

THE QUETZALCOATL PROPHECY AND INTERPRETATION
OF "REALITY IS A GREAT SERPENT"
IN CHICANO EXPRESSION

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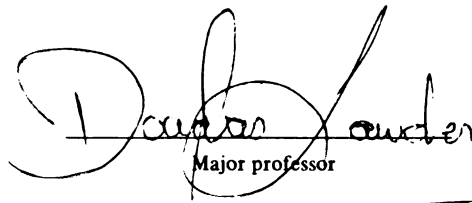
THE QUETZALCOATL PROPHECY AND INTERPRETATION
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ABSTRACT

THE QUETZALCOATL PROPHECY AND INTERPRETATION OF "REALITY IS A GREAT SERPENT" IN CHICANO EXPRESSION

By

David Steven Wessel

Chicanos are utilizing ancient American symbols as part of their aesthetic expression in literature and art. Reflecting upon the past the Chicano simultaneously disseminates their future concepts through aesthetic expression. Thus, Chicano aesthetic expression is important as an aid in understanding an ethnic people in a pluralistic society, as an indigenous American heritage, and as an addition to the wealth of man's achievement in the Humanities.

Among the traditional symbols which frequently appear in works of Chicano art and literature is the serpent. In "Pensamiento Serpentino" Luis Valdes states that "Reality is a Great Serpent." This study was conceived to interpret the meaning of "Reality is a Great Serpent."

The evocation of the ancient Serpent is affirmed by the Chicanos in the belief in a prophesy that the

Feathered Serpent, Quetzalcoatl, will return to this land August 16, 1987. Through an examination of the historico-mythological Quetzalcoatl, the ages of the world, the heavens and hells, and the time of the arrival of Hernan Cortes it was established how the date, August 16, 1987, was achieved.

An exploration through a maze of controversial conjectures on Mesoamerica led to the discovery of the Serpent and the key to its meaning--related to the agricultural world--in ancient American cultures. The interpretation of "Reality is a Great Serpent" was derived from reading hieroglyphs on codices, stelae, and panels, and interpretations of architectural concepts by scholars both ancient and contemporary involved in Nahuatl expression.

Symbolic veneration of the Serpent was first recognized with the appearance of an imitation volcanic pyramid at an excavation site of the earliest known culture in Mesoamerica. Through apperception of the volcanic action--enriching the earth for vegetation--the ancient people translated the volcano symbolically into a Great Serpent.

Dependence upon the land led to a unique transcendence: humanity and vegetation are derived from a single primordial source; generating, germinating, and

sustaining itself. This primordial source is symbolized by the Serpent.

Reality is cyclic--all things have their time of existence: birth, life, death, and rebirth--and is symbolized by the Feathered Serpent, Quetzalcoatl. The feathers represent vegetation. The human represents the Serpent. The Serpent is the Serpent.

Certain aspects of the original cultural tradition have exhibited a remarkable resistance to change while having been remolded and reinterpreted in conformance with underlying aesthetic values in Chicano literature and art. A graphic example, Moonsong, by Ray Chavez, of the evolutionary change of the Serpent into a tree is presented.

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David Steven Wessel

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to Janet

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I would like to express particular appreciation to Warren Peters, director of the Detroit Institute of Arts Library, and to the City of Detroit for collecting and preserving the ancient hieroglyphic literature.

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NAHUATL PRONUNCIATION

- The vowels:
- A as in cat
 - E as in set
 - I as in give
 - O as in hot
 - U as in true
- The consonants:
- X like sh in show
 - Z like s in say
 - H is pronounced with a soft aspiration as in English. It is like w in way; huethuetl, way-waytl
 - CH as in chat
 - QU has a k value
 - HU and GU have a w sound when preceding a vowel
 - TCH as in catch
 - TL both letters pronounced so fast they blend as though one
 - TZ like ts in cats
 - TL, TZ, and TS represent single sounds and are not to be divided
- The diphthongs:
- OA and UA like wa as in Swahili
 - UEI like way
 - HUIT like wit
 - OU like o in pole

The accent in the Nahuatl language falls on the penultimate syllable and therefore on every second syllable. English phonetic equivalents have been provided for the examples:

Ixtilxochitl (eeshtleel-SHO-cheetl)

Chalchiuhtlicue (chal-chee-OOT-lee-kway)

Chichen Itza (chi-CHEN eet-ZA)

Quetzalcoatl (kayt-zal-CO-atl)

Teutihuacan (tay-o-tee-wah-CAN)
tonacatecuhtli (to-na-ca-tay-COO-tli)
Ehecatl (ay-HAY-catl)
Tezcatlipoca (tez-cat-LI-po-ca)
Xolotl (SHO-lottl)
Chignahuapan (chi-na-WA-pan)
Huitznahuacans (weetz-na-WA-cans)
Xochimilco (sho-chee-MEEL-co)
Tenochtitlan (te-notch-ti-TLAN)
Cuicuilco (kee-KEEL-co)
Tonalpohualli (to-nal-po-WAHL-li)
Oaxaca (wah-HAH-cah)
Nezahuacoyotl (ne-za-wal-COY-otl)
Nahuatl (NA-watl)
Ixachilan (Ish-ah-chi-LAN)
Ixachilankak (Ish-ah-chi-LAN-ka)

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY STATEMENTS WITH DEFINITION OF TERMS

The inscription at the entrance to the National Archives in Washington D.C. reads, "WHAT IS PAST IS PROLOGUE." Chicanos are identifying with their ancient historical and cultural roots as a prologue to contemporary expression. This past does not begin with Columbus "discovering" a new land, nor with the foundation established by early Americans as demonstrated by a Chicano poet, Richard Olivas:

I'm sitting in my history class,
The instructor commences rapping,
I'm in my U.S. History class,
And I'm on the verge of napping.

The Mayflower landed on Plymouth Rock.
Tell me more! Tell me more!
Thirteen colonies were settled.
I've heard it all before.

What did he say?
Dare I ask him to reiterate?
Oh why bother
It sounded like he said,
George Washington's my father.

I'm reluctant to believe it,
I suddenly raise my mano.
If George Washington's my father,
Why wasn't he Chicano?¹

The original inhabitants of the Americas did not migrate from other lands but traveled to other lands. Arnold C. Vento asserts in an article "Myth, Legend, and History of Aztec Origins: The Oral Tradition," that it was not the Nahuas who were discovered, but Europe, Asia and Africa by the Nahuas.² Dr. Vento refutes the idea established by Elliot Smith that the Egyptians migrated to the continent of America and founded the ancient cultures.³

Autochthonous man began in this continent in Ixachilan according to Dr. Vento. In Nahuatl, Ixachilan means "immensity." The inhabitants of this continent were called Ixachilankah; the race was known as Ixachilankah, and contained many dialects in which Nahuatl was the dominant tongue.⁴ The term "Nahua" was used collectively for all peoples who successively inhabited Ixachilan in different periods. The Nahuas shared a common linguistic bond as well as cultural similarities. For this reason Miguel Leon-Portilla, a Mesoamerican scholar, attached to the ancient peoples the term Nahuatl, and refers to them collectively as the Nahuatl culture.⁵

Irene Nicholson, also a Mesoamerican scholar, uses the term Nahuatl to mean "those whom the whole cultural complex--language, myth, and symbol--first sprang."⁶ Nicholson's evidence was based on the fact

that so many myths among the peoples of Central Mexico, the Yucatan Peninsula, and parts of South America were so similar it would be reasonable to suppose the existence of some common parent stock.⁷

The scope of this study is thematic and generic based on examination from diverse areas and periods of ancient and contemporary resources. It is not important in the present purpose of this study to distinguish between various peoples. It is important to recognize a new ecumene--a culture unrelated to any other such as the European culture--the autochthonous Nahua.

Periods are generally designated according to the time the people of Mesoamerica moved from a simple site--village agriculture, sometime after 1500 B.C.--to the ceremonial civilization of the great city of Teotihuacan, 200-700 A.D. Pre-classic is the term given before Teotihuacan. Classic is the period during the flourishing of Teotihuacan, and Post-classic is the period after Teotihuacan up to the Spanish Conquest in 1523 A.D.⁸

Mesoamerica is that part of the continent differentiated from other areas by a common cultural basis and common tradition. Geographically it extends from central Mexico--from the Soto La Marina River in Tamaulipas and the Fuerte River in Sinaloa--to central Honduras and western Costa Rica. Its cultural tradition started around

2000 B.C., but as a civilized area its history only begins with the Olmecs.⁹

Archaeologists have excavated many sections of Teotihuacan. It was a city of airy spaciousness constructed along horizontal planes with massive sloping walls by architects who knew their skill.¹⁰ Located some twenty-four miles north-east of Mexico City, it so impressed the Aztecs that it appears in their mythology as the birth place of the universe, the gods and man.

In 1941 historians held a congress and passed a resolution that the capital of Quetzalcoatl was a certain Tollan--Tula, one hundred twenty-five miles from Mexico City, and not as previously thought to be at Teotihuacan.¹¹ It was at Teotihuacan that the cult of Quetzalcoatl found expression, states the archaeologist Laurette Sejourné, and the image of Quetzalcoatl existed a thousand years before the discovery of the city of Tula, but did not exist before the time of Teotihuacan.¹² In Chapter III of this study an obvious Olmec Feathered Serpent of a time long before Teotihuacan is presented.

There are many controversial conjectures mentioned in this study. The above controversy over the time of existence of Quetzalcoatl, Tula or Teotihuacan is not important to the purpose of this study. The intent of this study is to interpret the various symbolic aspects of the Mesoamerican Serpent, not to solve the controversial

conjectures. It is understood that the interpretation of the Serpent in the dissertation is itself an addition to the many conjectures that exist.

The representation of saurians or reptiles constitutes one of the most prominent motifs in Mesoamerican art, architecture, and sculpture. The symbol of Quetzalcoatl is a serpent adorned with feathers of the Quetzal bird. The name Quetzalcoatl means literally "quetzal-serpent" which is either called "feathered or plumed" serpent. The Quetzal, native of Guatemala, also lived during ancient times in Mexico and was regarded as one of the most beautiful birds in the world. It takes its name from "quetzalli," a Nahuatl term for tail feather, which came to mean "precious" or "beautiful."¹³ The word "coatl" means "serpent" and also "twin." Thus, the word Quetzalcoatl may also be translated as "precious twin."¹⁴

David Kahan writes in an article "Chicano Street Murals: People's Art in the East Los Angeles Barrio," that among the traditional symbols which frequently appear in the murals is the snake, the Feathered Serpent, Quetzalcoatl, the chief diety of the Nahuatl pantheon.¹⁵ Indian forms and symbols are no affectation for the Chicano, says Guillermo Guenfrios in "The Emergence of the New Chicano," "they are in his blood, his religion, and his culture."¹⁶

The archaeologist H. J. Spinden, referring to the symbol of the Serpent, writes:

When we can begin ourselves to feel the serpent symbolism of the Mayan artists as we feel, for instance, the conventional halo that covers the ideal head of Christ, then we shall be able to recognize the truly emotional qualities of Mayan architecture.¹⁷

Laurette Sejourne suggests that the image of the Feathered Serpent had for the Nahuatl culture the same evocative force as the Crucifix for Christianity.¹⁸ Symbols constitute a meaningful code to those whose existence it is based. Carl Jung states: "What we call a symbol is a term, a name, or even a picture that may be familiar in daily life, yet that possesses specific connotations in addition to the conventional and obvious meaning."¹⁹

The term "culture" is an essential part of the language of today. In this study culture means inherited traditional beliefs; it comprises observable modifications caused by human actions aesthetically expressed in succeeding generations. Chicano culture is the new generation. It is essential to identify this culture through its aesthetic content as an aid in understanding an ethnic people in a pluralistic society, as an indigenous American heritage, and as an addition to the wealth of man's achievement in the Humanities.

There are several different concepts over the meaning of the term "Chicano." Two letters published in

the Los Angeles Times Newspaper express vigorously different viewpoints. The first letter was written by Ruben Salazar. He states:

A Chicano is a Mexican-American with a non-Anglo image of himself.

He resents being told Columbus "discovered" America when the Chicano's ancestors, the Mayans and the Aztecs, founded highly sophisticated civilizations centuries before Spain financed the Italian explorer's trip to the "New World."

When you think you know what Chicanos are getting at, a Mexican American will tell you that Chicano is an insulting term and may even quote the Spanish Academy to prove that Chicano derives from Chicanery.

A Chicano will scoff at this and say that such Mexican Americans have been brainwashed by Anglos and that they're Tio Tacos (Uncle Toms). This type of Mexican Americans, Chicanos will argue, don't like the word Chicano because it's abrasive to their Anglo-oriented minds.

These poor people are brown Anglos, Chicanos will smirk.

What, then is a Chicano? Chicanos say that if you have to ask you'll never understand, much less become a Chicano.

Actually, the word Chicano is as difficult to define as "soul."

For those who like simplistic answers, Chicano can be defined as short for Mexicano. For those who prefer complicated answers, it has been suggested that Chicano may have come from the word "Chihuahua--the name of a Mexican state bordering on the United States. Getting trickier, this version then contends that Mexicans who migrated to Texas call themselves Chicanos because having crossed into the United States from Chihuahua they adopted the first three letters of that state, Chi, and then added cano, for the latter part of Texano. . . .

In New Mexico they call themselves Spanish Americans. In other parts of the Southwest they call themselves Americans of Mexican descent, people with Spanish surnames or Hispanos.

Why, ask some Mexican Americans, can't we just call ourselves Americans?

Chicanos are trying to explain why not. Mexican Americans, though indigenous to the Southwest, are on the lowest rung scholastically, economically, socially, and politically. Chicanos feel cheated. They want to effect change now. . . .

Chicanos, then, are merely fighting to become "Americans."²⁰

A Mexicano that did quote from a Castillian dictionary was Reverend Thomas Sepulveda, an army chaplain, who expressed his views in a letter published in the Los Angeles Times on January 5, 1970. The letter states:

The constant barbaric use by Mexican Americans and the general public of the word chicano instead of Mexicano urged me to break my long silence against the wrong use of the word.

According to Vastus's "Diccionario Enciclopedico de la lengua Castellana" the word chicano or chicana signified "mentiroso"--liar or "embustero"--tricky.

The meaning of this word chicano is even worse if one interprets it etymologically. So, I hope this statement will help the general public and the people who have pride in calling themselves chicanos, when they really mean to call themselves Mexicanos.

I feel proud to be a Mexicano and I forbid people to call me and my people chicano or chicanos because when they do they are calling us mentirosos--liars--"embusteros"--tricky--and something worse.²¹

REV. THOMAS SEPULVEDA
Chaplain, General Hospital
Denver, Colorado

In a short story by Mario Suarez, a Chicano writer, called "El Hoyo" (The Hole), on the cultural multiplicity among Chicanos in the barrio, there is a reference to the term "Chicano" which states: "While the

term 'Chicano' is the short way of saying 'Mexicano,' it is the long way of referring to everybody."²²

There are over seven million Americans of Mexican descent in the United States. Aztlan, a mythological name for "homeland," is considered the place of origin of the Chicanos. Aztlan is geographically located in the southwest: Texas, New Mexico, California, and Arizona. It appears that there is no single term designating Americans of Mexican descent. The terms "Mexican Americans" or "Mexicanos" are used in California, "Latin American" or "Tejano" in Texas, "Nuevo Mexicanos" or "Hispanos" in New Mexico.

"La Raza" (The Race) is a term which unites nearly all Americans of Mexican descent into an ethnic solidarity and a movement. Two tenets of this movement are "Chicanismo" and "Carnalismo." Chicanismo is a recognition of a socio-political and cultural emergence. Carnalismo is the recognition of an ethnic kinship or brotherhood which binds everyone of Mexican descent together regardless of station in life.

Contemporary relevance of Chicano expression lies in their ancient past: "as ancient and as beautiful as life itself," and from this, says Luis Valdez, "the Chicano is able to grasp a new perspective on the world he lives in."²³

The inspiration for this new perspective in the field of art is proclaimed by Manuel J. Martinez: "The most 'ancient' art of our history is purely Indian and is still considered the natural and most vital source of inspiration."²⁴

In Chicano literature this preoccupation with the ancient past is not mere nostalgia but "a ritual of cleansing and a prophesy," states Tomas Rivera.²⁵

Reflecting upon the past the Chicanos simultaneously disseminate their future concepts through aesthetic expression. Thus, understanding Chicano aesthetic expression lies in their very ancient roots.

