

Montezuma's Throne¹

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Historical approaches to Mesoamerican monuments began in the early sixties with several important articles on Maya monuments by Heinrich Berlin (1958), Tatiana Proskouriakoff (1960, 1961, 1963-64), and David Kelley (1962).

Proskouriakoff, in particular, was the first to suggest that the figures on these sculptures are kings and other historical personages, rather than priests or gods as previously supposed, and that sections of the hieroglyphic inscriptions include names and records of historical events. Since that time the dynastic histories of a number of important sites have been unraveled and investigators are now examining monumental sculptures from other areas for dynastic and historical content.

In Central Mexico, studies of Aztec sculptures began in 1790-91 with the discovery of three great sculptures in downtown Mexico City. Throughout the nineteenth century, quantities of Aztec sculptures were unearthed and there was a natural tendency, both on the popular and scholarly levels, to connect these sculptures to Pre-Conquest personalities and historical events, as they were known from the various written and pictorial sources from the colonial period. By the end of the century, however, the great German scholar Eduard Seler turned the tide against this type of historical approach. Seler concentrated on Aztec myths and religion to the neglect of historical concerns and his influence in this

respect has been strong up to the present day. It is thus time to reexamine the corpus of Aztec sculptures for historical, political, and dynastic significance.²



Figure 1. Monument in the form of a temple/ throne for Montezuma II, called the Teocalli or Temple of Sacred Warfare, Museo Nacional de Antropología, Mexico, courtesy of the museum.

Description of the Monument

The subject of this study is the Teocalli de la Guerra Sagrada (Temple of Sacred Warfare). In 1926 the Teocalli was removed from the foundation of the southwest corner of the National Palace in Mexico City, where the palace of Motecuhzoma Xocoyotzin (popularly called Montezuma II in English, or Moctezuma II in Spanish) had been located. Soon after its discovery, the Teocalli became the subject of several studies, most notably Alfonso Caso's

monograph (1927). As Richard Townsend noted (1979, p. 49), "Caso's views received particularly widespread recognition, for they were later incorporated into his influential writings on the subject of Mexica religion." However, Caso was following Seler in not recognizing the connection of the monument with historical events and personages at the time it was made.

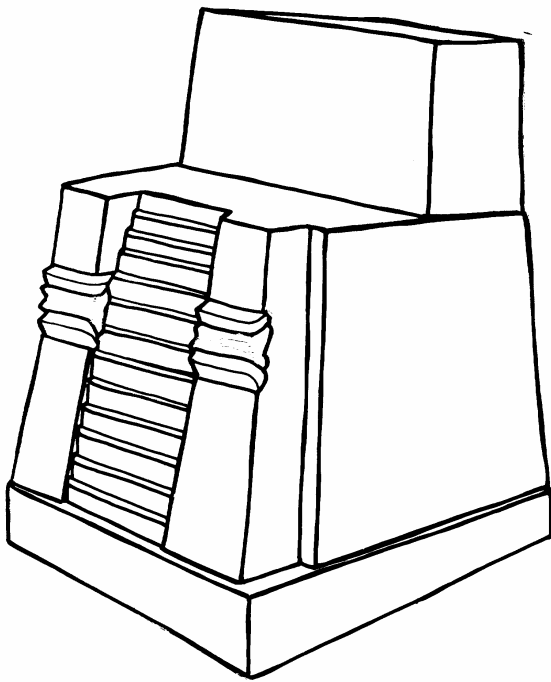


Figure 2. Schematic drawing of Teocalli of Sacred Warfare

The Teocalli is a masterpiece of carving (Figure 1). Its surfaces are covered with relieves depicting human figures, cosmic symbols, and various ceremonial objects and dates. The Teocalli consists of two masses, a flat-roofed temple on a truncated pyramid with stairs up the front to the platform (Figure 2). On the balustrades are the dates 1 Rabbit and 2 Reed in cartouches, much as they might have been on an actual pyramid (Figure 3). Numerically 1 Rabbit was the

first year of the 52-year cycle and was probably originally the time of the New Fire Ceremony, but by late Aztec times, when the Mexica dominated the Basin of Mexico and the Aztec Empire, the new Fire Ceremony was postponed until 2 Reed, reportedly because of famine in 1 Rabbit years (Codex Telleriano-Remensis, 1899, f. 41v; Sáenz, 1967, p. 16). In myth 1 Rabbit and 2 Reed were also the first two years of the Fifth Era, the present era of time. On the Teocalli the dates were meant to refer simultaneously to both the cycle change celebrated in the present and to the mythical precedents in the distant past.

