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# Beyond Rain and Storm: Tlaloc and his Relationship with Warfare, Earth and Territory in Teotihuacan

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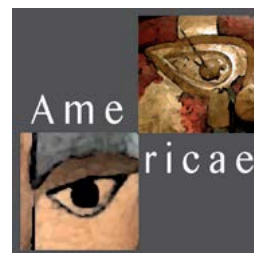
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# Beyond rain and storm: Tlaloc and his relationship with warfare, earth and territory in Teotihuacan

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This article offers a series of reflections on the iconographic relations between the Tlaloc of Teotihuacan and the politico-military sphere of the city. In particular, it considers the explanations for the presence of Tlaloc iconography alongside the warriors and representatives of Teotihuacan outside the city, notably in images from Petén, dating from the end of the 4th century AD. One of the most evident hypotheses is that Tlaloc had a warrior character, and may indeed have been the Teotihuacan god of war. Whilst this explanation is plausible, the complex personality of the god permits other interpretations. In particular, it is evident that the god had close ties with the earth and the underworld, and he is thus possibly linked to the embodiment of Teotihuacan as a territory.

Keywords: Mesoamerica, Teotihuacan, Tlaloc, warfare, iconography.

## Más allá de la lluvia y de la tormenta: Tlaloc y su relación con la guerra, la tierra y el territorio en Teotihuacan

*En el marco de este artículo se ofrecen algunas reflexiones sobre las relaciones iconográficas existentes entre el Tlaloc de Teotihuacan y el poder político-militar de la metrópoli. En particular, se abre una discusión sobre las razones por las que Tlaloc aparece junto a los guerreros y a los representantes de Teotihuacan fuera de la metrópoli, en imágenes encontradas en el Petén y fechadas de finales del siglo IV de nuestra era. Una de las explicaciones más obvias sería que Tlaloc tuvo un aspecto guerrero; incluso que fue el dios de la guerra de Teotihuacan. Dicha hipótesis es plausible, pero la compleja personalidad del dios impone proponer otras interpretaciones. En particular, Tlaloc parece estar vinculado con la tierra y el mundo telúrico y, en consecuencia, puede haber estado conectado con Teotihuacan en tanto que territorio.*

Palabras clave: Mesoamérica, Teotihuacan, Tlaloc, guerra, iconografía.

## Au-delà de la pluie et de l'orage : Tlaloc et ses rapports avec la guerre, la terre et le territoire à Teotihuacan

*Cet article offre une série de réflexions sur les relations iconographiques existant entre le Tlaloc de Teotihuacan et le pouvoir politico-militaire de la métropole. En particulier, il explore les raisons symboliques qui expliquent la présence de Tlaloc aux côtés de guerriers et de représentants de Teotihuacan en dehors de la métropole, notamment dans des images provenant du Petén et datées de la fin du IV<sup>e</sup> siècle de notre ère. Une des explications les plus évidentes est que Tlaloc aurait un caractère guerrier, voire qu'il ait été le dieu de la guerre de Teotihuacan. Cette interprétation est plausible, mais la complexité de la personnalité du dieu impose également d'autres lectures. En particulier, il est manifeste que le dieu a eu des relations étroites avec la terre et le monde tellurique, et il est donc peut-être lié à Teotihuacan en tant que territoire.*

Mots-clés : Mésoamérique, Teotihuacan, Tlaloc, guerre, iconographie.

**A**MONGST TEOTIHUACAN DEITIES, the god called Tlaloc (or “Storm God”), widely identified as the god of rain and storm, is known to be a great “travelling” deity: his iconography and/or the attributes associated with him are found in a number of images created outside the metropolis, in very distinct contexts.<sup>1</sup>

1. Tlaloc features can be identified on artworks dating from both the Teotihuacan period and the periods that follow. They are found on movable objects as well as on architectural elements; on creations by local producers as well as on exported works of Teotihuacan artists; on pictures found in the immediate surroundings of the metropolis as well as in remote areas (for a synthesis, see Couvreur 2004, t. 1: 206-224).

By the end of the 4th century AD, the Maya area, and especially the Petén region, had experienced a strong iconographic influence from Teotihuacan. Both the epigraphy and the iconography of this period reveal that there were direct relations between the Maya and Teotihuacan peoples at the highest levels of politico-military power,<sup>2</sup> and also most probably, at the religious level. As could be expected, Teotihuacan Tlaloc features (in particular the god's goggles and/or his tasseled headdress<sup>3</sup>) are present

2. See notably Miller (1978), Navarrete (1996), Stuart (2000).

3. The tasseled headdress is very frequent in the costume of Tlaloc in Teotihuacan (Armillas 1945: 48, plate 2d-e; Berrin and Pasztory 1993: 253, cat. 140; Caso 1972: 253, fig. 34b;

in this context. The clearest example of this phenomenon is found on Stela 31 of Tikal.<sup>4</sup> On this monument, the Maya king Siyaj Chan K'awiil II<sup>5</sup> is represented between two guards showing Teotihuacan facial features, who are dressed “*alla teotihuacana*” and holding the Teotihuacan weapons: a spear-thrower and a shield decorated with the face of Tlaloc (Figure 1). Considering this image was created during a period of direct contact between the Tikal and Teotihuacan peoples by an artist who paid great attention to details in the attributes depicted, the fact that Tlaloc is present on the shield of the Teotihuacan warrior leads to the question of what the role of Tlaloc in this context may have been. It is also worth questioning the choice of Tlaloc in particular, and not another deity of the metropolis. A number of specialists such as Pasztory, Taube and Von Winning have suggested that this is explained by the fact that Tlaloc was the war god of Teotihuacan (Pasztory 1974; 1997: 95-96) or, at least, that he was the god of warriors (Taube 2000: 274; Von Winning 1987, t. 1: 79).

