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*Function and Meaning  
in Classic Maya Architecture*

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## *Classic Maya Depictions of the Built Environment*

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One of the world's richest stores of information on built environments, particularly of a monumental nature, comes from the ancient Maya civilization of the Classic period. This evidence is at once varied and plentiful. There exist (1) the buildings themselves, organized into changing, often expanding and increasingly complex groupings of plazas, pyramids with summit temples, multi-roomed structures, basal platforms, and ballcourts; (2) textual descriptions of these buildings, framed in indigenous terminology, and as recorded either in roman script at a later date or in hieroglyphic inscriptions contemporary with such constructions (see Stuart, this volume); and (3) an equally selective view of such architecture through iconographic depictions, ranging from spontaneous graffiti to more deliberate representations on painted pottery and sculpture. No single presentation can do justice to this material or to the many ways in which it can be studied. Instead, this essay focuses on one aspect of the data—what the Maya themselves chose to emphasize according to set formulas in their depictions of architecture.

If there is a theoretical portmanteau to hold such observations, then it is woven from the threads of symbolic anthropology, in which “the built environment is activated through ritual” (Lawrence and Low 1990: 446), especially through performances regulated by the conventions of courtly practice. What is beyond the scope of this paper—although increasingly of interest to scholars—is the study of “phenomenological architecture,” how structures were experienced by visitors in “real time” (Foster 1989: 40–41) and how perceptions of places changed continually through “practice and recurrent usage” (Pearson and Richards 1994: 5).<sup>1</sup> We have precedent for this approach in the Maya re-

<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless, the complexity of “lived spaces” shaped by interactive experience should not be glibly underestimated by archaeologists wishing to apply such notions to prehistoric

gion: Horst Hartung (1980) pioneered work on sight lines in Classic Maya cities, an approach somewhat resembling Constantinos Doxiadis's work (1972: 5) on angles of view and site layout in Classical antiquity.<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, for images of architecture such redefinitions or restructurations of meaning or spatial relationship are almost beside the point; the depictions are useful to us precisely because they show frozen vantage points and, in their details, provide a highly selective winnowing of architectural features. We are left with what the Classic Maya wanted us to see, what they found important. Classicists have been inventive in using similar data, employing architectural depictions to reconstruct lost buildings from Mediterranean civilization (Donaldson 1965; Henig 1990: 157; Price and Trell 1972), to document shifts in imagery from imaginary to real landscapes or from one architectural style to another (Pedley 1987: 77), to testify to patterns of conventionalization (Vallois 1908: 360–361), and to examine how structures were “integrated into larger complexes of buildings” (Leach 1988: 265).<sup>3</sup>

The Classic Maya used a considerable range of architectural depictions to represent their built environment. We can review these images in several ways—by looking at their general characteristics, the pictorial conventions used to render them, and the complex patterns of metaphor and conflation that give them shape and meaning. A final approach involves an exploration of variety in architectural images.

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remains. William Hanks (1990: 516) describes some of the subtleties involved: “a *lived space* [is] made up of perspectival subspaces, costructured with the corporeal fields of human actors, and located within a broader sociocultural frame space.” It is doubtful that archaeologists will ever possess the means to detect the nuances of “perspectival subspaces.”

<sup>2</sup> George Andrews (1975: 81) comments more generally on “alignments or axes” in Classic Maya site layout, as do Aveni and Hartung (1986: 22–38) with regard to architectural astronomy. They pay less attention, however, to the ways in which alignments condition human movement, whether individual or processional. Earlier still, in 1833, Jean-Frédéric Waldeck drew notice to the manner in which buildings could frame and align with views of other structures, as shown, for example, in his watercolor of the Temple of the Cross, visible through a doorway in House A at Palenque (Baudez 1993: pl. 16). Regrettably, his romantic impulses, drunk with the *proportions héroïques* of the Maya, led Waldeck to invent scenes that did not exist. More recently—and far more than convincingly than Waldeck—Jeff Kowalski (1987: 132–146) has documented perceptual effects in architecture, particularly those devised by Puuc architects at Uxmal.

<sup>3</sup> For the time, Vallois's ideas (1908: 359–360) were surprisingly sophisticated in their sensitivity to rules of decorum and convention in architectural imagery: “Les images que nous citerons ne prétendent pas être des copies fidèles, ni même des croquis caractéristiques de monuments réels. Les modestes architectures d'un peintre de vases grecs sont . . . composées en vue du décor; ou bien, très abrégées, elles gardent tout juste la valeur d'une indication de lieu.” Clearly, Vallois was disinclined to take a literal view of vase imagery.

## Depictions of the Built Environment

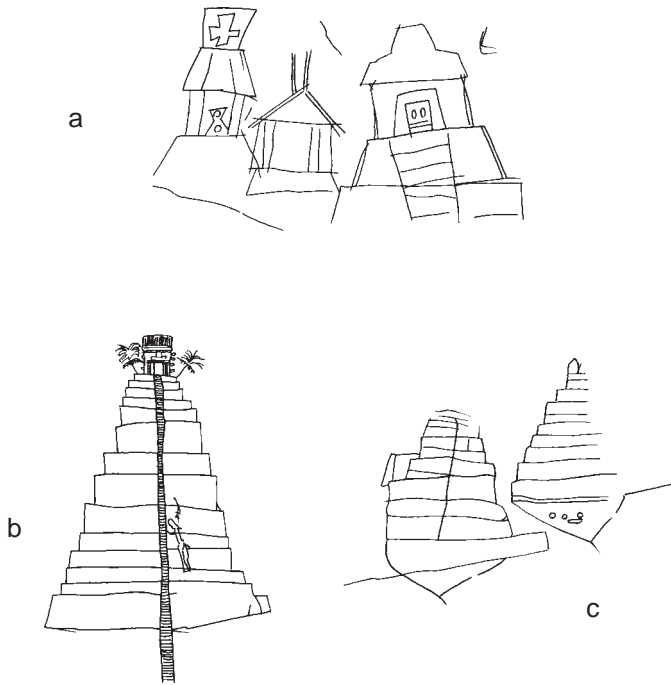


Fig. 1 Incised depictions of temples: (a) Comalcalco, Tabasco (after Pérez Campos 1992: fig. 11); (b) Chicanna, Campeche (after anonymous 1981: 90); (c) Yaxha, Peten (after Hermes and Galindo 1993: fig. 2).

### GENERAL FEATURES OF ARCHITECTURAL DEPICTIONS

A basic distinction exists between depictions that include human figures (or their supernatural analogues) and those that do not. For example, images of Maya pyramids, usually shown in frontal view, are, with few exceptions, devoid of human figures.<sup>4</sup> This is not to say that they lack detail: inscribed bricks at Comalcalco often show braziers and anthropomorphic *incensarios* inside summit chambers (Fig. 1a; see also Andrews 1989: fig. 107), and similar images occur at the sites of Chicanna (Fig. 1b), Yaxha (Fig. 1c), and Tikal (e.g., Orrego and Larios Villalta 1983: pls. 16a, 16c, and 20; Trik and Kampen 1983: figs. 8, 34,

<sup>4</sup> A probable exception was documented at Río Bec by Ruppert and Denison (1943: figs. 37 and 38). A small seated figure appears within a summit temple that displays a pinched roof and an “x-ray” view of roof beams.

36, 46, and 51), where, in contrast, depictions of ballcourts abounding with human activity appear next to graffiti of pyramids. In a strikingly different pattern, court scenes, which usually focus on an enthroned lord, take their scale from the height of the human figures. Seldom do the Classic Maya sketch anything more than framing vertical supports, an open doorway, and a few broad risers leading to a room. The emphasis lies largely on communicating status differences and on illustrating certain social transactions, such as gift giving or tribute, that confirm and are mediated by such differences. Of far less importance is any attempt to represent actual details of construction, such as the ratio of doorway to roof height. The explanation for the general absence of figures on pyramids is less clear, although there is one possibility that comes to mind: the scenes reflect the general lack of human traffic on such structures. When ritual processions are shown, as in a graffiti at Yaxha, it is in the context of single lines of individuals descending over a series of platforms rather than the steps of a pyramid. The number of participants is large—cup-and-staff bearers as well as other attendants precede a plumed figure; parasol holders and a trumpeter follow (Hermes and Galindo 1993: fig. 2)—but they avoid any apparent contact with pyramid stairways.

Another distinction exists between flat images and three-dimensional views of structures (see Schávelzon 1982). Models in-the-round necessarily involve a different set of pictorial conventions; after all, a spectator can view the object from several vantage points and, in some cases, transport the object to be examined in different settings. Such models are well documented in Mexico, starting with Early Formative examples from Tlatilco, with lattice screening for walls (Fig. 2a), and continuing with anecdotal clay sculptures of about a thousand years later from Nayarit and Jalisco (Meighan 1976: 41–43, pl. 12). These sculptures show extensively painted roofing, pinched roofs, and, in comparison to Maya examples, a reduced emphasis on the human figure as a determinant of architectural scale (Lehmann 1964; von Winning and Hammer 1972: figs. 2–4, pls. 1–43). Other examples include Oaxacan temple models, almost always lacking in human figures (Hartung 1984: fig. 10), as well as stone architectural carvings in the enigmatic Mezcala style (Gay and Pratt 1992: figs. 102–116, pls. 187 and 204),<sup>5</sup> which typically eliminates all figures but for recumbent deities on temple roofs (Karl Taube, personal communication, 1994). Better understood archaeologically is a Mezcala-style ballcourt model found cached in what was likely the principal ballcourt at Tenochtitlan (Fig. 2b) (Solis 1982: pls. 101–103;

<sup>5</sup> See also Eggebrecht (1987: pl. 97) and Leyenaar and Parsons (1988: pl. 161) for ballcourt models.

