



Absolute geomagnetic intensity record from pre-Columbian pottery dates elite Tlailotlacan Woman in ancient Teotihuacan



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ABSTRACT

A detailed rock-magnetic and archaeomagnetic investigation were carried out on seven pottery fragments (49 specimens) found within the burial of an individual with the most body/dental modifications and prestige elements found so far in the ancient Teotihuacan city. The skull of this 35 to 40 years old woman (at the time of death) shows an intentional cephalic modification with frontal-occipital compression. This is very uncommon within the Teotihuacan population and indicating the southern provenance (Oaxaca or Maya area). The age estimations, based on relative datings, placed the archaeological context between 350 and 400 CE. The magnetic mineralogy experiments were characterized by a single remanence component, occasionally accompanied by a soft overprint, probably of viscous origin and Curie temperatures between 540 °C and 565 °C. Only twelve specimens, belonging to two distinct pottery fragments, yielded reliable determinations meeting very strict selection criteria. The values retrieved from both fragments are statistically undistinguishable. The absolute age estimation of the *Tlailotlacan Woman* archaeological context obtained in this study contradicts the early estimations and indicates a late time interval between 650 and 800 CE corresponding to the decline of Teotihuacan, where the social differences of their inhabitants became much more evident.

1. Introduction

The Pre-Hispanic city of Teotihuacan was the scene of distinct social dynamics involving groups from various regions of Mesoamerica. The cosmopolitan character of the city allowed the coexistence of individuals devoted mainly to religion and trade. The political and cultural prestige distinguished this famous site for more than five centuries. Numerous archaeological surveys, carried out since the early sixties, provided some crucial information about ongoing relationships between the different groups in the city and those living in other places such as Monte Alban, in the current state of Oaxaca, Kaminaljuyú in the Maya area or Maticapan in Veracruz.

The site of Tlailotlacan, located approximately 3 km west of the *Avenue of the Dead*, is a great example of archaeological contexts with clear presences of people of different customs and traditions (Fig. 1). In this area, numerous Oaxacan potteries were recovered during the initial mapping project. In addition, many funeral traditions were discovered similar to the Central Oaxacan Valleys with presence of effigy vessels and even the inscription on a stone. Further studies conducted in the area from early eighties evidenced a broad and continuous contact between the inhabitants of Teotihuacan and Monte Alban demonstrat-

ing that in Teotihuacan megacity prevailed different concepts of philosophy and cultural characteristics on both life and death.

Twenty five years later, the INAH (Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia) carried out new survey in the area, aiming to establish the social dynamics of the neighborhood and try to understand its importance in the urban context in terms of social hierarchies, exchange circuits and spheres of interaction (Ortega Cabrera, 2014). Since 2008, eight architectural complexes of Tlailotlacan were partially excavated. This new effort evidenced that the neighborhood was mainly composed of several multifamily complexes in which three or more families shared domestic space (kitchens, warehouses and courtyards) and some ritual activities. Many architectural features are clear evidence of different type of families who shared very limited space but always respecting their individuality in separate dwellings (Ortega Cabrera, 2014).

Generally speaking, this kind of domestic assemblies are similar to other parts of the city but some distinctive elements are also detected which includes the construction of burial spaces (tombs) located mainly in landfills platforms. The neighborhood houses were made of stone and adobe. Moreover, they had drainage and a quite sophisticated water supply system. The growth of housing complexes was constant as

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Fig. 1. Schematic map of the Great Teotihuacan indicating the location of Tlailotlacan (in blue) and context of initial position of the burial (please see text for more details). (For interpretation of the references to colour in this figure legend, the reader is referred to the web version of this article.)

extensions and modifications in distribution of spaces are systematically evidenced during the excavation (Ortega Cabrera, 2014). It is important to emphasize that the presence of foreign and Oaxacan materials is a constant feature throughout the history of the neighborhood, from the Miccaotli to Metepec (100–650 CE) phases basically consisting of two types of networks: ideological (construction of tombs, use of effigy vessels, incense burners) and use of conical bowls and vessels. Families who inhabited these places maintained asymmetric relations with each other, as evidenced by the amount of foreign materials and the quality of construction of their homes and the amount of tombs built. Several sites protruded from the rest by their exceptional qualities; particularly the structure TL6 housing has spacious rooms and excellent construction materials as well as a large base of staggered bodies at the core of a tomb (Fig. 1). Most of the rooms had underground tombs with burials of individuals placed in extended position. One of these burials, called here Burial 13, was found under the floor of Room 2, in a pit of rectangular shape. The individual was accompanied by 19 pieces of pottery offering (Fig. 1) placed all of them through the skull to the pelvis.

The importance of this burial is that it belongs to the individual with the most body modifications and prestige elements found so far in the ancient Teotihuacan city. This is a woman between 35 and 40 years of age at death yielding an intentional cephalic modification (Fig. 2), with frontal-occipital compression which is not common within the Teotihuacan population. It was possible to identify that the individual had intentional dental modification in the upper central incisors, type G-3 according to the Romero (1958) classification. Another interesting feature is the existence of inlay on the front face using circular pyrite disk plates which requires a precise perforation in the enamel. This technique was reported mainly in Maya area in the Petén region and Belize. It is important to note that the G-3 type modification is a combination of two variants: mutilation type B-5, which has been found in the funerary urns of Monte Alban, and embedding type E-1 which is reported in the Maya area (Tiesler, 2011).

Another interesting feature of this individual is a finding of a tooth



Fig. 2. A detailed view of Tlailotlacan dental deformation and modification (please see text for more details).

made by serpentinite with jadeite (personal communication of Emiliano Melgar Tizoc) which presented shaped incisor filled by a dental inlay type E-1 Romero (1958). Based on the characteristics of jadeite it was concluded that this was a dental prosthesis (Fig. 2) placed in the area of the lower central incisors. The prosthetic part may have been used for a long time, which promoted the formation of dental plaque and tartar or wear by attrition that was generated in the upper teeth. Under these circumstances, it is inferred that the burial belongs to a person of elite from southern Mesoamerica (Oaxaca or the Maya Zone). The associated offering consists of 19 vessels, most of them made in Teotihuacan and used commonly in daily activities. These pieces correspond to various time intervals ranging from late Tlamimilolpan (250–350 CE) to Metepec (600–650 CE) phases.

The great importance of this unique individual within the political authority and neighborhood networks in the Great Teotihuacan re-

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