Taluds, Tripods, and Teotihuacanos: A Critique of Central Mexican Influence in Classic Period Yucatan

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RESUMEN

El tema de la influencia de Teotihuacan en las Tierras Bajas del Norte ha resurgido en los últimos años a partir de las excavaciones de los sitios de Oxkintok y Chac II. Las interpretaciones sobre rasgos teotihuacanos por parte de investigadores que han trabajado ambos yacimientos, revelan grandes diferencias de opinión en cuanto a la relación entre Yucatán y México Central durante el periodo temporal 550-700 d.C. En este artículo, se revisan los datos pertenecientes a la influencia teotihuacana en numerosos sitios a lo largo de las Tierras Bajas del Norte, pero centrándose en la evidencia de Chac II, donde los investigadores argumentan que un grupo de hombres de Teotihuacan establecieron un enclave que se extendió desde el Clásico Temprano al llamado Clásico Medio. De acuerdo con las nuevas interpretaciones de Oxkintok, se sugiere que la evidencia para un Clásico Medio en Yucatán no existe. Los propuestos rasgos teotihuacanos tienden a estar dentro de la variabilidad local de la cultura material de Yucatán, donde tales rasgos comenzaron a ser adoptados y transformados antes del 550 d.C. Si bien probablemente existieron contactos entre Yucatán y México Central durante el periodo Clásico, no hay evidencia de que gente de Teotihuacan viviera permanentemente en las Tierras Bajas del Norte.

Palabras clave: Maya, Teotihuacan, enclaves étnicos, Yucatán.

ABSTRACT

The issue of Teotihuacan influence in the northern Maya lowlands has resurfaced in recent years at the sites of Oxkintok and Chac II. Interpretations of Teotihuacanoid traits by investigators working at both sites reveal great differences of opinion as to the relationship between Yucatan and Central Mexico during the period of between A.D. 550-700. In this article, I review data pertaining to Teotihuacan influence at numerous sites across the northern lowlands, but with a focus on the evidence from Chac II, Yucatan where investigators argue that a group of men from Teotihuacan established an enclave that extended from the Early to the so-called Middle Classic. Agreeing with new interpretations from Oxkintok, I suggest that the evidence for a Middle Classic in Yucatan does not exist. The proposed Teotihuacanoid traits tend to be within the local variability of material culture in Yucatan, where such traits had begun to be adopted and transformed prior to A.D. 550. While contact probably existed between Yucatan and Central Mexico during the Classic period, there is no direct evidence of people from Teotihuacan permanently living in the northern Maya lowlands.

Key words: Maya, Teotihuacan, Ethnic Enclaves, Yucatan.

INTRODUCTION

The problem of Teotihuacan stylistic influence in the Maya lowlands has been the subject of several publications in recent years (Braswell 2003a; Fash and Fash 2000; Freidel *et al.* 2003; Smyth 2000; Stuart 2000). As Braswell (2003b) notes, since the 1980s there has been a general movement away from ideas such as enclaves of Teotihuacanos living in the Maya area (see Kidder *et al.* 1946; Sanders and Michels 1977) or horizon styles emanating from Teotihuacan such as the famed Middle Classic (A.D. 400-700 [see Pasztory 1978]). Recent analyses have treated Teotihuacan interaction with the Maya with a much more critical eye towards models of cultural change portra-

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ying the Maya as passive recipients of new styles and material culture.

Within the past few years, two competing models of Teotihuacan interaction have been proposed for Classic period sites in Yucatan, Mexico (Figure 1). The first model comes from the site of Oxkintok, where Varela (1998; Varela and Braswell 2003) now argues that local Yucatec Maya were appropriating and innovating cultural ideas that had been circulating in Mesoamerica, including Teotihuacan, for centuries. Varela proposes a time frame of A.D. 550-700 for this model. The second model draws on the idea of a Middle Classic Teotihuacan enclave (cf. Sanders and Michels 1977) at the site of Chac II (Smyth and Rogart 2004). Although Smyth and Rogart propose an Early Classic (A.D. 300-550) origin for this enclave, they argue that the majority of Teotihuacan influence can be dated to a Middle Classic period (A.D. 550-700) that is contemporary with the Oxkintok material.

The question that follows from the recent publication of these two models is that how can two, so closely located and contemporaneous, sites have such different cultural trajectories during the span of time between A.D. 550-700. The implications of whether or not Teotihuacanos were directly involved in cultural events in western Yucatan are too important for our understanding of socioeconomic events in the Puuc region and later ideological developments at sites such as Uxmal and Kabah to let the matter stand unresolved. In this article, I examine the two models in light of evidence from numerous sites across the northern lowlands. Focusing my critique on the evidence from Chac II, I argue that there is no conclusive evidence that people from Teotihuacan were permanently living at any community in the northern Maya lowlands during the period from A.D. 550-700. Agreeing with Varela and Braswell (2003), I suggest that alternative hypotheses should be pursued when interpreting vague stylistic similarities between Yucatan and Central Mexico.

OXKINTOK AND THE MIDDLE CLASSIC IN YUCATAN

Although the idea of a Middle Classic period in the northern Maya lowlands was explored during the 1970s and 1980s (Cohadas 1978a, 1978b; Freer 1986), the concept did not meet with enthusiasm and was not adopted by the general field. Recent chronologies firmly place many of the traits Cohadas (1978a, 1978b) thought to be Middle Classic at Chichén Itzá in the Epiclassic, a concept often treated as a horizon style dating to the Yucatec Late and Terminal Classic periods at sites exhibiting stylistic similarities to other Epiclassic communities in Mesoamerica such as El Tajín, Xochicalco, and Tula (A.D. 700-950). The period from A.D. 550-700 has generally remained as part of the late Early Classic or early Late Classic (see Bey *et al.* 1998; Jiménez 2002; Johnstone 2001; Robles 1990; Suhler *et al.* 1998).

Varela (1998) revived the concept of a Middle Classic with her important study of the Motul ceramic complex (Oxkintok Regional Phase) at Oxkintok (A.D. 500/550-600/630), Yucatan. Since the publication of her monograph, Varela (Varela and Braswell 2003) has concluded that the Middle Classic as a concept does not work well for the Oxkintok material, preferring to include the Motul ceramic complex as the latter part of the Early Classic period. Varela and Braswell (2003: 250) state that the Middle Classic period (horizon) «whose underlying hypothesis is the development and expansion of a Teotihuacan "empire" throughout Mesoamerica, now is generally discredited». Further, they acknowledge the fact that the idea of the Middle Classic employs an outmoded concept that cultural contact must have occurred through processes of one-way migration or diffusion. Such an idea explicitly ignores the possibilities for lowland adoption and innovation, and conceptualizes the Maya as completely passive.

Regardless of the chronological terminology, during the Oxkintok Regional Phase several interesting patterns emerge at Oxkintok, albeit much later than the appearance of similar patterns in the southern lowlands. First, framed *talud-tablero* architecture appears (Figure 2), possibly as early as A.D. 500 (see Fernández [1992] and Vidal [1999] for discussions of architecture at Oxkintok). The first civic architecture at Oxkintok appears in the fourth century A.D. and is associated with a polychrome ceramic tradition. The Proto-Puuc A style at Oxkintok starts at A.D. 500, roughly the same time as the *talud-tablero* traits ap-

[1] As Smyth and Rogart (2004) note, citing Traci Ardren's unpublished data from the Lool group at Chunchucmil, similar *talud-tablero* architecture appears at this site in domestic contexts during the time of the Oxkintok Regional Phase. There is, however, no evidence of Teotihuacan enclaves or even sustained contact with Central Mexico at all at Chunchucmil despite the fact that Dahlin and Ardren (2002) argue that it was a large economic center. Interestingly, ceramic ties at Chunchucmil appear to be restricted to Yucatan and the Gulf Coastal region of Campeche.

