

# SEATS OF POWER AND CYCLES OF CREATION: CONTINUITIES AND CHANGES IN ICONOGRAPHY AND POLITICAL ORGANIZATION AT DZIBILCHALTÚN, UXMAL, CHICHÉN ITZÁ, AND MAYAPÁN

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper examines continuity and change in political organization of four northern Maya centers: Dzibilchaltún, Uxmal, Chichén Itzá, and Mayapán, and analyzes the ways in which long-lived symbols of cosmic creation and traditional architectural forms (i.e., a radial pyramid featuring world tree iconography) are used at the Late Classic center of Dzibilchaltún, how quadripartite organization and creation iconography are modified in the Nunnery Quadrangle at Uxmal to legitimate the rulership at a Terminal Classic regional state, and how radial pyramids, jaguar thrones, and other creation-related iconography was reworked to provide ideological support for newly emerging polities with conciliar *multepal* governments at Chichén Itzá and Mayapán.

**RESUMEN:** Este estudio examina continuidades y cambios en la organización política de cuatro centros mayas de Yucatán: Dzibilchaltún, Uxmal, Chichén Itzá y Mayapán, y analiza las maneras en que símbolos antiguos de creación cósmica y formas arquitectónicas tradicionales (por ejemplo una pirámide radial con iconografía del árbol cósmico) fueron empleados en Dzibilchaltún; cómo una organización cuatripartita y la iconografía de la creación fueron modificadas en el Cuadrángulo de las Monjas en Uxmal para legitimar a los soberanos de un estado del periodo Clásico Terminal, y cómo pirámides radiales, tronos en forma de jaguar y otra iconografía relacionada con la creación fue reorganizada para proveer soporte ideológico para nuevos gobiernos conciliatorios de forma *multepal* en las ciudades de Chichén Itzá y Mayapán.

In this paper we consider the nature of sociopolitical organization and ideological legitimization at four northern Maya centers: Dzibilchaltún, Uxmal, Chichén Itzá, and Mayapán. Judging from the size of these sites, as well evidence from ethnohistoric records describing the last three, each of these Maya cities became the capital of a regional state during the Late and Terminal Classic through Late Postclassic periods.

The native historical sources do not provide much information regarding Dzibilchaltún's preconquest history, but according to the historical chronicles of Yucatán, both Uxmal and Chichén Itzá were settled by non-local Maya groups, the Xiu in the case of Uxmal, and the Itzá in the case of Chichén Itzá. After long travels these groups entered northern Yucatán in several "descents" during the Terminal Classic period.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> As mentioned, northern Maya native histories suggest that both, Uxmal and Chichén Itzá were settled by non-local Maya groups, the Xiu in the case of Uxmal, and the Itzá in the case of Chichén Itzá, who after long travels entered northern Yucatán in several "descents." The origin place of both the Xiu and the Itzá, generally has been placed in the southwestern base of the peninsula or in the adjacent Chontalpa region of the gulf coast (see Kowalski 1987: chpt. 4; Thompson 1970). This location has been questioned, since the relative paucity of archaeological remains makes it difficult to see as the homeland of people responsible for the impressive monumental architecture and art at these two northern Maya centers. More recently, on the basis of southern Maya inscriptional history, Linda Schele, Nikolai Grube and Erik Boot (n.d.) have suggested that the Itzá



In the case of Mayapán, native sources associate the Late Postclassic foundation of the city with the Coom, a prominent Itzá lineage, and indicate that they were considered first among equals in a form of joint government known as *mutepal* (Roys 1962; Marcus 1993). In our paper we will concentrate on examining how art and architecture were used at each of these sites to provide cosmic sanction for their new rulers. We focus particularly on the ways in which traditional forms, such as the radial temple, the jaguar throne, and other iconographic motifs associated with concepts of Maya creation mythology, were used to establish a visual charter for the existing sociopolitical order. Examining the reuse of such similar forms through

time and space provides an opportunity to consider the problem of continuity and disjunction in Mesoamerican art (see Kubler 1970). In this regard, we present evidence that the reuse of such traditional forms served to mask historical change and provided ideological legitimacy for new systems of governance by placing them in the context of cyclical and originary time.

### Dzibilchaltún, Radial Temples, and World Creation

We will begin our investigation by considering Dzibilchaltún,<sup>2</sup> whose city plan is influenced by the ancient Maya's view of their cosmos (figure 1). A north-south

may have stemmed from the region controlled by the Classic Maya polity of San José de Motul. We do not intend to try to settle the question of the origin place of either the Xiu or the Itzá in this paper. However, we would like to emphasize the fact that both Uxmal and Chichén Itzá, experienced a rather late and dramatic expansion of population and a concomitant increase in the creation of monumental architecture and art during the Terminal Classic period, just as many of the southern polities political regimes were disintegrating. Archaeologically, it has been shown that the well-known Eastern Puuc cities did not begin a rapid upsurge in population, settlement size, and architectural construction until about 9.17.0.0.0 to 9.18.0.0.0 in the Long Count (ca. A.D. 770-790), probably as the result of the perfection of chultun cistern technology (Dunning 1994). With more secure water supplies, new groups began to exploit the rich agricultural potential of the Puuc region. Some of the new inhabitants surely came from the western Puuc region, while others may have immigrated from more distant regions to the southwest.

After a time of competition among many autonomous Eastern Puuc centers during much of the ninth century, the site of Uxmal apparently was able to forge a more effective political military alliance involving the sister cities of Kabah and Nohpat, enlisting the assistance of smaller centers like Mul-Chic, whose vivid battle murals may well commemorate a victory in the expansion of this Eastern Puuc regional state, and even utilizing Itzá warriors from Chichén Itzá (Walters and Kowalski n.d.).

Chichén Itzá likewise shows little evidence of substantial population or constructional activity until the ninth century, at which time there was apparently a settlement established at the site. Although traditional interpretations of the historical chronicles and Chichén Itzá archaeology stressed the sequential occupation of the site by "Chichén Maya" and "Toltec" groups. More recent investigations have demonstrated that so-called "Maya" and "Toltec" traits overlap fully with one another in settlement plan and the iconographic programs of individual edifices (Lincoln 1990). In *The Forest of Kings*, Freidel and Schele (1990) suggested that Chichén Itzá was founded by Itzá groups during the ninth century, and that it was strategically located between the Puuc polities in the west and the Cobá state in the east, with a corridor of territory connecting this new capital to the important trading port facility on Isla Cerritos, and thence to a string of Itzá coastal entrepôts along the west and northwest coast of the peninsula. Although scholars currently disagree over the date of Chichén Itzá's abandonment (Ringle, Bey, and Peraza 1991), we would agree with Schele and Freidel (1990) that Chichén Itzá seems to have formed an aggressive, expansionistic tribute state, which eventually defeated the Puuc polities and that of Cobá during the tenth century, surviving to become the dominant power on the peninsula for some time thereafter.

What is particularly important for our discussion is the fact that both, Uxmal and Chichén Itzá rose rapidly and fairly late, both seem to have been "established" or founded by non-local groups. We will discuss some of the ways in which these non-local groups sought to validate their new-found political power, placing particular emphasis on the manner in which traditional maya cosmological symbols and references to creation mythology and divine ancestry were incorporated into the architectural settings and associated artforms at the two centers. Although both centers utilize aspects of creation mythology and divine ancestry in order to visually document their right to rule, differences in the political organization of the two cities is accompanied by corresponding differences in the iconography of kingship, contrasting the more traditional focus on a paramount ruler at Dzibilchaltún and Uxmal with the deliberate absence of the image of a single king in the art of the *mutepal* polity centered at Chichén Itzá and that at the Late Postclassic capital Mayapán.

