

## THE 9-XI VASE

A CLASSIC THIN ORANGE VESSEL FOUND AT TENOCHTITLAN

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TRANSLATED BY SCOTT SESSIONS

TO JAMES LANGLEY

Like the Babylonians, the Mexica are noted for their interest in the cultural manifestations of societies that preceded them. They felt so attracted to the past that, during the fifteenth and part of the sixteenth centuries, they made innumerable trips to the already archaeological cities of Teotihuacan and Tula (e.g., Umberger 1987a; López Luján 1989: 51–65, 1998, I: 357–364; Boone, chapter 12 of this volume). Amid the ruins, they were accustomed to make sacrifices, deposit offerings, exhume cadavers, and erect monuments. They also took advantage of their sojourns to undertake bonafide excavation campaigns in which they removed enormous amounts of debris to unearth entire buildings. These ambitious projects allowed them to copy architectural profiles, mural paintings, and sculptures in the same manner as they appropriated monolithic images and minor objects, whether supposing the works to be divine or made by legendary peoples. Returning to Tenochtitlan and Tlatelolco, the Mexica were given to the task of reproducing the old styles in markedly eclectic buildings, exhibiting some of the relics in their

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temples, and burying others as part of dedicatory caches and funerary offerings (Batres 1902: 61–90; Gussinyer 1969: 35, 1970: 8–10; Navarrete and Crespo 1971; Nicholson 1971; Matos 1983, n.d.; Umberger 1987a; López Luján 1989: 25–42, 1993, 137–138, 1998: 364–367; Fuente 1990; Matos and López Luján 1993; Solís Olguín 1997). As demonstrated by archaeological works carried out during the present century in the center of Mexico City, this interesting phenomenon of reutilization was not limited to Teotihuacan and Toltec antiquities; it also extended to Olmec creations (Matos 1979) and those of the Mezcala region (Angulo 1966; González and Olmedo 1990).

The fundamental purpose of this article is to make known a Teotihuacan-style vase that recently was discovered in the Casa de las Águilas (House of the Eagles), a building located within the Sacred Precinct of Tenochtitlan. We are referring to a vessel that, given its exceptional qualities, we have christened with the name, “9-Xi.” It is an interesting example of Thin Orange ceramic produced almost a thousand years before its reutilization as a cinerary urn for the remains of an important Mexica dignitary. This vessel is distinguished by its elevated aesthetic quality and its rich iconographic content. Its greater scientific attraction, however, stems from the appearance of two distinct calendrical dates on its sides. As is well known, this is an extremely rare phenomenon in Teotihuacan civilization. The corpus of numerals consigned by James Langley (1986: 139–143) is limited to twenty-two examples, only half of which seem beyond dispute, and Alfonso Caso (1967a: 143–163), in his celebrated and at the time controversial studies concerning the Teotihuacan calendar, proposed the identification of only a few signs in the *tonalpohualli*, or 260-day cycle, namely “Turquoise,” “Eye,” “Tiger,” and “Wind.”

#### THE CASA DE LAS ÁGUILAS AND OFFERING V

The 9-Xi Vase was discovered during the Fifth Field Season of the Proyecto Templo Mayor of the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia. This phase of exploration was not conceived of in the spirit of bringing to light unknown portions of the Sacred Precinct of Tenochtitlan, but rather to study integrally and in depth one of the fifteen religious buildings discovered during the 1978–1982 field season. The principal purpose of the new investigation was to analyze all tangible aspects of a specific case in Mexica sacred architecture: its original form and evolution through time, materials and techniques of construction, artistic styles and iconographic programs, special relationships with its surroundings, and associated archaeological objects. Equally important was to confront the difficult problem of functions and religious significance that builders and users had given to the architectural environment.

With these ideas in mind, the Casa de las Águilas was chosen, without a doubt, as the most promising location for gaining such information. This complex of rooms built on an L-shaped platform, is the second-largest building in the area explored by the project (Matos 1984: 19–20; López Luján 1993: 81–82). It stands out as much for its privileged location 15 meters to the north of the Templo Mayor as for its rich decoration and archaizing style (Figure 8.1). Another important reason for continuing work in the Casa de las Águilas was the presence of various large-format ceramic sculptures, codex-style mural paintings, benches with

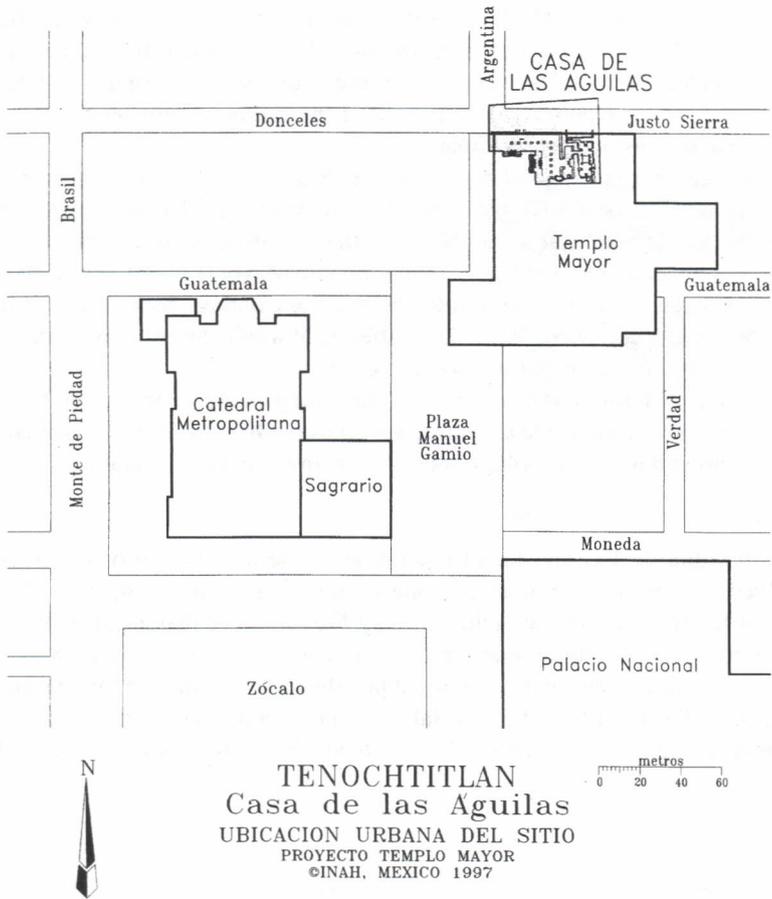


Fig. 8.1. Location of the Casa de las Águilas in the excavation zone (drawn by T. Medina, courtesy of CONACULTA-INAH-MEX).

polychrome reliefs, and rich offerings that, in all certainty, would offer valuable clues concerning the symbol program and liturgy developed in this ritual space.

Thus, a varied range of archaeological works was carried out from 1994 to 1997 (Barba et al. 1996, 1997; López Luján 1995, 1998; López Luján and Mercado 1996; Román and López Luján 1997). A systematic plan of excavations was developed that consisted of a total of twenty operations in places scrupulously selected as much for complementing previously recovered data as for resolving new questions. In the process of these works the discovery of Offering V and, consequently, the 9-Xi Vase were registered.

#### THE SPATIAL AND TEMPORAL LOCATION OF OFFERING V

The excavation of Offering V proved very advantageous for studying the functions and significance of the Casa de las Águilas (Aguirre et al. 1997; López

Luján 1998: 315–327, 500–504). As we shall later see, this rich deposit offered sufficiently abundant data for reconstructing a transcendental funeral ceremony that took place in front of the principal façade of the building (Figure 8.2). It was discovered during Operation Y, a test pit at the bottom of the stairway of the entrance to the east wing (coordinates Q'-60).

The context of this burial corresponds to Stage 3 of the Casa de las Águilas, when the fourth floor (P3/F3) of the North Plaza was in use. Through stratigraphic and stylistic correlation, it was established that the aforementioned construction phase was contemporary to Stage VI of the Templo Mayor (López Luján 1998: 54–56). This means that, if we take into account the existing chronologies (Matos 1981: 50; Umberger 1987b: 415–427), Offering V would date back to the last two decades of the fifteenth century (see Table 8.1).

We should point out, however, that the dating of a carbon sample (INAH-1517e) obtained from inside a ceramic vessel from Offering V itself resulted in a slightly earlier date: CAL AD 1432(1443)1484 with a standard deviation.