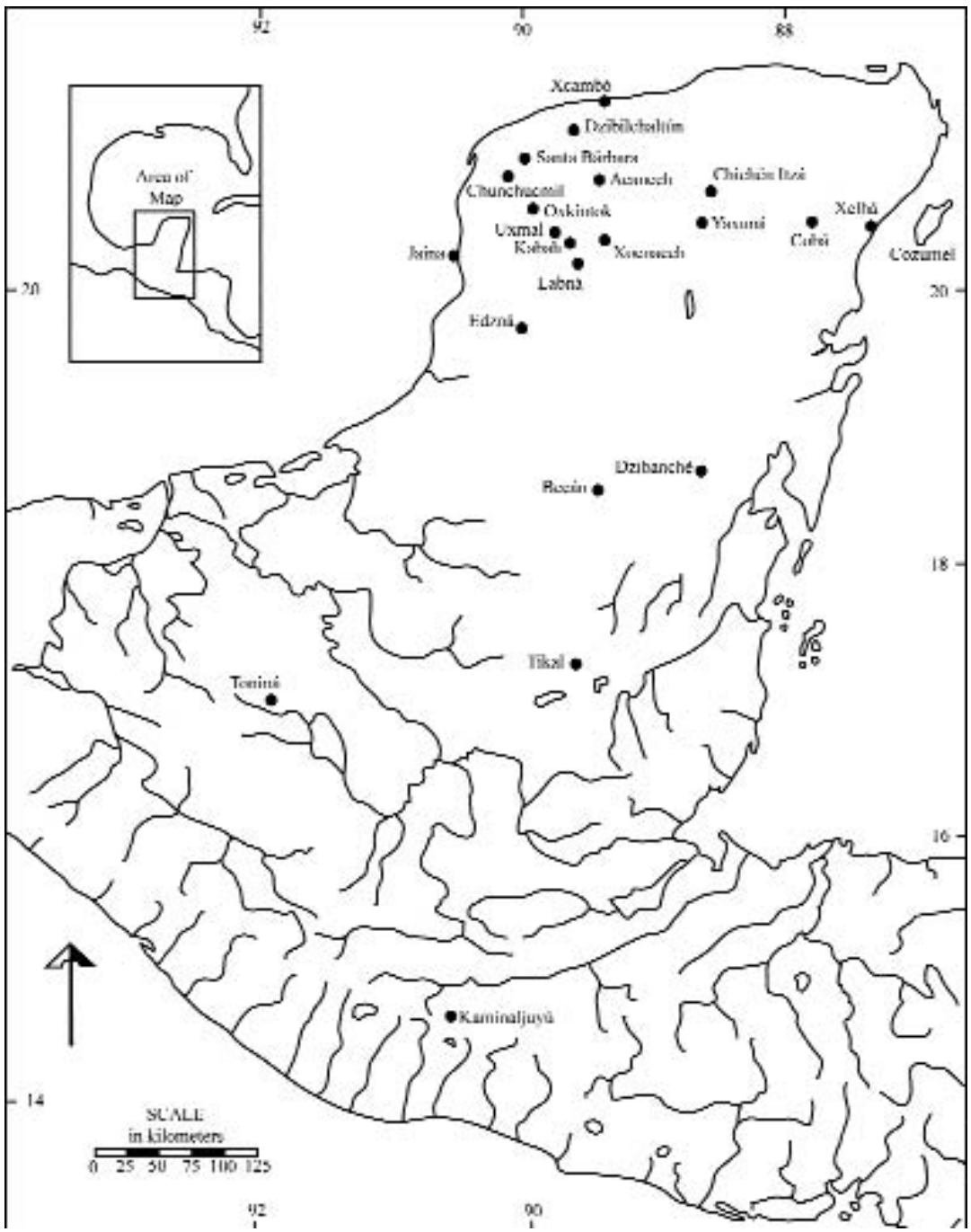

Figure 1. Map of the Maya Lowlands.

Figure 2. *Talud-Tablero* Architecture at Oxkintok

pear [1]. Noting that the proportions of the *talud-tablero* architecture are different from those at sites such as Matacapan and Kaminaljuyu, that the Oxkintok *tableros* do not pass completely around the structure (also seen at Tikal), and that distinctly Maya apron moldings are employed, Varela and Braswell (2003) argue that the late *talud-tablero* architecture at Oxkintok is a local innovation, possibly drawing some inspiration from Petén. In fact, the *talud-tablero* form appears in the southern Maya area during the Terminal Preclassic (Laporte 2003), and could have arrived in Yucatan as an architectural idea from this area [2].

Second, cylinder tripod ceramics appear. Although similar ceramic forms are found at Teotihuacan (Rattray 2001) [3] and other Maya sites with supposed Teotihuacan influence, the Oxkintok tripods are substantially different. Varela and Braswell (2003) argue that the proportions of the cylinders at Oxkintok differ from vessels found at Teotihuacan. Further, the vessel ba-

[2] As researchers in Central Mexico have demonstrated, however, *talud-tablero* architecture has Late Preclassic antecedents in Puebla (e.g. Plunket and Uruñela 1998).

[3] Rattray (1979: 62) actually states that the «origen de la forma de vaso cilíndrico en un enigma», suggesting that we may question the Teotihuacan origin of this trait.

ses often have open-work supports, not common at Teotihuacan [4].

Similar tripod vessels have been recovered at Chunchucmil, Yucatan, a contemporaneous site located on the closest route to the Gulf Coast from Oxkintok (Hutson 2004). My own investigations at a residential group at Chunchucmil (Stanton 2001), as well as other investigations at the site, corroborate the dating of the Oxkintok material, and suggest that these tripod vessels are part of a local ceramic tradition dating to the latter portion of the Early Classic through the very beginning of the Late Classic in western Yucatan (Figure 3). Interestingly, open work supports on tripod vessels have also been noted for Early Classic material at Yaxuná (Johnstone 2001, Suhler 1996, Suhler *et al.* 1998). One particularly striking case comes from a slightly flaring cylindrical vessel identified as Balanza Black (Figure 4). Although radiocarbon dates are not available from the context in which the vessel was found, a centerline tomb in Str. 6F-4 at the North Acropolis, stratigraphy and ceramics (e.g., Balanza Black, Hunabchen Red, Maxcanú Buff, and Tituc Orange Polychrome) suggest a date similar to the Oxkintok Regional Phase, probably sixth century A.D. Intriguingly, Str. 6F-4 is associated with a stela exhibiting a figure in Teotihuacan-style dress. As noted by Coggins (1983: 39), Yaxuná Monument 1 is one of the few monuments in Yucatan that depicts a person in Teotihuacan-style dress.

