

Ritual Processions in Ancient Tollan: The Legacy in Stone

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Here we present a brief study analyzing the depictions of key characters in processions the architecture at the archaeological site of Tula, located in the modern city of Tula (Hidalgo, México) (**Figure 1**). Ancient Tula was a city that evolved principally between CE 900-1150,

eventually covering more than 16 km² between the Tula and Rosas Rivers, with a ceremonial center adjacent to the broad and fast-moving Tula River.

The majority of the sculptural representations in Tula depict richly costumed personages with weapons appropriate to a warrior elite. Here we focus on specific groups of individuals placed in strategic locations within the ceremonial precinct known as Tula Grande (**Figure 2**), who are directed or are oriented towards a point, indicating to us that these groups are processions. These individuals were portrayed on small platforms called benches, which are low constructions horizontally placed along walls, with a height between 50 and 60 centimeters.



Figure 1.
Location of the Archaeological
Zone of Tula, State of Hidalgo,
Mexico.

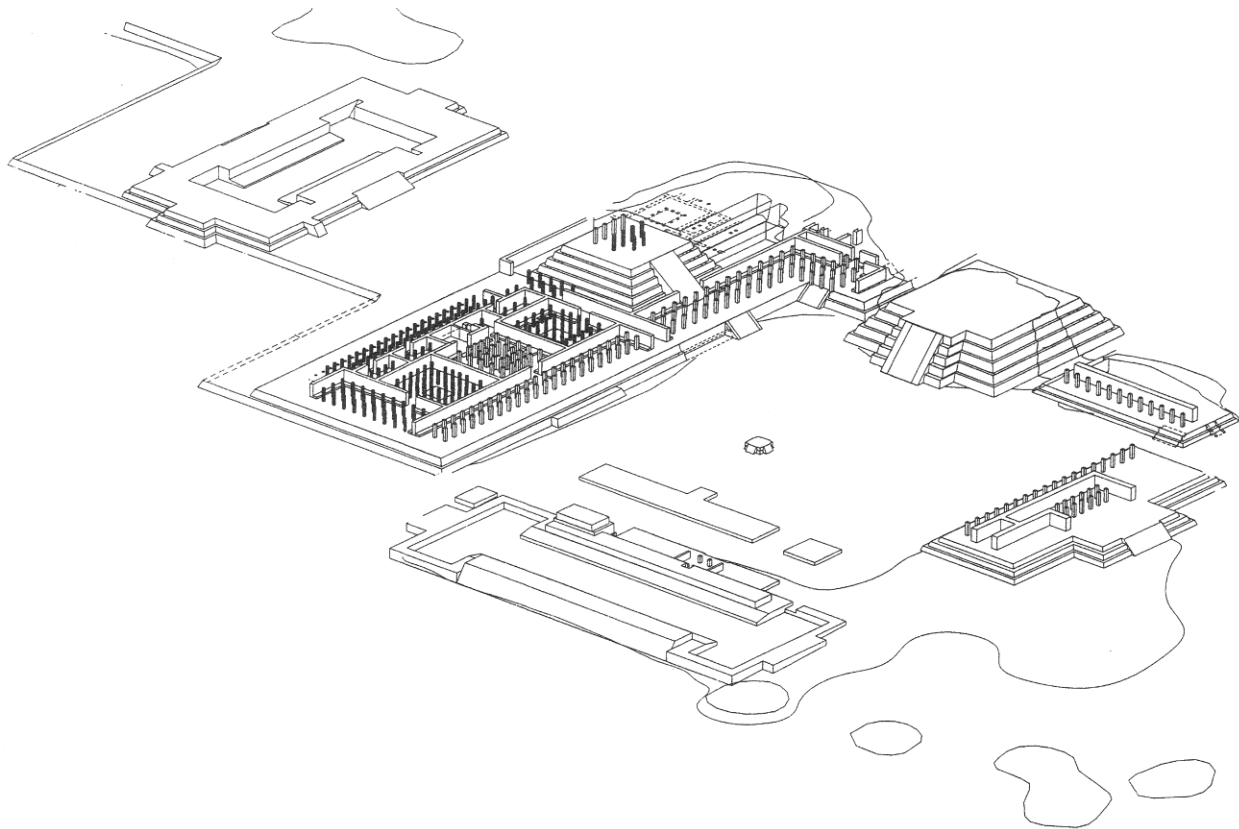
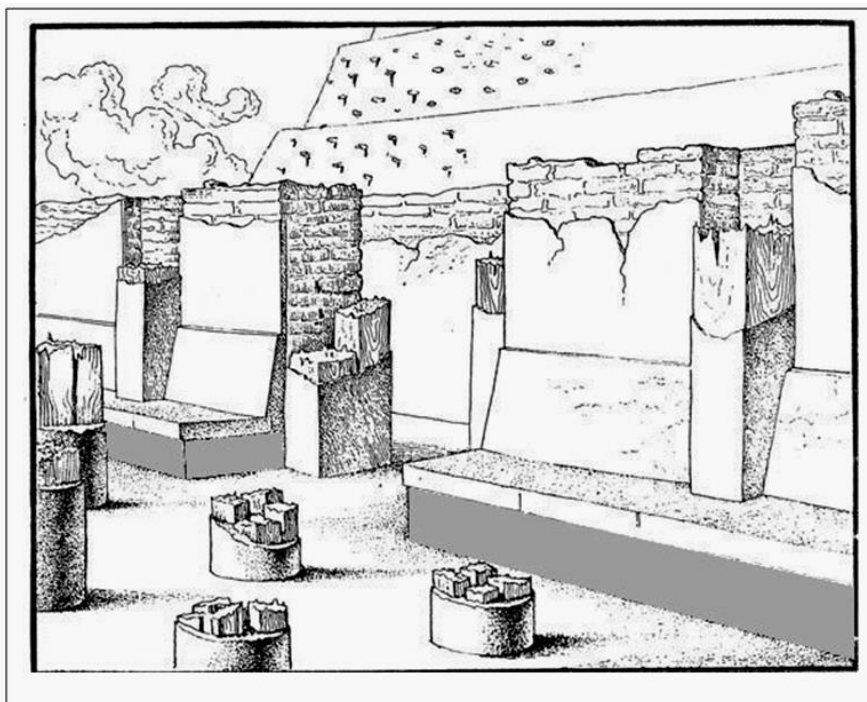


Figure 2 (above). Buildings of the ceremonial precinct known as Tula Grande.
(Drawing: Alba Guadalupe Mastache and Jesús Acevedo García)



Between 1940 and 1960, Jorge R. Acosta discovered several benches that were still *in situ*; he considered all the benches to be part of the same construction phase (**Figure 3**).

Figure 3 (at left). Benches at the Burned Palace, Tula.
(Cobean, Jiménez and Mastache 2012: Fig. VII.11, after Acosta 1956)

They were found in the Burnt Palace (Rooms 2 and 4, and in Hall 2); in Vestibule 1 (located between Pyramids B and C), and in the Altar of Building 4

(**Figure 4**). Surely the benches had various functions, including those of seats and altars (Acosta 1945; 1956; 1957; 1961; 1967).

