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Reconsidering Fertility Imagery in the Murals of Teotihuacan

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ABSTRACT

RECONSIDERING FERTILITY IMAGERY IN THE MURALS OF TEOTIHUACAN

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This thesis explores fertility imagery in the *Tepantitla Paradise* and *Tetitla Goddess* murals of ancient Teotihuacan in Mexico. In the beginning of the 1970s, these murals had been utilized as case studies in the assertion for the existence of a central female deity known as the Great Goddess, based on an abundance of fertility imagery within the scenes. Scholarship in the field has since discredited this theory, but the deity in the murals remains unidentified. In addition, the city does not offer surviving written texts to provide context for cosmological beliefs, only Teotihuacan's vibrant material culture was left behind after the city's collapse in the eighth century CE. By utilizing cross-cultural examples of mixed gender constructs and cosmology coupled with iconographic parallels, this thesis reconsiders the figures of the *Tepantitla* and *Tetitla* murals as a mixed gender deity based on a presence of both male and female fertility symbols. Iconographic parallels consist of Classic Maya fertility rituals, floral paradise, ball games, and ritual sacrifice. In addition, these components assembled in the *Tepantitla* mural illustrate a significant intention. The murals epitomize propaganda for the collective culture, through the depiction of gender ideals, ritual sacrifice, and a floral paradise. These motifs were included to influence inhabitants to appeal to gender ideals and to live with the possibility of their ritual death for the rewards of the afterlife, as these practices were thought necessary to ensure the longevity of the city and the cycle of the cosmos.

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Introduction

Teotihuacan, an ancient Mesoamerican city that flourished from the second century BCE to the eighth century CE, was a vibrantly painted metropolis. It is located twenty-seven miles from modern-day Mexico City, and in its prime was regionally powerful and influential with a socially diverse population. Modern visitors can encounter evidence of the city's devotion to color, as certain walls and objects exhibit traces of pigments from long ago. While some structures were covered with simple white plaster, the more delicately painted murals decorated both public and private spaces. The fresco murals displayed consistency in style, form, and subjects, and thus the ruins reflected a community of conformity. There are repeated motifs of stylized animals, humans, religious leaders, and deified figures, on the sides of temples and on patio walls of private complexes. Mural painting at Teotihuacan began in the Tzacualli-Miccaotli period (1-170 CE) but reached its technical pinnacle in the Xolalpan period (350-550 CE).[1] It was during this technical pinnacle Teotihuacan developed the red pigment the city is famous for. The murals function as invaluable primary resources for understanding the city's culture, social organization, and religious practices. While there are no surviving written texts or an accepted translation of available glyphs, art historians utilize the city's material culture, along with comparisons to concurrent cultures, and written evidence of the Post-Classic Aztecs for verification of their theories.[2] For decades, the famous burgundy dye and compelling imagery have stimulated scholars and they have speculated about complex murals such as the *Palacio de*

[1] Diana Magaloni-Kerpel, Megan O'Neil, and Maria Teresa Uriarte, "The Moving Image: Painted Vessels at Teotihuacan and the Maya Area," In *Teotihuacan: The World Beyond the City*, Edited by Kenneth Hirth, David Carballo, and Barbara Arroyo, (Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2020): 198.

[2] There have been numerous attempts to understand or decode the glyphs in Teotihuacan imagery, but there is not a widely accepted translation. George Cowgill, "State and Society at Teotihuacan," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 26 (1997): 130.

Tepantitla "Paradise" Mural (Fig. 1-2) of Portico 2 in the Tepantitla apartment complex and the *Palacio de Tetitla Goddess Mural* (Fig. 3) of Portico 11 in the Tetitla complex, both made during the Xolalpan period (350-550 CE).[3]

The Great Goddess was first introduced as an idea into the field because of the interpretation that water and nature iconography equated to female fertility. The idea was based on the ancient Mesoamerican belief in feminine places of the earth, especially caves, and fertility iconography of water and budding flowers. In Mesoamerican thought, caves were conceptually considered the womb of the earth.[4] This idea combined with an abundance of fertility iconography at Teotihuacan contributed to the theory of a female "Great Goddess," but it also relied on the western assumption that female presence and significance derived from their biology and ability to procreate. However, before Esther Pasztory had categorized the water and nature iconography present within the murals as an example of female fertility the inclusion of water first led to the identification of the male Storm God as the subject of the contested murals.[5]. Pasztory worked to group many of the figures in the city under the moniker of the Great Goddess with help from other scholars. The Goddess eventually replaced the Storm God as

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[3] The famous wine-like hue of the *Tepantitla Paradise Mural* was produced with hematite. There were four distinct technical phases of red paint, and it was during the Late Tlamimilolpa period (250-350 CE) in the Second Technical Phase, in which artists began to use this dark burgundy tone. The process utilized at Teotihuacan included powdered pigments suspended in water and painted over a wet lime substrate that chemically produced calcium carbonate as it dried. Analysis further proved that Teotihuacan artists used mica as a polishing agent, which has a golden color and is highly reflective, adding a glittering quality to the red murals. This technique and the advanced dark burgundy red are encompassed in the images of the selected murals for this thesis. See Diana Magaloni-Kerpel, "The Colors of Time: Teotihuacan Mural Painting Tradition," In *Teotihuacan: City of Water, City of Fire*, Edited by Robb, M.H, (San Francisco: University of California Press, 2017), 174-179.

[4] Karl Taube, "The Teotihuacan Cave of Origin: The Iconography and Architecture of Emergence Mythology in Mesoamerica and the American Southwest," *Anthropology and Aesthetics*, no. 12 (1986): 52.

[5] Esther Pasztory, "The Iconography of the Teotihuacan Tlaloc," *Studies in Pre-Columbian Art and Archaeology*, no. 15, (1974), 5.

the central deity of Teotihuacan, even though experts were still unsure of the figures' sex, gender, abilities, or significance.[6] Biological sex characteristics were not present in the scenes, and it was posited by some that the Great Goddess was non-binary or gender fluid, a persuasive theory considering the prevalence of mixed gender deities in other ancient Mesoamerican cultures.[7] Whether the Great Goddess can be challenged as an authentic deity has been deliberated by scholars such as Zoltan Paulinyi.[8] The focus of this thesis are the full figure murals of Teotihuacan – *Palacio de Tepantitla Paradise Mural* (Fig. 1-2) and *Palacio de Tetitla Goddess Mural* (Fig. 3), sometimes referred to as the *Jade Tlaloc Mural*, as they are most often referenced as images of the Great Goddess. In earlier research, scholars had less evidence to understand Teotihuacan society, and were more than reasonable in their assertions. With more information of the society coming forth all the time, one of the goals is to underscore the importance of analyzing the murals through the lens of ancient Mesoamerican fertility and gender understandings as opposed to employing contemporary western analysis.

Classic Maya (300-600 CE) immigrants were widespread in Teotihuacan, and the *Tetitla* apartment complex is theorized to have housed inhabitants of Maya descent.[9] The Classic Maya

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[6] Nichols, "Teotihuacan," 23.

[7] Elisa C. Mandell, "A New Analysis of the Gender Attribution of the Great Goddess of Teotihuacan," *Ancient Mesoamerica* 26, no. 1 (2015): 33.

[8] Zoltan Paulinyi, "The Great Goddess: Fiction or Reality?" Ancient Mesoamerica 17, no. 1 (2006): 1.

[9] The Tetitla compound is theorized to have housed a family of shell traders and artisans from the Maya region close to the Gulf of Mexico. The burials underneath the floors of the Tetitla compound contained lavish shell necklaces, shell trumpets, and other shell artifacts. The shell necklace is thought to have belonged to an elite individual and is a testament to a sustained cultural identity as it was a unique artifact in the city. See Matthew Robb, "Tetitla," *Teotihuacan City of Water City of Fire*, edited by M.H. Robb, (San Francisco: University of California Press, 2017): 356-357. This find can further be corroborated by other shell artifacts found at Teotihuacan, also thought to have come from trade with the Maya or from Maya emigration. Findings include burials under the Moon Pyramid which featured incised shells with watery motifs. They featured bands of circles, "lazy-S" signs, and fine incisions that echo iconography for the Maya, as similar watery motifs were found on artifacts from burials in

are discussed often, and so it is important to note that the various city-states of the Classic Maya were not a homogenous whole, but rather made up of culturally distinct groups, and the various city-states are discussed because of significant parallels or connections to Teotihuacan. Evidence of trade verifies the strong connection between the city-states of the Classic Maya and Teotihuacan. Via iconographic parallels and the inclusion of Maya ideology, the *Tepantitla Mural* displays an integration of Teotihuacan and Classic Maya ideals of sacrifice and rebirth. This, coupled with the city's standardized motifs, supports the idea these images were created as propaganda for sacrifice. Furthermore, the parallels to surrounding cultures suggest imagery selected for foreign inhabitants, likely higher-ranking individuals, as the painted murals typically decorated the compounds of the elite or in public spaces.[10] This thesis reconsiders the figures of the *Tepantitla* and *Tetitla* murals as a mixed gender deity with associations to both female and male fertility, taken from Teotihuacan and Classic Maya cosmology, to reach an integrated audience. The selected murals present the viewer with a mixed gender deity and fertility symbols to represent the cooperation of gender roles, and the rewards that occur from abiding by them. This was considered necessary to sustain the state and to ensure the continuation of life cycles. The *Tepantitla* and *Tetitla* murals were created as propaganda meant to encourage the inhabitants of the compounds to appeal to gender ideals and to consciously live with the possibility of their ritual death, all practices which were thought necessary to ensure the endurance of the city and the cosmos.

Tikal. See Nikolai Grube and Sergio Gomez Chavez, "Preliminary Iconographic Study of the Shell Trumpets from the Tlalocan Project," in *Teotihuacan City of Water City of Fire,* edited by M.H. Robb, (San Francisco: University of California Press, 2017): 248.

[10] Robb, "Tetitla," *Teotihuacan City of Water City of Fire*, edited by M.H. Robb, (San Francisco: University of California Press, 2017): 357.

Teotihuacan was a political center of immense economic and military strength, and its legacy of foreign relations, urbanism, and state formation is still revered in the modern day.[11] As a testament to this, the city's trade and craft production flourished on an unprecedented scale to the likes not seen again until the Aztecs founded Tenochtitlan.[12] For the Post-Classic Aztecs, Teotihuacan was a mythical site of creation. It is not known what caused the downfall of the city, but it had laid quiet and abandoned for hundreds of years before the Aztecs discovered it in the fifteenth century. It was a city of wonder and they believed it to be the birthplace of the gods, so they named it "Teotihuacan," which in Nahuatl, the language of the Post-Classic Aztecs to modern day, is translated to "place of the gods," or "where divinity comes into being." [13] Teotihuacan was the largest and most unique city in Mesoamerica at the time. Teotihuacan is recognized for its massive city plaza oriented to the Avenue of the Dead, along which sit the three major pyramids of the Sun, the Moon, and the Feathered Serpent. These were built to be temples, as the city frequently participated in ritual sacrifice, and victims were buried below the Moon and Feathered Serpent pyramids.[14] The presence of monumental temple construction, and murals with depictions of figures interpreted as deities and priests, constitute the primary evidence in support of a theocratic organization. During its apogee, from the third century CE to the sixth century CE, Teotihuacan was densely populated with about 100,000 to 150,000 inhabitants which included immigrants from other Mesoamerican regions. It is among the few

[11] Deborah L. Nichols, "Teotihuacan," *Journal of Archaeological Research* 24, no. 1 (2016): 1-2.

[12] Kenneth G. Hirth, David M. Carballo, and Barbara Arroyo, "Teotihuacan and the Classic Period Mesoamerican World." in Teotihuacan: The World Beyond the City, (Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2020): 1.

[13] George Cowgill, *Ancient Teotihuacan, Early Urbanism in Central Mexico*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015): 4.

[14] Saburo Sugiyama, "The Feather Serpent Pyramid at Teotihuacan: Monumentality and Sacrificial Burials," in *Teotihuacan City of Water City of Fire*, edited by M.H. Robb, (San Francisco: University of California Press, 2017) 59.

ancient cities in the world to have developed multifamily apartment compounds as urban housing.[15] During the 1960s and 1970s, scholars Rene Millon, George Cowgill, and Bruce Drewitt carried out the extensive Teotihuacan Mapping Project**,** during which Millon and others surveyed the entire Teotihuacan Valley and created the first complete map of the entire city. The city may have been divided into four districts by the north-south Avenue of the Dead and the east and west avenues, and in each district were different neighborhoods. Surrounding the city were also ethnic enclaves of people emigrating from Oaxaca, Michoacan, and Veracruz, each maintaining their original identity through distinctive rituals, symbolic items, and foreign goods.[16] There is an extensive amount of evidence for interaction of Teotihuacan with Classic period Maya cities in the surrounding areas, including Tikal in Guatemala, Copan in Honduras, and Yaxchilan in Mexico. Teotihuacan also had ties to the Zapotec civilization from the Valley of Oaxaca in Southern Mexico.[17] These regions are vital to discuss because their inhabitants functioned as trade partners, immigrants, and sometimes ritual victims to Teotihuacan.[18] Furthermore, the presence of foreigners within the city resulted in widespread distribution of imported goods, and especially innovative ideas in writing and artistic styles to inspire iconography at Teotihuacan.

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[15] David Carballo and Matthew Robb, "Lighting the World: Teotihuacan and Urbanism in Central Mexico," In *Teotihuacan City of Water City of Fire*, edited by M.H. Robb, (San Francisco: University of California Press, 2017) 12.

[16] Michael E. Smith, "Mesoamerica's First World City, Teotihuacan in Comparative Perspective," In *Teotihuacan, The World Beyond the City,* edited by Kenneth Hirth, David Carballo, and Barbara Arroyo (Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2020): 33.

[17] Wesley D. Stoner and Marc D. Marino, "Disembedded Networks of Interaction between Teotihuacan and the Gulf Lowlands," In *Teotihuacan, The World Beyond the City,* edited by Kenneth Hirth, David Carballo, and Barbara Arroyo (Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2020): 321.

[18] Sugiyama, "The Feather Serpent Pyramid at Teotihuacan: Monumentality and Sacrificial Burials," 59.

Literature Review & Methodology

Early Interpretations

There is substantial scholarship concerning the contested murals, and the focus for this section is on the history of their discovery and original interpretations up to their identification as the Goddess and the Goddess' subsequent decline as a theory. In addition, the section discusses the evidence of mixed gender deities from other cultures, and the interaction between Teotihuacan and contemporaneous cultures provides a basis of cultural influence and accounts for iconographic parallels. Lastly, there is discussion of accepted female deities at Teotihuacan to explain why a female presence should not be dismissed as a prospect within the city's iconography. This discussion also accounts for why this thesis argues for mixed gender rather than a solely male figure.

The Mexican government first excavated Teotihuacan in the nineteenth century, and Alfonso Caso discovered the *Tepantitla* and *Tetitla* murals in 1933. By the twentieth century western archaeologists and scholars interposed their own analyses, and the lack of surviving texts produced a turbulent academic journey. The city's found objects and structures are some of the only evidence available to scholars, in addition to concurrent and later cultures iconography and writings. With room for interpretation, the identity and social meaning of principal deities depicted in murals have shifted radically within the last fifty years. Early scholars such as Manuel Gamio, Alfonso Caso, Laurette Séjourné, and Janet Berlo first referred to the mural figures as Tlaloc, the Aztec rain deity.[19] The Post-Classic Aztec took frequent trips to the ancient city and returned home with artifacts to function as offerings in their sacred temple, the Temple

[19] Jesper Nielsen and Christophe Helmke, "The Storm God: Lord of Rain and Ravage," In *Teotihuacan: City of Water, City of Fire*, Edited by Robb, M.H, (San Francisco: University of California Press, 2017), 139.

Mayor in Tenochtitlan. [20] It is because of this cultural interaction that Aztec deities are considered inspired by Teotihuacan. For example, archaeologists have long acknowledged the Teotihuacan Storm God as a predecessor to Tlaloc—the Aztec rain deity. However, since the 1980s, experts in the field have preferred to not refer to the figure as Tlaloc, since the Aztec deity did not exist in the same manner until after Teotihuacan had fallen. The Storm God is necessary to discuss because of the widespread iconography of the deity within the city.

Among the deities in the pantheon of Teotihuacan, the Storm God held a principal place. The deity was strongly associated with mountains, volcanoes, and lakes, and is believed to have the ability to create lightning, fire, and rain.[21] The Storm God was thus related to both fertility and destruction. The initial classification of the selected murals as the Storm God was due to excavations of the city, as in Burial 2 of the Moon Pyramid which yielded simple ceramic vessel jars with elements that relate to a rain deity (Fig. 4). They featured shared attributes found in murals of the Storm God, including goggled eyes, three short fangs, and a curved upper lip, found in examples at Teotihuacan at the close of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century. Examples which clearly show the Storm God's features include tripod cylinder vessels such as this example from the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (Fig. 5). Similar features were recognized in mural examples such as this fragment thought to have been taken from the Techinantitla compound (Fig. 6).[22] The deity holds a lightning bolt in his left hand which emits clouds and flames. He also holds a vessel for water, and a plant emerges from his mouth. The Storm God sometimes featured a water lily or maize plant emerging from the mouth, as seen in

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[20] Carballo and Robb, "Lighting the World," 13.

