

## **INTRODUCTION**

## Social Mobility in the City of the Sun: The Legacy of Chichen Itza at the Turn of the Postclassic Period

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The transition from the Classic to Postclassic (ca. A.D. 800–1000) Mesoamerican worlds was fraught with tremendous cultural transformation. While this transition has most captured public attention in regards to the sensationalized Classic Maya ‘collapse’ (Culbert 1973; Demarest et al. 2004; Webster 2002), scholars are aware that tumultuous societal ruptures happened across a much wider area towards the end of the Classic period. It is around the eighth century A.D. that Monte Alban declines (Blomster 2008a). Evidence of the early Coyotlatelco tradition in Central Mexico (Tozzer 1921) suggests demographic decline, drastically changing settlement patterns, and the absence of strong centralized political centers (Gaxiola González 2006; see also Healan 2012; Mastache et al. 2002:60–61; Stoutamire 1975; Yadeun Angulo 1975). Cholula appears to have experienced a major population decline (up to 80%) during the Epiclassic, with a small population also present on Cerro Zapotecas, located in a defensible position in its periphery (Plunket and Uruñuela 2018:158; Salomón Salazar 2008; Uruñuela and Plunket, this volume). Of great note, Indigenous histories across Mesoamerica trace origin stories framed by migrations back to this specific period. Not only do the Mexica leave Aztlan (Boone 1991), but there are multiple, and sometimes conflicting, migration stories that surround groups identified as Mixtec, Tolteca-Chichimeca, and Olmeca-Xicalanca, among others (see Geurds, this volume; Nalda 1981; Smith 1984; Testard 2017). And, it is at this time that the Itzaes journeyed to Chichen Itza (Roys 1933). These roughly similar origin stories point to a sharing of cultural experiences that, we argue, sets the tone for new social formations, economic models, and ideological expressions to manifest in their own particular ways across a broad region. In important ways, the Classic to Postclassic transition appears to have represented a break so fundamental in the social memory of Mesoamerican peoples that references to a far deeper past were marginalized in favor of new narratives that in some sense “reset” cultural origins to this time. In our work here we suggest that the stress engendered by the forces behind this transition afforded new opportunities for societies to do things in novel ways, while ever mindful of selectively drawing on the past foundations of what had transpired over the previous millennia, in particular drawing inspiration from Teotihuacan. More than any of the individual material chronological markers that scholars use to identify the transition, we believe that it is this reconfiguration of political and economic models, reflected in ideological strategies and origin narratives as well as material culture, that sets the Postclassic world apart from the Classic world from which it emerged; the Postclassic was more than a time, it was a way of being.

Over the past few years our own personal journeys to better understand the Early Postclassic as a wider cultural phenomenon has centered on the city of Chichen Itza, one of the great centers where the Postclassic Mesoamerican cultural tradition crystalized. Each of the authors arrived at this city through a different academic path, but we all realized that Chichen Itza was key to understanding not only ‘post-collapse’ Maya societies, but the broader Mesoamerican sequence. Conversely, we understood that we could not fully comprehend Chichen Itza in a localized regional context. This important urban formation could only be studied in light of the evidence for broad sharing of ideologies, the strong connection with Tula, Hidalgo, and far-reaching exchange systems that went beyond the profound connection between Chichen Itza and Tula.

Views concerning the connections between Chichen Itza and Tula are contentious (Bey and Ringle 2007; Cobos 2006, 2015; Davies 1977; Kowalski and Kristan-Graham 2007; Kristan-Graham and Wren 2018; Kubler 1961; Kurjack 1992; McVicker 1985; Piña Chan 1972; Ringle 2004, 2017; Ringle et al. 1998; Ruz Lhuillier 1962; Slusser 2008; Sodi Miranda and Aceves Romero 2002; Taube 1994; Thompson 1941; Tozzer 1930, 1932, 1957). Yet, it is undeniable that these two cities were fundamentally linked (Figure 1.1). Some of the more striking similarities in art and architecture are serpent columns, pillars depicting warriors in distinct regalia including the butterfly chest pectoral, reclining Chac Mool figures, predatory animals such as eagles and jaguars grasping human hearts, and a figure traditionally referred to as the “jaguar-serpent-bird” (Kristan-Graham and Kowalski 2007; Figures 1.2–1.3) that we believe to be the Teotihuacan War Serpent (see also Turner 2017). A major artistic similarity shared between the sites of Chichen Itza and Toltec Tula during the Early Postclassic is in martial regalia which also reflects an ideology that places the warrior at center stage. Much of this regalia corresponds to the floral paradise afterlife destination of revered ancestors, kings, and warriors, a solar paradise known as Flower World that will be subsequently discussed (Taube 2020; see also Chinchilla, this volume; Coltman, this volume; Mathiowetz, this volume). While there is no clear solar deity or sun disk symbolism at Tula, as is becoming clearer with more recent work at Teotihuacan (Fash et al. 2009; Stanton et al. 2023, in press a; Sugiyama, this volume; see also Cowgill 1983:324), the sun was a central part of the ideological world of the urban centers of Central Mexico from Teotihuacan to Tula and ultimately Tenochtitlan (Figure 1.4; Coltman 2019, 2021a; see also Hernández Ibar and Olivier, this volume).

In terms of trying to make sense of these similarities, researchers working in Yucatan have largely abandoned the Toltec empire model, one of the fundamental narratives, inspired by Charnay (1885) and others (see Gillespie 2007), of the Carnegie Institution archaeologists working at Chichen (Thompson 1941; Tozzer 1957; see also Acosta 1952; Andrews 1990a; Braswell, this volume; Cobos 2006, 2015; Kristan-Graham and Wren 2018:4, 10). Yet despite this shift, progress has been slow on adequately explaining the similarities in site planning and iconography between the two sites (but see Ringle et al. 1998). One major hurdle for understanding the relationship has been the poor state of the chronologies of the sites. While there is now clear evidence of pre-Sotuta Complex occupation at Chichen Itza (see Chung 2009; Jiménez Álvarez et al., this volume; Osorio León 2004, 2006; Osorio León and Pérez de Heredia 2001; Pérez de Heredia 2010, 2012), the current prevailing view is that all of the surface monumental architecture and iconography date to the period in which the Sotuta ceramic complex was in use (see Braswell, this volume; Braswell and Peniche May 2012; Cobos 2016; Taube et al. 2020; see also Pérez de Heredia 2010, 2012; Vaillant 1927, 1961).<sup>1</sup> Further considering the fact that iconographic elements (see Adams 1971:165; Greene Robertson and Andrews 1992; Lothrop 1952; Parsons 1969; Pollock 1952; Rands 1952:281; 1954; Taube 1994; Taube et al. 2020) as well as aspects of the settlement patterns and architecture (see Bey and Ringle 2007; Cobos 2003a, 2016a; Kubler 1961; Lincoln 1983, 1986, 1990; Ringle 1990:240; Schele and Mathews 1998) are similar in the areas commonly referred to as “Old Chichen” and “New Chichen”, a chronological distinction invented by Edward Thompson (1932:219–229) and perpetuated by numerous scholars over the course of the twentieth century (e.g., Morley 1946; Thompson 1954; see also Braswell, this volume; Pool Cab 2016:48), there is really little evidence to justify a Toltec vs. Maya distinction for the surface architecture at the site. This is not to say that Chichen Itza is not a stratigraphically complex site that experienced profound changes over time (see Braswell, this volume; Braswell and Peniche 2012; Volta and Braswell 2014). It clearly did. However, we believe that there is no real convincing evidence to support the “Old” and “New” Chichen division of surface features, much less to evoke invading Toltecs to explain it. With that said, temporally situating the Sotuta complex has continued to be challenging given the lack of extensive radiometric dating (but see Braswell, this volume; Ringle 2017; Volta and Braswell 2014). Many of the carved monuments have calendrical dates in the ninth century, leading some researchers who view some degree of temporal overlap between the Sotuta and Cehpech complexes to suggest a Terminal Classic date for part of the site (see Andrews et al. 2003), more in line with dates for the Epiclassic of Central Mexico and the “Mexicanized Maya” (Fox

1980; Graham 1973) sites of certain areas of southern Mesoamerica including at Terminal Classic Ceibal and the Cotzumalhuapa region (see Chinchilla Mazariegos, this volume; Kowalski 1989a; Thompson 1970:41–45). Yet, the site clearly extended into the Early Postclassic period and we suggest that the Sotuta complex dates from A.D. 850/900 (although it could potentially go back to A.D. 800 depending on how the complex is defined)<sup>2</sup> to

<sup>2</sup> While Braswell (this volume) makes some excellent points concerning the later dating of the beginning of the Sotuta Complex, we do believe that without more radiometric dating, establishing the beginning of the complex will remain difficult. Part of the problem is that many of the stones (e.g., lintels) with hieroglyphic dates have been reset, rendering them problematic for dating anything except the dedication of the stones themselves and providing *terminus post quem* dates. More importantly, as Braswell brings up, how Sotuta is defined is variable and is not necessarily linked to the other major changes that Chichen Itza experienced over time; we believe that important elements of the Sotuta Complex could very well begin prior to the massive changes the city experienced that give it a “Toltec” identity. To clarify our position, however, Stanton’s assessment of the Sotuta Complex is based heavily on work from nearby Yaxuna, where well-stratified deposits have been examined and more radiometric dating has been performed from throughout the sequence. While there are no good dates from the Helep Complex (formerly known as Yaxuna VIb [Johnstone 2001; Suhler et al. 1998]) and contemporaneous with the Sotuta Complex at Chichen Itza at Yaxuna (three dates from a Helep context on the North Acropolis are too early and may represent old wood [see Stanton and Bey, this volume]) there are multiple good dates from the Cehpech-looking Tzolik Complex (formerly known as Yaxuna VIa [Johnstone 2001; Suhler et al. 1998]), none of which indicate that the complex goes much beyond A.D. 850 if that far. While we understand Braswell’s point about how arbitrary drawing the lines between ceramic complexes can be, analysis of the ceramics from Yaxuna indicates that the translucent white slips and deep red pastes (irrespective of the presence of forms like *molcajetes* and pyriform jars) that are typical of Sotuta are always later than pure Tzolik materials, although material that looks like Tzolik (unsurprisingly) continues to be present. We concur with Braswell that the arrival of forms (e.g., *molcajetes* and pyriform jars) is very significant, but in our opinion that does not diminish the utility of the arrival of translucent white slips and deep red pastes for chronological purposes; which in the end is important for cross-dating sites. Our intent is not necessarily to push back the “Toltec”-looking city back in time, but to draw attention to specific modes (which do need more scrutiny in our opinion) that seem to pre-date A.D. 870–900. Of further note, we have given a possible starting date of the Sotuta Complex at Chichen Itza at A.D. 800 partially because of the hieroglyphic date on the Temple of the Hieroglyphic Jamb and a radiocarbon date reported by Robles (1987) from the Chapel Complex at Isla Cerritos. In terms of the calendar round of the date Temple of the Hieroglyphic Jamb date, Stuart (this volume) uses the A.D. 832 date for jamb. Our understanding is that the date is very specific about the *katun* in which it falls (David Stuart, personal communication 2021). Given that date, and Ruppert’s (1950), Proskouriakoff’s (1970), and Grube’s (Grube and Krochock 2007) indication that the lintel in that building was in its original place (an interpretation that has been questioned by Pérez de Heredia and Bíró [2018:74], Stuart [this volume], and Braswell [this volume], the latter interpreting the date a whole calendar round later at A.D. 869), combined with Chung’s (2009) reporting of the ceramics at this building, we do believe there is sufficient evidence to consider a pre-A.D. 870 date for the Sotuta Complex at Chichen Itza (defined in part by translucent white slips and deep red pastes, which may be a product of new firing technologies rather than the specific clay sources available in central Yucatan); we caution against assuming that Pure Florescent architecture could not be associated with Sotuta-like ceramics. However, we also believe that there is a great probability that the lintel was reset. A longer treatment of the doubts concerning the dating of the Yabnal, Huuntun, and Sotuta complexes at Chichen Itza can be found in Taube and colleagues (2020) recent work. Yet, our reading of Pérez de Heredia’s (2010) analysis leads us to believe that: 1) there is little evidence of Yabnal architecture from surface contexts; 2) there is little evidence of a Huuntun Complex (a conclusion to which Braswell also arrives); and 3) the Yabnal Complex shared more affinity with the Cehpech Complex that Smith (1971) defines (also a conclusion to which Braswell also arrives) as well as the Tzolik Complex from Yaxuna. The Isla Cerritos context dated by Robles is reported to have a mix of Cehpech and Sotuta and has a range [calibrated using OxCal 4.2] from the seventh to ninth centuries (A.D. 622–892; see Stanton and Bey, this volume). In the end, until there is a better understanding of how the modes of ceramics termed ‘Sotuta’ by ceramicists changed over

<sup>1</sup> Even Brainerd (1958:31), who created the chronological distinction between Cehpech and Sotuta Slate Wares states: “although no certain stratigraphic evidence for the sequence from Florescent to Early Mexican ceramics is yet available, architectural stratigraphy is definite between the two styles in the Caracol and Monjas complexes.” This suggests that even at this early date there were grave doubts about the chronological sequence of Chichen Itza.

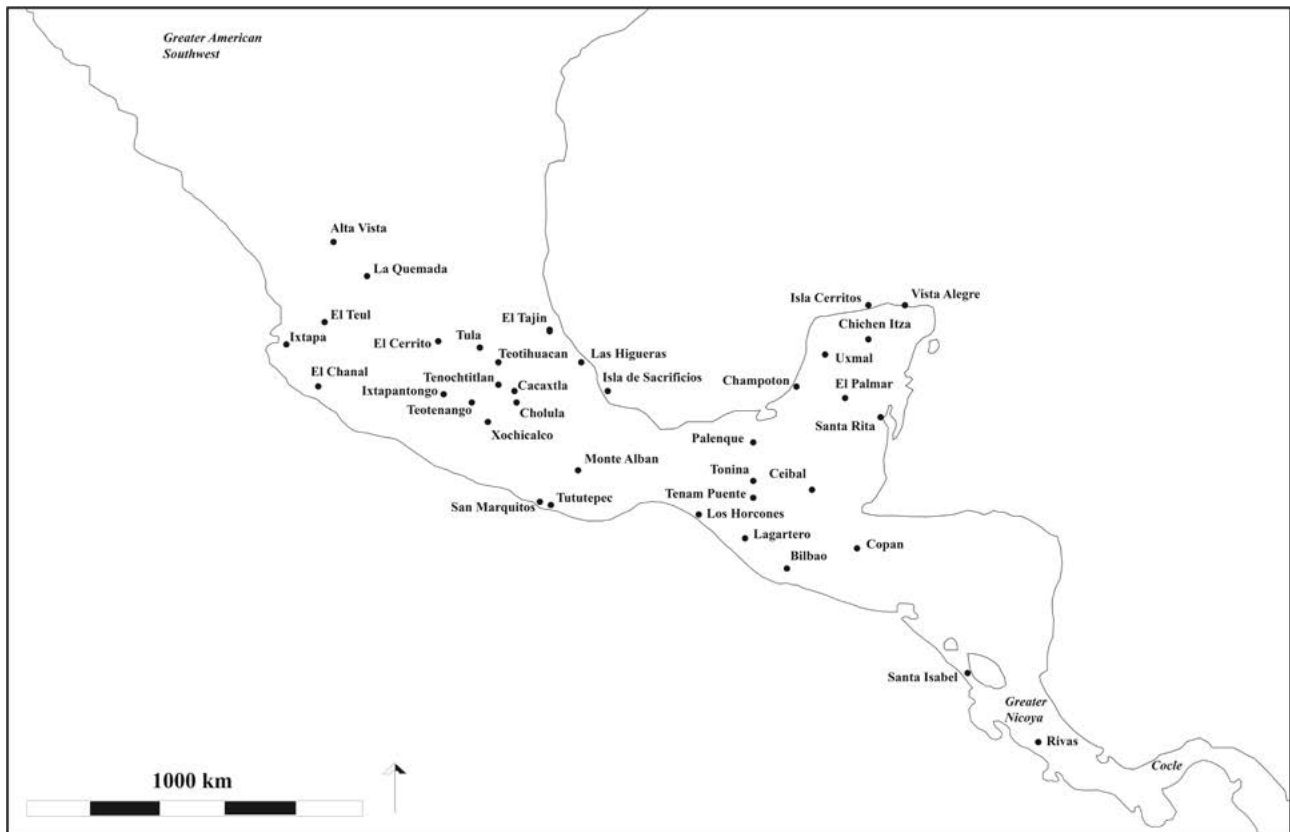


Figure 1.1: Map of Mesoamerica and adjoining regions with select sites and regions marked (drawn by Travis Stanton).



