

**COXCATLAN DEITY SCULPTURES AS ILLUSTRATIVE OF THE TOWN'S
AUTONOMOUS RELATIONSHIP TO THE AZTEC EMPIRE**

by

EMILY BEE CLARK

Bachelor of Interior Design, 2006
The University of Oklahoma
Norman, Oklahoma

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INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

The Aztecs politically and culturally dominated central Mexico prior to the arrival of the Spaniards in 1519. Their civilization was established in the Valley of Mexico beginning around 1200 A.D. The Aztec people can be defined as a group by their use of the Nahuatl language and their membership in a common empire. The Aztec empire developed when the cities of Tenochtitlan, Texcoco, and Tlacopan joined together to form a coalition known as the Triple Alliance. The Triple Alliance began conquering other cities with the idea that the conquered towns would be indebted to them and thus have to pay tribute to the conquerors in the form of material goods.¹ The people who lived in Tenochtitlan, the capital city of the Aztec empire, called themselves Mexica. In this paper, I will utilize the term ‘Aztec’ to refer to all people who were members of the Aztec empire, while the term Nahua refers more generally to all inhabitants of central Mexico who spoke the Nahuatl language. In short, complex political and social ties defined Mexico in the 13th-16th centuries.

In order to learn more about the Aztec, Nahua, and Mexica cultures, researchers can consult a variety of primary and secondary sources. It is helpful to study the archeological remains of these cultures, as well as the art objects that they created. The durable nature of stone statuary has ensured that many statues of deities, animals, and people have survived, making this art form particularly important for study. Codices, or painted manuscripts consisting of pictures and glyphs, are also valuable sources for understanding the cultures. These manuscripts reveal much about the people’s histories, migrations, calendrical systems, and their tribute payments.

In addition to these visual sources, there are also written accounts of Aztec society, such as those of Fray Diego Durán and Bernardino de Sahagún, Spanish friars who came to Mexico after the conquest. Durán was a Dominican friar who wrote three works, *Book of the Gods and*

¹ Smith and Berdan, “Introduction,” 2.

Rites (ca. 1576-79), *The Ancient Calendar* (1579), and *The History of the Indies of New Spain* (ca. 1580-81).² These texts were written after Durán had consulted codices, paintings, and indigenous peoples.³ As these works were produced about sixty years after the Spanish Conquest, it follows that the people Durán must have consulted would have been quite young prior to the Conquest and thus may not have provided accurate information. Additionally, Durán's consultants may have been idealistic about their belief systems and behaviors, as they looked back on their history that was so rapidly changing.⁴

Sahagún was a Franciscan monk who arrived in Mexico in 1529. He wrote an account of Aztec culture, which is now known as the *Florentine Codex: General History of the Things of New Spain*.⁵ This account covers a variety of topics, ranging from gods, ceremonies, philosophy, kings and lords, people, and animals. Sahagún also wrote another work titled *Primeros Memoriales* which includes similar information that he collected while in Tepepulco.⁶ Although the writings of both Sahagún and Durán provide valuable information, they are not perfect as they tend to focus solely on the elite part of society and offer generalized descriptions that may not be applied to cities outside of Tenochtitlan.⁷ Also, it should be considered that these texts were intended for a Spanish Catholic audience, which disapproved of the Aztec culture. This fact may have led the chroniclers to tailor their accounts to make it seem as though their religious conversion efforts were highly successful.⁸

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the significance of two stone statues that were excavated from a mound on a private estate in the town of Coxcatlan, Mexico, in the late 19th

² Horcasitas and Heyden, "Fray Diego Durán," 41.

³ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁴ Pasztory, *Aztec Art*, 20.

⁵ Smith, *The Aztecs*, 16-17.

⁶ Pasztory, *Aztec Art*, 19.

⁷ Smith, *The Aztecs*, 18.

⁸ Edgerton, *Theaters of Conversion*, 17.

century.⁹ One statue is of a female figure (Figure 1). This sculpture has a skull-like face with large circular recessed eye sockets, a skeletal nose with red shell inlaid in the nostril sockets, and an elongated mouth that was originally inlaid with white shell to represent the prominence of teeth in the skull. The figure also has two circular indentations below the eye sockets that were inlaid with turquoise. The ears of the figure protrude from the sides of the head and they are ornamented with circular earpools that were also decorated with turquoise. The hairline is marked with small holes that would have functioned as the attachment points for a headdress. On the back of the figure there is a date glyph consisting of eight small circles next to a representation of a skull in profile with decorative plant-like designs around it. Along the arm there is a slight delineation which indicates that the figure may be wearing some kind of mitten over her hands. The raised pad like areas on the hands, and the uniformity of digit length suggests that these mittens may be intended to show animal paws.¹⁰ The raised hands/paws of the figure face forward. The torso is short, and the exposed breasts are sagging. In the center of the chest, the figure has a hole which may have originally held another inlaid stone. A belt in the form of a snake is tied around the waist, and is painted brown, black and white. The skirt of the figure is made of intertwined serpents in a crisscross pattern. In this area of the statue, the artist has incised the details of the snake's heads and rattles. On her legs, the figure appears to be wearing some kind of animal boot, as she has claws on her feet.

The other statue that I will be analyzing is of a male figure (Figure 2). This statue has many similarities to the female work, as it also has holes in the hairline, protruding ears, large earpools, and a recessed circle on the chest that may have contained a stone. On the back of his head this figure also has a date glyph consisting of four circles next to a symbol of a crocodile.

⁹ I have not seen these statues in person and therefore all descriptions are based on photographs and written material.

¹⁰ Elizabeth Boone argues that the mittens and boots worn by this figure show feline characteristics. Boone, "The 'Coatlicues,'" 196.

However, the face of this statue is very different-it is much more naturalistic than that of the female's. The eyes are almond shaped and inlaid with white shell and obsidian to show both the white of the eye and the pupil. The nose and mouth are also both naturalistic, as the nose is rounded and the mouth is much smaller and is inlaid with white shells that represent teeth behind the lips. The figure's right arm is raised and the hand is in a fist as if it is clasping something. Although still somewhat blocky, the hand of this figure is more naturalistic than the female's hand. Damage to the statue has resulted in the loss of the other hand, but the arm is bent at the elbow and is by the figure's side. The figure wears a hip-cloth, a garment that is tied in front at the waist and drapes over the central part of the lower body.¹¹ Additionally, he has a long, geometrically designed accessory that is composed of squares and culminates in a triangular point. This ornament, which shows traces of paint, covers the figure's back, is tied around his neck, and is worn over the hip-cloth. The figure also wears elaborate sandals that are accompanied by bands on the calves. Both of these stone statues are similar in size, about four feet tall, with the female statue being slightly taller than the male statue. Additionally, they are both made out of the same light brown colored stone and are also resting on a low plinth which is attached to the sculpture. Originally, each piece would have been painted and decorated with inlaid stones.¹² These similarities suggest that the statues were probably a pair.

In order to make assessments about these pieces, I will look at a variety of sources to determine the nature of Coxcatlan's relationship to the Aztec empire. I will also analyze documents that detail tribute paid by conquered towns to the empire; examine the *Relación de Cuzcatlan*, a post-conquest questionnaire about the city and its customs; and look carefully at previous scholarship on the city and its imperial status. By carefully evaluating other scholars'

¹¹ Anawalt, *Indian Clothing*, 25.

¹² Solís and Alonso, "Coatlícue" and "Xiuhtecuhtli-Huitzilopochtli," 463.

interpretations of these pieces, comparing them to Mexica deity statues, and analyzing archaeological and historical evidence, I will argue that these statues were intended to be a pair and that they must represent the deities Cihuacoatl and Xelhua. I will also discuss the uniqueness of the date glyphs found on each of these statues and explain how their significance must relate solely to the people of Coxcatlan. Also, I will identify these sculptures as Aztec in style and look at the circumstances surrounding their patronage. Finally, I will contextualize these pieces, and explain what meaning the town of Coxcatlan may have attached to these works, and the purpose that they may have fulfilled in their religious ceremonies. All of these assertions will demonstrate that these statues are reflective of Coxcatlan's unique relationship to the Aztecs, as an ally but not a member of the empire.

CHAPTER 1

COXCATLAN AND TENOCHTITLAN

Coxcatlan (Cozcatlan, Cuzcatlan), a city located in the modern-day state of Puebla, is about one hundred fifty miles to the southeast of Tenochtitlan (Figure 3).¹ Coxcatlan's relationship with Tenochtitlan and the Aztec empire is somewhat ambiguous. The empire was initially composed of the three cities of Tenochtitlan, Texcoco, and Tlacopan, which joined together in 1430 to form what is known as the Triple Alliance.² This alliance conducted military campaigns together and demanded tribute in the form of material goods from those they conquered. Due to their defeat and thus their forced membership in the empire, many cities were required to comply with the wishes of the Triple Alliance. However, not all cities were conquered by the empire. For example, the town of Tlaxcala, located to the east of Tenochtitlan, was an ardent enemy of the empire and remained independent.³ Also, some areas that were located along enemy borders were semi-independent, as they served as a buffer between the enemy state and the empire.⁴ According to Frances Berdan, the Aztec empire sometimes developed unique "clientlike" relationships with outlying areas, which resembled alliances, but had several important distinguishing characteristics.⁵ For example, the relationship was one in which the client was constantly aware that the empire could at any point conquer them if it were to their benefit. These clients were usually in areas either near a trade route, close to critical resources, or next to an unconquered territory.⁶ In return for their semi-alliance to the empire, the client would allow Aztec merchants to safely travel trade routes, protect resources, and stave

¹ Coxcatlan is the modern name of the city, whereas Cozcatlan and Cuzcatlan were used by primary sources to refer to the town.

² Berdan and Anawalt, *The Essential Codex Mendoza*, xi.

³ Smith, "The Strategic Provinces," 140.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 137-138.

⁵ Berdan, "The Provinces of the Aztec Empire," 268.

⁶ *Ibid.*

off neighboring enemies of the empire by periodically conducting warfare.⁷ By developing these kinds of relationships, the empire was able to achieve its goals, while saving man power and money that would have otherwise gone into conquering the towns.⁸

Some primary sources suggest that Coxcatlan was independent. In particular, the Codex Mendoza, a book commissioned by the viceroy Antonio de Mendoza for Charles V of Spain which contained copies of conquest and tribute lists from native books,⁹ does not contain any reference to Coxcatlan. The absence of Coxcatlan from this codex suggests that the town was not conquered and did not pay tribute to the Aztec empire and, therefore, was independent. The fact that the Relación de Cuzcatlan, a response to a questionnaire sent out by Spanish officials in 1580, does not mention any resident central Mexicans in the town,¹⁰ the city of Tenochtitlan, or the empire at all also seems to suggest that the town was not a part of the empire. If the town had been conquered and was a part of the empire, one would expect the Relación to mention this association. Sahagún notes that the people of Coxcatlan, whom he refers to as Cozcateca, were present at a *tlacaxipeualiztli* ceremony which entailed the killing and flaying of captives in order to honor the god Xipe Totec.¹¹ Sahagún writes,

“And also from warring cities, from beyond [the mountains], those with whom there was war, were summoned, in secret, and came within, in secret, as Moctezuma’s guests, the Nonoalca, the Cozcateca, the Cempoalteca, the Mecateca. [These ceremonies] were shown to them, and they were confounded. For thus they were undone and disunited.”¹²

This explanation illustrates that the city of Coxcatlan was not allied to the empire, but was

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Pasztory, *Aztec Art*, 179.

¹⁰ Umberger, “Aztec Presence and Material Remains,” 170.

¹¹ Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, Book 2, 50-53.

¹² Ibid., 53.

warring with it. By inviting warring cities as guests to these ceremonies, Moctezuma was trying to intimidate them into submission. As they witnessed the sacrifice of war captives, the guests were supposed to understand Moctezuma's power and realize that unless they stopped their militaristic threats to the empire, they too could become sacrificial victims. Toribio de Motolinía, a Franciscan friar who arrived in Mexico in 1524,¹³ writes in the *History of the Indians of New Spain* that Coxcatlan was a frontier province that "waged war in many places" and committed "very cruel sacrifices of captives and slaves."¹⁴ This statement implies that the town was both independent and powerful.

Other primary sources suggest that Coxcatlan was a member of the Aztec empire. A document from the Archivo General de la Nación, Hospital de Jesús, states that tribute collectors from Coxcatlan were entrusted to care for Moteuczoma I's (1440-68) pleasure gardens in the area of Huaxtepec,¹⁵ a tributary province just to the south of Tenochtitlan. This account of tribute collectors in Coxcatlan implies that the city was required to pay tribute and thus was a part of the empire. Coxcatlan was also listed in a 16th-century document published in Paso y Troncoso's *Epistolario de Nueva España* as a town that paid undesignated tribute to the lords of the Triple Alliance.¹⁶ Durán proclaims that Aztec colonists stopped in the area of Coxcatlan on their way south to Oaxaca, during the time of Moctezuma I (1440-68). The fact that the Aztecs stopped in Coxcatlan suggests that the people of the area were not hostile to the empire.¹⁷

Coxcatlan is listed in the "Memorial de Tlacopan" (c. 1552), an account of the kingdom of Tlacopan that listed distinct groups that were members of the empire and their economic and

¹³ Motolinía's *History of the Indians of New Spain*, 1.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 124.

¹⁵ Carrasco, *The Tenochca Empire*, 132.

¹⁶ Smith, "The Strategic Provinces," 149.

¹⁷ Umberger, "Aztec Presence and Material Remains," 170. Tenochtitlan had established a colony at Oaxaca, sending their people there in the 1450's to repopulate after the area's defeat by Motecuhzoma in the same decade. *Ibid.*, 155.

political functions.¹⁸ Juan de Torquemada, a Franciscan friar who lived in New Spain during the late 16th and early 17th centuries, argued that the southern regions mentioned in the “Memorial de Tlacopan” paid tribute to Tenochtitlan.¹⁹ As Coxcatlan was located in the southern state of Puebla, this account implies that Coxcatlan paid their tribute directly to Tenochtitlan. If Coxcatlan was conquered, Aztec settlers may have been in the area, as conquerors were often sent to repopulate conquered areas.²⁰ In the *Crónica mexicana*, Alvarado Tezozomoc, a grandson of Moctezuma II,²¹ mentions that young men under the rule of Ahuitzotl traveled to Coxcatlan and exercised their weapons daily in the town.²²

Although Tezozomoc alludes to the conquest of Coxcatlan, the conquest of a city-state does not necessitate its inclusion in the empire.²³ Similarly, a town’s inclusion in the empire does not always mean that it has been conquered by the empire’s forces. For example, the town of Huexotzinco, which was suffering attacks from their neighbors, the Tlaxcalans, asked Tenochtitlan in 1512 if they could become Triple Alliance members and “true brothers in arms.”²⁴ Tenochtitlan accepted their request, but only four years later, in 1516, Huexotzinco quit the Triple Alliance and sided again with Tlaxcala and Cholula, probably because these cities threatened them with death should they continue to ally themselves with the Mexica.²⁵ This abbreviated history of Huexotzinco illustrates that there are various reasons for inclusion in the empire and that the alliances of cities were constantly shifting.