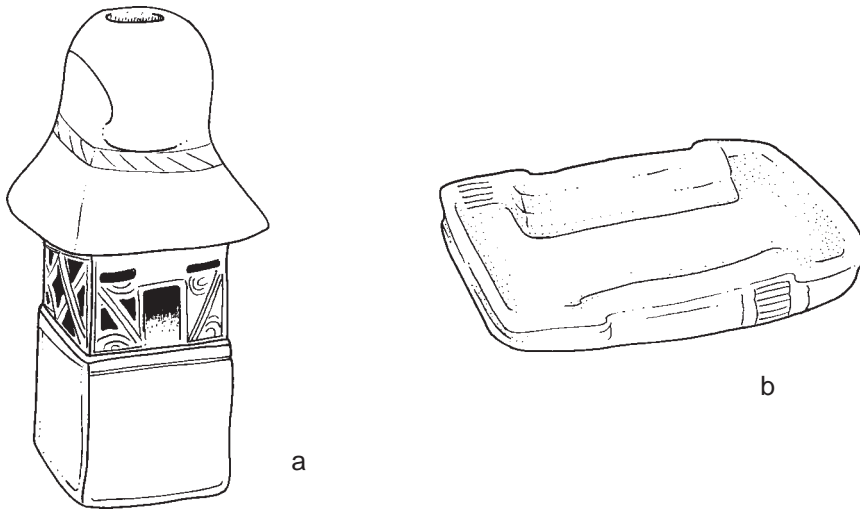


Fig. 2 Building models from Mexico: (a) house model from Tlatilco (after Coe 1965: pl. 80); (b) ballcourt model from Tenochtitlan (after Solís Olguín 1992: 149).

1992: 150–152). This minutely detailed model, which displays stairways both inside and outside the court, was accompanied by dark and white spheres—clearly intended to be representations of balls in the same relationship to rubber spheres as stone yokes are to wooden abdominal protectors (Ekholm 1946; Jones 1985: figs. 10 and 11). The best illustrations of larger, architectural landscapes are the stairways carved, probably during the Post-Classic period, into rock at Tetzoco and Acapulcan (Fig. 3) (Krickeberg 1969: figs. 1–3, 53). Some of these channels, depressions, and stairways—a few of which may represent agricultural terraces—could have been used to conduct fluids, either blood, as Cook (1955: 191) suggests, or more likely water, a pervasive ritual element that played a large role in, among other places, the circumferential aqueducts in the palace of Tetzcotzingo (Townsend 1992: figs. 80–83).

Maya models of houses and other buildings include stone and clay sculptures that are discussed in more detail below. What is noteworthy here is that they show a “pinched” roof, which reproduces the sheltered ventilation holes found in some modern Maya buildings (Wauchope 1938: fig. 34, pl. 13c), and, indeed, in structures elsewhere in the world, where they serve a similar func-



Fig. 3 Rock carving from Acapulcan (after Cook de Leonard 1955: fig. 1).

tion (Beals, Carrasco, and McCorkle 1944: fig. 19; Hohmann 1995: 252–258).<sup>6</sup> Clay models are much more common, although they depart dramatically from literal representations, seeming instead to play strongly off the metaphor of a building as a metaphoric expression of a person or deity (Taube, this volume). The body and headdress of a figure become the superstructure and roof comb of a building or litter (Fig. 4). Of the flat images—and I use this term advisedly, because a scene on a cylindrical vessel or painted around the interior walls of a building cannot be seen at one glance and from one perspective—the Bonampak murals are by the far the most ambitious in their reference to architecture, depicting massed stairways and platforms only hinted at on polychrome pottery (Miller 1985). Apparently, the number of people to be shown determines the quantity and disposition of terraces and platforms.

We should mention two other distinctions that characterize Classic Maya art, the first being that between immobile and movable structures. In both the

<sup>6</sup> Classicists demonstrated long ago that many forms in early Greek architecture derive from wooden forms (e.g., Richter 1969: 20; cf. Carpenter 1962: 218–219). Although he does not cite this literature, Robert Wauchope (1938: fig. 22) posits a similar connection between Maya stone architecture and wooden originals.

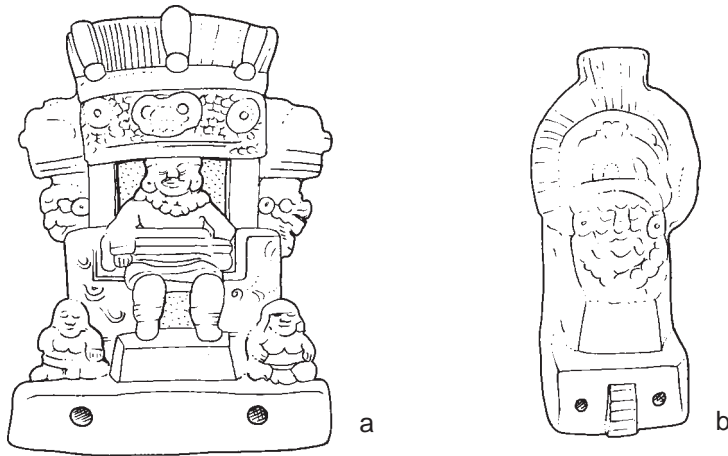


Fig. 4 Human figures as structures or possible litters (Karl Taube, personal communication, 1994): (a) seated ball player with Teotihuacan-style headdress as roof of building (after Goldstein 1980: fig. 5a); (b) deity effigy with stairway and holes for litter suspension (after Corson 1976: fig. 20c).

Classic and Post-Classic periods, there is ample evidence of litters, some with elaborate, thatched roofs (Fig. 5a-b; anonymous 1984: 81; Dumbarton Oaks slide archive dr. 13-LC-J4-4; Kerr 1992: 370; Trik and Kampen 1983: fig. 18, 41m, 72) and others with gigantic animal effigies standing protectively over a lord or lady (Fig. 5c) (see Stuart, this volume). A few such litters have been discovered archaeologically (Coggins n.d.: 344–347; Hall n.d.: fig. 70; Pendergast 1969: 21). A second distinction is that between perishable and imperishable structures. Ethnography, ethnohistory, and archaeology abound in references to arbors and wooden scaffolds, which bear strong sacrificial connotations (Roys 1965: xiii–xv; Taube 1988: 350–351). Many enclose underworld or supernatural beings and display wrappings of leaves or feathers and garlands of skulls or decapitated heads (Fig. 5d). The significance of both portable and perishable structures is that they compel a different view of Maya cityscapes. Instead of being empty and featureless, plazas and platforms could have been reconfigured by temporary placement of structures, banners, or parasols, whose position would change the use and meaning of ambient space.

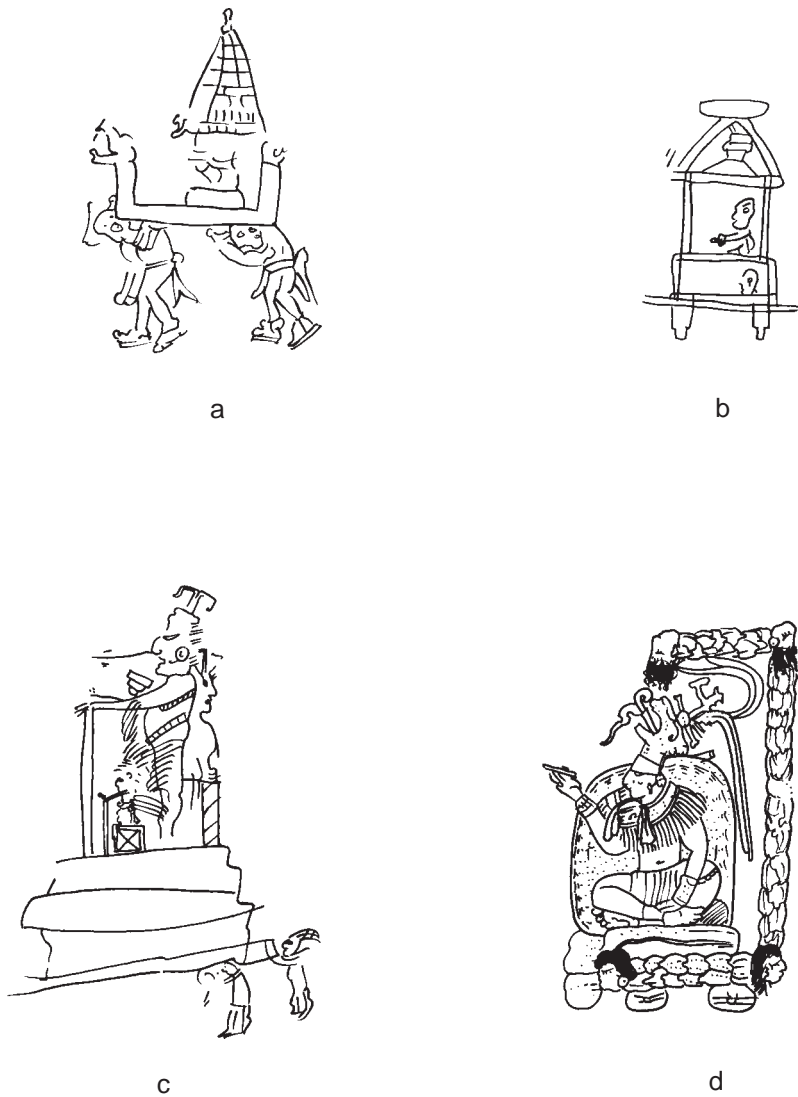


Fig. 5 Portable structures in Maya art: (a) Terminal Classic graffito from Río Bec (after anonymous 1984: fig. 2); (b) litter graffito from Tikal (after Trik and Kampen 1983: fig. 72); (c) "jaguar protector" graffito from Tikal (after Trik and Kampen 1983: fig. 72); (d) leaf-covered arbor (after Kerr 1992: 446).

