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Epi-Classic Cultural Dynamics in the Mezquital Valley

Translation of the Spanish by Alex Lomónaco



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Abstract

The Epi-Classic period (ca. A.D. 600/700–900/1000) was in most parts of Mesoamerica, except for the Valley of México, a period of regional apogee characterized by intense interregional interaction. During that time, an extensive communication network made possible the access to similar luxury goods to societies from extreme regions within Mesoamerican territory, from the northern-most part of the Central Plateau to the Maya Area. The luxuries involved in this Pan-Mesoamerican network include figurative jade plaques of a particular style, turquoise, Ucareo/Zinapécuaro obsidian and shell from both coasts.

Drifting from a macroregional perspective to a regional level, in this project we approach some of the distributive networks which may have involved the transit of these products.

Resumen

El período Epi-Clásico (c.a. 600/700–900/1000 d.C.) la mayor parte fue de Mesoamérica, excepto por el Valle de México, un período de apogeo regional caracterizado por la interacción inter-regional intensa. Durante ese tiempo, una comunicación de redes intensas hicieron posible el acceso a mercancías lujosas similares a sociedades de regiones extremas dentro el territorio Mesoamericano, de la mayor parte del norte del Altiplano Central del Área Maya. Los lujos involucrados en

esta red Pan-Mesoamericana incluye placas de jade figurativas de un estilo particular, turquesa, obsidiana Ucareo/Zinapécuaro y concha de ambas costas.

Navegando desde una perspectiva macro-regional a nivel regional, en este proyecto planteamos algunas de las redes de distribución que pudieron estar involucradas en el tránsito de estos productos.

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Introduction

The Epi-Classic period (ca. A.D. 600/700–900/1000) has been almost everywhere in Mesoamerica, except the Valley of México, a period of regional splendor characterized by intense interregional interactions.

At that time, a communications network that connected societies from extreme regions within the Mesoamerican territory was active from the northern portion of the Central Plateau to the Maya Area. This "Pan-Mesoamerican" network is insinuated in the generalized dispersion of a number of luxury goods.

Among these objects, the existence of certain greenstone figures should be outlined, with characteristics, peculiarities, a wide geographical distribution and a relatively limited temporal extension that turn them into an excellent marker for the horizon. We have dedicated the first part of this work to that phenomenon.

Besides, the dispersion of these figures is coincident with the circulation of other products, such as turquoise, the gray obsidian from Ucareo/Zinapécuaro, and shell from both coastal strips. The obtention of materials from such varied origins can only be understood as the result of an active and dynamical participation of these societies in a macroregional system.

When reducing the scale of our analysis, such system may be observed as a spatially integrating and continuous process, where the links with remote regions derive from the concurrence of connections with nearby regions. In the second part of this essay, a few distributive networks are outlined, which may have to do with the transit of the products mentioned above, both from an interregional perspective with emphasis made on the northern portion of the Central Plateau, and a regional perspective, where aspects of the Mezquital Valley have been underlined.

As stated in the proposal submitted to FAMSI, our goal is to contribute in reducing the number of "voids" which make it difficult to attain a perception of Mesoamerica as a

social, rather than a geographical space, and its pre-hispanic history as a consequence of a flexible, permeable structure in constant interaction. What we have just said forces us to reevaluate the role played by the human groups that occupied the region as integrated societies in a framework of inclosing relationships, within a much larger social matrix. In this sense, the definition of some groups as marginal or alien to the development of Mesoamerica is no longer easy to sustain.

Evidence of Interregional Interaction through the Epi-Classic

Forty years ago, during the explorations carried out in Xochicalco under his direction, the archaeologist César Sáenz found a number of offerings that predated the second building sequence for the Pyramid of the Feathered Serpent.

The peculiarity in this finding was the presence of a number of greenstone carved figures which, to Sáenz's surprise, seemed to share identical traits ([Figure 1](#) and [Figure 2](#)). Distributed in three of the four main contexts recorded in said building during the 1962-63 field season, the pieces were accompanied by other peculiar objects, such as a *tecali* vessel with a polychrome fresco decoration, a carved snail and shell strings, in Offering 1, and tubular and quadrangular greenstone beads, in addition to a pair of earflares of the same material, in Burial 2.

In his report on these findings, Sáenz noted that one of the characters represented in greenstone greatly resembled the plaque he had recovered while exploring Palenque's Temple XVIII, in 1954 (Sáenz, 1956:8-9, Hirth, 2000:203) ([Figure 3](#)), as also a number of objects that are a part of the Woods Bliss Collection, illustrated by Samuel Lothrop in his work *Pre-Columbian Art* (1959, in Sáenz, 1963a:21-22).

Regarding these figures, Lothrop suggested a possible connection with the Zapotecan culture, and Sáenz in turn mentioned that the type of headdress decoration used by most individuals is present in jades from the Guatemala and El Salvador Plateaus, as well as in the Olmec region (*ibid.*:22). All of the above made him state that "[...] we must find their association with the Zapotec region and perhaps also with cultures more to the south" (*idem*).

With these findings, plus those that had taken place months before in Building "C", where also greenstone pendants, snails, shell beads and plates of this style were jointly found, César Sáenz concluded: "The nine jade plates or pendants we have found, and which came from Structure C and from the Pyramid of the Feathered Serpents, are not indicative of the existence and significance of this deity in Xochicalco, since all of them represent, with slight variations, one and the same individual" (Sáenz, 1963b:7).

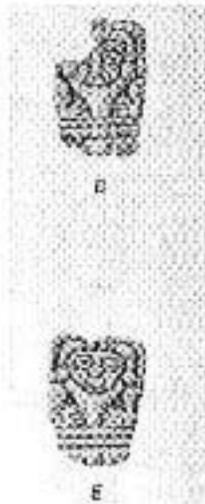


Figure 1. Sáenz, 1963a.



Figure 2. Taken from Sáenz, 1963a.



Figure 3. Taken from Sáenz, 1956.

Since the 1930's, Alfonso Caso headed a comprehensive exploration program in Oaxaca. With the assistance of several other researchers, sites from the Mixteca and the Central Valleys were surveyed and excavated, and in this latter region, Monte Albán in particular (Bernal, 1965:793). John Paddock, who participated in these efforts, presented in his *Ancient Oaxaca. Discoveries in Mexican Archaeology and History* (1966), some of the interpretations obtained following almost thirty years of works in the area.

Paddock's publication is specially mentioned, as it illustrates a large variety of pieces that are variants of the style that Sáenz described; today, most of these pieces belong to the collections of the National Museum of Anthropology and History ([Figure 4](#)).

Paddock reproduced the objects but did not provide a thorough description, nor has he mentioned any context of provenience though he has attributed them to the Monte Albán IIIb, IIIb-IV and IV phases (1966:152, figs.159-165). A similar temporal assignment and scarce provenience information are seen in Alfonso Caso's work on Oaxacan stone carvings, published one year earlier. In this work, Caso acknowledges the similarities with contemporary Maya pieces (1965a:906-907), a fact that can be easily observed in Robert Rands' work about lowland Maya jades included in the same volume (1965:569-573).



Figure 4. Taken from Paddock, 1966.

No one can deny the reality of the connections between Xochicalco, the Central Oaxacan Valleys and the Maya Area, but elements to think about how close they were and what characteristics they had socially adopted are not abundant, besides the commercial value of the objects in common. It is precisely in this sense that the objects and contexts that have motivated this research may be useful.

Surprisingly, their tracing has led us beyond these regions, to sites and contexts apparently so geographically apart and so culturally alien, that it would be worthwhile to reevaluate the role they played within the dynamic Mesoamerican mosaic.

César Sáenz was one of the first scholars to describe in detail the context in which these objects were found. The significance of his publications resides in having recognized the similarities of the traits represented, in a way that they may be considered not only as pertaining to a same style, but also associated to a specific deity, the attributes of which are enhanced by the objects with which they usually shared an archaeological context.

Several years before the findings in Xochicalco took place, the presence of these pieces had been documented in sites such as Tula, Monte Albán, Palenque, Veracruz, Chichén Itzá, and several others in Central America (see Ringle *et al.*, 1998; McVicker and Palka, 2001); also Ramón Mena, as Head of the Archaeology Department, has published a catalog with the jade objects stored in the deposits of the former National Museum of Archaeology, History and Ethnography, where several examples have been illustrated (1990 [1927]: illus. 2, 5, 13). We now know that a number of samples exist elsewhere in Hidalgo, Querétaro, the State of México, Guerrero and the Mixteca, for instance, and that they are abundant in sites from the southern Maya lowlands.

The Figures

What do they look like? And what are the traits they share that make it possible to include them in a same style? As seen in the illustrations exhibited in this text, they are greenstone plaques,¹ often with perforations that turn them into pendants, and which, through bas-relief techniques, portrait the front image of an anthropomorphic character.

The individual has protruding eyes² and mouth, and wears earflares, in addition to a headdress that varies in complexity. Frequently, around the neck hangs a string of circular beads. When the figure is fully represented, it shows a standing or kneeling individual "[...] with his hands on his chest in a ritual attitude [...]" (Sáenz, 1963a:21, see also Hirth, 2000:203). Sometimes, he holds in his hands a circular object.

As stated by William Ringle, Tomás Gallareta and George Bey, these jades show a surprisingly restricted set of attributes (1998:203), the headdresses being the most significant ones. These authors have designed a preliminary classification in four major groups, after the plaques originated in Chichén Itzá, Xochicalco, Monte Albán and Tula,

¹ Often, greenstone is referred to as "jade", but in fact, the varieties are numerous depending on their structure and chemical composition: "jadeite", "nephrite", "actinolite", "chloromelanite"... at first sight they may all seem very similar, and the fact that the aspect of the material varies even within one same deposit (Easby, 1961:79), makes it even more difficult to identify the place of provenience.

² They often give the impression of being closed, making several authors think it may be the representation of a deceased human being (Acosta, 1955:153; Zeitlin, 1993:134). This is not final, as individuals generally are shown in dynamic positions, standing or sitting in the "lotus flower" position, with their hands resting at the chest level (i.e. pieces illustrated by Rands, 1965:571-573).

that include: "Males with a circular mirror or ornament centered in their hairdress", "Males with headdresses holding a pair of human faces or serpents that look in opposite directions", "Males with headdresses in the shape of 'monster muzzles' ", and "Lords in a seated position leaning to one side or the other" (Ringle *et al.*, *ibid.*: 203, fig. 20, see also McVicker and Palka, 2001).

In the first and simpler of such cases, the headdress features a detail in the mid-forehead with two or more bands emanating from it, occasionally curled, which run down around the head to rest on the earflares, or at that same level as the earflares. In the second, the profile of serpents or of anthropomorphic heads at each side of the headdress may be appreciated. In the third case, the individual is frontally represented while his head "[...] emerges from a headpiece with the effigy of a serpent [...]." (Winter, 1994:165). In the latter case, real scenes are illustrated, with the leading character sitting in the oriental fashion and wearing a headdress with serpentine features, shown from one side.

The diverse complexities of the headdress that make these figures look radically different from one another, is thought to be a consequence of the varied levels of abstraction that range from an almost baroque-like precision and realism, to a remarkable degree of simplification that merely reproduces the minimum essential features. We consider, like Ringle, Gallareta and Bey do (regarding the plaques from Chichén, 1998:203), that most headdresses show characteristics that refer to a serpentine allusion (see also McVicker and Palka, 2001:183).

Notwithstanding the amazing geographical extension involved in the distribution of these plaques, it has not been determined so far which is the place or places of provenience, largely as a result of our ignorance regarding the total number of greenstone deposits existing in México and their particular characteristics.³ Thus, they are customarily interpreted as allochthonous objects and are only stylistically related to a particular region (Hirth, 2000:203).

³ About nephrite, Ramón Mena has referred to its existence in the states of Guerrero, Oaxaca, Chiapas, Zacatecas, Morelos and Hidalgo (Mena, 1990 [1927]:1, 76-77). As to jadeite, this author refers it is present in the Mixteca and the State of Morelos, close to Xochicalco (*ibid.*:5). Tatiana Proskouriakoff, in turn, states that nephrite is not found in Middle America, and that the mineral so highly appreciated in pre-hispanic times, was jadeite. Quoting different authors, she says "[...] William Niven has found jadeite cores in the Río del Oro and Río de las Balsas, in Guerrero [...]", and "Servin Palencia referred to a mine in Zacatecas and noted that jade was obtained from the states of Querétaro and San Luis Potosí. In the Maya area, only one jade deposit has been reported [...] discovered by Robert Leslie at El Manzanal, in the Motagua Valley". Regarding Mena's work, she adds that perhaps the existence of the deposits proposed by him has not yet been confirmed, and finally, referring to serpentine, she states that it may be obtained in Guatemala and Belize, among many other places in México (Proskouriakoff, 1974:1-2). For additional information on this material and the carvings, I recommend: Easby and Easby, 1956; Foshag, W.F., 1957; Rands, 1965; Digby, 1972; and Pastrana, 1991.

An Epi-Classic Marker

When in the Introduction we said that tracing the figures had led us to "very remote sites and contexts", it is worth specifying that we are using geographical and perhaps 'cultural', but not chronological, terms. An important portion of the pieces we have identified are of an unknown provenience, they often are some collectors' property, they may have been isolatedly found, the context of which they were a part may not have been recorded in detail, or may not support the attribution of a specific temporality... however, we feel that the phenomenon of such a vast distribution may be circumscribed to a quite specific temporal space, for two reasons. First, the absolute or relative dating of the pieces that allowed to be dated, is consistent with a chronological range that encompasses approximately the years A.D. 650 to 950, that is to say, from the Late Middle Classic to the beginning of the Early Post Classic (see also McVicker and Palka 2001:183). Second, the fact of finding this type of samples in sites that in spite of evidencing an extended occupational continuity experienced a peak of splendor in these centuries, is significant. Thus, the plaques style, together with their regional variants, may be considered as a horizon marker.

The Epi-Classic⁴ is a noble moment for studies on interaction, and the reason is quite simple. During the immediately preceding period, the Classic, almost any feature fit to be considered as Pan-Mesoamerican has been commonly associated with Teotihuacán as the focus responsible of every process that derived in the generalized distribution of goods. And even before that, in the Pre-Classic, most studies concentrate on discerning the complexity achieved by human groups instead of the bonds existing between them.

Needless to say, the first case is based on logic, as at that time, Teotihuacán was the head of a macroregional social structure of an impressive scope. As the most important city and strategic link between remote regions from the Mesoamerican territory, it would be surprising that the creation and dispersion of elements would have been alien to it or gone unnoticed, but it is necessary to keep in mind that "not all things present in Teotihuacán are to be considered a Teotihuacán trait", as John Paddock pointed out in 1966 (1972a:225); therefore, many of the elements which actually are a part of the cultural values recovered in Teotihuacán, may have been there precisely because they were generalized and typical of those times, or, in Paddock's words, "a style typical of Teotihuacán times throughout Mesoamerica, while Teotihuacán participates like the other centers [...]" (ibid.:227).

Similarly, it would be pointless to deny that the Teotihuacán system has been innovating in countless cultural features, in addition to supporting and transforming other, preceding ones; a process which also took place at its fall. It is important to outline this continuity, because many of the aspects observed here during the Epi-Classic are an inheritance of previous centuries.

⁴ This lapse, as proposed by Jiménez Moreno (1959:1063), specifically encompasses the centuries comprised between A.D. 600/700 and A.D. 900/1000. We often refer to the "Late Classic", thus respecting the original reference by the authors, though it is important to clarify that in chronological terms, they are basically equivalent.

Some Contexts

With the purpose of addressing the possible meaning of the figures and the implications of their distribution, it is important to identify the regions where they are present, and whenever possible, the contexts of which they were a part.

Maya Area

An abundant sample of these pieces was recovered in the Sacred Cenote, at Chichén Itzá ([Figure 5](#), [Figure 6](#) and [Figure 7](#)). In spite of how difficult it is to come to a conclusion with pieces that have been separated from their original context, Tatiana Proskouriakoff accomplished the enormous task of analyzing the objects that the Carnegie Institution of Washington recovered at the site, and produced a book that reached far beyond the exclusive goal of cataloging (Proskouriakoff, 1974). In her book, the author made a preliminary classification of the objects aimed at distinguishing temporality and provenience, while motifs and representations, forms and arrangement, and manufacturing techniques, were considered as primary variables.

Besides the differences imprinted by each manufacturer, Proskouriakoff has observed the emergence, transformation and decline of a number of techniques in the assemblage, while a comparative analysis of monuments, sculptures and contexts enabled her to propose a chronological sequence for such development.

Throughout this evolution and as of the Classic, the use of mechanical implements was adopted and their use widespread, allowing for an increased sharpness and standardized effects for delineating motifs, as well as a greater precision in the curved lines (Proskouriakoff, 1974:9).

As a part of that technological innovation, the use of tubular perforators or drills is observed, and the very particular traces they leave are considered to be one of the main chronological markers of the Late Classic (Digby, 1972:24; Proskouriakoff, *ibid.*:13).

Several iconographic patterns in the illustrations shown along the text, appeared during the Early Classic. In Alfred Kidder's description (in Proskouriakoff, *ibid.*:12) of plaques he recovered in the region of Nebaj, Guatemala, and corresponding to this period, the figures show flexed arms and the back of the hands united at the chest level, sophisticated headdresses and necklaces around their necks. In our opinion, the absence of ophidian or human profiles flanking the faces of individuals in the early pieces from Guatemala is significant, a difference outlined by Proskouriakoff in regard to her collection, where the motif is present in pieces she already considered to show a transitional Early–Late Classic style.⁵ Other features noticed for the first time in this transition are the "tufts" centered in the forehead, and the pierced earflares,

⁵ Based on stratigraphy, Alfred Kidder was able to establish the basic differences between the jade carvings from the Early and the Late Classic for the region of Nebaj, Guatemala (Rands, 1965:574). As a part of the late style, there are plaques showing individuals with their heads in profile and wearing serpentine headdresses, characterized by long noses (*ibid.*:573, 578, fig. 43).

"announcing common conventions at a later date", in Proskouriakoff's own words (idem).



Figure 5. Taken from Proskouriakoff, 1974.

During the Late Classic, and in addition to what has been mentioned before, the double plain bands that joined together the tuft of the headdress with the earflares were added, occasionally exhibiting, in the final epochs, an upwards curl,⁶ and a significant detail: hands still rested at the chest level, though by then palms were shown inwards, with the fingers often touching one another, contrary to the customary position of earlier times (idem).

⁶ In his study on Maya jades, Adrian Digby (1972:23-24) also refers to a technological and iconographical evolution that may be traced from the Early to the Late Classic periods. The use of tubular perforators or drills had already been noted by him as a key to differentiate the early style from the later one—perforators corresponded to the later style, as also the bands curled on top of the earflares (see also Easby, 1961:74-75).

After her analysis, the author concludes that "Most pieces in the collection were manufactured, not in Chichén Itzá but in the southern Maya area during the Late Classic Period" (*ibid.*:x).



Figure 6. Taken from Proskouriakoff, 1974.

Thus, and so far, we know that the manufacture of these Maya pieces took place mostly between the years A.D. 600 and 900, and that they were a derivation of a southern style. However, when, and to what purpose, they have been offered to the Cenote, still remains unclear.

Unfortunately, we are still unable to determine when the deposit was put in place (Thompson, 1973:133). There are two basic versions of this event that derive from two

different conceptions around the historical developments that took place in Chichén Itzá, and the kind of links this Maya city maintained with other regions.⁷

Proskouriakoff came up with an alternative to explain the presence of these pieces from the Late Classic and the southern style recovered at the northern border of the Yucatán peninsula. Even though a number of samples may have arrived along that route, the author considers that during the Classic period Chichén Itzá was not a place of gathering for pilgrims arriving from Petén, and explains that there's no concluding evidence to consider that an "intense" exchange between both areas has taken place at that time. In her view, it was during the "Toltec occupation" when these objects were offered to the waters of the Sacred Cenote, though this was not their original function; in Proskouriakoff's own words: "[...] most pieces manufactured in the south were used there and duly buried with their owners in Classic tombs, only to be unearthed at a later time, either by Toltec plunderers or by their regional allies, and further sent to Chichén Itzá as a tribute or gift [...]." (*ibid.*:14-15). To Proskouriakoff, this situation may have explained why a good portion of the burials in the southern regions have been plundered of their contents⁸ and why, being the 'Toltec period' the moment of greater activity in the Sacred Cenote, these objects with dates from the Late Classic were the ones that abounded the most. However, recent revisions in the chronology of Chichén Itzá have obscured the abrupt and sequential distinction presumed between the 'Maya' and 'Toltec' 'occupations' of Chichén, and they would even seem to confirm that the period with the greatest dynamics in that city may have been the Epi-Classic (Cohodas, 1989; Wren and Schmidt, 1991; Ringle *et al.*, 1998).

⁷ We refer to the occupational sequence in Chichén Itzá, which has been divided into two major periods: a properly "Maya" occupation of the site (A.D. 600/750-950) and a Toltec occupation (A.D. 950-1250) (Thompson, 1941; Kubler, 1961; Wren, 1984; Coggins, 1984, 1992). No doubt, a close relationship existed between Tula and Chichén, although when this happened, or under what circumstances, still remain unclear. There are scholars who think that a group of warriors coming from the city of Tula arrived in the Yucatecan peninsula and conquered the local population (Diehl, 1983:144; Coggins, 1984), imposing an architectural and an artistic style (Jiménez Moreno, 1941:82; Acosta, 1956-57:108-109). On the other hand, there is evidence that the impact of the foreigners was not too determining for the resident population (Du Solier, 1941:188; Wren, 1984:21), and that the "influence" also worked the other way round influencing the art and architecture of the Toltec capital, and also that the Toltecs residing in Chichén exported more than what they contributed (Kubler, 1961:49, 76-79). Presently, we know that some structures considered as typical of that period were in fact older (Wren, *ibid.*:20; Cohodas, 1989:228-231; Wren and Schmidt, 1991; Ringle *et al.*, 1998:184, 188-192), that the so-called 'Toltec style' also combined concepts of the Gulf Coast and Oaxaca (Wren and Schmidt, *ibid.*:203, Schmidt, 1999:439; Ringle *et al.*, *ibid.*:184), and of the southern Maya lowlands and the Pacific Coast of Guatemala (Wren, *ibid.*:19-20), and that many of the elements defined as "Toltec" in Chichén Itzá and other centers from the lowlands, have antecedents in the region, and that these didn't even exist in Tula (Kubler, 1961:47-79; Cobean, 1978:105-106; Cohodas, *idem*). This is the situation with most of the pieces from the Early Post Classic offered in the Sacred Cenote (Proskouriakoff, 1974:16), and regarding our subject of interest, the greenstone plaques, so abundant in collections recovered from the Cenote, for what we know, only four samples have been found in the Hidalgo site. The researchers who are presently working on these matters are favoring an intermediate solution, whereby the multiethnic aspects represented in the art and architecture of Chichén Itzá are interpreted as "[...] an example of cultural convergence, instead of an opposition between the elites of two ethnical groups [...]" (Wren and Schmidt, *ibid.*:201).

⁸ It would seem that the desecration of tombs and the plundering of offerings has been a common practice. N. Grube and L. Schele have worked on hieroglyphic texts inside Maya tombs that describe irruptions in sealed tomb in the search of relics (in Chase and Chase, 1996:77). A similar behavior has been noted among the Aztecs (Proskouriakoff, 1974:15).

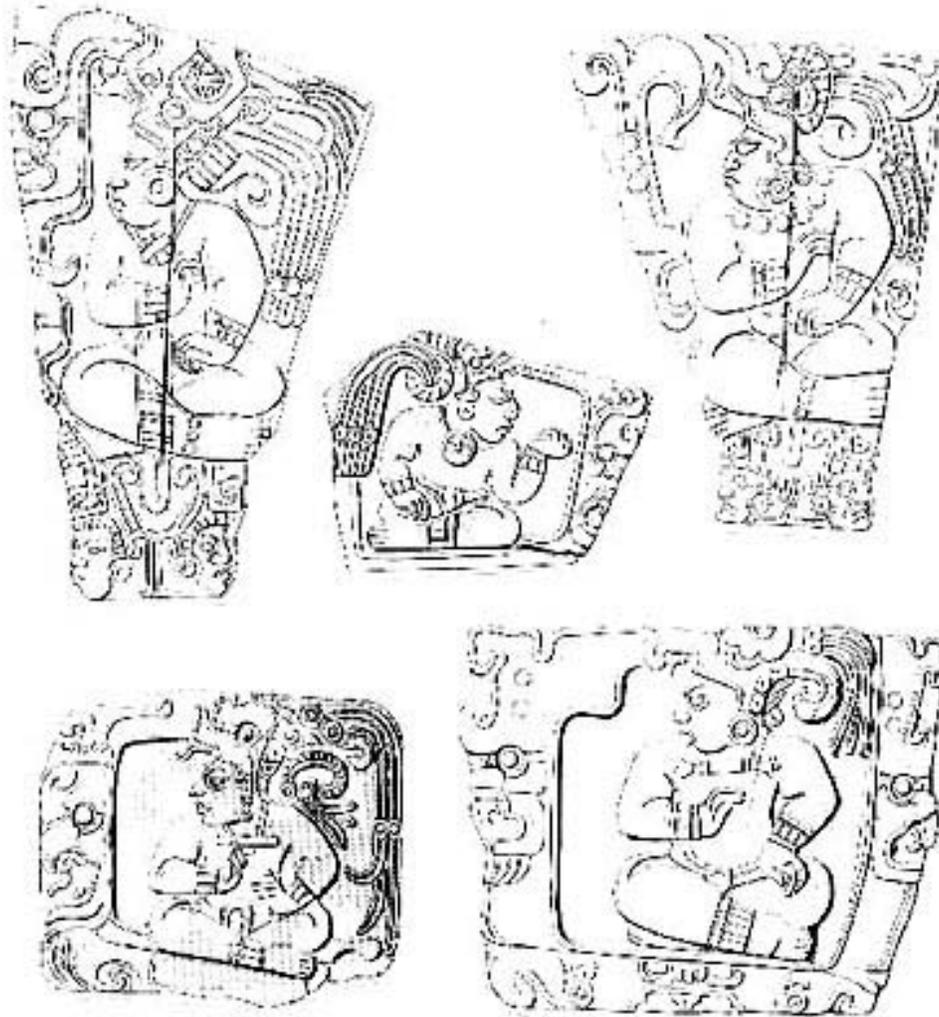


Figure 7. Taken from Proskouriakoff, 1974.

Clemency Chase Coggins suggests that the pieces were thrown down shortly after they were manufactured: "The simplest thing is to assume that all these foreign objects that were broken for their ritual consignment in the Cenote,⁹ were taken to Chichén Itzá during the Terminal Classic period when they were carved, rather than thinking that they were all relics, or that they were all plundered from tombs at a much later time" (1984:27).¹⁰

⁹ About the intentional damage that the pieces were subjected to before they were thrown down into the Cenote, McVicker and Palka suggested this was the result of a ritual act in which emblematic objects of some political order were "killed", for the establishment and justification of a new order (2001:194).

¹⁰ This is probably what happened, mostly because, as stated by Ringle, Gallareta and Bey, the limited variety of motifs among the abundant amount of pieces would be unlikely, should the objects had been plundered (1998:207, note 17). However, it should not be forgotten that the Cenote featured much older pieces contained in copal offerings from the Late Post Classic, and in this case Coggins accepts that "[...] apparently, they had been taken from tombs and offerings one millennium older [...]" (1984:27).

Coggins considers that the majority of the jade plaques were deposited during the Early Period I, around the IXth Century (1984:43, see also McVicker and Palka, 2001:184). Ringle, Gallaretta and Bey suggest that this could have started one century before, in face of the pieces of an identical type recovered in Epi-Classic contexts within the city of Chichén, in Monte Albán and Xochicalco (Ringle *et al.*, 1998:203).

During the explorations carried out in the Chac Mool Temple from Chichén Itzá, conducted by E. Morris, J. Charlot and A. Morris, from the Carnegie Institution, a stone box with a lid was found deposited as an offering on an altar. The container had remains of a shell necklace, jade, and a pendant with a carved face in the style already described, in addition to a turquoise mosaic (Morris *et al.*, 1931:186-188, figs. 119 and 121). A necklace, also found in a stone box that was placed at the foot of the inner stairway of El Castillo, presents similar characteristics (Erosa, 1939:241; Marquina, 1990 [1951]:854-855, photo 428; CCM/MEB, 1990:189, fig. 96; Ringle *et al.*, 1998:203, fig. 18; McVicker and Palka, 2001:184), this time by a "small deposit of human remains" (Erosa, *idem*). Again, the necklace was accompanied by two mosaics with coral, shell and turquoises, and a design of serpents in profile (Erosa, *ibid.*, figs. 6 and 7; Marquina, *ibid.*, photos 426 and 427). For the time being, it is difficult to assign both these contexts a definite temporality, but recent revisions of the site's chronology (Cohodas, 1989:227-238; Wren and Schmidt, 1991; Ringle *et al.*, 1998:183-184, 188-192) allow to assume that their disposition predated the Early Post Classic.¹¹

It is possible that the throwing of the greenstone plaques into the waters of the Sacred Cenote was contemporary to their manufacture, and that the offering ceremonies may be inserted in the ambit of their original significance (as proposed by Ringle *et al.*, *idem*); but contrary to Coggins (1984:70), we believe that their production was not exclusively designed for that purpose.

Contrary to Coggins' statements in support of the notion that the figures were destined, from the very beginning, to be thrown into the Cenote, simpler versions of these plaques are actually represented in sculptures and paintings worn by individuals as a part of their necklaces, chest protectors or belts, being this the reason why most of them have perforations, and showing, therefore, that they were in fact personal possessions and ornaments ([Figure 6](#) and [Figure 7](#); see also Acosta, 1955, illus. 2; Jiménez 1998, figs. 22 and 59; Mastache and Cobean, 2000, fig. 23; McVicker and Palka, 2001, figs. 10, 11 and 12c; see note 37).

¹¹ The substructure of El Castillo is an early building from the second architectural phase of the site, and the superstructure corresponds to the last part of the same phase. Based on C14 datings, Cohodas has placed both buildings by the Terminal Classic at the latest (1989:229; see also Ringle *et al.*, 1998: 191-192, Table 1). The Chac Mool Temple, one portion of which was destroyed when the Temple of the Warriors was built (Morris *et al.*, 1931:70), corresponds to the following architectural phase, well into the Late Classic (Cohodas, *idem*). Epigraphic and radiocarbon dates have also been obtained, linking the sites of Uxmal and Chichén Itzá towards the Terminal Classic. Interestingly, in the shrine located in front of the Governor's Palace in Uxmal, one of our plaques was recovered (Easby, 1961:72; Rands, 1965; CCM/MBE, 1990:190, fig. 100). Uxmal is also the place of origin of one of the tecali vessels that resembles the most the shape of the cylindrical vases supporting the tecali pedestal recorded in Tula (Acosta, 1956-57:100), Sabina Grande (Carrasco *et al.*; Carrasco, in preparation) (see below), and in the Cenote (Coggins, 1984:33). The Uxmal piece shows an engraved panel "in a Late-Terminal Classic (A.D. 800-900) Maya style" (Coggins, *idem*).

In the southern Maya lands these pieces were recovered in burial contexts. For instance, during the works carried out in Structure A34 at El Caracol, Belize, Diane and Arlen Chase explored a tomb where the remains of at least four individuals had been placed, together with some offerings (1996:66-78). This deposit had been accomplished in at least two episodes, reusing the grave. This situation partially disturbed the previous depositions, making it difficult to associate the objects and their owners, but the ceramic objects evidence a span of approximately one hundred years for the occurrence of these events during the Late Classic.

Of the four individuals, only one young adult had been dismembered and his remains possibly arranged in a mortuary bundle. Artifacts associated with this assemblage of bones include beads, earflares and other shell ornaments, obsidian blades, and one jadeite pendant like the ones we have mentioned here, of the type that shows only the face with the typical protruding eyes and mouth, earflares and the finish centered in the head, which in this case has been described as "[...] some kind of crown in his forehead which has been associated with the royal Maya authorities" (Chase and Chase, *ibid.*:70-71, fig. 9).