#### THE FUNERARY PITS OF OFFERING V

According to the register of Operation Y, the inhumation of the offering involved the removal of a floor of stone slabs with a mortar foundation (P3/F3) that was found at the bottom of the stairway. We estimated that the disturbed area measured 120 cm north to south by 150 cm east to west (see Figure 8.3). The Mexica then dug three small cylindrical pits through four mortar foundations of slab floors (F3, F4, F5, and F6), a false mortar foundation floor (F7), and five intermediate layers of clay (R3, R4, R5, R6, and R7). The pits were more or less

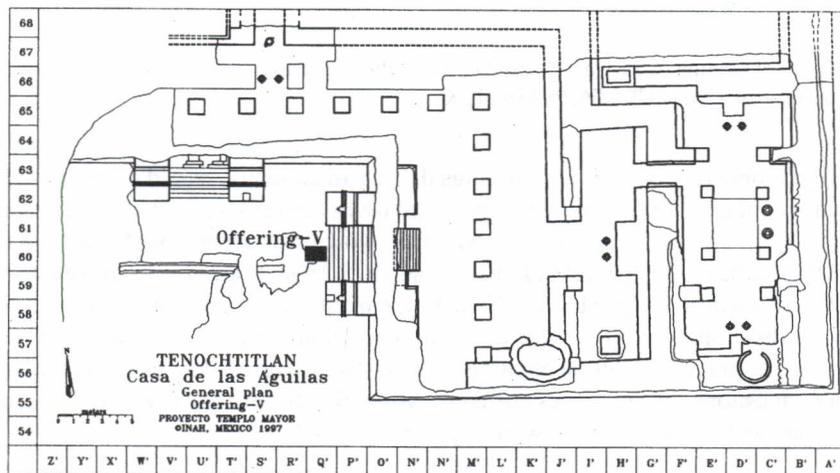
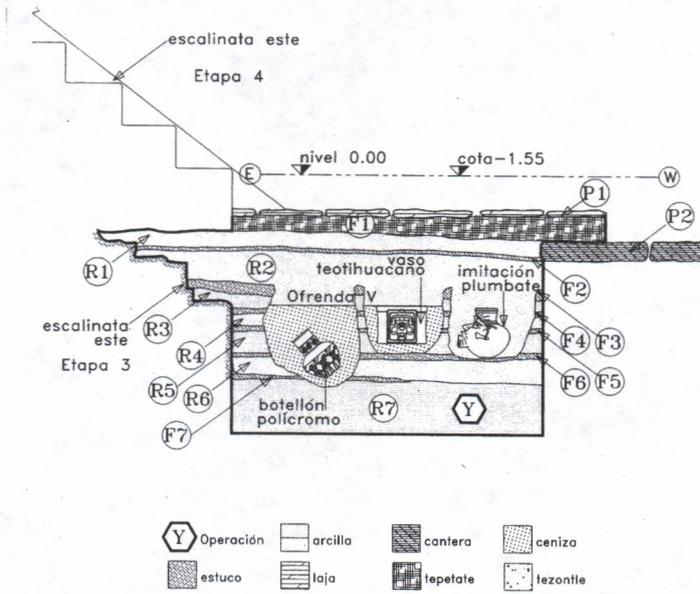


Fig. 8.2. Location of Offering V in the Casa de las Águilas (drawn by T. Medina, courtesy of CONACULTA-INAH-MÉX).

aligned in an east-west direction: the easternmost measured 60 cm north to south, 52.5 cm east to west, and 56 cm deep; the central one, 50 cm north to south, 43.5 cm east to west, and 36 cm deep; and the westernmost, 50 cm north to south, 45 cm east to west, and 39 cm deep.

Construction		Stages Chronology	
<i>Casa de las Águilas</i>	<i>Templo Mayor</i>	<i>Matos</i>	<i>Umberger</i>
1	III	Itzcoatl	Itzcoatl
1	IV	Moteczuhzoma I	Moteczuhzoma I
1	IVa	Moteczuhzoma I	Moteczuhzoma I
2	IVb	Axayacatl	Moteczuhzoma I
	V	Tizoc	Axayacatl
3/4	VI	Ahuitzotl (1487-1502)	Tizoc/Ahuitzotl (1481-1502)
	VII	Moteczuhzoma II	Moteczuhzoma II

Table 8.1. Relative chronology of the Casa de las Águilas.



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

Fig. 8.3. East-west cross-section of Offering V (drawn by T. Medina, courtesy of CONACULTA-INAH-MÉX).

Each of these intrusions served to accommodate a ceramic vessel, a portion of the mortal remains of a single individual, and a rich offering. After the inhumation ceremony, the three pits were covered with fragments of the previously removed stucco foundation. Finally, the stone floor at the foot of the stairway was restored, leaving no visible traces of the rite.

#### THE CONTENTS OF OFFERING V

With respect to the quantity and quality of the materials, Offering V rivals many of the offerings at the Templo Mayor (López Luján 1998: 560–561). This



Fig. 8.4. Offering V during the process of exploration (photo by S. Guil'liem, courtesy of CONACULTA-INAH-MÉX).

three-part deposit contained the remains of a man, a dog, a jaguar, a golden eagle, and a sparrow hawk (Figure 8.4). There were also 101 complete pieces, 32 incomplete, and 318 fragments belonging to artifacts made of ceramic, obsidian, flint, basalt, greenstone, turquoise, gold, copper, bronze, pyrite, bone, shell, copal, cotton, and palm.

Without a doubt, the most impressive objects in the assemblage were the three ceramic vessels used by the Mexica as cinerary urns. They are three fine pieces dating from different periods. The most ancient is the 9-Xi Vase, a Classic Teotihuacan piece that we will analyze further on in this chapter. Next in terms of antiquity is an effigy jar, in the form of an old man's head, imitating Tohil Plumbate-type ceramic, and produced in the Basin of Mexico during the Early Postclassic (900–1200 C.E.). The third urn is a Mexica polychrome bottle from the Late Postclassic (1200–1521 C.E.) that has a rich decoration of hearts and flowers.

Both inside and around the urns we found a large quantity of human skeletal remains that intentionally had been broken and exposed to fire for many hours. In spite of their fragmentary state, we were able to determine that all of them belonged to one adult male who had suffered from a severe dental ailment (Román and López Luján 1997; López Luján 1998: 280–284).

The ashes and the bone fragments of this individual were accompanied by a lavish offering, a fact that led us to formulate two hypotheses at the moment of exploration. On the one hand, we thought these may have been the remains of a deity impersonator (*ixiptla*) who had been sacrificed in a large brazier and later buried in front of the Casa de las Águilas. On the other hand, he could have been a high-ranking dignitary who, after his death, was cremated and buried at our building.

The first hypothesis, however, seemed unlikely in light of Javier Urcid's (1997) recent analysis of sixteenth-century sources. According to this investigator, the historical texts clearly point out that warriors, captives, and slaves, who were hurled into fire during the festivals of Hueytecuilhuitl, Xocotlhuetzli, and Teotleco, usually did not die from this action (e.g., Sahagún 1989: 90, 92, 137, 145, 153–154). Generally, they spent only brief instances in the flames, after which they were taken to be sacrificed by means of decapitation or heart extraction. In Urcid's judgment, the nature of their exposure to fire would not have been enough to leave traces on the bone tissue. The remains recovered in Offering V, however, exhibited very serious damage, a fact that reinforced the hypothesis concerning a high-level dignitary whose cadaver was cremated.

Other evidence supports this idea. First, we cite the Mexica custom of depositing cremation remains in ceramic vessels witnessed in numerous archaeological contexts (e.g., Ruz 1968: 155, 157; López Luján 1993: 220–229) and historical sources (e.g., Sahagún 1989: 221; Durán 1984, II: 436). Second, we should emphasize the discovery of numerous cranial fragments of a dog in Offering V (Polaco 1998), an animal that the Mexica and their contemporaries often buried together with its master's cadaver for magical ends (e.g., Sahagún 1989: 221).

We must also mention the presence in Offering V of other materials that usually form a part of mortuary contexts in sites such as Tenayuca (Noguera 1935), Tlatelolco (González Rul 1979: 15, 1988: 72–73; Salvador Guil'liem Arroyo,

personal communication, May 1990), and Tenochtitlan (López Luján 1993: 222, 225, 351; González Rul 1997: 52–53, 58). In Offering V these included obsidian beads in the form of duck heads, obsidian rings, flint and obsidian projectile points, ceramic spindle whorls, a greenstone bead, cords of cotton and palm, and copal.

