

THE COURSE AND EXPRESSION OF RELIGION THROUGH ART
IN PRE - HISPANIC MEXICO

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate the interrelationship of religion to art in pre-Hispanic Mexico, especially under the unifying influence of one deity, Quetzalcoatl. It is also to suggest certain explanations for this relationship and reasons why the religious effect on art was so great, and to create a better understanding of art and life in early Middle America as expressive of the faith, with particular reference to the culture hero who designed the universe and kept it in order. What began as a close study of the personality of Quetzalcoatl has become, instead, a rather involved discussion of pre-Columbian life for, in truth, Quetzalcoatl was life.

Art in ancient Mexico was a working part of an ordered and demanding religion, a religion that used everything around it to attain its end. Art provided the strongest support, serving as a peg upon which symbols were displayed, interpreting the complicated codes of law and duty into simpler directives, which were easily understood by the simple mind of the common man. Art was rarely, if ever, an individual expression of truth or beauty, but remained subservient to the collective conscience of the culture.

The desire of some writers to trace Mesoamerica's traditions to other civilizations is not a significant one for it is not really important if such contacts did exist. The possibility that ancient Mexican art is distinct or similar to other cultures is not as meaningful to scholars as is the idea of Man having a common mind throughout the world. The same drives and needs of men to feed and protect themselves has led to the forming

of similar thoughts among separate peoples on religion and art as tools to explain and satisfy the Nature that supported them.

The study of Art and its relationship to religion and society helps to support two theories concerning Mesoamerican art: The progression of development from the Maya to the Aztec may be seen as an unbroken line rather than a series of separate steps, and the presence of Quetzalcoatl reflects the changing moods of each succeeding culture. The civilizing scheme seems to have come out of prehistoric Yucatán along with the practice of moundbuilding. It may have been based around a totem-like faith which was eventually to give birth to the god, Quetzalcoatl. As religion and society matured, their personalities changed and Quetzalcoatl and his art mirrored that change. What had begun as an ideal of peace became a symbol of war. The god of creation became the god of death. Art and religion were inseparable. They indicated the times. They were a part of every life and life was a part of them.

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AN INTRODUCTION TO MESOAMERICAN ART

A popular and convenient method of dating in a study of ancient Mesoamerica is with the help of the Maya long-count calendar.¹ Since the long-count was used by the priests for the purpose of setting the dates of special or sacred events, which have in turn been rounded off by modern historians to the nearest century, the chronology used may seem rather simplified.²

The history of pre-Hispanic America has been divided into three areas. The pre-classic or formative stage began with the appearance of the earliest civilizations and is associated with the Olmec culture. The classic phase deals with the mature civilizations which resulted from the Olmec influence, namely, Teotihuacán and the Maya centers. After a "dark ages" of violence and conquest, the post-classic period appeared with the rising to power of the Toltec-Aztec culture.³ There was no one "cradle of civilization" in Mesoamerica; the cultural development was more of a community effort. Distinct and distant cultures blossomed and ripened simultaneously, then fell to make room for others. La Venta on the Gulf coast, Yucatán in the south, the western highlands, and most significantly, the Valley of Mexico--these were the destined sites. The separate societies developed individually and at their own rates, but cross-cultural influences

¹Gordon R. Willey, An Introduction to American Archaeology (Englewood, 1966), p.98.

²See appendix I for a chronological chart

³A map is included in Appendix II



between them were numerous and effective. There was a succession of conquerors, politically and ideologically, rising, gaining dominance, then yielding to the next and giving up a part of their achievement in passing.

La Venta was an extensive temple complex which prospered from 800 to 400 B.C. It was not actually a city, but a vast shrine, built as an expression of a primitive, totemistic faith that revered a man-jaguar deity. The first monumental architecture appeared on this site; a stepped pyramid, or teocalli, which served as a platform for a temple.

Whereas the Olmec people were originally more concerned with minor arts in jade and clay, theories have developed that the custom of moundbuilding on such a large scale was imported into La Venta from Yucatán.⁴ The Olmec, or at least the priests who devised their religion, may have been of Maya stock. They are now extinct but there is evidence that connects them to the Maya culture, especially through language similarities.⁵ Olmec lands were bordered on the north and south by Maya language groups, a tongue still spoken in these areas today.⁶ Also, the early centers of development for both the Maya and the Olmec peoples

⁴ Willey, p. 104

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ A study of language groups help us trace the history of a culture and their migrations. One of the most widely spoken linguistic strains is Uto-Aztecan, or Nahuatl, the language of the early central Mexican civilizations. It forms a great wedge across the map of North and Central America reaching down into Mayaland and north along the route of the Aztec migrations to the Colorado River, filling the Great Basin and even winding off across the plains of Oklahoma and Texas. (Illustration I) One chink in the wedge is formed by the Olmec and Maya tongues which cut side-by-side into the Nahuatl triangle from the east coast of southern Mexico. Linguists, closely studying these related languages, are able to synthesize a root language which is helpful in studying a culture's forgotten past. The Maya language has in this way been traced back to an extinct "mother tongue" and a culture group that was speaking proto-Maya words around 2500 B.C. See Willey, p. 19.

were close geographically and contemporary artistic styles are much alike. Figurines from both areas employ certain common stylizations; their small stone and jade heads present similar profiles by the head and nose forms and the incised techniques. This type of distortion is not found among the arts of other surrounding peoples. (Illustration II)

Even though La Venta was destroyed in 400 B.C., the Olmec tradition continued in such scattered settlements as Monte Alban in the Pacific highlands, and at Tlatilco in the Valley of Mexico.⁷ Tlatilco dates from as early as 1500 B.C. and her descendants established the community of Cuicuilco around 300 B.C. The first high-god in Mesoamerica appeared at this center. He was a real god, not a spirit or totem like the man-jaguar of La Venta. He was called Huehuetectl, a fire deity associated with the movement of the earth and sun, and he lived in the volcano that was one day to cover the temple complex with lava.⁸ (Huehuetectl, in Nahuatl, means "ancient god"; hue=old, Teolt=deity.)

From the beginning of the Christian era to the eight century, Teotihuacan, the most influential metropolis--and the New World's first true city--enjoyed peace and great prosperity. The fifteenth century Aztecs gave these ruins their name, an epithet meaning "Place of Deification". It was the archetype for all later Mesoamerican civilizations, its artistic and religious ideals surviving every conquest. The history of its people and their origins is obscure but it can be linked through Cuicuilco back to La Venta.⁹ Teotihuacán I, called Ostoyahualco and now

⁷Micheal D. Coe, The Jaguar's Children (New York, 1965), p. 7.

⁸Laurette Séjourné, Burning Water (New York, 1956), p. 52

⁹Jonathon N. Leonard, Ancient America, (New York, 1967), p. 36.

covered by later pyramids, was built on the la Venta ground plan and dates from 300 B.C.

The Nahuatl philosophy matured at Teotihuacán but soon spread to other centers throughout the Isthmus. Indications of the city's relationship with other peoples are clear, especially in the area of art. Some of the motifs in Teotihuacán painting and sculpture are Maya in origin for they represent serpent and quetzal-bird forms which are found only in the jungles of Yucatán. At the same time, connections with the Olmec civilization indicate that the Teotihuacáños had taken their inspiration from La Venta. A trend can be traced in the artistic styles of pyramids from their appearance at La Venta, through Tlatilco and Cuicuilco, to Teotihuacán I. (Illustrations III, IV, and V) The profile of the Olmec mound is reflected in that of the Pyramid of the Sun at Teotihuacán but is greatly elaborated upon in the Quetzalcóatl pyramid from the same city. The classic Maya teocallis at Tikal, built before any influence from the Valley of Mexico was to enter Mayaland, rise steeply and gracefully above the jungle tree tops but lack the interest in surface demonstrated in the Quetzalcóatl type. The post-classic pyramids, effected by the warlike Toltec influence, were massive and fortress-like, both in Yucatan and the Valley of Mexico.

To study any art fairly, one must compare it closely to other styles and other periods. Comparing Maya art to Teotihuacán or Toltec to Olmec is not enough to satisfy one's appreciation of pre-Columbian art. Some brief comparisons of early American art to Oriental and Western styles will be mentioned later in this study but the importance of such observations must not be misunderstood. The similarities that existed within the Isthmus were due to actual contacts between peoples, and these contacts even occurred with the Indians of North America so that common styles and

legends shared by the primitives and the city-builders alike are understandable. (Illustration VI) As far as the rest of the world is concerned, it is safe to assume that no physical contacts ever took place, though some authors, especially earlier ones, have suggested theories to the contrary.

The similarities in American and Asian artistic styles prove most enigmatic. Different phases of the styles were nearly contemporary: The simplest pre-classic figurines from La Venta and Teotihuacán resemble Shang Dynasty jades and Japanese Haniwa pottery. The ceramic wares of Teotihuacán are also reminiscent of Chinese types. (Illustration VII) Maya slip decoration on funerary bowls combined humor and elegance with graceful lines in the manner of a Zen Calligrapher, and the Baroque reliefs that adorned their temple facades bring to mind the elaborate Hindu work of India. (Illustrations VIII and IX)

One might compare Mesoamerican kingdoms to the Egyptian and with interesting conclusions--not because of any possibility of a physical connection--but by the startling closeness of their philosophies in the religion-life-art scheme that directed their lives. Both peoples employed post and lintel architecture extensively and their temples were often arranged in ordered plans including plazas and, in some cases, adjacent hypostyle halls and pylons. (Illustration X) Their artistic ideals were direct and simplified though often colorfully patterned and festooned with hieroglyphics. The treatment of the figure in relief or fresco is of paramount significance in that figures are presented in a way most recognizable and most representative of man; eyes and shoulders viewed from the front, face and legs from the side. (Illustration XI) The Maya artist was not confined to this standard as was the Egyptian but he used it often, deliberately stylizing his art to sharpen the religious-political substance. This does

not mean, however, that the ancient Egyptian or Mayan was incapable of producing realistic work.

Both civilizations erected dated steles and deified their rulers. The Mayas wore wigs and the Aztecs wore fake beards as did the Egyptian aristocrats, and both were divided into two major classes--the priestly elite and the working laymen. Both states were socialistic. The serpent, sun, and lotus blossom were sacred to both, and to both again, religion, life, and art were one.

II

RELIGION AND ART

Why do similarities in art and religion develop in distant lands among isolated groups of people? The answer lies in a theory based upon the premise that since early religions bear a common likeness throughout the world, which was directed by Man's common needs and desires for survival and achievement, it follows that as cultures progress and develop into more organized forms, like patterns will arise so that higher cultures, however distinct, will share similar customs and sacraments. "The positive and indubitable evidence of the prevalence of sacrifices (or other related practices) in one part of the world may reasonably be allowed to strengthen the probability of their prevalence in places for which the evidence is less full and trustworthy."¹⁰ In other words, if two cultures--such as the Maya and the Egyptian--are alike in some ways, artistically and philosophically, the connection might be ideological rather than physical.

Similarities in beliefs and practices of men arise from "psychic necessity," according to Joseph Henderson, in that all men's needs and wants are the same the world over, as any species' habits are alike. In religion, this phenomenon is referred to as a "spontaneous myth-forming tendency."¹¹ This depends not upon actual contacts between cultures but refers to the mind of Man, developing as one mind that transcends the oceans. C. G. Jung called it the "collective unconscious," the universal source of symbolism.¹²

¹⁰ James G. Frazer, The Golden Bough, I (London, 1911), p. 121

¹¹ The Wisdom of the Serpent, (New York, 1963), p. 15.

Mesoamerican art is often associated with primitive art since it is considered the product of a primitive religion. Robert Bellah, on the other hand, has classified pre-Columbian religion as being an "archaic" variety, like those of Greece or Egypt.¹³ The difference between "primitive" and "archaic" religions can be demonstrated in America itself when comparing the North American totem cults to the elaborate priest-societies of Mexico. The ritualistic and political organization of the Aztec and Maya religions was highly complex and it was this complexity that held the empires together. Even so, there is always a certain persistence of earlier practices, however strong the present system may be, such as the case of the totem. Among the Zapotecs of Monte Alban, when a woman was experiencing the final pains of childbirth, her relatives would assemble upon the dirt floor of the house and sketch animals, one after another, in the earth. The animal drawn at the time of birth became the child's totem or second self. The child would later capture and care for that particular animal as his brother.¹⁴ It is well known that the North American Indians also followed this practice but with greater prominence.

Early people failed to realize their limitations in controlling nature. As Man's knowledge of the universe increased he began to subordinate himself to the supernatural as possessor of the true power over life and death. Prayer and sacrifice assumed a leading place in more advanced

¹² Ibid., p. 5.

¹³ Readings in Comparative Religion, (New York, 1966), p. 73. In an article included in this collection, Bellah has divided religion into five succeeding types from primitive, through polytheism and montheism to present-day Protestantism and a world-church type which is yet to come. He defines "primitive religion" as a personal system allowing individuals to associate directly with the spirit or deity through totemism. Religion is society, each man being his own medium and not requiring priests or sacred buildings to achieve contact. Pure polytheism is called "archaic religion", and involves the collective worship of a hierarchy of gods by way of a complex system of priests and rituals maintained at sacred centers.

¹⁴ Frazer, p. 332.

religions, magic no longer being on equal terms with man. The former became the practice of the pious and enlightened while the latter remained the "refuge of the superstitious and ignorant."¹⁵

The guiding force behind most primitive and archaic religions is the mystic art of divination. Gods and spirits reveal themselves through humans "temporarily inspired" through a magic gesture such as drinking the blood of sacrificial victims or inhaling the smoke from burnt flesh or leaves.¹⁶ Apollo's oracles at Delphi and Argos participated in similar rites. The North American Indian high priest was recognized at the time of his inspiration by the unnatural movements he made with his body, the blank stare in his eyes and the distortion of his voice. His language would be one of peculiar sounds, self-consciously different from ordinary speech since common men were not meant to understand the language of the gods.¹⁷

As powerful and important as the gods were to the functioning of religion, they were not necessarily immortal. The graves of Greek and Roman gods are well marked even today, but they did not kill each other. Any deity who exhibited waning power or authority was sacrificed ceremoniously by mortals.¹⁸ This ritual is probably the most significant aspect of any religion and it carries the most sacred interpretations.

The custom of "killing the god" was elaborately celebrated in Mexico. The sacrament was similar in practice to the Romans in that the god was killed in the form of a special human representative.¹⁹ Many of the Mexican deities required periodic killing including Tezcatlipoca, the god of hosts,

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 32.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 36.

¹⁷ Ellen R. Emerson, Indian Myths, (Minneapolis, 1956), p. 244.

¹⁸ Frazer, p. 214.

¹⁹ Ibid.

whose ritual was particularly impressive. A young man, without blemish, was picked to imitate the god for an entire year. He was endowed with the raiment and reverence due his counterpart, and was even worshipped by the king. On the day of his glory he was killed, opened and eaten as a solemn eucharist. The youth's place was immediately filled by another imitator and the cycle began again. The pageant symbolized the god's simultaneously dying and being reborn and must not be confused with a resurrection as in the story of Christ; resurrection occurs only once while rebirth is part of a cycle.