<sup>2</sup> Dzibilchaltún is located in the dry northwestern part of the Yucatán peninsula, some 23 kilometers from the Gulf of Mexico, and north of Mérida, the present-day capital of Yucatán. The location, marks the first habitable land south of the salt-



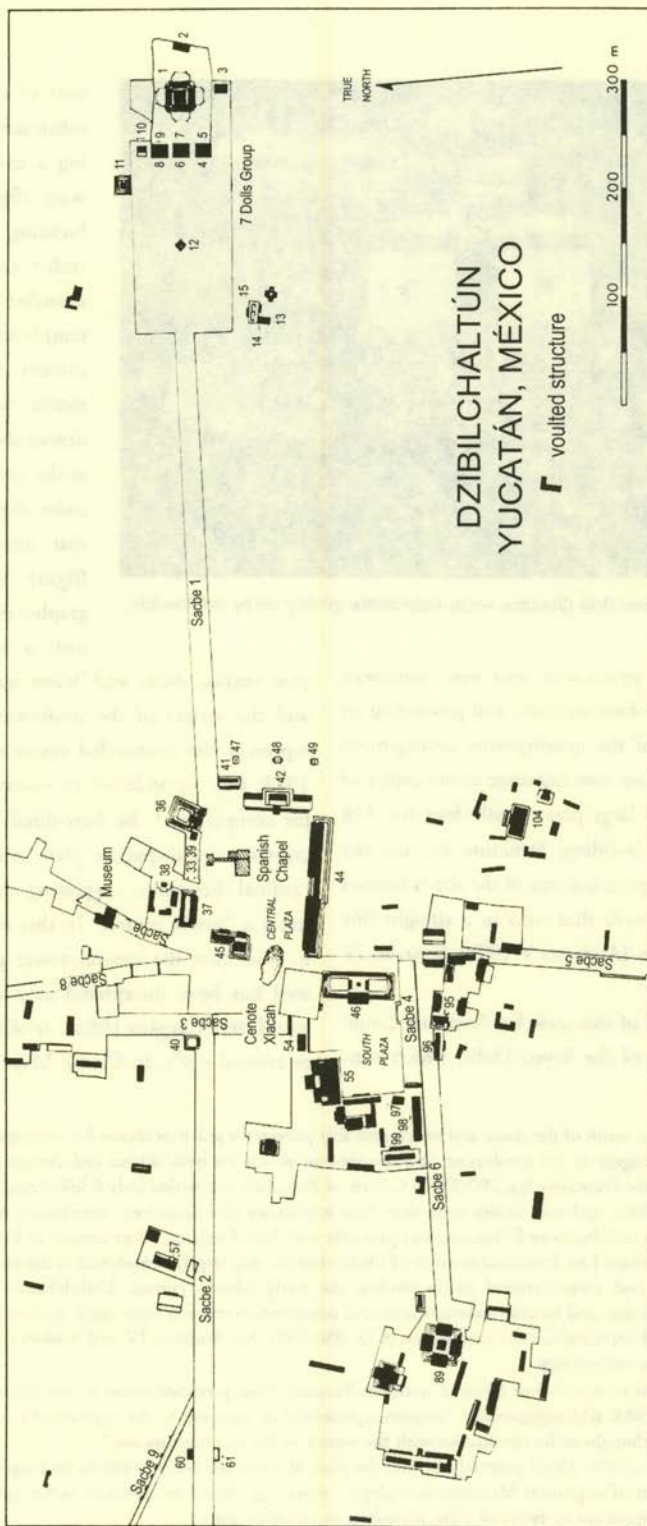


Figure 1. Map of the central section of Dzibilchaltún, Yucatán (after Andrews IV and Andrews V 1980; figure 1)



Figure 2. Temple of the Seven Dolls (Structure 1-sub), Dzibilchaltún (photograph by Jeff Kowalski).

causeway bisects a prominent east-west causeway, dividing the site into four sections, and producing an approximate image of the quadripartite arrangement of the world. These two axes converge at the center of the site, marked by a large plaza, a 400-foot (ca. 118 meter) long "palace" building, Structure 44, and the Cenote Xlacah.<sup>3</sup> The principal axis of the site is formed by a great east-west *sacbe* that runs in a straight line for some 2,263 meters (Andrews V 1978; Andrews IV and Andrews V 1980).

At the eastern end of this *sacbe* lies Structure 1-sub, the so-called Temple of the Seven Dolls, which con-

sists of a radially-symmetrical substructural platform supporting a temple with four doorways (figure 2). The temple building has a vaulted corridor surrounding an inner chamber which rises above the temple roofline to form a prominent central tower. Stucco masks with waterlily head-dresses above the doorways and at the corners of the upper facades depict saurian creatures that inhabit the underworld (figure 3). Associated iconographic elements on the frieze, such as waterlilies, twined ser-

pent bodies, shells, and "water stacks," allude to death and the waters of the underworld, waters that also represent the primordial ocean of creation (Coggins 1983: 60). In addition to resembling the maya sign for completion,<sup>4</sup> the four-sided shape of the temple creates a quadripartite plan roughly aligned to the cardinal directions, suggesting that the temple establishes a "world center." In this regard it is important to note that the central tower projecting above the roof has been interpreted as a manifestation of the world tree (Coggins 1983), or *Wakah Chan* ("stood up or erected sky"). In Classic Maya creation mythology,

laden lagoons that lies just south of the coast, and which probably provided a practical reason for the city's settlement, since it was strategically situated to engage in the production and distribution of salt via both inland and circum-peninsular trade routes. Indeed, the Middle to Late Formative (ca. 700-250 B.C.) site of Komchen was settled only 6 kilometers to the northwest of the later center of Dzibilchaltún, and even at this early date there is evidence that Komchen's inhabitants were in contact with the Olmec of the Gulf Coast of Tabasco and Veracruz, and probably with Late Preclassic Maya centers in Belize as well (Andrews V 1986). Komchen, and related Late Preclassic sections of Dzibilchaltún, was largely abandoned at the end of the Late Preclassic. After an occupational and constructional hiatus during the Early Classic period, Dzibilchaltún began to increase in population, to expand in size, and to undertake monumental construction projects once again during the seventh century and throughout the Late and Terminal Classic periods (ca. A.D. 650-950). See Andrews IV and Andrews V (1980) for the fullest account of Dzibilchaltún archaeology.

<sup>3</sup> Cenotes were sacred to the ancient Maya of northern Yucatán. They provided access to the waters and the spirits of the underworld. Coggins (1983: 61) suggests that "cenotes represented an opening to the underworld, and in northern Yucatán those waters were also thought to be continuous with the waters of the surrounding sea."

<sup>4</sup> Clemency Coggins (1980; 1983) pointed out that the plan of Structure 1-Sub, with its four-part radial symmetry, is an architectural embodiment of important Mesoamerican glyphic signs (e.g., *kan* cross, *k'in* sign, *lamat* sign, "zero" or completion sign) that denote the completion of cycles of solar, planetary, or calendric time.

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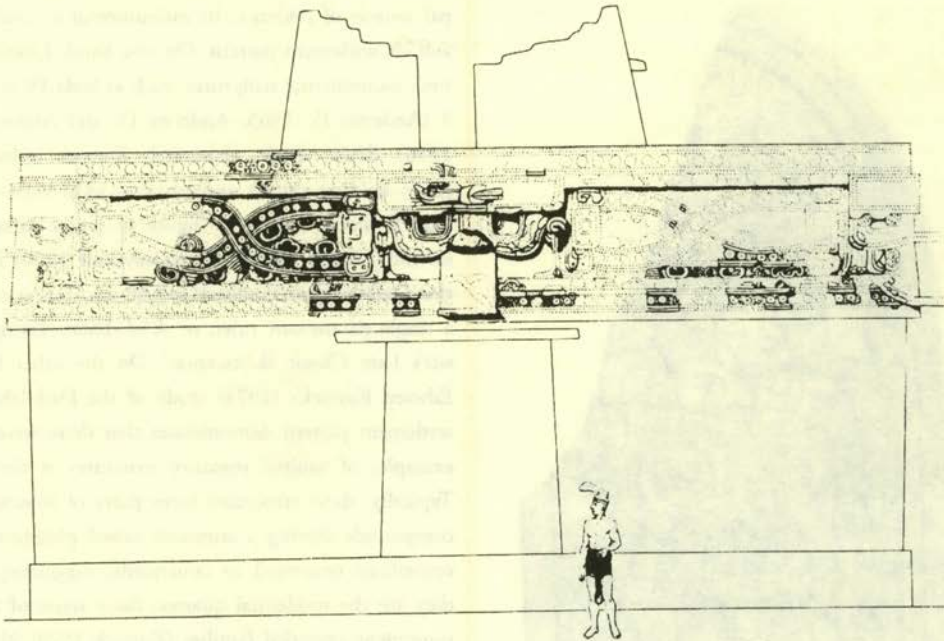


Figure 3. Drawing of the facade of the Temple of the Seven Dolls (Structure 1-sub), Dzibilchaltún, showing saurian masks at corners and above doorway, accompanied by symbols of the waters of the underworld and the primordial ocean of creation (after Andrews V 1978: figure 18)

the erection of the world tree by Hun Nal Ye was a critical event in the establishment of cosmic, and subsequent political, order (Freidel, Schele and Parker 1993).