In sum, the data from Oxkintok and other sites suggest that several quasi-Middle Classic traits date several centuries after they appear in the southern lowlands. In fact, the Oxkintok regional phase correlates well with the so-called Middle Classic Hiatus (A.D. 534-593), a period of time at Tikal and affiliated sites where there is an absence of dated monuments. Willey (1974) once proposed that this period represented the withdrawal of the Teotihuacan «influence» (see Braswell 2003b). Yet the vague Central Mexican stylistic similarities in the data from Oxkintok, among other sites, do not point to a direct Teotihuacan origin. In fact, Varela and Braswell argue, correctly in my opinion, for a local process of adoption and innovation. With the demonstration of Oxkintok (as well as Chunchucmil and Yaxuná) as a local phenomenon that may have borrowed and innovated on ideas that had been circulating among Mesoamerican cultures for centuries, it is interesting to see the return to an interpretation of a Teotihuacan ethnic enclave for a contemporaneous site located in the same region as Oxkintok, the Puuc.

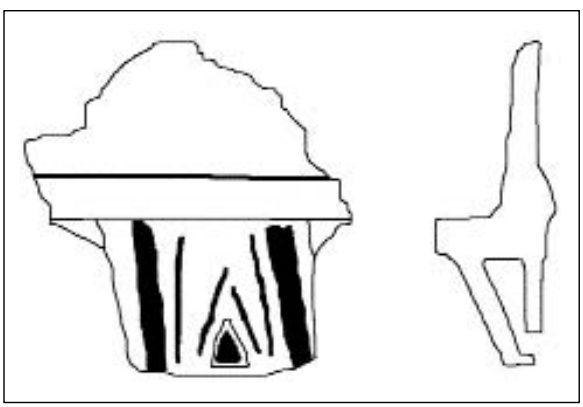

Figure 3. Cylinder Tripod Support from the *Aak* Group at Chunchucmil (Courtesy of Scott Hutson).

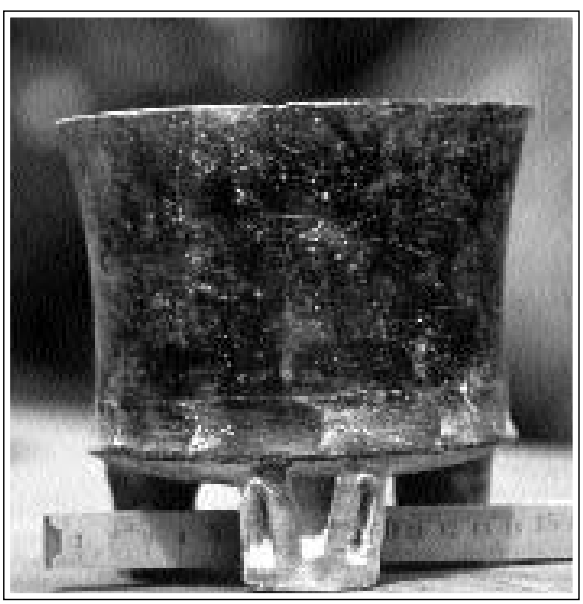

Figure 4. Cylinder Tripod Vessel from Yaxuná (Courtesy of David Freidel).

[4] While Robles *et al.* (2000) criticized Varela's (1998) original placement of these cylinder tripod ceramics in a Middle Classic as confusing a mortuary subcomplex with a ceramic phase, this criticism appears to have lost its bite as the concept of a Middle Classic at Oxkintok has been dropped.

CHAC II AND A TEOTIHUACAN ENCLAVE

The data from Chac II require a more detailed review than the data from Oxkintok. Whereas Varela and Braswell (2003) discuss generalities in two data categories, Smyth and Rogart (2004) present numerous pieces of individual data to be taken as a whole to indicate a Teotihuacan enclave at Chac II. To evaluate their hypothesis it is essential to critique each piece of information, in order to arrive at a more informed understanding of which lines of evidence may constitute directly imported or copied ideas and material culture from Teotihuacan and what evidence may reflect processes of adoption and innovation in the local culture as proposed for Oxkintok (Varela and Braswell 2003). Unfortunately, this necessitates devoting a large portion of this article to a critique of the Chac II data. A detailed review of the Chac II evidence, however, provides the opportunity to integrate and compare data from numerous sites around the peninsula. The comparison of these data with those presented for Chac II provide a forum within which to evaluate the poorly understood period between A.D. 550-700 in the northern Maya lowlands.

Ceramics

Smyth and Rogart (2004) offer several ceramic objects as evidence of the presence of Teotihuacanos at Chac II. Although I will review the iconography on some of the vessels and their chronological placement later in this paper, two ceramic forms and one ceramic type are reviewed in this section. First, the authors identify a possible polychrome candelero (*ibídem:* figures 17 and 19). *Candeleros* appear to be incense burners and are found at Teotihuacan and Matacapan among other sites. In Yucatan possible *candeleros* have been reported at Xcambó (Jiménez 2001) and Oxkintok (Varela and Braswell 2003). Interestingly, the Xcambó example dates to a post-A.D. 700 context and thus postdates the Metepec phase downturn at Teotihuacan.

The Chac II example is interesting, but no comparison is made to *candeleros* from Teotihuacan or Matacapan. Smyth and Rogart suggest that the piece is locally made in Yucatan, a statement that I would concur with given the style of polychrome painting. Thus, if we could agree that this piece is actually a *candelero*, it appears to me what Ball (1983) calls a homology, or local copy of a foreign ware. None of the proposed *candeleros* reported from Yucatan, however, actually look like *candeleros* from Teotihuacan (Figure 5), which are generally small, solid, monochrome, and have two holes during the later occupations at Teotihuacan (a period when they would have more chance of overlapping with the Chac II data). Further, the holes take up most of the volume of each piece, which is not the case in the Chac II example. The Yucatecan *candeleros* also contrast with the *candeleros* reported from Matacapan, which closely resemble those found at Teotihuacan (see Ortiz C. and Santley 1998).

The other ceramic forms that Smyth and Rogart discuss are the so-called poison bottles. Although Varela and Braswell (2003) argue that similar vessels are common in the southeast Maya periphery and that they were used as receptacles for cinnabar, Smyth and Rogart suggest that the Chac II examples may have been portable incense burners for long-distance traders. Yet even if they were used as incense burners for long-distance traders (which is debatable), these vessels are not from Teotihuacan. In fact, they show up at several Classic period sites across the peninsula, including both Oxkintok (Varela and Braswell 2003) and Yaxuná (Suhler 1996) among others. Such forms have not been reported from Teotihuacan itself.

Smyth and Rogart (2004: 36) also identify a «thin orange ware» as an Early Classic (A.D. 300-550) type known as Kinich Orange. They state that this is a poorly known type known from Edzná (not published in Forsyth's [1983] report) and Becán (not published from

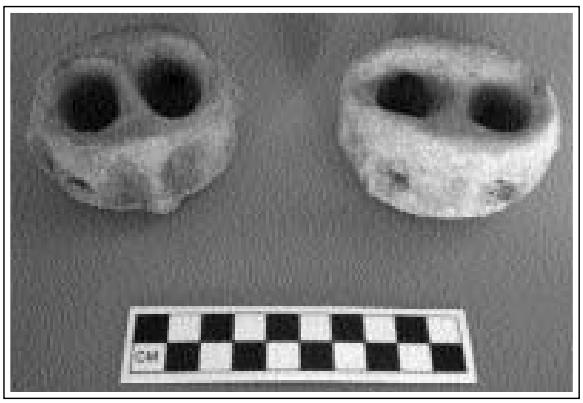

Figure 5. Early Classic *candeleros* from Teotihuacan (Courtesy of Laboratorio de Arqueología, Departamento de Antropología, Universidad de las Américas, Puebla).

