

## 4 Teotihuacan Takes Off: 100–1 BCE

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It has been difficult to get people to recognize that the Patlachique phase (c. 100–1 BCE) was more than a prelude to the development of Teotihuacan. Art historian Esther Pasztory (1997) doesn't even mention it. Yet it was during the Patlachique phase that, in one or two centuries, Teotihuacan grew from almost nothing to become a large city. The area of fairly dense Patlachique sherd cover extends over 6 to 8 square km (Figure 4.1). By the end of this phase, the population was likely at least 20,000. Teotihuacan was now comparable to the population of Cuicuilco at its peak, if not larger. The TMP ceramic analysis, carried out in the 1960s, classified about 27,500 sherds from the surface collections as Patlachique. A reanalysis supervised by Evelyn Rattray in the 1970s classified about 42,300 as Patlachique – a 61% increase, but this is probably in error. Only another analysis of a selected sample (possible only because Millon insisted on saving all the TMP collections) can resolve this discrepancy. Fortunately, Sugiyama and Cabrera (2007) recovered a large quantity of stylistically homogeneous ceramics from the fill of Stage One of the Moon Pyramid, enabling a much clearer definition of the Patlachique ceramic complex, which can be the basis for this re-reanalysis.

Highest densities of Patlachique ceramics were collected by the TMP in a broad area around the eastern and northern slopes of Cerros Colorado and Malinalco. Patlachique sherd cover, probably light, extends an unknown distance west and north beyond the TMP map. Millon was constrained by NSF reviewers in the 1960s who did not recommend funds to extend his map beyond the limits of the Early Classic city.

This western Patlachique-phase settlement might be seen as a logical development from the sparse Cuicuilco tradition occupation on these hill slopes. However, the Cuicuilco tradition village near the wetlands below the springs (TF-35) was nearly abandoned. Conceivably, this shift to hill slopes might be due to greater emphasis on defense, but the slopes do not seem steep enough to have offered much difficulty to

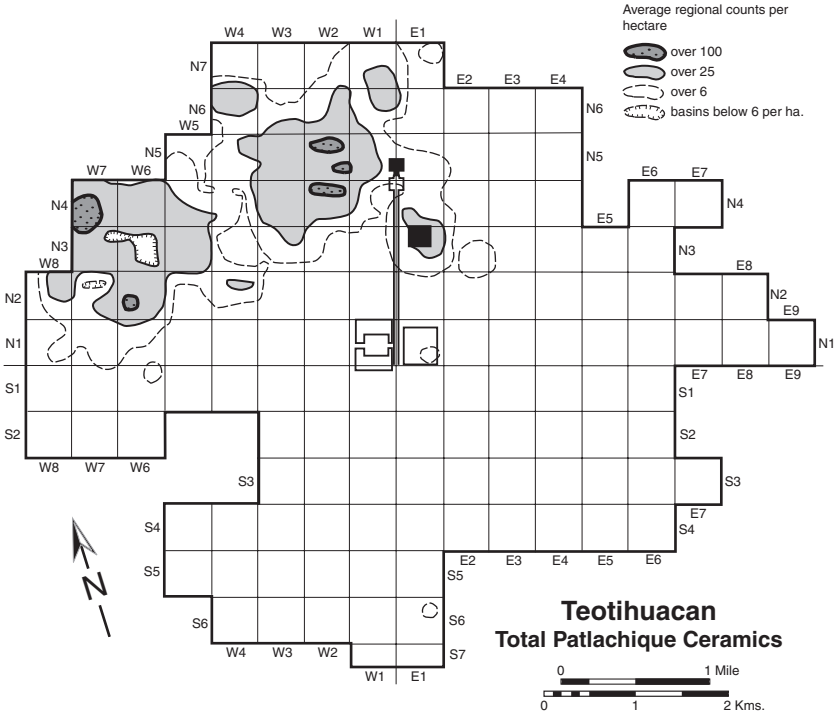


Figure 4.1. A smoothed contour map of Patlachique phase sherd densities per hectare collected by the TMP.

By S. Vaughn after original by author & W. Powell.

attackers, the summits of the hills were not occupied, and no evidence of fortifications survives.

