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DIPARTIMENTO DI SCIENZE DELL'ANTICHITÀ – MUSEO DELLE ORIGINI



# ORIGINI

*PREHISTORY AND PROTOHISTORY  
OF ANCIENT CIVILIZATIONS*

XLII  
2018-2

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DELLE CIVILTÀ ANTICHE

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*RETHINKING URBANIZATION AND ITS LIVING LANDSCAPES  
FROM THE INSPIRING PERSPECTIVE OF A GREAT "MAESTRO"*

Edited by Marcella Frangipane and Linda R. Manzanilla

In memory of Robert McC. Adams



Gestione editoriale e distribuzione

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## MESOAMERICA AND THE ANDES

### CORPORATE SOCIETIES WITH EXCLUSIONARY SOCIAL COMPONENTS: THE TEOTIHUACAN METROPOLIS

Linda R. Manzanilla\*

*ABSTRACT – Few urban developments are as multiethnic, corporate, and, in fact, exceptional as Teotihuacan, in Central Mexico. The city itself covered a surface of 20 square kilometers, with a very strict urban grid, a fact that is only present at that site in Classic Mesoamerica. It housed people from different origins in what may be called “a multiethnic pact”. At the base and summit of this society, traits of a corporate organization may be identified. The apartment compounds housed corporate groups that shared a particular activity. At the summit of this society, a ruling council emerging from the four districts may have been the means to appease coups d’état, in a multiethnic society with various (perhaps conflicting) interests. Nevertheless, in the intermediate level of this society, stand the quasi-autonomous neighborhood centers managed by the dynamic intermediate elite, which display of a wide variety of sumptuary goods coming from different regions, where each neighborhood center promoted alliances. The contradiction between these two elements –corporate and competitive– may be behind the collapse of this urban society that began by 550 CE.*

**KEYWORDS –** Teotihuacan, Teopancazco, Xalla, corporate, neighborhood center, competitive.

#### INTRODUCTION

The processes of emergence of the first urban settlements in the past involve different key factors, as Fox (1977) and Marcus (1983) have stated. Cities may emerge around dynastic palaces and royal courts; others are huge administrative and craft-producing centers; some others (fluvial ports, sea ports, exchange ports) are the by-product of exchange routes, and the advantages related to the flow of raw materials, goods, people, ideas, and technological innovations.

The first multiethnic cities (Mohenjo Daro, Teotihuacan, Tiwanaku, and others) seem to be exceptions in their areas. Most of them are huge metropolis, often with an strict urban grid, and well-defined manufacturing sectors. A wide array of sumptuary goods from other regions are present. Nevertheless, the

presence of single dynasts is not clear in them.

During the Classic period of Central Mexico (1-650 CE), a huge metropolis emerged that became the main urban settlement of the region, and the most influential society in Mesoamerica. The city summoned people from different origins, starting with those fleeing from the Popocatepetl volcano’s eruption in the first century CE (Plunket, Uruñuela 1998), who arrived to a valley already occupied by local Formative villages such as Cuanalan (Manzanilla 1985).

During the Tlamimilolpa phase (200-350 CE), the urban growth and the elements of urban planning that Millon (1973) brilliantly synthesized are already present (fig. 1): the existence of an urban grid of parallel and perpendicular streets, the presence of construction modules, multifamily apartment compounds that