PICTORIAL CONVENTIONS

Depictions of Maya architecture make little sense without an understanding of pictorial conventions, the generating principles that lie behind images of Maya structures. Attempts to itemize conventions in other parts of Mesoamerica include Donald Robertson's work (1959: 19–21) on Post-Classic Mexican depictions of architecture, Elizabeth Smith's comments (1973: 45, 49; see also Garza Tarazona 1970) on Mixtec conventions, and, in a more limited effort, Pincemin and Rosas's catalogue (1985: 90) of Post-Classic Maya representations of buildings.<sup>7</sup> The Classic Maya used an equal if not larger number of conventions, focusing especially on complex depictions of humans in palatial settings. Here I describe only those relevant to this paper.<sup>8</sup>

One dominant principle, common, in fact, to all Maya art, is that of the zone of contact—an area between the first person facing viewer's right and the first person facing viewer's left (Fig. 6). In terms of discourse, the person facing left might be described as the peak figure in the image, the *cynosure* of the scene. This figure usually appears on a throne. Those behind the peak figure are attendants of lesser rank, as are those to the right; typically, standing individuals hold lower rank than those who are seated. A different pattern obtains when deities are housed in buildings. Gods tend to be shown in reverse order, facing assembled figures to viewer's right (e.g., Coe 1978: pl. 11; Kerr 1989: 52, 65; 1990: 225; Robicsek and Hales 1981: 19, 20, 138, 172). Perhaps this departure from convention reflects a peculiar facet of underworld courts, such as those described in the *Popol Vuh*. The courts embody a mirror image of palace life in dynastic centers—in a word, they are “anti-courts,” in which anomalous or even repugnant behavior is not only tolerated but expected (Karl Taube, personal communication, 1991). Such reversals and mirror images resonate with Lacandon Maya belief, in which features of one level of the universe are re-

<sup>7</sup> Robertson insists, though, that indigenous artists made “compromises with nature in the construction of a picture,” perhaps as marks of respect for “actors in the pictures” (Robertson 1959: 20). I disagree; there is evidence of great concern with clarity of presentation, if not according to the idiom of “Renaissance realism” (Robertson 1959: 20).

<sup>8</sup> In a pioneering study, Mary Miller (1985: fig. 3; 1986: 66–67) discerns conventions used by the Maya to indicate the location of standing or seated individuals with respect to thrones and platforms. David Stuart (personal communication, 1993) also points out that, in visual terms, figures seated before thrones occupy a singularly complex space. Figures may fan out to either side of a throne (Piedras Negras Panel 3) or be seated in slightly overlapping positions (Bonampak Sculpted Stone 1). Despite the flattened composition, the intention is to situate the figures in double columns extending out from the throne (Panel 3) or to arrange them shoulder to shoulder (Sculpted Stone 1). This composition conveys a three-dimensional effect that is otherwise difficult to achieve in panel format.

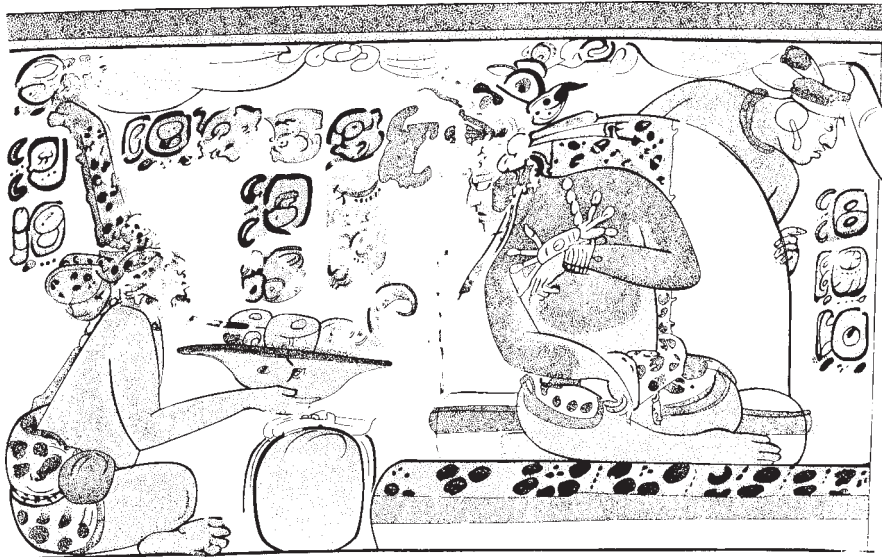


Fig. 6 Zone of contact on Classic Maya Vase (Coe 1973: pl. 29).

versed or amplified in another (Davis n.d.: 24); on a larger level, they may capture “the complexity and ambiguity of hierarchical relationships” as subtle messages in “dispraise” of rulers (Feeley-Harnik 1985: 295). The rare historical scenes that show buildings entered from the right may represent a visit to a foreign site, as shown on a Teotihuacan style vessel at Tikal (Coe 1967: 100–101) or the wall painting from Structure B-XIII at Uaxactun (Smith 1950: fig. 46).

Parenthetically, the primacy of figures to viewer’s right touches on a complex point of interaction between hieroglyphic texts and images. Since the earliest days of decipherment, scholars have recognized that Maya glyphs are read from left to right; that is, in a sense, the glyphs are addressed by eye movement in which the reader approaches as a supplicant might a higher-ranking individual. This is less far-fetched than one might think: some examples of reversed texts, such as Yaxchilan Lintel 25, exist because the reader approaches through a doorway to gaze up at glyphs that have been reoriented to face the viewer (Graham and von Euw 1977: 55); the summit inscriptions of Temple 11 at Copan are another instance of glyphs oriented systematically to face a corridor entrance (Schele and Miller 1986: 122–123). In consequence, glyph reversals, especially those on lintels, can be explained partly as efforts to adjust reading order to accord with the movement of a spectator into a building. Unfortu-

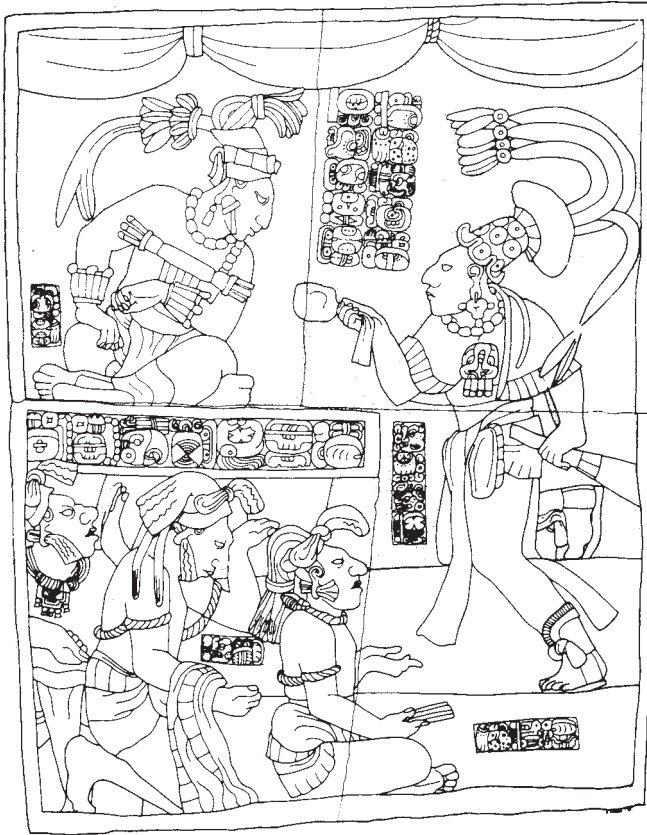


Fig. 7 Unprovenanced wall panel, Kimbell Art Museum.  
Drawing by Linda Schele.

nately, we cannot establish at present whether reading order determined Maya notions of courtly address or whether courtly decorum determined reading order.

