

Dramatic Renditions: Battle Murals and the Struggle for Elite Legitimacy in
Epiclassic Mesoamerica

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ABSTRACT

DRAMATIC RENDITIONS: BATTLE MURALS AND THE STRUGGLE FOR ELITE LEGITIMACY IN

EPICLASSIC MESOAMERICA

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Martial and bellicose imagery, as it commonly occurred in Mesoamerican monumental art, was almost universally reductive and allusive. It can be divided into a few major categories that are notable for their stability over two millennia and across the distinct, yet interrelated cultures of the region: emblematic motifs, solitary or processional warrior figures, individual debased captive figures, and captor-captive pairs. Depictions of actual battles, however, were notably rare. The handful of surviving examples – murals from the sites of Bonampak, Cacaxtla, Chichén Itzá, and Mulchic – are among the masterpieces of Precolumbian painting. The unprecedented dramatic complexity and heightened narrativity of these battle scenes – qualities produced by the presence of pictorial elements including action, specificity, variation, integration, and naturalism – contribute to a marked difference in their implicit content compared with other, more iconic artworks referencing warfare and militarism. Although these paintings are found at geographically distant sites and are stylistically unrelated, their approximate contemporaneity suggests that the brief, unprecedented appearance of battle murals in Mesoamerica was directly related to the widespread socio-political upheavals associated with the decline of Teotihuacan and the Classic Maya collapse during the Epiclassic period (c. 650 - 1050 A.D.), the time at which they were created. Their direct showcasing of feats of bravery and military prowess – both those of the rulers themselves and of their numerous allies and supporters – indicates a significant shift in the way legitimized authority was conceived during this period.

Additionally, the radically different conception of temporality underlying these images points to an erosion in the unique status claimed by rulers with regard to the marking, and perhaps even the production of time. The fact that such violent tableaux were no longer produced during the documentedly militaristic Postclassic period reaffirms that, rather than directly reflecting social realities, monumental art projects a constructed image of legitimized authority. Nevertheless, an analysis of the functional characteristics of these artworks and the reconstruction of their implicit messages provide evidence with regard to the bases upon which rulership was conceived to be established during the Epiclassic.

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CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

This dissertation results from a desire to develop new avenues of inquiry into the visual culture of Prehispanic Mesoamerica. At its core is a concern with the nature and function of pictorial representation, and specifically, with the potentials and limits of what can be inferred from images about the (socio-cultural or political) conditions to which they were produced as a response. It therefore constitutes a departure from the dominant trends in the study of Mesoamerican visual culture: iconographic analysis, or the study of the referential and symbolic content of an artwork, and stylistic analysis as it is typically conceived in the literature of this region – an ever more refined use of connoisseurship to distinguish the identifying characteristics of the art production of a given time at the cultural, regional, local, workshop, or even individual level.¹

The subject of this study consists of a small number of Mesoamerican murals that depict battle scenes. Each of these artworks has been the focus of previous scholarship, which has mined them for the valuable data they contain as documents of ancient indigenous warfare practices (iconography) or painting traditions (style).² But the radical nature of the pictorial innovations related to what I will call their mode of representation – by which I am referring to the ways in which artworks present their thematic content – has yet to be adequately treated, or even, to a substantial degree, acknowledged in the literature.

¹ A *departure* from traditional iconographic and stylistic analysis, but not a *dismissal* of these approaches, which are still being fruitfully deployed to interesting ends. See Clancy (2001) for a discussion of the implementation of methodologies over the course of the development and institutionalization of Mesoamerican art history, and Koontz (2009c) for a survey of current trends in the study of Mesoamerican visual culture.

² References to prior studies of these artworks can be found below in Chapters Two and Four.

The reasons behind this omission are largely methodological. For one, the practices of iconographic and stylistic analysis place inherent limits on the nature of the questions that are asked, and thus the information that can be obtained from an artwork. Additionally, the murals in question, although roughly contemporaneous and of similar subject matter, appear at geographically distant sites that are materially and stylistically unrelated. In a field that places a premium on archaeological context and that cultivates a justifiable skepticism of analogical interpretation, these paintings have largely been treated in isolation, and the affinities they share have only been cursorily mentioned (e.g. D. McVicker 2007). However, despite the trend in recent scholarship towards contextual specificity, broad characterizations and classifications underlying current interpretive models often implicitly consider artworks from archaeologically unassociated sites as a group. For example, stone monuments depicting rulers at the unrelated polities of Copán and Seibal, to choose two from among dozens of sites, are stylistically distinct, yet both belong to a category of representation – the stela – that is accepted as one of the major hallmarks of Classic Maya civilization.

Through a functional and experiential analysis of the battle scenes, and through comparison with the remaining corpus of monumental artwork, it is my aim to demonstrate that these murals, as a group, differ substantially from prior and subsequent pictorial treatments of martial themes in Mesoamerica. This difference represents the implicit content of the paintings, a message contained in their mode of representation that I will argue reflects a strategic choice made (independently but synchronically) by the rulers who commissioned them in response to widespread changes in the political environment of the time period in which they were created.

Warfare and the Study of Mesoamerican Art

Until the middle of the twentieth century, the Classic Maya were generally thought of as a peaceful, theocratic society, and their monumental art was interpreted as depicting priest-kings who involved themselves with making calendrical calculations rather than waging war.³ This pacific characterization of the Classic Maya provided a foil for the undeniably violent Postclassic Mesoamerican cultures that were encountered by the Spanish at the time of the Conquest. It was promoted by the most prominent scholars of the first half of the twentieth century, and was largely based on the current state of decipherment of Mayan hieroglyphic writing, of which only the portions pertaining to the calendar could then be read. The few instances in which scenes of warfare were indisputably present in the monumental art record – murals from the sites of Bonampak and Chichén Itzá – were explained as anomalous documentations of minor skirmishes, and as not being indicative of widespread militarism (Ruppert, *et al.* 1955: 51; Tozzer 1957: 16).

The late 1950s saw the beginning of a rapidly progressing decipherment of the historical content of Mayan writing, and the recognition of the importance of warfare in the written records subsequently caused a major revision of the way the Classic Maya were conceptualized (Knorosov 1956; Proskouriakoff 1960). Iconographic interpretation gained momentum at this time as well, as it was now based on the surer footing of the written texts

³ J.E.S. Thompson: “The absence of fortifications, the fact that most classic centers are in open country, and little evidence of warfare (the Bonampak murals of fighting rather clearly show a raid, not regular warfare) argue for an assumption of prevailing peace during the Classic Period...” (1954: 79); Morley: “Old Empire sculpture is conspicuously lacking in the representation of warlike scenes, battles, strife, and violence. True, bound captives are occasionally portrayed, but the groups in which they appear are susceptible of religious, even astronomical interpretation, and warfare as such is almost certainly not implicated (1947: 70). While this was certainly the dominant view, there were some dissidents (*cf.* Follett 1932; Rands 1952).

that accompanied the images. Figures, including armed warriors and denuded prisoners clearly related to warfare and capture events, were identified as specific Maya nobles, adding to an ever more detailed understanding of the ancient political landscape (Proskouriakoff 1963).

A recognition of the increase in number and greater explicitness of Maya references to warfare, both textual and visual, towards the seventh through ninth centuries A.D. has led to the conclusion by some scholars in recent decades that the Late Classic was a more violent period than the Early Classic (e.g. M. Miller 1993: 407-408; Mathews 2000: 128-129; Rivera 2005; Aguilar Moreno 2006: 18-21).⁴ This perceived escalation is typically attributed to a change in the way warfare was conceived of and practiced, leading to more frequent combat at larger scales and with more ambitious goals.⁵ Thus, largely based on the pictorial and textual evidence left by the Maya rulers themselves, the dialectic between a more peaceful Early Classic Maya and a violently bellicose Late Classic Maya has largely perpetuated, albeit in a more nuanced manner, the prevailing earlier conception of the pacific Classic and the militaristic Postclassic.

Meanwhile, archaeological, iconographic, and epigraphic evidence supports the existence of warfare as an important factor in the socio-political development of the Early Classic Maya, as well as in state development across Formative and Early Classic

⁴ The periodization of Mesoamerican civilization is an issue that will be taken up in greater detail in Chapter Five. The Classic period is typically divided into Early Classic (c. 250 - 550 A.D.) and Late Classic (c. 550 - 850 A.D.). This was preceded by the Preclassic or Formative Period (c. 1500 B.C. - 250 A.D.), which was further divided into Early, Middle, and Late phases, and it was followed by the Postclassic (c. 950 - 1519 A.D.), also subdivided into Early and Late phases. The Epiclassic or Terminal Classic (c. 650 - 1050 A.D.) covers the end of the Classic period and the transition to the Postclassic.

⁵ The nature of the various pressures that have been proposed as contributing to this situation will be discussed in Chapter Five.

Mesoamerica, despite this theme not being presented so overtly in the monumental art record.⁶ Indeed, discoveries of mass graves of apparent warriors at Teotihuacan and the association of Teotihuacan iconography with allusions to warfare in the Maya region strongly suggest that the great Classic-period Central Mexican metropolis was intensely militaristic, countering an earlier impression of peaceful theocracy that had been based upon the lack of overt martial imagery or defensive fortifications at the site (e.g. Kubler 1990 [1962]: 54).⁷ Thus, without discounting possible changes to the ways the Maya conceived of and carried out their wars over hundreds of years of cultural development, the fact remains that the degree to which martial themes are emphasized in the monumental art record should not be understood as directly correlating to the level of bellicosity present in a society at a given time, a reading that grants an unwarranted transparency to decidedly political images and texts.

Commissioned by those holding power, monumental art is better understood as serving the strategic needs of self-representing nobles with the goal of demonstrating their claims to power, rather than as a complete and accurate historical record. This, however, does not negate its importance as a primary document. The artistic choices that were made can suggest the intended messages and audiences of these prominent and labor-intensive artworks. Therefore, patterns of political influence and the basis for legitimate rule within a society can be inferred through an analysis of the communicative functionality of its monumental art.

⁶ The evidence for this will be presented in greater detail in Chapter Three.

⁷ While explicitly martial imagery is rare at Teotihuacan, much of the artwork at the site is now understood to symbolically suggest bellicose themes, as will be discussed in Chapter Three.

The present study builds upon these premises, focusing on a geographically widespread and stylistically diverse group of Mesoamerican mural paintings that are unrelated except for their dramatic martial content and near-contemporaneity. Wall paintings found at the sites of Cacaxtla, Bonampak, and Chichén Itzá, and Mulchic, as well as less extensive examples from Chacmultun and Ichmac, all of which date to the Epiclassic period, are unusual for their depiction of complex battle scenes involving numerous participants. While no direct relationship existed between these sites, their shared, short-lived departure from the traditional methods of alluding to warfare in Mesoamerican monumental art deserves greater attention.

The Battle Murals and the Epiclassic Period

From its earliest appearance as a theme in the monumental art of Preclassic Mesoamerica, martial subject matter was typically conveyed through the use of standardized, iconic or synecdochic imagery. Typical examples include solitary standing warrior figures emblematic of the victorious polity, individual denuded captives representative of entire conquered towns, and symbolic general references to militarism and aggression such as predatory animals or human skulls. Added to this catalogue from the Middle Classic onwards were figural pairings depicting a victorious warrior grasping a defeated opponent. This more active mode of representation nevertheless remained standardized in its form, which reduced an entire battle involving dozens or even hundreds of individuals to the visual shorthand of the capture of one (elite) person by another.

The murals depicting battles from Cacaxtla, a site in the Puebla-Tlaxcala Valley of Central Mexico; Bonampak, a site on the Usumacinta River drainage in the Southern Maya

Lowlands; Chichén Itzá, a site at the center of the Yucatan Peninsula; and Mulchic, a site in the Puuc region of Yucatan, each feature dozens of figures interacting in dramatic compositions. While the origins of such scenes can be seen as related to the captor/captive pairings mentioned above, their scope and complexity are entirely unprecedented in Mesoamerican art. Their radical pictorial ambition sets these paintings apart even from the abundant monumental art with martial themes dating to the same time period, including the examples of more traditional, iconic allusions to conflict that coexist with the battle scenes at each of these sites. Additionally, following this brief period of experimentation with multi-figural narrative compositions, such scenes ceased to be produced as even the acknowledgedly heavily militaristic cultures from the Postclassic period reverted to iconic allusions to warfare in their monumental art. While the greater explicitness of the murals should therefore not necessarily be taken as indicative of an increase in the level of conflict of the time of their creation, I will argue that the clustering of these dramatic renditions of warfare within such a short span of time demonstrates the relationship between the innovation of this unprecedented mode of representing martial themes and the significant pan-Mesoamerican social and political reorganization that took place during this period.⁸

The Epiclassic period (c. 650-1050 A.D.) was characterized by the decline of Teotihuacan as the preeminent source of Central Mexican cultural and political development

⁸ The link between artistic forms and socio-temporal forces that I am suggesting here should not be understood in purely Hegelian terms (i.e. *Kulturgeist* or *Zeitgeist*), that is to say as reflective of an underlying “spirit” of the period. Indeed, it is just such a simplistic reading – the dramatic violence of the paintings as indicative of the turbulent epoch in which they were created – that this study attempts to move beyond. My analysis takes a functional approach to the format of the battle murals, examining what types of information they convey and how their overt and implicit messages can be understood as serving the needs of the elites who commissioned them.

and the slightly later “collapse” of the Classic Maya in eastern Mesoamerica. The exact causes and nature of these events are still not perfectly understood; however, there is no question they were accompanied by a major upheaval of the power dynamics of the entire region (Cohodas 1989a; Marcus 1989). As the dominance of the larger centers waned, previously marginal sites competed for access to and control over long-distance trade routes. These rulers were less able to draw upon an increasingly discredited ideology of sacred rulership to legitimize their claim to power, and they therefore became more dependent on alliance building and the cultivation of a broad base of elite support to secure their positions. Large, multi-figural battle murals were a politically expedient means of expressing the specific martial achievements of both themselves and their supporters.

In painting these murals, the artists innovated a new mode of representation: the complex, multi-figural narrative battle scene. Issues that were involved included the creation and populating of space (setting), the identification of individual participants and differentiation of the opposing sides, and indications of temporal progression. Furthermore, their visual narrativity can be understood as a product of several pictorial qualities: action, specificity, variation, integration, and naturalism. Because each of the painting programs being considered here arose independently from different stylistic traditions, they each responded in unique ways to these representational challenges. An analysis of the battle murals together as a group will serve to acknowledge the differing solutions utilized by their creators while demonstrating their shared departure from the rest of the corpus of Mesoamerican monumental art alluding to warfare.

This study will necessarily begin with descriptions of the murals being examined, including the context of the surrounding programs of art and architecture at the sites at which they are found and a review of the prior scholarship that has been published about them. The next chapter will present an overview of the various strains of evidence for warfare in Mesoamerica, including a detailed discussion of the categories of martial imagery found in the monumental art. This extensive body of material will serve as a touch point in the following chapter, where, as part of an analysis of the narrativity of the murals, comparisons will be made to support the contention that the battle scenes represent a substantial and important departure from prior and subsequent pictorial traditions. The subsequent chapter will situate the relatively greater narrative complexity of the battle murals within the socio-political context of the Epiclassic period. Specifically, these artworks will be discussed in terms of the implicit messages they communicated in their role in legitimizing the elites who commissioned them. I will additionally suggest possible reasons for the abjuration of such battle representations in favor of iconic imagery during the Early Postclassic and continuing until the Spanish Conquest. A final chapter will present the conclusions of this study as well as further avenues of inquiry that it suggests.

CHAPTER TWO

THE BATTLE MURALS – DESCRIPTION AND CONTEXT

In this chapter, the murals at the center of this study are introduced with regard to the specific contexts of the sites at which they are found. While descriptions of each battle scene are presented here, further discussion of the narrativity of these paintings will take place in Chapter Four.

Cacaxtla

Site Description and Background

The site of Cacaxtla is a small, fortified hilltop in the Puebla-Tlaxcala valley of Central Mexico (Fig. 1). It occupies a strategic location at the confluence of trade routes connecting the Gulf Coast, Oaxaca, and the Valley of Mexico. The hilltop was known to contain Prehispanic ruins even from the earliest colonial times: the mestizo chronicler Diego Muñoz Camargo identified the mound and its ruins as the former seat of the Olmeca-Xicalanca people and placed its construction to some 360 years before he wrote his account of the province of Tlaxcala in the mid-sixteenth century (2000 [1585]: 139-140). In 1941, Pedro Armillas conducted archaeological reconnaissance around Cacaxtla and the neighboring ruins of Xochitecatl, publishing descriptions of the site's fortifications and surface ceramics and speculating on the nature of its occupation (Armillas 1946). Excavations, however, were not begun at this seemingly unassuming site until 1975, after local farmers digging looting tunnels discovered amazingly well preserved polychrome murals. Understanding the magnitude of such a find, they contacted the authorities, who immediately began an ongoing project of study and preservation at Cacaxtla (López and Molina 1995 [1976]: 159).

Initial excavations uncovered two major groups of mural paintings: those of Structure A, which depict solitary elites on either side of a doorway, additional figures on the jambs, and the faded remnants of processional figures on the back wall of the inner room;⁹ and the long Battle Mural that covers the talud of the platform supporting Structure B (Fig. 2). Further paintings were discovered between 1984 and 1986 during the planning and construction of the roof that now covers the site. These include the flora, fauna, and merchant figure on the walls flanking the stairway of the Red Temple, the adjacent captive step, and the twin pillar figures from the Temple of Venus (Santana Sandoval, *et al.* 1995 [1990]: 370). Finally, a cartouche containing a bent leg pierced by a dart, which likely functioned as a conquest statement, remained mostly unexcavated due to the exigencies of roof construction, and it now is hidden behind a support pillar (Moreno Juárez, *et al.* 2005; Brittenham 2008: 67-68).¹⁰ Most of the surviving murals at Cacaxtla were recovered with a remarkable state of preservation due to the fact that the inhabitants of the site intentionally buried the paintings, using finely sifted sand to protect them from damage (Brittenham 2009: 135-140). Thus, the site's modest size, its virtual lack of monumental stone carvings, and the unassuming nature of its ceramics and portable objects belie the artistic wealth of its surviving wall decorations.

The Murals

The Battle Mural

The Battle Mural covers the entire length of the talus of a large platform that forms the northern boundary of the Great Plaza (Fig. 3). It is divided into eastern and western

⁹ Another, fragmentary mural from the Cuarto de la Escalera, a room at the southeast corner of the plaza, also appears to have depicted processional figures (Brittenham 2008: 62-65).

¹⁰ This cartouche and the Red Temple Captive Stair will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Three, and are therefore omitted from the descriptions below.

halves by a central stairway giving access to the top of the platform. The surviving portion of the painting extends 11.74 m east and 8.99 m west of the central stairs, reaches a maximum height of 1.65 meters, and features 47 nearly life-size figures (27 on the east and 20 on the west portion) engaging in armed combat over a blue background (Lombardo de Ruiz 1995 [1978]: 248-251).

The central portion of the mural, which was intentionally buried behind a layer of finely sifted dirt, is in an excellent state of preservation, while the portions further from the staircase were not treated with such care and are therefore more fragmentary (Brittenham 2008: 263-264). This pattern can be seen reflected in the placement of the most important figures within the composition (Fig. 4; E3, E6, W5, W2):¹¹ the two most elaborately attired individuals, evidently representing the leaders of the opposing sides, are found repeated on either side of the staircase. No other figures are duplicated throughout the two halves of the mural. Presumably, the decision to protect only the central portion of the mural was related to the greater importance attached to the individuals depicted there.

The opposing forces engaged in the battle are roughly equal in terms of the number of participants, but there is a clear contrast between the consistent success of one group of warriors and the corresponding defeat of the other. The triumphant warriors are shown standing unharmed and causing grievous injury to their opponents, who are mostly seated or lying on the ground and bear numerous bloody wounds (Fig. 5).¹² Physiognomic and

¹¹ I have followed the numeration utilized by Foncerrada de Molina (1993), with the figures from the west and east portions of the mural each assigned numbers in ascending order moving outward from the central staircase.

¹² An exception to this is figure W10, a member of the losing side to judge from his avian helmet and near nudity, who is shown standing with a raised spear in the middle of a confrontation with figure W9. Further standing bird warriors could be present on the outer

costume traits differentiate the sides, with the victorious individuals depicted with light or dark brown skin and elaborate costumes that often feature jaguar pelts, while the defeated are depicted with red skin and are mostly denuded but still wear large avian headdresses.

Further contrasting features have caused many scholars to identify the victorious warriors as Central Mexicans and the defeated as Maya (Foncerrada de Molina 1995 [1983]: 33-35; Lombardo de Ruiz 1995 [1986]: 99; D. McVicker 2007: 83). Cranial deformation, a practice not known to have been common in Central Mexico, was practiced by the Maya nobility as a form of beautification and possibly to create a visual analogy between the human head and an ear of maize (Houston, Stuart, and Taube 1996: 45). The depiction of the leader of the defeated bird warriors on the eastern side of the Battle Mural presents such a profile with an elongated skull (Fig. 6).¹³ His counterpart among the victorious jaguar warriors, an individual identified on both the eastern and western sides with the glyphic name 3 Deer (indicated with three dots and a deer antler), wears costume elements with strong Central Mexican associations, including the Trapeze-and-Ray Year Sign, a stylized Tlaloc mask, and the use of the atlatl as a weapon (Fig. 7).¹⁴

Like 3 Deer, most of the victorious warriors from the Battle Mural are accompanied by glyphic constructions in a Late Classic Central Mexican writing system (Berlo 1989a: 27-29). Each statement includes a variable component as well as a repeated, three-part element featuring a quartered blue circle, a stylized representation of teeth and gums, and a stylized

portions of the composition, but the poor state of preservation makes these figures difficult to read with certainty.

¹³ The depiction of the corresponding figure on the western talus is destroyed above the brow, and thus does not preserve this information.

¹⁴ While these elements have Central Mexican origins and associations, they are often found in Maya art as part of a warrior outfit apparently signifying the power and legitimization derived from ties to the foreign metropolis of Teotihuacan (Stone 1989: 156-158).

heart with three pendant lobes of blood (Fig. 8). The variable sign is typically separated from the repeating element, but they are always found in proximity to each other, one pair per victorious warrior. Berlo has persuasively argued that the combination of teeth and quartered circle functions as a locative ending (*Ibid.* 28). While she has interpreted the entire construction as something akin to “place of the sacrifice,” reading the separated variable elements as the individual names of the victorious warriors (*Ibid.* 28-29), it is equally likely that the two together served as a conquest statement, with the variable element naming a specific town, the teeth and quartered circle identifying a locative reading, and the bloody heart indicating conquest.¹⁵ If this latter reading is accepted, the only other individual name on the Battle Mural aside from 3 Deer is found in front of figure E10 and consists of the numeral two beneath a round element with five curving, radial lines (Fig. 4b, element H).¹⁶

Encouraged by the elongated format of the mural, the artists¹⁷ depicted a relatively uncluttered progression of figures with minimal overlapping of limbs and weapons.

However, the results are anything but static or repetitive, as each figure takes on a unique and

¹⁵ See Chapter Three for a discussion of a similar glyphic construction of “variable element-mouth-quartered circle” repeated on the façade of the Pyramid of the Feathered Serpent at the contemporaneous site of Xochicalco, which has been interpreted by Hirth as indicating conquered, tribute-paying polities (1989: 73-75). Reading the glyphs interspersed between the figures of the Battle Mural as conquest statements rather than personal names would have enormous implications for the interpretation of the narrative content of the Battle Mural. Rather than a single event, the battle scene would have to be understood as a commemorative pastiche representing an amalgamation of multiple conquests. This argument will be presented in detail in Chapter Four.

¹⁶ The fact that Central Mexican personal names typically took the form of the day number and calendrical sign of the individual’s birthday gives this interpretation credence. Furthermore, figure E10 is also associated with a three-part glyph plus variable sign like the other warriors, suggesting that the 2 “Disk” or “Button” construction provides additional information of a different nature.

¹⁷ Kubler identified the hands of four distinct artists in the Battle Mural (1980: 170). Brittenham expanded this number to at least six, and possibly as many as nine or ten when the less well-preserved sections are taken into account (2008: 142).

dynamic pose that is both informed by and has influence upon the poses of nearby figures. Individuals are often portrayed as if frozen in mid-action, with bird warriors depicted in the process of falling to the ground and some triumphant jaguar-clad warriors shown with both feet lifted off of the red ground line as if raised aloft by the force of their attack.

Adding to the immediacy of the scene is the graphic portrayal of agony – spilling entrails, bleeding wounds, weapons embedded in flesh – that pervades the scene. Details such as a dart breaking as the wounded individual attempts to remove it from his leg give a poignancy to the suffering of the vanquished warriors as they futilely strive to cling to life (Fig. 9). Indeed, as the bird warrior captain, among the last men from his side left standing, grasps a dart that pierces his own left cheek just beneath the eye, it is unclear whether he is removing the projectile from a wound inflicted by the enemy or if he is purposefully drawing his own blood as an expression of his sorrow for the utter defeat his group has suffered: the blood that flows from this suggestively placed incision is redolent of tears (Fig. 6; Carlson 1993: 219).

The Structure A Murals

The murals from the portico and jambs of Structure A are slightly later in date than the Battle Mural, but are nonetheless related to it both stylistically and iconographically (Brittenham 2008: 245-250). A pair of naturalistically depicted, black-skinned figures, one wearing a jaguar costume and the other wearing a bird costume, appear over red backgrounds flanking a doorway (Figs. 10 and 11). Each stands upon a serpent with attributes reflecting his costume – jaguar skin and feathers respectively – that descends the outside edge before traveling horizontally along the bottom of the frame towards the doorway. A blue border

divided into trapezoidal sections in which various aquatic fauna reside is found beneath the serpents on the outside and lower edges.

The northern side of the doorway contains the mural depicting the jaguar figure (Fig. 10). His costume completely covers his body, including clawed hands and feet, leaving only the face visible emerging from the open jaws of the jaguar helmet. Long paper strips hang from his wide blue belt, below which he wears a blue and black skirt; he wears blue-feathered wings behind his shoulders. In his arms he holds a bundle of darts, from the points of which fall drops of blue water. Several Central Mexican style glyphs are inserted into the empty space around the figure, including 9 Reptile Eye, a profile head with the coefficient two, and a partially destroyed glyph with a figure-8 on its side in a container with the coefficient one.

The bird figure on the southern portico mural wears an avian helmet similar to those worn by the defeated warriors from the Battle Mural (Fig. 11). He additionally has taloned feet, black-tipped, white feather wings on his upper arms, a wide blue belt and blue-and-yellow skirt, and white pieces of paper tied with shells to his wrists and ankles. In his arms, he holds a large, two-headed serpent bar, a common attribute of rulership in the Maya region. In the space around the figure are found a depiction of a quetzal bird, the glyph 13 Feather, an eye-wing glyph similar to one found on the Battle Mural, and a rectangular enclosure, encircled by black footprints, with star signs on three sides and an opening at the bottom from which a pair of hands emerge.

As with the Battle Mural, we once again are presented with the pairing of jaguar- and avian-costumed figures. Here, however, they are not in opposition to one another, but rather shown with an equal status that has typically been interpreted as representing a form of

shared rulership (Graulich 1988: 105-107; Brittenham 2008: 25-27). The dualistic symbolism of these figures has also been discussed in terms of later Aztec concepts embodied in the twin pyramid complex (Graulich 2001).

On the jambs of the doorway between these paintings, two further figures are depicted over blue backgrounds. On the north jamb, paired with the jaguar figure of the northern portico mural, stands a figure wearing a jaguar-skin suit and a zoomorphic headdress, holding a snake with water scrolls and a water lily in his left hand, and pouring water from a vessel decorated with a depiction of the rain deity, Tlaloc; a water lily shoot grows from his abdomen (Fig. 12). The glyph 7 Reptile Eye is written beside his foot, overlapping an aquatic border. The south jamb figure is a dancing, black-skinned male with a jaguar-skin skirt and long hair tied up into a pompadour and strung with jewels hanging to the floor (Fig. 13). He holds a large green seashell from which a small figure with yellow skin and red hair emerges: named with the glyph 7 Reptile Eye, this is the same individual that is depicted on the opposite jamb. The large figure is given the nominative 3 Deer, the same name as the leader of the victorious warriors depicted on the Battle Mural, but here spelled with a full deer head rather than just the antlers.

Compared to the imagery of the Battle Mural, which they supplanted and with which they share a commonly named individual, the Structure A paintings present a much different image of the nature of rulership, one that relates to agricultural fertility and the watering of the earth rather than to physical power and conquest. In the Mesoamerican world-view these two roles of the ruler, far from being antithetical, can be seen united in the bundle of spears held by the jaguar figure of the north portico painting, from the tips of which blue droplets fall, equating life-giving rain with blood shed in battle (Fig. 10; Carlson 1993: 214-215;

Townsend 1997: 94-99). However, the choice of emphasis in the monumental art record can be understood as a message crafted to reflect the political dynamics of a specific moment in time.¹⁸

The Red Temple and Temple of Venus Murals

Two groups of murals located towards the southern end of Cacaxtla's hilltop compound – those of the Red Temple and those of the Temple of Venus¹⁹ – were discovered in the mid-1980s during excavations accompanying the construction of a protective roof (Santana Sandoval, *et al.* 1995 [1990]: 370). Based on the architectural stratigraphy, the Temple of Venus paintings pre-dated the Battle and Structure A Murals, while the currently visible Red Temple paintings were contemporaneous with those from Structure A (Brittenham 2008: 205-211, 218-219).

The Temple of Venus murals consist of a pair of blue-skinned figures, one male and one female, on red backgrounds adorning pillars in a small room (Fig. 14). Aquatic borders similar to those found in the Structure A murals are found at the bottom of each, while white star motifs are seen along the sides.²⁰ Additional, larger star motifs are found worn by both figures on their waists, over their jaguar-skin skirts. The male figure, who is found on the northern (right-hand) pillar, is more completely preserved, and an additional star can be seen

¹⁸ This argument will be taken up in more detail in Chapter Five.

¹⁹ It should be noted that the names given to these rooms, as with all Precolumbian structures, are modern inventions and do not reflect their ancient functions, which may or may not have been religious in nature.

²⁰ These latter are similar to the stars flanking the captured bird warrior from the west half of the Battle Mural, but with an inverted color scheme. This motif – an eye emitting five rays in a semi-circle – is a widespread star symbol that was often used in reference to the planet Venus, but also had aquatic and militaristic associations (Baird 1989: 108-114; Baus Czitrom 1995 [1990]: 336-341).

in his upraised left hand. Both figures are shown standing on the balls of their feet and with their arms raised, suggesting a posture of dance or possibly propitiation of the heavens. Additionally, both wear paper strips tied to their ankles, a costume element associated with sacrifice (Carlson 1993: 224). The fanged teeth, U-shaped pupils, and goggled eyes of the male figure, his scorpion tail, and the feathered, wing-like elements both figures display at their bent elbows suggest they represent supernaturals.

The Red Temple paintings include aquatic borders similar to those of the Temple of Venus and Structure A murals (Fig. 15). These are seen on either side of the stairway and are paired with the flowing bodies of feathered serpents. Atop this base, plants sprouting human-headed ears of maize alternate with supernatural frogs, the latter exhibiting jaguar spots on the west wall and reptile scales on the east wall. The west wall ends at the base of the stairway, the aquatic band turning to form a vertical border along with the serpent tail, which ends in a water-lily-like formation of feathers. The same vertical border is found on the east wall, which extends several feet further along the corridor and includes an additional scene. Here, an elaborately costumed figure is seen standing in profile between a cacao tree upon which a quetzal bird is landing and a large, heavily laden merchant's backpack propped up with a spear.²¹ This figure, named 4 Dog according to the accompanying Central Mexican-style glyph, has the features of an old man. He wears a jaguar helmet and skirt and has jaguar paws on his hands and feet, and his red skin is marked with white spots. He can be considered to be a representation of the Classic Maya God L, or possibly a specific historical

²¹ The name Cacaxtla means “place of the [merchant's] backpack” in Nahuatl. While this toponym dates to the Late Postclassic period, and we cannot be certain of the name given to the site by its inhabitants during its occupation, this mural suggests a long tradition for the name while indisputably demonstrating the importance of merchant activity to Cacaxtla's identity (Carlson 1993: 240).

individual who has been depicted with the attributes of God L (Brittenham 2008: 90-93; Carlson 1993: 239-240).

Style and Ethnicity

A notable feature of the murals that has fueled much speculation among scholars is the obvious incongruity of their style, which has a clear affinity with Maya naturalism and figural sensibilities, with the geographic location of the site hundreds of kilometers outside of the Maya region. This problem is further complicated by the inclusion of numerous signs belonging to the Central Mexican – and perhaps the Zapotec – writing system and the total lack of Maya hieroglyphic writing (Berlo 1989a). Additionally, the ceramics from the site are strongly local in character, although they present some similarities to late Teotihuacan forms; the limited number of trade pieces mostly derive from southern Puebla, Oaxaca, and the Gulf Coast, with only minimal indications to suggest links to the Maya region (López de Molina 1995 [1979]: 282; Santana Sandoval and Delgadillo Torres 1995 [1990]: 364-367).

Nevertheless, the calligraphic naturalism of the painting style has prompted many scholars to seek direct connections with Classic Maya art. Stanley Walling has cited the rhythmic use of space, the realistic figural proportions, the active poses of the figures, among other traits, as situating the Cacaxtla murals squarely within (and suggesting direct contact with) the Classic Maya painting tradition (1982: 209-213). Jacinto Quirarte has claimed to have discerned formal parallels between the Battle Murals at Cacaxtla and artworks from Yaxchilan and Mulchic, arguing that Maya vase painting was the vehicle for transmission (1983: 219). Donald Robertson has argued that if it was merely a matter of Maya “influence”

rather than the presence of Maya artists, there would be further manifestations of Maya-inflected art preceding or subsequent to the murals at Cacaxtla (1985: 298).

Indeed, the Maya figural style evident in the murals has led some scholars to posit the incursion of an outside group with strong Maya affiliations into the region (e.g. Graulich 1988: 95; Piña Chan 1998: 17-40).²² This conclusion finds support from sixteenth-century sources, including the writings of Muñoz Camargo, cited above, and those of another early mestizo chronicler, Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl, who identified the Olmeca-Xicalanca people as sea-faring traders pre-dating the Toltecs and originating from Potonchan, on the coast of present-day Campeche (Alva Ixtlilxochitl 1891-1892: 19-20). This ambiguous population has often been provisionally identified as a group of Chontal or Putun Maya traders from the delta of the Grijalva and Usumacinta rivers who expanded their reach into Central Mexico in pursuit of control over trade routes in the wake of the power vacuum left by the fall of Teotihuacan (Foncerrada de Molina 1980: 186-188; Carlson 1993: 215).²³ Donald McVicker complicates this model by suggesting that the Cacaxtla paintings could depict displaced elites from Teotihuacan who relocated to the Gulf Coast, where they became “Mayanized” before returning to Central Mexico (1985: 98). However, it must be noted that the lack of a sharp break in the local ceramic tradition at Cacaxtla argues for local continuity

²² Under this interpretation, the Battle Mural is assumed to represent the conflict that accompanied this incursion, with the implication being that the vanquished Maya group was compelled to depict their own defeat, possibly as a form of artistic tribute or humiliation.

²³ This same peripheral group of Chontal Maya was proposed by J.E.S. Thompson as a possible identity for the “Mexicanized” Itzá, another group known from early Colonial sources who made incursions into the central Maya area from the west at the end of the Classic period and are most famously associated with the “Toltec” style art and architecture of Chichén Itzá’s florescence, which will be discussed below (1946: 12-13). However, Ochoa and Vargas have disputed the inflated importance granted to the Late Classic population of this region (1987).

rather than a disruptive incursion (Santana Sandoval and Delgadillo Torres 1995 [1990]: 363).²⁴

A conclusion that is more in accord with the various strains of stylistic, iconographic, and archaeological evidence from the site has been reached by many authors, who have argued that Cacaxtla's art represents a unique, eclectic expression of local identity that is intimately bound to the socio-political forces of the Epiclassic period. Marta Foncerrada de Molina has identified the combination of various stylistic and iconographic elements from diverse regions as an "authentic product of a social, political, economic, religious, and artistic syncretism," that became possible following the disappearance of Teotihuacan hegemony (1978: 146).²⁵ George Kubler has discussed the paintings in similar terms, while emphasizing the conscious decision on behalf of the patrons to reference and intermingle various art styles as an expression of "syncretistic unification among the dominant religious and political views of that time" (1979: 172). Debra Nagao expanded upon Kubler's ideas, suggesting that the patrons and artists at Cacaxtla manipulated a variety of styles and symbol sets to proclaim their (real or imagined) ties to distant seats of power and legitimacy (1989: 100). Most recently, Claudia Brittenham has considered the murals of Cacaxtla as forming a unique painting tradition in which the borrowing of Maya stylistic features was part of a conscious decision to fashion a local identity independent from that of the failed metropolis of Teotihuacan (2008: 251-252).

²⁴ See Brittenham (2008: 253-259) for a pointed critique of the role the Olmeca-Xicalanca have played in most past interpretations of Cacaxtla.

²⁵ The same author has also suggested that the eclecticism seen at Cacaxtla has its direct roots in the cosmopolitanism of Teotihuacan, a city whose artwork was much more diverse than is typically acknowledged (1980).

Dating

While the surrounding countryside was continually populated from the Middle Formative period on through the arrival of the Spanish, most construction on the hill of Cacaxtla occurred during the Epiclassic period, during which time the murals were completed (Santana Sandoval 1995 [1984]: 79). This conclusion is based on several lines of evidence, including stylistic and iconographic analysis of the paintings, ceramic chronologies related to other regions, and, most significantly, a handful of radiocarbon dates.

The eclecticism apparent in the style and content of the murals at Cacaxtla has strong associations with the artwork of other Central Mexican sites dated to the Epiclassic, the period coinciding with and immediately following the decline of Teotihuacan, c. 650-900 A.D. Direct parallels can be drawn between the glyphs found at Cacaxtla and those known from Xochicalco, in the current state of Morelos, and Teotenango, in the current state of Mexico (Berlo 1989a). Stylistic and iconographic comparisons have also been made between the imagery at Cacaxtla and numerous Late Classic Maya sites, as was discussed above.

Stylistic analysis of the murals, as well as the construction sequence demonstrated by the superposition of architectural elements, has enabled Brittenham to present a detailed relative chronology of the Cacaxtla murals (2008: 205-225). Briefly stated, the southern group of paintings, including the Red Temple corridor, the Captive stair, and the Temple of Venus, was completed before the northern group. The Battle Mural was created in a brief period of intense building activity before being covered by new construction. The Structure A murals post-date the Battle Mural, but based on Brittenham's identification of the hand of

an artist shared between them, the successive paintings must have been created within a single generation (2008: 183-187).²⁶

Analysis of the ceramics recovered from the hilltop also securely places the apogee of Cacaxtla within the Epiclassic period. While the majority of sherds were of local manufacture, they correspond with the Teotihuacan III and IV, Tajín V and VI, and Cholula III and IV phases from the Valley of Mexico, Gulf Coast, and Valley of Puebla, respectively, or c. 600-900 A.D. (Molina Feal 1995 [1977]: 177-178).

Finally, and most importantly for the absolute dating of the site, several radiocarbon dates have been obtained, including three from contexts related to the Structure A and Battle Murals. These include a wooden lintel from Structure A, which serves as a *terminus post quem* for these paintings (A.D. 755 +/- 75); a test pit from the floor of Structure B, the building surmounting the platform on which the Battle Mural was painted (A.D. 744 +/- 91); and a burnt offering from the plaza in front of the Battle Mural, likely a dedication offering made at the time when all the surviving murals were buried under new construction and thus a *terminus ante quem* for the Structure A and Battle Murals (A.D. 792 +/-83) (Santana Sandoval and Delgadillo Torres 1995 [1990]). Brittenham has recalibrated these dates, resulting in 2-sigma (94.5% probability) date spans of A.D. 691-975, 665-969, and 688-985, respectively (2008: 237-245).

Thus, after considering all the lines of data, we are left with an almost 300-year window of possibility for what was nevertheless a brief span of time, lasting no more than a

²⁶ This interpretation is supported by the presence of figures named 3 Deer both on the Battle Mural and on the south jamb of Structure A. While there is no way to be certain that these represented the same individual – or, if they did, whether or not both were painted during his lifetime – the coincidence adds circumstantial evidence to the proposal that only a short span of time separated the completion of the two paintings.

few decades, during which three successive construction phases and the painting of the northern (Battle and Structure A) murals occurred. This was followed by a short period of decline, and the subsequent total abandonment of the site, which occurred by 1050 A.D. at the latest (Brittenham 2008: 223).

Bonampak

Site Description and Background

Bonampak²⁷ is a small Maya polity located near the Lacanha river in the northeast of the modern state of Chiapas, about 30 km southwest of the larger site of Yaxchilan, the Usumacinta river, and the Guatemalan border (Fig. 1; Arellano Hernández 1998: 1). It was first brought to the attention of Mayanists in 1946, when the vivid, polychrome murals that completely fill the interiors of the three rooms of Structure 1 were rediscovered by Giles Healey, who came across the site in the company of a Lacandon Maya named José Pepe Chan Bor as they pursued a deer through the jungle (Merle Greene Robertson 1980: 3-4). These rare surviving examples of Classic Maya painting caused an immediate sensation, leading to several clearing and documentary expeditions in the late 1940s, a more elaborate INAH preservation project from 1960-1962, further restoration efforts in the 1970s and 80s, and the more recent studies carried out under the auspices of the Proyecto La Pintura Mural Prehispánica en México (Arellano Hernández 1998: 1-6).

²⁷ The name Bonampak is Mayan for “painted wall”, but it was bestowed on the site by Sylvanus Morley shortly after its rediscovery (Merle Greene Robertson 1980: 5). Modern Lacandon Maya called the ruins Lacam (“lintel”) or Tum (“stone”); the name by which the site was known to its original inhabitants, however, remains a mystery (Arellano Hernández 1998: 1).

The core of Bonampak consists of a single large plaza bordered to the south by a large terraced hillside occupied by numerous buildings (Fig. 16). The largest of these – Structure 1 – houses the murals and consists of three non-connected rooms with their north-facing doorways overlooking the plaza that sits six meters below. The carved and painted stone lintels over each doorway, like the carved stelae from the plaza below, were completed in a style associated with nearby sites from the Usumacinta River drainage, most notably including Yaxchilan (Fig. 17). The atadura molding that divides the façade of Structure 1, however, is a rare example of this typically Puuc architectural element in the Usumacinta region (Kubler 1990 [1962]: 269). Structure 1 originally featured three-dimensional stucco figures seated in the five niches of its façade: one over each doorway and one on each end. Additionally, now-fragmentary stucco scenes are discernable between the niches over the entrances; to judge from what survives of them, they once depicted capture events, just as the lintels do (Fig. 18).²⁸

The rooms of Structure 1 are rectangular, measuring approximately 4.55 m wide by 2.7 m deep by 4.2 m high (Fig. 19). The slightly larger, central Room 2 shares its short east and west walls with Rooms 1 and 3, respectively. The rooms have corbel-vaulted ceilings, with the north and south sides sloping inward to meet at the top in narrow vault closings. Additionally, the eastern (outer) wall of Room 1 and the western (outer) wall of Room 3 slope inward. Wide benches line the perimeter of each room, leaving only a small area near the entrance with a ground-level floor. All surfaces, including the door jambs, benches, and floors were completely covered with polychroming, and the entirety of the walls and vaults

²⁸ The imagery from the lintels of Structure 1 will be discussed in the section on Mesoamerican martial iconography in the following chapter.

were painted with the figural murals described below. Structure 1 can be securely dated from the inscriptions included in the murals: its dedication occurred on November 11, 791 A.D.

(Miller and Houston 1998: 248).

The Paintings

When they were first discovered, the paintings of Bonampak Structure 1 were preserved behind a layer of calcification that had seeped through the limestone of the building's roof over hundreds of years. Numerous factors, including changes in the local humidity caused by human traffic and the cleaning of the lime coating with kerosene by early visitors, have contributed to the rapid deterioration of the paintings and respondent conservation efforts that have been carried out over the years. In their current condition, a new protecting layer of calcification has been allowed to coat the murals, a necessary step which unfortunately clouds their original crisp lines and vivid colors. However, several copies of the paintings have been made over the years that allow for the study of details no longer clearly visible to the naked eye.

The Bonampak paintings were conceived and completed as a unified program documenting historical events and rituals relating to the dynastic affairs of the polity. Three separate but related episodes were depicted, one per room, including the presentation of a young child to the court and a festival celebration in Room 1, the battle scene and subsequent display of the captives in Room 2, and a ritual dance accompanied by prisoner sacrifice and royal bloodletting in Room 3.²⁹ Distinctive architectural settings are shown occupied by

²⁹ The exact relationship of the scenes to each other, that is to say the order of their occurrence and their reading order, has been debated in the literature on the murals, and is an issue that will be taken up in Chapter Four of the present study.

dozens of figures that average 85 cm tall without their headdresses, or slightly less than half life-size (Arellano Hernández 1998: 6). Together, the murals, and the inscriptions that accompany them, provide a detailed picture of the nature of elite legitimacy in the late eighth-century southern Maya Lowlands.

Room 1

The events depicted in Room 1 occupy multiple registers, separated by alternating red and white lines that circle the four walls (Figs. 20 and 21). At the top, a series of supernatural masks can be seen over a blue background, likely referencing the sky. Below this, on a series of platforms whose different heights probably reflect the relative status of the individuals who stand on them, numerous individuals are depicted over a red background. The highest platform centers on the west vault but extends a short ways onto the south and north vaults. Here, a bench further elevates three seated figures (18-20),³⁰ as one (17) sits beneath and one (21) stands beside them. They all face to their left, looking at a figure on the south vault (16) who stands on the front of this platform holding a young child (15) in his arms. Ten figures (5-14) standing on a lower platform beneath them and to the left are shown in conversation with one another, while a further four standing figures (1-4) look on from a platform of middle height occupying the east vaulting. Twelve further figures are seen on the continuation of this same, middle-height platform on the north vault, but these seem to form a different scene, one centering on the dressing of three individuals (23, 25, and 27) in

³⁰ I have followed the numbering system used by Arellano Hernández in the publication of the *Proyecto Pintura Mural Prehispánica en México* (1998). This builds upon the earlier numeration proposed by Adams and Aldrich (1980), inserting numbers followed by lowercase letters for previously unrecorded figures that became apparent through the advanced imaging techniques utilized in recent years.

elaborate costumes that include feathered headdresses and backracks and jaguar-skin skirts. To the left, Figure 22 looks over his shoulder as he steps with one foot onto the corner of the highest platform, linking this scene with that on the west vault. Eight seated or kneeling figures occupy the lowest tiered platform of this register; the jaguar skins, strips of cloth, and other material they handle suggest they are also assisting the individuals being dressed directly above them.

On the lowest register of this room, completely encircling the walls of the chamber between the level of the bench and the vaulting, a linear procession of thirty-six figures is seen over a blue background. Centering on three elaborately costumed individuals on the south wall (62, 63, and 64) – likely the same individuals shown being dressed on the north vault – the remaining figures proceed in profile inward towards them from either side of the doorway on the opposite north wall. These figures are carrying out a variety of roles, including playing musical instruments such as trumpets (43 and 44), rattles (57-61), and drums (51, 53, 55, and 56); impersonating supernatural beings (45-50); and holding feathered standards (52, 54, 73, and 74).³¹ These standards are raised so as to overlap the lower tier of the platform depicted on the register above, and Mary Miller has noted that these paired, angled objects – one shown frontally and one seen in profile on either side – function to bracket the long text that occupies the space between them, setting it apart and heightening its importance (2002: 12).

³¹ Mary Miller has referred to the latter objects as “parasols” (2002: 12), but I believe it is more accurate to refer to them as standards, since identical objects are seen raised over the battle scene in Room 2, where their function is clearly heraldic signification rather than protection from the sun.

This lengthy text in Room 1 is the longest to accompany the Bonampak murals and provides a relatively firm chronological context within which the depicted events can be situated.³² It begins with an Initial Series date of 9.18.0.3.4 10 *kan 2 kayab*, corresponding to December 10, 790 A.D. (Arellano Hernández 1998: 41).³³ This date seems to refer to an accession event witnessed by Shield Jaguar II of Yaxchilan, and specifically the designation of the young child as heir to the throne and his presentation to the court (Miller and Houston 1998: 248).³⁴ Next is a distance number followed by the Calendar Round 8 *ahaw 13 muwan* (November 11, 791), a date that appears to refer to the dedication of the building in which the murals are found (*Ibid.*).³⁵

Room 2 – The Battle Scene and Presentation of Captives

Apart from a narrow upper register featuring cartouches containing seated figures alternating with bound captives over a yellow background, the entirety of the east, south, and west walls and vault of Room 2 is given over to a panoramic battle scene (Figs. 22 and 23).

³² Additional glyphic statements include numerous captions identifying many of the figures in the murals of all three rooms and a medium-length text in Room 2.

³³ See Mary Miller for a discussion of the various interpretations of this calendrical inscription, including the arguments supporting the date given here as the correct reading (1986: 28-38).

³⁴ However, Miller and Houston caution that the subject of this statement remains unclear and that it can only be said with certainty that it does not refer to the accession of Chaan Muwan II (1998: 248).

³⁵ Maya dates can be given in the Long Count system (also called Initial Series dates because they are usually found at the beginning of texts and follow a prescribed pattern), which records the precise distance of a day from a specific starting point in the distant past (much like our modern calendar measures time from the birth of Christ), or in the Calendar Round system, which gives the day in a cycle that repeats every 52 years, and therefore must be tied to other information such as an Initial Series date to be accurately pinned down. Sometimes, as in the case of the Room 1 inscription, this relationship is clear, but in other instances the interpretation of Calendar Round dates can require a significant degree of speculative argument.

A high horizon line runs across the composition about a third of the way up the vault, dividing the entire scene in half between a blue background indicating the sky above, and a green background representing the land below; an additional red ground line runs along the bottom of the scene. Over one hundred participants are depicted in a chaotic composition, with bodies and limbs overlapping as active aggressor figures grab twisting and contorted captives.

There are variations in the skin tones of the figures, which can appear a reddish brown, light tan, or dark chocolate hue. However, these different skin colorations are evenly distributed among the victors and vanquished alike, and therefore, unlike at Cacaxtla, this feature does not seem to be indicative of real or imagined ethnic affiliations differentiating the two warring factions. The figures of either side are distinguishable by their attire, however, as the aggressors wear a variety of costume elements, including elaborate headdresses, while the defeated individuals are mostly shown with minimal clothing or entirely denuded. This could possibly reflect the surprising nature of a nighttime raid that was then accurately depicted in the murals, but it is more likely representative of the use of artistic license to emphasize the difference between the nobility of the triumphant warriors and the debased status of their vanquished enemies, who are shown stripped of their possessions and dignity even before the battle has ended (Pincemin Deliberos and Rosas Kifuri 2005: 16).

Aside from a lack of clothing, the defeated warriors also lack weapons, contrasting with the lances, clubs, and unfurled flexible shields wielded by those on the other side. Some of the vanquished are shown grasping at the spears of their enemies as a defensive measure, but even this final struggle for their freedom is suggested as being futile, since the same

individuals are shown being securely held by others from the winning side, grasped by their hair and limbs (Fig. 24). While the facial expressions and physical deportment clearly indicate the suffering of the defeated, dead or mortally wounded bodies do not appear in the battle scene at Bonampak.

Despite the chaos suggested by the dense arrangement of overlapping figures, there are some suggestions of an organizational scheme behind the painting. The active clash between individuals belonging to the two sides is mostly found on the lower half of the composition, over the green background. Although still crowded, the upper portion is almost entirely populated by members of the winning side.³⁶ On the east vault, and turning the corner to the left side of the south vault, several figures (1, 3, and 5) are seen raising colorful battle standards, while others (7 and 35) blow into long trumpets as they hold what are possibly percussion instruments (Fig. 25). A further ten figures are shown brandishing clubs, spears, and shields along the upper portion of the south vault; several wear large headdresses of yellow or green feathers. Two of these, including Chaan Muwan (55) – the ruler of Bonampak – and the figure behind him, grasp prisoners, these latter figures shown seated beneath them over the green background below (Fig. 26). The relatively large proportion of empty blue background between and above these figures, particularly with regard to Chaan Muwan, serves to set them apart, as does their elevated position above the melee below and the glyphic captions that accompany most of them.

While most of the texts from Room 2 are short, nominal statements, a longer, although poorly preserved and difficult to read text is found in the space in front of Chaan

³⁶ An exception is Figure 4, a conquered individual who is grasped by Figures 2 and 6 on the east vault.

Muwan, whom it names as the protagonist of a capture event (“*chukah*”). Only a Calendar Round date is given, which has often been read as 13 *chikchan* 13 *yax*, and assigned a date of 9.18.1.15.5 (August 2, 792 A.D.) (M. Miller 1986: 47; Arellano Hernandez 1998: 42). But this reading has recently come under question, with a likely alternative of 13 *men* 13 *ch'en* (July 15, 786 A.D.) having been proposed (Rosas Kifuri 1988: 42; Miller and Houston 1998: 250-253).³⁷

The battle continues to rage along the lower, green-background portion of the west wall and vault, but its denouement appears on the upper vault above (Fig. 27). Here, six unarmed figures accompany the transportation of a large box supported on the shoulders of Figure 76. This scene has been interpreted as showing the resupplying of troops in the field (Kubler 1990 [1962]: 278) or the attempted defense of the precious or sacred belongings of the besieged community (M. Miller 1986: 97). However, in keeping with the consistency of the one-sided representation of capture and conquest throughout the mural, the treasure box is likely shown as already in the possession of the victorious side.

On the north wall and vault of Room 2 – the side in which the entrance door is located – a scene is painted that sequentially follows the combat events depicted on the other three walls (Figs. 28 and 29).³⁸ Nine prisoners taken captive in the battle are shown seated on the upper steps of a terraced structure, nude except for loincloths and with disheveled hair. Blood drips from the fingers of several of them (101, 103, and 104), suggesting they have recently been tortured, and a severed head rests on the step below Figure 103, presaging the

³⁷ The implications of this earlier date on the interpretation of the narrative content of the mural program of Bonampak Structure 1 will be addressed in Chapter Four.

³⁸ Kubler, however, has suggested that the north wall could instead depict mistreated commoners who have come to petition Chaan Muwan to avenge them, and thus a scene both preceding and justifying the battle depicted on the remaining walls (1990 [1962]: 278).

fate that likely awaits them.³⁹ Two groups of standing warriors, each wearing a unique headdress and most holding a club or spear, are located on the lower steps, facing inwards towards the central doorway, which they flank. At the center of the top of the platform, in front of a blue background, Chaan Muwan is shown standing frontally, with face in profile and holding a tall spear, being confronted by a seated captive who looks up imploringly with raised hands. To either side of these central figures, two lines of standing nobles, including eight male figures wearing court finery that includes capes and large zoomorphic headdresses (88-93 and 95-96), two noble females (97-98), and a servant (99) oversee the presentation of the victims. Once again, hieroglyphic inscriptions name these individuals, which include nobles from the nearby sites of Lacanjá and Yaxchilán (Arellano Hernández 1998: 42-43). Over the narrow, yellow-backgrounded register above this scene are four cartouches containing zoomorphic and anthropomorphic figures that have been interpreted as representing constellations (M. Miller 1986: 49-50).

Room 3

Many similarities exist between the murals of Room 1 and those of Room 3. Once again figures are arranged in multiple registers separated by alternating red and white lines, the upper-most register consisting of supernatural masks over a yellow background. And once again, the subject is a festival involving elaborately costumed dancers and musicians, and the elite rituals that accompany it (Figs. 30 and 31).

³⁹ There are several cases of trophy heads and skulls being worn by warrior and ruler figures in the art of Bonampak, including Figures 7, 35, 51, 54, 55 (Chaan Muwan), 64, and 79 from the Battle Mural, the victorious figure of Chaan Muwan (94) from the north wall of Room 2, and figures from the lintels over the three entrances of each of the three rooms of Structure 1. See Chapter Three for further discussion of body parts displayed as trophies in Mesoamerican art.

On the north vault, over the doorway, are two registers of figures over a blue background: ten (51-60) wear capes and individualized headdresses as they stand and face towards the center above, and nine seated figures (61-69) wear plainer garb and engage in conversation below. The standing figures each have rectangular spaces next to them to accommodate glyphic captions, but only one of these was ever painted, demonstrating that the mural program at Bonampak was left unfinished (M. Miller 1986: 145). The upper register carries over to the west and east vaults. On the west stands a tightly arranged group of ten figures facing to the left (30-39), those to the front brandishing clubs. They bear a litter on their shoulders at the center of which another figure (42) is raised, his elevated height causing his body to overlap with the celestial register above. On the continuation of this register on the east vault, three noblewomen (1, 2, and 6) sit atop, and one (5) stands behind, a blue bench decorated with red circles.⁴⁰ They perform auto-sacrifice, drawing cords through their tongues and collecting the blood on strips of paper placed in a container to the right. A male figure (7) kneels on the floor beneath the bench to the right, while a female figure (3) sits on the floor to the left, holding a young child (4) in her arms: the same toddler who was shown being presented to the court on the south wall of Room 1, the heir to the Bonampak throne.

The rest of the wall and vault surfaces of Room 3 are filled with a single panoramic scene of a ritual celebration that includes dancers, musicians, and human sacrifice. The setting is an eight-stepped pyramid that is centered on the south wall and vault but which extends around the corners to the west and east, the staggered sides mimicking the slope of the vaulting. At the bottom center of the south wall, on the central axis of the pyramid, two

⁴⁰ Unpainted spaces left for glyphic captions are found next to these figures as well.

figures (18 and 20) stand at the base of the structure, holding the arms and legs of a third (19), who is raised with his chest arched upwards as a fourth figure (22) kneels two steps down from the top, either preparing to extract or having just finished extracting the victim's heart (Fig. 32). The plainly dressed, profile individuals taking part in the sacrifice are almost lost among the theatrical costumes of the eleven frontal figures who dance around them on the steps and along the base of the pyramid (13-17, 21, 24-28).⁴¹ These wear massive headdresses of green feathers, triangular painted and fringed elements projecting from the hips, and abundant jewelry and paraphernalia.⁴² Most of these figures carry colorful round fans or paddles, and most have one knee slightly bent as they stand on the ball of one foot, a Maya iconographic convention used to indicate dance (Looper 2009: 47). Finally, on the north wall, figures process inward towards the festivities from either side of the entrance, including four trumpeters (46-49) and pairs of figures raising standards (11-12, 43-44).

Chichén Itzá

Site Description and Background

Chichén Itzá, located at the center of the Yucatan about 95 km inland from the north coast of the peninsula, is a large, easily accessible site with impressive architectural and sculptural remains (Fig. 1). Known and visited by Europeans since the time of the Conquest, it has been under almost constant study since the middle of the nineteenth century. These

⁴¹ A twelfth, less elaborately costumed figure stands in profile at the top of the structure, playing a drum as he flanks the central, topmost figure, who is identified in the accompanying caption as a "holy lord" but is apparently not Chaan Muwan of Bonamapk (Miller and Houston 1998: 249-250).

⁴² The only exception to this general costume description is Figure 14, who wears a conical black and white headdress and an undulating yellow and white outfit resembling a squash blossom.

circumstances have led to an abundance of archaeological discoveries and published studies of the various architectural groups of the site, many of which have been reconstructed in modern times.

Chichén is remarkable for the quantity and variety of its monumental art and architecture. This expansive site is typically divided into two sections based on architectural style: a northern, Toltec-Maya section and a southern, Puuc-Maya section (Fig. 33). This was once commonly understood as reflecting temporally distinct occupation periods dominated by different ethnic groups (e.g. Tozzer 1957: 23-35). While this view still has its adherents, especially due to the concentration of most of the known Maya hieroglyphic inscriptions in the southern portion of the site, there is a growing scholarly consensus acknowledging at least partial overlap between the construction of these two sections due to the relative homogeneity of the ceramics found throughout Chichén as well as the dates obtained from radiocarbon testing (e.g. Lincoln 1990: 560-562; Kristan-Graham and Kowalski 2007: 32-38).

The northern, “Toltec-Maya” portion of Chichén Itzá – the Great Terrace – is a large plaza encompassing several extraordinary buildings of designs unusual for the Maya region. Among others, these include the Castillo, a radial pyramid surmounted by a two-chambered temple; the Great Ball Court, the largest structure of this sort in all of Mesoamerica and whose design includes four temples containing extensive decorative programs; a large platform decorated with skulls; the Temple of the Warriors, which will be discussed in greater detail below; and large, colonnaded halls. To the south of the Great Terrace is another radial pyramid known as the Ossario or High Priest’s Grave.

Notable among the numerous buildings from the southern, Puuc-Maya area of Chichén are the Caracol, a circular, two-story building that likely functioned at least in part as an astronomical observatory; the Casa Colorada; the Akab Dzib; and the Monjas, an administrative or palace complex that will be discussed in more detail below. Although each possesses unique features, all of these structures share affinities with the mosaic decoration and corbel vaulting that are characteristic of Puuc Fluorescent architecture, the prevailing architectural style of the western Yucatan from c. 700-900 A.D. (Andrews 1995). However, there are significant differences between the construction techniques at Chichén, where thick facing blocks were used, and in the Puuc region, where thin veneers of stone covered concrete walls (Ringle and Bey 2009: 341).

The name Chichén Itzá, by which the site has been called since at least the mid-sixteenth century, means “At the Mouth of the Well of the Itzá” (Tozzer 1957: 1). Chichén was built adjacent to an unusually large cenote – one of the abundant water-filled sinkholes that have formed in the flat, limestone shelf that makes up the Yucatan. Aside from serving a practical function as rain-catching reservoirs, these landscape features were considered to be entrances to the watery underworld by the ancient Maya, and there is evidence that the so-called Sacred Cenote at Chichén was a site of ritual pilgrimage (Ringle, *et al.* 1998: 203-208).

The second part of the appellation refers to the Itzá, a Maya ethnic group who are known to have occupied part of the Petén of northern Guatemala at the time of the Spanish contact, and who are believed to have originated as a Mexicanized population on the Gulf Coast at the periphery of the Maya region that entered into Yucatán and the Pasión region during the Epiclassic period (Ball and Taschek 1989; Kowalski 1989: 183). As with the

Olmeca-Xicalanca, who were discussed above in relation to Cacaxtla, the actual identity of the Itzá remains vague despite references made to them in early colonial sources. This is further complicated by the problems associated with the unusual art and architectural styles found at Chichén Itzá, styles that implicitly associate the site with Tula and the Toltecs.

The “Toltec” Problem

Despite the great level of scrutiny Chichén Itzá has been subject to, it remains one of the least securely understood Maya sites. Basic issues such as the ethnic background of its inhabitants, the absolute and relative dating of its constructions, and the nature of its political organization have remained controversial and sometimes contentious points of scholarly speculation, even in the most recent literature (Kristan-Graham and Kowalski 2007).

One problem is central to the scholarship surrounding Chichén Itzá and complicates all interpretations of the material remains at the site: the questions that are raised due to the great similarities between Chichén and the Early Postclassic Central Mexican site of Tula, an observation first made in the nineteenth century by Désiré Charnay (1888 [1885]: 341-346). Architectural features such as colonnaded halls, as well as sculptural elements such as serpent columns, relief panels featuring eagles and jaguars, atlantean figures, and processional warriors wearing specific costume elements are mirrored almost exactly between these two distant sites, with almost no examples of these features appearing at other, intermediary sites.

This cultural exchange was interpreted through the folk histories provided by Central Mexican and Yucatec Mayan ethnohistorical sources dating to the 16th and 17th centuries, which respectively tell of the departure of the semi-mythological ruler Quetzalcoatl Topiltzin

from Tula, and the subsequent arrival of a great lord matching his description to the Yucatan Peninsula from lands to the west (Tozzer 1957: 27-31). Quetzalcoatl means Feathered Serpent in Nahuatl, the language of Postclassic Central Mexico; the founding ruler of the dynasty at Chichén was referred to in these later sources as Kulkulcan, which has the same meaning in Yucatec Mayan (Kubler 1982: 93). The abundant presence of feathered serpents in the imagery of Chichén Itzá were seen as bolstering this reading of the sites through Colonial-era sources, which considered Chichén Itzá as a secondary capital modeled on the original template of Tula, and saw the appearance of new architectural and iconographic features in Yucatán as resulting from an (aggressive) incursion into the region by ethnic Mexicans (Tozzer 1957: 25-27). This interpretation was used to explain the proliferation of martial imagery at Chichén, which was seen as both documenting the conquest of the site by foreign invaders and reflecting the militaristic attitudes of the Mexicans (contrasting with what was then believed to be the essential religiosity of the Classic Maya).⁴³

Kubler later challenged this interpretation with a formal analysis of the various features shared by the two sites, concluding that the greater variation and refinement of forms in evidence at Chichén Itzá indicate that this site was the source of innovation while Tula was an inferior copy by comparison (1961: 76-79). Indeed, several scholars have shown that the forms found at Chichén have numerous antecedents in the Maya region, and were more likely to have derived from these than to have been imported from Central Mexico (e.g. Rands 1954; Cohodas 1974: 18-25). More recently, scholars have taken increasingly nuanced stances on the issue, suggesting that features from Central Mexico (as well as other

⁴³ See Gillespie (2007) for a detailed analysis of the formation and perpetuation of the myth of Toltec invasion.

alternative centers of power) were intentionally manipulated by local Maya elites participating in a pan-Mesoamerican network of trade, religion, and legitimizing power (Kowalski 2007: 297; Ringle 2004: 213).

The Battle Murals

Militaristic themes abound in the monumental art of Chichén Itzá, and numerous examples will be presented in the discussion of Mesoamerican martial iconography in the following chapter. This heightened concern with bellicosity is perhaps most evident in the murals featuring narrative battle imagery that can be found in several structures at the site, including the Upper Temple of the Jaguars, the Temple of the Warriors, and the Monjas Complex.

The Upper Temple of the Jaguars

The Upper Temple of the Jaguars (UTJ) was a restricted access elite structure that was one of four major ritual buildings associated with the Great Ball Court, itself a massive ceremonial space (Fig. 34).⁴⁴ It overlooks the ball court from atop a pyramidal platform that encompasses the south end of the east playing wall and whose base covers an outward facing structure, the Lower Temple of the Jaguars. The only access to the structure was provided by a narrow stairway that led to a precarious narrow ledge at the top of the 10 meter-high

⁴⁴ The Great Ball Court is a remarkable program of art and architecture that is far too extensive to adequately describe here. The largest such structure in all Mesoamerica, the I-shaped playing field measures approximately 167 m long x 70 m wide x 10 m high, with a continuous bench of 96.5 m long x 3.1 m wide x 1.5 m high running along the east and west playing walls (Cohodas 1975: 30-31). Four large temples – the North Temple, South Temple, Lower Temple of the Jaguars, and Upper Temple of the Jaguars – all of which feature elaborate iconographic programs on their interiors, are incorporated into the perimeter. Detailed descriptions and analyses of these can be found in a variety of studies, including Cohodas (1975), Wren (1994), Schele and Mathews (1998: 197-255), and Ringle (2004).

playing wall. From here, one could ascend the final steps into the temple, raised a further 1.5 meters on a secondary platform (Cohodas 1975: 57).

The lower façade of the structure is relatively plain, its most notable features being the pair of serpent columns supporting the stone lintel that spanned the entrance, which they divided into thirds (Fig. 35).⁴⁵ Additional three-dimensional serpent heads were tenoned into the tops of the balustrades at either side of the stairway, relating to the feathered serpent molding that runs around the structure at precisely this height. The bottoms of the balustrades carry relief panels featuring serpent-bird-men common in the iconography of Chichén Itzá. The upper portion of the façade, essentially a very broad double atadura molding, is replete with martially themed decoration. Profile jaguars – from which the building’s modern appellation is derived – process towards the center, alternating with shields and bordered above and below by running friezes of intertwined serpents. Above this is a frieze of feathered serpents whose undulating bodies cross two registers, where they rhythmically alternate with rows of disks and spools. A final, upper frieze repeats the intertwined serpents design seen twice below. The upper flaring cornice was topped with individually carved roof ornaments representing shields with darts crossed in front of them.

The floor plan of the UTJ measures approximately 11.4 x 10.2 meters and is divided into inner and outer chambers, each with a separate corbel-vaulted ceiling (Fig. 36; Cohodas 1975: 57). The front chamber had collapsed by the time scholarly interest was directed towards the site in the nineteenth century, and, while the entire building has since been

⁴⁵ Similar serpent columns are found trisecting the front portals of the structures atop the Castillo and the Temple of the Warriors, two further “Toltec” style buildings that dominate the Great Terrace at Chichén Itzá. See Kubler (1982) for a discussion of these serpent columns.

completely restored, any murals that originally decorated walls of the front room have been lost. The doorway communicating between the outer and inner chambers has jambs with central projecting pilasters, resulting in a staggered, five-faced profile on either side of the entrance. These surfaces were carved with reliefs depicting solitary warrior figures (Fig. 37). Each figure is shown with slightly different costume elements that perhaps mark them as portraits of specific individuals, as do the Central Mexican-style name glyphs above them. Their attire and accessories, which include butterfly pectorals, round back mirrors, mosaic headdresses adorned by two feathers, fur-lined incense bags, and fur knee cuffs, identify them as “Toltec” warriors, now understood as indicating their participation in a military order or ideological system rather than their ethnicity (Tozzer 1957: 155-161; Ringle 2009: 19). Maya-style supernatural masks frame the figures above and below.⁴⁶

The inner chamber measures 8 m wide x 2.3 m deep x 7 m high, the latter dimension being evenly divided between the walls and the vaulting (Galindo Trejo, *et al.* 2001: 259). Murals have survived on the walls of the inner chamber, albeit in a relatively poor state of preservation. However, the extant portions were meticulously recorded by the English artist Adela Breton over the course of several prolonged visits she made to the site between 1900 and 1907 (V. Miller 1989: 34). These documents have served as the basis for almost all of the subsequent scholarship of the UTJ Paintings (e.g. A. Miller 1977; Coggins 1984; Ringle 2009).⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Karl Taube has interpreted these masks as representing Flower Mountain, thus situating the figures in a celestial paradise and thereby identifying them as warriors who died in battle (2004: 85-86).

⁴⁷ Breton made 1:1 tracings of each of the murals, working for years at the site to create accurate reproductions that closely matched the colors of the originals. She then made several 1:4 reduced copies of her paintings for interested scholars. It is the latter that are found

Directly across from the doorway, the painted panel on the center of the back (east) wall of the inner chamber is entirely filled by a pair of warrior figures facing each other (Fig. 38).⁴⁸ Both figures carry darts pointing downwards, and each is elaborately adorned – the one on the left with a zoomorphic jade headdress and the one on the right with gold disks worn on his head and chest. The right-hand figure is given additional emphasis by wavy yellow lines alternating with outward projecting darts that seemingly emanate from his body, as well as a feathered serpent that winds behind him. A nearly identical pairing of warrior figures is seen on the carved upper surface of a large table or throne that was recovered from the rubble of the outer chamber (Fig. 39).⁴⁹ Although in this case only the bottom third of the figures has survived, we again see that they both hold weapons in a non-aggressive manner, and the tail of a serpent can be seen winding behind the right-hand figure. Further similar figural pairings are found carved on the three visible surfaces of the wooden lintel over the doorway between the inner and outer chambers, once again occupying the central axis of the structure (Fig. 40). On each surface, a composition of two figures armed with atlatls and darts is repeated. They face each other across a container heaped with round objects; the figure to the south is surrounded by a solar disk and has a speech scroll in front of his mouth, while the

reproduced in publications by Coggins (1984) and Ringle (2009). For the purpose of this study, I reviewed Breton's original 1:1 traced reproductions as well as her 1:4 copies, all of which can be found in the archives of the City Museum in Bristol, England.

⁴⁸ Only the upper third of this panel has survived relatively intact. Traces from the lower portion suggest that the figures are seated on scaffoldings, and the narrow basal register shows traces of a prone figure in a jeweled costume with undulating serpents growing from its abdomen, identical to the better preserved example painted over the doorway on the opposite (west) wall.

⁴⁹ This table was supported by fifteen squat atlantean figures, each individuated with different costume elements. Although it was found in the outer chamber, all other two-room structures at Chichén had tables in the inner chamber; Cohodas has suggested that its original placement was at the center of the back wall of the inner room, beneath the nearly identical imagery found on the mural painted there (1975: 61).

northern figure has a serpent winding in an S-curve behind him. As will be discussed in Chapter Four, the identification of these pairs of individuals – who are so obviously central to the iconographic program of this room – has varied widely and greatly affected the interpretations that have been put forward with regard to the narrative content of the remaining murals.

The rest of the wall surface of the inner room of the UTJ is filled with six symmetrically arranged panels featuring scenes related to martial conflict. The long (east and west) walls are divided into thirds, with the central third of each not belonging to the battle cycle. Thus, the battle murals are situated at the following positions, listed clockwise from the entrance: north panel of the west wall (NW), north wall (N), north panel of the east wall (NE), south panel of the east wall (SE), south wall (S), and south panel of the west wall (SW).⁵⁰ These panels were in varying states of preservation when Breton documented them in the early twentieth century, with the south and southwest panels being almost completely accounted for, the northwest panel having about half its area preserved, and less than half of the surface of the three remaining panels being retained.

Beneath each narrative scene is a narrow basal register. While most of these are largely destroyed, scattered surviving fragments allow comparison with the better-preserved example from the southwest panel to confirm that all contained similar imagery: two individuals seated in front of a blue background, their legs crossed in front of them as they lean back onto one hand while the other is raised, supporting the blue upper border (Fig. 41). At the center of the scene, a small figure with an elongated forehead from which a water lily

⁵⁰ The reading order of the murals, if any was intended, remains ambiguous. Various proposals that have been suggested by previous scholars will be discussed in Chapter Four.

grows emerges from an indeterminate object – possibly a shell or a serpent’s maw – along with numerous scrolls and long water lily vines that wind across the composition and curl around the figures. Such figures – often referred to as Bacabs or Pawahtuns, the mythical supporters of the sky – are common in the art of Chichén Itzá; here they are depicted in the watery underworld supporting the earthy events that take place in the register above them (Coggins 1984: 159).

The battle scenes depicted in these murals are among the most complex known examples of multi-figural narratives from the entire corpus of Mesoamerican monumental art (Figs. 42-47). Each panel features dozens of participants interacting in distinctive settings that include depictions of landscape features, buildings, and defensive and offensive structures. The painted surfaces are entirely filled with a marked *horror vacui*, and individual figures seldom overlap. Although each scene was conceived as a continuous composition, it is possible to discern distinctive upper, middle, and lower sections due to the differentiated settings and actions – possibly indicating a temporal sequence of events – that are depicted in each area. The upper sections of the paintings features warriors attacking specific locations – a cluster of buildings forming a town in most cases, but a landscape of steep red hills in the NE panel. The center third of the compositions shows the meeting of opposing forces of warriors on a non-descript setting. At the bottom of each panel are two rows of figures leading captives or seated in dialogue, interspersed with various objects and small, round buildings possibly representing the temporary structures of encampments.

Most of the figures wear relatively simple outfits, especially compared with the elaborately costumed warriors portrayed on the UTJ jambs. The presence of white bands just below the knees of many of the attacking soldiers, as well as their use of spear throwers and

round shields, led Tozzer to identify them as “Toltec” warriors, and thus to read the paintings as documents of the conquest of local Maya populations by intrusive Central Mexican forces (1957: 158-159). There is significant variation in the costumes worn by the defending forces in each of the murals, suggesting that rather than depicting different stages in a single conflict, each scene depicts a separate warfare event (Ringle 2009: 22). Certain figures are distinguished by more elaborate attributes, including a tri-lobed “star” skirt (NW1, SE1, and S39),⁵¹ and, more dramatically, a full solar disk surrounding figures NW2, N1, S40, SW5, and SW82. Several other figures are set off by red, white, or green serpents winding behind their bodies (N3, N4, N6, N7, N8, N9, N33, N34, NE1, NE34, S34, S39, S57, S61, S77, S125, SW45, SW58, SW108, and SW113). These last two features – the solar disks and the winding serpents – clearly suggest an association with the paired figures carved on the lintel; the exact nature of this relationship remains uncertain, however, and they have been variously interpreted as specific individuals, supernatural beings, or allegorical types representative of ethnic and cosmological dualities (e.g. A. Miller 1977; Seler 1998 [1908]; Cohodas 1989).⁵²

The NW panel (Fig. 42) features an attack on a town composed of nine structures, several of which exhibit the distinctive *talud-tablero* profile associated with the

⁵¹ For ease of identification, I have numbered the individual figures. The format I have followed begins with the directional abbreviation of the specific panel and is followed by a figure number, which generally will increase moving from the top to the bottom of the composition. Due to the poor state of preservation of many parts of the murals, I have occasionally placed numbers next to very minimal indications that a figure would be present – such as the outline of a shield – where no other traces have survived.

⁵² The diverse interpretations that have been proposed for these figures have greatly affected the reading of the narrative content of the entire program, and will therefore be taken up in greater detail in Chapter Four.

dissemination of Teotihuacan culture and ideology (Angulo V. 2001: 31).⁵³ This latter feature indicates that, despite the relatively small numbers and modest appearances of structures on this and the other UTJ murals, it is a matter of monumental stone architecture, and therefore of substantial polities. Indeed, none of the depictions of architecture in the murals from Chichén Itzá are to scale, as figures are typically shown as large as the buildings they interact with: figure NW13, for example, holds a torch to the thatched roof of a structure that is no taller than he is, its doorway only coming up to his waist. A curving red defensive wall protects the town, further suggesting a population of sufficient density to justify the labor required for fortification. Unlike the other murals, the attacking forces shown here are almost all painted blue.⁵⁴ The conflict is confined to the town itself, suggesting a surprise raid; several of the victims – who are shown being chased, grasped, or thrown down by their aggressors – wear ankle-length skirts, and thus appear to be female (NW6, NW17, NW22, and NW26). To the left of the town, a figure surrounded by a solar disk is seen facing away from the conflict (NW2). Beneath him are two bowls containing offerings, as well as a vertical white banner with a tri-colored feathered base. An identical object, possibly a battle standard, sits at the center of the ground line at the bottom of the scene, where conquerors are shown processing with their captives and figures sit conversing in groups. The central portion of the composition – the non-specific space typically reserved for depictions of battle in the

⁵³ Talud-tablero refers to architecture in which a horizontal platform is supported on a sloping base. While there are many regional variations, the general configuration is thought to have been strongly associated with Teotihuacan civic identity, which it has commonly been taken to signify when it is found outside of Central Mexico (e.g. M. Miller 2001: 68-69). Juan Pedro Laporte, however, has challenged this view, arguing that the variation and early date of talud-tablero architecture at Tikal and other sites indicates that this was a pan-Mesoamerican phenomenon that should not be so closely identified with Teotihuacan (2004: 204-206).

⁵⁴ Exceptions include NW15, NW27, NW31, NW38, NW43, and NW53.

other UTJ panels – is entirely occupied by further victors leading their captives; the conflict depicted in the NW panel is limited to the upper portion of the composition, entirely occurring within the walls of the town.

Less than half of the painting on the north wall has survived (Fig. 43). Traces of two buildings and a tree can be seen in the center portion of the composition, indicating that a settlement is under attack. The background is divided between a green lower portion and a blue upper portion by a wavy line that extends from the middle of the left side to near the top of the right, suggesting, depending whether the blue is meant to indicate sky or water, that the town is situated either in hilly terrain or on the coast. A partial solar disk at the center top of the image presumably once contained a warrior figure that has since been obliterated. The sun symbolism would seem to suggest the blue area represents sky, but there are ten additional warrior figures over this upper portion of the background who stand on the backs of undulating serpents, which could possibly be intended as zoomorphized boats (N2-9 and N33-34) (Coggins 1984: 161). In the upper right corner of the panel, three denuded captive figures are seen standing beneath an identical three-colored standard (N15-N17). While most of the lower portion of the mural is destroyed, the blue outlines of numerous rectangular shields indicate the presence of the defenders of the town, who, in addition to the assault from the serpent-riding figures, are attacked by figures from the right who carry round shields (N10-14, N18-25, and N56-62).