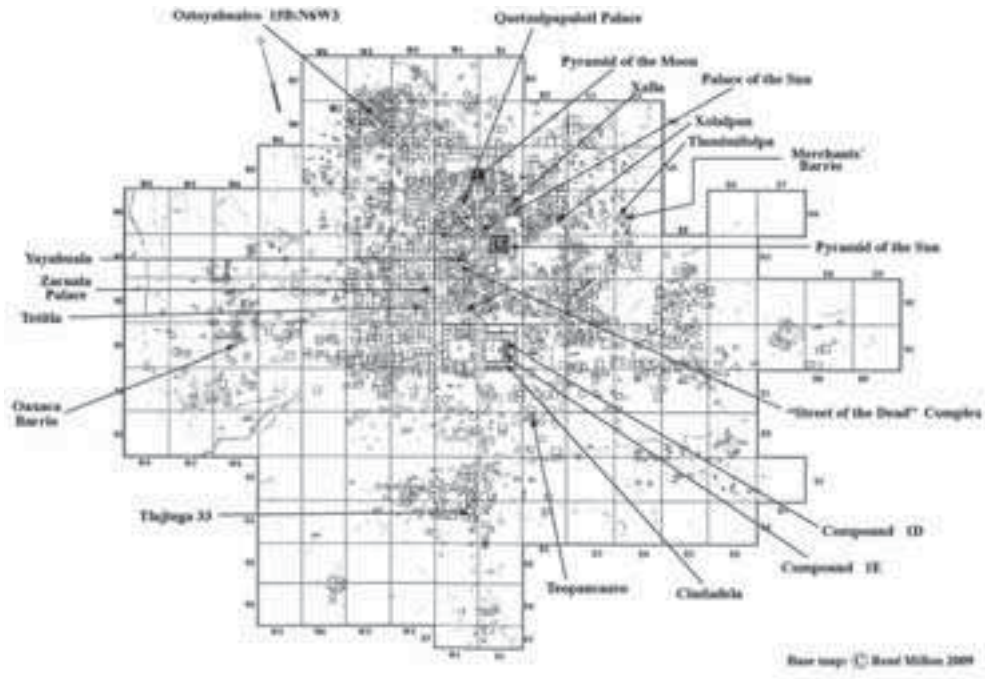


Fig. 1 – A map of Teotihuacan with the main constructions (redrawn from the original map by Millon 1973).

house the inhabitants of the city, the location of ethnic neighborhoods in the periphery, the channeling of the San Juan River to cope with the urban grid, and the existence of a vast subterranean drainage system. The city itself seems to have been divided into four districts by the Street of the Dead, and the East-West Avenue (Manzanilla 2009a).

This period represented a qualitative change in the settlement pattern of the Teotihuacan Valley. Migrants from different regions and the local population were organized in corporate groups based in apartment compounds surrounded by high walls (Manzanilla 1996; Manzanilla ed. 1993); these compounds surrounded ca. 22 neighborhood centers (Manzanilla 2012b; Froese *et alii* 2014) probably headed by nobles

of the intermediate elite that organized multiethnic labor for very specialized craft activities and for the provisioning of sumptuary goods from regions where alliances were established (Manzanilla 2006, 2009a, 2011, 2017d).

Along the Street of the Dead (a name given by the Aztecs when they visited Teotihuacan, ca. 800 years after the fall of the city), the main north-south axis of the metropolis, administrative and religious public buildings were set. To the north, two large congregation plazas were built: the Moon Plaza and the Sun Plaza; in the middle of the city, a third very large open space, surrounded by a wall with structures is found: the Ciudadela.

In front of the Ciudadela, another large open space is seen, surrounded by two large platforms; it is called the Great

Compound, and René Millon proposed it was the main market of the city, a hypothesis that has not been confirmed by archaeological evidence.

Three main pyramids mark the three main temples of the city: the Moon Pyramid to the north, the Sun Pyramid to the northeast, and the Pyramid of the Feathered Serpent to the southeast. It is my opinion that these are the main temples for three of the four groups converging into the co-rulership council of the city.

Near the core surrounding the Street of the Dead, large residential compounds (ca. 3600 m<sup>2</sup>) are found (Tetitla, Yahualala, Atetelco, Zacuala); another ring also includes large compounds which are not as glamorous as the ones already cited (Tlamimilolpa, Xolalpan). An outer sector houses smaller multifamily compounds such as Ozttoyahualco 15B:N6W3 (Manzanilla ed. 1993; Manzanilla 1996, 2009a). As will be described further on, these apartment compounds are an outstanding characteristic of Teotihuacan, not shared by other societies.

Sanders *et alii* (1979) state that during the Classic period, the massive growth of Teotihuacan comprised 20 km<sup>2</sup> and ca. 125,000 persons (a density of 7,000 persons per km<sup>2</sup>); it provoked a substantial depopulation of the Basin of Mexico, and the city concentrated half of the people of the region. Most of the Basin of Mexico was covered with large and small villages, and hamlets (Sanders *et alii* 1979) (fig. 2), providing another element that stresses the exceptional character of Teotihuacan (a scarcely developed settlement hierarchy, with the huge metropolis surrounded by rural sites) (Manzanilla 2017d).