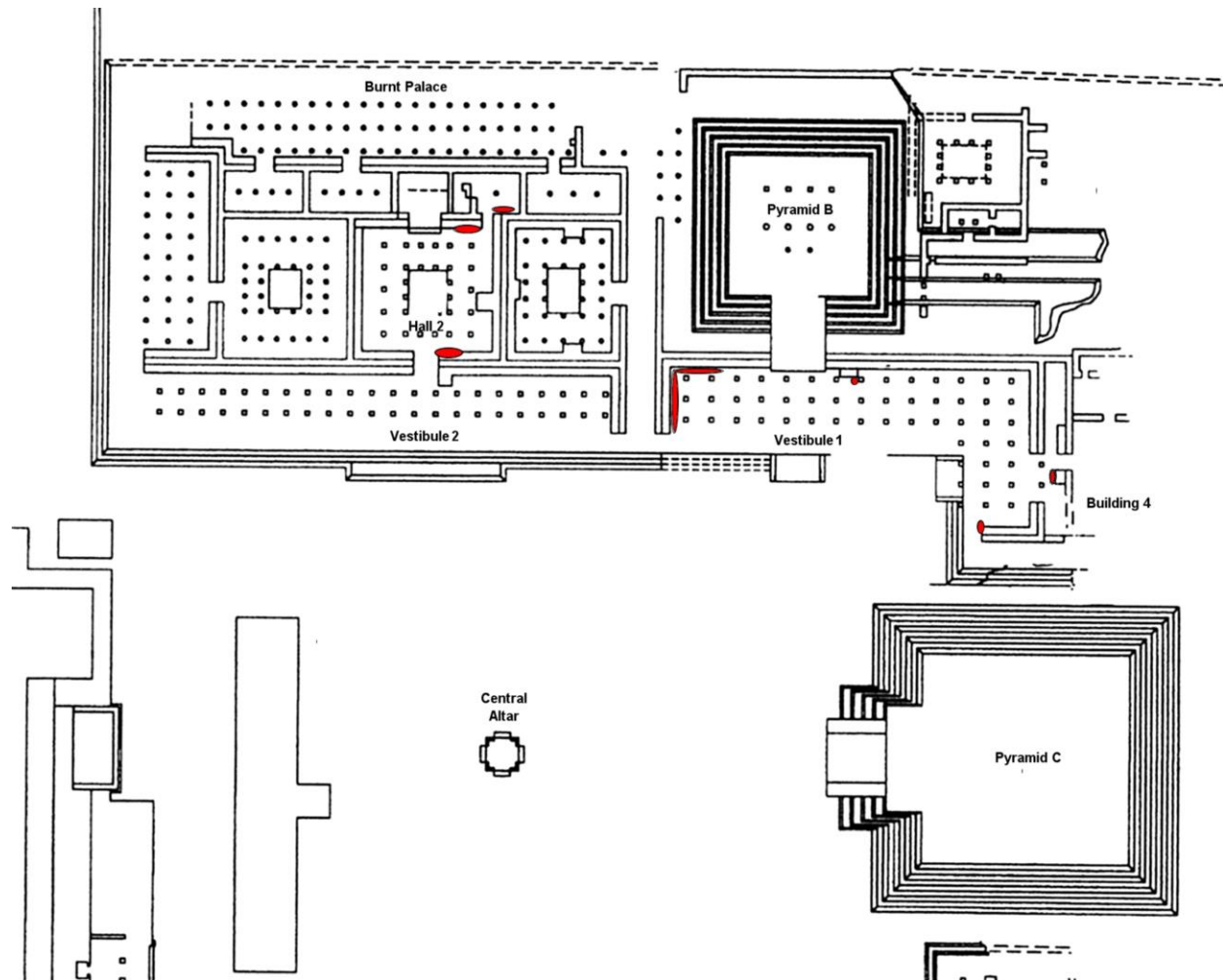


Figure 4. Location of the benches *in situ* in the ceremonial precinct.
(After an architectural drawing of Fernando Báez Urincho).

The fronts of the benches were covered with stone panels sculpted in relief in two registers, thus a kind of small *talud-tablero* format. On the lower wall, the talud (usually vertical but sometimes slightly sloping), standing individuals were

represented, and in the upper register, the vertical tablero, were sculpted serpents with undulating bodies. At least two types of ritual processions existed that were led by kings, priests and/or important warriors, as we will discuss here.

Processions in Tula

The groups of individuals represented on the benches have various characteristics: they are men in complex costumes including headdresses, capes, and specific garments. They wear their insignias of prestige (such as ear spools, breastplates, and necklaces), but they also carry arms and staffs. Most of these personages carry richly feathered shields in one hand, and a weapon in the other hand (an atlatl, a spear, a feathered staff, or a curved weapon). It is possible that these images are portraits of individuals,

but they do not bear specific names, instead they display detailed paraphernalia and costumes of Toltec elites. These elites are depicted with a frontal or three-quarter view of the torso but with the face in profile. They are walking towards a specific point in space and they are guided or accompanied by serpents placed above their heads. In only one case, the elite figures are accompanied by bisected conch shells instead of serpents.

Warriors with feathered serpents and with serpents having conch shells

For this type of procession, we have three groups (A, B, C), each composed of two lines or processions of personages who converge on a meeting point, or on a very

important individual (see Figure 18, below). These personages are still found *in situ*, and are depicted with a line of serpents above their bodies.

Group A: With two processions, Group A is located in Hall 2 of the Burned Palace.

Procession 1

Beginning in Room 2, (**Figures 5a, 5b**) Procession 1 originally continued on the east wall of Hall 2, and finished in the exit that enters Vestibule 2, leading toward the Central Plaza. The person leading this

procession (Figure 5a) is a warrior with circular eye goggles, thus having attributes of the principal rain deity or Storm God, Tlaloc. Among the individuals at the end of this procession is an aged warrior, with a well-pronounced jaw and a curved back (Figure 5b).

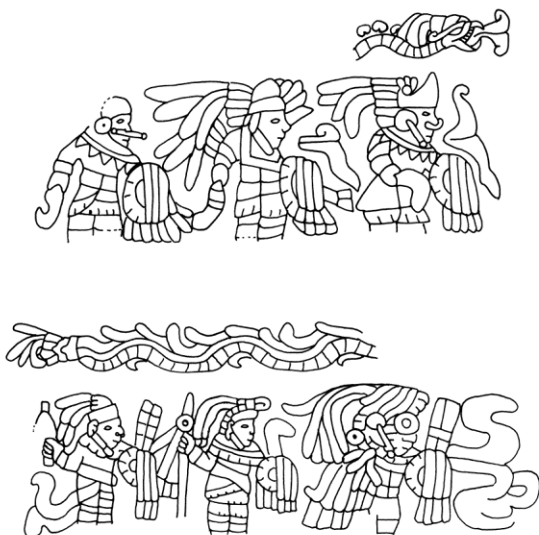
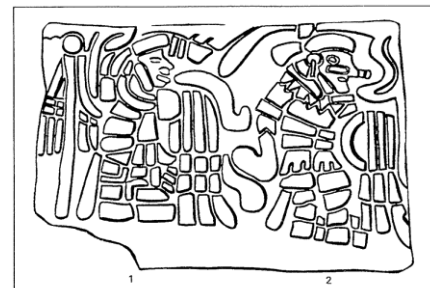


Figure 5a and 5b. Group A, Procession 1 in the Burned Palace.

5a, at left: Individuals who lead the group exiting Hall 2 (Drawing: Elizabeth Jiménez García);

5b, at right:

The last individuals who leave Room 2 in Hall 2. (after Acosta 1957)



Procession 2

Also in Group A, Procession 2 also could have begun in Room 2 so as to move towards the north wall of Hall 2 (**Figure 6**), then continuing towards the west wall, and exiting in Vestibule 2 in front of the previous Group. Although we cannot know who led this second group of personages, it is probable that this leader was an important

warrior or priest of a deity related to Ehecatl-Quetzalcoatl, as the deity of wind and creativity was known by the Nahuas of the Central Mexican Highlands during the Late Postclassic period. Both processions exited Hall 2 and continued towards the south to enter Vestibule 2, which had access to the main plaza.