Ball's [1977] report)[5]. Further, they compare the surface finish of Kinich Orange to San Martín Orange ware from Teotihuacan. There are several problems with their treatment of Kinich Orange, however. First, the use of the term «thin orange ware» is very misleading as it implies a relationship with Thin Orange, a ceramic ware originating in the Puebla-Tlaxcala area and found in large quantities at Teotihuacan. Kinich Orange is not particularly thin and is of local origin (most likely the western portion of the northern lowlands). Thus, Kinich Orange is not Thin Orange. Second, Kinich Orange was subject to an exhaustive study by Boucher and Palomo (1995) and has been studied at sites including Chunchucmil and Santa Bárbara among others. This work has demonstrates that Kinich Orange is a local ware dating to A.D. 500 at the earliest. Comparision of modes at Chunchucmil and Santa Bárbara suggest that that Kinich Orange could be considered an orange variety of Teabo Red, a Late to Terminal Classic redware common in the Puuc area. Kinich Orange seems to slightly predate Teabo Red, but the forms and pastes are strikingly similar, and without doubt local. Thus, it is difficult to see a connection between Kinich Orange and Teotihuacan.

One last piece of ceramic evidence that Smyth and Rogart bring to bear on the problem comes not from Chac II, but from Teotihuacan itself. Smyth and Rogart make a connection between Teotihuacan and Yucatan by citing the identification of Maya pottery at Teotihuacan by Rattray (1979, 1984, 1987). The primary problem here is not that there was not some sort of ceramic exchange, but that the ceramics in question have generally not been assigned to a particular region of the Maya lowlands. Rattray (1979) reports Early Classic Tzakol-style polychromes that appear to have strong ties to Petén rather than Yucatan. This correlation makes sense given the Early Classic Teotihuacan «influence» at Petén sites such as Tikal. Given the Petén designation of the Early Classic ceramics it is difficult to see a correlation between Teotihuacan and Chac II during the Early Classic using these data. The other ceramics that Rattray identifies relate to Late Classic material, although no clear association with the Puuc area can be made. One such ceramic type tentatively identified at Teotihuacan is Thin Slate, a type having a distribution from the northern plains of Yucatan to northern Belize and as far southwest as Becán. Ticul Thin Slate is found at Chac II, but there remains doubt that the material at Teotihuacan is actually Thin Slate, and if it is, where in the peninsula it could have come from. In a later publication, Rattray (1990) reported Petén-gloss wares at Teotihuacan. Rattray (1979: 65), citing an analysis by Robert Rands, originally suggested that these polychromes were not from Petén, but it remains unclear what area of the Maya lowlands they may have originated from. Other ceramics identified as Maya include some sort of negative ware that is not assigned to a type, as well as striated ceramics which have been sourced to «Yucatan-Grijalva,» a rather non-specific designation that does not help to resolve the question regarding Chac II.

Architecture and Chronology

At the beginning of their article, Smyth and Rogart (2004) argue that the Central Mexican presence at Chac II first appears during the period between A.D. 300-550, a time they refer to as the Early Classic period. Beginning with the Great Pyramid Plaza, they offer the use of small stone fill and *talud-tablero*-like architecture as evidence of a Teotihuacan connection. I will begin with this architectural group to asses both architectural similarities between Chac II and Central Mexico, as well as chronology.

Contradicting Smyth and Rogart's (2004) thesis, the Great Pyramid Plaza is built in a fairly common architectural arrangement found in the Puuc region; a large pyramidal structure anchoring one end of a plaza with more than four sides (see May 2000; Stanton *et al.* 2003). These arrangements usually include masonry ramps, as occur at Chac II, and sometimes masonry towers covered with anthropomorphic stucco figures such as those recovered at very similar groups at Labná (May 2000). Given the dates presented for the group, I suspect that it reached its current pentagonal form at some point around A.D. 550-600, not very much earlier than the dates given for a similar group at Santa Bárbara (Stanton *et al.* 2003). The Labná and Yaxuná examples may date slightly later, although as Smyth and Rogart (2004) note, more work needs to be done on Yucatecan chronology.

Although the supposed «Middle Classic» arrangement of the Great Pyramid Plaza is not found at Teotihuacan, Smyth and Rogart argue that the Teotihuacan presence can be discerned at an early date from the Great Pyramid itself. They refer to a substructure

[5] Unfortunately, no references of the identification of Kinich Orange are given for either Edzná or Becán.

dubbed Ka'nah (Phase I of the construction sequence). This substructure is associated with an uncalibrated radiocarbon date of A.D. 370 ± 60 [6]. The data they present for Teotihuacan influence, however, is the fact that a lower level of fill in one of the staircases is composed of small stones (*chich*). Smyth and Rogart argue that small stone construction fill is uncommon in the Puuc and that small stone resemble the use of volcanic scoria at Teotihuacan. First, small stone fill was often used in construction in the northern Maya lowlands. Often, the small stones were used to level out layers of fill or areas for floors. My own studies at Yaxuná can attest to the antiquity and duration of these construction techniques (Stanton 2000). Second, even if small stone fill was not common in Yucatan, the linkage between small stones and volcanic scoria used for fill is very weak.

The other feature that is claimed to be of Teotihuacan origin in the Phase I substructure is a series of terraces with sloping-walls (Smyth and Rogart 2004: figure 5). Smyth and Rogart identify this architecture as *talud-tablero*-like despite the fact that their reconstruction of the substructure shows only sloping walls (*taludes*) without *tableros* on each terrace. Sloping terrace walls do not equal *talud-tablero* architecture. Given that these are the only pieces of evidence offered for an Early Classic (A.D. 300-550) Teotihuacan presence at the Great Pyramid, any connection between this group and Teotihuacan during this period can be safely ruled out [7].

More substantial evidence for Teotihuacan interaction is presented for Phase III of the Great Pyramid. An uncalibrated radiocarbon date of A.D. 520 ± 40 comes from a context associated with a Chemax vessel in this phase. Chemax appears to be one of the early forms of slateware, and a sixth century date is not out of step with current revisionist chronologies. At this time the Great Pyramid was expanded. One of the more interesting features associated with this phase are a series of «15 staggered, recessed lateral staircases» (Smyth and Rogart 2004: 22, figure 4). The authors note that this staircase configuration resembles Str. 44 and Str. 36 at Dzibilchaltún [8]. Although the plan of Phase II of the Great Pyramid at Chac II is very reminiscent of the architecture mentioned for Dzibilchaltún, Smyth and Rogart (2004: 22) make the argument that the presence of staggered, recessed stairways on the west face of the Pyramid of the Sun at Teotihuacan (Figure 6) provides a more compelling comparison. In my opinion there is very little in common between these two structures. The number of staircases on the Pyramid of the Sun is much fewer than at Chac II and they occur on the front side of the structure, whereas the Great Pyramid staircase occur on every side, but the front. Further, the patterning of the staggering is very different.

The next line of architectural evidence that Smyth and Rogart (2004: 27-38) offer as evidence for a Teotihuacan presence at Chac II comes from domestic contexts, the Platform Group and the Sacta Group. They begin by describing the Platform Group as having an arrangement very different from «the typical Maya pattern of being oriented along cardinal directions around a central plaza» (Smyth and Rogart 2004: 28). Although many Maya domestic groups are oriented in this «typical» fashion, Smyth and Rogart ignore the great variability of known Maya domestic structures from the Maya lowlands in general and in Yucatan specifically. At three of the four Classic period sites that I have worked at in Yucatan, three of them exhibit domestic architecture that does not conform to this «typical» pattern and more resembles the Platform Group: large platforms with numerous superstructures and foundation braces at different levels. In regards to the Early Classic, the 5E-52 Group at Yaxuná provides a perfect example of a domestic group with such a configuration (Stanton 2000) [9]. I do not see anything out of the ordinary regarding Classic Period Yucatecan architecture at the Platform Group.