In Yucatan, the Maya New Year festival allowed the people to experience rebirth in a symbolic manner by running through sacred bonfires which would purify their souls.²⁰ The year, like men, also required certain rituals to insure its rebirth each Spring as in the Greek myth of the annual abduction of Persephone. Such rituals and legends served to explain in a simple way, the phenomenon of the changing seasons from harvest to death and then regeneration. We remember that Christ rose in the Spring. Likewise, the rites of sacrifice to Tezcatlipoca followed the vernal equinox.²¹

Art in Ancient America was almost totally an expression of this religion--a dynamic scheme that designed and controlled every breath of every life. The finest expression, and the one most exemplary of the art-life-religion relationship, was achieved by the classic period Maya. Produced prior to the Toltec cultural conquest in the tenth century, this classic style was nonetheless affected by the Valley of Mexico and Teotihuacán. Even so, Maya art had been allowed to develop independently for some time, if one considers the Olmec presence as an intrinsic part of its growth. In pre-

²⁰ Frazer, p. 272.

classic art, there was already evidence of a blossoming style, one of finese and elegance, which was to be unsurpassed in the New World for many centuries.

The stylistic cycle follows the normal pattern. Beginning with an archaic simplicity, it attained a golden age which overflowed into a baroque style and then died. In an instant of reflection prior to the barbarian invasions, there was a brief return to archaism which produced some of the finest monuments to the style's passing. This reform movement, like fifth-century Greek art, revolved around certain rigid ideals that directed what proportions and motifs to employ in carving a human figure or constructing the decorative facades of stucco. Unlike the Greek ideal, however, the Mayan played a minor role in the universe, a part of Nature rather than above it, subservient to the myriade of gods that guided his every move. His art was, therefore, like himself, an abstract manifestation of life; an image, not real.²²

As style developed, abstraction and symbolism soon came to overpower any desire for naturalism until the once languid, well-modeled figures became weighted down with hieroglyphics and ornaments of office, "humbling it to the role of a mere peg for symbols."²³ (Illustrations XII and XXIII) The artist had become a translator, a salesman, clothing the mathematical bones created by the priests with flesh which would be more easily understood by the ignorant populace. Individuality--even originality--was dead. The artist had become a working part of the religion, part of the collective ritual to appease the deities who periodically recreated the world if Man pleased them. The imagination that produced fantasy in stone and paint was one of religious

²¹ Henderson, p. 119.

²² Jean Charlot, Art from the Mayas to Disney, (New York), p. 21.

²³ Ibid., p. 22.

fervor, and was not personal gratification or pure esthetic interest.²⁴

²⁴ Ibid., p. 24.

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III

THE BIRD AND THE SERPENT

The serpent is revered by the Hindus as a special being on this earth since he possesses all things necessary for survival; "Covered with skin, he has no need of slippers for his feet."²⁵ This innocent little statement only lightly reflects the scheme of complex symbols that centers around that creature. There are but few religions that do not in some way accept the presence of the serpent as a divine sign, whether benevolent or evil. Strange as it may seem to our modern Western faiths, most other religions, from the primitive to the philosophical, revere rather than hate or fear the serpent. The significance is often a common one; it is of fertility or divine revelation. In many cases an abundance of sub-symbols are also attached, especially among the primitives, that make ophiolatry a most powerful device. The following survey of symbols and beliefs will examine the general reverence with which the serpent and the bird are worshipped.

The serpent is often a symbol of opposing ideals. Its form is that of a line with a head or tail at each end, and a line made into a circle has no end rendering it sacred, emblematic of immortality and also of death. Oriental thought believes in this paradox as does Mesoamerican; the sculptures at Tula portray skeleton warriors entwined with serpents whose open jaws hold the skulls. Grotesque as they are, these figures are vital and energetic in

²⁵ Emerson, p. 40.

a way that adds to the presence of death an attitude of regeneration.

(Illustration XIII) The decorative frieze below the serpent-warrior relief is a geometric interpretation of the movement of the serpent which to ancient Americans was symbolic of the power of generation.²⁶

North American Indians believed that the serpent had a certain divine knowledge as illustrated by the pictogram in illustration XIV of two snakes peering out of the line of heaven. He is also represented at times as listening, with waves of sound entering his ears and his silent, untranslatable "beloved speech" was the distorted language of the priests when they talked with the spirits.²⁷ Further, the pictographic line of heaven is itself serpentine, like the moving body of a snake. ²⁸(Illustration XIV) The celestial serpent symbol becomes more complex with the addition of the rainbow legend of the Southwest Indians where the phenomenon is believed to represent a beautifully scaled, flying snake. The entire image is completed when the following logic is considered. Birds migrate in lines across the sky, as do swans and geese, resembling the slithering movements of the snake. The transformation of the string of birds into a sky-bound serpent may be derived from the legend of the flight of departed souls as they cross the skies on their journey to heaven.²⁹

From the celestial serpent comes the fire serpent which in Mexico was lightning. The analogy here is obvious as lightning is serpentine in form, coming from the sky, and was associated with the gods. The Egyptians believed that men who were bitten by certain snakes were favored by the gods, and the Greeks thought the same type of grace was being granted those hapless

²⁶ Laurette Sejourne, El Universo de Quetzalcoatl (Mexico City, 1962) p. 26.

²⁷ Emerson, p. 47.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 52.

²⁹ Emerson, p. 53.

élite ever to be struck by lightning.³⁰ The same Mediterranean peoples, as well as the Chinese, are recorded as keeping snakes in temples. Likewise, the Spanish journals of the conquest of Mexico cite that snakes were often kept in the home as pets.³¹ Only in North America, among the Indians, was there found a fear of killing snakes. The Amerinds believed that snakes were able to send diseases to those who displeased them.

Reverence for snakes in America seems to have been based, in part, upon the connection with fire--lightning, the sun--and this is the representation of the "source or life." Comets, the moon's halo, coiling flames were the suggestive forms. The pictograph for fire was a square and often accompanied the snake symbol in drawings. (Illustration XIV)

The serpent is also associated with the sun as a sign of the creation of the earth and the attributes of the sun are often granted the serpent in picture drawing. On the Aztec calendar stone, Tonatuih, the sun, and Xiutecutli, the night, "dress themselves up in Xuicoatls, mystic and celestial serpents, whereby they acquire greater strength and authority."³² The two gods carry on a never-ending struggle to rule the heavens, alternately gaining and losing the advantage so as to create day and night. In both Egypt and America the sun was further associated with the bird as well as the serpent, perhaps co-representative of the movement of the sun through the sky by their "magic powers of locomotion," the bird with wings, the serpent without feet.³³

The Mexican spirit of daylight was an eagle who represented the sun and had a companion wind-serpent. The hawk and serpent are combined in Egyptian mythology as are the vulture and the cobra, the symbols of the upper and lower kingdoms. Moreover, the North American pictograph of the sun,

³⁰ Ibid., p. 45.

³¹ Oldfield Howey, The Encircled Serpent (New York, 1955) p. 314.

having ears with which to hear, also balances plumes upon his head with which to fly, much as the Egyptians depicted the sun in hieroglyphics as an orb with an upright plume at its perimeter.³⁴ (Illustration XV)

The uraeon is a symbol of the deity. It is a hierogram of a winged serpent and a circle and was found extensively in ancient Persia, Egypt, and Mexico; also in China, Asia Minor, Greece, and Italy.³⁵ (Illustration XV) The circle is the sun or the entire universe, ". . .regarded as the expression of the Creator or the simple essence of God, the Supreme Being and First Mind. The serpent is the word of the deity which brought forth life when first spoken and the wings represent the deity's ever present omnipotence."³⁶ The circle is also an egg--the mark of creation--also time or infinity since it has no end.

The feathered-serpent is not, therefore, unique to Mexico. It was of much greater importance to the Mexicans, though, for it unified in their ideology the universal symbol of the cosmos--the circle--with a cosmic symbol of its own--the serpent, two of which are entwined to form a ring about the calendar stone. To the Mexican mind, this huge icon represented a complete picture of the entire universe and its functions. (Illustration XVI)

³² Robert S. Flanders (Mexico City).

³³ Emerson, p. 53.

³⁴ Ibid., pp. 37, 40, 79.

³⁵ Emerson, p. 1.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 1.

IV

THE FEATHERED SERPENT IN MEXICO

One dominant, ordered, progressing strain was evident within the complicated network of societies in ancient Mesoamerica. Though divided into two distinct backgrounds, this line shared a common direction, bound together by the dynamic personality of the Feathered-Serpent. One might lightly call it the Mexico-Maya tradition, the two cultures united by a single ideal. As they progressed side-by-side, contacts occurred; they exchanged their art and with that, certain aspects of their religions, and became closer in their thoughts and practices. Post-classic art from both civilizations was of one style that reflected the times. The great unifier, even in that age of violence, was Quetzalcoatl.

Quetzalcoatl had been the chief deity of the Toltecs and in his mortal days was said to have dwelt in Tula. A benevolent god, he was eventually to find his way into many surrounding civilizations by way of the Toltec conquests. The Mayas called him Kukulcan, the Quichi of Guatamala called him Gucumatz--both names meaning plumed-serpent.³⁷ By the sixteenth century he had become a major part of most Mesoamerican cultures. This study deals with the greatest of these, the Teotihuacan, Toltec, Maya, and Aztec peoples. Their art reveals most dramatically the powerful presence of the god of life.

³⁷ Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology (London, 1959), p. 443, 7.

1. The first part of the document is a letter from the President of the United States to the Congress, dated January 3, 1862. It is a very long letter, and it contains a great deal of information about the state of the country at that time. The President talks about the war with Mexico, and about the relations between the United States and Great Britain. He also talks about the internal affairs of the country, and about the progress of the government. The letter is written in a very formal and dignified style, and it is full of references to the Constitution and to the laws of the United States.

2. The second part of the document is a report from the Secretary of the Treasury, dated January 3, 1862. It is a very long report, and it contains a great deal of information about the state of the Treasury at that time. The Secretary talks about the receipts and expenditures of the Treasury, and about the progress of the government. He also talks about the internal affairs of the country, and about the progress of the government. The report is written in a very formal and dignified style, and it is full of references to the Constitution and to the laws of the United States.

3. The third part of the document is a report from the Secretary of the Interior, dated January 3, 1862. It is a very long report, and it contains a great deal of information about the state of the Interior at that time. The Secretary talks about the land and mineral resources of the United States, and about the progress of the government. He also talks about the internal affairs of the country, and about the progress of the government. The report is written in a very formal and dignified style, and it is full of references to the Constitution and to the laws of the United States.

4. The fourth part of the document is a report from the Secretary of the War, dated January 3, 1862. It is a very long report, and it contains a great deal of information about the state of the War at that time. The Secretary talks about the military forces of the United States, and about the progress of the government. He also talks about the internal affairs of the country, and about the progress of the government. The report is written in a very formal and dignified style, and it is full of references to the Constitution and to the laws of the United States.

5. The fifth part of the document is a report from the Secretary of the Navy, dated January 3, 1862. It is a very long report, and it contains a great deal of information about the state of the Navy at that time. The Secretary talks about the naval forces of the United States, and about the progress of the government. He also talks about the internal affairs of the country, and about the progress of the government. The report is written in a very formal and dignified style, and it is full of references to the Constitution and to the laws of the United States.

THE LEGEND OF THE KING OF TULA

The following legend is told by many authors of Mexican history and may be interpreted in several ways. First, as the mythical explanation behind the appearance of Quetzalcóatl on earth; second, as a messiah-type story in which a mortal becomes the temporary abode of a god; and third, as the fantasized story of an actual man with little more than political significance.

Several earlier writers apparently interpret the story in the first vein, as complete myth. The legend is symbolic of the beginning of the world of order with the arrival of Quetzalcóatl at Tula, who, after being exiled and sacrificed, became immortal. The obvious discrepancy here is that the city of Teotihuacán preceded Tula by about a thousand years and Quetzalcóatl was worshipped there as evidenced by the sculptured temple mound. Besides, upon the walls of a recently excavated house, dating from classic Teotihuacán, frescoes were discovered that related the same story of the king of Tula.³⁸ This indicates that the existing Tula may be incorrectly named or, a double built near or on the site of the original Tula, or merely that the Tula of the legend is imaginary. It is quite probable that the worship of Quetzalcóatl goes back even further than the earliest settlements at Teotihuacán.

Some accounts elaborate upon the legend by endowing the mortal king, Topiltzin-Quetzalcóatl, with divinity through a story mindful of Greek mythology. His mother, Coatlicue, conceived miraculously when a feather-covered stone fell from the sky into her lap. He taught men how to feed and clothe themselves and while he lived, cotton bloomed in colors so that it needed no dyeing.

The least romantic view of the tale rests on its political implication

³⁸ Sejourne, El Universo, etc., p. 60.



and historical symbolism. It tells in its own way of the changing mode of life in the tenth century which was brought on by the conquering Toltecs. It symbolizes Quetzalcóatl's metamorphosis from a god of peace and love to one of war and death, and slowly coming to resemble his one-time enemy, the evil Tezcatlipoca. Although the Feathered-Serpent remained popular throughout Middle America, he had become secondary in importance to the god of war. The tale of Topiltzin's travel after his exile also parallels the historical movement of the cult of Quetzalcóatl from the Valley of Mexico to the rest of the Isthmus.³⁹

This retelling of the story is based upon several popular versions including quotations from Velazquez's translation of the Aztec codex, the Annals of Cuauhtitlán. In this codex the king is called his divine name, Quetzalcóatl, as the actual embodiment of that god. He was a popular king. He taught the people how to grow food, weave cloth and build clay pots. Under him the city became beautiful and prosperous. To teach his subjects reverence, he made himself a priest and established the rites of worship, prayer, and penance. He received little reward for his purity, however, for certain demons and the wizard Tezcatlipoca (who in some accounts has been called his own divine father) were irritated by his holy attitude and his prohibition of human sacrifice rites. They got together and decided to trick him by "giving him his body," which was, perhaps, a parabolic way of revealing to him that he was only human like everybody else. The phrase has also been interpreted in the reverse as putting the first men--who had been heavenly in origin--into the bodies of mortals.⁴⁰

³⁹ Tula, a guide book (Mexico City, 1965), p. 8.

⁴⁰ "Anales de Cuauhtitlán," Codice Chimalpoca, translated by Primo F. Velazquez (Mexico City, 1945), pp. 7-9.



...Those who call themselves Tezcatlipoca, Ihumécatl and Toltecatl said, "He must leave his village, where we intend to live." And added: "Let us make pulque; we shall give it him to drink so that he loses his skill and power."

Then Tezcatlipoca spoke: "I say that we should give him his body."

...First came Tezcatlipoca; he took a double mirror the size of a hand's span and wrapped it up; when he came to where Quetzalcoatl was, he said to the acolytes that guarded him: "Go and say to the priest; a youth has come to show thee thy body, Lord, and give it thee."

The acolytes entered and informed Quetzalcoatl, who said to them: "What is this...? What is my body? Look and see what he has brought and then he may enter."

He (Tezcatlipoca) did not wish to let them see it and said: "Go and say to the priest that I myself must show it to him."

Tezcatlipoca had been disguised as a young man but when he was allowed to enter the chambers of the king, Quetzalcoatl immediately recognized his divine parent. Some significance may rest in that certain accounts imply that the priest was suffering from a chronic disease that disfigured him.⁴¹

...Quetzalcoatl said: "I know and welcome thee, grandfather. Whence hast thou come? What is this concerning my body? Let me see."

Then he gave him the mirror and said: "Look and know thyself, my son, for thou shalt appear in the mirror."

Then Quetzalcóatl saw himself; he was very frightened and said: "If my vassals were to see me, (they would surely) run away."

