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Introduction: cognition of state symbols and polity

Motivations and ends

When the Spanish hurried by a ruin near Otumba during their war against the Aztecs in 1521, they apparently did not recognize the huge mounds they passed as historical monuments. Even after the Conquest, they could not learn the history of the ruins from the Aztecs, who had fundamentally mythological visions of the site. The Aztecs called the place Teotihuacan (in the Nahuatl language “place where gods lived”) eight centuries after the city’s fall, but its original name, the language spoken by its inhabitants, and the ethnic groups who created the city were unknown to them and are not understood today. The archaeological recovery of Teotihuacan history began only in the twentieth century.

To understand this early society, many surveys, excavations, and studies of materials have been carried out since the beginning of the twentieth century with different motivations, approaches, and techniques. Since Manuel Gamio (1922) undertook the first scientific, interdisciplinary approach in 1917–22, several explorations have successfully revealed specific cultural traits and have situated Teotihuacan prehistory within the Mesoamerican chronological framework (Table 1). The Teotihuacan Mapping Project (called hereafter TMP) directed by René Millon (R. Millon 1973; Millon et al. 1973), and the Settlement Survey Project in the Basin of Mexico directed by William Sanders (Sanders et al. 1979), largely contributed to our current view of the city (Fig. 1). Independent explorations in the city’s residential compounds also provided substantial information about social life and about people of different categories and levels.

According to these studies, the sacred center seems to have originated sometime during the first century before Christ (Patlachique phase: 150–1 BC);¹ however, this is based mainly on surface collections of ceramics, and excavation data on this incipient period are still too sketchy to reconstruct the dawn of the new center. During the next stage (Tzacualli phase: AD 1–150), Teotihuacan quickly became the largest and most populous metropolis in the New World. By AD 150 the urban area had expanded to approximately 20 km² and contained some 60,000 to 80,000 inhabitants, according to Millon (1981: 221). Construction of major monuments was apparently concluded by AD 250 and many apartment compounds were also built during this period (Miccaotli and Early Tlamimilolpa phases: AD 150–300). Unmistakable influences of Teotihuacan began to be felt during the fourth century throughout most parts of Mesoamerica (Late Tlamimilolpa phases: AD 300–400). During its prosperous period (Xolalpan and Metepec phases: AD 400–650), Teotihuacan was the

Table 1 *Chronology of Teotihuacan and other relevant sites*

(Approx.)	Mesoamerica in general	Basin of Mexico	Teotihuacan Valley	Oaxaca Valley
1500	LATE	AZTEC IV	TEACALCO	
1400	POSTCLASSIC	AZTEC III	CHIMALPA	LATE MONTE ALBAN V
1300	-----			-----
1200		AZTEC II/I	ZOCANGO	EARLY MONTE ALBAN V
1100	EARLY		ATLATONGO	
1000	POSTCLASSIC	MAZAPAN	MAZAPAN	-----
900	-----			
800	(EPI-CLASSIC)	COYOTLATELCO	XOMETLA	MONTE ALBAN IV
700	LATE CLASSIC	-----	OXTOTIPAC	-----
600		METEPEC	METEPEC	MONTE ALBAN IIIb
500	MIDDLE CLASSIC	XOLALPAN	XOLALPAN	
400	EARLY CLASSIC			MONTE ALBAN IIIa
300	-----	TLAMIMILOLPA	TLAMIMILOLPA	
200	TERMINAL	MICCAOTLI	MICCAOTLI	
100	FORMATIVE	TZACUALLI	TZACUALLI	
0		CUICUILCO	PATLACHIQUE	MONTE ALBAN II
100	-----		-----	
200				MONTE ALBAN Ic
300	LATE	TICOMAN III	LATE CUANALAN	
400	FORMATIVE	TICOMAN II	MID. CUANALAN	MONTE ALBAN Ia
500	-----	TICOMAN I	EARLY CUANALAN	-----
600	MIDDLE			ROSARIA PHASE
700	FORMATIVE	ZACATENCO	CHICONAUHTLA	GUADALUPE PHASE
800				

Source: Adapted from Millon 1981: fig. 7-7; Mastache and Cobean 1989: table 1; Cowgill 1996: table 1.

sixth largest city in the world, with an estimated population of 125,000 (Millon 1993: 33). In this latter period, until its sudden collapse, the city seems to have functioned as a well-developed urban center apparently with a multiethnic population (Cowgill 1996: 329; R. Millon 1988a).

