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*Function and Meaning  
in Classic Maya Architecture*

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## *Dynastic Architectural Programs: Intention and Design in Classic Maya Buildings at Copan and Other Sites*

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**M**aya archaeology has always been fascinated with the elaborate temple pyramids, palaces, and stelae plazas that formed the centers of the ancient communities from its inception to the present day. Despite the intense interest in large-scale architecture, we still have a rather limited excavated sample of Maya dynastic building programs. The scale of construction of these monuments poses immense logistical problems and other challenges for conscientious investigation, stabilization, and publication. More often than not, the version of a large-scale construction visible on the surface has one or more previous structures buried inside of it. This makes the problem of complete sampling of architectural monuments even more daunting from both a practical and an interpretive point of view. Despite these rather long odds, some remarkable progress has been made. Increased understanding of the writing system and pictorial symbol systems used to adorn the buildings and the principles of organization of Maya architecture on the level of commoners and the nobility help inform our judgments about the function and meaning of the building complexes that formed the heart of the Classic Maya towns and cities. This paper represents an attempt to understand how the ruling families organized their sacred and secular spaces and what kinds of buildings and messages they erected in those environs. It also explores the degree to which one may reliably infer the political strategies, idiosyncratic concerns, and even the personality of royal Maya patrons from the architecture they left behind.

The question of the design and intent of Maya dynastic architecture is best addressed in sites where a long sequence of constructions with accompanying historical texts and pictorial imagery have been recovered. In analyzing the

original contributions of individual rulers to the art and architecture of their palace compounds, Mesoamericanists often address questions of statecraft and political strategies (Fash 1988; Flannery and Marcus 1983; Gillespie 1989; Houston 1993; Marcus 1992; Schele and Freidel 1990). Some investigators try to progress even higher up the ladder of inference and get at issues of the idiosyncratic concerns and even of the personalities of particular Classic Maya rulers ( Jones 1977; Schele and Freidel 1990). One potential pitfall to these approaches of course is sampling, that awful problem that is present if not necessarily properly addressed in virtually all archaeological analysis. No large Mesoamerican site has ever been excavated in its entirety, even at the level of the final-phase buildings. The earlier structures buried beneath the final phase of construction are usually sampled only by test probes or trenched if they are investigated at all. This paucity of data on the earlier buildings and the larger complexes of which they formed a part leaves us with a weak understanding of the development of particular ideas and behaviors through time and space, hardly solid footing from which to judge the architectural originality or underlying motives of the latest actors on the stage of their kingdom's history.

Extensive investigations of earlier building complexes have been carried out in a few Maya lowland epicenters, and most of them have been properly published. These studies can tell us much about the trajectory of construction and the intents of the builders through time in particular spaces. There is now a fairly complete picture of this subject at the epicenters of Tikal (Coe 1990; Laporte and Fialko 1993, 1995), Uaxactun (Proskouriakoff 1946; Smith 1950; Valdés 1988), and Copan (Andrews n.d.; Andrews and Fash 1992; W. Fash et al. 1992; Larios, Fash, and Stuart 1994; Schele and Freidel 1990: chap. 8; Sharer, Miller, and Traxler 1992; Sharer n.d.; Stuart 1992). Important excavation projects in the Copan valley directed by a number of scholars have uncovered sculpture-adorned buildings and complexes that have to some extent also been "read" as texts and compared to the works in the royal compound (Ashmore 1991; Fash 1983, 1986; Webster 1989c; Webster, Evans, and Sanders 1993; Willey, Leventhal, and Fash 1978).<sup>1</sup> More broadly, many of the architectural patterns and principles that have been documented in Tikal, Uaxactun, and Copan are evident in different forms at other sites in the Maya lowlands and can shed light on the issue of the ideological and political strategies put to work by different

<sup>1</sup> It is impossible to cite and do justice to all of the different investigators and kinds of research that they have undertaken in the Copan region over the past 20 years in a specialized article such as this one. The interested reader is referred to an upcoming volume to be published by the School of American Research (Fash and Andrews, n.d.) for a more comprehensive bibliography.

dynasties and rulers in their respective dynastic building programs.

The origin of the ruling dynasties of the Classic Maya kingdoms is likely to be a controversial topic for quite some time. In most cases, our sole source of information on the early history of a royal line is that which was recorded on stone monuments by later rulers. If uncorroborated by other sources, such textual references are of course difficult to evaluate and are presently viewed by many students with deep suspicion. In Copan, we have addressed this issue directly by designing research to document the developmental trajectory of the building complexes in the site core. In the process, we strive to systematically test the historical claims of the last rulers through archaeological excavations and epigraphic and iconographic analyses of the inscriptions and pictorial imagery found in association with the Early Classic buildings. Since the origins of the Copan Mosaics Project in 1985 and its successors, the Hieroglyphic Stairway Project and the Copan Acropolis Archaeological Project, we have scrutinized the “texts” of the final-phase buildings, imagery, and inscriptions as information to be rigorously tested and evaluated on the basis of three broad categories of data: (1) the sociopolitical context in which the later rulers were acting, based on the gamut of information available in the site core and its regional sustaining area; (2) the archaeological remains of the earlier time periods in the site core and valley, particularly the time ascribed to the “founder” of the Classic period Copan dynasty and his immediate successors; and (3) the inscribed architectural and freestanding texts buried beneath the later structures that contain contemporaneous records of the events deemed important in the early centuries of the dynasty’s history (Fash 1988; Fash and Sharer 1991). Although our research is still ongoing, we can now provide some broad outlines of the continuities and changes that occurred in the dynastic building programs of many of Copan’s rulers. This in turn allows us to reevaluate some of the earlier ideas about the dynasty and its strategies of statecraft, which had been based predominantly on our understanding of the Late Classic structures in the Principal Group and the valley. It is hoped that the insights derived from this research may enable scholars to make better use of their time and resources when approaching these issues at other sites and regional settings in Mesoamerica.

#### ORIGINS OF THE DYNASTIC BUILDING PROGRAM IN COPAN

The ruler cited as the founder of the Copan dynasty by his 15 named and numbered successors was referred to in the inscriptions as K’inich Yax K’uk’ Mo’ (Schele 1992; David Stuart, personal communications, 1984, 1992; Stuart and Schele 1986a). Portraits and textual references to this individual abound in the Copan dynastic monuments of all periods and are found even in ceramic

burial furniture in a royal tomb (Agurcia Fasquelle and Fash 1991: 105). Initially, some of our colleagues viewed these records of a founder and a series of early kings that succeeded him with great skepticism. Even the idea that there was a polity of any magnitude in the fifth and early sixth centuries a.d. was rejected based on interpretations derived from test pitting predominantly in the rural sectors of the Copan valley. However, the archaeological evidence is now overwhelming that there was major construction in the acropolis and hieroglyphic stairway plaza areas from a.d. 420 onward (Fash and Sharer 1991; W. Fash et al. 1992; Sharer n.d.; Sharer, Miller, and Traxler 1992; Sharer et al. n.d.). Accompanying hieroglyphic inscriptions and painted texts as well as polychrome pictorial imagery in stucco and painted murals indicate that a series of individuals erected major dynastic monuments both in their own honor and in homage to their predecessors. Significantly, the individuals named in the buried texts and imagery found thus far are the same ones cited in the later texts. Both the buried and the surficial texts associate those same individuals with the same dates for royal accessions and other historical events, in the same chronological order given in the ruler succession (*ts'ah-bu*) counts and on Altar Q (W. Fash et al. 1992). Although it would be premature at this point to conclude that all later texts are historically accurate, I do think it is fair to say that there are presently no known contradictions between the dynastic records of the later (surficially accessible) and earlier (buried) stone monuments of the dynasty of K'inich Yax K'uk' Mo'. On the basis of currently available evidence, there is no documented example in the Copan corpus of rewriting of history and mindful erasing of earlier actors, at least for the dynasty immortalized in stone on the hieroglyphic stairway and on Altar Q. This makes our task of looking at building programs and their patrons' designs and intents far less complicated than it otherwise would be.<sup>2</sup>

The earliest extant elite constructions thus far encountered in the area of the acropolis were uncovered by Robert Sharer and his colleagues in the easternmost sector of the acropolis. These features are dated by radiocarbon assays to the fifth century a.d. and consist of three architectural groups: an elevated platform for elaborate dynastic buildings known as the "Mini-Acropolis of the South"; a palace group; and a northern group (Sharer et al. n.d.). Sharer and his

<sup>2</sup> It is quite possible, and should be kept open as a possibility, that an earlier dynasty resided in the area of the modern town (Morley's Group 9) or in the vicinity of the acropolis underlying Structure 10L-1 in the Principal Group. Archaeological evidence for Early Classic occupations abounds in both these loci. References to individuals antedating K'inich Yax K'uk' Mo' are found in numerous early and later texts, but short of archaeological evidence of the actual monuments of these individuals we are currently unable to evaluate the veracity of these references.

colleagues have demonstrated that the first monumental masonry architecture was built atop the elevated platform in the first quarter of the fifth century. The first structure adorned with painted and modeled stucco is presently referred to by the field name “Hunal.” This building had a *talud-tablero* façade on its substructure and a superstructure adorned with vivid mural paintings. Because the superstructure was nearly completely demolished by the Maya before its burial beneath its successor, the original content of the paintings cannot presently be reconstructed from the few scattered pieces of painted plaster that have survived (Sharer n.d.). Before the termination of Hunal, a vaulted tomb was placed under its floor, which may contain the remains of the Copan dynasty’s founder, K’inich Yax K’uk’ Mo’ (Sharer n.d.).

Hunal’s successor, “Yehnal” Structure, had polychrome stucco masks depicting the Sun God K’inich Ahau on its substructure and contained a vaulted masonry tomb built integrally into the substructure along its central axis. This building was subsequently encapsulated inside the next one erected at this locus, called “Margarita” Structure, but access to the vaulted tomb of Yehnal was left open by means of a set of stairs that led to the superstructure of Margarita. The modeled stucco decoration of Margarita’s substructure included a large full-figure polychrome depiction of two birds with intertwined necks that together with their “sun eyes” and “yax” signs name K’inich Yax K’uk’ Mo’ (“Sun-eyed Blue-green Quetzal Macaw”; Sharer n.d.). Hunal, Yehnal, and Margarita established the sacred center for the acropolis that was maintained by a succession of five more temples built atop this locus during the remainder of Copan’s history, including at least two (“Rosalila” and Structure 10L-16-1st) that also prominently displayed the name of the founder K’inich Yax K’uk’ Mo’ (Agurcia Fasquelle n.d.; Sharer n.d.).

The birds defining the dynastic founder’s name on Margarita Structure stand atop a glyph with supernatural associations that reads “9 Imix,” and the whole assemblage was framed on the sides and above by a sky band. This graphic depiction of the first ruler’s name was placed on the basal terrace of the substructure to the south of the central staircase on the west side of the building. In the corresponding position to the north of the stairs was another full-figure glyph that, because of its battered state, has not yet been uncovered. However, the hieroglyph at the base of it has been uncovered, and reads “7 Kan” (Sharer n.d.). These same two hieroglyphs are found beneath the feet of the two figures depicted on the Early Cycle 9 floor marker recently discovered beneath the hieroglyphic stairway (Williamson 1996; Fig. 1 here). There, the 9 Imix glyph is beneath the figure of K’inich Yax K’uk’ Mo’ on the left, and the 7 Kan glyph is seen on the right beneath the feet of Ruler 2, who was first identified by

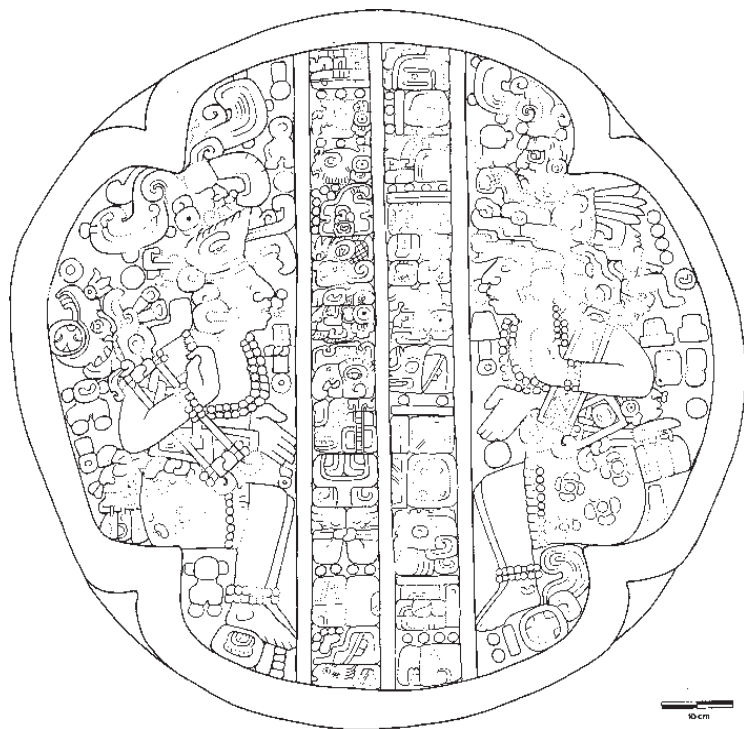


Fig. 1 The Motmot floor marker. On the left is K'inich Yax K'uk' Mo', identified by his bird headdress and his name in the left column of hieroglyphs. On the right is Ruler 2, identified by his headdress and his name in the right column of hieroglyphs. Drawing by Barbara Fash, incorporating field observations by Federico Fahsen, Nikolai Grube, Linda Schele, and David Stuart.

