

## **“This Means War!”<sup>1</sup>**

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### ***Introduction***

The contributions to this volume probe our perceptions of the nature of conflict and competition in Mesoamerica. The chapters also illuminate the range of social, cultural, and ideological factors that the social sanctioning of conflict entails. I have initially avoided using the term “war” to turn attention to our own emic perspective. It is curious, as the OED<sup>2</sup> comments, that there was no word for “war” as late as early historic times in the Germanic languages from which, of course, English derives. The OED does not supply chronological dates for “early historic times,” but other information in the entry references the period when the literate Romans spread out across Europe, because the Romans had a word for what we now think of as war, which was *bellum*. The closest equivalent in the Germanic languages was *werre*, which—from its hypothesized Proto-Indo European roots to its Old Saxon and other Germanic derivatives—meant *confusion, trouble, disorder, discord, strife, struggle, disturbance, perplexity* but not, oddly enough, “Hostile contention by means of armed forces . . .” as war is defined in the OED. As far as I can tell by adding information from the AHD<sup>3</sup>, the word *guerre* in French and *guerra* in Spanish were derived from a Frankish root, *werra*, and by about the 1100s or so, all these terms were used in the way we might use “war” today.

This ambiguity in the roots of European terms now used to refer to hostile contention by means of armed forces suggests that ideas about how to deal with competition—especially competition manifested as conflict—were much more varied than in our modern concept of war. Did rivals agree on concepts of winning or losing which they applied to their group, or did conflict entail predominantly individual agendas that permitted individuals from either side to benefit? Concomitantly, were there different words to describe these situations? Were there different rules of engagement in different sorts of competition so that only some competitions were manifested in conflict, and only particular kinds of conflict entailed socially sanctioned killing?

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<sup>1</sup> “Of course you realize, this means war!” Bugs Bunny, *Bully for Bugs*, 1953. Warner Bros., Looney Tunes, directed by Chuck Jones, written by Michael Maltese.

<sup>2</sup> Oxford English Dictionary.

<sup>3</sup> American Heritage Dictionary.

Clearly we cannot avoid using the term “war” (and its closest equivalents in other languages, e.g. *krieg* or *guerra*). Since the 12<sup>th</sup> century it has come to cover a widely recognised manner of resolving rival claims to power or resources through socially sanctioned methods of arming, fighting, and killing. War clearly has meaning for us, and it behoves us to use it to describe conflict and competition which we hope to explain, as in the anthropology of war (Fried et al 1968) or war before civilization (Keeley 1996) or an origin of war (Kelly 2000) or a beginning of war (Otterbein 2004) or a cultural context of warfare (Nielsen and Walker 2009). We should keep at the forefront of our minds, however, that we hold many ideas about war—such as the extensive killing we take for granted as part of warfare, or the concept of surrender—which may not have applied to competition and conflict in the Maya world. It is also possible that the Maya socially sanctioned arming or fighting or killing in ways that we might not at first recognize as war—such as the killing of an opponent away from, and after, the armed engagement. Where we can document conflict in hieroglyphic texts, we assume that rules of engagement were like ours by employing concepts of winning and losing which we apply to one “side” or the other. I do not argue that our concepts cannot illuminate Maya actions; I argue that the fit may not be as tight as we would like. Thinking about the history and cultural roots of our own terms and concepts helps to generate questions that we might not otherwise ask about how people in the past thought about or behaved in their world (Graham 2009).

In addition to exploring the roots of terminology, we can look to competition as a broader heuristic category (recognizing that humans compete in complex ways over a range of perceived needs and wants). We might hypothesize that individuals in social groups, even those with obligatory sharing, will compete for, or expect access to, resources (some individuals, for example, eat more than others). Individuals will also organize into groups (factions) to compete with other groups for resources (Brumfiel and Fox 1994). Our word “competition” serves well to categorize a phenomenon that recognises a degree of friction yet does not necessarily entail violence and can even include play (Huizinga 2014). One could make the case that a key factor is whether the competition is intra-group or inter-group, as it is inter-group competition that is more closely associated with warfare (e.g. Graeber 2014: 28-34; Fausto 2012; Webster 2000: 72). On the other hand, intra-group competition can often involve violence; the prime function of Mughal warfare, for example, is said to have been to bridge the *inner* frontiers of empire (emphasis Gommans 2002: 3). Even intra-community competition can become violent, although violence on this level, particularly when it results

in the death of a perceived rival or competitor *within* the community, is not generally socially sanctioned ([Webster 2000: 72](#)).

Conflict entails the idea that in some competitions, usually those involving organized groups, both bodily harm and killing are socially sanctioned, and our term “war” covers this nicely ([Webster 1975, 2000](#)). Where individuals represent groups, terminology can be trickier. Some competition could conceivably involve a “theater” of struggle in which individuals who represent a group compete in front of an audience. Where killing is not socially sanctioned—although bodily harm might be, as in boxing ([Taube and Zender 2009](#))—we would call this “sport”. In some theaters of struggle, however, killing may well have been socially sanctioned. A version of the Mesoamerican ball game in which elite men from rival armed groups compete could conceivably fit into this category. Here terminology is critical, because the killing, even though it is played out as theatre in order to have been witnessed by the community, is most likely to have been socially sanctioned as *war*.

Our vocabulary separates war and sport because sports today generally do not involve socially sanctioned killing, whereas warfare does. Yet, warfare can have an element of game, as has been ascribed to pre-modern warfare ([Huizinga 2014](#)) which, through “competitiveness and playfulness, as well as through . . . shared rules and conventions, brought together various parts of society” ([Gommans 2002: 3](#)). Reflecting what Gommans calls the fluid politics of the Mughal Empire, Mughal warfare is said to have been characterized by openness and flexibility, and even play ([Gommans 2002: 205-206](#); [Subrahmanyam 2012: 22](#)). Such complexity in elements of war should inspire us to re-evaluate the socially sanctioned killing we have come to associate with modern concepts of war. The manner and extent to which violence was socially sanctioned in armed conflict may distinguish not only our understanding of warfare from what was going on in Mesoamerica but may also distinguish practices among warring Mesoamerican groups ([Aoyama and Graham 2015](#)).

Given the perspective described above, we would not expect to find a one-to-one correlation between our term “war” and references in Mayan texts to conflict, which indeed is the case ([Helmke, Morton, Peuramaki-Brown, this volume](#); [Tokovinine, this volume](#)). In addition to the existence of more than one way in which competition and conflict were played out, we might also expect a range of terms or modes of expression that would reflect what we lump

together as winning or losing. The almost insuperable hurdle involves knowing what the rules of engagement were; the language of the inscriptions, as well as changes in weaponry over time, suggest that the rules of engagement did not remain static (Aoyama and Graham 2015). Suffice it to say at this point that attempting to discern the rules of engagement as well as the criteria involved in winning or losing is at least as important as knowing, for example, that Tikal claimed victory over the ruler of Calakmul (Martin and Grube 2008: 44).

The chapters in this volume shed a great deal of light on the complexities of both text and iconography in matters that relate to competition and conflict. I discuss the chapters and their implications according to various themes, which I hope will highlight new directions of research. I first consider *winning* and what it might mean for one community or city to “conquer” or subdue or overcome another. What are the implications of winning and how might the implications be manifested in texts and titles? The next logical step is to consider the *rules of engagement*. Much of what I say remains speculative, but speculation is important in providing the means of articulating new hypotheses that can be tested by further investigation. Related to rules of engagement is the meaning attributed to *objects, images*, and what are called *trophies*. What sorts of *metaphors* we can expect, and what meaning we can attribute to tropes as reflected in lordly titles as well as in claims on the power or influence of various deities or spirits are themes of importance and worth expanding in the context of conflict. The focus on individuals, either lords or gods, leads us to consider the degree to which conflict is *a family affair* (involving those we know rather than those we do not care about). I consider the role of *history and culture* in both conflict and its resolution with regard to how we interpret the origins of cultural icons and symbols as well as elite titles. Finally, and not least important, I consider the assumptions that underlie *socially sanctioned killing* in the past with the implication that the term and the concept of “human sacrifice” must be consigned to the dustbin.

### ***Winning***

We often understandably frame the results of conflict as conquest (victory) or defeat (e.g., Demarest 2004: 102; Martin and Grube 2008; O’Mansky and Dunning 2004: 94; Schele and Miller 1986: 29; Stuart 2000: 482; Valdés and Fahsen 2004: 140) because there are indications in texts—such as the taking of captives, the loss of a life, or a shift in power-holding—that one group or community or center gained at the expense of another. Yet it is difficult to picture either the details of the engagement or the full nature of the results and

their significance. How was it judged that a particular group “won” (Schele and Miller 1986: 218)? Hernandez and Palka ([this volume](#)) make the point that the way war and culture are intertwined is vital in understanding how conflict is conducted. Where everyday life in cities and towns continued after war events, as seems to have been the case among the Maya in Classic times, there had to exist agreed-upon rules concerning armed engagements as well as how losing was determined and what winning entailed. Where there are statements of conquest in the inscriptions, we should expect that the social and economic implications—such as the details of power and wealth transfer—accorded well with such rules. Where warfare was extremely disruptive to communities, as occurred in the Terminal Classic (e.g., [Demarest et al. 1997](#); [Inomata 1997](#)), there is every reason to consider that we are looking at conflict in which there was cultural disjunction between the opposing sides, and armed struggle entailed more than traditionally agreed methods of power and wealth appropriation. To draw from Hernandez and Palka, warfare cannot be considered above cultural considerations.

