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Chalchiuhtlicue's Odyssey: Historiographical Account of the Translocation from Mexico to the British Museum in London of Humboldt's "Aztec Priestess" Found by Dupaix

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At the end of the 18th century the young Prussian, Baron Alexander von Humboldt (1769–1859), accompanied by the French botanist Aimé Bonpland (1773–1858), led a major expedition to Latin America lasting from 1799 to 1804. When he arrived in the Viceroyalty of New Spain (today's Mexico) in 1803, the learned Berlin naturalist, then aged 33, made the acquaintance of Guillermo Dupaix (1746–1817), a 57-year-old of Luxemburgish origin serving as a Captain in the Spanish Army (Le Brun-Ricalens et al. 2014). Dupaix was a great lover of pre-Columbian antiquities and received Humboldt in his private rooms. It was there that Humboldt came across a statuette depicting what he designated an "Aztec priestess" but which in fact represents the goddess Chalchiuhtlicue (Beyer 1965; López Luján et al. 2015; Le Brun-Ricalens et al. 2020a, 2020b, 2020c)(Figure 1). This volcanic stone carving is noteworthy for being one of the first Mexica remains ever to have been described and published (Humboldt 1810), which represented a major step forward in making pre-Hispanic civilizations and cultures better known in the West during what is known as the Century of Latin American Independence (Medina González 2011).

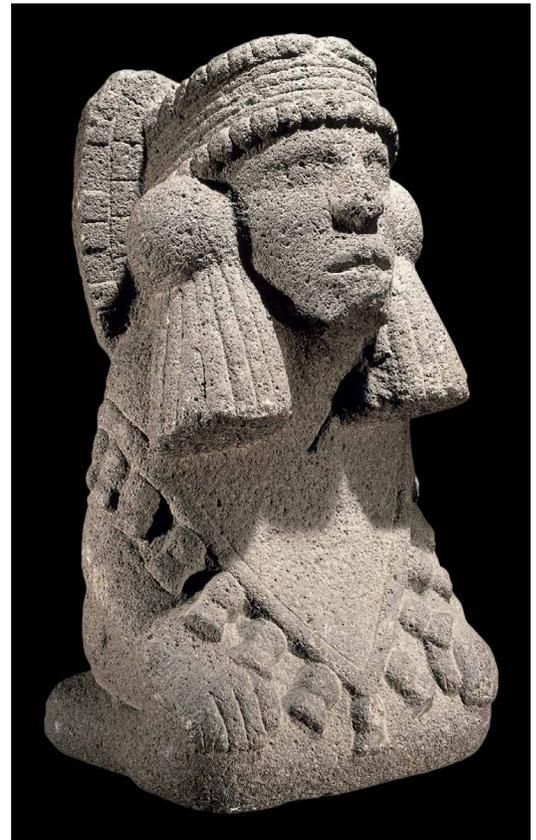


Figure 1. The goddess *Chalchiuhtlicue* of Tlatelolco (Am.St.373), British Museum, London (© The Trustees of the British Museum).



Figure 2. The goddess *Chalchiuhtlicue* of Tlatelolco (Am,St.373), British Museum, London (© The Trustees of the British Museum).

In the light of its remarkable voyage in the 19th century from one side of the Atlantic to the other, this Mesoamerican antiquity is a fine example of what we may term “translocation” (Savoy 2021; Blankenstein et al. 2019). In this article we propose to reveal the vicissitudes of this masterpiece over the last two centuries in its odyssey from the Real Seminario de Minería (Royal College of Mines) in Mexico to the British Museum in London, as it passed from the New to the Old World (Le Brun-Ricalens et al. 2020, 2021; López Luján et al. 2020).¹

The Chronicle of a Transatlantic Voyage

The Department of Africa, Oceania, and Americas at the British Museum currently displays an exceptional Mexica figure representing Chalchiuhtlicue, the goddess of water (Baquedano 1984; McEwan 1994). In the British Museum database it is listed under museum number Am,St.373:² a grey-violet figurine made of andesite, Mexica (AD 1400–1550). In its overall dimensions it is relatively small, being only 37 cm high and 19.5 cm wide, with a depth of 20 cm.

A Mexica Goddess

The statuette depicts a young woman in a kneeling position and its composition observes strict bilateral symmetry. The key to the identity of the goddess concerned is the complex headdress she is wearing, a sort of cylindrical cap. The top of the cap is smooth, but the sides are embellished by five superimposed horizontal bands, the topmost of which is formed by what appear to be rectangular plaques. Three smooth, superimposed, intermediate bands are rounded off by a bottom band composed of spherical shapes. The headdress is adorned on each side with prominent ear tassels whose threads hang downwards in the form of truncated cones. Two straps or sashes, both terminating in tassels, affix the headdress to



Figure 3. Glyph representing *Chalchiuhtlicue*. Codex Borbonicus, Plate 5. 16th century AD.

the neck and tumble languorously to rest on a rectangular shoulder cape characterised by vertical bands or strips. The final element is a pleated paper ornament known as an *amacuexpalli* attached to the back of her head (Figure 2).

The Tlatelolco Chalchiuhtlicue

The blank expression of the face reflects the Mexica ethos of temperance. It has elliptical eyes, a large nose, the beginnings of large cheekbones, a half-open mouth, and some damage to the chin as a result of a knock received in the past. The upper body is clad in a *quechquemiltl* (a shawl or shoulder cape) with an overlaid straight-edged band bearing numerous tassels. Two arms emerge from the sides of this garment and are folded forwards in order to rest upon the knees. The hands are shown from the back, the nails are clearly delineated and one thumb is slightly bent. Her dress, extending from the waist to the ankles is also smooth. At the lower edge of the statuette's back the sculptor has imparted a graceful outline to the soles of the feet, which are both bare, with the toes mirroring each other as they touch.

“She Who Wears a Green Skirt”

It comes as no surprise that the German scholar Eduard Seler (1849–1922) was the first to identify this female effigy as Chalchiuhtlicue (in Nahuatl: “She Who Wears a Jade Skirt”) in 1909 (Seler 1909, 1992). To do so he compared the effigy with other representations, such as the one in the *Codex Borbonicus* (Figure 3), and also drew upon the detailed research conducted in the 16th century by the Spanish Franciscan Bernardino de Sahagún (1499–1590). She is none other than the powerful goddess of the waters of the earth and the seas, also known under the

¹ See the Authors' Note at the end of the text.

² This is the archival code used in the British Museum (see Figure 12): Am(eric), (cipher for L.) St. (einbauer No) 373.