Stephen Houston (personal communication, 1992). This floor marker is associated with the second building constructed at that locus (field name "Motmot") and the first version of the Copan ballcourt (Fig. 2), labeled IA by Strömsvik (1952).

Thus, the first (known) hieroglyphically labeled dynastic architecture in the Copan Acropolis was commissioned by the second ruler, the successor of K'inich Yax K'uk' Mo'. The Motmot and Margarita monuments bear the names of the first two rulers of the dynasty and place them in association with the supernatural domains symbolized by the hieroglyphs 7 Kan (for Ruler 2) and 9 Imix (for Ruler 1). The Motmot marker itself stresses underworld contexts, most notably the quatrefoil in which the two rulers are depicted. The diameter and

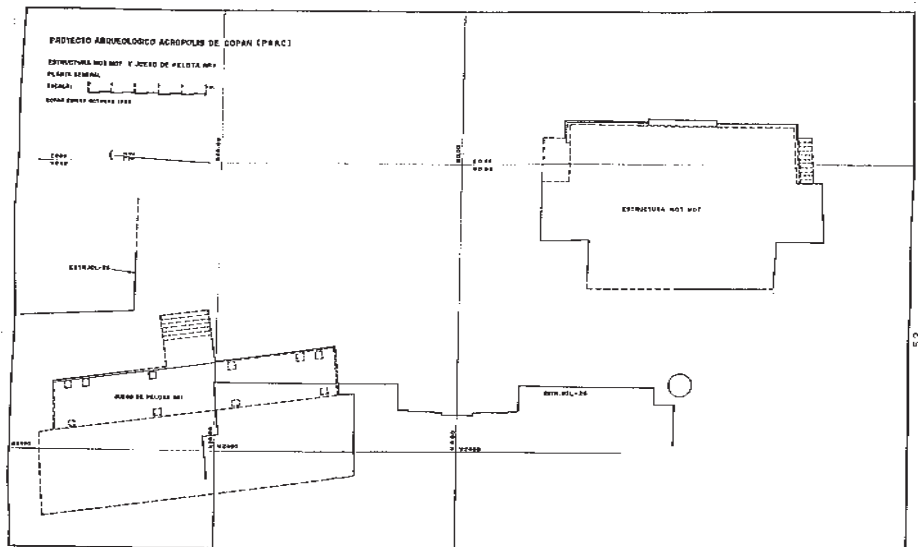


Fig. 2 Plan of Motmot structure, the Motmot floor marker, and the east building of Ballcourt I. Their location with respect to final-phase Structure 26 is shown by the outline of the latter. Plan by Richard Williamson, Fernando López, and Rudy Larios.

horizontal placement of the edges of the quatrefoil corresponded precisely to those of the cylindrical tomb (of form and size of the type most commonly used for burials at Teotihuacan; see Manzanilla 1993 and Serrano Sánchez 1993) found directly beneath the marker itself. On the substructure of Motmot there were four large sky bands and a depiction of GI (with a large bird in his head-dress) on the eastern side, framing the marker and tomb in the celestial context. The Margarita substructure imagery emphasizes the celestial realm, as denoted by the elaborate sky bands that frame the large full-figure glyphs, but like Motmot the building is tied to the underworld by the tomb found in the interior of the substructure. When the superstructure of Margarita was buried, a large inscribed stone bearing the names of Rulers 1 and 2 was placed at the south end of a secondary vault built above the tomb chamber (Sharer and Sedat 1995). As of this writing, no definitive answer can be given concerning the identity in life of the adults whose remains were found in the Margarita and Motmot tombs associated with these hieroglyphic texts and pictorial images. Motmot and Margarita share a plastered floor surface and are therefore contemporaneous, with the likelihood that Margarita slightly predates Motmot.

Their stratigraphic links with each other and with other features for which radiocarbon dates have been obtained leave little room for doubt that Margarita and Motmot were designed and built by the second ruler of Copan.

Given the textual references and stratigraphic tie-ins between the Margarita and Motmot building complexes, it is considered very likely that the earlier buildings found inside of Margarita and Yehnal (Hunal) and Motmot (Yax) were designed and built by the first ruler, K'inich Yax K'uk' Mo' (Sharer n.d.; Sharer et al. n.d.; Williamson 1996). This makes the contrast between them and their successor edifices built directly above them particularly pertinent to our topic. The surviving vestiges of Hunal, Yehnal, and Yax structures do not carry texts, or modeled stucco imagery, that directly cite the name of K'inich Yax K'uk' Mo'. Yehnal bore the image of K'inich Ahaul on either side of its central stairway, with a glyphic element that David Stuart (personal communication, 1995) has identified as an early form of the *way* glyph. The back side of Yax has the remains of a U-shaped bracket on its central axis. This most likely served to frame an image of GI such as the one placed in the same spot on its successor building, Motmot. Thus, although K'inich Yax K'uk' Mo' may well have associated himself with supernaturals (one of which he apparently claimed as his *way*), it remained to his successor to immortalize his name in stone and stucco on the dynastic buildings of the budding civic-ceremonial center. These findings from Copan are in keeping with the broader observations made by Houston and Stuart (1996) that Maya rulers were godlike in life but became enshrined as actual deities to be revered only after their deaths. On the much later Altar Q, the first ruler sits not on his name glyph (which he bears in his headdress) but on the glyph for "lord." The example that K'inich Yax K'uk' Mo' set as a godlike being was apparently so compelling that all of his successors felt compelled to honor, to cite, and to emulate it.

The first ballcourt was also given the benefit of modeled stucco decorations on its substructures, a fact not accessible to Strömsvik because he did not dig in the two places where these were preserved (again, a problem of sampling). The east sides of the eastern structures of both Ballcourt I and Ballcourt II were uncovered in a series of trench and tunnel investigations inside the final-phase architecture of Structures 10L-10 (Ballcourt III, east structure) and 10L-26 (the basal terrace, north of the hieroglyphic stairway) by the author and Richard Williamson (Fash n.d.; Williamson 1996). The remains of two large birds were found to have decorated both Ballcourt I and its more elevated successor, Ballcourt II. The features of these birds were remarkably similar, and the one at the south end of Ballcourt I's eastern building is quite striking (Fig. 3). The bird has the head of a macaw, supernatural serpent-head feet, and a series of macaw

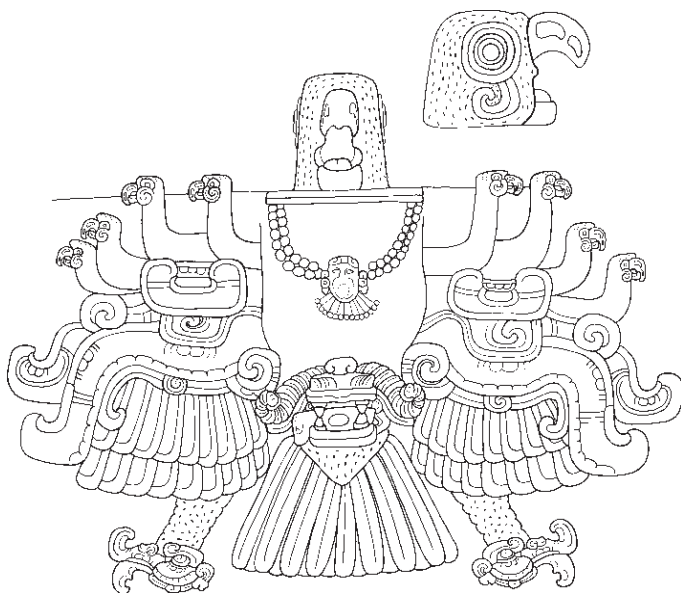


Fig. 3 Reconstruction drawing of the full-figure plaster bird from the south end of the east structure of Ballcourt I. Plaster conservation and refitting, and reconstruction drawing by Barbara Fash.

heads sprouting from the ends of its wing feathers. Such macaw imagery is perfectly in keeping with the macaw head markers found in association with Ballcourts II and III and with the 16 full-figure macaws that decorated the superstructure façades of the final phase Ballcourt III (Fash 1992; Fash and Fash 1990; Kowalski and Fash 1991). Much less in keeping with the Ballcourt III façade imagery is the head that emerges from the midsection of the Ballcourt I and Ballcourt II full-figure birds. This plumed reptilian would be nearly identical to the feathered serpent heads of the Temple of Quetzalcoatl in Teotihuacan were it not for the severed right forearm and hand that it holds in its jaws. The single “dot” on the forearm (for “one” or “Hun”) leaves little room for doubt about the intended meaning. This is the arm of Hunahpu, tying the Copan ballcourt imagery even more firmly to the Maya myth complex later recorded by the Quiche Maya in their sixteenth-century epic, the *Popol Vuh*—see Baudez (1980), Kowalski and Fash (1991), Miller (1986), Schele and Miller (1986), and Schele and Freidel (1990).

The Motmot floor marker inscription ends with a reference to “4 Macaw,” exactly what was seen in full-figure form on the substructures of Ballcourt I. The marker is set into the same plaster floor shared by Motmot and Ballcourt I. When the Maya conflated the Quetzalcoatl head with the macaw, the Ballcourt I full-figure birds shared both quetzal and macaw attributes, like the large-bird imagery on Margarita. Although its message is presently unclear to us,<sup>3</sup> there seems little doubt that these four birds were also designed to directly associate K’inich Yax K’uk’ Mo’ with the ballcourt and the playing of the ball game. They also associated him with supernatural forces, including in this case the Sun Imitator known to the Quiche as Vucub Caquix, and the person of Hunahpu who vanquished him just as the Copan kings were supposed to vanquish their rivals and enemies on the ball field and beyond.

The Quetzalcoatl aspect of the Ballcourt I and II full-figure stucco birds provides an entirely new and original twist to the ballcourt imagery. It also adds a provocative new element to the Teotihuacan links implied by a whole host of other archaeological features, objects, and pictorial imagery found in Early and Late Classic Copan. No longer can we dismiss the goggles over the eyes of K’inich Yax K’uk’ Mo’ on his depictions in the seventh-century effigy censer (Agurcia Fasquelle and Fash 1991: 105), on Altar Q (Maudslay 1889–1902, 1), or on the temple and façade of Structure 16 (Fash 1992) as the fashion-conscious designs of Late Classic kings. The cylindrical tomb beneath the Motmot floor marker, the Thin Orange and Teotihuacan-style painted pottery found in a series of Early Classic Copan tombs associated both with Motmot and with Margarita, the *talud-tableero* feature found on Yehnal Structure (Sharer et al. n.d.), and the *tableero* found on the platform that subsequently encapsulated Motmot (Williamson 1996) all point to conscious and deliberate attempts by the first two rulers of Copan to associate themselves with the great metropolis of Central Mexico. When this theme appeared in the architectural programs, pictorial imagery, and hieroglyphic inscriptions of the Late Classic it was not designed to fabricate a myth or even to present a revision in the historical record of a very

<sup>3</sup> The assumption in previous studies of the Copan ballcourt imagery has always been that the king was associated with the Hero Twins, the conquerors of the forces of darkness and evil in Xibalba. We also thought that, as such, he stood in opposition to the macaw, who was a representation of Vucub Caquix, the evil Sun Impersonator who tore off the arm of Hunahpu in the seventeenth-century Quiche account. However, in this instance the macaw seems to be associated with—indeed, to a degree labeled as—the deified first king, who clutches the arm of Hunahpu in his serpent-head appendage. One possible solution to this dilemma is to consider that perhaps the ruler’s name was derived from the supernatural one, which would certainly have inspired awe if not fear in his subjects.