Admittedly, criteria for winning in Mesoamerican warfare are obscured by our lack of detailed knowledge concerning how people or groups self-identified within the larger categories we use of “Maya” ([Henderson and Hudson 2015](#)) or “Mixtec” or “Mexica.” We have identifiable glyphs on stelae that reflect identities of families and dynasties ([Schele and Miller 1986: 137](#)) who engaged in conflict, but use of terms such as Maya warfare or Maya religion or Maya populace masks the very diversity that would have been associated with factions and groups at the heart of the initiation of conflict. The history of conflict between France and England, or between Boudicca and the Romans, would never be understood if it was assumed that self-identification as “European” was a factor in stimulating aggression. For lack of knowledge of names of sub-groups or ethnic factions or areas, we perforce use “Maya,” but for the purpose of generating hypotheses this should not prevent us from *envisioning* the dynamics of warfare as involving a variety of cultural groups and allegiances ([Aoyama and Graham 2015](#)). Excellent insight comes from Abtosway and McCafferty ([this volume](#)), who observe that the intra-Mixteca warfare described in the codices reflects people loyal to their regional centers and not to a cohesive larger regional unit. What did people from a particular Mixtec center hope to win? According to Abtosway and McCafferty, they were motivated by personal gain.

Even if we envision that the sites we excavate functioned as centers of polities, and hence as rallying points for agents, engagements also involved confederations, as in the case of the several centers that identified as “Pomona” in conflicts with Piedras Negras; confederations were also in operation in large parts of southeastern Peten (Laporte 2001; Webster 2002: 165). Without a term equivalent to our “war” in the inscriptions (Tokovinine, this volume; see also Schele and Miller 1986: 209-222), we are left with a variety of references which seem to reflect the results of conflict and hence the nature of a “win,” but which are metaphorical and culturally specific, and therefore difficult for us to understand. Before I discuss these references, it is important to frame the political landscape from which the references might draw meaning.

### *Framing the political landscape*

Martin and Grube (2008: 21) have proposed that the political landscape of the Classic Maya is better expressed by interaction between and among the various states/polities/centers than by a territorial map. I have made a similar argument on the basis of the knowledge we have of community interaction at the time of the Spanish conquest, and on studies of indigenous and Spanish fighting tactics during the Conquest (Graham 2006, 2011: 29-46, Graham et al. 2013). If competition and conflict among the Classic Maya were more about shifting dominant and subordinate relationships than about the taking of territory, then it helps to envisage how competition and conflict might have operated under these conditions. How would people or polities increase wealth or resources without actually appropriating territory?

An appropriate model—*pace* to those who consider pre-industrial civilizations to have been starkly different from us—is the modern world, in which nation states and their political rulers—Vladimir Putin excepted—generally do not engage in conflict for territory, i.e., to annex Iraq or Guatemala to the United States or to the United Kingdom. Nation states and their political chiefs engage in conflict over rights to resources, such as oil or minerals or crops. The resources are owned today by multi-nationals, and politicians (at least in terms of the governmental offices they hold) are subject to the power of the multinationals. Politicians are often offered jobs in these companies when they retire from office, and/or they become stakeholders in corporations. Thus government officeholders, heads of companies, corporate executives, landed gentry, wealthy investors—although they can be from different countries—all have a stake in the present economic system because the profits from resource exploitation accrue to them, if not strictly speaking as a class, as an elite group with shared

interests (Graham 2012). They may not share all aspects of culture, because they may be British or Brazilian or Saudi Arabian or Greek or Russian or Chinese, but they share enough in the way of values to sanction the economic system, even when—and perhaps because—the system frequently involves conflict as a means of resource appropriation or retention.

This idea, albeit in a slightly different form, was first introduced by Michael Smith in a landmark paper (Smith 1986) in which he emphasized that, despite their image as bloody and brutal, the Aztecs' success did not depend on military coercion. The Aztec system—if I may provisionally call it that—was successful because the elites from highland Mexico, Morelos, Puebla, Oaxaca, or the Gulf Coast—who would have self-identified locally—had a stake in the economic system of tribute/tax payers and tribute/tax receivers (Graham 2014; Smith 2014). Those at the upper end of the scale received tribute/taxes and those lower down the social scale paid tribute/taxes. Warfare among elites—that is, among the *tlatoque* of city-states or *altepetl* against *altepetl*—was usually a last resort and if carried through, shifted resources amongst elites. The claims of the Mexica of the fear and awe in which they were held by foreign and subject rulers were propagandistic; there was in fact tacit agreement among elites to uphold a system in which their common interests transcended political boundaries.

Such a system is dependent on frequent communication and shared experiences among the people of cities and city-states, on great time-depth to such communication, on wide-ranging commercial networks, and on a great deal of intermarriage. One has to imagine a “global” Meosamerica (a world system? [Blanton and Feinman 1984]) in which the flow of people from northern regions southward and eastward, and vice versa, had been going on for a very long time. Since Preclassic times, marine trade networks facilitated the circum-peninsular movement of goods, and the networks were well integrated with riverine and overland routes. Foot travel, rather than being a limitation (Sanders and Webster 1988: 529), can be a strong stimulus to local commerce. I say this based on my experience living in London, where commercial and industrial sectors of the city are everywhere integrated with residences. Although public transport is excellent, roads are congested. As a result, people walk considerable distances, even late at night or in the early hours of the morning. Vendors have sprung up along these routes selling food and drink, and because people are walking (and not travelling from point to point in a bus or tube), they are apt to buy food or drink more than

once *en route*, and there are lots of vendors. Small grocery stores also stay open late, some all night.

This phenomenon got me thinking that foot travel must have stimulated, not limited, opportunities for commerce, at least at the local or inter-community level. Although it is often argued that paved roads, wheeled vehicles and pack animals are an advantage in travel and transport, there are good reasons to put this claim into context. For one thing, the Maya did not know they were at a disadvantage, therefore *not* having a cart or a horse would not have limited their vision of where they could go or what commercial transactions were possible. It is also true, as anyone who works in the Neotropics knows, that paved roads, wheeled vehicles and beasts of burden are a mixed blessing given the huge and costly effort of upkeep. History also shows that the advantages of owning horses, cattle or wheeled vehicles accrued to the better off. In early Ireland, for example, prior to the coming of Christianity, horse-drawn transport was an aristocratic monopoly (Leighton 1972: 171). In the rest of western Europe, goods could be carried by animals such as mules or in ox-drawn carts, but animals and carts were limited and their use costly; other than goods, apparently only “the criminal, the aged, the sick, and women were transported by wagon” (Leighton 1972: 172). Kings, nobles, bishops and abbots rode horseback; priests walked or rode asses; the masses walked (Leighton 1972: 172).

In Mesoamerica, in places where water-borne travel or transport was not possible, *everyone* had to walk or take foot travel into account (as in the case of merchants who needed to transport goods, or rulers whose status meant they should be carried). Thus there existed a profusion of opportunities to provide food, drink, supplies, apparel, gear, medicines, transport services (porters), and rest stops to walking travellers of all stripes: individuals, families, messengers, pilgrims, and merchants’ “caravans.” Thus it is no stretch of the imagination to envision not impenetrable jungle but a landscape criss-crossed with paths and bustling with activity in Classic times, especially since we know that trade, which involved the movement of goods over long and short distances, was a key force in Maya history (Graham 1987a).

What does this have to do with winning wars? Despite what might be called ethnic or linguistic differences, the networks of people, communication and trade argue strongly for a Mesoamerica in which, at least to some degree, cultural values were shared. We know this was true of elites (Smith 1986) but some measure of commonality may also have existed at



other levels as the result of the involvement of large segments of the population in exchange and commerce—inter-regionally, intra-regionally, and locally—as envisioned above. The time depth of contact with a variety of cultures other than ones' own would have (at least) two outcomes: 1) elites throughout Mesoamerica were likely to have consisted of a proportion of individuals who were related and shared kinship connections; and 2) the commercial sector would have had a reasonable amount of power.

