A Re-examination of the Mesoamerican Chacmool

Mary Ellen Miller

Although *chacmool* literally means "red or great jaguar paw" in Yucatec Maya, it has become the terminology used to refer to the large number of three-dimensional sculptures of reclining male figures in Precolumbian Mesoamerican art (Figs. 1, 4, 15, 16, 19-24). The expression was coined by Augustus Le Plongeon, a roguish explorer and master of self-deception who in the 1870's and eighties invented a fictitious drama supposed to have taken place at a handful of Maya cities in northern Yucatan during the last few centuries before the Spanish Conquest. In this story, three brothers, Aac, Cay, and Coh, had lived at the large site of Chichen Itza. Prince Coh married Kinich Kakmo and together they ruled Chichen. Cay became the high priest, and Aac, the youngest brother, held sway over Uxmal, some one hundred miles to the southwest. Aac then murdered Coh, and his widow built a series of memorials at Chichen Itza to Coh, who was posthumously known as Chaac Mool.[1]

At Chichen Itza Le Plongeon excavated one of the structures he identified as belonging to this funerary complex, the structure now known as the Platform of the Eagles. He found a sculpture of a reclining jaguar covered with rubble on top of the structure (Fig. 2).[2] Following this archaeological success, he then began excavations into the core of the mound. Approximately seven meters down from the top of the mound (thus, according to his own description, below the groundline of the structure), Le Plongeon found a major cache consisting of a stone urn and the sculpture he called Chaac Mool (Fig. 3). "It is not an idol," he wrote, "but a true portrait of a man who has lived an earthly life. I have seen him represented in battle, in councils, and in court receptions."[3]

Once he had excavated the sculpture, Le Plongeon sought to remove it from Mexico and take it to Philadelphia for the Centennial Exhibition of 1876. The Mexican government took exception to those plans, and gunships removed the sculpture to the National Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City, where it remains today (Fig. 1).[4] Upon its arrival there, Jesús Sanchez, a zoological taxonomist in the museum, noted its similarity to two sculptures from Central Mexico, and the pan-Mesoamerican identity of the chacmool was born.[5] Perhaps because no other name had convincingly been assigned to this class of sculpture, the name chacmool has persisted despite its inappropriateness. The tag has also been valuable, because it has successfully linked sculptures from disparate geographical and chronological settings without implying a universal interpretation.

Since Le Plongeon's time, fourteen chacmools have been documented at Chichen Itza.[6] Twelve have been located at Tula, and examples from Tenochtitlan, Tlaxcala, Michoacan, and Cempoala, as well as other places, have been found. No chacmool can be convincingly dated before the early Postclassic or terminal Classic period. It is a sculptural type equally as unknown at Tikal as at Teotihuacan. Once the chacmool appeared, however, it rapidly spread through Mesoamerica, being seen as far south as Costa Rica. Despite the great number of these figures that are known and recorded, convincing arguments for their origin, dissemination, and meaning have rarely been made.[7]

Interpretation and understanding of the chacmool figures have been blocked, I believe, because of assumptions

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[1] As related in Augustus Le Plongeon, *Sacred Mysteries Among the Mayas and Quiches, 11,500 Years Ago*, New York, 1886, 78-82.

[2] Le Plongeon's archaeological findings rarely coincided with his illustrations of same. Of Figure 3, for example, the apparent discovery of the chacmool, he wrote, "The natives still use [these gestures of respect] among themselves, when their white neighbors are not present" (Augustus Le Plongeon, *Queen Moo and the Egyptian Sphinx*, New York, 1896, 132). The only report of the excavations was published by Stephen Salisbury, Jr., of the American Antiquarian Society, who for several years financially supported Le Plongeon's work ("Dr. Le Plongeon in Yucatan. The Discovery of a Statue called Chac-Mool, and the Communications of Dr. Le Plongeon Concerning Exploration in the Yucatan Peninsula," *American Antiquarian Society Proceedings*, LXIX, 1877, 70-119).

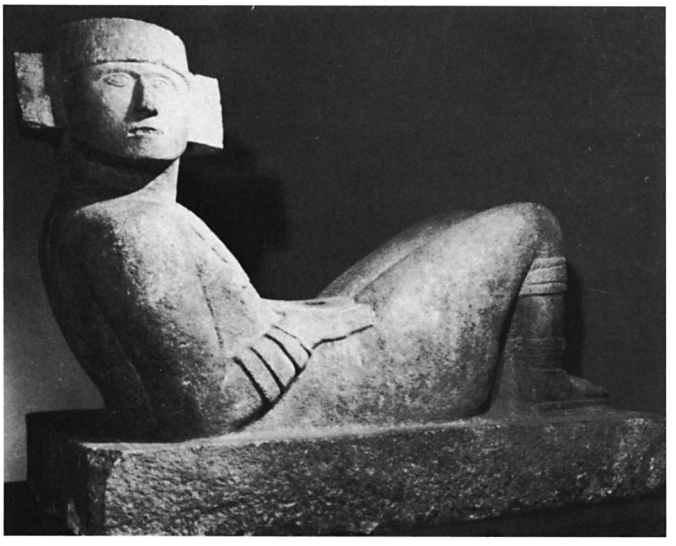
[3] Le Plongeon as cited by Salisbury, 77.

[4] An interesting account of Le Plongeon's efforts to keep his monument is included in Robert Brunhouse's essay. "Augustus Le Plongeon," in *In Search of the Maya*, Albuquerque, 1973, 136-165.

[5] Jesús Sanchez, "Estudio acerca de la estatúa llamada Chac-mool o Rey Tigre," *Anales del Museo Nacional de Mexico*, I, 1877, 277-78. The terminology *chacmool* is now generally written as a single word.

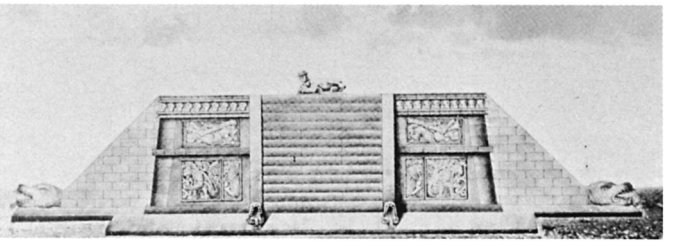
[6] Karl Ruppert, *Chichen Itza*, Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1952, 166.

[7] This, despite many attempts. Among them: Sanchez (see note 5); Désiré Charnay, *Ancient Cities of the New World*, New York, 1888; Enrique Juan Palacios, "El simbolismo del Chac-Mool: su interpretación," *Revista mexicana de estudios antropológicos*, IV, 1940, 49-56; and Cesar Lizardi Ramos, "El chacmool mexicano," *Cuadernos americanos*, XIV, 1944, 137-148. J. Corona Nuñez has raised the most interesting questions about the chacmool in "Cuál es el verdadero significado del Chac-mool?" *Tlatoani*, I, 1952, 57-62. The most recent study is that of Alfredo Cuellar, *Tezcatzoncatl escultórico: el "Chac-Mool" (El dios mesoamericano del vino)*, Mexico City, 1981.