While this assemblage of artifacts and dog bones persuaded us to infer with sufficient certainty the occurrence of a funeral in front of the Casa de las Águilas, other materials from the offering gave us some clues concerning the identity of the interred individual. Everything points to the idea that the personage in question was, in fact, a high-ranking dignitary. In this respect, we note that the cadaver was accompanied by goods used exclusively by the nobility. Among these were the fragments belonging to at least three elaborate garments with extremely fine cotton threads and decorated with exquisite brocades. Equally significant are the numerous gold-plated pendants, hemispheres, and spheres that were found together with the textiles. Possibly, these tiny pieces were sewn to some of the cotton cords, although they also could have formed part of a headdress, shield, or other adornment that did not survive the passing of the centuries (cf. Sahagún 1997: 206). It is appropriate to remember here that a good portion of the gold objects discovered in the ruins of the Templo Mayor belonged to funerary deposits of dignitaries from the highest levels of the Mexica hierarchy (López Luján 1993: 347, 351–352).

It would not be unreasonable to imagine that the marine-shell pendants, the bronze and copper bells, the copper tie clasps or brooches, and the turquoise mosaic tesseras recovered from Offering V also formed part of the rich attire of this individual. There is a certain probability that the tesseras formed part of a mosaic turquoise crown (*xiuhuitzollí*) or a nose ornament (*yacaxihuitl*). If our conjectures are correct—unfortunately we are unable to corroborate them—we would be standing before nothing less than the remains of a *tecuhtli* or of a warrior who died heroically (cf. Graulich 1992: 8; *Codex Magliabechiano* 1983: 66v–67r, 71v–72r). We should clarify, however, that he would not have been a *tlatoani* or a *cihuacoatl*, because these two supreme rulers were buried in the royal palace, the Templo Mayor, or the Cuauhxicalco, according to Fernando Alvarado Tezozómoc (1944: 174, 266, 392) and Fray Diego Durán (1984, 2: 248, 300, 369, 395).

Although with certain reservations, it is appropriate to suggest that other objects such as sacrificial knives, obsidian prismatic blades, and perforators made from the long bones of felines and birds of prey also relate to the obsequies of a dignitary. Speculating a little, we might propose that the deceased's servants and slaves were sacrificed with these knives, as mentioned in sixteenth-century sources (e.g., *Costumbres, fiestas, enterramientos* 1945: 57; Sahagún 1989: 222; Alvarado Tezozómoc 1944: 238–239, 390–391; Durán 1984, I: 55–56, II: 248, 295–297, 311, 392–394). Along these same lines, the perforators and prismatic blades were possibly the autosacrificial instruments used in the life of this personage, or by relatives during the funerals.

Unfortunately, determining the role played by other objects found in Offering V is even more difficult. For example, scepters were found with a globe on one end made of obsidian or basalt. These pieces could well be the votive representations of

war clubs or of the scepters carried by Techalotl, one of the pulque gods (Nagao 1985: 74–76).

A similar thing occurs with the remains of the feline and birds of prey. During the exploration, some burned animal bones were recovered: a sparrowhawk leg; a golden eagle claw; and an axis vertebra, two secondary premolars, and two fangs of a jaguar (Polaco 1998). These various anatomical parts possibly functioned as amulets or symbols of power. This seems to have been the case with the two jaguar fangs, which were separated from the skull by means of a transversal cut between the root and the crown.

#### THE SEQUENCE OF THE FUNERARY CEREMONY

Through laboratory analysis we were able to determine that, before cremation, the cadaver of the personage and the offering that accompanied him had undergone a systematic process of intentional destruction. As a consequence, a good portion of the human and animal remains, as well as the obsidian, flint, bone, and shell artifacts, were reduced to small fragments that still preserve the impact marks. In contrast, the basalt scepters, the smaller artifacts elaborated in ceramic, obsidian, greenstone, turquoise, gold, bronze, and copper, and some of the bones from his hands and feet apparently did not necessitate such treatment or escaped fragmentation due to their lesser size.

In the case of the cadaver, the diverse fracture patterns indicate that the blows were applied directly to the bones, free of their soft tissues, yet still fresh (Román and López Luján 1997; López Luján 1998: 280–284). In the fracture zones of the long bones, vertebrae, and skull, we found clearly-defined V-shaped clefts measuring about 4 mm, most likely produced with a stone ax weighing between 350 and 500 grams. Approximately 90 percent of the fractures were made with this instrument, primarily affecting the aforementioned skeletal parts. The remaining 10 percent of the intentional fractures were made by manually twisting and flexing the humeri, ribs, ulnae, and clavicles. It is worth adding that the bone perforators also show traces of both types of fracturing.

A detailed osteological analysis revealed a lack of cut marks that would presumably result from defleshing or dismemberment. The absence of these types of marks made us ask ourselves: How were the soft tissues eliminated before the direct fragmentation of the fresh bones? On the one hand, the elimination of the soft tissue may not have been necessary, given a hypothetical state of advanced putrefaction of the cadaver. This hypothesis, however, does not seem very probable, because various sixteenth-century sources say that dignitaries were cremated within four days of their deaths (e.g., Benavente 1971: 304). On the other hand, we could speculate that the dead body was subjected to a primary burning that eliminated the soft tissue. We propose that at the end of this cremation, the bones and the offering, partially consumed by fire, were gathered up and fractured with an ax and with the hands. This action would increase the efficacy of a second burning and, in time, would facilitate the introduction of the skeletal remains and other objects into the funerary urn.

Whichever the correct explanation may be, we are sure that after their intentional destruction, the bones and artifacts of Offering V were methodically mixed

together and thrown onto an open-air pyre. In fact, when we reunited the diverse fragments of the same bone or artifact, we saw that they were not exposed to the same intensity of heat. This may be due to the fact that temperatures in this type of fire vary a great deal between interior and extremities, and in terms of the duration of combustion.

In a later stage of the ceremony, part of the residue from the pyre was brought to the bottom of the principal stairway for its interment inside the previously described pits. This residue was composed of an amorphous mixture of ashes, bones, small artifacts, and pieces of larger ones. According to the inventory of Offering V, many fragments from the person's skeleton as well as the objects making up the offering were lacking in this context. This could be due, on the one hand, to numerous fragments being reduced to ashes after their prolonged exposure to fire or, on the other hand, to the possibility that certain portions may have had different destinations than inhumation in Offering V: for example, they may have been discarded, delivered to relatives, or ritually consumed (cf. *Costumbres, fiestas, enterramientos* 1945: 57).

Concerning the rite of inhumation, we have managed to distinguish three consecutive stages. In the first, 95 percent of the largest bone fragments were separated from the mixture in an incandescent state. Immediately after this separation, part of the glowing mixture was deposited at the bottom of the easternmost pit and inside the polychrome bottle. The bottle then was placed in the cavity and was covered with more of the incandescent mixture. This produced burning on the walls of the pit as well as on the inside and outside surface of the bottle. In the second stage, the same action was repeated in the central hole and with the 9-*Xi* Vase. By this time, the mixture had cooled, for neither the pit nor this vessel were burned. The third stage consisted of depositing 95 percent of the large bone fragments, cooled ashes, and copper tie clasps or brooches inside the effigy jar, then placing this urn in the westernmost pit, oriented toward the east. It seems that this exhausted the mixture because the rest of the cavity was filled with clay. Once the ceremony concluded, the three pits were definitively covered with the fragments from the mortar foundation and the stone slabs of the previously removed floor.

#### THE SHAPE AND CHEMICAL COMPOSITION OF THE 9-*Xi* VASE

The 9-*Xi* Vase is a large vessel measuring 20.2 cm in height and 28.2 cm in diameter at its widest point, with its sides being 0.6 cm thick (Figure 8.5). Morphologically speaking, it is a typical Teotihuacan cylindrical vase with a flat bottom, perpendicularly straight sides, and a slightly flanged rim (Figure 8.6 [a and b]). It has two small, flat rings: the upper one, 2 cm wide, is on the rim; the lower one, also 2 cm wide, is near the base. Originally, the vase had three hollow supports, although we do not know if these were in the form of rectangles or *almenas* (crenelations). Only the rectangular outlines of the supports have survived, each one measuring 10.2 cm by 3.9 cm (Figure 8.6 [c]). Two of these areas were intentionally polished, leading us to suppose that the Mexica found the vase with one of the supports broken and decided to eliminate the two remaining supports to reuse the piece as a funerary urn. However, comparing the proportions of other similar vessels, we estimate the original height of the vase to be around 24 cm.



Fig. 8.5. The 9-Xi Vase (photo by L. López Luján, courtesy of CONACULTA-INAH-MEX).

