

THE “GREAT GODDESS” OF TEOTIHUACAN

Fiction or Reality?

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Abstract

A critical review of the history of research devoted to the Great Goddess of Teotihuacan shows that over the past twenty years, and in several publications, this goddess has been transformed gradually into a universal nature deity, has received the title “Great,” and has been regarded by many authorities as the principal deity of Teotihuacan. This has become accepted even though, in my judgment, the goddess was created through a highly speculative line of argument, fusing several different iconographic complexes under that name, and despite the fact that the greater part seem to have nothing to do with each other. As a consequence, the concept of this omnipotent goddess has become a serious obstacle holding back the progress of iconographic research on the Teotihuacan supernatural world. The discussion here reaches the conclusion that in place of a Great Goddess, we are able to identify at least six different gods and goddesses, several among them not yet subjected to analysis.

The history of the Classic-period Teotihuacan goddess begins with the Rain God. Over a long series of excavations lasting into the 1960s, it became evident that representations of the Rain God are omnipresent in Teotihuacan art, giving rise to a unanimous consensus that the Rain God (who for many decades had been identified by the name Tlaloc, rain god of the much later Nahua tradition) was the principal god of Teotihuacan. Nevertheless, this consensus had a negative aspect. Into the images of the Rain God were also incorporated, without rigorous analysis, images of deities and mortals bearing features that are iconographically related (see, for example, the approximations of Pedro Armillas [1945] and Alfonso Caso [1942, 1966:252–259].) Among those images are some that would come to be considered the most emblematic representations of the goddess: the deity of the “Tlalocan Patio” of Tepantitla (Teotihuacan; Figure 1) and the “Jade Tlaloc Mural” of Tetitla (Teotihuacan; Figure 2). In this way, the Teotihuacan Rain God became an extremely complex mega-deity, but without any clear iconographic limits.

This iconographic complex began to fragment when George Kubler (1962:38, 1967:Figure 4) referred, in passing, to the deity of Tepantitla as feminine, and it continued with studies by Esther Pasztory (1973, 1974, 1976), the first investigator to examine with greater rigor the images attributed to the Rain God and to work out the first interpretations of the goddess. In her work on the iconography of the Rain God (Pasztory 1974:10–11), Pasztory argued, among other points, in favor of having found in the body of associated images attributed to the Rain God at least three images similar to each other that represented a new deity related to fertility that was different from the Rain God. She referred to the Tepan-

titla deity (Figure 1) and to the “Jade Tlaloc Mural” of Tetitla (Figure 2), as well as to the personage on a vessel from the Brooklyn Museum of Art (Figure 3).

In her dissertation, which was written in 1971 but not published until 1976, Pasztory made the most exhaustive study to date of the Tepantitla murals. In so doing, she gave her first interpretation of the goddess (Pasztory 1976:104–223, esp. 161–174). Pasztory presented a deity in a triple context of (1) water; (2) a mountain or platform with a cave; and (3) a cosmic tree. According to her detailed analysis, the murals display a richness of aquatic attributes unmatched in the common scope of Teotihuacan art, as well as a close iconographic and contextual relationship between this deity and the Rain God. It is in this work that certain ideas first appeared that constitute recurrent elements in Pasztory’s perception of the goddess: The Tepantitla deity would simultaneously correspond to a young–old, benevolent–destructive, and, perhaps, masculine–feminine deity. Nevertheless, these ideas have little or no basis in the images she examines. The duality of the young–old figure is based on the fire band with diamond-shaped eyes that appears in place of the deity’s eyes (Figure 1), a motif that can be observed on the Old God of Fire braziers. Strictly speaking, taking the band as a point of departure, it is possible to postulate only an igneous component and a dual igneous–aquatic deity—as was set forth earlier by Laurette Séjourné (1957:115–118, Figure 15)—and not necessarily young–old. The fire band in question also appears frequently in various contexts of Teotihuacan art without having any relationship with the Old God of Fire—and, therefore, without implying old age. The dual benevolent–destructive character and the possible bisexual aspect of the deity are without evidence in the Tepantitla murals.

Pasztory’s interpretation of the details of the representation of the Tepantitla deity and of its context show a strong influence of post-Teotihuacan written sources, especially those belonging to

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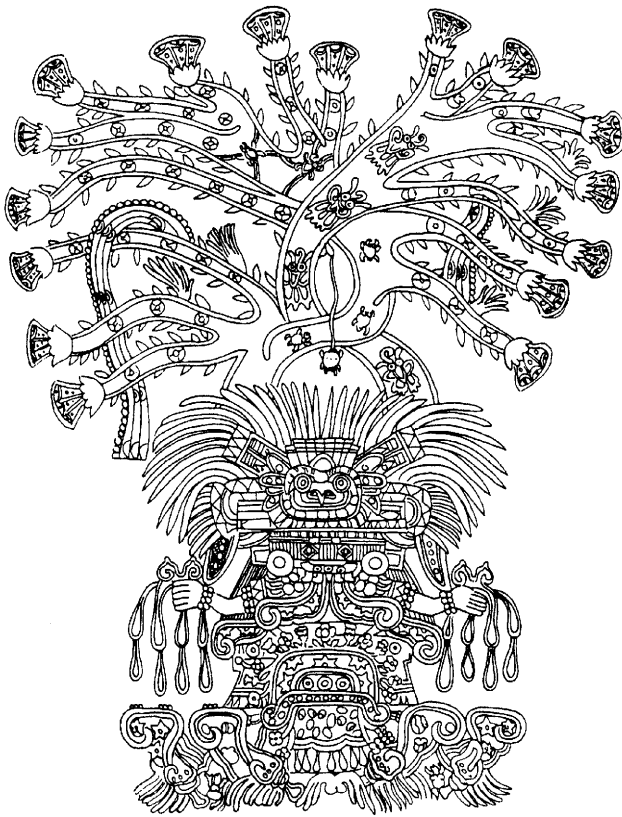


Figure 1. Goddess of the “Tlalocan Patio,” Tepantitla [Taube 1983:Figure 1].

the Nahua tradition. Similarly, when interpreting the overall meaning of the image, Pasztory again depended on sources from the Nahua tradition and offered the following alternative: The Tepantitla deity was either the Teotihuacan forebear of Xochiquetzal, goddess of fertility and the earth, surrounded by the mythic landscape of Tamoanchan, a place of creation, or a bisexual creator deity (also belonging to the Nahua tradition) and located in Omeyocan, another place of creation. (Salvador Toscano [1952:329–332] had proposed a Tamoanchan interpretation of the Tepantitla murals.) It is with this study that the goddess was born, although only as an alternative interpretation.