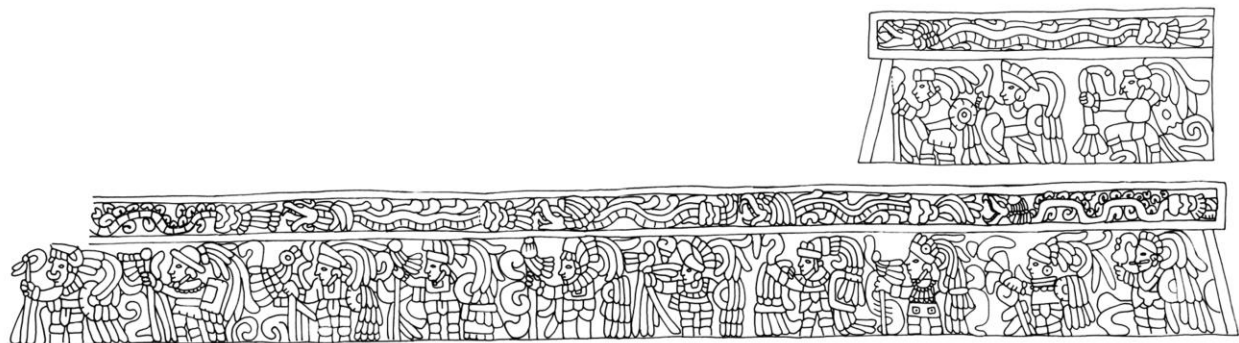


Figure 6. Group A, Procession 2. The final individuals in this procession. North Side of Hall 2, Burned Palace. (Drawing: Elizabeth Jiménez García)

Group B: has parts of two processions (3 and 4) that eventually converged in Vestibule 1, and continued towards Pyramid B.

Procession 3

Procession 3 was called the “*Friso de los Caciques*” (Frieze of the Lords) (**Figure 7a**) by Jorge Acosta (1945) and Hugo Moedano (1947), and the individuals depicted are carrying a shield and a baton

(or staff) either beside them, or resting on their shoulders. They are walking towards the stairway that offers access to the temple on Pyramid B.

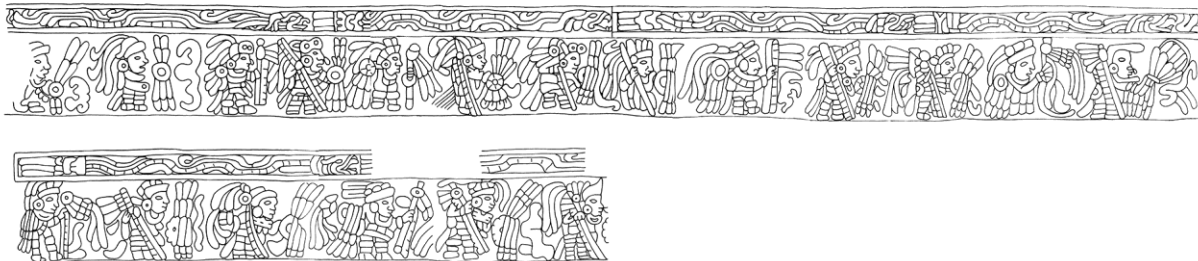


Figure 7a. Group B, Processions 3 and 4 in Vestibule 1; here are the individuals of Procession 3, known as the “Frieze of the Lords.” (Drawing: Elizabeth Jiménez García).

Procession 4

The second part of Group B, Procession 4, survives as only one panel *in situ* near Pyramid C. It shows the partial torso of a warrior holding a round shield in his left hand and a curved weapon in his right hand (**Figure 7b**). This person was at the final end of the procession, and was among the personages represented on the southeast wall of Vestibule 1, which also had access to the base of the main stairway of Pyramid B. The Frieze of the Lords started the procession on the west side of Vestibule 1. Another group of individuals started their procession on the opposite end of the same vestibule, but both processions eventually converge at the base of Pyramid B. The lone *in situ* warrior for Procession 4 (unlike the figures in the Frieze of the Lords) does not carry a staff, but instead uses a curved weapon.

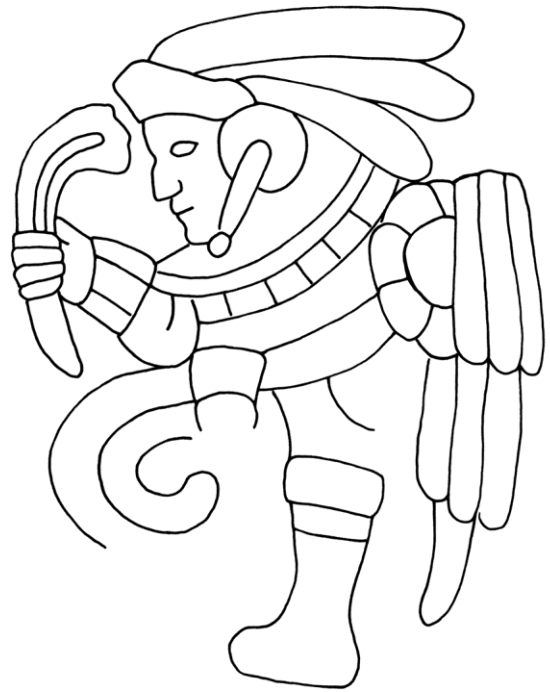


Figure 7b Group B, Processions 3 and 4 in Vestibule 1; this is the only individual preserved in Procession 4. (Drawing: Elizabeth Jiménez García).

Group C: is part of the Altar of Building 4 (**Figure 8**).



Figure 8. Group C, Processions 5 and 6, on the Altar of Building 4.. The preserved individuals form part of Procession 5, while Procession 6 survives only as a scepter or plumed baton to the left of central (front-facing) individual. (Drawing: Elizabeth Jiménez García)

Processions 5 and 6

These two processions converge near a personage whose body is represented frontally, with his face in profile: behind him there is a feathered serpent with an undulating body oriented vertically. Due to the central placement of this figure, together with emphasis on the Feathered Serpent, Acosta (1956: 74-80) identified him as the “Great Priest Quetzalcoatl” (*Gran Sacerdote Quetzalcóatl*). The individuals depicted in this bench (or altar) look like real people, personages who are occupying rooms in a large structure behind the altar, which Fernando Báez (2007) proposes functioned as a royal palace.

All of the individuals preserved *in situ* when Jorge Acosta excavated sections of this structure have war-like connotations; all of them carry at least one weapon. The central figure carries two weapons: a shield in his left hand and a curved weapon in his right hand. This interpretation leads us to speculate that the main guiding leader in Procession 2 of Group A (Hall 2) was also a

sacred individual with close ties to the feathered serpent. For the two groups of principal warriors, one presumably was associated with Tlaloc, while the other is still not identified, but probably was under the guardianship of Quetzalcoatl, whose image is placed above the heads of the second group of warriors.

These three groups of processions are accompanied by a line of serpents that advances horizontally in the panel formed by the small frieze of serpents that are leaving the benches and advancing in the same direction as the humans. All of these serpents have feathers on their backs, and only in Hall 2 do we observe that in addition to plumed serpents, there were other serpents with bisected conch shells on their backs and bunches of feathers on their heads and in their rattles (**Figure 9**). The different types of serpents alternated, as we can see in Procession 2 where one serpent with conch shells is followed by three plumed serpents, and then another serpent with conch shells.

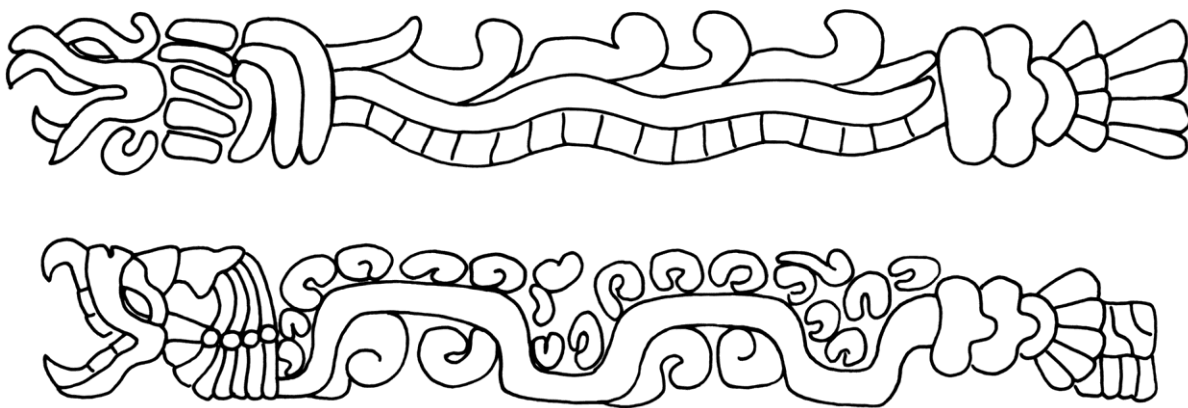


Figure 9. A feathered serpent and a serpent with a bisected conch shells. Hall 2 of the Burned Palace. (after a drawing in the Archivo Técnico de la Coordinación Nacional de Arqueología, INAH).