1 Chacmool excavated by Augustus Le Plongeon from Platform of the Eagles, Chichen Itza. Mexico City, Museo Nacional de Antropología (courtesy Slides and Photographs Library, Yale University)

3 Le Plongeon poses with his chacmool (from Le Plongeon)



2 Platform of the Eagles, as reconstructed by Le Plongeon (from Augustus Le Plongeon, *Queen Moo and the Egyptian Sphinx*, New York, 1896)

4 Chacmool excavated by Earl Morris and the Carnegie Institution from Temple of the Chacmool (courtesy Slides and Photographs Library, Yale University)

of a Central Mexican origin for the sculptures.[8] The problem is that antecedents in Central Mexico do not exist. No pre-Toltec prototype can be identified at Teotihuacan, Xochicalco, or Cacaxtla. Nor does the chacmool survive in Central Mexican manuscripts, a provocative lacuna. Of course, Le Plongeon's outrageous hypothesis has been one reason that investigation of a Maya origin has been neglected. There are, however, compelling reasons to consider a Maya origin without entertaining the notions of Le Plongeon, for if the impulse to three-dimensional sculpture is generally foreign to Classic Maya art, the nature of the chacmool is not: its posture, context, variety, and iconography are all consistent with Classic Maya art. In this re-examination of the chacmool, Classic Maya evidence will be used to suggest that the Postclassic chacmool develops from traditional Classic Maya representations.

The distinctive posture of the chacmool is what allows the many sculptures to be united under one term, regardless of their origin. In all cases, the figure reclines on his back, his knees bent and his body on a single axis from neck to toes. The elbows rest on the ground and support the torso, creating tension as the figure strains to sit upright. The hands meet at the chest, usually holding either a disc or a vessel. The head rotates ninety degrees from the axis of the body to present a frontal face. This recumbent position represents the antithesis of aggression: it is helpless and almost defenseless, humble and acquiescent.

These salient qualities of the chacmool's posture are the same characteristics that describe Classic Maya captive figures appearing on altars, carved stairs, basal panels of stelae, and even in the Bonampak murals (Figs. 5-6). Captives

[8] This idea was first articulated by Charnay (pp. 357-368). The main scholar to counter the notion of a Central Mexican origin is George Kubler, who has considered the preponderance of these sculptures at Chichen Itza a likely indicator of their source ("Chichen-Itza and Tula," *Estudios de cultura maya*, I, 1961, 65.)

may also recline on their bellies or sides (Fig. 7), but all share common features with the posture of the chacmool: both knees and elbows are bent (and their arms often show constrictive bindings). Although frontal faces are generally rare in Maya art, the notable exception is of captive figures.[9] At both Xultun and Naranjo the frontal face of the captive is common, perhaps part of a regional style,[10] but is also occurs elsewhere, as at Bonampak (Figs. 5, 6, 8). At other sites, such as Tikal, the frontal face is unknown (Fig. 7), but this may be attributable to the greater conservatism in all art at that site. Tatiana Proskouriakoff has pointed out that the artist had greater freedom in executing such subsidiary figures than in depicting principal lords, particularly in the circum-Peten region,[11] but despite regional variation, the captive figures conform to specific conventions, such as having bent elbows and knees.

Twenty years ago, Alberto Ruz Lhullier first noted that the posture of the deity known among scholars as GII of the Palenque Triad (Fig. 9), as well as that of the figure on the Palenque sarcophagus (Fig. 10), might well be compared to the chacmool. Ruz then dismissed any connection between the two as a meaningless visual parallel.[12] One suspects that it was the incongruity of comparing the regal sarcophagus figure with the chacmool that led Ruz to disregard his observation of its similarity to chacmools. But I believe that the posture of the sarcophagus figure can now be reconciled with the series of captive figures.

Maya rulers are known to appear in a host of penitential circumstances that require humble dress, transvestiture, or personal blood-letting. In these acts of penitence or sacrifice, rulers may even dress as captives, offering themselves to the gods. The sarcophagus carving may show a unique sacrifice: since the inscription on the edge of the Palenque slab records a death, it is likely that the protagonist is depicted at the moment of death. The recumbent figure descends into the open maw of a skeletal beast, to whom he gives himself. In adopting this vulnerable, passive posture, the ruler may intimate the self-sacrifice inherent in his own death. In this sense, the posture of the captive, in many cases himself a sacrifice or offering, shares a common meaning as well as posture with the dying ruler at Palenque.

Most depictions of captives in recumbent postures are found far to the south of Chichen Itza, at cities noted for Classic sculpture, but a few instances do occur in Yucatan. Captive figures in the recumbent posture are common at Cobá, Uxmal, and Edzná. On Edzná Stela 1 (Fig. 11), the figure lies on his back with his knees bent and his elbows on the ground, and he holds his hands above his torso, much as a chacmool does. The reclining figures at Uxmal reveal genitalia, perhaps an additional note of humiliation or passivity.

The recumbent posture of the Classic Maya captive also appears in the two-dimensional art of Chichen Itza and its environs, in material that has traditionally been designated Toltec, not Classic.[13] Although the Chichen figures who adopt the reclining position are not captives on the basal panels of Classic stelae, they are figures who suggest captives, because of the relationship to others, their position as basement paneling (Fig. 12), or the fact that they are depicted as the victims of heart sacrifice (Fig. 13). Le Plongeon illustrated a panel he saw at Izamal showing a figure so similar to a Classic Maya captive that one wonders whether it was not once part of a Classic stela (Fig. 14). Such examples show us that the two-dimensional artistic vocabulary featured the recumbent figure and that its connotation remained that of subservience and sacrifice, even though few examples can convincingly be dated earlier than the chacmools. It is nevertheless likely that the precedent for the chacmool posture lies with these figures.

The formal identification of recumbent chacmools with reclining captives provides no guarantee of the continuity of meaning, and so we must seek other methods of interpreting these sculptures. Unfortunately, the chacmools of Chichen Itza are not easily identifiable iconographically. Because of the absence of traits typical of Maya deities, most authors have seen the Chichen chacmools as bearing the same iconography as that imputed to the Central Mexican ones. That the chacmool represents a man has been the explanation only of Le Plongeon.

Without iconographic clues, the Chichen figures are enigmatic. The most useful means of examining their function, if not their meaning, is to consider their architectural placement. Eduard Seler first viewed the positioning of the chacmools as a key to meaning: "From these two examples [e.g., Figs. 15 and 16] we see that these idols were centered in temple antechambers, and so we should probably assume that they were receptacles in which incense or drink (pulque or honey wine) were offered to the lords of the temple."[14] Other meanings, however, can be interpreted from placement, especially given other furniture in the chamber. Secure architectural position is known for only five Chichen chacmools, those in the Castillo, Temple of the Warriors, Chacmool Temple, the Temple of the Little Tables, and the North Colonnade (Figs. 4, 15, 16).[15] Other chacmools were found buried in structures or near them, rather than in meaningful architectural configurations. Each

[9] Frontal faces of non-captive figures are known on Maya vases, but they too are extremely unusual. For an example, see Michael D. Coe, *Old Gods and Young Lords*, Jerusalem, 1982, No. 8.