“Classic Maya” city. Rather, it was a deliberate recalling of associations consciously made and reinforced in public monuments by the first rulers in the city. One implication of this is that references to linkages between the founders of Maya cities and Teotihuacan and/or the use of the latter’s imagery by late Cycle 9 rulers should not be dismissed out of hand as Late Classic revisionism or fictive propaganda. The Copan and Tikal data show that such claims can productively be tested archaeologically and may have a basis that can be demonstrated in the dynastic building programs, imagery, and inscriptions. We need more comparative material from other sites, such as Piedras Negras, where David Stuart (personal communications, 1995) informs me that there is yet another reference to links between the founder of that dynasty and the Central Mexican capital.

CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN THE COPAN  
DYNASTIC BUILDING PROGRAM

The evidence is clear that the layout of the dynastic center of Copan comprised an uplifted acropolis area that sustained Hunal and its successors, a residential and administrative complex directly north of it, and a more open and public dynastic temple–ballcourt–plaza complex still farther north (Fig. 4). All three of these areas saw considerable elaboration and vertical growth in the ensuing centuries.

Along with the overall continuity in imagery through time, there was a continuity in space for the ballcourt, as first noted by Strömmsvik (1952). After its initial construction by Ruler 2, the main ballcourt occupied essentially the same spot thereafter. Of course, as floor levels in the plaza around it rose in keeping with the ever more grandiose temples to the south, drainage considerations mandated that the ballcourt playing surface be raised in like measure. The thirteenth ruler’s additions to the adjacent Structure 26 were so ambitious that the ballcourt had to be shifted slightly to the north and east and enlarged to preserve a sense of scale with the buildings and courtyards next to it. Through it all, the court retained its original character and basic north–south orientation. In marked contrast to the dynastic temples and palatial residences and administrative buildings all around it, the ballcourt was never elevated on any sort of platform. The playing alley always sat on the lowest ground in the royal compound, perhaps in keeping with the floor markers being the most direct portals to the underworld and the Lords of Xibalba. This same vertical positioning is found for courts throughout the Maya lowlands and even at Xochicalco, Morelos.

In the case of Motmot Structure, both the building and its floor marker

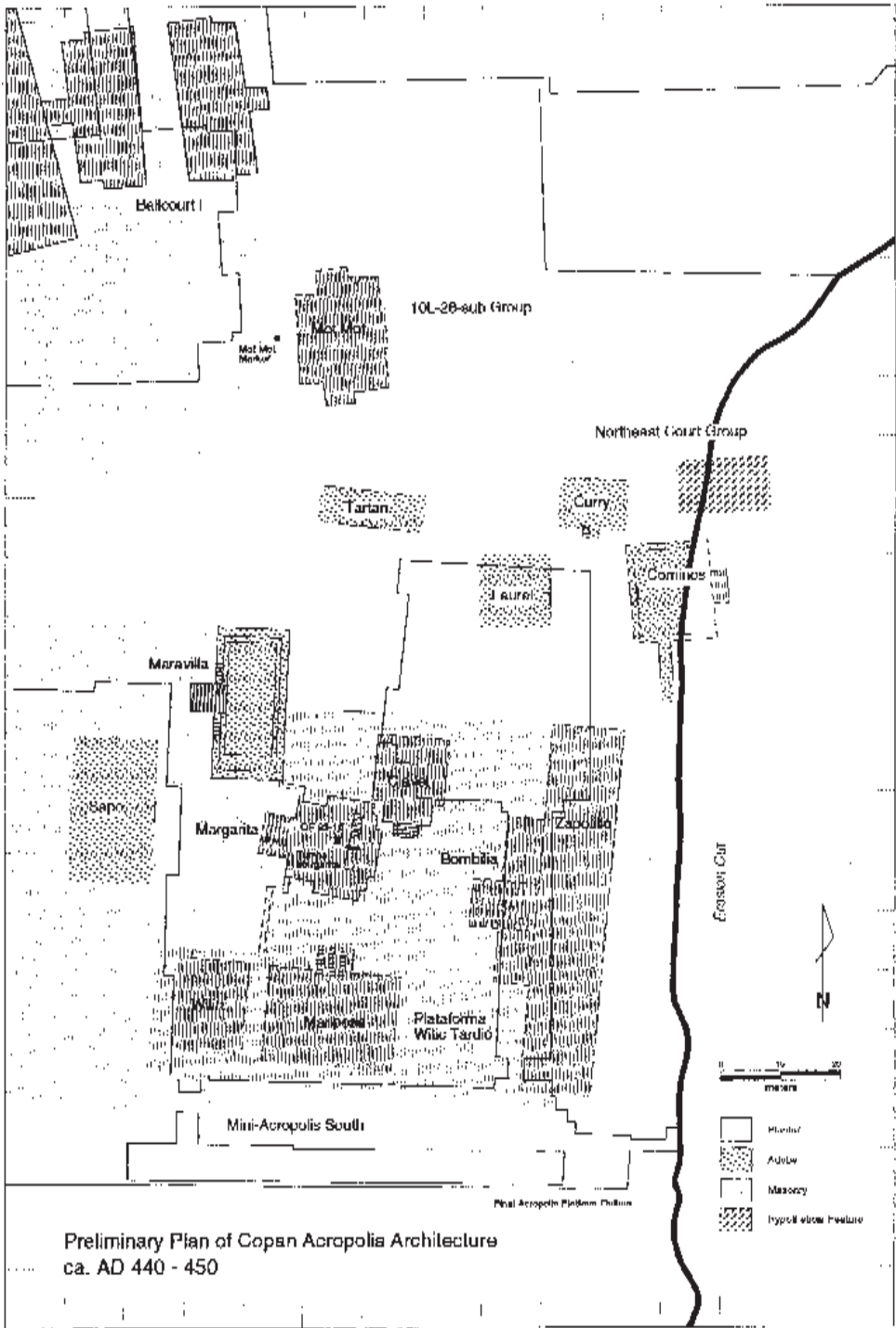


Fig. 4 Preliminary plan of Copan Acropolis architecture ca. a.d. 440–450. Produced by the Early Copan Acropolis Program under the direction of Robert Sharer (Sharer et al. n.d.). Computer-assisted map by Loa Traxler.

### *Dynastic Architectural Programs*

were covered over by a large platform within a few years of their original construction. The platform had a *tablero* on its front façade and was surmounted by a two-roomed temple (called Papagayo) and a stepped pyramid behind it (called Mascarones), which together replicated the plan of Motmot on a much larger scale. Inside the back room of Motmot stood Stela 63, which cited the 9.0.0.0 event first recorded on the Motmot marker and the names of K'inich Yax K'uk' Mo' and Ruler 2. The stela was subsequently abutted by a hieroglyphic step bearing the name of the fourth ruler, Cu IX, who also placed a second floor inside the temple (Fash 1991). This temple and its inscribed stela and step were then left intact for nearly two centuries, surely an indication of their sacred nature.

Hieroglyphic steps bearing the names of rulers were also carved and used to designate the builders of subsequent versions of the dynastic buildings in other parts of the acropolis as well. These include references to the seventh ruler on an Early Classic building buried inside of Structure 11 and steps citing the tenth ruler on the structures known as "Ante" (below final phase Structure 20), and Rosalila (built above Margarita, underneath Structure 16). The spectacular modeled stucco decoration that still adorns all three stories of Rosalila's superstructure consoles us somewhat for the lack of preservation of such embellishments on the majority of the other Early Classic Copan Acropolis structures. Nearly all the structures in the acropolis had their superstructures demolished as a prerequisite step for construction of other buildings above them. This practice resulted in demolition of the pictorial imagery that adorned the exterior façades of the superstructures, possibly including named ruler portraits. As Schele notes (this volume), the entablatures of the superstructure were the part of the building most favored for this kind of embellishment during the Classic period. As a result, we are presently very limited in what we can discern about specific supernatural associations for particular buildings. Expositions of the underlying cosmological conceits and political designs of the patrons of those particular edifices are still a long way away.

In terms of the layout of the royal compound, however, Sharer and his colleagues (n.d.) have detected a rather significant change at the beginning of the sixth century a.d., which they have ascribed to the seventh ruler, Waterlily Jaguar. This took the form of a massive infilling of previously existent plazas and buildings in both the original acropolis nucleus and the royal residential and administrative complex to the north. This was the first step in a quite significant expansion of the acropolis to the north, essentially forming the direct ancestor of what we see today as the East Court. The new layout resulted in repositioning of the residential and administrative courtyards that had previ-

ously been located north of the acropolis *per se*, down to its southern flank. The newly built residential compound on the south side of the acropolis was the direct ancestor of Group 10L-2, the Late Classic royal residential compound whose investigation was directed by E. Wyllys Andrews V (Andrews n.d.; Andrews and Fash 1992). In uncovering and documenting this major shift, Sharer and his colleagues (n.d.) have restored Waterlily Jaguar to his rightful place as one of Copan's "Great Builders." Through the end of dynastic rule at Copan, this complex saw numerous modifications in terms of the numbers and features of the buildings that it comprised but not in terms of its essential form and interpreted functions.

One of the most important buildings of the ancestral East Court was the first (known) version of what would eventually become known to us as Temple 22. Like the ballcourts and the dynastic temples under Structures 16 and 26, the sequent versions of Temple 22 have been shown to exhibit a strong continuity through time and numerous rebuildings. The corner masks bearing the image of the personified *wits* ("hill" or "mountain") deity on the final version of this famous building have been shown to have antecedents in two of its previous incarnations. Thus, a "sacred mountain" temple identified by Freidel, Schele, and Parker (1993) as a Yaxal Wits or "First True Mountain" seems to have occupied the northern limit of the ancestral East Court from its inception. Although it is tempting to ascribe to Waterlily Jaguar either the concept or the first construction of the *wits* building itself, it seems prudent to reserve judgment on this until more of the ancestral West Court is investigated by means of tunnels. But it cannot be denied that Waterlily Jaguar did effect major changes in the design, if not the meaning, of the royal compound.

For the reign of the tenth ruler, Moon Jaguar (a.d. 553–578), we have inscriptions and surviving stucco decoration on Ante and its superstructure "Ani" (located beneath final-phase Structure 20) and on Rosalila. The human heads portrayed on the exterior façades of Ani are the same as those on the final phase of Structure 20 (Barbara Fash, personal communication, 1991), lending credence to the idea that this building also showed continuity in meaning and purpose through time. Rosalila's polychrome stucco decoration (Fig. 5) is the subject of ongoing research by Agurcia Fasquelle (n.d.) and Fash and Taube (n.d.), and no doubt many more insights will emerge as a result of their conjoined efforts. For the present purposes, we should merely note that the building contains birds combining quetzal, macaw, and K'inich Ahau elements (Ricardo Agurcia Fasquelle, Karl Taube, and Barbara Fash, personal communications, 1995), which ties it directly into the symbolism of its predecessors, Margarita and Yehnal. This once again cements the association between the

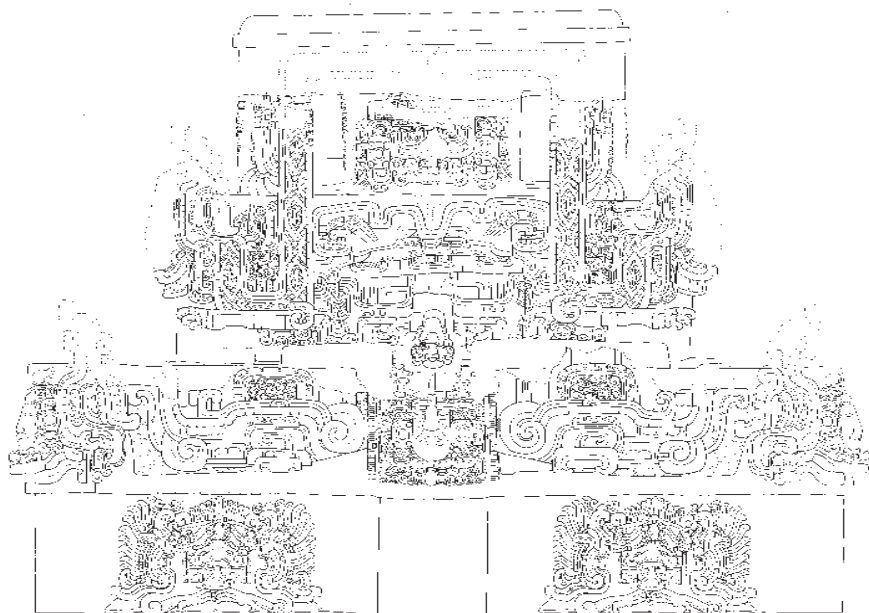


Fig. 5 West elevation of Rosalila structure. Based on the excavations of Ricardo Agurcia Fasquelle (n.d.), architectural recording by Jorge Ramos and Rudy Larios, and stucco investigations and conservation by Barbara Fash. Drawing by Barbara Fash.

deified founder and the most upraised and spectacular dynastic building in the acropolis.