Another principle is verticality—that is, the higher a seated figure in a scene, the higher the rank. This convention differs from that used in Egypt and late Classical antiquity, in which size correlated positively with social station—an emperor and his family were much larger than lesser individuals (Billig 1977: figs. 43–45). Occasionally, the Maya were compelled to reconcile rare situations in which the “peak” figure was not the highest ranking one in the image, as in a panel probably from the vicinity of La Pasadita, Guatemala (Fig. 7). Note that the highest, seated figure (an overlord from the site of Yaxchilan) appears at the

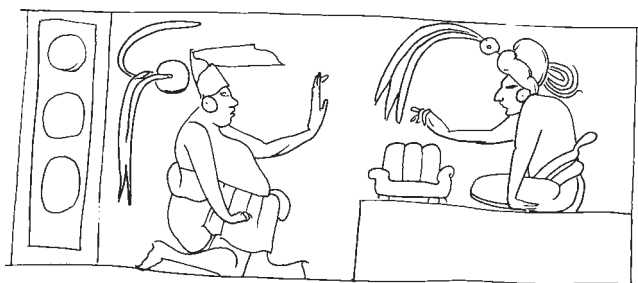


Fig. 8 Simultaneous angle of view in palace scene (after Coe 1967: 52).

top of the image, thus avoiding any problem of *lèse-majesté*. Nonetheless, the peak figure is the kneeling lord to viewer's right. He is the one who has assembled the captives, dressed them, and proffered them to his overlord. With this arrangement, hierarchical decorum is satisfied, and social relationships between individuals are made immediately apparent. Along with other visual cues, the placement of individuals in architectural space helps to establish their relative ranking and precedence, a matter of some importance to courtly society of the Classic period. Note as well that captives themselves are ranked; the individual closest to "peak" figure, yet still facing to viewer's right, is one *Ba wayib*, "top/head *wayib*," the same captive featured in the principal text of the panel.<sup>9</sup>

Another way of showing architecture solves a difficult problem: How can one show the zone of contact (and all the exquisitely exact relationships of precedence it implies) and yet pinpoint the location of such zones without resorting to cumbersome three-quarter views? Apparently, this was done in the following manner (Fig. 8): the architectural support to viewer's right would do double duty as the back wall of an interior palace chamber, in which a throne abutted against the back wall and the right doorjamb delineated the entrance to the room. The resulting scene is not so much a confused jumble as a scene of maximum clarity—the exact order of relative precedence is shown at the same time as the architectural setting that specifies such relationships. This convention—which I label simultaneous angle of view, in that it combines a physically impossible conjunction of perspectives—effectively solves the problem I posed, as it did for pre-Renaissance attempts to render diagrams of cylinders (Edgerton

<sup>9</sup> Elsewhere Stuart and I develop the argument that the Classic Maya used *ba* to denote not "first," its general translation from some modern Mayan languages, but "top" or "head" (Houston and Stuart n.d.)



Fig. 9 Temple with visitors.  
Vessel from Tikal (after Coe  
1967: 100).

1991: 27). The convention also applies to the human body. One Maya vessel, for example, illustrates kneeling figures, with a knee visible at the same time the legs are crossed (Kerr 1992: 437). This cannot be a literal scene, because the position would be exceptionally painful; instead, it depicts a simultaneous angle of view, a finely ordered arrangement of body parts that is probably dictated by gestures insisted on at court.

Another example of “simultaneous view” occurs in the common depiction of houses in Maya art (see Taube, this volume)—in a sense, the scene represents a cross section through the axis of a building, although again at a diminutive and unlikely scale because of the primacy of the body in such imagery, and the existence of architectural cues to sketch context. And, yet, the back wall again doubles as a doorjamb. In the house shown here, the stepped entrance is fully a profile view, whereas the rest of the structure is shown from a frontal perspective. In the few places where pyramids are shown with people, the human actors appear (rather improbably) ascending the broad, stepped platforms to the side, because this movement accords with the lateral “flow” of narrative information and order of precedence; the front stairway is left empty as always (Fig. 9). I speculate that frontal views of pyramids resulted from some protocol of behavior related to the proper approach to such buildings. It is probably relevant that houses linked with gods appear frontally, with both jambs clearly visible (e.g., Kerr 1990: 211, 285).

A related convention is oblique vantage. The vantage point into a palace chamber—a perspective ordained for us by the artist—lies somewhat to the right of the midline axis of a room. By glancing in at an oblique angle, the spectator perceives the left corner of the throne but not the right. Attendants on the right side of the room disappear behind an obscuring doorjamb (Kerr 1990: 255). This vantage has intriguing sociological implications, for the viewer does not enjoy a highly privileged position, being somewhat off axis from the building and some distance from the doorway. Possibly this reflects the artist’s

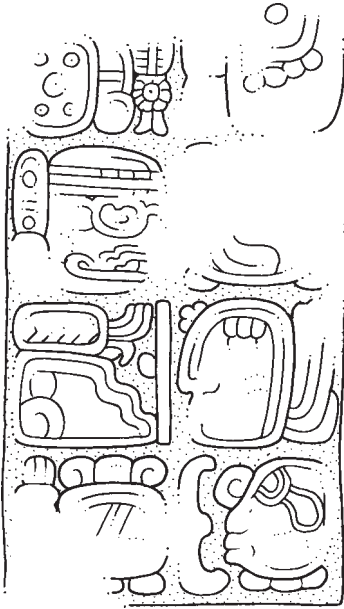


Fig. 10 Column text, Hacienda Chilib, Campeche (after unpublished drawing by Ian Graham).



Fig. 11 Texts on sides of vessel (after Hellmuth 1987: figs. 45 and 46).

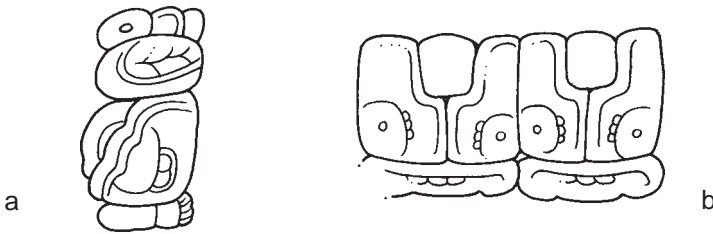


Fig. 12 Cross-sectioned glyphs for houses and ballcourts:  
(a) unprovenanced panel (after drawing by Ian Graham);  
(b) Tonina unnumbered panel, double ballcourt glyph  
(after Yadeun 1993: 137).

status or, more to the point, the status deliberately imposed on the viewer. At the same time, however, we should heed a caveat from Samuel Edgerton (personal communication, 1996): the suggestion that Maya tableaux were to be understood as “windows,” with a “stage-like space” behind the plane of the image, requires further substantiation.

The emphasis on profile and on sections in some of this art reflects a larger concern in Maya construction with axial and bilateral disposition, a pattern that can be, as in the North Acropolis of Tikal, a preoccupation of considerable longevity, regardless of subsequent modifications to building plan (Coe 1990: fig. 5). This concern with axuality accounts for some peculiarities of reading order, as in a column text from Hacienda Chilib, Campeche, that orients glyphs inward to an invisible line of axis (Fig. 10) (Mayer 1981: 15, pl. 12); ordinarily, the glyphs would all face left. Similarly, an Early Classic vessel has glyphs that are oriented to an invisible line bisecting the object (Fig. 11); it is probably no coincidence that the lid ornament of the vessel aligns with this axis. In depictions of buildings, we see this emphasis very heavily in depictions of temples and less so in palace scenes, which tend to compromise axuality to accommodate a larger number of human figures. That is, when axuality is stressed, it is the building that is important; when it is not, the emphasis is clearly on people. Notably, the hieroglyphs referring to ballcourts and houses tend to be sectioned, as though sliced by an archaeological trench (Fig. 12).<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> The Maya themselves used a convention to indicate that images of buildings were cross-sectioned: concentric circles, sometimes with two small dots attached. Elsewhere in Maya art this convention signifies that limbs or extremities—a hand or a lower torso—has been severed from the rest of the body. Possibly the Maya applied this corporeal reference to buildings because architectural depictions are only part of a larger whole.

A final convention consists of abbreviation. Rarely do the Classic Maya show anything but a schematic architectural frame. The massive platforms under most palaces and pyramids tend to be omitted; the upper cornices are compressed into flatter shapes. Elongated buildings with multiple doorways are seldom shown, nor does there appear anything more than a few terraces, of which the most ambitious depictions are those in the Bonampak murals (Miller 1985: 191). Actual buildings may be shown and some of their features rendered, but there is little apparent drive to do this with absolute fidelity; buildings have been abbreviated to focus on the portion framing or providing ground lines for human figures.

#### RECIPROCAL METAPHOR AND ARCHITECTURAL DEPICTION

A fundamental way of understanding architectural depictions is through metaphor, the mapping of a “model in one domain to a corresponding structure in another domain” (Lakoff 1987: 114, 288). Nonetheless, models do not simply move in one direction: rather, they operate as “reciprocal metaphors,” because the conceptual mapping may go both ways, the domain being shaped and systematized by one moving back to restructure the other.<sup>11</sup> Ethnography provides numerous examples of such mapping, in which buildings and settlement display an anthropomorphic symbolism and, in the thoroughly studied case of the Batammaliba in Africa, many other levels of metaphor and representation (Blier 1987: 135–139).<sup>12</sup> For instance, a Batammaliba house is dressed “in cloths for funerals and it is cicatrized, like a young girl, towards the end of construction” (Pearson and Richards 1994: 22–23), a pattern generally echoed by Carsten and Hugh-Jones (1995: 39), who note in many cultures an explicitly articulated parallel between the life spans of houses and their occupants. Furthermore, a Batammaliba cemetery is itself “a model of the settlement and the tomb locations mirror the house locations in a village” (Pearson and Richards 1994: 23).

