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Pyramid of the Moon
 Mexico Pyramid Holds Headless Bodies
By Rossella Lorenzi, Discovery News

Dec. 7, 2004 — Archaeologists digging inside Mexico's 2,000-year-old "Pyramid of the Moon" have uncovered startling evidence that the awesome stone pyramid was a site of grisly human sacrifices of an advanced, yet violent, civilization.

A vault filled with decapitated bodies and remains of animals shows one of the "most terrifying acts recorded archaeologically in Mesoamerica," according to Saburo Sugiyama of the University of Japan, in Aichi, one of the archaeologists leading the ongoing excavation.

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Brushing Off a Body

“ This seems to be a new and unusual practice, and is quite interesting. ”

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A structure of seven pyramids built on top of each other, the Pyramid of the Moon is a major tourist site in the ancient city of Teotihuacan, in the valley of the same name 25 miles north of Mexico City.

Little is known about this master-planned metropolis that was the first great city of the Western Hemisphere and predated the Aztecs, who called the monumental ruins "the City of the Gods," by around 700 years.

At its peak, Teotihuacan spread in a sophisticated grid pattern over eight square miles and had a population of more than 150,000 people.

The City of the Gods began declining sharply around 650 A.D., and was almost completely abandoned around 750 A.D. Unlike any other ancient society of the Americas, the site offered scholars no clue — in hieroglyphs or writings of any kind — of who ruled it, what their culture was about and why the city was abandoned.

"Teotihuacan presented itself as a timeless place, as if it existed from time immemorial and would exist into eternity, outside of history and historical contingency," Esther Pasztory, specialist in pre-Hispanic art at Columbia University, wrote in her book "Teotihuacan: An Experiment in Living."

One of the city's oldest structures, the Pyramid of the Moon, would have been a site for celebrating state power through ceremony and sacrifice, according to Sugiyama.

The burial chamber contained the remains of 12 people with their hands tied behind their backs. Ten of the victims had been decapitated and appeared to have been tossed, rather than arranged, to one side of the chamber.

The other two bodies also had their hands tied, but were richly ornamented with greenstone earspools and beads, a necklace made of imitation human jaws and other items indicating high rank.

The burial chamber also contained five canine skeletons (wolf or coyote), three feline skeletons (puma or jaguar), and 13 complete bird remains (many tentatively identified as eagles), all animals that are believed to be symbols of warriors in Teotihuacano iconography, Sugiyama said.

The sacrifice of the people and the animals "must have created a horrible scene of bloodshed," he said.

"We don't know who the victims were, but we know that this ritual was carried out during the enlargement process of a major monument in Teotihuacan, and highly symbolic objects associated with them suggest that the government wanted to symbolize expanding sacred political power and perhaps the importance of military institutions with the new monument," Sugiyama said in a statement.

Another impressive find was a greenstone mosaic figure "unlike anything seen before in Mesoamerica."

The mosaic figure was found in an unusual "offering" at the center of the burial chamber. It was surrounded by 18 large obsidian knives, carefully set in a radial pattern.

"Nine of these had a curving form, while the nine others had the form of the feathered serpent, a symbol of maximum political authority. Evidently this offering in some way formed the central symbolic meaning of the grave complex," Sugiyama said.

"The placement of humans as offerings in elite tombs was a

common practice in many ancient societies in the Old and New World, so this discovery — on one level — is not surprising," John Verano, a physical anthropologist at Tulane University in New Orleans, told Discovery News.

"However, usually the people sacrificed to accompany elite persons are not executed in such a violent manner as is seen at the Pyramid of the Moon at Teotihuacan. The binding and decapitation of victims and the careless way in which the bodies seem to have been thrown into the tomb, suggests that they were enemies, not servants or family of the two elites in the tomb," he said.

"This seems to be a new and unusual practice, and is quite interesting."

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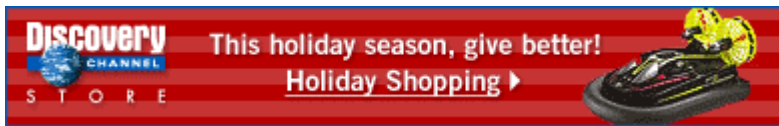
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