The dating of the platforms is also problematic. Smyth and Rogart assert that there three distinct periods are represented at both groups. The latest architecture is Late (or possibly Terminal) Classic. Yet only one substructure is identified for each group

[6] Smyth and Rogart assert that this is one of the earliest public buildings known from the Puuc region, despite the fact that recent work at sites such as Xocnaceh located at the north edge of the Puuc (Stanton and Gallareta 2002) exhibit Preclassic monumental architecture.

[7] Interestingly, Smyth *et al.* (1998: figure 13) made an argument that Str. E-VIIa of the Great Pyramid Plaza at Chac II exhibits *talud-tablero*-like architecture as well. I suspect that since the published photograph of this feature appears to show not only an inverse *talud-tablero* arrangement, with the *talud* superimposing the *tablero*, but that the *talud* and *tablero* have clearly different construction styles, that Smyth has since determined that this structure does not relate to this form of architecture.

[8] A date of «Late Terminal Classic» is given for Str. 36, although I am unclear whether this means Late to Terminal Classic or the end of the Terminal Classic. If it is the latter, no date is given for when the Terminal Classic might end. Given the rejection of an Early Postclassic by Andrews *et al.* (2003), the clarification of the Dzibilchaltún date is important to assess it's chronological relationship with the Great Pyramid at Chac II.

[9] As well as lacking vaults which Smyth finds strange in regards to the Platform Group.

Figure 6: Pyramid of the Sun, Teotihuacan.

implying that these substructures span both the Early (A.D. 300-550) and Middle (A.D. 550-700) Classic. At both groups, ceramics and radiometric dates are used to assess chronology. Beginning with the Platform Group, Smyth and Rogart report 28 complete ceramic vessels used to date the structure. Of the 28 vessels, they state that most were early slatewares. The dates for slatewares are being pushed back by ceramicists in Yucatan and a date for A.D. 500/550 is now reasonable for their appearance. Therefore the Chac II data suggest a date between A.D. 500/550-700, rather than earlier [10]. Interestingly, the authors make an association between these vessels and polychrome sherds identified as Dos Arroyos, which can date as early as A.D. 300. Yet the fact that sherds were recovered with the complete vessels suggests that the sherds were transposed from some other context, probably a pre-A.D. 400/500 context elsewhere at the site (e.g., midden used for fill). The fact that no complete vessels of the Dos Arroyos type were found in the burial assemblages suggests that the sherds are not contemporaneous with the burials. The authors also mention bichrome whole vessels that stylistically date to the Early Classic, but they do not identify types or what attributes were used to make this assessment. Therefore, it is impossible to assess the chronology of these vessels. In terms of ceramics the substructure of the Platform Group appears to date to the period between A.D. 550-700, not earlier.

The dating of the Sacta Group to the Early Classic is also problematic. First Smyth and Rogart (2004) argue for Early-Middle Classic vessels in association with burials. The first of these vessels is a Chimbote Cream Polychrome bowl. This type has been dated to strictly post-A.D. 600 contexts at Muyil and Cobá, Quintana Roo, as well as Edzná, Campeche (Forsyth 1983; Robles 1990; Witschey 1993). Ceramicists generally regard it as a Late Classic type. Smyth and Rogart also identify Chemax with the Early Classic (A.D. 300-550). As stated previously, accepted dates for Chemax are not earlier than A.D. 500. Robles (1990) placed it in his Blanco Complex (A.D. 300/350-550/600) at Cobá 15 years ago, but with the caution that it was not well situated within the chronology and also may occur in the following Palmas Complex (A.D. 550/600-700/730), a date that ceramicists are more in agreement with

[10] The authors also mention that most of the vessels were stucco coated citing that this is a common form of ceramic decoration at Teotihuacan. While rare in Yucatan, stucco coated slatewares do exist at other sites including Yaxuná and Chichén Itzá.

today. The authors also portray Kinich Orange as an Early Classic ware. Kinich Orange does not date to pre-A.D. 500 contexts. It is most likely an early variation of Teabo Red dating anywhere from A.D. 500/550-750 (Boucher and Palomo 1995; personal observation, Chunchucmil and Santa Bárbara collections). Smyth and Rogart provide no radiocarbon dates in association with undisturbed contexts that support the assertion that Kinich Orange dates to the Early Classic.

The Chemax vessels, as well as the Chimbote Cream Polychrome bowl were all found beneath an intact portion of the substructure floor, presumably dating to the construction of the substructure. Two radiocarbon dates on bone material associated with Burial 3 (one of five burials beneath this fragment of intact floor) gave a date of A.D. 1130 ± 40 and 1250 ± 40. Smyth and Rogart dismiss these dates as contaminated by root activity and cite that the dating of bone can be problematic. Neither date supports their dating of the substructure.

Two other radiocarbon dates are given for the Sacta Group. The first sample is reported to date to historic times and is dismissed. The second date, however, is accepted by the authors. This date (A.D. 660 ± 40, uncalibrated) comes from within the stucco covering Burial 6. Smyth and Rogart (2004: 37) state that this is an «important terminal date for the substructure». Several comments can be made here. First, no evidence is provided for the stratigraphic placement of Burial 6 (a similar problem exists for the A.D. 660 date given for Burial 8). In fact, no other information is given about the burial at all. Therefore, the reader is left to wonder why this is a terminal date for the substructure and not, for instance, a dedicatory date. Since the burial is «covered by stucco» one wonders if it was sealed during the original laying of the plaster floor. Second, the date is near A.D. 700, after the Metepec phase decline of Teotihuacan. Third, the date comes from within a stucco sample. While charcoal may be used from to date the wood used to prepare stucco, as Mathews (2001) notes, care has to be taken not to collect samples that may be contaminated by geological or modern C-14. In sum, no evidence is given for a pre A.D. 550 date at either architectural group and some of the data may suggest initial construction slightly after A.D. 550.

Chronology asides, the next piece of evidence for a Teotihuacan connection that Smyth and Rogart (2004) offer is that the excavated portion of the platform group is oriented between 15 and 20 degrees east of north. This orientation is similar to the axis at Teotihuacan. I am unclear how this indicates interaction with Teotihuacan. Numerous structures throughout the Yucatan peninsula have this orientation. Further, the majority of causeways in Yucatan have this orientation (see Romanov 1973). From my point of view this orientation is as much a Maya trait as it may be a Central Mexican trait.