Mesoamerica is equally rich in metaphor. Working with Tzotzil Maya, Robert Laughlin (1993: 101) reports on what he terms a “poetic association” between flora and humans, according to which labels for plant morphology contribute to descriptions of human features, and terms for “human or animal anatomy . . . name plant parts.” These reciprocal metaphors shape behavior in analogical ways, so that a farmer may tighten his belt to grow a gourd with a

<sup>11</sup> See King (n.d.) for a similar treatment.

<sup>12</sup> Mary Douglas (1972: 514, 521) was among the first to draw attention to symbolism in domestic space. Her ideas are couched, however, in a cautionary tale that questions the ability of archaeologists to study such matters.

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constricted center (Laughlin 1993: 107). Similar beliefs and practices characterize Nahua understandings of the human body (López Austin 1988: 346–347) as well as those of the Mixtec, for whom “the body is a central metaphor for things ranging from orientation in space to social and political arrangements” (Monaghan 1994: 96). A few scholars, from Hume to Guthrie, even presume to view anthropomorphization as central to the religious impulse: through a “strategy of perception” people interpret the nonhuman world as though human (Guthrie 1993: preface, 83).

### *The House Metaphor*

Not surprisingly, reciprocal metaphors shape representations of Classic Maya architecture (see Taube, this volume). One of the most common domains is that of the “house,” the features and terminology of which the Maya mapped onto a wide variety of objects and receptacles. The hieroglyphic terms for houses are discussed by David Stuart elsewhere in this volume, but the two relevant labels here are *nah* and *y-otot* or *y-otoch* (depending on the language), the first being a reference to a building and the second, apparently, implying the possession of such a structure, perhaps in the sense of “home” (Barrera Vásquez 1980: 608).<sup>13</sup> A subset of this metaphor includes instances of miniaturization, in which smaller objects used as containers are labeled hieroglyphically and characterized iconographically as “homes.” Figure 13 compiles examples of glyphs labeling vessels and dishes as *y-otot*, strongly recalling later Lacandon practice of terming a “god pot” *nahk’uh*, “god house” (Davis n.d.: 223). Of particular interest in the Classic material is a rare expression describing a plate as *u-lak y-otot, u k’inil u chaanil*, “his plate, his house, his sun-thing, his sky-thing,” or, in abbreviated form on another plate, “his house, his sun-thing.” Here, the reciprocal metaphor probably invoked a cosmological perception of the world as a large plate (Karl Taube, personal communication, 1994). Yet, whatever the context, the linkage of vessels to houses explains some features in Classic Maya ceramic art, ranging from details of roof lids and rims (Coe 1973: pl. 78; Emmerich 1984: pl. 25) to the houselike form of cache vessels, such as those from Quirigua and Guaytan (Fig. 14) (Taube 1994: 652); a separate series of miniature vessels represents the

<sup>13</sup> As David Stuart points out (personal communication, July 1994), there is a perplexing problem with respect to terms for house: although used together in hieroglyphic texts, *na(h)* and *y-otot* seem to be mutually exclusive in most lowland Mayan languages, with Cholan using *otot* and Tzeltalan using *na*. The languages that combine both are the Yucatecan, as in Mopan *naj* and *y-otoch* (Ulrich and Ulrich 1976: 149, 297), although Cholti may contain a hint of such usage.

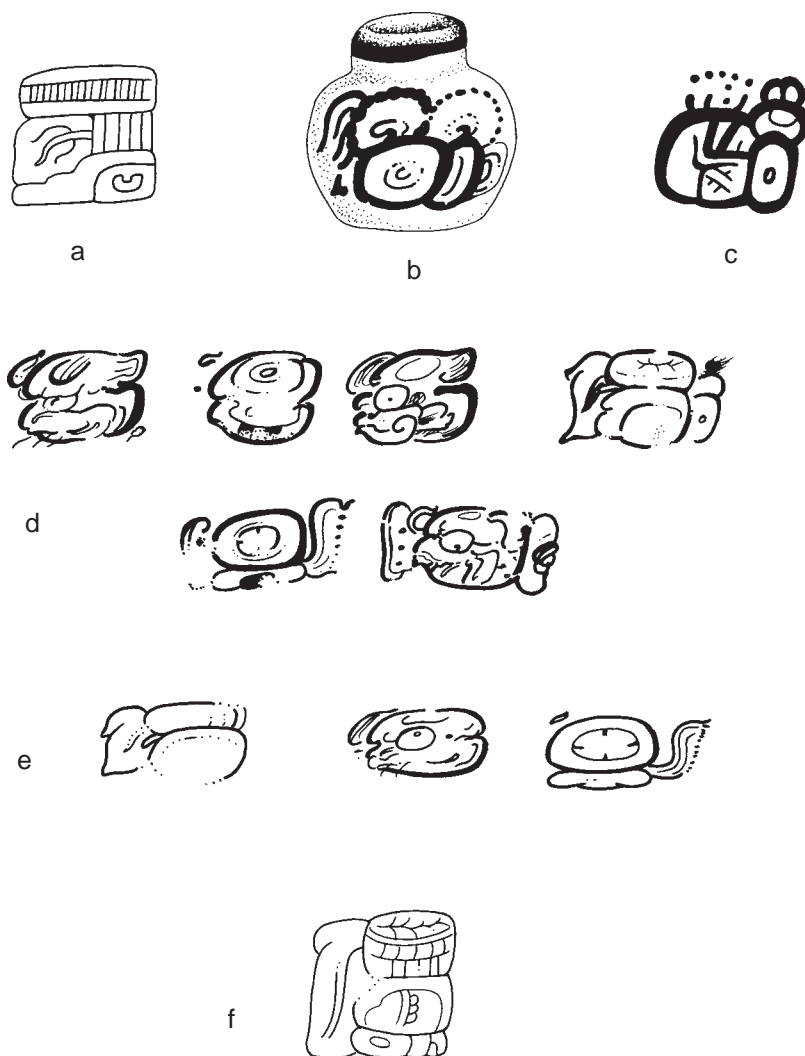


Fig. 13 *y-otot* labels from vessels and other containers: (a) Tikal, fitted lid of blackware vessel (after Kubler 1969: fig. 53); (b) unprovenanced miniature vessel (after Robicsek and Hales 1981: 220); (c) unprovenanced miniature vessel (after Coe 1973: pl. 77); (d) unprovenanced ceramic (after Dumbarton Oaks slide archive dr. 13-LC-p2-162); (e) unprovenanced ceramic (after Dumbarton Oaks slide archive dr. 14-LC-p2-213); (f) unprovenanced, wooden box described as *y-otot* (after preliminary drawing courtesy of David Stuart).

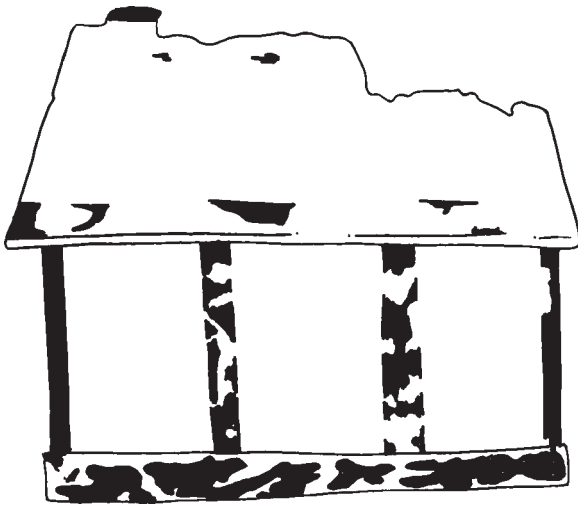


Fig. 14 House model (ceramic box) from Guaytan, Guatemala. Darkened areas indicate paint (after Smith and Kidder 1943: fig. 41c).

sedan chairs of the Classic Maya (Smith and Kidder 1943: fig. 52a).<sup>14</sup> The interplay of cache-vessel imagery and building façades suggests strongly that the house-to-vessel metaphor is fully reciprocal, as is the metaphor of house-to-person (see Taube, this volume; Danziger 1996: 72).

Another subset of reciprocal metaphors appears in tombs, which the Classic Maya consistently describe as “houses” or “homes,” in addition to the more explicit terminology of “burials” or, more allusively, “watery holes,” probably in reference to the underwater imagery of tombs (Hellmuth 1987: 357; Stuart, this volume). These tombs seem to have had individual names; some even use the term for “house,” *nah* (Fig. 15).<sup>15</sup> The metaphor here does not involve miniaturization—a change of scale and dimension—so much as transformation in the nature of the beings that occupy the structure. For example, in the Mixteca

<sup>14</sup> Another reciprocal metaphor, between the human body and ceramic vessels, is explored by Karl Taube in this volume. Lacandon terminology for ceremonial jugs reflects such concepts: the wide opening is called the “head,” the side the “face,” and clay supports the “feet” (Davis n.d.: 113).

<sup>15</sup> Like a few other signs, the *nah* glyph occasionally violates conventional reading order. Classic scribes preferred to orient the “T” to face to the top or to the left. The examples in Fig. 14 accord with this preference.