Thus conditions in Mesoamerica were ripe for conflict that involved appropriating resources in ways that did not necessarily have to involve land acquisition. One does not need to own (in our terms) land in a situation in which one has acquired the rights to its resources. If everyone in a group agrees on the rules about who as part of the group has rights to resources through tribute/taxes, one needs only to compete with others in the group for a piece of the pie (see, e.g., [García Loaeza 2014: 222-223](#)). Attempts to kill people in order to incorporate the land on which they live can also be counter-productive in situations in which people's labor, and the established infrastructure, are the bases of the economy. The need is only to kill or capture or subdue the *right* people in socially sanctioned ways if one is to appropriate their wealth, which can include rights to land and its products. Abtosway and McCafferty ([this volume](#)) cite a Postclassic example (see their citation to [Matthew and Oudijk 2007](#)) in which the Chichimeca allied themselves with the Tolteca-Chichimeca during the war against Cholula. The alliance included the stipulation that the Chichimeca would be paid in land grants and lordship titles. One is reminded of the Mexica rise to power via their alliances with the Tepanecs of Atzacozalco ([Smith 2012: 46-49](#)) in which the Mexica newcomers sought titles that would give them access to resources through tribute.

Economics—the acquisition of wealth or control of resources—plays a critical role in warfare ([Webster 1975: 468-469](#)). Scherer and Verano, however, in the introduction to their hugely informative edited volume on war in Precolumbian Mesoamerica and the Andes ([Scherer and Verano 2014: 4](#)), state that, “Nevertheless, to understand why people go to war we must look beyond material gain.” In support, they cite a recent survey of the reasons for enlistment among U.S. infantry battalions. Only one reason given by those who enlisted was financial (“money for college”) but the other top choices were adventure, serving the country, patriotism and the desire to be a soldier. Somehow they did not take into account the fact that all of the soldiers in the army receive salaries. A survey that truly looked beyond material gain would have to offer men or women the opportunity to fight and possibly to be killed in

Afghanistan or Iraq but without pay or any benefits either to them or to their families. I doubt that anyone would volunteer to fight solely as an adventure, to serve the country, to be patriotic, or to serve as a soldier without any salary or benefits. In earlier centuries, as in the case of the British navy in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, many of the ship's hands were conscripted when they were either drunk or asleep on land. The “pay” in those days was a share of the loot when another ship was captured.

It is hard to imagine that anyone anywhere would fight repeatedly for no economic reward. Among the Classic Maya, conflict must have involved gain for those who fought. But what was the mechanism of wealth transfer if land was not appropriated? Miller and Martin (2004) discuss the economic dimensions of captive-taking in suggesting that a “prisoner of note represented a much wider set of obligations and resources—be it a ransom that could be extorted or tribute that could be demanded . . .” (Miller and Martin 2004: 166). I have long proposed that captive-taking among elites *was* the mechanism of wealth transfer (Graham 2006, 2008, 2009, 2011: 40-43; Graham, Simmons, and White 2013). By this I do not mean, however, that ransom (as understood in western European warfare) was involved (McAnany 2010: 278-283) or that the case was one of tribute having to be demanded. Instead, tribute or tax payments, including access to land, via the act of capture, were accorded the victor (Gorenstein 1973: 15). Thus the capture itself embodied resource redistribution. I admit that this is speculative, but we need to look to models, perhaps to feudal Japan (Ikegami 1995), where, in the context of codes of honor, ransom was rare and enslaving captives out of the question (Ikegami 1995: 102). Instead, individual samurai warriors' triumphs over as many combatants as possible (exemplified by the accumulated severed heads of opponents) brought maximum wealth—through re-distribution of land by their lords—to the individual (Ikegami 1995: 101-103). Connecting captive-taking, resource redistribution, and codes of honor also makes sense of the images of live captives on monuments and portable objects (Helmke, Morton, and Peuramaki-Brown, *this volume*); on the naming of captives and the preoccupation with their identities (Scherer and Golden 2014: 59); and on the contradictions in representing captives as humiliated figures yet also as individuals with noble status (Houston, Stuart, Taube 2006: 203). (Among the samurai, capture entailed a particular kind of social and personal humiliation that could only be remedied—or made honorable—by death [Ikegami 1995: 24-26, 102-103]). The cultural and social implications of capture explain the humiliated figures on stelae (“bruised, beaten” [Scherer and Golden 2014: 59]). At the same time, receiving tribute and taxes was the right of the upper classes, and the

ideology of the various cultural and ethnic groups reinforced this right; hence captors were compelled to display the (shared) elite status of their captives.

I should make clear, however, that captive-taking could not have occurred on an individual basis—that is, each person out for himself alone. What I propose is that captive-taking was part of the rules of engagement, and we have also to envision the existence of a network of political and social relationships among the armed fighters. The ruler was the nexus of the network, and it is not illogical to assume that some warriors fought under the direct overlordship of the ruler, whereas others may have had loyalties and obligations to nobles who were also obligated to the ruler in some way. A hierarchy of political, social, and economic obligations must have already been in place before a conflict. Individuals could be credited with capturing other individuals, but capture was also a political and social act, and one with complex implications. Captors may have had rights to only part of the wealth of the captive as it would have been expected that the captor would pass on gains to his lord or to the ruler. Perhaps the ruler made all the decisions; perhaps rules of honor governed the captor's behaviour toward his captive and the captive's family. To turn to Japan again, a victorious samurai commander could pardon captive warriors if they elected to become his vassals (Ikegami 1995: 102). I cannot say of course exactly how much tribute or tax would be transferred or how resources were redistributed, although it may be possible to construct various models that can be tested. The important point is that captive-taking, although it appears on the surface to have been acts between individuals, could have worked as a mechanism of wealth transfer organized by a political entity.

*Metaphorical references reflecting the results of conflict*

I now **turn to a discussion of some of the conflict expressions as described** by Tokovinine (this volume).

- *Ch'ahkaj* (“chopped”) is used in expressions of conflict against a named place or against the holy grounds (*ch'een*) of a royal family or dynasty; in one instance it refers to more sweeping changes (where the land or *kab* of the southern, eastern, northern and western lords was chopped) and in another it is used uniquely to refer to head-chopping to describe the outcome of conflict between the rulers of Quirigua and Copan.

- *Jubuuy* is a reference to what we call “downfall”; *jubuuy* is a verb typically used in the expression “bringing down the flint and shield,” such as the defeat of Calakmul’s ruler, Yich’aak K’ahk, who was said to have his “flint and shield” brought down by actions instigated by the ruler of Tikal. Nuun Ujol Chaak of Tikal had his “flints and shields” brought down in A.D. 679 in an action with Dos Pilas; the death of Waxaklajuun Ubaah K’awiil at the hands of Quirigua’s king, K’ahk’ Tiliw Chan Yopaatis is described as a demise by “flint and shield” (Martin and Grube 2008: 57, 111, 205).
- Entering the *ch’een* (described above) is used in the example of the Naranjo ruler standing on a captive from Yootz, the *ch’een* (holy grounds) of which the Naranjo ruler is said to have entered. According to Tokovinine, “entering the *ch’een*” occurs for the first time on the Tikal “Marker.”
- *K’ahk’ och ch’een* or “fire *ch’een* entering” occurs on Yaxchilan Stela 18, Naranjo Stela 24, and in the case of a stucco frieze in Yaxchilan Str. 21 (see Helmke and Brady 2014: 205-209); its use reflects an expression with apparent roots in central Mexican (Teotihuacan?) culture and history.
- *Puluuy* or “burning” is used in the case of Lady Six Sky of Naranjo’s “burning” of Bital and Tubal (Martin and Grube 2008: 76) but is attested at other sites
- “Drilling fire” describes an action taken by Motul de San José at Itzan in which a local noble was captured (Tokovinine and Zender 2012).
- *Chuhkaj* translates as “she/he was seized”.
- The use of *te* (as in *eh-te’* or *at-te’*) describes captives (see Martin 2004).
- “He/she/it arrived” (*hul-iy* or *hul-li-ya*) is used to account for Siyaj K’ahk’s presence at Uaxactun and Tikal (MacLeod 1990; Martin 2003: 12-13; Stuart 2000: 476-477).

These expressions seem to represent forms of “winning” or at least a change in the power hierarchy (“arrival”). Why are they so numerous? Expressions that describe the outcome of competition and conflict are numerous in all languages and are often metaphorical.

“Downfall” in English is a good example; “fire” has come to mean engaging a weapon; and blowing the souls out of one another has been used to describe fighting (Ruskin 1909: 96).

Lakoff (1999) observes that the natural way to justify war entails metaphorical definition, not least because metaphors constitute “powerful forms of language that can influence how a concept is perceived and understood” (Hartmann-Mahmud 2002: 427). Hence of all

activities engaged in and described by the Classic Maya, the nature of war and conflict may be the most difficult to which to ascribe meaning.