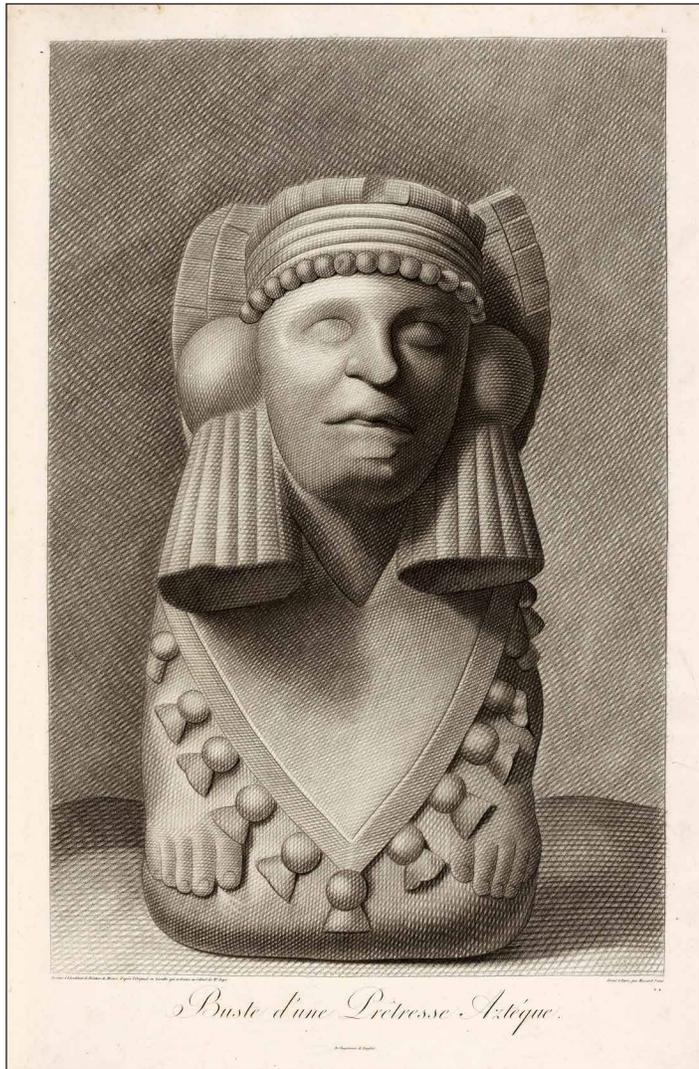


Figure 4. Bust of an Aztec priestess. Jean Baptiste Louis Massard, Engravings, Plate I (Humboldt 1810)
(© Reprografía Raíces).

following appellations: Acuecuéyotl (“Waves of Water”), Apozonálotl (“Foaming Water”), and Matlalcueye (“Possessor of the Blue Skirt”). In mythology she appears as the sister of Tlaloc (the god of water, rain, and lightning), with whom she bore Tecuciztécatl, the personification of the moon. Chalchiuhtlicue was venerated as a benefactor by rulers and lords who maintained that she, together with Chicomecóatl (the goddess of maize) and Huixtocihuatl (the goddess of salt) “fed the people in order that they might eat and multiply themselves.” Midwives invoked her when they bathed the new-born so that she would purify them with her waters. Chalchiuhtlicue however, like all gods in the Mexica pantheon, also had a sinister side. It was believed that if her anger were aroused, she would call forth storms and whirlwinds to sink ships and drown their crews.

In the lunar, religious calendar, Chalchiuhtlicue

appears as the third Lady of the Day; the sixth Lady of the Night, the patron saint of the day Coatl (“serpent”) and the regent of the gloomy *trecena* (a consecutive set of days numbered from 1 to 13) which began on the first day, 1 Acatl (1 reed). In the solar calendar she was celebrated on multiple occasions. For example, at the festival of Atlcahualo she was worshipped with the gods of rain and wind. At the maize festivals which took place in the sixth month (Etzalcualiztli) of the Nahuatl calendar, marking the beginning of the rainy season, water merchants and boat builders would sacrifice a slave to her. During the fourth month (Huei Tozoztli), a victim personifying the goddess would be sacrificed and her body thrown into the swirling waters of the Pantitlan, while for the feast of Tepeilhuitl and Atemoztli it was customary to make dome-shaped effigies of the goddess out of amaranth paste.

