INTRODUCTION

For almost 2,000 years Teotihuacan has fired the imagination of Mesoamericans and Mesoamericanists alike. There are many compelling reasons for our fascination with this ancient Promethean city. One of the first urban centers in the New World, today it is probably the most frequently visited archaeological site in the Americas. Even the most uninitiated visitor, who might refer to the city only as “the Pyramids,” is utterly astounded by the monumental scale of the city. The challenge to the specialist is to attempt to understand the dynamics of the early urban growth and development as well as the decline and collapse of Teotihuacan. A metropolis fit for gods and kings, most of its population of 200,000 consisted of peasants, many of whom had moved to the city from elsewhere in the Basin of Mexico. What attracted them to this arid location, or were they forcibly relocated by political fiat? How was Teotihuacan society structured, and to what extent was kinship maintained as an organizational principle? Who were the shadowy rulers of the Teotihuacan state, and how did they manage their political affairs? To what extent was elite ideology shared by the majority of the population? What was the economic base of the city? What role, if any, did hydraulic agriculture play in the evolution of the Teotihuacan state?

These are only some of the many intriguing questions that have driven research at Teotihuacan since the advent of anthropological archaeology, questions that specialists are just beginning to answer today. Building upon the pioneering work of the great Manuel Gamio, Eduardo Noguera, and George Vaillant, Pedro Armillas was the first to focus attention on the systemic relationship between urbanism, agriculture, technology, social organization, and religion at Teotihuacan. This theme reoriented archaeological research in highland Mesoamerica. It became the focus of the early work of René Millon, Angel Palerm, William T. Sanders, and Eric Wolf, and eventually led to the two great settlement-pattern projects directed by Millon (Millon, Drewitt, and Cowgill 1973) and Sanders (Sanders, Parsons, and Santley 1979). As these projects gathered momentum in the mid-1960s, the Instituto Nacional de Antropologia e Historia (INAH) launched the massive Proyecto Teotihuacan under the direction of Ignacio Bernal and Jorge Acosta (for a detailed history of research at Teotihuacan and a summary of the many important publications that have resulted from these projects see Manzanilla [1988] and Rattray [1987]).

Although the great projects came to a halt in the 1970s, archaeological and art historical research in the ancient city has continued apace. In this, the first of two special sections on recent research at Teotihuacan, we present a sampling of some of the ongoing research that is being accomplished.

Rubén Cabrera, Saburo Sugiyama, and George Cowgill provide the historical and institutional context with an overview of the most recent work at Teotihuacan by Mexican, North American, and Japanese scholars. Among their most spellbinding recent discoveries is a series of sacrificial warrior burials at the Temple of Quetzalcoatl, providing incontrovertible evidence of the importance of militarism in early Teotihuacan society. Along with advances in archaeological knowledge of Teotihuacan have come significant changes in iconographic interpretation, as evidenced in the article by Alfredo López Austin, Leonardo López Luján, and Saburo Sugiyama, in which they argue that the high-relief facade of the Temple of Quetzalcoatl represents the creation of time at Teotihuacan. Rebecca Storey extends her interpretations of the mortuary population from the Tlajinga 33 compound to offer new insights on the internal organization of residential compounds in the city. Pursuing one of the time-honored themes in Teotihuacan research, Deborah L. Nichols, Michael W. Spence, and Mark D. Borland have detected interesting patterns indicating changes in the way that irrigation canals were utilized. Finally, Randolph J. Widmer offers a detailed analysis of lapidary craft specialization at Tlajinga 33, emphasizing the importance of the analysis of formation processes and concluding that specialization may have occurred within the social context of the extended family.

We suspect that these excellent reports, complete studies in their own right, will form an important basis for future work at the largest Preclassic city in America.

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