[21] Nielsen and Helmke, "The Storm God: Lord of Rain and Ravage," 139.

the mural example, and coupled with fire and lighting, the mural underscores the deity's dual aspect of fertility and destruction.[23] In another mural fragment found at the Tetitla complex, the Storm God is depicted pouring water from effigy vessels and holding an undulating object interpreted as lighting (Fig. 7).[24] In 1945, Pedro Armillas published the first exhaustive analysis of the Storm God and linked elements of Teotihuacan imagery to the deity, including the jaguar, serpent, owl, butterfly, bifurcated tongue, water lily, and spider, but the contested murals were not included.[25] Additionally, the aggressive actions of the Storm God led to an association with the actions of the powerful warriors of Teotihuacan state.[26] For the next twenty years, all figures found with these elements at Teotihuacan were assigned to the Storm God deity. Scholars continued to follow this trend and attributed all imagery to the Storm God including the selected murals of the *Tepantitla* and *Tetitla* complexes, which limited analysis for the possibility that these figures represented something or somebody else. The mass attribution of figures representing a single deity became a trend for early scholarship on the iconography of Teotihuacan and limited comprehension of the city and its imagery.

In 1962, American scholar George Kubler proposed the idea that the central figure in the Paradise mural of the Tepantitla apartment complex at Teotihuacan was not the male Storm God but rather a female figure he called the Water Goddess. He did so because of the presence of feminine garments, and an abundance of what was interpreted as fertility iconography.[27]

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[23] Nielsen and Helmke, "The Storm God: Lord of Rain and Ravage," 138.

[24] Pasztory, "The Iconography of the Teotihuacan Tlaloc," 7.

[25] Pedro Armillas, "Los dioses de Teotihuacan," *Anales del Instituto de Etnologia Americana*, vol. 6 (1945): 35-61, 35.

[26] Nielsen and Helmke, "The Storm God: Lord of Rain and Ravage," 139.

[27] George Kubler, *The Art and Architecture of Ancient America*, (UK: Penguin Books, 1962): 37.

Feminine garments included a *quechquemitl*, a Mesoamerican triangular poncho typically worn by women of noble status.[28] Fertility iconography included gushing water and elements of the earth, such as seeds, budding flowers, and the nourishment of the fields. However, the theory overlooked the Mesoamerican cultural context and superimposed a western tendency to reduce feminine roles to biology and fertility. This theory was pioneering at the time because it was uncommon in western scholarship to argue a deity was feminine unless there were obvious biological markers, and there are none present in the murals. Then in 1967, Kubler published an article entitled "The Iconography of the Art of Teotihuacan," in which he referred to the figure within the famous "paradise mural" of *Tepantitla* as a feminine deity. He also cited simple forms, repetition, and dual alternating forms as important staples of the murals and introduced the idea of pictorial symbolism as a method to understand them.[29] A decade later, Esther Pasztory challenged the masculine gender identity of the *Tepantitla Mural* in her dissertation for Columbia University.[30] At the same time, Peter Furst in, "Morning Glory and Mother Goddess at Tepantitla," agreed with Esther Pasztory and George Kubler that the figure represented a Mother Goddess figure**.**[31] Kubler's articles served as the basis for the work of Esther Pasztory and enabled her and colleagues to invent the idea of the Great Goddess.

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[28] Peter Furst, "Morning Glory and Mother Goddess at Tepantitla: Iconography and Analogy in Pre-Columbian Art," in *Mesoamerican Archaeology, New Approaches*, edited by Norman Hammond, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1972): 197.

[29] Pictorial symbolism includes the interpretation of repeated motifs at Teotihuacan through their resemblance to a physical object or objects from documented mythology in the area. See George Kubler, "The Iconography of the Art of Teotihuacan," *Studies in Pre-Columbian Art and Archaeology*, no. 4, (1967): 5-6.

[30] Esther Pasztory, *The Murals of Tepantitla, Teotihuacan*, Dissertation for Columbia University, New York, 1972, (New York: Garland Publishing, 1976)

[31] Furst, "Morning Glory and Mother Goddess at Tepantitla," 193.

The Great Goddess

Esther Pasztory, Rene Millon, and Clara Millon identified images of the Great Goddess beginning in the 1970s. In 1974, Pasztory employed iconographic analysis and Kubler's attribution of a female god to interpret the *Tepantitla Paradise Mural* as an earth and fertility goddess.[32] She proposed the name "Great Goddess," and the moniker found wide acceptance. In her dissertation, she used the *Paradise Mural* at *Tepantitla* and introduced the Great Goddess as a deity that would constitute young and old, merciful and malevolent, masculine and feminine.[33] However, in 1983, Pasztory discarded the idea of a male-female deity and declared the image to be a fully feminine goddess that corresponded as a forebear to the Post-Classic Aztec goddess Xochiquetzal. The goddess Xochiquetzal was associated with fertility, and served as a protector of young mothers; she was a patron goddess of pregnancy, childbirth, and the crafts practiced by Aztec women such as weaving.[34]

While Pasztory made this connection, Kubler did not attempt to link the figure with well-known fertility goddesses of the late Post-Classic Aztec, because he rejected the concept of continuity between Teotihuacan and the Aztecs, as several hundred years separated them.[35] Pasztory was not in the same school of thought, and along with Claire and Renee Millon, proposed a female central deity, which was a glass-ceiling shattering contribution to the field.

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[32] Esther Pasztory, "The Iconography of the Teotihuacan Tlaloc," *Studies in Pre-Columbian Art and Archaeology*, no. 15, (1974), 11.

[33] Esther Pasztory, *The Murals of Tepantitla, Teotihuacan*, Dissertation for Columbia University, New York, 1972, (New York: Garland Publishing, 1976), 1.

[34] Furst, "Morning Glory and Mother Goddess at Tepantitla," 198.

[35] Furst, "Morning Glory and Mother Goddess at Tepantitla," 198.

According to Pasztory, the Great Goddess had three customary characteristics which could be used to identify her—a mouth-obscuring nose bar, an avian headdress, and a yellow and red zigzag design, though these attributes do not align with Xochiquetzal.[36] Karl Taube expanded on these to include the fanged nose bar and the feminine garments. In 1983, Taube accepted the *Tepantitla* image as a true representation of the Goddess, and included the *Tetitla* mural with it, and presented their *quechquemitls* as evidence.[37]

In 1993, Pasztory and Kathleen Berrin published a book entitled *Teotihuacan: Art from the City of the Gods,* in which they defined additional attributes of the Goddess in the *Tepantitla* and *Tetitla* murals specifically.[38] According to them, the Goddess was always shown frontally, her face either missing or covered in a mask, large headdress, and her hands outstretched giving water, seeds, and jade treasures. In the *Tepantitla Paradise Mural*, the Goddess is described as emerging out of a body of water, placed on a platform wherein a cave is also featured full of seeds "like her womb."[39] Additionally, a tree grows behind her laden with flowers, dripping with moisture and surrounded by birds and butterflies. According to Pasztory, the Goddess sometimes manifested solely as hands, called "bestowing hands," which featured symbols of abundance flowing from the palms. The scrolls of abundance are seen in the *Tetitla* mural, in addition to an impressive headdress, and a mouth with visible teeth. Just as with the Storm God, over time with more attributions of her name, the Goddess featured a wide range of characteristics. Pasztory described the Goddess as more important than the Storm God, and claimed the latter was not an

[36] Pasztory, "The Iconography of the Teotihuacan Tlaloc," 11.

[37] Karl Taube, "The Teotihuacan Spider Woman," *Journal of Latin American Lore* 9, (1983): 108-109.

[38] Kathleen Berrin and Esther Pasztory, eds, *Teotihuacan: Art from the City of the Gods,* (San Francisco: Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 1993), 56-57.

[39] Berrin and Pasztory, *Teotihuacan: Art from the City of the Gods,* 56.

ideal candidate for a supreme deity.[40] These events enabled scholars to identify the Great Goddess as the central deity of Teotihuacan, but criticisms of this theory occurred a few years after.

In 2006, Zoltan Paulinyi questioned the existence of a "Great Goddess." As mentioned, the Goddess had prevented the identification and study of other deities. This was evident from the ever-expanding list of the Goddess' attributes, which made for an overwhelming, all-powerful deity with far too many different representations. Meanwhile the analysis of other identified deities dropped. In his article, Paulinyi recounted Esther Pasztory's theories of the "Goddess" from her 1973 article, "The Gods of Teotihuacan," in which Pasztory identified qualifying characteristics of the Goddess. These characteristics included yellow "bestowing" hands, bared teeth, broad headdress with bird in the center, face or eye mask, nose ornament with fangs, mountain platform, yellow body color, and a cosmic tree and spider.[41] Most often, Pasztory cites a headdress with a zigzag border, yellow body, cave-like spaces, and faces hidden by masks. However, some of these qualifying characteristics collapsed as they occurred in representations of the Storm God as well. Paulinyi criticized the monopoly of yellow as an aspect of only the Goddess, because other deities, such as in some murals depicting the Storm God, also featured this skin color. Paulinyi criticized the "bestowing hands with fringed wristbands," and contested that it could not identify a female deity because fringed wristbands were masculine

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[40] Pasztory, *Teotihuacan: Art from the City of the Gods*, 57.

[41] Paulinyi, "The Great Goddess: Fiction or Reality?" 6.

attributes.[42] This argument, however, also overlooks the prevalence of gender fluid deities and rulers in ancient Mesoamerica.

In 2001, Cecelia Klein critiqued the modern western assumption of two genders, whereas anthropology and history has made it clear this has not been the case always and everywhere.[43] In 2015, Elisa Mandell added to this perspective with her argument that there was nothing to suggest a nose bar or avian headdress were feminine attributes, and mixed gendered deities were prevalent in Mesoamerica, so feminine garments were not a guarantee.[44] In another contention of the Great Goddess, Esther Pasztory claimed the deity's teeth were a manifestation of her destructive aspect, but Paulinyi maintained this did not correspond with her benevolent nature, which had previously been identified by her "bestowing" hands. Overall, there were too many aspects of the Goddess to make sense of her true character. On the other hand, Pasztory's theory of dual nature is very compelling, especially since the Storm God featured a similar dual nature of fertility and destruction. This thesis builds on the idea of a dual nature for the central figure of the *Tepantitla Paradise* mural and argues that the fertility images relate to a mixed gender deity.

Female Deities at Teotihuacan

There are other suspected female deities in the pantheon tied to fertility, but their multiple gendered associations in dress and iconography lend support for mixed gendered figures at

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[42] Zoltan Paulinyi claims that fringed wristbands are considered masculine attributes because they can be found on masculine beings exclusively throughout Teotihuacan art, and additionally Paulinyi claims that in other images of the Goddess she wears bracelets with no fringe. See Paulinyi, "The Great Goddess: Fiction or Reality?" 2.

[43] Cecelia F. Klein, "None of the Above: Gender Ambiguity in Nahua Ideology," in *Gender in Pre-Hispanic America*, edited by Cecelia F. Klein. (Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2001): 184.

[44] Mandell, "A New Analysis of the Gender Attribution of the Great Goddess of Teotihuacan," 33-34.

Teotihuacan. There are deities which illustrate the prevalence of supposed female deities in Teotihuacan's iconography. The Teotihuacan Spider Goddess, for example, was considered conceptually linked to women in the society by a few scholars, as well as spider iconography.[45] According to Karl Taube and Annabeth Headrick, spiders represented the ideal gender roles such as weaving and motherhood, but these gender roles were based on the Post-Classic Aztec goddess Xochiquetzel, the patron goddess for pregnancy and weaving.[46] The iconography of the spider shows up frequently in the iconography of Teotihuacan, including the *Tepantitla Paradise* mural which features spiders on the leaves of the trees. In 2017 scholars Christophe Helmke and Jesper Nielsen argued against the idea of the Great Goddess and contended that the *Tetitla* and *Tepantitla* murals depicted an amalgamation of female deities, such as the Water Goddess.[47] This deity has been long recognized at Teotihuacan and was once identified as the central figure in the murals.

The most impressive example of the deity's presence is the largest sculpture known from Teotihuacan, an almost four-meter-tall andesite monolith that was found lying face down to the west of the Moon Plaza (Fig. 8). It may have originally stood atop the Moon Pyramid, but either way it is thought to be associated with the structure.[48] From 1889, scholars have identified the

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[45] Taube, "The Teotihuacan Spider Woman," 108.

[46] Annabeth Headrick, *The Teotihuacan Trinity: The Sociopolitical Structure of an Ancient Mesoamerican City*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007), 141-142.

[47] Christophe Helmke and Jesper Nielsen, "Of Gods and Rituals: The Religion of Teotihuacan," in *Teotihuacan City of Water City of Fire*, edited by M.H. Robb, (San Francisco: University of California Press, 2017) 135.

[48] Cowgill, *Ancient Teotihuacan, Early Urbanism in Central Mexico*, 91.

monolith as a female deity known as the Water Goddess.[49] It is still a point of consensus today, although the identity of the monolith has shifted back and forth over the years. The Water Goddess was initially identified as a female deity through its earspools, large flat headband, *quechquemitl* poncho, netted skirt with beads along the hem, and fringed sandals. Cowgill referenced this attire as "unmistakably womanly."[50] This again shows a trend for identification through garments. The Water Goddess is additionally thought to be related to both water and the mountains, and this is underscored by the sculpture's rectangular block shape which reminds the observer of the heavy properties of stone. The face is shallowly carved and extremely symmetrical. Its cheeks are flat planes, framed by large ear ornaments, and its eyes are simple raised ovals. Below the chin is a beaded necklace, partly cut off by a hole drilled in the chest. The deity draws its hands inward towards the chest, also a flat plane. The sculpture gives no hint to sexual organs. The sculpture has neither a bird headdress nor a fanged nose plaque, distinguishing it from the *Tepantitla* and *Tetitla* murals, though scholars have attempted to identify it as an image of the Great Goddess in the past for the inclusion of the *quechquemitl* and skirt. In one instance, Rosemary Joyce asserted that netted skirts were female attire which often featured horizontal markers for a reference to the earth and feminine fertility.[51] Yet this theory is complicated by the sculpture's short skirt that is like skirts typically worn by men.[52] The rectangular headdress of the Water Goddess also features a small cleft at the very top. This indentation mimics the clefts seen frequently in the heads or headdresses of Olmec kings, who

[49] Matthew Robb, "The Water Goddess," In *Teotihuacan City of Water City of Fire*, edited by M.H. Robb, (San Francisco: University of California Press, 2017) 154.

[50] Cowgill, *Ancient Teotihuacan, Early Urbanism in Central Mexico*, 92.

[51] Headrick, *The Teotihuacan Trinity*, 33.

[52] Headrick, *The Teotihuacan Trinity*, 33.

were often associated with cleft mountains, and their headdresses featured sprouts or trees emerging from the split in their headdresses.[53] The Olmec of the Gulf Coast was a civilization from 1600 to 350 BCE and considered to have inspired both Teotihuacan and the Pre-Classic Maya regions. This shared ancestor is additional evidence for the interaction of the Classic Maya to Teotihuacan, but there is more considerable evidence of their connection.

Interactions with the Classic Maya

Archaeologists have long recognized that Teotihuacan's influence extended beyond the Valley of Mexico. The evidence of Teotihuacan's reach is present at a few Classic Maya sites, including Tikal in Guatemala and Copan in Honduras. Teotihuacan also held ties to the Zapotec civilization from the Valley of Oaxaca in Southern Mexico.[54] These contemporaneous civilizations are invaluable sources for context, especially the varying regions of the Classic Maya. While exact numbers for Classic Maya peoples at Teotihuacan are unknown, there is evidence of immigration.[55] This evidence included the Maya shell traders in the compound of Tetitla, but also evidence of foreign-born civilians that were sacrificed in rituals and buried beneath the Feathered Serpent and Moon pyramids.[56] Trade relations were strong between

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[53] Headrick, *The Teotihuacan Trinity*, 35.

[54] Sarah C. Clayton, "Interregional Relationships in Mesoamerica: Interpreting Maya Ceramics at Teotihuacan," *Latin American Antiquity* 16, no. 4 (2005): 427.

[55] Archaeologists were able to discover a presence of immigrants through oxygen-isotope studies and archaeological excavation of apartment compounds, pyramids, and population estimates, all of which suggest that Teotihuacan was sustained by a high influx of foreigners. See Michael E. Smith, "Mesoamerica's First World City, Teotihuacan in Comparative Perspective," In *Teotihuacan, The World Beyond the City*, edited by Kenneth Hirth, David Carballo,and Barbara Arroyo, (Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2020): 37.

[56] Oxygen-isotope data was utilized for analysis of inhabitants' geographic information. Interpretations of oxygen-isotope data from human skeletal remains rely on regional environmental variability in oxygen-isotope ratios, meaning individuals with ratios atypical of those defined archaeologically are likely to have come from elsewhere. Burials beneath the Tetitla compound and the Feathered Serpent and Moon pyramids yielded results of

Teotihuacan and various Maya city-states. Tikal was one of the most enduring trade relations, and it was proposed that Tikal functioned as a regional capital, through which Teotihuacan set up regional enclaves to channel relations with other Maya cities surrounding Tikal.[57] Their interaction can be found at lowland Maya sites too.[58] This is verified by evidence of extensive trade, including a significant presence of green obsidian objects such as flint knives. Obsidian was a material that naturally occurred in the region surrounding Teotihuacan and was controlled by the city, and so its presence in outer regions is considerable evidence for trade.[59] Other examples of interaction include Early Classic stelae found at Tikal, such as the famous *Stelae 31* from Tikal (Fig. 9), which depicts a Teotihuacan-clad warrior. The individual is Yax Nuun Ayiin I, and in 2000, David Stuart argued this individual disrupted the Maya line when he ascended the throne in Tikal, though he had been born in Teotihuacan. He wears two versions of a war headdress. He carries an *atlatl*, or a spear thrower, in his right hand, and in his left hand he clutches a shield bearing the image of the Storm God. The spear thrower features emulations of the Storm God including the deity's well-known goggled eyes on the finger grips. The evidence for interaction is significant, and equally notable to their trading of goods is their trade in architectural ideas and iconography.