Typologically, the 9-Xi Vase is a clear example of Regular or Export Thin Orange ceramic, in vogue during the Classic period and diffused by Teotihuacanos across a vast territory extending from Chanchopa in the Mexican state of Colima to Copán in Honduras (Sotomayor and Castillo 1963: 7). Numerous investigators have pursued the task of studying Thin Orange ceramic, especially from the 1940s on, when they discovered that it was not produced in the Teotihuacan Valley. At the end of the '80s, after several decades of fruitless efforts, it finally was established through archaeological, petrographic, and chemical means that the center of production was located in the Río Carnero region, about 8 kilometers south of Tepexi de Rodríguez in the state of Puebla (Rattray 1990; Rattray and Harbottle 1992). Among other things, the excavations in the residential units and potters' workshops at the site of Pedernal, Puebla, revealed that the peoples of this region—probably ethnically Popoloca—manufactured enormous amounts of this ceramic with Teotihuacan shapes and motifs during the Classic. This production was destined almost completely for exportation to Teotihuacan. Only this would explain why between 12 and 20 percent of the surface sherds found today in the City of the Gods are the remains of Thin Orange objects (Rattray 1979: 57). In addition to being the principal consumer of this type of ceramic, Teotihuacan held a monopoly on its distribution throughout Mesoamerica. With the decline of the city at the end of the Metepec Phase, however, the production of Export Thin Orange ceramic completely ceased (Sotomayor and Castillo 1963: 20; Müller 1978: 125–126; Rattray 1991: 10–11; Rattray and Harbottle 1992: 223; Cowgill 1996: 329–330). In fact, during the subsequent Coyotlatelco Phase, the inhabitants of the Río Carnero region would have only coarse incense burners in this material for local consumption (Rattray, personal communication, March 1997).

Concerning the 9-*Xi* Vase, it is clear that it was produced with the same paste as the majority of Thin Orange pieces. A quick visual inspection is sufficient to tell that it is of semifine texture, porous, and of reddish-yellow color (5YR 6/6), it contains numerous nonplastic schist and quartzite inclusions (from 0.5 to 1 mm), and its surfaces have no slip (cf. Sotomayor and Castillo 1963: 10–17; Müller 1978).

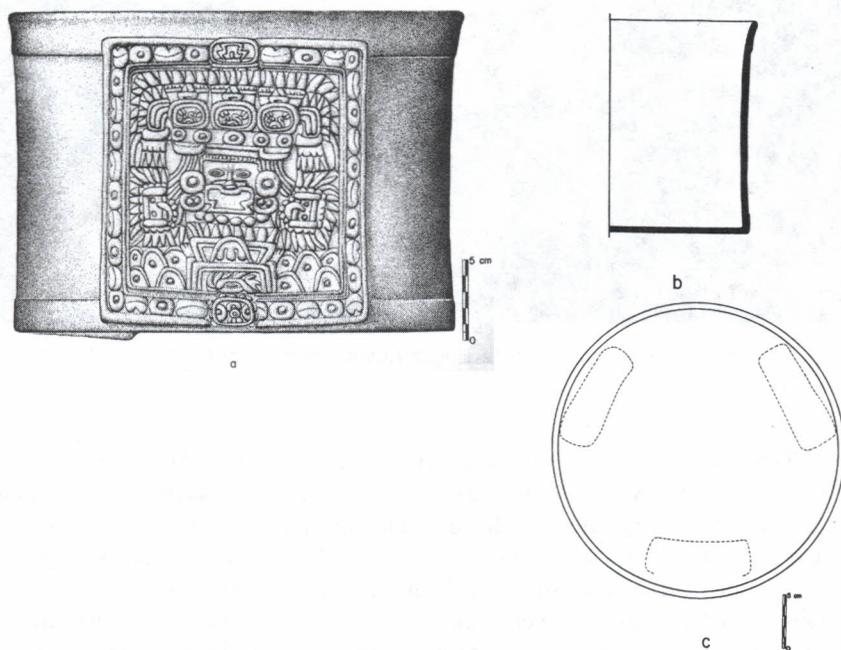


Fig. 8.6. Technical drawing of the 9-*Xi* Vase: a. Frontal view; b. Section; c. Base (drawn by F. Carrizosa, courtesy of CONACULTA-INAH-MÉX).

<i>Element</i>	<i>Concentration</i>	<i>Element</i>	<i>Concentration</i>	<i>Element</i>	<i>Concentration</i>
As (ppm)	9.70	Cs (ppm)	14.10	Zn (ppm)	76.00
La (ppm)	53.00	Eu (ppm)	1.92	Zr (ppm)	226.00
Lu (ppm)	0.58	Fe (%)	3.81	Al (%)	11.10
Nd (ppm)	46.00	Hf (ppm)	6.71	Ba (ppm)	1110.00
Sm (ppm)	10.10	Rb (ppm)	193.00	Dy (ppm)	7.42
U (ppm)	3.50	Sb (ppm)	3.49	K (%)	3.80
Yb (ppm)	4.34	Sc (ppm)	18.40	Mn (ppm)	381.00
Ce (ppm)	109.80	Ta (ppm)	1.36	Na (ppm)	1830.00
Co (ppm)	11.40	Tb (ppm)	1.10	Ti (ppm)	5500.00
Cr (ppm)	100.20	Th (ppm)	17.00	V (ppm)	130.00

Table 8.2. Chemical composition of the sample (ppm = parts per million).

In order to corroborate this identification, we decided to take a minute sample from the bottom of the vase for neutron activation analysis (see Neff 1992). The sample was irradiated in the Research Reactor Center at the University of Missouri to measure its gamma spectra and determine its chemical composition.

The results were compared with numerous other Thin Orange specimens contained in the database of the Brookhaven National Laboratory. This comparison demonstrated that the composition of the 9-Xi Vase was completely consistent for Thin Orange Ware (Figure 8.7). As Evelyn Rattray and Garman Harbottle (1992) have reported, Thin Orange has a unique chemical profile, fundamentally characterized by high concentrations of rubidium (Rb), cesium (Cs), thorium (Th), and potassium (K). In Table 8.2, observe that our vase manifests the same distinctive characteristics, thus confirming its origin in the southern part of the modern state of Puebla.

#### THE DECORATION OF THE 9-Xi VASE

As we pointed out, the exceptional nature of the 9-Xi Vase is due to its particular decoration consisting of two identical appliqué in bas-relief. Made from the same mold, these two thin pieces were added onto the polished sides of the vase a short time before firing (see Müller 1978: 116, 125–126; Séjourné 1983: 165). Each appliqué is composed of a central scene measuring 13.6 cm per side and a rectangular frame, 17.9 cm per side and 2.1 cm wide (Figure 8.8).

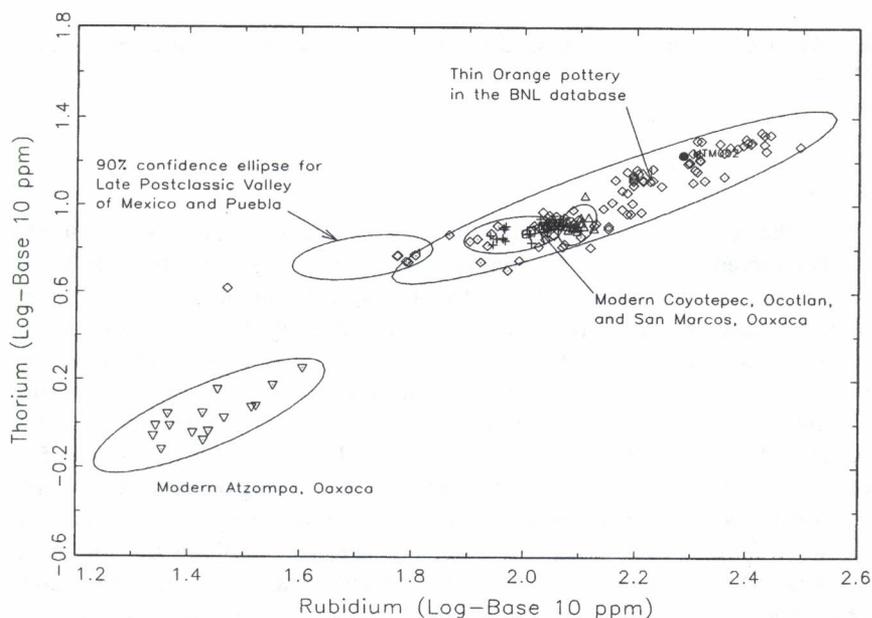


Fig. 8.7. Graphic representation of the chemical comparison between the 9-Xi Vase sample and other Thin Orange ceramic samples (H. Neff).