Accumulated information delineates historical trajectories and cultural traits, mostly of the affluent periods following the incipient stage. One of Teotihuacan City layout's most evident and distinctive features was a highly organized political structure that can be called, in an evolutionary view, a preindustrial state system. In addition to its immense population, a highly planned city layout with vast monumental structures and some 2,000 residential apartment compounds suggest that several kinds of institutional organizations administered the urban life. In particular, standardized architectural traits, rigid space control, and a systematic water management program seem to indicate formal constraints imposed by the state. Orderly channelization of drainage and large-scale canalization of the San Juan River were integrated into the grid system that persisted under the control of the government throughout the city's history.

In residential compounds life would have been complex in terms of social differentiation, labor divisions, economic transactions, and other routine activities. Recent osteological and mortuary analyses indicate that those living in an apartment compound (usually housing 60 to 100 residents) had patrilineal links, with significant social stratification within the compound (Sempowski and Spence 1994; Storey 1992).

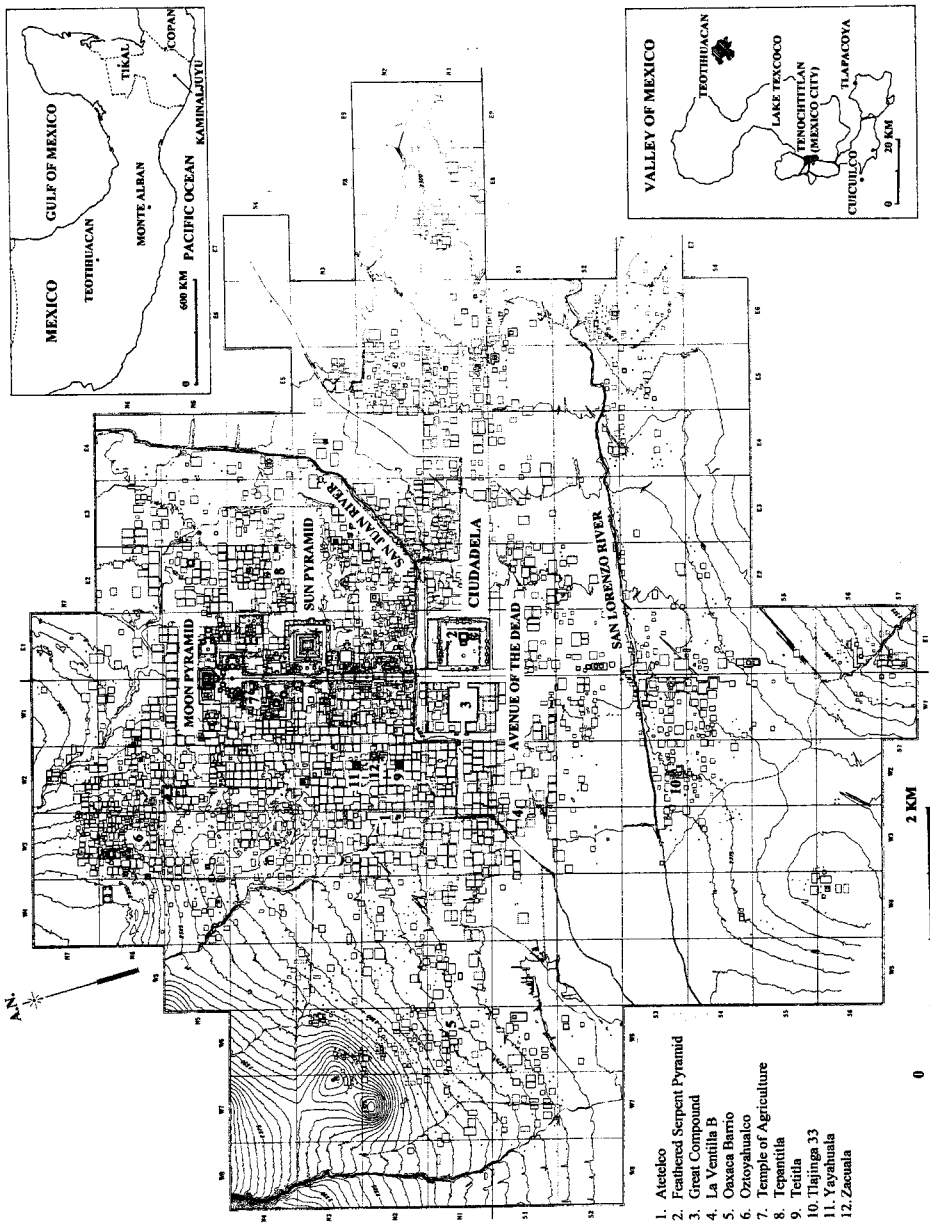


Fig. 1 Plan of Teotihuacan. After Millon 1993: 18, adapted by the author.

Mortuary remains seem to indicate that social differentiation was also conspicuous among apartment compounds. Economic activities, such as specialized manufacturing and redistribution of practical and prestige items, were carried out primarily in apartment compounds, as amply demonstrated by analytical studies (Manzanilla 1993; Múnica 1985; Spence 1987; Turner 1992; Widmer 1987). As Millon (1992: 382) has suggested, marketplace institutions also would have existed at Teotihuacan, beginning at least in the second century AD. For these urban activities, the state would have functioned administratively, legislatively, and judicially in return for labor and agricultural, craft, and other products as state revenue (Millon 1992: 377). Data from enclaves discovered at the Merchant's Barrio (Rattray 1990) and Tlailotlacan (Spence 1992) suggest certain constraints imposed on foreigners or immigrants by the state. In addition, widespread distribution of Teotihuacan products and symbols in contemporaneous Mesoamerican societies substantially demonstrates that a state system with interregional dominance was functioning centrally in this multiethnic metropolis.