At the end of the Tlamimilolpa period (ca. 320-350 CE) different events occurred:

the Pyramid of the Feathered Serpent was destroyed by the *Teotihuacanos* by fire and by sculpture dismantling; some dates related to the eruption of the Xitle volcano (Siebe 2000) suggest that it took place around this time, with the consequent population movements; many constructions of the Tlamimilolpa phase in the city were topped by others belonging to the later Xolalpan phase (350-550 CE); in places such as Teopancazco (Manzanilla ed. 2017b, 2012a; Manzanilla 2006, 2009a, 2012b), a neighborhood center in the southeastern district of Teotihuacan, different termination rituals took place at around 350 CE, as we will see further on. A severe crisis may have taken place at the end of the Tlamimilolpa period, perhaps related to political events that provoked the casting out of the group of the Feathered Serpent: as pointed out before, their temple was burned, dismantled and destroyed; the iconography related to serpents changed to felines in the Xolalpan phase.

One possibility may have been an intent of *coup d'état* by the serpent group towards the rest of the ruling council (whose emblems were: birds of prey, felines, and coyotes); the Mythological Animals' Mural Painting depicts two serpents being challenged by the emblems of the other three groups: felines, canids, birds of prey.

During the Xolalpan period (350-550 CE), a new construction phase occurs, in what Millon (1973) calls "urban renewal phase". The *Teotihuacanos* chose the color red to paint their city in this phase. By now, Teotihuacan is the centripetal force of Central Mexico, bringing a large labor force into the city.

By 550 CE (Manzanilla 2003a, 2003b, 2009b, 2003a, 2003b; Soler-Archalde *et alii* 2006) extensive evidence