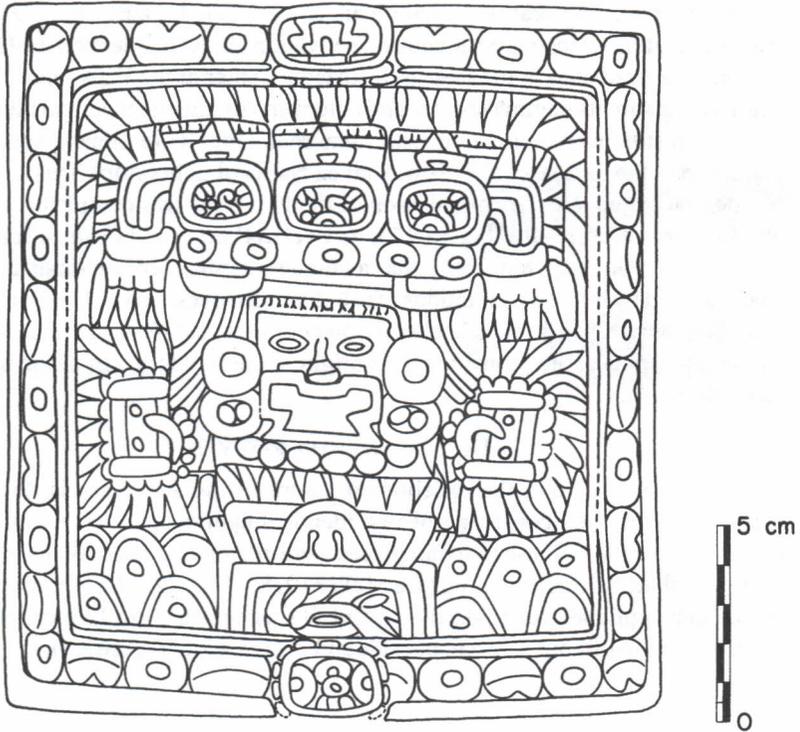


Fig. 8.8. Appliqué of the 9-Xi Vase (drawn by F. Carrizosa, courtesy of CONACULTA-INAH-MÉX).

#### THE CENTRAL SCENE

In the central scene is observed the frontal, symmetrical representation of a richly adorned personage. This complex image seems to emerge from the lower register of the scene, filled with an interesting series of notational signs, leaving only his head, torso, and open arms visible. He wears his hair long with straight bangs in front. His face has typically Teotihuacan, elliptical eyes and a realistic nose. The lower half of his face is covered by an enormous *yacapapalotl* nose ornament that some scholars identify with *talud-tablero* architecture or with a butterfly (Séjourné 1966: fig. 93; Langley 1986: 277; Winning 1987, I: 119, II: 59–60). The *yacapapalotl* partially obscures the facial painting on his cheeks, which in similar representations is usually in the form of a step-fret pattern. The personage wears large circular ear-spools with hanging rings. These rings, according to Winning (1987, I: 119, 124), imitate butterfly eyes that signify the individual is dead. The image in question also wears a collar and a pair of bracelets with globular beads. In his hands he holds two rectangular shields made of sticks with a plumed fringe on three of the ends.

The personage on the 9-*Xi* Vase wears an ostentatious headdress in the form of a stereotyped group of notational signs (see Langley 1993: 132–136) known as the “Panel Cluster.” According to Langley (1986: 139, 167–170), this group, frequently associated with the butterfly, could well be the register of a calendrical cycle. The Panel Cluster of our vase is integrated by three levels of notations and surrounded by feathers that denote sacrality or divine rank. In the lowest level are observed five *chalchihuites* superimposed on a band (Langley 1986: 282). The middle level is occupied by three *Reptile’s Eye* (RE) glyphs enclosed in double oval cartouches. This glyph was employed during the Classic and Epiclassic as an iconographic element and as a calendrical day sign. Even though associations with water, earth, wind, creation, warriors, and sacrificial victims have been suggested, the exact meaning of the Reptile’s Eye remains uncertain. Because of its particular shape, it has been related to the eye of a serpent, of the Cipactli monster, of a butterfly, and to flames (Winning 1961; Caso 1967a: 149, 158, 161–165; 1967b: 265–267; Langley 1986: 98–100, 280–281; Berlo 1989: 25; Miller and Taube 1993: 143). Finally, in the upper level of the Panel Cluster there are three representations of the “Manta Compound,” which has strong associations with the calendar and, in particular, with the year, the New Fire, and the year of the New Fire (Langley 1986: 166; 1992: 270–273; 1998). These representations correspond to Langley’s Type 3 (1986: 153–159, fig. 46): the lower section is not visible because the Reptile’s Eye glyph covers it; the middle section has a trapezoidal element over a band; and the upper section is a triangle with “accessory” signs. From each side of the Panel Cluster hangs a tassel (*Tassel B*) (Langley 1986: 338) that has certain formal similarities with the motif called *Aspergillum* (Langley 1986: 230–231).

As we mentioned above, the lower register of the scene is occupied by a horizontal band of notational signs. In the center of this band, we see the *Feathered Headdress Symbol* (FHS) (Langley 1986: 107–121; 1992: 262). This symbol complex may be broken down into two halves. The lower half consists of a rectangle that encloses a *Feathered Eye*, possibly a calendrical glyph, which has been attributed to birds, serpents, felines, canines, and humans (Langley 1986: 249). This representation corresponds to Langley’s Type C (1986: 250), because it only has feathers on the upper portion of the eye. In the upper half we observe a *Trapeze-Ray* ending in a row of feathers (“TR B” in Langley 1986: 293–294). This is the symbol of the year and of political authority (López Austin, López Luján, and Sugiyama 1991: 96–97). According to Langley (1986: 145–152), in Teotihuacan as well as many other Mesoamerican sites, the Trapeze-Ray usually appears as part of calendrical notations or as an attribute of government, military leadership, or sacrifice. Inside the ray of the 9-*Xi* Vase there is a *Trilobe* element (cf. Winning 1987, II: 52–53, fig. 1a, 70–71, figs. 9c–d) that usually is interpreted as a set of water droplets or as streams of sacrificial blood (Langley 1986: 296–297).<sup>1</sup> The trapeze is flanked by two diagonal elements with divided ends, which have been interpreted as torches (Taube, chapter 10 of this volume). Finally, we point out that on each side of the Feathered Headdress Symbol there are five large *Mountain* glyphs with their characteristic circles in their interiors (Langley 1986: 274, 331; Winning 1987, II: 11–13).

In sum, the central scene depicts: a) an individual who exhibits attire and paraphernalia related by several authors to the butterfly (nose ornament, earrings, and headdress) and to war (shields/wings); b) who is qualified by notations associated with fire, time, governmental authority, and possibly, sacrifice (Panel Cluster, Feathered Headdress Symbol, and the calendrical dates [see below]); and c) who emerges from a world of fertility (mountain glyphs and the rectangular frame, see below). He is a personage very similar to those who appear with many commonly shared elements everywhere in Teotihuacan iconography, in different symbol contexts, especially on Theater-type censers (e.g., Winning 1977; Berlo 1983; Manzanilla and Carreón 1991; Sugiyama 1998) (Figure 8.9), polychrome vases (e.g., Séjourné 1966: 38) (Figure 8.10), Thin Orange ceramic vessels (e.g., Pasztory et al. 1993: 262–263) (Figure 8.11), and stone sculptures (e.g., Pasztory et al. 1993: 126, 274) (Figure 8.12).

As is frequent in these cases, in spite of the enormous extant iconographic corpus, the identification of the personage in question is still debated. In 1922, Manuel Gamio (1979: 200) suggested that he possibly was a agricultural deity. According to Laurette Séjourné (1959: 116–128), he corresponded to a Teotihuacan version of Xochipilli, a Postclassic god related to butterflies, birds, and flowers. Years later, Caso (1967b: 259–263) called him “Quetzalpapalotl” and linked him to water and vegetation deities. Hasso von Winning (1987, I: 115–124) christened him as the “Butterfly God” and arrived at the conclusion that he was the tutelary numen of merchants and ambassadors, that is, people engaged in the external, including military, affairs of the metropolis. In addition, Winning proposed that the personages on the Theater-type censers represented the soul of the warriors and, by extension, deceased merchants and ambassadors. On the other hand, Janet C. Berlo (1983) at first held the idea of a feminine warrior divinity who prefigured Xochiquetzal or Itz'papalotl, but years later changed her opinion, assimilating her into the “Great Goddess” (Berlo 1992). In more recent times, however,

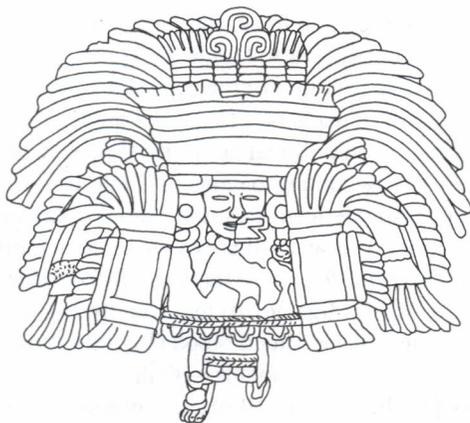


Fig. 8.9. Butterfly-personage from a brazier discovered by Linda Manzanilla in Oztotyahualco, Teotihuacan (Berrin and Pasztory 1993: 97, redrawn by F. Carrizosa).