The final argument that Smyth and Rogart make in regards to an architectural connection between Teotihuacan and Chac II is that substructures in both the Platform Group and the Sacta Group were built as Teotihuacan apartment compounds. Several problems with this interpretation can be noted, however. Besides the fact that the spatial conventions are not unusual for the Maya, Smyth and Rogart do not demonstrate that many of the substructure walls are actually walls and not construction pens for the post-A.D. 700 Late-Terminal Classic fill. Although stucco floors are described as dating to the substructures in both the Platform and Sacta groups, there is no description of the articulation, if any exists, between the stucco and the walls. In fact, for the Sacta Group Smyth and Rogart (2004: 37) state that the floor was laid down prior to the construction of the walls. Since the Maya were prone to construct walls before laying down plaster for floors (usually resulting in the «lipping» of stucco onto the walls), this suggests that the walls date to a period after the original use of the substructure floor, and that a possibility exists that some of them are construction pens for the Late Classic fill of the final structure. This inference is supported by the fact that the walls are described as being rough-cut boulders (not at all like the finished stones at Teotihuacan). Further, the possibility exists that some of the stone alignments could be retention walls for low platforms of the substructure or could delimit other features such as benches. I suspect that what looks like a busy series of walls is actually a combination of several features, although it is impossible to be certain given the current presentation of the data.

Regardless of these problems, if we are to take the architectural data from the two platforms at face value, they still do not appear like Teotihuacan apartment compounds. I see no resemblance to the form of a Teotihuacan compound in either group. While it is impossible for me to accurately interpret the form of the Sacta substructure without first-hand knowledge of the features shown in the plans, the point is that the substructure does not look like an apartment compound given the way the data are presented. Further, I'm not sure how strong a single vague architectural

similarity to Teotihuacan domestic architecture proves that Chac II was a Central Mexican enclave.

Iconography

Several lines of iconographic evidence are forwarded by Smyth and Rogart as evidence of a Teotihuacan presence at Chac II. First, they refer to a series of tenoned sculptures suggested to have Central Mexican inspiration (*ibídem*: figure 9; Smyth *et al.* 1998: figure 15). These sculptures consist of a pair of serpent heads and a pair of human heads inside of serpent mouths. Although Smyth argues that the human heads are wearing serpent helmets in an attempt to correlate the helmet worn by *Yax Nuun Ayiin* on Tikal Stela 31 with the Chac II sculptures, the sculptures appear to resemble the common Maya theme of an ancestor emerging from a serpent, known from post-A.D. 700 mosaic facades in the Puuc region. In fact, mosaic facades with tenoned sculpture are much more common post-A.D. 700 than pre-A.D. 700 (Gendrop 1983). Interestingly, Smyth (Smyth *et al.* 1998: 249) originally identified these sculptures as Feathered Serpents, making comparisons to post-A.D. 700 sites such as Uxmal, Labná, and Santa María, although it is difficult to make out any feather imagery in association with the serpents from published photos and drawings. Further, Smyth freely admits that these sculptures come from «Late Classic» contexts. In his earlier publication, Smyth (Smyth *et al.* 1998) associated one of the serpent heads with an altar with five ceramic vessels resembling Sotuta wares from Chichén Itzá, where Feathered Serpent iconography is more prominent than anywhere else in the Maya lowlands. The context and style of the sculptures appear Epiclassic (A.D. 700-950) rather than Middle Classic.

A much more interesting piece of iconographic data is a tenon stone (Smyth and Rogart 2004: figure 10) resembling a Teotihuacan funerary mask. The context of the mask comes from the final phase vaulted superstructure (E-I) of the Great Pyramid. Although the context of the tenon stone is obviously late, the authors do not give a date for the construction of the final phase of the Great Pyramid [11]. Given that the authors make an attempt to place the tenon stone with an earlier substructure, despite its obvious association with the last superstructure, I suspect the ceramic dates for E-I are post A.D. 700. Smyth and Rogart (2004: 23-24) claim that the tenon stone was «clearly» an offering as it was found «flat on the floor and covered with stones before the roof of E-I was intentionally collapsed». Unfortunately no evidence is given as to how they could assess that the stones surrounding the mask were not part of the collapse, or how they conclude that the vault did not collapse due to decay. Yet they further argue that «these contextual data show that the Teotihuacan-style sculpture mask must predate the last pyramid temple» (*ibídem*: 24). No explanation is given as to why a floor deposit must clearly date to an earlier substructure. Although there is always the possibility of curation and subsequent deposition of early material in later contexts, Smyth and Rogart do not present any evidence of such activity, except for the fact the tenon looks like a Classic Teotihuacan funerary mask (of which several others are known to exist in the Maya lowlands, especially in greenstone, e.g., mask from Dzibanché). I find the iconographic similarities between this tenon and Teotihuacan material very intriguing since they are so rare in the Maya lowlands, but there is no real connection made to Teotihuacan and the date of the context in which it was found appears to be out of step with their model.

Several other sculptural elements were located in the fill beneath the floor of E-I that may be situated in a better chronological context. These include merlons, stepless frets, a five-pointed star, and some moldings with goggle-eye-like motifs (*ibídem:* figure 11). Found in the same fill was a Timucuy Orange polychrome vessel, a confusing Classic period ceramic designation that appears to span both the latter part of the Early Classic and the early part of the Late Classic. Although Smyth and Rogart assert that they are unclear whether this vessel could have been imported (from where is not implied in the text) by citing Ball's (1977) nearly 30 year old publication that lamented the then vague state of polychrome typology in Yucatan, Timucuy Orange polychrome is a northern Maya lowland type. Much research has been conducted on polychromes in Yucatan and northern Campeche since Ball's study, and the research overwhelming points to the fact that Timucuy Orange polychrome is local (Jiménez 2002). While I am unsure as to the implication of this vessel being imported from a neighboring site, the sculptural elements from below the floor of E-I

[11] Given that previously published radiocarbon dates from the Chac Palace indicate a Terminal Classic date for this structure (Smyth 1998: 147), I suspect a Terminal Classic date for the final construction at the Great Pyramid.

do not appear to me to necessarily equate with Teotihuacan sculpture. Merlons are known from Chichén Itzá. Star imagery is common at sites throughout Mesoamerica, and one similar sculptural stone is on display at the Museo de las Estelas in Campeche. Further, the goggle-eye sculptures are not depicted. I see no reason to interpret this material as a result of Chac II being an ethic enclave of Teotihuacanos. A few stylistic similarities certainly do not imply resident Central Mexicans at Chac II.

Another vessel found in association with the «Intermediate Pyramid» or Phase II is purported to have an incised figure resembling the Great Goddess at Teotihuacan (*ibídem:* figure 13). Despite its earlier context, it is nearly impossible to assess the iconography on the vessel. I can make out a frontal faced figure wearing a cross-hatched headdress, but without a better image no correlation with Teotihuacan or anywhere else can be made. Interestingly, Smyth and Rogart (2004: 27), citing David Ortegón, suggest the vessel may have originated somewhere on the Gulf Coast. While this does not help their argument, it does correlate well with data from Chunchucmil and Xcambó, where ceramic imports appear to generally come from this area between A.D. 550-700 (Bond and Mansell 2001; Jiménez 2002).

Two other vessels are also tendered as evidence: an untyped brown-black cylinder tripod with nubbin feet and a fragment of an orange tripod dish. Smyth and Rogart (2004: 33, figure 21) suggest that the former vessel is an import with geometric designs similar to the murals from the Atetelco compound at Teotihuacan, although they concede that there are also strong parallels to the Frieze of the Dream Lords at Toniná, Chiapas, a Classic Maya site, mitigating their argument for a Teotihuacan origin. The form of the second vessel is said to be characteristic of the southern Gulf Coast (citing a designation made by George Bey), not Central Mexico, despite the fact that Smyth and Rogart (*ibídem*: figure 22) suggest that the design of a sun motif and skull are similar to Central Mexican *molcajete* vessels. The vessel was typed as Matacapan Type 30 (citing Christopher Pool). Unfortunately for the authors an association with Teotihuacan can be made for neither of these vessels, although something could possibly be said for trade along the Gulf Coast.

