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SPECIAL SECTION INTRODUCTION: ARCHAEOLOGY IN CHICHEN ITZA

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Chichen Itza was considered for many years an isolated and solitary settlement that flourished during the Postclassic period (A.D. 1000–1200) after the collapse of Classic Maya communities. The chronological position, as well as the social and cultural events that occurred in Chichen Itza during its apogee, derived mainly from two sources: first, the unquestionable interpretation of facts recorded in historical documents where the Maya always pre-dated the appearance or emergence of that site; second, the presence of non-Maya groups (first Toltecs, later the Itzas) who arrived, conquered, and settled in Chichen Itza to develop it, as attested by the architecture and sculptural features of supposedly "Toltec" origin.

The contribution of archaeology to the explanation of the social and cultural events that occurred at Chichen Itza during its apogee was practically non-existent. Moreover, in the case of Chichen Itza's chronology, the interpretations always adjusted or accommodated the dates reported in the historical sources to those events and this correlation was taken as a solid explanatory discourse. However, with the advance of archaeological research, not only in Chichen Itza, but in numerous Terminal Classic period (A.D. 800–1100) sites in the Yucatan, this discourse began to show enormous gaps and limited explanations; in other words, the paradigm established for decades began to crumble and the interpretation of archaeological data gradually helped in the creation of another paradigm that replaced the first.

The five articles that make up this special section further contribute to explaining Chichen Itza as a Maya site that had its apogee at the end of the Classic period. This special section focuses on four specific topics: gender, Chichen Itza and its relationship with the maritime littoral, human sacrifice, and economy. Each of the five articles provides new interpretations derived from rigorous analyses of archaeological data and helps to underpin the new explanatory proposal on the society and culture that occupied Chichen Itza during the Terminal Classic period.

The section begins with an article titled "The Construction of Masculinities at Chichen Itza: A Functional Interpretation of Structure 2D6," presented by Lilia Fernández Souza, Héctor Hernández Álvarez, and Mario Zimmermann, focusing on male collectivity in Chichen Itza, seen from Structure 2D6. This building is a gallery-patio structure in whose frontal gallery excavations unearthed archaeological, architectural, and chemical evidence that shows specific areas where male activities were carried out as part of the construction of masculinity in Chichen Itza. It should be noted that this study follows an archaeological perspective, and its results are added to sculpture and painting studies of the site that contribute to explaining the construction of a male ideology utilized to support the dominant structure of power when Chichen Itza flourished between the tenth and eleventh centuries. Fernández Souza and colleagues also point out that it is possible to establish a symbolic relationship between the discourse that exalted masculinity at Chichen Itza and the roles adopted or shouldered by rulers, warriors, and priests.

The relationship between Chichen Itza and the maritime coast of the Maya Lowlands is exemplified by an article written by Nayeli Jiménez Cano, whose title is "Animal Provisioning at Chichen Itza and Isla Cerritos: A Zooarchaeological Review on Faunal Utilization." Jiménez Cano shows the similarity that exists between marine and terrestrial species reported in both Chichen Itza and Isla Cerritos, and this resemblance can be explained by the economic, political, and social dependence that the former site had over the latter. The skeletal remains of vertebrate animals, such as white-tailed deer, tapir, sharks, turtles, ocelots, and dogs found in Chichen Itza, were used for food, rituals, adornment, and tools, according to the different archaeological contexts where they have been found at this site. In addition, it remains to be clarified what site or sites located between Chichen Itza and Isla Cerritos may have contributed to obtaining animals whose meat was consumed in both pre-Hispanic communities. Skeletal evidence of faunal remains suggests for now that whole animals as well as parts of them may have been exchanged between different communities to supply the inland capital and its seaport.

In the Special Section on Chichen Itza, two works contribute to the study of human sacrifice at the site. Vera Tiesler and Virginia E. Miller, in their contribution titled "Heads, Skulls, and Sacred Scaffolds: New Studies on Ritual Body Processing and Display in Chichen Itza and Beyond", analyze skulls and jaws that reveal signs of perimortem trauma; in other words, skeletal and iconographic data suggest that heads, after being separated from the body, were perforated or pierced to be exhibited in very specific structures, such as the *tzompantli*. Tiesler and Miller argue that the way in which bodies and parts of them were processed in Chichen Itza during the Terminal Classic period continued a tradition dating to earlier times of the Classic Maya period; however, the permanent exhibition or display of abundant skulls in a structure built for this particular function is observed only in Chichen Itza.

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The fourth article, co-authored by Alfonso Gallardo, Martha Pimienta Merlín, and Oana del Castillo Chávez, and titled "Movimientos poblacionales del clásico terminal en Chichén Itzá, a partir de la morfología dental de un grupo de niños sacrificados," is a second contribution to the study of human sacrifice in Chichen Itza, but using a dental sample of sub-adult individuals or children. The remains of these individuals, found in a *chultun* located a short distance northeast of the Sacred Cenote, were placed in this artificial feature, which was probably assigned a ritual context. The children were placed inside the *chultun* postmortem, and dental metric-morphological analyses reveal that the children were not natives to the Maya area. The sacrificed minors were originally from another region or regions that have yet to be identified in Mexico and/or Central America.

The last contribution, titled "Chichen Itza and its Economy at the End of the Classic Period: Tribute, Centralized Redistribution, and Maritime Stations" by Rafael Cobos, focuses on tribute and centralized redistribution as two key economic elements to explain the apogee of Chichen Itza at the end of the Terminal Classic period. Employing a regional economic perspective and considering archaeological data from several sites and regions that were coming to their political, economic, and social end between the tenth and eleventh centuries, Chichen Itza seems to have taken advantage of a region that was undergoing complex transformations due to its collapse. This site seems to have used its powerful military supremacy to extract tribute from sites and regions it conquered militarily and politically. Tribute obtained by Chichen Itza included sumptuous commodities that were used by members of the elite to reinforce the power structure and consolidate social relations among the different individuals who inhabited that ancient community.

It is an exciting time to conduct archaeology at Chichen Itza. We now know much more about this UNESCO World Heritage Site, thanks to the recent research efforts and publications of this Special Section. Ongoing archaeology will reveal greater insights and discoveries that may topple long-held notions about the story of the Maya who settled here. These articles are a contribution to those efforts to uncover how Chichen Itza residents flourished and interacted with the larger Mesoamerican world.

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