

# The Temple of Quetzalcoatl and the cult of sacred war at Teotihuacan

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The Temple of Quetzalcoatl at Teotihuacan has been the source of startling archaeological discoveries since the early portion of this century. Beginning in 1918, excavations by Manuel Gamio revealed an elaborate and beautifully preserved facade underlying later construction. Although excavations were performed intermittently during the subsequent decades, some of the most important discoveries have occurred during the last several years. Recent investigations have revealed mass dedicatory burials in the foundations of the Temple of Quetzalcoatl (Sugiyama 1989; Cabrera, Sugiyama, and Cowgill 1988); at the time of this writing, more than eighty individuals have been discovered interred in the foundations of the pyramid. Sugiyama (1989) persuasively argues that many of the individuals appear to be either warriors or dressed in the office of war.

The archaeological investigations by Cabrera, Sugiyama, and Cowgill are ongoing, and to comment extensively on the implications of their work would be both premature and presumptuous. Nonetheless, the recent excavations have placed an entirely new light on the significance of the Temple of Quetzalcoatl and its remarkable sculptural format. In this study, I will be concerned with the iconographic meaning of the Temple of Quetzalcoatl facade. In recent work, I noted that the temple facade represents serpents passing through a facade of circular mirrors (Taube 1986, 1988). Two forms of serpents are present, Quetzalcoatl and an ancestral form of the Xiuhcoatl. In this respect, the Temple of Quetzalcoatl facade may be compared to the Postclassic wind temple of Ehecatl-Quetzalcoatl, which also appears with mirrors and serpents (Taube 1986). However, in this paper I will be concerned not with the feathered serpent and Quetzalcoatl but with the other entity, the early Xiuhcoatl. I will argue that on the Temple of Quetzalcoatl, this serpent head serves as an emblem of the office of war. Although decidedly Teotihuacano in origin, this serpent is commonly worn by Classic Maya rulers. In both effigy and natural form, this creature was a basic component of a Teotihuacan warrior complex introduced into the Maya area. It will be argued that at Late Classic Tikal, the Maya explicitly identified this serpent with Teotihuacan, and one structure in particular—the Temple of Quetzalcoatl. It will be noted that many of the Teotihuacan-derived

warrior elements found in the Maya region also appear among the Classic Zapotec of Oaxaca. Finally, using ethnohistoric data pertaining to the Aztec, I will discuss the possible ethos surrounding the Teotihuacan cult of war.

## The Temple of Quetzalcoatl and the Tezcacoac

Located in the rear center of the great Ciudadela compound, the Temple of Quetzalcoatl is one of the largest pyramidal structures at Teotihuacan. In volume, it ranks only third after the Pyramid of the Moon and the Pyramid of the Sun (Cowgill 1983: 322). As a result of the Teotihuacan Mapping Project, it is now known that the Temple of Quetzalcoatl and the enclosing Ciudadela are located in the center of the ancient city (Millon 1976: 236). The Ciudadela is widely considered to have been the seat of Teotihuacan rulership, and held the palaces of the principal Teotihuacan lords (e.g., Armillas 1964: 307; Millon 1973: 55; Coe 1981: 168; Cowgill 1983: 316). According to Cowgill (*ibid.*), “it seems generally accepted that the Ciudadela combined political and religious significance, and the cult or cults associated with the Quetzalcoatl Pyramid were intimately connected with rulership of Teotihuacan.” The excavations of 1918 to 1922 by Manuel Gamio at the Temple of Quetzalcoatl revealed that the Plataforma Adosada on the principal west face covered and preserved portions of an earlier facade (see Gamio 1922, I: 145–156). This structure, often referred to as the Old Temple, is famed for its remarkable sculptured facade of projecting serpent heads and bas-relief sculpture (fig. 1). Although the Plataforma Adosada preserved much of the frontal west face, Millon (1973: fig. 34, legend) stresses that the Old Temple was never entirely covered: “When the mural-decorated Adosada was built, it did *not*, as is commonly attested, cover all the carvings on the west facade, either on its sides or its upper bodies.” Moreover, during the excavations of 1980 to 1982 by the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, remains of sculpture identical to the west face were discovered on the north and south sides of the pyramid (Cabrera and Sugiyama 1982: Plano 3). It thus appears that at least three if not four sides of the pyramid displayed the same sculptural format, with only the

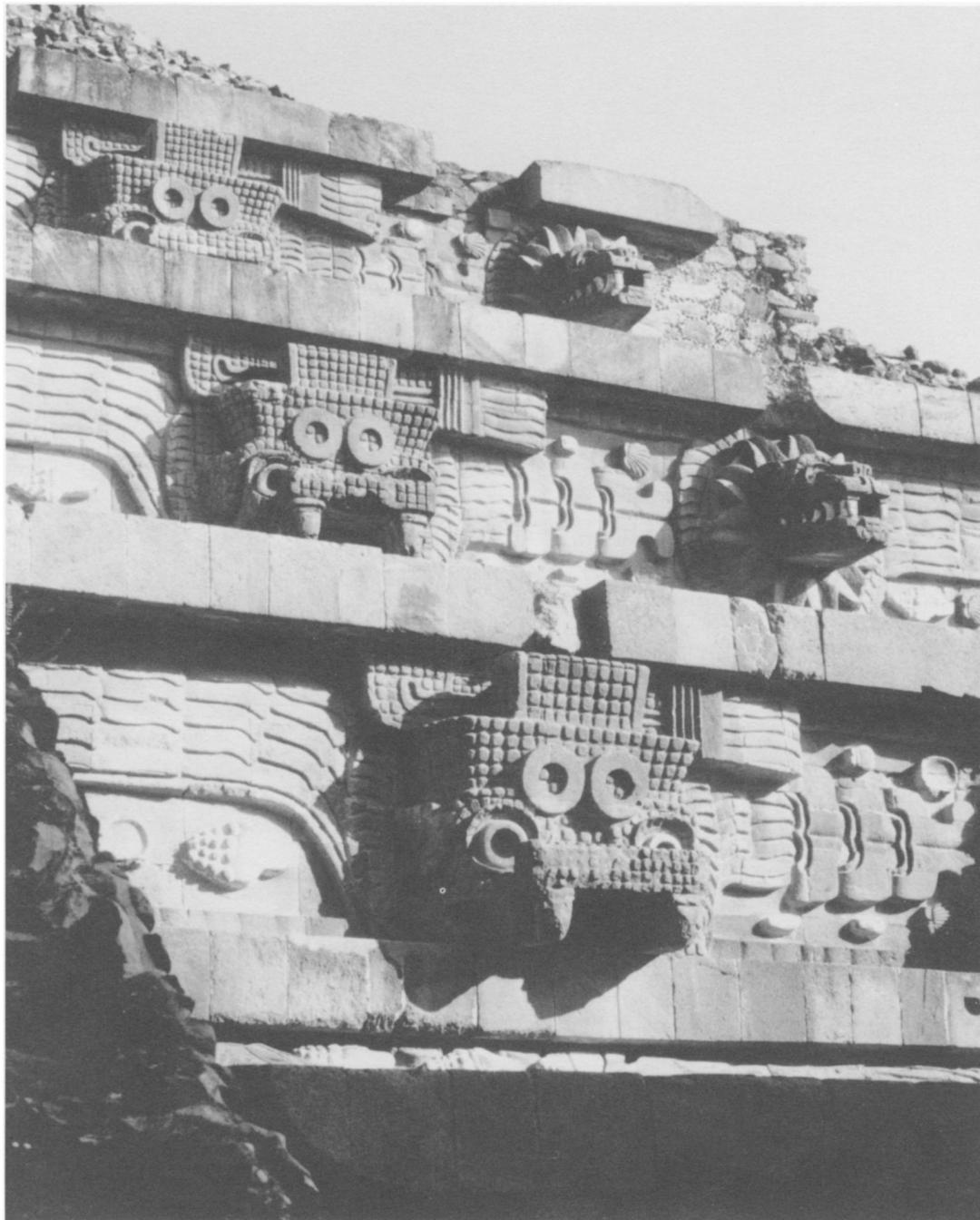


Figure 1. Detail of the Old Temple of Quetzalcoatl facade, Teotihuacan. Photo: Karl A. Taube.

frontal west side being largely covered by the later Plataforma Adosada.

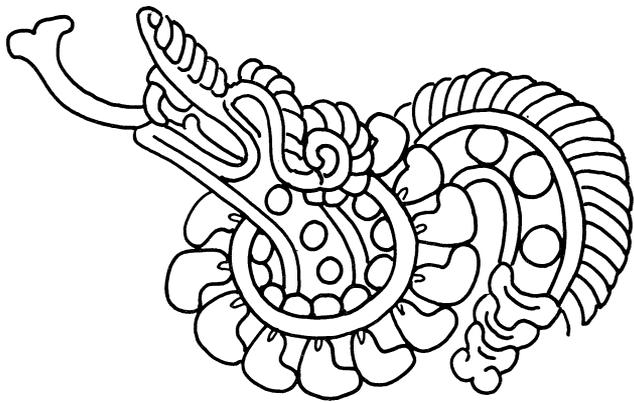
The Old Temple seems to have been constructed in either the terminal Miccaotli or early Tlamimilolpa phases, roughly in the mid-third century A.D. (Sugiyama 1989). Recent INAH excavations have uncovered mass dedicatory burials in association with the erection of the Old Temple. One multiple burial on the south side, Burial 190, contained eighteen individuals, and there are reports of similar mass burials in other portions of the pyramid (Sugiyama 1989; Cabrera, Sugiyama, and Cowgill 1988). According to Sugiyama (1989), the burial goods accompanying these and other dedicatory burials at the foundation of the Old Temple suggest that the individuals were warriors. Sugiyama cites the abundant presence of obsidian points, *tezcacuitlapilli* back mirrors, possible trophies or war emblems in the form of actual human maxillas and mandibles, and shell imitations of maxillas and teeth. Sugiyama (*ibid.*) also notes that all of the eighteen individuals of Burial 190 and the single individual in Burial 203 were mature but not aged males, of appropriate age for warriors. Burial 190 contained mass amounts of worked shell, in all 4,358 pieces (*ibid.*). Aside from shell carved in the form of human maxillas and teeth, there were also rectangular plates drilled at either end (*ibid.*: fig. 9, nos. 14–28). Berlo (1976) has suggested that similar items, found at Teotihuacan and in the Maya area, were platelets for shell armor. This platelet armor will be subsequently discussed in detail. In view of Burial 190, Burial 203, and other dedicatory internments in the Old Temple, it appears that even at its creation this structure was identified with war.

The iconographic program of the Old Temple appears in two distinct zones corresponding to the sloping *talud* and the vertical *tablero*, or entablature of Teotihuacan architecture. On the *talud*, the plumed serpent appears in profile, with marine shells flanking its curving body. The feathered body of Quetzalcoatl also occurs with shells on the *tablero*; here, however, the serpent body and shells are but a background to the most remarkable motif on the Old Temple—great serpent heads surrounded by feathered mirror rims (see Taube 1986, 1988). In other words, the serpent heads are either placed on or passing through the surface of mirrors (fig. 1). Yet, in the *tablero* reliefs, only the Quetzalcoatl serpent is explicitly depicted passing through the ring. A similar scene is found on the Teotihuacan style Las Colinas Bowl, where the feathered serpent again passes through a mirror rim (fig.

2a). During the Late Postclassic period, the circular temple of Quetzalcoatl is found with mirrors placed on the conical temple roof, at times with serpents either lying on or passing through the circular mirrors (figs. 2b–c).

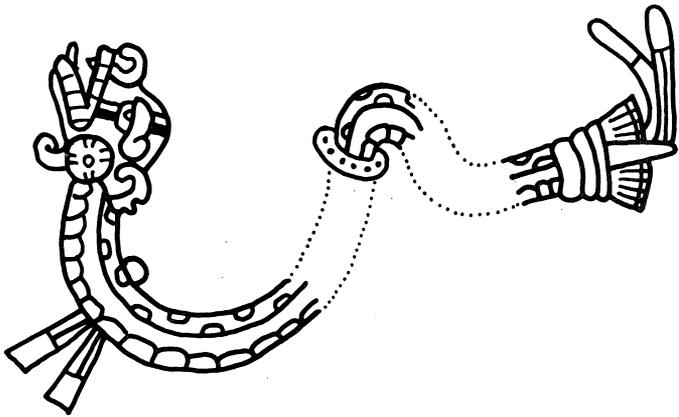
The concept of serpents passing through the surface of mirrors is a common convention in Postclassic Mesoamerican iconography. Thus on page 24 of the Codex Cospi, a yellow fire serpent passes out of a blue-rimmed mirror (fig. 2d). In the Cospi, similarly rimmed mirrors are frequently depicted at the back of the head or as *tezcacuitlapilli* back mirrors. At the Late Postclassic Maya sites of Santa Rita and Tulum, serpents are commonly found emerging from mirrors worn at the back of the head (fig. 2e). In outline, several of the Santa Rita serpent heads closely resemble an Aztec representation of a serpent emerging from a *tezcacuitlapilli* back mirror, here from the Tlaloc side of the Templo Mayor (fig. 2f). The partially effaced serpent is covered with the quincunx sign of turquoise, and it is likely that it represents the Xiuhcoatl, the turquoise serpent of fire.

Citing pre-Hispanic representations and sixteenth-century accounts, I have interpreted the mirrors on the Teotihuacan Temple of Quetzalcoatl in terms of the emergence (Taube 1986). Thus in the *Histoire du Mexique*, people emerged when the sun shot an arrow at the House of Mirrors (Garibay 1945: 7–8; León-Portilla 1963: 107). The placement of serpents on the House of Mirrors denotes the act of lightning fertilizing or rending open the earth, an important episode in emergence accounts of Mesoamerica and the American Southwest (Taube 1986). A recently reported Late Classic Maya Codex Style vessel provides striking support for the episode of lightning and emergence at the House of Mirrors (figs. 3a–b). The complex scene depicts a temple structure marked with Caban curls, clearly denoting it as the earth. On both sides of the structure, alternating with the Caban curl earth signs, there are round mirrors rendered with the curving petaled edges commonly found with Teotihuacan style mirrors. At our left, a composite form of two Maya lightning gods, the Classic Chac and God K, strikes at the structure with a smoking axe and an eccentric flint. Chac appears again on our right with the same lightning weapons in a cavelike hole on the roof. The composite Chac at the left has the serpent foot of God K, which coils up to cleave open the roof and penetrate the earth house. The burning serpent foot of God K is none other than lightning. Like examples from Central

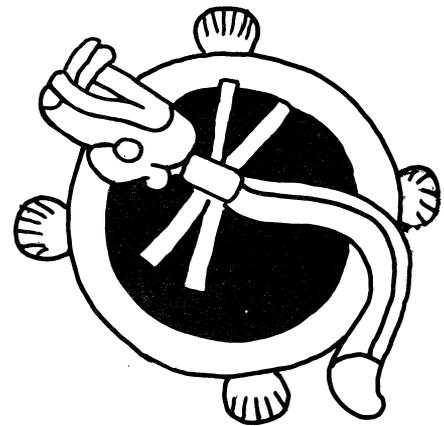


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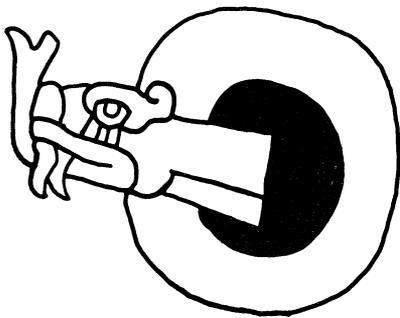
Figure 2. Representations of mirror serpents from pre-Hispanic highland Mexico. (a) Teotihuacan plumed serpent passes through feathered mirror rim, detail of Las Colinas Bowl (from Taube 1986: fig. 8b). (b) Lightning serpent with Xolotl-head and Xiuhcoatl tail passes through mirror placed on wind temple roof, detail of Nochistlan Vase (after Selser 1902–1923, III: 524). (c) *Itzcoatl* lightning serpent on mirror placed on wind temple roof, Codex Borgia, 37. (d) Serpent projecting through blue-rimmed mirror, Codex Cospi, 24. (e) Serpent emerging from mirror, detail of mural from east half of north wall, Mound 1, Santa Rita, Belize (after Gann 1900: pl. 29). (f) Partially effaced Aztec representation of serpent emerging from mirror, detail of mural within early Tlaloc temple of the Templo Mayor, Tenochtitlan. Drawing: Karl A. Taube, from copy in the Museo Templo Mayor.