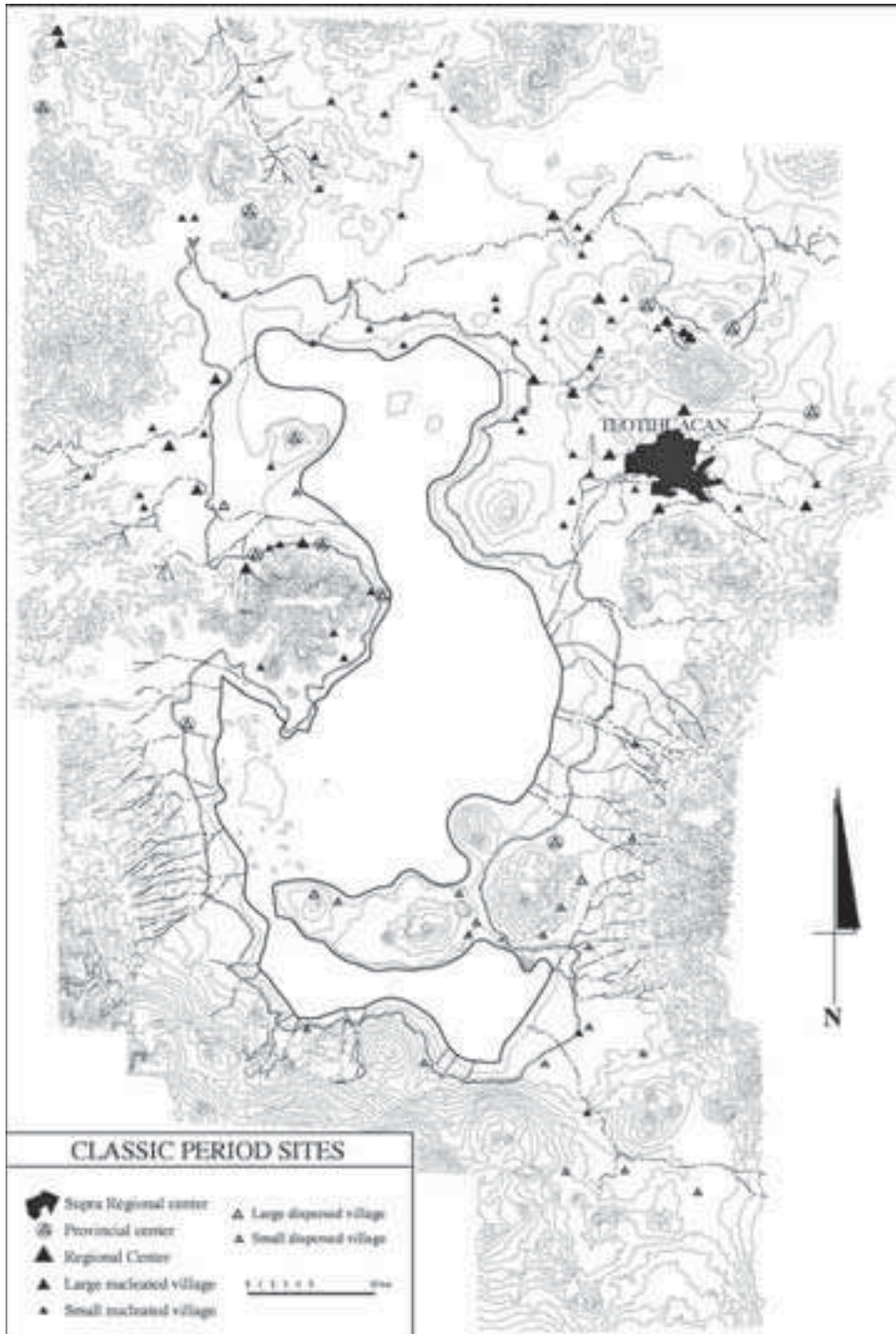


Fig. 2 – The Basin of Mexico during the Classic Period (redrawn from Sanders *et alii* 1979).

of destruction occurs in the core of the city: a huge fire (Millon 1988: 149-152), dismantling, and ritual destruction constitute the first phase of the collapse (Manzanilla 2003a, 2003b, 2008, 2017c).

In the palatial complex of Xalla, located between the pyramids of the Sun and the Moon (Manzanilla 2008, 2017c), I have found data related to the destruction of the main ritual plaza by an intense fire, and the archaeomagnetic dating of this event places it 550 CE (Soler-Arechalde *et alii* 2006). The shattering of major sculptures related to the deities in each of the precinct of the main plaza and adjacent areas is also assessed.

Not only at Xalla, but also at the Quetzalpapálotl Palace (Acosta 1964: 25), the Priests' House (Batres 1906: 15), the Viking Group (Armillas 1944), and Structure 1D of the Ciudadela (Jarquín-Pacheco, Martínez-Vargas 1982: 123), all structures set along or near the Street of the Dead (and thus, compounds related to the ruling elite), evidences of carbonized wooden roofs on top of the floor of late Xolalpan times are found.

There are two possible interpretations to this great fire: if this is the first event of the collapse, then it should be interpreted as an internal revolt, precluding the disarticulation of the central authority of the city. I would advance my hypothesis that this revolt is organized by the intermediate elite and master craftsmen of the neighborhood centers, towards the ruling elite, perhaps related to a late control on the part of the state towards the entrepreneurial, semi-autonomous and competitive neighborhood centers which naturally reacted.

Other collateral events related to the collapse of Teotihuacan are the following: the dramatic effects of the urban settlement

in its environment (particularly the need of fuel for domestic food preparation, pottery and lime production, which produced the cut down of a large wooden surface, as Mooser [1968: 31] as well as Barba, Córdova-Frunz [1999] suggested, as well as other effects such as soil erosion, lack of acquifer recharge, the clogging of derivation dams, the decrease of water production in springs, etc.). Millon (1988: 149) added awkwardness of Teotihuacan bureaucracy to deal with groups of different interests, bad administration of the economy and inflexibility towards change, and Chadwick (1966: 2) proposed the blocking of the provisioning routes to the east.

During the Metepec phase (550-650 CE) certain remaining groups remodel domestic and neighborhood compounds, through the building of small rooms of awkward construction; we suppose that little by little, the city is abandoned by the *Teotihuacanos*, when the central administration and the provisioning system collapsed ceased to function.

With the collapse of Teotihuacan there is a constant decrease and dispersion of the population (Parsons 1974: 106). A process of "balcanization" took place, together with the appearance of small polities centered in city-states (Marcus 1989: 201): Cholula, Cacaxtla, Xochicalco, Teotenango, and Tula in the central highlands, and Tajin in the Gulf Coast of Mexico. These polities were exclusionary in nature.