The authors also mention that the use of colors on painted stucco from the Phase III construction of the Great Pyramid demonstrates Teotihuacan influence. Specifically, three shades of red, malachite green, ochre, two shades of blue, and a few traces of black and white are reported from stucco fragments associated with this construction phase. The authors argue that these are common colors on Teotihuacan polychromes and should be included as further evidence of Teotihuacanos living at Chac II. Although the use of colors is rather weak evidence on its own, Smyth and Rogart ignore any discussion of color usage in the Maya area. At Chichén Itzá for instance, similar colors were reported on carved monuments and murals dating after A.D. 700 (Coggins and Shane 1984). The use of such colors at Chac II does not provide much evidence of Teotihuacan influence, much less migrations of men from Teotihuacan. Some of the iconography of the stuccos, however, is also argued to be of Teotihuacan origin. Specifically, fragmented fangs «reminiscent» of Tlaloc imagery and «abstract symbolism such as an eye motif similar to the *ollin* sign» (Smyth and Rogart 2004: 23) are given as evidence. Unfortunately, the fang imagery is not presented in the article and the *ollin* sign (*ibídem*: figure 8) exhibits only vague similarities to Teotihuacan iconography.

Mortuary Data

Several key points of comparison between Chac II and Teotihuacan concern mortuary practices. Although some of the mortuary goods have been discussed above, Smyth and Rogart (2004) also argue that possible child sacrifices and flexed/seated burials indicate Teotihuacan mortuary activity at Chac II.

Although mortuary patterns are considered by some to be one of the most conservative elements of ethnic identity, the practices of one culture can mimic the practices of another. This makes it very difficult to assess the presence of foreigners without more intensive bone studies such as strontium and oxygen isotope analyses. Even without this problem in mind, however, the Chac II mortuary data present further problems. First and foremost as Smyth and Rogart (2004) themselves point out, we know very little about mortuary practices in Yucatan dating prior to A.D. 700. Therefore, whatever pattern Smyth and Rogart might present could possibly be within the local variability that we have yet to appreciate.

With these caveats aside, Smyth and Rogart argue that seated burials occur at Chac II. Since seated burials occur at Teotihuacan, this appears to be a very strong point in their argument for a Central Mexican

presence at Chac II. Yet their presentation of the data is problematic. All of the supposed seated burials come from domestic contexts in the Platform and Sacta groups. Smyth and Rogart (2004: 29) argue, however, that with one exception «all burials were primary ones interred in seated or tightly flexed positions (perhaps as part of burial bundles) within circular to oval-shaped stone-lined cists or crypts». No distinction is made between flexed and seated in the subsequent text in regards to these burials, except for burials 3, 10, and 11 [12], which are simply claimed to be seated (*ibídem*: 31). No actual evidence is presented to demonstrate that any of these burials are indeed seated. In fact, no drawings or photos are presented of any of the burials at Chac II making it difficult to assess their osteological positions [13].

Although we lack good mortuary data for most of the peninsula regarding burials dating to A.D. 550-700, a large sample exists at Xcambó, located on the north coast of Yucatan. As Smyth and Rogart (2004) note, this sample demonstrates that the preferred post-A.D. 700 practice of extended burials, although present, did not dominate burial practices of this earlier site (see Cetina 2003). In fact, as at Classic period Xcaret (Con 2004) flexed burials were very popular, leading us to wonder how many of the Chac II burials were indeed seated and how many were actually flexed [14]. There is no present answer to this question. We do know, however, that flexed burials were popular amongst the Late Postclassic Maya (e.g. Masson 2000), as well as among the «Early Postclassic» Maya of the Caribbean coast (Terrones 2004) demonstrating some longevity in this burial position in the Maya lowlands.

Regardless of the positioning of the burials, Smyth and Rogart (2004: 29) make the case that «male individuals appear very robust, indicating physically demanding labor, one male survived severe cranial trauma». They take this evidence to indicate that these individuals were involved in trade. Several problems arise from this inference. First, being robust does not equate with trade. Based on analogies to Aztec society I would suspect most merchants not to be involved with the actual physical transportation of goods. In fact, most hard labor was probably associated with other types of activities. Second, although the idea of the merchant-warrior is popular in Mesoamerican archaeology, one cranial trauma, if indeed Smyth and Rogart are trying to equate the head injury with merchants, does not indicate what profession that person may have had (see Wakely 1997), much less that they also came from Central Mexico. More intensive analysis and publication of the bone material might help to resolve these issues.

Smyth and Rogart (2004: 30) also claim that the fact that multiple individuals were buried beneath the floor of a domestic structure demonstrates connection with Teotihuacan burial practices at Matacapan. Forgetting for the moment that Santley´s (1989) ideas concerning a Teotihuacan enclave at Matacapan is subject to some criticism as well, multiple subfloor burials in domestic contexts are not rare in Yucatan. A prime example from Mérida was recently published by Arias and Pool (2003). It is unclear from their argument what multiple burials at Chac II has do to with Teotihuacan.

A very interesting piece of data which is only alluded to in the text is that based on trace-element analysis one male and possibly one female exhibit nutritional patterns that are divergent for the Puuc area. No explanation of the statement is given, and the authors do not identify any region in the Maya area, or Mesoamerica in general, where nutritional patterns similar to those identified at Chac II may be found. I am not sure how much we know about Early Classic Puuc nutritional patterns since, as the authors note, our burial sample is virtually non-existent. Regardless, the statement concerning divergent nutritional patterns is not assessable given that no information is provided as to how the authors reached this conclusion.

A series of child burials (Sacta Burials 1-5) recovered at the Sacta Group are also argued by Smyth and Rogart (2004: 34-36) to represent Teotihuacan influence. All five burials were recovered in a stucco-lined basin beneath the floor of the Sacta Group substructure. Three or four of the burials were «sandwiched» between ceramic vessels. One of these

[12] Burials 10 and 11 are claimed to have been located near three circular stone-lined cists rather than in stone-line cists. It is rather unclear if the seated burials have something to do with the proximity of the stone-cists since Smyth and Rogart argue for seated burials inside of stone cists. Yet it is reported that the cists contained only fragments of human bone and other objects.

[13] Smyth (2000) presented a photo of Burial 13 in his report to FAMSI. Although this burial is reported to be seated in this report (despite the fact that it is not clearly identified as seated in Smyth and Rogart 2004), it is difficult to make out the orientation of the bones from the photo posted on the internet.

[14] There are also documented cases of urn burials in Yucatan. Several such interments exist in regional museums, and an A.D. 500-700 burial at the Muuch Group, Chunchucmil was found in a large *olla* (Stanton 2001).

vessels is purported to portray a stylized Tlaloc face with a bird-of-prey headdress. This vessel may be depicted in Figure 16, but no direct reference is made to this figure in the text concerning the burial. Smyth and Rogart follow the brief description of these burials by making a comparison of child sacrifices to the Tlalocs and burials of infants who died during childbirth at Teotihuacan with the Chac II burials. Unfortunately, no other osteological information is given concerning the burials.