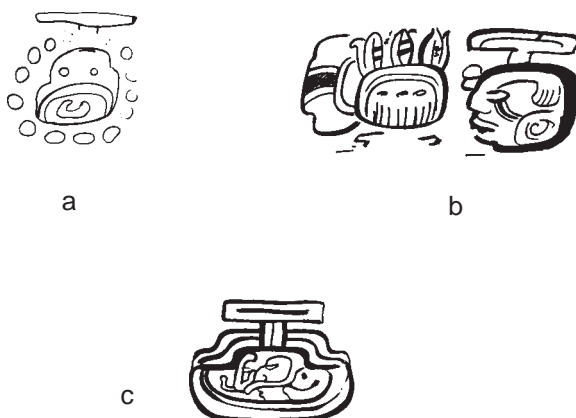


Fig. 15 House names in tombs: (a) Tikal Burial 48 (after Coe 1990: fig. 175); (b) Río Azul Tomb 6 (after drawing courtesy of David Stuart); (c) Río Azul Tomb 23 (after Hall n.d.: fig. 51, with changes from photograph in Adams 1986: 438).

Alta of Mexico, houses often connote moments of transformation and crisis, the house of the dead being the “true house” of the deceased (John Monaghan, personal communication, 1994). Similarly, Classic Maya tombs represent a special kind of house, occupied by entities different in kind from the living. Viewed in this way, the red-painted, vertical glyph bands in some royal tombs may depict doorways, a suggestion strengthened by the fact that the bands, like doorways, usually extend from the floor of the tomb to the springline of the vault (Fig. 16) (Karl Taube, personal communication, June 1994; Chase and Chase 1987: figs. 14 and 23); at Caracol, Belize, such “doorways” appear on the wall opposite the actual entrance to the tomb. Conceivably, the stone house models at Copan embody related concepts. They look like houses and have the same pinched roof and basal platforms as houses, yet the glyphs unambiguously label them as “sleeping places” or “residences” of a god, whose figure fills the doorways in at least two models (Fig. 17) (Andrews and Fash 1992: figs. 16 and 17; Grube and Schele 1990: figs. 2, 3, and 5).

#### *A Cosmological and Political Metaphor*

Two other metaphors operate at a broader scale. The first likens the levels of the cosmos—underworld and overworld—to components of buildings, particularly thrones. Most iconographers recognize that thrones may consist of two parts: a sky band on which the ruler or lord sits and, underneath, supports

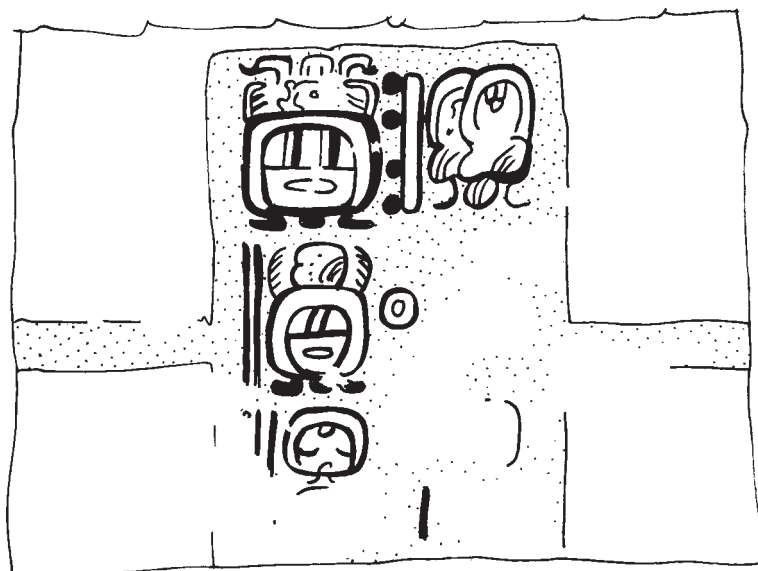


Fig. 16 Possible representation of doorway at Caracol, Belize, Structure B19-2nd (Chase and Chase 1987: fig. 23).

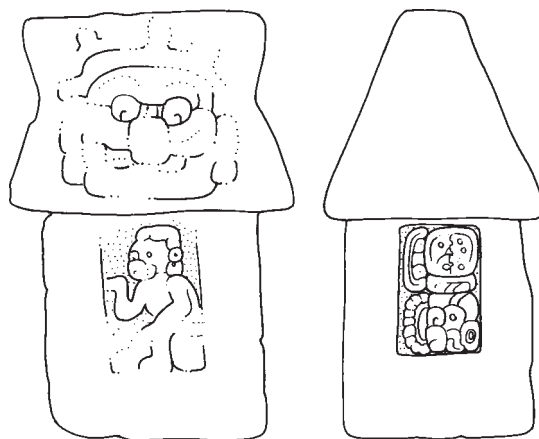


Fig. 17 House model from Copan Group 10L-2 (after Andrews and Fash 1992: fig. 17).

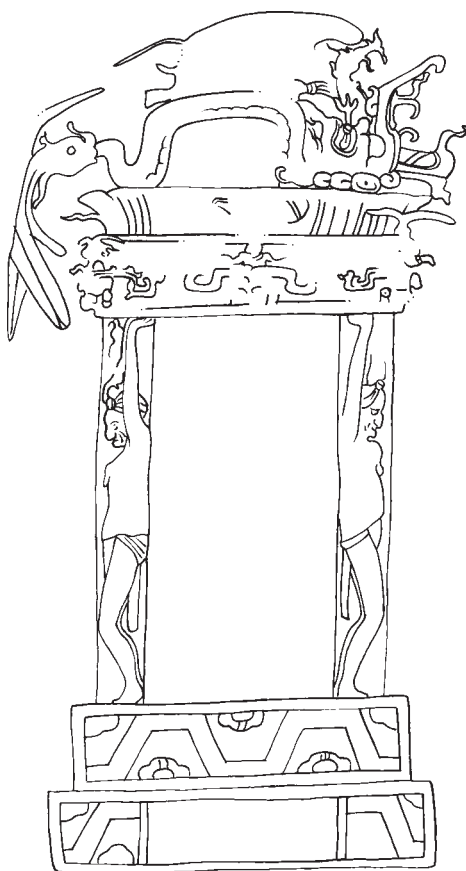


Fig. 18 Pawahtun as house supports.  
Unprovenanced altar  
(after drawing by Linda Schele).

in the form of Pawahtun, an Atlantean figure with both aged and youthful aspects and a variety of headdresses. Many of these Pawahtun are associated with the underworld, a connection made especially clear on throne supports from a bench in Copan Structure 9M-146 (Baudez 1994: fig. 112a): the supports appear as firefly Pawahtun, and at least one smokes a cigar, a clear reference to a dark, close, underworld place. An alternative conception of Pawahtun is that they serve as roof supports. An unprovenanced altar in the Dallas Museum of Fine Art and the corners of Structure 11 at Copan show as much (Fig. 18) (Taube n.d.: 113). In explaining this feature, Taube (n.d.: 113) points out that the Classic Maya regard the Pawahtun as the “sustainers of the world.” The world-bearers support not only the sky but, through metaphorical extension, the roof of a house or the flat slab of a throne. Again, the symbolism can be

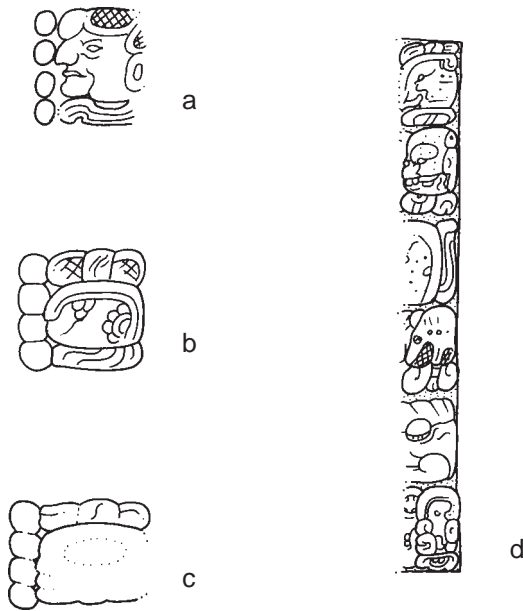


Fig. 19 Pawahtun titles used by subordinate lords. Comparison with text on House E throne support, Palenque: (a) Pomona Panel 1 (after unpublished drawing by Ian Graham); (b) unprovenanced lintel (after materials supplied by David Stuart) ; (c) unprovenanced panel (after Mayer 1978: pl. 53); (d) Palenque House E Throne support, right leg (after photograph in Spinden collection, Peabody Museum, Harvard University, courtesy of David Stuart).

quite elusive. Is the cosmos ordered like a house or the house like the cosmos? The concept of reciprocal metaphor allows us to resolve such questions by acknowledging the indissoluble, almost playful association between semantic domains. To enrich the metaphors further, Maya sculptors injected another dimension by identifying Pawahtun throne supports as specific subordinate lords. A lintel, probably from the vicinity of La Pasadita, Guatemala, shows two such lords, arms upstretched, sustaining two seated figures: Shield Jaguar II of Yaxchilan and his local representative (Mayer 1984: pl. 203). The subordinates have the headdresses of Pawahtun and are explicitly described as such in the accompanying captions (Fig. 19). In using this imagery, the Maya employed another metaphor: the likening of political support by vassals to the role of Pawahtun in buttressing the world (Taube n.d.: 197–200). Similar patterns appear on the throne supports from House E at Palenque that seem quite literally to show

subordinate lords impersonating stones (Fig. 19d) (Houston and Stuart 1996: 297–300).

