

Adela Breton and the Temple of the Jaguar

A Victorian perspective on the art of Chichén Itzá.



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Abstract

This study has three aims: to assess the archaeological significance of Adela Breton's work; to explore the relationship between Breton's perspective and her paintings; and to evaluate the research potential of the Breton collection in light of this evidence. To date, no investigation has considered the value of the Breton collection in relation to Breton's own ideals and experiences. This thesis therefore seeks to extend prior work to approach this gap in the literature, putting visual culture theories into practice that have yet to be applied to a Western case. The study uses a qualitative approach, analysing key elements of interdisciplinary research to evaluate how far Breton's perspective influences the significance of her work. To illustrate these ideas, reproductions of murals from a specific temple at Chichén Itzá is used as a case study to tangibly develop the thesis argument. Following this method of approach, the findings reveal that Breton's subjective experience of Mesoamerica as a Victorian, woman, artist and traveller is imperative to the importance and understanding of her work. The culmination of this thesis prompts a re-thinking of how visual culture theory can be used to further archaeological knowledge, and there is significant potential for future study.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Opening statement

This dissertation argues that Adela Breton was a pioneering archaeologist whose unique perspective is invaluable to the field of Mesoamerican archaeology.

Breton was a woman artist, traveller and collector in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and the Breton collection is an accumulation of her paintings and archaeological finds from her travels to Mexico. This collection includes several full-colour watercolour copies of pre-Columbian Mesoamerican wall paintings, in some cases the only surviving record of these artefacts. The collection was bequeathed to Bristol Museum by Breton upon her death in 1923 (McVicker, 2005, p.51), where it currently resides.

This thesis aims to examine the Breton watercolours within the frame of archaeological concepts, and through them evaluate the significance of Breton's work as an archaeological resource.

The introductory chapter will set out previous research on the topic, present the purpose and background of the case study, outline the framework and preliminary research questions, and summarise the structure of the thesis.

1.2 Adela Breton: Established research

The existing literature on Adela Breton is extremely limited. A general chronology of her life has been established, but neither her character nor her work have been examined critically in past studies.



Figure 1: Photograph of Adela Breton (1849-1923) [top right] with her mother Elizabeth d'Arch Breton (1820-1874), her father Commander William Breton (1799-1889) and her father's twin brother, General Henry Breton (1799-1887) (n.d.).

Adela Breton was born into an upper-class military family, and had an educated upbringing. Her father, William Henry Breton, was a member of the Royal Navy who had also taken an interest in archaeology (McVicker, 2005, p.10). His published travel writing was “surprisingly non-judgemental and unpatronizing for that time” (*ibid.*, p.3), which may have shaped Breton’s own attitudes towards Mesoamerican culture. Not much is known about Breton’s artistic background, but as a young woman of the Victorian upper-class she would have been educated in ‘cultured’ activities such as drawing, singing, needlecraft, and piano-playing (Casteras, 2005,

p.12; Nunn, 1987, p.5). Art was considered a desirable and ‘genteel’ pastime (Casteras, 2005, p.12) – the middle classes were discouraged from advancing beyond amateur levels, as upper-class women were believed to have refined tastes by nature (Nunn, 1987, p.5). However, it is known that Breton pursued art beyond what was required of her by high society (McVicker, 2005, p.7); far from cultivating a fashionable hobby, she used it as a tool to further scientific enquiry.

While this information is supported by the general literature concerning women artists in Victorian and Edwardian England, Breton herself has received little attention, and no attempts have been made to integrate her into wider discussion.

This thesis seeks to address the deficiency through targeted research, critically assessing the significance of the Breton reproductions as archaeological resources, and exploring the implications of Breton’s perspective on the evaluation of her work.

1.3 Purpose and background of the case study

Due to the 1:1 scale of the mural reproductions, the Breton collection is not available for study in its entirety. Digitization of the artefacts is an ongoing process, and access is restricted to pieces on open exhibition, illustrations in published works, and the images that are currently available in the museum’s online catalogue. As such, the theories and concepts of discussion will be applied to a case study to highlight aspects of Breton’s work in a specific example; though many pieces within the collection could provide valuable insight, Breton’s reconstructions of the wall paintings of the Upper Temple of the Jaguar at Chichén Itzá are not only available resources, but also archaeologically significant – these murals “may well have been the most important paintings at Chichen” (M. Miller, 1999, p.184) – and the high quality of Breton’s copies allows for an in-depth study of the demonstrated artistic

conventions. Nevertheless, the concepts discussed by this thesis can be applied across all of Breton's works.

To facilitate a critical analysis of the case study, the thesis is constructed on a grounding of established Maya archaeology. Advances in the study of the Maya have been considerable in the last decade (Coe, 2011, p.7), aided by new technological developments – as recently as February this year, Inomata *et al.* (2017) used radiocarbon dating and Bayesian analysis at the site of Ceibal, Guatemala, to prove that there was a Preclassic social collapse around 150-300 CE following a similar pattern to that of the later and better-documented Classic collapse around 800-900 CE. The Preclassic period, lasting from 2000 BCE to 250 CE, saw the widespread development of agriculture, great city complexes, pyramids and temples throughout Mesoamerica (Coe, 2011, p.26). The pre-Columbian cultures of Mesoamerica are now known to have shared many customs, including a diet rich in maize, pantheistic religion, cosmic calendars, books and paper, hieroglyphs, human sacrifice, and a rubber ball game played in a special court (Coe, 2011, p.13). These similarities are thought to be the result of a culture of common origin, widely accepted as the Olmec civilisation (Coe, 2011, p.14) – though more immediate Maya roots may lie with the Izapan culture of the first century BCE (Tedlock, 1996, p.22). Coe describes the legacy of the Olmec as a “matrix of cultural evolution and diffusion” leading to the development of distinct Mesoamerican civilisations (2011, p.14). The Maya emergence has been dated to the Early Classic period, between 300 and 600 CE (Tedlock, 1996, p.22), and the lowland Maya, located in the Peten Basin and Yucatán Peninsula (Coe, 2011, p.16), began erecting stone monuments from 250 CE through to 900 CE (*ibid.*, p.26).

The end of the Classic period is marked by a Mayan collapse of social order that occurred around 900 CE (Tedlock, 1996, p.23; Inomata *et al.*, 2017, p.4). Inomata *et al.* state that “social instability started with the intensification of warfare... followed by the fall of multiple centres across the Maya lowlands” between 735 and 810 CE (2017, p.1). Coe refers to this collapse as a ‘cataclysm’ (2011, p.26), suggesting one further cause: a widespread drought from 800 to 1050 CE, peaking in 862 CE (*ibid.*, p.32). Preliminary decline was “followed by a wave of drastic political disintegration throughout the Maya lowlands” (*ibid.*, p.4), and most Classic cities were abandoned or invaded by Mexicans or Mexicanised Maya (*ibid.*, p.26). Many of the centres that had begun to recover during the ninth century fell during the tenth, and “only Chichén Itzá continued as a powerful centre” (Inomata *et al.*, 2017, p.5) on into the Postclassic period, which lasted from 900 CE until the Spanish conquest (Coe, 2011, p.26).

This thesis will use the established information to discuss and apply context to the Chichén Itzá case study, developing the argument that Breton’s work provides valuable insight into the culture because of her unique perspective.

1.4 Thesis argument

The purpose of this thesis has been established as an exploration of the themes of Breton’s work presented in the surrounding literature to substantiate the hypothesis that Breton’s perspective should be considered a valuable archaeological source. This aim will be met through interdisciplinary argument, integrating material culture theory and archaeological concepts of visual culture to assess the academic potential of Breton’s work. Following this line of inquiry, research will seek to address a specific set of questions:

- Is Breton's work a useful archaeological resource?
- Is Breton's perspective unique?
- Do the influences of Breton's period limit her works as informative sources?

These questions are important to focus on because they prompt a thorough assessment of the Breton collection; if Breton's work provides significant archaeological evidence then it can be considered valuable, and a unique viewpoint can be considered valuable input whether impartial or not, but if that provision is limited by outdated information or a prejudiced view, then the value of the evidence is consequently reduced.

In order to accomplish the goals set out in this chapter, discussion will need to address how far Maya studies have developed since Breton's time, and how her paintings have factored into this process, focusing on the case study as a practical application of the thesis argument.

1.5 Thesis significance

This thesis is of special interest because it is based on a framework of material and visual culture concepts originating from both archaeology and art history. Works of art have only recently begun to be considered as sources of archaeological evidence, and the study of artefacts which occupy this intersection requires the engagement of both disciplines to place them in their full context. Discussion will apply interdisciplinary theories to a real case study, contributing a solid example to the question of how the field might advance.

As the themes explored within this study are not limited to Breton's work, the methodological approach can be applied to other artefacts occupying the same theoretical space, with wide-ranging implications for future study. The thesis also

seeks to acknowledge Breton's work as a valuable contribution towards a better understanding of Mesoamerican artistic traditions. Her watercolour reproductions are useful resources in the study of the art and archaeology of Mexico, but they are also significant artefacts in themselves, and allowing them to be viewed as such acknowledges that they are not exempt from Victorian-Edwardian practices. Finally, this thesis recognises Breton as a significant figure through her contribution to the cause of women within the field, something that remains a relevant issue in the discipline today.