Many modern day scholars are reluctant to classify Coxcatlan as a member of the Aztec empire. While Pedro Carrasco acknowledges Coxcatlan’s inclusion in the “Memorial de

¹⁸ Carrasco, *The Tenochca Empire*, 320, 14.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 55.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 319, 407.

²¹ Pasztory, *Aztec Art*, 33.

²² Tezozomoc, *Cronica Mexicana*, 27.

²³ Smith, “The Strategic Provinces,” 149.

²⁴ Isaac, “The Aztec ‘Flowery War,’” 422.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

Tlacopan,” he notes that the town is not mentioned in any other lists of conquests and that no sources mention it as “a town of importance in the imperial organization.”²⁶ The town’s exclusion from the conquest and tribute lists of the Codex Mendoza implies that it was independent. Michael E. Smith and Frances Berdan maintain that Coxcatlan is among a collection of city-states “of vague and controversial imperial status,”²⁷ which are neither tributary nor strategic.²⁸ They assert that Coxcatlan is not strategic because of its exclusion from the Codex Mendoza, nor tributary because of either its exclusion from Mexica tribute lists or due to a lack of documentary evidence (Figure 4).²⁹ Emily Umberger argues that the Tehuacan Valley area was neither a permanent enemy of the empire nor a tributary or strategic province, but rather that it was probably independent of the empire, but also allied in some way to it.³⁰ She sees Sahagún’s account of the people of Coxcatlan as enemy spectators at a religious festival in Tenochtitlan as suggestive of the town’s independence, but views Durán’s account of Aztec colonists stopping in the area of Coxcatlan during their travels as indicative of an alliance between Coxcatlan and the empire. Umberger claims that there are not any references to central Mexicans living in the area of Coxcatlan,³¹ which calls into question whether or not Tezozomoc’s reference to an Aztec invasion of Coxcatlan was accurate or came to fruition.

Coxcatlan’s location near trade routes used by the Aztecs may have been a factor that helped to assure the town’s independence. In central Mexico, trade was extremely important because cities relied on each other for food supplies and other commodities. As the people of Mexico lacked wheeled vehicles and draft animals, they utilized human labor to transport

²⁶ Carrasco, *The Tenochca Empire*, 319.

²⁷ Smith and Berdan, “Introduction to Part II,” 110.

²⁸ Smith, “The Strategic Provinces,” 147.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Umberger, “Aztec Presence and Material Remains,” 170.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 170

goods.³² People known as *tlamemes* traveled on foot with goods on their backs down roads that often went through several towns, as most roads were for local, not long-distance travel.³³ However, there were roads that ran from the cities in the Valley of Mexico to more distant areas. In order to transport goods along these routes, the transporters had a relay system, where one would take over for another about every six miles. Systems of transportation were highly organized, and inns were even built along trade routes for the merchants.³⁴

The city of Coxcatlan was located on an important transit route that was traveled by merchants.³⁵ Elizabeth Hill Boone notes that the Tehuacan Valley, which included the city of Coxcatlan, contained the Señorío de Teotitlan del Camino, which was a part of an important trade route.³⁶ It seems feasible that the members of the Aztec empire used this trade route and wanted to maintain neutrality along it. Although Boone does not describe the path of the route, it is possible that it originated in Tenochtitlan, passed through Teotitlan and Coxcatlan, and culminated in the southern town of Oaxaca. There must have been a route that went from the Aztec capital to Oaxaca, as 600 families from Tenochtitlan traveled to Oaxaca in the 1450's to repopulate the area after Moctezuma defeated it in the same decade.³⁷ This route was probably also used for trading, as the remains of imported pottery from Texcoco, the Gulf Coast, and the Mixteca Alta were excavated from the site of Coxcatlan.³⁸ In 1531, one of the first roads the Spanish built began in Tenochtitlan and continued on to Puebla and Oaxaca (Figure 5). This road was very likely not constructed entirely by the Spanish, but was probably an improvement on an existing trade route, as wagons and draft animals would not have been able to traverse the

³²Hassig, *Trade, Tribute, and Transportation*, 28.

³³ *Ibid.*, 28-32.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 31-32.

³⁵ Smith, "The Strategic Provinces," 147.

³⁶ Boone, "Manuscript Painting," 189.

³⁷ Umberger, "Aztec Presence and Material Remains," 155.

³⁸ Fowler, "Excavations in the Coxcatlan Locality," 336. The fact that pottery from other cities was found in Coxcatlan shows that the town was relatively wealthy, as elites usually had imported wares. *Ibid.*, 335.

rough, winding, and hilly roads previously utilized solely by foot traffic.³⁹ Therefore, it can be hypothesized that the Aztecs did not make an enemy out of the people of Coxcatlan because they wanted to be able to pass through the area on their way to Oaxaca without dealing with any military threats.

Some scholars assert that Coxcatlan was a part of the empire. Peter Gerhard believes that the town of Coxcatlan, as a part of the valley area of Mexico, was probably controlled by the Triple Alliance.⁴⁰ Robert H. Barlow identifies Coxcatlan, along with other towns in the Tehuacan Valley, on a map as part of an “independent principality of Teotitlan allied to the empire.”⁴¹ Although both of these scholars put forth these strong declarations, it is difficult to accept them, as they do not provide evidence to back up their claims.

In conclusion, there is not enough evidence to support the claim that Coxcatlan was definitively a part of the empire. It is telling that there is also inconclusive evidence for the imperial status of many of the cities around Coxcatlan, which suggests that the Mexica may have had a special relationship with these areas due to their geographic location. The little evidence that does suggest Coxcatlan’s alliance to the empire is not conclusive. There are a number of contradictory accounts about the town’s relationship to the empire. For example, Coxcatlan is not listed in the Codex Mendoza, but is present in the “Memorial de Tlacopan” (Figure 6). This discrepancy may be accounted for by the fact that these documents were produced by different groups and for different purposes. The Codex Mendoza, (1541) which was compiled by native scribes and those who still were knowledgeable about preconquest Aztec life, is primarily a pictorial account with some Nahuatl and Spanish written text.⁴² In contrast, the “Memorial de

³⁹ Hassig, *Trade, Tribute, and Transportation*, 171.

⁴⁰ Gerhard, *A Guide to the Historical Geography of New Spain*, 260.

⁴¹ Carrasco, “The Territorial Structure,” 103.

⁴² Berdan and Anawalt, *The Essential Codex Mendoza*, xii.

Tlacopan” (c. 1552) is an alphabetic document⁴³ which was written by the native ruler of Tlacopan, Don Antonio Cortés, in order to petition the king of Spain for the return of *sujetos*, or subjects.⁴⁴ Thus, it would have been to the author’s advantage to list as many towns as possible as previously paying tribute to Tlacopan, so that the Spanish would recognize the city’s prior authority and power.⁴⁵ Furthermore, the “Memorial de Tlacopan” cannot be used as a reliable source for tribute payments, as the similarity of language between the “Memorial de Tlacopan” and the “Memorial tetzcocano” indicates that the authors collaborated on the content prior to sending them to Spain.⁴⁶ While Durán explains that Coxcatlan served as a place for Aztec colonists to stay while traveling, Sahagún reveals that the people of Coxcatlan attended a *tlacaxipehualiztli* ceremony as spectators who were enemies of the empire. I believe that this contradictory account illustrates that Coxcatlan had a relationship to the empire in which it was neither a complete enemy, nor a complete ally. The exclusion of any imperial references from the *Relación de Cuzcatlan* suggests that the town was not a part of the empire.

I believe that Coxcatlan’s geographic location contributed greatly to its independence. As it was situated on an Aztec route that led to Oaxaca, an Aztec settlement, and was near the enemy area of Tlaxcala, it seems likely that the Aztec empire appealed to the city for a semi-alliance in which both parties benefited. In return for the exemption of being conquered, the town would allow Aztec merchants to safely travel along the trade route, and would insure that surrounding areas hostile to the empire were not a threat by periodically warring with them. Sahagún’s and Motolinía’s accounts both mention Coxcatlan’s warring nature, and the town’s proximity to a number of unconquered towns suggests that it successfully fulfilled its role as

⁴³ Carrasco, *The Tenochca Empire*, 51.

⁴⁴ Gillespie, “The Aztec Triple Alliance,” 245.

⁴⁵ In addition to Coxcatlan, many towns in the Puebla area are mentioned in the “Memorial de Tlacopan”, but not in the *Codex Mendoza* (Figure 3).

⁴⁶ Gillespie, “The Aztec Triple Alliance,” 246.

intermediary for the empire. The physical distance between Tenochtitlan and Coxcatlan, about 150 miles, may have been a factor in Tenochtitlan's decision not to conquer the town, as forging a semi-alliance would have been far more economical and efficient than equipping and sending an army that far from their home city. Because of the high mountains to the east, a high ridge line to the north, and a deep canyon to the south, Coxcatlan was easily defensible (Figure 7).⁴⁷ It is possible that the Aztecs recognized that Coxcatlan would be difficult to attack because of their position in the natural surroundings, and thus decided that an assault was not worth the risk and that a semi-alliance would be the best solution. Therefore, the members of the empire were able to create a relationship with Coxcatlan in which they could not lose, as they conserved resources and money, ensured their own protection, utilized Coxcatlan soldiers to fend off any encroaching enemies, and always had the threat of conquest to maintain the status quo. Coxcatlan's relatively unique relationship to the Aztec empire is reflected in the two deity statues found at the site.

⁴⁷ Fowler and Macneish, "Excavations in the Coxcatlan Locality," 334.

CHAPTER 2

IDENTIFICATION OF THE STATUES

Several factors suggest that the statues found at Coxcatlan (Figures 1 and 2) were created as a pair, which helps in their identification. For example, both statues were found on the estate of Mrs. Josefa Atecechea during a late 19th century excavation of a Pre-Hispanic mound at Coxcatlan,¹ which indicates that they may have been displayed together. Also, both statues are similar in size, about four feet tall. This relatively rare intermediate size -neither diminutive, nor monumental- further suggests that they were intended to be viewed together. Additionally, stylistic similarities suggest that the two were made to be a pair: both statues portray standing figures, both wear large ear spools, and both have a depressed circular form located on their upper chests. Also, both figures have a row of small holes around the hairline which would have originally functioned as attachment points for a headdress.² Finally, both statues are made of the same type of volcanic stone and feature inlaid shell and stones in the eyes and teeth that enliven the faces. The fact that one statue is of a female (Figure 1), whereas the other statue is of a male (Figure 2) further suggests that the statues were intended to go together: H.B. Nicholson mentions that Mesoamerican religious myths often contain consorts, or paired figures that are associated with one another.³ Susan Kellogg also notes that male deities often had female deities as consorts, who were their mothers, sisters and/or wives.⁴ These two statues then may be a pair of consorts.

Although many scholars have commented on the Coxcatlan statues, there is not a consensus about their identification. Esther Pasztory acknowledges that the statues might have

¹ Solís and Alonso, "Xiuhtecuhtli-Huitzilopochtli," 463.

² Pasztory, *Aztec Art*, 212.

³ Nicholson "Religion in Pre-Hispanic Central Mexico," 409.

⁴ Kellogg, "The Woman's Room," 568.

been intended to be a paired set,⁵ and Felipe Solís and Roberto Velasco Alonso also argue that the works are companion pieces.⁶ Pasztory does not assign a specific name to the female sculpture, but instead refers to it as “Death Goddess in Serpent Skirt,” and notes how the great Coatlicue of Tenochtitlan (Figures 8 and 9) as well as small death goddess images are similar to the statue.⁷ Felipe Solís and Roberto Velasco Alonso identify the female figure as Coatlicue and the male figure as Xiuhtecuhtli-Huitzilopochtli.⁸ Emily Umberger claims that the statues could be of local gods, specifically Cihuacoatl, a deity that can be equated to Coatlicue, and her son Xelhua.⁹

Since several scholars make a connection between the female deity statue and the goddess Coatlicue, it will be helpful to discuss Coatlicue’s significance and compare representations of Coatlicue to the death goddess statue from Coxcatlan. According to Sahagún, Coatlicue was an elderly woman who miraculously got pregnant after picking up a ball of down feathers and placing it in her bodice while sweeping in a temple area. Upon finding out about the pregnancy, her daughter, Coyolxauhqui, and her 400 sons were very upset, as they felt she had shamed them, and thus they began plotting her murder. Suddenly, Huitzilopochtli sprang out of Coatlicue’s womb in military attire and defended his mother by chasing the sons away and decapitating Coyolxauhqui (Figure 10).¹⁰ This myth has been interpreted as an explanation for natural occurrences, with Huitzilopochtli playing the role of the sun that must fight against the night which is enacted by the brothers as the stars, and Coyolxauhqui as the moon.¹¹ In accordance with this interpretation, Coatlicue was seen as mother earth who gives birth to the

⁵ Pasztory, *Aztec Art*, 212.

⁶ Solís and Alonso, “Coatlicue,” 463.

⁷ Pasztory, *Aztec Art*, 212.

⁸ Solís and Alonso, “Coatlicue” and “Xiuhtecuhtli-Huitzilopochtli,” 463.

⁹ Umberger, “Aztec Presence and Material Remains,” 169.

¹⁰ Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, Book 3, 1-5.

¹¹ Pasztory, *Pre-Columbian Art*, 90.

sun daily.¹² This violent myth was also used by the Aztecs to propagate the cult of war and to frighten their enemies.¹³ As the mother of Huitzilopochtli, Coatlicue was also associated with war and governance, as well as agricultural fertility.¹⁴ The pairing of Coatlicue and Huitzilopochtli as mother and son can be compared to Cihuacoatl and Xelhua, another mother and son pair. Coatlicue and Cihuacoatl share many characteristics as they are both fertility/death goddesses.