#### THE CORPORATE ORGANIZATION OF THE APARTMENT COMPOUNDS

The anatomy I made of a 550 m<sup>2</sup> peripheral multifamily apartment compound of Teotihuacan (Oztayahualco

15B:N6W3, 1985-1988 field seasons) (Manzanilla ed. 1993; Manzanilla 1996, 2009a) (fig. 3) revealed that three households occupied this compound, each one with an apartment. They did not share a kitchen nor a sanctuary; they were independent households, each one with a kitchen, a storeroom, porticoes, dormitories, service courtyards, backyards for domestic animal breeding (dogs, turkeys, and rabbits) as well as for butchering and other dirty activities; and a ritual courtyard where the family patron god was venerated (Manzanilla ed. 1993; Manzanilla 1996, 2009a). Thus, I have proposed that the corporate group constituted by three households occupying Ozttoyahualco 15B shared common activities: the preparation of stucco (as seen in the exterior of the compound to the west) and the plastering walls and floors.

We may suppose that the plastering of walls and the breeding of rabbits that characterize this corporate group may be activities offered to the neighborhood, centered in a three-temple plaza nearby. Other corporate groups may have been potters, obsidian knappers, etc.

Following Millon (1973), there may have been 2200 apartment compounds in the city, following the urban grid; some are large (circa 3500 m<sup>2</sup>, such as Tetitla, Tlamimilolpa or Zacuala Palace; others are middle-sized, circa 2280 m<sup>2</sup>, such as Xolalpan or Tlajinga 33, while others are much smaller, between 280 and 550 m<sup>2</sup> (such as Ozttoyahualco 15B) (Manzanilla 1996).

There is an internal hierarchy in each compound; at Ozttoyahualco 15B I observed that the most important household had the Thunder God (the state



Fig. 3 – Aerial photograph of the Ozttoyahualco 15B apartment compound excavated by Linda R. Manzanilla (photo by Linda R. Manzanilla).



Fig. 4 – Foreign neighborhoods in the periphery of Teotihuacan (drawing by Linda R. Manzanilla and Rubén Gómez).

deity of Teotihuacan) as its patron god, and had access to foreign raw materials such as slate, mica, and greenstone. The other two households of lower status were venerating the Fire God and a Rabbit God, perhaps related to the breeding of rabbits in the compound, an uncommon feature in Teotihuacan (Manzanilla ed. 1993; Somerville *et alii* 2017).

THE EXCLUSIONARY ORGANIZATION OF THE INTERMEDIATE ELITE IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD CENTERS

The most dynamic social units of Teotihuacan were the neighborhoods,

headed by the intermediate elite of the metropolis (Manzanilla 2012b, 2017d; Manzanilla ed. 2012a, 2017a, 2017b). We have counted 22 neighborhood centers in Teotihuacan (Froese *et alii* 2014), many of them evident in the three-temple plazas, their coordination centers (Manzanilla ed. 1993). Hypothetically, these neighborhoods seem to be located in the four districts of the city. There were foreign neighborhoods in the periphery of the site (the Oaxaca Barrio, the Merchants' Barrio, and the Michoacán compound; see fig. 4), and multiethnic neighborhood centers in the inner ring.

These neighborhood centers seem to

the managed by nobles, and they were very active in recruiting foreign labor for specialized manufacture (Manzanilla 2006, 2012b, 2015; Manzanilla ed. 2017b), through caravan systems that transited corridors of ally sites (Manzanilla 2011).

Foreign specialized craftsmen summoned through the caravan system managed by each neighborhood were attached to the neighborhood center, and fed perhaps by a rationing system (Manzanilla 2011). For the Teopancazco case I excavated (1997 to 2005 field seasons), the caravans headed by the nobles brought back foreign sumptuary goods (14 varieties of fish from the coastal lagoons in Veracruz, crabs, crocodile, coastal birds, cotton cloths, pottery from the Mixtequilla region, volcanic glass from Altotonga [Veracruz], as well as travertine and thin-orange ware from central Puebla, probably cosmetics and other goods) as well as migrants from Tlaxcala, Hidalgo, Puebla, Veracruz, and other areas, who were attracted perhaps with the promise of a better living condition than the one in their place of origin (Manzanilla 2011, 2012b, 2015; Manzanilla ed. 2017a, 2017b; Rodríguez, Valadez 2013; Barca *et alii* 2013).

