

Mural Painting in Cacaxtla and Teotihuacán Cosmopolitism

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Mural painting in Cacaxtla (figs. 1–8), a fortified site in southwest Tlaxcala regarded as an artistic phenomenon of the Epiclassic Period (eighth to tenth centuries), has neither precedents nor any stylistic continuity in the artistic panorama of the Central Plateau. It requires, for its full understanding, a methodical, unprejudiced analysis of the development of painting in Teotihuacán during the Xolalpan and Metepec stages (ca. A.D. 500–700), when the human figure became a particularly important iconographic motif.

During the last two centuries before the collapse of Teotihuacán, there was, I believe, a significant concern, involving a solicitous artistic search for the human figure, its physical characteristics, and the features which would distinguish individuals as members of a distinctive group, especially in the case of warriors. Some wall paintings may serve as a support for my statement (fig. 9).

This specificity of the human figure, however, did not result, in Teotihuacán, in individualized representations which dealt with personalities or historical events. It could be said that some Teotihuacán artists stated the problem without carrying it to its ultimate conclusions. This is due, perhaps, to the strict academic control which hindered the artist from attempting new ways different from those established by the religious ideology of which the ruling class of the metropolis approved. Or else, because the fall of Teotihuacán caused a dramatic end to the possibility of recording, on the walls of temples and palaces, a wide repertoire of human figures which would testify to this humanistic trend, already present in Atetelco, in Tetitla, and in various wall paintings scattered in different areas of the city.

Translated by Beatriz Alvarez Klein

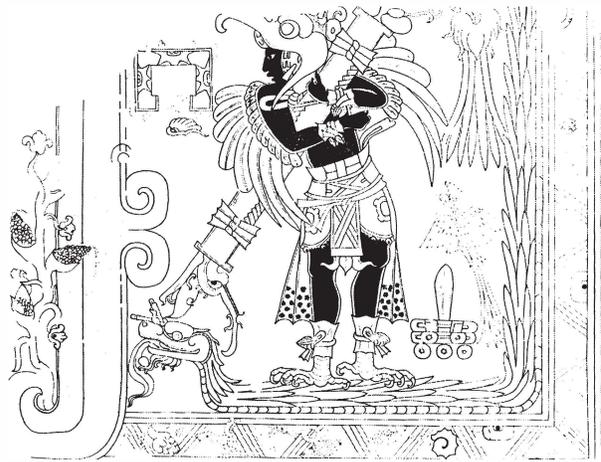


Fig. 1. Cacaxtla. Rear wall of the portico in Building A. Bird man.

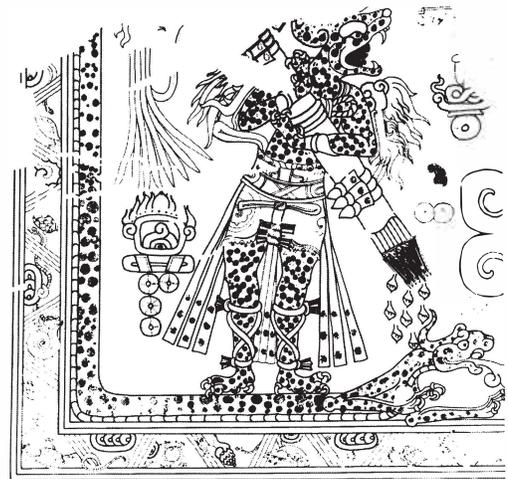


Fig. 2. Cacaxtla. Rear wall of the portico in Building A. Jaguar man.



Fig. 3. Cacaxtla. South jamb of the portico in Building A.



Fig. 4. Cacaxtla. North jamb of the portico in Building A.

In any case, it may be said that the spark Teotihuacán kindled blazed into a glowing fire, though evanescent and ephemeral, on the walls of Cacaxtla. In these paintings, many elements of the Teotihuacán iconographic vocabulary persist and are integrated into composite schemes centered around the human figure.

On the other hand, the wall paintings of Cacaxtla which deal with war show a pictorial genre of an extreme narrative realism that has no antecedents in the Central Plateau. They are analogous in content to the Maya murals of the Late Classic Period in Bonampak and Mulchic (eighth century A.D.).

Cacaxtla represents one more link in the superimposed chain of cultural features which characterized Middle America by the end of the Classic and during the Epiclassic. The most outstanding aspect of this epoch consists of the cultural interconnections among different zones, a fact which also determined a significant stylistic interaction. This historical situation involved an active relationship between the Gulf coast and the Central Plateau, in which such centers as Cholula, Xochicalco, Tajín, the Tabasco area and its possible extension to the Usumacinta River, and the northwestern part of Yucatán played an important role.

Cacaxtla is embedded in a valley which opens southward to the Valley of Puebla and northward

to that of Tlaxcala; on the eastern side lies the Malinche Peak, and the volcanoes are on the western side. It belongs to a particularly strategical area which served as a natural geographic corridor that favored, through the ages, a cultural contact with other places in the Central Plateau, Oaxaca, the Gulf coast, and the Maya area.

This city was a living center within the cultural range of Teotihuacán during the Classic Period and possibly was submitted to the political control of Cholula. It absorbed the influence of the final stages of the metropolis and received and gave an impulse to the incipient humanistic message in some of late Teotihuacán art. It also incorporated an assorted iconographic repertoire with varying symbolic connotations and geographical precedences into its plastic vocabulary.

Due to all the foregoing facts, the paintings of Cacaxtla may be rated as an eclectic form of expression which can also be recognized in its architectural monuments.

Nevertheless, this eclecticism does not imply that, from the artistic viewpoint, Cacaxtla was a mere receiver of styles and ideas. It is my belief that its art expresses a local creative impulse which clearly points at Middle American regionalism. Such regionalism shows the originality and the capacity of plastic expression of individual artists or art schools partially or totally deviated from the stylistic tradition promoted by the great urban centers of its time.

I agree with Sanders' statement (1978: 89) that "a distinctive feature of the Central American civilization throughout history is its intense regionalism. Stylistic or cultural horizons emerged periodically, but only as brief and temporary interruptions of this basic pattern of regional diversity." Cacaxtla seems to confirm Sanders' assertion objectively.

By way of hypothesis I propose, in the present analysis, that the stylistic definition of Cacaxtla is basically the result of cultural situations which are particular to the Central Plateau. It is therefore a unique artistic creation in the Plateau, in spite of the Maya nuance which may be ascribed to it. This nuance proceeds, to a great extent, from the cosmopolitanism of Teotihuacán.

I intend to base my hypothesis upon the following assumptions.

