Introduction

by Gordon R. Willey and Norman Hammond

In a sense, this collection of essays on Maya archaeology and ethnohistory is a random sample from the range of current scholarship. The essays are addressed to topics of the authors' own choosing in the format of the Cambridge Symposium, with no restrictions other than quality and limitation to some aspect of Maya studies. We make no apologies for this "randomness" or "scatter." The specialized symposium with its proceedings confined to a narrow theme has its proven value, but so, in our opinion, has the assembly and discussion of heterodox interests. In the present case, these examples of various lines of current Maya research do tend to cohere around a central theme, albeit a broad one, that of the nature of ancient Maya social and political structure and the degree to which Maya culture approximated those conditions of civilization and urbanism which, in the larger comparative perspective, are of interest to most anthropologists and historical scholars.

Marshall Becker's essay, with which we open the volume, is directly concerned with this theme. It treats with the way Maya archaeologists, for over a century and a half, have conceived of the great Maya Pre-Columbian sites, of the model of the "city" as opposed to that of the "ceremonial center," and of the implications of this for our interpretations of the larger fabric of Maya society. The four articles which follow, those by Bruce Dahlin, Clemency Coggins, George Cowgill, and Dennis Puleston, all, in their quite different ways, face this same set of problems. We have grouped these first five essays under the heading "Theoretical Interpretations." They are concerned with speculations and hypotheses. As archaeological studies they are all grounded in the material data, but they move very rapidly away from such data to formulations about the nonmaterial past, the processes of social, political, economic, and ideological development, and attempts to evoke the quality of ancient Maya life. Clearly, such essays are more susceptible to and provocative of discussion than those confined to the primary archaeological or ethnohistorical data, and this is reflected in our introductory comments here.

At the same time, the next five essays, those on archaeological "Data Presentations," are not without their implications for questions raised in the theoretical essays. They deal with the specifics of a major site settlement pattern, with Pre-Columbian agricultural production, and with aspects of art, iconography, and crafts which give us some sense of the complexity of the cultural matrix in which both producers and patron operated. The final four essays offer a bridge from the Pre-Columbian Maya into the Colonial European-Maya world. Like all such ethnohistoric-archaeological bridges, this one for the Maya is limited in the weight and kind of interpretive traffic it will bear. It is no open

and smooth thoroughfare into an understanding of the past. Nevertheless, these articles tell us a good deal about the way the transition from a native to a European Colonial social order was made; and in so doing they reflect back upon the quality of Maya civilization.

To return to what we have defined as the central theme—the nature of ancient Maya civilization, its structure and functions—Becker has cast his essay in an epistemological and critical frame. According to him, early Maya archaeologists thought of the great Maya sites as true cities. That is, they were considered the nuclei of large populations with all of the attendant functions of government, trade, and manufacturing that the Old World model of the city generally implies. Later, according to Becker, from sometime in the 1920's into the 1940's and later, this model was replaced by J. E. S. Thompson's "ceremonial center" concept. In this, the principal Maya sites were believed to have been only temple-and-palace precincts—essentially "vacant cities"—inhabited only by a priestly aristocracy and their retainers, who were supported by a lowly agrarian peasantry living in scattered farmsteads or hamlets at some distance from these centers of the elite. Now, in more recent years, as we have come to know more about the Maya centers and the overall dispositions of Maya settlement, the earlier, or "true city," model is being revived, particularly in view of the evidence from Tikal (Haviland 1970). The potentially wide implications of these two models are, of course, self-evident. One might say that the "true city" model brings ancient Maya society into the mainstream of cultural evolution, entailing as it does the institutions of state-level governance, an urban-type economy, and the correlates of a complex class system. As opposed to this, the "ceremonial center" model presents the Maya as a somewhat aberrant development, in which all of these above-mentioned institutions are less developed or have proceeded along courses more peculiar to themselves. New data now coming in from various sectors of research do indicate that the "true city" model as a nexus of trade, bureaucracy, and a "rising middle class" has much to recommend it. Becker takes one of us (Willey) to task for not following the basic evidence of settlement patterns all the way to a realization of the full applicability of the "true city" model; but that author would respond that settlement evidence, as he has seen it, does not lead all the way to such a clear conclusion. There are ambiguities in the data, and Thompson's concept, although overly polarized, still has to be kept in mind as we try to find our way through the literal and figurative jungle of Lowland Maya settlement and its demographic, social, political, and economic significances. As an aside, Becker reads much of Thompson's own social, political, and religious background into the "ceremonial center" formulation. True, but our only comment would be that the millennial goal of absolute objectivity in model building is still a long way off and that fashions in thought and circumstances are still operative on the archaeologist today. As a concession to objectivity, as we argue the matter out, we suggest David Webster's (1977) term "organizational center" as preferable to either "ceremonial center" or "city" as these may be applied to the great Lowland Maya sites.