In Room 4, Acosta (1961) found the remains of another bench (**Figure 10**) where the placement of the personages is somewhat different. Room 4 is a small closed space that connects with Hall 2 of the Burned Palace via a stairway that goes down to the Hall's floor surface. The stairway's axis is north-south, and it is aligned with the exit of Hall 2 into the southern vestibule. Inside Room 4 there is a bench with reliefs

of two individuals with their torsos presented frontally, wearing butterfly breastplates. They do not have shields like many warriors in other processions, but each has a curved weapon in his left hand and an atlatl in his right hand. Similar to the central personage of the altar in Building 4 (Group C), one of these individuals also has a plumed serpent behind him with a horizontal undulating body.

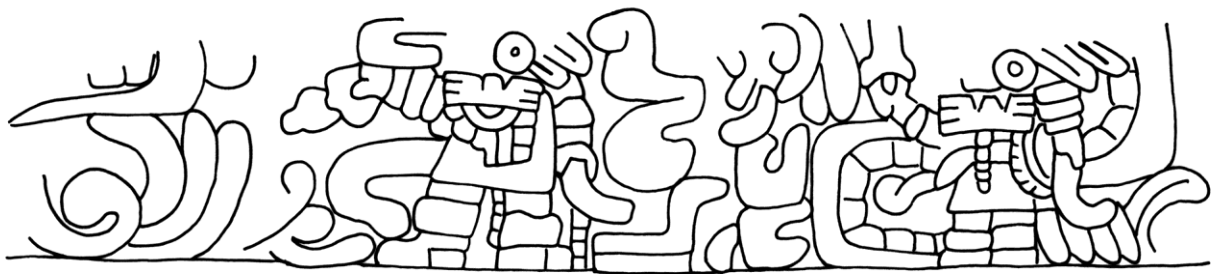


Figure 10. Warriors, one with a plumed serpent behind its body. Panel from Room 4, Hall 2 of the Burned Palace. (after a drawing of Acosta 1961).

In both cases (**Figure 11**) these outstanding personages are found in enclosed or restricted spaces -- one possibly associated with a palace, and the other associated with an exclusive room giving access to the central hall of an architectural complex that Jorge Acosta called the Burned

Palace (*Palacio Quemado*). He inferred its possible function as a palace upon finding clear evidence of this building having been burned down when the city the city was expanding during the Tollan phase, or, soon after the city and the sacred precinct lost its hegemony and was abandoned.

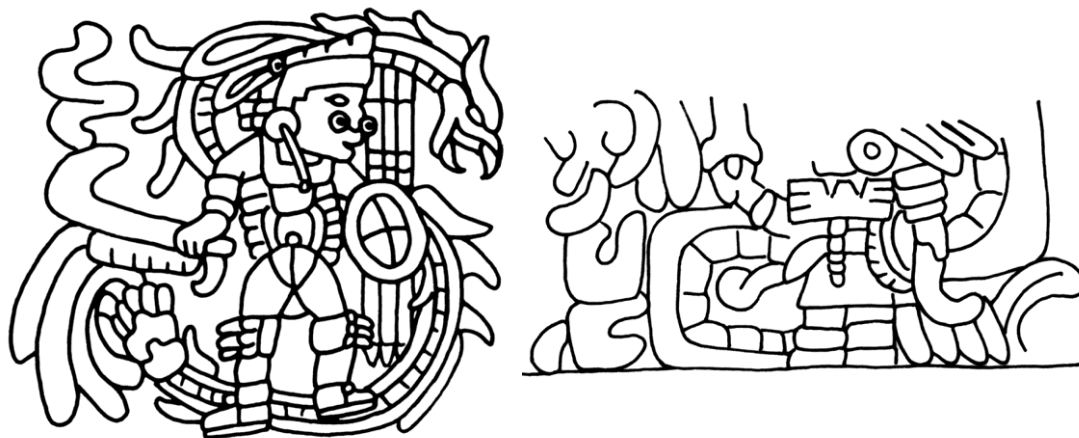


Figure 11. High-ranking warriors sacred to Quetzalcóatl. Details of panels from the Altar in Building 4 (Palace east of the Vestibule) and Room 4, Hall 2 (Burned Palace). (drawings: Elizabeth Jiménez García).

When we compare contexts and iconography of the benches that are still *in situ*, but in an advanced state of disrepair, we find an interesting pattern. Group A and Group B processions have features in common. The processions located on the east are composed of warriors, each carrying a plumed shield, and even more distinguished for using a curved weapon. In addition they have two classes of objects associated with Tlaloc (Jiménez G. 1998): a round breastplate with fringe, and round earspools having a central tube (Type Q). In particular, the warrior leading Procession 1 in Hall 2 has large goggles, leaving no doubt as to his affiliation with the Tlaloc cult. Likewise, in Procession 4 of Vestibule 1, the warrior has a round breastplate with fringe,

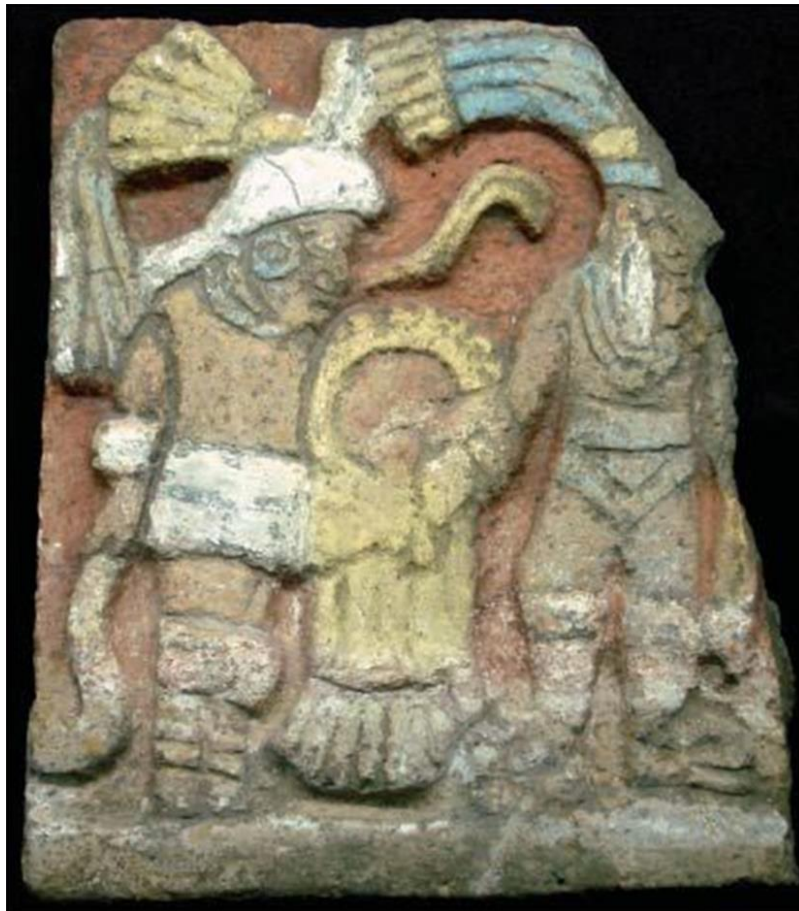
earspools of Type Q, and a curved weapon. Both processions located to the east, one in Hall 2 and the other in Vestibule 1, are clearly associated with Tlaloc.

In contrast, the warriors in the processions located in the west are distinguished by carrying plumed shields and plumed batons or staffs in front of their torsos or on their shoulders. The key object here is the baton or staff and not an offensive weapon. We propose that the processions placed on the east side of both structures consist of warriors having ideological ties with Tlaloc and are ready to make war. In contrast, these personages placed on the west side would be old warriors, no longer are active.

