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Mexica Textiles: Archaeological Remains from the Sacred Precincts of Tenochtitlan and Tlatelolco

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Mexica Textiles: Archaeological Remains
from the Sacred Precincts of Tenochtitlan
and Tlatelolco

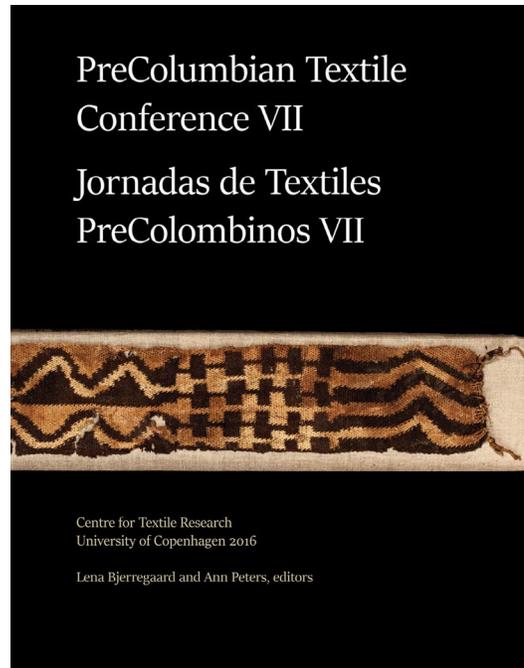
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Mexica Textiles: Archaeological Remains from the Sacred Precincts of Tenochtitlan and Tlatelolco¹

Leonardo López Luján² and Salvador Guilliem Arroyo³

Abstract

In contrast with the rich written and iconographical data from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries concerning Mexica textiles, discoveries of such materials in archaeological contexts in Mexico City are quite rare. This paucity is reflected in our archaeological collections, in spite of the fact that the imperial Mexica capital received in tribute and trade copious amounts of unprocessed cotton, thread, cord, fabric, and clothing, and that the sister cities, Tenochtitlan and Tlatelolco, were bustling centers of textile production. The few Mexica examples extant today are in poor condition and have survived thanks to being carbonized during rituals prior to their burial and then interred in flood-prone environments with copper artifacts which inhibited the proliferation of microorganisms.

This paper will examine the most important textile discoveries made in the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia's Templo Mayor and Tlatelolco Projects. After describing the procedures for archaeological recovery and subsequent conservation treatments, we will analyze the technology of these objects as well as their functions and meanings in the ritual contexts in which they were buried. Special emphasis will focus on the remains of elite garments woven with fine cotton thread adorned with gold brocade and pendants.

Keywords: Mesoamerica, Basin of Mexico, Mexica empire, Tenochtitlan, Tlatelolco, offerings, charred textiles, cotton

Textiles mexicas: Vestigios arqueológicos de los recintos sagrados de Tenochtitlan y Tlatelolco

Resumen

En contraste con la rica información escrita e iconográfica de los siglos XV y XVI referente a los textiles de la civilización mexica, el hallazgo de este tipo de materiales en contextos arqueológicos de la Ciudad de México es un acontecimiento poco frecuente. Esto se refleja en la pobreza de nuestras colecciones arqueológicas, a pesar de que la capital del imperio mexica recibía por vías tributarias y comerciales volúmenes gigantescos de algodón sin procesar, hilos, cordeles, telas y prendas de vestir, y de que las ciudades hermanas de Tenochtitlan y Tlatelolco eran activos centros de producción de tejidos. Los raros textiles mexicas que se conocen en la actualidad se encuentran en pésimo estado de conservación. Lograron llegar hasta nuestros días gracias a que fueron carbonizados durante el ritual previo a su enterramiento, amén de quedar sepultados en un ambiente anegado y con artefactos de cobre que inhibieron la proliferación de microorganismos.

En esta ponencia examinaremos los descubrimientos más importantes de textiles realizados por el Proyecto Templo Mayor y el Proyecto Tlatelolco del Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia. Describiremos los procedimientos seguidos para su recuperación arqueológica y los tratamientos posteriores de conservación. Haremos igualmente un estudio de la tecnología, así como de las funciones y significados de estos objetos en el contexto ritual en que fueron sepultados. Pondremos especial énfasis en los restos de vestimentas nobiliarias tejidas con finos hilos de algodón y decoradas con brocados y pendientes de lámina de oro.

Palabras clave: Mesoamérica, Cuenca de México, imperio mexica, Tenochtitlan, Tlatelolco, ofrendas, textiles carbonizados, algodón

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Introduction

In October 2015, the senior author of this paper attended a conference on archaeometry organised by the Museo del Oro in Bogotá, Colombia. The topic of this presentation was Mexica goldworking, specifically the gold artefacts that we have uncovered in the ruins of the Templo Mayor of Tenochtitlan. I felt embarrassed when I had to admit in this spectacular museum, where every floor, every hall, every display case is replete with exquisite pieces made of the yellow metal, that in thirty-eight years of excavations we were only able to find half a kilogram of the stuff and that all of the Mexica gold objects—as scarce as they are modest—fit in both of my hands (see López Luján and Ruvalcaba 2015).

In my defence, I said then that metallurgy and goldworking were introduced to Mesoamerica from South America around 800 CE, and that Andean civilisations had begun to develop these technologies two thousand years earlier. I also mentioned that Mexico was a country that is very poor in superficial sources of pure gold, reflected in the existence of only one display case devoted to the metal in the Mexica Hall at the National Museum of Anthropology and two more cases in the Museo de Templo Mayor, unlike the vast holdings of museums in Bogotá, Quito, Lima, and La Paz.

Today, I come before you, again, with that same embarrassed feeling. As you can tell from the programme of this 2016 *International Conference on Pre-Columbian Textiles*, the archaeologist Salvador Guilliem and I are going to present a research on Mexica textiles discovered in the sacred precincts of Tlatelolco and Tenochtitlan (Figure 1). In this contribution, you will be surprised by the ostensible poverty of our archaeological collections, especially in comparison with the spectacular Peruvian textiles that have been analysed here during the first three days of the conference. We must clarify, however, that, unlike Mexica gold, the scarcity and modesty of our textiles is not explained by a relatively late development of spinning and weaving technology in Mesoamerica or because the cultivation of plants such as agave and cotton was only practiced in a few regions (see Anawalt 1981; Stresser-Péan 2012). On the contrary, the archaeological evidence of these practices goes back to at least 1500 BCE and extends throughout this cultural area (Anawalt 2000: 205-207, 213). Rather, the dearth of textiles made by the Mexica and other Mesoamerican peoples in our collections is strictly due to conservation issues (Mastache 1968: 7-8; Anawalt 1981: 3-5; 2000: 205, 214; Sayer 1985: 15-69; Filloy Nadal in this volume). As other colleagues of mine in this session will explain, environments that favour textile preservation, such as deserts, dry caves, and permafrost, are relatively rare in Mesoamerica.

Mexica Charred Textiles

By charred textiles, we are referring to two sets of textiles that have managed to survive from the fifteenth century to the present because of a process known as *carbonisation*, in these cases resulting from specific ritual activity. Carbonisation is defined as the reduction of an organic substance into carbon by means of pyrolysis, that is, a thermochemical decomposition at elevated temperatures in the absence of oxygen (Miksicek 1987: 219-221; Sease 1987: 63-64; Wild 1988: 7-12; Mirambell and Sánchez 1986: 81-82; Jones *et al.* 2007: 9, 15). This process is observed, for example, when the combustion (or burning) of an organic material is suddenly interrupted when buried, immersed in water, or placed in an airtight container, thus preventing its full conversion into ash. Sometimes the materials that survive have lain in the edge of a pyre, or been protected by some other solid object.

In textiles, the carbonised fibres lose the water they originally contained and contract. Consequently, the intercellular spaces become closed, their density decreases, and their biochemical resistance increases as the organic products that feed the many microorganisms present in the environment disappear. Charred textiles also become insoluble and inert to chemical reactions in normal acidic or alkaline conditions.

As for the textiles found in Tlatelolco and Tenochtitlan that will be discussed in a moment, they not only were buried quickly when they were burned, but they were also put into a matrix of compact fine clay, with little free oxygen dissolved in water, a relative humidity greater than 70 per cent, total darkness, neutral pH, a constant temperature of around 10 degrees Celsius, and numerous copper artefacts whose corrosion acted as a sterilizing agent because of its fungicidal and bactericidal properties (Vázquez del Mercado 2000: 79).

Another crucial factor in the survival of these textiles was the work of the experienced conservators on our excavation team. We have to remember that charred fabrics use to be black, slag-like, brittle, and hard; its fragments are often very small and confusingly like charcoal. Thus, conservators' timely intervention prevented the sudden removal of the textiles from the burial matrix and their subsequent deterioration from exposure to new conditions of humidity, temperature, and light. The textiles were washed in a distilled water and neutral soap solution, softened with glycerine in alcohol, and, finally, after drying, were consolidated in a mixture of methocel and propylene glycol (Vázquez del Mercado 2000: 80-83, 110; García Lascuráin 2012).