The NE panel has suffered significant damage, with only about a quarter of the original painting still visible towards the upper center and left of the composition (Fig. 44). The surviving portion, however, depicts a battle occurring in a landscape made up of steep red hills peppered with trees and possibly a nopal (prickly pear) cactus plant. Scholars have

suggested that the scene could take place in the Puuc hills of Yucatan, or even in the hills of Oaxaca, but the close proximity of the peaks to each other – two are connected by a bridge crossed by figures NE30-32 – would seem to exclude these suggestions (A. Miller 1977: 212-213; Schele and Mathews 1998: 234). At the left of the scene, figure NE1 is supported on the open maw of a twisting white serpent, which raises him up to the level of three figures who defend the hilltop (NE3-5).

The upper third of the SE panel features a dense grouping of buildings amid low green hills, flanked on either side by forests of trees teeming with abundant fauna (Fig. 45). The inhabitants can be seen seated and standing in and around the structures (SE2-4, SE9-15, and SE21-24), and although the presence of warriors with round shields can be discerned despite significant loss to the mural (SE6-8, SE18, SE30-34), the general atmosphere is not one of military confrontation. To the left of the town, two warriors stand out: SE1 wears a star skirt and is surrounded by red scrolls, while SE5 wears a heavy green headdress and pectoral and is surrounded by white scrolls. Two curving red elements beneath the town have often been identified as canoes in the literature (e.g. A. Miller 1977: 214; Coggins 1984: 159; Schele and Mathews 1998: 234). However, the lack of any indications of water and the presence of a hillock in the space between these objects suggests they are rather to be understood as walls integrated into the naturally defensible features of the landscape to fortify the town. Further warrior figures can be discerned in the badly preserved lower portion of the mural, but here again, they do not appear to be engaged in battle. At the bottom of the scene, several rows of figures process along three successive ground lines, the uppermost of which undulates to suggest hills.

At the top of the south panel (Fig. 46) is a community formed by two rows of buildings that are occupied by seated figures (S2-5, S7, S10, S12-14, S16-17, S20, S22-24, and S26) and beset by warriors with round shields (S1, S6, S8-9, S11, S15, S18-19, S21, S26-32, and S37-8). Despite the structures and figures that appear firmly planted across it, the blue background of this upper portion of the painting would seem to indicate sky due to the undulating ground line separating it from the green background below, which suggests hilly terrain. Indeed the battle raging over the middle portion of the scene stresses the verticality of the struggle, with figures climbing ladders (S69-70) and several tall scaffold platforms rising from the ground line below. Warriors surrounded by winding feathered serpents (S57, S61, and S77) occupy the top position of each tower. Just below the town, warriors on either side are surrounded by red serpents (S34 and S39), while a figure surrounded by a solar disk is seen to the right (S40). At the bottom of the scene, below the ground line of the battle, is a narrow register with a red background. Here, amid several rounded structures, numerous figures wearing green helmets, ear ornaments, and butterfly pectorals sit and converse. A feathered serpent rises behind the centrally placed figure S125, in front of whom two prisoners (S122 and S124) and the same banner or standard noted in other scenes (carried by figures S121 and S123) are being presented.

Along with the south mural, the SW panel is among the best preserved of the UTJ paintings (Fig. 47). Here again, warriors are shown attacking a settlement at the upper portion of the scene. In this case, the buildings are more numerous and less regularly organized, and the background is uniformly flat and green. A few trees to the sides of the composition suggest a forested area, but the central portion of the scene is densely crowded by warriors engaged in battle. About half way up the right and left sides, two warriors

surrounded by green feathered serpents (SW45 and SW58) lead separate flanks of the attack, converging on the defending forces in the center. Another figure surrounded by a white cloud serpent (SW42) joins the attacking force on the right side. Part of a solar disk is visible above the town on the upper right, in a now destroyed corner of the mural. Another figure is a solar disk (SW82) is seen at the center bottom, just above two ground lines on which numerous figures sit amid several rounded structures. In the lower row of figures, two individuals are distinguished by the presence of feathered serpents behind them (SW108 and SW113). In front of these each of these figures are vessels with offerings, round red objects, and several standards planted in the ground, including the familiar tri-colored one seen in other UTJ panels.

The surfaces of the vaulting above the battle scenes were also originally covered with paintings, only two fragments of which have survived (Fig. 48). These – located on the lower south vault and on the center of the west vault just above the doorway – both feature scenes of processing warriors and human sacrifice by heart extraction. Further up on the south vault, warrior figures in active poses with one knee raised and weapons drawn back can be discerned. While this could be interpreted as a post-battle celebratory war dance, it also presents the possibility that the sacrifice scenes were only the lower registers of additional full battle scenes that once covered the vaults, mirroring the three-part composition seen in the wall panels. In either case, there is a direct thematic or even narrative connection between the subject matter of the vault mural fragments and the battle scenes on the walls below.

The Temple of the Warriors

The Temple of the Warriors is situated on the eastern edge of the Great Terrace, directly across from the Great Ball Court. The architectural complex consists of a large, four-level pyramidal platform whose frontal stairway plunges into (or emerges from) the roof of a large colonnaded hall comprising 81 square columns. Each of these is carved on all four sides with figures, including numerous warriors (Fig. 49).⁵⁵ The pyramid base supported a building with outer and inner chambers whose large size (slightly more than 21 meters per side) was made possible by the presence of internal columns, which were similarly carved with warrior figures that inspired the modern name of the structure (Fig. 50); the inner chamber had benches running along the lateral walls and a table altar or seat supported by atlantean figures at the center of the rear wall (Morris, *et al.* 1931: 13-20). Like the Upper Temple of the Jaguars and the Castillo, a pair of serpent columns supported the outer lintel of this structure, dividing the entrance into three equal parts. The Temple of the Warriors was built partially encasing the earlier Temple of the Chac Mool, the surviving portion of which reveals it to have had a nearly identical form (*Ibid.* 1931: 71-73).⁵⁶

When the structure atop the pyramid collapsed, the walls fell inward burying fragments of the paintings that covered them under piles of rubble. The excavators traced the surviving fragments and recorded which numbered section of the floor each was recovered from. In this way, the pieces were fitted together and their original placement on the walls of the building were able to be surmised (Morris 1931: 382-283). This painstaking effort

⁵⁵ Further abutting colonnades extend to the south and southeast, forming the periphery of the descriptively titled Court of the Thousand Columns. These feature plain (non-figural) round and square columns.

⁵⁶ For detailed discussions of the architectural design of this structure and its associated sculptural program, see Morris, *et al.* (1931) and Stone (1999).

resulted in Ann Axtell Morris' reconstruction paintings of several partial scenes, mostly from either side of the central wall that partitioned the two rooms. These include depictions of a procession of captives following a raid on a village (east wall of outer chamber, north of doorway), a naval conflict and scene of human sacrifice (east wall of outer chamber, south of doorway), and warriors being transported in canoes past a village (west wall of inner chamber, south of doorway).⁵⁷

On the back (east) wall of the outer chamber, to the left of the doorway to the inner room, numerous recovered painted fragments have been reconstructed into an expansive scene depicting black-painted warriors conducting a raid on a village defended by warriors painted with horizontal red stripes (Fig. 51; Morris 1931: 386-395).⁵⁸ At the upper left of the scene is a large enclosed body of water filled with aquatic creatures, five red-striped villagers, two canoes, a rearing jaguar, and a large temple. One figure carries a large load on his back, while others appear engaged in combat with unseen enemies; one of these individuals is depicted upside down, suggesting he has been wounded or killed (Morris 1931: 393). To the upper right, a group of five structures – four with thatched roofs and one with a flat roof and Puuc Colonnade molding – represent a village. About two thirds of the space is composed of a green background, which is separated by an undulating horizontal line, likely

⁵⁷ Among the hundreds of recovered pieces of painting that were too fragmentary to be reconstructed into coherent scenes, several exhibit martial subjects including a five-registered procession of numerous individuals including, but not limited to, warriors on the west wall of the inner chamber, north of the doorway; a scene including a warrior figure in an active pose and a temple from the center of the north wall of the inner chamber; and a warrior wearing a tri-lobed “star” skirt from the center of the east wall of the inner chamber (Morris 1931: 384-431 and *passim*).

⁵⁸ While enough fragments have survived to leave no doubt as to the overall subject of this scene, Morris' watercolor reconstruction fills in large gaps in the composition and therefore should not be considered a completely accurate copy. Only the details recorded in Morris' drawing of the assembled and arranged painting fragments will be discussed here.

representing hilly terrain, from a red background above. In the village, most of the figures painted with red stripes are shown inside, on top of, or emerging from the structures. Several are armed with curved sticks, which they hold raised, while one figure carries a bundle on his shoulders. Two black painted invaders can be seen to the right, one on top of a building, and one entering another structure. The double line procession at the bottom of the scene leaves no doubt as to the outcome of the attack: black-painted warriors carrying spears and shields hold ropes binding the hands of denuded red-striped captives, who are marched from left to right over a red background.

On the same wall, on the right side of the central doorway leading to the inner chamber, surviving fragments, although not numerous enough to be reassembled into a coherent scene, suggest a marine battle between black-painted figures and light-skinned figures with flowing blonde hair speckled with green jewels (Fig. 52; Morris 1931: 398-405). The latter are clearly vanquished by the former, based on their nudity, the falling posture of one, ropes binding another, and the grasping of the hair and arm of two others. The victors are depicted both in canoes and wading in shallow water teeming with aquatic animals. An apparently related neighboring scene depicts a light-skinned, blonde-haired individual being held down on a sacrificial stone by two kneeling black-skinned figures as a third stands with a curved stick raised above his head (Fig. 53). A feathered serpent winds across the sacrificial stone, behind the priest, and up to the cornice of the temple architecture that serves as the setting of this scene.

From the inner chamber, a scene has been successfully reconstructed from fragments associated with the west wall of the inner chamber of the Temple of the Warriors to the left

(south) of the entry door (Fig. 54; Morris 1931: 418-426).⁵⁹ Here, daily life in a coastal village is seen, with a half dozen thatched structures interspersed with a similar number of trees over a red background. The village bustles with activity: merchants carry loads on their backs supported with ropes tied around their foreheads, a woman tends an olla cooking over a fire at the center of the scene, a shore bird swoops down over some trees, and piles of fish can be seen in several locations. To the right, a double-bayed structure seemingly constructed from bundled reeds houses at least two seated figures as a feathered serpent rises in front of it. The lower third of the composition consists of an unbounded body of water teeming with snails, fish, rays, crabs, and a turtle. Three canoes, each steered by a light-skinned figure standing in the bow and carrying dark-skinned warriors armed with shields, darts, and spear-throwers, pass in front of the village, crossing the scene from right to left. Further fragments recovered from the north portion of the same wall, on the opposite side of the doorway, contain depictions of warriors in active poses, suggesting that a battle scene once occupied this spot (Fig. 55).

The Monjas

The Monjas (Structure 4C1) is an architectural complex located to the southeast of the Great Terrace at Chichén Itzá, where it likely functioned as an elite palace or administrative center (Fig. 56).⁶⁰ It underwent several expansion campaigns, including the enlargement of the central platform, the demolition of a west wing, and the addition of the

⁵⁹ As with the village raid scene discussed above, Morris' watercolor reconstruction fills in missing portions of the composition, and should therefore not be considered accurate in all its details. This study limits discussion to details evident in the drawing she made of the assembled fragments.

⁶⁰ Bolles (1977) provides a comprehensive treatment of the art and architecture of the Monjas.

second- and third-story buildings. The range structure surmounting the platform (atop which a third story once stood) was completed in a Puuc Mosaic architectural style, suggesting a ninth- to tenth-century date for its construction. This corresponds with the accepted reading of the Calendar Round date 8 *manik* 15 *uo* – found repeated in the inscriptions on five hieroglyphic lintels over doorways on the front (north) and sides of this structure – as referring to 10.2.10.11.7 in the Long Count, or February 8, 880 A.D. (García Campillo 2001: 413). Additionally, a radiocarbon date from the East Wing of the Monjas has given a recalibrated 1-Sigma range of A.D. 670 (891) 1000 (Ringle, *et al.* 1998: 191).

Several chambers of the second-story range structure of the Monjas exhibit traces of mural paintings; however, in most cases these are so fragmentary as to be illegible.⁶¹ Room 22, a wide chamber with three doorways that occupies the central position on the rear (south) side, is an exception. The traces of painted murals it once contained are now largely destroyed, but they survived long enough to be documented in reconstruction paintings by both Adela Breton and Jean Charlot.

The best-preserved area in Room 22 is located on the east end of the north vault, where a fortified city being overthrown by warriors is depicted (Fig. 57). Even studied from imperfect reconstructions, these fragments exhibit close stylistic and iconographic parallels with the murals from the Upper Temple of the Jaguars, adding support to the now widely accepted interpretation of the “Maya” and “Toltec” portions of the site as largely overlapping chronologically rather than representing sequential developments. Similarities between the

⁶¹ Apart from Room 22 discussed below, the only other substantial fragments come from Room 17, located to the left of the central stairway on the front (north) side of the building. Here, parts of musicians – some playing long red trumpets and others holding drumsticks – and portions of red-trunked trees in a blue and green landscape can be discerned.

murals include the use of red outlines for the figures; identically depicted costume elements such as knee bands, sandals, and weaponry; and identical representations of curving red defensive walls (northwest and southeast panels, UTJ).⁶²

The red curving fortification depicted in Monjas Room 22 forms the outer defensive feature of a pair of concentric walls depicted in this partially preserved scene. The inner wall, a rounded square topped by jagged crenellations, protects a dense grouping of architectural structures. To the left, warriors standing on a platform with flaring cornices fling flaming darts from their spear throwers in an attempt to set the roofs on fire.⁶³ Below the inner compound, three warriors circle between the two walls. To the right of the outer fortification, five figures wearing animal head headdresses and blue ear ornaments and bracelets walk towards the right in a single file line. A tri-colored scroll is seen above their heads, and above this a series of parallel wavy lines over a blue background indicates water. Above this is a horizontal platform on which the legs of five standing figures can be seen. Beneath the outer wall is a building in front of which sit three or four figures.

Other fragments of mural painting in Room 22 suggest the martial theme originally covered the entire interior of this chamber. On the east side of the vault, a partial figure is visible walking to the right as he carries a spear thrower in his right hand and a bunch of darts and a shield in his left. Portions of further figures in front of and behind him can be

⁶² The red curving feature from Room 22 of the Monjas can indisputably be identified as a wall since the lines of masonry can be discerned, strongly supporting the identification of the similar red curving features from the NW and SE panels of the UTJ as defensive walls rather than canoes. In all three murals, the walls are shown coming up to the waist of figures depicted behind them; however, figures in the murals at Chichén Itzá are typically depicted large relative to the size of buildings, so the scale of these walls should not be taken as accurate.

⁶³ A figure can also be seen setting fire to the roofs of buildings within the fortified town depicted on the northwest UTJ mural, but in that example the action is done by hand.

seen. On the south vault, very fragmentary remains are legible as depicting two figures, one clearly identifiable as a warrior by the spear thrower he holds, among several buildings.

Thus, the larger scene likely represented an attack on a village. Bolles describes a sacrificial scene on the south vault between the center and west doors, including several nude figures with their hair hanging loose, standing with bound arms or prone on the ground, one with blood spurting from his chest (1977: 207). Opposite this scene, on the north vault, a figure can be seen running to the right, his right knee raised and his torso twisting as he looks backwards. The trace of another raised foot in front of this figure suggests others accompanied him in his flight.

Dating

For much of the twentieth century, Chichén Itzá was considered to have had two phases: a purely Maya period associated with Puuc Florescent architecture accompanied by Maya hieroglyphic inscriptions, and a subsequent “Chichén-Toltec” or “Modified Florescent” period associated with the “Toltec” style art and architecture of the structures of Great Terrace (Tozzer 1957: 23-35). The latter was considered to belong to the early Postclassic, roughly 1000-1200 A.D. or even later. The primary factor contributing to the ascribing of this relatively late date was the general acceptance of the view that the presence of “Toltec” style architecture at Chichén reflected the incursion of people from Central Mexico, requiring Chichén to post-date, or at least be contemporaneous with, the site of Tula, whose florescence has been more securely established as dating to 900-1150 A.D. (Mastache, *et al.* 2002: 41-50).

However, several independent sources of chronological information exist from Chichén, including absolute dates from radiocarbon testing and epigraphic inscription, as well as the relative dates derived from ceramic seriation and stylistic analysis of the art and architecture. Synthesis of the combined data has led to the suggestion by recent scholars that Chichén's florescence occurred significantly earlier, with the last major construction occurring before the end of the tenth century (Ringle, *et al.* 1998: 192).

The half-dozen published radiocarbon dates from Chichén fall between the 7th and 10th centuries, including one from a wooden lintel in the Castillo – a radial pyramid that is the central monument of the “Toltec” portion of the site – giving a recalibrated 1-Sigma date range of A.D. 780 (886) 969 (Ringle, *et al.* 1998: 191).⁶⁴ The other 14C dates from the site include one from the Monjas, which was discussed above; two from the adjacent Iglesia, which provide recalibrated 1-sigma ranges of 636 (663) 690 and 776 (883) 961; and one from the Casa Colorada, another Puuc-style structure, which gives a range of 642 (666) 758 (*Ibid.*).

Mayan hieroglyphic inscriptions at Chichén Itzá are mostly found associated with buildings exhibiting Puuc-style architecture, while carvings associated with “Toltec” structures often include what appear to be nominal glyphs in a Mexican style (Tozzer 1957: 35). Dates from the Maya inscriptions are clustered in the mid- to late-ninth century,⁶⁵ and

⁶⁴ The initial test of this sample, which was collected by Alberto Ruz in 1958, gave a calibrated result of A.D. 790 +/-70. This unexpectedly early date for a “Toltec” structure raised concerns among scholars, who had the sample retested to rule out instrumental difficulties. The subsequent test corroborated the previous findings, giving a calibrated date of A.D. 810 +/-100 (Andrews IV and Andrews V 1980: 281-283).

⁶⁵ The vast majority of the inscriptions at Chichén only provide Calendar Round dates, which, since they repeat every 52 years, must be fixed in the Long Count through contextual associations such as corresponding ceramics or cross-references with other inscriptions. Most

their discontinuation has often been cited as marking a temporal shift in the nature of the ethnic occupation or political structure of Chichén. However, this distinction is no longer considered absolute, as there are instances of Maya inscriptions associated with “Toltec” architecture, including a carved ball court marker that was recovered from the Great Ballcourt in a context that suggests it was coeval with the building program, and which includes a date that has been read as 864 A.D. (Lincoln 1990: 611-612; Wren and Schmidt 1991: 206-207).

In ceramic seriation, complexes of coeval ceramics are identified through analysis of the forms and composition of sherds and statistical analysis of the occurrence of different vessel types relative to each other. The stratigraphic relationships of these complexes to one another provide a relative sequence that can then be tied to absolute dates (e.g. from radiocarbon analysis). The Sotuta Complex, which has been assigned a date of c. 750/800 - 1050 A.D., constitutes the overwhelming ceramic presence at Chichén Itzá during the period in which all major construction took place (Cobos Palma 2004: 520-525). Notably, there appears to be no significant distinction between the ceramics present in the different sections of Chichén exhibiting “Maya” and “Toltec” architecture, suggesting a substantially homogenous population (Lincoln 1990: 211-212, 378). This indicates that the construction and occupation of these portions of the site largely overlapped, discrediting the idea of drastic upheaval following a foreign incursion.

current literature situates Chichén’s inscriptions in the second half of the ninth century (e.g. Grube and Krochock 2007; Ringle, *et al.* 1998: 192). This corresponds well with the sole Long Count date at the site, found on a lintel from the Temple of the Initial Series: 10.2.9.1.9 9 *muluk 7 sak*, which converts to July 26, 878 (Grube and Krochock 2007: 237).

Finally, analysis of features of the architecture and monumental artwork found at Chichén Itzá has led some authors to propose stylistic sequences or to suggest chronologies for the site based on iconographic comparisons with material from other, more securely dated sites. Comparisons of artistic style or content should be considered the least reliable method of dating, however. The prioritization of certain traits over others in creating a chronology is dependent on the subjective biases of the modern scholar. Additionally, the possibility exists of intentional archaisms. It is no surprise, then, that such analyses have resulted in widely varying conclusions.⁶⁶

The establishment of a chronology at Chichén Itzá remains less precise than at most other similarly sized Maya sites due to the relative paucity of radiocarbon data and hieroglyphic inscriptions and the lack of multiple, clearly delineated ceramic phases. The window of dates given to the site by various scholars depends largely on the degree of overlap that is seen between the Maya and Toltec (or Florescent and Modified Florescent) portions of the site. Acknowledging this degree of uncertainty, a reasonable level of scholarly consensus currently situates Chichén's florescence to between c. 750-1050 A.D., or squarely within the Epiclassic period (Ringle, *et al.* 1998: 188-191; Andrews, *et al.* 2003: 152; Cobos Palma 2004: 531-533).

⁶⁶ Compare, for example, the divergent stylistic sequences proposed by Kubler (1961) and Cohodas (1975) for the art and architecture of "Toltec" Chichén. Additionally, Taube has suggested an Early Postclassic date (i.e., c. 900-1250 A.D.) for the "Toltec" period based partially on the depiction of certain materials at Chichén – namely turquoise and metal – that are otherwise not found in Classic Maya art (1994: 214).

Mulchic

Mulchic is a small site from the Puuc region of western Yucatan, located about 10 km north of Kabah and 12 km southeast of Uxmal (Fig. 1; Pollock 1980: 278). Excavations were carried out in the early 1960s by Román Piña Chan, who wrote a pair of articles describing the site and the murals uncovered in Structure A, a single-room building dating to the earlier of two construction periods at the site (1963; 1964). The murals were subsequently removed from Mulchic to the state anthropological museum at Merida, during which process they were severely damaged (Mayer 1990: 40-41).

Structure A is an Early Puuc-style building, with thick walls of roughly cut masonry, encased in a later platform upon which a building in the Florescent Puuc style, with finely carved masonry, was constructed (Andrews 1995: 20; Walters and Kowalski 2000: 207). Based on the chronology of Puuc architectural styles, this suggests Structure A was built between c. 700-800 A.D., and the encasing structure provides a *terminus ante quem* of c. 800-1000 A.D. An offering including Cehpech ceramics that was found in the floor of Structure A was likely deposited at the time the walls were re-stuccoed and the murals were painted (Piña Chan 1963: 116). This contextual information, along with stylistic analysis of the paintings themselves, has led Walters and Kowalski to propose that the murals were completed during the Terminal Classic, sometime between 770-925 A.D. (2000: 208).⁶⁷

The south wall of Structure A is divided by a central doorway. The scene painted to the right of the portal, which is typically referred to as a battle scene in the literature, clearly

⁶⁷ Although some inscriptions have been found at Mulchic, a date in either the Maya Long Count or Calendar Round is not among them. Arellano Hernandez's attempt to fix a date based on the mention of a "4 *tun*" period necessarily relies on other data to determine which cycle this would belong to (2001: 346).

depicts the slaughter of at least five individuals by a dozen or more other figures, including an elaborately costumed ruler who is depicted centrally and at a higher level than the others (Fig. 58). On the ground directly beneath him, two figures are laid on their backs with their heads raised on rock pillows and pointed in opposite directions. Head-sized stones are piled on these figures, as numerous figures standing in diverse postures raise more stones above their heads. To the right, a figure with his back to this scene aggressively grabs another figure by the hair.⁶⁸ On the opposite side of the stoning scene stands a blue tree from whose branches a figure hangs by a rope tied around his neck. Seated at his feet is another individual who is being garroted, the rope around his neck pulled taut by a figure standing in front of him. Blood pours from the mouths of both of these victims.

Continuing to the left, two figures wearing elaborate costumes in the guise of the rain deity, Chaac, stand with their backs to the violence as they face the central doorway. These figures thus serve to connect the paintings on either side of the entrance (Fig. 59). The left side of the south wall contains three further pairs of Chaac impersonators, all of whom wear identical headdresses with wide, flat brims; masks with goggle eyes and serpents emerging from the mouth; and padded strips on their forearms and lower legs. Each pair of Chaac figures faces each other across a stone altar upon which a human victim can be discerned. The figures raise axes aloft, ready to bring them down in a coordinated act of sacrificial violence.

⁶⁸ Beyond this point, the south wall mural has been destroyed.

A further, poorly preserved sacrificial scene is discernable on the opposite (north) wall (Fig. 60).⁶⁹ Here, two profile figures are shown with black-painted faces and wearing identical elaborate costumes that include inverted skulls at the front of their belts. They hold prismatic blades at waist level as they stand menacingly over prone individuals.⁷⁰ This presentation is as formalized as the sacrificial scene to the left of the doorway on the south wall; however, the costumes and weapons are different, suggesting a different context. Thus, the surviving portions of the painted program of Structure A at Mulchic represent at least three different scenes of violence.

Other Sites

Other partially preserved Late Classic murals with martial themes are documented at the sites of Chacmultun in southwest Yucatan and Ichmac in northeast Campeche, both belonging to the Puuc region of the Northern Maya Lowlands. While it is debatable whether either of these artworks can be said to depict a battle *per se*, they bear mentioning here as Epiclassic mural paintings with violent or militaristic content. These tantalizing fragments serve to remind us of the fragile nature of fresco painting while they hint at the unknown number of possible battle murals now lost to the depredations of time and the elements.

Chacmultun

Chacmultun is a moderately sized site located in the Puuc region of western Yucatan, about 24 km east of Labna, and 46 km southeast of Uxmal (Fig. 1). Its florescence can be dated to the Late to Terminal Classic period (c. 700-900 A.D.) through the prevalence of

⁶⁹ While the entire room was originally painted, only minimal traces of the murals on the east and west walls have survived.

⁷⁰ Additional figures towards the left are too poorly preserved to interpret.

Cehpech and Sotuta ceramics and the use of the Early Puuc and Colonnade architectural styles (Benavides C. 1985: 20). The surviving murals, found in Room 10 of Structure 3, were originally published by Edward Thompson in 1904 (Fig. 61); subsequent reconstruction paintings completed by Martine Fettweis in 1977 provide greater accuracy and sensitivity by which to study the fragmentary paintings, which include portions of two registers of figures separated by a blue band (Fig. 62; Mayer 1990: 39-40).

The upper register has previously been interpreted as a military skirmish (Barrera Rubio 1980: 176), a reading with which I am inclined to agree. Two groups of figures advance towards each other from either end, meeting in what appears to be a violent clash in the now fragmentary central portion. Here, the figures are positioned in much more active poses, many with their legs raised and spears held ready to throw. A fallen figure is shown seated helplessly on the ground as he is menaced by his conqueror standing above him.

The poorly preserved lower register depicts a procession of figures carrying standards or decorated spears. Although difficult to make out because of their fragmentary state, the individuals of this scene appear to be relatively passive and displaying formal deportment, based on the vertical position of their weapons and standards. A couple of figures to the far right, however, hold their spears raised as if ready to fling them.

Ichmac

Ichmac is a Puuc site from northern Campeche, close to the border with Yucatan and several kilometers to the southwest of Uxmal (Fig. 1). Fragments of mural paintings are

present in Room 8,⁷¹ found to the left of the central stairway on the ground floor of the two-story Building of the Paintings. This structure is an example of the Classic Puuc Colonnade style, and is therefore datable to the Terminal Classic, c. 750-900 A.D. (Benavides C. 2000: 134; Staines Cicero 1993: 112).

The most overtly bellicose of the surviving paintings is found on the north side of the vault (Fig. 63). Here, an elaborately costumed, frontally depicted individual with feathered wing-like fringes hanging from his outstretched arms grasps a (mostly destroyed) second figure by the hair. The position of the legs and feet of these individuals suggests their active demeanor, and this scene possibly represents a post-battle performance celebrating the taking of captives. Staines Cicero mentions further, now much-destroyed figures to the right of this pair, identifying two of these as captives (1993: 112).

Other murals from this chamber depict small groups of processional figures. Most notably, on the east vault a group of eight warrior figures carrying lances is shown descending from a small mound with *cauac* markings, indicating a mountain in Maya pictorial convention (Fig. 64). Thus, a military troop moves across a demarcated landscape, suggesting that the murals record a specific historical occurrence, and providing a basis for interpreting the figural pairing on the opposite wall as relating to the taking of captives in battle.

⁷¹ I am following the top-to-bottom, right-to left numeration of Antonio Benavides C., the INAH archaeologist who performed recent conservation work at the site (2000: 136). In her earlier publication, Leticia Staines Cicero referred to the chamber with the paintings as Room 2 (1993: 111).

CHAPTER THREE

EVIDENCE OF WARFARE IN ANCIENT MESOAMERICA

This study is founded upon two premises: that the Epiclassic battle murals represent a notable and temporally confined departure from typical modes of representing martial themes in the monumental art of Mesoamerica, and that their unprecedented dramatization of warfare is better understood as reflecting the rhetorical needs of the elites who commissioned them than as an indication of the increased prevalence of conflict during the period in which they were created. In order to support these assertions, this chapter will summarize the evidence for warfare in ancient Mesoamerica, including that derived from early Colonial-era textual accounts, as well as from archaeological, epigraphic, and iconographic sources. The latter will be examined thoroughly in terms of the great consistency of the imagery with which martial themes were alluded to across large geographic distances and great time depth. The results of this survey, which will provide a body of material with which to compare the battle murals, will demonstrate the lack of correlation between the (almost constant) historical presence or scale of warfare and the varying degrees of directness or explicitness with which militaristic themes were treated in the monumental art record. This will set the stage for a reanalysis, in later chapters, of the battle murals with regard to their innovative forms, the legitimizing messages they contained, and how these related to the socio-political context of the Epiclassic period.

Early Colonial Accounts of Warfare

When the first Europeans arrived in what is now Mexico, they found the region integrated into a vast tributary empire dominated by a confederation of Aztec polities led by

the Mexica of Tenochtitlan.⁷² Power relations between various neighboring ethnic groups and rival factions were enforced militarily, and the Spaniards were quickly and repeatedly obligated to prove their strength and valor on the battlefield. Eyewitness accounts by Spanish soldiers and priests, together with indigenous narratives recorded in the generation immediately following the Conquest, furnish the most detailed records of Mesoamerican warfare available to us today. These documents contain a wealth of valuable descriptions with regard to arms and armor, battlefield goals and tactics, and the organization and training of warriors. Nevertheless, there are reasons that such historical evidence of warfare can only be cautiously employed in the reconstruction of conflict among earlier Prehispanic cultures.

First, these observations are necessarily restricted to the brief period accompanying the initial arrival of the Spanish into Central America. The expectation of variation in approaches to warfare across different time periods, cultures, and varieties of social organization creates justifiable skepticism about the applicability of the information contained in sixteenth-century accounts to earlier periods. Additionally, the biases and rhetorical goals of those who provided these accounts must also be considered. Whether deriving from a self-serving purposefulness or an unconscious cultural conditioning, choices were made by the authors and their informants to include, omit, emphasize, or exaggerate certain pieces of information. For example, Spanish Conquistadors, in recording their battles with the Aztecs, had an incentive to overstate the savagery, manpower, and martial prowess

⁷² Despite the desire among some recent scholars for greater linguistic specificity to differentiate between the various people who occupied the Valley of Mexico at the time of the Conquest, the term Aztec remains generally accepted as an adjective describing the empire headed by the Mexica of Tenochtitlan, including its people, socio-political organization, and artistic practices (Smith and Berdan 1996: 4). I will continue with that usage in the present study.

of their foes, both to justify their own actions as self-defense and to increase their glory in overcoming a seemingly insurmountable enemy. Conversely, certain details that were deemed too banal to be worthy of recording at the time might now provide incredible insights if they were only recoverable. Despite such considerations, Contact-era observations remain an indispensable resource for scholars today as they attempt to interpret other lines of evidence, including those derived from the archaeological, epigraphic, and iconographic records.

Early Colonial Accounts of Aztec Warfare

While accounts exist of the martial activities of various peoples throughout Mesoamerica at the time of the Conquest, the greatest bulk of surviving documents pertain to the Aztec empire. This was the single most powerful political and military force encountered by the Spaniards, many of whom chronicled their experiences on the battlefield in great detail. Additionally, priests arriving in Mexico to convert the newly conquered population took great interest in the culture of their charges, and numerous ethnographic texts were written with the help of native informants. Finally, some descendants of the Aztec nobility, after being converted to Christianity and receiving European-style educations, recorded the histories of their people.

To judge by the various historical sources, the Aztecs had a significantly institutionalized military system, incorporating numerous professional soldiers, as well as trained and organized reserve forces and the ability to resupply large numbers of troops on

short notice.⁷³ Male children of the nobility were prepared for their future as military leaders through instruction in martial skills, tactics, and comportment as they accompanied seasoned warriors into battle, where they became inured to the violence of combat while serving as squires or messengers (Sahagún, Book VIII 1954 [1575-80]: 72). Members of the lower classes who exhibited notable bravery in battle could also attain advancement and honors (Acosta 2002 [1590]: 371). Indeed, a wide range of privileges and commendations existed depending on the numbers of captives a warrior had made, typically signaled by the right to wear certain costumes or insignia (*Ibid.* 371-372; Anonymous Conqueror 1917 [1556]: 19-20). Additionally, there were fraternities of warriors such as the eagle knights and jaguar knights, which were composed of members of the nobility who had demonstrated their military prowess (Hassig 1988: 45-47). Such warrior orders had quite possibly existed in Mesoamerica for as long as a millennium, to judge from imagery found at Tula, Chichén Itzá, and Teotihuacan, among other sites.

The Aztecs famously engaged in a type of ritualized combat known as the Flowery War (*xochiyaoyotl*), in which, while captives were taken for later sacrifice, the outright conquest or subjugation of the enemy was not actively sought (Hicks 1979: 87).⁷⁴ The drama

⁷³ The amount of information about Aztec warfare and military organization contained in the historical sources is far too plentiful to do justice in a brief summary. Hassig (1988) provides an excellent introduction to the subject.

⁷⁴ Since the time of the Conquest, the concept and practice of the “flowery war” has typically been understood as having had the taking of captives destined for sacrifice as its primary goal (e.g. Durán 1994 [1581]: 233). However, while acknowledging that some sacrifices took place, several scholars of the past generation have argued that this number was no greater than what was found after any other conflict, and that these wars were pursued for practical reasons: either to provide battlefield experience for young warriors (Hicks 1979), to make regular demonstrations of Aztec military strength as a means to discourage uprisings (Hassig 2003), or as failed attempts at conquest (Isaac 1983b). The tension between ideological and

and spectacle of human sacrifice – together with the seeming irrationality of waging large-scale warfare without pursuing a definitive outcome – has long overshadowed the more mundane (and more common) expression of Aztec military aggression, which involved a significant amount of death during battle and was underpinned by decidedly materialistic goals (Isaac 1983a). Thick accounting books detailed the tribute owed Tenochtitlan by each town of a conquered province, thus demonstrating the significant economic motives behind Aztec empire building. Following the conquest of a region local rulers were allowed to remain in place, but refusals to obey the demands of the emperor or mistreatments of Aztec merchants resulted in swift military responses from the troops who manned fortified garrisons in each province (Díaz del Castillo 1844 [1568]: I.262-263).

Most of the rank and file soldiers appear to have been ordinary farmers and artisans who had received military training as part of their education at neighborhood schools (*telpochcalli*) and could be called into action if needed (Hassig 1988: 53). Also functioning in a dual capacity, merchants traveling to the outer provinces served both as spies and as an advanced guard of the Aztec army (Sahagún, Book IX 1959 [1575-80]: 6-7). While there were almost certainly smaller and larger standard groupings of warriors, a basic division was into groups of 400 men. Each ward (*calpolli*) of Tenochtitlan fielded such a squadron under its own banner and leader (Hassig 1988: 55-58). Soldiers were provided with weapons from central armories that were regularly restocked, and they were fed through food and labor tribute that was required from towns throughout the empire (Durán 1994 [1581]: 153).⁷⁵

materialist interpretations of warfare has remained a consistent feature of scholarship focusing on ancient Mesoamerica.

⁷⁵ The variety of arms and armor employed by the Aztecs are outlined by Hassig (1988: 75-94).

During battle, the coordination of troops was accomplished audibly through trumpets, drums, and vocalizations and visibly through standards or banners (Díaz del Castillo 1844 [1568]: I.83, II.86). Battles varied greatly in terms of duration, scale, and the numbers of lives lost, but the goal of Aztec warfare seems to have consistently been to subjugate enemy polities, thereby securing sources of regular tribute (Isaac 1983a: 128-129). Sacking and the taking of captives regularly occurred, but conquest did not necessarily entail widespread destruction and carnage, especially if the enemy capitulated quickly (Hassig 1988: 112-113).

Early Colonial Accounts of Maya Warfare

A Spanish presence was established relatively quickly among the Maya kingdoms of Yucatan due to the region's proximity to the Caribbean and its generally hospitable environment. Numerous records related to this region have survived in the form of responses to official questionnaires of 1577 sent to fifty major polities by the Council of the Indies as part of an effort by the Spanish monarchy to take stock of their new possessions.

Additionally, the ethnographic treatise *Relación de las cosas de Yucatán*, written in 1565 by bishop Diego de Landa, is an important source about Maya culture at the time of the Conquest.

During the Late Postclassic period Yucatan was organized into a series of fiefdoms of different sizes, which were ruled over by nobles (*batabob*) who were engaged in regular struggles over land, labor, and prestige (Repetto Tió 1985: 84-98).⁷⁶ While the political

⁷⁶ The term *batab* can be used both as a title for the nobleman and in reference to his dominion (*-ob* is a common pluralizer in Yucatec Mayan). *Batabob* were further organized into weak or strong alliances, often related to kinship ties. Those with the most formalized structure were ruled over by a powerful *batab* who took on the further title of *halach uinic*,

situation in Yucatan was therefore more segmentary than the relatively highly organized and centralized system of the late Aztec empire, there were many similarities between the military structure and martial practices of the two regions. As with the Aztecs, the bulk of Maya military forces were drawn from the ranks of farmers, with a certain number of men from each town being specially designated as soldiers who were required to present themselves for battle when called to duty (Landa 1941 [1565]: 123).⁷⁷ These semi-organized battalions fought under their own banners, similar to the Aztec *calpolli* squadrons, and they were likewise led by professional war captains (*nacomob*) belonging to the nobility (*Ibid.* 122-123).

Wars in Yucatan were waged for a variety of reasons. A common goal appears to have been to take prisoners, the majority of which were kept or sold as slaves while certain high ranking individuals were sacrificed (Relaciones de Yucatán, vol. 1 1898 [1579]: 130, 187, 198). Aside from obtaining slave labor, further economic motives for warfare included control over the production or trade of valuable commodities such as salt, as well as the exacting of tribute from enemy towns (*Ibid.* 79, 129, 219). As with the Aztecs, although perhaps not institutionalized to the same degree, success in battle accrued honors and prestige to *nacomob* and *batabob*, providing an additional social incentive to engage in warfare (Landa 1941 [1565]: 123).

comparable to the Classic period title of *ajaw* (“lord”). Warfare at various scales occurred both between and within these provinces (Marcus 1993: 117-121).

⁷⁷ These fighting men were termed *holcanob*, meaning “valiant ones” or “strong ones” (Tozzer, note 564, in Landa 1941 [1565]: 123). If a larger army was needed, further men from each town would be drafted into action (*Ibid.* 123).

Archaeological Evidence of Warfare

Warfare, notwithstanding its potentially high impact on society, leaves relatively few definitive traces in the surviving material record. This, combined with the ambiguities associated with interpreting archaeological data, contributed to an essentially pacific characterization of Formative and Classic Period Mesoamerican cultures prior to the middle of the twentieth century. A shift occurred in the late 1950s as scholars began to question the existing paradigm and reevaluate the existing evidence. In the following decades, new archaeological projects were initiated that explicitly searched for remains documenting conflict, thus providing a wealth of data that appear to confirm the widespread and large-scale presence of warfare dating as far back as the early Formative Period.

Defensive Site Placement and Fortifications

One of the most compelling indications of warfare is that of defensive fortifications, including ditches, bulwarks, and palisades, as well as the choice of naturally defensible locations such as hilltops for site placement. The presence of manmade defensive features associated with ancient cities attests to a need for security that was pressing and continual enough to justify the mobilization of manpower on a large scale. Originally only recognized at a handful of sites, defensive fortifications are now known to have existed at numerous settlements dating to all time periods.

At the site of San José Mogote in the Valley of Oaxaca, a double row of postholes dating to the 13th-14th centuries B.C., not long after the first permanent villages were established in the region, was likely a defensive palisade (Flannery and Marcus 2003: 11802). A millennium later, the site of Monte Albán, which would come to dominate the

Valley of Oaxaca, was established on a strategic outcropping of rock at the confluence of the valley's three arms. Early in the site's history, walls of up to four meters in height were built on the northern and western slopes to reinforce weak spots in the hill's natural defensibility (Marcus and Flannery 1996: 150-151). At this same period, six peripheral sites in the Valley of Oaxaca built defensive walls while as many more were strategically situated atop terraced hilltops. These fortifications have been interpreted as permanent military outposts of the incipient Monte Albán state, indicating its growing hegemony over increasingly valuable trade routes (Elam 1989: 404-405).

At least half a dozen sites from the Southern Maya Lowlands had fortifications that can be dated to the Late Formative period from their associated ceramics (Cortes Rincon 2007: 100-102).⁷⁸ Additionally, substantial Early Classic fortifications have been investigated at the sites of Tikal, Becan, and Río Azul. At Tikal, in the Petén region of northern Guatemala, earthworks measuring at least 26 km in length are located some 4.6 km north of the site's center, suggesting a territorial defensive boundary.⁷⁹ Similarly, a ditch of nearly 2 km length and 16 m width was constructed at the Rio Bec site of Becan, with the excavated material serving to create an inner wall. The earthworks at both sites were constructed between swampy, difficult-to-cross areas, thus taking advantage of naturally defensive features of the landscape (Webster 1976: 362-364). Río Azul, a site in northeast

⁷⁸ In Chapter Three of her dissertation on Maya fortifications, Marisol Cortes Rincon summarizes the extensive architectural evidence of warfare from the Maya Lowlands in much greater detail than is allowed by limitations of space in the present study (2007: 96-180).

⁷⁹ Although it has recently suggested that these ditches were created primarily for agricultural irrigation (Silverstein, *et al.* 2009; Webster, *et al.* 2004), Cortes Rincon believes it probable that they were intended to serve a defensive function as well, a possibility that Webster, *et al.* do not rule out (Cortes Rincon 2007: 146; Webster, *et al.* 2004: 33-40).

Petén near the borders with Mexico and Belize, was built on a ridge overlooking a river. This defensible position was reinforced with ditches and walls that date to the Early Classic period, thus suggesting that warfare was an important consideration early in the history of this site (Adams 1999: 125).

The sites discussed above continued to be occupied during the Classic period, and many additional Classic period sites with fortifications have been identified. By far, the bulk of these date to the Late Classic and consisted of hastily build additions to already existing sites, suggesting rapid destabilization across the Maya region. This was especially true in the Petexbatun area, where the populations of Dos Pilas, Aguateca, and numerous second- and third- rank sites erected low masonry walls surmounted by wooden palisades around their central cores towards the end of the eighth century (Demarest, *et al.* 1997). Kinal, a Late Classic fortified site located near Río Azul, was built on the highest ridge in the area, had a series of high vertical terraces, and an inner citadel with a secure water supply (Adams 1999: 125). Many sites in the Northern Lowlands were also fortified at this time, including Chacchob, Cuca, Yaxuna, and at least a half-dozen others (Webster 1976: 364-365; Cortes Rincon 2007: 160-178). Notably, with regard to the present study, a wall surrounded the Great Platform of Chichén Itzá. While this barrier seems to have been originally constructed to delimit the sacred space of the precinct, it was later augmented – hastily thickened without being plastered – in what seems to imply an immediate concern for defense (Hahn 2010: 54-62).

Several Central Mexican sites dating to the Epiclassic period exhibit substantial fortifications. Cacaxtla was built with regard to defensive considerations, occupying a hilltop fortified with numerous terraces, ditches, and walls (Muñoz Camargo 2000 [1585]: 139-140;

Armillas 1946: 140-141). Xochicalco, in the current state of Morelos, was built on a tall hill that was further strengthened with numerous walls, ditches, and platforms; six further fortified precincts, which likely served as retreats for the outlying population, are found within one kilometer of the site's center (Hirth 1989: 70-72). Teotenango, located to the southwest of Mexico City in the current state of Mexico, was a strongly fortified site built atop a very steep hill that was substantially terraced to allow for construction (Alvarez A. 1983: 234).

Fortified sites are known from Postclassic times as well. In Quintana Roo, Tulum sits atop of precipitous cliff, while its three landward sides were protected by stone walls (Webster 1976: 365). To the west, in Yucatan, the site of Mayapan was surrounded by a low masonry wall of over nine kilometers length, its central precinct further protected by an additional wall (*Ibid.* 366).

While the selection of an easily defensible position or the presence of fortifications at a site are a compelling indications of military activity, the absence of these features cannot be understood to signal that warfare was not a significant concern. For example, the lack of defensive structures at the great Central Mexican metropolis of Teotihuacan contributed to the conclusion of many early scholars that this site was essentially pacific, a notion that has long since been overturned due to other indications of militarism (Pasztor 1997: 25-29).

Weapons

Weapons, of which chert and obsidian points are the almost exclusive examples to have survived, are another category of archaeological remains associated with warfare. Equally useful for killing animals and humans, the interpretation of recovered projectile

points is strongly dependent on the contexts of their depositions. In his recent analysis of points recovered from the rapidly abandoned fortified site of Aguateca, for example, Kazuo Aoyama has compellingly reconstructed the final, unsuccessful defense of the center of this polity by its besieged elites (2005: 297-298).

Most points, however, are not recovered in such spectacularly dramatic primary contexts. Nevertheless, these materials can still suggest other indications regarding the practice and causes of warfare. Symbolic manipulation of stone points in the creation of caches associated with burials or building dedications demonstrate a concern with violence, whether metaphorical or real. Thus, the abundant obsidian points accompanying individuals interred in mass graves beneath the Feathered Serpent Pyramid at Teotihuacan – combined with other signs pointing to their status as warriors, which will be presented in the following section – have contributed to the growing understanding of that site as being strongly militaristic despite its relatively non-violent iconography (Sugiyama 2005: 124-129). Furthermore, obsidian was only available from a few isolated sources in Mesoamerica, and the volcanic glass obtained from each of these regions has its own molecular signature. Thus, X-Ray Florescence or Neutron Activation Analysis of points can determine the geographic origin of the raw material a point was made from and thus provide potentially useful information with regard to interregional interaction and trade (Glascock, *et al.* 1998). Finally, the statistical analysis of the relative presence of points belonging to different types of weapons has been used in an attempt to reconstruct military tactics (Brokmann 2000).

Human Remains

Human remains can also present features that suggest violence on a scale and of an intensity consistent with warfare. Examples of this include mass burials – particularly those of adult males – and osteological remains showing signs of traumatic injury. However, the interpretation of such material remains somewhat tenuous due to the possibility of its resulting from rituals or mortuary practices unrelated to warfare. Sacrificial violence, corporal punishment, and murder could all manifest indistinguishable traces, and are furthermore often impossible to untangle conceptually from warfare.⁸⁰ Due to the desirability of erring on the side of caution, only a sampling of recovered human remains that appear to be unambiguously related to militarism involving entire polities or lineages will be presented here.

In one of the more grisly of the numerous archaeological testaments to the expansionist militarism associated with the late Formative period ascent of the powerful state centered at Monte Albán, sixty-one skulls were displayed on a wooden rack erected by the victorious Zapotec army in the conquered village of La Coyotera around 10 B.C. (Spencer and Redmond 2001: 195-197).⁸¹ The presence of mandibles and an associated hyoid bone suggests that many of the skulls were displayed while the flesh was still intact (*Ibid.*).

Thirty-three adult males were found buried under the floors relating to successive building stages of a Late Formative period structure from the site of Chalchuapa. Analysis of

⁸⁰ See Berryman (2007) and Tiesler (2007) for the challenges associated with interpreting human remains, with particular reference to violence and human sacrifice.

⁸¹ Jeffrey Blomster urges caution in interpreting these remains, claiming that the equal distribution of male and female skulls at La Coyotera is disjunctive from the known use of *tzompantli* in the Postclassic to display trophy heads taken from male warriors (2011: 128). However, Rubén Mendoza has noted that over half of the 170 crania recovered from the skull rack deposit at Tlatelolco were female (2007: 409).

these remains led William Fowler to conclude that they likely represent the sacrifice of captives taken in war (1984: 612-615). Similarly, dozens of military-aged males found buried in mass graves were likely part of an Early Classic dedication offering at the Feathered Serpent Pyramid at Teotihuacan, and as such have formed the basis for a militaristic interpretation of the seemingly benign iconography of that structure (Taube 1992: 55; Sugiyama 2005: 229-231). These individuals have been identified as warriors by the presence of abundant prismatic blades, discussed above, as well as slate disks worn on their lower backs – a common feature of Central Mexican warrior costumes – and necklaces made of real and imitation human maxillae (Spence, *et al.* 2004: 1; Sugiyama, *op. cit.*) Whether or not these burials directly relate to specific warfare events, they indisputably evoke the preeminence of martial activity at these early sites.

A shallow pit at the side of a stairway of an elite structure at the Maya site of Colha contained the severed heads of 30 individuals – men, women, and children – and is dated by its associated ceramics and radiocarbon testing to c. 650-850 A.D., a time coeval with the Terminal Classic abandonment of the site (Barrett and Scherer 2005: 107-108; Mock 1998: 113-115). The skulls feature cranial deformation and dental modifications, signaling the elite status of these individuals and suggesting that the pit represents the slaughter of the entire ruling lineage. (Mock 1998: 114). Cut marks on the skulls indicate that they were flayed prior to interment,⁸² a literal defacement intended to dissipate (or perhaps to appropriate through the wearing of the flesh as a mask) the spiritual force of the defeated individuals (Mock 1998: 119). Barrett and Scherer have argued that analysis of a second, coeval

⁸² The retention of mandibles and cervical vertebrae, however, shows that the skulls were interred soon after decapitation (Barrett and Scherer 2005: 108).

grouping of bone fragments belonging to at least twenty-five adult individuals scattered on the surface of a plaza to the west of the skull pit confirms the non-reverential nature of the treatment of remains during the abandonment of Colha (2005: 112-114).

Termination Events

A final archaeological indication of warfare – the termination event – testifies to the sudden and violent abandonment of the built environment. Interpretations of the physical evidence of termination events, however, can prove difficult. While some instances seem to index malicious acts of sacking or desecration, others could plausibly result from benevolent ritual destruction, for example to dissipate the sanctity of a space upon its (non-coerced) abandonment or repurposing.⁸³ Therefore, corroborating evidence – drastic changes in the ceramics, architecture, or occupational patterns at a site following a termination event, for example – becomes indispensable to support a determination of aggression (Barrett and Scherer 2003: 103-104).

Early termination events resulting from violent episodes are found at San José Mogote. Charcoal from the burnt remains of House 19 yielded a C-14 date of c. 1540 B.C., slightly earlier than those from the wooden palisade mentioned above (Flannery and Marcus 2003: 11802). Later at the same site, Structure 28, a large, centrally placed temple that has been radiocarbon dated to c. 600 B.C., was burned with such intensity that the clay of its walls vitrified (*Ibid.*). Experimental archaeology has shown that only an intentionally set fire could have generated heat of a sufficient intensity to produce this effect, and in their

⁸³ For a discussion of this interpretational dilemma, see Pagliaro, *et al.* (2003).

interpretation of the evidence Marcus and Flannery have drawn an analogy with the documented Aztec practice of burning the temples of their enemies (1996: 128-129).⁸⁴

Much of the ceremonial center of the Classic period Central Mexican metropolis of Teotihuacan was systematically burned and destroyed sometime in the early seventh century A.D. The desecratory nature of this event is corroborated by the presence of several bodies – identifiable as elites by associated jade and shell mosaics and beads, and with their skulls smashed and limbs dismembered – that were recovered from the destroyed and looted palace complexes within the Ciudadela (Millon 1988: 151-152). The selectivity and intensity of this destructive episode, which focused almost exclusively on elite and ritual structures while sparing middle and lower class apartment compounds, strongly suggests an uprising of the local population in revolt against an overreaching ruling class, although some scholars have suggested the involvement of outsiders (Millon, *op. cit.*: 156-158; Cowgill 1997: 156-157). Most of the destroyed buildings were never reoccupied by the subsequent inhabitants of Teotihuacan, and the appearance of a new ceramic complex around this time – the so-called Coyotlatelco phase – suggests a dramatic and geographically widespread cultural shift (Millon, *op. cit.*: 155).

The Northern Maya Lowlands site of Yaxuna presents evidence for several termination episodes spanning the Early Classic to Epiclassic periods (Ambrosino, *et al.* 2003). These have furthermore been associated with significant changes in the ceramic record, suggesting shifts in the population or culture. The final abandonment of the site, commonly attributed to aggression by forces from nearby Chichén Itzá towards the end of the

⁸⁴ The violent imagery of the contemporaneous and adjacent Monument 3, which will be discussed below, also adds credibility to a reading of the destructive acts at San José Mogote as evidence of warfare.

ninth century, was accompanied by the burning and forced collapse of an elite structure, preceded by holes being broken into the floor and the desecration of a noblewoman's grave (Suhler and Freidel 2003: 138-142). Broken ceramics in the plaza in front of this structure show that this event was accompanied by feasting – presumably by the conquerors – and after this destructive episode there is no further evidence of construction or the continuing presence of a significant population at Yaxuna (*Ibid.* 139).

Epigraphic Evidence of Warfare

Evidence derived from texts predating European contact have the advantage of directly documenting martial activities from earlier periods. However, like the Colonial-era accounts, these too must be considered in terms of their authorship, intended audience, and rhetorical goals. Literacy in ancient Mesoamerica, although not perfectly understood, is generally thought to have been restricted to a relatively small segment of the population (Brown 1991; Houston and Stuart 1992: 592). Even so, writing was likely much more extensive and varied than the limited corpus that has survived, which primarily takes the form of carved stone monuments, paintings on walls or ceramic vessels, and a handful of screen-fold books; that is to say, the writing that has survived is mostly formal, ritual, and related to a few recurring topics.

Classic Maya Textual Evidence

The best textual evidence of warfare prior to European contact comes from the Classic Maya. This is due to the fact that the logo-syllabic writing system employed by the Maya allowed for the recording of much more detail and nuance than other Mesoamerican

scripts. Several terms have been identified that have direct associations with warfare, while others refer to conflict peripherally.⁸⁵

The first verb related to warfare to have been deciphered by modern scholars was *chuk* (“to capture” or “to tie up”).⁸⁶ A related term, *bak*, refers to a prisoner, and forms the root of the verb *bakwah*, “to capture” (Martin 2000: 112); it is also part of the count-of-captives construction that formed a title or epithet attesting to the military accomplishments of an individual. The early decipherment of *chuk*, coupled with the prevalence both of these terms and of depictions of captives in Maya monumental artwork (to be discussed in more detail shortly), led to a distorted impression among scholars that the taking of captives was a primary goal of Classic Maya warfare. Other, more recently deciphered terms related to conflict, however, have served to counter this impression to some degree. Indeed, a more nuanced reading of *chuk* suggests that it refers not to the actual moment of capture in battle, but rather to the ceremonial binding or display of a captive during public rituals following a war event.⁸⁷ Another term, *ch’ak* (“to chop”), appears to have been used to refer both to conquest of a place and to the decapitation of captives during such ceremonial events. Thus, while captive taking is indexical of warfare, the term *chuk* actually records ritual presentation events that were themselves part of the ceremonialized rhetoric surrounding Mayan militarism.

⁸⁵ Stuart, who discusses many of the Mayan terms related to warfare in his dissertation, cautions that there is no known expression equivalent to “to wage war” in Classic Maya inscriptions, and that nuances of meaning attached to the different terms with which allusions were made to warfare might never be able to be fully understood (1995: 293-294).

⁸⁶ First identified in the Dresden Codex by Yuri Knorosov in 1956 and later found in Classic period inscriptions by Tatiana Proskouriakoff (Stuart 1995: 294).

⁸⁷ Stuart discusses this in relation to a reading of Dos Pilas Hieroglyphic Stairway 3 (1995: 298).

The explanation for this focus on captives in the rituals, texts, and images related to warfare among the Classic Maya lies in the synecdochic relationship between the captured individual, typically a ruler, and the polity with which he is associated. However, this was more than a matter of symbolic convention. Maya rulers were attributed with creative forces and shamanic powers, with which it was believed that they guaranteed the prosperity of their communities. The debasement of important captives demonstrated the superior spiritual powers of the victor and stripped the conquered individual of an important aspect of his claim to legitimate rule. Textual statements on stelae from the site of Naranjo – *ub'aah ti och ch'een Yomootz* (“[the king] is [in the act of] entering into the cave of [his prisoner] Yomootz”) and *ma' ch'ab ma' ak'ab* (“no creation, no darkness”) – have been interpreted by David Stuart as referring to the despoiling of the defeated ruler’s spiritual powers (2007: 44).⁸⁸ Simon Martin, on the other hand, has interpreted the phrase “entered into his cave” as referring to attacks on physical locations, namely the towns of origin of the named captives (cited in Velásquez García 2004: 83-84).

The term that perhaps most directly evokes the concept of warfare, particularly with regard to the martial prerogatives and obligations of rulers, is the metonymic compound noun *tok' pakal* (literally “flint shield”). This expression was written both phonetically and logographically in the inscriptions, and is also found presented emblematically in the iconography, as multiple examples from Palenque attest (Houston 1983). On both the Palace Relief and the Tablet of the Slaves, the central figure is being presented with signs of office: a mosaic “drum major” headdress and a round shield surmounted by an eccentric flint,

⁸⁸ Cognate statements – *och uch'e'n* (“entered into his cave”) – are additionally found accompanying several of the images of bound captives on the stairway from Dzibanché (Velásquez García 2004: 83).

the *tok' pakal* (Fig. 65). The Tablet of the Sun features a round shield with two crossed flint-tipped spears behind it as the central offering, raised on a double-headed serpent bar supported by two *bacabob*. The face on the round shield has been interpreted as representing GIII of the Palenque Triad in his guise as the Jaguar God of the Underworld (Schele and Miller 1986: 50). Baudez (2004: 73) has interpreted the anthropomorphic features of the previous two examples as indicating them to be shields made from flayed and stretched human facial skin, presumably obtained from captives taken during battle, and it would not be unreasonable to think that the example from the Tablet of the Sun depicts a shield made from the skin of a jaguar's face.

The hieroglyphic sign often referred to as “Star-over-Shell”, “Earth-Star”, or, more recently, “Star that Rains” has clear militaristic associations, but the exact nature of its meaning has been the subject of numerous readings (Fig. 66). The range of interpretations put forward about this glyph has played an important role in the evolving characterization of Classic Maya warfare in recent decades. Foremost among these has been a reading centering on its astronomical significance, based on both the inclusion of the sign for “star” as one of the elements of this glyph and the correlation of some associated dates with key moments in the Venus cycle.⁸⁹ Based on this interpretation, a view of Maya warfare as being highly ritualized and scheduled to coincide with propitious dates arose (e.g. Aguilar Moreno 2006: 12-16; Nahm 1994). While not completely discredited, current scholarship has suggested that this stance be viewed with skepticism. Cogent counter-arguments have been made to the evidence that has been put forth connecting the timing of “Earth-Star” events with significant

⁸⁹ The planet Venus had bellicose associations throughout Mesoamerica (Carlson 1993: 202-208).

moments in the Venus calendar (Hotaling 1995). Stuart (1995: 308-310) has suggested that, rather than Venus, the astral element of this glyph was meant to invoke meteor showers, an interpretation expanded upon by Aldana (2005: 313-314). This reading is supported by indigenous Mesoamerican associations of meteorites with obsidian, and thus with the weapons this material furnished: spears and arrows flying through the sky (Taube 2000: 296-299).

On occasion, the “Earth” element of the “Earth-Star” glyph is substituted with an Emblem Glyph, which has led Peter Mathews to interpret the “Earth” version as recording territorial conquest that did not involve a specific center of power, such as the capture of liminal, disputed, or hinterland regions (Mathews 1991). Alternatively, Stuart has tentatively proposed that “Earth-Star” is the logographic version of a phonetically written word that is found in similar syntaxes: *hub-i* (“to fall” or “to collapse”), which is often used to describe the “falling” of a ruler’s *tok’ pakal*, or his “failure at war” (1995: 311-314).⁹⁰ Stuart clarifies that such statements do not necessarily involve the capture of the named ruler, merely that his war (*tok’ pakal*) was unsuccessful (*Ibid.* 312). Thus, in the use of *hub-i* we see textual evidence for a Classic Maya conception of warfare that exceeded the concept of capture, one in which rulers understood as having waged war and lost nevertheless retained positions of power.

The Maya verb *pul* (“to burn”) is used in a variety of contexts, but when it is associated with a locative element it appears to denote the destruction of the named place during a warfare event (Stuart 1995: 321-322).

⁹⁰ Aldana has read the “Earth-Star” glyph phonetically as *ek’emey*, which he sees as a synonym for *hub-i* (2005: 313).

At least two honorific titles are known with specific martial associations: *bate'el* and *sahal*, the former simply meant “warrior”, while the latter indicated a military leader from the highest level of Maya society (Stuart 1995: 298-299; Stuart 1993: 329-330). Individuals holding either of these could be referred to as possessions of the ruler, a way to simultaneously suggest both their hierarchical subordination and political allegiance.

Other Textual Evidence

The most extensive text from outside of the Maya region that includes mention of warfare events is found on La Mojarra Stela 1, dating to the mid-2nd century A.D. This lengthy inscription is one of the few surviving examples of the Epi-Olmec script, which recorded a proto-Zoquean language. The text, which has been largely deciphered thanks to the efforts of Terrence Kaufman and John Justeson, includes references to astronomical events, accession rites, and, most importantly for the current study, a dramatic account of acts of violence related to a feud between rival claimants to a position of rulership (Kaufman and Justeson 2001: 2.34-2.74).⁹¹

Statements relating to warfare in other Mesoamerican writing systems were primarily pictographic, and many examples could appropriately be discussed as emblematic martial iconography in a later section of this chapter. Keeping this in mind, some instances will be considered here because of the specificity with which they transcribe verbalizations; other examples that perhaps have linguistic underpinnings will nevertheless be treated later as representational images due to their emphasis on expressive visuality or mimesis.

⁹¹ The small corpus of surviving Epi-Olmec texts available to serve as comparisons with which to verify the translation proposed by Kaufman and Justeson suggests that it should be considered, for the time being, as merely tentative.

The theme of warfare was most commonly expressed textually through statements of conquest. There is a remarkable consistency in this over a period of over two millennia: the name of an important individual or the town he presided over accompanied a depiction of a debased captive or a warrior-captive pair, or the toponym itself was affixed with a weapon, a burning building, or an upside-down head to indicate its overthrow. Examples of conquest statements are plentiful in the surviving Aztec and Mixtec historical manuscripts, all of which date to the Late Postclassic Period. Monumental examples, however, are more limited. At Monte Albán the exterior walls of Building J were inscribed with around forty examples dating to Phase II, c. 150 B.C. – 200 A.D. (Fig. 67). Most of these toponyms include the upside-down head affix, but a few do not. The lack of a head has been interpreted as indicating a polity that was successfully brought under control without recourse to military aggression (Marcus and Flannery 1996: 198).

At Cacaxtla, a painted cartouche that was partially exposed during the construction of the site's protective roof contains a black-painted leg, bent at the knee, with a blue plaque tied below the knee and a red-fletched dart penetrating the thigh (Fig. 68). This has been interpreted as a toponymic conquest statement (Moreno Juárez, *et al.* 2005: 58). I concur with this reading due to the similarity of this glyph with the conventions of the Mixtec writing system, which had its origins around the time of Cacaxtla's fluorescence in the region just to the south of the site and which often made reference to conquest events by depicting toponyms wounded by spears (Troike 1982: 176, 199-200; Ringle, *et al.* 1998: 185).

At the Epiclassic period Central Mexican site of Xochicalco, the tableros of the Pyramid of the Plumed Serpent are carved with a repetition of seated figures with trapeze- and-ray headdresses who hold bags and have scrolls emerging from their mouths; in front of

each figure appear three hieroglyphic elements: a variable sign above a paired open mouth and circle divided into four quarters (Fig. 69). Both Hirth (1989: 73-75) and Berlo (1989a: 33-34) have interpreted these groupings as image-texts recounting militaristic conquest and tribute obligations, the variable upper element naming the specific towns conquered by Xochicalco.⁹²

The Aztec pictorial element featuring the pairing or interweaving of a stream of water with a strand of fire or a torch is directly related to a metaphorical verbal construct in Nahuatl: *atl-tlachinoli* (literally, “water-fire”), a compound noun denoting warfare itself.⁹³ This motif is found in a variety of contexts on Aztec monumental sculpture, and it is often incorporated into a larger composition through visual punning. On the monument known as the Temple Stone or Throne of Moctezuma, its placement in front of the mouths of Huitzilopochtli and Moctezuma II on the backrest and in front of the eagle’s mouth on the back serves to indicate the bellicose speech or intentionality of these actors (Fig. 70). In another instance, it is found on the underside of the large, three-dimensional Coyolxauhqui head, where it simultaneously recalls her defeat and beheading in the context of a mythical battle and suggests the arteries and veins emerging from her severed neck (Fig. 71). The Aztec understanding of *atl-tlachinoli* likely extended to the dual nature of the Templo Mayor – the place where captives taken in war were sacrificed – and its twin shrines dedicated to the

⁹² While both of these authors draw comparisons with later Nahuatl terminologies and writing structures, they differ in their readings of the lower elements. Berlo (1989: 33) reads the mouth and circle as a “locative indicator” roughly translating to “place of”, while Hirth (1989: 73) sees the pair of glyphs as meaning “I eat or consume something precious,” equivalent to the Nahuatl term for tribute payment.

⁹³ Manuel Aguilar Moreno has proposed that this construction and its associated symbolism of war and sacrifice can be found on the Olmec “Humboldt Axe”, where it is accompanied by depictions of blood letting instruments, thus suggesting a time depth of at least two millennia for the fire-water metaphor (1997: 188-189).

water/fertility deity, Tlaloc, and the solar/fire deity, Huitzilopochtli, both of whom had martial associations.⁹⁴

Martial Iconography: Allusions to Warfare in Mesoamerican Art

The final type of evidence to be considered is iconographic, encompassing the various types of imagery used to allude to warfare in the monumental art of Mesoamerica.⁹⁵

Without claiming to be exhaustive, this survey will attempt to be as comprehensive as possible in an effort to achieve two ends: first, to demonstrate that the martial theme was widespread in Mesoamerican monumental art, occurring in almost all time periods and cultures; and second, to show that, despite the unique variations and combinations that were manifested at different time periods or localities, the pictorial vocabulary of militarism was relatively limited and consistent throughout the corpus of Mesoamerican art.

Mesoamerican martial iconography can be organized into four broad categories: symbolic or emblematic imagery such as weapons, predatory animals, and skulls; solitary or processing warrior figures; solitary captive or vanquished figures; and multi-figural groups involving both warriors and captives. Sections below are dedicated to describing each of these iconographic categories, notable examples of which are presented from a range of cultures and time periods.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Michel Graulich has persuasively argued that the symbolic dualisms manifested in the Templo Mayor are apparent in the significantly earlier murals at Cacaxtla and the relief façade of the Feather Serpent Pyramid at Teotihuacan (2001).

⁹⁵ While only monumental artworks are being considered in this study, it should be noted that categories of imagery discussed here are equally applicable to the imagery found on portable artworks.

⁹⁶ Examples from multiple categories of martial imagery can often be found together at a single site, suggesting the possibility for a differently organized presentation of this material, i.e. one based entirely on geographic and temporal considerations rather than upon categories

Symbolic and Emblematic Imagery

Symbolic and emblematic imagery, by its very nature, can be multivalent and at times ambiguous. Oftentimes, meanings that would have been obvious to viewers belonging to the cultural contexts for which they were made have now been lost, and can at best be speculated upon. Thus, while it is understood that a number of other motifs likely carried connotations of warfare, this section will limit itself to cataloging examples of such imagery for which persuasive arguments have been made regarding their martial associations.

Representation of human body parts, serving both as general emblems of death and as depictions of trophies taken from defeated enemies, are ubiquitous across Mesoamerica. The most common body parts displayed are heads – both intact and as fleshless skulls – and hearts, which are often portrayed as stylized designs that could function either pictorially or glyphically.

In an interpretation that has not gained widespread support, but which is nevertheless intriguing, Claude Baudez (2000: 197-199) has suggested the possibility that the colossal Olmec heads represented decapitated enemies (Fig. 72). The immense amount of labor involved in transporting and carving these monuments has led most scholars to conclude that they must depict the rulers who commissioned them. However, Baudez cites certain elements present on some of the heads that are typically associated with captives – ropes (San Lorenzo Monuments 3, 4, and 9), triple knotted ties (San Lorenzo Monument 4), zig-zag strips (San Lorenzo Monument 3), and closed eyes (La Cobata Monument 1) – while he questions why rulers would choose to depict themselves as disembodied heads (*Ibid.* 198-199). Taken in

of imagery. While recognizing its drawbacks, the present organization was chosen in order to most clearly emphasize how dramatically the battle murals depart from established pictorial traditions, an argument that is central to this study.

conjunction with the prevalence of depictions of captives and trophy heads throughout Mesoamerica, this hypothesis deserves consideration.⁹⁷

The Aztecs had platforms known as *tzompantli*, which were decorated with repetitious reliefs of human skulls and are known from eyewitness reports at the time of the Conquest to have served for mass presentations of actual skulls taken from sacrificed captives (Fig. 73).⁹⁸ A similar construction, dating to the Epiclassic period, exists at Chichén Itzá (Fig. 74). The extreme prevalence of martial iconography at this site, and particularly the depiction of decapitation rituals in the reliefs of the closely associated Great Ball Court, strongly suggests a similar function for this skull platform (V. Miller 1999: 350-354). Four platforms from the contemporaneous Yucatan site of Uxmal, collectively known as the Cemetery Group, feature alternating skull and crossed femur motifs (Fig. 75).⁹⁹ Although the glyphs inscribed along the upper registers of these monuments are rather eroded, Nikolai Grube has proposed a reading of one passage as a pairing of a star-war glyph with a toponym, suggesting a direct link between the skeletal imagery found here and the theme of warfare (2003: 365). Structures 7 and 16 at Copán also had smaller-scale platforms with repeating skull imagery at the centers of their staircases (Fig. 76). However, despite their

⁹⁷ While Baudez's proposed reinterpretation of the Olmec heads is worth mentioning, I would point to the naturalistic, disembodied stucco portrait heads found in the tomb of Pakal at Palenque, a context in which the heads of the (venerated) dead ruler and his ancestors are possibly being conflated with ripe ears of harvested maize. Additionally, Houston and Stuart have provided linguistic and iconographic evidence for the conflation of the concepts of "head" and "self" among the Classic Maya, citing examples of heads being depicted to indicate presence and suggesting that the Olmec portrait heads demonstrate the Formative period roots of this idea (1998: 83 and *passim*).

⁹⁸ Virginia Miller (1999) and Rubén Mendoza (2007) provide excellent treatments of the skull rack as a pan-Mesoamerican phenomenon.

⁹⁹ Similar skull and crossed-femur motifs decorate a platform from El Corral, near Tula (V. Miller 1999: 355).

inherent morbidity, skull motifs do not always necessarily reference warfare; they could instead serve as *memento mori* or in other capacities related to concepts of death. Thus, at Copán – a site with relatively few depictions or textual references to warfare – skull platforms should not automatically be interpreted based on their formal similarity to Aztec *tzompantli*. This caution also applies to the basalt relief depicting a profile skull found in the plaza in front of the Pyramid of the Sun at Teotihuacan, which nevertheless demonstrates the longevity of this motif in architectural decoration.

Among the Maya and their neighbors, decapitation was ideologically linked to a suite of ideas related to fertility and rebirth, particularly with regard to the life cycle of maize, and to the ball game (Taube 1985: 175-176; Mendoza 2007: 420-422). The Popol Vuh, a Colonial period manuscript, records a mythological narrative related to these ideas that, to judge from the iconographic evidence, had its roots deep in the past (Tedlock 1996: 96-99). Decapitation scenes are found in the monumental art of El Tajín, Chichén Itzá, Palenque, Toniná, Izapa, and the Cotzumalhuapa region, often in conjunction with ball game or other imagery that suggests elements of the myths from the Popol Vuh. At Chichén, reliefs from the Great Ball Court depict two teams of ball players, with the leader of one team beheading the leader of the other (Fig. 77). Blood gushing from the headless neck is metaphorically depicted as serpents and gourd vines, directly linking the sacrificial act with fecundity. Of course, the ideological conflation of severed heads with ears of maize did not preclude them from being used as war trophies. David Stuart has discussed the origins of the war-related Mayan verb *ch'ak* (“to cut”) as referring to harvesting, and he has identified a text at Palenque that makes further agricultural metaphors in a statement of conquest (1998: 8).

Trophy heads were often displayed as costume elements – typically as pectorals – and can be found depicted as such in the monumental art record. Several examples are found in the murals at Bonampak, as well as on Yaxchilán Lintels 9 and 12, Monuments 8 and 17 from Chinkultic, and the jambs of Copán Structure 10L-18 (Fig. 78). Baudez points to indicators of contempt – e.g. the heads being worn upside-down, with loose hair and strips as ear ornaments – as proof that these were trophies taken from slain enemies or sacrificed captives rather than relics of revered ancestors (2000: 196; also see Houston and Stuart 1998: 85).

The heart was another isolated body part depicted in Mesoamerican art from the Late Formative period through the Late Postclassic, although it was often represented in a stylized manner. It typically took the form of a tri-lobed motif or an elongated sphere with three pendant elements that suggest either the ends of severed vessels or dripping blood (Langley 1981: 31-32). Hearts are present in Teotihuacan iconography, often in front of the mouths of predatory animals – which are in themselves a category of martial iconography that will be discussed below – or on the ends of sacrificial knives held by priests, as is seen on the mural from Portico 19 of the Group of the Sun from Zone 5A, and from Portico 3 of the White Patio of the Atetelco apartment compound.¹⁰⁰ They are again seen being eaten by jaguars and eagles on reliefs at Tula and Chichén Itzá. At Cacaxtla, hearts are used pictographically as part of a glyphic phrase repeated on the battle mural, likely a toponym meaning “place of the precious sacrifice” (Fig. 8; Berlo 1989a: 27-28). In the same painting, they are also seen as pendants hanging from the belt of the main protagonist, 3 Deer, and figure E21 is shown with

¹⁰⁰ Tri-lobed heart motifs are also seen framed by stylized blades as part of a decorative frieze on tableros from the Plaza of the Chalchiuites of the La Ventilla apartment compound.

a stylized heart protruding from his chest that is identical to those from the accompanying glyphic constructions (Fig. 79). A Late Postclassic Aztec example of the use of hearts, in addition to other body parts, as a costume element comes from the imposing Coatlicue sculpture: the goddess' adornment includes a necklace composed of alternating hearts and hands, with a skull pectoral (Fig. 80).

Weapons were another common emblematic motif with obvious martial connotations. Similar to the previously discussed Mayan term *tok' pakal* and the glyphic imagery related to it, there was likely a linguistic aspect to other depictions of weapons. For example, the Nahuatl expression *mitl chimalli* (literally "arrow-shield") was an Aztec term for war (Stuart 1995: 302). The Temple Stone has two examples of the shield-and-darts motif flanking a depiction of the Earth Monster on the temple platform / seat of the throne. Another version was carved onto a large boulder in Cuernavaca, likely serving as a reminder of past aggression and a threat of future conflict if allegiance was not paid to the expansionist Aztec state (Fig. 81). Even without a secure linguistic reading, depictions of weapons carry unavoidably militaristic overtones. At Tula the carved pillars of Pyramid B alternate depictions of warriors with bound bundles of spears. On a façade relief from the same structure, three pairs of darts are crossed behind a tri-lobed heart motif. On the façade of the Upper Temple of the Jaguars at Chichén Itzá – the structure that houses the battle murals – repeating shields with darts crossed behind them were set into the roof cornice (Fig. 82).

Predatory animals – including jaguars, coyotes, and raptorial birds – are common and multivalent symbols in Mesoamerican art. While they almost always likely carried associations of militaristic strength, this concept was not necessarily given primacy or distinguished from more general connotations of hierarchical rulership and power. The first

representations of predatory animals suggestive as metaphors for martial aggression are Olmec: San Lorenzo Monument 107 and Chalcatzingo Monuments 4 and 31, all of which depict jaguars dominating human victims (Fig. 83).¹⁰¹ Reilly and Garber have suggested, partially based on the presence of possible trefoil motifs on the foreheads of the jaguars from Chalcatzingo Monument 4, that the scenes represent rulers supernaturally transformed into jaguars for the purpose of waging war (2003: 141-148). Whether these depictions are understood to be allegorical or to illustrate mythological stories is not crucial, however, as such readings would not be inimical to the underlying martial connotations they attribute to jaguars.

At Teotihuacan several murals feature frontal eagles or profile processional coyotes and jaguars, the latter sometimes depicted with their bodies composed of woven nets, all of which are often seen with bloody hearts in front of their mouths in what is understood to be a metaphorical representation of warfare and sacrifice (Fig. 84; Cabrera Castro 2002: 143-144). Later, at the Epiclassic Central Mexican site of Teotenango, two reliefs depict seated jaguars wearing pectorals and accompanied by the calendrical glyph 2 Rabbit (Fig. 85). One of these holds a heart to its mouth, has a femur bone outlined on its leg, and a second femur bone next to the cartouche containing the Rabbit glyph; a second date, 9 House, is carved on the side of the stone.¹⁰² Similar depictions of predatory animals are found on architectural

¹⁰¹ Río Chiquito Monument 1 and Portero Nuevo Monument 3 also possibly depict similar events, but their fragmentary state makes a definitive reading impossible.

¹⁰² This carving, along with similar representations at Chichén Itzá, has sometimes been interpreted as a metaphor for the moon devouring the sun, that is to say, as an eclipse (Álvarez A. 1983: 244). While an astronomical reading for the Teotenango relief cannot be discounted, especially considering the cord looped through the cartouche of the 9 House glyph that might indicate calendrical reform to correlate differing methods of time keeping (Berlo 1989: 31), there remains an unavoidable bellicosity to the image. A relief carved on

reliefs at Tula and Chichén Itzá (Fig. 86). The façade of Pyramid B at Tula features rows of processing coyotes and jaguars alternating with rows of profile eagles eating hearts and descending anthropomorphic figures wearing what Taube has identified as War Serpent costumes (2000: 285-287). At Chichén Itzá, aside from the processing jaguars on the façade of the UTJ, alternating panels of seated jaguars and eagles eating human hearts encircle the Platform of the Eagles, interspersed with profile warrior figures.