*Metaphor in Stairways of Succession*

Another reciprocal metaphor is attested in a few hieroglyphic stairways, particularly Hieroglyphic Stairway 1 from Yaxchilan (Fig. 20), the hieroglyphic stairway of Structure 26 at Copan, and La Amelia Hieroglyphic Stairway 1. All reflect a concern with legitimate succession, insofar as they recapitulate the enthronements of preceding lords (Mathews n.d.: 78–91; Stuart and Schele 1986). The stairways also depict predecessors according to the conventions of ancestral representation, so that some appear within cartouches (Yaxchilan; see McAnany and Houston, this volume), others grasp heads of the god *K'awil* (La Amelia), and still others have smoking tubes in their foreheads (Copan), as though they have come to personify this god. The chronology on two of these stairways—Copan and La Amelia—does not appear to follow a linear time line but rather loops back and forth in blocklike calendrical segments (Stuart and Schele 1986: 10–11). In contrast, the Yaxchilan stairway shows an orderly, sequential arrangement. The latest dates are on the lowest step, and the earliest, clearly referring to the first members of the Yaxchilan dynasty, occur on the top riser. Accordingly, as spectators ascend they move to the beginnings of the royal family; as they descend, they return to contemporary people and events, in a kinetic reexperience of dynastic succession. But how do the stairways involve metaphors? I suspect an explanation may lie in Yucatec sources such as the Motul and San Francisco dictionaries, which document an etymological relationship between *-ts'ak*, “a count of stairs and stairways and other things that go on top of each other” (Motul) or “step or count of steps of parentage or for

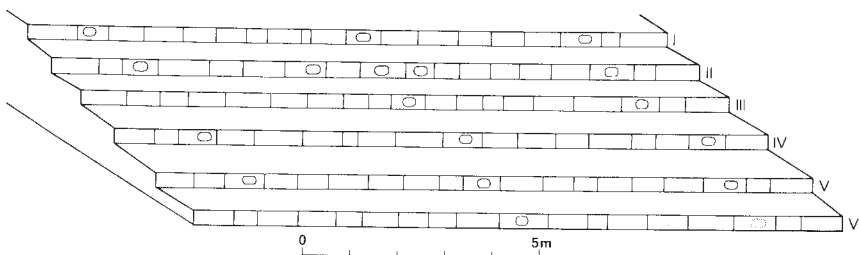


Fig. 20 Axonometric view of Yaxchilan Hieroglyphic Stairway 1. Two medallions on Step II hold ancestral cartouches (after Graham 1982: 141).

## *Depictions of the Built Environment*

things that go on top of each other” (San Francisco) and *ts’akab*, “ancestry, caste, lineage or generation” (Ciudad Real 1984: 123v–124r; Michelon 1976: 455; Barrera Vásquez 1980: 873). Possibly the Maya were making this relationship even more explicit by showing ancestors as stacked stairs.

### *Conflationary Metaphor in Ballcourt and Stairway Imagery*

A final, quite subtle kind of metaphor corresponds to what Mary Miller and I describe as architectural conflation (Houston 1996; Miller and Houston 1987). This metaphor not only establishes a connection between two types of structures but conflates their imagery, producing images that fuse two kinds of building that are involved in two distinct sets of activity. The clearest example is the common depiction of ball playing against stairway risers, possibly the last place to set a latex ball into play, because the ricochet would quickly become uncontrollable. An explanation for this is simply that two related sequences of events—ball playing and the subsequent torture, mutilation, and decapitation of captives—have been merged, along with the architectural setting appropriate to these activities. An especially effective illustration comes from Yaxchilan, Mexico, in which the ball about to be struck by a waiting player contains a flexed, glyphically labeled captive being flung down a stairway. The conflation is metaphorically apt: just as a captive rolls down a stairway, so does a ball carom against the sides of a ballcourt. Another possible example of architectural conflation is the occurrence of apparent symbolic sweatbaths in the Maya lowlands. The heat being generated and the sweat being purged seem to be of an entirely symbolic sort, with the bathers being effigies of gods (Houston 1996). Nonetheless, in this instance the conflation—of sweatbaths and small sanctuaries for the storage and purification of idols—is expressed materially rather than through the device of pictorial convention.

#### A RANGE OF DEPICTION

With such conventions and metaphors in mind, we can begin to detect—and understand—the principal architectural emphases in the art of the Classic Maya. The largest extant depictions of the built environment comprise clusters of buildings, which may be shown in one of two ways: as three-dimensional models or as frontal views of buildings arranged into plans.<sup>16</sup> Among the best-documented examples of the former is a model of ballcourts, cramped, massed

<sup>16</sup> Representations of cities in murals of Chichen Itza, including those of the *Monjas* that show attacks on walled cities (Bolles 1977: 202–203), are best left for another study that focuses on later Maya depictions. The same can be said for Post-Classic house models from

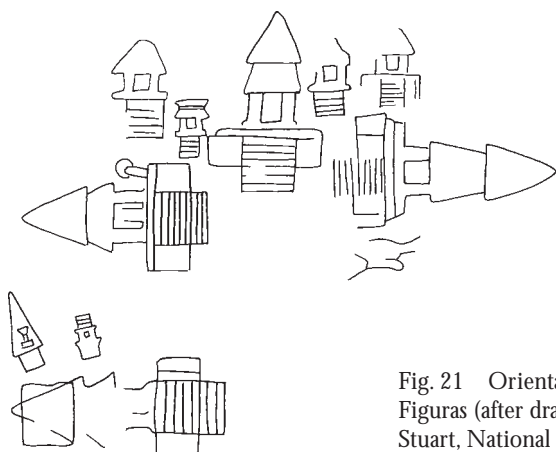


Fig. 21 Orientation plan at Planchon de las Figuras (after drawing courtesy of George Stuart, National Geographic Society).

platforms, chultunes, and access stairways found by Juan Pedro Laporte in the Mundo Perdido complex at Tikal (Laporte and Fialko 1995: fig. 74). It is doubtful that this object records a real landscape or even an architect's model—the grouping of buildings does not correspond to any known configuration at Tikal, and some of the platforms sit improbably close to one another, with one stairway abutting the back of another structure. Of the plans or frontal views, we have the rock carvings at Planchon de las Figuras, Chiapas, Mexico, a large slab of exposed bedrock on the banks of the Lacantun River (Fig. 21) (Bullard 1965: 45–48; Maler 1903: 204–206, fig. 67; Mullerried 1927). According to George Stuart (n.d.), the carvings are rather more than crude productions; their relief is high, and a few have deep depressions in places meant to depict windows.

At Planchon, the arrangement of buildings corresponds to a pattern best described as an orientational plan, which is common to Mesoamerican depictions of courtyards—a good example appears in the colonial *Mapa Quinatzin* (Radin 1920: pl. 17). Structures flatten out from the center as though viewed from an invisible pivot at the center of a courtyard. Despite the aerial view, the sculptor at Planchon did not stress an accurate depiction from the air so much as a spectator's view at ground level. Samuel Edgerton (1991: 27, 28) notes that such two-dimensional schemata are “natural to the human species,” appearing

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Mayapan (Proskouriakoff 1962: fig. 6) or for depictions of constructional activity—wall plastering and the raising of stone lintels—in the *Madrid Codex* (pp. 14a, 15a, and 95b). The *Madrid* provides the only known scenes of construction in the corpus of Maya art: for example, *Madrid* 14a glosses the image of a deity touching a stone wall as **u-ta-k'(a)/u-sa-s(a)**, *u-tak' u sas*, or “he plasters his wall.”

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in the art of young children as well as many non-Western cultures. Wisely, Edgerton cautions against the use of “naive” to describe such modes of representation, which express not so much “an abstract, uniform system of linear coordinates” (Edgerton 1975: 7)—the essence of renaissance perspective—as an ingenious combination of what James Gibson (cited in Edgerton 1975: 10) describes as the “visual world” and “visual field.” These kinds of perception involve different experiences. The visual world recalls our movement and orientation with respect to the ambient environment. It includes what we know to be present, as apprehended and cognized through many senses, not just sight. By contrast, the visual field involves “what we perceive when we fixate with the eyes” (Edgerton 1975: 10). An orientational plan invokes both: glimpses from a fixed vantage point (the “field,” the frontal view of a pyramid as seen from the center of a plaza), along with the results of movement and reorientation (the “world,” an image combining four different glimpses).<sup>17</sup>

Equally remarkable is a ballcourt model in the northern part of the Planchon slab (Fig. 22a). A groove conducted water from a spring into an I-shaped depression. Another set of petroglyphs from Las Palmas depict ballcourts or depressions, with channels grooved for the flow of water or some other fluid (Fig. 22b; Navarrete, Lee, and Rhoads 1993: figs. 50 and 51). This pattern recalls the drainage lines inscribed on the top of Piedras Negras Altar 4 (Fig. 22c) (Maler 1903: fig. 24), the spiraling conduit on top of a ball effigy at Copan (Baudez 1994: fig. 60), and the ballcourt models from Santoton and Tepancuapan (Navarrete 1984: figs. 89 and 90). Some of the channels connected with ballcourts may reflect the belief, documented in Post-Classic Central Mexico, that the central hole of a court is a “well,” a source of water for irrigation (Stern 1949: 65). This is an ancient concept; a rare, Pre-Classic model of a ballcourt from highland Guatemala doubles as a vessel in which water could fill the court and drain into the body of the ceramic (de Borhegyi 1980: fig. 4; Schávelzon 1991: fig. 9). I also speculate that the cupules connected by grooves on the Las Palmas petroglyphs represent the channel and holding tank systems now being documented in Classic Maya cities (Scarborough, Connolly, and Ross 1994: fig. 3). Regrettably, this suggestion is almost impossible to prove, although we can be

<sup>17</sup> Perhaps the most surprising quality of such views is what the Maya chose to represent. For all the modern emphasis on the Classic Maya as denizens of the tropical rainforest, trees or shrubbery seldom appear with images of architecture, which tend to represent a world shaped and domesticated by human artifice. When trees or plants appear, they often occur near scenes of battle, as at Mulchic or Bonampak (Miller 1986: 113, pls. 40, 41; Barrera Rubio 1980: fig. 1). Perhaps this pattern reflects the actual location of battles well outside settled areas, or artists may have associated scenes of strife and discord with uncultivated wilds, in contrast to an orderly landscape occupied by buildings.