Directly to the west of the Seven Dolls temple are three smaller structures aligned north-south in tandem. This overall layout resembles the E-Group assemblage of Uaxactun in reverse (Aveni 1980: 280-281, fig. 101). At Uaxactun, the Late Preclassic radial pyramid, E-VII-Sub was the focal point of the E-Group that was associated with the solar calendar, and was designed to commemorate the equinoctial and solstitial positions where the sun rises on the horizon (Aveni 1980: 277-281). Coggins (1983: 36) has shown that the Seven Dolls Group at Dzibilchaltún also served as an instrument for measuring and pre-

dicting the path of the sun, thus serving to "put man and his constructed environment in harmony with celestial phenomena." Finally, Coggins (1983: 63) notes that ideological concerns of Classic period (Early Period II) Dzibilchaltún involved cycles of the sun and included the erection of stelae and other specialized structures "which related the rulers of Dzibilchaltún to cyclic celebration." Coggins (1983: 54) pointed out large-scale correspondences between Dzibilchaltún's site plan and the standardized plan of Twin-Pyramid Groups at Tikal, Guatemala. Since the Tikal Twin-Pyramid Groups are associated with katun-ending rituals (Jones 1969), it is likely that the Temple of the Seven Dolls was used in connection with similar "cyclic celebration" marking end of the outgoing katun and the beginning of the incoming katun.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Coggins and Drucker (1988: 17) have argued that Structure 1-sub at Dzibilchaltún "encoded both observational and calculated calendrical data from the solar year, from the Long Count and from the Venus cycle for all synchronized for a single day in Maya history—this was the completion of katun thirteen, 9.13.0.0.0, 8 Ahau, 8 Uo or the Gregorian date of March 16, 692."



Figure 4. Dzubilchaltún Stela 19 (after Andrews V 1978: figure 8)

What was the relationship between the overall site layout, the Temple of the Seven Dolls, and the site's leadership? An understanding of Dzubilchaltún's sociopolitical organization can be gleaned from two princi-

pal sources of evidence: its monumental art tradition and its settlement pattern. On one hand, Dzubilchaltún's monumental sculptures, such as Stela 19 or Stela 9 (Andrews IV 1965; Andrews IV and Andrews V 1980), depict single, elaborately dressed, individual rulers holding shields and carrying local versions of God K manikin scepters (figure 4). These variations on the "Classic Motif" (Proskouriakoff 1950) imply that Dzubilchaltún's political system was dominated by a single paramount ruler, or *K'ul Ahaw*, during the site's Late Classic florescence.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, Edward Kurjack's (1974) study of the Dzubilchaltún settlement pattern demonstrates that there were 240 examples of vaulted masonry structures at the site. Typically, these structures form parts of interrelated compounds sharing a common raised platform and centralized courtyard or courtyards, suggesting that they are the residential quarters for a series of local, prominent extended families (Kurjack 1974: 91-94). In several cases these elite house groups are physically connected to the site center by means of secondary *sacbeob*. Based on what we now know about the sociopolitical organization of other southern Maya centers such as Copan, Yaxchilan, or Palenque, it seems reasonable to assume that the lineage heads from these compounds formed some sort of advisory council to the *K'ul Ahaw*. Perhaps Structure 44 (figure 5), located centrally and with an extraordinary plan featuring multiple doorways but only three long "public" chambers, would have served as a *Popol Nah* or community administrative center for the Dzubilchaltún polity (on *Popol Nah* structure as a type, see Fash et al., 1992), while the Seven Dolls Temple was used in community-wide cyclic completion rituals.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> In her milestone work, *A Study of Classic Maya Sculpture*, Tatiana Proskouriakoff (1950: 4-5) defined the long-lived Maya sculptural tradition as returning again and again to what she called the "Classic Motif," referring to the fact that at most sites monumental art compositions focus attention on a single human figure, frequently portrayed standing on a carved mask panel or a bound captive figure. Often the figure is shown holding a ceremonial bar, or alternatively the effigy manikin scepter, or a shield and spear. Later studies of Maya hieroglyphic writing, initiated by Proskouriakoff (1960) and furthered by many scholars (cf. Culbert 1988), have demonstrated that the principal figures on the stelae which bear this "Classic Motif" are historical rulers or *Ch'ul Ahaw'ob* of the sites where they are portrayed. Thus, the figural motif and associated iconography have been demonstrated to refer to a particular type of political organization which might best be termed a variation of divine kingship.

<sup>7</sup> Interestingly, Structure 1-Sub is not the only major radially symmetrical pyramid-temple at Dzubilchaltún. Another, Estudios de Cultura Maya. Vol. XXII, 2002



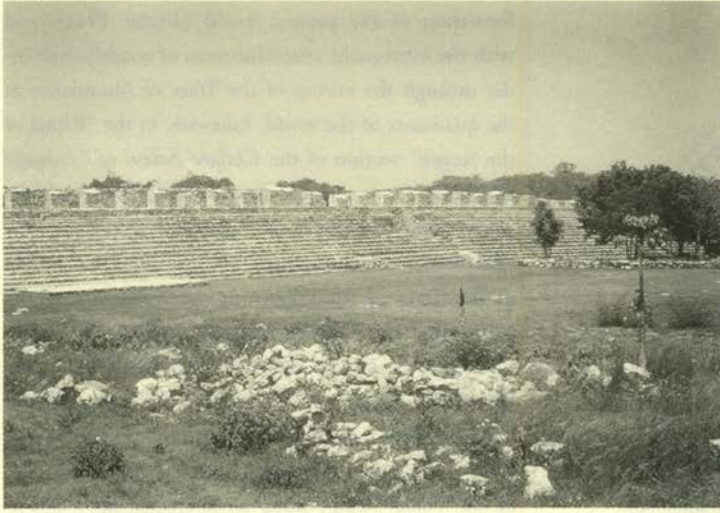


Figure 5. Structure 44, Dzibilchaltún (photograph by Tomás Pérez)

### Uxmal, Centrality, Ancestor worship, and the K'ul Ahaw

Nicholas Dunning and Jeff Kowalski (1994) recently have presented mutually supportive settlement pattern and iconographic evidence, indicating that Uxmal became the capital of a regional state which coalesced in the eastern Puuc region during the late ninth and

early tenth centuries of the Terminal Classic period under the leadership of a K'ul Ahaw known as "Lord Chaak" who appears on a bicephalic jaguar throne on Stela 14 (figure 6). Kowalski (1994) has argued that the Nunnery Quadrangle (figure 7) embodied key elements of essential Maya cosmological concepts in its plan and sculpture to convey the idea that Uxmal had become the primate religious center and political capital of the eastern Puuc region.<sup>8</sup> But further, much of the icono-

graphy of the quadrangle can be associated with Maya creation mythology which served as a divine charter for kingship, and which functioned periodically to ritually renew the bonds between the ruler, the gods, the ancestors, and the living community.<sup>9</sup>

God N, who appears on the West Structure of the Nunnery, plays an important role in maya creation myth (figure 8). God N, or Pawahtun, as the maya

Structure 89, is located a short distance southwest of the Central Plaza and is linked physically to the South Plaza by Sacbe 6 (Andrews IV and Andrews V, 1980: 14). Andrews IV and Andrews V note that this is the "second highest pyramidal platform at Dzibilchaltún," measuring some 41 meters per side and rising about 13 meters high, and that like Structure 1, it dates to the Early period II. Since no extensive excavations have been carried out in and around Structure 89, it is difficult to be certain of its significance. It is physically connected to the South and Central Plazas via *sacbeob* and forms, although its somewhat isolated placement makes its difficult to interpret as a communal "world center." On the other hand, the extensive plaza on which it rests could have accommodated a substantial number of people, so that it might have functioned in connection with world renewal rituals such as katun endings and/or new year's festivals. Perhaps ceremonies celebrated at the community-wide level involved Structure 1-Sub, Structure 66, the Cenote Xlacah, and the buildings of the Central Plaza, while Structure 89 was the locus of rituals conducted by a more restricted group of the elite. It is also noteworthy that a similar replication of four-stairway, radial pyramid temples also occurs at the site of Chichén Itzá, where the Osario or High Priest's Grave is a small-scale version of the larger Outer Castelloural elements were also cited as providing support for this interpretation

<sup>8</sup> In particular, Kowalski (1994) suggested that the quadrangular layout and approximate correspondence of the principal buildings to the cardinal points, represents an effort to replicate the well-documented quadripartite horizontal organization of the Maya cosmos, with east and west associated with the rising and setting sun, and with north and south corresponding to the upperworld and underworld. Specific door counts and iconographic sculpt

<sup>9</sup> Jeff Kowalski thanks Linda Schele for permitting him to read a draft of a chapter on Uxmal to be published in a forthcoming book coauthored by herself and Peter Mathews. Several of the ideas expressed here are inspired by those contained therein, as well as by the discussions of Maya creation mythology and iconography in Freidel, Schele and Parker (1993), although we differ with these in some particulars.