Figure 1.2: The War Serpent (called three jaguar-serpent-bird by Kristan-Graham and Kowalski 2007) on the Venus Platform at Chichen Itza, flanked by a mat symbol to the right and a New Year bundle and Venus symbol to the left, suggesting that militaristic themes were central to fire rituals and calendrical rites like those discussed by Fash and his colleagues (2009) at Teotihuacan (photo by Travis Stanton).

1100/1200<sup>3</sup>; meaning that the origins of urban Chichen Itza (not just a satellite site of some earlier polity [Volta et

time it would be prudent to detangle this ceramic complex with the idea of Chichen Itza as a 'Toltec' center. We do concur with Braswell, however, that there is little likelihood that Chichen Itza as a 'Toltec' center dates to A.D. 800, but that it transforms into something we recognize as a 'Toltec' center in the ninth century, by A.D. 870 or even several decades before.

<sup>3</sup> We also concur with Braswell (this volume) that Chichen Itza most likely ceased being an urban center closer to A.D. 1100 than 1200, but

al. 2018:53]) stretch back into the throes of the 'collapse' period, but that it is fundamentally an Early Postclassic site in terms of how we traditionally organize chronology in the Maya region.

In terms of the dating of Tula there is also a problem of a lack

we leave the door open to considering a later date given the lack of good radiometric dates from the site.



**Figure 1.3:** Segment of a carved dais depicting warriors at the Palacio Quemado at Tula (photo by Travis Stanton); similar to analogous features at Chichen Itza.

of published dates from solid contexts. Based on ceramics and 23 radiocarbon dates, Healan (2012), around a decade ago, placed Tula Chico (where Toltec-style sculpture has been found [Jordan 2016a]) firmly in the Corral Phase (now termed Late Corral Phase), then dated to A.D. 750–850 by Mastache and her colleagues (2002:42; see also Cobean 1978; Mastache and Cobean 1989:55), noting that there is strong evidence of Prado Phase (now termed Early Corral Phase) occupation (Mastache et al. 2009:312–316), in the deepest portions of the stratigraphy. More recently, analyses of 68 radiocarbon samples from the environs of Tula (Healan et al. 2021; see also Cobean et al. 2021:53) has resulted in an updated chronology and several phase names have changed. The revised part of the chronology that is of interest to us here is as follows: Corral (A.D. 400–600/650), Late Corral (A.D. 600/650–850), Terminal Corral (A.D. 850–900), Early Tollan (A.D. 900–1050), and Late Tollan (A.D. 1050–1150). The Late Corral Phase is the time of the apogee of Tula Chico, whereas the Tollan phase is the time of the apogee of the site centered on Tula Grande. In terms of the dates for the Late Corral, while perhaps a bit on the early side, they coincide well with the current dating of the Yabnal Complex at Chichen Itza (which we still know little about). The Tollan Complex also has dates which coincide very well with the timeframe for the Sotuta Complex at Chichen Itza, especially considering the A.D. 870–900 timeframe that Braswell (this volume) presents. While the lack of extensive radiometric dates at both sites continues to be a problem, we see little current evidence to suggest that the chronological sequences for the latter part of the Classic period and Early Postclassic are really that different (see also Bey and Ringle 2007). Only more detailed work on the chronologies of both sites will give us increased clarity (Smith 2007). However, the fact that both sites share a number of material traits that go beyond art and architecture at the end of the ninth century may point more to contemporaneity than chronological disjunction. These traits include the widespread adoption of semi-hemispherical bowls including *molcajetes* (Bey 1986; Bey and Ringle 2007; Cobean 1978; Stanton and Magnoni 2014), the slight use of *comales* (Bey and Ringle 2007;

Brainerd 1958:312–313; Cobean 1978; Healan 2012; Smith 1971:84)<sup>4</sup>, a general trend towards ‘ruralization’ outside of the core area (Cobean 1978:93; Mastache and Crespo 1974; Stanton et al. 2020; see also Parsons 1976), parallel changes in access to obsidian sources (Braswell 2003a; Healan 2007), the presence of specific trade wares such as Tohil Plumbate<sup>5</sup> (Cobean 1978:97–98; Pérez de Heredia 2010; Smith 1971), rare ceramic pipes which have been speculated to come from Michoacan (Cobean 1978:73; Morris et al. 1931:213; Thompson 1954), and potentially an increased focus in occupational specialization (Ardren et al. 2010; Glover and Rissolo, this volume; Healan 2012).

In lieu of further work on dating these two important sites, our view of the relationship between them is that they were intimately connected to such a degree that it would be near impossible to think that people did not at least move between them for economic reasons. Like others, however, we reject the old model of a Toltec invasion and, for our part, view the profound similarities more as an alliance that had economic, ideological, and political implications (Greene Robertson and Andrews 1992; Kowalski 2007:205). Yet as other scholars have noted (López Austin and López Luján 2000; Ringle 2004; Ringle et al. 1998; see also Robertson 1970), the connection between Chichen Itza and Tula was

<sup>4</sup> *Comales* are quite rare at Chichen Itza, but they do exist (Brainerd 1958; José Osorio, personal communication 2019). What is rather surprising, however, is the low frequency of this artifact class at Tula. *Comales* are present at both Teotihuacan (Biskowski 2017) and Monte Alban (Marcus and Flannery 1996) by the end of the Preclassic period and are also reported for Cholula, but in later contexts (Noguera 1954:73). They continue to be quite in evidence through the Postclassic period in Central Mexico (see Biskowski 2000, 2017), but are not common in the Gulf Coast region until the Middle Postclassic (Stark 2008:52). While we might think that *comales* experienced a decline during the Epiclassic and early portions of the Postclassic, Healan (2012; see also Cobean 1978) expresses surprise at the relative lack of this ceramic form relative to contemporary sites in the same region, indicating that the way maize was generally consumed at Tula may have varied from other sites in Central Mexico. We might add, however, that *comales* are also used to toast cacao beans (Wisdom 1940:143).

<sup>5</sup> Although Plumbate is more common at Tula than Chichen Itza (see Jordan, this volume). Plumbate is also found in small quantities at sites in the hinterland of Chichen Itza such as Yaxuna and Ikil.



**Figure 1.4: Carved sculpture from El Cerrito showing the night demons in battle against the sun god in the diurnal sky (photo by Travis Stanton); note the flower symbols in the bottom part of the carving juxtaposing well-ordered flower gardens against the forces of chaos. The sculpture is most likely Late Postclassic, but given it was found on the main temple at El Cerrito could represent later memory of this building as associated with the sun. On display at the site museum for El Cerrito.**

not an isolated phenomenon. While the degree of similarity between the Itza and Toltec capitals appears to have been unique, many sites (e.g., Cacaxtla, Teotenango, Xochicalco, Las Higueras, El Tajin, and El Baúl) that date to the ninth to eleventh centuries broadly share certain visual motifs such as Feathered Serpents, star or Venus symbols, and at times solar disks (Baird 1989; Carlson 1991; Ringle et al. 1998; Taube 2015). Few of these other sites appear to share a similar ground plan to Tula (Tula Grande, but perhaps Tula Chico as well [see Mastache and Cobean 1989:64, 2000, 2006; Matos Moctezuma 1974]) and the Great Terrace of Chichen, with a pyramid complex in the east and a ballcourt

in the west around a plaza with several platforms including a *tzompantli* (more below). Yet the similarities in visual culture suggest a profound sharing of ideologies, one that scholars have suggested has its origins in the inheritance and reconfiguration of trade routes following the decline of Teotihuacan (e.g., Kowalski 1989a:182; Santley 1989:145; Webb 1978). It is, in fact, during this transitional period that we see an extensive movement of goods through a substantially large system (Kepecs 2003, 2007). Products such as Plumbate ceramics, originating on the Pacific coast of Chiapas, were widely circulated through Epiclassic and Early Postclassic economic networks (Jordan, this volume; Neff 2003, Neff et al., this volume; Neff and Bishop 1988; Neff et al. 1989). At Chichen Itza itself, Braswell (2003a:134; see also Braswell and Glascock 2002) reports ten different obsidian sources in the collections from the site; a surprisingly high number for a Maya site, which speaks to the extensiveness of exchange networks at this time.

Yet, it is not just the connectivity across Mesoamerica at this time which is so impressive, but the extension of cultural and material exchange networks outside of Mesoamerica proper that speak to the socioeconomic changes happening during this period. Again, at Chichen Itza we see objects such as gold ornaments coming from the northern reaches of South America (see Mathiowetz, this volume; Miller, this volume) and turquoise, potentially arriving from northern Mexico or the American Southwest, in the artifact assemblage (Coggins and Shane 1984). These data would suggest that the greatest extension of Mesoamerican exchange networks happened at this time. In particular, the connections to the north between A.D. 900–1300 have generated significant attention over the years, with evidence of macaw breeding and a turquoise mirror at Paquime (Di Peso 1974; although these could be very well be Late Postclassic), chocolate residues on ceramic vessels at Chaco Canyon (Crown and Hurst 2009), the presence of the strikingly Mesoamerican site of La Quemada so far to the north (Nelson 1995), changes in the treatment of human remains (Turner and Turner 1999), and various architectural similarities to contemporary Mesoamerican sites at places like Alta Vista and Chaco Canyon among others (Mathien and McGuire 1986; Riley and Hedrick 1978) singled out as evidence of obscure connections between these two regions (Schmidt 2007:114; see also Mathiowetz 2013, 2019a). Some scholars have even argued that the similarities in material culture between early Coyotlatelco in the Tula region and sites farther to the north implicate migrations from places like Queretaro and Zacatecas (Beekman and Christensen 2011; Diehl 1976, 1983; Mastache and Cobean 1989:55–56; see also Armillas 1969; Fournier and Bolaños 2007). Further, there are profound ties in visual culture and cosmological narratives, much of which seems to point to a sharing of ideas regarding what has been termed “Flower Worlds”, a concept we will return to later (see Chinchilla, this volume; Coltman, this volume; Hays-Gilpin and Hill 1999; Hill 1992; Mathiowetz, this volume; Mathiowetz and Turner 2021; Taube 2004a, 2006). Interestingly, horned serpents, a being often considered to be prevalent

in North America and found in the American Southwest (Cobb et al. 1999; VanPool et al. 2008), clearly show up at a couple of Mesoamerican sites, including Teotihuacan and Chichen Itza at this time, indicating that not only were materials such as turquoise flowing south (Washburn et al. 2011) and chocolate flowing north, but that the exchange of ideologies was also robust at this time as well (see also Schaafsma 1999, 2001; Schaafsma and Taube 2006; Taube 2001a; Washburn 2018). Jesper Nielsen (2021), however, has traced this figure back to Teotihuacan, and suggests that ideas surrounding horned serpents related to water may extend back into the archaic period given their wide distribution across North America. The Mesoamerican examples of the horned serpent may refer to supernatural Chicchan “deer serpents,” horned beings that cause landslides and major flooding contemporary Ch’orti legend (Fought 1972; Wisdom 1940). In Mesoamerica deer snakes often refer to boas, creatures that can actually devour a deer, with the Nahuatl term being *mazacoatl*, with *mazatl* being the term for deer. In any event, evidence of shared ideas at this time is notable.

Regardless of the exact extension and intensity of exchange networks at this time, it was clear to us that to understand the place of Chichen Itza in the broader scheme of the Mesoamerican world at the transition from the Classic to Postclassic periods we needed to broaden our discussions and involve other scholars working across the region. Thus, we invited researchers not only interested in Chichen Itza itself, but at roughly contemporary sites across greater Mesoamerica. Some of these scholars we had already been working with, others we knew or suspected had an interest in the topic. But, we invited this group together to look at data across a wider space. Yet we also realized that we needed greater time depth to examine Chichen and its contemporaries. The transition from the Classic to the Postclassic is situated in a broader cultural sequence that cannot be set aside. From Olmec times onward, Mesoamerica was a world system (e.g., Kepecs et al. 1994; see also Freidel 1986; Rosenswig 2017; Geurds, this volume), a series of subregions which depended on each other for the exchange of goods and ideas, ebbing and flowing throughout a dynamic system of shifting connections (e.g., Carballo and Pluckhahn 2007; Grove 1968, 1970:92). The time of Chichen Itza was just an iteration, a new confirmation if you will, of the changing social, political, and economic relationships across this vast area. As we looked closer at the data from Chichen Itza we could see inspiration from Teotihuacan, not just in the material systems, but in the economic and political models that set this city apart from the Maya cities of the Classic period (see also Kubler 1961; Piña Chan 1972). To understand Chichen Itza, we knew that we needed to contemplate the city in fundamental ways as a cultural inheritor of Teotihuacano ways of doing things (Freidel et al. 1993:155–160, 374–391; Klein 1987; Kristan-Graham 1993, 2015; Schele and Freidel 1990; Schele and Mathews 1998; Umberger 1987); hence our attempt to engage scholars working directly with the issue of east-west connections at Teotihuacan, a place that the Aztec notably reckoned was the origin of governmental and legal systems as well as the present world (Boone

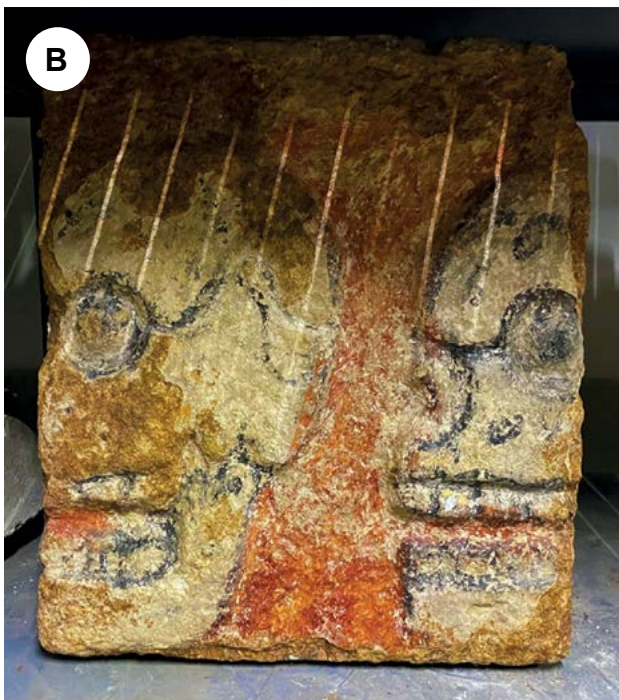
2000a:374–376). Yet, we also found ourselves looking at Chichen from the standpoint of its own cultural inheritors, the Aztecs. Time and time again, we would see data from the Early Postclassic that seemed to fit Aztec materiality and history (see also Klein, this volume). It could be argued that the Aztec inspiration comes directly through Central Mexico, from the site of Tula (Acosta 1956–1957; Dutton 1955; Lombardo de Ruiz 1973; López Luján and López Austin 2009; Nicholson 1971a; but see also Sodi Miranda and Aceves Romero 2006; Solís Olguín and Sodi Miranda 1985). But, as we argue, we think that there is a good case to be made that the Mexica and their contemporaries were well aware of Chichen Itza and could have even considered it to be the eastern solar paradise, the city of the sun (Coltman 2021; Taube 2015, Taube 2020; Taube et al. 2020). It is with this last point that we begin.

### Shared Ideologies: The Cult of Warriors and Flower Worlds in Ancient Mesoamerica

Although much has been made about the existence of a Feathered Serpent cult during the Epiclassic period (e.g., López Austin and López Luján 1999, 2000; Ringle 2014; Ringle and Bey 2009; Ringle et al. 1998), we do not believe that the Feathered Serpent was the central element of the prevailing ideology during this time.<sup>6</sup> Instead, we view Chichen Itza as sharing in a concept of Flower Worlds, celestial solar paradises filled with flowers, precious jewels and butterflies representing the souls of ancestors and the heroic dead that are widespread across Mesoamerica and the American Southwest (Hill 1992; Mathiowetz and Turner 2021; Taube 2004a, 2006). First identified by Jane Hill (1992; see also Hays-Gilpin and Hill 1999; Mathiowetz and Turner 2021), Flower Worlds are places of origin and ancestors, closely tied to the sun and concepts of heat and brilliance (Figure 1.5). The Feathered Serpent is fundamental element of many Flower World narratives<sup>7</sup>, but we suggest that the sun is a more central element, with the Feathered Serpent being the vehicle that engendered the sun’s diurnal journey; bringing the rain and wind from the east. The concept of Flower Worlds is quite ancient and extends well back into the Preclassic period (Mathiowetz and Turner 2021; Taube 2004a, 2005a, 2006, 2010a, 2020). However, a fundamental change in the conception of Flower Worlds occurred towards the beginning of the Early Classic period at Teotihuacan, when a version of this paradisiacal realm became merged with the emerging warrior cult established at this Central Mexican city (Taube 1992a, 2004a). We suggest that this war cult at Teotihuacan was the origin of the one eventually inherited by the Aztec nearly a millennium later. Related in some ways to the Late Postclassic Central Mexican practice of *xochiyaoyotl*, or flower war (see Isaac 1983), it centered around the concept that warriors who died in battle, ostensibly in service of the state, would go

<sup>6</sup> Ringle and Bey (2009) do note, however, that much of the artifact assemblage from the Sacred Cenote is related to warriors.