In the polychrome panel (**Figure 12**)

found in Hall 2 (Acosta 1957), unfortunately not *in situ*, there are two warriors: one with goggles and a skirt-like garment having panels or strips of paper represented by painted black lines. This figure supports our proposition concerning the existence of warriors dressed with the attributes of deities (in this case Tlaloc), who went to war to capture prisoners in order to offer them to their deity. The direction that the two individuals on the polychrome panel are walking (the same as the Tlaloc figure in Procession 1) suggests that this panel was placed on the bench of the east side of Hall 2.

Figure 12. Warriors, one of them with a skirt-like garment of rectangular cloth or paper strips, on a polychrome relief, Hall 2 of the Burned Palace. (Cobean, Jiménez and Mastache:2012:lám. 38)



Two warriors, who have behind them plumed serpents with vertical undulations in their bodies, may be warriors of the highest rank (see Figure 11). The figure in Room 4 adjoining Hall 2 could congregate with a few other warriors in an exclusive area dedicated for use by the principal captains of Tula. The warrior depicted on the bench in Building 4 where two lines or processions of warriors converge could also represent a

captain. The Temple of the Jaguars at Chichén Itzá has a similar scene of a warrior with an undulating serpent behind his torso. This personage also wears goggles, which associate him with Tlaloc (**Figure 13**). In Tula, none of the warriors with vertical undulating serpents possess goggles, but the close relation is clear for the warrior-Tlalocs with plumed serpents and Quetzalcoatl.



Figure 13. Individual with Tláloc goggles and a plumed serpent behind him, from the Temple of the Jaguar at Chichén Itzá, Yucatán. (From: Castellón 2002:29).

Warriors guarded by the symbol of the bisected conch shells.

Yet another type of procession features figures under bisected conch shells surrounded by volutes, which probably relate these personages to the god later called Ehecatl-Quetzalcoatl. Jorge R. Acosta (1956: 62-63) found a panel in the Palace of Quetzalcoatl (**Figure 14**) where it was repurposed to cover the upper part of a drain; the panel was probably originally part of an early frieze. The reliefs on this panel have had limited exposure to the elements,

and the sculptured weapons and costumes are well preserved. One of the characters has a headdress uncommon in Tula – a kind of helmet with rigid feathers, apparently from an eagle. This individual wears earspools, a nose plug, a butterfly pectoral and a dorsal disc (or mirror). He is garbed in cotton armor and holds two darts, objects that do not appear in the benches *in situ*. In front of him is another warrior, as indicated by a fragment of a headdress with long plumes.



Figure 14. Warriors with a row of cut conch shells above their heads, on a panel, Palace of Quetzalcóatl. (Jiménez García 2008:photo 26).

The bisected conch shells lie above these two figures. In codices from the Postclassic or Colonial periods, and in documentary sources, it is mentioned that one of the principal attributes of Ehecatl-Quetzalcoatl is the *ehcacozcatl*, a great bisected conch shell, either over the figure's

chest, or decorating his shield (Castellón 2002: 32), called by Sahagún “the spiral jewel of the wind” (1985: 886) (**Figure 15**). The bisected conch shell or sign of Venus occurs in Tula as a distinctive attribute of warriors who wear it as a kind of skirt-like garment.

Numerous blocks for cornices with carved reliefs of bisected conch shells from Epiclassic Tula Chico indicate that this image was very common during the early construction stages at Tula. It is possible that these cornices were associated with images of specific personages, but we are unsure if they were parts of processions.



Figure 15. Quetzalcóatl with his characteristic cut conch shell as a shield. *Códice Florentino*. (From: Ramírez 2002:50)

Warriors who travel on serpents and are protected by them.

A third type of procession can be discerned from worked stone blocks that might have been segments of benches. These objects, which we have arbitrarily termed “bench blocks”, are rectangular prisms that were partially reworked so that the upper section has the shape of a block, while the lower section has the shape of a panel. Acosta found a number of these prismatic “bench blocks” on the north side of Pyramid B, but they lacked clear contexts. Due to their shapes, we propose that the blocks were originally placed at floor level so that they did not fall off walls or facades.

The iconography of these objects suggests that they date to the apogee of Tula, or very near this time. On the thickest

sections there are serpents carved in high relief, while on the panel-shaped sections are sculptures of small warriors in various poses. A comparison of these objects shows that the serpents in high relief had undulating bodies, with the warriors being depicted on uncurved segments of the serpent bodies so that the serpents sometimes appear to be placed above the personages, while in other cases the warriors are placed standing on top of the serpents.

One of these sculptures depicts two individuals, protected by cotton armor, each armed with two darts in the left hand and carrying a dart thrower (Nahuatl: *atl-atl*) on the right arm, protected by cotton armor (**Figure 16**).

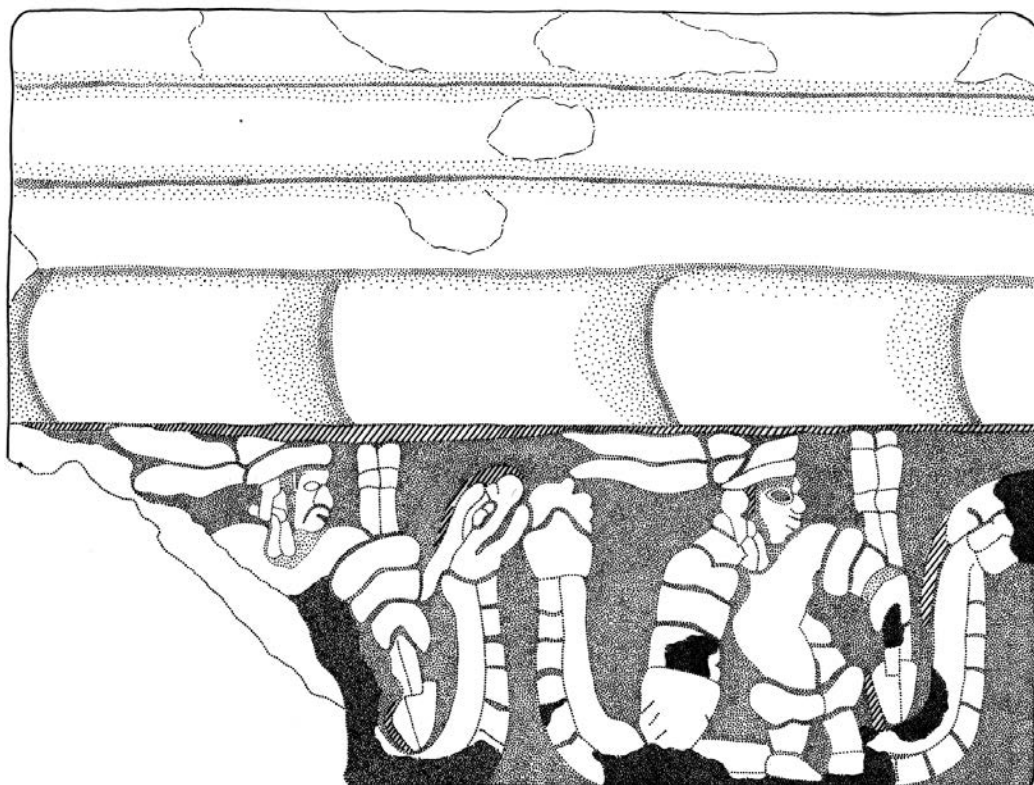


Figure 16. Warriors being carried by serpents. Bench block (?), possibly from the north side of Pyramid B. (drawing: Elizabeth Jiménez García and Daniel Correa Baltazar)

Each of these personages is placed on a serpent with a U-shaped body (similar to a canoe), which appears to be transporting him. These serpents have no feathers on their bodies, but they do have plumes above their eyes. Above them there is a large feathered serpent, with transversal lines on its stomach and feathers on its back. This great serpent is carved in high relief, and its

thick body is at the same height as the warriors. A scene very similar to this has been found in a mural at Cacaxtla (**Figure 17**). Castellón (2002: 34) observes that this mural depicts a personage travelling to his final destination on the body of a feathered serpent that transports him to different planes of the cosmos.