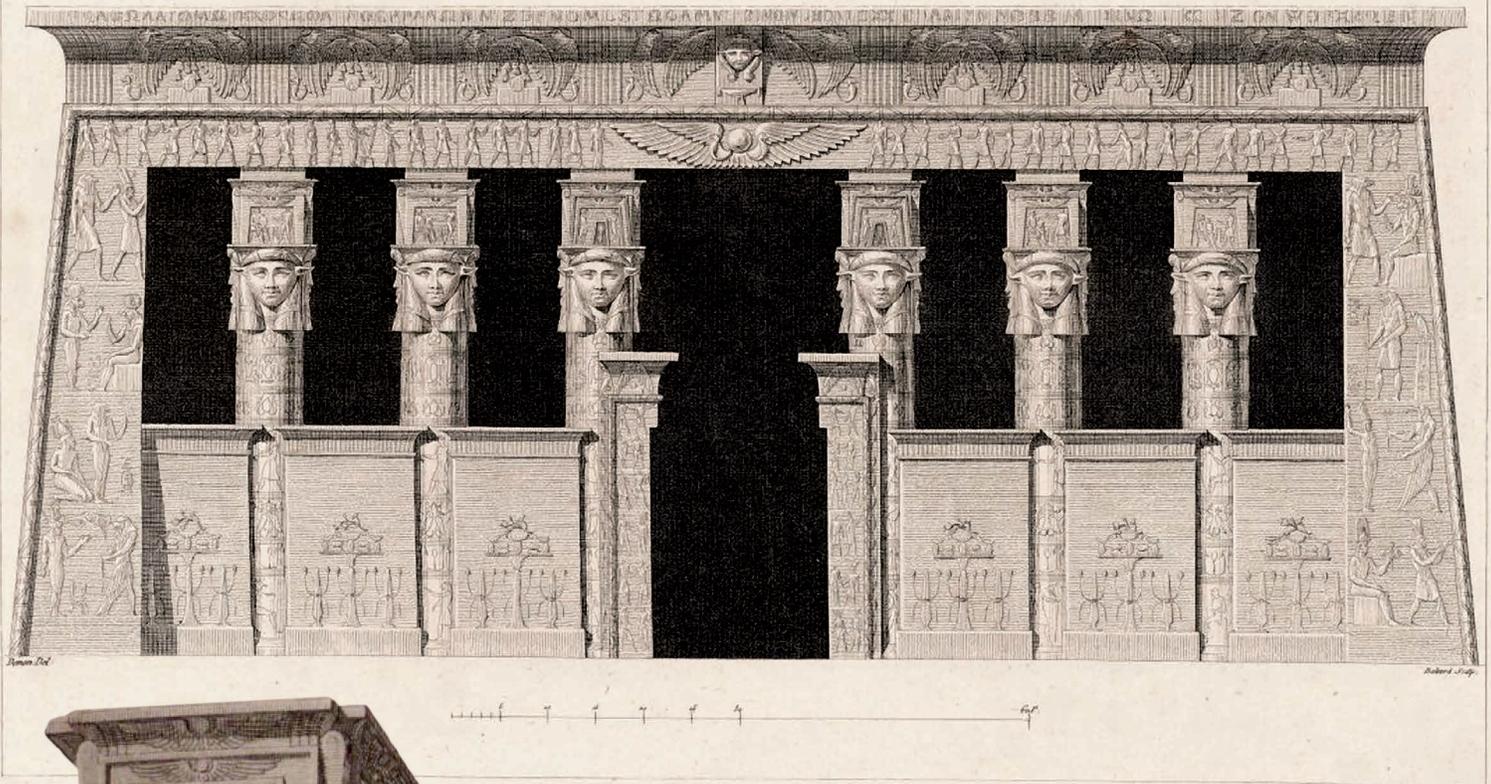
A World-Famous Masterpiece

By including two engravings of this remarkable figurine at the very beginning of his groundbreaking *Vues des cordillères, et des monumens des peuples indigènes de l'Amérique* in 1810, Humboldt put an end to the Chalchiuhtlicue of Tlatelolco's anonymity and exposed pre-Columbian art to the world at large (Figure 4). *Vues des cordillères* was translated into several languages and became a best seller. In it, the baron interpreted the sculpture as the “Bust of an Aztec Priestess” and stated that he had “placed [it] at the head of my picturesque Atlas” (Humboldt 1810:Pls. 1, 2) because it was “a precious remnant of an Aztec sculpture.” Humboldt's enthusiasm, however, led him astray when he confused the hands with the feet in his description of the first engraving. The Italian archaeologist Eumius Quirinus Visconti (1751–1818) pointed this error out to him in a letter dated 12 December 1812. The error appears to have caused Humboldt to distance himself from the pithy expression “which [was] a sign—according to him—“of the infancy of the art” in his description of the Chalchiuhtlicue's workmanship (Humboldt 1810:6, Pl. 1).³

The Mexica Headdress Reminiscent of the Egyptian Goddess Hathor's Headdress

This notwithstanding, what really attracted the naturalist's attention was the sculpture's headdress, in which he perceived great similarities “with the veil or

³ Humboldt repeated this judgement further on, in his description of “the Aztec idol”: “the shapes are all inaccurate, and everything here is indicative of artistic infancy” (Humboldt 1810:239, Pl. 40).



Vue géométrale du Portique du Temple de Tentyris.

Figure 5. The Temple of Dendara and its carved columns. Dominique-Vivant Denon, *Voyage dans la Basse et Haute Egypte*, Didot, Paris, 1803, Plate 39 (© Reprografia Raíces).



Figure 6. Detail of the column adorned with a carved head of the goddess Hathor (The Temple of Dendera). Dominique-Vivant Denon, *Voyage dans la Basse et Haute Egypte*, Didot, Paris, 1803, Plate 40 (© Reprografia Raíces).

calantica of the Isis heads, the Sphinx, the Antinoüs and a large number of other Egyptian statues" (Humboldt 1810:5). This positive connection was the result of visits Humboldt had made shortly before to the library of the Villa Ludovisi in Rome and to Cardinal Borgia's museum at Veletri (in 1805, his brother Wilhelm had been a Prussian diplomat at the Vatican), where he had been able to examine the fine collections of Egyptian antiquities. The identification also benefited from his detailed knowledge of the publications resulting from Bonaparte's expedition to northeastern Africa from 1798–1801. Humboldt might well have also been influenced by the Egyptomania then in vogue following Napoleon's Egyptian campaigns when he drew attention to the fact that the headdress of the Mexica statuette was similar to the one "covering the heads⁴ embedded in the capitals of the columns [of the temple of] *Tentyris* [Dendera], as one sees in the faithful renderings that Mr Denon included in his *Voyage en Égypte*" (Figures 5 and 6) (Humboldt 1810:5). He went on to say that "Most of these similarities fade once we examine these facts in isolation" (Humboldt 1810:6). One should note that the Mexican headdress is decorated with pearls, which, in Humboldt's opinion, had been brought to Tenochtitlan from the distant coasts of California. In the end, Humboldt admitted to uncertainty about the attribution, stating that the statue could well represent "some Mexica deity, and that it was originally placed among the household gods" (Humboldt 1810:6) or might even have been "simply an Aztec woman" (Humboldt 1810:6).

⁴ Depicting the Egyptian goddess Hathor.



Figure 7. Portrait of Alexander von Humboldt in 1803 in Mexico. Oil on canvas by Rafael Ximeno y Planes (© Faculty of Engineering, National Autonomous University of Mexico, UNAM).



Figure 8. Portrait of a Dragoon Captain in a uniform similar to that of Guillermo Dupaix around 1800. Oil on canvas (© INRA, Luxembourg).

“The Bust Preserved by Mr Dupé”

It is important to emphasise that in *Vues des cordillères* (Humboldt 1810) Humboldt categorically stated that the “bust” was “preserved in Mexico City at the home of an enlightened amateur, M. Dupé, a captain in the service of His Catholic Majesty. This educated officer, who developed a love for the arts while in Italy as a young man, has made several trips to the interior of New Spain to study Mexica monuments” (López Luján and Pérez 2013; López Luján 2015). Proof of his exchanges with “Mr Dupé” can be found in Volume VIII (1802–1804) of the *Amerikanische Reisetagebücher* [American Travel Diaries] of Alexander von Humboldt, now preserved in the Berlin State Library [Staatsbibliothek]. The Diaries mention “Dupé” in particular in connection with the description of the Tizoc stone. Humboldt moreover clearly stated that “he [Dupaix] has drawn with special care the reliefs of the pyramid [of the Niches] of Patantla, on which subject he may one day publish a very interesting study” (Humboldt 1810:4).⁵ “Mr Dupé’s” name is also to be found beneath the two engravings produced in Paris (Humboldt 1810:Pls. 1, 2) by Massard the Elder (to be precise, Jean Baptiste Louis Massard, 1772–1815?), based on two drawings “very accurately rendered by a student at the academy of painting in Mexico City, under the supervision of Mr Dupé” (Humboldt 1810:6).⁶ These drawings had been presented to Humboldt by Dupaix.