The workers of Teopancazco were diverse genetically, as the four haplogroups of Mesoamerica were present in one single neighborhood center of Teotihuacan (Álvarez-Sandoval *et alii* 2015; Manzanilla ed. 2017b); with <sup>87/86</sup>Sr isotopes and stable isotopes we could state that some of these workers came from Puebla, Tlaxcala, Hidalgo, Veracruz, and perhaps Chiapas and Oaxaca (Manzanilla ed. 2012a, 2017b). Most were fed with maize food (*tortillas*, *tamales*, *atole*) and cooked domestic

animals also fed with maize (turkeys, dogs) (Manzanilla ed. 2017b).

Some of these foreign individuals had nutritional stress during infancy, so one can imagine that they migrated using the caravan system, to profit from better living conditions in the city (Manzanilla 2015). They had activity markers in their skeletons that highlighted many hours of work in a squatting position, garment-making, fiber softening, net throwing, diving in cold waters, and walking many kilometers with heavy weights (Manzanilla 2015; Manzanilla ed. 2017b).

Neighborhood coordination centers displayed different functional sectors that distinguish them from the multifamily apartment compounds, as can be seen at Teopancazco (Manzanilla 2009a, 2012b) (fig. 5): a ritual sector with a huge ceremonial plaza, a large temple and an altar; a possible administrative area; the sector where the guard stood; an alignment of kitchens and storerooms located in the periphery to feed the workers; a very specialized craft-production area for garment-making; probably a medical sector; the residential area for the household that managed the neighborhood, and an open space attached to it, for barter activities, ball game, and possibly for dirty activities, such as the dyeing of cloths (Manzanilla 2009a, 2012b).

#### THE CORPORATE ELEMENTS OF THE CO-RULERSHIP

If the city of Teotihuacan was divided into four districts (fig. 6), as I have mentioned before, it is possible that four co-rulers, one for each district, may have constituted a ruling council (Manzanilla 2001, 2008, 2009a, 2017d); it was a result