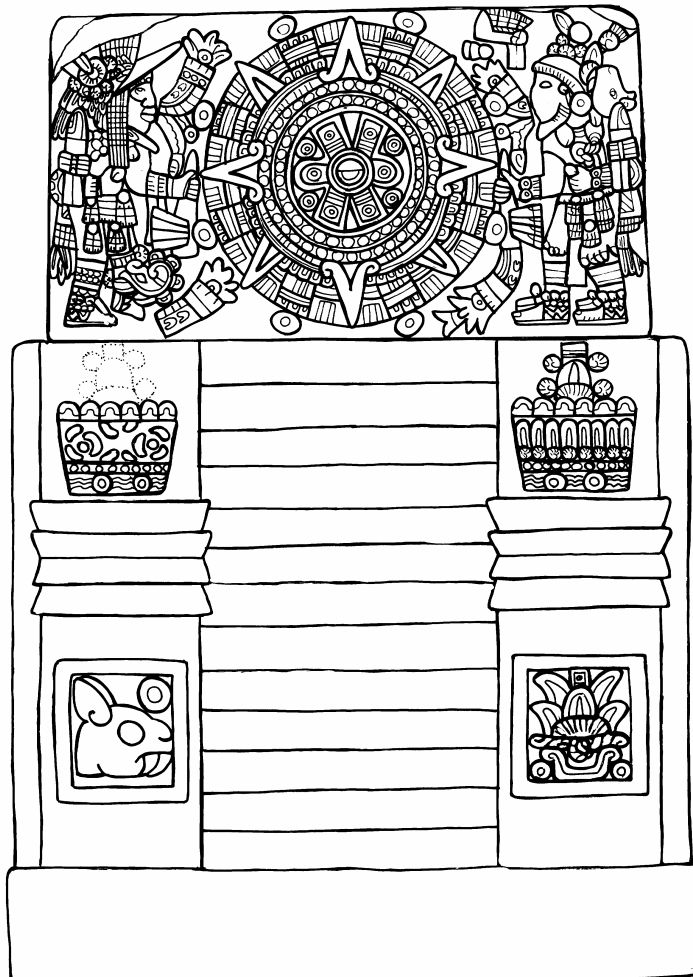


Figure 3. Front of monument

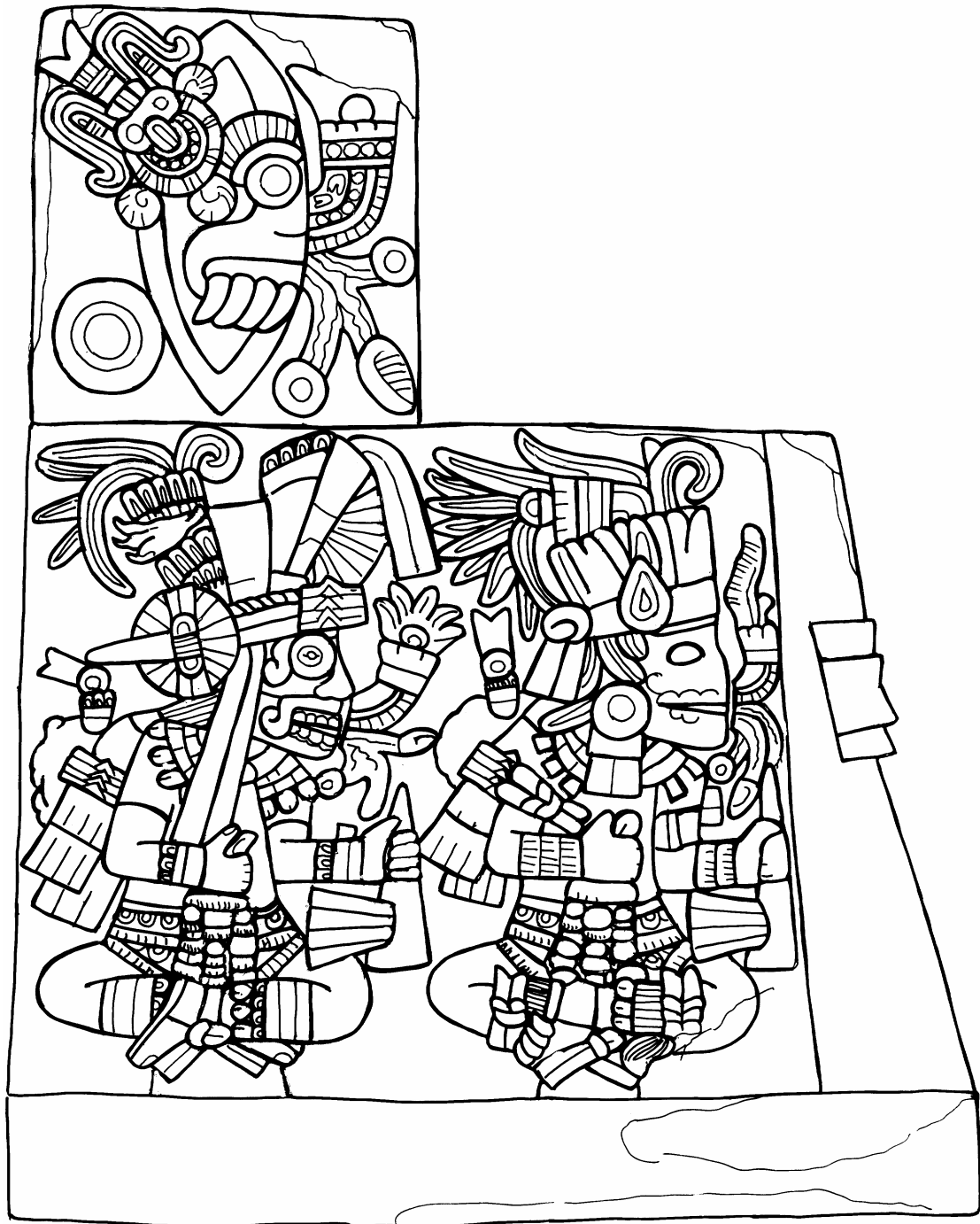


Figure 4. Right side of monument

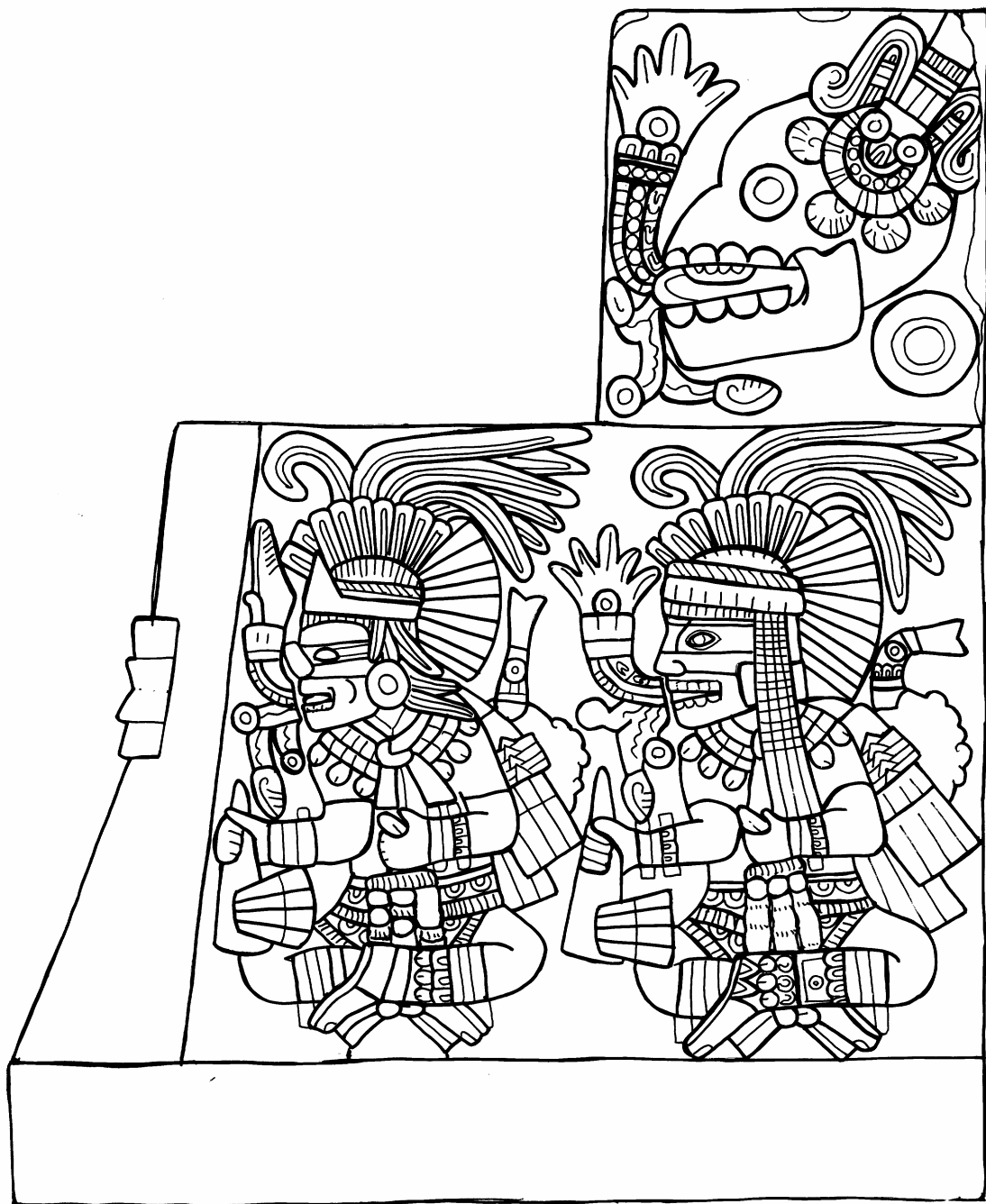


Figure 5. Left side of monument

On the sides of the pyramid part of the Teocalli are two pairs of figures seated cross-legged and facing the front (Figures 4 and 5). They all carry copal bags and maguey leaves with the spines of ritual bloodletting, and they wear tobacco containers on their backs. Although dressed alike and carrying the same implements, the figures are differentiated by facial painting and headdresses topped by upright feathers and a bunch of longer swept-back feathers. On all four figures the teeth are visible, indicating the fleshless jaws of the dead. Caso identified these four figures as the deities Tlaloc (the god of rain) and Tlahuiscapantecuhtli (the morning star god) on the left side, and Xiuhtecuhtli (the fire god) and Xochipilli ("flower prince," god of spring) on the right side. He suggested that they represent the gods who, according to Sahagún (1950-69, Book VII, pp. 3-9), sacrificed themselves at Teotihuacan so that the sun would begin to move at the beginning of the Fifth Era (Caso 1927, pp. 18-32, 63-64).³

On the platform of the pyramid above the figures, an "earth monster," a zoomorphic representation of the earth, is flanked by two shields with darts and banners (Figure 7). On the front of the temple part, directly above the zoomorph and aligned with it, is the sun disc, the focal point of the monument (Figure 6). Two standing figures face each other on either side of the sun. These two personages differ from the seated figures below in that they are alive. The figure on the left is identified by his hummingbird headdress as Huitzilopochtli ("hummingbird, left"); and the figure on the right is possibly Tepeyolotl

("mountain, heart"), one of the forms of Tezcatlipoca ("mirror's smoke"), who wears a jaguar skin costume.