A PORTRAIT OF THE GODDESS

Somewhat later, Pasztory (1973) presented a new portrait of the deity of Tepantitla. Putting aside the possibility of a bisexual creator god, she declared that the deity corresponded to the Teotihuacan forebear of the goddess Xochiquetzal, although she did not offer any argument in favor of this interpretation other than those presented in her dissertation. Among the images already attributed to the goddess, Pasztory discovered a strong presence of attributes of the Rain God in the personage on the Brooklyn Museum of Art vessel. At the same time, she greatly enlarged the circle of images that, according to her, represent the goddess. Arguing convincingly, she included in that circle the two images of deities from the “Mural of the Offerings” of the Temple of Agriculture (Teotihuacan; Figure 4a), which shows iconographic links with the Tepantitla murals. Yet in connection with the other new images, she was

unable to establish other representations comparable to the goddess of Tepantitla and supported her argument only with isolated attributes (Pasztory 1973:152–158). In my judgment, these additions are not well founded. The new images have no similarity, or only superficial similarities, to the reliable representations of the goddess. This point is important, and we must pay special attention, because the characteristics and importance attributed until now to the goddess are in great measure supported by these mistaken associations and on other, similar, later associations.

According to Pasztory (1973:152–158), the yellow hands that in an offering gesture bestow water, seeds, and precious objects of greenstone are attributes of the goddess; therefore, the hands with wristbands in the border of the “Divine Hands Mural” of Tetitla must symbolize the goddess (Figure 5). These murals were discovered in the room belonging to the portico of the “Jade Tlaloc” images of the goddess. However, the yellow color of the body and the yellow hands are characteristics that are not exclusively those of the goddess in Teotihuacan art, or of the world of the gods, or of that of mortals. Among the gods, we can count, at least, the images of the Rain God; the opuntia (prickly-pear cactus) deity of Tetitla (Figure 6); and the god of the Denver Museum of Art mural (Figure 7). All of these are represented with the body painted in yellow, just as mortals with yellow bodies appear, for example, in the murals of Teopancaxco and of Tepantitla, in the “Mural of the Offerings.” The offerant of Portico 1, Tetitla (Figure 8), also belongs to this series. In discussing the images of yellow rain gods, Pasztory (1973:148–149) called attention to this contradiction, but she attempted to solve it by declaring that the images are atypical.

The yellow bestowing hands at times wear fringed wristbands. When one looks throughout Teotihuacan art, one finds that these wristbands belong exclusively to masculine personages, although not all masculine beings have them. In Figure 5, the divine hands that bestow and that have wristbands, although not with fringe, can scarcely belong to the goddess, since in the few trustworthy images that we have seen of her she wears not wristbands but bracelets (see Figures 1–2). Nevertheless, the idea that yellow hands constituted special attributes of the goddess became one of the most popular commonplaces of Teotihuacan iconography. From this time on we see how chains of false associations are born, based in great measure on a mistaken attribute of the goddess: yellow bestowing hands.

Pasztory then declared that the pair of yellow hands with fringed wristbands of Portico 1 at Tetitla represented the goddess (Figure 9). This claim is obviously erroneous, as we have already seen that fringed wristbands are attributes of masculine personages. Pasztory’s next interpretation suffers the same fate. According to that interpretation, because it is yellow and because it is next to the yellow hands, the front-facing countenance of a deity with visible teeth and ear ornaments in the form of opuntia (which I shall call the Opuntia Deity) in the same portico also would represent the goddess (Figure 6). Also in Portico 1, there is a sacred image consisting of a circular element and an X-shaped, quadripartite arrangement of symbols for fire and water that contains a band with diamond shapes identical to those found in the face of the goddess of Tepantitla (Figure 8). For this reason, Pasztory drew the conclusion that this sacred image must be a representation of the supposed dual igneous–aquatic character of the goddess. Nevertheless, the circle with the X-shaped motif does not appear among the reliable images of the goddess. It must be emphasized that the band of diamond shapes is only one component

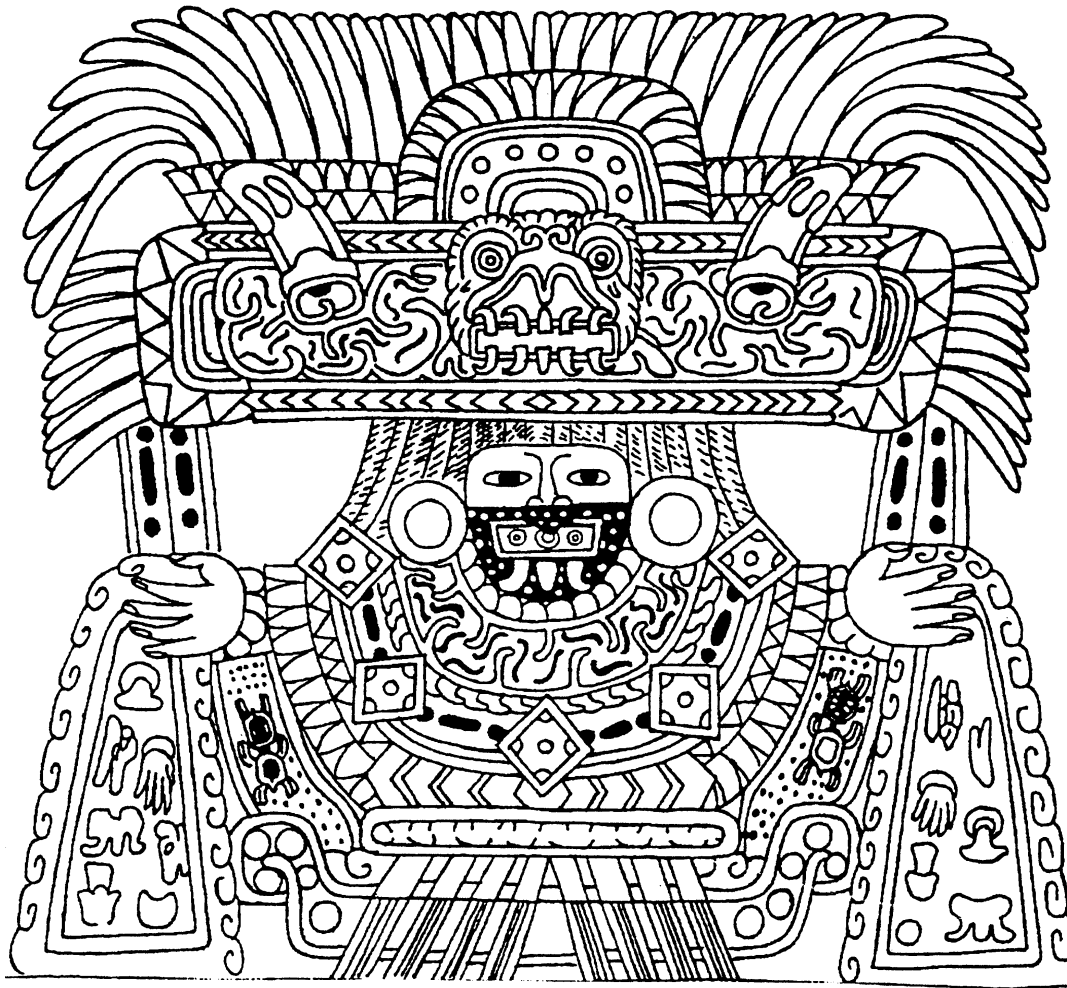


Figure 2. Goddess of the “Jade Tlaloc Mural,” Tetitla (Séjourné 1966:Figure 151).