Conquest-era accounts add to our understanding of the militaristic associations of predatory animals in Mesoamerica. The Aztecs had warrior orders whose members identified themselves as jaguar-knights or eagle-knights and wore full-body costumes reflecting this affiliation (Fig. 87; Hassig 1988: 45-47). While we cannot know with certainty whether the same held true at the earlier polities of Chichén Itzá, Tula, or Teotihuacan, the Epiclassic period murals from Cacaxtla document a clash between opposing groups of warriors respectively identified with jaguar or eagle costume elements. Even earlier, at Teotihuacan, depictions are found of bird-headed warriors at the Atetelco apartment compound and anthropomorphic jaguar warriors at the Zacuala compound (Fig. 88). This pictorial evidence strongly suggests a continued tradition of warrior orders associated with predatory animals dating back at least a thousand years before the conquest.

Other zoomorphic imagery from Teotihuacan – which also became diffused across Mesoamerica and survived the collapse of the metropolis – is of a less obviously bellicose character, but has nevertheless been shown to have associations with militarism. Foremost

the opposite side of the other jaguar depiction at Teotenango shows a profile creature with the body and wings of a butterfly and the head and legs of a raptorial bird; it wears a beaded necklace and is accompanied by the glyph 12 (or 13) Reptile Eye. While neither this eagle/butterfly nor the associated jaguar are shown eating hearts, the pairing of these animals of militaristic associations on a single monument remains suggestive.

among these is the butterfly, which, despite its seemingly innocuous beauty, symbolized warriors who died on the battlefield and thus served to evoke the mortal struggle of warfare, the bravery of those who fought, and the heavenly reward they stood to attain (Sahagún, Book VI 1952 [1575-1580]: 47-49). The nose ornaments worn by Teotihuacan warriors likely had their origins in butterfly imagery (Berlo 1983). These have a profile that resembles the *talud-tablero* profile so closely associated with the city's ceremonial buildings and architectural identity, and Annabeth Headrick has suggested that this architectural symbolism reinforced an ideology of martial obligation (2003: 168-169). War Serpent headdresses, originating at Teotihuacan but also known from Classic Maya depictions, exhibit features that likely derived from butterflies and caterpillars (Taube 2000: 282-285). Later, Toltec warriors wore pectorals in the form of stylized butterflies (Fig. 89).

Many other examples of emblematic iconography assuredly carried explicit or implicit associations with warfare in ancient Mesoamerica. I have attempted to collect here instances where the militaristic meaning appears paramount and relatively unambiguous, where warfare itself seems to have been a primary referent.

Warrior Figures

A second common allusion to warfare in Mesoamerican iconography consists of solitary or processional figures with the attire and accoutrements of warriors. These depictions generally take a standardized, iconic form and serve to identify the individual being represented as belonging to a military order. There is typically little or no narrative element to these depictions, which express their martial theme solely through the presence of weapons and other elements associated with warfare. Even when detailed hieroglyphic texts

accompany depictions of solitary warriors, identifying them and relating the image to a specific historical event, the images themselves are intended to convey the unqualified and enduring martial strength of the individual and of the polity that he represents.

There are a limited number of depictions of warriors in the surviving monumental art of Teotihuacan. These tend to be grouped into processions of nearly identical figures, giving the impression of being generic soldiers rather than specific individuals. The most notable examples are from murals in the Atetelco compound (Fig. 90). Large figures process on the basal portion of a wall on the Patio Norte. While the upper bodies of these figures have been lost, the bundled lances they carry in their hands confirm their identification as warriors. In porticos off the Patio Blanco of the same compound, profile figures, smaller in size but more numerous, are found in rhomboid frames formed by intertwined serpents. The feathered fletching of arrows or darts can be seen above a circular element at their backs, similar to the back disks seen worn by warrior figures in later Toltec art. They wear bird headdresses, bar nose ornaments with hanging fang-like elements, and large conch shells in front of their chests. In their outstretched right hands, they carry staffs topped by a circle with hanging plumes surmounted by a bar and finished with a pair of scrolls.

Solitary warrior imagery abounds in Classic Maya monumental art, and rulers were often depicted in their guise as military leaders. Many elements of Classic Maya war costumes appear to have been derived from Teotihuacan (Garcia-Des Lauriers 2000: 148-156). Early depictions of warrior-kings at Tikal and Uaxactun make direct reference to Teotihuacan through costume elements and accoutrements. The profile warriors depicted on the sides of Stela 31 from Tikal, dedicated in 445 A.D., represent opposing views of the same figure, Yax Nuun Ayiin (Fig. 91; Coggins 2002: 55). He wears a mosaic war serpent

headdress, a back mirror with pendant coyote tails, and fur bands over his knees, and carries a rectangular shield featuring a depiction of the Teotihuacan storm deity in his left hand while his right hand holds an atlatl – a weapon common in Central Mexico but never adopted by the Classic Maya (Hassig 1992: 72).¹⁰³

The Mexican costume of Yax Nuun Ayiin contrasts with the kingly garb worn by the figure on the front face of the stela, his son and heir, Siyaj Chan K'awil. This monument presents a case for legitimacy based both on the long bloodline of ethnically and culturally Maya rulers from Tikal, recounted in detail in a text on the back and visually expressed through the traditional trappings of Maya rulership adorning Siyaj Chan K'awil, and the presence of foreign, militaristic elements in the costume of the king's father, Yax Nuun Ayiin. This latter was the son of Spearthrower Owl, a ruler installed at Tikal following the *entrada*, an incursion by Teotihuacanos led by Siyaj K'ak' with extensive repercussions across the region (Stuart 2000: 480-482).¹⁰⁴ Monuments at several sites document this event, most notably Stela 5 (378 A.D.) from the large neighboring center of Uaxactun (Fig. 92). The figure depicted here, standing in profile wearing Central Mexican clothing and carrying a mace and an atlatl, is the ruler appointed to this site by Siyaj K'ak' following his mastery of the region, presumably through military conquest (Martin and Grube 2000: 30).

¹⁰³ Hassig attributes the Maya's decision not to adopt a weapon technology obviously known to them to tactical and logistical considerations: atlatls are most valuable at breaking up the large formations of a conventional army at a distance and require large open spaces and constant replenishment with new darts; Classic Maya warfare seems to have relied on smaller groups utilizing impact weapons, which could be used repeatedly without reloading and were more practical in densely forested areas (1992: 70-73).

¹⁰⁴ Martin and Grube give a detailed discussion of the current understanding of these events (2000: 29-36).

The northwest, southwest, and southeast jambs of Structure 18 at Copán feature carvings of solitary warrior figures carrying shields and spears (Fig. 78d).¹⁰⁵ By holding their weapons at an angle with the point downwards, these figures present an active and alert demeanor as they guard the inner and outer doorways of this building. Based on the accompanying inscriptions, Baudez interprets all four jambs as depicting the same individual, the ruler Rising-Sun (1994: 196).

Panel 2 from Piedras Negras depicts a standing figure with the mosaic War Serpent headdress, square shield, and pendant pouch, costume elements associated with Teotihuacan militarism in the Maya area (Fig. 93; Stone 1989: 156-158). Behind him stands a smaller figure wearing a headdress containing a bird head, rings on his eyes, and with a square shield and pendant bag. These figures are faced by six kneeling warriors who are identified in the captions above them as coming from the neighboring sites of Bonampak, Lacanja, and Yaxchilan (Schele and Miller 1986: 148-149). The entire figural group, all of whom hold spears in their right hands, is situated in an architectonic setting formed by framing bands of glyphs, which date this monument to 667 A.D. Despite the lengthy accompanying inscription, scholars have only been able to speculate on the exact nature of the event being depicted and the identities of the standing figures (Clancy 2009: 46-47).¹⁰⁶ However, the monument clearly indicates the Late Classic institutionalization of military hierarchies closely aligned with political legitimization in the Southern Maya Lowlands.

¹⁰⁵ The northeast jamb depicts a figure holding a jaguar scepter; however, as discussed above, the numerous trophy heads worn by this individual serve to associate him with warfare.

¹⁰⁶ The event described for the Initial Series date is Ruler 2 receiving a *ko'haw* helmet, indicated by a logographic glyph identical to those worn by the six kneeling figures; the text goes on to cite the receiving of the same helmet, this time written syllabically, 148 years previously by an earlier ruler of Piedras Negras (Clancy 2009: 46-47). While the exact meaning of this ceremony is uncertain, inter-site political interaction is clearly implicated.

At Bonampak, Stela 1 depicts the ruler Chaan Muwan II, who is also the protagonist of the battle mural, as a solitary warrior (Fig. 94). Rather than commemorating a warfare event, this monument appears to have been erected to celebrate a period ending in the Mayan calendar, in 780 A.D. (Mathews 1980: 64). Chaan Muwan II is shown frontally in a static pose, with feet firmly planted and facing outward. His left hand is placed on his hip and a round shield comprised of a monstrous face is seen in profile strapped to his left forearm. In his other, outstretched hand he holds a staff decorated with pairs of knotted strips of paper and with the butt emerging from the gaping maw of a fanged monster head. While the upper portion of this pole is missing due to damage of the monument, it can be securely identified as a spear by comparison with other depictions of this weapon, such as on Stela 8 from Naranjo (Fig. 95).

Warrior figures are found in the art of the Epiclassic period sites of El Tajín and Xochicalco. A mural fragment recovered from Building K from the Tajín Chico group of the site of El Tajín, located in the modern state of Veracruz, shows the profile heads of several figures with the top portions of decorated spears in between them (Fig. 96). Thus, a procession of warriors can safely be inferred. On the upper-level talud and on the sides of the stairway of the Pyramid of the Plumed Serpent at Xochicalco, seated warrior figures are depicted holding square shields and three crossed darts in their left hands while they raise objects in their right hands that Virginia Smith (2000: 65) has reasonably identified as spear throwers (Fig. 97).

The sheer quantity of individual and processional figures clad as warriors at Chichén Itzá makes the monumental art of this site among the most overtly militaristic in Mesoamerica (Fig. 98). The relief carved warrior figures on the jambs of the inner doorway

of the UTJ, on the Platform of the Eagles, and on the sides of the numerous columns of the Northwest Colonnade and inside the Temple of the Warriors have already been mentioned previously. Carved on the sloping sides of the daises of the Northwest and North Colonnades are processions of warriors holding spear throwers and darts, each with a serpent winding behind him; where they meet at the center are spheres of grass with sacrificial needles stuck into them. Warriors are also found on the faces of columns in the outer chamber of the Temple of the Chac Mool, an earlier structure covered by the Temple of the Warriors. In the inner chamber, carved onto the base of a bench on the left (north) side of the room, nine figures with typical warrior costumes – including back disks, bands beneath their knees, and spear throwers with bunches of darts clutched in their hands – sit in profile on a series of jaguar thrones.¹⁰⁷ Like the jambs of the UTJ, those of the Mercado are carved with armed individuals. This profusion of warrior figures at Chichén, which collectively suggest a large group of individuals who hold the same office or status, has been interpreted as an indication of the relative complexity and horizontality of the political organization of the site (Ringle and Bey 2009). Baudez and Latsanopoulos have noted that while the warriors show marks of individualization through differentiation of costume elements and the presence of possible name or lineage glyphs, the effect of their numbers is to demonstrate their corporate identity as the military arm of the state (2009: 8-9).

The warrior imagery from Chichén finds close parallels at Tula, a Central Mexican site that shares great similarities of art and architecture with the Yucatecan metropolis (Fig. 99). Atop Pyramid B, massive columns over 4.5 meters tall are carved in the round to

¹⁰⁷ On the opposite (south) bench of this symmetrically arranged room are a series of deity impersonators and other non-martial dignitaries. Similar figures are also found interspersed among the warriors on the columns of the Northwest Colonnade.

resemble figures wearing the distinctive costumes of Toltec warriors, including stylized butterfly pectorals and round back mirrors, and they carry spear throwers, bundles of darts, curved sticks, and bags in their hands. These were accompanied by equally tall square pillars that were carved in relief on all four sides with alternating registers of similarly clad warrior figures and bundles of weapons.¹⁰⁸ Bench reliefs found in several rooms of the neighboring Palacio Quemado feature numerous processional figures carrying shields and weapons.¹⁰⁹

Finally, depictions of processing warriors are found in the Late Postclassic period. In carvings from an early construction phase of the sacred precinct at Tenochtitlan, relief warriors processed along the sloping face of benches beneath a cornice featuring feathered serpents, a program that directly imitated Toltec prototypes (Fig. 100).¹¹⁰ The profile figures hold shields, spears, and spear-throwers. They converge on a *zacatapayolli* – a grass ball from which implements of auto-sacrifice protrude.¹¹¹ The figure to the left of this central bundle exhibits traits associated with the deity Tezcatlipoca: a foot replaced by smoke or a serpent head and a smoking mirror in his headdress.

The Stone of the Warriors is a square altar featuring nearly identical iconography to the bench relief: processional warrior figures converging on a grass ball on the now severely damaged front, and an upper register with undulating feathered serpents (Fig. 101). The more

¹⁰⁸ See Cynthia Kristan-Graham's dissertation (1989) for a detailed analysis of the figures on these pillars.

¹⁰⁹ See Jiménez García for a detailed analysis of the individual figures, including the weapons they carry (1998: 192-241). Diehl, however, has interpreted these figures as "priests or dignitaries" (1983: 64-65), and Kristan-Graham has argued that they represent merchants (1993).

¹¹⁰ The Aztecs also created sculptures in imitation of the atlantean Toltec warrior figures atop Tula Pyramid B.

¹¹¹ Pasztory identifies the *zacatapayolli* as an Aztec innovation to the design they copied from Tula (1983: 146). However, as mentioned above, this motif is also seen on the reliefs from the daises of the Northwest and North Colonnades at Chichén Itzá.

refined carving of this monument, however, suggests that it was completed at a later date. The implements carried by the figures vary and include shields, spears held vertically (i.e. non-aggressively), spear throwers, and serpent-footed staffs with feathered standards.

A no-longer extant mural featuring processing warriors was discovered at the provincial Aztec site of Malinalco, located 115 kilometers southwest of Tenochtitlan (Fig. 102).¹¹² The three figures were depicted with round shields, raised spears, and costume elements associated with Toltec warriors, including stylized butterfly pectoral, round back disk, and a pair of heron feathers in the headdress. Their bodies were painted with thin yellow and white stripes, and the only figure whose face survived to be copied in the reconstruction painting by Miguel Angel Fernández wore a green mask over his eyes.

Captive / Debased Figures

Representations of vanquished enemies, both living and dead, were common testaments of conquest throughout much of Mesoamerica. These individuals are often shown in ways that connoted their debased status: naked or with minimal clothing, bound with ropes, sometimes mutilated and contorted. In many instances, textual captions give either the personal name or town of origin of the person portrayed, presumably a high ranking individual whose capture therefore represents the defeat and subjugation of an entire polity. Thus, depictions of lone defeated individuals could function synecdochically to suggest conquest events with broader political implications.

¹¹² Malinalco is best known for a large round temple, carved into the living rock of the mountainside, that features flattened eagle and a jaguar reliefs set atop the bench that encircles the chamber. While the exact function of this shrine is not certain, the most widely accepted interpretations see it as related to the fraternities of jaguar and eagle warriors and as expressing the Aztec imperial domination of the local population through the occupation of a sacred cave (Garcia Payon 1974: 34-63; Pasztory 1983: 135-138).

Individual conquered figures first appear in Zapotec monumental art. Monument 3 from San José Mogote was carved during the Rosario phase (c. 700-500 B.C.), with a C-14-dated *terminus ante quem* of c. 560 B.C. (Fig. 103; Flannery and Marcus 11803). It depicts a figure in profile with his limbs disarrayed in a pinwheel configuration. He is identified by a glyph reading 1 Earthquake between his feet, and he is shown dead. This is indicated by his closed eyes and the tri-lobed heart visible on his torso, suggesting that his chest has been opened. An oblong shape projecting from his abdominal region between his bent right elbow and raised left knee most likely represents his bowels spilling onto the ground. His nudity, which is uncommon in Mesoamerican art with the exception of vanquished individuals, adds to his shame. This debasement was added to through recurrent performance: the monument was placed in the floor at the entrance to a passageway and was thus positioned to be trod upon, ritually reaffirming the dominance of the upright actor over the represented individual and his associated lineage.

At Monte Albán, hundreds of stones carved with similar denuded figures date to the earliest periods of monumental building at the site, c. 500 B.C.-150 A.D. (Fig. 104; Scott 1978: 12). These are concentrated on Buildings J and L, but examples are associated with several other structures on the south end of the site's ceremonial plaza. These figures were originally given the name "Danzantes" because their flailing limbs give them the appearance of dancers (*Ibid.* 21). While interpretations of them have varied widely – from revered ancestors to ecstatic shamans – current scholarly consensus views them as sacrificed prisoners, their contorted postures connoting their death (Marcus and Flannery 1996: 151-

153).¹¹³ Most of the figures are depicted with severed genitals, a mutilation that, combined with their nudity, would have contributed to the humiliation of these captives. Many are additionally associated with (presumably nominal) hieroglyphic inscriptions; the presence of such figures alongside the toponyms on Building J, mentioned above, suggests that both relate the conquest of polities or lineages, with the implication that the Danzantes represent overthrown rulers. The presence among the Danzantes of three severed heads, related to the emblematic depictions of trophy heads discussed above, greatly supports the reading of the full figures as slain enemies.¹¹⁴

The Late Formative-era site of Izapa, located near the Pacific coast at the border between Mexico and Guatemala, has numerous carved monuments notable for exhibiting strong ties to Olmec art as well as proto-Mayan characteristics. Much of the imagery appears related to the mythological or ritual underpinnings of rulership (Guernsey Kappelman 2004). Stela 89, however, depicts a solitary captive figure with his knees brought up to his chest and his arms bound behind his back (Fig. 105).

Early Classic Maya depictions of debased captives are found at the Petén sites of Tikal and Río Azul. At Tikal, such figures are seen on a stucco frieze found on the back wall of Room 1, Structure 5D-86-6 of the Mundo Perdido complex (Laporte and Vega de Zea 1987: 131). Dating to c. 300-350 A.D., the frieze depicts a row of five kneeling figures with their hands held in front of them bound by pendant cords (Fig. 106). Glyphs on their backs likely provided their names. At Río Azul captive figures are modeled in stucco on three altars

¹¹³ Scott rehearses the various interpretations put forth by prior scholars before presenting the strong case for reading them as captives (1978: 21-30).

¹¹⁴ Javier Urcid, however, argues that these reliefs celebrated victorious Zapotec warriors rather than documenting their defeated enemies (cited in Blomster 2011: 128-129).

set up in front of Structure A3-sub3 (Fig. 107; Adams 1999: 75-79). They can be dated to around 393 A.D. based on the inscription from Stela 1, an associated monument that depicts a further captive figure at the feet of the primary individual (*Ibid.* 91-92). The five surviving stucco figures are very similar to those seen at Tikal: shown in profile, down on one knee, with exposed genitals and hands bound in front of them. They, too, carry their name glyphs on their backs.

Depictions of captives are uncommon at Teotihuacan, with one possible exception. The jambs of a doorway leading off the White Patio of the Atetelco compound feature a pair of figures with upcurving broken feet (Fig. 108). Considering the presence of warrior figures in other murals associated with this same patio, these likely represent captives who have been hobbled as a form of punishment, torture, or to keep them from escaping. Their suffering is celebrated in the form of tears streaming from their eyes and scrolls suggesting anguished screams emerging from their mouths.

At Cacaxtla, paintings of two full figures and the legs of a third are found on a step leading from the South Plaza to the portico of the Red Temple (Fig. 109). Their red bodies are so emaciated as to be skeletal, with ribs and joints clearly delineated. They are naked except for blue loincloths, and they are accompanied by glyphs, including a burning temple and a profile skull. Like the Danzantes, these figures functioned as statements of conquest, with six toponyms indicating defeated polities extending across the riser of the step. And like Monument 3 from San José Mogote, these figures were placed horizontally across the threshold of a passageway, encouraging and even necessitating a recurrent, ritualized performance of subjugation.

Similar “captive stairs” are found at several Maya sites, including Dos Pilas, Tamarindito, Yaxchilán, Dzibanche, and Toniná, all dating to the Late Classic period (Fig. 110). At Dos Pilas, Hieroglyphic Stairway 3 includes depictions of recumbent figures, with bound hands and wearing only loincloths, interspersed with textual accounts of their capture.¹¹⁵ Lords from El Chorro, Yaxchilan, and the “Ik Site” are all mentioned as being taken prisoner within a short period of time by Dos Pilas Ruler 4, who was himself taken captive and presumably killed (there being no further references to him in the hieroglyphic record) as the result of a warfare event recorded on Hieroglyphic Stairway 2 at the nearby site of Tamarindito (Houston 1993: 117). This latter monument includes similar depictions of prostrate figures with bound wrists on the risers of the steps.

Hieroglyphic Stairway 3 at Yaxchilán is associated with Structure 44 and consists of three pairs of two steps, one in front of each of three doorways. Four of these steps (I, II, III, and V) include depictions of solitary captives with bound arms, while Step VI shows a captor holding a rope that leads to a bound captive. These prisoners are not nude, but rather wear elaborate headdresses that attest to their high status, thus emphasizing their value as captives and adding to the prestige of their captors. The carvings are considerably worn, but glyphs naming two of the figures (Steps I and III) can be discerned on their loincloths. Longer associated texts primarily focus on capture events with the Yaxchilán ruler Shield Jaguar as the protagonist (Tate 1992: 280).

¹¹⁵ The presence of hieroglyphic inscriptions beside the depicted captives on the upper surfaces of these steps raises interesting questions about the relationship of images, text, and architecture in the Maya mind. While the depictions of captives were almost certainly intended to be trod upon, what can be surmised from the presence of the names of victorious rulers in the proximal captive statements? Was the possibility of the ruler’s name being walked upon – a potentially potent and subversive symbolic act – of no concern to those who planned such monuments?

At Toniná, Monument 27 is an elongated block that formed a step similar to those discussed above. Here, the bound captive is depicted on the riser, allowing the carving to be viewed while it was stood upon. Numerous additional captive figures are found at Toniná, both carved in the round and in relief as well as painted (Fig. 111). Several freestanding monuments depict kneeling figures with their arms bound behind their back (Monuments 39, 41, 100, 108, and 38). Others depict similar figures with their arms crossed in front of their chest (Monuments 24, 25, 59, 70, 73, and 123), a posture that is widely accepted as indicating submission and is possibly linked to sacrifice (Baudez and Mathews 1979: 33). Monument 10 presents an interesting variation: the figure is prostrate on his hands and knees, his level back, inscribed with now eroded hieroglyphs, possibly serving as an altar or seat. Most of these figures retain some jewelry, indicating their high status, and therefore their value as prisoners. Notably, all of these sculptures are headless, suggesting that they were ritually decapitated some time after being carved. Other examples of captive reliefs were originally arranged in the walls of architectural structures. Many fragments of such figures exist, but the best-preserved example is Monument 122, which depicts the Palenquean ruler K'an Joy Chitam II. Finally, a well-preserved painting of a bound, recumbent captive figure is painted on a panel belonging to a frieze running across the side of the Acropolis at that site.

The relief figures on either side of the stairways of Houses A and C at Palenque represent captives (Fig. 112). They are shown kneeling, with arms bound behind their backs or crossed in front of their chests in gestures of submission. Accompanying inscriptions associate these figures with a series of battles waged against client sites of Calakmul by king K'inich Janaab' Pakal I (Martin 2000: 110-111). Interestingly, stylistic analysis of these

carvings – and of several monuments from Toniná – suggests that they were carved by compatriots of the very individuals they depict; that is to say, these and other captive images were in themselves a form of artistic tribute levied on the defeated polities as a means to further their humiliation and to secure a permanent indexical sign of their subordination (Pasztor 1993: 129-130; M. Miller 2002: 19).

Depictions of solitary killed or captive enemies – that is to say specific, historical individuals – are not found in Postclassic monumental art. However, there are sculptures worth mentioning in this context. Chacmools are freestanding sculptures in the form of generic reclining warrior figures with knees raised and basins held over their chests (Fig. 113). These first appeared in the Late Classic and Early Postclassic periods, and are associated with the Toltec style because of their concentration at the sites of Chichén Itzá and Tula.¹¹⁶ In later times, the Aztecs revived the form, and Late Postclassic examples have been recovered from Tenochtitlan, as well as Cempoala and Tlaxcala (M. Miller 1985: 7). Chacmools were performative in that they almost certainly functioned as sacrificial altars. But they were also monumental: even when rites were not taking place, they presented the recumbent form of a perpetual sacrificial victim, one who bravely met his own death – a warrior. Early chacmools are relatively unadorned, but there can be no doubt as to their identification as warriors since the varied costume elements they do wear are identical to those commonly found on Toltec-style warriors in the art of Chichén Itzá and Tula: pillbox hats, butterfly pectorals, padded forearm protection, and bands below the knees. The symbolism of the chacmool is complex, presenting associations with the maize and rain gods

¹¹⁶ Earlier sculptures of a similar appearance from the site of Cerro del Huistle in the West Mexican state of Jalisco have been proposed as proto-chacmools (Hers 1989: 63-68).

and concepts of rebirth and fertility (Miller and Samayoa 1998). What is important to this study is the way that chacmool altars synthesized these concepts with the practice of warfare into a programmatic display of state ideology.

The Aztec monumental relief representing Coyolxauhqui, placed at the foot of the Templo Mayor in Tenochtitlan, functioned in much the same fashion (Fig. 114). Its depiction of a debased (female) victim derives from a mythical, rather than an historical event. Celebrating the triumph of the Aztec war god and patron deity of Tenochtitlan, Huitzilopochtli, over his warrior half-sister, this massive relief carving of the dismembered body of the archetypal foe provided “metaphorical underpinnings” for the repetitive sacrifices of captured warriors that took place at the top of the pyramid (Umberger 2007). More than theatrical re-enactment, sacrificial victims were likely understood to embody the essence of this original victim, and to thus perpetuate the original, cosmologically symbolic event. That Coyolxauhqui was female and the captives were male does not invalidate this interpretation: Emily Umberger has presented pictorial evidence from the Florentine Codex and a greenstone pendant that suggest Coyolxauhqui was originally a male warrior, going on to argue that her identification as female after her death represents an emasculating transformation concomitant with her apotheosis as the moon goddess (2007: 14).¹¹⁷

Until now, this section has dealt with depictions of solitary conquered individuals. These can be understood as functioning within larger architectural or performative contexts – their placement or aggregation serving to reinforce or amplify their message, which is placed into dialogue with the ontology of the built environment and the power structures that it

¹¹⁷ While acknowledging the large temporal divide, it would be apposite to recall the emasculation of the Danzantes from Monte Albán through the severing of their genitalia in light of Umberger’s interpretation of the Coyolxauhqui mythological complex.

embodies. The next group of images that will be considered also involves captives, but as part of multi-figural compositions that often create nearly identical meaning through direct visual representations of these relationships.

Multi-Figural Compositions

Mesoamerican martial iconography includes compositions that feature two or more figures interacting with each other. As with depictions of isolated captive figures, these scenes focus entirely on the outcome of warfare, juxtaposing victorious warriors with their subjugated prisoners. Here, however, the dramatic interplay between the figures visually emphasizes the glory of individual captors, rather than the more corporate identifications of conquest that are implicit in isolated captive depictions.

The earliest examples of compositions that likely depict captors and captives together come from Olmec art. However, as with much Olmec art, the iconography of these monuments remains somewhat ambiguous, and some scholars have suggested non-martial readings of this imagery. The sides of Altar 4 from La Venta (c. 900-600 B.C.), a Middle Formative-era site from the Olmec Heartland, feature low-relief seated profile figures tied with ropes that are in turn held in the hand of a high-relief frontal figure placed in a central niche on the front face of the monument (Fig. 115). Ropes are often present in depictions of captives in Mesoamerican art, and this seems a reasonable interpretation of this the imagery from this monument. Some scholars, however, see the cord as a cosmic umbilicus connecting the current ruler to his ancestors (Grove 1973: 134; Kappelman and Reilly 2001: 40-1). The arguments made by these authors emphasize the shamanic role of the ruler, who is seated in the mouth of a cave – the entrance to the Otherworld – an iconographic reading that I

consider fairly secure (Grove 1973: 133). However, I would not agree that this discounts the possibility of the figure on the side of Altar 4 being read as a captive. It is worthwhile in this context to recall the Classic Mayan inscriptions referring to capture events from Naranjo and Dzibanché, mentioned above, that use phrases such as *och uch'e'n* (“entered into his cave”), a construction that has been interpreted by David Stuart as referring to the despoiling of a conquered ruler’s shamanic powers (Stuart 2007: 44).

At the Middle Formative Central Mexican site of Chalcatzingo, Monument 2 – a relief carving on the side of a boulder – depicts a more active scene (Fig. 116). Here we see three standing, masked individuals, two of whom hold what appear to be spears in front of them as they approach a fourth figure to the right. This last is seated on the ground, nude, with his legs stretched in front of him and his arms held forward, seemingly bound. The exposed genitals of the prone figure suggest his debasement; a more benign interpretation of this monument, however, sees it as depicting a fertility rite, the masked figures holding agricultural implements rather than weapons (Grove 1984: 118).

Kaminaljuyu Monument 65, dated based on its style and associated ceramics to c. 150 B.C. (Kaplan 2000: 186), features three rulers seated on thrones and flanked by pairs of captives in poses demonstrating their submission: on one knee with their hands bound in front of them (Fig. 117).¹¹⁸ All of the figures – rulers and prisoners alike – wear unique headdress that likely indicated their names or lineages (*Ibid.* 191).¹¹⁹ Further interpretation

¹¹⁸ This assumes the one-time presence of a figure on the now-missing lower right of the roughly diamond-shaped monument.

¹¹⁹ A potential exception is the upper left captive, who possibly lacks a headdress and instead presents a head of disheveled hair; he also unambiguously lacks the large round ear ornaments worn by the others, his having been replaced with the cloth strip commonly seen in later Maya depictions of captives.

becomes speculative: are the central figures depictions of temporally successive rulers presented simultaneously on a single monument; or are they the heads of separate clans, joined in confederation, depicted with their subjugated counterparts from rival lineages?

While its exact nature might never be fully known, Monument 65 of Kaminaljuyu nevertheless exhibits an early example of what would become a common composition in Classic Maya art, involving the presentation of prisoners in front of a ruler at his court. Although their captivity implies that they were forcibly seized, presumably during battle, the focus of such monuments is entirely on the resulting power relations between the dominant ruler, whether or not he was directly responsible for their capture, and the vanquished prisoners. Indeed, even if their fate – sacrifice, slavery, release as dependant vassal lords? – was implicitly understood by the original audience, this too was relegated as secondary to the principal subject of power imbalance and subjugation.

In the Maya region, multi-figural compositions involving captives and captors are quite common. Although such scenes were more prevalent during the eighth century, there are numerous examples from earlier dates. At Uaxactun, a now-destroyed mural from the time of the Mexican *entrada* in the fourth century included a depiction of a Maya lord making a gesture of submission as he faces a warrior with Central Mexican costume who holds an atlatl and raises an axe above his head (Fig. 118; Martin and Grube 2000: 30). From a very early date, rulers of Tikal had themselves depicted with prone captive figures beneath or behind their feet (Fig. 119): Stela 39, epigraphically dated to 376 A.D.; Stela 28, the glyphs of which are too eroded to read but which can be placed stylistically within the Early Classic period; Stela 10, from the beginning of the sixth century; and Stela 11, with a date of 869 A.D. (*Ibid.* 28-51). The captives are always facing downwards, with bound wrists and

their feet raised behind them. The rulers wear elaborate costumes, but these are not overtly militaristic as they lack spears and shields.

The placement of the captives beneath the feet of the rulers in these representations recalls the depictions of captives on places such as steps upon which they would be trod, which were discussed above. A similar arrangement was created by the pairing of stelae depicting rulers with low, round altars that had bound captives depicted on their upper surfaces (Fig. 120). The best preserved of these is Tikal Altar 8 (751 A.D.), which features a prisoner – Wilan Tok Wayib’ – with an elaborate headdress and large-beaded necklace, but otherwise wearing only a loincloth. In a similar position as the captives on the previously discussed stelae – face down with knees bent and feet raised – his arms are bound behind his back and the rope extends upwards to the edge of the monument, which it circumscribes. A supernatural mask with Tikal’s Emblem Glyph on its head is seen beneath the captive. This altar stone was found in its original context, paired with Stela 20, which depicts the ruler Yik’in Chan K’awiil standing in front of a jaguar throne while holding a long-shafted, three-bladed axe (Martin and Grube 2000: 48). Thus, although these depictions of the warrior king and his captive are carved on separate monuments, they were intentionally arranged into a tableau that situated Yik’in Chan K’awiil in a position of dominance.¹²⁰

¹²⁰ Tikal Altars 6 (790 A.D.), 9 (736 A.D.), and 10 (771 A.D.), and Altar 1 from the suburban site of Jimbal, 12.5 km north of the center of Tikal, also present captives, but with variations of the surrounding elements. Notably, the outer (vertical) surface of Altar 10 depicts four bound, seated captive figures with a rope linking them; by contrast, this portion of Altar 6 has four deity figures. Column Altars 1 (748 A.D.), 2, and 3 feature bound, seated captives on their upper surfaces. Further altars, now fragmentary or extremely eroded, also likely featured captive figures. Ropes can be seen on several fragments of Altar 1, for instance (Jones and Satterthwaite 1982).

A rock outcropping incorporated into the Maler Causeway, which connects the center of Tikal with the North Group, was carved with a relief scene depicting a captive with his arms bound behind his back and a rope around his neck, the other end of which is held in the hand of his captor (Fig. 121).¹²¹ Interestingly, in this image the postures of captor and captive are reversed from what we would expect: the former is shown seated while the latter is standing.

Numerous panels and stelae from Piedras Negras depict rulers interacting with captives. The relatively early Panel 12, dating to the first part of the sixth century, shows a badly eroded standing figure behind whom another figure, naked except for a loincloth, kneels with his arms bound behind his back (Fig. 122a). Facing this pair, but separated by a central vertical block of glyphs, are three kneeling figures wearing skirts and elaborate headdresses and with their hands bound in front of them.¹²² While the identity of the standing ruler is uncertain, the captives are named, including Knot-Eyed Jaguar from Yaxchilan (Clancy 2009: 22). In terms of composition and subject matter Panels 4 (667 A.D.) and 15 (706 A.D.) resemble the earlier Panel 12 while exhibiting some notable differences (Fig. 122b). All three suggest architectural settings through the arrangements of their hieroglyphic texts. The rulers on the later panels, however, are shown holding spears, and they each receive bound and denuded prisoners from pairs of armed soldiers – shown kneeling in obeisance to the left of Panel 4 and shown standing to either side on Panel 15. These two

¹²¹ Based on the accompanying inscriptions, Simon Martin has interpreted this monument as representing the capture of a noble from Naranjo – Wilan Tok Wayib’ – in 748 A.D., the same event depicted on Altar 8/Stela 20 and on Column Altar 1 (2000: 111-113).

¹²² Based on the differences between them and the kneeling figure to the right, Clancy has proposed that these three figures do not represent actual captives, but rather the scene depicts a ceremony in which vassal nobles are “bound” to the ruler of Piedras Negras (2009: 22-23).

panels can therefore be said to combine the captive presentation scene from Panel 12 with the interaction between a ruler and his military subordinates depicted on Panel 2.¹²³

Thematically similar to the panels discussed above, Piedras Negras Stela 12 (795 A.D.) is nevertheless dramatically innovative and pictorially unprecedented (Fig. 123). The most important figure (typically identified as Ruler 7) occupies the upper third of the composition, where he sits ornately bejeweled on his throne in a dynamic three-quarters posture, looking down with his left hand on the thigh of his bent left leg and his right hand outstretched holding a spear. Two standing figures flank the middle third of the image; both carry serpent-headed staffs, but each has a unique headdress.¹²⁴ A figure wearing jewels on his head and torso sits on a platform between them, arms crossed in supplication as he gazes up at the enthroned ruler above him. The crowded bottom third of the stela is filled with the overlapping bodies of eight bound and denuded captives. The distinctive physiognomy of each figure suggests that these are portraits; all the individuals on this monument except the

¹²³ The exact nature of these scenes, however, remains uncertain, particularly because the protagonists remain unnamed. The text accompanying Panel 4 contains several dates from the reign of Ruler 1, his death in 639, and the censing of his tomb by Ruler 2 in 658 (Clancy 2009: 44); how the depicted scene is related to these events is unclear. On Panel 15, the text relates numerous instances of capture or warfare, among other events; Clancy makes the intriguing observation that the number of martial events associated with Ruler 2 in the textual record at Piedras Negras is the same – five – as the number of captives seated at the feet of the central figure (presumably Ruler 2) on this panel, raising the possibility that rather than documenting a single event, this scene could represent a lifetime of accomplishments.

¹²⁴ Based on his rare headdress and the presence of a “lo” syllable in his name glyph, Clancy tentatively identifies the figure standing on the right as Tiloom, a ruler of La Pasadita who is depicted on Panel 1 from that site as a *sajal* of Bird Jaguar IV of Yaxchilan, with whom he is shown flanking a prisoner that is likely a Piedras Negras noble; she suggests that by showing Tiloom now in the service of Ruler 7 from Piedras Negras, Stela 12 could have been an attempt to rewrite history (2009: 166-167).

ruler are named in glyphic captions.¹²⁵ Depicting the presentation of captives following a war with Pomoná, Stela 12 is remarkable for the contrasting moods with which the figures are portrayed: the royal ease of the enthroned ruler, the stiff attention of the left figure – Turtle Chaak, the ruler of the allied site of La Mar and likely the brother of Ruler 7 – and the physical and emotional anguish of the eight captives depicted below.

Additionally at Piedras Negras, Stelae 26 (628 A.D.), 35 (662 A.D.), 4 (702 A.D.), 7 (721 A.D.), 8 (726 A.D.), and 9 (736 A.D.) all depict elaborately costumed rulers in frontal poses with either one or two bound captives depicted in profile seated at their feet (Fig. 124). While there are variations in the costumes of the rulers, most carry rectangular shields in their left hands and spears in their right.¹²⁶ Many of these figures wear costume elements typically identified with Teotihuacan and militarism (Stone 1989). The figures at their feet can securely be identified as captives by the ropes around their upper arms, their nudity, their loose and disheveled hair, and the paper strips they wear in their ears. Thus, these are portraits of rulers in their role as military leaders.¹²⁷

Located up the Usumacinta River from Piedras Negras, the site of Yaxchilan has numerous multi-figural compositions dating from the late seventh to the mid-eighth century

¹²⁵ For a detailed discussion of the identities of the figures depicted on this monument, the content of the lengthy inscription on its sides, and its relationship to numerous monuments from other sites, see Schele and Grube (1994).

¹²⁶ The exceptions are the ruler on Stela 4, who holds beaded cloths in both hands, and the ruler from Stela 26, who holds a staff that ends in the curving head of a serpent instead of a spear.

¹²⁷ Stone has proposed that this group of “warrior stelae”, which extolled the martial responsibilities of rulership, formed a conceptual pairing with a second group of “niche-figure stelae” that relate to the rulers’ metaphysical link with cosmic and agricultural cycles. She notes that of the five rulers who erected niche-figure accession monuments, only one lacks a known warrior stela (1989: 154-156). The sacrificed victim arched across an altar at the base of the accession scaffold on “niche-figure” Stela 11 provides a possible glimpse into the integration of these complementary functions of rulership.

and relating to the taking and presentation of captives.¹²⁸ For the most part, these involve one or more armed figures standing over one or more bound, supplicating prisoners who sit or kneel before them (Fig. 125). The accompanying inscriptions invariably recount capture events, securely linking the depicted acts of obeisance with military conquest as opposed to non-bellucose acts of courtly ritual. Interestingly, among the numerous scenes one specific capture event is alluded to four separate times: Itzámnaaj Bahlam II's defeat of Ah Ahauul in 681 A.D. is recounted on Stela 15, Stela 19, Lintel 45, and Step III of Hieroglyphic Stairway 3 (Tate 1992: 248). Thus, while there is indeed a large quantity of militaristic imagery and inscriptions at Yaxchilan during the Late Classic period, to some degree this represents an artificial exaggeration through the repetition of individual exploits.

The lintels over the entrances to each of the three rooms of Bonampak Structure 1 – the building containing the murals – depict capture events (Fig. 126). These all occurred prior to the warfare scene depicted in the paintings, and they feature three different protagonists, including Chaan Muwan II on Lintel 1, a descendent of Shield Jaguar of Yaxchilan on Lintel 2, and Knotted-Eye Jaguar, a prior ruler of Bonamapak, on Lintel 3.¹²⁹ The compositions are nearly identical, with the victorious warriors seen standing in profile to the left of the fallen captives, who are grasped by their hair. Minor differences between the three can be noted, however. On Lintel 1, the victim retains both his ear ornaments and his flexible shield, which is strapped to his left wrist. This suggests the moment being depicted is that immediately

¹²⁸ These include: Stela 15, Stela 19, and Lintel 45 (681 A.D.); Lintel 44 (689 A.D.); Lintel 46 (701 A.D.); Stela 20 (713 A.D.); Stela 18 (729 A.D.); Stela 11 (746 A.D.); Lintel 16 (752 A.D.); Lintel 8 (755 A.D.); and Stela 10 and Lintel 12 (unknown dates). All dates refer to the capture events recounted in the texts, not the dedication dates of the monuments (Tate 1992: *passim*).

¹²⁹ See Mathews (1980) for a discussion of the inscriptions of these lintels.

following his capture by Chaan Muwan. In contrast, the prisoners on the other two lintels lack shields and have had their ear ornaments replaced by strips of paper with holes, costume elements associated with captives and sacrifice (Baudez and Mathews 1979: 33).

Additionally, the figure on Lintel 3 has a rope tied around his neck. Thus, while the postures of the figures remains almost unchanged, these depictions would seem to conflate the moment of capture with the subsequent ceremonial presentation of the captive (Miller and Houston 1987: 50). Also notable are the jeweled skulls worn by the conquering warriors on Lintels 2 and 3, and the upside-down trophy heads worn by both victor and vanquished on Lintel 2.

Several carvings depicting captives being dominated by victorious warriors are found at the Northern Lowland Maya site of Kabah, located in the Puuc region of western Yucatan (Fig. 127). On the side of Altar 8, two standing figures flank a figure seated on the ground with his legs outstretched, while a second seated figure, here with his knees drawn towards his body, is found to the right side. The aggressive poses and elaborate costumes of the standing figures contrast with the nudity and powerlessness of the victims: the leftmost figure grasps his captive by the hair with his left hand while holding an object in his right hand. Behind this same prisoner, the other standing figure raises an object, presumably a weapon, in his right hand. The scene depicted in this heavily eroded carving shows much similarity with the lower registers of the carved jambs of Room 21 of Structure 2C6 (also known as the Codz Poop). These nearly identical, but mirrored compositions feature two standing figures flanking a seated third figure, all in profile. The hair of the captive is grasped by the standing figure facing him, the other hand raising a stone knife. The figure standing behind the captive raises a loaded spear thrower with one hand while clutching extra darts in the other. In the

upper registers of the jambs, two figures face each other with raised spear throwers and bunches of darts held in their other hands. The weapon of one, who is identifiable from his distinctive facial scarification as the same individual facing the captive in the scene below, is loaded, while that of his companion remains empty.¹³⁰ A simplified version of this theme is present on a further pair of jambs, found in Structure 1A1 (also known as Building of the Red Hands). Here, standing figures wearing elaborate zoomorphic headdresses aim their raised spear throwers at kneeling captives, whom they grasp with their other hands, which also hold bunches of spare darts.

On the Gulf Coast, the architecture of the Epiclassic period site of El Tajín was decorated with numerous narrative relief programs. Like those of the Lower Temple of the Jaguars and the North Temple of the Great Ballcourt at Chichén Itzá, these depict a complex set of events and ceremonies involving numerous human and supernatural actors and relating to elite legitimacy, institutionalized militarism, the ballgame, human sacrifice, and agricultural fertility. Recognizing that these themes are often too intimately related to untangle, only the pair of scenes in which clear allusions to warfare are made will be discussed here.¹³¹ The re-entrant scenes carved in two registers around the perimeter of the central column of the Building of the Columns feature processions of warriors and bound

¹³⁰ The scarified individual, known from other sculptures at the site and previously referred to in the literature as the Ruler of Kabah, has been given the tentative moniker of Ruler 3 by Carrasco Vargas, *et al.* (1996: 301).

¹³¹ That is to say that, due to the emphasis being placed on rituals with mythological and metaphysical significance, the numerous instances of human sacrifice will not be considered here as pictorial evidence of warfare. It is acknowledged, however, that the victims were likely prisoners taken in the course of battle for that very purpose, as was the practice among the Aztecs in the Late Postclassic period.

captives, whom they grasp by the hair (Fig. 128).¹³² Interestingly, many of the captives, despite being restrained and stripped naked with their genitals exposed, carry weapons such as spears, sticks, and darts. Tuggle has interpreted this as indicating that the scene occurs immediately after a battle, citing the figure in the lower register depicted mid-fall, as if he had just been struck down (1968: 41-44). However, it seems unlikely that defeated enemies already stripped of their clothing and bound with ropes would be allowed to retain their weapons, and I find Koontz' reading of this scene as representing gladiatorial sacrifice more convincing (2009b: 79-82). In the upper register, the procession converges on a seated figure with a decapitated head at his feet and a disemboweled sacrificial victim stretched across an altar beside him.

Two large, round Aztec monuments from the sacred precinct of Tenochtitlan, the Cuauhxicalli of Moctezuma and the Stone of Tizoc, feature repeating motifs of warriors taking captives along their circumferences (Fig. 129). The victorious figure from each pair was depicted with costume elements – including stylized butterfly pectorals, back mirrors, spear throwers, and triangular aprons in front of their loincloths – that were associated with Toltec warriors. Meanwhile, the defeated warriors were depicted with Chichimec costume elements, including animal skins and bows and arrows. Umberger sees this ahistorical construction of “otherness” as providing an ideological justification for Mexica expansionism: the triumph of the “civilized” Tenochca over their “barbarian” neighbors (1987: 70). The high degree of standardization of the conquest motif pairing captor and captive figures demonstrates its mnemonic and symbolic, rather than mimetic and

¹³² These are the middle two registers of the north column according to Ladrón de Guevara's reconstruction (reprinted in Koontz 2009b: 75).

representational functions. Associated glyphs, rather than providing the names of individual conquered rulers as was seen in conjunction with depictions of captives in the Maya region, are toponyms for defeated polities. This suggests that, while recording specific, historical events, these monuments served to emphasize the on-going condition of subjugation of the listed towns under the dominion of Tenochtitlan.¹³³ Both of these monuments likely functioned as *cuauhxicalli*, vessels in which the hearts of sacrificial victims were offered to the sun, invoked by the solar disks covering their upper surfaces.¹³⁴ Thus, the integration of imagery and performance presented by these objects manifested the unification of territorial conquest and cosmological ideology that was the underlying message of Aztec imperial art.

A similar captor-captive motif, now destroyed, was carved onto a rock outcropping at Tepetzingo, to the east of Tenochtitlan (Fig. 130). A victorious warrior dressed in Toltec costume and with the smoking foot and headdress mirror of Tezcatlipoca grabs his prisoner by the hair. The glyph One Flint was found below this image. Umberger has tentatively identified the captive, through his headdress and face paint, as Otontecuhli, the god of the Tepanecs (1981: 153-154). As this group was conquered by the Mexica in 1428, or 1 Flint in the Aztec calendar, the Tepetzingo relief could have commemorated this conquest. Alternatively, 1 Flint was the mythological date upon which the Mexica departed from

¹³³ While most scholars have interpreted the Stone of Tizoc as simply enumerating this ruler's inheritance of the conquests of his predecessors, Richard Townsend has suggested that the monument could document sacrificial victims provided by previously conquered towns on the occasion of Tizoc's accession to the throne, thus reaffirming their subjugation to Tenochtitlan (1979: 46). While this interpretation is speculative, it speaks to the type of information encoded in the monument: anonymous and lacking reference to specific dates (an otherwise common practice in Aztec monumental art).

¹³⁴ The so-called Cuauhxicalli of Moctezuma possibly also functioned as a *temalacatl*, a stone to which a victim was tethered during gladiatorial sacrifices, as suggested by the evidence that a bar, to which a rope could have been attached, was at one time located inside the open mouth of the deity mask at the center of the solar disk.

Aztlan to begin their migration. Thus, Pasztory has interpreted this monument as a general assertion by the Tenochca of their destiny as conquerors of the Valley of Mexico (1983: 116-117).

While the multi-figural scenes discussed above portray specific individuals and document unique historical events, they do so according to a limited visual vocabulary that changed little over the course of two millennia. Thus, despite their heightened narrative content derived from the presentation of direct interaction between multiple figures, these representations retain an inherent iconicity.

Discussion

Evidence for warfare in Mesoamerica was presented here according to the various sources from which it is derived: archaeology, ethnohistorical accounts, epigraphy, and iconography. However, it is important to recognize the interconnectedness of these various strands, which serves to both reinforce and inform the interpretations that scholars have made. The same can be said for the division of martial imagery into iconographic categories: these distinctions are often not absolute, as there is much overlap between them.

The decision to present the material in this manner, however, was not arbitrary or based merely on convenience. This study centers on the interpretation of a specific mode of representation – the battle mural – and is therefore interested in exactly what kinds of information are accessible from this type of pictorial evidence. The preceding survey of background and comparative data was therefore organized in an analogous manner; that is to say, it was categorized according to what it communicates to us. While acknowledging that, as with any classification scheme, this system is ultimately a contrivance with obvious

limitations, it was found in this case to be the best way to introduce the material while placing emphasis on the innate characteristics of each species of evidence and each image type.

While individual indications of warfare in the archaeological record are rather weak – due particularly to the degree in which the surviving physical remains present ambiguities – a growing body of evidence collectively confirms the consistent presence of warfare at all stages of Mesoamerican civilization. The role of warfare in the formation of complex societies – and not just its contributions to their collapse – has become increasingly remarked upon in the literature (e.g. Webster 1977; Spencer and Redmond 2001; Workinger and Joyce 2009). It is important to note, however, that whenever archaeological remains provide compelling evidence for warfare, it is always on a relatively large scale. Fortifications, the construction of which required a substantial labor commitment, indicate an on-going need for protection. Obsidian points, due to their use in normal daily activities such as hunting, can only be interpreted as related to warfare when they are found evenly scattered in large enough numbers or in ritual depositions in which they were used to evoke martial symbolism. Human remains, even those exhibiting signs of trauma, can only be taken as indications of warfare when they are found in mass burials. And termination events – acts of violence perpetrated against the built environment – result from the destruction of entire communities.

Thus, the best evidence for ancient conflict often takes form of textual and pictorial documents recording war events. Such records, of course, were statements of power crafted to serve the interests of the winning faction. Much of the imagery discussed above gives expression to complex ideas that interwove cosmological, mythological, and sociopolitical

elements. It has not been my intention to diminish the validity of these multivalent meanings by limiting my discussion to their militaristic associations, or even to suggest that practical and political motivations and conceptions of warfare can profitably be separated from its ideological underpinnings and justifications. Rather, my aim here has been to provide a comprehensive overview of the unambiguously martial imagery present in the corpus of Mesoamerican monumental art, and to thereby demonstrate the consistency with which a limited vocabulary of motifs and compositions was deployed across significant spatial, temporal, and cultural distances. In the following chapter the battle murals introduced in Chapter Two will be contrasted to the largely iconic imagery presented above, not in terms of their explicit messages of militarism, conquest, and secular power, but rather with regard to their employment of pictorial narrativity, an unprecedented mode of representation that has significant implications for the ways these images generate meaning.

CHAPTER 4 THE BATTLE MURALS – EXPERIMENTS IN REPRESENTATION

When the Bonampak murals first came to the attention of Mayanists in 1946, the battle scene they contained was considered by prominent scholars to be an anomaly in the artistic production of a mostly pacific civilization (e.g. Thompson 1954: 79; Ruppert, *et al.* 1955: 51). However, following advances in the decipherment of hieroglyphic inscriptions beginning in the late 1950s, the indisputably martial content of numerous Maya texts and images became a matter of widespread acceptance (e.g. Proskouriakoff 1963; Stuart 1995: 291-293). The Bonampak paintings were reconceived as one of, if not *the* canonical Classic Maya artwork, while martial iconography at Chichén Itzá – including murals depicting battle scenes – previously attributed to the invasive influence of militaristic Toltecs from Central Mexico, was now more readily understood as developing from long-standing Maya artistic traditions (Kristan-Graham and Kowalski 2007: 51-64). In analyzing the dense imagery of the paintings from Bonampak and Chichén Itzá, as well as those from a handful of sites in the Maya Puuc region and the Central Mexican site of Cacaxtla, scholars in recent decades have often drawn comparisons between them and other artworks with which they share certain iconographic features (e.g. Foncerrada de Molina 1982; M. Miller 1993: 401-403). Thus, while the rarity of depictions of battles in Mesoamerica is acknowledged, emphasis now tends to be placed on the similarity of content and message between the murals and more reduced and allusive examples of bellicose-themed art.

The interpretive sea change described above is usually attributed to a more accurate and refined current understanding of Mesoamerican civilization that has corrected the errors or delusions of an earlier generation of scholars (Webster 1993: 416-418). This serves as a

necessary reminder that interpretations of the past are inevitably colored by the concerns of the present (Benjamin 2003 [1940]: 395). However, the wrongful impressions and misguided conclusions of mid-twentieth-century Mayanists contain a kernel of truth that has largely been discarded by more recent authors: the fact that such abundant martial iconography, presented in the last chapter, could be ignored, misinterpreted, or played down by experts highlights a stark contrast with the dramatic immediacy of the battle scenes from Bonampak and other sites and suggests that the latter are indeed anomalous, not so much for *what* they depict, but for *how* they depict it.

I argue that the unifying point of distinction that sets the battle murals apart from the vast majority of prior and subsequent martial artwork is their relatively greater narrativity. This feature is intrinsic to the ways these murals are experienced as qualitatively differing from the iconicity of reductive allusions to warfare that, except for the brief period during which the battle scenes were painted, were the sole expression of this theme in Mesoamerican monumental art. Before discussing each of the murals in terms of their narrativity, however, I will begin with some general considerations, including a methodological justification for the comparative analysis underlying this study, a discussion of narrative and iconic modes of representation, and an examination of pictorial elements that contribute to the experience of narrativity.

General Considerations

Problems of Comparative Interpretation

It is a central assertion of this study that a handful of battle murals dating to the Epiclassic period present a significant departure from traditional modes of alluding to

warfare and militarism in the monumental art of Mesoamerica. The substantiation of this claim requires an enumeration of the contrasts between the pictorial features of the murals and those of the remaining corpus of martial imagery, but also a demonstration of the similarities shared by these paintings, the latter serving as a justification for treating these otherwise unrelated artworks as a group. Before beginning with this task, however, there are two counter-arguments that need to be addressed.

First, while this study highlights their innovative qualities, the battle murals were indeed part of a larger tradition of Mesoamerican art. They can each be shown to share many conventions and points of similarity with an array of artworks, including with those to which they are here being contrasted. Moreover, these similarities could be claimed as being of equal or greater significance than the stylistic and compositional differences between them.

Additionally, there is no indication that the ancient artists and viewers of these murals understood them to be qualitatively different than the iconic allusions to warfare to which they are contrasted in this study. That is to say, to set them apart from the rest of Mesoamerican martial iconography – to classify them as a group – is to impose a modern interpretation that potentially has no bearing on the original circumstances of their creation and reception.

Together, these two arguments represent the default position taken in the vast majority of current scholarship, where these paintings are commonly discussed in relation to the local art styles they belong to, but only rarely in relation to each other. The present study, by considering these apparently unrelated artworks as a group, risks making assertions that could be considered subjective or unverifiable. There is, however, a reasonable theoretical

basis to support this approach, one grounded in hermeneutics and the philosophy of history and which has been gaining traction among art historians.

It is now widely accepted that the possibility of an objective description of the past is an illusion derived from Enlightenment positivism, that the concerns of the present actively and inescapably shape the ways meaning is created through the description, organization, and narration of past events.¹³⁵ The circumstances of some forms of evidence surviving while others have vanished has an impact on even the least ideologically motivated historical accounts, a situation that becomes even more exaggerated when the subject is an archaeological civilization known only through its scant material remains. Moreover, the concepts, categories, and divisions that are required to make sense of the past are not intrinsic or absolute, but merely tools of greater or lesser utility. The (art) historian cannot avoid the anachronistic influence of his own moment as he attempts to reconstruct a past from which he is ultimately alienated.

In the face of this interpretive dilemma, numerous scholars, including Frank Ankersmit (2005), Georges Didi-Huberman (2005 [1990]), Mieke Bal (1999), and Alexander Nagel and Christopher Wood (2010), have begun to explore the idea of artworks not as frozen artifacts embedded in the moment of their creation, but rather as open nodes of communication across time. That is to say, these authors have each compellingly argued in different ways that modern responses to works of art have the potential to impact our understanding of their meaning, or at the very least to suggest insights that were not apparent to or articulated by their original creators or audience, but which are nevertheless valid.

¹³⁵ This hermeneutical skepticism can be traced back to writings on the nature of historical discourse by Friedrich Nietzsche (1978 [1874]) and Walter Benjamin (2003 [1940]); it has more recently been elaborated by Hayden White (1987).

While none would suggest an abandonment of historical contextualization, all would argue that this contextualization is itself a product of modern intellectual filters, and it should therefore not be treated as definitively knowable.¹³⁶

The comparative analysis that underpins this study considers the battle murals as a group based on their shared divergence from traditional martial iconography, and in doing so suggests an alternative way to categorize and frame these images within the larger corpus of Mesoamerican monumental art. This shift in analytical focus – from continuity back to disjunction – has the potential to generate new insights about the nature and function of pictorial representation in Mesoamerica, and its success or failure to do so is the ultimate criterion upon which it should be judged.

Narrativity Versus Iconicity

It is my contention that the painted scenes of warfare found at Cacaxtla, Bonampak, Chichén Itzá, and Mulchic share a degree of narrativity that reflects a significant departure from the traditional iconicity of martial allusions in Mesoamerican monumental artworks. Because this dialectic between narrative and iconic modes of representation is so central to my argument, and because the ways in which these terms are employed can vary widely in the literature, it seems prudent to begin with a brief discussion outlining the definitions of these terms and how they are being used in the context of this study.

A great deal of confusion exists with regard to the parameters of the term “narrative”, particularly with regard to its applicability to pictorial representation. In popular usage, “narrative” can be synonymous for “story” or “plot”, and artworks that suggest the unfolding

¹³⁶ For further discussions of subjectivity and art historical methodology, see Lagerlöf and Karlholm (2003).

of a story are commonly described as narrative. However, in literary analysis, story is but one element of narrative: causally linked events (real or fictional) occur in a sequence of time; these events are arranged into a story, which may present a different temporal logic through the use of devices such as flashback; the story is related by a narrator from a specific point of view (Bal 1985: 3-10). Indeed, it is precisely this final component – the relating of events from the point of view of a narrator – that was identified by both Plato (*Republic* III.393) and Aristotle (*Poetics* 1448a) as the defining trait of the narrative (*diegetic*), as opposed to the imitative (*mimetic*), mode of representation.¹³⁷ In literature the identity of a narrator – his unique point of view – is a function of the act of telling the story, and is not necessarily coterminous with that of the author (Chatman 1978: 146-158). In the visual arts, however, the act of narration is less determined, shifting between the artist, who shapes the image; the depicted protagonist, who takes part in the scene; and the viewer, who has far greater latitude in how to read a pictorial composition compared to a linear text (Brilliant 1984: 16-17). Therefore, disagreement exists as to how narrowly or broadly the term narrative should be applied to visual artworks, or even if it should be used at all.

Indeed, visual artworks possess inherent structural limitations that would appear to preclude the pictorial representation of temporal progression and causality. Recognizing this, Gotthold Lessing famously contrasted visual media, which depict frozen instants and are inherently descriptive, with literary texts, which unfold in time and therefore possess narrative potential (1957 [1766]: 16-22 and *passim*). Thus, no matter how skillful the artist or how pregnant the depicted moment might be, dependence is placed on the viewer possessing

¹³⁷ See Genette for a discussion and compelling complication of this dialectic, in which he concludes that *mimesis* is inseparable from *diegesis* since all imitation must necessarily be imperfect (1976 [1969]: 1-5).

a prior familiarity – either with the specific story being illustrated or with the pictorial conventions being employed – from which to extrapolate what is represented into a logical sequence of related (preceding and subsequent) events.¹³⁸ The problem of whether the term narrative can be applied to pictorial artworks not based on shared, pre-existing stories has therefore been the subject of scholarly debate (e.g. Kibédi Varga 1988; Elkins 1991).

Further adding to the confusion surrounding the term, “narrative” is often invoked in reference to the totalizing cultural narratives (*les grands récits*) that artworks serve to reinforce.¹³⁹ In this sense, it is no longer a matter of the pictorial representation of stories – or indeed even of the presence of figural imagery – but rather the role or status of an artwork as an instrument of ideological reification.

Likewise, the term “iconic” presents ambiguities of meaning with regard to the visual arts. In popular usage, “iconic” implies the immediate recognizability and the paradigmatic, or even transcendent, status of an artwork. In a semiotic sense, all representational imagery is iconic – it signifies through resemblance (Peirce 1932: 157-160).¹⁴⁰ In art historical parlance, iconic images are typically understood as being imbued with a life of their own, even to the

¹³⁸ It is exactly this dilemma of the creation and extraction of meaning that Simon Martin addresses in an excellent article that is one of the few attempts to deal with the problem of narrative in Pre-Columbian art (2006).

¹³⁹ As an element of contemporary critical theory, the concept of the grand narrative is most closely associated with Jean-François Lyotard (1984 [1979]: 27-37 and *passim*). The term “narrative” commonly appears in the literature on Mesoamerican art and architecture to reference broad cultural messages rather than to suggest a mode of discourse. For example, Cynthia Kristan-Graham’s 1993 article “The Business of Narrative at Tula” hinges on the re-identification of a row of processing figures as merchants rather than noblemen to show that trade was a prominent theme in the monumental art of Tula, thus reinforcing the polity’s central role in long-distance exchange networks.

¹⁴⁰ This is contrasted with the arbitrariness of the symbol, a type of sign that conveys meaning through convention rather than correspondence, and which includes written and spoken language (Peirce 1932: 165-169).

point of self-replication, regardless of whether this is conceived of as a mystical (a Byzantine image of Christ) or a cultural (an image of Che Guevara) phenomenon.

Thus, these two terms – narrative and iconic – are each associated with a wide range of ideas in relation to art objects, a situation leading to the potential diminution of their utility as their meanings remain unfixed. Nevertheless, I believe they remain productive dichotomous concepts. With iconicity, emphasis is placed on stability, timelessness,¹⁴¹ and the enduring nature of a condition. Images with the greatest iconicity do not just depict, they render present; they are not simply perceived, they are encountered and possess a degree of agency of their own.¹⁴² Narrativity, on the other hand, implies action, transition, and transformation. Narrative images depend upon an awareness of temporal progression, requiring the viewer to supply the events necessary and sufficient to have led to the moment depicted as well as its probable outcome.¹⁴³ That is to say, narrative images are read, and as such are understood to represent a time different from that of the viewer.

From the preceding, it can be seen that it is a matter of two radically opposed conceptions of the temporality of the image. However, rather than an absolute dialectic between mutually exclusive sets of narrative or iconic images, it is more productive to imagine artworks existing on a continuum of varying degrees of narrativity or iconicity. Such

¹⁴¹ “Timelessness” here is not used in reference to an object’s surpassing aesthetic value, but rather in a literal sense of the transcendence of temporality, of existence in a perpetual present.

¹⁴² Exactly *what* is rendered present and encountered by the observer of an iconic image? Clearly it is not the literal depicted subject. Rather it is an essence (e.g. sanctity, ideology) or function (e.g. apotropaism) that is made manifest. Thus, among the icons on the desktop of a personal computer, a depiction of a trash bin is allegorical of disposal, but, transcending the symbolic, the space it marks is activated with a real property (of deletion) that the user can interact with.

¹⁴³ Or, in the case of a series of images illustrating different moments from a single story, the viewer must be able to infer the causal chain that leads from one scene to the next.

a framework allows us to circumvent most of the disagreements about the application of these terms presented above and, more importantly, is in better agreement with the way artworks are actually experienced.¹⁴⁴

Indeed, almost all artworks exhibit, to a greater or lesser degree, a synthesis of these oppositions. In her classic study of ancient Egyptian and Near Eastern art, Henriette Groenewegen-Frankfort identified the principle characteristic of monumental art as being a “tension between the ephemeral and the lasting, between concrete event and transcendent significance,” or exactly such a synthesis between the narrative and the iconic (1951: 22). Narrativity and iconicity are therefore best characterized as qualities associated with images and the ways in which they are experienced. To speak of a narrative mode of representation is to suggest that an artwork exhibits abundant narrativity at the expense of iconicity, and vice versa.

Factors Contributing to Pictorial Narrativity

Having established a contrast between the qualities of narrative and iconic modes of representation, it remains to identify the pictorial elements that serve to enhance the narrativity of an image. A central attribute of narrative is that of temporal progression, so it should therefore come as no surprise that the most powerful contributors to pictorial narrativity are indications of time, particularly with regard to the ways time passes or is shared between individuals. These indications can take a variety of forms, which will be

¹⁴⁴ With regard to the recent interpretive turn from an absolutist conception of narrative to graded narrativity as an aspect of the way images are experienced, see Werner Wolf (2003).

identified generally in this section before the different ways they are manifested in the individual battle murals is discussed below.

Artists attempting to represent stories pictorially have typically made recourse to a handful of strategies, and the identification and categorization of these have formed the majority of art historical inquiry into visual narrative. Kurt Weitzmann, building off the earlier classificatory systems of Carl Robert and Franz Wickhoff, identified three methods of pictorial narrative: the simultaneous, in which multiple points from a story are depicted within a single, unified scene in which no figure is repeated; monoscenic, in which a single, usually climactic action is depicted in a unified space and time; and cyclic, in which the successive events of a story are depicted in multiple compositions (1970 [1947]: 13-33). This tripartite schema has been expanded and elaborated by recent authors, who have added a significant degree of descriptive nuance (Dehejia 1997: 10-32; Stansbury-O'Donnell 1999: 1-8).

Such systems of classification aim to describe how stories are told through pictures. As such, they tend to work backwards, presupposing a familiarity with the original story and analyzing the artistic solutions that were employed to illustrate it pictorially. Their categories are, for the most part, defined by the variations of a limited number of elements: the number of individual scenes depicted, whether or not characters are repeated, and whether one or more discrete moments of time or settings in space are shown. These elements, as strategies for indicating multiple temporalities, are an obvious starting point for a consideration of pictorial narrative.

Except for monoscenic (a single scene comprising a unified space and time without any repeating figures), all of the various permutations of the elements listed above provide

for the rendition of multiple events, whether in a series of independent but related images or within a single composition entailing a progression through time and/or space. This allows for the explicit portrayal of the changes in state that are a defining feature of narrative (Todorov 1990: 28-30; Bal 1985: 13-15). However, with both monoscenic and multi-phase images, the viewer is asked to fill in gaps, to make inferences as to prior causes and subsequent effects, or to deduce the causal connections between individual scenes, and perhaps even their reading order. Thus, it is up to the artist to provide not just evidence of temporal progression, but also cues to guide the viewer as the latter takes a more active role in narrating the story presented in the artwork.

These cues can take many forms. Common examples include the direction of a figure's gaze, which indicates the direction of his attention, or his gestures, which can be used to suggest the otherwise undepictable content of his inner thoughts, emotions, or speech. Such cues, however, are not inherently narrative. Many iconic (i.e. non-narrative) Buddhist images, for example, incorporate hand gestures in a purely iconographic manner, to indicate the nature or identity of the deity being depicted. These conventionalized forms aid in the representation of an inner state of being, but this state is stable and unchanging. The question then remains; exactly what pictorial elements can be understood to distinguish narrative and iconic modes of representation?

If we shift the analytical emphasis from narrative images to the *narrativity* of images – from an assumption that it is the goal of a particular class of pictures to record or convey stories, to an understanding that certain pictures convey the sense of representing specific (real or fictional) events more strongly than others – our inquiry will begin with the

artwork itself, focusing on the visual elements that contribute to the experience of the story – that give the impression of change and causality – rather than relate its content.

Werner Wolf, following Gerald Prince, has referred to the building blocks and syntax rules of narrativity as *narratemes* (2003: 183). These encompass both the easily quantifiable elements discussed above, such as how many discrete scenes are shown or how many times the protagonist is depicted, as well as indications that are subtler and less easy to classify. As such, exceptions can be found for almost any feature cited as increasing visual narrativity, and it is unlikely that a definitive list of narratemes could be compiled. However, I will argue that there are certain qualities, which I have outlined below, that are generally found associated with images falling towards the narrative end of the spectrum while their antitheses tend to be correlated with iconic imagery. Each of these individual qualities exists on a continuum itself, and there is a degree of overlap between them. Their contribution to the narrativity of a picture is both relative – dependent on the extent that any of these qualities can be said to be present – and cumulative – increasing with each additional element.

Action

Action, transformation, and progression are fundamental components of narrative, and the suggestion of these qualities in a fixed image is a central problem of pictorial narrativity (Parna 2001: 29-30). As a general rule, narrativity is increased when figures are depicted in active, dynamic poses. This is particularly the case with regard to bodily positions that are transitory and would typically not be adopted in and of themselves; that is to say, inherently unstable postures that read as frozen instants belonging to protracted motions. In

such cases, the logic of body and movement supplies the viewer with the necessary precursors and endpoints for the depicted actions, allowing unmoving images to successfully represent changes that occur over time.

Conversely, figures depicted in static, stable poses tend to evoke an enduring state of being, one that is resistant to movement or transformation and which therefore significantly contributes to the iconicity of an image. In some images figures performing actions are depicted iconically, whereby the deed itself is solidified as a perpetual event occurring within a continuous present. An example of this is the eponymous ruler depicted on the reverse of the Palette of Narmer, whose raised arm is endlessly poised to deliver the fatal blow to his captive (Fig. 131; Davis 1993: 48).¹⁴⁵ Such instances, much like depictions of ongoing actions that lack a clear beginning or conclusion – processing figures, for example – fall between the two poles of the continuum, but tend to transform their narrativity into iconicity.

It fits at this point to mention that narrative actions presuppose the *actors* who perform them. That is to say that narrativity implies actions that are goal-directed, and which are therefore the product of pointed intentions (Nanay 2009: 124-5). Such intentions can only be the product of actors; these do not have to be human, but should be anthropomorphic, not necessarily in form, but in terms of “the human capacity of making choices and resolving conflicts, of acting and reacting in a conscious and deliberate way” (Wolf 2003: 186).

Neither actions nor the actors who perform them need to be depicted in an image for it to be

¹⁴⁵ In Whitney Davis’ cogent reading of this artwork, the action of the blow – the assertion of the ruler’s power – is present in each moment of the story; is enacted during the viewer’s (conceptual or physical) rotation of the object to access the multiple depicted moments of the story, the temporal order of which alternates between front and back; and exists within the saucer on the front of the palette, which was (conceptually or actually) used to grind kohl with a pestle (1993).

considered narrative: their (absent) presence can be implied by indications of a condition that requires them to exist (Nanay 2009: 124). However, the narrativity of an image is typically greater the more prominently an action is displayed.

Specificity

Another quality contributing to pictorial narrativity is that of specificity, by which I am referring to those elements that emphasize distinctiveness over generality. This typically means a greater profusion and precision of details, delimiting the events, the setting in which they take place, and the individuals involved as unique and potentially identifiable rather than as generic types. Greater specificity adds to the experience of an image as narrative by suggesting the actuality (if not the reality) of the scene, thus adding to the viewer's sense of being made a witness to what is depicted.

Descriptive details, while not narrative in themselves, are without a doubt essential contributors to the experience of narrativity. According to Roland Barthes, in a narrative "everything, in one way or another, is significant" (1975 [1966]: 244). Thus, even seemingly trivial details supply essential information pertaining to individual characters, potential motivations, circumstances, and other crucial components that give meaning to a story. The question remains as to *how* these details transmit meaning.

Barthes, taking up the terminology put forth by the Roman Jakobson, referred to the basic units contributing to narrative meaning as "functions," further distinguishing between distributional (syntagmatic and metonymic) and integrative (paradigmatic and metaphoric) functions (*Ibid.* 244-256). While Barthes was primarily considering narrative in its literary manifestations, his framework can be applied to images as well. For example, in Théodore

Géricault's *Raft of the Medusa*, the dead bodies and dying figures are understood as indications of the prolonged period the raft has been adrift without food or water (syntagms of temporal extension), while the several figures who point and wave their shirts are paradigmatic indications of the presence of a vessel in the distance, despite its not being included in the painting (Fig. 132). Elaborating on this, Gregory Currie has noted the importance of the viewer's experience and expectations in the transmission of meaning in a narrative (2007).¹⁴⁶ That is to say, we can interpret these pictorial functions only because our expectations – based on prior experiences (with either the real world or with other representations) – tell us that starvation and dehydration cause great suffering but only result in death after a number of days, and that multiple persons weakened by hunger and exhaustion would not exert the energy of waving their shirts without having spotted a vessel, which nevertheless remains outside of our view.

The proliferation of descriptive detail in an image can therefore be seen as providing a greater number of entry points for the viewer to extrapolate meaning. Moreover, an increase in specificity provides the viewer with greater confidence that his reading of a depicted scene is the correct one, in alignment with the interpretations of others. Finally, specificity contributes to the experience of the figures, objects, events, and spatio-temporality of a scene as being unique rather than generic. Thus, while specificity in itself does not generate narrative content, images exhibiting greater specificity tend to possess a higher degree of narrativity than reductive or generalized images.

¹⁴⁶ Also see Reinhart Koselleck for a discussion of the role of experience and expectation in the construction of history, that is to say, in the production of meaning through the narrativization of the past (1985: 267-288).

Variation

A third quality strongly correlated with pictorial narrativity is variation – the incorporation of diversity among the depicted content of an image. Whether it is a matter of the landscape, the figures who occupy it, or the actions they carry out, the inclusion of variety suggests the presence of difference, and therefore the potential for change.

Conversely, compositional uniformity and the repetition of elements foster an impression of homogeneity, stasis, and fixity, and thus these pictorial qualities significantly lessen the narrativity of an image.

There is certainly some crossover between the representational quality of variation and that of specificity, as both tend to lead to the individuation of figures and objects. However, it is possible to conceive of images where a variety of reduced and repeated forms are presented in such a way as to suggest their connections within an unfolding series of events. Mixtec historical manuscripts are an example of this, with a limited number of standardized poses and settings sequentially arranged to indicate a progression of events.¹⁴⁷ Variation should therefore be treated as an independent quality of pictorial narrativity, distinct from specificity.

Because the dimension of time is closely linked to that of space in a fixed image, variation across a composition often serves as an indication of temporal progression (Arnheim 1992; Small 1999). This is the case in continuous narratives, where figures are repeated as multiple scenes take place within an unbroken landscape; in synoptic pictures,

¹⁴⁷ Much of the specificity found in Mixtec manuscripts is communicated through imagery that is more linguistic than pictorial in its functionality. Dates and the names of individuals are added using a standardized system of dots and icons; and, rather than representations of their unique landscapes, places are typically identified by rebus pictures that give their names.

which depict more than one distinct moment from a narrative in a unified space without repeating individual participants; and also in monoscenic compositions, where the differentiated but simultaneous actions of the various figures can nevertheless suggest the dynamism of motion and the passage of time. Conversely, in multi-scene images repetition of figures, setting, or other elements often allows the viewer to comprehend that it is a matter of the same actors at a different moment in time. However, this situation still depends on a degree of variation between the individual scenes to indicate the significant change(s) that have taken place.

Integration

In pictorial representation, integration – referring to the compositional cohesion within a scene as well as the pictorial cues linking separate scenes to one another – gives the viewer a basis for determining how figures and actions relate to one another. More than a mere sequence of events, narrative implies causality, or relationships between events that give them meaning. It is only through situating the elements of an image or series of images within a relationship to one another that their narrative (sequential and causal) logic can be made apparent. Therefore, greater pictorial integration leads to a heightened experience of pictorial narrativity.

Integration can be achieved through a variety of means. Within a single composition, overlapping or direct contact between elements strongly suggests that they are temporally and spatially coterminous and therefore able to exert direct influence on each other. In compositions where each figure or element occupies its own isolated space, on the other hand, the relationships between them become ambiguous and are left for the viewer to

decipher. However, even separated figures can show evidence of their relationships through other means, such as the directionality of their body or gaze and gestures suggesting interaction. Thus, in the Bayeux Tapestry, a linear pictorial narrative combining both the continuous and cyclical modes, the pointing of fingers is often used to show intent: for example, as Harold's crew disembarks on the shores of Normandy they are apprehended by soldiers who, to indicate the authority behind their actions, point to a mounted rider, Count Guy, who in turn points at the trespassers to command their arrest (Fig. 133).

Integration between two or more separate scenes is more difficult to establish. The repetition of costume elements, physiognomy, and other features can often allow a multiplicity of figures to be identified as representations of a single individual, thus establishing a diachronic relationship between the scenes. Similarly, a landscape can be repeated while the positions of the figures in it are changed. Regardless, even after a connection between multiple images is established, the interpretation of the exact nature of the relationship between them is largely dependent on the viewer's experience, prior knowledge of the story being related, or familiarity with the pictorial conventions.

Naturalism

One further pictorial quality – naturalism – deserves mention as a contributor to the experience of images as narrative. Naturalism would seem to be indicated by the combination of factors already discussed: greater specificity, variety, action, and integration would typically increase the naturalism of a picture. The presence of naturalism does not necessarily produce narrativity, as can be seen in the example of a Dutch still life. Nevertheless, this

quality often functions in crucial ways to increase a viewer's narrative engagement with images.

As mentioned above with regard to specificity, narrative as a mode of representation largely depends on the experiences and expectations of the audience, both with regard to the correlations between causes and effects and to the conventions of a particular genre (Currie 2007: 54). When an image exhibits greater naturalism – that is to say, when it represents (real or fictional) things more closely to how they would be expected to appear in the real world – the viewer is encouraged to place more confidence in her own experiences as accurate indications of what to expect with regard to the image. Thus, naturalism can be understood as enhancing the experience of narrativity in an image, especially when other narratemes are present.

Representational images lacking naturalism, that are reduced or conventionalized, can certainly convey narrative content. However, the reading of such pictures becomes similar to that of language – symbolic and standardized. The more obviously structured and artificial an image, the less it is experienced as transparent. This detracts from its narrativity insofar as narrative discourse seeks to mask all traces of the narrator, so establishing a semblance of objectivity whereby “the events seem to tell themselves” (Benveniste, quoted in Genette 1976 [1969]: 9). The pictorial quality of naturalism functions in precisely this way, thereby contributing to visual narrativity.

The preceding list of qualities associated with pictorial narrativity is acknowledgedly imperfect. Additional pictorial attributes that appear to be generally correlated with narrativity could likely be added, and exceptions for those that have been included can

assuredly be identified. Nevertheless, their general applicability serves as a useful starting point for an inquiry into the tension between narrativity and iconicity, manifesting the fundamental contrasts between these divergent modes of representation and the ways they are experienced while recognizing that these categories exist, not as absolutes, but rather on a continuum.

Narrativity and the Battle Murals

I will now turn my attention to the individual battle scenes from Cacaxtla, Bonampak, Chichén Itzá, and Mulchic,¹⁴⁸ identifying the features that contribute to their narrativity and contrasting these murals with other examples of martially themed Mesoamerican monumental artwork in order to emphasize the radicality of their innovations and their departures from tradition. Furthermore, prior interpretations of the content of these paintings will be considered in light of the present analysis of their narrativity.