According to several works by René Millon and to the studies of Sanders, Evelyn Rattray, and other investigators, it may be said that Teotihuacán was a main pilgrimage and trade center during the Middle Classic Period (A.D. 400–700). Its cultural range surpassed the limits of its location in the

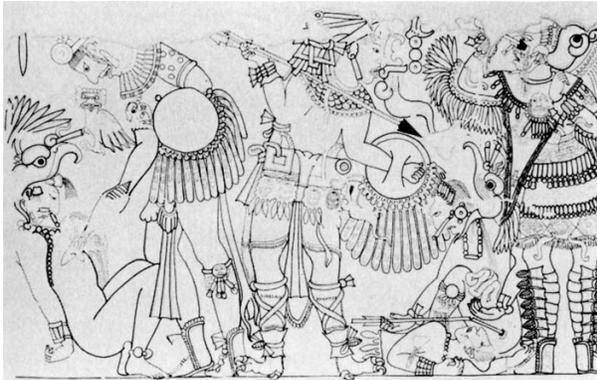


Fig. 5. Cacaxtla. Mural of the war. East talus of Building B (incomplete).

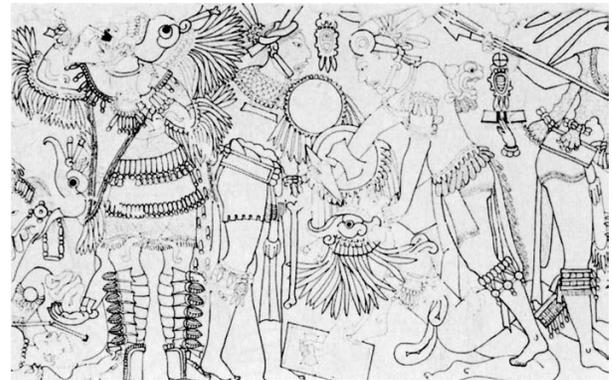


Fig. 6. Cacaxtla. Mural of the war. East talus of Building B (incomplete).

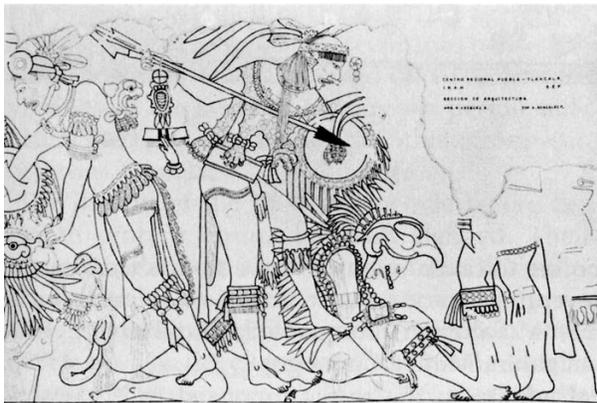


Fig. 7. Cacaxtla. Mural of the war. East talus of Building B (incomplete).

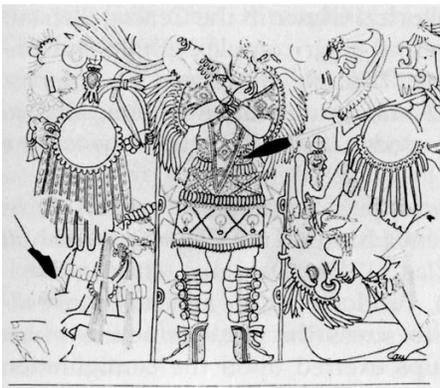


Fig. 8. Cacaxtla. Mural of the war. West talus of Building B (incomplete).

Central Plateau. The internal coherency and consistency of its ideology and of its social, political, and religious institutions made this possible. The Teotihuacanos developed such profitable conditions upon the basis of a regional agricultural economic system, which was reinforced by a thoroughly legalized tribute system. Both systems insured the subsistence and splendor of this great urban center.

Modern research on Teotihuacán has clearly established its metropolitan nature. For the purposes of this study, I shall refer to the existence of quarters in which groups proceeding from other areas in Middle America settled. This population pattern points out the heterogeneity of the inhabitants of Teotihuacán, and I rate it as essential for the understanding of Cacaxtla's distinctive eclecticism. Such eclecticism results not only from this particular situation in Teotihuacán but also from the cultural conditions which arose between the fall of the metropolis and the Toltec hegemony: mobility of different ethnic groups and restatement of ideas.

Archaeology has demonstrated the existence in Teotihuacán of sections inhabited by people from Monte Albán as well as from Veracruz and Maya groups (e.g., Millon 1967b; Rattray 1977; Rattray et al. 1977). The material evidence proceeding from these foreigners' quarters shows the city's capacity to absorb groups with different cultural traditions. In some of these quarters, which were built by craftsmen from other areas and by traders, particular patterns of artistic expression, as well as notions of the events that took place in other Middle American areas, must have been kept alive in the minds of their inhabitants.

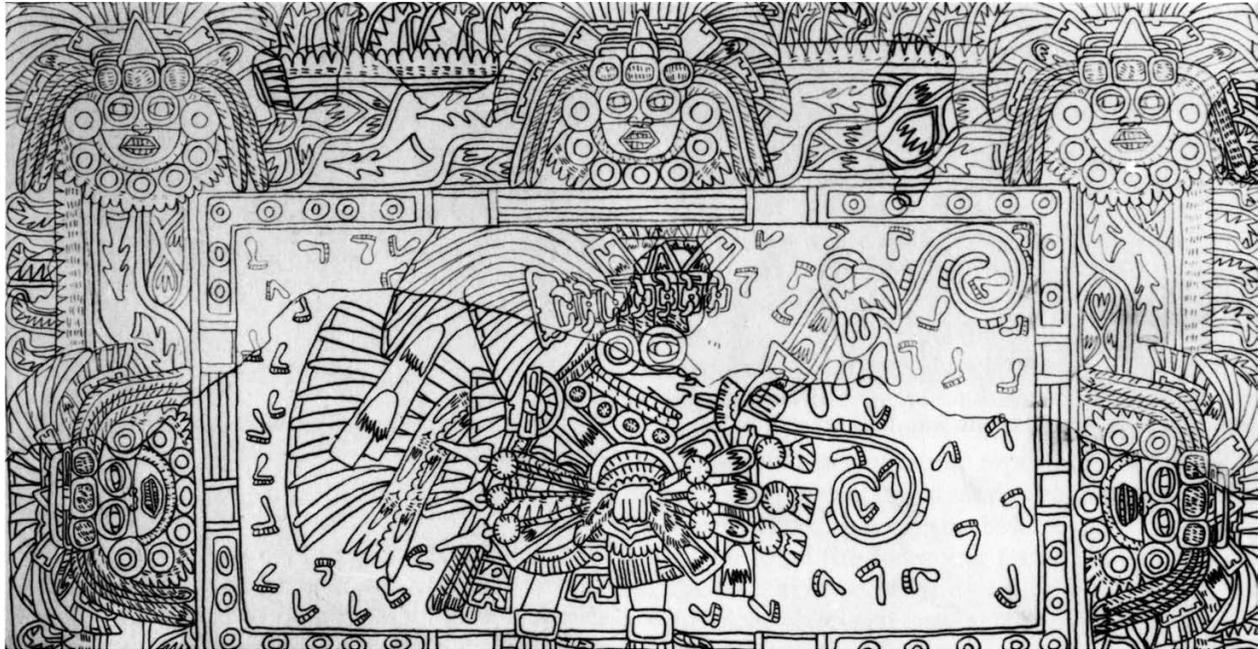


Fig. 9. Teotihuacán. Atetelco. Talus in Portico 3. White.