A Decisive Encounter in Mexico in 1803 between a Luxemburgish Lover of Antiquities and a Prussian Naturalist

It should be borne in mind that Humboldt and Bonpland spent almost a year in the Viceroyalty of New Spain (Virreinato de la Nueva España) between 22 March 1803 and 7 March 1804 (López Luján and Gaida 2015). Despite the wrong spelling due to Humboldt’s phonetic rendering of the name, the dates clearly show that he was referring to one Guillermo Dupaix (1746–1817), a Captain in the Dragoons of Luxemburgish origin, who had been living in Mexico since 1791 (López Luján 2015; Le Brun-Ricalens et al. 2014). The archives show that Dupaix lived not far from the main square (Plaza Mayor) at 17 Coliseo Viejo street (now, 16 de Septiembre street, number 45). That is to say, Dupaix lived five minutes’ walk away from the house at 3 San Agustín street (now Uruguay street, number 80) that Humboldt occupied during his sojourn in Mexico (Figures 7 and 8). It is moreover likely that the “pupil” was José Luciano Castañeda (1774–1834?), the rather unimpressive draughtsman of Toluca, who had been a pupil at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in San Carlos between 1789 and 1802. Castañeda had accompanied Dupaix on the Real Expedición Anticuaria [Royal Antiquarian Expedition], a campaign of three

⁵ In the sense of “worthy of interest,” as in the so-called “curiosity cabinets.”

⁶ The following comments can be found beneath the engravings of Plates 1 and 2 (Humboldt 1810): (bottom left) “Drawn at the Academy of Painting in Mexico after an original in basalt located in the collection of Mr Dupé”; (bottom right) “Engraved in Paris, by Massard the Elder.”

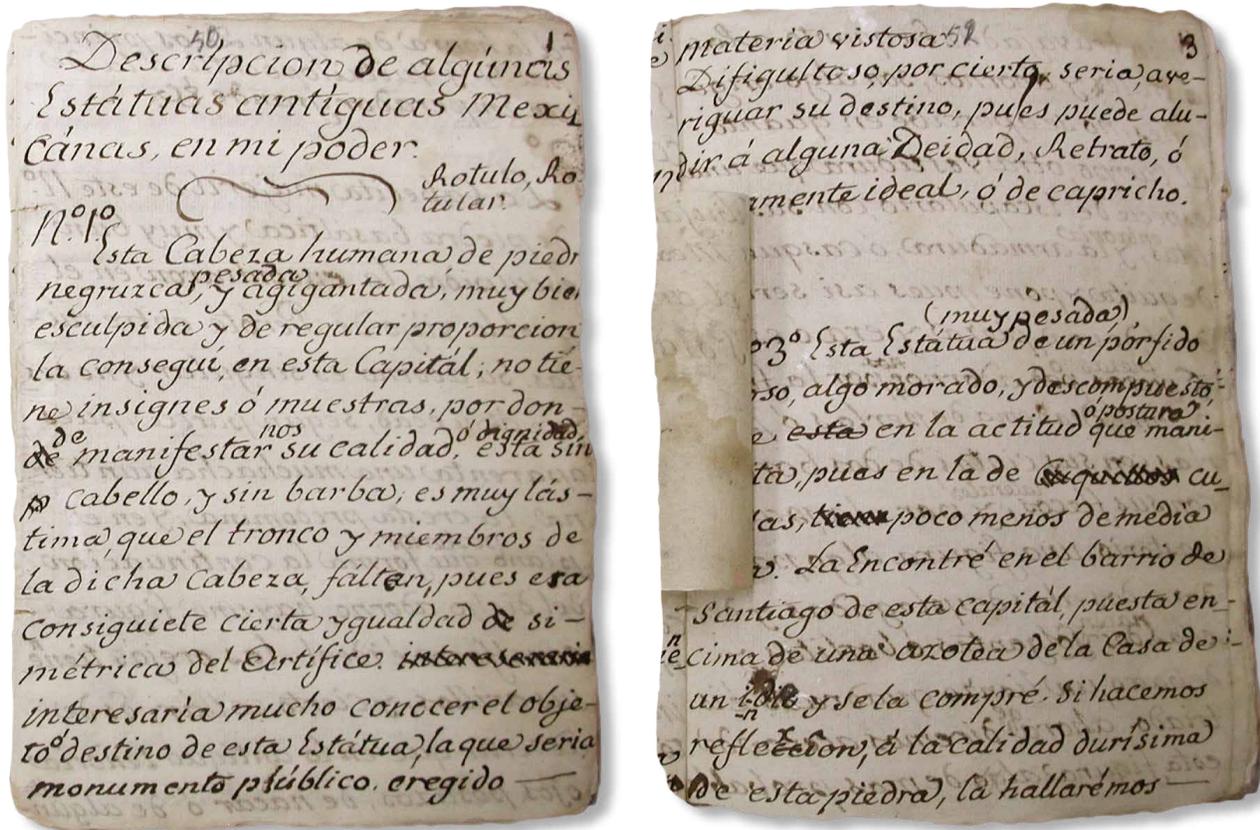


Figure 9. The personal archive of Guillermo Dupaix, “Breve Descripción de algunas Estatuas (...) [A Brief Description of some Statues]”, G.O. 131, AHBNAH, Mexico, about 1804, sheets 1 to 2 (© Reprografía Miguel Ángel Gasca, BNAH).

separate expeditions conducted between 1805 and 1808 in search of Mexican antiquities.

Provenance: Found on a Roof

Captain Dupaix had never been a great collector (López Luján 2015). He was more concerned with documenting his observations in the field accurately for scientific purposes. To this end he made use of technical drawings and written descriptions. In the inventories of his belongings drawn up after his death in 1818, his executor, the Basque mining engineer Fausto Elhuyar (1755–1833), declared that the retired Dragoon officer possessed 69 stone objects, 52 ceramic objects, six objects of bronze, and one of wood. There was also an assembly of samples containing 40 fragments of buildings and two small drawers with various small objects (UTBLAC G639). Of more use for our requirements is an old handwritten document comprising several sheets entitled *Breve Descripción de algunas Estatuas antiguas Mexicanas, de Piedra y en mi poder* [A Brief Description of Several Ancient Mexican Stone Statues in my Possession]; “Investigated through my avowed love of ancient Mexican arts, and this before a Royal Commission was established” (AHBNAH, G.O. 131). Dupaix gives a detailed description there

of 12 sculptures that he had acquired for his own collection between 1791 and 1804. Of particular note are several works whose current whereabouts in museums is a matter of record: the heads of a corpse and a water goddess (National Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City, inventory numbers 10-193 and 10-15717), a tortoise (Musée du quai Branly in Paris, inventory number 1887.155.9), an old god (Museum der Kulturen Basel in Switzerland, inventory number IVb 649), and a maize goddess (Brooklyn Museum of Art in New York, inventory number 51.109).

By happy chance the sculpture of Chalchiuhtlicue is also mentioned there as follows (Figure 9): “No 3. This (very heavy) porphyry statue, with violet tones, and weathered, measures in the attitude or posture in which it appears, just like the squatting one, slightly less than half a *vara*⁷ (approximately 42 cm). I found it on the roof of an Indian’s house in the Santiago [Tlatelolco] quarter of the capital and I bought it from him.” Dupaix provided a detailed description: “If we bear in mind the very hard nature of this stone, we will consider it well worked. As for the clothing and the decorations, they

⁷ A Spanish unit of measure (a *media vara castellana* [half a Castilian *vara*] = 41.8 cm).

are to a certain extent unusual. As regards the body, no other garment is visible except for a sort of scapula with little tassels or bells on its edge, and an *armadura*, or bonnet, which can be removed and replaced as such, being made in one piece, and which was, or is, made of six pieces or ornaments. On the front [there is] a pearl diadem or a pearl ribbon, with two tassels, with their side fringes and on the back [there is] a figure rather resembling two extended wings, from which two pendants or tassels descend, and a striped square cloth.”