The evocation of the ancient past is affirmed in the belief in a prophesy which relates to a concept expressed in "Pensamiento Serpentino" by Luis Valdez that:

. . . Reality es una gran Serpiente
a great serpent
that moves and changes
and keeps crawling
out of its
dead skin

despojando su pellejo viejo
to emerge
clean and fresh
la nueva realidad nace de la
realidad vieja²⁶

. . . no hay que olvidar
que segun la profesia
de los tiempos antiguos
QUETZALCOATL esta por volver
al mundo . . .

discarding his old skin

the new reality is born
from the old reality

Do not forget that according
to the prophesy of ancient
times,
Quetzalcoatl will return to
the world . . .

en el AÑO CE ACATL EN EL
DÍA CE ACATL

y cae el 16 de Agosto de 1987.²⁷

in the year one reed on the
day one reed.

August 16, 1987.

(English trans. by the author)

The recognition of the aesthetic values of their ancient past is part of the Chicano movement. Or, is it the Quetzalcoatl movement? A question which may take on a new meaning in the process of this dissertation.

The illumination of the Quetzalcoatl prophesy is found in a concept whose contents refers to "Reality is a great Serpent. The approach is to study the symbol of the Serpent in its various aspects for an interpretation of "Reality." The question is: What did the Serpent really mean to the ancient Americans as an "old reality" that so inspires "new reality" in Chicano expression.

History and myth are intermingled concerning Quetzalcoatl, the Feathered Serpent, and the personage who bore that name. The importance, whether history or myth, is the prophesy that Quetzalcoatl will return to reclaim his "Kingdom" on the day of his birth.

The main premises of this dissertation are presented in three chapters. The second chapter discusses the historico-mythological Quetzalcoatl, the ages of the world, the heavens and hells, and the ancient calendar. With this knowledge and the Gregorian calendar a calculation of the exact date of the prophesied return of Quetzalcoatl was achieved. Chapter III presents the

Serpent and the meaning for its existence. The fourth chapter presents an holistic explanation tying together the various aspects of the Serpent and is a demonstration of the Chicano affirmation of ancient indigenous thought and expression. It presents the symbol of the Serpent as it relates to the ancient primordial source, and explains American indigenous thought expressed in the symbol of the Serpent. The ancient people came to realize that the Serpent is the Serpent.

Information concerning ancient Mesoamerica is derived from reading hieroglyphs on codices, stelae, and panels, and interpretations of architectural concepts by scholars both ancient and contemporary involved in Nahuatl studies.

The term "codex" usually refers to European illuminated manuscripts consisting of pages bound on one side. This term is really a misnomer when referring to the ancient Mesoamerican picture writing which are screen-folds of animal skins or bark paper that can be opened in accordian-fashion to the shape of a long rectangle. The images of the picture book are painted in various colors, encased in black outlines. A good available example is the Codex Nuttall published in 1975 which contains many hieroglyphs of the Feathered Serpent.²⁸

Codices are generally named after the library or city where they are preserved. Some, however, like the

Codex Nuttall carry the name of the owner or are given a new name which does cause confusion in references in published literature. The Nuttall Codex is at times referred to as Codex Zouche after an Englishman known as Lord Zouche who owned it. Zelia Nuttall brought the Codex--the original is in the British Museum--to the attention of scholars. She had the original manuscript painted and published in 1902 by the Peabody Museum of Harvard University. Because of her contribution the director of the Peabody Museum of American Archaeology and Ethnology of Harvard University gave the name Nuttall to the codex, in her honor.

Codex painting was an art of the nobles, painted by and for the ruling class. Insight is given by a Dominican, Father Burgoa, on how the codices were used:

The painted manuscripts were executed by the sons of noble families who were chosen to be priests and were taught from childhood the art of pictographic writing and the stories and legends to be painted. . . . The historical manuscripts were explained by the Indians who were learned in the stories of the lineages and their achievements, and that the painted screenfolds were placed around the rooms of nobility as decoration.²⁹

In 1932, the archaeologist, Alfonso Caso, discovered in a tomb which he labeled as "Tomb 7" the Codex Bodley among other objects of art. Caso states:

Tomb 7 yielded more than five hundred pieces of jewelry and objects of art, and with them a wealth of information on Mixtec craftsmanship,

metalworking, and religion, much of it paralleled in the brightly colored folded Mixtec picture books of deerskin that survived the Spanish Conquest.³⁰

It is preserved in the Bodleian Library at Oxford. The subject matter of the Bodley Codex contains genealogies and histories of specific people and areas. It begins in A.D. 692 and ends abruptly in 1521, when the Mixtecs--inhabitants of the Valley of Oaxaca--were conquered by the Spanish.³¹

An English nobleman by the name of Lord Kingsborough compiled in nine volumes the first publication of hieroglyphic literature and named it Mexican Antiquities. Kingsborough devoted his entire life trying to prove that the indigenous Americans of Mesoamerica were descendants of the thirteen lost tribes of Israel mentioned in the Bible. He spent his time and fortune to this end gathering material for evidence. The publication and printing of Kingsborough's Mexican Antiquities was so costly he was unable to pay the debts he incurred and was put into prison in London where he died in penury.³²

The significance of the first publication of hieroglyphs for scholarly research into these ancient codices must not be underestimated. A facsimile of the 1831 publication of Kingsborough's work is preserved in the library of the Detroit Institute of Art. A list of the contents of the nine volumes is included in the

bibliography in this dissertation for those interested in future research. The bibliography lists all codices, literature about the codices, as well as works such as the Popol Vul and Bernardino de Sahagun's Florentine Codex which were derived from hieroglyphic writing under the heading "Hieroglyphic Literature." The bibliography is divided into sections with an introductory statement defining the material in each section.

Certain aspects of the original cultural tradition have exhibited a remarkable resistance to change while having been remolded and reinterpreted in conformance with underlying aesthetic values. As studies continue, and new excavations are discovered and explored, new information--such as the horizontal dimension discussed in Chapter IV--will aid in the understanding of the continent on which we live.

FOOTNOTES: CHAPTER I

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²⁷Ibid., p. 19.

²⁸Zelia Nuttall, ed., Codex Nuttall (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1975), p. viii.

²⁹ Mary Elizabeth Smith, Picture Writing from Ancient Southern Mexico (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1973), p. 20.

³⁰ Stuart, p. 68.

³¹ Ibid., inside cover.

³² Katz, p. 9.

CHAPTER II

THE PROPHECY

Historico-Mythological Quetzalcoatl

History and myth are intermingled concerning Quetzalcoatl, the Feathered Serpent, and the personage who bore that name. Whether history or myth, the essential part of the historico-mythological episode is that Quetzalcoatl, upon his departure, prophesied to return on the year and day of his birth.

It was for this reason that the conquest of Mexico by Hernan Cortes was so effective; the Aztecs did not fear any human being, only the gods could destroy them. Cortes arrived in the year One Reed, on the very day of the birth of Quetzalcoatl, and was believed to be the god returning to reclaim his "Kingdom."

Historical records contain dates of the birth and departure of Quetzalcoatl. Aztec mythology divides existence into ages. Four ages have passed and we are presently living in the Fifth Age. The ages are further divided into thirteen heavens and nine hells through which each age must pass before completion and the beginning of a new age. This information along with the

ancient and Gregorian calendars, a calculation of the exact date of the prophesy can be achieved.

The historical Quetzalcoatl is based on the legend that he was Ce Acatl Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl; translated it means Our Lord, One Reed Feathered Serpent. Historical reality was established by Bernardino de Sahagun who mentions a king called Quetzalcoatl who reigned many years in the city of Tollan--a name for Tulla which Sahagun mentions many times in relation to the Toltecs.¹

The historian H. J. Spinden states that Quetzalcoatl is:

. . . the greatest figure in the ancient history of the New World, with a code of ethics and love for the sciences and the arts.²

In the beginning of the tenth century, according to the legend, a Toltec chieftain, Mixcoatl, led his people from the north to conquer the Valley of Mexico. Mixcoatl married the daughter of Huitznahuacanos, Prince Chimalma. Mixcoatl died in 947 by a contender for his throne before the birth of his son. Chimalma died in childbirth and the son was named Ce Acatl Topiltzin after the calendrical sign that ruled the year of his birth.

Ce Acatl Topiltzin became a priest and eventually was elevated to the high priesthood of the religion of the god Quetzalcoatl, the Feathered Serpent. He then

assumed the name of the god whose living incarnation he was to be, and was thus known as Ce Acatl Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl or simply as Quetzalcoatl. Quetzalcoatl led his people in 980 to build his city, Tula. Myth attributes to him not only the city of Tula but all the benefits of civilization: corn, the calendar, the arts, and writing. In 999 Quetzalcoatl was forced to flee Tula and traveled across the Gulf Coast to Chichen Itza on the Yucatan Peninsula.³

The village of Tulla was mentioned by Sahagun in relation to a time of peace and plenty, and how the Toltecs had to leave their city with Quetzalcoatl.

The tale states that Quetzalcoatl was reared and considered a god, and in ancient times they worshipped him in Tulla. His subjects did not lack anything at all; they never suffered famine or lack of corn. The corn was so big they had to carry it in their arms, and never ate the small ears, but heated their baths with them instead of fire-wood. There was an abundance of cocoa-trees, and squash grew to a fathom (six feet) in circumference. They sowed and gathered cotton of all colors: red, yellow, purple, white, green and many others. These colors of cotton grew naturally. Also, in this town of Tulla, they reared many different kinds of birds of rich plumage in many colors as well as song birds who sang very sweetly and softly. The Toltecs were skilled

in all the arts which had their origin and commencement with Quetzalcoatl.

Quetzalcoatl also did penance by pricking his limbs and drawing blood with the maguey points, and he bathed at midnight in a spring. This custom was adopted by priests; they do exactly what Quetzalcoatl used to do in the town of Tulla.

The time came when the good fortune of Quetzalcoatl and the Toltecs came to an end. Tezcatlipoca had arrived, disguised as an old man, and the servants did not want to let him in to see Quetzalcoatl in his palace. However, Quetzalcoatl replied to his servants: "Let him come in here and appear before me, because I have awaited him for many days." Quetzalcoatl knew it was the beginning of the time of Tezcatlipoca, who reigns over the nine hells discussed below.

Sahagun records many trials and tribulations in Book III of his "History" before Quetzalcoatl finally departs on a raft of snakes.⁴ As god, Quetzalcoatl was defeated by the evil spell of Tezcatlipoca, traveled toward the east, built a raft of serpents and sailed away. In another version Quetzalcoatl cast himself into a bonfire he built himself, thus turning himself into the planet Venus.⁵

The Aztecs believed the origin of the gods, the world and man took place after four ages of time at a

city called Teotihuacan. The remains of this city stand today as a memorial testimony of the past.

About 200 B.C. there was built the city called Teotihuacan. About 750 B.C. Teotihuacan was sacked and burned, and all the people left. Who these people were no one knows. Moctezuma made pilgrimages to the city which the Aztecs named Teotihuacan, City of the Gods, because here, when one died he became a god, when one would say he became a god, it meant he died.⁶

Aztec mythology states that it was at Teotihuacan where the gods, the world and man were created. The origin of the gods, the world and man was called Omoteotl: "Ome" means two and "teotl" means god. Omoteotl was both masculine and feminine, and through his generative and conceptive powers he activated the concept of duality which continues throughout life's existence. Omoteotl was self-created by his own will and authority. In other words, by his own volition he came into being, and by his own will the gods, the world, and man came into existence.

Omoteotl first created the ages. Each age was represented by a sun, and each sun was considered a god--the sons of Omoteotl--and given a name: Tezcatlipoca, Quetzalcoatl, Tlaloc, and Chalchiuhtlicui. The sons of Omoteotl were entrusted with the creation of the other gods, the world and man. While each god or sun was in

power an age existed. The competition for supremacy over the destiny of man kept the world in tension and ultimately led to destruction. Thus, the world had been created and destroyed four times.

The first Sun was Tezcatlipoca. Quetzalcoatl struck him with his staff knocking him into the water. Changing into a Jaguar, the symbol of Tezcatlipoca, he devoured the giants, who inhabited the world.

Quetzalcoatl, as Ehecatl the wind god, was the second Sun, until he was struck down by the paw of the Jaguar, in which case, a great wind arose uprooting trees and most of mankind was destroyed. Those that survived were turned into monkeys.

The third Sun was Tlaloc, god of rain and fire, who showered the earth with fire-rain, and those not destroyed were changed into birds.

The fourth Sun or Age was Chalchiuhtlicue, goddess of water. The earth was flooded by Tlaloc and once again men were destroyed and those left were transformed into fish.

Tezcatlipoca and Quetzalcoatl had to lift up the sky, since it was made of water and had fallen upon the earth, so that land might appear again.

Now the earth was without light again so the four sons of Omoteotl, and the other gods they had created, decided to gather at Teotihuacan to create once again a

Sun that the earth might have light. They set about building a great fire in order that one of the gods would jump into the fire and sacrifice himself so there would be light.

Two of the gods volunteered for the sacrifice: one very rich and one very poor and sickly. For four days the two gods fasted and sacrificed for the trial ahead. On the fifth day a fire was built and one of the two gods were to throw themselves into the flames in order to emerge purified to illuminate the world. The rich god was to throw himself into the fire first. He tried three times but could not get himself to do it. The poor sickly god then leaped into the flames the first try. When the rich god saw this, shamed by his cowardice, he leaped into the flames and was also consumed.

The gods waited for the sun to appear. Then a great light appeared but there were two Suns. The gods enraged by the audacity of the deliberating Sun threw a rabbit at it and struck it in the face dimming its light; thus creating the moon.

However, the Sun did not move--all was still. Many times they tried to make the sun move. Then a great wind arose and made the sun move along its path.⁷ This is the Fifth Age or Sun of the world. It is the present age in which we live. The Fifth Sun will end after having traveled through the remaining sections of

the nine hells, August 16, 1987, which begins the Sixth Sun, or age, in its travels through the thirteen heavens.

Ometeotl and the thirteen heavens and nine hells are expressed in hieroglyphs in the Codex Vaticanus (Figure 1). The explanation of the heavens below is taken from Book VI of the Kingsborough edition containing the Vaticanus Codex. The numerical sequence on Figure 1 does not follow the explanation in Book VI. Two interpretations of the arrangements of the hieroglyphs taken from Codex Vaticanus for clarification follow: Alfonso Caso's from The Aztecs: People of the Sun (Figure 2); and that of Irene Nicholson's from Firefly in the Night (Figure 3).

The explanation of the heavens:

Omeyocan, the place where dwells Tonacatecutli, which signified creator generally. Tonacatecutli and Tonacatecuhtli, "Our Lord and Lady of Subsistence" as manifestation of Ometeotl's duality of being masculine and feminine. Omeyocan was the heavens of heavens or the highest heaven.

The next four heavens symbolize the four ages of the world. The last of the four is Quetzalcoatl or the age of Flints and Roses which is the present age. The age of Quetzalcoatl is not named "teotl" (god), the appellation by which the three preceding ages are distinguished, nor is it symbolized like them by a ray of the sun, because in this age no destruction of the world--extinction of the sun or creation of a new one--was supposed to take place.

The heaven next in order to Omeyocan was the green or light azure heaven, to which succeeded the green and black or dark azure heaven.

Figure 1.--The Thirteen Heavens and Nine Hells.

Codex Vaticanus, Kingsborough Edition,
Vol. II. Detroit Institute of Art,
pp. 1 and 2.