The trade of ideas between Teotihuacan and Classic Maya regions, such as Tikal, included architectural styles and iconography in ceramics and stelae. Structures at Tikal, dating

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varying foreign beginnings followed by a long stay in Teotihuacan. See Christine D. White, Michael Spence, Fred Longstaffe, Hilary Stuart-Williams, and Kimberly Law, "Geographic Identities of the Sacrificial Victims from the Feathered Serpent Pyramid," *Latin American Antiquity* 13, no. 2 (2002): 219.

[57] Clayton, "Interregional Relationships in Mesoamerica: Interpreting Maya Ceramics at Teotihuacan," 430.

[58] The Maya lowlands are defined as the land surrounded by the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean Sea, and is comprised of the Guatemalan region of Peten, Belize, and Yucatan. See Cowgill, *Ancient Teotihuacan, Early Urbanism in Central Mexico*, 28.

[59] Cowgill, *Ancient Teotihuacan, Early Urbanism in Central Mexico*, 35.

to 200 CE features *talud-tablero* architecture, the style of monumental architecture at Teotihuacan after 200 CE.[60] The *talud-tablero* was a distinctive architectural profile with a repeating stepped form over an inward sloping surface, and it is exemplified by the pyramids surrounding the Avenue of the Dead, the street of Teotihuacan's main urban center.[61] The design is recognized by its two parts, including the *tablero*—the upper portion that resembles a rectangular box, and the *talud*—the sloping element. This architectural staple of Teotihuacan is modeled after the terrain surrounding the city, especially the mountain range, the Cerro Gordo. It is evident as the slope of the Pyramid of the Sun gently follows the horizon line. In addition to its appearance at Tikal, the city of Copan featured structures associated the *talud-tablero* style, within structures related to the founding ruler K'inich Yax Kuk' Mo'.[62] The appearance of Teotihuacan-style architecture in more than one Classic Maya city is significant, as is Teotihuacan-style vessels found in Maya regions and reinforces the cultural influence Teotihuacan had on city-states of the Classic Maya, and vice versa.

The interaction of material culture included shared iconography and similar materials used in pottery and painting. In the fourth century CE, Classic Maya artists began to make stucco-painted vessels in forms like those from Teotihuacan.[63] As part of the Pre-Columbian collection at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art there is a stucco-painted vessel from the era in Teotihuacan style but bearing a Maya text (Fig. 10). The vessel has no archaeological

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[60] Structures at Tikal which featured *talud-tablero* architecture include the most notable Temple of the Sun, Temple of the Moon, and Temple of Q in the center of the city, as well as apartment compounds found outside the city. See Clayton, "Interregional Relationships in Mesoamerica: Interpreting Maya Ceramics at Teotihuacan," 431.

[61] David M. Carballo and Matthew Robb, "Lighting the World," 12.

[62] Clayton, "Interregional Relationships in Mesoamerica: Interpreting Maya Ceramics at Teotihuacan," 432.

[63] Magaloni-Kerpel, O'Neil, and Uriarte, "The Moving Image," 216.

provenance, but stylistic, epigraphic, and chemical analyses suggested that it originated from Peten in Guatemala, in the vicinity of Tikal.[64] The lidded ceramic vessel was painted postfire with brilliant polychrome stucco reminiscent of Teotihuacan mural painting. The vessel featured an inscription "*yajaw* ("vassal") of Spearthrower Owl," and this individual was hypothesized by David Stuart to have been a title or ruler at Teotihuacan.[65] The Maya vessel is a tripod cylinder vessel, and tripod cylinder vessels were a ceramic staple in Teotihuacan, such as with the *Storm God Vessel* from the Brooklyn Museum of Art (Fig. 4). This type of vessel was discovered by the hundreds in the city's excavations. The main parallel between the Spearthrower Owl vessel and the *Storm God Vessel* is their basic shape, defined as three square-shaped stands which act as the vessels' support and a wide bowl. In addition, the warm red and light green hues, minerals, and clay material used for the Maya vessel are typical of those utilized in Teotihuacan.[66] While the Storm God Vessel does not have a lid, the shape of the bowl and construction of the three feet are too alike to discount.

In other Classic Maya regions, there is further evidence of shared iconography. In Copan, the high relief panel on *Altar Q* depicts the city's founding ruler, K'inich Yax Kuk' Mo' wearing Teotihuacan-style warrior gear, with goggled eyes and a serpent shield, which is very reminiscent of the Storm God at Teotihuacan (Fig. 11).[67] In another example, in a tomb at Hunal

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[64] Magaloni-Kerpel, O'Neil, and Uriarte, "The Moving Image," 193.

[65] Magaloni-Kerpel, O'Neil, and Uriarte, "The Moving Image," 193-194.

[66] Magaloni-Kerpel, O'Neil, and Uriarte, "The Moving Image," 195.

[67] *Altar Q* is a sculpted stone block, and it was dubbed an altar, among many other examples. A large number of texts were found at Copan, nearly all on large stelae or altars. These texts have revealed information about royal history, rituals, and reigns of individual kings for scholars to study. *Altar Q* featured the ruler Yak K'uk Mo's significant life events as the ruler, and on another side is shown handing down royal insignia to Yax Pac, to show the successor is as worthy of rule as the first. See See Clayton, "Interregional Relationships in Mesoamerica: Interpreting Maya Ceramics at Teotihuacan," 431.

there is a burial which held five Teotihuacan-style ceramic vessels, which were manufactured in central Mexico.[68] At Altun Ha in northern Belize, there was a Teotihuacan-style contribution including over two hundred green obsidian objects which went with the earliest royal burial, dated to the third century, CE. Across Mesoamerica, ceramics were traded and used to share ideas and images. At Teotihuacan, ceramics were synonymous with murals, and the same motifs and colors were employed, and the same essential messages were transferred.[69] All these examples and more highlight a clear interaction of Teotihuacan to different city-states of the Classic Maya, further underscoring cultural interaction and the transference of ideas and beliefs, including those related to gender constructs and cosmology.

Gender Assumptions and Actualities

The question of a male or female deity has continued to be a discussion for scholars in the field, but western assumptions were problematic in distinguishing how gender constructs operated in Teotihuacan. Scholars identified the central figures in the *Tepantitla* and *Tetitla* murals as fully feminine through symbols of agricultural fertility, rather than from a presence of female biology. This theory of the *Tepantitla* mural limited women's role to the biological according to Elisa Mandell's article from 2015.[70] Western scholars considered a presence of female deities solely because of fertility implications, which highlights the western assumption

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[68] A tomb inside Hunal contained five Teotihuacan style ceramic vessels and were demonstrated to have been manufactured in central Mexico via instrumental neutron activation analysis. The process determines concentrations of elements in materials by emitting gamma rays at specific frequencies from which they can be identified. Depending on the elements found, scientists can find trace elements in the vessel's clay that are related to clay deposits in specific areas. It seems likely the vessels arrived there through political interaction between Copan and Teotihuacan. See Clayton, "Interregional Relationships in Mesoamerica: Interpreting Maya Ceramics at Teotihuacan," 432, 439.

[69] Magaloni-Kerpel, Diana and Megan E. O'Neil, and Maria Teresa Uriarte. "The Moving Image," 198.

[70] Mandell, "A New Analysis of the Gender Attribution of the Great Goddess of Teotihuacan," 29.

of women's roles as constrained to pregnancy and reproduction. This was not a common philosophy among the ancient inhabitants of Teotihuacan, as expressed by Miranda Stockett in 2005. Stockett explains the effects of sixteenth-century Spanish colonialization on Mesoamerican culture, as colonialists interposed their ideas of female roles as tied to biology, proving it was not a typical viewpoint before western interference.[71] Stockett additionally criticized scholars' tendency to use models of gender hierarchy in approaching Pre-Columbian Mesoamerica.

Gender hierarchy is a complex system by which the patriarchy rewards conformity and is designed to serve the interests of men, but as Stockett explains, this idea is rooted in western understandings of the sexual division of labor, which may not accurately characterize social systems of the past.[72] Traditional western assumptions dictate women's roles as subordinate to those of men, and this idea was transferred to the supernatural realm when western scholars considered it unlikely for a female deity to supersede male deities. In 2015, George Cowgill agreed with Zoltan Paulinyi's idea that it was unlikely there was a single overarching feminine goddess in multiple manifestations that took precedence over the Storm God.[73] However, this assumption is problematic as well for it implied a gender bias in thinking toward male deities. Assumptions like this about gender inequality led to the minimization of women's roles in Teotihuacan, when there has been evidence to the contrary, such as the largest sculpture found in the city identified as the Water Goddess, in addition to the established presence of female deities.

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[71] Miranda Stockett, "On the Importance of Difference: Re-envisioning Sex and Gender in Ancient Mesoamerica," *World Archaeology* 37, no. 4 (2005): 566.

[72] Stockett, "On the Importance of Difference: Re-envisioning Sex and Gender," 566.

[73] Cowgill, *Ancient Teotihuacan: Early Urbanism in Central Mexico*, 226.

The gender bias toward males constituted one trend of scholarship concerning Teotihuacan, even among private burials in the city, and the assumption women would be buried with less artifacts or precious items than men.

Studies of artifacts associated with burials represent the social statuses and identities of the deceased, and when compared to one another they highlight equality of genders. In 2015, Kristen de Lucia explored burial practices and iconography of the private compounds and ritual deposits below the Feathered Serpent and Moon pyramids to show that group identity superseded the importance of the individual and gender was an unimportant factor in determining social status.[74] De Lucia criticized Martha Sempowski and Michael Spence's assertion that it was not surprising to find burial offerings associated with males as generally more complex than those associated with females, and this meant they held social positions of greater importance.[75] Gender hierarchy in this case meant that scholars presumed men were buried with high value artifacts, and women were ignored. In residential burials, both men and women were buried with personal adornment or artifacts.[76] Studies of grave goods associated with burials are thought to represent the social roles and identities of the living. Therefore, the residential burials support the idea that both genders were buried with offerings. There is a slight discrepancy of more men buried with artifacts than women, but it is statistically an insignificant difference, as fifteen out of nineteen men and nine out of thirteen women were buried with grave goods at the Tlajinga compound.[77] However, men constituted most ritual sacrificial burials beneath the Feathered

[74] de Lucia, Kristin. "Looking Beyond Gender Hierarchy: Rethinking Gender at Teotihuacan, Mexico," 2.

[75] de Lucia, Kristin. "Looking Beyond Gender Hierarchy: Rethinking Gender at Teotihuacan, Mexico," 3.

[76] de Lucia, Kristin. "Looking Beyond Gender Hierarchy: Rethinking Gender at Teotihuacan, Mexico," 3.

[77] de Lucia, Kristin. "Looking Beyond Gender Hierarchy: Rethinking Gender at Teotihuacan, Mexico," 4.

Serpent Pyramid. More than two hundred victims were buried beneath the Feathered Serpent pyramid during its construction. Victims were identified as war captives, because of war insignia that adorned the bodies coupled with an inclusion of animal burials including pumas, birds of prey, and rattlesnakes—all of which were attributed to warfare.[78] These included both male and female bodies. The bodies were covered with slate disks attached to the waist and adorned with pendants made of human maxilla. Women were included, but to a much lesser extent, and adorned with shell earplugs, still both sexes had shell beads and obsidian projectile points.[79] The equality in burial practices among the genders challenges the western assumption of female roles as subordinate to male roles, as does the idea of gender dualism with the Post Classic Aztec.

In the Post Classic Aztec region, gender dualism was considered the social ideal. Gender dualism involves men and women taking on complementary gender roles, and this was paralleled in the Andean region where it was thought that the successful married couple was a single body with two halves.[80] The Post-Classic Aztec idea that a successful couple was equal, or a single body with two halves, is compelling. This idea could manifest as a mixed gender deity, as an intimate model of gender dualism. This being might perform the roles and possess the advantages of both genders. The Post-Classic Aztec peoples were highly connected to Teotihuacan, and so it is conceivable for there to have been a similar philosophy in the two cultures. It is this idea of gender dualism, not to be confused with binarism, which this thesis

[78] In Teotihuacan, there are mural paintings which depict these animals as hunters and warriors. They are depicted in aggressive stances, wearing military regalia, and holding sacrificial knives while they consume human hearts. In another example of a later culture, pumas and birds of prey pelts were cherished garments among the Post-Classic Aztec and were only given to the fiercest warrior clans. See Nawa Sugiyama, "Pumas Eating Human Hearts? Animal Sacrfice and Captivity at the Moon Pyramid," in *Teotihuacan City of Water City of Fire*, edited by M.H. Robb (San Francisco: University of California Press, 2017) 91.

[79] de Lucia, "Looking Beyond Gender Hierarchy: Rethinking Gender at Teotihuacan, Mexico," 4.

[80] Klein, "None of the Above: Gender Ambiguity in Nahua Ideology," 189.

contends is present in the *Tepantitla* central figure. Gender fluidity, and complementary gender roles, are critical to consider for the *Tepantitla Paradise Mural*, as the scene features symbols of both male and female fertility and ideal gender roles.

Methodology

Main methodologies for this thesis involve analyzing the iconographic parallels of Classic Maya cosmography to the *Tepantitla* and *Tetitla* murals to demonstrate foreign influence and connections. The scholarship in the literature review reinforces the prevalence of Maya influence at Teotihuacan to support this method's validity. This evidence of influence permits comparison of said iconographic parallels to gain a better sense of what is occurring in the scenes of the *Tepantitla* and *Tetitla* murals. In addition to this, gender constructs for ancient Mesoamerica are analyzed by utilizing scholarship such as Elisa Mandell, Kristen de Lucia, and Miranda Stockett, and by doing so, this thesis shows how any analysis of these images in binary gender terms will obscure their true meaning, and to illustrate that non-binary or mixed genders were common in Mesoamerican society. Esther Pasztory's theory of dual nature is compelling, and this thesis builds on this idea to argue the central figure of the *Tepantitla Mural* is a mixed gender deity with dual associations to both genders. Additionally, newer understandings of gender fluidity are applied to the *Tepantitla Paradise Mural*, suggesting that the figure represents both male and female associations to fertility and acts as an additional propagandistic tool for ideal gender roles. Additionally, prominent rituals practiced in Maya regions will be discussed to demonstrate the iconographic parallel of the ball players within the *Tepantitla* mural. Other scholars such as Karl Taube and Annabeth Headrick will be referenced for their scholarship on deities at Teotihuacan and other examples of propaganda in the city, respectively. Therefore, building from past scholarship and through iconographic comparison, this thesis illustrates the

murals' figure as mixed gender, and the intentions behind their creation as more calculating than they appear. These connections support the theory that rather than fertility symbols related to feminine biology, these murals represent a mixed gender deity among a floral paradise. By substantiating this theory with existing scholarship, this thesis builds on the theory and suggests the *Tepantitla* and *Tetitla* murals were made to be political propaganda for ritual sacrifice. This propaganda aimed to assure the necessity of ritual sacrifice to sustain the cycle of death and rebirth, otherwise known as the agricultural seasons and the daily return of the dawn as exemplified by Classic Maya cosmology.

Formal Analysis

The unknown artists of the *Tepantitla* and *Tetitla* murals applied intense warm colors, shape, line, and composition to translate a scene of paradise, abundant fertile crops, and ritual sacrifice. The first attribute of both murals to strike the viewer are their vibrant colors. These were painted in true fresco technique, on damp plaster, and combined with minerals to produce radiant backgrounds.[81] In the murals of the Xolalpan period (350-550 CE), the most common colors to be found are reds, pinks, blues, greens, and yellows. With the sparse use of whites and blacks, the compositions are sometimes muddled, but the repeated motifs and subjects aid in classification. The *Tepantitla Paradise Mural* (Fig. 1-2), completed around the fifth century CE, is located inside the Tepantitla apartment complex. The scene comprises two registers with the same blood red pigment throughout the entire background. The upper register is framed with light yellow and pink interconnected streams of water. One of the streams has red, star-shaped objects floating in the water, and the other stream carries anthropomorphic creatures. The streams interweave and act as the mural's frame. Profile and frontal representations of the Storm God are interspersed among the streams; and he exhibits the usual characteristics of fangs, goggled eyes, curved lip, and a water lily emerging from the mouth. Within the upper register are three prominent figures. The central figure is a frontal deity wearing an elaborate headdress. The headdress has many green and red quetzal feathers that fan out above a large, predatory bird at its center.[82] Behind the headdress, foliage stretches to the sky and is inhabited with butterflies and

[81] Berrin and Pasztory, *Teotihuacan: Art from the City of the Gods*, 194.

[82] The quetzal bird is a Mesoamerican indigenous species. They are native to Guatemala, sometimes found in Mexico, and frequently found in forests and humid tropics. They are covered with quetzal feathers of iridescent green or golden-green on its wings, back, chest, and head, and red feathers on its stomach. They were considered sacred among the Maya and is now a national symbol of Guatemala. See Les Beletsky, "Trogons," in *Birds of the World*, edited by Les Beletsky, (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2006): 193-194.

spiders. The foliage is made up of two intertwined branches, one red and one yellow, and each twig ends with flowers. Exotic birds fly around the tree and sit on the branches. The deity features light blue diamond-shaped eyes and wears large green earspools, a nose bar, beaded bracelets, and a *quechquemitl* with alternating red and yellow triangles and circles. Stylized scrolls emanate from the mouth of the deity, filled with the same red star-shaped objects as in the frame. The deity eternally outstretches their arms, and eight tear-shaped drops fall from each hand. Droplets fall from the flowers in the trees as well.

