

REVIEW ESSAYS

MAYANS AND MAYAN STUDIES FROM 2000 B.C. TO A.D. 1992

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PRECOLUMBIAN POPULATION HISTORY IN THE MAYA LOWLANDS. Edited by T. Patrick Culbert and Don S. Rice. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1990. Pp. 395. \$40.00.)

ARCHITECTURAL RESTORATION AT UXMAL, 1986-1987/RESTAURACION ARQUITECTONICA EN UXMAL, 1986-1987. University of Pittsburgh Latin American Archaeology Reports, Number 1. By Alfredo Barrera Rubio and José Huchím Herrera. (Pittsburgh, Pa.: University of Pittsburgh, 1990. Pp. 97. \$13.00.)

EXCAVATIONS AT SEIBAL. Memoirs of the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Volume 17, Numbers 1, 2, 3, and 4. Edited by Gordon R. Willey. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1990. Pp. 288. \$45.00.)

SIXTH PALENQUE ROUND TABLE, 1986. Edited by Merle Greene Robertson. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990. Pp. 359. \$65.00.)

FROM THE MOUTH OF THE DARK CAVE: COMMEMORATIVE SCULPTURE OF THE LATE CLASSIC MAYA. By Karen Bassie-Sweet. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991. Pp. 287. \$29.95.)

THE MESOAMERICAN BALLGAME. Edited by Vernon L. Scarborough and David R. Wilcox. (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1991. Pp. 404. \$45.00.)

SCRIBES, WARRIORS, AND KINGS: THE CITY OF COPAN AND THE ANCIENT MAYA. By William L. Fash. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1991. Pp. 192. \$35.00.)

- HOUSEHOLD AND COMMUNITY IN THE MESOAMERICAN PAST*. Edited by Richard R. Wilk and Wendy Ashmore. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1988. Pp. 305. \$32.50.)
- ANCIENT MAYA WETLAND AGRICULTURE: EXCAVATIONS ON ALBION ISLAND, NORTHERN BELIZE*. Edited by Mary Deland Pohl. (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1990. Pp. 439. \$48.95.)
- CUELLO, AN EARLY MAYA COMMUNITY IN BELIZE*. By Norman Hammond. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991. Pp. 260. \$90.00.)
- VISION AND REVISION IN MAYA STUDIES*. Edited by Flora S. Clancy and Peter D. Harrison. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1991. Pp. 224. \$40.00.)
- MODERN MAYA STORAGE BEHAVIOR: ETHNOARCHAEOLOGICAL CASE EXAMPLES FROM THE PUUC REGION OF YUCATAN/COMPORTAMIENTO DE ALMACENAJE ENTRE LOS MAYAS MODERNOS: ESTUDIOS ETNOARQUEOLOGICOS DE LA REGION PUUC DE YUCATAN*. University of Pittsburgh Memoirs in Latin American Archaeology, Number 3. By Michael P. Smyth. (Pittsburgh, Pa.: University of Pittsburgh, 1991. Pp. 172. \$13.50.)
- THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF POLITICAL STRUCTURE*. By Olivier de Montmollin. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989. Pp. 287. \$44.50.)
- MAYA POSTCLASSIC STATE FORMATION*. By John W. Fox. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987. Pp. 310. \$44.50.)
- LAND, LABOR, AND CAPITAL IN MODERN YUCATAN: ESSAYS IN REGIONAL HISTORY AND POLITICAL ECONOMY*. Edited by Jeffrey T. Brannon and Gilbert M. Joseph. (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1991. Pp. 384. \$45.95.)
- HOUSEHOLD ECOLOGY: ECONOMIC CHANGE AND DOMESTIC LIFE AMONG THE KEKCHI MAYA IN BELIZE*. By Richard R. Wilk. (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1991. Pp. 280. \$55.00.)
- TIME AND REALITY IN THE THOUGHT OF THE MAYA*. Second Edition. By Miguel León-Portilla. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988. Pp. 229. \$13.95.)
- THE BIRD WHO CLEANS THE WORLD AND OTHER MAYAN FABLES*. By Víctor Montejo. (Willimantic, Conn.: Curbstone, 1991. Pp. 120. \$22.95.)

Few parts of the world today exhibit as good a match between language and culture as the Maya area. If a circle were drawn around the habitats of the living speakers of the twenty-nine Mayan languages, it would also contain all the archaeological remains assigned to Maya civilization. Currently, more than six million Mayans reside in Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, and Honduras.¹ The continuous distribution of their lan-

1. Computing the precise number of Mayan individuals is difficult due to varying national and regional definitions of what constitutes a Mayan and the overall inadequacy of rural

guages and the relatively small variations among them indicate that Mayan speakers have inhabited this region for millenia. Archaeological, ethno-historical, and ethnographic research all suggest a continuity of Mayan occupation since at least 2000 B.C. This vast area (some 325,000 square kilometers) embraces a remarkable range of environments—from the volcanic highlands of Chiapas and Guatemala and the steep Pacific slope through the verdant tropical lowlands of the Petén and Belize to the dry, flat lowlands of the peninsula of Yucatán. Scholars have conventionally divided the pre-Columbian history of the region into time periods known as the Preclassic (2000 B.C. to A.D. 200), the Classic (A.D. 200 to 900), and the Postclassic (A.D. 900 to 1519).² Delineating Mayan cultural history has proved to be an enormous task requiring the talents of Mayan and non-Mayan scholars of many kinds, including historians, linguists, epigraphers, art historians, astronomers, archaeologists, architects, agronomists, geographers, and ethnographers. Yet because the field of Mayan Studies lacks an international multidisciplinary forum in which these many types of contributions can be shared publicly, some Mayanists have unfortunately tended to address their work either too narrowly, reaching only the members of their own subdisciplines, or too broadly, vying for the attention of the popular press.