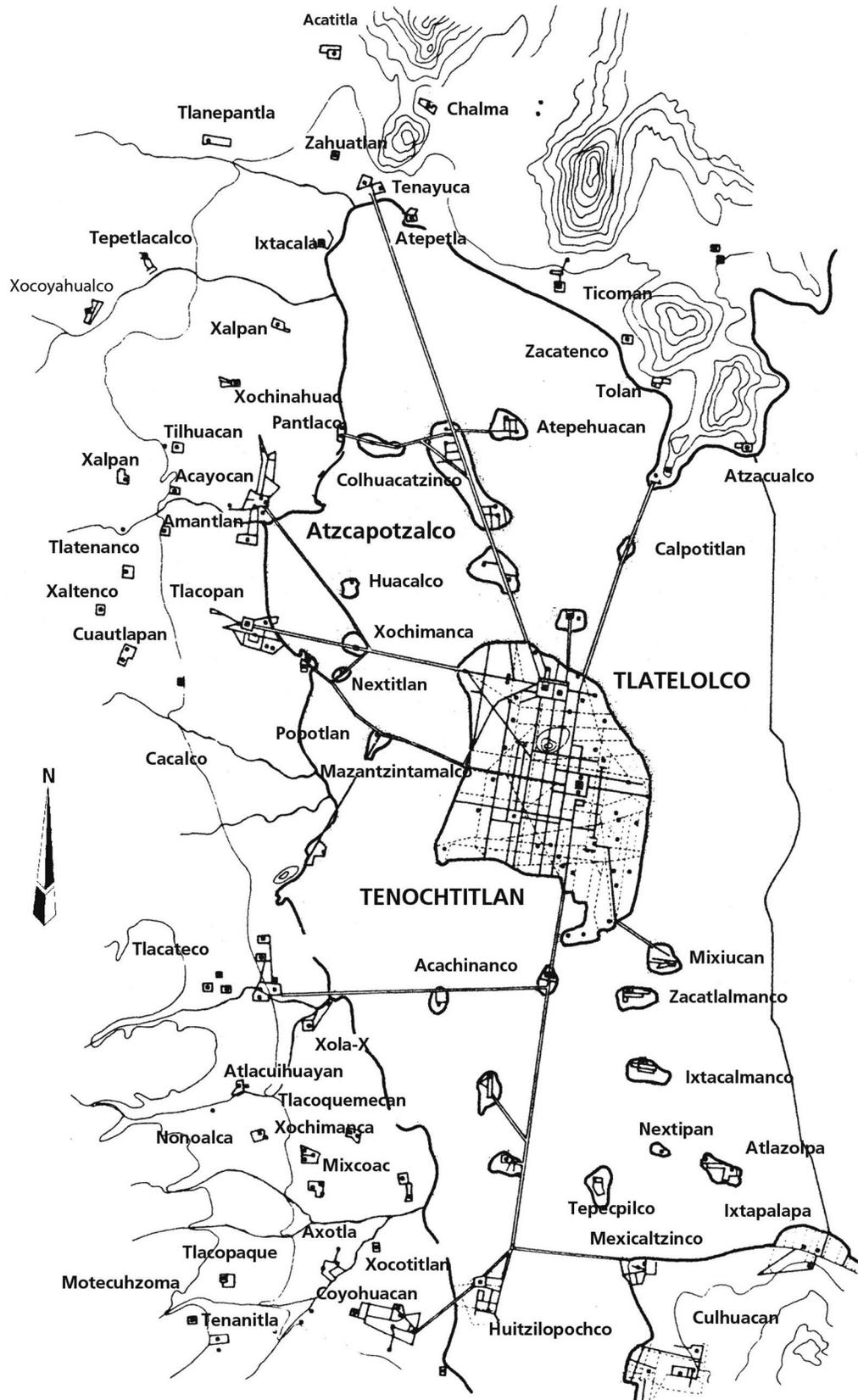


Figure 1. The Tenochtitlan-Tlatelolco island in Lake Texcoco, Basin of Mexico. Drawing Fernando Carrizosa, courtesy Proyecto Templo Mayor.

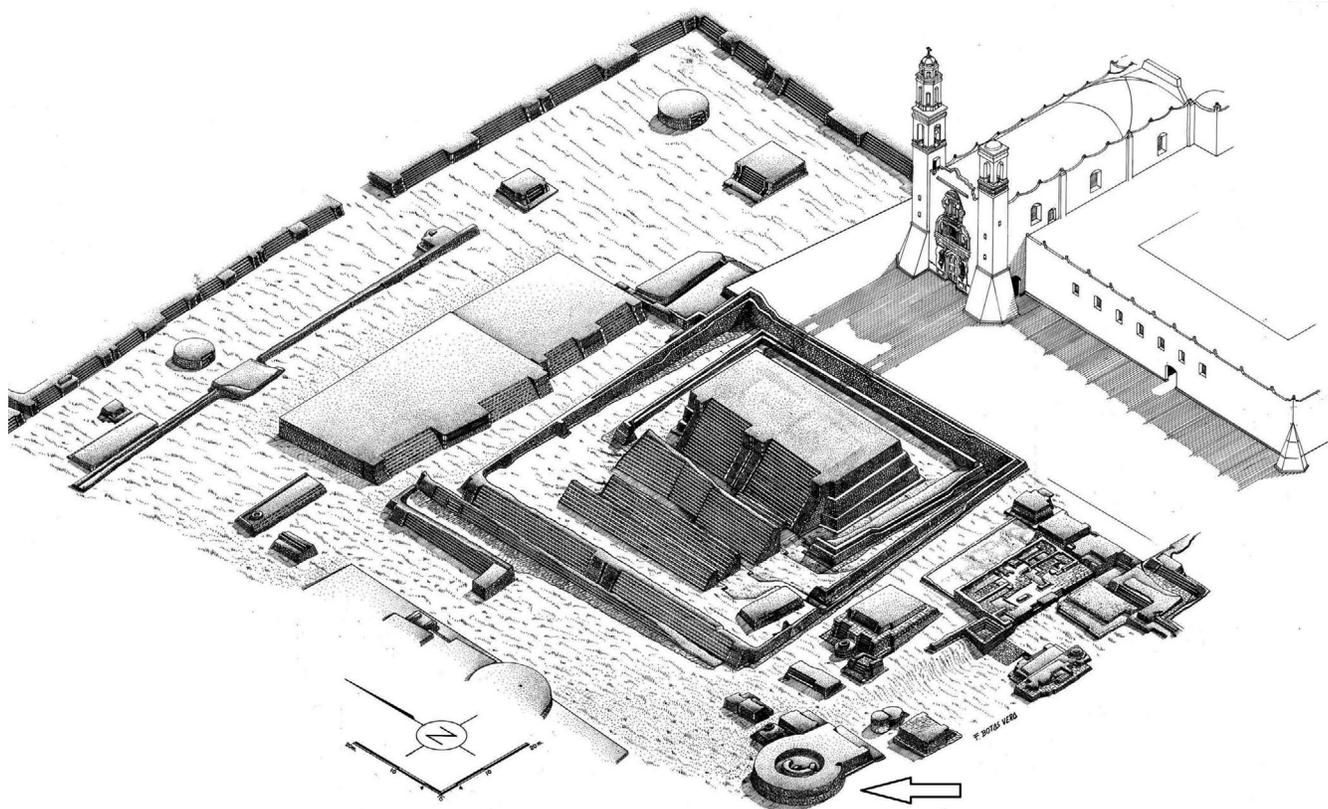


Figure 2. Sacred precinct of Tlatelolco, Tlatelolco Archaeological Zone, Mexico City. Location of Temple R. Drawing by Fernando Botas and Salvador Guilliem Arroyo, courtesy Proyecto Tlatelolco.

The Sacrificed Girl at Tlatelolco

Our analysis of Mexica textiles and their archaeological contexts takes us first to the Tlatelolco Archaeological Zone, north of the centre of modern-day Mexico City (Figure 2). On the southwest corner of this spacious area open to sightseers is a round temple, today known as Temple R (Guilliem 1989: 79-96). In pre-Hispanic times this temple was dedicated to the cult of Ehecatl, an aspect of the god Quetzalcoatl, or Feathered Serpent, associated with the breath of living beings and the winds that bring clouds bearing rain to the agricultural fields (Figure 3). Between 1987 and 1989, archaeologist Salvador Guilliem explored the eastern facade of this temple in search of offerings. In a long, 3- by 12-metre trench he excavated at the foot of the platform, below the level of the plaza floor, he found a total of 41 sacrificed individuals, including 30 children (Guilliem 1999: 97-142; 2008: 13-14; Román and Chávez 2006). Apparently, this ritual deposit is the result of a ceremony that took place around 1454, when a terrible four-year drought affected the inhabitants of the Basin of Mexico. According to various historical sources, the situation was so desperate that the Mexica tried to appease the fury of the rain gods by making numerous

offerings and sacrificing many children (Guilliem 1999: 207-226; 2008: 29-31).

In the sacred precinct of Tlatelolco, archaeologists found many of the sacrificed children inside large round ceramic pots, while others lay next to the remains of youths and adults at the bottom of the ritual deposit. All of the children were accompanied by many kinds of offerings totalling 2,058 objects. Prominent among them were seashells, copper bells, obsidian blades, blue pigment, and animal bones, as well as ceramic vessels and figurines.