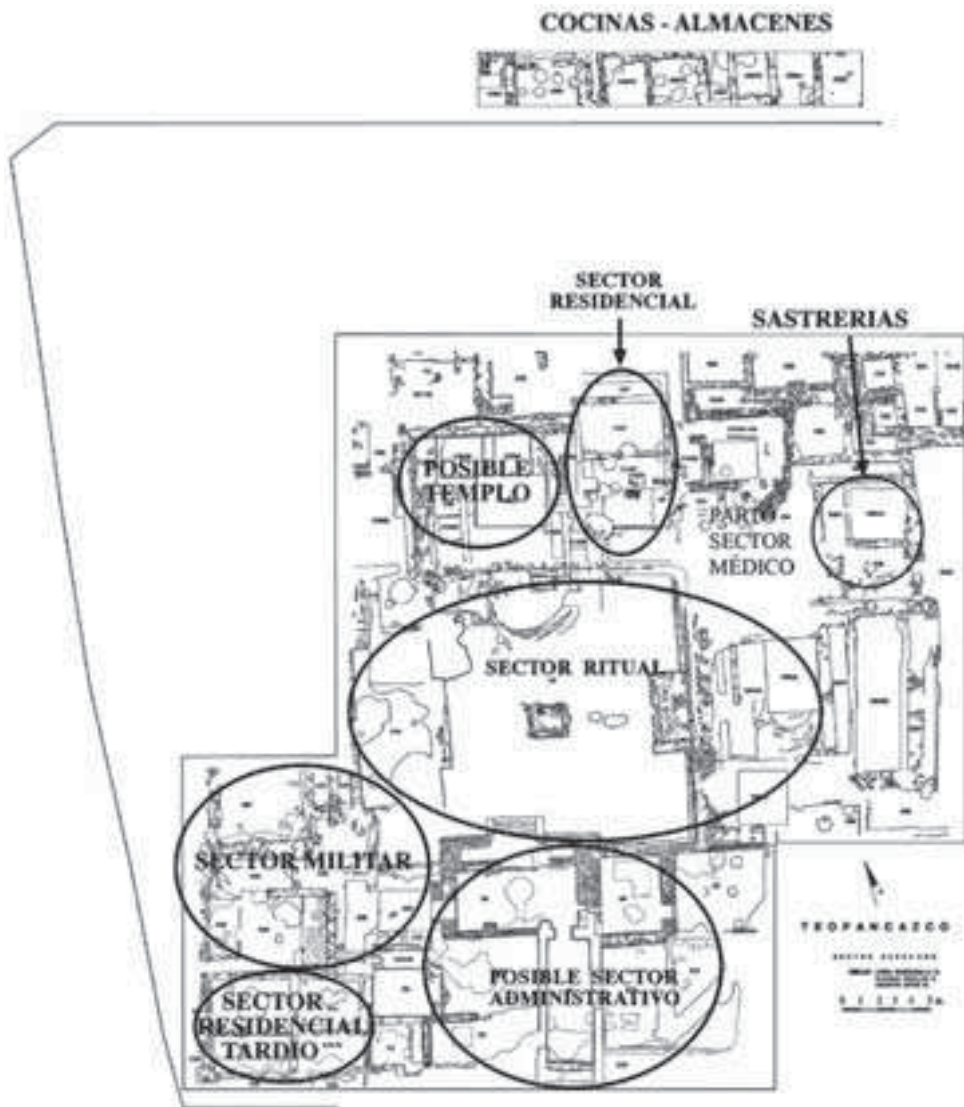


Fig. 5 – The functional sectors of Teopancazco (drawing by Linda R. Manzanilla and Rubén Gómez).

of the corporate organization (Blanton *et alii* 1996) of Teotihuacan, not only in the corporate groups at the base of the society, but also at the summit of this exceptional society. Although Pasztory (1978, 1992) and Paulinyi (1981) suggested the possibility of many rulers at Teotihuacan,

I have based my hypothesis of the four co-rulers (Manzanilla 2002b, 2006, 2008) in the Las Colinas vessel, found by Sigvald Linné (1942) in Calpulalpan, where four Teotihuacan nobles walk around the Thunder God's face, each one with an emblem: a bird of prey (probably



Fig. 6 – The hypothesis of the four districts of Teotihuacan (drawing by Linda R. Manzanilla and Rubén Gómez).

the northwestern district, where the Eagles' Plaza, the Quetzalpapalotl palace, and the Pyramid of the Moon stand); a coyote (frequently represented at Atetelco); a serpent (where the Feathered Serpent Temple is located), and a three-tasseled headdress (related to a goggled figure and to the Pyramid of the Sun, the Thunder God's main temple). The ruling elite were very much involved in the personification of the main deities of Teotihuacan, as my excavations at the palace of Xalla (Manzanilla 2008, 2017c, 2017d) suggest.

I have also proposed that the multi-ethnic pact behind the Teotihuacan

state originates a feeble political organization, not a strong state, as some have proposed. This first generation state is like an octopus (Manzanilla 2017d): the head is the huge urban settlement, and the tentacles are the corridors of ally sites heading to the sumptuary-good provisioning sectors.

The original effort to establish an urban grid (see Millon 1973) around 200 CE was probably intended to organize the huge multiethnic labor that poured into the city to work in building and craft activities, as well as in the caravan system. The intermediate elite of the neighborhoods represented the most dynamic part

of the Teotihuacan society, each one competing with the others to bring to the metropolis the most lavish and exotic goods. Their entrepreneurial behavior perhaps alerted the ruling elite of their excessive autonomy, and the Teotihuacan state may have reacted too late to control them; it seems that the revolt that caused the great fire by 550 CE (Manzanilla 2003a, 2003b, 2009b; Soler-Arechalde *et alii* 2006; Beramendi-Orosco *et alii* 2008) came from the intermediate elite of the neighborhoods and their master craftsmen. All the structures along the Street of the Dead were burned.

Palaces such as Xalla that I am excavating (Manzanilla 2008, 2017c; 2000 to 2019 field seasons) (fig. 7), located near the Street of the Dead, display the crudeness of this revolt: all the roofs of the precincts were burned at high temperatures; all the sculptures related to the main deities personified by the rulers were shattered into pieces.

A century after the great fire, nearly all the *Teotihuacanos* had left the city, and the Coyotlatelco people from the Bajío region came to loot it (Manzanilla 2003a, 2003b, 2009c; Manzanilla ed. 2005).