One example of the Mayanist tendency to address publications only to fellow members of a subdiscipline is *Pre-Columbian Population History in the Maya Lowlands*, edited by Patrick Culbert and Don Rice. Although the subject of the book is archaeodemography (estimation of the number of persons who once lived in a particular structure, site, or region), the editors narrowed the individual contributions so that closely related topics like ecological adaptation and settlement patterns were, in their words, “eschewed (*expunged* might be more accurate).” Although the comparative population figures of Classic Maya sites are interesting (ranging from low estimates of a thousand to fourteen hundred Maya at Quirigua to a high of sixty to ninety thousand at Tikal), the study’s narrow focus on archaeological and demographic methods and model building at the expense of

census reporting. This figure is based on those published for indigenous persons, nation by nation, in the Americas (Varese 1991). Likewise, determining the number of Mayan languages is problematic because of the necessity of deciding when dialects become separate languages. Although many Mayanists mention twenty-three or twenty-four separate Mayan languages, I have followed Lyle Campbell and Terrence Kaufman here in suggesting that there are currently twenty-nine (Campbell and Kaufman 1990, 51–52).

2. The dates used here for different Mayan historical periods are generic rather than site-specific, and they continue to change with new discoveries. Thus the dates used for beginning the Classic have been slowly pushed back by some scholars from A.D. 300 to 250 to 200 due to ongoing archaeological discoveries. Mayanists also have different ways of labeling the centuries that came at the end of the Classic. What one researcher refers to as the Terminal Classic is for another the Early Postclassic. These terminological choices are determined by a combination of the specific Maya site and the problems with which these scholars were working.

explanation and interpretation is disappointing. Also very narrow is a recent bilingual archaeological site report, *Architectural Restoration at Uxmal, 1986–1987/Restauración arquitectónica en Uxmal, 1986–1987*, by Alfredo Barrera Rubio and José Huchím Herrera. This report discusses work undertaken in 1986 by the Yucatán Regional Center of the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH). For example, the authors describe major revisions to the platform of the governor's palace but totally ignore all interpretive issues. Thus one finds no mention of the possible astronomical orientation of this building toward the southernmost rising position of the planet Venus or of the sculpted hieroglyphic frieze containing more than 350 Venus symbols that encircles the building (see Aveni and Hartung 1986, 22–38).

At the other extreme, some Mayanists have allowed themselves to become stereotypes in romantic or polemical scripts crafted for them by the popular press. Arthur Demarest, for example, has been crowned by the *Los Angeles Times* as “the real Indiana Jones” and depicted as going about in the jungle unraveling “the mystery of the Maya.”³ William Sanders, another archaeologist, reportedly told a member of the Associated Press that Linda Schele's recent hieroglyphic decipherments based on established epigraphic methodology and cognizance of living Mayan languages and cultures had “nothing to do with science.” In the same article, Richard Wilk was quoted as saying that “Schele and others are conspiring with the modern Maya to embellish their connection to the past, as a means of boosting Maya political clout and ethnic pride.” In Wilk's view, this approach “may be OK in a political sense, but it isn't anthropology.”⁴

HIEROGLYPHIC DECIPHERMENT

Direct attacks by two anthropologists on one of the major figures in hieroglyphic decipherment reveal the deep insecurity that has undermined the field of Mayan studies ever since major breakthroughs in deciphering hieroglyphic texts began to provide primary historical data in what had previously been a prehistoric field.⁵ In recent years, epigraphy has served both to supplement and to test archaeological interpretations. For example, Gordon Willey, an acknowledged leader in settlement-pattern studies of non-elite Maya, noted in *Excavations at Seibal* that “we have been surprised to learn from the epigraphers that Seibal was once conquered by—

3. See Alan Weisman, “Indiana Jones and His Pyramids of Doom,” *Los Angeles Times Magazine*, 14 Oct. 1990, 13–17, 20, 39–40, 42.

4. Arthur Allen, “Old Knowledge of Mayans Alive under the Guise of Christianity,” *Buffalo News*, 17 May 1992.

5. For an authoritative and engaging overview of the history of Mayan hieroglyphic decipherment, see George Stuart's (1992) contribution to *New Theories on the Ancient Maya*.

or its ruler captured by—the forces and ruler of Dos Pilas, a site in the Petexbatun locality.” Willey added, “this drives home the point that the outward surface appearance of a site’s size and grandeur need not be a measure of its political importance or power at any one particular period” (p. 270).