Near the southern end of the trench next to the Temple of Ehecatl platform, an assemblage called Offering 5 was found which is especially relevant to the topic at hand (Figure 4). It was composed of three sacrificial victims, all infants (Guilliem 1999: 112-114; 2008: 18-21). Burial 11 was a boy found in foetal position inside a round pot covered with an *apaxtle*, or earthenware basin. Burial 22 also contained a boy in a round pot, but much smaller, which had been cremated *in situ*. Burial 12, on the other hand, had a three-year-old girl. Her decapitated body had been placed in a seated position at the bottom of the deposit with tucked feet and arms crossed and resting on her knees. On her neck was a string of black beads and a long plate. Above this was the girl's

Figure 3. Basalt image of the wind god Ehecatl found at the foot of Temple R. Photograph by Salvador Guilliem Arroyo, courtesy Proyecto Tlatelolco.

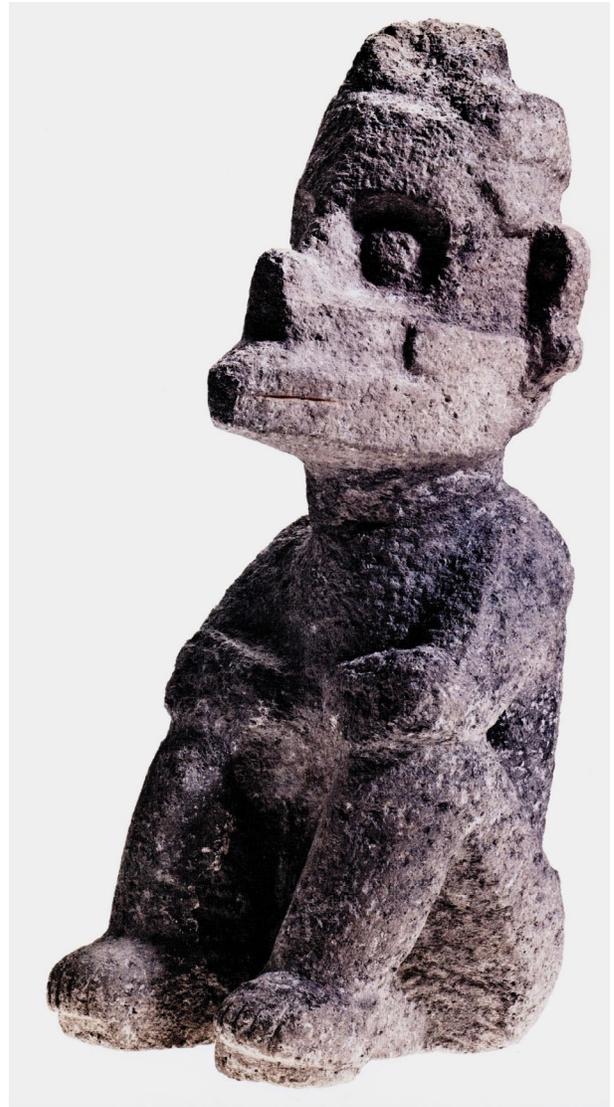


Figure 4. Archaeological trench excavated in front of Temple R, location of Offering 5. Drawing by Fernando Botas and Salvador Guilliem Arroyo, courtesy Proyecto Tlatelolco.

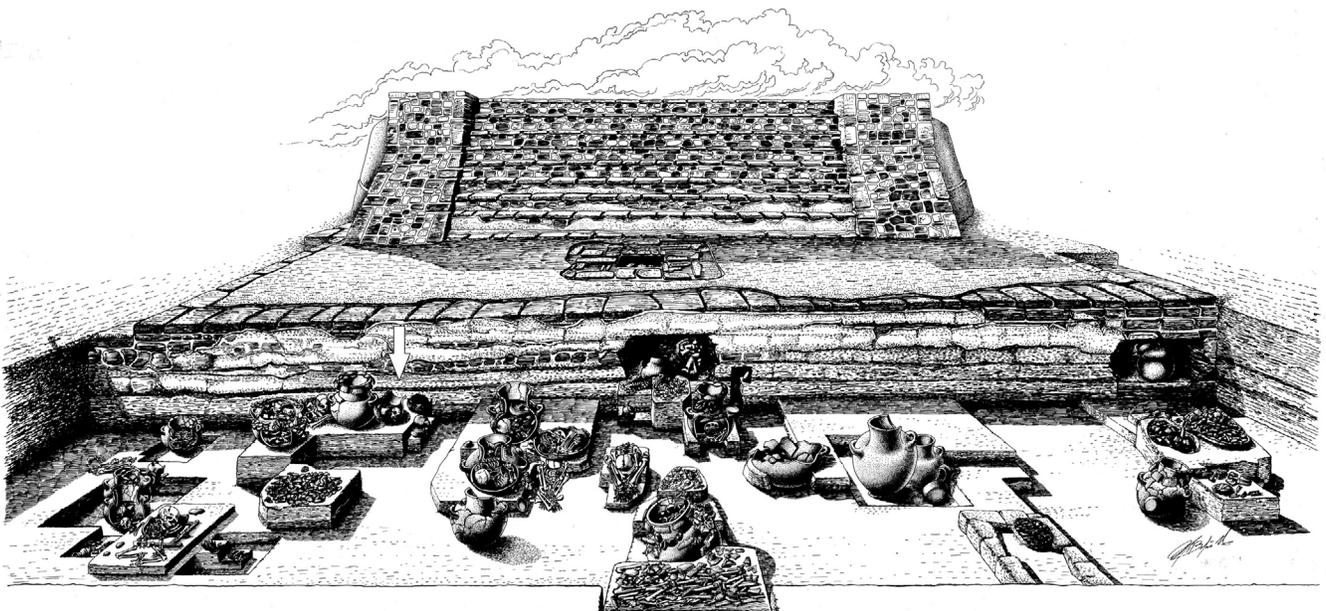




Figure 5. Offering 5, excavation process of the basket. Photograph by Salvador Guilliem Arroyo, courtesy Proyecto Tlatelolco.

severed head covered by a tripod bowl and then a basket filled with charred textiles topped by an inverted *apaxtle*.

In the process of recovering the offerings, the basket was extracted in a single block and taken to the lab to conduct a careful microexcavation and a detailed three-dimensional inventory (Figure 5). The basket measured 18 centimetres high and approximately 20 centimetres in diameter (Guilliem 2008: 21-27). Although the wicker had completely degraded, it clearly had been woven in a diagonal pattern. The basket contained several figurines that had been intentionally broken, including an image of Quetzalcoatl, another of a female deity, a dog, and an opossum with a baby on her back (Figures 6-8). There was also a small serpent carved out of antler, a seashell, king vulture bones, tubers, maize kernels, and chilli, tomatillo, amaranth, and chia seeds.

Particularly interesting were two sets of spinning and weaving implements found inside the basket. The first set had five small *malacates*, or lightweight ceramic whorls, including one that still had the remains of its wooden spindle; a tiny spinning bowl depicting the god Ehecatl's wind jewel (Figure 9); and the remains of a gourd vessel that contained the clay used to smooth the fingers while spinning.

The second set had a bone needle, a maguey spine, three prismatic obsidian blades, part of a bone *machete* or large batten, and the remains of sticks from a backstrap loom.

The Textiles at Tlatelolco

These spinning and weaving implements were wrapped together with 42 charred textile fragments of six different categories (García Lascuráin 2012):⁴

- 1) Four fragments of a taffeta or balanced plain weave fabric with brocades or weft-float patterning in the form of small bands, which seem to be the remains of a *quechquemiltl*, or shoulder shawl or neck cape (Figure 10).
- 2) Four fragments of a basket weave fabric (two weft yarns that cross one warp yarn), including two with kilim-type openings for the neck, which are possibly the remains of a small *huipilli*, or blouse.
- 3) Eight fragments of a basket weave and twill fabric that forms a rhombic design.
- 4) A long piece of fabric with a simple taffeta or balanced plain weave, measuring 33 by 160 centimetres, which may have been a *cueitl*, or long skirt or petticoat.

4. Other Tlatelolcan charred textiles have been discovered in the past (see Weitlaner Johnson 1956; Mastache 1968: 8; Gonzalez Quintero 1988; Guilliem 2008: 14-17).



Figure 6. Ceramic figurine representing creation god Quetzalcoatl (“Feathered Serpent”). Photograph by Salvador Guilliem Arroyo, courtesy Proyecto Tlatelolco.

Figure 7. Ceramic figurine representing a female deity. Photograph by Salvador Guilliem Arroyo, courtesy Proyecto Tlatelolco.



Figure 8. Ceramic figurine representing an opossum with a baby on her back. Photograph by Salvador Guilliem Arroyo, courtesy Proyecto Tlatelolco.



- 5) Four fragments of twill fabric associated with a cord, which probably was a small satchel.
- 6) Various cord fragments.

