifully engraved with anthropomorphic figures, one dressed in a jaguar costume, another as a bird (Figs. 2, 3). These discs have Gulf Coast stylistic influence and show evidence of having been inlaid with other material, which is missing. Both the clay vessels and discs were broken intentionally when placed in the chambers. The discs appear to have been mirror backs.





Fig. 2. Human figure carved on stone disc found in the cave, wearing a bird headdress. Tajin-style volutes form the background. Reproduced with the permission of the *Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia*, Mexico.

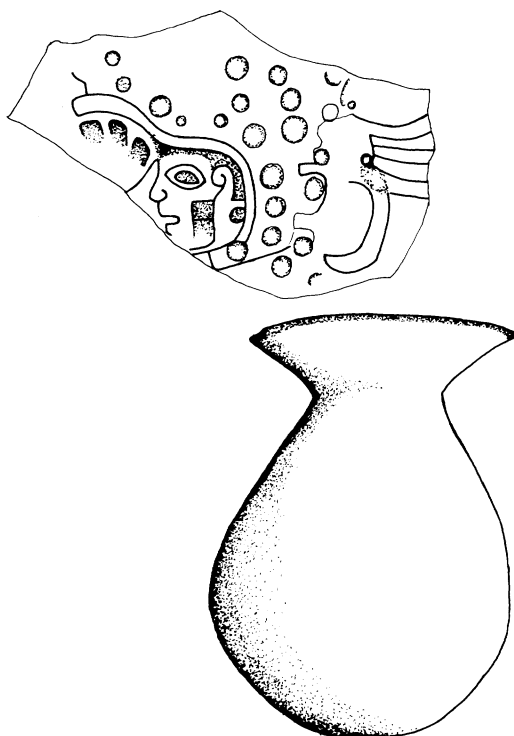


Fig. 3. Part of a disc showing a man wearing a jaguar headdress. This and the crude vessel, one of various, were found in the cave at Teotihuacan. Reproduced with the permission of the *Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia*, Mexico.

A fragment of an Aztec pulque vessel was found inside the entrance to the cave. Millon (personal communication) feels that both the pottery and plaques—except for the Aztec fragment, which may have slipped into the cave entrance on recent excavation—may date from the Tlaminilolpa phase (A.D. 250-450) and that the cave could have been sealed in Late Tlaminilolpa, perhaps by the staircase of the structure, called the Adosada, added to the pyramid's west side. The Aztec pottery fragment suggests that the vandals who broke through the walls may have been the Aztecs themselves. On the other hand the profanation could have taken place over different periods, perhaps at the end of the Classic period.

#### THE IMPORTANCE OF CAVES IN MESOAMERICA

The cave is the symbol of creation, of life itself; the religious history of Mesoamerica is impregnated with this theme. Representations of caves abound in the pictorial codices, both historical and religious, and the large number of place glyphs containing the symbol for caves indicate that they constituted an important element in town sites (Fig. 4).

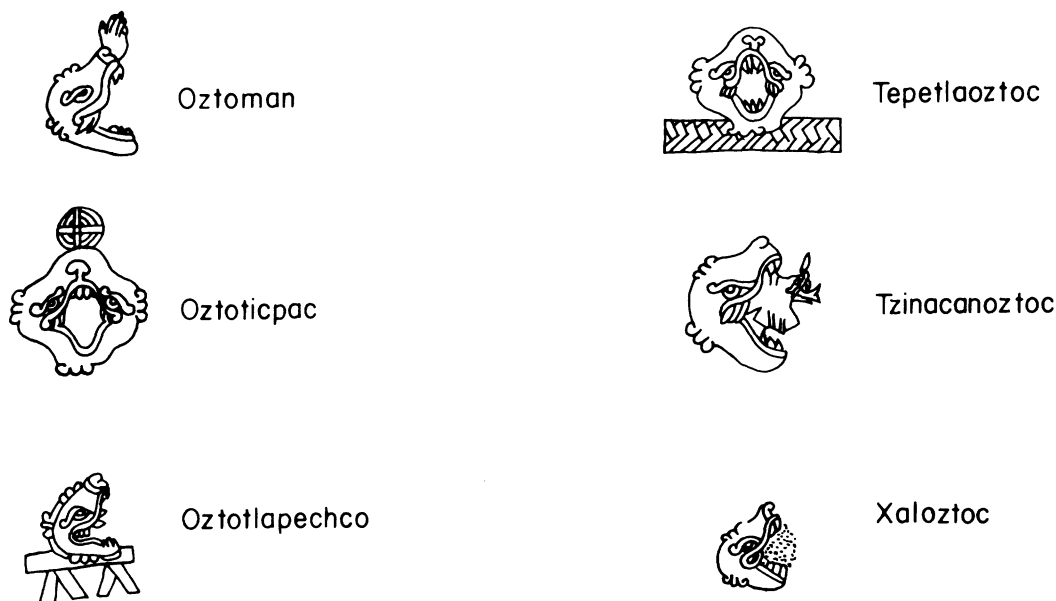


Fig. 4. Place names in Mexico where caves are found and therefore form part of the name, showing the cave symbol both profile and front view. Redrawn from Antonio Peñafiel, *Nombres Geográficos de México*, Mexico, 1885.

In much of Mexican mythology, the earth's womb from which ethnic groups sprang was a cavern or series of caverns. It was called Chicomoztoc, which means literally, in Nahuatl, "In the Seven Caves," from *chicome* (seven) and *oztotl* (cave). The cave was, and still is, highly revered as the womb of the earth, especially if there is a spring within it, inasmuch as life-giving water also springs from the maternal womb. As a woman remarks in one of the Huehuetlatolli texts collected by Sahagún, "we who are women . . . In us is a cave, a gorge . . ." (1969, VI:118).