Aside from the difficulties inherent in metaphorical understanding, we are likely to be dealing with people who shared some aspects of culture but not others; hence winning is expressed, and perhaps enacted, in different ways, as suggested also by Tokovinine. We apply the term “Maya” to all the groups who use the expressions above because the elites shared a writing system and some cultural values, but this does not mean that the people involved failed to see themselves as associated with distinctive communities whose members shared a culture or history which included particular expressions of domination. Expressions such as *k’ahk’ och ch’een* or “fire *ch’een* entering” may have roots in central Mexican culture and conflict history (Brady and Colas 2005; Helmke and Brady 2014).

Words such as *te*, in referring to captives, may reflect the particular nature and extent (summing up) of wealth appropriation, which is consonant with my hypothesis that a greater number of captives will result in a greater share of wealth, either directly by appropriation of the captive’s tribute or indirectly through the granting of rights by the captor’s overlord. The association with “spears” is interesting because it accords well with the idea that elite fighting codes among the Maya emphasized hand-to-hand combat with lances or spears (Aoyama and Graham 2015). Entering the *ch’een* could conceivably have entailed an appropriation of titles and all that went with it (tribute rights over swaths of territory) and hence access to resources in a way that was a step above the capture of lone individuals. The capture of a ruler with the intention of causing his death may have involved a particular metaphorical expression (bringing down the flint and shield?). In cases in which rulers were not killed but instead made vassals, other expressions might have been used. Some expressions, such as the drilling or scattering of fire, may simply derive from rituals that can (but may not always) symbolize conflict or its end result, as in our use in English of “fire” or “burning.” I should make clear that as a non-epigrapher I make no claims to translation of these expressions; I simply propose that they represent what we would expect in any situation in which conflict has a deep history and winning has the potential to be realized in a number of ways, ranging from encounters outside cities between large groups to encounters inside cities between individuals on ball courts.

### ***Rules of engagement***

The rules by which competition or conflict is waged are even more difficult to pin down than “winning” because such rules are rarely if ever made explicit, even today. Individuals internalize such rules and are often unaware of their cultural relativism until a group with other rules is encountered, and even in these situations it is often difficult for an individual to change his way of thinking (see [Graham et al. 2013](#)). One way to extract data that might help in constructing hypotheses to test would be to study changes in weaponry over time and space ([Aoyama and Graham 2015](#)). In this volume, Abtosway and McCafferty’s chapter is a gold mine of information on weapons associated with warfare. One weapon of interest that reflects rules of engagement is the bow and arrow. Abtosway and McCafferty question the assumption that the bow and arrow is a late introduction to Mesoamerica, but with regard to the Maya, bow and arrow technology—if not a late introduction per se—was not widely adopted until quite late. At sites with which I am familiar in Belize, the small side-notched points that reflect bow and arrow use do not appear in quantity until the Late Postclassic or even the Spanish colonial period ([Graham 2011: 252](#); [Simmons 1995](#)). Aoyama reports arrow points at Copan as early as the Classic period ([Aoyama 1999](#)) and at Aguateca in the Terminal Classic ([Aoyama 2005](#)), although the quantities are relatively small compared to larger-sized points (atlatls, thrusting spears). Abtosway and McCafferty suggest that the differential representation of atlatls and bows and arrows relates to cultural practice or, in my terms, rules of engagement.

What is called for with regard to the adoption of both side-notching (of any size point—spears, atlatls, or arrows) and the bow and arrow in the Maya lowlands is scrutiny of the archaeological record for occurrences at particular sites at particular times. With regard to the practices of notching, Abtosway and McCafferty make reference to MacNeish and colleagues’ catalogue of projectile points, particularly the “Teotihuacan point” that is said to have been present throughout Mesoamerica from the Classic through the Postclassic period ([MacNeish et al. 1967: 75-76, Fig. 62](#)). What MacNeish and colleagues actually state, however, is that the Teotihuacan points in Mexico seem to appear in the Classic period but are not common until Postclassic times ([1967: 76](#)). If one examines the illustrations of the Teotihuacan points ([1967: Fig. 62](#)), they vary in size; some are flat-based whereas others have a notch taken out of the base, and others have distinctive side-notches. These features are likely to be important reflections of hafting practices. If one views the chronological display of points ([1967: Fig. 34, p. 54](#)), small side-notched points (arrowheads), which form

the bulk of the Teotihuacan points, do not appear until the Venta Salada period, which has a huge time span from ca. A.D. 700 until the conquest—and hence not fully “Classic.”

No small side-notched arrow points appear in the burials associated with the Feathered Serpent Pyramid or the Pyramid of the Moon at Teotihuacan, although arrow points without side-notching are indeed present. Such variation in weaponry almost surely reflects cultural practice, as Abtowsay and McCafferty propose. The time at which particular cultural practices appear in the archaeological record is also important. When cultures clashed, it is possible that, as with the Mayas and Spaniards in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the conflict was not between groups who were closely related culturally ([Webster 2000: 72](#)) but between groups whose rules of engagement—and hence the kinds of violence or even methods of killing that were sanctioned—differed ([Graham et al. 2013](#)).

Helmke, Morton and Peuramaki-Brown ([this volume](#)) discuss raiding in Classic Maya culture. The definition provided by the authors is consonant with the dictionary definition (e.g., the AHD) and with what is generally understood as raiding: a surprise attack by a small armed force, usually with a well-defined, proximate goal. They add that raids serve to demoralize the enemy by pillaging or destroying a location of importance and are often aimed at capturing or killing specific individuals; raids can also be geared to gather intelligence. They provide a wonderful example of a more modern raid that took place in 1883 in southern Belize, when a group of Mopan Maya, who had recently migrated to Belize from San Luis in the Peten region of Guatemala, returned to San Luis under the cover of darkness, seized the statues of their saints and brought them to Belize.

The working assumption that the Classic Maya engaged in raids is not, I think, disputable. If, however, the goals of raiding varied over time and rapid deployment or surprise was a defining factor, as the authors state, then a raid seems to me to represent an elusive phenomenon. The authors offer impressive and productive discussions of important aspects of Maya warfare, such as the acquisition of trophies and the role of captive-taking. Given the concept of warfare I have adopted as my framework, which is that warfare is a kind of competition for which there are rules of engagement (rules can be broken, but they are expected to be adhered to), then raiding is a kind of flexible conflict that can operate outside the rules, and we would not expect a raid to be recorded in monumental texts. A raid would be expected to be subordinate to warfare, or, in some circumstances, to be associated with a

measure of social upheaval but not a major form of inter-polity conflict among the Classic Maya or in Mesoamerica generally.

I concur with Webster's (1975) implication that raiding is less likely to be a mode of inter-group conflict in state-level society because state-level societies would be expected to formalise conflict in ways that would make raiding, if it took place, subordinate to the broader objectives. Whether one considers the Maya to have reached statehood or not, there is ample evidence in inscriptions and representation to show that conflict was formalized, as in the practice among elites of taking captives. Furthermore, if we consider war as a form of competition (a development of the *agon* in Huizinga's [2014: 90] view), then "the surprise, the ambush, the raid, the punitive expedition and wholesale extermination cannot be described as agonistic forms of warfare" (Huizinga 2014: 90), although any such actions could have been seen by the perpetrators to have served in some way as part of the larger struggle.

Raiding would most likely operate in a manner that does not involve state interests or explicit involvement of the state. This was the case in the raid on San Luis, which constituted intra- rather than inter-group conflict. The San Antonio Maya of Belize were not attacking Guatemalan buildings or strongholds, or Guatemalans; instead, they were going back to their former community of San Luis to claim objects that they felt their new community had a right to possess. When this level of attack took place among the Classic Maya, it is doubtful that it would have made its way into formal inscriptions or would be easily detectable archaeologically. With regard to the conflict described by the authors between Tikal and Naranjo, which is recorded in inscriptions, establishment of a camp and resting at a town not far from Naranjo does not sound like a good raiding or surprise strategy, for everyone with eyes and ears must have known what was going on. Rules may have been broken in the endeavor—perhaps the timing during New Year's celebrations, but would not the involvement of two major rulers and all it entails have made the conflict more than a raid?

The section on captive-taking presents a wealth of information on the representation of captives as well as on the symbolism associated with the head of an enemy one has presumably fought and overcome. All of the information seems, however, to support the contention that captive-taking is one of the foundations of warfare. By this I mean that the taking of captives, as a part of war, is a means to an end (wealth, resources) and not an end in



itself (“human sacrifice”). Part of the conundrum may be the authors’ distinction—one that I have made myself—between warfare “to expand or annex territory” and warfare “to capture prisoners . . . to subdue neighboring city-states into networks of tributary indebtedness.” In fact, the goal of warfare in both cases is the same: to increase the wealth or resource access of the people who control a polity. It is the methods or aims used to achieve the goals that differ. Whether resource appropriation is effected by laying claim to a piece of ground and all that entails, or by earning the rights to exact tribute/taxes through capture of (and attendant negotiation with?) an individual who historically has had those rights depends on how the political and economic structure of a society has developed. The political and economic structure will then affect, if not determine, the rules of engagement in war, and captive-taking has to be seen in this context. Otherwise there is the danger, and perhaps the attraction, of perceiving trophy-taking as an end rather than as a symbol of achievement in a larger politico-economic conflict, or worse, resorting to “human sacrifice.” The economic and political context of captive-taking helps to explain why captured individuals figure so prominently in the written and visual corpus. I agree with Helmke and colleagues that the taking of captives was a defining cultural practice among the Maya, but such a practice was not a hallmark of raiding, and raiding was not a primary form of inter-polity conflict.