The entire scene emphasizes an abundance of water and its life-giving qualities. Facing the deity on either side are two profile figures wearing a headdress of green and red quetzal feathers, *quechquemitls*, and beaded bracelets. They exhibit human features, such as regular oval shaped eyes, nose, and mouth. The only thing to obscure their faces is a red band of color across their eyes. They could be priests or priestesses, as they hold small bags, used for incense. Scrolls embellished with flowers and seeds spray upward from the attendants' hands along with a stream of seed-filled liquid which flows downward. While the figures face the deity, they never look up to meet its eyes, and instead keep their gaze level with one another. This small detail further differentiates the central figure and could be an indicator of its divinity. In another example of water symbology, there is a seed-filled watery opening situated directly below the deity and it is assumed the mysterious liquid actively seeps into the lower register where the human realm awaits. This is further assumed to represent the water or rain necessary for fertile crops. The opening below the deity has been identified as different forms—either the large, upper lip of the Storm God, a cave, or a vagina.[83] Annabeth Headrick described the opening as having, "feminine qualities [that] might be attributed to this mountain as water gushes forth from a womb-like

[83] Headrick, *The Teotihuacan Trinity*, 16.

vaginal opening."[84] This is one of the qualities that previous scholars have used to define the Goddess as female. However, the shape does not appear to be a part of the Goddess. First, the deity stands above the opening like a pedestal. It is situated directly below the deity's fringed skirt, and it is level with the border of the composition. Furthermore, the shape is more square than curvilinear. However, given the suggestive nature of its presence between the Goddess' legs, the cavity could still reference the womb.

The lower register is sometimes referred to as the *Mountain of Abundance* mural and features a mountain with many smaller-scale humans wearing loincloths participating in various activities. There is no focus on one individual or group of individuals. If a ruler were present, one would expect there to be focus on him. Therefore, these figures are likely lower-class inhabitants of the city. There is a wide range of hairstyles and headdresses, though the faces follow a standard format, barring identification of any individuals. Each person is the same height, and their faces are identical. Speech scrolls emerge from their mouths, as if they were speaking, singing, or chanting. Some figures carry smaller humans, while others dance and sing, or play ball games. One group holds hands and performs a dance, and another individual holds a garland of flowers. The individuals are of varying skin colors including vibrant reds, yellows, and blues. The mountain sits in the middle of the composition with a split cleft from which a stream of water pours into a pool connected to a river. Fish convert into people in the pool below, and the humans appear to swim to and from the split opening where the stream emerges. In one striking part of the composition, two men are playing a ball game on a flat plane directly above the mountain (Fig. 12) Rivers pouring from the mountain lead to agricultural fields and continue to

[84] Headrick, *The Teotihuacan Trinity*, 16.

edge of the composition on the right side. It terminates into a pool teaming with aquatic life. Above the pool, on a hill, a man waves a palm branch and speech scrolls emerge from his mouth. It is not known what the dialogue entails. However, it is probable he was a victim of ritual heart sacrifice, because the scene depicts streams of red and blue blood pouring from his chest, and large tears pooling in his eyes. On the right side of the scene, there appears to be another ritual sacrifice victim. The entire composition has been referenced for many years as an image depicting the people's celebration of an abundance of fertility, for both agriculture and human reproduction, supplied by the deity.

The *Palacio de Tetitla Mural* is in the Tetitla complex and was completed between 600 to 750 CE. It has been identified as different figures, including the Great Goddess, a priest, or a deceased ruler, but it is difficult to ascertain. The frontal figure is large and takes up most of the space. It is situated next to an identical figure, and both are surrounded by a border of blue and green lines. Beyond that is a familiar archetype of interconnected serpentine forms framing the scene. The figure's skin is a light green pigment, except for its hands which are yellow. Human-appearing eyes look out toward the viewer, differentiating it from the azure diamond irises of the *Tepantitla Paradise Mural*. Both arms are extended, and wide scrolls filled with water and symbols of abundance flow from the hands. The presumed deity features large green earspools, a green nose bar, and green fangs. The deity wears a *quechquemitl* with geometric designs of varying colors, mostly red, green, and light blue. The lower half of the face is decorated with a black mask and yellow dots, effectively obscuring the cheeks, nose, mouth, and chin. The broad feathered headdress features an alternating red and yellow zigzag design, and large green quetzal feathers fan out above and along the sides. A green bird of prey sits in the center with red and blue eyes, which also stare out at the viewer. The yellow beak lies open giving an impression the

bird is squawking at the observer, and a green mouthpiece rests in its mandible. A blue plume of feathers fans out above the bird's head and above a geometric design of blue dots spaced out among green, red, and yellow bands. The rest of the headdress features a blue background with a red worm-like design. Hearts taken during ritual sacrifices decorate either side of the headdress. While the torso is fleshed out, the lower half of the figure is missing. Headrick claimed it was missing because the figure emerged from a ceremonial bowl and utilized this as evidence that it depicts a supernatural deity. In addition to this, the inclusion of sacrificed hearts has military connotations, and is therefore plausible to be the spirit of a dead ruler brought temporarily to the human realm.[85] The identification of the human spirit is complicated as suggested by George Kubler, as he argued a frontal figure equated to a deity, and humans were depicted in profile.[86] The frontal figure would indicate a more celestial being, however, there has been evidence that this is not always the case, as seen in the representations of the Storm God in the frame of the *Tepantitla Paradise Mural*, where the Storm God was depicted in profile. Regardless, the inclusion of seed-filled water falling from its yellow bestowing hands was considered a sign of the Great Goddess and it has been listed under this name in several publications.

[85] Headrick, *The Teotihuacan Trinity*, 32.

[86] Kubler, *The Art and Architecture of Ancient America*, 37.

Analysis of the Selected Murals as Propaganda

Cross-Cultural Examples of Mixed Gender

This section discusses mixed-gender iconography that occurred in Pre-Columbian cultures to illustrate the prevalence of this construct in ancient Mesoamerica. Gender identity is culturally and socially constructed and is distinct from sexual characteristics which are biologically determined. In the case of Pre-Columbian societies, it is difficult to determine a relationship between gender constructs and biological characteristics. For the murals at Teotihuacan, biological sex might have been identified by the presence of sexual organs, yet the figures lack definite male or female sex characteristics. Even if present, the individual's gender could still be misattributed. One must wonder if the documented desire to determine whether Pre-Columbian deities are male or female is rooted in the western familiarity of the Christian tradition of God represented as male, or the earlier Greek and Roman tradition of distinct male and female deities. As scholar Gilbert Herdt articulated in his 1994 essay for *Third Sex, Third Gender: Beyond Sexual Dimorphism in Culture and History*, not all cultures determine gender by anatomy, especially ancient Mesoamerican cultures.[87] The interpretation of Pre-Columbian deities as mixed gender is verified in the visual record of cultures connected to Teotihuacan. Scholars have long acknowledged the existence of a third gender category among various city-states of the Classic Maya, and the occurrence of mixed gender imagery was common within multiple cultures. Considering more than a few city-states were inhabitants of the city of Teotihuacan and trade partners; it can be argued that there were shared ideas on gender and

[87] Gilbert Herdt, "Introduction: Third Sexes and Third Genders," *Third Sex, Third Gender: Beyond Sexual Dimorphism in Culture and History*, Gilbert Herdt, ed. (New York: Zone Books, 1994): 21–81, 21.

similar iconography for these figures and lends support to the idea that mixed gender was present at Teotihuacan.

The frequent inclusion of mixed gender figures within Mesoamerican iconography is vital to address. Epigraphic and iconographic evidence include depictions of ritual performance by Maya elites, dressed in costumes traditional of the opposite gender. Visual records hail from city-states such as Copan and Palenque.[88] In 1996, Rosemary Joyce discussed the androgynous representations of the Maya elite, and clarified that male and female components were combined in ways that transcended dimorphic gender roles.[89] Examples can be seen in Copan ruler dress, where there existed a diamond-patterned net costume associated with both the Maya Maize God, a corn deity that signified great importance to the Classic Maya, and the Moon Goddess.[90] The net costume was a garment that covered or enclosed the body, which was typical of women's garments according to visual record, but not for the men who were usually more exposed. The net skirt additionally falls below the knees, as typical of the women's clothing, but not for men who usually wore shorter skirts or loincloths.[91] The net skirt can be seen in *Stela H* (Fig. 13) which depicted the thirteenth male ruler of Copan, Waxaklajuun Ubahh K'awaiil, impersonating the Maize God and wearing the diamond-patterned net costume. Scholars studying the ancient

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[88] Stockett, "On the Importance of Difference: Re-envisioning Sex and Gender," 570.

[89] Rosemary A. Joyce, "The Construction of Gender in Classic Maya Monuments," In *Gender and Archaeology,* ed. Rita P. Wright, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996): 167.

[90] Elisa C. Mandell, "A New Analysis of the Gender Attribution of the Great Goddess of Teotihuacan," 33

[91] In a few visual examples of male rulers dressed as the Maize God, the skirt was shorter in length and emphasized the figures' masculinity. Examples include the Temple of the Foliated Cross, the Palenque Sarcophagus lid, and the Yaxchilan Structure 33, all of which feature male kings performing as the Maize God and wearing short skirts. It is vital to say that in other visual records, the Maya Maize God wears the androgynous net costume, and this highlights the deity's gender ambiguity. See Matthew Looper, "Women-Men and Men-Women: Classic Maya Rulers and the Third Gender, in *Ancient Maya Women,* edited by Traci Ardren, Lopez Lujan, Hector Neff, and Saburo Sugiyama (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 2002): 178.

Maya were able to utilize hieroglyphic texts to distinguish between male and female figures to determine their identity and length of rule.[92] This is not easily accomplished at Teotihuacan as there are no surviving written texts, or a widely accepted translation of available glyphs. In another example of mixed gender connotations, Karen Bassie-Sweet offered a comprehensive argument in 2002 where she argued that the Maya Maize God embodied elements of both male and female and equated the deity to the biology of a corn plant that also features biological male and female parts—the tassel and the ear.[93] Maya women also wore mixed-gender costumes in the Maya city-state of Palenque, verified by Matthew Looper in his analysis of the *Palenque Oval Palace Tablet* (Fig. 14) wherein Lord Hanab Pakal I's mother, Lady Sak K'uk, wears the androgynous net skirt and a cape, wears a loincloth, holds a war helmet, and has a masculine coiffure.[94] Her androgynous dress stresses the mixed gender identity of Lady Sak K'uk who ruled at Palenque before her son, Pakal I, was king. In another example of Classic Maya ideology, Cecilia Klein briefly discussed the Ch'orti' Maya death god. The Ch'orti' Maya people primarily resided in southeastern Guatemala, northwestern Honduras, and northern El Salvador, and flourished from 250-850 CE. The death god manifested as a giant male figure dressed in female clothes.[95]

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[92] Elisa C. Mandell, "A New Analysis of the Gender Attribution of the Great Goddess of Teotihuacan," 33.

[93] Karen Bassie-Sweet, "Corn Deities and the Male/Female Principle," In *Ancient Maya Gender Identity and Relations*, edited by Lowell S. Gustafson and Amelia M. Trevelyan (Westport, CT: Bergin and Garvey, 2002): 169.

[94] Lady Sak K'uk wears an androgynous cape, skirt, loincloth, and her hair cut short with stepped sides in a masculine manner. She hands a martial helmet to her son the King of Palenque during his accession rites. Her androgynous dress stresses the mixed gender identity of Lady Sak K'uk who ruled at Palenque before her son was of age. In addition, women would dress as the Moon Goddess for military purposes, verified by additional visual record of women wearing the netted skirt and holding a shield and war banner in both hands as shown in a stela example at the Cleveland Museum of Art. See Looper, "Women-Men and Men-Women: Classic Maya Rulers and the Third Gender," 182.

A form of gender fluid dressing can be seen in the *Tepantitla Paradise Mural* with the combination of female and male garments.[96] The *quechquemitl* was a common inclusion in figures that are interpreted as female deities. However, the figure also featured fringed wristbands, the Storm God's nose bar and fangs, and a shorter skirt reminiscent of garments typically worn by men. In addition to this, from the context of Classic Maya iconography, mixed gender iconography sometimes included female fertility roles taken on by men through rituals. This includes a fertility ritual described by Andrea Stone in which Maya kings mimicked a women's menstrual cycle as a potent symbol of fertility for political benefit through penile bloodletting.[97] The *Tepantitla* figure could be a representation of this idea of a powerful gender fluid figure capable of giving life on their own. These instances of cultural interaction are referenced to highlight the valuable resource of Classic Maya art and iconography as a method to understand the *Tepantitla* and *Tetitla* murals.

The Cave-Born Peoples

The association of cave iconography to the vagina appears frequently in discussions of murals of the "Great Goddess." This occurs in the *Tepantitla Paradise Mural* because of an enigmatic form that looks like an upside-down saucer, or inverted horse-shoe shape that some have associated with a cavern. Scholars, such as Esther Pasztory, Claire and Renee Millon, and

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[95] Cecilia Klein references Charles Wisdom's description (*The Chorti Indians of Guatemala*, 1940) of the Ch'orti' Maya death god as both a male god with a female consort, dressed according to sex, as well as a giant male dressed in female clothes. In the description, Wisdom describes the deity as having sexual duality and taking on either sexual identity at will. See Cecelia Klein, "None of the Above: Gender Ambiguity in Nahua Ideology." In *Gender in Pre- Hispanic America*, edited by Cecelia F. Klein. 183-253, (Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2001): 190.

[96] Traci Ardren, "Studies of Gender in the Pre-Hispanic Americas." *Journal of Archaeological Research* 16 (2007): 1.

[97] Andrea Stone, "Sacrifice and Sexuality: Some Structural Relationships in Classic Maya Art," in *The Role of Gender in Pre-Columbian Art and Architecture*, edited by Virginia E. Miller, (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1988) 75-76.

Annabeth Headrick, interpreted the shape as a watery, seed-filled cavity situated below the "Goddess" as a symbol for a vagina. The location of the cavity is too low to the ground to be a part of the figure, which lends support to the idea it is not biological, but its placement is suggestive of the vagina or womb. Some Mesoamerican societies conceived of their ancestors as "earth-born", having emerged from the "womb of the earth," which were thought to be caves. In the case of the *Tepantitla Paradise Mural*, cave origin myths further substantiate the opening below the deity as a reference to the vagina or womb, given the indicative nature of its presence between its legs. It would make sense in the context of cave-born origin myths to reference a womb as part of the earth, rather than part of the deity. Origin myths of cave-born humans can be found within the Inka, Post-Classic Aztecs, and the Ch'orti Maya cultures. The Post-Classic Aztec regarded caves as representative of Chicomoztoc, their place of origin. In Nahuatl, Chicomoztoc translated to, "in the seven caves," from which the first seven tribes of people emerged to populate the present world.[98] Therefore, caves were thought of as the earth's "womb" from which the first humans issued. In other versions of the origin myth, people passed as fish through a series of four underworlds before emerging from the caves and transforming into humans.[99]

The mention of fish as people occurred in cultures that were concurrent to Teotihuacan as well, lending more support for the myth's significance. For example, in ancient Ch'orti' Maya accounts (250-850 CE) fish are traditionally considered to be people transformed by a great flood, and the consumption of fish was tantamount to cannibalism.[100] The fish were the first to

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[98] Karl Taube, "The Teotihuacan Cave of Origin," 52.

[99] Taube, "The Teotihuacan Cave of Origin," 51.

[100] Nielsen and Helmke, "Of Gods and Rituals: The Religion of Teotihuacan," 133.

populate the present world after the great flood and so the image of fish represented ancestors.[101] A similar scene occurs in a mural at Teotihuacan, called the *Mythological Animals Mural* (Fig. 16), in which the fish morph into humans at the bottom of the composition. If this mural aligns to the origin myth of the Ch'orti' Maya, then these fish would represent ancestors, or it could represent the underworld of the Post-Classic Aztec myth and would therefore be a depiction of the interior of a cave as the underworld. Either way, this mural's presence in the city offers additional support that there is a significant link to fish and/or cave imagery. More significantly, there is some version of these myths represented within the lower register of the *Tepantitla Paradise Mural* (Fig. 2). The central mountain features a split at its peak, from which a spring flows into the river below where fish and people swim.[102] If the imagery aligns to the myth of the Post-Classic Aztec, then the fish depicted are emerging from a cave-like split at the top and transforming into humans. These origin myths have reasonable links to Teotihuacan, especially with the consideration of rituals that took place in the tunnels below the Pyramid of the Sun, the greatest structure of the city.

The Pyramid of the Sun features an underground tunnel that leads into the exact center of the pyramid, as an emulation for the cave and the underworld. The presence of these striking tunnels constitutes as important evidence that the society at Teotihuacan held similar beliefs to the Post-Classic Aztecs.[103] Therefore, themes of watery passageways and a series of chambers are represented within the cave underlying the largest structure of the city and held a strong meaning for the city's inhabitants. This is significant as the tunnel beneath the pyramid lead to

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[101] Taube, "The Teotihuacan Cave of Origin," 51.

[102] Taube, "The Teotihuacan Cave of Origin," 52.