Other references in the literature show us the importance of grottos in Mesoamerican mythology and religion. The sun and the moon came out of a cave (Herrera, 1945, I:308). Tlaloc, lord of water and earth, lived in caves as well as on mountain tops. Durán describes Tlaloc as "God of Rain, Thunder, and Lightning . . . The name means Path under the Earth or Long Cave" (1971:154). In the *Primeros Memoriales* we read that in the Etzalcualiztli fiesta the victim representing Tlaloc was sacrificed and then placed in a cave (Sullivan 1972:216). Tepeyotlotl, "Heart

of the Hill," was also an earth deity, associated with caves. Finally the God of Fire, Xiuhtecuhtli or Ixcozauhqui, had his abode in the center of the earth, in the "turquoise enclosure," (Sahagún 1969, VI:41) logically reached through caves.

As the place of emergence for different groups, caves have been called Colhuacan, "Place of those who have grandfathers or ancestors"; Teocolhuacan, "Place of those who have divine grandfathers"; Tamoanchan, loosely, "Place of Descent"; Cincalco, "Place of the House of Maize"; and, more frequently, Chicomoztoc, "Seven Caves." The term Chicomoztoc is usually employed as the place of emergence and return, although the number seven could refer to a specific migration of seven groups in ancient times (Durán 1967, II:21-26). Also, Kirchhoff (1947:xxxv-xxxvi) conjectures that this number could refer to tribal divisions or places of reunion for chieftains. Actually, the number of caves is unimportant, it is the cave symbol that counts. In *La Española* (Haiti) tradition refers to two caves: all the men came out of the first, women from the second (Pané 1963:50). The pictorial codices in Mexico depict some of the emergence scenes (Figs. 5, 6, 7). Some of these representations show the caves in the form of a flower, a point we will return to later (Fig. 8).

Oracles frequently were located in caverns. In Chalcatzingo, Morelos, a rock carving dating from ca. 600 B.C. shows a figure whose enormous speech scrolls indicate that what he is saying is of great importance. Jiménez Moreno (personal communication) identifies this figure as an oracle within a cave (Fig. 9).

A cave in the pyramid Yopico in Mexico-Tenochtitlan served as storage space for the skins of flayed victims (Sahagún 1951, II:5). After the sacrifice, a priest wore the human skin for 20 days and then placed it in a cave *at the foot of the pyramid stairway*, "in an underground place . . . which had a movable stone doorway" (Durán 1971:183-184).

Durán (1967, I:155) tells us that the bodies of two young virgins sacrificed to the Mother Goddess, Xochiquetzal, were put away in a "cellar" or cave called Ayauhcalli (House of Mist).



Fig. 5. A group emerging from one of the Seven Caves, represented in the form of the open mouth of the earth monster. Redrawn from the *Atlas de Duran*.