Figure 6. Uxmal Stela 14 (after Graham 1992: 4:108)

"world sustainer," an earth- and sky-bearer corresponding to the Mam, the earth-dwelling mountain deity of the Kekchi and Pokomchi, and to the Tzotzil Maya Vasak Men, is associated with the "partitioning" of the world as the gods who stand at the four corners of and hold up the earth (Coe 1973: 14-15; Schele and Miller 1986: 4, 61; Taube 1989: 355; Vogt 1976: 15-16). God N could be referred to, as a Bacab as well as a Pawahtun (Taube 1988). It is the Bacabob, whom Landa describes as closely related to the Chaaks and the Pawahtuns, and who are associated with the great flood which preceded the present

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formation of the present world (Tozzer 1941), and with the subsequent reestablishment of quadripartite order through the raising of the Trees of Abundance at the quadrants of the world. Likewise, in the "Ritual of the Angels" section of the *Chilam Balam of Chumayel* (Roys 1967), the Bacabs are associated both with the world destroying flood, and with the subsequent reestablishment of quadripartite order through the raising of the Trees of Abundance at the quadrants of the world, and the establishment of a world axis by the raising of the Yaxche, the Green or First Tree of the World (Newsome 1991: chpt. 8). Of course, in the Classic period creation text from the Tablet of the Cross at Palenque, the task of erecting the world tree, or the *Wakah Chan* ("stood up or erected sky") falls to the "First Father" deity known as GI' or as Hun Nal Ye, identified as the Classic counterpart of Hun Hunahpu and the Maize God (Schele and Freidel 1990; Freidel, Schele, and Parker 1993). As we will see, the importance of the Maize God in creation is referred to in the sculpture of the South Structure of the Nunnery Quadrangle. In addition, Linda Schele (personal communication, 1996) recently has interpreted the mask panels on the West Structure as Itzam-Yeh, the Classic version of the braggart bird Vucub Caquix, whose defeat by the Hero Twins cleared the way for the present creation. Because of the creation-related significance of the Nunnery Quadrangle, we are inclined to accept this particular identification, although it is not clear that every long-snouted mask represents this bird.

The facade of the South Structure of the Nunnery features miniature Maya huts crowned reptilian masks and sprouting vegetation scrolls (Barrera Rubio 1987: 90; figure 9a). These images recall the maize plant rising from the *kan* cross earth reptilian on the Tablet of the Foliated Cross at Palenque (Maudslay 1889-1902, 4: pl. 81), and a related depiction of a leafy maize god emerging from a cleft *kawak/witz* monster head on the sculptured pillars of the Lower Temple of the Jaguars at Chichén Itzá (Taube 1985: 175) (figure 9b). Various related scenes occur on Late Classic poly-





Figure 7. The Nunnery Quadrangle, Uxmal (photograph by Tomás Pérez)

chrome or "Codex Style" vases (Robicsek and Hales 1981: fig. 59; Taube 1985: 175, fig. 6a). Taube (1985: 175) suggests that the young maize god rising from the turtle carapace is also a variant of Hun Hunahpu, the "first father" of the Hero Twins in the *Popol Vuh*, and a solar-maize deity who is resurrected annually in the underworld. This maize god also corresponds to Hun Nal Ye, the deity associated with the erection of the world tree at Palenque (Freidel, Schele, and Parker 1993). The maize-sprouting masks of the South Structure of the Nunnery probably pertain to this mythic complex, thus referring to the regeneration of the maize/sungod/Hun Nal Ye within the earth, referred to in the "Ritual of the Angels" as the pre-creation birth of the "three-cornered precious stone of grace," a metaphorical name for the maize kernel and for the Maize God (cf. Newsome 1991: chpt 8).

At the approximate center of the Nunnery Quadrangle stood an upright cylindrical stone column, probably an embodiment of the the *Yaxcheel Cab* or world axis (Kowalski 1994). The relation between creation myth and contemporary politics is evident from the fact that a single-headed jaguar throne was originally discovered on a low platform near the remains of

the stone column (Ruz Lhuillier 1955: 50; 1959: 14; Kowalski 1990) (figure 10). Such jaguar thrones have long been recognized as the preeminent "seat of power" and as one of the most important symbols of royal authority among the ancient Maya (Kowalski 1987: chpt. 14). In this regard, "Lord Chaak" is



Figure 8. God N (Pawahtun or Bacab) as he appears above the central doorway of the West Structure of the Nunnery Quadrangle, Uxmal (photograph by Jeff Kowalski)



Figure 9a. Maya hut with sprouting maize vegetation, South Structure of the Nunnery Quadrangle, Uxmal (photograph by Jeff Kowalski)

depicted standing on a two-headed jaguar throne on Uxmal Stela 14 (figure 6).

<sup>10</sup> On the facade of the East Structure of the Nunnery Quadrangle at Uxmal there is a series of six sculptural designs consisting of tiered arrangements of two-headed serpents with distinctive and intriguing mask motifs at their centers. These masks represent a figure with large round eyes and a reticulated incised treatment of the surface of the face. This has been interpreted either as a mosaic encrusted surface, or as feathers. Both, the feathered treatment and the large eyes have led several scholars to identify this as an owl (see Foncerrada 1965). This identification would seem to be strengthened by the sculptural treatment of the creature's torso, where the "reticulated" pattern has an overlapping appearance that more closely resembles plumage. Surrounding the owl's head are his earplugs, bivalve shells, and two large, circular, ringlike motifs. On top of his head are a pair of tied knots or bows. Surrounding his head is a large spray of feathers, and behind these are two projecting forms which Schele and Mathews recently have identified as spears or atlatl darts.

In earlier discussions of the Nunnery Quadrangle, Kowalski (1994; Dunning and Kowalski 1994) continued to accept the owl identification, but have also noted Karl Taube's association of the mask with the reticulated appearance of the alternating heads on the Old Temple of Quetzalcoatl at Teotihuacan. Taube (1992) identified the Teotihuacan heads as examples of a "war serpent" which was ancestral to the later Mexica-Aztec *Xiuhcoatl*. Depictions of this war serpent, frequently featuring similar reticulated or mosaic surface treatments, also occur in Classic Maya art both in the southern and northern Maya lowlands, where they form part of a complex of iconographic motifs and symbols associated with Tlaloc-Venus warfare. Because such Tlaloc-Venus warfare-related motifs also appear on other structures at Uxmal, Kowalski suggested that the owl on the East Structure was used as a symbol of this complex of sacred war, in essence a somewhat later variant of the well-known Teotihuacan "owl-and-weapons" motif, and that it may even have been used to signify that the captives taken in such Venus-sanctioned warfare were necessary for maintaining the continuity of astral and agricultural cycles which are also incorporated in the iconography of other palaces at the Nunnery.

Kowalski now believes that there may be an even more specific and "historical" reason why this owl motif appears on the facade of the East Structure. Specifically, he argues that this motif is a reference to the founder Uxmal, the Xiu lineage head who

One reason why the jaguar throne became an important symbol of royal authority was because of its associations with Maya creation mythology. Freidel, Schele, and Parker (1993), in their analysis of Quirigua Stela C, have shown that this jaguar seat represents one of the three "throne-stones" which were occupied by deities at the time of creation. Such a jaguar throne is also occupied by the Underworld deity God L who serves as a "chief speaker" in a creation-related council of divinities on the so-called Vase of the Seven Gods (Coe 1973; Freidel, Schele, and Parker 1993). At Uxmal, the close juxtaposition of the jaguar throne and the columnar "world tree" apparently reflects a long-lived Maya tradition that linked the king and the *Yaxcheel Cab* (Schele and Miller 1986: 109), associating the ruler with primordial acts of world creation (Freidel, Schele, and Parker 1993: 66-68). Interestingly, these general references to creation are coupled with a probable iconographic reference to the ethnohistorically documented "founder" of Uxmal, Ah Kuy Tok Tutul Xiu, embodied by the distinctive owl and weapons emblems on the East Structure of the Nunnery.<sup>10</sup>

Located in front of the House of the Governor is a small radial platform that supported a two-headed ja-



guar throne resembling that shown on Uxmal Stela 14 (Kowalski 1987). Another small radial platform, located between the jaguar throne and the House of the Governor, supported a large stone column that can also be interpreted as a world tree monument. The two-headed jaguar throne and stone column

is referred to as Ah Kuy Tok' Tutul Xiu in the Maya chronicles. The Chilam Balam books refer to this founding event in the following terms:

This is the katun 2 Ahaw

Ah Kuy Tok' Tutul Xiw founded the land at Uxmal

2 Ahaw

13 Ahaw

11 Ahaw

9 Ahaw

7 Ahaw

5 Ahaw

3 Ahaw

1 Ahaw

12 Ahaw

10 Ahaw

Ah Kuy Tok' Tutul Xiw founded the land at Uxmal

ten score years they founded land at Uxmal

together with the Halach Winik of Chich'en Itzá

and Mayapán

In the Chilam Balam of Tizimin and Mani the name of the founder is spelled Ahcuitok. Barrera Vásquez and Morley (1949: 33, note 37) however, revised this name to read AhSuyTok and thus interpreted the name to mean something like "living flint." This reading depends on reading the cuitok in the Mani version of the text as quitok with a *cedilla* which was assumed to be missing. Barrera Vásquez did not consider the possibility that the cui was to be read as written. If we do so we find that the following entry from the *Cordemex Dictionary* (p. 357) is pertinent:

ah kuy: es una especie de búho (*Diccionario Maya Cordemex*: Maya-Español, Español-Maya. Alfredo Barrera Vásquez, director. Ediciones Cordemex, Mérida, Yucatán, México.)