Sanders' opinion regarding the existence of gods and forms of worship peculiar to several quarters in Teotihuacán gives credence to my assumption that if a certain degree of autonomy, as far as religious beliefs and devotional practices are concerned, may be observed, art must have met with a similar situation. But, in relation to art, the possibilities of achieving a plastic fulfillment were scanty, owing to the demands which official institutions undoubtedly exerted on artists. However, I assume that some of the walls in Teotihuacán acknowledge the statement of new artistic conceptions that reached a thoroughly renovating expression on the walls of Cacaxtla, as the Teotihuacán order weakened and eventually was extinguished in the metropolis.

Owing to the fall of Teotihuacán, both the local and the foreign artists who had lived in the city dispersed in different directions. By means of the preceding considerations, I intend to point out that this fact, as well as the cosmopolitan nature of the metropolis, and its implications must be seriously considered in order to achieve a full understanding of the anthropocentric and narrative figurative nature of the wall paintings of Cacaxtla.

The effects of the dispersion of the inhabitants of Teotihuacán are deeply related to the Olmeca-Xicalanca dominance in the Puebla-Tlaxcala area and to the conquest of Cholula—under whose

power Cacaxtla seems to have flourished—in the seventh century A.D., according to colonial documents (Sahagún, Torquemada, Ixtlilxochitl, Chimalpahin, Muñoz Camargo).

I adhere to the thesis proposed by Chadwick (1966), who renders the eighth century Olmeca-Xicalancas as a group of Mixtecan ethnic filiation. During the second and third stages of Teotihuacán, the latter constituted a significant element in the cultural development of the city.

Many an analysis has been devoted to the presence of the historical Olmec in the Central Plateau, their ubiquity, and their complex ethnic and linguistic filiation. The one developed by Jiménez Moreno (1942) stands out among them, due to his deep knowledge and synthetic view of the problem.

Chadwick compiles the ideas expressed in works by Jiménez Moreno (1942, 1966), Kirchhoff (1940), Armillas (1946), Dahlgren (1954), Covarrubias (1957), Paddock (1966), and other investigators, so as to stress the catalytic action which Mixtecan groups exerted upon the configuration of the artistic patterns of the Classic Period in the Central Plateau (Teotihuacán and Cholula) and those of the Post Classic Period (Tula).

The Mixtecan cultural action in Teotihuacán revealed itself mainly in the fields of art and orga-

nized trade. Within the Teotihuacán society, the Mixtec served as agents of cultural change and interchange. This seems to have determined, to a great extent, the projection of Teotihuacán through trade and through its tribute system in all of Middle America. The Teotihuacán influence may be observed in the presence of Teotihuacán stylistic patterns and iconographic symbols in several areas, and it embraced even various zones in the Maya area. This fact has brought about a series of hypotheses about the particular nature of the Teotihuacán influx in Middle America, especially in the Maya area. I consider that it was mainly trade that determined such phenomena, and not military or confessional expansion, as Sanders proposes in his study on Kaminaljuyú.

Regarding the Mixtec, again, it may be said that they appeared in Teotihuacán as a formative agent on the artistic tradition of the city. This agent was already present on the Plateau centuries before the establishment of the Tilantongo and Tezacoalco dynasties of the seventh century—a period fully documented in the history of this group—in northwest Oaxaca.

The history of the Mixtecan people before the seventh century cannot be easily defined. Their cultural antecedents seem to date from the millenary culture of La Venta, which set its seal upon Monte Albán I through this group (Jiménez Moreno 1966: 17). The development of the Nuiñe style in the lower Mixtecan area (Paddock 1966) reveals the early regional development of Mixtecan art.

The history of the Mixtecan irruption into the Central Plateau is obscure and uncertain. It is related to the incorporation of other groups and languages (Mixtec, Chocho Popolucan, Nahuatl) into the original Mixtecan nucleus, proceeding from the Gulf coast, throughout several centuries (Chadwick 1966: 10).

These groups presented such ethnic and linguistic characteristics as they burst onto the Teotihuacán scenery, and so did the Olmeca-Xicalancas, a group which consisted basically of artists and traders and which possessed a powerful ancestral cultural tradition. The latter is recorded by Chimalpahin as follows:

Y la verdad es
que aquellos que por primera vez vinieron a
establecerse
que hicieron merecimientos de tierra,
eran grandes hombres,
muy experimentados,
eran sabios,
estaban prestos a todo.

Y porque eran sabios,
todo lo que hacían
siempre lo afirmaban.
No se sabe en qué año
fue cuando se acercaron
allá frente a los dos grandes montes,
el Ixtactépetl y Popocatépetl.
Y arriba del montecillo que se dijo,
al que habían llegado,
allí vinieron a descubrir que se extendía el agua,
que estaba reluciente
lo que había hecho el Señor Nuestro Dios.
Y luego veneraron como dios al agua
los dichos olmecas, xicalancas, xochitecas,
quiyahuztecas, cucolcas, etc.

This may be translated into English as:
And it is true
that those who for the first time came to settle
and whose deeds made them worthy of the land
were great men,
men of experience;
they were wise;
they were prompt to all feats.
And as they were wise,
they always were certain
of all that they accomplished.
It is not known what year
it was when they approached
the two great mountains
—Ixtactépetl and Popocatépetl.
They came; they settled on a hill
before these two great mountains.
And upon this hill
to which they had come,
they beheld that water stretched before them,
that the works of Our Lord
were there resplendent.
And so they worshiped water as a deity.
They were Olmecs, Xicalancas, Xochitecas,
Quiyahuztecas, Cucolcas.

On the other hand, Sahagún (1956: 205) groups the Olmec, Uixtotins, and Mixtec into one single section; he locates them in the east and rates them as holders of great skill in craftsmanship.

The significance of the Mixtecan tradition, embodied in the Olmeca Xicalancas, demands that an urban center, which served as a dwelling for this group during the Classic Period, be localized in the Central Plateau. The Olmeca-Xicalancas may have contributed to the local configuration, transmission, and development of art-craft forms and techniques which underlie Toltec art and persist throughout the Aztec hegemony. Based upon a flexible interpretation of the data furnished by

colonial documentary sources and upon the assumption of modern research, Chadwick agrees with the idea expressed by Covarrubias (1957: 294), and he considers Cholula as the capital city of the early Olmeca-Xicalancas. Therefore, Cholula appears as a Mixtecan center in the Central Plateau which promoted an active relationship between the Puebla-Tlaxcala area and the Gulf coast, Oaxaca, and, of course, Teotihuacán, in the Valley of Mexico.

Seemingly, as the Olmeca-Xicalancas from Teotihuacán moved into the Puebla-Tlaxcala Valley in the eighth century, they contended against the Olmeca-Xicalancas from Cholula and conquered for themselves a city whose population probably had a similar ethnic filiation.