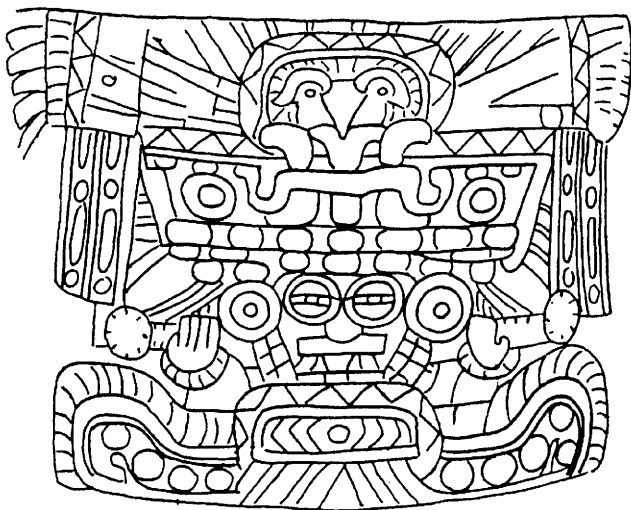


Figure 3. Personage on the Brooklyn Museum of Art vessel (Taube 1983: Figure 6).

of the quadripartite symbol represented in Figure 8. Nor does this quadripartite symbol appear with reliable images of the goddess. On the contrary, it is often found in other contexts. So once more we are dealing with an image that does not represent the goddess.

As a next step, Pasztory looked at a deity of unknown identity in a mural of the Palace of the Jaguars (Teotihuacan; Figure 10a). The body of that deity is composed of a circle and an X, and the figure bears a broad headdress similar to one on a Tepantitla mural. Noting that the deity bore the referred to headdress and had a mouth with visible teeth, and that the quadripartite symbol was found in the border of the mural, Pasztory regarded the representation as a new image of the same goddess. Again, in my judgment this identification is mistaken because it is based on analogies established using images that Pasztory herself had already incorrectly identified with the goddess (see Figures 6–8). As far as the broad headdress is concerned, it is a lot like a headdress that can be seen on the border of a Tepantitla mural (Miller 1973: Figure 158), but this example shows no formal relationship with the Tepantitla goddess headdress. Pasztory’s next step—which was just as incorrect—was to establish that the mouth with visible

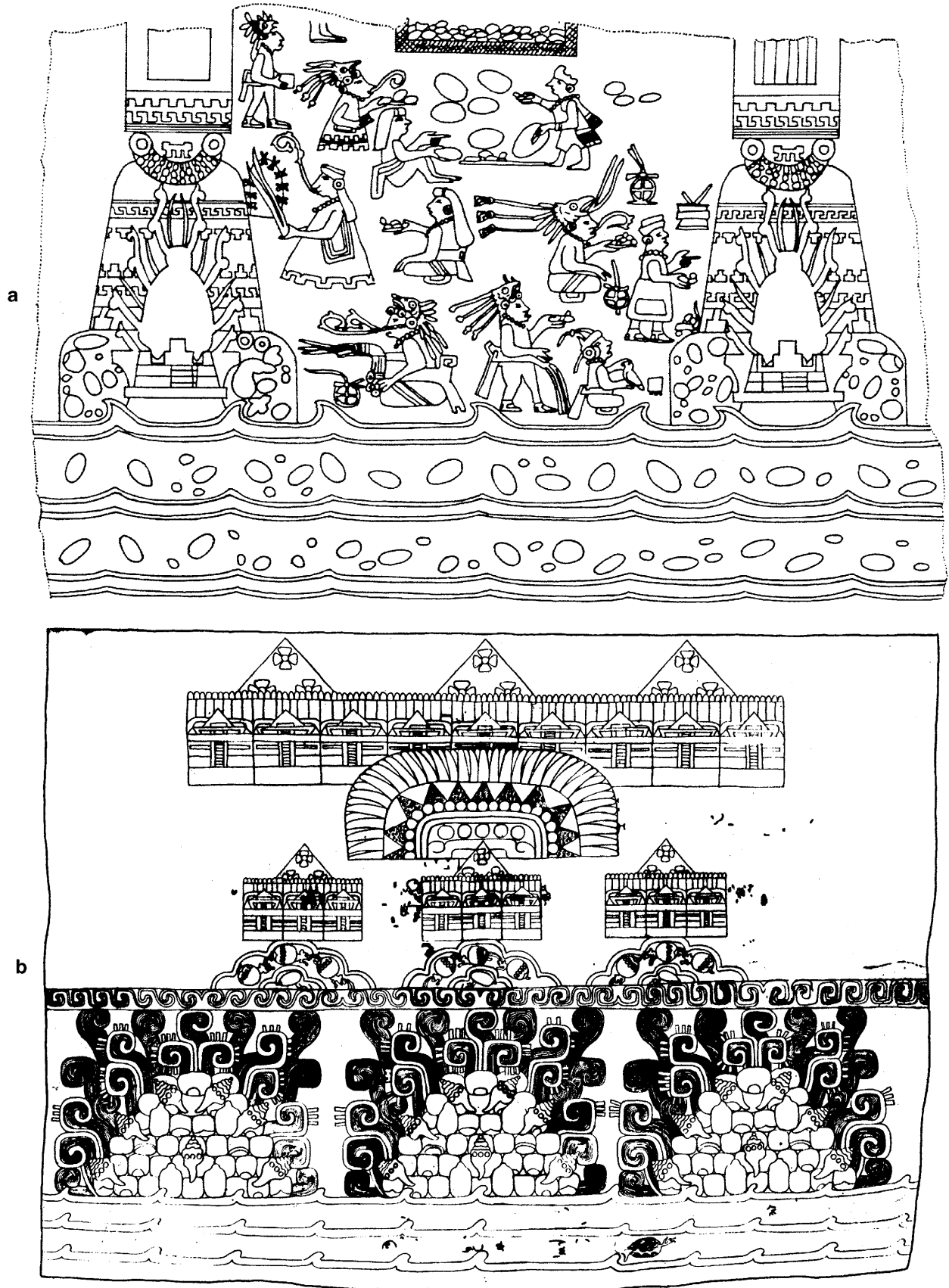


Figure 4. (a) "Mural of the Offerings," Temple of Agriculture (de la Fuente 1995:Figure 10.3); (b) Temple of Agriculture mural (Villagra Caletí 1971:Figure 8). Courtesy University of Texas Press.

