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THE ALTEPETL, OR “MOUNTAIN OF WATER”

Water, as a vital element for the subsistence of these peoples, acquired a transcendent importance that is present in myths and in the importance of the gods associated with it. It was common belief that water was kept inside mountains or hills; therefore it would not be strange that the sacred mountain would be where the liquid giving life to plants and humans would be kept. In the case of the Pyramid of the Sun, it seems, a stream of water ran inside the aforementioned cave and some stone channels have been found in its interior. The most recent archaeological excavations around the Pyramid of the Sun have resulted in the discovery of a canal, 3 meters wide, surrounding the pyramid on all sides. It has been thought that perhaps this could be a street for specific ceremonies, but the avalanche of water that would come down the sides of the pyramid during the rainy season makes us think seriously that it was a canal. The other “center” of the city of Teotihuacan, the Temple of Quetzalcoatl, has undulating serpents surrounded by snails and conch shells depicted on its façade that speak of the importance of the aquatic element. Furthermore, archaeologist Rubén Cabrera says that a looters’ tunnel inside the building was discovered running into the center, where an inexplicable degree of humidity was detected, suggesting that a source of flowing water might be found just below it.

In the case of Tenochtitlan, particularly the Templo Mayor, we have already mentioned the streams of water and the maize kernels kept inside.

It would be interesting to analyze the *altepetl* character more deeply, because its relation to the community is important from the symbolic as well as social-organization, kinship, and other points of view.

THE PRESENCE OF SACRIFICE AND OFFERINGS

When Leopoldo Batres excavated the Pyramid of the Sun at the beginning of this century, he found the skeletal remains of children in each of the corners of the four sections that make up the building. This fact is particularly interesting given that we know how children were dedicated, in later times, to the cult of the water god, Tlaloc. It would not be strange that this cult would have come from Teotihuacan, since many aspects present in Tenochtitlan previously existed in the earlier city. As for the Temple of Quetzalcoatl, we have the ceremonial burials found by archaeologists Rubén Cabrera and Saburo Sugiyama in specific places and numbers. One of the characteristics of the individuals deposited there, male (nine in number) and female (in groups of four), was that their hands were tied behind their backs. This has been interpreted as human sacrifice in honor of the temple in association with the calendar and agriculture.

As for the Aztec Templo Mayor, various studies speak of the presence of multiple offerings of decapitated skulls, child burials (forty-two on the Tlaloc side in Offering 38), and ritual sacrifice by heart extraction practiced on the side dedicated to Huitzilopochtli, about which various historical sources have left us information.⁶

THE SURROUNDING PLATFORM

In Teotihuacan we see only two places inside the city with large platforms that enclosed and delineated,

in our judgment, the spaces of great sacrality and buildings that were the fundamental center of the city: the Pyramid of the Sun and the Temple of Quetzalcoatl in the Ciudadela. The first of these buildings was

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excavated in 1993 in the Proyecto Especial Teotihuacán, although a portion of the south side, in the so-called House of the Priests, was partially excavated by Batres several years earlier. Surely it was Batres who destroyed part of the platform near the southwest corner to remove debris from the pyramid and constructed his camp on top of the south side, and its excavation has continued in recent years. Returning to the topic at hand, in the past this platform has been interpreted in several different ways. It was first mentioned in the Report of the Pachuca Scientific Commission (Almaraz 1865) on the map of the center of the city, which referred to it as a "rampart" (*muralla*). Later on, it was Batres who said that its function was to provide stability to the great mass of the Pyramid of the Sun, something that evidently did not correspond to reality. Other studies such as Gamio (1922, 1995) and Marquina (1951: 69–76; 1995) only mentioned it, without attributing to it a specific function, while Rémy Bastien (1995), who conducted a study of the Pyramid of the Sun for his 1947 thesis in the School of Anthropology, referred to three functions: 1) mechanical, seeing its absence at the Pyramid of the Moon and "its importance at the Ciudadela"; 2) aesthetic, related to the visual appearance of the complex, and 3) military, or defense. Concerning what he says about the absence of this and other elements we have mentioned from the Pyramid of the Moon, they were omitted so that the Pyramid of the Sun would be considered the "center" of the city.

As for Tenochtitlan, we have various pictographs in which we see the great platform framing the principal plaza with, according to Sahagún (1989), its seventy-eight buildings, inside. Archaeologically, sections of the platform from a later stage of the Templo Mayor have been found with walls that alternate with stairways. The same arrangement is seen at Tlatelolco, where one can examine a large section, including the inside southeast corner. In the case of Tenochtitlan, the rampart or walled-platform is clearly a delimiter of sacred space from which the great causeways running north, west, and south emanated.

In summary, we think that this platform divided two types of space: the interior, consisting of a great plaza imbued with enormous sacrality, and the exterior, profane, or less sacred space.

CONCLUSIONS

In the case of Central Mexico, all these elements had to be present to identify a building as the principal temple, as an axis mundi, with all its implications. In Teotihuacan, evidently, two fundamental centers were established: the Pyramid of the Sun and the Temple of Quetzalcoatl in the Ciudadela. There is also another important fact in relation to this second building: the excavations of Rubén Cabrera allow us to see that this second "center," in turn, was desacralized. There is evidence of a looters' tunnel penetrating the southeast

corner that terminates at the center of the building. Subsequently, the building, at least its principal façade, was covered by another building stage less rich in elements than the one preceding it. Other tunnels made by Teotihuacanos themselves were found in the La Ventilla excavations carried out in the Proyecto Especial Teotihuacán. This leads us to think about the city's development, because this clearly did not occur during a time of internal peace, but rather there were many moments (at least three) in which disturbances in Teotihuacan society must have occurred. These three moments are: 1) when the "center" of the city passed from the Pyramid of the Sun to the Ciudadela, which must have been an enormous transformation with important religious and social implications; 2) when the Temple of Quetzalcoatl was covered and desacralized to such a degree that it was looted; and 3) when we see in later phases (Tlamimilopa-Xolalpan) that looters'