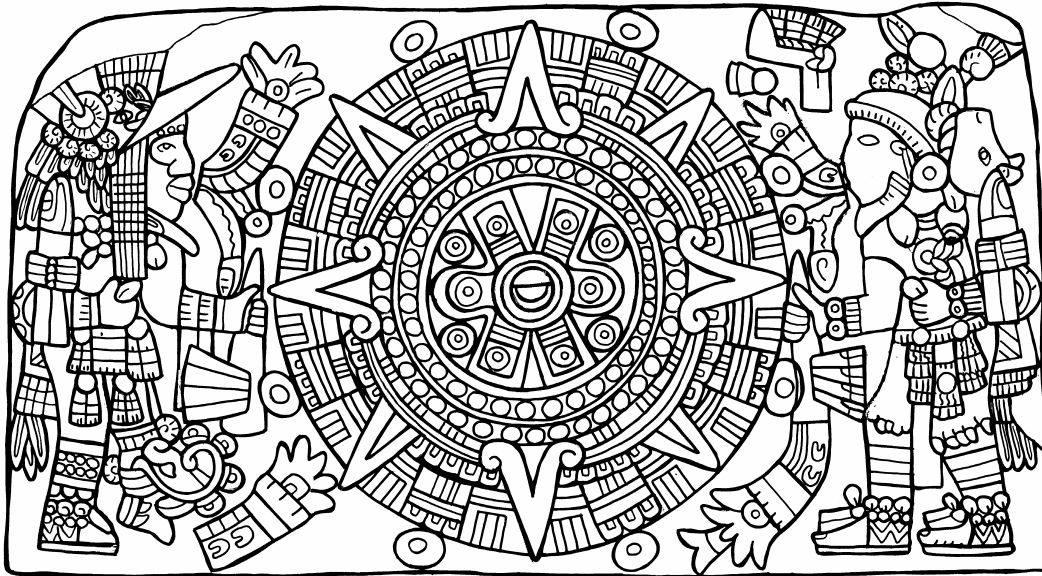


Figure 6. Front of temple part

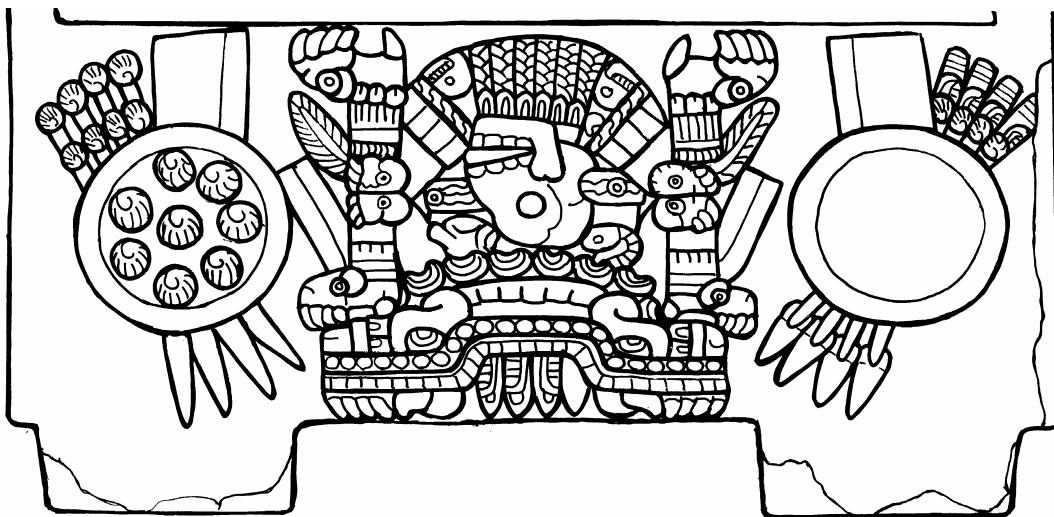


Figure 7. Platform of pyramid in front of temple

This last figure is distinguished from all the others on the monument by a hieroglyph next to his head, which, as argued later, is in the position of a personal name. On the sides of the temple (Figures 4 and 5), beside the two figures are the dates 1 Flint and 1 Death, both with the smoking mirror emblem of Tezcatlipoca attached to their upper parts. These ceremonial days of Huitzilopochtli and Tezcatlipoca were associated with the New Fire Ceremony, and for this reason they are found together with a third date, 2 Reed, on stone year bundles (Seler, 1960-61b, Vol. II, p. 877, fig. 77). The year bundles represent bunches of reeds tied together to symbolize the 52-year cycle.⁴ On the top of the temple of the Teocalli (Figure 8) are a group of cult objects, two paper fire serpents and a *zacatapayolli*, the grass ball for the points of auto-sacrifice. Beneath the grass ball is the date 2 House.