An additional example is represented by César Sáenz's finding in Palenque, mentioned above. In 1954, while excavation and consolidation works were being carried out in Temple XVIII, near the portico and under the stucco floor, three cists sealed with stone slabs were found. Among them, the denominated Tomb No. 2 contained a secondary burial together with over one hundred objects of jade (beads, pendants, fragments of a mosaic and two earflares), shell (beads and one piece with carved glyphs), flint (pendants), pearls, pyrite (thin flakes), obsidian and pottery (Sáenz, 1956:8-9). Among the objects, there is "[...] a jade plaque representing a "halach huinic" in a seated position [...]" in Sáenz's description, and he continues "[...] with a headdress formed by one circle with two crossing lines in the shape of an X, and two sorts of serpent heads, one at each side. He is wearing earflares and a necklace" (Sáenz, *ibid.*: 15 and *illus.* 20) ([Figure 3](#)). The material found near the dismembered individual could not be absolutely dated, but when the temple's portico was liberated, adhering to the outside wall and on both sides, "[...] two burial slabs with their corresponding Initial Series and a Long Count date [...]" were found, which read "[...] 9.12.6.5.8, 3 Lamat 6 Zac, year 678 of our Age in the B correlation, while in the A correlation it corresponds to the year 418" (*ibid.*:9). Like the Goodman-Martínez-Thompson correlation has proved to be the most accurate, Sáenz favors the dating for the A.D. 678, and when he further mentions this finding, he refers only to this latter one.

Coming back to the work on the objects found in the Sacred Cenote, Tatiana Proskouriakoff concludes that "[...] the overall geographical extension of this collection is difficult to establish. A small number of pieces may be ascribed to the Guatemalan highlands and to the Pacific Coast" (1974:x), and later she refers to their presence in Oaxaca: "There is a closely related Oaxacan style, in which much of the same technique has been used (Late Classic's). The ears, nose and mouth are represented with plain arcs, and in the larger pendants, the headdress consists of the central tuft from the Late Classic, and bands which sometimes are rolled over the earflares" (*ibid.*:14).

Coincidences with Oaxaca have also been noted by Clemency Coggins, who refers to a "Nebaj" style plaque included in the collection recovered at the Sacred Cenote, by saying: "In any way it may have arrived in here (from the southwestern Maya regions), similar events may probably have connected the Oaxacan center of Monte Albán with the region of the Usumacinta River, where it originated. A fragment of a "Nebaj" plaque such as this one was included in an offering from Monte Albán IIIB, with a jade variety comparable to those found in the Cenote (Caso 1965a, fig. 20)" (Coggins, 1984:70).

Oaxaca

Alfonso Caso had also noticed the link mentioned by Coggins, pointing to an apparent Maya influence of jade Maya carvings in Monte Albán IIIb, while additionally, a number of fragments directly imported from that region were found, included in offerings together with local pieces (Caso, 1965a:899).

As mentioned above, the pieces originated in Monte Albán attributed to periods IIIb, IIIb-IV and IV (Caso, *ibid.*:906-911; Paddock, 1966:157-160) ([Figure 4](#)) are abundant. In the chronological sequences of the site, those are precisely the more confusing periods in regard to their temporal delimitation and social characterization, as there are no true material distinctions between them (Flannery and Marcus, 1983:184; Paddock, 1983:187; Kowalewski, 1983:188; Scott, 1998:185). Ignacio Bernal considers that culturally they are "exactly the same", as both ceramics and architecture are identical, and the only trait that corresponds to the latter one is the destitution of Monte Albán as the major center in the Oaxaca Valley (Bernal, 1965:802, 804, 806-807). For this reason, the author came to the conclusion that there were not two, but one unique period with two subphases, and he attributed this continuity to the fact that notwithstanding the abandonment of the ceremonial center, the valley was still inhabited (Bernal, *ibid.*:804).

Recently, the archaeologist Marcus Winter produced a thorough analysis of the features that could be reliably attributed to each one of the intervals, in Monte Albán and other contemporary sites, corroborating that there are no grounds to differentiate the periods IIIb and IV. By acknowledging that only one designation was valid (IIIb) and based on radiocarbon dates and ceramic correlations, he suggested it began by the year A.D. 500 at the most, to culminate around A.D. 800 (these datings fluctuate specifically between the years A.D. 640 and 755); it was by then that the ancient Zapotecan city of Monte Albán was experiencing its peak. Winter also noted that there is no information supporting the idea that the occupation extended until the year A.D. 1000, as is usually stated (1989:127).¹²

¹² The next phase showing some certainties in the Central Valleys of Oaxaca, is Monte Albán V (A.D. 1250-1521), while there's a span of approximately five hundred years with very scarce information available (Winter, 1989:127-129). Considering the abandonment of Monte Albán prior to the year A.D. 1000, an approximate duration of 200 years would sequentially correspond to Period IV, at least in that city. To avoid the problem involved in the numeric designation of phases, the scholars actually working in Oaxaca have suggested a new terminology (see Winter 1998:158, fig. 1), whereby Monte Albán's peak is now denominated "Xoo Phase" (Winter, *ibid.*:158, 170-176).

Significantly, in the Central Valleys of Oaxaca the greenstone figures referred to in this report replace those with a strong Teotihuacán style, common during the Period IIIa (Caso, 1965a:903). Caso refers to this change as a rebirth or reanimation of jade carvings in Monte Albán, contemporary or slightly later to the rebirth of the Maya style in the Late Classic.

According to Caso's work, lots of these figurines were recovered from Offering 3 of the Jaguar Temple, and from the first and third offerings from Mound B. Except for one piece, this work makes no reference to an association with human burials, while the contextual characteristics were not thoroughly studied; also, their apparent absence inside the famous Zapotecan tombs is quite amazing. It is a pity that among the more elaborated samples known originated in Oaxaca, Caso illustrated just two of them: one from Guiengola, whose precise provenience is unknown, and the other one was recovered in Monte Albán's Mound B, of an uncertain temporality (Caso, *ibid.*:908, 910, figs. 26 and 27). About the last piece that features an individual with a glamorous headdress, Caso notes: "[...] it may be the representation of a man with the attributes of a feathered serpent (i.e. Quetzalcóatl) [...]" (*ibid.*:908).

Headdresses with serpent attributes are common among the more sophisticated plaques, like the one exhibited at the Völkerkunde Museum, in Vienna,¹³ and illustrated by Marcus Winter, who pointed out: "These adornments are portable and they were probably exchanged between groups from different regions, and that's why they have also been found in Xochicalco and Chichén Itzá. The place of manufacture has not yet been determined" (Winter, 1994:165).

Xochicalco

At the beginning of this text, we mentioned that the offerings recovered both from the Pyramid of the Feathered Serpents and Structure "C" shared a number of elements. This is what César Sáenz states: "In both explorations, we were able to obtain offerings, burials and data (ceramic) that relate both monuments because of the similarities existing between the objects found, some of which appeared for the first time in this area, therefore evidencing a contemporaneity between them" (1964:9); and he adds: "One of the aspects by which the offerings of these two monuments resemble the most, has to do with the jade plaques or pendants with representations of individuals wearing headdresses in the shape of serpent muzzles [...]" (*ibid.*:13).

¹³ One of these pieces, very probably of Zapotec manufacture, was found in San Jerónimo de Juárez, Guerrero (Von Winning and Stendahl, 1972, fig. 338; Hirth, 2000:203). The headdress of the individual features a feathered serpent in profile, with the face of a second individual, also in profile, emerging from the muzzles. We ignore exactly where it came from; and regarding its contextual association, we only know it was found inside a tecali tripod vessel, with two shells (Von Winning and Stendahl, *ibid.*, fig. 337). With these data, it is difficult to suggest a temporality, as in this area of coastal Guerrero, there was a seemingly continued occupation from Formative times to the Early Post Classic (Weitlaner, 1948:80-81). Towards the Classic, specifically, there are references about "Teotihuacanoid" and "Mayoid" objects, and later, about elements of the "Mazapa culture" and Plumbate ceramics (*ibid.*:83).

In these coincidences, he includes the architectural traits, which also seem to be similar (ibid.:10). In spite of this contemporaneity, the Pyramid of the Feathered Serpents underwent at least one extra architectural renovation, while Structure "C" was abandoned or merely survived with the same looks until both monuments were definitely abandoned.

Our introduction includes the descriptions of the jade figures Sáenz recovered in the Pyramid of the Feathered Serpents in addition to the associated materials, so the contents of the offerings will not be relisted at this time, though it is worth remembering that they are a part of the construction of the second architectural stage of that monument, which may be situated, through ceramic correlation, in Xochicalco's phase III (Centuries VII to X, our Age) (Sáenz, 1963b:7).

As to the findings in Structure "C", they took place when a test pit was opened along its entire width, and at the center of the building on the upper platform. When the stucco floor was broken and from the inside of a stone lined box, jade, shell and snail ornaments were recovered, together with "[...] a jade plaque or pendant representing an individual with a headdress in the shape of a serpent mouth and with his hands on his chest in a ritual attitude (Illus. VII, A); [and] a second jade plaque or pendant with an anthropomorphic representation and a headdress also in the shape of serpent muzzles (Illus. VII, B)" (Sáenz, 1964:12).

At the entrance of the building, between the two pillars that led to the vestibule, a burial was found, with stucco floors altered to allow the internment, together with an offering that according to Sáenz, may have been taken from a similar box that lay near the previous finding, and which was empty. This was a secondary burial, and was found together with a rich offering, again with jade and shell ornaments and three jade pieces described as follows: "[...] a large jade plaque or pendant with a *bas-relief* representing an individual with his arms on his chest, with a headdress in the shape of a serpent muzzle and two faces in profile, in the upper portion and at both sides of the headdress (Illus. VIII, A); an anthropomorphic jade pendant with a stylized headdress simulating an ophidian muzzle (Illus. VIII, b); an additional pendant, a small anthropomorphic jade head, with a highly stylized headdress imitating the mouth of a serpent (Illus. VIII, C) [...]" (ibid.:12-13).

The intrusion of the secondary burial was considered a late event by Sáenz. It is true that the arrangement took place after the construction of the building, but that does not necessarily mean this happened after the occupation, in particular, nor after the overall use of the ceremonial center. His suggestion regarding the removal of objects to be further integrated to a burial context is feasible, though both events may have taken place in the framework of the original significance of the monument.

In this report, Sáenz refers again to the similarities between the greenstone plaques and the pendant he found at Palenque, and concludes: "What has been said up to now evidences the contemporaneity between the building of the Pyramid of the Feathered Serpents and Structure "C", which may be considered as corresponding to the Late

Classic period. This also leads us to believe in a strong influence or occupation of peoples from Southern México, mainly from the Maya region" (ibid.:14).

Cerro de las Mesas

In 1941, the archaeologists Matthew Stirling and Philip Drucker, sponsored by the Smithsonian Institute and the National Geographic Society, carried out explorations at the site of Cerro de las Mesas, Veracruz. During the excavation of Trench 34, an offering was found with 800 jade pieces at the base of a mound from the Central Group (Drucker, 1943:11, 13-14). The offering included figures of varied proportions and attributes, such as carved plaques, perforating discs, beads, earflares, and several samples like those we have been repeatedly mentioning (cf. Drucker, 1955:figs. 31b, e, and 34a).

The pottery from the mound in front of which the offering was recovered (sherds from the fill and complete pieces from funeral offerings located in the building) has been studied by Drucker and assigned to the Lower Horizon II (approximately A.D. 750-1000). In the results published in 1943, he suggested that given its connection with the building, the offering itself could date from that time (1943:79-80; 1955:29), as it was not possible to provide an absolute dating. However, in 1952, Drucker himself initiated a study of jades that was published three years later by the Smithsonian, and this is what he said:

"[...] jade has proved to be not an easy material to study. Not only jade objects have been widely commerced in Mesoamerica, but also, and as it has been repeatedly demonstrated, some pieces were preserved for a long time—maybe as relics, or treasures, or even possibly as objects *d'art* [sic]—. Placing a jade piece in a timeframe is not the same as positioning a ceramic type or categorizing a distinctive trait; the only thing this may provide is a possible limit date. The Olmec jade figurines represent the best possible example one may find. Of course, these objects are easily recognizable, from a stylistic point of view. This evidence suggests that the period, or at least the main period of manufacture, took place during the Middle Pre-Classic in the Tres Zapotes–La Venta horizon [...]. However, a number of objects of this type are present in the offering from Cerro de las Mesas, presumably brought from the neighboring Olmec region, during a period considered on different basis as contemporary to Upper Tres Zapotes (A.D. 750-1000). Consequently, if these different assumptions are correct, the objects had been manufactured quite a long time before being buried under the steps at the front of the mound [...]. All by themselves, the data from Cerro de las Mesas may completely mislead us" (Drucker, 1955:30).

We have transcribed this extended quotation because of the perspicacity with which the author has approached the issue of a chronological determination, a problem other

scholars were also forced to address, like for instance those who studied the objects from the Sacred Cenote.

The mound with which the offering was associated is a referral of when the jades were not deposited (that is, prior to its edification), but the construction of the building and the deposition may not necessarily be a synchronic phenomena. Thus, as an early limit, we have the dates corresponding to the Lower Horizon II, which, as already seen, encompasses approximately the years between A.D. 750 and 1000.¹⁴ On the other hand, and considering that the pieces may have been offered to the mound during the last years of occupation or even after the mound was abandoned, we have like the latest limiting date, the years A.D. 1400 to 1450 approximately, after which no activity has been detected at the site (Drucker, 1943:81-87). This range generates more problems than it solves around the origin and meaning of the offering.

As a result of Drucker's comprehensive analysis (1943:13-14; 1955:29-67), elements of contrastable functionality, temporality and provenience were integrated, with no apparent order or association with human remains or remains of any other kind. No particular piece outstands among the others, and neither a pattern may be identified concerning their condition (there are new samples and others worn out by usage, complete and fragmented, with jewels or valuable ornaments as the most important pieces...). What we have here is a deposit where, from our point of view, elements that originally were a part of other contexts, wherefrom they were extracted to constitute a new, different one, were joined together. It would be only reasonable to think that in the process, the pieces lost their original meaning to assume a different one, whose sense remains absolutely elusive.

Because of the characteristics presented so far, we are favoring a later date for the deposit; besides, in the equivalent to the Drucker's Lower Horizon II, in other regions the pieces appeared arranged in primary contexts, like those from which, assumedly, some of the pieces included in the Cerro de las Mesas offering were plundered.¹⁵

Hidalgo and Querétaro

As a part of the ENAH's Mezquital Valley Project (*Proyecto Valle del Mezquital*), in the winter of 1998, miniextensive excavations were carried out at the site of Sabina Grande, in the town (*municipio*) of Huichapan, Hidalgo (Carrasco *et al.*, 2001). Here, there is a surface representation of the Corral, Terminal Corral and Tollán complexes (López and Fournier, 1992:16-42; Fournier, 1995), as designated by Robert Cobean for Tula

¹⁴ Jiménez Moreno considers that the Lower Horizon II for Cerro de las Mesas actually began around A.D. 300 to end approximately in A.D. 800 (1959:1027-1028).

¹⁵ It is possible that samples like the ones we are interested in do exist at the site, in their original context. In Drucker's ceramic analysis, several burials containing jade objects were mentioned, though they have not been described in detail (maybe Stirling did, in his general field season report, though we have not consulted with him). This would deserve an in-depth study, as some of the components in the offering may even have been removed from local deposits.

(1990), but during the excavation works a stratigraphic sequence was detected, which may be situated within the limits of the Terminal Corral complex (A.D. 900-950).

Terminal Corral is a transition between the phases related to Coyotlatelco and the primary occupation of Tula Grande. There, materials from both complexes, Corral (A.D. 800-900) and Tollán (A.D. 950-1150/1200) overlap: "[...] the main ceramic continuity between the occupations of the Coyotlatelco and Tollán spheres in Tula, is the temporal "overlap" of some well defined types from both spheres, rather than the existence of transitional types" (Cobean, 1990:502; see also Cobean and Mastache, 1989, Table 5.2; Healan *et al.*, 1989:243-244). Besides, at that time, the Mazapa Red-Undulating-Lines (*Mazapa de Líneas Rojas Ondulantes*) pottery appears as a diagnostic (Healan *et al.*, 1989:243; Cobean, 1990:267-280).

According to this, the stratigraphic description of Sabina Grande (Carrasco *et al.*, 2001:59-67) reports types found in a same layer, which after Cobean's classification, would initiate in Corral (i.e. Pastura, La Luz, Rito) other diagnostics of Terminal Corral (like Mazapa Undulating Lines and Hump, *Mazapa Líneas Ondulantes* y Joroba) and some others extensive to Tollán but appearing in Terminal Corral (i.e. Macana, Manuelito, Proa) (Cobean *et al.*, 1981:195; Cobean, 1990:301-303, 327, 333, 362, 364, 502). Besides this coexistence, an additional indicator that the sequence in general may be circumscribed to the borders of Terminal Corral, is the remarkable absence of the most common types from previous stages, and of the exclusively later types.¹⁶

A diagnostic ceramic type of the Tollán phase is Jara Orange Polished (*Jara Anaranjado Pulido*), whose presence in earlier phases is insignificant compared to its abundance around the final portion of Tollán (Cobean, 1990:345). In contrast, the author notes that Raised White (*Blanco Levantado*) which begins in Terminal Corral and extends to Tollán, decreases as Jara grows, and he even considered they "excluded one another" (*ibid.*:455). In the Sabina excavation, important amounts of Raised White were recovered, while in the preliminary ceramic analysis only two Jara sherds were reported (Carrasco *et al.*, 2001:59-67).

Additionally, there are no samples of Sillón Incised (*Sillón Inciso*) or Plumbate, a presence that would be expected in the context we shall now describe. Both types were located in the region at surface level, thus, we know that the inhabitants had access to them, being the latter one "[...] relatively common in sites from the Tollán phase in the region of Tula, outside the urban zone" (Crespo and Mastache, 1977, in Cobean, 1990:483).

¹⁶ Another chronological indicator is the spindle whorls—or *malacates*, or *torteros*—with molded decoration and coated with asphalt (*chapopote*). These objects are from the Huasteca and the Southern Veracruz regions, and are considered as diagnostic of the Middle and Late Classic periods (Drucker, 1943:66, 76; Thompson 1953:453; Hall, 1997:129-130).



Figure 8. Carrasco *et al.*, 2001.

In the main offering context from the Sabina excavation, and as a part of a secondary burial, a series of manufactured objects of shell, jade, *tecali*,¹⁷ silex, obsidian and a few mosaic components, presumably turquoise, were found. There was also a greenstone pendant with a carved face, of the type we are dealing with here (Carrasco *et al.*, 2001:61, 68-70, 72, 73) ([Figure 8](#)).

The isolated presence of this object in the region may have been interpreted as an anomaly, and its obtention, the product of an unusual long distance exchange, had it not been for the remaining objects that were also there and the similar context found a few years before in San Juan del Río, Querétaro, which we shall address in short.¹⁸

Among the ornaments recovered in Sabina Grande, the most remarkable ones are the *tecali* vessel,¹⁹ two earflares and several objects in carved greenstone, an obsidian razor and knife, and several silex points (Mario Carrasco, in preparation); carved shell

¹⁷ In pre-hispanic societies, the *tecali* must have been considered as a luxury object, due to its scarcity, its fragility and the difficulties it poses at the time of working it. We ignore whether the material had any metaphoric meaning, as was the case with jade. About its origins, Coggins states: "The *tecali* is a calcite stone from the Puebla mountains and Northern Oaxaca" (1984:54), and Acosta, in turn, says: "They possibly come from the region of Veracruz, which was one of the major centers for the production of objects made with that material" (1956-57:101). *Tecali* vessels have been recovered in remote places, like Culiacán (Kelly 1941:200), the Sierra Gorda in Querétaro (Querétaro Regional Museum), Tula (Acosta, 1956-57:100-101; Castillo, 1970 in Diehl and Stroh, 1978:74-75, fig. 1, Diehl, 1983:101; and Paredes, 1990:188), Monte Albán, Chichén Itzá, Uxmal (Coggins, 1984:33, 54) and Tikal (Sáenz, 1963a:21). Some vessels with fresco painting appear in places like Xochicalco (Sáenz, 1963a:13, 21, illus. III) and again in the Cenote, where the piece is compared with some from Oaxaca (Coggins, 1984:54).

¹⁸ Raúl García Chavez, in a personal communication (2001) has informed us of a similar finding in the vicinities of Tecamac, State of México. He referred to a burial with a jade plaque of the same style mentioned before, shells and ceramic vessels. Raúl García identified among the materials from Sabina Grande, the same ceramic types of the context he excavated.

¹⁹ In Tula, Acosta considers that the *tecali* pieces were "objects in fashion during the Toltec occupation", but he accepts that: "Unfortunately, the few fragments found so far lack any chronological value" (1956-57:100). Some samples recovered during the works of the Actopan-Tula highway containing burnt human remains, have the same shape as the object from Sabina: "[...] a simple cylindrical vase with a circular support, made of alabaster, yellowish-white in color and with a rather poor polish [...]" (idem). From the Sacred Cenote, Coggins (1984:33) illustrates a vessel with an identical shape, and in this sense he considers it equals another one found in Uxmal, which also features an engraved panel "in the Late-Terminal Classic (A.D. 800-900) Maya style" (idem).

beads and plaques, a surface recovered hoop of a bivalve, and spirals carved on snails (Mónica Jiménez, in preparation).

In turn, during the salvage excavations carried out in 1991 in Barrio de la Cruz, San Juan del Río, and Querétaro, Ana María Crespo and Juan Carlos Saint-Charles explored a number of extremely interesting burials and offerings (Crespo and Saint-Charles, 1991). This is what they said about Burial 3:

"This is the direct interment of an adult individual accompanied by three infant skeletons, two of which are complete, though mutilated, and one cranium. [...] In front of the adult skull lay the three infant craniums in a North-South alignment with the frontal part to the East. Several long child bones appear to be delimiting the remains of a central character. They are accompanied by the skeleton of a beheaded mammal, possibly a dog [...]. Under the skull of the adult individual, a tubular greenstone bead (1.5 cm)—jadeite—and one fragment of a prismatic obsidian blade were found; around this cranium, some 300 small beads of shell and greenstone were recovered, which were a part of a necklace that terminated in a plaque also made of greenstone. This plaque, measuring 5 cm, shows in one of the faces an individual looking front, in *bas-relief*, in the Mixtec style" (Crespo and Saint-Charles, 1996:130, fig. 10; see also Saint-Charles, 1991a:7-8, 11; Crespo and Saint-Charles, 1991 n/p) ([Figure 9](#)).

The context was found during the excavation of a trench in one of the plazas located west of Cerro de la Cruz, whose construction, based on C14 samples, has been dated between the years A.D. 650 and 750, approximately (*idem*). Unfortunately, Burial 3 seems to have been an intrusive event, and therefore the time frame is uncertain, although it may be slightly or considerably later than the dates mentioned. In any case, it is our belief that they wouldn't be too distant from them, as the burial contained vessels that in different contexts from the same site (i.e. UEG) appear associated with pieces which for the most part "[...] are remarkably similar to Epi-Classic ceramics [...]" both from Central México and the Bajío (Crespo and Saint-Charles, 1996:137). In addition, Burial 3 included a piece of the type known as Xajay Red Postfire Incised (*Rojo Inciso Postcocción Xajay*), with a chronological situation that has been controversial since it was first identified on the surface by Enrique Nalda in the area of San Juan del Río (1975:95-98).



Figure 9. Taken from Crespo and Saint-Charles, 1996.

However, even if it is possible that this incised pottery had a vast temporal extension, at least at a certain time it was consistent with ceramic types found in other regions through the Epi-Classic. For example, the report of the extensive excavation carried out at El Zethé, Hidalgo, refers to the consistency of Xajay sherds with Cañones Red/Brown (*Cañones Rojo/Café*) (Morett *et al.*, 1994:93); this type corresponds to the Coyotlatelco Sphere from the area of Tula, mainly within the Corral phase (A.D. 800-900) (Cobean, 1990:238-244).²⁰ During these explorings, a tomb containing several burials and ceramic vessels was found, including one sample of Xajay Red Postfire Incised (*Rojo Inciso Postcocción Xajay*). The context was associated with the construction of a platform dated, by means of Carbon 14, for the period comprised by the years A.D. 777 and 997 (Morett *et al.*, 1994:93, 115).

While the plaque recovered at Sabina Grande reproduced nothing but the face of the individual, the one recovered in the Barrio de la Cruz is complete and shows the hands on the chest. None of them features headdresses with reptile attributes, but regarding the plaque from Sabina, and as a part of the same offering, a number of cut shells that integrated a string were recovered (Carrasco *et al.*, 2001:72), which, again, portrayed the same individual, but this time with serpent heads in profile on both sides.

²⁰ During the excavations for a drainage in Barrio de la Cruz, a rich offering was exposed and further delivered to the INAH. The vessels from this offering have been studied by Juan Carlos Saint-Charles, and in his view, they are the result of two separate events. The author also considers that the Xajay Red Postfire Incised (*Rojo Inciso Postcocción Xajay*) and Cañones Bay/Red (*Cañones Rojo/Bayo*) are a part of a same event (1998:341).

In spite of their proximity and contemporaneity, at least at one particular moment, the sites of Sabina Grande and Barrio de la Cruz may be considered a part of different social systems. The architectural and settlement patterns differ greatly, and so far, the situation seems to be the same regarding most wares (it is very important to outline that they do share ceramic types, although these are but a few). Thus, the coincidences in the quality of the objects included in the offerings recovered from both sites, would insinuate that they were a part of an identical ideological "equipment" which for now does not seem to indicate an everyday contact.

In the first report about the finding of the figure from Querétaro, Crespo and Saint-Charles refer to Aveleyra's report on serpentine plaques with similar motifs in burials from Apatzingán, Michoacán,²¹ and they further state: "The representation of the individual resembles the one observed in a plaque from Tula, Hidalgo, as part of the offerings placed inside stone containers in the altars of the ceremonial rooms that Acosta has explored" (Crespo and Saint-Charles 1991, n/p).

Tula

Between the seventh and tenth season of archaeological works in Tula, Hidalgo, under the direction of Jorge Acosta, the explorations concentrated around Rooms 1 and 2 from Building 3 or Burnt Palace. Both rooms had socles running along the interior walls, and in Room 2 they were covered with wonderful reliefs representing a procession. Attached to the socles, there were altars in both rooms, and two of them contained the offerings we are referring to (Acosta, 1954:95-106, 112-114; 1955:146-154, 167-168; 1956-57:100). In the South Altar of the first room, the following has been recovered:

"[...] an extremely important offering that was spotted at a depth of 25 cm, consisting of a cylindrical lidded limestone vessel, painted in red. Inside, there was a jade plaque together with 18 shell beads (Illus. 45 and 46). The lid, which still keeps a good amount of red paint, presents perforations for its use as a pendant (Illus. 47). It is dark green in color, and a human figure occupying the entire surface of one of the faces has been magnificently carved on it. [...] The individual is in a front position and standing, with his left hand on his chest, he wears circular earflares and as headdress, a large tuft of feathers that fall on both sides" (Acosta, 1954:104) ([Figure 10a](#), shown below).

²¹ The authors refer to the acquisitions catalog of the National Museum summarized by Aveleyra in 1964. Among the materials from the West, there is a necklace made of "marine shells with inserted little serpentine plaques" exhibiting as the primary ornament a plaque with the image of an individual, actually in the style we are referring to. According to his introduction to this section, Aveleyra believes that the necklace is Tarascan, though he provides absolutely no other information about contexts or time frame, or about who made the finding and when. It is possible that the piece was a product of looting, as is the case with a large portion of the objects that were acquired (bought) by the Museum to enhance the collections at the beginning of the 1960s (Jiménez Betts, personal communication 2001). The occupation in Apatzingán began at least at the same time as Teotihuacán III (Kelly, 1948:67-70), so that the time frame of the jade plaque from this place is not necessarily late. There is another sample presumably from Michoacán (presently at the Brooklyn Museum), but, again, it was the product of looting and there is no available information about it (McVicker and Palka, 2001:184-185, notes 9 and 10).



Figure 10. Taken from Acosta, 1956-57.

Regarding the altar where these objects were found, Acosta notes it is a superposition, as it was built on top of the general floor of the room and from the surrounding socle (ibid.:106). The situation of the East Altar in Room 2 is the same:

"[...] 0.20 cm deep, a cylindrical, lidded stone vessel was found, also painted in red. [...] once unlidded, we saw it contained a wonderful jade plaque, two shells, and 16 small beads of the same material (illus. 27). The plaque was used, almost for sure, as a pectoral, in view of its two lateral perforations. On one of its faces, a beautiful human figure, in frontal position, had been sculpted (illus. 28). The hair had been tied over the forehead with a circular ornament and fell in curls on both sides. The individual was wearing circular earflares, and a necklace made of spheric beads hung from his chest. His hands were on his thorax, and held a circular object seen in another sculpture from Tula [...]" (Acosta, 1955:152-153) ([Figure 10b](#)).

In this work, the author presents a comparative illustration that shows the figurine we have just described, the Toltec sculpture with which he finds similarities, the plaque Sánchez recovered in Palenque, and three samples of pieces originated in Monte

Albán; we may include a plaque from Guerrero, exhibited at the National Museum, which features the same characteristics.²² The arms are lifted in the position frequently observed in other figures, at the chest level, and with the palms of the hands facing each other, representing maybe the same attitude, although now the hands are holding an object whose meaning or functionality is unknown.²³

We know of three other plaques in the same style originated in Tula; two of them are made of jade, while the third one is shell. The first is presently exhibited in the Toltec Hall from the National Museum, but there are no details indicating contextualization. The second one was recovered during the explorations in the locality of El Canal, accomplished by the Missouri Project (Diehl, 1983, fig. 51), but besides the image and the general provenience, no other information is provided. Finally, several other authors have illustrated or referred to a shell fragment carved in the Late Classic Maya style found by Désiré Charnay in Tula in the late XIXth century, presently exhibited in the Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago (Easby, 1961:72; Thompson 1973:217; Schele and Miller, 1986:78, 89, fig. 5; Paredes, 1990:13-14; McVicker and Palka, 2001). For a long time, it was thought to be abalone shell, whose origin is restricted to the north of the Pacific Ocean and the Gulf of California (see Schele and Miller, *idem*); however, a recent study suggested that it actually corresponded to the species *Pinctada mazatlanica*, circumscribed as well to the Pacific, but with a wide distribution that extends from the Gulf of California to Peru (McVicker and Palka, 2001:179). It has been considered that the piece was carved at least twice, and finally exported to Tula (Schele and Miller, *idem*; McVicker and Palka, *ibid.*:179, 182). Unfortunately there is no context information, as in addition to being a one-of-a-kind piece, it presents an interesting phenomena: even though the composition, the position and part of the individual's garments are undoubtedly of a Maya style, this is not what happens with the phenotype (McVicker and Palka, 2001:182) which seems to be closer to the Toltec representations.²⁴ In addition, the character is wearing Q type earflares and a nose ring bar, ornaments that are absent in the Maya plaques known so far, but which are present, and frequently, in the sculptural representations from Tula (Jiménez, 1998) and

²² Eduardo Noguera describes a sculpture from Xochicalco exhibited at the National Museum, which shows similarities with the Toltec monolith: "[...] a standing individual holding a perforated disc in his hands." However, this time, "The head appears inside the serpent's mouth and features large earflares," as is the case with the images of the jade plaques. Noguera concludes: "This deity has been identified as Chalchiuhtlicue" (1960:61). Karl Taube illustrates another sculpture from the Late Classic originated in Puebla, again with a serpent headdress and holding a similar object (2000b:318, fig. 10.27c).

²³ About the circular element, Acosta notes: "[...] it has been temporarily identified as a magic mirror, those that priests used for their prophecies" (1955:167). Also in Room 2 of the Burnt Palace, several pyrite mirrors have been recovered (Mastache and Cobean, 2000:121). Karl Taube shows two Teotihuacán-style figurines recovered by Joseph Ball in Becán that were a part of an offering, and that again were holding a circular object in their hands, which he also identifies as a mirror (Taube, 1992:179-180, fig. 10). In a different work, this author referred that this was a relatively common sculptural subject in Mesoamerica throughout the Late Classic (Taube, 2000b:317). The pendant that the individual is wearing in the shell plaque we shall now refer to, has also been interpreted as a mirror (McVicker and Palka, 2001:182).