1.6 Outline of dissertation structure

The following chapter will review the literature that forms the basis of the thesis, providing an outline of proposed research methodology. Chapters three and four will embark on a discussion of the context and importance of the case study, addressing Breton's work in its social context and attempting to answer the research questions. Finally, chapter five will summarise and evaluate the conclusions drawn by the previous chapters, reflecting on the dissertation process to provide recommendations for future study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Methodology

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will present an overview of the literature used to discuss and evaluate the Breton collection, followed by an outline of the research methodology. The objective of the literature review is to highlight the key points and identify the gaps in the literature which relate to the thesis argument. Research was targeted towards the integral aspects of the thesis topic. The literature review is structured around this, addressing firstly the literature focusing on Adela Breton and her work. The review will then discuss the basic framework of the thesis, addressing the role of material culture theory and highlighting suggestions towards an archaeological interpretation of the Breton paintings. Discussion will move briefly on to the supporting literature with an evaluation of current groundwork on the Maya, focusing on work of direct relevance to the case study, and finally will address literature that establishes the cultural principles and customs for women artists in the Victorian-Edwardian era, on which basis further discussion may set Breton's circumstances into period context. The supporting literature is restricted to these topics to direct the focus of discussion to reflect the themes of the Breton collection. Access to the literature was limited to published works available in English, prioritising recent work from the 1990s to present, with literature dating to the mid-twentieth century used sparingly and critically, and earlier works used only to demonstrate contemporary prejudices. As a novel approach to the material in question, the current state of knowledge on the subject is piecemeal. The research is therefore built on a foundation of general

information to offset the limitations of working with fragmentary central literature, which is reflected in the structure of the literature review.

2.2 Adela Breton

There are so far two works directly concerning Breton: a museum catalogue by Sue Giles and Jennifer Stewart (*The Art of Ruins: Adela Breton and the Temples of Mexico*, 1989), and a biography by Mary McVicker (*Adela Breton: A Victorian Artist Amid Mexico's Ruins*, 2005). The catalogue contains contributions from multiple authors summarising Breton's accomplishments, with a section devoted to images of her work; the aim is not to convince but to inform, so statements are given little supporting evidence. McVicker's biography, based on this previous publication, goes into greater depth, but as a biographical text places the emphasis on Breton's experiences and relationships, neglecting the fundamentals of her work and contribution to the field. However, Breton authored several papers (republished in Giles and Stewart) which fill this gap, discussing her own insights into Pre-Columbian cultures through their artefacts; she does not discuss her work, but these papers are valuable sources for the nature of her interest in – and contribution to – Mesoamerican archaeology.

Aside from these works, Breton is briefly mentioned in a handful of publications, with a few lines in *The Code of Kings: The Language of Seven Sacred Maya Temples and Tombs* (1999) by Linda Schele and Peter Mathews, a brief credit in *Cenote of Sacrifice: Maya Treasures from the Sacred Well at Chichen Itza* (1984) by Clemency Coggins and Orrin Shane, and in "The Art of War: Imagery of the Upper Temple of the Jaguars, Chichen Itza" (2009) by William Ringle, who describes the latter as "the sole full publication [of Breton's work] in color... but at a scale too small for detailed

discussion” (p.15). Other works omit her altogether – Michael Coe’s *Breaking the Maya Code* (1992) refers to her colleagues Alfred Tozzer and Edward Thompson (p.115-118), discussing their work at Chichén Itzá without mentioning Breton.

George Kubler states in *The Art and Architecture of Ancient America* (1962) that the murals of the Upper Temple can only be studied “in reproductions” (p.202), while Mary Miller’s *Maya Art and Architecture* (1999) describes the paintings in detail, yet fails to credit Breton’s work as a source (p.184-186).

It is clear from this evaluation that a grounding of general information is necessary to supplement research.

2.3 Visual culture theory

This thesis seeks to apply the theoretical underpinnings of material culture to Breton’s paintings, but few authors to date have addressed art as a form of visual artefact. One of the first anthropologists to address this was Clifford Geertz, in his article “Art as a cultural system” (1976), which discussed the place of art in anthropology. Geertz disagreed with the contemporary notion that culture-specific cues are present only in ‘primitive’ art, arguing that Western art is by no means independent of cultural meaning.

Material culture became a discrete discipline in the 1980s; Jules Prown’s article “Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method” (1982) expanded on core concepts, emphasising the prevalence of unconscious cultural assumptions and proposing methodology “based on the proposition that artifacts are primary data” (p.10), and in the introduction to their edited work *The Iconography of Landscape* (1988), Denis Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels link art and the landscape through iconographic study, explaining how to find “meaning in a work of art by

setting it in its historical context” (p.2). This idea is reiterated in social anthropologist Alfred Gell’s pivotal work *Art and Agency* (1998), which proposed a theory of art as both social function and agent, advising that knowing cultural context will facilitate a better understanding of a given piece.

After this groundwork came a secondary literature response that focused on a general interpretation of material culture, as demonstrated in Nicole Boivin’s edited chapter “Mind over matter? Collapsing the mind-matter dichotomy in Material Culture Studies” (2004), which echoed Gell’s concept of art “constituting social relationships” (p.63), and Linda Hurcombe’s 2007 work *Archaeological Artefacts as Material Culture*, which defends visibility as an aspect of the material and highlights the lack of practical case studies as an ongoing issue in the field.

The next wave of literature sought to integrate visibility into material culture theory; Fred Myers’ edited chapter “‘Primitivism’, Anthropology, and the Category of ‘Primitive art’” (2006) emphasised the need to step away from outdated concepts for a better anthropological study of art, and Michael Yonan’s 2011 paper “Toward a Fusion of Art History and Material Culture Studies” reasoned that art history and material culture theory are limited by their isolation, arguing for an integration of the two disciplines with an emphasis on visibility.

The most recent literature has conversely focused on the material aspect of art. *Veiled Brightness: A history of Ancient Maya color* (2009) is useful for its insight into archaeological interpretations of colour, as Stephen Houston, Claudia Brittenham, Cassandra Mesick, Alexandre Tokovinine, and Christina Warinner approach concepts of art through an archaeological lens, reiterating Gell’s ideas of art as a conscious process and social function, and aesthetics as culture-specific. Following

this vein is Chris Horrocks' introductory chapter to *Cultures of colour* (2012), which proposes that colour perception is also culturally and period-specific (p.3).

To conclude, there is an established framework in the literature for approaching art in an archaeological setting, yet it has rarely been put into practice. This thesis seeks to occupy that gap through an adoption of these concepts to facilitate an archaeological interrogation of the Breton paintings.

2.4 The Maya

The Maya civilisation have been covered by some of the foremost scholars in the field. J. Eric S. Thompson was an esteemed archaeologist, but *The Maya Civilisation* (1954) is now largely outdated. Likewise, Kubler's book was written before Breton's work was rediscovered, and predates subsequent significant discoveries.

Nevertheless, these works can be used for basic information, provided their limitations are acknowledged. On the other hand, antiquarian authors John Lloyd Stephens (*Incidents of Travel in Yucatan*, 1843) – whose work is covered only narratively in Peter Koch's book *John Lloyd Stephens and Frederick Catherwood: Pioneers of Mayan archaeology* (2013) but is critically approached in the earlier paper "Landscapes of Indifference: Robert Smithson and John Lloyd Stephens in Yucatán" (2000) by Jennifer Roberts – and Edward Thompson ("Atlantis Not a Myth", 1880) both demonstrate more about the attitudes and circumstances of antiquarian archaeology than providing any insight.

Coe's *The Maya* (2011) is a recent take on a comprehensive overview of Maya history; *Breaking the Maya Code* is more narrative account than informative text, and omits Breton when discussing her contemporaries, but retains some understanding of Maya culture through the language. This work is particularly useful when

considered in conjunction with Dennis Tedlock's translation of the *Popol Vuh* (1996), a primary source for Maya mytho-historical narratives.

Some late twentieth century works focus on Maya visual culture. Arthur Miller's *On the Edge of the Sea* (1982) provides an account of the artistic customs and conventions of Tancah-Tulum, proposing possible social connections with other Yucatán settlements, and M. Miller's work on Maya art is presented in *Maya Art and Architecture* (1999) and *The Art of Mesoamerica* (2001). In recent years, several works have taken a scientific approach to Maya archaeology, as demonstrated by Houston *et al.*'s inclusion of chemistry and etymology in *Veiled Brightness* (2009), and Takeshi Inomata *et al.*'s paper "High-precision radiocarbon dating of political collapse and dynastic origins at the Maya site of Ceibal, Guatemala" (2017).

Despite this evidence for an extensive history of Maya study, few works address the murals of the Upper Temple of the Jaguar. Coggins and Shane (1984) cover the artefacts of the Sacred Cenote in detail, but only give a brief overview of the paintings in question, and use Breton's reproductions to illustrate their points without addressing her in discussion. Conversely, Schele and Mathews (1999) give a comprehensive analysis of the mural imagery, but are only able to provide black and white illustrations, and are quick to move on to discussion of their own interpretation. In this manner, the limitations of their work are comparable to those of Ringle's 2009 paper; while he does provide Breton's colour copies for analysis, the study is centred on the argument that the original murals provide insight into social order at Chichén Itzá, which draws the focus away from the murals as an artistic endeavour and Breton's reproductions as artefacts.