As will be discussed first below, this hypothesis could provide a basis for understanding the visible presence of Tlaloc in the highest politico-military context, as the god has clear martial connotations in Teotihuacan and such connotations can still be identified in the Aztec period even if they are much less evident. Nevertheless, Tlaloc attributes also appear along with religious emissaries from Teotihuacan. Another aspect of Tlaloc symbolism could provide further clues concerning his “international” visibility. In Teotihuacan as in other Mesoamerican cultures, the rain god has telluric associations: it can be shown that the image of Tlaloc was used in direct contact with the earth surface. This leads to the hypothesis that in his representation of the earth, Tlaloc may, by extension, also have represented the territory of the metropolis, and that he could have been the tutelary god of the “city of the gods.” The role of the Aztec Tlaloc in the definition of the territory and in the transmission of local power, as reported by Contel (1999a, 2008, 2011) and Botta (2009), reinforces this hypothesis (see below).



Figure 1. Stela 31 of Tikal (detail), drawing by Nicolas Latsanopoulos based on Schele (2000: no. 2036).

## THE WARRIOR ASPECT OF TLALOC IN TEOTIHUACAN

The figure of the Teotihuacan pantheon discussed in this paper is identified as the ancestor of the Aztec Tlaloc. This deity, called Tlaloc of Teotihuacan or “Storm God,”

Linné 1934: 55, fig. 21; Séjourné 1966: fig. 49; Taube 1983: fig. 18b; Von Winning 1984 and 1987: 1: ch. 7, fig. 11d). As in the Aztec context, the headdresses of the Teotihuacan gods were also used as glyphic elements in the Teotihuacan writing system (Millon 1988: fig. 5).

4. See also: Stela 32 of Tikal (Stuart 2000: 469, fig. 15.3); Stela 7 of Monte Albán (Marcus 1983: fig. 6.5); Stuccoed vase from Kaminaljuyú (Kidder et al. 1946: fig. 207a); Vase from Copán (Martin and Grube 2000: 195); Merlons from Cinteopa, Morelos (Cook de Leonard 1985: 52, 54).

5. For further details, see Martin and Grube (2000: 34).



shares clear iconographic and symbolic connections with his Postclassic counterpart. They were both considered as the providers of rain, by pouring water out of a jar ornamented with their facial features<sup>6</sup>; they were both identified as the lords of lightning, which is pictured as a snake in both cultures; they were both regarded as the providers of maize: in Teotihuacan and Aztec pictures, the god is represented holding a ripe maize stalk or wearing a maize headdress.<sup>7</sup>

Unsurprisingly (as we are dealing with Mesoamerican pictures, always highly polysemous), the symbolic domain of the Teotihuacan Tlaloc appears to be even more extended. One of his specificities that has struck investigators<sup>8</sup> is the fact that in the Classic period, he is often represented with martial attributes. In a number of images, Tlaloc (or characters wearing his diagnostic goggles, nose bar and/or tasseled headdress) appears along with spear-throwers and darts (Figure 2)<sup>9</sup>; or with warrior emblems such as the “owl and spears” symbol (Figure 3).<sup>10</sup> Some of these examples were uncovered in the metropolis, while others are from its sphere of influence and in particular from Tikal.<sup>11</sup> Thanks to images such as the reliefs of Stela 31 from Tikal (Figure 1),<sup>12</sup> the platelet headdress can be recognized as one of the most characteristic accessories of the warriors from Teotihuacan. In the Mexican highlands of the Classic

period, characters wearing this specific headdress are very often also depicted with goggles, which in this specific cultural context is likely to be a reference to Tlaloc (Figure 4).<sup>13</sup> One interesting example of such a combination is found in the Feathered Serpent Pyramid of Teotihuacan, where, as Taube (1992) suggests, the sculpted scaled-skin heads could be a version of the warrior platelet headdress (Figure 5). The precise identification of these heads is still a matter of discussion, as most authors doubt there is any link between the rings ornamenting their foreheads and Tlaloc’s goggles (López Austin et al. 1991; Taube 1992: 59). However, it is noteworthy that there is a clear relation between the scaled-skin heads and another feature of Tlaloc: the heads are associated with the mouth ornament of the god, which is represented under their snout. A possible connection between the forehead rings and Tlaloc cannot be discarded because of their unusual position. This attribute can be compared to a very significant example from the Great Temple of Tenochtitlan (Figure 6), where rings displayed at the top of snake heads are clearly a reference to Tlaloc as these heads are sculpted in the Northern side of the pyramid, i.e. the side of the temple of Tlaloc.

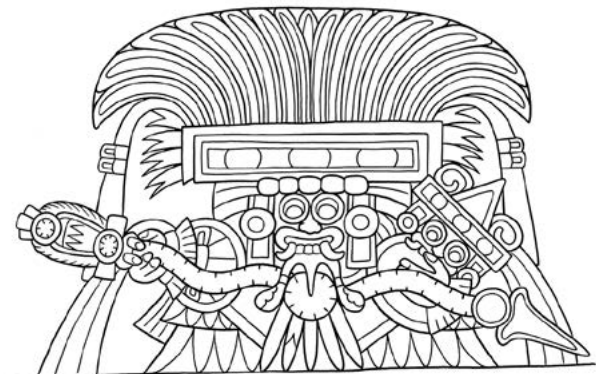


Figure 2. Mural painting from Corridor 21 at Tetitla (Teotihuacan), drawing by Nicolas Latsanopoulos based on Von Winning (1987, t. 1, ch. 6, fig. 7).