Another broad zone of heavy Patlachique sherd cover is centered in TMP map sectors N5W2 and N4W2 (Figure 4.1), in relatively flat land considerably farther from the wetlands or any irrigable areas than was the Cuicuilco tradition village. It is unclear why this region was selected for settlement. Neither defense nor close proximity to the best agricultural land explain it, and it now seems that supposed caves in this area are results of later mining for building materials, rather than possible sacred localities. The Moon Pyramid is near the eastern margin of this zone, instead of near its center. Likewise sector N6W3, although labeled “Old City” on the TMP map (Millon et al. 1973) is marginal to this zone. There is a probable Patlachique sherd concentration near the Sun Pyramid. The location of the future Ciudadela complex, in TMP sector N1E1, is nearly a kilometer south of the zone of dense Patlachique sherd

cover, and significant occupation in this district is doubtful. A small concentration several kilometers to the south, in sector S6E1, looks like a separate settlement, although its location near what would become the southern terminus of the Avenue of the Dead suggests that this place already had symbolic meaning.

Whatever the outcome of further ceramic analysis, the Patlachique-phase settlement surely qualifies as urban in size. Nevertheless, there is little evidence of monumental structures at this time in Teotihuacan, and the extent to which the settlement was “urban” in terms of practices, institutions, and function remains to be determined. The Patlachique phase polity must have been quite complex, with a variety of institutionalized offices and wide hereditary differences in status and power. Whether it qualifies as the capital of a state depends on one’s definition of “state” and also on what one believes are valid and reliable archaeological clues of statehood, as I discussed in Chapter 1.

The clearest evidence of Patlachique civic-ceremonial construction is from the earliest of the seven stages of construction at the Moon Pyramid, where Sugiyama and Cabrera (2007) found a square pyramidal platform that measures 23.5 m on a side. Its height is unknown because of later disturbance. The façade on all sides is a sloping apron (*talud*) made of small pink cut stones set in mud mortar. There is no surviving evidence of ornamentation, burials, or offerings. The orientation is 11–12 degrees east of astronomic north, which differs by about four degrees from the orientation that later became canonical at Teotihuacan. Ceramics in the fill of this structure are almost entirely of the Patlachique complex, although about 2.5 percent have been assigned to the Tzacualli complex in preliminary analysis. These may be intrusive or misidentified. Stage One of the Moon Pyramid was probably built toward the end of the Patlachique phase or very early in the Tzacualli phase.

#### **Box 4.1 Triadic Groups (Three-Pyramid Complexes)**

There are many single pyramids at Teotihuacan, but pyramids sometimes occur in groups of three: one on each of three sides of a rectangular plaza, often with a low transverse platform along the fourth side (Headrick 2001). This arrangement suggests their dedication to a triad of deities, but it is not clear what deities they might be. Triadic groups also appear at many other sites in Mesoamerica.

Stage One of the Moon Pyramid is perhaps not the only Patlachique phase civic-ceremonial structure at Teotihuacan. Even so, there was nothing on the scale of the largest pyramids at Cuicuilco. Several of the triadic groups in the northwestern quadrant of the city have above-average surface densities of Patlachique sherds in their vicinities, although their visible features are later. Plaza One (1:N5W2) is the best example. Excavations there in the 1950s (Cook de Leonard 1957; Millon 1960; Millon and Bennyhoff 1961) found evidence of Tzacualli construction and possibly a Patlachique occupation. Further work is needed at Plaza One, and the other triadic groups in this northwestern district remain to be explored by excavation. All these groups, as well as the Moon Pyramid, face southward, suggesting an early religious emphasis on this direction. Whether any of the platforms and pyramids that now face east and west on both sides of the Avenue of the Dead has Patlachique antecedents remains to be determined.

A tunnel at ground level into the Sun Pyramid, excavated by José Pérez in 1933 under the direction of Eduardo Noguera (Pérez 1935: 91; Noguera 1935: 5–6), revealed remains of a small structure faced with stone cobbles (Millon et al. 1965). Within it was an offering that included a small obsidian human effigy, surrounded by nearly 40 tiny obsidian points. The contents and their arrangement are reminiscent of those in the considerably later Tombs 2 and 6 in the Moon Pyramid, but on a much smaller scale. This suggested that a small structure of ritual importance existed here prior to the massive Sun Pyramid construction event during the Tzacualli phase. Renewed excavations in the Sun Pyramid in 2008–2011 (N. Sugiyama et al. 2013) revealed burials, offerings, and traces of structures predating the pyramid. Most notable is what seems to have been a free-standing wall more than 13.5 m long, too large for an ordinary residential room, and not a pyramid. It probably was part of a civic-ceremonial enclosure, such as existed elsewhere in Central Mexico in Late Preclassic times (Carballo 2012), suggesting a relatively egalitarian society. Dates of these pre-pyramid features are unclear, perhaps Tzacualli but possibly Patlachique.