Cacaxtla

The mural painted along the platform of Structure B at Cacaxtla gives the viewer a strong impression of witnessing a unique and chaotic moment of violent confrontation, reflected in early descriptions of it as representing a scene of warfare between two contending factions and the bestowal and continued use of the title of “La Batalla” or “The Battle Mural” to refer to it (e.g. Foncerrada de Molina 1976: 19-20; López de Molina 1977: 7). However, as will be discussed below, a number of different arguments have been raised to dispute whether this painting should be understood as a representation of actual battle.

¹⁴⁸ The traces of wall paintings from the sites of Ichmac and Chacmultun, which were presented in Chapter Two, are too fragmentary to conduct a substantive analysis of their narrativity, and thus will not be included here.

Despite a growing recognition of the technical inaccuracy of the moniker “Battle Mural,” I will argue that the continued use this name is justified based on the undeniable impact of the painting’s unprecedented narrative mode of representation, a feature that is central to the experience of this artwork and which distinguishes it from other examples of monumental art whose content is otherwise similar.

Contrary to the impression given by its heightened narrativity, there are several aspects of the Battle Mural that suggest that its subject is not an actual moment of combat (Fig. 4). The strongest and most consistently raised argument against reading the Structure B painting as a true depiction of battle is the extremely one-sided presentation of the slaughter, which would seem to suggest that this is a scene of (post-battle) sacrifice rather than a depiction of proper warfare (e.g. Langley 1981: 32-33; Baird 1989: 116-118). Only four members of the losing faction (E6, W5, W10, and W15) are depicted standing: the first two are dual representations of the injured and captive leader of the bird warriors, and the last is in the process of falling to one knee; only the third retains his weapon and exhibits an active posture of resistance. Almost all of the bird warriors are injured with multiple bleeding wounds, many of which appear to be mortal. Intestines are shown spilling out from the opened abdomens of figures E5, E8, E24, E26, W6, W12, and W19, while heart extraction is shown on figures E1, E21, and W12. The jaguar-clad warriors, on the other hand, are all shown standing, uninjured, and inflicting damage upon their opponents.

Additionally, the representation of the leader of the bird warriors to the west of the stairs (W5) shows him with bound hands, standing formally in front of what has tentatively

been identified as a stone stela (Fig. 134; D. Robertson 1985: 294-296; Baird 1989: 114).¹⁴⁹

Such an architectonic object is unlikely to have been found on a battlefield, but would rather be located in the main plaza of a city where sacrificial ceremonies would presumably have taken place.

The half-stars on the border of this stela-like element suggest a distinctly astronomical symbolism that resonates with other, non-martial imagery at Cacaxtla. This motif, originating at Teotihuacan with connections to water and fertility, later came to be associated with war and sacrifice both at Teotihuacan and in the Maya region (Baird 1989: 108-112). At Cacaxtla, it is present on both the Battle Mural and the aquatic border of the Red Temple stairs, suggesting a polyvalence or conflation of symbolic meanings for this motif. Pursuant to this, several authors have seen the Battle Mural as a vision of ritualized, Venus-associated warfare, conflating ritualized violence, cosmology, and the fertilization of the earth into an interwoven complex of ideas that appears to have been widespread among Mesoamerican cultures of all time periods (Baird 1989: 114-116; Carlson 1993: 243-245; Townsend 1997: 94-99).

Indeed, the prevalence of symbolic elements in the Battle Mural has suggested to some scholars that the imagery is largely allegorical. Pablo Escalante Gonzalbo sees the painting as a general statement of warfare and the confrontation of oppositional forces rather

¹⁴⁹ Parallel vertical lines extending downward from his shoulders frame the space behind this figure, which, unlike the solid blue background covering the rest of the composition, is colored white with a pair of red half-stars on either edge. Donald McVicker reads this feature as a “star cloak” hanging behind the figure (1985:86-87). While this remains a possibility since the area clearly does not extend above the figure’s shoulders, two factors suggest the solidity of this white rectangle: the rigidity of the outline and the fallen figure to the right (W4), whose weight rests against this object. Alternately, Carlson reads this feature as indicating the defeated bird captain is standing within the Venus Temple at Cacaxtla, awaiting his imminent sacrifice (1993: 233-237).

than as depicting a specific historical event (2002: 75-76). Similarly, Michel Graulich characterizes the mural as the allegorizing of an historical conflict, such that the opposing sides are represented as symbolic of dualities deeply embedded within Mesoamerican culture: day/night, sky/earth, rainy season/dry season, agriculture/war (1988: 111-112). Ramón Piña Chan identifies the scene as allegorically representing the death and rebirth of Venus; he is entirely ambivalent about whether an historical battle occurred that was later mythologized in the painting, or if the entire conflict was fabricated (1996: 78). In these interpretations, the idea of battle itself becomes subordinated to the allegorical message, undermining a reading of the painting as an historical narrative.

The general thrust of the preceding readings of the content of the Cacaxtla Battle Mural – as depicting either the aftermath of battle or a subsequent sacrificial ceremony, and as heavily allegorizing the idea of conflict – is strongly supported by comparisons with other examples of Mesoamerican art alluding to warfare. For example, several authors have noted the numerous similarities between costume elements worn by 3 Deer and those worn by individuals depicted as warriors at other sites, identifying them as deity impersonators and thereby emphasizing the connections between the rulers' secular and spiritual powers (e.g. Graulich 1988: 109-110; Baird 1989: 114-116). The parallels are particularly striking with regard to the twin monuments of Aguateca Stela 2 and Dos Pilas Stela 2 (Fig. 135). Both of these stelae, which commemorate a military victory over Seibal, depict Dos Pilas Ruler 3 clad as a warrior with a bound captive doubled over in a register below his feet. Points of similarity between the costumes of Ruler 3 and 3 Deer include the presence of a Trapeze-and-Ray Year Sign in the headdress, a stylized Tlaloc mask in front of the face, a wide beaded collar, a Tlaloc mask at the waist, and clawed jaguar paws for feet. Thus,

iconographic affinities between the Battle Mural and monuments demonstrating heightened iconicity suggest the presence of an essential continuity with regard to content and message, deemphasizing the dramatic disjunction in the mode of representation, which will be discussed below.

Similarly, Yaxchilan Lintel 8 depicts a pair of elaborately costumed warriors standing over two fallen figures whom they grasp by the hair and wrists (Fig. 125a).¹⁵⁰ These captives have been largely denuded, wear ropes as a sign of their subjugation, and are tagged with glyphs identifying them. Thus we see a scene that, while suggesting the actual moment of capture, possesses iconography that belies the post-hoc nature of the depicted event. Miller and Houston have suggested the term “resonance” to indicate such a conflation of multiple temporal moments into a single depiction, which appears to have been a common feature of Late Classic Maya art (1987: 51). Because this exact condition is present in the mural at Cacaxtla, it strengthens the impression of affinities between the Battle Mural and other, more reduced allusions to warfare, thereby downplaying the relative uniqueness of the former’s narrativity.

Adding to this deconstruction of the narrative aspect of the battle scene at Cacaxtla is the recognition of some notably schematic aspects of the composition that subordinate temporal logic to spatial order. As was noted in a previous chapter, two figures – the most elaborately costumed individuals who are presumed to be the leaders of the respective factions – are repeated on either side of the central staircase. This would seem to suggest that

¹⁵⁰ To the right, the ruler of Yaxchilan, Bird Jaguar IV, is shown with his captive, Jewel Skull, while to the left, his *sajal* (military captain), K’an Tok Wayib’, is depicted with a second captive. The capture event took place on 9.16.4.1.1 (May 9, 755 A.D.) (Schele and Miller 1986: 212; Martin and Grube 2000: 130).

the east and west halves of the mural are separate scenes that form part of a cyclical program (e.g. Carlson 1993: 219; McCafferty and McCafferty 1994: 162). Indeed there is a slight change in attitude between the bird captain on the east, who grasps a dart that has wounded his cheek, and the correlating figure on the west, who is shown with bound arms, indicating a progression from one moment to the next (Fig. 136). However, certain details counter this assumption. The heels of the bird warrior's sandals switch from jaguar skin to blue feathers and the weapons held by 3 Deer alternate between a loaded spear thrower on the east and a long spear from the west, suggesting the privileging of symbolic duality rather than the documentation of real events (Fig. 137). Additionally, both representations of 3 Deer depict him in an identical posture of menacing his enemy with his raised weapon, seen from the front on the east and from behind on the west. Notwithstanding the slight differences in the details, this implies that the viewer is granted multiple perspectives of a single moment, much like the profile depictions of Yax Nuun Ayiin on the lateral surfaces of Tikal Stela 31 (Fig. 91).

This symmetrical organization of figures is additionally observed at the extreme ends on either side of the mural. Here, conquered bird warriors (W19 and E27) are seated with their backs to the action, bound with ropes (Fig. 138). Thus, there is a sense that the east and west halves of the painting represent the unfolding of space around the central axis of the stairway. Because spatial concerns drive the composition, the direction, or even the presence, of temporal progression becomes ambiguous.

Resonance in the Battle Mural is not only present in the depiction of fallen bird warriors as already having been stripped of their clothing and weapons while still ostensibly in the midst of the confrontation, but is also evident in the simultaneous presentation of

distinct phases of combat within a single, continuous composition. As Brittenham has noted, various members of the jaguar warriors can be seen using spear throwers, long spears, and knives, weapons that connote different stages of battle (2008: 55). Spear throwers require a significant distance to be used effectively, and as such were typically employed as an opening salvo in a battle (Hassig 1992: 73, 102, and 172). This distance is completely eliminated in the depiction at Cacaxtla, where warriors raising spear throwers menace nearby enemies (e.g. E3 & E6; E10 & E11; W10 & W9). Indeed, the bearers of these weapons are interspersed with those wielding hand-held spears, used for thrusting during close combat (e.g. E 23, W2, W13, W20). Finally, short knives are shown being used by warriors to dispatch fallen foes, presumably after the brunt of the fighting was finished (e.g. E2, E9). Thus, both temporal and spatial compression can be detected in the arrangement of figures at Cacaxtla.

It is possible that this compression is even greater than suggested in the previous paragraph. As discussed in Chapter Two, the repeating glyphic construction of a quadripartite blue disk, teeth and gums, and a bleeding heart combined with a separate variable element, which is often interpreted as giving the names and the (identical) rank or affiliation of the victorious jaguar warriors, is possibly a statement of conquest and tribute, with the variable elements providing the names of subjugated towns.¹⁵¹ As it happens, this was exactly the

¹⁵¹ Brittenham, who supports reading these as nominal statements identifying the names of individual victors, gives her argument against the place name interpretation in an extended footnote (2011: 77). In support of the toponymic reading, I would point to the fact that certain figures from the Battle Mural are clearly identified with personal names in a different format – one which is used consistently for this purpose in the other murals at Cacaxtla – of dot numerals combined with an ideographic element: a deer antler with three dots (E3 & W2) and a red disk or button with two dots (E10). That the latter is positioned directly next to a disk/teeth/heart/variable element statement suggests they convey separate meanings.

information that typically accompanied pictorial allusions to conquest in Mesoamerica, such as with the earlier Captive Stair at Cacaxtla or on the later Aztec monument known as the Stone of Tizoc. If we accept this reading, the Battle Mural would have to be understood as depicting multiple, separate conquests from a campaign of state expansion rather than a single event. However, it does so in an atypical manner, by presenting unique, disjointed occurrences as a unified, synchronic episode.

Indeed, the most notable feature of the Battle Mural is the impression of immediacy, cohesion, and singularity it generates. Like most Mesoamerican martial iconography these paintings present warfare in terms of its cosmological significance and the teleology of its outcome. However, in contradistinction to the remaining corpus, the Cacaxtla artists have chosen to emphasize the instant of conflict to a much greater degree, producing an artwork with a relatively high degree of narrativity. This condition can in turn be understood as a factor of the combination of the qualities of action, specificity, variation, integration, and naturalism.

The Cacaxtla Battle Mural bustles with energy, as almost every figure exhibits an active and dynamic pose. Among the dominant jaguar warriors, some individuals raise spear throwers in preparation to fling their darts while others thrust with their long spears, stab with their daggers, or use rope to bind their captives. The transitional nature of almost all of their poses is suggested by the unstable distribution of weight placed on their feet as they are depicted in the process of moving. Furthermore, the actions they carry out are all directed towards a single goal, which is presented as inevitable but not yet complete: the conquest of the opposing force of bird warriors. The majority of the latter are depicted as stripped of volition, and thus incapable of performing actions themselves; rather, they are the objects

that are acted upon, and thus serve to demonstrate the motivations of the actors. And yet, the defeat of the bird warriors is a condition that is simultaneously depicted as both fully accomplished and still in the process of occurring. They have fallen, irrevocably, yet the body postures of many show them to be alive, struggling, and suffering in their final moments (e.g. E8, W6, W12, W17).

There is a high degree of specificity evident in the painting at Cacaxtla. The presence of bird or jaguar costume elements and physiognomic differences serve to differentiate the two opposing factions of warriors, but also to suggest the uniqueness of individuals within these two groups. This sense of the artists' attention to detail is such that scholars have pondered the meaning of slight differences between the two depictions of the bird captain, such as the material of his sandal backs or the number of shells tied to his lower legs (e.g. Kubler 1979: 171; D. Robertson 1985: 296). Additionally, depictions of bodily injury at Cacaxtla are notable for their unusual explicitness and specificity. For example, serving as more than a mere generic marker of failure in battle (although it does communicate this), a forearm injury sustained by one of the bird warriors (E8) vividly and indexically suggests the precise event that gave rise to it: the parrying of a blow with the victim's defensive, shield-bearing arm (Fig. 139). The multiplicity of different injuries sustained by each bird warrior suggests the progression of their defeat over the duration of a temporally extended confrontation.

Many of the examples presented above – individuating costume elements, the diversity of weapons and wounds – are also aspects of variation, a quality that can likewise be detected in the syncopated arrangement of the figures. These do not simply alternate between conqueror and victim, nor do all the members of each side face in a similar

direction. Rather, there is substantial variety in their presentation, which produces a sense of both naturalism and chaos as we understand them to be responding to their immediate situation rather than being subordinated to the artistic concerns of pictorial convention or ease of legibility. Furthermore, the related but distinct positions of contiguous figures can suggest sequential moments of action despite indications that different individuals are represented. This is the case with E8 and E11, who share the same lower body position with left leg bent under and right leg partially extended, but the former has his upper body pushed back while the latter is slumped forward as his assailant steps on him (Fig. 140). Differences in the placement of their wounds confirm that these are distinct individuals, but their related posture allows them to be read as successive points in time in a synoptic composition.

The figures in the Battle Mural do not only exhibit variations of posture and placement, they are actively integrated into a complex and unified composition. As Brittenham has noted, the Cacaxtla painting is an agglomeration of numerous synecdochic capture events of the type commonly seen in Mesoamerican martial iconography (2008: 54-55). However, every effort has been made to present these as occurring within a continuous and coherent spatio-temporal situation. Individual groups of conqueror and victim do not remain discrete, but are often interrupted by figures belonging to other groups. For example, as E3 binds E4 with a rope he is in between E2 and E5, the spear of the former crossing his body to point at the abdomen of the latter. Moreover, while the arrangement of figures in the mural is such that each largely occupies its own space in an example of *horror vacui* design, there is nevertheless enough overlap of limbs, costumes, and accessories so that the general impression is one of crowded cohabitation rather than of a jigsaw-like patterning of the picture plane.

Finally, and largely due to the combined effect of the previously discussed qualities, the Cacaxtla mural is extraordinarily naturalistic, especially by Central Mexican standards, but also compared to most similarly themed Maya artworks. The force of this quality is such that all of the spatial and temporal compression, allegorizing, and teleology that are indisputably present in this constructed image are overshadowed by an overwhelming impression of the immediacy of combat. The unprecedented abundance and variety of vividly depicted wounds – many of which are shown at the moment of their infliction and the accompanying inevitability of death – as well as the suffering evident in the faces and contorted limbs of the victims, seem calculated to produce an affective response in the viewer, drawing him into the fray.

Having established the presence of qualities in the Battle Mural that imbue it with a high degree of narrativity, it remains to demonstrate how radically this mode of representation diverges from the relative iconicity of the majority of martially themed Mesoamerican monumental artworks. This is best accomplished through contrastive comparisons with artworks already cited for their similarity to the Cacaxtla painting, thereby illustrating the striking nature of its differences from even the most closely aligned examples.

Aguateca Stela 2, which commemorates a specific war event, depicts Dos Pils Ruler 3 wearing an almost identical costume to 3 Deer, and shows the ruler standing atop his captive, presents obvious parallels with the mural at Cacaxtla (Fig. 135a). However, the differences in presentation are equally as notable. Ruler 3 stands in a stiff, frontal pose, the symmetry of which is only broken by his profile head and the contrast between the shield held in his left hand and the spear in his right; the latter is held vertically in a non-menacing position with its butt resting on the ground. His captive – Yich'aak B'alam, ruler of Seibal –

is depicted in a separate register under his feet, his diminutive body bent over double to fit in the confined space. Bound and denuded, he is stripped of the markers of his secular and supernatural claims to authority in stark contrast with the extravagant display of Ruler 3's costume. The two figures are placed into relationship with one another, demonstrating Ruler 3's total domination of his enemy. However, their association reads as largely symbolic, as the use of multiple registers serves to sever their direct ties to one another. The formalized composition functions as a synecdoche, with either ruler standing in for the polity under their control, and thus the monument presents an image of the enduring political state of affairs between Dos Pilas and Seibal.

At Cacaxtla, on the other hand, 3 Deer is portrayed in an active posture, his body tilts forward with his weight placed on one foot. In his right hand, he raises his spear or atlatl behind his shoulder, aiming its deadly tip towards the vulnerable abdomen of his enemy (Fig. 141). The latter is fully clothed, and is easily the most elaborately costumed individual in the entire scene, a paradoxical situation that has generated much speculation among scholars.¹⁵² Additionally, he remains standing and is of equal stature to his foe. The two figures are

¹⁵² Aside from its avian elements, this figure's costume consists of a knee-length skirt and a pointed poncho known as a *quechquemiltl*, both decidedly feminine articles of clothing. McCafferty and McCafferty give several possible interpretations for this: 1) these figures were captured enemy noblewomen taken for sacrifice or marriage; 2) these were male rulers being humiliated through emasculation; 3) these were male elites cross-dressing for symbolic purposes or as deity impersonators; or 4) this representation is purely mythological and these figures represent goddesses (1994: 165). Among the Aztecs, however, use of the *quechquemiltl* appears to have been restricted to religious contexts, suggesting that the first interpretation is incorrect (Anawalt 1982: 41). I have previously observed similarities between the paired costumes of the Bird Captain and 3 Deer with an investiture scene from the Building of the Columns at El Tajín, suggesting symbolic associations are being invoked rather than simple emasculation (Finegold 2004: 40; also, see Koontz 2009a: 79-91). Additionally, see Umberger's argument, discussed above in Chapter Three, about the Coyolxauhqui Stone at the Aztec Templo Mayor imparting meaning upon the sacrificial act through the use of gendered, mythologizing imagery (2007: 14).

presented not only in relation to one another, but as unambiguously interacting in a unified setting; emphasis in the depiction is placed not on the enduring condition of subordination (although this theme is certainly present), but rather on the ephemeral moment of triumph. While 3 Deer and his prisoner are indeed synecdochic of the idea of conquest, they are also subsumed within a larger panorama of warfare that acknowledges the collective involvement of dozens of participants.

This compositional expansion is reflected, to a limited degree, on Yaxchilan Lintel 8, which depicts the ruler of that site, Bird Jaguar IV, along with his military captain, K'an Tok Wayib', each grasping a fallen captive on the ground at their feet (Fig. 125a). The active and varied poses of the four figures, along with their pronounced interaction, give this artwork a relatively high level of narrativity compared with most Mesoamerican martial imagery. However, a variety of factors differentiate this scene from the Cacaxtla Battle Mural. Most notable is the paucity of any indication of events prior or subsequent to the depicted moment. Bird Jaguar firmly grasps the wrist of his captive, Jewel Skull, whose body lacks any wounds to suggest the preceding confrontation. Additionally, Bird Jaguar's spear is pointed away from the prisoner, eliminating any immediate mortal threat, while suggesting that "grasping" – demonstrating possession and control – is both a completed action and an enduring condition. Thus, despite the presence of resonance – the conflation of the "capture" action with the already existing state of captivity – the actual narrativity of the scene is minimized by its refusal to suggest the events that led to and that will follow what is depicted as a state of being.

This is not the case at Cacaxtla, where the majority of bird warriors exhibit wounds indexing the prolonged duration of their struggle and the specific nature of the injuries they

received. While their current, defeated state is depicted as absolute, it is also shown to be the result of a specific course of previous events. Likewise, although their deaths are inevitable, most have not yet reached this final state, but are rather shown just before their demise, impelling the anticipatory viewer to supply effect to cause and complete the actions in his mind. Thus, unlike Yaxchilan Lintel 8, the Battle Mural extends itself temporally, both forward and backwards in time, and in so doing exhibits a surpassing degree of narrativity.

Despite the relative naturalism of the image, the grasping pose exhibited by the two pairs of figures on Yaxchilan Lintel 8 is an example of a common, pan-Mesoamerican pictorial shorthand for the idea of “capture”. It can be seen in a more stylized version repeated fifteen times around the perimeter of the Stone of Tizoc (Fig. 129b). Here, important conquests from a history of Aztec imperialism spanning several decades are presented as a series of nearly identical figural pairings: generic Aztec warriors with deity attributes and anachronistic Toltec costume elements are shown on the left, grasping warriors in the guise of the deities of conquered towns on the right. Slight variations in the attributes of these latter figures and the toponyms that accompany them identify the specific polities; among the Aztec warriors only the slightly larger Tizoc, who additionally wears the hummingbird headdress of Huitzilopochtli, stands out as different. Even though all the figures stand on a common groundline, the repetition of standardized forms as well as the total lack of interaction between the individual groups disabuse the design from any potential narrativity and cause it to be read as a formal list.

The Cacaxtla painting exhibits several parallels with the Stone of Tizoc in terms of its content. Just as Tizoc is equated with the god Huitzilopochtli, there is a similar conflation between a presumably human warrior, 3 Deer, and the storm deity, Tlaloc. However, even if

the Battle Mural is understood as presenting numerous isolated conquests as a single composition – a possibility that was presented above – it does so in an integrative, naturalistic manner, introducing variation and specificity among the positions and actions of the figures. No mere shorthand for conquest, the subject of this scene is the struggle of combat itself, the fleshy and visceral confrontation of warriors on the field of battle. It is for this reason that I support the continued use of the title “Battle Mural” in reference to the painting on the platform of Structure B at Cacaxtla.

Bonampak

The battle scene on the east, south, and west walls and vaults of Room 2, Structure 1 at Bonampak is indisputably a depiction of an historical battle that is, moreover, integrated into a larger narrative program including the directly related scene occupying the north side of the same room and the conceptually linked episodes covering the walls and vaults of the two adjacent chambers. However, the exact relationship of the events to each other, and even their chronological ordering, remains unsettled and has been subjected to a variety of interpretations.

The most likely reading order of the three rooms, initially proposed by J. Eric S. Thompson, follows a left to right direction (i.e. Room 1, followed by Room 2, then Room 3) (Ruppert, Thompson, and Proskouriakoff 1955: 47). As Mary Miller has noted, this sequence is experientially logical because the viewer, having ascended the main stairway of the acropolis, would naturally encounter the rooms in that order (1986: 23). Additionally, the

presence of a lengthy inscription beginning with an Initial Series in Room 1 strongly indicates that this chamber was meant to be read first (*Ibid.*).¹⁵³

However, other suggestions have been put forward. Sonia Lombardo de Ruiz has argued that the central Room 2 should be given primacy, with the flanking chambers to be understood as subordinate (1976: 376). Thus, the battle is understood as the main event, while Rooms 1 and 3 document subsequent festivities. Her argument is based on the composition of the battle scene, whose climax is shown on the center of the south wall, but which wraps around onto the adjacent east and west walls. George Kubler also noted the significant difference between the arrangement of the figures into multiple registers in the outer rooms and the paintings in Room 2, which fill the entire wall space and exhibit greater figural variety. He suggested that these differences reflect a stylistic development and thus the passage of time between the completion of the paintings, proposing a sequence of 1, 3, 2 for the order of their creation (1990: 276). While this difference is indeed noteworthy, I find it unlikely that the individual rooms were not conceived as a unified program and painted in quick succession. Rather, I would argue that the artist intentionally created a contrast between the more orderly and static courtly rituals represented in Rooms 1 and 3 and the turbulent chaos of the battle depicted in the central chamber.

Accepting the left-to-right reading order of the rooms, however, does little to clarify the order in which the events depicted on their walls occurred or the nature of their relationship to each other. Indeed, it is a common feature of the narrative mode of representation that events are presented in a different sequence than that in which they took

¹⁵³ The so-called Initial Series is a Maya grammatical construction that gets its name from being found at the beginning of most inscriptions of substantial length.

place (e.g. Chatman 1978: 63-67; Bal 1985: 51-53). The interpretation of the scenes depicted at Bonampak is further complicated by ambiguities arising from the partial illegibility of some of the inscriptions. Although several names of the numerous participants as well as a date for the events in the first room have been securely deciphered, other crucial pieces of information, such as the identity of key figures and the date of the battle depicted in Room 2, have been left open to the conjecture of scholars. This fact, along with conflicting interpretations of the imagery itself has contributed to different readings of the narrative presented in the murals.

Mary Miller has made a convincing case that a series of cartouches containing a peccary, a turtle, and two anthropomorphic figures in a narrow register above the presentation of captives on the north wall of Room 2 represent Maya constellations (1986: 49-50). This led her to interpret the entire composition as an elaborate version of the Star-over-Earth verb, which at that time was understood to refer to war events that appeared to have some connections to the significant dates in the Venus cycle (*Ibid.* 50-51). Thus, she approached the epigrapher Floyd Lounsbury to see if the Calendar Round date from the long inscription in Room 2 could possibly coincide with a meaningful moment in the path of this planet across the sky. Because the day and month glyphs were completely unreadable, with only the numerical coefficients being legible, these scholars, primed to identify an astronomically interesting date subsequent to the Initial Series date from Room 1, proposed a reading of 13 *chikchan* 13 *yax* (9.18.1.15.5), corresponding to August 2, 792 in the Julian calendar and to an inferior conjunction of Venus (Lounsbury 1982: 149 and *passim*; Miller 1986: 50-51).

Thus, Bonampak became one of the key pieces of evidence to support the theory of “star wars” – the timing of battles to the movements of Venus. This demonstrates the persisting desire among scholars to view the Maya as fixated on the night sky, even following the decipherment of historical content in the inscriptions and the accompanying awareness of the very down-to-earth concerns that they relate. Indeed, the allure of this reading has been such that it is still cited by some scholars as evidence for the importance afforded to astronomical observation among the Maya (e.g. Arellano Hernández 1998: 42; Galindo Trejo and Ruiz Gallut 1998: 146 and *passim*).¹⁵⁴

Miller herself, however, has since dismissed the August 2, 792 date based on new, more legible images of the inscription (Miller and Houston 1998: 253). She and Stephen Houston have concluded that the month sign must be read as *ch'en*, while the day sign could be either *men* or *ok* (*Ibid.*). This gives several possible dates, none of which have any apparent astronomical implications. Each of the two most likely dates – 9.17.15.12.15 13 *men* 13 *ch'en* and 9.17.2.9.10 13 *ok* 13 *ch'en* – occurs prior to the Initial Series date from Room 1: eighteen and five years earlier, respectively (*Ibid.*).¹⁵⁵ Thus, the latest epigraphic advancements in the decipherment of the Bonampak inscriptions have radically overturned the once prevalent reading of the three rooms of Structure 1 as presenting events in a linear

¹⁵⁴ The now-deciphered phonetic reading of the “Star-over-Earth” glyph as *hub-i* (“to fall”), a general term of conquest lacking any astronomical connotation, was discussed in Chapter Three. Additionally, the once common attribution of astronomical significance to dates in the inscriptions has come under methodological scrutiny in recent years, and many scholars have begun to question the extent to which the Maya actually based their culture on the movements of celestial bodies (e.g. Hotaling 1995; Stuart 1998: 10).

¹⁵⁵ The first of these dates was originally proposed by Mauricio Rosas Kifuri (1988: 42). Miller and Houston also give another, less probable possibility of 9.18.6.15.10, 11 *ok* 13 *ch'en*, which would require the day coefficient to be read as 11 instead of 13 (*op. cit.* 253).

order, thereby complicating our understanding of the relationship of the depicted events to one another.

Questions have also been raised about the reading order of the scenes within each room. In Room 1, the correlation between the three central dancers on the lower register of the south wall, who wear large, green-feathered backracks, with the three lords on the middle register of the north vault accompanied by attendants holding identical backracks seems clear (Fig. 142). The latter scene is typically interpreted as representing the dressing of the lords in preparation for the festivities below, which in turn are understood as being a celebration of the presentation of the child heir depicted above on the south vault (e.g. Ruppert, Thompson, and Proskouriakoff 1955: 58; Lynch 1964: 25; M. Miller 1986: 58). Michel Graulich, however, has argued for a reverse reading, with the north vault mural representing the *disrobing* of the principal figures from the dance in the lower register (1995: 48). He bases this reading on the fact that the leftmost figure in this scene (22) appears to be exiting, stepping onto a dais while he carries a backrack away from the figures of the lords, whom he looks at over his shoulder. From this reading, he makes a compelling argument for the high degree of programmatic and spatial organization in the murals of all three rooms, which privilege the viewer by placing prior events on the walls seen as one enters the building, and subsequent events on the north wall, seen only when one turns to exit (*Ibid.* 48-49).

As alluring as Graulich's analysis may be, a consideration of the iconography of similar scenes in Classic Maya art supports the original reading of the north vault painting as a representation of lords being dressed prior to the celebrations depicted below. In his exhaustive recent study of Maya dance, Matthew Looper presents several analogous scenes from painted ceramic vessels that depict lords being dressed for ritual performances (2009:

65-66). Because the dressing and the dancing are combined into a single moment – following the principles of resonance as defined by Miller and Houston that were discussed above – there is little doubt as to the intentions of the artists of these scenes in depicting moments of adornment rather than disrobing. Depictions of the Maize God being dressed in preparation for his resurrection are also found on polychrome vessels. Loooper concludes that “the detailed depiction of adornment in the context of Classic period dance performance may have commemorated the process by which dancers assumed a semi-divine ritual status (*Ibid.* 65).” This reading, however, leaves the problem of how to interpret Figure 22, who exits the scene carrying a backrack. Perhaps, by stepping onto the same raised platform from which the child heir is being presented on the opposite side, the action of this figure indicates the transfer of the role of dancer (and the spiritual leadership this implies) to the infant, while the dancers below are acting as regents due to the tender age of the new ruler.

In Room 2, the scene on the north wall and vault is almost universally understood to represent the display of prisoners following their capture in the battle depicted on the remaining walls (Fig. 28; Ruppert, Thompson, and Proskouriakoff 1955: 51-52; M. Miller 1986: 95-96; Graulich 1998: 48). Kubler, however, provocatively proposed an inverted reading, with the north wall representing mistreated commoners seeking justice and therefore as the instigation, rather than the culmination, of the battle scene (1969: 13). This reading of the paintings as a document of *bellum iustum*, while almost certainly wrong, demonstrates the extent to which a narrative reading of images depends upon the expectations of the viewer and his familiarity with the shared storylines and representational conventions of a culture. It is only because enough comparable images of abused and debased captives have

come to light in the corpus of Maya art that we can be fairly certain about the order and nature of the events depicted in Room 2.

The prisoner figures depicted on the north wall of Room 2 are shown suffering, with anguished expressions on their faces as they raise their injured hands, from which blood drips (Fig. 143). Because of the systematic nature of these injuries, this has typically been understood to indicate the (post-battle) torture of the captives (e.g. M. Miller 1986: 122; de la Fuente 1995a: 456).¹⁵⁶ Kevin Johnston, however, has proposed a more specific interpretation of this scene as depicting the targeted mutilation of scribes/artists as a means of asserting control over the recording of history (2001: 376-378).¹⁵⁷ Indeed, figure 108 appears to be holding a pen in his hand. Johnston's reading of this and other related images as scenes of scribal capture seems both to confirm and contradict a theory of artistic tribute, based on stylistic analysis, whereby it is believed that artists from conquered polities were made to create monuments attesting to their own subjugation (Pasztor 1993: 129-130; M. Miller 2002: 19): both hypotheses emphasize the controlling of the production of texts and images as a primary goal of warfare; however, the mutilation of the fingers of the captured scribes at Bonampak would seem to preclude the forced production of documents recording their defeat.

¹⁵⁶ However, J.E.S. Thompson, the first major expositor of the murals, refused to read this image as depicting torture, "as the Maya are not by nature sadists" (Ruppert, Thompson, and Proskouriakoff 1955: 53).

¹⁵⁷ Writing and painting are referred to by a single Mayan term, *ts'ib*, indicating that these were not conceptually distinct categories; carving, however, is indicated by another term, *lu-bat*, showing a differentiation between calligraphy and sculpture (Stuart 1989: 153-154). Moreover, scribes were mostly members of the nobility, and thus their capture could be understood as a doubly potent assertion of domination (Johnston 2001: 378).

I would suggest a third possible interpretation, whereby the bloody hands of the captives reflect their suffering in forced labor constructing the very building in which the murals are housed, their fingers literally worked to the bone. Thus, the paintings of these defeated individuals could indeed be an example of artistic tribute – perhaps completed by figure 108, who holds a pen or brush and whose fingers are not bloody – but this represents only one part of the labor tribute exacted from the defeated faction. Following the revised epigraphic dating of the battle that places it prior to the events of Room 1, some authors have suggested that the construction of the building was likely accomplished through the tribute exacted in the depicted battle, and was perhaps even intended as a war monument (Miller and Houston 1998: 253; Pincemin Deliberos and Rosas Kifuri 2005: 8-9).¹⁵⁸ In this light, the panoramic celebration scene in Room 3, in which the architectural setting is a prominent feature, could be interpreted as a depiction of the dedication of the building itself, an event mentioned in the Initial Series text from Room 1 as occurring on 9.18.1.2.0 8 *ahaw* 13 *muwan* (November 15, 791 A.D.) (Miller and Houston 1998: 248).

Furthermore, the arrangement of the captives on the steps of the structure depicted on the north wall of Room 2 relates their bodily suffering and debased condition to the physical presence of the architectural setting. Indeed, this equivalence between monumental architecture and sacrificed captives is a common in Mesoamerican conceptualization, as suggested by dedicatory burials such as the mass graves found associated with the Pyramids of the Moon and the Feathered Serpent at Teotihuacan, as well as in the embedding of reliefs

¹⁵⁸ To this end, Miller and Houston note the presence of a bulk to the side of the throne room depicted on the west wall of Room 1, which is marked with an inscription identifying it as 40,000 cacao seeds, the easily exchangeable currency employed throughout Mesoamerica as a form of wealth (1998: 248-249).

depicting captives directly into the fabric of buildings, a practice known since the Formative period at San José Mogote and Monte Alban in Oaxaca, and commonly seen among at Classic Maya sites in the form of captive stairs. More than mere records of conquest, I believe that such artworks, as well as the Bonampak murals, attest to the abundant captive labor that was required to construct an urban environment composed of aggrandizing architectural statements.

What distinguishes the Bonampak paintings from these other examples, however, is the representation of the specific events as a coherent story of (past) accomplishment, rather than the presentation of the captivity of prisoners and their incorporation into the architectonic space of the city as an ongoing condition.¹⁵⁹ Thus, despite communicating a similar message of conquest as an element of political power and legitimacy, the murals depart from the iconicity of the majority of Mesoamerican allusions to warfare in their extraordinary degree of narrativity, a product not only of the linking of multiple, related scenes, but also, within the depiction of the battle itself, of indications of temporal progression.

Room 2 at Bonampak is unusual in representing “capture in battle” and “the presentation of captives” separately as distinct events. As was discussed above, these actions were typically conflated into a single image, such as can be seen on Yaxchilan Lintel 8, or, indeed, on the lintels over the doorways of Structure 1 at Bonampak (Figs. 125a and 126). An argument can be made that the battle mural itself is an example of such conflation, given its one-sidedness and its depiction of the defeated as weaponless, denuded, and grasped by

¹⁵⁹ This, however, occurs at Bonampak as well. For example, captive figures are depicted on the sides of the bench in Room 2, thereby literally and perpetually supporting the ruler or members of the nobility who would occupy this privileged seat.

the victors. However, the indications of their condition as captured are not so extreme: some of the defeated wear skirts (e.g. 11, 22, 52a), figure 43 wears a zoomorphic pectoral, and figure 56 – the captive of Chaan Muwan – has retained his large greenstone ear ornaments (Fig. 144). These details can be compared with the prisoners on the north wall, which have been stripped of all their jewelry and clothes except their loincloths, and whose hair is disheveled (Fig. 143). The implication is that, while they are shown as powerless (lacking weapons) and being made captive in the battle scene, they have not yet undergone the indignities that accompany the total control over their person inherent to the final and ongoing state of captivity; rather, that condition is depicted separately on the north wall.

A sense of temporal progression adds to the impression that the battle mural represents a transitory event. Although the scene of warfare that wraps around the east, south, and west walls of Room 2 occurs within a continuous and unified landscape, there are certain indications that successive moments take place within the image. This type of pictorial narrative, in which multiple points in time from a story are depicted in a single composition without the repetition of any figures is commonly referred to in the literature as “simultaneous” (after Weitzmann 1970 [1947]: 13-14) or, more recently, as “synoptic” (after Snodgrass 2006 [1982]: 383). These terms are most often applied to illustrations of known texts (e.g. Greek myths or episodes from the Bible), in which the viewer possesses a prior familiarity with the sequential nature of the represented events. At Bonampak, however, indications of temporal progression are subtler and exist in tension with the incessant teleology of the depiction, which unambiguously represents the victory of the Bonampak faction as a foregone conclusion.

Thus, while victorious warriors are seen grasping captives throughout the scene, the viewer can nevertheless discern a temporal arc to the battle as his eyes pass left to right across the upper portion of the composition, from the east to the south to the west wall. On the upper portion of the east wall, and wrapping around onto the adjacent south vault, the battle is introduced by a series of figures holding colorful standards aloft and playing trumpets and drums to coordinate the troops (Fig. 25). On the left side of the south vault, the dense and active portrayal of figures brandishing weapons and taking prisoners suggests the height of the battle (Fig. 145). To the right, the climax of the conflict is shown, with the ruler Chaan Muwan and his captive flanked by several other nobles, the greater amount of empty space around them suggesting the calm following the subdual of the enemy (Fig. 26). A majority of the figures taking part in the battle direct themselves toward the person of the ruler, showing him to be the locus of the action. Finally, on the upper west wall, in the denouement of the engagement, a group of figures carries a box likely containing the spoils of war back towards Chaan Muwan (Fig. 27). The reading of this sequence of events, and indeed the narrativity of the mural as a whole, is strengthened by the presence of the pictorial qualities of action, specificity, variation, integration, and naturalism.

The battle scene from Room 2 of Bonampak teems with figures depicted in active, inherently unstable and transitory poses. This encourages the viewer to extrapolate the conditions that led to this moment and the expected outcome as the actions are followed through. The poses of members of the losing faction are unstable due to their being acted upon by their captors, while the poses of the victors are transitory due to their goal directed nature. The upper body of figure 30 is pulled almost horizontally by figure 32, who places his weight onto his back (left) foot. Figures 52a and 58 are shown in nearly identical poses,

nearly doubled over onto their hands and knees; but that of the former is caused by his falling forward as the latter lunges purposefully to grasp his lower leg. Indeed, every figure in the mural is depicted in a more or less dynamic pose, either performing an action or being acted upon.

The high degree of specificity and the profusion of detail in the Bonampak mural leave no doubt as to the actuality of the depicted events. Even without the presence of hieroglyphic captions naming the most important participants, many of the figures would likely have been identifiable by their strongly individuated headdresses (e.g. figures 10, 12, 15, 24, 25, 26, and 28 from the east wall), as well as the presence of other costume elements such as shirts, collars, and trophy heads. Additionally, the uniqueness of the manner by which each captive is grasped by his assailants strongly suggests the specificity of his predicament, thus strengthening the impression that the scene is a portrayal of, rather than a symbolic allusion to, an historical event.

The experience of a progression of time across the battle scene is perhaps most indebted to the degree of variation that is evident in the image. From an initial impression of homogenous chaos, the viewer becomes aware of distinct groupings composed of figures performing discrete actions – the relative calmness of the standard bearers on the east and box carriers on the west wall who bracket the confrontation; the crowded and energetic clash of soldiers on the lower portions of all three walls and on the left side of the south vault; and the eye of the storm on the right side of the south vault, where Chaan Muwan and his noble retinue stand out against the blue sky. Variation is also evident among figures performing similar actions, so that their adjacent depictions read as successive moments in time. Such is the case with the trumpeters at the intersection of the east wall and south vault: figure 7 leans

his body backward with his trumpet angled upward, while directly in front of him figure 35 leans forward with his trumpet directed down into the mass of figures below. The undeniable impression created by the variation in these figures' poses is that of the forceful exhalation of breath accompanied by the noise of the instruments.

The figures depicted engaging in battle at Bonampak are arguably integrated to a greater extent than in any other work of Mesoamerican art. The density with which individual bodies overlap each other is such that it is often difficult to discern what limbs belong to which figure, an attribute of the painting that serves to simulate the confusion of mass conflict. While this integration has the quality of locking the participants together within a unified spatio-temporal surrounding, it also, paradoxically, engenders an experience of the passage of time. This is due to the extended period of viewing required by the extreme visual complexity of the image. After taking in an initial, instantaneous impression of the battle mural as a single frozen moment in time, the viewer's eye slowly wanders from figure to figure. During this protracted engagement with the painting, the unstable and momentary actions of each group of figures are completed in the mind of the observer, thus allowing a series of events to unfold in concert with (or activated by) the viewer's mobile gaze.

Finally, the scene of warfare from Room 2 is depicted in a believably naturalistic manner. That is to say that, even if this is the biased account of the victor, with one side completely dominating the other, there is a palpable sense of struggle and exertion by all those involved. The large number of participants depicted – over one hundred – give a more accurate impression of the scale of conflicts that are credited in Maya inscriptions as “capture” events (*chukah*) and which are typically illustrated by images involving at most only a handful of people. The need for such large groups of soldiers to be organized and to

coordinate their actions is also indicated – through the depiction of peripheral participants such as standard bearers and musicians, as well as through the somewhat hierarchical differentiation between the figures occupying the upper portion and those on the lower portion of the composition.

All these pictorial qualities combine to endow the Bonampak battle scene with a cinematic dimension of panoramic temporality beyond anything else seen in Maya art. The familiar message of conquest is presented in a novel format whereby the extreme narrativity of the paintings encourages a markedly different engagement of the viewer with the image. Rather than conflating temporal moments – conceiving of “capture” as an inherent and ongoing (resonating) component of the condition of “captive” – as was common in Classic Maya monumental art, the Bonampak murals acknowledge the sequentiality of the depicted events, and therefore the necessity of their past completion.

Chichén Itzá

The paintings from the inner chamber of the Upper Temple of the Jaguars at Chichén Itzá have served as something of a Rorschach test for scholars. Despite – or perhaps because of – the profusion of detail and the diversity of the actions depicted in these murals, Mayanists have made a wide variety of interpretations of their content during the past century. At different times, the scenes have been read as documents of historical battles, as dramatizations of mythological or cosmological events, or as generic depictions of an annual festival. Following an examination of these prior interpretations, I will argue that an analysis of the narrativity of the UTJ paintings strongly supports the underlying historicity of the scenes they depict.

Chichén Itzá presents an abundance of monumental art and architecture that appears to depart from Classic Maya traditions while demonstrating a marked affinity with examples from Central Mexico. This observation, combined with the existence of Colonial-era accounts that attribute the founding of the city to foreigners from the west, greatly impressed early scholars, who sought further archaeological and iconographic confirmation for a “Toltec” incursion into Yucatan in the Early Postclassic period. Thus, in his lengthy analysis of the art of Chichén, Eduard Seler drew heavily on the Central Mexican pictorial manuscripts for comparative material (1998 [1908]), a practice that has continued to the present (e.g. Taube 1994; Ringle 2009). The preoccupation with the ethnohistorical sources culminated in Alfred Tozzer’s exhaustive and influential study of Chichén iconography, in which he identified distinct markers of ethnicity among the figural depictions and characterized the majority of monuments from the site as documenting the domination of the Maya by the Toltec (1957: 148-184).¹⁶⁰ Guided by this unifying theory of Chichén art, Tozzer interpreted the UTJ murals as depictions of important historical battles in the process of Toltec ascendancy in Yucatan (*Ibid.* 176, 181).

Although distinct warrior types can indeed be identified through complexes of associated attributes such as costume elements and weapons, Tozzer’s conclusions about the Chichén pictorial record as a document of Toltec invasion are now widely considered to have

¹⁶⁰ Included among the elements identified by Tozzer as Toltec are a mosaic headdress, often with two or three feathers at the back; a bird headdress; an avian (now considered as butterfly) pectoral; fur bands on the wrists and just below the knees; padding covering the left arm; a back mirror; an atlatl (spear-thrower) and darts; curved sticks; and bags (1957: 155-161). Most of these costume elements and accoutrements are seen on the atlantean warrior figures atop Pyramid B at Tula, and thus they indeed seem to represent a shared iconography of militarism, but one that is now probably better understood in terms of participation within a shared martial ideology with possible origins at Teotihuacan (e.g. Coggins 2002: 46; Ringle and Bey 2009: 374-375).

been misguided. In different places, Maya and Toltec figures can each be seen in the guise of victors as well as captives, while some figures possess costume elements belonging to both types and are thus ambiguous (e.g. Wren and Schmidt 1991: 212; Kurjack 1992: 89-92).

Rather than a Toltec invasion, it now seems more plausible, based on the lack of disruption in the archaeological record and the continuity of many Maya traits at the site, that Central Mexican costume elements and iconography were intentionally manipulated as a political strategy (Tuabe 1994: 244). Indeed, this would not have been a new phenomenon, as Classic Maya rulers often depicted themselves in the guise of warriors with Teotihuacan costume elements in an effort to claim real or imagined ties to a source of foreign power (Stone 1989: 156).

Still, some scholars have continued to attribute the unique presence of the “Toltec” style at Chichén and the site’s apparently sudden hegemony over the Northern Lowlands to an invasion of foreigners. However, these are now more commonly understood to have been the “Itzá”, a Mexicanized group of ethnic Maya who are believed to have originated on the Gulf Coast periphery of the Maya region and migrated into the Southern and Northern Lowlands in the eighth to ninth century A.D., thus accounting for both the influx of Mexican features and the continuity of Maya traits (e.g. Ball and Taschek 1989; Kowalski 1989: 183). The UTJ murals have been interpreted by some authors as evidence in support of this theory – as straightforward history paintings documenting the wars of conquest waged by the Itzás as they migrated northwards into Yucatan (A. Miller 1977: 223-224; Schele and Mathews 1998: 240).

In addition to the ethnic contrast between “Maya” and “Toltec” or “Itzá” warrior figures in the UTJ murals and other Chichén monumental art, scholars have also focused on

another apparent symbolic dualism: a pair of figures, one surrounded by a solar disk and the other by a feathered serpent, which appear repeated on the three visible surfaces of the wooden lintel over the entrance to the inner chamber (Fig. 40).¹⁶¹ Figures surrounded by parti-colored sun disks (Fig. 146) and serpents (Figs. 147-149) – green feathered, as well as red (fire) and white (cloud) – are found interspersed throughout the battle scenes.¹⁶² While the motifs framing these figures cause them to stand out from the crowded compositions of the murals as individuals of obvious importance, interpretations of their exact nature have varied greatly, ranging from indications of supernatural status, social rank or lineage affiliation, or even individual identities. This ambiguity has engendered characterizations of the battle scenes as either predominantly historical or substantially allegorical or mythologized, and additionally has had an impact on potential readings of the narrative content of the scenes.

In one of the earliest comprehensive assessments of these paintings, Eduard Seler referred to appearances of figures surrounded by rayed disks (SW82; S40; NW2) as representations of the solar deity, while he identified the figures accompanied by feathered and fire serpents as (human) chiefs and those surrounded by cloud serpents as the souls of dead warriors (1998 [1908]: 111-121). However, his interpretation of the large figure on the central panel of the east wall – behind which a serpent winds – as the deity Quetzalcoatl, and

¹⁶¹ On the center panel of the east wall, on the privileged spot directly opposite the entrance, a further pair of figures is depicted, one of which has a feathered serpent behind him. Additionally, a similar pair of figures is carved in relief on the top of the large slab that filled much of the room. Both are very poorly preserved, but there is no indication of a sun disk, so interpretations of these figures as identical to those on the lintel are speculative.

¹⁶² In addition to the various types of serpents used to highlight figures, certain individuals are accompanied by flames, scrolls, or wavy rays of energy being emitted from their bodies (e.g. SW1-4, SW45, SW58, SW113).

the figure facing him as the sun god (despite the lack of a solar disk) led him to interpret the entire program as the mythologization of a series of historical battles through the invocation of celestial forces (*Ibid.* 119).

Marvin Cohodas interpreted the dualisms present in the iconographic program of the UTJ as consciously invoking both ethnic (Maya / Mexican) and cosmological (Sun / Venus) oppositions (1989b: 19-20). He cites the equal pairings of figures along the central axis of the chamber – three times on the lintel, on the top of the table (altar/throne), and on the center panel of the east wall – which in each instance place the Maya/solar figure to the south and the Mexican/feathered serpent/Venus figure to the north.¹⁶³ While relying on the costume elements identified by Tozzer as markers of ethnic identification, Cohodas is skeptical of the idea that the battle scenes depicted here and elsewhere at Chichén represent historical battles pertaining to the conquest of Yucatan by Toltecs (*Ibid.* 27). Rather, he suggests that the prevalence and consistency of this opposition in art from across Mesoamerica and spanning almost a millennium suggests that cosmological symbolism is paramount in such imagery. Thus, he considered the placement and compositions of the UTJ battle paintings to reflect cosmography: scenes to the south showing the lush tropical lowlands of the Maya region and those to the north including the rocky hills of the highlands of Central Mexico; the three-part division of the murals into upper (village), middle (battle), and lower (encampment) portions suggesting the division of the cosmos into upperworld, earth, and underworld (*Ibid.* 22-24).

A similar reading of the UTJ mural program as reflecting a cosmological reinterpretation of historical events was put forward by Clemency Coggins, who argued that

¹⁶³ Cohodas also notes the parallels of this arrangement with that found in the paintings from the portico of Structure A at Cacaxtla (1989b: 24-25).

the depicted battles represented the journeys of the sun and Venus through the sky (1984: 157).¹⁶⁴ Building on this, Susan Milbrath interpreted the division of the program into eight segments as reflecting eight solar years, a period of time exactly corresponding to five Venus cycles (1999: 181-183). Problems with these interpretations include the assumptions they make about the content of largely destroyed panels based on the few that have survived intact, as well as the presence of two solar disks on the SW panel (Ringle 2009: 21). Astronomical concerns indeed appear to be present in the architectural orientation of the UTJ and the iconography of the mural program (Galindo Trejo, *et al.* 2001). However, I believe that, just like at Bonampak, this factor has often been granted too much importance in interpretations of the narrative program of the paintings.

Among scholars who have favored a more purely historical reading of the murals, the figures highlighted with solar disks and serpents have been interpreted in a variety of ways. Arthur Miller understood them to be opposing war captains engaged in two battles – depicted on the north and south walls, each flanked by sequentially related scenes of preparation and resolution – from which “Captain Serpent” emerges as triumphant (1977). This reading is untenable for a variety of reasons. The different locations and costumes featured in each panel indicate that more than two combat events featuring diverse populations are depicted. Additionally, Sun Disk and Serpent figures are never directly opposed to each other in any of the scenes, many of which feature numerous figures associated with serpents.

¹⁶⁴ Reading counter-clockwise from the southeast panel, Coggins saw the murals as charting a cyclical celestial narrative with the sun travelling from pre-dawn to sunrise, morning, noon, afternoon, sunset, post-sunset, and midnight, and Venus progressing from helical rising, to superior conjunction, to Evening Star, to inferior conjunction (1984: 157).

The solar disk and serpent elements have also been suggested to relate to a pair of names – Kukulkan (“Feathered Serpent”) and Kakupakal (“Fiery Shield”) that appear both in the hieroglyphic inscriptions at Chichén and in Colonial era Maya and Spanish accounts of the history of the site (Lincoln 1990: 82-90; Schroth 1990: 28-42). In this reading, the two insignia identify specific, allied individuals or lineage members who collectively formed the leadership at Chichén Itzá. Regardless of the exact nature of these nominals (i.e. personal name, family name, or title of office), the implication is that of alliance and shared power, an interpretation that is in better alignment with the depictions of paired sun disk and serpent figures on the UTJ lintel and the apparent cooperation – or at least lack of antagonism – between solar and serpent figures in the battle scenes (e.g. S39 and S40).

In his recent analysis of the UTJ murals, William Ringle has interpreted the figures depicted within sun disks as representing a battle standard depicting a deity (2009: 21). Like Seler before him (1998 [1908]: 111), Ringle bases his reading on the coincidence of placement of the sun disk figure directly above white banners rising from a tri-colored feathered panel (NW2 and SW82), as well as Colonial-era sources that record examples of the (Postclassic) Maya bringing deity effigies with them into battle (*op. cit.* 21). However, there are instances where the sun disk figure is distinctly *not* associated with the same standard of white banners and tri-colored feather base (N1, S40). Additionally, Ringle believes many of the figures associated with serpents in the UTJ murals represent specific historical individuals or offices, which he identifies as Warrior A (SW58, SW113, and S61), Warrior B (SW45, SW108, N4, N9, and S57), and Warrior C (SW42, NE1, and SE5) based

on their costume elements (*Ibid.* 30-34).¹⁶⁵ That is to say that, according to Ringle, the presence of clearly metaphorical (i.e. non-realistic) serpent imagery is understood to indicate the personal identity or rank of the figure, while the similar use of the solar disk is taken as a sign of supernatural status. In support of his argument, he cites the presence of offering dishes placed in front of one of the sun disk figures (NW2), something he believes “would be unlikely if it enclosed a human participant” (*Ibid.* 21). But, contrary to this assertion, two of the feathered serpent figures he identifies as human military leaders (SW113 and SW108) are also shown with offering bowls placed in front of them.

Whether the serpent and solar motifs were intended to indicate names, titles, supernatural forces, or celestial bodies, I believe that these should be understood as the visualization of abstract concepts overlaid onto historical, human actors. That is to say that it is not a matter of the historical *or* the allegorical, but both at once. When Mesoamerican rulers impersonated deities or invoked connections between themselves and cosmological forces, this was not simply a symbolic gesture, but rather a means of manifesting the supernatural while maintaining their human identity (Houston and Stuart 1996: 297-299; Houston 2006: 146-149). In the Cacaxtla Battle Mural, when 3 Deer is shown wearing the mask and costume elements of the storm god Tlaloc, he is simultaneously the specific human actor accomplishing a (historical) capture and the deity whose identity actuates the event

¹⁶⁵ I agree with Ringle’s identification of the repeated depictions of two individuals in the SW mural (SW58=SW113 and SW45=SW108) due to the nearly exact congruity of their costumes. His extension of these identifications across the other murals, however, is less convincing: the individual figures of each of his groups often display significant differences in their costumes, and examples of some elements – the two white feathers of the headdress, for instance – can be found across all the groups.

within a structure of metaphysical associations.¹⁶⁶ Thus, regardless of the exact nature of the figures ensconced in the sun disks in the UTJ murals – an historical ruler or military leader at Chichén, a solar / war deity, a war banner, or something more nebulous that combines some or all of these signifieds – what is important for the purposes of this study is the role of these figures as active and integrated participants in the depicted battle scenes.

A final proposed interpretation of the narrative content of the UTJ murals revolves around their apparent bloodlessness. In contrast to the violence of the clashes depicted at Cacaxtla and Bonampak, the physical contact of hand-to-hand combat is rarely depicted among the numerous figures, none of which exhibit signs of injury such as dart wounds.¹⁶⁷ Lincoln has noted that explicitly violent imagery is present in other Chichén artworks, from which he concludes that gory details would have been included if the UTJ murals depicted actual battles and that they therefore must represent either a war dance or ceremonial conflict (1990: 159-160). Reaching a similar conclusion, Patricia Anderson has suggested with greater specificity that the murals depict war dances and sacrificial rituals associated with the month of *Pax* (1994: 33-34). I will argue that these readings of the UTJ murals as depictions of rituals grant them an untoward degree of representational transparency, and that an analysis of the narrativity of these paintings will confirm that they do indeed depict historical war events.

¹⁶⁶ On the Aztec Stone of Tizoc, the historical ruler, who is identified by his name glyph, wears the hummingbird helmet of the (solar and war) deity Huitzilopochtli and has a smoking mirror on his head and a serpent for a foot identifying him with the god Tezcatlipoca. Thus, a similarly ambiguous conflation is created between the human ruler as conqueror and the manifestation of divinity.

¹⁶⁷ Examples of the grasping of captives by aggressors include S4 & S28, as well as several pairs of figures from the raid on the town at the top of the northwest panel: NW8-9, NW10-11, NW16-17, NW18-19, NW26-27, NW29-30, and NW32-33.

The different interpretations of the content of the UTJ murals discussed above – historical, cosmological, mythological, ritual – have been accompanied by almost as many readings of the narrative connections between the individual panels. The six scenes have variously been construed as two distinct groups – north and south – representing either two battles with their accompanying preparations and outcomes (A. Miller 1977: 210), or allegorical ethnic and cosmological oppositions (Cohodas 1989: 24); as a single linear narrative charting the movement of celestial bodies, beginning with the southeast panel and moving counterclockwise around the room to the south wall (Coggins 1984: 157; Milbrath (1999: 181-183); as a story of migration and conquest following the same counter-clockwise sequence, but discarding overt astronomical interpretations (Schele and Mathews 1999: 234-241); or as a series of repeating rituals related to warfare lacking a definitive anchor in time or a clear beginning and end (Schroth 1990: 26-27; Anderson 1994: 33). Such a diversity of interpretations demonstrates both the near universal compulsion to read causal connections between the UTJ scenes and the difficulty to do so with any assurance of precision. I agree with Ringle that the different settings and costumes worn by the defenders in each scene are clear indications that the panels depict separate events, and therefore programmatic readings relating to sequences of preparation, escalation, and outcome of battle can be discarded (2009: 22). Furthermore, the degree of specificity of place and action would seem to strongly indicate that distinct historical events are depicted, thus precluding any cyclical or timeless reading of the content of the murals.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁸ The same is true of the fragmentary paintings from the Temple of the Warriors and the Monjas, the pictorial qualities of which will be discussed in greater detail below.

Thus, while the paintings are certainly thematically unified through their depictions of martial conquest, and they likely present a series of conceptually related warfare events, a reading order linking the panels can no longer be convincingly established. However, successive events taking place in distinct temporal moments appear to be depicted *within* each panel, and these can be more or less persuasively reconstructed through causal inferences.

A separate setting is indicated at the lower portion of each panel, set off by the presence of one or more ground lines, and, in the case of the south wall mural, by a different background color. The scenes presented in the lower registers, to judge by the surviving examples, represent the encampments of the attackers; their small, domed structures lack platforms or masonry elements and were therefore likely temporary shelters. The figures depicted in these registers are typically seated and engaged in discussion (S & SW panels), or calmly processing with lowered weapons (NW & SE panels). That these lower registers represent different moments in time from the scenes above, and not simply different locations, is suggested by the repetition of figures and objects in both places: figures SW5 & SW82, SW58 & SW113, and SW45 & SW108, for example, as well as the tri-colored standard to the left of figures NW6 and NW79. Furthermore, these scenes can be understood as sequentially following, rather than preceding the battles depicted above, due to the presence of denuded prisoners (NW74, NW78-79, S122, S124), whose captivity can be presumed to have resulted from the adjacently depicted conflicts.

The UTJ murals, like the paintings from Room 2 at Bonampak, are therefore examples of the cyclic method of representation, with multiple points in time represented in multiple scenes with repeating figures; but – again like the battle scene at Bonampak – they

also feature suggestions of synoptic narration, in which multiple moments are indicated within a single composition and without the repetition of figures (Stansbury-O'Donnell 1999: 4-6). Taking one of the better preserved panels as an example, on the south wall the battle has a clear direction – up and to the left – as the attackers mount scaffold platforms and notched logs forming make-shift steps to ascend the hilly terrain leading to the settlement at the top of the scene (Fig. 46). Defenders pour out of the town to meet the onslaught. However, despite several defenders in the center of the composition who block the progress of the assailants coming up the ladders (e.g. S37, S38, S46, S48, S54), several members of the attacking force can be seen further on, stretching or leaping upward to reach the buildings of the town (e.g. S28, S31, S32). Thus, several stages of the battle are depicted simultaneously, with the goal-directed actions of the individual participants leading the viewer to read the unfolding of events across a unified composition.

This general pattern appears to be repeated in each panel, with warriors defending a unique geographic location at the top of the composition from an attack by a force who approaches from below, and whose own encampment is depicted at the bottom on a second ground line. The NW panel presents a slight variance, with the fury of the attack confined to the within the walls of the town itself, its unarmed denizens apparently taken by surprise and made prisoner as they attempt to flee (Fig. 42). In the center portion of this panel, instead of a battle we see the victorious warriors leading their captives down to their encampment at the bottom of the scene. Nevertheless, the essential format in which the conquered region is located at the top and the attacking force is based on the bottom of the image is maintained.

Furthermore, this format makes use of the placement of figures above one another to simultaneously suggest both verticality (the hilly terrain scaled by the attackers in the south

mural or the steep red hills of the NE panel) and the recession into the space of the picture plane (the diagonal files of troops pouring out of the town they are defending in the SW panel or the depiction of the curving red fortification walls protecting the towns in the NW and SE panels). These paintings thus make tentative overtures to pictorial depth, an extremely rare occurrence in the corpus of Mesoamerican art.¹⁶⁹ Notably, the dimensions of space and time appear to be intimately bound in the placement and interaction of the figures in these synoptic scenes. The experience of temporal succession – and, by extension, of narrativity – in these scenes can therefore be attributed in large part to their innovative compositions; however, this dimension is activated and enhanced through the pictorial qualities of action, specificity, variation, integration, and naturalism.

The murals from Chichén Itzá abound with clear indications of action. Figures are depicted in unstable and dynamic poses that evince the transitory and goal-directed nature of their movements. At the left of the NE panel, figures defending the hills raise their spearmen (e.g. NE3, NE6) while spears are shown in mid-flight as they hurtle towards their targets (Fig. 44). Likewise, a figure from the surviving portion of the painting in Room 22 of the Monjas is shown with a spearman held at the ready while projectiles fly in front of him, their flaming tips aimed at the thatched roofs of structures located within a fortified precinct (Fig. 57). Figure NW13 from the UTJ is also seen setting fire to a building, flames leaping from the torch he holds in his hand to the dry straw of the roof (Fig. 150). Nearby,

¹⁶⁹ The spatial depth evident in these paintings is largely conceptual rather than visual, and should therefore not be treated under the rubric of “perspective,” a term that is rooted in vision (e.g. Snyder 1980: 522-526). While there are indications that the closer something is depicted to the top of the composition the further back into the depth of the scene its position is conceived, figures are not depicted at different scales to indicate their relative distance from the viewer. Additionally, figures are depicted disproportionately large compared to the architectural structures they interact with.

figures NW16 and NW27 each hold captives by the hair, threatening them with raised weapons. Other victims struggle to escape their captors, whose bent knees and use of both hands to grab their prisoners ably demonstrates the effort they are exerting (NW18-19 and NW29-30). Similarly, figure S28 reaches up to grab the arm of the resistant figure S4 in an attempt to pull him down from the roof of a building (Fig. 151a). Elsewhere in the same painting, the striving of the attackers to ascend a ladder – and the defenders to prevent them – is communicated through the directed movements and instability of all the figures (Fig. 151b; S48, S54, S69, S70). Above them, figures S31 and S32 leap and stretch upwards to reach the defensively positioned hilltop settlement (Fig. 151c).

The Chichén murals are additionally noteworthy for their high degree of specificity with regard to the settings, tactics, and costumes they depict. The precision with which the communities under attack in the UTJ paintings were described has already been mentioned, including their location on hilly or forested terrain, the types of structures and their density, and the presence of offensive and defensive constructions, such as scaffold platforms and walls, related to their attack and protection. This is also the case with the mural from Room 22 of the Monjas, where two walls – an outer red wall and an inner crenellated wall – protect the settlement under attack, which appears to be located next to the coast due to the water and boats depicted to the right (Fig. 57). Similarly, the painting from Areas 15-16 in the Temple of the Warriors depicts a building at the center of a lake next to a town on its shore (Fig. 51); two of the structures feature flat masonry roofs with friezes composed of “spools”, both elements that are commonly associated with Colonette- and Mosaic-style architecture (Andrews 1995: 43-66). The figures of the opposing sides in this scene are depicted with distinctive details: the denuded captives are shown with horizontal red-striped body paint and

heads shaven except for a long forelock, while their conquerors have black-painted skin and wear blue loincloths and headdresses of white feathers.¹⁷⁰

Together with specificity, the abundant variation in the paintings at Chichén in terms of landscape, costume, and action contribute to the experience of multiple places and times being represented in each panel. It is largely through such variation that the UTJ murals can be divided into upper, middle, and lower portions – typically depicting an attack on a settlement at the top, the engaging of the opposing forces in the liminal middle area, and the encampment of the invading force at the bottom, where their relatively inactive poses suggest a (spatial and temporal) separation from the battle above. While the initial impression of the crowded scenes is of the chaos and confusion of battle, the role and affiliation of the participants can be distinguished relatively easily by their distinctive costumes as well as the directions they face and the actions they perform. The great degree of variation across each composition means that even where there are repetitions of figures wearing similar attire and maintaining nearly identical poses – figures SW31-41 and SW 48-54, for example – such conformity is read not as mere pictorial shorthand, standardization, or convention, but rather as indicating an organized and coordinated group executing a simultaneous maneuver – in this case, a two-flanked defense of the town from which they emerge (Fig. 152).

Variation as an indication of change in state often depends on some elements remaining constant to promote correspondences that serve to integrate the depiction of multiple points of time. Thus, in the painting from Areas 15-16 of the Temple of the Warriors, numerous figures with horizontal red strips on their bodies are depicted performing

¹⁷⁰ As was discussed above, the similarly specific delineation of figures from the UTJ murals has led scholars to propose the identification of specific ethnic or military affiliations (e.g. Tozzer 1957: 148-184; Ringle 2009: 30-34).

various actions in the upper portion – as warriors wearing full military outfits, as loincloth-wearing merchants with large bundles on their backs – but on the bottom, similarly striped figures are now depicted entirely nude and bound by ropes that are held by their conquerors, who are distinguished by their black-painted bodies and full warrior costumes (Fig. 51). The implication is clearly that the invasion and disruption of the lives of the red-striped faction is followed by their subsequent and total defeat by the black-painted attackers. Integration is also apparent in the interaction of individual figures with the architecture, landscape, and each other. Unlike the battle scenes at Cacaxtla, Bonampak, or Mulchic, there is very little overlap of bodies or direct contact between figures in the Chichén murals. However, the action of each participant is almost always either directed towards a specific figure or structure, or is in response to the action of another that is being directed towards them. Thus, entire compositions featuring many dozens of figures exhibit an exceptionally high degree of internal coherence.

In some regards, the paintings from Chichén Itzá can be considered as the least naturalistic of all the battle murals under consideration here. The organization of the compositions and the lack of overlapping among the individual figures belie a subordination of the pictorial logic to the flatness of the picture plane. Moreover, clearly metaphorical or emblematic elements such as serpents, solar disks, and radiating lines of fiery energy are depicted so as to be indistinguishable from objects with a physical presence. However, in other respects these images are endowed with a greater degree of naturalism than the other scenes. Unlike the battles depicted at Bonampak and Cacaxtla, which take place in undefined surroundings, the examples from Chichén feature distinctive and varied settings into which the figures are actively integrated, strongly suggesting that they represent specific historical

places and events.¹⁷¹ Additionally, among the dozens of figures featured in the battle paintings from the other sites there are only two possible attitudes: triumphal victor or debased captive, the former grasping or wounding the latter who is typically depicted as denuded and weaponless. At Chichén, however, multiple moments and perspectives of military activity are explicitly shown, from the surprise attack on an unprepared town, to the meeting of two large, equally armed forces on a field of battle, to the siege and defense of a fortified settlement, to the marching away of bound captives following the conclusion of a conflict. The paintings from Cacaxtla, Bonampak, and Mulchic present greater affectivity by focusing on moments of heightened emotional impact, which emphasize the immediacy of the struggle and the suffering of the victims. At Chichén Itzá, on the other hand, the murals contain such a profusion of information in their markedly fuller, more expansive accounts of warfare that the viewer predominantly engages with the imagery on an intellectual, rather than visceral level. This spectatorial attitude is further encouraged by the pronounced compositional suggestion of a greater distance and objectivity, compared with the other murals that seemingly place the viewer directly in the midst of battle.

Thus, an analysis of the narrativity of the murals from the Upper Temple of the Jaguars, as well as the surviving fragments from the Temple of the Warriors and the Monjas, strongly suggests these paintings can be understood to depict specific historical battles. Metaphorical or allegorical elements, such as winding serpents and solar disks, are incorporated into the scene to provide types of information (possibly ranks, affiliations, or lineage names) that would otherwise be difficult or impossible to communicate visually.

¹⁷¹ As was mentioned in Chapter Two, this impression of naturalistic specificity has led some scholars to try to attempt to identify the precise locations of the depicted events (A. Miller 1977: 212-213; Schele and Mathews 1998: 234).

While some celestial symbolism might indeed be intended, this subject does not seem to have been central to the narrative of the images, but rather, just as at Bonampak, it added a further layer of meaning that perhaps provided a cosmological justification for – or indicated the apotheosis of – the depicted (historical) events.

Mulchic

Due to their relatively fragmentary state upon their rediscovery in the early 1960s, and because of the destruction associated with their removal to the state museum in Merida, the murals of Mulchic have been the subject of only a handful of focused art historical studies (Piña Chan 1963 and 1964; Walters and Kowalski 2000). Additionally, they have been included in studies of Late Classic Puuc mural painting (Gendrop 1971; Barrera Rubio 1980; Mayer 1990) or mentioned in passing in studies of the scenes of violence at Bonampak and Cacaxtla as a comparable depiction of warfare (e.g. de la Fuente 1995a: 465-466; Brittenham 2008: 54). However, as with the Structure B mural at Cacaxtla, a strong argument exists that the painting on the west side of the south wall of Structure A at Mulchic depicts a post-battle slaughter or sacrifice rather than a scene of true warfare. Nevertheless, just like the example at Cacaxtla, the chaotic immediacy of the composition seems intended to evoke the conditions of battle, and therefore to justify the inclusion of the Mulchic painting in a study of Mesoamerican battle scenes.

By far the most common reading of the scene to the right of the doorway on the south wall has been that it depicts a battle (Piña Chan 1964: 63; Gendrop 1971: 58; Barrera Rubio 1980: 173; Mayer 1990: 40-41; Staines Cicero 1999: 224). However, Walters and Kowalski have compellingly asserted that the violence depicted here should rather be understood as a

scene of sacrifice (2000: 210). This interpretation is based on the representation of methods of murder – hanging and stoning – typically associated with ritualized executions rather than with confrontation on the battlefield. Even if what is shown is a scene of post-battle sacrifice, however, the presentation (in reference to both the painting and to the event it documents) is unquestionably intended to evoke the immediacy and collective violence associated with combat. This is demonstrated by the prevalence of the interpretation of this scene as a depiction of battle in the literature dealing with the Mulchic paintings, and is manifest in the starkly contrasting representation of violence on either side of the doorway on the south wall of Structure A. The high degree of narrativity present in the right-hand painting – engendered by the qualities of action, specificity, variation, integration, and naturalism – stands opposed to the greater iconicity of the mural depicting human sacrifice to the left.

The figures depicted in the mural to the right of the entrance on the south wall of Structure A at Mulchic are noteworthy for their dynamic poses, which suggest fleeting moments of action (Fig. 58). One figure lifts a large stone from the ground, while several others raise similar rocks over their heads; the numerous stones piled on the prone body at the center of the composition leave no doubt as to the purpose of their exertions, as the viewer is simultaneously shown similar actions at different stages, both imminent and completed. The suffering of the seated figure towards the left of the image is indicated by the blood that pours from his mouth as a rope is fastened around his neck. The figure hanging from the tree also vomits blood, showing him to be still alive despite his otherwise stiffly vertical posture. Thus, we see a series of transitory moments that collectively insist on the immediacy of the events depicted. In contrast, while the sacrificial scene to the left of the doorway presents an action poised to happen – axes raised to strike the prone victims – it

does so in such a way as to eternally perpetuate the blow, and thus transforms a transitory moment into an ongoing present. Here, there is no phase shift between the identical depictions of the three sacrifices, which are all represented as just about to occur. But without any pictorial indication of the fall of the axes, or of the fleeting nature of the depicted moment, the impression is one of action made static, always in the process of completion but never completed.

The figures from the mural to the right of the entrance almost all exhibit the same minimal attire and Mohawk hairstyle. Thus, there would seem to be a lack of specificity in this scene, as it would appear impossible to distinguish individual personalities from among the participants. Paradoxically, however, the composition as a whole gives the impression of depicting a specific event. This is due to the numerous details pertaining to the action that suggest we are witnessing the particulars of a unique historical occurrence: how one figure hangs from a certain branch of a tree, the contorted position of another as he is bound with a rope, the piling up of stones upon the body of a third. Conversely, the elaborate but identical costumes worn by the Chac impersonators in the adjacent scene serve to render these figures anonymous (Fig. 59). Thus, the scene reads as a generic sacrificial ritual in which the actions remain the same and the identities of the individual participants are irrelevant or interchangeable.

These contrasting impressions are heightened by the high degree of variation present in the right-hand mural and the lack thereof in the scene to the left. To the right, we see several methods of murder – hanging, stoning – being carried out by dozens of figures who each strike a unique and expressive pose. The differing heights of the prone, seated, standing, and hanging figures, as well as the multiple directions in which they direct their attention,

create a syncopated composition that adds to the chaos, complexity, and drama of the scene and encourages the viewer to equate the temporality involved in reading the image with the passage of time in the representation itself as the depicted events are understood to unfold. On the other hand, the repetition of the three identical groupings of figures in the left-hand mural reinforces the impression of stability in this scene, thus compelling the viewer to read the depicted action as ongoing rather than transitory.

Moreover, the figures in the painting to the right of the entrance are fully integrated into a coherent pictorial spatiotemporal setting. The physical space is created through the overlapping of bodies, which creates a believable depth for the figures to occupy. The solitary landscape feature – the tree – is pushed back behind the picture plane by a figure whose body overlaps its trunk, but it is pulled back into the space of the conflict and given a solid presence by the figure who hangs from its branch. Temporal unity is created by the direct interaction between individual figures as well as the resonances that exist between similar forms. Thus, the destructive potential inherent in the weight of the stones is manifest through the resonance between the projectiles that some of the figures exert themselves to raise above their heads and the stones that have already found their mark and rest solidly on the ground. By contrast, the spatiotemporal nature of the left-hand mural is ambiguous. There are no features to identify the setting, and the lack of overlap or physical contact between any of the figures serves to flatten the space and leaves the viewer unsure how exactly how the three identical figural groupings are related to one another, either in space or in time. This leads to a reading of the scene to the left of the doorway, with its repeating groups of symmetrically arranged figures, as a rigid and formal pattern whose compositional logic is subordinated to the horizontality of the register and the flatness of the wall surface. The

mythologized ideology of sacrifice is presented as a reduced and repeated image. The painting to the right of the entrance, on the other hand, evinces a much greater degree of naturalism due to the variation, integration, and spontaneity of actions being performed. Here, the viewer is presented with the document of a specific event – a sacrifice stripped of any cosmological or ritual implications and instead presented as the mass slaughter of the battlefield. Only the methods by which death is dealt show the scene to be one of sacrifice rather than combat.

Thus, a contrast is drawn between the narrativity of the representation of ritualized combat depicted to the right of the entryway and the iconicity of the representation of formalized sacrifice to the left. The two scenes are connected, however, by the presence of two additional figures on the right-hand mural who are attired with the same rain deity costumes as the sacrificers from the painting on the left. They stride away from the stoning scene with their axes raised, facing the scene of formalized sacrifice depicted across the entrance from them. If their appearance and gaze links them to the other mural, how are we to understand the connection between these scenes? It clearly cannot be a matter of a battle followed by the ritual presentation and sacrifice of the prisoners, as is the case at Bonampak, since, even if the right-hand mural *is* considered a battle, the defeated are shown being killed on the spot – hanging from a tree, buried under a pile of hurled stones – not being captured alive. Instead, the two scenes on the south wall, together with the poorly preserved scene on the north wall, appear to be thematically, rather than causally, linked. Together, they present three different modes of ritualized violence: two of which – those shown on south wall and to the left of the door on the north wall – were more formal and institutionalized, being carried out by personages elaborately clad as deity impersonators and which are depicted with an

iconicity befitting the solemnity of the rites, while the other – to the right of the door on the south wall – was carried out by a large number of individuals wearing only loincloths who engage in a chaotic orgy of violence that is overseen by a single, elaborately clad figure who brandishes a knife as he strangely hovers above the fray.

Discussion

The preceding analysis of the murals from Cacaxtla, Bonampak, Chichén Itzá, and Mulchic demonstrates that the contrasts between their representations of violence extend beyond merely stylistic considerations, but are additionally manifest in the differing approaches to pictorial narrativity that they reflect. At Cacaxtla, emphasis is placed on affect and immediacy, which, due to the specificity and realism of the figural representations, serves to naturalize the one-sidedness of the slaughter that is depicted. A similar situation is found at Bonampak, but in this case there is a distinct temporal trajectory and hierarchical ordering within the synoptic battle scene itself, while the subsequent presentation of the captives is depicted separately on an adjacent wall. At Chichén Itzá, multiple moments in the course of warfare events are pictured, utilizing both the synoptic and cyclic modes, as at Bonampak. But here the tension between the frozen instant and the unfolding of time in the mind of the viewer is even more pronounced, as events are not depicted with the same teleological certainty as is the case with the other murals. Finally, at Mulchic, the turmoil and immediacy of the violence depicted on the west side of the south wall contrasts with the greater stability and atemporality of the sacrificial scene on the east side of the same wall.

Questions have also been raised as to the nature of the violence portrayed in these murals. At Bonampak and Chichén Itzá, the depicted battles are essentially bloodless, with

the indicated goal apparently being the taking of prisoners. Depictions of corporeal violence are associated with the warfare events, but only in adjacent scenes of ritualized, sacrificial acts: nearly identical representations of heart extraction on the south wall of Room 3 at Bonampak and on the south and west vaults of the UTJ, as well as from Area 19 in the Temple of the Warriors, at Chichén Itzá. The paintings at Cacaxtla and Mulchic, on the other hand, appear to conflate the unregulated and chaotic group violence of battle with the ritualized murder of individuals who are already identified as captives. The preference for ritualized violence – both in the reality of the torture and sacrifice of captives taken in war and in the portrayal of these events in monumental artworks – can be understood in terms of the concepts of spectacle and reification.¹⁷²

Moving violence away from the battlefield simultaneously accomplished several desirable outcomes. It was possible to exert absolute control over prisoners, with low-level captives being converted into valuable slave labor¹⁷³ while elite captives could be publically sacrificed in front of a much larger audience than would be present at the scene of the battle. The formalized dramaturgy of ritual sacrifice allowed the conquerors to precisely dictate the

¹⁷² These concepts have been most forcefully employed in the Marxist critique of late capitalist society (e.g. Lukács (1971 [1923]; Debord 1994 [1967]). However, as mediations between the underlying materialist and performed ideological bases of power, I believe they can be productively employed in a Mesoamerican context. For discussions of spectacle and the performance of power among the Classic Maya, see Houston (2006) and Inomata (2006a, 2006b). Carrasco (1999) and Taylor (2004) have written about the performance of violence among the Aztecs.

