

The Return of the Toltecs: Reconsidering the “Toltec Invasion Hypothesis” at Chichen Itza

by

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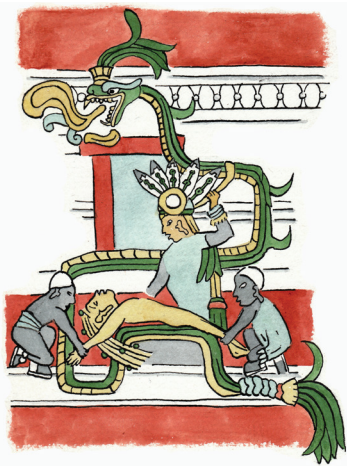
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Similarities in art and architecture between Tula, in Central Mexico, and Chichen Itza, in Yucatan, in the era between the Classic and Postclassic periods indicate a close relationship between these two sites. Yet, there has been much debate over the nature of this relationship. Late 20th century studies almost universally rejected the earlier interpretation of a Toltec conquest of Chichen Itza in favor of elite emulation hypotheses that argued this was only an “international style” adopted by many independent elites across Mesoamerica. However, the latest chronology produced at Chichen Itza no longer supports the elite emulation hypothesis, instead corresponding closely to that used in the earlier proposals of the Toltec conquest model. This change provides an excellent opportunity to revisit the topic. In this paper, often overlooked ethnohistoric evidence is presented to show that the early Colonial period Maya of Yucatan recognized that, around 500 years earlier, Central Mexicans had conquered Chichen Itza and dominated the peninsula. This convincing evidence is rarely referenced or analyzed by proponents of the elite emulation hypotheses, which have been very popular in the last 25 years.

Keywords: Toltec, Migration, Ethnohistory, Archaeology, Chichen Itza



One of the most controversial topics in Mesoamerican studies is the question of the chronology of Chichen Itza and its relationship with the Central Mexican site of Tula. In this short exposition I have the very limited goal of highlighting an often-overlooked set of facts that I believe are crucial to truly understanding this issue and the history of Chichen Itza. The nature of the so-called “Toltec” or “international” traits at this northern Yucatan site and their chronology have been at the heart of the well-published debate of whether these were the result of a “Toltec Conquest” from Tula or were the product of local Maya rulers simply emulating prestigious foreign art styles and/or participating in an international cult revolving around that of the famous Mesoamerican deity, the “Feathered Serpent” (see Boot 2005, Kristan-Graham 2007, and Gillespie 2007, among many others, for extensive recent discussion of the historiography of this debate). The list of similarities between Tula and Chichen Itza is long and there has been a long history of discussion of these, most famously with Alfred Tozzer’s magnum opus, *Chichen Itza and Its Cenote of Sacrifice* (Tozzer 1957). These similarities include the presence of feathered serpent iconography, especially on support columns and balustrades of major temples, as well as “galleries and halls whose roofs were supported by rows of columns or pillars; pillars bearing images of soldiers wearing related butterfly pectorals, “pillbox” helmets, and carrying atlatl spearthrowers; reclining chacmool sculptures; small atlanteans and standard bearers; and relief sculptures featuring “jaguar-serpent-bird” (or “Tlahuizcalpan-tecuhtli”) icons and images of predatory animals and raptorial birds holding human hearts” (Kristan-Graham & Kowalski 2007:13).



Do these similarities, which indicate a particularly close relationship between Tula and Chichen Itza, suggest a conquest of Chichen Itza by Toltecs (Tozzer 1957) or “Mexicanized Maya” (Thompson 1970) or do they indicate an adoption of these “International” styles of art and material culture by local, Maya elites (see Kowalski & Kristan-Graham 2007 for a recent collection of papers expressing this view)? Or is it due to something else entirely?

Early 20th century studies suggested that Chichen Itza was built in two separate phases. First, an earlier Maya phase was seen in the Terminal Classic period (A.D. 800-900) featuring buildings with dated Maya inscriptions in Puuc-style architecture and associated with Cehpech pottery of northern Yucatec origin. Then, at some point in the tenth century, at the start of the Early Postclassic period (A.D. 900-1200), the site was taken over by Itza from the Gulf Coast and/or Toltecs from Central Mexico who oversaw the construction of the structures of “New Chichen”, including the Castillo, the Great Ballcourt, and the Temple of the Warriors (Tozzer 1957, Thompson 1966, 1970).