#### THE LATE CLASSIC ROYAL COMPOUND AND ITS IMITATORS

In looking at form to infer function, the Late Classic Principal Group or epicenter of the kingdom of Copan has a number of clearly differentiated spaces (Fig. 6). Access to the center is provided by means of two roads (*sacheob*) leading into the central open plaza area from the urban wards to the east and west. Once one had entered the largest paved area in the city, there were two basic choices: go to the north and the plaza with the stelae of the thirteenth king, or go to the south and the area of the ballcourt, hieroglyphic stairway, and the massive Structure 11. Much more restricted in access and size are the two elevated patios or courts in the acropolis, south of these great public plazas. The restricted nature of the access to the East and West Courts was noted a decade ago by Mary Miller (1986) in her classic study of the Copan Acropolis. This highly restricted nature is also reflected by the fact that the courts themselves are not even visible from anywhere below.

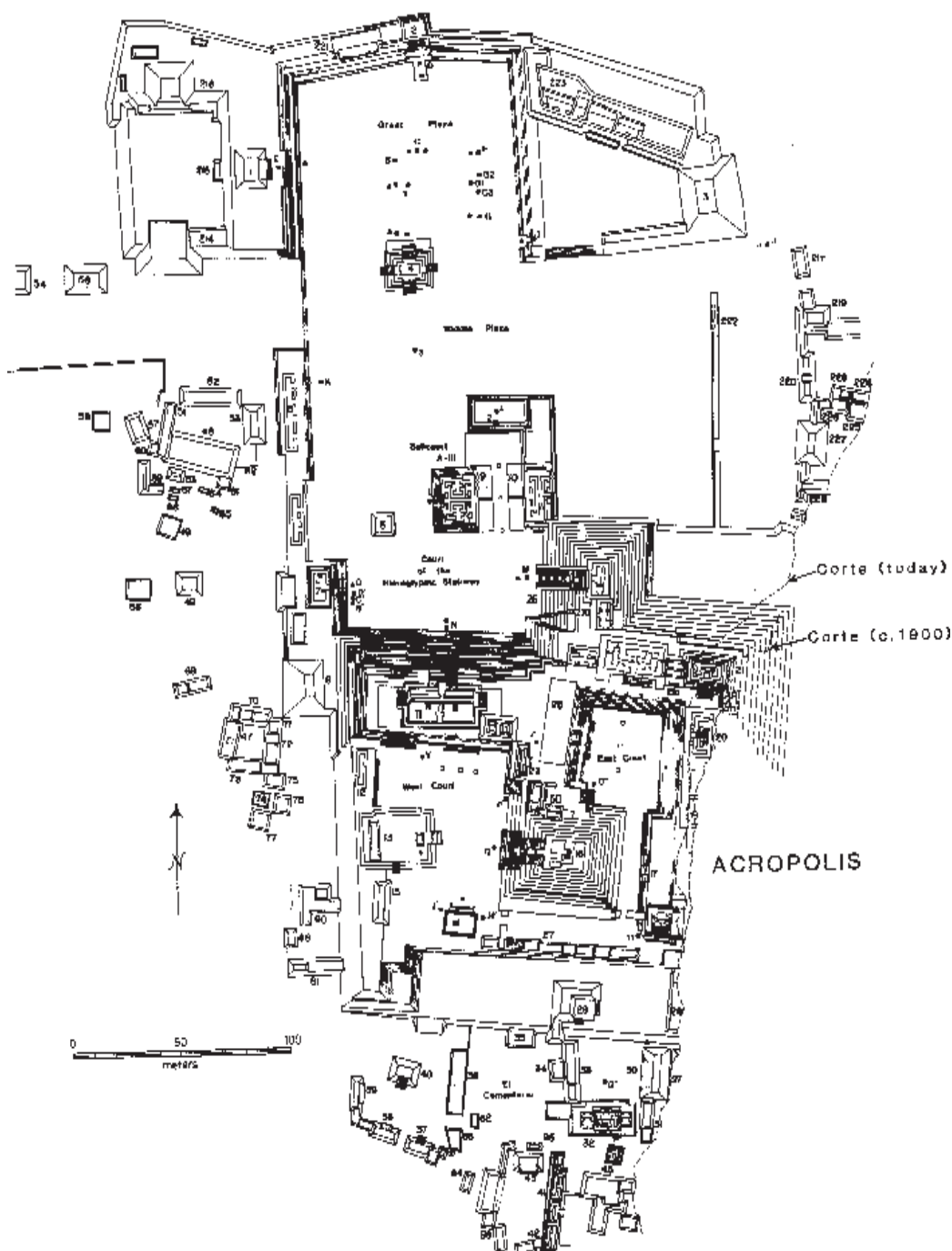


Fig. 6 Plan of the final-phase Principal Group of Copan, ca. a.d. 800 (after Fash and Sharer 1991: 168, fig. 1).

## *Dynastic Architectural Programs*

In her prescient analysis of the meaning and uses of the Copan Acropolis, Miller (1986) presented the idea that the steps of both the Reviewing Stand and the Jaguar Stairway were places where rituals were performed. She noted that, although the Reviewing Stand had long been thought to be a place for spectators, it seems more likely that it forms a half or “false” ballcourt. Miller and Houston (1987) subsequently showed that the Reviewing Stand is even glyphically labeled as a ballcourt in the accompanying inscription. The three markers in front of both the Jaguar Stairway and the Reviewing Stand were likened to the three floor markers of the main ballcourt, in further support of this important new insight. Miller then posited that the Jaguar Stairway was used for sacrifices in association with ball-game ritual and the dispatching of sacrificial victims. Remarkably, the East Court of the Palace at Palenque seems to have been the scene of similar rites, to judge from the depictions of bound prisoners and the hieroglyphic stairway that they front and flank. Miller also suggested that the adjacent north steps of the East Court were used for royal bloodletting (Miller 1986: 85).

Stephen Houston (this volume) has made another critical contribution in pointing out that the steps on Maya buildings were also used as a symbolic device for marking social status. The “palace scenes” on polychrome vases show that the relative heights of the participants on the steps correlated with aspects of dress and other indications of their social status in the scenes. If Miller is right about the use of the north steps in the East Court, and Houston’s insightful analysis holds as well, a lively and revealing picture can be conjured up. The participants in the East Court rituals would have been ranked from lowest (stationed at the level of the underworld waters on the floor of the court; Freidel, Schele, and Parker 1993) to highest, who basked in their exalted station (and a much better view of the proceedings) on the steps of Temple 22 at the mouth of the temple itself.

Miller did not hazard a guess as to what the most expansive eastern set of steps in the East Court was used for. I believe that they were used, at least in part, as accommodations for people to observe both the rituals that Miller postulates and also the dances that Barbara Fash suggested were taking place above the Jaguar Stairway on the low plaster-capped platform labeled Structure 10L-25 (B. Fash n.d.a; B. Fash et al. 1992; B. Fash, personal communication, 1988). In like fashion, the steps that surround the Great Plaza were thought by Stephens (1841) to be seating accommodations for well-attended public spectacles. Fuentes y Guzmán (cited in Morley 1920) referred to this area as the “Circus Maximus,” which may not be far off the mark for the kinds of awe-inspiring displays of ritual theater and pageantry that took place there.

Perhaps the clearest example of steps being designed for seating in a Classic Maya center is that afforded by the “amphitheater” at the site of Pechal (Ruppert and Denison 1943: 92 and pl. 74; Fig. 7 here). Ruppert and Denison (1943: 92) calculated that for Pechal “the seating capacity of the amphitheater, very conservatively estimated, is placed at 8,000.” The amphitheater at Pechal has nearly the same dimensions (“averaging 68 by 75 meters”; Ruppert and Denison 1943: 92) as the floor and delimiting steps of the Great Plaza of Copan (cf. Fig. 6). The Pechal example seems to have been designed for all eyes to be focused on the plaza area where all of the stelae and altars of the site were situated. Likewise, the steps of the Great Plaza of Copan would have enabled all the “participant-observers”—whether seated or standing—to view the important rituals and ceremonies that made use of the altars and stelae. This certainly does not preclude that there would have been a pecking order of who got to sit or stand at particular elevations or vantage points or that the steps could also have been used for parts of the ceremonies themselves.

Richard Williamson (n.d.) estimated the seating capacity of the steps and terraces from which the Copan ball games could have been watched to be about 3000 people. The Great Plaza steps could have seated at least this many as well. If one were to allow for people standing in the plaza (as is presently practiced in the Maya highlands and is documented worldwide in such settings) and double this figure, there would have been about 6000 (or more) people present for such rituals. This would have represented about one-quarter of the total population of the kingdom during its cultural and population climax, according to the latest population estimates (Webster and Freter 1990; Webster, Sanders, and van Rossum 1992). Thus, the proportion of the population of a kingdom that could have been in attendance at public ceremonies in the Classic Maya civic-ceremonial centers was significant.

However, the East Court of the acropolis definitely did not have the capacity to accommodate as many people as did the Great Plaza or the ballcourt/hieroglyphic stairway plaza area. Taking the reduction policy even further, the West Court of the acropolis has even fewer steps and may have been reserved for activities that only a chosen few were empowered to witness. Of course, the temples themselves were the most elevated and restricted spaces of all, with the behaviors taking place there being literally the paramount example of the use of sacred space to elevate both the social hierarchy and its legitimating ideological system. The temple inside the final version of Structure 16 is the smallest and highest in the Principal Group, the most exclusive and rarefied environs in the entire city.

In comparative terms, there is a consistent design in Classic Maya dynastic

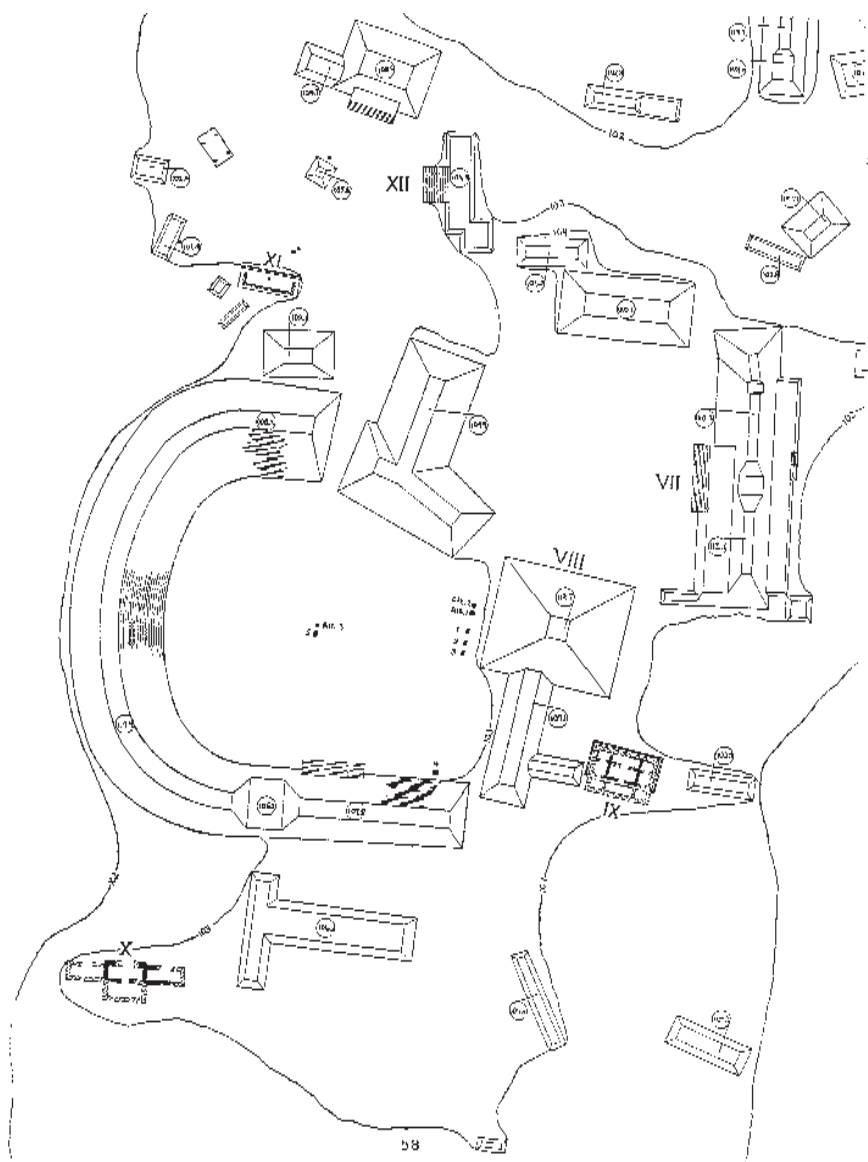


Fig. 7 Plan of the central sector of the ruins of Pechal, Campeche (after Ruppert and Denison 1943: pl. 74).

centers to make use of causeways to funnel large numbers of subjects and pilgrims into large, open plazas. One of the most often visited today is the Great Plaza at Tikal, with steps for seating accommodations and/or as “stages,” forming an integral part of the assemblage on the north side (Fig. 8). Adjacent to such public squares are elevated “acropolis” areas, for example the North Acropolis at Tikal and the Palace at Palenque (Fig. 9), which were quite clearly designed for more exclusive ceremonies. Thus, the architecture can tell us something about the social hierarchy of ritual and pageantry in the royal compounds at the heart of the Maya kingdoms. In Copan, at least, it can also inform us about the social hierarchy in the residential areas that sustained the centers.