The authors also make a couple of other minor connections between burial practices at Chac II and Teotihuacan. First, two burials had jade beads associated with their crania. The authors suggest that the jade beads may have been placed in the mouths of the deceased such as at seen at Teotihuacan. No explanation of the context is given and no figures or photos document the position of the jades in relation to the crania. The possibilities that the jades could have been associated with some sort of adornment near the head are not addressed. If the beads had been placed in the mouths of the deceased at Chac II, however, such practices are not necessarily uncommon in the Maya area. Houston and Taube's (2000: 270) statement that «the placement of jade beads in the mouth, a custom commonly documented by excavations of Maya burials (Ruz 1965: 459)» makes clear that we cannot correlate the jade beads found in the mouth of interred individuals with Teotihuacan. Second, Smyth and Rogart suggest that the circular to oval-shaped stone cists and crypts are of Teotihuacan origin. Again no drawings or photos accompany the text making it difficult to compare these features with other known mortuary contexts. Other non-rectangular burials have been documented in Yucatan, notably at Dzibilchaltún Group 612 (Andrews and Andrews 1980: 68-73).

Lithics

Smyth and Rogart (2004) list several pieces of lithic evidence to support their interpretation of Teotihuacanos at Chac II. This evidence includes *atlatl* points found in the Platform Group. Assuming that they are true *atlatl* points (there are no published photos or drawings), I am not sure what Smyth and Rogart are trying to argue. Schele and Freidel (1990) made the argument years ago that the *atlatl* was introduced by Teotihuacans in Petén during the fourth century A.D. Not only have some aspects of this hypothesis been challenged (Stuart 1993), but the evidence certainly demonstrates that the Maya had adopted the *atlatl* long before A.D. 550. The *atlatl* may have been a preferred weapon of warriors from Teotihuacan, but it was also popular among certain segments of Maya society prior to the date of the Chac II material. I do not see that «these data suggest tangible evidence of a possible foreign group of merchant-warriors living at the site» (Smyth and Rogart 2004: 28) [15].

Smyth and Rogart also indicate that the majority of obsidian at Chac II has been visually sourced to El Chayal, Guatemala. They argue that if Teotihuacan controlled Kaminaljuyu at this time that the large percentage of obsidian from this highland Guatemalan source supports their argument of a Teotihuacan presence. I find this very weak evidence. El Chayal obsidian is found throughout the Maya lowlands. In fact, the obsidian for the period between A.D. 550-700 at Oxkintok and Chunchucmil is primarily from El Chayal (Varela and Braswell 2003; Aline Magnoni, personal communication 2005).

Additionally, seven green obsidian blade fragments were recovered from the Great Pyramid Plaza. They note, however, that all of the contexts in which the green obsidian was found are construction fill, making it impossible to place them chronologically. Braswell (2003b) notes that green obsidian from the Pachuca source is present in the Maya area in various periods, not only during the proposed time of the Middle Classic. Therefore, it is impossible to evaluate this evidence.

ETHNICITY, MIGRATIONS, AND EARLY TO LATE CLASSIC TRANSITIONS IN YUCATAN

As Braswell (2003b) points out, there has been a substantial return to migration studies in archaeology (e.g. Burmeister 2000; Champion 1990; Chapman and Hamerow 1997). I am very sympathetic towards such studies as I believe that many movements of people took place in the past. Yet in general these recent stu-

[15] I am also unclear why the *atlatl* point found in a cached ceremonial offering in the Great Pyramid Plaza dates to an earlier period than the radiocarbon date associated with it (A.D. 620, uncalibrated). Smyth and Rogart (2004: 31) offer evidence that it was reworked prior to being interred, but I do not understand the link between reworking and an earlier date.

dies have not advanced the study of prehistoric [16] migrations past the identifications of stylistic clusters found in areas outside of their presumed origin. As we all should well know by now, although style can encode information concerning ethnicity (Wiessner 1983; Wobst 1977), it can also reflect other social processes (see Adams 1979; Burmeister 2000; Goodby 1998; Jones 1997: 112-116). As Braswell (2003b: 11) so bluntly states in regards to the problem at hand, pots are not people.

I suspect that the northern Maya lowlands was an ethnically diverse place both according to our etic views from the present, as well as emic constructions in the past. Also, I would be very surprised if Teotihuacans had not visited Yucatan, and vice versa. Although we might argue over whether there are sufficient data to prove my assumption, I feel that it is fairly ridiculous to maintain a model where people from nearby complex societies do not at least visit each other occasionally for a broad range of reasons. The similarity between murals at Teotihuacan and Xelhá (Berlo 1992; Lombardo 1987), the Teotihuacan-like stucco frieze at Acanceh (Miller 1991), and variations on *talud-tablero* themes may all bespeak of an intimate knowledge of Teotihuacan, whether in reality or myth. Yet none of this evidence proves that Teotihuacan men were permanently living in the northern Maya lowlands. In fact, Miller's (1991) assertion that the Acanceh frieze represents an eclectic style rather than one derived directly from Teotihuacan suggests that we might consider some of these «Middle Classic» traits to be part of a variation of an international style, such as the Epiclassic, although we should remember that elements of this style continued to influence Mesoamerican cultures for centuries after the Metepec decline of Teotihuacan (Stone 1989).

The model that Smyth and Rogart (2004) propose, however, is not that there was direct contact between people from Teotihuacan and Yucatan from A.D. 550-700, but that Teotihuacans had set up a permanent enclave at Chac II. I am obviously a bit more skeptical about this assumption. As Braswell (2003b) notes, such arguments bring up the question as to why people from Teotihuacan would have been tolerated by local populations in such an arrangement. Smyth and Rogart do not address such issues, and argue that the main reason that attracted men from Teotihuacan would have been the ideological significance of the Gruta de Chac, a cave long known to have been affiliated with rain gods among the later Maya (Andrews 1965). Smyth and Rogart state that the famous Chac polychromes vessels found in this cave have no other parallels in Yucatan and could be considered evidence of the Teotihuacan presence at Chac II. By proposing the Chac polychromes as evidence that men from Teotihuacan came to Yucatan with the primary intent of conducting cave-related rituals, the authors ignore two important facts: similar polychromes have been reported from caves in the Tekax region of Yucatan (Barrera and Peraza 1999), and that nothing resembling Chac polychromes have been reported in Central Mexico. Further, no Teotihuacan-like artifacts have been reported from the cave itself.

Given the fact that the late date of the so-called Middle Classic in Yucatan (Smyth and Rogart 2004; Varela 1998) is during or after the decline of Teotihuacan and the fact that many of the Central Mexican elements seen at sites across the northern lowlands are at best several stylistic changes removed from their highland origins, I agree with Varela and Braswell (2003) that the similarities reflect an adoption and innovation of ideas that had been circulating for centuries in the Maya lowlands. Just as a future archaeologist might arrive at Washington, D.C. and see Roman-influenced architecture, sculpture, style of government, etc., that post-date the period of greatest influence of Rome, we must be careful not to equate stylistic similarities with actual people. To take a phrase from Lowenthal (1994: 51) out of its original Greek context, the Teotihuacans served as a stick with which some Maya beat other Maya. The idea of Teotihuacan was surely used by some Maya for prestige and legitimization and as the previous statement implies. I suspect that things Teotihuacans were used in competitive displays among elites in the Maya area long after Teotihuacan had faded. In the end, analyzing the Chac II data with these questions in mind may prove more fruitful than returning to the idea of Teotihuacan enclaves in the Maya lowlands.

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[16] We might say ahistoric in the case of Chac II, since the epigraphic record of the northern Maya lowlands does not contain such information. In fact, no hieroglyphs of any sort have been reported from Chac II, despite their presence at nearby sites.

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