Notwithstanding the above, it appears that a significant number of pieces of evidence indicate that in the Classic metropolis, Tlaloc was represented holding warrior equipment, such as spears, spear-throwers and shields. A clear question is whether these images can be interpreted as an indication of Tlaloc being a war god, or even the war god, of Teotihuacan, as a number of scholars have suggested. In several instances, his spears are undoubtedly a metaphor of lightning evoked by the undulating shape of their shaft and by their representation along with Tlaloc-faced jars symbolizing the vases where the god stores the celestial waters (Figure 2). In Tepantitla, the flames pictured at the back of a figure with goggles and spear-thrower could refer to the celestial fire handled by Tlaloc and his representatives (Figure 7). It appears

6. Paintings from Pórtico 2 of Tepantitla (Fuente 1995, t. 1: 144, pl. 19); Painting presumably from Techinantitla (Fuente 1995, t. 2: 436, pl. 1); Vase from La Ventilla (Cabrera Castro 1998: vasija 3); Vase of unknown origin (Langley 1997: fig. 12).

7. Compare for instance the paintings of Pórtico 3 at Zacuala (Séjourné 1959: 30, fig. 12) with plate 22 of *Codex Magliabechiano* (1983), as well as the paintings of Gran Conjunto at Teotihuacan (Fuente 1995, t. 1: 25, fig. 2) with plate 20 in *Codex Vaticano B* (1972). In other Postclassic pictures, corn is poured out of Tlaloc jars: see *Codex Borgia* (pl. 27), Ahuitzotl box (Pasztory 1983: 164, pl. 122), ceremonial vessel from Iguala representing the birth of Quetzalcoatl (Museo nacional de Antropología). The role of Tlaloc being the provider of food, and specifically of corn is clear in Aztec myths (see for instance *Leyenda de los Soles* 1945: 121).

8. In a famous paper, Paszatory (1974) has suggested that there were actually two different Tlaloc in Teotihuacan: one specifically dedicated to water and rain (Tlaloc A), and the other one being a war deity (Tlaloc B). Despite its huge success in the literature, this theory is not valid, as demonstrated by Langley (1986: 77-85; 1992: 248-249; see also Couvreur 2004: 88-90).

9. See also the murals of Patio 9 at Tepantitla (Fuente 1995, t. 1: 152, pl. 54); the goggled canidae represented in the Patio Blanco paintings at Atetelco (Fuente 1995, t. 1: 206).

10. See the Teotihuacan figurine from a private collection (Taube 2000: fig. 10.3b), a fragmentary vase from La Ventilla (Cabrera Castro 1998: vase 5) and a vase from the Rivera Collection (Séjourné 1966: 105, fig. 87). For a discussion about the emblem “owl and spears,” see Couvreur (2004, t. 1: 195-198; 2005: 16-18); Von Winning (1984; 1987, t. 1: 85-91).

11. Such as on a vase from Burial 10 of 5-D-34 Structure of Tikal (Von Winning 1987, t. 1, ch. 7, fig. li).

12. See also Stela 1 from Tres Islas (Guatemala) (Greene et al. 1972: 209, pl. 97).

13. Also Berrin and Paszatory (1993: 229, cat. 96).



Figure 3. Engraved vase (detail) from Xolalpan (Teotihuacan), drawing by the author based on Caso (1972, fig. 39b).



Figure 4. Figurines from Teotihuacan, drawing by Eduard Seler (1902-1923, t. 5, fig. 48).

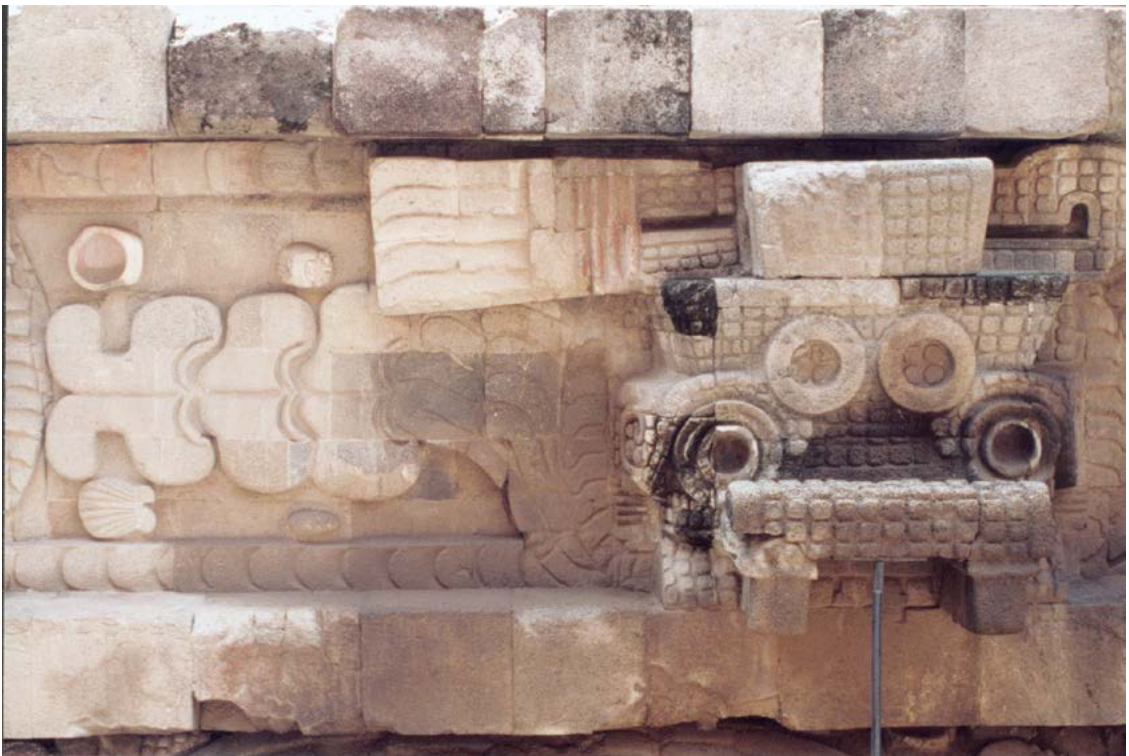


Figure 5. Sculpted heads, Feathered Serpent Pyramid (Teotihuacan), picture by Bertrand Lobjois (2003).