We can take this architectural layout down the social ladder in Copan, where extensive excavations of residential architecture have been conducted for the past 18 years. The largest and most imposing residential compounds in the urban wards of the Copan kingdom also had impressive architectural monuments, embellished with sculptures that portrayed the power and prestige of their owners. The hieroglyphic benches and pictorial façade sculptures that adorned the paramount structures of the elite residential groups have been the subject of considerable interest for models of status competition, political evolution, and even the nature of the Classic Maya collapse (B. Fash et al. 1992; Fash 1983, 1986, 1991; Fash and Stuart 1991; Sanders 1986, 1989; Sanders and Webster 1988; Webster 1989a; Webster, Evans, and Sanders 1993). A key to understanding the function of the buildings within their own social context and the behaviors that took place in each one of them comes in the form of the architectural spaces themselves.

Located in the Sepulturas ward less than a kilometer east of the Great Plaza, Group 9N-8's space boasted seating/stage accommodations on three of the four sides of its principal plaza and a ceremonial structure on the open end. This plan is quite similar to that of the Great Plaza in the epicenter (cf. Figs. 6 and 10) and is not unlike that of the amphitheater at Pechal (Fig. 7). Although there were no stelae set in Plaza A, Webster (1989a) has shown that Altar W was originally placed there. Also, the sculptures adorning its east and west buildings are in keeping with the themes on the east and west stairs of the East Court of the acropolis (Fash 1986). Broad stairways for seating are also found in the main plaza of Group 10L-2, the royal residential compound investigated by Andrews on the south flank of the acropolis (Fig. 11). Structures fronted entirely with stairs, such as Andrews' Structures 10L-30, -32, and -33, were uncovered at excavations of the much smaller (“Type 2”) residential site, Group 9M-22 Plaza B (Webster 1989b: fig. 4). This implies a concern for rituals, or at least for ritual presentation of status, on stairways fronting plazas even for less prestigious family groups in Late Classic Copan.



Fig 8 Plan of the central sector of Tikal (Carr and Hazard 1961).

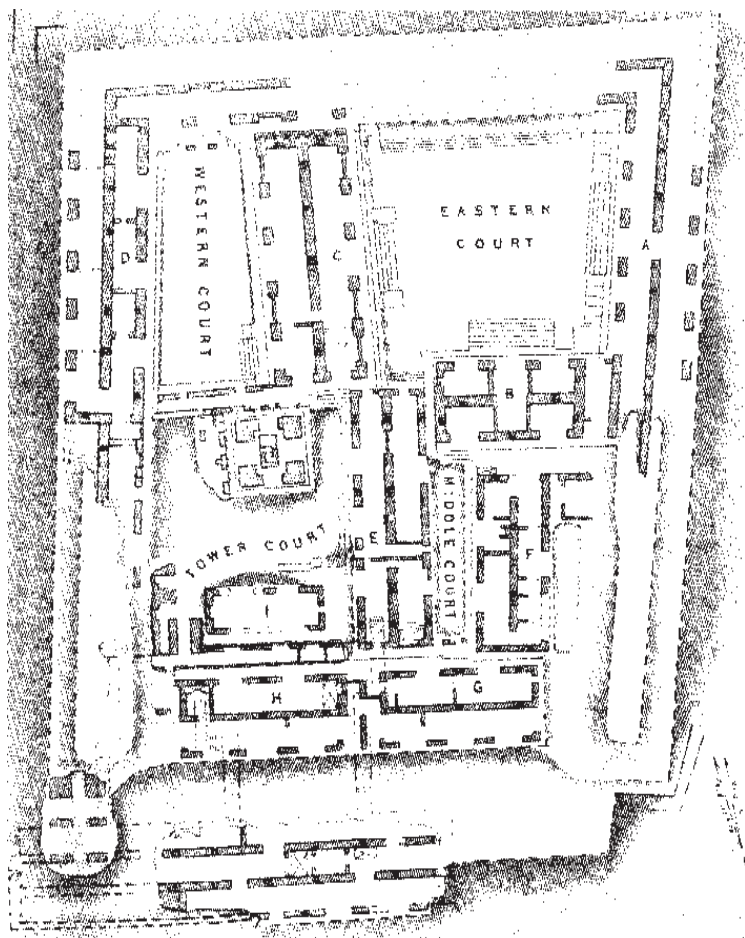


Fig. 9 The Palace at Palenque (after Maudslay 1889–1902, 4: pl. 3).

Of course, in the broader comparative study of human organization and expression, we can expect many of the manifestations of Classic Maya culture to correlate with those of other civilizations of antiquity. Grounded in considerations of ecology, social structure, and political evolution, many scholars find the theatre states of Southeast Asia and Indonesia to be productive non-Mesoamerican sources for analogy with the Classic Maya kingdoms (Webster, this volume). In his classic book on the theater state of Bali, Geertz (1980) shows the importance of pageantry and ritual in that society. All of the elaborate ceremonies, and the hundreds of palace and temple complexes that dotted

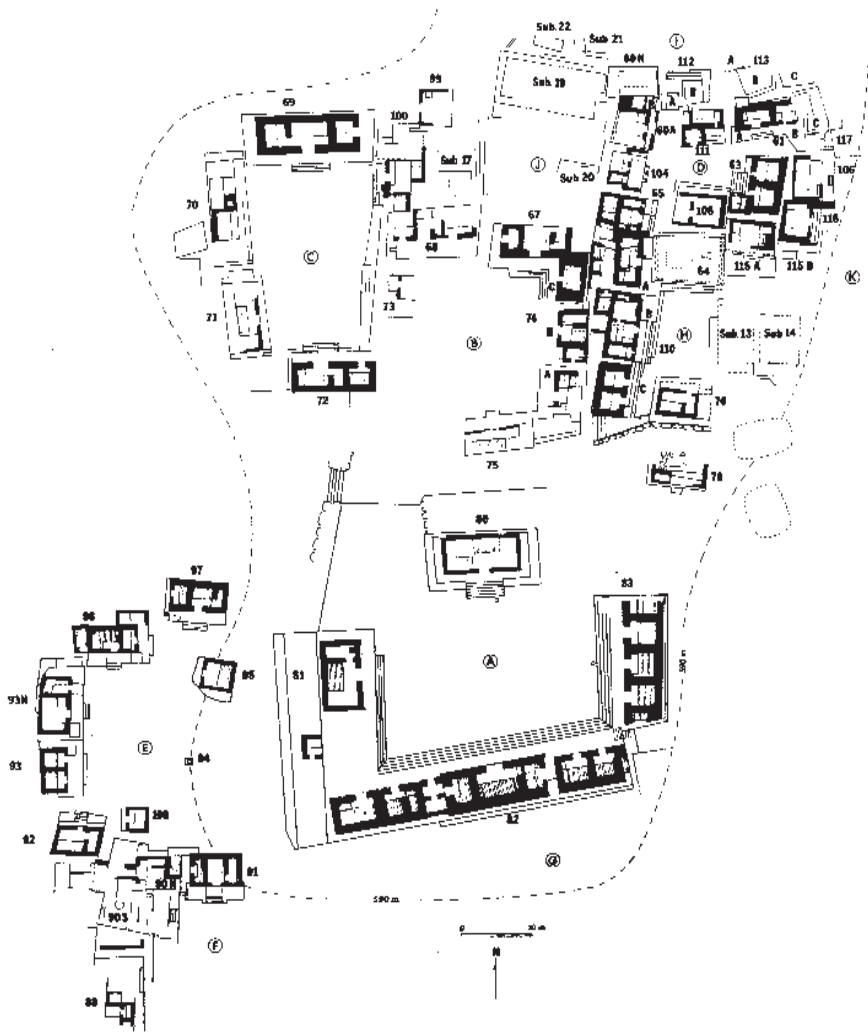


Fig. 10 Plan of Group 9N-8, Sepulturas, Copan (after Webster 1989b: 10, fig. 5).

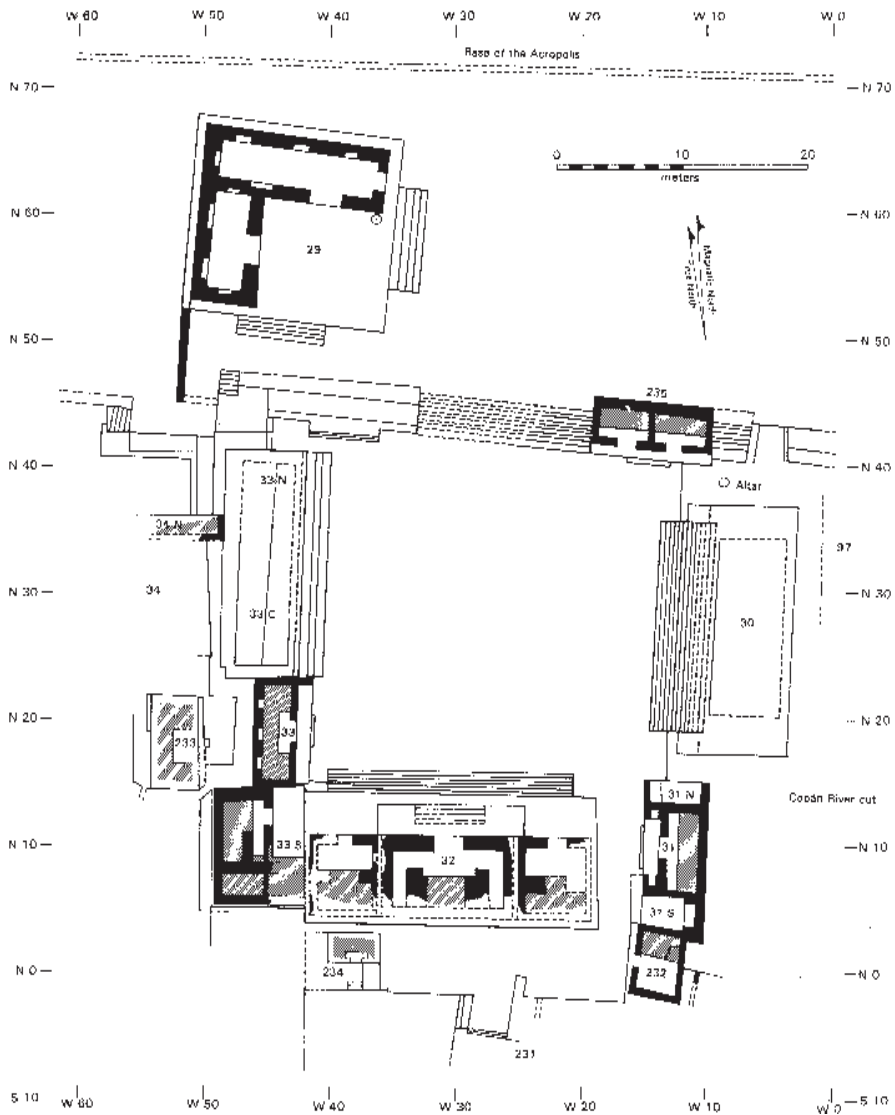


Fig. 11 Plan of Plaza A, Group 10L-2, Copan (after Andrews and Fash 1992: 66, fig. 3).

the countryside, were geared to the proposition of “making inequality enchant,” as Geertz put it. This is precisely what the archaeological evidence of seating accommodations, and the epigraphic and pictorial symbolism on architecture and sculpture, point to for Copan, both at the city center and in the surrounding residential areas.