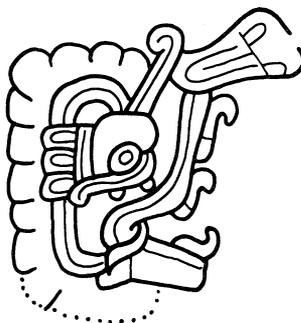
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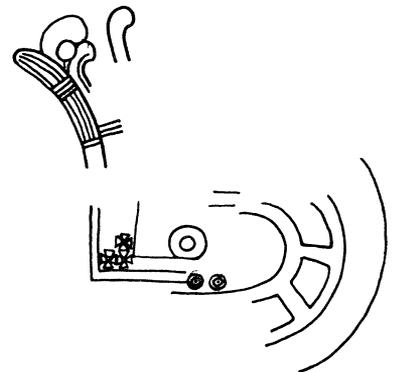
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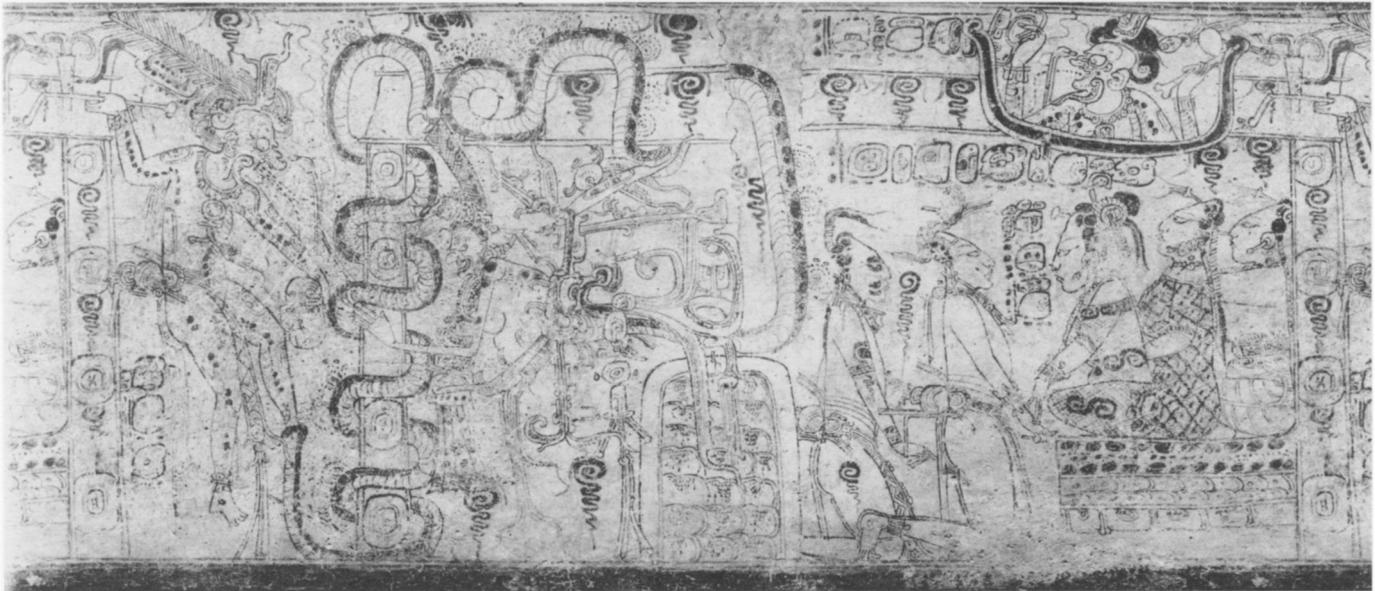
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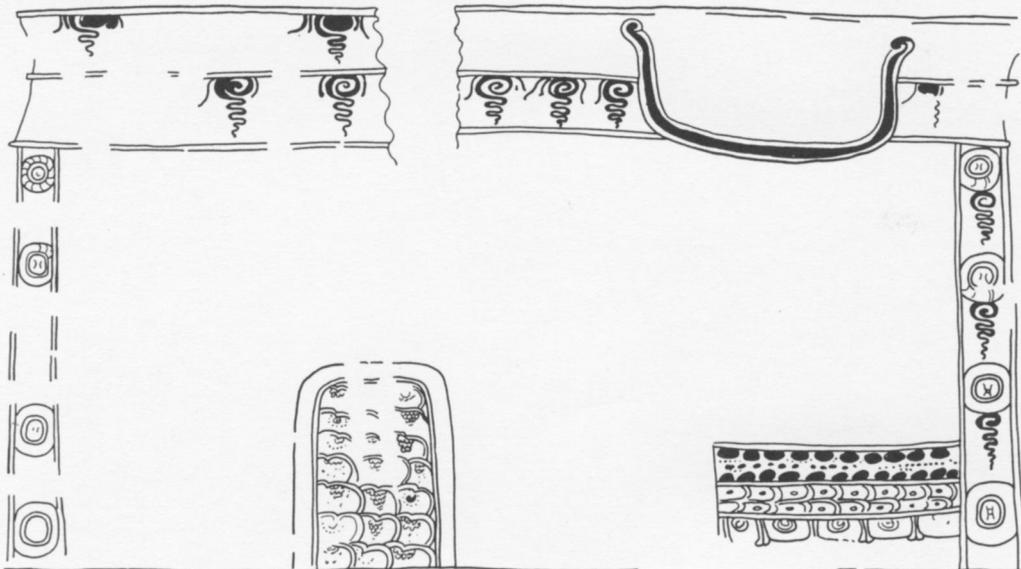
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Figure 3. Representation of the House of Mirrors emergence episode on a Late Classic Maya vase. (a) Roll-out photograph of Codex Style vase, showing Chac with lightning foot of God K striking open House of Mirrors. Photo: © Justin Kerr 1985. Courtesy of Barbara and Justin Kerr. (b) Detail of vessel scene showing House of Mirrors; note petaled mirrors on sides of house and Caban curl earth signs on left roof.

Mexico, this scene again represents the lightning serpent penetrating the House of Mirrors. The Headband Twins, Classic forms of the *Popol Vuh* Hero Twins Xbalanque and Hunahpu, kneel within the temple; the presence of the twins points to the creation saga of the *Popol Vuh* and the origin of mankind and maize (see Taube 1986: 57–58).

It is clear that the House of Mirrors was a place of emergence, in both the Maya region and highland Mexico. In Postclassic Central Mexico, however, the House of Mirrors was also closely identified with war. In the Florentine Codex description of the ceremonial precinct of Tenochtitlan, the twentieth temple was the Tezcacalco, or House of Mirrors. The Nahuatl description of the temple is terse, and only mentions that captives were slain there (Sahagún 1950–1971, bk. 2: 183). However, Seler (1902–1923, II: 495) points out that later in the Nahuatl account the structure is described as the Tezcacoac Tlacoachcalco:

“There was slaying there, only sometimes when there were many captives. And there spears, arrows were guarded. With them there were conquests” (Sahagún 1950–1971, bk. 2: 193). The name of this structure can be translated as Spear House of the Mirror Serpent. Seler (1902–1923, II: 495) notes that this structure, the Spear House of the Mirror Serpent, served as an arsenal or citadel for the Aztec. It is highly interesting that in the sixteenth-century Mazapan maps of Teotihuacan, there is a place termed Tezcacoac, or “Place of the Mirror Snake,” although it is illustrated nowhere near the Ciudadela and the Temple of Quetzalcoatl (Kubler 1982: 50). Nonetheless, there are indications that the Teotihuacanos did consider the House of Mirrors to be a war structure. One Teotihuacan figurine represents a warrior holding two rectangular war shields with mirrors placed in the center; both above and below each mirror there is the device denoting a temple roof (fig. 4a). The placement of the roof device against the

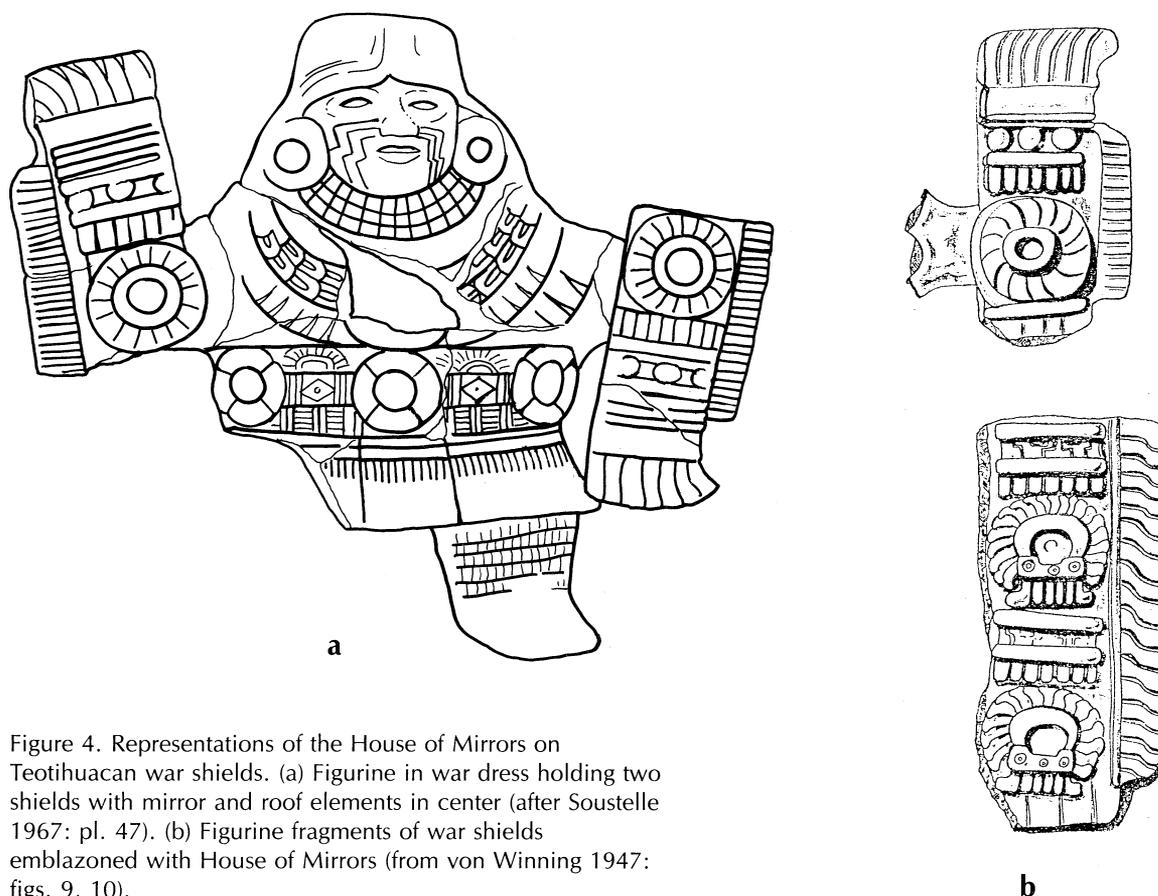


Figure 4. Representations of the House of Mirrors on Teotihuacan war shields. (a) Figurine in war dress holding two shields with mirror and roof elements in center (after Soustelle 1967: pl. 47). (b) Figurine fragments of war shields emblazoned with House of Mirrors (from von Winning 1947: figs. 9, 10).

mirror converts the disk into an architectural form, a House of Mirrors. Von Winning (1947), the first to note the architectonic significance of the roof device, illustrates other examples of the House of Mirrors on rectangular, feather-edged shields (fig. 4b).

\* \* \*

The two types of serpent heads alternating on the *tablero* mirrors are strikingly different in both appearance and context at Teotihuacan. The naturalistically rendered Quetzalcoatl plumed serpent is widely depicted in mural painting, stone sculpture, and decorated vessels throughout the city. The other head, however, has been difficult to identify for two reasons. For one, it is sculpted in a rigid and static quadrangular fashion, quite unlike the feathered serpent heads. Additionally, representations of this serpent are extremely limited at Teotihuacan; until now, it has been identified only at the Old Temple (fig. 5). Due to the two prominent rings at the upper center of the head, this creature has been frequently—and erroneously—identified as Tlaloc. In their classic study *Urnas de Oaxaca*, Caso and Bernal (1952: 113–114) note that the circular devices are not eyes but rings; the actual eyes occur below. According to Caso and Bernal, the creature is actually a serpent, an early form of the Postclassic Xiuhcoatl. I agree with the Xiuhcoatl identification, although I will also stress that the serpent is closely identified with war as well as with fire. Although monumental depictions of the creature are extremely limited at Teotihuacan, it appears widely in Classic Maya iconography, both on stone monuments and on small, portable objects.

### The Classic War Serpent

Unlike the almost canid snout of the Teotihuacan feathered serpent, the Teotihuacan entity identified by Caso and Bernal has a horizontally projecting nose with a slight upcurve at the end (fig. 5). The Old Temple creature lacks a lower jaw, but the slightly curving teeth of the mouth are large and closely set, resembling in this regard the teeth of Teotihuacan jaguars. The eyes are pronounced and round, and have the characteristic backcurved element of Teotihuacan serpent eyebrows. Above the eyes, there is a pair of rings frequently misidentified as the eyes of Tlaloc. Rather than eyes, these rings are the protective goggles commonly worn by Teotihuacan warriors. In Teotihuacan style warrior costume, the goggles may appear either over the eyes

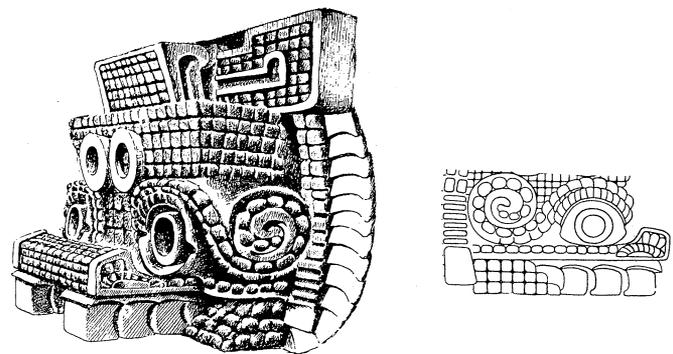
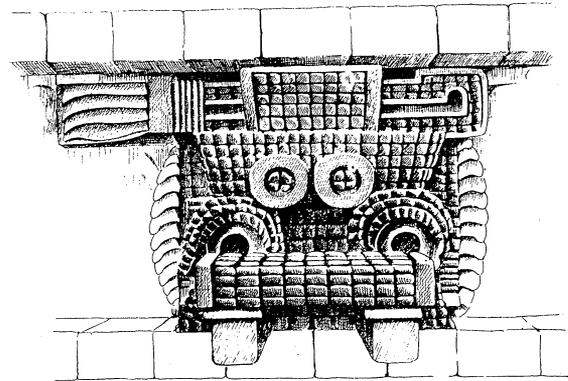


Figure 5. The War Serpent headdress from the Old Temple of the Pyramid of Quetzalcoatl, Teotihuacan. Lower right: detail of Caso and Bernal's reconstruction drawing of the creature (from Caso and Bernal 1952: fig. 184).

or on the brow (figs. 10b, 12, 16b, 19b, 19c). At the top of the head, there is a broad horizontal device partly obscured by a smaller element. Caso and Bernal (1952: 113) consider the two forms to be a single large knot. Their identification appears to be correct, and an almost identical knot appears on a helmet headdress on the Estela Lisa of Early Classic Monte Alban (fig. 19a). Marcus (1980) notes that this figure and his three following companions appear to be Teotihuacan emissaries visiting Monte Alban.

In contrast to the projecting feathered serpent, which is depicted intact with a body and tail in the *tablero* scenes, the Old Temple entity lacks not only a lower jaw, but also a serpent body; only the head covers the surface of the mirror. The goggles and knot visible on the head also appear on Teotihuacan style headdresses.

In the case of the Old Temple serpent, however, there is no differentiation between the upper portion of the head and a headdress (fig. 5). This is simply because the entire head constitutes a helmet mask to be worn.<sup>1</sup> The horizontal element immediately below the headdress probably refers to the shoulders of the wearer, whose face is largely covered by the serpent helmet-mask.<sup>2</sup> At the back of the serpent mouth, there is a bar with a pendant row of teeth. In terms of an actual mouth, this row of teeth makes little sense, because it corresponds not to the front of the mouth, but to the gullet. Rather than constituting part of the serpent teeth, this element probably refers to a nose bar pendant worn by the individual under the serpent mask. This nose bar pendant is a primary attribute of the Teotihuacan Spider Woman, a goddess closely identified with war (Taube 1983).