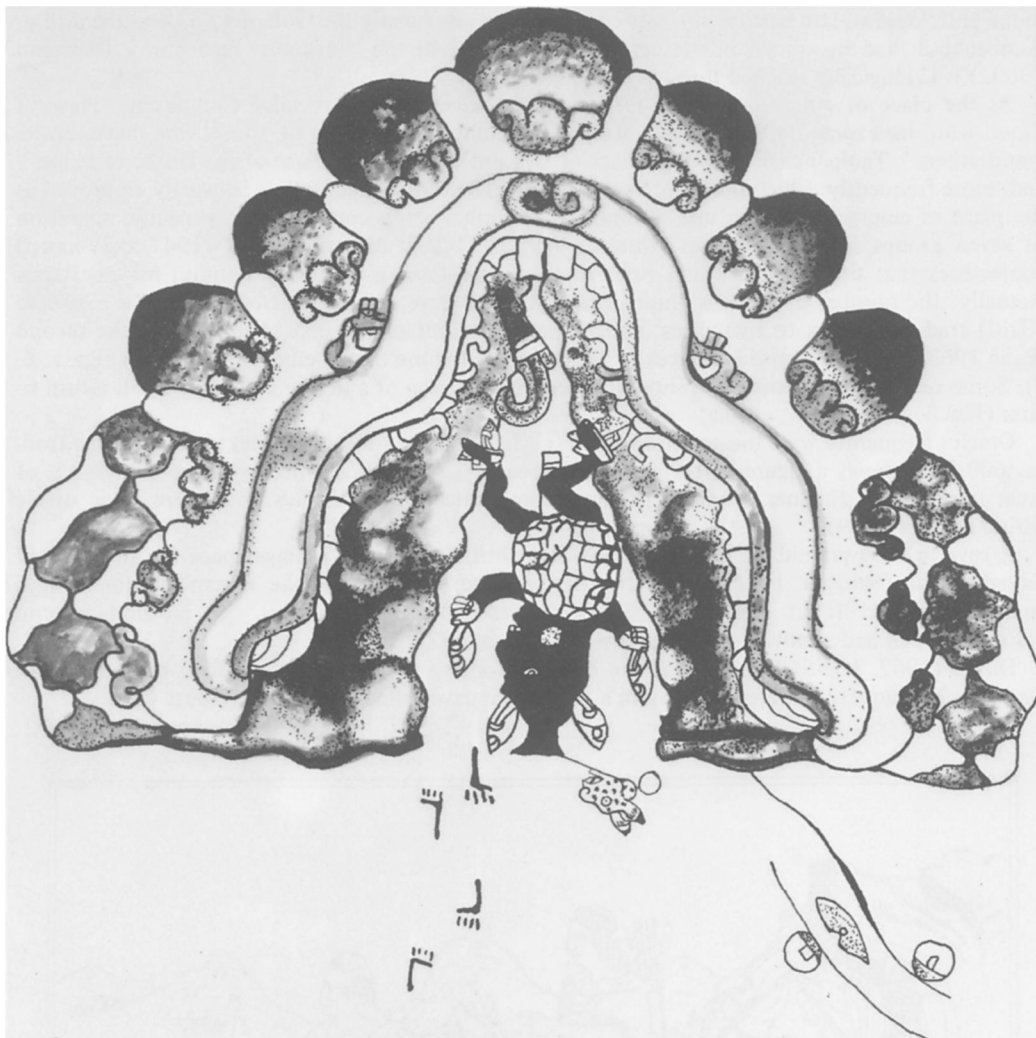


Fig. 6. Chicomoztoc, the Seven Caves. The earth is represented by the open mouth of a serpent-jaguar, the caves by seven black circles around the top of the earth's head. Redrawn from the *Codex Selden Roll*.

Gifts from the supernatural to men often come from grottos. In Oaxaca, in ancient times people came from remote regions to a cave where gods who "were in charge of giving water and germinating seeds and fruits" lived (Burgoa 1934, I:341-342). Some caves were the Cincalco, "Place of the House of Maize," where corn was kept. The *Relación de Tepoztlán 1580* tells us that in a sacred cave voices of people were heard and ears of corn were found (Paso y Troncoso 1905:246-247).

The god Quetzalcoatl went under the earth where he stole bones in order to create men. Then he turned himself into an ant and penetrated the hills in order to steal maize of four colors for these men (*Leyenda de los Soles* 1945:120-121).

When Motecuhzoma II fled from the invading Spaniards, he hid in Cincalco, a great cave which was "a place of crystalline clear waters and great fertility" but was also the home of the Lord of the Underworld (Durán 1967, II:493-497).

Fig. 7. Place glyph for Chicomoztoc as the mouth of a cave in the form of the earth monster as serpent-jaguar. The black circles represent the seven (*chicome*) caves (*oztotl*). Redrawn from Ross Parmenter, *Codex Antonio de León*.

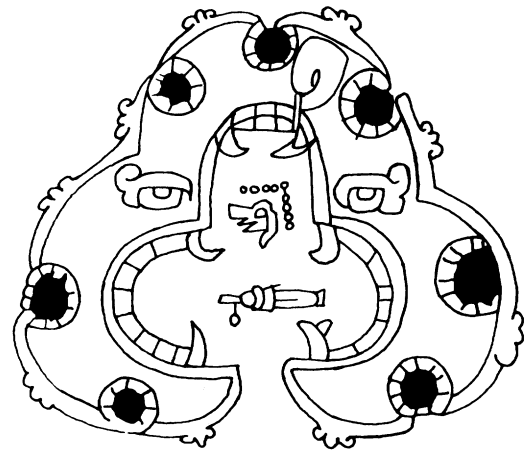
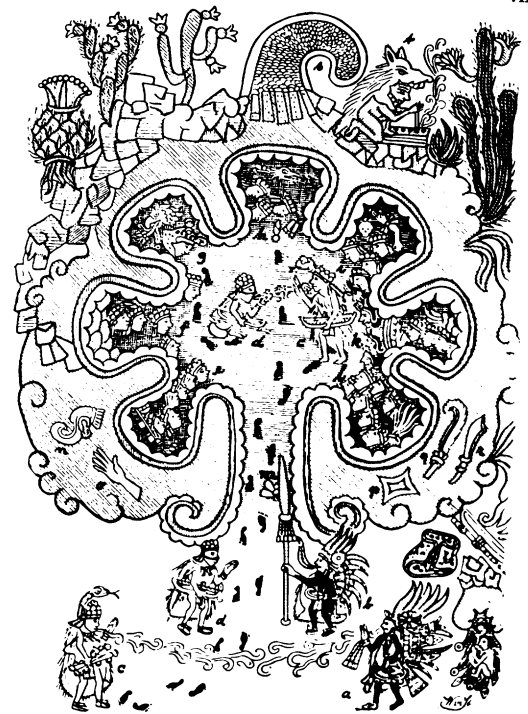


Fig. 8. Chicomoztoc, Place of Origin. The series of caves is somewhat similar in form to the end chambers of the caverns at Teotihuacan. Redrawn from *Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca*.



Caves serve as tombs. Sacrifices and burials of children in caves were common in pre-Conquest times (Dahlgren 1954:279; Motolinía 1941:50). Burgoa tells us that in ancient times, in the Mixteca, one venerated cave was full of “putrid . . . mummies of their kings and lords . . .” (1934, I:337-340). Sahagún relates that the old ones “have departed . . . have gone to reside in the water, in the cave,” back to the maternal womb (1969, VI:137).