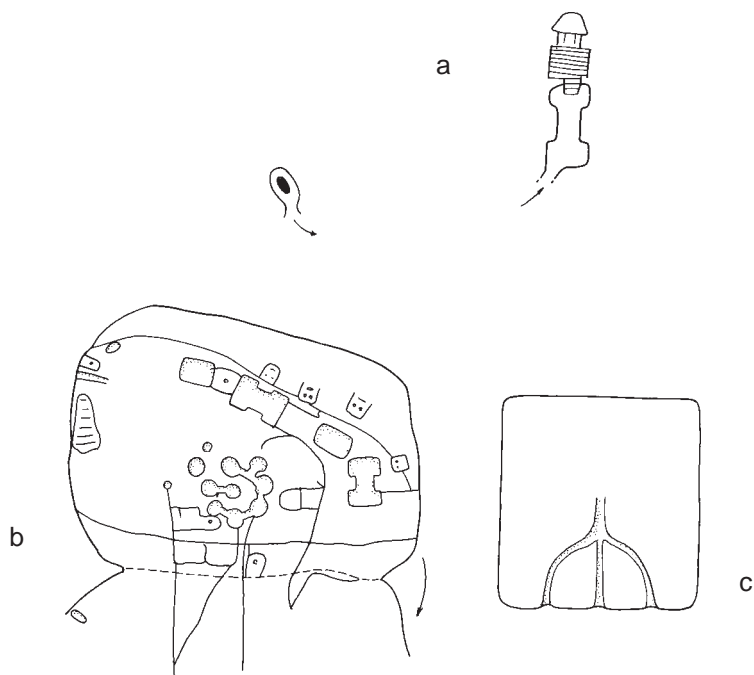


Fig. 22 Ballcourts and conduits for liquids: (a) pecked ballcourt plan, Planchon de las Figuras, Mexico (after drawing courtesy of George Stuart, National Geographic Society); (b) ballcourt petroglyphs, Las Palmas, Mexico (after Navarrete, Lee, and Rhoads 1993: fig. 51); (c) grooves on Piedras Negras Altar 4 (after Maler 1903: fig. 24).

certain that the Lacantun River periodically inundated the Planchon slab, a feature that doubtless attracted the Maya to this spot. One theme stands out in all such evidence: the ritual reproduction or creation of a partly urban, partly agricultural landscape, with particular emphasis on the channeling of fluids. The model terracing and water channels in Post-Classic Central Mexico offer an obvious parallel, as do the grooves and steps in Yucatec caves, where cenote water or solution droplets flow over stepped forms hewn into rock (Miller 1982: figs. 118–120; Thompson 1897: pl. iv).

The next depictions of interest—those recording substructural platforms and ballcourts with stairways—involve a smaller scale than courtyard plans and water systems. Nonetheless, these are the closest the Classic Maya get to showing public spaces with people (the landscapes are completely lacking in human figures). In my opinion, the stepped platforms and ballcourts are profoundly dramaturgical. Erving Goffman (1959) might label these the “fronted” or “in-

clusive” features of Maya architecture, the places where a dynasty interacts with the outside world in terms set by the court. In many respects, Maya royal stagecraft is precisely the opposite of western practice rooted in Classical theater. Flat areas are the locations for the audience, the ascending levels of a platform mark the place for focal activities, such as the heaping of tribute, the arrangement of visitors or other participants in court ritual, or the display of captive mutilation and sacrifice. The added benefit of such levels is that they place the participants in their appropriate level of verticality vis-à-vis the audience; they also offer concurrent locations for different rituals, so that platforms may show the musical performances and formal address and unwrapping of balls that accompany ball play. Moreover, as Karl Taube (personal communication, 1994) points out, many chambers or passageways near platforms could be interpreted in dramaturgical ways, in that they may have served as dressing chambers or places for the sudden appearance of new actors, as unexpected and crowd-pleasing as any theatrical tricks from the American Northwest coast (Holm 1990: 379, 383). Yet, we should not assign too much weight to the Goffmanesque perspective or dramatic analogy. For one thing, the inner recesses of the palace could hardly be said to lack theatrical aspects or the quality of formal display; they simply hold a reduced number of actors, some of whom also saw the more public spectacles. For another, it could not always have been possible to distinguish rigidly between the actors and members of the audience. Participation, particularly in terms of “structured movement systems” (Kaeppler 1985), probably involved spectators as well, who might have danced in open plazas while dynastic displays took place (Grube 1992; Monaghan 1994: 91).

Most scenes of Maya architecture focus insistently on exterior views, even though interior views may form part of an image. Almost exclusively in use outside permanent buildings were the litters and temporary structures mentioned before. As with many objects, the Maya took pains to indicate the material of construction: some scaffolds with crossbars contain clear hieroglyphic markings of *tah* (“pine”), an appropriately light wood for a portable object; in the same way the Maya would mark a canoe or war dart with the *te* or “wood” sign. But these images are relatively uncommon. The preponderant architectural scene comprises the outlines of a palace room, often placed behind ascending levels of basal platforms. These are the most intimate views of all, for the location is inherently exclusive and the numbers of participants are few. Almost always the viewer is slightly outside the scene, beyond the confines of a palace chamber. Above the throne and most important figures are swagged curtains that define regal space (parasols do not seem to serve the same function, because they tend to accompany musicians). An intriguing fact is the

ubiquity of narrative palace scenes in the Late Classic period and their near absence in the Early Classic, when royal figures appear with pillows and thrones but scarcely with any delineation of architecture. I suspect courtly life as an expression of political theater developed to a far greater extent in the Late Classic, a period to which we can date most of the great palace complexes, such as those at Tikal and Palenque. This may also explain the progressive enclosure of space noted by Ledyard Smith (1950: figs. 2–5) in Structure A-V at Uaxactun, where ease of ingress became more difficult through time and, in the jargon of access analysis, the enclosed spaces “deeper” in access diagrams.

The most difficult question about palace scenes has been left for last. Do any depict real buildings or architecturally defined spaces? Despite the formulaic presentations—of rulers and other lordly figures on thrones, with a few platform levels below them—I suspect that some of the depictions are the regularized and orderly representations of actual buildings. A good illustration of this was excavated by Juan Pedro Laporte in the Mundo Perdido sector of Tikal (Laporte and Fialko 1995: fig. 70): the doorjamb to the side of this dressing scene—doubtless an intimate preparation for a more public event—is described as *ts'ibal-na y-otot bakab*, the “writing house is the house of the bakab.” The figures in the scene are clearly historical personages, and the building itself, identified hieroglyphically, is likely to have been an actual location within Tikal or some site nearby. As Mary Miller contends, we can also identify, probably, the location of some of the events depicted on the Bonampak murals of Chiapas, Mexico, because the long, ascending platform levels seem to correspond closely to those fronting the South Acropolis at the site, the locus of the captive mutilation and dances illustrated in Rooms 2 and 3 (Miller 1985). Nonetheless, the scenes have passed through a filter, and it would be a mistake to infer hard architectural data from sanitized and conventionalized imagery.

#### CONCLUSION

What is clear so far is how imaginative and resourceful the Classic Maya could be in representing their built world. What is just as certain is that layers of reciprocal metaphor, complex pictorial conventions, and historical nuance envelop these images of temples and ballcourts, platforms and palaces. The most common images by far, the palace scenes, exist in architectural settings where the positioning of bodies reflects and verifies the relative ranking of individuals. The palace scenes have little meaning outside of the interactions taking place within them, and it is partly for this reason that architecture seldom appears in anything approaching its true proportions or physical scale relative to the people who used it. In Maya art there exist great limitations to architectural scenes—

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a selection carefully made by the Maya themselves, and unlikely to result from problems of modern sampling. The formal variety of Maya architecture—the corridors, the multiroomed buildings, and the complex, involuted basal platforms—is reduced to a surprisingly restricted set of images.

The much-vaunted “naturalism” of Maya art and its attention to details of curtain knots and moldings and specifications of building material belie its essentially formulaic nature, in which idiosyncrasy and deviations from decorum have only a small role. If indulged too far, artistic license would reduce the general intelligibility and garble the lucidity of intended messages about appropriate ritual behavior and relative social station. What remains for the future is to explain the finer points of such decorum and to synthesize available sources for a fuller comprehension of ancient Maya architectural space. Beyond this, our ultimate goal is more ambitious. Depictions may tell us how the Classic Maya saw the built environment, but they provide only one step toward the more vital goal of understanding how that environment was used and why it changed. Other papers in this volume launch toward that goal.

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