Though there is enough general literature to provide a solid basis for a study on the Maya, works that are relevant to the case study are few and far between. This issue

is one which the thesis aims to address through the consolidation and integration of the available sources within discussion.

2.5 Women artists of the nineteenth century

The field of identifying and focusing on women's roles in Western history is relatively recent, and somewhat contentious where Victorian women are concerned. Some authors argue that Victorian women artists were solely acting as agents of societal progression, while others take a more nuanced approach. For example, *Victorian Women Artists* (1987) by Pamela Nunn provides a good foundation on the circumstances surrounding women artists in the Victorian period, but Nunn's argument is too narrowly focused on presenting a positive feminist narrative, thus failing to identify and discuss the complicity of these women in the imperialist and colonialist acts of Victorian society. Francina Irwin's edited chapter "Amusement or instruction? Watercolour manuals and the woman amateur" (1995) likewise sets the scene of social customs for women artists in the nineteenth century, but does not touch upon the deeper issues of privilege and racism inherent to Breton's social environment. Only in the last twenty years has a more balanced dialogue emerged in the literature. Jordana Pomeroy's edited work *Intrepid Women: Victorian Artists Travel* (2005) fits a very narrow niche by addressing the complexities of travelling women artists' experiences both at home and abroad. Chapters by Pomeroy, Susan Casteras, and Dianne Macleod in particular contribute to the overall argument that these women artists and travellers brought cultural prejudices with them, reflecting their society through their own agency as much as they redefined it.

These works, though they are few, nonetheless provide the opportunity to bring Breton's perspective into the context of her life as a nineteenth-century woman artist

and traveller. This reiterates the overall conclusion that there is indeed enough information to conduct a thorough study of Breton's work, most of which has yet to be put into practice.

2.6 Literature review conclusions

The key findings of the literature review have shown that, although a lot of work has been done on the several topics relating to Breton's paintings, very little study has been conducted on the paintings themselves – few authors have applied material culture theory to works of art since its inception in the 1970s. The review has also identified commonalities in literature of the same field, where authors corroborate information and make common arguments, on which basis discussion can be targeted towards the most significant points.

The findings of the literature review support the research proposal through evidence that Breton's paintings are significant and yet under-researched; their context is not considered when they are used to illustrate Maya studies, and yet the literature emphasises through its own omission the impression of Breton as an intriguing figure in both her period and her field. In the light of the above, this study will take a fresh approach to Breton's work, consolidating the sources and using theoretical concepts outlined in the literature to answer the questions of significance and originality, and subsequently assess the value of the Breton paintings as archaeological artefacts.

2.7 Methodology

The study was undertaken following the conceptual framework of visual culture theory. This approach was chosen because of a recognised reluctance in the literature to address art as an aspect of material culture. As the subject of study is a

collection of paintings, research focused on the gathering of qualitative data because of the inherent subjectivity of art and aesthetics. The limitations of this approach lie with that subjectivity, as it relies upon established theoretical works that are the product of a modern western academic system, and use a modern western understanding of aesthetics. In addition, the deficiency of literature approaching art through material culture theory means that there is no set structure for analysis. To evaluate the significance of Breton's work, it must be placed into its context to determine what information was and was not available to her, and in turn how much her work has advanced the study of Maya archaeology. This information may give guidance for how that work should be handled, and in what instances it may be used to contribute to the discipline in the future.

Research was carried out through an analysis of the literature, including primary sources where possible. The literature was cross-referenced to identify recurrent themes within each research topic, and supplemented by first-hand experience of artefacts on public display; to minimise personal bias this was used only to gain an understanding of the physical properties of Breton's paintings.

Reconstructed murals from the Upper Temple of the Jaguars at Chichén Itzá are used as a case study to illustrate the thesis argument. They were chosen both because they are the most complete in detail and quantity, and because the scope of the study prevented a broader examination of Breton's complete body of work, which number well into the hundreds. In addition, the approach demonstrated by the case study can be applied to other scenarios where artwork or artefacts with complex provenance may be used to aid archaeological study.

Documentary analysis was chosen because of the limitations of the primary data, and the relative availability of secondary texts. The scope of the study prevented

certain questions from being addressed; the degree of accuracy of Breton's reproductions are not under scrutiny, as it is her perception and interpretation which are being evaluated and not the significance of the originals. The findings are presented in the form of referenced material integrated into the main arguments. To summarise, the research methodology consists of documentary analysis and limited first-hand experience. Key challenges include the dearth of primary sources, which was resolved by consolidating research with secondary literature, and the risk of personal bias, which was minimised by reducing personal input. This section has outlined the key themes and limitations of the literature, and provided an overview of the research methods used to analyse and report the findings. The following chapters will build on this review, integrating the findings into a full exploration of the thesis statement.

Chapter 3: Current knowledge of the Upper Temple of the Jaguar

3.1 Introduction

The core argument of this study is an evaluation of the significance of Breton's perspective as manifested in her collection of paintings, and the value of her contribution to the study of Maya archaeology. As such, Breton's work on the Upper Temple of the Jaguar at Chichén Itzá will be presented as a case study, enabling an examination of the contemporary attitudes acting on the paintings, and to what extent Breton's perspective can be extrapolated from them.

These chapters will first set out the thematic and historical context of the case study, integrating it into a discussion of Breton's agency and circumstance, and finally evaluating Breton's achievements in light of the limitations of her period.

3.2 Maya art at the time of Chichén Itzá

Before an analysis of the Chichén Itzá paintings can take place, we must first establish the general conventions of Early Postclassic Maya art. Art was a significant component of Maya culture from the Early Preclassic throughout the pre-Columbian era and into the present. "The Ancient Maya coloured their world in a variety of ways" (Houston *et al.*, 2009, p.43), whether through costume, jewellery, ceramics or adorning their walls with paintings. It is telling that the terms for colours in the Maya language have hardly changed in over two-thousand years (Houston *et al.*, 2009, p.42).

The Maya preferred stucco for their paintings and sculptures, but the materials involved were very expensive and many had to be imported (Schele and Mathews,

1999, p.31) – limestone was burned for two days to create the plaster, and wood was a limited resource towards the end of the Classic period (Mary Miller, 1999, p.84-85). This suggests that wall paintings had a significant societal role for the Maya to go to such lengths. Arthur Miller argues that these murals represented “a vision of reality presented as visual symbols embodying... patterns of trade, conquest and a unique regional *Weltanschauung*” (1982, p.98) – a shared world view. The social role of art may therefore have been a visual expression of the Maya world view.

One “omnipresent” element of Maya art was its use of the human form (M. Miller, 1999, p.150). The naturalistic poses (*ibid.*) and “frozen movement” (A. Miller, 1982, p.98) of later works appeal to the modern eye, but Preclassic and Early Classic Maya art depicted the human body symbolically rather than representationally (Miller, 1999, p.153).



Figure 2: A detail from a sacred Maya mural at San Bartolo (Garrett, 2012).

It was not until the Late Classic period that figures became ‘realistic’ – as Miller explains, artistic techniques of foreshortening and overlapping limbs evidenced “a

deep understanding of human form and the foreshortened, rounded way in which the eye sees rather than what the brain knows” (*ibid.*, p.173). While deities continued to be depicted with restraint due to religious conventions, the Late Classic Maya rendered humans with more freedom (Thompson, 1954, p.174). A. Miller suggests that Maya figures were drawn in profile and objects were depicted from the front not for ease, but because it was the most practical way to make their symbolic elements visible (1982, p.55). For example, depicting a face in profile was the best way to show the distinguishing features “important to its iconographic identification” (*ibid.*). As Schele and Mathews state, “in Maya art, style could be political” (1999, p.34) – symbolic depictions of identifiable figures may have served as propaganda when displayed in the public sphere. In addition, taking into consideration spatial and economic constraints, this method of depiction took up the least amount of space, meaning that more information could be fit into one mural (A. Miller, 1982, p.55). A. Miller also states that uniform backgrounds were often used in Maya murals to bring attention to whole figures, rather than emphasising disjointed details (1982, p.55-56). However, the prioritisation of iconography “led to over-elaboration of certain aspects and to consequent distortion of proportions” as Maya art continued to develop, and these backgrounds became more complex (Thompson, 1954, p.173). This suggests that later Maya art may have lost its representational elements, becoming more abstracted over time.

Having established a brief overview of Maya artistic conventions, discussion will now address the context and current disputes surrounding the subject of the case study, the city of Chichén Itzá.

3.3 Chichén Itzá



Figure 3: Chichén Itzá: location (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2009).

Chichén Itzá was a city in the Yucatán Peninsula founded during the Late Classic period, between 600 and 900 CE (Tedlock, 1996, p.22). It is considered to have been a powerful centre in its time – Coe argues that Chichén Itzá maintained its strength during the Terminal Classic period while other cities collapsed, and M. Miller suggests that it was the “most powerful” tenth century Mesoamerican city (1999, p.10).