In relation to the basket and its charred contents, we should remember that the lives of women in Mexica times essentially revolved around textile production. Thus, the Franciscan friar Bernardino Sahagún's native informants mention that newborn girls in their presentation ceremony

were given the *par excellence* female toolkit, including "The spinning whorl, the batten, the reed basket, the spinning bowl, the skeins, the shuttle, her little skirt, her little blouse" (Sahagún 1989: 670). And, when women died, this same set of instruments was burned in the funerary pyre so that the deceased could continue to use them in the afterlife. In light of this, we can certainly understand why a basket of burnt fabric was placed on the sacrificed girl at Tlatelolco's Temple of the Wind God.



Figure 9. Ceramic spinning bowl depicting the god Ehecatl's wind jewel. Photograph by Salvador Guilliem Arroyo, courtesy Proyecto Tlatelolco.

The Cremated Dignitary at Tenochtitlan

Now we must leave Tlatelolco and go 2 kilometres south-east to the Archaeological Zone of the Templo Mayor, in the heart of the ancient island city of Tenochtitlan (Figure 11). Here a team directed by Leonardo López Luján recovered another collection of charred textiles, although in

this case the context was not the sacrifice of infants, but rather the interment of an adult. This burial was discovered during explorations of the building known as the Casa de las Águilas, or House of Eagles (López Luján and Mercado 1996; López Luján 2006). This unique architectural complex is distinguished by its prime location just 15 meters north of the Templo Mayor and by its rich decoration in the “Neo-Toltec” style. In the last two field seasons, we exhumed from its interior various ceramic sculptures that represented semi-defleshed beings and personages dressed in eagle outfits, as well as mural paintings in the pre-Hispanic codex style, benches with polychrome reliefs, and sumptuous offerings.

This burial was found on the exterior of the third construction phase of the House of Eagles, an enlargement that dates to the last two decades of the fifteenth century, that is, the reign of Ahuitzotl (Román and López Luján 1999; López Luján 2006, 1: 244-251). The inhumation ceremony was conducted at the foot of the stairway that accessed the east wing of the building where the Mexica had dug three small cylindrical cavities about 50 centimetres in diameter (Figure 12). Each of them served to house a ceramic funerary urn, as well as part of the mortal remains of one individual and a rich offering.

This three-part ritual deposit contained the cremated skeletal remains of a man, a dog, a jaguar, a golden eagle, and a hawk. There also were other objects made of ceramic, obsidian, flint, basalt, greenstone, turquoise, gold, copper, bronze, pyrite, bone, seashell, copal, cotton, and palm. This assemblage totalled 101 complete pieces and 350 fragments.

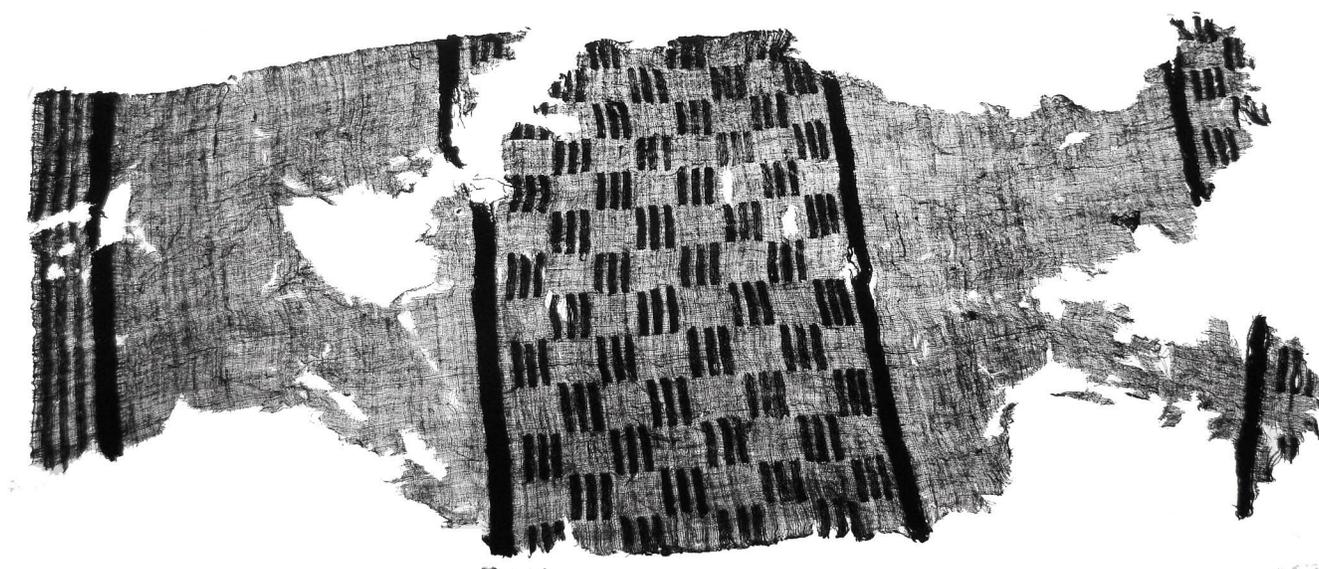


Figure 10. A *quechquemiti* or shoulder shawl (balanced plain weave). Photograph by Salvador Guilliem Arroyo, courtesy Proyecto Templo Mayor.

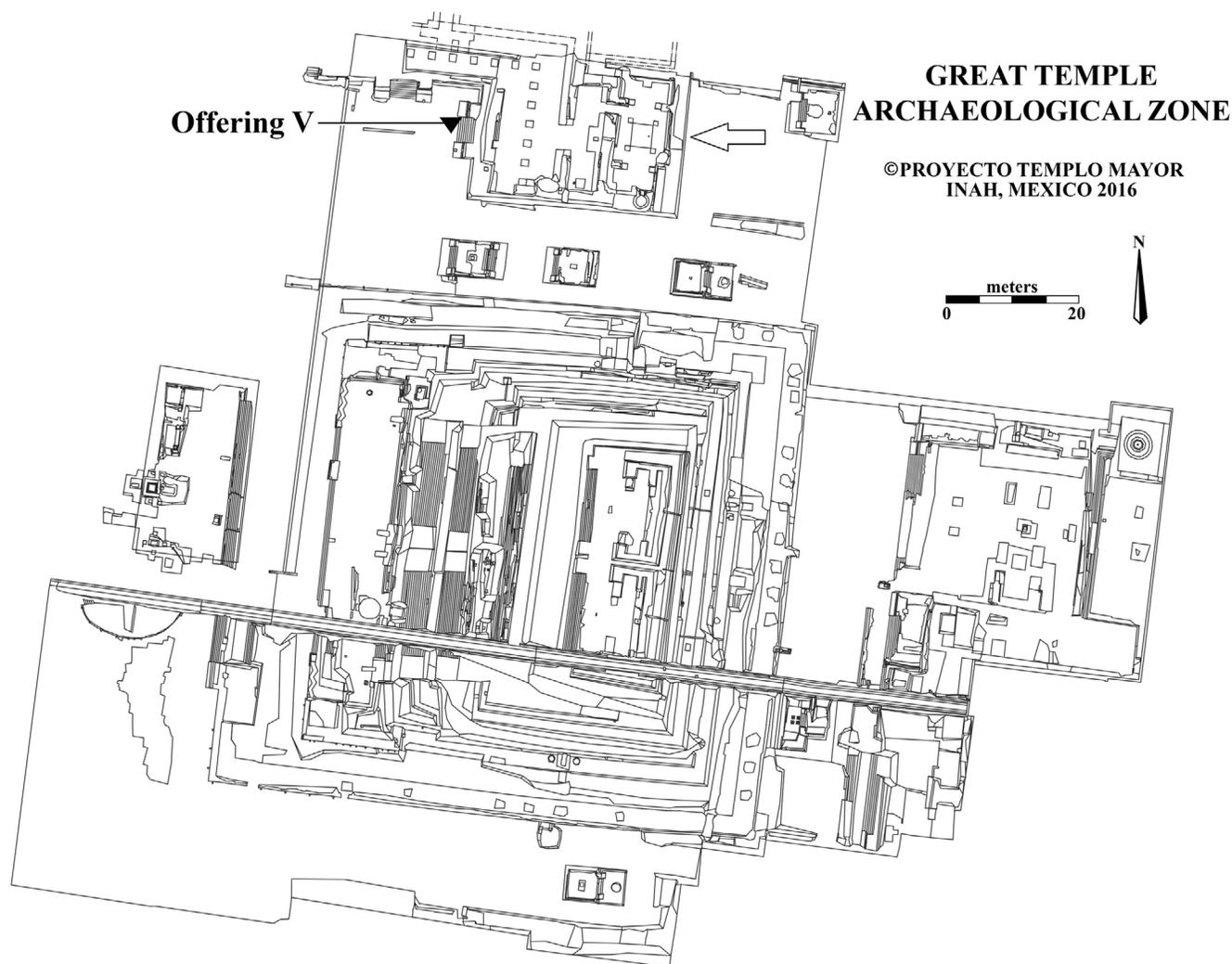


Figure 11. Sacred precinct of Tenochtitlan, Great Temple Archaeological Zone, Mexico City. Location of the House of Eagles. Drawing by Michelle De Anda Rogel, courtesy Proyecto Templo Mayor.