Figure 17. Individual on a plumed serpent. Mural at Cacaxtla, Tlaxcala. (adapted from Castellón 2002:34).

Processions in the Sacred Precinct of Tula Grande.

The existence of groups of individuals in procession placed in architectural spaces like the benches can offer information about the functions of these spaces and of the reliefs themselves (**Figure 18**). The benches of Tula are located in the most important buildings at the site. Being, on average, one-half meter in height, they provide space for persons to sit, to placing objects and offerings, or to display the ostentatious costumes used by specific individuals who were invited to

enter these restricted spaces. Another possible bench function could be to display tribute or war booty brought to Tula, where the king, Señor (lord) or *tlatoani* would honor his warriors, who afterwards would exit the building to be presented to the rest of the people. Everyone, both nobles and commoners, may have participated in the rituals that began with key processions, and whose elite members are depicted in the bench reliefs.

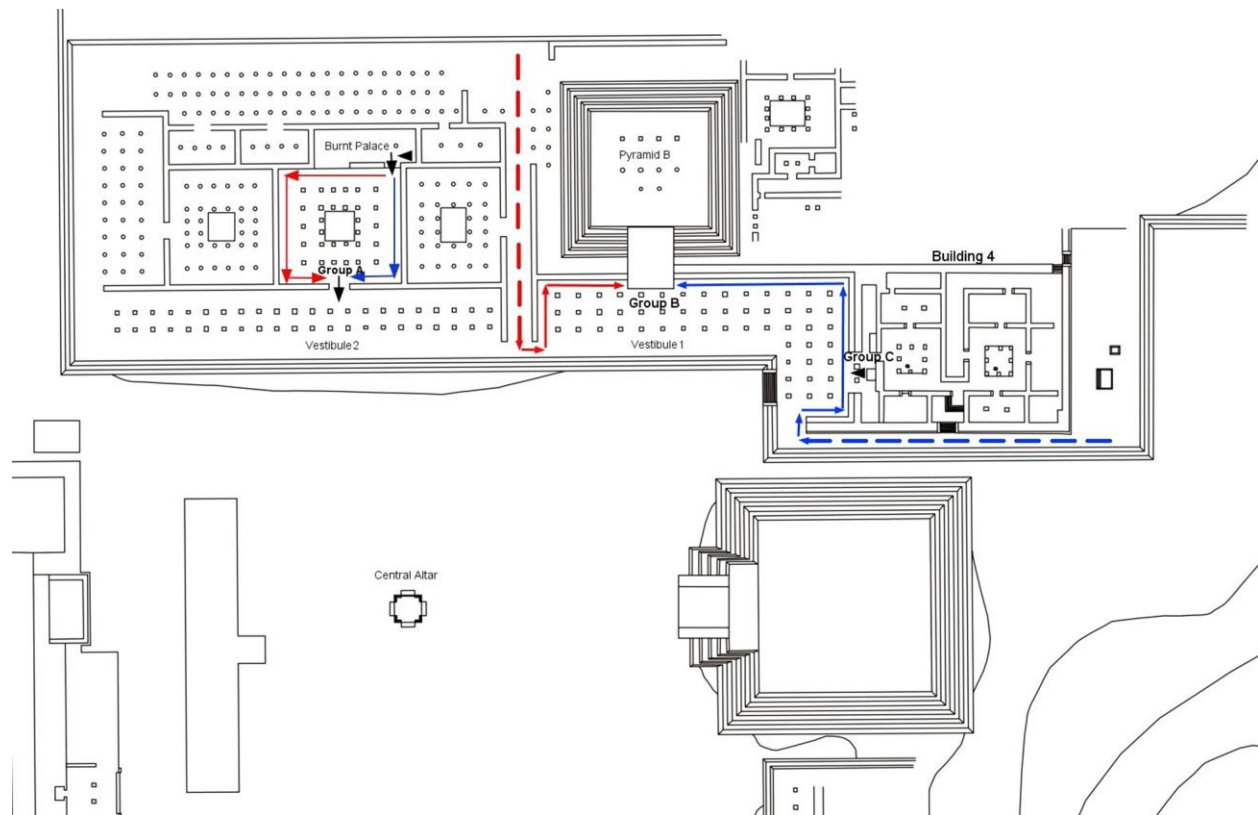


Figure 18. Directions of the Processions in Tula's ceremonial precinct. The arrows with dots show possible entrances. (after an architectural drawing of Fernando Báez Urincho)

On the other hand, the processions depicted on the benches of Vestibule 1, which began along the sides of Pyramids B and C, heading towards the stairway of Pyramid B, did not converge inside any

structure. This suggests that the individuals represented had arrived already costumed to Vestibule 1 in order to participate in ceremonial rites, possibly because they arrived from buildings or structures near the

precinct, or possibly because they represented different wards of the city, or they were subjects or allies of Tula.

In the case of the warriors who are standing on serpents, these scenes could symbolically represent canoe transport, which evokes warrior processions, or mythic incursions departing Tula for other regions, with each warrior transported by a serpent and being protected by feathered serpents. Our interpretations are limited, given that the original locations of these sculptures are unknown. For the moment, we consider these to be mythic processions of warriors who, along with other individuals shown in battles, form a select group of Toltec warriors who died in battle, and became members of a sacred pantheon.

The weapons that these personages carry are generally similar to some of the key archaeological objects recovered from the Cenote of Chichén Itzá, Yucatan. For example, a nearly complete atlatl found at Chichén measures 53.5 cm. long (Coggins 1992: fig. 8.14), although other Chichén atlatls are slightly larger or smaller. The find at Chichén of atlatl foreshafts gives us an idea of the size of the darts, some of which have a length of 40.5 cm. (Coggins 1992: fig. 8.27). The curved weapons (curved sticks) found at Chichén measure between 45-47 cm. long (Coggins 1992: figs. 8.31, 8.32). The curved weapons at Chichén are

essentially identical to sculptured images of these weapons at Tula. As have been analyzed by by Mastache, Cobean and Healan (2002: 290-291), the rose-colored chert bifaces used as projectile points on the Chichén atlatls are identical in morphology and color to the chert points found by Guadalupe Mastache and Ana Maria Crespo in a Toltec lithics workshop in the southeastern alluvial valley of the Tula region. Future work includes petrographical analyses to identify the origins of the chert used to manufacture the Tula and Chichén bifaces.

Important elite elements in the costumes of some Toltec noble warriors in the processions are the dorsal disk or *tezcacuitlapilli* and butterfly breastplates, which are associated with solar events and the souls of elite warriors. In the Hall 2 of the Burned Palace two turquoise mosaic disks with distinct designs have been excavated (Cobean and Mastache 2003: 56-57; Cobean, Jiménez and Mastache 2012), which appear to be similar to disks on the backs of the *atlante* sculptures on Pyramid B, each with four fire serpents (*xiuhcōatl*). Both the dorsal disks and the butterfly breastplates, which the atlantes and the procession figures display, emphasize the relationship between the warriors and Quetzalcōatl.

Benches in Tula and in México-Tenochtitlan.

As a comparative reference, we should mention benches located in the Aztec capital, Tenochtitlan, found at the Casa de las Águilas, which borders the Templo Mayor of México-Tenochtitlan. These benches were constructed and later buried during the reign of Motecuhzoma

Ilhuicamina (CE 1440-1469) (López Luján 2006: I: 53). As Mastache, Cobean and Healan (2002: 114, fig. 5.29) noted, the Casa de las Águilas and its columned portico share architectural similarities with Building 4 and Vestibule 1 at Tula, including polychrome Toltec-style benches.