Survival of these practices in caves is still evident. Caves in Chiapas and other places are considered to be holes for communication with the Earth Lord (Vogt 1969:375-387, 547). In the Totonac region, entrance to the underworld is through a cave (Kelly 1966:399) and supernatural

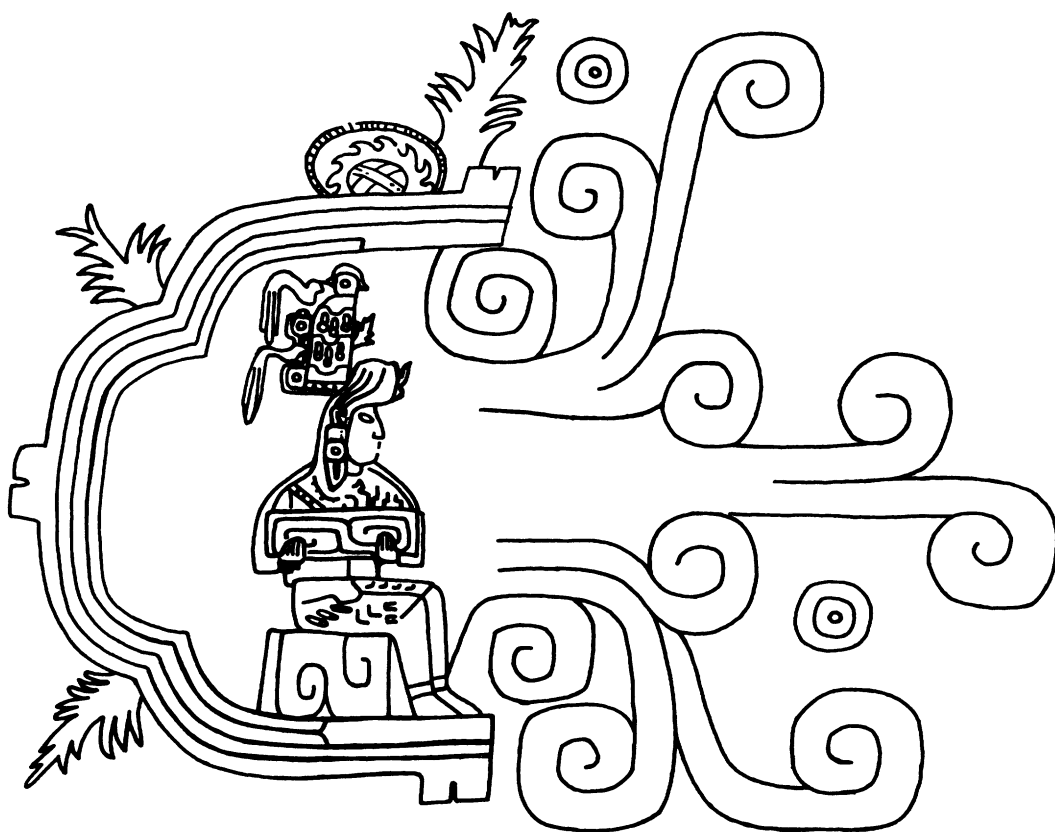


Fig. 9. Oracle speaking in a cave, Chalcatzingo rock carving. Redrawn from Ignacio Bernal, *The Olmec World*.

beings and ancestors of men make their homes here (Hermitte 1970:33-42). The center of a supernatural government is found in caverns; here a judge and police force frighten away evil spirits and protect human subjects. Here the Mother of War, Lightning (and Rain), and *El Sombrero* (keeper of the animals) hold office (Hermitte 1970:33-42).

Rites of passage take place in caves. Until fairly recently, in the Valley of Mexico, when a child was born he was taken to a grotto and placed upon a stone. A goat supposedly came from within the cave and licked the baby's face. If the baby did not cry, from that moment on he was considered to be a *tecihuero* or *granicero* (shaman associated with rain or curing ceremonies in caves) (Martel 1922:246-248). The nahual or person's double, lives within a cave (Hermitte 1970:38).

Illness and loss of soul can be caused by cave spirits (Hermitte, 1970). These spirits send out "evil airs" that sicken people (Madsen 1957:159-160). On the other hand, cave spirits not only provoke illness but cure it. Water from a sacred cave or waterhole cures a patient who bathes in it (Vogt 1969:387). Supernatural beings are propitiated in caves for man's well-being (Sepúlveda 1973:9-20).

In some caverns the Powers keep gold, animals, and other treasures (Hermitte 1970:35). People petition certain caves for work implements or success in their endeavors (Hermitte 1970:38).

Rites are held to request rain and/or food. At the bottom of a mammoth cavern in Guerrero there are four caves where four giants live who represent the rain and winds of the four world quarters and who guard the maize of different colors that is kept in these caves (Sepúlveda 1973:9-20). This reminds us of Cincalco, Place of the House of Maize, and the four-quarter cave compares with the flower form chambers at Teotihuacan.



## THE CAVE UNDER THE PYRAMID OF THE SUN IN TEOTIHUACAN

For a long time Rene Millon believed that there was a primitive sacred structure underneath the Pyramid of the Sun. When he and his collaborators studied the interior of the pyramid in the tunnels made by Mexican archaeologists Gamio, Noguera, and Pérez, they reported that “near the center of the pyramid are the remains of what may be a major structure . . . and possibly a large pit” (Millon, Drewitt, and Bennyhoff 1965:10, 18). After the first mention of this possible structure, the archaeologists referred to the center as “the tomb area.” Remains of the suspected structure did come to light and proved to have an earth nucleus, covered with adobe brick, and faced with uncut stones and cobbles (Millon, Drewitt, and Bennyhoff 1965). This type of construction is rare at Teotihuacan but the three archaeologists note that other similar edifices are found in Oztotyahualco, Teotihuacan, whose name means “In a circle of caves.” Juan and Carmen Leonard excavated one of these buildings and found it to be quite early, since it was structurally similar to Cuicuilco (Millon, Drewitt, and Bennyhoff 1965:33). Millon, however, feels it to be either Patlachique (150 B.C.-0) or Tzacualli (A.D. 0-150) (personal communication). It is significant also that in nearby Oztoticpac the Colonial chapel is built over a cave. Shortly after Contact many churches replaced pre-Conquest shrines.