The last quarter of the 20th century saw the pendulum of interpretation shift away from foreign conquest models to ones in which the similarities between Chichen Itza and Tula were seen as resulting from decisions of local Maya elites to emulate prestigious styles popular in western Mesoamerica (the term “Toltec” is usually eschewed in these proposals in favor of the term “International”). These interpretations argue there was significant overlap between “Old” and “New” Chichen, with the differences between these two areas not being due to chronological or cultural differences, but to distinct purposes and uses (see Ringle et al. 1998, Boot 2005, and Kowalski and Kristan-Graham 2007).

This debate was long fueled by uncertainty over the Chichen Itza chronology. While the “Old Chichen” buildings often bore hieroglyphic inscriptions with dedicatory dates, the “New Chichen” structures did not. Thus, there was much debate over the exact dates of their construction, with most elite emulation hypotheses proposing that these latter structures were built very close in time to those of the former. With the removal of the chronological distinction between the two “Chichens”, the entire site was argued to date to the Terminal Classic period, and the term “Early Postclassic” fell out of use in discussions about the site’s history.

Most recently, however, a new chronology of Chichen Itza has been proposed by combining a new interpretation of the site’s ceramic chronology (Pérez de Heredia 2010), a Bayesian analysis of radiocarbon dates, and a new study of the site’s stratigraphic chronology produced by recent excavations in both the site’s center and its periphery (Volta and Braswell 2014, Volta et al. 2018). The new chronology is, in fact, quite similar to the old chronology of the mid-20th century, with the buildings of “Old Chichen” being built in the 9th century and those of “New Chichen” being built between ca. A.D. 950 and 1000/1050, after a (near) hiatus at the site between A.D. 900 and 950 (Volta & Braswell 2014:386-389). The dating for “New Chichen” now places its buildings back into the Early Postclassic phase, a term revived by Volta and Braswell.

However, while Volta and Braswell have resurrected the “Early Postclassic” label, they have been quick to stress that they do not want their interpretation to be seen as a return to the Toltec Conquest hypothesis of the past:

“Despite our preference for the phrase “Early Postclassic” to describe the second great period of construction at Chichen Itza, we differ strongly from the traditional model in that we do not see evidence for positing a foreign invasion of either “Toltecs” from Tula or “Putun Maya” from the Gulf Coast. Instead, we believe that most of the Early Postclassic occupants of Chichen Itza were the descendants of the Terminal Classic Maya who lived in the great city and other parts of the northern Maya Lowlands. The emulation of foreign styles, wide-ranging trade relations, and a shared world religion are all plausible explanations for the participation of Chichen Itza in the Early Postclassic Mesoamerican world. Moreover, given that the second great period of Chichen Itza took place several decades after the collapse of powerful cities elsewhere on the peninsula, it seems more proper to explain the growth of the Early Postclassic Itza state in terms of opportunistic expansion into a political vacuum and demographic void rather than as a militaristic conquest. The Early Postclassic at Chichen Itza was a period of great reorganization and experimentation in the aftermath of a general Terminal Classic collapse felt throughout much of the north. But there is no need to resort to foreign migration, invasion, or even regional conquest models as explanations” (Volta and Braswell 2014:393).

While I find the arguments of Volta and Braswell compelling, I disagree with their conclusion. There is, in fact, evidence that has long been overlooked that cannot be easily explained by positing that local Maya elites of northern Yucatan were merely trading with and emulating other parts of Mesoamerica. This evidence strongly suggests the presence of Central Mexicans at Chichen Itza in positions of power. Before presenting this evidence, I should note that the new chronology of Volta and Braswell has not gone unchallenged (see Ringle 2017). However, it can be said that the evidence presented here must be accounted for by all elite emulation arguments, no matter which chronology they follow. Yet, in the last 40 years, when elite emulation arguments have dominated, this evidence has only rarely been referenced, let alone dealt with; something that I believe calls into serious question these hypotheses.

The Evidence for Central Mexicans in Positions of Power at Chichen Itza: The Hieroglyphic Inscriptions of “New Chichen”

Countless books and articles have been written about specific art and architectural motifs appearing at Chichen Itza and whether these derive from Central Mexican or Maya sources. I do not wish to enter that debate here. While I believe that Karl Taube (1994) and others have shown that many of these do indeed derive from Central Mexican “Toltec” sources, the truth is that stylistic arguments are never definitive, especially in the absence of a secure chronology. Even when the sources of certain motifs are clear it is always possible, without wider sources of evidence, to argue that the presence of such motifs in a foreign area are due to elite emulation rather than migration or imperialism. The following considerations cannot so easily be explained away.