The city has traditionally been divided into two phases: Old Chichén to the north, and New Chichén to the south. The north includes the Great Ballcourt, Castillo, Temple of the Warriors, the Mercado, the Group of the Thousand Columns and the ceremonial walkway to the Sacred Cenote, while situated in the south are the High

Priest's Grave, the Xtoloc Cenote, the Red House, Temple of the Wall Panels, El Caracol and the Nunnery.

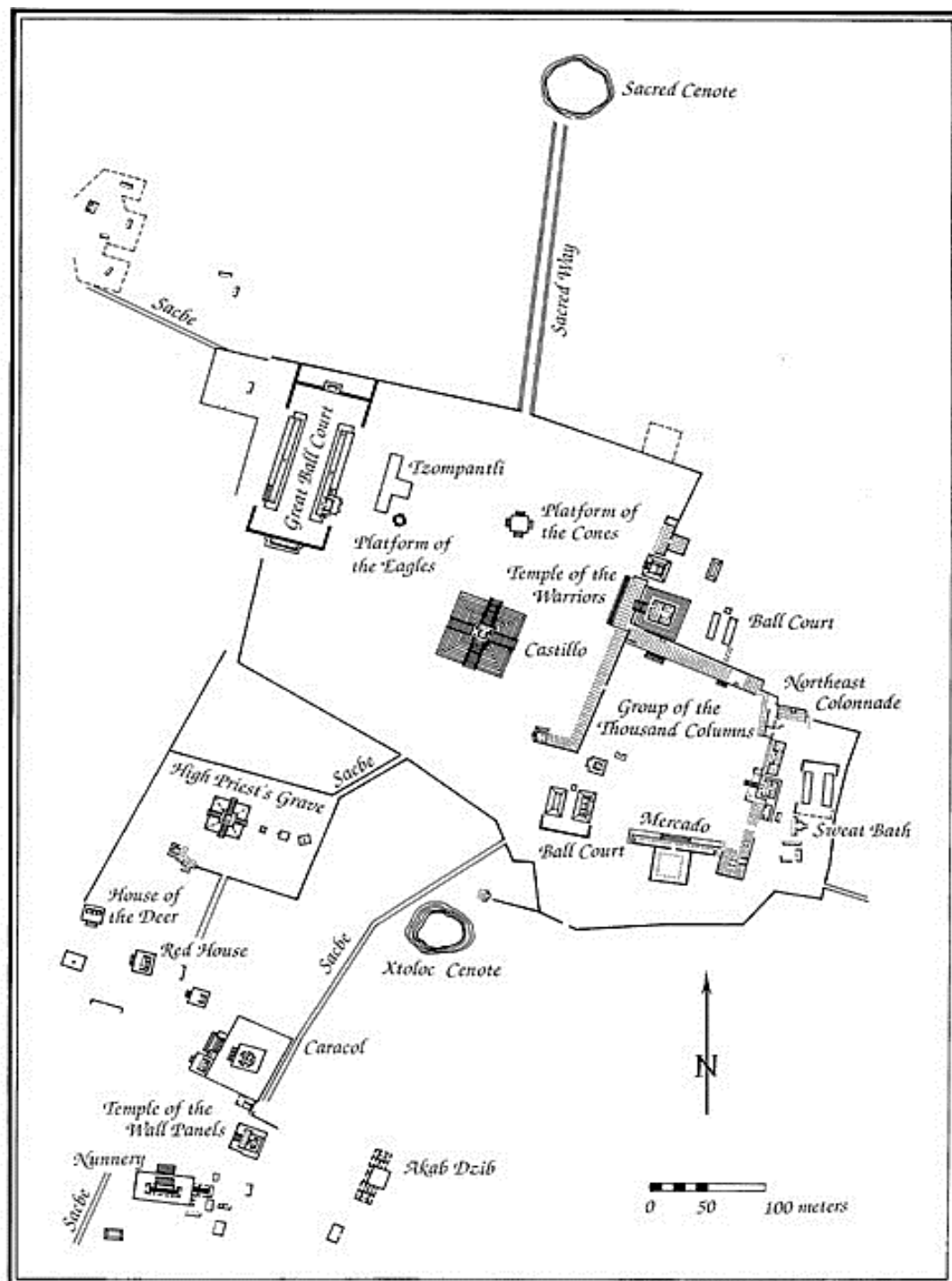


Figure 4: Plan of Chichén Itzá (Blackburn, n.d.; In Coe, 2011, p.190).

Old Chichén was thought to have been built by the Toltec, while New Chichén has been suggested to be Maya (McVicker, 2005, p.53). However, the chronology of occupation is a subject of dispute. Kubler attributes Chichén Itzá's first phase to the

Puuc-Chenes Maya, with an invasion by the Toltec in 1000 AD and Maya reoccupation from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century (1962, p.174), and suggests that during Toltec occupation the city of Tula was an outpost of Chichén Itzá (*ibid.*, p.178). Coe appears to agree, stating that the Toltec invaded in the tenth century, and the Itza or Putun Maya took over in the thirteenth century (1992, p.70-71), though he believes the Toltec to be ruling from Tollan (Tula) with Chichén Itzá as an outpost. However, he later states that it is still unknown whether there was Toltec-Maya occupation at Chichén Itzá, arguing that further excavation is necessary (2011, p.7). Schele and Mathews believe all phases to be contemporary, stating that there is archaeological evidence that the main ceremonial buildings were all constructed before 1000 AD (1999, p.199). They disagree with the Toltec theory, arguing that the term was a name the Aztec used for the ancient Olmec in their mythology (*ibid.*, p.38-40), while Tedlock adds that Tula was a Classic period Nahuatl word for city, which the Maya applied to Teotihuacán (1996, p.45).

One perceivable issue with this dialogue appears to be in attempting to fit the development of Chichén Itzá into the actions of distinct cultural groups, not acknowledging the possibilities of cultural hybridisation – nevertheless, discussion must move on to the Upper Temple of the Jaguar and the impressive collection of murals reproduced by Adela Breton.

3.4 The Upper Temple of the Jaguar (UTJ)

The Upper and Lower Temples of the Jaguar are part of the Great Ballcourt, situated in the Northwest. It is the largest known Maya ballcourt, at 120 feet (36.6m) wide and 450 feet (137.2m) long (Koch, 2013, p.227).



Figure 5: Great Ball Court: The Upper Temple of the Jaguar (Mikko, 2007).

The dating of the UTJ is part of ongoing debate – Coggins and Shane (1984, p.157) agree with Kubler’s argument that the UTJ was the last development of the Great Ballcourt (1962, p.185), but Ringle states that Kubler also “placed the UTJ... immediately following the Temple of the Warriors and the Little Tables” (2009, p.16), while Cohodas (1978) and Tozzer (1957) dated it “among the earliest Toltec buildings” (*ibid.*). Ringle makes a counterpoint, stating that the Temple of the Warriors is angled towards the UTJ but the reverse is not true; therefore, “the Temple of the Warriors may have been built to align with an already existing UTJ” (2009, p.16).

M. Miller describes the UTJ as “one of the most ornate” temples at Chichén Itzá (1999, p.184). The inner chamber is “divided into eight panels, three each on the east and west walls (one being the central doorway) and a single mural on both the north and south end walls.” (Ringle, 2009, p.19), possibly dating to around 850 CE

(Coggins and Shane, 1984, p.157). However, the front facade of the temple collapsed long before the nineteenth century (Ringle, 2009, p.17), and the wall paintings within were already damaged in 1843 (Stephens, 1843, p.310-311). Exposed to the elements, they are now in extremely poor condition.



Figure 6: Ballcourt, Upper Temple of the Jaguars, detail mural (Schele, 2005).

Much of what is known today is based on antiquarian reproductions of the murals – most significantly those by Breton herself, without which there would be no possibility of comparative study. There are, however, issues with this lack of primary data. Yonan argues that “art has a physical, sensual dimension, and not just a visual one” (2011, p.243), and Hurcombe adds that any material culture reproduced in image format loses its additional sensorial qualities (2009, p.109), so it is important to acknowledge that for both the original murals and the reproductions presented in this thesis, visibility is the only aspect that can be observed. The next section will focus

on this facet of the UTJ murals to separate their provenance from the background of the reproductions, affirming the importance of Breton's efforts to preserve them.

3.5 Murals of the UTJ

The paintings of the UTJ can in some ways be argued to be typically Maya in style.

Ringle identifies the technique as a combination of true fresco and dry application



Figure 7: Watercolour quarter-scale copy of wall painting from south end of west wall, UTJ (Breton, n.d.).

onto a stuccoed surface (2009, p.20), which is consistent with Maya artistic tradition. In addition, the murals feature “a common basal register” of blue underwater and underworld imagery which Ringle argues is “unambiguously Maya” (*ibid.*). This is comparable to M. Miller’s account of the aquatic basal registers at Tanchah-Tulum (1999,

p.186). She writes of a rare pigment known as Maya blue which “dominates the paintings” at Bonampak (*ibid.*, p.85). Maya blue was “a critical component of Late Classic color aesthetics” (Houston *et al.*, 2009, p.69), and the pigment identified at Bonampak may be the same blue pigment of the registers at both Tanchah-Tulum and Chichén Itzá.



Figure 8: Bonampak, Room 1, east wall (Sánchez, 2007).

