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Reconstructing Teotihuacán's Political Structure



Research Year: 2000

Culture: Teotihuacán

Chronology: Pre-Classic to Early Classic

Location: Teotihuacán, México

Site: Teotihuacán

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Abstract

Because of the nature of this project which is more mechanical than research, this report includes not so much new information, but an update on the various steps taken. This project essentially consists of making illustrations and photographs for a forthcoming book on Teotihuacán's political structure. The need for the illustrations is critical for purposes of quality, copyright, and to produce illustrations of undocumented

materials. In addition, a second thrust of this project is to produce a digital database of drawn and photographed images that can be made available for study or publication by the general public or specialists.

Resumen

Debido a la naturaleza de este proyecto que es más mecánico que la investigación, este informe no incluye tanta información nueva, pero sí una actualización de los pasos tomados. Este proyecto consiste esencialmente en la fabricación de ilustraciones y fotografías para un libro que vendrá sobre la estructura política de Teotihuacán. La necesidad para las ilustraciones es crítica para los propósitos de calidad, derechos de copia, y para producir ilustraciones de materiales indocumentados. Además, un segundo empujón de este proyecto es producir un banco de datos digitales de imágenes de dibujos y fotografías que pueden estar disponibles al público o especialistas para el estudio o publicación general.

The archive of materials, entitled: Annabeth Headrick: Teotihuacán and Related Drawings, will soon be accessible through the Research Department on the FAMSI website.

The Teotihuacán Trinity, by Annabeth Headrick is in press and will be available from the University of Texas Press. For additional information, please visit: <http://www.utexas.edu/utpress/>.

Submitted 10/01/2003 by:

Annabeth Headrick

Assistant Professor of Art History and Anthropology

Vanderbilt University

annabeth.headrick@vanderbilt.edu

Background of the project

To begin, it is first necessary to provide a brief summary of the manuscript in which these materials will be included. Entitled "The Teotihuacán Trinity," this manuscript makes a new proposal for the socio-political structure of Teotihuacán. In essence, the argument is that three socio-political entities can be identified at Teotihuacán. The first is the office of the king who is identified in the iconographic record. The second are the heads of powerful lineages who are most identifiable through the ubiquitous stone Teotihuacán masks. An argument is made that the masks probably functioned as the faces of mortuary bundles, bundles which represented elite ancestors and served as a

legitimizing tool of lineage heads. The third component of Teotihuacán society seems to have been the military, specifically military orders grouped under heraldic imagery.

As for these military organizations, they seemed to have served a pivotal role in Teotihuacán society, functioning as a social cement of sorts, unifying the entire society. Because the imagery of different military groups appears together in lineage organized spaces, these groups most likely cross cut lineage. In essence, these military sodalities unified Teotihuacán because they drew their membership from the spectrum of Teotihuacán society and were not exclusive to a particular lineage. Thus, loyalties could be directed towards greater civic interests outside the realm of the lineages.

Because of the close association of royal imagery with imagery of the military sodalities, a system in which the ruler relied heavily on the military emerges. In other words, the lineage heads, backed by their ancestral bundles must have exerted great pressure on the royal house, probably vying for power with the ruling family. In an effort to counteract this pressure, the king may have aligned himself with the military sodalities in order to develop social groups whose allegiance was towards civic goals more than lineage interests.

In sum, the manuscript develops an image of Teotihuacán where the balance of power seems to pivot between three socio-political entities. Although each of the groups identified had its own interests and agendas, they shared, nevertheless, some mutual interests, and this overlapping led to coalitions of power whereby the city might be united in civic duties and goals. Though rife with factional interests, this fluid system resulted in the unification of disparate parts, and it was this unification which seems to have been the key to Teotihuacán's remarkable success. Over half the manuscript has been written, and I expect to submit it to the University of Texas Press by the end of the year.

Photographic documentation

One of the major portions of the proposal was a trip to México City and the site of Teotihuacán primarily to document the site photographically for illustrations to be included in the manuscript. I undertook this trip during July 10-22, 2000, and it was a success in every way. Through the generosity of the Teotihuacán Archaeological Center and Dr. George Cowgill of Arizona State University, I was able to stay at the center during the whole of my stay. Not only does the Teotihuacán Archaeological Center allow for easy access to the site of Teotihuacán, but it also facilitates the flow of information between a variety of Teotihuacán scholars. As many scholars stay at the center or simply stop by for conversation, my research time in México was incredibly enhanced. Access to a number of renowned scholars allowed me to clarify issues in my research, inquire about resources available, and confirm data, and discuss possible interpretations. This kind of interaction is invaluable and will result in a manuscript of much higher quality.