[103] Nielsen and Helmke, "Of Gods and Rituals: The Religion of Teotihuacan, 133.

four underground chambers where rituals certainly took place, and as can be seen in a plan of the pyramid, the passageway flares into four distinct lobes (Fig. 15).[104] In addition, the Pyramid of the Sun featured deposits of fish bones and shells, as well as drains for water, all of which suggests water held a major ceremonial role within the cave.[105] Altogether, the drains, fish remains, and a four-lobed chamber seem to relate to the emergence of humankind within the largest structure at Teotihuacan. This would also link the Post-Classic Aztec origin myth to the tunnel beneath the Pyramid of the Sun, where water rituals took place and fish bones were discovered. If they were connected, perhaps the ritual at the pyramid was a recreation of the ancestors on their journey through the underworld and to the terrestrial realm. Considering the wide-reaching origin myth of caves, and their association to "womb of the earth," an assertion to female biology within the *Tepantitla Paradise Mural* is warranted.[106] However, the cavity to which scholars refer to has not been absolutely identified as a cave or a vagina, but its chosen location is suggestive, especially considering cave origin myths. Through cross-cultural analysis, the inclusion of the cave and mountain lends support for a cosmic scene.

The combined motif of trees, mountains, and caves were seen before with the Olmec of the Gulf Coast, a civilization that flourished from 1600 to 350 BCE. The clearest representation of this idea comes from an incised Olmec tablet from the Dallas Museum of Art, from 900-500 BCE (Fig. 17). It features a u-shaped cave opening below a stepped mountain, and from the summit a tree grows complete with vegetation on its branches. Both the *Tepantitla Paradise Mural* and the Olmec plate include a grand cosmic tree atop a mountain to place emphasis on a

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[104] Taube, "The Teotihuacan Cave of Origin," 52.

[105] Taube, "The Teotihuacan Cave of Origin," 52.

[106] Headrick, *The Teotihuacan Trinity,* 28-29.

link between the three levels of the universe—the underworld, terrestrial, and paradise.[107] To apply this idea to the *Paradise Mural*, then the central deity in the bird of prey headdress represents the celestial realm, while the lower body of the cave ties the entity to the underworld. The lower register is easily recognized as the terrestrial realm. The three levels of the universe are associated to the rites of death and rebirth and were explored by many Mesoamerican cultures through ritual sacrifice and fertility bloodletting rituals. To place the *Tepantitla* and *Tetitla* murals in this context will call for more analysis of bloodletting in the Classic Maya regions, as there are iconographic parallels of the repeated motif of "bestowing hands" to fertility rituals of the Classic Maya.

Blood and Fertility

Blood was a vital fluid and made a common appearance in Mesoamerican rituals, including various city-states of the Classic Maya, such as Tikal and Yaxchilan, and other civilizations such as the Zapotec of the Oaxaca region, all of which featured ties to Teotihuacan. Bloodletting rituals were performed to ensure the annual return and abundance of crops, and thus were intricately linked to agricultural fertility.[108] These included instances of auto-sacrifice and mutilation of the penis or tongue, from both male and female elites in Late Classic Maya regions. This can be seen in the imagery of Yaxchilan, within Structure 23, the limestone stele known as *Lintel 24* was made after 709 CE out of limestone (Fig. 18). It is a depiction of Maya king Shield Jaguar the Great and his wife Lady K'ab'al Xook. The stele depicts Lady K'ab'al Xook pulling a thorned rope through her tongue, while the king watches over. In Maya ideology, blood and

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[107] Headrick, *The Teotihuacan Trinity,* 29.

[108] Adam T. Sellen, "Sowing the Blood with the Maize: Zapotec Effigy Vessels and Agricultural Ritual," *Ancient Mesoamerica* 22, no. 1 (2011): 72.

maize symbolism were considered metaphorical equivalents, one alluding to and sometimes substituting for the other. The Maya association of blood to seeds was a result of the belief that all people were made from maize, verified in the *Popol Vuh*.[109] The *Popol Vuh* is a sixteenth century K'iche' Maya poem, K'iche' Maya people were historically from the highlands of Guatemala and flourished from 300-950 CE. The poem recounted the Early Classic Maya origin mythology, which had been an oral tradition passed down for several hundred years before it was recounted in the *Popol Vuh.*[110] In the story humans were made by the gods from yellow and white maize meal, after a few other failed attempts with earth, wood, and other materials.[111] The act of blood flow was a part of ritual communication with gods and spirits for the Maya. In addition, blood is important for fertility as shown in the Aztec story of creation, when the goddess Coatlicue was killed and from her blood sprouted all life, and everything necessary for human beings such as the grass, flowers, trees, and mountains. Bloodletting proved to be necessary to create the universe for the Post Classic Aztec.[112] Further evidence for the relationship between blood and fertility includes the Aztec Codex Borgia, wherein exists an image of two male penitents that pierce their penises with bone awls, and the two streams of blood produce personified maize.[113] This connection between blood and fertility offers a significant possible understanding of the contested murals at Teotihuacan.

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[109] Bryan R. Just, "Mysteries of the Maize God," *Princeton University Art Museum* 68 (2009): 4.

[110] Adrian Recino, translated from K'iche' to Spanish, *Popol Vuh,* Translated by Delia Goetz and Sylvanus G. Morley to English. (Los Angeles: Plantin Press, 1954): 2.

[111] Recino, translated., *Popol Vuh,* 2.

[112] Brian Stross, "Maize and Blood: Mesoamerican Symbolism on an Olmec Vase and a Maya Plate," Anthropology and Aesthetics, no. 22 (1992): 101.

[113] The Codex Borgia is an Aztec pictorial manuscript from Central Mexico featuring calendrical and ritual content, dating to the Post Classic period, from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century.

There is a definite parallel between the images of Teotihuacan figures pouring liquids from their hands and depictions of auto-sacrifice by Classic Maya kings, which continues into the Post-Classic Period with the Aztecs. One example includes the Late Classic (600-900 CE) *Lintel 2* from La Pasadita (Fig. 19) wherein the Maya king Bird Jaguar IV pours blood from his hands to a ceremonial bowl or basket waiting below. Considering the Maya belief in the fertility of blood, this is a significant parallel to both the *Tepantitla* and *Tetitla* murals. The deity's hands of flowing liquid laden with seeds could conceptually be semen, or blood, as a conceptual equivalent to liquid necessary for life to begin. Therefore, these examples of Classic Maya fertility ritual iconography compared to the *Tepantitla* mural supports the theory that the deity's "hands of abundance" demonstrate the likelihood the figure is not solely feminine, because the practitioners of fertility rituals have been conducted by mostly male individuals within these examples with one notable exception of Lady K'ab'al Xook. Fertility iconography was represented by varying fluids—saliva, blood, semen, vaginal fluid, and flowing water, and the liquid emanating from the Goddess' hands could theoretically be any of the above, also underscoring mixed gender connotations. Blood would have therefore been a part of the city, and even its iconography underscores its importance. The *Tepantitla* and *Tetitla* murals feature a deep wine-hue red, as do most mural paintings across the entire city, and this conscious choice could have been intended as a reference to blood. If it was not intended, it still conjures the image of blood for the viewer, especially once they understand bloodletting and sacrifice was a reality for numerous Mesoamerican cultures, including Teotihuacan.

Fertility of the blood was a common theme in many Mesoamerican cultures besides the Maya, such as the Zapotec of the Oaxaca region. The Zapotec were a prominent society before and concurrent to Teotihuacan. They believed the rituals allowed for rain, the fertility of the

earth, the health of the people, military power, and even the vitality of the sun.[114] Therefore, the cycle of rebirth was prolonged by offerings of blood, and the blood drawn from the penis was considered the most potent because of its life-giving abilities and was often buried in the earth to feed the most important crop of maize.[115] Semen might be considered an equivalent to blood as well. The Zapotec were known to have been involved in bloodletting rituals since the Formative period (500-200 BCE) before and concurrent to the emergence of Teotihuacan. This was archaeologically proven by findings of specialized tools for the act such as obsidian blades, shark teeth, and stingray spines.[116] The common method of using a cord to pass through the head of the penis would not show up in archaeological record but can be validated from scenes depicted on effigy vessels. These effigy vessels of the Oaxaca region were known to be a frequent practice and were produced in massive quantities from 300 BCE to 800 CE. Two of these ancient Zapotec effigy vessels, exhibited at the British Museum (Fig. 20) and the Ethnographic Museum of Berlin (Fig. 21), illustrate genital bloodletting rituals. The figures are both made of light brown clay and had applications of yellow paint. They are from two different regions, the first from Cuicatlan, an area north of the Oaxacan valleys, and the second vessel was from Yatzechi, a town in the southern arm of the central valleys of Oaxaca. They are not stylistically the same, but they feature the same key iconographic elements. They are in seated positions, and in each hand are the ends of a twisted cord that passes through the tip of a corncob, emerging from their

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[114] Sellen, "Sowing the Blood with the Maize," 72.

[115] Sellen, "Sowing the Blood with the Maize," 72.

[116] Stingray spines, obsidian blades, and shark teeth were proven to be bloodletting tools after archaeologists had examined the edges and blades and compared the microscopic damage to the edges, which suggested they were used as bloodletters. In addition, iconography depicts these tools in Teotihuacan (Fig. 27) This mural fragment features an elite male figure surrounded by bloodletting tools that resemble blades or spines. See Sellen, "Sowing the Blood with the Maize," 72.

own waist. Past scholars equated the image of the corncob to a symbol of male fertility.[117] While these vessels do not explicitly resemble the *Tepantitla* or the *Tetitla* mural, the imagery of maize as the penis underscore the connection between agriculture and fertility rituals, and even more the conceptual link of agricultural fertility to male reproduction to support the idea the *Paradise Mural* figure is not solely female, and the concept of mixed gender with scenes of rebirth is further supported by Classic Maya mythology, including the Maize God.

The Maya Maize God at Teotihuacan

This significant link of the fertility of blood and the rebirth of agriculture was symbolized by the Maya Maize God. Since 4,000 B.C.E., maize and its use became a defining staple of Mesoamerican culture.[118] It is for this reason the Olmec incorporated maize into their art, mythology, and politics. They created images of split clefts with maize sprouting on top and appointed their rulers to stand in for the role of the Maize God during their reign.[119] As a deity, the Maize God fully embodied the crop and its life-sustaining power. The deity became an operating metaphor for the annual cycle of agricultural seasons, and the people were heavily involved as they were responsible for its fertilization. The Maya of the Classic period explicitly invoked the Olmec and the Maize God. The origin story—one of maturity, death, and eventual

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[117] Sellen, "Sowing the Blood with the Maize," 74.

[118] Matthew Robb, "The Maize God," In *Teotihuacan City of Water City of Fire*. Edited by M.H. Robb, (San Francisco: University of California Press, 2017) 150.

[119] The Olmec, especially during the Formative Period (1500-400 BCE) at La Venta in present-day Tabasco, were known for their images of the Olmec Maize God as an ear of maize, or with a projecting cranial cob from a split in the foliated head. Joyce Marcus argued the Formative depictions of maize growing out of cleft heads served to qualify the head not as maize but as the earth from which corn grows. These depictions were typically on incised jadeite celts, and the green jade was considered an allusion to green, growing maize. The visual convention recalls the Maya Maize God, as both cultures equated harvesting with the act of decapitation, and in both cultures the head of the deity was an equivalent to the maize head. See Karl Taube, "The Olmec Maize God: The face of corn in Formative Mesoamerica," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, no 29/30, (1996): 39.

rebirth was a central metaphor for the life cycle of the crop and predominant in their iconography. The harvest was a direct symbol of the Maize God's death and often illustrated as his decapitated head. In the myth, his spirit is transported to Xibalba, the Maya dark underworld, after his death where he is reborn from the mouth of a fish.[120] He is then adorned in regalia in anticipation of his resurrection into the terrestrial realm through the cracked earth, sometimes represented as a turtle carapace.[121] It is critical to note the reoccurring motif of a turtle carapace was occasionally interpreted as a symbol for the womb, emphasizing another link to feminine fertility.[122] The important inclusion of both male and female reproductive processes as reference to both genders are a critical component to the idea of gender fluid deity. The motifs connected to death and rebirth, and both themes were often accompanied by the Maya Maize God, and these were sometimes represented in stelae as a mixed gender deity.

The Maize God was referred to as male in mythology but was represented as a mixed gender deity in various stelae and other art. The Maize God was embodied by Maya kings and would be depicted as wearing the androgynous net skirt, examples include *Stela H* (Fig. 13) from Copan, which as mentioned featured a ruler dressed as the Maize God in female garments including a *quechquemitl*, and the netted skirt. The skirt additionally features a cross-linked pattern that scholars have interpreted as a symbol for the turtle carapace (the earth) out of which

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[120] The earlier discussion of fish in the origin myths of the Maya and Aztec, and images of fish at Teotihuacan, are critical to remember with the consideration of the Maize God reborn from the mouth of a fish before his resurrection through the turtle carapace, or the earth. This offers additional support for the mythological significance of fish in Teotihuacan's iconography.

[121] Just, "Mysteries of the Maize God," 9.

[122] The turtle carapace was a Classic Maya symbol of the earth, from which all plants emerged. The Maya Maize God is repeatedly shown or referred to as having been reborn from a turtle carapace (as the earth), therefore the shell is consistently equated to a womb. See Matthew Looper, "Women-Men and Men-Women: Classic Maya Rulers and the Third Gender," 178, 184. Also see Just, "Mysteries of the Maize God," 9.

the Maize God was reborn and is further verification it has mixed-gender connotations. The Maize God's significance to this thesis is found in the mixed gender examples, as well as examples of agricultural fertility driven by grisly deaths or scenes of bloodletting, such as the *Princeton Plate* (Fig. 22) from the Early Classic Period (350-500 CE), contemporaneous to the zenith of Teotihuacan. The plate was stylistically identified with the Classic Maya Tikal region of the Guatemalan Peten, which was known for its close association in trade and political ties to Teotihuacan. The plate features a central emblem of a disembodied head belonging to the Maize God. Four separate glyphs decorate the sides, surrounding the head, and indicate the four cardinal directions. Three bloodletting instruments sit in front of the deity's face, including an obsidian blade, a stingray spine, and a flint knife. Finally, the entire image floats in blood, shown through the *k'an-cross* glyphs which qualify the water pattern in the background as blood.[123] The everlasting cycle of the Maize God was to reflect the cycle of agriculture. This plate directly addresses the deity's death and depicts the blood from which more life will stem.

In other examples of plates, the artisans explicitly rendered the process of new life emerging from the dead body. Visual evidence for this comes from an example at the Princeton University Art Museum originally from Peten, Guatemala (Fig. 23). In this Late Classic ceramic, the Maize God is depicted with a long quetzal-feather headdress dancing atop a skull at the center of the composition. The skull represents a decapitated seed, and red scrolls of blood or fire and plant stems capped by white lily blossoms emerge from the desiccated seed. The water lilies, the red band, and black rectilinear forms at the bottom of the composition reference the low still

[123] According to Brian Stross, k'an-cross glyphs refer to maize and the portal between worlds. They have the shape of a quatrefoil, a design element known to Mesoamerican scholars as a representation of the portal separating this world from the underworld or afterlife. It is believed sacrificial blood opens the portal, and according to mythology the maize springs anew from the portal annually where humans planted it. Therefore, maize, blood, and the k'an cross are inextricably linked. See Stross, "Maize and Blood," 100.

water and swamps of the field and alludes to the underworld from which the maize god emerges as a new plant. Two figures flank the Maize God, one with a snail-shell torso and the other wearing a crocodilian headdress. These have been identified as other deities from Xibalba the underworld, or rain deities, and collectively allude to the coming of rains and rough storms which will open the parched earth, represented by a turtle carapace, and quench the seeds within with rain.[124] In addition to this, the interaction of the genders is further represented by a reference to female fertility within the image, as not only were there significant links to caves, but the turtle carapace of which the Maize God is reborn from is often equated to a womb.[125] The turtle carapace was a Classic Maya symbol of the earth, from which all plants emerge, and sometimes the Maize God was depicted as emerging from the carapace, further abstractly relating the carapace to the womb.[126] In some Mixtec regions near Oaxaca, pregnancy and birth are also equated with agriculture, and in their version the gods made corn agriculture possible through the birth of an ear of corn from a personified female corn plant.[127] This specific plate is important to analyze because of the familiar party of three individuals in a cosmic scene—a central deity and their two attendants or companions amid an agricultural cosmic event, which is parallel to the *Paradise Mural*. Furthermore, the Maya Maize God was recognized at Teotihuacan, seen through examples of murals of unknown provenance that depict the deity. One example of the Maize God at Teotihuacan includes this mural of two deities, it has no title or known date, and it

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[124] Just, "Mysteries of the Maize God," 8.

[125] Just, "Mysteries of the Maize God," 13.

[126] Just, "Mysteries of the Maize God," 5.

[127] John Monaghan, "Physiology, Production, and Gendered Difference: The Evidence from Mixtec and Other Mesoamerican Societies," in *Gender in Pre-Hispanic America,* edited by Cecelia Klein, (Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2001): 297.

is housed at the Museo Amparo in Puebla (Fig. 24). Karl Taube identified the deity on the left as the Maize God through the notable differences in its headdress and hairstyle, which resemble the long-quetzal feather style of the Maya images of the deity, as well as its face, body paint, and costume of earspools, belt, and garments. The Maize God's inclusion in the mural lends further support that its presence was recognized at Teotihuacan, and the elements of the Maize God such as his connection to fertility and rebirth as a comparable deity to the *Tepantitla* central figure is a reasonable assertion.