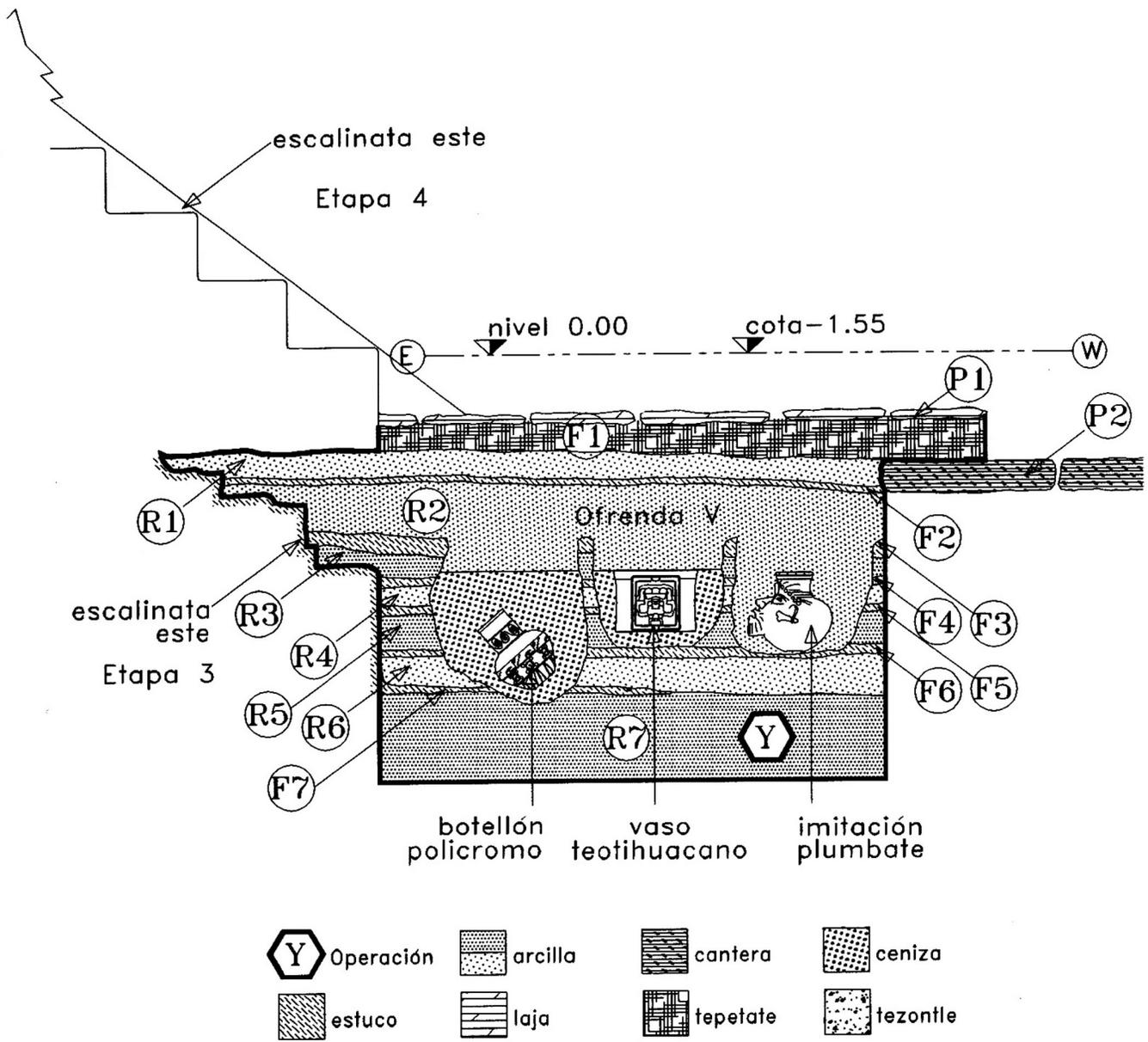
Without a doubt, the most impressive objects were three beautiful ceramic vessels—each from very different periods—which the Mexica used as funerary urns (López Luján et al. 2000; López Luján 2006, 1: 132-140). The oldest of the three is a vase that dates back to the Late Classic and whose exterior surface depicts the famous butterfly-personage in Teotihuacan iconography. The next oldest is an effigy pot depicting the head of an old man produced in the Basin of Mexico during the Early Postclassic. The third is a polychrome bottle from the Late Postclassic that has an elaborate decoration of precious beads, flowers, hearts, and step-fret motifs.

Although the bones had been purposely broken and burned for many hours, we were able to determine that they all belonged to the same adult male. They were mixed together with a rich mortuary array containing some greenstone and obsidian beads, miniature obsidian and flint

projectile points, obsidian and basalt sceptres shaped like maces, and palm cord. Equally significant were the many fragments of charred cotton textiles, gold laminate pendants possibly sewn on the fabrics, copper pins, and turquoise mosaics.

Following Mexica tradition, the mortuary bundle of this individual underwent an initial burning to remove his body's soft tissues. After this cremation, the fresh bones and the partially burnt offerings were fractured with a stone axe and twisted by hand. This made the second burning more effective, which took place five days later according to historical sources, and reached an estimated temperature of 950 degrees Celsius (Román and López Luján 1999: 38-39; López Luján 2006, 1: 246).

In a subsequent step in the ceremony, part of the remains from the pyre was brought to the foot of the main stairway of the House of Eagles for its interment inside the three



TENOCHTITLAN
 Casa de las Águilas
 Cala Q', Cuadro 60
 Operación Y, Corte sur

PROYECTO TEMPLO MAYOR
 ©INAH, MEXICO 2000

Figure 12. House of Eagles, East-West Section of Offering V. Drawing by Fernando Carrizosa, courtesy Proyecto Templo Mayor.

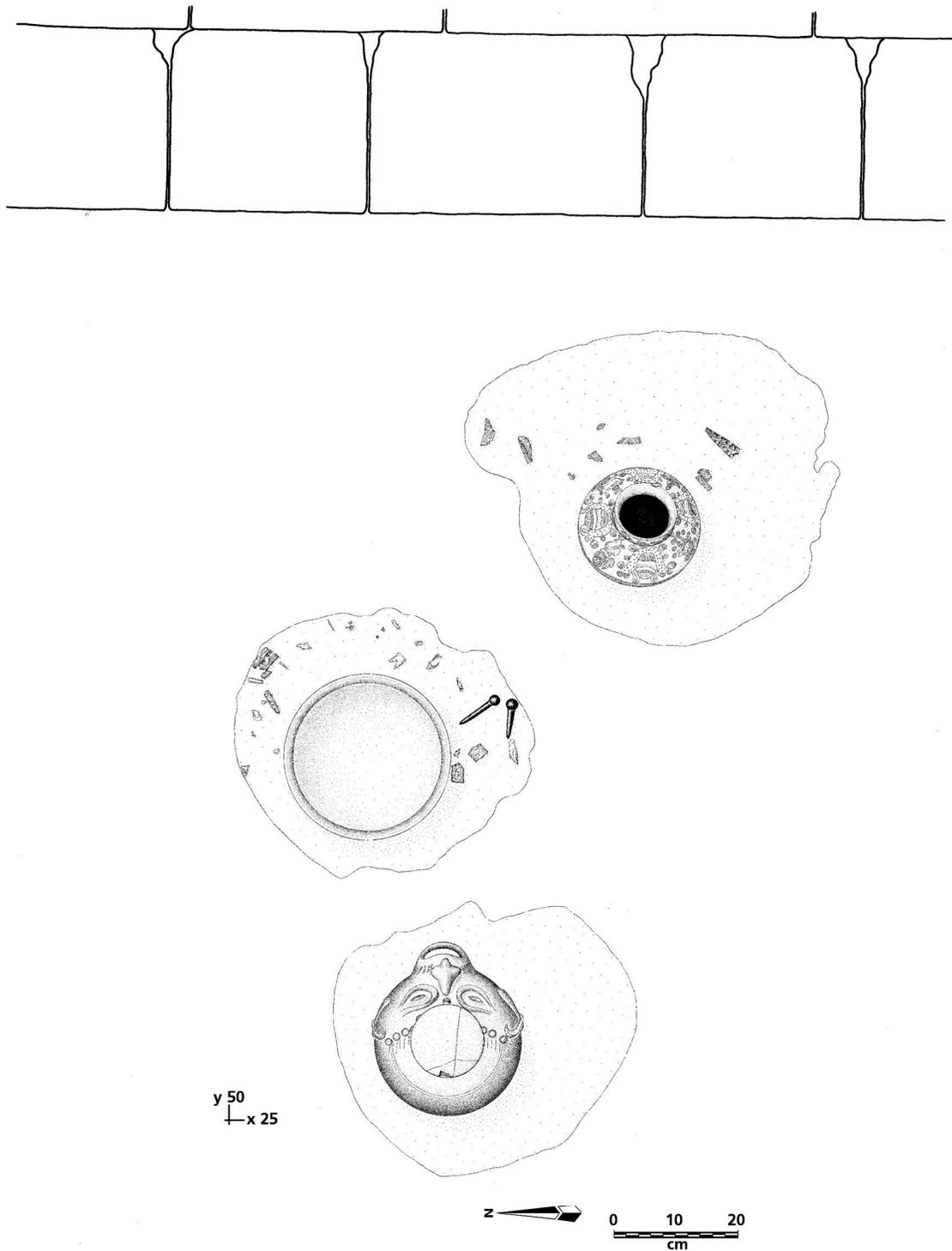


Figure 13. Offering V, excavation level 1. Drawing by Fernando Carrizosa, courtesy Proyecto Templo Mayor.

cavities we just described (Figure 13). These remains consisted of an amorphous mixture of ash, bone, small complete artefacts, and pieces of larger ones. Our inventory, however, suggests that many fragments of both the skeleton and the objects that made up the offerings are missing. This could

be due either to many of the pieces being reduced to ashes in one or both of the two burnings, or to certain remains having had a different destination than the burial; for example, they could have been discarded, delivered to relatives, or ritually ingested.