[10] As suggested by Virginia E. Miller, "Pose and Gesture in Classic Maya Art," Ph.D. diss., University of Texas, 1981, 118-125.

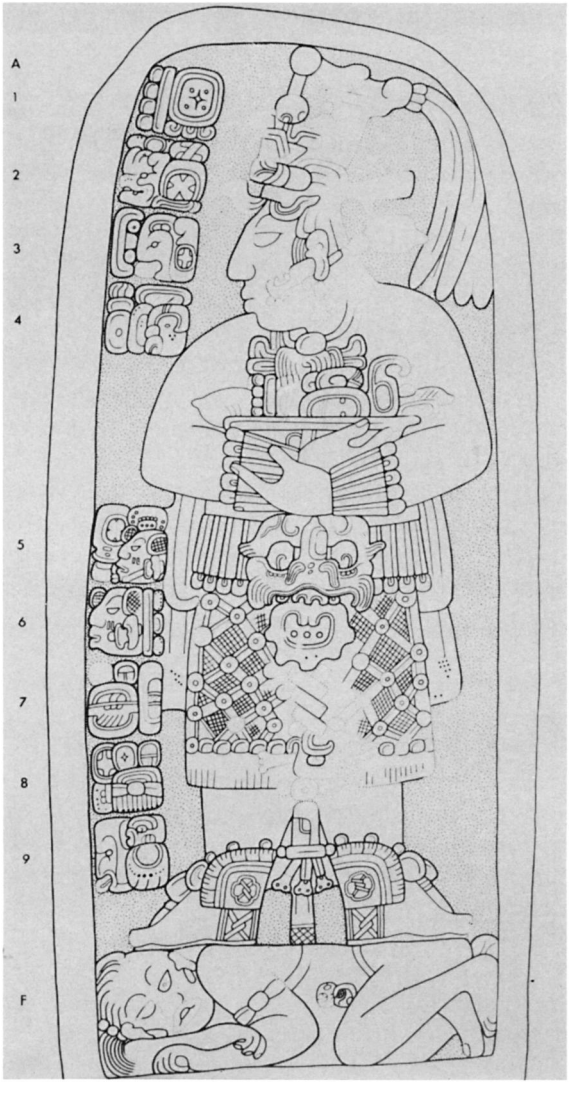
[11] Tatiana Proskouriakoff, *A Study of Classic Maya Art*, Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1950, 19.

[12] Alberto Ruz Lhullier, "Chichen-Itza y Tula: comentarios a un ensayo," *Estudios de cultura maya*, II, 1962, 209. Corona Nuñez had first noted the similarity.

[13] For a full discussion of the differences between so-called Maya and Toltec art at Chichen Itza, the best source is Alfred M. Tozzer, *The Sacred Cenote of Chichen Itza* (*Peabody Museum Memoirs*, XI and XII), Cambridge, Mass., 1957. Charles E. Lincoln offers a different opinion in a recent unpublished manuscript (1982).

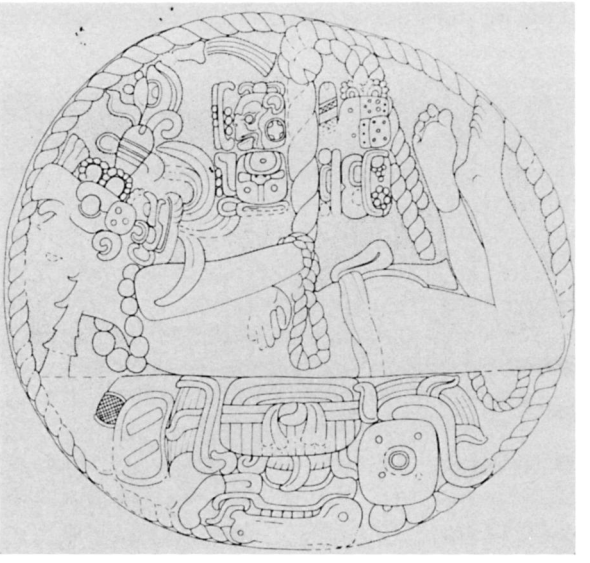
[14] Eduard Seler, *Gesammelte Abhandlungen*, V, Graz, 1961, 266-67. Author's translation.

[15] See Ruppert (as in n. 6), 166.

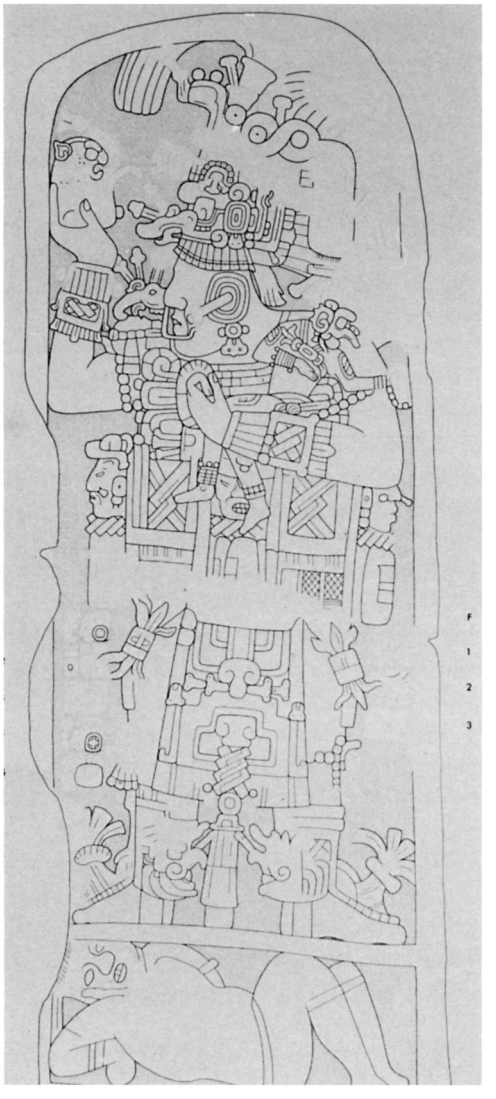


5 Stela 24, Naranjo, drawing by Ian Graham (from Graham and Eric von Euw, *Corpus of Maya Hieroglyphic Inscriptions*, II, 1, Peabody Museum Press, © 1975 the President and Fellows of Harvard College)