This kuy owl is depicted in various contexts in Maya art. For example it is found on the headdress of God L, one of the principal gods of the underworld, and probably served as his messenger. However, the most important reference to the owl as a symbol of warfare and sacrifice occurs in connection with the Teotihuacan-related Tlaloc-Venus complex. For example, on Dos Pilas Stela 16 Ruler 3 of Dos Pilas appears wearing an owl pectoral with a highland/Oaxaca style Venus pectoral around its own neck. This owl forms part of an interrelated set of clothing and insignia which Stone (1989) has termed the Teotihuacan Warrior Costume, and which has been demonstrated to be associated with Venus regulated warfare throughout the Maya area (Carlson 1991: 206-207, figs. 8.2a-d). The connection between the owl, shield, and weapons can be traced back to the Early Classic period at Tikal, when Teotihuacan related symbols and Venus-regulated conquest warfare were introduced and adopted by the local rulers Curl Nose and Stormy Sky during the fourth and fifth century.

Interestingly, the owl appears in the owl-spearthrower glyphs which appear in the texts above the figures on the sides of Tikal Stela 31 (Schele and Freidel 1990). These are interpreted as references to Curl Nose's father as a "spearthrower-shield" person. In a broad sense the spearthrower-shield collocation has the same meaning as the well-known *tok'-pakal* glyphic expression which seems to express an individual's war-making prerogatives. Perhaps most importantly for the discussion of the Uxmal owl-and-spears motif, the *tok'-pakal* is referred to as something that is associated with Yat-Balam, the lineage founder of the Yaxchilan dynasty, as he is portrayed on Lintel 25 (Schele and Freidel 1990). This could be taken as evidence that the *tok'-pakal* expression, or its cognate, the *kuy-tok'* expression, were considered an important quality associated with dynastic founders.

Schele, Grube, and Boot (n.d.) recently have presented a new correlation of the events described in the Uxmal katunob katun chronicles in the Chilam Balam books. According to their interpretation, this founding event involving Ah Kuy Tok' Tutul Xiu fell in the katun 9.15.0.0.0 4 Ahaw 13 Yax (22 August, 731). Barrera Vásquez and Morley (1949) suggested that this founding event occurred in the katun 2 Ahaw (10.9.0.0.0) corresponding to the period 987 to 1007. Because the extant hieroglyphic dates at Uxmal fall in the early tenth century, and because these are associated with the latest, not the earliest buildings in the sequence, the Barrera Vásquez and Morley interpretation cannot be supported. In my own work on the Xiu histories, Kowalski (1987) followed Tozzer (1957) and Roys (1962) in placing these foundation events even later in the katun count, suggesting that the Xiu were latecomers to the peninsula who asserted a fictive claim to founding Uxmal in order to bolster their political bona fides. Taking Schele, Grube, and Boot's investigations into account, however, as well as the fact that Nicholas



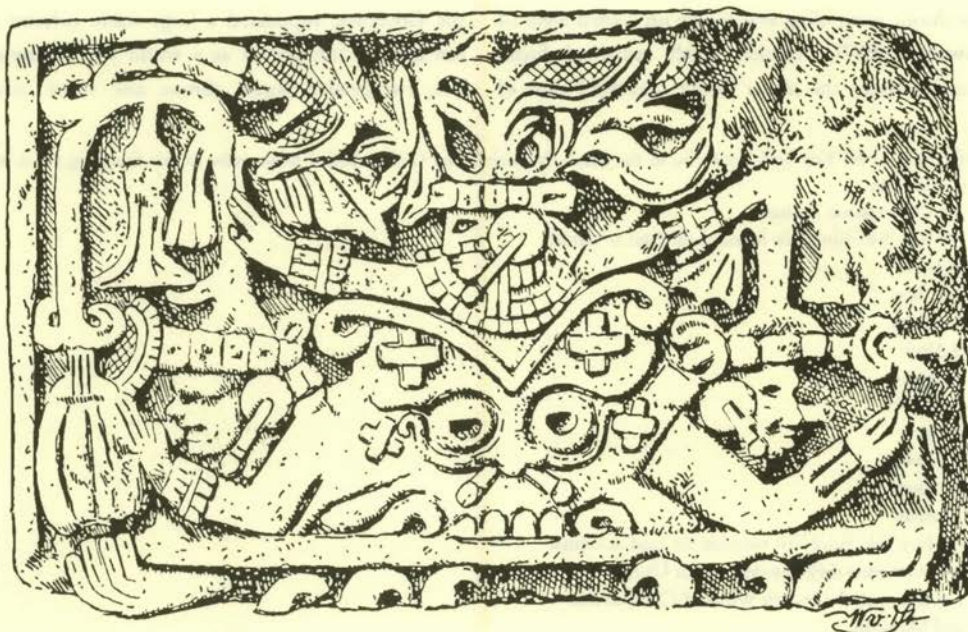


Figure 9b. Maize God emerging from a cleft turtle carapace conflated with a *kawak/witz* monster, carved piers, Lower Temple of the Jaguars, Chichén Itzá (after Maudslay 1889-1902, 4: pl. 81)

mark an important Venus-rise alignment (Aveni 1980; Bricker and Bricker 1997) that can also be interpreted as having creation-related meanings. For the Classic Maya, Venus and the Sun appear to have been considered "twin brothers" in much the same way that the Sun and Moon were later paired as Hunahpu and Xbalanque in the *Popol Vuh*.<sup>11</sup> Considering that both archaeology and ethnohistory indicate that Uxmal's rulers were relative newcomers to Yucatán, the use of traditional quadripartite building plans and creation iconography undoubtedly was designed to provide ideological legitimacy for the recently founded dynasty of Ah Kuy Tok Tutul Xiu.

#### Jaguar Thrones, Radial Pyramids, and Group-Oriented Monumental Art at Chichén Itzá

Based on studies of epigraphy, art, and ethnohistoric sources, various scholars have suggested that Chichén Itzá had a form of conciliar government known as *multepal* ("joint or crowd rule"), like that at the later northern Maya city of Mayapán (see Krochock 1988; Schele and Freidel 1990; Grube 1994). Architecture and art also provides evidence for some type centralized political leadership (Miller 1977), although the Classic period's emphasis on a paramount ruler is replaced by more inclusive group compositions (Pros-

Dunning's (1994) settlement pattern studies in the Puuc region indicate that there was an increase in local populations during the eighth and ninth centuries that was so rapid that it cannot be explained simply on the basis of local buildup, I believe this new placement for the foundation provides a plausible explanation of the evidence. The founding of Uxmal by a faction of the Xiu thus may have taken place in the katun 2 Ahaw corresponding to 9.16.0.0.0 2 Ahaw (A.D. 751-771).

<sup>11</sup> See comments by Kowalski in Bricker and Bricker (1996: 220-221) *Estudios de Cultura Maya*. Vol. XXII, 2002

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Figure 10. Jaguar throne from the Nunnery Quadrangle, Uxmal (photograph by Jeff Kowalski)

kouriakoff 1950), leading to proposals that Chichén Itzá had either a “dual kingship” (Lincoln 1990) or some form of ranked lineages like those at the Quiché capital of Utatlan (Gumarcaaj). This political transformation at Chichén Itzá was accompanied by the development of new forms of art and architecture, dramatically transforming the format and content of monumental art programs. The strong parallels that exist between some of these forms and those at Tula, Hidalgo, indicate that Chichén Itzá maintained some special relationship with this central Mexican capital (Tozzer 1957; Jones 1995). It is likely that the Itzá rulership of Chichén Itzá maintained ongoing diplomatic and trading contacts, and perhaps a military pact, with the Toltec rulers of Tula, an alliance reflected by their shared architectural, artistic, and iconographic repertoires. Yet, even in many of the edifices located in the so-called “Toltec” section of the site, Chichén Itzá’s political rulership signaled their basically Maya ethnicity and worldview, and sought to validate their claims to authority by regularly incorporating references to traditional Maya deities, symbols, and creation myths into their architectural and artistic iconography (Freidel, Schele, and Parker

1993). Thus, it is possible to interpret some important aspects of Chichén Itzá’s new forms of art and architecture as efforts to legitimate a new political order and to found a new expansive and multi-ethnic polity, rather than simply as the result of foreign conquest (Wren and Schmidt 1991).