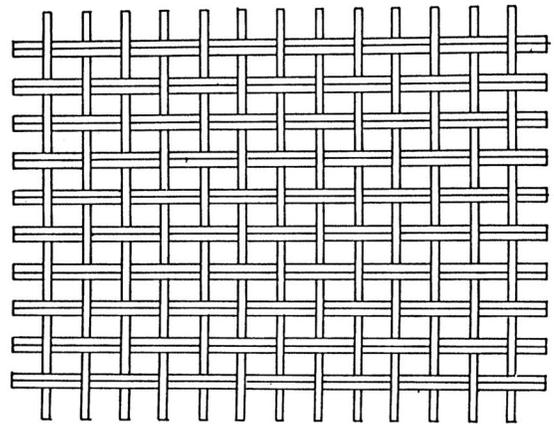
As for the inhumation rite, we were able to distinguish three consecutive stages. In the first stage, 95 per cent of the large bone fragments were separated from the mixture in an incandescent state. Part of the incandescent mixture was immediately deposited at the bottom of the cavity to the east and into the polychrome bottle. Then the bottle was put inside the cavity and covered with more of the incandescent mixture. This produced burns on the cavity wall and on the interior and exterior surfaces of the bottle. In the second stage, this same action was repeated in the central cavity with the Teotihuacan vase. This time, the mixture had already cooled, so that the cavity wall and vessel were not burnt. The third stage involved depositing 95 per cent of the larger bone fragments, cold ash, and copper pins inside the effigy pot, and then placing it in the cavity to west. Apparently, this exhausted the mixture, for the cavity had to be topped off with clay. After the ceremony concluded, the three cavities were definitively covered with earth and with the slabs that had previously been removed from the plaza floor.

The Textiles at Tenochtitlan

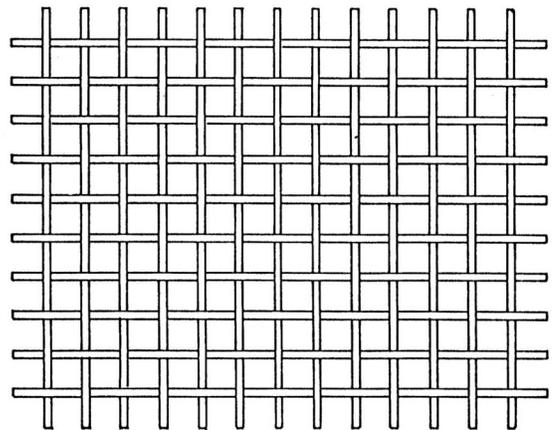
The 96 fragments of this collection of cotton (*Gossypium hirsutum*) textiles exhibit common characteristics in terms of textile manufacturing techniques. On the one hand, we have yarns from basic weave fabrics, which are all composed of a single strand with a 30-degree Z-twist. On the other hand, we found yarns in the supplementary weave and selvages made up of two strands with a 45-degree S-twist. Finally we have fragments of cord consisting of two strands with an S-twist.

The most important variations in our collection fall into the following five categories of cotton textiles based on their weaving technique (Vázquez del Mercado 2000: 84-110; López Luján 2006, 1: 211-214):

- 1) 15 fragments of basket weave (Figure 14a). The technique followed in the production of the basic weave is an unbalanced plain weave and consists of two weft yarns that cross one warp yarn. The fabric density per square centimetre is 15 warp yarns by 8 double weft yarns.
- 2) 27 fragments of taffeta or balanced plain weave with a brocade or weft-float patterning in the shape of a cross or a zigzag (Figures 14b, 15-18). A basic technique is used, that is, a plain weave in which one weft yarn crosses one warp yarn. The fabric density per square centimetre is 15 to 18 warp yarns by 15 to 18 weft yarns. In this type we identified two kinds of supplementary weave. The first consists of a simple brocade where one weft yarn crosses one warp yarn, which was produced at the same time as the taffeta or balanced plain weave



a



b

Figure 14. Offering V's charred textiles: a) Basket weave; b) balanced plain weave. Drawing by Fernando Carrizosa, courtesy Proyecto Templo Mayor.

- by inserting an additional weft yarn. In two cases we observed a zigzag motif. The second kind has a brocade that involves 8 warp yarns. The weave passes the first three in a simple manner (one weft yarn crossing one warp yarn), then it "floats" over three warp yarns and ends by simply crossing two more warp yarns. This brocade or weft-float patterning is in the shape of a cross.
- 3) 23 fragments of taffeta or balanced plain weave with a brocade in the form of a step-fret pattern. Like the previous type, these follow the basic taffeta or balanced plain weave technique. The fabric density per square centimetre is 15 to 16 warp yarns by 15 weft yarns. The balanced

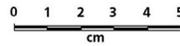


Figure 15. Balanced plain weave with cross brocades. Drawing by Fernando Carrizosa, courtesy Proyecto Templo Mayor.

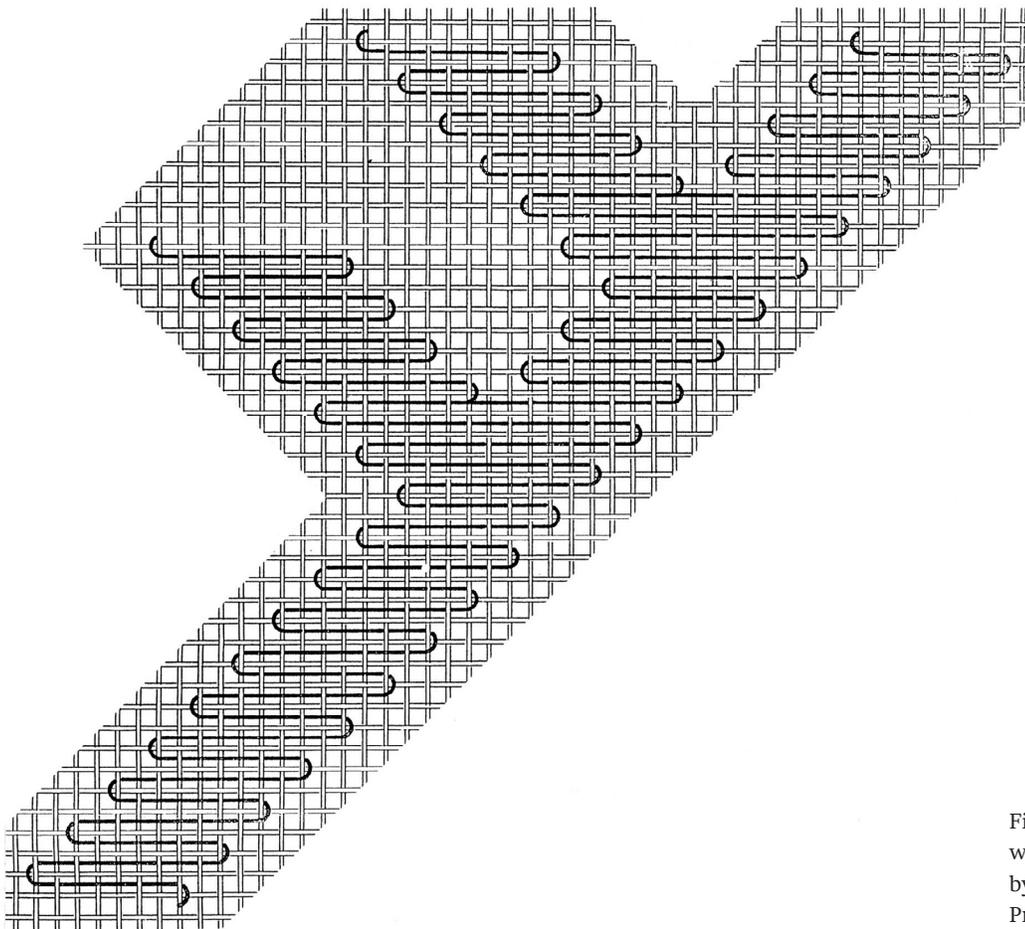


Figure 16. Balanced plain weave with cross brocades. Drawing by Fernando Carrizosa, courtesy Proyecto Templo Mayor.