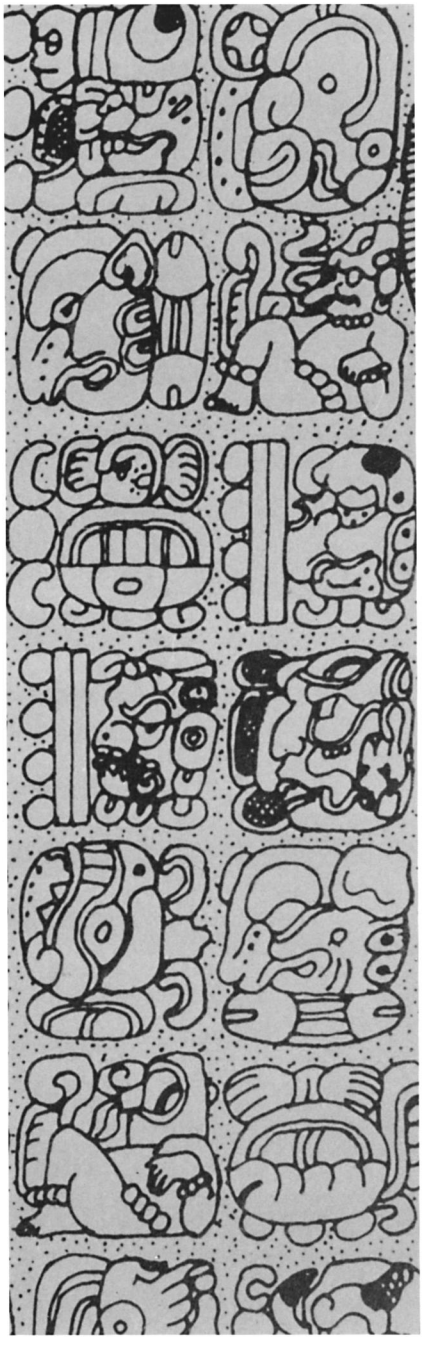
6 Bench entablature, Room 2, Bonampak. Copy of the Bonampak murals in the Museo Nacional de Antropología, Mexico City

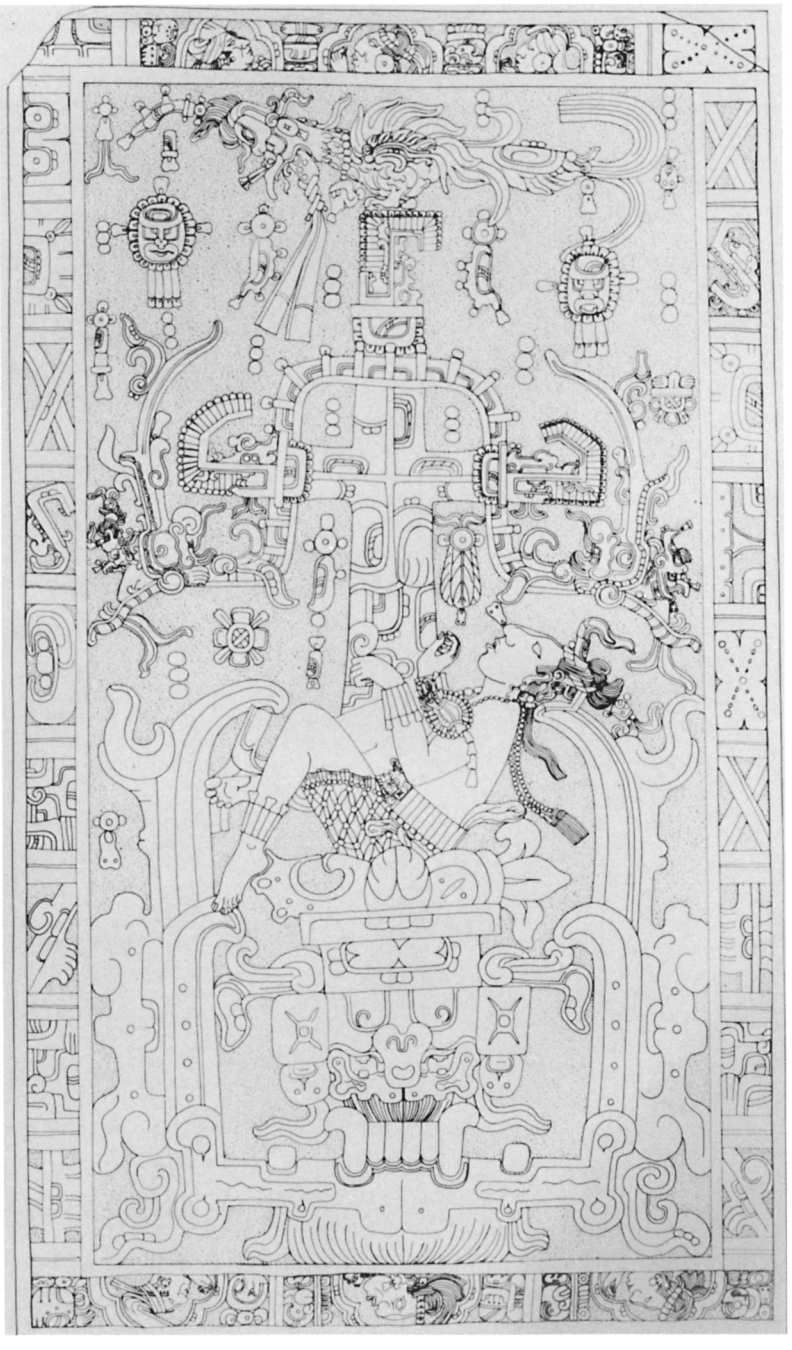


7 Altar 8, Tikal, drawing by William R. Coe (from Christopher Jones and Linton Satterthwaite, *The Monuments and Inscriptions of Tikal, Part A: The Carved Monuments*, Philadelphia, 1983)



8 Stela 5, Xultun, drawing by Eric von Euw (from Von Euw, *Corpus of Maya Hieroglyphic Inscriptions*, V, 1, *Xultun*, Peabody Museum Press, © 1978 the President and Fellows of Harvard College)





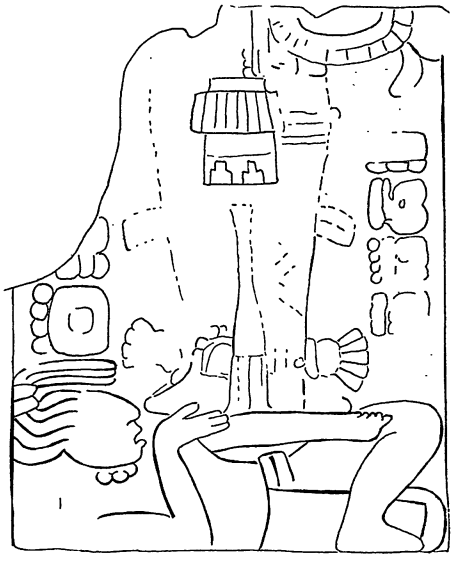
9 The deity GII can be seen as second glyph in right-hand column and at bottom of left-hand column; drawing by Linda Schele

10 Sarcophgus lid, Temple of the Inscriptions, Palenque, drawing by Merle Greene Robertson

one of these five chacmools with architectural placement was set at the entrance to a vestibule (Fig. 17). The vestibule itself was occupied by a ritual seat, a platform supported by miniature atlantean columns in the first three cases, a jaguar throne in the fourth, and a raised, carved dais in the fifth. Although the vestible furniture has often been considered an "altar" or "table," Kubler has convincingly argued for its function as a throne, part of the serpent column/chacmool/throne complex that describes rulership during the early Postclassic.[16]

The relationship of the chacmool to this arrangement demands our attention. If the atlantean platforms are thrones, then set in front of the thrones are chacmools, bearing a relationship similar to the one that Classic captive figures have with Classic thrones. For example, this relationship can be seen clearly at Tikal, in the sculptures of the Twin Pyramid complexes (Fig. 18). Rulers' full-length portraits are recorded on stelae; the ruler may or may not be depicted in front of a throne. Altars are placed in front of the stelae, and the images of bound captives are carved on their

[16] George Kubler has also pointed out that captive figures depicted as the supports of Classic Maya rulers seem to vanish from Chichen during this era, to be replaced by platforms with atlantean supports, perhaps willing "pillars" of legitimate government. See Kubler, "Serpent and Atlantean Columns: Symbols of Maya-Toltec Polity," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, XLI, 1982, 115.