Coatlicue's association with the earth, which gives life to humans but also becomes their final resting place, correlated the goddess to the concept of death.¹⁵ According to Solís and Alonso, Coatlicue or 'Serpent Skirt' was so named because of the Aztec's conception of the earth's surface as covered with reptiles and their association of the deity with the regenerative power of the earth. Coatlicue's association with death is described by Solís and Alonso: "she is the mother-goddess who feeds the sun, the moon and humankind and she collects the bodies of human beings when they die."¹⁶ In the Coxcatlan statue, the deity's association with death is shown through her skull-like head, and her raised hands which are going to retrieve the bodies of children that she brought to life.¹⁷

Perhaps the most well known statue that has been identified as Coatlicue is a monumental work which is now in the National Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City (Figure 8 and 9). This sculpture, which is about 11 feet 6 inches tall, portrays a bare-breasted female figure with raised hands facing the viewer and claw-like feet. Additionally, the figure wears a skirt made of intertwined serpents and a belt that features two rattlesnake heads that hang in front. These same

¹² Carrasco and Sessions, *Daily Life of the Aztecs*, 82.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Read and Gonzalez, *Handbook of Mesoamerican Mythology*, 150.

¹⁵ Nicholson, "Religion in Pre-Hispanic Central Mexico," 422.

¹⁶ Solís and Alonso, "Coatlicue," 463.

¹⁷ Ibid.

iconographic features are also found in the female deity sculpture from Coxcatlan, indicating that these two statues could have been portraying the same goddess. The monumental work from Tenochtitlan, however, looks very different stylistically from the Coxcatlan deity sculpture. The high level of detail, squat proportions, and unrealistic representation of the body make the Tenochtitlan sculpture far less naturalistic than the Coxcatlan statue and even difficult to initially interpret. The 'Coatlicue' statue from Tenochtitlan also contains some elements that are not present on the Coxcatlan work. For example, the statue features two serpents facing each other in place of the now decapitated head.¹⁸ Additionally, the deity from Tenochtitlan wears a necklace of hearts and hands. Both of these elements are missing from the Coxcatlan statue, as the figure wears no necklace and has a skull-like head.

Simply because the statue from Coxcatlan does not portray all of the same elements as the monumental statue of Tenochtitlan, does not necessarily discount the possibility that both statues may have been intended to convey similar ideas or portray similar deities. To the Aztecs, the gods were polymorphous, or able to take on a variety of forms. A deity who exemplifies this quality is Quetzalcoatl, a god who manifested himself as both Ehecatl (wind) and Tlahuizcalpantecuhtli (dawn).¹⁹ It is possible that the Aztecs conceptualized deities in such a fluid way because they saw variety in the cosmos, and also complementary and conflicting forces in nature.²⁰ H.B. Nicholson also notes that deities were often conceived of in numerous forms.²¹ Elizabeth Boone believes that the costumes and physical elements of the several statues identified as 'Coatlicue' are seen as characteristic of a variety of deities. In particular she mentions that Coatlicue (Serpents Her Skirt), Cihuacoatl (Woman Serpent), Tzitzimime

¹⁸ Cecilia Klein suggests that the monumental Coatlicue may have been designed with a decapitated head because it represented the sacrifice that she made to set the sun in motion. Klein, "The Devil and the Skirt," 18.

¹⁹ Austin, "Cosmovision, Religion, and the Calendar of the Aztecs," 34.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Nicholson, "Religion in Pre-Hispanic Central Mexico," 422.

(Demons), Itzpapalotl (a warrior goddess), and Cihuateteo (spirits of women who died in childbirth) all share similar iconography that associates them with the earth and death.²² Often these female figures have skull-like faces, open mouths with bared teeth, tousled hair, joints marked by fangs, claws instead of hands and feet, and wrist and leg bands.²³

Since the statue at Coxcatlan has been interpreted as Cihuacoatl, it will be important to discuss the significance of this goddess. Cihuacoatl (Snake Woman) was, like Coatlicue, associated with the earth in her role as patroness of agriculture.²⁴ She was also connected to the concepts of regeneration as they applied to people, as she was also the patroness of midwives.²⁵ According to Durán, Cihuacoatl was the sister of Huitzilopochtli and human sacrifices were made during her feast day.²⁶ He also notes that Cihuacoatl was the patron goddess for Xochimilco, but that she was worshipped throughout Mexico.²⁷ He describes the goddess as wearing an all white outfit and having a gaping mouth that showed her teeth, and long, bulky hair.²⁸ Except for an all white outfit, this description is similar to how the Coxcatlan statue may have appeared with its headdress made of hair.

Cecelia Klein deviates from the predominant interpretations of Cihuacoatl as the earth mother who demands sacrifice and instead focuses on how Cihuacoatl was used politically. The assistant to the Mexica king had the title of *cihuacoatl*, after the goddess, and he would wear a costume that was similar to Cihuacoatl's. Klein argues that Cihuacoatl was used in the political system because she represented military origins and the expansion of the Aztec empire.²⁹ The

²² Boone, "The 'Coatlicues' at the Templo Mayor," 193-194.

²³ Ibid., 194.

²⁴ Read and Gonzalez, *Handbook of Mesoamerican Mythology*, 147.

²⁵ Ibid., 148.

²⁶ Ibid., 217, 212.

²⁷ Durán, *Book of the Gods*, 210. This statement implies that Durán believed the Mexica had taken the cult of Cihuacoatl from Xochimilco. Klein, "Rethinking Cihuacoatl," 239.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Klein, "Rethinking Cihuacoatl," 237.

cult of Cihuacoatl became popular in Tenochtitlan immediately following the Mexica conquest of Cuiclahuac, a city to the south with especially rich farm lands.³⁰ Cihuacoatl was the patron deity of many southern cities, including Colhuacan, from where the Mexica may have taken the goddess' cult.³¹ Cihuacoatl can be seen as belonging to a group of goddesses, with Coyolxauhqui as a variation of Cihuacoatl, who was also interchangeable with Coatlicue.³²

The Mexica had a tendency to portray Cihuacoatl in a negative manner, as they depicted the goddess decapitated, showed her with flayed skin, placed her image on the undersides of statues (Figure 11), and hid her main statue.³³ Since decapitation of enemies was commonly performed after a military conquest, the Mexica may have transferred this quality to Cihuacoatl in order to signify their conquest over the people of the southern areas who had originally worshipped her. Similarly, the portrayal of Cihuacoatl with flayed skin is another way to illustrate her as a conquered enemy.³⁴ Additionally, by placing her images on the bottoms of statues and hiding her main statue, the Mexica were conferring the status of prisoner on the goddess, and therefore the status of prisoner on their conquered enemies.³⁵

It is important to note that the female deity sculpture from Coxcatlan has none of these negative traits. The statue is not portrayed with a decapitated head, or flayed skin, which suggests that the creator of the work did not have a negative image of Cihuacoatl. Although the statue does have some references to death, such as her skull-like head, these would not necessarily be viewed as negative, as the Aztecs saw death as needed for life.³⁶ It can be concluded that this piece was probably not made for the political purposes of the people of

³⁰ Ibid., 238.

³¹ Ibid., 238-239.

³² Ibid., 243.

³³ Ibid., 243-245. Durán notes that the statue of Cihuacoatl at Tenochtitlan was kept at all times in a dark chamber. Durán 1971, 213.

³⁴ Ibid., 245.

³⁵ Ibid., 243-244.

³⁶ Pasztory, *Aztec Art*, 58.

Tenochtitlan. Instead, it seems much more likely that this image of Cihuacoatl was made for the people of the town of Coxcatlan primarily for religious purposes and also to illustrate their prestige.

Both Klein and Boone agree that traits of Cihuacoatl are seen in other earth goddesses. Based purely on physical appearance, it is difficult to make an assessment about the identity of the statue from Coxcatlan. The work could represent Cihuacoatl, Coatlicue, or any number of earth goddesses. Fortunately, the physical evidence of the statue itself is not the only source available for consultation. The *Relación de Cuzcatlan* indicates that Cihuacoatl was the patron goddess of the city. Within the document, the author notes that Cihuacoatl helped the people with their tribulations, afflictions, battles, and luck.³⁷ Most importantly, the *Relación* states that Cihuacoatl was above all the other gods that they had.³⁸ Furthermore, the fact the Cihuacoatl was a patron goddess for several southern cities suggests that the deity would have also been important to Coxcatlan, a city in the south.³⁹ Since the Coxcatlan deity statue does seem to fit into the category of an earth goddess, and Cihuacoatl, a goddess connected to agriculture and midwifery is mentioned in the *Relación*, it seems likely that the statue represents her. Finally, the high level of detail and the use of fine materials in the statue imply that this goddess was extremely important to the people of Coxcatlan. If they had to choose a goddess to venerate in an elaborate statue, they would certainly choose their patron goddess. Therefore, I believe that the female deity statue from Coxcatlan represents the city's patron goddess, Cihuacoatl.

The male deity figure from Coxcatlan has also been variously interpreted by scholars. Pasztory believes the symbol on the back of the figure is either a year sign or a fire symbol, but notes that the rest of the figure's costume does not correlate to depictions of the fire god in the

³⁷ "Relación de Cuzcatlan," 47.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Klein, "Rethinking Cihuacoatl," 238-239.

codices.⁴⁰ The figure's triangular cloth associates him with warriors, as they often wear a similar garment.⁴¹ His cape resembles a fire serpent, and his sandals have solar ray designs. Both of these elements reveal the figure's association with the sun.⁴² Solís and Alonso identify the male figure as Xiuhtecuhtli-Huitzilopochtli and note that the figure originally held either a banner or a weapon, as his right hand is shaped for this purpose.⁴³ While I agree that the statue has some of the features of Xiuhtecuhtli, I do not believe that the statue represents Huitzilopochtli, as the costume on the statue is not characteristic of that deity.

Xiuhtecuhtli has been identified as not only the fire god, but also the god of the year and time.⁴⁴ Xiuhtecuhtli, whose name means Turquoise Lord, is also associated with young warriors and rulers.⁴⁵ The gods' association with turquoise is often shown through the presence of a turquoise pectoral shaped like a butterfly, a turquoise colored bird against his brow, and the adornment of his image with turquoise mosaic. Additionally, the deity also often wears the xiuhuitzolli crown of rulership, and the xiuhcoatl fire serpent on his back.⁴⁶ The fire serpent design is present in many images that have been identified as Xiuhtecuhtli. For example, the fire serpent appears with the god in a page of the Florentine Codex (Figure 12). A similar design is seen on the back of the Coxcatlan statue, which suggests that the deity could be the fire god. The fire serpent symbol is not an identifying feature of the deity Huitzilopochtli, as an illustration of the deity from Sahagún's *Primeros Memoriales* shows (Figure 13). This suggests that the Coxcatlan statue is not Huitzilopochtli, but is instead Xiuhtecuhtli or a human dressed in his insignia.

⁴⁰ Pasztory, *Aztec Art*, 212.

⁴¹ Solís and Alonso, "Xiuhtecuhtli-Huitzilopochtli," 463.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Solís and Alonso, "Xiuhtecuhtli-Huitzilopochtli," 463.

⁴⁴ Miller and Taube, *The Gods and Symbols*, 190.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 189.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

Alfredo López Austin has analyzed depictions of fire gods iconographically. Focusing on a stone sculpture excavated from the Templo Mayor at Tenochtitlan (Figure 14), he argues that there are several elements of this statue which relate it to fire: the seated, hunched position, abundant feathers, the cylinder on the head, and the decoration of the cylinder. None of these elements are seen in the statue from Coxcatlan. López Austin sees the circular earspools as characteristic of the fire god.⁴⁷ Although the Coxcatlan statue does have these ornaments, this alone is not enough to identify the deity as Xiuhtechtli. However, the sandals seen on the fire god statue from Tenochtitlan (Figure 15) are also similar to those depicted on the Coxcatlan statue (Figure 16). The fact that the Coxcatlan statue does not have all of the attributes of the fire god but does have similar clothing and personal ornamentation suggests that the sculpture is not Xiuhtecuhtli himself, but rather a human or another deity with similar characteristics.

Emily Umberger argues that the male Coxcatlan statue could represent Xelhua, a local deity who was Cihuacoatl's son.⁴⁸ According to Motolinía's *Memoriales*, Xelhua was the son of Ilancue, who came from Chicomoztoc and founded Coxcatlan, along with the neighboring towns of Teohuacan and Teotitlan.⁴⁹ The *Relación de Cuzcatlan* describes Xelhua as a real person who was an ancestor of the people of Coxcatlan, became their ruler, and was also deified.⁵⁰ Umberger claims that the local deity of Xelhua can be equated to Huitzilopochtli, the Aztec god. The mothers of these two deities, Cihuacoatl and Coatlicue respectively, are both associated with death and fertility. Additionally, both Xelhua and Huitzilopochtli are deities that came from mythical places to found cities. Xelhua's journey from Cicomoztoc or "Seven Caves" led to the founding of Coxcatlan. Huitzilopochtli first appeared to the Mexica in Aztlan and then in

⁴⁷ Austin, "The Masked God of Fire," 262.

⁴⁸ Umberger, "Aztec Presence and Material Remains," 169.

⁴⁹ Motolinía, *Memoriales*, 9.

⁵⁰ "Relación de Cuzcatlan," 48.

Culhuacan where he instructed them on their journey and the founding of Tenochtitlan.⁵¹ The fact that there are such similarities between these two pairs of deities suggests that the Nahuatl people in Coxcatlan may have been familiar with the Mexica migration myth and adapted it with minor alterations to explain their existence as well. While the Cozcatlaca viewed Xelhua as an ancestor who was deified for his role in the founding of Coxcatlan, the Mexica saw Huitzilopochtli primarily as a deity associated with military prowess. These differences illustrate that perhaps the town of Coxcatlan was not as militaristically oriented as Tenochtitlan, a city that utilized Huitzilopochtli to advocate war and imperial expansion.

I believe that the male Coxcatlan statue could be a depiction of Xelhua, as it seems likely that the people of Coxcatlan would want to honor this man/god who founded their city. If the female deity statue is of Cihuacoatl as I believe it is, then it follows that the accompanying male statue portrays Xelhua, the goddess' son. The pairing of these two deities is due not only to their familial relationship, but also to their roles as patron deities of Coxcatlan. The fact that the people of Coxcatlan chose Cihuacoatl and Xelhua to venerate in such elaborate statues indicates that they held them in high regard for their respective roles in fertility and the founding of the town.