In great distress he drank the potion of pulque and became drunk. In his stupor he slept with the beautiful priestess Quetzalpetatl. Even the demons who had tricked him were saddened by these results. In a sense he had destroyed himself and he knew he must leave his beloved Tula forever and wander about the earth doing penance for many years:

⁴¹ Perhaps it was Leprosy, Tula, p. 8.

...And he sang the sad song that he had made that he might depart from there;

"This is an evil tale of a day when I left my house. May those that are not present be softened, it was hard and perilous for me. Only let the one whose body is of earth exist and sing; I did not grow up subjected to servile labor."

When Quetzalcoatl sang, all his acolytes were sad and wept. Then they also sang: "In an alien house my Lord has grown poor. He has not headdress of precious stones. Perhaps somewhere the timbers are clean. Behold him there. Let us weep.

...At once went Quetzalcoatl; he stood; he called his pages and wept with them. Then they went to Tlillan Tlapallan, the burner...

It is said that...having reached the celestial shore of the divine water (the Gulf of Mexico), he stopped, cried, seized his garments, put on his insignia of feathers and his green mask...Then when he was adorned he set fire to himself and burned... It is said that when he burned his ashes were at once raised up and that all the rare birds appeared when he died, for which reason they call him Lord of the Dawn. They say that when he died dawn did not appear for four days...(and) in eight days there appeared the great star (which we call Venus.) And they add that he was enthroned as Lord.⁴²

He had promised his return to rule over earth with peace and justice and the landing of the bearded Cortéz on the eastern shore, at a time which had long ago been predicted by prophets, coincided happily with the spiritual declining of the Aztec Empire. The brooding king, Montezuma, sick of blood and sacrifice, longing for peace of mind, handed his gory city over to Cortéz with a "happy face."⁴³

The legend of the mortal life of Quetzalcoatl, as living at the very beginning of the human cycle of the world and serving as humanity's creator, symbolized the life-journey every human soul must follow. All men were taught by his example that their lives must follow that of the creator's.

⁴² "Anales etc.", p. 9.

⁴³ Burning Water, p. 42.



Penance and good works were all important. After death, their souls would travel the same path as did Quetzalcoatl after fleeing Tula, encountering trials and obstacles, pain and torture, then finally being liberated and carried off by the solar eagle to be united with the sun.⁴⁴ This brief discussion can only lightly suggest the tremendous sway held over Mesoamerican life by that single personality of an overwhelming myth. Indeed, Quetzalcóatl symbolized life in its every aspect.

He was called founder of the Nahua culture, creator of Man, founder of the ruling priesthood. Séjourne speaks of him with the reverence due Christ, respecting his mortal life more than his divine life. When he was king of Tula, like Christ teaching in Israel, he instituted a code of morals and rites that dominated all of Mexico for over fifteen-hundred years.⁴⁵ In order to better grasp the full significance of this god, let us analyze the attributes and functions behind his power in respect to what has been said before about pre-modern religions, their origins and symbols. First, he is the obvious combination of the bird and the serpent and represents the uraeon in that he rules--at least in his original form--the entire universe. The bird is designated as commander of the skies and the serpent is associated with the earth. The two signs combine to form a quetzal (bird)--cóatl (snake) and it is interesting to note that he is not a bird with reptilian qualities but a serpent with feathers. The union represents not only that of the soil-bound serpent which aspires to conquer the air, but also that of the celestial eagle which longs to control the earth. The earth and sky united become the universe.⁴⁶ The snake erects itself to reach the bird but his tail never leaves the ground so that it becomes a link between heaven and earth. Quetzalcoatl was both earthly and heavenly, he was man and god.

This duality, a complex of opposing ideas, may have been inherited

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 78.

from his parents as the union of a mortal woman with the mystic and paradoxical god of hosts, Tezcatlipoca.⁴⁷ This deity was imagined to be eternally young and linked to the jaguar through his fleet-footedness. He was patron of the house of warriors, yet was an enemy of Man and a spreader of discord. He stimulated sexuality and was the guardian of all that is evil and unclean. At the same time, he was a penitent and a confessor of sins. His name means, literally, "Smoking Mirror," which has an ambiguous connotation. A mirror is clear and smoke is opaque, giving forth a deformed and dark image but reflecting what really is. He represents a view of Man's insides and outsides at the same time.⁴⁸

The Feathered-Serpent's duality is emphasized further when we remember that as a mortal, he had abhorred the practice of human sacrifice and yet, many centuries later, he himself was to be sacrificed to by the Aztecs. The fact that the Aztecs were aware of the paradoxical aspects of this god is revealed in the following poem from the Cuauhtitlán annals.⁴⁹

...And it is told, it is said;
That Quetzalcóatl would involk, deifying something
 in the innermost heaven:
She of the starry skirt, he whose radiance envelopes
 things;
Lady of our flesh, Lord of our flesh;
She who is clothed in black, he who is clothed
 in red;
She who endows the earth with solidity, he who
 covers the earth with cotton.
And thus it was known, that toward the heavens
 was his plea directed,
Toward the place of duality,
Above the nine levels of Heaven...

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 25.

⁴⁶ El Universo, p. 35.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 88.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 90.

⁴⁹ "Anales," p. 4.



In the poem, he and she refer to one deity, an aspect of Quetzalcóatl as Ometéotl, god of duality. Ometéotl was also called Huehuetéotl, the original high-god of the earliest Mexican societies:

...Mother of the gods, father of the gods,
The old god
Spread out on the navel of the earth,
Within the circle of turquoise.
He who dwells in the waters the color of
the bluebird,
He who dwells in the clouds.
The old god, he who inhabits the shadows
of the land of the dead,
The lord of fire and of time.

The cosmology of the religion of Teotihuacán is obsessed with dualities; Quetzalcoatl representing these several signs is also part of the jaguar-eagle struggle which symbolizes the tenuous union of heaven and hell. In other words, his journey from the underworld into paradise is the transformation of matter into air, earth into sky. There is also the night and day aspects of Quetzalcóatl as both the sun and the planet Venus. Furthermore, he was god of the wind, his own creator, as the legend goes, for it was the wind that launched the sun into the sky. As wind, he draws opposites together and unites them--death becomes life, knowledge comes out of ignorance--and he carries a flowering shinbone showing to all that life is a product of death. He is portrayed in this avatar as a quetzal bird, ruler of the air. When pictured in the land of the dead, he is serpentine and disfigured, imprisoned by the earth.⁵⁰

The flaying of a victim in a sacrificial ritual is symbolic of what the soul must do to achieve salvation, namely, to escape its earthly body for one of divine beauty. Xipe-Toltec, lord of the flaying, was more appropriately called, God of Liberation. In that case, Xipe was also associated with

⁵⁰ Burning Water, pp. 112, 136

Quetzalcoatl as was Xochipilli, the flower god and protector of seeds which are flayed open to permit the blossom to escape.

...Quetzalcoatl taught that human greatness grows out of the awareness of a spiritual order; his image must, therefore, be the symbol of this truth. The serpent plumes must be speaking to us of the spirit which makes it possible for man--even while his body, like the reptile's, is dragged in the dust--to know the superhuman joy of creation. This hypothesis is confirmed by Nahuatl symbolism where the serpent represents matter ...and the bird heaven. The plumed-serpent is thus a sign of the revelation of the heavenly origin of man.⁵¹

Both the serpent and the bird are related in some way to creation and generation throughout mythology. In the Ohio valley, the mouth of the great Serpent Mound holds an egg. From the Aztec legends of the creation of the earth as related in the ancient codex, the Popol Vul, "...All was immobility and silence in the darkness...; only the Creator, the Maker, the Dominator, the (Feathered-Serpent), (he) who engenders, (he) who creates, (was) on the waters..."⁵² Moreover, to the Mexicans, the mother of the entire human race is Cihuacohuatl, the great-serpent-woman. In North America she was a tortoise. The Hopi Indians of the Southwest believe that all the water on earth came from the breasts of a great female snake. The tree is sacred to North American Indians, as to other cultures, and is represented as an erect serpent, vertical like a man, but without legs or feet, and rooted to the ground. From him and his mate sprang the human race.⁵³

The cosmic patterns of the earth are so beautifully explained by Hinduism through the dance of Shiva Nataraja. His music was the rhythm of

⁵¹ Burning Water, p. 84

⁵² Howey, p. 300.

⁵³ Emerson, pp. 119, 132.

1



the workings of the universe, the music of the spheres. From his drum rose creation, protection issued from his band of rope, destruction from the fire and salvation from his raised foot to which his left hand points. He is usually pictured holding an erect serpent by the tail.

While dancing, he is simultaneously terminating and regenerating the world in endless cycles. Brahma creates the universe each celestial day (which is equal to four billion earth years) and throughout each celestial night chaos reigns until the next day. When the Creator is one hundred celestial years old, he dies and the universe becomes nothing until another Brahma is born. The Mexican universe was also a system of interlocking rounds. The Eagle's Bowl, the Aztec calendar stone, is a sculptured image of the cosmic cycle of universal creation, destruction and re-creation. (Illustration XVI)

Tezcatlipoca is associated with the nocturnal phase as the jaguar was the first sun who begat the first era of the world. The people of this epoch were giants, their skeletons--actually those of mastodons--were found on the shores of Lake Tezcoco and their houses were the colossal ruins of Teotihuacán. Smoking-Mirror was also the constellation Ursa Major. The epoch ended when his enemy, Quetzalcóatl, smote him playfully, and in his anger, he destroyed the world. Quetzalcóatl assumed the sun's throne until Tezcatlipoca knocked him down and an era of winds began and men were changed into monkeys so that they could better cling to the trees. The gods then chose Tloloc, god of rain and celestial fire, as sun for the third epoch but Quetzalcóatl caused the fire to fall upon the people who were changed into birds to fly away. Quetzalcóatl chose Tloloc's sister-bride, Chalchiuhtlicue, to be the sun but Tezcatlipoca caused a rain to fall so long that the fourth epoch earth was flooded and those who were not drowned became fish.

It seems, up to this point, that Quetzalcóatl was a mischief-maker,

like Hermes was to the Greek gods, but Sejourne believes he was far more important in that the legend implies that he is pictured as the center symbol on the sun stone which is a human face. Quetzalcóatl is, therefore, the present sun, creator of the fifth epoch.⁵⁴

Maya cosmology was more complex and less comprehensible. The many gods, or manifestations of them, appeared and apparently, duplicated themselves in all areas of Maya life, partly at the will of the priests. As myriads as the Hindu, and as metamorphic, these gods bore the burdens of the units of time that populated the five calendars of each year. The 260 day year was completely sacred, based on an intellectual construction of revolving units of thirteen months of twenty days each into a revolving sacred year which meshed mathematically with the solar, 365 day year to form a calendar "round" of fifty-two years. These, brought into line with the other three calendars, if viewed linearly, would probably appear as a pattern of interlocking circles of various sizes.

If Teotihuacán was the first Nahuatl culture to appear in Mesoamerica as Sejourne has suggested, then one must assume that the origin of the worship of the god, Quetzalcóatl, is Nahuatl. Willey, on the other hand, has stated the possibility that the ancient Olmecs were the ancestors of the Teotihuacanos, and since they, by linguists, are connected with the Mayas, Quetzalcóatl may have originally come into the Valley of Mexico from the jungles of Yucatán along with the practice of pyramid building. The jaguar's people at La Venta also followed a man-serpent cult which produced elegant sculpture as early as 800 B.C. These works are similar to later serpent motifs. (Illustration XVII)

A possible theory on the origin of the dynamic god of life could

⁵⁴ Henderson, pp. 78-90.

be based on the idea expressed as early as 1764 by Voltaire, who wrote, "that men began by knowing a single god, and that later, human weakness adopted a number of deities."⁵⁵ Wilhelm Smidt elaborates upon this by suggesting that primitive man's earliest religions, rather than beginning as a totemistic cult, were centered around the idea of one High God, breaking down into more complex forms as society developed, until the original god had become no more than a brother to the many other gods; his various attributes had been subdivided and distributed into the hands of his cohorts.⁵⁶ Huehue-téotl, the primary embodiment of Nature itself through this process might have become Quetzalcóatl, still called creator and generator, but reserving only a shakey minor position in the entire scheme. Smidt goes on to describe the primitive's view of the original high god much as Quetzalcóatl is described by the popular legends of ancient Mesoamerica: He was old and wise and with a long white beard as proof of his age. Being an incarnation of goodness, he was radiantly white rather than the color of the people who worshipped him, and the brilliance of his color was that of the sun.⁵⁷

The iconographies behind the entire personality of Quetzalcóatl, transcending all periods and cultures since his birth, would be too numerous and involved to be clearly understood after so brief an encounter with ancient Mexican life. The inner complexities and double meanings discussed seem to multiply and intensify as one's knowledge of pre-Columbian religion grows. The closeness of the Aztec practices to the Roman, and of the Maya concepts of deity to the Hindu are no less astonishing than the likeness of Mesoamerican philosophies to Buddhist and Christian thoughts, not to mention the overall significance of Amerindian cosmology with modern sciences. All

⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 24-25.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Readings in Comp. Rel., p. 34.

aspects of Quetzalcoatl's world allude to other worlds and other gods illustrating most adequately the "collective unconscious" theory put forth by Jung that through the basic drives of Man, common throughout the world, basic and common thoughts will arise.⁵⁸ The religious ideas of one people, however isolated and distinct, will reflect those of faiths everywhere. The interpretations may be unique but the fundamental premise is the same.

Quetzalcoatl, in his many capacities, is Apollo, Shiva, Buddha, and Christ all in one. He is creator of earth, the sky, the sun, the wind, and of life; the giver of corn, the granter of art, the establisher of religion, the ordainer of priests, the writer of codes of morals and laws, the forgiver of sins. He is the half-mortal ambassador of men to gods, the protector of beauty, the generator of seeds, the resurrector of souls, the stabilizer of opposites, the embodiment of the entire universe.

⁵⁸ See Page 7

V

THE CHANGING STYLE

Through the architectural trends in Mexico and Yucatán, from Teotihuacán onward, one may follow the historical pattern of Quetzalcoatl's personality as he matured and changed with each generation. The change is important for it not only affected the lives of the people but also the art they produced. Society's face changed and so did its hands; what had begun a symbol of peace became a token of war; a religion of thought became one of action. The ideal of the Feathered-Serpent reversed itself from a heavenly aspiration to earthly power, from mind back to matter.⁵⁹ A survey of art styles as they reflected the changing society will serve to illustrate the transformation, for the artistic intention as a tool of the priests, mirrored the way of life.

The temple at Teotihuacán is one of beauty and awe. Though it is smaller in scale than the Pyramids of the Sun and Moon, it outshines them in a unique and energetic way; it is the only pyramid in Mesoamerica completely adorned with sculpture, monumental and finely carved, still bearing traces of red, green, and white paint. The structure was originally of six steps equaling height of about seventy feet, each terrace faced with sculptured panels of the Feathered-Serpent and protruding monolithic heads of Quetzalcoatl and Tloloc. Each weighs several tons. (Illustration XVIII)

Mound building seems to have been indigenous to American Indian life since it was practiced at various times throughout the continent. In

⁵⁹ See p. 25.

some cases it was used as a grave monument as in the Ohio mounds, and in others as a base for a temple. The latter type was most popular in Middle America, and only occasionally was used there as a grave site. Now, if the Olmecs were of Maya extraction, then perhaps the Mayas, rather than the Olmecs, should be given credit for initiating the custom in pre-classic Mexico. The great La Venta teocalli was only of adobe. Later structures were encased with a thick veneer of stone and plaster, sometimes in several layers.