As far as other data which verify the cosmopolitan nature of Teotihuacán are concerned, I wish to establish the following: the most direct and objective evidence of the relationship between the metropolis and the Maya area through the Gulf coast during the late Xolalpan and Metepec stages is furnished by the most recent studies on trade pottery found in Teotihuacán (Ratray et al. 1977). Ratray points to a series of pots and sherds in which the type of clay, the shape, and the ornamental techniques denote their derivation from the Maya area and the Gulf coast (fig. 10). This material proceeds basically from the A and B complexes of La Ventilla and from Barrio de Mercaderes.

In the sections of the city mentioned above, Tepeu pottery (which, according to Rands, pro-



Fig. 10. Teotihuacán. Pottery. Patio fragment of a vessel.

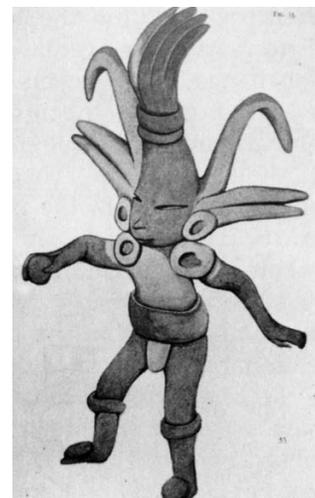


Fig. 11. Teotihuacán. Clay figurine.

ceeds not from the Guatemalan Petén but from a peripheral area) was found along with fine clay pots of different types (perhaps from the northwestern border of the lowlands: Rands 1973) and others related to the pottery from Yucatán, coming, says Harbottle, from the basin of the Grijalva River (Ratray et al. 1977).

Ratray points out that an extensive trade and a community of artistic ideas which established a relationship between Teotihuacán and the Gulf coast and the Maya area are distinctive to the later stages of Teotihuacán. The central and southern area of the Gulf coast was undoubtedly the connecting bridge between the Maya and the Valley of Mexico.

Pottery decorated with scenic reliefs, characterized by processions in which outstanding personalities take part, political religious ceremonies, ball games, and calendar symbols, particularizes a significant expression of the artistic tradition of the Gulf coast. Ratray quotes von Winning, who considers the Alvarado area as its place of origin (Ratray et al. 1977).

The fact that, according to Ratray, the Gulf coast served as both receiver and transmitter of artistic forms of expression throughout its own regional development is particularly important. The humanistic and realistic trends from the Gulf coast and Maya art reached Teotihuacán by very different means. The trade in pottery showing the features mentioned above was probably one of these means, and it contributed to the promotion of a new, renovating conception of the image of the human figure in mural painting. I consider that the significance of the local manufacture of pots



Fig. 12. Teotihuacán. Clay figurines. Costumes.

with reliefs of the human figure as a motif which does not strictly follow the orthodox, official canons of Teotihuacán art is in no way susceptible of underestimation.

Besides, the wide repertoire of clay statuettes with individualized physical features—some of them peculiar to the Maya (fig. 11)—and with assorted types of costumes (fig. 12) points out the persistence of this realistic trend in the metropolis. This fact seems to have contributed to the efforts made by a group of artists to incorporate a singularized human figure as a basic motif into the pictorial array.

The generalized image of the warrior (fig. 13), his weapons, his symbols, and the costume which identifies him as a member of a fully differentiated social class, stands out in this artistic trend. Characters pertaining to other social classes also appear, but on a lower scale. Occasionally, the conventional canon of the mural-painting tradition in Teotihuacán suffers changes, and naturalistic human beings individualized by means of peculiar physical traits, of their varied costumes, of the objects they carry, and of their poses are depicted.

The wall paintings known as “realistic paintings” (Villagra Caletí 1955: 69), which proceed from a portico and three rooms of the great residential complex in Tetitla, belong to this type of representation. This pictorial group dates from the later stages of Teotihuacán. More than 250 fragments of these wall paintings (which have since disappeared) were carefully recorded in drawings by Agustín Villagra Caletí, to whom I am thankful for the opportunity to reexamine and to photograph them.

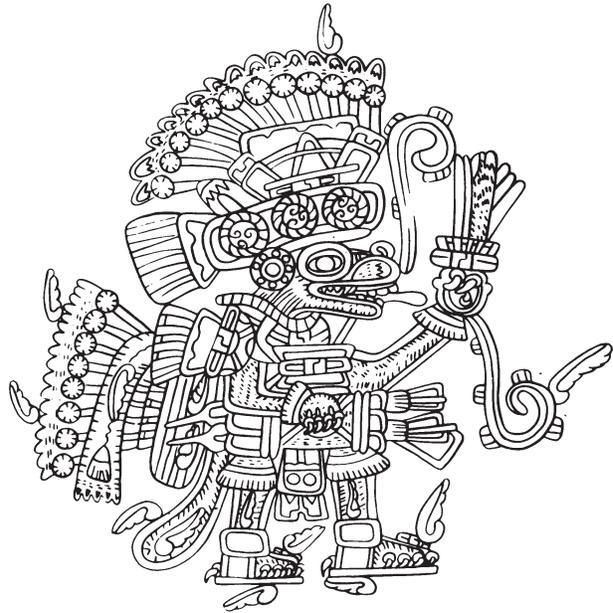


Fig. 13. Teotihuacán. Atetelco. One of the coyote warriors on a wall of Portico 1. White Patio.

The wall paintings represented a number of motifs (figs. 14–19): human figures, talus and panel platforms, bands with complex designs which seem to have divided the pictorial space into sections (Villagra Caletí, personal communication). In these bands, fragments of signs which possibly denote some of the graphic conventions of the Maya writing system are to be found.

I believe that the “realistic paintings” of Tetitla document the existence of commercial rela-

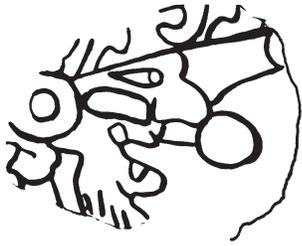


Fig. 14. Teotihuacán. Tetitla. "Realistic paintings" (fragment).



Fig. 15. Teotihuacán. Tetitla. "Realistic paintings" (fragment).



Fig. 16. Teotihuacán. Tetitla. "Realistic paintings" (fragment).

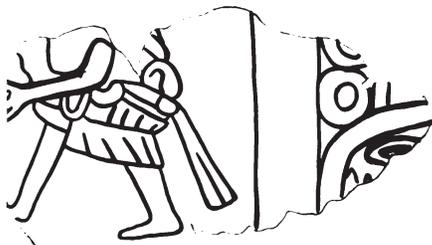


Fig. 17. Teotihuacán. Tetitla. "Realistic paintings" (fragment).

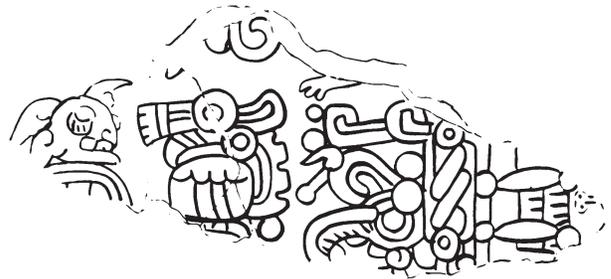


Fig. 18. Teotihuacán. Tetitla. "Realistic paintings" (fragment).

tions between Teotihuacán and the Maya area. They also betoken the physical presence of the Maya, revealed in the design of various faces with Maya profiles, of high-ranking persons sitting on thrones, of their costumes, of a mask with a long nasal appendix, and of the association between human figures and glyphic symbols (figs. 20–22). The latter is a distinctive element of the characteristic patterns of Maya art.