¹⁷³ Slavery served to commodify prisoners, whose labor was further convertible into spectacle, as it enabled the construction of the monumental architecture that manifested the power of the rulers and formed the stage for performances. Slavery as a goal of Precolumbian warfare is attested to in the early Colonial-era sources (e.g. Landa 1941 [1565]: 32-36; Marcus 2000: 237) as well as by the numerous terms for “slave” found in early Maya-Spanish dictionaries (Marcus 2000: 233). In the labor-intensive economy of ancient Mesoamerica, the coercion of manpower, through labor tribute or slavery, was almost certainly a primary goal of warfare from the Formative period forward.

terms – including the timing, method, and associated conditions – by which death was dealt, thus stripping the victim of any agency. Without questioning the strength or genuineness of the ideological convictions attached to the practice of human sacrifice in Mesoamerica, its performative spectacularity – accompanied by the objectification of the victim, who was reconceived as a precious commodity that was offered to the gods – must be considered as a potential motivating factor.¹⁷⁴

Thus, while death was undoubtedly a common occurrence during battles, the taking of life was also intentionally postponed as a means to more explicitly invoke the power of the state in a collectively consumed display of ritualized violence.¹⁷⁵ This same concern is also reflected in the pictorial representation of warfare events – itself an act of fixing the spectacular gaze – which naturally placed emphasis on this totality of the control wielded over the enemy. It is this aspect of the battle murals – their apparent removal of the moment of violence (as opposed to that of capture) from the flow of time, either through the bloodlessness of the battles (Bonampak and Chichén Itzá) or the presentation of victims as unarmed and powerless, and thus as individuals who have already been made captives prior to their depicted demise (Cacaxtla and Mulchic) – that has led to them increasingly being

¹⁷⁴ For discussions of the ideological bases of sacrifice in Mesoamerica, see Boone (1984), Graulich (2003), Stuart (2003), and Pasztory (2010).

¹⁷⁵ Early Spanish sources document the extent to which death occurred on the battlefield: “[The lords of Tlaxcala] replied that although the Mexicans had several times defeated them [with an army of 150,000 men], killing many of their subjects and taking away others to be sacrificed, they had also left many dead and prisoners on the field (Díaz del Castillo 1963 [1568]: 179); “...passions and quarrels rose again [between the Xiu, Cocom, and Chel lineages in Yucatan], so that 150,000 men died in battle (Landa 1941 [1565]: 41).” Even if these numbers are considered to be gross exaggerations, it seems clear that warriors indeed died during the course of battle.

discussed as highly constructed images with essentially similar messages and content to much of the rest of martially themed Mesoamerican art.

However, this characterization ignores a prominent feature shared by these paintings that represents a significant contrast between them and other artworks with which they evince a superficial affinity of similarly bellicose subject matter: their substantially greater narrativity, which derives from their representations of the varied actions of numerous, specific participants within integrated compositions that strongly suggest the conditions associated with the battlefield. Thus, despite the different approaches to pictorial narrativity exhibited by each of the mural programs discussed here, their shared pursuit of this mode of representation causes them to collectively stand out from the corpus of Mesoamerican monumental art alluding to warfare, which almost entirely tends towards greater iconicity.

The question then arises as to the implications of this shared departure from pictorial conventions. If, as was shown in Chapter Three, warfare was a constant and important presence throughout the course of Mesoamerican civilization, then the sudden emergence of narrativized portrayals of martial violence in the Epiclassic period cannot be understood as merely indicating a greater concern with bellicosity during that time. Rather, these experiments in representation reflect the self-image of the elites who commissioned them, and, by extension, their shifting conceptions of legitimized power. It is therefore the aim of the next chapter to explore possible explanations for the approximately contemporaneous appearance of unprecedented depictions of conflict at these otherwise unrelated sites by situating the innovation of battle scenes featuring a heightened pictorial narrativity in relation to the socio-political context of the brief period in which they were made.

CHAPTER 5

THE BATTLE MURALS AND THE CONTEXT OF THE EPICLASSIC PERIOD

In this chapter, the battle murals will be contextualized as functional objects of elite self-representation intended to reinforce and legitimize claims to authority. It is in this light that their brief, collective experimentation with pictorial narrativity will be analyzed. However, by asserting that a group of otherwise unrelated paintings reflect similar pictorial solutions motivated by the specific socio-political circumstances attendant to the era in which they were created, this study invokes an issue that has become increasingly fraught among both (art) historians generally and Mesoamericanists specifically: that of periodization. Therefore, prior to presenting a summary definition of the Epiclassic period as it is currently understood, this chapter will begin with a discussion of the problems associated with periodizing the past as well as a critical outline of the broad temporal framework commonly applied to Mesoamerica.

The Epiclassic Period

Problematizing Mesoamerican Periodization

Periodization refers to the common historical practice of partitioning the past into discrete segments based on features that are seen to be definitive and overarching. Periodization has been central to the field of art history, whose primary occupation since its conception has involved the defining of a series of successive styles and the linking of these to the cultural or historical circumstances of their production. While the periods under consideration can range from broad swaths of artistic production – Modernism, for example, which encompasses diverse movements in a variety of media – to the specific – the distinct

phases of the career of a single artist, for instance, such as Picasso's transition from his Blue Period, to Analytic Cubism, followed by Synthetic Cubism – the general approach to the classification and analysis of visual material has remained essentially constant: the grouping together of similar works, which in turn are contrasted with prior and subsequent art objects from which they differ.

Scholars half a century ago began to denaturalize the concept of periods, demonstrating that such divisions are more indicative of the modern relationship with the past than of any objective notion of reality. In his admirable attempt to describe the classifications of man-made things based on their temporal relationships to other things, *The Shape of Time*, George Kubler advocated the project of identifying formal sequences that represent evolving solutions to evolving problems (1962: 33). However, rather than suggesting that these groupings are absolute, he acknowledged that “every thing is a complex having not only traits, each with a different systematic age, but having also clusters of traits, or aspects, each with its own age...(*Ibid.* 99).” Thus, any artwork (or any thing at all) can be understood as participating simultaneously in numerous stylistic sequences of varying duration. Because “history cuts anywhere with equal ease, and a good story can begin anywhere the teller chooses (*Ibid.* 2),” the privileging of certain features as being more salient than others in the seriation of the past must be understood as arising from the concerns and biases of the historian's present.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁶ With archaeological civilizations such as ancient Mesoamerica the situation is further complicated by the biases inherent in the evidence available for study: durable materials able to survive for centuries of burial, often in rainforests. Thus, entire chronologies are often based solely on the morphological changes observed in shards of ceramic vessels over time, a data point that has been granted far too much weight as an indicator of ethnicity, economic conditions, demographics, and other broad societal categories (Kubler 1970: 132).

However, as Meyer Schapiro has noted, the identification of distinct periods is not entirely arbitrary, since these are typically founded on observable qualities (Schapiro, Janson, and Gombrich 1970: 113). Indeed, despite his recognition of the contingent nature of historical explanation, Kubler did not reject periodization outright but merely sought a more flexible structure to accommodate the multiplicity of factors to be considered. Thus, in his proposal for the periodization of ancient American civilization, three major temporal boundaries are drawn at points exhibiting a great degree of cultural change, but the rates at which these transitions occurred is understood as variable between the metropolises (fast) and the peripheral regions (slow). (1970: 129-131).¹⁷⁷ Kubler's "empty chronology" allowed for regional differences among interconnected cultures following a roughly aligned trajectory through early, middle, and late phases, followed by the arrival of the Spanish and the onset of the Colonial era.

The terms Kubler used for his tri-partite division – early, middle, and late – were an ultimately unsuccessful attempt to provide a neutral alternative to the loaded terminology – Preclassic (or Formative), Classic, and Postclassic – that took root in the early twentieth century and even today remains commonly employed by Mesoamericanists.¹⁷⁸ This latter

¹⁷⁷ It is precisely this recognition of the strong spatial bias underpinning ostensibly temporal periods that has generated the current anti-periodization sentiment among some art historians, who desire greater equitability within the discipline's treatment of art production from diverse regions and cultures. The urgency of this critique arises from the project of expanding a canon formerly dominated by the (Hegelian, teleological) narrative of artistic development in the Western European tradition to include all world art production (Piotrowski 2008; Kaufmann 2010). However, the extreme geographic localization of concepts that come to define periods occurs within Europe as well: the entire Renaissance can be understood as a predominantly Italian, or even a Florentine, phenomenon (Moxey n.d.: 6-9).

¹⁷⁸ While Kubler argued for the neutral terms Early, Middle, and Late in the text of his essay, the accompanying diagram identifies the periods as Formative, Classic, and Postclassic,

scheme, which implies development, florescence, and decadence or decline, is a familiar one that mirrors the stages of human life and is commonly applied to descriptions of cultural succession, most notably in the Archaic, Classical, and Hellenistic periods of ancient Greece. Ernst Gombrich has argued that the entire periodization of styles upon which (European) art history is based can be understood as alternations between a striving for a classical ideal and its rejection, and as such manifests the primacy of a single term of aesthetic judgment (1966). The “Classic”-based periodization terminology reflects the application of a similar conceptual framework onto Mesoamerican civilization.

Kubler’s was not the only attempt to reform the Mesoamerican period system. Barbara Price proposed the adoption of a schema based on the one used by Andeanists, in which intermediate periods of regionalism alternate with phases of widespread interaction known as horizons (1976). Preserving the tripartite division (Early, Middle, and Late Horizons) but under a more neutral terminology, Horizons nevertheless present a rigidity that made them less than desirable for use in Mesoamerica. They posit periods of deep interactivity and therefore insist on an exact synchronicity between regional chronologies that the evidence does not seem to support (Demarest and Foias 1993: 151-154). Additionally, what exactly defines a horizon is debatable. The Middle Horizon, corresponding to the Classic period, exhibits high levels of interactivity between Central Mexico (Teotihuacan), Oaxaca (Monte Alban), the Maya region, and the Gulf Coast. However, each of these regions maintained its own unique cultural expressions, and the existence of representatives of one culture in the region of another is often indicated by the

suggesting that he recognized the impossibility of replacing terminology that had already “hardened” in its usage, and instead focused on creating a more flexible conception of the boundaries between periods (1970: 128-130).

presence of paradigmatic art and architecture styles. Conversely, the Late Intermediate Period (corresponding with the Epiclassic and Early Postclassic periods), which is typically associated with artistic eclecticism and political factionalism, has recently been shown to have had possessed a widespread religio-political symbol system that would seem to have as much claim to being a horizon as the period that preceded it (Ringle, *et al.* 1998; López Austin and López Luján 2000). Thus, despite its more neutral terminology, the Horizon system has never gained widespread acceptance among Mesoamericanists.¹⁷⁹

Thus, while most scholars, myself included, continue to use the term “Classic” as the anchor of a tripartite periodization of Mesoamerica, it is generally understood to be a pure convention lacking the implication of either a uniform developmental trajectory or an inherent value judgment. Additionally, as the complex interactions that permeated all periods of cultural development in the region become ever more apparent, the blurring of the temporal boundaries that Kubler proposed have taken on greater refinement. The periods have been subdivided into early, middle, and late phases, and the large degree of continuity has meant that the divisions between them are seen as less definitive than they once were. Nevertheless, beyond mere perpetuation for convention’s sake, there are enough indications of major pan-regional cultural and political shifts (i.e. between the Formative and Classic periods and between the Classic and Postclassic periods) to justify the continued implementation of the current schema.

¹⁷⁹ The most recent attempt to insert Horizon terminology into the literature included frank disclosures of the problems associated with this system so that, even though it was put forward as a more neutral alternative that deemphasizes cultural development, it never posed a serious challenge to the deeply rooted “Classic” terminology (Stone-Miller 1993).

The Concept of the Epiclassic Period

The Epiclassic, also referred to as the Terminal Classic by many Mayanists, refers to the period of transition between the Classic and Postclassic eras, and is therefore defined in terms of a series of cultural continuities and disjunctions. Thus, prior to a delineation of the characteristics of the Epiclassic, a brief discussion of the Classic period in Mesoamerica is necessary.

The term “classical” was first used to describe what was considered the apogee of Maya civilization in the Southern Lowlands, and specifically refers to the period during which stone monuments were erected that contained hieroglyphic inscriptions which included dates in the Long Count calendar (Thompson 1943: 106). While other features, such as the use of the corbel vault in stone architecture, are often cited as hallmarks of the Classic, only the presence of Initial Series dates inscribed on stelae remains confined to the span of time now commonly associated with this period, c. 250-900 A.D. (Martin and Grube 2000: 8-9; Coe 2005: 87). Thus, the term Classic is accompanied by both a cultural-regional bias (Southern Lowland Maya civilization) and a privileging of monumental stone artwork featuring precise calendrical notation as evidence of cultural achievement.

In Central Mexico, the term Classic has come to be associated with the period during which the imposing metropolis of Teotihuacan was a major cultural and political power. The presence of Teotihuacan traits such as ceramics, architectural profiles, and iconography in the Maya region, and the apparently important role played by Teotihuacanos in Early Classic Maya political history at sites such as Tikal and Copán, has suggested strong ties and essential chronological overlap between the two regions (Braswell 2003). Additionally, compounds housing populations from the Maya area as well as from Oaxaca and the Gulf

Coast have been identified at Teotihuacan (Cowgill 2008: 99). However, most current estimations for the dating of Teotihuacan place the florescence of the city to between 100 B.C. and 650 A.D., with recent analysis of radiocarbon data suggesting that the destruction of the elite central portion occurred as early as 550 A.D. (Beramendi-Orosco, *et al.* 2009). Thus, the Central Mexican Classic period predates that of the Maya region by several centuries.

The Epiclassic period was originally proposed as an attempt to impose a conceptual framework upon the temporal transition between Teotihuacan and Toltec dominance in Central Mexico (Jiménez Moreno 1966: 49-55). Since this span of time also corresponds with the Late Classic transition into the Early Postclassic in the Maya region, it has become a useful tool to scholars attempting to model pan-regional socio-political and economic dynamics (often under the rubric of “world systems”) during an especially volatile time in Mesoamerican history.¹⁸⁰

At its height, Teotihuacan was not only the most populous city in the Americas, but was among the largest in the world at that time (Chandler and Fox 1974: 368). While Teotihuacan suffered a violent termination event in the burning of its civic center, this was merely the most dramatic episode of what was a prolonged period of decline lasting some two centuries. Millon suggests that a century of stagnation in the Late Xolalpan phase, during which time there is little evidence for new construction, preceded a brief resurgence of building and art production in the Metepec phase, which was brought to a halt by the

¹⁸⁰ While Janet Berlo, in calling for the implementation of a Horizon system, has decried such additions to the “Classic” scheme as “stopgap measures”, I believe that it is exactly such modifications that demonstrate the flexibility of the traditional system; a horizon, which by its very nature implies an exact temporal concordance between cultures, would be inherently less, not more flexible as Berlo suggested (1989b: 209-210).

conflagration (1988: 142-149).¹⁸¹ No major construction occurred during the subsequent Coyotlatelco phase, and the destroyed buildings remained abandoned (Manzanilla 2003: 101). However, even with a greatly reduced population mostly occupying suburban structures, the city likely remained the largest and most densely settled community in Central Mexico for the next century or more (Diehl 1989: 12).¹⁸² Yet, while there is evidence of continued economic activity such as craft specialization at this time, Teotihuacan never regained its formerly central role in either trade or religious matters (Millon 1988: 155; Diehl 1989: 14-15).

Numerous theories have been put forward to account for the decline and fall of Teotihuacan, which was undoubtedly a complex process involving numerous factors: environmental collapse associated with deforestation, loss of power or legitimacy by the city's elites, loss of control over trade networks, and incursion by foreign groups (Manzanilla 2003: 94-96; Moragas Segura 2003: 263-279). The waning of Teotihuacan hegemony could be as much a symptom as a cause of the conditions that created the Epiclassic period. As Teotihuacan lost influence, numerous peripheral sites grew in importance, including Xochicalco, Teotenango, El Tajín, and Cacaxtla. While the exact nature of the cause-and-effect dynamics related to this shift in power is unclear, these sites all appear to have participated in a widespread political and economic realignment whose ramifications were felt across Mesoamerica (Webb 1978: 160-168; Diehl and Berlo 1989).

¹⁸¹ The dates given for the phases of Teotihuacan occupation vary in the literature. As mentioned above, the latest 14C dating of the fire that destroyed the city center places it at c. 550 A.D., which would push the traditional dating of Late Xolalpan (c. 550-650 A.D.) back at least 100 years.

¹⁸² Manzanilla acknowledges the continued habitation of Teotihuacan during the Coyotlatelco phase, but she has suggested that such settlements were small and scattered (2003: 95-101).

The Maya region was certainly involved in this turmoil, although once again the exact cause-effect relationship between the upheavals in eastern and western Mesoamerica is uncertain. What was once characterized as the sudden “collapse” of Maya civilization in the Southern Lowlands in the ninth century A.D. is now recognized as a two-century process of increasing factionalism and inter-polity conflict that resulted in significant social, political, and economic restructuring, although in a less than uniform manner across the different sub-regions of the Maya zone (Demarest, *et al.* 2004; Aimers 2007). Contemporaneous with the upheavals in the Southern Maya region, the Northern Lowlands experienced a brief florescence, with population growth and ambitious programs of art and architecture at numerous sites on the Yucatan Peninsula (Carmean, *et al.* 2004). However, within a century this region underwent its own chain reaction of collapse, culminating in the abandonment of Chichén Itzá by about 1050 A.D. (Andrews, *et al.* 2003).

As with Teotihuacan, scholars have suggested numerous explanations for the Maya collapse, all of which likely intermeshed to foment a complex and self-reinforcing process of societal segmentation and endemic conflict. Population pressures and environmental factors undoubtedly played a role in the growing instability of the region as untenably large populations competed over increasingly scarce resources (Culbert 1988). Outside populations – specifically the Itzá or Putun Maya from the Gulf Coast, who are believed to have taken over control of vital trade routes in the wake of Teotihuacan’s diminution – likely took advantage of an already fractious political environment to make incursions into the Maya region (Ball and Taschek 1989). Most notably, a growing number of secondary elites are depicted and named on monuments in the eighth and ninth centuries A.D., suggesting an increasingly crowded political landscape ripe with the potential for status rivalry (Stuart

1995: 273-277; Webster 2000). Indeed, hierarchical relationships among individual members of the nobility, as well between allied or subordinated sites, are common topics of Late Classic inscriptions, and have been identified archaeologically through analysis of architectural complexes and settlement patterns (Hendon 1991).

The pan-Mesoamerican social reorganization that took place during the Epiclassic period has been characterized as a shift from centralized to segmentary states (Marcus 1989), or, put another way, from a corporate strategy of political economy involving elite control over local resources, to a network strategy in which status was linked to the ability to establish and maintain strategic trade relationships with distant partners (Blanton, *et al.* 1996: 4-5, 9-10). Such characterizations perhaps oversimplify matters; nevertheless, they serve as a point of departure for current understanding of the essential and widespread organizational transformations that have come to define the Epiclassic.

While there is great stylistic diversity in the art produced across Mesoamerica during the Epiclassic period, two widespread features are commonly cited as distinguishing it: eclecticism and a focus on militaristic themes (Kubler 1979; Cohodas 1989a: 222). As discussed above, the heightened bellicosity of Epiclassic artworks has often been taken as a straightforward indication of the increased prevalence of warfare (Mathews 2000: 128-129; Aguilar Moreno 2006: 18-21). The tendency towards eclecticism, on the other hand, is commonly seen as reflecting the intentional self-fashioning of local identity in a time of extensive intercultural exchange through trade, migration, and conquest (Nagao 1989: 98-100). Such purposeful self-representation is characteristic of all monumental artworks, and thus the following section will consider the battle murals in terms of their functionality as transmitters of messages intended to bolster the authority of those who commissioned them.

The Battle Murals and Strategies of Elite Self-Representation

The Role of Monumental Art in Elite Legitimization

It is often taken as self-evident that monumental art functions (or is intended to function) to reinforce the authority of those in power. Such artworks, by the mere fact of their existence, testify to a surplus of disposable wealth and the command of highly skilled artisanal labor. Additionally, the placement of monuments demonstrates the ability to impose control over the landscape and to demarcate, give meaning to, or even sanctify space (Lefebvre 1991 [1974]: 223-226). To probe deeper into the relationship between monumental art and rulership, however, is to raise questions with regard to the nature of authority, its production, and its legitimization.

Max Weber defined authority as the high probability that “commands from a given source will be obeyed by a given group of persons,” further suggesting that systems in which obedience is based primarily on material interests or calculations of personal advantage are inherently unstable (1947 [1925]: 324-325). Similarly, in distinguishing between power and violence (i.e. coerced obedience), Hannah Arendt observed that even the most oppressive, totalitarian regimes require a base of voluntary adherents to successfully implement their control over society (1969: 50-51). Thus, some additional, ideological rationale for legitimate authority is typically invoked, of which Weber identified three types: legal authority, based on a set of agreed upon socially binding rules; traditional authority, based on the recognition and sanctity of inherited status; and charismatic authority, based on the recognition of the special qualities of a specific individual (*op. cit.* 328). Regardless of what form it takes, legitimization depends upon the shared recognition of an underlying ideology upon which its claims are founded (Bourdieu 1979: 82-83).

Participation within a shared ideological system, manifested through ritual and symbolism, provides a unifying counterbalance to the underlying tendency towards self-interest and segmentation inherent to power relations (Cohen 1969: 221). More than empty political theatrics, such symbolic enterprises contribute to the production of the “animating center” of a society, which in turn endows those involved with the charisma of authority (Geertz 1977: 152). Thus, symbolic systems do not simply point to power structures, but rather can be understood as actively contributing to their formation and perpetuation (Cohen 1969: 220).

Taking the above into consideration, monumental art should be approached not simply as a mirror of elite ideology, but rather as a participatory agent involved in the process of reproducing the structures of power relations (DeMarrais, *et al.* 1996; Sanchez 1997: 1-10). That is to say, monumental artworks such as the battle murals were created to be experienced in specific contexts by specific segments of society. Furthermore, the ways in which an artwork is experienced – the interactive relationship it demands and the responses it elicits from the viewer – encode a variety of implicit meanings with regard to the nature of the authority to which it owes its existence and the (actual, desired, or perceived) relationship of this authority to its intended audience.

The Contexts and Intended Audiences of the Murals

With the exception of Cacaxtla, all of the Mesoamerican battle scenes that are the focus of this study were painted on the interior walls of elite structures that could accommodate only a handful of people at any one time. And all of the murals, including those from Cacaxtla, appear to have been painted with an acute awareness of the architectural

settings they were created to inhabit. Thus, the paintings can be seen as both being subordinated to the spaces they occupy and as activating them. The possibilities and restrictions created by this interaction between art and architecture provide indications of the ways in which the battle murals were intended to be experienced as well as their intended audiences, important factors to take into consideration in an analysis of the implicit meanings of their narrativity.

Cacaxtla

Situated on the talus of platform bordering the large plaza at the heart of the site, the Battle Mural at Cacaxtla would have been sunlit, seen regularly by those crossing the space, and potentially visible to significant numbers of people simultaneously (Fig. 3). While this relative visibility sets the Cacaxtla painting apart from the other battle scenes, it should be noted that the entire archaeological site of Cacaxtla – a small, fortified hilltop overlooking a broad valley – was essentially a large palace or elite ritual-administrative center. Therefore, access even to the most public portions of the complex would have been relatively restricted, with outside or lower rank individuals only gaining admittance under specific, highly controlled conditions that likely involved great solemnity or ceremonial pomp. However, within the fortress of Cacaxtla, the Battle Mural was prominently displayed in one of the most public settings. The openness of the space in front of it allows for a wide view that takes in the entire scene, followed by a leisurely peripatetic examination of the individual figures.

As discussed in Chapter Four, the compositional symmetry between the two halves of the Battle Mural – in which the primary pairing of 3 Deer and the Bird Captain are repeated

on either side of the central stairway and at either end vanquished bird warriors (W19 and E27) are depicted seated with their backs to the battle – demonstrates the significant subordination of the painting to the architecture it adorns. The representation of the most noteworthy figures towards the center of the composition, a fact further attested to by the selective preservation of only this portion of the painting during its burial, indicates the heightened importance of the area immediately surrounding the stairway. This latter feature is the marked center that both divides and is framed by the mural, and the functionality of the stairs suggests that the battle scene demarcates a liminal zone.

Indeed, a distinction can be drawn between the more restricted space on top of the platform and the openness of the plaza onto which it faces, creating a spatial hierarchy between those individuals who have mounted the stairs that divide the two halves of the Battle Mural from those who observe from the open court below. Individuals appearing atop the platform would have been unable to view the painted battle scene, but to an audience gathered in the plaza below the depicted conquest would appear to form the very foundation upon which they stood.

This suggestive configuration, in which a direct equivalence is created between the visceral embodiment of conquest and the foundations of monumental architecture, is seen at numerous sites across Mesoamerica. The construction of these buildings were almost certainly made possible by labor obtained through military conquest and the ongoing threat of future violence, and this was explicitly presented in their decorative and consecratory programs. Examples include the hundreds of Danzantes embedded into the walls of the base of Building L from Monte Alban, the numerous Maya structures containing captive stairs, and the bodies of dozens of sacrificed warriors arranged beneath the Feathered Serpent

Pyramid at Teotihuacan.¹⁸³ The most direct parallel with the example from Cacaxtla is found at the Palace of Palenque, where captive figures flank a central stairway leading to a wide reception hall overlooking a central, open yet restricted plaza.

However, the Cacaxtla painting differs from all the previous examples by its representation of both victors and vanquished as equally prominent participants in the scene. Rather than simply creating a relationship of subordination between the privileged position of the ruler and his entourage standing upon the platform and the vanquished individuals depicted on its side, the latter are depicted as being directly dominated by a multitude of individuated warriors whose presence in the scene also places them in a similar relationship as their victims to the live actors in front of them in the plaza and above them on the platform. Thus, a series of hierarchies are embedded into the painted and architectural program of the central plaza at Cacaxtla: victorious jaguar warriors collectively vanquishing their bird warrior counterparts, and both groups subordinated to the apotheosized elite(s) occupying the platform above. The latter likely indicates 3 Deer himself, the apparent leader of the jaguar faction who is not only depicted twice as a victorious warrior with attributes of

¹⁸³ The inclusion of the last example in this list leads to several interesting questions. As real, rather than depicted bodies, they raise the issue of how representation was understood in ancient Mesoamerica – could imagery be as efficacious as flesh in marking space, or were the two recognized as ontologically distinct? Furthermore, while they index a ceremony that could have been witnessed and remembered by large numbers of people, after their burial the bodies were no longer observable and thus their material presence was given precedence over their ongoing visual consumption. What are the implications of this for our understanding of artworks such as the battle murals? Some representational artworks – the carved bottoms of many Aztec sculptures, for instance – were certainly created with the expectation that their presence alone was sufficient and that visibility would not be required of them. I would argue, however, that this is not the case for the battle murals, the narrativity of which seems to presuppose, even to necessitate the act of viewing them.

the Storm God near the center of the Battle Mural, but who is also shown as a semi-divine dancer on the south jamb of the slightly later Structure A.¹⁸⁴

During ceremonial events, the audience of the Cacaxtla Battle Mural found itself placed into a paradigmatic relationship with the depicted warriors and a syntagmatic relationship with the individuals elevated above the plaza in Structure B. They would be expected to identify with the participants of the battle, the visceral immediacy of which this painting, more than any other Mesoamerican artwork, succeeds in representing. There is competition for their affective response, however, as both the triumphant aggression of the victors and the agony and impotence of the defeated are equally palpable. Thus, whether the audience was composed of important personages from allied or subjugated polities, all were gathered on the symbolic battlefield of the plaza, where valor in life-or-death conflict was given primacy and the lives of all involved were submitted to the will of the ruler above. Meanwhile, any ritual or ceremonial events occurring on top of the platform literally took place above the fray.

Bonampak

At Bonampak, the situation is essentially inverted, with the battle scene covering three interior walls of a small chamber high above the plaza below. Although the site appears to have suffered abandonment just prior to the completion of the painting program, and therefore the murals were likely never experienced as they were intended, this anticipated viewership should be understood as contributing significantly to their planned compositional

¹⁸⁴ It is worth noting that in both cases the images of 3 Deer mark spaces of transition and access: the stairway leading to Structure B and a jamb of the portal leading to the inner chamber of Structure A.

structure. Access to the inner spaces of Structure 1 was likely restricted to individuals interacting with Bonampak royalty – highly structured moments of ceremonial gravity – and once they entered any further movement would immediately have been hindered by the large, U-shaped benches that fill the chambers.¹⁸⁵ Thus, there are two possible perspectives from which the paintings could be viewed: the privileged position from atop the bench, presumably occupied by the royal person or his closest relations; or the subordinated position just inside the entryway, occupied by individuals being received by the ruler.

The organization of the paintings in each room acknowledges this two-fold audience, with clear divisions between what is represented on the north wall, which frames the doorway and was viewed by the individual seated within the chamber, and what is shown on the south wall, which is visible upon entering into the room and served as a backdrop for the enthroned noble. In Room 1, the presentation of the child heir to a group of gathered nobility, the bulk of the long Initial Series inscription, and the three ornately dressed dancers at the center of the festivities are all found on the south wall across from the entrance. Compared to these primary demonstrations of the power and legitimacy of the Bonampak royal family, the episodes visible on the north wall are seemingly of a supporting nature: the dressing of the principal dancers and the presentation of sumptuary gifts, moments that privilege a behind-the-scenes intimacy over the ceremonial pomp featured on the opposite wall. In Room 3, the

¹⁸⁵ I would contend that the sumptuousness of the decoration of Structure 1, its relatively low position on the acropolis, and the near filling of the rooms with benches that severely restrict entry all point to the exclusive use of this building by the Bonampak nobility in ceremonial events, and particularly to receive foreign dignitaries. Ritual activities of a more private nature, such as royal bloodletting, likely took place in a more secluded environment: Structure 9, with its high position on the acropolis and the abundant space around its bench, would possibly be a better candidate for such activities to judge by the bloodletting scene depicted on the east wall of Room 3, which features several individuals standing and seated on the floor as well as on a bench in an enclosed room.

situation is nearly identical, with the south wall filled by a ceremonial spectacle involving numerous elaborately garbed dancers and a human sacrifice, while the north wall contains two registers of groups of plainly dressed, standing and seated nobles engaged in discussion – a less glamorous behind-the-scenes moment nevertheless crucial to the negotiation of power relations among neighboring sites.

In Room 2, the panoramic scene of conflict that spans the west, south, and east walls is intended to fill the vision of the (subordinate) visitor while the royal personage is presented with a subsequent scene in which the captives taken in battle are arranged on the steps of the acropolis. The roiling battle surrounding the actually present person of the ruler becomes an externalized projection of his might and wrath, allowing him to adopt a suitably calm demeanor befitting of his station while perpetually maintaining the suggestion of overwhelming force ready to be unleashed. Meanwhile, the individual standing in the entryway is flanked by painted rows of armed guards and is situated beneath a depiction of the ruler standing above. Thus, the incorporation of the visitor into the surrounding scene manifests his subordinated role. Despite his having ascended to the elevated position of Structure 1, the painting surrounding the visitor in the entrance situates him back down below, at the base of the steps.

This is accomplished because the mural on the north wall of Room 2 depicts events that take place on the terraced platform upon which Structure 1 sits, thereby turning space inside out. The same relationship of the bodies of prisoners to monumental architecture that was discussed above with regard to Cacaxtla, and which is seen manifested at numerous other Mesoamerican sites, is suggested by the arrangement of the captives sprawled across

the stepped mound. However, in this case the analogy is indicated somewhat less literally as the represented architecture is as much a simulacrum as the figures.

The conditions involved in viewing the Bonampak murals, aside from being more controlled and more intimate than at Cacaxtla, also include the relative darkness of their surroundings. Only a limited amount of sunlight enters through the doorways, and there are no indications that a torch was ever brought into the rooms (M. Miller 2002: 12).¹⁸⁶ This means that, even under optimal conditions, viewing the images requires a period of adjustment as one's eyes adapt to the dimness of the interior space. The necessity for such an extended viewing would seem to encourage viewers, both ancient and modern, to consider the mural program in all its complexities, to allow their gaze to traverse between the myriad details as they read the pictorial narratives presented in the paintings.

Chichén Itzá

The exclusivity associated with the locations of the murals depicting combat at Chichén Itzá is even greater than that encountered at Bonampak. The most accessible of these spaces – Room 22 of the Monjas – is located at the rear of the second story of what appears to have been a ritual/administrative complex in the southern portion of the site.¹⁸⁷

The wide stairway and platform of this structure suggest a relative permissibility of

¹⁸⁶ Mary Miller has proposed that large white cloth mantels could have been used to reflect additional ambient light into Structure 1 as an aid in viewing the paintings (*Ibid.*).

¹⁸⁷ The hieroglyphic texts on the lintels of the Monjas refer to the (presumably deceased) parents of K'ak'upakal as well as several deities, suggesting that this structure was dedicated to the (real and mythical) lineage of the individual now widely recognized as being the preeminent figure in Chichén Itzá during this period (Grube and Krochock 2007: 234-235). While there is little direct evidence for how this building was used, it likely served a public function, possibly as the day-to-day seat of this ruler's power (García Campillo 2001: 417-418).

admittance, but the elevated situation and massiveness of the imposing architecture nevertheless demarcates it as a place of solemn importance (García Campillo 2002: 417-418). To the north, the Temple of the Warriors and Upper Temple of the Jaguar both belong to the Great Terrace, a large ceremonial precinct girded by a wall that regulated all access. Further choke points and transitional spaces ensured that admittance to these elevated chambers would be even more restricted and that those gaining entry would be primed to consider these spaces and the activities they housed as especially potent. To enter the Temple of the Warriors, one first had to cross the cavernous hall of the Northwest Colonnade,¹⁸⁸ ascend a stairway that projected through its roof, and pass between twin serpent columns into the two-roomed, quadruple-vaulted structure. The UTJ, which belongs to the Great Ball Court complex, required visitors to ascend a precarious stairway and traverse a narrow, unprotected ledge to attain the final steps leading through the serpent columns guarding its entry.

The amount of daylight able to penetrate the inner chambers of the UTJ and the Temple of the Warriors at Chichén Itzá would have been significantly less than in the relatively small, single vaulted rooms at Bonampak or Mulchic, or in the wide gallery space of Room 22 from the Monjas with its three doorways. Thus, despite the inability to confirm the ancient use of torches due to the ruined condition of the vaulting in these structures, the presence of some variety of artificial lighting must be presumed as necessary for the viewing of these paintings. This would have had an impact on how they were experienced, as the

¹⁸⁸ “Cavernous” by Mesoamerican standards, as large, continuously roofed rooms were a relative rarity in the architecture of the region.

flickering light of a flame would have danced across the figures, contributing to a sense of movement and action within the scenes.

Due to the extremely fragmentary nature of the paintings from the Temple of the Warriors and the Monjas, it is impossible to situate the few documented portions within what were undoubtedly elaborate and highly structured decorative programs. Similarly, the paintings that once covered the vaulting of the inner chamber and the walls and vaults of the outer chamber of the UTJ have been almost completely lost. Nevertheless, the organization of the surviving panels from the walls of the inner room of this building and their relationship with the space they occupy provide an adequate basis for reconstructing the experience attendant on viewing these artworks.

Along the line of symmetry that forms the central axis of the UTJ are found five double portraits: one on each of the three visible surfaces of the carved wooden lintel that spans the doorway between the outer and inner chambers; one on the central panel of the east wall, directly across from the doorway, and one on the upper surface of the table-throne that once sat beneath it at the center of the room. More than mere portraits, these figures, which are shown in profile facing each other, are engaged in a dialogue, perhaps representing a *détente* or the formulation of a military alliance. Comparison with other Epiclassic imagery suggests that the latter is likely the case: similar depictions of paired figures meeting in ball court settings at El Tajín and in the Mixtec codices are followed by allusions to jointly waged warfare (Koontz 2009b: 45-46). The repetition and prime positioning of the paired conversing figures in the UTJ, as well as the building's position overlooking the Great Ball Court, suggest that this structure was a location intended for such political-military

discourse.¹⁸⁹ Thus, with their intended audience now tentatively identified, the battle murals can be situated in a relationship with their viewership.

Lacking an apparent reading order or clear causal connections between the individual panels, the paintings are nevertheless thematically united and their symmetrical arrangement on the walls of the chamber suggests that the lynchpin of their unification resides in their positional relationship to the centrally placed bench and the personage who occupied it. The common compositional pattern that each of the panels appears to follow places the victorious camp at the bottom and the invaded territory at the top, with an expanse of middle ground in between. The individual military campaigns are depicted in a relational perspective that equates vertical position with the depth of distance. Thus, encircled by the six panels, the privileged viewer at the center of the room occupies the heart of an expansionist empire based upon conquest and the extraction of tribute.

Unlike at Bonampak, the relatively open space of the UTJ invites viewers to circulate freely, stopping to examine each of the paintings individually. This would seem to encourage a more engaged contemplation of the battle scenes, and points to their potential employment for didactic purposes. They could have served as mnemonic illustrations to both guide and augment the recounting of important historical battles. Moreover, the proliferation of detailed specificity, and the great variety of confrontations, landscapes, and tactics depicted in the UTJ murals – all of which are shown in relation to prior successful campaigns – provide a

¹⁸⁹ In a recent article, Ringle has argued that the prevalence of cloud serpent imagery in the UTJ indicates that this space was the domain of a posited high ranking military leader associated with Mixcoatl, an interpretation with greater specificity than I believe is warranted by the accompanying iconographic analysis and ethnological analogy (2009: 32-36).

wealth of generally useful information that could potentially aid in the training of young military leaders or in the planning of future conquests.

Mulchic

The murals at Mulchic are found on the walls of the single large chamber of Structure A. Based on the situation of the building, access to the interior can be surmised to have been somewhat restricted, but not overly so, and therefore similar to what was seen at Bonampak or the Monjas at Chichén Itzá, with an expected audience comprised primarily of allied and subordinate members of the local power hierarchy. The surviving murals are too fragmentary to allow for anything more than a general discussion of the overall structure of the original program, which appears to have focused overwhelmingly on depictions of ritual violence. The best-preserved paintings are found to either side of the entrance on the south wall, and these present an interesting relationship to the functionality of the architecture, specifically with regard to the negative space of the entryway.

The contrast between the so-called battle scene to right of the doorway and the structured ceremonial compartment of the scene of ritual human sacrifice to the left was discussed above in Chapter Four. Two figures costumed as the god Chaac in an identical manner to the sacrificers on the left are located directly to the right of the doorway, processing in profile with their backs to what is otherwise a chaotic scene of violence. These figures create a visual link with the scene across the doorway, which they appear poised to cross. Thus, in a similar manner to what is seen in all three rooms of Bonampak Structure 1, any living individual who walked through the portal (either entering or leaving the building) briefly became a participant in their procession.

Narrativity and the Implicit Messages of the Battle Murals

Much of the preceding discussion of the contexts and audiences of the individual painting programs imagined their depicted content as being conceived as having a presence with relation to both the architectural spaces the murals were created to occupy and the embodied viewer who encountered them. This condition – representation as literally making something present – was introduced in Chapter Four as a characteristic quality of artworks exhibiting significant iconicity, and would thus seemingly be at odds with what has been argued is the high degree of narrativity possessed by the battle murals. However, in each case the elements of the mural programs that are the most actively engaged with the space as it is inhabited are the same features that shade towards the iconic end of the pictorial spectrum: the underlying symmetrical organization at Cacaxtla and the UTJ, both of which associate repeated figural pairings with the central axis / point of egress; and the depiction of ambulatory figures adjacent to doorways at Bonampak and Mulchic, a circumstance that allows for the specific actions that are represented to become perpetuated only through the most generalized extension of the processional act.

The battle murals certainly present superficial thematic similarities with other bellicose artworks: military might, past conquest transformed into present power and wealth. However, as was argued in the previous chapter, their narrativity serves to distinguish them. While the association of the bodies of the conquered with monumental architecture on Structure B of Cacaxtla or the north wall of Room 2 at Bonampak can be seen as belonging to a widespread tradition that includes the Danzantes of Monte Alban and captive stairs at numerous Maya sites, their unprecedented presentation of this theme in complex, multi-figural compositions reflects a radical shift, not only in their mode of representation, but also

in the implicit messages communicated by these paintings. Analysis of this underlying content, particularly with regard to the portrayal of violence as a collective endeavor, suggests that the choice to produce monumental artworks depicting battle scenes was directly related to the socio-political climate of the Epiclassic period.

The murals are noteworthy for depicting violence as a group activity. While violence was a common subject in Mesoamerican art, as was seen in Chapter Three, it was typically alluded to indirectly, through symbolic imagery or representations of its aftermath. When the moment of violence was represented, it was almost always in the form of single pairs of figures engaged in a relationship of domination and subjugation. Images suggesting the existence of established military organization, such as rows of nearly identical processional warriors with standardized costumes and weaponry, generally avoided the portrayal of violent acts. They manifested the ability of the state to control and coordinate martial activity, but they left violence as the unstated, or even unnecessary, consequence of this show of force, existing only by insinuation in the mind of the viewer.

This pictorial emphasis on the communal nature of acts of martial violence, however, cannot be taken as merely reflecting the greater brutality of this period. The political environment of the Epiclassic indeed seems to have become increasingly segmentary and fractious at this time; however, the evidence for warfare presented in Chapter Three demonstrates that state violence, often occurring on a massive scale, played an important role at all points of Mesoamerican cultural history. Archaeological evidence attesting to the militarism of the Teotihuacan and Zapotec states and eyewitness historical accounts testifying to the extreme organization and heightened spectacularization of violence in the Aztec empire are accompanied by only the most generalized allusions to martial activity in

the monumental art of these cultures. Thus, the choice to commemorate acts of collective bloodshed in narrativized imagery must have been motivated by more nuanced concerns than state-sponsored glorification of violence. I believe that these concerns are most profitably conceived as relating to the legitimization of political power.

Regardless of the exact nature of the direct and indirect causes that led to the downfall of Teotihuacan and the Classic Maya city-states, this process was accompanied by a concomitant erosion of long-recognized sources of political legitimacy. Notably, the assertion of a right to rule based solely on parentage no longer held the same weight as it previously had. In the better documented Maya region, the expansion of the elite classes through the practice of polygamy placed pressures on rulers to accommodate the growing numbers and competing interests of potential rival claimants to the throne (Webster 2000: 109-110). Noble titles proliferated during the Late Classic period, both in their number and how freely they were used, suggesting an attempt to create nuanced distinctions between various statuses as well as the greater liberalness with which terms of rank were applied (Stuart 1993: 324-332). This was certainly the case at Bonampak, where, among the dozens of depicted dignitaries accompanied by nominal captions, numerous different titles are in evidence, many of which incorporate the word *ahaw* (“lord”) as their base (Arellano Hernández 1998: 41-43). Some important individuals are accompanied by multiple different titles, with the Bonampak ruler Chaan Muwan II carrying five or more titles in the texts naming him in Room 2 (*Ibid.* 42).¹⁹⁰ Additionally, even a qualified title suggesting a semi-

¹⁹⁰ Although Chaan Muwan of Bonampak is clearly the protagonist of the battle and his accompanying inscription carries more titles than any other figure, one of the titles appears to identify him as a vassal lord acting under the auspices of the ruler of the neighboring site of Lacanjá (Miller and Houston 1998: 253).

divine status – *k'uhul ahaw* (“holy lord”) – is associated with multiple individuals in the murals, indicating just how crowded the upper echelon of Maya society had become (Miller and Houston 1998: 250).

This over-saturated deployment of honorifics in the Late Classic period very likely served to undermine the potency once attached to such titles and the offices to which they referred. As greater numbers of individuals were dubbed “sacred lords” or “sustainers of the world” (*bacabob*), the essential arbitrariness of these epithets would have become apparent. In such a situation, claims to legitimate power would increasingly need to have been actively and convincingly substantiated. The transition from the Classic to the Epiclassic period can therefore be broadly characterized, in the system delineated by Max Weber, as a transition from traditional to charismatic bases for authority, in which the personal qualities and achievements of individuals became more important than established systems of rank and hierarchy (1947 [1925]: 329).¹⁹¹

In projecting images of themselves as military leaders, Maya rulers had traditionally erected stelae on which they were represented clothed in the trappings of warriors, often with captives at their feet. The strong iconicity of such monuments – which, as manifestations of a certain role associated with rulership, functioned in much the same way as titles – was

¹⁹¹ It goes without saying that charisma played a not insignificant role in legitimizing rulers in the primarily traditional systems of authority of the Classic period and that tradition continued to be invoked during the Epiclassic. The shift from one system to another is therefore one of emphasis and degrees, in which greater weight was given to charismatic authority – the ability of a potential ruler to command obedience through the force of their perceived qualities of leadership – than had been the case previously. To put it another way, while Classic rulership was based on charisma, this was largely conceived as accruing to the individual through the office (i.e. through inheritance); in the Epiclassic, with more individuals laying claim to titles of distinction, these lost their inherent power of authority and charisma increasingly became a quality that rulers had to actively demonstrate outside of the traditional system.

intended to reinforce the vital presence of the portrayed individual; but in the significantly charged political environment of that period, they had the potential to become viewed – comparably to staged images of Michael Dukakis riding in a tank or George Bush landing in a jet on the deck of an air craft carrier parked close to shore – as merely empty posturing. Thus, While Chaan Muwan followed tradition when he had himself represented in warrior regalia on Bonampak Stela 1 in 780 A.D., a scant ten years later he commissioned the elaborate narrative battle scene in Room 2, a persuasive pictorial document attesting to the actuality of his martial accomplishments.

I believe that what I have identified as the narrativity of the battle murals – the pictorial quality that unites these otherwise unrelated artworks and distinguishes them from other martially themed monuments – is directly related to the changing requirements of this political landscape. Their different approaches to pictorial narrativity reflect the independent experimentation by artists at each of the sites where they are found as they sought new means to visually express power, ones that made evident the charismatic authority of individual rulers rather than emphasizing the traditional authority attached to the offices they held. A shift in the portrayal of bellicose subject matter from a more iconic to a more narrative mode of representation paradoxically accomplished this goal by situating the person of the ruler within a pictorial space shared by numerous other figures. This had several interrelated effects: it forcefully substantiated the active role played by the ruler on the battlefield, and thus justified his assumption of the duties of a military commander on the basis of merit rather than default; it depicted the ruler as the head of a large group of allies acting in concert, demonstrating the significant extent of consensus and united support underlying the military action; and it allowed for the heroic exploits of allies to be documented, thus

honoring them in a way that nevertheless placed their glory as subordinate to and dependant upon that of the ruler, thereby tying their interests more closely to his own.

Much more than the representation of a solitary ruler in military garb, or even the portrayal of an isolated ruler exerting his dominance over a captive, the panoramic battle scenes indisputably establish the martial bona fides of the depicted individuals. The narrativity of such images evokes the chaotic immediacy of battle, thus balancing the implied teleology of inevitable triumph with the real and present threat of injury or death involved in such a conflict. The person of the ruler exists at the center of the conflict, with the capture of an enemy leader often standing synecdochically for the conquest of the entire polity. By having himself depicted in the midst of an ongoing struggle rather than as an isolated victor, the ruler was able to insinuate at the recently vanquished agency of the enemy, the effort that was required to overcome it, and the fact that his own person, more than that of any of his allies, was at stake.

The incorporation of so many additional participants into these scenes did not solely serve as a backdrop for the person of the ruler, but was itself an important feature of the battle murals. Every warrior that has taken part in a battle had placed his life on the line and thus had exhibited, aside from acts of martial skill and physical prowess, a mental fortitude and a willingness to die for a greater ideal (i.e. the advancement of the interests of the community as a whole and of their own interests within its established hierarchies of power and respect). In what amounts to a radical democratization of depiction in a monumental art tradition that was otherwise focused almost exclusively on persons of the highest rank, the contributions of all combatants are commemorated in these inclusive renditions of warfare. The highest honors were reserved for the rulers, and complex hierarchical pecking orders can

be discerned in the positioning of vassals and allies around these central figures.

Nevertheless, to have depicted subordinates at all indicates an acknowledgement on behalf of the rulers of their increasing dependence upon the approbation of their peers and the uncoerced obedience of their underlings to maintain the legitimacy of their authority.

Evidence of charismatic authority engenders more charisma in a process of self-replication. The ability of leaders to attract followers through the force of their personality enhances their aura of legitimacy. By depicting military action as a collective endeavor, rulers portrayed themselves as leaders; that is to say, they represented their allies and subordinates acting as a unified force under their direction. This further demonstrated the ability of a ruler to call upon substantial numbers of armed warriors willing to do his bidding – and the implied threat of violence against those who aligned themselves against his will. That such images, previously absent from the monumental art record, were deemed desirable suggests that the ability of rulers to command obedience and loyalty – the essence of legitimate authority – was not as assured as it once had been.

Finally, the high degree of specificity and variation with regard to the figures represented and the actions they are shown carrying out add to the impression that these paintings document specific historical moments rather than ongoing conditions of domination. The inclusion of identifiable individuals, each of whom could have feasibly provided oral accounts of the depicted events that would have presumably confirmed the pictorial versions, served to attest to the veracity of their content. Such densely populated historical images, while certainly expressing a particular point of view, invoked the presence of numerous eyewitnesses as an implicit confirmation of their assertions.

The battle murals were calculated to communicate certain traits that were intended to reinforce the legitimacy of the rulers who commissioned them: the military prowess of the ruler, the allegiance of other nobles to him, the truth in representation. However, by suggesting a need to overcome contrary perceptions – of the emptiness of the trappings associated with the office of the ruler and the inability to take the support of others for granted – these artworks actually demonstrate the diminishing authority of Epiclassic leaders. This decline in authority is perhaps most significant with regard to the rulers' perceived relationship to time.

The majority of stelae – upright stone monuments that were typically carved with portraits of rulers and inscribed with historical texts, the erection of which is considered to be *the* defining feature of Classic Maya civilization – were created to mark period endings in the Long Count calendar. More than a simple commemorative monument, the stela presented the ruler as time personified; these embodied moments of time were conceived as living extensions of the royal person, loci of the past perpetually brought into direct contact with the present (Stuart 1996). The extreme iconicity of these monuments can thus be seen as directly related to ideas of representation and agency. Even when stelae documented specific war events in their inscriptions and in the depictions of captives at the feet of the rulers, these activities were subordinated to the regular movement of time and its collection into distinct periods. History was seen as something that occurred in the container of time, not as the defining feature of its progression. Maya rulers were thought of (or at least presented themselves) as the stewards of time, uniquely empowered to mark its passage, or, possibly, even as the source from which it emanated (*Ibid.* 165-167).

In each of the battle murals, on the other hand, the ruler is shown to be but one participant among dozens in a tableau of shared temporality. The action of the conflict is given primacy over the numinous presence of the person of the ruler; historical events overshadow the conception of time as an abstract entity. The recognition of the ruler's dependency on his numerous allies and subordinates is manifest: the fashioning of time is shown to be a collective endeavor. In other words, the ruler's claim to a unique status with regard to time was ceded to the demands of political calculus. This is reflected in the viewers' relationships to the artworks as well. The battle scenes, with their high degree of narrativity, represent moments from the past as being removed from the time of the viewer. Rather than having a perpetually accessible presence in the person of the ruler/stela, the past – and time itself – is shown to be unstable, fleeting, contested.

The Discontinuation of Dramatic Representation and The Triumph of the Iconic

The above characterization of the Classic to Early Postclassic transition as involving a crisis of legitimate authority, including a reconceptualization of the relationship between rulers and time, perhaps risks oversimplifying what was undoubtedly a complex and multifaceted period in Mesoamerican cultural history. Indeed, I would not suggest that the battle murals, or even pictorial narrativity generally, be considered as exemplary of the Epiclassic period in the same way that the ruler-portrait stela with Initial Series inscription has been taken as definitive of the Classic period. Rather, these represent some of the many possible solutions to the problems encountered by artists and the rulers they served as they sought new paradigms for visualizing legitimacy in a volatile political environment. In almost every instance, the battle murals co-existed with other, more iconic forms of martial

imagery, including the captive step at Cacaxtla, the capture imagery on the lintels of Bonampak Structure 1, and the warrior figures on the jambs of the UTJ and the columns of the Temple of the Warriors. Following this brief flirtation with pictorial narrativity in the representation of conquest themes at a handful of sites, battle murals did not appear again in the monumental art of Mesoamerica. Thus, while they are not in themselves representative of the extreme diversity of Epiclassic art production, the battle murals can be understood to owe their existence directly to the conditions associated with this time period.

I have presented arguments, based on directly observable pictorial qualities of the battle murals, for the underlying factors that I believe made this innovative format appeal to the rulers who commissioned them as strong visual expressions serving to bolster the legitimacy of their authority. It remains to account for why such imagery did not spread but was instead deemed unsuccessful, as the subsequently produced corpus of martially themed monumental art was largely iconic in nature. I believe that the somewhat ironic solution to this puzzle is that the very same pictorial elements that had made the battle murals attractive as statements of power quickly came to be seen as undesirable by rulers seeking to negotiate the rapidly changing political landscape.

It is not difficult to imagine a permanently displayed documentation of the complex arrangement of alliances and hierarchical relationships that belonged to a particular political moment as later becoming inconvenient to a ruler, particularly at a time when these conditions were especially mutable. The paintings served as detailed records of favoritism and rank through their placement of figures in relation to the ruler and each other. The inclusion in a battle scene of an individual once held in high regard but who had subsequently fallen out of favor could potentially embarrass a ruler or alienate those whose

support he sought at a later date. Weighing the advantages of narrative and iconic modes of representations, those holding power likely found the greater flexibility of reduced imagery and generic references to warfare to be preferable to the highly specific content of battle scenes. By alluding to bellicosity through emblematic imagery and non-individuated warrior figures, and to conquest through standardized depictions of captor-captive pairs, the ongoing conditions of state militarism and the subjugation of dependant polities could be communicated without recounting the particulars.

This had the added advantage of reserving permanent, pictorial recognition for the ruler or for the regime in general, rather than sharing honor among numerous individuals. Valuable supporters could continue to be lauded during public celebrations and through the bestowal of ranks and privileges, but such accolades were ephemeral – they could be withdrawn as the ruler saw fit and, rather than leaving lasting reminders, they depended on individual recollections for their perpetuation. By eliminating such content from the monumental record, rulers were able to reify and naturalize the underlying structures and ideologies upon which the social order was founded, thereby reaffirming the broad legitimacy of their authority without appeals to individual personalities.

Furthermore, while narrative battle scenes convey the accomplishment of the depicted participants in overcoming an enemy force, in doing so their crowded and turbulent compositions emphasize the struggle of combat. Images with high iconicity, on the other hand, project stability and the persistence of an ongoing condition of domination. Thus, while the Stone of Tizoc has typically been interpreted as commemorating past Aztec victories, its imagery is vague enough to have allowed for alternate interpretations of the figural pairs, such as Richard Townsend's suggestion that they represented the tribute of sacrificial victims

sent to Tenochtitlan by previously subjugated towns on the event of Tizoc's coronation (Townsend 1979: 46). It is precisely this potential for multivalency that made iconic imagery more flexible, and therefore more desirable, than narrative scenes for Postclassic rulers.

Monumental art, a strongly evocative focal point for the messages of the elites commissioning it, provides the opportunity to reverse engineer the motivations that led to its creation. In this light, the abandonment of pictorial narrativity as a strategy for self-representation at the beginning of the Postclassic period suggests a shift away from charismatic authority back to traditional authority, albeit to a transformed version of what tradition was understood as entailing. Indeed, Weber notes that charismatic authority does not present long-term viability as a means to maintain power, and it is typically only involved in the establishment of a regime (1947 [1925]: 364-374). Through its routinization, charisma becomes transformed into tradition as the ruling elites establish policies and promote an ideology intended to strengthen their hold on power (*Ibid.*). Thus, at the risk of over-generalizing, the preceding analysis of the the battle murals with regard to the implicit messages of their complex, multi-figural compositions appears to strongly support the prevailing model of Mesoamerican political organization: the disruption of traditional authority resulting in segmentary factionalism during the Epiclassic period, followed by the rapid realignment of power under new paradigms of legitimacy in the early Postclassic as local elites solidified their control through participation in pan-regional systems of commercial and symbolic exchange (Ringle, *et al.* 1998; López Austin and López Luján 2000).

CHAPTER SIX CONCLUSIONS AND FURTHER AVENUES OF INQUIRY

The preceding chapters have treated a group of ostensibly unrelated artworks as collectively representing a departure from traditional modes of representing bellicose themes in Mesoamerican monumental art. In creating these battle scenes, artists from the individual sites of Cacaxtla, Bonampak, Chichén Itzá, and Mulchic experimented with pictorial narrativity, and, while each of their solutions was unique, a comparison of them has allowed the identification of certain qualities they hold in common – action, specificity, variation, integration, and naturalism – that distinguish these paintings from much of the rest of the regional corpus of martial imagery. Furthermore, this unprecedented approach to the representation of warfare is found to be limited to a brief period of Mesoamerican history, strongly suggesting a link between the pictorial format of the battle mural and the widespread socio-political context in which the handful of surviving examples were created. But rather than simply indicating an increased preoccupation with violence, as has commonly been asserted, I have argued that the strong narrativity of the paintings reflects significant changes in the way legitimate authority was conceived during the Epiclassic period.

In pursuing these ideas, several further lines of inquiry have suggested themselves that were not possible to take up in the context of this dissertation. This project has limited its analysis to monumental artworks, which were produced in conjunction with the architectural settings they occupy to create spaces charged with political symbolism. However, martial imagery is also found in the realm of portable objects, notably in the form of figurines representing warriors and in scenes painted or incised on vessels. Numerous Classic Maya vases make textual reference to warfare, depict processing warriors, or show the aftermath of

combat, with vanquished captives arranged in front of rulers or being sacrificed. However, only a handful of examples are known to me that feature narrative battle scenes, all of which date to the Late Classic period.¹⁹² These were the subject of a study by Jean-Michel Hoppan, who analyzed them in terms of their iconographic and epigraphic content, as well as their style (2000). However, further analysis of their pictorial narrativity – comparing these scenes to the larger examples examined here while taking into account the cylindrical form of the support and the interactivity required of the viewer – would be an appropriate complement to the current work.

Additionally, a broader analysis of pictorial narrativity in Mesoamerican art – both monumental and portable – would enable some of the conclusions arrived at in this study to be tested. Late Preclassic artworks such as those from San Bartolo and Izapa exhibit some degree of narrativity in their representation of mythological imagery, but these appear to be significantly more reduced in their narrative ambitions than Epiclassic scenes of elite rituals from the sites of El Tajín and Chichén Itzá. Investigation of the temporal and cultural contexts in which narrativity was employed in monumental art, including comparisons between artworks that represent similar themes through different – narrative or iconic – modes, would allow for the ideas about pictorial representation introduced here in relation to the battle murals and martial iconography to be expanded, and to see whether they remain applicable beyond the realm of warfare. Specifically, such an analysis would begin to broach the problem of the possibility of accessing cultural attitudes toward, conceptions about, or experiences of time through the different ways in which it is represented. Csapo and Miller have presented an argument linking changing Greek relationship to temporality as this

¹⁹² These include K0503, K2036, K2206, K2352, and K6990 from the Kerr database.

dimension is represented across different media to the political shift towards democracy that occurred at the same time (1998). A more inclusive study of the narrativity and temporality of Mesoamerican artworks could significantly add to our understanding of continuities and disjunctions with regard to the philosophical and social perceptions of time in the region and their implications for political organization.

Classic Maya polychrome vessels present a panoply of highly narrativized scenes relating to a wide range of mythological and courtly subjects. A comparative analysis of the imagery displayed on ceramics would allow the model of pictorial narrativity presented in Chapter Four to be expanded and refined, particularly with regard to the qualities I have suggested are implicated in its production. The large collection of surviving Classic Maya vessels, which numbers in the thousands, is drawn from numerous local artistic traditions and features both abundant diversity of subject matter and the repetition of similar scenes with slight variations. This corpus thus provides a wealth of material ideally suited for comparative and even statistical analysis, as Jennifer Loughmiller-Newman has recently shown in her study of 110 painted Maya vases featuring combinations of textual and figural representation, which focused on the relative size and placement of figures and glyphs (2008). A similar approach that further considers strategies of pictorial narrativity would be a productive contribution to our understanding of Classic Maya visual communication.

Focusing on depictions of warfare in Epiclassic period Mesoamerica, this dissertation has been concerned with the issue of violence, and particularly the representation of violence in monumental art as a strategy of elite legitimization. The questions it has raised, however, primarily deal with time. Multiple strands of temporality have become inseparably interwoven in the course of this study: the pictorial time depicted in artworks exhibiting high

levels of narrativity; the relationship of the viewer to an artwork and its ability to embody or break time; the social time that characterizes the period of an artwork's creation; and the historiographic or interpretive time that charts the developing ways in which specific artworks and the cultures that produced them have been characterized in the scholarly literature. Contributing to the discussions surrounding the battle murals, the ideas expressed here have now themselves entered into the historiography of Mesoamerican art, and are no doubt reflective of the present moment (and the interests of the author) in ways that we are currently too immersed in to adequately recognize.

At the end of the day, we are left with the elusiveness of meaning. In attempting to best synthesize our current knowledge about the topic at hand, interpretations inevitably involve a degree of subjective response to the material under consideration. Additionally, they typically build upon what are seen as the most compelling interpretations that others have previously made. Even supposedly hard data – 14C dates, statistical analyses of pottery sherd variation and distribution patterns, etc. – must be subjected to interpretation to become meaningful. Furthermore, the very foundations underpinning our interpretations are skewed, since we inevitably rely on the biased sampling of what has survived to be recovered archaeologically.

If a painting depicting a scene of combat dating to the Late Formative or Early Classic period were to be uncovered tomorrow, it would undermine a central premise of the argument presented here. Battle murals would no longer be confined to a brief span of time, and their narrativity could no longer be described as an unprecedented innovation tied to the socio-political conditions of the Epiclassic period. I would deem such a major discovery a welcome event, and, despite my thesis becoming disproven, I would hope that some of the

ideas that have been set forth in these pages, in addition to belonging to a particular historiographic moment, would continue to prove useful. Aside from specific observations made about individual artworks, the interpretive framework presented in Chapter Four that considers artworks in terms of their relative narrativity or iconicity and identifies several pictorial qualities associated with these modes of representation would retain its validity and potential utility for the analysis of all images and the intentions for which they were made.

Despite the contingency, tenuousness, or speculative nature of our interpretations of the past and our apparent inability to fully contextualize the objects of art historical inquiry, the very act of engaging with the material serves a very real and important function. The expository writing that is at the heart of the art historical praxis serves to offer explanations about the past, and in so doing to make it relevant to the present. Through this act, it reaffirms the value of artworks long ago abandoned to the vicissitudes of time, not just as historical curiosities or evidence of the past, but for their ability reach across an otherwise unbridgeable divide of centuries and cultures to move us, here and now.

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ILLUSTRATIONS

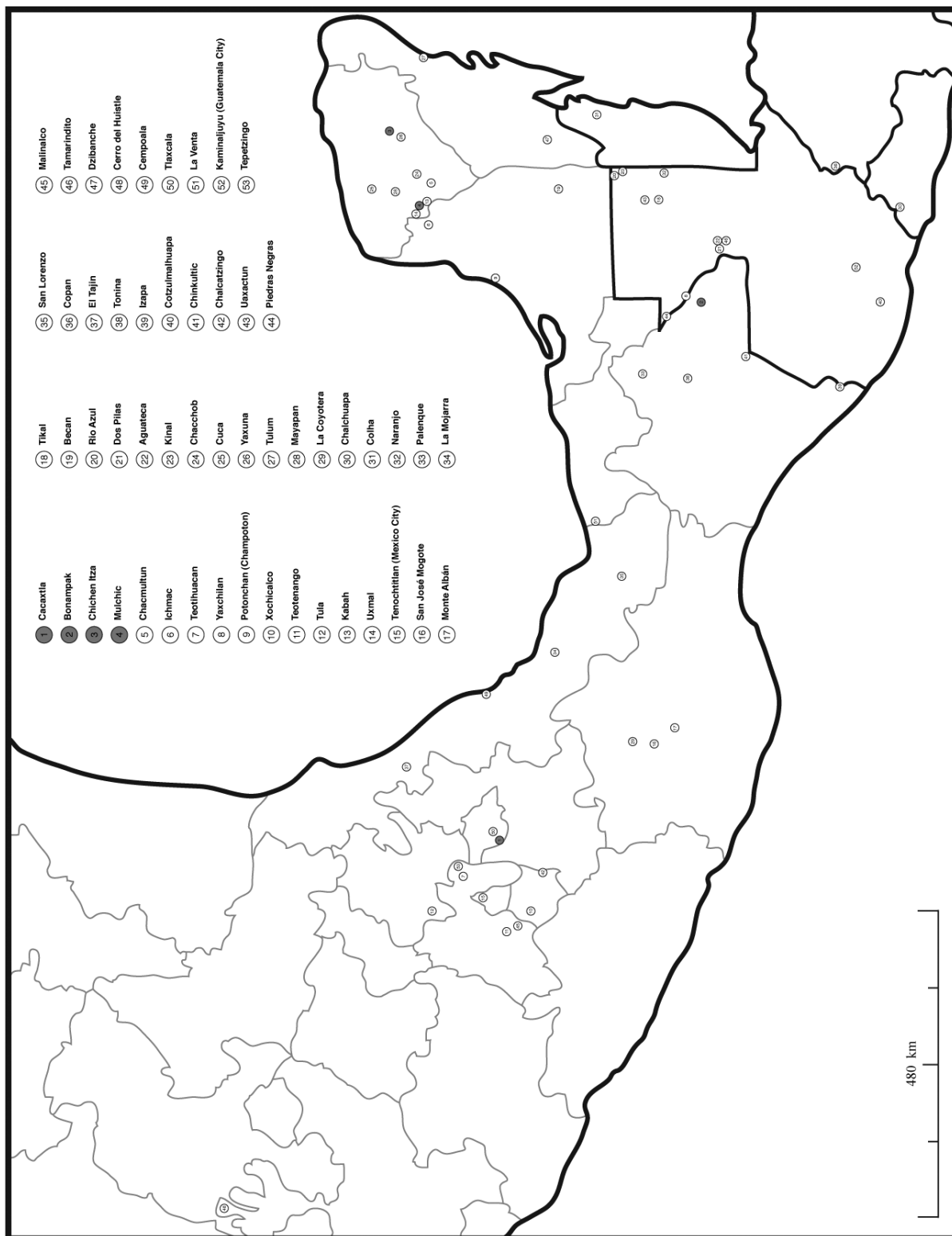


Fig. 1 Map of Mesoamerica with sites numbered in the order they appear in the text. Sites with significant surviving battle murals are shown in red.

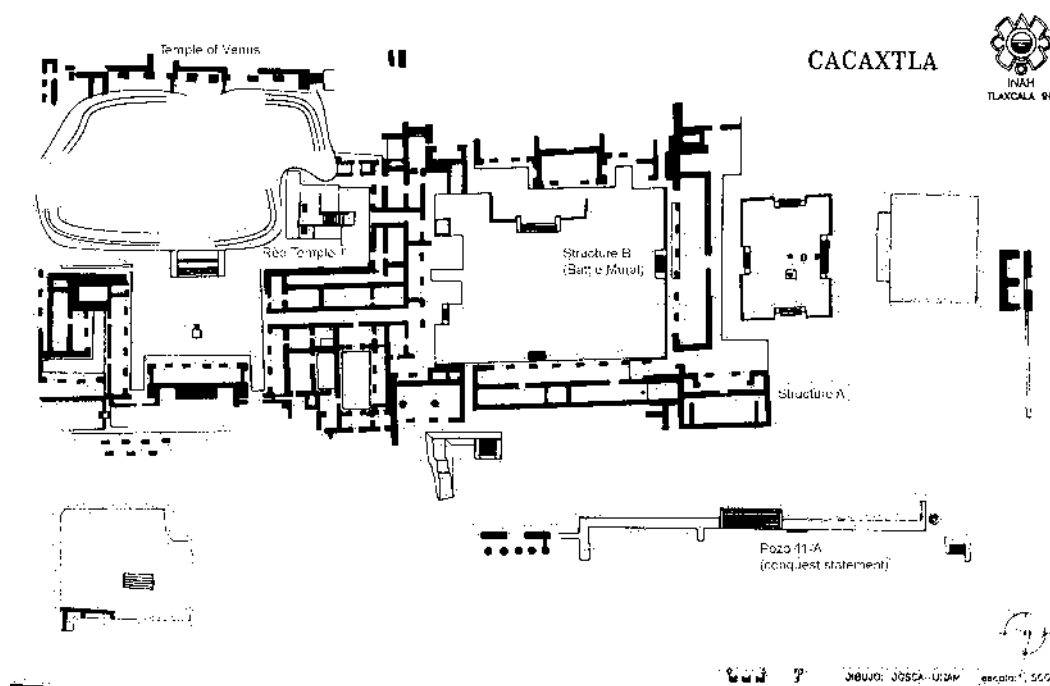


Fig. 2 Plan of Cacaxtla with location of the murals indicated. After Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (1990: 11).

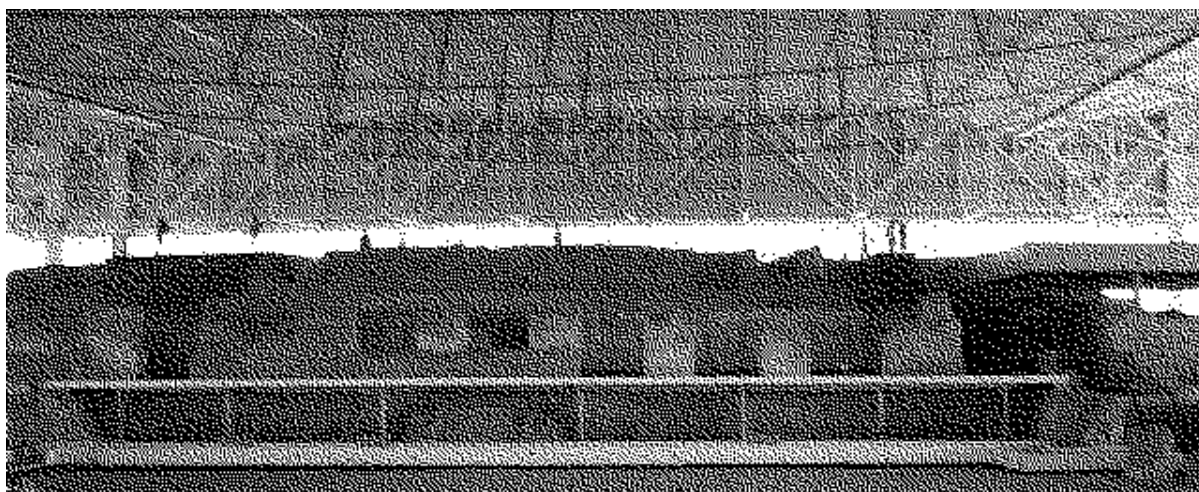
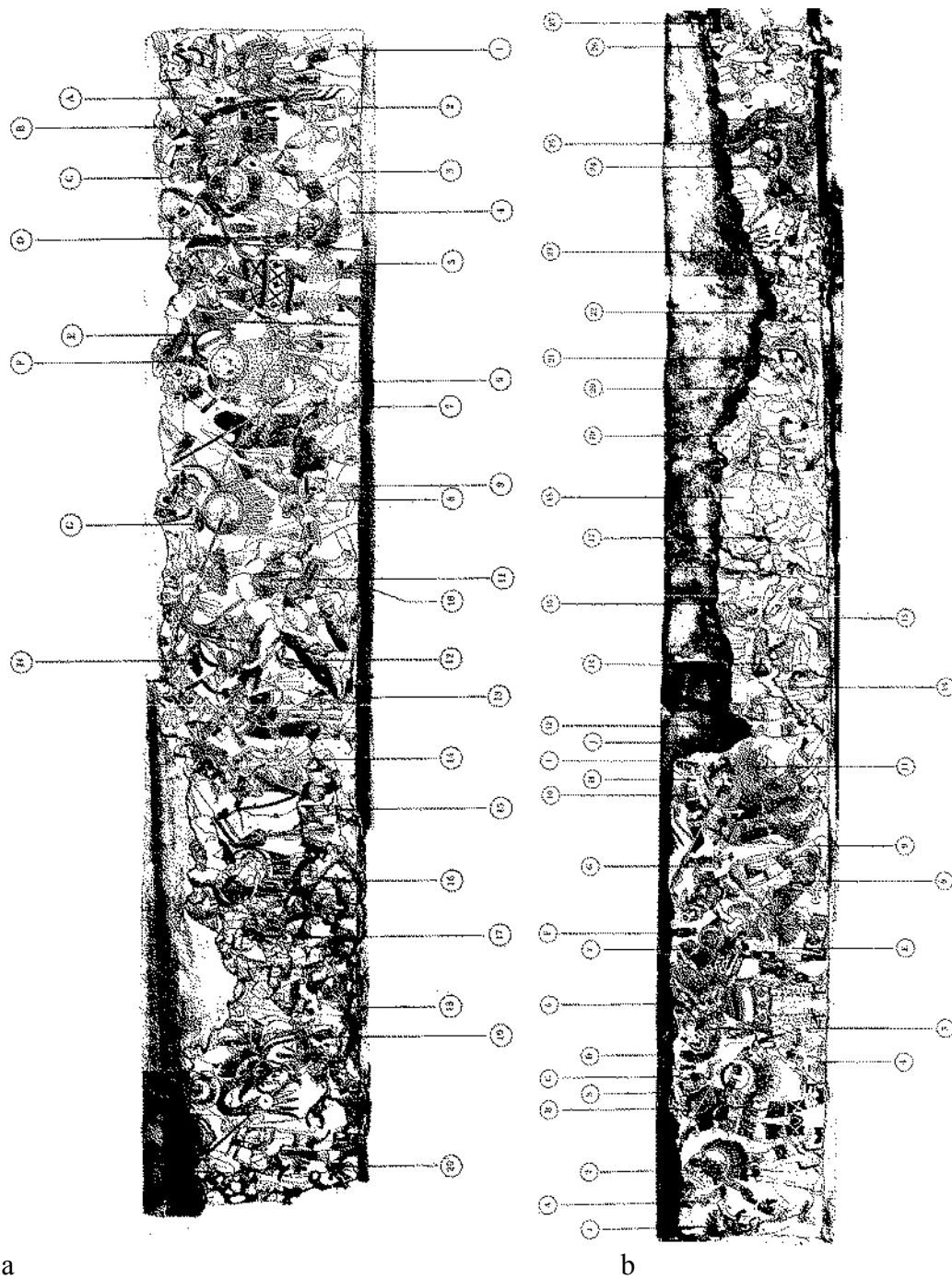


Fig. 3 Structure B, Cacaxtla, seen from across the main plaza. Photograph by the author.



a
 Fig. 4 Battle Mural, Structure B, Cacaxtla. Reconstruction paintings by Francisco Villaseñor Bello, from Foncerrada de Molina (1993).
 a) west talus
 b) east talus

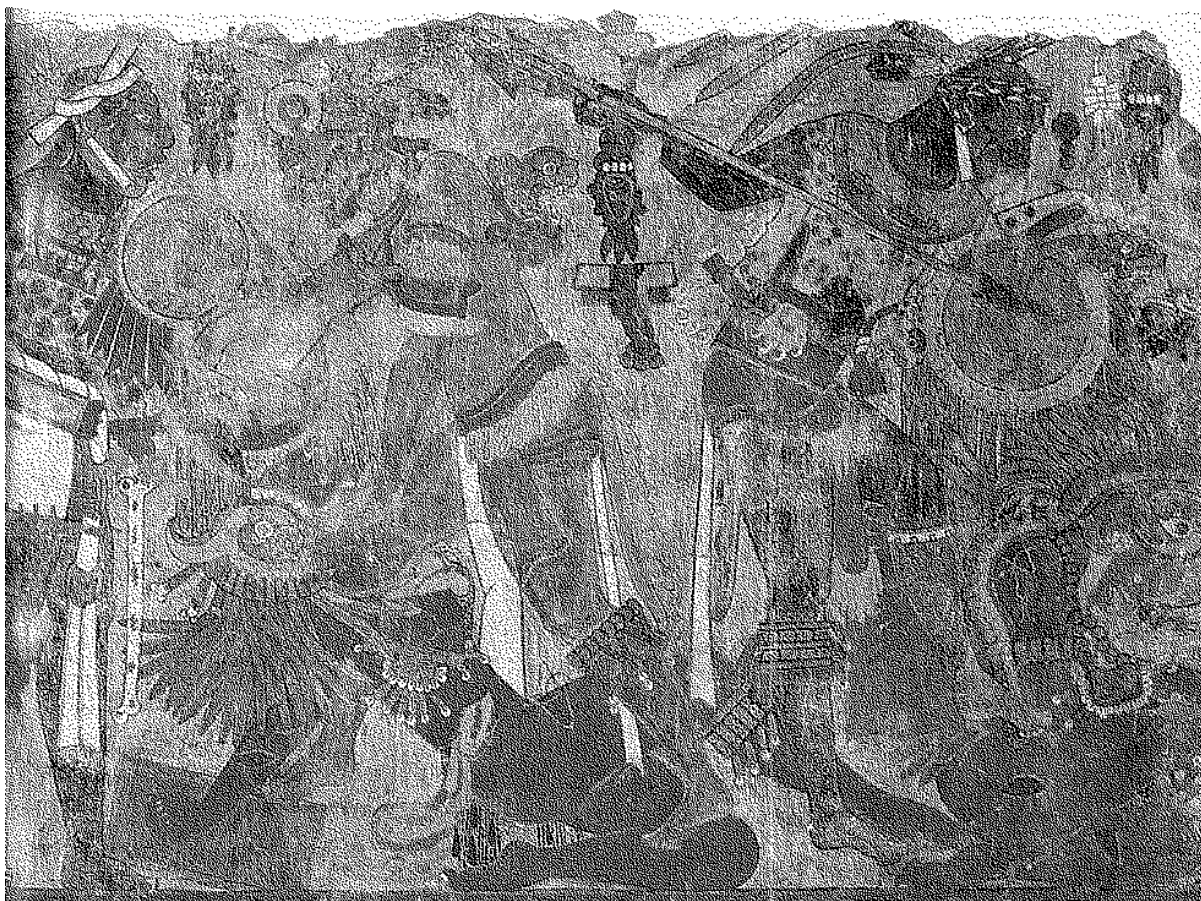


Fig. 5 Detail of Battle Mural from east talus of Structure B, Cacaxtla. Photograph by Enrico Ferorelli. From G. Stuart (1992: 127-128).



Fig. 6 Detail of Bird Captain from Battle Mural, east talus, Structure B, Cacaxtla. Photograph by Enrico Ferorelli. From G. Stuart (1992: 126).



Fig. 7 Detail of 3 Deer from Battle Mural, east talus, Structure B, Cacaxtla. Photograph by Enrico Ferorelli. From G. Stuart (1992: 125-126).



Fig. 8 Drawing of the three-part glyphic element repeated on the Cacaxtla Battle Mural. After Baird (1989: 117).



Fig. 9 Detail of figure E5 from the Cacaxtla Battle Mural. Photograph by Enrico Ferorelli. From G. Stuart (1992: 126).