Within the field of hieroglyphic decipherment, various combinations of linguists, ethnographers, art historians, and archaeologists have been making remarkable breakthroughs. Beginning with the Primera Mesa Redonda held at the Maya site of Palenque in 1973, small interdisciplinary working groups have concentrated on the iconography and epigraphy of the Classic Maya. Under the editorship of art historian Merle Greene Robertson, the proceedings of Palenque round tables have been published. Linda Schele’s essay in the *Sixth Palenque Round Table, 1986*, “The Demotion of Chac-Zutz’: Lineage Compounds and Subsidiary Lords at Palenque,” rethinks the contribution that she and Peter Mathews made during the Primera Mesa Redonda (Mathews and Schele 1974) and posits that a personage whose name reads Chac-Zutz’ was a *cahal* or “territorial governor,” a lineage head subordinate to a king rather than a king or an *ahau*. This identification of Chac-Zutz’ as a *cahal* exemplifies the ways in which decipherments undergo revision as knowledge advances, and it yields a finer understanding of Palenque’s dynastic and cultural history. The same volume contains several other important papers on epigraphy by Nicholas Hopkins, J. Kathryn Josserand, Martha Macri, Tom Jones, Victoria Bricker, Bruce Love, Carolyn Tate, Merideth Paxton, and Nikolai Grube.

Two essays in the *Sixth Palenque Round Table* are particularly helpful for understanding the methodological basis and the overall process of hieroglyphic decipherment. Kathryn Josserand’s “The Narrative Structure of Hieroglyphic Texts at Palenque” shows that Palenque’s inscriptions exhibit formal similarities to the modern Chol oral narratives that she has recorded. Josserand’s extension of discourse-analysis models to hieroglyphic inscriptions contributes to overall understanding of the content of particular inscriptions and helps with deciphering specific elements in the inscriptions. At a finer level of linguistic analysis, the current understanding of noun and verb morphology in modern Mayan languages has provided Josserand and other scholars with tools for hieroglyphic decipherment. In “An Investigation of the Primary Standard Sequence on Classic Maya Ceramics,” Nikolai Grube demonstrates that the body of texts written on ceramic vessels contain enough redundant elements to permit identifying glyphic substitution patterns and scribal variations. New readings of important glyph compounds in the Primary Standard Sequence (found around the rims of Classic Maya dishes, bowls, and vases) indicate that it refers to the ritual use and manufacture of the ceramics on which it was written. The first clause of the sequence identifies the specific medium, carved or painted, and the second identifies the shape and con-

tents of the vessel. Texts on several Late Classic vases reveal that these vessels once held a cacao drink (see D. Stuart 1988; Houston, Stuart, and Taube 1989).

Current ethnographic knowledge comes into play when the cultural implications of glyphic texts are discussed. The epigraphic investigations of Stephen Houston and David Stuart have revealed the shamanic dimension of hieroglyphic texts by identifying explicit references to “companion spirits” (Houston and Stuart 1989). Their decipherment of the *way* glyph has fundamentally changed scholarly understanding of Classic Maya religious belief and iconography. Many of the supernatural figures once called “gods” are better described as companion spirits or “co-essences” of supernaturals or humans. This finding, together with the new phonetic reading of the Primary Standard Sequence, undermines Michael Coe’s (1978) hypothesis that Maya vase paintings depicted an underworld afterlife. Pottery texts record vessel types and the beverages they held rather than another world, and it now appears that much of the accompanying imagery is related to Maya perceptions of the “self” or “person.”

Iconography

Maya iconography and hieroglyphic writing are distinct but interacting expressive forms that developed over the same time period and were typically combined in Maya sculpture, architecture, and other media. Karen Bassie-Sweet, in *From the Mouth of the Dark Cave: Commemorative Sculpture of the Late Classic Maya*, defines a framing convention used to indicate which of many events described in a hieroglyphic text is illustrated in the accompanying image. She argues that the images and texts on Late Classic sculpture have the same function—“to present information about a particular occasion”—and that the “relationship between the text and image comes down to a basic storytelling convention: we are told, and we are shown” (p. 238). Some of the motifs found in images, like sky bands, “Cauac Monsters,” and serpents, symbolize cave openings and tunnels where religious and other rituals took place. According to Bassie-Sweet’s analysis, the primary function of Late Classic sculptures is the public commemoration of private or semiprivate rituals performed by members of the elite who undertook periodic visits to nearby caves, much like visits made by both the highland and lowland Maya today. Arthur Miller (1989), in contrast, questions whether Maya art can function like a text, arguing that the signification of iconography (unlike that of texts) does not lie in a specific identification such as the Cauac Monster but expresses complex and even conflicting meanings that contrast strongly with the linear organization of writing. As far as Miller is concerned, one should not apply methods for reading linear texts to the problem of un-

derstanding multivariate images, and meaning in Maya art cannot be determined from an image deprived of its archaeological context.