During my research in México, I spent most days at the site photographing architecture and materials for illustration and research purposes. In total, some 360 photographs were taken in both black-and-white and color film. The photographs in black-and-white were of particular need for this project, for black-and-white photographs will be needed for submission to the press for final publication. A focus for this project was the documentation of both architecture and murals.

Of particular note for this project, is the fact that I was able to obtain crucial photographs of the Ciudadela from locations that were formerly closed to public access. This allowed for particular photographic angles which better inform the viewer of the nature of the space. Furthermore, in the manuscript, I spend a great deal of time exploring the relationship of the landscape to the architecture, and on this trip I was able to obtain photographs from the proper angles to fully illustrate the integration of the manmade with the natural.

Not only did this trip prove successful in obtaining those photographs which were written into the proposal, but it also allowed me to view a new set of murals which contribute to a better understanding of the Teotihuacán artistic tradition. In the manuscript, there is much discussion of the murals in the White Patio of the apartment compound of Atetelco. While Atetelco has not been fully excavated, a new section has been uncovered since my last visit to the site. This is of importance, for the new murals are in a style similar to that of the apartment compound, Tepantitla, a style formerly thought more rare at Teotihuacán. These murals serve as a cautionary tale about our characterization of Teotihuacán murals, for we base our statements of a relatively small percentage of the murals which once must have existed. Indeed, the new murals suggest that further excavations will probably result in a greater number of murals in the "Tepantitla-style," a style which includes more narrative and may assist in the interpretation of Teotihuacán ritual behavior. Unfortunately, I was unable to document these murals through photography for two reasons. First, the murals are faded and quite faint and just marginally visible to the naked eye. Second, the murals have not yet been published by the archaeologists who uncovered them, and to do so would be to ignore professional courtesy. However, having viewed the murals, and simply knowing of their existence and general character is invaluable when writing a manuscript that heavily draws upon the mural tradition of Teotihuacán.

Production of illustrations

As is the nature of the production of illustrations, this has been a long and time-consuming process. First, by necessity, I postponed production of the images until I returned from Teotihuacán and developed the film, which is used as a source for accuracy in the drawings. Second, in order to insure that this project results in the finest quality of illustrations I have been demanding in my standards, and this has resulted in replacing my artist and substituting a different one who was better able to perform to the required standards. While this did not result in any lost or wasted funds, it did cost the project time, and the number of completed images is not where I had hoped it would be.

To date, a little over thirty images have been produced, although an additional large number of illustrations are in the hands of the artist and should be sent in shortly. The work is ongoing and progressing at a nice pace. This new artist was initially new to archaeological illustration, but highly motivated and dedicated to the discipline. After some time adjusting to the demands and specifications of this form of drawing, the artist has adapted nicely and is producing a fine product.

As the drawings are completed, they are sent to the FAMSI database entitled: Annabeth Headrick: Teotihuacán and Related Drawings. I am currently working with FAMSI to enter the pertinent data about each image so that they can be easily located via the search engine and clearly identified. As for the photographs, I am engaged in having them digitized and then sent to the database. All of these drawings and photographs will be made available for use not only in my own manuscript, but for other interested scholars through the FAMSI website. The use of these illustrations will be unrestricted, meaning that they may be used for study, reproduction, or publication free from copyright issues. The ultimate goal is to produce high quality, documentary illustrations that may be freely used, furthering discourse and the exchange of ideas.

Conclusions

The funds provided by FAMSI have proved to be invaluable in the completion of this manuscript. Visual materials have been documented both through film and drawing, which will result in quality illustrations for the final book. In addition, the research time in México allowed for the unforeseen and fortuitous gathering of new information which will strengthen the data and improve the manuscript in invaluable ways.

When the illustrations are completed, the archive of materials will be made available to Mesoamerican scholars through the FAMSI database: Annabeth Headrick: Teotihuacán and Related Drawings. I hope that through this archive, the scholastic need for visual resources will be simplified. For those needing drawings or photographs for teaching, publication, or study, it should be easier and less costly to obtain them, facilitating better publications and the exchange of ideas.