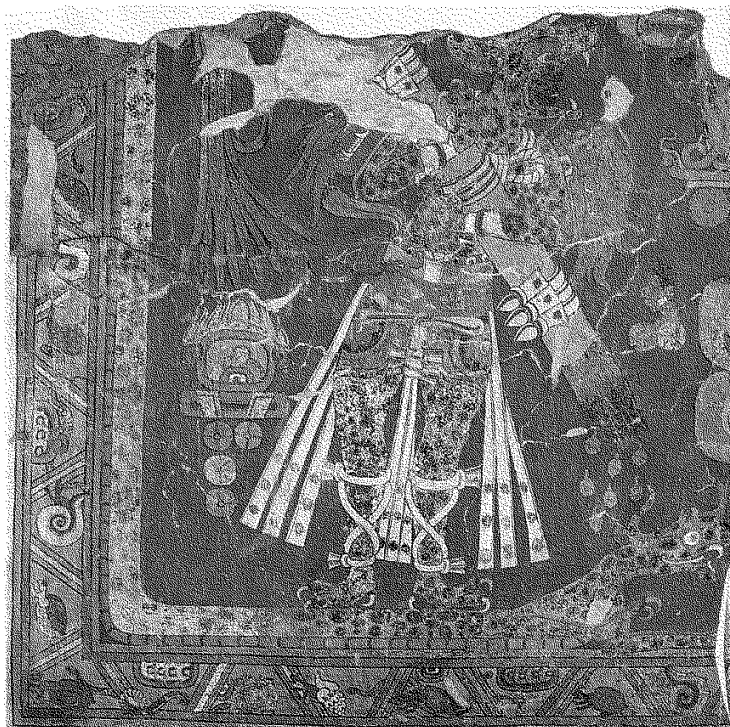


Fig. 10 North mural from the portico of Structure A, Cacaxtla. Photograph by Enrico Ferorelli. From G. Stuart (1992: 124).



Fig. 11 South mural from the portico of Structure A, Cacaxtla. Photograph by Enrico Ferorelli. From G. Stuart (1992: 129).



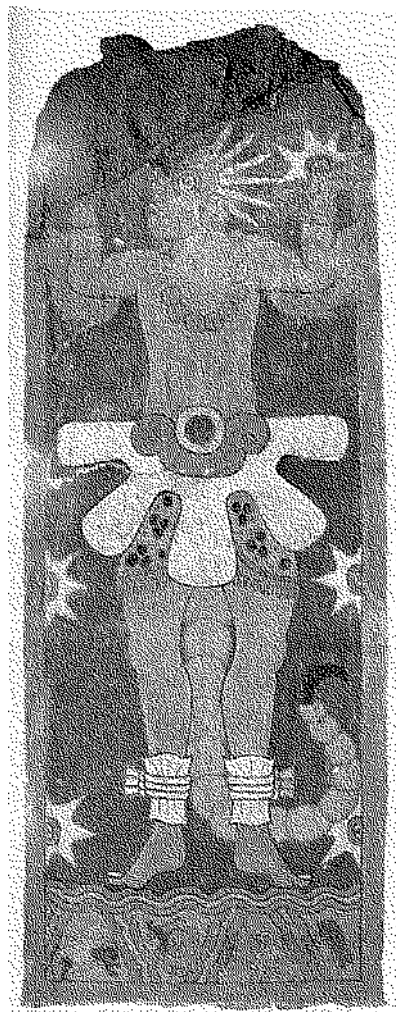
Fig. 12 Painting on north jamb of Structure A, Cacaxtla. Photograph from de la Fuente (1999: Plate 58).



Fig. 13 Painting on south jamb of Structure A, Cacaxtla. Photograph from de la Fuente (1999: Plate 57).



a



b

Fig. 14 Paintings from the Temple of Venus, Cacaxtla.

a) South pillar. Photograph by Enrico Ferorelli. From G. Stuart (1992: 132).

b) North pillar. Photograph by Enrico Ferorelli. From G. Stuart (1992: 133).



a



b

Fig. 15 Paintings from the Red Temple, Cacaxtla.
a) West wall. Photograph by Enrico Ferorelli, from G. Stuart (1992: 134-135).
b) East wall. Photograph by Enrico Ferorelli, from G. Stuart (1992: 136).

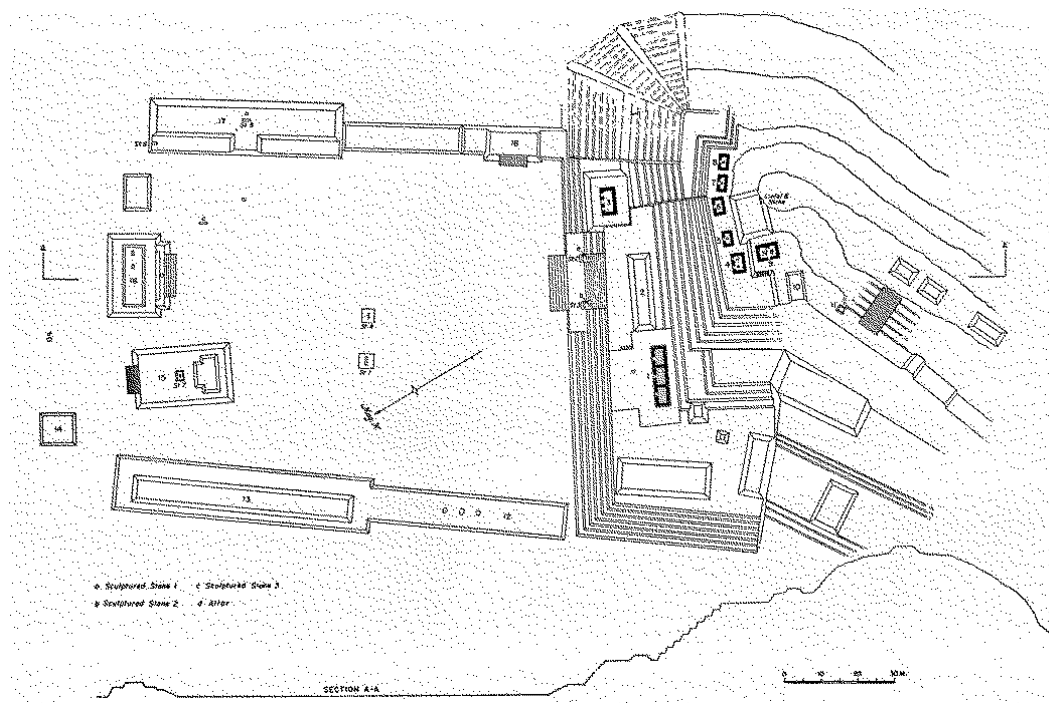


Fig. 16 Plan of Bonampak with Structure 1 marked. After M. Miller (1986: Fig. 4).



Fig. 17 Lintel 1, Bonampak. Photograph by the author.



Fig. 18 Remnants of stucco frieze, Structure 1, Bonampak. Photograph by the author.

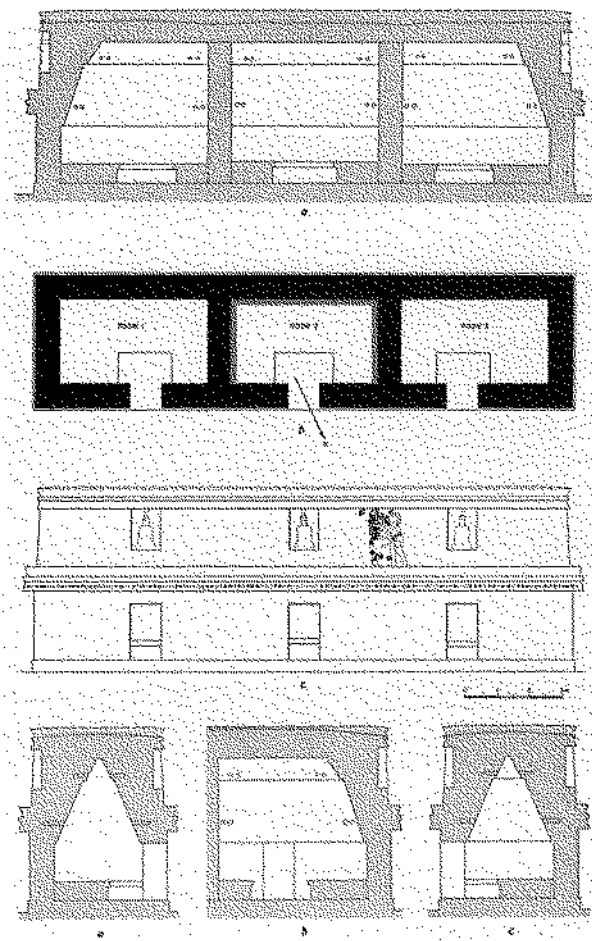


Fig. 19 Floor plan, elevation, and cross-section of Structure 1, Bonampak, with location of the battle scene marked. After M. Miller (1986: Fig. 5).

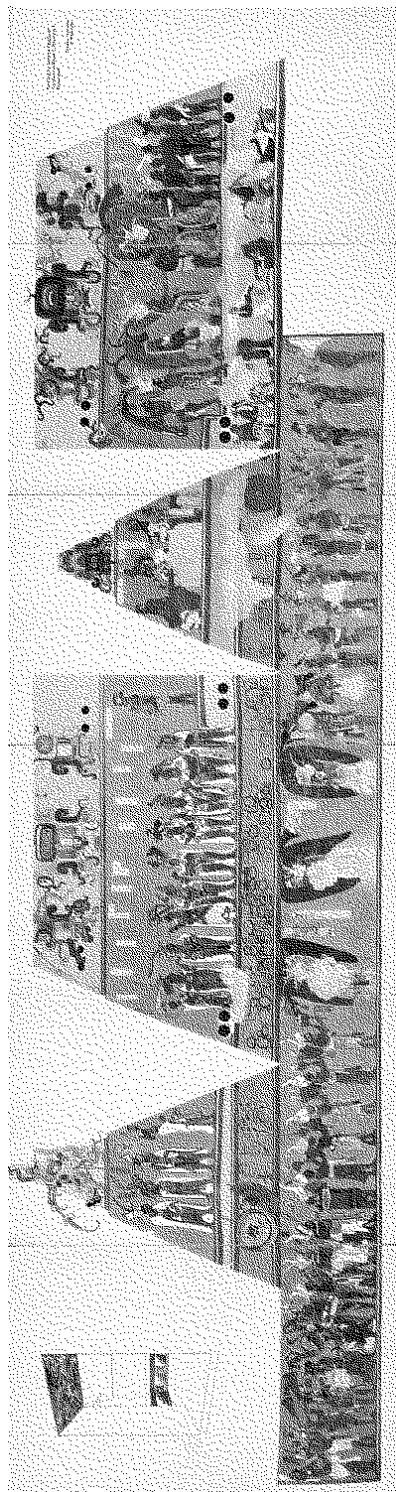


Fig. 20 Room 1, Structure 1, Bonampak. Reconstruction painting by Antonio Tejada Fonseca. From Ruppert, *et al.* (1955).

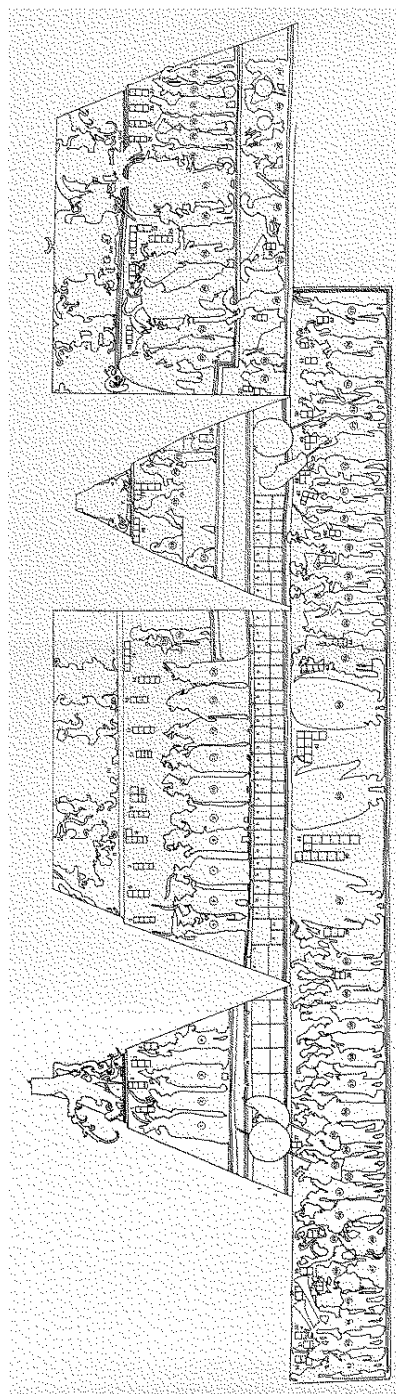


Fig. 21 Drawing of Room 1 with individual figures numbered. Drawing by Alfonso Arellano Hernández after Adams and Aldrich. From Arellano Hernández (1998: Fig. 17).

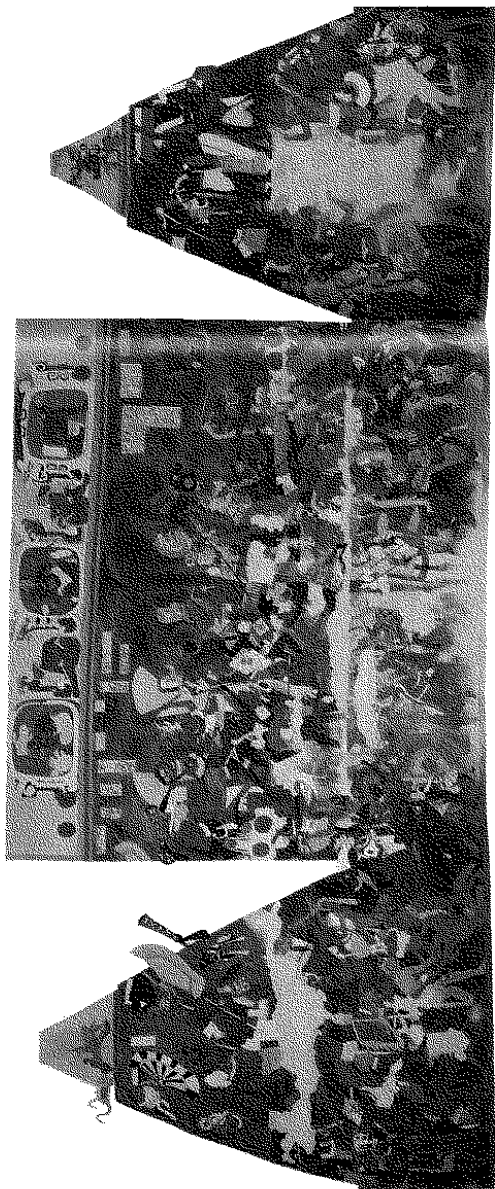


Fig. 22 Battle scene from east, south, and west walls of Room 2, Structure 1, Bonampak. Reconstruction painting by Heather Hurst and Leonard Ashby. From Martin and Miller (2004: 164-165).

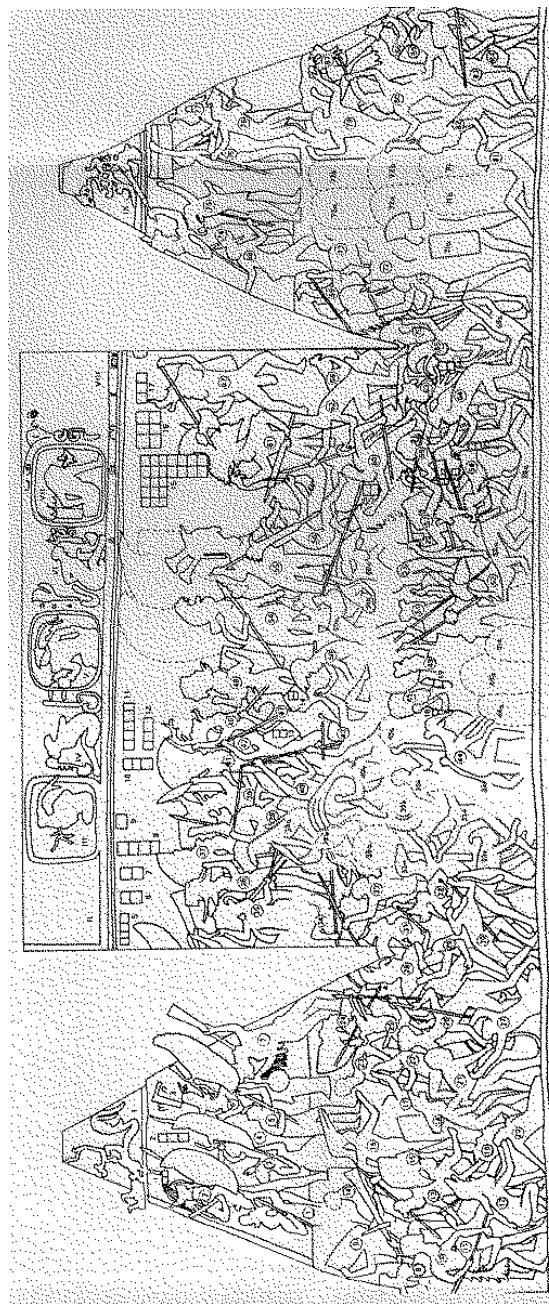


Fig. 23 Bonampak battle scene with figures numbered. Drawing by Alfonso Arellano Hernández after Adams and Aldrich. From Arellano Hernández (1998: Fig. 18).



Fig. 24 Detail from south wall of Room 2, Bonampak. Reconstruction painting by Heather Hurst and Leonard Ashby. From Martin and Miller (2004: 164-165).

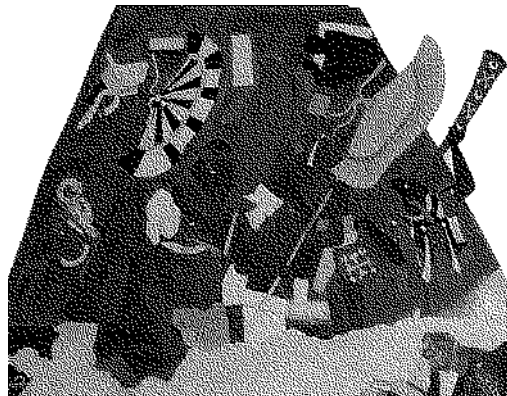


Fig. 25 Detail from east vault of Room 2, Bonampak. Reconstruction painting by Heather Hurst and Leonard Ashby. From Martin and Miller (2004: 164-165).



Fig. 26 Detail from south vault of Room 2, Bonampak. Reconstruction painting by Heather Hurst and Leonard Ashby. From Martin and Miller (2004: 164-165).

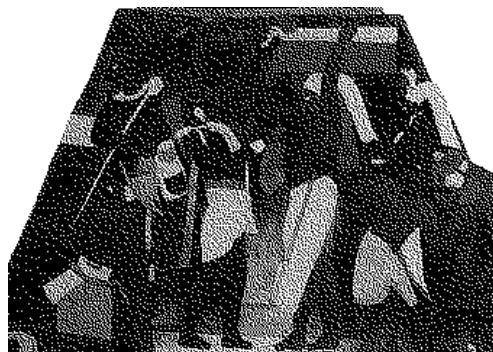


Fig. 27 Detail from west vault of Room 2, Bonampak. Reconstruction painting by Heather Hurst and Leonard Ashby. From Martin and Miller (2004: 164-165).

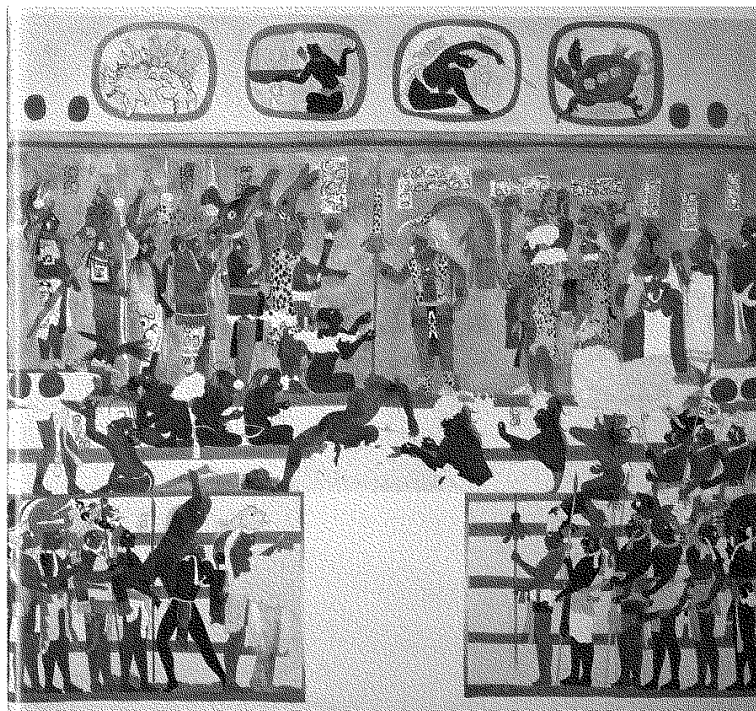


Fig. 28 North wall of Room 2, Bonampak. Reconstruction painting by Heather Hurst and Leonard Ashby. From Martin and Miller (2004: 175).

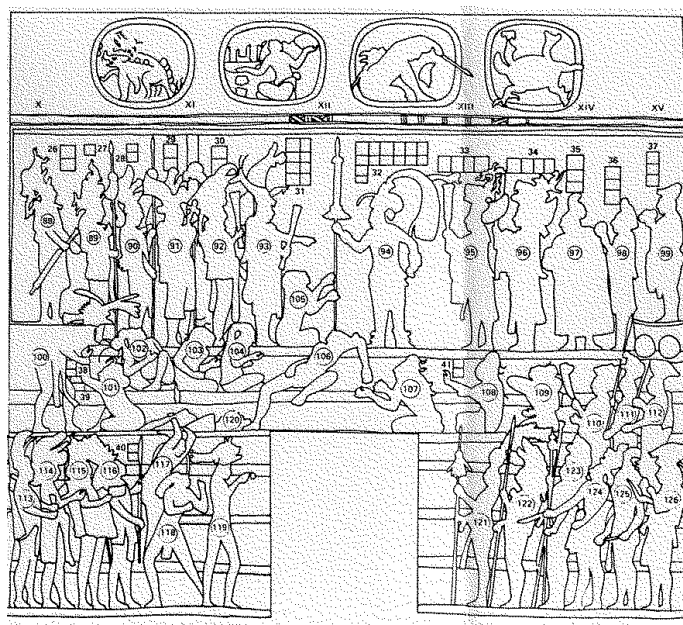


Fig. 29 Drawing of north wall of Room 2 with individual figures numbered. Drawing by Alfonso Arellano Hernández after Adams and Aldrich. From Arellano Hernández (1998: Fig. 18).

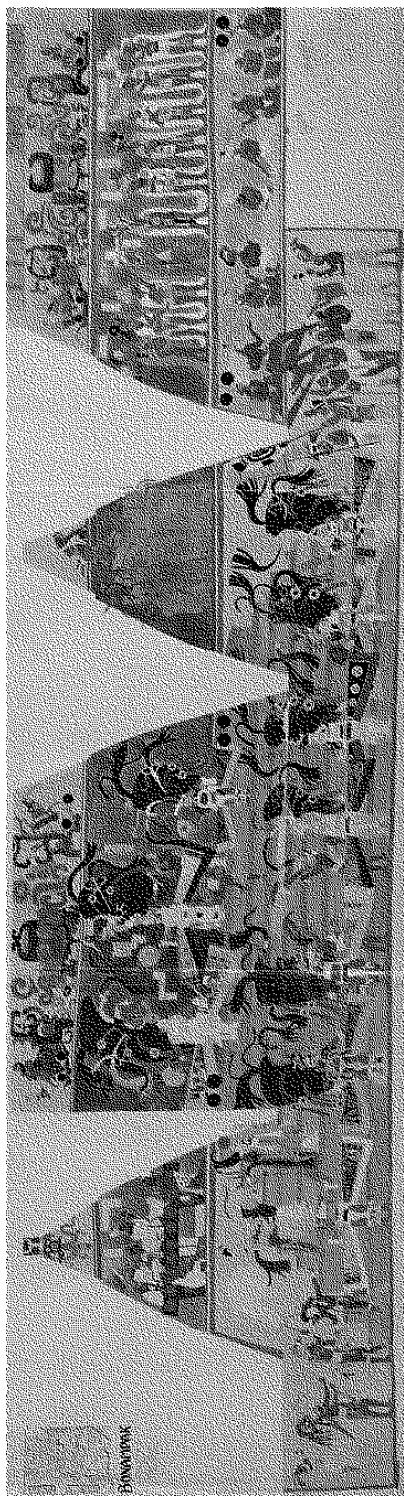


Fig. 30 Room 3, Structure 1, Bonampak. Reconstruction painting by Antonio Tejada Fonseca. From Ruppert, *et al.* (1955).

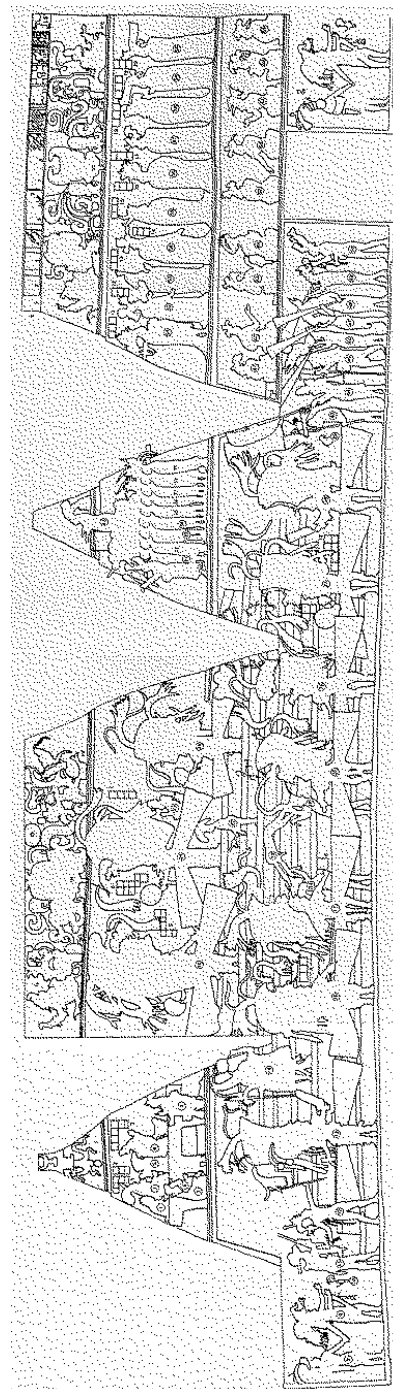


Fig. 31 Drawing of Room 3 with individual figures numbered. Drawing by Alfonso Arellano Hernández after Adams and Aldrich. From Arellano Hernández (1998: Fig. 19).

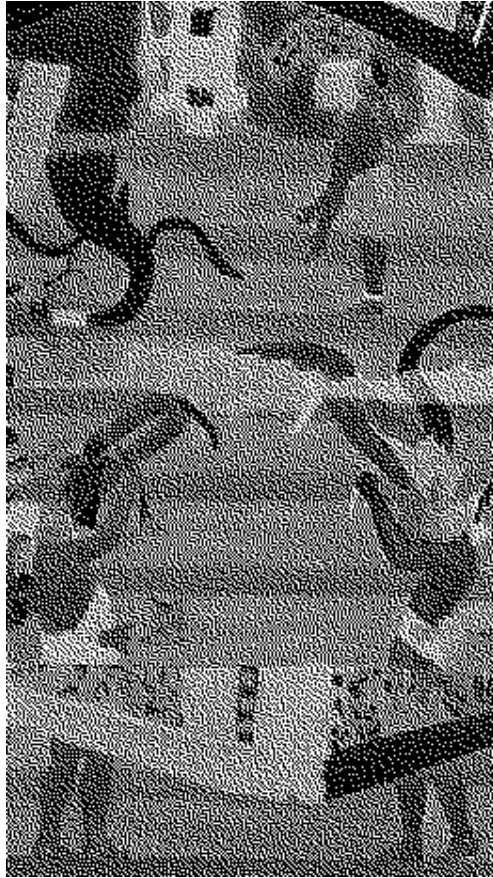


Fig. 32 Detail from south wall of Room 3 showing heart extraction sacrifice. Reconstruction painting by Antonio Tejada Fonseca. From Ruppert, *et al.* (1955).

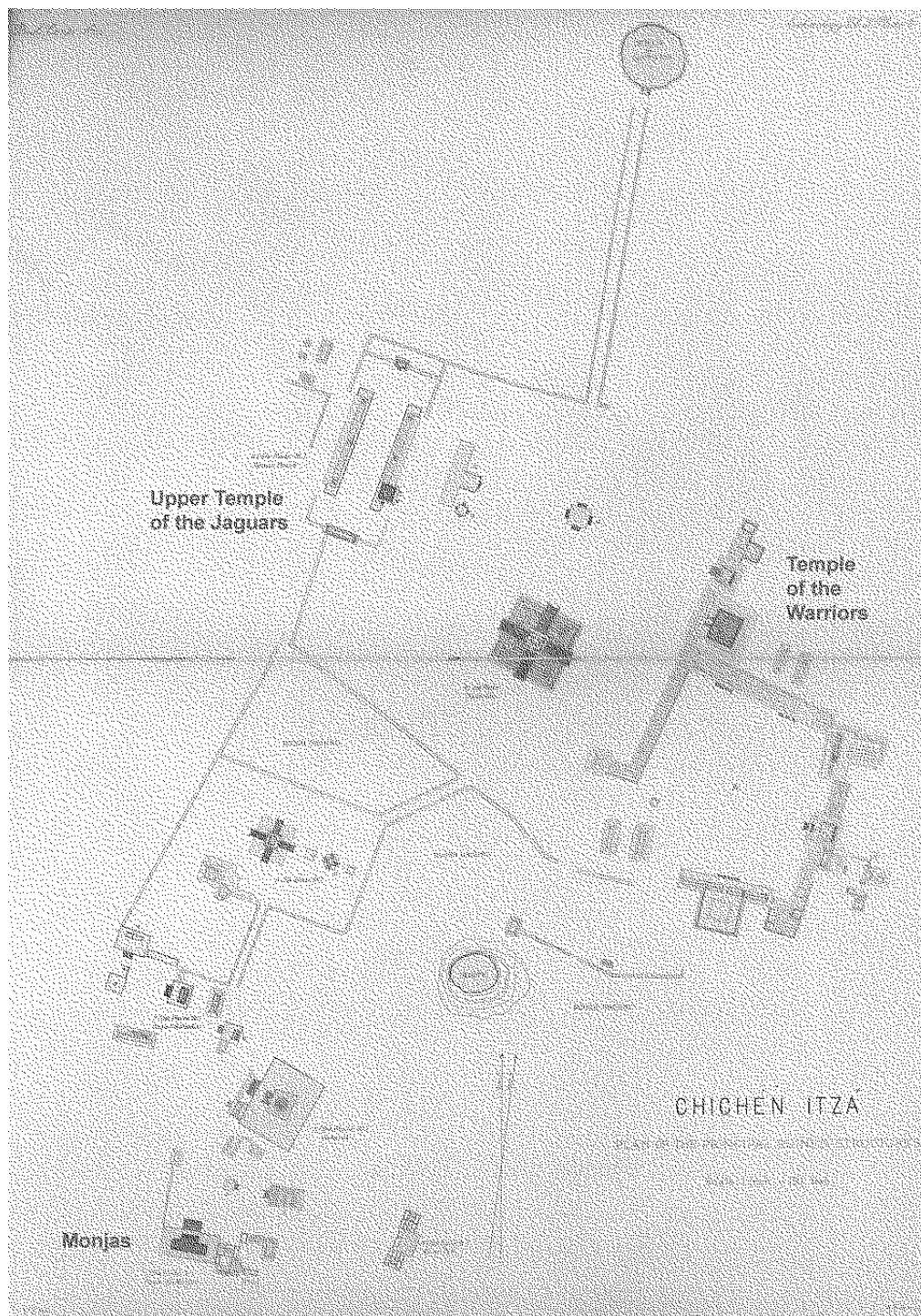


Fig. 33 Plan of Chichén Itzá with structures containing battle murals marked. After Maudslay (1889-1902: Vol. III, Plate 2).



Fig. 34 Aerial photograph of the Great Ball Court, Chichén Itzá, with Upper Temple of the Jaguars marked. After a photograph from Ferguson and Adams (2001: 220).

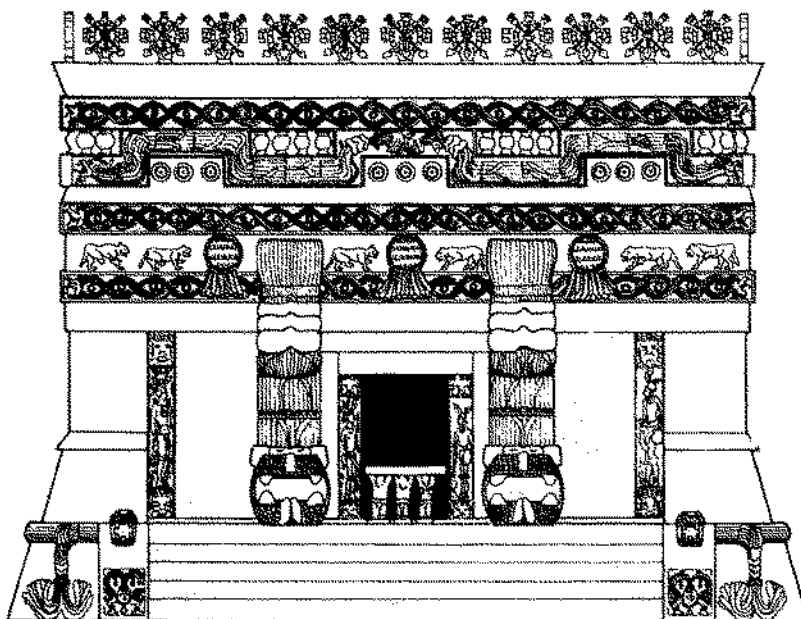


Fig. 35 Façade of the Upper Temple of the Jaguars. After Schele and Mathews (1998: 226).

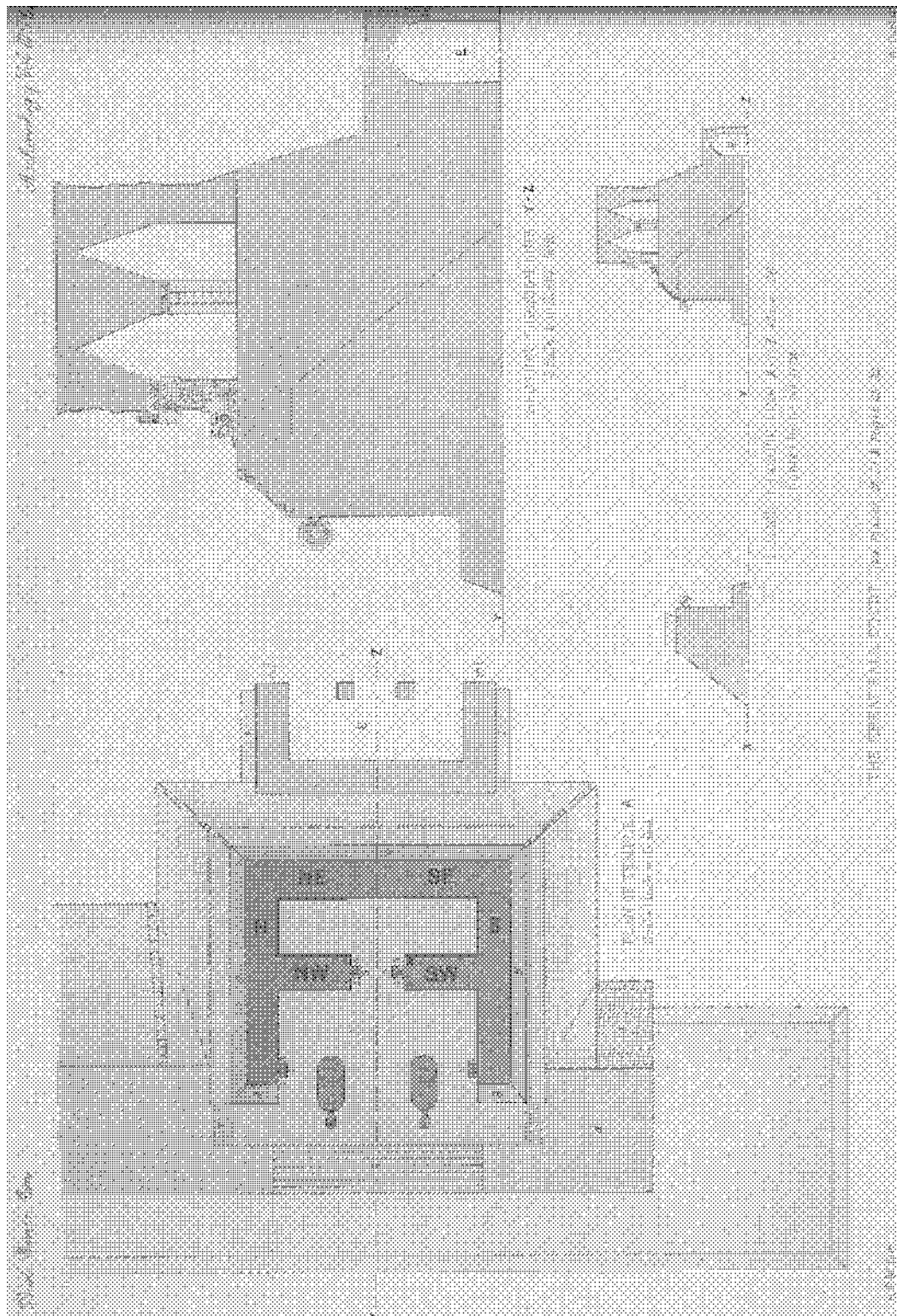


Fig. 36 Floor plan and cross-section of the Upper Temple of the Jaguars with the locations of the battle murals marked. After Maudslay (1889-1902: Vol. III, Plate 27).



Fig. 37 Jamb pilaster figures from Upper Temple of the Jaguars. Hand-colored photograph by Adela Breton, archives of the City of Bristol Museum and Art Gallery.



Fig. 38 Center panel of the east wall, inner chamber of the Upper Temple of the Jaguars, Chichén Itzá. Reproduction painting by Adela Breton, archives of the City of Bristol Museum and Art Gallery.

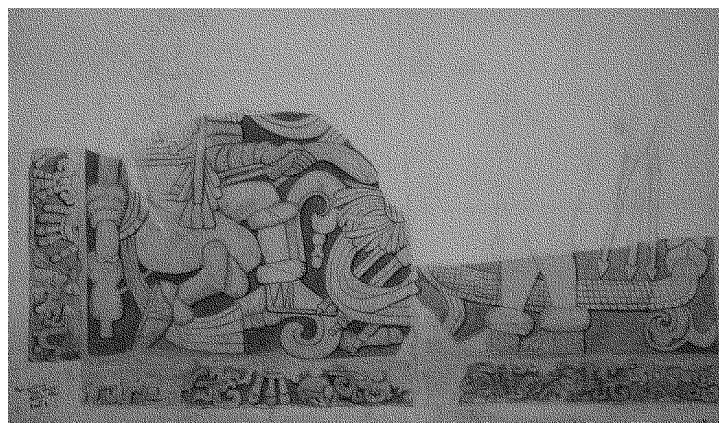


Fig. 39 Table from Upper Temple of the Jaguars. Reconstruction painting by Adela Breton, archives of the City of Bristol Museum and Art Gallery.

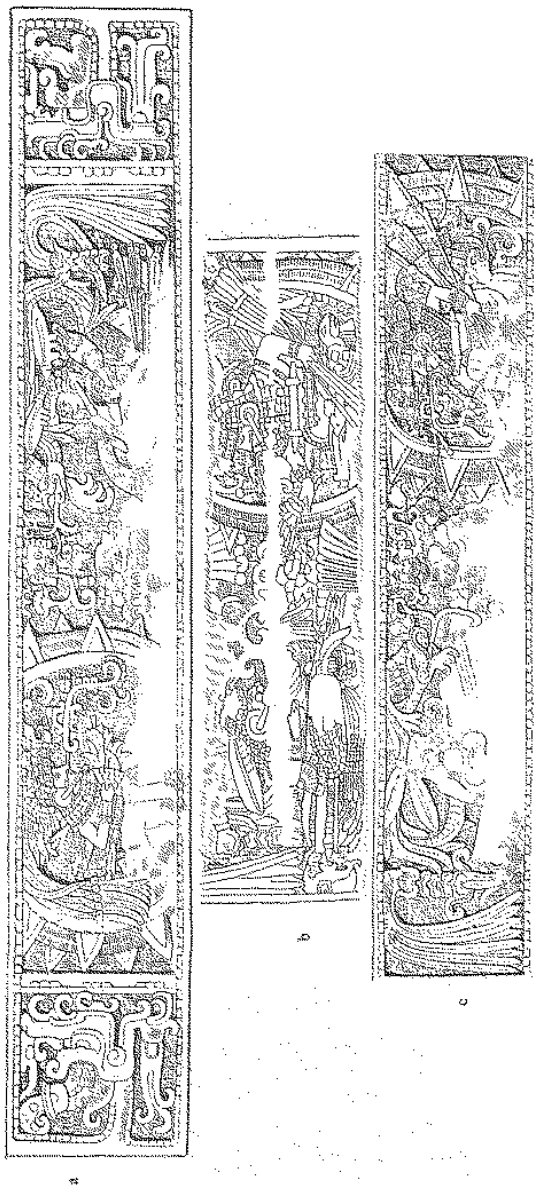


Fig. 40 Front (a), Bottom (b), and Rear (c) of carved wooden lintel from Upper Temple of the Jaguars. From Seler (1998 [1908]: Fig. 121).

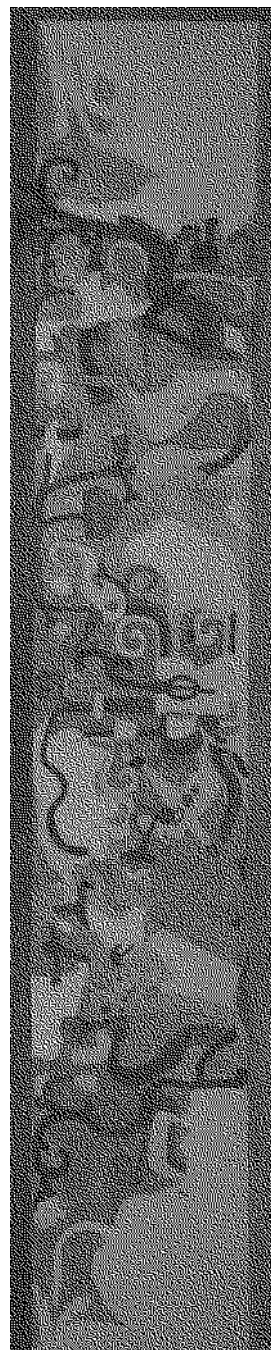


Fig. 41 Lower register from southwest panel, inner chamber of the Upper Temple of the Jaguars. Reconstruction painting by Adela Breton, archives of the City of Bristol Museum and Art Gallery.



Fig. 42 Northwest panel from the inner chamber of the Upper Temple of the Jaguars with figures numbered. After a reconstruction painting by Adela Breton, archives of the City of Bristol Museum and Art Gallery.



Fig. 43 North panel from the inner chamber of the Upper Temple of the Jaguars with figures numbered. After a reconstruction painting by Adela Breton, archives of the City of Bristol Museum and Art Gallery.



Fig. 44 Northeast panel from the inner chamber of the Upper Temple of the Jaguars with figures numbered. After a reconstruction painting by Adela Breton, archives of the City of Bristol Museum and Art Gallery.



Fig. 45 Southeast panel from the inner chamber of the Upper Temple of the Jaguars with figures numbered. After a reconstruction painting by Adela Breton, archives of the City of Bristol Museum and Art Gallery.

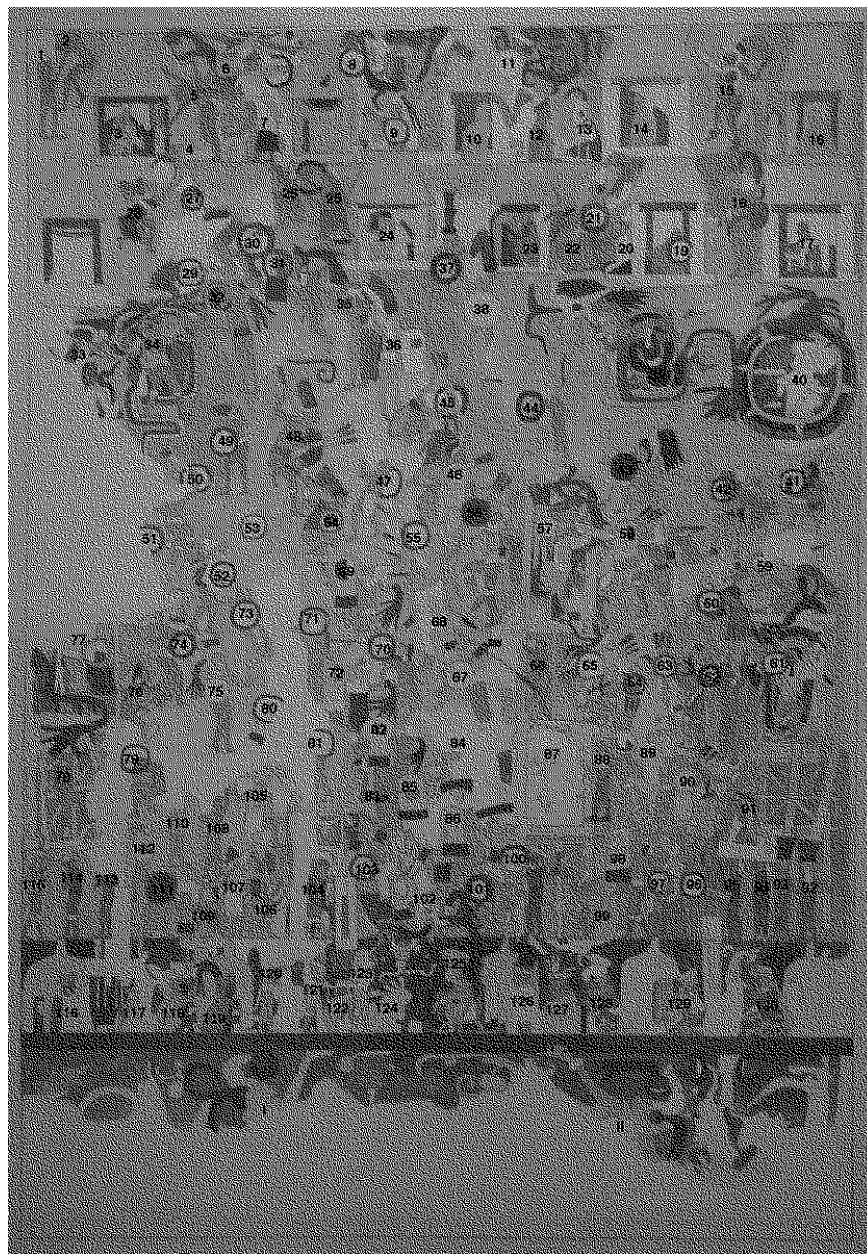
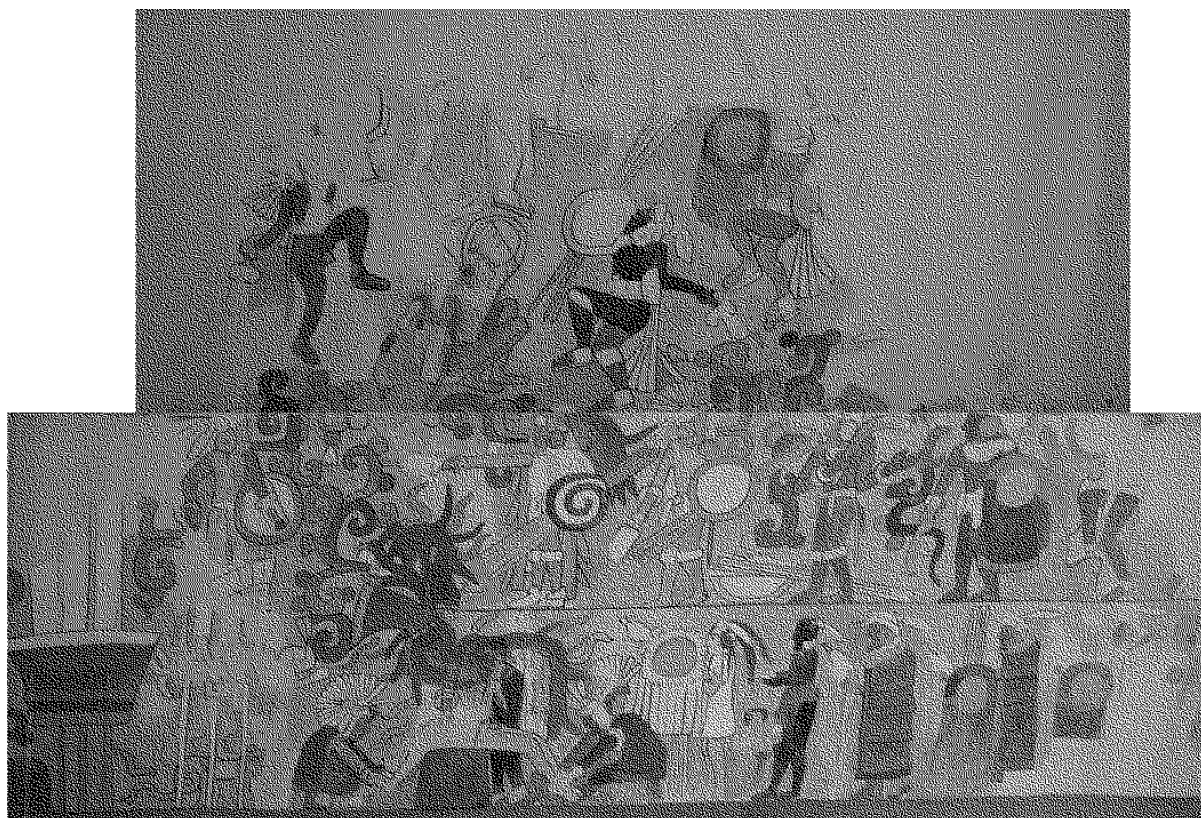


Fig. 46 South panel from the inner chamber of the Upper Temple of the Jaguars with figures numbered. After a reconstruction painting by Adela Breton, archives of the City of Bristol Museum and Art Gallery.



Fig. 47 Southwest panel from the inner chamber of the Upper Temple of the Jaguars with figures numbered. After a reconstruction painting by Adela Breton, archives of the City of Bristol Museum and Art Gallery.



a



b

Fig. 48 Sacrifice scenes from south (a) and west (b) vaults, inner chamber of the Upper Temple of the Jaguars. Reconstruction paintings by Adela Breton, archives of the City of Bristol Museum and Art Gallery.

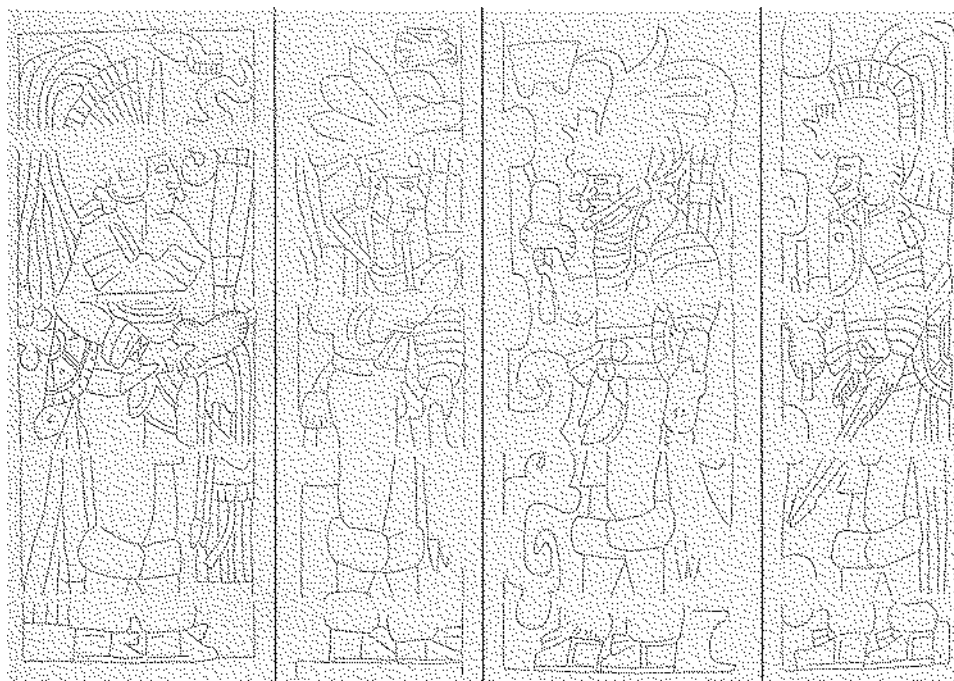


Fig. 49 Rollout drawing of Column 14, Northwest Colonnade, Chichén Itzá. Reconstruction drawing by Jean Charlot, from Morris, *et al.* (1931: Plate 82).

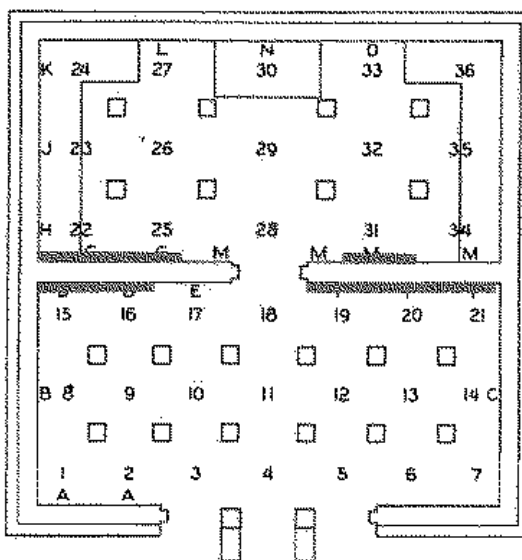
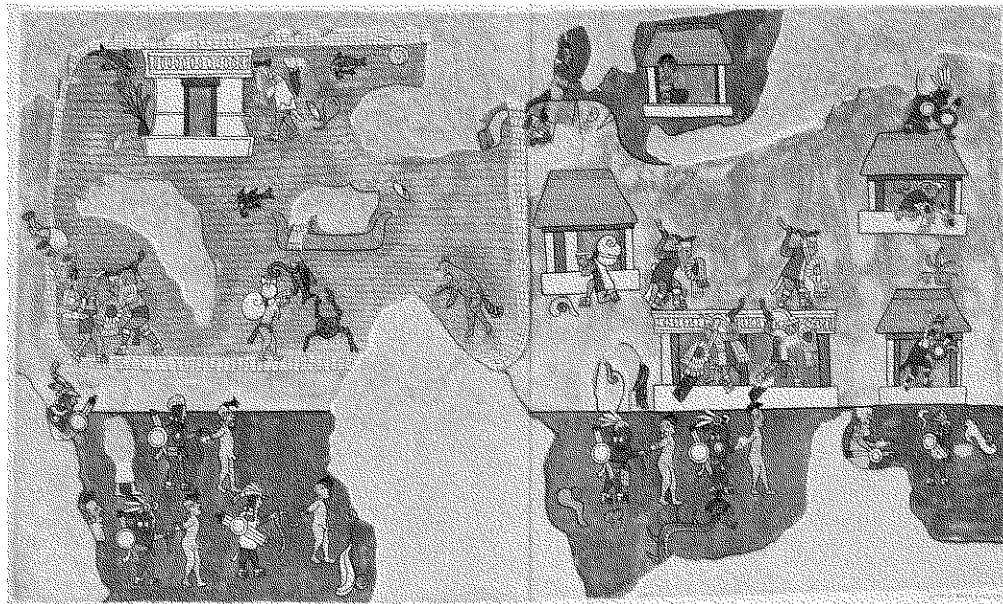
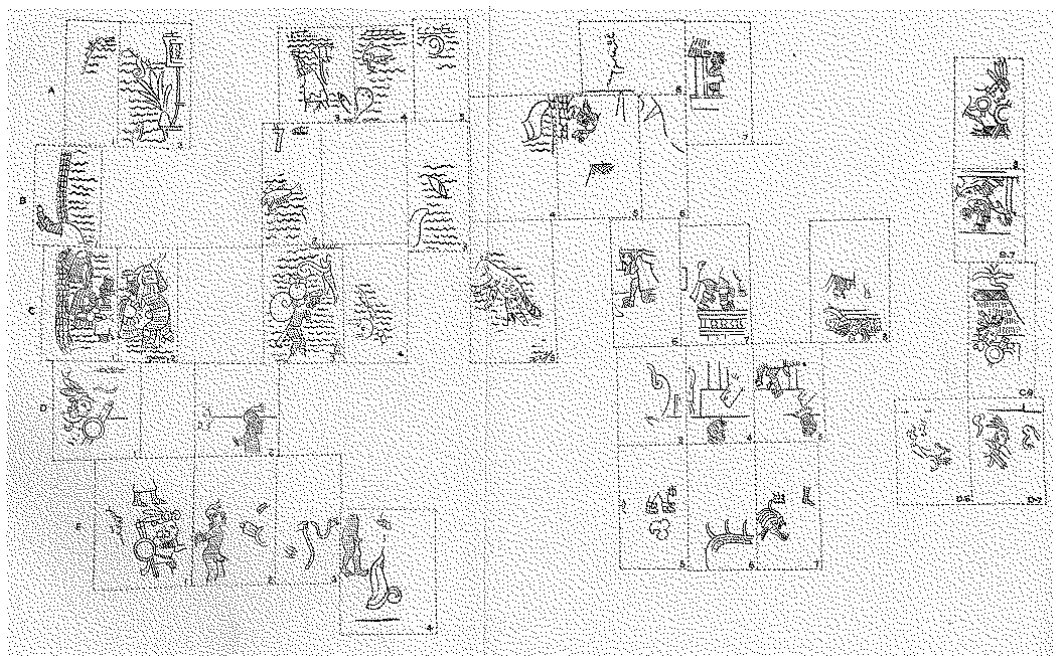


Fig. 50 Ground plan of Temple of the Warriors with positions of the recovered murals indicated. After Morris, *et al.* (1931: fig. 63).

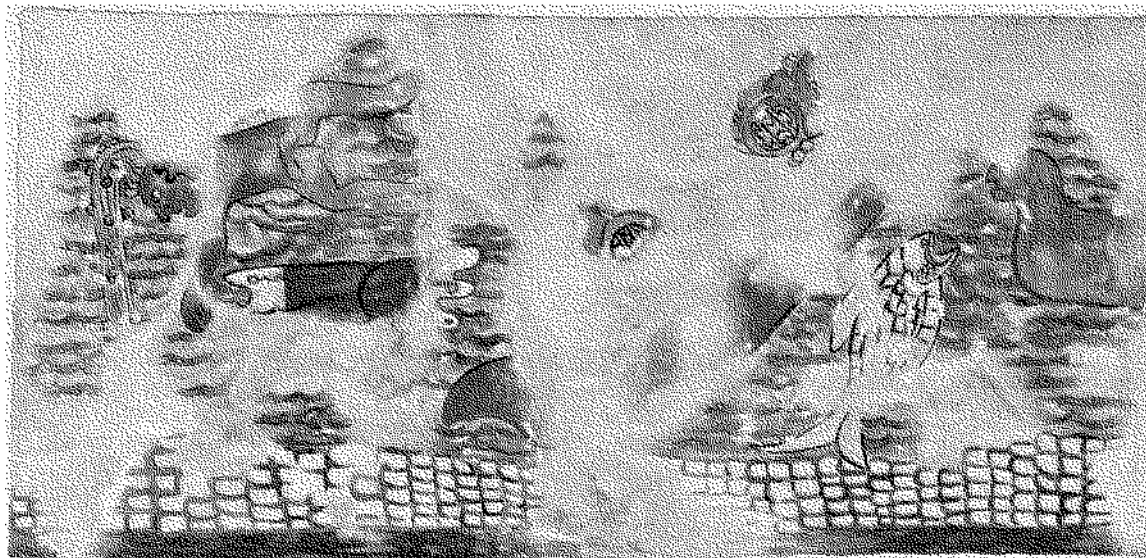


a

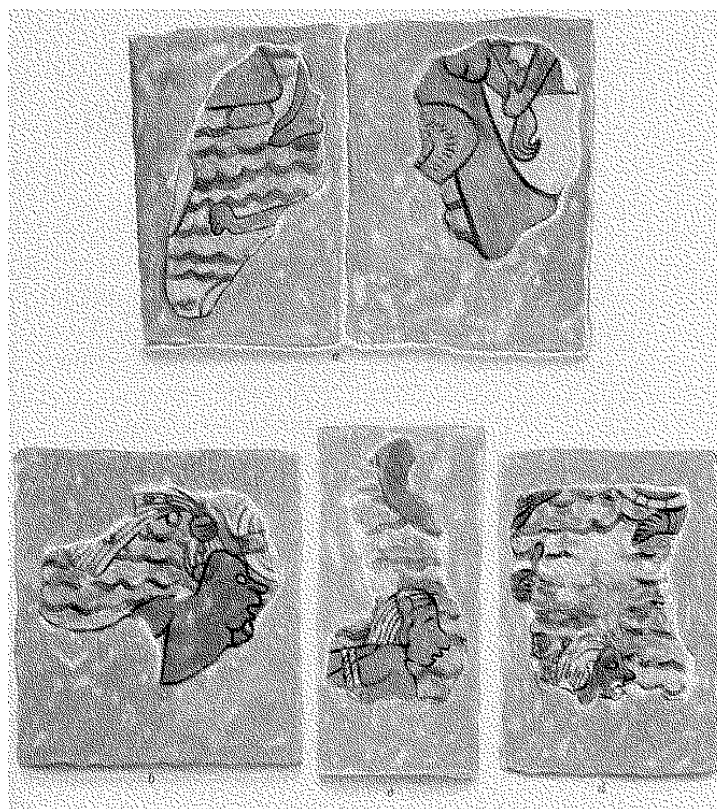


b

Fig. 51 Village Raid scene from Area 15-16 (north portion of east wall, outer chamber), Temple of the Warriors. Reconstruction painting (a) and drawing (b) by Ann Axtell Morris. From Morris, *et al.* (1931: Plate 139).



a



b

Fig. 52 Fragments of a marine battle scene from Areas 20-21 (south portion of east wall, outer chamber), Temple of the Warriors. Reconstruction paintings by Ann Axtell Morris. From Morris, *et al.* (1931: Plates 146-147).

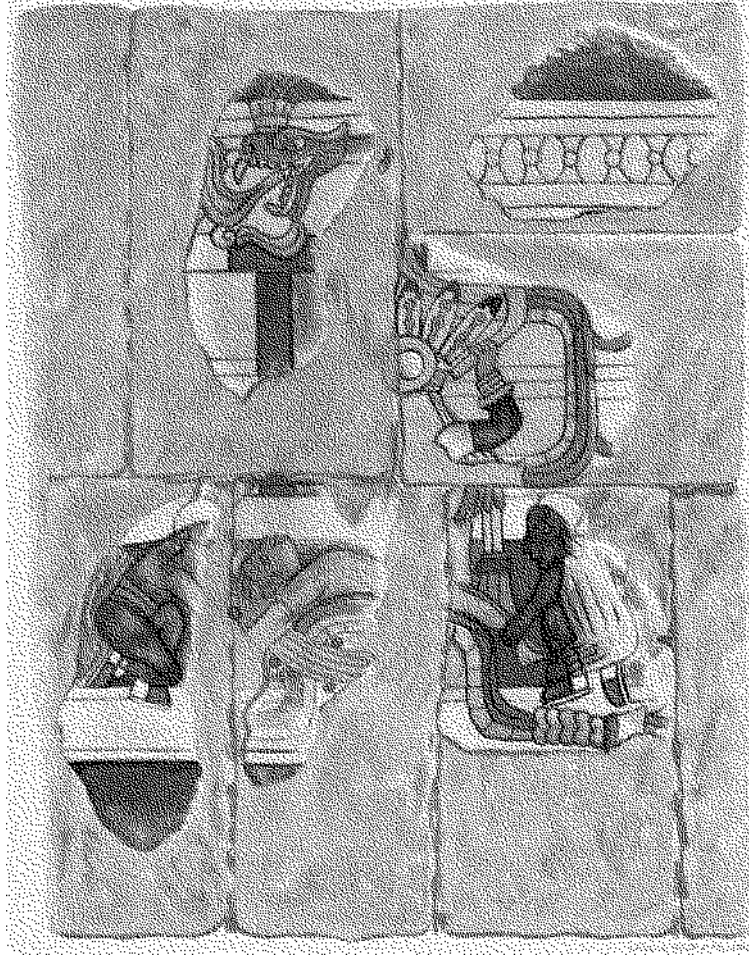
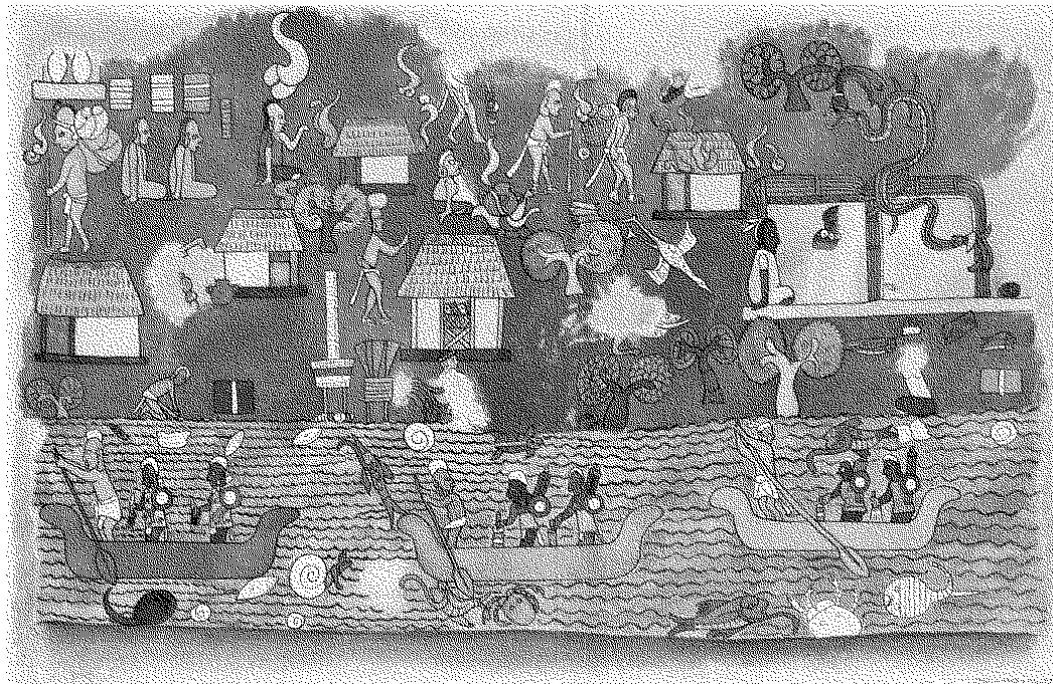
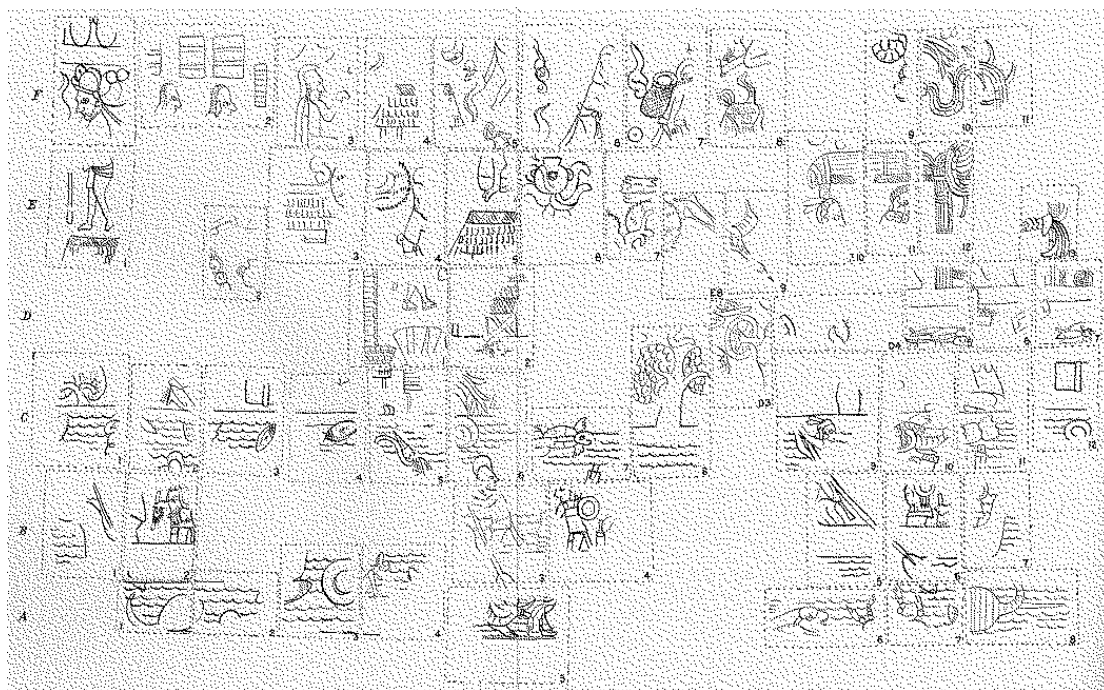


Fig. 53 Sacrifice scene from Area 19 (south portion of east wall, outer chamber), Temple of the Warriors. Reconstruction paintings by Ann Axtell Morris. From Morris, *et al.* (1931: Plate 145).



a



b

Fig. 54 Temple of the Warriors, Area 31. Reconstruction painting (a) and drawing (b) by Ann Axtell Morris. From Morris, *et al.* (1931: Plate 159).

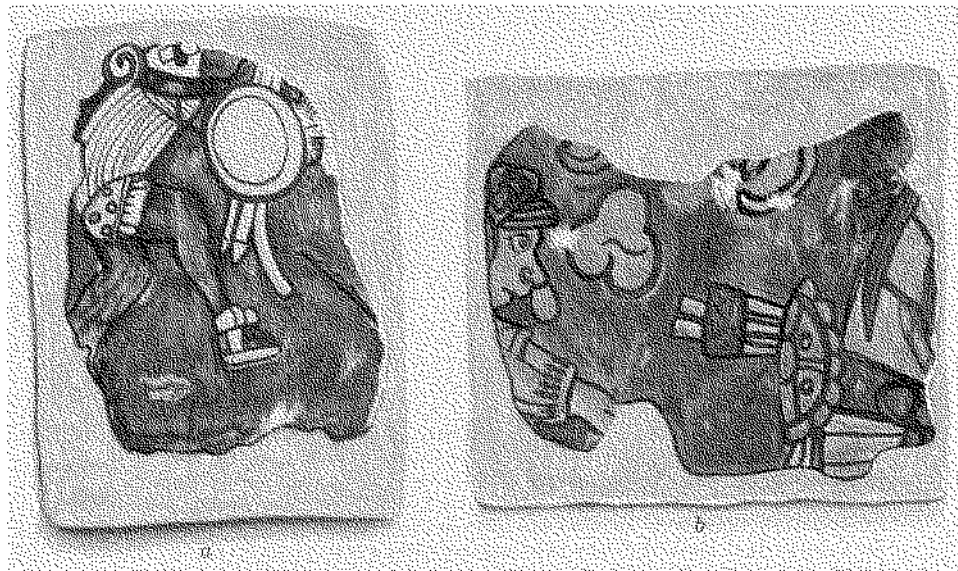


Fig. 55 Fragments from Areas 22 and 25 (north portion of west wall, inner chamber), Temple of the Warriors. Reconstruction paintings by Ann Axtell Morris. From Morris, *et al.* (1931: Plate 156).

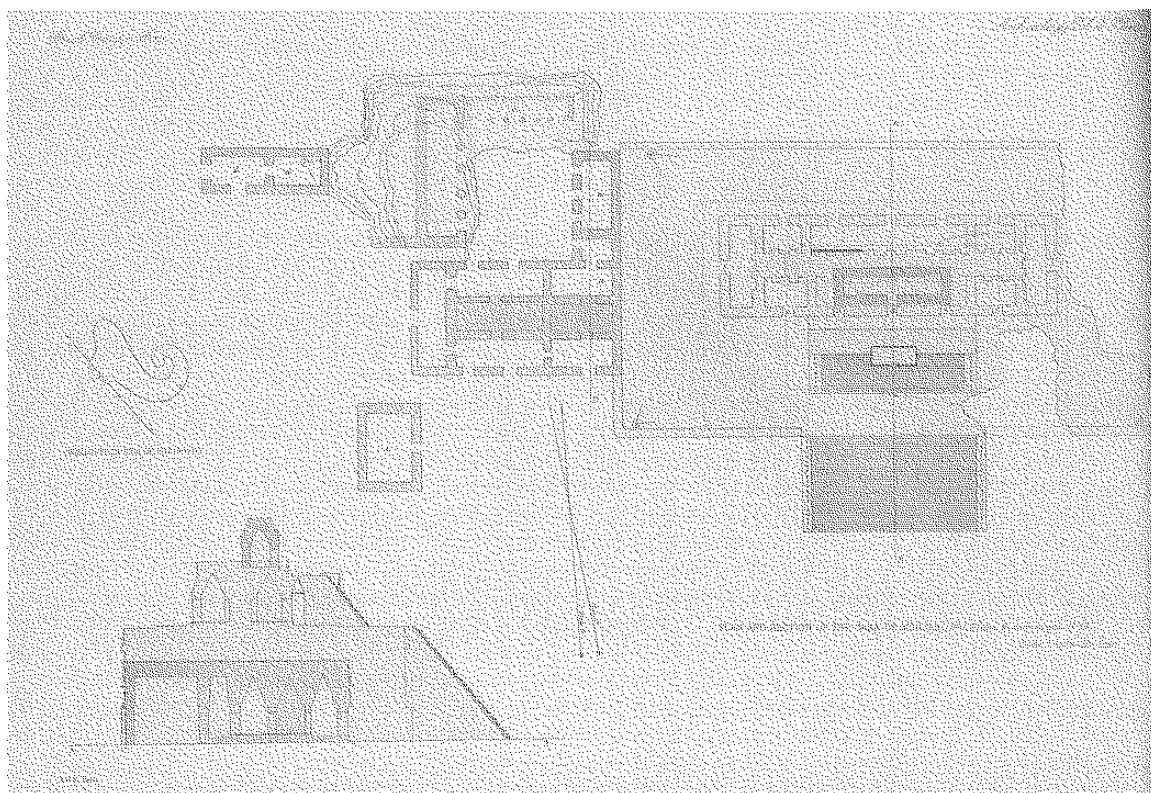


Fig. 56 Plan of the Monjas, Chichén Itzá, with the location of the murals indicated. After Maudslay (1889-1902: Vol. III, Plate 3).

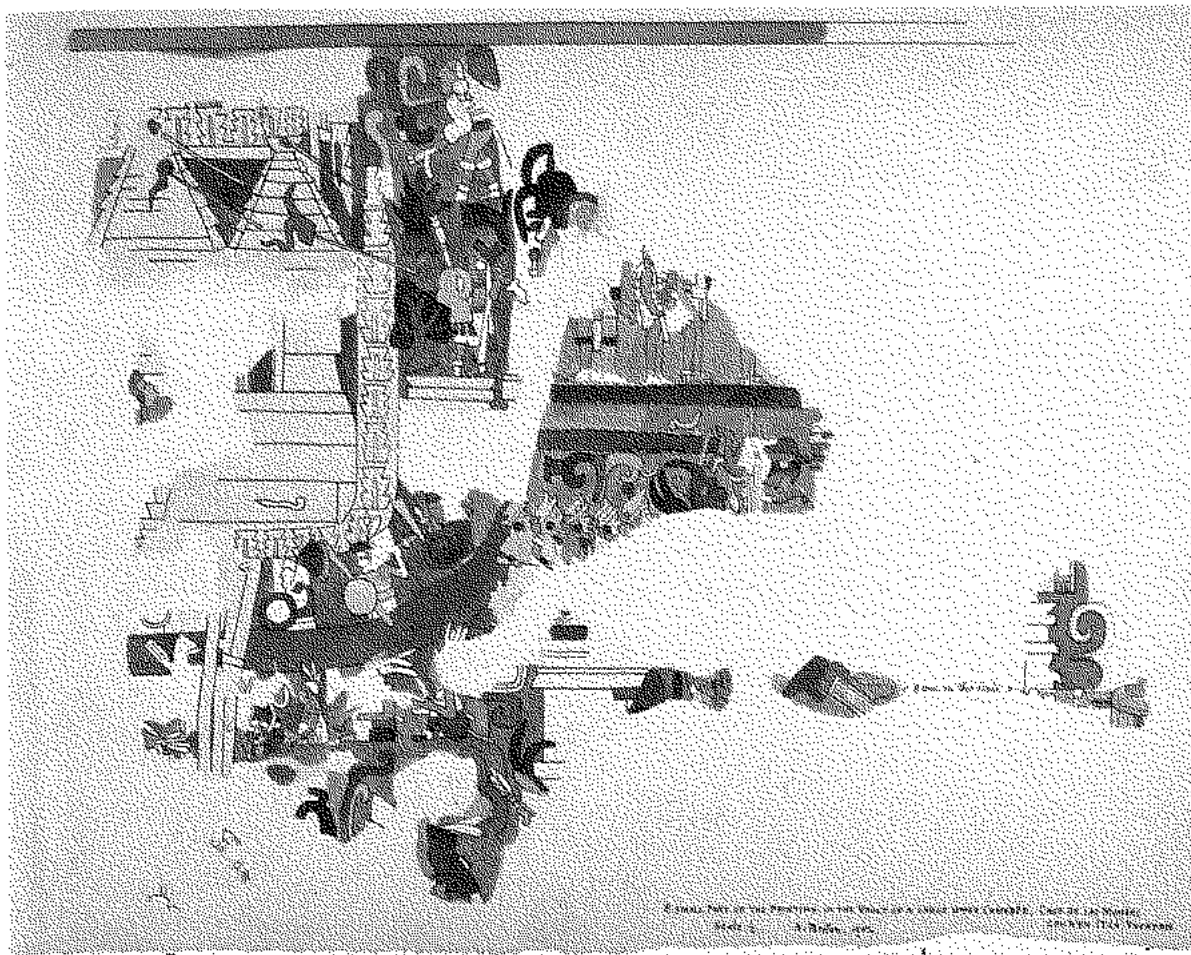


Fig. 57 Mural from east side of north vault, Room 22 of the Monjas. Reconstruction painting by Adela Breton. From M. McVicker (2005: 101).



a



b



c

Fig. 58 Mural from west side of south wall, Structure A, Mulchic.
 a) Photograph from Staines Cicero (1999: Fig. 137).
 b) Reconstruction painting by Alberto Flandes, from Gendrop (1971: Fig. 131).
 c) Reconstruction drawing from Piña Chan (1964: Plate 1).



Fig. 59 Mural from east side of south wall, Structure A, Mulchic. Reconstruction drawing from Piña Chan (1964: Plate 2).