Bey, Ringle and Gallareta Negrón ([this volume](#)) comment on ways in which the lack of fortifications in the Puuc, with the exception of Uxmal, has been interpreted, and note that some have equated the lack of fortifications with lack of conflict. Lack of fortifications is more likely to reflect rules of engagement, and there is no reason to assume that lack of a defensive wall is an indication of absence of warfare. Even a substantial construction such as Hadrian’s Wall is thought to have served multiple functions: as a symbol of power or imperial identity ([Hingley 2008: 26](#); [Poulter 2008: 103](#)); a frontier mark ([Collingwood 1921](#)); a barrier or elevated walk to guard against raiding and to regulate licit and illicit traffic ([Bidwell 2008: 29](#); [Collingwood 1921](#); [Poulter 2008: 103](#)); and a defensive feature equivalent to a kind of fort wall, although this seems to have proved the most difficult to substantiate ([Bidwell 2008](#)). Bey and colleagues make the excellent point—although they qualify their statement slightly—that conflict can be seen as contributing to the stability of a state. This seems counter-intuitive, but it depends on whether or not rules of engagement are shared among the communities and settlements of the region.

Koontz ([this volume](#)) argues that the organization of military groups and their place in the polity might provide clues to larger-scale military organization and hence indirectly to rules of engagement. Although his analysis is meant to apply to Classic Veracruz, which he describes as a “highly competitive military environment,” the organization of the individuals who do the fighting, or who at least have a role in conflict situations, is important in understanding the nature of warfare anywhere in Mesoamerica. An important point that Koontz makes with regard to the Mexica, which applies also to the Maya, is the idea that military organization is likely to have changed through time. At the same time, Koontz suggests that there are “basic elements that may be seen across most if not all Mesoamerican military systems.” *Why* this should be true is a complex matter. Did the Gulf Coast civilizations set the stage in the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium B.C. so that the basic rules of engagement were theirs and were simply copied by the less powerful? Or, as seems to be the case in many places in world history (see e.g., [Subrahmanyam 2012: 22-23](#) for Afghan, North Indian or East India Company game-changing tactics), did those groups who fought according to rules of engagement in which winning meant killing the most people triumph consistently (the Spaniards being an excellent example) so that incrementally, over time, rules that sanctioned the most killing became shared?

Is it possible to document changes in the rules of engagement in the archaeological record (outside detailing of changes in weaponry)? Haines and Sagabiel ([this volume](#)) discuss the site of Ka’Kabish, where settlement dates from at least the Middle Preclassic to the Postclassic period, although occupation of the site center differs in details from occupation of the settlement zone. Unlike Lamanai, Ka’Kabish appears to have declined dramatically in the early Late Classic period, ca. A.D. 600-750. Haines and Sagabiel suggest that the individuals named and events recorded on Lamanai Stela 9, which date to the early part of the 7<sup>th</sup> century ([Closs 1988](#); [Martin 2016](#); [Pendergast 1988](#); [Reents-Budet 1998](#)), may reflect regional power concentration at the site. During this period, construction efforts continued in the site center at Lamanai but were discontinued at Ka’kabish, whereas in the Late Classic to Terminal Classic transition, both sites witnessed a flurry of activity.

More data will be required to be able to paint a fuller picture, but their scenario is an intriguing possibility. I have suggested, based on archaeological evidence in the form of midden accumulation around and against the Str. N10-27 platform terrace faces ([Graham 2004](#)), that Stela 9 with its early 7<sup>th</sup> century dates was moved from an unknown original

position and re-erected during the first half of the 8<sup>th</sup> century in the central room of the building athwart the stairs of Str. N10-27. Pendergast (1988) on the other hand sees no reason to assume that the stela was not originally erected in the room in A.D. 625, and that the building and the stela stood in place for 150-200 years. The case described by Pendergast implies that the stela represents the lineage in power from the beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> through the first half of the 8<sup>th</sup> century; if re-erected, the same could be true, but there is also the option that Lamanai's 8<sup>th</sup>-century rulers had another reason to make the most of a claim of legitimacy based on a relationship of some sort (blood or affinal ties) or simply a recognition of the sequence of officeholding (Martin 2003: 29) to the individuals named on Stela 9.

The ruler or ruling group that came to power at Lamanai in the latter half of the 8<sup>th</sup> or early 9<sup>th</sup> century did so in an environment that is likely to have included conflict. Fire-damage to the stela (Pendergast 1988) combined with cessation of construction as the building was being modified, dismantling of the upper portions of the building, and slow and deliberate burial of the terraces by midden deposition all suggest a kind of aggressive behaviour that involved changes in cultural priorities. The midden that accumulated reflected a deliberate “dump” of fragmented ceramics, many of which were from fine-ware vessels that may have originated in various ceremonies associated with the N10[3] (“Ottawa”) plaza/courtyard group (Howie 2012). The Terminal Classic ceramics in the midden display aspects of continuity in Late Classic styles (Graham 1987b) and production (Howie 2012). With regard to the Ottawa Group at this time, there were significant changes in construction techniques and orientation of buildings (Graham 2004; Pendergast 1985, 1986), activities that paralleled Ka'Kabish's resurgence. It is interesting that the more drastic change in fine-ware surface treatment at Lamanai occurred in the late 10<sup>th</sup>-early 11<sup>th</sup> century with the manufacture of the Buk-phase Zakpah ceramics (Aimers 2009; Aimers and Graham 2013; Walker 1990), although continuity is reflected in production expertise (Howie 2012). There are no texts on these ceramics that can be recognized, at least thus far, as linked to war, but the question remains: Was conflict responsible for a change in the individuals at the top of the community's hierarchy, and did new ritual practices and tastes require changes in pottery's appearance?

### ***Objects, images, trophies***

Helmke, Morton and Peuramaki-Brown's discussion of trophies raises the important issue of symbols and their meanings, and the authors introduce a number of ideas worth pursuing.

That skulls among the Classic Maya can be considered trophies makes sense—the taking of heads as trophies after combat, particularly hand-to-hand combat, is not uncommon in world history and is not particular to the Americas (see [Ikegami 1995: 100-103](#) for the samurai). It is interesting, however, that no one cites soldiers or warriors who took heads in warfare in medieval Europe or Japan as “head hunters.” People engage in conflict for a range of reasons, and the taking of a head represents—or is symbolic of—an individual’s success in combat. Whether or not the individual who takes the head has gained resources or a wife or has fulfilled an important social role in killing someone as part of the conflict ([Vilaça 2010: 13](#)), the trophy head is a *symbol* of something else. It is the *something else* that is the crux of the matter. To say that people are motivated by obtaining heads or that they fight for trophies would be somewhat like saying that it didn’t matter in a sport today if an individual never competed in the game at all but instead purchased a cup or a figure on a stand in a trophy shop in the belief that it is the object, and not the game, that counts.

Hernandez and Palka ([this volume](#)) provide both detail and insight in their discussion of the role of meaningful objects and places in war. Consulting divine beings, often represented by images as in the cases of Cozumel and Noh Peten, seems to have been an important part of Maya (and many other cultural groups’) behavior in times of crisis. Thus it is not difficult to understand the importance of the shrine dedicated to the Virgin in Cancuc in Chiapas in the revolt of 1712, or the talking cross in the Guerra de Castas. The discussion of the Jakaltek association of lightning with war nicely dovetails Bassie-Sweet’s and Bey, Ringle, and Gallaretta’s references ([this volume](#)) to *Chahk*. That notions of the sacred and their material manifestations influenced Maya warfare seems well supported by what we know of conflict, both ancient and modern. In fact, the outcome of armed conflict could well have been viewed by all those involved as determined by the sacred. In European history, the waging of war was often seen as a way “to obtain a decision of holy validity” ([Huizinga 2014: 91](#)).

The important and often neglected idea that landscapes can be objectified as symbols is exemplified by Hernandez and Palka’s proposal that the mass (secondary) burial at Zacpeten is archaeological evidence for an attack on spiritual forces and disruption of communication with the deceased. Even if the mass burial should turn out to reflect a different sort of event, their example works powerfully in getting us to think of how people might use a ritual landscape to convey a message of dominance.