Although I do think that the Coxcatlan statue depicts Xelhua, I believe that the deity maintains some characteristics of the fire god. I argue that the creator of this work chose to incorporate elements of the fire god onto the statue in order to show the transformation of Xelhua from man into god and also to confer power onto the figure. It was not unusual for the Aztecs to conflate history with religion, and to conceptualize deities as having both divine and human-like qualities. A good example of this is seen in the Aztec's perceptions of Huitzilopochtli. It is

⁵¹ Boone, "Migration Histories," 133-140.

probable that the Aztecs actually did make a migration to Tenochtitlan,⁵² but it is likely that they constructed the story of Huitzilopochtli's guidance in order to explain why they settled where they did. Additionally, the Aztecs saw Huitzilopochtli as god-like in his role as their spiritual guide from Aztlan to Tenochtitlan, but they made him more human by creating a story about his birth at Coatepec, a later stop of the migration.⁵³ By relating a story of his birth, the Aztecs had a more tangible idea of the deity in a bodily form. A similar conflation of history and religion, and divinity and humanity, appears to occur in the Coxcatlan statue. Xelhua is a human historical figure who is divinized by taking on Xiuhtecuhtli's costume and the role of son of a goddess, Cihuacoatl.

López Austin notes that the fire god is known for his power of transformation.⁵⁴ This association seems to correlate to the transformative powers of fire itself. Fire can transform, among many other things, cold into warmth, uncooked food into consumable food, wood into charcoal, and water into steam.⁵⁵ It is probable that the application of the fire god symbols onto the image of Xelhua represented his transformation from human to god. The fire god is also associated with power. During the feast of *Izcalli*, the *tlatoani*, or rulers, dressed in the fire god's costume and images of the fire god were dressed in the usual clothing of the *tlatoani*.⁵⁶ This correlation between the costumes of the *tlatoani* and the fire god is significant, as it illustrates that the costume of the fire god can be appropriated by important people as a demonstration of their power. Therefore, the Coxcatlan statue of Xelhua may show him dressed in the costume of the fire god in order to signify his transformation from man to god, and his power and importance as the founder and patron deity of Coxcatlan.

⁵² Ibid., 142.

⁵³ Ibid., 134.

⁵⁴ Austin, "The Masked God of Fire," 274, 276.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 277.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

In conclusion, I believe that the female statue at Coxcatlan is a portrayal of Cihuacoatl, the patron goddess of Coxcatlan. The fact that the statue has some characteristics of earth/death goddesses in general, such as the serpent skirt and the skull-like head, supports this identification. Although the polymorphic nature of Aztec deities makes it difficult to ascertain the statue's identity, the mention of appeals made to Cihuacoatl in the *Relación de Cuzcatlan* suggests that the people of Coxcatlan held this goddess in high regard. The use of fine materials and the level of detail that went into the creation of the statue suggest that it is of a deity that was extremely important to the people of Coxcatlan. Based on the available evidence, it seems probable that the female deity statue is of Cihuacoatl, the patron goddess of Coxcatlan. Although the Mexica often utilized the image of Cihuacoatl to represent the subjugation of their enemies by showing the deity as decapitated or with flayed skin, the Coxcatlan does not have these qualities. Therefore it can be inferred that this statue was not made by the Mexica in order to intimidate Coxcatlan. Rather, it is more likely that the statue was made for religious purposes and that its ornamentation with costly materials was intended to convey the prestige of Coxcatlan.

I believe that the male statue represents Xelhua, the man/deity whom the Cozcatteca saw as responsible for the founding of their town. Although the statue looks naturalistic, especially when compared with its paired female statue, the figure has a fire serpent accessory, a feature which associates him with the fire god, Xiuhtecuhtli. When compared to a fire god statue from Tenochtitlan, the Coxcatlan sculpture differs in posture but has similar earspools and sandals. This correlation suggests that the sculpture is not of the fire god, but is perhaps of either a human dressed in Xiuhtecuhtli's attire or another deity with similar characteristics. I believe that Xelhua was depicted in Xiuhtecuhtli's costume in order to signify his divine transformation and his

importance as the founder and patron deity of Coxcatlan. Xelhua's identification as Cihuacoatl's son would have also signified his transformation from man to god. The fact that the statues are a pair, and that Cihuacoatl and Xelhua are two deities that pair well together due to their familial relationship and their similar roles as patron deities of Coxcatlan supports their identification.

CHAPTER 3

SIGNIFICANCE OF DATE GLYPHS

Date glyphs are commonly found on Aztec stone sculptures. They consist of a pictorial icon and a certain number of dots that represent numbers. These glyphs correlate to the Aztec calendar, which was ordered into two systems. One system, the *tonalpohualli*, consisted of 260 days and was a religious calendar (Figure 17).¹ This calendar was composed of twenty repeating day signs which were represented by the illustration of an animal, a plant, natural forces/features, or a human construct.² In addition, there were also thirteen numbers that accompanied these day signs. The calendar began with 1 Crocodile and then cycled through, repeating the numbers and the day signs as time progressed.³ This particular form of the calendar was illustrated by the Aztecs in the *tonalamatls*, or divinatory books detailing the timing of religious festivities.⁴

In addition to the divinatory calendar, the Aztecs also had a separate 365 day calendar that marked the solar year. Based on this system, there were eighteen months of twenty days each, and five left over days. Although these months were important for religious festivals and were given hieroglyphic names, there is not any evidence to suggest that these month names were represented on any Pre-Conquest stone sculpture.⁵ Finally, the Aztecs also had a system for naming their years, which they conceptualized as grouped in 52 years for each “century”.⁶ The years were marked by four of the day signs -Rabbit, Reed, Flint and House- and were also accompanied by the numbers one through thirteen.⁷ These date glyphs were also sometimes placed on sculptures to represent a specific year. Often it is difficult to distinguish between a

¹ Umberger, “Aztec Sculptures,” 43.

² Boone, *Cycles of Time and Meaning*, 36.

³ Umberger, “Aztec Sculptures,” 44.

⁴ Boone, *Cycles of Time and Meaning*, 38.

⁵ Umberger, “Aztec Sculptures,” 45-46.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁷ *Ibid.*

glyph of a day and that of a year, as there is considerable overlap in the system. However, Aztec sculptures usually portray a year glyph in a cartouche, or square frame, while day signs are shown unframed.⁸ The date glyphs on the Coxcatlan statues must be day signs as they are shown unframed.

There are several reasons why a particular sculpture might include a date glyph. For example, a glyph might be included on a statue to signify an important historical event that occurred in connection with the subject matter of the statue. Also, the date glyph might convey an important ritual or ceremony day associated with the sculpture.⁹ Finally, a date glyph might be placed on a statue to refer to the calendrical name, or “birth date,” of a deity or human.¹⁰ While the Mixtec gave calendrical names to important historical people, the Aztecs did not follow this practice, instead reserving their calendrical names for deities only.¹¹

Both of the statues from Coxcatlan have a date glyph located on the back of their heads. The date glyph on the female figure is 8 Grass (Figure 18), and the glyph on the male figure is 4 Crocodile (Figure 19). The date glyphs on these statues must be days and not years, as they are not framed and the only year glyphs are Rabbit, Reed, Flint, and House. Pasztory mentions the glyphs on the Coxcatlan statues only briefly, as she notes that neither of the dates were common deity names and therefore cannot help us identify either piece. She also remarks that the glyphs were not necessarily meant to be seen, as they were probably covered by a headdress that originally fitted onto the head of each figure.¹² In contrast, Solís and Alonso claim that the glyphs refer to the calendrical names of the deities.¹³ Umberger also believes that the glyphs are

⁸ Umberger, “Aztec Sculptures,” 58.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., Abstract.

¹¹ Ibid., 56.

¹² Pasztory, *Aztec Art*, 212.

¹³ Solís and Alonso, “Xiuhtecuhtli-Huitzilopochtli,” 463.

calendrical names.¹⁴ H.B. Nicholson, who probably used the Coxcatlan sculpture as a source, notes that 8 Grass is a possible calendrical name for Coatlicue. Additionally, he notes that 4 Reed or 1 Dog is the calendrical name for Xiuhtecuhtli, the fire god,¹⁵ which further emphasizes that the statue does not represent Xiuhtecuhtli.

A comparison of the glyphs found on the Coxcatlan statues to the glyphs on statues of similar deities reveals that the Coxcatlan date glyphs are unique. The monumental Coatlicue statue from Tenochtitlan has the date glyph of 1 Rabbit on the bottom, and the date of 12 Reed inscribed on the back of the figure above its skull belt.¹⁶ Elizabeth Boone argues that the 12 Reed date is a year date because it is in a cartouche. She believes that it may represent the first year of the Second Sun, in which the sky collapsed and people were eaten.¹⁷ 12 Reed may also represent the year of the sculpture's completion, 1439 or 1491,¹⁸ or refer to the death date of Tlacaélel, a Mexica ruler who patronized the cult of Cihuacoatl.¹⁹ The date glyph of 1 Rabbit could refer to the calendrical name of Tlaltecuhli, (a deity who is represented on the bottom of the statue), the year of the earth's creation, or the year 1454, which was marked by a great famine.²⁰ 12 Reed and 1 Rabbit also appear on another monumental Tenochtitlan statue titled Yolotlicue (Skirt of Hearts), which may have belonged to a series of works that also included the 'Coatlicue.'²¹ The presence of the same dates on both of these figures suggests that the dates must have signified something important that related to both of these female deities.

¹⁴ Umberger, "Aztec Sculptures," 84, 89.

¹⁵ Nicholson, "Religion in Pre-Hispanic Central Mexico," Table 3.

¹⁶ Umberger, "Aztec Sculptures," 77.

¹⁷ Boone, "The 'Coatlicues,'" 191. The Aztecs conceptualized time as existing in a series of suns, or eras, that were created and then destroyed. Smith, *The Aztecs*, 193.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Umberger, "Aztec Sculptures," 77.

²⁰ Boone, "The 'Coatlicues,'" 192.

²¹ Umberger, "Aztec Sculptures," 74, 77.

There are several other sculptures of death goddesses, none of which have date glyphs that correspond to the glyph of 8 Grass on the back of the Cihuacoatl statue from Coxcatlan. In fact, no other known, dated sculptures have a glyph of 8 Grass on them. The unique quality of this date glyph could possibly be explained by the suggestion that different geographical areas had different calendars that began on different days and months.²² Although this assumption would allow for the dates of the Coxcatlan glyphs to convey the same meanings as the date glyphs on the Mexica statues, there is not enough evidence to prove the presence of a separate calendar, and thus the glyphs must convey something that was especially important to the people of Coxcatlan.

The fact that the glyph of 8 Grass was not found on any other goddess statues suggests that the date must not relate to an important historical event that occurred in Tenochtitlan, or of a date that the Mexica strongly connected to earth/death goddesses. The exclusive use of the 8 Grass glyph indicates that it might signify something that was important solely to the people of Coxcatlan. Also, the fact that the Coxcatlan statue does not incorporate any of the glyphs seen on Mexica earth/death goddesses suggests that the people of the area may have not been familiar with the date glyphs commonly associated with death goddesses in the Mexica tradition. This unfamiliarity with common Mexica dates, or the unwillingness to utilize these, could be a factor to argue for the independence of this city from the Aztec empire.

It is possible that the glyph 8 Grass is the calendrical name of Cihuacoatl. However, it is difficult to be certain, as no statues have been securely identified as Cihuacoatl. Nevertheless, several statues have been identified as Cihuateteo, or small death goddesses which are similar in significance to Cihuacoatl (Figure 20). These statues are part of a group that represents women who died in childbirth and will descend back down to earth on certain days. The days on which

²² Ibid., 48.

they will descend; 1 Deer, 1 Monkey, 1 House, and 1 Eagle, are marked on the statues by a date glyph.²³ These date glyphs represent events and not calendrical names of the Cihuateteo. Since none of these sculptures of goddesses related to Cihuacoatl have the 8 Grass glyph, this glyph could refer to a date of particular importance for Coxcatlan.

In the case of the 4 Crocodile date glyph on the male statue, there are comparatively fewer relevant examples. No known dated sculptures have the same date glyph as the Coxcatlan statue. However, the Tenochtitlan monolith identified as the god of fire, which shares some similar characteristics with the Coxcatlan statue of Xelhua, is dated 11 Reed. Although the meaning of this glyph is not known, it is probably a year glyph because it is in a cartouche. The date 11 Reed belongs to the trecena (week-like period) of 1 House, a period that foretold of a violent death, including a possible death by fire for all those born into it. This correlation alone is not sufficient to argue for the presence of the glyph on the fire god statue, and therefore the glyph of 11 Reed probably signifies something else about the deity.²⁴ 11 Reed is probably not the calendrical name of the fire god, as 4 Reed was one of his calendrical names.²⁵ The date of 11 Reed may signify a date commemorating the occasion of the sculpture's creation. The Coxcatlan statue of Xelhua with fire god attributes has only the glyph of 4 Crocodile, which is not present on any other known statues. This suggests that it is either representative of a specific event important solely to the people of Coxcatlan, or it relates to Xelhua, rather than the fire god. The date could be the calendrical name of Xelhua, and the fact that there are no other statues that have been identified as this figure could help to explain the uniqueness of the date glyph on the Coxcatlan statue.

²³ Ibid., 78-79.

²⁴ Austin, "The Masked God of Fire," 269-270.

²⁵ Ibid., 274.

The styles of the glyphs differed according to the group that produced the work. For example, the glyph for grass always incorporates the representations of grass and teeth or a jaw. However, the level of distinction placed on each of these elements varies according to the group responsible for the creation. The Central Mexican codices, which were produced in Tenochtitlan, Tlatelolco and Tlaxcala,²⁶ place the emphasis on the grass aspect of the sign. In contrast, the Borgia group codices, which were produced outside the Valley of Mexico, emphasize the mandible aspect of the sign (Figure 21).²⁷ Both the grass and the crocodile glyphs found on the Coxcatlan statues (Figure 22) look most similar to the glyphs from the Codex Borbonicus, an Aztec group codex, which was painted in Tenochtitlan-Tlatelolco.²⁸ Since the Coxcatlan statues are stylistically similar to the Aztec group of codices, the statues were probably made by someone familiar with Aztec style. The artist was likely either from Tenochtitlan-Tlatelolco or the Tlaxcala area, or they were trained in the styles of these areas.

Based on the available evidence, my interpretation is that the 8 Grass date glyph on the Coxcatlan female figure signifies an important date to the people of Coxcatlan. This date could be either the birth date or calendrical name of their patron goddess Cihuacoatl, or it could be a date in which the deity of Cihuacoatl played a role in the religious rituals of Coxcatlan. Although there is not enough conclusive evidence to prove what the glyph meant, I feel confident that it signified a date that was especially important to the people in the area of Coxcatlan, as the glyph is not present on any known Mexica statues. The date glyph of 4 Crocodile on the Coxcatlan male deity figure probably either refers to the calendrical name of Xelhua, or to a specific date on which Xelhua was honored in Coxcatlan. While the exclusive use of the date glyphs 8 Grass and 4 Crocodile suggests that Coxcatlan was independent from the

²⁶ Boone, *Cycles of Time and Meaning*, 212, 213.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 36.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 212.