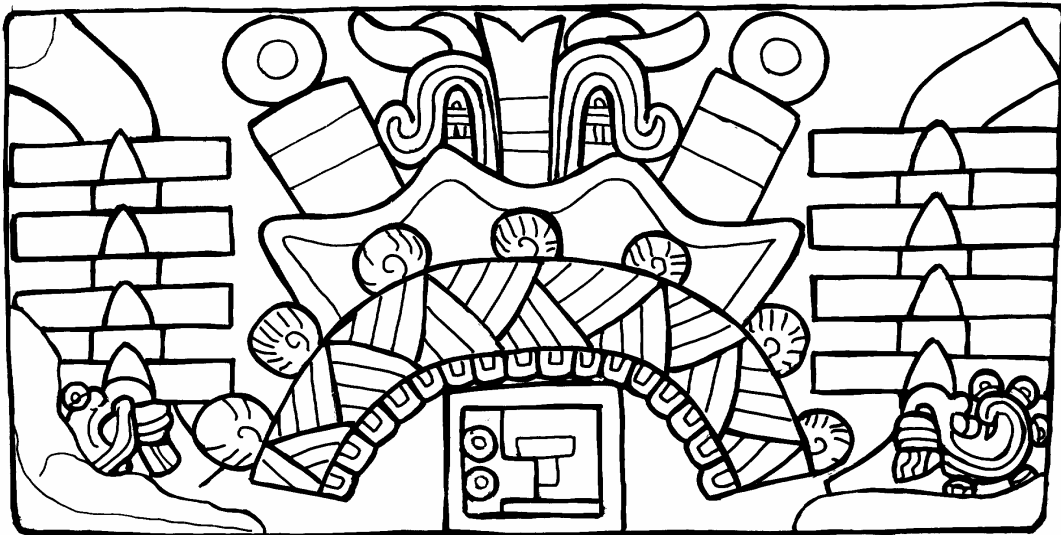


Figure 8. Top of monument

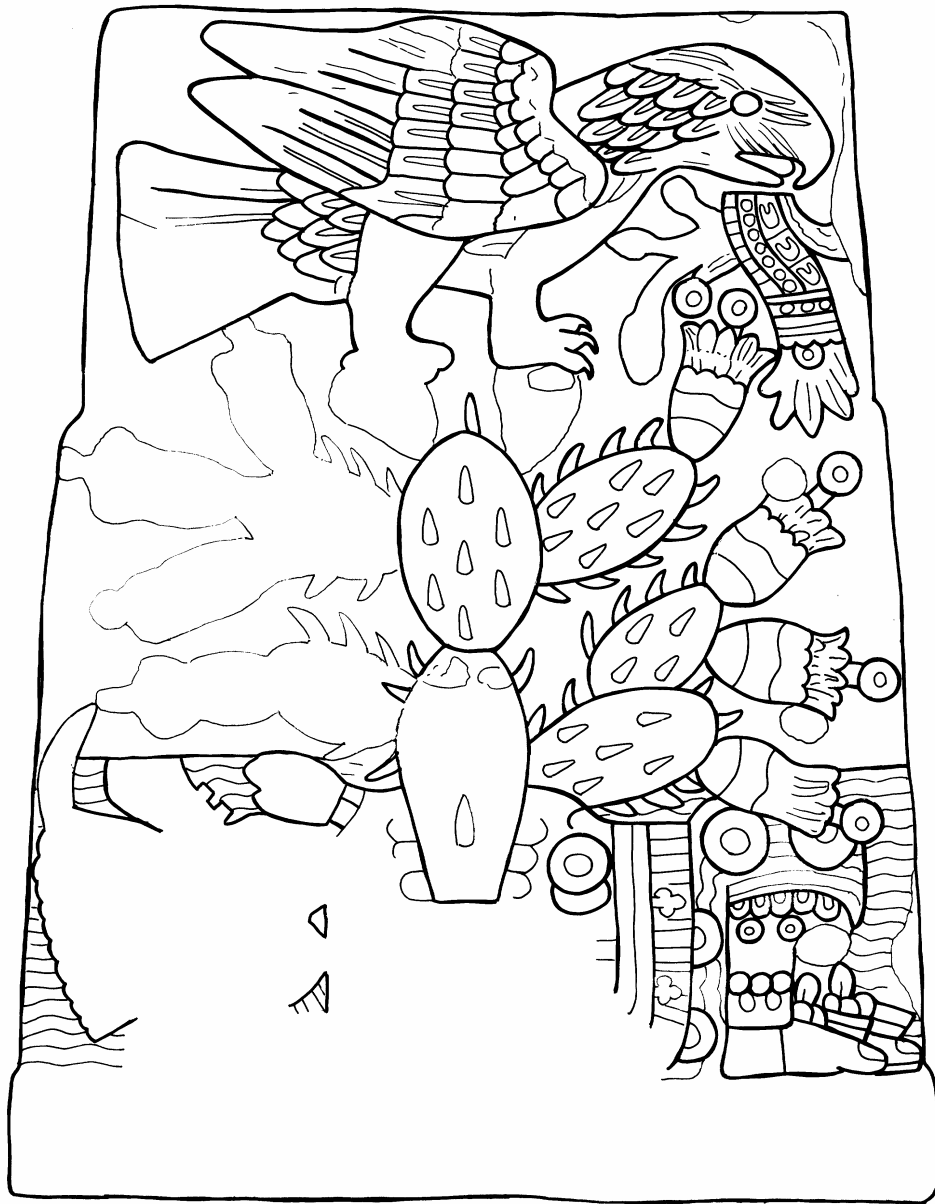


Figure 9. Back of monument

2 House, 1325, was the date of the foundation of the Mexica-Aztec city, Tenochtitlan, and this event is portrayed on the back of the Teocalli (Figure 9). According to tradition, when the Aztecs arrived at the island in Lake Texcoco where their city was to be built, they saw an eagle perched on a cactus, and their

tribal god Huitzilopochtli commanded them to settle in that place. On the Teocalli the water goddess Chalchiuhtlicue reclining along the lower part represents the lake.⁵ The cactus and the stone in the center of the goddess's abdomen together form the emblem and name of the city, Tenochtitlan. Growing on the cactus are human hearts instead of fruits, and the eagle, representing the sun, plucks these hearts. In short, the city of Tenochtitlan provided the sun with the nourishment of human hearts that it needed to continue on its journey through the sky.⁶

Previous Interpretations

There is another important motif on the Teocalli, which Caso used as the key to the interpretation that he presented in his famous study of the monument. This motif is the speech symbol that emanates from the mouth of every figure, as well as the eagle and the dates 1 Flint and 1 Death. This is the sign that Seler (1960-61c) had previously connected with the Aztec/Nahuatl expression *atl-tlachinolli* ("water-something burned"), a metaphor for sacred warfare, the object of which was the acquisition of sacrificial victims. Caso (1927, pp. 61ff.) decided that the central theme of the monument was sacred warfare and sacrifice to the sun, and for this reason he called it the Temple of Sacred Warfare. Caso was correct in observing that no other monument displays the *atl-tlachinolli* symbol so prominently. But his interpretation missed important historical and political references on the sculpture and the significance of its pyramidal form. Appearing around the same time were other, less well-known interpretations, which were more concerned with specific historical references and the event that the Teocalli was carved to commemorate. Ramon Mena (1928), for instance, wrote a short

study in which he identified the figure with the glyph next to its head as Montezuma II and dated the monument to the New Fire Ceremony of 1507 (also see Palacios, 1929; Alcocer, 1935, pp. 60-62).



Figure 10. Clay figurine representing deity with solar disc on his back and seated on pyramid. Museum für Volkerkunde, Berlin.

In the years since then, the dating of the monument to 1507 has more or less gained scholarly acceptance, but the interpretation of the glyph as Montezuma's name has not. I would like to call attention to two other important observations in

regard to the Teocalli. One is Townsend's (1979, p. 55) suggestion that the earth zoomorph on the platform actually represents Mexica land held by force of arms, as symbolized by the shields and darts on either side of the animal. The other is Gordon Ekholm's (1953, p. 87) idea that the Teocalli might be a throne, an idea based on the existence of small ceramics of deities with solar discs on their backs seated on pyramids (Figure 10).

In this study I am developing this last interpretation of the monument. The Teocalli seems to have belonged to a class of small pyramid platforms called *momoztli*, which have been described as "seats of Tezcatlipoca" in colonial documents, and good arguments can be given for identifying it as a symbolic throne for Montezuma II in the guise of Tezcatlipoca. Likewise its relieves can be given political and dynastic interpretations.

Upper World and Lower World

The pyramid in Mesoamerica seems to have symbolized two concepts. It was a man-made mountain and therefore an image of the earth, within which was the underworld, a place reached by caves. At the same time pyramids also symbolized the ascent to the heavens, especially the ascent and descent of the sun on its daily course from the underworld to the zenith and back down again. These two interpretations were not necessarily mutually exclusive; pyramids could have referred to either idea on some occasions or to both at the same time.⁷ On the Teocalli the zoomorph lying on the platform of the pyramid

designates that part as representing the earth. Appropriately, the four figures on the sides of the pyramid have the skeletal jaws of death and in their headdresses an abundance of folded paper ornaments, of the type usually associated with the earth and underworld. Such ornaments are worn by fertility, water, and death gods as well as mummy bundles (Figure 11). The figures on the lower part of the Teocalli are in the underworld.



Figure 11. Mummy bundle of dead warrior, *Codex Magliabecchiano*, f. 72r (Seler, 1960-61, Vol. II, p. 736, fig. 26).

On the upper part the sun disc is located where the door of the temple would normally have been. In this context the temple door probably represents the entrance to the underworld (like a cave) from which the sun is emerging. The earth zoomorph and solar disc are aligned; they were meant to be considered in

relation to one another. This juxtaposition of the sun and earth is common on Aztec sculptures and expresses the tense cosmic relationship between the two in Aztec thought. The Aztecs believed that every night the sun descended into the mouth of the earth in the west, and feared that it would not re-emerge on the eastern horizon in the morning, especially at cycle endings. On the Teocalli the zoomorph faces away from the sun; it is not a direct threat because the sun is rising in the east. The temple front represents the solar zone, the upper world, the world of the living.

There are other differences between the figures on the upper and lower parts that can be given a political interpretation (Figure 12). Caso suggested that the four on the lower part were the old gods who sacrificed themselves so that the sun of the present era would begin to move. In addition, their costumes are differentiated from the two above in ways that could point to older Central Mexican civilizations.

Their distinctive triangular hip aprons (Anawalt 1981) go back to Toltec sculptures. The colossal figures at Tula, for instance, wear them (Figure 13). The long feather headdress is also characteristic in relief sculptures of the Aztecs' predecessors (Figure 14)--not just in Toltec sculpture, but also at Xochicalco. These are purposeful references to the past.



A



B

Figure 12. Contrasting costumes on the upper and lower figures on the monument. A. Above, Aztec Huitzilopochtli facing Tezcatlipoca-Montezuma on temple front in non-Toltec costumes. B. Deity figures from left side of pyramid base, wearing Toltec triangular hip aprons and Toltec-style feather headdresses.



Figure 13. Atlantean figure at Tula, wearing triangular hip cloth.

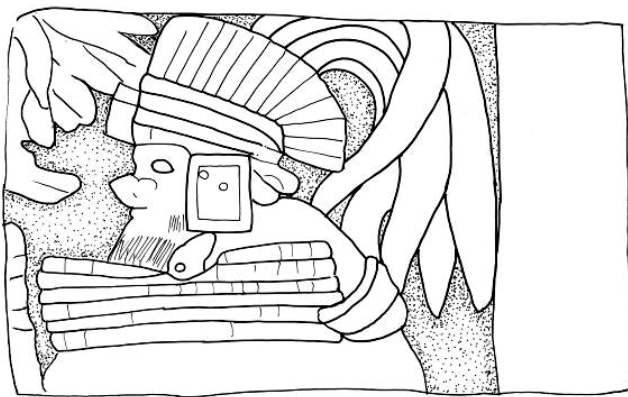


Figure 14. Toltec relief of personage with plumed headdress, Site Museum at Tula.