The styles of painting and sculpture that accompanied the style of architecture would have traveled, therefore, with the practice of pyramid building from Yucatan to La Venta, hence, to Monte Albán and the Valley of Mexico where it would be perfected by the craftsmen of Teotihuacán. Whether the jaguar and serpent-man cults of La Venta also came from Yucatán or not is a mystery, and whether Quetzalcoátl as a divine incarnation of man and serpent evolved from La Venta's faith or was born at Teotihuacán is not important historically. Artistically, the Teotihuacán style is unique from anything before. It presents the very first portraits of the god and sets the type for later presentations, a type that will hardly change in 1000 years, though, the god himself changes drastically. In the three hundred years following the fall, or decline, of Teotihuacán around 700 A.D., all classical Mexican centers fell into Dark Ages which lingered until about the middle of the tenth century. Then renaissance after renaissance broke the silence with the breaking of tradition and the mending of cultures with a post-classic thread of discord. Fortified cities appeared for the first time accompanying new ceremonial centers to new gods, and the old gods were refurbished with a cloak of violence. The new rule was one of political force where it had been religious fervor, and the new rulers were the Toltecs. Once wandering tribes, they stormed into Mexico from the north, and by 1400, they ruled the Isthmus.

The Feathered-Serpent represented the olden days of peace and simple pleasures, and it is curious that the wild Toltecs should adopt him as head of their pantheon for it was he who was portrayed in the grizzly friezes at Tula rather than Tezcatlipoca. The bas-reliefs in stone and plaster are saturated with signs of death but the plumed-serpents there resemble the profiles of those on the pyramid at Teotihuacán. After Quetzalcoatl's symbolic expulsion from Tula, he remained popular but with a new personality, one which was more easily recognized at Chichen-Itza. This great post-classic Maya center is more Toltec in atmosphere than Maya, although it is nearly eight-hundred miles from Tula.

The tenth century invasion of Chichen by Toltec warrior-priests is associated iconographically with the migrations of Quetzalcoatl and feathered-serpent motifs coil about the walls and balustrades of the temples that date from this period. Most famous are the serpent columns whose opened mouths and patterned bodies imitate the Teotihuacán sculptures in many ways. (Illustration XIX) The temple of warriors at Chichen is on the same plan as the temple at Tula (Illustration X) emphasizing even moreso the bloody aspect now awarded this one-time peaceful god. Strangely, though, he remains essentially a god of life and culture as he was in the beginning, emblematic of the sacred attachment of war and death to resurrection and regeneration. All the attributes and associations previously presented as part of the deity's overwhelming importance and function are still present behind his mask of war--tail erect, holding a human head in his jaws, plumed--all stressing his duality which has taken on an even greater significance now, a god of life who approves of war and terrorism.

Besides the major temple to Quetzalcoatl at Chichen-Itza, of importance is the observatory which was used to calculate the Maya calendars by studying the

movements of the planet Venus. This, in fact, endows the round structure with holiness dedicated to Quetzalcoatl as Venus, the star which leads the fifth epoch sun into the west. The observatory is, therefore, a temple and probably the idiological--if not the actual--prototype for the circular temple to Quetzalcoatl in the Aztec capitol. (Illustration XX)

The founding of Tenochtitlan is based around an omen emblematic of the Feathered-Serpent in every way. When the nomadic Aztecs entered the Valley of Mexico in the early 1300's, they were subservient to the many city states that rimmed the shore of the lake. After a skirmish with the city of Culhuacán they were forced to retreat into the shallow lake Tezcoco where they hid among the reeds. It was then that their bloody god, Huitzliopochtli, sent them a sign: "Look and you shall find an eagle," he said, "perched upon a cactus, and holding in his talons a serpent, and it is there that you shall build your temple to me." The omen appeared upon a barren island in the center of the lake and on that spot was built the sacred square of the city that once supported 300,000 people and ruled a vast empire. In the plaza, sharing ground with the temples to Huitzliopochtli and Tezcatlipoca, was the temple to Quetzalcoatl of which only a description remains. A great stone and stucco serpent was coiled about the temple, and the door was his opened mouth. Inside were four chambers, one for each point of the compass, the four worlds over which Quetzalcoatl ruled.⁶⁰

Like the two gods of war whose temples mounted the huge pyramid in the plaza (Illustration XX), Quetzalcoatl was also sacrificed to in Tenochtitlan, but it is encouraging to note the reluctance with which this was done. Montezuma II, the last emperor, was a "religious intellectual dominated by doubts and worries that did not fit the creed of the Aztec

⁶⁰ Emerson, p. 9.



Conquest state.⁶¹ He was absorbed with the history of the Toltecs and like most historians, longed for the peaceful times of the distant past when the gods were worshipped without such a flow of human blood.

The same code of Quetzalcoatl's that forbade sacrifice and ordained priests was betrayed and perverted by the Aztec priests themselves to buttress their political-religious society. Those men who performed the elaborate ceremonies were considered reincarnations of Quetzalcoatl, and were called, "...virtuous, humble, and peace-loving, and considerate, and prudent, and loving and compassionate, and friend of all, and devout..."⁶² In a real sense, the rituals of slaughter in Mexico were for political protection.

The contradicting elements of Aztec life--love of living and demand for death--eventually gave rise to courageous philosophies and mystic theories which harked back to the tradition of a high god, nameless and unknowable, yet all-knowing--a belief, which, shunned by the priests as new and radical, **but** was actually old and stable. One later emperor even toyed with a type of monotheism. The Old God was associated by these fifteenth-century thinkers with Quetzalcoatl, the legend of his gentleness had survived all the warped histories of the savage Toltecs. Though historians feel the Aztec Empire was on its threshold to greater glory when the Spaniards arrived, it would seem, instead, at least culturally and philosophically, to have been on the decline. The Empire displayed a characteristic longing for simple peace.

⁶¹ Leonard, p. 68.

⁶² Burning Water, p. 28.

THE CONCEPT OF REALISM

In fresco painting, a concept of perspective was understood, at least by the Mayas. Though scenes were usually of shallow space, foreshortening of the human figure was, in some cases, superb. (Illustration XII)

The figure in illustration Twelve is from a classic Maya mural at Bonampak which depicts an elaborate post-battle ceremony. It is both religious and political in effect, and displays a tinge of emotionalism in the naturalistic mode in which the captured warriors cower and faint with fear. The setting is a simple, flatly drawn pyramid, and the color is well placed to create a subtle pattern. The decorative composition of the nearly contemporary fresco at Teotihuacán is not so subtle. The scene itself is more abstract. It is a view of Tloloc's Heaven, and the tiny floating figures have been carefully stylized until they resemble hieroglyphics scattered across the red background. The entire work is bordered with a geometric design in the form of serpents lending a carpet-like appearance to the wall.

The small figurine sketched in illustration twenty-one was found at Teotihuacán and is shown a little larger than lifesized. Built of red clay, it still bears traces of red and white paint. Though the body of the figure is simplified and resembles the glyph-like figures in the mural of Tloloc's Heaven, the face is surprisingly naturalistic in the modeling of the mouth and nose. The purpose of the figurine is unknown but it may have been a burial effigy. (Illustration XXI)

The art of Teotihuacán is a religious as well as an artistic expression of the rhythm and symmetry of Nature; an interpretation of the coming together of spiritual and earthly things.⁶³ Painting is, therefore, abstract in its attempt to portray the unreal, employing geometric forms, repetitive and unearthly colors and patterns and being simply composed with

ordered regularity, the product of a simple, ordered society not involved with intellectual and self-conscious philosophies. The Maya frescoes at Bonampak, though, reflect a more sophisticated outlook, for they are based on real-life rather than imagination--non-fiction as compared to poetry. Pose and expression are individualized, not so typical as the forms painted at Teotihuacán. The Maya was concerned with life and earth, the other with death and heaven. It was the different concepts of religion that produced the different styles of art through their different ideals of the real: Realism is not a means of expression but an individual's interpretation.

Gothic, Baroque, and Cubist are descriptive names of western styles which were liable to the particular laws of the vogue as tempered by the thoughts of the epoch and the artist himself. Ancient Mexican art is also divided into styles, such as the Teotihuacán and Maya, but the differences between them are cultural rather than esthetic. All styles may be concerned with realism in their own way, and indeed the Mexican artist strove to accomplish this as ardently as did the European but his unique mental attitude automatically envisioned a type of realism that would have been misunderstood in Europe. The ancient Greek sculptor idealized the human figure through an eye that transformed reality into pure beauty which to him was true, uncorrupted Nature. The Gothic sculptor discovered a divine aspect in a simple phenomenon. Physical appearance meant nothing to the Aztec or Maya artist; it was but a shell in which the real truth was hidden.

Western realism's pursuit was to reproduce the visible, whereas, the Mexican artist sought realism by making visible the invisible. While a western artist would represent a nut by painting its shell, the ancient American artist would penetrate the shell to reveal the nut. This brings to

⁶³ The following discussion is based on Paul Westheim's book, Idéas Fundamentales del arte Prehispánico (Mexico City, 1957) pp. 90-117, and pp. 23-30.

mind the image presented by the god, Tezcatlipoca, as one of both the flesh and the soul at the same time. He once said to the king of Tula, "look and know thyself, my son."

We must remember that the easiest mode of expression in Mesoamerica was through the use of symbols and signs that translated the myth into reality and rendered it understandable to the people. Moreover, as the Oriental was subservient to Nature and the Westerner obsessed with controlling it, the ancient American was part of it. The moon, a poetic image of awe to the Zen Buddhist, and a mystery to be deciphered to the European, was a logical indication of Nature's role in the cosmic plan to the Mexicans. They did not lack a sensitivity to esthetic beauty: The moon was a beautiful goddess torn to bits by demons, and then recuperating and restoring her full, round face to wholeness, as further proof of life's cycles from birth to death, and, at last, another birth.

VI

CONCLUSION

Two major theories have been suggested in this study; first, that the progression of development of the highest civilizations in early Middle America--namely, the Maya and Toltec-Aztec peoples--has been a continuous one with the Olmecs serving as the connecting link between the two. Second, that the legend of the life of Quetzalcoatl is more significant than it may, at first, seem, for it parallels the changing times that occurred within the progression. Furthermore, art has come to provide the base upon which these ideas are built--they could not have been justified without the help of the overwhelming quantity of artifacts at hand.

On the direct-line-of-development theory, many illustrative examples can be cited to show that a certain culturizing scheme first appeared among the Mayas in Yucatan and traveled, perhaps with a primitive cult of mound-builders, to La Venta and from there via Olmec missionaries, to the Valley of Mexico. For example, the sculpture of the early Olmecs and Mayas employed a similar mode of stylization. The small jade heads produced by both are alike in their geometric treatment and incised carving. It is probable that they were produced by the same faith. Other authors have already connected the two languages of these people to a common root and the possibility of the practice of pyramid building coming to La Venta out of Yucatan rather than the reverse, is mentioned by others.

From La Venta on, the pattern is more visible as the dispersion of the Olmec style to other parts of Mexico is easily proven by the art found in these many distant sites. This style, being unique in all Middle America,

is definitely recognizable when discovered within the art of a different culture. Ties with Teotihuacan are indicated through the histories of linking cultures such as Cuicuilco, which kept the Olmec style alive until the "City of the Gods" was well on its way to prosperity. The pyramid form for the Temple of the Sun is, notwithstanding, a stylistic descendant of the clay mound located at La Venta, but most conspicuous of the Olmec-Teotihuacan association is the serpent-man relief carving (Illustration XVII). This carving not only reveals the existence of a Quetzalcoatl-like cult in 400 B.C., but in a modified way, was the prototype of the style of the heads on the teocalli at Teotihuacan. (Illustration XVIII)

The purest evidence of changing the ways of life, the intentions of religion, the aspects of Quetzalcoatl, and the role of art that began with the fall of classic civilization in Middle America, is in the sculptured and painted images of the god himself. True, the first sculptural example of his image that appeared on the temple at Teotihuacan is fiercely fanged and snarling. The stone heads are not so frightening in their intentions for they do not, in this case, portray a blood-thirsty god, but a benevolent one, however ugly he may be. The frescoes in that city show him as a man in elaborately patterned and richly colored clothes. It is from these paintings that moderns have learned of the hero, and the works are expectedly filled with iconography. The figure in illustration twenty-two shows the mortal hero in full regalia, his headdress is a stylized feathered jaguar mask with curly-cue nose and square-lidded eyes. He holds in his right hand a serpentine quetzal bird. The concern for design and decoration has all but taken over the desire for realism and, it would seem, even to the point of overwhelming the symbolic meanings present. Also, this figure is only one of several other identical ones that make up the entire mural. (Illustration XXII)

Quetzalcoatl was interpreted by the Mayas in the widest variety of expressions to complement his many different roles. The classic style relief in illustration twenty-three is more realistically treated than the Teotihuacan figure and, typical of the style, is much less geometric, though nonetheless patterned (Illustration XXIII). The scene shows a priest worshipping the god who is hieroglyphic in presentation. The serpent and man qualities are more obvious than the bird attributes but the sign held in his hand is a pictograph for his name, and the priest wears a feathered-serpent headdress. This example demonstrates the curious combination of realism and symbolism where naturalistic portraits appear out of abstracted and richly patterned bodies.

When comparing this with the Teotihuacan mural, it is evident that the two styles have not yet come into strong contact. These effects shall come later with the entering of the Toltecs into Yucatan, for in Tula, the stylistic connections with ancient Teotihuacan are outstanding. It is there that the image begins to change and the warlike attitude of Toltec life is dramatically illustrated in the carved columns that once supported the roof of the temple to Quetzalcoatl. They are carved in sections, little more than relief depth, not the deep, in-the-round carving of the monolithic heads from the earlier city. They are treated as a flat surface and come closer in style to the mural figure discussed earlier than to sculpture. Rather than priests, they represent warriors. Their cylindrical form is much like that of the later serpent columns at Chichen-Itza. These supports adorn a temple on the same plan as that at Tula for it was built by the same people. (Illustration X) In the Toltec tradition, sculpture is of shallow carving, but blocky and monumental, not powerful in presentation but in significance.

As time went on, the god appeared less and less in the form of a man dressed up as a serpent, but more often as a rather viciously grinning snake. The profile of the serpent head from Chichen is still much like its ancestor at Teotihuacan but the sneer on the face is now evil rather than authoritative.⁶⁴ It is of interest to note that the early images of the god were placed upon the sides of the pyramid itself so that the lowest level was easily viewed by common people, whereas the Chichen sculptures are located in the doorways of the temple atop the teocalli and out of view to anyone but the priests. On the Aztec altar at Xochicalco is another relief of the Feathered-serpent, again resembling the original type but with the malificent attitude. This is more geometric but could never be mistaken for a Teotihuacano relief for it does not possess the refinement of that style, instead it exhibits the cruder, blockier techniques of the Toltec mode.

The Aztecs left many stone sculptures of Quetzalcoatl, usually in the form of a snake, but sometimes as a fabulous man, coiled and plumed. (Illustration XXVII) The skill is superbly demonstrated in these pieces, though the cutting is still rather shallow and relief-like, and surprisingly, the scary aspect is strangely overshadowed with a certain fantasy of subject matter and beauty of workmanship. The Aztecs refined the Toltec style somewhat, producing, in some cases, highly naturalistic work. The heaviness and hard-line remained, which is perhaps merely indigenous to the Valley of Mexico, but the finish on most pieces is highly polished and more simply detailed. Natural stone and obsidian textures were more popular than brilliantly painted or intricately incised ceramics or stucco. Perhaps Aztec art was an expression of a different level of sophistication than the Maya, and

⁶⁴ Compare illustrations XVIII and XIX.

attained its own golden age in its own way. The gory interpretation behind it may discolor its beauty, but it was achievement enough that beauty was even produced by such a terrible religion.