Although social complexity has been thus indicated by various kinds of materials, the political form of the early state has not been well understood. Little is known about the founding of the new center, largely because of little archaeological record from the early period. However, I believe that the uncertainties are also due to an insufficient cognition of the different qualities of available data and the scarcity of holistic interpretation. This book, dealing as it does with the symbolism of an early monument, is explicitly directed to the issue of an emerging state polity at Teotihuacan.

From a macroscopic view, it can readily be recognized that the data do not represent the different sectors of Teotihuacan society evenly, despite the quantity of research during the last century. Data about people of the highest social status are still scarce in every period of the city's history. We have not even identified residences of the ruling group that could have been distinguished in material culture from the others. Royal families are absent from burial data, despite the fact that more than 800 single or multiple graves with more than 1,400 skeletons have been discovered to date in Teotihuacan (Rodríguez 1992). Although a population of low, intermediate, and higher status is evident in the city, people of the *highest* social status have still not been identified in the data from residential areas.

Interpretations of political structure thus seem to be influenced significantly by the lack of palace and royal graves in the archaeological record. The fact that specific paramount individuals have not been identified in works of art also restrains researchers from explicitly discussing rulers or ruler-centered political structures. The "uniqueness" of Teotihuacan in material culture has been stressed mostly as a reflection of the special political form of the Teotihuacan state (e.g., Pasztory 1992), and also has led some to propose a collective polity for Teotihuacan (Blanton et al. 1996). The invisibility of Teotihuacan rulers contrasts greatly with other Mesoamerican societies such as Olmec, Maya, and Aztec, in which ruling individuals were conspicuous or at least visible in mortuary practices, works of art, and written records.