ARCHAEOLOGY

As Joyce Marcus (1983) has pointed out, the Maya state offers the greatest variety of complementary data sets of any in the New World. It includes eyewitness reports, hieroglyphic texts, linguistic reconstructions, settlement-pattern and subsistence data, and architectural evolution. The challenge is “to integrate all these lines of evidence, to highlight the differences and similarities among them” (Marcus 1983, 482). This process may indeed be taking place, judging from research at Bonampak, Caracol, Cerros, Copán, Palenque, Quirigua, Río Azul, and Tikal, where hieroglyphic and iconographic findings are being compared with archaeological field data (Rice 1989). Certain topics have been particularly amenable to a controlled iconographic-archaeological approach, one being the rubber ball game. Art historians have demonstrated that Mesoamerican ball-game myths, rituals, and iconography combine solar and agricultural fertility motifs (Pasztor 1972; Cohodas 1975), while archaeologists have found that the function, purpose, and personnel involved in playing the ball game varied greatly in the Mayan world, regionally as well as temporally. Editors Vernon Scarborough and David Wilcox have assembled a collection of essays on the subject entitled *The Mesoamerican Ballgame*. In one of its essays, “The Courts of Creation: Ballcourts, Ballgames, and Portals to the Maya Otherworld,” Linda Schele and David Freidel argue that at Yaxchilán a Classic Maya king named Bird-Jaguar constructed a building on which he was represented in the guise of a ballplayer to celebrate the fifth anniversary of his accession to power. In contrast, John Fox’s contribution to the same volume, “The Lords of Light versus the Lords of Dark: The Postclassic Highland Maya Ballgame,” argues that among the Postclassic Quiché of highland Guatemala, the ball game functioned to bring together opposing lineage groups within their segmentary sociopolitical organization.

As contributions to the study of the Mayan rubber ball game indicate, archaeologists working within specific architectural and spatial frameworks are beginning to develop new hypotheses about dynasty and political power. This synthetic approach to Mayan history is best exemplified in the Copán Mosaics Project, directed by William Fash. Project epigraphers continue to find that hieroglyphic stone inscriptions record Mayan calendrical data (along with solar, lunar, ritual, and planetary events) as well as historical events. The latter are identified by hieroglyphs for verbs—those for birth, accession to power, royal visits, marriage, war and capture, death, and burial—followed by others that identify the protagonists of such actions. Meanwhile, archaeologists like Wendy Ashmore and her

students are investigating the larger context in which these rulers acted. In *Scribes, Warriors, and Kings: The City of Copán and the Ancient Maya*, Fash bridges the gap between elite (hieroglyphic and iconographic) studies and non-elite (settlement) studies by paying equal attention to urban Copán and the rural area in the surrounding valley. He notes that “we must not forget that the larger, more public buildings and statuary that the Classic Maya produced were essentially politico-religious advertisements” (p. 34).

Settlement Archaeology

In the introduction to *Household and Community in the Mesoamerican Past*, Richard Wilk and Wendy Ashmore describe settlement archaeology as growing out of a combination of U.S. ecological anthropology and European environmental and landscape archaeology. The most important contributions to this subfield “have been the expansion of the research focus from individual sites to site distributions and the ‘democratization’ of sampling” (p. 7). The relative importance of temples, palaces, and tombs receded as researchers realized that ancient communities could not be understood without studying the places where ordinary people lived, worked, and died. Settlement pattern surveys, which provide reconstructions of variable although generally high population densities, resulted in increased emphasis on reconstructing modes of economic production and environmental analysis (see Ashmore 1981; Pohl 1985; Sabloff and Andrews 1986). Recent studies of the settlement patterns of Classic Maya civilization have yielded the hypothesis that the swidden farming technique of historic times was augmented by constructing artificial eco-niches that brought peripheral regions into agricultural production (Ashmore 1981; Flannery 1982; Turner and Harrison 1983). The ancient Maya, rather than being a scattered population supported solely by swidden agriculture, especially during the densely populated Late Classic Period (A.D. 600 to 900), were believed to have depended on various intensive agricultural techniques that included cropping trees, terracing, and building raised fields and drainage canals (Harrison and Turner 1978). None of this evidence, however, has drawn as much attention or raised as much controversy as the discovery of relict wetland fields in Quintana Roo and Campeche, Mexico, and in northern Belize (Siemens and Puleston 1972; Olson et al. 1975; Puleston 1977; Turner 1974).

One group of researchers has now reanalyzed the field data on agriculture and was unable to verify that the ancient Maya ever built artificial planting platforms in wetlands. This surprising result has been published as a collection of papers edited by Mary Pohl, *Ancient Maya Wetland Agriculture: Excavations on Albion Island, Northern Belize*. It now appears that Maya farmers, instead of constructing wetland planting platforms during the Classic, practiced flood-recessional agriculture on peats in

sawgrass marshes more than three thousand years ago. By the Late Preclassic (350 B.C. to A.D. 200), in response to rising water levels, they began to drain their wetland fields with ditches. Over time, these fields started to turn into ponds, but the Maya were able to continue to cultivate wetlands by using ditches. Finally, by the end of the Late Classic, the water levels stabilized. As these findings came in, Pohl reformulated the theoretical orientation of the wetlands research project and focused it on the manner in which prehistoric agriculture fed political development during the Preclassic. She hypothesized that a combination of swidden and wetland farming provided enough surpluses to allow the emergence of political competition and the development of elites. The ditched fields of the Late Preclassic tied farmers to their land and made them vulnerable to domination by elites, who became the protectors of the farmers' agricultural investment.