Perhaps the most striking attribute of the Xiuhcoatl creature at the Temple of Quetzalcoatl is the surface of the skin. It appears to be formed of mosaic platelets, and is comparable to the surface of the platelet helmets found at Teotihuacan, at Monte Alban, and among the Classic Maya. Kubler (1976) notes that among the Classic Maya, these helmets may be either a simple domelike form or in the zoomorphic form of a serpent. Berlo (1976) suggests that the simple and zoomorphic war helmets were fashioned from plates of shell. Easily worked, shell armor would provide a hard, tough, and relatively light protective surface. According to Berlo (*ibid.*), the many rectangular Spondylus shell plates from one portion of Piedras Negras Tomb 5 may have formed a platelet helmet. These plates are quite like the rectangles of worked shell found in the dedicatory burials in the Temple of Quetzalcoatl at Teotihuacan. It is also noteworthy that Tomb 5 also contained two circular pyrite mirrors and shells carved in the form of

incisors, similar to examples from the Old Temple (see Coe 1959: figs. 52p, 52x).<sup>3</sup>

In the Maya region, Classic rulers often wear the mosaic serpent helmet appearing on the Temple of Quetzalcoatl.<sup>4</sup> In this case, the lower jaw is frequently intact, with the face of the wearer looking out from within the open jaws (fig. 6). On the hiatus period Lamanai Stela 9 (fig. 6a), a Maya lord wears a mosaic serpent headdress with the same tipped snout, large eye, and backcurved element found on the Old Temple example. The Lamanai platelet helmet is markedly similar to a roughly contemporaneous example appearing on a fragmentary vessel from Nohmul (fig. 6b). Here a Maya figure wears the serpent helmet, a *tezcacuitlapilli* back mirror, and a thick collar from which Spondylus shells depend; additional Spondylus shells appear on the right wrist. The entire costume is markedly similar to Lacanja Stela 1, dated at 9.8.0.0.0, that is, in the year A.D. 593 (Proskouriakoff 1950: fig. 44b). However, the Lacanja lord wears a simple platelet helmet, not the serpent headdress. At nearby Piedras Negras, rulers often appear as warriors wearing platelet helmets of both simple and zoomorphic form: the serpent helmet first appears on Stela 26 of Ruler 1 (9.9.15.0.0) and last on Stela 7 of Ruler 3 (9.15.0.0.0). In other words, the serpent helmets of Piedras Negras fall squarely within the Late Classic (Stone 1989). Berlo (1976), however, notes that an almost identical zoomorphic platelet helmet appears on an Early Classic figurine from Burial 1 of Mound 2 at Nebaj (Smith and Kidder 1951: fig. 87a). Like the headdress from the Old Temple of Quetzalcoatl, the Nebaj example lacks a lower jaw. There are other Early Classic examples. A Teotihuacan style vessel from the Early Classic Tikal Burial 10 depicts the jawless serpent headdress (Coggins 1975: fig. 53b). At Kaminaljuyu, another Early Classic example appears on a monumental stone sculpture, again without the lower jaw (Parsons 1986:

1. In a recent paper, Saburo Sugiyama (1988) has independently noted that the serpent head alternating with the feathered serpent is actually a headdress. Although we have reached many of the same conclusions, Sugiyama considers the headdress to be a representation of the feathered serpent; I argue that it is a distinct entity closely identified with war.

2. The mask and shoulders of the Teotihuacan figure are notably similar to the series of six busts appearing on the East Building of the Nunnery Quadrangle at Uxmal (see Anton 1970: pl. 243). Like the Teotihuacan example, the motif is a mask placed on a trapezoidal element representing the upper shoulders and chest. The Uxmal mask is quite similar to that worn by masked warriors appearing in the Lower Temple of the Jaguars at Chichen Itza (Maudslay 1889–1902, III: pls. 46, 47). Although anthropomorphic, the Chichen and Uxmal masks appear to have the same mosaic surface found with Classic War Serpent headdresses.

3. Two Piedras Negras caches, 0-13-13 and 0-13-23, contained incised shell disks similar to the shell effigy "molars" discovered in the recent Old Temple excavations at Teotihuacan (cf. Coe 1959: fig. 51t–v; Sugiyama 1989: fig. 9, nos. 47, 51, 60). It is possible that the Piedras Negras carved shell teeth originally formed imitation mandibles similar to those recently discovered at the Old Temple of Quetzalcoatl.

4. Mary Ellen Miller (personal communication, 1988) has made a number of independent observations regarding the Old Temple serpent and the Classic Maya serpent headdress. Although she does not argue that the Old Temple sculpture depicts a helmet mask, Miller also considers the serpent platelet headdresses found among the Classic Maya to be the same entity appearing at the Old Temple.

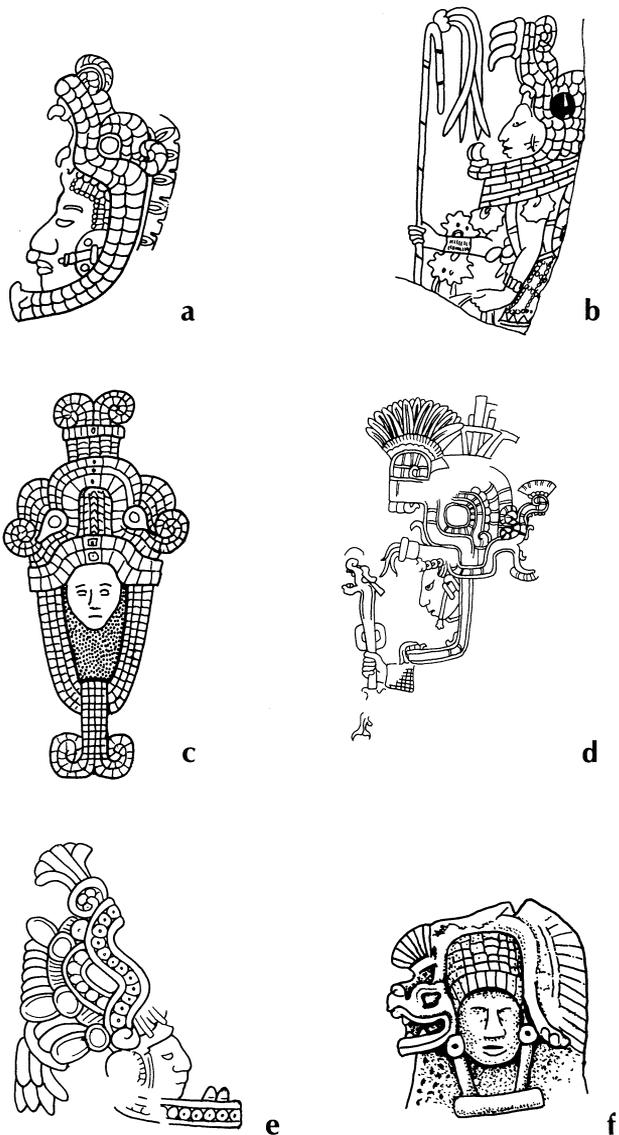


Figure 6. Classic Maya figures wearing platelet War Serpent headdress. (a) War Serpent headdress helmet worn by hiatus period ruler, Lamanai Stela 9 (after rubbing by Merle Greene Robertson, detail). (b) Polychrome vessel sherd from Nohmul depicting Maya figure with War Serpent helmet headdress (after Gann and Gann 1939: pl. 2, 1). (c) War Serpent helmet headdress worn by Ruler 1 of Piedras Negras, detail of Stela 26, Piedras Negras (after Spinden 1975: fig. 251a). (d) Chaan-Muan with mosaic War Serpent headdress helmet; note burning War Serpent *atl-atl* (after Mathews 1980: fig. 4). (e) Terminal Classic representation of Maya lord with War Serpent headdress, detail of doorjamb from northern Maya lowlands (after von Winning 1968: pl. 465). (f) Detail of Jonuta style figurine of warrior wearing platelet headdress with War Serpent (after Corson 1976: fig. 24d).

figs. 193, 194).<sup>5</sup> In the Maya region, the jawless form of the serpent helmet is commonly found with Late Classic Jaina and Jonuta figurines (Corson 1976: figs. 5d, 20c–d, 21a, 24a, 24c).<sup>6</sup>

In Classic Maya iconography, the serpent can appear both in platelet mosaic and as a more naturalistic creature. Both forms are present on Lintel 2 of Temple 1 at Tikal (figs. 7a–b, 12). Although the scene is filled with depictions of the platelet serpent, a naturalistic form appears on the sandal of the ruler (fig. 7b). It can be readily seen that in outline this creature is identical to the platelet creature. Thus it has the same horizontal snout, prominent front teeth, and a greatly enlarged nostril topped with a tuft. Although the forehead is eroded, it is probable that a tufted crest originally ran across the back of the head. In Classic Maya iconography, the two forms of the serpent differ slightly in context. The mosaic version appears primarily as an object to be worn in the context of rulership and impersonation, whereas the other, more animate form can occur in isolation, as if it were a living mythical entity. Many Late Classic Codex Style vessels contain representations of the actual animate creature (fig. 7c), often with flames pouring out of the serpent mouth (see Robicsek and Hales 1981: 215–217). Robicsek and Hales (*ibid.*) identify this entity as a form of Tlaloc. Although this creature may have attributes of both Tlaloc and the jaguar, it has the long snout and curving teeth of the serpent. In many instances, it has a curving tooth surrounded by a ball-like element resembling the poison gland of rattlesnakes and other vipers (fig. 7c). Aside from the unprovenanced Codex Style vessel renderings, a painted *olla* from Jaina Burial 169 bears a clear depiction of the same serpent, again with flames pouring out of the mouth (fig. 7d).

The serpent being is consistently identified with the iconography of war among the Classic Maya. Yaxchilan Lintel 25 depicts Shield Jaguar emerging out of a

5. On a number of Early Classic Escuintla style vessels, there are mold-made decorative panels depicting a warrior figure with a shell bivalve collar. Although it is difficult to see, it appears that he is wearing the jawless War Serpent headdress (see Hellmuth 1975: pls. 17–18).

6. The platelet headdress is quite common in the Terminal Classic art of the northern Maya lowlands. Aside from the illustrated example from an unprovenanced doorjamb (fig. 6e), there are two excellent representations on Itzimte Stelae 1 and 7 (see Graham and von Euw 1977: 9, 19). Both monuments represent a lord wearing not only the headdress, but also twisted platelet snakes that cover much of the figure's body. One of the Stela 1 serpents has a smoking rattle tail, clearly identifying it as a rattlesnake.

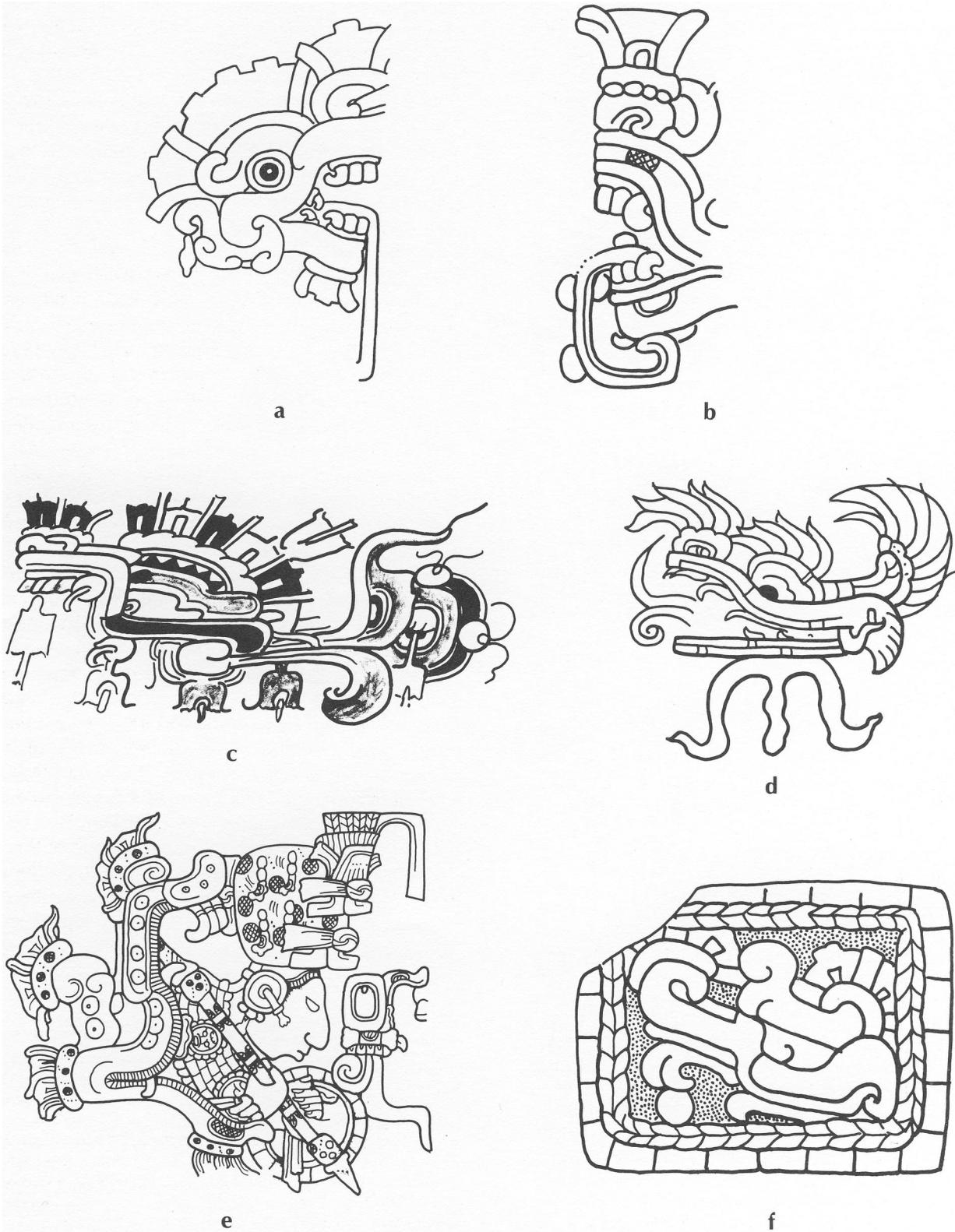


Figure 7. Representations of the War Serpent in Late Classic Maya iconography. (a) Schematic view of War Serpent with mosaic pattern omitted from upper right portion of Lintel 2 Temple 1 at Tikal (after Jones and Satterthwaite 1982: fig. 69, detail). (b) War Serpent worn on ankle of Ruler A, Lintel 2 Temple 1 at Tikal (after Jones and Satterthwaite 1982: fig. 69). (c) War Serpent on Codex Style Maya vessel (after Robicsek and Hales 1981: 216). (d) War Serpent from exterior of painted *olla*, Burial 169, Jaina (drawn after item on display in the Museo Nacional de Antropología, Mexico City). (e) Shield Jaguar emerging out of mouth of War Serpent, Yaxchilan Lintel 25 (after Graham and von Euw 1977: fig. 55, detail). (f) War Serpent placed on surface of shield, Late Classic sculpture from La Canteada, Honduras (after Pahl 1987: fig. 16).

bicephalic form of this serpent, which hovers above a burning bowl of bloodied paper. Shield Jaguar appears not only with a balloon headdress but also with a lance and shield (fig. 7e). On the Copan Hieroglyphic Staircase, a series of figures sit on thrones while wearing the War Serpent headdress (see Gordon 1902: plates VII, X, XIV, XV). The figures carry rectangular shields, in one case with an owl, and in another example with Tlaloc. In view of the shields and other costume details, it appears that the seated rulers are depicted as Teotihuacan warriors. A fragmentary sculpture from the nearby site of La Canteada, Honduras, depicts the serpent in profile on a shield, again an explicit reference to war (fig. 7f). On the west wall of Tikal Structure 5D–57, dated to the seventh century A.D. (Miller 1978: 66), the serpent again appears in the context of war. Here two of the serpents pass out of goggles worn on the forehead of a frontally facing warrior (*ibid.*: fig. 3).

Although the serpent entity may at times possess jaguar attributes, such as clawed limbs, it is most consistently represented as a serpent. Thus it commonly appears with a bifurcated tongue and the sinuous body of a serpent (e.g., figs. 6c–d, 8, 9a–c). The natural model of the serpent is based on the rattlesnake. At Acanceh, there is a fine Early Classic representation of the serpent with a rattlesnake body intertwined on a type of curving eccentric blade commonly found at Teotihuacan (fig. 8a).<sup>7</sup> It is noteworthy that at Acanceh

the feathered serpent also appears in the same stucco facade, indicating that they are distinct entities. The creature also appears with a rattlesnake tail on Jaina style figurines (fig. 8b). On Piedras Negras Stela 9, this serpent flanks a balloon warrior headdress, again with a rattlesnake tail (fig. 8c). Another example may be found in the lower center of a Late Classic Codex Style dish. Although the central body is replaced with a disk, the rattlesnake tail appears opposite the serpent head (fig. 8d).

On the Codex Style dish, a Maya lord sits on the serpent disk. He holds a burning crooked staff depicting the same creature and wears the balloon headdress conventionally associated with warriors in Teotihuacan and Late Classic Maya iconography (cf. Berlo 1976; Schele 1986). Andrea Stone (1989: 158) suggests that the short serpent staff may refer to an *atl-atl* spear-thrower, and compares the staff to the serpent *atl-atl* of Bonampak Stela 3. On this Bonampak monument, Chaan-Muan stands above a prisoner while wielding a serpent *atl-atl* with a burning foot. The headdress worn by Chaan-Muan is a late form of the serpent platelet helmet, with a smaller serpent curling out from the mouth of the mask. In profile, these platelet headdress serpents are identical to the serpent *alt-atl* (fig. 6d). In other words, the burning *atl-atl* is a manifestation of the same creature. Yet, whereas the principal headdress serpent has an exaggerated nostril distinct from the horizontal upper lip, the smaller platelet serpents and the *atl-atl* have the nostril merged into a single back-curving snout. An abalone shell reportedly from Tula, carved in Late Classic Maya style, depicts a Maya lord wearing the serpent headdress with this same sharply curving nose (Schele and Miller 1986: pl. 5).