11 Tracing of Edzná Stela 1, after sketch by Eric von Euw

12 Basal paneling, Chichen Itza (photo: author)

13 Gold plaque, Chichen Itza (from Samuel K. Lothrop, *Metals from the Cenote of Sacrifice, Chichen Itza, Yucatan* [*Peabody Museum Memoirs*, x:2], Cambridge, Mass., 1952

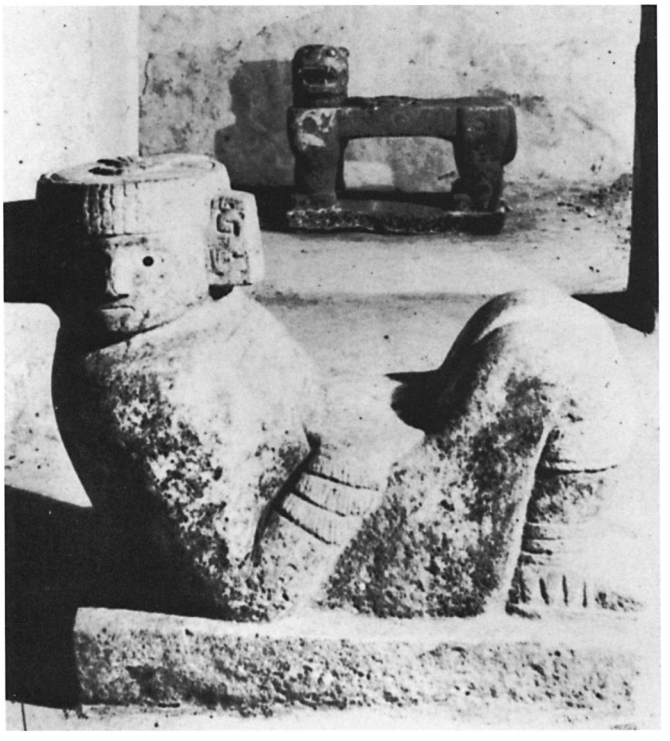
14 Carving from Izamal (from Le Plongeon)

upper surfaces (cf. Fig. 7). In other words, if we first imagine the configuration of ruler:throne:captive at Tikal, we can then see the same configuration at Chichen—ruler:throne:chacmool. At Chichen, the ruler is not carved in stone, but is rather a living figure who takes his place on the dais, the chacmool in front of him. The chacmool thus not only repeats the posture of the Classic Maya captive but also appears in one of the same positions as do captives with regard to rulers on Classic monuments.

At Tula, chacmools with specific provenance either are set in front of raised platforms or mark the entrances to chambers where rulers may have been seated on perishable, elevated platforms. The so-called altar behind the chacmool in Room 2 of the Tula palace is probably a throne.[17] Given the placement of chacmools at Tula, it is likely that they too commemorate a defeated enemy, as do the captive figures (Figs. 19 and 20).

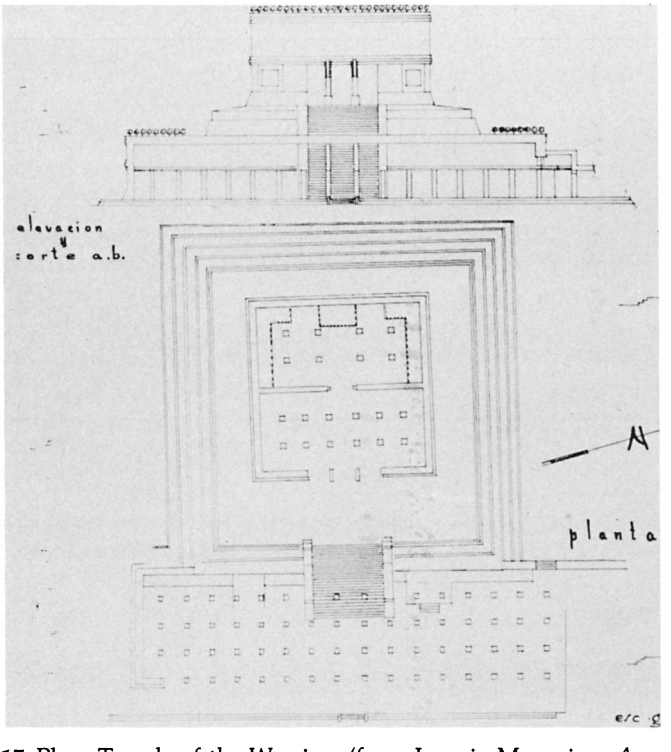
A question worth asking at this point is whether it is possible for the Chichen Itza chacmools to have preceded the Central Mexican ones. Mesoamericanists have long quarreled over the relative dating of Chichen Itza and

[17] Acosta's designation of "altar" for the raised platform behind the chacmool in Room 2 of the Tula palace could be revised to "throne." See Jorge Acosta, "Resumen de los informes de las exploraciones arqueológicas en Tula, Hidalgo, durante las IX y X temporadas, 1953-54," *Anales del INAH*, IX, 1957, 119-168. It is also useful to re-examine the Postclassic chacmools of Michoacan for their relationship to thrones. From Acosta's description of the coyote in bench form that was found with the chacmool at Ihuatzio, it seems likely that the throne/chacmool configuration prevailed among the Tarascans, a parallel also noted by Corona Nuñez. See Jorge Acosta, "Exploraciones arqueológicas realizadas en el Estado de Michoacan durante los años de 1937 y 1938," *Revista mexicana de estudios antropológicos*, III, 1939, 85-98.