However, there is a consensus that the UTJ murals lack the depth of traditional Maya depictions. Thompson criticizes the paintings for their “stiffness” and “depressing monotony”, arguing that they “lack the vivacity of the murals of Bonampak or Uaxactun” (1954, p.176-177), though this is hard to objectively assess. M. Miller elaborates, explaining that at the start of the ninth century the artists at Chichén Itzá “gave up their attention to the individual human form and the situation of that form in scaled architectural settings” (1999, p.184). Houston *et al.* appear to agree with this assessment, stating that at contemporary Yucatán sites “human figures are reduced in scale, more figures are crowded into each scene, and the action may be contextualized within a landscape” (2009, p.92). Ringle notes that most Maya murals indicate location by the strategic positioning of buildings or landscape markers, whereas the UTJ murals depict whole “camps, communities, and battlefields” (*ibid.*, p.25). The figures of the UTJ are correspondingly arranged in “dense clusters” (Kubler, 1962, p.202) and registers, rather than in relation to their

background, and the lack of central action precludes any illusion of depth (M. Miller, 1999, p.184).

M. Miller concludes that the paintings of the UTJ have “more in common with early Teotihuacán painting” than Maya tradition (2001, p.199); Coe, who is a proponent of the Puuc-Maya theory of origin, identifies architectural elements at Chichén Itzá concurrent with the Puuc style, such as masks with bands of flowers that may symbolise ‘flower mountain’, a concept which possibly originated at Teotihuacán (2011, p.174-175), while both Kubler (1962, p.176) and Thompson (1954, p.103) believe the feathered serpent imagery at Chichén Itzá to represent a non-Maya deity of Mexican origin also found at Tula, suggesting this to be evidence of Toltec influence. Kubler also argues that the “narrative relief panels set in plain wall surfaces” at Chichén Itzá are Toltec (1962, p.176). The composite style of the UTJ murals incorporates elements of Maya tradition while also exhibiting the influence of other Mesoamerican settlements.

Thompson states that the introduction of “exotic elements” to Maya art coincides with the epidemic of social collapse which signified the end of the Classic period (1954, p.173); it is possible that the presence of non-Maya elements at Chichén Itzá is a result of the theorised Toltec invasion bringing foreign ideas and styles into the city (Thompson, 1954, p.97). However, Schele and Mathews believe that the multicultural nature of the paintings of the UTJ was a deliberate choice to communicate meaning in a manner that could be understood by the wider Mesoamerican population (1999, p.255). It is likely that both theories are true, and a complex social situation of cultural exchange through invasion and deliberate adoption influenced the style choices of the Chichén Itzá artists. Regarding their contents, Virginia Miller argues that the UTJ murals “represent the most complete

and graphic depiction of Maya warfare and its aftermath since the Late Classic murals at Bonampak” (1989, p.37). However, there has yet to be a consensus on what the paintings represent, nor is their purpose yet known. Schele and Mathews argue that the paintings illustrate the “wars of conquest that gave the Itza their right to rule” (2011, p.207), which Coe believes refers to the battles fought between the Maya and the Toltec (2011, p.188). Ringle finds it odd that, despite the location of the UTJ on the Great Ballcourt, the murals within depict warfare rather than the ball game (2009, p.19), noting that the paintings emphasise the events rather than



Figure 9: Watercolour, quarter scale copy of a wall painting from the north wall, UTJ (Breton, n.d.).

highlighting singular figures as heroes of the narrative (*ibid.*, p.21). He states that the paintings have “no obvious reading order” (2009, p.19), while M. Miller believes that they represent a “temporal progression” of war (1999, p.185), and suggests from the possible presence of water in some of the paintings (Fig.9) that they depict the “demise of one of the Usumacinta cities” (*ibid.*, p.186).

The paintings of the east wall opposite the door (Fig. 10, 11 and 12) would have been illuminated by the sun on the “anniversary of the day when the Maya believed creation had taken place” (M. Miller, 1999, p.185), the implication being that this was a deliberate architectural feature, and that the two large figures depicted in the centre (Fig. 11) were cosmologically or ideologically significant to Chichén Itzá.



Figures 10, 11 and 12: Watercolour, quarter-scale copies of a wall painting from the east wall, UTJ (Breton, n.d.).

These figures have been suggested as two opposing generals, referred to as “Captain Sun Disk and Captain Serpent” in the literature (Ringle, 2009, p.21). Aztec sources refer to the ruler of Tula as a “god-man calling himself Quetzalcoatl”, while Maya sources mention a warrior-king called Kukulcan – meaning ‘feathered serpent’ (Coe, 1992, p.71). Coe believes this role to be part of Toltec military structure (2011, p.187); if so, the two generals in the painting would appear to represent “Maya-Toltec opposition” (Ringle, 2009, p.21). However, Ringle identifies that both figures occur in multiples within the same painting, and “in several cases both appear to be on the same side” (*ibid.*, p.21).

A. Miller makes note of the differences between attacking and defending figures, stating that “the colour associations of these historical founders seem to relate to their military identity” (1982, p.68). M. Miller goes further in supporting Coe’s

interpretation by arguing that the darker figures represent the Toltec, while the candy stripe figures are defenders or captives and the houses are Maya in style (2001, p.199). In addition, Coe identifies elements of 'Toltec' military style in depictions of some of the warriors with pillbox-like headdress, bird or butterfly insignia on their chests, armed with feather-decorated darts and atlatls and defending with round shields (2011, p.187). However, V. Miller maintains the view that "the distinction between 'Maya' and 'Toltec' warriors proposed by Tozzer (1930) cannot be sustained on close examination" (1989, p.37), and Ringle argues that the lack of consistency between the opposing figures and locations being depicted is indicative of "several discrete enemies rather than a single ongoing conflict" (2009, p.22). Going back to A. Miller's concept of *Weltanschauung* (1982, p.98), the Maya "were obsessed with war" (Coe, 2011, p.217) – artistic depictions of warfare are central to their visual culture; the paintings of the UTJ, as with many Mesoamerican murals, may be a material expression of their worldview. However, Boivin suggests that artefacts can also have an "active role in constituting social relationships" (2004, p.63), giving weight to the argument that the art at Chichén Itzá enforced these cultural values and legitimised the city leaders' right to rule. On the other hand, Schele and Mathews state that in Maya architecture "small, dark interiors, especially of the temples" were thought to be the realm of the gods and ancestors, and access was restricted to a few lords or priests (1999, p.23). If so, this would mean that the paintings of the UTJ would not have been seen by most of Chichén Itzá's inhabitants. Their significance must therefore be in a private sphere, the intention not as a message to the masses but a ritualisation of space.

Having established the state of knowledge surrounding the murals of the UTJ, this information will be used to assess the significance of Breton's work in light of the fact

that she would not have had access to this information, as well as her direct contribution to advances in Maya studies. The next point of discussion will therefore set the reproductions in their historical context, focussing on the attitudes, social customs and limitations of the Victorian-Edwardian era, which may provide an understanding of the influences acting on Breton as an archaeological artist.

Chapter 4: Painting the Maya: Adela Breton and her work

4.1 Introduction

The nineteenth century saw increasing amateur participation in academic disciplines (McVicker, 2005, p.10). It was socially acceptable for Adela Breton to work alongside professional scholars with privileged access to archaeological excavations. Warwick Bray states that she was a respected figure among the “small, but international, group of scholars who laid the foundations of Maya archaeology” (1989, p.9), and a peer of Edward Thompson, Alfred Maudslay and Alfred Tozzer (McVicker, 1989, p.18).

However, while a wealth of information is available to the modern archaeologist, Breton was living at a time before Mesoamerican archaeology had developed scientific methods (Bray, 1989, p.9), and the Yucatán peninsula was still extremely isolated (McVicker, 1989, p.14). As such, the state of knowledge during Breton’s lifetime was limited. Wider awareness of the Maya only began in 1822, following Antonio del Rio’s account of excavation at Palenque, and subsequent expeditions by John Lloyd Stephens and Frederick Catherwood in 1839 to 1842 (Coe, 2011, p.24). There were no breakthroughs in Maya chronology until the work of Ernst Forstemann and Alfred Maudslay at the end of the nineteenth century (Coe, 2011, p.24-25). It is clear that Breton was approaching the UTJ paintings with a lot less information, subject to different social biases. Therefore, to discuss Breton’s perspective of the paintings, we must take her social and historical background into consideration.

4.2 The precedent for Breton's work: Patterns of prejudice in the nineteenth century

One would assume an assessment of Breton's significance would hinge on the originality of her work. However, at face value, she does not appear to be unique among her peers. As one of the first to illustrate Mesoamerican archaeology for an academic purpose, Breton was narrowly beaten by John Lloyd Stephens, a New York lawyer, and Frederick Catherwood, a London architect and topographical artist (Koch, 2013, p.1), who detailed their travels to various sites across Mesoamerica in *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas and Yucatán*, published by Harper and Brothers in 1843 (Roberts, 2000, p.544). Roberts states that these "meticulously detailed Central American travel narratives... are considered classic texts in Mesoamerican archaeology" (*ibid.*, p.545). The volumes were illustrated by Catherwood (*ibid.*), who republished his illustrations in *Views of Ancient Monuments in Central America, Chiapas and Yucatán* in 1844 (*ibid.*).