Fertility rituals occurred at Teotihuacan as well. In a mural painting in the city, a figure interpreted to be a priest is depicted pouring libations on his erect penis as part of a ritual (Fig. 26). Within the mural, the viewer can see the figure holding a small ceramic jar meant for libations and holds his penis as a sign he is prepared to begin the ritual.[128] The motif of liquid represented as wide bands pouring out from his hands and toward the ground recalls the *Tetitla* central figure as well as the priest or priestess figures beside them. Therefore, the contested Goddess figure with hands bestowing liquid laden with seeds, as in the *Tetitla* mural, could instead reference an offering of *pulque,* or blood, or semen, all of which are connected to agricultural fertility.[129] Other fertility rituals consisted of sowing seeds called scattering rituals.[130] In examples of murals at Teotihuacan, the Storm God, identified through his goggled eyes and curved lip, sows seeds in the ground and is depicted with the same wide scrolls issuing from his hands (Fig. 25). The repeated association of agricultural fertility to a female deity is

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[128] Nielsen and Helmke, "Of Gods and Rituals: The Religion of Teotihuacan," 134.

[129] *Pulque* is defined as a traditional Mexican alcoholic drink made by fermenting sap from the agave plant, and it is known for its sweet taste and its thick, milky texture. See Nielsen and Helmke, "Of Gods and Rituals: The Religion of Teotihuacan," 134.

[130] Berrin and Pasztory, *Teotihuacan, Art from the City of the Gods*, 195.

misleading because of these contradictory images. By establishing that fertility rituals occurred at Teotihuacan, it is important to discuss the inclusion of more Classic Maya ideologies, such as a floral paradise, ball games, and sacrificial rituals.

Classic Maya Ideology and Rituals

The religious beliefs of the Classic Maya offer comparative information to gain a better sense of the budding floral paradise, ball game, and sacrifice. The Maya floral paradise is combined with Teotihuacan stylization within the *Tepantitla* mural. In religions of Classic Maya societies, there were two distinct afterlife zones, including the dark underworld called Xibalba, and a garden of paradise. In 1992, Jane Hill defined the widespread concept of a floral paradise which dated to the Pre-Classic Maya and before to the Middle Formative Olmec, but it was most developed among the Post Classic Aztec.[131] For the Classic Maya, the floral paradise was considered a mountain that served as a dwelling place for both ancestors and gods.[132] In addition to this, the floral paradise was thought to possess a beautiful garden of flowers, tropical birds, and fruit-bearing plants, all of which are featured in the top register of the *Paradise Mural.* Aside from being a place of solar ascent, the mountain was a means for rain-making moisture to enter the sky and was closely related to the celestial powers of the sun, all of which are necessary for a fertile earth.[133] It is not surprising then that the Maize God and the Maya Sun God were commonly identified with the flower mountain, as they both relate to symbols of revival or regeneration, as everlasting metaphors for the annual seasons of harvest and the daily return of

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[131] Karl Taube, "Flower Mountain: Concepts of life, beauty, and paradise among the Classic Maya," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics,* no. 45 (2004): 69.

[132] Taube, "Flower Mountain," 69.

[133] Taube, "Flower Mountain," 69.

dawn.[134] An Early Classic vessel known as the *Death Vase* (Fig. 28) features the most common themes of the Maya including rebirth, the resurrection of the Maize God, and the ascent of the sun into the sky. One side of the vessel depicts three personified trees growing from a corpse, and they hold hands as they emerge from the soil. On the other side of the vessel are six female mourners flanking the dead Maize God. He features cheek markings, long hair, floral head elements, and the mourners dress the god for his journey to the underworld and forthcoming resurrection. The mountain behind the lifeless Maize God is marked by flowers, linking the underworld to the earth and the heavens.[135] While the Maize God has no iconographic similarities to the central figure of the *Paradise Mural*, the Maya paradise can be connected to the imagery of the tree, flowers, birds, and the possible rain emanating from the hands of the "Goddess." Therefore, the symbols thought to be representative of female fertility are reminiscent of mixed gender fertility when compared to Maya iconography.

Flower iconography was additionally identified in other works of art at Teotihuacan. The presence of the flower realm can be seen in the Early and Late Tlamimilolpa (170-350 CE) period at Teotihuacan and in Maya sites of the Preclassic (200-300 CE) to Classic (300-600 CE) periods. This suggests it could be an ancient concept in Mesoamerica, and a shared inheritance from the Olmec. If this were true, then Teotihuacan inhabitants held belief in a floral paradise before Maya influence. However, the Maya have been known to interact with Teotihuacan since 100 BCE, the time of Early Classic Teotihuacan, and so it is still possible there was an early exchange of ideas. The flower mountain in the *Paradise Mural* included depictions of spiders and butterflies, creatures that are rampant within the iconography at Teotihuacan. Not only do

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[134] Taube, "Flower Mountain," 93.

[135] Taube, "Flower Mountain," 80.

the painted murals which cover the city commonly include them, but visual record depicts warriors clad in butterfly costumes, and were considered symbols for fallen warriors.[136] The most significant example of this record are ceramic funerary censers which served as memorials for warriors. These have been found in great quantities and are thought to have been produced for private homes to venerate warrior ancestors. As explained by Christopher Helmke and Jasper Nielsen, there have been numerous examples which featured depictions of warriors among flowers and butterflies, and the most intricate were made with *adornos*, or mold made decorative elements.[137] An important example is a theater-type ceramic censer found in a compound at Teotihuacan (Fig. 30) The censer displayed *adornos* on the front made from clay molds which were manipulated to look like draping feather plumes, flowers, butterflies, bird heads, and temple representations all centered around a central human face. The human face is a portrait of a deceased warrior individual, shown through its nose plaque, earspools, and faded facial paint. The presence of butterflies, flowers, and birds reference the floral paradise. These would therefore constitute as evidence that exalted warriors were believed to enter the flower realm after death.

Despite the hundreds of years that separated the Aztec from Teotihuacan, the Post-Classic Aztecs had a symbolic use of the butterfly, and the visual parallels are striking. It was believed that Aztec warriors who had died in battle would join the sun in the sky to eventually transform into butterflies or hummingbirds to live carefree lives of drinking the sweet nectar of

[136] Butterfly imagery flits across ceramics, murals, and censers. They were so pervasive in the city, and connected to warriors, that a certain segment of a military group wore butterfly-shaped nose plaques in Teotihuacan. Images at Teotihuacan of men dressed in military costume repeatedly included round goggles through which normal human eyes would appear. The butterflies in the city's iconography frequently had the same feature. The goggled eyes of both warriors and butterflies undoubtedly associated them with the Storm God, the deity affiliated with themes of fertility, destruction, and war. See Headrick, "The Teotihuacan Trinity," 126, 134.

[137] Helmke and Nielsen, "Of Gods and Rituals: The Religion of Teotihuacan," 134.

flowers.[138] This is significant considering the presence of both butterflies and hummingbirds within the upper register of the *Tepantitla* mural. In a comparable way, women who had died in childbirth were conceptual counterparts to fallen male warriors. In Aztec thought, a woman who had died in childbirth had fought a hard battle and died a noble death. It was believed she would join the Sun God in the afterlife.[139] The common motif of spiders was also considered a symbol for the roles of women in the Post-Classic Aztec culture, such as weaving and motherhood.[140] This is conjecture based on Post-Classic Aztec beliefs and patron goddess for motherhood. It is therefore significant that these same insects and birds are depicted among the floral paradise of the *Tepantitla* mural.

The appearance of spiders combined with butterflies and hummingbirds within the upper register of the *Paradise Mural* offers further support for the work showing ideal roles for both men and women. This image conveyed the idea that there was promise of afterlife for those individuals who aligned themselves with these ideal roles to help the state. This suggestion of propaganda present at Teotihuacan was further supported by Headrick, who had made a case for propaganda in the city through *talud-tablero* structures.[141] Headrick contended that the *talud-tablero* structures emulated the butterfly nose-plaque found on images of warriors including the theater-type censer (Fig. 30), and therefore inhabitants of Teotihuacan would have associated the

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[138] Taube, "Flower Mountain," 87.

[139] Headrick, "The Teotihuacan Trinity," 142-143.

[140] Headrick, "The Teotihuacan Trinity," 143.

[141] Headrick argues the *talud-tablero* architecture symbolized an ideology of warfare that was visually conveyed through the butterfly. By building off her earlier claim that war and the Storm God were associated to butterflies and warriors, Headrick argued that nose plaques of warriors were a simple stylized version of a butterfly's body, and further resembled a simplified version of *talud-tablero* architecture. The architectural style was visually dominating and so it would have been effective as a propagandistic tool to remind inhabitants of warriors' importance and role in the city, and to remind them of their civic duty. See Headrick, "The Teotihuacan Trinity," 125.

pyramids along the Avenue of the Dead to the city's cult of war. Headrick explains the most insidious quality of the city's propaganda was that it was inescapable. The *talud-tablero* structures lined the Avenue of the Dead on both sides, meaning it would dominate the visual experience and remind the inhabitants of their duties. This would be the case for the *Tepantitla* and *Tetitla* murals as well, as they decorated private compounds, and the inhabitants were surrounded by propaganda. Men were pressured to become warriors for the state, and to die in sacrifice or in battle for the good of the city. Women were pressured to reproduce to ensure the city's population, an often-lethal situation for women before modern medicine. In the case of the *Paradise Mural*, the rulers of Teotihuacan utilized Maya symbology to influence inhabitants to comply with the values of the state. Therefore, if the upper register of the *Paradise Mural* is representative of the Maya floral paradise, then it is probable the lower register depicts the terrestrial realm. The *Paradise Mural* depicts one large mystic tree which hints at a more otherworldly domain, and the lower register of the terrestrial realm hints at cosmic events on the terrestrial plane with the inclusion of two ball players above a mountain of emergence.

The lower register of the *Paradise Mural* references the ball game, an established idea in Classic period Maya ritual practice and iconography. It is further a remarkable inclusion as Teotihuacan lacked a prominent ball court, which was a common addition to several ancient Mesoamerican cities.[142] However, it was an established game known to have existed since the time of the Olmecs and was a shared inheritance for later Mesoamerican cultures.[143] The lack of

[142] The game was invented sometime during the Preclassical period (2500-100 BCE) by the Olmec and became a common feature of Classic Period Mesoamerican landscape. Ball courts were often built in sacred precincts, which further suggests it was more significant than a game. Ball courts were built in several Mesoamerican cities, including El Salvador, Chichen Itza, Tikal, and Yaxhilan of the Maya, Monte Alban of the Zapotec, and Xochicalco. Other cities such as El Tajin (Veracruz) hit records with eighteen ball courts, and Cantona had twenty-four. See Carballo and Robb, "Lighting the World," 12.

a court begs the question of the game's popularity among the inhabitants in Teotihuacan. Conversely, if the game were not played at Teotihuacan, the *Tepantitla Mural* would show even greater Maya influence. Within the lower register of the *Tepantitla Mural* there are two isolated figures on a horizontal plane with a red circular object between them (Fig. 12). The two figures are just above the mountain and directly below the upper register. The chosen location for this scene is compelling because of the proximity to the heavens and its isolation from the other depicted humans. However, the composition of the scene is confusing because of the lack of a horizon line or common ground. The figures are interspersed evenly across the entire scene, as if they were walking in the sky. Regardless, the two players are together on a short horizontal line directly above the mountain compositionally. The scene references the ball game because the poses of the figures emulate the rules of the game. Neither use their hands to reach out and grab the ball, but rather angle their hips or knees to return the shot.[144] The traditional rules are players scored points when the opposing team failed to return the ball or when the ball was launched into the opponent's end zone. The mural seems to refer to an important, miraculous ball game. The sport and its taking place above the mountain elevates the scene to a cosmic meaning, because of the significance of mountains in the city.[145] While the inclusion of the game alone is not enough

[143] Marvin Cohodas, "The Symbolism and Ritual Function of the Middle Classic Ball Game in Mesoamerica," *American Indian Quarterly* 2, no. 2 (1975): 99.

[144] Teams of players would use their hips to knock a hard rubber ball toward goals at either end of the court. Players were only allowed to use their heads, elbows, legs, and hips to hit the ball. The ball was not allowed to touch the ground, but if one of the teams got the ball through the stone hoop, then that team won. In general, the ball courts were open-ended, long narrow alley flanked by two walls with sloping faces. Later ballcourts had enclosed end-zones, giving the structure an "I" shape when viewed from above. The ball game reenacted the creation story recorded in the *Popol Vuh*, and was a major part of political, religious, and social life. For candidates of human sacrifice, it literally became a game of life or death. See Cohodas, "The Symbolism and Ritual Function of the Middle Classic Ball Game," 99.

[145] The significance of mountains at Teotihuacan are documented through earlier discussion of the deities such as the Storm God and the Water Goddess, who are both associated to mountains, as well as the dominating *talud-tablero* architecture of the pyramids which mirror the horizon line of the Cerro Gordo Mountain. In addition,

evidence to classify the image, the combination of the floral paradise above could link ball games to ritual sacrifice.

Religious beliefs in Mesoamerican cultures frequently demonstrate a connection between time, ritual, and agricultural cycles. From the Early and Middle Preclassic through the Classic period, there have been numerous accounts of the ball game, and it was routinely accompanied by ritual sacrifice. For the Maya, the ritual function of the ball game was linked to calendrical time. Games were played on the equinoxes to provoke the descent of the Maya Sun God into the underworld and prompt his rebirth.[146] For example, the ball game played on the vernal equinox would culminate with the sacrifice of the player chosen to represent the descending sun.[147] In stelae found at Yaxchilan, the common theme of capture, sacrifice and death of the Sun God is frequently paired with a ruler scattering water of coming rains as a symbol of rebirth.[148] This highlights the idea that with death always came rebirth. Sacrifices were believed by Mesoamerican cultures to instigate the cycle of the sun and agricultural activity.[149] This is a parallel to the upper register of the *Paradise Mural* as the central figure pours a type of fluid from their hands. As there is a prevalence for images of rebirth to be paired with images of death, it is feasible the two ball players above the mountain represent death in the *Paradise Mural*, and the pouring of water symbolizes rebirth. In other examples, both the Mayas and the Aztec regarded the ball game as a reenactment of warfare, in which defeated enemies were sacrificed in

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earlier civilizations held mountains in high regard, such as the Olmec, seen through the Olmec Plate which featured a simplified model of the universe consisting of the tree of paradise, the mountain, and the underworld below, with the mountain as an essential link between the two.

[146] Cohodas, "The Symbolism and Ritual Function of the Middle Classic Ball Game," 127.

[147] Cohodas, "The Symbolism and Ritual Function of the Middle Classic Ball Game," 109.

[148] Cohodas, "The Symbolism and Ritual Function of the Middle Classic Ball Game," 109.

[149] Cohodas, "The Symbolism and Ritual Function of the Middle Classic Ball Game," 110.

the aftermath of ballgame play.[150] The outcome of the ball game was considered a divine selection of the proper sacrificial victim.

In the Classic Maya ritual of the autumnal equinox, ball game players would represent the Hero Twins, named Hunahpu and Xbalanque. The Hero Twins of the *Popol Vuh* were part of the most elaborate Mesoamerican ball game myth known, and furthermore were considered the sons of the Maize God.[151] The known association of the ball game with the Maya Hero Twins in the *Popol Vuh* further elevates the possible meaning of the mural and underscores the role that ritual sacrifice played. In one part of the myth, the twins allowed themselves to be killed but are reborn as fish, a familiar image in Teotihuacan, and soon after they destroy the gods of Xibalba, the underworld, they ascend into the heavens.[152] This myth of ascension could be represented by the two ball game players above the mountain, and their rebirth shown by the fish swimming to the mountain below. The inclusion of the ball game players references Maya ideology and would inevitably call for an examination of ritual sacrifice and why it is represented on a private residence wall in Teotihuacan.

The State at Teotihuacan

Ritual sacrifice is proven to have occurred in Teotihuacan, and the *Tepantitla Mural* appears to have a depiction of a victim. Teotihuacan participated in this grisly affair which can be seen in prevalent iconography in the city such as depictions of hearts on knives from Portico 19 (Fig. 29) The two figures stand in a procession wearing bird-costumes and each holding a

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[150] Mary Ellen Miller, "The Ballgame," *Princeton University Art Museum* 48, no. 2 (1989): 24.

[151] Cohodas, "The Symbolism and Ritual Function of the Middle Classic Ball Game," 109.

[152] Cohodas, "The Symbolism and Ritual Function of the Middle Classic Ball Game," 110.

knife with an impaled heart. Teotihuacan used sacrificial blades on captives reminiscent to these, and archaeological data corroborates the images. The Pyramid of the Feathered Serpent is famed for its remarkable sculptured façade of projecting serpent heads, and mass graves of sacrificial victims. In total, about two hundred people were sacrificed as part of the construction of the Feathered Serpent Pyramid.[153] Burials were similarly discovered beneath the Pyramid of the Moon. Excavations of the pyramids carried out by the Mexican government resulted in the discovery of numerous human skeletons with hands tied behind their backs indicating they had been bound. Many were in military garb, accompanied by weapons, and arranged in structured patterns, suggesting they were captives of war. In some burials beneath the Pyramid of the Moon, victims were interred with other animals like pumas and wolves. This occurred in Burial 2 at the base of the Moon Pyramid, considered one of the richest burials at Teotihuacan.[154] The sacrificed individual of Burial 2 was placed in a seated position, leaning on the east wall, and facing the west. His arms were bound behind his back, and bioarcheological studies revealed him to be between forty to forty-five years old, and analysis of stable isotopes in the bone and dental phosphate revealed the victim had spent his earlier years in a place other than Teotihuacan, but it is not known exactly where he lived before.[155]

Some burials featured artifacts accompanying the bones that suggested elites or high-status individuals, and in others the artifacts suggested lower-class.[156] In a separate example,

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[153] Matthew Robb, "Ritual Deposits in the Moon Pyramid at Teotihuacan," In *Teotihuacan City of Water City of Fire*, Edited by M.H. Robb, (San Francisco: University of California Press, 2017): 83.