The first evidence to consider comes in the form of the hieroglyphic inscriptions from the monuments of “New Chichen”, including the Great Ballcourt and the colonnades surrounding the Temple of the Warriors (Figure 1). There are relatively few of these but they are very unusual in comparison to not only the other inscriptions of Chichen Itza, but to the broader corpus of inscriptions from northern Yucatan and the Maya world in general. Maya hieroglyphic inscriptions, from their first appearance in the Late Preclassic period until their last appearance in the early Colonial period, were characterized throughout by combining logograms and syllabograms in glyphblocks. This contrasts with Central Mexican hieroglyphic writing, where hieroglyphs were simply pictures of the things depicted, with no attempt to squeeze the resulting images into any block form (Helmke & Nielsen 2011, Taube 2011, Zender 2008). Maya and Central Mexican hieroglyphs are visually distinctive and there is essentially no overlap in signs, with signs from each system being immediately recognizable, even if they are not deciphered. Many of the figures portrayed on the piers of the ballcourt and colonnade structures are identified by hieroglyphic names and, in every single instance, these names are written in Central Mexican hieroglyphs.

This case is unprecedented at any Maya site, nor was it ever repeated. These inscriptions are universally acknowledged to name the figures below them, who are pretty much exclusively warriors in “Toltec” costume. It can thus be noted that these are warriors in Central Mexican costume with their names spelled out using Central Mexican hieroglyphs. One of these name glyphs is a snake above a star (Figure 2) and, while it is possible to read this as Kan Ek’, “Snake Star” in Mayan (Schele and Mathews 1998:245), one can as easily read such a name in Nahuatl or other Central Mexican indigenous languages. In fact, the name Citlalcoatl (“Star Snake”) is one known to have been used by Aztec nobles, including a brother of Motecuhzoma I (Vigil 1878:249, 268). While one might object that this name at Chichen Itza is written with the snake above the star, and thus favor the Maya reading, it must be emphasized that the hieroglyphs in which the name is written are clearly part of the western Mesoamerican corpus of signs, not from the Maya one, and, in the Central Mexican writing system, there is no rule as to which sign should be read first in a multiple-sign hieroglyph. Furthermore, given the way calendrical signs are written at Chichen Itza (see below), with the coefficient below the main sign, it is clear that at least some of the Chichen Itza hieroglyphs are meant to be read from bottom to top.

The few calendric signs in the corpus of “New Chichen” inscriptions emphasize the foreign nature of these hieroglyphs and the people whom they name. Two of the most important figures in the Lower Temple of the Jaguar (in the Great Ballcourt) are also shown and named on the columns of the North Temple of the same complex (Figure 3); names written as day names in the