²⁴ McVicker and Palka have carried out a thorough study of this piece (2001). By comparing it with others with similar raw materials and manufacture, the authors find a number of similarities with a bivalve on which the figure of a seated individual was carved, originated in Panaba, in the northeastern edge of the Yucatán peninsula (*ibid.*:179). Although the style greatly resembles the sample from Tula, the authors underline that the facial traits from the Panaba plaque are more Maya "classics", and tentatively place it in the Late/Terminal Classic. They also emphasize the similarity between this latter representation and the scene carved in a tecali vessel, recovered together with a figurative jade in an offering from Uxmal (*idem*).

occasionally in sculptures or mural paintings from Maya sites like Seibal, Chichén Itzá and Halal, or sites from Central México, like Cacaxtla, during the Terminal Classic (McVicker and Palka, *idem*, fig. 12). To McVicker and Palka, the similarities between these iconographic motifs and the shell ornament are an indicator of contemporaneity (*ibid.*:183).

One may think that the plaque was carved in Tula imitating the Maya style, perhaps using as a referral an original jade plaque from that region,²⁵ but then it would be strange that the objects display a series of Maya glyphs on one of its faces, which by no means is a feature extensive to the Central Plateau. Those who have studied this object state that the front and rear carving of the piece took place in different episodes, and that the inscription was damaged when the individual was represented (Schele and Miller 1986:78; McVicker and Palka, 2001:181). Could this have something to do with the non-Mayan traits of the central image? This is what McVicker and Palka say: "In case this was a talisman owned by foreigners who were not familiar with the Maya texts, the inscription in itself may have been of little importance" (*idem*). If in fact the piece was a Maya export, perhaps its destination was already anticipated when the second carving was completed. This may provide some information on its time of arrival to the Toltec capital, as the integration of allochthonous traits (frequently from Central México) and their arrangement within a composition of local rootings is a phenomenon common in the Maya lowlands since the Epi-Classic (Wren and Schmidt, 1991; McVicker and Palka, 2001:194). We believe that one of the plausible candidates for the manufacture is Chichén Itzá, a site with which Tula was intimately related.

In fact, the elements for reliably "dating" the presence in Tula of any of these jade plaques are inexistent. It has been said that the occupation of El Canal corresponds to the Tollán phase (Diehl, 1983:91; Healan, 1989:163; Healan *et al.*, 1989:244; Paredes, 1990:85), but our lack of knowledge on the precise provenience and context in which this jade piece was found, is an obstacle to reflect on its presence in that place.

There is some more information concerning the figures from the Burnt Palace, but the assignation of a time frame seems difficult, as no associated ceramic materials have been recovered. As to the building, a number of ceramic elements collected during the excavations conducted by Acosta would suggest a late temporality (1945, in Paredes, 1990:122). In fact, the building was used during the Tollán phase, but it is possible that the construction dates back at least to the Terminal Corral phase (within the Ancient Period in the sequence defined by Acosta), due to the presence of the Coyotlatelco and Mazapa Undulating Lines (*Mazapa Líneas Ondulantes*) types (Paredes, 1990:60, 122; Gómez *et al.*, 1994:17). It has been proposed that construction works at Tula Grande began during the Coyotlatelco age, when the ceremonial center of Tula Chico was still in use, and that the monumental sector of the Tollán phase was built on top of that first construction (Mastache and Cobean 2000:101). Regarding the Burnt Palace, Robert

²⁵ It must be outlined that none of the known jade plaques from Tula seems to have been imported from the Maya Area. In the illustrations included here, the pieces from this latter region may be compared with the ones found by Acosta. The figure from the National Museum has greater similarities with the Zapotecan ones, and the one from El Canal is fragmented and its strokes look rather simple, making it difficult to establish a connection with the regional variants of this style.

Cobean and Elba Estrada referred to a number of offerings located at the centre of the building, as deposits made between the years A.D. 900 and 1000 (1994:77).

As to the finding of the jade plaques, the apparent late placement of the compound caught the attention of Acosta himself, as he had information on the objects from Oaxaca and Palenque:

"[...] the fact that representations resembling those from Tula are present in Monte Albán, should not be surprising, as the latest phases from this large city already correspond to the Historic Period, and therefore, are contemporary to the Toltec Horizon. [...] But the Palenque sample corresponding to the Classic Period, that is, prior to Tula, is disconcerting" (Acosta, 1955:167) (as mentioned before, the findings from both places have been dated around the Epi-Classic).

The presence of these plaques at the Burnt Palace is a phenomenon that may be interpreted at least in three different ways, and the first two do not respond to our chronological proposition:

1. If these pieces and the one from El Canal had been found in primary contexts corresponding to the Tollán phase (and provided the time frame suggested for this phase is correct), the force of the phenomenon we have described would be larger than the one initially proposed, while its latest examples would be found in the ancient Toltec capital. Needless to say, the implications would be much larger; including that the pattern observed for the arrangement of pieces in contexts from neighboring sites has not been preserved.
2. One may think that the pieces were there for circumstances similar to those from Cerro de las Mesas, that is, long after they were manufactured and with a different functionality and symbolism than the original ones. Thus, the pieces may have been taken from earlier contexts of the same site (Tula Chico, for instance) and kept as relics, or either, considering the close relationship existing with the Toltecs that apparently inhabited the Yucatecan peninsula during the Early Post Classic, they may have been imported from the south, towards the decline of the Tollán phase.²⁶
3. The more probable alternative, we believe, is that the figures were deposited sometime during the tenth century or maybe earlier, as was the case with similar jade plaques in nearby sites (Sabina Grande and Barrio de la Cruz, for instance),

²⁶ Although less feasible, the possibility that the pieces were taken to the site during the Late Post Classic by Mexica groups must be considered. Intrusive contexts with Aztec materials (including ceramic IV) have frequently been recorded in the Tula Grande buildings (1954:86; 1955:136, 145, 147, 164) and similar offerings in stone boxes were recovered at the Templo Mayor, according to the information provided for one of the jade plaques exhibited in the museum in this latter site. However, as seen in Acosta's reports, there is no doubt that the rubble which covered the Burnt Palace (resulting from the collapse of the roof originated by the fire and collapse of the building, was used as refill for a Mexica platform, and in this case, at least the East Altar of Room 2 should have remained totally sealed).

and as also happened with other offerings from the Burnt Palace, situated between the years A.D. 900 and 1000 (Cobean and Estrada, 1994:77), close to the moment when presumably, the shell plaque was obtained. In this case, the singularities in the integration of contexts in Tula may be a consequence of the emulation of depositional patterns from other regions, considering specifically the contexts already mentioned from the Chac Mool Temple and the substructure of El Castillo, in Chichén Itzá. It is of interest to note the great similarity existing in the arrangement of the objects found by Acosta and these two offerings: in the four contexts jade plaques were found as a part of shell necklaces inside stone lidded containers of identical shapes and very similar dimensions, in three cases the pieces had been deposited in an altar, and in all four cases in relation with buildings that exhibited Chac Mool type sculptures (Erosa, 1939:244; Acosta, 1955:147-151, 164-167; Marquina, 1990 [1951]: 853, 855, photo 422). The Toltec boxes did not contain turquoise mosaics, but in the same Room 2 of the Burnt Palace one of them was recovered by Acosta (1957, in Mastache and Cobean 2000:121), and yet another one was recovered years later (Mastache and Cobean, idem), with the serpent design observed in two of the Chichén discs. The homologies between these deposits represent additional singularities shared by Chichén Itzá and Tula: "No doubt, people in these two areas maintained a direct contact, and there is clear evidence on the dispersion of a highly structured politico-religious ideology " (Sanders, 1989:216). The main obstacle to address the nature of the relationships between both these sites lies, as mentioned by Peter Schmidt (1999:444) in the fact that in both of them there are, still, major details concerning the absolute and relative chronologies that need to be solved.

Similarities and Differences Between the Contexts

In addition to the similarities between the materials that accompany these jade plaques, there are other similarities worth mentioning. One of them is precisely the association with secondary or primary human burials, or the absence of them, although there are cases like Xochicalco where both phenomena have been observed.

Absence of Bone Remains

In the Veracruz site, materials of variable temporalities often representing extended periods of time, are found together; the arrangement of pieces does not evidence any pre-established order, and all kind of objects and ornaments mingle, and therefore, they have been interpreted as relics. This issue has already been noted, and we have also delved deeply in regard to Chichén Itzá and Tula, so the only places open for discussion are Xochicalco and Oaxaca. The sites from Morelos and Monte Albán pose a particular set of problems, in the first case because we know that there, figurines with and without associated human remains have been found. It is possible that the situation in the

second site was the same, but we ignore the characteristics of the contexts and the precise provenience of the majority of the greenstone plaques from the Oaxaca region. Even though from Caso's descriptions it seems to be almost implicit that the offerings are exclusively artifactual, the author has mentioned only three samples; thus, the fact that we have not heard of any cases where human remains were involved does not rule out the possibility that they in fact existed. For the time being, little can we add in this respect. Perhaps we should wait until primary and burial contexts, such as those we have described, are discovered in sites from the Central Valleys which during the Epi-Classic were at their peak, and not precisely in the Zapotec capital from the preceding period.

Associated Human Remains

Provided a burial is actually found, one distinction would be relevant. This may happen to be the burial of an individual, in whose honor the pieces were deposited (probably his belongings, like Proskouriakoff points out), or on the contrary, the bone remains may have been aggregated to the objects offered. This important distinction is hard to establish.

The answer doesn't seem to lie in the position of the bones, as the arrangement of a secondary burial does not necessarily represent human sacrifice, but it can be motivated by an ideological pattern of *post mortem* treatment of the corpse as a part of the burial ritual.²⁷ In single interments, the secondary burials seem to be a frequent case in Oaxaca, as expressed by Alfonso Caso in a summary on Zapotecan burial patterns (Caso, 1933:645). There he notes: "[...] in some collective tombs, primary and secondary burials coexist, but in this case, the secondary is the richest and most important one" (idem). In turn, Chase and Chase specify that primary burials do not represent the prevailing burial practice in El Caracol, and they add that the same situation had been reported by Diego de Landa (1996:76-77).

On the other hand, the relationship between the bone remains and the architectural features suggests that the individual was sacrificed as a part of an architectural renovation, but at least for what is known from the Late Post Classic and through historical accounts, such was not always the case. Some individuals were buried, according to their status, in buildings with which they somehow had been related during their lifetime (López de Gómara, 1985:122, 302);²⁸ much before that, the alteration of

²⁷ Mary Helms describes the abandonment of corpses in the open as a common practice in the chiefdomships of Panama. After wild animals cleaned the bones, the remains were recovered and duly buried with the corresponding offerings (Helms 1979:17, 186, note 16). In turn, when analyzing the marks in the bone remains recovered at the Hall of Columns, La Quemada, Faulhaber (1960, in Darling, 1998:387) concludes that they were secondary burials, where the cleaning of bones had taken place long after the decomposing process had begun, and following a first interment episode. Nelson *et al.*, (1998, in Darling, idem) concur with this interpretation, and they add that a number of structures, tombs and premises where such processes of multiple bone manipulation took place, may have been used to house the remains of venerated ancestors before their final burial.

²⁸ "Countless temples are in México, in every parish and neighborhood, with towers, with chapels and altars, where the idols and images of their gods are present, that serve as tombs to the lords that own them, while all others are buried in the surrounding grounds and patios." (López de Gómara, 1985:122).

floors, walls and steps with the purpose of depositing burials might have been the consequence of a similar habit.

Both aspects (the treatment of the corpse and its relationship with the architectural structures) may be the result of regional traditions and the aggregate of local traits, so that the universe now at hand is limited. If contexts are separately analyzed, great divergences will come up. In the cases of Palenque and Xochicalco, Sáenz notes the advanced state of deterioration in which the bones were found. Not only the anatomical relation between them was no longer discernible, but apparently some limbs were missing, probably suggesting that they had been removed from elsewhere before being deposited in the structures, although this is only an assumption. At El Caracol, whether the dismembering was ritual, or it was during the desecration that the bones were withdrawn from their original matrix and crammed together with the offerings at the bottom of the chamber, is uncertain. Barrio de la Cruz has shown, as a part of one and the same depositional event, one complete individual and three mutilated infants (in addition to a mammal).

Therefore, the analysis of the relationship that may have existed between the materials and the individuals could provide some clue. Almost as a rule, whenever human remains exist, the objects seem to be complemented with garments. It is true that other separate objects such as strings, pendants or earflares are also found, but in some cases, the ornaments were found right in the place they would have occupied should they have been exhibited by the owners (this has been specified for Burial 3 in San Juan del Río and for the Sabina context); regarding earflares, only two have been recovered (as is the case in Palenque's Tomb 2, Burial 2 from Xochicalco, again in Sabina Grande and presumably in El Caracol, as opposed for example to Cerro de las Mesas, where dozens of them were recovered, or Tula and Chichén, where they were not present).

Garments and Ritual Paraphernalia

If it is true that the deceased were buried with their belongings, it is possible that during their lifetime they were the representatives of some religion and that the greenstone plaques were an insignia of that status. When referring to the ones he found, Jorge Acosta notes that they are all images of priests, because they are not carrying weapons (1954:113; 1956-57:100). In fact, it is not possible to tell for sure if there were any "weapons" in the archaeological contexts described, moreover if they were made of perishable materials, but in iconographic contexts where we believe the jade figurines were represented while being used, those who are wearing them do not carry weapons but on the contrary, are showing a ceremonial attitude (see [Figure 6](#) and [Figure 7](#); see also McVicker and Palka 2001, fig. 10 (Late Classic polychrome Maya vessel) and fig.

11 [engraved panel from Bonampak, Late Classic]).²⁹ Besides, they are often wearing headdresses with serpentine attributes, which in turn are seen in sculptures and mural paintings mostly in representations of priests or rulers.³⁰

It has been often stated that the religious and political functions in several pre-hispanic societies were the responsibility of just one person (Jiménez Moreno, 1959:1057, 1064; Millon 1988a:205; Florescano, 1995:17-18) or group of persons (Earle, 1990:76. To this author, this is an indication of complex chiefdomships). In fact, establishing an overall rule to explain the character of all individuals meant to wear the plaques (or either the ophidian headdresses) is not possible. This is because the pre-hispanic ruling system was heterogeneous in nature, maybe as a consequence of the level of complexity and degree of hierarchism achieved by each society. But this is due also to the fact that the traits chosen to represent the image of prominent individuals are consistent, not only with the political situation of the era, but mainly with the type of proselytizing message they attempted to convey, and therefore sometimes the warrior attributes were highlighted, while in other cases the priestly qualities were emphasized. As said, it is in this latter category that the use of most of these jade figures has been integrated.³¹

Regarding Teotihuacán, Linda Manzanilla suggests that: "[...] the Teotihuacán government lay in the hands of priests, who not only organized the state and the local religion, but also watched over economic circuits of different kinds" (1995:167-168). Monte Albán seems to feature a similar case.

As previously stated, we are concerned for our lack of knowledge regarding the finding of these greenstone figures in the burial contexts of Monte Albán. We are concerned because it is precisely in this city where we think we have found a good example of its

²⁹ McVicker and Palka consider that the jade plaques were not designed to be used as a part of an outfit, as cases where individuals are shown exhibiting them are not known (2001:190). We disagree, as in fact there are examples where these figures are present in necklaces, belts or chest protectors being worn by persons, in sculptures (stelae, mainly), paintings and in the plaques themselves, whenever the images are richly elaborated. The authors claim that they have not been recovered in tombs and that they were not associated with particular individuals in the burials (ibid.:192), something that, in our view, did happen in a number of cases we have described above. The fact that some of these pieces were deposited in votive offerings does not exclude the other possibility.

³⁰ Serpent headdresses are often associated with images carrying incense bags, which is considered a priestly attribute (Rands, 1955:286, 288; Coggins, 1980:62; Von Winning, 1987:1:79; Millon, 1988a; Manzanilla, 1995:163; Taube, 2000a:15). In mural paintings from Teotihuacán, the characters wearing such headdresses frequently carry "pulque irrigating" bowls (Rivas, 1993), bags (probably containing copal), usually a stream of water or blood emanates from their hands, and a virgule comes out of their mouths displaying marine and "precious" elements (such as shell and chalchihuites, or trinkets) (Millon, 1988a:196). In the reliefs of the Pyramid of the Feathered Serpents in Xochicalco, the individuals that alternate with the serpent undulations represent "[...] several human figures seated in the oriental fashion: for a headdress, they wear a serpent head and long feathers turned downwards [...]. Some of these characters exhibit the word *virgula*, and because of their venerable gesture and attitude they are probably priests, although they have also been identified as great lords or chiefs. They wear five large beads on their necks, wide earflares hang from their ears [...]" (Noguera, 1960:45). In Oaxaca, the frescos in Tomb 104 show several individuals, and one of them greatly resembles the ones that appear in the Teotihuacán murals, with a serpentine headdress of the type that features an elongated muzzle turned upwards. In one hand he carries a bag, while the other is extended front (Caso and Marcus' interpretations regarding the figures in these frescos are the same as those concerning the urns, see below) (Caso, 1965b:867, fig. 28; Marcus, 1983a:137, 140, fig. 5.9). The urn decorating the façade in Tomb 104 presents identical features (Caso, 1965b:867; Caso and Bernal, 1952:52, fig. 72).

³¹ The only exceptions of individuals carrying jade plaques and weapons that we know of, are those found in column 10W of the Temple of the Warriors, in Chichén Itzá (in McVicker and Palka, 2001, fig. 12c), and in two sculptures from Tula (Acosta, 1955, illus. 2; Jiménez, 1998, figs. 22 and 59). In one of them, Mastache and Cobean have identified, in addition to the weapons, a number of possible "symbols of royalty" (2001:119, fig. 23).

use. We are referring to the widely known urns, whose presence in tombs is almost a rule. Alfonso Caso and Ignacio Bernal have analyzed almost three hundred pieces of this type and in regard to their possible meaning, they have stated: "Undoubtedly, most urns are representations of gods, or either of priests wearing the outfits of gods [...]" (Caso and Bernal, 1952:10; Paddock 1972b:253). We shall focus our attention on a feature present only in four of them, all corresponding to the IIIb period.

During the decoration of Tomb 104, the image of an individual whom Caso and Bernal defined like a "God with Cocijo Head in the Headdress" was infixed in the tomb. The individual is extending one of his hands with his palm upwards, while with the other he is holding a bag. He is wearing, together with a glamorous headdress with the image of the rain god, a "[...] pectoral formed by a little mask which probably represents a little jade mask, and a topknot from which three rattles hang [...] formed by some cutout snails of the *olivella* genus" (1952:52, fig. 72). At the entrance of that tomb another urn was found, this time baptized as "God with a Topknot in the Headdress", one of the presumable avocations of Pitao Cozobi, a maize deity. The image also features "[...] a necklace with a pectoral formed by a little mask, probably of jade, from which three snail rattles hang" (*ibid.*, 1952:101-104, figs. 168 and 168 bis). Besides, it carries in the mouth a "typical serpentine little mask, with the nose turned upwards", a feature that appears once more in the north mural of the burial as the headdress of an individual, and on the burial slab that sealed the entrance (*ibid.*:104, 107).

The two remaining samples, originated in Xoxocotlán, are wearing necklaces with similar characteristics, presumably insinuating jade and shell ornaments. The Cocijo mask is covering the face of one of the characters (*ibid.*:20, fig. 2), while the other one, unmasked, has been associated with Pitao Cozobi (*ibid.*:46, fig. 63).

We concur with Joyce Marcus' statement (1983b) that the majority of the urns are representing human beings and not gods. The author argues that deities are not given calendrical names like the ones seen in several urns, and she notices the frequency with which features initially assumed as belonging to different deities, are combined. This latter phenomenon posed Caso and Bernal some problems, as each time new elements appeared, or were recombined, they gave the new representation a new name, in a way that when their classification was completed, one was led to think that the Zapotec pantheon had been incredibly vast, a polytheistic religion in the full extent of the word. Marcus suggested: "[...] perhaps what we have here is merely a system that comprises one human figure and a set of attributes (for example water, maize, lightning), that define the supernatural force or the series of supernatural forces present in the headdress" (1983b:146).

But, what is the meaning of a character displaying these traits in his face or headdress? Marcus thinks that the first case might have something to do with the ancestors of the buried individual having adopted supernatural attributes, and the second, with contemporary individuals that were honoring such ancestors and the supernatural forces present in their ornaments (*ibid.*:144, 146, 148). The second observation resembles that of Caso and Bernal, not in the sense that they were deities, but rather, that they might have been priest images of some specific religion (or religions)

expressing this status through their garments (which include, in all four cases outlined, necklaces with a jade figure).

Marcus' initial proposal presents some obstacles, as not always are urns associated with burials; besides, many pieces have been mass produced and used in different contexts (Caso and Bernal, 1952:10). For this reason, they may hardly be considered 'portraits' of particular characters or 'true' ancestors; however, they may well be expressing a sense of belonging to some particular lineage, although perhaps, the lineage was of a fictitious or mythical nature, or in other words, that it represented some 'kinship' line that the individual was able to exhibit not through a direct blood inheritance but rather through his social status.³²

Referring once more to the overall contexts, we shall finally say that the majority of the Oaxacan urns were found empty, though in the rare occasions they contained something "[...] there are obsidian blades, greenstone beads, snails used like rattles, and occasionally, small animal bones" (Caso and Bernal, 1952:10).

Prismatic blades, a common element in the offerings described so far, may be a symbol of self sacrifice.³³ Making an analogy with the practices observed by the conquerors at the time of their arrival, the use of blades for self sacrifice has been recorded by Bernardino de Sahagún and Francisco López de Gómara, as a part of the preparation of a number of parties celebrated by the Mexica.³⁴

This may not apply in all cases, but in the contexts of Sabina Grande and San Juan del Río, specifically, there are additional elements that lead to consider that offerings were the result of the burial ritual of an individual together with the arrangement of his possessions, and that this practice was related to the activities that the individual accomplished in his lifetime. As already seen, the adult from Barrio de la Cruz was accompanied by infant remains (their skulls had been peculiarly placed), and a possible canine. Referring once again to the XVIth Century sources, the chroniclers describe

³² As to Marcus annotation regarding the fact that deities are not given calendrical names, Judith Zeitlin claims that in the Popol Vuh such names are in fact given to supernatural protagonists of mythical events (Zeitlin, 1993:133).

³³ Andrew Darling mentions that the abundance of prismatic obsidian blades in a number of Mesoamerican areas has motivated that they were taken for utilitarian objects (1998:383); however, their importation as a finished product, the remote provenience of the material (in spite of the possibility of obtaining the resource from nearby deposits) and its occurrence in specific contexts, enables the author to suggest that the distribution of prismatic blades may have derived from "[...] an exchange of 'prestige goods' among elites or authorities" (Darling, *ibid.*:382-383, 392, see also Jiménez and Darling 2000:175-177). These objects were important ritual tools, including their use as personal blood-letters. Darling adds that the blades were probably used for dismembering and cleaning the bones, further to the completion of a sacrificial act or as a part of a sophisticated ritual for burying prominent individuals (*ibid.*:384-388, 391): "[...] prismatic blades have not been an essential element, but probably they were desirable in the execution of such rituals for their effectiveness as a tool and their potential significance as sacred objects of power, associated with long distance contacts [...]" (Darling, *ibid.*:391).

³⁴ "[...] they cut their ears with small stone blades, and with the blood that emanated from them they stained with blood the maguey points that had previously cut, and they also stained their faces with blood." (Sahagún, Book II, Chapter XXV, 1982:114). "Priests would perfume those new blades and would put them under the sun on the same cotton cloths. They used to sing joyful songs to the sound of a few small drums. The drums went silent, and they sang a different sad song, and then they would cry out loud. Then they walked, one after the other, as if they had taken ashes, towards a priest who stood one step higher; and he perforated, as the man skilled in the task he was, the tongue of each one of them with his blade, as for this reason they manufactured such large quantities of them." (López de Gómara, 1985:325).

infant sacrifices (Gómara specifically uses the word "skinning") as offerings to the water gods,³⁵ together with the habit of burying the dogs together with their masters so that they would be of help during their transit through the underworld.³⁶

One distinctive characteristic of the priests is that they carry censers when they are at work, as seen in countless buildings, mural paintings, stelae...and as it has also been pointed out in the sources.³⁷ One such censer was found in the offering of the buried individual from Sabina, together with a clay pipe (Carrasco *et al.*, 2001:61, 68, 70). Pipes are objects present with a remarkable frequency in the region, and may also be considered to be ritual in nature.

Another element typical of the Sabina Grande context is the perforated shell ring mentioned above, which greatly resembles those illustrated by Séjourné for her excavations in Teotihuacán (1996 [1969]: 254). These are features that were originally united in pairs and used by male individuals like eyeglasses, tied with a band at the back of the head. The use of eye patches is a feature present in mural paintings to distinguish humans from mythological beings, because while human figures wear them as masks to cover their eyes, in the case of deities the rings are a "monstruous", organic component of the creature's face (Pasztory, 1974:13). It is possible that this object in Sabina served a similar function.³⁸

Common Characteristics of the Offerings

Among the traits they share, perhaps the most important one is the varied geographical provenience of the objects involved, which when joined together constitutes an

³⁵ "[...] During this month they killed many infants; they sacrificed them in different places and on the top of the mountains, tearing their hearts out to honor the gods of water, so that they would grant upon them water or rains" (Sahagún, Book II, Chapter I, 1982:77); "[...] they would celebrate a god known as Tláloc, who is the god of rains. During this celebrations they killed many children on the hills, they were offered in sacrifice to this god and his partners so that they would be granted water" (Sahagún, Book II, Chapter III, *ibid.*:79); "[...] they made important celebrations to honor the gods of water or rain known as Tlaloque. For this celebration they searched for numerous infants who still nursed from their mothers and they would buy them from these women; they would choose those showing two whirls in their heads [...]. These children were taken and killed on the high hills [...]" (Sahagún, Book II, Chapter XX, *ibid.*:98). "Once the bread was one palm high, they would walk to a hill they used for this purpose and sacrifice a three-year-old boy and girl, to honor Tlaloc, the god of water [...] they would not rip their hearts off but instead they cut their throats. They were wrapped in fresh cotton cloths and buried inside a stone box. For the Tozotli celebration, when the maize fields were already knee-high, they distributed a certain tribute among the neighbors by which four little slaves were bought, infants five to seven years old and from a different nation. They were sacrificed to Tlaloc, so that it would rain frequently [...]" (López de Gómara, 1985:319-20).

³⁶ "[...] they forced the deceased to carry with them a small red-haired dog, with a loose cotton yarn around the neck; they said that the deceased would swim on top of the little dog whenever they crossed a river from hell [...]" (Sahagún, Appendix to Book III, Chapter I, 1982:205); "[...] a dog to guide him wherever he was bound to" (López de Gómara, 1985:302).

³⁷ "[The "sátraps" or "idol ministers"] went out to the cu patio, and once in its center they took coals from the censers and poured copal on top of them and censed towards the four parts of the world [...]" (Sahagún, Book II, Chapter XXV, 1982:113).

³⁸ In the Sabina context, only one such element could be recovered, so whether that was its real function or not, is uncertain. However, at the time of reporting some burials associated with Mazapa pottery from Atetelco, Pedro Armillas also refers to the finding of one single "annular, shell plaque [...] with tiny holes that most probably were used to insert a string so that it could be hung", arranged before the left eye socket of one of the skulls (1950:56).

indivisible universe. Probably it is not by accident, but rather the result of an underlying intentionality and symbolism, that places so distant from one another and with a differential access to resources and exchange networks, obtained and joined together the same type of "luxury" objects in similar offerings. The fact that jade plaques are accompanied by shell objects is customary, and in a same context, elements coming from both coasts may be found; most of the times they are beads, but there are several more sophisticated ornaments and complete or carved pieces. Also joined together are greenstone ornaments, more frequently earflares and beads, and in several cases there are also prismatic obsidian blades. Finding thin plates that once were a part of a mosaic is common (of turquoise, in Sabina Grande and Chichén Itzá), while the *tecali* vessels are present in contexts from Xochicalco, Sabina Grande and San Jerónimo (see [note 13](#)), as well as in the Sacred Cenote. An extra coincidental trait is, like we mentioned above, their time frame.

Concerning the greenstone figures, most of them show a headdress with ophidian traits. George Kubler, an expert in Teotihuacán iconography, suggests that "[...] the painters and sculptors were interested in clear and simple logographic forms. They were less interested in recording appearances than in combining and composing significant associations [...]" (a reflection shared by Pasztory, 1992:288); for this reason he attempted the application of a linguistic model that would allow him to examine each form according to some hypothetical verbal function. In his analysis, he discovered that most signs and images are used like nominal expressions for describing substances and concepts. It becomes immediately evident that the most numerous are those used as adjectives to denote qualities and hierarchy. Less common are the verbal predicates for works and actions (Kubler, 1972a:74). Among the expressions recorded in this way, Kubler finds that many forms occupy several "grammatical" positions at the same time. "The normal use appears where substantive properties are combined (like jaguar muzzles, serpent tongues and bird eyes) in a religious image. Yet, when this form is present in a headdress, the role it plays is to convey the bearer the character of a devout or celebrant, and may then be classified as an adjectival form" (ibid.:76). This example would correspond to that which we have observed in the jade figures, whose purpose would not be portraying an individual but rather expressing some quality, which, when extended to the user, would again be pointing to a religious representative (see [note 28](#)). Regarding a couple of such plaques (one of them from Jaina), Herbert Spinden states: "In spite of the fact that evidently the jades were frequently buried with the deceased or used as votive offerings in the temples, considering them as portraits would be inappropriate" (1975 [1913]:144, figs. 195 and 196). Ringle, Gallareta and Bey also think that the intention was not to portrait historic characters, given the limited variety of costumes and poses represented in the pieces, apart from their presence in architectural façades and offerings in different places (1998:207).

An additional feature that is present with an amazing regularity in the jade plaques is the position of the hands. Only seldomly they are holding an object, and the majority are seen lifted on the chest with the palms facing each other, or with the back of the hands held together. It is possible that this posture is originated in the sculptural representations where images holding objects do appear, as may be seen in the monoliths described by Acosta and Noguera for Tula and Xochicalco ([see page 26](#), this

volume);³⁹ in Stelae 1, 2 and 3 from Nopala, in the Oaxacan coast (Zeitlin, 1993:134, figs. 12a, b and c);⁴⁰ and also in countless Maya stelae, as Stelae E, H, P, N, 3, 5, 6 and 7 from Copán (Spinden, 1975 [1913]:50, fig. 46 and photos 18 and 19; Fash and Fash, 2000:fig. 14.1), Stela 6 from Naranjo (Spinden, *ibid.*:178, fig. 226) and the Stela 1 from Tikal (Spinden, *ibid.*:photo 21).⁴¹ As glyphs, hands in a very similar position appear accompanying scenes, which may be seen in Stela 9 from Monte Albán and in Stela 1 from Xochicalco (Litvak, 1972:61), where Joyce Marcus has interpreted them as a glyph symbolizing political alliances (Marcus, 1992:409, 411).

In itself, the generalized presence of greenstone figurines in places so remotely located from one another, and in Coggins words, "[...] suggests a relation derived from an eclectic offering activity which was widely spread during the Terminal Classic" (Coggins, 1984:70),⁴² but actually this relationship is much more complex when considering that such trait is not an isolated one. As we have pointed out, the meaning of the images on greenstone is also expressed in the qualitative association of the different objects that accompany them.

³⁹ At El Cerrito, Querétaro, it was recovered a sculptural fragment of an individual who appears "[...] in a front position with his hands resting on his thorax; as adornments, he exhibits a pectoral and circular earflares" (Crespo, 1991b:203, fig. 24). As outlined by the author (*idem*), this representation greatly resembles the greenstone figures.