Figure 6 (a and b). Sculpted serpent head, Great Temple of Mexico-Tenochtitlan, pictures by José Contel (1999a, fig. 123).

therefore that the weapons held by the god may refer to his capacity to dispatch thunderbolts. In Mesoamerica, lightning is frequently considered as a both fertilizing and destructive phenomena,<sup>14</sup> and it is at times described as powerful and effective magic weapon. The *Título de Totonicapán* (1983: fol. 12r, 21r) reports for instance how the Quichés defeated their enemies thanks to lightning and other atmospheric phenomena. Amongst the modern Tzotziles of San Pedro Chenalhó lightning is considered as the weapon of Anhel, the rain god (Guiteras Holmes 1961: 302). This understanding of lightning as a “weather weapon” could explain its representation as a spear-thrower or a dart in the Teotihuacan context.



Figure 7. Mural painting from Patio 9 at Tepantitla (Teotihuacan), drawing by Nicolas Latsanopoulos based on Von Winning (1987, t. 1: 80, fig. 1j).

Such a weapon-like aspect of the Tlaloc lightning scepter is less clearly stressed in depictions from the Aztec period, but in a series of images the object representing the rain god’s thunderbolt is an axe (*Codex Fejérvary-Mayer* 1994: pl. 4; *Codex Laud* 1994: pl. 21 [4], 23 [2], 24 [1]; *Codex Vaticanus B* 1972: 41, 69; *Codex Cospi* 2004: pl. 17), a spear-thrower (*Codex Borgia* 1993: pl. 25; *Codex Vaticanus B* 1972: pl. 70) or a traditional obsidian sword (*macuahuitl*) (*Codex Borgia* 1993: pl. 20). Moreover, it should not be forgotten that Opochtli, one aspect of the Aztec Tlaloc, is the

god of fishermen and lake people, whose specific tools to hunt waterfowl were the net and the spear-thrower (*CFI*, ch. 7: 37; *Historia de los Mexicanos por sus pinturas* 1985: 47). Thus not every weapon attribute of the Aztec Tlaloc is a weapon of war: some are a reference to his aspect of storm god, others to his patronization of the lake activities.

In this context, the Teotihuacan data confirm Tlaloc was the master of lightning, which was probably considered as an extremely powerful atmospheric weapon. The Teotihuacan Tlaloc may have been considered as a war-related god, in the sense of a god able to release the storms to support his people—as it was thought amongst the ancient Quiche.

However, if the possession of this powerful atmospheric weapon provides an explanation of the representation of Tlaloc on the shields of Teotihuacan warriors, other hypotheses should be explored. This is especially so, as in non-Teotihuacan contexts, the attributes of Tlaloc—and in particular his tasseled headdress—are worn by other emissaries from Teotihuacan, notably characters who seem to be religious representatives of the metropolis. Such a case is the famous vase found in the Problematic Deposit 50 of Tikal, which represents a procession of emissaries from the Mexican highlands to a Maya temple (Figure 8). The first four characters are clearly military dignitaries, showing bright Teotihuacan costumes, while the last two appear to be religious representatives of the metropolis, as they are wearing tasseled headdresses and holding cylindrical tripod vases, the characteristic ritual ceramics of Teotihuacan. On a vase from Kaminaljuyú, similarly adorned characters are showed in a ceremony of ritual offerings (Figure 9).

From the above, it can be seen that outside Teotihuacan, the image of Tlaloc and his tasseled headdress was widespread, and not limited to military dignitaries. For Paulinyi (2001: 23), the representatives wearing the tasseled headdress are “civil” rulers of Teotihuacan, the highest leaders of the metropolis. In fact, it appears that different types of emissaries—both martial and religious—from the metropolis were placed under the flag

14. See for instance Contel and Mikulszka (2011: 26-27).





Figure 8. Vase from the Problematic Deposit 50, Tikal (Guatemala), drawing by Nicolas Latsanopoulos based on Culbert (1993, fig. 128a).

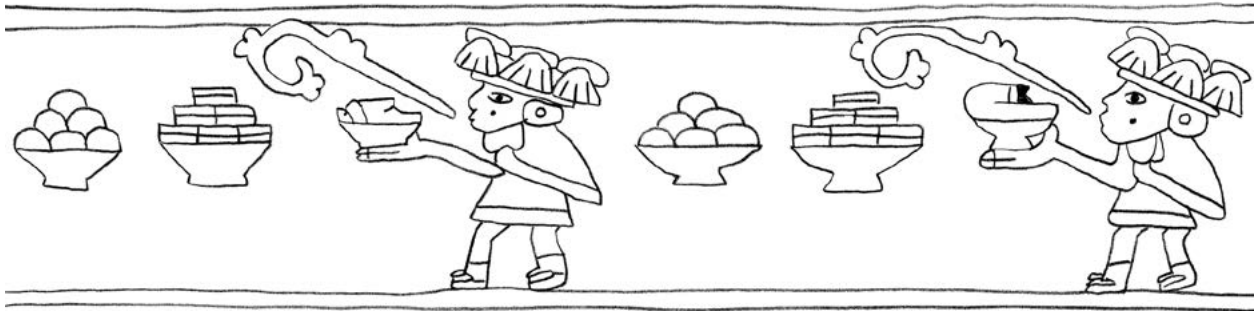


Figure 9. Vase from Kaminaljuyú (Guatemala), drawing by the author based on Kidder et al. (1946, fig. 207a).