The Preclassic

Wetland cultivation possibilities were greater in the distant past, especially during the formative stages of prehistoric Maya culture. Conditions were particularly good in northern Belize and northeast Petén (in present-day Guatemala), one of the areas where complex nonegalitarian societies first appeared in the Maya lowlands. Archaeological research in this area indicates that the Preclassic Maya, rather than occupying small villages, raised enormous public buildings as early as 400 B.C. and by the second century B.C. built the largest Maya structures ever erected. A developed art style, literacy, and numeracy all appeared during the Late Preclassic (see Justeson, Norman, and Hammond 1988). In *Cuello, an Early Maya Community in Belize*, Norman Hammond argues that settlement data and mortuary evidence suggest that Middle Preclassic Cuello (1000 to 300 B.C.) was egalitarian in social structure. The subsequent appearance of overt rulership in iconography suggests that by the beginning of the Late Preclassic (200 B.C.), Cuello had become socially stratified.

The transition from Late Preclassic to Early Classic was marked by important changes. Although both Tikal and Lamanai experienced a period of stasis in construction, Cerros was abandoned and El Mirador (an enormous site in the Petén) collapsed (see W. Coe 1965; Pendergast 1981; Matheny 1987). Meanwhile, interaction intensified between the inhabitants of the Maya lowlands and highland Mayan societies to the south, which were already depicting royal personages on carved stone monuments, complete with hieroglyphic texts and calendrical notations (see Sharer 1974; Schele 1985). Either the beginning or a major transformation of the institution of kingship is currently regarded as contingent on this cultural contact between highland and lowland Mayan societies (Willey 1985; Freidel and Schele 1988).

The genesis of Maya civilization has inspired several theories, including the indigenous lowland theory, the highland transplant theory, and the Olmec origin theory. At the present time, no one of these theories is considered adequate to account for the complexity of the processes that led to Maya civilization. All that can be said for certain is that Maya civilization resulted from a multilineal process within a large spatial and temporal framework. The ancient Maya world was a mosaic of interrelated but diverse regions and traditions, each of which contributed to the origins and growth of the total system. Earlier studies underestimated the prevalence and duration of pre-Columbian travel and interaction among regions of the Maya area. It seems likely that the ancient Maya maintained substantial communication links, even over long distances, beginning no later than the Early Preclassic (2000 to 1000 B.C.), with contacts increasing in frequency throughout the Preclassic. The nature of this communication was diverse and probably included social interactions like marriage-exchange networks and trade (Sharer and Sedat 1987). Evidence from several highland Guatemalan regions refutes R. E. W. Adams's early proposition (1972) that the northern Maya highlands were devoid of significant settlement during the Preclassic. Occupation along the north-south routes, through the Alta Verapaz and along the Chixoy River, has been established by the Early Preclassic and expanded throughout the remainder of the Preclassic. The location of these Preclassic settlements is consistent with maintaining trade and other modes of interaction, contacts documented in recorded trade goods and reflected in similarities in all categories of surviving material culture (Sharer and Sedat 1987). As Hammond noted in *Cuello, an Early Maya Community in Belize*, it is becoming clearer that Maya civilization was penetrated by and shared its origins with the culture of highland Guatemala, where the Mayan language family reveals its greatest diversity and perhaps its origin.

The Postclassic

Just as Mayanists have adjusted their picture of the Preclassic, so they have also reassessed their previous assumptions about the Postclassic. Until recently, words like *decadence*, *decline*, and *depopulation* were commonly used by archaeologists to describe the Postclassic. But due to new discoveries and a postmodern spirit of "revisionism" toward history, in which new questions are brought to old data, the Postclassic is emerging as an era of potency rather than decadence. The collapse in the south was clearly not as decisive as once thought but rather part of a set of responses to crisis in the wider lowland area, an array that included instances of persistence and even florescence as well as decline (see Chase and Rice 1985). David Pendergast's "Up from the Dust: The Central Lowlands Postclassic as Seen from Lamanai and Marco Gonzales" (his contribution to

Vision and Revision in Maya Studies) describes a case of genuine florescence. At Lamanai, massive building projects continued at least into the eleventh century, along with a constant flow of nonlocal goods that included Guatemalan obsidian, Yucatec ceramics, and (by the twelfth century) copper objects from central Mexico, Oaxaca, and lower Central America (p. 173).

HISTORY AND ETHNOGRAPHY

Flora Clancy and Peter Harrison, the editors of *Vision and Revision in Maya Studies*, note in their introduction the existence of a “methodological gap” between the disciplines of history and archaeology. They predict that in the near future, the interrelationship of archaeological and historical data will become a pressing issue (pp. ix–x). Clancy and Harrison suggest that the new interdisciplinary fields of ethnoarchaeology and historical ethnography may mediate this methodological gap.