Finally, he made an erroneous attempt at identification: “Now, what can we say about this representation, since it can only be guessed at here, one might conjecture that it could, perhaps, be a symbol or an effigy of a certain divinity, taking its clothing (unless it happens to be that of a religious leader or dignitary) and its reverential posture into account, suggesting a minister serving in a temple in the presence of a false likeness of some kind of a God. Its main virtue in terms of its age is to have remained in a perfect state of preservation, [and retained] an integrity (completeness) which contributes to its great value in an Antiquarian’s eyes.”

A Draughtsman Without Means

Let us turn our gaze back to 1818, when Elhuyar began to compile an inventory of the papers and archaeological effects preserved in the house of the late Captain Dupaix. This high official and friend of the deceased wished to determine which items derived from the “exercise of a royal commission” on the Real Expedición Anticuaria and which were therefore the property of the “High Government” and, on the other hand, to identify those archaeological objects, the oldest of which derived from Dupaix’s “private forays” (López Luján and Pérez 2013). Elhuyar therefore sought the support of the Viceroy, Juan Ruiz de Apodaca (1754–1835), for a large-scale operation to bring to the capital all the antiquities documented by Dupaix and Castañeda on their royal expeditions. This involved taking possession of 72 objects in twenty different geographical locations. Once both sets of archaeological remains had been united, Elhuyar personally ordered that they be taken “to a suitable room in the Royal College of Mines,”⁸ of which he was then the director, but which he had been obliged to leave when Mexico gained its independence in 1821. Being a faithful servant of the Spanish crown, he returned to Spain.

Two years later, in 1823, an Englishman, William Bullock (1773–1849), claimed to have seen both collections at the Royal College of Mines and profited from the occasion to copy drawings and describe some of the antiquities. Mexico’s independence undoubtedly led to the rapid dispersal of both collections. For example, in 1825 a substantial number of objects were removed to the seat of the Mexican national museum and were

subsequently divided into three separate ensembles.

One group managed to remain in Mexico and finally came to rest in the National Museum of Anthropology and the National Library of Mexico. This collection was enriched by the purchase of several documents produced by Dupaix in the possession of the historian Federico Gomez Orozco (1891–1962) and, in 2014, by the donation of a brochure on Xochicalco by the Bernal Vera family.

A second group was exchanged at the initiative of the Museum’s first curator, the priest Isidro Ignacio de Icaza (1783–1834) with the first American minister plenipotentiary to Mexico, the notorious Joel R. Poinsett (1779–1851). Poinsett subsequently donated the collection to the American Philosophical Society in Philadelphia.

The third part of the collection arrived in Austin, in the South of the United States in 1921, having being sold to the University of Texas by the descendants of the historian Genaro García (1867–1920). Garcia had served as Director of the National Museum of Anthropology in Mexico on three occasions between 1907 and 1913.

An Attempt at Chronicling the Translocation

As for the archaeological objects, while we are still uncertain of the exact circumstances, it is clear that around 1824 Castañeda took advantage of the unsettled situation to acquire a significant portion of them, thus, as it were, receiving the salary still owed to him by the Spanish government for his services on the Royal Expedition. It is well documented (Fauvet-Berthelot et al. 2007) that at the end of that year he organised a public auction at which several Britons and a young Frenchman from a Creole landowner family of New Orleans called André Latour Allard (1795–1863) took part.⁹ Brother of Louis Allard (1777–1847) (Allard 1842, 1847; Freiberg 1980; Tinker 1932:14-15; Shapiro and Weiss 2004; Dopson 2010; Kress et al. 2010), the Cajun Allard bid successfully to acquire 180 archaeological objects, several manuscripts, 120 drawings relevant to the Royal Expedition and a codex considered to come from the Boturini collection.

In 1825, André Latour Allard sent this rich haul to France. There is no need to go into details (Fauvet-Berthelot et al. 2007), but it is known that after many tribulations the objects finally arrived in Paris. They were sold to the Louvre in 1849 but were subsequently kept at the Musée du quai Branly and are still there today (López Luján and Fauvet-Berthelot 2005). At more or less the same time other manuscripts and drawings were purchased in 1827 by Agostino Aglio (1777–1857)

⁸ The Real Seminario de Minería of Mexico.

⁹ “André Latour Allard v. Louis Allard and another, 1844,” The Supreme Court of Louisiana Archives, January 1844 (Robinson 1845:320-323; Freiberg 1980; Jochum 2013).

on behalf of Edward King (1795–1837), alias Lord Kingsborough. King published them in 1831 in Volumes 4 and 5 of his *Antiquities of Mexico*.

Castañeda did not sell all of the archaeological objects at his 1824 auction. Five years later the Mexican draughtsman received Jean-Frédéric Waldeck (1766–1875) at his home in Callejón de la Condesa. After viewing Castañeda's archaeological collection, the Bohemian explorer recorded his great disappointment in his diary: "There is only one fine piece in stone ... I am richer than he in idols ..." (Baudez 1993:56). He did mention the Basel "old god" which Castañeda would later sell to the Swiss merchant Lukas Vischer (1780–1840). That same year, 1829, the German printer and artist Maximilien Franck (1780–1830) also visited Castañeda and made a pencil drawing of his "old god" and a further 14 other objects: 11 plain ceramic receptacles, a Maya jade plate, a sculpture of Chicomecóatl (Am,St.376) (Figure 11), and the Tlatelolco Chalchiuhtlicue (Figure 10). Franck made three separate sketches of this figure and noted in French in the margin "A porphyry figure (...)" From the collection of Mr Castanetto [sic] in Mexico" (Franck 1830). Castañeda's final years were particularly difficult despite his having been appointed draughtsman and keeper of the new National Museum (AHMNA, v. 1, 1831) and also being accepted as a full member of the National Institute of Statistic and Geography.

British Investors in Mexican Mines

The British Museum archives hold an old registry slip for the Tlatelolco Chalchiuhtlicue which refers to the "Glennie collection." This archival note suggest that a certain "Glennie" was the next person after Castañeda to own



Figure 10. Drawing of Chalchiuhtlicue (Am,St.373) from the collections of Dupaix, Castañeda, Glennie, and Christy. Sketch made in 1829 by Maximilien Franck, kept in the British Museum, sheet 67 (© The Trustees of the British Museum).