of the god. Somehow, the Tlaloc features seem to have been used as a geographic or cultural tag, underlining the Teotihuacan origin of an individual. The god's iconography could have the same value as "he who is from Teotihuacan" and, by extension, to evoke Teotihuacan as a territory. Knowing the Mesoamerican political and geographical structure, it may be that Tlaloc is being used to refer to Teotihuacan as an *altepetl*, i.e. a city as a settlement, a community and a political entity. Scholars such as Raynaud (1907: 29), Contel (1999a: 53, 78, 274, 308, 328; 2008, 2011) and Botta (2009) have underlined the strong links existing between Tlaloc and the *altepetl*. They have shown that, in the Aztec context, Tlaloc not only rules over the two aspects of this famous *difracismo* (*alt*, water and *tepetl*, mountain), but, being the deity of the autochthonous, he embodies the local soil in peregrination myths, and by extension, stands for the territory of a city. As Botta (2009: 190-194) notes, the fact that, according to the *Histoire du Méchique* (1905, ch. 7: 28-29), the torn body of the earth-monster (of which Tlaloc is an aspect) gives birth to a proper landscape (trees, flowers, plants, wells, springs, caves, rivers, valleys and mountains), is evidence that Tlaloc is not only an earth deity responsible for supplying food, but for providing a territory to people.<sup>15</sup> Other mythical episodes confirm the role of Tlaloc as the autochthonous god granting a territory to newcomer king and gods.<sup>16</sup>

#### THE TELLURIC ASPECT OF TLALOC IN TEOTIHUACAN

The possible use of Tlaloc image to evoke Teotihuacan as a political and territorial entity similar to the Aztec *altepetl* is consistent with the telluric aspect Tlaloc appears to have in the Classic metropolis.

Firstly, the connection between Tlaloc and the earth can be deduced from its frequent representation at the very edge of the earth: his image is regularly used to make a visual transition between the above—and underground worlds. This is very clear in the Las Colinas vase, a mould-ornamented ceramic discovered in Calpulalpan (Tlaxcala) dating from the Metepec phase (AD 550-650). As Pasztory has commented (1983: 157), Tlaloc has a crucial position in the iconography of this vase: he is not represented on the body of the vase but in a medallion on its underside (Figure 10), which means that when the vase is resting on the floor, the picture of the god is in direct contact with the ground and not visible. This recalls the Aztec tradition of representing the earth monster—at times with the facial features of Tlaloc—on the basal surface of sculptures.<sup>17</sup> The pivotal position of Tlaloc at the edge of the underworld in Teotihuacan iconography can also be recognized in the tripod vases typical of Teotihuacan and its area of influence. In a series of examples, the feet of the vases, i.e. the elements of the ceramics that are in direct contact with the earth surface, are decorated with the fanged mouth ornament or the face of Tlaloc (Figure 11).

15. See Botta (2009: 190-194).

16. For a thorough discussion of this subject, see Contel (2008).

17. See for instance Pasztory (1983: pl. 109 and 113).



Figure 10. Vase from Las Colinas (Calpulalpan), drawing by Nicolas Latsanopoulos based on Linné (1942, fig. 128).

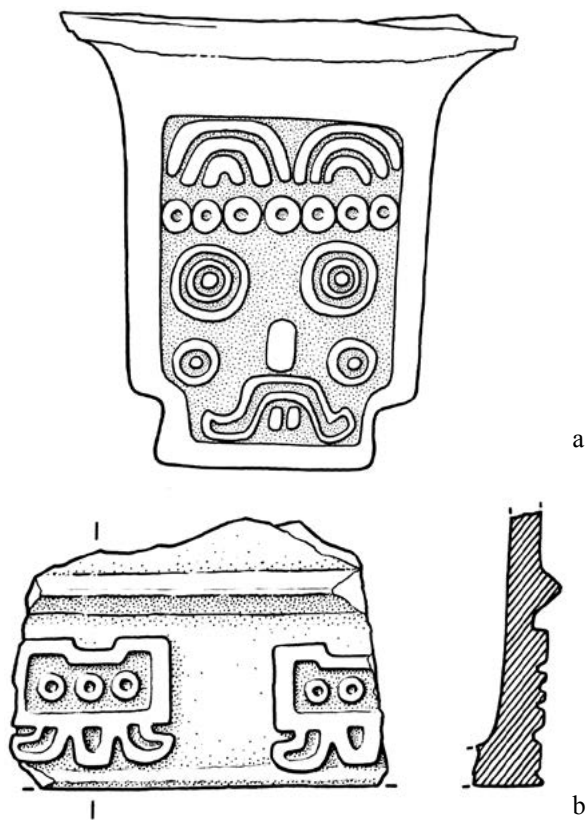


Figure 11 (a and b). Fragmentary feet of Teotihuacan-style ceramics found at Los Chatos (Guatemala) [left] and Teotihuacan [right], drawings by Nicolas Latsanopoulos based on Bove and Medrano Busto (2003, fig. 2.9) and Rattray (2001, fig. 160c).