<sup>7</sup> And is certainly linked too rulership as Ringle and colleagues (1998) have argued.



**Figure 1.5: Images of painted sculpture at Chichen Itza: a) photo filtered with *iDStretch* of an image of God N from the bottom of a pilaster on top of the Temple of the Warriors at Chichen Itza (photo by Travis Stanton). The filter brings out the existing traces of color that were originally painted on the image and highlights the fact that, as documented in the color plates of the Temple of the Warriors volume (Morris et al. 1931) and images of the facades in at the Initial Series Group (Taube et al. 2020), much of the sculpture and monumental architecture of Chichen Itza (and other sites) were brilliantly colored in much the way we would expect Flower World to be portrayed; b) photo of a painted block from the Tzompantil at Chichen Itza filtered in Photoshop (courtesy of Bernardo Sarvide of the Palacio Canton Museum, INAH, photo by Travis Stanton); note that the lines of light are not part of the original image.**

to a solar realm as beautiful fiery birds and butterflies who sipped the nectar of flowers (Berlo 1983, 1984; Headrick 2003a; Hill 1992; Taube 2004a, 2006, 2020). While the connection between Flower Worlds and the war cult can be seen in data from many Mesoamerican sites (Figure 1.6), data from Chichen Itza are among the most extensive and clear (Coltman 2021; Taube 2020; Taube et al. 2020).

Beginning with Chichen Itza, we argue that despite the chronological legacy of ‘Old’ versus ‘New’ Chichen, the Great Terrace is undoubtedly the ideological center of the city (Stanton et al., 2023; Taube et al. 2020). The causeway system not only converges on the Great Terrace (Figure 1.7), but it appears to do so using foundational principles of dividing the city into four wards, as was described for the city in the *Chilam Balam de Chumayel* (Roys 1933) and which can be found in other cities such as Tenochtitlan, Izamal, Mayapan, and nearby Yaxuna (Brown 1999; Matos Moctezuma 1988; Roys 1957; Stanton et al., in press. Further, de Anda and his colleagues (2019a) make a cogent argument that the Castillo was the focal point for a quadripartite cosmogram with four *cenotes* (Sacred Cenote, Cenote Xtoloc, Cenote Holtun, and Cenote Xkanjuyum) delimiting the four quarters.<sup>8</sup> While there were likely several pre-Sotuta communities in this locale, we suggest that the city pertaining to the Sotuta complex occupation was subject to centering rituals materialized in part by quadripartite architecture and causeways that clearly made the Great Terrace the heart of the urban zone.

Just as important as the Castillo and its relationship to the Sacred Cenote via Sacbe 1, or possibly even more important, is the east-west axis of the Great Terrace, consisting of the Temple of the Warriors and the Great Ballcourt among other important, but smaller structures (Figure 1.8). We argue that this axis commemorates the sun’s journey through the sky (see also the cogent discussions in Jimenez Betts 2020a; Solar, this volume), accompanied by the souls of sacred warriors whose work and sacrifice engendered its daily cycle (Figure 1.9). Further, this narrative was more broadly immersed in the context of Flower World and we suggest that this axis reflects an attempt by the people of Chichen Itza to reimagine the Ciudadela at Teotihuacan, where the earliest evidence of this merging of a war cult with the idea of Flower Worlds appears to occur (see Taube 1992a, 2004a, 2006).

As noted by Šprajc and Sánchez Nava (2013:48; Sánchez Nava and Šprajc 2015:130–136; see also Galindo Trejo et al. 2001; Milbrath 1988, 1999:68; Ringle 2009:16, 19), the line of sight of the centerline of the Temple of the Warriors to the staircase leading up to the Upper Temple of the Jaguars has a solar association; with sunset alignments

<sup>8</sup> We believe that Braswell’s (this volume) interesting argument that there is a Castillo-Sub 2 that remains unexplored suggests that the Great Terrace as a focal point in the site plan may even stretch back to the times Yabnal Complex ceramics were in use, further complicating the division between ‘Old’ and ‘New’ Chichen.

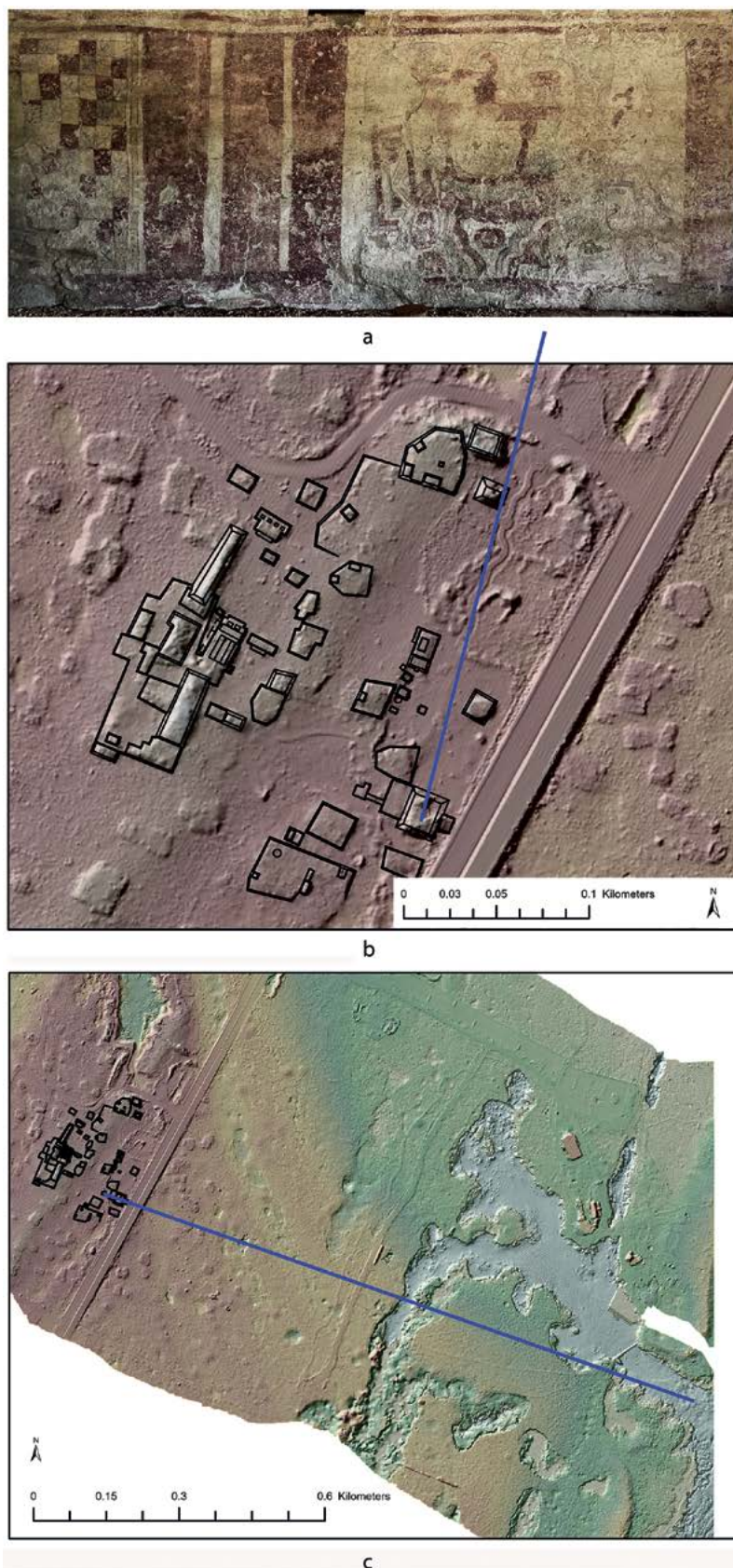
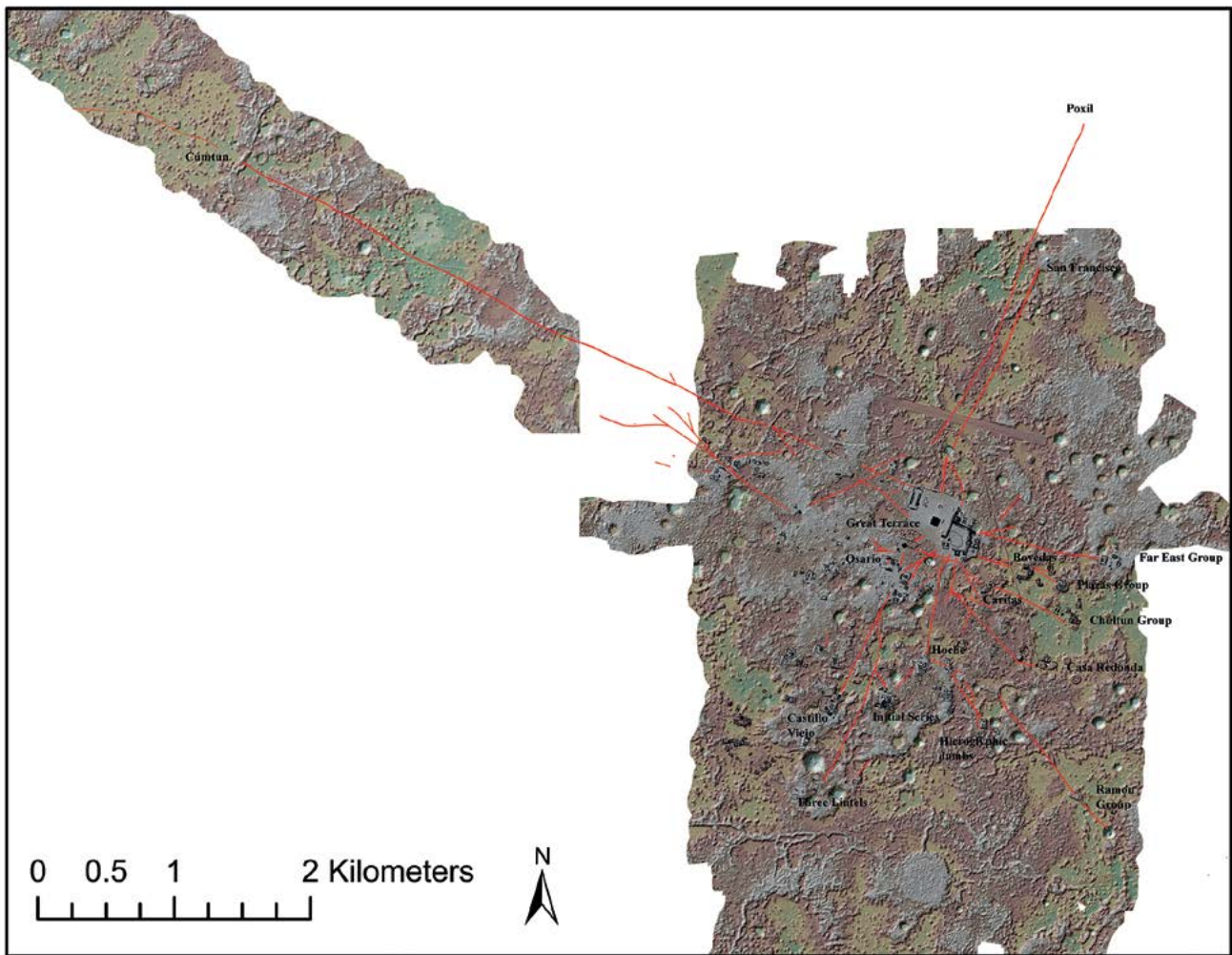


Figure 1.6: Images from Xelha Quintana Roo: a) photo of an Early Classic mural showing a Teotihuacan-style warrior (photo by Travis Stanton); b) DEM/Hillshade image of Xelha (with a small portion of the site center rendered in Maler-style plans; this is the area we have ground-validated the lidar), showing the location of the above mural (image by Travis Stanton); c) DEM/Hillshade image of the broader site of Xelha showing the line of site of the structure where the murals are located (image by Travis Stanton). The structure with the murals has a small causeway to the east. This causeway, as well as the temple, are oriented directly at the entrance to the watery inlet; an orientation similar to the Great Terrace at Chichen Itza and Maya E-Groups. The temple and its warriors would greet the sun, which we argue would emerge along a watery road and then continue along the causeway to the west; see the argument for a flowery road later in the chapter.



**Figure 1.7: DEM/Hillshade image of Chichen Itza generated from lidar data flown in 2014 and 2017 with the current INAH map superimposed (principle causeways in red, image by Travis Stanton). We have previously argued that a quadripartite plan centered on the Great Terrace can be seen in the organization of monumental architecture with the north end centered on the Poxil and San Francisco Groups, the southern end centered on the Castillo Viejo, the west end centered on Cumtun, and the east end on several groups including Bóvedas, the Far East Group, Caritas, the Plazas Group, and the Chultun Group (Taube et al. 2020:6–9). This plan has also been argued to be reflected in the arrangement of *cenotes* around the site (de Anda et al. 2019).**

falling on May 13<sup>th</sup> and August 1<sup>st</sup> (two dates separated by 4 periods of 20 days). This alignment is marked by a narrow flagstone walkway that leads away from the Atlantean throne on the Temple of the Warriors, straight towards the staircase leading up to the Upper Temple of the Jaguars, where it is also clearly visible (Figure 1.10). While this walkway does not continue across the plaza today, the Great Terrace has been heavily disturbed, especially in historic times when the highway directly ran past the Castillo to the south (see Braswell, this volume); ultimately we may never know if this feature crossed the length of the Great Terrace. Interestingly, the concept of an east-west road crossing a plaza to mark moments in the solar year has precedent in the region of Chichen Itza. Collins (2018) has reported a similarly oriented raised *sascab* road crossing the east-west axis of the E-Group at Yaxuna (which could mean ‘green is her/his house’ or ‘first house’; interpretations of the meaning of the name vary in the town of Yaxunah today), the previous regional capital located a mere 16 km south of the Great Terrace

(Stanton 2012, 2017; Stanton and Collins 2017, 2021). Dating to a Late Preclassic building phase of the E-Group, this walkway was colored with a red hue, distinguishing it from the surrounding white stucco surface, and roughly shares the same orientation at the Great Terrace alignment; E-Groups are well-known to have solar associations (Freidel et al. 2017). Among the Maya, red is the color of east, possibly in this case alluding to the diurnal passage of the sun.