Ethnoarchaeology and Household Archaeology

Much of the archaeological interpretation in Mayan Studies depends on ethnographic analogy. Yet the many ethnographies written by cultural anthropologists about the Maya have offered few details about material culture that might help archaeologists. As a result, archaeologists set up their own ethnographic research programs. The earliest such projects were more descriptive than explanatory (Wauchope 1938), but by the 1950s, ethnoarchaeologists were beginning to relate consistencies and variations in material forms to the underlying behaviors that produced them (Thompson 1958). Much of this research has centered around specific items of material culture: Wauchope examined Mayan dwellings, Thompson analyzed pottery, and the Coxoh Ethnoarchaeological Project focused on stone tools (Hayden 1987). In contrast, Michael Smyth’s recent monograph, *Modern Maya Storage Behavior/Comportamiento de almacenaje entre los mayas modernos*, focuses on behavior. Smyth studied Mayan households in the Puuc Region of Yucatán, documenting spatial relations of activities carried on in house yards and the types of disposal practices and residues they engender. According to an essay by Gair Tourtellot, Jeremy Sabloff, and Smyth in *Precolumbian Population History in the Maya Lowlands*, “Room Counts and Population Estimation for Terminal Classic Sayil in the Puuc Region, Yucatán, Mexico,” this research provided categories of data that have allowed archaeologists to identify ancient Mayan dry storage locations, activities, and abandonments in various structures and rooms considered to be dwellings. The data suggest that differential domestic storage practices may be indicators of status and wealth, a finding with important

implications for understanding processes of Maya social stratification and agricultural intensification.

Ethnoarchaeological research has provided a cautionary tale against facile correlations between the social and material realms and the archaeological “principle of abundance,” which states that where many small mounds exist, they must have been houses. Such research has also led to building interpretive theories about the way in which ancient societies were organized. Houses and households have remained natural focal points because they are the elementary building blocks of society. The best-known household-based ethnoarchaeological research in Mesoamerica has been that of Richard Wilk among the Kekchi Maya in Belize (Wilk 1983, 1984) and that of Brian Hayden and Aubrey Cannon among the highland Maya of Mexico and Guatemala (Hayden and Cannon 1983, 1984). Wendy Ashmore’s and Richard Wilk’s introduction to *Household and Community in the Mesoamerican Past* characterizes such studies as confronting the analytical complexities posed by household dynamics and their effect on material residues, relating social units to subsistence practices and the accumulation of wealth and prestige. Hayden and Cannon (1983) found that refuse disposal did not reflect the behavior of individual households and that it was better analyzed at neighborhood levels. Wilk (1983) found that size differences among houses related to the number of inhabitants and possibly to their wealth as well as to the economy and longevity of the community. The proponents of this approach argue that the time has come for what they call “household archaeology,” given that all societies are composed of households and examining specific examples can help in the search for meaning (Rathje 1983). The same proponents also argue that the household represents the last stage in the historical progression of archaeology’s chosen units of analysis from culture areas to progressively smaller units, with site and intersite analysis falling in between (Wilk and Rathje 1982).

Political Archaeology

Household archaeology has been sharply critiqued by Olivier de Montmollin in *The Archaeology of Political Structure*. He views it as a form of “strict methodological individualism” that in its reductionism suppresses the importance of institutional variability among ancient complex societies (pp. 246–49). Further, the claim that households are ubiquitous and equally important everywhere at all times is contradicted by both ethnographic and ethnohistorical evidence. From his own substantivist theoretical position, De Montmollin looks for the possibility that corporate groups larger than the family were important. In his brief search for such units, he notes Aztec *calpullis*, Inca *ayllus*, and Teotihuacan’s apartment compounds but misses altogether the Maya lineage known as the *nimha* (literally “big

house”) or *chinamit* (from Nahuatl *chinamital*) among the Quiché and Cakchiquel Maya (B. Tedlock 1989, 498). A similar unit was known as the *molab* among the Pokomam, Pokomchi, and Kekchi Maya (see Hill and Monaghan 1987, 47). These lineages are mentioned in several important ethnohistorical texts, including the *Popol Vuh*, where they are described as exogamous (D. Tedlock 1985). A larger political unit consisting of a group of confederated chinamitales known as the *amaq'* is also mentioned in these same sources (Hill and Monaghan 1987, 47). Further, if De Montmollin had read John Fox's *Maya Postclassic State Formation*, he would have found that the segmentary state concept, which he borrowed from Africanist political anthropology, had already been elegantly presented by Fox in another Maya context—that of the Postclassic Quiché. A careful reading of ethnography would also have revealed that segmentary patri-lineage systems were still extant in highland Guatemala (Carmack 1966; Falla 1978).