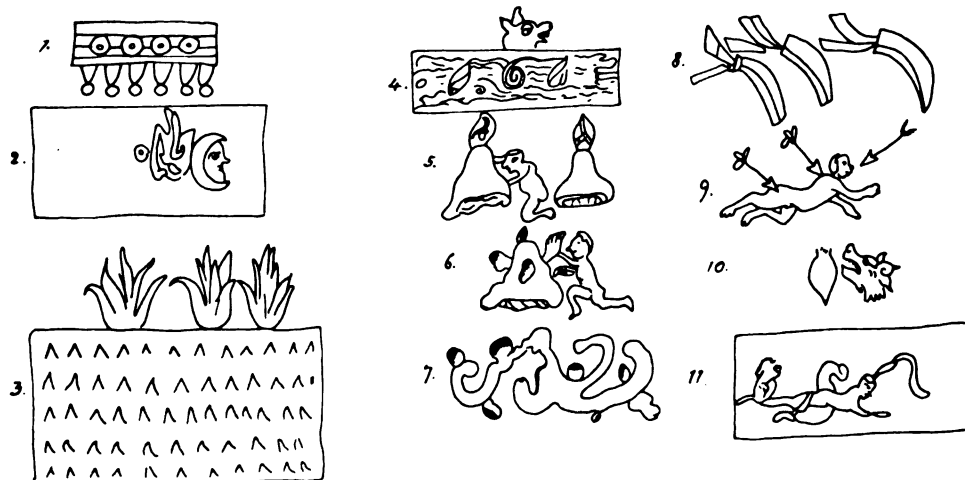
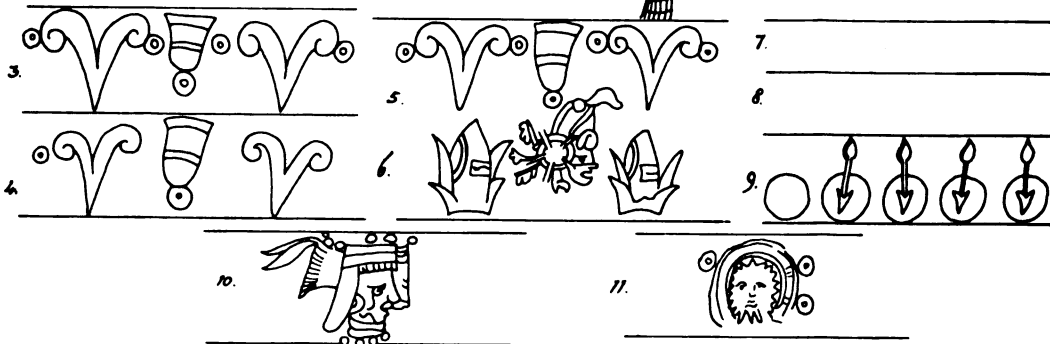


Figure 1.--The Thirteen Heavens and Nine Hells.

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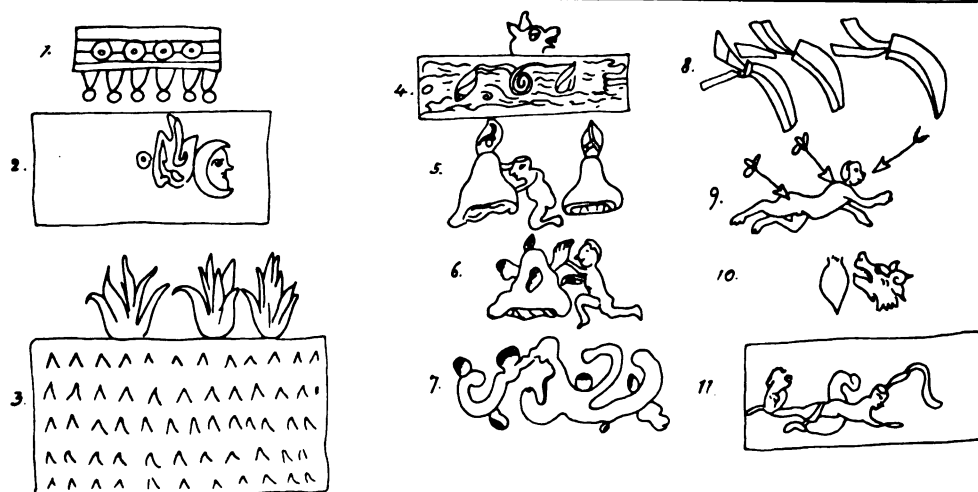
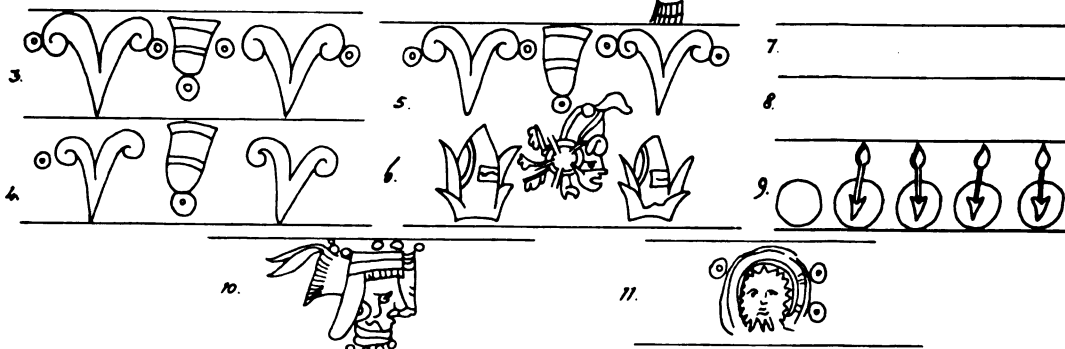


Figure 2.--The Nine Hells and The Thirteen Heavens.

Arrangement by Alfonso Caso, The Aztecs,
People of the Sun, trans. Lowell Dunham
(Norman: University of Oklahoma Press,
1958), p. 61.

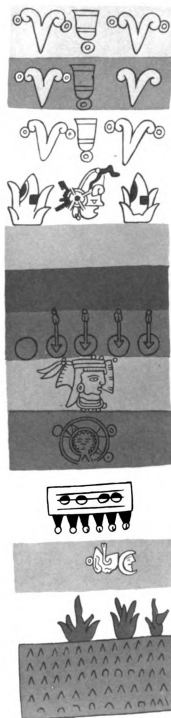
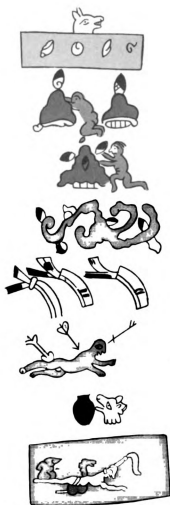


Figure 3.--The Nahua Heavens.

Arrangement after Irene Nickolson,
Firefly in the Night: A Study of
Ancient Mexican Poetry and Symbolism
(London: Faber and Faber, 1959), p. 56.

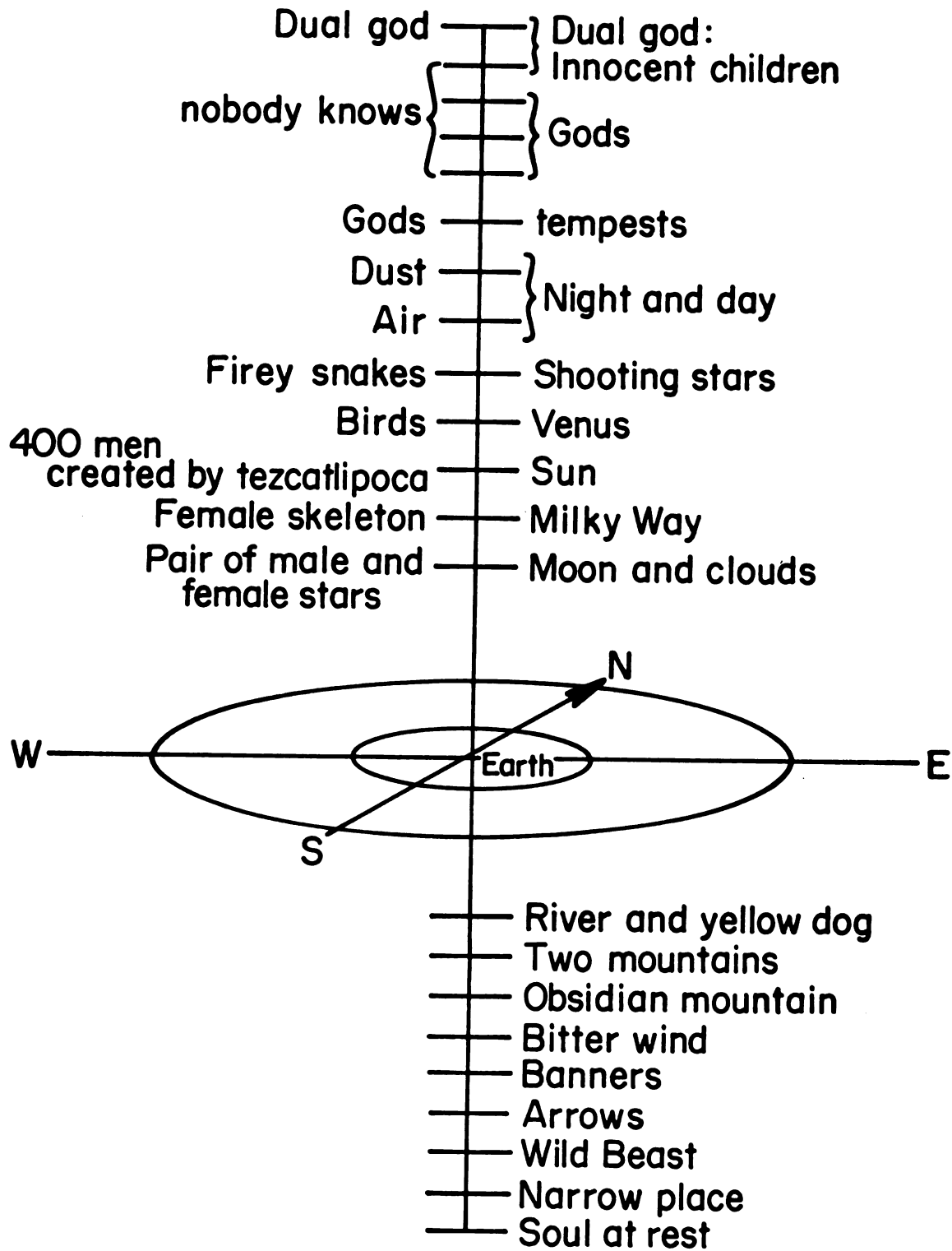
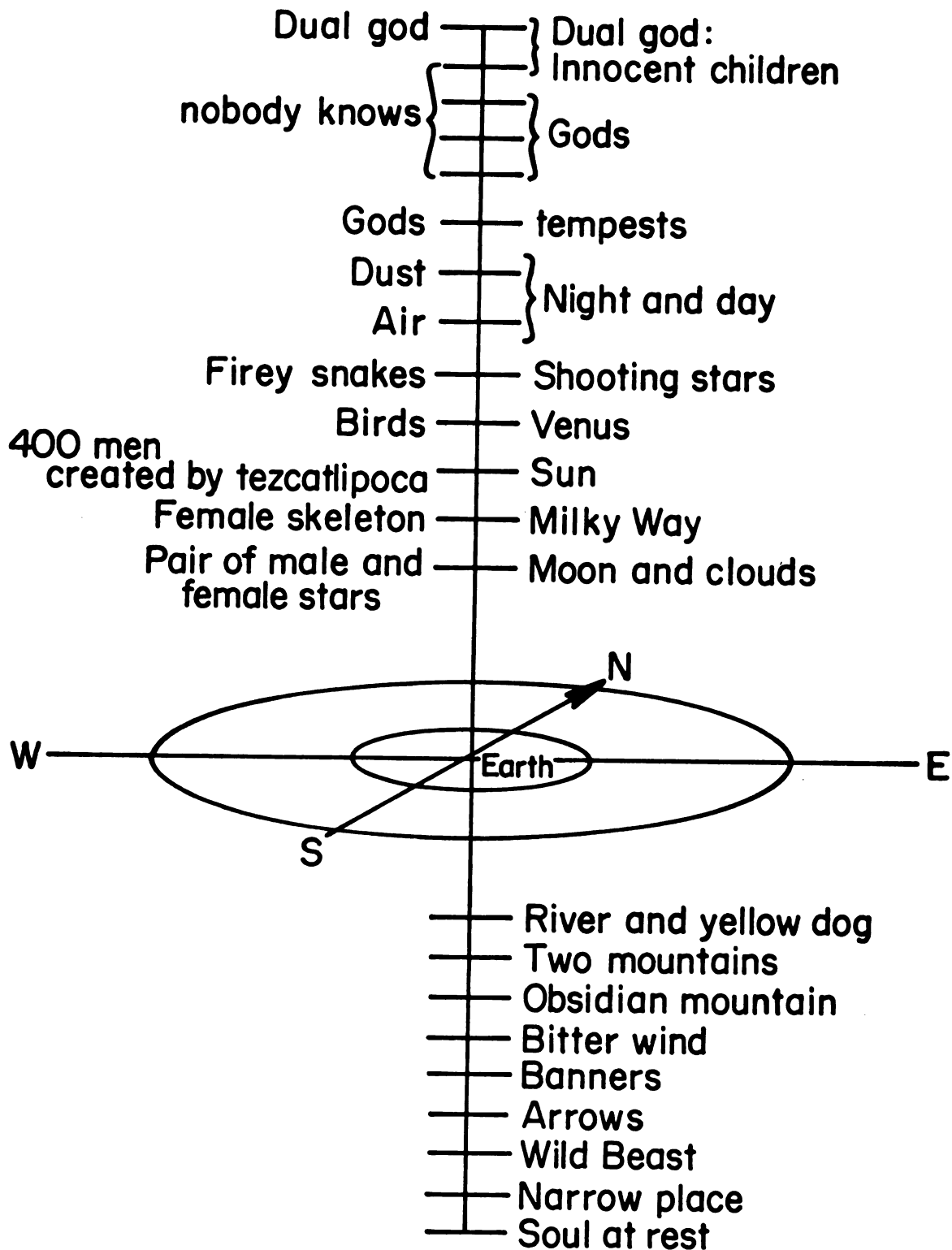


Figure 3.--The Nahua Heavens.

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(London: Faber and Faber, 1959), p. 56.



The symbol distinguishing the fifth heaven is the head of the goddess Chalchiuitlicue. The goddess may always be recognized by the symbol of "atl," or "water" upon her head denoting that she presided over the element.

Tonatiuh, the name of the sixth heaven, signifies "the heaven of the Sun."

Citlalicoe is perhaps the seventh heaven. It would then be the "heaven of the stars"; since "Citalal" means star.

Tlalocaypanmeztli, the name of the eighth heaven signifies the god Tlaloque and of the moon, or of "Paradise" and of the moon.

The ninth and last heaven was called Tlalicipac, which is here interpreted "the earth." Tlalicipac was an epithet which was bestowed on their (Book VI refers to "Mexicans") supreme diety Tonacatecutli, which its etymology refers more to the creation of light, or the work of the first day. The symbol of the ninth heaven resembles in its square form to the superior heavens.

In order to reach Mictlan, the place of rest, the soul or dead must pass through nine hells. The soul must cross a river called Chignahuapan, pass between two mountains that were joined together, climb over a mountain of obsidian, be subjected to an icy wind, so bitter it cut like obsidian knives, pass through a place where flags waved, be pierced by arrows, pass the place where wild beasts ate human hearts, go over narrow paths between stones, and, after a period of four years, finally reach the place called Chignahumietlan, where souls found repose.⁸

Figure 4.--The Calendar.

Arranged by the author. Glyphs are from the Codex Laud, Kingsborough Edition, Vol. II, Detroit Institute of Art.

Alligator		8	2	9	3	10	4	11	5	12	6	13	7
Wind	2	9	3	10	4	11	5	12	6	13	7		8
House	3	10	4	11	5	12	6	13	7		8	2	9
Lizard	4	11	5	12	6	13	7		8	2	9	3	10
Serpent	5	12	6	13	7		8	2	9	3	10	4	11
Death	6	13	7		8	2	9	3	10	4	11	5	12
Dear	7		8	2	9	3	10	4	11	5	12	6	13
Rabbit	8	2	9	3	10	4	11	5	12	6	13	7	
Water	9	3	10	4	11	5	12	6	13	7		8	2
Dog	10	4	11	5	12	6	13	7		8	2	9	3
Monkey	11	5	12	6	13	7		8	2	9	3	10	4
Grass	12	6	13	7		8	2	9	3	10	4	11	5
Reed	13	7		8	2	9	3	10	4	11	5	12	6
Ocelot		8	2	9	3	10	4	11	5	12	6	13	7
Eagle	2	9	3	10	4	11	5	12	6	13	7		8
Vulture	3	10	4	11	5	12	6	13	7		8	2	9
Motion	4	11	5	12	6	13	7		8	2	9	3	10
Flint	5	12	6	13	7		8	2	9	3	10	4	11
Rain	6	13	7		8	2	9	3	10	4	11	5	12
Flower	7		8	2	9	3	10	4	11	5	12	6	13

The Ancient Calendar

In order to understand how Cortes could be taken for the mythical hero-god, and Luis Valdez could prophesy the return of Quetzalcoatl, August 16, 1987, it is necessary to look at the Mesoamerican calendric system (Figure 4).