The cultural revolution so dynamically revealed in the art of the people who experienced it had been prophesized centuries earlier through the legend of the life of Quetzalcoatl. In a parabolic way the myth foreshadowed what was to come, how life was to be transformed from one of a spiritual acceptance of the Universe as the guiding directive of Man to a life controlled by other men; no longer recognizing the harmony of Man with Nature as one of peace and promise, but perverting it into a justification for conquest and power-grabbing. There is no art at Teotihuacan that represents any aspect of war but the city of Tula reeks with symbols of death. The delight embodied in the clay figurine from the earlier city is not found in Tula. Instead, terror is chiseled into the warrior columns with perfect skill. The elegant, formally patterned serpent in the classic Maya relief was to become at Chichen-Itza, a portent of fear. Less heavenly, more earthly, Quetzalcoatl seemed to lose the most important aspect of his dual personality as time went on--the divine, the celestial, the philosophical. To the Aztecs, he was a snake, the symbol of concrete matter, the logical, the earthy; in Teotihuacan cosmology, the king of Hell.

Art and religion are inseparable in Mesoamerica. They had been one in the beginning and later, art would still be present, but subservient to the whims of the new cult. It became only a part of the constant ritual to appease the gods and control the people. It made clear the laws of Nature and Man, the dogmas set up by the priests. It fulfilled many functions for the stabilizing of the faith: It was a teacher as exemplified in the frescoes at Teotihuacan and a recorder as in the Bonampak murals; it explained life

and death in the friezes at Tula, portrayed divine images in the Quetzalcoatl sculptures and decoded the complex universe in the calendar stone. It served a practical end but through esthetic means, and depended upon the Feathered-Serpent for inspiration. Without his encompassing presence to stimulate the artistic minds--a god who loved mystic beauty and encouraged skillful perfection, who unified religion and complimented life, who invented art as an expression of Man's thoughts--the achievement may not have been as grand. Art is the product of life and Quetzalcoatl was life.

APPENDIX I

Pre-Classic Period

Early Phase:	2000	to-1000 BC	(settlements in Central Mexico and Chiapas)
Middle Phase:	1000	to- 300 BC	(Olmec influence, La Venta)
Late Phase:	300 BC	to- 300 AD	(Teotihuacán I)

Classic Period

Early Phase:	300	to 600 AD	(Teotihuacán-true city, low land Maya centers)
Late Phase:	600	to 900 AD	(Classical Maya Tikal)

Post-Classic Period

Early Phase:	900	to 1200 AD	(Toltec influence, Chichen-Itza)
Late Phase:	1200	to 1520 AD	(Aztec Empire)

APPENDIX II

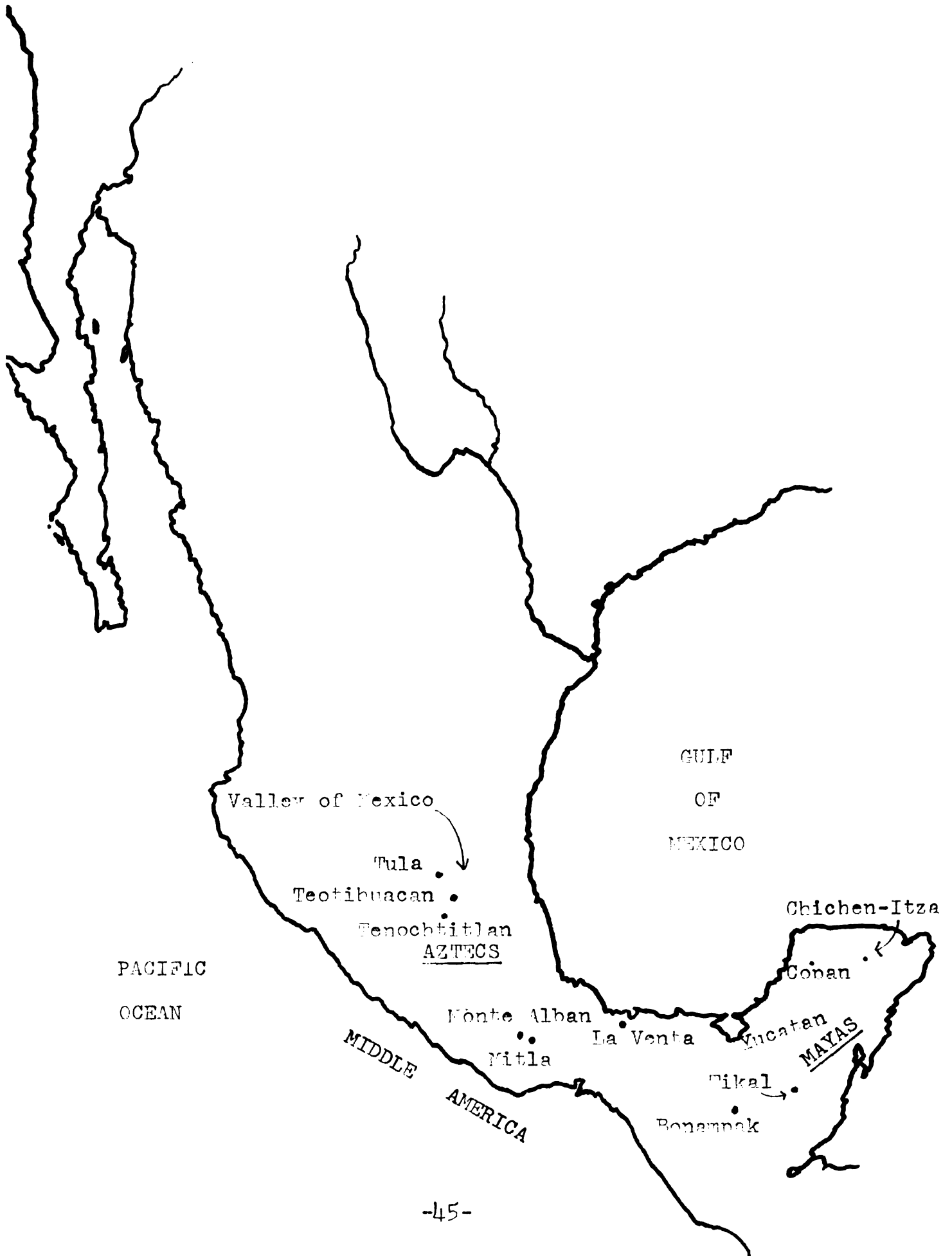


ILLUSTRATION I

Languages

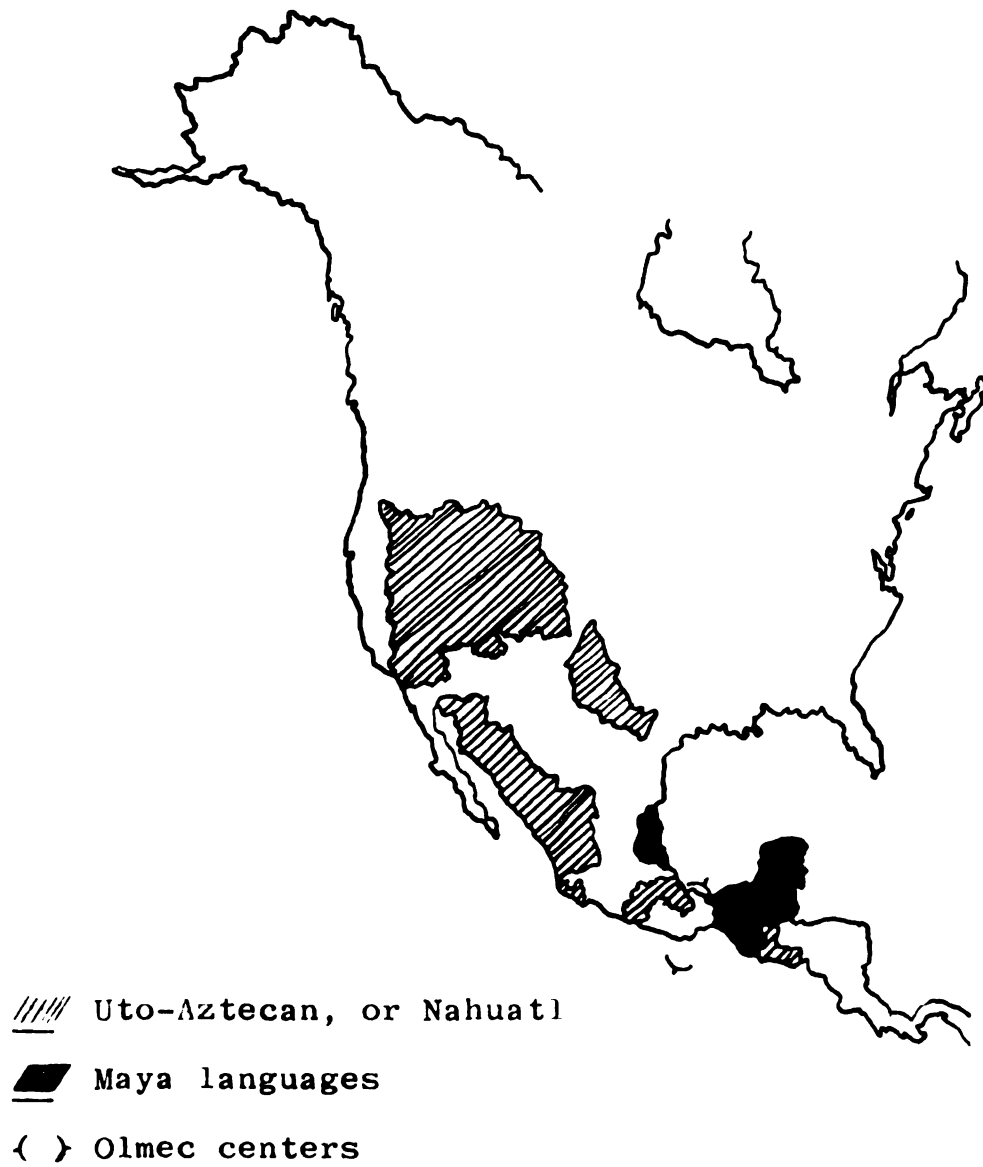
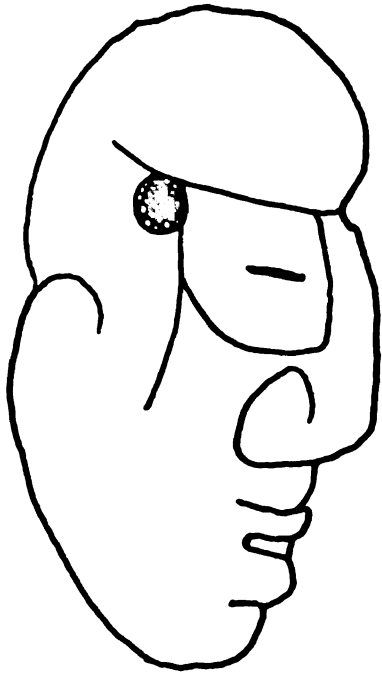
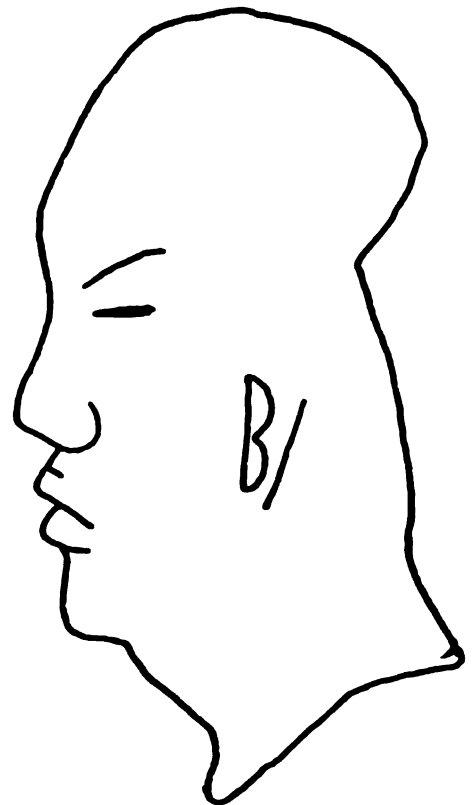