One important example of the blend of innovative and traditional forms appears at the impressive Temple of the Warriors Complex (Kristan-Graham 1989; Stone in press). The Temple of the Warriors was built over the smaller but similar Temple of the Chacmool. Kristan Graham (1989) and Stone (in press) note that some of the images in these two temples apparently are associated with real activities that occurred in particular areas of the buildings (Kristan-Graham 1989; Stone in press). For example, the Temple of the Chacmool benches portray an assembly of typical Chichén warriors on the north bench, and a group of eight figures including “priests” and Chaak “god impersonators” on the south bench (Charlot 1931; Morris 1931a: 186; Kowalski 1987: fig. 162; Taube 1988: fig. 4e). The warrior figures sit on painted jaguar thrones (figure 11) resembling actual stone versions of such thrones found in the Inner Castillo (see figure 15) and



Figure 11. One of a series of warrior figures seated on red-painted jaguar effigy thrones, north bench, Temple of the Chacmool (after Roys 1967: figure 3)

the Lower Temple of the Jaguars (figure 12), and depicted in relief in the interior of the North Ballcourt Temple (Wren 1989: fig. 10) and the Lower Temple of the Jaguars (Maudslay 1889-1902, 3: plate 50). It is significant that the warriors on the Temple of the Chacmool bench all occupy identical jaguar thrones. In Classic Maya art, and even at Terminal Classic Uxmal, the jaguar throne is occupied only by the king, and seems to associate him with the jaguar throne-stone created at the beginning of the present world era. At Chichén Itzá this same significance is implied in representations which associate the iconographic figure known as "Captain Sun Disk" (Miller 1977), probably a manifes-

tation of the sun and of the generalized principle of kingship (Lincoln 1990; Schele and Freidel 1990), with the jaguar throne. However, unlike any other Maya site, in the Temple of the Chacmool this symbol of royal authority is occupied by multiple warriors, none of whom can be identified as a paramount ruler. Traditionally, these warriors have been identified as "Toltecs" because of their resemblance to warrior figures at Tula, Hidalgo. They do wear a *tezcacuitlapilli*, a turquoise back mirror considered to be a diagnostic Toltec item (Taube 1994: 233). However, there are no examples of jaguar thrones known at Tula, while there are many Classic Maya versions of such royal seats. In addition, these warriors seem to share power in a "separate, but equal" relationship with the series of seated figures impersonating the Maya deities Chaak and Chac Chel painted on the south bench (Morris, Charlott, and Morris 1931; Stone in press). The overall figural arrangement and blend of traditional Maya and innovative Tula-related iconography suggests not conquest, but accommodation, with Chichén Itzá's rulers demonstrating their cosmo-politan connections with distant elites as well as their association with the ancient Maya deities of creation.

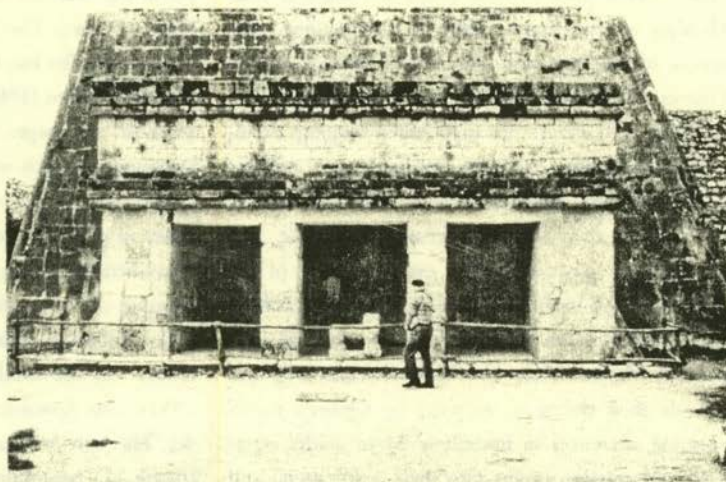


Figure 12. Lower Temple of the Jaguars, Chichén Itzá (photograph by Jeff Kowalski)



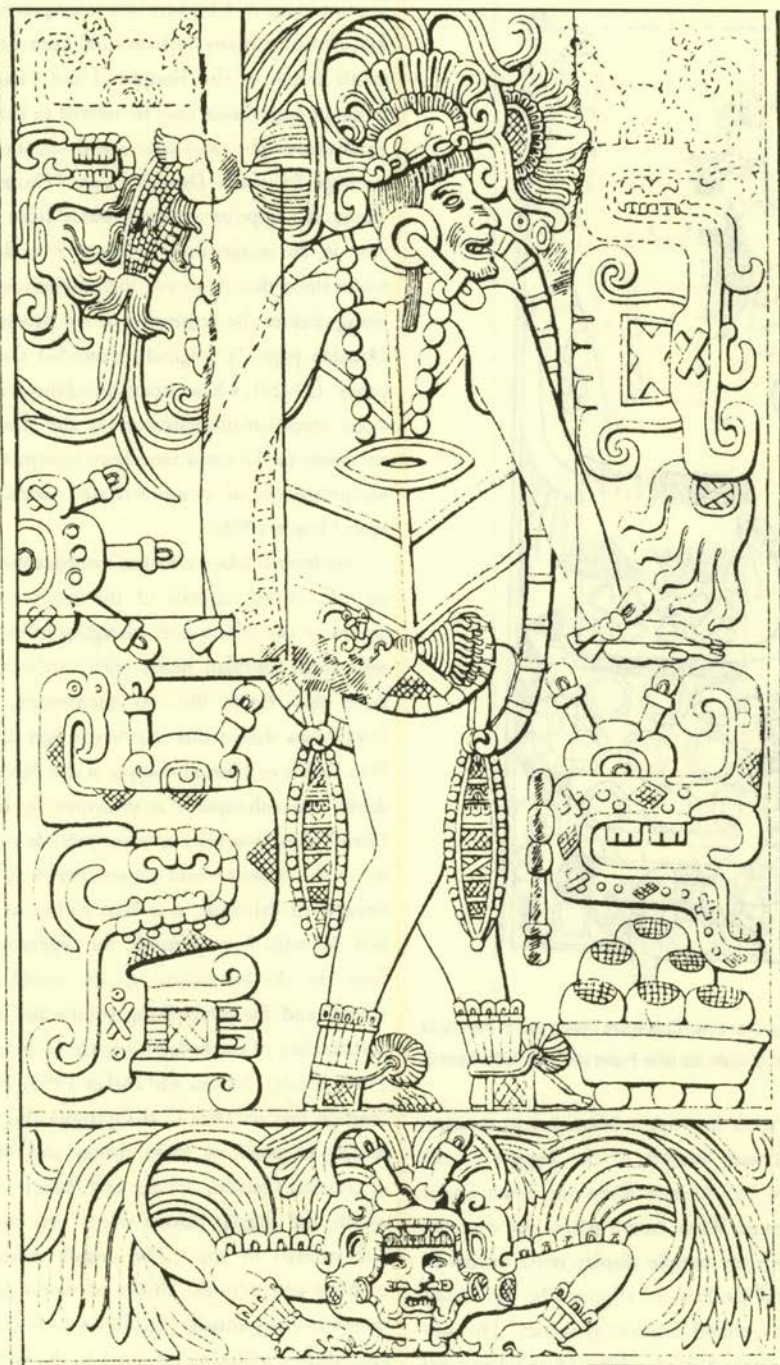


Figure 13a. God N figure from the embrasure of the Lower Temple of the Jaguars, Chichén Itzá

(after Maudslay 1889-1902, 3: plate 51c).