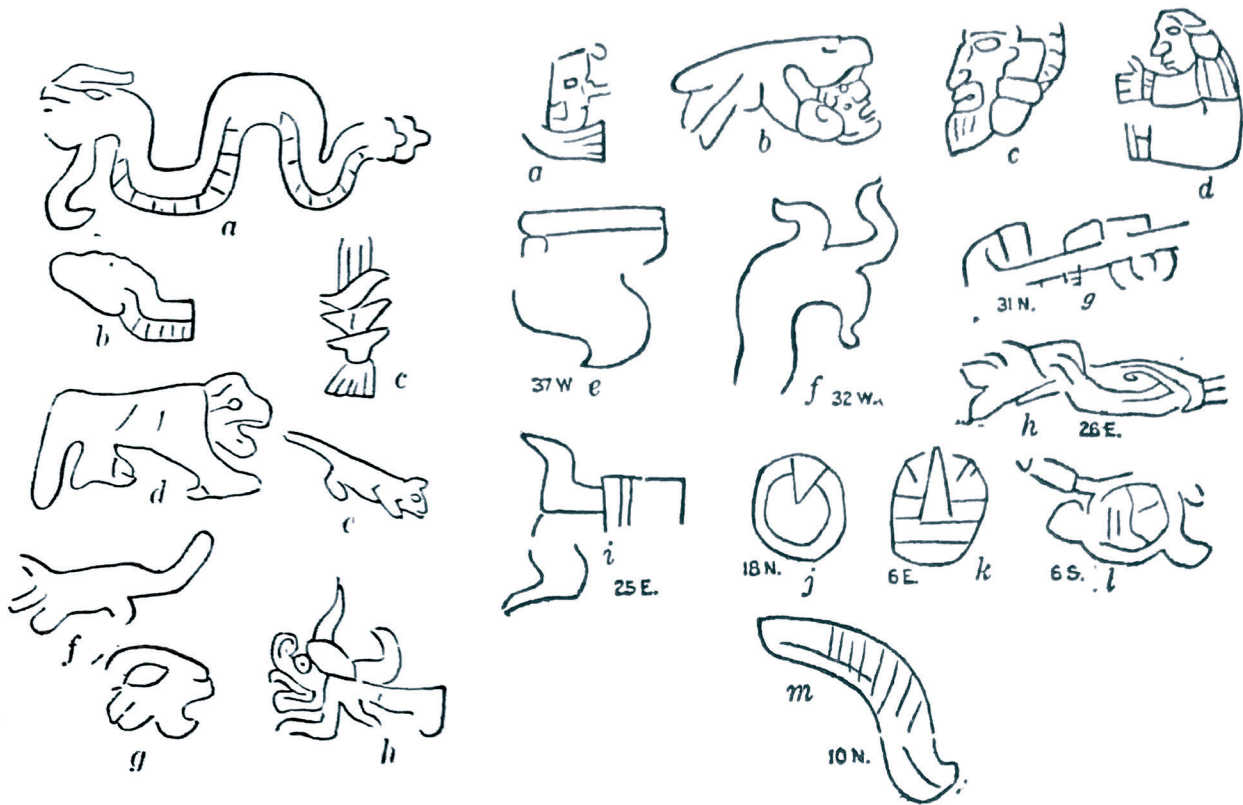


Figure 1. Non-Maya hieroglyphs used to name figures portrayed on the columns of the Northwest Colonnade, in front of the Temple of the Warriors, at Chichen Itza. Drawings after Morris et al. 1931:312.

Central Mexican sacred 260-day calendar (Schele and Mathews 1998:251-252). These day names are 1 “Reptile Eye” and 5/6 “Knot/Glyph A”. The closest analogy to these glyphs at Chichen Itza come from the stelae of Xochicalco and the murals of Cacaxtla – Late/Terminal Classic sites from Central Mexico with heavy Maya influence (Caso 1962, Helmke and Nielsen 2011, Smith and Hirth 2000). It is important to note that these day names are so clearly foreign, and definitely not simply variants of Maya day names, that we are not even certain which Maya day names they correspond to. Given that the use of day names as personal names in Mesoamerica seems to reflect the date on which someone was born, these individuals were likely born into a society using a Central Mexican calendar, something for which there is no attested use in Yucatan at any time.

Thus, during the period of most intense similarities between Chichen Itza and Tula, the ruling elite of Chichen Itza chose to portray themselves in Central Mexican “Toltec” attire and to record their names with Central Mexican hieroglyphs – some of which were derived from a Central Mexican calendar. While this does not confirm that these were definitely foreigners, it is exceedingly difficult to explain as mere elite emulation or even as part of some putative politico-religious “Cult of Quetzalcoatl”. Even in cases where Central Mexican sites such as Xochicalco and Cacaxtla exhibit heavily Mayanized art styles and iconography, the hieroglyphs are local and