Although Stage One of the Moon Pyramid was likely the single largest structure in Teotihuacan in the Patlachique phase, it is on the edge of the districts of heavy Patlachique sherd cover. There is no clear single center for the settlement, which seems incongruous in view of its size and the rapidity of its growth. It is unlikely that low Patlachique sherd densities east and south of the Moon Pyramid are due to incorporation of Patlachique phase debris in later structures, because the quantity of Patlachique ceramics in these later structures (including the Sun Pyramid) is small. Perhaps at this time the city had multiple

centers. Lack of a single preeminent civic-ceremonial core would suggest a coming-together of several relatively autonomous and, in terms of politics, relatively equal groups, rather than a strong central authority, a possibility also suggested by Tatsuya Murakami (2010). But if that was the case, why did independent groups choose to settle in close proximity to one another and attract such a flow of immigrants? Patlachique Teotihuacan was probably politically unified but perhaps without a single monarch. Excavations testing the dates and sizes of the earliest stages of later civic-ceremonial complexes with heavy Patlachique sherd cover (including further work at Plaza One) are badly needed.

We still have no data on Patlachique phase residential architecture within the city. Probably it was of perishable materials, perhaps much like the structures of adobes and stones set in mud mortar that are well preserved at Tetimpa, about 90 km to the southeast, in the state of Puebla (Figure 1.4/16) (Uruñuela and Plunket 2002, 2007; Plunket and Uruñuela 1998, 2002). At Tlachinolpan, only a kilometer or two northwest of the later city of Teotihuacan, on the northeastern slopes of Cerro Malinalco (1:N7W8, Figure 2.3/2, TF-39 in the Teotihuacan Valley survey) Darlena Blucher (1971) found abundant Cuanalán phase ceramics, but no evidence of Cuanalán structures. She excavated several structures that seem to have been built in the Patlachique phase and rebuilt in the Tzacualli phase. They appear to be civic (rather than residential or religious) buildings – small, partially roofed, rectangular stone-walled enclosures unlike anything else known for Teotihuacan, although somewhat like slightly earlier structures found at Nativitas in Tlaxcala (Hirth et al. 2009). The largest is a low rectangular building about 15 by 10 m, its long axis oriented approximately to astronomic north. These structures were enlarged in the Tzacualli phase, and then abandoned.

The rapidity of growth of the city during the Patlachique phase suggests strong, although possibly collective, leadership. The city may have grown in periodic spurts, but the average rate of population growth must have been at least 1.5 percent per year. Part of this exceptionally high growth rate may have been due to unusually high fertility, but death rates were so high everywhere in the world before the twentieth century that high fertility alone probably could not account for this growth rate. Archaeological and historical evidence suggests that, before the twentieth century, rates of natural increase that were this high only occurred when people moved into territory previously unoccupied by humans or when, as in North America, they often could easily remove former occupants. Neither of these situations was the case in the Basin of Mexico in Patlachique times. Much of the rapid increase probably was due to in-migration, from elsewhere in the Teotihuacan Valley

and from somewhat beyond, although Parsons et al. (1982) see only a modest decline in population in the southeastern Basin of Mexico, and Cuicuilco was apparently still quite large. According to Siebe (2000) the Xitle eruption was still several centuries in the future. There is no good evidence of much migration from far beyond the Basin.

Why, then, did Teotihuacan grow so rapidly in this period – from nearly nothing to the largest settlement in Central Mexico, outstripping its rival, Cuicuilco? It was probably a combination of several factors, including successful warfare, a good location for trade, perhaps compelling new religious ideas, and very possibly the sheer luck of having a few unusually able and ambitious leaders. Irrigation can hardly be the sole explanation, but being not too far from a small area of wetland farming and a larger region of irrigated agriculture should not be discounted. Yet it seems that Cuicuilco, not yet devastated by a volcanic eruption, was in a richer zone for irrigated farming. Perhaps several independent villages joined forces to resist Cuicuilco expansion.