Returning to the Great Terrace of Chichen Itza, the serpents at the Temple of the Warriors descend, while those on the balustrades on the Upper Temple of the Jaguars ascend. This arrangement may indicate that the walkway itself was the Feathered Serpent as the road of the sun, which was a widespread convention in Late Postclassic Mesoamerica, including the Huastec and Aztec (Taube 2015). This idea of the Feathered Serpent as a solar road continues among the Zinacanteco Tzotzil of highland Chiapas, where it is believed that a great Feathered Serpent as Venus serves

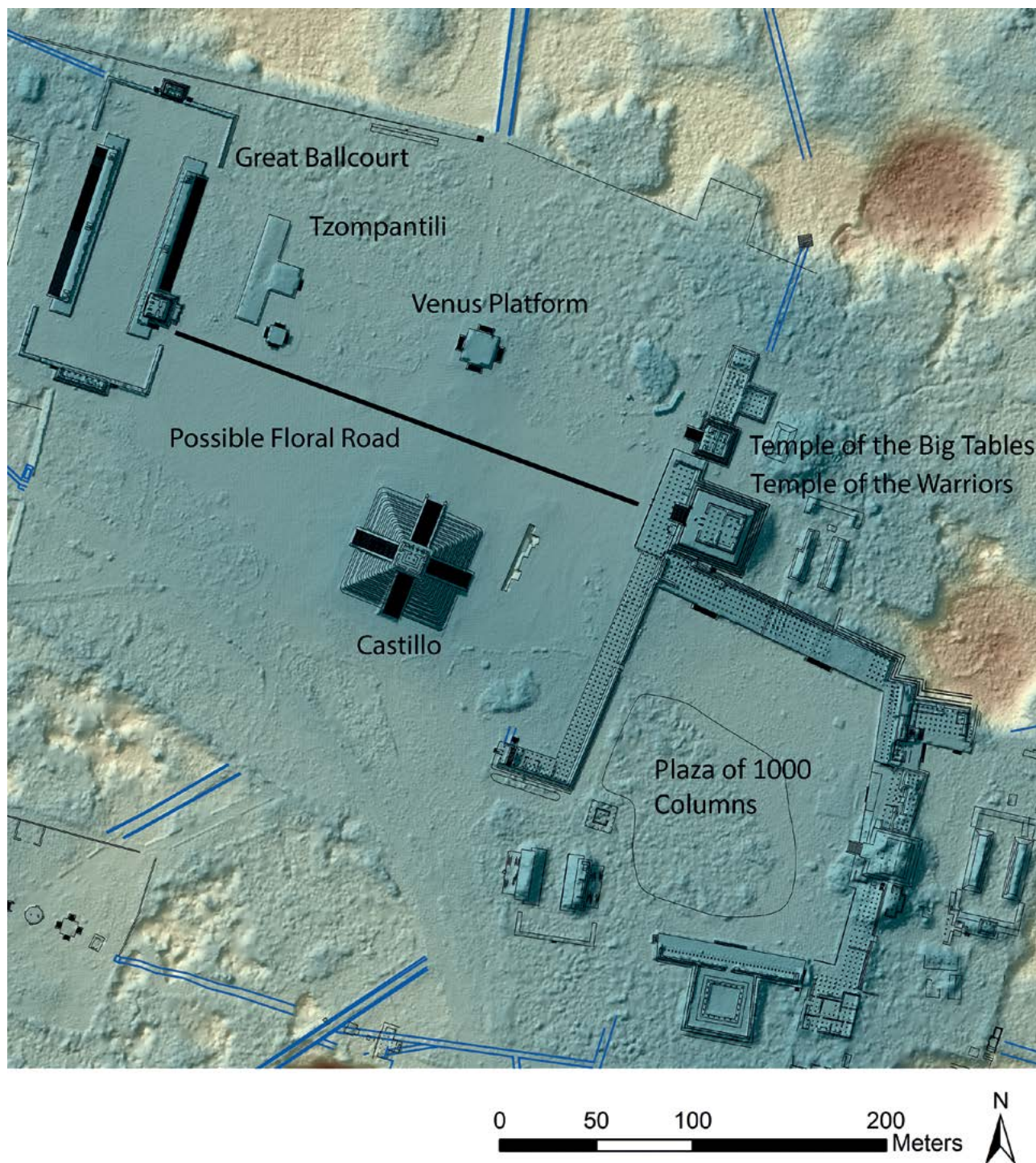


Figure 1.8: DEM/Hillshade image of the Great Terrace of Chichen Itza generated from lidar data flown in 2014 and 2017 with the current INAH-map of the site structures superimposed. Note the alignment of the Temple of the Warriors to the stairway of the Upper Temple of the Jaguars on the south side of the Great Ballcourt (image by Travis Stanton).

as the celestial vehicle of the sun: “At dawn the sun rises in the east preceded by Venus, the Morning Star, a large plumed serpent called *Mukta ch'on* (Vogt 1969:89).”<sup>9</sup> This contemporary Tzotzil account pertains directly to highland Mexican sources of Quetzalcoatl being summoned to

the east by the sun as well as warrior souls following the sun on its eastern dawn appearance, and it is likely no coincidence that the line of sight between the Temple of the Warriors and Upper Temple of the Jaguars passes the Venus platform. A clear example of this solar road is found on the Aztec Stuttgart Statuette which depicts Tlahuizcalpantecuhtli “Lord of Dawn” as a skeletal Toltec warrior (Coltman 2007, 2009). On the back of Tlahuizcalpantecuhtli is a Feathered Serpent carrying

<sup>9</sup> By virtue of Venus being close to the sun, it is always seen at its rising and setting, understandably why this planet is closely associated with the sun’s journey, such as through Tlahuizcalpantecuhtli.



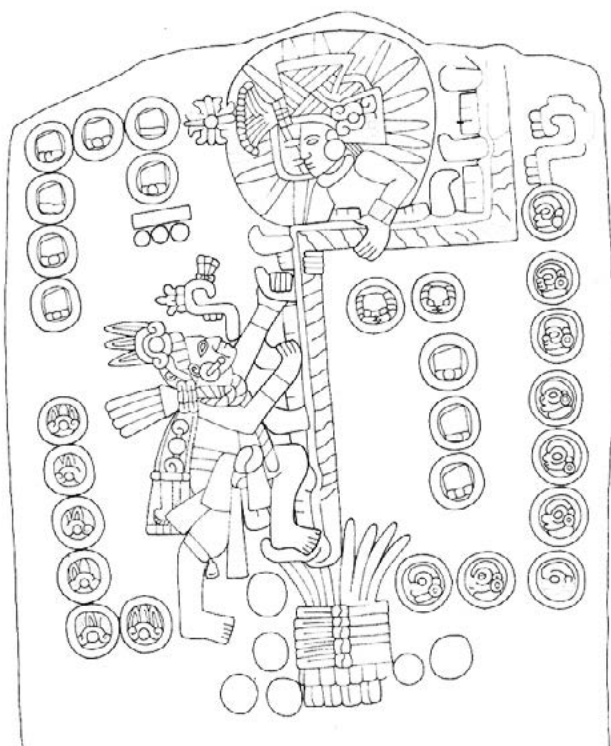
**Figure 1.9: Flaming semi-skeletonized warrior on the Tzompantli at Chichen Itza, further indicating the centrality of heroic warrior dead in the version of Flower World at Chichen Itza (photo by Travis Stanton).**



**Figure 1.10: Photos of the stone walkway at the Great Terrace at Chichen Itza: a) on top of the Temple of the Warriors facing west; b) at the foot of the stairway to the Upper Temple of the Jaguars facing west (photos by Travis Stanton).**

a solar disk with Tonatiuh, the sun god, in the center. A carved bone from Tomb 7 from Monte Alban provides a strikingly similar example (Taube 2015: Figure 5.6b) and several monuments from the Cotzumalhuapa region provide additional support (Chinchilla Mazariegos 1998; Figure 1.11). Further, one of the mural fragments from the Temple

of the Warriors depicts a scene of human heart sacrifice, with the victim on a sacrificial stone (Figure 1.12). Directly below his body and ascending to the upper part of the scene is a green Quetzalcoatl serpent, clearly denoting this being as the symbolic sacrificial “road” of the slain captive to follow the sun’s path (see Morris et al. 1931).



**Figure 1.11: Monument 1 from Cotzumalhuapa showing the sun god and Venus on the Feathered Serpent (drawing courtesy of Oswaldo Chinchilla).**

Warriors are not just sacrificed to engender the sun's journey, however. They also accompany the sun in his journey across the sky, dancing at its zenith, in Aztec accounts (see also Uriarte Castañeda [this volume] for a discussion of dancing warrior in the Upper Temple of the Jaguars). While warriors are well known from Chichen Itza, they are also fairly restricted in their distribution to this east-west axis of the Great Terrace, where, coincidentally, the vast majority of pyrite and mosaic back mirrors offerings, both symbols of warriors and of the sun, are found at Chichen (Maldonado 1997; Morris et al. 1931).<sup>10</sup> The Temple of the Warriors is aptly named for the plethora of warrior images associated with that complex, but there are also numerous warriors associated with the Great Ballcourt and Temple of the Jaguars, as well as with the plaza in front of the Templo Mayor (Barrera et al. 2012; López Luján and González López 2014). In the Upper Temple of the Jaguars, the highest point between the Temple of the Warriors and the Great Ballcourt, numerous warriors appear in what have been widely considered as scenes of battle and quite probably particular historical events. Many individuals dressed as the Feathered

Serpent are also found on this western side of the axis, as well as a number of images of an individual in a solar disk, who, contrary to some popular interpretations as a historical individual (Miller 1977), we believe is the sun god, portrayed at Chichen Itza with *cuauhxicalli* vessels filled with sacrificial hearts (Taube 1994:229, Figure 24; see also Kowalski 2007:211; Ringle 2009, 2017; Schele and Freidel 1990:393; Figure 1.13). According to Aztec accounts, the origin of heart sacrifice began at Teotihuacan following the fiery immolation of the humble Nanahuatzin (Taube 2000a; see also Boone 2000a). For the newly born sun to move and follow its path, all the gods at Teotihuacan sacrificed themselves. This also relates to Late Postclassic fire drilling as a dedicatory event, which is well documented for Late Postclassic Central Mexico (Taube 2000a, 2004b; see also Klein, this volume); fire drilling being an activity prominently portrayed at Chichen Itza (Eberl 2006). The Aztec practice of sacrificing warriors through heart extraction seems to be present at Chichen Itza in very similar form, and most likely can be traced to Teotihuacan itself.

That Flower World was a, if not the central theme at Chichen Itza, is corroborated by other data outside of the Great Terrace. Annabeth Headrick (2018; see also Taube 2004a) has recently interpreted the Osario as a representation of Flower Mountain and given the strikingly similar iconographic programs with the Initial Series Group, we are in complete agreement. Castillo Viejo and the nearby Initial Series Group portray vivid examples of paradise with carved flowers, vines, beautiful birds, and other precious objects (Figure 1.14). Recent investigations into the Initial Series Group (Taube et al. 2020) reveal scenes of music, dance, wealth, beauty, and possible cacao cultivation. In many ways, the elaborate floral imagery with its sinewy vines and cacao pods recall the art of Cotzumalhuapa on the south Pacific coast of Guatemala which Oswaldo Chinchilla (2015, this volume) has recently argued is part of the elaborate Flower World complex. Importantly, the Initial Series Group is not alone in having such iconography. While the majority of the larger architectural groups away from the Great Terrace have yet to be systematically investigated, most of those that have been mapped have relief carvings in surface contexts (José Osorio León, personal communication 2019; Stanton et al., 2023), many of which have been anecdotally related to themes such as floral imagery. Despite the lack of systematic investigation of these contexts, we argue that the extensive distribution of such art shows more similarity with Teotihuacan, where even the most humble apartment complexes had simple murals (de la Fuente 1995a), than with Classic period Maya sites in that it is apparent that wealthier corporate groups not only had the means with which to reproduce such art (and art very much in the state style from what we can appreciate of it so far), but the approval of the governing body of the city to do so as well.

Returning to the arrangement of architecture on the Great Terrace of Chichen Itza, from the Temple of the Warriors to the Great Ballcourt and including the Venus, Tzompantli, and Eagle and Jaguar platforms, it is also very similar to

<sup>10</sup> The only such mirror found outside of the Great Terrace that we know of was found in a deposit filling up a *chultun* at the Initial Series Group (José Osorio, personal communication 2019; Marengo Camacho et al., this volume). This deposit is late in the use of the group, but it is also a place with clear reference to an east-west axis associated with the warrior cult (Taube et al. 2020). Pyrite and turquoise mirrors were also found under a Chac Mool associated with the Palacio Quemado at Tula and fragments of and even whole examples of pyrite mirrors have been reported from the tunnels underneath the Feathered Serpent Pyramid (Gómez Chávez 2017) and the Pyramid of the Sun (Heyden 1973) at Teotihuacan.



Figure 1.12: A mural fragment from the Temple of the Warriors depicting a scene of human heart sacrifice, with the victim on a sacrificial stone (taken from Morris et al. 1931: Plate 145; courtesy of the Carnegie Institution for Science). The victim appears to be the sun god with jade beads in his yellow hair.



**Figure 1.13:** Photo of the sun god in a solar disk from the restored murals in the Upper Temple of the Jaguars (photo by Travis Stanton); color enhanced using Photoshop.



**Figure 1.14:** Photo of a panel recovered from the top of the Temple of the Big Tables showing a male puma with its tail passing by a tree; vines, trees, and floral images being associated with Flower World (photo by Travis Stanton). While jaguars are associated with darkness and the night (e.g., Jaguar God of the Underworld), pumas may have more solar associations and are also found in mural painting along the Avenue of the Dead near the Pyramid of the Sun at Teotihuacan, as well as the pumas going up the temple itself; the pumas being associated with the sun by Sugiyama (2016). The Temple of the Big Tables is just north of the Temple of the Warriors and also faces the Great Ballcourt. Interestingly, the pumas in these sculptures face bundled darts, darts being a metaphor for the first rays of the sun, which would have risen behind the Temple of the Big Tables just as it did the Temple of the Warriors.

the layout of the ceremonial precinct of Tenochtitlan with the Temple Mayor taking the place of the Temple of the Warriors; as mentioned, we believe that these similarities have to do with a focus on the path of sun (see Matos Moctezuma 2009). Besides being on the eastern side of the plazas, both of these structures have trapezoidal sacrificial stones that would have been used to extract the hearts of warriors to engender the sun's movement at dawn, rising from the underworld; both structures also have reclining Chac Mool figures also used for human heart sacrifice. On the 1524 Nuremburg map of Tenochtitlan the sun is clearly shown in an important alignment rising between the two temples on the Templo Mayor (Mundy 1998:18). Similarly, on Page 1 of the Codex Fejérváry-Mayer, the rising sun is found on the upper portion of the cosmic map, up being east in Indigenous thought. This is the same position as the Templo Mayor and in the Fejérváry-Mayer the sun appears to be rising along the centerline of a temple.

For the Aztec, the Tzitzimime or death goddesses of darkness and the night and underworld are found opposite the sun in the west, waiting, as Mundy (1998:22; see also Turner and Kristan-Graham, this volume) puts it, "to devour the sun (see also Taube 1993)." This would place the Tzitzimime in the place of the ballcourt at Tenochtitlan, exactly where the Great Ballcourt is in the Great Terrace layout at Chichen Itza and Ballcourt 2 is located at Tula. The ballgame appears to be essential to this narrative of the

sun, as the place of the setting sun. While the east is linked to maleness and heat, the west appears to be associated with a female aspect, cold, water, and death (see Alcina Franch 1997, 1999); the west being the place that the sun entered the underworld. At Chichen Itza, female skeletal goddesses are also associated with the Lower Temple of the Jaguars (Figure 1.15), suggesting that this association predates the Aztec. Ballcourts were certainly associated with water and springs being entrances to the underworld, hinting at the fact that this potential association with the sun setting into the underworld should be given more serious consideration (Taube 2018a). That the Great Ballcourt was indeed flooded is attested by the multiple large drains located around its edges (Figure 1.16) and we would not be surprised if the entire Great Terrace was intentionally flooded during heavy rain on occasion with massive beams at its major entrances and exits. Finally, the position of the Tzompantli and warrior imagery at Tenochtitlan (e.g., López Luján and González López 2014) has strong parallels with Chichen Itza, indicating that at both cities, just like the placement of Xiuhtecuhtli as a Toltec warrior in the center of Page 1 of the Codex Fejérváry-Mayer, the warrior took center stage in the narrative of the sun's journey.

We might suspect that the Aztec were inspired by this solar architectural arrangement at Tula instead of Chichen Itza as both Chichen Itza and Tula Grande (and perhaps Tula Chico [Mastache and Cobean 1989:64, 2000, 2006; Matos Moctezuma 1974]) have similar plans (see also Acosta 1956–1957; Cobean 1978:55; Coe 1962; Lombardo de Ruiz 1973; Nicholson 1971a); Tula Pyramid C (whose form has been notably compared to the Pyramid of the Sun at Teotihuacan by Healan [2012:60; see also Mastache and Cobean 2000; Mastache et al. 2002:94]) substituting for the Temple of the Warriors (platforms roughly analogous to the Venus and Eagles and Jaguars platforms at Chichen,<sup>11</sup> as well as a *tzompantli* are also found at Tula).<sup>12</sup> Both Tula

and Chichen also have Chac Mool figures, which occur at the Templo Mayor. Yet, we believe that certain elements found at Tenochtitlan might have come directly from Chichen Itza rather than Tula. In particular, we feel that the many detailed accounts of the travails of Quetzalcoatl at Tula and his subsequent journey to the red lands (Tlapallan) to the east are significant. Based on colonial accounts in Sahagún (1950–1982:I:69–70) and Chimalpain (1991:157), Quetzalcoatl was summoned by the sun and went to Tlapallan, the city of the sun (Taube et al. 2020). In several publications, Taube (1992a, 1994, 2015) has noted that the Central Mexican sun god, Tonatiuh, directly derives from this Early Postclassic sun deity at Chichen Itza as a deified version of a Classic Maya king and these early colonial accounts may refer to this same legendary solar god summoning Quetzalcoatl to the “city of the sun,” which in our opinion, may be Chichen Itza. In terms of orientation, Tula and Chichen Itza are on extremely similar latitudes, with Chichen Itza being only slightly north of Tula. While a certain amount of caution is required when using oral histories, one of the things that made Chichen Itza truly unique was that it had an ideology centered around the sun thus giving a new level of credence to these colonial accounts (Coltman 2019, 2021a).