It is also clear that as a woman artist and traveller, Breton was not unrivalled for her period and place, proven by the similar circumstances of Olivia Fanny Tonge (1858-1949). Tonge's father was also in the Royal Navy, and being a naturalist and painter, he was also a clear influence on her life (Pomeroy, 2005, p.46-47). Like Breton, Tonge did not begin to travel until the age of fifty, when she took a solo trip to India to study and draw the indigenous fauna (*ibid.*).

Despite this, it can be argued that Breton's perspective differs from her peers in the degree to which her work expresses nineteenth-century cultural prejudices. During this period, many travelling women artists carried "cultural baggage" (Macleod, 2005, p.3), an imperialist gaze manifesting in an aesthetic that "merged the picturesque with the primitive" (*ibid.*, p.6). Casteras argues that British audiences required

“favourably received narratives or art” (2005, p.11) based on “biased imperial mentalities and colonial realities” and “tainted ideologies of nationalistic hegemony” (*ibid.*, p.22) – artists reduced foreign landscapes to pretty garden scenes in an attempt to appropriate the unfamiliar for a Western audience, such as Marianne North’s painting of the Taj Mahal (Macleod, 2005, p.6) (Fig. 13) which uses the historic building as a partially-obscured backdrop for the plants, and integrates the three female figures as though they were part of the flora, making no effort to separate them from their colourful but insubstantial surroundings.

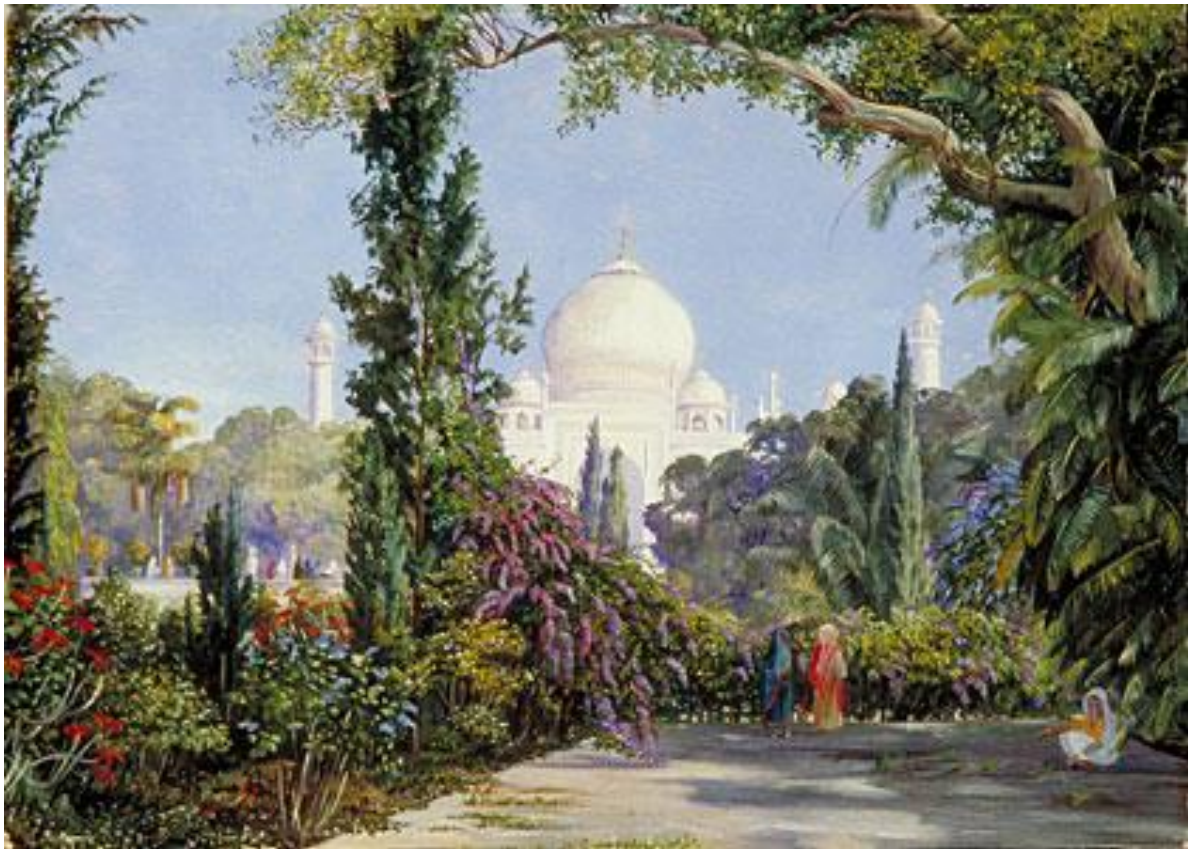


Figure 13: The Taj Mahal at Agra, North-West India (North, n.d.).

Such racist and colonialist attitudes were present even in the academic sphere; Catherwood and Stephens may have been pioneers of Mesoamerican studies, and Stephens “one of the most successful American travel writers of the nineteenth century” (Roberts, 2000, p.545), but their written account is “steeped in nineteenth-century imperialist and positivist rhetoric” (*ibid.*, p.544). Stephens regarded the

indigenous population as slothful and lazy (*ibid.*, p.548), while Catherwood believed them to be ignorant, indifferent to their own history (*ibid.*, p.546). It was “nearly universal at the time” to claim impressive archaeology as the product of a lost civilisation, for indigenous races were too ‘primitive’ to be responsible (Roberts, 2000, p.550). Archaeologist Edward Thompson claimed in his article “Atlantis Not a Myth” that pre-Columbian ruins were the “deserted home of a lost race”, labelling the indigenous Maya “ignorant” and “semi-civilised” (1880), and although Catherwood and Stephens were the first to ascribe Mesoamerican archaeology to an ancestral indigenous group (Coe, 2011, p.24), Catherwood’s colonialist attitude is evident from his illustrations.

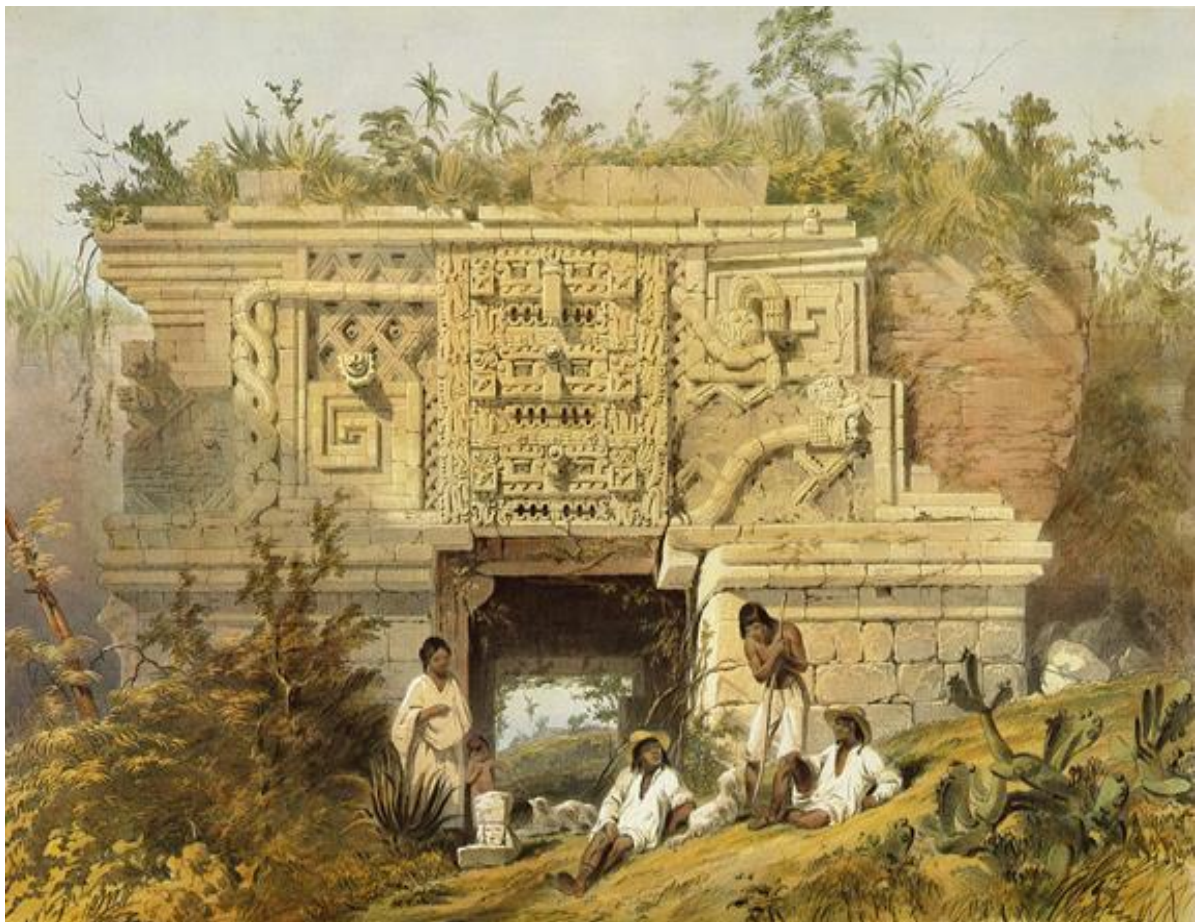


Figure 14: Plate 14, Portion of a Building, Las Monjas, Uxmal (Catherwood, n.d.).