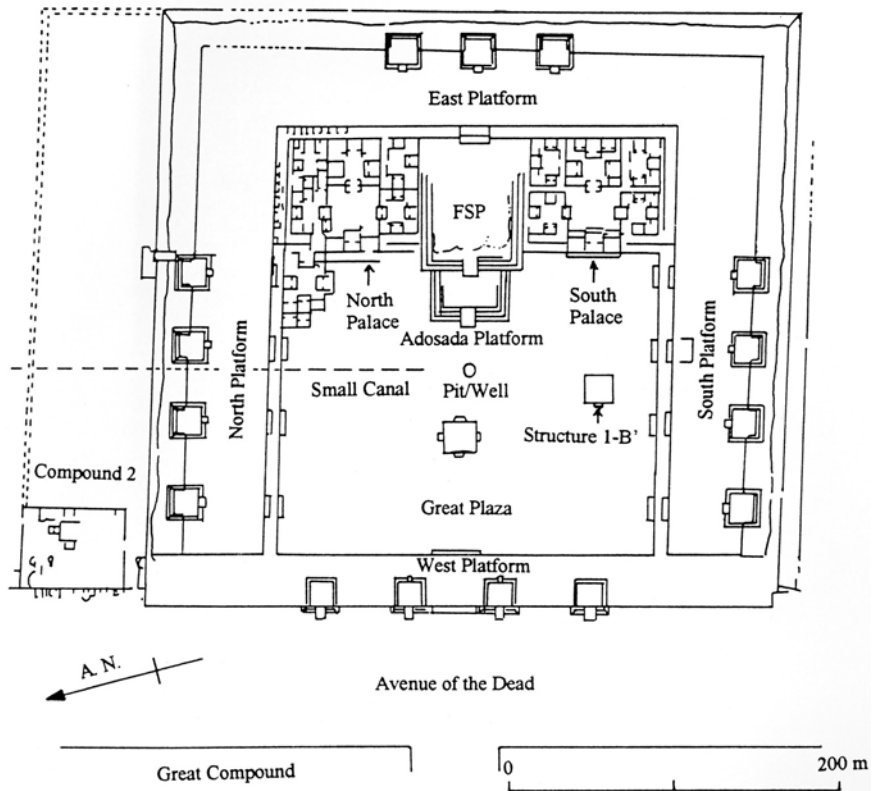


Fig. 2 Plan of the Ciudadela. Drawing: Kumiko Sugiyama, from Berrin and Pasztor 1993: 1020.

New discoveries, analytical studies, and holistic interpretations, described in this volume, suggest that this interpretative framework needs modification. A different kind of data set is the focus of this book. While excavations in residential areas provide continuous information about subsistence, technology, trade, and social life in Teotihuacan, excavations of monumental constructions reveal other aspects of the state. The monuments, apparently representing ideational realms of the ruling group in a symbolic manner, were excavated mainly by Mexican archaeologists of national institutions, currently called the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH), as the nation's interest in its cultural heritage and history has been raised in certain social and political contexts since the beginning of the last century.

Leopoldo Batres (1906) first excavated the Sun Pyramid, one of Teotihuacan's major monuments, in the early 1900s (Fig. 1). In 1917, Manuel Gamio (1922) extensively explored the Ciudadela (Citadel) complex, including parts of the Feathered Serpent Pyramid (FSP) (Fig. 2). In 1962–64, an INAH macroproject directed by Ignacio Bernal (1963) excavated and consolidated the Moon Pyramid complex and a major portion of the temple-residence complexes along the Avenue of the Dead (Acosta 1964). Two decades later, another INAH presidential project,



Fig. 3 Principal facade of the FSP. Photo: author.

the Proyecto Arqueológico Teotihuacán 1980–82 (PAT80–82), directed by Rubén Cabrera (Cabrera, Rodríguez, and Morelos 1982a, 1982b, 1991), mainly excavated the southern section of the city's core, including most structures in the Ciudadela that Gamio did not excavate. In the early 1990s, Eduardo Matos (1995) of the INAH coordinated excavations of the Sun Pyramid complex, uncovering the base of the northern and eastern parts of the pyramid and the large platforms surrounding the pyramid.²