There were several ways of writing numbers in ancient Mesoamerica. The Olmec of La Venta, and the Maya used a "bar and dot" system.⁹ To write a number "5" a bar was used. One dot equalled "1", two dots equalled "2", etc.

There are 260 numbers, 20 horizontal and 13 vertical. $20 \times 13 = 260$. On the left are drawn glyphs. Each number signifies a day and each glyph is the sign of that day.

Beginning with 1 Alligator read down to 7 Flower. Then start the next column to the right which begins with 8 Alligator and ends with 1 Flower. Continue reading from left to right in this manner until reaching the last number, 13 Flower. This ends the 260 days of the first year of time which was called 1 Alligator.

The year continued until you passed through 260 days when you reached 13 Flower. Then the year sign changes and becomes "Year 2 House: one of the 4 "Year Bearers" that comprise the cycle discussed below. The first day of year 2 House is 1 Alligator. It will take

exactly 260 years to reach the year 1 Alligator, Day 1 Alligator again.

The cycle comprised 52 years or four revolutions around the calendar. $13 \times 4 = 52$. There were 4 "Year Bearers" which carried the names "House," "Rabbit," "Reed," and "Flint." According to the combination of numbers each "Year Bearer" could only occur once every 52 years. The day 1 Reed, the date and year in which Quetzalcoatl was born could only occur once in the 52 year cycle. Cortes arrived on the very day and year: 1 Reed.

Actec mythology reveals that four ages have passed and we are presently living in the Fifth age. Each age had a calendrical name: "Jaguar," "Wind," "Rain," and "Water." The fifth age, "Movement," began in 843 A.D.¹⁰ Each age consists of thirteen heavens and nine hells: $13 + 9 = 22$. After this completion a new age, in this case the Sixth, begins.

Each age consists of twenty-two 52 year cycles.

$13 \text{ heavens} + 9 \text{ hells} = 22$

$22 \times 52 \text{ years} = 1144$

There are 1144 years in each age.

5 ages $\times$ 1144 years = 5,720 years the Fifth age will have traveled through the thirteen heavens and nine hells at which time it will end on August 16, 1987--

the date that Luis Valdez states in "Pensamiento Serpentino" when Quetzalcoatl will return:

Y no hay que olvidar
que segun la profesia
de los tiempos antiguos
QUETZALCOATL esta por
volver al mundo.
(Tezcatlipoca su cuate
malicioso lleo en forma
de Cortez la ultima vez
en 1519).
Pero por hay viene el
dia y ano del nacimiento
de la SERPEINTE EEMPLUMADA
(segun la cuenta antigua)
en el ANO CE ACATL EN EL
DIA CE ACATL
y cae el 16 de Agosto de 1987.

Do not forget that
according to the prophesy
of ancient times,
Quetzalcoatl is going to
return to the world.
Tezcatlipoca, his evil twin,
has arrived for the last time
in the form of Cortez
in 1519.
But the day and year will
come on the birth of the
Plumed Serpent (according to
the ancient tale) in the
year one reed on the
day one reed
August 16, 1987.¹⁰

This system of utilizing 13 heavens and 9
hells. along with the calendar was devised by Tony
Shearer, an American Indian. In Shearer's book Beneath
the Moon and Under the Sun, he offers the world his
formula as a new way of teaching mathematics and corre-
lating history.¹¹

According to Shearer, the Fifth World began on
843 A.D. exactly thirteen 52 year cycles before Hernan
Cortes landed in Mexico and ends in 1987. Ce Acatl
Quetzalcoatl Topiltzin was born in 947 A.D. and will
return August 16, 1987.

Shearer began his system with the birth of a new
age at the beginning of the first of 13 heavens. He
began the nine hells the year of the arrival in Mexico of
Hernan Cortes. Luis Valdes, in "Pensamiento Serpentino"
states:

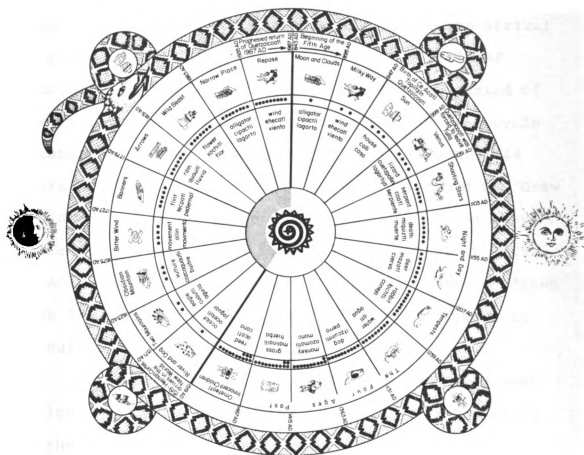


Figure 5.--The Ancient Calendar and Division of Time.

Illustrated by the author.

Tezcatlipoca su cuate mallicioso
llego en forma de Cortez la
ultima vez en 1519.

Tezcatlipoca (Quetzalcoatl's)
evil twin arrived disguised
as Cortez the last time in
1519.

The diagram (Figure 5) shows that the Fifth age began in A.D. 843; thirteen 52 years before the arrival of Cortez. It is divided into 22 equal periods of time; A.D. 843 to 1987. This represents the period of the Fifth age. Each period represents a 52 year cycle established by the calendar and a time-cycle of 1144 years. $22 \times 52 \text{ years} = 1144$. What Shearer did was draw a diameter to the point opposite the date of the birth of Ce Acatl Quetzalcoatl from A.D. 947 across to 1519. Ce Acatl died in the year A.D. 999. A diameter is drawn from 999 to 1571, thus forming a spoke-like system to calculate dates.

Ce Acatl, born in 947 A.D., had twenty 52 year cycles left in the twenty-two 52 year cycles remaining in the Fifth Age.

$$20 \times 52 = 1040$$

add his birthdate

$1040 + 947 = 1987$: the beginning of the first heaven of a new age and the year of the return of Quetzalcoatl.

To reach the exact date of August 16, the Gregorian calendar which forms a 30 day month period was used. By dividing 30 days into the ancient 260 day

calendar a sum of eight months occurs. Subtract or add according to the numbers in the months to reach an equal thirty days. The calculations follow:

January	31	plus	1
February	29	minus	1
March	31	+	1
April	30		0
May	31	+	1
June	30		0
July	30		0
August	31	+	<u>1</u>
$+ 4 - 1 = 3$			

Looking at the calendar (Figure 4) the birth of the Sixth World will begin on 1 Alligator 1987. Count down to the day Reed which is number 13. Add 3 numerals which is 16. Thus, August 16, 1987 is the date of the return of Quetzalcatl.

An interpretation of "Reality is a Great Serpent" to illuminate the prophesy is the reason for the ensuing chapters.

FOOTNOTES: CHAPTER II

¹Bernardino de Sahagun, A History of Ancient Mexico: Anthropological, Mythological, and Social, trans. Fann R. Bandelier from the Spanish version of Carlos Maria de Bustamante (Nashville: Fisk University Press, 1932), Book III.

²Laurette Sejourne, Burning Water (London: Thames and Hudson, 1956), p. 25.

³Andre Emmerich, Art Before Columbus (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963), pp. 168-170.

⁴Sahagun, Book III, pp. 173-189.

⁵Sejourne, p. 65.

⁶Ibid., p. 85.

⁷Miguel Leon-Portilla, Aztec Thought and Culture: A Study of the Ancient Nahuatl Mind, trans. Jack Emory Davis (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963), pp. 38-44.

⁸Caso, p. 62.

⁹Tony Shearer, Beneath the Moon and Under the Sun (Albuquerque: Sun Publishers Company, 1975), p. 100.

¹⁰Valdez, p. 19.

¹¹Shearer, p. 82.

¹²Valdez, p. 19.

CHAPTER III

IN SEARCH OF THE SERPENT

There are literally thousands of sites for excavation in Mesoamerica--the Gulf Coast, Olmec territory, has reported over six hundred sites in the state of Veracruz alone. Only a few of these sites have been explored and only a handful exposed to intensive study.¹

It is not unrealistic to state that controversial conjectures are fluent over such subjects as the origin of a culture, a serpent, or a god in Mesoamerica with so many sites yet to be explored. The archaeologist Laurette Sejourné stated that the image of the Feathered Serpent did not exist before the development of the Teotihuacan culture about 200 A.D.² Yet this chapter presents a stone sculpture of an undeniable image of the Feathered Serpent from the Olmec culture dated by a scientific method of radiocarbon at 1500 to 500 B.C.³

This chapter intends to explore a few of these controversial conjectures in search of the Serpent that Luis Valdez speaks of in "Pensamiento Serpentino," and a possible meaning for its existence. This is a

necessary procedure before any interpretation of the serpent's symbols can be made.

The earliest known culture in Mesoamerica is known as the Olmec and believed by archaeologists, historians and artists to be the "mother culture" of all other Mesoamerican cultures. The first to suspect the Olmec as the "mother culture" from which all other cultures are derived was the historian, George C. Vaillant, and the artist, Miguel Covarrubias. Their premise was based on a study of Olmic influence in art throughout Mesoamerica, and radiocarbon dating.⁴

Artistically, the Olmec style is recognized throughout Mesoamerica in the different periodical formations of the various cultures: the Maya zone in Uaxactun; the Zapotec (Monte Alban) and Mixtec (Montenegro) cultures of Oazaca; in many sites of central Mexico such as Tlatilco, Las Bocas, Chalcatzingo, Gualupita and Tlapacoya as well as in numerous (as yet to be unexcavated) ancient sites in the state of Guerrero.⁵

The conclusion that Covarrubias reached is that most likely the Olmecs originated many of the basic elements of Mesoamerican cultures as well as jaguar gods of the earth, the rain, and the sky, which in time evolved into a multitude of gods, mythical dragons, and monsters.⁶

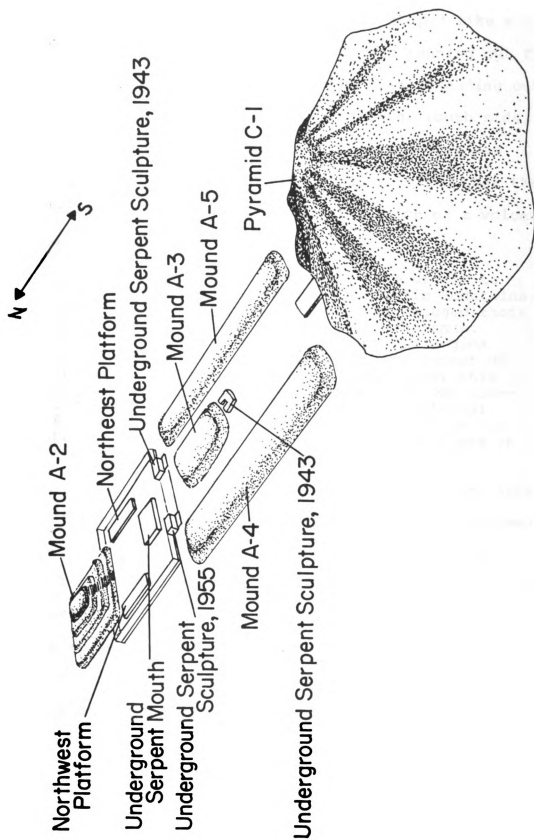
The Mesoamerican system was thought to be exclusively Mayan until the archaeologist, Matthew Sterling, discovered at Tres Zapotes, an Olmec site, a date recorded in stone of 31 B.C. the inscribed date utilized the same numerical system as did the Maya, and was 300 years before the earliest known Maya date recorded.⁷

The origin of Olmec culture is presently in dispute. C. A. Burland suggests that the Olmec-style rock sculptures found at Chalcatzingo are earlier than those found from the Gulf Coast.⁸ Karl Luckert conjectures that the Tuxtla Mountain range may be the early Olmec homeland. However, the Tuxtla volcanos have covered these sites with several hundred feet of lava and may never be found.⁹

The National Geographic Society-Smithsonian Institute sponsored several research programs carrying on extensive excavations of the Olmec site at La Venta. One such research project sponsored Michael Stirling, during which he obtained the earliest known data on stone monuments. Another, in collaboration with the University of California, sponsored the archaeologists Drucker, Heizer, and Squier, who discovered the earliest known monument in Mesoamerica (Figure 6).

Figure 6.--The La Venta Site.

Drawn after P. Drucker, R. F. Heizer, and R. J. Squier,
Excavations at La Venta, Tabasco, 1955 (Washington, D.C.:
Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 170, 1959).



It was described as a pyramid shaped like a fluted cone with ten ridges and gullies fanning out from the peak downward. The fans can be seen spreading out at the bottom spaced further apart on the south side.

During one of their excavations Heizer was flying over the Tuxtla Mountains and realized that the La Venta pyramid was actually an imitation of a volcano. Heizer observed:

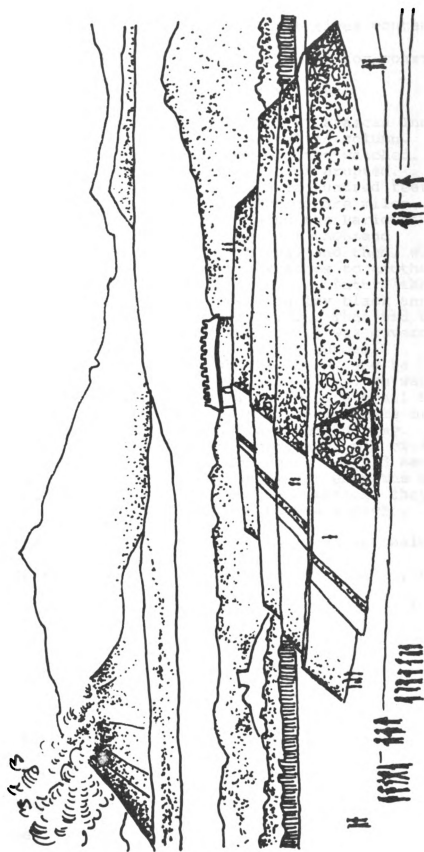
The closest parallel to the form of the La Venta pyramid can be seen in the Tuxtla Mountains, the place from which the Olmecs had dragged their immense basalt boulders for their monuments. Dozens of small volcanic cones dot the region around beautiful Lake Catemaco in the center of the Tuxtlas. When Heizer was flying over this region one day the thought suddenly struck him-- The La Venta pyramid is an imitation volcano! Exactly the same sort of ridges and gullies can be seen fanning out from each cone. Here was an example of architecture imitating nature.¹⁰

A similar construction of a monument that appears to be patterned after a volcano is the Cuicuilco Monument (Figure 7). The picture is a reconstruction of the ancient cuicuilco monument by Ignacio Marquina which was dedicated to the wind god, an aspect of Quétzalcoatl, before it was covered with lava by the volcano Xitl about 100 B.C.¹¹ The wind is an essential part of the make-up of the "Great Serpent."

The key to the reason for such a task as constructing a pyramid imitating nature is found in the significance of the eruption of the volcano in Eduardo

Figure 7.--The Cuicuilco Monument.

Drawn after a painting by Ignacio Marquina,
Arquitectura Prehispánica (Mexico, D.F.: Instituto
de Antropología e Historia, 1951), Lamina 8.



Villasenor's chicano novel, Macho. It gives contemporary evidence of the ancient Olmec's rationale for constructing symbolic pyramids. Villasenor writes:

In 1943 in the flat cornfield of a Tarascan Indian some smoke began rising. A spiraling column. The Indian and his and their team of oxen watched. The ground shook, and a great explosion erupted. . . . and in one week formed a cone five hundred feet high and covered an area of five square miles. The volcano, now officially named the Paricutin, became el monstruo and forced four thousand Tarascan Indians from their homes, and then, with the wind, sent a cloud of black ashes to another valley one hundred miles away. . . . Later [they] . . . went out and found their valley black and smooth and as shiny as water That had been their valley for farming, and now it was covered with blackness. They began having hunger.

Years later a first son was born, and he knew nothing of the now dying volcano He was a Tarascan born one hundred miles away, and all he knew was that in the valley there was a lake of evil where children were not allowed to play.