⁴⁰ These pieces are very interesting because, contrary to the examples illustrated by Acosta which only show one circular object, in Stelae 1 and 2 from Nopala, the individual is holding a knife with one hand, and a triple spiral with the other, perhaps symbolizing a heart (Urcid, 1993:148). According to the images that illustrate Judith Zeitlin's and Javier Urcid's texts, this posture is not the most common in the region, where the arms of the characters are shown, instead, crossed on the chest. The author interprets these pieces as representations of deceased individuals associated with the ball game sacrificial ritual (Zeitlin, 1993:134); Javier Urcid thinks they may be ancestors (1993:148). The sculptures showing crossed arms also present some resemblance with the jade plaques, as may be seen in those exhibited at the Museum of San Miguel Ixtapan, State of México, dated for the Epi-Classic.

⁴¹ We have mentioned a number of cases where the sculpted characters are holding a circular object. Among the Maya, it is more frequent to find a ceremonial bar, held in the bent arms and at the chest level. The extreme of these bars often show serpent head endings (Spinden, 1975 [1913]: 24, 48-50).

⁴² He also describes the tecali vessels as "one facet of the contemporary offering activities proposed for the Terminal Classic" (Coggins, 1984:54).



Map 1. Distribution of the Jade Plaques.

1. Barrio de la Cruz, Querétaro.
2. Sabina Grande, Hidalgo.
3. Tula, Hidalgo.
4. Tecamac, State of México.
5. Teotihuacán, State of México.
6. Cacaxtla and Xochitécatl, Tlaxcala.
7. Xochicalco, Morelos.
8. San Jerónimo, Guerrero.
9. Cerro de las Mesas, Veracruz.
10. Central Valleys, Oaxaca.
11. Palenque, Chiapas.
12. Nébjaj, Guatemala.
13. El Caracol, Belize.
14. Jaina, Campeche.
15. Chichén Itzá, Yucatán.
16. Apatzingán, Michoacán.

Social Interaction Throughout the Epi-Classic

In an interesting article, Ringle, Gallareta and Bey (1998) address the wide distribution of jade plaques in Mesoamerica as a reflection of the ideological dispersion of a religion connected with Quetzalcóatl. As opposed to these authors, the data and contexts examined in this work and their iconographic analysis, would suggest the expression of a different cult, related to the Mesoamerican complex of water and fertility, after one of its major examples: the feathered serpent. This aspect has been widely explored in a work we are now preparing (Solar, in preparation).

Finally, the possibility exists that the buried individuals were priests who presided such a religion, and that the jade plaques were a part of their peculiar costumes. The fact that, simultaneously, some status or political power was granted upon them, is also feasible (see [pages 33-34](#), this volume). These individuals, while alive, might have arranged that some of their belongings were included in their votive offerings in ceremonies connected with the cult they represented, or that after their passing, these objects would accompany them as a testimony of their privileges. For the time being, we are interested in the fact that we can observe this expression not only in a city or a region, but throughout two thirds of the Mesoamerican territory.

In his excellent work about continuity as a common social denominator, John Paddock states: "[...] the Mesoamerican 'Classic' did not 'decline', it did not become 'extinct' and was not followed by a 'Middle Age' that anticipated the emergence of the 'Post Classic' [...] it was followed, directly and indirectly, by a Pan-Mesoamerican phase [...]" (Paddock, 1987:26, see also Flannery and Marcus, 1983:183; L. Austin and L. Luján, 2000:23; Jiménez, 2001:4). This phenomenon is probably the result of an opening in the system of ideological communication and exchange that the decline of the Teotihuacán splendor gave way to. One obstacle for approaching such system is represented by the existing concept about Mesoamerica during the Epi-Classic, as a period very much full of tensions and permanent confrontations among human groups.

The rapprochement of ideological links and the social separation are arguments not only opposed to one another, but contradictory. This does not mean that being participants of an identical ideological tradition rules out the possibility of political confrontations, but it does mean that the communication required to express in a same way such an ideology would be diminished, should it exist a never ending and unsolvable intercultural conflict. How to explain ideological common schemes and the material manifestations thereof among societies in the process of mutual annihilation?: a "scenario designated by competition and the poor level of integration", an "unreliable environment", where the "poor resources" were being disputed, and where "political instability makes the military permeate all spheres of social life" (López Luján, 1995:262, see also Paredes, 1990:30, note 21; Sugiura 2001:347) and the populations are involved in "an endless struggle to maintain their autonomy in front of their ambitious neighbors" (Marcus, 2001:29), are some of the characteristics brought forward as descriptive of the Epi-Classic.

One cannot deny that in pre-hispanic times conflict between populations existed, but considering that the notion by which the difference between the Classic and Post Classic periods lay in the *exclusively* theocratic character of the first, and the exacerbated military character of the second,⁴³ has been ruled out, the Epi-Classic should neither be assumed as the period of hostilities some authors refer to (i.e. Pasztory, 1988:71; Hers, 1988:30-36; López Luján, 1995; Florescano, 1995:225-228; Ringle *et al.*, 1998:185, 195; L. Austin and L. Luján, 2000; Marcus, 2001; Sugiura, 2001:347, 349, 385). In a situation like this, it is difficult to conceive that channels for such a close communication and integration like those reflected in the obtention, distribution and contextualization of the features examined here, could be maintained.

The presence of allochthonous materials has been an argument for those who favor political impositions, war invasions and conquests (i.e. Bernal, 1976:133), as if the only way that objects could travel was through the hands of their manufacturers, with no intermediaries and no sophisticated exchange systems: "[...] we mistakenly take a humble potter for an imperial army [...] we create great empires to explain that which just a few traders may account for [...]", are John Paddock's words (1972b:251).

It is difficult to separate aspects that have been essentially articulated, such as politics, economy and religion were (Drennan, 1998). In Mesoamerica, trade was closely connected with all three, and we may even say it constituted precisely the core of such connections.

It would seem that the splendor of Epi-Classic sites was the result of a shift in the religious, political and economical significance of Teotihuacán, which was able to propitiate the restructuring (not the nullification) of the patterns of commerce and exchange, and give other centers the opportunity to participate in the economic network from a more favorable position (Senter, 1981:149; Flannery and Marcus, 1983:185; Ball and Taschek, 1989; Jiménez, 2001:2-3). Elsewhere we delve deep into some of the ways through which such societies interacted, as the cause and consequence of their immersion in an open system of communications, whose origin has more to do with the natural drive of human beings to participate in the global dynamics of a civilization, than with the existence of mere passive receptors (Solar, in preparation).

Close relationships among human groups have existed across the entire territory of Mesoamerica (geographically and temporarily speaking), and this system has not been a victim of drastic interruptions, like our chronological charts seem to show. The fact that Teotihuacán constituted an attractor during the Classic, was not enough to cause the extinction of such structure. We agree with Sanders that perhaps the most important heritage that Teotihuacán has left to the rest of Mesoamerica has been precisely the integration of the existing networks (Sanders, 1989:214; see also Willey and Phillips

⁴³ The definition of the Classic world as a theocracy has been introduced by Wigberto Jiménez, Pedro Armillas, Ángel Palerm, Ignacio Bernal and Alden Mason, among others (Jiménez Moreno, 1959:1056-1057), and the transformation of this latter into a militarist world has been mainly a proposal of the first (*ibid.*:1063-1064). The scheme was adopted and became quite popular until the past few years, but now, indications of militarism have been found in the "theocratical" Classic capital, and it has been found as well that the Epi-Classic and the Early Post Classic have not exclusively been periods of social conflict.

1958, in Jiménez Moreno, 1959:1058; Jiménez, 1989:29-30; Jiménez and Darling, 1992:22). Such articulation between societies lasted all through the Epi-Classic (and not only at a local level, as has been suggested, see Sugiura, 1996:239; 2001:376), and maybe its complexity was even enhanced.

Precisely as a consequence of such non-confrontational expressions, the interaction between societies achieved a greater complexity, and in irregular and unpredictable ways, phenomena of a geographical scope never heard of before, began to insinuate.

Among the observations of the authors mentioned above, it results that even though there were several places where jade could be obtained, the *physical production* of the figurines we are interested in, took place towards the Pacific Coast, in the territory presently occupied by the States of Guerrero (southern portion), Oaxaca and Chiapas, in México, and Guatemala and El Salvador, in Central America. Through what distribution networks did these jade plaques arrive to the States of Querétaro and Hidalgo? And inversely, through what routes could turquoise be distributed as far north as the Yucatán Peninsula?

In the following section we shall sketch some of the networks through which these objects may have spread, with emphasis made on the northern portion of the Central Mesa. This region, whose role in the Mesoamerican dynamics has been underestimated, is crucial for going deep into the magnitude and scopes of this social system.

Like we shall see, as the scope of the analysis is reduced from a macro to a regional level, the connections frequently tend to involve a larger number of material elements.

Interaction Spheres and Distribution Networks in Mesoamerica

"This dispersion [of jade plaques] poses interesting problems, as it is not consistent with our overall impression on the isolation of the Maya lowlands during the Late Classic and the limited exchange of ceramic objects at that time."
(Proskouriakoff, 1974:14)

Notwithstanding the fact that the Basin of México has been considered a fundamental actor in the historical developments of Mesoamerica, it has not been a primary agent in the establishment of pre-hispanic systems of communication and exchange. In the peculiar Mesoamerican geography, the coastal strips have been important routes along which objects and ideas have traveled, branching off in the inlands. Unfortunately, our knowledge about this area commonly considered as marginal is rather poor, and the efforts of those who work in the coasts are hardly beginning to fill this void.

Important cultural and geographical distances turned shorter via the Mexican Gulf, and in this sense, like Jaime Litvak claims, it is important to consider the importance of Veracruz "as the general harbor within a total Mesoamerican network" (1987:204); maybe we should add to it the Isthmus of Tehuantepec as an equally important knot of cultural connections (Schmidt, 1999:427; Fash and Fash, 2000:433), and of course, as the antecedent to another major corridor: the Pacific.

In Mesoamerica, and at least since the Formative period,⁴⁴ a network began to configurate, which included a few major river-beds, like those that run parallel to the coastal strips and merged in the Isthmus, those that embraced the Basin, and the other one that penetrated into the Basin from the south. This is what architect Ignacio Marquina tells us:

"The ceramic remains of this period are much more abundant, and evidence the wide extension of the archaic culture, as they have been found in the States of México, Querétaro, Morelos, Hidalgo, Veracruz, Tamaulipas and Guerrero [...] However, the detailed study of these types [...] seems to evidence that the core of the archaic culture is not to be found in the Central Mesa; on the contrary, this was a peripheral culture derived from the influence on populations that inhabited Central México, by a well developed culture in the Gulf Coast, from Tamaulipas to southern Veracruz, which extended along the basin of the Pánuco River and throughout the valleys of Puebla and Morelos, to Teotihuacán and Cholula, and even farther to Michoacán and Guerrero. This would indicate that since those days, which could be placed two or three centuries before the Christian Age, there was already some kind of unity among the cultures from the Gulf and the Central Mesa, and consequently, there are a number of common features in monuments and ceramics which persist through their later development [...] since then, and everywhere, the basic features of buildings are also the same, even though they differentiated, at a later time, with varieties typical of each region" (Marquina, 1941:137-138).

In a comparative study between Veracruz and the Maya Region, Eric Thompson has shown that the links between these regions in pre-hispanic times were constant: "[...] since the Formative time and until the arrival of the Spaniards, Veracruz and the Maya region were linked by strong cultural bonds" (1953:453). Evidences of these contacts

⁴⁴ Regarding the tracing of materials such as jade, green obsidian and quetzal feathers, engineer Joaquín García Bárcena concludes: "[...] many of the exchange routes were in use since the Pre-Classic, and all of them, apparently, since the Classic, although the use of the N.W. route (La Quemada–Chalchihuites) does not seem to have been established before the Late Classic [...]. Then, a constancy is observed in regard to the commercial routes used in Mesoamerica throughout time, although the intensity of use of one route in particular may not have been constant. This constancy was probably due to the fact that the materials susceptible of being transported through long distances were desirable during the entire period comprised between the Middle Pre-Classic and the XVIth century [...]" (G. Bárcena, 1972:154). In turn, Jaime Litvak refers to a "[...] formalized route pattern communicating Mesoamerica, as a whole and regionally, one that worked for the transportation of both goods and ideas. Such a network must have been established very early in time, in fact not later than the Pre-Classic, suffering constant change throughout its existence. Such changes reflect [...] the also changing pattern of cultural interaction in the super area." (1972:72). See also Jiménez (1989:36) and Jiménez and Darling (1992:22), regarding the 'structural backgrounds' of macroregional networks.

are present from Guatemala to Belize, across the states of Chiapas and Tabasco up to the Mexican Gulf, and then north along the coast up to Tampico.⁴⁵ In general, this connection corresponds to the area Lee Parsons (1969) denominated the "Peripheral Coastal Lowlands", or PCL. Thompson seems to be surprised for the interruption in the joint use of ceramic types during the Classic, something that did not happen with many other elements (*ibid.*:450). This is an example that in spite of its utility as a chronological and correlative referral, the ceramic changes considered as abrupt are not always synonymous of equivalent fractures in the social system.

Thompson notes that in contrast with the close communication with the south, the Huastecan groups seemed to be alienated from their inland neighbors. It is true that the links are not too evident, but they exist. We should ask ourselves, how did the shell samples from the Gulf reach the south of Querétaro and the west of Hidalgo,⁴⁶ and how the almost identical integration of contexts in western Hidalgo and the northern Yucatán Peninsula was possible (see [page 30](#) in this volume).

Given the remarkable coincidence between the architectural and sculptural styles from Chichén Itzá and Tula, the societies that inhabited the coastal strip of the Gulf have been considered intermediaries in close relation with both sites. However, the apparent scarcity of ceramic materials common to all these areas has always been surprising, specifically in regard to cultural traits common to Tula and their western neighbors (Diehl and Feldman, 1974:106; McVicker and Palka 2001:193). Actually, this would derive of the poor archaeological information available for Central Veracruz and the Huasteca. As archaeological explorations keep progressing, this void of common features and objects is gradually dissolving.

At a certain moment, it was believed that there were no types in Tula that could be considered as imports from the Huasteca, and the same was true in the other way around (Diehl and Feldman, 1974:106). However, the Las Flores Polychrome (*Las Flores Poíchromo*) and Tlaxco Black on White (*Tlaxco Negro sobre Blanco*) types are present in the Mezquital Valley by Early Post Classic times (Fournier, 1995:446-447, figs. 20 and 21, chart 9), and presumably the Incised with a White Coat (Inciso con Baño Blanco) from Period V in Ekholm's sequence (see Ochoa, 1984 [1979]:36); at a later date, Tancol Polychrome (*Tancol Poíchromo*) and Black on White (*Negro sobre Blanco*) of Period VI appear (Ekholm 1944:364, 431-433; Ochoa, 1984 [1979]:39-40) (see Fournier, 1995, figs. 20 and 21). The presence of Huastec potteries from Period V

⁴⁵ One example that reinforces Thompson's thesis regarding the scopes of this network is represented by the ceramics with a basal flange, a strong diagnostic of Xochicalco, about which Eduardo Noguera states: "[...] it is found in the period of Monte Albán I, and it should be noted as well that a similar feature is present in the ceramics of other regions, like the Tampico-Pánuco area, and Tres Zapotes and Cerro de las Mesas, in the State of Veracruz. [...] almost in an identical manner in the ceramics from San Agustín Acasaguastlán, in Guaytán, and in those from Uaxactún, Maya localities situated in Guatemala" (Noguera, 1960:69; see also Sáenz, 1962a:80). One additional trait connecting those regions that is also present in Xochicalco are the yokes and axes (Sáenz, 1962a:42-45, 80), connected with the practice of the ballgame.

⁴⁶ After the analysis of shells from La Negreta, south of Querétaro, we know that at least during the Classic, samples from the Atlantic and the Pacific have arrived to this region (Brambilia Velasco, 1988:291). Pieces from the Pacific and the Gulf have also been identified in Tula (cf. Diehl, 1976:262, 1983:92, 94; Cobean and Estrada, 1994:78) while some shell samples recovered from El Zethé are known to be originated in the Gulf (López Aguilar, personal communication, 2002).

has also been identified in Tula (Cobean 1978:119; Diehl, 1983:115, 144; Healan *et al.*, 1989:246) and it has been presumed that the concept of circular architecture, present for example in the building of El Corral, is the result of a "Huastecan" impact (Diehl, 1983:143). In the opposite sense, it has been observed that: "A few ceramic types in the Tampico area and other places, closely resemble the materials from the Tollán phase, and architecture with Toltec similarities may be observed at Castillo de Teayo and other sites" (Diehl, 1983:144). The interaction between these two areas is also consistent with the fluvial system, as the Tula River is a tributary of the Pánuco River (Diehl and Feldman, 1974:107). To Diehl and Feldman, this relation represents the northward deviation of Tula's expansion, as the expansion to the east was not possible due to the presence of El Tajín (Diehl and Feldman, 1974:107). However, between the Toltec capital and the societies settled in the central and southern portions of the Veracruz territory, material coincidences are also observed (Cobean, 1978:119; Diehl, 1983:115, 144; Healan *et al.*, 1989:246; Paredes, 1990:58, 77, 196, 210).

At Tula, ceramics similar to the ones from Isla de Sacrificios (Healan *et al.*, 1989:246) and Tres Picos (Diehl, 1976:263) in Central Veracruz have been detected. It is believed that Fine Orange (*Naranja Fino*), so common among the sites from southern Veracruz, Tabasco and Campeche, is not present in Tula (Diehl, 1983:115; Healan *et al.*, 1989:246-247; McVicker and Palka, 2001:193), though Cobean and Mastache specify that this pottery is not present in "significant amounts" (1989:44); besides, a complete vessel is exhibited in the site museum. Beatriz Braniff argues that in fact, Fine Orange is present in Tula (Braniff 1972:289), and also in other sectors of the North-Central Plateau, like Carabino, north of Guanajuato (Braniff, 1972:280-281) and Villa de Reyes, south of San Luis Potosí (Braniff, 1992:152). Nalda refers to it in regard to San Juan del Río, at the south of Querétaro (1975:98; 1991:34). This ceramic is also reported in the Huasteca, where stylistic connections with several Pánuco types have been noted (Ochoa, 1984 [1979]:36). It is possible that the wheeled figurines recovered in Tula were originally from Central Veracruz (Diehl and Feldman, 1974:106; Diehl, 1976:266; Diehl 1983:109; Diehl and Mandeville, 1987:239, 241), and they are also present in the Huasteca.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Wheeled figurines have been widely distributed in Mesoamerica. In addition to Tula, they have been found in Tenenepango (foothills of the Popocatepetl); Xolalpan (Teotihuacán); and in the states of Michoacán, Guerrero and Nayarit (Diehl and Mandeville, 1987). In Veracruz, they are found in Tres Zapotes, Pavón, Pánuco, Nopiloa, Remojadas, Cocouite and Tlalixcoyán, while some samples have been recovered in Central America, for instance at the site of Cihuatán, in El Salvador (Diehl and Mandeville, 1987). In the region of Tierra Blanca, Veracruz, it is believed they corresponded to the Late Classic (Von Winning and Stendahl: 171, 207, fig. 277). Braniff (1992:107-109, plate. 10h) illustrates what we think might be a wheel from these figures at Villa de Reyes, and we believe the same about some others coming from Sabina Grande, Hidalgo, whose relationship with Tula has already been noted. Diehl and Mandeville consider that the wheeled figurines were invented in Central Veracruz sometime after A.D. 600, but that the manufacture of most of them and their dispersion to Northern Veracruz, Central México and Southern Mesoamerica took place between A.D. 1000-1100 (Diehl and Mandeville, 1987:240, 243). However, these authors also mention this may have happened one or two centuries before, but evidences have not been found so far. "Should this historic reconstruction be correct, the dissemination of the concept of wheeled figurines may have been a part of a larger process of diffusion (that) involved the dispersion of architectural motifs from the Gulf Coast, iconographic elements, the ballgame and associated paraphernalia, and other elite ritual concepts to many different parts of Mesoamerica after A.D. 600 (Parsons, 1969; 1978; Sharp, 1978; 1981). The areas that suffered such influences include Central México, the Pacific Coast, the piedmont and highlands of Southern Mesoamerica, and

In a similar way, there are resemblances between some iconographic traits from Tula and the Tajín region, as is the case with the Stela from Cerro de la Morena (see Pascual, 1990). As to a burial slab from Building J, in ancient Tollán, Karl Taube notes that the treatment (an elongated muzzle was added to the image of Tláloc) is similar to the images of the rain god in Tajín (in Mastache and Cobean, 2000:124). Ringle, Gallareta and Bey argue that in the South Ballgame from this latter site, sculptures of the Chac Mool type were represented, and architect Marquina refers to some sort of Chac Mool in Misantla, several kilometers at the southeast of Tajín (Ringle *et al.*, 1998:203).

Referring once again to the Huasteca, we have mentioned that some kind of isolation was presumed in regard to the rest of the Mesoamerican territory towards the Classic and Epi-Classic periods, considering that during Periods III and IV, the Huastecan types do not evidence direct connections with other cultural areas, as opposed to the ceramics of the following period (Thompson, 1953:450; Ochoa, 1984 [1979]:31). Anyway, we concur with Lorenzo Ochoa when he says that "[...] everything tends to indicate that such connections were not from Period V, but instead, that they must have started along the previous one, that is, during the last portion of the Classic period [...]" (1984 [1979]:33).

The exchange of objects between the Mezquital Valley, the Huasteca and Central/Southern Veracruz was not limited to the Post Classic period. In the first region, and since the Epi-Classic, vessels with pastes that may have been imported from the coast have been identified (Fournier, 1995:61, 69; for the Huichapan-Tecozaulta region, see Socorro de la Vega Doria, personal communication, 2001; for Chapantongo, Cervantes and Fournier, 1996:118; for Tula, Matos, 1974:67; Diehl, 1983:115, 143; Healan *et al.*, 1989:246; Paredes, 1990:58, 77, 196, 210) together with some local pieces that show remarkable similarities in shape and decoration with those from the Huasteca. Pit 1 from Tula Chico is reported to have "pottery from the Gulf" (Matos, 1974:67) and García Payón has noted that the sites from Tuzapan and Castillo de Teayo include Mazapa pottery (1971, in Diehl and Feldman, 1974:107).

Another object probably imported from the Huasteca region or Central and Southern Veracruz, at least since the Epi-Classic, are spindles, decorated or covered with chapopote (tar) from Sabina Grande and Tula (see [note 18](#), and also Diehl and Feldman, 1974:106; Paredes, 1990:194, this author also refers to *chapopote* "fragments" in two rooms at the site of Cerro de la Malinche, in the surroundings of Tula, *ibid.*:153-154).

Most probably, the connection between Tula and the peninsula of Yucatán remained close thanks to this route (McVicker and Palka, 2001:194) and that as a natural consequence, such connection may have reached other areas from the North-Central Plateau, again, since Epi-Classic times. As an example of this, we may recall the well-known pipe recovered at the Temple of the Warriors in Chichén Itzá (Morris *et al.*,

Yucatán—and among them, only Yucatán has produced no evidences so far regarding wheeled figurines" (Diehl and Mandeville, 1987:243).

1931:177-179, illus. 21), which has been considered an import from the Toltec capital or Michoacán (Porter, 1948:210; Thompson, 1966, in Cobean 1978:73). Ten similar examples (complete pieces and fragments) were located in Tula during the explorations of the Burnt Palace conducted by Acosta, but with that exception, its frequency in this city is not significant (Cobean, *idem*). In contrast, these objects are abundant in other areas of Hidalgo close to its boundaries with Querétaro, where they possibly were manufactured, or else, where their use seems to have been widespread ([Figure 11](#) and [Figure 12](#)). We shall come back on this matter later.⁴⁸

An additional evident example of the bonds that existed between the Tula area and the southern lands, referring once more to the Early Post Classic, is the amazing abundance of Plumbate ceramics and several samples of Nicoya Polychrome (*Nicoya Polícromo*) in the Hidalgo site (Diehl, 1976:263; 1983:115; 1987:142; Cobean, 1978:97, 114; Cobean and Mastache, 1989:44; Healan *et al.*, 1989:246; Paredes, 1990:84). In the Huasteca, no Plumbate pottery has been found (though there is a local imitation: a "lead-colored" type also imported by Tula, Ochoa, 1984 [1979]:38), but in fact, it was present in Central Veracruz (Diehl and Feldman, 1974:106), while Tlaloc effigy braziers have been recovered at Los Tuxtlas and as far as the Balankanché cave (Thompson, 1973:268; Cobean, 1978:105; Cobean and Mastache, 1989:46), with a production attributed to Tula during the Tollán phase.

Perhaps the networks established between the Tula region and the Gulf coastal strip, most probably since the Epi-Classic, became stronger with time. Maybe we should ask ourselves whether this could be a possible consequence of the gradual abandonment of the Red-on-Buff ceramic tradition and the integration of orange and cream wares that characterized the peak of ancient Tollán; a change of direction that intrigued several authors (see Cobean, 1978:96-97; 1982:75-76; Healan *et al.*, 1989:244).

⁴⁸ Another example that the links with the southern lands included other areas from Hidalgo, in addition to the Tula region, may be the use of the 'Maya blue'. In 1996, with the assistance of Professor Luis Torres, from UNAM's Institute of Anthropological Research, samples of the pigment that decorated some ceramic pieces from the site of "Los Huemás", in the municipio of Nopala de Villagrán, were analyzed. After the tests of reflection, refraction, composition, texture, etc., were completed, it was found to be a coloring known as 'Maya blue' (Solar, 1997:66-67). This pigment was first identified during the study of the Chichén Itzá mural paintings conducted by Merwin (1931) and baptized in 1942 by R. Gettens and G. Stout with the name of the cultural region where its generalized use was observed (1942:130; Gettens, 1961-62:557). Presently, we know that the distribution of the Maya blue is not restricted to the homonymous region, but in fact, that it follows a much wider pattern that includes several states from the Mexican Republic. However, the organic component that provides the blue coloring is a perennial plant known as indigófera, which grows in very restricted locations and climates, particularly in the southern area of the country and northern Central America (Grinberg, 1987). The differences in tonality depend on the type of clay used in the preparation, and in general, three different types have been identified (Navarrete and Valencia, 1988:50, 52). It is possible that this differentiation responds to regional patterns of pigment preparation, where the finished product was not necessarily imported, but instead, the plant and the manufacturing know-how (Solar, 1997:68-69). Unfortunately, our sample was recovered on the surface and therefore lacks any chronological value at this time.

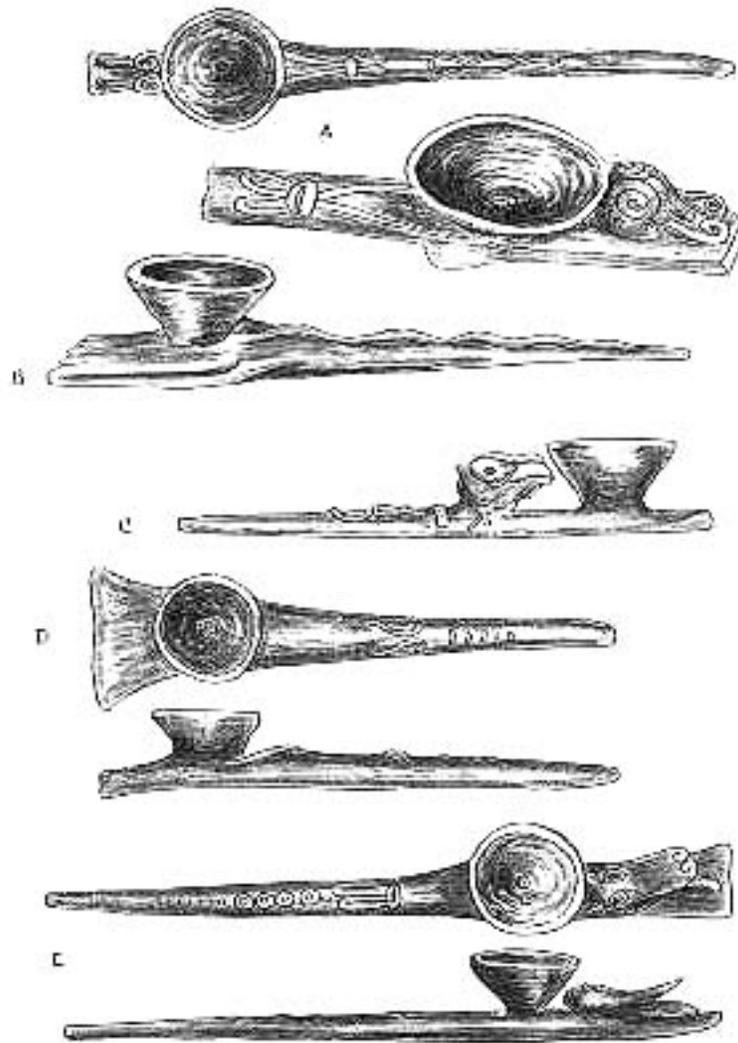


Figure 11. Taken from Porter, 1948. (A–Chichén Itzá; B–Tula; C/E–Cuitzeo.)



Figure 12. Pipes recovered at the Mezquital Valley, municipios of Tecozautla and Huichapan.

According to a different source of interregional connections, some coincidences have also been noted between Tula and Xochicalco (Noguera, 1941:161; Sáenz, 1962a:73-80; Litvak, 1972:67), considering the second one as an important influence on the glyphs and the earlier art of the first, in addition to its architecture (Cobean, 1978:56; de la Fuente, 1995:174). In this relationship, the Basin of México may have also played a secondary role. For what we know, evidences that directly connect Xochicalco with the Classic and Epi-Classic settlements of the Valley of México are scarce, notwithstanding that a number of elements in its art and architecture derive therefrom. Debra Nagao considers that the sculptures from Xochicalco show iconographic motifs but lack any Teotihuacán stylistic feature, and states: "It would seem that Teotihuacán was not an important commercial partner and neither a center of influence in the artistic emulation of Xochicalco" (1989:96; Litvak thinks differently, 1972:57-59).

Since Teotihuacán times, a differential relationship was observed between the Basin of México and the Morelo valleys, this being a much closer one with the sites located at the centre and the east of the State (Angulo and Hirth, 1981; Sugiura, 2001:372). In some points of the Western Valley, Teotihuacán materials have been recovered (including Xochicalco, Sáenz, 1962a:80), but these seem to be scarce in comparison with their abundance in the rest of the Morelos territory (Angulo and Hirth, 1981:86-87). Anyway, in the Epi-Classic, Xochicalco apparently disconnected itself from the Valley of México (Sugiura, 1996:234, 238; 2001:349, 360, 376).

This contrast responds to geographical logics. While in the central and eastern portions there are several natural passages that lead to the Basin, in the northern Western Valley the steep Ajusco *sierras* begin. This mountainous system extends north, limiting or surrounding the Valley of México (Angulo and Hirth, *ibid.*:82). Possibly, the inhabitants of this area in Morelos may have maintained a richer communication with the populations at the west of the Basin, including the neighboring Toluca Valley. And perhaps this was also applicable to the Mezquital Valley through the same route, reaching Jilotepec and further the Tula area, or continuing up to Huamango. In this latter site, ceramic types from both the Toluca region and the west portion of Mezquital join together (Segura and León, 1981:116-117), similarly to Teotenango (Nalda, 1996:269, note 17), and resemblances have already been noted among some components of the Toltec wares, the ceramics from the Toluca Valley⁴⁹ and from Michoacán (Acosta, 1940; 1941; 1945; 1956-57 in Cobean, 1978:72).⁵⁰ Due to the presence of Matlatzincan ceramics at Xochicalco, Noguera suggests that the connection of this site with Tula could have been maintained through the Toluca Valley (1941:161), a network which since the Middle Post Classic has been recognized through the dispersion of Tlahuica potteries, embracing Morelos and the Matlatzinca area (Litvak, 1972:69), but which also reached the Mezquital Valley, where a number of sherds have been identified (de la Vega Doria, personal communication, 2001).