Objects and images are clearly meaningful, but what we see as an object, such as a statue or effigy that is not part of our cultural repertoire, would in Maya eyes be a symbol not just of a deity or spirit but of all that the deity stands for in its long relationship with individuals and the community, as in the case of Catholic saints (Graham 2011). The destruction of the statue of Saddam Hussein in Firdos Square described by Hernandez and Palka symbolized triumph because it stood for the downfall of Saddam Hussein, his regime and its history. We attribute agency to objects yet, in the case of the Maya, because we are outsiders, we must be extremely cautious in treating objects themselves as powerful. Villagutierre Soto-Mayor (1983) seems to attribute such power to an object in his description of an Itzaj “idol” which he reports (from the Spanish point of view) as being consulted by the Maya at a time of war (de Villagutierre Soto-Mayor 1983: 315). From the Maya point of view, the ritual or cultural practice of “consultation” would very probably be found to be inextricable from political or economic or religious motives for conflict. In the same way, the statue of Saddam Hussein was not erected by his supporters because the image itself had power but rather because the image symbolized a history of his dominance; its destruction symbolized the end of that dominance. I agree that success in war is related to the preservation of a community’s sacred places and images, but the destruction or preservation of a sacred place or image is a reflection or consequence of the complex dynamics of competition or conflict. Destruction or preservation of an image is more a symptom than cause.

### *Their own metaphors*

I think we can, with little opposition, proceed on the assumption that the Maya, and indeed all Mesoamerican peoples, had as part of their conceptual systems a wealth of metaphors that they used to make sense of their experience (Lakoff and Johnson 1989). Assuming that many meanings were conventional, shared, and preserved in ritual (Lakoff and Johnson 1989: 109; 234-235), we should be able to develop hypotheses concerning what representations symbolize and test to see whether these interpretations continue to be supported over time. On the other hand, people, including artists, are influenced by other cultures over time, and individuals themselves can add degrees of interpretation. Probably the most we can do is to establish flexible rather than rigid frameworks of interpretation and repeatedly test their strengths.

Bassie-Sweet’s discussion (this volume) of the Classic Maya gods of flint and obsidian, *Chahk* and *Tlaloc* respectively, integrates into a comprehensible package what can seem to be

disparate connections of these deities to materials (flint, obsidian), products (fire, in both cases), celestial phenomena (thunder/rain, meteors), and human action. The idea that action can only take place through some kind of material medium reinforces the importance of making these connections (Graeber 2001: 83). We might reverse this (*pace* Graeber) and state that the medium, or range of media, cannot be understood without taking the action into account. Bassie-Sweet proposes that Tlaloc was associated with war. If we consider, as discussed in the Introduction, that our concept of “war” has roots in a range of ideas broader than simply hostile contention by armed forces, then we can expand on Bassie-Sweet’s insight and suggest that Chahk and Tlaloc are ideas that arise out of people’s attempts to categorise or conceptualize friction or conflict more broadly in the material world (e.g., like the old meaning of *werre* as confusion, disorder, disturbance, perplexity). Flint and its association with fiery, noisy thunder and obsidian and its association with the burning up of meteors can then both be seen to serve as metaphors for behaviours that include, but can be broader than, our notion of warfare.

Bassie-Sweet’s proposal that the Early Classic lineages acquired Tlaloc effigies from Teotihuacan as emblematic of patron war gods, and that the Wi’tē’naah (also Winte’naah) structures in the Maya area, closely associated with Tlaloc imagery, were temples dedicated to Tlaloc and his avatars is closely argued. How did lineages in the Maya area, however, acquire Tlaloc associations? Some sort of conflict seems to have been involved—with westerners initiating the conflict with the Maya. Who were these westerners? They could have come from ruling lineages or families originating in Teotihuacan or perhaps they represented a broader spectrum of people with socio-cultural affiliations to Teotihuacan and its area of influence. Once they intermarried with individuals from whatever city or area was targeted, it stands to reason that only particular families could claim an association with the western lineage(s), which would indeed complicate developing hierarchies among the ruling elite. Such interactions would also introduce a level of competition that could have formed the roots of conflict in which rules of engagement were disputed.

Other intriguing implications arise from the idea that the title of *Kaloomte’*—or at least the title as it would come to be known and advertised in the Maya area—was restricted in its distribution. Could the title as conceptualized have originated outside the Maya lowlands? The first time the title is known is via its association with Sihyaj K’ahk’ at Tikal (Martin and Grube 2008; Stuart 2000, 2004), and Bassie-Sweet highlights its association with Tlaloc

imagery and hence with war and conquest. With the distinctive history of the Tlaloc iconography and the Kaloomte' title, we may be looking at a particular kind of war. By this I mean that conflict, in the sense implied by the Kaloomte' title, may have entailed rules of engagement that were not universal and differed from rules of conflict in places where individuals (of other lineages?) would or could not claim to have "entered Wi'te'naah" or to have used the Kaloomte' title. To have been meaningfully read or recognized among elites, however, the significance of the title had to have some history in the lowlands, and we ought to consider (even without direct evidence) the existence of a good deal of Preclassic highland-lowland interaction.

Bassie-Sweet also discusses the overlap between Tlaloc and God L, both associated with obsidian, but she states that it is Tlaloc that is associated with war and God L with merchants. Perhaps the connection is not so distinct, and the imagery she describes also represents links between merchants, acquisition of resources, and conflict or disruption. We might then consider that the title of Kaloomté reflects a rank associated with success or conquest that historically (having developed in its region of origin) conflated conflict (or achievement) with acquisition of new resources and perhaps also with a particular pattern of resource redistribution. In western history, we have only to look at the activities of the East India Company to remember how closely interconnected are conflict and trade ([Dalrymple 2002](#); [Robins 2012](#)).

Place names have significance on several levels, but there is little question that the metaphors used by the Maya for places and titles are difficult for a cultural outsider to interpret. [Tokovinine's](#) discussion (this volume) revolves around frequencies of place names in the context of warfare. Although his discussion is not centred on warfare, this is an advantage, because warfare is not a phenomenon that can fruitfully be considered apart from socio-cultural phenomena.

Tokovinine ([2013](#)) has identified toponyms that may be linked to specific locales within Maya cities and towns, and his research leaves little question regarding the importance of power of place in Maya narratives, and indeed in Maya life. Identifying place names, however, seems not to be without problems. *Oox-kul*, for example, one of the names associated with "Sky Witness" who attacked Palenque, lacks, according to Tokovinine, the morphological attributes of a toponym and does not appear outside the context of the *Kanu'l*

lords. It is possible that it was once a toponym, perhaps even a narrowly circumscribed one, but became a title, although this would be difficult to prove on present evidence. I mention it because the use of these names over time, whatever their origin, is likely to reflect changing hierarchical relationships among lords and rulers, and the stimulus to such changes is as likely conflict as anything else.

Tokovine highlights that the most frequent land categories are *kab* and *ch'een*, with *ch'een* referring to places that are considered “holy” or special to particular lineages and linked to ancestral grounds, and *kab* referring more broadly to people or places under the sway of a particular ruler or lineage. Places are usually not classified as *kab* but *kab* may belong to places in the way that social and political entities can be associated with places. This seems to me to imply strongly that even where places can be identified, they are intimately linked to people, which reinforces the idea that the taking of territory or land per se was not visualized or actualized as a dynamic in Maya conflict.

*Ch'ahkaj* may refer, based on Tokovine's description, to an effect of conflict rather than to conflict itself. This would explain its dissociation from military victory. It is an enigmatic term, and may have to do with the abrupt ending or curtailing of the power of a lineage, or the manner in which such an ending occurred. “War” may have been only one of the possible conditions under which *ch'ahkaj* could occur; alternative conditions might have been other socially sanctioned categories of competition or conflict. With *jubuuuy*, the implication (my suggestion and not Tokovine's) is that a large number of the enemy lords were captured—hence the phenomenon of a “fall” or “toppling” of the rule of a king—so that the community would have to undergo considerable restructuring at the hands of the victors.

### ***It's a family affair***

Let us consider for the moment the possibility that place names and people's names may not be entirely distinguishable from each other. As in the cases of the royal houses of Europe, place names can be family names, individuals can be named after places, and reference to places may reflect history rather than geography (see discussion in [Martin 2014: 207-211](#)). A good example is one of the oldest royal houses of Europe, the House of Wettin ([Helbig 1980](#)). “Wettin” in the “House of Wettin” refers both to a place (or at least a “mythical” place in that it was once long ago a municipality but is now a town) and to a dynasty. In this particular case, the family who ultimately built the dynasty originated in a place called



“Wettin” in what is now Germany, and they came to be called “Wettins.” Through time, however (they ruled for almost a millennium), the title “Wettin” came nowhere near covering the territories over which the family had power. In 1422, one of the Wettins, Frederick IV, received the Duchy of Saxe-Wittenberg from the then-emperor. Frederick’s title had been Frederick IV of the House of Wettin, Margrave of Meissen and Landgrave of Thuringia, but with the new duchy, he became Frederic I, Elector of Saxony. What is interesting is that Frederick used the Saxony title and applied it to all of his domains, even those that were in Thuringia. He took this step because the Saxony title was a ducal title, the most prestigious title the family possessed; all family members and their descendants used the title even though many of them held land (or had rights to resources from land) that was in Thuringia and not in Saxony at all. We can imagine that it gets even more complicated through time as titles are passed on and lands are split between sons.