The "realistic paintings" show assorted human types. These, along with a human figure whose face is no longer visible and who sits in profile (fig. 23), after the Maya pattern, and appears in another section of the architectural complex, and along with depictions in Tetitla that show men emerging from shells (fig. 24), constitute iconographic motifs frequent in polychrome pots of the Maya Late Classic Period (Tepeu 1 and 2). The diversification of faces and scenes in this Maya artistic form of expression, which also appears in the relief decoration of pots and the varied inventory of clay statuettes of the Jaina, Jonuta type, is undoubtedly more flexible and less conventional than the one used in official art, especially in the case of sculpture. I believe this figurative flexibility



Fig. 19. Teotihuacán. Tetitla. "Realistic paintings" (fragment).



Fig. 20. Teotihuacán. Tetitla. "Realistic paintings" (fragment).



Fig. 21. Teotihuacán. Tetitla. "Realistic paintings" (fragment).



Fig. 22. Teotihuacán. Tetitla. "Realistic paintings" (fragment).



Fig. 23. Teotihuacán. Tetitla. Room 7.

is partially due to the fact that portable art was more closely related to the artistic demands and to the requirements of trade.

The representations in Tetitla bear certain similarities to the examples of Maya art noted above, and they possibly reflect, to a great extent, what was transmitted to Teotihuacán through trade from the Maya area in its way along the Gulf coast.

The human figures in the "realistic paintings" in Tetitla preserve the artistic postulates proposed since the Tlamimolpa stage (ca. A.D. 400) by a school of painting which carried out frescoes characterized by principles of asymmetry, superimposition of forms, and organic fluidity in the outline. These features are conspicuous in the Mythological Animals wall painting in the fourth zone (Paszatory 1972: 99).

In my opinion, the assorted assemblage of human figures depicted in full motion in the so-called Tlalocan in Tepantitla also suggests the dynamic realistic tendency in Teotihuacán painting.

The scenic artistic representations which relate two or more human figures according to Maya patterns seem to have achieved a response in a small wall painting from Teotihuacán which dates from a

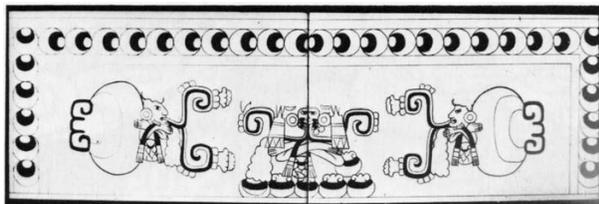


Fig. 24. Teotihuacán. Tetitla. Room 27.

later stage of this city and which is now included in the Sáenz Collection in Mexico.

The Sáenz wall painting contains the images of two richly clad and bejeweled high-ranking persons, placed side by side (fig. 25). The one on the left appears in a dancing pose; his legs are flexed, and his face, in profile, turns upward. The one on the right, in profile, is leaning toward the first character; he holds a richly ornamented shield. A florid scroll emanates from his mouth. The context of this array is one of dancing and chanting.

The configuration of the Sáenz wall painting is novel, since it breaks with the traditional Teotihuacán way of representing high-ranking persons in paintings, which is reiterative and impersonal. In this case, the artist differentiated both figures according to their poses, costumes, facial ornaments, and physical traits, and thus he bestowed life upon them.

I wish to point out that I observe one single fluidity in the outline of the faces of both characters. However, the body and the costume of the dancing figure constitute an abstract, highly ornamental scheme that opposes the more open naturalism of the second character.

In the artistic representation of both figures in this Teotihuacán wall painting, two stylistic trends seem to intertwine—the first, disclosed in the dancing character, later aimed at the symbolic, depersonalized, ornamental, figurative representations of the non-Maya Post Classic Period. Toltec and Mexica art prove this fact, as evinced in small representations in codices and clay objects.

Within the Central Plateau, only Cacaxtla seems to have retrieved and kept the second trend alive in its time. This trend bears a close relationship to the Maya tendency, as far as its search for a record which adjusts better to the visual datum and is centered around the image of the human figure is concerned. This image has been depicted not as a stylistic stereotype but as physically individualized within a more dynamic context which

would intrinsically reveal reality and both its experiential and symbolic meanings. The figure on the right side in the Sáenz wall painting would belong, I believe, to this type of representation.

The figure of the warrior, as well as a particular iconographic complex which connotes war and human sacrifice symbolically, appears in many wall paintings in Teotihuacán (C. Millon 1973; Pasztory 1974). My hypothesis is that in Cacaxtla the warrior, along with some of the symbols which specify his rank in the Teotihuacán society, becomes a live document on war and the apotheosis and glorification of the men who took part in it (respectively, tali of Building B and portico of Building A). The Teotihuacán realistic trend, kept alive by Maya artists and traders and by those proceeding from the Gulf coast who settled permanently or temporarily in Teotihuacán, constitutes the basis for this historical record, which may be considered innovative from an artistic viewpoint.

The emigration of a significant number of inhabitants of Teotihuacán as the metropolis came to a crisis determined the encounter within Cacaxtla of groups with a Maya tradition or from the Gulf coast and the Olmeca-Xicalancas or Mixtec who lived in the city. The latter groups bear not only the whole weight of the Teotihuacán iconographic tradition but also their own artistic code. From a historical point of view, the paintings depict a period of social and political restlessness expressed in the military confrontation between contending groups in both tali of Building B. In the record of this event, the figures bearing jaguar emblems clearly represent the victors; the defeated wear bird-shaped helmets.

Yet, the situation of victory and defeat expressed in the wall paintings dealing with war reaches its climax on the walls of the portico of Building A, which was erected a little later. These paintings denote the parallel and simultaneous exaltation and glorification of the dignitaries and their retinue, who appear as enemies in the tali in Building B.