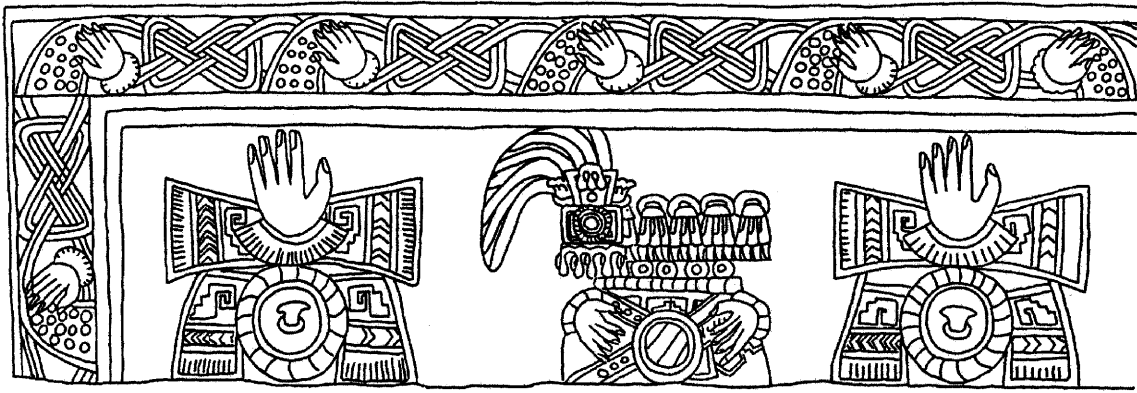


Figure 5. Bestowing hands in the border of the “Divine Hands Mural,” Tetitla (Villagra Caletí 1971:Figure 15). Courtesy University of Texas Press.

teeth therefore corresponded to another attribute of the goddess, representing her supposed destructive aspect, in contrast to the yellow bestowing hands that correspond to her benevolent aspect. Regarding the teeth as an attribute is as great a mistake as attributing the yellow hands to this goddess; nevertheless, in the literature of the iconography of the goddess, the mouth with visible teeth would come to be one of her most outstanding features.

Further, Pasztory believed that the goddess was symbolically present in the Temple of Agriculture mural because her headdress is shown (Pasztory 1973:153; Figure 4b). However, the headdress scarcely resembles that of the goddess. In addition, the headdress

appears crowning the emblem of the Rain God, consisting of his upper lip (*bigotera*) and a row of circles. Finally, one must mention that Pasztory, relying on arguments similar to those noted earlier, interpreted two images in the murals of the Palace of the Sun (the deity of “The Glyphs” [Figure 10b] and the diving deity [Figure 10c] as corresponding, respectively, to Xochiquetzal and her masculine companion, Xochipilli. (In this last point, she was following Séjourné.) I propose that these murals present features characteristic of the Butterfly (or Butterfly-Bird) God (Paulinyi 1995:87, 91). Pasztory’s interpretation is noteworthy because it anticipates the step Janet Berlo (1992) would take 20 years later,



Figure 6. Front-facing deity of Portico 1, Tetitla (Miller 1973:Figure 234).

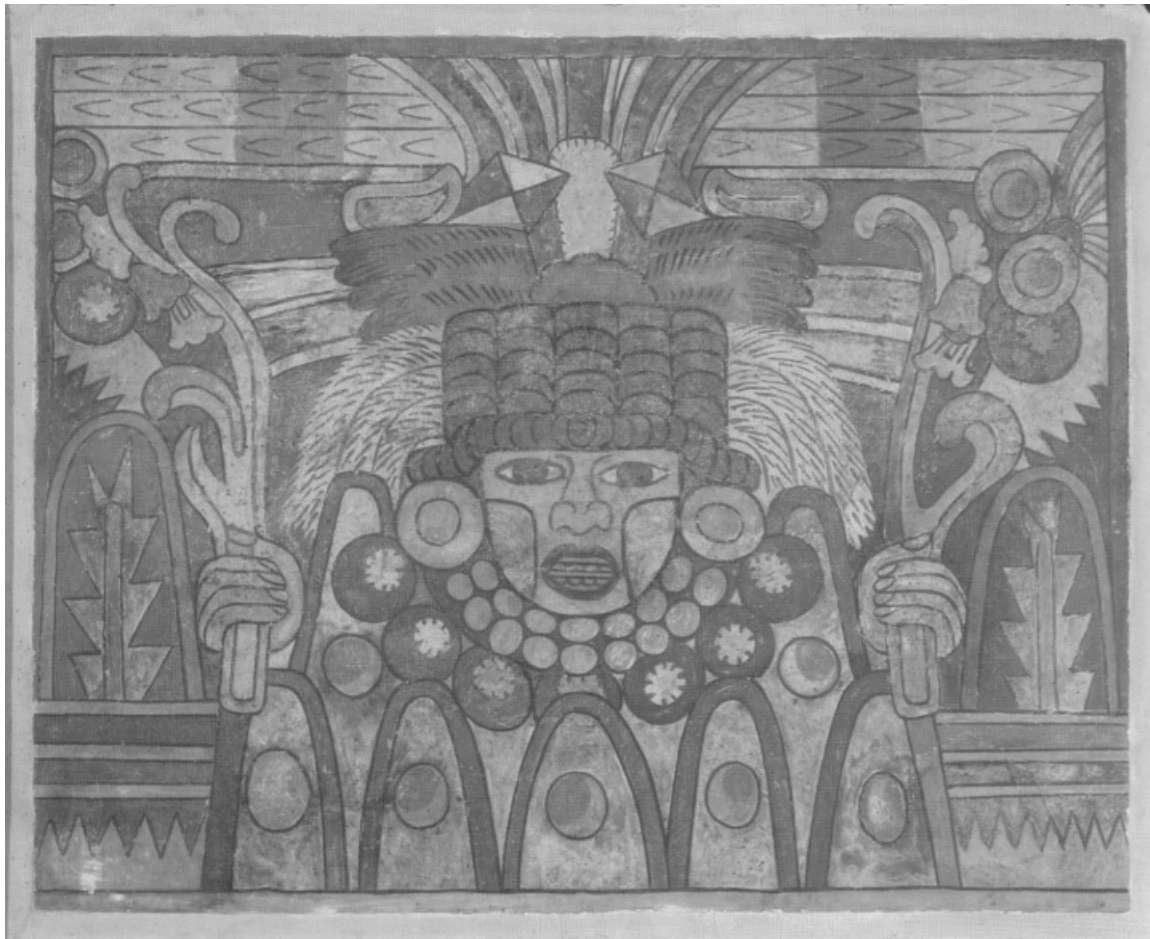


Figure 7. Deity from the Denver Museum of Art mural (Berrin and Pasztory 1993: Number 41).

reaching an interpretation of the entire Butterfly God iconography as one more manifestation of the goddess.

After Pasztory formulated her interpretation of the goddess, she did not return to the theme until the end of the 1980s. If the extension of the idea she proposed were valid, the goddess would have a massive presence in Teotihuacan. In contrast with the solidity of her iconographic analysis of the Tepantitla murals (Pasztory 1976), in her interpretation of the goddess we encounter a faulty line of argument that resembles a house of cards. Thus, even though the goddess hypothetically has more than a dozen diagnostic traits (Pasztory 1973:155–157), only half of them are found in trustworthy images of her: a broad headdress with a central bird, a face or eye mask, a nose ornament with fangs, yellow body color, bestowing hands, the mountain–temple platform, and the cosmic tree and spider. The rest, as we have seen, correspond to images mistakenly identified with the goddess. Despite these objections, this portrait of the goddess became an influential concept in the iconographic studies of Teotihuacan, setting a foundation for the goddess's later meteoric rise.