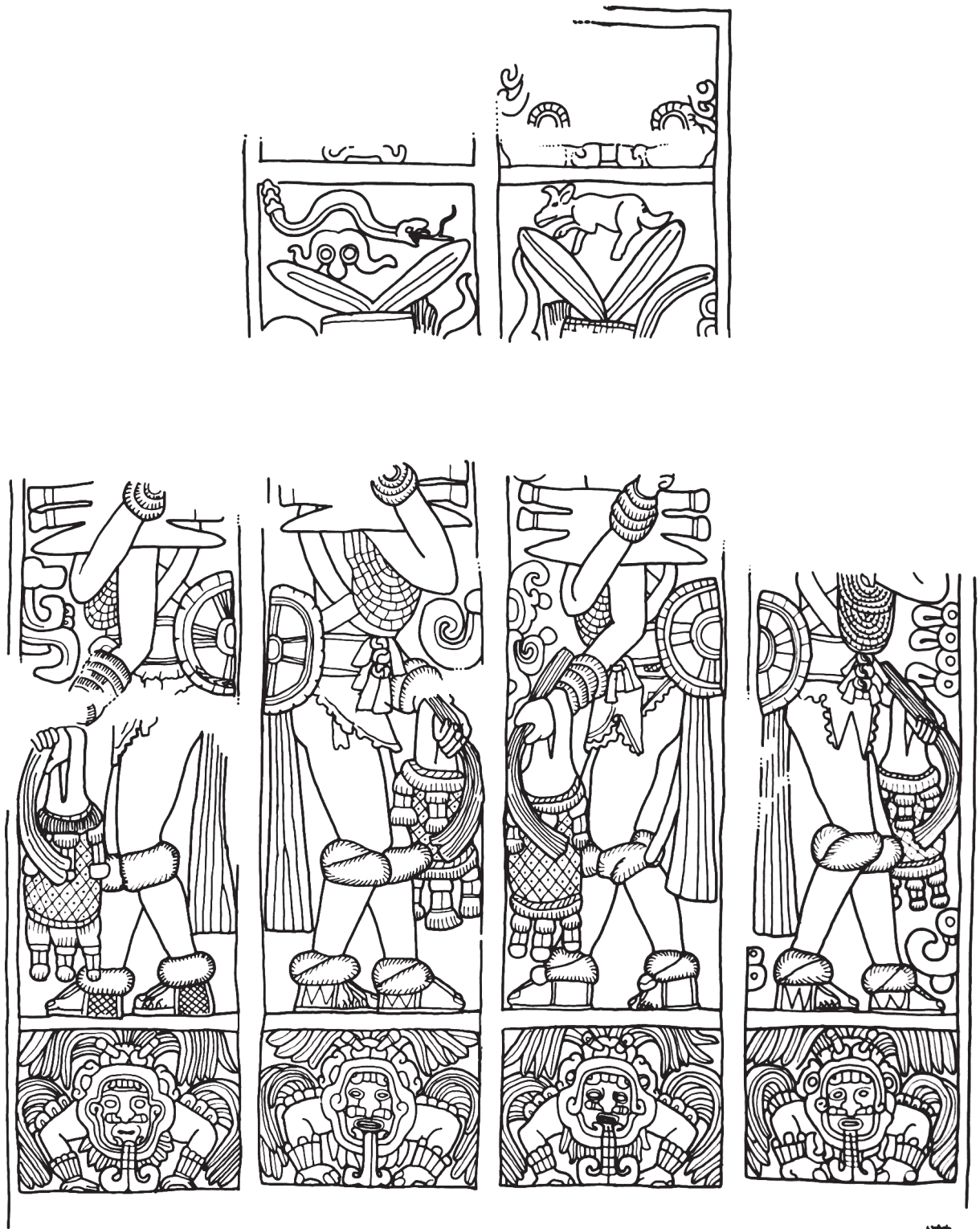


Figure 2. Carvings from Pier 5 of the South Temple of the Great Ballcourt at Chichen Itza. Drawing by Linda Schele, after Schele and Mathews 1998:Figure 6.43, used with permission, © David Schele.