Given this concern with and social replication of the staging of public ceremony, the question then becomes what kinds of pageants and passions were played out in the Maya ritual arenas? The art and texts that embellish Classic Maya structures can lend us a hand here. I hasten to add that I am referring to the reconstruction of what it was the Maya elites were encoding in, and communicating through the edification of, their public monuments. This does not mean that I accept wholesale everything that the Maya aristocracy said about themselves and their role in their imagery and texts. My point is rather that the meanings that they designed these monuments to pass on are recoverable, albeit in varying degrees. Just as the residential architecture in the Copan valley is an explicit indicator of the relative social standing of its owners by its relative volume and complexity, so too the messages carved in stone on the steps, exterior façades and roof crests, and interior benches and jambs are explicit and very revealing of the motives, the ideals, and the pretensions of those who designed, built, and used them. Just as we all agree that the public monuments were biased and self-serving, there is also a general accord that not everyone in Classic Maya society could read the inscriptions. But I think that scholars also agree that the populace could understand and appreciate the architectural sculpture, which was designed and built to be admired and understood. Of course, the level of understanding varied with age, experience, and social standing. Thus, on a purely practical level a higher position on the steps enabled one to see more of the rituals, the architectural setting, and its attendant pictorial imagery. On a more social and intellectual level, the more elevated individuals could better understand the information and power communicated in the built environment and the pageantry that made it resonate with meaning.

#### BUILDINGS AND THEIR MEANING IN LATE CLASSIC COPAN

Here I summarize some of the results of our most recent work on the Late Classic Maya architecture in Copan to illustrate what kinds of meanings were encoded there, what kinds of behaviors took place in those dramatic environs, and what all of this can tell us about dynastic design and intent. The discussion will proceed chronologically from the time of the eleventh ruler to the sixteenth and final member of the K'inich Yax K'uk' Mo' dynasty in order to pursue development of the architectural program in historical sequence. Progress

and pitfalls in the interpretations of idiosyncratic concerns and strategies of statecraft will be addressed for each ruler in his turn.

During the reigns of the eleventh and twelfth rulers in the seventh century a.d., change was in the air as far as dynastic monuments went. Barbara Fash (Fash n.d.b; Fash and Taube n.d.) has noted that the Copan architects and sculptors began to change the way they embellished the structures with sculpture in the reign of the eleventh ruler, Buts' Chan. Instead of using stone armatures outset from the façade to support masses of modeled stucco, the stone itself became increasingly salient and carved, and the use of stucco was correspondingly decreased. This process is best exemplified by the sculptures that adorned "Indigo" (below final-phase Temple 22) and "Oropéndula" (adjacent to Rosalila and beneath final-phase Temple 16). By the end of the reign of Ruler 12 (referred to variously as "Smoke-Jaguar" and "Smoke-Imix-God K"), this transition was complete. Some of the very finest sculptures ever carved in the Maya area were found in a context that dates to the end of the reign of Ruler 12, in a structure beneath 10L-26 first known as "Hijole" (Fash n.d.b).

Ruler 12 commissioned several buildings with the most evenly hewn dressed tuff blocks ever produced in the Maya area, on such massive structures as "Esmeralda" (beneath Structure 26) and "Púrpura" (which encapsulated the still intact Rosalila). Sadly, we are unable to even guess at what messages the adornments of the temples atop these massive renovations bore, because few of them survived the subsequent rebuilding episodes. We can take note of the fact that Ruler 12 was not just intent on large-scale renovations of the acropolis temples but on the placement of a series of inscribed stelae and altars in different parts of the Copan valley as well. Although Buts' Chan (portrayed on Stela 7), Waterlily Jaguar (memorialized on Stela 9), and other earlier dynasts (responsible for Stelae 20, 21, 23, and 24) erected monuments at the site of the modern town, Ruler 12 erected no less than six stelae and four inscribed altars in the valley at a number of different loci. This concern with leaving a literary mark on the landscape has certainly impressed the community of modern scholars working on Mesoamerica, who have interpreted these monuments in various ways.

Although I was once one of its most enthusiastic backers, I find that I no longer subscribe to the view that the outlying valley stelae delimit the boundaries of the domain of Ruler 12. The beginning of the Late Classic period corresponds with the appearance of Copador ceramics. Payson Sheets' (1992) work at the site of El Ceren shows Copador to have been in use before a.d. 600, prior to the reign of Ruler 12, who acceded in a.d. 628. Survey and excavations conducted in the larger sustaining area demonstrate that during the

reign of Ruler 12, the kingdom clearly extended far beyond the limits of the Copan pocket. In this case, our earlier assessments were in error, not because of sampling but because of the mistaken dates (a.d. 700 or even 737) then posited for the appearance of Copador polychrome. The idea that the stelae are associated with particular sacred spots on the landscape and associated ancestors (Proskouriakoff 1973), likely used in ritual pilgrimage circuits (Schele and Freidel 1990), now seems to have much more in its favor.

For the thirteenth ruler, Uaxaclahun Ubah K'awil (also known as XVIII Jog and 18 Rabbit), a whole series of architectural and freestanding monuments have been identified and subjected to all manner of scholarly interpretation. It is only with thorough investigation of earlier monuments that his considerable achievements can be put in proper perspective. Although it is true that half of the stelae (i.e., A, D, F, and 4) and one of the buildings (Structure 22) that he built have the very high relief style that made Copan famous, we know now that this style began with the work of an incredibly skilled and visionary sculptor in the reign of the previous king (B. Fash n.d.b). Although it is also true that the final version of Temple 22 was probably one of the most beautiful buildings in the New World from the time of its construction until it fell into disrepair, we know now that there were numerous antecedent versions of this artificial sacred mountain for at least a century before Uaxaclahun Ubah K'awil built the one whose ruins continue to inspire us today. Finally, the birds that adorn the façades of the ballcourt he completed in the year before his much-remarked demise were but a more plentiful version of the dramatic and powerful avians that were emblazoned on the sides of the courts of his ancestors.

On the positive side of this particular ledger, Stuart (n.d.a) has recently suggested that Uaxaclahun Ubah K'awil had not been given his due as the original patron of the hieroglyphic stairway. The lower part of the stairway carries a dedicatory date that falls fairly early in the reign of the thirteenth ruler. Because the later date higher up on the stairs had long been taken to represent the date of its completion—with a formal dedication, perhaps, when Stela M was erected at its base in a.d. 756—the earlier dedicatory date was not given its due until Stuart's recent reanalysis of this material. Thus, the idea that the hieroglyphic stairway was built after a 19-year hiatus at the site (Marcus 1976; Morley 1920; Riese 1980, 1986) is no longer tenable. The interpretations that I derived from this dating of the stairs after the death of Uaxaclahun Ubah K'awil and its purported use as a revivalist temple conceived and built to restore faith in the royal line (Fash 1988, 1991; W. Fash et al. 1992) will also have to be revised. The view now is that Uaxaclahun Ubah K'awil sought to create the most impressive hieroglyphic stairway in the Maya area to enshrine the glorious deeds of

his ancestors (Stuart n.d.a). Singled out for special veneration was Ruler 12, whose portrait and exploits are found at eye level at the base of the stairs.

For the ballcourt, we have seen that the floor markers and macaws on the benches and façades of both buildings show that mythological and astrological aspects were an integral part of the symbolism and ideology of the ball game at Copan from the onset of dynastic rule through the reign of Uaxaclahun Ubah K'awil. Likewise, the Temple 22 themes of maize growing from the sacred mountain, guarded over by the figure of the king (B. Fash n.d.b) were also sacred, unchangeable propositions. This is in keeping with worldwide patterns of veneration of sacred mountains, a popular theme among the Maya in general and especially so at Copan, whose inscriptions refer to it as the "Three Mountain" place (Stuart 1992, n.d.b). The entrance to Temple 22 transformed it into the gaping mouth of a cave, which is what the interior of the temple was designed to replicate. Whatever rituals and other behaviors took place within this artificial sacred mountain, the results of them were probably communicated to the anxious public, assembled by the hundreds on the steps and the courtyard below. We are now confident that a Day or Rising Sun God originally graced the east side of the East Court, turning the entire patio into a giant cosmogram oriented on both vertical and horizontal axes (Ashmore 1991). This gives us a feel for the larger picture in which these rituals and pageants were played out, according to the design conceived by the Maya.

Barbara Fash (n.d.b) has recently demonstrated that there were numerous water birds on the façades of Temple 22, in keeping with the idea that the plaza below was a metaphor for the lagoons and reservoirs found on Maya sacred mountains. She also notes that this and the other acropolis temples and courts were designed as an integral part of a larger water capture and runoff system such as those documented for Tikal and other ancient Maya communities (Scarborough 1983, 1993). Dynastic architecture is in fact the maximal expression of the water-related concerns that faced every farmer since Formative times; the reservoirs of Tikal, Copan, and other cities are but the most sophisticated dynastic versions of that aspect of the built environment.

It is intriguing that although some were given the benefits of some refurbishment or expansion, no subsequent king sought to build over the four great architectural achievements of the ill-fated thirteenth king: the Great Plaza, the final ballcourt, the hieroglyphic stairway, and the final version of Temple 22. Perhaps the end he suffered made him a martyr of legendary, perhaps even mythical, proportions in this kingdom, making of his monuments a virtually sacrosanct legacy.

Ruler 14 ("Smoke Monkey") was long thought not to have commissioned

or erected any monuments during his relatively short reign. This view has been successfully challenged by the investigation of Structure 10L-22A (B. Fash et al. 1992; Fash and Fash 1990) (Fig. 12). Just as both epigraphic and stratigraphic data support the placement of Structure 10L-22 1st in the reign of Uaxaclahun Ubah K'awil (Larios, Fash, and Stuart 1994), the textual and contextual information both place Structure 10L-22A in the reign of his successor, Ruler 14. Barbara Fash's sculpture analysis showed that this building was embellished with large mats, considered to label this as the Popol Nah, or Council or Community House (B. Fash et al. 1992). Other motifs are read as *zac nicté'il na* or "white flower house," which is another term for council house in Maya dictionaries (Stephen Houston, personal communication, 1990). Its identification as a council house thus relies on two distinct pieces of epigraphic data.

Between the oversized mat symbols were a series of niches, inset into which were human figures seated above hieroglyphs. The epigraphers recognized the hieroglyphs as place names that occur in other contexts where they may refer

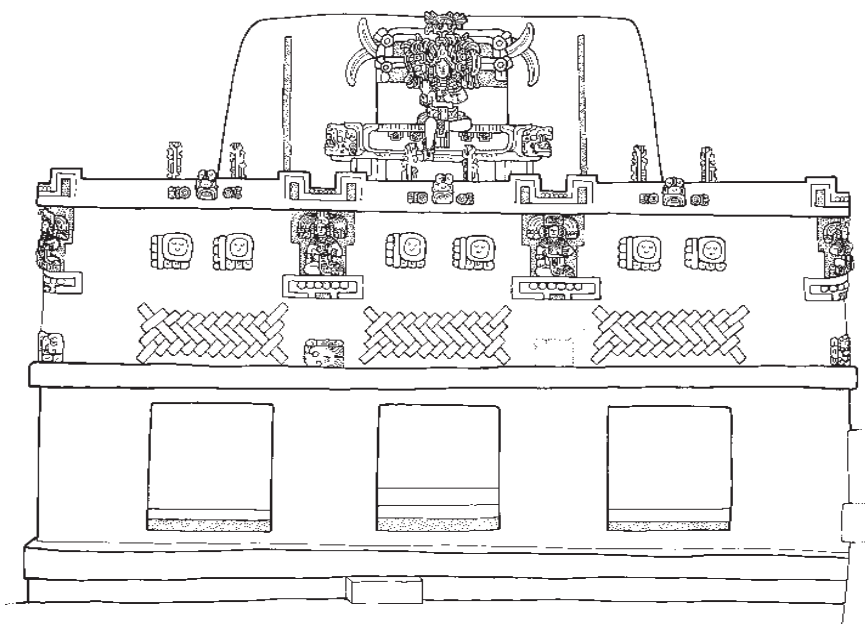


Fig. 12 Reconstruction drawing of Copan Structure 22A. Based on architectural data provided by Rudy Larios and sculpture reconstruction by Barbara Fash. Drawing by Barbara Fash.

to supernatural locales (B. Fash et al. 1992; Stuart and Houston 1994). Will Andrews found one of the place name glyphs on three different buildings in Group 10L-2, the royal residential compound that he was digging just south of the acropolis (Andrews n.d.; Andrews and Fash 1992). This provided the first archaeological evidence that the place names on the Mat House were actually associated with specific lineages and/or residential groups within the ancient kingdom of Copan. The location of Andrews' compound to the south of the acropolis is in keeping with the position of the kanal or fish glyph on the south façade of the Popol Nah. This datum leads us to wonder whether the other place names might also be placed on the façades of the building in keeping with the geographic positions of their respective lineages or communities. This hypothesis is being put to the test in new research in the valley, at Group 9J-5 (north of the Principal Group), and at the secondary center of Río Amarillo (to the east). Linda Schele (personal communication, 1992) has suggested that the "black water hole" place name on the west side of Structure 10L-22A may refer to Quirigua, which is located both west and north of Copan.