The telluric aspect of Tlaloc is also suggested by the famous “crosses of Teotihuacan” (Figure 12). Two items of this series of six sculpted slabs were uncovered by Charnay in the “Edificios superpuestos” complex in

the 1880’s. As Hamy (1882) showed in his commentary on this discovery, the bas-relief carved on these slabs is a very synthetic representation of Tlaloc mouth, recognizable from its fangs, its thick and curved upper lip and its bifurcated tongue. The original use of these sculpted stones is not certain, and because of the methods of investigation at the time of their discovery, their archaeological context is poorly documented. One of the commonly accepted hypotheses is that they were part of the decorative program of the architectural complex, maybe as merlons ornamenting the edge of the flat roofs. However, in his description of the discovery, Charnay (1885) clearly records that the two slabs were found closing underground spaces: “one of the two slabs was concealing an underground passage with perpendicular walls, and the other a tomb which was accessible through a well-preserved staircase.”<sup>18</sup> Although it cannot be totally excluded that these Teotihuacan stones had been re-used, it appears that these sculptures were marking limits between the interior of the earth, and the over-ground world. In such case, the choice of Tlaloc’s mouth is particularly significant, as it reveals that during the Classic period, the rain god may already have been connected to the concept of earth monster, whose mouth is conventionally used to represent the opening of the earth in Mesoamerican art throughout pre-Columbian times.<sup>19</sup>

Thirdly, the close ties that Teotihuacan Tlaloc maintains with the earth and its interior can also be deduced from pictures where he is represented in an area that can be identified as a space under the earth’s surface, or a space that is a junction between the above and underground domains. Even if the Teotihuacan artists did not represent earth monsters underneath their sculptures (unlike their Aztec counterparts who used this highly meaningful area to reinforce the identification of Tlaltecuhlti and Tlaloc as earth monsters<sup>20</sup>), clear evidence of this direct association with the earth’s surface is provided by images where Tlaloc (or a Tlaloc-related character) stands at the very base of a plant<sup>21</sup> or, in some cases, where his

18. Personal translation of: “L’une des deux dalles masquait un souterrain de parois perpendiculaires, et l’autre, un caveau où l’on descendait par un escalier en bon état” (Charnay 1885: 122).

19. The identification of cave entrances with the mouths of monsters goes back to Olmec times: see the “King” and Monument 9 of Chalcatzingo (Bernal 1986: fig. 372; Kerr 1999: cat. K3116). This concept appears in the decoration of the door jambs in the Maya Chenes-style temples (Gendrop and Heyden 1994: 126, 130, fig. 180) and in the Aztec temple of Malinalco (Gendrop and Heyden 1994: 173, fig. 251) as well as in representations of caves in Postclassic codex such as the *Codex Laud* (1994: pl. 4 [21]).

20. See notably Graulich (2004).

21. As in a Teotihuacan vase (Anton and Dockstader 1969: 38) and the tableros of Tepantitla. There have been intense discussions on the identification of the Tepantitla figures, some scholars relating them to the domain of Tlaloc (Caso 1942: 143; Séjourné 1982 [1957]: 102-104; Kubler 1962: 37; 1967: 10; Krickeberg 1962: 32; Furst 1974: 198; Couvreur 2004: 157-164), others to the “Great goddess of Teotihuacan” (Pasztory 1973-1976, 1976 and Taube 1983), a



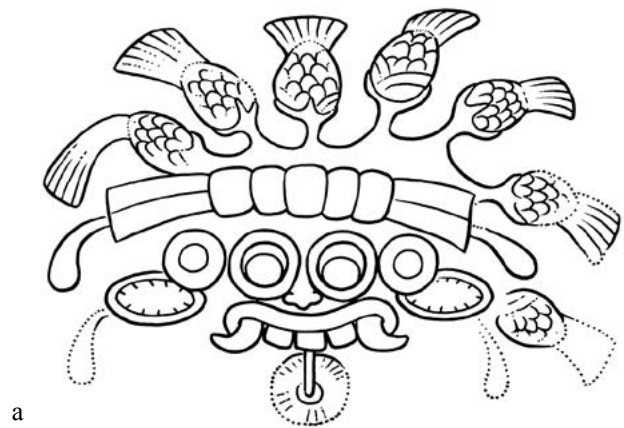


Fig. 1. — Croix de Teótlhuacan.  
(Musée du Trocadéro. N° 40394.)

**Figure 12.** The “Cross of Teotihuacan” of the musée du Trocadéro (Paris), drawing by B. Schmidt (Hamy 1882, fig. 1).

head is covered with a vegetal headdress (Figure 13a-b). The same iconographic structure exists in the Postclassic iconography (Figure 13c). One common interpretation of these pictures is that Tlaloc is represented as the Tlamacazqui, the food provider god—corn being the food *par excellence*. But it may also be that in such cases, the head of the god is identified with the earth surface, the god himself embodying the earth, especially as in other Teotihuacan images, the god’s face is pictured in an area that can be identified as an underground zone. It is the case of the paintings of Zone 3, where the god is represented in a medallion capped with obsidian blades (Figure 14a). As suggested by the paintings of Atetelco (Figure 14b) where a similar blade-capped and undulating line represents mountain crests, it can be deduced that the Zone 3 pictures are another example of image where Tlaloc is displayed under the earth’s surface. Lastly, evidence is also provided by the decoration of a vase found in Tiquisate (Figure 15), an area of the Guatemala Pacific coast strongly influenced by Teotihuacan, if not a real colony of the metropolis. On this ceramic, Tlaloc is represented in a round zone decorated with four small Tlaloc heads and elements that can be identified to sprouts or feathers. Given the Maya convention of representing the earthly domain by a round zone ornamented with two