Figure 11. Drawing of Chicomecóatl (Am,St.376) from the collections of Dupaix, Castañeda, Glennie, and Christy. Sketch made in 1829 by Maximilien Franck, kept in the British Museum, sheet 33 (© The Trustees of the British Museum).

this statue. From a historical point of view, it should be borne in mind that after the first years of independence numerous Englishmen arrived in Mexico. They were drawn by the country's mineral wealth (in particular the silver mines) which Humboldt's works had brought to public attention. Several publications and archival documents (Green 2020) show specifically that in 1824 the engineer and Royal Navy Lieutenant, William Glennie (1797–1856)¹⁰ arrived from London in the company of his younger brothers Robert Gavin (1805–1872) and Frederick (1808–1872). Once in Mexico William, together with Lucas Alamán (1792–1853) and a certain Mr. Agassis, founded the United Mexican Mining Company which owned interests in what are today the states of Oaxaca, Jalisco, Guanajuato, Zacatecas, and Chihuahua.

In 1827 the Glennie brothers acquired a certain renown when they scaled the 5,426 metre peak of the volcano Popocatepetl (Glennie 1827). That same year, William reconnoitred the ruins of Mitla, taking measurements of the

¹⁰ Cf. the Glennie-Rawes family archives: <https://www.rawes.co.uk/family.htm>

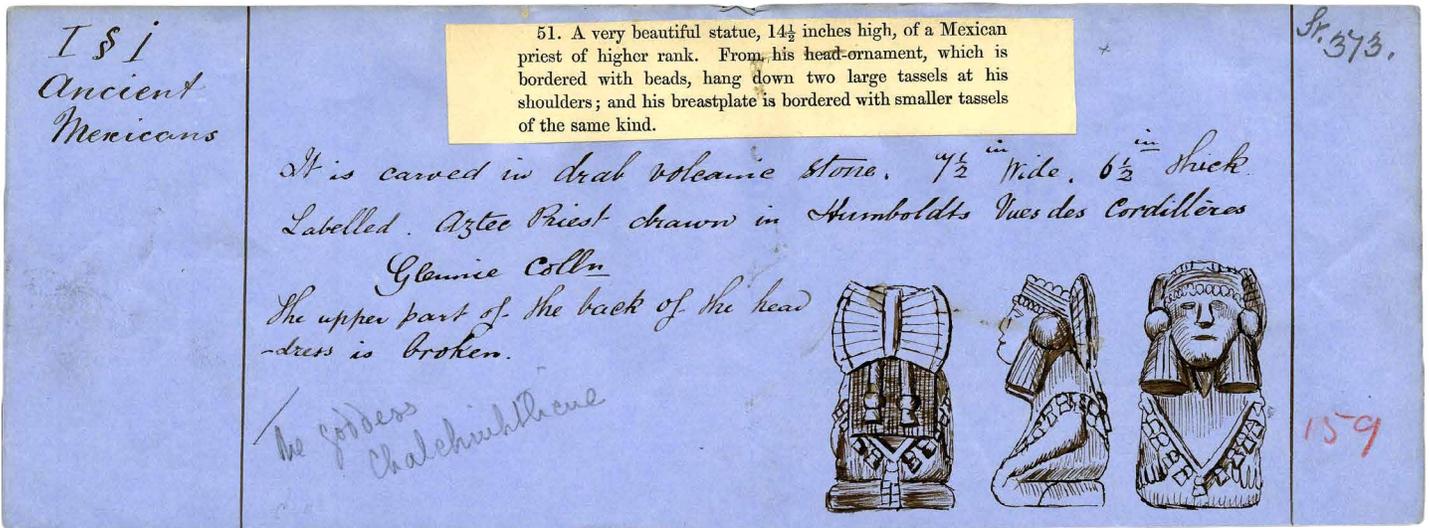


Figure 12. The original British Museum archive slip: Chalchiuhtlicue (Am,St.373) (© The Trustees of the British Museum).

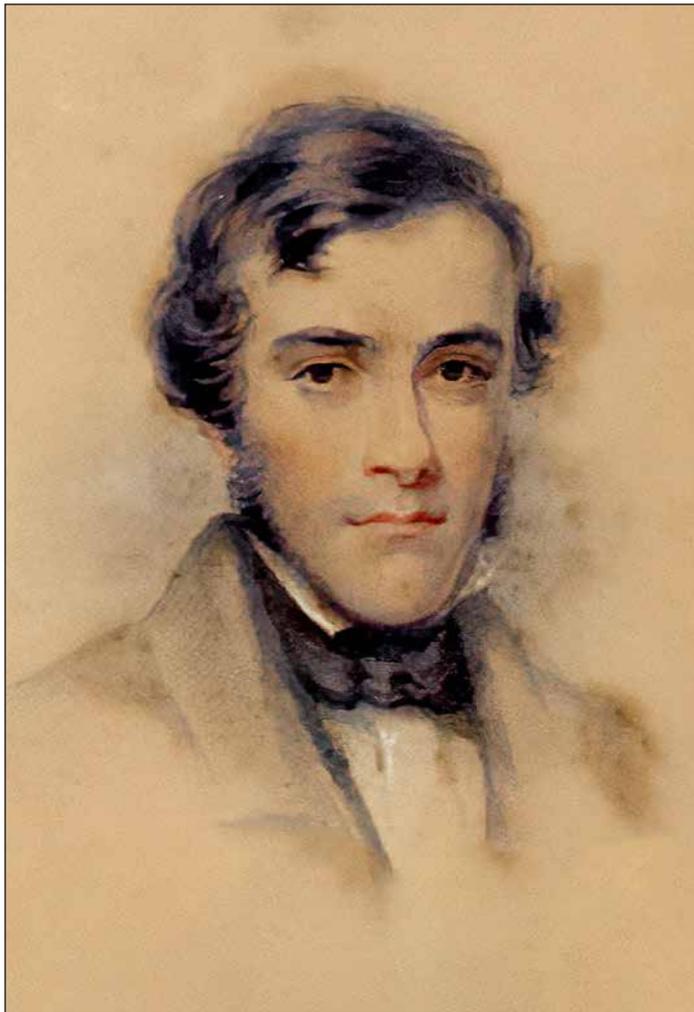


Figure 13. Portrait of Henry Christy (1810–1865), London banker and collector (ca. 1845) (© The Trustees of the British Museum).

building blocks of the ancient palace at the request of the British ambassador, Henry G. Ward (Ward 1828). William eventually returned to England in 1834. His brothers assumed responsibility for the family business and were subsequently employed by various potentates in Guanajuato. There are, finally, documents showing that around 1853, and even in 1866, Frederick Glennie served as a British consul in Mexico. He also acted as Danish consul in 1857. His brother Robert was responsible for the Danish consulate in 1859 and became acting British consul in 1862 (AHGESRE 42-6-89, 1908). Based on the foregoing, we suggest that Castañeda sold the sculptures of Chalchiuhtlicue and Chicomecóatl to one of the Glennie brothers between 1829 and 1834.