The figures on the upper part, dressed as Huitzilopochtli and Tezcatlipoca, represent the two most powerful gods in the Aztec pantheon. Huitzilopochtli was the tribal god who had led the Mexica-Aztecs on their migration to the Valley of Mexico, according to legend. Tezcatlipoca was the most powerful Valley deity after the fall of Tula and before the rise of the Mexica and Huitzilopochtli in the mid-fifteenth century. He was also the creator of fire and the god associated with the New Fire Ceremony. Both figures wear simple rectangular loincloths, without the triangular Toltec hip apron worn by the figures below. Moreover, Tezcatlipoca's headdress may have had special ethnic/tribal significance. Caso (1927, pp. 40-41) believed this type of headdress, which consists of rosettes and plumes on sticks, is like that worn by the Mexica's nomadic ancestors sometimes called by the generic name Chichimecs) in Post-Conquest pictorial sources (Figures 15 and 16).



Figure 15. Close-up of frontispiece of Durán's *Historia* (1867-80, Vol. I).

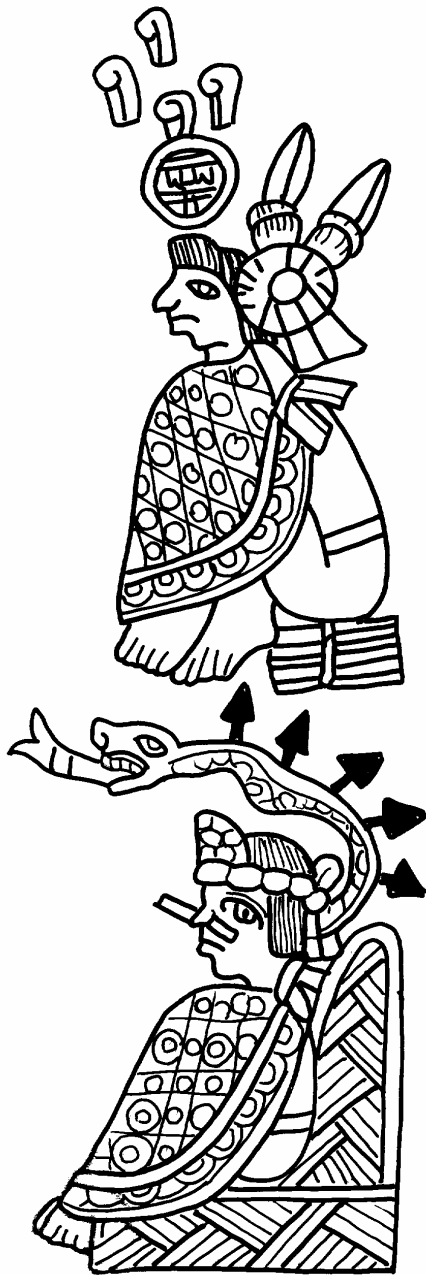


Figure 16. The rulers Chimalpopoca and Itzcoatl. Their different dress refers to their relative status, as subject and independent rulers, respectively. Chimalpopoca, the ruler just before the Aztec War of Independence, is dressed as a Chichimec, while Itzcoatl, who won the war, dresses as a Toltec lord (after *Primeros Memoriales* [1559-61], f. 51r).

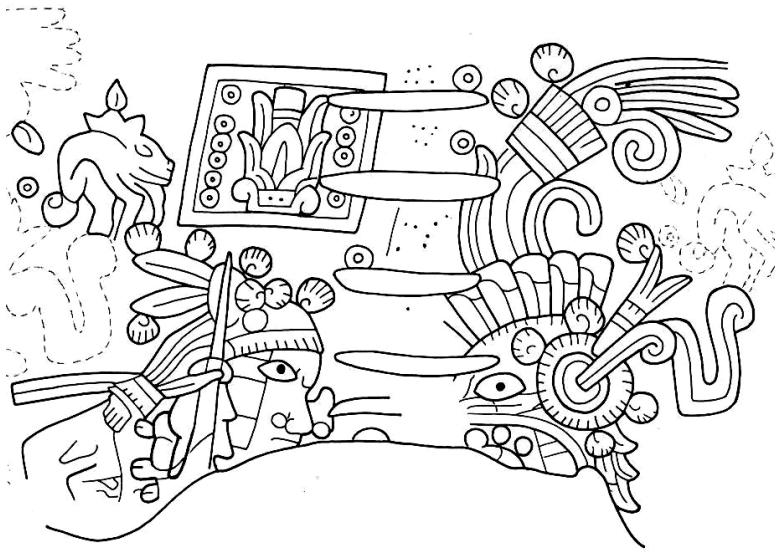


Figure 17. Ahuizotl's Bone, close-up of lower part with ruler Ahuizotl drawing blood from his ear, facing Huitzilopochtli, and wearing a cap very like that worn by Montezuma on the Teocalli. The cap is associated with blood-letting and the feathers on it seem to vary, Museo Nacional de Antropología..

Nicholson (1967, p. 73) added that in Sahagún's *Primeros Memoriales* the early rulers of Tenochtitlan wear it, while later kings wear the usual royal headgear, the *xiuhuitzolli* diadem. Montezuma's headdress is the same as the one worn by Ahuizotl on a bone sacrificial point that I call Ahuizotl's Bone; it actually features a cap covering the hair and the sticks, feathers, rosettes on top of the cap (Figure 17). Since this distinctive type of headdress is not usually part of Tezcatlipoca's costume, it may be an intentional reference to Mexica tribal dress.⁸ The two figures on the upper part of the Teocalli then seem to represent the Mexica at the time of the foundation of Tenochtitlan, which is depicted on the back of the monument. One is the god who led the ancestors to the site, and the other is dressed in non-Toltec, seemingly Chichimec clothing. The foundation itself

represents the time when the Aztecs ended their migration, took possession of the land, and assumed their sacred duty to the sun. All figures on the monument, both Aztecs and Toltecs, carry the instruments of sacrifice and shout the sacred words of the solar cult, but the Toltecs are dead in the underworld; their service to the sun is finished. Now the Mexica accompany the solar disc. For this reason, their assumption of the solar duties, they also wear discs (probably solar discs) on their backs (see Caso, 1927, pp. 43-44) instead of the tobacco containers worn by the figures below.⁹

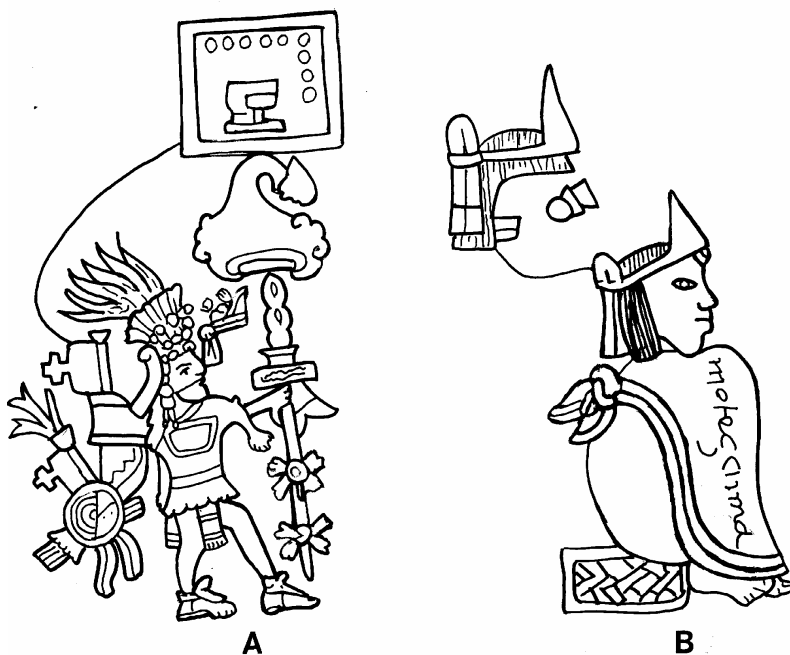


Figure 18. Hieroglyph of Montezuma II's name in the codices: (A) *Codex Vaticanus A/Rios*, f. 83v (after Seler, 1960-61, Vol. II, p. 675, fig. 4); (B) II, *Codex Mendoza*, f. 15v.

The Headdress Glyph¹⁰

It is necessary at this point to present the arguments for identifying the hieroglyph next to Tezcatlipoca's head as the name of Montezuma. I have dubbed this glyph the Headdress Glyph because it includes the royal diadem, hair, earplug, and nose plug of a ruler. These same elements form the name Montezuma in Post-Conquest pictorial codices (Figure 18), as well as month names and titles (hieroglyph types that do not appear on pre-Conquest remains). Motecuhzoma means "angry lord" or "lord becomes angry," and the royal paraphernalia stand for the root *tecuh-*, "lord." In the past, however, this glyph on stone sculptures has been read by scholars, more often than not, as something other than the name Montezuma.