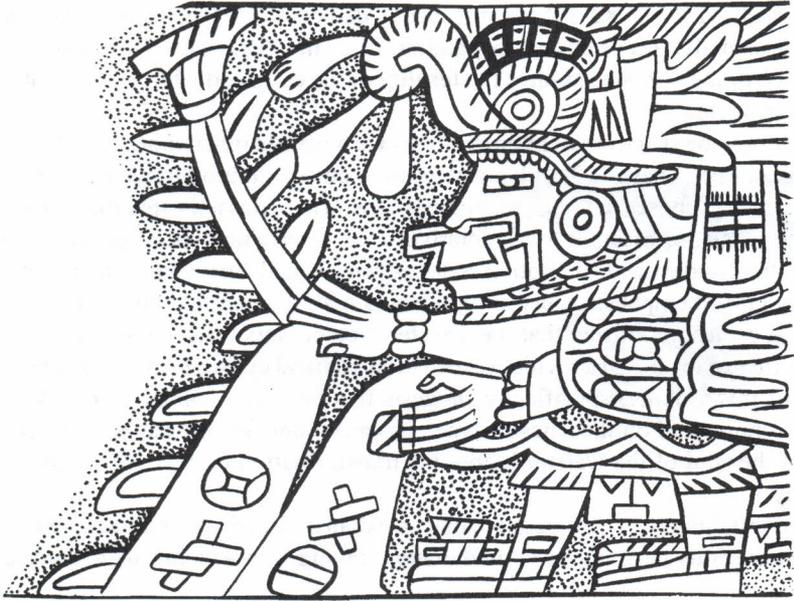


Fig. 8.10. Butterfly-personage from a Teotihuacan polychrome vase (Séjourné 1966: fig. 8, redrawn by F. Carrizosa).



Fig. 8.11. Butterfly-personage. Backside of a pyrite mirror, probably from Escuintla, Guatemala. Xolalpan/Metepec Phases (Berrin and Pasztory 1993: 126, redrawn by F. Carrizosa).

Zoltán Paulinyi (1995: 82–95) has sufficiently demonstrated that the personage in question is male. According to this author, he is the “Butterfly-Bird God,” an avocation of the Sun who assures the fertility of the earth and who descends into the Underworld.

To this wide spectrum of interpretations we must add other, more recent ones that link our personage to Teotihuacan military elites. Saburo Sugiyama (1998), for example, proposes that they are images of warriors, possibly specific historical individuals, or abstract representatives of a determined social group, who were symbolized with identification codes as being ritually incinerated in braziers. Langley (1998) emphasizes his symbol nexus with the martial elite, death, and temporal cycles, proposing that the Theater-type censers were used in periodic warrior rites or in martial activities related to calendrical cycles. Karl Taube (chapter 10 of this volume) specifically suggests that he was a soldier whose dead body—represented on the Theater-type censers—connotes the chrysalis or cocoon of the soul of the warrior before his transformation by way of fire into a butterfly.

In our judgment, it is imperative that an exhaustive and systematic review of these mysterious personages be undertaken, taking into account their diverse



Fig. 8.12. Butterfly-personage. Thin Orange tripod vase. Xolalpan/Metepec Phases (Berrin and Pasztor 1993: 263, redrawn by F. Carrizosa).

iconographic elements, their variants according to the medium in which they were executed (mural painting, ceramics, sculpture, etc.), and their contextual relationships. Obviously, future studies will have to explain the presence—sometimes combined, sometimes isolated—of symbolic elements related to calendrical cycles, political authority, war, fertility, the associated offerings, the passing to the other world, and the ancestors.

#### THE FRAME AND THE CALENDRIAL DATES

We mentioned above that a frame in the form of a rectangle delineated the personage scene. This frame is composed of two parallel lines that enclose *chalchihuites* and ovoid elements with an end split. Perhaps, the latter represent shells or seeds such as those painted in the Temple of Agriculture mural (Marquina 1979: 125, plates 27, 33; Villagra 1971: 140, fig. 8) (Figure 8.13). According to Cynthia Conides (personal communication, March 1997), the frame of the 9-Xi Vase may represent the personage emerging from an aquatic world of fertility or else passing through a portal to the other world (cf. Figures 8.8 and 8.12).

In addition to the *chalchihuites* and ovoid elements, the frame contains the two calendrical dates that make the 9-Xi Vase so special. The first date in the frame is found in the center of the upper border and corresponds to an oval cartouche that encloses the Xi glyph (Figure 8.14[a]). This serrated-shape glyph was designated with the letter *S* by Alfonso Caso (1928: 44) in the 1920s; however, Caso (1967a: 174–175) himself changed its name decades later, due to the fact that its physiognomy imitates the tail of a *xihcoatl*, or fire serpent. Under the Xi glyph on our vase we observe the number 9, represented with a horizontal bar over four dots.

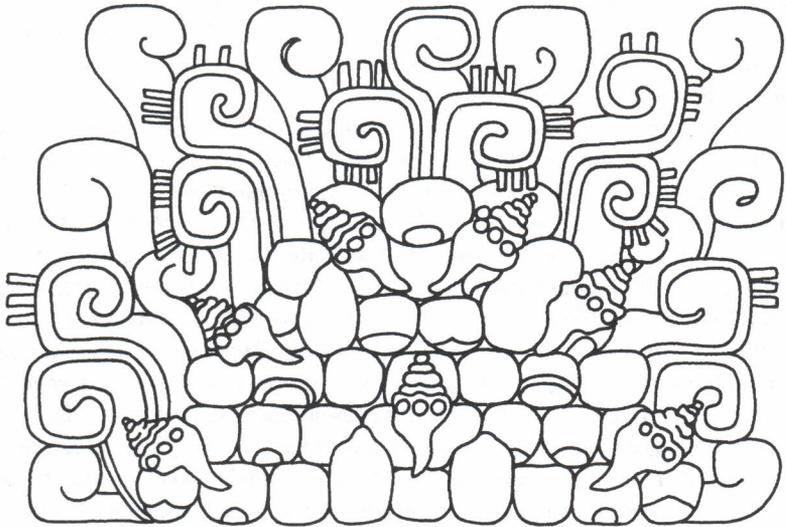


Fig. 8.13. Detail from a mural at the Temple of Agriculture, Teotihuacan (Marquina 1979: lám. 27, redrawn by F. Carrizosa).

The second date in the frame is located on the opposite extreme, that is, at the center of the lower border (Figure 8.15[a]). There we see a glyph in the shape of a knot which Caso (1928: 27–28) designated with the letter *A*. An oval cartouche and eleven dots surround this glyph. According to Javier Urcid (personal communication, April 1997), this notation could be read in three different ways: a) as the date *11-A*, if we concede that the dots have numerical value; b) as the date *1-A*, if we suppose that the cartouche represents a unit and the dots are decorative elements, as is usually the case in the Ñuiñe system (see Winter and Urcid 1990: 44); and c) simply as the *A* glyph, if we assume that the cartouche and the dots have no numerical value. If the first reading were correct, that is to say, if we have the date *11-A*, our vase would combine two different numbering systems: a date from the bar-and-dot system and another one from the dots-only system. We should not consider this strange because it seems to have been a common phenomenon in Teotihuacan, at least in the few known examples, and also in other cities in Central Mexico such as Xochicalco, Teotenango, Tula, as well as Tenochtitlan (Langley 1986: 141–143; Berlo 1989: 30, 44).<sup>2</sup>

Today controversy still exists concerning the calendrical position of the *Xi* and *A* glyphs. With respect to the *Xi* glyph, Caso (1967a: 174–175; 1967b: 268) proposed that it could be equivalent to the 10th day (*Dog*) of the *tonalpohualli*, due to the fact that Xiuhtecuhtli had the day *1-Dog* as his calendrical name. In contrast, Edmonson (1988: fig. 15a) associate the *Xi* glyph with the 18th day (*Flint*), while Urcid (1992, I: 168–169, 197, II: 250) suggested that perhaps it corresponded to the 4th day (*Lizard*) and calls it *Xicani*, the Zapotec name of the *xihcoatl*. The *A* glyph is equally controversial. According to Caso (1967a: 173), greater possibilities exist that this glyph is equivalent to the 12th day (*Twisted Grass*) of the *tonalpohualli*; however, he also considered as other plausible candidates, the 4th (*Lizard*), 9th (*Water*), 10th (*Dog*), 15th (*Eagle*), and 16th (*Vulture*) days. On the other hand, Edmonson (1988: fig. 15a) identifies it with the 12th day (*Twisted Grass*), while Urcid (1992, I: 136–137, II: 250) proposes the 10th day (*Dog*, for the Mexica; *Knot*, for the Zapotec).