Fundamentally, we think that the archetype for this plan can be traced back to Teotihuacan, specifically to the Ciudadela (see López Luján and López Austin 2011:76 for a comparison of the Ciudadela with central Tenochtitlan). The Feathered Serpent Pyramid, located in the east is clearly associated with warfare and warriors, just as the Temple of the Warriors and the Templo Mayor. The sacrificial burial of warriors underneath the temple (Sugiyama 1989, 2005), the presence of the War Serpent on the façade (Taube 1992a; also found in association

<sup>11</sup> According to Sahagún, the Aztec believed that the eagles and jaguars as warriors first risked their lives for the movement of the sun across the sky at Teotihuacan (Boone 2000a:373). The placement of Eagle and Jaguars platform at the Great Terrace at Chichen (and its potential analog at Tula), right along the east-west axis between the Temple of the Warriors and the Temple of the Jaguars most likely references the role of warriors in the sun's celestial journey.

<sup>12</sup> Many of the elements of this plan can be found at some other sites as well. In some cases, these elements are limited, such as the fact that the Pyramid of the Plumed Serpents at Xochicalco (Hirth 1989), which coincidentally means ‘in the house of flowers’ in Nahuatl, faces east in a similar orientation as the temples mentioned for Chichen Itza, Tenochtitlan, and Tula; the same can be said for the main pyramid in the monumental group at Xochitecatl, which has an important Epiclassic component as part of greater Cacaxtla and whose name coincidentally roughly means ‘citizen of the place of flowers’ and the principal temple at Teotenango (Piña Chan 2000). Other sites, however, have more of these elements. For example, La Laguna, a Preclassic site with an important Early Classic Teotihuacan affiliated component argued to be located along a critical trade route between the highlands and the Gulf Coast lowlands (Carballo 2016), has a strikingly similar plan with a ballcourt located on the western site of a plaza, opposite the main temple. Zaculeu, known as an important Late Postclassic site in the Maya highlands, but with important Early Classic (Atzlan Phase) and Early Postclassic (Qanakyak Phase) occupations, has several elements that resemble this plan. In particular, the arrangement from Structure 4, located on the east of the central axis of the monumental zone, to the ballcourt represented by

Structures 22 and 23, has the same orientation and relative arrangement of the Temple of the Warriors to Great Ballcourt plan at Chichen Itza (Trik 1953a). Not only are there several platforms and temples between the extremes of this arrangement at Zaculeu, but there is also causeway that extends to the west from Structure 4 connecting several of these buildings. There is clear evidence of important Early Postclassic (as well as Early Classic) construction along this axis that we believe contemporary with the Sotuta Complex at Chichen Itza and numerous examples of Tohil Plumbate vessels have been recovered, as well as cremations and ossuaries that bespeak of mortuary practices related to the Flower World complex as reported from Chichen Itza (Taube et al. 2020). Interestingly, Structure 1 at Zaculeu, located to the north of Plaza 2 where the axis just discussed is situated, has an important Atzlan Phase construction that shows some important similarities with the Pyramid of the Sun at Teotihuacan. In addition to having a similar orientation to the east, this structure has an artificial cave ending in an Early Classic tomb underneath it as well as an arrangement of parallel stairways that is reminiscent of the Pyramid of the Sun. Importantly, an upright stone sculpture of Huehuetotl was found in a burial underneath the upper temple showing some parallels with the large Huehuetotl sculpture recovered in association with the Pyramid of the Sun (Fash et al. 2009) and the numerous smaller Huehuetotl sculptures found in offerings at the Templo Mayor (López Luján 1994); coincidentally, Zaculeu is located next to Huehuetenango. This burial has been tentatively dated to the Late Classic Chinal Phase (Trik 1953b:84; Woodbury 1953:218), but given the stratigraphic placement could also date to the Early Postclassic. Regardless, this sculpture is one of the only portrayals of Huehuetotl between the Teotihuacan and Aztec examples that we know of. Given the importance of fire and fire drilling to this whole Flower World complex, it is quite surprising to see a relative absence of images of Huehuetotl at sites like Tula and Chichen Itza.



**Figure 1.15:** Photo of an image of Goddess O on a pilaster from the Lower Temple of the Jaguars (photo by Travis Stanton).



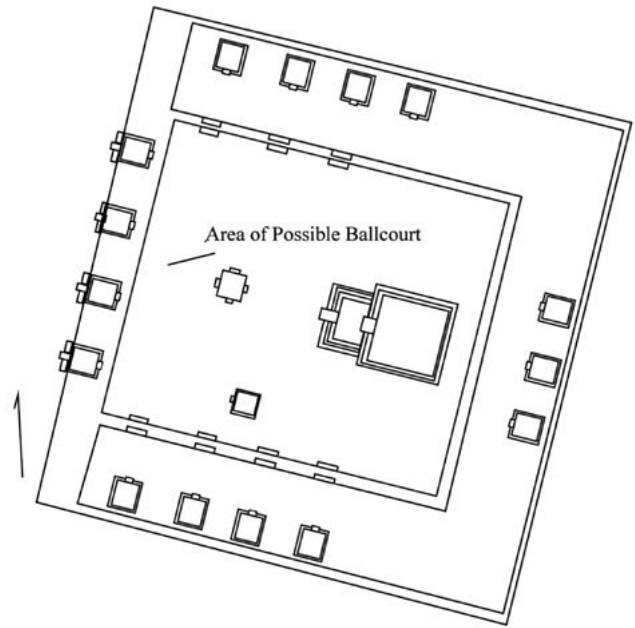
**Figure 1.16:** Drain at the Great Ballcourt (photo by Travis Stanton).

with the Temple of the Warriors),<sup>13</sup> and the location of production of theater censers associated with warriors within the Ciudadela (see Berlo 1984; Múnera Bermudez 1985; Taube 2000a) all attest to this association. The theater censers in particular show a deep connection to the Flower World complex. In addition to Teotihuacan, theatre censers have also been found in the cacao rich region of Escuintla, Guatemala where Teotihuacan ‘influence’ was palpable during the Early Classic (Bove 1991, 2002a; Bove and Medrano Busta 2003; Chinchilla Mazariegos 2019; García-Des Lauriers 2012, 2020; Hellmuth 1975, 1978). Butterflies appear widely on these Teotihuacan ‘theatre censers’ which portray these insects as emerging out of fiery funerary bundles (Taube 2000a). As with a number of other researchers (Berlo 1983; Taube 2000a), Headrick (2003a) sees the origin of this butterfly warrior complex at Teotihuacan, which we fully concur. We see no evidence of the merging of a warrior cult with Flower World prior to the rise of Teotihuacan. And while the Feathered Serpent fits prominently into this complex, and is more obvious in the surviving visual culture as can be appreciated by the preserved stone serpent heads on the Feathered Serpent Pyramid and later buildings such as the Castillo at Chichen Itza, we believe that the central elements revolve more around the sun and paradise than they do the Feathered Serpent.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Along with some of the earliest portrayals of the quetzal-plumed serpent later known as Quetzalcoatl to the Aztec, all sides of this pyramid also featured a platelet helmet of a being that Taube (1992a) identified and labeled as the “War Serpent.” Although the identity of this image from the Feathered Serpent Pyramid continues to be a subject of debate, it was explicitly referred to in Classic Maya texts as a serpent, and more specifically Waxaklahun Ubah Chan, meaning 18 its heads of the serpent (Freidel et al. 1993:308–312). It is probably no coincidence that in reconstructions of the principal façade on the western side of the structure there are 18 heads of this being flanking each side of the stairway. Following his initial discussion of the War Serpent and the Feathered Serpent Pyramid, Taube (2004a, 2005a, 2006) subsequently noted that the Feathered Serpents are probably emerging out of massive open blossoms, making this a preeminent Flower Mountain. In support, a ceramic *sello* or seal attributed to Teotihuacan features the plumed serpent emerging from an explicit flower (Enciso 1953).

<sup>14</sup> This is not to say that places like Chichen Itza were not places of investiture as argued by Ringle (2004, 2017; Ringle et al. 1998). Functioning like other “Tollan”-like cities such as Postclassic Cholula

Militaristic themes aside, the link to solar movement at the Ciudadela comes from various sources. First, as Laporte (1992:327) first noted, the Feathered Serpent Temple appears to form part of an E-Group complex, an architectural form associated with solar movement in the eastern lowlands of Mesoamerica (in particular the Maya area) as early as the Middle Preclassic period (Freidel et al. 2017). In Laporte's reading of the Ciudadela, the Feathered Serpent Temple takes the place of a radial structure in the E-Group plan (Figure 1.17). To the east of this temple are three smaller temples in linear arrangement much like known Maya examples of E-Groups. Taube (2004a, 2020:156) has made the argument that the Feathered Serpent Temple is a prime example of Flower Mountain with the serpents on the façade emerging from open blossoms (see also Taube and Stanton, in prep). Given more recent evidence of a strong Maya presence at Teotihuacan (Sugiyama et al. 2016, 2020), the question of the relationship between the Feathered Serpent Pyramid and Maya E-Groups should be revisited. Yet even if we can link the Feathered Serpent Temple to E-Groups, there is definitely a difference between their ideological associations, in particular the merging of ideas of Flower World with the warrior cult, which we argue was an innovation at Teotihuacan and adopted by the people of Chichen Itza.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, the Classic Maya linked their



**Figure 1.17: Line drawing of the Ciudadela at Teotihuacan (drawing by Travis Stanton).**

and earlier Teotihuacan (Fash et al. 2009), Chichen Itza was most likely a center where such activities took place. While we do not agree that the figure illustrated by Ringle (2004: Figure 21a) from the north vault of the North Temple of the Great Ballcourt at Chichen Itza is clear evidence of nose piercing (e.g., the object in the hand of the individual looks more like an earflare than a nose-bead, this individual is surrounded by several people holding bowls, and there is no specialist actually piercing the nose as in the Folio 52 image of the Codex Nuttall), we think it likely that such piercing did occur at Chichen Itza. In fact, Carmack (1968) indicates that the people of the far southern reaches of the Maya area looked to Chichen Itza for governmental legitimation and it likely served as a place where rituals of investiture took place. The Feathered Serpent certainly fits prominently in activities related to investiture and kingship, but our point is that the central element of the broader state religion revolved around the sun.

<sup>15</sup> Although we emphasize that the Feathered Serpent Temple would have been conceptualized very differently than Maya E-Groups given its association with the warrior cult at Teotihuacan, there could be a link between this prominent building at Teotihuacan and Maya E-Groups concerning Flower World. The location of the Late Preclassic San Bartolo murals is in the plaza of a complex associated with a buried E-Group, an architectural complex that is famous for its radial western temple (Freidel et al. 2017), radial structures looking much like a floral symbol from the air. On the north wall of the mural building we see a representation of Flower Mountain with a Feathered Serpent emanating from its mouth, headed towards the east, away from the radial structure of the group (Saturno et al. 2005) in much the same way as the raised *sascab* road mentioned earlier for the Yaxuna E-Group does (Collins 2018). The Sub-5 version of the radial structure actually has modeled stucco Feathered Serpents (much like those reported for Uaxactun Temple E-VII-Sub [Ricketson and Ricketson 1937]) appearing to descend the building on the sides of the staircases (Saturno et al. 2005:23, 2017), not much different in some ways to the Feathered Serpents descending both the Osario and the Castillo, prominent radial structures at Chichen that both have Witz heads associated with them. Of further interest, the northern causeway at the Great Terrace at Chichen Itza (in line with the Castillo) ends with two monumental Feathered Serpent heads at the Sacred Cenote. Given that this causeway was likely a procession route, we can also make another comparison to the north wall mural at San Bartolo in the sense that the several figures stand on the back of the Feathered Serpent emanating from Flower Mountain. While we believe that the cultural context (especially in light of the warrior cult) is very different between Chichen Itza and San Bartolo, there are some interesting linkages between the two sites in terms of Flower World (which in turn has associations with the Temple of the Feathered Serpent), even

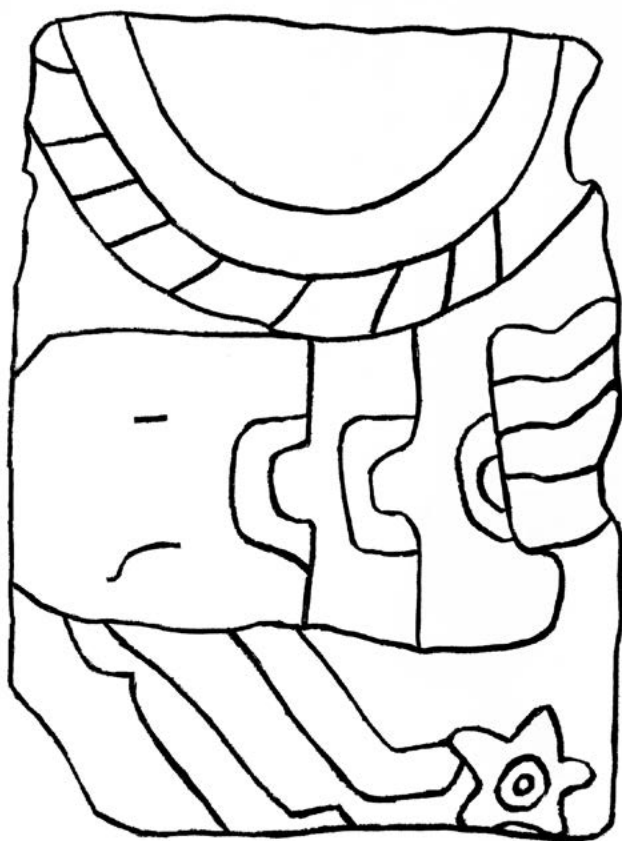
sun deity to warfare, and in many respects he served as their god of war and sacrifice (Taube 2009a). Yet Maya E-Groups do not show evidence of this association.

Second, the Aztec remembered the Feathered Serpent Pyramid as associated with the sun, where it is depicted on the San Francisco Mazapan map of Teotihuacan (Arreola 1922). Dated to 1560, this map clearly shows a pyramid with a “European-style sun disk, complete with rays and frontal face.” (Boone 2000a:373) Arreola (1922:555; English translation by Boone 2000a:373) translated the associated Nahuatl text as “place of burials in honor of the sun” suggesting that Late Postclassic peoples may have not only known about the sacrificed warriors underneath the pyramid (Sugiyama 1989), but that they remembered this structure as a place associated with a celestial solar paradise where the souls of warriors who died in battle reside in the afterlife.<sup>16</sup>

Third, while the lack of a clearly identifiable sun god at Teotihuacan might be cause for some degree of skepticism in the idea that the sun and a solar flowery paradise were central elements in Teotihuacan ideology, a monument found in a secondary context (Figure 1.18), but thought to

more interesting given the solar associations at the Great Terrace and the solar associations with E-Groups (see Freidel et al. 2017; Quintal Suaste and Rodríguez Barrales 2006; Ruppert 1940). A similar Witz head graced the top of the Sotuta period radial pyramid at Ikil (Yucatan), but only a few fragments of the mosaic were recorded, none of which were elements of the headband (Robles Salmerón et al. 2011).

<sup>16</sup> Based on the carved bone found in Burial 116 at Tikal, Fash and his colleagues (2009:219, 222; see also Taube 2004a) make the claim that the Nikte' Witz (Flower Mountain) location mentioned on the bone represents a place at Teotihuacan. If this is true, the Feathered Serpent Temple would be the logical place, although we do not see much evidence that this reference names a place outside of Tikal itself.