Being able to read the proper nouns in any text (titles, names, dynasties, houses or places) is only a beginning. Whether a noun is a title or a place or a “house” or some or all of these things can only become known as more knowledge is accumulated regarding local and regional histories. Titles do not always represent control of place; the title of “Elector” in the case I have described meant that the titleholder had a vote in the election of the Holy Roman Emperor. Another fascinating example is “Duchy,” a term used almost exclusively in Europe. Apparently duchies are no longer sovereign, meaning that the title of “Duke” does not come with rule of a territory (although it can come with rights to income) except in the single case of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg. The Duchy of Cornwall generates income for the Duke (the Prince of Wales) but he has no political power in or over Cornwall. What can we learn from these examples? We need simply to keep in mind how complex the socio-political landscape can be. More knowledge can only come from more texts, but we should nonetheless continue to ask questions based on a wide range of possibilities, some of them generated by known histories of ruling families elsewhere in the world. How many Classic-period lineages owed their prestige and economic clout to claims of relationship to founding lineages? Were various individuals and families—including perhaps families outside the lowlands—scrambling since Preclassic times either to share rights through marriage or to acquire rights through conflict? Was social exclusion one of the strategies used by lowland dynasties to dominate access to resources and services? If so, was supporting a change in the rules of engagement a justifiable reaction?

### **History, culture, and empire**

Several points have been made about the passage of time and its potentially confounding effect on our attempt to understand terms that refer to people, to the claims they make through their titles, and to the ways they describe their actions or achievements. Culture and beliefs were also factors; if combatants did not share cultural values, they might not focus on the etiquette of titles or at least on the etiquette of the rules of the enemy. In some cases, different sorts of conflict or competition and hence references to conflict, competition, or places may have depended on the cultural practices and values of who was fighting. Our use of the term “Maya” is balanced in favour of an expectation of uniformity. It also encourages us to think about who or what was “foreign” strictly in terms of places, when long-term family and lineage ties may have made foreigners of locals.

Nielsen’s chapter ([this volume](#)) argues for the existence of a Teotihuacan empire, and his discussion encourages us to think deeply about Mesoamerican interaction. He describes Teotihuacan as an imperial state that held sway in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries, and he is not alone (see [Coe 2012: 30, 140](#)). That power was amassed by people and families who originated—or at least built a historical base—in the central Mexican highlands is not doubted. The lack of an overarching political system structurally different from the cities it controlled and the absence of a state-managed economy or extensively managed territorial boundaries ([Blanton et al. 1993: 17, 223-224](#)) all indicate that if Teotihuacan can be said to have ruled an empire then, like the Aztec empire, it was hegemonic, as Nielsen makes clear. The nature of Teotihuacan hegemony has, however, been somewhat elusive in that military takeover has been harder to prove than cultural influence. Nielsen has added significantly to the data from Tikal and Copan on *entradas* by proposing that aspects of Teotihuacan iconography in some places in Mesoamerica—he uses El Rosario in Queretaro as an example—reflect military takeovers and not just Teotihuacan influence. Teotihuacan influence takes a number of forms—ceramics, architectural preferences, design styles, weaponry—and the significance of the presence of these features outside of Teotihuacan has long been a subject of debate ([Braswell 2003](#)). Nielsen describes images of individuals who carry shields, darts, and flaming torches and who seem to be speaking or singing about war and death. He argues that the flaming torch signifies the installation of a new ruler, and its appearance in men’s headdresses marks the presence of Teotihuacanos outside of Teotihuacan. His case is more detailed and subtle than I have represented it here, but the important point is that he sees the iconographic evidence he has marshalled as adding to the existing evidence for wider

Teotihuacan military action and hence as support for the existence of a short-lived but powerful Teotihuacan empire.

His argument is strong and closely argued, and if hegemons are defined as powers that seek dominance but not the establishment of boundaries around appropriated territory, then Teotihuacan fits the bill. My only comments are that references to “human sacrificial victims” should be re-evaluated in light of the possibility that rules of engagement in warfare involved death by heart removal, and that we consider that those who brought Teotihuacan culture and values—warriors or merchants or eligible marriage partners—to areas outside of central Mexico may have come from “Teotihuacanized” families in the broader region rather than solely from Teotihuacan.

To address the question of the dynamics of such an empire, we would need to consider a number of points already discussed. The main one is that not just Maya but also Mesoamerican political systems were based on interpersonal obligations (taxes, tribute, income from commerce) rather than direct annexation of territory and attendant resources. If the central Mexicans were, in deeper history, originally migrants from regions to the north of the Valley of Mexico, their own power politics may have been different from what they found in Mesoamerica, but they would have been heavily influenced—particularly in order to access positions of power—by much older traditions already in place and developed earlier along the Gulf Coast. The imperial iconography described by Nielsen is distinctively “Teotihuacano” on the one hand—spearthrowers, darts, square shields—but the use of shell extensively in headdresses reflects influence from people with ready access to marine resources.

Like “Maya”, the term “Teotihuacano” can be a hindrance. Experimentally, we might consider erasing from our minds the idea of a Teotihuacan ruling family sending out sons in pursuit of empire but instead try to imagine Teotihuacan and its rulers over time. Whatever families were in power in central Mexico, they had increasing numbers of descendants who married into other families--some from Teotihuacan itself, some from outlying cities, some perhaps from as far away as the Gulf Coast--representing the commercial reach of the great city. Perhaps at some point, most of the alliances close to home had already been made, which meant that new opportunities lay largely in venturing into territories farther afield. Those mentioned by Nielsen include Kaminaljuyu, Tikal, Copan, Guerrero, the Pacific coast

of Oaxaca, Monte Alban, Chiapas, southern Guatemala, Hidalgo, Queretaro, Guanajuato, and Michoacan. This spread alone suggests that we are looking at enterprising individuals or groups—and by this I mean warriors as well as merchants—and not an imperial army. Indications are that these individuals shared a range of cultural values that were manifested metaphorically in material things. Those noted by Nielsen are spearthrowers, darts, square shields, the shell-platelet headdress, a headdress with human hearts, back mirrors, and torches. Individuals who shared these cultural emblems, and hence practices, need not have been part of a united front, and in fact it is highly likely that they were not. Both Nielsen (2003: 251-53) and Filini (2004), among others, have observed that Teotihuacan's role appears to have had different levels of intensity in different places.

That the Teotihuacan imprint results from the spread of individuals seeking fortune and power is strongly suggested by Nielsen's observation of the short-lived but widespread Teotihuacan phenomenon. If individuals, their retinues, and ultimately their (new) families and descendants were the "culprits" displaying Teotihuacan-related cultural symbols rather than individuals who represented state interests in seeking to widen territorial boundaries, then short-lived influence is just what we would expect. The trade, tribute and commercial advantages acquired during this period of opportunity could well have continued for years. Residence of cultural Teotihuacanos in Oaxaca or Michoacan or at Tikal or Copan, as well as variation in their places or families of origin, would result in the selective display of images, even if most images were martial, and eventually the disappearance of some, but perhaps not all, of the Teotihuacan symbols that were characteristic of an earlier era in central Mexico and its region of influence. The idea of individual or small-group acts of acquisition or aggression integrates well with Nielsen's suggestion that the symbol of the flaming torches represents a ceremony that legitimized new rule. As Nielsen proposes, the ceremony would have marked a point in time when resources and services supplied through tribute and taxes under the old order were re-directed to the advantage of a new ruler or ruling order. Where the torch-headdress is displayed, as in the case of Yax Nuun Ahiin I at Tikal and as worn by the figure on the polychrome vessel from Michoacan, the power of its symbolism seems, over time, to derive from its use by descendants as a title rather than from its direct attribution to a Teotihuacan emissary.

Accoutrements such as dart throwers, darts and shields certainly represent conflict, and it is difficult to deny that aggression figured in Teotihuacan's dominance. Nielsen quotes Hirth

and Angulo (1981: 137), who draw a connection between Teotihuacan presence and areas of desirable resources. If rights to resources and trade were the goal, several methods are likely to have been used to bring about change in favor of the outsiders. Outsiders came with knowledge of their home territory and its commercial links, and likely maintained ties to people in central Mexico or the Gulf Coast who circulated materials that would have been valued by Maya rulers and their families and were not accessible in Peten or Honduras. Marriage into a Maya ruling family was probably the most desirable option. Even if only trade alliances were established in the first instance, it is hard to imagine that anyone hailing from Teotihuacan or the surrounding region who resided in a Maya community for any length of time would not have married locally. Trade alliances with people from central Mexico, the Gulf Coast and other areas probably preceded the better known Teotihuacan connections recorded in texts, perhaps by many years, so that whoever arrived at Tikal in the 4<sup>th</sup> century was not a total stranger.