Presiding over the councillors was the portrait of the ruler, who was carved larger than life and occupied the central portion of the roof crest. Structural evidence adduced by Barbara Fash (1992) now allows us to prove that most of the major buildings of the Late Classic Copan Acropolis did sport roof crests, just as their counterparts in the Petén did and as the Early Classic temple Rosalila did (Fig. 5). As noted, the architectural stratigraphy shows that Structure 10L-22A was built after the reign of the thirteenth ruler and before that of the fifteenth ruler. The 9 Ahau glyphs that were placed prominently on the building are thought likely to refer to the 9 Ahau period ending 9.15.15.0.0, falling in a.d. 746. This building is thus thought to have been dedicated by the fourteenth king, Smoke Monkey, toward the end of his short reign and less than a decade after the humiliating death of his predecessor XVIII Jog at the hands of his former vassal from Quirigua, Cauac Sky. This historical context makes for an interesting analysis of the strategies of statecraft pursued by the short-lived fourteenth ruler, as reflected in his architectural program.

The original idea was that Structure 10L-22A and the royal council were innovations of Ruler 14 in response to the rising power of the nobles in the valley and the need to appease and engage them at a time of political crisis in the history of the dynasty (B. Fash et al. 1992; Fash and Fash 1990). The realization that Group H at Uaxactun contained a Late Pre-Classic Mat House (Fash and Fash n.d.; Freidel, Schele, and Parker 1993) and the documentation of other Late Classic buildings of this type in numerous parts of the Maya lowlands (Ringle 1990; Schele, this volume) has enlightened our thinking on this

topic. So has the recent discovery that the building beneath 10L-22A does not have the form or decoration of the Mat House and appears to have had some other function (Sharer n.d.). This does not preclude the possibility that an earlier Council House might have existed in some other part of the acropolis that has not yet seen the dim light of our tunnel system. Therefore, at present we incline to the view that, although both the institution of and a building for the ruling council may well have existed before the reign of Ruler 14, public depiction of the councillors and their associated supernatural abodes was a decorative and architectural design very much in keeping with the exigencies of the times (Fash 1996, n.d.a).

In addition to showing his concern for his councillors and their people by placing the representatives' portraits and place names on the building, Smoke Monkey also created facilities for public spectacles in association with the Council House. The large platform labeled Structure 10L-25 was a low, plaster-capped surface built directly in front of the Popol Nah and was clearly never used for supporting a masonry superstructure. Again on the basis of analogy with colonial and modern Maya, Barbara Fash suggested that it was used for dance and for the public feasts that followed the council. The large size of the platform certainly would have accommodated many dancers, and the ample steps of the East Court would have been a great vantage point from which to take in the proceedings.

All of this presents a lively picture of the intent, including strategies and ideals, of the fourteenth king, in the wake of Copan's defeat at the hands of Quirigua. It could even lend itself to the pursuit of inferring aspects of his personality. But to my mind, we are still at too great a distance from these times, places, and people to do that with what a statistician would call a high degree of probability. We have postulated that the fourteenth ruler made explicit references to the representatives of the people, and the places they harked from, as a recognition of—if not an outright concession to—their political power in the years after the humiliating defeat of Uuxaclahun Ubah K'awil. On this basis, should we then claim that he was a noble visionary, a mere pragmatist, or even a quivering coward? Tempting as it may be to make a stab at this kind of inference, the information presently available does not allow us to be sure. The very existence of a council and of evidence for the importance of the competing nobles in the decision-making process opens up a number of questions about the nature and strength of the ruler's power at this and other Classic Maya kingdoms.

For Ruler 15, the monuments that have survived are Stelae M and N, and the completed hieroglyphic stairway and temple of Structure 10L-26. The im-

mense hieroglyphic stairway was finished off by an even more elaborate and important inscription in the temple that surmounted the inscribed steps. The entire monument represents an ode to the Copan dynasty, a singular affirmation of historical continuity and divine rule, beginning with the first king in a.d. 426 and continuing up to the time of the fifteenth ruler, who dedicated the completed temple and stairs in a.d. 756 (Fash 1988; Fash and Stuart 1991; W. Fash et al. 1992; Schele and Freidel 1990; Stuart 1992, n.d.a; Stuart and Schele 1986b). The inscriptions accompany life-sized portraits of the rulers themselves, whose exploits are detailed in the text. The rulers all carry shield and lance, and many wear Tlaloc and other war imagery in keeping with the martial theme (Fash 1992). The Tlaloc imagery is, of course, consistent with surviving portraits of the first king, who is portrayed with goggles over his eyes. Thus, the ball games and most inclusive public ceremonies all took place under the watchful eyes of all of the earlier rulers, whose gaze also encompassed all of the assembled subjects.

As noted above, the investigations inside the pyramidal base of Structure 26 have shown that this building always functioned as a dynastic temple, with inscriptions relating to events that took place in the reigns of the first four rulers. Papagayo Structure's stela cited the ceremonies associated with the completion of the Great Cycle 9.0.0.0.0 and the name of the first ruler, Yax K'uk' Mo'. This temple was deliberately curated and left accessible by the Copan dynasty for some 250 years before finally succumbing to the expansive designs of Uaxaclahun Ubah K'awil. One can imagine this building serving as a kind of oracle as well as the most sacred of the dynastic temples. It is revealing that when the thirteenth ruler had this temple buried, he had its stela's text partially replicated on the mat stela ( J), that symbol for divine rulership people were forced to contemplate on their way into the city from the eastern *sacbe*. Just as the ballcourt showed continuity in function and decoration through time, Structure 26 served as a dynastic shrine for the duration of Copan kingship and emphasized the sacred as well as the historical origins of divine rule.

During the reign of Ruler 16 (a.d. 763 to ca. 820), whose name is best transcribed as Yax Pasah (Stuart 1992), once again a major change was in the air as far as dynastic monument programs went. This was the complete abandonment of the medium of the stela as a vehicle for aggrandizement of the ruler. Henceforth, information was recorded primarily on buildings and secondarily on inscribed altars and the lids of portable stone *incensarios*. Of his buildings, we know that in the Main Acropolis he was responsible for the final versions of Temples 11, 16, 18, and 21A. Although Structures 18 and 21A basically represented relatively small additions to the East Court, the renovations on Struc-

tures 11 and 16 were physically imposing and visually impressive. The multiple depictions of K'inich Yax K'uk' Mo' in the sculptures that embellished and gave life to Structure 16—on its exterior temple façades, in the temple interior, and on Altar Q (Fash 1992)—are now seen as perfectly in keeping with his depiction on the earlier temples at this locus, namely Rosalila and Margarita (Agurcia Fasquelle n.d.). The emphasis on Tlaloc imagery, as noted above, is grounded in the associations made between Teotihuacan and Copan in the first three decades of the city's history. The massive renovations of Structures 16 and 11 were the most impressive part of Yax Pasah's dynastic building program; the West Court of the acropolis was virtually completely redone.

Rather than celebrating fertility, the cosmos, and dance, Mary Miller and Linda Schele have shown us that the (final phase) West Court was an underworld redoubt where, as noted, the steps for ritual participant/observer accommodations were quite limited. It is clear from the elevation and depictions of crocodiles, aquatic snails, and Pawahtun musicians on adjacent buildings that Altar Q and the meeting of kings that it portrays was symbolically placed in the watery underworld. The stairs of the imposing Temple Pyramid 16 that rose just behind Altar Q contained dozens of skulls on its lower outset panel, which is also in keeping with the symbolism shown on the other buildings of the West Court. The first version of Structure 11 was one of the earliest buildings in the acropolis, and David Stuart long ago deciphered the inscription on an early buried step within it as "the lineage house of Yax K'uk' Mo'." Structure 11 faced both the most exclusive theatre space of the West Court and the most inclusive one, the great open plaza that incorporated the ballcourt, the hieroglyphic stairway, and the public entrance and Great Plaza beyond. The king could be involved with either the most inclusive or the most exclusive ceremonies simply by walking out the north or the south door. In fact, he could have supervised many pageants simultaneously, including the dances on the dance platform just outside the east door without ever having to leave the premises.

The huge Pawahtun heads found on the north side of Temple 11 (Fash 1986) formed part of two full-figure depictions of this deity that were the largest ever carved in the Maya area. Everyone entering the central plaza area by means of the *sacbeob* would have seen the imposing Temple 11 and its giant Pawahtuns and crocodilians, surely one of the most dazzling visual displays of its day. This most grandiose version of this "overarching theme" is in keeping with the virtual obsession with the Pawahtun/Bacab complex in Copan, which began (as far as we know) with the inner chamber of Temple 22 in the early eighth century. Fragments from another such Pawahtun-supported archway originally inside the temple of Structure 10L-26 were found by the Peabody

Museum expeditions of the 1890s and also in our excavations of the late 1980s, indicating that the fifteenth ruler mimicked this part of the Temple 22 imagery. During the reign of Yax Pasah, this imagery was transformed two ways: into a giant version to adorn the new king's most massive building project (Temple 11) and into a standardized smaller format used by the nobles in the valley, with Pawahtun figures (now at a smaller scale) supporting the ledge of interior benches with hieroglyphic texts. Three such benches have been uncovered in the Sepulturas ward of the city alone, and the presumption is that many more will surface as more of the elite residential compounds in the valley are dug. Perhaps the Pawahtuns/Bacabs became a special supernatural patron of the royal line in Copan, as Houston and Stuart (1989, 1996) have adduced to have been in use at various centers in the lowlands during the Classic period.

The first two Pawahtun-supported benches discovered in the Sepulturas ward of the valley led me to posit that Yax Pasah was bestowing royal gifts in the form of hieratic monuments on his most important subjects as inducements for them to remain loyal to his political order and to continue to provide him with tribute (Fash 1983, 1986, 1988). The supporting Pawahtun figures were thought to represent a metaphor for the role of the supporting nobles; both were adduced to be "pillars of the world order" during the reign of the sixteenth and last ruler in the line of K'inich Yax K'uk' Mo'. Taking matters a step further, the abundance of large elite residential compounds led me to suggest that there might have been a "nobles' revolt" at Copan or other Classic Maya sites, as push came to shove at the end of the Classic period (Fash 1988, 1991). Since then, yet another example of a Pawahtun-supported bench was uncovered by David Webster and his colleagues (Webster, Evans, and Sanders 1993) in their investigations of Structure 8N-66, the easternmost large vaulted masonry structure found at Group 8N-11, located at the terminus of the eastern *sacbe*.

The importance of the upper nobility at other Classic Maya sites was also brought to the fore by investigations at Palenque (Schele 1991) and Tikal (Haviland 1981; cf. Schele and Freidel 1990). In both cases, inscribed monuments were found in the context of long-lived elite residential compounds in close proximity to the dynastic center. Stuart (1993) has recently shown that such elites were bestowed a number of nonkingly titles in different parts of the Maya lowlands at the end of the Classic period and were a growing political force with whom the rulers were forced to contend. However, Stuart is less convinced by the idea that the Copan benches were necessarily bestowed upon the nobles by the king. He sees more independent action and political competition on the part of the aspiring elites of the Maya lowlands in the eighth century a.d. Certainly, the decipherment of genealogical information on the

bench from Structure 9N-82 does indicate a desire to showcase the prestige of his family background. The inscription cites the owner of the house, his mother's name, and his "predecessor" (presumably his father). The long-term occupation sequence at Group 9N-8 included substantial Early Classic remains (Fash 1983, 1991), yet only in the Late Classic did the residents begin sculpting images of their supernatural patron (a hybrid Pawahtun/scribe), images of themselves, and hieroglyphic texts to record their story for posterity.