**Figure 1.18:** Line drawing of a monument fragment found in a secondary context, but thought to be from the pre-temple of the Feathered Serpent Temple at Teotihuacan. This fragment has a sun disk carried on back of the plumed serpent as the Road of Flowers (drawn by Travis Stanton from photo in Gazzola 2017:44).

be from the pre-temple of the Feathered Serpent Temple, has a sun disk carried on back of the plumed serpent as the Road of Flowers (Gazzola 2017:44). Similar to much later depictions of solar disks on the backs of Feathered Serpents (Coltman 2009; Taube 2015), this monument indicates that the idea of the Feathered Serpent as the vehicle of the sun was present at Teotihuacan. We believe that the fact that this monument was found in association with the Feathered Serpent Pyramid itself provides much more concrete evidence to not only understand it as a solar monument, but as a representation of Flower Mountain (Taube 2004a; Taube and Stanton, in prep).

Exploring this lack of an explicitly depicted sun god at Teotihuacan further, while there are no clear images of solar deities at Teotihuacan, this does not necessarily mean the sun and a solar paradise were not central elements to the ideology (see Fash et al. 2009, who argue that the Pyramid of the Sun was also closely associated with solar rituals and investiture).<sup>17</sup> The absence of such iconography might

be a result of broader traditions of visualization and a link between rulership and the solar deity. An interesting case is that of Ukit Kan Le'k Tok' of Ek' Balam who, much in the tradition of Classic Maya kings, is portrayed as the maize god on his painted tomb capstone (ca. A.D. 801).<sup>18</sup> Yet on Stela 1 (A.D. 840) he is later apotheosized as the sun god (Taube 2015; Figure 1.19). We suggest that shift in representation during the early ninth century A.D. may be reflective of the gradual adoption of a Teotihuacan-inspired model moving into the time of the collapse; just as Chichen Itza is being founded as an important city. If, perhaps, Teotihuacan rulers were associated with a sun deity, the Maya of the later Classic period may have begun to shift to this association as they adopted more Central Mexican political structures. This might help to explain the lack of a sun deity at Teotihuacan as, again, there appears to have been an explicit tradition of not depicting rulers in Central Mexico going back well into the Preclassic period. Although we admit that this idea is speculative, we do believe that the Feathered Serpent Pyramid at Teotihuacan has a strong solar component, and that the lack of a clear solar deity in the visual culture of the city needs to be explained somehow (see also Fash et al. 2009).

Interestingly, we see numerous figures in solar disks at Chichen Itza, which we have interpreted as a solar deity (Figure 1.20). Yet perhaps some of these images could be interpreted as a ruler of Chichen Itza as well, given the Maya penchant for depicting people in power, sometimes dressed as supernaturals.<sup>19</sup> The most prominent figure in the hieroglyphic texts at the site is K'ahk'upakal K'awiil (Kelley 1968; Krochock 1998; Ringle 1990), which translates to Fire is the Shield of K'awiil (Grube and Krochock 2007:168–169); a fiery shield being an apt description of the sun, especially the sun whose abode is the place where fallen warriors reside. Of note, when we do see kings installed with Teotihuacan symbolism in the Maya lowlands in the Early Classic we often see them associated with solar symbolism. K'inich Yax K'uk

Great Terrace including the Castillo-Sub and the Temple of the Warriors at Chichen Itza (Erosa Peniche 1947; Morris et al. 1931), as well as the bountiful references to fire drilling in the art and epigraphy of the site (Krochock 1998), suggest not only an important association to fire, but potentially to the Huehuetotl-Xiuhcoatl complex from Central Mexico; turquoise being inextricably related to Xiuhcoatl, “the mother and father of all deities who resided at the centre of the universe” (Olivier and López Luján 2009:86) and Xiuhcoatl the War Serpent, which Taube has argued is represented by the commonly depicted figures in the bottom registers of the carved warrior columns at the Temple of the Warriors (see Taube 2000a, 2012).

<sup>18</sup> This king is an interesting case as he appears to have been installed on the throne by Chak Jutuwan Chan Ek', who comes from the east. Ringle and his colleagues (2021) liken this situation to the installation of a king by Teotihuacan related individuals at Tikal in the fourth century A.D. Esparza Olguín (2016) suggests that Ukit Kan Le'k Tok' had familial ties to the Coba dynasty to the east. Given the similarity in style of the monuments between Ek' Balam and Coba, that the last monument at Coba has a date of A.D. 778, and that a structure very similar to Str. 1 at Ek' Balam at the site of Kauan along the Coba-Yaxuna causeway not far from where one would turn to head up to Ek' Balam (see Stanton et al. 2020), we suggest that Ukit Kan Le'k Tok' might be originated from a failing Coba dynasty regardless of the origin of Chak Jutuwan Chan Ek'.

<sup>19</sup> Lincoln (1994) argues that both Ka'k'u Pakal and K'uk'ulkan are titles rather than the names of individuals.

<sup>17</sup> There is also a clear association with fire at the Pyramid of the Sun (Fash et al. 2009; see also von Winning 1979). The link to fire and time is evident in the presence of a large Huehuetotl figure, as well as sculptures showing the twisted cords of the new fire; Huehuetotl figures being the most frequently found images in the Templo Mayor offerings as well. The presence of turquoise solar disks at prominent buildings of the



**Figure 1.19: Uk'it Kan Le'k Tok' as sun deity with centipede lance and shield in solar disk, detail of Ek' Balam Stela 1 (drawing by Karl Taube).**

Mo' at Copan and Sihyaj Chan K'awiil at Tikal are good examples of solar imagery being introduced with Maya rulers affiliated with Teotihuacano symbolism. Also of note, K'inich Yax K'uk Mo' is not only depicted as a sun god, but also as a fire god at Copan and is shown passing the very central Mexican concept of the 'New Fire' to his heirs on Altar Q (Taube 2004b); dated less than a century before the earliest hieroglyphic dates at Chichen Itza (A.D. 776). In any event, there appears to be a link between solar deities and Maya rulers apotheosized as solar gods in contexts that show extensive influence from Central Mexico, a fact that may better inform us of the prominent sun disk figures and K'ahk'upakal K'awiil at Chichen Itza.

Returning to the solar theme of the Ciudadela, we do not only believe that this architectural complex commemorated the sun's journey through the sky, but also its descent into the watery underworld, where it traversed an otherworldly nightscape to then be reborn the next morning. Recently, Julie Gazzola (2017:43–44; Gómez Chávez and Gazzola 2015) has reported evidence for a large ballcourt on the western side of the Ciudadela, hidden beneath the last floor surface; which, importantly, floods during the rainy season, creating a primordial sea within the confines of the complex. If proven to be a ballcourt, this find would provide a very strong link to the plans at Chichen Itza, Tenochtitlan, and Tula. Of equal interest is the finding of a spectacular tunnel along the east-west axis of the Ciudadela (Gómez Chávez 2017). Leading from the direction of the possible ballcourt to its terminus in the center of the Pyramid of the Feathered Serpent, this tunnel represents the underworld, that in the words of Gómez Chávez (2017:48) is, "where, just as on earth, there were rivers, lake, mountains, and a celestial vault and night sun that crossed its

winding path from sunset to sunrise." Among the Chorti, this idea of the night sun is still present in contemporary legend:

"The old people used to tell that the world here we live, they said that under the – world which we live on, farther down, they say that there is just water. And they say that under the – water, that there is another – place [...] They say that when the sun sets here, and the night grows dark, they say that in that place [...] there it is growing light, and things are becoming visible. And here it is dark. And they say that when the sun passes through that place, over the heads of those men, that it – is stronger – its heat." (Fought 1972:371)

A similar set of ideas has been recorded for the Lacandon Maya, who believe that the sun passes through a cave near San Quintín, accompanied by Biram and Kiyum, during the night (Villa Rojas 1968:115; see also Bonor Villarejo 1992:123). Soustelle (1961:22) reports that the Lacandon also have an underworld deity named Usukum or Sukunyum who, much like the Feathered Serpent, carries the sun on its back towards the east.

While the excavations and analyses of the overwhelming amount of materials have still to be completed, much of the material culture in the tunnel underneath the Feathered Serpent Pyramid appears to relate to the watery underworld (e.g., shell) and the sun (e.g., pyrite and slate mirrors) (Gómez Chávez 2017:50; see also Taube [2000a] for the solar associations of the disks and Olivier [2014] for the use of different materials for disk pectorals in relation to Tonatiuh and the night sun). Impressively, part of the south antechamber was covered by a powder mix of pyrite, hematite, and magnetite that in torchlight would have made it look like the night sky (Gómez Chávez 2017:51–52). We suggest that, if the possible ballcourt can be confirmed, the tunnel represents the road of the night sun after it entered the waters of the underworld at the ballcourt, similar to the arrangement at Chichen Itza. At the end of the tunnel there was a sumptuous offering surrounding several greenstone figures that leaned back to gaze at the spot the sun would rise out of the underworld, ascending to the top of the Feathered Serpent Pyramid to be born again through the sacrifice and work of warriors.<sup>20</sup> That the Maya were familiar with this foreign take on old ideas during the Classic period is clear. For example, at El Diablo, Guatemala, an Early Classic temple, aligned to a prominent cave to the east that the sun rises over at the summer solstice, contained a tomb with Teotihuacanoid ceramics, severed heads facing the direction of the rising sun, and iconographic depictions of the Jaguar God of the Underworld (Houston et al. 2015; Newman et al. 2015), thought to be the embodiment of the Maya night sun (Stuart 1998a:408) and prominently found on several Witz masks at Chichen Itza itself.

<sup>20</sup> Bonor Villarejo (1992:124–125) also makes the link between the sun's underworld journey and the ballcourt by making reference to parallel stories in the Popol Vuh (Tedlock 1985) and the Relaciones de Michoacán (Corona Nuñez 1956). Both stories link ascension of the sun to acts of death occurring in an underworld ballcourt.



**Figure 1.20: Wooden lintel from the Upper Temple of the Jaguars depicting the sun god (right) in a solar disk facing a warrior with a *cuauhxicalli* filled with hearts between them (photo by Travis Stanton).**

What is clear is that there are architectural similarities between Chichen Itza, Tula, and Tenochtitlan and that there are fundamental links among the ideological strategies employed at each site that may be based upon a model originating at Teotihuacan. While each society employed these strategies in their own unique way, responding to the historical circumstances in which they were situated through time and across space, at Chichen Itza in particular it is clear that they represent a fundamental break with the strategies employed by Classic period societies such as those found at Tikal, Copan, Palenque, and Calakmul. This is not to say that Classic period Maya ideologies were absent at Chichen. In fact, we, along with others (e.g., Schele and Mathews 1998; see also Braswell, this volume), argue that there is much evidence to suggest that central Classic Maya ideas were part of the fabric of society at Chichen and that even some parts of the site were geared towards replicating more traditional practices, such as the Monjas and some other parts of ‘Old Chichen.’ For example, the Caracol features four massive facades of the Maya maize god seated atop Witz heads (Ruppert 1935; Figure 1.21), probably alluding to ancient Maya concepts of mountains and maize to the four directions (Taube and Tsukamoto, this volume). The differences between these two parts of the site were more likely functional than chronological in our opinion. However, the presence of new ideological elements focused on the warrior rather than a king. In the next section we will outline a political/economic model that we believe could explain these new elements. This is a model very similar to that employed by the Aztecs, but that we suggest ultimately had its origins at Teotihuacan.

### **Politics, Economics, and the Appeal of Social Mobility**

It is clear that something major happened at the end of the ninth century that during the thick of the Classic Maya ‘collapse’ disrupted local political systems. At this time sites such as Ceibal and Uxmal were still employing a visual hierarchy based upon Classic Maya kings, but the

visual culture surrounding those kings began to take on a more Central Mexican flavor. As mentioned earlier, we believe that it is the stress and vulnerability of the ‘collapse’ that opened up the possibility for populations to look to other models when things fall apart. We think that the primary model that Maya peoples began to look towards was Early Classic Teotihuacan, where the warrior became central in the visual culture, not the ruler, just as we see at Chichen. Esther Pasztory (1997) once called Teotihuacan “an experiment in living” and over a century of archaeological work at the site has uncovered a cultural tradition which breaks with previous Mesoamerican traditions in innumerable ways. It is clear that Teotihuacan was the largest city in Early Classic Mesoamerica and that it was undoubtedly a multicultural center, including a very strong Maya presence (Manzanilla 2017a, 2017b; Rattray 1984, 1987, 1989, 1990a; Spence 1992; Staines Cicero and Helmke 2017; Sugiyama, this volume; Sugiyama et al. 2016, 2020; Taube 2004a, 2017a). Yet it is clear that Teotihuacan was a tremendously successful economic center that did things in very different ways from its peers and cultural predecessors. We believe that this success, however sustainable it may have been, would have provided ample inspiration for later societies which were undergoing a period of increasing struggle and hardship. It is clear that the Aztec looked towards Teotihuacan for inspiration (Boone 2000a; López Luján 1989), inheriting a tradition of drawing off of Teotihuacan from Early Postclassic societies such as those at Tula and Chichen Itza; effectively remembering or imagining Teotihuacan through an Early Postclassic lens (Taube 2020:157). While we do not believe that the economic and political systems centered at Tenochtitlan were the same as the ones centered at Chichen Itza, Tula, or Teotihuacan, we do think that there are important similarities, demonstrated by the uncanny parallels in material symbolism and ideology. With the Aztec, however, we have the great benefit of accessing historical sources such as Indigenous and Spanish accounts, with which we are able to flush the model out more fully.



Figure 1.21: Witz mask with the head of the maize god at the Caracol, Chichen Itza (photo by Travis Stanton).

The Aztec phenomenon is often described as an empire headed by strong rulers from Itzcoatl to Moctezuma Xocoyotzin (see Berdan et al. 1996). Yet with a few exceptions, Aztec rulers, chosen from a group of very high ranking nobles, are not materially visible in the archaeological record. There are no clear tombs (although they would have been cremated [Chávez Balderas 2007; see also Headrick 2018:212]) and notably few visual representations. While there is a reference to Aztec rulers being named at Chapultepec (McEwan and López Luján 2009), without our knowledge of the post-Conquest historic record it would be near impossible to associate mentions and depictions of specific historical individuals with rulers. In fact, without this record, identifying the presence of strong Aztec rulers would be nearly as challenging as testing for the presence of strong rulers at Teotihuacan, a continuing point of contention for understanding the political structure of this Classic period metropolis (Carballo 2020; Manzanilla 2002a; Nielsen 2014; Paulinyi 2001; Sugiyama 2004), or even more challenging than Chichen Itza, where hieroglyphic texts name specific, albeit nebulous figures (Krochock 1998, 2002; Ringle 1990). While we do not necessarily advocate for an Aztec governmental structure at either Teotihuacan or Chichen Itza, we do not believe that the data argue against such a comparison. We do, however, draw attention to the fact that the lack of clear royal tombs and visual culture associated with rulership is shared

by all three sites, as well as by Mayapan, a city that has convincing evidence of kingship (Jones 1998:104–105; Ringle 2004:168; Ringle and Bey 2001:273–275).

Yet the Aztec data go far beyond showing us what the upper echelon of Postclassic Central Mexican society was like. There is ample evidence of a complex and stratified system below the level of rulers from *pipiltin* nobles to the *macehualtin* commoners and beyond. Yet what strikes us about the Aztec social structure is the degree of social mobility that seems to have been afforded to some members of the society. Much has been written about the ability of *pochteca* (traders) and *quauhpiptin* (warriors) to advance in Aztec society based on their job performance (Berdan 2014:184–189; Carrasco 2008; Hassig 1988; Hicks 1999; Smith 2003a); able to amass some degree of wealth and prestige beyond their social station at birth. While the Classic period Maya had a hierarchical social system as well, there is little evidence to suggest that these kinds of opportunities for social mobility were regularly available to people of non-elite status. Most of what we know about Classic period Maya social structure comes from various titles named in the hieroglyphic script. In large, these titles appear to have been used by people already born into high status. There were clearly important warriors and merchants in Classic Maya society, but the kind of social mobility described for the Aztec does not appear to have been clearly present.