Although inclusion of this comparative Mayanist material would have substantially improved De Montmollin's discussion of his Late Classic Rosario polity, *The Archaeology of Political Structure* is nonetheless a significant contribution to the field of political archaeology. Further, both he and Fox make a strong case for research in which an archaeological problem is closely related to other kinds of records, even nonarchaeological ones. De Montmollin suggests that simplistic earlier conceptualizations of political structure and organization based on archaeology that were posited for the Preclassic and the Classic might be rethought along the lines of current research on the Postclassic, which includes ethnohistorical documentation. He asserts that politics may have been just as complicated during the Preclassic and the Classic as ethnohistoric documents reveal it to have been during the Postclassic (p. 239). Fox clearly agrees and makes an argument for a “conjunctive method” in which ethnohistoric documents are combined with archaeology to delineate chains of events. In his own archaeological research, Fox combines this conjunctive method with a comparativist approach spanning a large area of Mesoamerica during the entire six centuries of the Postclassic.

Historical Ethnography

An example of the kind of historical information that can contribute to new archaeological interpretations may be found in Grant Jones's work on the colonial Maya (1977, 1989). In “Prophets and Idol Speculators: Forces of History in the Lowland Maya Rebellion of 1683” (in Clancy and Harrison's *Vision and Revision in Maya Studies*), Jones reveals new information from the Archivo General de Indias in Seville that sheds light on the many forms of Maya resistance, rebellion, and warfare. His findings have important implications for understanding both pre- and post-Columbian

times. In some cases, such work has gone hand in hand with new research in the archaeology of historically documented sites. Documentation from the period of Spanish settlement is particularly rich in some areas, providing new insights into the extant archaeological record and stimulating investigation of the archaeologically little-known transition from precolonial Maya life to postcolonial. The past decade has witnessed a renewed interest in the history of the Maya as they adapted to and resisted Spanish colonialism. Examples include Inga Clendinnen's revealing restudy of Spanish and Maya documents bearing on the Yucatec Maya's first contact with Europeans (Clendinnen 1987) and Robert Hill's historical ethnography of the Cakchiquels' adaptation to Spanish rule in Guatemala (Hill 1992). This later text is based on descriptive documents like memoirs written to portray some belief, custom, or institution as well as on episodic documents like wills and litigation proceedings, which were created for an immediate utilitarian purpose. A slightly different kind of cultural history is provided by Victoria Bricker's (1981) and Nancy Farris's (1984) publications on the Maya of the colonial period. These studies combined ethnographic and archival sources to reconstruct the culture, social organization, and ideology that enabled the Maya to sustain a distinctive way of life. This kind of historical ethnography, which includes reinterpretations of previously known sources, has helped introduce history from the perspective of the participants, who emerge neither as passive actors nor as objects but as purposive actors who shaped their social situation as much as they were conditioned by it (Smith 1990; Mörner 1990).

Political Economy

A rather different approach to Mayan history is found in Jeffrey Brannon's and Gilbert Joseph's *Land, Labor, and Capital in Modern Yucatán* and in Richard Wilk's *Household Ecology: Economic Change and Domestic Life among the Kekchi Maya in Belize*. Brannon and Joseph's edited volume includes ten essays on the political economy of Yucatán that examine elite strategies of appropriation and control and the direct responses they elicited from Mayan peasants, Belizean black creoles, and Yucatecan urban workers. Although the contributors used a combination of episodic and descriptive documents (including parish registers and notarial archives, agrarian census records, land titles, litigation files, tax lists, and oral histories), their approach was that of regional political economy. Wilk's *Household Ecology* is concerned neither with Kekchi discourse nor with perceptions but only with what he perceives to be pragmatic actions and rational economic behaviors. Wilk admits that the best household histories weave individual economic pragmatics and group action together with the discourse of family life (including discussions, bargaining, arguments, and

even violence), but he explains that he lacked the necessary materials to do so because his original research task was to study the effects of agricultural change on household organization.

Cultural Patterns

The persistence of Mayans in maintaining themselves in the modern world as a distinct ethnic group has encouraged cultural anthropologists and historians to focus on the specificity of Mayan cultural patterns. The historical and ongoing Mayan fascination with the art and meaning of measuring time is Miguel León-Portilla's subject in *Time and Reality in the Thought of the Maya*, now reissued in a revised second edition. This clearly written synthesis analyzes the long line of research on the topic originally conducted by an international and multidisciplinary group of scholars. Among the lowland Maya of Yucatán, the ancient ways of reckoning and interpreting time are known from inscriptions on thousands of stone monuments, from the few ancient books that survived the bonfires of Spanish missionaries, and from early colonial documents. But the contemporary Mayas of that region have long since forgotten how to keep time the way their ancestors did. With the highland Maya, the situation is reversed. Here, the archaeological monuments are bare of inscriptions after the early Classic and not one ancient book has been recovered, although the contents of a few such books were transcribed into alphabetic writing and preserved in colonial documents. Yet among the highland Maya, time continues to be calculated and interpreted according to ancient methods. Scores of indigenous communities, principally those speaking the Mayan languages known as Ixil, Mam, Pokomchi, and Quiché, keep the 260-day cycle and (in many cases) the ancient solar cycle as well (see B. Tedlock 1992a).