We may ask who these people were that played a main role in this situation, which reflects, in two almost contemporaneous buildings, a dramatic war episode and one dealing with the apotheosis of the rival leaders, which issues a message of peace and friendly agreement. I believe the wall paintings depict the arrival in Cacaxtla of Teotihuacán groups with assorted ethnic and cultural affiliations, among whom the Mixtecan and Maya-like elements would prevail. The fact that the main characters in the wall painting dealing with war are richly clad denotes a high level of cultural de-

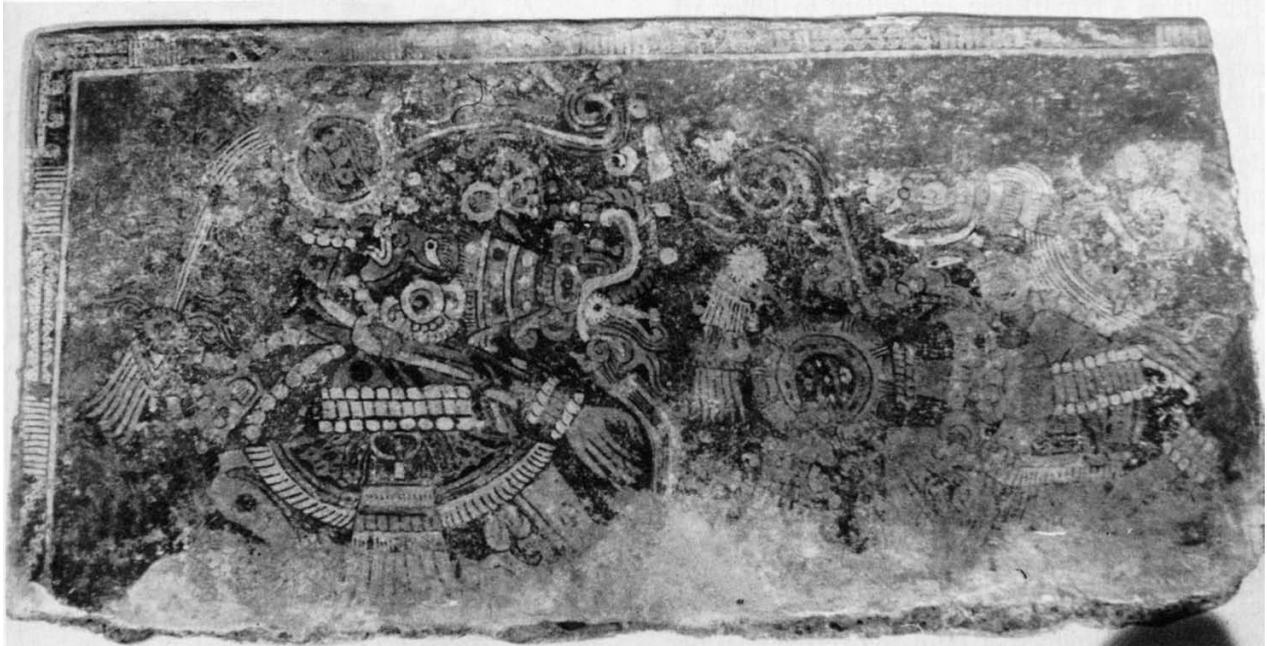


Fig. 25. Teotihuacán. Mural. Collection of José Sáenz, Mexico City.

velopment in the groups to which both belong. This irruption of people from Teotihuacán determined their defeat and their partial extermination by the inhabitants of Cacaxtla (ca. A.D. 650–750). By that time Cacaxtla, as I stated before, was under the political and cultural influence of Cholula.

If, according to the assumptions mentioned above, Cholula constituted the early dwelling of the Mixtec (Olmeca-Xicalancas) in the Puebla-Tlaxcala Valley, we may assume that the inhabitants of Cacaxtla possibly had analogous ethnic characteristics. On the other hand, although the Cholula area and the city itself kept a close relationship to the cultural development of Teotihuacán, it may be observed in many of their artistic manifestations that there are prominent regional forms of expression, as, for example, the Drinkers murals. The relationship between the Gulf coast and Cholula is also evident in other monuments in this city.

In relation, again, to Cacaxtla, the peace treaty depicted on the walls of the portico in Building A supports the existence of a similar cultural background in both groups; although, at first, these groups contended as enemies, after a short period they recognized each other as allies who deserved being glorified with equal stateliness and rank on the walls of Building A. This is connoted by the presence of the feathered serpent and the ser-

pentlike jaguar at the feet of the bird and tiger men, respectively.

The wall paintings in the portico of Building A reflect, in my opinion, the deliberate purpose of the artist of including several essential motifs of the last stages of Teotihuacán artistic ideology, which is not one but plural. The painter retrieved the humanistic germ, already latent, and carried it to its foremost realistic and anthropocentric expression in the wall paintings dealing with war and in those of Building A.

Belonging to the Epiclassic Period, the artist of Cacaxtla perceived the social and political significance which in other regions of Middle America had the individualized personalistic representation of the ruler and its subjection, in monuments (fig. 26), to particular symbolic schemes, related to supernatural figures and glyphic signs that legitimize his right to rule over other peoples. The regional artistic spirit of Cacaxtla, which depicts crucial aspects of this artistic trend with an obvious creative originality, may be easily observed. The Maya spirit is visible, true; but it appears without any Maya epigraphic connotations.

I believe that the context of the mural paintings of Cacaxtla partially reflects the cosmopolitan nature of Teotihuacán in all its cultural and artistic implications. In the Middle American panorama, it

appears as a remarkable antecedent to Toltec art. The extraordinary feathered serpent in the bird man wall painting, a design which foreshadows the serpent-shaped stone column in the buildings of Tula, constitutes a clear example of this. The deifying exaltation of the warrior in Cacaxtla is preserved in Toltec sculpture by means of indistinctive, reiterative schemes. Tula abandons the naturalistic stress suggested in the paintings of Cacaxtla.

As far as the figure of the feathered serpent is concerned, I believe it had an aquatic connotation in Teotihuacán, and it possibly maintains this connotation in the wall painting depicting the bird man in Cacaxtla. However, here, as well as in the later Toltec art, it acquires, besides, a heraldic meaning which establishes a conceptual relationship between the mythological beast and the human being, a relationship which confers historical identity and rank on the latter.

It is my opinion that both the ceremonial bar with a serpentlike top piece, undoubtedly of Maya descent, worn by the bird man in Cacaxtla and the mask headdress with a long nasal appendage, on the head of the character in a jaguar costume on the northern jamb of Building A, also play the role mentioned above. The artist of Cacaxtla selected these symbols and merged them together with the human figure as crucial motifs in the iconography of power in a culture distant, from a geographical point of view, but related to it through ethnic affinity or through the information line produced by traders.

The foregoing considerations partly explain the reasons for the presence of Maya physical traits (the outline of the eyes, the profile, and the cranial deformation) in the bird man in Building B and in the figures of the defeated in the talus depicting war. These elements, besides the ones mentioned above, as well as garments (overskirts and feather cloaks) and the elaborate hairdressing of the dancer on the southern jamb of Building A, constitute features which are disseminated in Maya cities in the Usumacinta area (Palenque, Bonampak), up to its junction with the Pasión River (Seibal). In one of my studies I state that the Putunes, a Mexicanized Maya group of traders, may have contributed to this contact. Xicalango, located on the Gulf coast in the delta formed by the Usumacinta and Grijalva rivers in Tabasco, constituted one of the main centers of this group.

