

### A Grand Cuauhxicalli: The Stone of Tizoc

The Stone of Tizoc exists in a state of fascination: its true purpose(s) is widely debated amongst historians. However, based on the structural make and composition of the cylindrical monument, it is valid to assume the Stone of Tizoc acted as a cuauhxicalli: the imagery, carvings, and structural components of the Stone of Tizoc indicate its function as a sacrificial stone. Namely, the cavity in the center of the monument as well as the intentionally carved strait, which solidify it as not only an instrument on which sacrifices would be performed on, but also as a cuauhxicalli. Furthermore, the monument would be one of the singlemost grand examples of a cuauhxicalli in terms of its size, and its use as such would be deemed a significant event: the Stone of Tizoc would be considered the prime and most extravagant example of a cuauhxicalli.

The Stone of Tizoc<sup>fig 1</sup>, commissioned for the Aztec emperor it is named after, is a three foot tall cylindrical basalt monument measuring 8.7 feet across with a diameter of 27.3 feet. The top face showcases a relief in the center of the monument with arrows pointing outwards into the four cardinal directions, as well as the intermediate directions between. These arrows resemble that of solar rays. Around the lateral surface of the monument, carvings of warriors adorned in eagle feathers and headresses are displayed in a repeating pattern where one is pulling another's hair. On the upper band above these warriors, carvings of stars are set to portray the heavens, while the lower band is carved with triangular points to represent the earth. The Stone of Tizoc most closely resembles that of the Stone of Moctezuma<sup>fig 2</sup>, which both contain depictions of eagle warriors on their lateral surfaces, cardinal directions on their top surfaces, and a center relief. However, unlike the Stone of Moctezuma, the Stone of Tizoc is carved with a long divot

that connects the central relief to the outer ridge of the monument. This divot cuts through other carvings among the top surface of the monument, curves slightly, and does not align with any of the cardinal directions. It is believed that this divot was carved into the monument after its initial make for these reasons, especially since the Aztecs were known to be meticulous and precise in their art. This divot was likely carved into the stone to allow for the drainage of blood and bodily fluid from the sacrifices performed on the monument, adding to the belief that this stone was used as a *cuauhxicalli*: to hold the hearts of the sacrificial victims while also allowing the drainage and flow of blood from these organs and victims.

On the other hand, the Stone of Tizoc differs from the Stone of Moctezuma through its use: The Stone of Moctezuma being used as a *temalacatl* and the Stone of Tizoc as a *cuauhxicalli*. This can also be seen through the overall structural composition of each monument. The Stone of Moctezuma, while having the central relief, is filled with the image of a carved face, whereas the Stone of Tizoc's central relief remains hollow for its use as a *cuauhxicalli*. A hollow central relief is necessary for a functional and efficient use of a *cuauhxicalli*, used "as a receptacle for the hearts of sacrificial victims."<sup>1</sup> While there is evidence of the Stone of Tizoc being used as a *temalacatl* like the Stone of Moctezuma, this evidence (shown through an image of the stone being used as such) comes from the Florentine Codex, which is not a primary source and was written after the arrival of the Spanish.<sup>2</sup> Also, stones used as *temalacatls* often were equipped with a pole or stake of some sort to tie the sacrificial victim to during the gladiatorial fight. It is clear that the Stone of Tizoc has taken inspiration from the Stone of Moctezuma, noting the similar carvings around the lateral face, the cardinal directions and central relief on the top surface, and the overall shape and size of the monument. Although the Stone of Tizoc has

---

1. Cartwright, Mark. 2013. "The Tizoc Stone." *World History Encyclopedia*.

2. "Florentine Codex." *Historians.Org*.

taken such inspirations, its structural composition and make shows its use as a *cuauhxicalli* as opposed to a *temalacatl*.

The imagery depicted around the lateral face of the Stone of Tizoc depicts that of the eagle warriors: Aztec warriors adorned in eagle feathers, headdresses, battle attire, and equipped with *macuahuitls*. The warriors are placed in a repeating pattern along the stone monument in which one warrior is seen grabbing the hair of another to symbolize the conquering of another. This stance is repeated along the lateral face for 15 tribesmen, with a glyph in the upper right corner of each warrior that depicts which village or tribe the individual defeated warrior hails from<sup>fig 3</sup>. Also depicted along the lateral face of the Stone of Tizoc is emperor Tizoc himself, adorned in a large headdress of hummingbird feathers as opposed to the eagle feathers of the other warriors. These hummingbird feathers are symbolic of the patron deity of the Aztecs, *Huitzilopochtli*. By adorning the emperor in such attire belonging to that of a great deity, emperor Tizoc is being deified and placed on a pedestal amongst the others in the carvings. The stone could be representing a deified version of Tizoc so it can also be interpreted as being the sacrifice that Tizoc made when he became ruler and continued attempting to conquer surrounding tribes, or to symbolize the blood that was to be sacrificed to appease the earth monster deity, *Tlaltecuhli*. Furthermore, this imagery aids in the idea of the Stone of Tizoc not only acting as a sacrificial stone, but specifically as a *cuauhxicalli*, since the warriors conquered from other lands and tribes were often taken to be used in sacrifice, “Spanish chronicles describe Tenochtitlan's sacrificial victims as captives brought back from wars... The killing of captives, even in a ritual context, is a strong political statement,”<sup>3</sup> which would not only showcase the power of the Aztecs, but also provide sacrificial substance to their deities and gods.

---

3. Wade, Lizzie. 2018. “Feeding the Gods: Hundreds of Skulls Reveal Massive Scale of Human Sacrifice in Aztec Capital.” *Science (New York, N.Y.)*.

Many cuauhxicallis are much smaller in size when compared to the Stone of Tizoc, meaning that should the evidence be substantial in proving the monument as such, it would be one of the most grand examples to date. Cuauhxicallis are often smaller in size, being handheld vessels capable of holding a single victim's heart<sup>4</sup>. These vessels would not have sacrifices performed on them, and instead would only have the remnants of the sacrificial event (hearts, blood, etc.) placed within them. In the case of the Stone of Tizoc, the substantial size of the monument suggests that sacrifices were performed atop it while also acting as a cuauhxicalli vessel in the center relief. The sacrificial victim was likely tied to the monument or otherwise restrained, and had their heart removed and placed into the central vessel. The grand size of the Stone of Tizoc suggests that more than one sacrificial victim's hearts could be contained within it as well, making it a significant tool for the Aztecs to use in giving blood to the gods.

To conclude, the Stone of Tizoc's grandeur in size, symbolic carvings, and structural makeup support the claim that this monument acted not only as a sacrificial stone, but also as a cuauhxicalli. Evidence shows that the stone was used as a vessel for the hearts of sacrificial victims, being capable of containing multiple organs and thus likely being able to have multiple sacrifices performed on it over a short span of time. As such, the Stone of Tizoc is one of the largest, most well known, and most grand cuauhxicalli that has been discovered thus far.



Fig. 1 (Stone of Tizoc)



Fig. 2 (Stone of Moctezuma)



Fig. 3 (Lateral Face)

---

4. Groupe, Livres, ed. 2010. *Cuauhxicalli: Pierre Du Soleil, Chac Mool, Pierre de Tizoc, Pierre de Moctezuma*. Books.