The Pyramid of the Sun appears to have been the first major structure erected in Teotihuacan, toward the end of the Tzacualli phase; it was followed by the Avenue of the Dead and the Pyramid of the Moon. Since the early settlement pattern of the valley corresponds to dispersed hamlets without ceremonial architecture, the place of worship prior to Tzacualli may have been the sacred cave, or an early shrine covering it at that time. During Tzacualli, the settlement shifted to the alluvial plain, with half the population concentrated in the huge center which was to be the Classic city. This large number of people in the valley as well as in the surrounding area made possible the construction of the Pyramid of the Sun (Sanders 1965:101). Parallels between Cuicuilco and early Teotihuacan—talud and balustrade in Cuicuilco’s structures 6 and 7, serpentine figurines and thin orange ceramics found at this site (F. Muller, personal communication)—suggest the possibility that residents of the southern part of the Valley of Mexico moved northward in the direction of Teotihuacan after the eruption of Xitli volcano (ca. 200 B.C.) in the Cuicuilco area. If this were so, refugees could have contributed to the building of Teotihuacan.

Millon et al. suggest that Teotihuacan had a strong religious attraction early in its history (1967:38) and that pilgrimages to the shrine area, an ancient tradition in Mexico, may have played a part in the building of the pyramid (1965:36).

Since skeletal remains and charcoal are absent in the cave, owing to ancient vandalism, it is impossible to date the earliest use of the place for ritual purposes or for rites of passage. The ceramics and discs could have been placed here centuries after the conversion of the natural tunnel into a shrine. In view of the position of the pyramid over the grotto, it would seem that the cave was the focal point and not an accidental coincidence, and that it may have determined the site for the construction of a primitive place of worship and then for the pyramid itself.

Since pre-Columbian myths and customs recorded in Colonial chronicles usually reflect those of earlier periods, Sahagún’s sixteenth century informants may provide us with a clue regarding the location chosen for the pyramids by their builders, that is, whether the cave as a shrine determined the site. When questioned about the origins of their people, these informants said that “Offerings were made at a place named Teotiuacan. And there all the people raised pyramids for the sun and for the moon . . . And there leaders were elected, wherefore it is called Teotiuacan [place where lords or gods are made]. And when the rulers died, they buried them there. Then they built a pyramid over them . . . those who made them at that time were giants . . .” (1961, X:191-192; 1938, III:138). Obviously the Aztecs of Mexico-Tenochtitlan of the fourteenth or fifteenth centuries were not the builders, although the *Relación Geográfica* of the Teotihuacan Valley tells us that the priests of “Montesuma, the lord of Mexico-Tenochtitlan, with the said Montesuma came to offer sacrifices (in Teotihuacan) every twenty days” (1905:222), apparently continuing or reviving the ancient tradition of pilgrimages to the shrine.

Aztec lords were not buried under the pyramids, since it was their custom to be cremated before the image of the god Huitzilopochtli and the ashes buried next to the cuauhxicalli or Sun

Stone in the Temple of the Sun at Tenochtitlan (Durán 1967, II:394-395). It is possible, however, that rulers from earlier periods were buried beneath the pyramids.

The passage in Sahagún may be associated with a group that reached Teotihuacan in the period of decadence of this metropolis and lived side by side with the Teotihuacanos for a time, thus inheriting their traditions and the local myths. Like those before them, they must have used the pyramids as a shrine. Although the Aztecs appeared on the scene at a late period, they too considered Teotihuacan part of their own heritage. Any site and civilization as important as Teotihuacan must have continued living on in tradition which would have been absorbed by later groups. Inasmuch as the Aztec ruler Itzcoatl burned documents in order to rewrite history in the approved Aztec image (Sahagún 1961, X:191), he may simply have been following a pattern set earlier. Unfortunately, we have no documents from the late Classic or early Postclassic groups of Central Mexico which could throw light on some of these questions. A Colonial manuscript in the Boturini collection (Guzmán 1938), however, mentions Xolotl, Chichimec leader, who established himself in the valley of Teotihuacan in A.D. 1117 and whose descendants paid tribute to the City of the Gods.

#### rites in the cave

The cave underneath the Pyramid of the Sun was obviously important to early Teotihuacan man, judging from its careful reshaping, plastering, and roofing, and from ceramic remains found within it. Although we have no direct evidence of the nature of the rites held here, we offer the following hypotheses on the basis of indirect evidence such as the chronicles and ethnographic data.

The cave could have been a Chicomoztoc, Seven Caves. Although the grotto has only four final chambers, two more lead out from the stem, while the stem or tunnel itself can be considered the