As with North’s treatment of her human subjects (Fig. 13), in Catherwood’s work:

“Indians are made to appear uninterested in the historical axis of their environment. Detaching them conceptually from the archaeology they frame, Catherwood associates them only with the space (and, it is implied, the order) of the vegetation that provides a foil to the historical building” (Roberts, 2000, p.547).

Casteras discusses the idea of “art as a way to possess”, a display of domination over people, places and objects captured by the artist (2005, p.23), and Roberts criticizes the pair’s attempt to legitimise their appropriation of indigenous Maya history (2000, p.550) – although Stephens emphasised his expedition as an archaeological and academic pursuit, “through his antiquarian's eye the Maya are conquered again” (*ibid.*, p.551).

This is the world in which Breton was living, and these complex prejudices were the *habitus* of her society – shared attitudes and behaviours which were unconsciously learned, and rarely questioned. It is within this environment that Breton conducted her work, so it is to be expected for her perspective to embody and reflect the cultural values of the period. The following section will explore why it is in fact the rejection of these prejudices, even as Breton subscribed to nineteenth century cultural customs, that signifies the value of her work both as artefact and resource.

4.3 Breton and her paintings: An exceptional case

Having established the precedent for Breton’s experiences, it stands to reason that originality is expressed not in the classification of her work, but the nature of it – her significance lies in how far her perspective of the Maya culture differs from that of her peers.

As Yonan states, “a painting is not simply an image but also a thing, made of real materials and occupying finite time and space” (2011, p.240). It is important to acknowledge Breton’s watercolour reproductions as material culture in their own

right; an examination of the materials used to create them may bring insight into Breton as a social agent. For example, her use of watercolour pigments was both a practical choice and one influenced by the customs of the period – watercolours were indeed more portable than other media and therefore better for travelling, but they were also considered “an ideal medium for women”, and believed to be more “lady-like” than oils (Irwin, 1995, p.151). Irwin argues that there was a “surge of enthusiasm” for female amateur watercolourists throughout the nineteenth century (1995, p.149), and soon “watercolor and British artistic identity were inextricably intertwined” (Pomeroy, 2005, p.39) – Queen Victoria herself owned a watercolour paint box and was considered “an experienced amateur painter” (*ibid.*, p.157). The increasing popularity of the medium among women travellers was engendered by a desire to document their experiences in a more convenient manner than photography (Pomeroy, 2005, p.41).

However, Breton’s use of watercolours was not limited to leisure: her archaeological work differed from the illustrations documenting her travels, and she was not carrying the necessary supplies for full-scale reproductions during her trip to the Yucatán, meaning that she cannot have made the decision in advance.

McVicker suggests it was Alfred Maudslay who first requested that Breton make copies of the murals found at Chichén Itzá (1989, p.13). Her motivations for accepting are unknown, but “interesting and a little curious”, considering she had little history of such work, besides basic lessons in copying the Old Masters (McVicker, 2005, p.35). In addition, it is an arduous task to fill large spaces using equipment designed for miniature paintings, so watercolours must have been an inconvenient medium to work with.



Figure 15: Copy of a wall painting from the 'House of the Priests', Teotihuacan (Breton, n.d.).



Figure 16: Close-up of visible brush strokes on the right edge of the painting (Author, 2016).

Considering the social customs for women travellers, it is more likely that these pigments were merely immediately available to Breton.

In a sense, Breton was subverting an established societal practice for a novel purpose, and her choice of subject was also unusual for the period. Faithful reproductions of pre-Columbian wall paintings did not fit into the mainstream "preference for pleasant subjects" (Macleod, 2005, p.7), and Breton's artistic contemporaries "screened out the repellent or disturbing" (Casteras, 2005, p.14). Most women

amateur artists stuck to inoffensive botanical drawing (Irwin, 1995, p.156), such as Marianne North, who provided botanical illustrations for Kew Gardens (Macleod, 2005, p.3), or Elizabeth Twining (1805-1889) of the Twining tea family, whose work was published in several books (Casteras, 2005, p.15). Even in academic circles, though Maya art was aesthetically pleasing, it was regarded as 'primitive' (M. Miller, 1999, p.11-12) and inferior to Western efforts. Myers stresses that "primitive art" is a socially constructed category for the "circulation, exhibition and consumption" of material culture in a foreign setting (2006, p.267); it was nevertheless the case that

contemporary attitudes restricted all non-Western decorative material culture to this category.

Here is where Breton's work demonstrates a distinct departure from the assumptions of the nineteenth century, not only in the primary focus of her work but also in her consideration of the Maya as a complex and interesting culture, an attitude which becomes all the more evident when contrasted with her peers.

Writing of their visit to Chichén Itzá, Catherwood and Stephens make brief mention of the murals in the UTJ, providing no insight other than a note of the damage, colours present and similarity to the “well-known picture writings of the Mexicans” (Stephens, 1843, p.310-311).



Figure 17: Plate 21, Las Monjas, Chichén-Itzá (Catherwood, n.d.).

By comparison, Breton's paper on the subject is a detailed discussion of the methods used in the original paintings, and the identification of discrete styles which she argued may correspond to two different artists. Breton also stated that, "although to modern eyes they may appear quaint and childlike", she recognised the value of the wall paintings both as archaeological artefacts and as works of art (1906, p.55-56).

Of course, Breton was not totally exempt from contemporary attitudes; it can be argued that she participated in the imperialist traditions of the time in sending her finds back to Britain against antiquities law (McVicker, 2005, p.50). However, the



Figure 18: Artefacts from the Breton collection on display at Bristol Museum (Author, 2016).

impression given by the body of her work is one of respect, and a desire to understand the cultures that she encountered, archaeological or contemporary. Breton's written accounts of indigenous inhabitants "lacked the condescension" common in nineteenth century travel writing (McVicker, 2005, p.15), and a comparison of Figures

13, 17 and 19 shows that Breton took a similar approach to her landscape paintings – her depiction of Las Monjas puts the cultural landmarks in clear focus, letting them speak for themselves without using the indigenous population as props, nor does she attempt to stake any claim on Mesoamerican history.



Figure 19: Watercolour of Las Monjas at Chichén Itzá (A. Breton, n.d.).

In addition, while “travelling women... generally did not assimilate into the cultures they described” (Pomeroy, 2005, p.43), Breton learned to speak Nahuatl in her later years (McVicker, 2005, p.142), becoming close with an indigenous man named Pablo Solorio (McVicker, 1989, p.15) who helped her undertake most of her work in Mexico. She objected to him being referred to as a “common Mexican servant” by Edward Thompson and his wife (McVicker, 2005, p.120), and Pablo’s death was taken as a devastating blow (ibid., p.123). It is clear from this that she immersed herself in the native cultures she encountered in a way that was, if not unique, then extremely rare amongst her peers. All things considered, Breton appears to have bridged the supposedly “unbridgeable chasm” between artist and subject (Pomeroy, 2005, p.44), which goes some way towards explaining why her work on the UTJ is so extraordinary.

4.4 Perception and perspective: Breton's approach to the murals of the UTJ

Due to this departure from the prejudices of the period, Breton's work is of significant archaeological value, and her coloured reproductions of the wall paintings of the UTJ are still used as an academic resource. One of the most compelling aspects of Breton's perspective is her recognition that this work was desperately needed – she was aware that the paintings were rapidly deteriorating, meticulously replicating them because she believed that every detail was important. This is particularly remarkable when considering how little was known about the culture of Chichén Itzá at the time – while it is hypothetically possible to ascribe significance to art on a purely aesthetic basis, “the pure aesthetic response is a myth” (Gell, 1998, p.81); people bring, consciously or not, their sociocultural background into their understanding and response to visual culture. Geertz argues that to understand a work of art as a cultural object, it must be connected to the everyday experiences of the society in which it functioned, recognising the shared cultural dialogue between artist and audience:

“The artist works with his audience's capacities – capacities to see, or hear, or touch, sometimes even to taste and smell, with understanding. And though elements of these capacities are indeed innate... they are brought into actual existence by the experience of living in the midst of certain sorts of things to look at, listen to, handle, think about, cope with, and react to; particular varieties of cabbages, particular sorts of kings.” (1976, p.1497)

Thompson highlighted this as an ongoing issue in the study of Maya art, explaining that newcomers “may have difficulty in appreciating it because its conventions are quite different from those of Western art”, and comparing this to the initially negative Western response to Japanese art (1954, p.173). This was even more significant in

the nineteenth century, when racial and colonial prejudices prevented Western observers from engaging with the cultures of origin – woman artist and traveller Frances H. Eden (1801-1849) described a sculpture of an Indian deity as “horrid”, demonstrating that observation of an artefact does not equate to engagement with the culture (Pomeroy, 2005, p.40). Breton would therefore have had to overcome this initial reaction to engage with her work in any kind of meaningful manner, and she would have approached the paintings of the UTJ from a place of almost total unfamiliarity – what sets her apart from her peers is that she recognised their cultural and historical significance without academic or cultural understanding. As a result, her reproductions are without detrimental bias, and prove to be useful resources in the study of the UTJ today.