There are additional evidences connecting Xochicalco with the Toluca Valley. Jaime Litvak notes that towards the end of the Epi-Classic "[...] the types in fact connect the valley [of Xochicalco] with northern Guerrero and the Toluca area" (1987:206), but he

⁴⁹ Cobean says: "In some zones outside the Tula area, there are several types that may represent a transition between the Coyotlatelco and the Macana types. They are tripod hemispheric bowls that present the "wide red band", and that simultaneously feature painted designs of the Coyotlatelco type. García Payón (1941), Du Solier (1941) and Piña Chán (1975), have described these types for the Toluca Valley, especially in Calixtlahuaca and Teotenango." (Cobean, 1982:75).

⁵⁰ We agree with Acosta that there are some vessels from Michoacán whose shape (differently than their decoration and possible function) is extraordinarily similar to the shape of some Macana type tripod bowls and mortars described by Cobean for the area of Tula, particularly regarding the supports "[...] with a wide tabular area at the base that occasionally makes the support in profile look like an abstract silhouette with a duck head" (Cobean, 1990:299, *illus.* 137). In addition, some examples from Macana present a resist decoration, in the same manner as some samples from Michoacán. Macana is a type which according to Cobean's classification appeared, towards the Terminal Corral phase (A.D. 900-950) in lesser quantities, and generalized up to the beginning of the Tollán phase (A.D. 950-1150/1200), while it was also present in the Basin of México, Guanajuato, Veracruz and Xochicalco (*ibid.*:302). For one of the pieces recovered at Urichu in the interior of a sealed tomb containing a multiple burial, two C14 datings were obtained, which situate the context between the years A.D. 888 and 943 (Pollard, 1995, 41-43, 57, *fig.* 8b). If the comparison between these Michoacán and Toltec pieces is valid, it is interesting to note that in Michoacán their use was generalized slightly before Tula. Healan and Hernández also note a local Macana variant in the Ucareo Valley (1999:139).

does not specify what samples he is referring to. Perhaps he is talking about potteries with a thick orange slip, whose distribution follows a similar pattern, absent in the Basin of México and the eastern portion of Morelos, but connecting the valleys of Xochicalco, Malinalco and Toluca during the Epi-Classic (Sugiura and Nieto, 1987:459-463; Sugiura, 2001:360). This ceramic is also found in the warm lands of Guerrero, where it might have originated, due to the inclusion of crushed shell in the paste (Sugiura and Nieto, *ibid.*:458-463). In addition, Sugiura notes that some "features from Xochicalco" have been identified in the architectural and sculptural style of the Northern System of Teotenango (1996:242; 2001:360).

Finally, it appears to be greatly significant that during the Epi-Classic, obsidian was imported in Xochicalco from Michoacán (Garza and González, 1995:128). From the results of the Xochicalco Mapping Project, it appears that Ucareo/Zinapécuaro was, by large, the major supplier of obsidian (Healan, 1997:77, 1998:102; Healan and Hernández, 1999:136; Hirth, 2000:284-290) and the easiest way to do this must have been precisely across that Toluca Valley, where obsidian was obtained from the same source (Sugiura, 1996:234, 247; 2001:360, 383-384).⁵¹

A different important source of obsidian for Xochicalco was Zacualtipán, Hidalgo (Hirth, 2000:284-290; Cobean, 1998:135), and interestingly, this material has been identified also for the Late Classic up to Laguna Zope and Ejutla, in Oaxaca, and in some locations from Chiapas and Guatemala (Cobean, 1998:135; Nelson and Clark, 1998:282-283, 293-296).

The region of Xochicalco is characterized by the connections it maintained with multiple places. It has been noted that the height of its splendor was largely due to its strategic situation in relation to different commercial systems, being directly connected with Guerrero, the State of México, Oaxaca, the Maya Area and the Gulf Coast (Litvak, 1972; Senter, 1981:149; de la Fuente, 1995:146-147, 155, 173-174; L. Luján, 1995:270; Hirth, 2000); however, the character of the relationships this society maintained with others, could hardly result from one unique cause. Trade may have been one of the most important ones, but the adoption and adaptation of alien stylistic, glyphic and numeric features, suggests that there also existed other communication channels (León Portilla, 1995:35). Debra Nagao says: "[...] it would seem that Xochicalco tried to develop a style of its own, taking symbolic and glyphic elements from a variety of sources, without allowing that any particular source prevailed" (1989:97), and "[...] the styles that blend and mingle give birth to a new personality" (de la Fuente, 1995:188, 194).

As to the possible communication between the North-Central Plateau and the Western Valley of Morelos, Jorge Acosta observes that "[...] both the Toltec hieroglyphs and numerals resemble the ones from the Zapotecan region in a greater degree than those of any other culture. This may indicate that there was some cultural exchange between the last stage of Monte Albán and Tula, and though we do not know where such an

⁵¹ For the Pre-Classic, Litvak notes the existence of figurines coming from Michoacán in the Xochicalco area (1972:56), which may have also arrived through this route or by way of the assumed connections with northern Guerrero.

exchange may have taken place, we believe it might have been through Xochicalco, a site with several calendrical signs common to both places [...]" (Acosta, 1954:92). The writing and numbering systems are among the primary aspects, as they represent some of the few traceable testimonies of information exchange. This aspect links Xochicalco mainly with Oaxaca and the Maya Area (Sáenz, 1962b; Litvak, 1972:61).

It has been argued that the relationship of the Oaxacan valleys with the Central Plateau during the Classic had a primarily intellectual foundation, due precisely to the development of the numeric and writing systems (Coggins, 1980:59; Winter, 1998:157), but the extension of such contacts has been underestimated. Little is known about their impact on areas different from Teotihuacán, and in terms of time frame, its presence was presumably limited to the peak period of that city: "[...] the Zapotec presence in Central México may have been more complex and may have become more widespread than documented in Teotihuacán" (Winter, 1998:160-161, note 4). We know, for instance, about settlements with Oaxacan ceramics in locations from Hidalgo, such as Chingú (Díaz, 1981:109), and the northeast of Tepejí del Río, in El Tesoro and Acoculco (Cobean, 1978:84; Cobean *et al.*, 1981:189-190; Diehl, 1987:133; Cobean and Mastache, 1989:37; Hernández, 1994). Those who have addressed the dispersion of Zapotec features in Central México suggest that contacts began at an early stage (Paddock, 1972b:257), and continued after the Classic, notwithstanding Monte Albán and Teotihuacán had lost most of their population and political power (Winter, 1998:176-179; Scott, 1998:185).

Also since Formative times, a close relationship between the Oaxacan societies from the Central Valleys and the Maya is apparent (Fash and Fash, 2000:439), and grew stronger as the Classic period unfolded (Coggins, 1980). It is possible that such relationship had plenty to do with the integration of Xochicalco to the Maya networks, provided this took place through the Mixteca and the middle portion of the state, although it might also have developed parallel to the Pacific Coast, like Jiménez Moreno suggests: "[since the Formative] Maya influences seem to have reached Xochicalco—in Noguera's view—who argues that the probable route must have been along the coast of Oaxaca where Brockington and De Cicco found Mayoid objects—and then along the coastal Guerrero, where Moedano found similar elements" (1959:1049-1050). It would seem that along this route also the Mezcala style dispersed to the east and south, to reach, according to Sáenz, Guatemala and Costa Rica (1962a:53).

In spite of the thorough studies accomplished on the connections that the Central Valleys from Oaxaca maintained with remote lands, little is said about the situation that prevailed with their coastal neighbors. Again, the writing system links both these areas (Urcid, 1993; Joyce, 1993:76), whose developments regarding other cultural aspects, seem alien to them (Joyce, *ibid.*:72-75). Apparently, the coastal fraction corresponding to Oaxaca developed a relatively independent cultural system, hooked, however, to the commercial network of the Central Oaxaca Valley, which was interested in shell ornaments from that region, at least during the Formative (Joyce, *ibid.*:69-72); to Central México during the Classic (Joyce, *ibid.*:74-76), and on a permanent basis, to the network Lee Parsons denominated the "Peripheral Coastal Lowlands" (PCL) that includes territories from El Salvador, Guatemala and Chiapas, then climbs through the

Isthmus and embraces almost the entire territory of Veracruz (Zeitlin, 1993:121-122, figure 1) (about the relationship between both coasts see also Sáenz, 1962a:42-45; Fash and Fash, 2000:439). Also with these neighbors from the PCL, the inhabitants of the Oaxacan coast seem to have maintained a relationship which was not exclusively of a commercial nature, as the link is primarily expressed in features of a joint religion (Zeitlin, 1993; Joyce 1993:76).

The Northern Sector of the Central Mesa

The links between the Maya regions, the Oaxacan areas in the Central Valleys, Central and Southern Veracruz and even the western Valley of Morelos, have been noted and explored by a number of scholars (Marquina, 1941; Thompson, 1953; Jiménez Moreno, 1959; Sáenz, 1963a; 1963b; 1964; 1966; Litvak, 1972; Coggins, 1980; Kroster, 1981; Cohodas, 1989; Nagao, 1989; Joyce, 1993; Schmidt, 1999; Fash and Fash, 2000; among others). The same can be said about the septentrional fraction of Mesoamerica and its relationship with the American Southwest, the West, the Jalisco Highlands and the Bajío (Kelley, 1974; Braniff, 1974; 1977, 1994; 2000; Jiménez, 1989; 1992; 1995; 2001; Jiménez and Darling, 1992; 2000; Weigand, 1995; Ramos and López, 1996; 1999; to mention just a few). However, and for the contextualization of those extended areas in the overall history of Mesoamerica as a whole, one evident obstacle becomes apparent: the particularism with which the dynamics of the Central Plateau has been approached.

Through this text, we have mentioned a couple of sites north of the Central Mesa, and we have referred, superficially, to some of their features. In this section we shall attempt to focus more intensely on the aspects of that region, to support the analysis on the distribution of the pieces and the contexts that motivated our study.

Even though numerous archaeological works have been carried out at the west of the State of Hidalgo, the south of Querétaro, the south of San Luis Potosí, Guanajuato, and northeastern Michoacán, their joint dynamics have been approached only superficially, and little is known on the role they played within the Mesoamerican network as a social integrated system, and a liaison among other regions. In that strip, converging elements are linked on one side, with the oriental, septentrional and occidental areas of Mesoamerica, and on the other, with the Basin of México and the south of the Central Mesa. Before addressing this issue, it would be convenient to explore a number of schemes that have biased the archaeology in the area, and needless to say, which have derived in a fragmentary approach to their historic development.

Among the studies completed in the North-Central Plateau, a recurrent argument becomes apparent. Its pre-hispanic history tends to be summarized as a permanent shift and massive readjustment of human groups, a perception that has been adopted to explain both the transformation of the archaeological contexts and the abandonment and foundation of new settlements (see Flores and Crespo, 1988:205, Castañeda *et al.*, 1988:332; Cervantes *et al.*, 1990; Paredes, 1990:30, note 21; Saint-Charles and

Crespo, 1991:8; Crespo and Brambila, 1991:8; Saint-Charles, 1991b:57; Braniff, 1992; Crespo and Viramontes, 1996:11; Viramontes, 1996:28).

In spite of the undisputable continuity of some archaeological sequences, the majority of the interpretations are based on that notion of a fluctuating region, an affirmation created around the '60s, at a time when research in the region had just begun, but shiftings were already being discussed.

Within such a framework, Pedro Armillas' proposal regarding climatic variations derived from atmospheric transformations and their impact on farmer communities was heartily supported (1999[1964]). This phenomenon, which was never proved,⁵² was assumed as one of the determining factors in the contraction of the septentrional Mesoamerican frontier.⁵³

The almost total ignorance regarding the universe of archaeological sites and their definite occupational sequences, jointly with the migratory events present in the accounts of ethnohistoric sources and the extension of the agricultural Mesoamerica towards the XVIth century, have reinforced the notion of sudden abandonments/foundations and have biased the perspectives on the social history, thus leading to an unfortunate categorization of the area, which for a long time was considered as a "marginal" one (Armillas, 1999 [1964]:33; Braniff, 1972:277; 1974; Hers, 1988:23, 28, 30, 36-37; Paredes, 1990:30; Sugiura, 1996:243).

No one denies that the "limits" of the Mesoamerican territory have experienced variations throughout time, but the fact that the farming frontier receded south to result in the configuration found by the Spaniards, does not mean that an eternal process of expansion-contraction had taken place in the septentrional strip along its entire history. It neither means that the conflicts with nomadic groups recorded in historic accounts dated from that far back; actually, at different times prior to the Conquest, a 'peaceful' relationship was perceived with the sedentary Mesoamericans (Braniff, 2000:36-37; Spence, 2000:256) and it has been accepted that the role played by the nomadic and seminomadic groups in Mesoamerican dynamics might have been significant, particularly as a liaison with other cultural areas (like the American Southwest, Wilcox, 1986, in Braniff, 1994:121-122; Jiménez and Darling, 2000:178, note 2). Presently, we are aware that the complexity of the history of the intermediate region between the limits of maximum expansion and contraction of the 'septentrional frontier' is much greater.

⁵² Pollen analysis in the region do not support the idea of chaotic change in the environmental conditions, which for what it seems, were never less favorable than today (for southern Querétaro, see Nalda, 1975:132-134; for the area of Tula, see Healan *et al.*, 1989:248).

⁵³ A transformation of the environmental conditions, like the one proposed by Armillas, may have caused some modifications in the settlements of the region, but would not have necessarily motivated an overall abandonment. It seems more logical to think that human groups looked for alternative resources within a well-known environment (Nalda 1996:259) before traveling long distances in the pursuit of new places to relocate. To think about an environmental change as chaotic and final to the degree of exceeding the "sustaining capacity" of an environment towards the communities settled in the area, seems excessive to us. Climatic changes take place gradually, and in this sense the adaptation factor, the flexibility of the social way of life and the differential exploitation of resources in a same environment are always present, a flexibility we in fact know to have existed between the groups that populated such latitudes (i.e. seminomadic groups). For a critique on this type of model derived from an ecological determinism as explanatory of social decline, see Julio César Olivé N. and Beatriz Barba A., 1955.

It is important to point out that Armillas' hypothesis has derived from a process detected at a worldwide level, and should it have had any resonance in Mesoamerica, it would have cut the rainfall averages towards the XIIth or XIIIth Centuries (Armillas, *ibid.*:37-39; Braniff, 1977:10). Then, it is surprising that reference is made to such a notion when addressing processes that took place, at least, two hundred years before that (i.e. Hers, 1989:35-36; Saint-Charles, 1990:51; Braniff, 1992:14, 159), some of them connected with the period now under study.

Presently, there's an overall support towards a contraction of the frontier around the year A.D. 900 or 1000 (see Brambila *et al.*, 1988:13, 19; Castañeda *et al.*, 1988:327, 329; Hers, 1988:25; Flores and Crespo, 1988:205; Saint-Charles, 1990:51, 53, 58; Saint-Charles and Crespo, 1991:8; Braniff, 1992:14; 1994:119, 128; 1999:20; 2000:35, 42; Crespo and Viramontes, 1996:11; Viramontes, 1996:23), approximately up to the south of the Lerma and San Juan rivers (Saint-Charles, 1990:15-16). This proposal has been implemented by Beatriz Braniff in a famous work where she stated: "There is a general agreement on the idea that in Toltec times, that is, between the years A.D. 900 and A.D. 1200, the septentrional Mesoamerican frontier expanded to include marginal zones like Guanajuato, Querétaro, Jalisco, Zacatecas [...]. The preliminary investigations we have carried out [...] suggest different ideas [...]" (1972:273). One of such "different ideas" includes the notion that "[...] the Mesoamerican frontier had initiated its disintegration towards the final portion of the Classic" (*ibid.*:275).

The grounds for this presumed "disintegration" were fragile, as the author herself recognized when she specified: "The archaeological studies in Guanajuato have been *scanty* and *limited*", "In the past years we have *quickly* and *superficially* surveyed the states of San Luis Potosí, Zacatecas, Aguascalientes and Guanajuato [...]", and "[...] we have carried out some *small excavations*, which have provided *relatively limited data* [...]" (*idem*, the scripts are ours).

The excavations that Braniff refers to are those she conducted at El Cópore, Morales and Carabino in Guanajuato, and at the site of Villa de Reyes (Electra), in San Luis Potosí. All these explorations have yielded interesting results on the local ceramic types and their connections with foreign wares, and the analyses have led to interesting proposals concerning ceramic sequences. Although to an important extent the temporal determinations and the distribution patterns of these types have proved valid, following later works, a number of hypothesis (and their implications, mostly), were assumed as facts, still unsubstantiated. Among these hypothesis, as we have seen, the general abandonment of the area towards the Xth century and its assumed "marginal" character, have been highlighted.

Undeniably, parallel to the gradual fall of the Teotihuacán system and to a greater extent in the time immediately after, there were some modifications in regard to the settlement pattern. But it is possible that this process, that affected a large portion of the Mesoamerican territory and not only its septentrional sector, was the result of local adjustments to major changes in the macroregional social structure, rather than forcibly a permanent situation of total abandonments and massive arrivals. John Paddock refers the following:

"Cultures rarely extinguish [...]. The renovation process, in which the old or obsolete pattern gives way to a new one by means of a more or less radical transformation that often implies a change of location, appears to be frequent" (1987:26).⁵⁴

Even though it is true that around the year A.D. 1000 certain areas appear to be depopulated in the archaeological record, in others continuity is undisputable, and even regional peaks may be observed resulting from a greater complexity in the settlements and the systematic exploitation of new and abundant resources.

Around those times, references are made regarding an abandonment of 'Septentrional Mesoamerica' (Flores and Crespo 1988:205-206; Braniff, 1999:20), when a decrease in population only takes place, in fact, at the Malpaso Valley, Zacatecas, an area north and northeast of San Luis Potosí (Jiménez Betts, personal communication, 2001) and in the Río Verde area (Michelet, 1995:216); while in other areas of the Zacatecan territory,⁵⁵ in central-south San Luis Potosí and in northern Jalisco, there is continuity (Jiménez Betts, personal communication, 2001), as is also the case in Durango (Kelley and Abbot, 1966; Kelley, 1971, 1989; Hers, 1988:25; Braniff, 1994:120; 2000:42; Darling, 1998:392). At that time, the northwest experienced a perceptible peak in the Aztatlán network (Braniff, 1975:10; 2000:42; Bojórquez Diego, in preparation), and something similar takes place in southern Tamaulipas and northern Veracruz, Querétaro and Hidalgo, with the Huastecan development (see Ochoa, 1984 [1979]; Michelet, 1995:216).

Hellen Pollard suggests an occupational continuity for central and northern Michoacán starting early in time and until the conformation of the Tarascan state (Pollard, 1995; 2000a), and Brigitte Faugère describes a similar phenomenon for the Lerma Basin (1996:100-106). Throughout this sequence, significant transformations are evident in the planning, location and occupation of specific sites, but in both cases changes have been interpreted as the consequence of transformations in social dynamics and not as a sign of rupture of the overall occupation or of the cultural tradition (see also Moguel and Sánchez, 1988:233 for the Lerma Basin and Cuitzeo in particular; Healan and Hernández, 1999:140 for the Cuitzeo Basin).

After the year A.D. 900, a change is observed in the settlement patterns of sites from the confluence of the Lerma and Guanajuato rivers and towards the foothills of the surrounding sierras, but here again, signs of an occupation that continued up to Tarascan times (Zepeda, 1988:385) are evident, and it has been noted that by the same date, the settlements of the Pénjamo and Huanímaro sierras and those from the foothills of the Guanajuato sierra, were enriched with new architectural features, changing the use of enclosed patios to open plazas, and incorporating ballgame courts

⁵⁴ One good example is the abandonment of the ceremonial center of Tula Chico during the Corral phase, which did not imply the total abandonment of the settlement. On the contrary, in the remaining urban areas, there is evidence of a Coyotlatelco–Tollán continuity, parallel to the foundation of a new ceremonial center (Cobean, 1982:60).

⁵⁵ In southern Zacatecas, in the boundaries of that state with its neighbor San Luis Potosí, is located El Cerrito, with a probable occupation towards the ending of the Classic that extended at least to the Early Post Classic (see Braniff, 1974:43).

(Castañeda *et al.*, 1988:329-330). Also close the boundaries of Guanajuato with the states of Michoacán and Querétaro, there are descriptions of settlements which during the Late Classic shared ceramics with the rest of the Bajío (Bambila and Castañeda, 1991:146), but whose wares were later integrated to the ceramic complex of Tollán (Brambila and Castañeda, *ibid.*:150), suggesting an occupation that extended at least until the Early Post Classic. It has been proposed that the occupation of several sites from the Río Laja also extended until that time, and the case of Cañada de la Virgen has been supported with absolute datings (Nieto, 1997 in Wright, 1999:83, note 7).



Map 2. Localization of the Sites Mentioned in the Text.

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| 1. Alta Vista, Zacatecas | 18. La Griega, Querétaro |
| 2. La Quemada, Zacatecas | 19. Barrio de la Cruz, Querétaro |
| 3. El Cerrito, Zacatecas | 20. San Bartolo, Guanajuato |
| 4. Villa de Reyes (Electra), San Luis Potosí | 21. Yuriria, Guanajuato |
| 5. Buena Vista Huaxcamá, San Luis Potosí | 22. Acámbaro, Guanajuato |
| 6. Río Verde, San Luis Potosí | 23. Zimapán, Hidalgo |
| 7. Pánuco, Veracruz | 24. Pahnú, Hidalgo |
| 8. Cuarenta, Jalisco | 25. Zethé, Hidalgo |
| 9. Cóporo, Guanajuato | 26. Sabina Grande, Hidalgo |
| 10. Carabino, Guanajuato | 27. Chapantongo, Hidalgo |
| 11. Cerrito de Rayas, Guanajuato | 28. Tula, Hidalgo |
| 12. Tierra Blanca, Guanajuato | 29. Huamango, Estado de México |
| 13. Cañada de la Virgen, Guanajuato | 30. Zacapu, Michoacán |
| 14. Morales, Guanajuato | 31. Cuitzeo, Michoacán |
| 15. Salamanca, Guanajuato | 32. Zinapécuaro, Michoacán |
| 16. La Magdalena, Guanajuato | 33. Toluca, Estado de México |
| 17. El Cerrito, Querétaro | 34. Teotenango, Estado de México |

Among the areas that experienced a continuity beyond the year A.D. 1000, needless to say, is the region of Tula. In view of the fact that many elements from this site have been shared with settlements to the north and west (Brambila *et al.*, 1988:18), the presence of materials that connect Tula with the rest of the Central North has been explained as a consequence of a "colonizing momentum" (Castañeda *et al.*, 1988:329) from the Toltecs towards places that were uninhabited at that time: "The explanation of the presence of some settlements of Toltec origins has been proposed as a phenomenon of reoccupation of this region and not as a continuity in the settlement" (Brambila *et al.*, 1988:19, see also Crespo and Flores, 1988:218; Castañeda *et al.*, 1988:328; Saint-Charles, 1990:58; 1991b:61; Crespo 1996:87; Braniff, 2000:36, 42).

This "reoccupation" or "intrusion" by the Toltecs, after a general abandonment of the northern area, poses a number of queries. The earlier phases of the occupation in Tula predate the Xth century, and several ceramics from those earlier complexes are present as well in the "sites of Toltec origins" from Guanajuato, Querétaro and San Luis Potosí, coexisting with local materials. In some cases, such coexistence occurs even with materials of the Tollán phase (see Braniff, 1972; Flores and Crespo, 1988) and in others, the 'Toltec' complex prevails on the local ware, but there is no evidence of a period of abandonment pointing to a discontinuity in the occupation.

Among the sites that shared ceramics with Tula and that were considered as "isolated within the regional context", are mainly El Cerrito, in Querétaro, Carabino, in Guanajuato, and Villa de Reyes, in San Luis Potosí (Castañeda *et al.*, 1988:328, see also Braniff, 1994:119; 2000:36). Close to El Cerrito in Querétaro, lies the site of La Magdalena, which contains some examples of the Corral de Tula complex (see Flores and Crespo, 1988:210), but whose occupation was initiated in the Classic period, where materials shared with southern Guanajuato are present (Crespo 1991a, figs. 14a-14c, see below). In the same way, the Plow Phase (*Fase Arado*) from El Cerrito (A.D. 400-650) shares materials with La Negreta (including ceramics of the Xolalpan and Metepec phases) (Crespo, 1991a:104; see also Crespo, 1989:12; 1991b:165, 176, 192, fig. 9), and from the beginning of the Cerrito phase (A.D. 650-1100) there are types that link it with the Bajío, such as Paso Ancho Red Rim (*Paso Ancho Borde Rojo*), Cantinas, and Garita (Crespo, 1991a:104 see also Crespo, 1989:12; 1991b:176, 192, figs. 9 and 13), while by the end of the Cerrito phase, ceramics in common with the Toltec complexes of Terminal Corral and Tollán are present, sharing as well architectural and sculptural elements with Tula (Crespo, 1989:12; 1991a:104; 1991b:176, 189, 192, fig. 13; Flores and Crespo, 1988:208, 211; Crespo, 1998:327), although the material always follows "features of its own" (Crespo, 1991b:218).

Carabino, in Guanajuato, is an additional site considered as a Toltec outpost. This is so because some of the materials from the Tollán phase from the Tula area were recovered in excavations (Braniff, 1972), and later, the architectural space was identified as similar to the one in that city (Bey, 1986:146-147). In his surface collections, George Bey confirmed the existence of the Tollán complex in Carabino, although he specifies that Carabino was a part of that ceramic sphere, but from a different complex: "They have used important amounts of local ceramics and types of the Tollán phase, and their ceramics seem to denote a greater dependence on the Red-

on-Buff (*Rojo sobre Bayo*) types than the average collection of the Tollán phase" (ibid.:149). Even though Bey tends to consider the site was "Toltec", it is significant that the Carabino inhabitants never abandoned their own tradition, and that in fact maintained the features typical of their region, notwithstanding their participation in distribution networks like the Toltec's. The case of Carabino is quite frequent, with sites that, due to the permeability of their borders, participated in networks that enabled them to adopt or to adapt alien features, and which were interpreted as the product of subsequent discontinued and divorced occupations by foreign groups.

Finally, in Villa de Reyes, are present materials from Terminal Corral and Tollán, complemented with "coarse local ceramics" (Castañeda *et al.*, 1988:328-329), and in the description of their stratigraphic sequence, a neat continuity may be observed between the San Luis and the Reyes phases, precisely in the transition from the Classic to the Post Classic (see Braniff, 1992).⁵⁶

Notwithstanding, Braniff makes emphasis on a drastic change that occurred at the site around A.D. 800-900/1000 (ibid.:14, 161), in her report of the excavations carried out between 1966 and 1967, the material density does not seem to be affected, nor does the sequence appear to be interrupted. As an example that the continued occupation in Villa de Reyes extended beyond the IXth or Xth Centuries, we may refer to the place where the latest datings of her samples come from. The first (A.D. 714±44) was recovered on a room floor that, according to the description and drawings, is an extension of the platform that constitutes Layer 4 of the general excavation (Braniff, 1992:36), filled and sealed with several different floors (ibid.:33).⁵⁷ The second date (A.D. 693±137) originated in Trench 105, in a layer sealed with a floor, on which several other floors had been laid.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Braniff has modified at least five times the relative extension of the San Luis phase. In the original text, the result of her excavations in Electra (1975), there is a suggested time frame for this phase between A.D. 650-900, and for the Reyes phase, between A.D. 900-1200 (1992:118). In the version revised for publication (1992), the first of these chronologies was modified, and the San Luis phase then established between A.D. 350/400–700/800 (ibid.:149). In the chronological chart of a recent work, the author illustrates two limits, making reference to previous works authored by her: A.D. 600-900 (1975), and A.D. 200/400–700/800 (1990) (see Braniff, 2000:40, fig. 3.5). Finally, in the text of that article, she refers to the San Luis phase with the date of A.D. 350-850 (ibid.:41). Of course, the chronological boundaries of the archaeological phases are approximate and are always subject to revision as new data come forth, but as far as we know, Braniff has never made public the information that motivated these modifications. This has generated a number of problems. In the first place, several works in the North-Central area still use the initial dates, and secondly, Braniff's more recent postures represent a rupture of 100 or 150 years between the two phases, a breach that has not been accounted for.

⁵⁷ North Room, excavation Unit E (Appendix III, Sample 7, Element 14): "This North Room was carefully filled with the type of mud mixed with zacate (hay) we have found in other constructions, used to refill rooms and artificially elevate the level, with the obvious intention to build something on top. This upper construction is, among others, the one that corresponds to the large wall 3 that runs along this portion of the platform" (Braniff, 1992:36). According to the description of the excavation unit, this room is an extension of the platform that constitutes Layer 4 of the general excavation, while the first layers were conformed as follows: "Layer 1 [...] is constituted by several mud floors, one on top of the other [...]. Layer 2 is a black mud refill which terminates and simultaneously extends upwards on the large wall 3. Layer 3 is a refill of pink earth. Layer 4 consists of a heavy accumulation of boulders consolidated with mud forming a platform [...]" (ibid.:33).

⁵⁸ Pit 4, in Trench 105, Layer 4, extending below the floor that delimits Layer 3 and down to the bedrock (Appendix III, Sample 1, Element 1). Braniff describes the preceding layers as follows: "Layer 1 [...] extends to a heavily compacted earthen floor. Layer 2 includes both the floor mentioned above and another series of deeper floors, approximately 2 cm thick each [...]. Layer 3 [...] ends in a compacted earthen floor [...]" (1992:25).

If we follow the stratigraphic sequence, it would not be difficult to think that the last stage in the occupation of these buildings has been a bit later than the dates obtained. We should emphasize that none of the examples referred to, mention (or illustrate) any interruption that might represent the period of abandonment which, assumedly, took place by A.D. 800-900, followed by a reoccupation related to a Toltec advance, well in the Reyes phase (see Braniff 1992:161-162) (see [note 102](#)). In fact, on the analysis of her ceramic types, Braniff says "[...] allowing to establish three phases [...]. Such phases are well represented and are successive in pits 3 and 4" (ibid.:117), and regarding the transition between the San Luis and the Reyes phases, she adds: "In a rather noticeable but not drastic way, the significance of the Valle de San Luis type diminishes for the last Reyes Phase, even though it is still present with over 50% of the ceramics [...]" (ibid.:117, 151).

The materials of the San Luis phase have been attributed to a local development (the Valle de San Luis type is among them), while those of the Reyes phase are considered allochthonous and mainly connected with the conformation of the 'Toltec state' and a product of colonization (Braniff, 1992:162). As to the Mazapa Undulating Lines (*Mazapa Líneas Ondulantes*) ceramics, which definitely cannot be considered as a Toltec diagnostic, inasmuch as even in the city the type is poorly represented (Cobean *et al.*, 1981:195; Cobean, 1990:303), to Braniff it would be showing an evident connection with Tula, in spite of accepting that there are noticeable differences between the type from Villa de Reyes and the one found in the Central Valleys:

"We consider that this type in Electra was an import, but in Electra they assumed shapes and finishings that are unusual in the central valleys, suggesting a slight variation, due perhaps to geographical differences (a product or local version of some well-known type), or to chronological differences, or both [...]. In spite of this small difference, we use the chronological value assigned to this type in the Central Valley to suggest a dating for our Reyes phase in the Early Post Classic" (Braniff, 1992:104).

If this was an imported pottery, the variations are difficult to explain. Perhaps it would be easier to consider those "geographical differences" as the "local version of a well-known type" the author refers to. This, of course, together with the integration of local wares with antecedents in the Classic period (like Valle de San Luis Polychrome) (*Valle de San Luis Polícroma*), would lessen validity to the proposal of a "Toltec advance", and could be interpreted, perhaps, as a consequence of wide networks of interregional interaction (see below). This adaptation on the side of the inhabitants, who populated Villa de Reyes since the Classic, is consistent with the uninterrupted occupational sequence stratigraphically recorded by the author.

Pioneer works such as Braniff's have been of crucial importance, as her attention was centered in an area that up until then had been ignored by Mexican archaeological studies, but actually, most of her proposals consolidated as the foundational grounds for later interpretations without any serious questionings, many of the voids were forgotten and the resulting implications adopted as final.