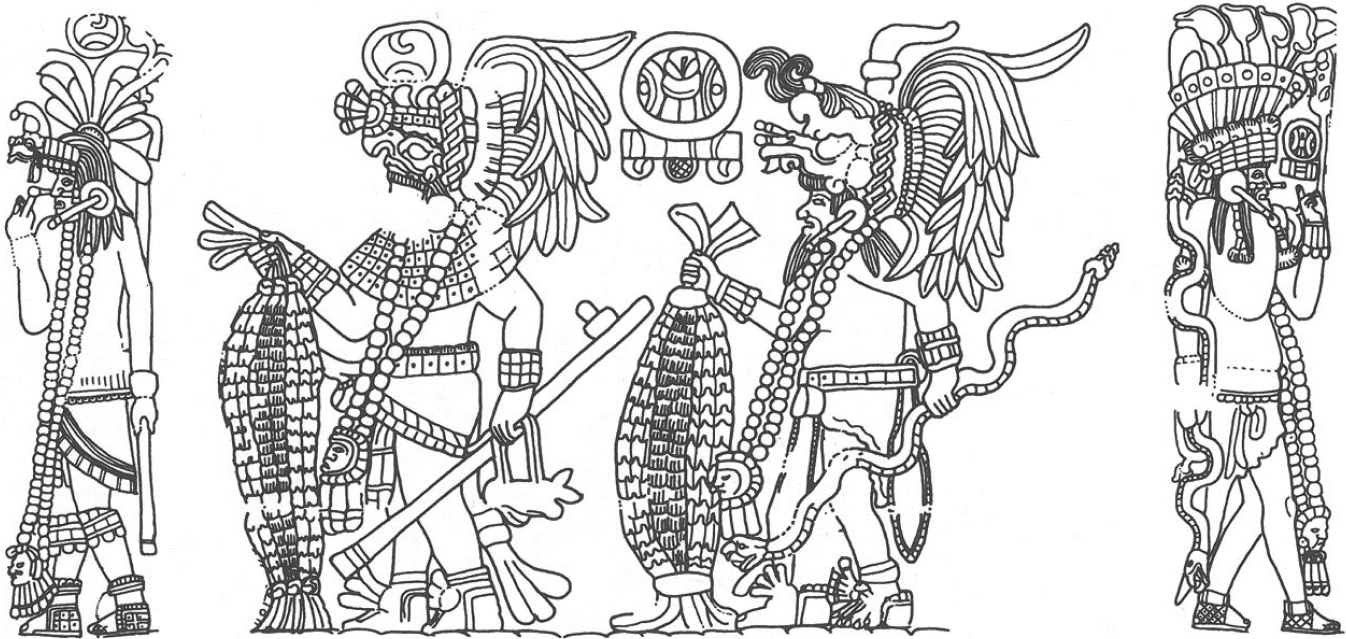


Figure 3. Figures portrayed in the middle register of the Lower Temple of the Jaguars (middle two) and their corresponding figures, identified by name glyphs, from the columns of the North Temple of the Great Ballcourt at Chichen Itza. Drawings by Linda Schele, after Schele and Mathews 1998:Figure 6.50, used with permission, © David Schele.

not Maya at all. And, even when we have major surge in Teotihuacan art and iconography in the Central Peten area in the Early Classic period and hieroglyphs from Tikal record the intrusion of foreign (apparently Teotihuacan) warlords who imposed a scion of their own dynasty on that site's throne (Stuart 2000, Martin and Grube 2008) – even in such a clear case of imperialism we do not see any texts at Tikal or other Maya sites in which the entire text is written in Teotihuacan script. The hieroglyphs of “New Chichen” thus stand out for many reasons and must be dealt with in any attempt to explain the rulership of Chichen Itza at this time period.

Ethnohistoric References to a Conquest of Yucatan by “Mexicans”

The second piece of evidence I wish to highlight comes in the form of multiple references in early Colonial era ethnohistoric documents, especially the *Relaciones de Yucatán* (1898) and Bishop Landa's *Relaciones de las Cosas de Yucatán* (Tozzer 1941). In these, the Yucatec Maya state that, according to their emic understanding of their history, they were subjects of (Central) Mexicans centuries before. It is thus hard to refute that these are references to the “Toltec” period of Chichen Itza. While these have long been known, they are almost always omitted from or glossed over in this debate and, if mentioned at all, the import of these indigenous statements on the ethnic identity of Chichen Itza's rulers and occupants is almost never discussed.

The first source is the famous *Relación de las Cosas de Yucatán* by Bishop Diego de Landa, which was written in the second half of the 16th century, only decades after the Spanish conquest of Yucatan. While what has been found and often republished under that title is unfortunately

not Landa's original manuscript and is definitely an abridgement (see Restall and Chuchiak 2002 for a fuller discussion of the issues with this important document), it is still a compilation of early colonial accounts about what the Maya, at that time, believed about their own history and can profitably be investigated as such. In his discussion of the history of Yucatan, Landa quotes his informants as telling him:

“Chichen Itza [...] was ruled by three lords who were brothers who came into that country from the west [...] It is believed among the Indians that with the Itzas who occupied Chichen Itza, there reigned a great lord, named Kukulcan, and that the principal building, which is called Kukulcan, shows this to be true. They say that he arrived from the west; but they differ among themselves as to whether he arrived before or after the Itzas or with them. They say that he was favorably disposed, and had no wife or children, and that after his return he was regarded in Mexico as one of their gods and called Quetzalcoatl; and they also considered him a god in Yucatan on account of his being a just statesman; and this is seen in the order which he imposed on Yucatan, after the death of the lords, in order to calm the dissensions which their deaths had caused in the country” (Tozzer 1941:19).

From this passage we can see that Landa's Maya informants saw that Chichen Itza's principal temple, the radial pyramid known today as the “Castillo”, was associated with “a great lord, named Kukulcan”. This structure is one of those of the *Gran Nivelación* of “New Chichen” containing great amounts of “Toltec” art. It is consequently apparent that Landa's early Colonial period Maya informants would have associated this art with western foreigners. While these informants were not entirely certain as to the exact relationship between the three fraternal Itza lords who first ruled Chichen Itza and the “great lord” Kukulcan, they did identify all of these as foreigners who arrived in Chichen Itza from the west. Furthermore, while Kukulcan is said to have been later worshipped as a god in both Mexico and Yucatan, the passage very clearly identifies this character first and foremost as a human lord who was not worshipped until he was apotheosized after he died or returned to Mexico.

We can combine this information with a passage in the *Relación de Quincama*, in the *Relaciones de Yucatán*:

“the elders of this province say that around 800 years ago they were not idolators and after that the Mexicans entered and took possession of it, [whose] captain was named Quetzalcoatl in the Mexican language” (*Relaciones de Yucatán* 1898:255, translation by the author).

