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The Cover

Biotic relationships between man and environment are often reflected through art. Teotihuacan society, one of Mexico's earliest high cultures, symbolized such relationships, leaving artifacts that reflect their many oral traditions.

Fragments From an Incense Burner (cover) is believed by archeologists to be the face of a fire god or an old man who in death became a god. A bird directly over the nose and the feather headdress are avian symbols through which smoke might be taken to the god as a token of worship or sacrifice.

Self-mortification is suggested by the ear spools, and other artifacts suggest that sacrificial ceremonies also involved cutting fingers and eyelids, and sometimes even ritualized cannibalism. Paintings tell of human hearts offered to deities of water, earth, fertility, the sky, or other forces of nature. These rituals, passed down from classic ancient cultures, varied, as did the gods, with changing environments, social structures, and folklore. Today ritualized use of drugs is common among many Mexican Indians as they attempt communication with their gods.

While the effects of self-mortification on the health of Teotihuacanos might never be known, effects of drug use in modern-day Indians are available to researchers. Articles about effects of peyote (p 299) and marijuana (p 306) on users consider some health problems related to drug use.—JEANETTE ALMADA

(*Fragments From an Incense Burner*, c 450-750 AD. Ceramic. 36¼ cm high. Courtesy of the Art Institute of Chicago.)

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