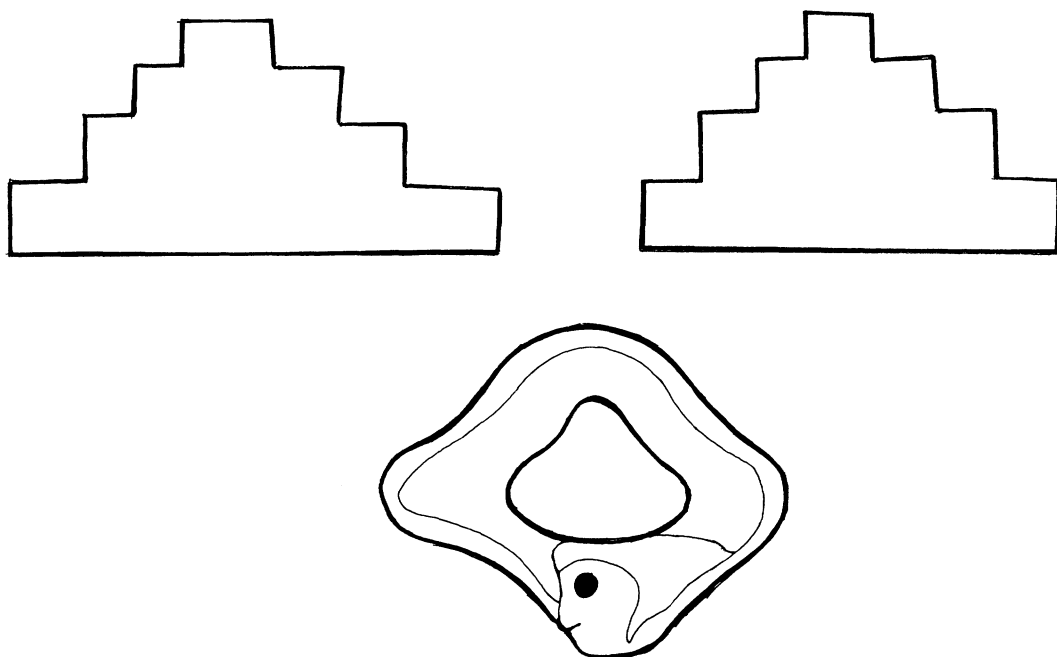


Fig. 10. Glyph for Teotihuacan, showing the pyramids over a cave symbol. That these three images combine to represent Teotihuacan offers proof of the importance of a cave or caves at the site. The head in the cave may represent an oracle. From the sixteenth century *Codex Xolotl*, Map 1. Redrawn from Charles E. Dibble.

seventh cave. Nevertheless, I do not feel that the number of caves in the case of Teotihuacan is important, since Chicomoztoc was a symbol of emergence and return. Sahagún speaks of people returning to the Basin of Mexico, "from (whence) they came . . ." (1961, X:195), although he refers to a later group. Sanders (1965:187) also talks of a return to the traditional heartland. A comparison of the plan of the Teotihuacan cave with the Chicomoztoc portrayed in the *Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca* (Fig. 8) shows an amazing parallel, in spite of the difference in the number of chambers.

As in Guerrero, the four flower-form end chambers may have been regarded as the abode of the winds and rains and storage place for colored maize (Cincolco), all of these associated with cardinal directions and earth-fertility gods.

Since the Codex Xolotl gives as the glyph for Teotihuacan two pyramids over a cave (Dibble 1951:22, Pl. 1) (Fig. 10), the importance of the cavern at Teotihuacan must have been truly outstanding. The cave represented in the Codex Xolotl is probably the one underneath the Sun pyramid; I feel that this was the most revered one in the valley due to the existence of a spring within. Springs are always sacred and are the openings to the underworld and to the earth gods. Although the cave is now dry, ancient stone drainage pipes and manhole-type covers were found inside. These must have channeled the water of an underground stream or spring long ago. Millon feels that a line of vegetation seen on aerial photographs may indicate an underground watercourse stemming from the pyramid itself but which may have become only a trickle of moisture (personal communication).

That such a stream or spring existed is suggested by the sacrifices of children associated with the four corners of the four bodies of the Pyramid of the Sun (Batres 1906:22), probably at the time of its construction, if we can believe Batres' drawing (Fig. 11). Child sacrifices are related to water deities. Motolinía describes offerings to Tlaloc during which four children were sacrificed, their bodies deposited within a cave, the entrance to which was sealed up until the following year, when the offering was repeated (Motolinía 1941:50). This suggests another possibility for the use of the grotto: the chambers could have been used successively for this rite, then sealed up and later reopened. The water deity, Tlaloc, was not only associated with rain and lightning, but also with earth, which of course includes hills and caverns. I have mentioned that Durán calls Tlaloc "Path under the Earth" or "Long Cave." Muñoz Camargo (1966:208-209) tells us that in the case of a cataclysm rivers would flow from underneath the temples of the gods. In the mural painting of Tepantitla the river in paradise flows from a cave, and Pasztory (1972a) believes that the central figure is standing on the symbol of the mouth of a cave.

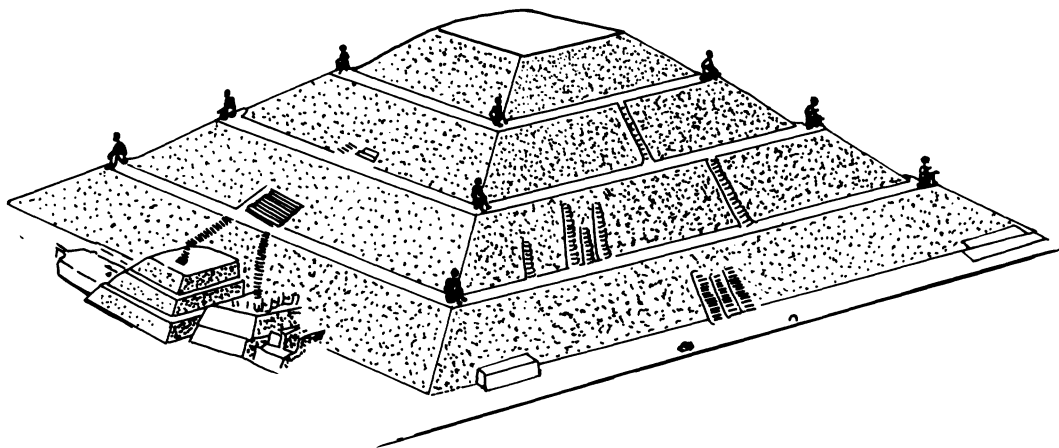


Fig. 11. Batres' drawing of skeletal remains of children found at the four corners of each body of the Pyramid of the Sun in 1906. Redrawn from Leopoldo Batres.