ILLUSTRATION II

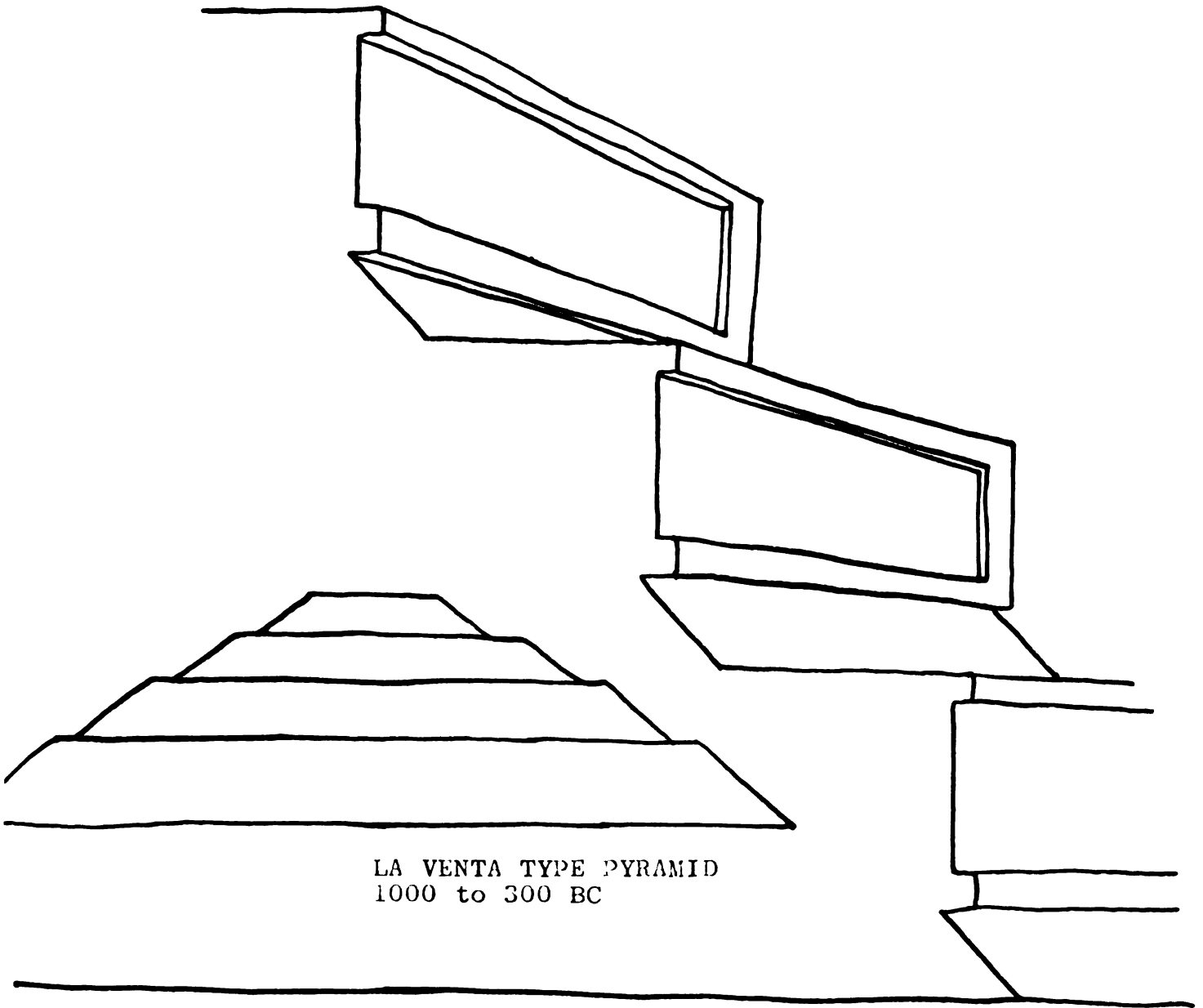


MAYA STONE HEAD



OLMEC HEAD

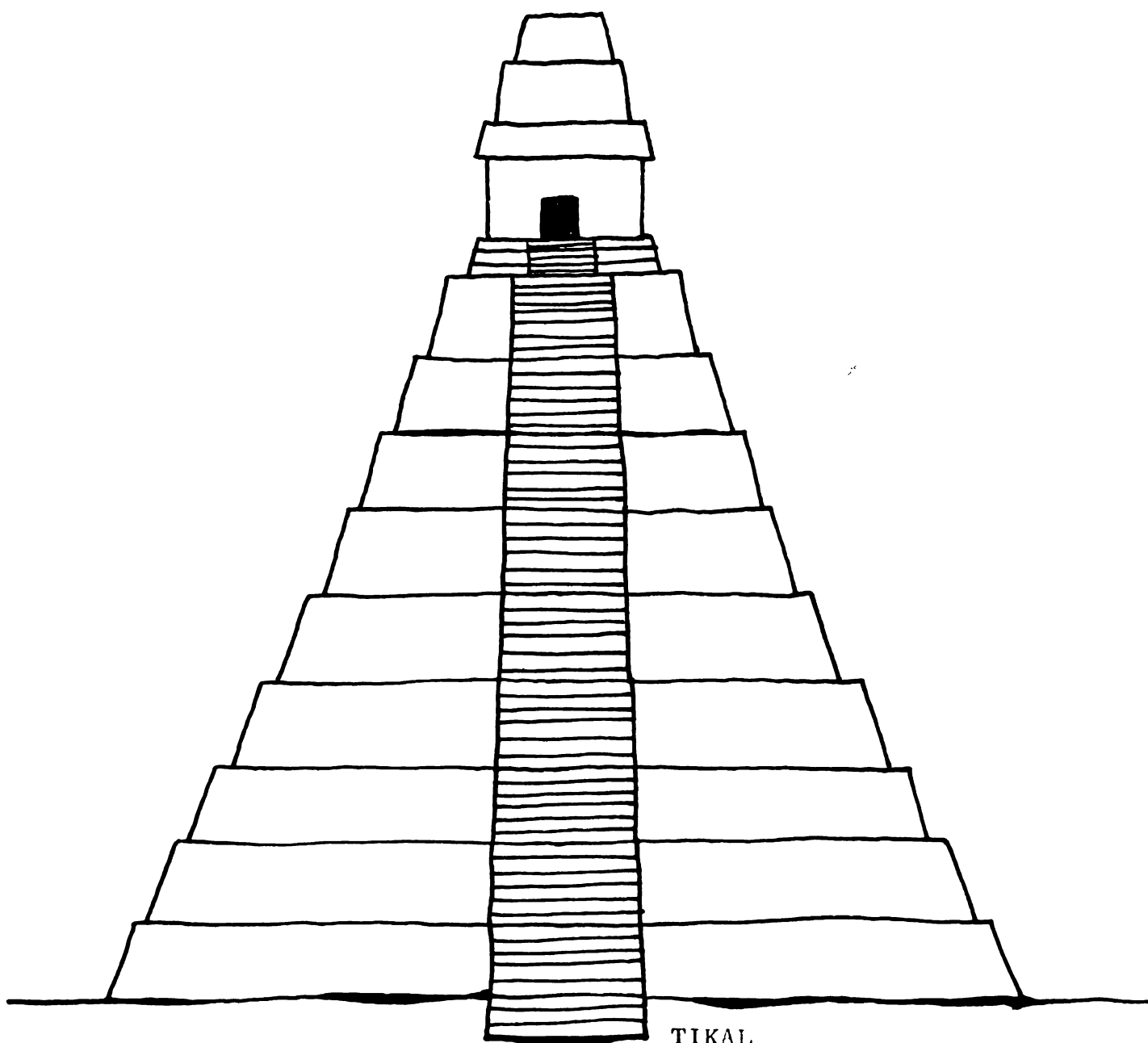
ILLUSTRATION III



LA VENTA TYPE PYRAMID
1000 to 300 BC

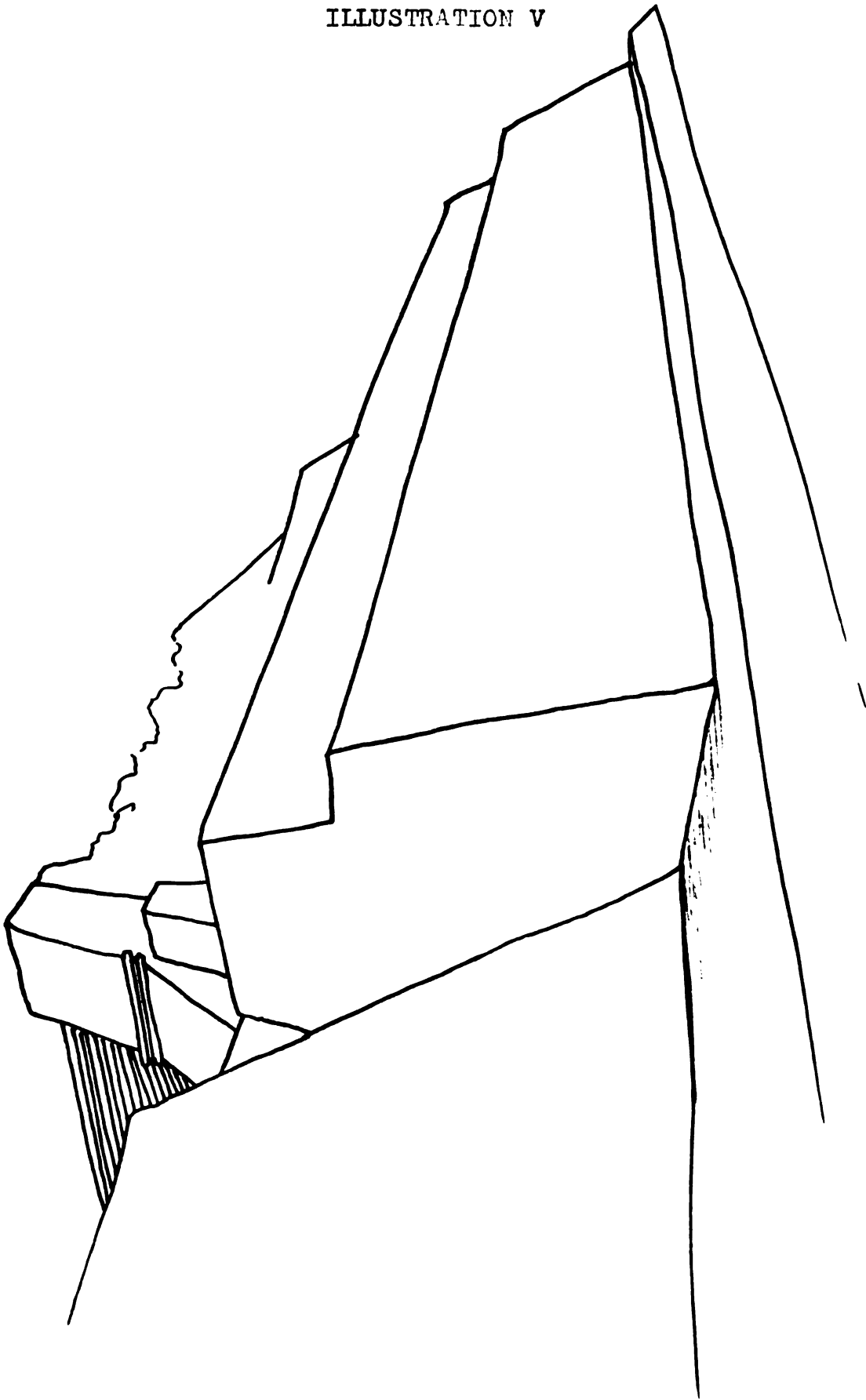
TEOTIHUACAN TYPE PYRAMID
PROFILE
FROM ca 100 AD

ILLUSTRATION IV



TIKAL
PYRAMID TYPE
150 FEET HIGH
ca 800 AD

ILLUSTRATION V



TENAYUCA PUEBLO
ca 1400

ILLUSTRATION VI

SHELL GORGET
from a Tennessee
mound



MAYA STONE DISC



SANDSTONE DISC
from an Oklahoma
mound

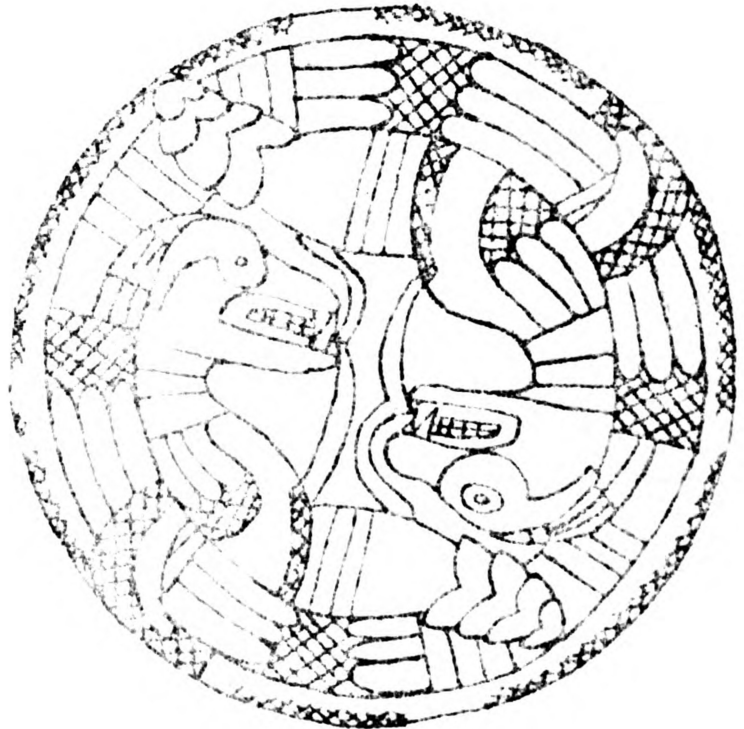
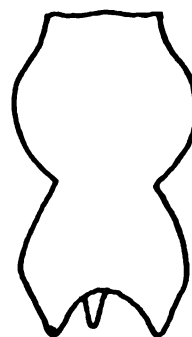
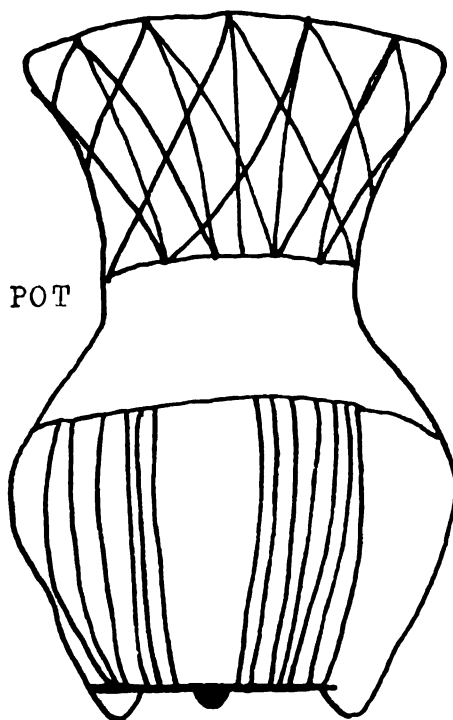