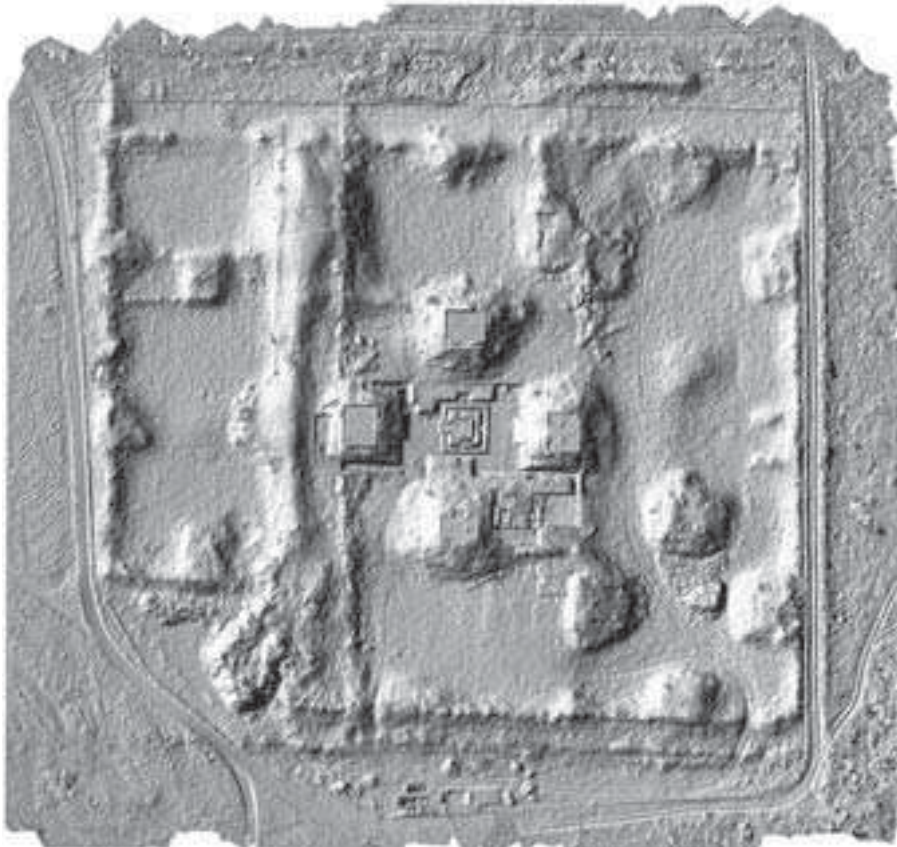


Fig. 7 – The palace of Xalla (photogrammetric image taken by Geneviève Lucet and her collaborators for my project).

## CONCLUSIONS

At the base and at the summit of this society, corporate traits may be identified. The apartment compounds housed corporate groups with a common activity; the fact that each household within an apartment compound had an apartment, a ritual courtyard, and a particular patron god suggests that these were independent families that shared a domestic territory due to the activity they fostered. This fact sets the Teotihuacan example apart from other Classic contemporary societies such as the Maya, in which the domestic *solares* housed extended families that venerate a common ancestor or patron god in one sanctuary for the whole compound.

At the summit of the Teotihuacan society, which does not depict kings or supreme lords, a ruling council may have been the means to appease *coups d'état*, in a multiethnic society with various (perhaps conflicting) interests. These ruling elite, which may have emerged from the four districts of the city, may have been more involved in personifying deities than controlling the city, except for a very late involvement.

Nevertheless, in the middle of this society, in the neighborhood centers managed by an entrepreneurial and dynamic intermediate elite, a different situation is detected. The exclusionary behavior of these nobles is seen in the display of a wide variety of sumptuary

goods coming from different regions of Mesoamerica, where each neighborhood center promoted alliances. Through the caravan system organized by these nobles towards a particular region, they summoned foreign specialized craftsmen that became embedded in the neighborhood network. Residing in the neighborhood center, they suffered harsh living conditions, working many hours a day, but being fed by the rationing system.

The contradiction between corporate elements at the base and summit, and exclusionary elements in the middle tore apart the multiethnic pact. Future societies do not display corporate traits such as Teotihuacan does.

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