OTHER INTERPRETATIONS

Around the same time that Pasztory was writing, Peter Furst (1974) published an article that concentrated principally on interpreting

the tree of the goddess of Tepantitla. He proposed that the tree represents the psychotropic plant *ololiuhqui* (*Rivea corymbosa*). However, since he presented no images of the plant, and since he made no comparative analysis with the Tepantitla tree, his hypothesis cannot be supported. Although Furst did not debate the character of the goddess of Tepantitla with Pasztory, he stated his impression that, owing to its general aquatic context, the mural might refer to a goddess of the waters, suggesting at least the possibility of an alternative interpretation to Pasztory's.

During the 1980s, two new opinions were offered. Karl Taube (1983) attempted a radical reinterpretation of the iconography of the goddess. With good critical sense, he accepted as true representations corresponding to the goddess only the Tepantitla images, the images of the “Jade Tlaloc Mural,” the Brooklyn Museum of Art vessel, and the “Mural of the Offerings” of the Temple of Agriculture, and denied similar validity to the rest of the images proposed by Pasztory (1973). He did so, however, without delving deeply into criticizing Pasztory's arguments. Among other positive points in his article, Taube presented new arguments that the deities of Tepantitla and Tetitla wear a *quechquemiltl*, a Mesoamerican feminine garment, and consequently are feminine deities. He also clearly established both that the goddess of Tetitla emerges from a vessel filled with water and that her headdress displays hearts.



Figure 8. Human figure making offerings to sacred object, Portico 1, Tetitla (Miller 1973:Figure 235, detail).



Figure 9. Bestowing hands from Portico 1, Tetitla (Miller 1973:Figure 231).

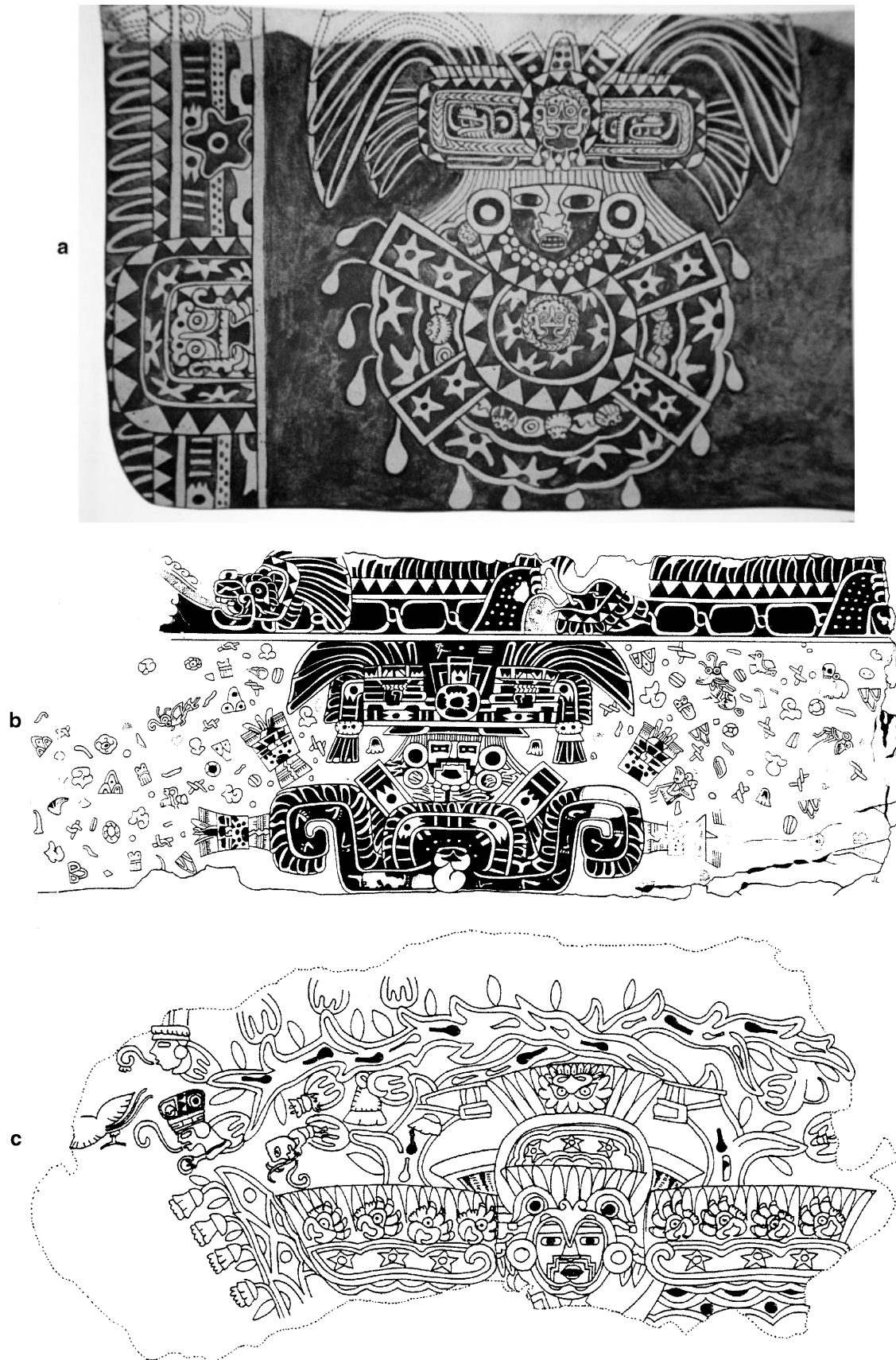


Figure 10. (a) Deity from a mural of the Palace of the Jaguars (Miller 1973:Figure 47); (b) "Mural of the Glyphs," Palace of the Sun (Langley 1993:Figure 8, detail). © James C. Langley; (c) Diving deity from the Palace of the Sun (de la Fuente 1995:Figure 6.2).

Even so, Taube’s attempt to reinterpret the few trustworthy images of the goddess led to over-interpretation. He proposed novel ideas that had been developed with great creativity but generally without solid arguments. He named the goddess Spider Woman, asserting that her nose ornament imitated a spider’s mouth and that her principal attribute was that of the spider, but he was unable to present any Teotihuacan spider with a mouth similar to the nose ornament. Nor did he point out that, although there are spiders and butterflies in the Tepantitla mural, the insects with large heads of the “Jade Tlaloc Mural” surely are not spiders. In short, there is no reason to hold that the most important attribute of the goddess was her spider character. Further, Taube arbitrarily considered that the *quechquemiltl* of the goddess of Tetitla alluded simultaneously to a shield and a mirror, and that the goddess is seen emerging from a divinatory mirror vessel. As none of these theses can be demonstrated, one cannot accept his conclusions that the goddess must have been related to warfare and shamanic powers. Although Taube tried to establish a historical relationship between the Teotihuacan goddess and the present-day Spider Grandmother of the Pueblo Indians of the Southwestern United States, he was not able to resolve the problem of the enormous temporal and geographic distance between the two. In the end, one has the impression that Taube’s readings on Pueblo ethnography strongly influenced his reinterpretation the Teotihuacan goddess.