The headdress glyph is found on eight Mexica sculptures (Figure 19)¹¹: a box in the National Museum in Mexico (A), a box in Berlin (D), the Hackmack Box in Hamburg (G), a greenstone fire serpent at Dumbarton Oaks (B); a sculpture of Tlaloc in the Santa Cecilia Acatitlan Museum (C), the Chapultepec cliff sculpture of the king (E), and the Calendar Stone (H),¹² as well as the Teocalli (F). The glyph occurs in three variations. Type I is the simplest; its only elaboration is a speech symbol on some examples. On Type II upright elements have been attached to the top of the headdress. Type III is the most elaborate; it has a feather decoration on top and the "butterfly" breastplate of the fire god below, as well as a speech scroll attached to the nose-plug.

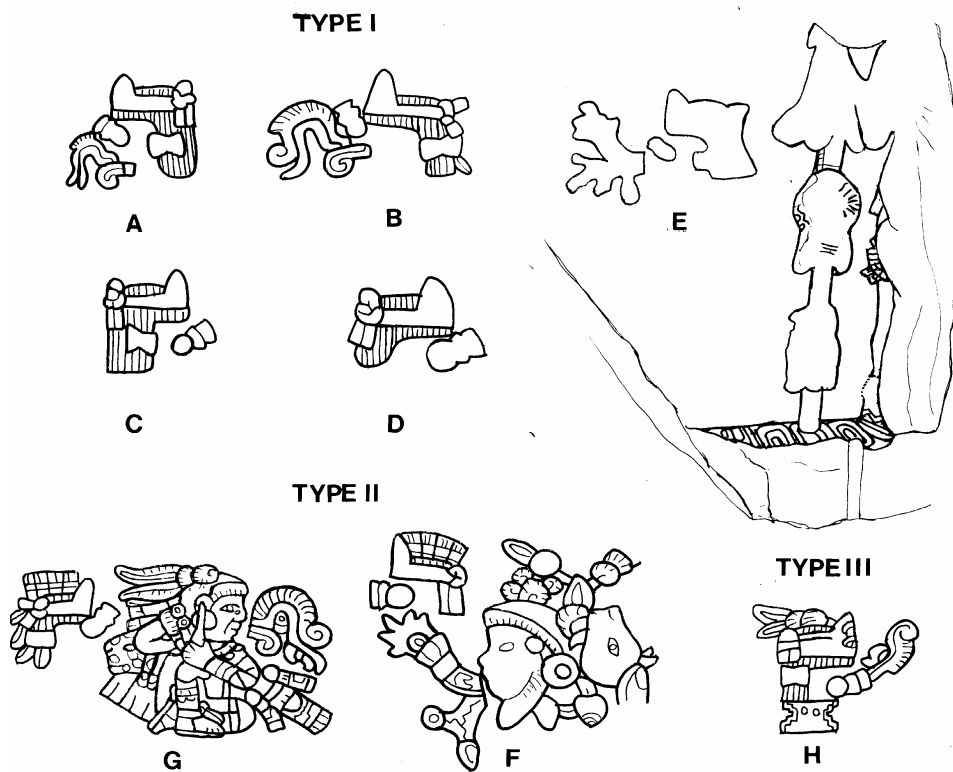


Figure 19. Headdress Glyph, representing the hieroglyphic name of Montezuma II on Mexico stone sculptures. *Type I*: (A) Box, Museo Nacional de Antropología (after Seler, 1960-61a, Vol. II, p. 744, fig. 31); (B) fire serpent, Dumbarton Oaks (Dumbarton Oaks, 1963, no. 107); (C) Tlaloc, site museum, Santa Cecilia Acatitlan (after a photograph by Esther Pasztory); (D) Box, Museum für Volkerkunde, Berlin; (E) cliff portrait at Chapultepec. *Type II*: (F) Teocalli; (G) Hackmack Box, Hamburgisches Museum für Volkerkunde (after Seler, 1960-61a, Vol. II, p. 732, Fig. 18). *Type III*: (H) Calendar Stone, Museo Nacional de Antropología.

The Headdress Glyph has been given a variety of interpretations in studies of the different sculptures listed above. In early studies of the Calendar Stone (Figure 19H), first it was interpreted as a symbol of fire by León y Gama (1832, p. 102) and then as the name Montezuma by Peñafiel (1890, Vol. I, pp. 102, 108 [English text]). Seler (1960-61a, Vol. II, pp. 731-746; and 1960-61b, Vol. II, pp.

799-800), however, suggested that the headdress glyph represented the "spirit of the dead warrior" and the direction east, and this is the interpretation that is usually accepted by scholars. After the Teocalli was found in 1926, Mena (1928) identified the glyph (Figure 19F) as Montezuma's name, as stated above, but Caso, in his monograph (1927, pp. 43-48) thought that it represented a deity's name. These conflicting interpretations have persisted to the present.

The individual elements of the headdress glyph do represent other concepts in different contexts. In manuscripts, for instance, royal crowns are used as hieroglyphs to represent high political offices and months, among other things (see Nicholson, 1967, pp. 71-72). *These colonial expansions of the pre-Conquest system of hieroglyphs broadened their usage.* Considering the context of the headdress glyph on the sculptures on which it occurs, however, it is most logical to interpret it as the name Montezuma. On the Hackmack Box (Figure 19G), the Chapultepec sculpture (E), and the Teocalli (F) the glyph is located next to a figure in the position of a name. On the Teocalli it accompanies a figure in a typical dynastic composition comparable to the well-known Dedication Stone (Figure 20), where two kings face each other across a central cult object and have hieroglyphic names next to their heads.