In outline, the sharply backcurved snout of this serpent being is identical to the Xiuhcoatl, the turquoise fire serpent of Postclassic Central Mexico. To the Aztec, the Xiuhcoatl was preeminently the fire weapon of Huitzilopochtli, the solar war god. Selser (1902–1923,

lizard head and forelimbs. The reputed forelimbs are simply the flanges that commonly flare at the base of Teotihuacan points, just above the basal haft (cf. Sugiyama 1989: fig. 19). The actual head, with an open, tooth-filled mouth, is at the opposite end. I have suggested that the undulating obsidian serpent appearing at Teotihuacan is an ancestral form of the *itzcoatl* obsidian lightning serpent of Postclassic Central Mexico (Taube 1986: 76). In view of the Acanceh scene representing the War Serpent intertwined on a curving obsidian blade, it is quite possible that the Teotihuacan creature was also identified with obsidian and lightning.

7. At Teotihuacan, obsidian eccentrics are frequently in the form of crested serpents. Gamio (1922, I: Lam. 102) illustrates two particularly large examples. Gamio (*ibid.*) identifies these large eccentrics as lizards, but clearly he mistakes the blade hafts for the

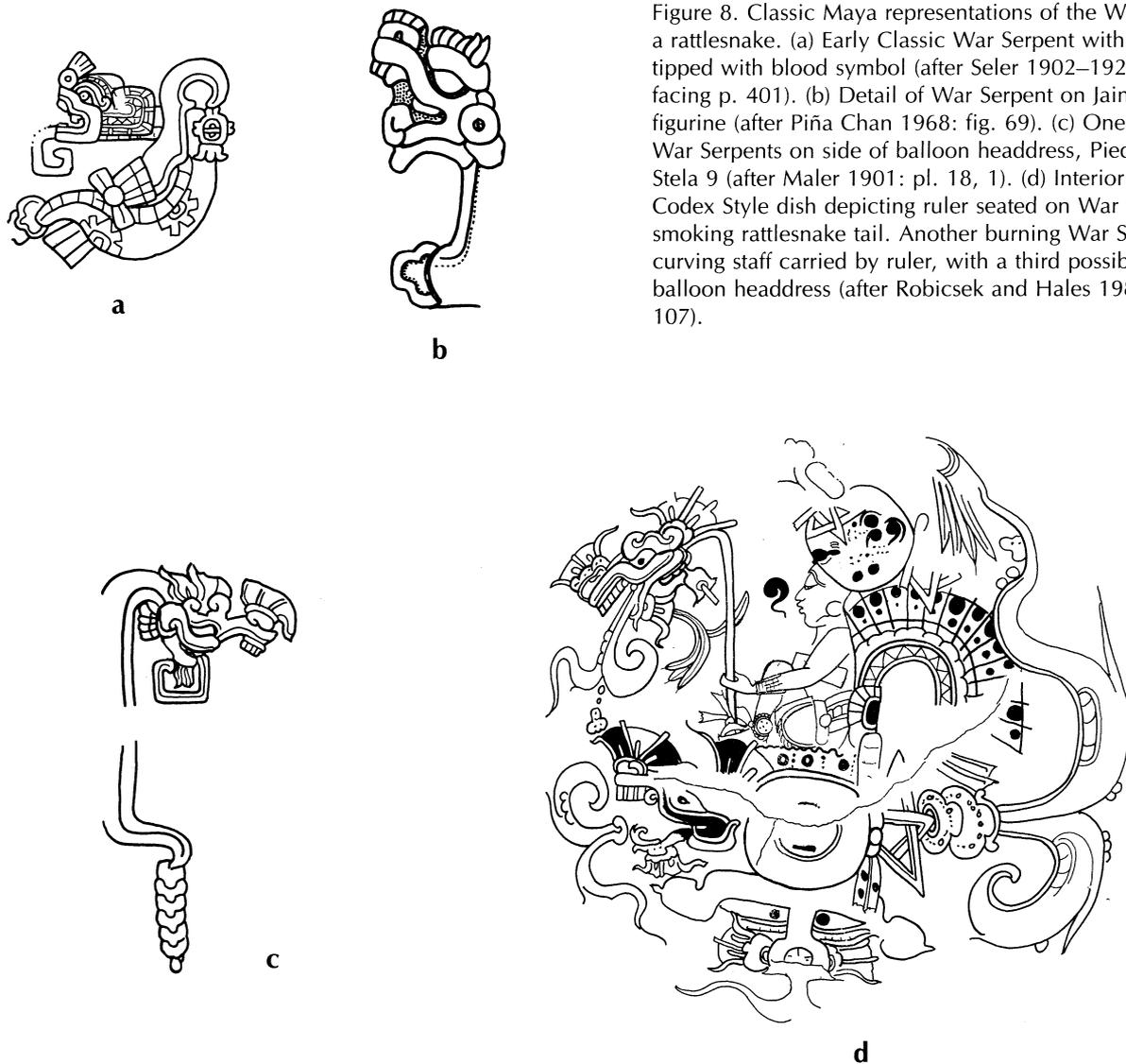


Figure 8. Classic Maya representations of the War Serpent as a rattlesnake. (a) Early Classic War Serpent with curving blade tipped with blood symbol (after Seler 1902–1923, V: fig. facing p. 401). (b) Detail of War Serpent on Jaina style figurine (after Piña Chan 1968: fig. 69). (c) One of pair of War Serpents on side of balloon headdress, Piedras Negras Stela 9 (after Maler 1901: pl. 18, 1). (d) Interior scene of Codex Style dish depicting ruler seated on War Serpent; note smoking rattlesnake tail. Another burning War Serpent tops curving staff carried by ruler, with a third possibly at front of balloon headdress (after Robicsek and Hales 1981: Vessel 107).

II: 396) has noted that the *Xiuhcoatl* weapon is identical to the blue *xiuhatl* spear-thrower frequently wielded by Huitzilopochtli and Xiuhtecuhtli in Aztec manuscripts. With its identification with the *atl-atl*, the Aztec *Xiuhcoatl* fire serpent is very much like the burning serpent *atl-atl* held by Chaan-Muan. Although I do believe that the Classic entity is an ancestral form of the Postclassic *Xiuhcoatl*, they are not entirely equivalent. Thus, for example, the Postclassic creature is named “turquoise serpent,” *xiuitl* being the Nahuatl word for “turquoise.” Turquoise could not have been a component of the Classic entity, because this stone was not widely introduced in Mesoamerica until the Early

Postclassic. In view of the pervasive association of the Classic creature with war, I will call it by the more noncommittal term of War Serpent rather than *Xiuhcoatl*.

In Classic Maya iconography, the War Serpent is consistently identified with fire. Thus it has been noted that flames frequently exude from the mouth of the creature (figs. 7c–d, 8d). A Late Classic full figure glyph from Copan depicts the War Serpent as the serpent foot of God K (fig. 9a). In this case, God K is rendered as its Mexican counterpart, Tlaloc, another god of rain and lightning. The War Serpent in turn replaces the conventional Bearded Dragon serving as the flaming

foot of God K.<sup>8</sup> A column from Chichen Itza depicts a descending War Serpent with probable flames placed on the serpent body (fig. 9b). On the roughly contemporaneous Stela 7 at Terminal Classic Bilbao, the War Serpent appears frontally, with curving serpent fangs and smoke volutes pouring off the snout (fig. 9c). The tip of the snout is pointed, much like the wedge-shaped ray of the Mixtec trapeze and ray year sign. I do not think this is fortuitous; both the War Serpent and the Postclassic Xiuhcoatl frequently appear with the trapeze and ray sign (e.g., figs. 6d, 8d). On the aforementioned Codex Style bowl, the year sign is placed on the tail of the basal War Serpent (fig. 8d). In the case of the Postclassic Xiuhcoatl, the year sign is frequently on the tail. For the Postclassic period, there is good reason for the turquoise Xiuhcoatl serpent to be identified with the year sign; in Nahuatl, the term *xiuitl* signifies “year” as well as “turquoise” (Molina 1977: 160). Among the Postclassic Mixtec, the year sign can be depicted as a frontally facing creature, complete with eyes frequently backed by feather tufts. The feather tufts also appear on the Postclassic Xiuhcoatl, and it is probable that the Mixtec zoomorphic year sign is a representation of the Xiuhcoatl (figs. 9d–e).

The extensive background provided by the Classic Maya imagery makes it possible to identify other images of the War Serpent of Teotihuacan. The War Serpent headdress is commonly found on Teotihuacan figurines where it appears frontally, at times without the lower jaw (figs. 10e–f). In form, it is virtually identical to War Serpent headdresses known for the Classic Maya and Zapotec (e.g., figs. 6c, 17, 19d–e). A Thin Orange *olla* contains a molded representation of a platelet War Serpent headdress worn by Tlaloc A (fig. 10a). It appears that at Teotihuacan this headdress can be traced to as early as the Miccaotli phase. There are a number of Miccaotli modeled figurines representing a figure seated on a throne (figs. 10c–d). With later mold-made Teotihuacan figures (figs. 10e–f), the throne figures are usually warriors, and a similar case can be made for the Miccaotli examples. For one, they wear thick collars, but more important, the figures appear with the War Serpent headdress. Just below the frontal

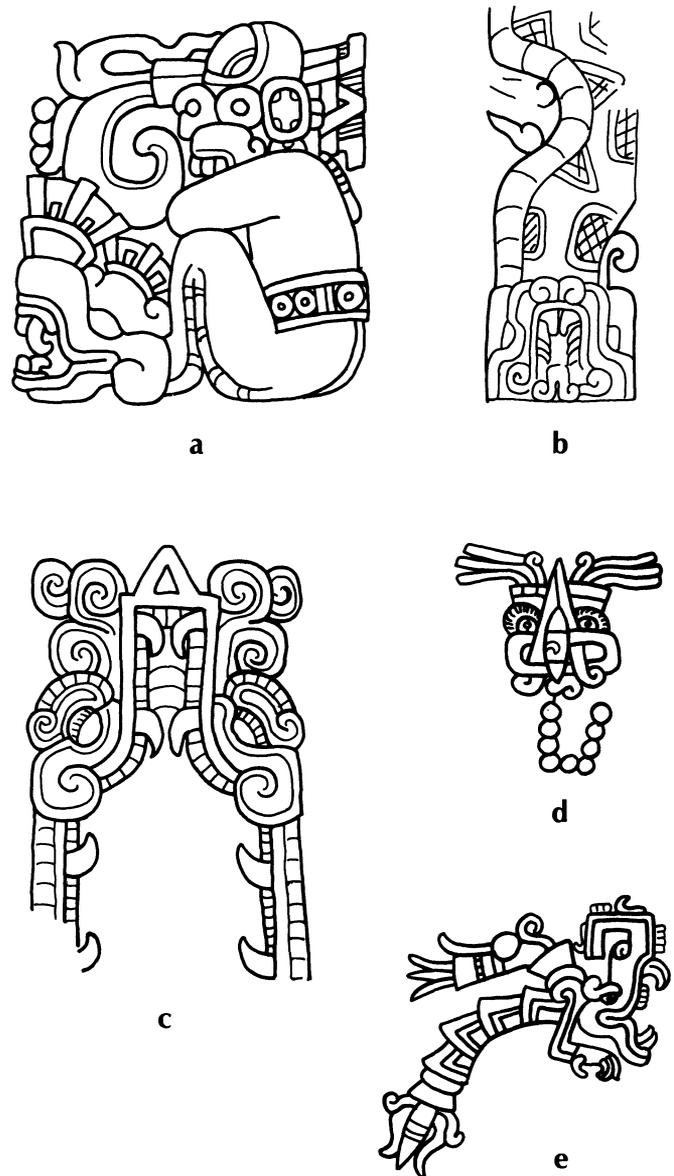


Figure 9. The fiery War Serpent and the Postclassic Xiuhcoatl turquoise fire serpent. (a) Maya full figure glyph of Mexicanized God K; note replacement of Tlaloc for head of God K and War Serpent for burning serpent foot of God K (after Proskouriakoff 1950: fig. 35). (b) Descending serpent with frontal War Serpent face; note probable flames at upper portion of body, Chichen Itza (after Seler 1902–1923, V: 304). (c) Frontal War Serpent face with smoke curls on snout, Stela 7, Bilbao (after Parsons 1969: pl. 34b). (d) Conflation of trapeze and ray year sign with frontal Xiuhcoatl serpent face; compare flanking tassels with Xiuhcoatl, Codex Nuttall, 39. (e) Postclassic example of Xiuhcoatl; note feather tassel on shoulder, Codex Nuttall, 76.

8. At Copan, the War Serpent appears with another representation of Tlaloc. On Stela 6, the bicephalic serpent bar is composed of two War Serpent heads from which Tlaloc faces emerge (cf. Maudslay 1889–1902, I: pl. 106). In this instance, the Copanecs are again substituting the Teotihuacan Tlaloc and War Serpent for the Classic Maya God K and Bearded Dragon.

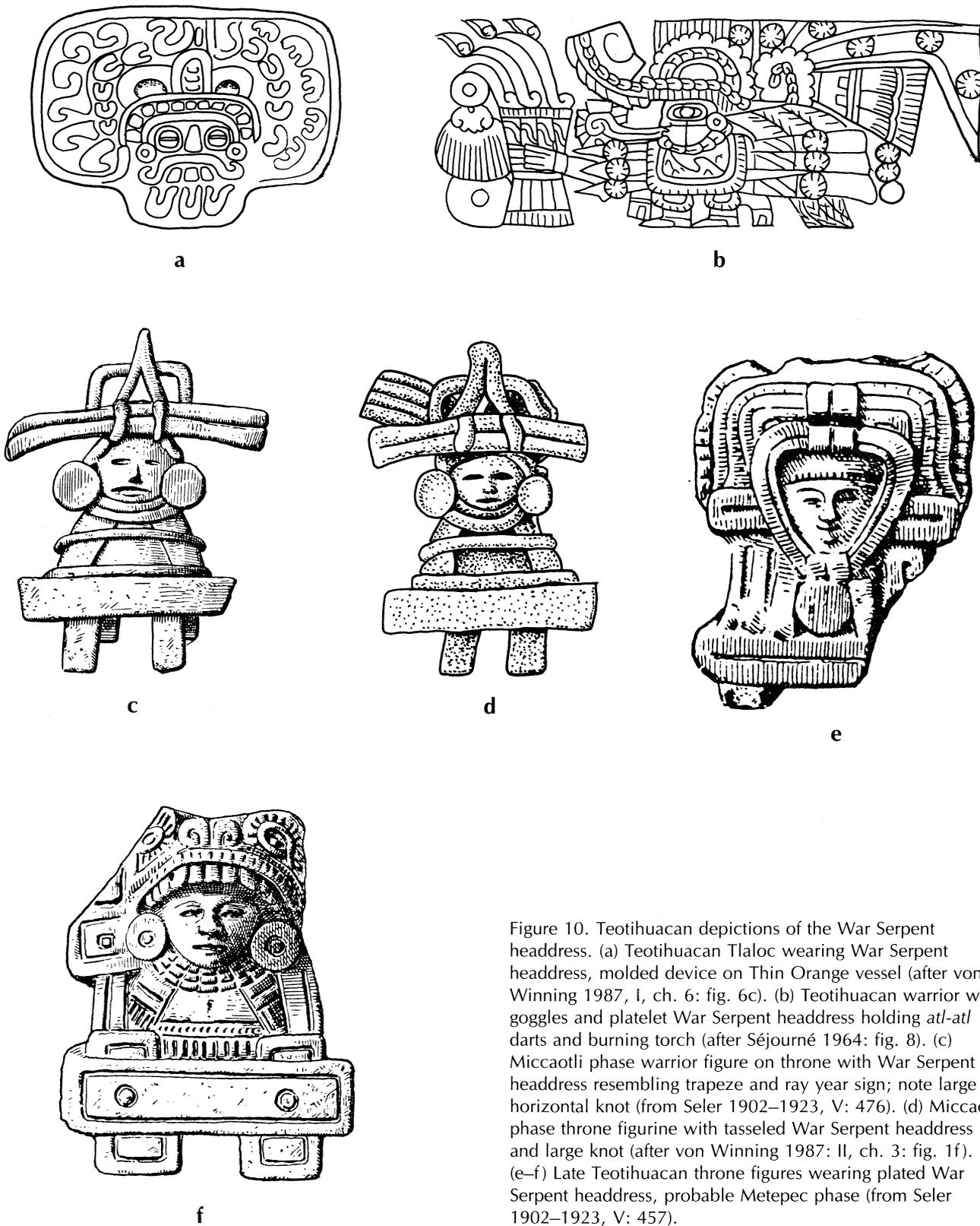


Figure 10. Teotihuacan depictions of the War Serpent headdress. (a) Teotihuacan Tlaloc wearing War Serpent headdress, molded device on Thin Orange vessel (after von Winning 1987, I, ch. 6: fig. 6c). (b) Teotihuacan warrior with goggles and platelet War Serpent headdress holding *atlatl* darts and burning torch (after Séjourné 1964: fig. 8). (c) Miccaotli phase warrior figure on throne with War Serpent headdress resembling trapeze and ray year sign; note large horizontal knot (from Seler 1902–1923, V: 476). (d) Miccaotli phase throne figurine with tasseled War Serpent headdress and large knot (after von Winning 1987: II, ch. 3: fig. 1f). (e–f) Late Teotihuacan throne figures wearing plated War Serpent headdress, probable Metepec phase (from Seler 1902–1923, V: 457).

serpent face, there is a long horizontal knot, which brings to mind the horizontal knot appearing with the Old Temple War Serpent headdress. With the upturned snout and flanking horizontal eyes, the Miccaotli War Serpent headdresses closely resemble the trapeze and ray year sign. In fact, von Winning (1987, II: 27) identifies the headdress not as a frontal serpent face, but as the year sign. The outline of the face, however, is virtually identical to the platelet War Serpent headdress appearing on the Thin Orange vessel (fig. 10a). Like the zoomorphic year sign of the Postclassic Mixtec, the Miccaotli figurine headdress seems to represent both the War Serpent and the year sign. One of the Miccaotli figurines originally had a pair of feather tufts behind each eye (fig. 10d), which is virtually identical to the pair of feather tufts appearing behind the head of the zoomorphic Mixtec year sign (fig. 9d).