A Lover of Mesoamerican Art and a British Banker

According to its own database, the British Museum today holds close to 160 archaeological objects which once belonged to the former Glennie collection. It seems that they were subsequently acquired by a learned collector, the wealthy English banker Henry Christy (1810–1865). The Tlatelolco Chalchiuhtlicue formed part of this collection. The sale may have been conducted between 1834 and 1856 in London by William Glennie himself or, possibly, by his widow following his death in that year. The vendor might also have been his brother Frederick Glennie in 1850 during a brief stopover in London. It could also have been the case that either Frederick or Robert concluded the sale when Christy visited Mexico in 1855 in the company of the English anthropologist Edward Burnett Tylor (1832–1917). It is a nice irony of history that in his book *Anahuac*, which came out in 1861, Tylor mentioned that Christy owned a female sculpture very similar to the

one published by Humboldt (Tylor 1861) when it was in fact one and the same!

What is true is that the Tlatelolco Chalchiuhtlicue was already listed under the Number 51 in the catalogue of the Christy collection published in 1862 by the famous Danish curator Carl Ludvig Steinhauer (1816–1897). The catalogue describes it as “A very beautiful statue (...) of a high-ranking Mexican priest” (Figure 12). The millionaire philanthropist Christy (Figure 13) at that time already possessed 1,085 objects, of which 602 were of Mesoamerican origin. These objects were proudly displayed at his London residence in London's Victoria Street (Steinhauer 1862).

From the Royal College of Mines in Mexico to the British Museum in London

As our voyage reaches its destination, the final chapter of this chronicle of the Tlatelolco Chalchiuhtlicue's translocation ends with Christy's death in London (see Savoy et al. 2021). Christy bequeathed his collections to the British Museum in his will. He also endowed a generous fund in his name, enabling the museum to expand its collections. Although the eventful story of this remarkable ancient statue, involving changes of countries, continents, and owners, culminates with the Tlatelolco Chalchiuhtlicue entering a public collection in a national institution, some questions still remain. Given that 200 years later this statue is not part of a public collection in its country and continent of origin, it cannot escape the contemporary debates¹¹ which challenge the notion of collecting and appropriating items of another country's national heritage to the detriment of the weaker party (see Savoy et al. 2021). In this respect it should be pointed out that as early as November 1827, Mexico, which had only achieved independence in 1821, passed a law regulating the customs authorities and frontiers of the young republic with a view to protecting its archaeological heritage by prohibiting the export of cultural goods. This was followed by the promulgation of a Civil Code in 1870 and a law on the protection of historical monuments in 1897 (Cornu 2004; Sanchez Cordero Davila 2004).

The Tlatelolco Chalchiuhtlicue has been part of the British Museum's collections for more than 150 years and is not exempt from “Rousseauist” controversies opposing all forms of (colonialist) spoliation and the removal of

artefacts from their original homes (Savoy 2003). The intelligence and wisdom of the Luxemburgish archaeological pioneer Guillermo Dupaix combined with the young and very cosmopolitan Prussian explorer Alexander von Humboldt, around the Chalchiuhtlicue statuette in 1803, were as crucial to expanding the awareness of the western scientific community as they were to opening the Mesoamerican archaeological heritage as a field of study. Thanks to the groundbreaking historiographical role it embodied, the Tlatelolco Chalchiuhtlicue has become one of the principal symbols of the growth in appreciation of Mesoamerica's pre-Columbian historical and cultural heritage.

Authors' Note

This article is the fruit of research conducted over many years by the authors. Some of the information gathered in the research was shared with our friend and colleague David Blankenstein, enabling him to include a short notice in the catalogue of the exhibition dedicated to the Humboldt brothers (Blankenstein et al. 2019:244), held in Berlin at the Deutsches Historisches Museum from 21 November 2019 to 19 April 2020 to commemorate the 250th anniversary of the birth of Alexander von Humboldt.

Having received several requests from fellow specialists in American studies, and in view of the 275th anniversary of the birth of Guilielmus Josephus Dupaix, it seemed appropriate make the detail of our research available to colleagues in the field. With this in mind, in 2020 a first version of the article on Chalchiuhtlicue was published in Spanish in the journal *Arqueología Mexicana* (López Luján et al. 2020) and an expanded version in French came out in *Archaeologia Luxemburgensis* (Le Brun-Ricalens et al. 2020). The authors extend their warmest thanks to all the individuals and institutions which enabled us to undertake this research into Chalchiuhtlicue, Dupaix, and Humboldt, and in particular, Ian Waite for his outstanding translation into the language of Henry Christy and Shakespeare.

Translator's Notes

In the interests of historical accuracy and verisimilitude, all direct citations from *Vues des cordillères, et monumens des peuples indigènes de l'Amérique* have been taken verbatim from the critical edition of the J. Ryan Poynter translation, published by the University of Chicago Press in 2013. The same applies to any other book titles or direct quotations: where authentic English-language versions exist, these have been used. The names of the Musée du quai Branly and the Museum der Kulturen Basel have been left in the original throughout because these museums are not known under any English translation of their names.