Aztec empire, the stylistic similarities between the Coxcatlan glyphs and the glyphs of the Aztec codices implies that the city or the sculptor was familiar with Aztec style.

CHAPTER 4

STYLE AND PATRONAGE

The proportions, glyphs, and details of the Coxcatlan sculptures suggest that the works are Aztec in style. Solís, Alonso and Umberger maintain that the works exhibit Aztec style. Umberger explains that Aztec style sculpture is distinguished by the presence of naturalistic details, which can be seen particularly in the hands, feet, sandals and costumes of these statues. In particular, “the form and treatment of the sandals, the positioning of the hands, the painted border of the jacket, and the treatment of hairline and facial features” provide evidence of the Aztec style.¹ Aztec sculptures usually have a more general body form, which tends to be short in proportion to the large head, hands and feet.² These sculptures do have generalized bodies and short proportions which are emphasized by the placement of the skirt on the female and the cloth on the male high up on the torsos. The stylistic similarity of the date glyphs on the statues and the date glyphs in the Aztec codices also indicates that these statues were produced in the Aztec style. Based on Umberger’s assessments and the glyph styles of these statues, I argue that these works are stylistically Aztec.

While it can sometimes be difficult to determine where Aztec style sculptures were produced, in the case of the Coxcatlan statues the material suggests the location of their creation. Although the Coxcatlan deity statues were probably made by artists trained in Tenochtitlan, they almost certainly were not produced in the capital, as they were made out of a stone that is characteristic of the region near Coxcatlan.³ Therefore, it follows that both of these statues were produced in or around Coxcatlan, either by traveling sculptors from Tenochtitlan, or Coxcatlan artists who trained in Tenochtitlan.

¹ Umberger, “Aztec Presence and Material Remains,” 170.

² Umberger, “Aztec Sculptures,” 21-22.

³ Umberger, “Aztec Presence and Material Remains,” 167.

Although the circumstances surrounding the creation of these works are not entirely clear, it is possible that they were carved by a Coxcatlan artist who trained in Tenochtitlan and returned to his home city to create the Aztec style works. It is also possible that they were given as gifts from the empire to the town of Coxcatlan. When the Aztec empire developed a client-like relationship with an outlying area, imperial elites would often exchange gifts with the town.⁴ By giving towns gifts and asking for gifts in return, the empire could set up a relationship that was more equalitarian than one based on tribute payments.⁵ The sculptor of the Coxcatlan statues may not have been summoned to the town to carve the works. Some sculptors may have earned their living by traveling around and inquiring if cities needed their services.⁶ Therefore, it is also possible that the people of Coxcatlan directly commissioned the works from traveling sculptors trained in Tenochtitlan. Coxcatlan might have requested that these statues be completed in the Aztec style in order to associate themselves with the prestige of the capital. Since the town was not conquered and did not have to pay tribute to the empire, the elites of Coxcatlan would have had plenty of money to pay for these statues.

I believe that the elites of Coxcatlan commissioned these deity sculptures from sculptors trained in Tenochtitlan. These works were likely made in the area of Coxcatlan, as the locality of the stone suggests. However, even if the sculptures were not made out of a stone local to Coxcatlan, it would have been highly unlikely that they would have been made in Tenochtitlan, as they were each nearly four feet tall and would have been very difficult to transport. Thus, in order to provide sculptures of this size, the Tenocha sculptors probably would have had to make

⁴ Berdan, "The Provinces of the Aztec Empire," 268.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Umberger, "Aztec Presence and Material Remains," 167.

them on the site. Furthermore, the fact that the people of Coxcatlan mainly produced *xantiles*, or ceramic figures,⁷ suggests that these stone figures were made by sculptors from outside the area.

This situation would account for the Aztec style of the statues, as they would have been created by artists from Tenochtitlan. Although the sculptors from Tenochtitlan may have created these works in the Aztec style, they also probably conferred with the Cozcateca about their wishes concerning the statues. As the works may represent the local deities Cihuacoatl and Xelhua, the Tenocha artists must have garnered information about these deities from the locals. The sculptors may have also been instructed on the date glyphs that adorned the back of these figures. The fact that the date glyphs of 8 Grass and 4 Crocodile were not found on any known Mexica sculptures suggests that the elites of Coxcatlan may have specifically requested these glyphs.

If these statues were in fact directly commissioned by the people of Coxcatlan, they were probably intended to illustrate the town's importance. Tenochtitlan's possession and production of a large number of high quality craft objects can be seen as largely political, as the prestige of the objects was intended to be symbolic of the status and power of the capital city.⁸ Thus, by owning two sculptures which were created in the Aztec style, the town of Coxcatlan could confer prestige and political power on itself. The fact that these two works are highly ornamented with paint and a variety of costly inlaid materials illustrates that they were created by a highly skilled craftsman who wanted to attach value and importance to the pieces. Owning such an elaborate pair of sculptures would have demonstrated to all the surrounding towns the prestige of Coxcatlan. As the Coxcatlan statues may be of local deities and not of adopted Aztec deities,

⁷ Ibid., 170.

⁸ Brumfiel, "Elite and Utilitarian Crafts," 117.

they do not show the town's absorption into the empire.⁹ However, they are reflective of the ties that the town had with the empire, as they were produced in the Aztec sculptural style.

⁹ Ibid., 171.

CHAPTER 5

PURPOSE AND USE OF STATUES

In the Aztec culture, deity statues were commonly present during religious ceremonies. According to Durán, idols in Tenochtitlan and Tetzaco were kept in temples most of the time and only priests who served the gods and performed religious ceremonies were allowed in the space. However, he also notes that the stone statues were taken out of the temples for several occasions. The occurrence of a feast in honor of a deity or simply the need for their assistance could all necessitate the idols' relocation to a public space.¹ Durán notes that once the idol was out in the public, it would be presented with offerings and sacrifices.² Some statues were designed to hold banners or flags during festivals. Statues that fulfilled this purpose were known as standard bearers.³ Esther Pasztory suggests that standard bearers were statues without deity insignia.⁴ As the Coxcatlan male deity figure does have deity insignia, I do not believe that this sculpture was merely a standard bearer.

According to Solís and Alonso, the male statue found at Coxcatlan was a designed to hold either banners or weapons.⁵ While only one of the statue's hands remains, this hand is raised and is shaped so that it could hold an object. However, standard bearers are usually portrayed in a seated position,⁶ so this sculpture may not be a standard bearer. There are several factors that suggest that standard bearers were usually seated. A seated standard bearer originally sat at the Templo Mayor entrance in Tenochtitlan and held banners with Huitzilopochtli's name (Figure 23).⁷ Additionally, Durán's description of the Templo Mayor

¹ Durán, *Book of the Gods and Rites*, 210.

² Ibid.

³ Pasztory, *Aztec Art*, 228.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Solís and Alonso, "Xiuhtecuhtli-Huitzilopochtli," 463.

⁶ Pasztory, *Aztec Art*, 217.

⁷ Solís and Alonso, "Standard-bearer," 457.

includes a mention of “two seated stone men holding standards in their hands” at the top of the temple (Figure 24).⁸ In an illustration of the Templo Mayor for his *Primeros Memoriales*, Sahagún also includes two seated figures that appear very similar to Durán’s standard bearer illustrations (Figure 25). The fact that Durán does not mention any standing standard bearers in his account, and that neither of these chroniclers include drawings of standing statues at the Templo Mayor suggests that the Mexica created standard bearers in seated poses. Since most standard bearers are seated and do not have deity insignia, and the Coxcatlan sculpture fits neither of these characteristics, I believe that the sculpture is not a standard bearer. It is more likely that the statue arm is shaped to hold a weapon or another accoutrement of Xelhua. In both Durán’s and Sahagún’s illustrations of the Templo Mayor the deity sculptures that are located inside of the temple are holding various accessories.

As Coxcatlan was designated as *cabecera* (or capital) of a group of towns in the “Memorial de Tlacopan,”⁹ it probably served as the religious center for various surrounding towns.¹⁰ If Coxcatlan did serve as the religious center, it makes sense that they would have elaborate and highly detailed deity statues, as they would have been viewed by so many people. The Coxcatlan sculptures, as deity statues used in religious ceremonies, were probably originally placed in or around the temple of the city. Merely the existence of the statues themselves suggests that the city had a temple. Additionally, an excavation report of Coxcatlan notes that the town had “at least 10 ridge-top ceremonial centers, and then 2 major plaza areas with many surrounding pyramids adjacent to each other.”¹¹ One of these plaza areas was surrounded by four rooms, one of which was raised and accessible by a steep staircase (Figure 26). I believe

⁸ Durán, *Book of the Gods and Rites*, 76.

⁹ Carasco, *The Tenocha Empire*, 319-320.

¹⁰ MacNeish, Peterson, and Neely, “The Archeological Reconnaissance,” 472.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 470.

that this raised room could have been the altar area where the two Coxcatlan sculptures were kept. The fact that the sculptures are still in such good condition supports this hypothesis as well, since the room remained undisturbed until excavations in the 1970's. In this room, there were two raised platforms resting on top of one another, and a shallow circular basin in front of a rectangular block.¹² A structure that was extremely similar to this was also excavated at a nearby site in the Tehuacan Valley, and several god effigy fragments were discovered near this structure, suggesting that it was a religious shrine.¹³ Since the structure at Coxcatlan is so similar, it seems likely that it too was a religious shrine. It is probable that the rectangular block was used for sacrifices and that the basin was used to collect blood or burn incense. The stacked platforms at the rear of the room probably held statues of deities.¹⁴

In addition to this archeological evidence for a temple area in Coxcatlan, the original presence of a colonial church on the site is evidence that a temple once stood in the city. Most churches that were built by the Spanish in Mexico were built either on or near the foundations of temples. The Spanish even utilized the stones from the temples as building material for the churches.¹⁵ The two maps included in the *Relación de Cuzcatlan* (Figure 27 and 28) show one large central church with eleven structures clustered around it. According to Barbara Mundy, the symbol of a church or single building often represented human settlements.¹⁶ On Map A of Coxcatlan (Figure 27), beneath the centrally located church, a scribe has added the word *cabecera*, indicating that this town was the capital of the others. As Coxcatlan was listed as

¹² Ibid., 338.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., 338-339.

¹⁵ Edgerton., *Theaters of Conversion*, 47.

¹⁶ Mundy, *The Mapping of New Spain*, 70.

cabecera in the “Memorial de Tlacopan,” it is likely that this large church represents Coxcatlan and its continued religious centrality.

The two deity statues were excavated during the nineteenth century from a mound, which is now a part of a private estate.¹⁷ It is likely that the formation of the mound resulted from the remains of the temple and the colonial church accumulating over the years. The fact that the statues survived in Coxcatlan and were excavated at that site is evidence that the town was not conquered by the Aztec empire, as conquerors would often take the statues representing the patron deities of the city and bring them back to the sacred precinct of their own city.¹⁸ To conclude, the statues found at Coxcatlan were used for religious purposes. I believe that the male deity statue was not a standard bearer, as these types of figures were usually portrayed in seated positions and were without deity insignia. The fact that the town of Coxcatlan was a *cabecera*, or capital town, of several surrounding areas would have made their possession of these deity statues even more important, as they would have been viewed by many people. The existence of a temple complex in Coxcatlan is evidenced by the archeological reports of the area and the original presence of a colonial church on the site. The deity statues are probably of Cihuacoatl and Xelhua, deities with particular local importance. Thus, the practice of worshipping to these local deities illustrates the town’s independence from the Aztec empire.

¹⁷ Solís and Alonso, “Xiuhtecuhtli-Huitzilopochtli,” 463.

¹⁸ Klein, “Rethinking Cihuacoatl,” 243.

CONCLUSION

The Coxcatlan deity sculptures are reflective of the town's unique client-like relationship to the Aztec empire. Although some primary sources suggest that Coxcatlan may have been a member of the empire, they do not provide conclusive evidence. While Durán's proclamation that Aztec colonists stopped in the area of Coxcatlan on their way to Oaxaca suggests that the Cozcateca were not hostile to the empire, it does not necessarily imply that they were incorporated into the empire. Despite the fact that Tezozomoc alludes to the conquest of Coxcatlan, it does not mean that the town was automatically incorporated into the empire, as the conquest of a city-state did not necessitate its inclusion in the empire. Additionally, Coxcatlan's listing in the "Memorial de Tlacopan" does not make the town's inclusion in the empire definitive, as the document was written in order to try to illustrate Tlacopan's prior authority and power, and thus the author may have added independent towns as paying tribute to make his city appear more influential. There are many primary sources that imply that the town of Coxcatlan was independent. For example, the absence of Coxcatlan from the Codex Mendoza suggests that the town was not conquered and did not pay tribute to the empire. Additionally, Sahagún's account of the Cozcateca as enemy spectators at a religious event in Tenochtitlan suggests that the city was not allied to the empire. Furthermore, the fact that the Relación de Cuzcatlan does not mention the Aztec empire or the town's conquest suggests that the town was not a part of the empire.

The fact that some sources suggest Coxcatlan's imperial status whereas others imply its independence could be because the town had a relationship to the empire in which it was neither complete ally nor complete enemy. Motolinía mentions that Coxcatlan was a frontier province. The Aztecs sometimes formed client-like relationships with outlying areas or frontier provinces

in order to gain economic, political, or militaristic benefits. These “client” states were often located near critical resources, an unconquered territory, or a trade route. Coxcatlan’s proximity to a trade route from Tenochtitlan to Oaxaca may have helped to guarantee the town’s independence. The Aztecs needed to travel from the capital to Oaxaca and they probably would have preferred to pass along their route without dealing with any military threats. Setting up Coxcatlan as a client state would have allowed the empire to ask for safe passage and defense of surrounding enemy areas in exchange for their decision not to conquer the town. Coxcatlan’s long distance from Tenochtitlan and its naturally defensible position may have discouraged the empire from conquest attempts, as it could economize time and resources better by forging a semi-alliance with the town. Although the establishment of a client state spared the town from conquest, the empire always had the threat of conquest to maintain the status quo. An analysis of the sculptures’ identities, date glyphs, style, patronage, and use reveals more information about Coxcatlan’s relatively unique relationship to the Aztec empire.