Aside from the sculptures of the Temple of Quetzalcoatl, the cited representations of the War Serpent headdress at Teotihuacan have been frontal views. A profile view appears on a remarkable carved Teotihuacan vessel depicting a warrior with *atl-atl* darts and goggles wearing the War Serpent platelet helmet (fig. 10b). The zoomorphic headdress appears with the large eye, prominent nostril, and frontal teeth of the War Serpent, along with plating to suggest the mosaic armor. Like the platelet War Serpent headdress on the Temple of Quetzalcoatl, the headdress lacks a lower jaw.

If the examples from the Old Temple, figurines, and the ceramic vessel are headdress effigies of the War Serpent, are there representations of the actual being at Teotihuacan? René Millon (personal communication, 1989) has pointed out two possible instances of this entity in Teotihuacan mural painting (see Millon 1973: figs. 20b, 48b). Both creatures possess a sharply up-curving snout and featherless serpent bodies. Clearly, these two figures are not the feathered serpent; they may well portray the War Serpent, but until more examples are known their identification remains tentative.

In highland Mexico, representations of the War Serpent continue well into the Late Classic period. A number of late or epi-Teotihuacan style examples bridge the gap between the Classic period War Serpent and the Postclassic Xiuhcoatl. Although these figures are provided with the feather crests found with other examples of the War Serpent, they are clearly not Quetzalcoatl. At Arcelia, Guerrero, there is a stone monument identical in form to the La Ventilla ball court marker and the recent example found at Early Classic Tikal (fig. 11a). Like the Teotihuacan and Tikal

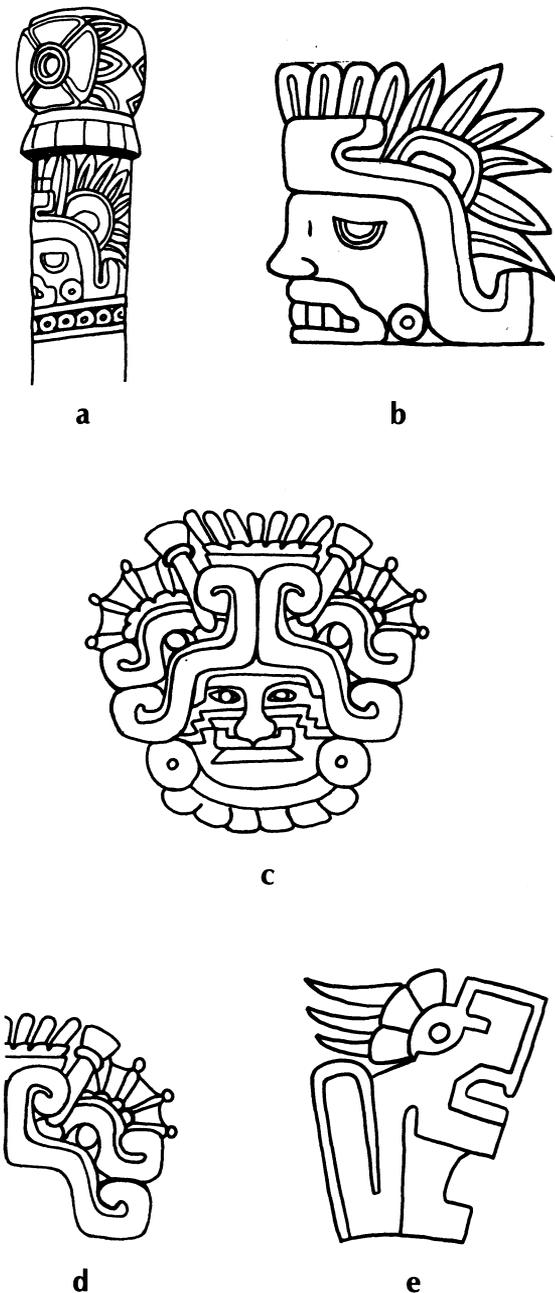


Figure 11. Late Classic and Early Postclassic depictions of the War Serpent and Xiuhcoatl. (a) Ball court marker from region of Arcelia, Guerrero (after Cepeda Cárdenas 1970: fig. 21). (b) Detail of head with War Serpent headdress (after Cepeda Cárdenas 1970: fig. 22, detail). (c) War Serpent headdress on Ixtapaluca Plaque (after Cepeda Cárdenas 1970: fig. 23e). (d) Profile of War Serpent face on Ixtapaluca Plaque headdress (after Cepeda Cárdenas 1970: fig. 23e, detail). (e) Early Xiuhcoatl from rim of Early Postclassic Toltec style back mirror excavated at Chichen Itza (after Bernal 1969: pl. 98).

monuments, the Guerrero example is a stone post supporting a disk, with a skirted ball placed at midsection. Although the upper portion of the Arcelia monument—the large stone disk—is missing, its resemblance to the Teotihuacan and Tikal examples is striking. On the lower portion of the monument, there is a human head wearing a crested War Serpent headdress, here without the platelet surface (fig. 11b). The snout of the creature is sharply upcurved, much like the Postclassic Xiuhtli. Cepeda Cárdenas (1970: fig. 23) compares the headdress to that found on the fine *tecali* plaque from Ixtapaluca, Chalco (fig. 11c). The Ixtapaluca plaque headdress bears a clear resemblance to Classic Maya examples of the War Serpent, as both a platelet headdress and a living entity (figs. 6–9a). When the Ixtapaluca plaque headdress is split into two profile views, it is readily evident that this serpent head is identical to the Arcelia example (fig. 11d). With their upturned snouts and prominent feather crests, the Arcelia and Ixtapaluca War Serpents are notably similar to the Xiuhtli serpents appearing on Early Postclassic Toltec back mirrors (fig. 11e). But although the War Serpent developed into the Postclassic Xiuhtli, the platelet serpent headdress appears to have ended during the Late Classic period.

### Lintel 2 of Temple 1, Tikal

The War Serpent is widely found among both the Early and Late Classic Maya. If it is so endemic to the Maya region, did the Maya actually consider it as a foreign device? The contexts in which the War Serpent appears indicate that it was perceived as a decidedly foreign element, thus it frequently occurs with Teotihuacan style costume and gods, such as Tlaloc (e.g., figs. 9a, 17 left). Lintel 2 of Tikal Temple 1 provides perhaps the strongest evidence that even the Late Classic Maya regarded the War Serpent as a foreign being deriving from highland Mexico, and specifically from the site of Teotihuacan.

Carved of hard *sapote* wood, Lintel 2 was originally composed of four beams spanning the middle doorway of Temple 1 at Tikal (fig. 12). Whereas the lintel in the exterior doorway of Temple 1 was plain, both Lintel 2 and the still more interior Lintel 3 were beautifully carved (Coe, Shook, and Satterthwaite 1961: 32). Both carved lintels bear similar scenes of a seated ruler backed by a great creature; in the case of Lintel 2, the creature is a serpent, and Lintel 3, a jaguar. Jones (1977) identifies the seated figure as Ruler A, also

known as Ah Cacau, who acceded to rule on 9.12.9.17.16, or in the year A.D. 682. It is widely accepted that this is the same ruler buried in the sumptuous tomb within the Temple 1 foundations. Unfortunately, both Lintels 2 and 3 are only partly preserved. Two beams of Lintel 2, composing one-half of the total scene, are entirely missing. The surviving

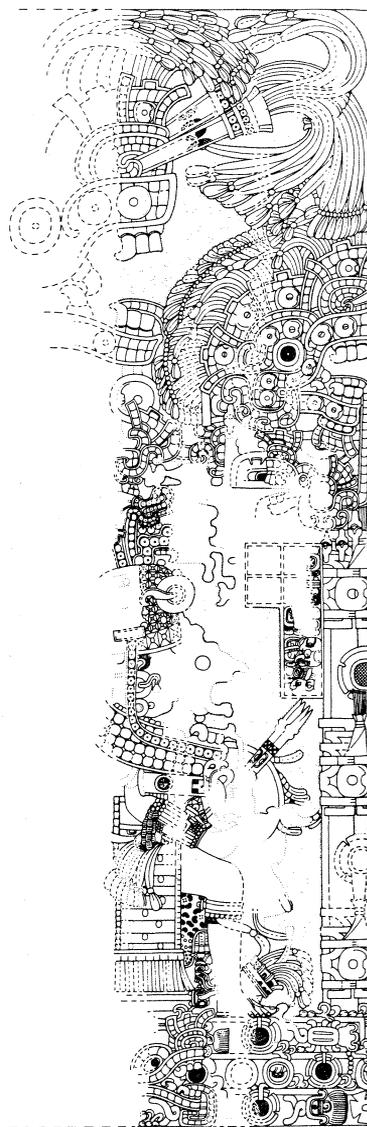


Figure 12. Lintel 2 of Tikal Temple 1, Ruler A with the War Serpent on a stepped structure marked with War Serpent, mirrors, and plants (from Jones and Satterthwaite 1982: fig. 69). Drawing: Courtesy of the Tikal Project, The University Museum, The University of Pennsylvania.

beams correspond to the front portion of the scene, with the seated lord facing out toward an ornamented vertical beam. Only the snout and lower jaw of the backing War Serpent are visible. Although it is possible to identify the head of this creature, the rest of the serpent's body cannot be reconstructed.

Lintel 2 depicts Ruler A seated before an architectonic element, evidently an ornamented post. Similar devices appear before Ruler A on Lintel 3 of Temple 1, and before Ruler B on Lintel 2 of Temple IV. In these two latter examples, the post element is topped with jaguar figures, the Waterlily Jaguar and G III of the Palenque Triad. The topping device on Lintel 2 of Temple 1, however, is the same War Serpent found looming above the seated lord. The surviving portion of Lintel 2 is filled with representations of the War Serpent; in all, there are eight now visible. Ruler A wears both a simple platelet helmet and a War Serpent mask. The lower jaw of the creature hangs on the thick Teotihuacan style collar covering his chest and shoulders. Ruler A is clearly portrayed as a warrior, and holds both a rectangular shield and series of short lances or darts of the type conventionally used with the Central Mexican *atl-atl*. Unfortunately, the object held in the ruler's right hand is effaced, but in view of the accompanying darts, it quite likely was an *atl-atl*.

Dressed in the battle regalia of the War Serpent, Ruler A sits on a pyramidal structure that fills the surviving lower portion of Lintel 2. Composed of three stepped platforms, the building is covered with iconographic motifs, the largest being the platelet serpent at the left portion of the surviving scene. I suspect that these elements describe and label a particular place and structure, that is, they serve as an iconographic toponym. Marcus (1976: figs. 4.2, 4.15) notes that on Tikal Stela 1 and Yaxchilan Stela 4 the basal register of each monument bears an iconographic form of the main sign constituting the local emblem glyph. Thus, on Tikal Stela 1, there is a zoomorphic head with the bound hair knot typically forming the main sign of the Tikal emblem glyph. The cleft sky constituting the main sign of the Yaxchilan emblem glyph occurs as the cleft forehead of a Baktun sky bird at the base of Yaxchilan Stela 4. In recent ground-breaking work, Stuart and Houston (1987) demonstrate that toponyms are extremely common in Classic Maya epigraphy and art. Stuart and Houston (*ibid.*) note that in the Postclassic Dresden Codex, particular regions occurring in the basal portion of scenes are frequently also mentioned in the accompanying text (e.g.,

Dresden, pp. 66c–69c). Stuart and Houston (*ibid.*) describe a similar pattern on Classic monuments, where place names appear both as epigraphic toponyms and as iconographic elements in the accompanying scenes. According to Stuart and Houston (*ibid.*), emblem glyphs denote regional polities and frequently derive from the name of a particularly important place at the central site. In this perspective, the figures on Tikal Stela 1 and Yaxchilan Stela 4 are standing at the most venerated places of Tikal and Yaxchilan.

Many of the Classic toponyms identified by Stuart and Houston (*ibid.*) include not only regional centers and polities, but also supernatural regions and particular structures. In the Classic texts, Stuart and Houston have identified ball courts, pyramids, sweat houses, and even stone monuments. Often a particular structure or monument is labeled with a proper name. A similar situation occurs on Lintel 2 of Tikal Temple 1. Here, however, the place name of a particular pyramid is described not epigraphically but only iconographically; no epigraphic reference survives in the extant portion of the text. Nonetheless, the basal stepped structure provides a detailed description of a particular place and structure.

On Lintel 2, the upper and lower step of the three-tiered platform contains a curious series of horizontal elements with a twisted device on their left side (figs. 12, 13a–b). Two intact examples appear at the right side of the structure, with others partially obscured behind the serpent at the left. The twisted element can be identified as a stylized representation of roots. This convention for roots can be found at Teotihuacan and other Classic period sites (figs. 13c–f). In the Lintel 2 scene, these roots are attached to two types of plants—one spiked, the other resembling a tufted ball. Kubler (1976: 173) notes that the spiked plant is a Tikal representation of the *biznaga*, or barrel cactus of arid highland Mexico. Almost identical examples appear in the mural paintings of Teotihuacan and later art of highland Mexico (fig. 14). First identified by Séjourné (1959: 26–27), the Teotihuacan *biznaga* has the same ovoid outline, yellow capping flower, and curving red-tipped spines found with species of *Ferocactus*. According to Kubler (1976: 173), the barrel cactus in Lintel 2 refers to the arid site of Teotihuacan.

Although Kubler (1976: 173) notes that the spiked plant of Lintel 2 represents a barrel cactus with its roots, he considers the other plant to be a bird wing, and makes no mention of the accompanying roots. Kubler calls attention to a very similar device in the

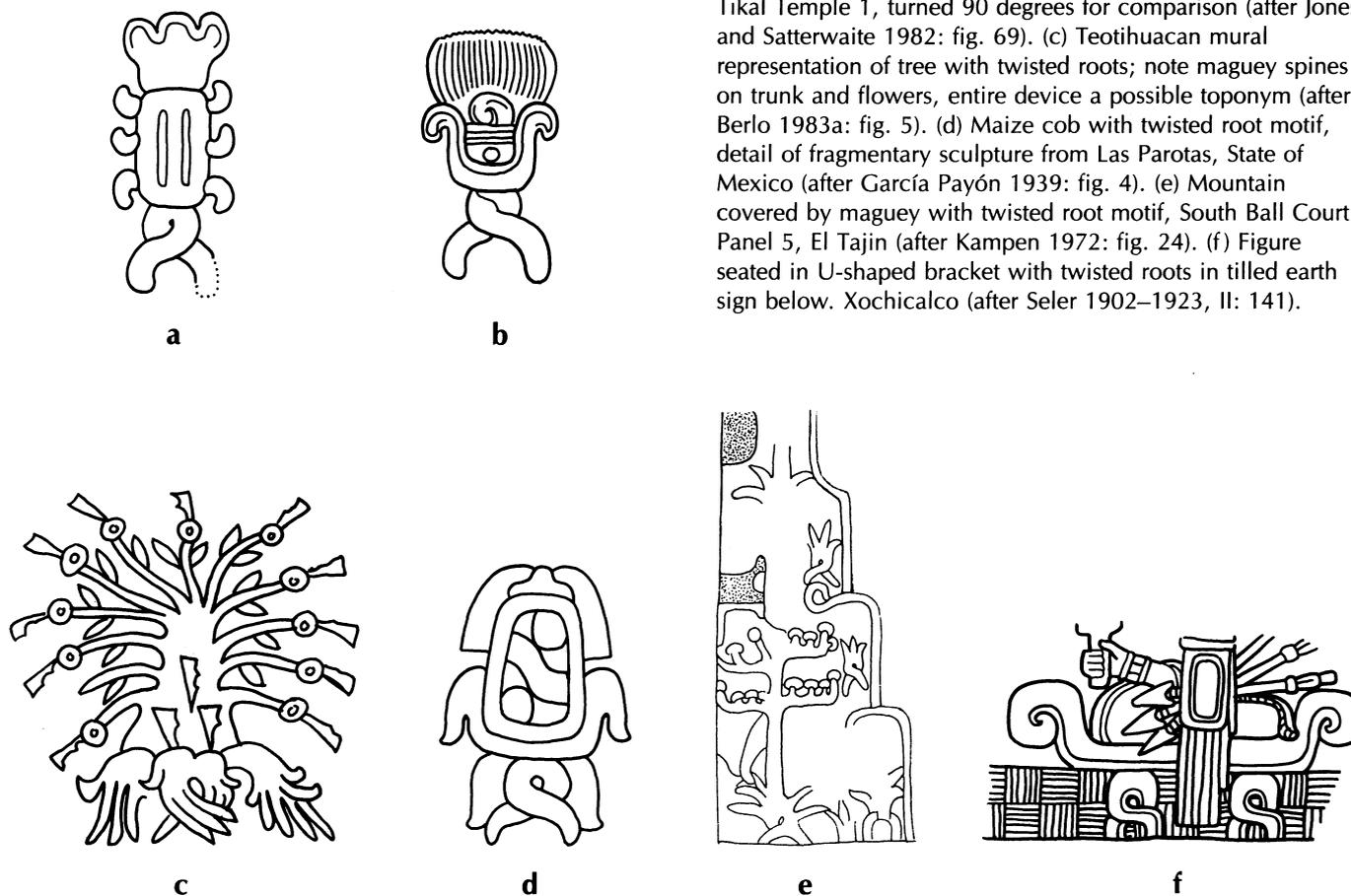


Figure 13. The twisted root motif in Classic Mesoamerica. (a–b) Plants with twisted roots from basal portion of Lintel 2, Tikal Temple 1, turned 90 degrees for comparison (after Jones and Satterwaite 1982: fig. 69). (c) Teotihuacan mural representation of tree with twisted roots; note maguery spines on trunk and flowers, entire device a possible toponym (after Berlo 1983a: fig. 5). (d) Maize cob with twisted root motif, detail of fragmentary sculpture from Las Parotas, State of Mexico (after García Payón 1939: fig. 4). (e) Mountain covered by maguery with twisted root motif, South Ball Court Panel 5, El Tajin (after Kampen 1972: fig. 24). (f) Figure seated in U-shaped bracket with twisted roots in tilled earth sign below. Xochicalco (after Selser 1902–1923, II: 141).