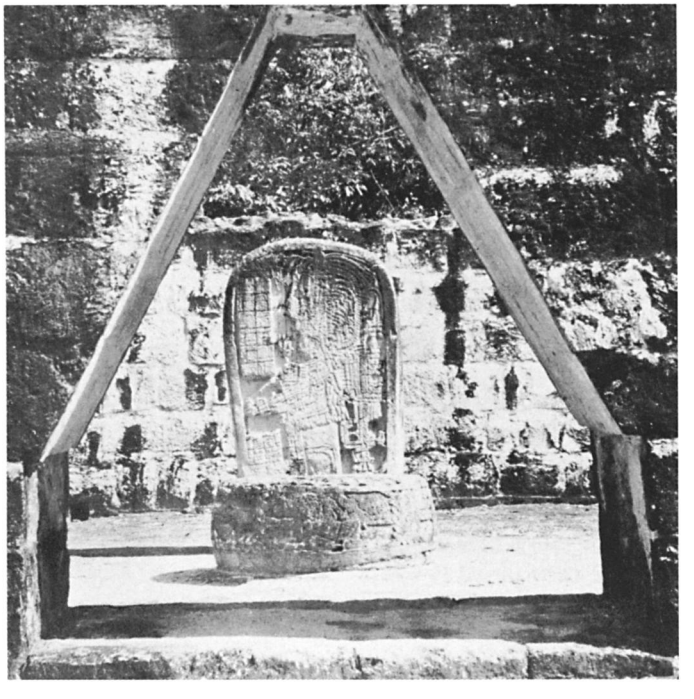


15 Chacmool from the Castillo, Chichen Itza (courtesy Slides and Photographs Library, Yale University)

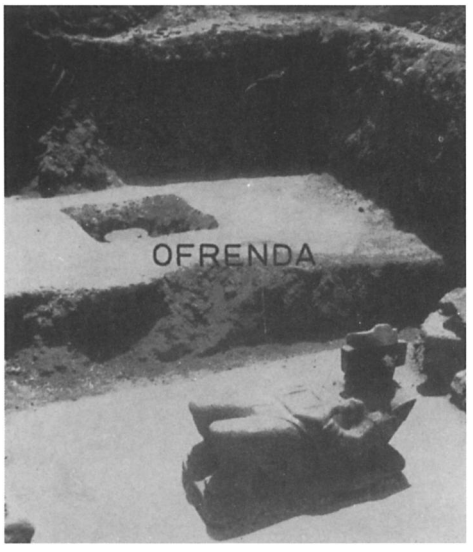
16 Chacmool, Temple of the Warriors, Chichen Itza. Atlantean throne visible behind the chacmool (courtesy Doris Heyden)



17 Plan, Temple of the Warriors (from Ignacio Marquina, *Arquitectura prehispánica*, Mexico City, 1951)



18 Twin-pyramid complex altar and stela, Tikal. Captives depicted on the altar (courtesy Doris Heyden)



19 Chacmool, Tula, from the Palace. Raised banquette behind chacmool was probably a throne (from Jorge Acosta, "Resumen de los informes de las exploraciones arqueológicas en Tula, Hidalgo, durante las IX y X temporadas, 1953-54," *Anales del INAH*, IX, 1957)

20 Fragmentary chacmool, Tula (from Acosta)

21 "Swimmer" chacmool from Chichen Itza (courtesy Slides and Photographs Library, Yale University)

Tula.[18] Nigel Davies has raised the problem of chacmools in this regard, as they abound in greater number at Chichen Itza and Tula than at other sites. What in fact seems logical is that Chichen and Tula may have arisen and thrived simultaneously, both places later exchanging and cross-fertilizing ideas, producing the hybrid "Maya-Toltec" seen at both sites.[19] Such hypotheses would allow for artistic ideas that had been developed independently to take hold at both sites, perhaps in a kind of international style. In any case, there is no documentation of a Central Mexican chacmool that must predate the Chichen Itza sculptures.[20]

A Maya origin for the chacmool form can thus be argued, based on both the appearance and the placement of Classic captive figures. The variations of the form at Chichen Itza also suggest its development at that site. At Tula, the chacmool is a standardized figure, one varying little from the next in proportion or posture (Figs. 19 and 20). At Chichen Itza, no two well-preserved chacmools are identical in dress, form, or proportions. If we use a Tula chacmool as our standard, then some of the Chichen examples are aberrant indeed (cf. Figs. 20, 21). It is as if the Chichen sculptor developed the chacmool form while the Tula sculptor executed a series of codified examples. It has been argued that a poorly preserved chacmool ought to be considered the earliest because of the primitive workmanship,[21] but there is no reason that inferior quality need be equated with an early date.

It is, thus, reasonable to credit a Maya origin for these sculptures. They bear the same relationship to the enthroned ruler as do the Classic captive figures to which they bear such formal resemblance, albeit in three dimensions. In this way, the chacmools/atlantean thrones succeed the altar/stela complexes of the Classic Maya. But if the chacmool is an invention of the Maya, transmitted to Central Mexico during the Toltec era, then we must assess the iconographic meanings given to this figure in later Central Mexican art.

Identification of most Central Mexican gods and goddesses in monumental art derives from examination of both pre- and post-Conquest pictorial manuscripts. One of the few sculptural types without parallel in manuscripts is the chacmool. Thus, unlike most Postclassic figures to be identified as deities, the chacmool receives no confirmation from manuscripts. It may be for this reason that the chacmool has been identified as many deities, among them Tlaloc,

[18] Begun, as stated above in note 8, by Charnay, who was the first to note the physical similarity between the two places. The idea was codified by later writers who emphasized the texts that proposed that Central Mexicans arrived in Chichen Itza. Kubler argued that the influence ran contrary to the prevailing hypothesis (Kubler, as in n. 8). More recently, Roman Piña Chan has written a book on Chichen Itza based on the premise of Chichen Itza's precedence, although he mentions none of the relevant authors in the dispute. Roman Piña Chan, *Chichen Itza, la ciudad de los brujos del agua*, Mexico City, 1980.

[19] Nigel Davies, *The Toltecs Until the Fall of Tula*, Norman, Okla., 1976, 211-12.

[20] The presence of a chacmool in a Classic city such as Quirigua leaves the possibility open that the three-dimensional figures themselves may have been known in the Maya region prior to their appearance at Chichen, although as Robert Sharer points out ("Terminal Classic Events in the Southeastern Lowlands: A View from Quirigua," unpub. MS, University Museum, University of Pennsylvania), it is likely that this sculpture belongs to the Quirigua Postclassic occupation. The sculpture resembles a Tula chacmool, not one from Chichen Itza.

[21] Cuellar, 67.

Cinteotl, and Tezcatzoncatl.[22]

Two Aztec chacmools found in the context of the Templo Mayor (Figs. 22a-c, 23) bear more iconographic data, and it is those two which may resolve the identification of the figure. The first (Fig. 22a-c) was uncovered at the corner of Venustiano Carranza and Pino Suarez Streets in 1943; the second (Fig. 23), the only fully polychromed chacmool to be recovered, appeared during recent excavations in the sacred precinct. These two sculptures make clear reference to Tlaloc. The first bears three images of Tlaloc. The most elaborate is the descending, low-relief Tlaloc amid aquatic symbols carved on the underside and normally not visible (Fig. 22a); the second is borne on the *cuauxicalli*, or vessel for sacrificed hearts, which the figure holds over his belly (Fig. 22b). Finally, the figure himself wears a goggle-and-fangs Tlaloc mask (Fig. 22c). The second sculpture, undoubtedly of much greater antiquity than the other Aztec chacmool, was found *in situ* on the Tlaloc side of the great double pyramid of the ceremonial precinct, and thus can be associated with that deity as well (Fig. 23). A chacmool without certain provenance, although clearly of Aztec metropolitan manufacture, was published by Sanchez a hundred years ago, and, like Figure 22, it is carved on the underside (Figs. 24a and b). In this case, the motifs on the bottom are purely aquatic, although Tlaloc himself is not depicted, and the reclining chacmool figure wears a goggle-and-fangs mask.