Then one day his father came home all excited. That black, evil lake was God-sent! An old man had found out the volcanic ashes enriched the earth. And the boy watched his father and mother; they were so happy, and that night they ate much¹²

The "old man's" discovery that the volcanic ashes made the land fertile is evidence. The key to the meaning for constructing imitation volcanos lies in the Olmec agricultural world. "The key to the beginning of civilization," states Burland, "was the discovery of Agriculture."¹³

The culmination of Olmec culture--Alexander von Wuthenau concludes that Semitic and Negroid peoples must have crossed the Atlantic as early as 1500 B.C., and lived in Mesoamerica--¹⁴ evolved from the earliest presence of

the human being in the Americas. Proof of an ancient culture was found about 15,000 to 7,000 B.C. in the valleys of the central highlands of Mexico.¹⁵

Ancient life style was nomadic. They were hunters of gigantic animals and gatherers of wild plants. Due to the disappearance of the gigantic animals necessary for sustenance the early inhabitants began to attach themselves to the land, . . . gathering wild seeds and grasses. In time, after observing the germination of vegetation, the nomads evolved from food gathering to a sedantary culture which allowed sufficient safety, continuity and organization to develop their creative vision of the world.

Gradually, these early planters began to distinguish a rhythm in the atmosphere, a change of seasons, the movement of the sun, and slowly accumulated the knowledge necessary to create a numerical system and a calendar.

Dependence on the land led to the discovery of the greatest transcendence: the development of agriculture based on cultivation of edible plants, especially the maize plant, which was the principal plant of the ancient Mesoamerican agricultural world as well as the foundation of the early cultures¹⁶ and a unique association, linking humanity to vegetation, which began with the veneration of the volcano.

Today, as well as in the past, when fire and smoke burst forth from the mouth of the volcano, as the earth trembles, forming clouds in the atmosphere, the volcano is regarded with reverential respect: a mountain "to-be-spoken-to" as Villasenor so poignantly puts it in his novel.¹⁷

Not only did the Olmec realize the volcanic productivity--observing the mountain ranges with volcanic mouths--the ancient Americans watched spirals of smoke rise, form clouds, and rain, making plants grow--when the volcano lifted itself from earth--terrifying and awe-inspiring--it appeared alive!

In order to make manifest and comprehensible the terrifying and awe-inspiring earth phenomenon, the ancient agriculturalists related it to their own existence--something they could handle and relate to, yet still terrifying and awe-inspiring. They translated their venerable apperception into a visible and tangible anthromorphic god: the Serpent.

This startling fact came to light while Karl Luckert, an historian, was doing research for his forthcoming book, The Navajo Hunter Tradition. In the search of defining Navajo religion, Lukert eventually arrived at what he describes as the "earliest now clearly discernible stratum of Middle American civilization--the Olmecs."¹⁸ Out of this research he wrote a book called The Olmec

Religion: A Key to Middle America and Beyond, in which Luckert offers an in-depth criterion nullifying the Olmec jaguar cult that the artist Miguel Covarrubias saw among Olmec art. Covarrubias insisted that the jaguar dominated the art of La Venta, and that jaguar features of various sorts are its basic motifs, and, that the jaguar fixation must have had a religious motivation, either totemic or related to the cult of the early rain and earth spirits conceived as jaguars.¹⁹

The conjecture that Luckert proposes is that the jaguar as a religious symbol literally "leaped upon" a serpent cult when leaders of hunter societies captured the priesthood of the Great Serpent.²⁰

The jaguar was a Mesoamerican symbol of Tezcatlipoca, the war god. Thus, beneath the masks of two gods, Quetzalcoatl and Tezcatlipoca, two cultures were in conflict: champions of a benign god, Quetzalcoatl, who personified all things good and an evil god, Tezcatlipoca, personifying all things bad. The conquest of Ancient America took place long before Cortes arrived, states Luis Valdez in "Pensamiento Serpentino":

Cuando los indigenas dejaron
de creer en Quetzalcoatl
and they began to believe in
the Jaguar y las fuerzas de
la noche.

entonces comenzo
la conquista de Mexico

when the natives stopped
believing in the Feathered
Serpent
the Jaguar and the forces of
the night

then began
the conquest of Mexico

y eso fue cienos de anos antes
de la llegada de Hernan Cortes.

and that was hundreds of years
before the arrival of Hernan
Cortes.²¹

A proposal that Luckert makes is that before the identification of any more Mesoamerican gods the first step would be a photographic survey made of all Mexican serpents, lizards, and amphibians.²²

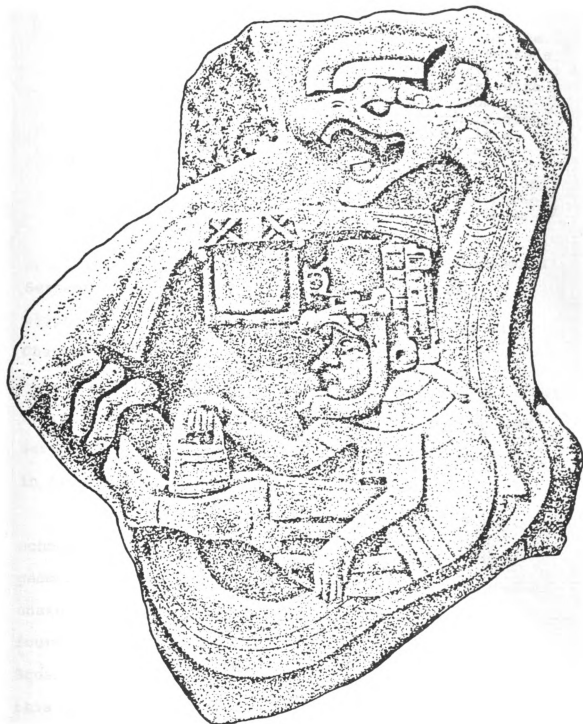
Knowledge of the image of the Feathered Serpent was established at La Venta. It was carved on a stone and is known as Monument 19. Michael Coe states in an article "The Iconology of Olmec Art" that the serpent on Monument 19 from La Venta adorned with feathers and/or wings, is none other than the Feathered Serpent, Quetzalcoatl²³ (Figure 8).

Monument 19 is a representation of a rattlesnake adorned with feathers and was found during the 1955 excavation at La Venta and reported in the Smithsonian Institution Bulletin.²⁴ Below is a description from the Bulletin:

On the flat upper surface in very low relief, two figures were depicted. One is a seated human figure shown in profile, facing to the left, the other figure behind and partially surrounding the first figure in a protective attitude is a plumed rattlesnake He is shown wearing a headdress which represents the head of a jaguar. The mandible of the beast is carried downward as though it formed a chin strap, so that the wearer's face is enclosed in the open mouth Above the headdress is a rectangular area with some fine details which no longer can be made out. . . . Above this set of rectangles is a horizontal rod with a long tasseled end from which hangs a

Figure 8.--Monument 19.

P. Drucker, R. F. Heizer, and R. J. Squier,
Excavations at La Venta, Tabasco, 1955
(Washington, D.C.: Bureau of American
Ethnology, Bulletin 170, 1959), p. 198.



rectangular bordered banner which looks very much as though it had been intended to contain some glyphs. . . . The banner is fastened to the tasseled rod by two X-shaped elements. . . . Behind and surrounding this figure is that of the plumed rattlesnake. The upper part of the snake's body is drawn back in reverse S-shaped curve. . . . Surrounding the snake's head is a flat crest with two ribbonlike appendages trailing back from the rear part of the head. The snake's mouth is open. . . . Down the middle of the snake's body is a double line marking the separation of the back and belly. A few very lightly incised curves indicate the belly scutes and a few similar lines indicate scales on the back. The tail with three rattles and "button" is shown curled up in front of the human figure.

The person within the embrace of the Feathered Serpent, the rectangles, and the S-shaped symbol are glyphs which contain serpentine concepts explained in Chapter III.

Drucker, referring to Monument 19, was the first to recognize this realistic presentation as a "Plumed Serpent" thus establishing the "Feathered Serpent" theme in Olmec art.²⁵

Jose Diaz-Bolio, in a Mexican guidebook derided by scholars, stated that the Maya art, architecture, geometry, and religion all derived from the Maya rattlesnake, *Crotalus Durissus Tzabzcan*. Its skin pattern, the four-vortex Canamayte which in Mayan means "Four Corner Square," shows a basic symmetrical design. Bolio based this conjecture on the serpent's rhomboid pattern which outlines Maya thatched roof houses, the pyramid, the

temple roof-vault, and the flattened forehead of the Maya himself.²⁶

Diaz-Bolio's statement concerning the rattlesnake's skin pattern coincides with Luckert's conjecture of the serpent glyph found at La Venta (Figure 9). Luckert surmised that this glyph was an unmistakable and timeless writing spelling out the name, with a top-side-bottom view of the Serpent, which is patterned after two rattlesnakes; the *Crotalus durissus Terrificus* of Central and South America, and the *Crotalus durissus durissus* of the lowlands of Middle America (see Figures 10 and 11).²⁷

The glyph naming the Serpent was discovered in a pit beside a pattern of rectangular serpentine slabs which Drucker called a "highly conventionalized mask of the Jaguar"²⁸ (Figure 12). Luckert describes the mask:

A pit over twenty feet deep had been dug, measuring about forty-one by forty-nine feet at the bottom. Then from a leveled clay base upward twenty-eight well-arranged levels of green serpentine rocks--about one thousand tons--were embedded in olive and blue clay. The color of the clay matrix, obviously, was chosen to match the square block of "green," the serpentine mosaic face was laid out. Then the remainder of the pit was filled in with highly contrasting mottled pink clay.²⁹

The conjecture which is made by Luckert is that the deposit could be seen not as a two-dimensional pavement but as a three-dimensional entity: the underground

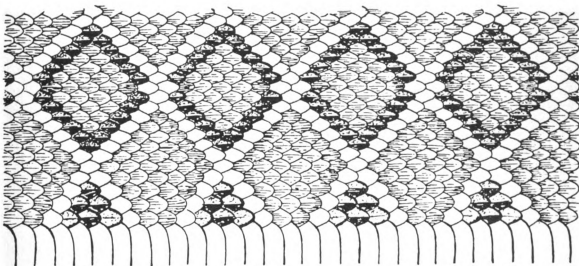
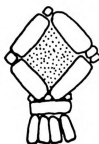


Figure 9.--The Serpent Glyph.

Karl Luckert, Olmec Religion: A Key to Middle America and Beyond (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1934), p. 103.

Figure 10.--*Crotalus durissus terrificus*.

Karl Luckert, Olmec Religion: A Key
to Middle America and Beyond (Norman:
University of Oklahoma Press, 1934),
p. 104.

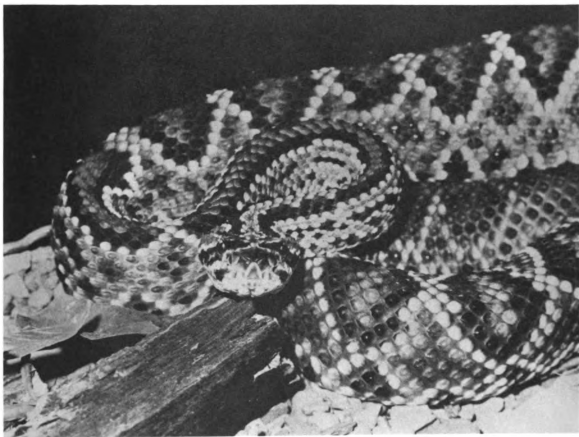
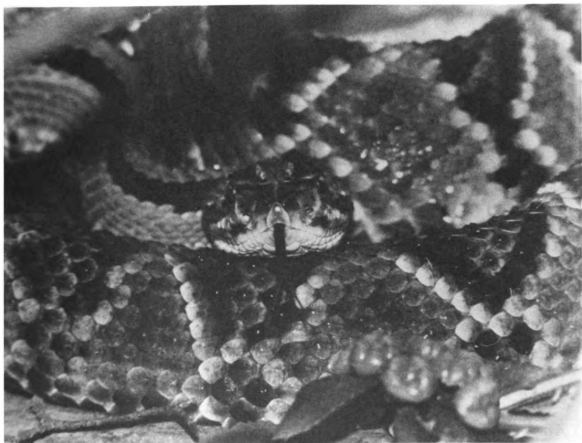


Figure 11.--*Crotalus durissus durissus*.

Karl Luckert, Olmec Religion: A Key to
Middle America and Beyond (Norman:
University of Oklahoma Press, 1934),
p. 105.



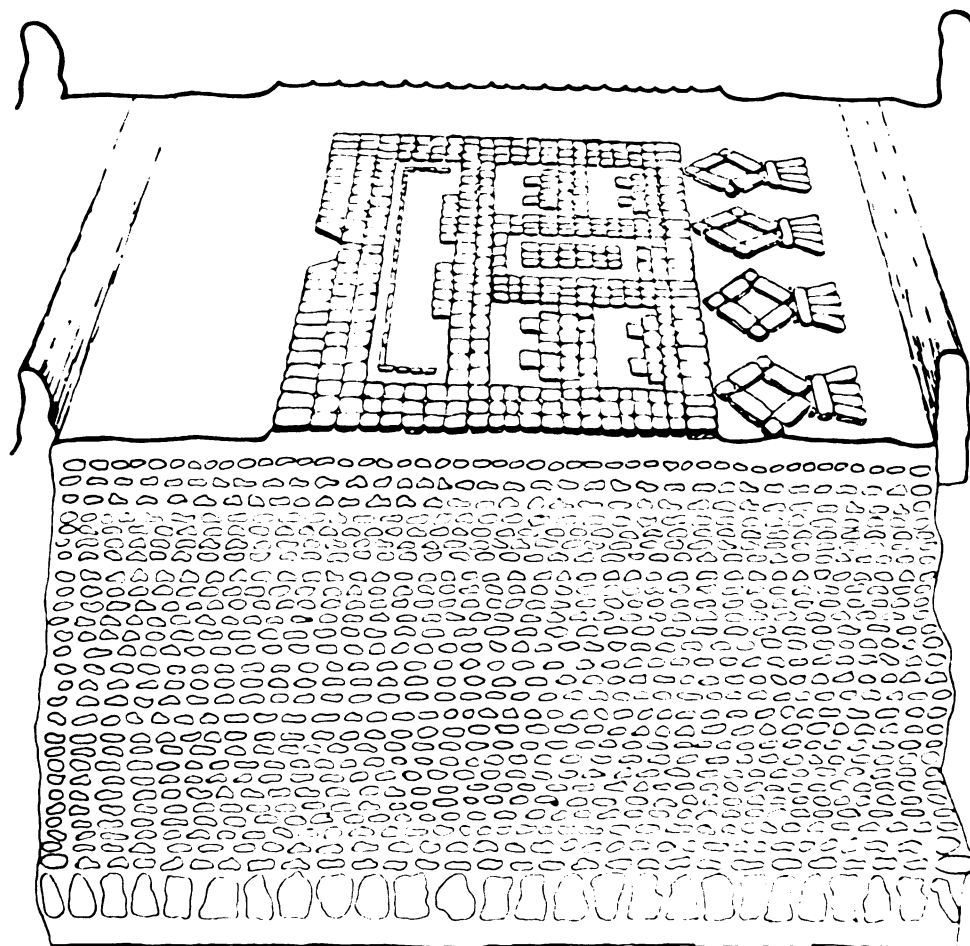


Figure 12.--La Venta: Underground Serpentine Sculpture.

Karl Luckert, Olmec Religion: A Key to Middle America and Beyond (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1934), p. 100.

sculpture of the earth serpent, and the mask is the serpent's face.

Drucker reported that at the southwest corner of the mask there was found a small human kneeling figure of fine-grained basalt.³⁰

It is true that the scientific origin of reality, historical or mythical, may be an everlasting mystery. However, spiritual truth is reality based not necessarily on what one sees but what one believes and is best learned from those who have faith.

What the ancient planters felt kneeling by the sculpture may never be realized, but Karl Luckert did listen to those who believe. He listened to "a number of Southwest Indian sages and friends." Luckert said: "On more than one occasion they have pointed to a long mountain range and explained to me what I was actually looking at. Big Snake lies there!"³¹

Directed onto a serpentine tract by his "Indian sages and friends" Luckert conjectured that the imitation volcanic pyramid at La Venta represented the head of a serpent. Luckert observed that the eastern, western and southern sides of the pyramid have only two ridges while the northern has four. He postulated that the north slope of the mountain represents the helmet scales on the Serpent's head similar to the helmets of the colossal basalt heads and the serpent lies in a

normal prone position, so the differentiated north slope of the volcano represents the side opposite the Serpent's lower jaw. The mouth, he assumed, points upward in volcano fashion. Thus, the serpent faces south and the Olmecs perhaps danced before it on the ceremonial platform directly in front (see Figure 6).³²

In a pit at La Venta, thirteen feet deep and sixty-six by sixty-three feet large at the bottom, is a serpentine deposit found north of the mosaic masks (Figure 13). Six layers of serpentine rocks were embedded in green mortar. The rim which rises at the edges of the serpentine layers are none other than lips of an underground serpentine mouth.