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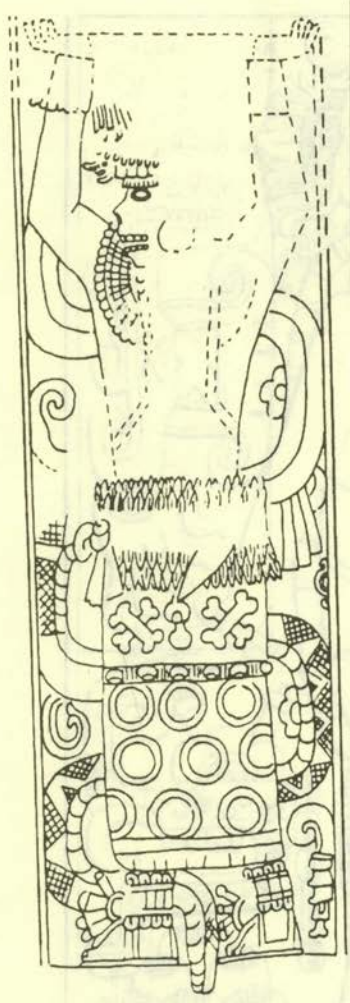


Figure 13b. Goddess O or Chac Chel figure from a pier of the Lower Temple of the Jaguars, Chichén Itzá (after Foster and Wren 1996: figure 2)

One of the most important references to creation occurs at the Lower Temple of the Jaguars of the Ballcourt (figure 12). Linnea Wren and Lynn Foster (1996) and Linnea Wren (n.d.) point out that the piers leading into the temple display relief images of both God N and Goddess O (figure 13a, b), whom they interpret as paired creator divinities. The important Maya female deity, Goddess O or Chac Chel (Kelley 1976: fig. 22), the probable counterpart of the Late Postclassic goddess Ix Chel, or "Lady Rainbow,"

is prominent in Chichén Itzá iconography, appearing frequently in many architectural contexts (as on the south bench of the Temple of the Chacmool). Her frequent appearance may be related to her role in Maya creation. Her association with creation is evident on page 74 of the *Dresden Codex* (Thompson 1972), where she appears pouring water from an inverted vase in an image interpreted as a depiction of the world flood that destroyed the previous race of human beings before the beginning of the present world era. Dresden page 74 originally preceded the "new year's pages" (25-28), whose rituals involving the erection of stone trees (*akantun/akante*) at the four directional entrances to the town have been interpreted as annual reenactments of creation-related world renewal rituals (Taube 1988).

Traditional Maya creation iconography also appears on the carved capitals of the piers, which feature scenes of the Maize god emerging from cleft *kawak/witz* earth reptilian heads with turtle-carapace attributes (see figure 9b). As mentioned, Karl Taube (1985) has shown that the Maize god is a version of First Father or Hun Hunahpu of the *Popol Vuh*, whose death and subsequent resurrection by his sons, the Hero Twins, was the necessary prelude to the beginning of the present world era and the rise of the Quiché lineage. At Palenque, it is First Father, as G1' or Hun Nal Ye, who is responsible for separating the earth from the sky by setting up the world tree (*Wakah Chan*), and for establishing primordial order by the partitioning of cosmological space (Schele and Freidel 1990; Freidel, Schele, and Parker 1993). As noted, the creation text on Stela C at Quirigua also refers to the setting in place of three stones and three thrones of creation (Freidel, Schele, and Parker 1993), one of which, the "jaguar throne stone," became an important symbol of the *Ch'ul Ahaw's* connection with creation and periodic rituals of world renewal. It is therefore exceptionally significant to find an actual jaguar throne sculpture centered in the entrance to the Lower Temple of the Jaguars (figure 14).

Another jaguar throne, the well-known red-





Figure 14. Jaguar throne in the central doorway of the Lower Temple of the Jaguars, Chichén Itzá (photograph by Jeff Kowalski)

painted and jade inlaid example, connected with concepts of cyclical time, world renewal, and cosmic creation, was placed in the rear chamber of the Inner Castillo temple at Chichén Itzá (Marquina 1964: 849–855, fot. 423; Erosa Peniche 1947) (figure 15). A circular iron-pyrite and turquoise mosaic mirror found on the throne's seat, indicates that new fire was drilled here, perhaps in connection with the great Baktun of its integration of the polity. However, because the site's Itzá rulership maintained important trading contacts with Tula and other central Mexican and gulf coast centers (Freidel 1986), Chichén Itzá's iconography also incorporates more overt references to non-Classic Maya deities and myths, frequently merging them into syncretistic blends of Maya and central Mexican forms and content.

rectural edifices. Thus, broader numbers of lineage lords could be visually linked to creation mythology and ritual and thus psychologically incorporated in the multilineage, multiethnic government that was developed at this Terminal Classic/Early Postclassic regional capital.

#### Mayapán: the Radial Temple, Cyclical Time, the Cocom Overlordship, and Multepal

It has long been recognized that Mayapán ("Standard of the Maya") succeeded Chichén Itzá as the most important regional capital in northern Yucatán during the Late Postclassic period (Sharer 1995: 408–412; Pollock, Roys, Proskouriakoff, Smith 1962).<sup>12</sup> Maya-

<sup>12</sup> In this regard it is important to consider Taube's (1988: 289) observation that: "The ethnohistoric accounts describing the Yucatec installation of the new year are far more concerned with purification and renewal than with the simple marking of calendric time. The period of the Uayeb is described in entirely negative terms as a time of evil and danger. The Pío Pérez passage mentions wild beasts and other dangers that threaten the community during the Uayeb. In Song 3 of the *Cantares de Dzitbalche*, the period of Uayeb is described in terms of world destruction. In Song 3, the concept of cosmic annihilation is more than a powerful metaphor; it is stated that the Uayeb will eventually constitute the end of the world. The first day of the new year, on the other hand, is marked with relief, feasting, and celebration. It is a return to order, and the re-creation of sacred space by the Chacs surely marks not only the purification of a particular courtyard, but also the community, the fields, and the world. Similarly, the ceremonies at the edges of the town is a reaffirmation of the ordered community in relation to the uncontrollable and frequently threatening surrounding world."



Figure 15. Red-painted and jade-inlaid jaguar throne in the Inner Castillo Temple, Chichén Itzá (after Marquina 1964: fot. 423)

pan's highest-ranking lineage, the Cocom, was an offshoot of the Itzá (Roys 1962), and many of Mayapan's most important ceremonial structures were modeled on prominent edifices at the earlier capital (Proskouriakoff 1962; figure 13). The Temple of Kukulcan (Structure Q-162), also known as the Castillo, is a terraced, pyramidal platform with four stairways leading to a summit temple featuring a serpent column doorway (figure

17). Also within the central ceremonial area is a cenote (Sharer 1995: 411). Both the radial plan of the Mayapán Castillo, as well as its proximity to a cenote or underworld entrance, mark this as another world center, and suggest that the foundation of the polity involved a deliberate effort to create a materialization of the world mountain. It is difficult to be certain what sort of activities occurred in and around this structure, but we may suppose that they involved communal rituals and dances like those described in connection with the New Year's festival and/or the festival of Kukulcan which was held in the Tutul Xiu capital of Mani at the time of the conquest (see Tozzer 1941: 134-149, 7157-158).

In addition, Mayapan<sup>13</sup> is known for the reintroduction of the "stela cult," following the nearly total abandonment of stelae at Chichén Itzá. Earlier scholars interpreted this as a "Maya resurgence" following the period of strong "Toltec" or "Mexican" influence at Chichén Itzá (Morley 1946; Andrews IV 1965). In some ways this does seem to be an accurate characterization, since these monuments again feature the use of Maya hieroglyphic inscriptions, demonstrating that the



Figure 16. The Castillo, Chichén Itzá (photograph by Tomás Pérez)

<sup>13</sup> Bishop Diego de Landa (Tozzer 1941: 23-25), attributed the foundation of Mayapán, like that of Chichén Itzá, to Kukulcan, and described it as a walled city, at whose center were constructed "their temples, and the largest, which is like that of Chichén Itzá, they called Kukulcan, and they built another building of a round form with four doors, entirely different from all the other in that land...."