ILLUSTRATION VII

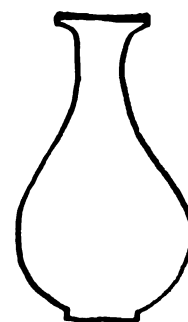


TING
SHANG DYNASTY

TEOTIHUACAN POT
100 AD



POPULAR CHINESE WINE
BOTTLE TYPE



TEOTIHUACAN
BOTTLE
6TH CENTURY BC

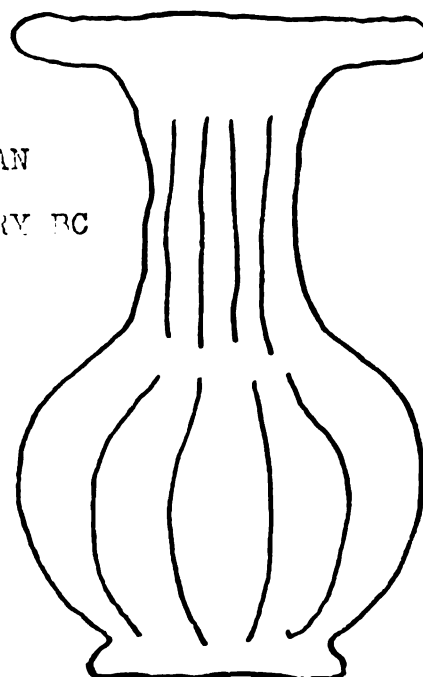


ILLUSTRATION VIII



MAYA FUNERARY DISH

ILLUSTRATION IX

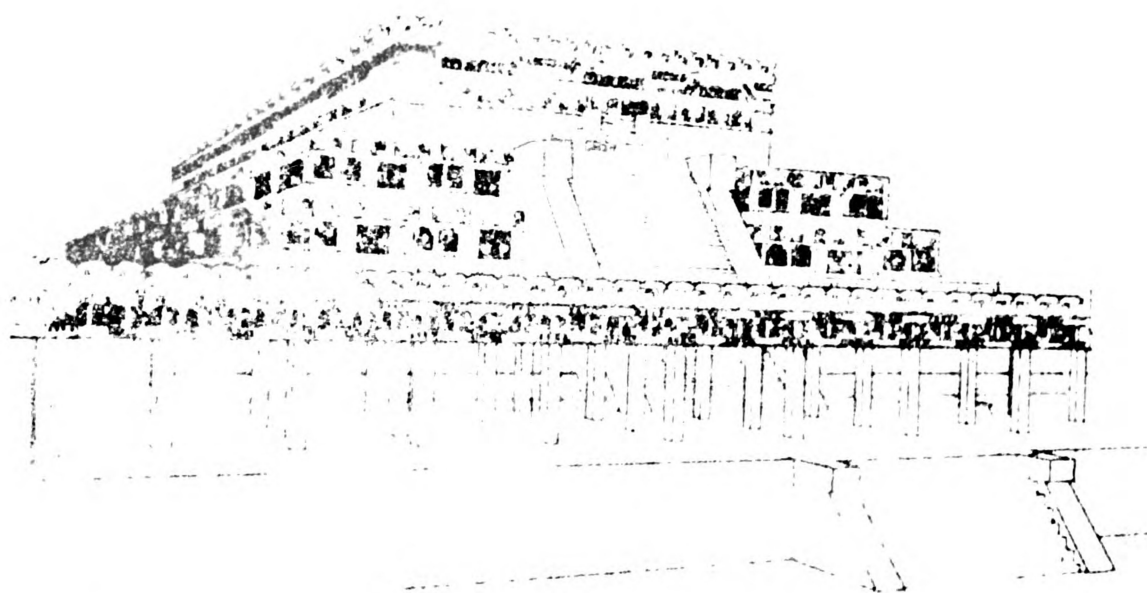


HINDU
STONE SCULPTURE

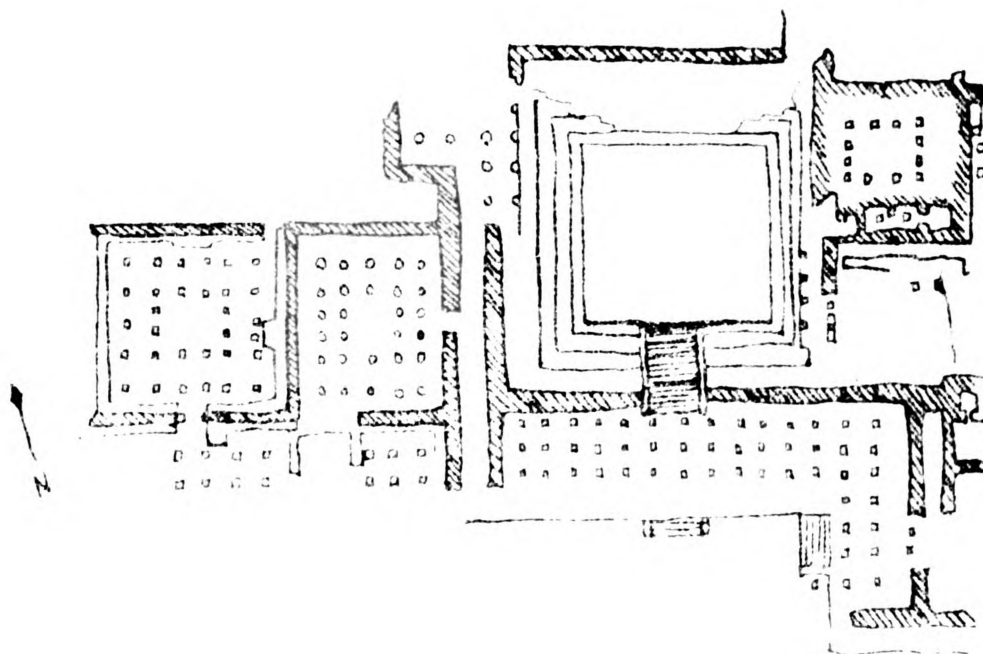
MAYA STONE ALTAR



ILLUSTRATION X

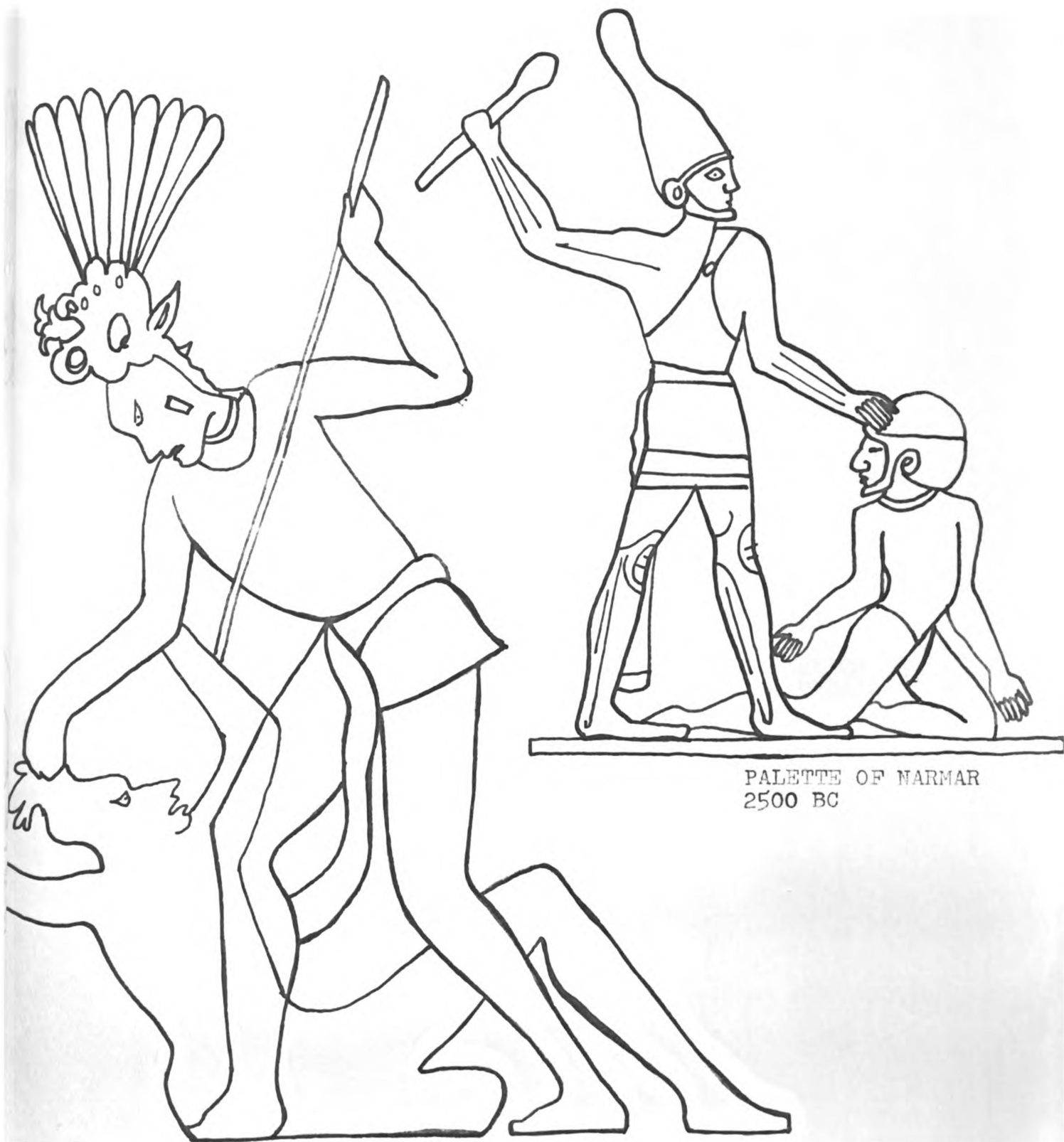


TEMPLE OF QUETZALCOATL
TULA
11th CENTURY



GROUND PLAN
TEMPLE OF QUETZALCOATL
TULA

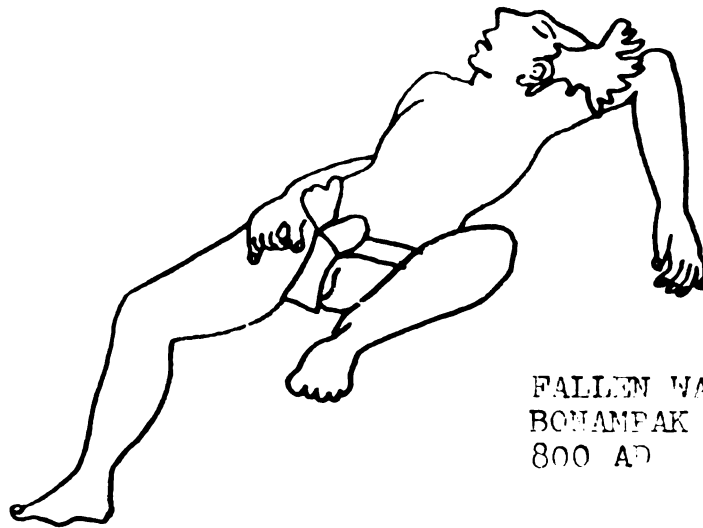
ILLUSTRATION XI



PALETTE OF NARMAR
2500 BC

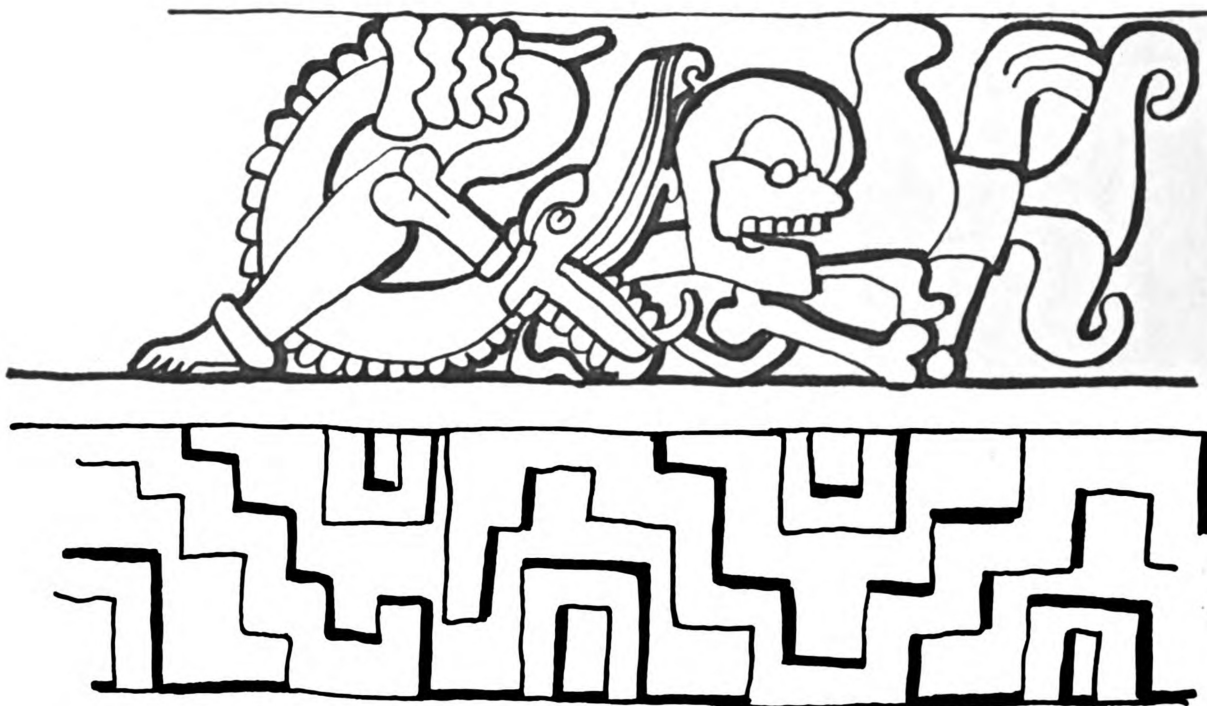
HAYA FRESCO
BONAMPAK
ca 800 AD

ILLUSTRATION XII



FALLEN WARRIOR
BONAMPAK FRESCO
800 AD

ILLUSTRATION XIII



WARRIOR-SERPENT FRIEZE

MOVING
SERPENT
MOTIFS

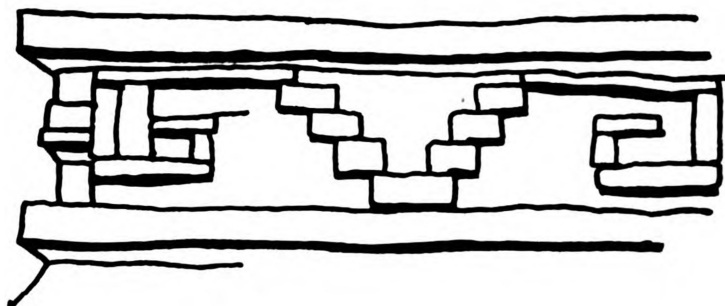
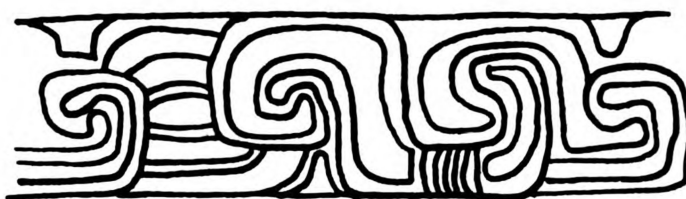
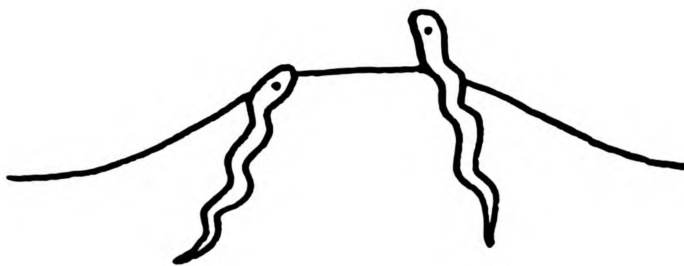
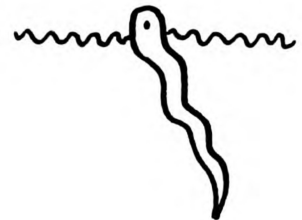


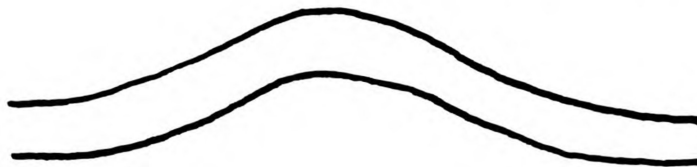
ILLUSTRATION XIV



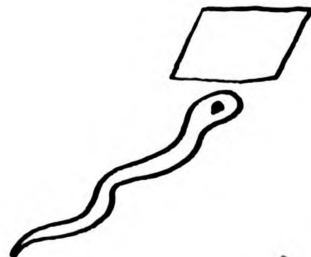
DIVINE SERPENTS



LINE OF HEAVEN



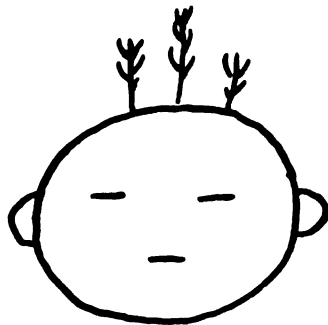
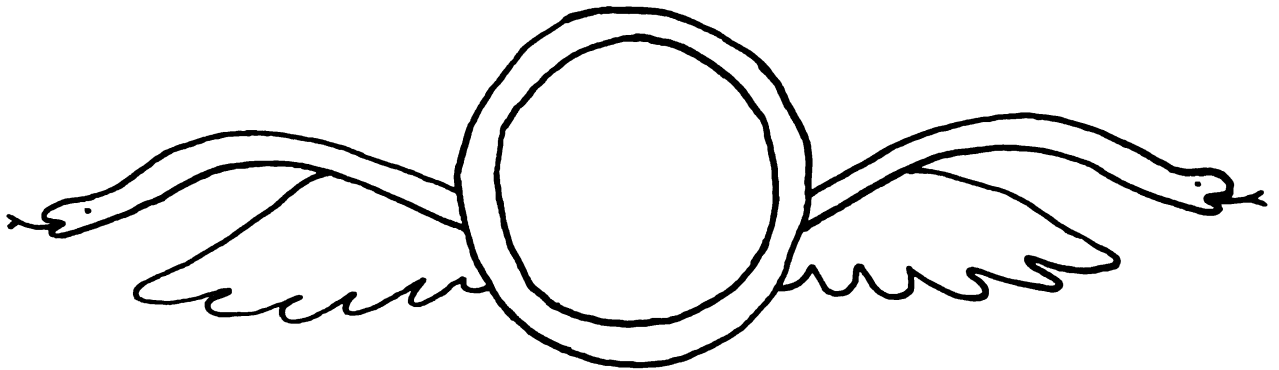
NORTH AMERICAN
FIRE SYMBOL