#### Patlachique Phase Ceramics and Lithic Artifacts

After the Tezoyuca ceramic complex, Bennyhoff (1967) saw the ensuing Patlachique complex as a return to the Cuicuilco tradition, after rejection of Chupícuaro influences, although with, in his opinion, other influences perhaps from the Cholula region. There is little to support Sanders's (2006: 184–186) belief that Náhuatl speakers might have entered the Basin of Mexico in numbers at this time. My discussion of Patlachique ceramics is based largely on a manuscript by Darlena Blucher (1983) and her dissertation (Blucher 1971). Ceramic forms that continue from the Cuicuilco/Cuanalán tradition include composite silhouette vessels with shoulder breaks, and ollas with “wedge” rims, usually less angular than those in Tzacualli. Tecomates are rare. Hollow supports continue but are less common and tend to be smaller. Bichrome and polychrome decoration includes combinations of red, white, and resist. Polychrome motifs include angular broad red geometric shapes with white borders. Incising is rare and includes hatched triangles. Figures 4.2 and 4.3 show Patlachique examples. Rattray (2001: 467, Figures 26 c and d) mislabels two good Patlachique sherds as “Early Tzacualli.”

Obsidian implements were produced for local consumption. Less than one percent of sharp-edged lithic artifacts from all periods at Teotihuacan were made of chert or other materials. Spence (1984, 1987), using the surface collections of the TMP, identified nine possible Patlachique phase obsidian workshops on the western edge of the city, apparently intermittent and independent producers not specializing in

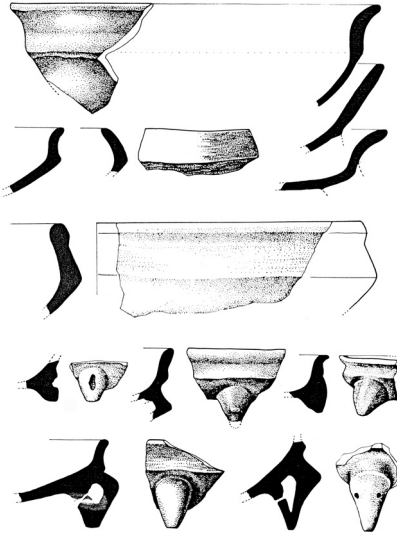


Figure 4.2. Patlachique phase serving wares. After Blucher (1983).

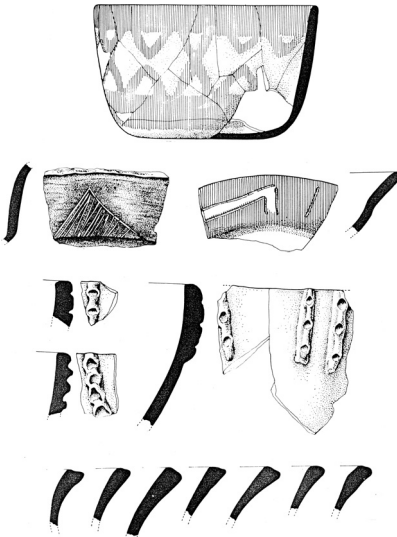


Figure 4.3. Patlachique ceramics. Upper two rows serving wares (top is red-on-natural), third row matte censers, bottom row olla rims. After Blucher (1983).

particular kinds of objects. Otherwise nothing is known about organization of production or mechanisms of distribution and consumption. Even less is known about production, distribution, and consumption of ceramics and other materials, although some objects are so skillfully crafted and sensitively designed that they must have been made by experienced and unusually talented artisans.

#### Elsewhere in the Basin of Mexico

Sanders et al. (1979: 98–105) see a four-tier settlement hierarchy during the Patlachique phase, with six principal spatial groups in the Basin, separated by zones of sparse occupation, probably buffer zones between hostile polities, a notion that seems inconsistent with the idea that, between them, Cuicuilco and Teotihuacan firmly controlled most of the Basin at this time. Yet the 13 other regional centers they identified in their surveys are so much smaller that “they must almost certainly have been to some extent subordinate to” Cuicuilco and Teotihuacan (Sanders et al. 1979: 102). They estimate that the Chalco, Ixtapalapa, and Texcoco clusters each had around 15,000 people. The southeastern Basin continued to be a major demographic focus, but there were also new foci in the Teotihuacan Valley and the Texcoco region.

#### Teotihuacan’s More Distant Interactions

Robert Smith (1987: 26–29) found two Maya-style waxy ware sherds below the Sun Pyramid, in a layer described as 80 cm below the pyramid and above *tepetate* subsoil (Smith 1987: 4), which Smith thought likely dated to the Patlachique phase. Maya ceramics are drastically different from Central Mexican ceramics. These sherds are imports from somewhere in the Maya Lowlands. Smith describes one as “a bowl or dish with red slip and very much in the Chicanel tradition,” while the other is a bowl, “which may also belong to the Chicanel horizon, but ... has more of a Mamomlike appearance” (Smith 1987: 29). Maya ceramics were already reaching Teotihuacan, although not in large numbers and possibly by way of intermediaries.