The total absence of symbols pertaining to the Maya hieroglyphic writing system and other motifs distinctive to the artistic repertoire of this cul-

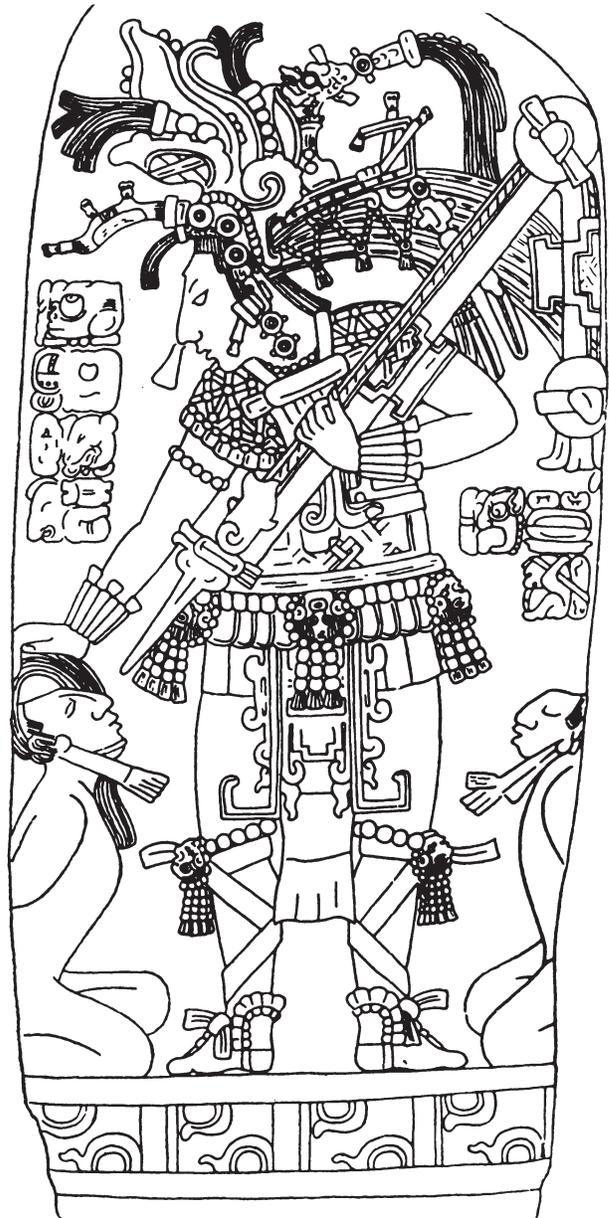


Fig. 26. Balancan—Morales, Tabasco. Stela 4.

ture in the wall painting provides me with sufficient bases for hypothesizing that the Maya influence reached Cacaxtla through Teotihuacán, not through direct penetration. The information, of necessity defective, brought by traders from the Maya area and the Central Plateau favored a dynamic exchange of artistic ideas and concepts which yielded prime fruits in Cacaxtla.

I present the following nonexhaustive list of iconographic symbols shared by Teotihuacán and Cacaxtla:

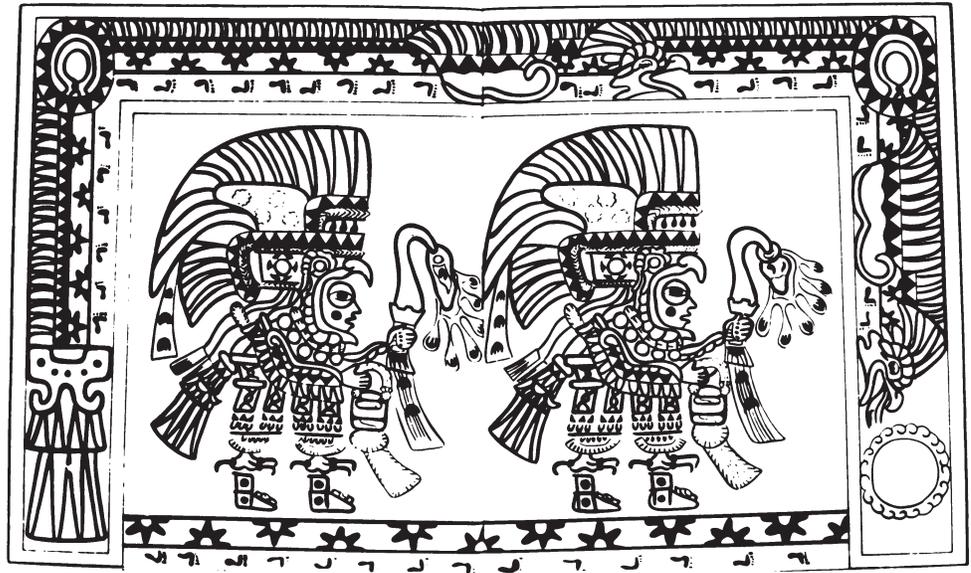


Fig. 27. Teotihuacán. Bird man. Zone 5A.



Fig. 28. Teotihuacán. Atetelco. One of the figures on a wall of Portico 2. White Patio.

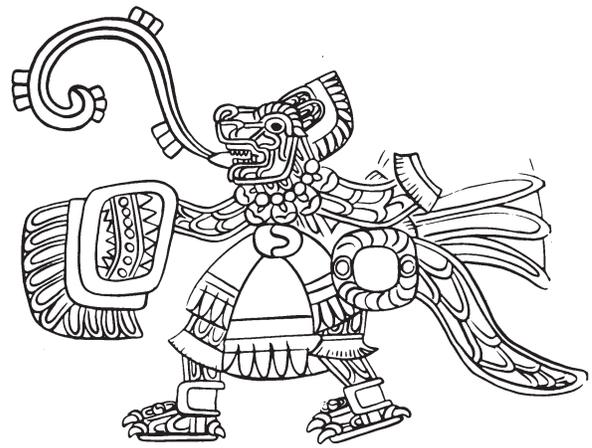


Fig. 29. Teotihuacán. Jaguar man. Zacuala Portico 1.



Fig. 30. Teotihuacán. Aquatic bands. Zone 5A.

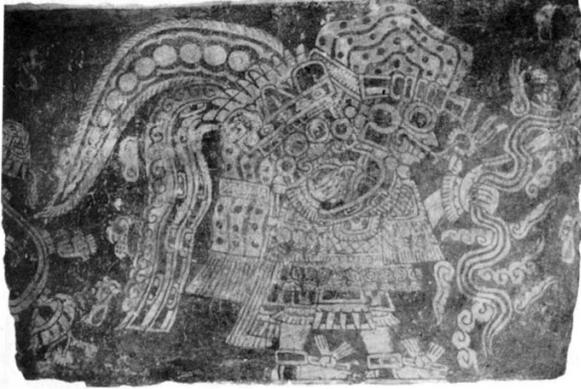


Fig. 31. Teotihuacán. Mural. Tlaloc as a portable object. Blooming plant stemming from the human body. Tlaloc as water purveyor. Collection of José Sáenz, Mexico City.



Fig. 32. Teotihuacán. Tetitla. “Realistic paintings” (fragment).