AZTEC FIRE SYMBOL



THE URABON



NORTH AMERICAN INDIAN
PICTOGRAPH OF THE SUN

EGYPTIAN
SOLAR
DISC

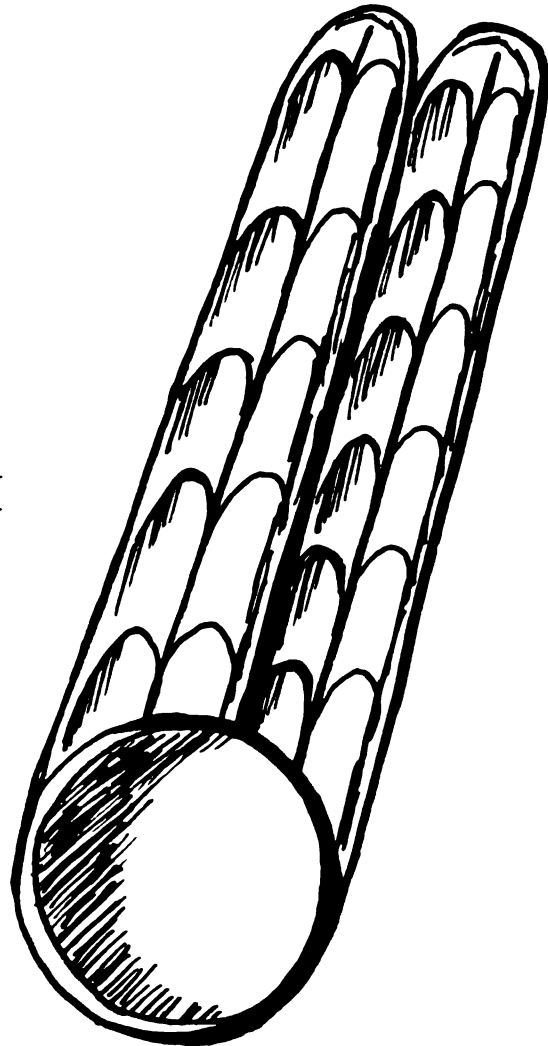
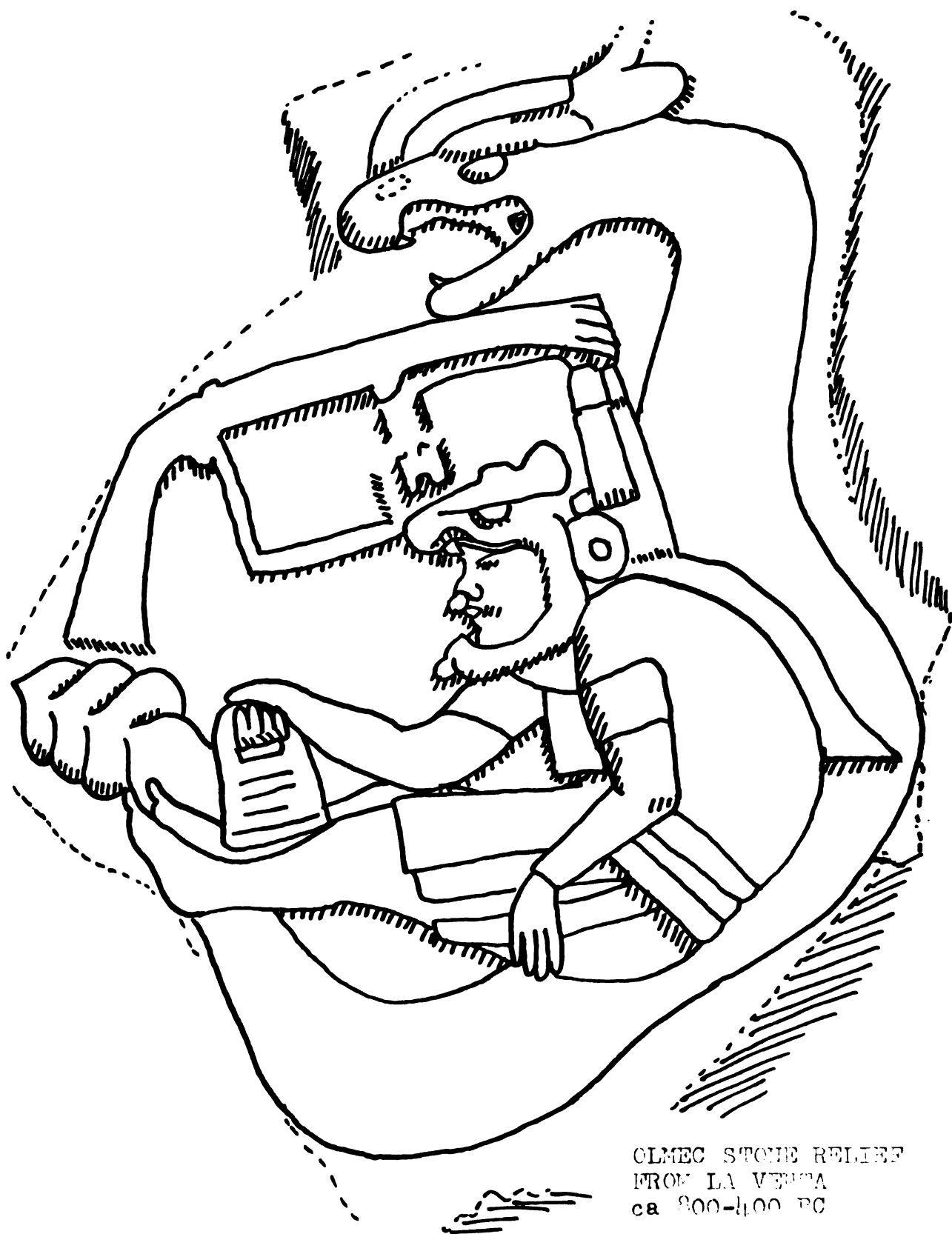


ILLUSTRATION XVI



AZTEC CALENDAR STONE

ILLUSTRATION XVII



OLMEC STONE RELIEF
FROM LA VENTA
ca. 800-400 BC

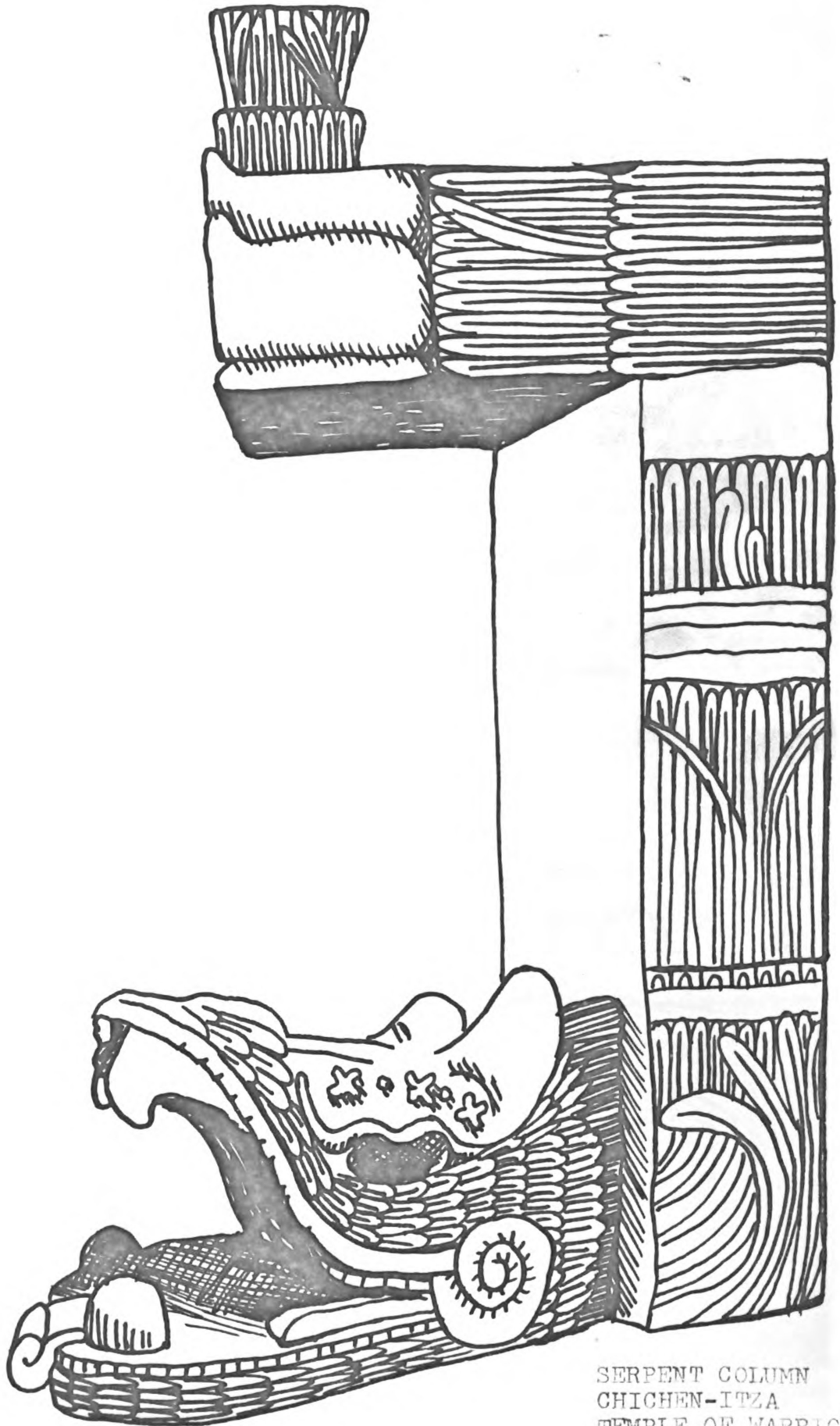
TEOTIHUACAN
STONE HEAD
TEMPLE OF
QUETZALCOATL



AZTEC STONE
SCULPTURES

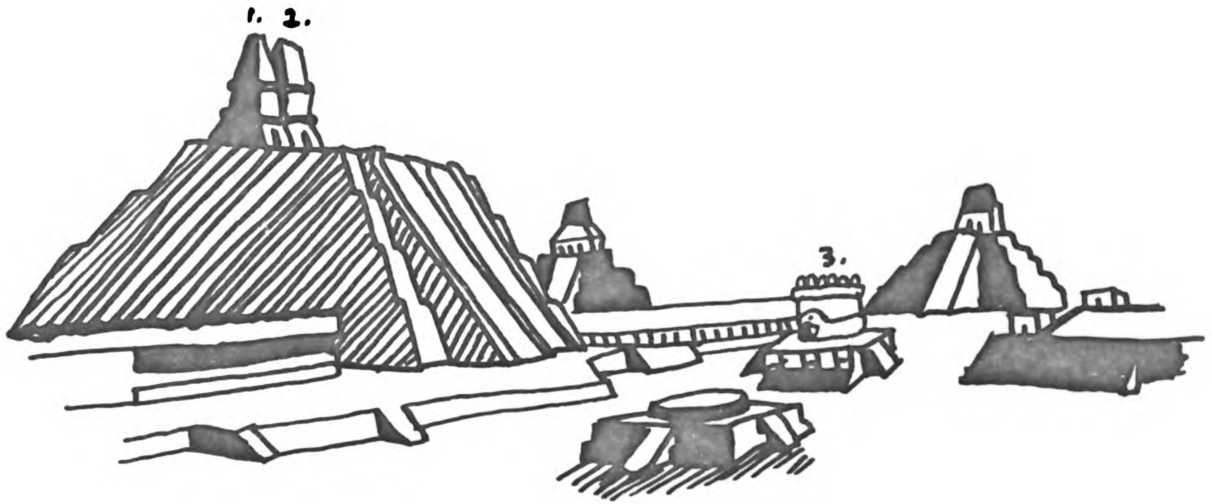


AZTEC HIEROGLYPH FOR SERPENT



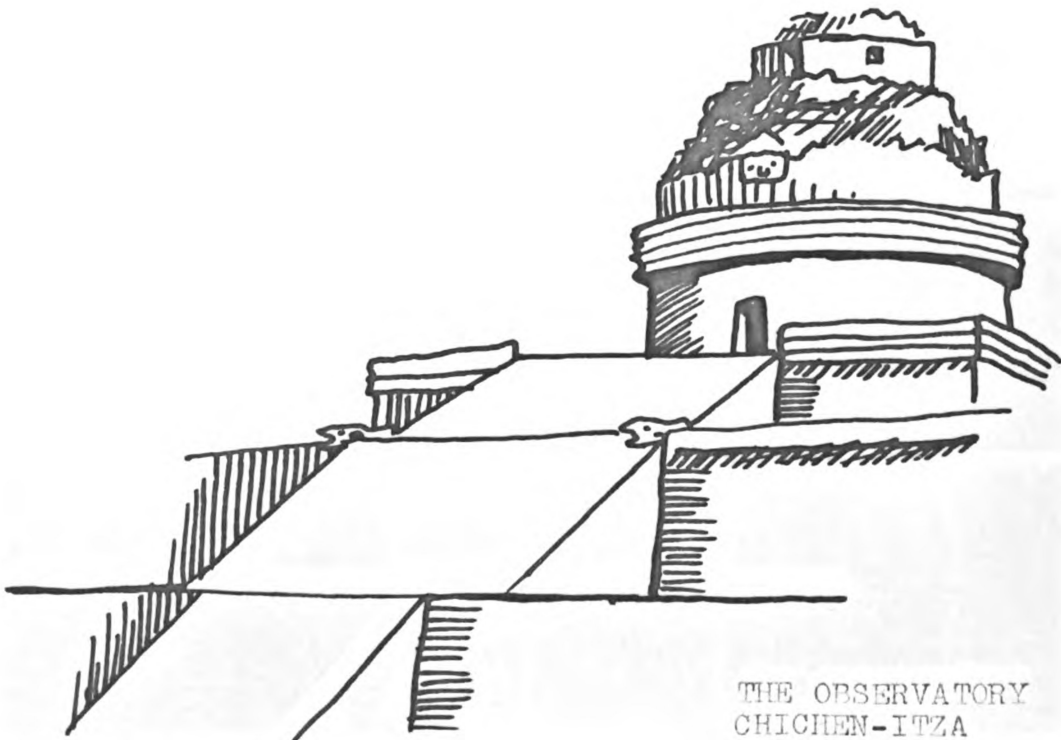
SERPENT COLUMN
CHICHEN-ITZA
TEMPLE OF WARRIORS

ILLUSTRATION XX



TENOCHTITLAN

1. temple of Tezcatlipoca
2. temple of Huitzliopochtli
3. temple of QUETZALCOATL



THE OBSERVATORY
CHICHEN-ITZA



FIGURINE FROM
TEOTIHUACAN



QUETZALCOATL MURAL
TECTIHUACAN

DETAIL OF
QUETZAL
BIRD



ILLUSTRATION XXIII



MAYA STONE RELIEF

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