Leonardo López Luján proposed that the 12 benches of the Casa de las Águilas are neither exact replicas nor duplicates of the Tula benches (**Figures 19 and 20**). They are imitations of Tula's benches, but the Mexica used local materials and their own construction techniques (López Luján 2006: I: 104-105) in order to depict processions of armed individuals forming a confluence centered on a *zacatapayolli* (a ball of grass or hay braided with spines and needles which are bloodied and strung together for sacrifice rituals). These *zacatapayolli* grass balls are located at the center of each bench

altar (López Luján 2006: I: 102, 109). The twelve bench sculptures of the Casa de las Águilas were discovered between 1981 and 1997 by Eduardo Matos Moctezuma and his research team and subsequently documented and studied by López Luján. There were various objects given in offering in this sacred space, all associated with the polychrome benches (López Luján 2006: I: 53). There are also iconographic similarities between benches at Chichén Itzá and Tula, which we will not address here (see Ringle and Bey 2009: 369).



Figure 19. Bench at the Casa de las Águilas, México-Tenochtitlan. (from Matos Moctezuma 1990).

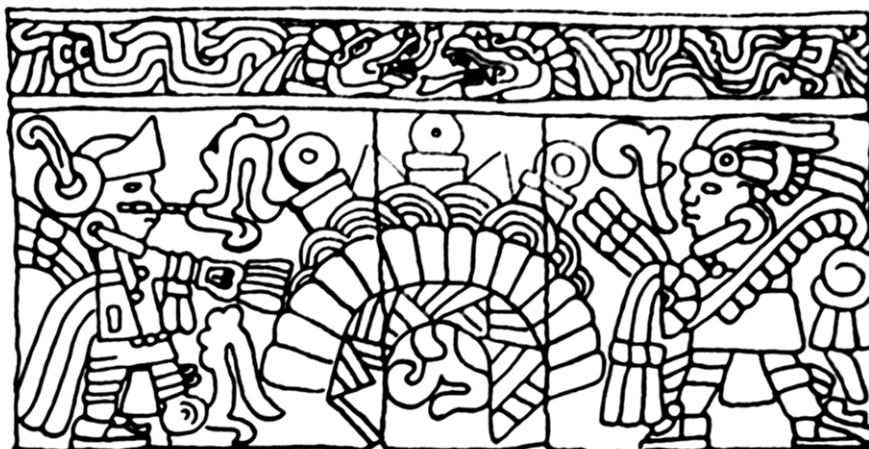


Figure 20. Another Bench from the Casa de las Águilas, México-Tenochtitlan. (from López Luján:2006:II:fig.139a).

In the Casa de las Águilas, the Mexica not only imitated the Toltec benches, but also other Toltec style objects, in addition to

bringing original sculptures from Tula, such as the basalt Chac Mool located at the edge of the Templo Mayor in the foundation of the Marquis de Apartado palace (López Luján and López Austin 2009: 402). During 19 field seasons in Tula, Acosta (1956-57) uncovered significant Aztec presence, including numerous Aztec offerings in Tula Grande, and evidence of Aztec excavations in various sectors of the ancient city, probably with the intent of searching for Toltec ceremonial objects.

Eduardo Matos Moctezuma (1990: 190) observed that Tula-style benches were incorporated into several rooms of the Casa de las Águilas. One of the entrances presented two large (approximately 1.9 m high) ceramic sculptures of eagle warriors, each placed on a bench. One of the hallways in this building contains two full-sized ceramic sculptures of human skeletons. Within the rooms, six large Tlaloc effigy ceramic braziers were found, with tears in their goggle eyes, and a general shape and iconography very similar to that of the Early Postclassic weeping Tlaloc braziers found at Tula.

The Casa de las Águilas has also been called the “Recinto de los Caballeros Águila” (Precinct of the Eagle Knights). This major large Mexica architectural complex is well documented archaeologically. Its construction materials and context, and its well preserved inventory of sculptures (the eagle knights and the skeletal figures), the decorated benches

showing warrior processions, among other elements, perhaps indicate that this building was a meeting place for various activities of this military order (Matos 1999). The skeleton sculptures in the Casa de las Águilas are equivalent to the skinned and butchered individuals represented in the Coatepantli reliefs in Tula, while eagle warriors also are present at Tula in the reliefs decorating the pillars on Pyramid B.

López Luján (2006: I: 110) proposed that the personages on the Tula benches are in procession towards a ceremonial object similar to the *zacatapayolli* on the Casa de las Águilas benches; however, at Tula the only *in situ* central representation found is that of a warrior or king surrounded by a feathered serpent in Building 4. According to López Luján (2006: I: 115) the Mexica imitated the Toltec benches to highlight an archaic or ancient aesthetic in the decoration at the Casa de las Águilas, establishing ties with Tula as the famous city of Quetzalcoatl. We propose that the Mexica architectural plan (which is similar to Tula even in the placement of the two stairways of Tula’s Vestibule 1) indicates that all of the construction found at the Casa de las Águilas, the benches and the objects in the offerings, were created specifically in order to reconstruct part of the Mexica historical past, thus paying homage to its Toltec heritage and, by extension, to the cultural interests of the tlatoani Mexica Motecuhzoma Ilhuicamina.

General Comments

The processions depicted on the sculpture of the sacred precinct of Tula constitute a kind of portrait of the ceremonies or rituals that the warrior elite performed in the heart of the city.

Processions 1 and 2 left Hall 2 of the Burned Palace in order to emerge from Vestibule 2, which connects with the Central Plaza. In contrast, Processions 3 and 4 entered Vestibule 1 from the sides of Pyramids B

and C in order to advance and concentrate at the base of the stairway providing access to the temple of Pyramid B. And in Processions 5 and 6 of the Altar of Building 4, the individuals are associated with a warrior surrounded by a feathered serpent.

Given that the iconography always presents war-like themes, it is likely that these processions which included individuals who participated in events such as military conquests, glorifying the warrior class at Tula, who would parade with their weapons, insignias, rich costumes, jewels and feathers before the public gathered in the principal plaza. The feathered serpent is depicted around various individuals – crowning them, guiding them, or even carrying them and transporting them; the feathered serpent is the most important icon of Tula associated with warriors. Blas Castellón demonstrates that the attributes of Quetzalcóatl were appropriated by culture heroes such as the Mixtec personage 9-Wind, who in the Vienna Codex (p. 48) receives the costume of the wind god, and descends to earth (Castellón 2002: 29). At Tula all the individuals represented in the sacred precinct are probably some type of hero, some historical and some mythical, or a combination of both, like the individuals who travel on serpent canoes, possibly looking for conquests to obtain tribute and to extend the dominion of the feathered serpent.

At Tula, we observe two lines of processions which convergew at points of exit or meeting, each headed by warriors. The processions placed on the east side have ties with Tlaloc, and those on the west possibly have ties with Ehecatl-Quetzalcoatl. The warriors with attributes of the god Tlaloc wear goggles, a breastplate with fringes, Type Q earspools, or sometimes goggles and skirt-like costumes

made of paper strips or panels. We call them “Tlaloc-Warriors.”

The warriors who carry feathered batons or staffs are placed on the west side both in Hall 2 of the Burned Palace and in the Frieze of the Lords. Hugo Moedano (1947: 133) proposed that this frieze depicts lords, warriors, or leaders of conquered peoples and allies of Tula. In contrast, Cynthia Kristan-Graham (1989: 274-275; 1993: 3-4) considered the individuals depicted in this frieze to be merchants who are participating in trade-related rites. We believe that these lords were warriors with ties to Ehecatl-Quetzalcoatl, possibly associated with merchants as Kristan-Graham proposed. She also identifies the possible existence of decorative or iconographic programs paralleling the development of Tula as an important center of long distance trade during the Early Postclassic, further arguing that the Toltec merchants were prototypes for the Mexica *pochteca* merchants. The personages in the Frieze of the Lords, and the other lords depicted in the rest of Vestibule 1, surely were the most important individuals of the Toltec nobility, such as priests, warriors, captains, and governors of neighborhoods, who when dressed with their weapons and insignias demonstrated their sacred ties with Quetzalcoatl and Tlaloc. During the Toltec period these deities had strong influence throughout Mesoamerica and were related to trading activities and warfare.