It is highly likely that the statues found at Coxcatlan were created as a pair, which helps in their identification. I believe that the female deity statue at Coxcatlan represents Cihuacoatl, the patron goddess of Coxcatlan. The sculpture has a skull-like head, an open mouth with bared teeth, and claws instead of hands and feet that associate her with the pantheon of fertility/death goddesses. Also, as the figure wears the serpent skirt characteristic of Cihuacoatl it is probable that the statue represents Cihuacoatl. The mention of the many appeals made to Cihuacoatl in the *Relación de Cuzcatlan* suggests that this deity was the patron goddess of Coxcatlan. The utilization of fine materials and the high level of detail in this statue imply that the deity represented was very significant for the Cozcateca. As it seems that Cihuacoatl was a crucial deity for the town, it follows that the statue would represent her. Although the Mexica often

utilized the image of Cihuacoatl to represent the subjugation of their enemies, this statue was probably not created for that purpose as it does not have any characteristics that associate it with conquered enemies. Therefore, this statue was likely intended to serve a religious purpose for the town of Coxcatlan and also to convey the power and prestige of the town.

I believe that the male statue represents Xelhua, the man/deity whom the Cozcateca saw as responsible for the founding of their town. Although the figure's naturalistic appearance suggests that it is of a human, the presence of a fire serpent symbol associates it with the fire god, Xiuhtecuhtli. When compared to a fire god statue from Tenochtitlan, the Coxcatlan sculpture has only the earspools and sandals in common with the statue. Since the Coxcatlan figure does not share any other characteristics with this sculpture of the fire god, it is possible that the sculpture is not of Xiuhtecuhtli, but is perhaps of either a human ornamented in his garb or a deity with similar characteristics. I believe that the artist of this piece was aware of Xiuhtecuhtli's associations with transformation and power and used the fire serpent symbol on Xelhua in order to signify his transformation from mortal to deity, and his powerful role as the founder and patron god of Coxcatlan. Xelhua's conversion into a deity would have also been indicated by his identification as the son of the goddess Cihuacoatl. The fact that the statues are a pair, and that Cihuacoatl and Xelhua are two deities that pair well together due to their familial relationship and their similar roles as patron deities of Coxcatlan supports their identification.

I believe that the 8 Grass date glyph on the Coxcatlan female figure signifies either the calendrical name of Cihuacoatl or a date in which the deity was honored in Coxcatlan. This date must have been especially important to the people in the area of Coxcatlan, as no known Mexica statues were ornamented with this glyph. The date glyph of 4 Crocodile on the Coxcatlan male deity figure also probably either refers to the calendrical name of Xelhua or to a specific date on

which the Cozcateca paid homage to Xelhua. Coxcatlan's independence is implied by its seemingly exclusive use of the date glyphs 8 Grass and 4 Crocodile, while its familiarity with Aztec style is shown through the similarities between its statues' glyphs and the glyphs of the Aztec codices.

The proportions, glyphs, and details of the Coxcatlan sculptures suggest that the works are Aztec in style. The fact that they were made out of a stone local to Coxcatlan indicates that both of these statues were produced in or around that town. The works were likely either made by traveling sculptors from Tenochtitlan or Coxcatlan artists who trained in Tenochtitlan. It is possible that these deity sculptures were given as gifts from the empire to the town of Coxcatlan in order to cement their semi-alliance. I believe that the elites of Coxcatlan commissioned these deity sculptures from sculptors trained in Tenochtitlan. As these stone sculptures differed from the indigenous production of ceramic figures, it is probable that they were made by sculptors from outside the area.

Although these works exhibit Aztec style, they also contain locally specific references, suggesting that the Cozcateca may have specifically requested certain characteristics. As the statues are probably depictions of Cihuacoatl and Xelhua, the Tenocha artists must have garnered information about these deities from the locals. Also, the uniqueness of the date glyphs on these works suggests that the elites of Coxcatlan asked that these date be utilized due to their local significance. By commissioning these Aztec style statues, the people of Coxcatlan could illustrate the importance of their town through its association with the power and prestige of the empire. By commissioning statues that were of local deities in the Aztec style, the Cozcateca were able to show their independence and imperial connections.

The statues found at Coxcatlan were used for religious purposes. I believe that the male deity statue was not a standard bearer, as these types of figures were usually portrayed in seated positions and were without deity insignia. The fact that Coxcatlan was a *cabecera*, or capital town, of several surrounding areas would have made their possession of these deity statues even more important, as they would have been viewed by many people. The existence of a temple complex in Coxcatlan is evidenced by the archeological reports of the area and the original presence of a colonial church on the site. The deity statues are probably of Cihuacoatl and Xelhua, deities with particular local importance. The practice of worshipping these local deities illustrates the town's independence from the Aztec empire. As a comprehensive analysis has shown, the identification of the statues as local deities is reflective of Coxcatlan's independence, while utilization of unique date glyphs in the Aztec style illustrates that the city was independent but familiar with Aztec stylistic conventions. The Aztec style of the sculptures denotes that the town had imperial associations, and the commission of the statues illustrates that the town desired to be viewed as prestigious. Finally, the existence of the statues reveals that Coxcatlan was an important and elite town with a temple that was used to show its dedication to local patron deities.

ILLUSTRATIONS



Figure 1. Front and back view of female deity sculpture from Coxcatlan. As reproduced in *Aztecs*, edited by Warwick Bray (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2002), fig. 252.



Figure 2. Front and back view of male deity figure found at Coxcatlan. As reproduced in *Aztecs*, edited by Warwick Bray (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2002), fig. 253.

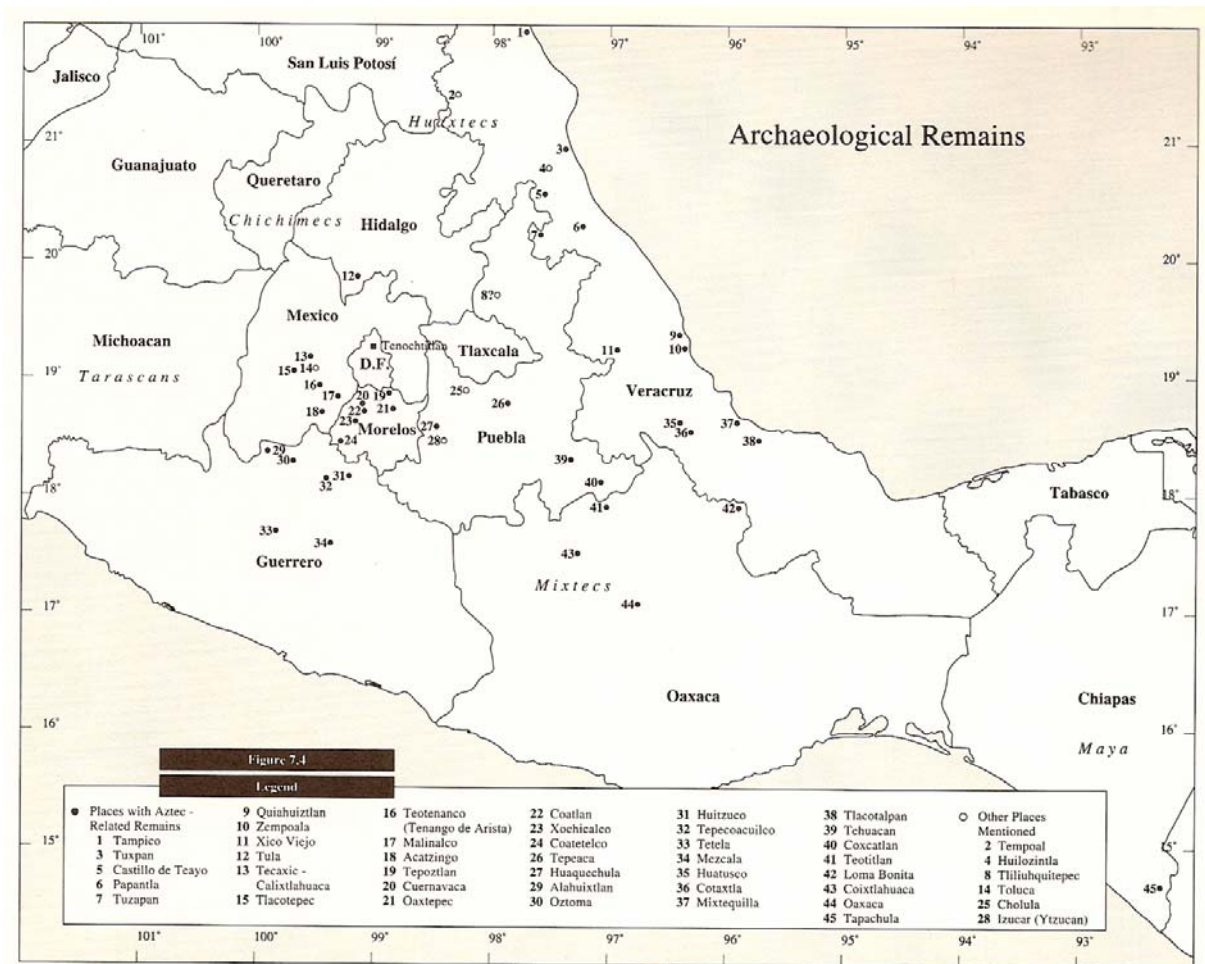


Figure 3. Map of places with Aztec-style material remains. Coxcatlan is listed as number 40. As reproduced in Umberger 1996, fig. 7-4.

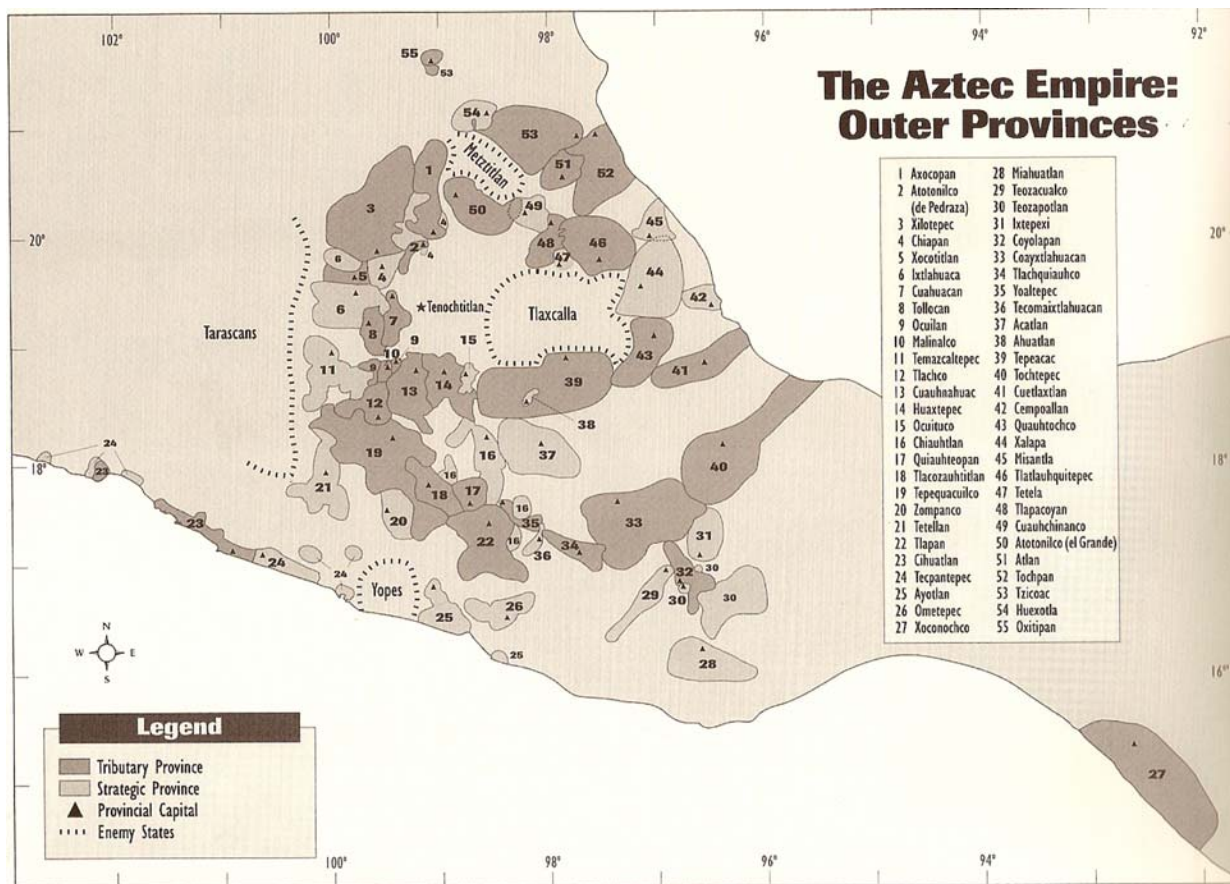


Figure 4. Map of the provinces of the Aztec empire. As reproduced in Smith and Berdan 1996, fig. 11-1.