To assume that all elements shared with Tula derive from a process of "expansion" of the city, not only underestimates the local developments, but also generates an obstacle to understand the creation of the Toltec capital, by estranging its particular dynamics of all other regional dynamics. In Richard Diehl's words:

"The data suggest that either Tula had been established by migrants from the north, or that it was the only one community within the entire cultural configuration (regional) that turned into a great urban center. I am in favor of the second interpretation." (Diehl, 1976:272).

It would be desirable that, far from any imperial influence exerted over their neighbors, the material similarities between the valley of Tula and the surrounding areas, in fact reflected their coeval interregional cultural dynamics, and that many of the ceramic features and types identified in Tula were found there precisely for that reason, and not because this was strictly their place of origin and unique focus of their distribution.⁵⁹

This is particularly probable in regard to the first ceramic complexes of Tula, like Prado, Corral and Terminal Corral. From now on, we shall center our attention on them, as they predate the highest peak of splendor in the city, are placed within the temporal range we are considering in this work, and integrate traits and types shared by neighbor sites, which at times were going through their final phases of occupation.

Anyway, the distribution of the Tollán phase complex (A.D. 950-1200) beyond the Valley of Tula does not forcibly represent an imposition or direct "influence" from the inhabitants of that city upon others. Perhaps it would be wiser to think, for the sites that adopted Tollán elements, their own wish to be connected with the prevailing center at the moment (a smaller-scale version of what happened with Teotihuacán, see Jiménez, 1992:191-192).

This discussion is important because the reasons for the splendor and decline of the Toltec capital (as may be sensed in Diehl's comment) will be understood only as of its contextualization in the North-Central cultural dynamics and not the other way around, by claiming that Tula's fluctuations are to explain the social history of that region.

Of course, this is consistent only when leaving aside the notion revised in previous pages, that around the end of the Epi-Classic and the beginning of the Post Classic, the entire septentrional sector of Mesoamerica was suffering a drastic decline and had initiated a definite process of abandonment.

⁵⁹ Even now, the original cultural correspondence of a number of traits that have been considered as "Toltec" is uncertain, as the occurrence of some of them predates the foundation of the city of Tula (i.e. rooms with colonnades, Tzompantli, Kelley, 1978; Hers, 1988; Jiménez, 1989:37; 1995:59; Braniff, 1992:14; 1999:19; Jiménez and Darling, 1992:7; White Raised (*Blanco Levantado*), Braniff 1972; 1992:162; Crespo, 1996:77), or its frequency is not so significant or diagnostic as one may have thought (i.e. Mazapa Undulating Lines (*Mazapa Líneas Ondulantes*) and Macana, Cobean *et al.*, 1981:195; Cobean, 1990:303). Tohil Plumbate has been considered one of the trade ceramics whose dispersion has been Tula's responsibility. For North-Central México and perhaps the Basin, the obtention of Plumbate could indeed be connected with the sphere of Tula (Diehl, 1983:115), but there are several examples, particularly as we approach the production area, where the Plumbate presence is not linked to any other element of the Toltec wares (see Diehl, 1983:144).

The Mezquital Valley

According to the information at hand concerning the western edge of the Mezquital Valley, we know that towards the Epi-Classic and the beginning of the Post Classic, settlements coexisted in the region, connected, on one side, with southern Querétaro and the Bajío, and on the other, with the region of Tula (Fournier, 1995:56; Cervantes and Fournier, 1996:113;⁶⁰ López *et al.*, 1998:29-33) (the Tula area lies within limits of Mezquital, longitudinally towards its central strip). A binary distinction of the local developments does not appear to be very appropriate, but it is the most useful for the overall outline we are attempting to present here.

It is important to clarify that the traits that allow to establish a distinction between these two types of settlements and their nearer connections, correspond mainly to the settlement patterns and domestic equipments, while in the field of rituals, there are objects common to both. That is why we know that although the history of these sites and the social systems responsible for them were not fully parallel, at some point, undoubtedly, their developments coexisted, and of course, interacted.⁶¹

Towards the western border of Hidalgo, there is a group of sites with monumental architecture whose peculiar location and material elements link them directly to sites from southern Querétaro (López, 1994:117; Cervantes and Fournier, 1996:113; Morett, 1996:1; López *et al.*, 1998:29) ([Map 2](#)). The "Xajay regional development", as is presently known, has adopted its name after an elevation found at the south of San Juan del Río, a place extensively surveyed by Enrique Nalda, who also excavated 39 stratigraphic pits in the 1970s. Nalda gave the same name to a ceramic type that also presented peculiar characteristics and which has been considered as diagnostic of these groups (Nalda, 1975:95-98) ([Figure 13](#) and [Figure 14](#)). However, it is important to point out that Xajay Red Incised Postfire (*Rojo Inciso Postcocción, RIP*) is only one of the elements of a ceramic, lithic, architectural and symbolical, much larger complex, and therefore, that its temporal or distributive boundaries do not necessarily match the whole of the social system in which it has been included.

Perhaps the major distinctive trait of the Xajay types is the election of mesas (mostly oriented northwards) for the placement of their ceremonial centers, whose surface, with bedrock outcrops, was leveled to create plain spaces and facilitate the construction

⁶⁰ According to the frequency patterns of the ceramic types, Cervantes and Fournier have distinguished two subregions for the Mezquital Valley: the Tula–Chapantongo area (materials corresponding to the Prado–Corral complex), and the area of Huichapan–San Juan River (Xajay complex) (1996:113). We concur with this distinction, but not with the geographic demarcation, because it is in Huichapan where the site of Sabina Grande is located, with a material equipment that is more closely related to Tula than to southern Querétaro, while El Zethé, scarcely six kilometers away, presents the opposite filiation. It should not be forgotten that close to the San Juan River, there are settlements which also show evident connections with the area of Tula, such as El Cerrito.

⁶¹ Possibly, the differences could be also reflecting differential connections with alien systems, perhaps the product of a "varied orientation of the economic networks", as proposed by Cervantes and Fournier (1996:113), or the result maybe of a more profound cultural interaction throughout a longer period. The answer is difficult, inasmuch as some of these sites are very close to one another, but at first sight, its interaction seems to be limited to the exchange of specific and not numerous products (Cervantes and Fournier, *ibid.*:117).

works (Cedeño 1998:57). Five major sites have been recorded in Hidalgo (Zethé, Pañhú, Zidada, El Cerrito and Taxangú) (López *et al.*, 1989 n/p; López and Fournier, 1990:131; 1992:9-13, 48-51) and the coincident placement and architectural features of at least five sites reported along the San Juan River, south of Querétaro (Cerro de la Cruz, Santa Lucía, Santa Rita, San Sebastián de las Barrancas and Muralla Vieja) (Nalda, 1975; Saint-Charles, 1991a; 1991b; 1993) makes us believe they corresponded to one and the same development. The building system, as described by Saint-Charles for the sites of Querétaro (1991b; 1993) and Cedeño for the sites of Hidalgo (1998:58) are also coincident. In these latter ones, important amounts of Xajay RIP have been collected, and the situation is similar for San Sebastián de las Barrancas, Santa Lucía and Cerro de la Cruz (Nalda, 1975:39, 102; Crespo, 1985; Saint-Charles and Crespo, 1991:4; Saint-Charles, 1991a and 1991b). Perhaps the major distinctive trait of the Xajay types is the election of mesas (mostly oriented northwards) for the placement of their ceremonial centers, whose surface, with bedrock outcrops, was leveled to create plain spaces and facilitate the construction works (Cedeño 1998:57). Five major sites have been recorded in Hidalgo (Zethé, Pañhú, Zidada, El Cerrito and Taxangú) (López *et al.*, 1989 n/p; López and Fournier, 1990:131; 1992:9-13, 48-51) and the coincident placement and architectural features of at least five sites reported along the San Juan River, south of Querétaro (Cerro de la Cruz, Santa Lucía, Santa Rita, San Sebastián de las Barrancas and Muralla Vieja) (Nalda, 1975; Saint-Charles, 1991a; 1991b; 1993) makes us believe they corresponded to one and the same development. The building system, as described by Saint-Charles for the sites of Querétaro (1991b; 1993) and Cedeño for the sites of Hidalgo (1998:58) are also coincident. In these latter ones, important amounts of Xajay RIP have been collected, and the situation is similar for San Sebastián de las Barrancas, Santa Lucía and Cerro de la Cruz (Nalda, 1975:39, 102; Crespo, 1985; Saint-Charles and Crespo, 1991:4; Saint-Charles, 1991a and 1991b).



Figure 13. Xajay vessel. Courtesy of the Mezquital Valley Project.



Figure 14. Xajay Red sherds. Courtesy of the Mezquital Valley Project.

The steep landscape and the abrupt falls existing between the limits of the mesas and the surrounding stream beds, originally led to consider they were defensive sites (Nalda, 1975:123, 136-137; Saint-Charles, 1987-88:5, 7; López and Fournier, 1990:131; 1992:240; Saint-Charles, 1991b:94; López, 1994:117; Viramontes, 1996:28). Today, we know that terraces, platforms and perimeter walls were designed to level the ground or to prevent the landslides of the rocky fronts (Saint-Charles, 1993; Cedeño, 1998:58; this was also the case in La Quemada, Zacatecas, Jiménez and Darling, 1992:6), that most ceremonial centers were not placed on agricultural lands, while their location involved a heavy ritual causality (Cedeño, *ibid.*:57, 60-63), and that the major part of the pre-hispanic population settled a couple of kilometers away or in the irrigable plains that extend over the lower areas (Morett, 1996:5; López *et al.*, 1998:29).

There is some confusion around the time frame of these settlements, largely because only three of them were subject of extensive excavations (Cerro de la Cruz, Pañhú and

Zethé⁶²), and because there are no absolute datings for the contexts where samples of the ceramic type considered as diagnostic were recovered.

As to the sites from Hidalgo, Luis Morett is inclined to consider an occupation that was initiated in the IVth century and continued up to the Xth: "[...] coeval to the climax and contraction of Teotihuacán, and an antecedent as well to the emergence of Tula" (Morett, 1996:1-3, see also Cedeño, 1998:56; López *et al.*, 1998:27-30). Same as in the neighbor site of Cerro de la Cruz, the structures exposed in sites like Pañhú and Zethé reveal several building stages, and as a part of the ceramic collections (which include surface recollections), there is a number of figurines and earlier sherds that indicate links with the Bajío (Chupícuaro) (Morett, 1996:8) and Central México (Ticomán) (López and Fournier, 1990:130; López *et al.*, 1989, n/p; López, 1994:116; López *et al.*, 1998:28), but as far as we know, these were not unequivocally associated with the architectural remains, as was the case with San Juan del Río, where Chupícuaro materials and earlier ceramics locally manufactured were found under the floors and as a part of the refills (Saint-Charles, 1991b:69-77; 1998:339-340). Saint-Charles has proposed a continued occupation between the years 500 B.C. and A.D. 800/900 (1991b:66).

At Zethé, two carbon samples were recovered and dated, but these absolute datings only support the later limit proposed by Morett and Saint-Charles, and probably a slightly longer extension.⁶³

Due to the incipient nature of the studies at the Xajay sites of Mezquital, a ceramic seriation that would allow to establish if types corresponding to the Classic are present, has not been completed so far, thus presenting at first sight a void between a discreet formative occupation and an Epi-Classic one of a considerable magnitude.

As a result of his surveys and excavation works that included 39 pits in the surroundings of San Juan del Río, Enrique Nalda proposed a preliminary ceramic sequence for the region, which confirms the existence of early materials and a suggested continuity until approximately the XIIIth century (1975). This work, upon which later correlations have been based (i.e. Saint-Charles, 1991b), also favors the opinion that the main occupation in the area took place during the first part of the Classic.

Leaving aside the continuity and occupational extension of the Xajay sites, it is more feasible, at present, to favor the idea that the peak of this development took place, not around the first centuries of our Age, but towards the final years of the first millennium, a possibility initially contemplated by some authors (for instance López and Fournier, 1992:240; Saint-Charles, 1993:17). In a later work and as a consequence of a more detailed analysis of the data recovered during the excavation, Enrique Nalda pointed out:

⁶² Besides, in the first two cases, several sectors outside the monumental ceremonial group presumably attributed to the same period, have been explored (Barrio de la Cruz and Huesamenta, respectively).

⁶³ Sample 1125 (Layer VII) calibrated with two standard deviations: A.D. 784-981/A.D. 777-997; Sample 1360 (Layer XVIII) calibrated with two standard deviations: A.D. 641-677/A.D. 600-770 (Morett *et al.*, 1994:70-78, 93, 115).

"Thus, two well-represented periods and an intermediate one, with a lower profile, are derived. The first block would correspond to the Late Pre-Classic and Terminal Pre-Classic. [...] it is possible to date the second block for the Late Classic and Early Post Classic. The period with a weak representation would then be the Early Classic. Then, the analysis of the excavation materials makes us believe that the cultural development and possibly the demographic development in the area may have reached their peak towards the end of the Classic, and not necessarily, as we suspected before, towards the Middle Classic" (Nalda, 1991:34).

There is a number of additional reasons that may support this for the Mezquital Valley. If a major occupation in the Xajay sites from the State of Hidalgo had taken place parallel to Teotihuacán's peak of splendor, why is this contemporaneity not expressed through some connection with the Teotihuacán sites of "filiation" distributed in the vicinities?⁶⁴ Among the Xajay ceremonial centers, the use of talud-tableros (sloping basements), some greenstone blades and a sculpture that recalls abstract representations of Tláloc, had been considered as indicators of a classic temporality and of some kind of relationship with the Basin of México, but none of these traits is circumscribed to one period nor are they exclusive of Teotihuacán.⁶⁵

Thus, the absence of truly diagnostic elements shared among the Xajay sites and the nearby "Teotihuacán" sites would need to be explained.⁶⁶

This lack of presence has been interpreted as the consequence of an "excluding relationship" and a "disparity in histories" (López *et al.*, 1998:31), but we consider that it could be the result, instead, of a temporal displacement. For example, a number of ceramic elements common in the Xajay sites is in fact shared by contemporary sites with the complexes Prado, Corral and Terminal Corral from Tula (López and Fournier, 1992; Cervantes and Fournier, 1996:111-113, 117; Carrasco *et al.*, 2001), and in the

⁶⁴ At scarce twenty-five kilometers southeast of Zethé lies El Mogote San Bartolo, where the diagnostic types of the Teotihuacán wares of the Miccaotli and Tlamimilolpa phases have been identified, in the excavation and on the surface, in addition to a settlement pattern, architectural features and building systems consistent with those of the great city and other sites from the region connected with it (Polgar, 1997; 1998, in preparation).

⁶⁵ In an article that includes data on the excavations he carried out in El Mogote San Bartolo, Manuel Polgar notes, also as a shared trait among Xajay sites, the use of the *talud-tablero* (or sloping boards) (1998:47), though in later observations, he pointed out that their structure, shape and proportions were very different (Polgar Salcedo, personal communication, 2001). In the same text, he refers to the presence of pipe fragments, frequent in the Xajay settlements; however these very few sherds were recovered in the upper layers of a residential group whose occupation survived several centuries the abandonment of the ceremonial center (Polgar Salcedo, personal communication, 2001).

⁶⁶ South of Querétaro, there is a ceramic type which Nalda denominates "Teotihuacánoid", as he considered it was a local version of the Teotihuacán tradition (1975:90-92, 127; 1991:53, 55, fig. 12). Again, and after a careful revision of his excavation's data, this ware happens to be later than the peak of splendor of that city (Nalda, 1991:35, 38, 41), maybe contemporary to the Metepec phase (Nalda, *ibid.*:41). At the Mezquital Valley, there are settlements with an occupation that seems to clasp the lapse comprised between the abandonment of the 'Teotihuacán' ceremonial centers (around Tlamimilolpa), and the emergence of sites contemporary to the Prado and Tula Corral phases (Fournier, 1995:55; Polgar Salcedo, personal communication, 2001). Their characteristics and the dynamics that have generated them, are reasons enough to justify further studies and we shall not address them here, but we want to outline the abundance of that ceramic type among them. Fournier refers to these "Teotihuacánoid-style vessels" as a part of an Atlán Complex, and similar to the contemporary traditions from the Bajío (1995:55, note 14, chart 7 and fig. 10).

opposite sense, in Xajay sites, frequent types have been located in the area of Tula and the Bajío during the same period (López and Fournier, 1992:11; Morett *et al.*, 1994:93; Cedeño 1998:56; Saint-Charles, 1998:340-341), as shall be specified in short.

At some point, there was a tendency to situate the Xajay RIP diagnostic type towards the XIIIth or XIVth Centuries, and even in the XVth and XVIth (see Crespo, 1985; Saint-Charles, 1987-88:5; Saint-Charles and Crespo 1991; Saint-Charles 1991a:9-11; 1991b:66, 88, 91, 94; Crespo, 1991a:112, fig. 7h). In support of this, the primary argument lay in its coexistence with Aztec and colonial ceramics at the site of San Sebastián de las Barrancas, but the subsequent report stated that this proposal was based on surface observations:

"[...] while conducting a salvage at San Sebastián de las Barrancas, large concentrations of this ceramic type associated with later materials were observed *on the surface*, such as flat supported mortars and pottery manufactured during the early colonial times—animal figurines and vessels with litharge. Such an association of materials suggests a continuity in the occupation of San Sebastián from the XIVth Century to colonial times (Crespo, 1985)". (Saint-Charles and Crespo, 1991:3, see also Saint-Charles, 1991b:91).

To support this late assignation, Saint-Charles in one of his works referred to the coexistence of Xajay RIP with Aztec III in one excavation unit from Barrio de la Cruz, but, again, this also took place on the surface and within the first layer (Saint-Charles, 1991a:10), while complete vessels of this type have been recovered in contexts of offerings at the same site and in association with vessels that are clearly earlier (Crespo and Saint-Charles, 1996). Saint-Charles interprets the presence of Xajay RIP in Cerro de la Cruz as a discontinuity in the settlement, a "third occupational stage" represented "exclusively" by this ceramic type, which "took place over the ruins of this ancient compound", that had been abandoned around A.D. 800-900 (1991b:88; see also Saint-Charles and Crespo, 1991:8). Unfortunately, Red Incised Postfire materials associated with architectural features were not recovered in this ceremonial center other than on the surface, and there is no other ceramic type exclusively associated with it (Saint-Charles, *ibid.*:66, 88). This causes difficulties for its temporal correlation, but we think that it is not possible to determine an occupational stage on the exclusive basis of one ceramic type.⁶⁷

Also, at some point it was believed it was feasible to correlate the Xajay ceramics with Aztec III through the occasional use of flat supports in the form of "plaques", with

⁶⁷ Saint-Charles emphasizes that Xajay RIP is not associated with any building activity, though this does not mean necessarily that the use of this ceramic took place when the site had already been abandoned. In his work on the occupational sequence of Cerro de la Cruz, he proposed a continued occupation of 1300 years, with only five building sequences having identified (1991b:66), which means that between one architectural renovation and the other, a good number of years may have elapsed. In this sense, it would not be incongruent that the red incised material had appeared at the site after the last building stage had been completed, so that consequently, the fill of the structures was already sealed. If the fill of the last stage has been relatively dated between the years A.D. 800 and 900, it is logical that this renovation was in function for a period that reached beyond such dates, and not necessarily that the place was abandoned at any time near them.

indentations (Saint-Charles, 1991b:91), but reference is made to flat supports in Classic ceramics from southern Querétaro (Crespo, 1991a:123), to some supports of Coyotlatelco samples found at the site museum in Tula that also show "plaques", and the situation is the same with a cajete or bowl from the Malo Zozaya Collection, by which Braniff defined the hypothetical Tierra Blanca phase for the Late Classic in Guanajuato (1992:101, 115, 125, 140, illus. 5-18). Indented supports are also present among the materials from this collection (see Braniff, 1972:313, illus. 8; 1999:112, fig. 65b).

Finally, a breach was postulated between Red Incised Postfire and the regional ceramic tradition, frequently related to the bichrome red/buff with painted designs (Nalda 1975:95; 1996:269, note 17; Saint-Charles, 1998:343); however, reference is made to one type that maintains the two red/buff colors, but together with the implementation of sgraffiti (incised postfire) motifs (Nalda, 1975:94-95). In the Xajay area at Mezquital, bichrome decorated sherds have been recovered, not as frequently as RIP, but evidently related to it ([Figure 15](#)),⁶⁸ while they differ significantly from the Teotihuacán red/buff incised (there are examples of the latter one in other areas within the region), in shape, color, incision techniques and motifs (we ignore which one of the two resembles best the pottery that Nalda reported). During the Epi-Classic and in the region of Tula, the "postfire incision" (or sgraffiti decoration) appeared in the Guadalupe Red Incised Postfire type (*Guadalupe Rojo Esgrafiado*), in the Guadalupe Red on Brown Incised Postfire type (*Guadalupe Rojo sobre Café Esgrafiado*) and in the Clara Luz Black Incised Postfire type (*Clara Luz Negro Esgrafiado*) from the Prado complex (Cobean, 1990:75-93, 104-118). In southern Guanajuato, towards the final portion of the Classic, the decorative technique of postfire incisions is also present (Nalda, 1996:274) although incisions are much more common in the range of incised ceramic types that have appeared in that State at least since the Classic (Braniff, 1972:284, 286; 1999:50-58; 2000:39; Saint-Charles, 1990:55). Sgraffiti and incisions are present in Zacatecas continually during the Classic and the Epi-Classic (Kelley and Abbot, 1971; Braniff, 1972:284, 286; Jiménez, 1989:10-11, 17; 1995:43, 49; 1998:299, note 10; Jiménez and Darling, 1992:13; 2000; Braniff, 2000:39), as also in the Pacific Coast and Jalisco (Braniff, 2000:39; Saint-Charles, 1990:55; Jiménez, 1995:43; Jiménez and Darling, 2000:169).

⁶⁸ As to this pottery, we are familiar with the cajetes (bowls) of diverging straight walls, with red on orange incised postfire (sgraffiti) decoration or with buff incised postfire decoration, to delineate the motifs. It has been called Incised Polychrome (Polícromo Inciso) by Luis Morett (1992:25, 26, fig. 33), though Patricia Fournier's denomination of Xajay Bichrome Incised Postfire seems more appropriate (1995, chart 8). We agree with Morett (*idem*) and Crespo and Saint-Charles (1996:132) that it is a variety and not a type, so that it would be more correct to talk about a Xajay Incised Postfire type with two varieties: Red Monochrome and Red/Orange Bichrome or Bay. Morett also outlines that this ceramic might represent the union of two decorative traditions "configuring some sort of a hybrid" (*idem*). Thanks to the kindness of archaeologist Carlos Castañeda, we had the opportunity to observe a number of sherds similar to these from San Felipe Irapuato, Guanajuato, presently stored with the pottery collections of the Bajío, in Salamanca.



Figure 15. Xajay Bichromatic Postfire Incised (Sgraffito). Courtesy of the Mezquital Valley Project.

The initial chronological confusion regarding the Xajay type was derived from its apparent later and excluding stratigraphic position with respect to the ceramic type of El Mogote Red on Buff (*El Mogote Rojo sobre Bayo*) with a suggested later limit of A.D. 700/850 (Nalda, 1975:80, 95). This notion was modified by Nalda himself, following a revision of the data he obtained from his excavation, when he noticed a lapse where both types overlapped; he named the last stage of El Mogote Red on Buff type (*El Mogote Rojo sobre Bayo*) as La Trinidad (Nalda, 1991:36, 38, 41, the coexistence of Xajay RIP and El Mogote R/B is also observed in his original work, in two of the four units where the type frequency is illustrated (UE52 and UE103), 1975:83). In spite of such reconsiderations, in a recent work Nalda refers to Xajay Red Incised Postfire (*Rojo Inciso Postcocción Xajay*) as appearing in the region around A.D. 900 (1996:269).

Based on the ceramic correlations and on the few direct datings available for the region, it would seem that the lower extreme limit for this ceramic type cannot predate the years A.D. 750/800, because one of the contexts from Barrio de la Cruz, where a complete vessel was recovered, is later to the construction of a platform, C14 dated between A.D. 650 and 750 (Saint-Charles, 1998:340-341). On the other end, and as we shall now see, in a number of sites Xajay RIP coexists with diagnostic elements of the Prado and Corral de Tula complexes with other common traits present up to Terminal Corral. According to this, and subject to further changes in the chronology of Tula, the upper maximum limit would not exceed the year A.D. 950, proposed for the beginning of the Tollán phase. This range is coincident with the C14 dates obtained for the site of El

Zethé, where a context containing a Xajay RIP vessel was associated with the building of a platform, between A.D. 777 and 997 (Morett *et al.*, 1994:93, 115).⁶⁹

The attempt to chronologically place Xajay RIP has been greatly supported by its presence in other settlements and its coexistence with other materials that are diagnostic of more or less well defined moments.

Several sites reported by the Mezquital Valley Project, evidence strong connections with the societies established in the Valley of Tula, according to the variety of ceramic types they share (López and Fournier, 1990:132; Fournier, 1995). In contrast with Xajay ceremonial centers, the ones from these sites were located on hillsides with gentle slopes, while the nearby areas, by means of terraces, were adapted for habitation and agriculture (López and Fournier, 1990:132; López 1994:117-118). Among them, we are particularly interested in Sabina Grande, a site where excavations and several survey studies have been carried out (López and Fournier, 1990:91; 1992; Carrasco *et al.*, 2001) and because it is, geographically, very close to Desarrollo Regional Xajay.

As we have mentioned before, Sabina Grande presents surface representations of the Corral, Terminal Corral and Tollán complexes (López and Fournier, 1992:16-42). In Sabina Grande, no complete sample of Xajay was recovered, but the type is frequently seen on the surface (see López and Fournier, *idem*), wherefrom a sample of the bichrome variety is known. Xajay RIP sherds were present in the stratigraphic sequence described in chapter three of this thesis, which may be circumscribed to Terminal Corral (A.D. 900-950). Also from this sequence there is a large fragment of a globular, polished, buff-colored bowl, decorated with a red band over the body and resist frets on the neck, which exhibits exactly the same shape, finish, and decorative technique and motifs as a complete piece recovered during the excavation of a multiple burial in El Zethé (Figure 16), a context which yielded one complete tripod Xajay RIP *cajete* (bowl), associated with the datings referred to above.⁷⁰

An additional site where ceramics share abundant attributes with the region of Tula is Chapantongo, located in the central strip of the Mezquital Valley, scarcely 20 kilometers north of Tula (López and Fournier, 1992:71-74; Fournier, 1995:56-57; Cervantes and Fournier, 1996:106-108). From the surface collection, several types of the Prado and Corral complexes designated by Cobean have been reported, in addition to varieties, local types (Fournier, *idem*; Cervantes and Fournier, *ibid.*:108-112, 117) and materials considered as a part of intraregional exchange, being the Xajay RIP among them (López and Fournier, *ibid.*:73; Cervantes and Fournier, *idem*).

⁶⁹ On this dating, Crespo and Saint-Charles have recently (1996:119) based themselves to propose a chronology between A.D. 600 and 900 for the contexts excavated at Barrio de la Cruz, where a number of Xajay RIP vessels were recovered in offering contexts.

⁷⁰ The similarities between the bowls from El Zethé and Sabina Grande are unquestionable, and suggest an identical origin. They may have been imported pieces, as at least in the collections of the Mezquital Valley Project, we know of no other similar samples or sherds. Red/Bay and Resist types have been reported from varied places, but we found no great similarities with the one we are referring to, although a fragment with a very similar decoration and motifs, but with a different shape, is included in the sample that the INAH Center in Guanajuato has recovered from the Salamanca-Yuriria stretch of the Gas Pipe Project, and which archaeologist Carlos Castañeda has graciously shared with us.



Figure 16. Bowl with a resist decoration. Courtesy of the Mezquital Valley Project.

In an opposite sense, in the Xajay sites, some wares that are frequent in Sabina Grande and Chapantongo have occasionally appeared. In the Xajay collections, the types Ana María Red/Brown (*Ana María Rojo/Café*) and Coyotlatelco Red/Brown (*Coyotlatelco Rojo/Café*) (Prado and Corral complexes, respectively) from Cobean's classification have been identified (López and Fournier, 1989; 1992:12; Morett, 1992:29, 39; Fournier, 1995:56; Fournier and Cervantes, 1996:117) and El Marqués Brown Polished (*El Marqués Café Pulido*), a type typical of Chapantongo (Fournier and Cervantes, idem). In El Zethé and Pañhú, a correspondence between Zajau RIP and Cañones Red-on-Brown (*Cañones Rojo sobre Café*) has been reported (López and Fournier, 1992:11; Morett *et al.*, 1994:93) which is an additional ceramic type that Cobean has considered as diagnostic of the Corral phase in Tula (1990:238-244), and which is also present in Cerro de la Cruz (Saint-Charles, 1998:340-341; see also 1991b:80, 87, fig. 10).⁷¹ Apparently, there are other elements in Cerro de la Cruz which are somehow connected

⁷¹ In his work from 1991b, Saint-Charles refers to the Red/Bay Long Necked Bowls, which according to his illustration (fig. 10) could correspond to the Cañones type he referred to in his later work (1998:340-341). Cervantes and Fournier refer to Cañones pitchers that have appeared in the Xajay area as a variety of the type reported by Cobean (1996:117).

with the Prado and Corral complexes in Tula (Saint-Charles, personal communication, 2002), and we think that some of the red/buff types locally manufactured in El Zethé and El Pañhú belong to the Coyotlatelco sphere. The possible scopes of this latter sphere and some of its implications will be elsewhere referred to in detail (Solar, in preparation).

As previously stated, the Xajay occupation is not circumscribed to the temporal limits of Red Incised Postfire.⁷² Nevertheless, the intraregional and interregional distribution of this diagnostic type is a significant support at the time of tracing the connections of the area towards the Epi-Classic.

Contrary to some general beliefs, Xajay RIP was neither restricted to the valley of San Juan del Río (Saint-Charles, 1987-88:7) nor circumscribed to the basin of the San Juan River, or the surroundings of its confluence with the Tula River, the western portion of the *municipio* of Tecozautla, Hidalgo, and exceptionally to Cerro Magoni in Tula (Saint-Charles and Crespo, 1991:4). In an isolated way, reference has been made to Xajay Red sherds in Huamango, México (Segura and León, 1981:116-117; Morett: 1996:1), Teotenango, México (Nalda, 1996:269, note 17) and Sierra Gorda in Querétaro (Crespo and Saint-Charles, 1996:119; Elizabeth Mejía and Alberto Herrera, personal communication, 2001⁷³), while there is a distributive continuity between southern Querétaro and Western Hidalgo, undoubtedly including the Valley of Querétaro (Crespo and Saint-Charles, *idem*) and the *municipios* of San Juan del Río, Querétaro (Nalda, 1975), Tecozautla, Hidalgo, Huichapan, Hidalgo (López *et al.*, 1989; López and Fournier 1990:131; Crespo and Saint-Charles, *idem*) and Chapantongo, Hidalgo (Cervantes and Fournier, 1996:108-112, 117).⁷⁴ For what we know, no Xajay RIP sherds have been reported in Guanajuato, but it should be remembered that in the southern half of the state, some have been recovered which, in our opinion, may correspond to the variety Red/Orange of Xajay Incised, together with a fragment comparable with the bowl from El Zethé that shared its context with one Xajay RIP cajete.

Clay pipes represent an additional example to establish that a connection between El Mezquital and El Bajío during the Epi-Classic was possible. These artifacts are

⁷² Possibly its existence extended to the early stages of the Tollán phase. Even though we are not familiar with any diagnostic type of that 'Toltecán' complex among the Xajay sites from Mezquital, there is in them a ceramic type known as Pañhú Orange (*Naranja Pañhú*), which in one of its shapes and decoration, greatly resembles the tripod bowls 'with rough strokes' and button supports of Jara Orange Polished (*Jara Anaranjado Pulido*) (Cobean, 1990:335-350). However, in the first one, the past is much finer and thinner, and at first sight it seems to be originated in the Gulf Coast (de la Vega Doria, personal communication, 2001). During the Epi-Classic, the types La Costa Orange Polished (*La Costa Anaranjado Pulido*) and La Costa Orange/Orange (*La Costa Anaranjado/Anaranjado*) were found at Chapantongo (Fournier, 1995:382, chart 8; Cervantes and Fournier, 1996:112, 118, fig. 11), but we do not know whether this is the same type.