[154] Robb, "Ritual Deposits in the Moon Pyramid at Teotihuacan," 83.

[155] Robb, "Ritual Deposits in the Moon Pyramid at Teotihuacan," 83.

[156] Robb, "Ritual Deposits in the Moon Pyramid at Teotihuacan," 84.

Burial 4 of the Feathered Serpent Pyramid was deposited around 350 CE. The burial held evidence for victims who had emigrated to Teotihuacan and lived for some time before their death. Different types of cranial deformation and dental mutilation, which was atypical for Teotihuacan, suggests the victims may have come from diverse origins.[157] Isotope studies confirmed most of them were foreigners who changed their place of residence in some time of their life.[158] Buried with them were obsidian blades and war insignia in the form of human mandibles and maxillae arranged as neckwear. All eighteen individuals of this burial were of the age for mature warriors. [159] In total, about 200 persons were sacrificed as part of the construction of the Feathered Serpent pyramid, and many were in military garb and accompanied by weapons, arranged in structured patterns. They were either enemies or low-status peoples dressed as soldiers and dignitaries.[160] Since the floral paradise was thought to be reserved for warriors, the nobility, or gods, then it is also plausible the two ball players within the *Paradise Mural* represent warriors or were ball players put in the role of warriors. It was thought that ritual practices were directed to deities associated with rain and water, such as the Storm God. However, it is now understood to be connected to political, economic, and social processes particularly related to conflict or competition.[161]

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[157] Robb, "Ritual Deposits in the Moon Pyramid at Teotihuacan," 86.

[158] Christine D. White, Michael W. Spence, Fred J. Longstaffe, Hilary Stuart-Williams, Kimberley R. Law, "Geographic Identities of the Sacrificial Victims from the Feathered Serpent Pyramid," 220.

[159] Robb, "Ritual Deposits in the Moon Pyramid at Teotihuacan," 86.

[160] George L. Cowgill, "State and Society at Teotihuacan Mexico," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 26 (1997): 145.

[161] Christopher Morehart, "Human Sacrifice During the Epi-Classic Period in the Northern Basin of Mexico," *Latin American Antiquity* 23, no. 4 (2012): 426.

Isotopic analysis has proven that some, but not all, of the ritual sacrifice victims were from foreign regions. In addition, some had lived in Teotihuacan for a long while before their death.[162] The analysis of dental modification suggests that many of the sacrificed individuals had been foreigners.[163] Even more surprising is that the victims appear to have come from a variety of distant places, and many had lived in Teotihuacan for a significant amount of time before their death, as verified by oxygen-isotope ratios.[164] Furthermore, the compounds of the selected murals, specifically the *Tetitla* compound, was known to be inhabited by Maya shell traders from the Gulf.[165] This would suggest that these victims were selected from the city's existing population, rather than kidnapped captives of war.[166] This would further suggest a recognized pattern of ritual sacrifice of the inhabitants of Teotihuacan, and their knowledge of the practice for they continued to live there supposedly willingly. To consider this and the presence of the selected murals in private residential areas, all the above might point to state-mandated imagery as propaganda in the homes of the city's inhabitants.

The location of a private residence for both murals is of particular interest and calls for analysis of the viewer. Scholars theorized the Tetitla complex housed Maya shell traders and artisans that emigrated to Teotihuacan from a region close to the Gulf Coast. Burials beneath the

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[162] Christine D. White, Michael W. Spence, Fred J. Longstaffe, Hilary Stuart-Williams, Kimberley R. Law, "Geographic Identities of the Sacrificial Victims from the Feathered Serpent Pyramid," 220.

[163] Christine D. White, Michael W. Spence, Fred J. Longstaffe, Hilary Stuart-Williams, Kimberley R. Law, "Geographic Identities of the Sacrificial Victims from the Feathered Serpent Pyramid," 220.

[164] White, "Geographic Identities of the Sacrificial Victims from the Feathered Serpent Pyramid," 220.

[165] As mentioned, the Tetitla compound is considered to have housed Maya-born shell traders from the Gulf coast, because of the array of shell artifacts that were discovered in burials beneath the floor of the Tetitla compound. See Matthew Robb, "Tetitla," 351.

[166] Robb, "Ritual Deposits in the Moon Pyramid at Teotihuacan," 86.

compound featured unique artifacts made of shell, including an elaborate shell necklace meant for a high-ranking individual.[167] In addition, there were discoveries of shell trumpets within the compound. These discoveries were unique to Teotihuacan, except for a discovery of incised shells in burials beneath the Feathered Serpent Pyramid, and these too were brought to Teotihuacan from the Gulf Coast.[168] It is probable the inhabitants moved to Teotihuacan and brought these shell artifacts with them from their origins. The *Tetitla Goddess* mural features the same scattering hands of liquid and seeds just like the figure of the *Tepantitla* mural, which led to the identification as the Great Goddess for both figures. However, the theory of the murals as propaganda is a stronger argument by utilizing the *Tepantitla* mural because of its diverse imagery. The theory of propaganda is complicated at the Tepantitla compound because it is not precisely known who inhabited the space. However, there are multiple theories it was meant for high-ranking individuals.[169] This is a significant, since both complexes might have housed high-ranking individuals, the propaganda of fertility rituals, sacrifice, and gender ideals for the city becomes a reinforcement of civic ideals that have allowed the city to prosper. Furthermore, the murals depict the system which benefitted themselves and their families.

Summary of the Tepantitla and Tetitla Murals

The *Tepantitla* and *Tetitla* murals are representative of an integrated population, with a mix of iconography which depicts male and female fertility symbols from both Teotihuacan and Classic Maya cosmography. This is evident mostly in the *Tepantitla Mural*, which offers iconographic parallels to female fertility through caves and spiders. Female fertility is

[167] Robb, "Tetitla," 356-357.

[168] Grube and Chavez, "Preliminary Iconographic Study of the Shell Trumpets," 248.

[169] Robb, "Tetitla," 357.

represented through the inclusion of the "seed-filled cavity" often thought to be a cave for the origin myth of humans. This is a direct link to Mesoamerican thought regarding female fertility; but still, all present symbols of fertility in the scene should not be equated to female roles. The bestowing hands of liquid laden with seeds of the *Tetitla* and *Paradise Mural*s had been equated to female biology as the life-giving waters from the womb. However, there are clear similarities to other Mesoamerican rituals of fertility that involved sowing with varying fluids by male practitioners. A variety of fluids further highlight mixed gender connotations for fertility rituals. Iconographic parallels for men are represented through the presence of butterflies and hummingbirds as symbols for warriors and their duty to protect and die for the well-being of the city. Butterflies and spiders are included in the Paradise Mural as personifications of ideal gender roles that can now enjoy the benefits of the afterlife.

The Maya Maize God and his rebirth narrative can be tied back to *Tepantitla* and *Tetitla* murals through agricultural fertility, and his death and rebirth to the harvest and germination of new maize. If the "bestowing hands" are linked to fertility rituals of bloodletting, then the image further acts as a conceptual parallel to the practices that would bring forth fertility for Teotihuacan. Through cross-cultural imagery parallels, this thesis argues that the murals are propagandist images, meant to compel inhabitants to be active participants in the collective culture at Teotihuacan. An active participant would exemplify loyalty, willingness to be sacrificed for rituals, and abiding by ideal gender roles, such as mother or warrior, to ensure the city was sustained. In this case, the central figure of the *Paradise Mural* could constitute a conceptual parallel to the Maya Maize God, who was often depicted as a mixed gender deity, and was responsible for the life-sustaining crop of maize and embodied the cycle of death and rebirth. Again, it is highly likely the central deity of the *Paradise Mural* is a mixed gender deity,

as an equivalent to this idea. For instance, the Maya Maize God was referred to as male in mythology but was represented as a mixed gender deity in various stelae and other examples of art, as seen in the example of *Stela H* from Copan. Other iconographic parallels for this idea include the motif of three individuals in a cosmic scene of agricultural significance, seen in the Maize God being attended to by other deities, and the *Tepantitla* central figure is similarly attended to by two other priests or priestesses combined with common iconography of Classic Maya fertility rituals. Through cross-cultural analysis, the motif of sowing seeds and liquid is parallel to bloodletting and fertility rituals, which were carried out by men and women, and supports the likelihood of mixed gender. However, as attested by iconographic comparison, the hands of abundance should not be considered only female. This would illustrate a model for gender dualism in the state too, for the two genders to work together to sustain and support the city.

The mural includes a reference to a floral paradise and a ball game. The floral paradise is alluded to through the budding flowers, the cosmic tree, and exotic birds. The paradise was considered the afterlife for warriors, shown through the inclusion of butterflies. The presence of spiders in the mural coupled with the Post-Classic Aztec idea of women who died in childbirth as equated to warriors is further support this is a paradisal realm for those who sacrificed themselves for the city. Classic Maya ritual sacrifice was often connected to the ball game, and victims were treated as warriors during the game and sacrificed. In Teotihuacan, warriors were shown to have been ritually sacrificed and buried beneath the major pyramids of the city, and the *Paradise Mural* includes a depiction of a victim, as the far right of the mural includes a crying man bleeding from his chest as a direct reference to sacrifice. His blood falls into the river below where fish swim in and out of the mountain stream. The combination of blood and the fish in the

water also references the cycle of death and rebirth, as the fish were symbols of ancestors who would transform into people at the mountain of emergence. This inclusion of a sacrifice victim is significant when combined with the theory of propaganda as presented by Headrick, with the *talud-tablero* structures as ever-present reminders of the duties that citizens were expected to undertake. The murals include a similar message, but for inhabitants of the respective apartment complexes to fulfill their roles as warriors or mothers. Of course, these vocations were extremely dangerous, often lethal for both parties, and sometimes were pressured to do more, such as acting as a sacrificial victim. While it is not known precisely why Teotihuacan sacrificed victims, Classic-Maya cross-cultural examples offer evidence, including the cycle of the sun and agricultural cycles perpetuated by the letting of blood. Also, clues from the city itself offer reasons for sacrifice, such as to prompt rain from the Storm God and the Water Goddess. Given the inhabitants of *Tetitla* were known to be of Maya origin, the inclusion of these murals in private residential complexes is further proof for a subtle propagandistic arrangement which would fully immerse the typical inhabitant of the city with omnipresent reminders of their expected roles.

To support the theory of propaganda, the *Tepantitla Mural* is analyzed for identification of both male and female fertility symbols, as well as references to death and rebirth. In addition, Classic Maya ideologies, such as the floral paradise, the ball game, and sacrifice are identified to further confirm propaganda. In the case of Teotihuacan, collective culture meant the complete collaboration of everyone in the city, no matter their sex or ethnicity, and focusing on the community over oneself. This would have meant being willing to sacrifice oneself in ritual, or as a warrior, or as a mother, to sustain the city. This idea of collective culture could be represented through deities of mixed gender, as a figural manifestation of gendered attributes working

together to bring positive results. The fertility of nature has been equated to female biology too often and drives the patriarchal idea that women's single significant role is reproduction. These points are compelling ideas which have helped to structure this argument. As an alternative interpretation, these murals should be understood as an exhibition of fertility for both men and women, and the collective interest in fruitfulness of the city, and the practices thought necessary to maintain it. In addition, without much context available to scholars it was difficult to understand the decoration of the ancient city, let alone the city's lost beliefs and understanding of the universe.

Conclusions

The shared Mesoamerican interest in the cycle of death and rebirth was present at Teotihuacan and concerned all inhabitants of the city. The rulers of Teotihuacan, though unknown, left behind traces of persuasion. Teotihuacan utilized the ubiquitous nature of the murals to reinforce ideals for the genders, and to remind the inhabitants of the procedures necessary to yield an abundant fertile lifestyle by alluding to the cycle of death and rebirth. With the consideration of the viewer, it would make sense for an elite individual to have propagandistic art in the compound. As mentioned, not only did the system benefit them and their families but having it would demonstrate a display of civic pride. By utilizing contemporaneous cultures to highlight the Mesoamerican interest in fertility rituals and ritual sacrifice, this thesis argues for propagandist imagery. Cross-cultural comparisons are significant to this understanding, as many of the images within the *Tepantitla* scene are parallels to Classic-Maya practices and beliefs. The selected murals present the viewer with a mixed gender deity and fertility symbols to represent the cooperation of gender roles, and the rewards that occur from abiding by them. This was considered necessary to sustain the state and to ensure the continuation of life cycles. Death was the necessary step to bring new life in much of Mesoamerican thought, shown through the repeated presence of death and rebirth narratives as related to agriculture including the Maya Maize God. It is more likely the Teotihuacan murals were parallel to these ideas and artists utilized Classic Maya cosmography to articulate it. The population of Teotihuacan became active participants, including those who had moved to the city willingly from other regions. The inhabitants were summoned to ascribe to these roles—warrior, mother, or victim, and if achieved they would be promised a beautiful afterlife. Their cooperation would allow for the bestowing hands of the deities to sustain, and thus the rains

would come again, the sun would rise the next day, and the maize would continue to sprout from the dry, cracked earth. This thesis can serve as a model for more research that aims to rethink how deities and figures are not male or female binary figures, as they have often been discussed. By utilizing larger contexts and a greater understanding of the function of gender in ancient Mesoamerican cultures, scholarship in the field can better discuss imagery and visual culture at Teotihuacan.

Key Dates

850-1000 CE	Mazapan
750-850 CE	Coyotlatelco
550-650 CE	Metepec
350-550 CE	Early to Late Xolalpan
170-350 CE	Early to Late Tlamimilolpa
100-170 CE	Miccaotli
1-100 CE	Tzacualli

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ILLUSTRATIONS

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Figure 2. *Palacio de Paradise Mural* (lower register), Portico 2, Tepantitla, Teotihuacan, Early to Late Xolalpan period (350-550 CE), stucco and mineral pigments

Figure 3. *Palacio de Tetitla Goddess Mural*, Portico 11, Tetitla, Teotihuacan, Xolalpan period (350-550 CE), stucco and mineral pigments

Figure 4. *Storm God Vessel*, Moon Pyramid, Teotihuacan, Early Tlamimilolpa period (170-250 CE), 10 5/8 x 8 ¼ in, ceramic

Figure 5. Tripod cylinder vessel with Storm God mouthpiece, Teotihuacan, Late Xolalpan period (350-550 CE), ceramic

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Figure 8. *Water Goddess Statue*, Pyramid of the Moon, Teotihuacan, National Museum of Anthropology, Mexico City, (), monolith stone