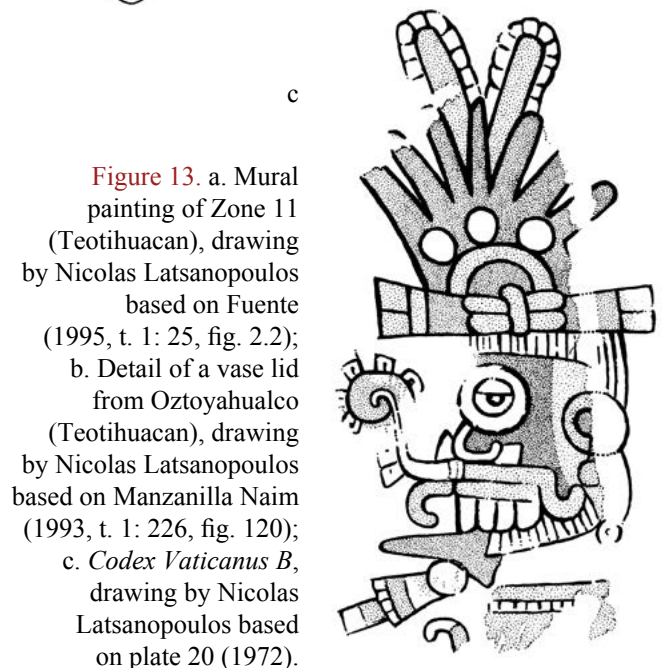
deity whose existence has been called into question and denied (see Morelos García 1987: 61; Couvreur 2004: 74-84; Paulinyi 2006).



a



b



c

**Figure 13.** a. Mural painting of Zone 11 (Teotihuacan), drawing by Nicolas Latsanopoulos based on Fuente (1995, t. 1: 25, fig. 2.2); b. Detail of a vase lid from Oztoyalualco (Teotihuacan), drawing by Nicolas Latsanopoulos based on Manzanilla Naim (1993, t. 1: 226, fig. 120); c. *Codex Vaticanus B*, drawing by Nicolas Latsanopoulos based on plate 20 (1972).

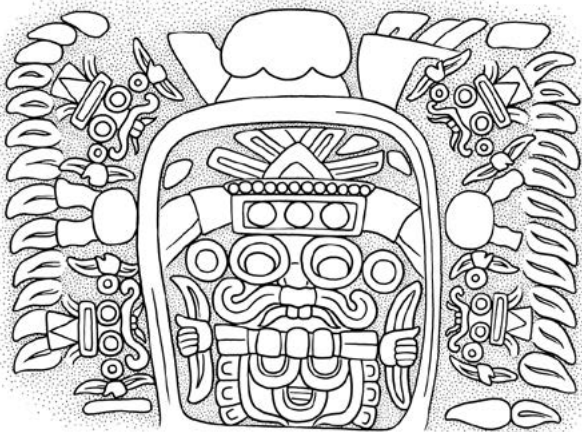
or four elements displayed symmetrically around it,<sup>22</sup> it may be deduced that the Tiquisate vase iconography was influenced by Maya imagery and that the round medallion in which Tlaloc is displayed represents the earth and the underground world.

22. As discussed notably by Baudez (2003).





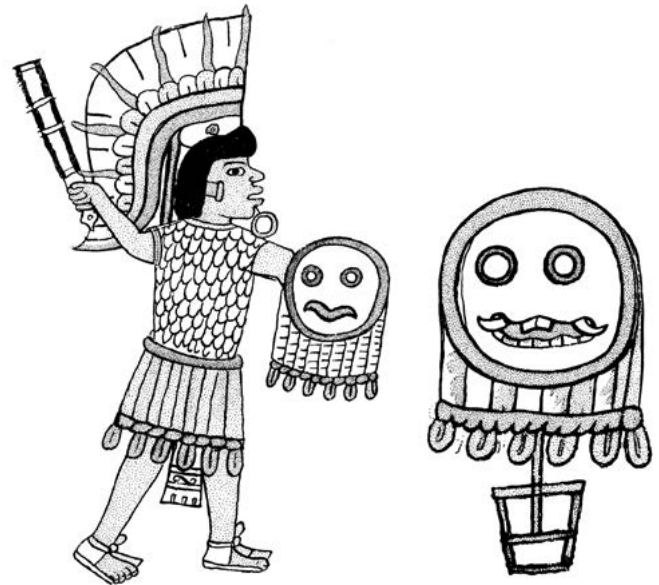
**Figure 14.** a. Mural painting of Platform 15 at Zone 3 (Teotihuacan), drawings by Nicolas Latsanopoulos based on Fuente (1995, t. 1: 91, fig. 8.6);  
b. Mural painting of Portico 1, North Patio (no. 3) at Atetelco (Teotihuacan), drawing by the author based on Fuente (1995, t. 1: 240, fig. 18.18).



**Figure 15.** Vase from the Tiquisate region (Guatemala), drawing by Nicolas Latsanopoulos based on Hellmuth (1978: fig. 16).

## A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE: THE SYMBOLIC COMPLEXITY OF THE AZTEC TLALOC

In completing this discussion on the reasons that could have led the choice of Tlaloc as a symbol on the banner of the Teotihuacan emissaries, it is worth returning to the Aztec data. Even if Tlaloc is principally known as



**Figure 16.** Images from the *Primeros Memoriales*, drawing by Nicolas Latsanopoulos based on Sahagún (1993: fol. 73r and 79r).

the god of rain and earth during the Postclassic period,<sup>23</sup> he is far from being merely an agrarian god.<sup>24</sup>

It may be noted, for instance, that some of his representations suggest he was also linked to the martial world, as in the case of the Tlaloc of Teotihuacan. The Postclassic images of Tlaloc holding weapons have already been mentioned above, and there are also notable examples of Aztec warriors displaying Tlaloc attributes (Figure 16),<sup>25</sup> including warrior banners ornamented with the god's simplified face features. In the written records, several references may be alluding to his warrior aspect. The fact

