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THE CUICUILCO EXCAVATION

By Charles E. Dibble

THE Valley of Mexico has long been an area of volcanic activity, and extinct volcanic cones are familiar landmarks. After the valley was peopled, a flow of molten lava poured down a mountain slope partially to cover a massive mound, which had served as the base for an altar.

The top of a mound protruding from a jagged lava surface suggests great antiquity, and Cuicuilco has long been considered the most ancient temple on the American continent. Early geological estimates considered the lava flow to be five thousand years old, but subse-



THESE PHOTOGRAPHS SHOW THE PART OF CUICUILCO WHICH PROJECTS ABOVE THE SURFACE OF THE LAVA.

quent archeological investigations show the eruption to be more recent.

In 1826, Cuicuilco was excavated; the lava was cut from the sides of the mound, and its original size and shape plotted. The center of the circular mound is formed of adobe, and the sides are faced with irregular rocks. The pottery and figurines uncovered suggested a B. C. date for the erection of the mound.

Recent work by Dr. George C. Vaillant at the many early archeological sites in the valley of Mexico brings the volcanic eruption down to a much later date. He has carefully compared the artifacts of Cuicuilco with others from sites excavated and dated by him. It now seems very probable that the volcano erupted about 400 A. D., and that the mound was constructed a century earlier. This recent date is more in accord with an Aztec-Toltec tradition, as recorded in *Los Angeles de Cuauh-titlan*, which recalls a volcanic eruption early in the history of the valley.

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