Such discrepancies and the lack of testimonies concerning the Teotihuacan calendrical system impedes our ability to determine if the *Xi* and *A* glyphs functioned as year bearers. In this respect, we mention that Caso (1967a: 161–163) proposed that the “Turquoise,” “Eye,” and “Wind” signs were three of the four year bearers employed in Teotihuacan, due to the fact that at times they were associated with the Trapeze-Ray and numerical notations. On the other hand, this author (Caso 1967a: 163) and Edmonson (1988: 241–243) have suggested that the Type II (2nd, 7th, 12th, and 17th days of the *tonalpohualli*) system of year bearers prevailed in Teotihuacan. Based on these propositions, we may speculate that: a) if the Trapeze-Ray of the *9-Xi* Vase does not form part of the attributes of the personage, and b) if the *A* glyph corresponds with the 12th day, then the contiguous position of the Trapeze-Ray sign and glyph *?-A* could indicate a year in the fifty-two-year cycle. However, it is also plausible to consider that the Trapeze-Ray marks the year of the Feathered Eye glyph that is found directly below him.

The specific significance of the dates *9-Xi* and *?-A* is equally obscure. Our current state of understanding allows us only to surmise four possible types of

reading: that one or both types of notation allude to: a) the calendrical name of a divinity; b) the date of a mythical event; c) the name of a historical personage, and d) the date of an historical event. If the personage of our piece turns out to be a divinity, the first two types of readings would be more viable. On the other hand, if the personage in question is, in fact, a renowned personage from Teotihuacan history, then the last two types of readings would seem more adequate.

<i>Glyph</i>	<i>Calendrical Position</i>		
	<i>Caso</i>	<i>Edmonson</i>	<i>Urcid</i>
<i>Xi (S or Xicani)</i>	10th	18th	4th?
<i>A (Knot)</i>	12th (4th, 9th, 10th, 15th, or 16th)	12th	10th

Table 8.3. Proposed calendrical positions of the *Xi* and the *A* glyphs.

#### THE ANTIQUITY OF THE 9-XI VASE

According to Rattray's (1992: 59) inventory, all the Thin Orange objects discovered in funerary and oblatory contexts at Teotihuacan until now date from the long period between the Late Tlamimilolpa and Metepec Phases. The 9-*Xi* Vase, however, offers certain indications that assist us in establishing its antiquity with greater precision. According to the inspection of this vase amicably conducted by Warren Barbour (personal communication, June 1997), the more rounded rather than geometric contours of the personage are appropriate for the style in vogue during the Metepec Phase. This dating is corroborated by recent investigations which affirm that Thin Orange cylindrical vases decorated with appliqué panels were one of the few innovations of the Metepec Phase (Rattray 1991: 10) and that their production did not continue into the subsequent phase (Cowgill 1996: 329–330).

In the same vein, we should point out the evolutionary study of the glyphs present on our vase. Thanks to the work of Urcid (1992, I: 168–169, II: 202–203), we know that the *Xi* glyph has its origins in Oaxaca during Monte Albán II (200 B.C.E.–200 C.E.), a phase in which it was represented as the tail of a fire serpent (Figure 8.14 [b]). Nevertheless, it was not until the Monte Albán IIIa–IIIb transition (450–650 C.E.) that this glyph was used in Zapotec writing (Figure 8.14 [c]). In regards to Teotihuacan, the images of the *Xi* glyph are extremely rare and probably quite late. One of these scarcely known cases is observed on the headdress worn by a feminine figure on a stela published by Berlo (1992: 142–143) (Figure 8.14 [d]). Unfortunately, we do not know the exact provenance of the monument. Other interesting examples include an *almena* in the form of the *Xi* found by Noel Morelos (1993: photo 1.3; cf. Peñafiel 1890, 2: 40) in the uppermost levels of the West Plaza Complex at Teotihuacan (Figure 8.14 [e]) and a petroglyph with numerical notation discovered in the Teotihuacan site of Xihuingo (Jesús Galindo, personal communication, January 1999). The most celebrated image of the *Xi*

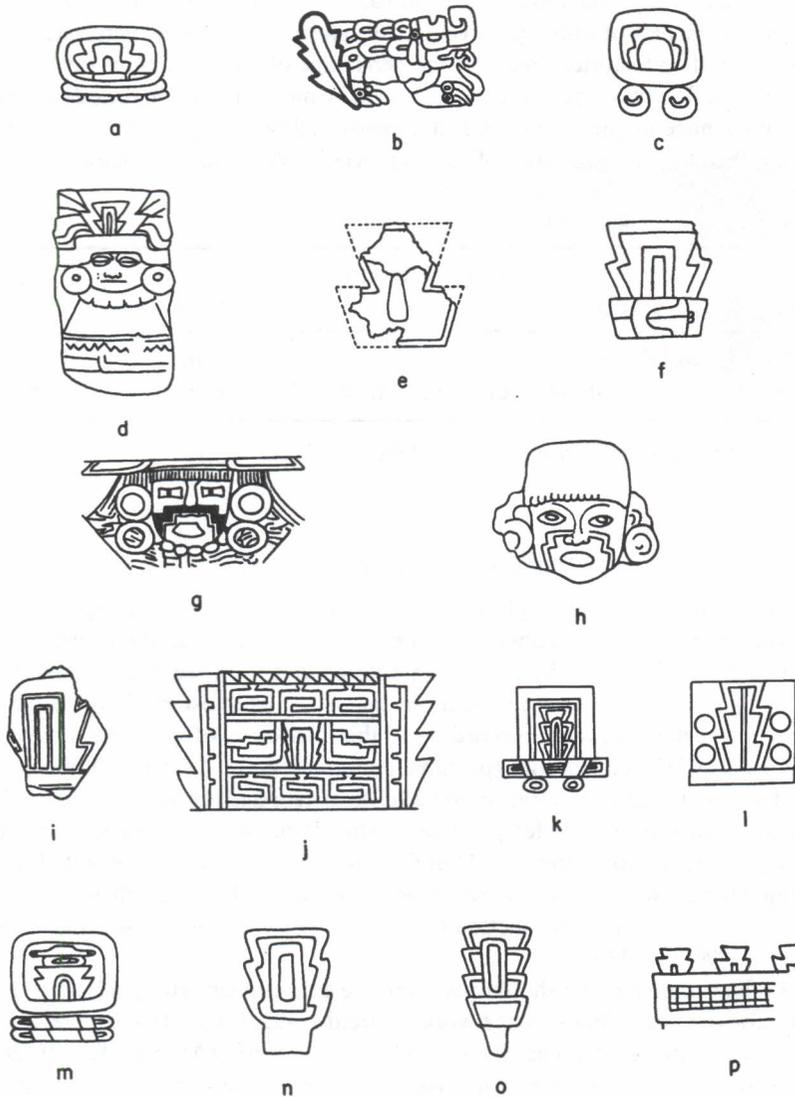


Fig. 8.14. The *Xi* glyph: a. The *9-Xi* Vase; b. As the tail of *xicani* (Urcid 1992: fig. 4.115); c. Zapotec glyph (Urcid 1992: fig. 4.114); d. Teotihuacan-style stela (Berlo 1992: fig. 17); e. Teotihuacan *almena* (Morelos 1993: photo 1.3); f. Jaguar from the Palace of Quetzalpapalotl (Acosta 1964: fig. 54); g. Face of the butterfly-personage, mural painting (Langley 1993: fig. 8); h. Face of the butterfly-personage, ceramic figurine (Caso 1967b: fig. 16.3c); i. Cacaxtla (López de Molina and Molina Feal 1986: lám. 109); j. Xochitécatl (Serra Puuche, personal file); k. Río Grande (Caso 1967a: fig. 11b); l. Cerro de los Monos (Caso 1967a: 11c); m. Xochicalco (Caso 1967a: fig. 11a); n. Tula (Fuente, Trejo, and Gutiérrez 1988: fig. 150); o. Chichén Itzá (Ruppert 1935: fig. 246c); p. Tenochtitlan (González Aragón 1993: 47-48); all redrawn by F. Carrizosa.

glyph, however, comes from the Quetzalpapalotl building, in a context dated between 500 and 650 C.E. by Acosta (1964: 52–58). We are referring to the *tecalli* sculpture representing a seated jaguar. This fine object has the glyph *1-Reed* carved on its back and the *Xi* glyph on its tail (Acosta 1964: 34–35, fig. 54) (Figure 8.14 [f]). In Teotihuacan we also find suggestive formal analogies between the *Xi* glyph and the step-fret pattern facial paint characteristic of the personages we are discussing (Figure 8.14 [g and h]).