The suggestion put forth by Luckert as reason for this underground mouth is:

On the filled-in ceremonial plaza above the La Venta people stood, wondered, or danced actually in the Great Serpent's open mouth; thus becoming the Serpent's devout followers, not waiting till their time of death to follow him, instead, they would conduct all their ceremonial affairs in the Serpent's mouth while they were still alive.³³

Through observation and listening to the faithful the Serpent was discovered opening its jaws in volcanic fashion as its body moved forming mountains. The key that led to the interpretation in the following chapter was the fact that the volcano was related to the agricultural world.

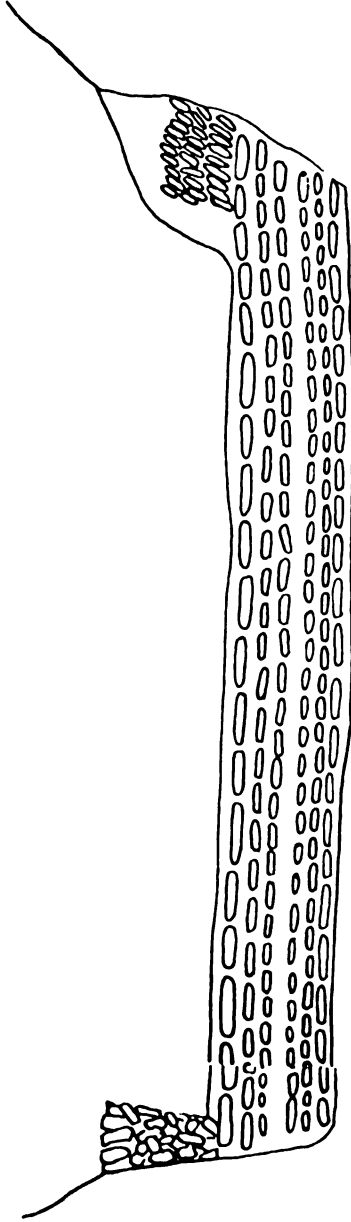


Figure 13.--La Venta: Underground Sculpture of the Serpent's Mouth.

P. Drucker, R. F. Heizer, and R. J. Squier, Excavations at La Venta, Tabasco, 1955 (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Ethnology, Bulletin 170, 1959), pp. 30-31.

FOOTNOTES: CHAPTER III

¹Miguel Covarrubias, Indian Art of Mexico and Central America (New York: Knopf, 1975), p. 40; and Matt S. Meir and Feliciano Rivera, The Chicanos (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), p. 5.

²Sejourne, p. 20.

³Covarrubias, p. 78.

⁴George C. Vaillant, Aztecs of Mexico (Baltimore: Penguin Books, Inc.

⁵Pedro R. Vazquez, Mexico, Art, Architecture, Archaeology, Ethnography (New York: Alexis Gregory Publishers, 1968), p. 125.

⁶Covarrubias, p. 82.

⁷Stuart, p. 64.

⁸Cottie A. Burland, Feathered Serpent and Smoking Mirror (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1975), p. 10.

⁹Karl W. Luckert, Olmec Religion, A Key to Middle America and Beyond (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1976), p. 41.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 41.

¹¹Ignacio Marquina, Arquitectura Prehispanica (Mexico, D.F.: Instituto Nacional de Antropologia e Historia, 1951), Lamina 8.

¹²Edmund Villasenor, Macho (New York: Bantam Books, 1973), pp. 3, 4.

¹³Burland, p. 7.

¹⁴Alexander Von Wuthenau, Unexpected Faces in Ancient America, 1500 B.C.-A.D. 1500: The Historical Testimony of Pre-Columbian Artists (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1975).

¹⁵Vazquez, p. 56.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 61.

¹⁷Villasenor, p. 65.

¹⁸Luckert, p. x.

¹⁹Covarrubias, p. 58.

²⁰Luckert, p. 24.

²¹Valdez, p. 9.

²²Luckert, p. 23.

²³Michael D. Coe, "The Iconography of Olmec Art," The Iconography of Middle American Sculpture (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1973), p. 9.

²⁴P. Drucker, R. F. Heizer, and R. J. Squier, Excavations at La Venta, Tabasco, 1955 (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin 1970, 1959), p. 199.

²⁵Ibid., p. 203.

²⁶Frank Waters, Mexico Mystique, The Coming Sixth World of Consciousness (Chicago: Sage Books, 1975), p. 46.

²⁷Luckert, p. 106.

²⁸Drucker, Heizer and Squier, p. 73.

²⁹Luckert, p. 101.

³⁰Drucker, Heizer and Squier, p. 95.

³¹Luckert, p. 43.

³²Ibid., p. 44.

³³Ibid., p. 10.

CHAPTER IV

THE INTERPRETATION

Earth and existence were closely associated to the ancient planter: earth, the place where all things come from and the place to which all things return. It is the place where the bodies or "planted" dead are placed along with plant and animal life. It is the place where the sun, last seen on the horizon, descends into the earth. Each is seen born again: maize every season, the sun each day, humanities' life-span.

Symbolic veneration of the Serpent was first recognized with the appearance of the imitation volcanic pyramid at La Venta (Figure 6). With a desire to be closer to their venerable Serpent the ancient planters constructed an underground sculpture of the Great Serpent's mouth (Figure 13).

The Serpent and the volcano are one. The volcanic orifice and the opened jawed serpent represented the entrance and exit to the center of the earth. The Serpent symbolizing the earth was female. The Serpent depicted in codices present nature, or man, as swallowed whole (Figure 14). This hieroglyph of the Serpent is

Figure 14.--The Feathered Serpent.

Codex Fejervary, Kingsborough Edition,
Vol. III, Detroit Institute of Art,
p. 14.

Figure 15.--The Serpent as Female.

Codex Laud, Kingsborough Edition,
Vol. II, Detroit Institute of Art,
p. 41.

adorned with Quetzal feathers and is a representation of Quetzalcoatl, the Feathered Serpent. The serpent was a natural choice for this theme because it devours its prey whole.

The serpents shed their skin. Serpents became symbols of the cyclic renewal. The form and movement of the serpent led to the association with natural phenomena--the volcano, man, and the link between human and plant-life.

The hieroglyph from the Codex Laud depicts a female wearing a death mask standing in the open jaws of a serpent. Her arms are reaching out to embrace the personage being handed to her (Figure 15).

Another hieroglyph from the Codex Fejervary depicts a female wearing a death mask pointing at a serpent facing in a descending direction toward the person in question shown in the open jaws of the serpent with closed eyes (Figure 16).

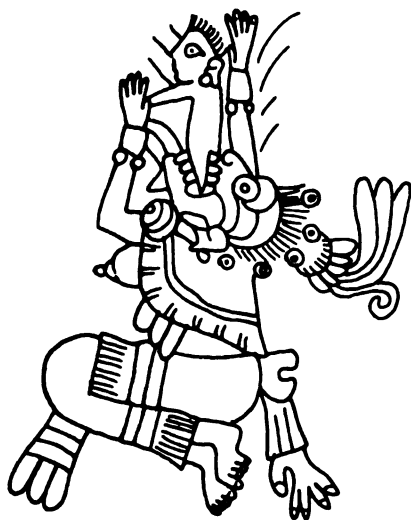
The two hieroglyphs above as well as those below from the Fejervary and Laud codices show the persons being swallowed whole (Figures 17a and 17b). Figure 17a depicts a female wearing a death mask adorned with quetzal feathers, and in Figure 17b, serpent scutes are seen as clothing. Both hieroglyphs represent an anthropomorphic serpent as a human female. The fact that the eyes are open indicates that death was not feared, which is discussed later.

Figure 16.--The Female Serpent as Death.

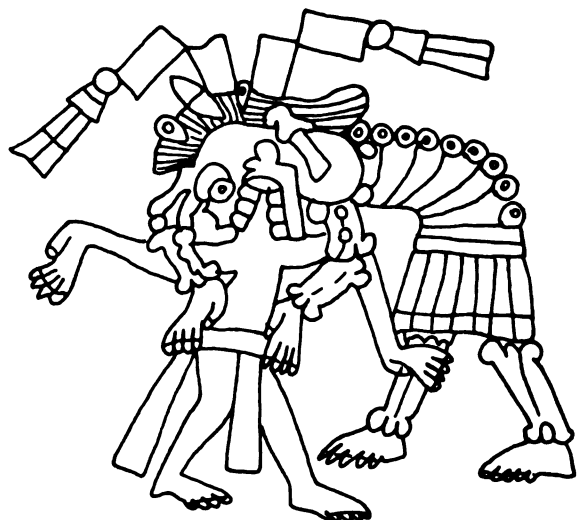
Codex Laud, Kingsborough Edition,
Vol. II, Detroit Institute of Art,
p. 53.

Figure 17.--Anthropomorphic Serpent as Female.

Codex Laud, Kingsborough Edition,
Vol. II, Detroit Institute of Art,
p. 6.



A



B

The god, who is called Quetzalcoatl, is not himself the Feathered Serpent. The god, Quetzalcoatl, is the one who emerges from the Feathered Serpent (Figure 18). The person emerging from the open jaws of the serpent is Quetzalcoatl, recognized by the headdress of Quetzal feathers he is wearing. On the back of the serpent can be seen the maize plant showing its fruit. Quetzal feathers represent vegetation--the plumes are an indication that the serpent is the Feathered Serpent. The diamond shape motif of the rattlesnake along with "caban" glyphs are recognized on the body and are explained later.

The idea that the person in the above hieroglyphs were swallowed whole was learned through the observation of the serpent. As ancient planters, observing the earth, they recognized that even the sun was swallowed whole--seen descending on the horizon with its "shinning-like-eyes" open, exactly the same way it ascends at sunrise. From the language of the Yucatec Maya Leon-Portilla discusses "the sun in the mouth" and its rebirth:

From the time it rises in the east ("la-k-kin") in Yucatec Maya: the "accompanying sun") until it sets in the afternoon ("chi-kin"; "the sun in the mouth," or "the devoured sun"), the sun's travel creates the day, marking its duration and existence. Therefore, "day" is simply a presence or cycle of the sun.

The sun does not rest, however. When it is apparently "devoured" in "chi-kin," its setting, it goes into the lower world, crosses it, and triumphantly is reborn.¹



Figure 18.--The God Quetzalcoatl. Relief from Yaxchilan.

Luis Valdez, "Pensamiento Serpentino," Chicano Theatre One (San Jose: El Centro Cultural de la Gente, Inc., Spring 1973), p. 9.

The fact that the serpent devours its prey whole and also sheds its skin renewing itself, the ancient planters--depicting descent and ascent in the codices with open eyes--shared a concept of life and death as one and the same: a cyclic process rather than a termination. The sun, maize and humans all descend into the earth, are renewed, and return.

The sun and the earth were not abstract entities but realities. The earth was the place from which all things emerge and to which they returned. The sun was the governor of the cycles of the seasons and of day and night. Existence was lived out on the surface of the earth represented by the Serpent's body in a horizontal position. The serpent in a horizontal position worn as a waist band above the cross in Figure 15 is an indication of the surface of the earth.

The X-shaped symbol is the key to the horizontal plane on which life is lived. It is the symbol of the sun which is based on the intercardinal points--sunrise and sunset--suggesting a rectangle rather than the cardinal points--east, west, north, and south--which form a square. This concept is a developing new idea in ancient American studies.

A graphic image of the sun at sunrise and sunset in the moment of its maximum declination at the solstices is presented in Figure 19.

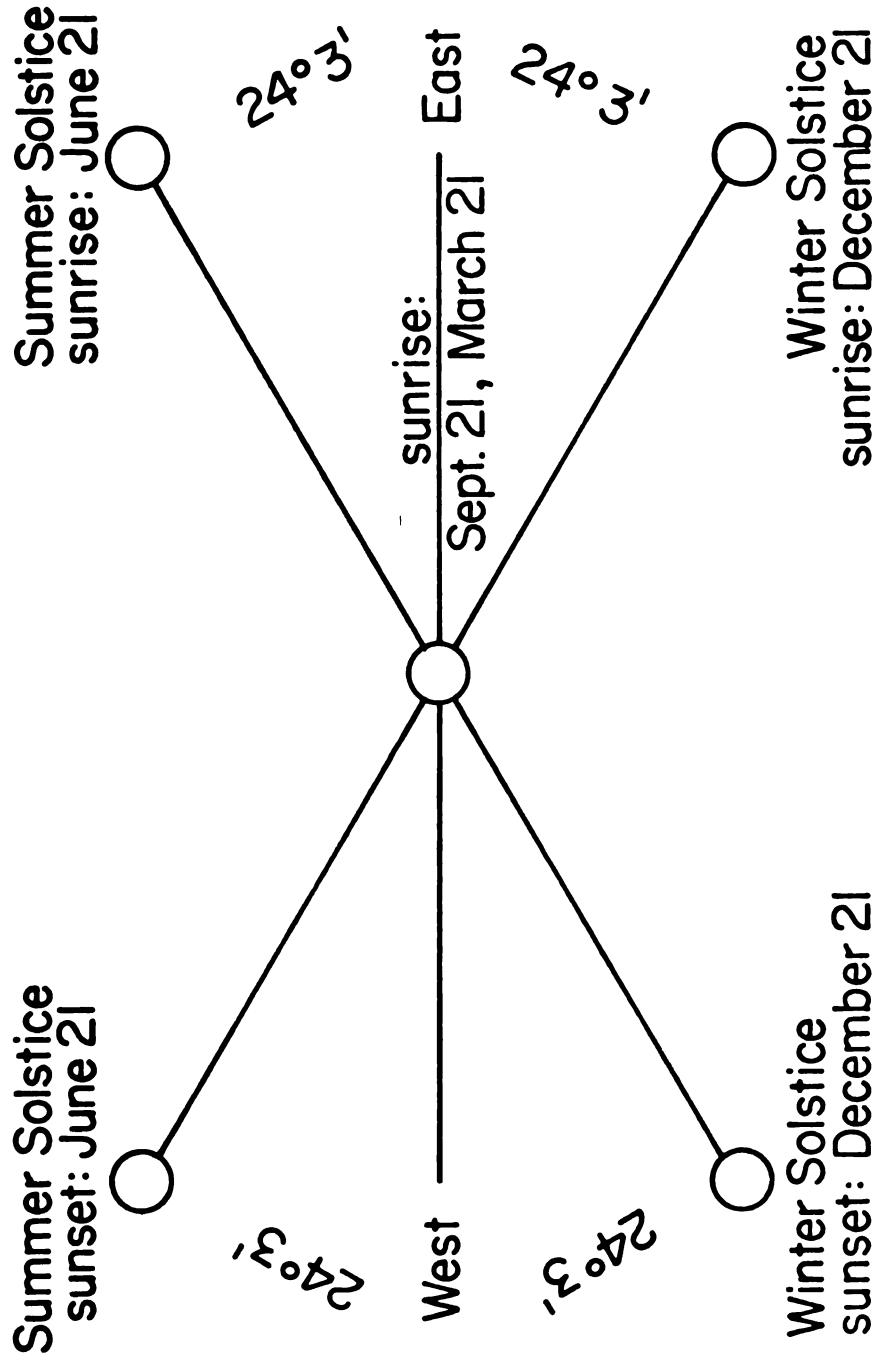


Figure 19.--The Intercardinal Points.

Miguel Leon-Portilla, Time and Reality in the Thought of the Maya, trans. Charles L. Boiles and Fernando Horcasitas, Beacon Press, 1973, p. 129.

An explanation of the sun's solstices is offered by Alfonso Rojas:

Two points correspond to the rising and setting of the sun on June 21 (summer solstice), and two more resulting from the rising and setting of the sun on December 21 (winter solstice). The moment when the sun passes through the zenith is represented by the fifth point. The four points placed to the sides of the equinox line are no further than $24^{\circ}3'$ from it, either to the north or to the south, lacking 20 degrees to arrive at the midpoint between the extremes of the compass. The graphic figure forms a rectangle, not a square, with two corners toward the east and the other two toward the west.²

The horizontal or rectangular plane posed by Rojas is the place where existence is lived: the surface of the earth; the serpent's body.

