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SPECIAL SECTION: TULA IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY: NEW DATA, NEW PERSPECTIVES, NEW INSIGHTS

## INTRODUCTION

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Tollan-Xococotitlan, great city of the Toltecs, represents one of those enigmatic ancient places that played a prominent role in Mesoamerican history and mythology. Known to us today simply as Tula, it is largely thought of as the most important Early Postclassic Period (A.D. 900–1250) city in central Mexico and throughout Mesoamerica. In this Special Section, Dan M. Healan has assembled eight articles whose authors present some of the latest research and interpretations on the Toltecs and the quintessential Toltec center in Hidalgo, Mexico that complement the previous seminal survey and excavations conducted by archaeologists of the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH) and the University of Missouri.

In the first article (“Recent Investigations at Tula Chico, Tula, Hidalgo”), **Robert Cobean**, **Dan M. Healan**, and **María Elena Suárez** provide a historical accounting of the numerous scientific investigations that have taken place, from Jorge Acosta’s work in the 1940s to the most recent ones at Tula Chico. The authors report on the chronology of Tula Chico, a complex that was founded by Coyotlatelco peoples during the Middle Classic, much earlier than any previous estimation of the time when Tula was first settled. Tula Chico flourished during the Epiclassic period, but it did not overlap in time with Tula Grande as a functioning administrative center. After its ritual termination at the end of the Epiclassic, Tula Chico remained partially occupied with a small population until the end of the Tollan-phase city.

The archaeological record throughout the world is a limited resource and in danger of disappearing. While 1.1 km<sup>2</sup> of Tula’s core is protected, areas outside of it are not, though archaeological intervention takes place before modern activities ensue. In the second article, we learn of the various factors altering the remains of the ancient city. **Luís Gamboa Cabezas** and **Dan M. Healan** illustrate the urgency of this situation through the remarkable finds that have been recovered at Tula Grande through “Salvage and Rescue Archaeology Inside Ancient Tula: Recent Discoveries and Revelations.” They offer new insights about diversity, social status, housing, neighborhoods, economics, ritual, and many other facets of Toltec life, highlighting the critical role that salvage operations increasingly play in our understanding of the past.

Human sacrifice was common to peoples of the past the world over, including the Toltecs. In the third article (“Child Sacrifice in Tula: A Bioarchaeological Study”), **Angélica María Medrano**

**Enríquez** analyzes a recent deposit found about a kilometer from Tula Grande, Feature 5, containing 49 individuals, of whom 47 were subadults. She reveals in her bioarchaeological study of child sacrifice in Tula the skeletal evidence for sacrifice and its role in Mesoamerica in general, as determined from archaeological and ethnohistorical sources. On numerous portentous occasions, children were the preferred sacrificial victims as offerings to different deities. Some of these individuals may have been sacrificed to Xipe Totec. The recovery of this deposit was the result of a salvage operation, once again underscoring the essential role that rescue operations have come to play in expanding our knowledge.

**Blanca Paredes Gudiño** and **Dan M. Healan** report on the “Systematic Investigations in the Core and Periphery of Ancient Tula” in the fourth article. During the 1980s, archaeologists from INAH investigated Tula prior to the construction of the large tourist center and a railway that now traverses the ancient city. Those data, combined with more recent work, produced a wealth of information on household and ritual contexts from the Epiclassic through Postclassic occupations. Ties to northern, southern, and western Mesoamerica manifested in artifacts and ecofacts, such as exotic pottery and non-local species. The god of merchants, Yacatecutli, is possibly represented in a carved panel in the Zapata II locality. Recommendations for future studies include DNA and isotope analyses to determine possible migrations and their reasons, as well as further investigations to elucidate the nature of the presence of the Aztecs.

We are informed about the “Archaeological Investigations in the Northern Portion of Ancient Tula” by **Fernando Getino Granados**. Prior to the construction of a four-lane highway, the “Arco Norte,” INAH archaeologists conducted salvage operations involving survey, testing, and excavation of numerous locales. The planned path of the highway provided a ready-made transect, 1.4 km long, of which archaeologists could take advantage for the Proyecto Zona Urbana Norte, or ZUN, which was the first project to explore the northernmost part of the ancient city. This intervention produced data on the earliest and latest phases that are the least well-known, and a plethora of residential structures. Getino Granados secured the protection of a twin-temple pyramid, among other unique remains, by having the road diverted, while other sites were recorded and subsequently destroyed.

In the following article, **Fernando Báez Urincho** reports on his research on a little-known structure at Tula Grande. Many well-

known buildings comprise the core of Tula, but Edificio 4, located in Tula Grande, has not been as extensively explored as others. Though previously investigated and identified as a palace by Acosta, such excavations were limited in scope. From 2002 to 2005, Báez Urincho (“Edificio 4, Tula Grande: Architecture, Occupation, and Abandonment”) uncovered interior rooms, corridors, and a patio as part of the Proyecto Tula, directed by Alba Guadalupe Mastache and Robert Cobean. Given the delicate nature of the remains, test pits were carefully placed and backfilled to preserve architecture for future restoration, but not before archaeologists obtained much information that illuminates how this building functioned and its sociopolitical significance.

The Toltecs designed some of the most recognizable architecture in Mesoamerica. In the penultimate article of this Special Section (“Warriors, Kings, and *Teohuaque* at Tula: A Reconsideration of the So-Called ‘Warrior Pillars’ atop Pyramid B”), **Elizabeth Jiménez García** reexamines the famous pillars of Tula. Using iconography, archaeology, and conquest-era codices, she concludes that the 16 “warriors” portrayed on the four pillars are in fact warrior-kings who utilized symbols of the elite to effectively convey powerful messages. She also provides a tentative reconstruction of their original order and orientation atop Pyramid B.

Given the enormous amount of recent research, it is only fitting that this Special Section wraps up with an article on the “Revised Chronology and Settlement History of Tula and the Tula Region” by **Dan M. Healan, Robert Cobean, and Robert Bowsher**. Combining the new with the old, the authors produce a history of the city based on robust excavation data, radiocarbon and archaeomagnetic dates, and ceramic chronologies. Inhabitants of this dynamic ancient city witnessed dramatic shifts in occupation through the centuries.

This Special Section has highlighted the opportunities and challenges presented to archaeologists by salvage projects combined with focused field research. The effectiveness to which researchers of Tula and related centers have utilized such situations to produce new data and interpretations, in combination with legacy data, speak volumes about future research in Mesoamerica. As the archaeological record disappears before our very eyes, we must make the most of every chance afforded us to gather and disseminate information about the past.

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