Acanceh reliefs (fig. 15b). I entirely agree with this comparison, although I consider both to be not bird wings but a plant—in particular, a species of coarse, tufted grass.<sup>9</sup> The same U-bracket forming the lower portion of the plant also appears as a platform for a warrior on the Pyramid of the Plumed Serpent at Xochicalco (fig. 13e). In this case, two sets of twisted roots are placed below, on the sign for tilled earth. Unfortunately, the upper portion of the Xochicalco scene is missing, and it is impossible to discern if a

plant originally rose behind the seated warrior. The tufted spire emerging from the top of the Acanceh examples is notably similar to Teotihuacan representations of grass (fig. 15c). Angulo (1972: 50, 62) considers the tufted elements at Teotihuacan to be *malinalli* grass. This coarse grass, often used for rope and tumplines in Central Mexico, is frequently represented with tufted spires (fig. 15d). In a recent thorough study of *malinalli* grass, Peterson (1983) considers *malinalli* to be grass species of the genus

9. In direct support of the plant identification, David Stuart (personal communication, 1989) notes that the Tikal and Acanceh examples are very similar to the T584 “inverted sky” glyph, a sign that Stuart reads as *pu*. Noting that *pu* means “bullrush” in a number of Mayan languages, Stuart suggests that the Acanceh examples represent rushes with cattails. However, the T584 element may have had a more generalized meaning, such as plant. On a fragmentary

Late Classic relief from Jonuta, the sign is repeatedly placed on a cacao tree (see Mayer 1980: pls. 23, 38). Although I find the *pu* value convincing, the Acanceh and Tikal forms bear more resemblance to Postclassic representations of grass than to rushes. However, if the bullrush identification proves to be correct, it is then possible that the Acanceh and Tikal plants refer to a Classic Tollan, or place of rushes.

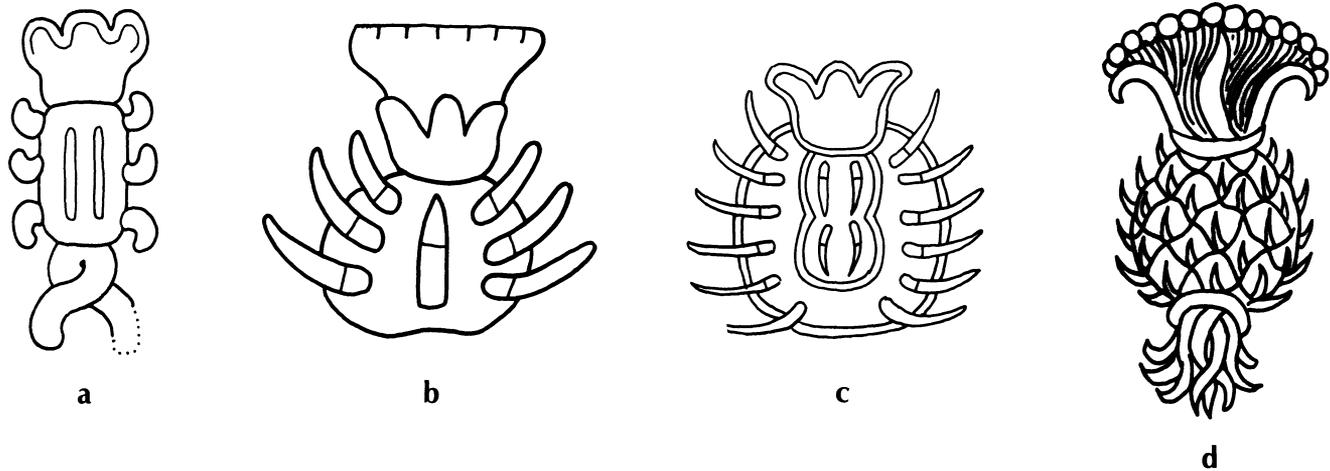


Figure 14. Representations of the *biznaga* barrel cactus. (a) Barrel cactus from Lintel 2, Temple 1 of Tikal; note roots, flower, and curving spines, vertical elements in center possibly refers to deep channeling in cactus (after Jones and Satterthwaite 1982: fig. 69). (b) Barrel cactus from mural in Zacuala compound, Teotihuacan (after Séjourné 1959: fig. 9). (c) Mural rendering of barrel cactus, Atetelco compound, Teotihuacan (after Miller 1973: fig. 356). (d) Sixteenth-century depiction of barrel cactus, *Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca*, 5, recto.

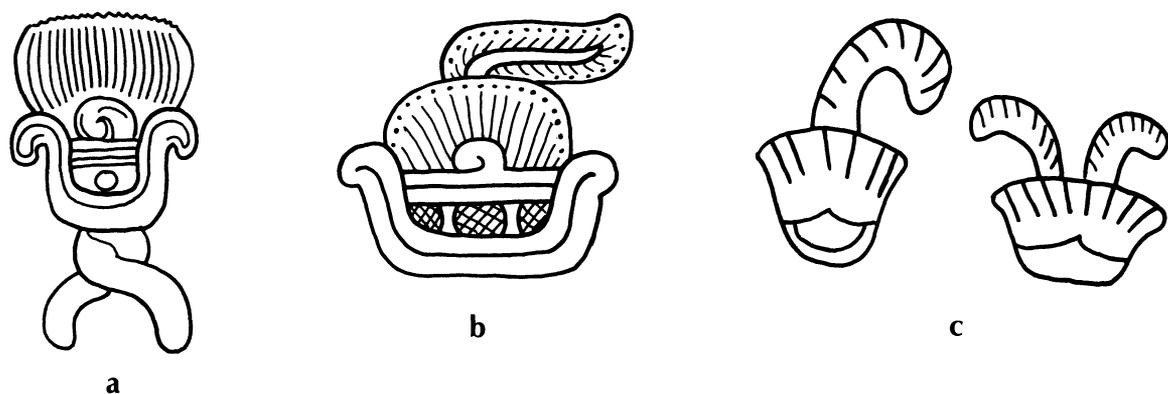


Figure 15. Representations of grass tufts at Tikal, Acanceh, and highland Mexico. (a) Grass tuft from Lintel 2, Tikal Temple 1 (after Jones and Satterthwaite 1982: fig. 69). (b) Grass tuft with tassel, detail of stucco relief from Acanceh, Yucatan (after Seler 1902–1923, V, sec. 2, no. 4: Tafel 11). (c) Teotihuacan representations of tasseled grass from Atetelco compound (after Villagra 1971: fig. 18). (d) Tasseled grass appearing as the Postclassic day sign for Malinalli (after Codex Borgia, 13).

*Muhlenbergia Schrebner*. Peterson (ibid.: 116–117) notes that the *malinalli* grasses are native to arid highland Mexico: “Like many of the *Muhlenbergia* grasses, these species have a wide geographic distribution, up to Baja California in the north, throughout the western states, and south from Puebla to the state of Oaxaca; all display great tolerance for both arid and semiarid regions.” The area described for species of *malinalli* is virtually identical to that of the barrel cactus.

Particular types of plants frequently appear in Classic and Postclassic toponyms of highland Mexico. A famous example is the nopal cactus of Tenochtitlan, but many others can be found in the Codex Mendoza and, evidently, at Classic Teotihuacan as well (see Berlo 1983a: 15–16, figs. 5–8). It appears that the barrel cactus and the coarse tufted grass serve to refer, almost in couplet form, to an arid region of highland Mexico, a place entirely foreign to the moist and humid Peten.

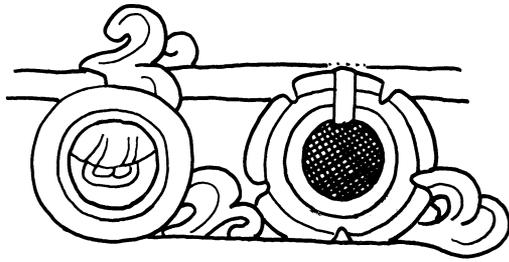
It has been noted that the Teotihuacan Temple of Quetzalcoatl contains a series of great feathered mirrors. Along with the highland plants, the stepped structure of Lintel 2 has a series of circular devices with notched rims. The center of these disks is crosshatched, probably to depict another material. The same notched disk is twice repeated on the post in front of Ruler A. On the middle tier of the basal structure, the notched elements alternate with disks containing a central eye (fig. 16a). Both disks probably represent mirrors. Both Klein (1976: 208–213) and I (Taube 1988) have noted the widespread association of mirrors with eyes in Mesoamerica. Frequently, human eyes can substitute for the mirror face. A clear example occurs on a Teotihuacan style vessel from Tikal Burial 10, where the center of a mirror chest piece is replaced by an eye (fig. 16b).

Unlike Teotihuacan mirrors, which tend to have rims smoothly circular in outline, Classic Maya mirror rims frequently have a notched or coglike appearance. With its notched rim, the other disk on the Lintel 2 structure resembles other Classic Maya mirrors placed on platforms. Two Piedras Negras accession monuments, Stelae 6 and 33, depict similar disks on the platform supporting the acceding lord (figs. 16e–f). Another architectonic example of the notched mirror occurs on Naranjo Stela 32, here on the tiers of a sky band platform (fig. 16g). The disks on Piedras Negras Stela 6 and Naranjo Stela 32 both have the central face broken into a series of elements resembling the platelet mosaic pattern. In this case, however, the mosaic refers to iron

pyrite, not shell. In both Early and Late Classic Maya art, the segmented mosaic surface of the iron pyrite mirrors is frequently delineated by scalelike elements or widely spaced cross-hatching (figs. 16c–d). The stepped structure at the base of Lintel 2 is a House of Mirrors.

Finally, there is the great serpent occupying the left side of the surviving portion of the Lintel 2 structure. I suspect that this element, even more than the plants, points to a particular place in Central Mexico. In concept, the serpent head is very much like the zoomorphic knotted heads at the base of Tikal Stela 1 and the recently discovered Stela 39, which refer to the site center of Tikal. In the case of Lintel 2, however, the serpent head refers not to Tikal, but to the center of Teotihuacan—the Ciudadela and the Temple of Quetzalcoatl. The only known Classic period structure emblazoned with the War Serpent in highland Mexico is the Temple of Quetzalcoatl at Teotihuacan. At Teotihuacan, monumental carvings of the War Serpent have been found only at the Temple of Quetzalcoatl. Although it is entirely possible that other representations will be encountered in other sectors of the city, it is highly unlikely that they will be of the monumental scale found at the Temple of Quetzalcoatl, the third largest pyramid at Teotihuacan. The arid plants, mirror medallions, and War Serpent emblazoned on the Lintel 2 platform all suggest highland Mexico and the Temple of Quetzalcoatl at Teotihuacan. It appears that this structure, devoted at its onset to a cult of war, was one of the more renowned pyramids of Classic Mesoamerica. The placement of Ruler A on this pyramidal structure suggests a conscious and direct affiliation with Teotihuacan. This association need not be taken too literally; it is unlikely that Ruler A actually

Figure 16. Classic representations of mirrors in the lowland Maya area. (a) Mirror medallions from tiered structure at base of Lintel 2 of Temple 1, Tikal (after Jones and Satterthwaite 1982: fig. 69). (b) Teotihuacan style rendering of warrior with eye occurring in center of mirror chest piece; Early Classic stucco-painted bowl, Tikal Burial 10 (after Coggins 1975: fig. 53). (c) Aged male wearing two pyrite mosaic mirrors, detail of Late Classic polychrome (after Robicsek and Hales 1982: no. 11). (d) Pyrite mosaic mirror held by Tikal ruler Jaguar Paw, detail from looted Early Classic incensario (after Andre Emmerich and Perls Galleries 1984: no. 45). (e) Pyrite mosaic mirror placed on scaffold structure, detail of Stela 6, Piedras Negras (after Maler 1901: pl. 15, 3). (f) Mirror on scaffold throne, detail of Stela 33, Piedras Negras (after Maler 1901: pl. 26, 2). (g) Mirrors on throne structure, detail of Stela 32, Naranjo (after Graham 1978, II: 85).



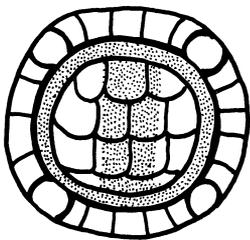
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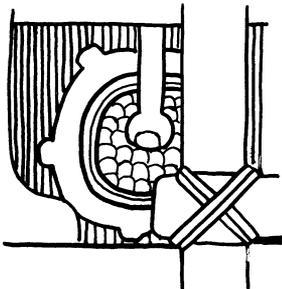
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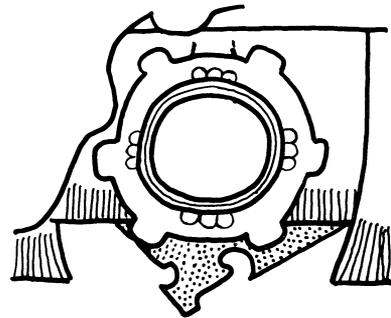
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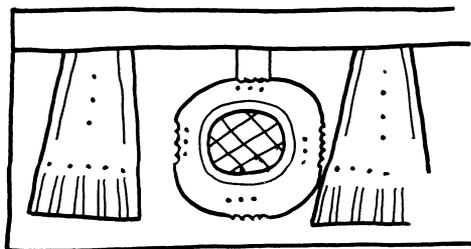
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visited Teotihuacan by pilgrimage, much less by conquest. Nonetheless, the tiered platform at the base of Lintel 2 does reveal a substantial knowledge of the environment and sacred architecture of Teotihuacan.

### Teotihuacan war iconography in Classic Oaxaca

Many researchers have noted that much of the Teotihuacan style iconography found in the Maya region is based on war (e.g., Kubler 1976; Berlo 1976, 1983b; Schele 1986; Stone 1989). Thus Berlo (1983b: 80) notes a pervasive concern with warrior imagery in the Teotihuacan style art of Escuintla: "The figural incense burners and tripod vessels recovered from Escuintla emphatically depict a concern with a religious ethos based on militarism." Stone (1989) has recently noted that on the "warrior stelae" of Piedras Negras, local Maya rulers consciously identified themselves with a war complex from Teotihuacan. The same situation occurs on Lintel 2 of Tikal Temple 1, where Ruler A is seated on a foreign Teotihuacan structure, probably the Temple of Quetzalcoatl. This is repeated on a smaller scale with Jaina style figurines depicting Maya lords seated within War Serpent structures (fig. 17). In these instances, it is clear that the Teotihuacan



Figure 17. Late Classic Jaina style figurines depicting seated Maya lords wearing War Serpent headdresses; War Serpents are placed on the roofs of both structures; note Tlaloc on left structure (from Piña Chan 1968: Lam. 21, 20).

imagery represents not foreign invasion, but a local adoption and manipulation of Teotihuacan war regalia and iconography.

Like the lowland Maya, the Classic Zapotec of Oaxaca also adopted a complex system of Teotihuacan warrior iconography. Many of the foreign elements are identical to those also found among the Classic Maya. An example is the Jaguar Butterfly, an important iconographic entity among the Classic Maya and Zapotec as well as at Teotihuacan (fig. 18). Berlo (1983b) suggests that among the Zapotec the Jaguar Butterfly was a local Zapotec interpretation of the Teotihuacan warrior butterfly. However, the Jaguar Butterfly is also widely found in the Maya region. A Teotihuacan style mural from Xelha, on the Caribbean coast of Yucatan, depicts a warrior wearing a Jaguar Butterfly headdress (fig. 18b). This same iconographic entity is also found farther south, on polychrome vases from Altun Ha, here with both the curling proboscis and antennae found with Teotihuacan style butterflies (fig. 18c). At Teotihuacan, the Jaguar Butterfly also occurs in the form of butterflies displaying the characteristic fangs of the jaguar (fig. 18a).