⁷³ This sherd is rather surprising, because according to Mejía and Herrera, it was recovered in a later layer in the excavation sequence.

⁷⁴ Luis Morett adds the north of Zumpango and the vicinities of Zimapán (1996:1). In fact, this would be quite reasonable given its proximity with the areas mentioned here, but reference is not made to any author or particular context, so we are considering this with caution. Morett notes as well that Xajay RIP appeared in the earlier layers of Tula Chico (*idem*), but again, he fails to refer by whom or when such finding took place. In the reports consulted by us, this information was not found.

abundant in the collections of sites located in Hidalgo, although, actually, their dispersion is much wider.

The Septentrional Network of the Plateau

After Porter's typology (1948:187), the Mezquital is rich in angular pipes with plain or zoomorphic platform supports; the little furnace or cazoleta has the shape of a funnel, and like the tube, the walls are thin. In general, these pieces show a cover of red polished slip, though there are also samples in brown, black or unslipped. Frequently, the decoration has been applied with the technique of *pastillaje*, a narrow strip that embraces the bowl with endings that continue along the upper portion of the tube, in a straight or curled shape, or with a design of motifs; occasionally, the platform exhibits a zoomorphic design ([Figure 12](#)). As stated before, similar objects were recovered by Acosta during the explorations of the Burnt Palace in Tula ([Figure 11b](#)).⁷⁵ We have referred as well to the amazing similarity of the pipe (a unique object in that region) recovered at the Temple of the Warriors in Chichén Itzá (Morris *et al.*, 1931:177-179, illus. 21), the origin of which was thought to be Toltec (Porter, 1948:210; Cobean, 1978:73), or Michoacán (Thompson, 1966, in Cobean, *idem*) ([Figure 11a](#)). In the Xajay sites from El Mezquital (and surrounding areas), abundant samples of these pipes have been recovered on the surface and in excavations (Morett, 1992:24; 1996:8), while among the sites that shared wares with Tula, there was a complete sample from Sabina Grande (Carrasco *et al.*, 2001:61, 68, 70), and in Sabina and Chapantongo several fragments were recovered on the surface (Fournier, 1995:382, chart 8; Cervantes and Fournier, 1996:111, 112, 125, fig. 13).

In general, there are reports on pipe fragments from the sites south of Querétaro, for example El Palacio (Brambila and Castañeda, 1991:153), La Joya (Crespo, 1991a:123, fig. 10a), La Magdalena (Crespo, 1991a, fig. 14c), La Griega (Flores and Crespo, 1988:214), El Cerrito (Flores and Crespo 1988:214; Crespo, 1991a:104), the valley of San Juan del Río (Nalda, 1991:37, 41), and Barrio de la Cruz (Saint-Charles, 1991a:9; Crespo and Saint-Charles, 1996:125). Although sometimes there are no illustrations available or the fragments are too small, it is feasible that most of them correspond to the same type we have described, as is the case with samples from Tequisquiapan, a quite nearby place (see Porter, 1948:203, illus. 17).⁷⁶ In Guanajuato, close to the border with Querétaro, two pipes have been reported from the site of Morales (Braniff, 1999:92), one of them being very similar to the ones from Tequisquiapan (*ibid.*:fig. 52d), while the other one is different than all of which we have described so far (*ibid.*:fig. 52e).

⁷⁵ In Cerro de la Malinche, near Tula, Blanca Paredes has reported fragments of pipes that coexisted stratigraphically, and increased in proportion with Mazapa Red Undulating Lines (*Mazapa Líneas Rojas Ondulantes*) ceramics (1990:194). There are no illustrated examples, but according to the descriptions, these pieces are different from the ones we are studying here, as it has been noted that they present an incised postfire decoration (*idem*).

⁷⁶ As to the fragments from Tequisquiapan, Porter notes similarities with the Guasave pipes (1948:203, illus. 17), though the first ones show platforms with applications of *pastillaje*, while the second have supports and exhibit a painted and postfired incised decoration. The figure illustrates the resemblance between the pieces from Querétaro and Hidalgo.

Some pipes from Guanajuato are also angular and have a platform support, a furnace in the shape of a funnel and a frequently zoomorphic decoration in *pastillaje*. They occasionally present a pair of bulges in the platform, but in most cases these could not be taken for supports, as they extend to the sides and do not get to alter the angle of the body. Several complete pieces are from Tierra Blanca (Braniff, 1972:283, illus. 8; 1999:146) and some others are exhibited at the San Miguel de Allende Museum, while a number of them resemble our pieces. Also from central Guanajuato, fragments of pipes have been reported in Cañada de la Virgen (Nieto, 1997:101), and north of the state in Cerrito de Rayas (Ramos *et al.*, 1988:314) and Carabino (Diehl, 1976:271; Flores and Crespo, 1988:214), but none of them have been illustrated.⁷⁷

As to the states of Querétaro, Guanajuato and San Luis Potosí, Beatriz Braniff considers that the use of pipes began around the Late Classic (1972:292-293; 1974:43). We know now that the state of Hidalgo should be included, and as we shall later see, the state of Michoacán is in the same situation.

Going deeper into the temporality of these objects, it would be advisable to keep in mind that the Sabina Grande context, where one complete pipe was recovered, has been placed through ceramic correlation within the Terminal Corral phase of Tula (A.D. 900-950). The fragments recovered in Chapantongo, classified under the name of Cerritos al Pastillaje, are related to elements of the Prado-Corral complexes (Fournier, 1995:382, chart 8; Cervantes and Fournier, 1996:111, 112, 125, fig. 13), which according to Cobean's sequence fall between A.D. 700 and 900.⁷⁸ In the case of Cerrito de Rayas, Guanajuato, the identified ceramic types suggest that the occupation of the site did not extend beyond that time (see Ramos *et al.*, 1988).⁷⁹

As to southern Querétaro, Enrique Nalda believes the pipes are later than the year A.D. 900 (1996:269), though he notes they appeared for the first time in association with Xajay RIP (1975:97) which in our view may be situated between A.D. 750/800-950. This is consistent with pipe fragments recovered during the excavations carried out at Barrio

⁷⁷ Very close to these sites is Villa de Reyes, in the territory of San Luis Potosí, where pipes have been also recovered (Crespo, 1976:43, 45, 56; Flores and Crespo, 1988:214; Braniff, 1992:39, 61; 1974:43), and described with a coating of polished red paint, conical bowls and a "crest" which "may have the shape of a fan or a spiral" (Crespo, *ibid.*:56), with occasional zoomorphic or anthropomorphic decorations (Braniff, *ibid.*:61). Pipes with "spiral crests" like the ones Crespo has described are exhibited at the San Luis Potosí Museum, at the North Hall of the National Museum, and several pieces from Tierra Blanca, Guanajuato, show this feature as well (see Braniff, 1999:146, illus. 11). The use of pipes was a habit that was shared, in those times, by southern San Luis Potosí and the places referred to above, but apparently, it is clear that the pipes from Tunal Grande presented greater similarities with those from the regions of Río Verde and Guadalcázar (Braniff, 1992:61; Braniff, 1999:146) and perhaps also with those of the Tamaulipas sierras, that are contemporary (Braniff, 1974:43). It is possible that the samples from northern Guanajuato (or at least some of them) are like these and not like the ones we have described for southern Querétaro and the west of Hidalgo.

⁷⁸ It would seem that the findings from the Burnt Palace in Tula are an exception to the Epi-Classic assignment of these pipes, because they were found on the floor, coexisting with materials from the Tollán phase (Cobean, 1978:71).

⁷⁹ Although the survey carried out at Cerrito de Rayas was superficial, the presence of diagnostic types of the Late Classic, such as Valle de San Luis and Garita, has been outlined. There is White Raised (*Blanco Levantado*), but this does not seem to correspond to an Early Post Classical occupation like in other sites, inasmuch as in Cerrito de Rayas, no Plumbate and no other elements of the Tollán complex seem to be present (see Ramos *et al.*, 1988). There is a thick pasted pottery, but the authors believe it does not correspond to the well-known Late Thick Paste (*Pasta Gruesa Tardío*) (*ibid.*:313).

de la Cruz, San Juan del Río, which stratigraphically coexisted with Garita Brown Polished Incised (*Garita Café Inciso Pulido*), Cantinas Red-Orange on Bay (*Cantinas Rojo-Naranja sobre Bayo*), El Mogote Red on Bay (*El Mogote Rojo sobre Bayo*) and Cañones type pots (Saint-Charles, 1991a:9; Crespo and Saint-Charles 1996:125), so that Saint-Charles places them within the El Mogote phase of Cerro de la Cruz, between A.D. 400 and 900 (Saint-Charles, *ibid.*:10). The samples from El Palacio are surface collections, but the materials that allow to chronologically situate the site, include Cantinas and El Bajío R/B, in addition to a ceramic that is considered to be very similar to Mazapa Undulating Lines (*Mazapa Líneas Ondulantes*) (Brambila and Castañeda, 1991:153). La Joya represents a similar case, with Cantinas and Paso Ancho Red Rim (*Paso Ancho Borde Rojo*) sherds, the latter one with a proposed existence from A.D. 600 to 900 (Saint-Charles, 1990), the same temporality suggested by Crespo for the pipes of this site (Crespo, 1991a:123, fig. 10a). As to La Magdalena and La Griega, the collections are also from the surface and therefore the temporal definition of the pipes is uncertain. Both places share elements with the Tula wares, and for sites such as these, pipes have been considered to be consistent with the Tollán phase (see Flores and Crespo, 1988:214, 217).⁸⁰ However, and interestingly, in La Magdalena, diagnostic types later than the Corral phase are not present (cf. Flores and Crespo, *ibid.*:210-215), with the exception of White Raised (*Blanco Levantado*), with a greater temporal depth in this region than in Tula (Braniff, 1992:105; Crespo, 1996:77). Besides, the settlement shows an occupational continuity from at least the preceding period, as evidenced by the presence of El Mogote R/B, Paso Ancho Red Rim, Cantinas, and San Miguel R/B (see Crespo, 1991a, figs. 14a-14c).

El Cerrito, in Querétaro, is an additional site connected with Tula during the final phases. In the excavations completed in this site, pipe fragments have been recorded, coexisting, in the upper levels, with materials from Terminal Corral and Tollán (Crespo 1989:12; 1991b:176). However, they are also said to be consistent with earlier types, such as Garita Black Brown and Valle de San Luis Polychrome in Level III of the sequence (see Crespo, 1989:12; Crespo 1991b, fig. 9), where two radiocarbon datings were obtained (676 ± 77 , and 805 ± 113 , Crespo, 1989:4; 1991b:165, 218). Regularly, Crespo places the pipes from El Cerrito between A.D. 600/650–900/950 (1989:20; 1991b:192), within the homonymous phase (A.D. 650-1100) (Crespo 1991a:104), a period when, in addition to the ceramics mentioned, Paso Ancho Red Rim (*Paso Ancho Borde Rojo*) is present. Given the frequency of types from southern Guanajuato, the author considers that the types originated in the region of the Laja River (1989:20; 1991b:192).

In the San Luis phase of Tunal Grande (A.D. 650-900), the use of pipes is reported in Villa de Reyes coexisting with Valle de San Luis Polychrome, the diagnostic type for that period (Crespo, 1976:43, 45, 56; Braniff, 1992:39, 61).⁸¹ The temporal distribution

⁸⁰ Flores and Crespo have not mentioned the presence of pipes in La Magdalena (see 1988:214), but in a later work, Crespo illustrates a pair of fragments from this place (1991a:fig. 14c). At the foot of the images, the dates A.D. 400-800 have been indicated.

⁸¹ Braniff outlines that pipes were common in the San Luis phase, and that there were three fragments in the San Juan phase (ca. 270 B.C.–A.D. 130, 1992:147). They were black and showed no decoration behind the bowl or *cazoleta* (*ibid.*:61, 117-118).

of this kind of ceramic is wide, but it is worth remembering that in El Cerrito, some pipe fragments occur in the same level as Valle de San Luis. They are also present in Guanajuato, where they have been placed in the hypothetical phase of Tierra Blanca, in the Late Classic, again together with the clay pipes (Braniff 1972:283).

If we were to suggest a filiation for the pipes mentioned (whenever we are familiar with the shapes) with pipes from other areas, our primary candidate would undoubtedly be northeast Michoacán, in the surroundings of the Cuitzeo lagoon ([Figure 11c-e](#)). This is where three of the nine samples illustrated by Porter come from, and they are truly similar (the others are the pipe from Chichén, one of the pipes recovered in Tula, another one from in Pánuco⁸² and three fragments from Tequisquiapan, Querétaro) (1948:186-189, 197, 209, 210, 216, illus. 8k, 17b and 22). The author seems to assume that all pieces from Michoacán are Tarascan, but in her study, one may see that those from Cuitzeo, specifically, are quite different from the rest.⁸³ We ignore their precise temporality or provenience, but as seen, it may be considered that the type to which they corresponded became generalized prior to the year A.D. 1000.

From recent works, we only know of a fragment which most certainly corresponds to the same type, illustrated by Moguel (1987 illus. 50) and collected during the surveys accomplished in the Yuriria-Uruapan stretch, together with Tarascan samples showing "coiled" or "twisted" mouthpieces (Moguel, *ibid.*:illus. 50-51). Specifically in the Cuitzeo Basin, pipes have been surface collected (Moguel and Sánchez, 1988:231), but we do not know whether they are of the type we have described or whether they are Tarascan. The same thing happens at the Zacapu Basin, where Brigitte Faugère has attributed them to the Milpillas phase (A.D. 1200-1450), based only on surface data, while there are pipes in places where in addition to materials from the Milpillas phase, there are some which correspond to La Joya (A.D. 850-900), such as the Hornos Group and Chirimoyo Rim (*Borde Chirimoyo*) (see Faugère, 1996:87-88).⁸⁴

The distribution of angular pipes with platform support, funnel-shaped bowl and *pastillaje* decoration, has clasped a number of spheres during the Epi-Classic (we shall refer to this later on). The Cuitzeo pieces illustrated by Porter are a fine indicator of the existence of a network linking at least northeast Michoacán, Guanajuato, southern Querétaro and the western portion of Hidalgo. Maybe these links, observed as well in relation with other archaeological materials at least since the end of the Classic, have

⁸² This is an interesting piece, as it is actually comparable to the ones we have described, and seems to be exceptional among the collections from the Huasteca, although this region features a great variety of types (Porter, 1948:191-193, illus. 8 and 9). Among the most frequent ones, the pipes with a platform support, but with rounded, thick rims and a cylindrical bowl in the middle may be mentioned (Porter, *ibid.*, illus. 9b; Du Solier *et al.*, 1947-48:21, illus. 3a and b, 24). As to their shape, these latter artifacts seem to be closely linked to those from the region of Caddo, in the American Southeast, where they were usually made of stone (Porter, *ibid.*:192, 227; Du Solier *et al.*, *ibid.*:26-29; Armillas, 1999 [1964]:34). For El Mezquital, we know of only one fragment which perhaps corresponds to a clay pipe of this sort, surface collected and originated in Sabina Grande.

⁸³ The most common Tarascan pipes are also angular, but have no platform; they regularly have supports and the decoration consists of painted, punched, or postfire incised designs (Porter, 1948:186-190, 193-199, illus. 12-15), sharing some of these attributes with the pipes from Sinaloa that are, to a certain extent, contemporary (see Porter, *ibid.*:199-203, illus. 16 and 17).

⁸⁴ The only test pit where pipe fragments were recovered was carried out in a shallow cave. They were black, polished mouthpieces, and one of them was "twisted". Like the author, we also believe they "resemble" the Tarascan types (Faugère, 1996:94).

facilitated the insertion of Tula in the networks through which the obsidian from Ucareo/Zinapécuaro and the turquoise have circulated, since the Epi-Classic and until the Early Post Classic.

The human presence in the territory of Michoacán is considerably old, but it has been suggested that the primary occupation in the northeast took place by the Epi-Classic.⁸⁵ Specifically, east of the Cuitzeo lagoon, the settlement was relatively insubstantial almost until the end of the Classic period, when sites connected with the exploitation of obsidian in Ucareo/Zinapécuaro were spotted, (Healan, 1997:94-96; 1998:106), and which, throughout the Epi-Classic proved to be a resource of Pan-Mesoamerican significance (Healan, 1997:77; 1998:107; Healan and Hernández, 1999:136).

The connections between El Mezquital and northeast Michoacán are also evident precisely because of this obsidian, as at least during the earlier phases of Tula (A.D. 700-950) they represented almost 90% (Cobean, 1982:80; Healan and Stoutamire, 1989:236; Healan *et al.*, 1989:244, 248; Healan, 1997:77, 1998:101; Healan and Hernández, 1999:136, 141).⁸⁶ It is only logical to think that the relation between both regions was a secondary consequence of their participation in the same network (Healan and Hernández, 1999:141), and not that inevitably, it took place in a direct manner: "[...] the network may have had direct links (from settlement to settlement) or indirect links (chained) and multiple points of contact, which determines, to begin with, that the artifacts may have been transported along considerable distances" (Cervantes and Fournier, 1996:118).⁸⁷

Some Spheres and Possible Overlappings

Throughout the past three decades, several archaeological projects were carried out in northeastern Michoacán, southern Guanajuato and southern Querétaro. Although in the past few years many sites have been excavated, most of the information concerning this area has been built on surface observations. Thus, the correlative grounds have been, primarily, the ceramic sequence established by Michael Snarkis for the site of Acámbaro (1974; 1985) (see Nalda, 1981; Velázquez, 1982; Contreras and Durán, 1982; Sánchez and Zepeda, 1982; Moguel and Sánchez, 1988; Ramos *et al.*, 1988;

⁸⁵ As a consequence of the analysis of materials recovered in the Yuriria-Uruapán stretch of the Gas Pipe Project, María Antonieta Moguel observed an occupational continuity that extended from the Upper Pre-Classic to the Late Post Classic in the Cuitzeo Basin, but with the greatest diversity and frequency of ceramic types occurring as of the Late Classic (1987:2, 5, 68, 115, 129). The town of Zacapu is located west of the lagoon, and between this town and the Lerma River, a continuity that began in the earlier times has also been observed, although again, the primary occupation took place during the final portion of the Lupe phase (A.D. 700-850), during La Joya (A.D. 850-900) (Faugère, 1992:41, 43, 45; 1996:84, 90, 95; Pollard, 1995:36; 2000a:63), and extending throughout the Palacio phase (A.D. 900-1200) (Faugère, 1996:84, 90-92, 95, 100).

⁸⁶ Richard Diehl states that at least 80% of the obsidian from Tula comes from Pachuca, and maybe 10% from Zinapécuaro (1982:111), but it would seem this only applied to the Tollán phase (Cobean, 1978:117; Healan and Stoutamire, 1989:234, 236; Healan *et al.*, 1989:248-249).

⁸⁷ Most likely, other resources must have been involved, whose traces have not been clearly identified in the archaeological record; one such resource may have been salt, whose exploitation east of the Cuitzeo lagoon has been documented for the Late Post Classic (Moguel, 1987:12; Nalda, 1996: 261-262; Williams, 1999:164-165, 170-171).

Saint-Charles, 1990; 1991b; Durán, 1991; Healan and Hernández 1999:133), those proposed by Nalda for San Juan del Río (1975) (see Saint-Charles, 1991b; Crespo) and by Cobean for the region of Tula (see Braniff, 1999; Flores and Crespo, 1988; Cervantes and Fournier, 1996).

In spite of the vagueness that surface studies may offer in chronological terms, it has been precisely after them that the geographical scopes of some ceramic provinces could be gradually established, while their extensions and overlappings now constitute a remarkable approach to the distinction of interregional relationships.

With the word "province" we refer to the dispersion of one particular ceramic type (or group of types). In such a distinction, the place occupied by the varieties is sometimes confusing, particularly whenever they show a filiation with types corresponding to other provinces. This observation is necessary, as the confluence of diagnostic traits from different provinces, would, hypothetically, be the result of a differential orientation in the connections abroad made by each social group, and consequently, of the implicit degree of interaction. In this sense, the concept of "style" is, again, very useful, as a mid position between the particularizing connotation of "type", and the generalizing connotation of "tradition" (Willey and Phillips, 1958:34-43).

The coincidences/dissents in terms of ceramic styles, reach beyond the local scale to integrate several social systems. From now on, whenever we talk about "Spheres", we shall do it after Charles Kelley's definition, of "[...] a series of local and more or less adjacent *archaeological cultures*, connected by the joint presence of one or more "horizon styles" [...] where sharing such styles implies some degree of cultural interaction" (Kelley, 1974:33, note 8).

The Bajío Sphere

It has been argued that between the years A.D. 350 and 900, mainly three "traditions" may be identified in the Bajío: White Raised (*Blanco Levantado*), Red on Bay (*Rojo sobre Bayo*) and Incised Black or Brown (*Negro o Café Inciso*) (Castañeda *et al.*, 1988:326; Saint-Charles, 1990:51; Braniff, 2000:39). Considering the temporal extension and the roots in one particular region, the term "tradition" seems appropriate to generally refer to these ceramics (Willey and Phillips, 1958:34-35); however, throughout their lifetime, they have experienced local and chronological variations which, because of the differences regarding shape and design, have been catalogued as different types.

White Raised (Blanco Levantado)

There is a number of works in regard to the White Raised decoration technique, where its extended use and variability throughout a considerable period of time are described (Saint-Charles, 1990:56-59, 80-82, 102-103; Crespo, 1991a; 1996; Durán, 1991:70-71).

The analysis of shapes has allowed to distinguish several types. The latest one is that which is a part of the Terminal Corral and Tollán de Tula complexes (Saint-Charles, 1990:56; Crespo, 1996:77; Braniff, 2000:40); the earliest one was present in the Formative sites of both coasts (Crespo, *ibid.*:79), and from the Middle Classic to the Early Post Classic, it was identified in sites from northern Guanajuato and El Bajío (Saint-Charles, *ibid.*:56; Crespo, *ibid.*:77).

The Raised White, which spread throughout the Bajío during the Classic, and was identified in El Mezquital during the Epi-Classic and the Early Post Classic, was distributed northwards at least as far as southern San Luis Potosí. It embraced almost the entire territory of Guanajuato and was present even in Salvatierra; while to the east, it was identified in several sites south of Querétaro and east of the Mezquital Valley ([Map 2](#)).⁸⁸ It has been frequently found jointly with local ceramics, and towards the end of the Epi-Classic, jointly with ceramics from the Terminal Corral complex from Tula. Surprisingly, Raised White is not present in Acámbaro, Cuitzeo, and has not been seen in large quantities south of the Lerma Valley (Moguel, 1987:122; Moguel and Sánchez, 1988:232; Castañeda *et al.*, 1988:326; Durán, 1991:70; Braniff, 1999:58), as some of the types that characterize this area and that are found north, south and east, coexist in several sites with this one. Besides, nearby Acámbaro, there are China clay deposits, an indispensable resource for its decoration (Cárdenas, 1997:17, map 2); and the Basin of the Laja River, which flows into the Lerma River almost at the level of the Yuriria Lagoon, close to Cuitzeo, has been indicated as the major area of production for Raised White (Crespo, 1996:80).

There is a Black on Orange pottery which has been considered a variety of Raised White (Contreras and Durán, 1982, n/p; Castañeda *et al.*, 1988:326; Saint-Charles, 1990:83-84, 102-103; Durán, 1991:68; Crespo, 1996:77). This has been occasionally confused with the Aztec II type (see Juárez and Morelos, 1988:279, 282), but besides the existing differences between them, the first seems to be earlier (Braniff, 1972:281-282). Its probable beginning has been proposed for sometime around A.D. 750/800 (Contreras and Durán 1982, n/p; Sánchez and Zepeda, 1982, n/p; Saint-Charles, *ibid.*:57; 84). The Black on Orange from the Bajío shows a pattern of distribution similar to Raised White, because even though it is usually reported in a lesser proportion (Durán believes the contrary, 1991:69-70), it is anyway present in southern San Luis

⁸⁸ Raised White has been reported in Villa de Reyes, San Luis Potosí (Flores and Crespo, 1988:210-215; Crespo, 1996:87; Braniff, 1999:30-31); Cuarenta, Jalisco (Durán, 1991:70); Carabino, Guanajuato (Braniff, 1972:279; 1999:30-31; Flores and Crespo, 1988:210-215; Crespo, 1996:87); El Cópore, Guanajuato (Middle and Late Cópore phases, associated with local types) (Braniff, 1972:276; 1999:30-31; Flores and Crespo, 1988:210-215; Crespo, 1996:82); Alfaro, Guanajuato (Ramos and López, 1999:253); at sites from the Comanjá-Guanajuato sierras (such as Cerrito de Rayas) (Ramos *et al.*, 1988:313; Ramos and López, 1996:112); Agua Espinoza, Guanajuato (Crespo, 1996:87); Cañada de la Virgen, Guanajuato (here, it is situated between A.D. 850-900 and 1100) (Nieto 1997:107); La Gavia, Guanajuato (as of the Late Classic and during the Early Post Classic) (Moguel and Sánchez, 1988:232); Tlacote, Guanajuato (Crespo, 1991a:123); Urétaro, Guanajuato (Crespo, 1996:83), La Magdalena, Guanajuato (Flores and Crespo, 1988:210-215; Crespo, 1991a:figs. 14a-14c; Braniff, 1999:30-31); Salvatierra, Guanajuato (Braniff, 1999:30-31); the Salamanca-Yuriria stretch (Contreras and Durán, 1982, n/p) and the Salamanca-Degollado stretch (Sánchez and Zepeda, 1982, n/p); Valle de Lerma (Moguel and Sánchez, 1988:231); La Griega, Querétaro (Flores and Crespo 1988:210-215; Crespo, 1996:87); Santa Bárbara, Querétaro (Crespo, 1996:88); El Cerrito, Querétaro (Flores and Crespo, 1988:210-215; Crespo 1991a:104; Crespo 1996:82, 87); La Negreta, Querétaro (Crespo, 1996:82); San Juan del Río (Nalda, 1975:94-95); Zimapán (Sánchez *et al.*, 1995:141-142); Sabina Grande (Carrasco *et al.*, 2001); Tula (Cobean, 1990).

Potosí, central and southern Guanajuato, southern Querétaro, and several samples are exhibited at the site museum in Tula.⁸⁹

Red-on-Bay (Rojo sobre Bayo) and Black-Brown Incised/Incised Postfire (Negro-Café Inciso/Estrafiado)

The behavior of these ceramics cannot be analyzed separately, as they usually appear in association. Like Raised White, they cover an extended time span, but due to their presence in several stratigraphic sequences, there is some more information available in regard to the differences between them, the chronological validity of a number of peculiarities, and the scopes of their geographic dispersion.

As said, the correlative base for the Bajío studies has been mainly the work by Michael Snarkis, who named the diagnostic Red on Bay of the Lerma phase from Acámbaro⁹⁰ as Cantinas Red-Orange A (Snarkis, 1985:239, figs. 70-75), and the primary incised diagnostic type as Garita Black-Brown B (ibid.:238, figs. 62-69) ([Figure 17](#) and [Figure 18](#)). Apparently, the distribution of these types includes the center and south of the State of Guanajuato (Nalda, 1981; Contreras and Durán, 1982; Velázquez, 1982, n/p; Ramos *et al.*, 1988:315; Durán, 1991:64-68; Crespo, 1991a:123, figs. 14a-14c), northeast Michoacán (Moguel, 1987:72-73, 80-81; Moguel and Sánchez, 1988:231; Faugère, 1996:84; Healan, 1998:106; Healan and Hernández, 1999:139) and southern Querétaro (Brambila and Castañeda, 1991:146; Crespo, 1991a:104, 1991b:192, fig. 13; Saint-Charles, 1991b:80-88; 1998:349). The generalized presence of the Acámbaro types does not seem to have reached beyond the eastern boundaries of the State of Querétaro.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Black on Orange has been reported in Villa de Reyes, San Luis Potosí (Braniff, 1992:112; 1999:98); Alfaro (Ramos and López, 1999:253); at the sites from the Comanja-Guanajuato sierras (such as Cerrito de Rayas) (Crespo, 1996:82; Ramos and López, 1996:112); Morales, Guanajuato (Braniff, 1999:96); La Gavia, Guanajuato (as of the Late Classic and during the Early Post Classic) (Moguel and Sánchez, 1988:232); Huanímaro, Guanajuato (Juárez and Morelos, 1988:279, 282); the Salamanca-Yuriria stretch (Contreras and Durán, 1982; Durán, 1991:68-69) the Salamanca-Degollado stretch (Sánchez and Zepeda, 1982); Valle de Lerma (Moguel and Sánchez, 1988:231); El Cerrito, Querétaro (Crespo, 1991a:104; 1991b:192, fig. 13); and Tula, Hidalgo (Braniff, 1999:98; Cobean, 1990:463-470). Black on Orange pottery has been noted in the Río Turbio Valley, El Cóporo, Guanajuato, and Cuarenta, Jalisco, but it has not been definitely confirmed it corresponds to the same type (Durán, 1991:69).

⁹⁰ The preliminary periodification for Acámbaro was designed by Shirley Gorenstein based on Snarkis' ceramic analysis, and consisted of four phases. The Lerma phase, which is the focus of our interest, occurred in the Late Classic (Saint-Charles, 1990:8, 53, 114). Years later, with the results of some C14 datings, the limits were widened to A.D. 450/475-1450 (Gorenstein, 1985:45-46, 97; Saint-Charles 1990:8, 53, 114; 1998:337). The works anchored in the Acámbaro sequence were based on the first chronology, and their accuracy, therefore, is uncertain. However, the nature of the correlations is indeed valid, and notwithstanding that there are no firm grounds so far for absolute datings, the chronological proposal also seems appropriate (Saint-Charles, 1990:59). At some places there is a consistency of the diagnostic types of the Lerma de Acámbaro phase with ceramic types tentatively placed towards the end of the Classic or the Epi-Classic, and there are absolute datings for southern Querétaro, in layers containing Cantinas and Garita (El Cerrito, Test Pit 3, Layer III, 805±113, Crespo, 1991b:165, fig. 9: Barrio de la Cruz, Unit Excavation F, Layer 6, A.D. 760±35, Crespo and Saint-Charles, 1996:124-125).

⁹¹ However, it remains to be verified whether some intrusive incised that were recovered in western Hidalgo, in Xajay sites and in Sabina Grande, are consistent with Garita, as at first sight they do resemble, in addition to their contemporaneity.



Figure 17. Sherds of the Cantinas Red-Orange A Type. Courtesy of the INAH Center, Guanajuato.



Figure 18. Sherds of the Garita Black-Brown B Type. Courtesy of the INAH Center, Guanajuato.

The concurrence of Cantinas and Garita is one of the traits that define the Bajío Sphere, but its presence is the local expression of a larger phenomenon, by which it existed, apparently, a primary relationship between the manufacture of the red on bay types with painted designs and the brown/coffee types with incised/incised postfire (sgraffiti) designs. This primary relation is important because it has allowed us to contemplate the multiple local expressions as the translation of interregional concepts or styles, rather than the emulation of specific types.

Throughout the Classic and the Epi-Classic, the complementation of red on bay painted decorations with incised or incised postfire decorations on monochrome pieces, spread all along the northern portion of the Central Mesa and to the northwest (see Braniff, 2000:39), at least from Sinaloa, Colima, Jalisco (Meighan, 1972 in Braniff, *idem*) and Zacatecas/Durango (see Kelley and Abbott, 1971; Jiménez and Darling, 1992:14; Jiménez, 1995:43), to the region of Tula (see Cobean, 1990).

The primary relation is more clearly observed in a number of cases where in addition to their coexistence, these types are sharing motifs. For example, the peculiar designs of the Xajay Incised Postfire materials are not directly comparable with those of the incised postfire types of neighbor wares; however, some of them have been indeed reproduced in red on bay in ceramics also locally manufactured. Beatriz Braniff had noted this phenomenon, outlining not a direct analogy between certain types from central and southern Guanajuato, but between Snarkis' relation Cantinas–Garita, and the relation of her types San Miguel Red on Bay–San Miguel Incised Postfire (Braniff, 1999:58), the latter ones being present in the San Miguel (100 B.C.–A.D. 300) and Tierra Blanca (A.D. 300–950) phases (Braniff, 1972:279-281; 1999:46, 125). In this sense, the primary relation we mentioned would include several "styles", and from that point of view, the differences between the Reds on Bay and Blacks or Coffee Incised/Incised Postfire that were generalized towards the end of the Classic in the northern portion of the Central Plateau, are significant.