As discussed above, warriors were tremendously important in Aztec society. They were celebrated in the most sacred precinct of the empire. The sacrificial offerings of warrior hearts sustained the sun and kept the cosmic order intact. The image of the warrior was nothing short of a central element of state ideology. And, in the daily functioning of the empire the warrior was a critical ingredient to the success of the Aztec political and economic system. Not only did warriors extend the influence of Tenochtitlan, coercing adjacent polities into submissive relationships (either through force or intimidation) whereby lucrative tribute was paid to the capital, but they opened up trade routes for Aztec merchants, strengthening the Aztec market economy tremendously.<sup>21</sup> We suggest that such a political and economic system worked so well for the Aztec because, to a substantial degree, there was great incentive for people who might be potentially great warriors to buy in to the system and participate.<sup>22</sup> By utilizing a structure in which successful warriors were rewarded with some degree of prestige and wealth (giving them a measure of social mobility), the Aztecs were able to attract promising warriors to their military forces, thus giving them motivation to succeed. In comparison to other systems whereby non-elite warriors might not have the same degree of potential advancement within the society, warriors in the Aztec system could see the benefit to themselves and were effectively given a stake in the system itself. Further, as Headrick (2003a) has argued, the Aztecs used the ideology of paradise, represented by the butterfly warriors, to further entice them to participate; in dying in battle for the state a warrior's soul would go to a solar realm and transform into beautiful fiery birds and butterflies who sipped the nectar of flowers. The Aztec ruling elite likely understood the importance of the warrior for the success of the system they oversaw, enticing willing participants with tangible gains in life, paradise in the afterlife, and deciding to celebrate the warrior as a central element in the ritual mechanisms of cosmic health and wellbeing, going as far to celebrate the figure of the warrior in practice and visual culture instead of the figure of the ruler, as was done for well over a thousand years among the societies of the eastern lowlands such as the Preclassic Olmec and Classic Maya.

Importantly, warriors were not the only individuals who went to live in a solar paradise after death. In addition to women who died in childbirth, merchants who died on the road were also afforded this distinction, emphasizing the importance of the merchant class to Postclassic Mesoamerican societies.

“... the merchants did not truly die;  
they went to heaven,  
they accompanied the Sun on its course.

Like those who died in battle,  
they say they accompanied the Sun,  
they went to heaven.” (Sahagún 1950–1982:IX:22R)

While merchants were not celebrated in the same public way as warriors, their often dangerous work was recognized as worthy of paradise when the ultimate sacrifice befell them.

### Final Thoughts

This paper has outlined several different modes of thought and ideas, some perhaps a bit more speculative, others more fully developed, that we three authors have been discussing over the past few years. While there is still much to be learned about Teotihuacan, it was without a doubt a unique social experiment in Mesoamerica, one that had tremendous repercussions for societies throughout across Mesoamerica during and after its apex. We believe that there is evidence to suggest that a new kind of social contract was developed at this metropolis around the transition from the Formative to Classic periods. Although Teotihuacan was likely very hierarchical with a governmental structure that could have perhaps included strong rulers as Sugiyama (2004) has proposed, the figure of the ruler, much like in later Aztec society, was minimized, replaced by images of warriors, who we argue were a central element in this new social contract; allowing members of society who participated in warfare and commerce the ability to gain a degree of wealth and prestige. Opening the door to this kind of social mobility, which we believe was difficult if not impossible in Classic period Mesoamerican societies like the Maya, helped Teotihuacan achieve the success it had as an economic and, most likely, political center. In short, we see this as a strategy for offering a stake in the state and its endeavors to critical social actors who sustained the political and economic structure; opening up and controlling trade routes as well as potentially creating tribute relationships through force or fear thereof.<sup>23</sup> These social actors promoted the interests of the state and its major corporate groups while conversely, this political apparatus provided opportunities, that were unknown in Mesoamerica previously, to those actors.

The resulting success of the Teotihuacan system is demonstrated both abroad and at the city itself. Teotihuacan became a true multicultural urban center, perhaps the first city with such diversity of its kind in Mesoamerica, attracting people seeking to benefit from the great economic opportunities with its novel social and economic models; promoting social mobility through economic and military activities in contrast to a more “Olmec inspired model” that emphasized growing class differences through the active prestige building and legitimation practices associated with ‘divine/shamanic’ rulership. Abroad, the widespread evidence for long-debated “Teotihuacan-influence” (e.g., Braswell 2003a) stands testament to the success of the

<sup>21</sup> Although we do urge caution in comparing Aztec state strategies of conquest to those at Chichen Itza, especially in light of the fact that the Aztec link their ideology to Huitzilopochtli, a very foreign deity integrated into this model in the latter part of the Postclassic.

<sup>22</sup> Violence only goes so far in creating and maintaining large state organizations. Creating opportunities for ‘buy-ins’ for people outside of the core state group is an important factor for the success of such sociopolitical phenomena around the world.

<sup>23</sup> These stakeholders would not have just been from Central Mexico, but from various parts of Mesoamerica as evidenced by the multicultural nature of material culture at Teotihuacan.

Teotihuacan model that for several centuries during the Early Classic appears to have dominated the region.

Yet while other regions of Mesoamerica, such as the Maya area, were very familiar with the Teotihuacan system, trading with people from Teotihuacan (e.g., Moholy-Nagy 1999), serving as home to potential enclaves (e.g., García-Des Lauriers 2012; Ortíz Ceballos and Santley 1998; Sanders and Michels 1977; Santley 1989), and perhaps suffering political meddling at the hands of this great Central Mexican city (Freidel et al. 2003; Schele and Freidel 1990; Stuart 2000) and having some of their rulers invested with insignia of their offices there (Fash et al. 2009), local governmental structures do not appear to have changed drastically through their exposure to the new model. The Maya are a good case in point, where dynastic systems with little evidence for social mobility continued into the ninth century A.D., just as the Classic ‘collapse’ entered its apex. It was the various stresses of this period, we believe, that opened opportunities for the Maya (and others across Mesoamerica) to consider other ways of doing things, in particular to consider the attractive Teotihuacan model as an alternative to traditional ways of organizing political and economic structures. This brings us to some of the changes we see in the ninth century that seem to anticipate what happens at Chichen Itza. The shift to a new model appears to have been a process, and did not happen overnight.

As mentioned, the second half of the eighth century saw Teotihuacano ‘revivalism’ at some sites, including at Copan, where it is very clearly depicted on Altar Q. During the first half of the ninth century stelae at Ceibal (more or less contemporary with the early hieroglyphic dates at Chichen Itza) demonstrate a Central Mexican ‘influence’ (see Martin, this volume). At Yaxuna, much closer to Chichen Itza, a platform was constructed just to the south of the North Acropolis that was used for public fiery immolations of individuals (Tiesler et al. 2017), reminiscent of New Fire ceremonies that Fash and his colleagues (2009:213) not only associated with the 52 year cycle, but with the establishment of creation of new political orders. The ceramics associated with this platform are Terminal Classic slate wares, but do not include Sotuta complex materials, indicating a late eighth or more likely early ninth century date. Sun god imagery also appears by the early ninth century, including the aforementioned depiction of Ukit Kan Le’k Tok’ of Ek’ Balam and possibly an image at a relatively contemporary Puuc-style structure at the North Acropolis of Yaxuna (Coltman and Stanton 2022). Teotihuacan ways of doing things were clearly on the minds of some Maya from, at the very least, the eighth century until the crystallization of Chichen Itza as an influential urban center, perhaps in the latter ninth century; in the thick of the ‘collapse’ period.

Why the Classic ‘collapse’ occurred has engendered great debate (Aimers 2007; Culbert 1973; Demarest et al. 2004; Freidel 1985; Sabloff and Andrews 1986; Webster 2002), and many have pointed their fingers as increasing drought events in the Maya area (Douglas et al. 2015; Gill 2000; Hoggarth et al. 2017; Webster et al. 2007; see Cobos Palma

et al. [2014], Hoggarth et al. [2016], Kristan-Graham and Wren [2018:8], and Ringle [2017:133] for implications of climate change and Chichen Itza). While factors other than drought were surely implicated in this process, evidence of a drying period goes beyond the Maya area and other parts of Mesoamerica appear to have suffered drought events (Stahle et al. 2011; see also Goman et al. 2018; Lachniet and Bernal-Uruchurtu 2017; Lund et al. 2018; Winter 1989), indicating that increasing lack of rain is a variable we need to consider with much seriousness. One way to approach this is by giving consideration to the rain cult characterized by the production of hundreds of Tlaloc incensarios as we know from Balankanche cave and the nearby Balamku cave, both of which have further shown the importance of Tlaloc and the rain cult at Chichen (Andrews 1970; Brady et al. 2019). There are probably other caves yet to be discovered that will likely yield similar finds. Is it possible that drought brought upon a major devotion to the rain deity with these incensarios becoming mass produced? An ossuary recovered in a salvage project near the airport at Chichen revealed the bones of at least one hundred sacrificed children in a *sascabera* (Márquez and Schmidt 1984). Given the ethnohistoric and archaeological link between sacrificed children and petitions for rain, it is likely that these sacrifices were meant for that purpose. While climate change may have been just one factor in the rise and fall of places temporally situated at the Classic to Postclassic transition, it appears that rain was very much on the minds of the inhabitant of Chichen Itza at the very least.

In any event, it seems fairly evident that migrations of Nahua speakers from the north intensified at this time, with large-scale migrations reaching places such as Tlaxcala, where local Otomi were displaced (López Corral et al. 2016; see also Testard 2017:171–172), and parts of Veracruz a bit later (Stark 2008), among others. In the Maya area it is clear that the ninth century was a time of great stress and transition; although we are mindful that not all areas of the Maya lowlands responded in the same way over this rather extended period of time. As we have argued, we believe that this period of stress and societal flux opened the door for the Maya to transition from more rigid social systems, as evidenced by the last gasp of dynastic portrayal at Uxmal, to one that more fully embraced the Teotihuacan model, which we believe was reimagined at Chichen Itza and other sites within the Epiclassic tradition across Mesoamerica. As Ringle and his colleagues (1998) have pointed out, Chichen Itza was not an isolated phenomenon, but inextricably linked to places such as Cacaxtla, Xochicalco, and Tula during the end of the Classic period and into the Early Postclassic, although as we have argued, we do not think that it was an adherence to a Feathered Serpent cult that most united these places, but to a version of the solar paradise of Flower World that was merged to a warrior cult similar to that at Teotihuacan and ultimately among the Aztec; the Feathered Serpent being the road on which the sun traveled with his cohort of warriors across the sky.<sup>24</sup> In any event, the

<sup>24</sup> As Velásquez García (2016:57–58) points out, Diego López Cogolludo may have documented the sun god/Feathered Serpent pairing in seventeenth

possibility of important migrations occurring during this should continue to be scrutinized (Thompson 1970; see also Martin 2020).

In the end, we believe that a system similar to the Late Postclassic *pochteca* system functioned at Chichen Itza, one that likely had its origins at Teotihuacan. Linda Manzanilla (2011) has argued that corporate groups (represented by apartment compounds) took it upon themselves to secure access to trade goods by organizing armed caravans, maybe the first iteration of something we could call a *pochteca* system, although we must be careful with the idea that these kinds of systems were the same from Teotihuacan to Aztec times (see also Cheek 1977; Kidder et al. 1946:245–255; Santley 1983, 1989). Given that warriors were key to the functioning of such a system, later societies, such as those at Chichen and Tenochtitlan, adapted the cult of the warrior to their own means, utilizing the ideology of warrior personhood and sacrifice, mixed with ideas of paradise and Flower World, to serve as the central element of the state propaganda (see Headrick 2003a). Warriors created access to trade routes/goods and markets by making local political organizations ‘compliant’ through conquest and fear; gaining the acquiescence of client states rather than their incorporation in any meaningful structural way like state structures akin to the Roman, Inka, or Chinese empires. And, these warriors were celebrated by the Maya in a very different way than during Classic period. Gone were the warriors celebrated in prestige building activities exclusive of elites. The image of the warrior was reimagined. The warrior was now not only a symbol of social mobility, but a supernatural actor that engendered the cosmos. Beyond being a quintessential driver to fulfill the state’s interests, the warrior, through work and sacrifice, was a powerful symbol demonstrating that it was not just the kings and queens who made the cosmos work, but a powerful segment of the “non-elite” that maintained cosmic balance. We believe that this was the model that made Chichen Itza such a successful place, emerging from the throes of the Classic Maya ‘collapse’ as an economic, ideological, and political powerhouse as the city of the sun, the literal eastern paradise of Mesoamerican cosmic geography. Just as Teotihuacan, we believe this city would be remembered as a critical place in Mesoamerican mythic history, not only as a cultural inheritor of the Teotihuacan system, but as an innovator, serving as an inspiration of later Postclassic societies such as the Aztec, especially in its role in developing solar symbolism that would eventually be adopted in Central Mexico (Coltman 2019; Taube

2015).<sup>25</sup> The end of the Classic period and the beginning of the Postclassic represented a tremendous cultural shift across Mesoamerica, and along with Tula, we argue that Chichen was the main fulcrum for this change.

Many of the ideas presented in this paper are not necessarily new. For example, the sharing of the warrior complex and ideas of Flower World from Teotihuacan to the Aztec has been discussed before. Scholars have also discussed the possibility of *pochteca*-like systems extending far back into the Mesoamerican past. And, the legacy of Teotihuacan on later Mesoamerican cultures has been a topic of interest for decades. Yet, we feel that the time is ripe for a new consideration of all of these elements to better understand how the Terminal Classic/Epiclassic/Early Postclassic across Mesoamerica served as a cultural bridge between the potential origins of many of these ideas at Teotihuacan to their reimagining in Late Postclassic societies such as the Aztec; to their continued re-imagination today (Figure 1.22).

### Organization of the Volume

This volume is broken up into six sections. The first emphasizes one of the major theme’s in this volume; remembrance and reinvention of Teotihuacano ways of doing things. Beyond being just a very influential urban center, Teotihuacan was a place of tremendous innovation. After the fall of Teotihuacan as an urban center these innovations continued to have profound impacts across Mesoamerica. In Chapter 2 Sugiyama begins the broader conversation surrounding Teotihuacan by contextualizing current research into Teotihuacan’s contacts with foreign groups from the city itself. She provides a recent view on Teotihuacan as not only the fountainhead of Classic heritage in Mesoamerica, but also a society that embraced, manipulated, and appropriated in order to codify a cosmos and create key symbols. According to Sugiyama, this was not abrupt, but gradual and created out of an amalgamation of ideas from different regions of Mesoamerica. Sugiyama notes that Teotihuacan magnified cosmic materialization, but also institutionalized a pan-Mesoamerican intellectual elite. To support her arguments, Sugiyama brings recent archaeological data from the Moon Pyramid, Sun Pyramid, the Feathered Serpent Pyramid, the tunnel underneath the Pyramid of the Feathered Serpent, and the Plazas of the Columns Complex. Sugiyama sees Teotihuacan as the largest and most enduring representation of the cosmos, the ultimate archetype of a *tollan* where the custodians of ‘high culture’ would continue to contribute to the maintenance of these heritage attributes.

In the following chapter on Coatepec, Headrick examines the political charter originating at Teotihuacan and the paradigm for political power that served as formula for rulers and polities in the subsequent Epiclassic and Postclassic periods. Drawing on data from a number of sites and periods,

century Yucatan, whereby the solar deity and/or deified ancestor (named “Kak vpacat”, possibly Ka’k’upakal) was ringed by fire and was associated with martial activities. Velásquez García (2016:59) further points out that Kakupacat shows up again in the nineteenth century work of Manuel Orozco y Berra who states: “Para la guerra cantaban a Kukulcan: a Kac upacac, mirada de fuego, quien en la guerra llevaba una rodela de fuego con que se abroquelaba [...] Salían a campaña precedidos de un gran estandarte; guerreros principales conducían en hombros a los mismos Kukulcan, Kakupacat (Mirada de fuego) y Chuykak (el que prende fuego)”; further cementing the close relationship between the sun and the Feathered Serpent.

<sup>25</sup> As many scholars have suggested, Chichen Itza could have even been considered a Tollan (Ringle et al. 1998).



**Figure 1.22: Red-colored flowers placed in the water-filled stone basin at the foot of the main temple at Xochitecatl (‘citizen of the place of flowers’) around the time of the Day of the Dead in 2005 (photo by Travis Stanton). This temple, first built in the Formative period, faces west along a similar axis as Templo Mayor, the Ciudadela at Teotihuacan, and the Temple of the Warriors at Chichen Itza and most likely has solar (and ancestral) associations associated with the Flower World complex, a reminder that many of the ideas discussed in this volume continue to be practiced in contemporary forms.**

but focused heavily on Chichen Itza, Headrick recognizes a deep history that survived for over a thousand years that reveal a consistent expression of political authority.