Significant amounts of information have been provided by these national projects, which have contributed to our understanding of the monuments of Teotihuacan. However, the question of how these monuments were specifically involved in state affairs remains poorly understood. These major pyramids and other monumental programs should be intensively and systematically explored further in an appropriate methodological and interpretative framework. In this book, I discuss one of the major monuments, the Feathered Serpent Pyramid located in the Ciudadela, in order to explore the nature of early government of the Teotihuacan state. This monument was the third largest pyramid and, perhaps, the one reflecting the highest energy expenditure in Teotihuacan, as indicated by its extraordinary sculptural facades (Fig. 3). The pyramid's physical features establish that the monumental construction was totally directed by the state administration.

As a consequence of long-term explorations at the pyramid, accumulated data, although they are not exhaustive, deserve a thorough examination, with a focus on state affairs. The structure provides much higher quality and quantity of data than any other monument excavated earlier at Teotihuacan. The FSP was one of the excavation fronts of the PAT80–82, in which I have been involved since 1980 (Cabrera and

Sugiyama 1982). As a complementary operation to PAT80–82, burials associated with the FSP were searched for, and a part of the burial complex was found on the south side of the pyramid in 1983–84 (Sugiyama 1989a, 1991a). Subsequently, a joint project called the Proyecto Templo de Quetzalcoatl 1988–89 (PTQ88–89) was formed with members of two institutions with which I was associated at the time; we explored this monument more intensively and extensively (Cabrera, Sugiyama, and Cowgill 1991).

These new discoveries comprise three construction levels, a large-scale grave complex of apparently sacrificed people, material symbols, and a systematic termination program including the looting of multiple burials.³ The rest of an earlier construction prior to the Feathered Serpent Pyramid was uncovered with a corresponding sacrificial burial. The second level, corresponding to the Ciudadela and the Feathered Serpent Pyramid, which has been dated to the early third century, was one of the most monumental construction programs in the city. The Adosada platform was the third construction level at this location. It covered the front facade of the main Feathered Serpent Pyramid sometime in the fourth century (Sugiyama 1998c). One of the most significant discoveries was the more than 137 individuals that were found with abundant symbolic offerings of exceptional quality in and around the pyramid. The distribution pattern of the graves clearly indicates a materialization of the Teotihuacan worldview; significant numbers in Mesoamerican cosmology and calendric systems were evidently used in organizing the burials. Although we intentionally left some graves unexcavated, we believe that more than 200 individuals were buried during the construction of the pyramid.

In this volume, I mainly discuss the FSP in terms of its symbols and their socio-political implications in the broader context of the city and beyond. My goal is to explore the nature of an early state and the process of urbanization of a nonindustrialized city in the New World, given the current immature state of our understanding of the Teotihuacan polity.

A holistic approach is chosen for this purpose. I explore the symbolism of the location, monumental architecture, sculptures, burial complex, and offerings discovered at the FSP. An underlying notion is that the various symbolic acts associated with the pyramid would have been manipulated meaningfully by the state administration. One of the main propositions is that, as in other Mesoamerican states (López 1994; Marcus 1992a; Schele and Miller 1986; Umberger 1987a), rulership of the Teotihuacan state also may have been encoded metaphorically and systematically in architectural features, graves, and offerings found at the monument. Knowledge of ritual meanings expressed in each material assemblage may lead us to a better understanding of a cohesive symbolization program by the state.

Much of the book is devoted to the interpretation of ritual and cosmological connotation of materials, explored with descriptive and analytical tools. The fundamental objectives of this process are, specifically, to search for coherent significance and to discuss sociopolitical implications. Finally, I discuss the FSP as a state symbol and relate it to the early polity in Teotihuacan and beyond, arguing patterns of Mesoamerican state politics and preindustrialized urbanization processes.