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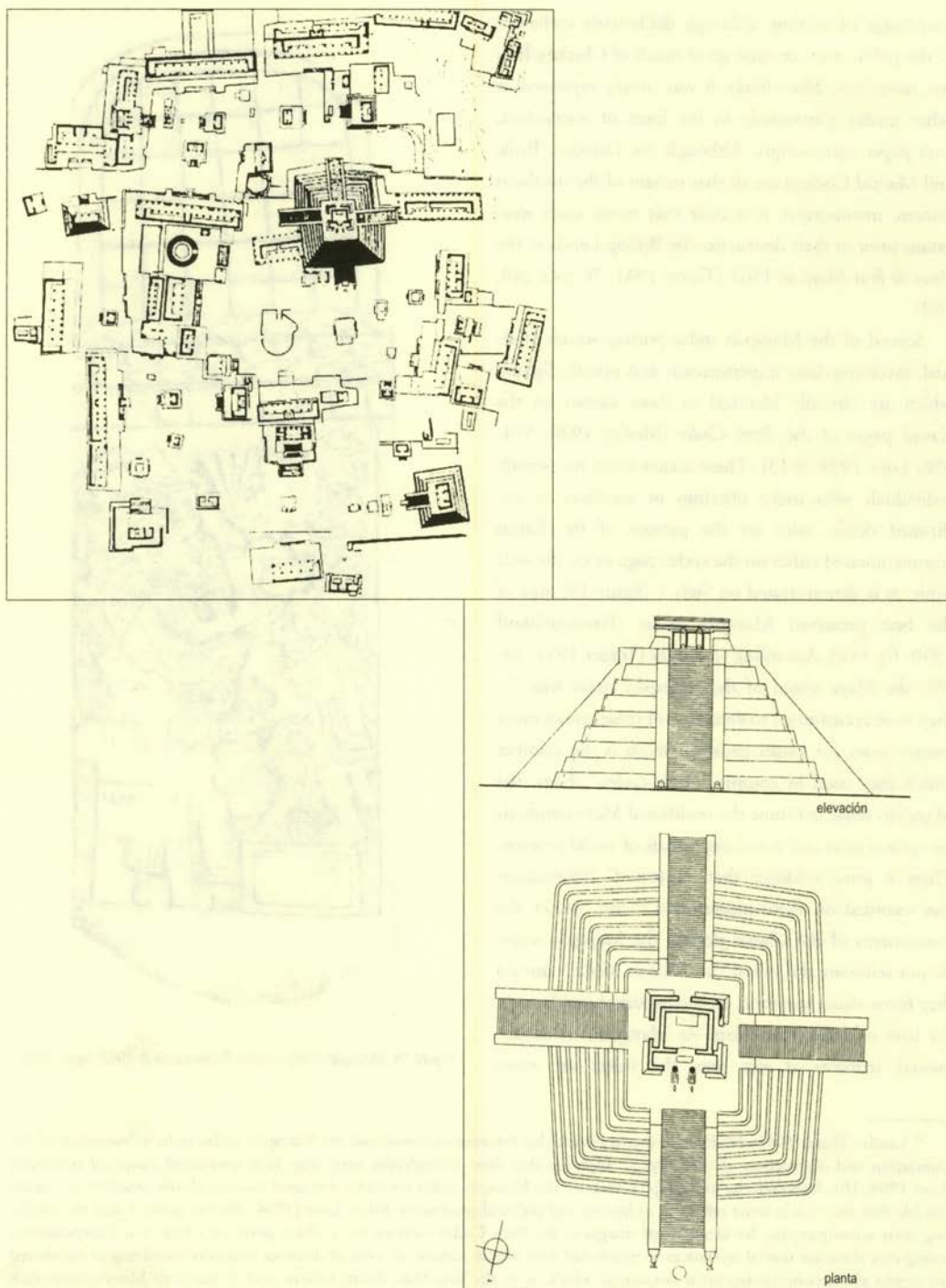


Figure 17. Elevation and plan of the Castillo (Structure Q-162) at Mayapán (after Marquina 1964: appendice, lám. 9)

knowledge of writing, although deliberately eschewed in the public monumental art of much of Chichén Itzá, was never lost. More likely, it was simply expressed in other media, particularly in the form of screen-fold, bark-paper manuscripts. Although the Dresden, Paris, and Madrid Codices are all that remain of the northern Yucatec manuscripts, it is clear that many more were extant prior to their destruction by Bishop Landa in the *Auto de fe* at Mani in 1562 (Tozzer 1941: 76 note 240, 169).

Several of the Mayapán stelae portray scenes of ritual, involving deity impersonators and priestly figures, which are virtually identical to those shown on the Katun pages of the *Paris Codex* (Morley 1920: 574-576; Love 1994: 9-13). These scenes focus on priestly individuals who make offerings or sacrifices to enthroned deities who are the patrons of the Katun commemorated either on the codex page or on the stela front, as is demonstrated on Stela 1 (figure 18), one of the best preserved Mayapán stelae (Proskouriakoff 1950: fig. 90e). According to Landa (Tozzer 1941: 38-39), the Maya stated of the Mayapán stelae that "... they were accustomed to erect one of these stones every twenty years [or katun period], which is the number which they used in counting their cycles." Thus, the Mayapán stelae continue the traditional Maya emphasis on cyclical time and associated rituals of world renewal. There is some evidence that "historical" information was recorded on these monuments,<sup>14</sup> but, unlike the monuments of the Classic period, the Mayapán stelae do not reinitiate the use of the "Classic Motif," nor do they focus visual attention on the historical incidents in the lives of individual rulers. At Mayapán, in monumental artforms at any rate, the rulers are more



Figure 18. Mayapán Stela 1 (after Proskouriakoff 1962: figure 12a)

<sup>14</sup> Landa (Tozzer 1941: 38-39) also mentions that his informants considered the Mayapán stelae to be a "memorial of the foundation and destruction of that city..." implying that their hieroglyphic texts may have contained historical references (Love 1994: 10). Although the hieroglyphic texts on the Mayapán stelae are badly damaged and not clearly readable, it is quite possible that they made some reference to history and political geography. Bruce Love (1994: 28) has posited that the similar long texts accompanying the katun ritual images in the *Paris Codex* contain clues which point to a historical interpretation, noting that there are several references to numbered tuns within katuns (or even of distance numbers consisting of numbered tun glyphs and accompanying uinal notations), which, as in the Tun-Ahau dating system used at northern Maya centers such as Uxmal and Chichén, or as in references in the later U Kahláy Katunob chronicles in the Chilam Balam books, may serve to fix historical events more precisely in time.



anonymous, portrayed in their priestly role as officials at Katun ending rituals, rather than as triumphant militarists.

It is possible that the different lineages participating in the *multepal* conciliar government at Mayapán participated on a rotational basis in katun ritual.<sup>15</sup> It is interesting that although there are references in the Books of Chilam Balam to the seating of katuns on the jaguar mat (*ix pop ti balam*), there are no known versions of actual jaguar thrones at Mayapán. We are unsure how to explain this absence. Perhaps the effigy form was replaced by the use of more impermanent jaguar pelts at Mayapán, or perhaps it was finally abandoned because of its associations with concepts of paramouncy. This may also account for Mayapan's lack of a ballcourt, a structure particularly associated with dynastic ideals and the concept of Ahaw.<sup>16</sup>

Although the centralized radial temple, and the associated concepts of world creation and world order it represented, make a final appearance at Mayapán, the building form must now be understood as a late effort to maintain the sense of cohesion and social order that had first been embodied in the Preclassic ritual structures like E-VII-Sub at Uxactun, later adapted to the dynastic political organizations of Classic centers like Tikal, Copan, or Dzibilchaltún, and then used as the

spatial and ritual fulcrum of the multiruler polity at Chichén Itzá. At Mayapán, however, the unity that can be achieved in art could mask but could not overcome the factional disputes and enmity between Cocom, the Xiu, and other lineages in the *multepal* government, which lead to the violent overthrow of the Cocom and the disintegration of the Mayapán conciliar government at around A. D. 1450.

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<sup>15</sup> Bruce Love (1994: 25; see also Edmonson 1986) points out that the *Book of Chilam Balam of Chumayel* indicates that in northern Yucatán at the time of the conquest "politics and geography were interwoven with *katun* commemorations; towns and polities received the sacred *katun* stone in succession...." It is quite possible that the figures seated on thrones on the Mayapán stelae represent a succession of the rulers or priests of the principal lineages constituting the Mayapán confederacy, with the katun being instituted, at least symbolically, in their respective territories. Such scheduled rotation of important ritual duties, and symbolic "seatings" of katuns in different polities would have provided a "power sharing" mechanism that permitted the lordly lineages at the site, which are known to have been highly competitive in other arenas, to maintain a sense of common purpose.

<sup>16</sup> Throughout the Classic period the ballcourt was the place where Maya kings publicly demonstrated their kinship to the original "lords," the Hero Twins (Schele and Miller 1986). More so than the radial temple, the ballcourt was a structure associated with dynastic ideals and an aristocratic ethos blending prowess on the ballcourt with prowess on the battlefield. Again, at Chichén Itzá, the Great Ballcourt suggests an effort to adapt this type of structure to a new form of sociopolitical organization, but the many other smaller courts scattered throughout the site suggest that each of the lineages maintained a sense of autonomy and independence based on their status as Ahaw'ob.

Although this is a plausible reason why the ballcourt, a structural type so long-lived and widespread in the Maya area, was abandoned at Mayapán, we also recognize that the ballcourt and ballgame were not similarly abandoned in the southern highlands during the same Late Postclassic period. At highland centers like Gumarcaaj (Utatlan), the Quiché capital, ballcourts were more abundant (Carmack 1981). In this case, as at Chichén Itzá, the various lineages, although hierarchically ranked, also shared power in a variant of the *multepal* form of government. Since the leaders of each independent lineage continued to hold the Ahaw status, ballcourts continued to be a significant ritual space in which elite ideals could be enacted and validated.

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