Ceramics were among the commodities that the Toltecs traded. For example, among the imported ceramics in Tula, the key type was the lead-colored Plumbate ware from the Soconusco region (the Pacific coast of Chiapas and Guatemala), and in lesser amounts pottery from the Gulf lowlands (the Huasteca, Veracruz), from the Maya region, and from

Central America (Costa Rica and Nicaragua: types of Papagayo or Nicoya types) (Cobean 1990: 475-492.)

Cacao was more important than imported ceramics. The ancient Mesoamericans used cacao as a kind of currency, as well as a luxury drink. The region where Plumbate pottery was produced has been famous for its cacao since the 16th century CE, but it was a prime

cacao growing area for centuries before. The metallic-poled Plumbate vessels found in Tula probably arrived there full of cacao beans (Diehl, Lomas and Wynn 1974: 187).

The following description of how the *tlatoani* Ahuítzotl received the traders after they had conquered distant lands is very suggestive (Sahagún 1985: 490-491):

[...] he ordered that they be received with great solemnity; many satraps and other ministers of the temples went to receive them, and many of the principals of México and many of the nobles, also went.

The satraps brought incense and perfumes which they used as incense, along with shell trumpets which they used to play in the temples...

They walked along the road as if in procession in two files, one for the priests and the other for the nobles, these merged together in the town of Acachinanco [located south of downtown Mexico City, near San Antonio Abad], and when they merged together, they began to burn incense and other perfumes, doing this with great reverence, as was done in older times, ... they came organized along all of the road in front of them; and all the neighboring people of the road came out of their homes to see this great marvel.

And since they arrived in Mexico, none [of the recently arrived] went to their own homes, but instead went directly to the house of the lord Auitzotzin, and when they entered in the patio of the palaces, they began burning many perfumes in the hearths which were made for this, to honor the gods, where the lord Auitzotzin received them with great honor, and he spoke to them in this manner: "My beloved, merchants and traders; you are very welcome here, repose, and rest."

Afterwards they were taken to the hall of the most eminent and generous men, where in terms of their importance they were seated according to what they deserved based on their deeds; there being also a place where lord Auitzotzin would have sat; later the merchants put before him all of the holdings which had [formerly] been used by their prisoners of war.

Having done this, one of the merchants began speaking to the lord [Auitzotzin] saying [...] "our lord [...] your uncles the pochteca who are here put our heads and lives at risk, and we have worked night and day; even though we look like and call ourselves merchants, we are captains and soldiers, who by cloaking ourselves we go to conquer, and we have worked and suffered much in order to achieve these things that were not ours, but by war and with much work we achieved them."

Hearing this, the lord answered them saying: "My uncles, you have suffered from many things, you have done many labors, like brave men; it was the will of our lord Huitzilopochtli, god of war, that you came through successfully in what you attempted and that you have returned healthy and alive as I now see you [...] I give you permission to recognize your achievements because you deserve this."

This done, afterwards the lord sent them many valuables to show his thanks for their good works; he also gave them very fine cloths of diverse styles and richness, many rich *maxtles*; he also gave each merchant a load of cloths made of *tochponecáyotl*, and to each he gave a hanega¹ of maize and another of beans, and a measure of chia [...] (Sahagún 1985:490-491).

Shortly before the Conquest, the merchants of Tlatelolco also called “cloaked captains and soldiers dressed like merchants, roamed over all regions which border and make war on provinces and peoples.” When the lord of México wanted to send the merchants “who were dissimulated captains and soldiers, to a province to make trenches”, he spoke to them concerning what he wanted them to do. He gave them “1,600 pieces of cloth which they called *quachtli*”²; after receiving this, they went to Tlatelolco, there the merchants of México and the merchants of Tlatelolco met in order to discuss the business that the king had commended to them (Sahagún 1985:492).

In Tula, it is possible that Hall 2 of the Burned Palace, and other exclusive locales were spaces for meetings of warriors and merchant-warriors who were received or instructed by the tlatoani of the city, either because they had just arrived to the city, or because they were initiating a new journey to distant lands. The warriors who were dedicated to Tlaloc seem to have been tasked with obtaining prisoners for sacrifice. The lords who used feathered batons with few weapons were merchant-warriors, possibly under the tutelage of Quetzalcoatl or Ehecatl-Quetzalcoatl. We tentatively refer to them as “Warriors-Ehecatl-Merchants”.

Of all the individuals depicted on the benches, only two warriors have feathered serpents behind them with vertical undulating bodies, highlighting their religious importance. These captains, warriors of highest rank or “in general” are depicted in reserved spaces. The personage

in Room 4, together with a few other warriors, would exit Hall 2, and enter the vestibule that connects with the Central Plaza of the precinct. The individual in Building 4 would have more direct access to the same vestibule that connects to the Central Plaza.

With different ranks and patron deities, the warriors possessed two types of serpents as guides and protectors: some were completely plumed and others had a mixture of plumes and bisected conch shells. There are similar serpents on the serpentine columns of Tula and they are depicted at Xochicalco. The existence of a relief with warriors with bisected conch shells above their heads instead of plumed serpents supports the idea of warriors having ties to the wind god.

To date, at Tula no equivalent of the *zacatapayolli* seen at the Casa de las Águilas has been found; thus we consider this representation to be an innovation of the Mexica. The depictions of large basins at Tula do not appear to be located in a central place where processional files of individuals converge. In the basins, the presence of round yellow objects, the reeds, and the inserted feathers, and also the volute elements could indicate the burning of offerings over balls of copal. We cannot be sure that the basins served as receptacles or deposits of reeds that were stained with blood from sacrifices, or from autosacrifice. If this is true, the places where we found benches and depictions of processions were also places for some form of sacrifice or autosacrifice.

The halls of the Burned Palace of Tula where benches are located, such as Hall 2, probably functioned as council rooms, meeting places, or even centers of administration and ritual cult, but not as living areas for the rulers of Tula and their families. On the other hand, it is very possible that high officials and some leaders of Tula occupied these benches during administrative meetings (Cobean and Mastache 2001: 173). In addition, the halls would have been used for meetings of warriors, captains, priests, and merchants who arrived in or left Tula, where matters related to the economic, political or military life of the city were discussed.

We have demonstrated the possibility that some processions at Tula were inspired by an emblem of Ehecatl-Quetzalcoatl, bisected conch shells. In contrast, the presence of who were transported by serpents simulating canoes and surrounded by great feathered serpents, leads us to propose the existence of a fourth group of mythic processions, made up of "Mythic Warrior Serpents".

For processions that exited from Hall 2 and Building 4, and others arriving at the Tula Grande precinct, all could converge in the vestibules, where the warrior class of Tula must have participated in the rites, songs and ceremonies that gave cohesion to Toltec society. Young and old warriors were commanded by renowned leaders, as we

have named the "Tlaloc Warriors" and "Ehecatl-Merchant Warriors." The warrior elite presented their weapons and sacred warrior insignia to the people gathered in the principal plaza of the precinct, the heart of the city, after arriving from distant lands, or when they were departing to conquer peoples and obtain tribute, and prestige.

The feathered serpent was a rattlesnake covered with plumes on its back, a feather crest on its head, and a bunch of feathers on its tail rattles, and it was the icon of the god Quetzalcoatl. In a humanized version, he was represented as a man emerging from the gullet of this mythical animal, and he was converted into a critical source of political legitimization based on divine power (Castellón 2002: 31).

Perhaps since the end of the Classic period in Mesoamerica (CE 900), the divine nature of the feathered serpent began to be incarnated by powerful elites who assumed its attributes. This process served to found noble dynasties for many groups, via historical personages who were a mixture of priests and rulers, whose achievements were partially historical and partly mythological. The feathered serpent accumulated multiple meanings, perhaps more than any other divinity. The ancient peoples not only associated this being with the earth and its fruits, but also it was considered it a source of life, and a symbol of legitimacy and power of rulership (Castellón 2002: 29-33).

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Notes

¹ Hanega or fanega: a measure of variable capacity for grains, which generally is equivalent to 55 liters (Acuña 1984:305).

² *Quachtli*: a large cotton cloth (Molina 1992:84).

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