An interesting contribution, albeit in some points not fully explicit, is that offered by Hasso von Winning (1987:I:135–140) as part of his monograph on Teotihuacan iconography. As a point of departure, von Winning on the whole accepted the original proposals in Pasztory’s doctoral dissertation, and he awarded the goddess the name of “Great Goddess,” becoming the first to use this term. Von Winning’s portrait of the goddess presented two novel

aspects. First, through a detailed analysis of the “Mural of the Offerings,” he presented new arguments in favor of the idea already proposed by Pasztory that the supernatural images in the mural correspond to the goddess of Tepantitla, although he did not mention her original identification (von Winning 1987:I:41–46). The second, and most original, contribution is his inclusion in the circle of the images of the goddess three monumental sculptures. Although the sculptures somewhat lack the distinguishing features, at least two of them certainly represent feminine deities because of they are wearing skirts and *quechquemiltl* (Figure 11a–b). The most outstanding sculpture has been traditionally called Water Goddess (or, using the name of the corresponding goddess in the Nahuatl tradition, Chalchiuhtlicue; Figure 11a). Although von Winning did not give any explicit iconographic arguments in favor of enlarging the representations of the goddess in this way, it would appear that the “Mural of the Offerings” tacitly played a role in his doing so, since in that mural the two supernatural images show similarities with both the goddess of Tepantitla and the monumental sculptures. At any rate, including these monumental sculptures in the representations of the goddess of Tepantitla is an original proposal that merits attention and cautious evaluation.

Also important in determining the eventual lot of the goddess are the studies that Berlo (1982, 1983, 1984) made during the 1980s on Teotihuacan and Tiquisate (Guatemala) *incensarios*, the most characteristic artistic format for the Butterfly God (Figure 11c). Berlo reached the conclusion—contrary to the opinion of other authors, such as Caso (1966:259–263), Séjourné (1962), and von Winning (1987:I:111–124)—that the Butterfly God is really a warrior goddess and, using late ethnohistorical analogies, identified her with the goddesses Xochiquetzal and Itzpapalotl. This interpretation is important regardless of whether it is valid



Figure II. [a–b] Monumental sculptures of goddess with rectangular headdress (a: Matos Moctezuma 1990:Figure 76; b: von Winning 1979:Number 214); (c) Teotihuacan *incensario* (Berrin and Pasztory 1993:Number 70).

because it prepares the way for Berlo's later interpretation of the Butterfly God as a manifestation of the goddess.

THE EMERGENCE OF THE "GREAT GODDESS"

Toward the end of the 1980s, the important Teotihuacan murals of the Wagner Collection were published (Kathleen Berrin 1988) with the participation of Pasztory, Clara Millon, and René Millon. This publication signaled the beginning of important changes in studies of the goddess in that its authors no longer considered the analogy with the goddess Xochiquetzal; unanimously accepted the term "Great"; and showed a strong inclination to connect the goddess, without a strong basis, to several outstanding images from the Wagner Collection, including personages dressed as felines who scattered fire, coyotes, and green birds. Iconographic rigor frequently gave way to speculation. As we shall see, the complex of images considered to be representations of the Great Goddess was extended even further, and this was the first time that her predominance within the Teotihuacan pantheon was broached. Nevertheless, the point of departure for these authors continued to be Pasztory's 1973 article, with its analogies and conclusions but shorn of its ethnohistorical aspects.

These changes in great part are related to a radical theoretical and methodological turnaround by Pasztory, who, following the path taken much earlier by Kubler (1967), broke with her previous axioms, questioned the importance of the continuity between Teotihuacan and the world of Late Postclassic central Mexico, and stopped using ethnohistorical analogies. She grew skeptical toward the possibility of investigating Teotihuacan iconography, emphasizing the polyvalent character of the images in the art. In its place, she proposed a semiotic-structural approach. (See the synthesis of this new approach in Pasztory 1997.)

Clara Millon (1988) interprets a new image, known through several looted murals, as a new type of representation of the Great Goddess (Figure 12), a supernatural being composed of a set of symbols: a mouth with teeth from which an ample bifid stream of water pours, surrounded by an almost rectangular strip that, at its lower open ends, terminates in a pair of claws with fringed wristbands and bracelets. This image, bearing several symbols of water and fertility, is located above a trapeze-shaped motif, and at the top it has a border composed of a serrated and feathered strip. Millon claims that this image refers to the Great Goddess because of the presence of the following motifs, which she considers diagnostic of the goddess: (1) bands composed of circles and bars;



Figure 12. Deity with Claws and Teeth (Berrin and Pasztory 1993: Number 40).

(2) the serrated strip; (3) the mouth with teeth; (4) the bifid stream of water; and (5) the trapeze shape interpreted as a skirt.

The first attribute (the bands composed of circles and bars) appears not only in the case of the goddess (for example, in the “Jade Tlaloc Mural” of Tetitla) but also in the case of the Rain God (Miller 1973:Figure 85). Although the second attribute (the serrated strip) appears in the headdress of the goddesses of Tepantitla and Tetitla, is also found in a great variety of contexts foreign to the Great Goddess. The third attribute (the mouth with teeth), as was shown earlier, is an erroneous attribute created by Pasztory. The fourth attribute, the bifid stream of water, pours not only from the mouth of the goddess of Tepantitla but also from the mouth of the reticulated jaguar in the Palace of the Sun (Miller 1973: Figures 118–119). Finally, the interpretation of the fifth attribute (the trapeze shape) as a skirt is uncertain, since the shape could also correspond to a pedestal similar to that of Teopancaxco (see de la Fuente 1995:Figure 16.1). Given that the being examined by Millon is markedly different from the reliable images of the goddess and wears both wristbands and bracelets (and could thus be masculine or bisexual), her interpretation, in my judgment, is highly doubtful. This entity, which from now on I will call the “Deity with Teeth and Claws,” is clearly related as much to the Rain God as to the goddess but probably is not identical to either. It corresponds to a third deity, which has not yet been analyzed, of the world of water and the earth.

In Millon’s analysis, a dilemma arises that later appears in the work of Berlo and Pasztory, who are proponents of the existence of the Great Goddess. They suggest that, because of the supposed abundance of her images, this goddess may have been—at least, for a time—the principal deity of Teotihuacan. However, there is a problem with the marked differences observed among those images. That is why Millon suggests that, in place of the Great God-

dess, it is more correct to speak of the Great Goddess complex: According to Millon, it is impossible to know the degree to which the “personalities” of the goddess are manifested in various divine entities.