It is important to mention the existence of various examples of the *Xi* glyph in the Puebla-Tlaxcala Valley, which are contemporaneous with or slightly later than the decline of Teotihuacan. Among these, the fragment from a Teotihuacan

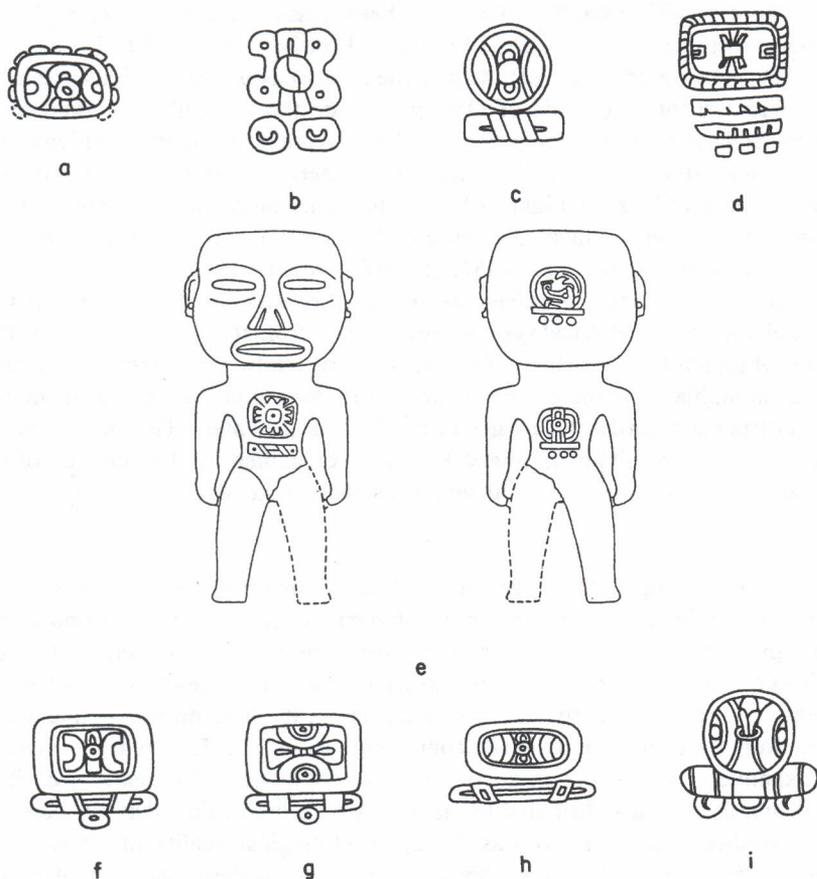


Fig. 8.15. The *A* glyph: a. The *9-Xi* Vase; b and c. Zapotec glyph (Urcid 1992: fig. 4.61); d. Teotihuacan (Caso 1967b: fig. 42f); e. Teotihuacan-style figurine (Urcid 1992: 4.167); f and g. Xochicalco (Caso 1967a: figs. 8a and b); h. Chalco (Caso 1967a: fig. 8d); i. Chichén Itzá (Caso 1967a: fig. 8g); all redrawn by F. Carrizosa.

“Engraved Brown” vase (variant 13, group 8) found in Cacaxtla (López de Molina and Molina Feal 1986: 51, lám. 109) (Figure 8.14 [i]), as well as a “Foso Engraved” tripod vase (Figure 8.14 [j]), and a Teotihuacan-style brazier discovered in Xochitecatl in contexts dated between 632 and 774 C.E. (Serra Puche 1998: 68–69, 83, 86, 89–90; personal communication, January 1999). Finally, we would add to this corpus of *Xi* glyph examples, the Río Grande Stela from Oaxaca; the Cerro de los Monos Stone in Guerrero; the Stone of the Four Glyphs at Xochicalco (Caso 1967a: 174–175) (Figure 8.14 [k–m]); as well as some Postclassic *almenas* (roof ornaments) from Tula (Fuente, Trejo, and Gutiérrez 1988: fig. 150), Chichén Itzá (Ruppert 1935: fig. 246c), and Tenochtitlan (Eduardo Matos Moctezuma, personal communication, December 1996; cf. *Codex Mendoza* 1992: 61r; *Codex Telleriano-Remensis* 1995: 39r; González Aragón 1993: 47–48) (Figure 8.14 [n–p]).

The *A* glyph, on the other hand, has been identified in twenty examples of Zapotec writing ranging between 200 B.C.E. and 1000 C.E. (Urcid 1992, I: 136–137; II: 147) (Figure 8.15 [b and c]). Among the rare occasions in which its presence has been registered outside of Oaxaca include the 13-*A* glyph carved on a Teotihuacan piece (Caso 1967b: 275, fig. 42f) (Figure 8.15 [d]), the 8-*A* glyph on a Teotihuacan-style greenstone figurine from southern Puebla (Urcid 1992, II: 258; Pasztory et al. 1993: 276) (Figure 8.15 [e]), the Palace Stone and the Pyramid of the Plumed Serpent at Xochicalco (Figure 8.15 [f and g]), and other monuments in Chalco and Chichén Itzá (Caso 1967a: 173) (Figure 8.15 [h and i]).

Although we lack many elements to fully reconstruct the development of the Central Mexican calendrical system, we may infer from this quick review that the *Xi* and *A* glyphs have Preclassic Zapotec roots, which first manifested in Central Mexican highlands at the end of Teotihuacan’s dominion and reached its maximum dispersion during the apogee of the Epiclassic centers. The unusual presence of these two glyphs on the 9-*Xi* Vase is explained by the late date of its production, which, we are convinced, dates back to the Metepec Phase.

#### CONCLUSIONS

There is a high probability that the Mexica obtained this 9-*Xi* Vase in the ruins of Teotihuacan, given the archaeological richness of this metropolis, its close proximity to Tenochtitlan, and the numerous accounts concerning the activities of Postclassic peoples in the so-called City of the Gods (see Castañeda 1986: 234–236). Evidently, this does not rule out the possibility that this piece came from the ruins of another site contemporaneous with Teotihuacan, such as, for example, Azcapotzalco, Xico, or Portezuelo. Whichever the case may be, it is clear that the Mexica attributed to the 9-*Xi* Vase a dual value, derived from its great aesthetic quality as well as its supposed magical quality in terms of its creation by divine or legendary beings. In addition to these two attributes, we should ask ourselves if the Mexica decided to reutilize this vase as a funerary urn for a high-level dignitary due to their relating the image of the personage with its suggested funerary, governmental, and martial symbolism.

Concerning the 9-*Xi* Vase’s central scene, we have noted enormous analogies with the Theater-type censers, above all on the level of the correlated presence and distribution of certain notational signs. There is little room to doubt that the

appliqués of this vessel found in the Casa de las Águilas depict the mysterious personage extensively celebrated in Teotihuacan iconography, although at the end of the twentieth century he resists being fully identified.

Throughout this essay we also have stood firm in terms of the two calendrical dates on our vase. As we have said, their presence seems to be explained by the late production of this Thin Orange vessel, which we have dated to the Metepec Phase. Although it is still unclear whether the temporal boundaries of this phase are 650 and 750 C.E. (Ratray 1991: 10–11) or one hundred years earlier (Cowgill 1996: 329–330), there is common consensus that Teotihuacan experienced great transformations on the political and cultural levels at that time. The art of the city became more virtuous and complex, exalting, as never before, war, individualism, and aristocratic secularity (Pasztory 1988a; Cohodas 1989). This is precisely when the murals of Techinantitla are painted with their innovative notational signs and when the formation of the Central Mexico writing system that would lead to the Aztec system is initiated (Pasztory 1988b; Berlo 1989: 20–23; Cowgill 1992). Thus, Metepec Phase Teotihuacan—whether preceding or contemporaneous with Cacaxtla, Xochicalco, and Teotenango (cf. Molina Feal 1977: 1–5; Hirth and Cyphers 1988: 110–143; López Austin and López Luján 1996: 170)—shared many of these glyphs in common with the Epiclassic centers. This phenomenon is revealed in the 9-Xi Vase.

#### NOTES

1. In this respect, the painted murals recently found at La Ventilla B are worth mentioning. Among the depicted images, a representation of the Feathered Headdress Symbol stands out, whose Trapeze-Ray encloses a blue trilobe (Néstor Paredes, personal communication, January 1999).

2. Recently, Langley (1998) has identified the row of elongated signs across the top of the V Manta Compound as fingers. He proposed that the finger would be in this context a variant of the numeral 1, as occurs in the Zapotec, Maya, and Mexica number systems.

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FROM TEOTIHUACAN TO THE AZTECS



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