Another aspect of Breton’s work which “sets [her] apart from her contemporaries”, and many modern scholars, was the amount of attention she paid to colour (V. Miller, 1989, p.33).

Despite recent recognition of the complexity of colours and developing theories of an agency of colour, it is rarely the focus of study (Houston *et al.*, 2009, p.ix-x), and Hurcombe argues that even today, “colour is something that we underrate continually as archaeologists” (2009, p.114-115). Houston *et al.* theorise that “the difficulty of replicating color in publications may have diminished a sense of its importance” (*ibid.*, p.x) – few Mesoamerican examples survive the “humidity, fungus, vegetation, and general weathering” (*ibid.*, p.61), highlighting the benefit that Breton’s colour copies provide to discussion.

There is significant potential in the study of Maya colour use. Houston *et al.* stress that for the Maya “color was not merely ‘added decoration’; it was a central element of Ancient Maya experience” (2009, p.69), for whom colours held multiple meanings,

embodying each attribute simultaneously (*ibid.*, p.71). To an extent, the perception of colour is universal – “humans do, after all, belong to the same species and can only vary so much from the potential of their shared, physical equipment” (*ibid.*, p.3), but at the same time colour is a period-specific, socio-cultural construction (Horrocks, 2012, p.3), with a “near infinity of meanings... requiring sensitivity to local setting, precedent, and creativity” (Houston *et al.*, 2009, p.3).

The perception of colour was different for the Maya than for nineteenth century Britain, and both differ from those of the present. Breton would not have known what colour choices signified to the Chichén Itzá artists – yet she recognised those choices to be meaningful, aesthetic and symbolic. Through her work she sought to overcome her own subjectivity, replicating the exact shades of the UTJ murals for the sake of future study, even making note of how the colours changed with lighting to pick the right base hues (McVicker, 2005, p.66-67).



Figure 20: The word ‘blue’ noted on a copy of a warrior’s shield. Section of a copy of the south end of the west wall, UTJ (Author, 2016).

Her drive for objectivity influenced her refusal to attempt reconstruction, as was common with her peers, leaving spaces blank if remains were too damaged (Fig. 21).



Figure 21: Watercolour quarter-scale copy of wall painting from centre of west wall, UTJ (Breton, n.d.).

Breton's reproductions of the UTJ wall paintings are invaluable to the study of the art of Chichén Itzá, and indeed the Maya as a whole. The standard of her work at Chichén Itzá is reflected in the reproductions which make up much of the Breton collection, and her meticulous representation of the details of now-destroyed murals is a huge benefit to modern archaeology. Coggins and Shane reiterate the vital function served by these reproductions in the preservation of "an extraordinary wealth of historical and ethnographic information" (1984, p.157), while V. Miller argues that as well as this tremendous benefit to future scholarship, Breton's paintings have additional cultural value as a source of "unexpected aesthetic pleasure for viewers accustomed to seeing pre-Columbian monuments as they

generally appear today: a monochrome, neutral hue” (1989, p.41). Due to Breton’s unique perception of Mesoamerican culture the evidence provided by her work is extremely rare for the period, providing even more valuable insight into the complexities of nineteenth century society, which leads to the conclusion that the Breton paintings are significant both to the study of Maya archaeology, and as archaeological artefacts in their own right.

The following chapter will summarise the findings of the study, assessing to what extent the research questions posed by the thesis have been answered through discussion and detailing the potential for future research.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

5.1 Recapitulation of purpose and findings

The aim of research was to assess the significance of the Breton reproductions as an archaeological resource, and to explore the implications of Breton's perspective on the evaluation of her work. This thesis has argued that both points can be interpreted through the application of material culture theory, with an emphasis on the function of art in society, to place the Breton watercolours in their social context. This section will summarise to what extent the research questions set out in the introduction to the thesis have been addressed using this method.

Regarding the question of whether Breton's work is unique, the results of the study have concluded that there is indeed precedent for Breton's work among her contemporaries, but there is originality in her personal perspective and method.

Breton's attitude towards the culture and indigenous inhabitants of Mesoamerica from an outsider's point of view was progressive for her time, but her treatment of the work she was carrying out is what makes her perspective of the archaeology truly stand out. Her recognition of the archaeological significance of the Maya civilisation is expressed through the meticulous recording of her body of work, and the copies of the murals of the UTJ are the most detailed examples of this continuing asset to the Mesoamerican studies of the present. Breton's reproductions were created out of a desire to copy the murals as accurately as possible, with the intention for academic use, and so demonstrate a notable effort towards objective reconstruction. Breton was remarkably insightful for her time, understanding the need for this work without an equivalent understanding of the culture; the prejudices of her peers are at times

reflected in her experiences, but bring into even starker contrast the many ways in which her unconventional perspective stands out against the backdrop of a colonialist and xenophobic period.

This evaluation provides the answer to the second research question of significance, as the unique qualities of Breton's perspective means that her work is a singular source of evidence, particularly in cases where the archaeology has since been lost, such as the now-deteriorated wall paintings of the UTJ. In addition, the Breton collection is also a significant resource for the possible study of women travellers and antiquarianism at the turn of the twentieth century – Breton's work represents a subversion of traditional Victorian-Edwardian values regarding art, femininity and the other, fashioning the Breton watercolours into symbols of her agency and providing a unique view of Maya art through the eyes of an upper-class woman artist, traveller and archaeologist at the turn of the twentieth century.

The results of the study are broadly in line with the recognition that the works of Giles and Stuart (1989) and McVicker (2005) give towards Breton as a significant antiquarian figure, and provide the additional assessment of the value of her paintings as artefacts for study, alongside their traditional interpretation as representations of her experiences. These findings run counter to the common practice among scholars of the Maya to ignore or downplay Breton's contribution to the field, particularly the likes of researchers such as M. Miller (1992; 2001) and Schele and Mathews (1999) who use her work as a source, and demonstrate that Breton's paintings are both understudied and undervalued in the current literature.

5.2 Implications of the findings

If the conclusions drawn by this thesis are supported under further scrutiny, then the implications for the discipline are, firstly, that Adela Breton's work should be studied in greater depth from an archaeological standpoint, and secondly, that there is potential for the methodology employed in research to be used in similar cases and with similar artefacts. In addition, the aim of the thesis has been to fill a gap in the literature at the intersection of art history and archaeology, and to specifically address the current insufficiency of literature on the Breton collection, as was identified in the literature review, but it has also revealed that the gap is wider than could be addressed within the scope of this study. The evaluation of Breton's case has revealed the potential for an approach to all artefacts occupying the point at which archaeology and art history intersect, using the theoretical underpinnings of material culture to facilitate a better understanding of such works; advancements in the union of this crucial intersection require the collaboration of both disciplines in recognising the comprehensive value of the material, something that will require attention and study far beyond the boundaries of this thesis to be achieved.

5.3 Reflection on the dissertation process

It is important to acknowledge the limitations faced by this thesis which were encountered during the research process. Firstly, the scope of study was intentionally restricted to an assessment of the potential of Breton's work as an academic resource, excluding any exploration of the method of study which could be applied to the artefacts for the proposed academic use. Access to the Breton collection was restricted, due to the size of the artefacts, to the few that were on exhibition, published in the catalogue or as digital images online, and the availability

of relevant literature was limited to English-language works with library or online access, as well as by the sheer nature of the underrepresented subject. As a result of these constraints, the thesis required a case study to be the focus of discussion and was otherwise confined to generalisations of the Breton collection, having neither the resources nor the range to discuss it in its entirety. In addition, the lack of relevant literature prevented a critical evaluation of the thesis argument against other pre-established viewpoints. Therefore, conclusions on the influence of Adela Breton and the Breton collection as a whole within the academic sphere cannot be drawn on the basis of this thesis alone.

Upon reflection, if the study were to be revised within broader confines, research would be expanded to include wider general reading; personal correspondences with leading authors, museum curators and visitors to the exhibition; and a full evaluation of the artefacts within the Breton collection, subject to accessibility. Additional research questions would be devised regarding the content of the Breton watercolours and what they have already contributed to the current state of knowledge of the Maya civilisation; this could possibly be advanced to also address other Mesoamerican cultures. At its broadest, a complete interpretation of Breton's perspective would entail travel to the archaeological sites featured in her work for an analysis of likeness, purpose and the phenomenological significance of the Breton collection.

5.4 Recommendations for the future

The culmination of this thesis provides the basis for a potential focus of future study within the archaeological discipline. The conclusions arrived at over the course of discussion present an opportunity to explore the Breton collection in greater breadth

and depth, and results may be generalised beyond Breton's work as research generates new inquiries into the wider field. The findings suggest that acknowledging art and decorated objects as multidimensional artefacts shows promise for future study, particularly in the furthering of art history and archaeology as interconnected disciplines, and raise the question of how far this approach can be extended to include other artefacts and time periods. Following the method demonstrated in this thesis, only objects with known provenance can benefit from a material culture theoretical approach, but it can be used in studies of artefacts with known context to deepen understanding and contribute a fresh perspective to discussion, suggesting the possibility of a full re-examination of the history of Western art from an archaeological perspective.

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