In turn, Pasztory (1988a:Figure III.25a–b) interprets a relief discovered in the Street of the Dead Complex (Figure 13) as a new image of the Great Goddess. George Cowgill (1997:149–151) has expressed doubts on the matter. In addition, Pasztory proposes that the Great Goddess may have been Teotihuacan’s principal deity—at least, in the city’s last phase (Pasztory 1988a:74). Her rather unconvincing arguments in favor of this proposal are two-fold: that the relief mentioned earlier appears in the possible palace complex of Teotihuacan (that is, the Street of the Dead Complex), and that the Great Goddess usually appears in a dominant (“superior”) position in Teotihuacan art.

As to Pasztory’s first argument, it should be emphasized that reliefs representing the Rain God also come from the same complex. Consequently, one might then argue in the same manner that this god must have been the principal deity of the city. (I refer here to the “Crosses of Tlaloc” from the Superposed Buildings.) The second argument, explained in little detail, agrees with the highly speculative idea proposed by René Millon (1988:100, 103) that the procession of the Rain Gods in the murals discovered in the residential compound of Techinantitla (Teotihuacan) may have been to honor the Great Goddess with teeth and claws (Figure 12), whose images hypothetically come from an adjoining room. Nevertheless, as we have seen, it is highly probable that the image of the Deity with Teeth and Claws does not correspond to that of the Great Goddess, and for the same reason, the procession of the Rain Gods could scarcely have been to honor the goddess. On the other hand, the hierarchical relationship between these two groups of murals remains highly uncertain.



Figure 13. Relief from the Street of the Dead Complex (Berrin and Pasztory 1993:Number 4).

THE ALL-EMBRACING GREAT GODDESS

The process of reinterpreting the Great Goddess gained new impetus with the publication of the papers presented at a symposium on Teotihuacan at Dumbarton Oaks in 1988 (Berlo [editor] 1992). In the book, Berlo (1992:129–147) created a true mega-goddess. She rejected none of the numerous identifications proposed by Pasztory, by Clara Millon (questionable, as we have seen, except for a small group of images), or by von Winning. At the same time, she added to them a great number of new images that, she said, also represent the Great Goddess. The most radical modification was her conclusion, following the logic of her earlier investigations, that the Butterfly God is in reality nothing but a manifestation of the Great Goddess (Berlo 1992:136–137, 140–142). As I have noted, a number of authors already considered this a masculine god. Most recently, I offered arguments in favor of its masculine character (Paulinyi 1995:77–81), which were considered decisive by Leonardo López Luján and colleagues (2002:234–236). In the same study, I established that the iconography of the Butterfly God is radically different from that of the goddess (Paulinyi 1995:105–106). Another important change Berlo (1992a:142–144) made was to include images of a Teotihuacan goddess wearing a broad headdress with a circular motif in the center, at times containing a four-leaf pattern. The identity of the goddess is still uncertain but presents no clear iconographic links with the Great Goddess (Figure 14).

With all this, the Great Goddess completely loses any iconographic profile she might have had (although from the publication of Pasztory's 1973 article on, such a profile really existed in appearance only) and breaks up into several iconographic complexes and individual representations, all of which are markedly different from one another. Faced with this obvious heterogeneity, Berlo (1992a:147), following Millon (1988), prefers the alternative of a Great Goddess complex, perhaps consisting of several goddesses in place of a single Great Goddess. However, this restriction cannot save the Great Goddess, since speaking of a complex of deities makes sense only if they are of similar character and iconography (as presented in Nicholson [1971] on the Late Postclassic-period pantheon of central Mexico). This is not the case. The dilemma Millon and Berlo faced is false, because neither of their alternatives is valid. Instead, we are probably looking at a series of independent deities (masculine as well as feminine) that are sometimes related and sometimes very different.

Berlo considers the Great Goddess to be as important as—or more important than—the Rain God. Pasztory (1992) agrees with her, although with minor differences, as she believes that all of the images mentioned earlier correspond to various aspects of the same goddess and definitively declares that the Great Goddess was the principal deity of Teotihuacan, and not only toward its end. Pasztory's argument in favor of this is simply that images of animals and of the Rain God appear in a secondary position compared to the Great Goddess. In this version of the Great Goddess, the meaning is now extremely broad: She is the deity not only of water and of fertility but also, more generally, of nature, with both benevolent and destructive aspects. Pasztory defines her as a “faceless” goddess generally hidden by masks. As a result, the concept of the Great Goddess has become so broad and inclusive as to become meaningless—an empty entity. In the same volume, René Millon (1992:359–360) accepts the Great Goddess as the principal divinity, this time explicitly stating that in Techinantitla the Rain God is found in a position subordinate to her, and he at-

tempts, without presenting arguments, to relate the Great Goddess to the Pyramid of the Sun, a possible principal temple of the city.

The Great Goddess plays a prominent role in the interpretation of works of art presented in the catalogue of the major exhibition of Teotihuacan art organized by the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco (Berrin and Pasztory 1993), and the number of images ascribed to the Great Goddess keeps growing. Among other items, the *incensarios* and other images of the Butterfly God appear explicitly as representations of the goddess. In the catalogue, Pasztory (1993:45–46, 54–57) mentions, among the twelve “basic facts” regarding Teotihuacan, that its principal deity was the Great Goddess. According to her, the Great Goddess is found in Techinantitla and Tepantitla in more important positions than the Rain God, which indicates her generally superior status. We have already seen the highly speculative nature of the Techinantitla argument. As far as Tepantitla is concerned, it is true that the principal figure of the *tablero* murals does represent the goddess, but it is equally certain that her figure emerges over a cave that contains the Rain God emblem and that the borders of all the *tableros*, *taludes*, and doorways of the “Tlalocan” patio are crowded with images of the Rain God (these last serving as a basic context for all the murals in the patio). Whoever the most important deity may be in the murals of Tepantitla, this is *one* case in *one* particular context in which the observed hierarchy between the two divinities may not neces-



Figure 14. Goddess with circular motif in her headdress (Berlo 1992: Figure 22).

sarily reflect the general hierarchy within the Teotihuacan pantheon. Pasztory proposes the idea—again without arguments—that the so-called water eyes symbols also belong to the Great Goddess and interprets the deity of the Denver Museum of Art mural (Figure 7) as a new version of the Great Goddess (Berrin and Pasztory 1993: Number 41). It is impossible to accept such an idea, because that deity, which so far has not been analyzed, wears the “helmet” type of headdress of high-ranking Teotihuacan dignitaries and, as a consequence, should be masculine.

Pasztory has summed up in book form her new semiotic-structural focus and her overall view of Teotihuacan, in which the goddess appears with no important changes (Pasztory 1997: 85–94), just as we have seen in her publications of the early 1990s. But even though Pasztory herself refers critically to her old method of free association, and cites only three murals from her early effort to widen the circle of the goddess’s images (Pasztory 1973), she nevertheless maintains intact her general ideas coming from that study: the yellow hands and the mouth with teeth as symbols, respectively, of the benevolent and destructive aspects of the goddess (this last now enlarged with the claws motif).