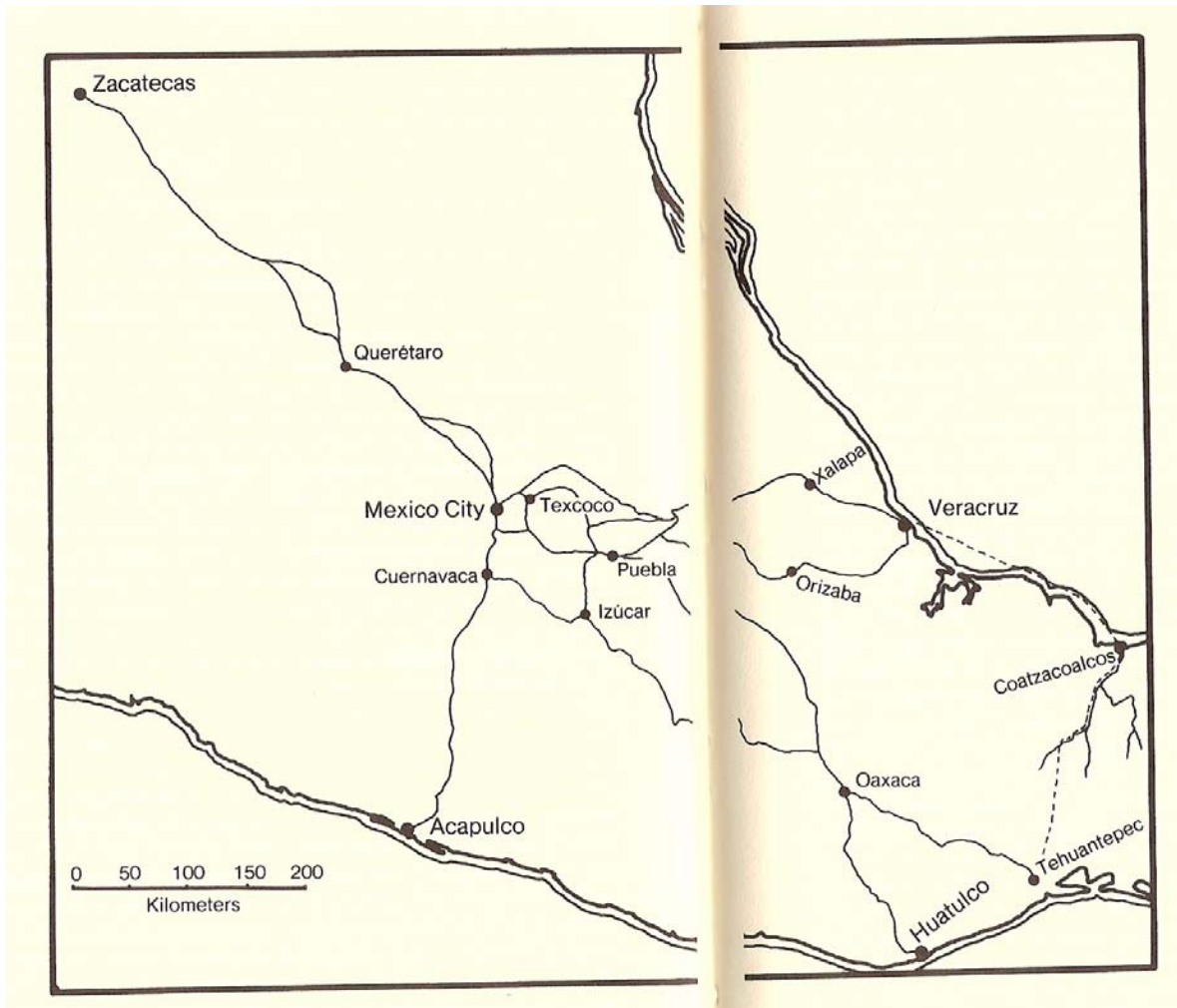


Figure 5. Map illustrating the main roads in New Spain in the sixteenth century. As reproduced in Hassig 1984, Map 7.

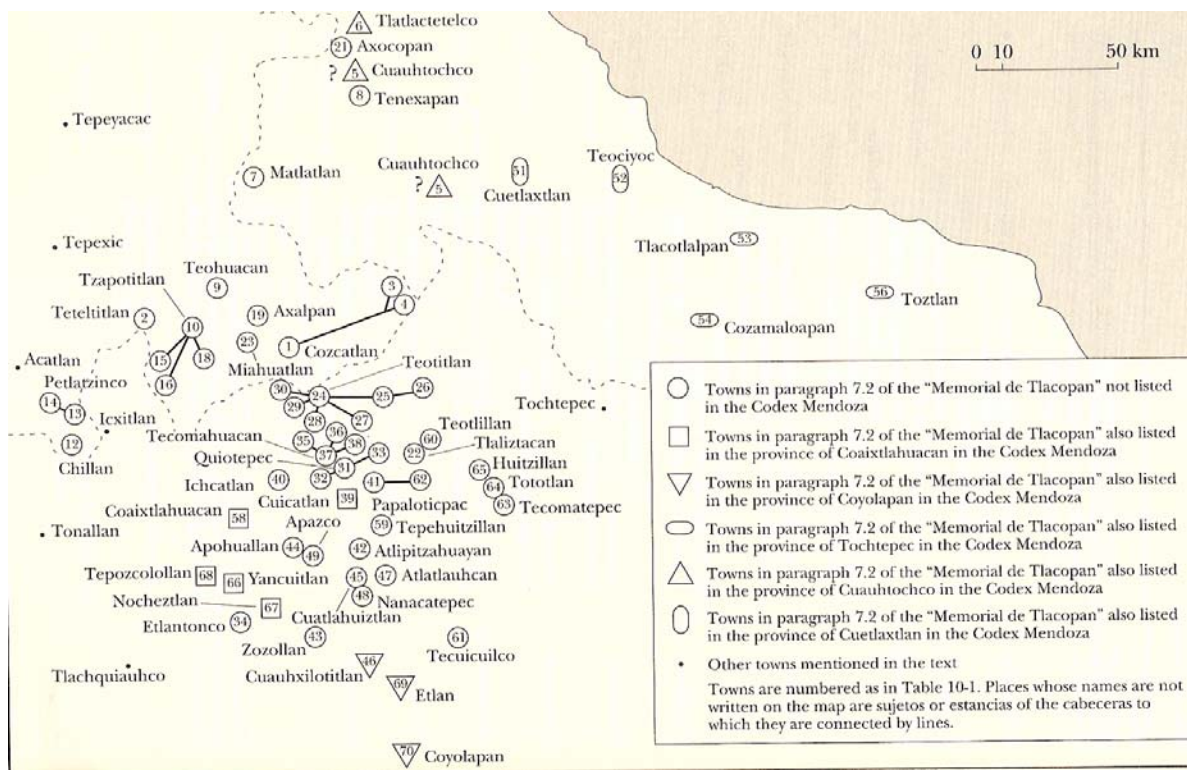


Figure 6. Map illustrating Paragraph 7.2 of the "Memorial de Tlacopan." As reproduced in Carrasco 1999, Map 10-9.

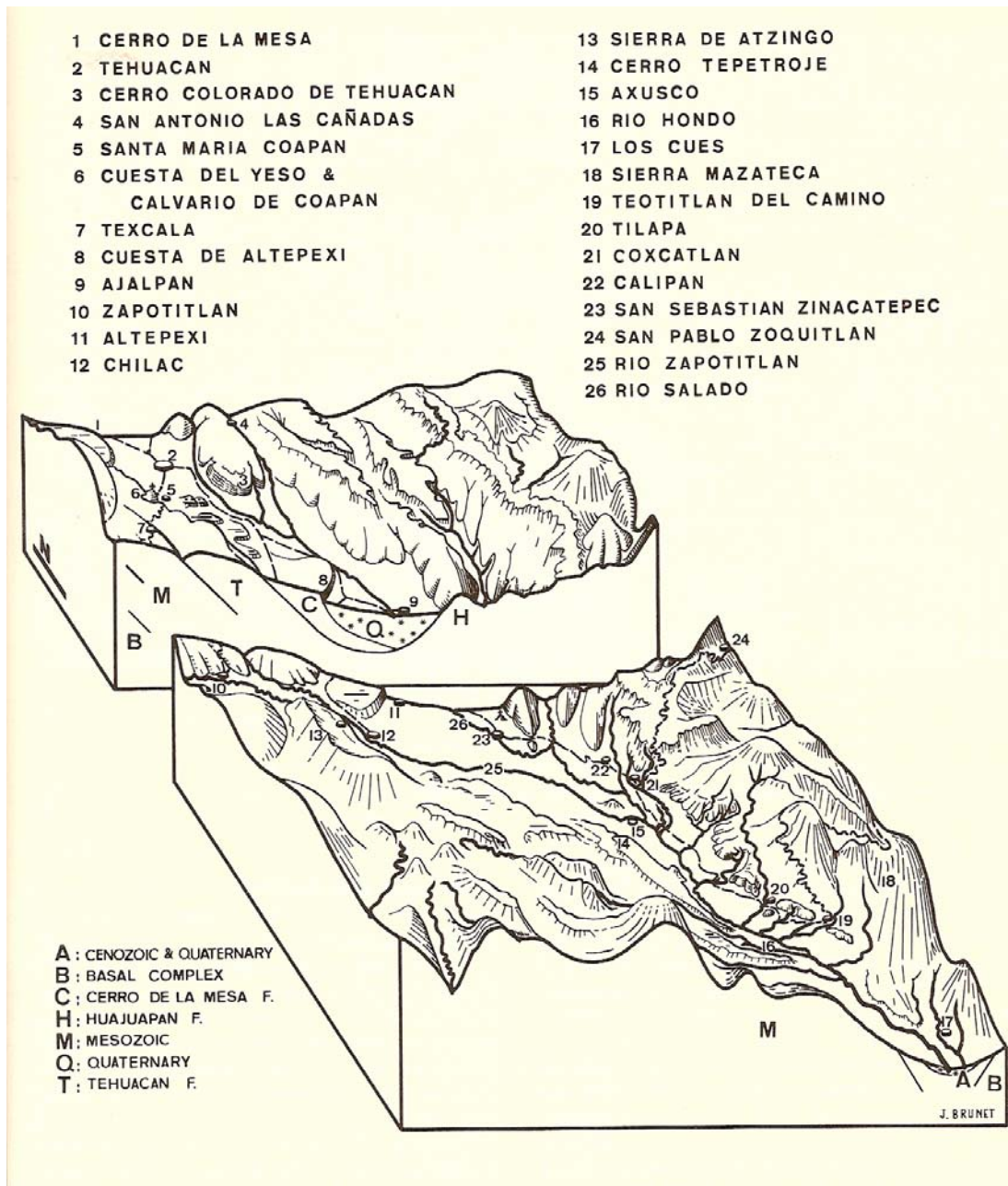


Figure 7. Block diagram of the Tehuacan Valley. As reproduced in Jean Brunet, "Geologic Studies." In *The Prehistory of the Tehuacan Valley* Vol. 1, edited by Douglas S. Byers, 66-90. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1967), fig. 42.



(Left) Figure 8. Frontal view of the monumental 'Coatlicue' from Tenochtitlan. As reproduced in Davide Domenici, *The Aztecs: History and Treasures of an Ancient Civilization*. Translated by Catherine Bolton. (Vercelli, Italy: White Star, 2007), fig. 185.

(Right) Figure 9. Three-quarter back view of monumental 'Coatlicue' statue. As reproduced in Boone 1994, pg.134.



Figure 10. Birth of Huitzilopochtli. As reproduced in Sahagún 1952, fig. 1.



Figure 11. Cihuacoatl, stone relief on underside of Feathered Serpent sculpture, Tenochtitlan. As reproduced in Klein 1988, fig. 6b.

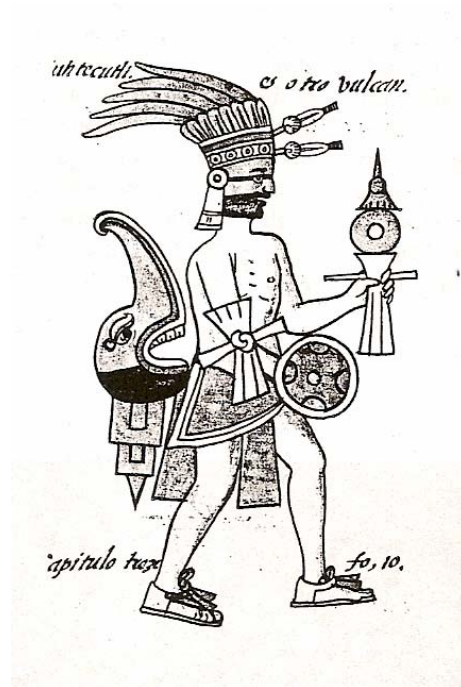
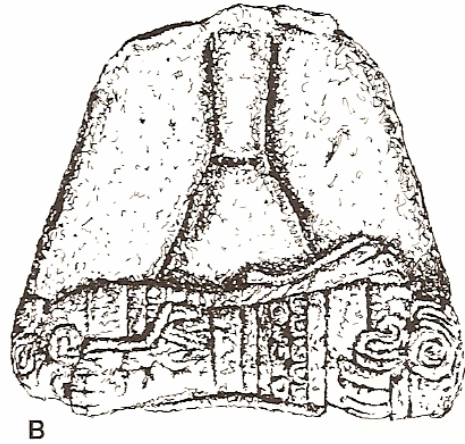


Figure 12. Xiuhtecuhtli in the Florentine Codex, Book 1. As reproduced in Miller and Taube 1993, pg. 189.



Figure 13. Huitzilopochtli. As reproduced in Sahagún 1993, Folio 261 r.



(Left) Figure 14. Monolith of the masked god of fire. As reproduced in *The Aztec Empire*, edited by Felipe Solís. (New York: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 2004), fig. 46.

(Right) Figure 15. Underside view of fire god sculpture illustrating the sandals. As reproduced in López Austin 1987, fig. 3.

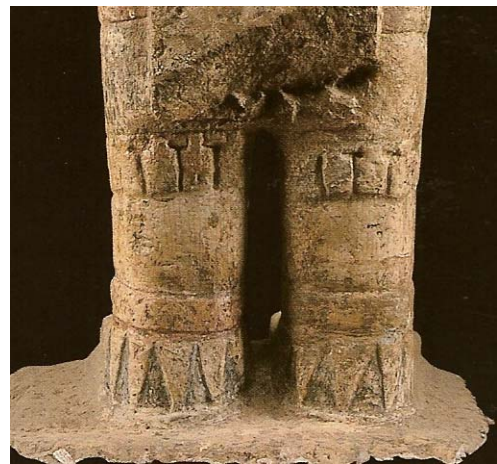


Figure 16. Front and back view of sandals of male deity figure. As reproduced in *Aztecs*, edited by Warwick Bray (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2002), fig. 253.