23. References on these aspects of Tlaloc are numerous: on the etymology of Tlaloc see Raynaud (1907: 7) and Sullivan (1973-1976: 216); on the other names of the god see *Historia de los Mexicanos por sus pinturas* (1985, ch. 2: 26), *Florentine Codex* (VI, ch. 8: 35-40), *Costumbres...* (1945: 44) and the analysis of Sullivan (1965: 52-53); on his links to the caves and mountains, see *Historia de los Mexicanos por sus pinturas* (1985: 26), *Historyre du Méchique* (1905: 26), Durán (1984, t. 1, ch. 8: 81), Motolinía (1995, tratado 1, ch. 7: 36); on the funerary treatment of the people whose death is imputed to Tlaloc, see *CF* (III, app., ch. 2: 47), on his connections with telluric gods and in particular the earth monster see *Codex Fejérváry-Mayer* (1964-1967, pl. 26 [19]: 238-239) as well as Raynaud (1907), Matos Moctezuma (1997), Graulich (1999: 19-20, 157, 161-170, 225-232, 364-368, 274-277; and 2004), Contel (2011: 312-313).

24. As Botta (2009: 175-178) demonstrated, the long-lasting interpretation of the Mexican gods as the incarnation of natural phenomena has to do with the strategy of the Christian missionaries in eradicating local "pagan" religions.

25. For other Postclassic examples: *Codex Zouche-Nuttall* (1992, pl. 33 and pl. 8); Postclassic bas-relief of Atlixco (Puebla) (Urdapilleta Pérez and Urquiza Puebla 1997: 403, fig. 6); Mixteca-Puebla vase of unknown origin (*Rediscovered Masterpieces...* 1985: pl. 178).

that one of the Tlaloque gods is called Opochtli<sup>26</sup> is significant, because this name means “left-handed” and, when it is referring to a man, it denotes his outstanding skills: left-handed warriors being considered as near-invincible (del Castillo 1966, ch. 69: 98; Graulich 1999: 42; López Austin 1973: 73; *Relación de la genealogía* 1886-1892: 244; Sahagún 1950-1981, book I, ch. 7: 37 and book II, ch. 21: 53). Other sources, like Ixtlilxochitl (1975-1977, t. 1: 273), present Tlaloc as a valiant king, which implies he was also a war leader.

More significant still is the fact that Tlaloc was not only the food supplier: he also granted power to kings, confirming it and taking it back in due time. A series of mythical examples have been compiled and analyzed by Contel (2008, 2011). One of the clearest is an episode described in the *Anales de Cuauhtitlan* (1945: 40, § 152): the future king of Texcoco, Nezahualcoyotl, fell into water on his way to Tenochtitlan and was rescued by some “diablos,” easily identified as the Tlaloque, who took him to the top of a mountain and told him: “[...] you will be the one that we will favour, so that the city will fall into your hands.” The role played by Tlaloc emissaries is clearly to legitimize the takeover and it is related to his telluric aspect: he is the god of earth who grants the ownership of a place.<sup>27</sup> If this action has first to do with earth, territory and *altepetl*, such granting of political power is also the prospect of war. As Contel (2008: 349) summarizes, what the king is offered in the domain of Tlaloc is “the secret of conquest, the secret of war, metaphorically called *teuatl tlachinolli*, ‘the divine water-the fire,’ thanks to which he would conquer the *altepetl*.”

## CONCLUSION

Exploring the symbolic reasons of the “international” visibility of the Teotihuacan Tlaloc reveals how complex his personality and his domain were in the Classic metropolis. It appears that Tlaloc was not only the rain and storm god, but he was also a deity related to the war domain and the telluric world.

His warrior aspect, or at least his ties to the Teotihuacan warriors, is the first and most obvious explanation for his presence in the attire of military characters in Maya iconography, but being the god ruling over the earth domain in Teotihuacan provides a further interpretation of his presence abroad, alongside the different emissaries of Teotihuacan, whether military or religious delegates. In such cases, the emissaries would not only be presenting themselves outside of Teotihuacan under the auspices of the warrior rain and storm god, but also under the

banner of the god embodying the earth in Teotihuacan and, by extension, the master of Teotihuacan territory. In this context, it cannot be excluded that Tlaloc was the tutelary god of the Teotihuacanos. Unfortunately, no tangible evidence is available to confirm or refute this hypothesis. The variety and the complexity of the symbolic fields over which the Teotihuacan Tlaloc ruled have echoes in the personality of his Aztec counterpart: his lightning bolt is represented as a weapon—understood as a very effective weather weapon. A deeper and more significant connection of the Aztec Tlaloc to the war sphere can be identified in his major and prominent role in the transmission of the political power, as a god who embodies the *altepetl* and who legitimized kings by granting them a territory, and the capacity to conquer it.

Despite the difficulties in clarifying the details of his character, a series of lines of evidence suggests that, like his Postclassic counterpart, the Teotihuacan Tlaloc, beyond control of the waters and thunderbolts, was a significant political force in the life of the metropolis and its international negotiations.<sup>28</sup>

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Abbreviation

CF *Codice Florentino*, see Sahagún (1950-1981).

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26. For a discussion on the links between Opochtli and Huitzilopochtli, see López Austin (1973: 73-75) and Contel (2011: 309-313).

27. For a further discussion on this mythical episode, see Contel (1999a: 272-279; 1999b; 2008: 347-349).

28. Pour citer cet article : COUVREUR Aurélie, « Beyond Rain and Storm: Tlaloc and his Relationship with Warfare, Earth and Territory in Teotihuacan », *Americae* [en ligne] 2, 2017 | Teotihuacan, mis en ligne le 27 septembre 2017. URL : <http://www.mae.u-paris10.fr/americae-dossiers/americae-dossier-teotihuacan/beyond-rain-and-storm-tlaloc-and-his-relationship-with-warfare-earth-and-territory-in-teotihuacan/>



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