The Serpent emitting people, animals, food and other objects, called "The Emergence of the Aztec," onto the earth's surface reflects the horizontal concept (Figure 20). Open mouthed caves can also be considered as serpent's mouths or volcanic orifices. This representation depicts the tradition that the Axtecs first derived from a cave in the north.³

At a meeting of Maya specialists in 1962, Evon Voght, in a context that nullified the meaning of the cardinal points, states:

The Maya spatial orientation of the four corners of their universe is not based upon our cardinal directions of north, south, east and west, but probably to either our intercardinal points (northeast, northwest, southwest and southeast), or toward two directions in the east and two in

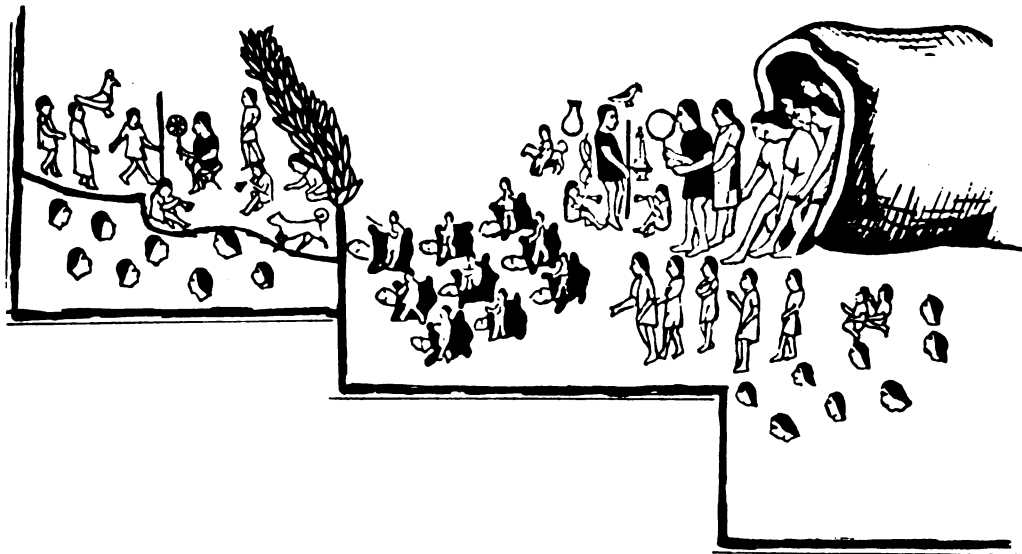


Figure 20.--The Emergence of the Aztec.

Karl Luckert, Olmec Religion: A Key to Middle America and Beyond (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1934), p. 111.

the west, that is to say, sunrise at winter and summer solstices, and sunset at the same two solstices.⁴

Voght discovered among the Tzotzil Indians that their language has no words designating north or south. East and west were expressed in terms "lokeb-kakal" (rising sun) and "meleb-kabal" (setting or disappearing sun).⁵

These aspects concerning horizontal space are only beginning to be known. Rojas mentions that the implication to be grasped from the horizontal concept will take a great amount of information and research.⁶

The sun in its relationship with earth was ruler of day and night, and the seasons which were so important in an agricultural world. In this aspect he was Tlaltecuhitli, "Lord of the Earth." The earth was always represented by the ancient people as a goddess except in one case: Tlaltecuhitli, the male frog (Figure 21).

A frog-like figure of Tlaltecuhitli is represented opposite the sun glyph on the ancient calendar from the Codex Ferjervary (Figure 22).

At sunset, the sun is seen at the horizon sinking into the serpent's mouth. As frog, the sun is male, the earth female, and the act is impregnation, the constant cycle of procreation.

A reading of the hieroglyphs on the ancient calendar explains the process of the earth-sun

Figure 21.--Tlaltecuhтли.

Alfonso Caso, The Aztecs, People of the Sun, trans. Lowell Dunham (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1958), p. 52.



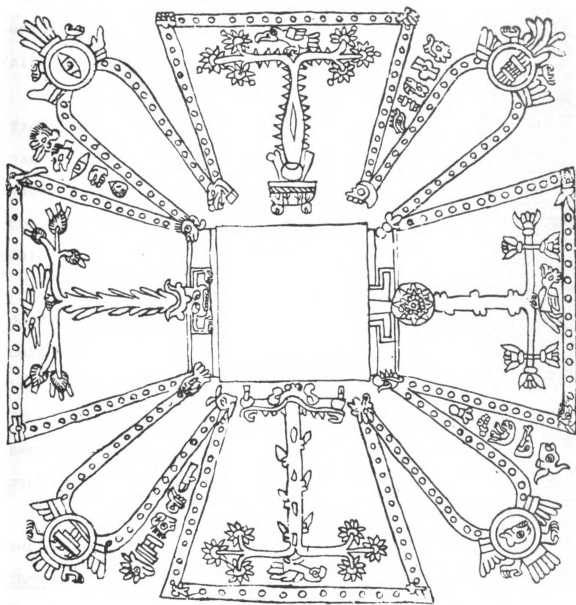


Figure 22.--The Ancient Calendar.

Codex Fejervary, Kingsborough Edition,
Vol. III, Detroit Institute of Art, p. 14.

relationship. This calendar is a graphic representation of the process in the cycle of self-procreation. The entire calendar must be looked upon as a single entity although comprised of many parts.

The divisions of the calendar are: the sun as frog, the penis; the lips of the mouth of the open jawed Serpent, the vulva; the opening in the tree, the vagina; the pot in which are found human bones, the womb--the place of the primeval germination. The center of the calendar represents the place of the primordial source.

Sunset is the beginning of the process. The sun descends to the open jawed serpent, enters the earth and descends into the womb, represented as the pot, where it is rejuvenated--or sheds its old day to begin a new one. It emerges once again at sunrise from the open jawed serpent, ascends to its zenith. There it starts the cycle over again.

The manner in which Leon-Portilla arranged the sun-god symbolism in his book Time and Reality in the Thought of the Maya gives credence to the above conjecture (Figure 23). My interpretation of these heiroglyphs along with Leon-Portilla's captions⁷ (indented) follow:

Figure 23a: The sun-god as phallic symbol.

The sun in its relationship with the earth with glyphs of "caban." Temple of the Sun, Palenque.

Figure 23.--The Sun-Earth Cycle.

Miguel Leon-Portilla, Time and Reality
in the Thought of the Maya, trans.
Charles L. Boiles and Fernando
Horcasitas, Beacon Press, 1973, p. 25.



a



b



c



d

The Maya calendar was depicted not only by numerals--a bar and dot system--but by diety glyphs as well. Portilla states that "caban" was a youthful goddess of the earth, of maize, and of the moon: a young and at the same time aged god.⁸ It is significant that on this figure the glyph is a conception of both female and male components; the idea, of course, self-perpetuation.

Figure 23b: The sun-god in its diurnal aspect.

The face of the sun in the table of the eclipses. Dresden Codex 56a.

Figure 23c: The sun-god at birth emerging from the jaws of a saurian.

Diety with a sunglyph on its forehead. It emerges from the jaws of a crocodile. Copan.

Figure 23d: The sun-god in the act of impregnation.

The sun glyph under a strip of celestial symbols. It is about to be devoured by the Earth Monster. Madrid Codex 25a.

Hieroglyph 23d is undeniably a graphic image of the sexual act. The female is lying on her back. The serpent symbolizes her sexual organs. She is accepting the sun, the act is copulation.

The process by which the sun and earth act out existence is explained by the atmosphere which surrounds them. Among its many actions it serves as an agency, using the sun's radiation as a power source to move the currents of air around the earth.

The sun radiates its heat through space to earth. The earth absorbs this heat from the sun, is warmed by it, reradiates this heat into its encompassing blanket of the atmosphere.

An important change occurs in the process. The terrestrial heat waves going out are longer than those going in--too long to escape through the atmosphere into space so many of these waves are absorbed by the water vapor in the atmosphere, creating heat energy which powers the complex circulation of the atmosphere. This energy is the agency which drives the winds, and creates the rain that so directly affects existence.⁹

The symbols that depict the sun, movement, and the dynamic conversion of the Serpent in the process of germination are the same design (Figure 24a, 24b and 24c).

The stamp (Figure 24a) shows two cross designs, a center stylistic serpent motif of the open jaw, and the split tongue (discussed later) of the serpent enclosed in a horizontal or rectangular plane. This horizontal plane represents the earth-sun relationship which affects vegetation on the surface of the earth. The hieroglyph (Figure 24b) depicts two serpents intertwined forming two crosses similar to Figure 24a. The open center can be associated with the open mouth of the serpent. The two heads and tails form a design representing the serpent's split tongue. The total configuration of two serpents and

Figure 24a.--Serpent-Sun Symbol.

Jorge Enciso, Design Motifs of Ancient Mexico (New York: Dover Publications, 1953), p. 144.

24b.--Dynamic Conversion.

Codex Borgia, Kingsborough Edition,
Vol. III, Detroit Institute of Art,
p. 3.

24c.--The Hook.

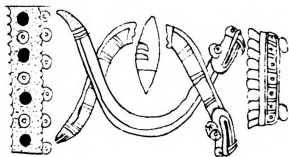
Jorge Enciso, Design Motifs of Ancient Mexico (New York: Dover Publications, 1953), p. 145.

24d.--The Reverse "S".

Laurette Sejourne, El Universo Quetzalcoatl (Mexico, D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Economica, 1962), p. 34.



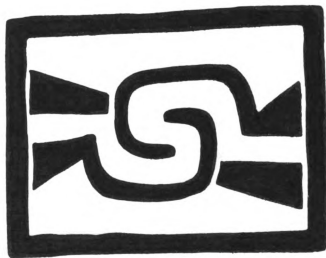
A



B



C



D

a seed represents the dynamics which converts the serpent into the germ of life.¹⁰

There is an ideogram called the Chalcatzingo relief on which is carved various glyphs that represent the peculiar serpentine agricultural world of the ancient planters (Figure 25). The Chalcatzingo relief was discovered near Jonactepec by the archaeologist Eulaliz Guzman in 1943.

The symbol of the "mystery" of the dynamic conversion, the sun, and the earth may be represented on the Chalcatzingo carving resting on the top of the open jawed Serpent now facing in a horizontal direction.

Plant-life was realized through the process of the atmosphere creating energy by the union of the heat of the sun and earth. The power or movement is symbolized in the serpentine design of the "hook" and "S" (Figure 24c and 24d). Laurette Sejourne refers to these designs as stylizations of the serpent in movement.¹¹ These designs are seen on the throne-like seat upon which a person is sitting in the Chalcatzingo carving (Figure 25). The person is also embracing this design with his arm. If the hook on the throne-like seat is continued, a spiral is formed (Figure 26).

The movement of the serpent, especially the coiled serpent, inspired the ancient planter to conceive movement and time in the form of spirals like the currents of air

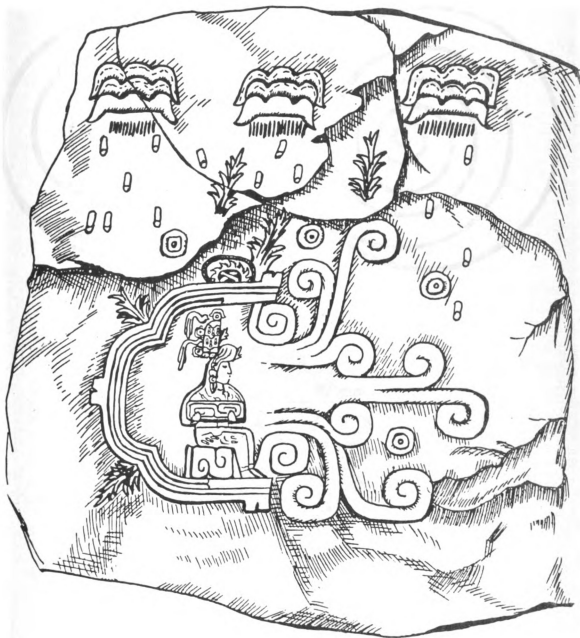
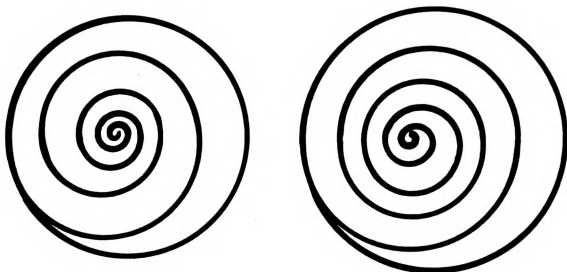


Figure 25.--The Chalcatzingo Relief.

Karl W. Luckert, Olmec Religion, A Key to Middle America and Beyond (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1976), p. 49.



A



B

Figure 26a.--Movement-Time Spirals.

Illustration by author.

26b.--The Feathered Serpent.

Miguel Covarrubias, Indian Art of Mexico and Central America (New York: Knopf, 1954), p. 34.

encompassing the earth. The Serpent can be seen encompassing the calendar in Figure 5. Not only does the Serpent encompass time it is also at the center; the place of the primordial source. Bernardino de Sahagun depicts this movement in the ancient calendar wheel (Figure 27).

Sahagun states how to read the calendar:

The reader might assume four spirals instead of the concentric lines shown. Beginning at the center with One Rabbit, proceed to Two Reed, Three Flint Knife, Four House, Five Rabbit, etc., and end at the outside circumference with Thirteen Rabbit. Begin again at the center with One Reed and proceed as before to the outside circumference at Thirteen Reed; and so on until the fourth spiral, which begins with One House, ends with Thirteen House, thus completing the fifty-two year series.¹²

In the myth of the ages of which there were four completed each had its ascent and descent--thirteen heavens and nine hells--and each begins again. Movement and time were both perceived in spirals, and in this sense, synonymous. Time actually is a measure of movement. As synonymous terms both movement and time had their periods of birth, growth, death, and rebirth.

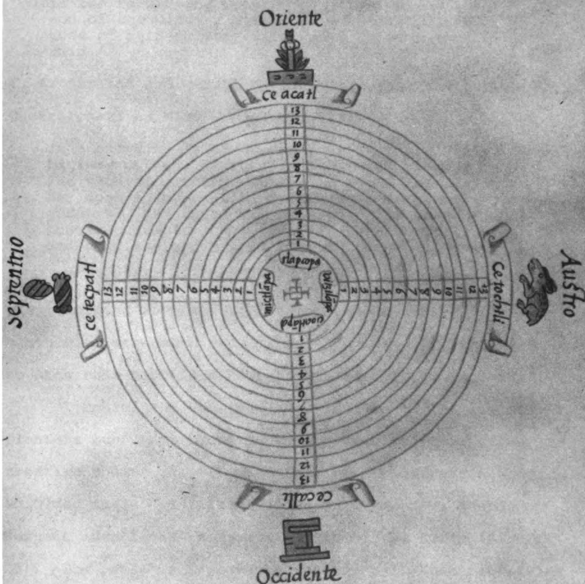
One of the earliest Mesoamerican circular monuments showing four spirals was depicted earlier (Figure 7). This monument is called the Cuicuilco Monument and is dedicated to the god of wind. The god of wind was one of the aspects of the Serpent, Quetzalcoatl. Bernardino de Sahagun referring to Quetzalcoatl recorded that "before the waters begin there are great winds." He says:

Figure 27.--The Calendar Wheel.

Bernardino de Sahagun, Florentine Codes, A General History of the Things of New Spain, trans. from the Aztec into English by A. J. O. Anderson and C. E. Dibble (Santa Fe, N.M.: School of American Research, 1950), Book III.

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de la astrologia



Quetzalcoatl, although a man, was held as a god who, they said, swept the road clear for the gods of the water. This they supposed to be a fact because always before the rainy season begins there are heavy winds and dust clouds, and this is the reason why Quetzalcoatl was called the god of the winds who swept the roads for the gods of rain so they might come on with their rain.¹³

C. A. Burland and Werner Forman state that the breath of Quetzalcoatl as Wind God gives life:

In a painting in the Codex Laud in the Bodleian Library Oxford, he is seen as a wind blowing in the waters; sitting within the water, displaying her open vulva to him, is the younger moon goddess. The implication is that the breath of Quetzalcoatl is the fertilizing breath of life,¹⁴ and that the goddess will be impregnated by it.