Structure and brief summaries

This book is structured in the following way to arrive at the goals mentioned above. In the second half of this chapter, I discuss current theoretical and methodological issues dealing with symbols in archaeology, touch upon the degree to which we can deal with ritual behavior, and explore the question of how we can decode ritual behavior from archaeological materials. I especially stress the feasibility of relating rulership to religion in the Teotihuacan state. I believe that the materials recovered from the FSP over the last two decades are detailed, precise, and specific enough to allow us to consider the ideological and cosmological issues involved.

In Chapter 2, I provide brief background information of two quite different types: sources of data discussed in this book and some Mesoamerican ideational features. The chapter presents the framework for the discussion of analyses and interpretations in the following chapters. I first summarize the history of exploration and excavation at the FSP to provide a setting for the studies, referring to the discoveries of different kinds of materials during the last eighty years. Descriptive detail in published and unpublished reports varies significantly from one discovery to another. Numerous objects found earlier are no longer accessible; therefore, data from excavations after 1980 are the main sources for analysis, and the previous information has been re-interpreted retrospectively from newly discovered, comprehensive data. Particularly, the materials obtained by PTQ88–89 form the core of the data studied.

In the second half of Chapter 2, I briefly introduce Mesoamerican mythology and other ideational factors that we may recognize through analyses of archaeological materials in Teotihuacan. I stress cosmological structures, indigenous concepts of time, space, deities, and cosmogonical myths, that probably were shared by Mesoamerican societies since the Preclassic periods.

The next five chapters are intended as a bridge between the data and ideational realms, both summarized in Chapter 2. In Chapter 3, I begin an analytical interpretation of possible meanings attached to the location of the Ciudadela in which the FSP stands as the principal pyramid. The locational data are examined in terms of a worldview materialized in the city layout, which I have proposed elsewhere had existed since an early stage of the city's formation (Sugiyama 1993). My study of the measurement unit used in Teotihuacan (TMU) is a basic tool for this assessment, together with information about the topography, orientation, and architecture of the city. This study suggests that the Ciudadela, with the FSP, was located topographically and conceptually at the lowest point on the Avenue of the Dead and may have been constructed for ritual displays related to the mythological Underworld.

Study of the architecture and iconography of the FSP comprises Chapter 4, a discussion of the cosmogonic aspects of the building. Interpreted in the contexts of Teotihuacan iconography are the architectural style and sculptured facades, as well as burned clay fragments (which may have been walls of the temple once situated atop the FSP) found in the construction fill of the Adosada, a stepped platform later built over the front of the FSP.

The sculptural facades of the FSP seem to have commemorated a myth of the creation of time (López et al. 1991). More concretely, the facades can be read as

the following: the Feathered Serpent brings time from the watery Underworld to the present world; it bears a calendar sign on its body in the form of a headdress that represents the Primordial Crocodile, a Teotihuacan antecedent to the Aztec creature, Cipactli. As my survey of later representations of the Feathered Serpent elsewhere in the city suggests, the Feathered Serpent at the FSP seems to have borne symbols of warfare, human sacrifice, and most explicitly rulership.

The core of this volume, found in Chapters 5 through 7, is a discussion of the massive burial complex found at the FSP. In total, 132 complete skeletons plus fragmentary remains have been found with rich offerings around and in the FSP; the majority of the interments chronologically correspond to the stages of construction of the pyramid. Many were found with their wrists crossed behind their backs as if they had been tied. Many of the people buried were identified as soldiers because of the types of offerings associated with them (Cabrera, Sugiyama, and Cowgill 1991; Sugiyama 1988b, 1989a). Based on the excavation contexts, the remains have been interpreted intuitively as those of human sacrifice with militaristic implication, although there is no direct evidence of cause of death from the bones (R. Millon 1988b: 109).

In this book, I endeavor to interpret the data from the burial complex more specifically, systematically, and comprehensively. Chapter 5 deals with burial patterns at the FSP. The grave complex may have been, rather than the result of a single event, a complicated ritual process that involved many burials. I consider several alternative explanations inductively in the context of the excavation, and present interpretations of each grave based on stratigraphy, association with architecture, and differences in treatment of the dead among the graves.