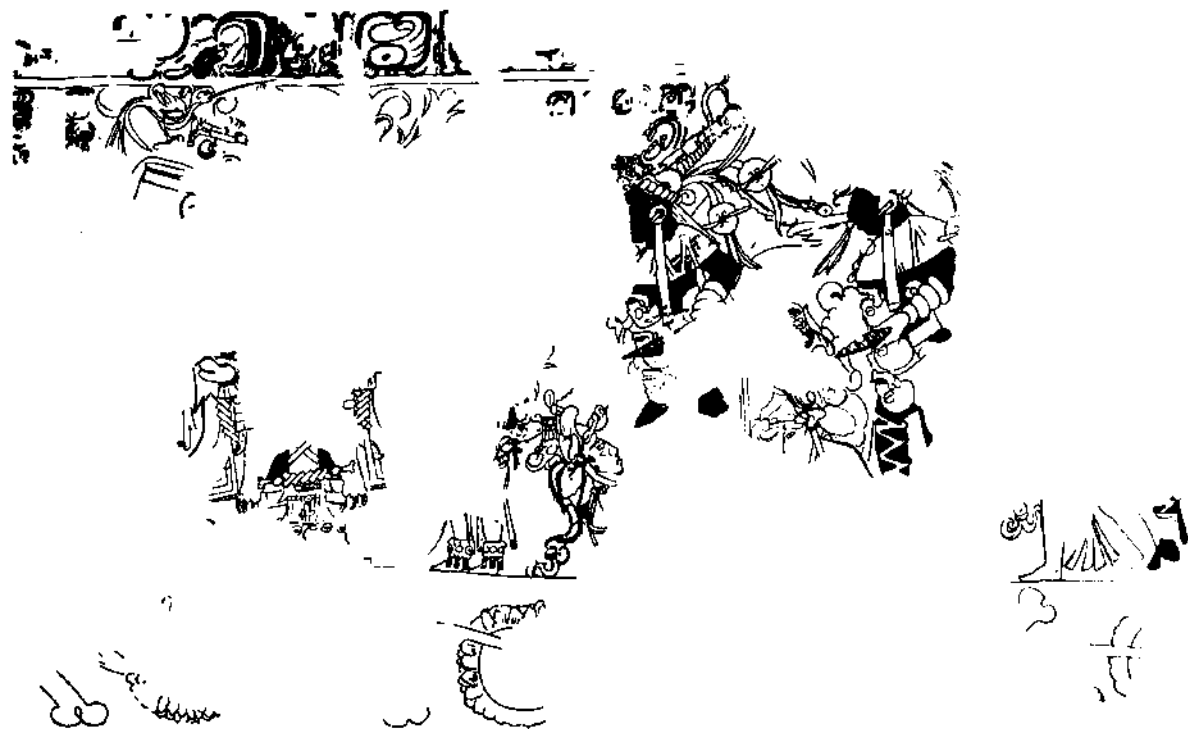


Fig. 60 Mural from north wall of Structure A, Mulchic. Reconstruction drawing from Piña Chan (1964: Plate 3).

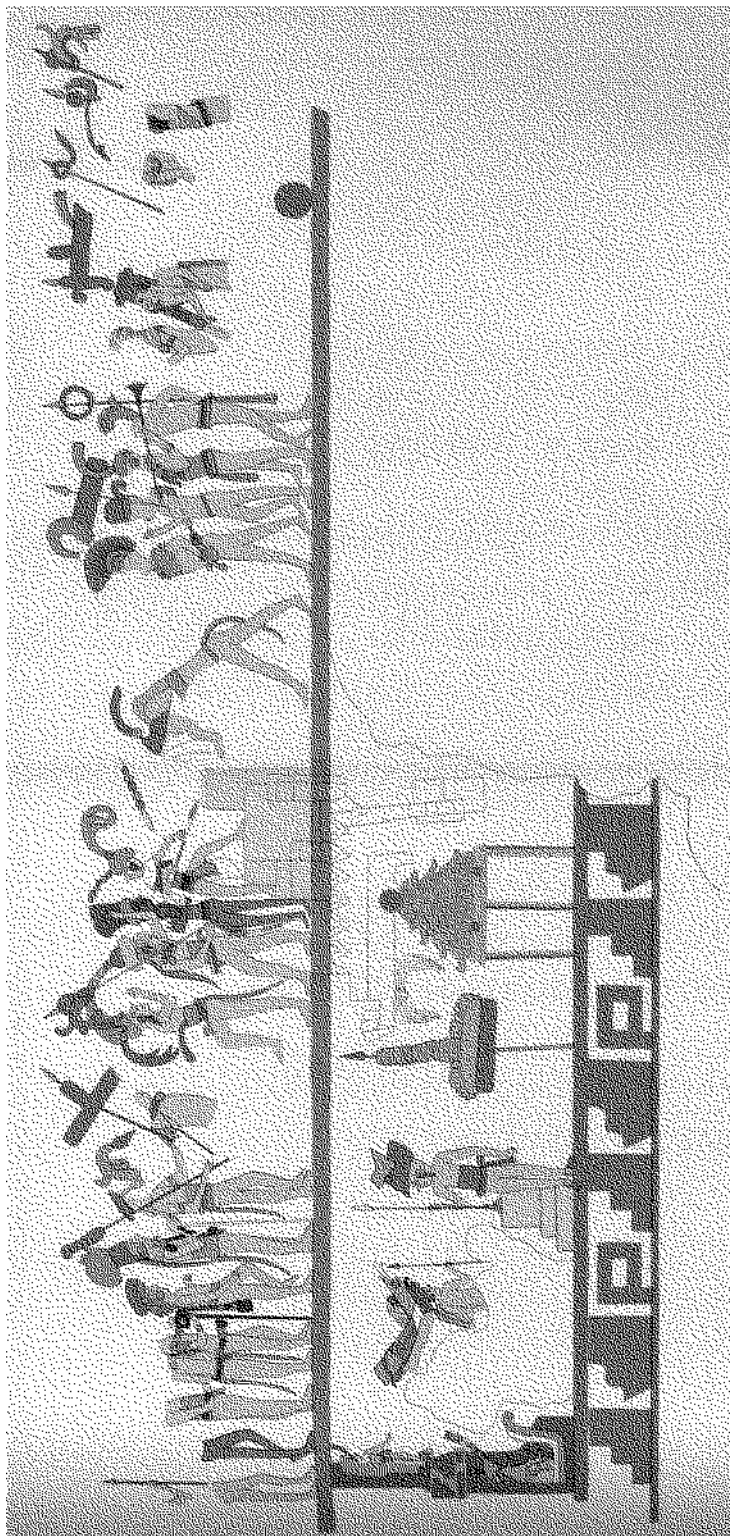


Fig. 61 Mural from Room 10, Structure 3, Chacmultun. Reconstruction painting from E. Thompson (1904: Plate VIII).



Fig. 62 Mural from Room 10, Structure 3, Chacmultun. Reconstruction painting by Martine Fettweis, from Mayer (1990: Fig. 24).



Fig. 63 Mural from north vault, Room 8, Building of the Paintings, Ichmac. Reconstruction drawing by José Francisco Villaseñor, from Ruiz Gallut (2001: Fig. 8).

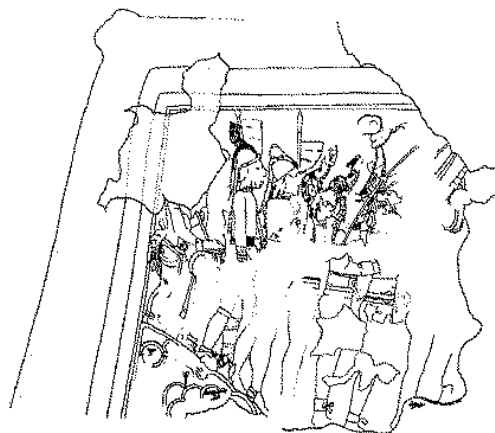
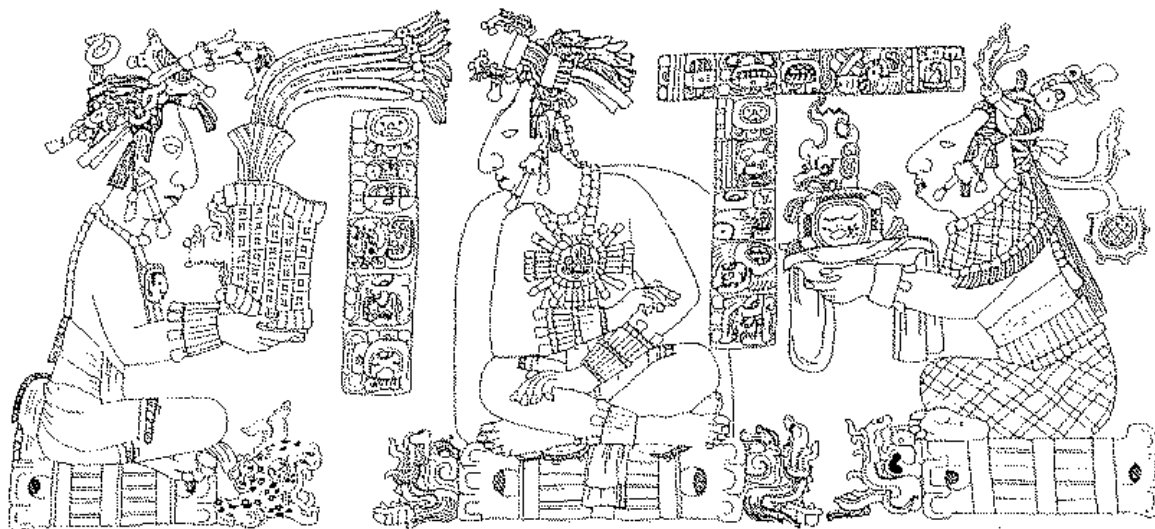


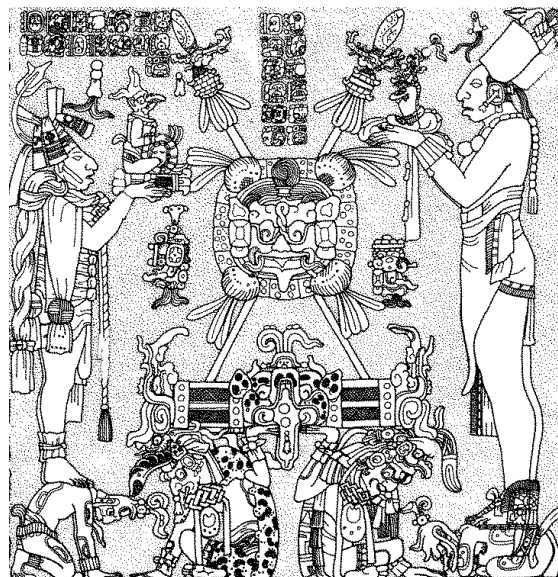
Fig. 64 Mural from the east vault, Room 8, Building of the Paintings, Ichmac. Reconstruction drawing by José Francisco Villaseñor, from Ruiz Gallut (2001: Fig. 9).



a



b



c

Fig. 65 The *tok' pakal* emblem at Palenque

a) Palace Tablet. From Schele (1979: Fig. 10).

b) Tablet of the Slaves. From Schele (1979: Fig. 16).

c) Tablet of the Sun. From Schele (1979: Fig. 1c).

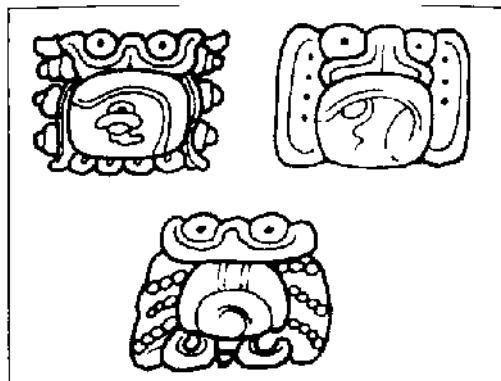


Fig. 66 Examples of the “Star-Over-Shell” verb. From Nahm (1994: Fig. 2).

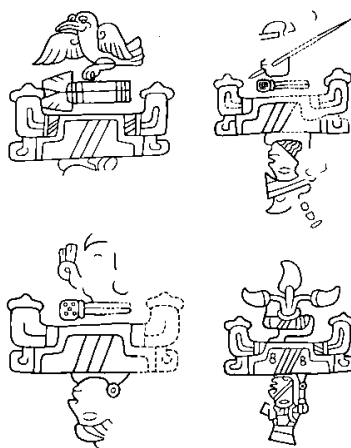


Fig. 67 Conquest statements from Building J, Monte Alban. Drawings from Marcus and Flannery (1996: Figs. 234 and 236).



Fig. 68 Conquest statement from Pit 11-A, Cacaxtla. Photograph by Pedro Ortega Ortiz. From Moreno Juárez, *et al.* (2005: 55).

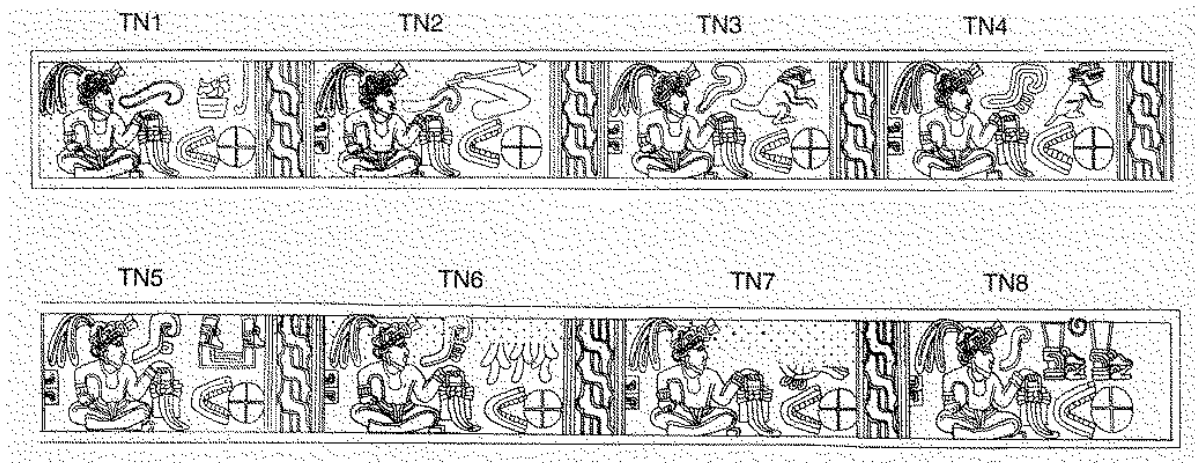


Fig. 69 Conquest statements from the Pyramid of the Plumed Serpent, Xochicalco. Drawings from Smith (2000: 70).

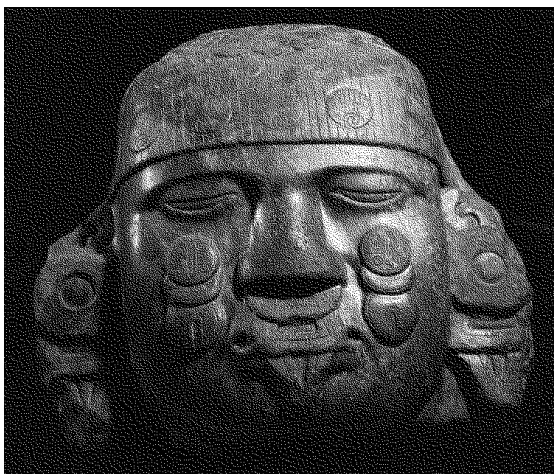


a

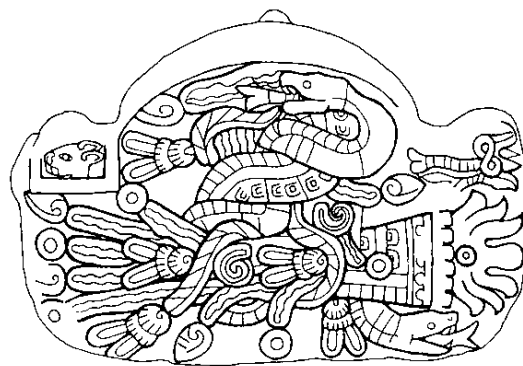


b

Fig. 70 Details from the Temple Stone.
 a) Backrest. From Pasztory (1983: Plate 127).
 b) Back. From Pasztory (1983: Plate 126).



a



b

Fig. 71 Head of Coyolxauhqui.

a) Front. From Museo Nacional de Antropología (2004: 194).

b) Bottom. Drawing by Janice Robertson, from Pasztory (1983: Plate 101).

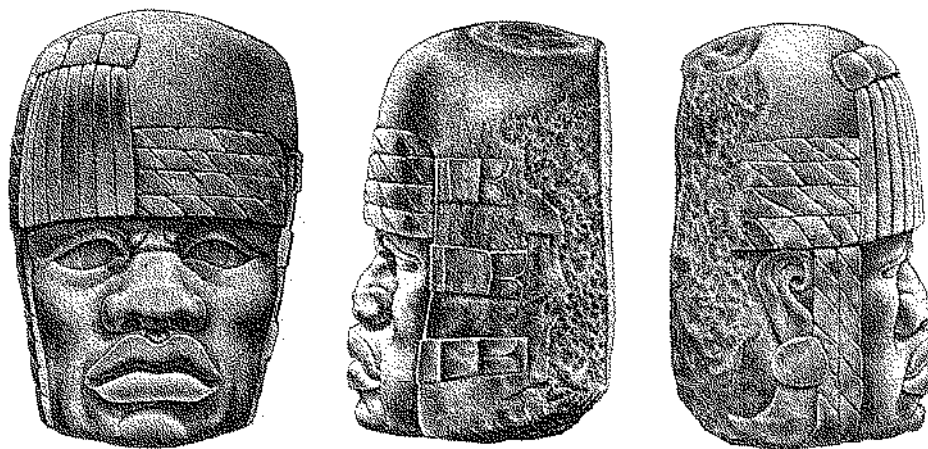


Fig. 72 San Lorenzo Monument 4. Drawings from Diehl (2004: Fig. 71).

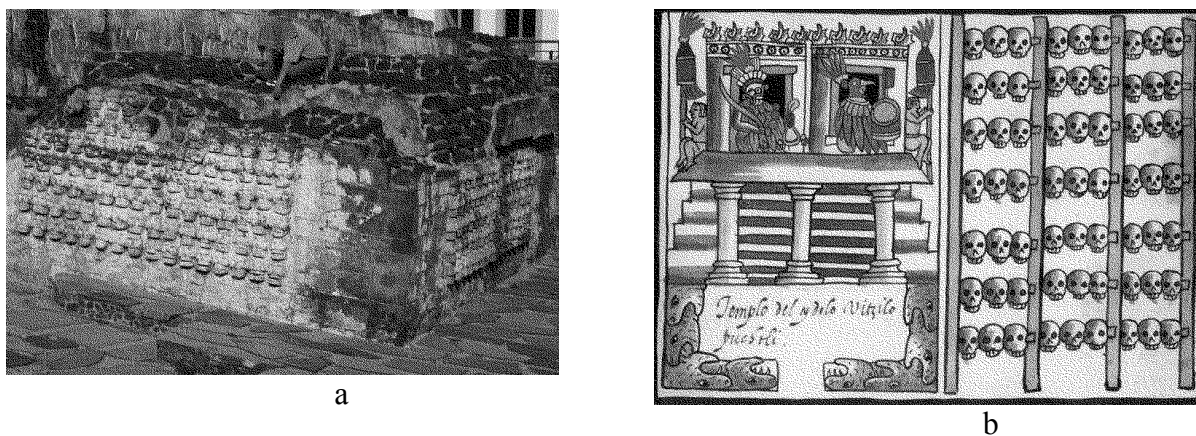


Fig. 73 Skull Platform, Sacred Precinct, Tenochtitlan.

- a) Photograph by the author
b) Tovar Codex, Plate 19.

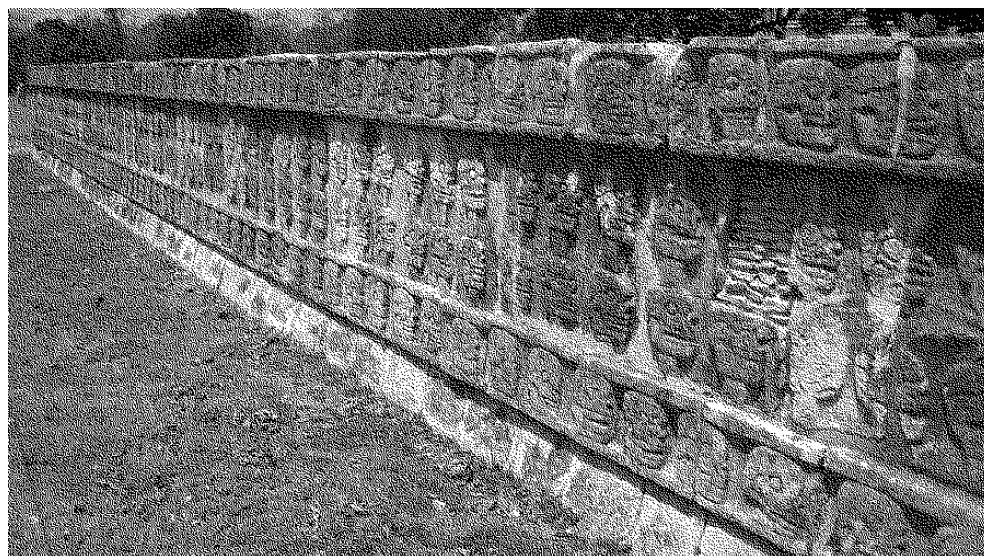


Fig. 74 Skull Platform, Chichén Itzá. Photograph by the author.

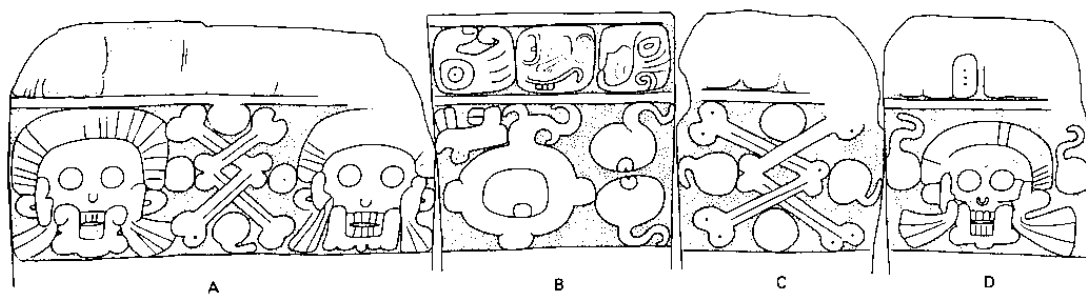


Fig. 75 Skull imagery from Monument 1, Cemetery Group, Uxmal. Drawing by Ian Graham. From Graham, Vol 4.2 (1992: 122).



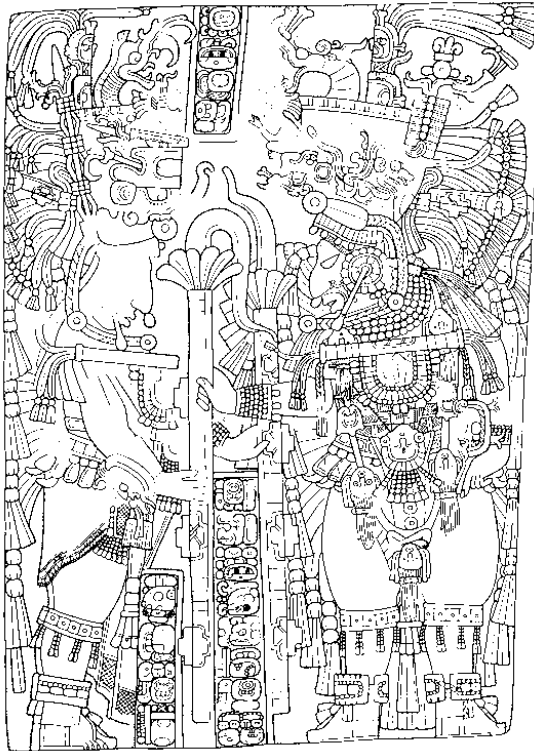
Fig. 76 Skull platform from Structure 16 at Copán. Photograph by the author.



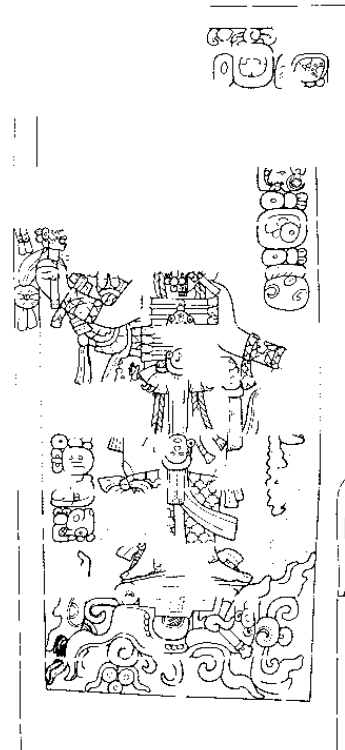
Fig. 77 Relief from the Great Ball Court, Chichén Itzá. From Schele and Mathews (1998: 247).



a



b



c

Fig. 78 Examples of trophy heads worn as costume elements.

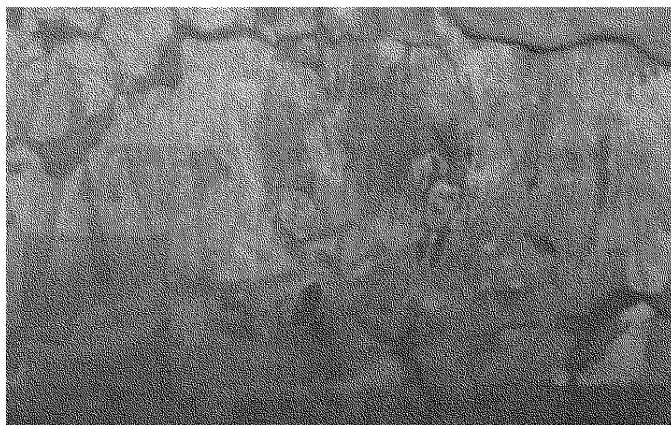
a) Detail from south vault, Room 2, Bonampak. Reconstruction painting by Heather Hurst and Leonard Ashby. From Martin and Miller (2004: 164-165).

b) Yaxchilán Lintel 9. From Graham, Vol. 3.1 (1977: 29).

c) Northwest jamb from Copán Structure 10L-18. From Baudez (1994: Fig. 95).



a



b

Fig. 79 Heart motifs from the Cacaxtla Battle Mural.

- a) As pendants hanging from the belt of figure E3. Photograph by the author.
- b) Protruding from the chest of figure E21. Photograph by the author.

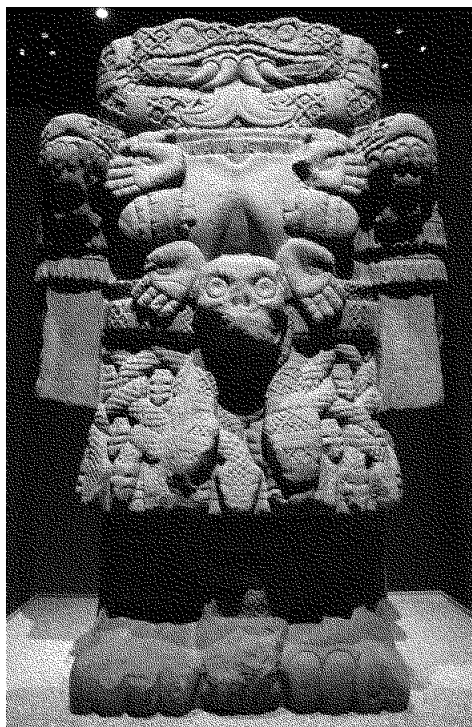
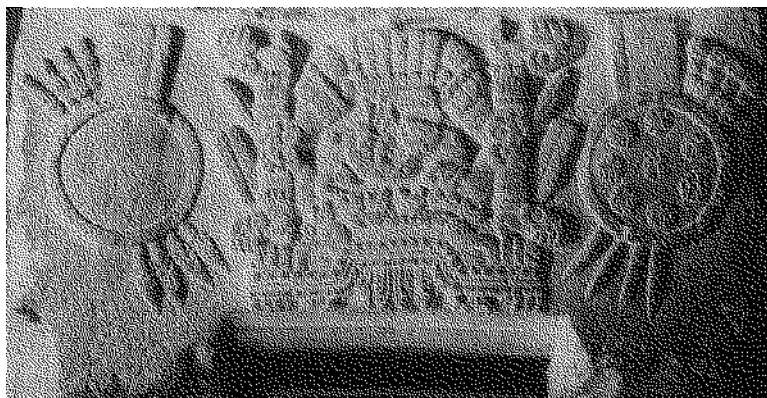
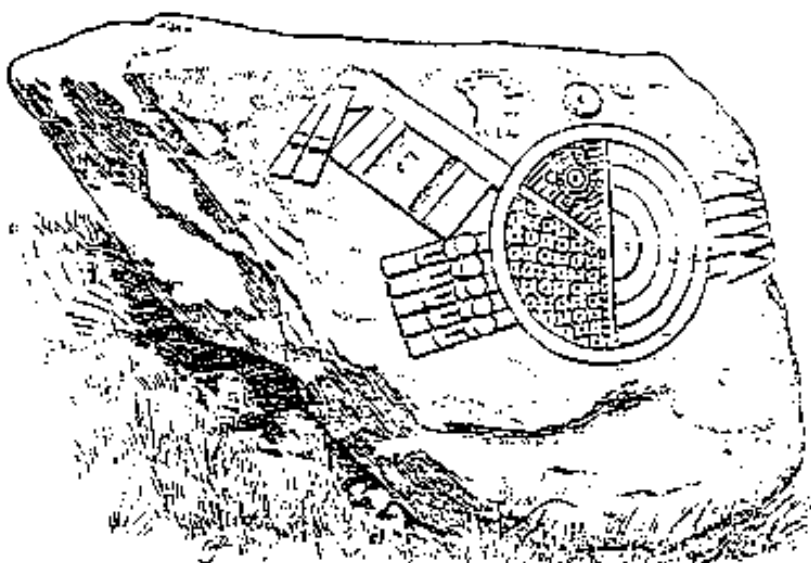


Fig. 80 Coatlicue sculpture, Tenochtitlan. Photograph by author.



a

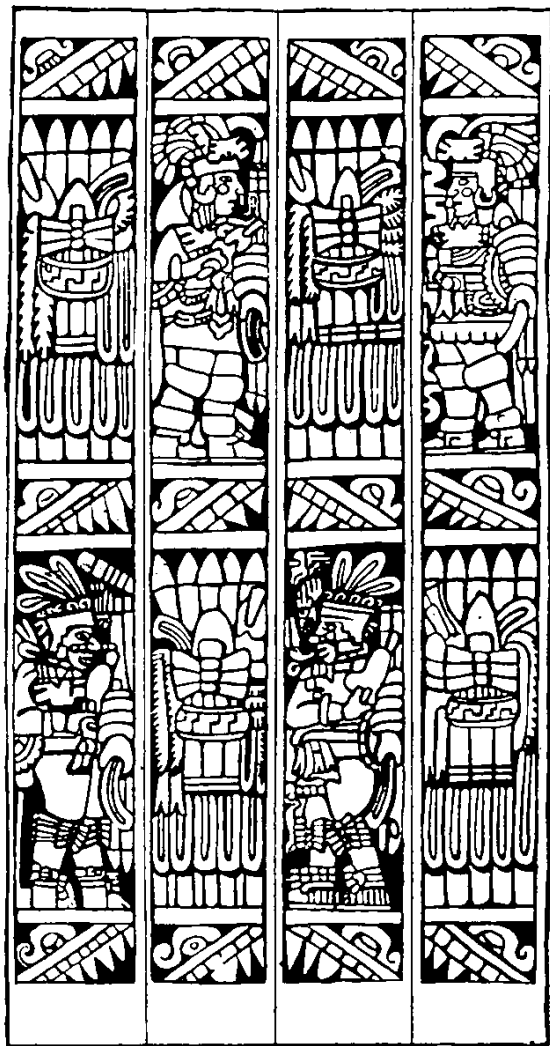


b

Fig. 81 Aztec *mitl chimalli* motifs.

a) Seat of Temple Stone. From Pasztory (1983: Plate 130).

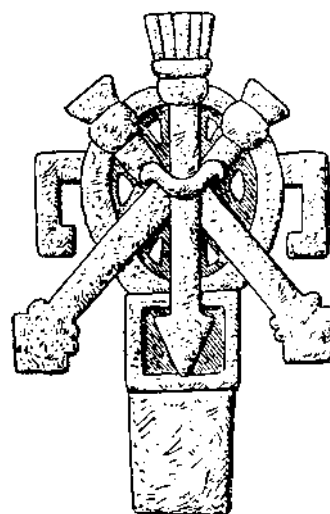
b) Boulder in Cuernavaca. From Umberger (1981: Fig. 124B).



a



b



c

Fig. 82 Weapon imagery.

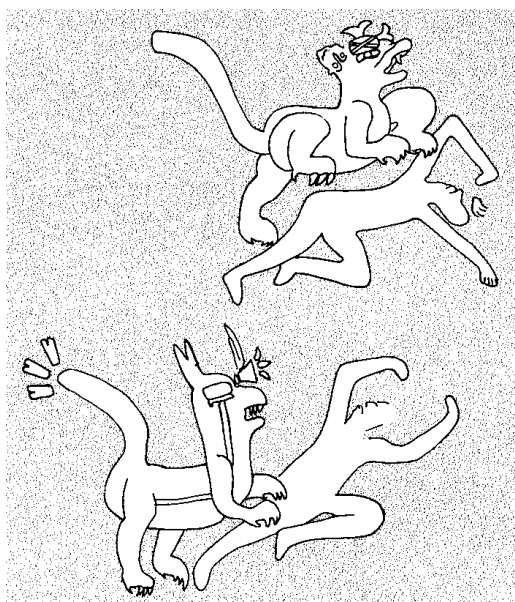
a) Relief from pillar on Pyramid B. From Diehl (1983: 62).

b) Relief panel from Pyramid B, Tula. From Diehl (1983: Plate 16).

c) Cornice relief from the Upper Temple of the Jaguars, Chichén Itzá. From Selser (1998 [1908]: Fig. 251).



a



b



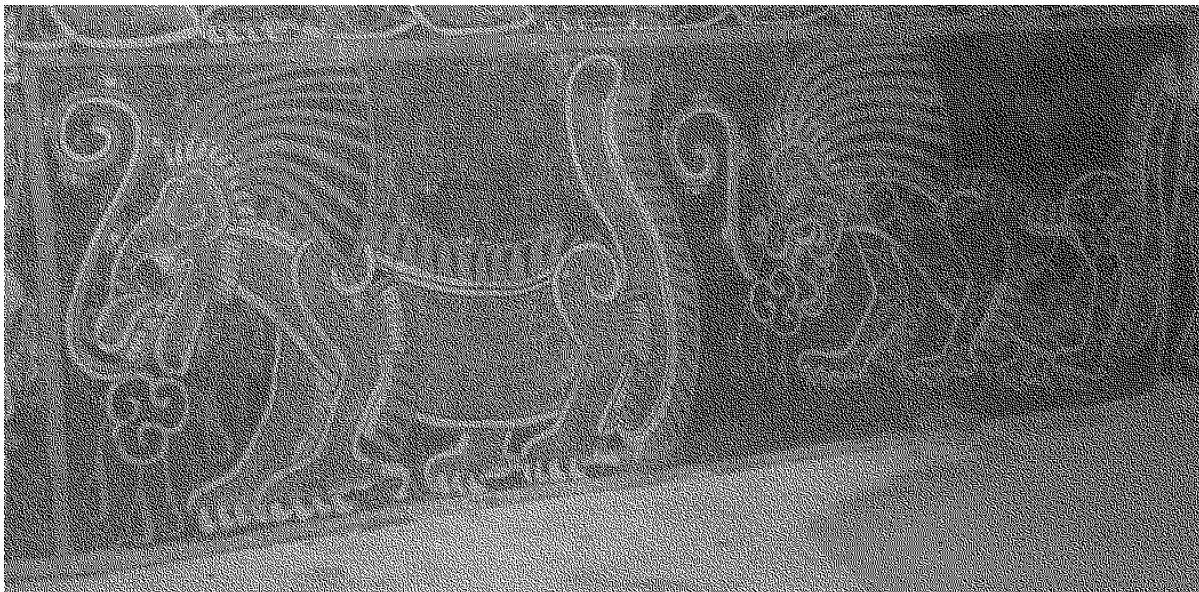
c

Fig. 83 Predatory animals as martial symbols in Olmec art.

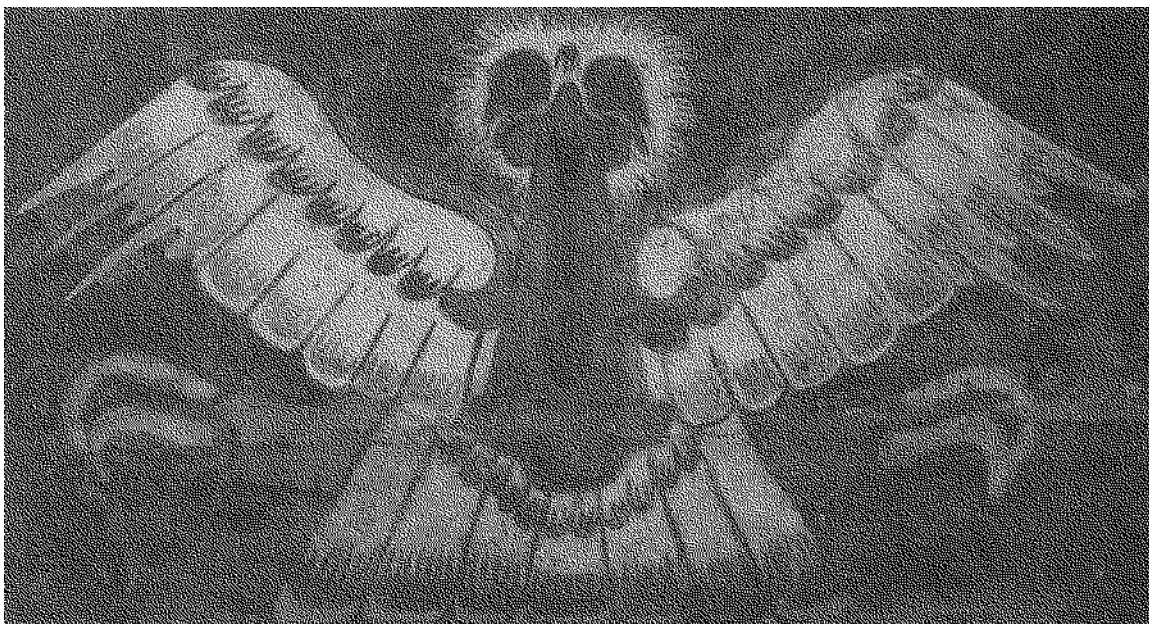
a) San Lorenzo Monument 107. From Berrin and Fields (2010: Fig. 14).

b) Chalcatzingo Monument 4. From Grove (1984: 113).

c) Chalcatzingo Monument 31. From Reilly and Garber (2003: 142).



a

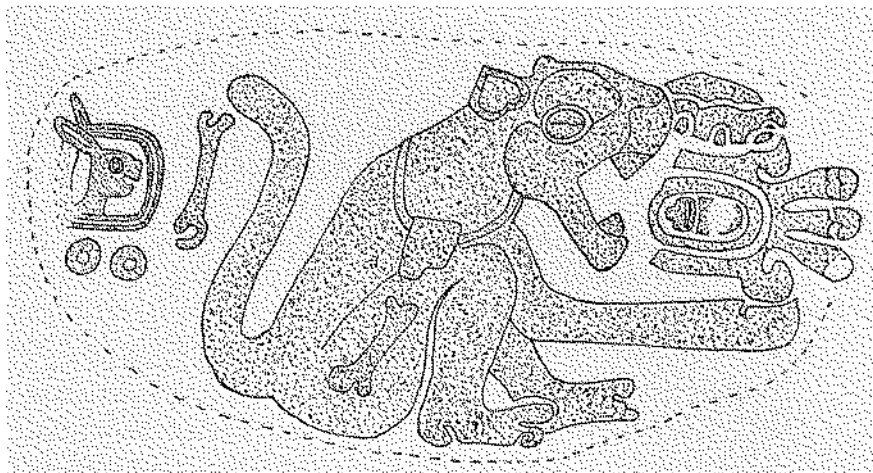


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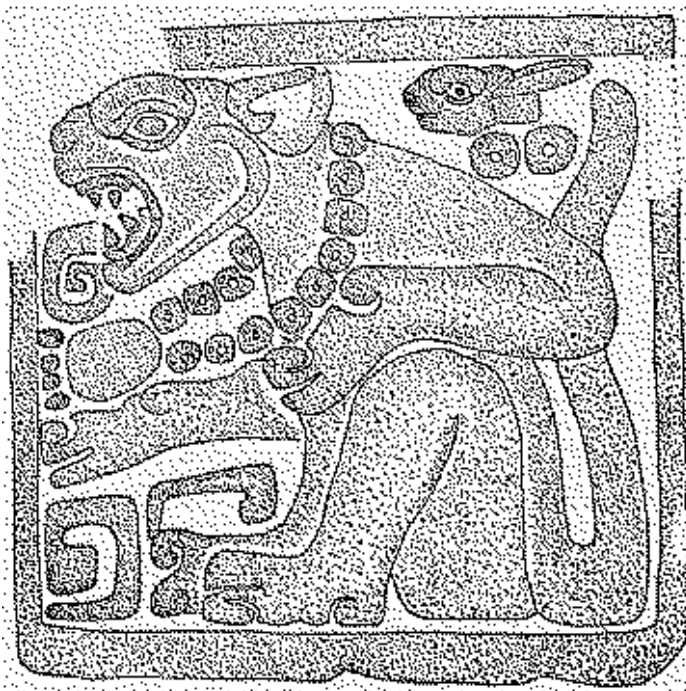
Fig. 84 Predatory animals as martial symbols in Teotihuacan art.

a) Coyote and Net Jaguar from Room 2 of Patio Blanco, Atetelco. Photograph by the author.

b) Eagle from Corridor 25, Tetitla. Photograph by the author.



a

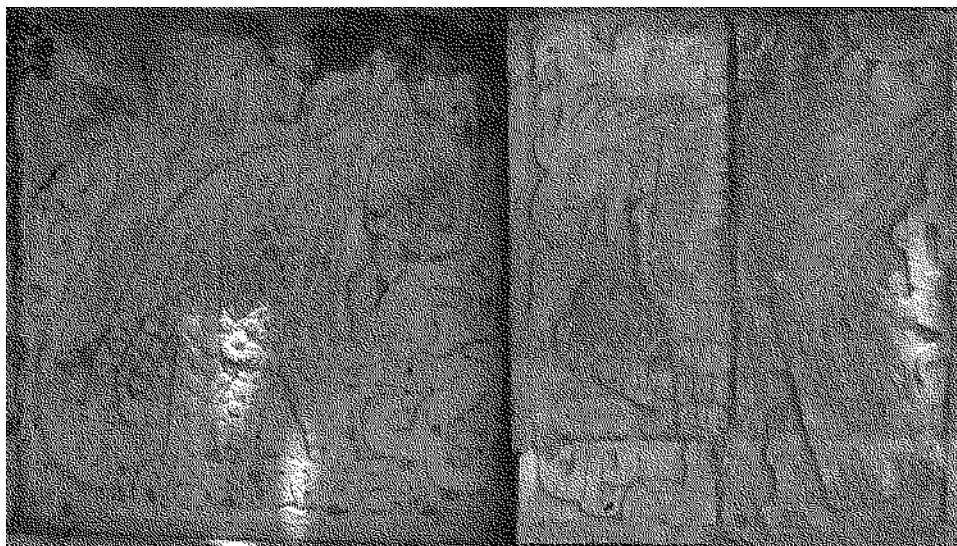


b

Fig. 85 Predatory animals as martial symbols from Teotenango.
a) Carved boulder. From Álvarez A. (1983: Fig. 4a).
b) Trapezoidal stone. From Álvarez A. (1983: Fig. 2).



a



b

Fig. 86 Predatory animals as martial symbols at Tula and Chichén Itzá.

a) Reliefs from Pyramid B, Tula. Photograph by the author.

b) Reliefs from Platform of the Eagles, Chichén Itzá. Photograph by the author.



Fig. 87 Aztec jaguar and eagle warriors. From Sahagún, Book 2, Chapter 21.

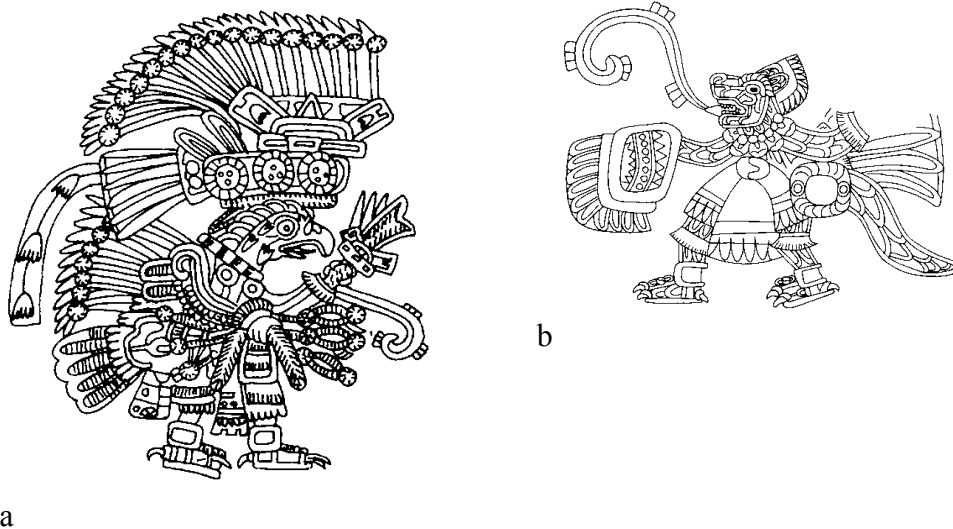
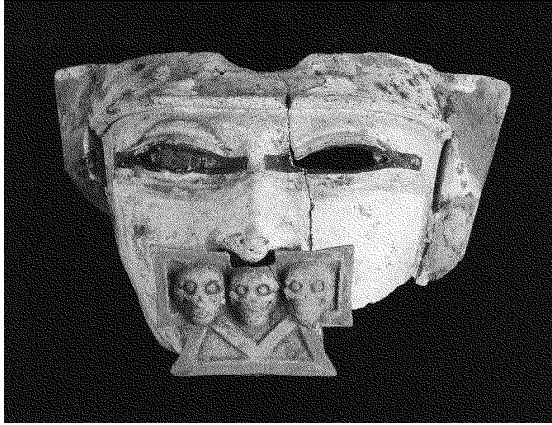


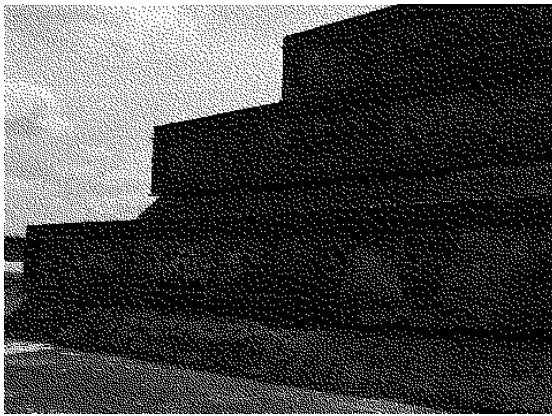
Fig. 88 Zoomorphic warriors from Teotihuacan.

a) Bird warrior from Atetelco. From de la Fuente (1995b: 212).

b) Jaguar warrior from Zacuala. From de la Fuente (1995b: 321).



a



b



c

Fig. 89 Butterfly imagery with possible martial symbolism.

a) Teotihuacan mask with stylized butterfly nose ornament decorated with skulls. From Berrin and Pasztory (1993: 220).

b) Teotihuacan *talud-tablero* architectural profile. Photograph by the author.

c) Warrior with butterfly pectoral, Pyramid B, Tula. Photograph by the author.



a



b

Fig. 90 Warrior figures from Atetelco apartment compound, Teotihuacan.

a) Patio Norte figure. Photograph by the author.

b) Patio Blanco figure. Photograph by the author.

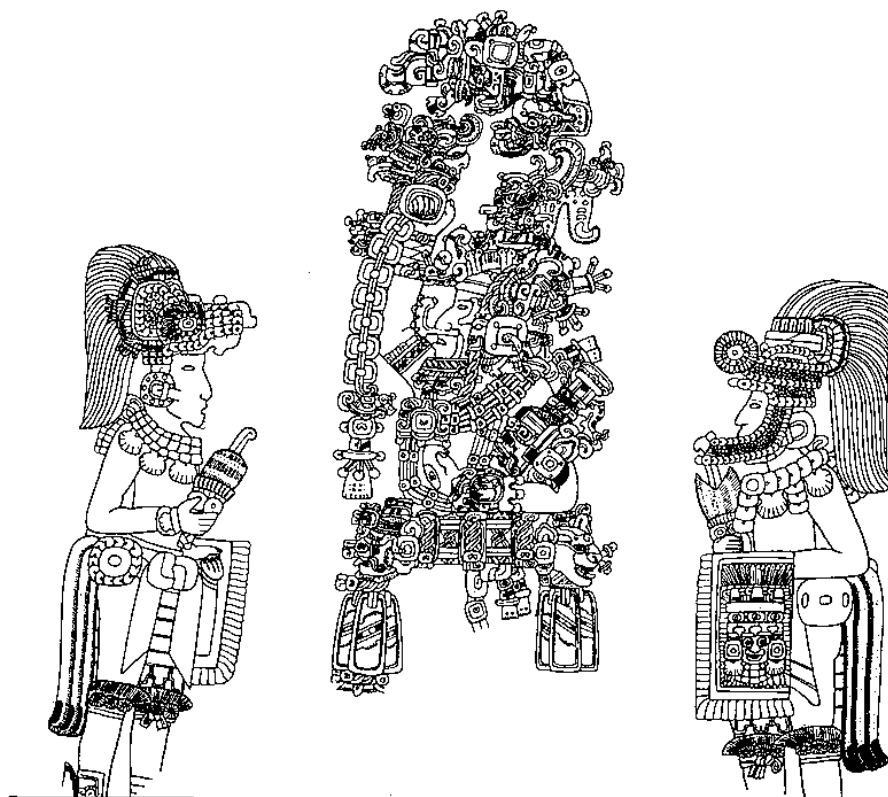


Fig. 91 Tikal Stela 31. Drawings of front and sides by William R. Coe, from Jones and Satterthwaite (1982: Figs. 51-52).

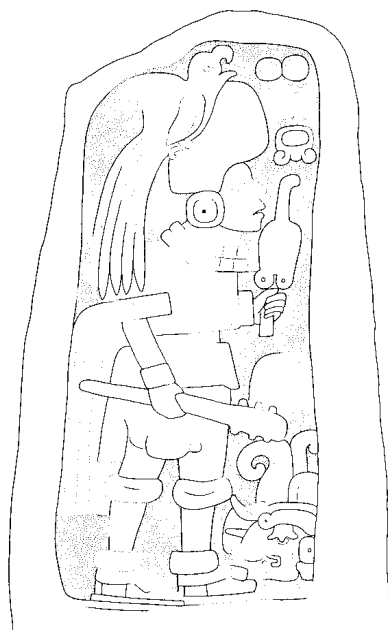


Fig. 92 Uaxactun Stela 5. Drawing from Graham, Vol 5.3 (1986: 143).

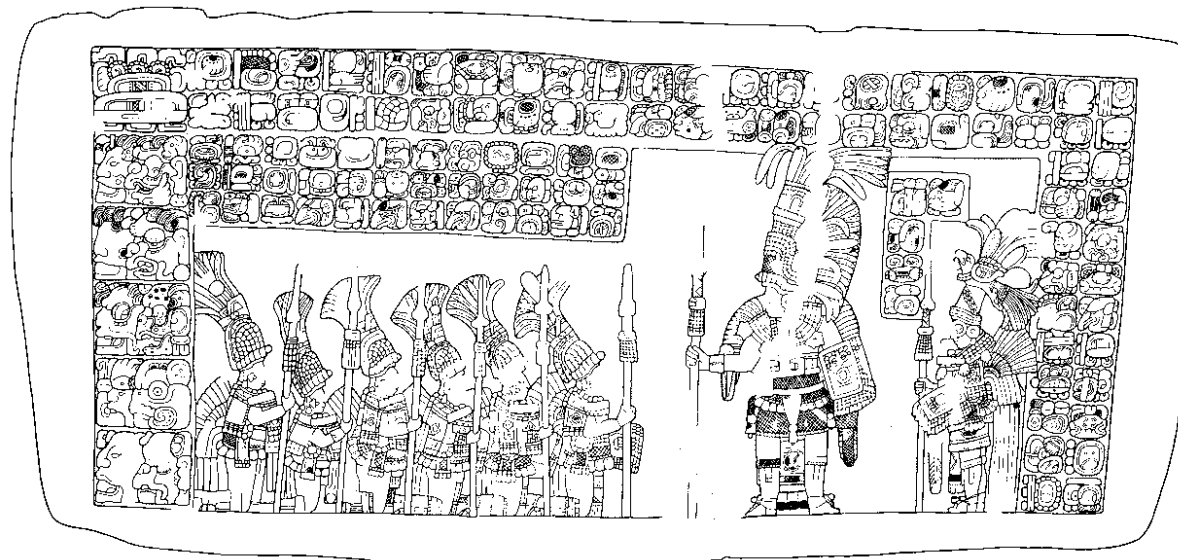


Fig. 93 Piedras Negras Panel 2. Drawing by David Stuart, from Clancy (2009: 47).

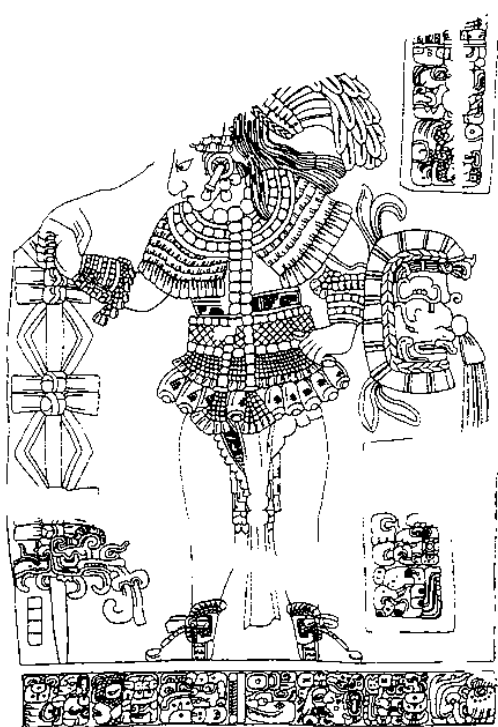


Fig. 94 Bonampak Stela 1. Drawing from Mathews (1980: Fig. 3).

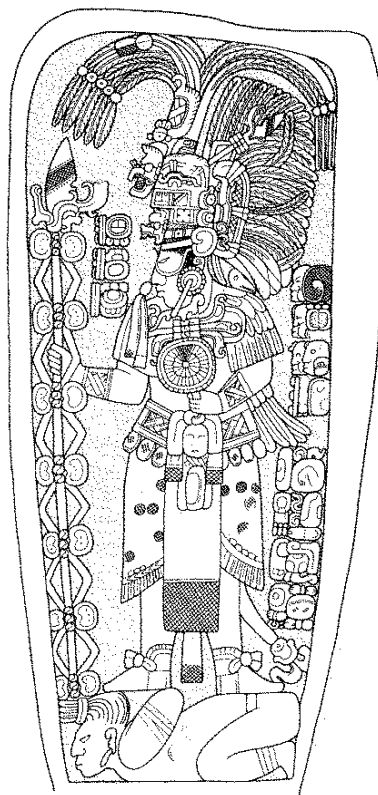


Fig. 95 Naranjo Stela 8. Drawing by Ian Graham. From Graham, Vol. 2.1 (1975: 27).



Fig. 96 Mural fragment from Building K, Tajín Chico, El Tajín. Photograph by Rafael Doniz, from Pascual Soto (1998: 67).

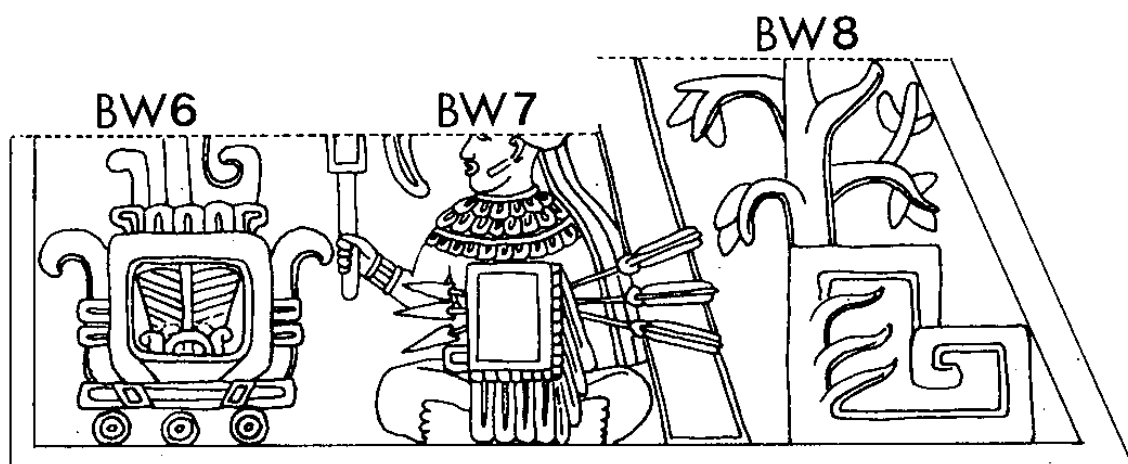


Fig. 97 Relief from the Pyramid of the Plumed Serpent, Xochicalco. Drawing from Smith (2000: 59).



a



b

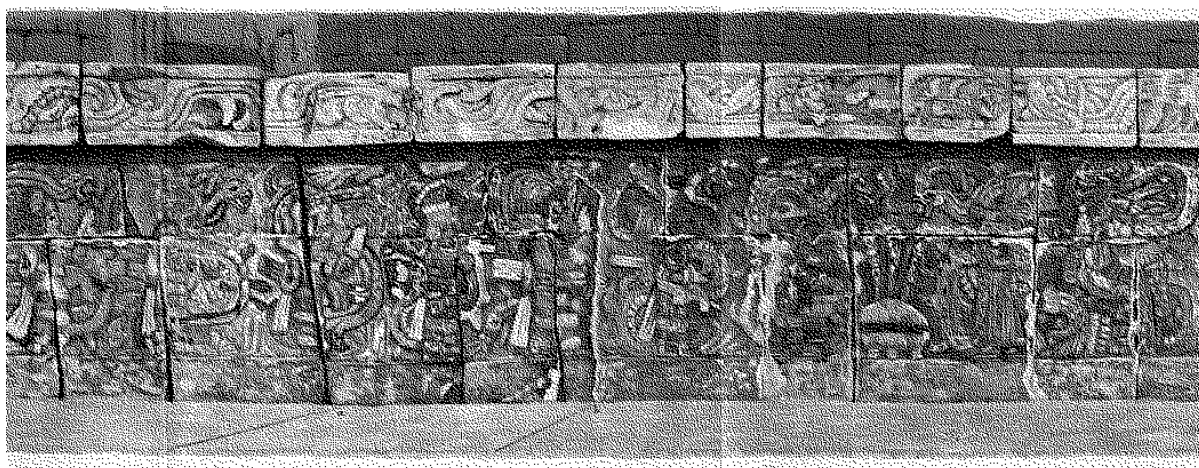
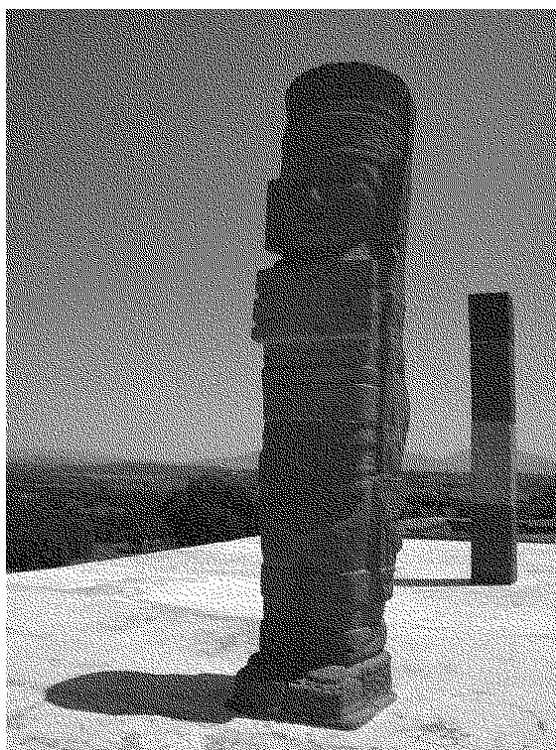


Fig. 98 Warrior figures from Chichén Itzá.

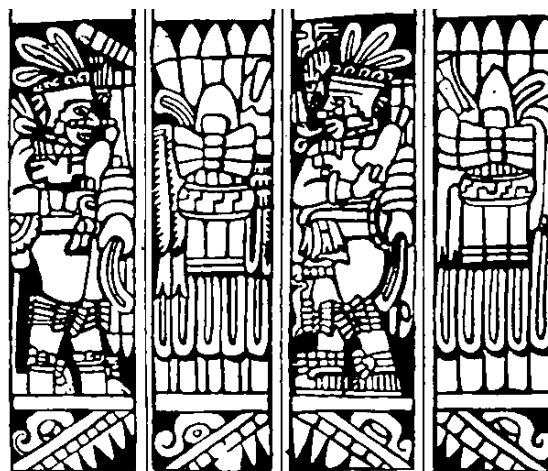
a) Relief from Platform of the Eagles. Photograph by the author.

b) North Bench from inner chamber of Temple of the Chac Mool. Reconstruction painting from Morris, *et al.* (1931: Plate 135).

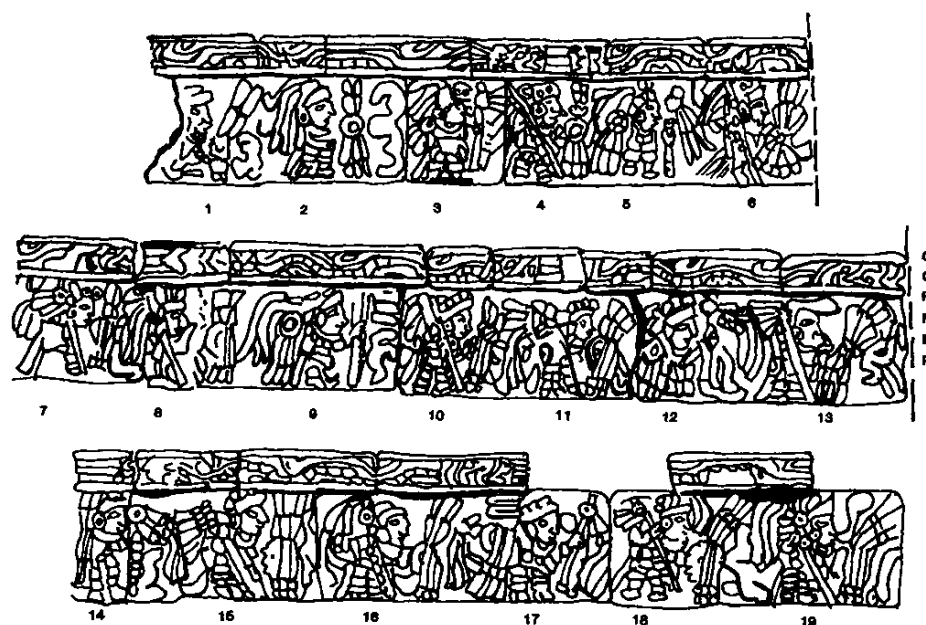
c) Portion of west side of dais, Northwest Colonnade. Reconstruction painting from Morris, *et al.* (1931: Plate 125).



a



b



c

Fig. 99 Warrior figures from Tula.

a) Atlantean column from Pyramid B. Photograph by the author.

b) Relief from pillar on Pyramid B. From Diehl (1983: 62).

c) Bench relief from Palacio Quemado. From Kristan-Graham (1993: Fig. 1).

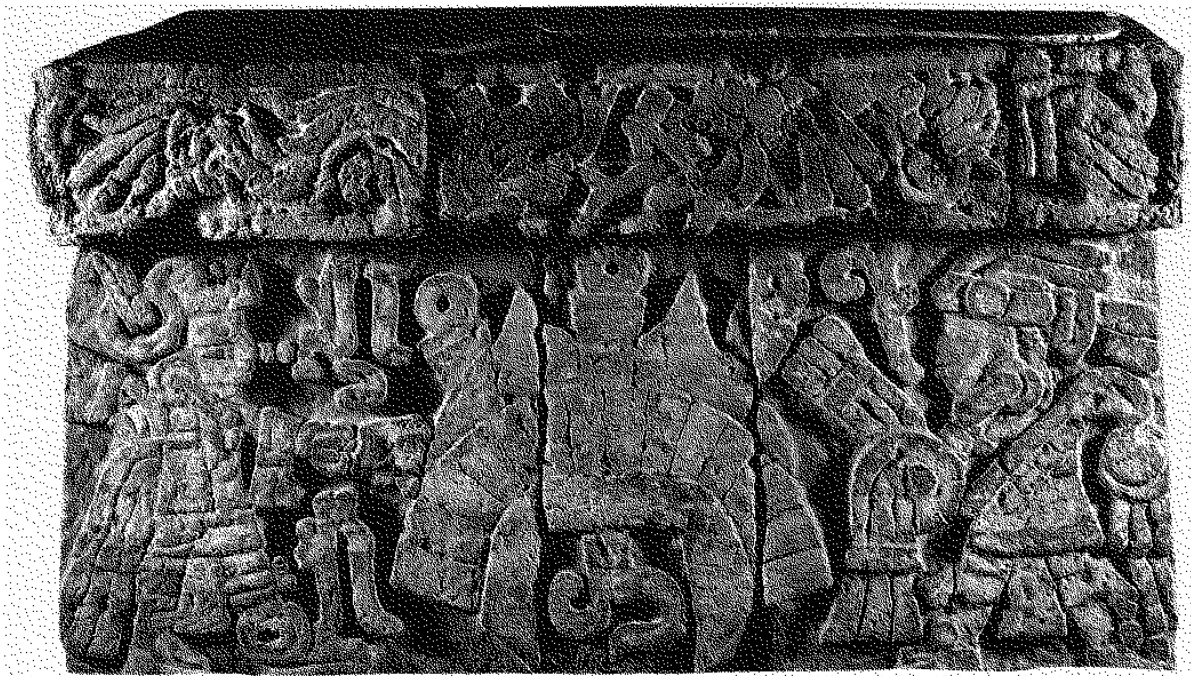


Fig. 100 Bench relief from Sacred Precinct, Tenochtitlan. From Museo Nacional de Antropología (2004: 195).

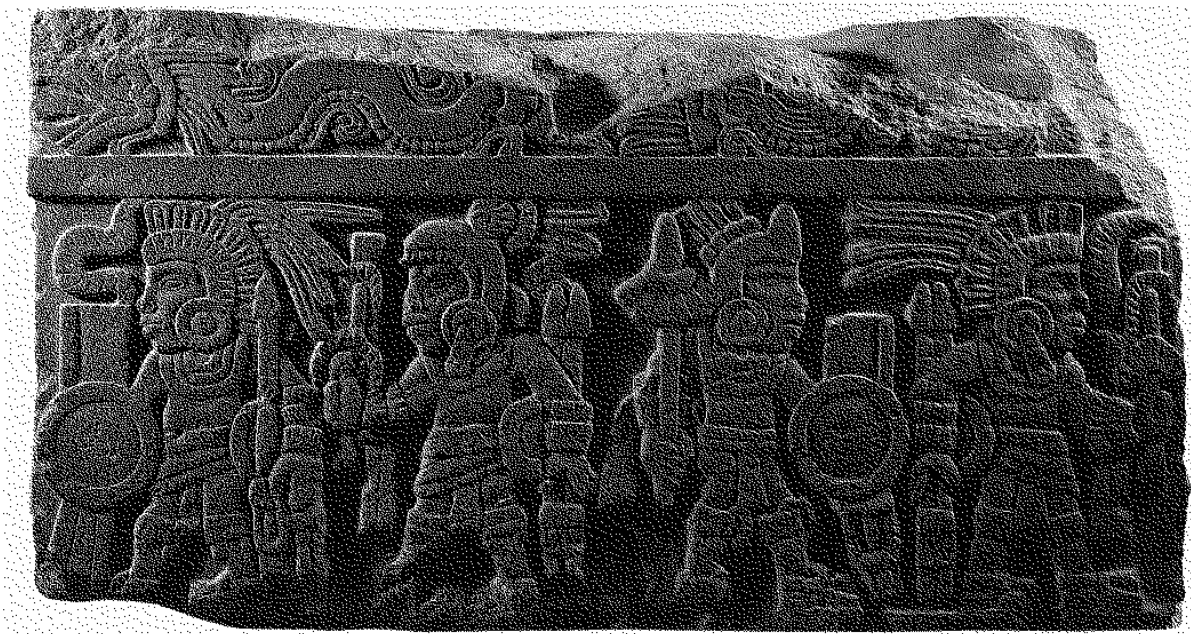


Fig. 101 Stone of the Warriors, Tenochtitlan. From Museo Nacional de Antropología (2004: 195).

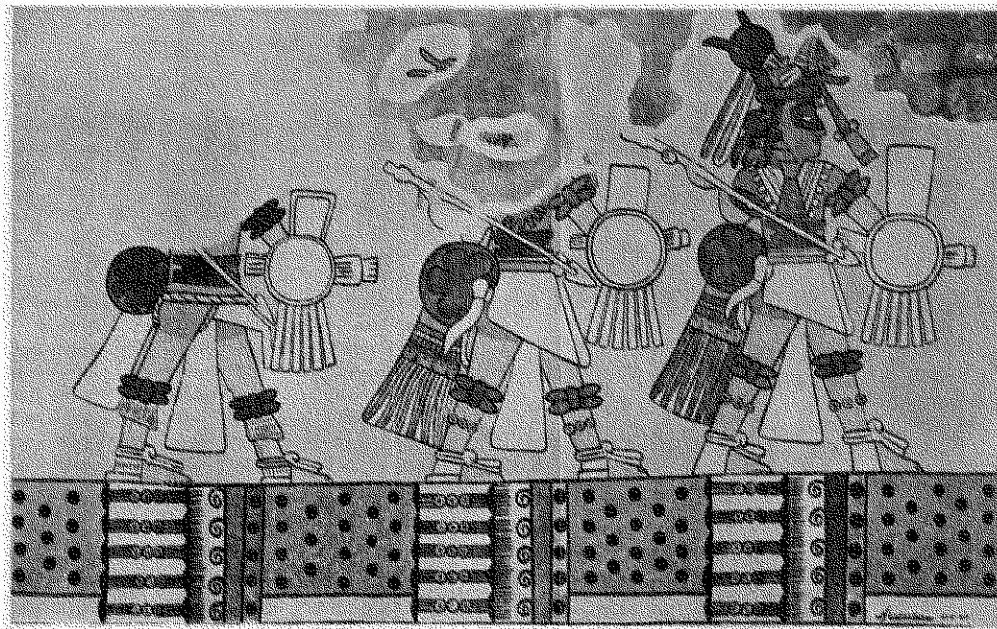


Fig. 102 Mural from Malinalco. Reconstruction painting by Miguel Angel Fernández, from García Payón (1974: Fig. 28).



Fig. 103 San José Mogote Monument 3. From Marcus and Flannery (1996: 129).

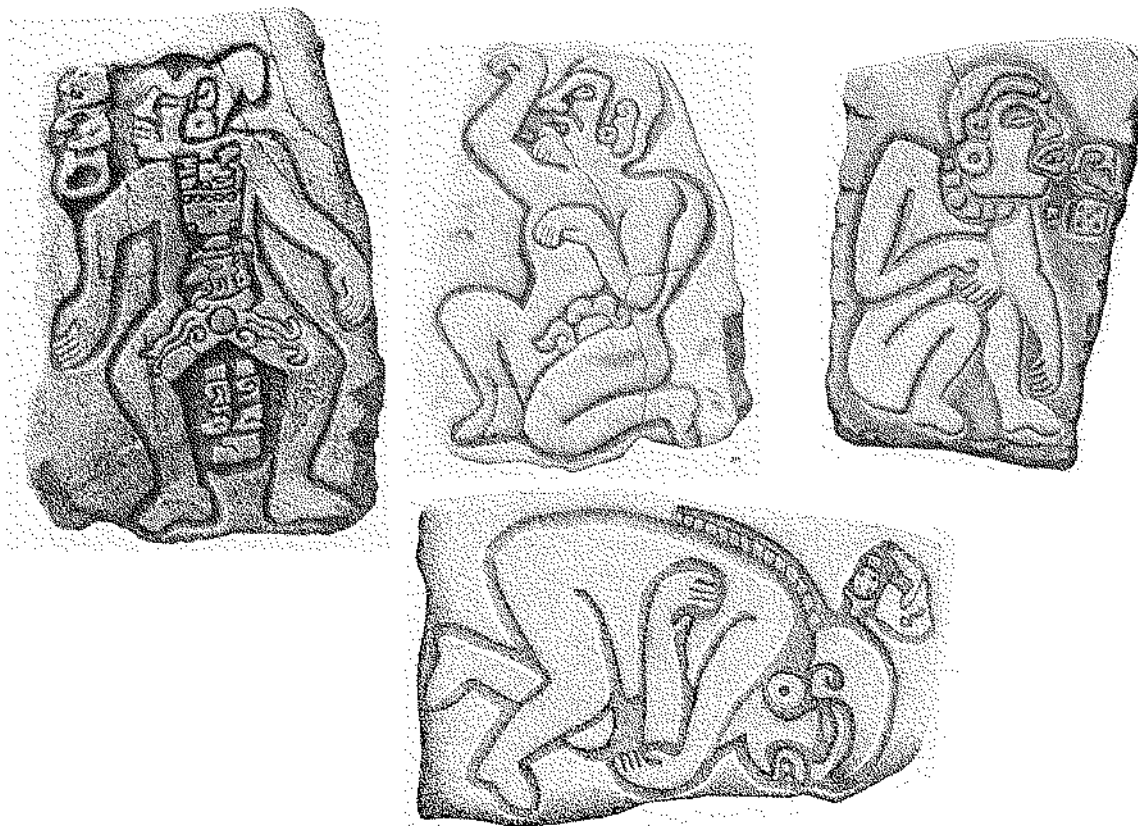


Fig. 104 “Danzante” figures from Building L, Monte Albán. Drawings from García Moll, *et al.* (1986: Plates 110, 126, and 127).



Fig. 105 Izapa Stela 89. Drawing from Cortes Rincon (2007: 69).



Fig. 106 Stucco captive figure from Room 1, Structure 5D-86-6, Tikal. Drawing from Laporte and Vega de Zea (1987: 139).

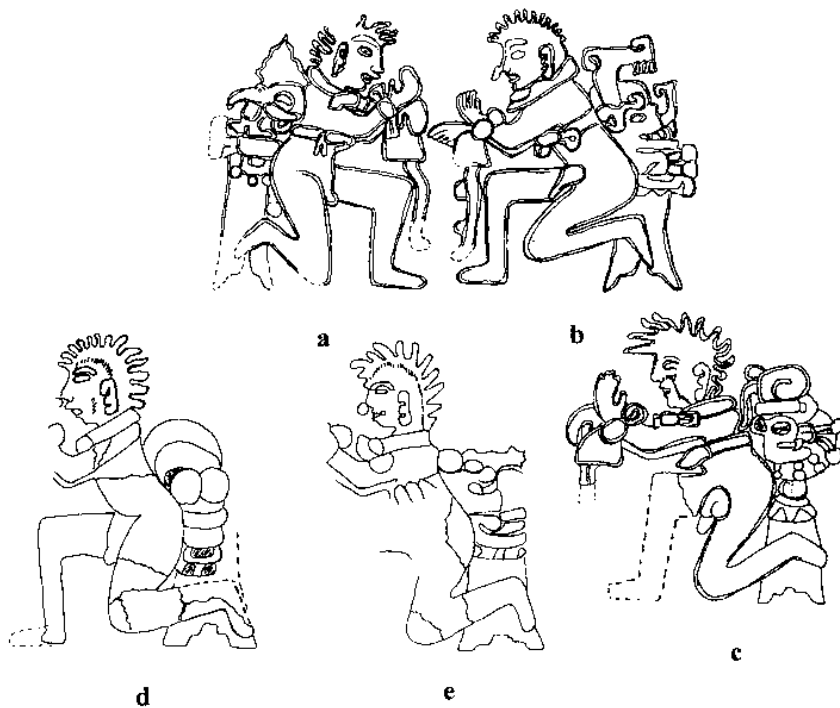


Fig. 107

Stucco captive figures from altars associated with Temple Complex A-3, Río Azul. Drawing from Adams (1999: 78).

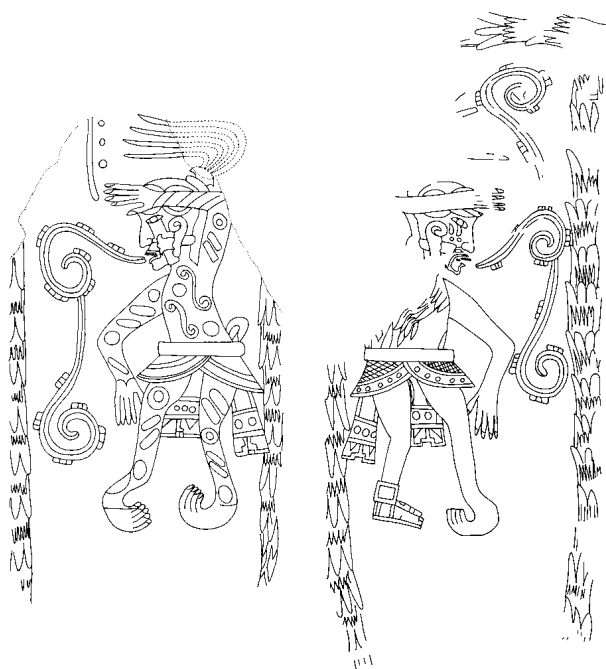
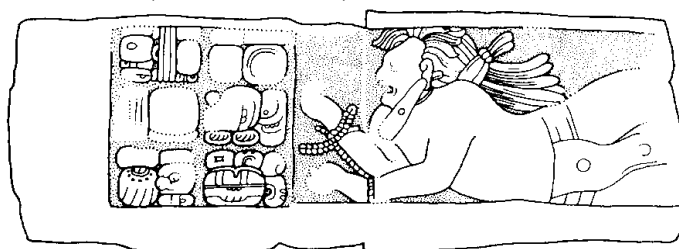


Fig. 108

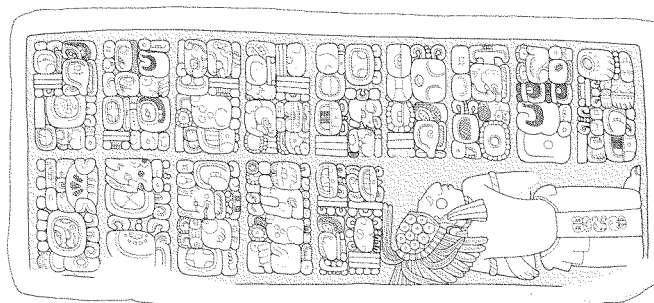
Jamb figures from White Patio, Atetelco compound, Teotihuacan. Drawings from de la Fuente (1995b: Figs. 18.10-11).