This report not only confirms the association of Kukulcan/Quetzalcoatl as the leader of a group of Mexicans who entered Yucatan, but also explicitly asserts that this leader and his “Mexicans” took possession of the peninsula. A similar reference is found in the *Relación de Mutul*:

“Regarding worship, they had knowledge of a single god who created heaven and earth and all things and whose throne was in heaven, and for some time they knew only this one god, for whom they built a temple with priests and they gave presents and alms to them to offer to God. In this manner they worshipped until from outside this land arrived a great lord named Kukulcan with his people. He and his people worshipped idols and from this point the people of [this] land began to worship idols” (*Relaciones de Yucatán* 1878:78-79, translation by the author).

This passage provides yet further evidence that, in the 16th century at least, there was a widespread belief among the Maya of Yucatan that Kukulcan had originally been a lord – not a god

– who arrived from outside of Yucatan itself and was, thus, a foreigner. Combining this account with the previous, we see a consistent picture of how at least a number of Maya in the first few decades after the Conquest viewed the history and ethnicity of the Feathered Serpent lord of Chichen Itza. The lord Kukulcan, who was only later apotheosized as a deity, came to Chichen Itza from outside of the peninsula, specifically the west, and he came with “Mexicans” who took possession of the land, and, after ruling Chichen Itza justly and introducing idolatry, returned to Mexico. Thus, our ethnohistoric sources strongly contradict the basic premise of the elite emulation hypotheses, that the similarities noted between the material culture of Chichen Itza and Tula can – and should – be explained without resort to positing actual foreigners from Central Mexico in positions of power in Yucatan.

Now, it may be tempting to dismiss the two latter ethnohistoric examples given above due to the apparent Christian influence in these accounts, with their descriptions of the Maya not having or worshipping idols until the arrival of Kukulcan. And, there are many publications that in the past few decades have highlighted discrepancies and anachronisms in these accounts and many of these studies have argued that while these ethnohistoric sources may provide evidence as to Colonial era indigenous beliefs about their own history they may be of dubious value in recovering actual historical events in those earlier centuries (Carrasco 1982, Florescano 1993, 2004, Gillespie 1989). However, while the emphasis in the stories in question on Kukulcan bringing in idolatry may reflect a Christianizing of some indigenous memory of major religious changes brought in to Yucatan between the Terminal Classic and Postclassic periods; the idea that this account is entirely or mostly a Colonial era fiction would require us to believe something far more remarkable and unbelievable than that these accounts contain at least a kernel of truth.

If these stories about a foreign Kukulcan coming from outside Yucatan are merely 16th century fictions told to Spanish friars to absolve the Maya of the sin of their idolatry and foist the blame on foreign Mexicans, it would be an extraordinary coincidence that these indigenous prevaricators should have chosen to blame the one deity in their pantheon with the clearest foreign (Central Mexican) roots. Furthermore, they connected this foreign Kukulcan with a temple at Chichen Itza that has the clearest iconographic comparisons with Central Mexico and that was built in the same time period that Central Mexican ethnohistorical sources would place a voyage by a like-named lord from a site where nearly identical “Toltec” figures are to be found. All of this when both Chichen Itza and Tula were complete ruins and there is no evidence of contacts between early Colonial period Maya and Nahuatl elites. In this case Occam’s Razor must prevail and the far simpler hypothesis is that Landa and the other early Spanish recorders of these stories were (relatively) accurately recording what their native informants told them; and that these stories about a foreign lord Kukulcan arriving from Mexico to take control of Chichen Itza and oversee the construction of “New Chichen” are substantially true. This, of course, would directly contradict the elite emulation hypotheses.



The Maya Adoption of the Term *Macehual*

The third piece of evidence I would like to emphasize in this debate is the curious fact that, during the Colonial period, the Maya of northern Yucatan referred to themselves by the term *macehual* (Reed 1964, Restall 1997). While this term was used by the Maya to refer to themselves by the end of the Colonial period, it began as a term for “commoner” (Restall 2004, 2017). As has long been known, the Yucatek Maya term *macehual* is simply a borrowing from Nahuatl, where the word *mācehualli* is the term for “vassal or (Indian) commoner in general” (Bierhorst 1985:187).