We should not overlook the orientation of Teotihuacan structures to heavenly bodies. The cave may symbolize one of these; after all, both Sun and Moon were fertility symbols. Mendieta in the sixteenth century refers to a grotto in Teotihuacan when he describes the creation of the Fifth Sun there: "About the creation of the Moon, they say that when that (god) who threw himself into the fire turned into the Sun, another (god) went into a cave and came out of it as the Moon . . ." (n.d., I:87).

The cave also may have been a kind of Yopico. In Aztec times the skins of flayed victims were kept in a cave underneath the Yopico pyramid and in Teotihuacan we find figurines of the flayed god, Xipe, as early as Teotihuacan II, which suggest the flaying rite.

There are other possibilities as well. Perhaps the cave underneath the Pyramid of the Sun was an Ayauhcalli, the underground place where the bodies of young virgins sacrificed to the Mother Goddess were placed. Or, an oracle may have existed in the cave. The *Relación Geográfica 1580* (1905:220) refers to an oracle in Teotihuacan, next to (or underneath?) the pyramids (Fig. 12). The discs found in the cave appear to have been mirror backs. Mirrors were often used for divination, which would point to a seer.

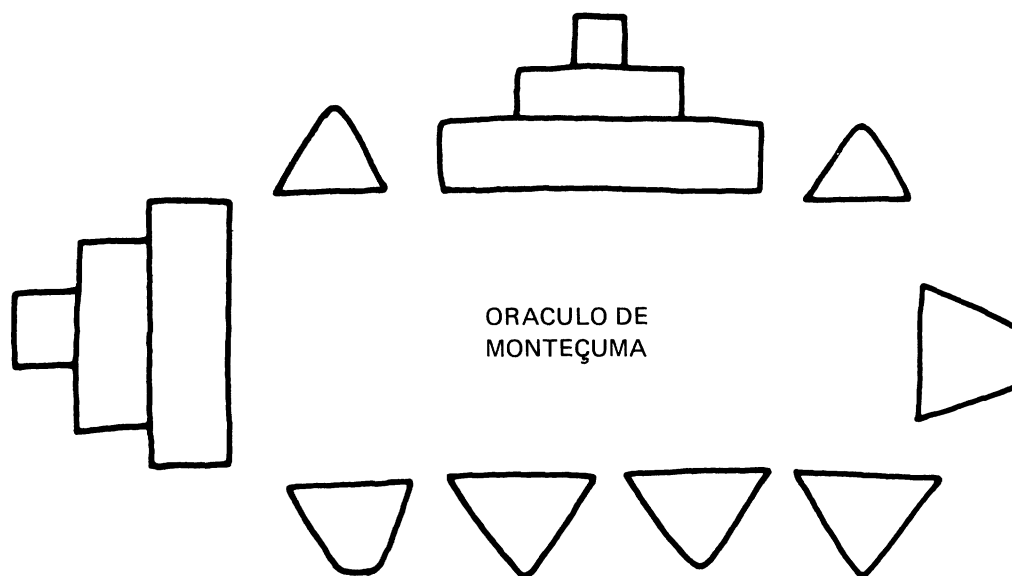


Fig. 12. The area between the Pyramid of the Sun and the Pyramid of the Moon on the Avenue of the Dead was called *Oráculo de Monteçuma* in the *1580 Relación de Teutiucan*. Redrawn from Francisco del Paso y Troncoso, *Papeles de Nueva España*.

Investiture of rulers may have taken place in this or other caves in the valley, when men, anointed with a divine pitch, became not only sovereigns but themselves divine. The inner chambers also could have served as a type of "long house" or kiva for esoteric gatherings. The jaguar and bird costumes on the discs found in the cave seem to support this theory, since Jaguar and Eagle Knights gathered in cave-like temples, such as Malinalco in later times. Finally, the cave chambers perhaps served as tombs, possibly for cremated remains. Sahagún tells us that "when the rulers died, they buried them there," underneath the pyramids (1961, X:191-192).

#### ASSOCIATION OF WATER-EARTH DEITIES WITH THE PYRAMID OF THE SUN

The colossal statue of Chalchiuhtlicue, the water goddess, was discovered near the Pyramid of the Moon. Both pyramids may originally have been dedicated to water-earth deities (in part, because of the cave-spring underneath the Sun Pyramid), or to the Mother Goddess—who was

Tlaloc's wife before she was stolen by Tezcatlipoca—in her role of Earth-Water-Moon goddess. Although it is possible that an early fertility cult was later displaced by a Sun-worshipping one, my own feeling is that sky and earth were inseparable in ancient myth and thought; Sahagún refers to the Sun-Earth as one: "*in tonatiuh in tlaltecuhtli*" (1969, VI:172). The flower form of the end chambers relate to the Mother Goddess since the flower, symbolizing the four quarters and the center as well as creation, was also her insignia.