Teotihuacan war regalia commonly appears on Classic Zapotec stone monuments, urns, and mural paintings. On the Estela Lisa relief discovered by Acosta (1958–1959), four individuals march toward a Zapotec lord backed by a temple structure (fig. 19a). Marcus (1980) notes that all four individuals appear to be Teotihuacan emissaries. Although they do not wield weapons, the Teotihuacan figures wear platelet headdresses and shell collars associated with Teotihuacan warriors. Males with platelet headdresses and the warrior eye rings appear on Classic Zapotec urns. At times these figures wear an asymmetric bird in the platelet headdress (fig. 19c). Berlo (1984) notes that the asymmetric bird headdress is found not only with warrior figures at Teotihuacan, but also on Stela 5 of Uaxactun.

The War Serpent headdress occurs frequently on Classic Zapotec urns and whistles (Boos 1966: 92–111, 130–132). In form, it is almost identical to the frontally facing jawless War Serpent headdress found at Teotihuacan and the Maya region. One slight difference, however, is the occasional addition of profile serpent faces at the sides of the headdress. Additionally, the face may be topped with the eyes and proboscis of the butterfly. Among the Classic Zapotec, the War Serpent headdress also alludes to war. Thus one Zapotec urn depicts a female wearing the



a



b



c

Figure 18. The Classic Jaguar Butterfly at Teotihuacan and in the Maya region. (a) Butterfly with jaguar mouth, detail of incised Teotihuacan vessel (after Seler 1902–1923, V: 515). (b) Warrior wielding shield and *atl-atl* with Jaguar Butterfly headdress, detail of mural from Xelha, Yucatan. Drawing: Karl A. Taube, from original. (c) Jaguar Butterfly appearing on Late Classic vase, Altun Ha, Belize (after Pendergast 1967).

headdress while she wields a shield and weapon (Boos 1966: fig. 83). In many examples, the serpent face is delineated with the platelet pattern, making it clear that the War Serpent platelet headdress was known among the Classic Zapotec (figs. 19d–e). In at least one instance, the Zapotec platelet headdress is topped with a horizontal knot—immediately recalling the War Serpent knot on the Temple of Quetzalcoatl at Teotihuacan and the Miccaotli phase figurines (fig. 19e).

During excavations in the patio overlying Tomb 103 at Monte Alban, a remarkable cache was discovered (Caso 1947: 181, 183). The cache contained sixteen figurines, five of which are relatively large and richly costumed. One of the smaller figures is a miniature Huehuetotl censer, virtually identical to examples found at Teotihuacan. The costuming of the five larger figurines also points to Teotihuacan. These individuals wear thick collars, back ruffs, and zoomorphic platelet

headdresses. Two of the platelet headdresses depict the owl, a creature widely identified with war at Teotihuacan (von Winning 1948). The other three headdresses bear the War Serpent, with its upturned agnathid snout (fig. 20a). Aside from the beaked mask, which is found on all five figurines, the costume of the War Serpent figures is strikingly similar to a Late Classic Jaina style figure seated within a War Serpent structure (fig. 17, right).

In addition to the Huehuetotl censer and the costuming, the Monte Alban cache contains another Teotihuacan-derived trait: three of the figures hold large circular mirrors to their torsos. Circular mirrors are fairly rare in Classic Zapotec iconography; when round mirrors do appear, they are frequently on figures exhibiting Teotihuacan traits (e.g., fig. 19b). With their raised segmented rims, the cache figurine mirrors are in strong Teotihuacan style.

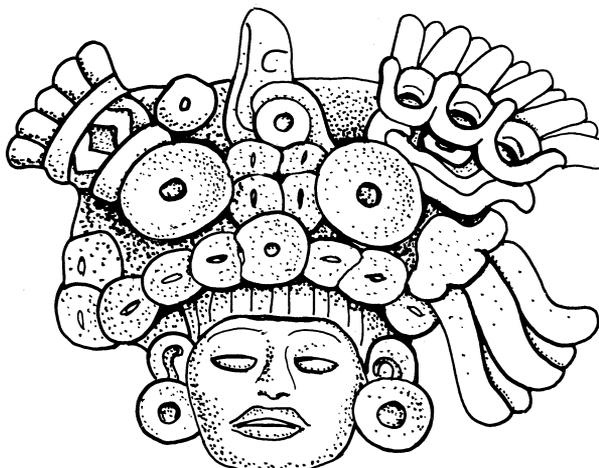
Nicholson and Berger (1968) present a number of



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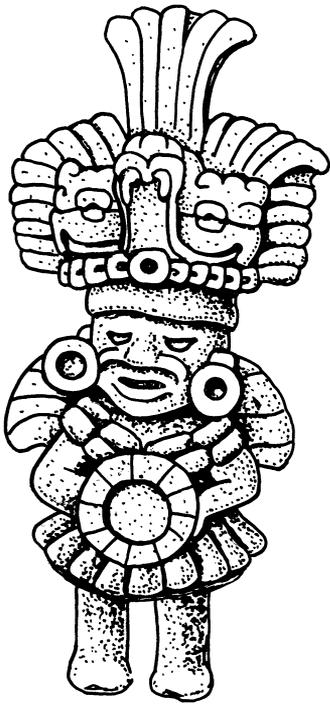


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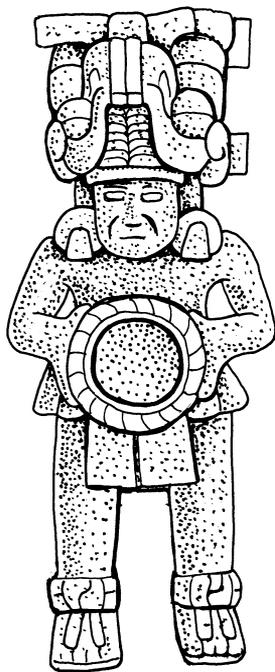
Figure 19. The platelet headdress in Classic Zapotec iconography. (a) The Estela Lisa, Monte Alban. Four Teotihuacan figures, at least three with platelet headdresses walk toward Zapotec ruler (from Acosta 1958–1959: fig. 16). (b) Zapotec deity dressed as Teotihuacan warrior with platelet headdress, shell collar, goggled eyes, and back mirror; other possible burning mirrors placed in headdress, Tomb 105, Monte Alban (after Miller 1988: fig. 4). (c) Detail of Zapotec urn representing male wearing Teotihuacan warrior dress; note platelet headdress with goggles and asymmetric bird (after Boos 1966: fig. 353). (d–e) Figurine whistle wearing War Serpent headdress with platelet edging (from Caso and Bernal 1952: fig. 294g–h).



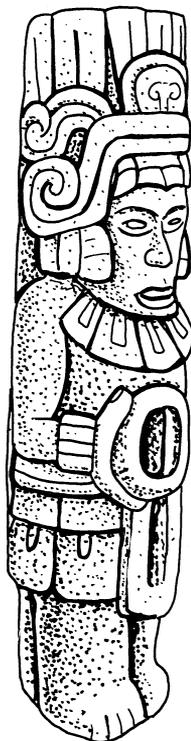
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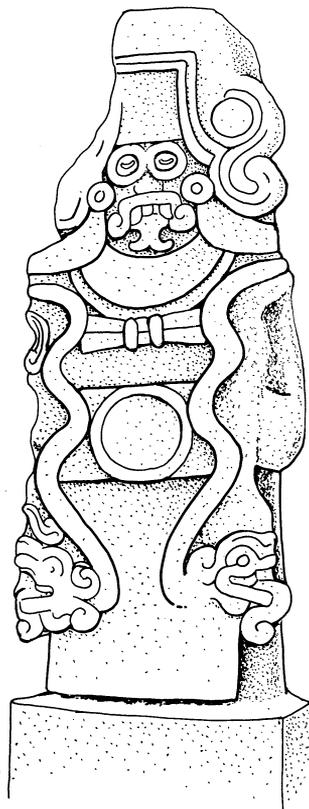
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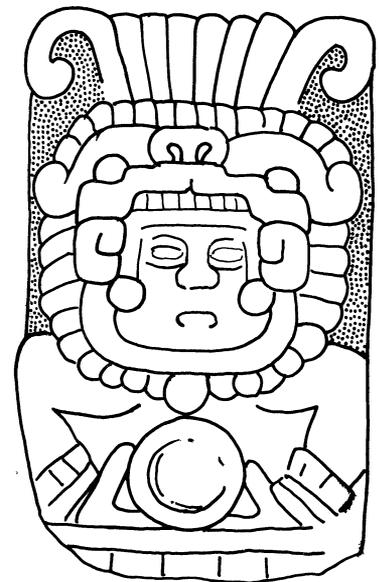
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Figure 20. Late Classic and Early Postclassic figures wearing War Serpent headdresses while holding circular mirrors. (a) Figure from cache in Patio of Tomb 103, Monte Alban (detail after Easby and Scott 1970: fig. 163). (b) Female figure from Xochicalco (after Nicholson and Berger 1968: fig. 15). (c) Figure with large petal-rimmed mirror, from Ixtacamaxtitlan, Puebla (after Nicholson and Berger 1968: fig. 19). (d) Figure possibly from Tlaxcala region (after Nicholson and Berger 1968: fig. 18). (e) Figure with burning serpents, La Morelia, Guatemala (after Clark 1978: pl. 1). (f) Figure with probable mirror, Tula (after de la Fuente et al. 1988: pl. 133).

Late Classic monumental sculptures of standing figures holding large disks against their abdomens. At least three of the illustrated examples wear the War Serpent headdress. Like the figures from the Tomb 103 patio cache (fig. 20a), they appear to be holding large round mirrors (figs. 20b–d). The same theme also occurs on a probable Terminal Classic monument from La Morelia, Guatemala (fig. 20e). Bearing the visage of Tlaloc, the figure wears the War Serpent headdress and displays a prominent disk on the abdomen. In addition, the figure is flanked by two undulating serpents. Smoke emanates from the mouths of the snakes, and one of the creatures clearly bears flame volutes. It is quite likely that these undulating fire serpents represent the burning lightning bolts of Tlaloc. An Early Postclassic form of the mirror figure appears at Tula (fig. 20f); it is clear that the headdress is identical to that found with the crouching figures at Tula Structure B and the Temple of the Warriors at Chichen Itza. By the Early Postclassic period, this War Serpent figure can be regarded as the Xiuhtecuhtli, the same entity that appears in the encircling turquoise rim of Toltec pyrite mirrors (e.g., fig. 11e).

### The cult of sacred war

Clearly, the Teotihuacan war iconography found among the Classic Zapotec and Maya does not derive from a naive use of alien and poorly understood elements gathered piecemeal from a foreign source. Instead the local manipulation of the Teotihuacan imagery by the Maya and Zapotec reveals an extensive understanding of the concepts underlying the iconographic conventions. The ideological significance of this war imagery must have been profound, not only for the Zapotec and Maya, but obviously also for the inhabitants of Teotihuacan. Like the later Aztec, the Teotihuacanos appear to have linked the cult of war to the cosmogonic acts of creation. Moreover, just as the Aztec sources indicate, much of the symbolism surrounding the Late Postclassic war cult seems to have originated in the sacred pyre at Teotihuacan.

To the Teotihuacanos, war was closely identified with fire. Thus, in Teotihuacan mural paintings, flames often emanate from armed warriors (e.g., Miller 1973: figs. 195, 336). Berlo (1983b: 83) notes the almost exclusive representation of warriors on Teotihuacan style Escuintla censers. Berlo (ibid.: 83–86) also mentions the widespread association of Teotihuacan warriors with butterflies and argues convincingly that the butterfly warriors found among the Postclassic

Toltec and Aztec were a legacy from Classic Teotihuacan. It is generally accepted that like the Aztec and other Postclassic peoples of highland Mexico, the Teotihuacanos identified butterflies with fire. Thus, like the individuals spouting flames, the Teotihuacan butterfly warriors were probably considered as fiery entities. The Teotihuacan War Serpent falls squarely within the Teotihuacan war/fire complex. An ancestral form of the Postclassic Xiuhtecuhtli, the War Serpent is frequently found with flames, and can be considered as a form of fire serpent. For the Late Postclassic inhabitants of Central Mexico, the fire serpent was identified with two important war gods, Huitzilopochtli and Xiuhtecuhtli. Seler (1963, I: 90, 190) notes that as patron of the ninth day, Atl, Xiuhtecuhtli was a god of war, and thus is frequently depicted with the sign *atl-tlachinolli*, or “burning-water,” a basic metaphor for war. According to Seler (ibid., II: 195), Xiuhtecuhtli was “el representante de la guerra.”

Francisco Hernández (1946, I: 65) mentions that the ritual battles of the Aztec flower wars were initiated by setting a pyre between the two warring groups. To the Aztec, the sacred flower wars, the *xochiyaoyotl*, owed their origin to the fiery creation of the sun at Teotihuacan. In the sixteenth-century accounts, the sun and the moon were created in a great sacrificial pyre at Teotihuacan. Due to the voluntary sacrifice of two particular gods—often named Nanahuatzin and Tecciztecatl—the sun and moon were born out of the flames.<sup>10</sup> The Florentine Codex and the *Leyenda de los Soles* accounts suggest that the Aztec military orders of the eagle and jaguar also originated in the flames at Teotihuacan. In both accounts, the eagle and jaguar throw themselves into the hearth after the sun and moon (Sahagún, 1950–1971, bk. 7: 6; Velázquez 1945: 122). The following excerpt from the Florentine Codex describes this important episode following the voluntary immolation of the sun and moon:

It is then told that then flew up an eagle, [which] followed them. It threw itself suddenly into the flames; it cast itself into them, [while] still it blazed up. Therefore its feathers are scorched looking and blackened. And afterwards followed an ocelot, when now the fire no longer burned high, and he came to fall in. Thus he was only blackened—smutted—in various places, and singed by the fire.

*Sahagún 1950–1971, bk. 7: 6*

10. For citations of the important ethnohistoric accounts of the creation of the sun at Teotihuacan, see Nicholson (1971: 401–402).