In Chapter 4, Brittenham and Miller turn to the ancient metropolis of Teotihuacan as one of the most influential models for Chichen Itza. The authors propose three different routes for how the legacy of Teotihuacan could have arrived at Chichen Itza. The first route they propose involves the great Maya city states where the *entrada* resonated deeply in the Maya lowlands centuries later. The second route they propose could have come through Epiclassic sites such as Cacaxtla, Xochicalco, and El Tajin, while the third could have been pilgrims from Chichen Itza traveling to Teotihuacan itself. All proposed routes suggest the movements of people and reinforce the idea that Mesoamerica was by no means static. The authors provide an argument for the intellectual exchange taking part in Mesoamerica and provide alternative avenues for thinking about Teotihuacan’s influence on Chichen Itza.

The second section of the volume is centered on one of the major themes of this volume; the importance of Flower Worlds and solar ideology in the changes we see from the Classic to Postclassic period. Flower World is a very ancient concept in Mesoamerica, but there appear to be important changes to how this fundamental complex was conceived by certain societies during the Classic and Postclassic that inform us as to broader ideological views at the transition from the Classic to Postclassic. The ideology

surrounding the Feathered Serpent, as has been pointed out by some scholars (e.g., Ringle et al. 1998), is a critical part of these views. Yet we believe that the conversation needs to be broadened more to consider the Flower Worlds that the Feathered Serpent and the sun, among other deities, were embedded in. In Chapter 5, Mathiowetz looks at the appearance of gold metallurgy and the use of gold-disk pectorals during the Postclassic in central, southern, and northwestern Mesoamerica. Mathiowetz draws interesting connections between the wearing of gold disks by Postclassic Mesoamerican elites and among lower Central American nobles who may have inspired these political legitimization strategies. Mathiowetz gives ethnographic context to his paper by discussing gold-disk pectorals in the Aztatlan region of West Mexico where they were worn by cargo holders within Flower World contexts.

In Chapter 6, Jordan writes on the importance of Tohil Plumbate ceramics, especially in Central and West Mexico, that may be grounded in large part in shared Early Postclassic elite beliefs in one or more eastern paradises associated with the sun, rain, and the ancestral and honored dead. Both Tohil Plumbate and the Flower World/eastern paradises are associated with shimmering and iridescence, materials with similar properties like metal and quetzal feathers, cacao, feasting, flowers, water, and elite burial rites. From the perspective of Tula and West Mexico, Plumbate, by its place of manufacture and association with these related materials and commodities, was quite concretely associated with the east.

Moving on to Chichen Itza specifically, Chinchilla explores the origins of Flower World at Chichen Itza in Chapter 7. According to Chinchilla, much of Chichen Itza's floral iconography denoting Flower World such as sinuous vines, flowers, song or speech scrolls, and cacao has origins on the South Pacific Coast of Guatemala. Indeed, there are many striking similarities in the iconography between the two areas and Chinchilla synthesizes the imagery very well, making a compelling case that Chichen Itza may have been influenced by the art and iconography of Cotzumalhuapa.

Continuing on the theme of the Flower World of Chichen Itza, Coltman discusses some of the specific themes that make Chichen Itza an earthly manifestation of the eastern solar paradise in Chapter 8. Aside from the rich imagery pertaining to flowers, birds, and blossoming vines, Coltman looks at the prominence of the sun god, Feathered Serpent, and warrior cult in relation to paradise and elaborates on how the Flower World of Chichen Itza was a place of preciousness and beauty as well as one of sacrifice.

In Chapter 9, Pohl looks at the heroic sagas of Maya and Mixtec noble lineages through a comparison between the roles of K'uk'ulkan and Ah Kin of Chichen Itza and Lord Four Jaguar and Lord One Death, an oracular priest of the sun god of the Mixteca. Pohl sees direct continuity between Early and Late Postclassic ritualism with its roots being found in the long distance relationships that were initiated by Tula and Chichen Itza. According to Pohl, Tolteca-Chichimeca and Maya ritualism was reconceived through a decentralized organizational strategy during the Late Postclassic that served as a more stable long-term adaptation throughout Oaxaca.

Finally, in Chapter 10, Taube and colleagues provide the first analysis specifically devoted to a Maya Fine-Orange vase excavated at Tula. In this study, the authors give a detailed iconographic analysis of the vase and examine the Maya origins of the Late Postclassic Central Mexican sun god, Tonatiuh. This vase provides excellent evidence of Early Postclassic contact between Central Mexico and Yucatan and should be important in future discussions of Chichen Itza and Tula connections.

The third section of the volume focuses on the eastern side of the traditional narratives of the Early Postclassic in Mesoamerica; the northern Maya lowlands more broadly and Chichen Itza specifically. In Chapter 11, Stuart looks to the epigraphic record at Chichen Itza, which are all architectural texts found at the Casa Colorada, Monjas, and Akab Dzib, among other structures and shrines. Stuart advocates for a rapid and quite intensive "founding" of the city in the early ninth century when the site was transformed through the construction of major monumental architecture. Stuart argues that despite the short time span of these hieroglyphic texts, they provide strong evidence that Chichen Itza was both a culturally and religiously innovative site during its early years before the

construction of so-called "Toltec" monuments associated with the Great Terrace. Stuart provides compelling evidence that the majority of these texts refer to fire rituals and ceremonies dedicated to deities or ancestors.

Turning to the ceramics of Chichen Itza, Jiménez Álvarez and colleagues report on ceramics recently recovered from the Proyecto Chichen Itza in Chapter 12. They present a complementary perspective on the changes in pottery from stratigraphic contexts in several areas of the site. This work advances our understanding of attribute change, moving beyond a reliance on type-variety analysis for the ceramic sequence of the site.

Continuing with the ceramics from the northern Maya lowlands, in Chapter 13 Stanton and Bey argue that the current typological system in place does not adequately organize the Late Classic to Early Postclassic slate wares that form the base of the ceramic complexes at Chichen Itza. They argue that by re-envisioning the slate wares in a ceramic system, some of the difficulties in trying to reconcile traditional ceramic typologies with current data can be resolved. Their work draws off of data from sites outside of Chichen Itza, including Ek' Balam, Kiucic, and Yaxuna.

The focus on the chronology of Yucatan continues in Chapter 14, where Braswell contributes an important paper on chronology at Chichen Itza guided by a single question: "why are Mayanists so hung up on using a single label to describe and essentialize these centuries at Chichen Itza?" Braswell looks to researchers at Tula who have no problem describing earlier Tula Chico as "Epiclassic" and later Tula Grande as "Early Postclassic" and critiques the use of the term Epiclassic to describe Chichen Itza. Braswell notes several problems in trying to push the dates for Chichen Itza too far back in time and argues that patio-gallery complexes represent the earlier phase of monumental construction. For Braswell, researchers should focus on identifying what changes and what stays the same at the site, and then look for explanations for both continuity and transformation.

In Chapter 15, Osorio León and colleagues give a broad summary of the current narrative of Chichen Itza put forward by the INAH research group that has been working at the site for decades. This summary touches on what is currently known about the settlement system, as well as the site chronology and architectural diversity. This chapter also discusses the chronology of the site, a topic repeated in several of the chapters in this section.

New work from the INAH project continuing the pioneering research of Peter Schmidt in the Initial Series Group is presented by Marengo Camacho and colleagues in Chapter 16. In 2019 work at the Initial Series Group commenced after a approximately 15 year hiatus. This chapter describes new excavations undertaken in the patio-gallery associated with the House of the Moon, as well as continued excavations in the House of the Phalli.

However, much of the chapter is dedicated to excavations in the previously unexplored altar in the center of the South Plaza. The initial results of the analysis of human remains associated with this altar are presented and Marengo and her colleagues discuss the implications of the altar in terms of the quadripartite organization of the architecture surrounding the plaza and associated iconography.

In Chapter 17, Cobos continues on the topic of Chichen Itza by examining patio and patio-gallery groups, some of the most important architectural features found throughout the city. He focuses on analyzing the location as well as the chronology of these two types of construction. Cobos also evaluates the ceramic evidence that has been found and how they are associated with these two types of constructions. He notes that the evidence reveals the long temporality of these buildings and their architectural transformations between A.D. 700/800 and 1000/1100. Further, Cobos shows that materiality found in the excavated patios and gallery-patios reveal similarities and indicate participation and interactions between individuals belonging to the same social group.

In Chapter 18, Uriarte takes a look at the murals from the Upper Temple of the Jaguars at Chichen Itza. She publishes the full corpus of Adela Breton's watercolors of the murals and discusses a number of topics, including the relevance of several deities (the maize god, Tlaloc, and God N, among others) to the content of the murals.

Moving to the Sacred Cenote, Miller discusses a single object, Disk H, one of the gold disks recovered from the Sacred Cenote of Chichen Itza. In Chapter 19, this disk depicts an explicit scene of heart sacrifice on sheet metal gold and as Miller notes, represents two artists who probably did not share the same culture. Miller notes that the gold disk, characteristic of southern Central American examples, arrived as blanks and were completed in Yucatan. In other words, while the object itself was foreign, the imagery executed on it was certainly local. Miller discusses both the manufacturing and iconography and concludes that new materials introduce new techniques for executing the imagery.

The last chapter in the section moves to a consideration of the coastal areas of the Yucatan Peninsula. In Chapter 20, Glover and Rissolo give a broad overview of coastal archaeology and provide more detailed insights from their work at Vista Alegre along the northern coast of Quintana Roo. In contrast to some traditional views that have characterized coastal sites as having a considerable impact on maritime trade and cultural change in the Early Postclassic, they rephrase the narrative to suggest that many coastal sites were impactful, and different from their inland peers, from much earlier times. This observation does not lessen their importance during the Early Postclassic, but serves to better contextualize how coastal communities fit into a changing cultural landscape at the turn to the Postclassic.

The fourth section of the volume turns to the western side of traditional narratives of the Early Postclassic in Mesoamerica, which have long been dominated by Tula and the Central Mexican Epiclassic period. In Chapter 21, Turner and Kristan-Graham look at the artistic style and origins of Tula as an Epiclassic-Early Postclassic artistic tradition. Such a study on the art of Tula is long overdue and the authors do a thorough job of discussing the Tula art tradition in relation to Tula's relationships with the other polities that share similarities in monumental art and material culture. As the authors note, some of these sites appear outside the primary domain of Tula and include El Cerrito, Ixtapantongo, Tetmilincan, and Chichen Itza. The authors conclude that what Tula chose to represent in their artistic programs were deliberate statements of identity for both the local and foreign visitor.

In Chapter 22, Nielsen and his colleagues look to the important and often neglected Early Postclassic site of El Cerrito, Queretaro. The majority of their paper looks at the striking similarities in art and architecture shared with both Tula and Chichen Itza. One of the main features the authors point out is the radial pyramid at El Cerrito which strongly resembles the Castillo from Chichen Itza and may speak to a relationship between these two cities. The authors suggest abandoning the idea of "twin Tollans" instead favoring at least three or more players involved in the intense cultural interaction of the Epiclassic to Postclassic periods.

Moving to another site that has been known for some time and relatively neglected Hernández Ibar and Olivier offer a detailed study of the very important rock paintings of Ixtapantongo in Chapter 23. This fascinating Early Postclassic art shows early images of a number of very important Postclassic deities, some of which also show up in the art of Chichen Itza. One of these deities is the sun god in his solar disk. The authors provide a thorough analysis of the art, further demonstrating that the Early Postclassic in Central Mexico has much more to offer beyond some of the more discussed sites such as Tula.

In Chapter 24, Uruñuela and Plunket discuss the Epiclassic decline of Cholula and its revitalization in the Early Postclassic. Cholula has figured in many recent narratives of the transition to the Postclassic, but the archaeology of the site is fairly complex. Building off of previous work, the authors link data from previous archaeological work to their own long-term research to argue for a demographic and political decline of the site near the time of the collapse of Teotihuacan. Later revitalization efforts are discussed in the context of ethnohistoric evidence for migration and conquest by outside groups.

In Chapter 25 López Corral offers a fascinating reconsideration of Olmeca Xicallanca, among other groups from the Puebla-Tlaxcala valley. He combines archaeological and ethnohistoric data to conclude that Olmeca Xicallanca were located in the valley in the Early Postclassic, later than could be possible for their

association with the important site of Cacaxtla. This work calls for fresh reevaluations of what we know about ethnicity and migrations for this oft discussed region.

In the fifth section of the volume, we attempt to move beyond this traditional east-west emphasis on Tula and Chichen Itza by including work on other areas of Mesoamerica and beyond that are not often considered in broader narratives of the Early Postclassic. In Chapter 26, Meehan and colleagues discuss data from the coast of Oaxaca. They demonstrate how the Lower Río Verde valley created and maintained new long-distance contacts in the wake of the political collapse of Río Viejo towards the end of the Classic period, but abstained from adopting the many of ideological staples found at places such as Tula and Chichen Itza. They also go on contextualize the Mixtec conquest of the area at the turn to the Late Postclassic period.

In Chapter 27, Paris and her colleagues discuss a rather neglected area in considerations of the transition to the Postclassic, the highlands of Chiapas. As noted by the authors, this area usually garners some attention in regards to the early tenth century date at Tonina. Yet beyond this piece of data, this important region is often left out of traditional narratives. Paris and her colleagues discuss the evidence for integration and local autonomy of this region from data at sites including Tenam Puente. The historical account of an Indigenous leader named Ghoxvotan in the *Probanza de Votan* is considered in the understanding of Postclassic dynamics in this region.

Martin, in a wide-sweeping chapter that covers much of the Maya lowlands, examines the idea of ethnicity in Chapter 28. While Martin ultimately hones in on questions of identity at Chichen Itza, the spatial breadth of the chapter places this urban center in a much broader context, bringing areas to the south of Yucatan more into focus. Martin asks the reader to consider whether the available evidence could really argue against political reasons for the foreign traits at Chichen Itza and whether we should not be more seriously considering movements of people as a field again.

Moving much farther south to the Greater Nicoya region, Geurds discusses the evidence for Postclassic interaction with Mesoamerica in Central America in Chapter 29. Throughout areas of Central America, including Greater Nicoya, evidence for material expressions originating in Mesoamerica have been long reported for the period of transition to the Postclassic period. Much of the discussion of this evidence has been couched in terms of migrations. Geurds reframes this discussion by moving away from the idea of Mesoamericanization towards a more nuanced understanding of new connections and configurations of objects and people during this period.

The final section of the book focuses on interregional connectivity among different areas of Mesoamerica. Klein's work in Chapter 30 examines a set of semi-reclining individuals who wear goggles and hold torches

on the Platform of the Eagles and Jaguars and the Temple of the Warriors at Chichen Itza, but in light of broader iconographic patterns in time and space. According to Klein, these figures represent fire priests and bear attributes of Tlaloc, the Central Mexican god of rain and lightning who oversaw fires that brought the rains. Klein argues that these fire priests from Chichen Itza gained knowledge of fire priests from Teotihuacan through peoples in southern and southeastern Mesoamerica rather than contemporaneous Tula. This last point is interesting as it implies that the fire priesthood of Chichen Itza directly influenced the Aztec fire priesthood.

In Chapter 31, Neff and his colleagues examine one of the most discussed categories of materiality during this period, Plumbate pottery. Based on decades of concerted research, the authors piece together a detailed historical narrative of this ceramic ware, found across Mesoamerica, albeit distributed in a very uneven fashion. Neff and his colleagues frame the changes in Plumbate in terms of climatic changes and movements of people to give a better sense of the larger dynamics at work beyond trade and exchange.

Examining specific patterns of post-sacrificial body treatment, Tiesler and Ruiz González discuss data from three sites in eastern Mesoamerica that indicate shared ritual practices in Chapter 32. Operating under the methods of archaeoethnatology, the authors argue that the deposits under study represent bodies that had been prepared for display in intricate performances. The authors make the case that these bodies had been transformed into marionettes.

In Chapter 33, Taube and Tsukamoto examine Witz 'mountain' symbolism from Copan Temple 22 and its influence on Maya architecture in the northern lowlands. This connection is discussed in light of a specific historical event in the journey of dignitaries from El Palmar, Campeche to Copan during the reign of Waxaklajuun Ubaah K'awiil in A.D. 726. According to the authors, contact between the two sites may account for the dissemination of Puuc and Chenes style architecture found throughout Campeche and Yucatan. Taube and Tsukamoto also give an in-depth analysis of wide spread Mesoamerican traditions of structures pertaining to cave symbolism and rain ritual.

And finally, Solar offers her comments on the volume in Chapter 34. She draws on data from her own research in the northern reaches of Mesoamerica to contextualize many of the ideas forwarded throughout the book.

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