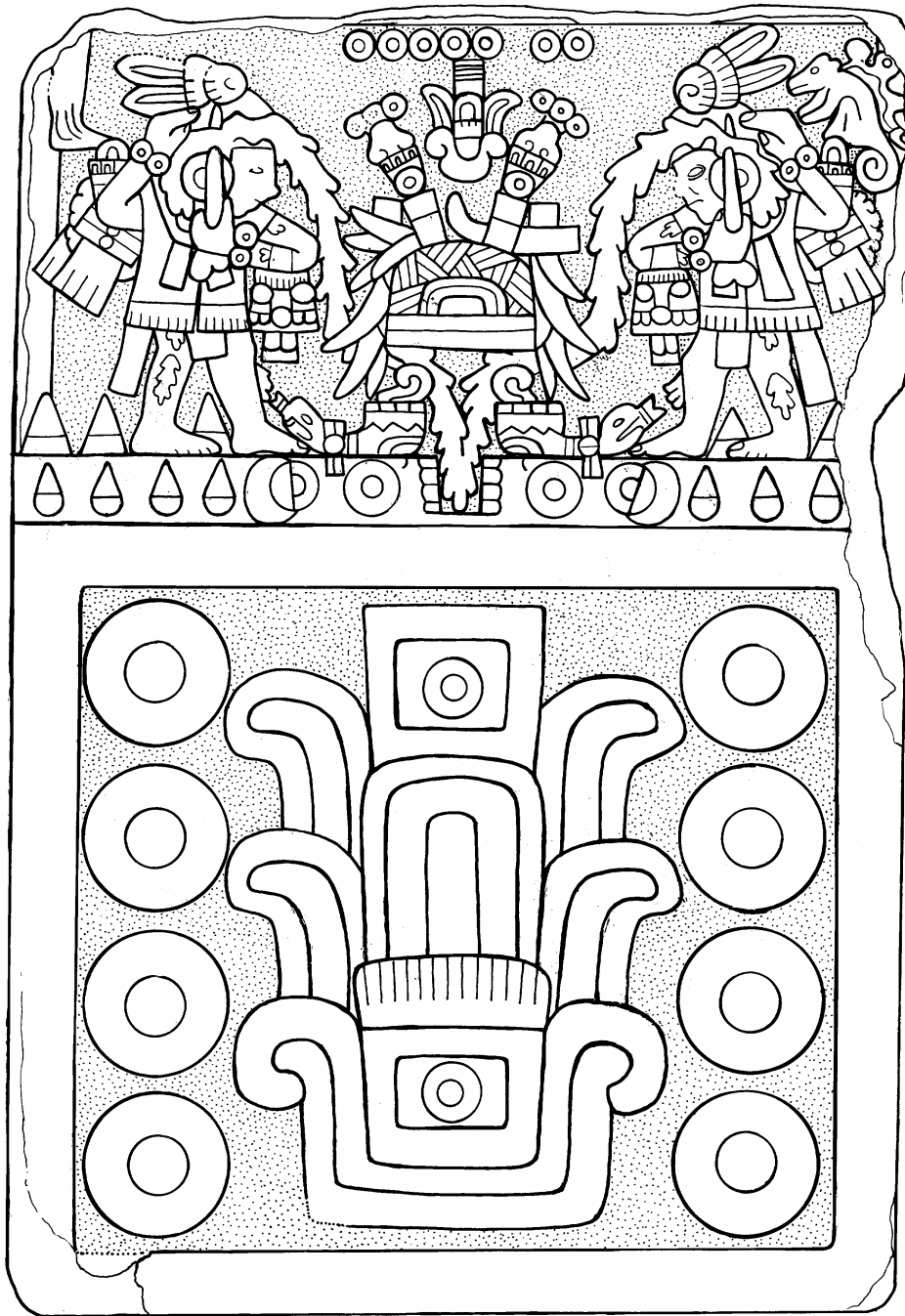


Figure 20. Dedication Stone with the rulers Tizoc and Ahuitzotl facing each other over a *zacatapayolli* (grass ball for sacrificial points), Museo Nacional de Antropología.

It is known from the written sources that the now effaced sculpture at Chapultepec once represented a Mexica ruler. Nicholson (1961) and others (Krickeberg, 1969, pp. 15-30) have identified it as a portrait of Montezuma II, although unaware of the hieroglyphic name next to the figure (even the glyphs were removed from the rock and are now difficult to read). Nicholson thought it represented a jaguar head, but close inspection in 1976 revealed that it is actually a version of the Headdress Glyph, Montezuma's name glyph (Umberger 1981).

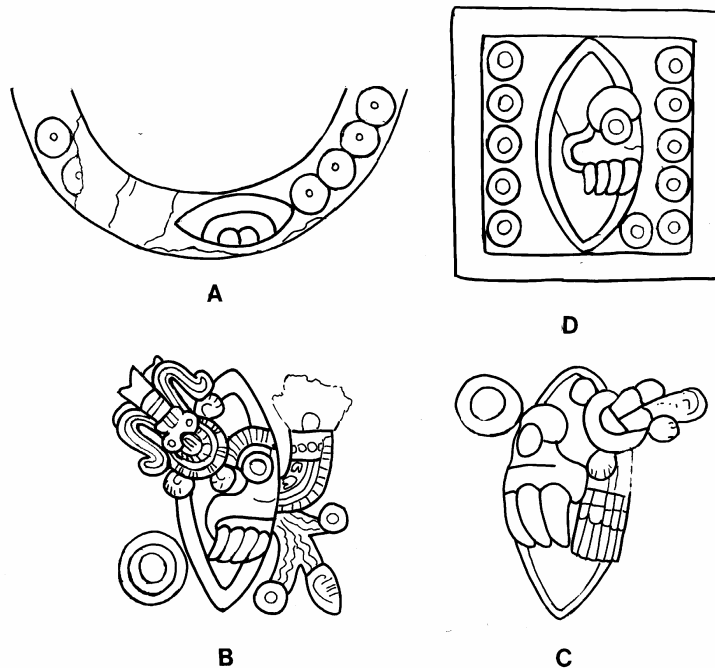


Figure 21. Flint dates, some personified and with different elaborations according to occasion. A. 8 Flint on the rim of the Bilimek Pulque Vessel (Museum für Volkerkunde, Vienna). B. 1 Flint on right side of temple on Teocalli. C. 12 Flint on lid of Montezuma's Box in the Museo Nacional de Antropología. D. 1 Flint on the Calendar Stone, Museo Nacional de Antropología.

The elaborations on the different versions of the Headdress Glyph should not be considered as changing its basic meaning. Hieroglyphic dates on sculptures can likewise be decorated with symbols appropriate to different occasions. A Flint date (Figure 21), for instance, can be a plain flint knife (A) or a personified Flint knife (B) or it can be elaborated with the smoking mirror of Tezcatlipoca and a speech symbol emanating from the face (B and C). If the date glyphs are thus added to, then it follows that the name of the ruler can assume the paraphernalia of the deities with whom he is identified and other symbols specific to historical occasions. In this short paper I cannot explain the reasons why, but style and imagery dictate that all eight of the sculptures with this glyph must date from the reign of Montezuma II, who ruled from 1502 to 1520.

Montezuma's Throne

The imagery on the miniature pyramid, to this point called the Teocalli, makes even more sense when it is identified as a throne. As mentioned before, it is actually a model of a particular class of small pyramids called *momoztli* that were conceived as seats of Tezcatlipoca. There has been some controversy over the actual form of a *momoztli*, and likewise what forms the seats of Tezcatlipoca took. According to one important passage in Sahagún's *Florentine Codex*,

...and in all the roads and crossroads they placed a seat made of stones for him [Tezcatlipoca], which was called *momoztli* (Sahagún, 1979, Book III, f. 8r-8v, translated by the author).

Seler (1960-61, Vol. II, pp. 872-883) thought these seats could take various forms. They could be stone blocks with Tezcatlipoca imagery, altars with skulls and cross-bones, and also year bundles, because in another illustration in the *Florentine Codex* (Sahagún, 1950-69, Book I, fig. 15) the god Omacatl (meaning "two reed" because it is the form taken by Tezcatlipoca on the day 2 Reed), sits on a year bundle. All three forms were probably considered as "seats of Tezcatlipoca," but I do not think they were *momoztli* in the exact sense of the word (except possibly the skull altar).



Figure 22. Illustration of *momoztli* in the *Florentine Codex*, Book III (Paso y Troncoso, 1905-07, Vol. V, pl. XIX, fig. 8).

Nicholson was correct when he observed (1958, pp. 605-606) that a *momoztli* was more complicated than a single block, and he points to Sahagún's

description of a "seat of stones," more than one stone. Sahagún's illustration, indeed, depicts the *momoztli* as a small pyramid (Figure 22). Nicholson therefore suggested that Sahagún was referring to the small pyramid platforms that have been found in plazas at various archaeological sites all over Central Mexico.

Alcocer (1935, pp. 38-40) and Noguera (1973) have also discussed the *momoztli* as a low platform and suggested that the large circular sun stones, like the Calendar Stone and the Stone of Tizoc, were on such platforms. And Heyden (1968, pp. 43-45) pointed out a passage in Durán that establishes that some *momoztli* did have sun discs on top.

...it is necessary to know first that they had in olden times a god of markets and fairs, for whom they put a *momoztli*, which are [sic] altars, like spires, which they used ...They had many of these in the roads and crossroads and the market.

On those in the market they attached some carved stones as large as a shield, and on them sculpted a round image, like the image of the sun...on others they put other images, according to priestly contemplation and market and town authority (Durán, 1967, Vol. I, p. 177; my translation).

The illustration (Durán, 1967, Vol. I, fig. 28) that accompanies this passage depicts a circular stone lying on the ground in the middle of the market plaza. Heyden was right that sun discs were an important part of the *momoztli*, but in a

stricter sense the word *momoztli* seems to refer primarily to the pyramidal platform, while the horizontal circular sun stones on top were called *cuauhxicalli* ("eagle's vessel") or *temalacatl* ("round stone").

In Molina's dictionary (1970, Nahuatl-Spanish section, f. 61v), the word *momoztli* (*mumuztli*) is defined as "altar of the idols, or shrine"; and in another place in the *Florentine Codex* (1979, Book II, f. 60r) a *momoztli* is called a "round altar," which could be referring to the circular stone on top, and not to the form of the platform itself. An illustration in the *Florentine Codex* (1950-69, Book II, fig. 52) shows a human sacrifice on an altar in the form of a small pyramid. The *momoztli* then probably varied in form from small altars with or without sun discs to large platforms with the monumental sun discs, the sacrificial stones, in a horizontal position on top.