These three Aztec chacmools not only record clear links to Tlaloc but they also suggest how the sculptural form functioned. The round object that chacmools hold on their bellies has been viewed as a disc, a mirror, or a vessel. Though the one case may not explain all, the two late Aztec chacmools carry *cuauxicallis*.[23] The newly discovered chacmool also holds a vessel, and it seems likely that it too is a *cuauxicalli* designed to hold the blood offerings of human hearts. Set at the entrances to buildings, chacmools were probably repositories of human sacrificial offerings. With their undersides carved with aquatic symbols, these sculptures seem to float on water. This suspension suggests the liminal qualities of the messenger, the link between earth and supernaturals, as suggested by Corona Nuñez.[24] With the sacrifices of war placed over water, we may also see a reference to the metaphor *atltlachinolli*, water-fire, or war.

Tlaloc, the "god of rain" according to most early accounts, has been shown to have many other associations, particularly as a deity of the earth.[25] The Templo Mayor excavations have also yielded caches of human skeletal remains, often those of children, which were interred on the Tlaloc side of the temple, so although the southern side of the temple, dedicated to Huitzilopochtli, is generally associated with human sacrifices, it is now clear that Tlaloc received human offerings. The Aztec regularly dispatched war captives as offerings at the Templo Mayor; Father Duran records many such victims at Ahuitzotl's rededication of the Templo Mayor in 1487. The chacmool sculptures were probably used during sacrificial ceremonies of this sort. These Tlaloc-associated sculptures not only receive the blood of captives but also commemorate them, the single, humiliated, recumbent figure perhaps recalling many.

Tlaloc may seem an unlikely patron for a sculpture that refers to the human booty of the Aztec war machine. But a re-examination of the Classic Maya captive figures, the likely origin of the chacmool form, suggests that Tlaloc is an integral part of the Maya iconography of war and sacrifice.[26] Tatiana Proskouriakoff first pointed out the use of Tlaloc imagery in war scenes at Yaxchilan, and Linda Schele has recently shown that together, battle and sacrifice are the exclusive domain of this costume.[27] Esther Pasztory has demonstrated that Tlaloc imagery particularly flourished

[22] Recently, in examining the history of the interpretations of chacmool figures, Cuellar reached the same conclusion as other authors, that is, that the recumbent figure refers to Tezcatzoncatl, a god associated with intoxication. Authors have seized on a citation from Torquemada referred to by Leon y Gama to argue that a reference is made to a figure *ya tirado*, or knocked down, that bears a *tina*, or basin (Juan de Torquemada, *Monarquia Indiana*, II, Bk. 9, Mexico City, 1964, 184). Unfortunately, Leon y Gama does not illustrate the sculpture to which he refers, nor is there reason to assume that he is correct in his interpretation, even if he is describing a chacmool. Furthermore, the Torquemada passage he cites does not specify that the description of this fallen drunkard is to be applied to sculpture rather than to a deity or his impersonator (Antonio de Leon y Gama, *Descripción histórica de las dos piedras* . . . , Mexico City, 1832; facsimile Mexico City, 1978, 90-93). Although it is not specified by those who follow this interpretation, it is probably the recumbent position that has suggested the drunkard, leading in turn to the reading as Tezcatzoncatl, an appropriate patron. There are no appropriate markings, however, such as the glyph "2 Rabbit" or other symbols normally associated with this figure and other pulque gods. Although the "drunkard" paintings at Cholula show reclining, if not sprawled, figures, those murals are chronologically isolated from the chacmool figures. Furthermore, the chacmool is never sprawled or in disarray as an intoxicated figure might be; he is always tense, under the strain of raising his back off the ground. The two other interpretations, Tlaloc and Cinteotl, bear closer examination. Based on the aquatic elements on the underside of the Tacubaya chacmool (Fig. 24b), E. T. Hamy, curator of the Trocadero Museum in Paris (now the Musée de l'Homme), identified the recumbent figure as Tlaloc (*Galérie americaine du musée d'ethnographie du Trocadero*, Paris, 1897). Sanchez believed that the figure grew from these aquatic elements and thus could best be identified as Cinteotl, an Aztec agricultural deity (Sanchez, as in n. 5, 270-78).

[23] Lizardi Ramos (as in n. 7), 137-38.

[24] Corona Nuñez (as in n. 7), 58.

[25] Thelma Sullivan has discussed the polyvalence of Tlaloc's name ("Tlaloc: A New Etymological Interpretation of the God's Name and What It Reveals of His Essence and Nature," *International Congress of the Americanists*, II, Rome, 1972, 213-19); Cecilia Klein has evaluated his role as a deity of the earth and nether regions ("Who Was Tlaloc?" *Journal of Latin American Lore*, VI, 1980, 155-204.)

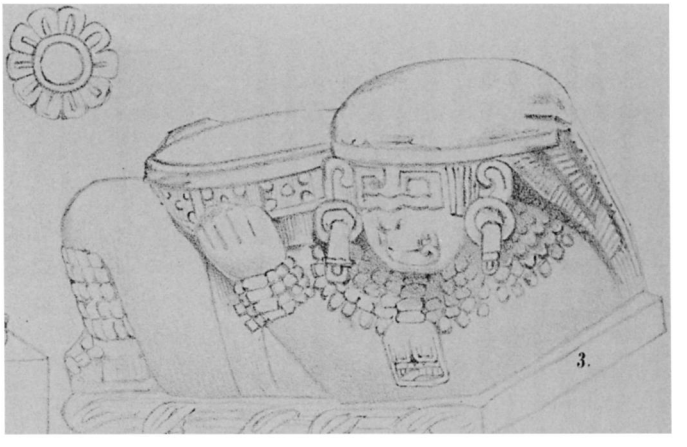
[26] Whether or not this figure was known as "Tlaloc" in Classic times remains uncertain, although the morphological identity is clear. For convenience, the name Tlaloc will be used in this paper.

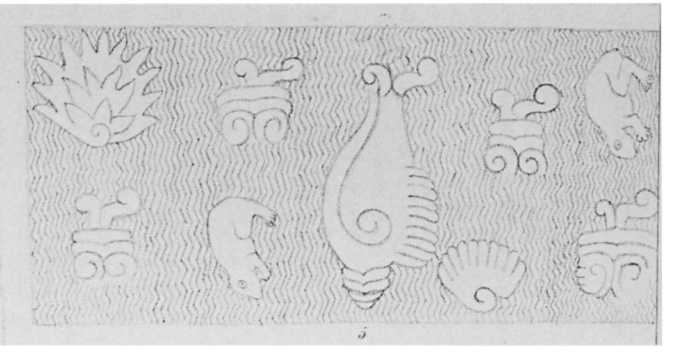
[27] Tatiana Proskouriakoff, "Historical Data in the Inscriptions of Yaxchilan, Part I," *Estudios de cultura maya*, III, 1963, 150; Linda Schele, "Human Sacrifice Among the Classic Maya," in *Ritual Human Sacrifice in Mesoamerica*, ed. Elizabeth H. Boone, Washington, D.C., 1984, 7-48.