- Bird man (fig. 27)
- Man carrying a shell (fig. 28)
- Jaguar man (fig. 29)
- Bands decorated with aquatic animals (fig. 30)
- Shell as a portable object (fig. 31)
- Tlaloc as a portable object (fig. 31)
- Blooming plant stemming from the human body (fig. 31)
- Tlaloc as water purveyor (fig. 31)
- Headdresses with a circular element on the front (fig. 32)
- Bands decorated with starfish (fig. 33)
- Feathered serpent (fig. 34)
- Jaguar
- Quetzal (fig. 35)
- Owl (fig. 36)
- Rectangle closed by human hands (fig. 37)
- Footprints arranged geometrically (fig. 38)
- Feathered eye
- Reptile’s eye glyph (in Teotihuacán, more often used in decorated pottery)
- Year symbol on the headdress
- Water or blood glyph
- Flaming glyph
- Bar-and-dot numerals

For a discussion of some of the glyphic signs of Cacaxtla, see Foncerrada de Molina 1977a.

The list above does not include other motifs that appear in Cacaxtla in which significant parallelisms may be observed with the iconography in Xochicalco, Tajín, and Monte Albán and even with later Mixtecan codices. Each of them requires an extensive study of the variants in meaning they acquire in Middle America from a proper historical



Fig. 33. Teotihuacán. Starfish band. Zacuala Portico 9.

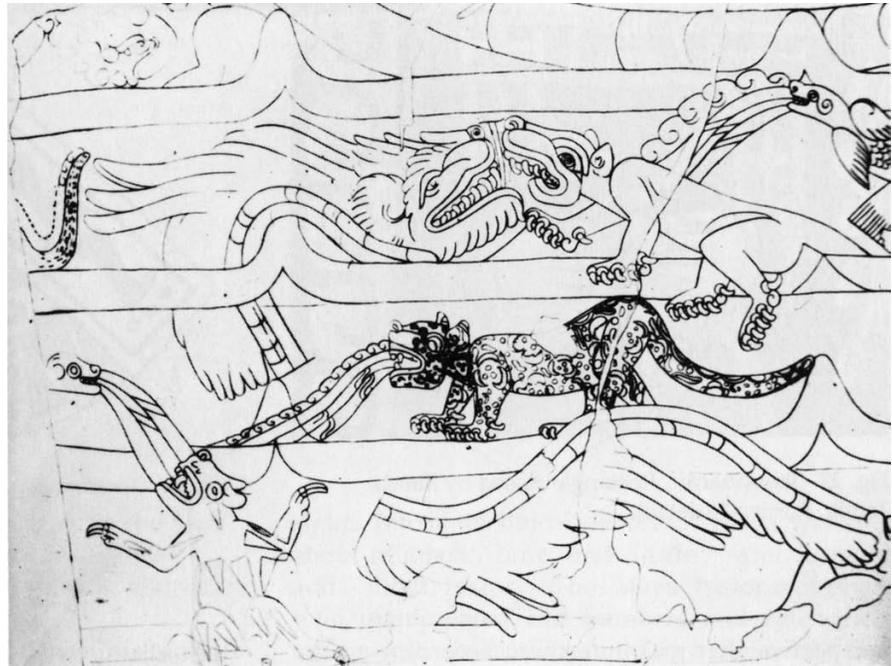


Fig. 34. Teotihuacán. Feathered serpent. Mural of the Mythological Animals. Zone 4.



Fig. 35. Teotihuacán. Quetzal. Tetitla. Corridor 15. Mural 1.

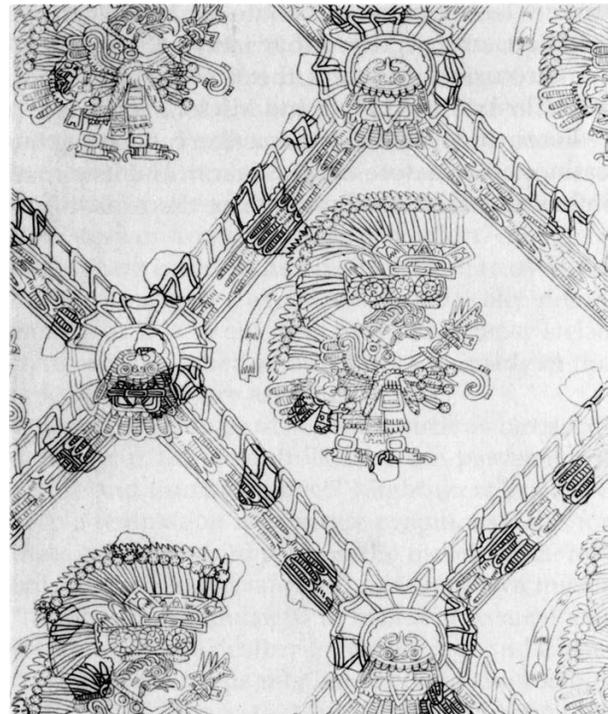


Fig. 36. Teotihuacán. Owl. Atetelco. Portico 1. White Patio.



Fig. 37. Teotihuacán. Rectangle closed by hands. Tetitla. Portico 1 (detail).

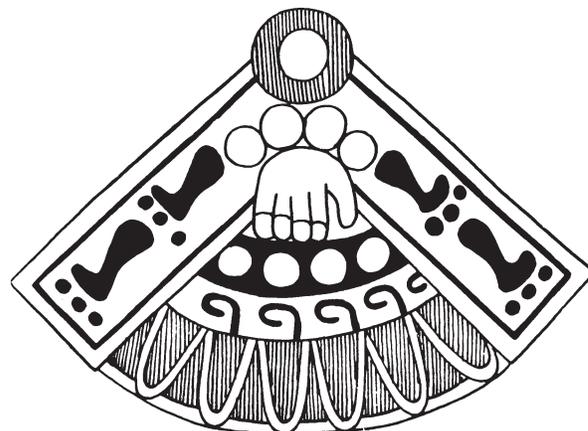


Fig. 38. Teotihuacán. Tetitla (Sejourné 1966c).

perspective that may rate them according to the context in which they appear.

In its representations, Cacaxtla mural painting (fig. 39; see color section) absorbs symbols which correspond to contemporaneous (Xochicalco) or earlier (Teotihuacán and Monte Albán) epigraphic traditions and register other motifs that later became recurrent forms in the iconography of the Post Classic Period (Tula and Mixtecan codices).

To conclude, an initial discussion concerning the cosmopolitan nature of Teotihuacán and its partial influence in the configuration of the artistic pat-

tern distinctive to Cacaxtla mural painting has proved valuable to me.

Cacaxtla constitutes one more example of Middle American regionalism, which was, in this case, capable of transforming the depersonalized, un-historical mystic atmosphere of the image of the human figure in Teotihuacán and of giving birth, within a highly creative eclectic pattern, to a live document of excellent artistic handling, which summarizes and widens the postulates that appear latent, or in an established manner, in the Mesoamerican Middle Classic Period.

The following color plate was published facing Page 179.



Foncerrada de Molina essay, fig. 39. Cacaxtla. Building B. East talus. Section of war mural.

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PART 2

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Jacket illustration:

LORD CHAACAL III

Birth: 9.12.6.5.8 3 Lamat 6 Zac

Accession to the throne of Palenque: 9.14.10.4.2

9 Ik 5 Kayab

Death: pre-9.14.11.12.14 8 Ik 7 Yaxkin

Drawings courtesy of Linda Schele