By the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D., if local rulers chose for one reason or another to resist commercial intrusion of individuals or groups from central Mexico, conflict may have been the only option, although the nature of the conflict leaves us with questions about rules of engagement. Adoption of Teotihuacan or central Mexican symbolism—if not the result of marriage alliance in which the child took on the symbolism of the parent's culture—suggests not only that Maya (and other Mesoamerican) forces lost whatever battles were waged, but also that they may have been forced to change their rules of martial engagement in the process, in which case new weapons, such as darts and spear throwers, were adopted (Aoyama and Graham 2015). Although we might not expect the imagery used by conquerors to be internalized by the conquered, this would depend on how Mesoamerican groups interpreted victory and loss. Christenson ([this volume](#)) provides an example in the Tz'utujil adoption of Santiago and the Virgin Mary as protectors; he reports a conversation in which a traditional Tz'utujil priest admitted that Santiago and Mary were once foreigners but were now Tz'utujils and spoke only Tz'utujil.

Bey, Ringle, and Gallareta, like Nielsen, discuss militarism in art; in their case the region is the Puuc. They emphasize the great time depth of occupation in the Puuc region, and especially the scale of Middle Preclassic architecture. They observe that some sites were “small,” but perishable architecture was almost certainly an important element of towns and villages of the time, hence zones of occupation may have extended well beyond the

recognized masonry-built cores. The implications of early settlement are, as the authors emphasize, that conflict would have had a role in the history of the region. Thus Bey and his colleagues put to rest—one hopes permanently—the idea that the Puuc rise was made possible by collapse in the south. Instead, post-A.D. 800 growth reflects internal processes that included conflict with roots in the Preclassic. Additionally, the rulership thought to have evolved in the 9<sup>th</sup> century actually manifested itself in the early 8<sup>th</sup> century—before the purported migration of southerners.

### ***Socially sanctioned killing***

It seems to have become almost universally accepted, as articulated by Hernandez and Palka, that in addition to being a way to increase power, war was also “a source of captives that were central to ancient Maya religion, which required the sacrifice of human blood to spiritual forces.” Part of the wide support in our field for the idea that the Maya practiced human sacrifice comes from the very fact that we accord viability to the term “religion.” We agree that something called “religion” subsumes motivations that can be heuristically separated from politics or economics or greed (Graham 2011: 66-71) and then use the term to subsume a practice which *we* see as “human sacrifice.” Not only is there no known ancient Mayan (or Nahuatl) word in the texts that can be definitely interpreted as human sacrifice (Graham and Golson 2008); neither did the Maya conceptualize “religion” as a category (Pharo 2007). We are so accustomed to “religion” as a concept that we do not question its use, yet an argument can be made that the term arose in the West in a growing multi-cultural milieu as a means of categorizing and making sense of the practices of an “other.” This does not make it wrong so much as historically and culturally contingent.

Competition in the Maya world can be assumed to have materialized, at least in one form, as conflict, particularly war. War involves socially sanctioned killing, which is not unusual globally today or in history. War provides, in fact, the most popular rationale for killing people and getting away with it. To remove any room for moral doubt, societal leaders bring in a god or a fight against “evil” and killing becomes a duty. If we can for a moment get out of our heads that there was ever any such thing as human sacrifice, we might see that textual evidence presents a good case for tying the sanctioning of killing among the Maya to conflict in war. Add to this the points made above about resource appropriation being dependant on tribute, taxes and services historically owed to individuals (rather than based on direct control or ownership of land per se), and we can see the common depictions of captives and captive-

taking as support for the argument that killing people was a consequence of conflict. Such conflict was most often played out on the field as war but may also have been played out in certain circumstances on the ball court, as discussed above and suggested by Koontz ([this volume](#)) in his emphasis on the importance of the way the ballgame and warfare articulated on the Mexican Gulf Coast.

Koontz notes that much attention has been given to ballcourt iconography associated with decapitation. He draws attention to a panel in El Tajin's main ball court which depicts a rite that relates to martial matters. The panel has a supernatural emerging with three spears from a zoomorphic mouth and handing the spears to a human in the center of the composition. Koontz interprets this as supernatural donation of weaponry, but an alternative interpretation is that it symbolizes the gods' legitimization and hence sanctioning of killing in war.

Koontz also discusses the distinctive war banner or standard associated with El Tajin. Rites involving the display of banners or standards, such as the ball game, are thought to have been linked to the return of a successful military expedition. Koontz presents a strong argument for the presence of banner rituals at both elite and non-elite levels, involving the plaza of the Pyramid of the Niches and its associated architecture, and suggests that such rituals reflect more than one level of military organization. He admits that such an association cannot yet be proved, but military organization was almost certainly complex, and banner rites and their associated iconography seem excellent candidates for generating viable hypotheses about levels of military organization and their significance. What is also intriguing in his discussion is the linking of the imagery of an individual holding a banner on an Early Classic stela with Teotihuacan. Thus Teotihuacan, or individuals who shared the cultural values of Teotihuacan, loom large as the source of a particular kind or kinds of conflict practices.

### ***Where do we go from here?***

This volume explores Maya hostilities through the epigraphic and iconographic record and hence is an attempt at an emic perspective on warfare. It may then be asked why I, an archaeologist, am contributing, for I am by no means an epigrapher or art historian. The editors intended specifically, however, to include contributions that drew on archaeological materials, ancient texts, and images to provide a view of conflict from the Maya perspective. I am not Maya, but I have attempted, based on the points made by contributors to the volume, to approach warfare by asking the most basic of questions about why people fight in groups,

why they fight other groups, what constitutes winning, and how all this meshes with people's life goals such as prosperity, wealth, and in some cases, power.

I draw from the chapters in the volume to propose several ways forward. In the first instance, we should continue to broaden our ideas about what constituted conflict and competition in societies and cultures other than our own. Turning to Asian warfare would be a good start because, at least in what are known today as China and Japan, the term "religion" did not exist until contact with the West (Bowie 2000: 22, n23), and the role of the warrior and his defeat or capture have significance very different from such roles in western warfare. Literature on South Asian warfare includes studies of a range of social, political, strategic, and individual motivations behind fighting, which are often simplified in later accounts as "religious" (Gommans 2002; Subrahmanyam 2012). Study of the region might provide models that would stimulate new questions about Maya warfare.

Perhaps the most important way forward would be to cease employing the terms "sacrifice" or "human sacrifice" as if they were explanatory. If we know that an individual was killed, we should simply say so, and cite the evidence. In many circumstances we will find, as has been the case in cave research, that there is often no clear evidence that people were killed, let alone "sacrificed" (Wrobel et al. 2014). Use of the term "human sacrifice" brings with it assumptions that are rarely questioned, especially when it comes to violence and the sacred (Girard 1972). I have drawn here on archaeological evidence, texts and images to propose that the killing so widely described as human sacrifice was sanctioned as an inevitable part of what we today would call war. The fact that the killing did not take place on the "battlefield" does not exclude it from the category of conflict or war; it simply excludes it from our own metaphors.

Once "human sacrifice" is laid aside and we take on more fully the idea that wealth is embedded in individuals and their relationships--including the tribute and taxes owed to them--and once we have explored non-western models of what it means to be captured in war, we can begin to look at the naming and depictions of captives as primarily a reflection economic and political goals. This is not to deny that some sort of spiritual or other-worldly underpinning was involved but only that "religion" was the icing on a cake that was already baked.



Although I do not have expertise in deciphering texts, it may not be out of order to emphasize that, despite the common language of Maya inscriptions, we are likely to be dealing with groups in the lowlands that self-identified not as “Maya” but according to their city, home town, or village ([Restall 1997](#)); according to their family connections or group affiliations; or according to their status in society. There were probably a number of bases for hostilities. Without explicit details in texts, it is difficult to know how to improve analytical strategies, except to keep in mind that cultural variation in either space or time is possibly responsible for variable references to conflict or its consequences ([Tokovinine, this volume](#)). Thinking about rules of engagement is also important. Where groups agreed on rules of engagement, we might expect texts (perhaps upholding a tradition in titles) and archaeology (continuing construction in cities; common weaponry) to reflect this. Rules were, however, subject to change as the result of contacts with new people and cultures. In the case of culture clash, via technology or tactics, the side that has the stronger rationale for killing or disabling the larger number of people--an area in which supernatural sanctioning looms large--will come out ahead. Thus older cultural traditions in fighting must either mesh with the new or be rejected, a process that continues in our own times. We can therefore enrich our understanding of Maya warfare from texts, iconography and archaeology by continuing to broaden our ideas about what has come to constitute conflict and competition in our own culture, society, and history.

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