Table 1. THE CENTRAL MEXICAN TONALPOHUALLI

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Crocodile | 1 (1) | 8 | 2 | 9 | 3 | 10 | 4 | 11 | 5 | 12 | 6 | 13 | 7 |
| Wind | 2 | 9 | 3 | 10 | 4 | 11 | 5 | 12 | 6 | 13 | 7 | 1 (18) | 8 |
| House | 3 | 10 | 4 | 11 | 5 | 12 | 6 | 13 | 7 | 1 (15) | 8 | 2 | 9 |
| Lizard | 4 | 11 | 5 | 12 | 6 | 13 | 7 | 1 (12) | 8 | 2 | 9 | 3 | 10 |
| Serpent | 5 | 12 | 6 | 13 | 7 | 1 (9) | 8 | 2 | 9 | 3 | 10 | 4 | 11 |
| Death | 6 | 13 | 7 | 1 (6) | 8 | 2 | 9 | 3 | 10 | 4 | 11 | 5 | 12 |
| Deer | 7 | 1 (3) | 8 | 2 | 9 | 3 | 10 | 4 | 11 | 5 | 12 | 6 | 13 |
| Rabbit | 8 | 2 | 9 | 3 | 10 | 4 | 11 | 5 | 12 | 6 | 13 | 7 | 1 (20) |
| Water | 9 | 3 | 10 | 4 | 11 | 5 | 12 | 6 | 13 | 7 | 1 (17) | 8 | 2 |
| Dog | 10 | 4 | 11 | 5 | 12 | 6 | 13 | 7 | 1 (14) | 8 | 2 | 9 | 3 |
| Monkey | 11 | 5 | 12 | 6 | 13 | 7 | 1 (11) | 8 | 2 | 9 | 3 | 10 | 4 |
| Grass | 12 | 6 | 13 | 7 | 1 (8) | 8 | 2 | 9 | 3 | 10 | 4 | 11 | 5 |
| Reed | 13 | 7 | 1 (5) | 8 | 2 | 9 | 3 | 10 | 4 | 11 | 5 | 12 | 6 |
| Jaguar | 1 (2) | 8 | 2 | 9 | 3 | 10 | 4 | 11 | 5 | 12 | 6 | 13 | 7 |
| Eagle | 2 | 9 | 3 | 10 | 4 | 11 | 5 | 12 | 6 | 13 | 7 | 1 (19) | 8 |
| Vulture | 3 | 10 | 4 | 11 | 5 | 12 | 6 | 13 | 7 | 1 (16) | 8 | 2 | 9 |
| Movement | 4 | 11 | 5 | 12 | 6 | 13 | 7 | 1 (13) | 8 | 2 | 9 | 3 | 10 |
| Flint | 5 | 12 | 6 | 13 | 7 | 1 (10) | 8 | 2 | 9 | 3 | 10 | 4 | 11 |
| Rain | 6 | 13 | 7 | 1 (7) | 8 | 2 | 9 | 3 | 10 | 4 | 11 | 5 | 12 |
| Flower | 7 | 1 (4) | 8 | 2 | 9 | 3 | 10 | 4 | 11 | 5 | 12 | 6 | 13 |

Note: The table correlates the sequent day signs and day numbers. Numbers in boldface indicate the sequent *triccens*.

Figure 17. The Central Mexican *Tonalpohualli*. As reproduced in Boone 2007, table 1.



Figure 18. Date glyph on the back of Coxcatlan female deity head. As reproduced in *Aztecs*, edited by Warwick Bray (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2002), fig. 252.

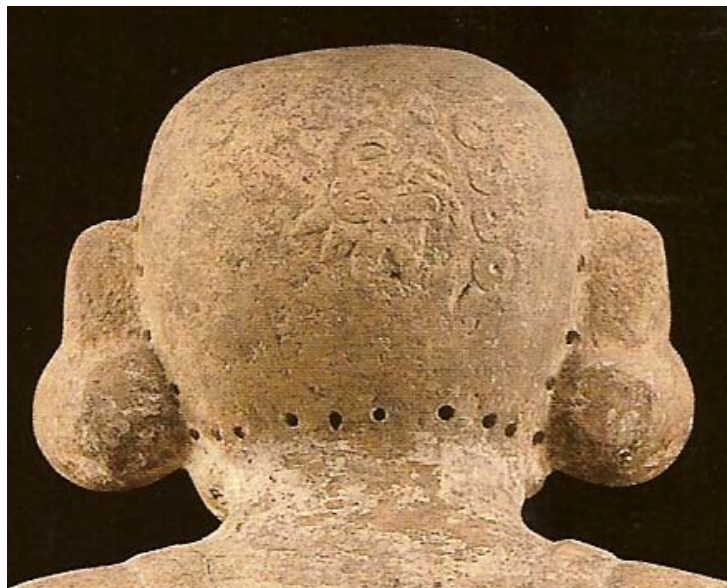


Figure 19. Date glyph on the back of Coxcatlan male deity head. As reproduced in *Aztecs*, edited by Warwick Bray (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2002), fig. 253.



Figure 20. Cihuateteo. As reproduced in *The Aztec Empire*, edited by Felipe Solís (New York: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 2004), fig. 144.

| | Codex Borbonicus | Tonalamatl Aubin | Codex Borgia | Codex Laud | Codex Zouche-Nuttall |
|-----------|------------------|------------------|--------------|------------|----------------------|
| Alligator | | | | | |
| Grass | | | | | |
| Reed | | | | | |
| Rain | | | | | |

Figure 21. Day signs in the Aztec, Borgia Group, and Mixtec manuscripts. Drawing by Elizabeth Boone. As reproduced in Boone 2007, fig. 126.

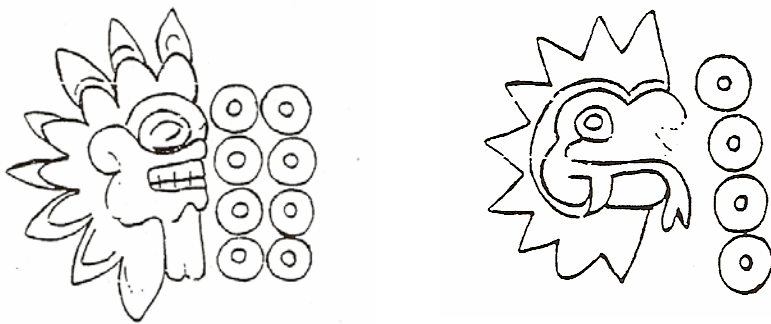


Figure 22. Drawings of the date glyphs of 8 Grass and 4 Crocodile on the back of Coxcatlan deity statues. As reproduced in Umberger 1981, fig. 27 b and fig. 16 a.



Figure 23. Aztec Standard-bearer, c. 1500. As reproduced in *Aztecs*, edited by Warwick Bray (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2002), fig. 231.

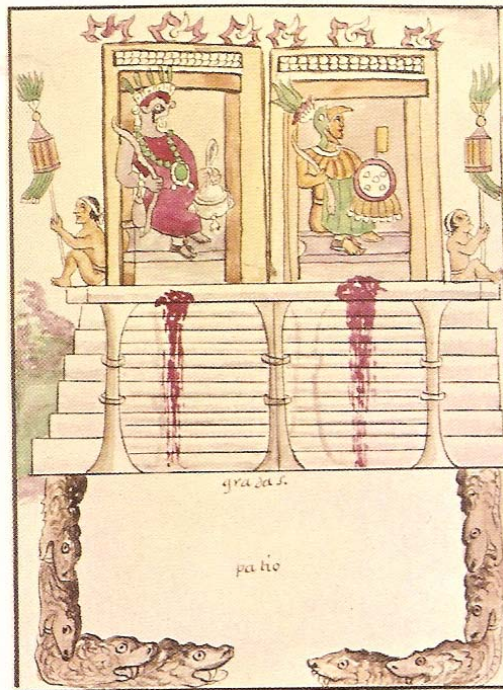


Figure 24. Durán's illustration of the Templo Mayor at Tenochtitlan. As reproduced in Durán 1971, Plate 4.

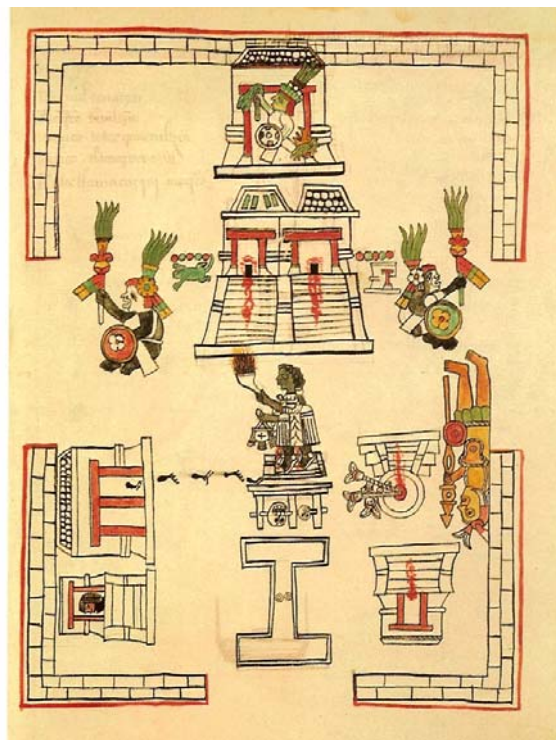


Figure 25. Main Temple Area at Tenochtitlan as illustrated in Sahagún's *Primeros Memoriales*. As reproduced in Pasztor 1983, colorplate 22.

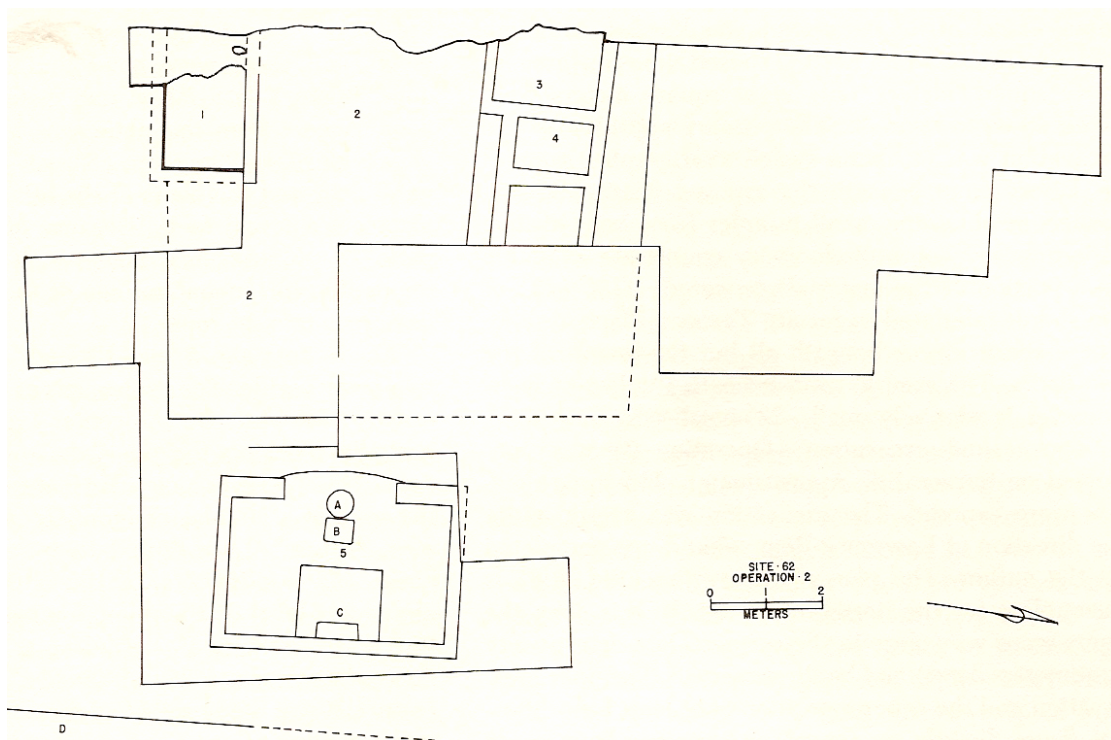


Figure 26. Possible altar structure and building complex at Coxcaltan. As reproduced in Fowler 1972, fig. 138.

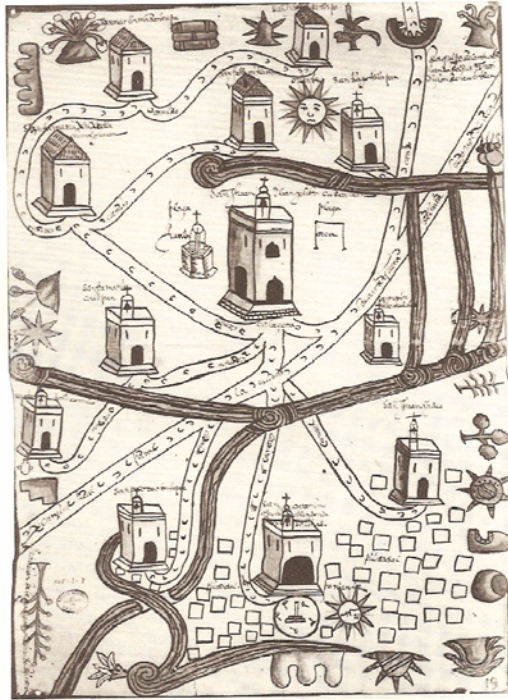


Figure 27. Relación Geográfica map of Cuzcatlan A, 1580. As reproduced in Mundy 1996, fig. 32.

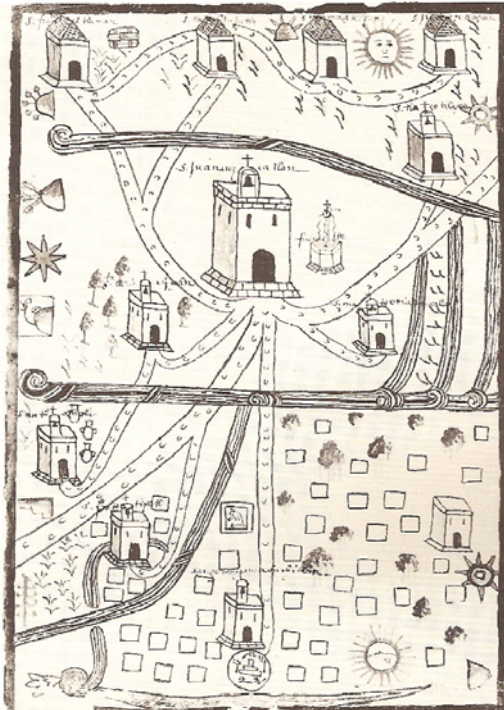


Figure 28. Relación Geográfica map of Cuzcatlan B, 1580. As reproduced in Mundy 1996, fig. 33.

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ABSTRACT

The Aztec empire was a powerful political and cultural force that dominated central Mexico prior to the Spanish Conquest. Although the leaders of the empire warred with many cities in order to extract tribute payments from the conquered, they also recognized that some towns were strategically valuable, and formed semi-alliances with these towns that served their economic and political purposes. This thesis will examine the relationship that Coxcatlan, a city 150 miles to the southeast of Tenochtitlan, had to the Aztec empire. An analysis of two deity sculptures excavated from Coxcatlan in the late 19th century will reveal that the town maintained its independence but was loosely allied to the empire. By carefully evaluating previous scholarship on these pieces, comparing them to Mexica deity statues, and analyzing archaeological and historical evidence, I will argue that these paired statues must represent Cihuacoatl and Xelhua. The local importance of these deities, as well as the uniqueness of the date glyphs found on each of these statues, implies that the town was independent. The Aztec style of the date glyphs and of the sculptures in general suggests that the town may have been emulating the imperial style in order to associate with the prestige of the capital. In order to substantiate any arguments made using the sculptures as evidence, I will also analyze tribute and conquest lists, examine the *Relación de Cuzcatlan*, a post-conquest questionnaire about the city and its customs; and look carefully at previous scholarship on the city and its imperial status. All of these investigations will reveal that Coxcatlan was an independent town with imperial associations.