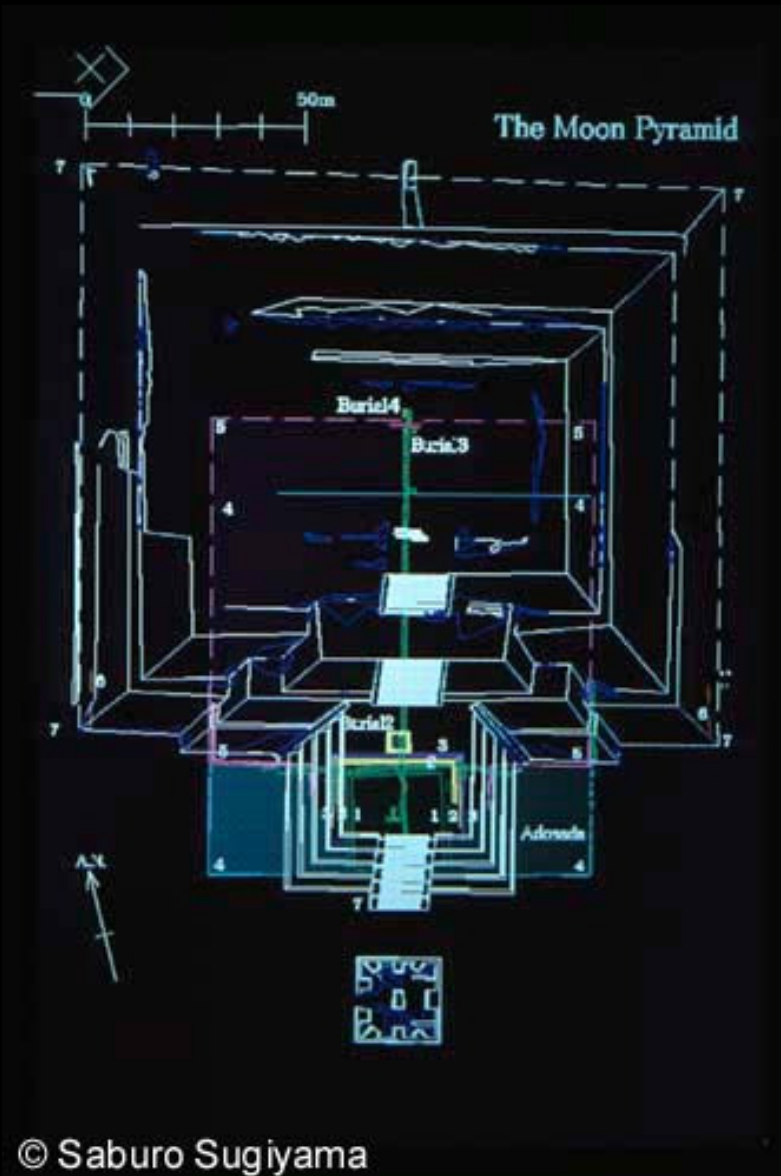




The Layers of Teotihuacán's Pyramid of the Moon

The Pyramid of the Moon is a complex structure that should be investigated in terms of layers. First the surroundings of the pyramid need to be discussed to understand the toposhesia of the pyramid. Then the pyramid itself should be discussed to comprehend the interesting building process used in its creation. Finally, the burial chambers hidden inside the Pyramid can be explored. The analysis of these layers can provide a deeper understanding of the cultures involved in its construction.

Teotihuacán is an ancient city that was discovered just 50 kilometres north-east of Mexico City. “Teotihuacán was Mexico’s first true urban civilization” [1] and contained “more than 2,600 major structures” [1]. Among the plethora of structures found within the city limits the pyramids of the Sun and the Moon are the most prominent. The Pyramid of the Moon faces slightly southwest and rests at the head of the Avenue of the Dead which runs just east of true north. Perpendicular to that axis lies the Pyramid of the Sun facing Slightly North of West. This deviation is done intentionally to orient the Pyramid of the Sun so it faces the setting sun on August 12th and April 29th, which are about one divinatory calendar year apart for the people of Teotihuacán. Therefore the alignment of these pyramids was an integral part of the Teotihuacán culture.



The Pyramid of the Moon is currently the second largest monument at Teotihuacán, although recent discoveries have indicated that it underwent many architectural changes during the centuries following its initial construction. Originally “Fragments of pottery and primitive tools and figurines” [2] were used to distinguish the different layers, but more recently “Extensive excavations around the pyramid and tunnel operations within its nucleus have discovered an elaborate architectural sequence, including seven overlapping monumental constructions and five burial complexes” [3]. This architectural sequence was used to unravel the history of Teotihuacán. Each level represents changes in economy or culture of the society at a given time period. The smallest and initial building for the Pyramid, was oriented facing due south and must have served a different purpose than the following super structures, and it is known that the “earliest building clearly functioned as a monument of symbolic importance for religious activities” [3]. The following change created the new, southwest, orientation and the third change just enlarged it. Then the fourth change caused the Pyramid to grow nine times its original size, which clearly indicates an era of great prosperity. The final stages indicate a continual change of the stylistic choices of the time and their ideological principles. Also cultural relationships can also be found from the different architectural layers: “The material evidence at Kaminaljuyu suggests that its Maya inhabitants developed a cultural relationship with the inhabitants of central Mexico. Objects discovered at the site indicate that Teotihuacan artistic elements were adopted ... architectural style known as *talud*” [4] and “During the first three enlargement phases ... stepped talud facade” [3]. From this it is easy to see that the Maya and Teotihuacán cultures interacted at some period in history. Therefore to

understand the history of a people it is often beneficial to also investigate the architectural process.

To further understand the Teotihuacán culture, a discussion of the burial chambers in the Pyramid of the Moon should take place. The burial chamber in the oldest part of the building was used to provide a safe resting place for the important people of their time; “three individuals were buried in a cross-legged seated position, indicative of very high social status” [3]. But later burial chambers indicate a change in ideologies; “skeletons found there were buried with their hands and feet bound, suggesting that they had been sacrificed” [5]. And From the excavation of the Pyramid it has been proven that “The tradition of human sacrifice conducted for the dedication of the monument continued at least until the erection of Building 6” [3].

It is surprising that only one structure could depict an entire history of a people, but through its multitude of layers the Pyramid of the Moon manages to record a large part of the evolution of the Teotihuacán culture. **By: Jacob Hooey**

[1] FIND REFERENCE] *Teotihuacan, Mexico*. By: Horngren, Barbara, Lesbian News, 07391803, Aug2002, Vol. 28, Issue 1

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[4] *The Relationship of the Maya and Teotihuacan: A Mesoamerican Mystery*. By: Ferguson, Keith, Undergraduate Research Journal, 2007

[5] *City of the Gods*. By: Lemonick, Michael D., Dorfman, Andrea, Time, 0040781X, 12/21/98, Vol. 152, Issue 25

Pictures (From Top to Bottom): www.conifers.org/topics/mex/j18.htm, <http://www.iconoclasm.dk/?p=256> and <http://archaeology.asu.edu/teo/moon/moon.en/6/architect.en.htm>