Considering the connection between the *momoztli* and the solar disc, it is significant that Molina (1970, Nahuatl-Spanish section, f. 60v) defines a related word, *mumuztlayé* (*momotzlayé*) as meaning "every day." Durán gives the same definition:

...a shrine that was at the crossroads, called *momoztli*, which in our language means "daily place," a word related to *momoztlayé*, which means "every day" (Durán, 1967, Vol. I, p. 172; my translation).

Did the *momoztli* then symbolize the daily trip of the sun to the top of the heavens and down again? One well-known passage in Durán (1967, Vol. I, p. 107) says that the route of the sun through the sky was imitated by the messenger to the sun who climbed up the east side of the Pyramid of the Sun and was sacrificed when he reached the top at noon.

The description of a pyramid with an image of the sun on top also recalls the little clay pyramid models on which deities are seated with sun discs on their backs. These figurines, first compared with the Teocalli by Ekholm, confirm that such pyramids with sun discs were conceived literally as seats, and that the sun discs could be in a vertical position as the sun is on the Teocalli. Another interesting passage on the *momoztli* in Torquemada sets up a comparison between the seat of Tezcatlipoca and a royal throne:

They placed at all the crossroads a seat for him [Tezcatlipoca] made of stone which they called *momoztli* and by another name, *Ichialoca*, which means "where he is awaited"; and this seat, or throne, they covered with branches and no one sat on the seat, which is the same thing as in the houses of the kings, the seat and canopy which they have in the rooms, which represents the royal majesty, and no one dares to sit on it, except for the king himself...(Torquemada, 1969, Vol. II, p. 40; my translation).

Doris Heyden (personal communication) is correct that Torquemada was probably comparing the seat to the throne of a European king, as he often made such comparisons in addressing his European audience (and these empty thrones are featured in the Salones del Dosel in colonial Mexican palaces). Still, it is possible that Torquemada's original source referred to the *momoztli* as an empty, “metaphorical” seat, and Torquemada made the connection to the contemporary colonial practice.



Figure 23. Person seated on model of Teocalli in Mexico City Metro, demonstrating its human scale.

In summary, a *momoztli* was a small pyramid platform, which could have a sun disc on it and which was conceived as a seat of Tezcatlipoca. The Teocalli likewise is a pyramid model with a sun disc on top; it has references to Tezcatlipoca on it; it was found at the site of Montezuma's palace; and the king himself is represented on it dressed as a form of Tezcatlipoca. Surely this sculpture was meant to represent a symbolic throne for Montezuma on the occasion of the New Fire Ceremony of 1507. On the Teocalli the sun disc and the earth zoomorph are aligned and were meant to be conceived together: they were the seat and back of the throne. Their width is about 32 centimeters, wide enough to seat a normal person, and the depth of the seat is around the same. Although in human scale (Figure 23), it was a symbolic throne and a commemorative monument rather than something he actually sat on. The throne he sat on was made of reeds (Figure 18B), sometimes with a high back, as commonly illustrated in the codices. On the monument the seat itself symbolized the ruler's dominion over the earth (as represented by the zoomorph), while the solar disc on the backrest implies the solar disc worn on the back (as in the figural representation of the ruler next to the sun and refers likewise to his burden to "carry" the sun through the sky. That this was the imagery of Aztec leadership is supported by linguistic evidence. *Motlalia*, the Nahuatl verb for ruler installation, means literally to be settled or seated. The root *tlal-* means land; so in a sense, the verb means to be seated on the land. The verb *mama* literally means "to carry on one's back"; metaphorically it means "to rule" (Brundage, 1972, p. 122; Molina, 1970, Nahuatl-Spanish section, f. 51v). Colonial writings

reveal that the ruler carried various burdens; he carried the people and he also carried the gods. The Teocalli presents a powerful dynastic image. The juxtaposition of the sun and zoomorph expresses dramatically the Aztecs' fear that the earth would swallow the sun forever. Townsend (1979) has noted that on Mexica monuments rulers are usually depicted in a setting between heaven and earth and that these symbols represent both the sacred cosmos and the domain over which the Mexica claimed possession. The monumental seat represented by the Teocalli places the living ruler in such a cosmic setting, signifying simultaneously his sacred duty to the sun and his domination over the land.

Notes

¹ This is an English translation of an article "El trono de Moctezuma" published in *Estudios de Cultura Náhuatl* 17 (1984), pp.63-87, a fuller version of a paper presented in the Symposium on the History of Art at the Frick Collection in New York in 1976; further elaboration appeared in my Columbia University dissertation (Umberger 1981). The article was written during a Chester Dale Fellowship at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and an English translation has not appeared in print until now. Many changes have occurred since this article was written, but I have made only a few additions (indicated by underlined, italicized

sentences). A synopsis appeared in Esther Pasztory's influential book *Aztec Art* (1983). I thank Patrick Hajovsky for help with this version.

² Since the 1970s other scholars have sought political and historical meaning in Aztec art (for example, Townsend, 1979).

³ It has been pointed out that these images represent imitators, that is, priests dressed as gods (Townsend, 1979, pp.60-62), or even that the individual attributes are those of various orders of priests, and not of gods at all (Klein, 1984). 2009 addition: The words used above imply a distinction between humans, as totally secular beings, and gods, as well as implying that clothing was neutral and without power. That the authors realize that neither was the case in Aztec thought is evident elsewhere in their studies.

⁴ The dates 1 Death and 1 Flint mark a period of 52 days in the Tonalpohualli, the sacred day count, as Caso notes (1927, pp.33), but no one has observed that the day 2 Reed is in the middle of the period between the two dates (actually, one day off from the exact middle). I think that this period of 52 days was the ceremonial period of the New Fire Ceremony, prefiguring the years of the new "century," and that 2 Reed which appears in the middle, was the *day* of the ceremony as well as the *year* (see Umberger, 1981, pp.122-124).

⁵ The space on the left is destroyed, but the remains seem to reveal the raised hands of the goddess in the upper part, the outline of the headdress of upright plumes on the left border, a long feather higher up, and, in the lower part, the profile of a folded paper fan behind the head. I cannot see the second eye on the stone that Townsend mentioned (1979, pp. 56).

⁶ See Caso (1927, pp.54-63 and 1946), Townsend (1979, pp.56-58), and Umberger (1981, pp.191-192, 209-213, and 222-223) for various discussions of this scene and the date of the foundation of Tenochtitlan.

⁷ Krickeberg (1950), who produced the principal study on the symbolism of the pyramid in Mesoamerica, believed that it was a symbol of the sky. The other aspect of the pyramid--as a symbol of the earth--has not been as well studied yet (but see Heyden, 1973).

⁸ At first glance one might consider the jaguar skin worn by this figure as an allusion to Mexica tribal dress (as well as being the costume of Tepeyolotl), since in the pictorial sources the ancestors characteristically wear animal skins. However, as Thelma Sullivan (personal communication) has pointed out, the ancestors are not represented in jaguar skins. Diana Fane (personal communication) has suggested likewise that the clothes of the ancestors would not include the head of the animal, which is more appropriate to deities, warrior clothing, and the *nahualli*.

⁹ The wearing of solar discs on the back is not uncommon in Aztec art. See, for example, the large relief from Texcoco in the Museo Nacional de Antropología (Bernal, 1969, no. 35) and the greenstone Xolotl in Stuttgart (Seler, 1960-61, Vol. III, fig. 4, following pp. 392).

¹⁰ For discussion of this glyph, see also Umberger (1981, pp.66-71).

¹¹ Nicholson (1973, pp.7) listed six of these sculptures as possibly bearing the name, but thought there were preferable interpretations. As indicated in the text, he was unaware of the glyph at Chapultepec.

¹² Seler illustrated the box in the Museo Nacional (1960-61a, Vol. II: pp. 743-745, figs. 29-32); the Berlin box has not been published previously (see Umberger, 1981, fig. 75); the Hackmack Box is illustrated in Seler (1960-61a, Vol. II, pp. 732-735, figs. 18-25); the Dumbarton Oaks Serpent is published in the *Handbook of the...Bliss Collection...* (Dumbarton Oaks, 1963, pp.63, no. 107); the Tlaloc sculpture is illustrated by Solís (1976, figs. 5 and 6), but the glyph is not shown; the Chapultepec relief is illustrated by Nicholson (1961) and Krickeberg (1969, pls. 8-14); the Calendar Stone is illustrated by Beyer (1965, pp.194, fig. 122 shows the glyph).

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