Both Dahlin and Coggins are concerned with the rise of Classic Maya civilization. Dahlin examines this development from the vantage point of the Protoclassic Period and with an emphasis on external influences. Along with some of his colleagues (Sheets 1971), he looks to El Salvador and sees the eruption of the Ilopango volcano, about A.D. 250, as the triggering event. This disaster forced western Salvadoran populations north into the Maya Lowlands. The archaeological evidence for this migration is seen in the Lowland occurrences of the Floral Park or Holmul I ceramic complex, with these occurrences being concentrated mainly along the eastern, or Belize, edge of the Peten. Dahlin then reasons that these immigrants brought with them the skills of cacao production and that as cacao producers they established a successful economic symbiosis with the Lowland Maya heartlands, especially Tikal. Such economic stimulation, in turn, was a major factor in the buildup of the Tikal Classic. This explanation favors the "true city" model, arguing as it does for the rise of major trade nuclei as early as the end of the Late Preclassic. It is a hypothesis to be kept in mind, although whether the appearance of the Floral Park ceramic complex signals migration, as opposed to more casual diffusion of some salient elements into a basically Lowland development, is a matter that is still under debate (Hammond 1976; 1977; Pring 1977).

Coggins's data and arguments are drawn largely from the intricacies of Tikal political history as this is read and extrapolated from the hieroglyphic texts and iconography of the site. She defines a "Middle Classic Period" for Tikal, which corresponds approximately to the Classic Maya "hiatus" (Willey 1974*b*) and is the two hundred years or so following the reign of Stormy Sky and preceding the "renaissance" of Ruler A's accession to the throne (Jones 1977). This is a time of relatively low cultural profile following a rupture of relations with Teotihuacan. Coggins's treatment of this whole Tikal-Teotihuacan relationship is the most fascinating part of her paper. She sees Curl-Snout, the founder of the Teotihuacanoid Early Classic dynasty at Tikal, as the synthesizer of Mexican ritual and calendrics with those of the resident Maya. Such a synthesis was, in effect, the sanctification of a new mercantilist philosophy which the Central Mexican Highlanders had succeeded in grafting onto the polity of conservative, ancestor-worshipping Lowland Maya society. Such a philosophy and outlook then prevailed throughout the reigns of Curl Snout and his successor, Stormy Sky, or until the beginning of the "Middle Classic Period" at about A.D. 480. During the "Middle Classic Period" (A.D. 480-680) Coggins sees a constant dialectic between the older Lowland Maya values and those which Curl Snout had implanted at Tikal, with no clear winner or ruler emerging to maintain the dominance of one side or the other. Finally, after A.D. 680, the powerful Ruler A emerged to revive the symbols, and presumably the international trading policies, of Curl Snout and Stormy Sky. Such an interpretation takes one back to Becker's "true city" and "ceremonial center" models. It may very well be that the Maya were themselves ambivalent about these two models and at loggerheads with each other over just what kind of po-

litical and socioeconomic structure they wanted to design. We are inclined to think that there must have been tension within Lowland Maya society from a quite early time as aristocratic lineages attempted to control, channel, and to a degree restrict trading contacts which otherwise might have been disruptive to an existing social order. This probably began during the Late Preclassic with the first organizational centers, which were, primarily, "ceremonial centers." Trade and contacts from the south, possibly mediated through immigrant colonies from Salvador as Dahlin argues, would have increased Lowland Maya wealth but also would have increased the tensions within a conservative society. A few centuries later the Teotihuacan connections, whatever they may have been in all of their ramifications, were obviously much more difficult to deal with. The dilemma was a real one, for without these external contacts and pressures Lowland Maya Classic greatness seems to have grown dim, as in Coggins's "Middle Classic Period." With the "renaissance" of Ruler A, Teotihuacan contacts, *per se*, were not revived. By this time it was too late for that. Teotihuacan was no longer a Mesoamerican power; but Late Classic Maya culture did assimilate Central Mexican influences. These are seen in art and iconography, as Coggins points out, and her assumption that this represents ideological change seems well taken. From an even longer historical perspective, going beyond the Late Classic to the "great collapse" of the ninth century, it would appear that the Lowland Maya never did fully resolve the tension between the old local, "ceremonial center-oriented" way of life and the trend toward the "true city" that characterized other parts of Mesoamerica. For whatever reasons—and a search for these constitutes one of the major concerns of Maya archaeology—the Lowland Maya were never able to effect fully the synthesis which Curl Snout had proposed.