During the past ten years, several ethnographers have studied the Postclassic and colonial periods seeking to understand and explain the remarkable success and longevity of Mayan culture—despite invasion, disease, war, oppressive colonial policies, and even recent counterinsurgency attacks on hundreds of Mayan communities in Guatemala. From 1978 to 1985, between fifty and seventy thousand Guatemalans were killed, most of them Mayans. Another half-million became internal refugees, one hundred and fifty thousand fled to Mexico, and more than two hundred thousand escaped to other nation-states (Manz 1988, 30, 209). Mayan leaders and outside observers have asserted that the Guatemalan government used its counterinsurgency campaign as a thin disguise for ethnocide, if not genocide, against the Mayan population.⁶

6. For arguments that the counterinsurgency attack on Mayan civilian populations was an attempt at *genocide* (defined by the United Nations as any act perpetrated with the intention

This violent uprooting and dispersion, like the earlier Jewish and Armenian diasporas, may lead to a cultural and political regrouping into an ethnic nation that transcends the boundaries of established nation-states. This possibility is currently indicated by several simultaneous social and cultural developments among Mayans living in Guatemala, Mexico, Belize, Canada, and the United States. In 1986 Guatemalan linguists who are native speakers of Mayan languages organized themselves nationally as the Academia de las Lenguas Mayas de Guatemala (ALMG 1988) and voted in new alphabets for writing the twenty-six Mayan languages spoken in Guatemala. President Vinicio Cerezo signed the new alphabets into law in 1987, and in 1991 the Guatemalan Congress recognized the ALMG as an autonomous government ministry. Activities of the members of this Mayan academy include advocating the use of the new alphabets for writing Mayan languages and pressing for bilingual education. They are also encouraging indigenous customs such as wearing distinctive clothing and using the Mayan calendar. Soon after the academy's inception, a number of other all-Mayan organizations were founded, including the Centro de Documentación Maya, the Centro de Investigación Social Maya, the Coordinadora Cakchiquel de Desarrollo Integral, Escritores Mayenses, Mayab' Ajtz'ib' Jun Iq, and Mayahuil. The names of the last two cultural groups are in Mayan languages. Mayab' Ajtz'ib' means "Mayan Writers" and Jun Iq is the date of its founding on the 260-day Quiché calendar. Mayahuil means "New Dawn" in Mam. The former group publishes literature written in Mayan languages, while the latter publicizes environmental destruction and protests the promotion of the quincentennial of Columbus's so-called discovery of America.

In the Toledo district of Belize, two Mayan organizations—the Toledo Crafts Association and the Toledo Maya Cultural Council—are involved in promoting and preserving Mayan culture and initiating various economic ventures that could raise the standard of living for local Mopan and Kekchi Mayan communities (Sletto and Sletto 1990). Since the mid-1980s, the Toledo Maya Cultural Council has been petitioning the Belizean government and attending international conferences to request "freehold title" to half a million acres of land in the Toledo district for establishing a Mayan homeland (TMCC 1986). Mayan women are embroidering the twenty day names into their handicrafts, using hieroglyphic script, and Mayan catechists have recently taken a serious interest in the prophetic visions of former Guatemalan Kekchi catechists concerning the proper care of sacred corn and worship of the Earth deity (B. Tedlock 1992b).

of destroying totally, or in part, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group), see Ricardo Falla (1984), Rigoberta Menchú (1984), and Richard Adams (1988). An argument that it was also an example of attempted *ethnocide* (a term used by anthropologists to describe the damage caused to native cultures by war) was made by Carol Smith (1988).

While these developments were taking place in Guatemala and Belize, the Kanjobal Mayan refugee community in Los Angeles (some six thousand strong) founded a nonprofit mutual-aid organization called IXIM (a term for corn in all Mayan languages). It began publishing *El Vocero de IXIM*, a newsletter featuring trilingual (Mayan/Spanish/English) versions of traditional stories and information about Mayan hieroglyphs and calendars. Víctor Montejo, a Jakaltek Mayan refugee currently residing with his family in Connecticut, has published *The Bird Who Cleans the World and Other Mayan Fables*, a delightful collection of thirty-three Mayan folk tales dealing with political power struggles in the animal kingdom, mutual respect, and ethnic relations and conflicts. This beautifully illustrated volume along with his first book, a painful first-person narrative account of his experiences of violence in Guatemala (Montejo 1987), mark the beginning of a Mayan literary tradition in the English language.

New communal cultures of resistance to Western domination and control are clearly emerging today in the context of the Mayan diaspora. Mayan languages, myths, traditional dress, the sacred Earth, and the ancient 260-day calendar have all become key cultural values and symbols in constructing a transnational pan-Mayan identity. As part of this movement, Mayan intellectuals and professionals have created their own discipline of Mayan Studies, simultaneously critiquing Ladino racism and North American neocolonialism and promoting linguistic and anthropological research by Mayans about Mayans. It should be self-evident that this is an indigenous movement and not some sort of “conspiracy” between the modern Maya and outsiders. Especially under recent and current conditions, Mayan and non-Mayan scholars alike have been addressing the question of how it is that Mayans, individually and communally, have managed to sustain their Mayanness in the face of strong pressures to the contrary and how they will continue to do so.⁷

7. See Coc (1985), Cojtí (1987, 1989), Otzoy (1988), Otzoy and Sam (1988), Nelson (1991), B. Tedlock (1992a, 1992b), Warren (1992), and Watanabe (1992).

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