

NOTES ON THE SACRED PLACE CALLED THE COATLAN BY THE AZTECS

There is a large plaza at Teotihuacan which lies at the the foot of the so-called Temple of the Moon. This Temple looms like a mountain at the northern terminus of the great north-south ceremonial way and is almost certainly a man-made model of that mountain which the Aztecs named "Tenan" meaning "Our Mother" or "Mother of Stone". As a sacred enclosure the plaza is second in size only to the Ciudadela toward the southern end of the ceremonial way which was by far the most prominent thoroughfare through the city of Teotihuacan. The Aztecs named it "The Road of the Dead". Although the original name of the plaza is lost to us, the significance of the space must have been clearly understood by the Aztecs. We know they had the most profound respect for Teotihuacan even though its ancient structures had lain in ruins for five hundred years before the ~~nomadic~~ Aztecs entered the Valley of Mexico. *ARTE NOMADS*

Like the mountain Tenan, the plaza and its temple honored the mother goddess, the giver of life and the devourer of the dead. She had many names and manifestations for the newcomers. Her most prestigious name among the new lords of the Valley of Mexico was "Cihuacoatl", "Woman-serpent", and in the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan her temple and its enclosure ^{was} called the "Coatlan".

As with Coatlans everywhere, the Aztecs saw the Plaza of the Moon as a the Place of Origins and Endings, both womb and tomb. This is the enclosure where Scott and I believe the original fire burned out of which, according to Aztec tradition, the Fifth Sun was born. We believe that this birth occurred here and not in front of the so-called temple of the Sun or the Ciudadela as most scholars believe. Why? Because the North has always been considered the place of origins. The famous Aztlan paradise and Chicomoztoc, "The Seven Caves" which gave birth to the various Aztec tribes are legendary sites of the north. The calendrical sign for the North is Tecpatl, the Flint Knife. The Aztecs began their great migration in the year One

stone had remained intact, it might have born the date One Reed as do the bottoms of a number of other objects. The arrival of Cortes and the belief of the natives that he was the returned Quetzalcoatl may have been exaggerated by early colonial sources, but there is little doubt that it caused deep concern to the military leaders of the Triple Alliance. Though not armed for war, the three god impersonators on our stone do brandish the obsidian star wand like a weapon. The wand is thought to symbolize the Pleides and very likely the fire serpent, a powerful manifestation of lightning and celestial fire. The fire serpent was in fact the weapon of choice for the Aztec god of war Huitzilopochtli.

Is it possible that our stone might commemorate a ceremony held by the rulers of the Triple Alliance to propitiate the possible malevolent influences brought about by the arrival in the East of a living embodiment of Venus and Quetzalcoatl-Ehecatl, Hernan Cortes? Probably not. But surely the stone does record a special ceremony recognizing the return of the planet Venus on the eastern horizon. It is thus the same kind of cyclical Venus celebration that did indeed include the possible return of the god Quetzalcoatl some day in a One Reed year.

A couple of final observations: The shape of this stone is rather odd in the surviving list of Aztec objects. Originally it was more elongated. With the bottom missing we can only guess how long it was, but it is possible that when it was complete it may have resembled a column. This is intriguing, because the great colonial scholar Bernardino de Sahagun in his famous list of the sacred buildings of Tenochtitlan's Templo Mayor, mentions as the fortieth site a place called Ilhuicatitlan.

"The fortieth building was called Ilhuicatitlan, and

dressed in the ceremonial costume of The god Quetzalcoatl in
his manifestation as the Wind God Ehecatl. They converge on