According to Cowgill, one of these reasons for Lowland Maya failure may have been a predisposition for endemic warfare. Cowgill's case is a sophisticated and subtle one, drawing on comparisons from Teotihuacan as well as China and ancient Greece. The thrust of his argument is that population increase may be a result of conscious cultural (sociopolitical) choice. Such a decision may have been dictated—as Cowgill believes was true for the Lowland Maya—by a desire for military advantage. This reverses the process whereby warfare is a result of population growth and pressure. Cowgill notes that Teotihuacan achieved its population maximum by about A.D. 200. After that, population remained constant and static until the sudden collapse of the city, probably by military conquest, about A.D. 700. The Lowland Maya population growth profile is quite different. From Preclassic times onward there appear to have been peaks and dips, with the highest peak occurring in the cultural climax of the Late Classic Period. Cowgill rejects the idea that this Late Classic Maya population growth was an "overshoot" that precipitated the "great collapse." Instead, he sees it as the result of deliberate policy on the part of numerous warring "city-states." Such warfare may lead eventually to the domination of all contenders by a single successful "empire-builder," as in the case of ancient China, or it may result in very long periods of exhausting conflict without political integration, as with the Greek city-states.

The Lowland Maya would appear to have followed the latter course. If Cowgill is right, and there are an increasing number of clues to indicate that the old idea of the "peaceful Maya" is an erroneous one, then this militaristic competition is surely another token of the attempt on the part of the Maya to move toward state-type and "true city" organization in, at least, their later centuries.

Puleston's essay, on Maya fatalism and the eventual fate of the "great collapse," is enough to set a good materialist's teeth on edge. It is true, though, from what we have learned from ethnohistoric sources, that the Maya did have a cyclical view of history. In their calendar a katun of the same name came up every 256 years, at which time history was expected to repeat itself. The prophecies of the Chilam Balam state this with reference to the Itza abandonment of Chichen and to the fall of Mayapan possibly some 260 years or so later. Counting backward in time Puleston notes that the beginning of the "great collapse" precedes the Chichen abandonment by about this same span of time (thirteen katuns) and that, still earlier, the "hiatus" low point of Maya achievement began at thirteen katuns prior to the beginning of the "great collapse." We are left with the interesting proposition that ideology—"an epistemological error, a self-validating myth"—can provide a positive feedback for destruction in a cultural system. Is this no more than a series of coincidences, linked to rather vague ideas about "cycles of creation," the kinds of myths that are common to peoples in many parts of the world? Apparently the Maya themselves thought not, as Gordon Brotherston discusses in his essay at some length. The katun cycles had "undeniable historical dimensions," as well as supernatural sanctions, to their priests and scholars. Was their fatalism a subconscious expression of the tensions and instability within their culture and society? Were they somehow aware that the attainment of the urban state would always be just beyond their grasp and that their efforts to achieve it would lead to disaster?

Among the "Data Presentations" the essay by Gordon Willey and Richard Leventhal on Copan Valley settlement is most directly pertinent to Becker's "ceremonial center" or "true city" question. The Copan Valley, or that segment of it which forms the natural basin setting for the big site, is twelve kilometers long and four kilometers wide. The main center takes up less than a square kilometer of this territory, more or less in the center of the valley. Moving out from this center in all directions, on the valley floor as well as the bordering hillsides, are thousands of smaller structures. The pattern is relatively dense. As one moves further away from this segment of the valley such small mounds are fewer in number or are not found at all. In other words, there is a nucleation, or "knotting up," of apparent house or residential structures around the Copan organizational center if one views regional settlement in the large. The pattern, though, is not the urban pattern of Teotihuacan or Tenochtitlan. Spacing of fifty to one hundred meters between residential units is not the equivalent of street-to-street living. Of course we do not know, as yet, just what this Copan settlement distribution means socially and politically, although we have hopes that further surveys and excavations will give us more of a basis for developing ideas about this. This physical dimension of the

Lowland Maya urban problem—the study of settlement patterns and systems—is one of the important starting points for research into the whole question, and much remains to be done.