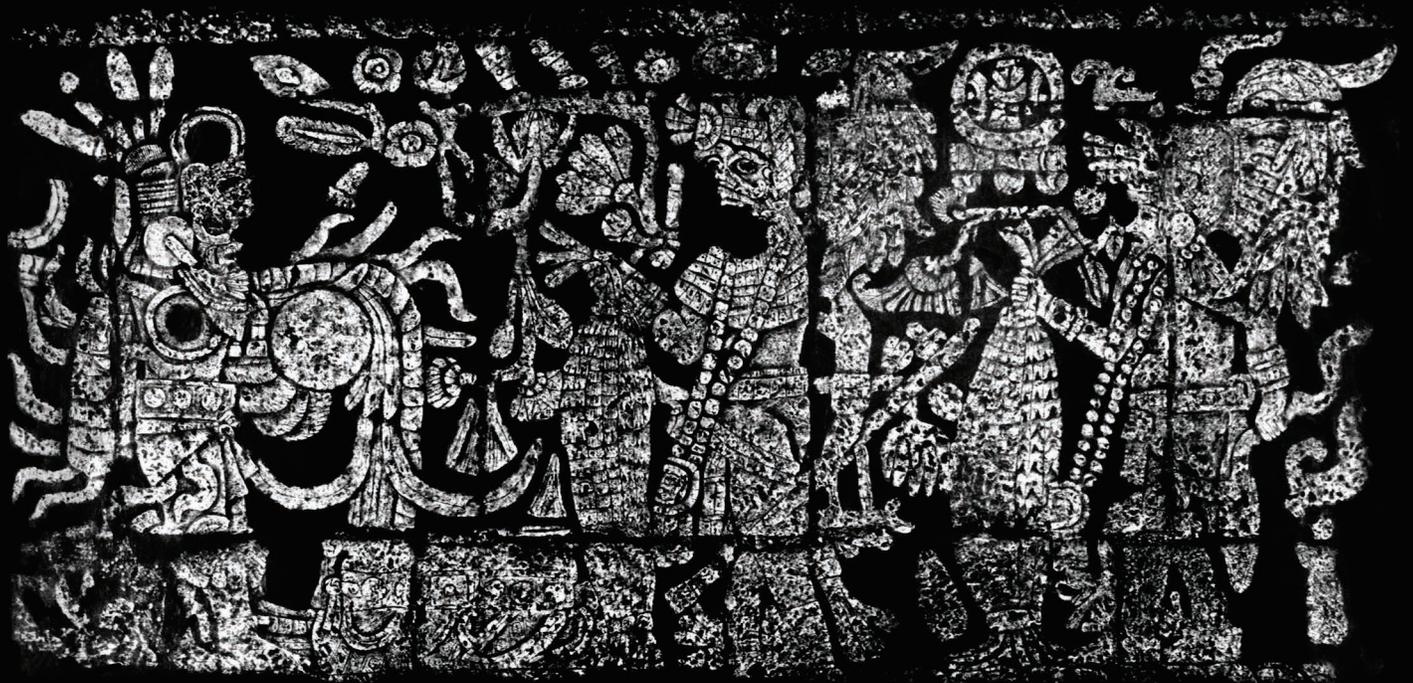
¹¹ In this context, despite a request by the Mexican government, a statuette of Chalchiuhtlicue in volcanic rock from the former Manichak and Jean Aurence collection was recently sold at auction for 377,000 euros at the Hôtel Drouot in Paris on 18 September 2019 by the auctioneering house Millon. This was a perfect opportunity to denounce this sort of activity which fosters looting, the illegal trade in antiquities, and unauthorised imitations of archaeological heritage in general and pre-Columbian in particular.

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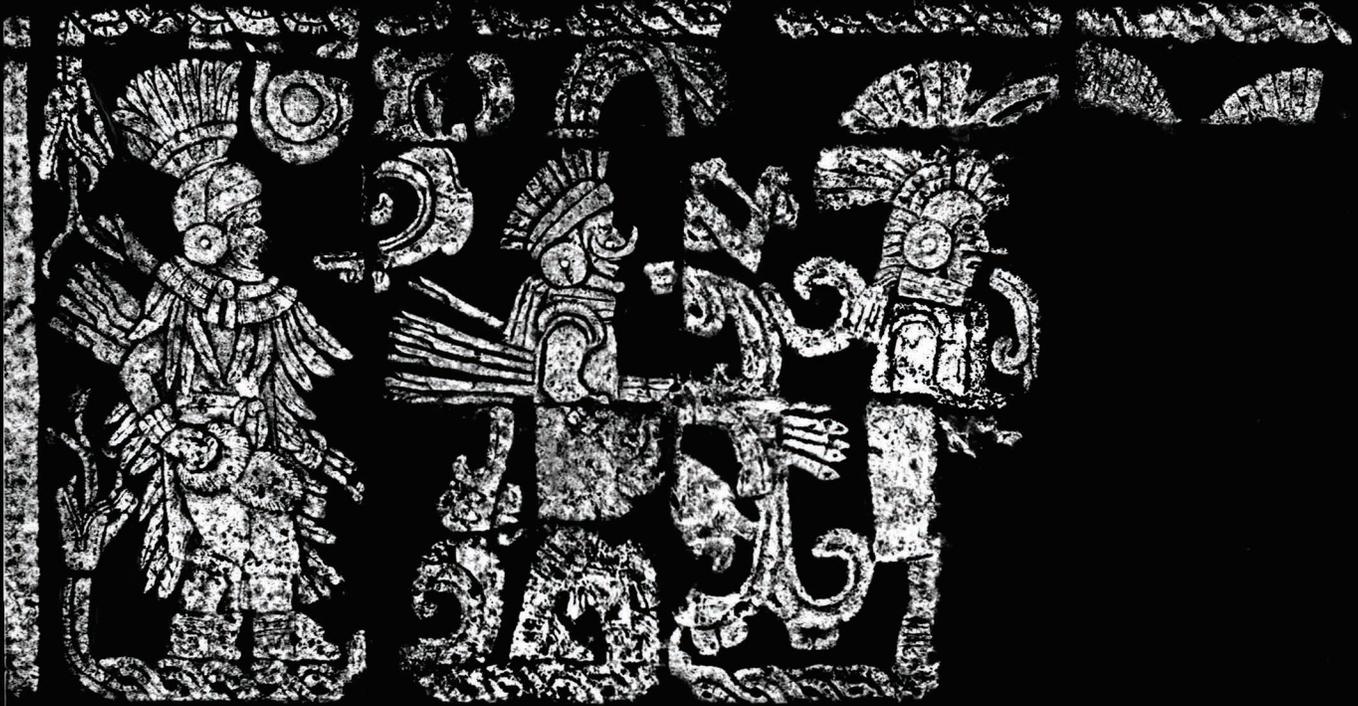


Site: Chichen Itza
 Building: Lower Temple of the Jaguars
 Monument: West wall panel, register B, figure
 14, Q god
 Mon. Type: Wall panel
 Border: Serpent
 Base: Animal or serpent
 Primary Figure: Deity or impersonator
 Direction: Profile facing left

Position: Standing
 Face: Tlaloc eyes, Mask, Old man or woman
 Hair: Long
 Headdress: Feathers, multiple kinds,
 Headband, floral, Mat symbol in hd
 Pectoral: Hanging from long chain
 Clothing: Collar, feathered, Belt, beaded, Hip
 cloth
 Ears: Round ear ornament

Arms: Padded arm
 Feet: Anklets
 Floral/Fauna: Flower, Feathered Serpent, Corn
 Object in hand: Corn, Bag
 Objects: Serpent, Ceramic vessel
 Glyphs: Glyph(s)

Rubbing by Merle Greene Robertson.



Site: Chichen Itza
Building: Lower Temple of the Jaguars
Monument: South wall panel, register B, figures
1- 4
Mon. Type: Wall panel
Border: Serpent
Base: Animal or serpent
Primary Figure: Skeletal figure
Direction: Profile facing right

Position: Walking
Face: Human, Nose bar, Nose crescent
Headdress: Helmet, Feathers,clipped,
Feathers,long pointed, Headband,cloth or
leather
Clothing: Dress,short, Dress with sleeves,
Cloak,feather, Collar, Belt,tied
Ears: Round ear ornament
Arms: Wristlet

Legs: Knee gaiters
Feet: Anklets
Floral/Fauna: Flower, Snake
Object in hand: Atlatl, Spear, Curved stick
Rubbing by Merle Greene Robertson.