South of Guanajuato and Querétaro, one of those styles may have integrated ceramic types such as Snarkis' Cantinas Red-Orange A, and maybe a good portion of those that have been reported as their variants or equivalents (while the same thing happened with the Blacks-Browns Incised) (see Nalda, 1981, n/p; Contreras and Durán, 1982, n/p; Sánchez and Zepeda, 1982, n/p; Velázquez, 1982, n/p; Moguel, 1987:72-73, 80-81; Saint-Charles, 1990:64-66, illus. 50-58; Durán, 1991:64-68), but these types also coexisted with red on bay ceramics derived from other styles.

We refer for example to the one with which the Red on Bay type from San Bartolo Aguacaliente, Guanajuato, would fit, contemporary to Cantinas, at least along the Epi-Classic (A.D. 600-900) (Flores, 1981 in Saint-Charles, 1990:62 and Durán, 1991:62). This ceramic has deserved little attention, and therefore it is difficult to trace its scopes and possible links, although types with very similar designs, shapes and finishes have been reported in several sites from Guanajuato (see Red/Bay, Contreras and Durán, 1982, n/p; Red/Bay Group 10, Sánchez and Zepeda, 1982, n/p; El Bajío Red/Bay, Saint-Charles, 1990:52, 60-62, illus. 33-49; Red/Bay Polished, Zepeda, 1986 in Braniff, 1999:46) and Querétaro (Brambilía and Castañeda, 1991:146; Saint-Charles 1991b:80-

88; 1998:340). These types, related to San Bartolo Red on Bay, coexist with Cantinas in a number of sites (see Contreras and Durán, idem, Sánchez and Zepeda, idem), but at first sight, it would seem that their scope is not fully consistent. Perhaps the distribution of San Bartolo Red on Bay and other associated types, should be taken as a subsphere within the Bajío sphere ([Figure 19](#)).⁹²

The dispersion (or 'provinces') of particular types such as Black on Orange, Cantinas Red-Orange A, Garita Black-Brown B, or San Bartolo Red/Bay, is not circumscribed to the Bajío Sphere, but instead, it includes the south of Zacatecas, San Luis Potosí and the Jalisco highlands, where they are present in the form of intrusions. Additionally, in the Bajío Sphere, there are red on bay ceramics which we believe would adequately integrate allochthonous styles, such as the Coyotlatelco style. Both phenomena are the result of overlappings with neighboring spheres.

The Bajío Sphere towards the eastern and southern borders, connects with Coyotlatelco, thus confirming the bonds of the social groups that inhabited in northeastern Michoacán, southern Guanajuato, and southern Querétaro, with those to the east of Hidalgo, the State, and the Basin of México. At this time, we shall focus our attention on the links of the Bajío with the north and the northwest.

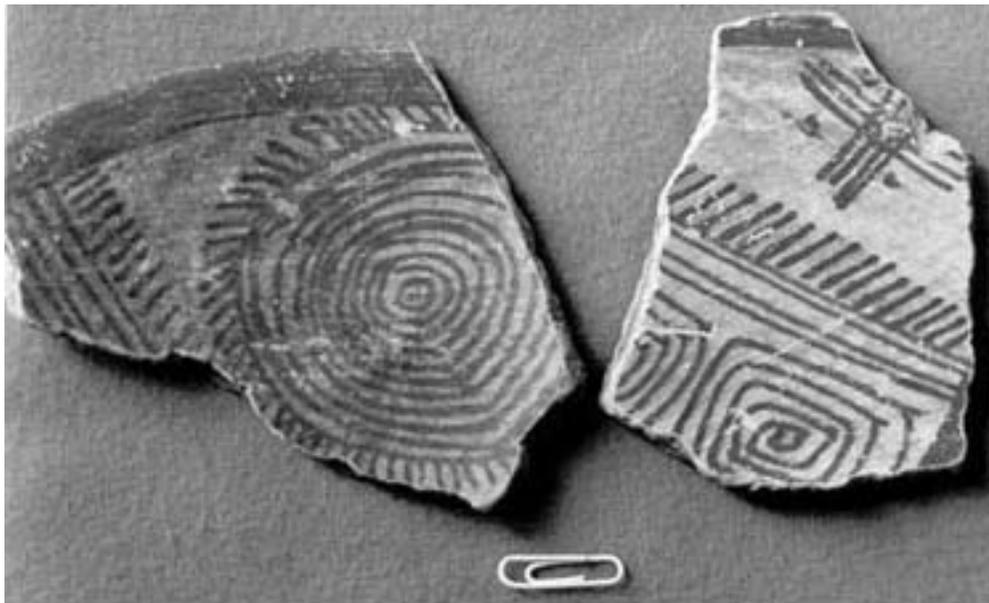


Figure 19. Sherds of the San Bartolo Red on Bay Type. Courtesy of the INAH Center, Guanajuato.

⁹² It is possible that the type San Miguel Red on Bay that Braniff identified at the site of Morales, Guanajuato, and in the surroundings of San Miguel de Allende (Braniff, 1972:282; 1999:32-50, illus. 3 and 4), corresponds to the same style (Saint-Charles, 1990:52, 62), but apparently, with a greater temporal depth. Nieto correlates the Red on Bay from Cañada de la Virgen with Braniff's type, and also with materials from northern Michoacán (1997:107), perhaps referring to the Ramón Red on Brown from the Ucareo Valley, named by Healan and Hernández, who outlined their similarities with Saint-Charles' El Bajío Red on Bay (1999:138).

Septentrional Sphere

Since the late '80s, Peter Jiménez correlated a series of archaeological features and materials common to an extended area in northeastern Mesoamerica, redefining the "Septentrional Sphere" first proposed by Charles Kelley (1974) (Jiménez, 1989; 1992; 2001; Jiménez and Darling, 1992; 2000). In his own words: "The presence of this sphere is significant, as it articulates the Chalchihuites area with other neighboring areas and with the Lerma-Santiago corridor" (Jiménez, 1989:9).

The overlapping of this sphere with regions to the south has been inferred at least since the Early Classic (Jiménez, 1989:36), when a connection already existed between the incised postfire and the red on bay types from Chalchihuites, Juchipila, Malpaso and Guanajuato (Braniff, 1972; Jiménez, 1989:10-11; 1995:40; Jiménez and Darling, 2000:160). Such ceramic connection continued for several centuries, and was clearly observed through the Epi-Classic, involving several other regions.

According to Jiménez, towards the late Classic and during the Epi-Classic (ca. A.D. 650-850), the articulation of human groups inhabiting the central and southern portion of the modern State of Zacatecas, the Highlands/Atemajac Valley in Jalisco and northern Guanajuato was evident, among other things, due to the generalized distribution of several diagnostic materials such as the pseudo-cloisonné pottery (Kelley, 1974; Jiménez, 1989:20, 35; 1995:56; Jiménez and Darling, 1992:14; 2000:164, 175), and the Figurine Type I (Jiménez, 1989:14-16, 35; 1995:47, 56; Jiménez and Darling, 1992:14; 2000:165-166, 175).⁹³ The sites where these elements are present, the architectural scheme of the plaza-altar-pyramid complex, and the locally manufactured wares that show coincidences with one another and suggest a generic relationship, integrate the

⁹³ In his original proposal, Jiménez defines, for the distribution of the Figurine Type I, a time frame of ca. A.D. 650-850/900, based on its presence in stratigraphic contexts from the site of Alta Vista, during the homonymous phase (ca. A.D. 750-850) (Jiménez, 1989:16, 35; 1995:47, note 16). Later, the annotation of Beatriz Graniff on the coexistence of this figurine with Thin Orange in El Cópore, Guanajuato, led Jiménez to reconsider the chronology towards the Middle Classic (Jiménez, 1992; Jiménez and Darling, 1992). However, Braniff later accepted that in her context the Valle de San Luis Polychrome type was also present, and this, jointly with the recovery of new samples of Figurine Type I at the Sayula Basin in Epi-Classic contexts, or its association with figurines of the Cerrito de García type and ceramics of the Ixtépete-El Grillo complex from Juanacatlán, Jalisco, has reverted her chronology back to the initial position (Jiménez and Darling, 2000:170, note 10). The apparent presence of 'Thin Orange' in the layer corresponding to El Cópore, does not necessarily threaten a late classical temporality for Figurine Type I, because even though this pottery has been considered as a sign of links with Teotihuacán, those who have studied it have come to accept that in said city, the consume was increased during the final phase (Ratray, 1981:64-65). It is generally said that Thin Orange ceased to exist around the fall of Teotihuacán (Ratray, *ibid.*:67), but evidences of its possible presence in the Basin have also been exposed up to the Coyotlatelco period (Good, 1972, in Cobean, 1982:66). On the other hand, the complex Prado de Tula (ca. A.D. 700-800) includes one ceramic type "very similar to Thin Orange [...], even in the texture and color of the paste", suggesting that even when shapes may differ, it could be a local imitation (Cobean, 1982:65). This is consistent with the data regarding the type of clay with which Thin Orange was manufactured, also found in a strip located at the center of the State of Querétaro, and at the northwest of Hidalgo (Lambert, 1978 in Ratray, *ibid.*:67). Perhaps it would be advisable to ask oneself whether some sherds identified at sites north of the Central Mesa (including El Cópore), like the Thin Orange produced in Puebla and used in the Basin through the Classic, are not in fact varieties produced with clays from these nearby deposits. Should this be the case, the correlative utility of this ceramic in the region should be reevaluated.

Septentrional Sphere (Jiménez, 1989; 1992; 1995; Jiménez and Darling, 1992; 2000) (Figure 20).

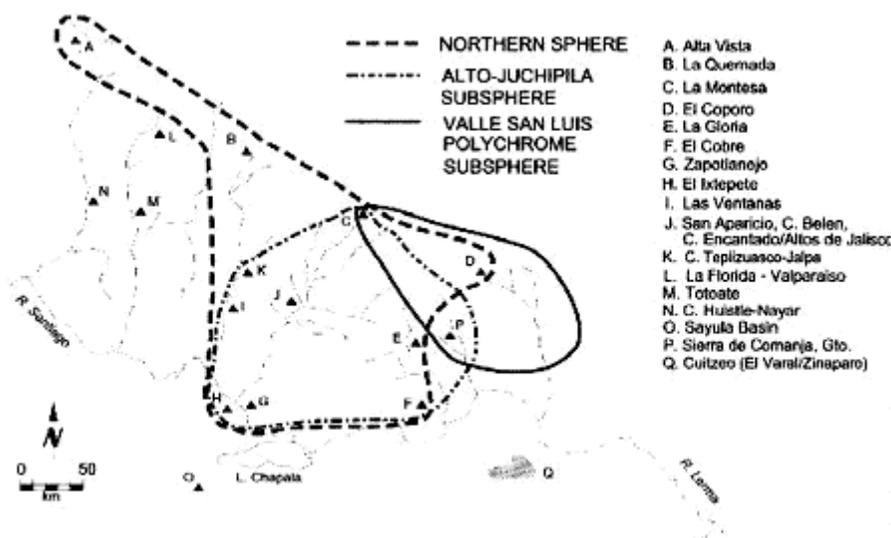


Figure 20. Septentrional Sphere. Taken from Jiménez and Darling, 2000.

Jiménez and Darling (2000) have outlined two subspheres in the southern portion of the Septentrional Sphere Highlands/Juchipila and Valle de San Luis Polychrome (Jiménez and Darling, *ibid.*, fig. 10, 13) (Figure 20), the latter one characterized by the homonymous ceramic.

The Valle de San Luis Polychrome type is a diagnostic of Tunal Grande during its San Luis phase (ca. A.D. 600-900) (Crespo, 1976:37-38; Braniff, 1992:17-18), while its distribution involves mainly Aguascalientes, the southeastern edge of Zacatecas, northeastern Jalisco (Los Altos), northern Guanajuato and southern San Luis Potosí (Crespo, 1976:37-38; Brown, 1985:224; Braniff, 1992:17-18, 69; Crespo, 1998:329), though it is of an intrusive nature in the Malpaso Valley (Jiménez and Darling, 2000:164, 180, note 13), the Río Verde Basin, central Guanajuato and southwestern Querétaro (Braniff, 1992:17-18, 69; Crespo, 1991b:192, 1998:329). In the territory of Hidalgo, there are no sherds that we know of.⁹⁴

⁹⁴ Valle de San Luis Polychrome has been reported in Buenavista, San Luis Potosí (Braniff, 1992:17-18, 69), Peñasco, San Luis Potosí (Braniff, 1992:69); Río Verde (Michelet, 1984, in Crespo, 1998:329); Villa de Reyes (Crespo, 1976:37-38; Braniff, 1992:17-18); La Quemada (Jiménez and Darling 2000:164, 180, note 13); El Cerrito, Zacatecas (Brown, 1985:224; Braniff, 1992:69); Peñón Blanco, Zacatecas (Braniff, 1992:69); Aguascalientes (Braniff, 1992:17-18); Chinampas, Jalisco (Braniff, 1992:69); Cuarenta, Jalisco (Brown, 1985:224; Braniff, 1992:69); El Cóporo, Guanajuato (Middle Cóporo Phase, associated with local materials and Cloisonné) (Brown, 1985:224; Braniff, 1992:69); Cerrito de Rayas, Guanajuato (Ramos *et al.*, 1988:313); Agua Espinoza and Tierra Blanca, Guanajuato (Brown, 1985:224; Braniff, 1972:283), La Gavia, Guanajuato (Jiménez and Darling, 2000, note 13); La Magdalena, Guanajuato (Brown, 1985:224); Tlacote, Guanajuato (Crespo, 1991a:123); El Cerrito, Querétaro (Crespo, 1991b:192, fig. 13).

This diagnostic type is usually found jointly with Raised White, resist-decorated vessels and occasionally with Cloisonné (Brown, 1985:224; Braniff, 2000:40). The presence of Raised White in El Tunal, together with the intrusion of Valle de San Luis Polychrome in sites from central Guanajuato and southwestern Querétaro, confirms the overlap of the Bajío Sphere with the Septentrional Sphere, but moreover, it insinuates the connection of both eastwards, with the Huastecan territory (Jiménez, 2001:6).⁹⁵

In a recent work, Beatriz Braniff refers to a clear cultural frontier that separated El Tunal Grande and El Bajío from the northeastern territories, including the Sierra Gorda from Querétaro, the valley of the Río Verde in San Luis Potosí, and the sierras of Tamaulipas (2000:36). It is true that the regions we have just mentioned show greater affinities with the Gulf Coast (Michelet, 1989:185; Herrera and Quiroz, 1991), but there are also elements that link them with the Septentrional Sphere and the Bajío Sphere. It is remarkable, for instance, the occurrence of Zaquil Black in sites from El Tunal (Braniff, 1972:276; 1992:17; Crespo, 1976:56; Jiménez, 2001:6) and San Diego Fine Orange (Crespo, *idem*), ceramics that are diagnostic of Period IV in the region of Pánuco (Ekholm). Like Crespo specified: "Both types are from the Late Classic, and represent the tradition developed in the Potosinian Plateau, based on ceramic patterns from the Gulf basin" (*idem*). Consistent with this, some Valle de San Juan sherds have been recovered in Buena Vista Huaxcamá (Braniff, 1972:276; 1992:17) and in Río Verde, during its Phase B (A.D. 700-900) (Michelet, 1984 in Crespo, 1998:329). Pipes present both in Río Verde and Villa de Reyes show similarities, and Braniff notes that some clay and stone pipes from San Luis Potosí resemble those of the Caddo region. Precisely, the connection with this area of the American Southeast has been detected via northern Tamaulipas and the Huasteca (Porter, *ibid.*:192, 227; Du Solier *et al.*, *ibid.*:26-29; Armillas, 1999 [1964]:34). The connection between Tunal Grande and Río Verde has already been outlined (Braniff, 1992:43-44; Michelet, 1995:218, note 48), as also the bonds between this latter region and the Huasteca (Ochoa, [1979] 1984:33).⁹⁶ From Southwest Querétaro, there is a report of a fragment of a "clay sculpture from the Gulf", with a presumed provenience from El Cerrito (Crespo, 1991b:192, fig. 13), a site that

⁹⁵ Tunal Grande may also have been an intermediary region between the farming communities and the nomadic groups of the northern deserts (Braniff, 2000:36). To Braniff, "The interrelations between the Mesoamerican groups and the hunter-collector groups from the north-central region may be corroborated through some lithic artifacts shared in the region known as Tunal Grande, which is in Mesoamerica, and the extended regions north of San Luis Potosí and southern Coahuila" (1994:135, see also Crespo and Viramontes, 1999, for the north-central region). These lithic artifacts include the well-known "Coahuila scrapers", present, like in El Tunal, in Guanajuato (Rodríguez, in Crespo and Viramontes, 1999:113), in Zimapán (Sánchez *et al.*, 1995:143, 154, fig. 17) and in Cerro de las Burras, east of the Mezquital Valley (Polgar Salcedo, personal communication, 2000).

⁹⁶ "[...] based on the ceramic similarities from the final portion of period IV and early period V, perhaps they could be correlated with the Río Verde pottery, an area that might have been a passageway for a number of Mesoamerican elements, not only towards northern México, but maybe also towards the Tamaulipas sierras. Some sites within this area, which are not definitely Huastecan, show architecture with indistinctly circular and rectangular shapes, pottery similar to Buenavista's, the Zaquil black and incised types, ball games and burials with yokes, among other elements" (Ochoa, [1979] 1984:33).

also has led to the recovery of "Black Incised Postfire pottery from Río Verde" (Crespo, idem). Zaquil Black has even been found in El Mezquital (Fournier, 1995, chart 9).⁹⁷

As to the Valle de San Luis subsphere, Beatriz Braniff considers that the closest links between southern San Luis Potosí and the Bajío were held with the west (Braniff, 2000:36, 41). As an example of this, she outlines that some ceramic types recovered in Villa de Reyes are reminiscent of the Chametla Early Polychrome from Sinaloa, that the figurines are also similar to those of the west coast, and that at La Gloria and Peralta, Guanajuato, there are some architectural features from a Teuchitlán tradition (Braniff, *ibid.*:40-41). This association may have taken place via the Highlands-Juchipila subsphere, which in its eastern edge overlaps with the Valle de San Luis subsphere ([Figure 20](#)), and whose connections with the west have been widely explored (Jiménez and Darling, 2000:167-171, fig. 10-13). Maybe this is the reason why a form so typical of the orange-cherry ceramic group from the Jalisco highlands, as the stepped rim is, was found in the valley of San Luis Potosí (during the San Luis phase), and in the region of Río Verde, "widening the interrelation of the diagnostic forms from the north-central-west to the eastern areas of Mesoamerica." (Ramos and López, 1999:255).

The Septentrional Sphere overlaps with the Bajío Sphere via its two subspheres. The one from the Juchipila highlands extends slightly out of the borders of the Septentrional Sphere towards the east, to reach Cerrito de Rayas and including also La Gavia, in Guanajuato. Both of these sites are important because they show the engagement of both subspheres after the resist-decorated ceramics and Valle de San Luis Polychrome, but in addition, they represent an area that links the distributive limits of Garita, Cantinas and Black on Orange (Moguel and Sánchez, 1988:230; Ramos *et al.*, 1988:315; Ramos and López, 1999:258; Jiménez and Darling, 2000:180, note 13; Jiménez, 2001:6). Towards its southeastern edge, the Septentrional Sphere also incorporates the sites of El Cópore, La Gloria and El Cobre, in Guanajuato, which constitute the northeastern border of the Bajío Sphere (Jiménez and Darling, 1992:17). There is a coexistence, in all three sites, of Figurines Type I, the pseudo cloisonné and the resist ceramics, with Raised White, incised types, incised postfire types (sgraffito) and red on bay (Jiménez, 1992:189-190, note 8; Jiménez and Darling, 1992:14-15, 18; Braniff, 2000:40).

A long while ago, Charles Kelley outlined the similarities between a number of Red on Bay ceramic types from Durango and Zacatecas, and the Coyotlatelco type defined by Tozzer (1921) for the Basin of México (Kelley, 1960:570; see also Braniff, 1972:284-285; Jiménez, 1989:34-36; Mastache and Cobean, 1989:55). From the Central Plateau, this connection is generally assumed as sequential in nature, considering the Coyotlatelco type as a derivation of a process of evolution that tended to advance

⁹⁷ References have also been made regarding a connection between Río Verde and the Sierra Gorda (Herrera and Quiroz 1991:299; Michelet, 1995:215), and of course between the latter one and the Huasteca (Herrera and Quiroz, *ibid.*:287, 297, 299). Even though the traits ascribable to the Sierra present in southern Querétaro and western Hidalgo are scarce, it is worth remembering that along its spurs, Xajay Incised Postfire has been recovered (Mejía and Herrera, personal communication, 2001), and Mezquital has yielded fragments of a figurine very similar to another one exhibited in the National Museum, with a provenience from Sierra Gorda. It has been assumed that the cinnabar that decorates several figurines from El Mezquital comes from deposits located in the Sierra, but this is not definite, as cinnabar also exists in other regions, like for example in the vicinities of Acámbaro (Cárdenas, 1997, map 2).

geographically, as opposed to the assumption that both styles were interrelated. On one side, this is due to the pretended sudden emergence of the Coyotlatelco type in the Basin of México when the Teotihuacán system was declining; and on the other, to the initial chronological placement of the "northern" types, that indicated they were earlier. Following the recent adjustments in the chronologies of both these areas, it presently appears to be more adequate to assume that the similarity between the Suchil or Gualterio Red on Cream types from Chalchihuites, and the Coyotlatelco type from the Basin, reflect their partial contemporaneity (Jiménez, 1989:34-35; personal communication, 2002), that Coyotlatelco is a local expression of a pan-regional phenomenon (Solar, in preparation), and that some important answer in regard to this phenomenon must be sought in the region in-between (Jiménez, *idem*; Jiménez and Darling, 1992:2), precisely in the overlapping of the spheres that, like the one from the Bajío, have integrated the septentrional network of the plateau.

The Concurrence of Close Links in the Construction of Macroregional Networks

The wares shared by the human groups that inhabited that geographic strip are a residual testimony of the construction and endurance of social links. As seen at least since the Mid Classic and the Early Post Classic, the North-Central Plateau participated in a system of communication and exchange whose major flow moved in an east-west direction, as a consequence of the fluvial systems Lerma/Santiago and Moctezuma/Pánuco (Diehl, 1976:280; Jiménez, 1989; Sánchez *et al.*, 1995:145; Faugère, 1996:142; Ramos and López, 1999:258). At first sight, the connections become evident in the distribution of specific resources such as obsidian, and the joint use of materials such as clay pipes or some ceramic types, but no doubt they derive of a much larger interest. In fact, as stated by Peter Jiménez, "raw materials that circulated at the heart of this wide economic system were not the cause of the system, but rather, its results" and "It would seem that the exchange networks emerged parallel to the interaction per se." (Jiménez, 2001:4).

The origins and consequences of these connections must have had larger expressions and implications than the sole adoption of vessels. In this case, among the most significant ones is the probable engagement with neighbor networks (see Pollard, 2000a:64) and the subsequent emergence of macroregional networks:

"[...] the economic spaces of the Epi-Classic were not an exception; on the contrary, they interacted, creating channels through which artifacts from different regions could travel. Such channels tended to be preferential in regard to a specific type of good, and in this sense, they were limited networks regarding the class and number of artifacts, although they could be very wide in terms of spatial scope" (Cervantes and Fournier, 1996:117).

It is not difficult to realize the advantages that the participation in such networks represented for these societies. Definitely, one of them was the exchange of products with a remote origin, resulting from consolidated connections between intermediate

regions. Guanajuato and northeastern Michoacán, for instance, were crucial in the integration of the northern and western spheres (see Diehl, 1983:114, 116; Jiménez, 1992:180; Williams, 1999:160-161), also connected with the State and the Basin of México (Jiménez, *idem*; Williams, *idem*), and via the Toluca valley, possibly with the western valley of Morelos (see [pages 49-51](#) in this volume). San Luis Potosí contributed its connections with the northwest, the north and the Huasteca region, while from southern Querétaro and Mezquital, some kind of connection may have existed with the Basin of México, the Sierra Gorda, and again, with the Huasteca (see Sánchez *et al.*, 1995:145; Fournier, 1995:61), while maybe from the Gulf Coast, with Southern Veracruz and even the Maya Area (see Diehl, 1983:114).

Therefore, we may think that the different "luxury" or "prestigious" objects we have considered in this work have "traveled" along such networks, although we are still far from understanding the ideological platform on which all that was taking place. Viewed in this way, it no longer seems so much "surprising" to find, during the Early Post Classic in Tula, abalone shell from the Gulf of California...ornamenting a Plumbate vessel from the Maya region.⁹⁸

The efficacy of this system allowed that at least since the Epi-Classic, some sites from the inlands were able to gain access to keratic materials, for instance Cerrito de Rayas (Ramos *et al.*, 1988:314; Ramos and López, 1996:104)⁹⁹ and Cañada de la Virgen (Nieto, 1997:101), Guanajuato, Barrio de la Cruz (Crespo and Saint-Charles, 1996:130; 1991; Saint-Charles, 1991a:7-8, 11), Querétaro, or Sabina Grande (Carrasco *et al.*, 2001), El Zethé (Morett, 1991; López and Fournier, 1992:240-257) and El Pañhú (Morett, personal communication, 1996), in Hidalgo. At times, the obtention of shell from the Pacific and the Gulf was possible, for instance in Tula, in southwestern Hidalgo (Diehl, 1976:263; Cobean and Estrada, 1994:78), in Urichu (Pollard, 2000b), and Loma Santa María (Cárdenas, 1999:223) in Michoacán.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ The applications on the Plumbate vessel that represent a human face emerging from coyote fauces, presently exhibited at the National Museum, have been identified as abalone shell (Braniff, 1994:137). In her text, Braniff points out that the place of origin of this species is restricted to the north of parallel 28° in the Pacific Coast, northern Baja California, and Alta California (*idem*).

⁹⁹ Ramos *et al.*, (1988:314) refer to a pottery in Cerrito de Rayas that may have originated in the Gulf.

¹⁰⁰ Loma Santa María had an important occupation connected to Teotihuacán. However, the analysis of the ceramic materials and the architectural features from the site has allowed Efraín Cárdenas to distinguish two major moments, the first well within the Classic (A.D. 300-600) and the second in the Epi-Classic (A.D. 600-900) (1999:217, 228). We ignore the context where the shell and other materials included here come from, and we have no information on time frame. Apparently, the record produced during the archaeological explorations (1977-1982) was insufficient and the analysis of materials was not completed, so much of that information has been lost (Cárdenas, 1999). If we include Loma Santa María when we talk about a network that was active during the Epi-Classic, it is because of the great coincidences existing between the materials that jointly circulated along the network and the associated ones that were recovered at the site. The obsidian from Ucareo is among them (Cárdenas, 1999:222), and its exploitation was probably not limited to the Epi-Classic, but as we have seen, it was then when it reached the highest peak of demand.

The importance and contextual junction of shell from both coasts, in inland sites, allows to consider that there was a relative facility regarding the moving of objects between the societies engaged in the network.¹⁰¹

Less of a surprise is the presence of shell in sites from Michoacán, as, and although this has not always been proven, a good portion of it must have come from the Pacific. In addition to the ones mentioned above, and among the northeastern sites with an Epi-Classic occupation where keratic materials have been recorded, we may mention Tingambato (Pollard, 1995:37; 2000a:63); Tres Cerritos (Pollard 2000a:63) and the area of the Lerma Basin (Faugère, 1992:39; 1996:132). In the latter place, ceramic figurines from the west have been found (Faugère, 1996:93-132).

It is important to trace the connections between northeastern Michoacán and the coast, as it is possible that the exchange of some products (i.e. shell) was engaged during the Epi-Classic with the mechanism of distribution of obsidian from Ucareo/Zinapécuaro, one that in an eastward direction, may have taken advantage of the septentrional plateau network to reach Tula, and maybe even Veracruz territories (it has been found, for example, in El Tajín, Healan, 1998:102, 104). In due time, this may help to explain the presence of Pacific shell in sites from western Hidalgo, the presence of wheeled figurines in Michoacán (see [note 94](#)), the presence of figurines apparently from the west in Tula (Diehl, 1976:263), and, via central and southern Veracruz, the presence of obsidian from the Michoacán deposit as far as northern Campeche (i.e. Edzná, Healan, 1998:104), the north of the Yucatán peninsula (Healan, 1997:77; 1998:102, 104, Healan and Hernández, 1999:137; Schmidt, 1999:445) or the coast of Belize (Healan, 1998:102, 104; Healan and Hernández, 1999:137).

The distribution of obsidian from Ucareo/Zinapécuaro traveled a different, important route; one that probably crossed the Toluca Valley to reach Xochicalco and one that maybe continued to the south via the Morelos territory, as obsidian from this source has been identified in the coast and the central valleys of Oaxaca (Healan, 1997:77; Healan, 1998:102, 104).

¹⁰¹ In La Negreta, a Classic site south of Querétaro, shell from both coasts was also imported (Brambila and Velasco, 1988:291). Although in a period preceding the one we are dealing with in this work, the possibility that the north-central network already existed as of the Classic, is interesting. Why not, considering that this was one of the reasons why Teotihuacán connected itself with the northern regions of the central plateau? Shell from the Gulf of California and from the Pacific Ocean was recovered at the Temple of Quetzalcóatl (Rubín de la Borbolla, 1947:65; Sugiyama, 1989:92-93). Would it be possible that sites such as La Negreta had played an important role, at least in regard to the shell supply from the West, instead of the other way around, as suggested before, in the sense that shell objects "reached La Negreta through Teotihuacán" (Brambila and Velasco, 1988:292-293, see also Brambila *et al.*, 1988:17)?

At least through the Epi-Classic, turquoise may have traveled along the two routes of this network,¹⁰² as suggested by the presence of this material, on one side, in Urichu (Pollard, 2000b), Tingambato (Pollard, 1995:37; 2000a:63), Loma Santa María (Cárdenas, 1999:215, 221-222; see note 137), Cerrito de Rayas (Ramos and López 1996:104); Barrio de la Cruz (Saint-Charles, 1991a:9; Crespo and Saint-Charles, 1991, n/p), Sabina Grande (Carrasco *et al.*, 2001), Tula (Cobean and Estrada, 1994:77-78; Mastache and Cobean, 2000:121) and even in Chichén Itzá (Morris *et al.*, 1931:186-188; Marquina, 1990 [1951]:854-855, photos 426 and 427); and on the other side, in Xochicalco (Sáenz, 1962b:1-2).

There is no need to outline the important incidence that these connections may have had for the dispersion, the other way around, of our jade plaques.

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¹⁰² It is widely known that turquoise was imported into Mesoamerican territories from the American Southwest. Although of a poorer quality, in México there are also deposits that were exploited during pre-hispanic times. According to Weigand's studies, these occur in Santa Rosa, west of San Luis Potosí, Saucedo de Mulatos, Zacatecas, Coahuila, Chihuahua and Sonora (Weigand, 1995:127). Until the analysis of the composition of this material in its different sources is completed, together with the pieces recovered in archaeological contexts, it is difficult to establish an accurate provenience; however, it would seem that the overall distribution of turquoise was closely linked to the social system responsible for the mining activities in Chalchihuites, Zacatecas: "Besides their own mining operations, the inhabitants of the Chalchihuites area would frequently buy chemical turquoises from other regions [...] Part of this turquoise was obtained in nearby deposits of a rather poor quality located in Zacatecas, San Luis Potosí and Coahuila. While these were the closest deposits available [...] they have not been so intensely exploited as others of a much better quality farther north" (Weigand, *ibid.*:120-121). The first chemical turquoises in the Chalchihuites area appeared around A.D. 500 (*idem*), but their use was intensified during the final portion of the Classic (see Weigand, *ibid.*:130, fig. 1).

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