22a, b, and c Chacmool excavated in 1943 at corner of Venustiano Carranza and Pino Suarez Streets (from Cesar Lizardi Ramos, "El chacmool mexicano," *Cuadernos americanos*, XIV, 1944)

in the first half of the eighth century.[28] Tlaloc faces appear on shields, in headdresses, or as masks of warriors.[29] The combination of elements of both Pasztory's "A" and "B" Tlaloc in some Maya depictions suggests that the Maya

23 Chacmool excavated at the Templo Mayor in 1978 (courtesy Emily Umberger)

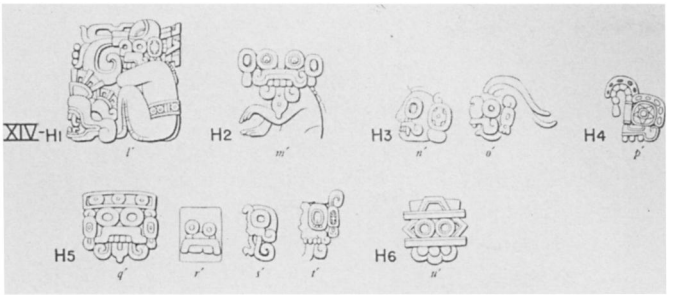




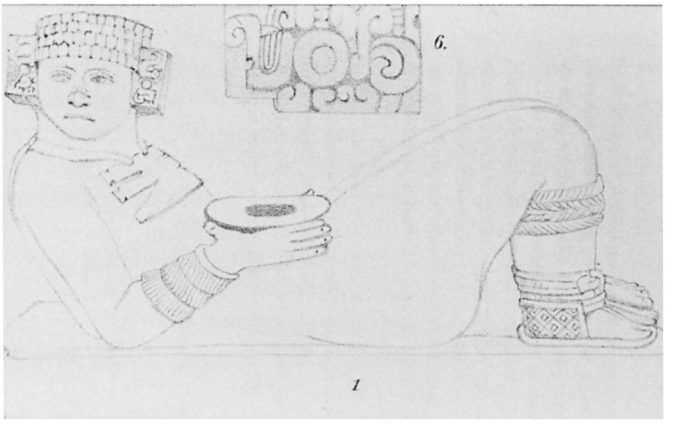
24a-b "Tacubaya" chacmool, as drawn by José Maria Velasco and published by Jesús Sanchez in 1877 ("Estudio acerca de la estatua llamada Chac-mool o Rey Tigre," *Anales del Museo Nacional de Mexico*, I, 1877)

[28] Esther Pasztory, "The Aztec Tlaloc: God of Antiquity," *Festschrift for Thelma Sullivan*, ed. D. Heyden and K. Josserand, in press.

[29] Pasztory identified two "Tlaloc" clusters in Teotihuacan iconography, one with a bifurcated tongue and tassel headdress, the other with the trapeze and ray year sign, water jar, and lightning bolt. The "Tlaloc" used among the Classic Maya is often shown in profile and is somewhat harder to identify, but it is usually Pasztory's "A," with year sign, who is shown. He usually figures as a headdress element but he can also be the mask worn by the Maya ruler (*The Iconography of the Teotihuacan Tlaloc* [*Dumbarton Oaks Studies in Pre-Columbian Art and Archaeology*, 15], Washington, D.C., 1974).



25 Maya "Tlalocs" (from Proskouriakoff, *A Study of Classic Maya Sculpture*, Washington, D.C., 1950)



26 Le Plongeon's chacmool, as drawn by José Maria Velasco and published by Sanchez in 1877. Tlaloc ear ornaments drawn as inset

blurred the distinctions between the two, much as modern scholars have (Fig. 25). Although the Central Mexican origin of Tlaloc is not the question here, it nevertheless seems that the Maya devised their own use and interpretation of this Teotihuacan deity. During generations of use in the Maya area, the characteristic form of Tlaloc was preserved.

Given the particular and isolated use of Tlaloc imagery for war and sacrifice among the Maya (and correspondingly, little clue to such specific and isolated usage at Teotihuacan), it is possible that the association of Tlaloc and war captives may have survived the Classic. Le Plongeon's original chacmool bears part of the clue to this survival: marked on the chacmool's ear ornaments are small Tlalocs, similar to those seen in the context of Classic Maya bloodshed (Fig. 26). The Maya war/Tlaloc imagery may have persisted after the Classic collapse, in the body of the chacmool. The chacmool of the interior Castillo (Fig. 15) may strengthen the identification. The ornaments attached to his ears also show small deity heads, but in this case, they appear to be tiny *Chacs*, or Maya rain gods, affirming the association between human sacrifice and rain deities. It can thus be proposed that both the form of the chacmool and its iconographic associations developed from Classic Maya prototypes. As a sculptural form, the three-dimensional chacmool was a reworking and codification of the Classic Maya captive. Set within its architectural context, the chacmool also maintained a relationship to the ruler established earlier in the stela/altar complex, where captives were set in front of rulers. The chacmool/throne configuration may have been a more flexible arrangement, allowing for a shifting pattern of occupants, while the altar/stela complex recorded a specific individual. The chacmool can also be shown to have been associated with Tlaloc, but the Tlaloc is a Mayanized version, associated with war, sacrifice, and captives. In this way, a trace of Classic Maya iconography, as well as one of its forms, could have persisted into Postclassic times. The chacmool can thus be understood as a Maya sculpture, probably invented at Chichen Itza, based on Maya precedents, and perhaps stimulated to three-dimensional form through contact with Central Mexico.

At the time of the Conquest, Father Sahagún's informants described the Toltec in rosy terms, attributing to them skills and knowledge: "Nothing that they did was difficult. . . . They cut green stone, and they cast gold, and they made other works of the craftsmen and feather worker. . . .[30]

". . . And these Tolteca were very wise; they were thinkers, for they originated the year count, the day count; they established the way in which the night, the day, would work; which day sign was good, favorable; and which was evil, the day sign of wild beasts. All their discoveries formed the book for interpreting dreams."[31]

Sahagún's informants' description of the work of the Toltec may have simply explained the Aztec view of antiquity.[32] If among the skills for which the Toltecs are praised are many that sound like those of the Maya, it should come as little surprise, because undoubtedly forms other than the chacmool owe their origin or meaning to a distant Maya past or perhaps to a past of even greater antiquity.

Yale University
New Haven, CT 06520

[30] Fray Bernardino de Sahagún, *The Florentine Codex*, trans. from Aztec by Charles E. Dibble and Arthur J. O. Anderson, Santa Fe, 1957, IV, 13.

[31] *Ibid.*, 1963, XI, 168.

[32] Tlaloc himself was probably identified with antiquity by the Aztec, and his images were used to legitimize Aztec ones, as Pasztory has argued (as in n. 28).