#### THE CAVE ASSOCIATED WITH THE RISE OF TEOTIHUACAN

It would seem that a holy shrine in itself, however, no matter how popular, is not sufficient cause for a city to spring up around it. Optimum ecological and economic conditions must also be present. Although the rise and fall of Teotihuacan will not be discussed here, the creation of an important city-state depends upon many factors. The highly favorable ecological conditions of the Valley of Teotihuacan plus the obsidian trade established since 1200 B.C. (Cobean, Coe, Perry, Turekian, Kharkar 1971:666), and the fabrication and exportation of obsidian implements (Spence 1966:213-218) are some of the reasons why this city became the leading center of its time in the New World (Millon 1970:1082). Without dwelling further on the subject I should like to point out, however, that a shrine area attracts pilgrims, and trade routes (firmly established in Teotihuacan) are usually accompanied by pilgrimages, all of which favors a flourishing economy. Not every center of worship becomes a metropolis but in the case of Teotihuacan the highly favorable ecological conditions were combined with the religious attraction to create the religious-economic and consequently socio-political situation necessary for the rise of a great center.

#### WHY WAS THE CAVE FORGOTTEN?

Before concluding, I should like to mention the following enigma. About a century after the construction of the Pyramid of the Sun, the Pyramid of the Moon was built, and more or less at the same time, the Avenue of the Dead, which crosses a large part of the city from north to south. This was a spacious and imposing road, flanked by shrines. Great numbers of pilgrims followed this avenue which ended precisely at the plaza and pyramid of the Moon, at the House of the Gods, as Schondube has identified it (1971, No. 3), which stands at the foot of this pyramid. The Avenue of the Dead seems to have bypassed the Pyramid of the Sun, apparently putting it in second place. Can there be an even more sacred place underneath the Pyramid of the Moon, one that is still unknown to us?

Tobrer has claimed that Cerro Gordo (called *Tenan*—Mother of Stone—in the 1580 map), which forms a natural backdrop for the Pyramid of the Moon, was an important source of springs for Teotihuacan. He suggests that the Teotihuacanos built the most important road in their city oriented toward Cerro Gordo because they considered this mountain to be one of the main sources of their water supply, and therefore associated it with the adoration of water gods (1972:102-114). This analysis may explain the change of emphasis in the importance of the pyramids at Teotihuacan, a change that perhaps took place after the course of the stream within the cave under the Pyramid of the Sun either dried up naturally or was changed artificially.

Judging from the emphasis on water-earth deities in Classic Teotihuacan it would seem that in the early Postclassic a change in some aspects of religion may have relegated this earlier cult to a minor position, at which time the Pyramid of the Sun cave may have been sealed and to some extent forgotten. Pasztory has shown that Tlaloc himself, as seen in the Teotihuacan murals, changes from an agricultural deity to one associated with militarism and with the calendar (1972). Piña Chán feels that a Sun-worshipping warrior cult substituted an agricultural one, indicated by the myth of the creation of the Fifth Sun in Teotihuacan which, according to this scholar, corresponds to a period immediately after the end of the Classic (A.D. 750) (1972:55-61). At this time the existence of an oracle, possibly located within the cave, may have ceased.

Mooser claims that the southern part of Teotihuacan was covered by a swamp during an early period (personal communication). After this was drained the Ciudadela was built. At the time of the construction of the latter (ca. A.D. 300-650) the religious as well as the civic center of the city

evidently moved south; Millon places the Ciudadela as the economic-political-religious center. This move may have affected the Pyramid of the Sun.

### CONCLUSIONS

When the cave underneath the Pyramid of the Sun was discovered, Dr. Clara Millon said "This may have been the beginning of everything" (personal communication); this was also, my own immediate impression. This cavern with its natural chambers enlarged by man, although they do not number seven, may well have been a Chicomoztoc (Seven Caves). I do not say *the* Chicomoztoc because, as I have demonstrated, Chicomoztoc is both a mythical and probably also a real Place of Birth and Place of Return—like Tlalocan and Tamoanchan—a paradise on earth (or, as Sahagún calls Tamoanchan, our Ultimate Home: 1969, VI:105). Undoubtedly there were many paradises of this type, both in mythology and in fact, and more than one with the same name. Every group, every individual, has his Chicomoztoc, his place of the "good old days," the place we would like to call home.

I believe also that the existence of a strong cult associated with the cave in question probably determined the site for the building of the earliest structure within the Pyramid of the Sun, and consequently for the pyramid itself. That this grotto was more sacred than others in the valley is indicated not only by its location underneath the pyramid but by the fact that it once contained a spring, making it doubly an entrance to the underworld and Earth Lords' home; springs are invariably sacred in Mexico. The multiple chambers in the grotto, located almost exactly underneath the center of the major structure (the pyramid we see today) suggests the following possibilities:

- (1) that the cave may have been viewed as a Cincalco, House of Maize, associated with the world quarters;
- (2) the cave was the place of communication with earth deities;
- (3) these chambers were dedicated to a water deity and it was here that sacrificial rites involving children were held;
- (4) the cave could have been an *Ayauhcalli* or Mist House, which played an important part in ceremonies to water gods;
- (5) the skins of flayed victims or the bodies of impersonators of the gods could have been placed in the caves;
- (6) an oracle may have been consulted here;
- (7) the investiture ceremony of anointing Chichimec or Toltec chieftains (and/or earlier rulers) may have been carried out within this cave;
- (8) reunions of esoteric societies may have taken place in the grotto; or
- (9) deceased sovereigns of Teotihuacan or their ashes were buried here during the life of the Classic city and perhaps as late as the early Postclassic period.

Regarding the last possibility, skeletal remains are conspicuous by their absence and even cremation leaves tiny bones, to say nothing of ashes. Nevertheless, the floor of the entire cave has not been explored to bedrock, and new evidence may turn up.

It is impossible to say at this moment whether or not a cult within the cavern, which must have been of extreme importance, was substituted at one time by a cult in a new center of worship that took the Teotihuacanos and visiting pilgrims a short distance to the north, to the Pyramid of the Moon. Only exploration at the latter site will throw light upon this question.

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