Pasztory (1997) no longer uses the adjective “Great,” which reflects the same false dilemma that we have already pointed out in connection with Millon and Berlo. Although Pasztory insists that we are dealing with a goddess, she is aware that she cannot exclude the possibility that these are several related deities. Even so, she persists in saying that, in the three monumental sculptures mentioned earlier, a feminine figure has become transformed into the most important visual image at Teotihuacan. When questions arise about the iconographic characteristics and thematic content of the goddess, Pasztory is able to mention only the headdress with a zig-zag border, the yellow body, cave-like spaces, and faces hidden by masks. Yet even this slight common denominator can not embrace all the iconographic complexes that have been forced on the figure of this goddess.

Finally, Pasztory presents new arguments in speculating that the Pyramid of the Sun, the possible principal temple of the city, was the temple of the Goddess: (1) the Goddess was the principal deity; and (2) caves, including the sacred cave found under the pyramid, belonged to her domain. In my judgment, the entire analysis presented in the present paper shows that the first argument is not valid. And since the Rain God is no less related to the caves than is the goddess, we might present a similar argument in his favor.

DIFFERING OPINIONS

The concept of the Great Goddess has become popular but has not enjoyed general scholarly acceptance. At the same time, it has not received thorough critical review from experts in the field of Teotihuacan iconography. As a result, many authors inexperienced in the field of Teotihuacan studies have accepted as a fact the existence of a preeminent Teotihuacan Great Goddess.

Several experts are exceptions. For example, Taube (2001: 733) maintains his thesis of the “Spider Woman” and rejects the idea that Teotihuacan must have had a principal goddess, believing that, in her place, several goddesses existed. Annabeth Hedrick (2003), Saburo Sugiyama (1998), Taube (2000: 308–311) believe that the *incensarios* in fact represent warriors rather than a deity. Doris Heyden (1998), in interpreting the Teotihuacan caves, always refers to Tlaloc without mentioning the Great Goddess. For my part, I have questioned the supposed preeminence of the Great Goddess (Paulinyi 1995: 105). Among the archaeologists,

Cowgill (1997: 149–151) rejects the idea that the Great Goddess was as important as claimed, underlining the arbitrary character in the selection of diagnostic attributes of the goddess and, at the same time, expressing skepticism regarding the feminine monumental sculptures, asserting that they do not possess her attributes. Finally, Linda Manzanilla (1999: 1113–122, 2001: 180–182) believes that the principal god of Teotihuacan was the Rain God.

CONCLUSIONS

Where does this leave us in our review of the history of the Great Goddess? The principal result is the conclusion that we have no solid basis for supposing that a Teotihuacan Great Goddess, according to the terms sketched out earlier, ever existed. We are dealing not with a single mega-goddess but, rather, with an incoherent group of several iconographic complexes and independent images that have been forcibly joined into the figure of a single goddess. The deities that emerge in place of the Great Goddess are at least the following: (1) two or three goddesses; (2) the deity long identified as the Butterfly God; (3) the god of the Denver Museum of Art mural; (4) the Opuntia Deity of the Tetitla mural; and (5) the Deity with Teeth and Claws. Looking at this group of deities, one begins to suspect that one of the most deeply rooted commonplaces of Teotihuacan iconographic studies, according to which Teotihuacan appears to have had only a meager pantheon, is not correct. Instead, it is more likely a matter of our present meager abilities to recognize and interpret an apparently well-stocked pantheon.

Once the idea of the Great Goddess is discarded, new and refreshing avenues of research open up. Of the gods of the Teotihuacan pantheon, two lacunae—the god of the Denver mural (Figure 7) and the Deity with Teeth and Claws (Figure 12)—await scholarly attention. The two or three goddesses need their own reinterpretation from an existing and highly useful literature. Of that group, one can begin to make out three different divinities: (1) the Goddess of Tepantitla (Figure 1), which corresponds to the divinity originally identified by Pasztory as the Teotihuacan goddess (also belonging to her are the “Jade Tlaloc Murals” of Tetitla and probably the relief from the Street of the Dead Complex); (2) the Goddess with the Rectangular Headdress (Figure 11a–b; mainly monumental sculptures, the greater part of which von Winning identified as images of the Great Goddess); and (3) the Goddess with a Circular Motif (Figure 14), whose images are cited in Berlo (1992) along with others representing the Great Goddess. I suppose that the first two divinities are either the same goddess or two that are closely related, although the third, whose identity we do not know, seems to conceal a different goddess. Of the remaining deities, the Butterfly God has already been the object of abundant research and debate and will continue to be so treated. At the moment, perhaps one can say little about the Opuntia Deity (Figure 6) other than to acknowledge its independent existence.

As a result of the process of resolving the Great Goddess into its component parts, it is also possible that we may in the future have images that belong to none of the deities listed, and we will confront images that, with our present knowledge, we cannot interpret. At the same time, with the disappearance of the Great Goddess, we must rehabilitate the Rain God as the principal god of Teotihuacan. Scholarly attention must return to this divinity, who has not been seriously taken up in the past twenty years, since the studies by James Langley (1986), Pasztory (1988b), and von Win-

ning (1987:I:65–77, 93–109), and whose iconography still presents unsolved problems.

Ironically the situation of 40 years ago, when the Rain God achieved an equally inflated status, is repeating itself in the history of Teotihuacan studies. Nor is it less ironic to realize that it is precisely one fragment of this deity that has become the starting point for the growth of a new mega-deity. Despite the similarity of

the two situations, they are not identical. Since its reanalysis and reformulation, the Rain God has continued to be—and will continue to be—the principal deity of Teotihuacan. But in the case of the Great Goddess, none of her constituent deities can aspire to the supposed importance that she, an artificial construct, came to possess.

RESUMEN

El objetivo de este artículo es la revisión crítica de la historia de la investigación dedicada a la “Gran Diosa” de Teotihuacan. A través de varias publicaciones de los últimos veinte años la diosa mencionada se ha ido transformando en una divinidad universal de la naturaleza, ha recibido el apelativo “Gran” y ha sido considerada por muchos autores como la deidad principal de Teotihuacan. Esto ocurre no obstante—a mi juicio—la “Gran Diosa” fue creada por medio de una argumentación altamente especulativa, fusionando varios complejos iconográficos diferentes bajo su nom-

bre, y a pesar de que la mayor parte de ellos parece no tener nada que ver entre sí. En consecuencia, el concepto de esta diosa omnipotente ha llegado a transformarse en la actualidad en un obstáculo serio que frena el avance de las investigaciones iconográficas acerca del mundo sobrenatural teotihuacano. Concluyo que en lugar de una “Gran Diosa” podemos identificar al menos seis diferentes diosas y dioses, entre los cuales varios no han sido hasta el momento analizados.

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