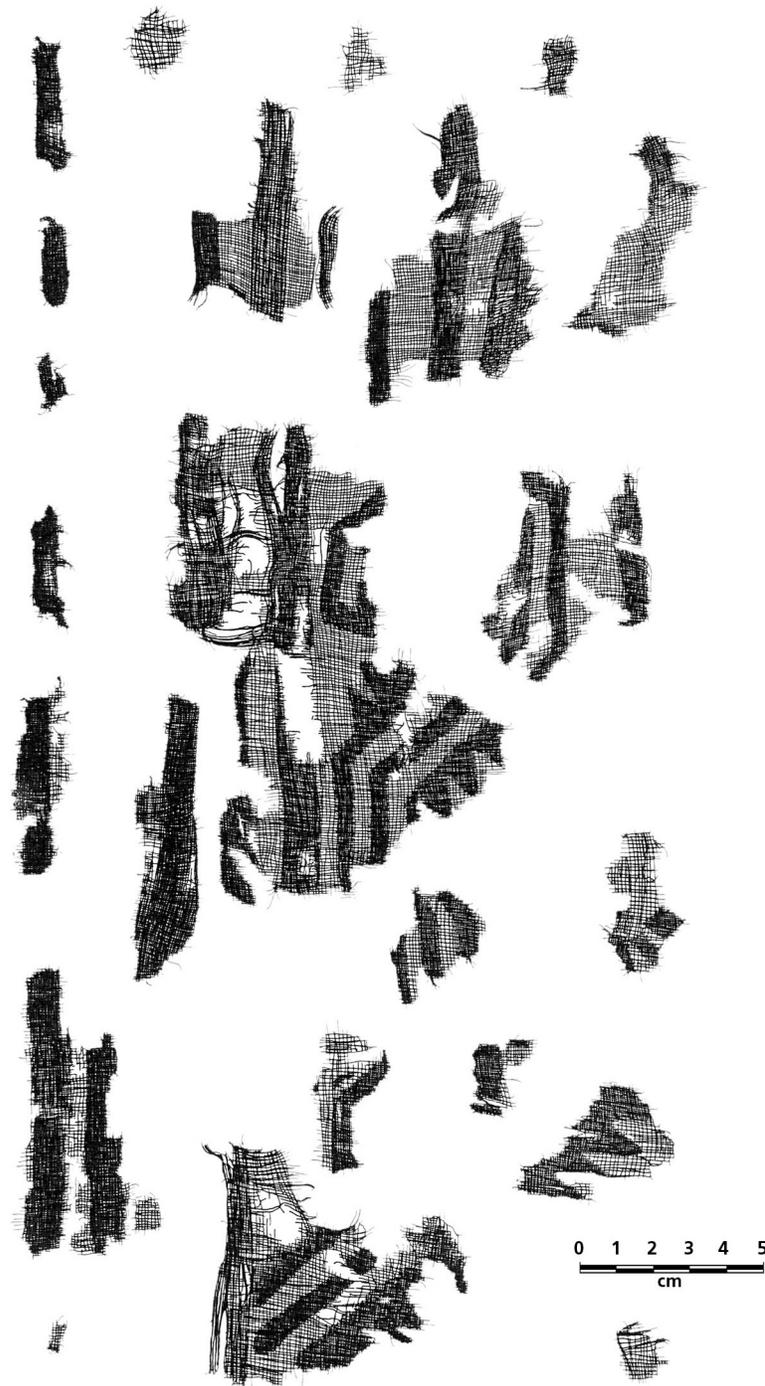


Figure 17. Balanced plain weave with zigzag brocades. Drawing by Fernando Carrizosa, courtesy Proyecto Templo Mayor.

plain weave has a simple brocade or weft-float patterning as a supplementary weave. In this case the weft yarn is double and thicker than the basic weave. This brocade forms motifs of bands and zigzags that make up a step-fret pattern.

4) 15 fragments of selvedge (Figure 19). The fabric density per square centimetre is 8 to 12 warp yarns by 8 to

10 weft yarns. Subtype 1 consists of a lateral selvedge where the weft yarns extend 0.5 centimetres beyond the base fabric to form weft-fringes. Subtype 2 combines a lateral selvedge and a notched decoration. Each notch is composed of a group of 12 yarns. Subtype 3 is constituted by bands with two lateral selvedges, which are made up of four warp yarns and have a plain weave

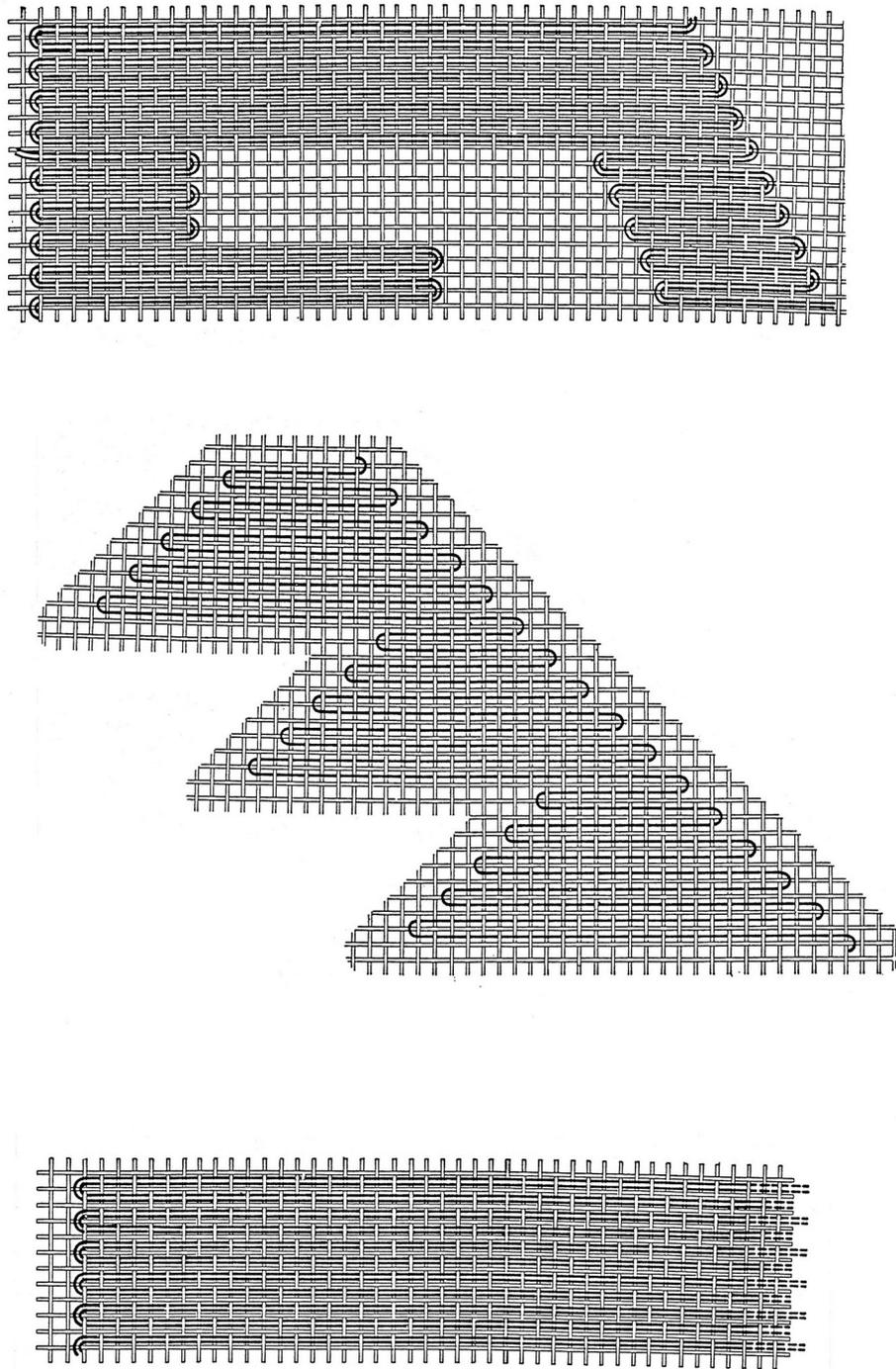


Figure 18. Balanced plain weave with zigzag brocades. Drawing by Fernando Carrizosa, courtesy Proyecto Templo Mayor.

with a weft face. The centre is a warp work. Finally, Subtype 4 consists of bands with two lateral selvages made up of four warp yarns and have a plain weave with a warp face. The centre is a special work that we were not able to identify.

- 5) 16 fragments of cotton cord (Figure 20). Apparently they formed part of the same element. Each fragment is

composed of two strands of S-twisted fibres. We should also mention another 16 cord fragments, but these are stiff palm fibres of the species *Brahea dulcis*. All of these fragments are from a single strand of Z-twisted fibres. The function of these cords escapes us, although they might have been used to fasten the hypothetical mortuary bundle of the cremated person.