Future research at such elite residential groups throughout the Maya lowlands may show that many such subroyal families were creating their own monuments to exalt their genealogy, social station, political office, and supernatural affiliations. We plan such investigations at Copan and hope that others will pursue them at other sites. The work at secondary centers and subroyal elite compounds will allow us to assess continuities and change in the power politics among and between competing lineages in the middle and at the top of the political system and between those lineages and the royal family itself. It will also provide a much needed bridge between the dynastic building programs of the royal families and the more humble abodes that have traditionally been the focus of household archaeology in the Maya area. Once this is accomplished, we may be able to better address the question of who, ultimately, commissioned these monuments: the nobles themselves, bent on their own aggrandizement, or the kings who sought their continued support? We may also get a better idea of whether these "subdynastic" public monuments were purely a Late Classic development or in fact had deeper roots in the histories of the major Maya kingdoms. Finally, one can hope that we will obtain a clearer picture of whether the practice of replication in the form and functions of Maya architecture went from the top down or the bottom up.

#### REFLECTIONS ON THE PAST AND PORTENTS OF THE FUTURE

In the study of dynastic building programs, the researcher is confronted with a series of huge challenges, many of them owing to the scale upon which they must conduct investigations to obtain meaningful results. The present offering was designed to illustrate that the most productive way to put Maya dynastic history to the test is by uncovering it on and around the buildings that were the maximal political statements of the paramount players on the stages of the Classic period. Only by directing research to squarely address the issue of how the Maya towns and city-states were formed and how they grew in scope and complexity through time and space can we put the aspirations and achievements of the individual dynasts—from earliest to latest—in their proper historical and processual contexts. The investigations of the North Acropolis and

the Mundo Perdido Complex of Tikal, as well as of the Main Acropolis of Copan, have yielded a number of revelations regarding the origins and development of complex society and the subsequent development of dynastic building programs and their accompanying ritual, pomp, and circumstance. However, even the developments at those loci cannot be evaluated in isolation but must be scrutinized in the context of the larger social system they formed the apex of before their significance in etic terms can be assessed. Likewise, results of tightly focused research on the supporting populations cannot tell us the whole story of a kingdom, as some of the more recent work in Copan has clearly shown. The dismissal of the existence of an Early Classic founder of Copan's dynasty and his pre-seventh century successors based on the results of a sample of visible mounds presents us with an object lesson in the dangers of dismissing the historical record as mere propaganda.

Obviously, the possibilities for discerning the scope and strength of dynastic rule through time are immeasurably enhanced when the data from the supporting population include information on the interest groups that are most likely to have influenced or even decided questions of policy. Certainly, the "feedback" between the rulers, lesser nobles, and commoners that J. Eric Thompson (1939) pioneered at San José and that has more recently been attempted both at Copan and elsewhere is still in its intellectual infancy. Our present attempts at this kind of analysis will likely appear crude and clumsy in the future, as a whole array of comparative ethnological and archaeological data are brought to bear on these questions.

This chapter hopefully has also served to demonstrate that analysis of the idiosyncratic concerns and strategies of statecraft of particular rulers as adjudged from their monuments can reliably be made only in the context of an understanding of their predecessors' works. Categorical statements of the innovative nature of a particular ruler's program or monuments are best reserved for cases where extensive investigations of earlier manifestations have been conducted at those loci. The "cross-cutting, self-corrective strategy" for research on sociopolitical evolution in Copan has enabled us to substantially revise a number of erroneous earlier ideas and models that we now realize were made on the basis of faulty chronology, insufficient samples (especially of earlier versions of the same phenomena before Late Classic times), or other shortcomings. A strong commitment of time and financial resources is required for even this strategy to be effective in the epicenters of ancient Maya metropoli. A willingness to constantly revise previous, sometimes cherished, interpretations and to seek answers to new questions is also a vital prerequisite for this type of work. Perhaps the most important finding, however, is that the final versions of build-

ings and other dynastic monument programs are often a very good basis from which to predict the forms and decoration of their predecessors.

The documentation of how an idea and a monument were transformed through time permits us to question how the exigencies of rulership may have required flexibility and change in some areas and rock-solid stability in others. The portraits of representatives on Ruler 14's version of the Mat House are thought to be an example of a change in "public broadcasting" based on political expediency to mark the ascendance and power of the nobility. Conversely, the ballcourt, Temple 22, and Temple 16 embodied and illustrated immutable themes from their first construction to their last. Nuances and styles of expression certainly changed, but the meaning and intent of these three monuments were never in doubt, either to their makers or to the public; they were designed to enthrall and engage. Structure 26 was more complex. It apparently always served as a dynastic shrine, perhaps even as an oracle, but its form and its decorative program changed dramatically more than once in its long public life. Its final version represents something of a paradox. Although its hieroglyphic stairway constitutes the longest, largest, and most explicit inscribed public record of dynastic power in the Maya world, its written message was legible only to a chosen few. Although the overall intent and meaning was made clear to all by the ruler portraits and huge Tlaloc imagery, the power of the deified rulers was at the same time rendered inaccessible by the written word itself. It was designed to inform but, more importantly, to impress and intimidate.

The question of whether Classic Maya dynastic buildings can be "read" as texts at this point in time can perhaps best be answered in some cases "yes, but to varying degrees." The most clear-cut way they can be interpreted is in terms of the volume and complexity of their construction. Elliot Abrams's studies of energetics (this volume) show us that those data can speak volumes about the power of the people who commissioned the buildings. Equally clear is that "bigger is better" meant not only "taller" but "broader" for the dynastic centers of the Classic Maya. The design and intent of vertical space is a feature of royal architecture that has largely gone uncommented on and surely holds more for us to explore. Just as the stationing of people on steps had meaning in terms of status and social standing (Houston, this volume), so the height and accommodations for people on buildings and their plazas also had meaning in terms of how many people, and which ones, were allowed to be participant observers there. The layout of the buildings themselves varies so widely from site to site that it is hard to claim there were codes that were universally agreed upon. It is clear that the earlier patterns in a particular site to a degree dictated later ones (Webster and McAnany, this volume). This makes the massive redesign of the

Copan Acropolis by Waterlily Jaguar (Sharer et al. n.d.) and the shifting of the triadic plan from the North Acropolis to the Great Plaza by Ruler A of Tikal (Coe 1990) stand out as the daring work of visionaries. But did the Maya have their own Imhoteps, or can we attribute these sweeping changes to the rulers themselves? Without the requisite textual data, at this point we can do little more than pose the question. Regarding function, it appears that certain kinds of buildings were essential components of all Classic Maya dynastic centers. The royal palace and administrative compound; funerary temples for deified ancestors; buildings and entire plaza complexes for ritual penance, sacrifice, dance, ball games, feasts, and other compelling fare; council houses; and dynastic temples, all these and more were built into the Classic Maya centers. But identifying and distinguishing them on the criteria of form and associated artifacts alone has been an uphill battle. For such identifications, the insights provided by texts and imagery are a godsend to us and worthy of the most careful scrutiny.

Certainly, the Copan dynastic architectural corpus is replete with examples of pictorial imagery that illuminated the nature of a building in clear-cut terms that the entire population could understand. The GI panel and sky bands on Motmot and Yax, the Ballcourt I full-figure macaws with their Hunahpu arms, and the K'inich Ahau and sky bands on Yehnal and Margarita show the explicitness of the imagery used to label the holy grounds from the very onset of dynastic rule. The full-figure images and associated glyphs on Margarita show that even rulers' names were literally spelled out for the viewing public on the façades of the buildings, as were the supernatural locales with which they were associated. Indeed, one cannot escape the feeling that 99% of the Maya population in Classic times understood the 7 Kan and 9 Imix references much better than we do! The *wits* masks on Temple 22, the mat designs on the Mat House, the Tlaloc imagery on Temples 16 and 26, the bats on Temple 20, and the giant Pawahtuns on Temple 11 were clear and explicit symbols that the Maya world could understand and revere.

On the other hand, the more esoteric information encoded in the longer hieroglyphic texts that adorned the steps and interior chambers of the buildings were probably designed more to lend an aura of sacred mystery to the environs than to spell things out for the person on the street. Then, as now, a specialist was needed to interpret them. Perhaps too then, as now, there were different interpretations placed on their content according to the passions of the moment and the aspirations of the reader. The point is that now, as then, they constitute an integral part of the message, especially given that in many cases the inscriptions refer as much to the monuments themselves as they do to

their makers (David Stuart n.d.b; personal communication, 1995). They may still be our most direct window into the thoughts, intents, and perhaps even the personality of their patrons.

The renewal of tried and trusted religious themes and the structures that personified them is one of the most consistent patterns found to date in the study of Classic Maya dynastic architecture. This practice is entirely in keeping with the cyclical view of history shared not only by the city-states of the Classic Maya lowlands but also of the larger culture area of Mesoamerica. Curiously, this view of history seems to have an eerie counterpart in the cyclical manner in which those cultures have been interpreted by Western scholars. When Stephens published his popular books, a new window was opened to us on a wondrous and fascinating world. The initial concern with the large public monuments, and the history that Stephens knew was recorded in their glyphs, was later distorted into the dogma that the one thing the inscriptions did not record was history (Coe 1992). Fortunately, interest in housemounds (Ricketson and Ricketson 1937; Wauchope 1934), secondary centers (Thompson 1939), modern Maya people (Redfield and Villa Rojas 1934), and their material culture (Wauchope 1939) brought new avenues for exploring the human dimension of ancient Maya life at the time the denial of history was in ascendance. When the historical record finally resurfaced with the brilliant work of Tatiana Proskouriakoff and Heinrich Berlin, a new window was opened onto the workings of the ancient Maya world. But now the Post-Modern take on this is that none of it is valid, that history does not exist in the abstract, and that those who would study it do so only to upgrade or reinforce their own social position. Can it be that the investigation of housemounds, secondary centers, and the modern Maya can once again bring balance to our profession? It seems to me that there are grounds for optimism in thinking so, particularly given the progress that this volume has shown in our understanding of Classic period architecture and the many ways it can be used to open new vistas onto the lifeways and conceits of the ancient Maya. The study of their dynastic architecture can shed precious light on how the Classic Maya conceived, structured, and viewed their world during a particularly creative juncture in their history.

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director. In Copan, a number of talented people have joined forces to address a broad array of questions, including many of those addressed here. Often, their professions and interests parallel those of their ancient counterparts and as such provide a vantage upon possible meanings and motivations behind the buildings and symbols. The interest in agriculture and food production has been avidly pursued by scholars such as William T. Sanders and B. L. Turner II, whose lifeworks revolve around reconstructing the lifeways and strategies of the farmers and the agricultural economy that sustained civilized life in Mesoamerica and elsewhere. The subject of urban planning has been addressed by Sanders and David Webster from the standpoint of political evolution and by Wendy Ashmore, who reconstructed the ideological motivations that played a role in the thoughts and decisions of those who laid out the ancient city. Questions of theology have been tackled head-on by Linda Schele, who has devoted much thought to reconstructing the path of the shaman and the role of faith in moving the Maya mountains. Dynasty and political history have been tackled by epigraphers Schele, David Stuart, Nikolai Grube, Berthold Riese, Federico Fahsen, Stephen Houston, Floyd Lounsbury, and others. Stuart's insights on the different offices and specializations visible in the Late Classic inscriptions and their implications for the fall of the Classic order were the subject of a recent *Dumbarton Oaks* paper, and of course he has also gleaned much about the world of the Maya scribe and the many kinds of messages and meanings they succeeded in leaving behind. The Maya architecture at Copan is presently being restored by the architect Rudy Larios, whose vast experience in Maya restoration and archaeology speaks for itself. The sculptured façades that adorned those buildings are being documented, refitted, and analyzed by Barbara Fash, who brings an artist's sense of aesthetics and composition to her work and an uncanny ability to conceptualize and solve three-dimensional puzzles. The dirt archaeologists have the role of putting all of this in context. As E. Wyllys Andrews V puts it, our task is to reconstruct human behavior from the excavation of abandoned places or discarded things, especially the abandoned residential complexes that are the essential building blocks in our efforts to reconstruct social, political, and economic behavior.

My thanks to all of my students over the past ten years, for bringing fresh perspectives, tireless enthusiasm, and years of hard work to our efforts to put the Copan monuments and behavioral residues in their proper context in excavations on Structures 10L-10, -16, -22, -22A, and -26. For the earlier phases of the acropolis, the superposition of those building complexes has been the focus of five years of research by Bob Sharer and his colleagues, and Ricardo Agurcia Fasquelle has concentrated on Structure 10L-16 and its antecedents.

*Dynastic Architectural Programs*

Their investigations have enabled us to see how the epicenter developed and what kinds of behavior took place in its buildings through time and space. E. Wyllys Andrews V and his students and colleagues have given us a magnificently comprehensive and insightful picture of the royal residential compound situated on the south flank of the acropolis as the result of four full field seasons of excavations there. Whatever success this paper and the work in Copan in general have attained owes more to their efforts than my own, although they should, of course, not be held responsible for any of the shortcomings of the present offering.

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