B. L. Turner's article is really the first to describe Maya agricultural terracing in any detail and as such merits particular commendation. This is done, especially, for the Río Bec region where Turner (1974a; 1974b) has worked, but he also includes a more general survey of Lowland Maya terracing as a whole. Mainly as the result of Turner's investigations we know now what we didn't five years ago, that terracing was extensive and important, at least in Late Classic times, and that the Maya were considerably more advanced as farmers than the simple long-fallow swidden method would imply (Harrison and Turner, eds., 1978). They had addressed themselves seriously to the problem of supporting large populations.

The essays by Jacinto Quirarte, Merle Greene Robertson, and Susanna Ekholm add to our knowledge of Maya sophistication in various realms of endeavor and regions. Quirarte is undoubtedly correct in his interpretation that much of Maya art and iconography pertains to the underworld, the afterlife. Yet in conceding this we do not think that anyone can seriously dispute the proposition that the Maya vision of the world of the dead reflected behavior in the world of the living. Status, rank, and interpersonal relations were an overriding concern in both. Greene Robertson gives us an insight into the high technical competence of one aspect of this art, a competence rooted in centuries of practice. Ekholm opens up another regional aspect of Maya art in her descriptions of the pottery and figurines of the Lagartero site in Chiapas. The styles here are clearly related to, yet significantly different from those of what we have recognized as the "standard" Peten-Usamacinta modes. This is another example of Late Classic regional diversity.

Peter Harrison's discussion of the Lobil Phase of the southern interior of the Yucatan Peninsula gives us a first glimpse of Postclassic culture and settlement pattern in this part of the Maya Lowlands. It would appear that Lobil is Late Postclassic in date, coming up to the time of the Spanish Conquest and beyond. The concentrated town pattern seems to obtain for Lobil—communities of perhaps fifteen thousand people. Tom Lee's Coapa study is set in the Upper Grijalva, out of the Maya Lowlands proper, but its analysis of Maya-Spanish acculturation makes it germane to the ethnohistoric approach. This approach is pursued in the question of religious syncretism by Arthur Miller and Nancy Farriss in their study of the east coast of Yucatan. They argue that Christian beliefs and iconography were not, at least in the Maya way of thinking, completely incompatible with old native beliefs and that the syncretistic results came not from bewilderment or misunderstanding but from an intellectual attempt on the part of the Maya to synthesize the old and the new (cf. J. E. S. Thompson 1970). Gordon Brotherston makes this same point still more dramatically in his analyses of the Chilam Balam. The early Spanish fathers were dealing with neither esoteric obscurantists nor bedazzled heathens. Rather, their Maya opposite numbers were highly sophisticated

and somewhat cynical scholars, secure in what they believed the superiority of their ancient intellectual traditions offered them but willing, albeit under some pressure, to attempt accommodation to a new, if nevertheless inferior, theology. They were old hands at treating with foreigners. One was about as bad as another (or so they thought). Toltects and Itza had come and gone. (And are there ancient memories here of the Teotihuacanos before them?) The Spaniards were yet another set of vulgar invaders, the kind of thing prophesied in the katun cycles, and were to be borne, along with famine and pestilence, as another of many preordained woes. Following Brotherston's interpretation, there can be no doubt that old, native Maya ideology survived the era of "Mexicanization" and was still an intellectual force in the sixteenth century.

To conclude this introduction, it is our opinion that a reading of these essays, disparate as they are in subject matter and approach, leaves one with the idea that while Maya cultural history and cultural processes cannot be understood in terms of the Maya alone, a Maya world, a Maya idea set, a Maya tradition, or whatever one wishes to call it, must always first be taken into account. While there is nothing particularly new in this statement of a basic anthropological tenet of cultural relativism, it is to be borne in mind as we attempt to formulate hypotheses for the explanation of the Maya past.

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