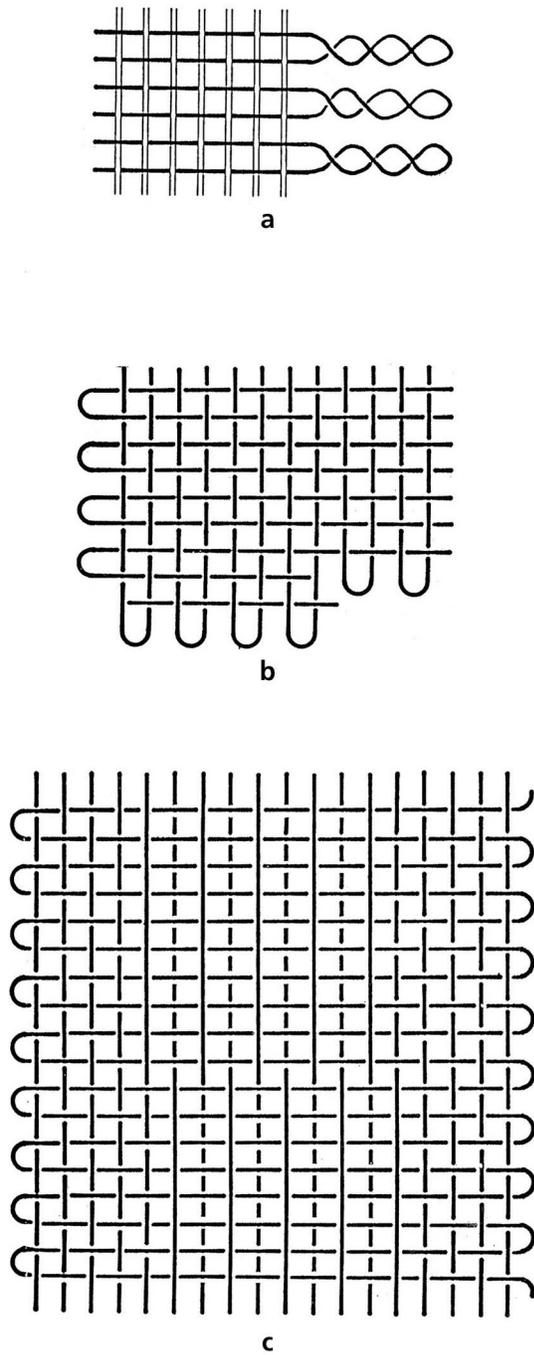


Figure 19. Three different types of selvage. Drawing by Fernando Carrizosa, courtesy Proyecto Templo Mayor.

The process of carbonisation that permitted the conservation of the cotton and palm objects in our collection prevented us from determining if they were white or if they had been woven from one or more colours. Today they are reddish-yellow or utterly black. Nevertheless, the brocades, as well as indigenous pictographs, lead us to suspect that at least the decorative elements were a colour other than white (see Mastache 1968: 17, 39).

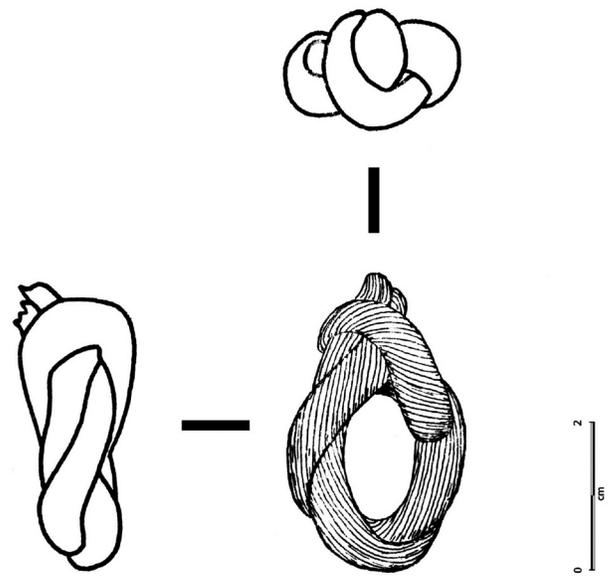


Figure 20. Cord fragments. Drawing by Fernando Carrizosa, courtesy Proyecto Templo Mayor.

Although they make up an important set, the fragments recovered from the burial are so small that it is impossible to reconstruct their original forms and thus determine their function with certainty. Nevertheless, some indications would support the notion that, before they were ritually burnt, they were worn as noble attire. The technological analysis suggests that the 80 textile fragments formed part of at least three different garments: two made of tafeta or balanced plain weave and one of basket weave. These garments not only were made of soft and very fine cotton yarns, they were also densely woven and decorated with beautiful, perhaps multicoloured, brocades. As we said earlier, these fabrics were probably enriched with small gold laminate pendants. As for the associated materials, these fabrics and cords may have formed part of the interred person's clothing, an offering made in his honour, or the mortuary bundle in which his corpse was wrapped.

Moreover, elements such as cotton and the brocades suggest the elevated status of the interred person (see Fernández 1965: 148-152; Anawalt 1980). It is well known that in the Postclassic societies of Central Mexico, each person was obligated to wear clothing appropriate to his or her station. At this time, dress involved a complex code that implicitly conveyed one's rank, occupation, and ethnic affiliation. But as Patricia Anawalt (1980: 42-43; 1981: 15-21; 1985: 5) has pointed out, the differences generally were not reflected in the form of attire, but rather in the materials and quality of its manufacture. In this regard, we should remember that multicolour cotton textiles were reserved for the exclusive use of the nobility. According to sumptuary laws,

commoners could not wear them under pain of death. In addition, they were prohibited from wearing their cape below the knee or knotted in front instead of over the right shoulder. We should also remember that uncooperative nobles, lords who refused to pay tribute, and captains beaten terribly in battle, were punished by disallowing them to wear cotton.

From the data presented thus far, some basic conclusions may be formulated. Since the corpse was cremated with the remains of a dog, and a greenstone bead was found inside the deceased's mouth, it is clear that this person died a *tlalmiquiztli*, or natural death. The incineration rite had the purpose of liberating the *teyolia*, one of the body's three main animistic entities, so that he could begin his journey to the World of the Dead. On the other hand, it is necessary to emphasise his high status in Mexica society, attested by the richness of his mortuary offering as well as his interment within the sacred precinct of the imperial capital. Unfortunately, we lack sufficient elements to discern if this individual was a *tecuhtli* lord or a high-ranking warrior. We can only say that he was not a king, for the historical sources tell us that the uppermost Mexica dignitaries were buried in the Templo Mayor or in a building just to the west called the *Cuauhxiccalco* (López Luján 2005: 172-183; 2006, 1: 251-253; López Austin and López Luján 2009: 338-341, 403-407).

The Provenance of the Raw Material, Yarns, and Fabrics

Before concluding, we should mention that the origin of the archaeological fabrics and cords analyzed in this presentation can be found anywhere in the Mexica empire—including the cities of Tlatelolco and Tenochtitlan—as well as in the independent domains of the Mexica's enemies, as can be inferred from the sixteenth-century historical sources (Fernández 1965: 143-144; Anawalt 1980: 38-42). Cotton was cultivated in very diverse regions of Mesoamerica. Prominent among them is the hot land of the coast of the Gulf of Mexico, as well as the present-day Mexican states of Morelos, Puebla, Guerrero, and Oaxaca, in addition to other areas located in Sinaloa, Nayarit, Jalisco, Colima, Michoacán, Chiapas, and Yucatán (Rodríguez 1976: 70-84).

Unspun cotton could be processed where it was cultivated or it could be sent in tribute or trade to manufacturing centres that did not grow the plant. This is clear from Friar Bernardino de Sahagún's texts that speak of the existence, presumably in Tlatelolco, of vendors of cotton bolls (Sahagún 1989: 616). The best known data in this respect, however, come from the *Matrícula de Tributos* (1991: 18, 26, 31, 32) and the *Codex Mendoza* (1992: 38r, 48r, 53r, 54r) which note that the provinces of Cihuatlan—on the Pacific

coast—and Tzicoac, Atlan, and Cuauhtochco—on the Gulf—paid their tribute obligations in bundles of unspun cotton.

Centres of textile production were found everywhere in Mesoamerica. The pictographic and written sources, including the two codices just mentioned, indicate that, with few exceptions, all of the imperial regional capitals produced and sent cotton cloth to Tenochtitlan, and that some of them also provided articles of clothing in tribute (Rodríguez 1976: 37-51). At the same time, yarns, cloth, and clothing were imported from many different regions and sold in large quantities in the market of Tlatelolco (Cortés 1994: 63; Díaz del Castillo 1950: 176; Sahagún 1989: 531, 538-539, 610-611). Archaeological data likewise confirm this. Mary Parsons (1972: 65, 71), for example, calculates that a third of all the *malacates* found superficially in the regions of Teotihuacan and Texcoco were used exclusively for spinning cotton. This means that these areas, unfit for growing the plant, somehow acquired the raw fibres, spun them, and probably wove them as well. She goes on to propose that, since cotton fabric was limited to the nobility and not so important in the Teotihuacan Valley, the bulk of its production was paid in tribute to Tetzaco, the regional capital. Thus, in short, cotton textiles were made throughout Mesoamerica, and clearly Tlatelolco and Tenochtitlan were among the main manufacturing centres (and consumers) at that time.

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