Quetzalcoatl was a sexually potent being and when depicted as tumor in the codices he wore a loin-cloth with a rounded end, "apparently as a bag in which to stow this marvelous 'organ,'" states C. A. Burland.¹⁵

One of the earliest observations of the ancient planters must have been the recognition of their pro-creative endowments from the form of the Serpent's body. An Olmec style¹⁶ rattlesnake design of an open jawed Serpent identifies the sexual parts of the human (Figure 28). The penis is represented by the tail, the rattles and point. The Serpent's mouth represents the vagina. The dot within the vagina signifies the primeval source or germ. All parts are placed in the womb of the Serpent. The split tongue within the womb is discussed later.

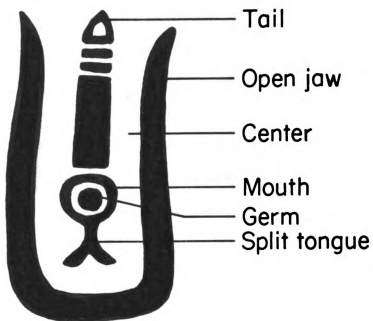


Figure 28.--Rattlesnake Motif.

Jorge Enciso, Design Motifs of Ancient Mexico (New York: Dover Publications, 1953), p. 74.

These symbols are found on the Chalcatzingo carving (Figure 25). Phallic symbols are recognized on the thigh of the person seated inside the Serpent's mouth. Both male and female symbols are seen on the headgear worn by the figure. The ancient planter realized that the same concept which explains the sun, the earth and vegetation--the ancient planters sustenance--should explain man.

With a desire for an explanation of himself the ancient planter naturally conceived in Serpentine thoughts a transcendental association linking humanity and vegetation. This transcending conception was visually portrayed by the Great Serpent's tongue and the young maize plant (Figures 29 and 30). By linking the maize plant and the serpent's tongue the concept that one becomes two developed. Both animal and vegetable were derived from the same primordial source. Thus, the ancient planter associated not only his world but himself with that of the Serpent.

This conception is explained by a hieroglyph from the Codex Fejervary (Figure 31). An erect serpent with split tongue and a maize plant bearing seeds rise as if growing from the open jawed serpent representing the earth. Animal and plant are derived from the same source.

Protruding from the Serpent's closed jaws is the split tongue, the symbol that one becomes two. This

Figure 29.--The Serpent's Split Tongue.

Karl Luckert, Olmec Religion: A Key
to Middle America and Beyond (Norman:
University of Oklahoma Press, 1934),
p. 67.

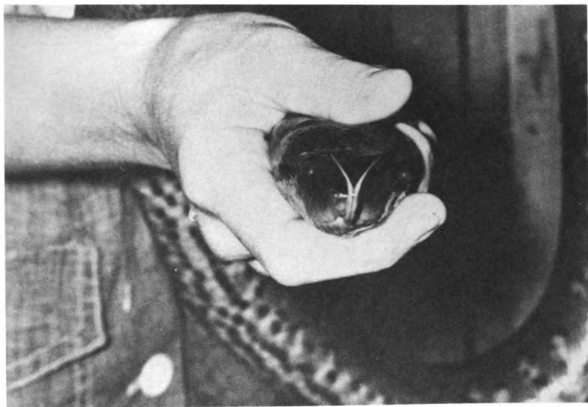


Figure 30.--Young Maize Plant.

Karl Luckert, Olmec Religion: A Key
to Middle America and Beyond (Norman:
University of Oklahoma Press, 1934),
p. 66.



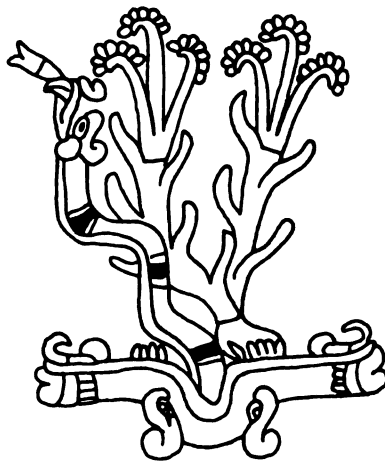


Figure 31.--Humanity and Sustenance.

Codex Fejervary, Kingsborough Edition,
Vol. III, Detroit Institute of Art,
p. 29.

concept later developed into the supreme being at Teotihuacan called Ometeotl--the god who willed himself into existence and was both masculine and feminine (see Chapter I).

The Chalcatzingo carving is even more explicit (Figure 25). On the headgear worn by the person in the center Quetzal feathers hang like drooping leaves of the maize plant. The feathers of the Quetzal represent vegetation. In the center of the Serpent's womb, quetzal feathers and the human together represent the Feathered Serpent. Reality is symbolized by the Feathered Serpent. Reality is the Serpent. In other words, the Serpent is the Serpent. Everything else is interwoven together as integral parts of the Serpent's total configuration. The Serpent is all existence: tangible and intangible; visible and invisible. The Serpent is the primordial source: generating, germinating, and sustaining itself.

Evolution

The evolution of the meaning--that one becomes two--of the Great Serpent evolved into a new expression. The young maize plant grew into a large tree. The ancient cultures expressed this concept as a tree split at the top like the Serpent's tongue. Four of these trees are represented on the ancient calendar (Figure 22).

A similar tree was found at Palenque on the "Panel of the Cross" (Figure 32). Leon-Portilla states that the tree rests on "the monstrous mask of the earth."¹⁷

Among contemporary Maya, the Itza of Tayasal, the tree was called "yaaz-chel-cab," which means "the first tree of the world."¹⁸ Referring to the Itza, Franz Blom states:

. . . the cross we see in their dwellings (or huts) is not the Christian cross but the direct descendent of this "Yaaxche," the tree that demands water in order to flourish.¹⁹

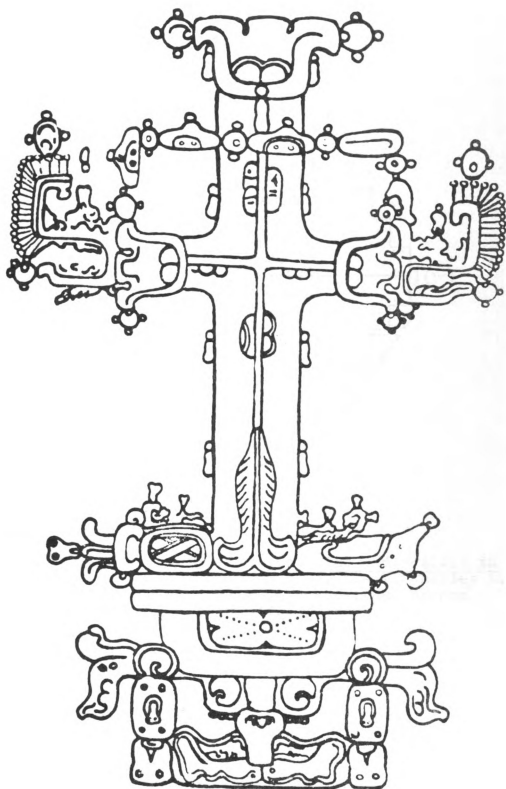
The contemporary Tzotzil who live in the state of Chiapas express their world visually with a tree and the movement of the sun (Figure 33).²⁰

Ray Chavez, a contemporary Chicano artist, evokes the ancient past by utilizing trees in lieu of the human figure.³⁴ One of his paintings named Moonsong has four trees arranged within a horizontal plane linking the agricultural world with humanity.

"Reality" is expressed by the painting Moonsong: the horizontal surface, humanity and plant, the earth, and the sun. It is a "Great Serpent."

Figure 32.--The Panel of the Cross.

E. Forstemann, "The Inscription on the Cross of Palenque," Mexican and Central American Antiquities, Calendar Systems, and History (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 28, 1904), p. 546.



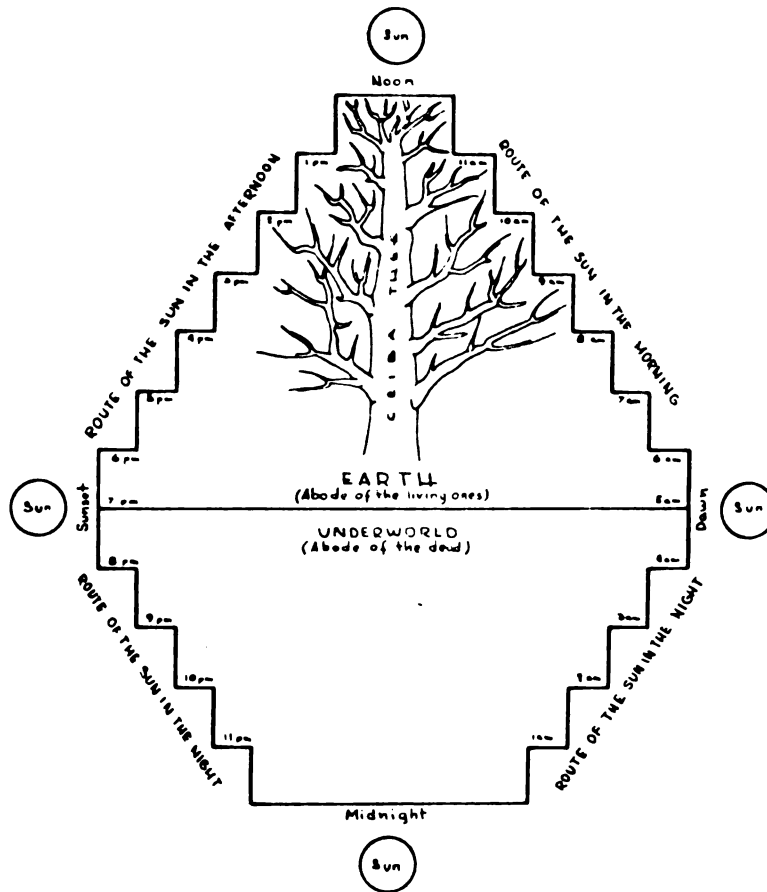
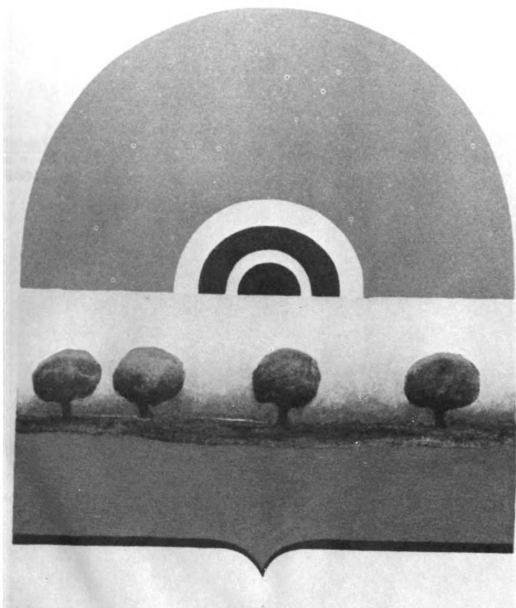


Figure 33.--The Tzotzil Visual World.

Miguel Leon-Portilla, Time and Reality in the Thought of the Maya, trans. Charles L. Boiles and Fernando Horcasitas, Beacon Press, 1973, p. 141.

Figure 34.--Moonsong, by Ray Chavez.

Jacinto Quirarte, Mexican American Artists, The John Fielding and Lois Lasater Series, No. 2 (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1973), p. 104.



FOOTNOTES: CHAPTER IV

¹Miguel Leon-Portilla, Time and Reality in the Thought of the Maya, trans. Grace Lobanov and Miguel Leon-Portilla (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1969), p. 18.

²Ibid., p. 128.

³Luckert, p. 14.

⁴Leon-Portilla, p. 130.

⁵Ibid., p. 134.

⁶Ibid., p. 124.

⁷Ibid., p. 40.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Arthur Beiser, The Earth (New York: Time, Inc., 1962), p. 59.

¹⁰Laurette Sejourné, El Universo Quetzalcoatl (Mexico, D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1962), p. 29.

¹¹Ibid., p. 33.

¹²Bernardino de Sahagún, Florentine Codex, A General History of the Things of New Spain, trans. from the Aztec into English by A. J. O. Anderson and C. E. Dibble (Santa Fe, N.M.: School of American Research, 1950), Fol., 12 vol., Book VII, p. 20.

¹³Sahagún, Bustamente edition, Book I, p. 26.

¹⁴Burland, p. 45.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Covarrubias, p. 34.

¹⁷Leon-Portilla, p. 56.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 139.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid., p. 141.

²¹Jacinto Quirarte, Mexican American Artists,
The John Fielding and Lois Lasater Series, No. 2
(Austin: University of Texas Press, 1973), p. 108.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Reflecting upon the past the Chicano culture is simultaneously disseminating their future concepts through aesthetic expression. Among the traditional symbols from their ancient past which frequently appear in works of Chicano art and literature is the Serpent.

The evocation of the ancient Serpent is affirmed by the Chicanos in the belief in a prophesy that the Feathered Serpent, Quetzalcoatl, will return to this land August 16, 1987. Through an examination of the historico-mythological Quetzalcoatl, the ages of the world, the heavens and hells, and the time of the arrival of Hernan Cortes, it was established how the date, August 16, 1987, was achieved.

An exploration through a maze of controversial conjectures on Mesoamerica led to the discovery of the Serpent and the key to its meaning--related to the agricultural world--in ancient American cultures.

The interpretation of "Reality is a Great Serpent" was derived from reading hieroglyphs on codices, stelae, and panels, and interpretations of architectural

concepts by scholars both ancient and contemporary involved in Nahuatl expression.

Symbolic veneration of the Serpent was first recognized with the appearance of an imitation volcanic pyramid at an excavation site of the earliest known culture in Mesoamerica. Through apperception of the volcanic action--enriching the earth for vegetation--the ancient people translated the volcano symbolically into a Great Serpent.

Dependence upon the land led to a unique transcendence: humanity and vegetation are derived from a single primordial source; generating, germinating, and sustaining itself. This primordial source is symbolized by the Serpent. Reality is cyclic--all things had their time of existence: birth, life, death, and rebirth--and is symbolized by the Feathered Serpent, Quetzalcoatl. The feathers represent vegetation. The human represents the Serpent. The Serpent is the Serpent.

Certain aspects of the original cultural tradition have exhibited a remarkable resistance to change while having been remolded and reinterpreted in conformance with underlying aesthetic values in Chicano literature and art. A graphic example is the painting, Moonsong, by Ray Chavez, of the evolutionary change of the Serpent into a tree.

Through aesthetic expression in art and literature the Chicanos are sharing with the world the illumination of the Quetzalcoatl prophesy, and a new interpretation of existence. The dark period of the nine hells through which existence must pass is ending. A new age of peace and understanding is beginning as the world approaches the thirteen heavens, the period of light.

The intent of this dissertation is to increase knowledge of Chicano expression and its roots. Chicano aesthetic expression, indigenous American heritage, is essential to understanding ethnicity in a pluralistic society. Of equal importance is the role of the university in adding to the wealth of man's achievement in the Humanities, and demonstrating the relevance of humanities in multicultural programs of study in colleges and schools.

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This volume contains an explanation of the following codices, paintings, sculptures, and reliefs along with new works presented in Spanish, French and Italian:

Codex Mendoza
 Codex Telleriano-Remensis
 Codex Mexican
 Monte Alban
 Pueblo de San Pable Mitlan
 De Zachila y Quilapa
 Tlascala
 Third expedition of M. Dupaix (1807)
 La Palenque, Pedra Trumgal at University
 of Mexico

Libro Sexto de la retorica y filosofa, moral y telogia de la gente Mexicana, donde hay cosas muy curiosas tocates a los primores de su lengua, y cosas muy delicados tocante a las virtudes morales, por el M.R.P. Frayle Bernardino de Sahagun de la Orden de los Frayles Menore de la Observancia.

In a footnote on page 4x of this volume it is stated: "The General History of New Spain," by Bernardino de Sahagun, from which this book has

been extracted, has never been published;
it is the possession of the Right Honourable
Lord Viscount Kingsborough.

Volume VI:

This volume contains the same material in
Volume V translated into English with
numerous additional notes.

Volume VII:

This volume contains the History of New Spain
by Bernardino de Sahagun in Spanish. Twelve
Books.

Volume VIII:

Supplementary notes to the Antiquities of
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inserted at the end of the sixth volume.

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