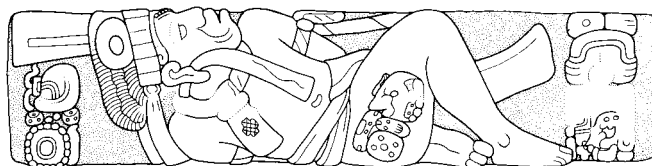
Fig. 109 Captive Step, Red Temple corridor, Cacaxtla. Photograph by Enrico Ferorelli. From G. Stuart (1992: 130-131).



a



b



c

Fig. 110 Examples of Maya Captive Stairs.
 a) Dos Pilas Hieroglyphic Stairway 3, Step 2. From Houston (1993: 119).
 b) Yaxchilán Hieroglyphic Stairway 3, Step 1. From Graham, Vol. 3.3 (1982: 166).
 c) Toniná Monument 27. From Graham, Vol. 6.2 (1996: 71).



a



b



c

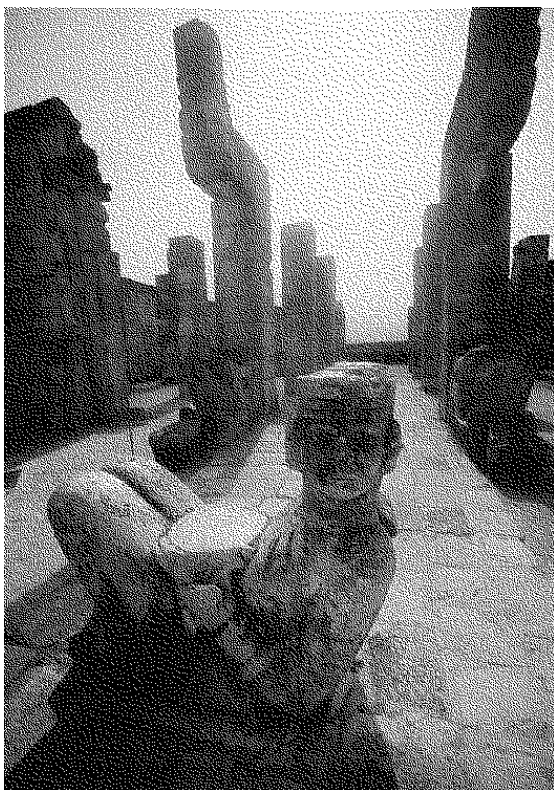


d

Fig. 111 Examples of captive figures from Toniná.
 a) Monument 41. From Baudez and Becquelin (1982: Fig. 104a).
 b) Monument 10. From Baudez and Becquelin (1982: Fig. 103a).
 c) Monument 122. From Baudez and Becquelin (1982: Fig. 166a).
 d) Painting from Acropolis frieze. From Angulo Villaseñor (2003: 11).



Fig. 112 Captive figures, House A, Palenque. Photograph by Merle Greene Robertson. From Baudez and Mathews (1979: Fig. 6).



a



b



c

Fig. 113 Examples of Chacmools.
 a) From the Temple of the Warriors, Chichén Itzá. From Pasztory (1998: 86).
 b) From Palacio Quemado, Tula. Photograph by Robert Cobean, from Diehl (1983: Plate XII).
 c) From the Templo Mayor, Tenochtitlan. Photograph by the author.



Fig. 114 Coyolxauhqui relief, Templo Mayor, Tenochtitlan. Photograph by the author.

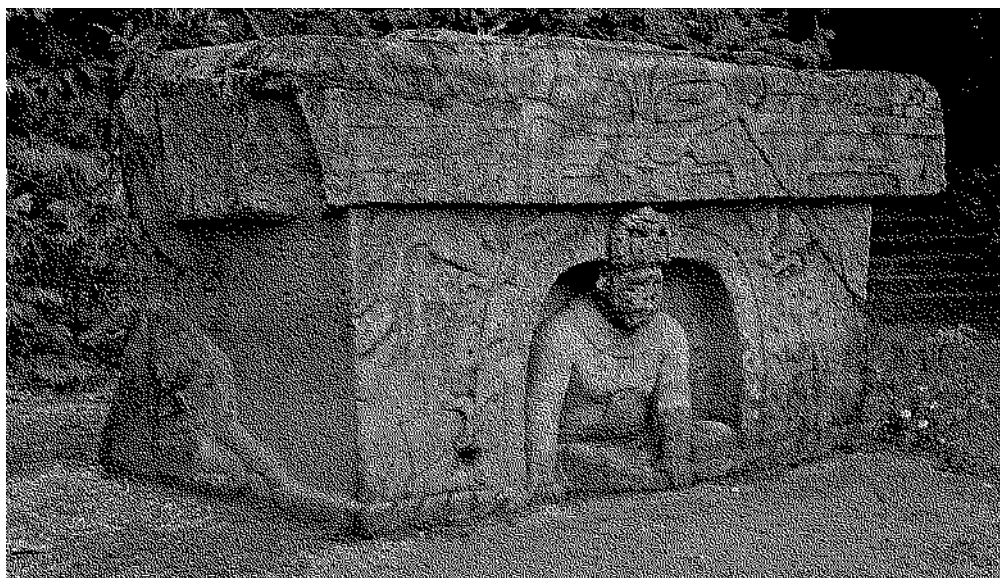


Fig. 115 La Venta Altar 4. Photograph from Grove (1973: 128).

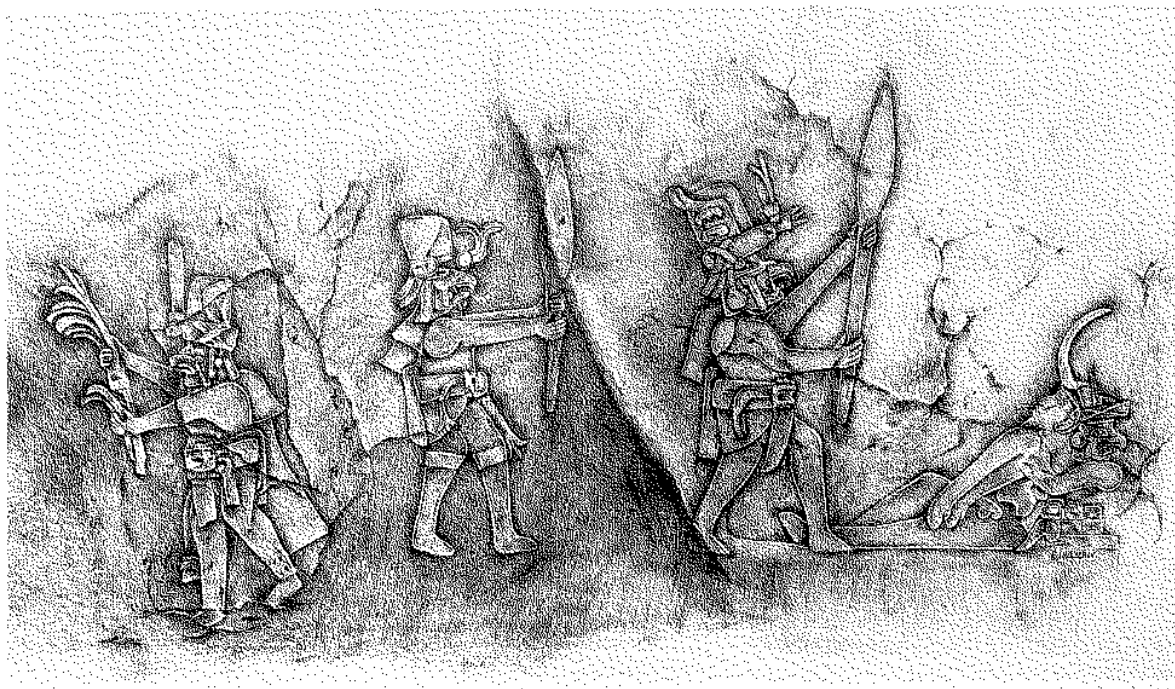


Fig. 116 Chalcatzingo Monument 2. Drawing from Grove (1984: Plate 9).

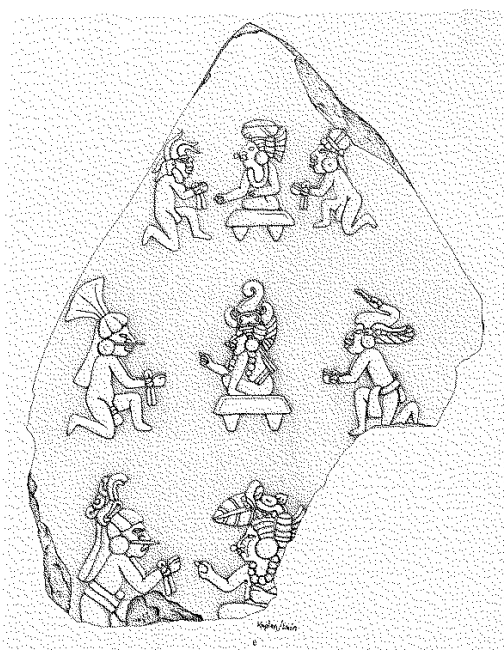


Fig. 117 Kaminaljuyu Monument 65. Drawing by Fernando Luin and Jonathan Kaplan, from Kaplan 2000: 189).

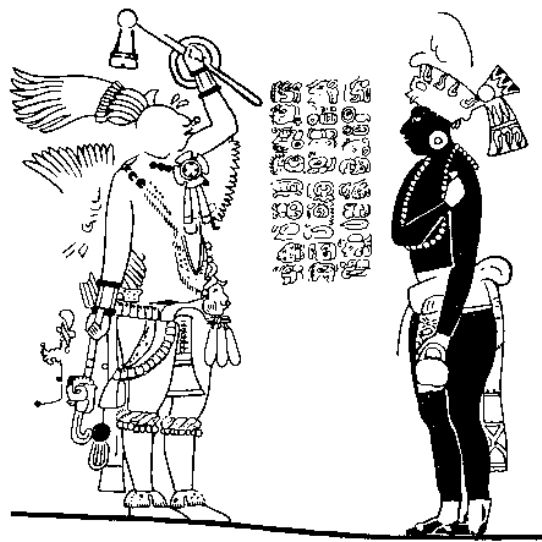


Fig. 118 Detail of mural from Uaxactun Structure B XIII. From Staines Cicero (1999: 216).

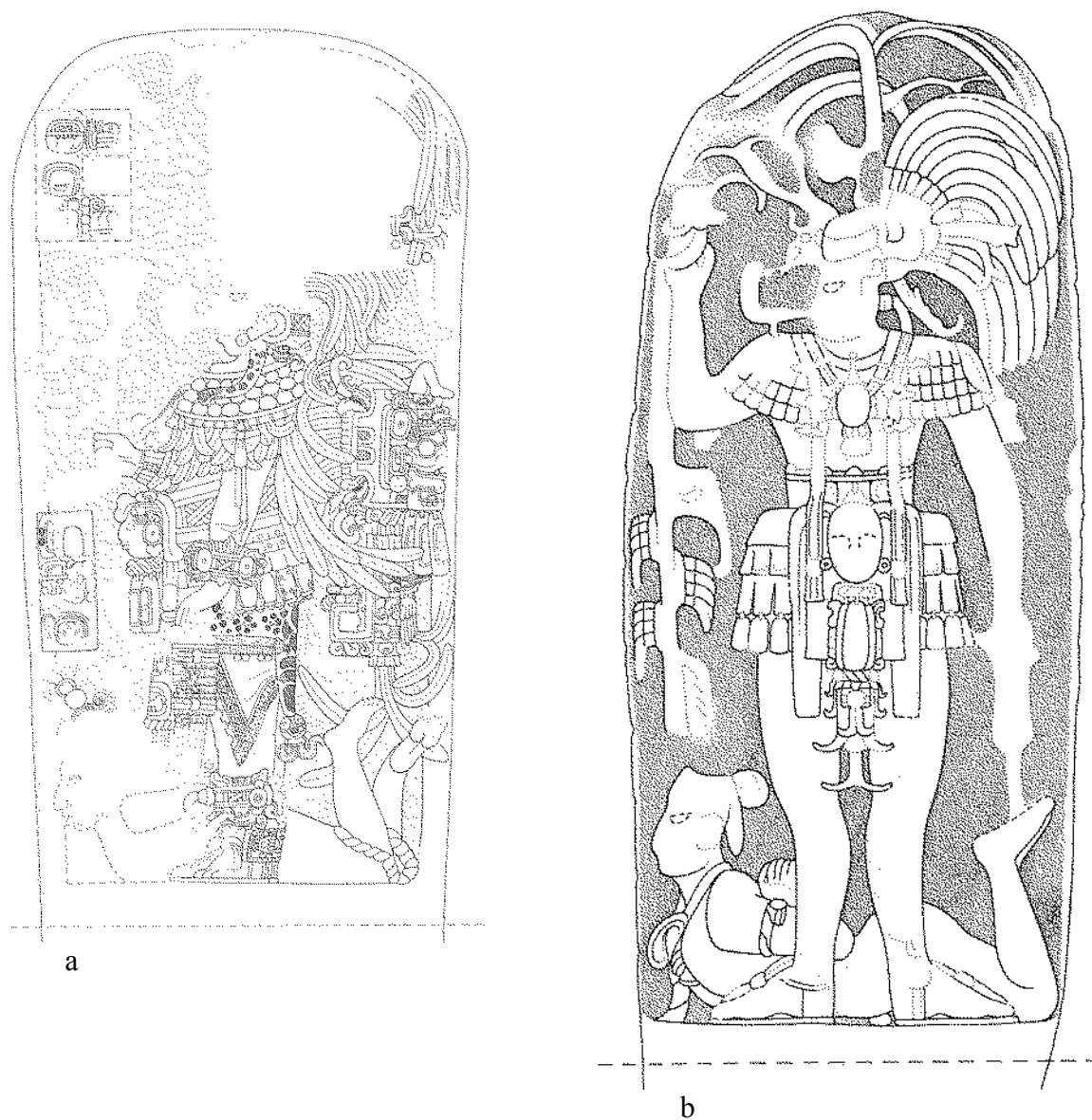
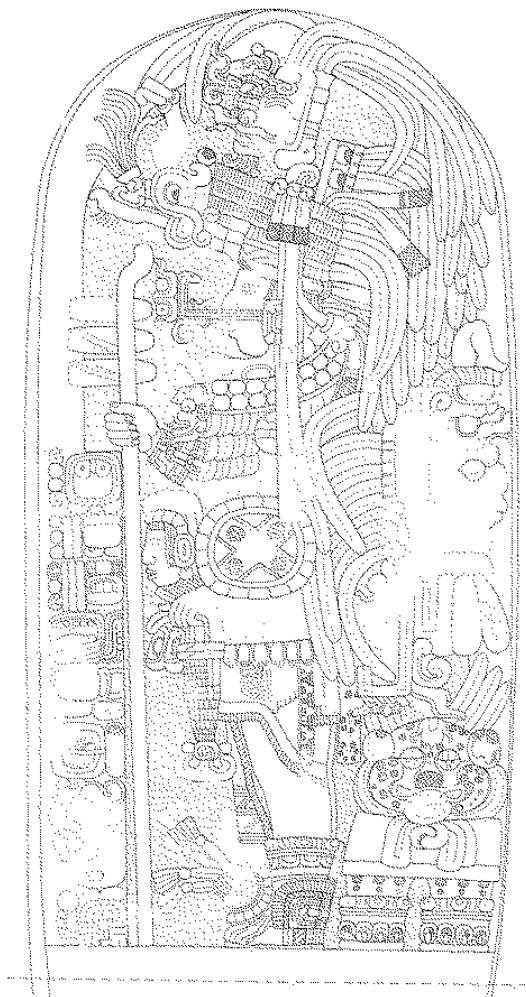


Fig. 119

Examples of Tikal monuments depicting captives beneath the feet of rulers.

a) Stela 5. Drawing by William R. Coe, from Jones and Satterthwaite (1982: Fig. 48).

b) Stela 10. Drawing by William R. Coe, from Jones and Satterthwaite (1982: Fig. 14).



a



b

Fig. 120

a) Tikal Stela 20. Drawing by William R. Coe, from Jones and Satterthwaite (1982: Figs. 29).

b) Tikal Altar 8. Drawing by William R. Coe, from Jones and Satterthwaite (1982: Figs. 30).

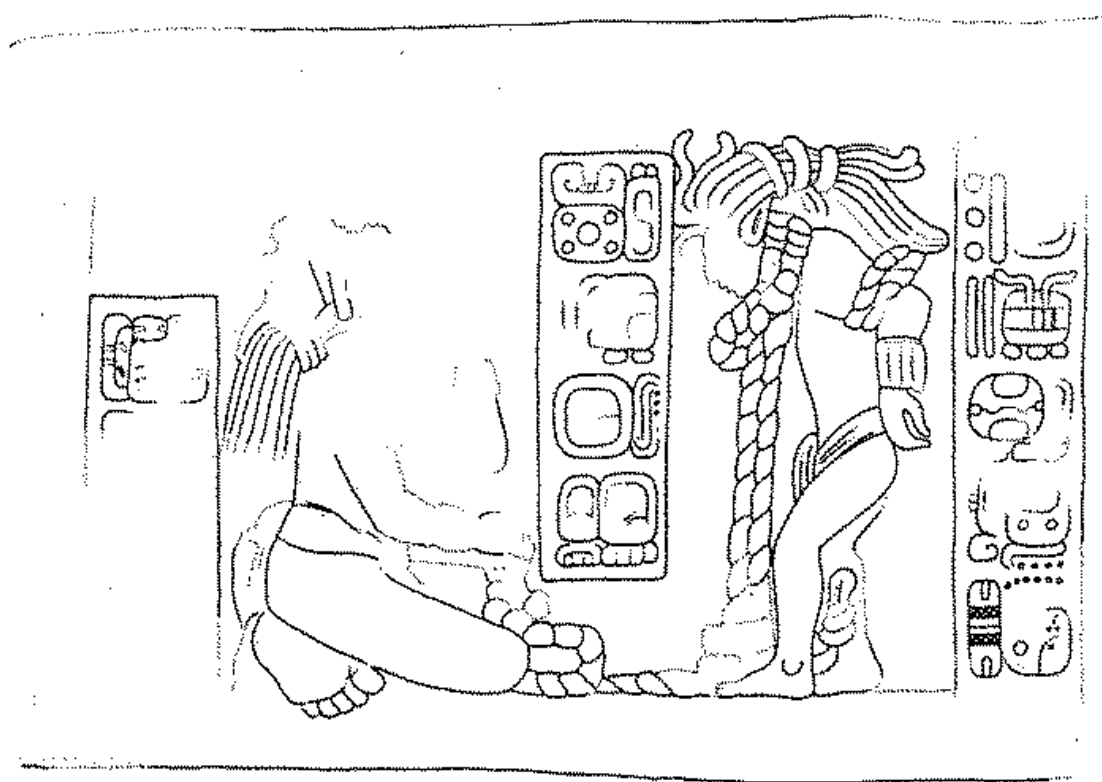
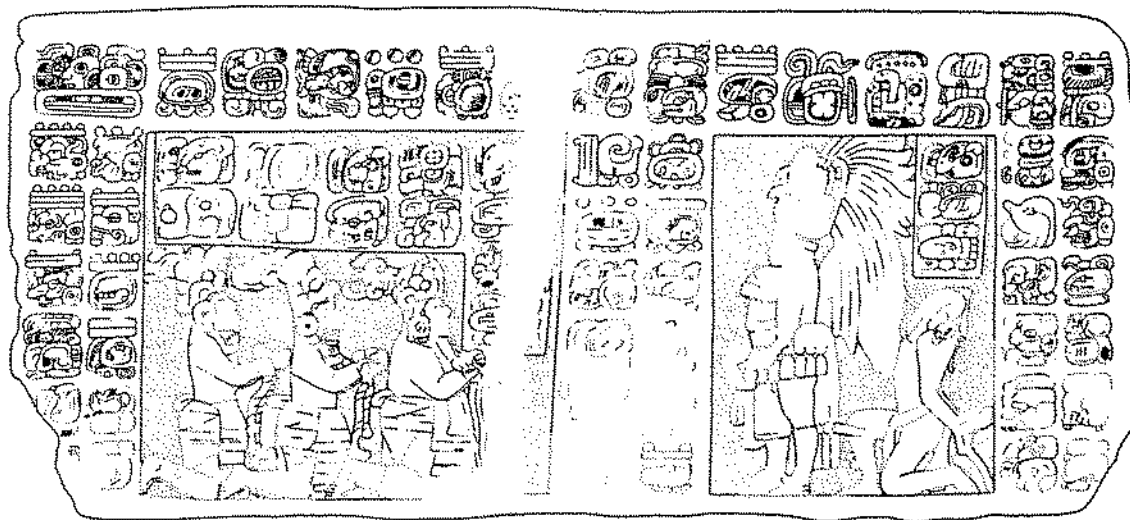
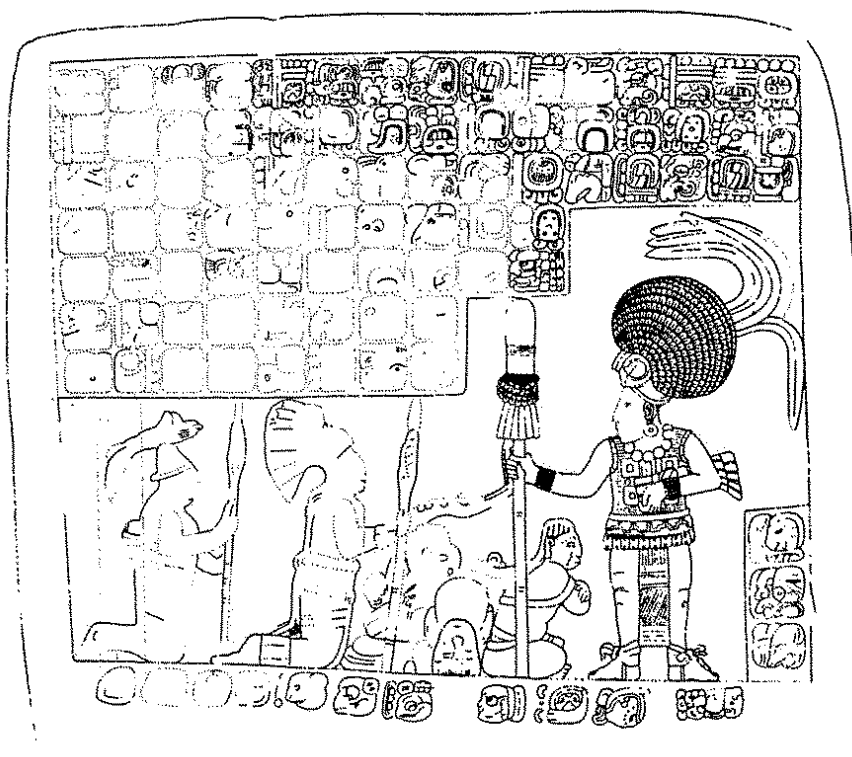


Fig. 121 Rock Sculpture, Maler Causeway, Tikal. From Martin (2000: 111).



a



b

Fig. 122 a) Piedras Negras Panel 12. Drawing by John Montgomery, from Clancy (2009: 22).
 b) Piedras Negras Panel 4. Drawing by John Montgomery, from Clancy (2009: 43).

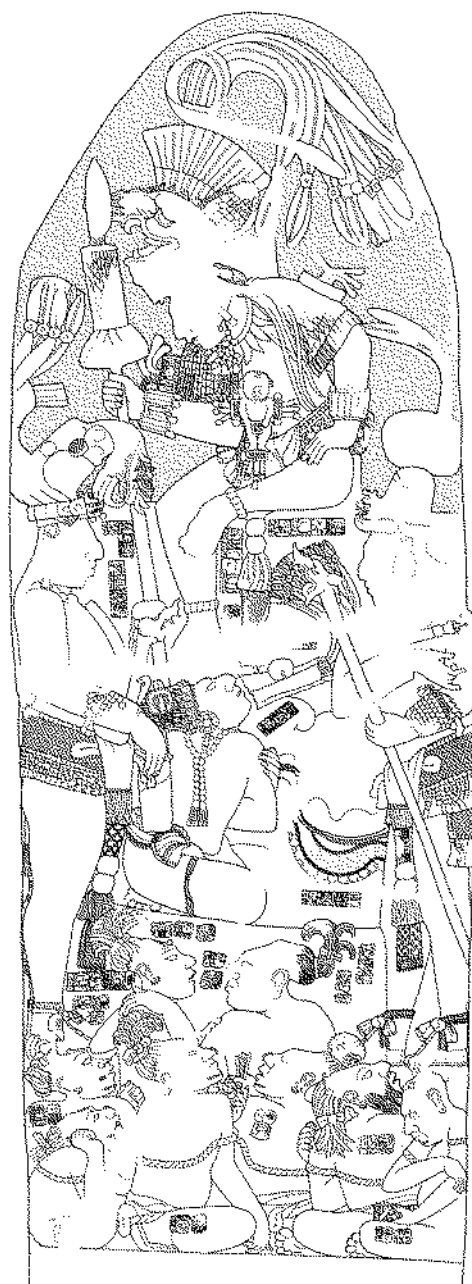
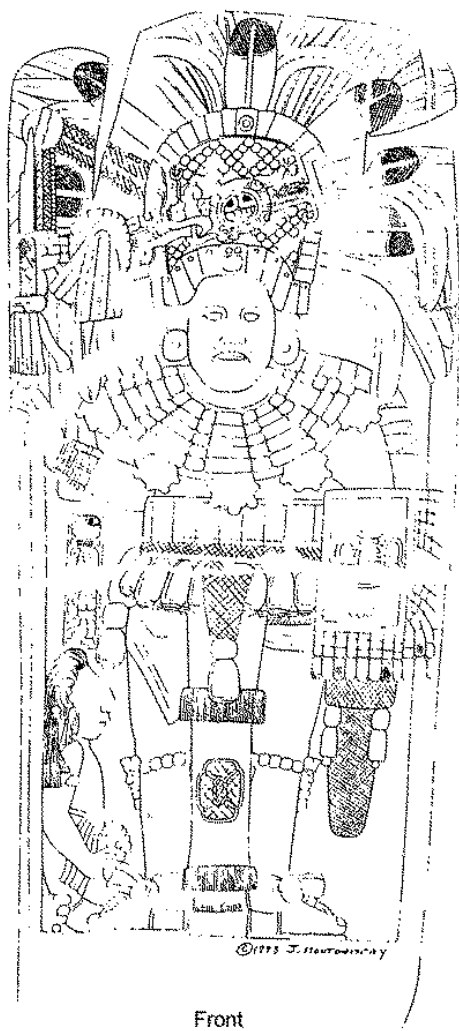
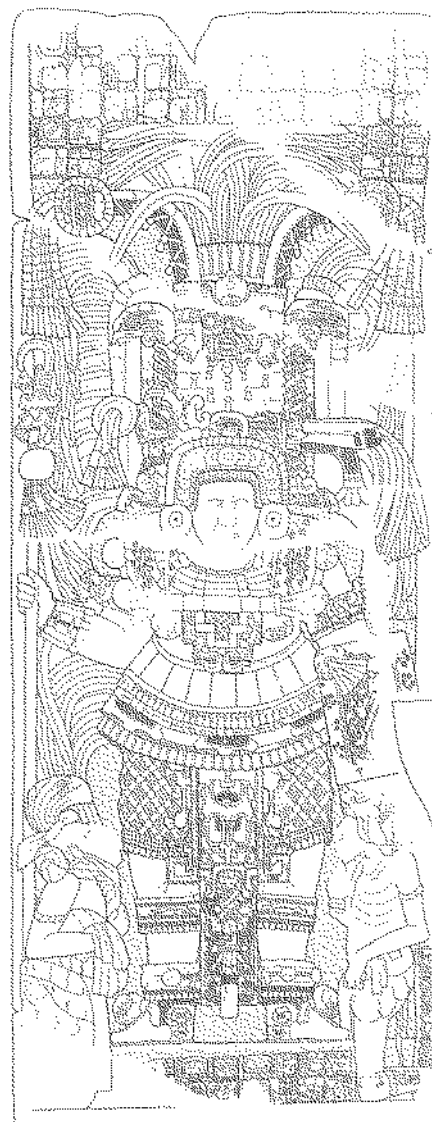


Fig. 123 Piedras Negras Stela 12. From Schele and Miller (1986: 219).

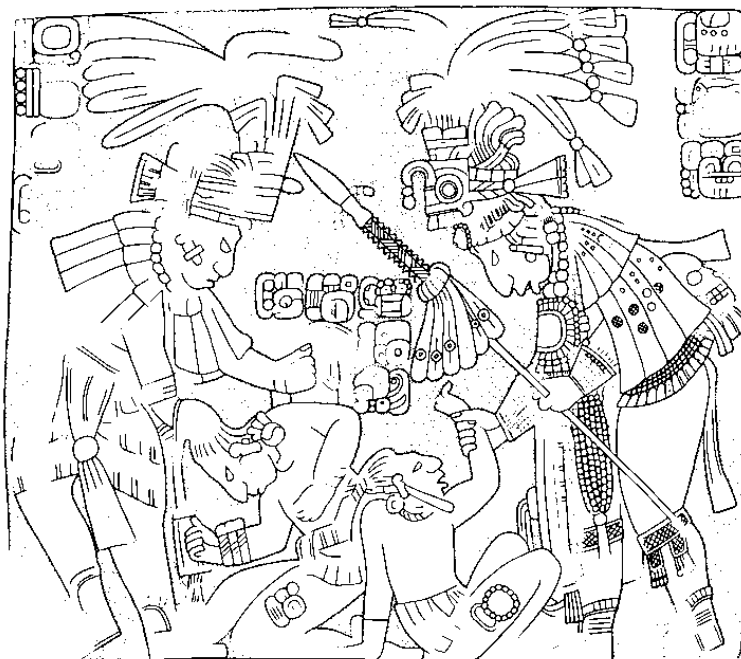


a



b

Fig. 124 a) Piedras Negras Stela 35. Drawing by John Montgomery, from Clancy (2009: 61).
 b) Piedras Negras Stela 8. Drawing by David Stuart, from Clancy (2009: 105).



a

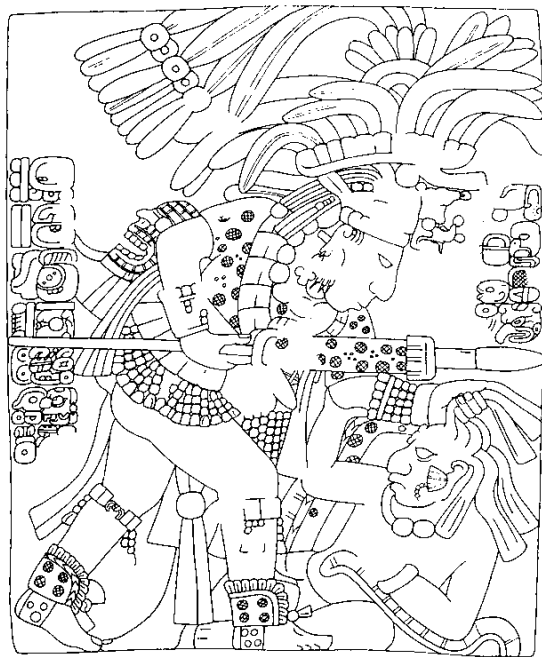


b

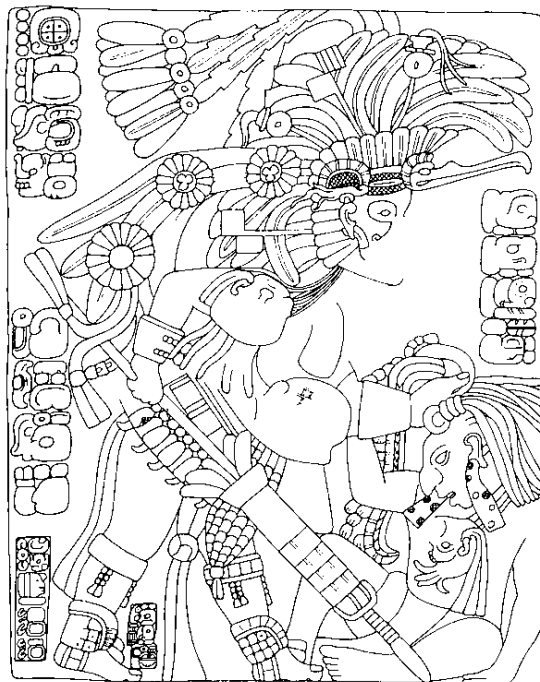
Fig. 125

a) Yaxchilán Lintel 8. From Graham, Vol. 3.1 (1977: 27).

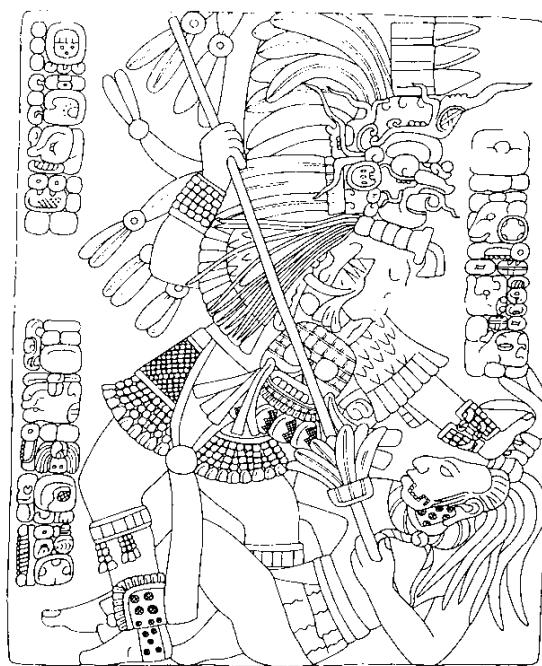
b) Yaxchilán Lintel 45. From Graham, Vol. 3.2 (1979: 99).



a



b



c

Fig. 126

- a) Bonampak Lintel 1. From Mathews (1980: Fig. 5).
 b) Bonampak Lintel 2. From Mathews (1980: Fig. 6).
 c) Bonampak Lintel 3. From Mathews (1980: Fig. 7).

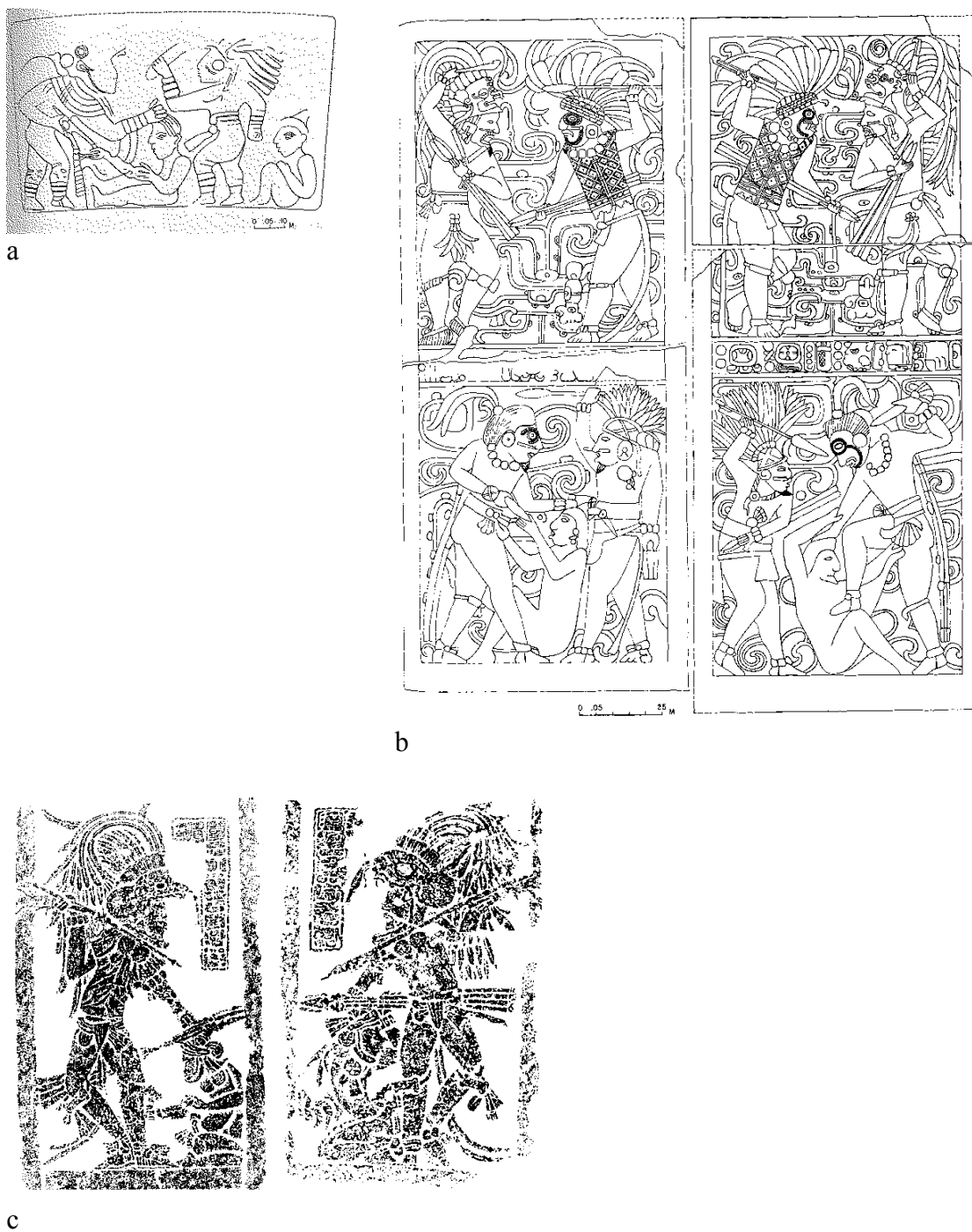


Fig. 127

a) Kabah Altar 8. From Pollock (1980: Fig. 381).

b) Jamb from Room 21 of Structure 2C6. Drawing by Aubrey S. Trik, from Pollock (1980: Fig. 373).

c) Jamba from Structure 1A1. Rubbings by Merle Greene Robertson.

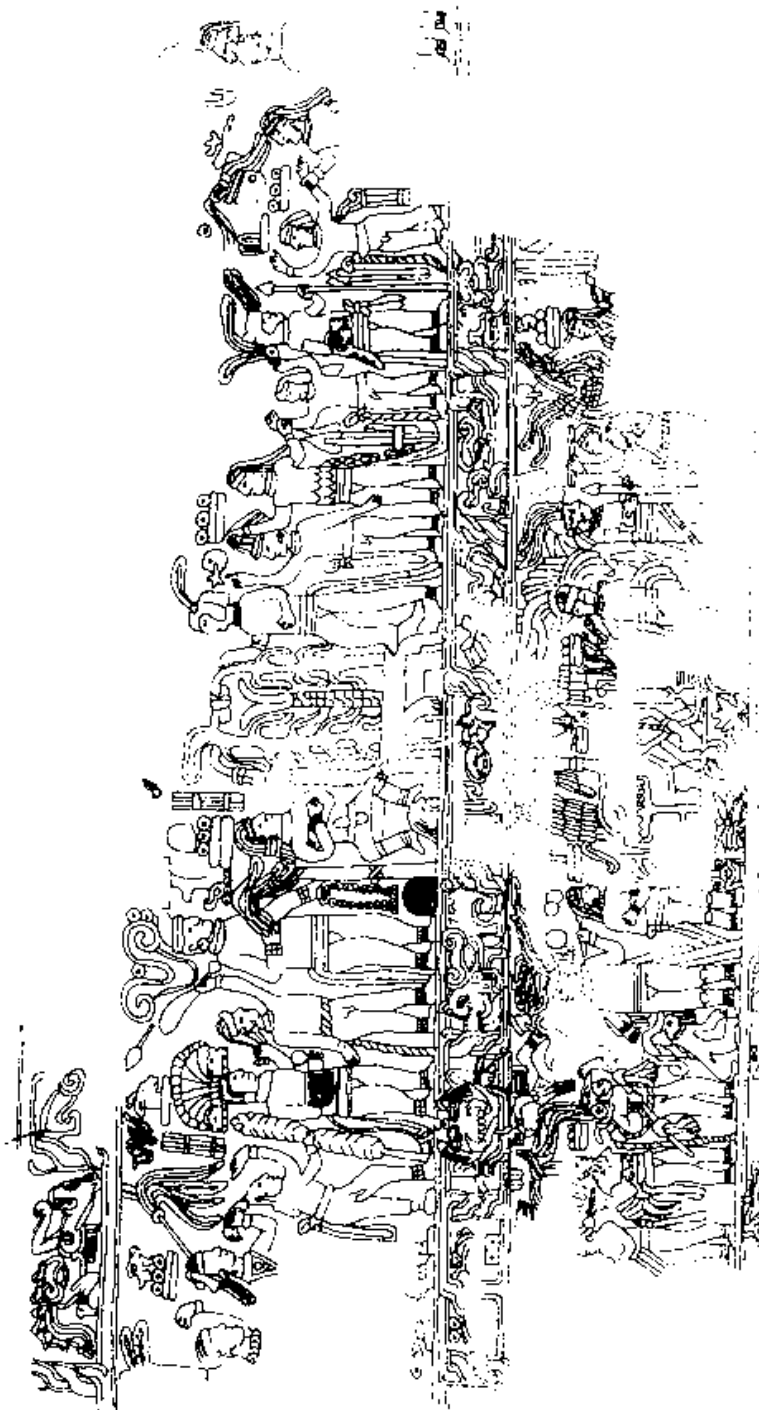


Fig. 128

Relief from Central Column, Building of the Columns, El Tajín. Drawing by Sara Ladrón de Guevara, from Koontz (2009b: 75).



a



b

Fig. 129

a) Cuauhxicalli of Moctezuma. Photograph by the author.

b) Stone of Tizoc. Photograph by the author.



Fig. 130 Rock carving, Tepetzingo. Drawing by Janice Robertson, from Pasztory (1983: Plate 59).



Fig. 131 Reverse of the Palette of Narmer. From Davis (1993: 30).

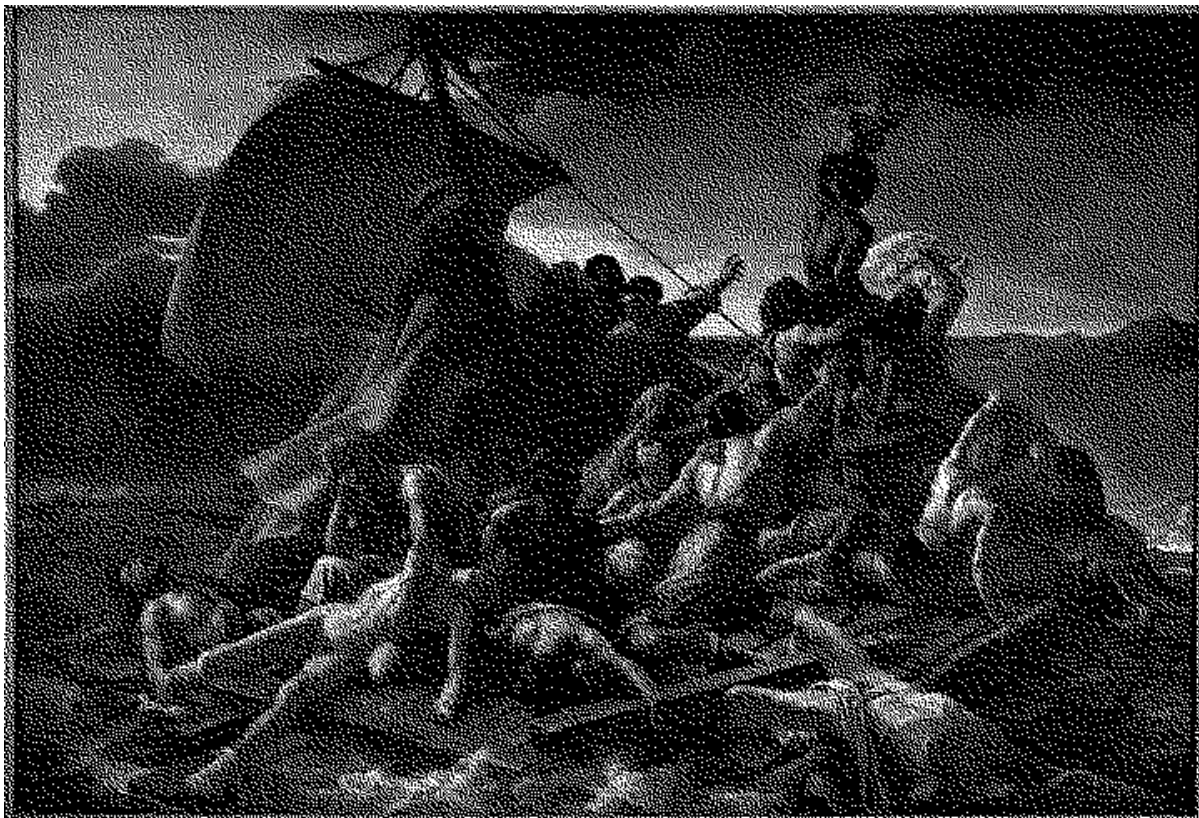


Fig. 132 Théodore Géricault, *Raft of the Medusa*. From Alhadeff (2002: Fig. 1).

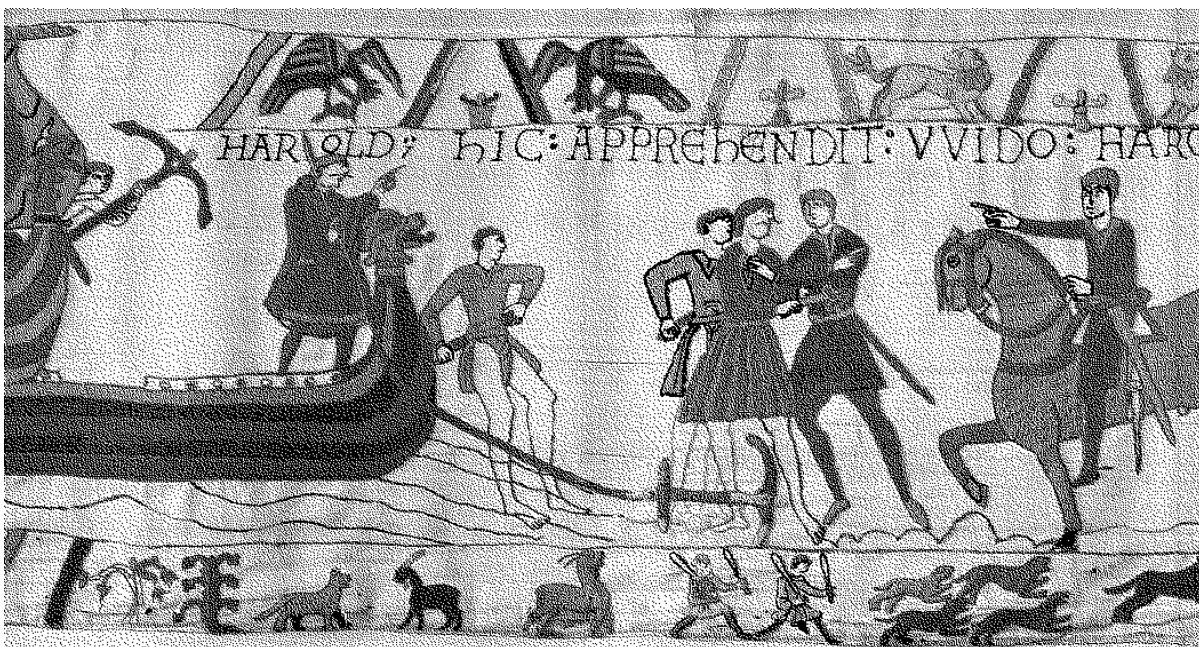


Fig. 133 Detail from the Bayeux Tapestry, c. 1070. From Grape (1994: 96-97).

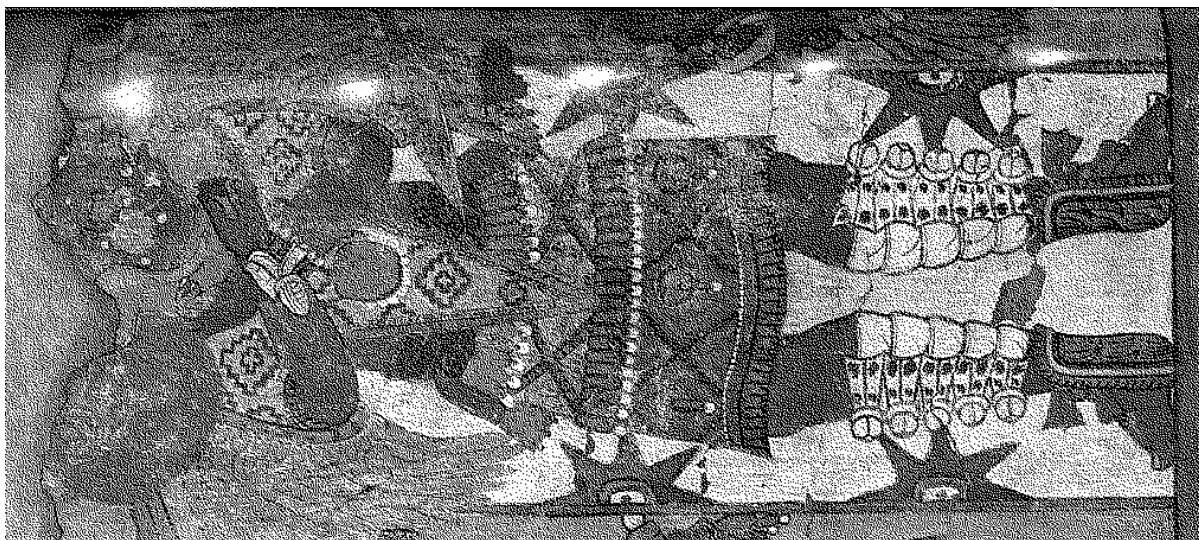
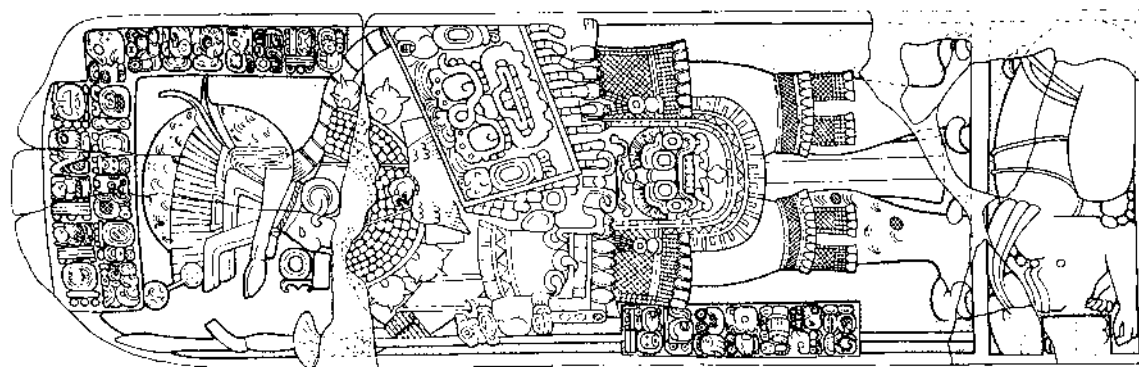
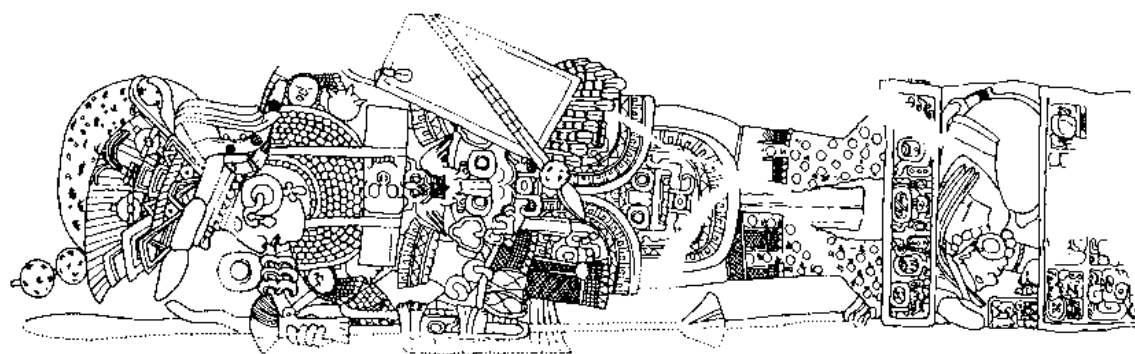


Fig. 134 Detail of figure W5 (bird captain) from west talus of the Battle Mural, Cacaxtla. Photograph by Enrico Ferorelli. From G. Stuart (1992: 132).



a



b

Fig. 135 a) Aguateca Stela 2. From Graham (1967: Fig. 5).
b) Dos Pilas Stela 2. From Schele and Miller (1986: 213).

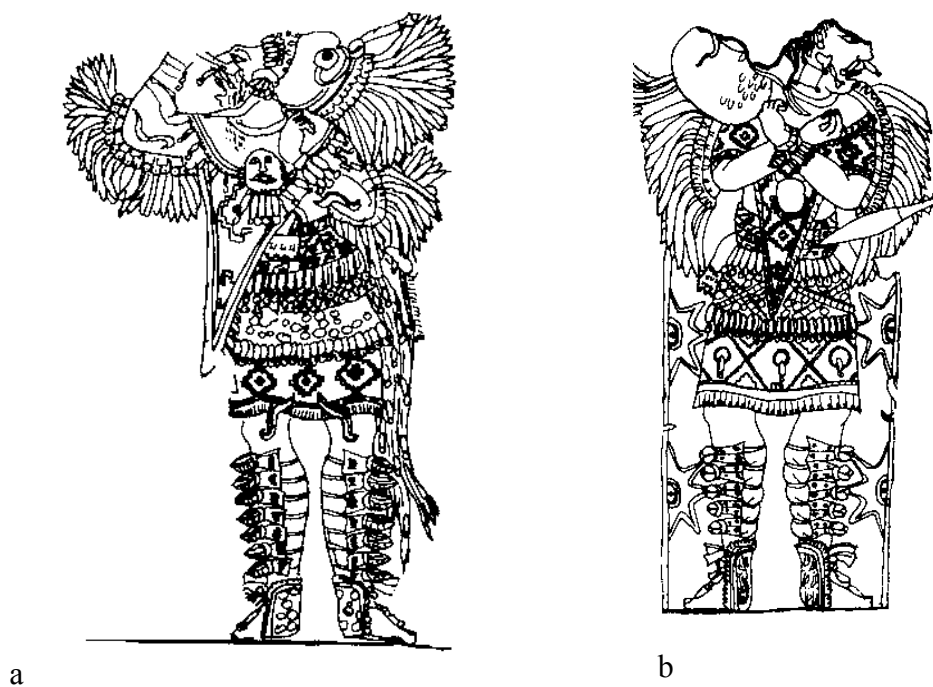


Fig. 136 Details of Bird Captain from the Battle Mural, Cacaxtla.
 a) East talus. Drawing by Debra Nagao, from Diehl and Berlo (1989: Volume Fig. 1).
 b) West talus. Drawing by Debra Nagao, from Diehl and Berlo (1989: Volume Fig. 2).

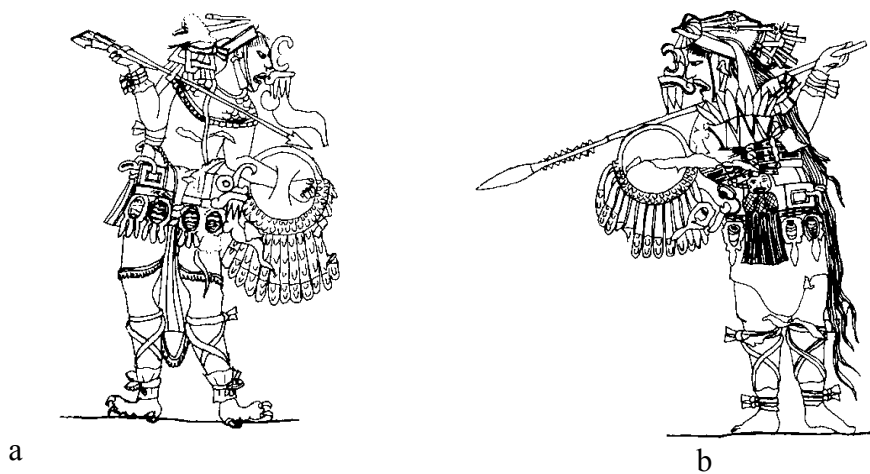
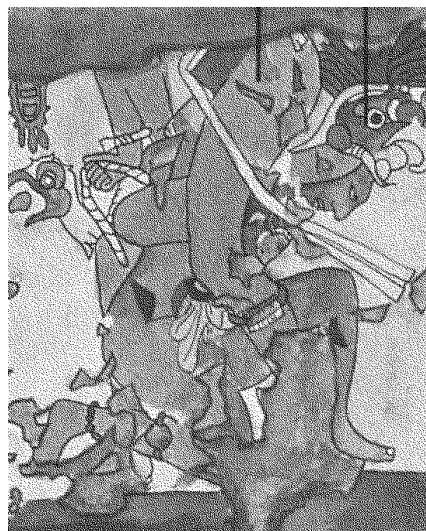


Fig. 137 Details of 3 Deer from the Battle Mural, Cacaxtla.
 a) East talus. Drawing by Debra Nagao, from Diehl and Berlo (1989: Volume Fig. 1).
 b) West talus. Drawing by Debra Nagao, from Diehl and Berlo (1989: Volume Fig. 2).



a



b

Fig. 138 Details from the Battle Mural, Cacaxtla.
 a) Figure W19. Reconstruction paintings by Francisco Villaseñor Bello, from Foncerrada de Molina (1993).
 b) Figure E27. Reconstruction paintings by Francisco Villaseñor Bello, from Foncerrada de Molina (1993).

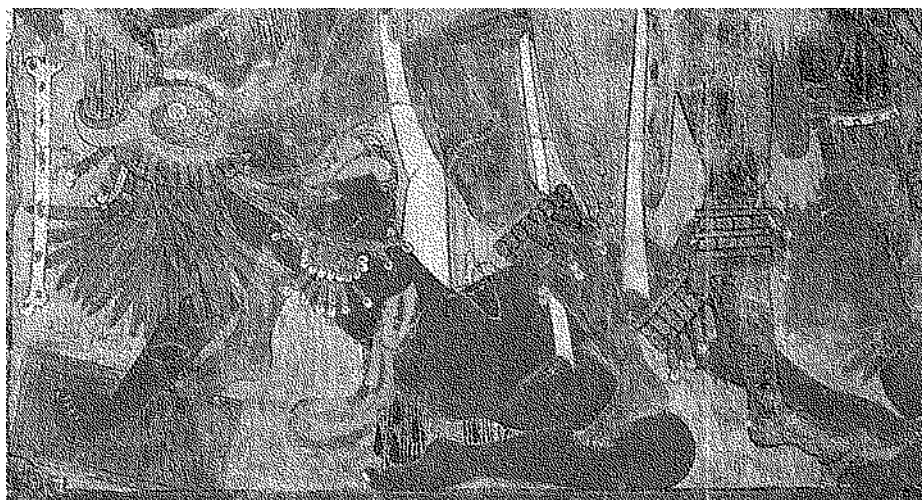


Fig. 139 Detail of figure E8 from the Battle Mural, Cacaxtla. Photograph by Enrico Ferorelli, from G. Stuart (1992: 127).



Fig. 140 Detail of figures E8 and E11 from the Battle Mural, Cacaxtla. Reconstruction painting by Francisco Villaseñor Bello. From Foncerrada de Molina (1993).

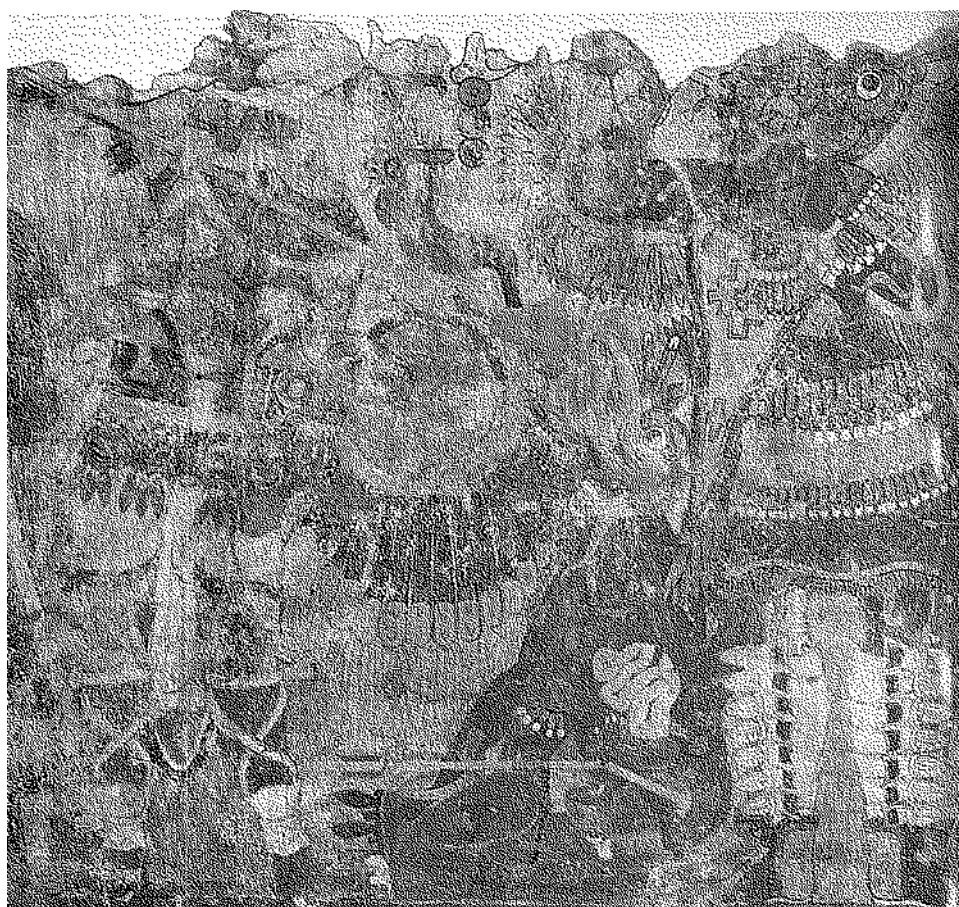
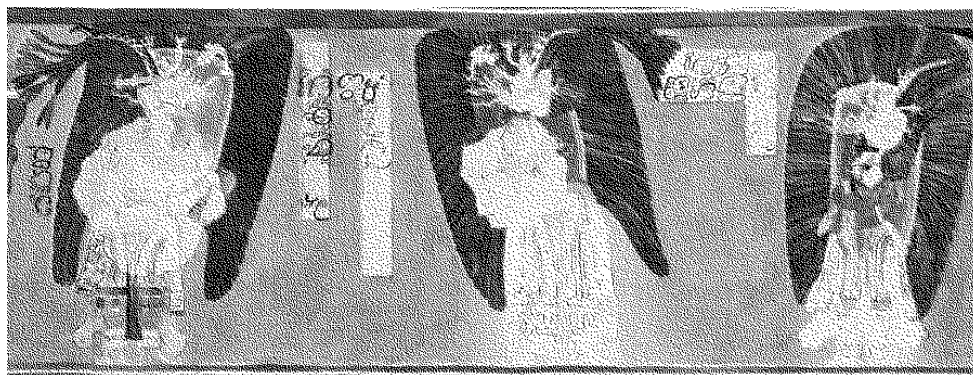
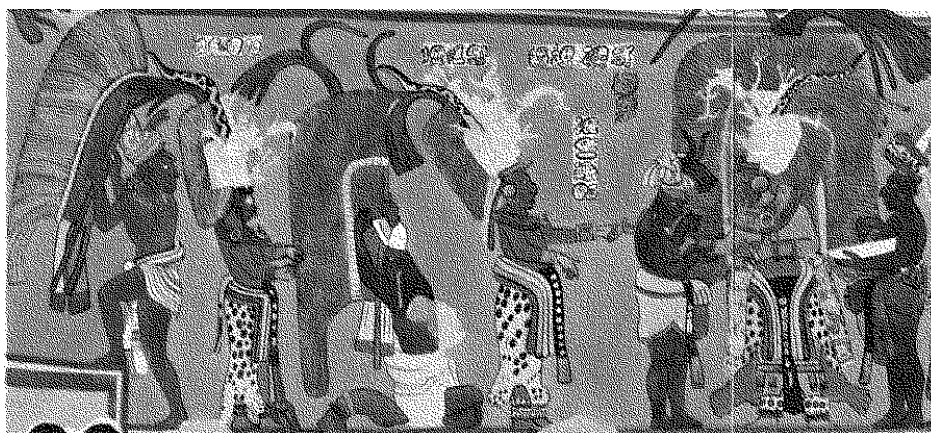


Fig. 141 Detail of 3 Deer and the Bird Captain from the east talus of the Battle Mural, Cacaxtla. Photograph by Enrico Ferorelli, from G. Stuart (1992: 125-126).



a



b

Fig. 142 Details from Room 1, Bonampak.
 a) South wall. Reconstruction painting by Antonio Tejada Fonseca, from Ruppert, *et al.* (1955).
 b) North vault. Reconstruction painting by Antonio Tejada Fonseca, from Ruppert, *et al.* (1955).

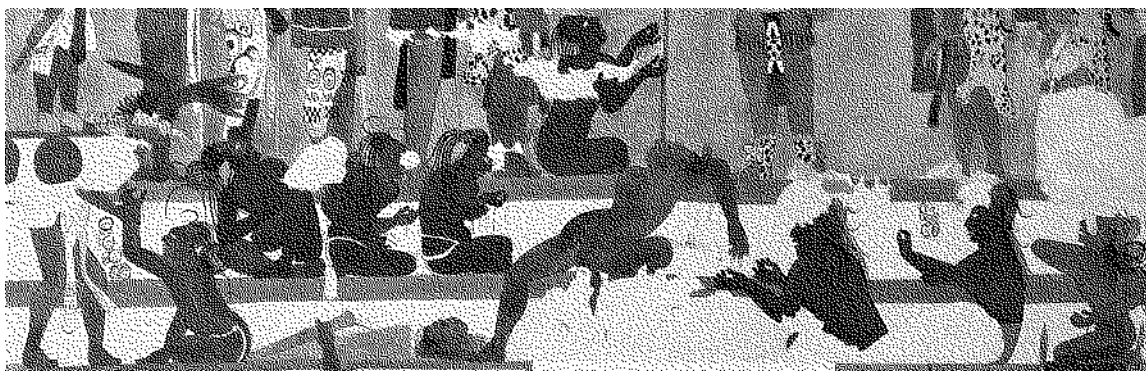
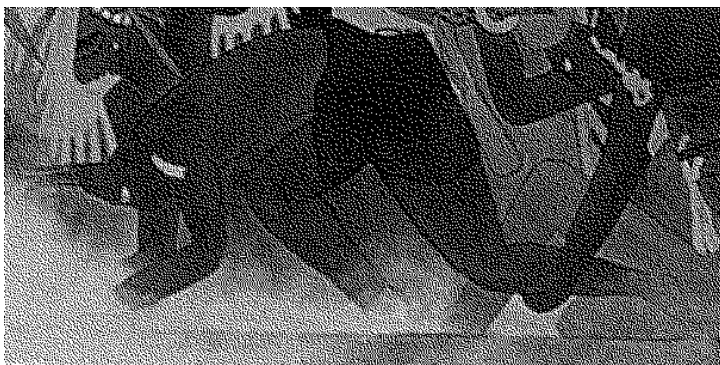


Fig. 143 Detail of prisoners from the north wall of Room 2, Bonampak. Reconstruction painting by Heather Hurst and Leonard Ashby. From Martin and Miller (2004: 175).



a



b



c

Fig. 144 Details from south wall and vault of Battle Mural, Room 2, Bonampak. Reconstruction painting by Heather Hurst and Leonard Ashby. From Martin and Miller (2004: 164-165).

a) Figure 52a.

b) Figure 43.

c) Figure 56.

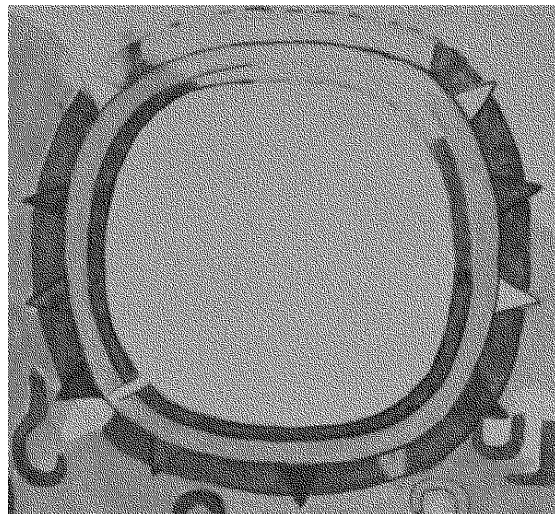


Fig. 145

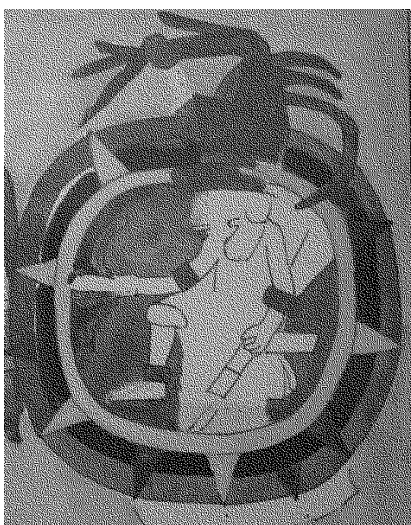
Detail from upper left portion of south vault, Room 2, Bonampak. Reconstruction painting by Heather Hurst and Leonard Ashby. From Martin and Miller (2004: 164-165).



a



b



c



d



e

Fig. 146

Figures surrounded by sun disks from the UTJ murals. Reconstruction paintings by Adela Breton, archives of the City of Bristol Museum and Art Gallery.

- a) Figure NW2.
- b) Figure N1.
- c) Figure S40.
- d) Figure SW5.
- e) Figure SW82.



Fig. 147

Figures associated with green feathered serpents in the UTJ murals. Reconstruction paintings by Adela Breton, archives of the City of Bristol Museum and Art Gallery.

- a) Figure NE34.
- b) Figure N9.
- c) Figure S57.
- d) Figure S61.
- e) Figure S77.

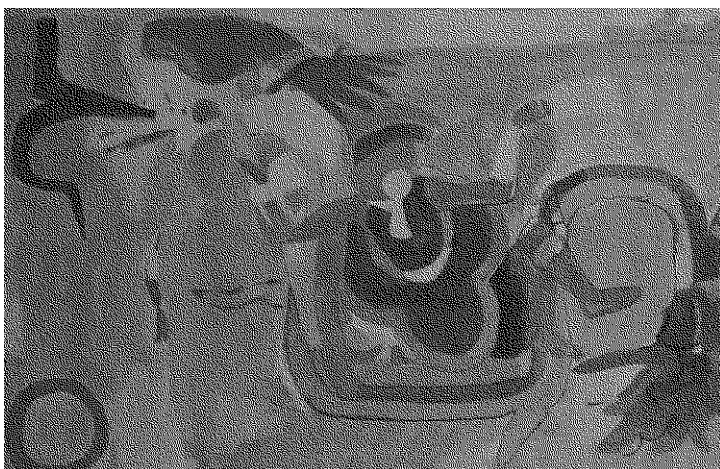
- f) Figure S125.
- g) Figure SW45.
- h) Figure SW58.
- i) Figure SW108.
- k) Figure SW113.



a



b



c

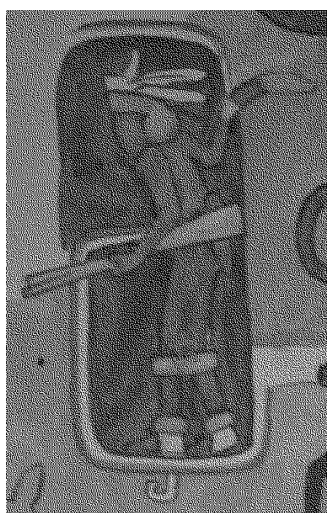
Fig. 148 Figures associated with red (fire) serpents in the UTJ murals. Reconstruction paintings by Adela Breton, archives of the City of Bristol Museum and Art Gallery.
a) Figure NW1.
b) Figure S34.
c) Figure S39.



a



d



b



e



c

Fig. 149

Figures associated with white (cloud) serpents in the UTJ murals. Reconstruction paintings by Adela Breton, archives of the City of Bristol Museum and Art Gallery.

a) Figure NE1.

b) Figure N7.

c) Figure SE5.

d) Figure S104.

e) Figure SW42.

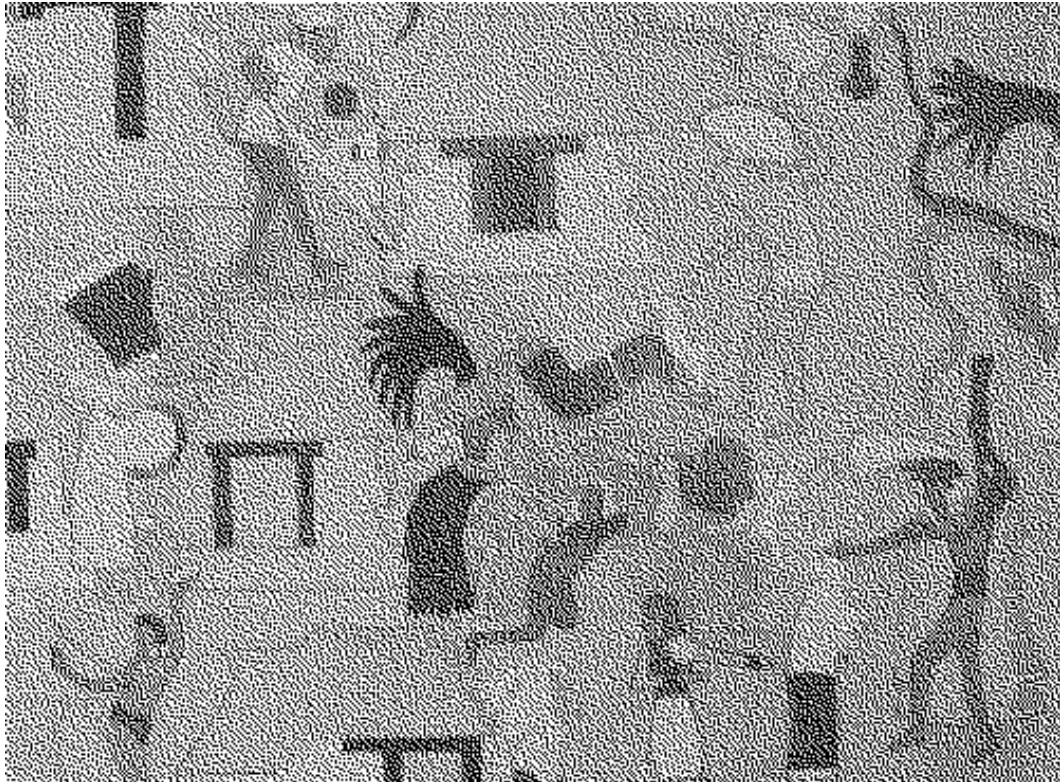
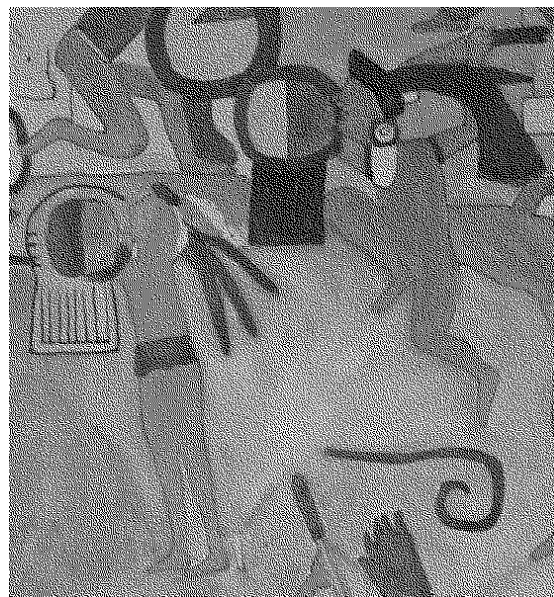


Fig. 150 Detail of upper portion of NW panel, UTJ. Reconstruction painting by Adela Breton, archives of the City of Bristol Museum and Art Gallery.



a



c



b

Fig. 151 Details from south panel, UTJ. Reconstruction painting by Adela Breton, archives of the City of Bristol Museum and Art Gallery.
 a) Figures S28 and S4
 b) Figures S48, S54, S69, and S70
 c) Figures S31 and S32

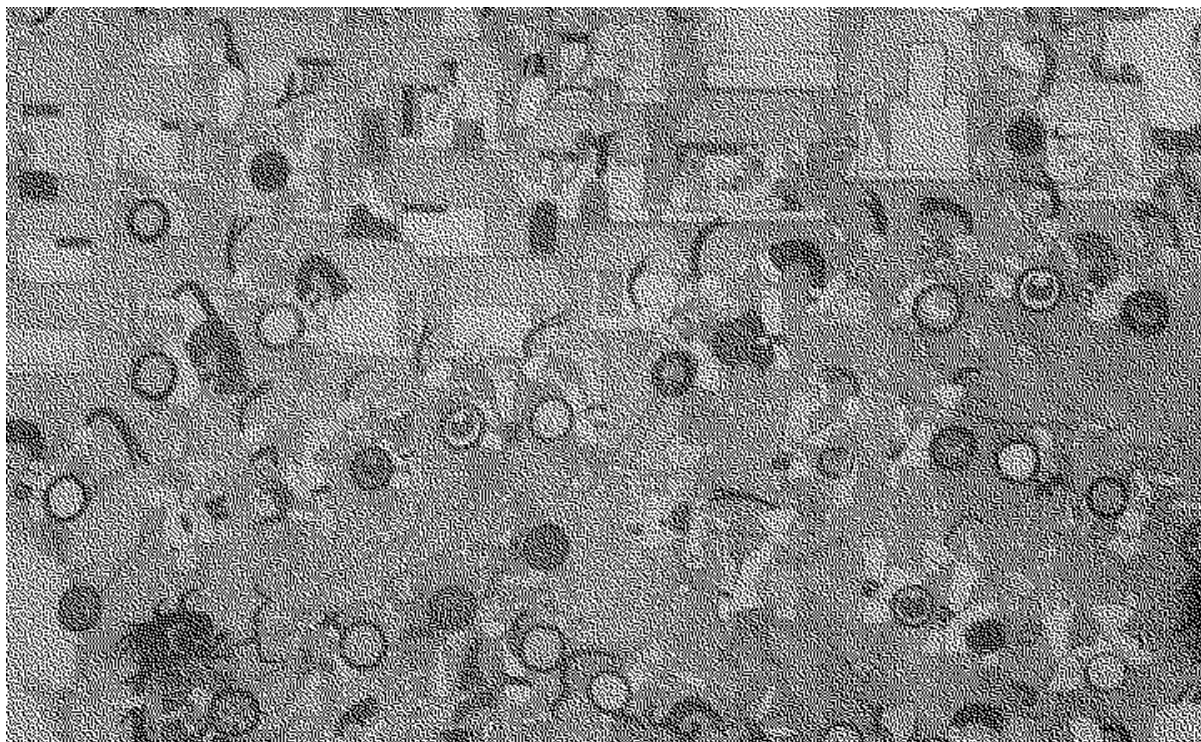


Fig. 152 Detail from SW panel, UTJ. Reconstruction painting by Adela Breton, archives of the City of Bristol Museum and Art Gallery.