After a diachronic review, I examine hypothetical propositions that the graves were highly patterned to express the state's ideological concerns, and that social hierarchy among burials existed in a metaphoric religious manner. Mortuary features – locations and morphologies of the graves, number of individuals buried in each grave, positions, orientations, and forms of bodies, ages, sex, and other physical traits of the burials – are used to plot the spatial distribution of bodies in a search for patterns. The studies indicate that the burials found at different spots in and around the FSP manifested a foundation program integrated into the monument.

A royal burial or burials might have been included in the graves discovered at the FSP, in addition to the dedicatory burials. Unfortunately, the “candidates” for royal burial, two graves found near the center of the pyramid and a large pit in front of the staircase, were heavily looted in ancient times (Sugiyama 1998c). Although we cannot know for certain whether the body of a ruler was included in the graves at the FSP, the issue is discussed in the light of circumstantial field data and the burial patterns. Preliminary conclusions are that almost all graves found at the FSP, including the central grave, were essentially sacrificial and dedicated to the erection of the monument, and that one or two elite burials might have been integrated into the monument sometime after the construction was completed. They suggest that rulership was not only symbolically involved in the monument, but also that ruling individuals may have been physically integrated into the grave complex. These hypothetical interpretations, however, remain, for the present, unverified.

Chapter 6 consists of analyses of burial offerings, organized by type of material. Many formal analyses of the obsidian, greenstone and other stone materials, shell, pottery, and organic materials have been completed, and a few are still underway. Detailed descriptive information will be published in Spanish and in English in the near future. In addition, an extensive World Wide Web page publication is already available on the internet as a complementary report (see Chapter 1, note 3). Therefore, after a brief description, I discuss these materials mainly in terms of their symbolic significance.

Offerings are first classified on the basis of morphology and quantitative data. I then analyze locational data using a GIS program (MapInfo Corporation 1992–94) in reference to the classifications and visually display distributional patterns of the offerings, interrelation among burials, and hierarchical groups of graves. After possible emic classifications are suggested with locational data, ritual meanings are discussed in the light of Teotihuacan iconography.

In Chapter 7, before overall conclusions are stated, results from the mortuary studies are evaluated in the comparative context of the city and beyond. Sacrificial burials and elite graves in other parts of the city and Teotihuacan-related sites are briefly reviewed. This includes hypothetical propositions about the graves associated with major monuments in Teotihuacan. I first review other sacrificial burials in Teotihuacan, in order to compare them with the instances at the FSP. Mortuary forms of sacrifice in residential areas contrast considerably with the cases at the FSP. Second, elite burials associated with monuments at Teotihuacan and Teotihuacan-related sites are reviewed in general. Particularly, burials discovered by Kidder, Jennings, and Shook (1946) at Mounds A and B in Kaminaljuyú are useful to distinguish possible elite graves from sacrificial ones at the FSP.

In Chapter 8, I synthesize the information. Several implications can be deduced through different approaches: the cosmological nature of the materials recovered from this central monument of the city; the cohesiveness of meanings in various kinds of materials in terms of a citywide program, which in effect materializes a Teotihuacan worldview. I end the book with a discussion of sociopolitical implications of these ritual behaviors in Teotihuacan and beyond and argue that the huge amount of material at the FSP can best be interpreted as official symbols manipulated by ruling groups to create a New Era brought by the Feathered Serpent. The two important sociopolitical institutions – militarism and human sacrifice – seem to have been woven metaphorically into this “net” of cosmogonic meanings. These institutions were most likely connected with individualistic rulership, which was proclaimed to be given by the Feathered Serpent at the monument. State symbols thus established at the FSP in Teotihuacan about AD 200 seem to have diffused as a social power, in time and space, to other Mesoamerican societies.

Theories and strategies

For some years, many archaeologists focused their research on the material side of early human society, such as human ecology, subsistence, economic systems, and technologies. In recent years, there has been a growing tendency to investigate