

Teotihuacan

Practices

At its zenith, perhaps in the first half of the 1st millennium AD, Teotihuacan was the largest city in the pre-Columbian Americas. It was a multi-ethnic city known for its many elaborate pyramids and well preserved murals. The society at Teotihuacan was hierarchical and this is reflected in its burial practices.

Low status individuals were buried in floors or public areas within earthen pits, and high status individuals receiving deeper burial pits in more public and sacred spaces. The grave goods found with individuals also vary by status ranging from ceramic vessels and obsidian to jadeite and highly decorated vessels. Elite burials are found in tombs with exotic materials and metals.¹

Human sacrifice was also practice and is especially seen in the creation of the great pyramids.

Burials for women and men were similar as both were buried in the earth, wrapped up and their bodies placed in a crouching position, facing eastward toward Tlalocan, the place of abundance and joy. Adolescents and children were buried in a crouching position on their backs; and newborns were placed in a crouched position in a wide bowl or in large pieces of earthenware, sometimes covered by another vessel as protection.²

Cosmetics seemed to be used as a part of the funerary process at least for the elite class. Additionally, the remainders of cosmetics have been found near grave sites and may have been left as funerary offerings for warriors (to use as war paint) and dancers (to use as stage makeup).³ Priest would also visit the elite, remove the bodies, and redecorate them with cosmetics as part of post funerary rites.

Sixteenth-century chroniclers had a clearer picture of indigenous peoples' ideas about death at the time of the conquest; their accounts can be correlated to archeological observations. On the whole, the dead were destined for Mictlán, and those who died due to causes related to the rain god, Tláloc (from lightning strikes, drowning, gout, dropsy) went to Tlalocan. Warriors killed in combat went to the House of the Sun, while sacrificed prisoners of war and women who died during their first childbirth, and babes in arms who died were headed for Chichihualcuauhco, the place of the árbolnodriza, the nursemaid tree, where they would be fed while they waited for the moment to return to the world.

Deities and Important Concepts

- Great Goddess of Teotihuacan (Spider Goddess)

The main deity of Teotihuacan, her worship seems to have been confined to the city. She is depicted wearing a bird head dress and a nose pendant. She is shown with three or five descending fangs.

Worshiped as goddess of the underworld, darkness, the earth, water, war, and possibly even creation itself. She also had a warlike aspect, but was depicted as being much gentler than other Mesoamerican god/desses.

The underworld that she rules over is shown as a paradise.

- Green stone – Jade or Obsidian

Green Obsidian was only found at Teotihuacan. This high quality stone was extremely useful for making tools and weapons. Green stones were seen as being alive. Thus Jade and Obsidian were valued for more than their functional properties.

¹ "The Role of Cosmetics in Teotihuacan Funerary Rites." Bones Dont Lie. N.p., n.d. Web. 13 Mar. 2014. <http://bonesdontlie.wordpress.com/2012/02/23/the-role-of-cosmetics-in-teotihuacan-funerary-rites/>

² Sanchez, Carlos. "Funeral Rites in Pre-Hispanic Mexico." N.p., n.d. Web. 13 Mar. 2014. <http://www.revistascisan.unam.mx/Voces/pdfs/9415.pdf>

³ "The Role of Cosmetics in Teotihuacan Funerary Rites." Bones Dont Lie. N.p., n.d. Web. 13 Mar. 2014. <http://bonesdontlie.wordpress.com/2012/02/23/the-role-of-cosmetics-in-teotihuacan-funerary-rites/>

- Mictlán, Tlalocan and Chichihualcuauhco
Most of what we know of these afterlife locations comes from the Aztecs. More details on these locations can be found in the Aztec section.

Modern Adaptations

- Bury a piece of green stone with the person. Speak of how the stone represents life.
- Apply cosmetics to the deceased as a sign of honor.
- Let it be known that the deceased will go to the paradise that is ruled over by the Spider Goddess by saying the following:
“__ fear not, the great Spider Goddess who once ruled over Teotihuacan will claim you. She will take you to her lands which are lovely to behold.”

Sample Readings

Regretfully no written language has been deciphered at Teotihuacan.

Resources

- Funeral Rites in Pre-Hispanic Mexico
<http://www.revistascisan.unam.mx/Voces/pdfs/9415.pdf>
- The role of cosmetics in Teotihuacan funerary rites
<http://bonesdontlie.wordpress.com/2012/02/23/the-role-of-cosmetics-in-teotihuacan-funerary-rites/>