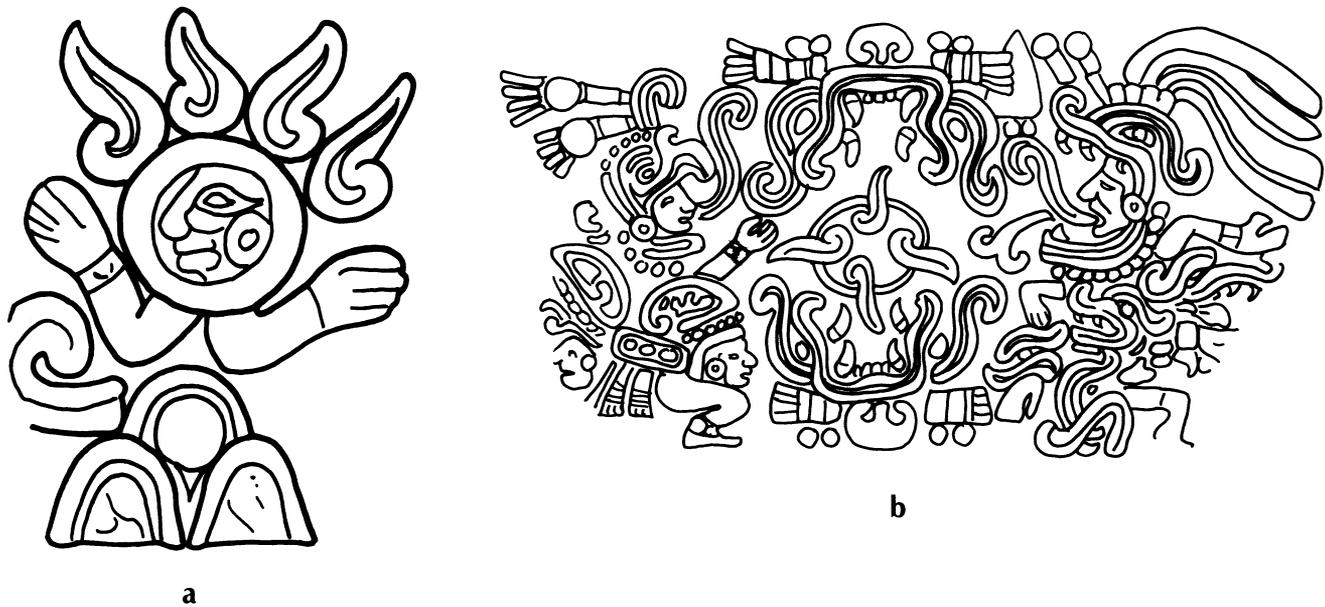


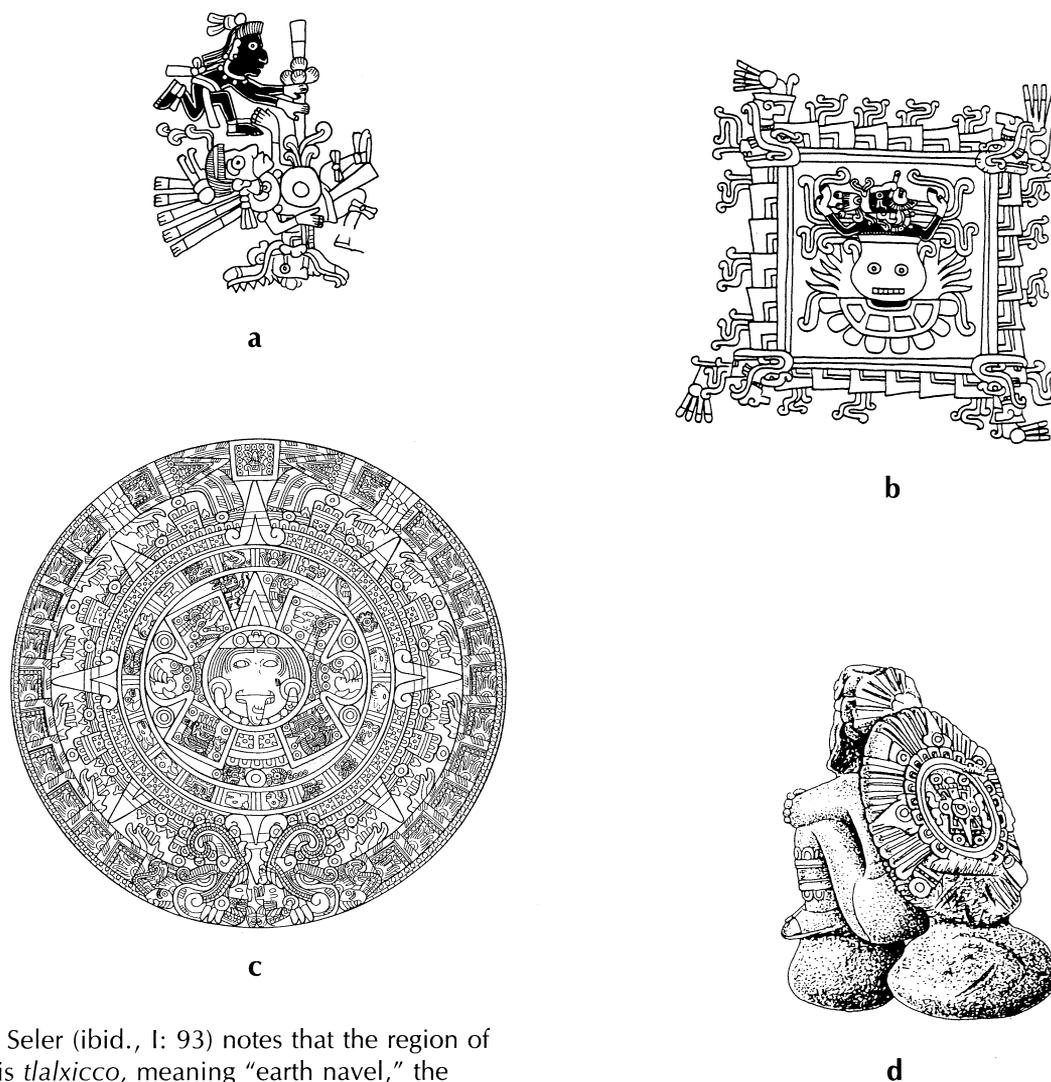
Figure 21. Esquintla representations of figures with burning disks. (a) Detail of Early Classic Esquintla vessel depicting figure in burning disk (after Hellmuth 1978: fig. 14). (b) Repetitive scene from Early Classic Esquintla vessel depicting two figures flanking burning disk or hearth. Figure to viewer's right wears War Serpent headdress with other War Serpent heads covering body (after Hellmuth 1978: fig. 12).

In the text it is stated that, because of this sacrificial event, valiant Aztec warriors were referred to as *quauhtocelotl*, or “eagle-jaguar.” It is therefore evident that Aztec bravery in battle was compared to the self-immolation at Teotihuacan.

Following Séjourné (1960), Vidarte de Linares (1968), and others, Millon (1981: 230) suggests that, during the Classic as well as Postclassic periods, Teotihuacan was considered to be the birthplace of the sun and moon. In support, Millon (*ibid.*) cites a number of mural paintings that may depict episodes of this cosmogonic event. A Teotihuacan style Esquintla vessel may represent an Early Classic form of this important myth (fig. 21b). In the vessel scene, two animated figures flank a burning circular disk or hearth from which flames emanate. Above and below the fiery device, there are frontal zoomorphic faces representing either the jaguar or, more likely, the War Serpent. The anthropomorphic figure to our left of the central fire sign appears with wings and a bird headdress, possibly a vulture or eagle; the antennae and curling proboscis

of the butterfly top the bird head. The opposing figure is clearly dressed as the War Serpent, and wears a helmet mask quite similar to that found on Lamanai Stela 9 (fig. 6a). Aside from the War Serpent headdress, four additional War Serpent heads cover his body, as if he were enveloped in flames. I suspect the scene depicts the event of sacrificial self-immolation in the pyre at Teotihuacan. So far as I am aware, this vessel is the only known instance in which the War Serpent appears in a narrative mythical context. In another Esquintla vessel scene, an elevated human figure appears in a burning disk, quite possibly the fiery sun born from the sacred pyre (fig. 21a).

During the Postclassic period, circular pyres, fire serpents, and round mirrors frequently appear together in representations of the sun and its origins. In a recent study, Coggins (1987) argues that mirrors played an important part in Mesoamerican new fire ceremonies—the calendrical reenactment of the creation of the sun. Several scenes in the Codex Borgia illustrate the creation of fire on a mirror. In the nineteenth-century Kingsborough edition of the Codex Borgia, it can be seen that in the upper right corner of page 33 fire is being drilled on a mirror placed on the abdomen of a prone figure (fig. 22a). Seler (1963, II: 28) suggests that the mirror represents either the heart, stomach, or navel of the prone victim. Almost surely it serves as the navel or center. Directly below the mirror, there is a Xiuhtecuhtli containing the face of Xiuhtecuhtli within its



open mouth. Seler (*ibid.*, I: 93) notes that the region of Xiuhtecuhtli is *tlalxicco*, meaning “earth navel,” the sacred center or axis of the world.<sup>11</sup> On Borgia page 46, fire is drilled on another disk placed on the center of Xiuhtecuhtli’s body; to either side, Tezcatlipoca and Quetzalcoatl appear as warriors wielding weapons as they stand on thrones with jaguar cushions. Directly above the prone Xiuhtecuhtli, there is a structure composed of four Xiuhtecuhtli serpents surrounding a pyre representing a burning, turquoise-encrusted mirror (fig. 22b). Seler (1963, Atlas: 46) labels the structure as a

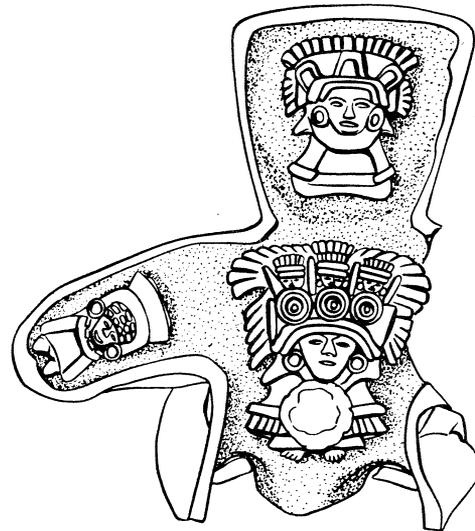
11. The Tlaltecuhltli earth monster occurring on the base of many important Aztec sculptures at times has a large rimmed and petaled disk strikingly similar to Teotihuacan style mirrors. In the center of this disk, there is the quincunx sign, probably labeling this region as the *tlalxicco*, or world center (see Pasztory 1983: pls. 109, 113, 117).

Figure 22. Late Postclassic depictions of mirrors and solar fire. (a) Creation of fire with mirror placed on abdomen of prone figure; note Xiuhtecuhtli serpent at base of scene. Detail of Codex Borgia, 33 (after Seler 1963, II: fig. 10). (b) Figure on burning turquoise-rimmed mirror surrounded by four Xixiucoa. Detail of Codex Borgia, 46 (from Taube 1983: fig. 32b). (c) The Aztec Calendar Stone, note turquoise quincunx rim and two encircling Xixiucoa. Drawing: Emily Umberger, reproduced courtesy of Emily Umberger. (d) Aztec sculpture representing a seated figure wearing Nahui Ollin sun as smoking mirror on back (from Taube 1983: fig. 36a).

*xiuhcocalli*, or “house of the fire serpents.” In view of the prominent mirror, I would label the structure as the House of the Mirror Serpents. The turquoise-rimmed mirror in the center of the structure spouts yellow flames and clearly serves as a burning hearth. In the Florentine Codex, one term for the sacred hearth at Teotihuacan was the *xiuhtetzaqualco*, signifying “turquoise enclosure” (Sahagún 1950–1971, bk. 1: 84). I suspect the scene on page 46 refers to the turquoise enclosure and the fiery creation of the sun, an event reenacted every fifty-two years during the new fire ceremony.

In two studies, I (Taube 1983, 1988) have argued that the great Aztec Calendar Stone represents a turquoise-rimmed pyrite mirror (fig. 22c). Near the rim, there is a ring of turquoise quincunxes, probably another allusion to the *xiuhtetzaqualco*. This identification finds support by the presence of two great Xiuhcoatl turquoise or fire serpents at the outer edge. The turquoise signs and serpents recall both Borgia page 46 and the Toltec style pyrite *tezcacuitlapilli* (fig. 11e), with its Xiuhcoatl serpents placed on the turquoise rim. The aforementioned Late Classic and Early Postclassic sculptures of War Serpent figures holding large mirrors are undoubtedly part of the same solar fire complex (fig. 20). The occurrence of these mirrors at the center of the body probably refers to the earth navel, or *tlalxicco*. The large scale of these mirrors partially obscures their placement on the body. When similar figures appear with smaller mirrors, however, they are clearly centered in the region of the navel (see Nicholson and Berger 1968: figs. 20, 21).

According to the eighteenth-century accounts of Boturini and Clavijero (cited in Seler 1902–1923, V: 407), the Teotihuacan Pyramid of the Sun once had a great stone statue of a figure with a “gold mirror” on its chest to reflect the rays of the sun. Although no sculpture of this description now exists at the Pyramid of the Sun, two Teotihuacan style monuments from Tepecuacuilco, Guerrero, depict figures that appear to have mirrors corresponding to the region of the navel (see Díaz 1987: 10, 42). Several of the small ceramic figures contained within the hollow ceramic figure from Becan, Campeche, also have mirrors over their abdomens (see Ball 1974: 8). This theme is repeated with other Teotihuacan hollow figures, where actual miniature pyrite mirrors are placed on the abdomens of figurines placed in the interior navel region of the hollow figures (fig. 23). In other words, the pyrite mirror serves as the navel of both the figurine and the



a



b

Figure 23. Teotihuacan representations of the *tlalxicco* pyrite mirror within hollow ceramic sculptures. (a) Interior of hollow Teotihuacan figure; note remains of pyrite mirror on abdomen of figurine at lower center, three more figures with mirrors in figurine headdress (from Séjourné 1966: fig. 193). (b) Detail of central figure within Teotihuacan style hollow figure, American Museum of Natural History, New York. Figure in form of anthropomorphic butterfly with pyrite mirror on abdomen. Three House of Mirrors signs originally placed on headdress of figure (after Ekholm 1970: 48).

enclosing larger hollow figure. In one case, this motif is repeated three times in the headdress of the central figurine, which has three more figures with mirrors over their abdomens (fig. 23a). In another instance, the *tlalxico* mirror-bearing figurine is portrayed with butterfly wings, possibly referring to a butterfly warrior (fig. 23b). Three mirrors again appear in the headdress, and with their capping roof elements they seem to represent the House of Mirrors. The butterfly nose piece occurring in the center of each mirror is found in other representations of Teotihuacan style mirrors (e.g., von Winning 1947: fig. 6). This hollow figure appears to represent the House of Mirrors at the *tlalxico* center of the Teotihuacan world.

Both Coggins (1987) and I (Taube 1983, 1988) have noted the widespread association of solar fire with pyrite mirrors in ancient Mesoamerica. Supplied with encircling Xiuhcoatl serpents, the Toltec *tezcacuitlapilli* appearing on the warrior atlantean columns at Tula probably represent the sun (Taube 1988). Similarly, there are Aztec sculptures depicting the sun as a mirror worn on the back. The famous Stuttgart Xolotl figure wears such a solar back mirror (see Pasztory 1983: pl. 279). The Stuttgart figure is notably similar to an Aztec copy of a Toltec atlantid warrior, although in this case the back device is simply a petaled mirror, not an explicit solar disk (ibid.: pls. 144–146). Another Aztec sculpture represents a seated figure wearing the Fifth Sun, Nahui Ollin, as a smoking mirror on the back (fig. 22d). I suspect that the *tezcacuitlapilli* commonly worn by Teotihuacan warrior figures had a similar meaning. By donning this device, the Teotihuacan warriors assumed the burden or office of the sun and, in a sense, became warriors of the sun.

## Conclusions

The curious serpent head accompanying the plumed serpent at the Temple of Quetzalcoatl serves as one of the most important symbols of secular and sacred power at Teotihuacan. Due to Classic representations at Teotihuacan, in Oaxaca, and especially the Maya area, it is clear that the creature is closely identified with the office of war. Following the early identification by Caso and Bernal, I have argued that this entity is a solar fire serpent ancestral to the Xiuhcoatl of Postclassic Central Mexico. Unlike the Teotihuacan feathered serpent, or Quetzalcoatl, the Classic War Serpent is supplied with either a sharply upturned nose or a large, accentuated nostril placed at the tip on the snout. Although it is

often supplied with feather crests or tassels, the feathers coat neither the face nor the body. At Acanceh, the War Serpent and the Teotihuacan feathered serpent appear simultaneously in the same scene, and it is clear that they are separate entities. The symbolic domain of the War Serpent is also distinct. Unlike the feathered serpent, the War Serpent is identified predominantly with fire and warfare; the platelet form is a direct manifestation of its war aspect. Both of these attributes, fire and war, continue to be essential elements of the Postclassic Xiuhcoatl, the weapon of the Aztec solar god Huitzilopochtli. Between the War Serpent and the Xiuhcoatl, there is a continuity of form as well as meaning. The Ixtapaluca Plaque, the Arcelia marker, and other terminal Classic representations of the War Serpent demonstrate clear morphological similarities to the Postclassic Xiuhcoatl.

The wearing of the platelet War Serpent headdress by rulers at Lamanai, Tikal, Piedras Negras, Bonampak, Copan, and other Classic Maya sites appears to be a conscious identification with the warrior complex of Teotihuacan and the Temple of Quetzalcoatl. Aside from the obviously highland Mexican plants depicted on the Tikal lintel scene, the antiquity of the Old Temple also argues for a Central Mexican origin for this creature. The facade was created in the second century A.D., even before the Maya Early Classic period. For the Maya, the War Serpent appears to be directly associated with rulership. Thus it is specifically worn by rulers on the Classic Maya monuments. In Lintel 2 of Tikal Temple 1, Ruler A sits on the War Serpent structure as if he were on a throne. On the great Hieroglyphic Staircase at Copan, a series of rulers are seated on thrones while wearing the War Serpent headdress. Similarly, Late Classic Maya figurines frequently depict enthroned Maya rulers wearing the War Serpent headdress (e.g., Corson 1976: figs. 5d, 20d, 24a, 24c). There are also Late Classic figurines depicting rulers wearing the War Serpent headdress while enthroned within temples emblazoned with the War Serpent (fig. 17). In the Maya region, this serpent is identified with one particular aspect of rulership, that of paramount war leader.

If the War Serpent reveals important aspects of rulership and statecraft among the Classic Maya, it has an even more profound significance at Teotihuacan. At Teotihuacan, the war headdress is prominently displayed on the central pyramidal structure of the Ciudadela, the sacred axis, or *tlalxico*, of Teotihuacan. The structure does appear to be an ancestral form of the

Aztec Tezcacoac, or place of the mirror snake, a structure devoted at least in part to the office of war. It is possible that the alternating serpent heads, Quetzalcoatl and the War Serpent, refer to dual aspects of rulership, the feathered serpent with fertility and the interior affairs of the state, and the War Serpent with military conquest and empire. This could partly explain why the War Serpent is of far greater distribution than the feathered serpent in Classic Mesoamerica. In contrast to the War Serpent, the feathered serpent is notably rare among the Classic Maya and Zapotec. Like the later Aztec, the Teotihuacan sphere of influence may have included a solar war cult carried by proselytizing emissaries and warriors.

The excavations at the Temple of Quetzalcoatl reveal that, even near the beginnings of Teotihuacan, war was

a central component of Teotihuacan religion and statecraft. Clearly, there was not a contrast between secular military offices and religious ideology, because it was a cult of sacred war providing a divine charter for rulership. It may have been that offices of power and rulership were considered in terms of the penitent warrior, one who sacrificed individuality, personal interest, and even life in terms of the common good. Like the gods destroyed on the sacrificial pyre, the many slain warriors within the Temple of Quetzalcoatl may be a graphic representation of this code of ethics. The particular emotional states of these victims—willing or unwilling—is a moot point. What is important is that they are portrayed as Teotihuacan warriors. In terms of the state, the death of these individuals does represent a supreme act of self-sacrifice.

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