This raises the obvious question of why the Maya of Yucatan would have themselves adopted the Nahuatl term for commoner. It may be tempting to think that the Spanish Colonial period authorities may have been already familiar with the term *macehualli* from the conquest of the Aztecs and applied it to the Maya when they subsequently conquered them a few decades later. Restall (2004) has noted that the term does not appear in the earliest Spanish or indigenous documents of Yucatan. However, he did find that the term *maceualthan*, meaning “vulgar speech”, did appear in the 16th century Motul dictionary (ibid) and thus there can be no doubt that *macehual* as a term for Maya commoner was common among the Maya from at least the early Colonial period. There is no evidence that the conquistadors of Yucatan were in the habit of using that Nahuatl term for the Maya they had conquered and the early dictionaries show that the Spanish used other words to refer to the Maya commoners who served them (ibid). Given the ethnohistoric references detailed above, we have a clear alternative explanation for the Maya use of this Nahuatl term. If the Maya were ever in their earlier history subjects of Central Mexicans speaking a Nahuatl language, such a usage would be easily explained and the Maya of Yucatan clearly did claim that they had been the subject of Mexicans centuries before the Spanish arrived (see Karttunen 1985 for a discussion of other Nahua words borrowed into Yucatek Maya.)

The Books of Chilam Balam begin their accounts of Maya history with the foundation and settling of Chichen Itza (Edmonson 1982, 1986, Roys 1933; for a discussion of how these Colonial-era documents merged legendary history, religious myth, and prophesy, see Christensen 2016, Gunsenheimer 2002, Knowlton 2012, Persson 2000). If the rulers of Chichen Itza included “Mexican” foreigners, they would have almost certainly spoken Nahuatl, the most common language in Postclassic Central Mexico. They could also have used their own term for “commoner” to refer to their Maya vassals. If that political domination was strong enough, the Maya could also easily have come to adopt the term, and later Maya lords could have used this familiar Nahuatl term to refer to their own vassals after the fall of Chichen Itza. Certainly, when the later city of Mayapan was established and came to dominate northern Yucatan, its rulers deliberately chose to model many of their new capital’s buildings after the most impressive and imposing structures at Chichen Itza (Milbrath & Peraza 2003, Pollock et al. 1962).

The curious use of the term *macehual* by the Colonial period Yucatec Maya to describe themselves makes sense if we see actual Toltecs from Central Mexico in positions of power in Chichen Itza. However, it is hard to explain why the local Maya would have taken to calling themselves by this term if the history of Chichen Itza is one of mere elite emulation of foreign art styles by local, purely Maya nobles.

Discussion

The three lines of evidence presented here strongly suggest that some Mayanists have been too quick to dismiss the presence of Toltecs or other Central Mexicans in Chichen Itza. It has been noted that most publications proposing elite emulation arguments to explain “New Chichen” almost never even address this evidence and, in those rare cases where they do, there is almost no attempt to explain these data. This is problematic, for these sources are the earliest Colonial-era records of what the Maya of Yucatan thought of their own history. Thus, these records are the closest we will likely ever get to an original Maya view of the history of Chichen Itza and the relationship of its rulers to other kingdoms and cultures and yet these are rarely discussed in the modern literature. No interpretation of Chichen Itza’s history can be considered complete without taking this evidence into account.

It should be noted that this evidence for a Central Mexican/Toltec presence at Chichen Itza does not invalidate the many studies that have noted Maya elements in the art and material culture of “New Chichen”. There certainly are many Maya elements, from elite jewelry to images of Maya gods, that appear in the art of the Great Ballcourt, the Castillo and Temple of the Chacmool, etc. There is no space here to fully discuss my views of the nature of the society that oversaw the construction of “New Chichen” but I will note that I prefer Tozzer’s combined term, “Toltec-Maya” (Tozzer 1957:20-21), to describe this era in the site’s history, a period known otherwise as “Modified Florescent” in the literature (Andrews 1965, Ringle 2017).

It is important to recognize, however, that this evidence of numerous elements within the art of “New Chichen” having origins in earlier Maya culture does not undermine a “Toltec Conquest” model, nor does it invalidate the evidence for the presence of foreigners at Chichen Itza. One need only look at the numerous Egyptian temples found throughout Ptolemaic Egypt to see that evidence of considerable strength of local cultures in a given region does not indicate the absence of an imperial regime (Arnold 1999, Hölbl 2001). This is not the venue for a discussion of the question as to whether Tula, Hidalgo, was ever the capital of an actual ancient empire (cf. Smith and Montiel 2001). Yet, there are multiple ways to interpret the likely presence of Toltecs at Chichen Itza and we should be open to distinct and multiple ways of interpreting these data. This paper is not intended to overturn many decades of significant and robust scholarship on the subject of Chichen Itza’s history. Rather, this short exposition is meant to present and emphasize long-overlooked evidence that should and must be included in all future discussions of the nature of “New Chichen”.

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