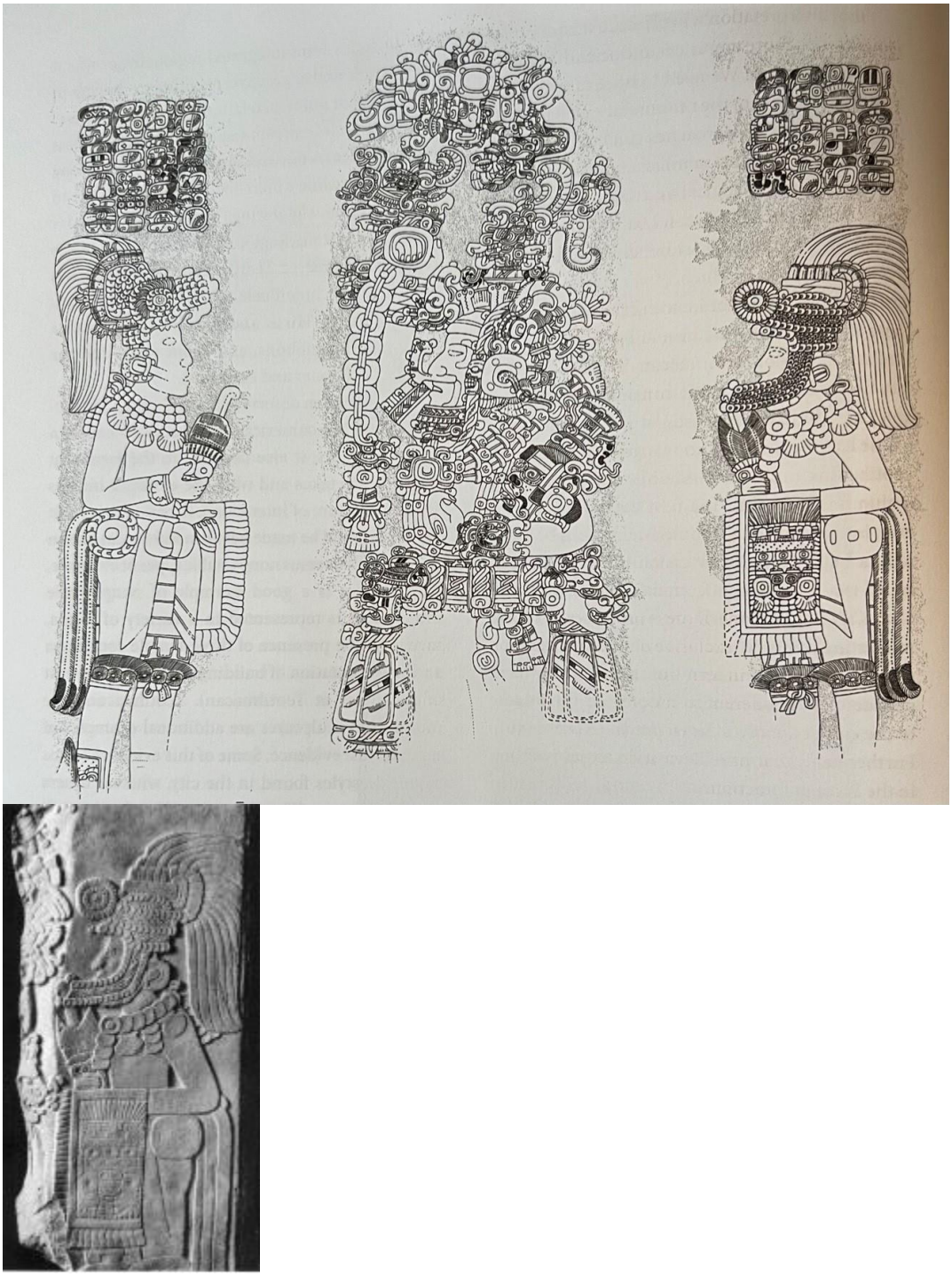
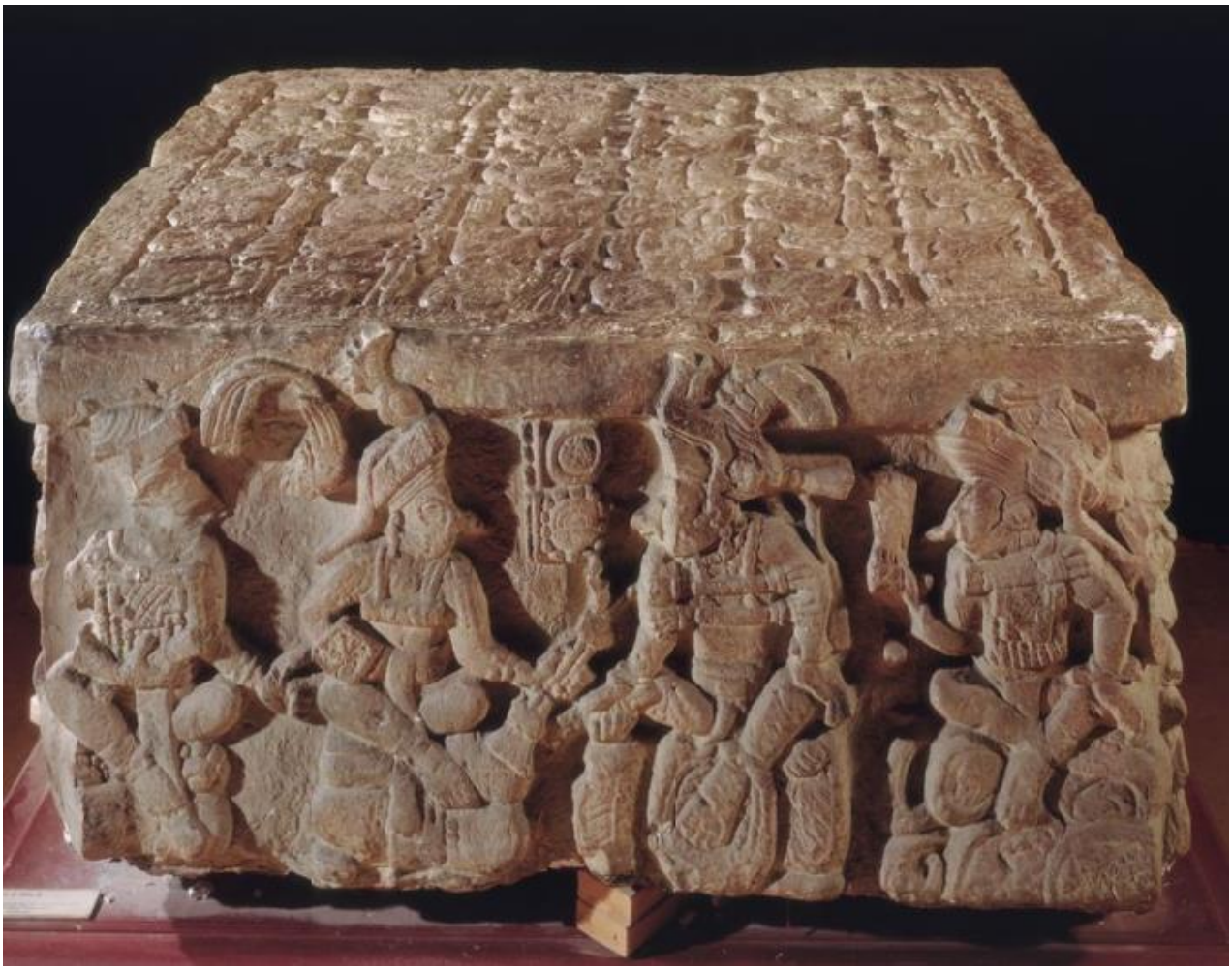


Figure 9. *Stelae 31*, Tikal, Guatemala, University of Texas Art Museum, Early Classic Maya (445 CE) stone

Figure 10. Lidded tripod cylinder vessel in the Teotihuacan style, Peten, Guatemala, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Early Classic Maya (300-400 CE) ceramic



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(Drawing by Matthew Looper, 2002)

Figure 14. *Palenque Oval Palace Tablet*, commissioned by K'inich Janaab Pakal I, Palenque, Mexico, Late Classic Maya (7th century CE), stone tablet.

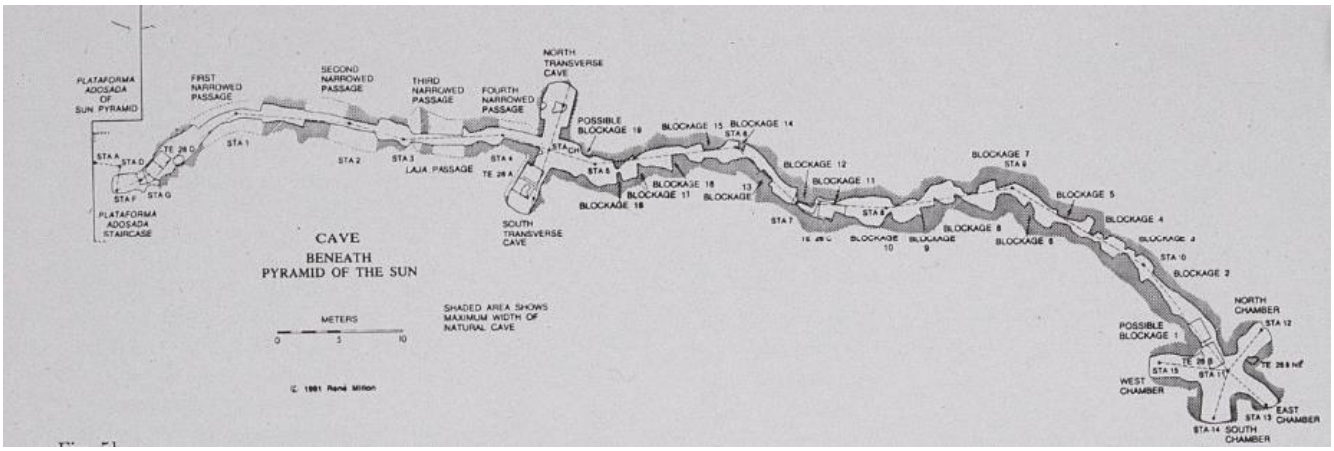

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Figure 16. *Mural of Mythological Animals,* Zone 4, Platform 1, Teotihuacan, possibly late Xolalpan (approx. 350-550 CE) stucco and mineral pigments

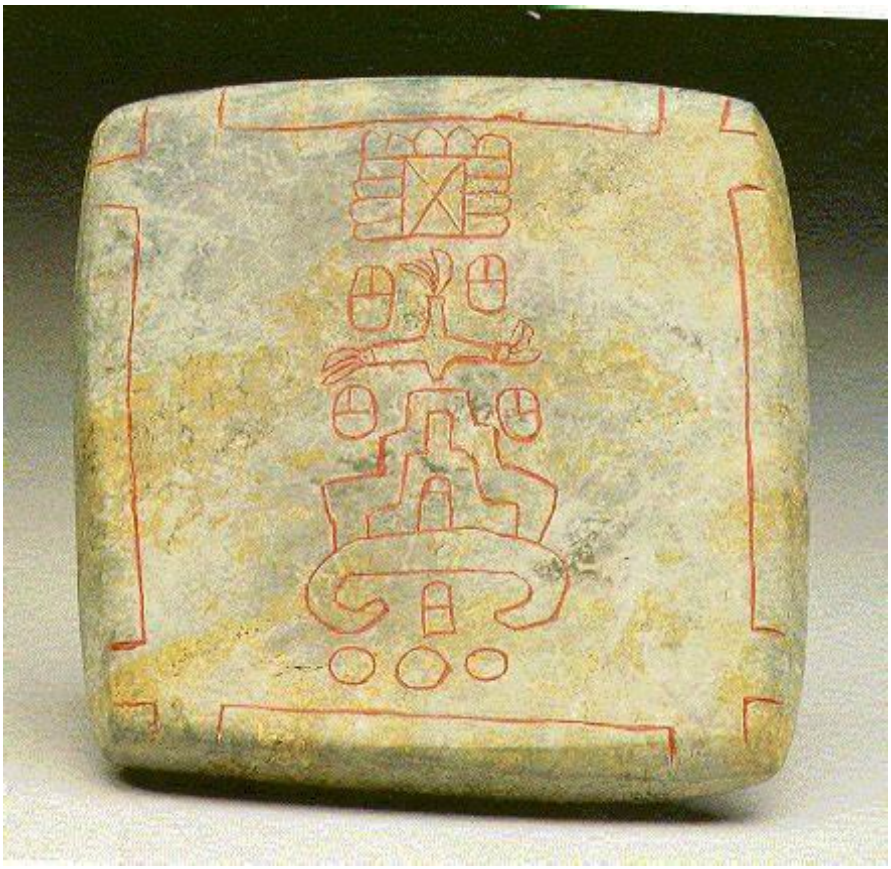

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Figure 23. Plate with Maize God resurrection scene, Peten, Guatemala, Princeton University Art Museum, Late Classic Maya (600-800 CE) ceramic

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Figure 27. Mural fragment with elite male figure and bloodletting tools, Late Metepic-Coyotlatelco period (550-850 CE), 32.8 in. x 45.7 in., stucco, and mineral pigments

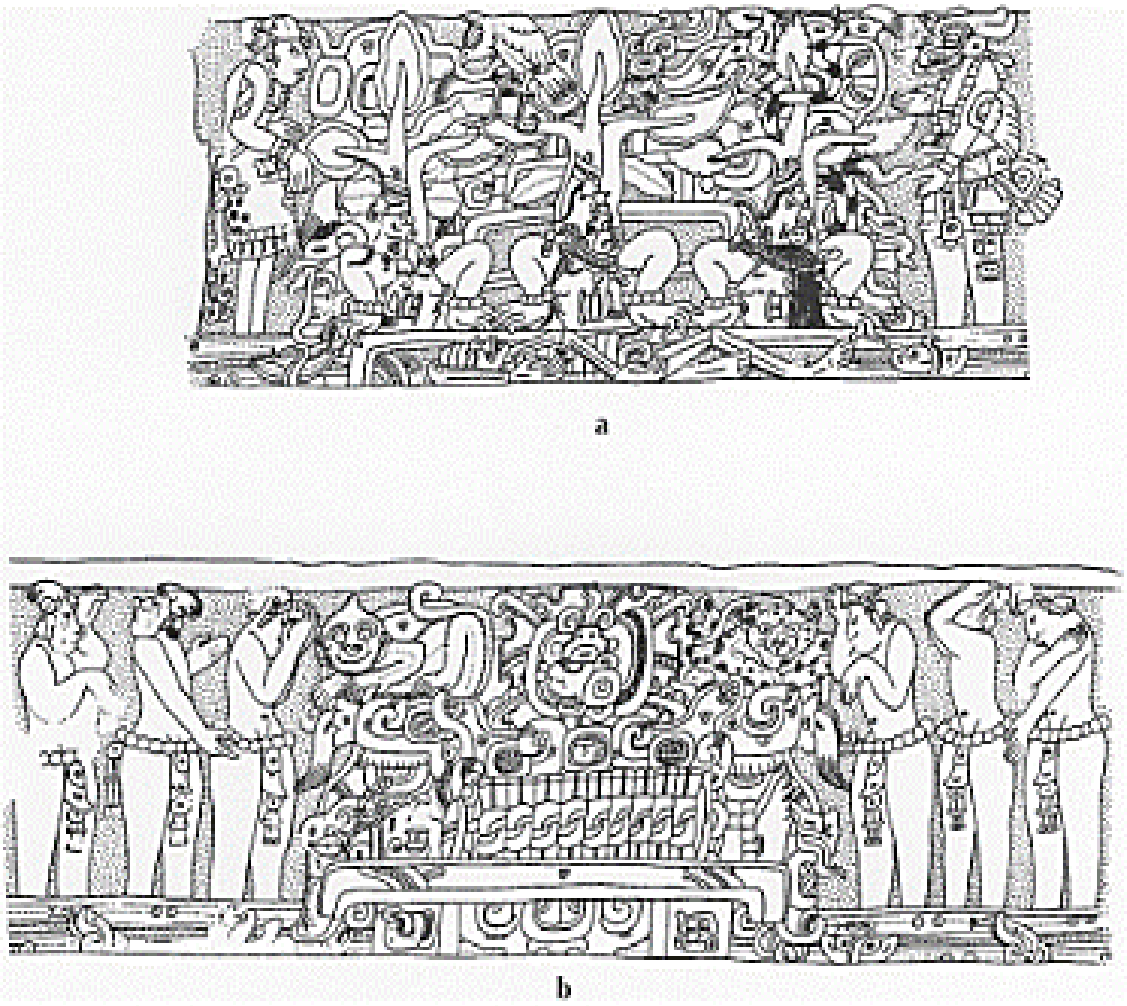

Figure 28. Line drawing of the *Death Vase,* drawing by Stephen Houston, 2000, Early Classic Maya (300-600 CE) ceramic

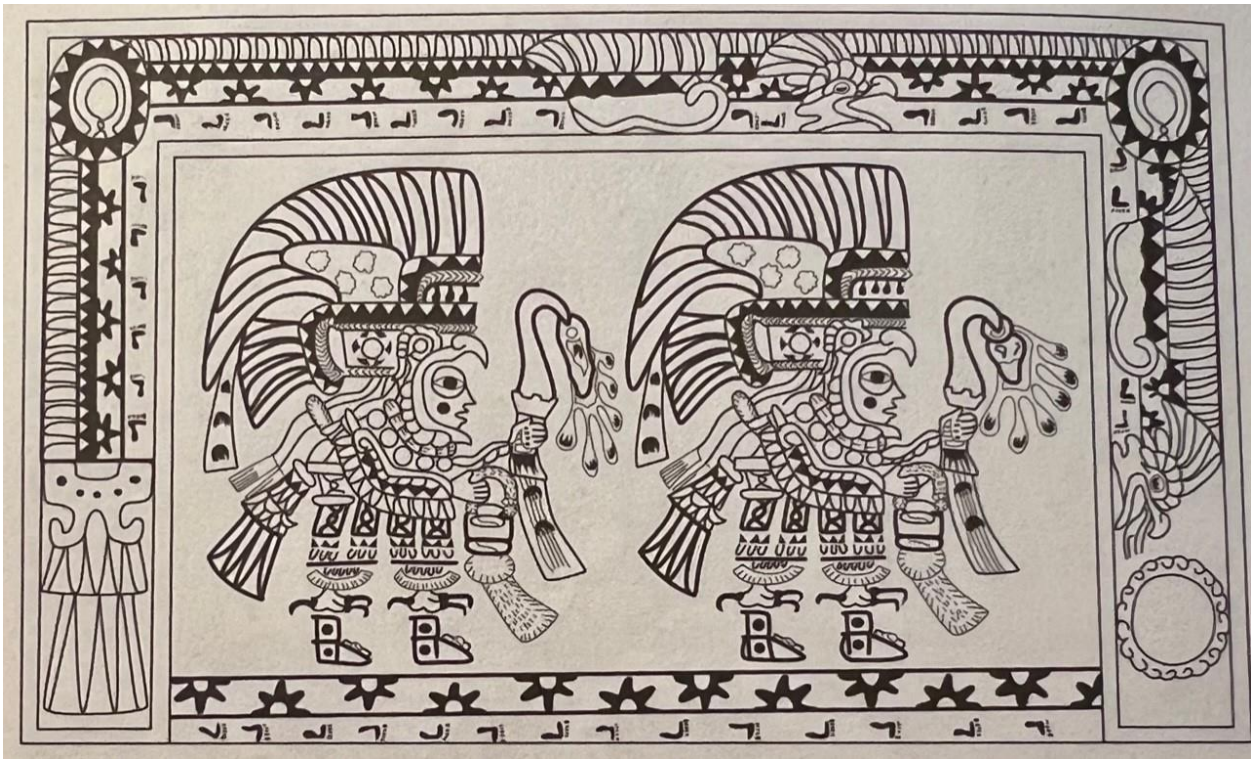

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Figure 30. Ceramic censer with butterfly motif, dead warrior, Teotihuacan, Early Xolalpan period (350-550 CE), 26.5 x 17.5 x 9.5 in., ceramic and mineral pigments